

Character and Historical Consciousness in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

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The essay attempts at a critical reading of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) in terms of character and socio-cultural change. Juxtaposing the story of Michael Henchard's career with the social and economic changes in the agricultural town, it attempts to elaborate on the complex ways in which Hardy relates the old modes of life and thinking to the material culture. Though the novel is centered on the story of Henchard, the Henchard-Farfrae clash represents the conflict of "old" and "new" modes of socio-economic organization and consciousness. The story of the rustic man of character struggling with his contradictory traits of strong will-power and emotional collapse suggests that Hardy's literary representation of the rural community and the rustic protagonist is deeply rooted in historical reality. However, while there is the interlocking of the changes in personal fate and social change, the representation is a "reinvented" literary construction with complex mediation. Despite the narrator's emphasis on Henchard's immutability, peculiarity, and resilience, his character is, in a complex, mediated way, shaped by the material conditions of English rural community in the late 19th century. The mediating role of Elizabeth-Jane as a narrative resolution embodies Hardy's ambivalent historical position concerning the period undergoing change and conflict.

[historical consciousness/bourgeois realism/textual contradictions/ historical contradictions]

I. HARDY AS A LITERARY PRODUCER

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), the first of Thomas Hardy's "Wessex novels," the narrative events begin in around 1850 and the whole action lasts 25

years, from 1831 to 1856, with the major action, after the 18 or 19 years since the wife sale, spanning for about 6 years. Hardy wrote about Dorchester and its rural past he knew so well when he was a boy, but with a backward glance toward the Wessex. With some modification of dates of actual events such as Prince Albert's visit (1849) and the railway reach to Dorchester (1847) and with relatively marginal allusions to such important indexes of English political landscape as the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) and the urbanization process, Hardy gives form to his feelings about the changes in his native countryside.

As Richard Altick states in his *Victorian People and Ideas*, the Victorians had a uniquely ambivalent sense of history due to the unprecedented physical and social transformations and the widening interactions with overseas cultures: "Although in one mood they valued the innovative, the liberal, and the rational, their affinity with the romantic temper nourished an equal sympathy with the antiquarian, the conservative, the emotional" (101). This new, ambivalent sense of history made the Victorians puzzled and confused about their time and, out of anxiety over the disappearance of physical links to the past, they tended to resort to "the sense of continuity" with the past. Mid- and late-Victorian writers such as Dickens, Eliot, and Thackeray also tended toward a "backward-looking" and Hardy was no less so. No less significant to note is that the novel is concerned with change, not just with the rural past, and that Hardy was forward-looking as well as backward-looking.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is, as the subtitle suggests, the story of "a Man of Character." It is, more than anything else, a work of characterization with an account of the struggles and fate of one particular man. Unemployed, impoverished, homeless, and burdened with a wife Susan and a baby daughter Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard gets drunk in a furmity (a kind of pudding) tent at the fairground and sells his wife and child to a sailor for five guineas. Next morning he regrets his folly, but to no avail. But his drunken folly is also a desperate act perpetrated in an attempt to escape his impoverished condition. Remorseful and shameful, he vows against drink. About 20 years after the incident, Henchard, with an enormous capacity for will and abstinence becomes the mayor of his adopted town of Casterbridge. Though he acquires power and status, he never for an instant believes that his crime can be excused. The "primal" fear of his past appears like a ghost. The sudden appearances of Susan and Elizabeth-Jane, and later that of Lucetta, Captain Newson, and the furmity woman, become a testing ground for his morality and character. He remains burdened with impulsiveness

of his character until his social and emotional collapse, which is initiated by his battle with Donald Farfrae, the young Scottish man he loves and hates, and evolves into his self-exile and self-effacing death in the Egdon Heath. He changes his selfish and jealous behavior and learns his lesson of altruism, self-effacement, tragic consciousness, and stoicism of endurance. But he does not fully understand or accept the unknowable power of Nature working imperviously against him as a form of opposition. He changes morally and in self-awareness, but he does not abandon his indignation or cosmic interrogation against the ineluctable force of Nature.

The plot is meant to serve as a tool to register Hardy's vision of man's plan in the universe. The focus of the novel pivots around the singular character of Henchard, the dispossessed migrant worker of hay-trussing, the corn merchant and the mayor of his newly adopted community. The narrative introduces a handful of other characters, though it is with Henchard that the novel is primarily concerned. However, in dramatizing the rise and fall of Henchard, the novel is no less concerned with the social and cultural changes. Henchard's career is deeply entwined with the historical change he is situated. In the Preface Hardy writes: "The incidents narrated arise mainly out of the three events....They are 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." But, as Hardy clarifies, "The story is more particularly a study of one man's deeds and character than, perhaps, any other of those included in my Exhibition of Wessex life"(1). The presence of Henchard is so powerful that the other characters appear to pivot around him as aspects or "doubles" of his enormous selfhood. The "three events" mentioned above tend to serve to emphasize the problems of Henchard's character rather than its social import. In this respect, "one man's deed" may be a phrase denoting the great achievement, but it is also a serious limitation of the novel (Gregor 113).

Hardy's position as literary producer in relation to his contemporary readers and reviewers, as Terry Eagleton, Peter Widdowson argue, drastically affected his novels. Although Hardy's self-assessment of his Wessex novel is not to be ignored, it suggests his self-consciousness about the plot overworked with mechanical device for the sake of characterization and about his conflictual relations with the publishing industry, his readers, and the mechanics of serialization. Despite these constraints, the novel nevertheless puts forward several important social issues in the story of a man of character. Hardy's concern

with social issues appears early in his career. In his important early essay, "The Dorsetshire Labourer" of 1865, he expressed profound interest in the "agricultural unrest" and the labor conditions in the rural communities he belonged to. He had a strong concern for the farm-laboring community and the situations of the laboring classes such as the depopulation in the countryside, the migration for jobs, and "the houseless and landless poor" (189). His main regret in the essay was about rural laborers who were "losing their peculiarities as a class" and the community's movement toward "uniformity," its loss of identity:

While their pecuniary condition...is bettered, and their freedom enlarged, they have lost touch with their environment, and that sense of long local participancy which is one of the pleasures of the age. (182)

But he had also positive feelings about the process: "Change is also a certain sort of education. Many advantages accrue to the labourers from the best market for their abilities" (180). Although this essay demonstrates his early conservatism--insofar as he was anti-unionist, taking the members of the Dorset Agriculture's Union not as "honest Radicals" but as degenerated "Anarchists"--it suggests an important relation between the material change and the change in people's consciousness: "melancholy among the rural poor arises primarily from a sense of incertitude and precariousness of their position" (174). It might appear far-fetched to directly connect this assessment in the essay to Henchard's gloomy fits and sense of loneliness in the novel. But there remains a certain "mediated" relation that Hardy believes to exist between the material and the mental conditions of ordinary working class.

The existence of this relation, though mediated, marks Hardy's social ideas as a kind of historical materialist. This is not to imply that Hardy was a radical thinker but to take seriously his interest in the working-class experience as a subjugated and isolated ordeal. Hardy's "tragic vision" or pessimism or "agnostic" amoralism leads him to consider history a "general drama of pain," as the last sentence of *The Mayor* suggests. This view is antithetical to such historical materialist tenets as history as class struggles, man making history, and the material being determining consciousness. However, in connecting the internal and external pressures which Henchard experiences and in describing the processes of the change Casterbridge undergoes, Hardy's view is not antithetical to Marx's. Marx argues:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness....With the change in economic foundation, the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. ("Preface" 389-90)

Along with the general social change there emerge, "more or less rapidly" as Marx says, the changes in consciousness. Mechanical materialism ignores this important point about the complex way in which material life "conditions" consciousness. The "structure of feeling" such as "a warmth, a seriousness, an endurance in love and work," as Raymond Williams argues, was what Hardy cherished as a member of "knowable community" of Wessex and what Hardy "mourns as loss" when witnessing its disappearance (258). This formulation seems to work better in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* than *The Mayor*, but it also very convincingly sums up the gap between Henchard on the one hand and Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane on the other, between the major characters at the marketplace and those members of the laboring class at the Three Mariners and those at the Peter's Fingers on the Mixen Lane who launch the "customary" traditional rituals of skimmity-ride with its "rough music" and violent folk elements.

The contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production takes on various forms, such as class conflicts, changes in consciousness and sentiments. But it is a merely mechanical, determinist Marxism to assume the one-to-one correspondence between the economy and the cultural, and the character of Henchard is only a partial component of the structure of feeling. There are various mediations and uneven developments between an individual's character and social conditions. Instead of a crude correspondence, Williams pays attention to Hardy's "complicated feelings and ideas about country life and people." And he defines the issue at the heart of Hardy's novels as the problem of the relation between "customary" and "educated" feeling and thought (240). Williams regards Elizabeth-Jane as belonging to educated feelings as opposed to Henchard and the local underclass folks. Since she is interested in self-education and favors Donald Farfrae's urban, metropolitan values and since she has experienced overseas cultures, William's evaluation sounds quite plausible. But it seems farfetched to pin down Elizabeth-

Jane as "educated" class. Following critics like Boumelha and Langbaum, who argue that Elizabeth-Jane is a "new heroine," I take her as a balanced character and a significant heroine in the novel. (Besides, as Dale Kramer has pointed out in his "Textual Notes" to the Oxford edition, the 1886 one volume edition, the Norton edition I use for this essay, renders the portrayal of Elizabeth-Jane far more favorably than the early magazine and the earliest manuscript versions.)

II. THE HENCHARD-FARFRAE CONFLICT AND ELIZABETH-JANE

Elizabeth-Jane plays almost as large a part in Henchard's story as he does himself. Almost as many pages are allotted to her as to Henchard. Early in the novel, the narrator puts her perspectives of the town topography, atmosphere, and activities in town almost *descriptively*; the reader is introduced through her perspectives to the initial transaction between Henchard and Farfrae. The scene of the marketplace engaged in corn and job transactions is seen from her position in the High-Place Hall. Later in the novel when the new sowing machine is to be introduced to the townspeople, she overlooks the folks gathering around the symbolic center stage of Henchard's defeat by Farfrae. Although she is initially portrayed as a person overly self-conscious of her respectability and her initial attraction to Farfrae in the Three Mariners is as much misguided as Henchard and the folks gathered in the inn about Farfrae's romantic sentiment, she comes closer to Hardy's views than any other characters in the novel as the novel proceeds. She comes at times to speak for the narrator, and the narrator comes to speak for her, so that her wisdom seems close to Hardy's own. This is not to imply that Elizabeth's perspective and the narrator's (or Hardy's) are convergent. There are different strands or layers of narrative technique in the novel. But her perspective is closest to Hardy's.

When Lucetta shifts her attention from Henchard to Farfrae, the narrator speaks rather scornfully of Lucetta that she finds Henchard unattractive in his shabby old clothes because of her vanity. Elizabeth, on the other hand, can penetrate into the reality, the real man under the externals. Similarly, she can see the reality under the surface of optimism and naive aspirations. The narrator comments:

She had learnt the lesson of renunciation, and was as familiar with the wreck of each days wishes as with the diurnal setting of the sun. If her earthly career had taught her few philosophies it has at least practiced her in this. (137)

This is the narrator's description, but there seems to be the authorial voice involved also. The first sentence sums up her experience for herself, whereas the second one sums up her experience by the narrator himself. What she has grown into or what she has learned is the lesson taught by Henchard's life as much as by her own life. This lesson is the stoic philosophy of endurance, of "making limited opportunities endurable," of not aspiring too high or expecting too positive happiness during "the doubtful honour of a brief transit through a sorry world" (255).

The scene at the High Place Hall where Lucetta and Elizabeth overlook the marketplace and the movement of Henchard and Farfrae remarkably contrasts the two characters' internal and external communications. Through the intricate narrative technique of "focalization" (Rimmon-Kenan 117) and indirect narrative intrusion, Elizabeth is seen to be more objectively interested in her stepfather's movement and the "market-faces" than Lucetta, who is seen to be agitated by the delayed visit of the mayor Henchard and her total indifference to the market activity. In the next chapter where she is unexpectedly visited by Farfrae, Lucetta is totally absorbed in him and introduces herself as a Bath lady to allure him. She is not a lady of high society, but a middle-class daughter of a recently retired army officer, though she has been endowed with her deceased aunt's inheritance.

In the course of her interview with Farfrae, Lucetta totally forgets her former interests in Henchard as well as her letters about her wealth to attract the mayor. She and Farfrae look at the same marketplace on the "hiring fair" in which they see the "old shepherd" and his son, who has to separate from his father and his girl Nelly. Farfrae, influenced by Lucetta's feigned feelings, hires both the old shepherd and the young man. She tells him, "you have both temperature going on at the same time, flattering his possession of both the "commercial and the romantic" (123). But Farfrae answers, "I try to be civil to a' folk--no more," and adds that he hires them mainly because the shepherd is inexpensive to hire (124). His "market-mind" never blends with romance even at this moment of mutual attraction. In the next chapter which dramatizes the introduction of the new sowing machine, Elizabeth and Lucetta again overlook the spectacle of the machine and people. Both look at Farfare. But whereas Lucetta is self-

interestedly absorbed in his attractiveness as a good-looking and influential man in Casterbridge, Elizabeth observes him more objectively. As the three chapters involving the observing characters suggest, Elizabeth's point of view is "focalized" to suggest her personality, but there is also an obvious overlap between the character and the narrator as well as a distance.

There are different narrative layers in the novel, those of the characters', the narrator's, and conflictual merging of the two employing the indirect narrative voice. But there is clearly an implied hierarchy of narrative voices in terms of reliability, beginning with the impersonal voice of the omniscient narrator, moving through Elizabeth, down to the "rustic chorus" when performing the narrative function. There are narrative slippages and incoherences but a closer analysis reveals a progressive overlap between that narrator's and Elizabeth's voices (Ebbatson 94). Her observation about the marketplace in terms of "market faces" and "ready money" converges with the authorial voice. This point about Elizabeth's central function within the narration for both characterization and plot, is also demonstrated in the portrayal of her character, laying an emphasis on her "silent observing eye" and her "quiet" but wise passiveness. Henchard and Farfrae, in contrast, take up the gap in the extreme opposition: rural vs. metropolitan, stubbornness vs. malleability, gloominess vs. vivacity, "old" vs. "new" ways of investment and business management, orality vs. literacy. In contrast, Elizabeth takes up a balanced position.

In comparison with the Henchard-Farfrae conflict, she is a figure signifying an "equitable serenity" between contesting values. Even when she marries Farfrae after Lucetta's death, she takes this favorable turn of life with equanimity, absorbing it into her philosophy of endurance, of the tragic sense of life. Such a view appears early in the novel when she found herself to have been a daughter of a mayor but took it without being naively indulged in optimistic gaiety:

Light-heartedness seemed to her too irrational and inconsequent to be indulged in except as a reckless dram now and then.... She felt none of those ups and downs of spirit... and her present cheerfulness was fairly proportionate to her solid guarantees for the same. (67)

Inured in and educated through rough times, she remains modest in her clothes and interested in her self-help through self-education. "How an unfinished girl I am," she speaks to herself (74). Her perceptiveness, revealing to her both the

darker and brighter side of life, also arms her against darkness and bitterness. Although open to change and new values, her initial sense of rural feelings is not "contained" by the new social values of adaptation and changeability seen in Farfrae. Her consistent use of local dialects, her considerate way of treating her servants, and her interest in books, all of which become Henchard's irritation and blame on her, and her careful adaptation to Farfrae's positive values of new knowledge and letters--all testify to her sense of balance. To retain this positive value drawn from the old mode of life and to cultivate her intellectual life are "a valuable habit" which Hardy seems to applaud in the age of radical social change (67). Elizabeth's balanced character and culture reappear in the novel's final sentence in which she shows a clear-eyed understanding and her "wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen" in the very midst of her happiness, which to her mind "was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain" (256).

Elaine Showalter argues that the wife-sale is figured as a male act to extirpate in himself what can be called "feminine." Showalter reads the novel as making women a mere "sign" of what is missing, or lost, or repressed, in the acquisition of masculinity. She argues that the novel is about the ways in which Henchard's acquisition of sexual and social power, initiated by selling out his femininity, leads to a crisis and his rapid decline brought about by the sudden appearances of Susan, Lucetta, and the furmity-woman. The women of the novel, she contends, are mere instruments for representing maleness or probing the melancholy projection of the repressed male self. Henchard, in selling his wife and daughter to another man, repeats the definite patriarchal act of exchange, and Hardy replicates the patriarchal pattern at the level of aesthetics by "writing off" women as instruments of male tragedy. But while it seems plausible to point out Hardy's insensitiveness to women's issues--especially in that the novel does not consider the wife-sale a gender issue--what Showalter calls an "unmanning" process doesn't seem to be the very source of Henchard's downfall, because the novel does not just stop at the defeat of the virile protagonist as unflinching masculine hero.

Clearly the novel is tragic, as Jeannett King and others argue, but the power of the novel as a modern tragedy (as opposed to the classical one) is that Henchard does not stop just at being aware of his flaws and repenting his past faults, but continues to resist the "unforeseen power" which he perceives as nullifying his effort to overcome his sense of alienation and mortification through a renewed love for Elizabeth-Jane. And what is defeated but not destroyed at the end of the

novel is his endurance in warmth and labor without self-pity and his sense of community as symbolized by his attraction to the place he left and his visits to Elizabeth on her wedding night. "On her account, pride itself wore the garments of humility," the narrator reminds us (230). The interpretation drawn on "classic" tragedy is possible only when the novel is read as a tragedy of a man who resists the change in himself. Henchard in fact does change in terms of his moral sentiment toward his stepdaughter and his understanding of himself. What is not changed in Henchard, as Hardy seems to emphasize, is his pure energy and passion untutored by the changed social milieu led by the "new spirit" of the educated class, or what Williams calls the "educated feeling and thought."

III. HISTORICIZING HARDY'S SOCIAL POSITION AND THE DECLINE OF THE RURAL ECONOMY

The final catastrophe of the novel is saturated with a deep sense of loss, but this sense is mitigated by the stress on human warmth, continuity, and endurance in both Avel Whittle's monologues and Elizabeth's closing reflections. This ending conveys much consolation in this story of the life and death of a troubled man of character. The scene of the dead caged goldfinch, which Elizabeth discovered to be Henchard's wedding gift to her, leads her to soften her heart toward her self-alienated stepfather. She knows that he is emotionally a changed man and understands his death; she is ready to respect the odd conditions of his will concerning his anonymity and obliteration from the public: "She knew the directions to be *the same stuff that his whole life was made of*, and hence not to be tampered with" (255, emphasis added).

George Levine characterizes the novel as a new realist novel redefining the conception of "ordinariness" for its assertion of the "the presence of the uncommon in the common"(244). Levine argues that Henchard is a symbol of the submerged energies, the monstrous energies of human nature as in Frankenstein's untrammelled power of will and ego, whose realist compromise reveals the narrative ruptures or tensions between "realism" and "romance." Levine concludes that the novel inaugurates a "new mode" of realism, for it represents those narrative ruptures suppressed by the "balances of fictional reality" (245). It seems that both William's emphasis on humanity and Levine's on the uncommonness of human energy are quite pertinent to the story of Henchard. But

as suggested earlier in the essay, both critics tend to pay less attention to Elizabeth than she deserves as a character and as a role to represent the narrator's perspective. In "Hardy and Social Class," Merryn and Raymond Williams argue that Hardy was born into not the peasant class, but into the "relatively independent and intermediate class," a class fraction composed of lifeholders or copyholders who were family farmers or more usually the craftsmen, artisans, and tradesmen (32). This relatively independent group was put under intense pressure, like the D'urbervilles in *Tess*, in the course of the 19th century in England by developments in monopoly capitalist farming and by urban manufacturing industry. As Williamses suggest, it is this "complex and self-conscious, precarious and mobile" situation of the "intermediate" class that makes Hardy so conscious of it, that makes Hardy's class position such a critical issue. As Williamses articulate the late 19th century society, capitalist social relations put pressure on all those who did not belong or fit in with them, dispossessing, undercutting or effectively pauperizing a majority of their "residual class" or "the relatively indecent and intermediate class" from which Hardy originated (31). In *Capital*, Marx noted "the chief cause" of the pressure and "encroachment of "capitalist farming in the country" and the "progressive annihilation of the rural economy":

England is at certain epochs mainly a corn-growing country, at others mainly a cattle-breeding country. These periods alternate, and the alternation is accompanied by fluctuations in the extent of peasant cultivation. A consistent foundation for capitalist agriculture could only be provided by large-scale industry, in the form of machinery; it is large-scale industry which radically expropriates the vast majority of the agricultural population and completes the divorce between agriculture and rural domestic industry, tearing up the latter's roots, which are spinning and weaving. It therefore also conquers the entire home market for industrial capital, for the first time. (911)

Marx's detailed historical account and diagnosis of the English historical reality provide a helpful context for the novel. The merit of Hardy is that the late Victorian countryside's historical processes are eloquently expressed in his imaginative rendition of the rural Wessex region experiencing a radical social consequence. Hardy seemed to respond to this change with mixed feelings of regret, nostalgia, indignation, and resignation. Hardy's novels, especially the later,

socially conscious novels, describe and analyze the sense of displacement conditioned by the overdetermined cultural change. *The Mayor* deals with the vast process in the English rural social structure. But the social and economic change is seen also as a political change and it is also a cultural change.

In re-historicizing Hardy's novels and film renditions, Peter Widdowson agrees on Williames' assessment of Hardy's social origin as "intermediary," and he notes the ways in which Hardy's social position and the determinations which "produce" him as writer are "shifting and complex"(130). But he argues that, even so, it is in the "metropolitan profession of writing" that Hardy's "true" class position is ultimately located, not in the "intermediate" rural class from which he derives. So he differentiates between Hardy's social origin and his social position, which has been ignored by other critics. Furthermore, he goes on, Hardy's social interests are not to be considered socialist because there is no material analysis of the changing rural economy and no material relationship between that environment and the personal drama played out against it. Mapping Hardy's literary status within the dominant bourgeois realism, he states that "Th[e] displacement of history by myth, together with the asocial focusing on individual human subjects, is part of the whole ('English' and realist humanist) cultural ideology" (103).

Widdowson's main point is to criticize the de-historicizing, asocial construction of "rural" Hardy which he takes to be so pervasive in both Hardy criticism and cinematic renditions which focus on Hardy as realist-humanist rural tragedian. Focusing on Hardy's upbringing and education which has a mixed literary relevance to his own upward social mobility, Widdowson argues that it is "a self-conscious tension between class position and the one of origin which marks all of his work" (132). It is this tension, he argues, which generates Hardy's complex stylistic tensions, so that "the clash of modes, the mannered style, the derisive irony, the satires of circumstances" are determined by "the anomie of his class and professional contradictions" (130). Terry Eagleton also notes Hardy's conflicting literary modes (such as pastoral, melodrama, social realist, classical tragedy, and fictional realism) and argues that these internal conflicts of the text are "not to be grasped as the reflection of 'real' historical contradictions" but as resulting from the "textual contradictions" whose "ideological" function is to occlude or distort history (94-5). In other words, there is a complex mediation going on between the novel and historical reality; literary texts are located

problematically and complexly within history, and thus producing ideology in a highly mediated way.

The Mayor, seen in these critical prisms, is situated in "relation to definable historical process" but not "rooted directly in historical reality" (Wotton 73). In Hardy's social comments on the changing town and countryside and the narrative construction of the conflict between Henchard and Farfrae and of Hanchard's rise and fall in Casterbridge, some historical relevances can be articulated, but it is worthwhile to note that it is a "reinvented" literary construction with complex mediation, not a historical construction of the "real" society. Though the novel is the story of Henchard as "man of character" and of this "one man's deed," the clash between Henchard and Farfrae in some way represents the conflict of "old" and "new" modes of socio-economic organization and modes of consciousness. Just as both Henchard and Farfrae are bourgeois men competing for market dominance, a civil leadership, and female affection, so is Casterbridge not a "feudal" but a capitalist rural town where the impact of the new machines and the emerging commercial cash-nexus (based on corn and cattle dealings) put "pressure" on the old ways of life.

Although the town's layout and its surrounding landscape (its Roman legacy and its intermixture of town and cornfields figured like a "chess-board") are described in detail, the commercial area of Casterbridge provides the focus for the main actions, with its marketplace forming the central arena of the action. Henchard thrives in the old ways of capitalist agriculture based on harvest weather, oral culture, patriarchal labor relations, and the rule of thumb way of measurement. And he is self-defeated mainly by his own impulsive, volcanic character and the "return" of his past (figured by the return of Susan, Lucetta, Newson, and the furnity woman). However, his decline is situated by the impact of the free trade (introduced by the repeal of the Corn Laws), the principles of "civil" ways of labor relations, and the more formal, literate notation of time and new methods of book-keeping and management. Farfrae is the unwitting agent of such a change in Casterbridge, coming from the urban, Scottish entrepreneur culture signaled by new methods, techniques, and machines. By focusing on the provincial town's internal conflicts after the impact of the more "advanced" external forces, the novel allegorizes this arena of struggle in the course of dramatizing the passionate love and rivalry between the new and the old mayors.

It is almost impossible to think of Farfrae in isolation from Henchard, the former figuring as a sort of the latter's alter ego or a subject of brotherly,

homosocial or homoerotic bonding which, as Christopher Lane argues, marks "the wider continuum of late Victorian masculine affection" (Lane 132). And the novel is indeed about Henchard's "own deed," and such themes as the "conflict between generations" based on Hardy's use of Saul-David parallels (Moynahan 326) and the tension between "old rural world and new urban one" or between "the native countryman and the alien invader" (Brown 323) are relatively marginal because the novel deploys more than just the contestation between the characters. Rather, the story concerns the ways in which Henchard's fall (situated within Casterbridge's change) is caused *internally* by his failure to cope successfully with the pressure of material and cultural changes.

The narrator suggests that what Henchard regards as successive unhappy coincidences--such as the revelation of Susan's posthumous letter about Elizabeth's biological father, Captain Newson, at the moment of his confession to her about his past and the exposure of his past by the old woman in the civic court--are in fact caused by Henchard's misrecognition of Nature's indifference and inscrutability and of his impulsive character. The narrator quotes George Eliot's version of Novalis' "Character is Fate" (88) in order to suggest that, despite the coincidences of the plot, Henchard's decline and fall from power derive from his own character and his self-destructive behavior. The point about Henchard's character determining his fate and about Nature being indifferent and amoral is suggestively explained by the pattern of his impulsive act and immediate remorse. This persistent pattern is already foreshadowed in the opening scene of wife-sale and his church oath on abstinence. It is repeated in his treatment of Abe Whittle, his dismissal of Jopp and Farfrae, his handling of Lucetta's letters, and later in his anguish after the wrestling-match with Farfrae, and even in his "sudden reckless determination" (246) to attend Elizabeth-Jane's wedding.

By ironically connecting Henchard's impulsiveness to the pivotal final scene of his humanity and warmth, the narrator seems to emphasize that Henchard's tragic flaw is not irreverent to his unchanging character. After reading Henchard's final will demanding his anonymity and obscurity, Elizabeth understands the "same stuff that his whole life was made of" (255). But the last scene of Henchard's death in the wilderness also suggests the interconnection between Henchard's elemental energy and Nature's power of continuity. He is defeated by his character but his energy and power is, like Nature, not defeated. Raymond Williams notes that the novel demonstrates not so much the alleged pessimism of Hardy as an affirmation of human warmth, of what Hardy perceived as

disappearing in the wake of the rural society's disintegration, and concludes that what is destroyed but not defeated is "an endurance in love and work" (258).

IV. HARDY'S REINVENTION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

In describing Weydon Priors in the opening chapters, Hardy draws from the bygone journalistic accounts of the decline in trade in the annual fair and transforms this social document with powerful imagination and amplifies this theme of social transformation with the opening dialogue. It is through the seemingly cursory remarks by the turnip-hoer--in response to Henchard's inquiries about available hay-trussing jobs and lodgings--that the narrator introduces such changes in the rural economy as the lack of jobs for field laborers, the eviction of the local residents, and migration: "Pulling down is more the nature of Weydon. There were five houses cleared away last year, and three this: and the folk nowhere to go--no, not so much as a thatched hurdle; that's the way of Weydon Priors" (4).

When Henchard and Susan enter the marketplace, the paucity of trade is made evident, but it is ironically presented, for the characters are not conscious of the larger picture of historical change in the Wessex region. In his travel writing on Britain just before the industrial revolution, Daniel Defoe had wrote that "the open down country" of "Wey-Hill," located within a mile of the thriving manufacturing part of Somersetshire, was a place where "the greatest sheep fair for sheep is kept that this nation can show" (Defoe 268). The decline of the Weydon Fair and the whole region, so minutely deployed in the novel, was a significant landmark in the British economic history. But the decline in the rural economy had already been under way years before the novel begins. The implication of the narrative account of the Wessex landscape is that Hardy is not so deeply interested in recording the "real" history with a romantic longing for his native regions, nor with his "remarkable anachronism in the history of English Literature" as John Paterson would like to argue (Paterson 346). Rather, Hardy is interested in the character's change of personal fortune and feelings dramatized within the larger "process" of English social change which remain imperceptible to the participating characters and to which Hardy reacts by "mourning" the loss of communal and humane feelings brought about by the social change (Williams 279).

By distancing each character's consciousness from the narrator's social comments and narrative perspective, Hardy makes the reader perceive the interlocking of the changes in personal fate and social change. When the narrator's and the character's consciousness are narrowed, though these two never converge, the latter is usually mixed with the narrator's social comments which are painted with Hardy's own tragic conception of a neutral and unconscious power ("the Immanent Will") governing the universe and human matters.

In the scene where Susan and Elizabeth revisit the same site 18 years later, the narrator contrasts the sense of eternity in nature with the sharply declined annual fair. Despite "Nature's power of continuity" which has transferred the young handsome figure of the mother to that of her daughter, the old hustle and bustle and the sense of vitality and festivity at the opening scene of the fair, where Henchard sold his wife out of drunken impetuosity, has "considerably dwindled."

The new periodical great markets of neighbouring towns were beginning to interfere seriously with the trade carried on here for centuries. The pens for sheep, the tie-ropes for horses, were about half as long as had been. (16)

The decline of the traditional trade is marked by the change of rural economy effected by the pressure of the intra-communal trade put upon the self-sufficient, inter-communal trade. The main action in the novel, especially the rivalry between Henchard and Farfrae, is situated within this historical terrain undergoing the drastic social transformation. Both Farfrae's rise and the new economic order which the rise represents are intimately interwoven with the decline of the old agrarian community and the emergence of the new commercial, industrial society which is dramatized in the scene of the arrival of the new seed-drill and the railroad near the town.

At the end of the novel, 25 years after its opening, Henchard revisits Weydon Priors fairground--again as a hay-trusser with his tool basket on his back and the wayfarer's hat and with his "dawn-turned face." The parallel between his mental disarray and the market's disappearance is highlighted in the description of the landscape as a kind of decayed "pastoral." The "renowned hill" is now marked by the dreary landscape which is "now bare of human beings and almost of aught besides. A few sheep grazed thereabout, but these ran off when Henchard halted upon the summit." (243) In juxtaposing Henchard's lapse into his initial social standing as hopeless field laborer and the lack of his previously festive mood in

the fairground, the narrator seems to emphasize Henchard's pessimistic and fatalistic attitude to the world. But this suggestion proves shorthanded when we are aware of an ironic juxtaposition of his downward social standing at the summit of the hill and his tragic vision implied by the "down-turned face." (243)

After Lucetta's death, which puts him into despair at the loss of trustworthiness, Henchard starts to see Elizabeth-Jane in a new light, it is just when Henchard, for first time since his alienation from Elizabeth and the community, has a faint dream by finding a "pinpoint of light" in Elizabeth that Captain Newson's sudden appearance at Casterbridge changes the course of the story. His momentary selfishness out of desperation is so prominent that it shapes the whole course of his relationship with his newly found hope amid the pitfall of his social and emotional life. When he prepares with a "housewifery care" a breakfast for Elizabeth who comes to his cottage with severe emotional distress at Lucetta's death, Newson visits him and inquires about his daughter. Henchard's lie that his daughter died is caused by his fear at the prospect of her loss rather than by his grudge against the captain. His own idiosyncratic habit of impulsiveness reasserts itself against himself. The pangs of conscience at his unpredictable and uncontrollable behavior hurt him so much that he contemplates suicide when standing at the Ten Hatches Hall and begins to see his "double" in what turns out to be one of the effigies used for the skimmity-ride. When he is in a serious doubt and fear, the habit of his superstitious mind recurs in a self-destructive way. Concerned about Henchard's reckless and raving fear, Elizabeth offers him to reunite. He accepts her offer and, against his will and pride, he accepts the seed business at the Town Council headed by Farfrae had purchased: "on her account pride itself wore the garments of humility" (230). But the apparition of Newson haunts his mind because he fears that Newson will know his lie and publicize it, which he fears would make him more vulnerable to his already endangered reputation. And there is a moment of self-justification for his lie; his affection for Elizabeth overrides the fear.

Observing the mutual affection between her and Farfrae, Henchard shows his moral dignity by deciding not to meddle into their affair. Despite his "instinctive opposition" to her interests in books, the narrator comments, "Henchard was, by original make, the last man to act stealthily, for good or evil. But the *solicitus timor* [anxious fear] of his love denaturalized him" (233). This comment suggests a very significant change in Henchard, especially when compared with his early despotic and domineering attitude to her since he finds out the fact through

Susan's posthumous letter confessing that she is not his biological daughter but Newson's.

Unable to accept his defeat and humiliation incurred by Farfrae's popularity and social rise, Henchard, a man of ambition and desire for social power now falling back to his former seed-shop retailer and journeyman, has chosen to be an outcast rather than a degraded person. He loses Lucetta to his young challenger. Farfrae now takes up every emblem of his former social rise, ranging from the corn dealer through leader of the Town Council, up to the Mayor. Right after his terms of abstinence, he drinks heavily and speculates on his corn dealings to ruin his enemy by resorting to superstition; he become ruthless. He misunderstands that Farfrae has meant to destroy him, and he contemplates a mortal revenge on him and challenges him in a wrestling match to kill him. But a man of honor, as the bull scene shows, he desists the temptation and regrets his vengeance. Now losing everything he had cherished, he stands upon the summit of Weydon Fair. He is alone with himself, contemplating on his "cursed pride and mortification at being poor."

He experiences not only the bitterness of a man who finds...that what he has sacrificed in sentiment was worth as much as what he has gained in substance; but the superseded bitterness of seeing his very recantation nullified. He had been sorry for all this long ago; but his attempt to replace ambition by love had been as fully foiled as his ambition itself. His wronged wife had foiled them by a fraud so grandly simple as to be almost a virtue. It was an odd sequence that out of all this tampering with social law came that flower of Nature, Elizabeth. (243)

His self-alienation from the community with a heroic sense of pride reminds us of the tragic fall of Job, or Oedipus, or King Lear. But the difference is that he cannot move away from the community, finding himself wandering around Casterbridge because of his indelible love for Elizabeth after all his fluctuating feelings toward her ever since his knowledge of her true identity. The confrontational mode of his action toward Farfrae, which had aggravated a sense of humiliation and loss of self-respect and jealousy and self-accession, along with his inner struggle with his "contrarious inconsistencies," (243) is replaced by his enlightened affection for Elizabeth. Thus Henchard's integrity as man of character is emphasized not so much by the classical tragedy's *hubris* and *hamartia* as by

the transformation in his moral sentiment, which is related to the "unmanning" process culminated in the marriage scene and the episode of the bird cage. It is true that he is, unlike Farfrae, a man whose old, "customary," "feudal" way of life and thinking cannot be adaptable to the changes in environment and that his tragedy is conditioned by his character as determining factor.

In Hardy's view, it is people's interpretations of the universe and human life that determines their fate, not the universe that changes their fate. His tragic vision makes him believe the tragic views to be more mature than optimism, as he projects his view on Elizabeth-Jane's balanced perspective, her "equitable serenity": the "secret...of making limited opportunities endurable" which equips her to take happiness as an "occasional episode in a general drama of pain" (255, 256). But the two opposing aspects of Henchard's "Character" themselves as determining one's life, are in fact contingent on the historical and circumstantial context which in Hardy's view is always dependent on the law of Nature. Thus so many coincidences which have been criticized as Hardy's artistic defect, are related to Hardy's own metaphysics of tragedy. Frederick R. Karl summarizes Hardy's notion of the Immanent Will or chance:

Although man's will is not nullified by change, neither can will itself overcome chance; the latter is, in its functioning, the will of the universe, what Hardy...called the Immanent Will. This force operates in the world without conscious design; even though it is not a controlling force...it frequently seems to evoke more malignity than benevolence. (Karl 367)

With Henchard, it seems apparently sinister because he lacks proportion and balance. With Farfrae it seems benevolent because his decision to charge his initial plan to go to America works favorably.

Despite Henchard's energetic pursuit of economic and communal power after his initial fault of the wife sale, the novel suggests both negative and positive aspects of his "unchangeableness" and immutability; his lack of moderation and explosive behavior and his almost animalistic masculinity, as opposed to his priority of "sentiment" over "substance" and of love-nexus over money-nexus. But this view of Henchard's "Character as Fate" is seriously qualified when we consider that the haunted sense of guilt reappears not only in the "ghost" scene, where Susan is figured as a symbol of Henchard's Nemesis, but also in his Casterbridge life as mayor-merchant. Selling a wife and daughter is rare enough

an incident to appear in the local newspapers and to shock Hardy's contemporary audience. But according to historical materialist views, the selling of human power, commodification of labor, is one of the dominant ways in which capitalism operated.

E.P. Thompson identifies the wife-sale as not uncommon customs among working classes. He argues that wife-sales should be placed historically as one of the popular customs to economize the formal divorce and re-marriage. He identifies certain common conditions of wife-sales such as the marketplace, the consent of the wife, ritual exchanges of pledges, and public recognition. He construes the institution of wife-sale as a form of male domination and commodification of women, but notes that "such sales need not take place to the husband's advantage" (459). The opening scene of the novel is very suggestive of agricultural capitalism as an early stage of commodification, but the disadvantage Thompson points out is ironically suggested in Henchard's career. Unable to sell his own lifelong means of life, Henchard the hay-trusser as a migrant day laborer is having hard times getting a mean of sustenance, including a housing which was a serious social problem for the agricultural workers and the laboring poor. Metaphorically, his wife sale is the only alternative to live on for his family, but it suggests that the act is symptomatic of the time shaped by commercial exchange. Though Henchard regrets the wife-selling, he is not totally outside of the old ways of market activity of barter and human exchange which remains unintelligible to him. He lived in Casterbridge on his economic activity under agricultural capitalism, and became a journeyman and then a corn and hay merchant and a mayor. He gained his economic power and status, but he is lonely and suffers from guilt. The narrator puts emphasis on his past act and impulsive personality which verges on self-destructive maniac. But we can also see him suffering by his alienated insertion into a society that is strangely out of sync with his inner feelings.

V. THE CRISIS OF HENCHARD AND HARDY'S RECONCILIATION

In *The Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukacs argues that, as distinct from the form of epic, the novel expresses man's uneasy feelings of "disharmony" or "transcendental homelessness" because the outer world of reality is "a stranger to ideals and an enemy of interiority" of the individual (41, 79). Lukacs describes

the typical trajectory of the novel--as a central form of the bourgeois world in which the epic harmony between interior/exterior world and the self/community is irrevocably lost--in the following:

The inner form of the novel has been understood as the process of the problematic individual's journeying toward himself, the road from dull capacity within a merely present reality...towards clear self-recognition. After such self-recognition has been attained, the ideal thus formed irradiates the individual's life as its immanent meaning; but the conflict between what is and what should be has not been abolished and cannot be abolished in the sphere wherein these events take place--the life sphere of the novel; only a maximum conciliation--the profound and intensive irradiation of a man by his life's meaning--is attainable. (80)

Lukacs's observation applies to Hardy's protagonist and to the entire action of *The Mayor*. Henchard experiences the intensely emotional complex which leads him to experience a social, moral, and emotional crisis which in a way shapes his gloomy sense of homelessness and wish for self-annihilation. From the beginning of the novel, Henchard is literally and metaphorically "homeless," and after the "long journey" on foot described in the opening scene, his self-destructive impulsive character erupts into his desire to free himself from the "dull captivity" of marriage. In his adopted town of Casterbridge, he becomes a self-made "pillar of the town" as a leading businessman and mayor due to his strong will-power, abstinence, and hard work, but as he confides in Farfrae, he always feels lonely and empty in his interior life. His search for a lost "home" (family, love and friendship, community, and Elizabeth-Jane) can never be attained. The crisis of Henchard involves his estrangement from society, self-estrangement, and his last moment entails an ambivalent mixture of self-recognition and reconciliation on the one hand and existential anguish and personal collapse on the other. Henchard, situated within the "history-in-process," is certainly a "subject-in-process" who struggles and is capable of self-awareness, moral growth, and humanity, but his sense of "transcendental homelessness" is pervasive throughout the novel because he is a character situated in the historical process.

In the novel, the idea of the subject-in-history, suggested in Henchard's moral change, is subsumed under the subject-in-Nature or Universe, which is in Hardy's creative world of fiction suggested as inscrutable, amoral, and indifferent, and

trans-historical. Only in his last days is Henchard's pilgrimage toward self-recognition in the course of his downfall, which is basically self-inflicted though endured heroically, attained. The progression of narrative time ensures that the loss can never be recuperated. Though the protagonist can never succeed in his quest for the harmony with unknowable Nature, the narrative, in presenting a "heroic" and "human" rendition of fall and failure, in a way succeeds in reconciling with a secularized world. This reconciliation is conveyed through the ideas of community and humanity (Ebbatson 116-7). Henchard's self-exile and agony in the wilderness are counterbalanced by his love of "work" and his longing for a home, humanity, and community, as Williams and Gregor point out. Though self-exiled and self-alienated, Henchard is finally drawn to humanity (Elizabeth-Jane's "pin-point of life"). This man of passion, frustration, loneliness, ambition, and desire now becomes softened, humanized, and humble. Still defiant toward the unknowable cosmic significance, he starts to identify himself in his relation to labor and community.

But the idea of identity and community becomes problematic in the late 19th century England as a matter of perception and valuation, as the scale and complexity of social organization is increased. As Williams noted, the possibility of "knowable community" was increasingly dying out in the course of English realist tradition, and Hardy's novel demonstrates that difficulty.

The growth of town and especially of cities and metropolis; the increasing division and complexity of labour; the cultured and critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a knowable community--a whole community, wholly knowable--became harder and harder to sustain. (165)

With his depiction of Casterbridge, Hardy, in a similar tone as his Dorset Laborer essay does, demonstrates the ways in which such idea of community is subject to rupture and contestation. Hardy's detailed description of the Wessex rural town and of a man of character's decline and fall suggests Hardy's sense of "mourning" for the decline of the "border country."

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