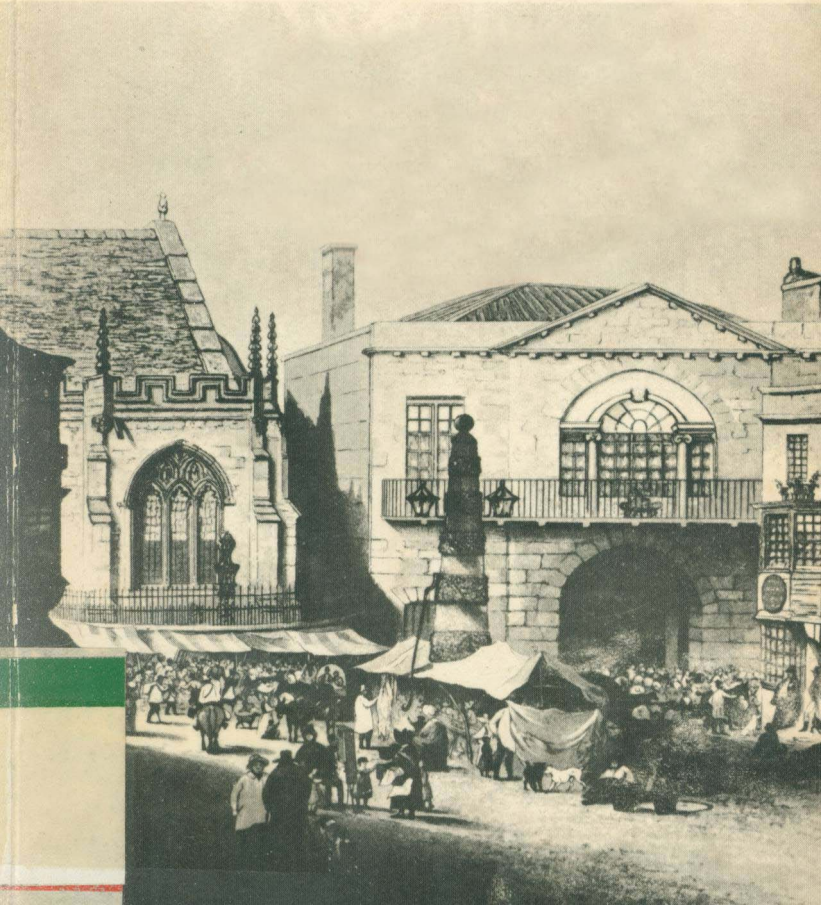
Douglas Brown

HARDY

The Mayor of Casterbridge



STUDIES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE No. 7

General Editor
David Daiches

Already published in the series:

1. **Milton:** Comus *and* Samson Agonistes
   by *J. B. Broadbent*
2. **Pope:** The Rape of the Lock
   by *J. S. Cunningham*
3. **Jane Austen:** Emma
   by *Frank Bradbrook*
4. **W. B. Yeats:** The Poems
   by *A. Norman Jeffares*
5. **Chaucer:** The Knight's Tale *and*
   The Clerk's Tale
   by *Elizabeth Salter*
6. **Marlowe:** Dr Faustus
   by *J. P. Brockbank*
7. **Hardy:** The Mayor of Casterbridge
   by *Douglas Brown*
8. **Webster:** The Duchess of Malfi
   by *Clifford Leech*
10. **Wordsworth:** The Prelude and
    other poems by *John F. Danby*
11. **George Eliot:** Middlemarch
    by *David Daiches*
12. **Conrad:** Lord Jim
    by *Tony Tanner*
13. **Shakespeare:** Hamlet
    by *Kenneth Muir*
14. **Shakespeare:** Macbeth
    by *John Russell Brown*
15. **Shakespeare:** King Lear
    by *Nicholas Brooke*
16. **Shakespeare:** Much Ado About Nothing
    by *J. R. Mulryne*
17. **Donne:** Songs and Sonets
    by *A. J. Smith*
18. **Marvell:** Poems
    by *Dennis Davison*
19. **Dickens:** Great Expectations
    by *R. George Thomas*
20. **Emily Brontë:** Wuthering Heights
    by *Frank Goodridge*
21. **Shakespeare:** The Merchant of Venice
    by *A. D. Moody*
22. **Tennyson:** In Memoriam
    by *K. W. Gransden*
23. **Fielding:** Tom Jones
    by *I. Ehrenpreis*
24. **Shakespeare:** Henry IV
    by *R. J. Beck*
25. **Shakespeare:** As You Like It
    by *Michael Jamieson*
26. **Shakespeare:** The Winter's Tale
    by *A. D. Nuttall*
28. **D. H. Lawrence:** Sons and Lovers
    by *Gāmini Salgādo*
29. **Dickens:** Little Dorrit
    by *J. C. Reid*
30. **E. M. Forster:** A Passage to India
    by *John Colmer*
31. **Shakespeare:** Richard II
    by *A. R. Humphreys*
32. **Henry James:** The Portrait of a Lady
    by *David Galloway*
33. **Gissing:** New Grub Street
    by *P. J. Keating*
34. **Blake:** The Lyric Poetry
    by *John Holloway*
35. **Shakespeare:** A Midsummer Night's
    Dream
    by *Stephen Fender*
36. **Mark Twain:** Huckleberry Finn
    by *Jonathan Raban*
37. **T. S. Eliot:** The Waste Land
    by *Helen Williams (2nd edition)*
38. **Swift:** Gulliver's Travels
    by *Angus Ross*
39. **Shakespeare:** The Tempest
    by *John Russell Brown*
40. **Conrad:** Nostromo
    by *Juliet McLauchlan*
41. **Tennyson:** The Early Poems
    by *John Pettigrew*
42. **Golding:** Lord of the Flies
    by *John S. Whitley*

Already published in the series (*continued*):

43. **Hardy:** Tess of the D'Urbervilles
by *Bruce Hugman*
44. **Shakespeare:** Antony and Cleopatra
by *Robin Lee*
45. **Webster:** The White Devil
by *D. C. Gunby*
46. **D. H. Lawrence:** The Rainbow
by *Frank Glover-Smith*
47. **Shakespeare:** Othello
by *Juliet McLauchlan*
48. **Virginia Woolf:** To the Lighthouse
by *Stella McNichol*
49. **Pope:** The Dunciad
by *Howard Erskine-Hill*
50. **James Joyce:** Ulysses
by *Michael Mason*
51. **Tobias Smollett:**
The Expedition of Humphry Clinker
by *John Valdimir Price*
52. **James Joyce:**
A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
by *Harvey Peter Sucksmith*
53. **Gerard Manley Hopkins:** The Poems
by *R. K. R. Thornton*
54. **Dickens:** Bleak House
by *Grahame Smith*
55. **Samuel Richardson:** Clarissa
by *Anthony Kearney*
56. **Wordsworth** and **Coleridge:**
The Lyrical Ballads
by *Stephen Prickett*
57. **Shakespeare:** Measure for Measure
by *Nigel Alexander*
58. **Shakespeare:** Coriolanus
by *Brian Vickers*
59. **Chaucer:** Troilus and Criseyde
by *A. C. Spearing*
60. **F. Scott Fitzgerald:** The Great Gatsby
by *John S. Whitley*
61. **John Gay:** The Beggar's Opera
by *Peter Lewis*
62. **Patrick White:** Voss
by *William Walsh*
63. **Huxley** and **Orwell:** Brave New
World *and* Nineteen Eighty-Four
by *Jenni Calder*
64. Poetry of the First World War
by *J. M. Gregson*
65. **Shakespeare:** Julius Caesar
by *David Daiches*
66. **Chinua Achebe:** Things Fall Apart
by *Kate Turkington*
67. **Dickens:** David Copperfield
by *Philip Collins*
68. **Tourneur:** The Revenger's Tragedy
by *Philip J. Ayres*
69. **Melville:** Moby Dick
by *Brian Way*
70. Beowulf
by *T. A. Shippey*

HARDY:
THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

by

DOUGLAS BROWN

EDWARD ARNOLD

First published 1962
by Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd
41 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DQ

Reprinted 1964, 1966, 1970, 1973, 1976, 1979

ISBN 0 7131 5065 3

For Keith Barry and other Colleagues

'I wanted him to say one word about his writing before we left and could only ask which of his books he would have chosen if, like me, he had had to choose one to read in the train. I had taken *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.
"And did it hold your interest?" he asked.'

VIRGINIA WOOLF, in
A Writer's Diary

Printed and bound in Great Britain at
The Camelot Press Ltd, Southampton

General Preface

The object of this series is to provide studies of individual novels, plays and groups of poems and essays which are known to be widely read by students. The emphasis is on clarification and evaluation; biographical and historical facts, while they may be discussed when they throw light on particular elements in a writer's work, are generally subordinated to critical discussion. What kind of work is this? What exactly goes on here? How good is this work, and why? These are the questions that each writer will try to answer.

It should be emphasized that these studies are written on the assumption that the reader has already read carefully the work discussed. The objective is not to enable students to deliver opinions about works they have not read, nor is it to provide ready-made ideas to be applied to works that have been read. In one sense all critical interpretation can be regarded as foisting opinions on readers, but to accept this is to deny the advantages of any sort of critical discussion directed at students or indeed at anybody else. The aim of these studies is to provide what Coleridge called in another context 'aids to reflection' about the works discussed. The interpretations are offered as suggestive rather than as definitive, in the hope of stimulating the reader into developing further his own insights. This is after all the function of all critical discourse among sensible people.

DAVID DAICHES

Acknowledgements

The Author wishes to acknowledge the kind permission given by Macmillan and Co. Ltd. and the Trustees of the Hardy Estate to quote from *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and other novels of Thomas Hardy; by Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd. to quote from his book *Thomas Hardy*; and by Mr. Leonard Woolf to quote from Virginia Woolf: *A Writer's Diary*.

Contents

1. *A Rehearsal of Themes*

The labourer in Weydon countryside

It reads like some grotesque old country legend, this brief, disquieting trauma of a wife-auction. But Hardy was quick to advise the sceptical that such transactions did indeed take place, and within living memory: one, near Dorchester itself. The memory serves him in two ways. First, it originates his saga of mid-century Dorchester in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. It has the effect of drawing together the twenties, the forties and the eighties: for the eighties were the years of composition. They provide the vantage-point. Second, in a grim fashion, it treats of primary human relationships under the arbitration of the cash nexus. It subordinates the human to the mercenary. In a violent image it puts a quiet and hopeless woman up for auction; and her price climbs by guineas, guineas whose paper and coin can be heard clinking and crackling.

The novel is about transition. It charts the change and disorder in the southern English communities, that accompanied the disturbance of agriculture in the national economy. It explores a related disordering of human values, the consequence of new forms of commerce, and of the attitudes these forms promoted. Its general tenor reflects, too, the pressure of powerful economic forces, perceptible in their effect but not understood. All these Hardy's imaginative art explores, not conclusively but taking the feel. There is something of stern confrontation; something of bewildered withdrawal. There is an effort to bear faithful record. These are the predicaments, this is how life goes, for societies taking the strain of change.

From the start, it is human society that engages Hardy's imagination rather than the individual consciousness. Here are wayfarers: a family approaches a village. The light alters: a labourer, fit and skilled, seeks his proper work. We know Henchard first in his agricultural and social rôle, by his clothes and his tools. He comes before us less as a human being than as a representative: 'His measured, springless walk was the walk of the skilled countryman,' and the stern and swarthy aspect, the dogged and cynical indifference, reveal themselves in the step of the foot and

the movement of clothes. And in this spirit the interests of a portrait artist seem to be at work. We see Henchard's wife bright and warm in sunlight and apathetic in shade. (Hardy's comment on her quiet apathy seems portentous; but it puts before us, in 'nature' and 'civilization', two terms useful for understanding the changes disturbing the local societies of the south.) The relationship of husband and wife has staled, through the difficulties of his livelihood. But the countryside feels lively about them, and the wayfarers approach the village with 'sundry distant shouts and rattles' in their ears, a token of community; and they meet, as its representative, another labourer with his tools.

Weydon-Priors offers neither work nor home. And the dogged hopelessness implicit in the situation of migratory labour sounds eloquently through the first voices to be heard. 'Pulling down is more the nater of Weydon. There were five houses cleared away last year, and three this; and the volk nowhere to go—no, not so much as a thatched hurdle; that's the way o' Weydon-Priors.' A tension develops between the gay distant shouts, and the hopelessness here. It's Fair Day: the first of a succession of festivities that punctuate Hardy's novel, reminders and enactments of an older and continuing reserve of local tradition and pleasure in commonalty. Hardy is striking out the kind of equipoise his novel needs, between the residual vigour of the older community and the necessities of change. The Furmity Woman's tent harbours a warm, tenebrous, protective fellowship; and the novelist's absorbed prose records a responsive warmth of allegiance.

There is real fellow-feeling here, there is an unforced community of interests; and there is the numbed marriage relationship, and the sleeping child. The talk turns to the obstructions of agricultural labour, and Hardy subtly mingles with the tones of Henchard who wants to be free and worth a thousand pounds, the sound of an auctioneer's voice in the field outside selling old horses. The voices inside and outside, all the detail of village life, seem to verify the grotesque transaction that impends. Mercenary forces, and that irrational, merely competitive desire of acquisition to which the auctioneer's technique addresses itself, are securing control. The patience and unease and regret of the quiet wife, and the growing insecurity of the men and women around her, lodge in the mind. The late swallow, momentarily trapped and bewildered, and seeking release from an unnatural environment, fixes the attention and deepens it. (We half-remember this swallow in the caged goldfinch of the closing pages.) Then the auction begins. There is an odd implicit

tribute to what remains priceless, in the dream-like inversion of the usual procedure. The price goes up and up, without bidders. And Susan Henchard bows her head 'with absolute indifference'.

This patient impotence of the country victim is a constant image in Hardy. Here, it is the plight of the travellers on the first page, now wrought to a higher pitch. Financial exchanges circulate about Susan of which she is innocent and which she cannot engage. So, in due course, it is to be for the mayor in the larger community. The sailor who enters at the crucial moment is another wayfarer; by his very calling a man of no continuing city. Though the body of the novel locates itself securely in a place and a time—Dorchester, the forties—yet exiles, travellers, the homeless, move through its pages, perpetual reminders of what the new commerce and the new techniques are doing to older social stabilities. 'Where do the sailor live?' asks a voice out of the shadows. 'Seafaring natures be very good shelter for shorn lambs, and the man do seem to have plenty of money,' says another, curiously bringing together three important images of the novel. And here all comes to a point of focus.

> The sailor hesitated a moment, looked anew at the woman, came in, unfolded five crisp pieces of paper, and threw them down upon the table-cloth. They were Bank-of-England notes for five pounds. Upon the face of this he chinked down the shillings severally—one, two, three, four, five.
>
> The sight of real money in full amount . . . had a great effect upon the spectators. Their eyes became riveted upon the faces of the chief actors, and then upon the notes as they lay, weighted by the shillings, on the table . . .
>
> . . . With the demand and response of real cash, the jovial frivolity of the scene departed. A lurid colour seemed to fill the tent, and change the aspect of all therein.

It is a concentration of the whole novel's movement; an embryonic vision. A moment later Henchard's vexed 'She'd no business to take the maid—'tis my maid,' hints at the tendency to treat relationships as an extension of the self, of its properties. And Susan Henchard's obedient acquiescence, loyally to be sustained through years to come, reflects her credence in purchase power and in society's complicity in that power. Now darkness falls, and the community melts away from the hay-trusser; the Furmity Woman disappears and the last candle is extinguished.

The rehearsal of themes is still incomplete, even with that ebbing away. There is also the movement from candle-extinction to sun streaming through crevices. The freshness of morning, new life stirring and old life resuming after misery, or death, or defeat: the ordinate vitality of the sun—here is another recurring theme. Tinkling of sheep-bells, nesting of yellowhammers, heavily dewed grass under the newly-risen sun, accompany a bracing of the personality as Henchard does what can be done to make amends. Natural rhythms and personal rhythms meet. Even the stillness here falls into place in a rhythm of labour. But renovation in the context of such an act as Henchard's, in this old legend (as it seems), can only take the form of shouldering consequences, making the gesture of reparation, and dourly 'going on'. He is again the hay-trusser, a representative figure, as he approaches the altar rails. He makes his vow there, where village piety has its social traditions, because there has been a grievous offence against the sanctities and stabilities of the older community, a kind of rupture. It is again a wayfarer who sees 'a thick jet of wood smoke suddenly start up from the red chimney of a cottage near', and who later disappears into Casterbridge.

The morning scene seems, too, to clear the mists of the pages before; to sharpen our sense of the ordinary Weydon-Priors; to carry an illusion of nearer time. I have concentrated upon the deposits of imagery that this remarkable narrative leaves behind because these can delicately guide the reading of the saga that now unfolds. But the sombre conviction of that narrative is itself imposing. This is what the past feels like to the concerned, imaginative participant. It has been brought to life, yet it has kept its distance, its aura. Hardy is communicating a sense of its momentum, its processes; not, particularly, a sense of the human heart. He is faithful to that, but he does not illuminate it.

2. *'Things Fall Apart'*

The mayor in Casterbridge town

WAYFARERS AGAIN

We are in the eighteen-forties, the decade of Hardy's boyhood; shortly we are to enter Dorchester, where (during those years) he had formed his deepest impressions and commitments. To this very town, the Casterbridge of his novel, Hardy had himself returned, drawn back to Dorsetshire from the London world; had built himself a house and settled permanently. He ranked by now among our more eminent novelists. After a long period of anxiety and bad health he had recovered vigour and confidence. Although (for financial reasons) he had serial publication in view, he worked at *The Mayor* for over a year and completed the whole to his design, before publishing the first instalment. His mind and imagination were testing out the boyhood time. But he, and those among whom he lived, knew what had happened since and what was happening still. The past was not simply the past.

As the novel moves into the forties, the image of wayfarers troubles the mind again. Mother and daughter approach the village and the fair, walking 'with joined hands . . . the act of simple affection'. They see how the years have told. The fair registers 'mechanical improvements' but its real business has dwindled. 'The new periodical great markets of neighbouring towns were beginning to interfere seriously with the trade carried on here for centuries.' Here is the impact upon stable and accustomed communities of forces outside, and we can see why Hardy locates his saga in a market town. Mother and daughter 'thread the crowd' and the old Furmity Woman's lament suggests the poignant incapacity of the tight-knit local societies to withstand the shocks of change. They simply disintegrate. She herself is to reappear among the human derelicts that these inexorable and useful processes have discarded, in Casterbridge's Mixen Lane. She 'opens the sluices of her heart' to speak her elegy, and a vital part of Hardy's imagination resides in this sense of loss. It is the first of a series of elegiac passages that stud the novel as do the scenes of communal mirth. And the Furmity Woman's last

words engage plainly the evolution of the novel itself: 'But Lord's my life—the world's no memory: straightforward dealings don't bring profit—'tis the sly and the underhand that get on in these times!' So the new economy is felt to bear upon the old community.

But through the daughter the new generation makes its voice heard in a disconcerting way. 'Don't speak to her—it isn't respectable . . . Mother, do let's go on—it was hardly respectable for you to buy refreshments there. I see none but the lowest do.' Caste-feelings to that effect had no part in the Furmity Woman's tent twenty years back (her lament makes clear). Elizabeth-Jane aspires to withdraw into her own segment of the new community. It's a fragmentation, true, that continues from the earlier divisions by trade and skill; but those divisions hadn't this fracturing effect. Hardy here starts to explore a facet of the processes of change his world has to come to terms with: something bewildering, something Elizabeth-Jane herself, once in Casterbridge, and more fully sensitive, recoils from. In the meantime she, the younger, appears the guardian of Respectability; she remains guardian throughout the journey into Casterbridge, the first sojourn there.

Susan Henchard's sale was the first, the plight of the Furmity Woman is the second image of the predicament Hardy seeks to bring to legendary force and clarity in Henchard himself: representatives of an older style of living and working, dependent upon an earlier economy; involved in new processes whose authority they cannot comprehend nor hold back; broken and defeated. Nor ought there to be any holding back; but the distress of their predicament remains, and the possibility of real loss. What ought to happen? Hardy intimates a way through the maze in the pages that discuss Elizabeth-Jane's rearing.

> . . How zealously and constantly the young mind . . . was struggling for enlargement; and yet now, in her eighteenth year, it still remained but little unfolded. The desire—sober and repressed—of Elizabeth-Jane's heart was indeed to see, to hear, and to understand. How could she become a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute—'better', as she termed it . . .

Hardy's imagination is always probing here; he knew this area of difficult confinement so well in himself. So Clym Yeobright determines; Grace Melbury and Edred Fitzpiers are joined by the same desire; it is Jude's story. How to come to terms with a world in which this had to happen to the enclosed agricultural communities? Hardy himself, in private life,

was studying contemporary philosophy systematically and deeply, in the effort to make terms of his own with an inharmonious experience. From this point in the novel, as the two wayfarers approach the City and migration is over (until catastrophe is complete) the Elizabeth-Jane who seeks to comprehend becomes a guiding consciousness. The situation in Casterbridge, in all its complexity, impacts particularly upon her; her response is, as it were, barometrical. She is like Waverley or another protagonist in Scott engaging related processes of change. For her desire of advancement, knowledge, new opportunities to extend the possibilities of living, command our allegiance too. This has to be set alongside the Furmity Woman's lament. A balance is being struck.

THE OLD COUNTRY TOWN

In a sense the whole novel so far has been a pilgrimage to Casterbridge. When the two women ascend the last hill they contemplate the City—a hint of Jude's meditations about the distant Christminster. What does this City *mean*? Sounds of distant revelry (as from the fair at Weydon) permeate the reflections. 'An old-fashioned place': so it strikes the trained forward movement of the girl's consciousness. And Hardy hints a sense that his readers must find it so too, forty years after; a few inhabiting another Dorchester, most inhabiting quite another England. We find an imagination of the civil centre of an agricultural community, inextricable from surrounding villages and arable landscape. Here and there is a sentence of mere opinion; Hardy intrudes. But for most of these three vital pages the art takes care of itself. Dwellings and streets have grace and order, trees enfold variety of houses in their own variety of kinds, there are no suburbs, and avenues lead out into cornfields. The community seems at once protectively fortified, and sheltered; and bold in coppery sunlight. All is mosaic. By a fine stroke of art, twilight and lamplight come as the women enter; as though a shadow falls across all this interweaving and ordered variety: defensive now, a little shuttered. 'The lamplights now glimmered through the engirdling trees, conveying a sense of great snugness and comfort inside.' Things become nearer and more distinct. Sharp footnotes remind us of demolitions and alterations since those days, and we recognize that we are in the realms of imaginative sociology, that a whole style of life is latent in the wayfarers' vision. The paragraph of the gaze into the shop windows takes that word 'mosaic', with its suggestion of interlocking variety, right into trade and occupation. Material and historical detail inform a nostalgic imagination.

The sociological blends with the fabular [1] in a way peculiar to Hardy's fiction. We may say that the memoried vision of a boy has been set to work by the deep attachments of a man, but that is not all. The eyes are wide open. It is still a subtle art that ends this vision with the ringing of old curfew and the clatter of shutters falling (the first communal activity Casterbridge visits upon the reader). Here, in this City of Agriculture, is the novel's field of change; to whatever extent humanly valid and satisfying, processes set in motion outside are at work here, and the novel is to explore and hold in balance the consequences.

Deft humour informs the imagination, too. For it really is a delicately humorous art that sharpens its hold upon time and change by listening to the clocks and bells in the way it does, watches the women devouring the loaf of bread, and so leads from what may have seemed idyllic, legendary, vision into such distinctness of time and place and voice; into issues of sound bread and sound beer. The brass band and the illuminated festive building collide with—

> 'Oh, 'tis the corn-factor—he's the man that our millers and bakers all deal with, and he has sold 'em growed wheat, which they didn't know was growed, so they *say*, till the dough ran all over the ovens like quicksilver . . . I've been a wife and I've been a mother, and I never see such unprincipled bread in Casterbridge as this before.—But you must be a real stranger here not to know what's made all the poor volk's insides plim like blowed bladders this week?'

Hardy doesn't often invest his country voices fully with dialect; when he does, a particular local vigour pushes through, as here. The human invades the Casterbridge idyll all right; and the interlocking of human and mercenary and agricultural interests is there triumphantly in the angry clash of terms—*unprincipled bread.* The festive band plays 'The Roast Beef of Old England', and if the humour is obvious it is also purposeful. Neither old England nor her roast beef make valid currency in these streets now. The trade in wheat suffers perturbation, and the corn-factor, willy nilly, must play his part. So the movement as a whole from the first vision of the town to the bitter voices and the band does not point clearly in one direction or another; it veers about.

[1] Here, and elsewhere in this study, I use 'fabular' in the strict sense of 'having the quality of fable'.

MAYOR AND COMMONALTY

We take the feel of Casterbridge before we meet its mayor. And from now on rarely half a dozen pages pass without some occurrence bringing the business of the town back into the texture. The figure of the mayor takes its force and confidence partly from the sustaining civic rôle. He bodies the Casterbridge of the forties into personal terms. We meet him presiding at civic festival; gazing with the two women into the King's Arms we seem to experience the Furmity Tent writ large. The whole community participates in this mirth, and windows are open so that their representatives at feast can be supported by the invisible poor. The sense of community is the more vivid for our consciousness of two isolated spirits cut off from common life, and their vision invests the scene again with the curiously fabular quality Hardy's art sustains so confidently. And of course the appearance of Henchard in this transformed guise *is* fabular, a fairy-tale transformation, echoing old country ballads and anecdotes. From skilled labourer migrant in the country to corn-factor and mayor in the country town—he is still the essentially *representative* protagonist. And Hardy contrives not a new portrait but a reminder and extension of the old. The corduroy-clad labourer with his established place in society has become the mayor ('What a gentleman he is! and how his diamond studs shine!') wearing the clothes of an office which sorts uneasily with the older vocation, whose heavy gold chain and old-fashioned evening suit suggests compromises with another milieu. We seem to see a portrait; and the novelist reflects as one might upon the character a portrait suggests. 'Rather coarse than compact', 'rich complexion which verged on swarthiness', 'flashing black eye', 'an occasional almost oppressive generosity'—it would be a mistake to confuse the art that gives us this psychology with the subtlety of a George Eliot's. The strength in the characterization of Henchard rests in a kind of confidence, learned through general observation and serious reflective habits trained by traditional country experience and wisdom. And it rests in a quality of distance and reserve such as belong to older styles of story-telling; not so much creative sympathy, imaginative out-going, as respectful disengagement, even from the pivotal figure: and a consequent clarity and certitude. With changing forms of social life Hardy is an imaginative explorer; with human nature and human behaviour he is the confident delineator, wary, astute, but not profound.

But the admixture of social connivances into the hay-trusser's new rôle

is another matter. Susan watches and thinks of past days and 'shrinks back'; Elizabeth-Jane feels elation at discovering herself 'akin to a coach'. It is still part fairy-tale for them. But status, affluence, economic power, starting out of 'dealings in wheat, barley, oats, hay-roots and such like' and as if by invisible pushes growing beyond these, are real here. The dinner is ordered so as to reflect degrees of status, and outside the voices of the commonalty appraise their mayor as the merchant and employer who has 'risen' by his dealings. Yet the sense of power is illusory. When the rude shout interrupts the formalities and the question of responsibility for unprincipled bread comes up, we feel the stunned incapacity of the old-style factor (for all the clothes of office) in contemporary mercantile transaction. 'I was taken in in buying it as much as the bakers who bought it o' me.' Hardy deposits another sharp image along the way: the victim of 'the market', of unchecked economic relationships, through whom others too have to suffer. There is a feeling of strength (Henchard has it here), there are gestures of amelioration. But the sources of weakness pass uncomprehended.

THE YOUNG COMPETITOR

The talk of labourers outside the King's Arms lent substance to Henchard's rôle. Now a further gathering of distinct classes of Casterbridge society prepares the entry of Farfrae the Scot. He too impinges on the tale like a legendary figure (though his smart travelling bag fixes him in the contemporary scene). He has the magic knowledge of the Other World—that's how his new techniques are felt here. He is the Canny Scot of tradition; he is the Stranger from Far Away (especially in the Inn later). Yet he is part of the history of Hardy's own decade too: a pointed reflection of something important in the farming tragedies of the times. Records show how frequently Scots farmers did come south and save farms and little communities from bankruptcy and collapse, by new and thrifty, wary, adaptable methods.[1] Farfrae is at once a saga figure and a part of the history of Dorset: the same blend as Henchard himself, who receives the magic formula, and reassumes the responsibilities of the Corn Distributor as the festivities decline. A grim facetious humour peels off the social veneers of the banqueters, the daytime poses ordained by social forms (as Hardy notes). A more natural, less dignified and paraded human solidarity comes in.

[1] I owe the point to Miss R. Young, the social historian.