

“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
OLD AND NEW”:
THE TRAGIC PREMISE OF
THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

William Leung

Thomas Hardy's achievement as a novelist has always been problematic so far as generic definition goes. On the one hand, he composed fiction during a period when the high realist mode was dominant; on the other hand, he saw himself as essentially a poet whose prose-writing captured the 'eternal spirit' of poetic drama. Consequently, the experience of reading Hardy often arouses the conflicting impression that his works strive to put forward a universal vision about life at the same time as they reveal a keen understanding of the social and historical specificities of their subjects. For those who regard the 'universal' as nothing more than the falsification of an historical consciousness, there is no difficulty in doing away with this aesthetic tension altogether. "The absolute is nothing but the fixation of thought", writes Georg Lukacs; "it is the projection into myth of the intellectual failure to understand reality concretely as an historical process".¹ Just as cultural-materialist critics, like Jonathan Dollimore and Catherine Belsey,² have argued that the universalist tendency in Renaissance drama is actually a dialectical strategy aimed at subverting (or subserving, as the new historicists are more liable to suggest) a political-materialist reality, so the pugnacious Hardyan theorist Peter Widdowson has argued in a similar vein that for Hardy's "tragedy" one should read "social satire", and that the professed "socialistic" theme of Hardy's abandoned first novel, "The Poor Man and his Lady", can in fact be traced in his *oeuvre* from his first published novel, *Desperate Remedies*, to his last published novel, *Jude the Obscure*, as part of a life-long campaign to subvert tragic humanism by pretending to endorse it.³

The theoretical rationale behind Widdowson's revisionist reading of Hardy ought to be familiar to anyone who has observed the changes in English studies in the past thirty years or so. One might summarise (with the inevitable simplification) the methodological divides between literary studies and cultural studies as the divides between the relevance and the irrelevance of authorial 'intention'; the aesthetics and the politics of literature; the integrity of meaning and the artifice of meaning, and the unity/continuity and disunity/heterogeneity of cultural history. Nothing is more unhelpful for promoting English studies as a pluralistic discipline, however, than the argument that the relation between "old" and "new" critical theories is one of mutual exclusion and consecutive displacement.⁴ If there is justice in the post-structuralist belief that all critical positions necessarily reveal their proponents' particular biases, one cannot then logically assume that the cultural theorists are any less partisan or selective in what they say about history and literature than their predecessors; and the argument that the 'absolute' represents a long-sighted failure to see the historical is only valid insofar as the counter argument that the 'particular' is a short-sighted fixation on the historical is also valid. Taking issue with Widdowson's assumption that the sole justification for resurrecting a dead author is to turn him into either a Marxist-socialist pioneer or mercenary apologist of Victorian capitalism, I would argue it is the mark of a great writer that he recognises the complexities of ideological conflicts, and is able to explore them profoundly through the potent medium of narrative art. And it is on the basis of this conviction that I will try to define the particular quality of Hardy's tragic creation in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

I

One common traditional approach to *The Mayor of Casterbridge* has been to see it as a straightforward Victorian reworking of a Sophoclean tragedy, in which the consequences of the central protagonist's act of violation are played out on an existential stage of divine retribution and natural restoration. John Paterson's essay "*The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy*" is one of the first and most elaborately argued examples of this school of reading, and the condition that Paterson stipulates as being fundamental to all tragic literature is the writer's belief in "the existence of a moral order, an ethical substance, a standard of justice and rectitude, in terms of which man's experience can be rendered as the drama of his salvation as

well as the drama of his damnation".⁵ Many commentators have since taken issue with the prescriptive formalism of Paterson's 1959 reading. Marxist-oriented critics especially have worked hard to redress what they saw as a disproportionate critical interest in the 'metaphysical' side of Hardy's fiction by mounting their revisionist 'sociological' interpretations. Even before Paterson's essay was published, Douglas Brown had dismissed the existence of any inviolable "natural order" in the novel and put forward the "agricultural crisis" of 1870-1900 as the real "centre of the book".⁶ And among more recent critical accounts, one might point to Michael Valdez Moses' "Agon in the Marketplace: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as Bourgeois Tragedy"⁷ as a sophisticated example of a Marxist-materialist attempt at demystifying the novel as an existential humanist tragedy by laying bare the process of Hardy's construction of a 'metaphysical' backdrop to disguise an otherwise mundane history of bourgeois life.

It would undoubtedly be foolhardy for anyone nowadays to endorse Paterson's account absolutely and dismiss the significance of the sociological concerns of the novel. In the preface, Hardy freely admits that the tale is based on three facts in history: "the sale of a wife by her husband, the uncertain harvests which immediately preceded the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the visit of a Royal personage to the aforesaid part of England".⁸ No responsible critic can afford to ignore, avoid or refute Hardy's acknowledgement. But a frank confrontation with the issues that this specificity of locality raises need not lead one to the opposite conclusion that nothing is beyond the materialist reality of sociology. While a critical strategy that consists of broadly paraphrasing the story and laboriously accumulating references to contemporary history might allow a critic to arrive at the satisfactory conclusion that he has caught Hardy out in the act of artificially constructing a "bourgeois tragedy", it accomplishes very little in the way of capturing the imaginative power and aesthetic effect of the novel." And readers who aren't content with the facile explanation that the tragic mode is relevant to the tradition of nineteenth century fiction only insofar as it allowed a novelist to market his writing to a middle-class readership with petty pretensions to high culture, might prefer to explore Hardy's historicism by pondering his own explications on the matter in his general preface to the 1912 Wessex Edition of his novels.

In the preface, Hardy justifies his creation of a "partly real, partly dream"¹⁰ country of Wessex as the setting of his stories by making a significant allusion to Greek tragedies:

I considered that our magnificent heritage from the Greeks in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its action in an extent of their country not much larger than ... Wessex, that the domestic emotions have throbbed in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe, and that ... there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose.¹¹

Topographical specificity is, as Hardy sees it, instrumental in conveying the continuity of human experience, and the fabric of society is intended to provide an integrated environment against which the drama of "elementary passions"¹² is played out. Examples from *The Mayor* might help to illustrate what he means. The famous references to the Roman invasion and the Amphitheatre in chapter XI establish the concrete historical context, the "partly real" dimension, of the novel; but they also serve important symbolic functions that contribute to creating the "partly dream" qualities of the novel, here serving as a powerful interlude to the emotionally charged scene of Henchard's and Susan's reunion after twenty-years of separation. It would certainly be wrong to project the novel's setting into the realm of a timeless continuum in which historical reality plays no part; but it would be equally wrong to explain away the emotional resonances of the characters' experience by reductively making cultural politics the sole determining factor of every action and decision made by the author and his characters.

A definition of tragedy offered by American playwright Arthur Miller might at this point be cited to further the understanding of Hardy's approach to his tragic fiction. In Miller's view, the "operations of ... social laws of action" found in modern tragedies can reveal as much about human passion as the "tribal law administered by gods with names" found in ancient tragedies. "The lasting appeal of tragedy", Miller summarises, "is due to our need to face the fact of death in order to strengthen ourselves for life".¹³ Hardy's ambition, one might argue, was to do for nineteenth century English realist fiction what Miller subsequently did for twentieth century American realist drama—to create an aesthetic form which "varies" from ancient drama, but which nevertheless shares with ancient drama the impulse to affirm life in the face of death.

II

After pointing out the three historical events that serve as cornerstones of the story, Hardy makes a further comment in the Preface: "[t]he story is more particularly the study of one man's deeds and character than, perhaps, any other of those included in my Exhibition of Wessex life",¹⁴ a statement that he corroborates elsewhere with the observation that "it is not improbabilities of incident but improbabilities of character that matter".¹⁵ What this emphasis on "character" might be taken to mean is that history and sociology are meaningful to Hardy's artistic purpose not only in terms of their status as external happenings, but also in terms of their being symbolic projections of the internal experiences of his human protagonists. A newspaper account of the sale of a wife is thus transformed into an act of violation that simultaneously reveals the self-assertion and self-hatred of the central "character"; the uncongenial climate preceding the passing of the Corn Laws is employed as a catalyst to produce a sequence of events that demonstrates the effect of the character's instinct for survival and process of self-destruction; the event of the Royal Visit marks the culmination of the character's social defeat, leading him to the attempt to murder his rival which paradoxically also brings about his *anagnorisis* and "unmanning". The importance of historical reality is always subsidiary to the importance of emotional effects, which is also why a painstaking attempt at documenting history can neither repudiate nor account for the powerful creation of Henchard as a tragic "character".

If the particular achievement of Hardy as a Victorian novelist is, as Jeannette King argues, his success in balancing "two apparently opposing tendencies—the universal and elemental aspects of tragedy [and] the contemporary realities of the novel",¹⁶ it might be more particularly remarked of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* that this mediation between "universality" and "specificity" is further manifested in Hardy's interrogation of the interrelation between the ideas of "character" and "fate". The description of Henchard's reaction to his discovery of Susan's posthumous letter about the true parentage of Elizabeth-Jane provides a succinct summary of this tension:

Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him. Yet they had developed naturally.¹⁷

Here two distinct sets of explanations are offered for Henchard's predicament. On a universal, symbolic, and religious level, Henchard is punished for flouting divine and natural laws, according to which the rainstorm, Susan and the Firmity woman are agents in the morality tale of an old sinner receiving his just desert—"some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him". On a particular, realistic, and rational level, Henchard is defeated by the scientific and practical methods of industrialisation, by Farfrae's youthful and expert manipulations of events, by old age, sheer bad luck, or mere cause and effect—"[everything] had developed naturally". It is crucial to recognise that it is precisely the tension between these two views that Hardy wishes to explore in the novel.

This conflict between realistic and metaphysical explanations is not only located within Henchard's psychology but also within the narrative itself, where Hardy the poet, artist and myth-creator can at times be seen as working in direct conflict with Hardy the philosopher, sociologist and historian. The episode of Henchard's visit to the weather-prophet Fall in chapter XXVI is a particularly instructive instance of this tension. Hardy introduces the episode in the strain of a historical and social commentator:

The farmer's income was ruled by the wheat-crop within his own horizon, and the wheat-crop by the weather. Thus, in person, he became a sort of flesh-barometer ... The local atmosphere was everything to him; the atmospheres of other countries a matter of indifference. The people, too, who were not farmers, the rural multitude, saw in the god of the weather a more important personage than they do now. Indeed, the feeling of the peasantry in this matter was so intense as to be almost unrealisable in these equable days.¹⁸

The novel seems at this point to be adopting the tone and style of a documentary, and the passage might well have been taken from the pages of a contemporary journal of the period.¹⁹ It acknowledges the reader's presence, and assumes a specific class of readership through the reference to the "rural multitude" and "these equable days". It presents a balanced historical overview of the insular state of English agriculture prior to the repeal of the Corn Laws, when local farmers could still afford to ignore foreign events. But at the same time, the passage is used only as a preamble to the description of Henchard's visit to the weather-prophet. When the narrative reaches

this point, it changes abruptly from documentary mode to narrative mode, from the specificity of a social-historical context to a ballad-like or fairy-tale mysteriousness:

In a lonely hamlet a few miles from town—so lonely that what are called lonely villages were teeming by comparison—there lived a man of curious repute as a forecaster or weather-prophet. The way to his home was crooked and miry—even difficult in the present unpropitious season. One evening when it was raining so heavily that the ivy and laurel resounded like distant musketry, and an out-door man could be excused for shrouding himself to his ears and eyes, such a shrouded figure on foot might have been perceived travelling in the direction of the hazel-copse which dripped over the prophet's cot.²⁰

The contrast between the two passages is obvious: the first passage is informative, the second passage is evocative; the first passage is grounded within a specific historical and social moment, the second passage creates an atmosphere that is timeless and archetypal; the first passage builds up to an argument, the second passage builds up to a mysterious stranger's appearance. The shrouded figure who emerges from the rain turns out to be Henchard, but the mythic atmosphere does not end with the revelation of his identity: Henchard discovers on arriving at the hovel that the weather-prophet has already anticipated his visit and has set an extra dinner plate for him. A narratorial tension is thus created by the implication of the possibility that both naturalistic and symbolic explanations are valid. The fact that Fall himself is presented as a wise, congenial and dignified eccentric, rather than a crazy old man living off the charity of a fetishistic rural community, further makes it problematic for readers to stereotype him as an ogre or to explain away his power anthropologically as a product of superstition.

One might at this point introduce the pre-eminent Victorian realist George Eliot's *Silas Marner* by way of furthering our discussion of Hardy. Eliot's role as the voice of Victorian humanism is well known, and the way in which she reconciles the conflict between social realism and providence contrasts markedly with the way in which a humanist tragedian such as Hardy approaches the subject. The opening pages of *Silas Marner* are in many ways strikingly similar to the passages quoted above from *The Mayor*. Eliot's opening sentence—

In the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses ... there might be seen in districts far away among the lanes ... certain pallid undersized men, who, by the side of the brawny country-folk, looked like the remnants of a disinherited race

—similarly adopts a documentary tone and assumes a genteel class of readership. The opening passage builds up to the introduction of the eccentric Silas, at which point, this narrative, too, can be said to adopt a tone that summons up the aura of a fairy-tale:

In the early years of this century, such a linen-weaver named Silas Marner, worked at his vocation in a stone cottage that stood among the nutty hedgerows near the village of Raveloe, and not far from the edge of a deserted stone-pit.²¹

Eliot, however, is primarily concerned in her novel with reconciling the realistic and the metaphysical elements in order to validate the moral meaning of life: the comparable stories of Silas Marner and Godfrey Cass resolve themselves in the men's receiving of their just deserts both symbolically and naturalistically, and the result is a moral fable that at the same time constitutes a humanist assertion.

Hardy, by contrast, takes great pains to problematise the moral of his story and ironise the idea of Henchard's getting his just deserts. The realistic and symbolic elements do not unite to serve a moral end, as they do in Eliot's novel, but are suspended in ironic juxtaposition. The events subsequent to Henchard's visit to Fall leave entirely open the question of the weather-prophet's power. Fall predicts foul weather; Henchard accordingly stocks up on the wheat, but grows suspicious and sells early; then the weather really turns bad and Henchard loses the lot. Is the forecast of Fall a fluke, or is Henchard's reckless impatience the cause of his ruin? The realist interest of the narrative locates the metaphysical interpretation in Henchard's mind—"[t]he movements of his mind seemed to tend to the thought that some power was working against him"²²—but the symbolic thrust of the narrative refuses to rule out the validity of Fall's prediction or the possibility of Henchard's being punished by a divine judgement. It would be as wrong to admit the powers of Fall absolutely as it would be to deny them unequivocally. Both responses are needed to expose and enlarge the central contradictions in Henchard's character: on the one hand, he is endowed with a "modern" sensibility—confident, competitive, defiant, forward-looking, energetic; on the other hand, he

is burdened with an "archaic" sensibility—self-judging, shame-ridden, with an affection for past associations and an atavistic belief in a retributive moral order. He is both rational and atavistically emotional, having rashly committed himself to the ethos of unconditional progress while remaining acutely a man of the past. And it will take the rest of the novel to work through this tragic contradiction.

III

A significant episode, which further amplifies the tension between naturalistic and metaphysical causes, is the attempted suicide of Henchard at Blackmoor Vale and its interruption by the spectacle of the skimmington-puppet floating on the river (XLI). The power of symbolism complicates, while not exactly displacing, the naturalistic explanation in this key episode, and Henchard's response to his biological and social paternity reveals that his capacity for love is both repulsively selfish and deeply sympathetic. The scene in chapter XLI recalls the moment in chapter XIX, when Henchard approaches the river after reading Susan's letter and identifying traces of Newson's features in Elizabeth's face. Henchard's discovery that he does not "own" his daughter biologically fills him with a sense of loss. His misery is projected onto his surroundings: the distant gallows which has the "missing feature"²³ of a corpse symbolises Henchard's wish to die. At this point, he doesn't understand his own motive and he asks himself: "why the deuce did I come here!"²⁴ which also registers the death of his emotional self. In the second scene, Henchard goes to the river with the intention of ending his life because of his feeling of inevitable displacement, after Newson has returned to reclaim his daughter. This time, however, Henchard's intention is foiled by the appearance of a corpse and it leads him to a moment of self-recognition: the puppet is in his own shape and dressed in his mayoral clothes, registering the death of his social self. "The sense of the supernatural was strong in this unhappy man", we are told: "he turned away as one might have done in the actual presence of an appalling miracle".²⁵ His wish to die paradoxically leads to his reconciliation with Elizabeth, who agrees to move in with him after learning of his suicide attempt. This is followed by what seems to be a spiritual and emotional rebirth for Henchard:

Then Henchard shaved for the first time during many days, and put on clean linen, and combed his hair; and was a man resuscitated thenceforward

Despite [the] natural solution of the mystery, Henchard no less regarded it as an intervention that the figure should have been floating there. Elizabeth-Jane heard him say, "Who is such a reprobate as I! And yet it seems that even I be in Somebody's hand!"²⁶

Arguably this would not be an inappropriate place for the novel to conclude, and if Hardy had allowed this version of events to transpire, Henchard's experience would not then be entirely dissimilar to the experience of many of his fellow repentant sinners in Victorian fictions, such as, for example, Charlotte Brontë's Rochester, who is finally brought to marvel at God's tempering of "judgement with mercy".²⁷

But whether fate is intent on playing a cruel joke on Henchard, or whether there is no God at all in this agonistic world, Henchard's life is doomed to end differently.²⁸ The first sentence of the next chapter in the wake of his "enlightenment" immediately deflates any sense of a miraculous intervention:

But the emotional conviction that he was in Somebody's hand began to die out of Henchard's breast as time slowly removed into the distance the event which had given that feeling birth.²⁹

Henchard's new found faith in God turns out to be merely an illusion, and his moment of positive enlightenment is soon replaced by the novel's return to wholly naturalistic events. And in accordance with the idea that "character is fate", Hardy denies any explicit correspondence between religious and social laws, ethical and emotional consistencies. The roles of culprit and accuser are intermingled and inseparable: the immoral man who sells his wife is also the penitent who punishes himself with an oath; the misogynist who threatens to expose his mistress' sexual indiscretion is also the man of "moods, glooms, and superstitions" whose "heart smote him for having attempted reprisals on one of a sex so weak";³⁰ the furious madman who tries to murder his enemy is also the man who retreats in shame at the very moment that success is within his reach—"God is my witness," he tells Farfrae, "that no man ever loved another as I did thee at one time".³¹ Henchard the sinning devil consistently takes on the role of his own punitive god. His impulse to get rid of Farfrae as a suitor to Elizabeth by revealing her illegitimate birth is prevented by his own conscience: "God forbid such a thing! Why should I still be subject to these visitations of the devil, when I

try so hard to keep him away?";³² and later, his inability to cease yearning for the love of his step-daughter is ironically attributed to "God's ingenious machinery for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum".³³ Convenient as it is to dismiss these references as artificial intrusions, such an approach misses what they highlight about Henchard's character; the internal conflict of a man whose lawless desire and superstitious belief in justice are warring within him, and who finds that there is no straightforward course to right that he can take. It is Henchard's will to make himself into a "better" man that takes him closer to a complete destruction of himself, and his spiritual rebirth ultimately prepares him only for another kind of doom.

Against the optimistic tradition of Victorian humanist literature, Hardy can be seen as committing himself to complicating the nineteenth-century reworking of poetic justice. The sinner, after being chastened into a reverence for God, is not allowed to settle into a secure possession of that knowledge. The "moral order of the universe" combines with the naturalistic course of events to bring him down even after his repentance. Elizabeth-Jane's significant answer to her stepfather's belief in divine judgement—"I don't think there are any miracles nowadays"³⁴—strikes the chord of the irreversible change that is taking place in this society; her remark registers the disappearance of a world view which used to provide moral guidance and authority, but which has now become no more than a superstition. In Eliot's version, the social and the providential combine for a moral effect: social progress in the form of the draining of Stone-pits coincides with the punishment of Godfrey. And the uncertainty of Silas' remark to his adopted daughter—"things *will* change, whether we like it or no"³⁵—is resolved in Eppie's ability to combine filial duties and marriage; the image of the flower garden on which the novel ends is symbolic of the fruitful combination of the values of the past and future.³⁶ In Hardy's version, the naturalistic and the religious explanations combine to produce an unresolved tragic tension: Henchard is sinning but he also redeems himself by his sins; the commercial acumen and technological ingenuity of Farfrae bring Henchard down but serve no moral purpose at all, and Elizabeth-Jane's marriage to Farfrae—symbolic of the triumph of "civilisation" over "nature"—displaces her stepfather from the centre of the community.

IV

It will be clear from my discussion so far that neither the argument that the novel is a kind of Victorian justification of the will of God to man (Paterson's reading), nor the argument that it is a mundane bourgeois biography draped in Classical-mythological trappings (Moses' reading), does adequate justice to the subtlety and richness of Hardy's artistic endeavour, or the complexity of his ambivalent conceptions of the cause and effect of human actions. Seeing everything as historically determined is ultimately as unhelpful in understanding Hardy's tragedy as seeing everything as providentially determined: both modes of seeing simplify in the interests of a particular kind of consistency the actual fissures and tensions which it is the unique capacity of tragedy as an art form to identify, accentuate and interrogate without vacillation or obfuscation.

Hegel famously defines tragedy as the conflict between two equally justifiable and unilateral forces,³⁷ and one of the significant tragic issues of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is its exploration of two conflicting views of the world—one religious, the other rationalistic—that might be seen firstly as being internalised in the struggles of Henchard's "character", secondly as being externalised in the action of Henchard's and Farfrae's rivalries, and thirdly as being integrated in the narratorial strategy of generic interplay between "poetry" and "realism". I have already touched upon this third strategy in my analysis of the episode of Henchard's visit to Fall, and its significance might be further elucidated by examining the way in which Hardy invokes and reworks established tragic conventions for his creative purpose. An emblematic instance is Henchard's suicide attempt in Blackmoor Vale, which leads to his rescue by and reconciliation with Elizabeth-Jane, a reconciliation which also signals the temporary re-burgeoning of his emotional self:

"Father—I will not leave you alone like this!" she cried.

"May I live with you, and tend upon you as I used to do?..."

"May you come to me?" he cried bitterly. "Elizabeth, don't mock me! If you only would come!"

"I will," said she.

"How will you forgive all my roughness in former days?
You cannot!"

"I have forgotten it. Talk of it no more."³⁸

This conversation carries an unmistakable resonance of Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia:

Lear: You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave

Cordelia: O look upon me, sir,
And hold your hand in benediction o'er me

Lear: Pray do not mock me
If you have poison for me I will drink it.
I know you do not love me, for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
You have some cause; they have not.

Cordelia: No cause, no cause.³

Hardy's allusions to *Lear* in the novel have been noted by many commentators, and one could chart the development of critical attitudes to Hardy from enthusiastic adulation of the novel's "Shakespearean" quality in older criticisms to cynical dismissal of their artificial imposition on the novel in recent criticisms. But merely praising or denigrating Hardy's Shakespearean allusions is not enough. For a proper appreciation of the novel, one must try to understand how Hardy appropriates *Lear* to further his own dialectical purpose; how adaptation and borrowing become integration and innovation; and how the potential problem of combining the tragic mode into the realist mode is wrought into a problematising strategy that finally expresses the particular tragic concern of the novel.

One of the striking parallels between Shakespeare's play and Hardy's novel is that the emotional centre of both works is located in the figure of a pious and meditative young woman who disregards social triumphs, in marked contrast with the erring tragic hero. Elizabeth-Jane is initially the victim of Henchard's materialistic desires as much as Cordelia is the victim of Lear's attempt to materialise love into a calculable asset. And one of the most important moments of Henchard's *anagnorisis* concerns Elizabeth:

It was an odd sequence that out of all this tampering with social law came that flower of Nature, Elizabeth. Part of his wish to wash his hands of life arose from his perception of its contrarious inconsistencies—of Nature's jaunty readiness to support unorthodox social principles.⁴⁰

Yet surely one of the greatest ironies of the novel is that at the very moment that Henchard the ambitious sinner is educated into humane values, she who is "the flower of Nature" switches her allegiance to support the very orthodox social principle of marrying a man of wealth and social standing. In effect, she exchanges roles with Henchard, gaining a social identity at the moment that he loses his. And this is where Hardy might be seen most radically to revise Shakespeare's play and that play's conception of Cordelia as an agent who "redeems Nature from the general curse".⁴¹ In *Lear*, Shakespeare arguably mounts what might be called a humanist validation of the value of life: the two competing views of life, as dramatically juxtaposed in Gloucester's superstitious belief in planetary influence and Edmund's rationalistic belief in amoral autonomy,⁴² are undermined and displaced in the course of the drama by Lear's recognition of the value of Cordelia's "nothing"—a word embodying the power of an unconditional love that at once defies logical calculation, resists rational explication, and refuses conversion into something material. Lear is educated into the meanings of selfless love and forgiveness, and the fact that the woman who speaks "nothing",⁴³ and loves for "no cause",⁴⁴ finally dies—in flagrant contravention of providentiality and poetic justice—for "nothing" as well, is the play's ultimate way of challenging us into seeing love not as means to an end but as "the thing itself".⁴⁵ In *The Mayor*, on the other hand, Hardy modifies the condition of tragic experience by pragmatically accommodating it to the realist-domestic novel: in the modern world, accidental death is less likely to occur than something is to triumph over nothing; the complication of familial relations opens up new possibilities of "love" even as it gives rise to new forms of conflicts and problems, and Henchard's tragic knowledge must spring from his confrontation with the fact of Elizabeth's successful social integration without him.

V

It is typical of ideologically-driven accounts of literature that they are often most ingenious where they are also most blatantly inaccurate: two competing accounts of the direction in which Elizabeth-Jane's character matures provide a telling instance for analysis. Readings that cynically condemn her as a mouthpiece of patriarchal morality,⁴⁶ and readings that heartily endorse her as an embodiment of constructive femininity,⁴⁷ are comparable in their

seemingly radical provision of a "revisionist" perspective on the text; but their originality, it must be said, is also made possible by a common willingness to obfuscate the most important motivation governing Elizabeth's decision to marry Farfrae. The reason that Elizabeth-Jane chooses as she does is not so much that she is an infallible agent of conscience, or a patriarchal apologist who is dazzled by the Scotsman's social elevation, or even a sentimental martyr who is eager to fulfil the death wish of her mother. Rather, it is because she recognises the inevitability of change and accepts the necessity of the past's making way for the future. Earlier, the narrative describes Elizabeth's achievement of a conclusive wisdom about life:

She had learnt the lesson of renunciation, and was as familiar with the wreck of each day's wishes as with the diurnal setting of the sun Continually it had happened that what she had desired had not been granted her, and that what had been granted her she had not desired. So she viewed with an approach to equanimity the now cancelled days when Donald had been her undeclared lover, and wondered what unwished-for thing Heaven might send her in place of him.⁴⁸

Elizabeth's serene acceptance here stands in ironic contrast with Henchard's torturous self-discipline, but Hardy also subjects his heroine's stoicism to another ironic twist: so absolutely does Elizabeth subscribe to the lesson of renunciation, that when Heaven sends her an "unwished-for thing" in the person of Farfrae again, she accepts the offering without resistance.⁴⁹ Recognising that the ultimate form of renunciation is the renunciation of her ideal, Elizabeth chooses to join the prosaic business of life rather than remain above it.⁵⁰ The problem is that her self-sacrifice also involves sacrificing Henchard, and renunciation is thereby transformed by Hardy into a form of moral compromise which is strikingly different from the more ideal form it is prone to assume in George Eliot's conception of ethical experiences. The woman who religiously laments the passing away of traditional rural life—" [t]hen the romance of the sower is gone for good"⁵¹—will marry the man who is responsible for introducing the threshing machine into Casterbridge, accepting the fickleness of her lover's affection and the general trend of social progress as regrettable but necessary conditions of what is, in Farfraean idiom, "the way of the warrl'd".⁵²

Elizabeth-Jane's willingness to resolve conflicts sensibly makes her a survivor. But it is also this willingness that excludes her from being involved in a tragic conflict, where such a resolution is denied. It finally takes the isolation and destruction of Henchard to produce an *anagnorisis* that is worthy of the complexity and grandeur of a tragic epiphany. In such critical discourse as Michael Valdez Moses', which insists on measuring tragic heroism exclusively in socio-political terms, the irrelevance of the final stage of Henchard's life to the political concerns of Casterbridge is necessarily seen as a failure on Hardy's part to graft the heroic dimension of Classical tragedy onto a Victorian mercantile setting—so much so, that the memorable scenes depicting Henchard's self-banishment and returning to attend Elizabeth's wedding can be written off as "empty theatrical gestures",⁵³ and even the spectacle of Abel Whittle's loyalty to his former master can be explained away as revealing the sentimental naturalisation of power-relations in an agricultural society. Whatever ideological insights such a reading yields, they offer poor compensation for what they fail to address. This reading signally fails to respond to the profound internal drama of Henchard's emotional struggles and the extraordinarily varied consistency with which Hardy captures that "idiosyncrasy" which "had ruled [Henchard's] courses from the beginning".⁵⁴

The pitiable fearfulness of Henchard's character is so powerfully realised in these episodes that their culmination in the moment of his death contributes strongly to the impression that what we witness is indeed made of "the same stuff that his whole life was made of"⁵⁵: the contradiction of his fatalistic fear of rejection and his craving for affection; his totally irrational yet totally believable sense of need to reclaim the love of his step-daughter; his painful confrontation with Elizabeth-Jane where the intensity of his feelings for her is balanced by his inability to express those feelings, and where his attempt to explain away his sins paradoxically leads to his perception that an explanation would constitute a greater sin than a silent admission; the "proud superiority" with which he takes leave of her which at the same time springs from his magnanimous consideration of her "discomposure";⁵⁶ his association with the lonely caged bird which rewrites the "two birds in a cage" paradise that Lear idealistically envisages as sharing with Cordelia, and which gives poignant expression to the former mayor's unvoiced yearning; the single-minded resolve of his final

act of self-effacement as reported in Abel Whittle's awkwardly moving elegy, and his leaving behind him the uncompromising instructions in his Will⁵⁷ that finally reaffirms his stamp as a man of character who "meant what he said".⁵⁸

Surely a method of interpretation that has to validate itself by dismissing all these impressions and experiences as "superimposition" leaves something to be desired. Far from being arbitrary, the final pages of the novel achieve a momentum of tragic inevitability whose effect on readers one might appropriately describe in the Aristotelian terms of "pity" and "fear". The straightforward reporting of Whittle's commentary summarises the singleness of Henchard's vision in the final moments of his life: he no longer moves in a circle like the "Canadian woodsman",⁵⁹ but, knowing his course, walks straight into the heart of the wilderness until he collapses from sheer exhaustion. Henchard's experience has travelled full circle both symbolically and structurally: he begins with a piece of paper (the ballad sheet) and ends with a piece of paper (his Will); he begins by renouncing "nature" and ends by "s[inking] in the earth".⁶⁰ The finality of his *anagnorisis* is such that he can no longer find consolation in religion: the sinner who was once able to begin his life anew by making an oath in a chapel dies as a man who will rest in his own judgement, stipulating that he be buried not in sacred ground and that no sexton toll his funeral bell. As a tragic protagonist, however, Henchard's negation also constitutes an assertion; his violation, his redemption.⁶¹ The fullness of his humanity is revealed in his willingness to relinquish Elizabeth-Jane to his rival, his total forgiveness of her cruel rejection, and his citation of her welfare as the foremost condition of his Will. On this point, Elizabeth is surely wrong to weep for what she calls her stepfather's "bitterness",⁶² for if there is one thing that redeems Henchard's offences, it is his willingness to care unconditionally for the young woman who is no daughter of his. He reminds her before he leaves Casterbridge to remember that "though I love 'ee late I loved 'ee well",⁶³ and in the end, he doesn't repeat his love aloud but offers her his mute blessing. In this version of the *Lear* story, it is the sinner who loves and is silent.⁶⁴

Just as Shakespearean tragedy conventionally offers a moment of respite following the death of the tragic protagonist, in which the surviving characters attempt to come to terms with the overwhelming spectacle to which they have borne witness, so Hardy's novel also includes a restorative rationale in the form of Elizabeth-

Jane's concluding meditation on the condition of her survival without her step-father. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret Hardy's apparent adherence to this tragic convention as a blandly imitative gesture rather than as the appropriative technique that it is. Determined to score an ideological point at the expense of a 'dead author', the cultural-materialist critic George Wotton interprets Elizabeth-Jane's triumphant social ascendancy as an achievement which Hardy intends his readers to accept as validating the "unity and harmony and universality" of her rationalistic consciousness, and which it takes Wotton's own theoretical apparatus to expose as being "put into contradiction by images of suppression, domination, conflict".⁶⁵ Yet reading Wotton, one cannot help marvelling at the confidence with which such a critic sets out to deny Hardy and claim for himself perspicacity on an issue that the novel's tragic argument seems to have directly anticipated and confronted. It has often been said that Elizabeth-Jane's role in the early part of the narrative (a role which she significantly chooses to abandon when she agrees to marry Farfrae) resembles an objective observer and surrogate narrator.⁶⁶ If this argument holds true, then Elizabeth's act of dismissing Henchard in favour of Farfrae might also be interpreted as symbolic of her creator's own reluctant accession to the modern values that the new mayor of Casterbridge embodies.

Through Elizabeth, then, Hardy is implicitly acknowledging his involvement in the modern world in spite of his guilt at dissociating himself from his rural origin and his lamenting of the disappearance of a way of life that he cherishes. Elizabeth-Jane's awareness of the limitation of her philosophy thus also echoes Hardy's self-critical acknowledgement of the distance that lies between his privileged position as a respectable man of letters and the harsh experience of rural life that forms the subject of the bulk of his writing. The shared inability of author and heroine to resolve this contradiction makes them the communicators rather than the protagonists of tragic conflicts.⁶⁷ But it is also the negative experience of a tragic protagonist like Henchard that ultimately enables a life-affirming wisdom to be articulated by the spectator in the "general drama of pain".⁶⁸ One might recall Elizabeth's early aspiration to become a "better woman"—one "of wider knowledge, higher repute"⁶⁹—and observe that while she finds "respectability" from marrying Farfrae, it is solely through her association with the

sinning Henchard that she becomes a "better" woman. Her morality and philosophy are softened with a humane wisdom as a result of her participation, albeit only in a spectator's role, in the latter's tragedy.

VI

This paper has tried to identify and clarify some of the formal and thematic characteristics that make *The Mayor of Casterbridge* quintessential of a late nineteenth century tragic novel. If Arthur Miller was right to define the primary function of tragedy as the affirmation of the sanctity of life in the face of death, he was probably also right to remind us that "[o]ver and above this function of the tragic viewpoint, there are and will be a great number of formal variations which no single definition will ever embrace".⁷⁰ One of Hardy's most distinctive contributions to the formal variations in English tragedy is undoubtedly his powerful and original appropriation of the themes, nuances and emotions of the tragic drama for the medium of the realist novel.

In "Candour in English Fiction", the first of two articles Hardy contributed to the journal *New Review* in the early 1890s, he deplores the constraints on artistic freedom that fiction writers of his day had to endure on account of the prudish censorship exercised by publishers, editors and reviewers. As his argument develops, however, Hardy also widens the scope of his attack to include the aesthetic objective of his literary peers and criticises what he sees as their reluctance to recognise tragedy as a viable genre for dealing with issues of contemporary life. The best method of presenting the "prevalent views of life", Hardy argues, was "by a procedure mainly impassive in its tone and tragic in its developments":

Why the ancient classic and old English tragedy can be regarded deeply ... and the modern novel cannot be so regarded; why the honest and uncompromising delineation which makes the old stories and dramas lessons in life must make of the modern novel, following humbly on the same lines, a lesson in iniquity, is to some thinkers a mystery inadequately accounted for by the difference between old and new.⁷¹

In explicitly relating the "old" dramas to the "new" novels, and in rejecting the determination to see a disjunction between them as something "inadequately accounted for", Hardy affirms his belief

that the preoccupations which are found in the former medium are not merely compatible, but also continuous, with the preoccupations expressed in the latter medium. While contemporary thinkers like George Eliot and J. S. Mill tried to counter the social and intellectual problems they saw around them by actively searching for rational and humanitarian solutions, Hardy's way of dealing with these problems was partly to revert to the collective wisdom of the past, to draw inspiration from older forms of literature, and to extract from them a tragic solution that might be applicable to his examination of contemporary issues. "Perhaps great tragedy", writes Robert N. Watson, "is that which resists history and retains humanity".⁷² On the strength of the tragic achievement of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, one might reasonably say that, despite its unfashionableness, this is an observation that Hardy would have found agreeable.

Notes

- 1 Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), quoted by Laurence Lerner, *Tragedy or Social History?* (Toronto: Sussex University Press, 1975), p. 75.
- 2 Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984); Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1985).
- 3 Peter Widdowson, *Thomas Hardy* ('Writers and their Work' Series, Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996), pp. 32-33.
- 4 Thus Widdowson: "No writer's work—and certainly that of no writer who has held a significant place in literary history—can now be studied in and for itself", (*Thomas Hardy*, p. 10). As far as statement goes, this is as dogmatically universalist as it gets; yet what is especially interesting is to witness the way in which even a cultural materialist critic is guilty of confusing his personal opinion with a universal truth: if Widdowson is not even aware of the way in which he has offered what he thinks "should not" be done as something that at the same time "cannot" be done by any reader, it seems there is still something to be desired in a critical methodology that prides itself on recognising and exposing precisely these kinds of contradictory discourses in language.
- 5 John Paterson, "*The Mayor of Casterbridge* as Tragedy", in *Victorian Studies*, no. 3 (1959), pp. 151-172, reprinted in *Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Albert Guérard (Edgewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963), pp. 91-112 (p. 92). See also D.A. Dike, "A Modern Oedipus: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*", in *Essays in Criticism*, no. 2 (1952), pp. 169-79.

- 6 Douglas Brown, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Longman, Green, 1954), p. 65. Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), offers a different sociological interpretation from that of Brown, who contends that the novel demonstrates "the struggle between the native countryman and the alien invader". Accordingly, to Williams, "[t]he pressures to which Hardy's characters are subjected are then pressures from within the system of living Henchard is not destroyed by a new and alien kind of dealing but by a development of his own trade which he has himself invited" (p. 114).
- 7 Michael Valdez Moses, "Agon in the Marketplace: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as Bourgeois Tragedy", in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 87 (1988), pp. 219-257.
- 8 Thomas Hardy, "Preface to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*" (1895), reprinted in *Personal Writings*, ed. Harold Orel (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 18.
- 9 "[T]hough his novel actually reveals the contradictions that riddle bourgeois existence, [Hardy] succeeds in making that form of economic life palatable to his middle-class readers by assimilating it to the prestigious patterns of traditional Greek myth and tragedy", Michael Valdez Moses, "Agon in the Marketplace", p. 243.
- 10 Thomas Hardy, "Preface to *Iar From the Maddening Crowd*", reprinted in *Personal Writings*, p. 9.
- 11 Thomas Hardy, "General Preface to the Novels and Poems" (1912), reprinted in *Personal Writings*, pp. 44-45.
- 12 *Personal Writings*, p. 45. It is also significant that Hardy classifies all his "tragic" novels under the heading "Novels of Character and Environment".
- 13 Arthur Miller, "Introduction to Collected Plays" (1958), reprinted in *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 56.
- 14 Thomas Hardy, "Preface to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*" (1895), p. 18.
- 15 Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 176. Many commentators have pointed out that the aphorism which Hardy uses to describe Henchard—"Character is Fate" (*Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 143)—was most probably inspired by George Eliot's observation on Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*: "Character, says Novalis in one of his questionable aphorisms, 'Character is destiny.'" (VI.vi). R. H. Hutton was one of the contemporary reviewers who took issue with Hardy's concept of "character": "the words on the title-page", Hutton wrote, "rather mislead", *The Spectator* (5 June 1886), reprinted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 137.
- 16 Jeannette King, *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 15.

- 17 Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, introduced by Ian Gregor (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 154. All subsequent references are drawn from this edition.
- 18 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 209.
- 19 See Thomas Hardy, "The Dorsetshire Labourer", reprinted in *Personal Writings*, pp. 168-191. The passage describing the old man in chapter XXIII was originally intended for this article.
- 20 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 210.
- 21 George Eliot, *Silas Marner*, ed. Q.D. Leavis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 51-52. Specific to the social concerns, one may contrast the use of the inn as a symbol of community. In *Silas Marner*, the Rainbow is the centre of communal value in Raveloe; in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the three inns—King's Arms, The Three Mariners and Peter's Finger—are used to highlight not only social unity but social division as well.
- 22 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 215.
- 23 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 155.
- 24 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 155.
- 25 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 319.
- 26 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, pp. 320-321.
- 27 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Q.D. Leavis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), Chapter 38, p. 477.
- 28 Once again, a comparison with *Silas Marner* is justified. Henchard's supposed epiphany—"[a]nd yet it seems even I be in Somebody's hand"—sounds very much like the acceptance of Dolly Winthrop's explanation to which Silas is finally brought: "there's dealings with us—there's dealings" (p. 205). But the way in which Eliot reconciles religion and rationality to form a meaningful continuity is different from Hardy's.
- 29 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 322.
- 30 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, pp. 273-74.
- 31 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 296.
- 32 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 328.
- 33 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 340.
- 34 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 319.
- 35 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 210.
- 36 It is tempting to speculate on the extent to which Hardy's extension of Shakespeare's concept of filial love is influenced by *Silas Marner*, where George Eliot highlights the superior claim of the foster father (Silas) to the biological father (Godfrey), by endowing the former with moral and emotional justification. Henchard's love for Elizabeth is stronger than

- Newson's—Newson, for example, moves to Budmouth to be near the sea after his daughter's wedding—"the contiguity of salt water proved to be such a necessity of his existence" (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 348)—while Henchard dies yearning for Elizabeth's company: "the sympathy of the girl seemed necessary to his very existence" (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 323)—but Hardy also complicates Eliot's story by tragically setting the moral and the emotional causes in conflict: unlike Eppie's straightforward preference of Silas over Godfrey, Elizabeth's rejection of her stepfather is morally sound yet emotionally cruel, and Henchard continues to retain our emotional sympathies in spite of his moral failings.
- 37 G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (c.1820), trans. Anne and Henry Paolucci, reprinted in John Drakakis and Naomi Conn (eds.), *Tragedy* (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 23-52.
- 38 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 320.
- 39 *King Lear*, IV.vii.45, 57-9, 72-5.
- 40 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 339.
- 41 *King Lear*, IV.vi.206-7.
- 42 *King Lear*, I.ii.
- 43 *King Lear*, I.i.8.
- 44 *King Lear*, IV.vii.77.
- 45 *King Lear*, III.iv.103. To appreciate this point, one must resist insisting on finding cynical political reasons to explain Cordelia's function in the play. For example, Leonard Tennenhouse, "The Theatre of Punishment", in *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York: Methuen, 1986): "To ask why Cordelia ... has to die, is virtually to provide the answer: because the patriarchal principle itself rather than the identity of the monarch's natural body is in question" (reprinted in *King Lear*, ed. Kiernan Ryan ('New Casebook' Series, London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 70). To a degree, Kathleen McLuskie is right to point out the inconsistency of Cordelia's defiance of her father only in order to assert her submission to her husband: "Cordelia's saving love", McLuskie writes, "works in the action less as a redemption of womankind than as an example of patriarchy restored"—"The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and *King Lear*", reprinted in *King Lear*, ed. Kiernan Ryan, p. 49. Yet such a view not only misses the very subversive nature of Cordelia's behaviour and the lesson that Lear is made to learn through his daughter's devotion, but also attributes a straightforward political motive to an action that the play presents as politically ambiguous. When confronted by the conflict of political and emotional allegiance, Cordelia completely abandons her new 'care and duty' as the queen and wife of a foreign monarch France to rescue her father, waging a war in the name of love: "[n]o blown ambition

- doth our arms incite./ But love, dear love, and our aged father's right" (IV.iv.27-8). If Cordelia's return to England is a submission to one form of patriarchy, her departure from France constitutes an undermining of another form of patriarchy.
- 46 For example, John Goode, *Thomas Hardy, The Offensive Truth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 83-84; Marjorie Garson, *Hardy's Fables of Integrity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 111-121.
- 47 For example, Elaine Showalter, "The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge", reprinted in *Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, ed. R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 156; Ellen Lew Sprechman, "Hero of Casterbridge: Elizabeth-Jane", *Seeing Women as Men: Role Reversal in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Ithaca: University Press of America, 1995), pp. 59-76.
- 48 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 204.
- 49 Cf. Martin Seymour-Smith, "Introduction", *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 45.
- 50 For example, Elizabeth will abandon her industrious net-weaving and scholarly studies to join the worldly circle of the nineteen ambitious young ladies of Casterbridge who have all set their mind on becoming the next Lady Farfrae (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 329). This might be Hardy's revision of Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, whose death from her act of allowing life to compromise her art is transformed into Elizabeth-Jane's survival as a result of her allowing her ideal to be compromised by life. Yet the question of whether the softening of Henchard constitutes a "decline" or "advancement" also applies to Elizabeth. Her decision to marry Farfrae is the subject of gossip in *Three Mariners*, and it is not without significance that the last words belong to Christopher Coney, whose judgement is that she is "a stooping to he" (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 329).
- 51 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 195.
- 52 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 250.
- 53 Michael Valdez Moses, "Agon in the Marketplace", p. 245.
- 54 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 325.
- 55 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 353.
- 56 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 346.
- 57 Cf. Laurence Lerner, *Tragedy or Social History?*: "Henchard dies offstage but it is not quite true that he has no curtain speech. His final philosophy is his Will, and it is the most powerful ending of any [of] Hardy's character[s]" (p. 68).
- 58 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 353.
- 59 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 339.

- 60 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 349.
- 61 Marjorie Garson's feminist reading sees the self-conscious echoing of *King Lear* as a strategy employed by the text to naturalise a masculine tragic fulfilment at the expense of feminine experience—"The text eroticizes the notion of exposure which it borrows from *Lear*" (p. 121)—yet this exposure only applies to Susan and Lucetta who die shamed and sexually exploited, whereas Henchard is protected by tragic discourse even in his defeat. "Precisely because [Henchard's] ordeal is modelled so self-consciously on Lear's, we can never forget that, unlike Lear, Henchard is always ... "in Somebody's hand"—in the hand of the author who insists at the end of the story on endowing him with a fictitious unity and wholeness" (Marjorie Garson, *Hardy's Fables of Integrity*, p. 124).
62. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 353.
63. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 353.
64. Note the explicit verbal echoes. Cordelia speaks "nothing" when Lear demands to know her love, and Elizabeth's response at the news of Henchard's death echoes this: "As for Elizabeth, she said nothing" (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 352).
65. George Wotton, *Thomas Hardy, Towards a Materialist Criticism* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1985), p. 65.
66. For example, Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy, His Career as a Novelist* (London: Bodley Head, 1971), p. 229; Dale Kramer, *The Forms of Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 91; Ian Gregor, *The Great Web* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), p. 125; Robert Langbaum, *Thomas Hardy in Our Time* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), p. 140.
67. See Robert Gittings, *The Older Hardy* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 18, p. 42, for speculations on Hardy's struggle to reconcile his emotional attachment to his family and his discomfort with its humble origin.
68. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 354.
69. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 58.
70. Arthur Miller, "Introduction to Collected Plays" (1958), in *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 56.
71. Thomas Hardy, "Candour in English Fiction", reprinted in *Personal Writings*, p. 131. In "Profitable Reading of Fiction", also reprinted in *Personal Writings*, Hardy also wrote: "Good fiction may be defined as the kind of imaginative writing which lies nearest to the narrative masterpieces of the past" (p. 114).
72. Robert N. Watson, "Tragedy", *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 301-351 (p. 303).