CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

An examination of Hardy's views on tragedy and his treatment of such tragic novels as The Return, The Mayor, The Woodlanders, Jess and Jude shows that he meant his views to be applicable to his tragedies. Accordingly, the first note that he made about tragedy appears the same years as the publication of The Return i.e. 1878. The note says:

"A Plot or Tragedy should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices and ambitions." 📚

As has been shown The Return is a dual tragedy—the tragedy of the romantically passionate Eustacia and the idealistic

1 F.E. Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 120.
and masochistic Clym Yeobright.

Here, in *The Return*, we have an example of the "gradual closing in of a situation" because the protagonists do not take necessary measures to ward off the disastrous events that arise out of the passionate nature of Eustacia and the idealistic nature of Clym. For, with all his ideals, Clym is the dupe of his own passions. He is equally responsible with Eustacia for his mother's death. It is his failure to go to his mother to be reconciled which helps bring about her death. But as to a true tragic hero, self-realization dawns on him, though rather late. He realizes the evil of the world as well as his own fatal flaws.

Eustacia is a living embodiment of passion. She is in love with love; it cannot be satisfied through a normal relationship. So, very soon, we find her tugging at her bonds and seeking a way of release. She wants to reach a higher state of ecstasy through her union with Clym, but in vain. This limited object of love as well as the Heath stifles her, and fittingly death seems to be the only way of escape for her.

In *The Return*, Hardy has explored the passions and prejudices

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2 Hardy's Eustacia provides an interesting contrast to Flaubert's Emma Bovary. Emma seems to be in love with an abstraction called love, for neither her husband, Charles, nor her lovers Rodolphe and Leon satisfy her. But the immediate cause of her tragedy, the conspiracy of pecuniary circumstances, has no counterpart in Eustacia. She lives far above such materialistic considerations.
of Clym, Eustacia and Mrs Yeobright. He has delved deep into the sub-conscious of his characters, and explored the destructive drives of the protagonists—the destructive drives that doom their lives.

It has been shown that these drives manifest themselves in the character of Clym, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright in the form of self-destroying impulses. These, together with the strokes of fate, spell ruin for the protagonists of this thrilling human drama which takes place on the mute, immutable surface of the Egdon Heath which broods over the tragic predicament of the protagonists.

It has also been shown that The Return is more Shakespearean than Sophoclean. Only the rustic chorus as commentators on the actions of the protagonists and the elements of pity and terror are a throwback to the elements of Greek Tragedy.

Hardy's second note on Tragedy appears the same year in which The Mayor was published (1896). The note says: "Tragedy. It may be put thus in brief: a tragedy exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end in a catastrophe when carried out."  

This view of tragedy seems to be applicable to The Mayor.

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3 F.E. Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 176.
For, we have seen that Henchard's very character is fate, that it is the idiosyncrasy in his character that spells ruin for him. He has the instinct of perverse character — he is the instigator of his own misfortunes. He, too, shows the same self-destroying impulse as manifested by Clym and Eustacia.

Like Clym, Henchard too is aware of the fatal flaw in his character, there is a passionate realization of a dark force within, when Henchard cries: "'T'hy should I still be subject to these visitations of the devil when I try so hard to keep him away!' (The Mayor, p. 303).

His is a tragedy of crime and punishment. The crime of selling his wife and child haunts him all his life and destroys him, as the fumity-woman returns from the past to nullify his future. He has flouted a moral order and finds himself as alienated as Job and Cain. He is also very much like Lear, more sinned against than sinning; he also wants to be happy in the company of his daughter, but Newson, the "Mephistophelian Visitant" returns and Henchard must leave Casterbridge and die, to be cared for only by the dim-witted labourer, Abel Whittle.

The Mayor is both Sophoclean and Shakespearean. The reversal of situation, the reappearance of the key people, the use of the fumity-woman and the weather-prophet, the victimizing of the main character by women, the chorus of the townspeople,
the inability of the protagonist to find happiness so long as there is a taint on his conscience, the elements of pity and terror, these are all elements borrowed from Greek Tragedies. On the other hand, in the delineation of Henchard's character as his fate, in the way he is frustrated and hindered by the very things he hopes to attain, in his self-recognition, in his moral alienation he is very much a Shakespearean figure, nay a twentieth century "hero".

The source of tragedy in *The Woodlanders* seems to be the one applicable to *The Return*. Here, Giles Winterborne is doomed because he harbours a grand passion for Grace Melbury, and takes no steps to ward off the disastrous consequences that follow. He also shows the same self-destroying impulses as Clym and Henchard. The mood of self-sacrifice is reinforced by immense powers of self-control and he would rather die than act in a way that would compromise Grace's reputation.

Grace Melbury, on the other hand, is not made of the stuff of greatness, and she showers her affections at the bidding of her father. But, in a way, she is Sue in a rudimentary form; for the tragic machinery in her case is also heightened by mismating and Hardy speaks of her "modern nerves". But the other woman character, the unobtrusive, uncomplaining Marty South, who harbours a grand passion for Giles, undeclared and so unperceived by Giles, has a tragic grandeur which puts Grace very much in the
shade. Hers predicament is tragic, though she is the only unflawed character in Hardy's tragic novels.

Marty South's predicament fits Hardy's idea about the best tragedy, the one which showed "the WORTHY encompassed by the INEVITABLE". In Tess he has written such a tragedy. Tess is one of the finest specimens of womanhood, caught up in forces beyond her control, forces of history, economic circumstances, Alec's lust, Angel's idealism — also entangled in a fatal web of her own making. As has already been shown she is a curious mixture of chastity and sensuality and she displays the same self-destroying impulses as do Clym and Henchard and Giles.

For ever a struggle rages in her between Puritan self-denial and Pagan sex, a clash between the real and the ideal.

This clash between the ideal and the real is nowhere more explicit than in Jude the Obscure which, according to Hardy is a tragedy of "unfulfilled aims". It has been shown, I hope conclusively, how Jude's tragedy is a tragedy of frustration, of the clash between the ideal life that he wished to lead and the real life that he is forced to lead because of the conspiracy of circumstances and his own fatal flaws of character — his weakness for women and strong liquor.

Sue, on the other hand, is made of grander stuff, Eustacia

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4 F.E. Hardy: *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p. 272.
5 Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure*, p. v.
and Grace rolled into one. Hers is a passionate hankering for freedom, freedom from the gross sexual passions, freedom from the institution of marriage. Her one passion is to be loved to madness eternally and though this love should not smack of gross sensuality, she is made in such a way that she arouses strong sexual desire.

Sue is a bundle of contradictions, and "epicure in emotions". Like Eustacia she is always in search of new sensations. Even love is an experiment with her; forcing someone to fall in love with her and then withholding herself and breaking the poor man's heart. The remorse that follows is a fine example of masochism in Sue. She is a curious mixture of a sadist and a masochist, and shows the same self-destroying impulses that typifies such characters as Clym, Giles, Henchard and Tess.

Yet no one can deny the grandeur in Sue's character. She is "an intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves", she is all feminine charm with a heightened sensibility, but her senses remain mute.

Hardy, commenting on certain reviews of Jude the Obscure, remarked that "Tragedy may be created by an opposing environment either of things inherent in the universe or of human institutions."

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6 Thomas Hardy: Jude the Obscure, Postscript to the Preface, p. viii.
7 F.E. Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 274.
That either ..... or makes a problem; for if we grant Hardy his premises of a Natural Law inherent in the universe and indifferent to mankind we should still presume that this power would tend to work through human institutions. In Jude the human institutions that have conspired to bring about the fall of Sue and Jude are the institution of marriage and the institution of learning (Christminster) respectively.

II

After having shown how far Hardy's views on tragedy are applicable to his tragic novels, an attempt is now made to explore the romantic strain in Hardy's tragedies. As a broad generalisation, we may say that Hardy's tragic protagonists are romantic idealists, brought to ruin because of a clash between the ideal and the real. It has been shown that Hardy's tragic protagonists are victims of an insidious need to immolate themselves, for they are fired with a brand of romantic idealism that is too much for the harsh reality of life.

To understand Hardy's tragic heroes one must realize that they are romantic heroes worthy to be ranked with the most memorable heroes of the great romantic tradition of the nineteenth century. They are heroes whose desires are never fulfilled, but
whose spirits, in the best traditions of tragedy, are never crushed.

The nineteenth century had many romantic heroes. They were often figures of great daring. Byron's Manfred defies the spirits who come for him by boasting of power achieved by his own strength. Shelley's Prometheus and Goethe's Faust labour for mankind while Melville's Ahab sets sail looking for the secret of evil. Other heroes try to achieve higher states of personal existence. Emily Bronte's two great romantic protagonists, Heathcliff and Cathy, strive to be united. Hardy's Jude and Sue strive in much the same way. In the case of both couples the two lovers are separated and are driven by an inner compulsion to become one. Phillotson's description of Jude and Sue as being "one person split in two" (Jude, p. 239) reminds us of Cathy's fervent, "Nelly, I am Heathcliff". These heroes who sought greater personal development were often seeking it through some kind of union with another person. Interestingly enough, this union often had little or nothing to do with sex: Cathy is almost sexless, so is Sue. It is a kind of spiritual union with another of like soul. A good example of this is Sue's affair before she met Jude.

Thus Jude, Sue and Bessie are romantic protagonists of the Cathy - Heathcliff stamp. Probably the most fully developed

romantic protagonist in Hardy is Eustacia. Love is to be her
great means of fulfilment. At first reading, Tess and Henchard
might seem to have little in common with such romantic persons
as Eustacia and Jude. But both are very much in the tradition.
It is through the love of Angel that Tess hopes to find fulfilment.
She does not pant for love and ecstasy like Sue and Eustacia,
but her strongest drives are directed towards this higher
state of union with Angel. In Angel's presence she is capable
of exaltation. "Tess was conscious of neither time nor space.
The exaltation which she had described as being producible
at will by gazing at a star, came now, without any determination
of hers" (Tess, p. 139). Even before she had met Angel, she was
ripe for love. "The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency
to find enjoyment, which pervades all life, from the meanest to
the highest, had at length mastered her, no longer counteracted
by external pressures" (Tess, p. 120), but she meets the wrong
man, Alec, at the wrong moment.

The search for romantic joy, the by-product of a heightened
spiritual state is found in many nineteenth century romantic
poets and especially in Shelley. Hardy's tragic protagonists are
only continuing that tradition. Sue Bridehead, a sort of latter-day
Shelley, proclaims the new reign of joy: "I feel that we have
returned to Greek joyousness and have blinded ourselves to sickness
and sorrow, and have forgotten what twenty-five centuries have
taught the race since their time" (Jude, p. 307). For Shelley, Swinburne and many others joy was associated with classical paganism. As several critics have noted, there is in Hardy's work a longing for the paradisiacal state — a state which Hardy's tragic protagonists can never reside in for a long time.

Henchard as a romantic hero is somewhat more complex than the others. As The Mayor of Casterbridge opens, he seems to belong to that branch of heroes who mould and subdue the outside world with their wills. The iron will is Henchard's trademark.9

As the book progresses, however, he seeks affection — a continued closeness to his beloved, Elizabeth-Jane: "Born one by one of all other interests, his life seemed centring on the personality of the step-daughter whose presence but recently he could not endure" (The Mayor, p. 236). She is nearly as necessary to him as Sue is to Jude.10

Clym Yeobright is another tragic protagonist who has more than one drive. In his desire to better the lot of his fellows we see some old Promethean fire, but in his passionate love for Eustacia, we find the quest for joy and ecstasy — the heightened spiritual state. The strands of the tragic web are woven by the passionate idealism of Clym tangling up with the passionate materialism of Eustacia, brought together by sexual attraction.

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9 Cf. W.E. Henley's "Invictus".
"I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul."

10 Cf. Othello, "Loving not wisely but too well".
on the one side and by a mistaken opportunism on the other; the archetypally possessive mother boding no good for her son's marriage and a few ironical quirks of circumstance which ensure the growth of disaster in the fruitful soil of discord.

As a romantic idealist Jude is at once driven by the desire for union with Sue and by the need for greater intellectual development. Seen in this light Jude is much more than just the "history of a worthy man's education", as Arthur Mizener calls it. It is the story of a man reaching for—and grasping momentarily—a higher spiritual and intellectual sphere, but perishing because of lack of will and through a combination of character and destiny. His is essentially a soul's tragedy: "The worthy encompassed by the inevitable."

There is something basically wrong in Hardy's tragic protagonists. I have defined it as "self-destroying impulse". It is an irrational masochistic impulse. To give one example: Jude cries out that "human nature can't help being itself" (Jude, p. 356), and Sue replies by saying that it must learn self-mastery. But her words are a mockery because there is something within herself that drives her to self-torture. Jude sees this and cries out against it. "That a woman poet, a woman seer, a woman whose soul shone like a diamond — whom all the wise of the world would

11 Arthur Mizener: "Jude the Obscure as a Tragedy", p. 53.
have been proud of, if they could have known you — should
degrade herself like this! I am glad I had nothing to do with
Divinity — damn glad — if it's going to ruin you in this way" (Jude, p. 352).

After reading a passage like this, one realizes that the
romantic protagonists in Jude are up against more than corrigeble evils in society. Even the desire for self-mastery is an idle dream. A malignant fate in the form of chance without and their own irrational ungovernable impulses within (their tragic flaw) bring about their downfall when they seek the paradisiacal state — a state which exists only in some kind of eternity.

III

There are some critics who maintain that Hardy's deep-rooted pessimism comes in the way of his writing tragedies. A critic, like Sewall, thinks that because of his deep-rooted pessimism his view of man's lot fall too far short of the full tragic affirmation.12 Similarly, Frederick R. Karl in The Mayor of Casterbridge: A New Fiction Defined says "though Hardy has modelled himself on Greek master ".....he (Hardy) failed to recognize that Greek tragedy is not necessarily bleak and pessimistic."13

12 Richard B. Sewall: The Vision of Tragedy, p. 129.
Again Arthur Mizener says: "..... Hardy's attitude suffered from the same kind of fault as Browning's. Browning tried to convince himself that because God was in his heaven all must be right with the world ..... Hardy, using Browning's logic, in reverse, tried to convince himself that because all was obviously not right with the world, there could be no heaven." 14

The view is, however, altogether untenable, for if we accuse Hardy of pessimism, we have to do the same to Shakespeare, in his plays of mature years, such as Hamlet and Lear.

W.H. Gardner has put the problem in its proper perspective when he says: "It is the sublimity of that death scene (referring to the final agony of Henchard's death) which to my mind utterly refutes the charge of pessimism so frequently brought against Hardy. For surely, when a writer can make us feel so intensely the poignant throes of a dying soul ..... he is ipso facto proving to us the great value which he sets on the human soul; and only by a considerable elasticity of definition can such a valuation be called pessimistic. It is true that here, as in Shakespeare, there is no hint of survival in the paradisian or indeed, any other sense. And Shakespeare has never been called a pessimist. Then why Hardy?" 15

14 Arthur Mizener: "Jude the Obscure as a Tragedy", pp. 45-46.
Hardy steers away from pessimism at the outset through his respect for humanity. When he was dying, he asked to have three poems read to him—Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra", "The Listeners" by Walter de la Mare and a quatrains from "The Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyam. Whatever Hardy wrote was bathed in the genial sunshine of sympathy. Cruelty and Hardy were absolute strangers. His sympathy was all-embracing—"Promethean" as John Coopser Powys called it. As F.L. Lucas has said: "I would have thought the effect of reading Hardy's novels was to make man, not less compassionate but more...".

Again, when we say Hardy is a pessimist, the accent is on his philosophy and not on his art. It is necessary to remember that he was neither a scientist, nor a philosopher, but an artist. And as Keats perceived, the artist, strictly speaking has no opinion; he has only perceptions. As Hardy himself has said, referring to his art in "Jude the Obscure", "...Jude the Obscure is simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions...."

Hardy is an exceptionally sensitive, sympathetic man, inclined

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16 The quatrains closes with the lines:
"For all the sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blackened, Man's forgiveness give— and take!"


19 Thomas Hardy: Jude the Obscure, p. v.
temperamentally toward a dark brooding over the nature of things, his is a nature that became vocal in the presence of tragedy and not comedy, though that did not mean he was unresponsive to the latter. He embodies for us, his impressions of life as it appears to a man of such temperament from, say, the vantage points of Egdon Heath.

As R.A. Scott-James has pointed out: "Hardy did not set out to give us a pessimistic philosophy. He did set out to show how certain persons, selected because they were interesting, having certain characters, would behave under certain circumstances, arbitrarily conceived, but not impossible." 20

An examination of Thomas Hardy's tragedies would show that there are passages in the novels, which though not optimistic, have an anti-pessimistic tinge about them. 21

In Tess he introduces a conception that makes nonsense of anything like deep-rooted pessimism. For example at the end of the second phase where Tess makes a fresh start: hope, youth, spirit rise in her again: "All the while she wondered if any strange good thing might come of her being in her ancestral land, and some spirit within her rose automatically as the sap in the twigs. It was unexpended youth, surging up anew after its

20 R.A. Scott-Jones: Thomas Hardy, pp. 24-25.
21 Jude seems to be the only exception, but, though like Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, it is a tragedy of despair and frustration, a strong possibility of human worth remains.
temporary check and bringing with it hope and the invincible instinct towards self-delight" (Tess, p. 116).

The overall effect of reading Tess is not one of pessimism but an awareness of the grandeur of the character of Tess—a grandeur that makes her greater than destiny. As Henry Duffin says: "Tess herself was not crushed into anything lower than herself by the cruelty of life that bore down so leadenly upon her, but against its pressure raised herself into something of infinite nobility...... This is, in someways, the most hopeful word Hardy has pronounced......".

There is darkness in Hardy's novels, we cannot deny that, but the darkness is not all unrelieved. Here and there little stars twinkle relieving the gloom.

For example, The Mayor of Casterbridge is such a heart-rending tragedy, but there at the end of the novel he notes a fact which though not joyful enough to be called optimistic, has an anti-pessimistic tinge about it. He made Elizabeth-Jane wonder at the "persistence of the unforeseen" which had brought her to "unbroken tranquillity", although youth had seemed to teach her "that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general

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23 H.C. Duffin: Thomas Hardy, p. 254.
drama of pain" (The Mayor, p. 330).

Thus in his novels what Hardy has given us is a tragic vision of life and not a pessimistic view of life, or we may say that he has given us a taste of both pessimism and optimism as tragedy is compounded of both. As Richard Sewall has pointed out: "Tragedy contains both 'pessimism' and 'optimism', goes beyond both, illuminates both, but comes to no conclusion ..... It is pessimistic in its view of the overwhelming proportion of evil to good and in its awareness of the mystery of why this should be — the 'unfathomable' element in which Ahab floundered. But it is optimistic in what might be called its vitalism, which is in some sense mystical, not earthbound; in its faith in a cosmic good; in its vision, however fleeting of a world in which all questions could be answered .24

IV

In conclusion we may say that Hardy, as a writer of tragedies, has modelled himself on the Greek masters, as well as on Shakespeare.

He attempted to revive the Greek ideal of tragedy.\textsuperscript{25} A rustic fatalism runs through his novels. But while the Greek was a fatalist in the will of the gods, Hardy is a fatalist in the will of Nature, which is hostile to civilisation and which he incarnates nowhere so well as in Egdon Heath, "untameable and Ishmaelitish" with "Civilisation as its enemy" (The Return, p. 14).

Hardy has often been taken to task for his philosophy of fatalism, but as Professor Beach has pointed out, he is not a fatalist but a determinist,\textsuperscript{26} and determinism is an essential quality in Tragedy. As Simon Lesser has observed: "There is something deterministic about the way tragedy pursues and exacts retribution from its heroic but flawed protagonists."\textsuperscript{27}

The classic greatness of Hardy's writing is in that they are concerned first and last with the dignity of man, the affirmation of positive values. Like Shakespeare, to some extent, with Hardy, "Character is Fate"—the kind of suffering on which he concentrates is not the misery of hardship and destitution alone, so much as the emotional tragedies of the heart.

\textsuperscript{25} As Katherine Ann Porter has pointed out: "Hardy admits to a study of Greek dramatists, and with his curious sense of proportion, he decided that the Wessex countryside was also the dwelling place of the spirit of tragedy; the histories of certain obscure persons in that limited locality bore a strong family resemblance to those of the great, the ancient and the legendary". Katherine Ann Porter: "On a Criticism of Thomas Hardy", Boston, 1938, p. 305.

\textsuperscript{26} Joseph Warren Beach: The Technique of Thomas Hardy.

Hardy's characters are full of moral conflicts and of decision, arrived at by mental processes. Certainly Jude, Clym, and above all Henchard are men who have decisions to make, and if they do not make them entirely on the plane of reason, it is because Hardy was interested most in the hairline dividing the rational from the instinctive, that is, between instinct and the habits of thought fixed upon the individual by his education and his environment. Romantic miscalculation, of the possibilities of life, of love, of the situation; of refusing to reason their way out of their predicament; these are the causes of disaster in Hardy's novels.

So it would be wrong to dismiss Hardy's tragedies as tragedies of "not being" as T.S. Eliot does, or to say with Edwin Muir that Hardy takes a short-cut to tragedy by reducing life to a formula. Hardy's attitude is tragic not pessimistic; his characters have nobleness even in their ruin; they may stray, yet they are not lost, and so we compare his tragedies with those of both Sophocles and of Shakespeare.

A.C. Bradley has said, in tragedy, "we seem to have a type of the mystery of the whole world ...... because that greatness of soul which it exhibits, oppressed, conflicting and destroyed, is the

28 Quoted in Katherine Ann Porter, op cit, p.306.
highest existence in our view. It forces the mystery upon us, and it makes us realise so vividly of the worth of that which is wasted that we cannot possibly seek comfort in the reflection that all is vanity". 30 In his tragedies Hardy has sounded the very depth of that mystery.

A tribute paid to Thomas Hardy on his eighty-first birthday by younger men, sums up very well Hardy's tragic vision of life:

"In your novels and poems you have given us a tragic vision of life which is informed by your knowledge of character and relieved by the charity of your humour, and sweetened by your sympathy with human suffering and endurance. We have learned from you that the proud heart can subdue the hardest fate, even in submitting to it ...... In all that you have written you have shown the spirit of man, nourished by tradition and sustained by pride, persisting through defeat." 31

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31 Douglas Brown : Thomas Hardy, p. 28.