I

Seven months after he had finished writing *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, in April 1885, Hardy stated in his notes:

"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."¹

This note suggests that Henchard, like Clym, Jude and some others of low birth, is a tragic hero, frustrated and hindered by the very things he hopes to attain, and blinded by the obsessive nature of his quest. Clearly, Henchard’s flaw is more

¹ F.E. Hardy: *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, p.176.
than rash temper; his whole character, Hardy is careful to indicate in his definition, is his fate.\textsuperscript{2}

Here, in \textit{The Mayor}, Hardy achieves a tragedy in theheroical sense, a tragedy in the manner of Sophocles andShakespeare, a tragedy stemming from the interaction of characterand destiny.

He differed from Shakespeare in transferring tragedy on thegrand scale to a familiar local setting and to people ofordinary taste.

II

The outline of \textit{The Mayor}, as befitting a tragedy, is quite simples, despite the several new incidents occurring in each chapter. As John Paterson has pointed out:

"The traditional basis of \textit{The Mayor of Casterbridge}as tragedy emerges at once in the plainly fabulousquality of its first episode."\textsuperscript{3}

Discouraged by his failure to get on in the world andimpatient of ordinary domestic restraints, Michael Henchard,

\textsuperscript{2} Thomas Hardy : \textit{The Mayor of Casterbridge}, Macmillan and Co.,1953,"A Story of a Man of Character," sub-title, title page. All page references will be to this book.
the journeyman hay-trussser, arrives at the fair at Maydon-Priors, steeps himself in alcoholic brews of the fumity woman, and in a drunken moment, sells his wife to a sailor for five guineas.

As D.A. Dike has pointed out, this episode, has analogies with Oedipus Rex. Henchard's act of violence bears the same relation to the novel as the murder of Laius in the story of Oedipus.4

The opening of the novel also recalls that of King Lear, where the king loses the sympathy of the reader by the violence with which he rejects and banishes his daughter Cordelia, as a result of injured pride. In both we have a kind of temporary madness resulting in unnatural severance, and in both we are left wondering what the results of rash decisions of such appalling magnitude can be.

But the more appropriate Shakespearean comparison, however, is with A Winter's Tale, where Leontes, in a fit of mad jealousy, despotically rides himself of his queen, and sixteen years pass before the story is resumed.

The fact that twenty years intervene between the shocking events of the first two chapters and the events of the chapters that follow, is to dramatize the causal relation between Henchard's crime and punishment. It is the crime of selling his wife which

concentrates his energies. It both makes his character and destroys it.

Henchard looks in vain for his wife, swears an oath "to avoid strong-liquors" (p. 16) for twenty-one years, becomes the mayor of Casterbridge though equipped with little more than energy. He makes friends with Farfrae, passion reaching out to reason, as it were, tells him his past with Susan and Lucetta. When Susan finally reappears, he stolidly and conscientiously marries her. When Lucetta reappears, he acts honourably, though long tempted to revenge himself on Farfrae through her. When the furmity woman reappears, he publicly acknowledges his guilt. Forsaken by Farfrae, blasted by the disclosure that Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter and deprived of the love and loyalty of Lucetta; humiliated by the revelations of the furmity woman and ruined in a trade-war with his Scottish antagonist; crushed by his public rebuke on the occasion of the Royal Visit rejected by the "daughter" whose affection had consoled him in defeat, he is reduced in the end to the starkest of deaths. As John Paterson says: "Henchard is thus forced like Oedipus, Faust and Lear to rediscover in suffering and sorrow the actuality of the moral power he had so recklessly flaunted."

5 "Henchard is an Oedipus, who instead of marrying his mother after twenty years, remarries Susan after a similar lapse of time".

6 John Paterson: "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy", p. 93.
"'Character is Fate', said Novalis, and Farfrae's character
was just the reverse of Henchard's who might not inaptly be
described as Faust had been described — as a vehement gloomy
being who had quitted the ways of vulgar men without light
to guide him on a better way" (p. 110).

This passage from the novel shows that Hardy places due
emphasis on the role of character and Henchard's tragedy,
like Lear's, stems from the idiosyncrasies of character.

At the very beginning of the novel, "a skilled countryman"
steps out of the landscape; he is of a piece with it in his
clothes, his implements, his gait, but the dogged and "cynical
indifference" is "personal to himself". He is "a fine figure",
"swarthy and stern in aspect" — fairly general attributes but
his "profile so slightly inclined as to be almost perpendicular"
(p. 1), is again idiosyncratic. Typical yet highly distinctive,
epitomising the rural south-west, but with a powerful individuality,
such are the characteristics of Michael Henchard outlined at the
outset.
How far was Henchard master of his own character, the archi-
cracter of his own fate? Certainly, to a far greater extent
han Oedipus who was doomed by the gods to be a victim. For,
whereas Oedipus kills his own father and weds his own mother
by oracular decree and without knowing what he was doing, Hen-
chard, on the contrary, sells his wife, bullies Abel Whittle,
estranges Farfrae, persecutes Elizabeth-Jane, dallyes with
Lucetta, speculates wildly, deceives Newson, and all the time
he is as fully aware of the tenor of his action as were Hamlet,
Lear and Macbeth of theirs.

Fundamentally good, he soon feels the prick of conscience
and tries to make amends. But something which is at once an
objective (forces without) and subjective (forces within)
antagonism is forever thwarting his best intentions. He accepts
this scourging as the just punishment of his own misdeeds and at
each successive stroke of the whip, he clenches his teeth and
murmures in a spirit of heroic resignation: "My punishment is not
greater than I can bear" (p. 309).

All this testifies to Hardy's appreciation of the truth
in those words quoted from Novalis. We see in Hardy, as we also
see in Shakespeare that the warp of the calamity is spun out of
the tragic character.
The tragic conflict in the novel is the struggle between Henchard and Farfrae and the fall of the protagonist is the story of his slow defeat by a more practical man than himself. The main crisis in Henchard’s career occurs in the scene where Farfrae rebukes his master for his rash cruelty towards Abel Whittle, whose flesh he would mortify for unpunctuality (p. 96).

John Paterson regards the conflict between Henchard and Farfrae as a conflict between the passion of the one with the reason of the other. It is also a “conflict between the rugged individualist and the organization man, between primitive and modern ways of doing business.”

"In my business 'tis true that strength and bustle build up a firm ....... But judgement and knowledge are what keep it established. Unluckily I'm bad at science ....... a rule o’thumb sort of man. You are just the reverse" (p. 46).

Farfrae brings to the firm an order and regularity of which the owner is rendered, by the very largeness of his nature, mentally incapable: "...... the old crude viva voce system of Henchard, in which everything depended upon his memory, and bargains were made

8 John Paterson: "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy", p. 96.
by the tongue alone, was swept away. Letters and ledgers took the place of 'I'll do it' and 'You shall hasn't'" (p. 86).

Later, identifying himself with the new mechanisation, Farfrae will be responsible for introducing the modern sewing machine, while Henchard, identifying himself with custom and tradition, will remain true to "the venerable seed-lip (which) was still used for sowing as in the days of Heptarchy" (p. 162).

Indeed, for all his idiosyncrasy of behaviour, Henchard is moved by profound emotions. Farfrae, on the other hand, is ready, not long after Lucetta's death, to dishonour the emotion to which he once had thrilled. "There are men," Hardy remarks, and he must have had Henchard in mind "whose hearts insist upon a dogged fidelity to some image or cause ...... long after their judgement has pronounced it no rarity ...... and without them the band of the worthy is incomplete. But Farfrae was not of those ...... He could not but perceive that by the death of Lucetta he had exchanged a looming misery for a simple sorrow" (pp. 297-298).

The events that help nullify Henchard are those that develop from his own character: he literally makes the world that first envelopes and then squeezes him to death. Hence the justification of the sub-title: "A Story of a Man of Character".

At the very beginning of his career, he has planted those seeds which lead to his destruction. He has already "the instinct
perversé character. This is reflected not only in the
sale of his wife, a crime which will haunt him all his life —
but also in such idiosyncrasies of character as the following:

For example, giving an account of his relationship with
Lucetta, he says:

"'I sank into one of those gloomy fits I sometimes
suffer from on account of the loneliness of my
domestic life, when the world seems to have the
blackness of hell, and like Job, I could curse the
day that gave me birth' " (p.74). 10

Henchard marries Susan not merely to make amends and to
provide Elizabeth-Jane with a home but also "to castigate
himself with the thorns which these restitutitory acts brought
in their train, among them the lowering of his dignity in
public opinion by marrying so comparatively humble a woman"
(p.79).

Again, when Farfrae courts his step-daughter, Elizabeth-Jane,
though he knows a union between the two is to his own good, he
prevents the friendship from taking root:

9 Albert Guerard : Thomas Hardy : The Novels and Stories, p.149.
"...Henchard is a man of great force and destructive energy,
which he turns outward occasionally but inward far more often." Ibíd, p.147.
10 Cf. Ishmael in Melville's Moby Dick: "Whenever I find myself
growing grim about the mouth, whenever its a damp drizzly
November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily
passing before coffin ware-houses and bringing up the rear of
of every funeral I meet; .... then I account it high time to
get to sea as soon as I can".
Herman Melville : Moby Dick or The White Whale, Eurasia
"One would almost have supposed Henchard to have had policy to see no better modus vivendi could be arrived at with Farfrae than by encouraging him to become his son-in-law. But such a scheme for buying over a rival had nothing to recommend it to the Mayor's headstrong faculties .... Loving a man or hating him, his diplomacy was as wrong-headed as a buffalo's" (pp. 109-110).

After the terrible revelation of Elizabeth-Jane's parentage: "His lip twitched and he seemed to compress his frame as if to bear better. His usual habit was not to consider whether destiny were hard upon him or not, the shape of his ideas in cases of his affliction being simply a moody 'I am to suffer, I perceive.' 'This much scourging, then, is it for me?' But now through his passionate head there stormed this thought—that the blasting disclosure was what he had deserved." (p. 121).

Albert Guerard describes this streak in his characters as a tendency towards "paranoia" and "self flagellation": "Hardy recognized that the guilty may also punish themselves and cause their own 'bad luck'. The man who repeatedly cuts and burns himself is no mere victim of absurd mischance; he is compelled to cut and burn himself; though he may not understand his compulsion."

ii Albert Guerard: Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories, p. 150.
There is ample evidence of this in the text: "Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had (referring to the blasting disclosure) produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him. Yet they had developed naturally. If he had not revealed his past history to Elizabeth he would not have searched the drawer for papers, and so on." (p. 122)

This "sinister intelligence" is not a manifestation of destiny; it is merely Henchard's superstition. Guerard says: "Unaware that the power was wholly inward, he 'looked out at the night as at a fiend' " (p. 122). 12

This self-destroying impulse is also evident in the way he gambles on uncertain rains to drive up the price of corn and is confirmed in his prophecy by the mysterious Mr Fall. He buys enormous quantities of corn and is ruined by the blazing August weather. 13

After he has squared his affairs in a ruinous way to get rid of his burdensome purchases at a monstrous loss, the harvest begins and after three days of excellent weather, it changes: "If Henchard had only waited long enough he might at least have avoided loss, though he had not made a profit. But

12 Albert Guerard: Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories, p. 148. 13 "The adverse force was his own lack of Wessex prudence", Ibid, p. 150.
the momentum of his character knew no patience" (p 136).

This impulse towards his own destruction is also evident in the way he licks his wound, when after 'busting out drinking', he demands that the journeymen sing the terrible One hundred and Ninth Psalm.

Henchard's self-destroying mood asserts itself far less equivocally at the time of the Royal Progress. He has a "passing fancy" to join in welcoming the Royal Visitor, though no longer a member of the town council. But what might have appeared a last conscious effort to reassert his dignity, was, in fact, a half-conscious effort to degrade himself before the collected town-folk in the most humiliating way. "He was not only a journeymen, unable to appear as he formerly had appeared but he disdained to appear as well as he might. Everybody else, from the Mayor to the washer-woman, shone in new vesture according to means; but Henchard had doggedly retained the fretted and weather-beaten garments of bygone years" (p 261).

This self-destroying quality is also evident in the way he tells Newson a tissue of lies to keep Elizabeth-Jane: "..... the sudden prospect of her loss had caused him to speak mad lies a child, in pure mockery of consequences" (p 289).

14 Even his "busting out drinking after taking nothing for twenty-one years" (p 225) is certain self-punishment.
But his happiness with Elizabeth-Jane does not last long. The moment Farfrae starts courting her again, all his perverse instinct is aroused once more: "Thoreupon promptly came to the surface that idiosyncrasy of Henchard's which had ruled his courses from the beginning and had mainly made him what he was. Instead of thinking that a union between his cherished stepdaughter and the energetic thriving Donald was a thing to be desired for her good and his own, he hated the very possibility." (p. 300).

Thus we see that Henchard's character, like Lear's, is of heroic proportions, although so moulded that the vast energies are dissipated in foolish acts of pride and vanity, in short, in his own destruction.

The end of *The Mayor* is the most perfect tragic ending Hardy has achieved in his novels.

Henchard has disappeared in the remote recesses of Egdon Heath. It is as if this man of primeval ruggedness and passions has returned to the rude world of the past. But this impression belies the Henchard of the present. In many ways like Lear, he has been redeemed through folly and suffering. Finally despised and rejected by the only person he could turn to, he goes his own lonely way and it is a superlative irony that only Abel Whittle befriends him at the last. Whittle's unswerving, heartfelt loyalty recalls his (Abel's) "pitiful eyes" as he
watched his former master hay-trussing for Farfrae, and
Henchard's scornful remark: "He is such a fool." (p. 231).
Whittle sees feelingly, and does not forget a kindness. It
is remarkable that the most perceptive of the principal
characters, fails to understand and forgive at the critical
moment, and that it is left for a poor, unsophisticated
peasant, who had suffered shamefully at Henchard's hands but
could never forget his kindness to his mother, to show
awareness of Henchard's sufferings and needs.

It is this poor, unlettered man who describes Henchard's
end and few tragic endings are more poignant than this. Here
we have a simplicity of the "highest cunning", such as Hardy
found in the Bible narratives: "Yes, ma'am, he's gone! .......
"What, Whittle," he said, "and can ye really be such a poor
fond fool as to care for such a wretch as I! " Then I went on
further, and some neighbourly woodmen lent me a bed, and a chair,
and a few other things, and we brought 'em here, and made as
comfortable as we could. But he didn't gain strength, for
you see, ma'am, he couldn't eat—no, no appetite at all—
and he got weaker, and to-day he died. One of the neighbours
have gone to get a man to measure him" (pp. 328-329).

15 This is reminiscent of Lear and his fool. John Paterson says:
"He (Henchard) has rediscovered in the figure of a hapless
and dim-witted labourer, as Lear had rediscovered in a fool
and a madman, that brotherhood with all men to which he had,
in the pride of his nature and his office, been unfaithful."
John Paterson: "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy" (p.99).

16 Cf end of Falstaff
B. Hodek: Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Henry V,
When Henchard has been defeated one has witnessed the conflict of a powerful will with an implacable force, and his dying wishes give him the unearthly power of a maddened Lear, whose defiant cry of "'Ere they shall make us weep! we'll see 'emstarved first!'", should be an epitaph for Casterbridge's former mayor.

Hardy wrote significantly in his diary, just two days after finishing The Mayor, his own epitaph on Henchard's struggle: "The business of the poet and the novelist is to show the sorriest underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things."

IV

Hardy intended The Mayor to be a Greek tragedy appropriate for his own time. Certainly, the formal patterns of the novel attempt the simple line of Greek Tragedy with evident rise and fall of incident leading to the hero's recognition of his situation. Even the moral alienation

17 "'Michael Henchard's Will. 'That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me. ' & that I be not bury'd in consecrated ground. ' & that no sexton be asked to toll the bell. ' & that nobody is wished to see my dead body. ' & that no rumours walk behind me at my funeral. ' & that no flowers be planted on my grave. ' & that no man remember me. 'To this I put my name. 'MICHAEL HENCHARD,'\n
18 F. E. Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy, p. 171.
of Henchard, which places him close to a twentieth century "hero", finds its source in the isolation of Aeschylus and Euripides' protagonists.

The leitmotif of the fumity woman together with the recurrence of themes of isolation, the reappearance of the key people, the use of the weather prophet, the prevalence of classical architecture, the starkness of the landscape, the morbidity of Henchard's "sickness", the victimising of the hero by women, the use of folk customs like the skinnyt ride, the presence of the townpeople as a chorus, the inability of the main character to find happiness as long as there is a taint on his conscience—all these are a throwback to the chief elements of Greek tragedy now reproduced and brought to bear upon the novel.

Reversal of Fortune:

Reduced to the humble trade with which he began, discarding the shabby-genteel suit of cloth and the rusty silk hat which had been the emblems of his illegitimate power, taking again to the drink he had twentyone years before repudiated, leaving Casterbridge exactly as he had entered it, revisiting Wydon-Priors, the scene of the original crime and dying at last, broken in body and spirit on the barren wastes of the Egdon Heath,
Henchard travels with every stage of his decline and fall the long road by which he had come, embraces with every step the past he had denied, and rediscovers, like Lear, in the conditions of his going out the conditions of his setting forth:

"And thus Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied a quarter of a century before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum — which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passu with the departure of zest for doing — stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena a second time of a world that had become a mere painted scene to him" (p. 315).

Henchard's fall is bound with the fumity-woman's reappearance. She is Henchard's Nemesis and her disclosure of Henchard's guilty past "formed the edge or turn in the incline of Henchard's fortunes":

"On that day — almost at that minute — he passed the ridge of prosperity and honour, and began to descend rapidly on the other side. It was strange how soon he sank in esteem. Socially he had received
a startling fillip downwards; and, having already lost commercial buoyancy from rash transactions, the velocity of his descent in both aspects became accelerated every hour" (p. 203).

When Farfrae meets him on the second bridge and asks him not to leave Casterbridge, Henchard recognizes the reversal of fortune:

"'Tis turn and turn about, isn't it? Do ye mind how we stood like this in the Chalk Walk when I persuaded 'ee to stay? You then stood without a chattel to your name; and I was the master of the house in Corn Street. But now I stand without a stick or a rag, and the master of that house is you' " (p. 221).

The wheel comes full circle, when after an illness, he stoically asks to be taken as a journeyman or casual hay-trusser to Farfrae.19 Like Samson at the mill of the Philistines, he works in Farfrae's yard, a very different hay-trusser from the Henchard of old:

"Then he had worn clean, suitable clothes, light and cheerful in hue; leggings yellow as marigolds, corduroys immaculate as new flax, and a neckerchief

19 "And thus the once flourishing merchant and Mayor and what not stood as a day-labourer in the barns and granaries he formerly had owned" (p. 223)."
like a flower-garden. Now he wore the remains of an old blue cloth suit of his gentlemanly times, a rusty silk hat, and a once black satin stock, soiled and shabby" (p. 224).

Henchard is fully aware of the reversal of fortune: when he learns that Farfrae is to be elected Mayor, he at once sees the oddness of the situation: "... how cust od it is! Here be I, his former master, working for him as man, and he the man standing as master, with my house and my furniture and my what-you-may-call wife all his own" (p. 224).

Reappearance of the Key People:

The reappearance of Susan and Elizabeth-Jane, reappearance of Lucetta, reappearance of the fumity-woman and finally the reappearance of Newson—all have a role to play in Henchard's tragedy.

The reappearance of Susan and Elizabeth (and his remarriage of Susan) has the effect of demeaning Henchard in the eyes of the Casterbridge people. 20

The fumity woman is a creation out of a past that goes back to the days of Macbeth and the witches: "Over the
days of Macbeth and the witches: "Over the

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20 'The five-and-forty years since I had my settlement in this here town,' said Coney: 'but daze me if ever I see a man wait so long before to take so little!' " (p. 80).
pot stooped an old woman, haggard, wrinkled, and almost in rage. She stirred the contents of the pot with a large spoon ......" (p.19).

The furmity-woman, with her witch-like qualities, is a very important factor in Henchard's tragic doom. Her reappearance destroys Henchard; the past comes back to destroy the future.

It is significant that Henchard's response to the furmity-woman's revelation of the past is typical of the honest quality of the man. When the furmity-woman tells her story in court, the clerk immediately responds, "'Tis a concocted story ...... so hold your tongue!'" (p.198), Henchard need only go along with this interpretation to save himself. Instead creating "a sensation in the court" (p.198), he admits the truth of the story.21 He does so because she is the physical equivalent of Henchard's past which has come back to haunt him. Only by accepting his past, and its concomitant guilt can Henchard free himself. Hence, at any price, he grasps at the chance the furmity-woman has given him.

The reappearance of Lucetta and Newson also has a disastrous effect on the fortunes of Henchard.

21 "'No -- 'tis true.' The words came from Henchard. 'Tis as true as the light,' he said slowly. 'And upon my soul it does prove that I'm no better than she! '" (p.199).
Just as Henchard has lived with a guilty past and suffers because of the revelation of the guilt, Lucetta too has a guilty past and will suffer as much as the male protagonist.

John Paterson says: "..... in having lived with Henchard in Jersey, she too has been guilty of a moral indiscretion in the past. Indeed, in rejecting her own lover and electing to marry Farfrae, she has refused once again like her more heroic male counterpart, to recognize and make restitution for her crime 'I won’t be slave to the past —,' she cries pathetically, when the demonical Henchard seeks forcibly to legalize their old association. 'I’ll love where I choose!'" 22

Whereas the secret of Henchard's guilt rests in the finicky woman, Lucetta's secret rests in the love-letters written to Henchard. By a quirk of fate, these letters fall into Jopp's hands and their contents are made public to the inmates of Peter's Finger of Uxen Lane before they reach Lucetta's safe hands. At the very moment when she has burnt those letters and thinks, she is free from the consequences of her moral indiscretion she hears the sounds of the skimmity ride, which will publish her shame and eventually bring

22 John Paterson: "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy", p. 94.
about her death.23

It is the reappearance of Newson that completes Henchard's demoralisation.24 Henchard is no longer in touch with the fibres of his being which had prevented him from falsehood in the past. If we consider the meaning that Elizabeth-Jane has for Henchard as the metaphor of his own self-love and self-regard, we can assess the threat that Newson presents and can better understand Henchard's lie. Elizabeth's absence would mean that: "The whole land ahead of him was as darkness itself. There was nothing to come, nothing to wait for" (p. 292).

On the verge of losing himself for ever, Henchard sees his own counterpart, his actual double floating in the river. Henchard recoils at the prospect of self-alienation but this self-alienation is forced on him with the return of Newson. He secretly leaves Casterbridge by the same road by which he had entered twenty-five years before. As he reaches the crest of a hill overlooking Casterbridge, he ruminates on the prospect of the loneliness facing him on the other side of the steep hill: "I Cain go alone as I deserve — an

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23 "Her melodramatic and middle-class re-enactment of Henchard's authentic moral drama bears witness, like Gloucester's prose re-enactment of Lear's crime and punishment, to the reality of an order whose indignation, once provoked, can neither be appeased nor controlled". John Paterson: "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy", p. 95.
outcast and a vagabond" (p. 309). A kind of heroic stoicism informs his identification with Cain, the first outcast, and we shoulder his pain with him.

The Victimization of the Hero by Women:

Henchard is not only a victim of his own idiosyncrasy of behaviour and of a relentless force called fate, he is also the victim of the women in his life. Susan deals him a hard blow indeed, when through her perfunctorily sealed letter Elizabeth-Jane's parentage is disclosed. Elizabeth-Jane herself is transformed into a very hard-hearted woman in the closing chapters of the novel, with the return of Newson. Henchard's relationship with Elizabeth-Jane shows that he is not given a chance to recover after penance. During his decline, Henchard has hopes of living close to the girl: "In truth, a great change had come over him with regard to her, and he was developing the dream of a future lit by her filial presence, as though that way alone could happiness lie" (p. 296). This passage is measured against a later one in which the girl, now married, rebuffs his attempt at reconciliation: "Oh how can I love, or do anything more for a man who has served me (her) like this (deceived her about her real father)" (p. 323). 25

25 About Elizabeth-Jane's cruelty, Frederick Karl says: "One of Henchard's few real acts of demonstrable affection is rejected out of hand, and rejected, moreover by a girl now secure with a husband and a father. The cruelty here is
The Role of the Weather-Prophet:

Henchard's reliance on the weather-prophet, a person deep within a world of superstition, exemplifies his growing insecurity, like Macbeth's before his last visit to the witches, and also puts him at the mercy of a human interpretation of the uncertain elements. The hero can no longer rely on his own devices and by taking counsel from a false prophet wills a destiny that will destroy him. But here it is significant that had Henchard actually followed the weather-prophet's advice, as Macbeth had followed the witches, though with disastrous results, he would have at least avoided loss, "although he had not made a profit" (p. 136). But he did not wait because the "momentum of his character knew no patience" (p. 136). Henchard does not follow the weather-prophet's advice for two reasons. First, he is embarrassed by his own superstitious beliefs. Secondly, we might speculate that Henchard has an abiding need to deny the reality of the irrational in life since an acceptance of this irrationality would mean he is no longer in control of his destiny or his impulses.

unbearable for the reason that Henchard has been discarded by one who is solidly part of the society, while previously, his rejections had at least been at the hands of people equally insecure. Now Elizabeth-Jane respectable, cared for, loved, confident and youthful, strike at Henchard's last vestige of dignity: he indeed becomes the dead gold-finch forgotten in the cage.

Frederick Karl: "The Mayor of Casterbridge: A New Fiction Defined" (p. 25).
In conclusion we may say that the frumity-woman and the weather-prophet destroy Henchard on the fable level as much as Lucetta, Farfrae, Elizabeth-Jane, Susan and the town itself nullify him on the realistic level.

V

The "Chorus" in the Manner of Greek Tragedy:

The townspeople of Casterbridge serve as a chorus to the tragedy unfolding before them. The most important role which this chorus plays is that of providing the reader with a perspective on the main action. Thus the reader gets a view of the action through the eyes of the characters involved in that action, and still another view of the action through the eyes of the villagers. Lest the reader be misled by the characters' matter-of-fact acceptance of their own behaviour, the novel presents a second perspective which reminds the reader just how distant this behaviour is from that of ordinary people. Thus the reader is constantly reminded that Henchard is not simply an ordinary man engaged in ordinary activities.
from the first, the villagers stress those qualities in
Henchard which set him apart from plain people like
themselves. When Susan, Elizabeth-Jane and the reader first
meet Henchard in his role as the Mayor, the townspeople talk
about him as a large and awesome figure. Similarly the
comments of the villagers underline Farfrae's relentless
ambition, and in the skimmity ride, Lucetta's deviant morality.
The reader is presented with the enormity of Henchard's
caracter by the comments of this chorus.

Christopher Coney, Solomon Longways and Mother Cuxson
are the principal characters of this "chorus".

Christopher Coney gives us a realistic picture of
Casterbridge:

"'When you take away from among us the fools
and the rogues, and the lassigers, and the
wanton bussies, and the slatterns, and such
like, there's but few left to ornament a
song with in Casterbridge, on the country
round'.......... we be bruckle folk here —

26 "'..........he've strong qualities that way' " (p.32) and a
page later:"'..........he's the powerfullest member of the
Town Council, and quite a principal man in the country
round besides. Never a big dealing in wheat, barley, oats,
hay, roots, and such-like but Henchard's got a hand in it.
Ay, and he'll go into other things too; and that's where he
makes his mistake. He worked his way up from nothing when 'a
came here; and now he's a pillar of the town' " (p.33). The
speaker is Solomon Longways.
the best o' us hardly honest sometimes, what
with hard winters, and so many mouths to fill,
and God-a'mighty sending his little taters so
terrible small to fill 'em with' " (p. 49).

Christopher Coney's remarks on Henchard's remarriage
with Susan is quite philosophical and almost in the vein
of the chorus of the Greek tragedy: " '.....daze me if ever
I see a man wait so long before to take so little!" (p. 80).

And Nance Brockridge's remarks that follow would seem
prophetic in the light of the later events: " 'She'll wish
her cake dough afore she's done of him. There's a bluebeardy
look about 'em; and 'twill out in time' " (p. 82).

Mrs Cuxsom's remarks on Mrs Henchard's death have a
Shakespearian flavour: " 'And she was as white as marble-stone,'
and likewise such a thoughtful woman, too — ah, poor soul —
that s' minded every little thing that wanted tending.........
And there's four ounce pennies, the heaviest I could find, a-tied
up in bits of linen for weights — two for my right eye and two
for my left," she said. "And when you've used 'em, and my eyes
don't open no more, bury the pennies, good souls, and don't
ye go spending 'em, for I shouldn't like it" (p. 115).
In its subtle blending of pathos and humour, it recalls, without echoing, Mistress Quickly's account of the death of Falstaff, Solomon Longways' "why should death rob life o' fourpence" (p. 116) is a reminder of the tragic poverty of the labouring class.

Since the social aspirations of Lucetta and Farfrae play such a major role in the novel, it is important that the social structure of Casterbridge be clearly delineated. This task belongs to the chorus of the townspeople. The townspeople are clearly lower class and their attitude toward the characters and their actions clearly identify the social demarcations of the town and the position of the characters in this structure. Their attitude towards Farfrae clearly shows the steps in his reversal of positions with Henchard. The chorus is quick to realize the difference between the present Farfrae and Farfrae of the past, specially after his ill-treatment of Henchard during the Royal Visit: "In the crowd stood Coney, Buzzford, and Longways. 'Some difference between him now and when he sung at the Droe Mariners,' said the first........ Yet how folk do worship fine clothes! Now there's a better-looking woman than she that nobody notices at all, because she's akin to that hootish fellow Henchard.
'I could worship ye, Buzz, for saying that,' remarked Nance Mockridge. 'I do like to see the trimming pulled off such Christmas candles' " (p.263).

And the skimmity ride is planned and executed.

Then after Lucetta's death Farfrae begins courting Elizabeth-Jane once again, this is how the chorus react to it: "Mrs. Steannidge, having rolled into the large parlour one evening and said that it was wonder such a man as Mr Farfrae, 'a pillow of the town,' who might have chosen one of the daughters of the professional men or private residents, should stoop so low, Coney ventured to disagree with her.

'Tis she that's stooping to be — that's my opinion....... But as a neat patching up of things I see much good in it" (p.304).

The town's social attitudes are so clearly delineated that the reader begins to think of Casterbridge as a tribal ground with its own strict hierarchy of social position. This impression is reinforced through the carefully delineated geographical structure of the town. There are even two bridges, each carefully preserved as the gathering place of a particular social group. Both bridges attract failures, but even the failures are divided into two groups in this town of strictly
defined social position. The brick bridge is the gathering place for failures "that did not mind the glare of the public eye". The stone bridge is for the failure of a "politer stamp" who is sensitive to his own condition. This very carefully delineated social hierarchy, serves at the same time to make Henchard's position of Mayor more imposing and his descent through the ranks to failure more tragic.

VI

Elements of Pity and Terror:

As a classical tragedy The Mayor arouses our emotions of pity and terror.

The suffering of Henchard after the blasting disclosure that Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter, arouses our pity: "For the sufferings of that night, engendered by his bitter disappointment, he might well have been pitied. He was like one who had half fainted, and could neither recover nor complete the swoon" (p. 123).
His condition arouses our pity when he asks the choir at Three Mariners to play the One hundred and Ninth Psalm:

"'A swift destruction soon shall seize
On his unhappy race;
And the next age his hated name
Shall utterly deface'" (p. 328).

Though the words are meant for Farfrae, we know that it is Henchard's own epitaph.

Then, during the wrestling, Farfrae's life is in his hands, and Farfrae says: "'Then take it, take it! You've wished it long enough!' he is unmanned: 'Henchard took his full measure of shame and self-reproach. ..... So thoroughly subdued was he that he remained on the sacks in a crouching attitude, unusual for a man, and for such a man. Its womanliness set tragically on the figure of so stern a piece of virility" (p. 270).

The days of his decline, when he leaves Casterbridge by the same old route by which he had entered, and goes back to his old job of hay-trussing, are a pitiful picture of something fine broken and bruised: "Very often, as his hay-knife crunched down among the sweet-smelling grassy stems, he would survey mankind and say to himself: 'Here and everywhere he folk dying before their time like frosted leaves, though wanted by their
families, the country, and the world; while I, an outcast, an encumberer of the ground, wanted by nobody, and despised by all, live on against my will!" (p. 316).

Finally, he arouses our pity in the way Elizabeth-Jane rejects him: "Henchard's lips half parted to begin an explanation. But he shut them up like a vice, and uttered not a sound. How should he, there and then, set before her with any effect the palliatives of his great faults—that he had himself been deceived in her identity at first, till informed by her mother's letter that his own child had died; that, in the second accusation, his lie had been the last desperate throw of a gamester who loved her affection better than his own honour? Among the many hindrances to such a pleading not the least was this, that he did not sufficiently value himself to lessen his sufferings by strenuous appeal or elaborate argument." (p. 323).27

Elements of Terror:

Often in the novel, there is a feeling that Henchard is caught in a vast scheme of things. One such occasion is the "blasting disclosure" that Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter. Henchard then "looks out at the night as at a fiend". It is as if he is up against something greater than himself:

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27 Henchard here resembles Tess. The underlined words show once more that he has self-destroying traits.
"Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him". (p. 122).

When, through the caprice of weather, Henchard has lost almost all, "the movements of his mind seemed to tend to the thought that some power was working against him": "I wonder," he asked himself with eerie misgiving; 'I wonder if it can be that somebody has been roasting a waxen image of me, or stirring an unholy brew to confound me?" (p. 136).

We have a feeling that Henchard is truly trapped when he goes to The Ten Hatches Hole with the intention of committing suicide, and sees: "...Not a man somewhat resembling him, but one in all respects his counterpart, his actual double, was floating as if dead in Ten Hatches Hole.

"The sense of the supernatural was strong in this unhappy man, and he turned away as one might have done in the actual presence of an appalling miracle............Elizabeth-Jane heard him say, 'Who is such a reprobate as I? And yet it seems that even I be in somebody's hand!' " (p. 293-295).

Thus we see that pity in The Mayor has its source in the idiosyncrasies of character, terror in the manifestations of fate. That Henchard's tragedy is a tragedy stemming from the
interaction of character and destiny, that it is both
Shakespearean and Sophoclean will be evident from the following
passage in the novel:

"His mood was no longer that of the rebellious,
ironical, reckless misadventurer; but the leaden
gloom of one who has lost all that can make life
interesting, or even tolerable. There would remain
nobody for him to be proud of, nobody to fortify
him; for Elizabeth Jane would soon be but as a stranger,
and worse. Susan, Faffrae, Lucetta, Elizabeth—all had
gone from him, one after one, either by his fault or
by his misfortune" (p. 292).

VII

The Background:

The background, the setting of the novel acts as a perfect
counterpoint to the tragedy. The principal features of Casterbridge,
sometimes etched in great detail, sometimes shadowy, form a
fitting background to this tragic drama.

"Its squareness was, indeed, the characteristic which most
struck the eye in this antiquated borough, the borough of
Casterbridge...... It was compact as a box of dominoes. It had no suburbs — in the ordinary sense. Country and town met at a mathematical line...... To the level eye of humanity it stood as an indistinct mass behind a dense stockade of limes and chestnuts set in the midst of miles of rotund down and concave field. The mass became gradually dissected by the vision into towers, gables, chimneys, and casements, the highest glazings shining bleared and bloodshot with the coppery fire they caught from the belt of sunlit cloud in the west" (p. 22).

The hub of its life is agricultural and pastoral, though it is significant that the principal characters of the novel come to this town from the outer world: "The agricultural and pastoral character of the people upon whom the town depended for its existence was shown by the class of objects displayed in the shop windows" (p. 27).

The historical associations of Casterbridge are more Roman and Hebraic than English. And like Hamlet's Denmark there is something rotten in it:

28 "In his physical resemblance to the town of Casterbridge itself — they are both described in terms of squares and rectangles, for example — he (Henchard) becomes the very symbol of the place".

John Paterson : "The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy", (p. 102).
"Casterbridge announced old Rome in every street, alley, and precinct. It looked Roman, bespoke the art of Rome, concealed dead men of Rome. It was impossible to dig more than a foot or two deep about the town fields and gardens without coming upon some tall soldier or other of the Empire, who had lain there in his silent unobtrusive rest for a space of fifteen hundred years" (p.66).

The description of the Ring, the remains of the Roman amphitheatre, suggests the intrigue and violence that is associated with the place: "Melancholy, impressive, lonely, yet accessible from every part of the town, the historic circle was the frequent spot for appointments of a furtive kind. Intrigues were arranged there; tentative meetings were there experimented after divisions and feuds" (p.67).

Just as Henchard has a guilty past, it would seem that the guilt attaches to Casterbridge itself: "Apart from the sanguinary nature of the games originally played therein, such incidents attached to its past as these: that for scores of years the town-gallows had stood at one corner; that in 1703 a woman who had murdered her husband was half-strangled and then burnt there in the presence of ten thousand spectators.....In addition to these old tragedies, pugilistic encounters almost to the death had come off down to recent dates in that secluded arena....." (p.67).
Depressed and embittered by the disclosure that he is not Elizabeth's father, Henchard encounters in a walk by the river a half phantasmagorical scene emblematic not only of his own crime and guilt but also of the crime and guilt that attach to Casterbridge itself: where were ruins of a Franciscan priory, and a mill attached to the same, the water of which roared down a beck-hatch like the voice of desolation. Above the cliff, and behind the river, rose a pile of buildings, and in the front of the pile a square mass cut into the sky. It was like a pedestal lacking its statue. This missing feature ... was, in truth, the corpse of a man; for the square mass formed the base of the gallows, the extensive buildings at the back being the country gaol. In the meadow where Henchard now walked the mob were wont to gather wherever an execution took place, and there to the tune of the roaring weir they stood and watched the spectacle" (pp. 122-123).

Like Henchard and Lucetta herself, High-Place Hall — Lucetta's Casterbridge house, has a guilty secret. Its reasonable exterior conceals ugly and grotesque passions, passions here associated with the Gothic. For one thing, the secret exit Elizabeth discovers in the rear, an ancient archway, significantly described as "older even than the house itself" has for its keystone a sinister mask which evokes the theme of a hidden decay and disease: "Originally the mask had exhibited
a comic leer, as could still be discerned; but generations of Casterbridge boys had thrown stones at the mask, aiming at its open mouth; and the blows thereon had chipped off the lips and jaws as if they had been eaten away by disease" (pp.136-137).

More significantly, the door and the mask conjure up once again the imagery of the vile and violent crimes in the past: "The position of the queer old door and the odd presence of the leering mask suggested one thing above all others as appertaining to the mansion's past history — intrigue. By the alley it had been possible to come unseen from all sorts of quarters in the town — the old play-house, the old bull-stake, the old cockpit, the pool wherein nameless infants had been used to disappear" (p.137).

If the place smacks of pollution so do the people.29 The local pollution is rendered most dramatically in the sinister community of Mixen Lane. The polluted precincts harbour a peasantry no longer redeemed, as even Christopher Coney and Solomon Longways are redeemed by their whimsicality and humour:

"Much that was sad, much that was low, some things that were baneful, could be seen in Mixen Lane. Vice ran freely in and out certain of the doors of the neighbourhood; recklessness

dwell under the roof with the crooked chimney; shame in some bow-windows; theft (in times of privation) in the thatched and mud-walled houses by the sallows. Even slaughter had not been altogether unknown here" (p. 250).

The novel contemplates the delinquent proletariat of Casterbridge with something resembling aristocratic irony and disdain. The inn called Peter's Finger is described as "the church of Mixen Lane" (p. 252). Satirically described as "a virtuous woman who years ago had been unjustly sent to goal as an accessory to something or other after the fact", the land lady has worn a martyr's countenance ever since, except at times of meeting the constable who apprehended her, when she winked her eye" (p. 252).

Thus the corruption and demoralization of Casterbridge, register, as in Oedipus and Hamlet, the corruption and demoralization of the protagonist.

VIII

In conclusion it may be said that Henchard's story, like that of Oedipus and Lear, is a story of crime and punishment.
But there is this fundamental difference between Henchard and Oedipus: that whereas Oedipus had no knowledge of his crime, Henchard is fully aware of his crime and tries his best to atone for it.

The other tragic figures that Henchard resembles are Job and Cain. But he resembles Lear the most.

Charles Lamb said that the tragedy of King Lear was too intense for stage representation because as we read the play "we are Lear." This is how we feel about Henchard: we are Henchard.

Henchard is a man, more sinning than sinned against, though, in his case, indeed, a more active and malign external fate is to be taken into the reckoning. But when the point is conceded we find many striking resemblances both in their character and in the role of Destiny in their lives.

Each story opens with an act of folly, springing from one fundamental weakness, egoism. Lear casts off his favourite daughter because she refuses to pander to his vanity. Henchard casts off the responsibility of wife and child because they are a serious hindrance to his self development. The natural passion in Lear is aggravated by senility; the natural passion in Henchard is aggravated by alcohol. There follows for both men a long story of retribution, of purgation through suffering. The decline of the old king begins at once; whereas the fall of the
corn factor begins soon after he has achieved prosperity. Both are divested of wealth and authority. Both are victims of a too generous delegation of powers to inferiors. Both feel bitter regret for their lost position. They are both so keenly affected by their misfortunes that their minds are unhinged.

Even Lear's terrible excreations on his daughters find their counterpart in the novel, for Henchard in the bitterness of hatred forces the trembling choir in Three Mariners to consign Farfrae to perdition with ritualistic thoroughness.

Eventually both men are purged of their egoism, of their vanity, and their harshness towards inferiors. Each becomes a little child, living only for the sake of the daughter he has wronged. The ultimate ideal of each is fully expressed in the poignant words of the King: "No two alone will sing/like birds in the cage."

Their dream is shattered and the catastrophe that over-whelms the one and the other seems to be the only consummation possible.

The tragedy of Michael Henchard is thus a tragedy "where his natural aim or desire ends in a catastrophe when carried out," or

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30 Thus Henchard's return to Casterbridge, on the day of Elizabeth-Jane's marriage, with a goldfinch in a cage as a wedding present becomes highly symbolic in this context.
we may say the tragedy of Michael Henchard is the supreme consummation of the tragedy of all those who

"......in Life's busy scenes immersed see better things and do the worst".

(Matthew Green).