CHAPTER I

HARDY'S VIEWS ON TRAGEDY

I

Hardy's views on tragedy are expressed in the random notes that he was wont to make. The first one appears in April 1873:

"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." 1

Seven months before the publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* he makes his second note about tragedy:

"Tragedy. It may be put thus in brief: a tragedy exhibits

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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.  

The next note comes much later - more than six years have passed, *Tess* has just been published. The note appears on October 24, 1892:

"The best tragedy - highest tragedy in short - is that of the WORTHY encompassed by the INEVITABLE. The tragedies of immoral and worthless people are not of the best."  

This is the sort of tragedy that Hardy has endeavoured to write in *Tess*. Apart from a slight incautiousness in her character which George Wing calls "sexual haughtiness", *Tess* does give the impression of the WORTHY encompassed by the INEVITABLE. Here is something fine broken and bruised but the same is not true of Sue and Jude, though Hardy seemed to think so.

The next note on Tragedy appears after *Jude* has been published and has been ferociously attacked by the reviewers:

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3 Ibid., p. 251.
"Tragedy may be created by an opposing environment 
either of things inherent in the universe, or of 
human institutions. If the former be the means 
exhibited and deplored, the writer is regarded as 
impious; if the latter, as subversive and dangerous; 
when all the while he may never have questioned the 
necesity or urged the non-necessity of either . . . ."6

A careful examination of Jude reveals that the tragedy 
there has been created partly by an opposing environment of 
early inherent in human institutions, the clash between 
Judg and Sue's ideas about marriage and sex, and those of the 
age in which they lived. Here one must not lose sight of the 
the fact that the tragedy of Sue and Jude is partly due to an 
inessent flaw in character.

A fuller discussion will be found elsewhere in the pages 
that follow. It will not be inappropriate here to note Hardy's 
action to that great tragedy - Shakespeare's King Lear:

"The grand scale of the tragedy, scenically, strikes 
one, and also the large scheme of the plot. The play 
rises from and after the beginning of the third act, 
and Lear's dignity with it. Shakespeare did not 
quite reach his intention in the King's character and 
the splitting of the tragic interest between him and 
Gloucester does not, to my mind, enhance its intensity, 
although commentators assert it does."7

5 Cf. Tans viz., The criticism of the quotation from Aeschylus. 
6 F. L. Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, London, Macmillan 
 & Co. Ltd., 1902, p. 274. 
7 Ibid., p. 282.
For all his modernism, Hardy was a classicist. His life by his second wife, Florence Hardy, shows that he was an avid reader of the Greek writers. He was steeped in the writings of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides and others. Thus the tragedies he has written — and according to R.A. Scott-James these are five in number — *The Return, The Woodlanders, The Mayor, Tess* and *Jude* — have both a classical and Shakespearean tinge about them.

II

Aristotle defined tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative, through pity and fear effecting the proper *katharsis*, or purgation, of those emotions." 9

If we examine this definition carefully we will find that his initial clause is not very clear; scholars are still debating just what he meant by action and what constitutes "completeness". We may say that a single incident of suffering

may serve as material for a lyric poem or dramatic episode, but the action of a tragedy can not be less than the series of incidents, in probable or necessary sequence, of a change of fortune. Unlike the little ups and downs of comedy, which can be laughable because they are trivial, the change of fortune of a tragedy is serious, with great and grave consequences; therefore, a tragedy loses effectiveness if its action is too brief to make a serious impression or too long for its incidents, which reveal the probability or necessity of the change of fortune, to be easily retained in memory.

The final clause of Aristotle’s definition expresses the function of tragedy — the distinctive tragic effect. One of the most controversial points about Aristotle’s definition has been his theory of katharsis. According to Butcher “the tragic katharsis involves not only the idea of an emotional relief, but the further idea of the purifying of the emotions so relieved.”

The emotions in question are pity and fear. Aristotle defines pity as “a sort of pain at an evident evil of a destructive or painful kind in the case of somebody who does not deserve it, the evil being one which we might expect to happen to ourselves or to some of our friends, and this at a

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time when it is seen to be near at hand”.\textsuperscript{11} Aristotle defines fear as "a species of pain or disturbance arising from an impression of impending evil which is destructive or painful in nature."\textsuperscript{12} Simplified this would mean we would fear for ourselves if we were in the position of him who is the object of our pity.

Pity and fear are most fully excited by a change in fortune from good to bad. Aristotle calls it reversal of the situation.

Closely connected with the theory of \textit{katharsis} is the theory of \textit{hamartia} or tragic flaw. "The change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity; for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity; for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. Such an event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible. There remains then, the character between

\textsuperscript{11} S.R. Butcher, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
these two extremes, — that of a man who is not eminently good or just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity but by some error or frailty.\(^{13}\)

The controversial point is whether tragedies effect a purgation as well as a purification of our emotions of pity and fear. According to John Gasenier, Aristotelian katharsis is a valid definition of tragic effect even today, "In the tragic experience we temporarily expel troublesome inner complications. We expel 'pity' and 'fear'; to use Aristotle's terms and the terms are broad enough to cover the most pathological or near-pathological elements — namely anxieties, fears, morbid grief or self-pity, sadistic or masochistic desires, and the sense of guilt that these engender and are engendered by. In a successful tragedy we see these drives enacted on the stage directly or through their results by characters with whom we can identify ourselves."\(^{14}\)

According to Aristotle the tragic hero should be a person of high rank. This statement is not applicable to modern tragedies which deal with the lot of the common man. As Arthur Miller has pointed out, "Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of his character, is really but a clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the

\(^{13}\) S.H. Butcher, p. 43.

right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king.\textsuperscript{15}

The tragic hero, even though he be a villain like Macbeth, attracts our admiration because of a certain grandeur in his character, a greatness in his effort to resist, and our pity for his defeat. Although he must be crushed in his conflict since his adversary is necessity, yet he does not yield the victory on all counts. The hero is a man like us, showing human weaknesses, but though an object of our sympathy, he also seems sublime, for he outstrips us and the superior powers whom he opposes, in greatness of spirit.

According to Muller the tragic spirit is both pessimistic\textsuperscript{16} and humanistic, a reconciliation of antithetical traits.

The tragic spirit is pessimistic in the sense that though it shows how men bring about their own downfall, in many cases their suffering is not fully deserved, that it is disproportionate to the wrong-doing, that it can result from good as well as bad intentions.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Arthur Miller: "Tragedy and the Common Man", \textit{The N. Y. Times}, February 27, 1949, Section 2, p. 1, col. 6.

\textsuperscript{16} According to Arthur Miller this is a misconception. As he points out "... in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlookers brightest opinions of the human animal." \textit{Ibid}, p. 3, col. 4.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Tess and Jude and Clym and Henchard and Giles.
The tragic spirit is humanistic in the sense that it is centered on the interests and the claims of man. It would not arise if men were convinced that their whole duty was to love and serve God. It is a proud spirit. It is here that humanism touches pessimism for pessimism itself is proud, for it implies man deserves a better fate.

Finally, the tragic spirit is an affirmation of positive values. As Bonamy Dobree says "The great tragic writer says 'Yea' to life in every fibre of his being, however terrible, grim, or ghastly it may appear."

Kenneth Burke has suggested that the basic rhythm of the Tragic action is purpose, passion, perception. The hero's purpose is defeated, his passion is harrowing, but through his final perception he comes to terms with his fate. As Maxwell Anderson points out, "... the essence of a tragedy ..... is the spiritual awakening or regeneration of its hero."

The major element in the tragic pleasure is a reverence for the human spirit. Man retains his dignity in failure and death. To quote Bonamy Dobree again, "The end of tragedy, then, is to show

18 Cf. Aeschylus: Prometheus_Vinctus.
the dignity of man for all his helpless littleness in the face of the universe, for all his nullity under the blotting hand of time." 21

Myers has pointed out that tragedy reveals "a just relation between good and evil in the life of a representative man." 22

Tragedy thus deals with the relationship between good and evil and according to Bertrand Russell it is the proudest, most triumphant of the arts, the loftiest monument to a "free man's worship.

"It builds its shining citadel in the very centre of the enemy's country, on the very summit of its highest mountain, from its impregnable watch-towers, his camps and arsenals, his columns and forts are all revealed; within its walls the free life continues, while the legions of Death and Pain and Despair and all the servile captains of tyrant Fate, afford the burghers of that dauntless city new spectacles of beauty." 23

A point to be considered here is the fact whether the term "tragedy" could be applied to the genre novel. Is there any such thing as novel-tragedy? The answer to this is an emphatic 'Yes', for the term tragedy has broken down the barrier of different forms

and has, in fact, entered into every form. As Sewall remarks, "It (the tragic sense of life) informs all literature of a sombre cast — the dirge, the lament, the melancholy lyric or song, the folk ballad of betrayal and death. It colours many scenes in the great epics and hovers about the best comedy as an imminent possibility. The tragedies of the tradition from Aeschylus to Dostoevski say this about it: that by most men it must be learned and learned through direct immediate experience; that is through suffering." 24

In an interesting book on Dostoevski, Vyacheslav Ivanov makes a strong case for novel-tragedy. He says, "In modern times the novel form has evolved with even greater power and impact becoming ever more many-sided and comprehensive, until finally in its urge to acquire the characteristics of great art, it has become capable of conveying pure tragedy." 25

III

Having discussed the nature of tragedy in the preceding section, an attempt is made here to distinguish between Sophoclean

and Shakespearean tragedy and to place Hardy in this scheme.

When Aristotle says that tragedy is an imitation of action that is serious in the sense that it deals with material that is not paltry or ridiculous, his definition covers all the plays of Sophocles. Moreover when Aristotle goes on to say that tragedy produces its effect through pity and fear, his words are applicable to Sophocles.

The central idea of Sophoclean tragedy is that through suffering a man learns to be modest before the gods. The conflict in Sophoclean tragedy is mainly between divine and human purposes. It may involve conflict between human beings but in the last resort it arises from the differences between gods and men, from men's ignorance of their own state or refusal to do what the gods demand.

Though the conflict in Sophoclean tragedy is between men and gods, Sophocles proclaims again and again the glory of man. As Kitto observes: "It is not merely that Sophocles says explicitly, 'Nothing is more wonderful than man', it is that Ajax, Odysseus, Antigone, Electra, Creon, Oedipus fill his place and in their own right. On the one hand are these heroic characters, Man at his greatest, on the other their miscalculations which allied to the manifold chances of life bring them down."26

What Kitto says here is applicable to Hardy as well, for in his tragedies he proclaims again and again that the power of circumstance and the frailty of human beings must always be reckoned with. In the midst of this shifting and baffling scene, one thing stands firm, of perishable nature but imperishable grandeur, the heroic character of man.

But there is this fundamental difference between Sophocles and Hardy: both of them admit that man is vulnerable and so they ask the question: what defence can be contrive? To Hardy there is no defence but resignation. On the other hand Sophocles demands piety and reverence, but also prudence in knowing what is what.

The conflict in Shakespeare is between men and men. The hero, noble and righteous, is brought into conflict with results of evil and circumstance and he is crippled by his own ability or weakness. Tragedy becomes inherent in character, in the incompleteness that marks the best and mightiest of mankind.

The force of chance, equivalent to the Greek fate plays a part in all tragic story and drama; the power of evil without or within was the counterforce in medieval drama, and was the theme most powerfully dwelt upon by Shakespeare’s immediate contemporaries. The fateful power of incompatibility of temperament with conditions of life seems to have been Shakespeare’s own conception.

In Sophocles, arrogance and audacity are accounted evil; in
Marlowe and Chapman it is intensity of desire that drives to
disaster. But in Shakespeare, the melancholy and reflective
temper of Hamlet, and the generous and credulous magnanimity of
Othello are the allies of untoward circumstance and the designing
villainy in bringing suffering to the good and failure to the
potent. The greatness of Shakespeare's conception, however, results
from the massing of all these combatants against the hero. The
conflict thus gains in the comprehensiveness of its presentation
of life; and human nature in the face of such odds becomes
magnificent even in failure. Hero wars with villain, human
intrepidity and wisdom with chance and destiny; conscience with sin,
greatness of purpose with crippling defects of temperament.

Such a conception of tragedy involves a recognition of the
blindness of chance that can not be squared with any theory of
poetic justice, or theological view of the rewards due to virtue.
But it also involves a recognition of moral law that results in the
punishment of its violators. The villains never escape as they do
in a comedy. The wages of sin is always death, though the reward
of virtue is not happiness. The vastness of evil in the world,
its malignant influence, its temporary triumphs are conceived
in a manner not different from that of contemporary thought. The
doctrines of total depravity and of moral responsibility go side
by side as in medieval drama, theology and psychology. In the
depiction of the waste of effort, the expense of spirit, the
crippling of greatness by weakness, the ineffectuality of virtue, Shakespeare gave a far more comprehensive and a far more penetrating representation of tragic fact than the world had yet known, but without professing any solution of its mysteries.

Sir Maurice Bowra in his *Sophoclean Tragedy* brings out the following points of resemblance and difference between Sophocles and Shakespeare.

**Resemblances:**

"Both display abrupt and unfortunate changes of fortune which engage profound interest and sympathy; both display the hazards of the mortal state and the depths, no less than the heights, which human nature can touch; both are concerned with the great not merely in station but in natural endowments and force of character; both involve sooner or later, speculations about the powers that govern the universe, about their justice or injustice, their solicitude or indifference to suffering men; both lead through crisis agony and disaster to an end which somehow, despite all the horror provides peace."  

**Distinctions:**

While Shakespeare's tragedies end in the death of the chief character or characters, only one of Sophocles' surviving

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plays so ends.

In every play of Sophocles the gods take an active, even a decisive part. Their will is done, even though men resist it. It may work on or through the characters but it works. In Shakespeare, too, superhuman powers are at work. The witches in Macbeth and the ghost in Hamlet affect the action, but only a part of it and that only because they appeal to something latent in these human beings to whom they appear, to that hidden ambition of Macbeth and the lurking suspicions of Hamlet. "The evil that wrecks Lear and Othello is not in their stars but in the corrupt souls of men." 28

There is no struggle in Sophocles between good and bad men except in a very limited sense. There is sometimes a struggle between the good and bad in a single man but most commonly it is between men and the gods or those who represent their will. In this respect Sophocles presents a contrast to Shakespeare who finds his tragic conflict between men who, despite their faults, are essentially noble and others who embody an active principle of wickedness. Sophocles' characters cannot be so divided into good and bad. They come from one mould and suffer in different degrees from the same defects.

28 C.M. Bowra: Sophoclean Tragedy, p. 360.
Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Macbeth fall because of some fault in an otherwise noble nature, a fault which grows until it dominates their characters and encompasses their ruin. The fault is a real flaw at variance with their true selves. The great men of Sophocles fall because they are what they are, because their great gifts may, in the wrong circumstances, be turned against them, because the gods choose to humble them by the same means which once exalted them. Even when all is well, in the end the same process is at work and great qualities create great dangers.

IV

The consensus of opinion among critics is that Hardy is a writer of tragedies. One of the earliest critics, Lascelles Abercrombie, has this to say, "A tragic comprehension of the world is a profound characteristic of Hardy's mind ....... The obvious quality of Hardy's tragedy is that it does not begin in the persons who are most concerned in it; it is an invasion into human consciousness of the general tragedy of existence, which thereby puts itself forth in living symbols."29

Herbert Muller calls Hardy, "the first great tragic novelist in England".

"Hardy had a coherent theory of tragedy", says Sewall in his *The Vision of Tragedy*. "viewed man's lot as 'tragic' ...... Hardy is not dispiriting in the sense in which cynicism is dispiriting, he depicts people who 'refuse to be dwarfed into sluggishness'. The stars may shine down on Egdon Heath coldly and impersonally but they are beautiful. Life is presented in his novels as neither 'little nor cheap, nor easily found out'."

D.H. Lawrence in his essay on Thomas Hardy writes in his own inimitable style about tragedy in Hardy:

"This is the tragedy of Hardy, always the same, the tragedy of those who more or less pioneers, have died in the wilderness, whither they had escaped for free action, after having left the walled security and the comparative imprisonment of the established convention."  

As a writer of tragedies Hardy's is the sea where both the Sophoclean and Shakespearean rivers meet and mingle. The tragic conflict in Hardy is between men and gods and between men and men.

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31 Richard B. Sewall : *The Vision of Tragedy*, p. 131.  
He considered his characters primarily in their relation to Time and Destiny, even his feeblest dramas are enacted in the presence of gods. He resembles Sophocles and Shakespeare in the sweep of his imagination, the magnitude of his designs, the universality of his themes. Although his heroes are obscure simple folk, inhabiting a small rural area, insulated from the fields of spectacular activity in the modern world, he endowed them with an intensity of passion, a greatness of soul that make them heroic, and he gave a spaciousness to his restricted scene by concentrating his attention upon the timeless problems of life and death, the play of elemental passions before the majestic background of nature. As Lawrence puts it:

"..... this is the quality Hardy shares with the great writers, Shakespeare or Sophocles ..... this setting behind the small action of his protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature."33

He has much in common with the Greeks. Like Sophocles, he had a profound sense of fate. Both perceived a force that opposed human will, that in often fantastic ways, frustrated human designs. Both recognised the futility of attempting to combat its incomprehensible decrees. But to Sophocles the gods were intelligent if not merciful and he retained an unwavering faith in the essential

33 D.H. Lawrence: "Study of Thomas Hardy", p. 419.
rightness of their government. Of such faith Hardy had not a jot.
where, accordingly, the spirit of Sophocles was ultimately a
reverend submission, the spirit of Hardy was a passionate, at times,
almost, a satirical protest. "Justice was done and the President
of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport
with Tess" — this is Hardy's final comment on the terrible fate
of his heroine. These bitter words state an irreconcilable
difference, that, in its larger aspect, is the difference between
modernity and antiquity.

But it would be wrong to go away with the impression that
Hardy's characters are mere puppets in the hands of destiny. They
are partially responsible for their fates — there is no doubt
that Henchard is the architect of his own fate and to a certain
extent Tess, Jude, Sue, Clym and Eustacia. As Abercrombie says,
"we assuredly do not feel Hardy's tragic characters to be mere
puppets jected by a malicious fate: were it so, indeed, they would
miss an essential condition of tragedy." 34 His characters resist
their fate for there is no tragedy where there is no resistance.
Jude does indeed ache but his resistance is magnificent and so
also his tragedy.

What strikes us most in Hardy's tragic heroes (or heroines)
is a note of "doomed defiance". As F.L. Lucas has pointed out

in his discussion of John Webster's tragedies:

"The Muse of Tragedy is of her nature infidel at heart. ....
It is not the glory of God that she declares, but
the glory of man in his doomed defiance of his destiny
and the bounds it has set to his mortal endeavour,
whether it be Prometheus on Caucasus, or Capaneus on the
wall of seven-gated Thebes, or Faust in his study, or
Macbeth on the wall of Dunsinane."

As this statement suggests, the great tragic effects of
pity and fear, the Aristotelian katharsia, are bound up with this
"doomed defiance". We feel pity for the doomed hero, but there
is a kind of terror or awe, or fear as Aristotle puts it; present
in his downfall. Miss Edith Hamilton in her brilliant The Greek
Way to Civilization tells us, "Only individuals can suffer and
only individuals have a place in tragedy. The personages of the
Greek drama show first and foremost what suffering is in a great
soul and therefore they move us to pity and awe."

In his great novels - The Return of the Native, The Mayor
of Casterbridge, Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure -
Hardy saw man beaten down by forces within and without himself
and sought to record man's eternal struggle with fate. This is
also what the Greeks and Shakespeare do.

35 F.L. Lucas : The Complete Works of John Webster, London,
1927, I p.40.
36 Edith Hamilton : The Greek Way to Western Civilization, N.Y.,
1949, p.183.
There are certainly differences between Shakespeare's and Hardy's heroes. Shakespeare's heroes with their intellect and imagination reveal at great dramatic moments in the plays the breadth and depth of man's tragic existence. Their own self-realization and their realization of man's tragic nature give them a kind of universality that Hardy's heroes do not have. 37

But one thing that Hardy has in common with both Sophocles and Shakespeare is a fund of sympathy that he brings to bear on his characters. The flood of compassion in which all of Hardy's thought and emotion unite, stems from his deep reverence of human life, his conviction of its dignity on its lowest plane. The story of man is to him infinitely sad, but it is never commonplace, never mean, never a matter of mockery or scorn. He insists that man is nobler than the will that creates and controls him. His novels are filled with records of generosity and unselfish devotion among all classes, and most strikingly, among the humblest, from the half-witted peasant, Abel Whittle, in The Mayor who cares for the dying Henchard by whom he had been treated harshly, simply because he remembered a kindness Henchard had once done to his mother, to the unobtrusive, uncomplaining Mart

37 Bradley's observation that "... A Shakespearean tragedy is never depressing .... He (the tragic hero) may be wretched and he may be awful, but he is not small. His lot may be heart-rending and mysterious, but it is not contemptible;" I think, is equally applicable to Hardy.

South who showed all the marks of poverty and toil, yet touched sublimity at points as she spoke the beautiful words that close *The Woodlanders*. By such examples of unwavering loyalty, of patient endurance, of selflessness, of pure beauty of soul, Hardy elevates and ennobles a common humanity. He demonstrates what he explicitly asserted that the tragedy of obscure and unpretentious men can be endowed with a majesty and grandeur "truly Sophoclean".

What strikes us about Hardy's characters is the intensity of their passions. They demand our admiration, and we experience a feeling that someone of great worth has been lost when we see them destroyed. It is the passionate defiance of fate by Sue, Jude and Henchard and the other great protagonists which makes their downfall more than merely pathetic. A character who goes to his doom without having some insight into and realization of the forces of evil which work to bring about his downfall may be pathetic but can not be tragic. The tragic hero cries out defiantly against the fact that the forces arrayed against him must finally bring about his downfall. As Bonamy Dobree says: "It is always fineness which brings about the crash of Hardy's heroes and heroines, as it is fineness which impels Oedipus, Orestes, Hamlet or Othello."38

The ill-fortune that befalls a tragic hero is the result not only of forces working against him from without, but of forces within him which hasten him towards his downfall. Hardy's great

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38 Bonamy Dobree: "Thomas Hardy", p. 332.
characters —Tess, Sue, Jude, Henchard, Clym and Eustacia—are all driven by forces within them that are tragic flaws. In the pages that follow an attempt has been made to locate this tragic flaw in each hero and heroine. They also move us to pity and terror—pity because something fine has been bruised and broken, terror because each one has been caught in the meshes of fate. Thus in the end his grim narratives do affirm the ideal values of tragedy. Despite their drastic terms, they have uniformly the "certain cathartic Aristotelian qualities" that Hardy strove for even in Jude the Obscure, the most gruesome of his novels.

It is true that Hardy's heroes do not reach a high state of personal development as Shakespeare's heroes do, but it must be emphasised again and again that their spirits are never crushed. There is nothing mean or abject about them: they have the necessary loftiness to make their fate truly tragic.

Hardy was not all of a piece in his world view. He was capable both of a tragic apprehension of the world and a belief that the world might, in some cases, be made better for men, possibly Hardy's meliorism detracts from the power of his tragedies. But regardless of this, Hardy's vision in his great novels is fundamentally tragic. Like Poe and Dostoevski, Hardy explored the depth of man's soul and found dark forces there that helped to drive him to destruction, in spite of his surface desires for worldly happiness.
It is particularly in the torn and divided souls of Jude, Sue and Henchard that we see these forces at work — forces which finally act as fatal flaws to bring about the downfall of otherwise worthy individuals. They seek undefined goals of ecstasy and power and unable to achieve them, they turn on themselves. Certainly, the sympathetic reader must feel a certain amount of awe and pity, while watching the downfall of characters so powerful as Clym, Eustacia, Henchard, Tess, Sue and Jude. These characters are certainly capable of Lucas' "doomed defiance". In all ages of spiritual turmoil men have faced the inscrutable forces of destruction and re-asserted man's dignity by lofty defiance and final acceptance of the eternal tragic lot. Although Hardy created a kind of tragedy which is peculiarly his own, he was working in the great tradition of tragic poets, Sophocles and Shakespeare in particular.

In the subsequent pages each of the tragedies will be explored in detail and the tragic flaw of the protagonists will be located and defined.