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Introduction

JULIAN WOLFREYS

I

At the risk of stating the obvious, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is complex. This complexity folds and unfolds for the reader the numerous layers and interrelationships of the narrative, its characters, and the places throughout Casterbridge where the fate of Michael Henchard and those associated with him is enacted. In his introduction to the novel, Keith Wilson addresses patterns of doubling, 'and at times tripling and quadrupling', which structure the text and complicate the act of reading.[1] Wilson aptly describes such patterns as 'forming themselves into a dense web'.[2] In the introduction to another edition of the novel, Norman Page also considers the structural and formal complexity: 'In the construction of the narrative, repetition and circularity are … prominent features'.[3] Furthermore, there is 'a polyphony of different, even contrasting [narrative] voices'.[4]

The two editors see this intricate patterning serving different purposes. For Wilson, the doubling and multiplying folds serve to articulate the rejection of 'absolutist notions of identity'[5] and a proto-modernist exploration of the fragmentation of the self, pursued principally through the character of Henchard, but also through other characters, their 'protean relationships' which serve to relativise identity,[6] and the various doubles they invoke.[7] Page, on the other hand, relates the structural network to Hardy's 'recovery of the past [in the novel's present] both spatially and temporally'.

The novel's complexity, readable by turns as 'difficulty', 'thematic ambiguity' or 'stylistic awkwardness', has provoked a complex of responses since it was published in 1886. As one reviewer expressed it, '[Hardy] is most ingenious in devising problems, and bringing his people into situations of a complicated nature'.[8] This in itself is not peculiar to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. It is, indeed, a condition of the critical response to Hardy until at least the 1970s, until when criticism was dominated either by aesthetic and formal concerns or with social and historical interests. The interwoven nature of lives, narrative strands and details of *The Mayor* – whether these be topographical, architectural or archaeological, spatial or temporal – produces a matrix of reiterative structures which has troubled critical comprehension. Moreover, Hardy's interlacing of countless aspects of the plot is echoed in the formal levels of the text. The patterns of tension and resistance to easy comprehension suggest that the more we seek a single narrative thread, the more we come to realise how each thread is interwoven with countless others.

II

It is perhaps for such reasons that criticism has tended to focus on Michael Henchard. The attention to this undeniably central character, regarded by Hardy as one of his most complex creations, has served as a means of calming down the play of the text. If we visualise the novel as a wheel, Henchard is often read as its axial figure or identity. To note this critical focus, however, is not to suggest, in a moment of foolhardy contrariety, that he is not important. Nor is it meant to imply that critics have been in error in focusing so strenuously on the man who is so well known for having sold his wife and then, subsequently, rising to a position of some social and political importance.

But, as critics have pointed out, including Simon Gatrell (essay 4), the novel is entitled *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, not *Michael Henchard*. We do the novel an injustice if we do not register fully the implications of this. The title speaks immediately of a certain identity. However, the identity of which it speaks is both a public and an impersonal identity, constructed, not natural. The title is also that of a social position or office, a structure into which any appropriate subject may be located. It names a public office, and a specular role

involved, through the town's hierarchical organisation, with questions of social organisation and society's identity, the economy of the town in its various relations within itself, and questions of local politics. The mayoral post is a locus of civil organisation and power, to be filled by successive individuals. Henchard is merely a privileged agent of an already existing historical and cultural formation, occupying the position after countless others.

Thus the title names both a social, a communal structuration, and a position which provides evidence of but one temporal thread, a continuum or stitch in the social and temporal weave of Casterbridge itself. Again, it is possible to see, from this brief sketch of the title's function, the complexity of the novel's structure.

III

Clearly, then, to return to where I started, the novel *is* complex. Simon Gatrell points out in his essay that the 'narrator of [*The Mayor*] is a complex organism' (p. 56), speaking with '(at least) three different accents' (p. 56). Suzanne Keen suggests that the novel has a 'generically mixed plot',[9] which in part explains both the levels of complexity and the critical desire to trace a single structure within the heterogeneous whole. Despite the complexities – or, perhaps, precisely because of them – there has existed what Keith Wilson calls a 'recurrent critical tendency'[10] to simplify the textual relations through the act of reading. This act of simplification has tended, in the past, to reduce Hardy's significance as a novelist. Terry Eagleton and F. R. Leavis provide us with a suitable starting point for understanding the critical response to Hardy.

As Eagleton reminds us, Leavis omits Hardy from his 'great tradition'.[11] Leavis' assessment is a summary dismissal of Hardy.[12] Making vague allusions to nameless critics whose views of Hardy are favourable, Leavis, with his customary manipulation of rhetoric, cites Henry James' condescending assessment ('[t]he good little Thomas Hardy'), as the authority by which the critic can determine Hardy's stylistic and philosophical 'clumsiness', along with his not being either Victorian or modern enough. Indeed, Leavis writes off critics of the twenties, judging their reading of Hardy as the pre-eminent writer of 'modern consciousness' as 'comic'.[13] The question is not one, I would argue, of Hardy's pre-eminence (which merely serves as the slightly hyperbolic excuse for Leavis' cavalier

disregard). The fact that his writing may be read as struggling to come to terms with a transition between the 'Victorian' and 'modern' in terms of the subject's perception of the world is surely to the point. However, Leavis deflects us from any serious consideration by refusing to take Hardy seriously – or he tries to, at least.

Eagleton sees Leavis' dismissal as symptomatic of certain strains in Hardy criticism, describing it as a 'predominant critical strategy'.[14] In identifying this, Eagleton points to what we might describe as the 'problem of Thomas Hardy', which is, as Eagleton puts it, the novelist's 'blunt disregard for formal consistency, … [his readiness to] articulate form upon form – to mingle realist narration, classical tragedy, folk-fable, melodrama, "philosophical" discourse, social commentary'.[15] This attempted taxonomy at once points to the difficulty that conventional criticism grounded on formalist and aesthetic criteria has had in making Hardy conform to a single model or identity. At the same time, as Eagleton suggests – and this takes us back to the issue of complexity – Hardy's text resists critical acts of recuperation precisely because of its discursive heterogeneity. Eagleton identifies four 'distinct stages' in the development of Hardy criticism.[16] The first two phases read the novelist as 'anthropologist of Wessex' and, subsequently, 'the melancholic purveyor of late nineteenth-century nihilism'.[17] This particular assessment at least accords Hardy a certain comprehension of the difficulties he encounters in seeking to transcend 'the analytical stage' which he felt novel writing had reached by the 1880s.[18] Moving beyond this early assessment of Hardy, Eagleton describes the response to Hardy in the post-war years. Formalist criticism of the 1940s and 50s reads Hardy's work as 'irreparably violated by ideas'. At the same time, there begins a shift towards 'a more "sociological" reading of Hardy'.[19] This latter phenomenon is not, however, unproblematically positive for Eagleton. For, as he argues, much of such criticism focused sentimentally and mythologically on a safe vision of a lost rural England, while also criticising Hardy for the oddities of his language and style, a critical tendency persisting into the seventies.[20]

IV

Oversimplifying greatly, we might say that criticism of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* falls into two camps. On the one hand, it attempts

either directly or indirectly to stay the complex texture of the text through a reading of it as a character study. On the other, there is also the reading, produced most frequently in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, though still in evidence in recent critical studies, which operates more or less thematically, isolating the sociological or tragic aspects of the novel. (More recent critical work has avoided the reductive tendency implicit in thematic analysis.) Reading Hardy's novel as social history or for the influences of Greek or Shakespearean tragedy provided a thematic path, which, in being thematically driven, tended to overlook other aspects of the novel. As early as 1955, James Baker addressed the thematic ambiguity of the novel. Douglas Brown's work in the 1950s and 60s established the sociological approach in a convincing manner. John Patterson was amongst the first critics to explore the tragic dimensions. Lawrence Lerner's *Thomas Hardy's The Mayor of Casterbridge: Tragedy or Social History*? (1975) catches at the principal critical and thematic interests, while also returning to the question of thematic ambiguity explored twenty years earlier by Baker.

Academic criticism of the novel has, then, conventionally stressed and returned to particular kinds of readings, and this critical legacy has been difficult to leave behind. As Suzanne Keen puts it, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* 'has been discussed as tragedy, character study, and as a realistic representation of places, practices and "peasants"'. Michael Valdez Moses (essay 9) also addresses the attempts of '[f]ormalist critics' to seize 'upon those sets of parallels which Hardy developed between his hero and characters such as Oedipus, Lear and Macbeth' (see p. 171). Moses continues to argue that those critics who read the tragic dimension of *The Mayor* persist either in pursuing 'the archetypal equivalence between the dramatic action of Hardy's novel and that of traditional tragic dramas' or otherwise understand 'Henchard according to some universal and transhistorical model of the tragic hero, such as that of existential man facing an indifferent, godless universe' (p. 171).

Marjorie Garson (essay 5) also emphasises the 'common impression' of the novel, guided by the insistence on the part of critical response to read it as shaped by 'the conventions of classical and Shakespearian tragedy' (see p. 80). Reading – or, perhaps, imposing – the 'tragic shape', lends, again in Garson's words, a 'sense of generic decorum [which also] makes it sound somewhat pompous and schematic' (p. 81). Whether pompous or not, the tragic paradigm applied to the reading of the novel *is* schematic, especially if

such a context and structurally oriented interpretation is put to work at the expense of other narrative structures, traces, and Hardy's act of generic mixing. Garson's term 'decorum' suggests economically the act of closing down on the novel's play, the domestication of Hardy's novel into a manageable form. It also returns us to Eagleton's understanding of the ways in which criticism has sought to produce particular versions of 'Thomas Hardy' as a manageable product of literary culture. Hardy's writing in general, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in particular, has proved particularly resistant to what Eagleton terms the 'literary-ideological process'[21] of recuperation and insertion into a canon formed on ideas of organic wholeness, greatness, beauty or truth. Instead, as Eagleton puts it, 'the significance of Hardy's writing lies precisely in the *contradictory* constitution of his linguistic practice',[22] which in turn, mediates *The Mayor*'s negotiation of social and ideological crisis, as Raymond Williams has so astutely argued.[23]

V

It is precisely the fractured, heterogeneous nature of Hardy's writing, its refusal to be read as a seamless form hinting at a timeless bucolic condition or the universal struggle of humanity in the face of meaninglessness, to which criticism of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* has turned in the last three decades, choosing to emphasise the novel's complexity in resisting the act of critical domestication.

Thus in a positive sense, more recent criticism produced over the last quarter century may be said to *complicate* the novel. It is those essays which complicate and, indeed, challenge our understanding of the workings of *The Mayor* to which I have turned in making the selections for this volume. Each of the critics chosen teases out hitherto 'under-read' aspects of the novel, while acknowledging the debt they have to earlier critics. Some comment directly in the introductions to their studies of the novelist on those aspects of the novel which had previously been judged 'weak', 'awkward', 'clumsy'. In doing so, they make explicit that aesthetic considerations are not the only concerns when reading. If, as Eagleton has argued, the question of Hardy's writing had been, for so many critics, a problem, in more recent assessments this 'problem' is no longer seen as such but is instead the focus of interest.

Marjorie Garson, in her study of subjectivity, suggests that '"Hardy", the realist novelist of "character and environment", is himself a construction', a construction which has led to a distorted reading of the novels.[24] Furthermore, she argues that '[m]any of the instabilities, contradictions, and grotesqueries in the fiction – the "flaws" to which realistically minded readers have always drawn attention – make considerable sense' when the novels are read as the exploration and expression of a 'somatic' anxiety about the dissolution of bodily identity,[25] whether the body is the human body or the figurative bodies of buildings, structures, or indeed towns such as Casterbridge: 'Hardy's fiction expresses certain anxieties about wholeness ... in ways which are fairly consistent, though never simple or predictable'.[26]

Garson's reading, in connecting the human and non-human worlds, shares with the essays by Miller and Johnson a focus on the subject and the world of objects which comprehends more completely the ways in which Hardy's writing functions. Their concern with the text also finds an echo in the essay by Tess O' Toole (3), which considers fictions of genealogy and anxieties surrounding narratives of paternity which surface frequently in Hardy. Although each of the critics addresses different, yet interrelated strands of the text, each acknowledges what Gatrell describes as Hardy's ability 'to sustain ... a multiplicity of causality'.[27] Gatrell's study, which begins with a consideration of Hardy's titles, also acknowledges Hardy's observation of 'individuals in relationship to their non-human environment'[28] and summarises what we can understand as a shared interpretation of Hardy amongst critics since the 1970s that Hardy is never 'single-minded or wholly consistent'. This makes 'the experience of reading his fiction both rich and contradictory'.[29] Whereas this contradictory quality had been seen previously as a problem, Gatrell usefully points to the positive, the 'rich', aspect of such a complex construction. It is for this reason that no one critical approach or 'single line of argument'[30] is ever sufficient.

Robert Langbaum[31] (essay 6) points to the appeal of Hardy to both feminist and 'politically radical critics', as does Joe Fisher (essay 7).[32] Langbaum places Hardy as a transitional writer, arguing that, '[a]lthough Hardy's novels may seem Victorian largely because of their well-made plots, the plots contain exaggerations verging on fantasy that suggest twentieth-century symbolisations of the unconscious'.[33] For Langbaum, whose assessment recalls Garson's in part, Hardy's writing provides a connecting link

between George Eliot and D. H. Lawrence. This emerges through the reading of those forms of exaggeration and other 'submerged' elements in Hardy. Fisher also reads the submerged and 'partly concealed patterns' for the force they exert, though his analysis is more explicitly political than Langbaum's. Fisher argues that revealing the submerged patterns suggests 'dangerous subversions of mode and ideology … which have been critically suppressed in favour of … the production of an "acceptable" Hardy'.[34]

As Fisher shows so forcefully, the tensions within the competing structures of the novel when read expose 'the essential relationship between prose fiction and the reproduction of ideology'.[35] Michael Valdez Moses also offers a political reading of the novel. Compared with Fisher's radical reading, influenced by the French Marxist Louis Althusser and by British materialist criticism, that of Moses concentrates on the eventual containment of subversion, and thereby shows itself indebted to the New Historicist critical discourse favoured in North America during the 1980s.

VI

Having considered the developments in Hardy criticism in general, and the place of the essays in this collection in that development, I want now to look at some of the essays' features and the particular issues they raise. In part what follows is a summary of the essays, though it is also concerned with their theoretical implications and positions (page numbers refer to this volume).

J. Hillis Miller (essay 1), provides a suitable starting point, inasmuch as he is one of the first critics to avoid the purely thematic reading. He is, in addition, one of the first to address *The Mayor of Casterbridge* from a phenomenological perspective, analysing the interconnectedness between the human subject and the non-human world. Miller also explores the persistence of past moments within the structure of the narrative. The two extracts address the temporal aspects of Hardy's work, its reliance on patterns of repetition across time where the past brings to bear a certain force on the actions of individuals in the present. Such resonance operates in a number of different ways, whether through the impression left by the past on material objects in the present which affect human behaviour; or through the complicating temporal patterns of love affairs, which play themselves out in structurally repetitious forms

of behaviour, and which forms return repeatedly through the persistence of desire. Desire makes one act in similar ways, repeatedly, often through the unconscious frustration of the desire by the desiring subject, in order to prolong that self-same desire. Desire thus assumes what Miller describes as a rhythm, a recurring movement of postponement, delay and, thereby, re-enforcement.

This rhythm of insistent recurrence is read at both the human and non-human levels, although the two, it should be stressed, are never separable; each 'contaminates' the other. The question is one of reciprocal oscillation between human consciousness and non-human world, whether this world is the natural world or that of artefacts and objects. Miller therefore begins with the material persistence of the past in the present as the trace of history. Objects bear the trace of those who have used them. This persistence Miller sees as being Proustian, and it demonstrates Hardy's understanding of the interaction between the subject's consciousness and the material world, because the material world and that which haunts it from the past have the power to evoke feelings, rather than feeling being understood as purely subjective. As Miller puts it, the past has a 'coercive power'. Through such an understanding Miller moves on to a reading of *The Mayor* where the imprint of the past causes events to be enacted which are repetitious, which bear a resemblance to acts having occurred in the same place, even though the protagonists are often unaware of this. Hardy's literary allusions also operate in a similar manner. Thus Henchard repeats 'certain archetypal patterns of tragic experience', which are also 'universal patterns of recurrence' (p 24).

Bruce Johnson (essay 2) also speaks of recurrence. Like Miller's, Johnson's essay is phenomenological in orientation, relating the question of tragedy to the figure of the return, in this case initially Hardy's return to 'natural and even rustic identity' (p. 31), as well as the sense of universal recurrence. Johnson also explores the complex relation between past and present. Rather than reading tragedy as the dominant structural form, Johnson helpfully re-reads the novel, showing how Hardy places 'the problems of tragedy in the context of the return, of the correspondence of Man to Nature' (p. 32). Johnson argues that while Hardy can be understood as a writer of tragedies, this view must, of necessity, be complicated through a reading of phenomenological correspondence. No longer simply tragedy, the novel becomes inevitably transfigured by its encounter with the modern. This view is a significant movement

forward in criticism of *The Mayor*, for it reads textual relationships as being reciprocal, rather than assuming the tragic text of the past to be merely an interpretable context or determining paradigm, as earlier readers had done.

Hardy's 'return' is also a return to the exploration of the connectedness between the subject and the 'non-human world' (p. 33), which, Johnson argues, is 'forgotten' by the Victorian novel. Henchard's 'tragedy' is that he typifies this Victorian forgetting. As a Victorian of the 1830s and 1840s, Henchard 'forgets' his ontological connectedness to the world in the act of selling his wife. Through this act he enters into the purely commercial and social world, signified by his own 'translation' from 'Michael Henchard' into 'the Mayor of Casterbridge'. Thus the novel is an 'ontological exploration of a social institution' (p. 35), of which the wife-auction is only the first symbolic advertisement. Johnson reads Henchard as a tragic figure inasmuch as Hardy's flawed protagonist provides a vehicle with which to explore the consequences of being blind to or cut off from a sense of Being. In dying, Henchard returns to the non-human world and thus sutures the gap between self and world. For Johnson, Henchard's blindness is Hardy's insight into the phenomenological condition of being-in-the-world.

The emphasis on persistence and return is to be found in Tess O'Toole's extract (essay 3), although given a significantly different orientation, directed towards a consideration of genealogy. Beginning with a consideration of how both genealogy and fiction are 'arts of making' (p. 40), O'Toole directs the reader to family relations and histories, as well as to 'fictions' of paternity, as expressed through Henchard's story maintained for Elizabeth-Jane (Garson also usefully explores the problematic claims of paternity [pp. 101–3], particularly in relation to Elizabeth-Jane's sense of propriety). What returns for O'Toole is a 'spectral' recurrence of a family figure from the past. She reads the wife-sale as effecting the dissolution of the family structure, only to return twenty years later. This reorganisation of the family shapes our reading, as 'family relations ... are integral to the narrative pattern' (p. 43). Such patterns are more closely linked than we may imagine. For the family is not Henchard's, the grown-up Elizabeth-Jane being of course Newson's daughter. Discovering this, Henchard reinvents the family narrative, which fiction is already anticipated in Susan's 'lie' to her first husband. However, as O'Toole makes explicit, Elizabeth-Jane disrupts any simply organised familial or narrative

structures in that the genetically transferred 'spectral' traces readable in her face bring back not paternal but maternal likeness. This exchange of stories and structures serves a double purpose: it both speaks of the return of the past – the uncanny likeness readable being that of the young Susan sold at the fair, who thus 'haunts' Henchard – and it speaks also of exchange as the dominant mode of transaction in present-day Casterbridge. Elizabeth-Jane and the landscape around the town both carry traces of the past in the present, and this 'archeological' sedimentation (p. 45) reflects a 'deeper structure in the narrative' (p. 45). From this, the extract concludes by acknowledging the frequency with which 'fictions intervene in genealogical patterns' in Hardy's novel (p. 46), while, in turn, genealogical structures and 'genetic product' (p. 44) can be understood as deeply sedimented, complex textual traces, misrecognised and subsequently available for further reading.

VII

Simon Gatrell (essay 4) also turns our attention to the necessity for further acts of close reading. Beginning with the title and its relation to tragic convention, Gatrell considers Hardy's cursory treatment of Henchard's rise to power and his desire for power. It is the rhythmic drive of desire, already discussed, which causes Henchard to shift his attention from various love-objects, and which unveils desire, not for a particular character but for power. Henchard fails, however, and the submissive position he assumes following the fight with Farfrae 'feminises' him, at least as far as the 'expectations of the novel's Victorian readership' (p. 53) are concerned.

From this initial consideration, Gatrell turns his attention to the heterogeneity and complexity of the novel's description of Casterbridge. The description of the town and the 'reader's experience of Casterbridge' (p. 58) is markedly ambiguous, complicated by a range of narrative voices. Gatrell's reading of the ambiguity of urban representation insists on the difficulty of 'pin[ning] down … a single definition of Dorchester' (p. 58). The town, too rural to be properly metropolitan, and not rural enough to be merely an organic extension or function of the countryside, exists temporally, spatially, culturally and socially between definable meanings.

The representation of Casterbridge is implicated in the structures of the entire text. Despite its rural affiliations, one aspect of the

town which is urban is its ability to create currents of 'economic struggle or collapse' (p. 58) as an expression of the modern, in which Henchard is himself ensnared and which operates across the novel, from the narratives of success and failure of individual characters to the lives of the poor in Mixen Lane. The modernity of economic struggle is played out in the trial scene, between Henchard and the furmity woman, where Henchard's supposedly tragic 'flaw' becomes rewritten within the specific economic and social contexts of Casterbridge life.

Moving to the novel's often overlooked subtitle – 'a man of character' – Gatrell considers Henchard in the context of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. From scrutiny of Mill, Gatrell shows how Henchard's character is articulated through what Mill describes as both a 'greater humanity and, equally, a more powerful impulsive nature ... an intensity of desire' (p. 65). Henchard fulfils the description of Mill's 'individual', but fails to live up to his potential, making him dangerous to society because his will to power and desire outstrips his conscience. Gatrell argues that this should not be read just in terms of tragedy, that Henchard's so-called tragic dimension may be read as a rejection of Mill's notions concerning a man of character. Moreover, through this rejection it is possible to read a critique of, and 'fundamental discontent' with, Victorian society (p. 67). Thus the novel's complexities, its ambiguities and elements read by earlier critics as flaws of design or clumsiness, become available to us as the struggle to articulate a position at the limits of a culture which has helped in part to make that very critique possible. Recognition of this allows Gatrell to move to a more general consideration of 'certain unsettling features' (p. 68) of the narrative, which disturb any unequivocal sense of authority, not least of these being the absence of homogeneity, if not 'evidence of radical ambiguity' in the narrative voice, or voices (p. 73).

Marjorie Garson's psychoanalytically inflected analysis (essay 5) seeks to explore the expression of the 'dissolution of the self', the anxiety concerning identity and the fear of 'corporeal dissolution',[36] against which fables of subjectivity are positioned in Hardy's novels, as one particular expression of the negotiation of crisis. Garson examines the roles the principal characters play and the ways in which these characters, according to questions of Victorian and tragic decorum, exist more as textual figures with social and structural connotations, rather than having any somatic depth. The decorum of the text dominates the reading to such an extent that

there is always that sense of ambiguity identified by Gatrell, while, on the other hand, there is little of the overt erotic expression – what Langbaum describes as the minimisation of sexuality – which is found in Hardy's other novels. Treating primarily of the tragic dimension, Garson moves through a carefully articulated set of readings of the principal characters, including Casterbridge itself, as she examines the 'gaps and discontinuities' in character delineation alongside the text's constant concern with boundaries and borders, with propriety and decorum.

Describing the novel as a text concerned with exposure – the exposure of truths motivated often enough by the frequently contradictory claims of decorum – Garson's essay is as much concerned with what remains unsaid as with what is explicit. Indeed, the strength of her argument is in the reading of textual surfaces and the silences by which the surface structures are articulated. The 'tragic shape' (p. 80) of the narrative is not simply a dominant structure, one which determines 'the novel's sense of 'generic decorum' (p. 81). Also, the generic parameters are themselves mediated and dependent on both readers' and characters' understanding of discursive and generic boundaries. All of this serves to produce a novel which is simultaneously 'unusually controlled' (p. 81) in comparison with other novels by Hardy, notable for their melodrama and more explicit erotic content, and 'delicate and ambiguous' in expression (p. 81). Indeed, Garson contends that the propriety of the text emerges as a result of Hardy's attention to control, even to the extent that tragic decorum dictates that Henchard will die 'off-stage'.

One of the ways in which Hardy's text is controlled is through the essentially decorous representation of characters' bodies, which have any '*somatic* depth and penetrability' carefully erased (p. 82), and are equally 'carefully subordinated to their thematic function' (p. 82). Farfrae, for example, is 'all surface' (p. 82). The Scot has 'a canny sense of boundaries' (p. 91). He easily assumes roles in his ability to move across various boundaries – social and cultural – and is an explicitly textual character. For as much as he borrows 'bits of speech and song' to construct a persona, he is also 'produced' by Hardy 'in terms of a paradigm' constructed by Sir Walter Scott, as Hardy's narrator makes us aware through allusions to the Scottish novelist (p. 93). We understand therefore that we are in the presence of a character from a novel, rather than some flesh and blood figure, and what is true of Farfrae is true in different ways

about the other principal characters. There is, moreover, 'little erotic life' either to Henchard or Farfrae, while the women are even more lacking in any somatic resonance than their male counterparts (p. 83). Garson would doubtless agree with Langbaum that there is a minimisation of sexuality unusual for Hardy in this novel. And Garson goes further, for she analyses the function of clothing, which she reads as being almost wholly absent of 'sexy texture' and serving solely a socially orientated semiotic function, merely one more surface in a novel of surfaces (p. 83).

Tragic decorum and Victorian propriety commingle in the text, conspiring to reduce bodies to surfaces without erotic or somatic oscillation. Clothes, in being primarily socially encoded, provide one more figure of the boundary or border with which the novel is so concerned. 'Spatial boundaries often correspond to social boundaries in this novel', writes Garson (p. 86), yet 'the novel seems to depict … the mingling of classes and the crossing of boundaries' (p. 87). Moreover, it is this constant play of structuration and mobility across lines of demarcation which serves in the construction of the social and economic aspects of the characters of Henchard and Farfrae. Thus, the novel 'has a powerful investment in the permeable boundary as a positive image' (p. 89). There is a 'flexibility to the social borders' of the novel which suggests that it is readable as strangely ambiguous concerning those tactful and underplayed moments of illicit behaviour which punctuate the narrative. While the characters are strangely de-eroticised, then, the town is not. Indeed, Casterbridge is the only fully realised 'body' in the novel (p. 83), ambiguously articulated through innumerable references to structure, to apparently stable boundaries, while simultaneously endlessly permeable, easily penetrated, and equally constantly eroticised. Casterbridge is a 'splendidly androgynous body' (p. 86), while the land surrounding it is clearly maternal. Such eroticism and corporeality leaves female characters nothing other than their social roles.

Social function expressed as a specular sense of the self is explored through Elizabeth-Jane, defined 'in terms of her clothing and her image in the mirror' (p. 99). Garson's reading suggests that Elizabeth-Jane is always defined in relation to her own sense of propriety, her self-control always being a condition of her awareness of 'the specular nature of the subject' (p. 99). This reflexive sense of propriety as social image is that which kills Henchard. Elizabeth-Jane's construction always refers back to issues of decorum, which

is clearly articulated through her attitude towards her dress. Interestingly, she finds ways of justifying first her plain dress and then her more elegant clothing according to her flexible sense of what is fitting. Through Elizabeth-Jane perhaps, Hardy finds a way of exploring the limits of the ideology of Victorian decorum.

Ultimately, and in contradiction to the 'text's more liberal and generous social notions' (p. 103), the function which Elizabeth-Jane serves is one served by all the female characters. The novel operates through the mechanics of exposure, where the guilt of tragedy becomes rewritten as the shame of social revelation. While a 'real man does not expose people' in the novel, '[w]omen are at the bottom of Henchard's exposure' and are seen to have no real objection to exposing one another (p. 104). That which exposure challenges, that which it *exposes*, is the fantasy of integrity. If men such as Henchard desire the integrity of the self, and with that a certain subjective stability, a 'dream of phallic unity' (p. 110), then Susan and Lucetta's deaths expose what Garson calls the 'final impropriety … the extinction of the subject' (p. 109), and with that the impossibility of the imagined unity of the tragic hero.

VIII

Perhaps the most 'traditional' of the readings, Robert Langbaum's reading of tragedy (essay 6) complicates the perception of the tragic framework by concentrating on the unusual – for Hardy – minimisation of sexuality. The diminishment is necessary, Langbaum argues, in order that, in keeping with the tragic framework, emphasis be placed on the question of 'moral judgement' (p. 117). Langbaum's principal interest, though, is in Henchard, who is almost wholly devoid of sexual feelings. This absence is compensated for and explained by Henchard's extraordinarily determined will to power, along with his desire to control and to possess, whether money or people. Henchard's behaviour towards Susan and Lucetta is governed by 'moral obligation without anticipation of sexual pleasure' (p. 117), as he has chosen 'the pursuit of money over the pleasures of sexuality' (p. 118).

The one sexual aspect of Henchard is his 'passion' for Farfrae. This, Langbaum correctly observes, is touched by the intimation of homoeroticism which, however, never becomes fully worked out, but is instead subordinated to 'male power rivalry' (p. 119).

Henchard's struggle with Farfrae is a sign of the former's tragic flaw, as Langbaum sees it, which is his 'self-destructiveness' (p. 120). This eventually results in Henchard's 'unmanning'. For Langbaum, such excessive 'imaginative and emotional resources [are] too large for success in life' (p. 124; recalling Gatrell's reading of Mill). The excess simultaneously amplifies the idea that character is fate while also resonating with Hardy's indebtedness to *King Lear*.

From Henchard, Langbaum moves to Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane and their lack of sexuality. While Lucetta is the 'only sexually passionate character' in the novel (p. 125), Farfrae exhibits only 'shallow emotions' (p. 125; recalling Garson's argument); Elizabeth-Jane's character is marked by an 'unromantic rage for respectability' (p. 126). She is asexually intellectual, a woman who 'does not *feel* beautiful and compensates with intellectuality' (p. 127). Langbaum's argument thus complements Garson's analysis of figures living in a social world which, like the text itself, is marked by absence.

Joe Fisher's essay (7), which searches for hidden patterns and structures within Hardy's narratives as potential sites of subversion, trades between two 'texts', two ostensibly different and differing versions of the same narrative within *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, as he builds a materialist critique. Reading for the 'hidden Hardy' and the 'force of ... concealed patterns',[37] Fisher discerns an imminent patterning drawing on 'pre-capitalist myths' and, most significantly, the discourse of witchcraft, first figured in the novel by the mixing of rum and seed (as a form of alchemy), in the furmity woman's 'cauldron'.[38] The submerged discourses of mythology and witchcraft are figured in the text in a number of places, Fisher argues, and pertain throughout to issues of fertility (or its lack) and female sexuality.

The initial scene of 'witchcraft', where Henchard imbibes the adulterated furmity, enacts the planting of the seed by which Henchard is to grow and assume his later temporary power. Thus there is movement or trade between the two texts, between the world of economic exchange, modern market forces and commodity value, and the older, anti-rational world of carefully encoded magic, symbolised not only by the furmity woman but also by Conjuror Fall, the skimmington ride, and the figure of Henchard himself, a manifestation of the rural, medieval myth of the Wild Man, momentarily controlled by the organised social forces of Casterbridge, but eventually to return to the natural world. The

binary opposition between natural and social world is not so simply defined, however, as Fisher makes clear. For there are a number of marginal places – Mixen Lane and the fair at Weydon-Priors being the most significant (the Ring is another such, and makes explicit Casterbridge's, and the present moment's relationship with an older, other past) – which undo the opposition.

The fair stands at the limits of both the natural and the civilised worlds, a structure symbolising a 'threatening "low" culture' (p. 136), in opposition to the ostensibly bourgeois culture of Casterbridge (with, once again, the notable exception of Mixen Lane). Henchard, the 'superstitious countryman' (p. 135), enters through the liminal site of the fair and is transformed by it, his transformation effected by the intersection between the old mythical world and the modern one of economic exchange. In entering into economic transactions, Henchard is put into a process of becoming a man of 'character', 'credit' and 'standing', which three figures are virtually synonymous (p. 146–7). So, while there is 'no clear narrative continuity offered to explain' (p. 132) the relationship between the 'two' Michael Henchards (the one who drunkenly sells his wife, and the one who is a solid, respectable pillar of the community), there is a carefully staged '"magical" disruption of 'realism' (p. 138), as well as a disruption of the apparent stability of civilised life as a result of the introduction of 'anti-rational and "superstitious" discourses' (p. 147). The novel thus read maps a struggle for 'hegemonic control' between 'competing discourses, where the mythical and anti-rational displace bourgeois realism from the very start' (p. 147). In the unfolding of this struggle, *The Mayor* is Hardy's most successfully subversive novel, challenging most completely the ideology of stability at the heart of late Victorian bourgeois culture.

The material aspect of the text is only one, however. Miller, O'Toole, and Langbaum variously describe moments of ghostly apparition. No discussion, though, has fully considered the novel's spectral quality. Moreover, while various essays consider the legacy of the past in the novel's present, none has explicitly mobilised the past's return as an expression of ghostly revenance. In my essay (8), I turn precisely to the question of haunting.

Throughout the novel, Hardy draws explicitly on the language of the uncanny, as well as the discourse of the spectral. This occurs in discussion of individual characters, but also in the consideration of the town and its environs, and through particular architectural

features. Hardy makes plain that there is always installed in every structure the resonance of earlier structures which haunt the present formations, whether as in the case of the Ring or the keystone over Lucetta's door. Taking each of these temporal oscillations as spectral displacements, I continue by suggesting that the very form of the novel itself is haunted by the trace of other textual structures and that the movement of haunting figures circulates to disrupt any simple identity or generic identification. The identity of the novel, of the town and its inhabitants, the very shape of the novel itself is indelibly traced by spectral energies which displace and make unknowable any single originary point. Seeing tragedy as just a prior textual form is to misrecognise the way in which the structures of the text haunt one another. Instead, it is necessary to redefine the tragic as one manifestation of the spectral trace.

While also redefining the tragic dimension, Michael Valdez Moses (essay 9) reads ideological containment rather than subversion, arguing that Casterbridge is 'a modern bourgeois variant of the *polis*' (p. 174). For Moses, a historicised understanding of the novel, where the 'changing economic and political conditions' (p. 197) inform the reinvention of tragic models, reveals how Henchard's tragic 'fall' merely, in bourgeois fashion, divests him of 'stature and dignity without putting an end to his life' (p. 197). In order to follow this reading, Moses insists that 'an attempt be made to understand the history of tragedy in political terms' (p. 170), and hence his discussion of Greek political and social concepts. Moses not only effectively reinvents and politicises the tragic dimensions, but he also demonstrates how a supposedly aesthetic form such as the novel is indelibly marked by the signs of its own historicity. His reading complicates the comprehension both of tragedy as aesthetic context and of the supposedly timeless rural values on which Hardy draws, unfolding the politics of both contextual and conceptual investment on the part of the novelist, subsequently obscured by critical practice. The possibility of reading the 'superimposition' of the tragic model on the story of Henchard is in one sense 'an ideological feint, an attempt to mask the contradictions in bourgeois existence Hardy had uncovered' (p. 192). Mobilising the politicised reading 'reveals the contradictions of that riddle' (p. 192) although Hardy sought to make these acceptable to his contemporary audience. Henchard's banishment is not just a result of an inevitable tragic plan, but because of 'quickly changing economic and political conditions of Victorian England' (p. 197), which overdetermine the

supposedly universal and timeless tragic model. Like the essays as a whole, Moses' re-reading of the text works to unsettle our grasp of the novel and the ideas it raises, the same kind of unsettling that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* itself seems to be about.

NOTES

1. Keith Wilson, 'Introduction', in Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. Keith Wilson (London, 1997), p. xxviii.
2. Ibid.
3. Norman Page, 'Introduction', in Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. Norman Page (Peterborough, Ontario, 1997), p. 23.
4. Ibid., p. 24.
5. Wilson, 'Introduction', p. xxviii.
6. Ibid., p. xxxi.
7. Ibid., p. xxvii.
8. Anon. Review of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Athenaeum* (29 May 1886), rpt. in Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. Page, p. 404.
9. Suzanne Keen, *Victorian Renovations of the Novel: Narrative Annexes and the Boundaries of Representation* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 129.
10. Wilson, 'Introduction', p. xxv. Wilson highlights the 'recurrent critical tendency to read Henchard and Farfrae as existing in simple opposition'.
11. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London, 1981), p. 127.
12. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (New York, 1963), pp. 22–3.
13. Ibid., p. 23.
14. Eagleton, *Benjamin*, p. 127.
15. Ibid., p. 126.
16. Ibid., p. 127.
17. Ibid.
18. Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (London, 1985), p. 183.
19. Eagleton, *Benjamin*, p. 127.
20. Ibid., pp. 127–8.

21. Ibid., p. 129.

22. Ibid., p. 128.

23. Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London, 1970), pp. 106f.

24. Marjorie Garson, *Hardy's Fables of Integrity: Woman, Body, Text* (Oxford, 1991), p. 1, n. 2.

25. Ibid., p. 1.

26. Ibid., p. 3.

27. Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind* (Basingstoke, 1993), p. 3.

28. Ibid., p. 4.

29. Ibid., p. 6.

30. Ibid.

31. Robert Langbaum, *Thomas Hardy in Our Time* (Basingstoke, 1995).

32. Joe Fisher, *The Hidden Hardy* (Basingstoke, 1992), p. 1.

33. Langbaum, *Thomas Hardy in Our Time*, pp. vii–viii.

34. Fisher, *Hidden Hardy*, p. 2.

35. Ibid., p. 19.

36. Garson, *Fables*, p. 1

37. Fisher, *Hidden Hardy*, p. 1.

38. Ibid., p. 16.

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There are no entries for characters or scenes in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The only reference included here is to discussion of the town itself. References in footnotes are not included.

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