

The Philosophical Context of Thomas Hardy's Conception of History

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ABSTRACT

The publication of numerous historical novels during the Victorian age attests to the survival of Sir Walter Scott's legacy of the Waverley novels. Nevertheless, Thomas Hardy's Wessex historical novels form a break from Scott's tradition of Historical Romances. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) illustrate Hardy's substitution of the socio-economic and technological changes that took place in rural England during the 1830s for Scott's political context to portray their impact on the rural communities. At the same time, Hardy's Wessex novels, as well as his epic-drama *The Dynasts* (1903; 1905; 1908), which depicts the rise and fall of Napoleon Bonaparte, exhibit the skeptical spirit of the age in terms of their assimilation of the principles of the leading philosophers, historians, and biologists of the times, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Auguste Comte, Arthur Schopenhauer, Thomas Carlyle, and Charles Darwin. Hardy himself acknowledges their impact on his ontological outlook on life in general, and on history in particular. Accordingly, using the above mentioned texts as representatives of Hardy's work, the study aims at assessing the influence of those intellectuals on Hardy's work, in terms of his conception of the historical process, as a process of repeated tragedies rather than of progress, his evaluation of change, as well as his views on the universal condition of humanity throughout the ages; the study also focuses on Hardy's fictional methods, such as his manipulation of time, especially the connection of the ancient past with the present, to dramatize his personal convictions on history and life.

Keywords: Thomas Hardy, Conception of History.

INTRODUCTION

The vogue of the historical novel in the Victorian literature attests to the fact that the legacy of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), the founder of the historical novel, became rooted in the British literary tradition. Hardly, any Victorian writer of prominence failed to produce at least one historical novel. As the list of historical novels kept increasing, more and more variations on Scott's Waverley novels by novelists such as Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), Charles Dickens (1812-1870), George Eliot (1819-1880), and Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), among others, took center stage and challenged Scott's Historical Romances through adding their own variations to the form and the content of the Waverley series. The situation applies to most of

those novelists in general and to Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) in particular.

As a Victorian novelist of historical fiction, Hardy outnumbered his contemporaries for he was a prolific writer who wrote fourteen historical novels that he grouped under the heading of the Wessex novels. Unlike Scott, who included historical figures in his narrative, Hardy focused on the private world of his characters: a real shift from Scott took place in Hardy's Wessex novel when he centered his novel on provincial communities rather than placing them in a political vortex, as Scott had done. (Sanders, 1978, 18; 19) Hardy was a regional writer *par excellence* for he set his novels in the near past of rural Dorchester, the Wessex of his series. By the end of the nineteenth century, Hardy was already well on the way of joining novelists like Dickens and the Brontës who had made specific areas of Britain distinctly their own, (Keating, 1989, 334) and like them, the romanticism of his regionalism- a type of image making- enhanced his fame and attracted not only the illustrated periodicals, but

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also Victorian tourists as well. Commenting on the issue of his regionalism Hardy says that

The application which I [Hardy] had thought to restore to the horizons and landscapes of a partly real, partly dream-country, has become more and more popular as a physical province definition; and the dream-country has, by degrees, solidified into a utilitarian region which people can go to, take house in, and write to their papers from. (*Far from the Madding Crowd*, p. ii)

Despite the pastoral appeal of Hardy's *Wessex* novels to popular taste, they are serious works that *transcend* the local scene. After the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Hardy broke from the pastoral mode of representation and from readers' expectation by shifting to historical novels within a tragic form by using the same pastoral setting, and it was in tragedy that Hardy found his distinctive voice (Casagrande, 1987: 17). The grouping of his novels under the title of *Wessex* gave his novels a territorial definition of some sort to lend unity to their scene (Raymond Williams: 197).

The *Wessex* novels are historical in the fundamental sense as they occupy a specific spot in time and are placed there by external evidence (Haynes, 1971: 326) Hardy deliberately closed both the settings and the periods of his novels in order to build up a comprehensive account of nineteenth-century *Wessex*, *cum* Dorchester, both as a geographical and an historical fact (Millgate, 1970: 245) Hardy was in the unique position of being able to communicate a living past by recording landscapes and customs which have survived into his own present, and which he was forced to adapt and modify to suit his creative needs. (*Ibid.*, 248)

Hardy's *Wessex* novels transcend the local scene because they reflect a consciousness of *historical change*. The invention of *Wessex* gave Hardy the opportunity to explore the clash between the old and the new ways of life, and gave his fiction a heightened air of verisimilitude (Keating, 1989: 333-34). Each novel demonstrates the direct and the indirect consequences of historical events and movements upon the life of an individual in a remote corner of the country (Rogers, 2001: 219). Next to the agricultural depression in rural England that began in the 1870s, tension in the novels emanates from pressures from within the society as from those impinging from outside (Williams, 1970: 94). In this respect, the *Wessex* novels record the spread of technology to the countryside,

namely railroads, horse-drills, and thrashing machines and their impact on individual destinies as machines replaced man power. Public history takes place off-stage and is very little noticed, but economic history, the history that affects ordinary lives most profoundly is always evident (Haynes, 1971: 327) where his novels *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) are cases in point.

The "Preface" to *Mayor* evokes the history of Dorchester in the 1830s so that one can check the harvest in Dorset, the Casterbridge of the novel, before the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and the visit of the Royal Personage, that is, Prince Albert, the Consort, to Dorset (*The Mayor*, 1-2), in addition to the extensive migration of farm workers to urban areas as the result of the arrival of the railway that split farms and rendered them unprofitable for farming, as well as the technology that replaced man power (Pinion, 1991: 43). Hardy depicts his middle-aged protagonist Michael Henchard as being compromised by the conflicting values of the old and the new, as well as the values inherent in Nature (Vigar, 1974: 147) Henchard, who is old-fashioned in every aspect of farming and business management, is not a match to the knowledgeable and young Donald Farfrae who suddenly arrives in Casterbridge armed with the latest discoveries in the treatment of damaged corn, the knowledge of book-keeping, and of business management in general, as well as his introduction of the newly invented horse-drill. Henchard's initial friendship with Farfrae turns into a vicious rivalry as he puts up a heroic struggle to save his corn business and his position as town mayor, only to face an impending disaster of bankruptcy, defeat, and death. Henchard's downfall is the result of a dynamic interplay of forces currently active (Hofling, 1977: 399), and over which he has no control.

Henchard's tragic downfall is enacted within the context of a dying culture (Midgal, 1971: 283). The minute attention which Hardy pays to the final gasps of an agrarian English society also suggests that Henchard's tragedy is in many ways, not only historically located, but also historically determined. When he dies, a society dies with him. (*Ibid.*, 283). Accordingly, *Mayor*, as is the case with all the *Wessex* novels, functions as a microcosm that allows us to draw larger conclusions for the macrocosm (Sanders, 1978: 234).

Alongside the evocation of the attributes of a specific historical period, Hardy's fiction predominantly transcends the limitations of a particular setting and time

through offering a panoramic vision, that ranges from the Roman presence in Britain to the present, with the aim of emphasizing the continuity of human experience (Page, 2001: 8). As John Holloway maintains, the continuity of human affairs through time is prominent in Hardy's fiction. The sense that bygone generations still live in the main characters of the novels also runs through much of Hardy's work (Holloway, 1963: 275). For this reason, the situation also applies to Hardy's epic-drama, *The Dynasts* (1903, 1905, 1908) that depicts the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte's and his subsequent fall at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, for Hardy places Napoleon in the context of the fate of megalomaniacs throughout history.

There is a consensus within the scholarship on Hardy's fiction that it is Hardy's distinctive achievement to have transformed the literal antiquities by which he was surrounded, such as the Roman amphitheatre in *The Mayor* and Stonehenge in *Tess* into narratives that juxtapose different historical perspectives within itself (Tanden, 2003: 474). Granted that his work, whether it deals with contemporary history as in the *Wessex* novels, or with the Napoleonic era as in *The Dynasts*, Hardy juxtaposes the temporal next to the universal because Hardy's work gives "the cosmic stream and the personal value . . . equal weight." (Fleishman, 1972: 184). In this respect, Hardy's contribution to the historical novel does not reside in his stylistic innovations; rather it resides in his specific outlook on history as repetitions of tragic patterns (*Ibid.*, 180). This is due to the fact that the "ultimate subject of the historical novel is . . . man in history, or human life conceived as historical life. . . . When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when the novel's characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel" (*Ibid.*, 11; 4). Hardy himself maintains that

My art is to intensify the expression of things . . . so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible The realities to be the true realities of life, hitherto called abstractions. The old material realities to be placed behind the former, as shadowy abstractions. (*Life*, 177)

"Abstractions" in the above quoted passage signify that Hardy uses his protagonists as characters in their own right and also as symbols of the human condition. For this reason, Hardy is a writer of symbolic historical texts: Hardy raises his protagonists to a universal level through connecting the present with the distant past, which explains why he includes such ancient landmarks as

Stonehenge in his narrative. As Avrom Fleishman explains:

we may see in *Tess* [for example,] an epitome of recent social change in England [pertaining, for instance, to the agricultural depression], but this is not enough to make it a historical novel. As the images of these processes expand in the novel to cover a period larger than the close of the nineteenth century, *Tess* becomes a *symbolic history* of modern (that is, post-medieval) England, with an added excursion into the prehistoric past at its close. (191; emphasis mine)

Hardy is intent upon focusing on the universals to render his novels or epic-drama as historical because he is aware that when the novelist fuses history with the universals through a specific mode of representation, be it tragic or satiric, or even comic, he writes the kind of literary texts that adhere to Aristotle's theoretical distinction between history and poetry, that is, literature in the *Poetics*. According to Aristotle,

The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history The true difference is that the one [the historian] relates *what has happened*, the other [the poet] *what may happen*. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. (25; emphasis mine)

For his own mode of the representation of the condition of man within the historical process (alongside the temporal one), Hardy turned to the tragic notably because he was highly *skeptical* about the optimism of the Romantics and the contemporary historians and philosophers who viewed history as a process that moves towards the amelioration of the human condition. For Hardy, man is a helpless and passive observer of the historical factors at hand. Referring to them, Hardy wrote in his notebook in May 1886 saying: "These philosophers seem to start wrong; they cannot get away from a prepossession that the world must somehow have been made to be a comfortable place for man. If I remember, it was [Auguste] Comte who said that the metaphysics was a mere sorry attempt to reconcile theology and physics." (*Life*, 179). On another occasion, Hardy wrote in his notebook a remark that summarizes his own conception of history by saying:

Query: Is not the present quasi-scientific system of writing history mere charlatanism? Events and tendencies are traced as if they were rivers of voluntary activity, and courses reasoned out of circumstances in which natures, religions, or what-not, have found themselves. But are they not in the main the outcome of passivity -- acted upon by unconscious propensity? (*Life*, 168)

Since Hardy views the human condition as constant tragic defeat, his inclusion of ancient historical edifices in his work pertains to an awareness of the past as a dark theatre of tyranny, penury and superstition (Stewart, 1976: 57) and suggests that the tragic downfall of Hardy's protagonists is the common fate of all those who attempt to challenge their destinies. For instance, when Hardy's history-consciousness carries us back to the Roman foundations of Casterbridge in *The Mayor*, the town symbolically assumes the character of the world arena, (Dave, 1985: 63) Henchard's downfall is *not merely* the result of current forces working against him, nor of unresolved conflicts of his early life: it is true that *Mayor* opens with the scene when Henchard sells his wife and child in an auction in a drunken stupor some two decades ago before arriving in Casterbridge, only to regret it the next morning, and he deserves a punishment, but the eventual retribution exceeds the crime, especially because Henchard makes amends by remarrying his wife Susan when she suddenly reappears with her daughter in Casterbridge. Henchard's struggle and subsequent downfall suggest that Hardy's vision of the individual in the universe is forever a Promethean one. For this reason, Hardy's narrative is predominantly both *linear and circular*, (Page, 2001: 10; emphasis mine) suggesting a pattern of *repeated* human tragic defeats. Henchard enters Casterbridge as a simple laborer looking for a job in the midst of a recession; with industry, he rises to become the town mayor only to circle back from where he starts twenty years ago, destitute and lonely.

The circularity in Hardy's fiction suggests that the lives of the successive generations constantly *repeat* the experiences of their forefathers (*Ibid.*, 10). This is because Hardy insists that history does not flow like a stream; for Hardy, "There is nothing organic in its [history's] shape, nothing systematic in its [history's] development." (*Life*, 172). For this reason, Hardy's "allusions [in the novel] to figures of tragic stature- Job, Saul, King Lear, among others- suggest some of the roles

which Henchard [and other Hardian protagonists] seems doomed to play."¹ (Dollar, 2006: 303). As such, J. Hillis Miller clarifies that the ultimate effect of those allusions in *The Mayor* is to create "a revisionary reading of the tradition as an endless repeated tale of frustration and defeat." (1995: 45).

Given Hardy's negative outlook on the human condition and his deep skepticism about its improvement despite all the inventions, this study aims at tracing the origins of Hardy's *skepticism* in the works of prominent historians and philosophers of his age with the aim of clarifying how it affected his work. The term "conception" within the context of the study, as manifested in its title, pertains to Hardy's *skepticism* about the human condition. The tragic nature of Hardy's narrative suggests affinities with the views of numerous prominent thinkers of his age and, which, in turn, embodies serious implications for Hardy's conception of the historical process. In this respect, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) Arthur Schopenhauer, (1788-1860), (1795-1881), Auguste Comte (1798-1857), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), in addition to Charles Darwin's (1809-1882), the theory of Evolution had tremendous influence on Hardy's outlook on the human condition in general and the process of history in particular. Hardy himself acknowledges some of the sources of his ontological outlook on life by saying: "My [Hardy's] pages show harmony in view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill and others, all of whom I [Hardy] use to read." (*Collected Letters*, VI: 259) To achieve its purposes, the study makes a short-circuit of the historical and philosophical notions in the works of the aforesaid to clarify how they influenced Hardy's work. The study then examines *Mayor*, *Tess*, and *Dynasts* as manifestations of Hardy's outlook on history under the influence of Carlyle, Nietzsche, Comte, and Schopenhauer.

To begin with, Hardy's rejection of the Romanticism and historians of his age as "mere charlatanism" (*Life*, 168) and his conception of the historical process suggests that Carlyle's work played a vital role in shaping Hardy's notion of a circular movement of history. During the Victorian era, Carlyle was a dominant figure and many novelists adhered to his notions about history, while others followed Thomas B. Macaulay. In *The French Revolution* (1835), Carlyle (1987) vehemently maintains that the process of history is *not linear* but cyclical. Such a view indicates that history should be

viewed in its totality as a pattern of *repeated* human experiences that combine human success with defeat. By contrast, in his "Sir James Macintosh," Macaulay (1854) emerges as an apologist because he believed that the history of England's "was emphatically the history of progress, . . . the history of a constant movement of the public mind, of a constant change in the institutions of a great society." (226).

Where Carlyle's influence is concerned, Andrew Sanders and Jim Reilly, among others, clarify Carlyle's influence on Victorian novelists (Sanders, 1978: 1-4, and *passim*). Commenting on the issue, Reilly (1994) maintains that the Victorian age attempted "to read history after the Carlyle model in *Sartor Resartus* (1833), in "On Hero, Hero Worship, and the Heroic" (1834), and in *The French Revolution*. (Reilly, 1994: 14) Like Carlyle, Hardy believed that the process of history is not one of progress; instead, he suggests that the mass of humanity is passive and incapable of controlling its destinies (Sanders, 1978: 237). History for Hardy "moves on arbitrarily and unorganically, pulling passive humanity with it." (*Ibid.*, 239) For this reason, Hardy differs from many of his early and mid-Victorian predecessors, because he "was able to write a historical novel which no longer showed a confident trust in a theory of benevolent human progress." (*Ibid.*, 247). Heroism and the idea of heroic advance are, to Hardy, illusions founded on too easy a notion of personal, social, and political history (*Ibid.*, 237).

Next to Carlyle (1896), Comte was implemental in shaping Hardy's outlook on history, and the evidence of such an influence is reflected in the way Hardy adheres to Comte's skepticism about human progress in the above quoted passage from Hardy's notebook of May, 1886. (*Life*, 179) rather than to the optimism of the intellectuals of his age. Hardy's dismissal of a notion of a "systematic" (*Ibid.*, 172) and organized flow of the history has strong affinities with the works of Comte. His treatment of time has been analyzed in relation to his comments on Comte's notion of the process of history as a "looped orbit." (Dollar, 2006: 303). In his *Social Dynamics*, Comte says that "social progress is like a looped orbit," signifying a forward and a cyclic movement of history, that is a pattern of repetitions. In this respect, Dale Kramer (1975) explains how Hardy in "Candour in Fiction" expresses parallel notions (71): for Hardy human history is not linear but cyclic and the dominant motif of movement is not a steady and an unwavering progress but

one that moves in pulsating and irregular advances because Hardy states that

Things move in cycles, dormant principles renew themselves, and exhausted principles are thrust by. This periodicity . . . does not take the form of a true cycle of repetition, but what Comte, in speaking of general progress, happily characterizes as a "looped orbit": not of revolution but -to use the current word- evolution. (*Literary Notes*, 78)

In addition to Comte's influence, Hardy's view of history as a repetition of the past is also Nietzschean in its essence. Nietzsche (1966) embraced the view that "since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain." (Nietzsche, 1966: 62). For this reason, Hardy adopted the Nietzschean concept that life is a series of repetitions of former lives; he also embraced Nietzsche's belief that the individual is *incapable* of controlling his destiny because of the universal "Immanent Will" that defeats the individual will, and it is on the basis of Nietzsche's notion of the "Immanent Will" that Hardy's work rests, both in his *Wessex* novels after *Madding Crowd*, as well as in *The Dynasts*. Hardy's depiction of the tragic defeat of his charismatic protagonists, Henchard, Tess and Napoleon, are manifestations of the role of the "Immanent Will" in shaping human life. Nevertheless, Nietzsche (1966) does not believe that the individual should give up the struggle by submitting to the will of the world.

Hardy's allusion to Darwin's celebrated Theory of Evolution in the context of commenting on Comte's ideas indicates that he adhered to Comte's notion of the cyclic pattern, but he substituted Comte's optimism *vis-à-vis* human progress for Darwin's principles of evolution because they contradict the Positivist optimism of Comte's theories of development, (Beer, 1983: 14) a matter that brings us to examine Darwin's influence on Hardy's conception of history.

As known, the advent of Darwin's Theory of Evolution on the intellectual scene in *The Origin of Species* (1859), together with the scientific discoveries of Tyndall, Huxley, Lyell, among others, "profoundly unsettled the organizing principles of Victorian thinking." (Beer, 1983: 47). Darwin's principles of the theory of the survival of the fittest, of random natural selection, as well as the natural law determinism, contradict the Positivist

philosophy of such great figures as Comte. As opposed to Positivistic thinking that believes in progress and places the individual at the center of the natural scheme of things, Darwinism reveals the truth of the human condition through focusing on the marginal role of human beings within the natural process. Man's diminished role manifests itself in the way he lacks control over his destiny. Accordingly, Gillian Beer clarifies the human condition in accordance with the principles of Darwin by saying that

Its eschewing of fore-ordained design allow chance to figure as the only sure determinant order . . . since Darwin's evolutionary theory operates in the universe through a system of random selection, that is chance. Darwin's system of random selection removed man from the center of meaning to set him in a universe not designed to serve his needs. (1983: 19)

Hardy himself comments on the difficulties of the human condition by stating that

Everywhere there is evidence for struggle for existence . . . [so] that human or moral consciousness is an anomaly in an indifferent world [because Nature] takes no account of human pain or joy." (*Life*, 1984: 399-400).

For a skeptical intellectual as Hardy, Darwinism reveals the truth of the human condition through focusing on the marginal role of human beings within the natural process. Within Hardy's scheme of a deterministic universe, the world has its own will, which Hardy calls the "Immanent Will" in the Nietzschean sense of the term. For this reason, Hardy believes that involvement in the world is pointless, and he manifests this element in his fiction through portraying the inevitable defeat of his strong-willed characters and the paradoxical survival of his passive ones.

Hardy's rejection of involvement complies with Schopenhauer and runs counter to Nietzsche's "will to power" because it is "the will not to will." (Miller, 1995, 5). At the same time, Hardy usually undermines the efforts of his strong-willed characters who question the logic of the world in an attempt to understand it. This is because Hardy, once again, like Schopenhauer, believed that no one can arrive at an objective truth. In this respect, Schopenhauer, explains that the tragedy of the human situation resides in our inevitable misapprehension of the world. Laurence Lerner sums up Schopenhauer's views

in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) on the matter by saying that Schopenhauer

Offers two alternative modes of apprehending the world. The first is the world as representation, or idea, in the work of the intellect [;] . . . the categories by which we represent the world do not belong to the world itself, but are the forms of our knowing, imposed by us on the world . . . [;] the world is [unknowable, and in this world] the individual is unimportant . . . [and] gratification is impossible. (43)

Like Schopenhauer, Hardy believed that objective knowledge is unattainable because he says:

We don't always remember as we should that in getting at truth, we may only get the true nature of the impression of an object, etc., produces on us, the true thing itself being still, as Kant shows, beyond our knowledge. (*Life*, 1962, 247-8)

As in Schopenhauer's philosophy, thinking for Hardy drains the energy and increases pain. Few of his characters attain contentment because thinking distracts one from the traditional life in the country where thinking has a humbler and more useful role, concerning itself only with the best way for men to feed and clothe themselves, and to enjoy the few modest pleasures that life affords, (based on Cockshut, 1976: 140).

As a novelist who adhered to Carlyle and to the philosophical tenets of Nietzsche, Comte, and Schopenhauer, as well as to Darwinism, Hardy composed the kind of fiction that synthesizes all those convictions to draw a fictitious world that reflects his outlook on history as a cyclic pattern of repeated experiences, that is of a series of "looped orbits." At the same time, Darwin's principles of the theory of the survival of the fittest, of random natural selection, as well as the natural law determinism had particular implications for narrative and for the composition of fiction. They proved to be crucial to the novel not only at the level of theme but also at the level of organization (Beer, 1983: 7-8). To illustrate his ontological outlook on history and the general human condition, Hardy juxtaposes two different time zones next to each other, the one being the historical period of the novel, and the other forms the history of the novel's setting since ancient times. Hardy then organizes the narrative in the form of the Classical tragedy. His method aims at expressing the poignancy of the human situation

on the particular and the general levels of human history. In this way, Hardy emphasizes the validity of his concept of "looped orbit," that is, the repetitive tragic nature of the human condition, and our inability to control the historical forces at hand, or predict the uncanny workings of fate, or what Hardy deems it to be "Chance," where his novel *The Mayor* is a case in point.

Within the context of *The Mayor*, there are two concurrent time zones. The first one is a *forward* movement of history. It manifests itself in the novel in terms of the technological changes taking place in rural England. Suzanne's return to England in search of Henchard coincides with the arrival of the railway in the countryside and the newly invented agricultural machinery. By contrast, the second time zone in the novel is more general, and therefore more universal, since it encompasses the entire history of humanity.

As far as the forward movement of history is concerned, Henchard's struggle with Farfrae portrays the transfer of power from the figure of influence; the tragic career of Henchard is enacted in a social context of a dying culture (Midgal, 1971: 283). The conflict between the passion of Henchard on the one hand and the reason of Farfrae on the other, is dramatized as a conflict between the primitive and the modern ways of doing business, with the result that Henchard carries within himself the seeds of his own destruction (Paterson, 1963: 96-7).

Through the dramatization of the powerful forces of change, Hardy succeeds in capturing the essence of Comte's idea of cyclic change because the plot suggests that Farfrae himself is as destructible as any one else. According to the logic of the cyclic theory, Farfrae is doomed to fall in time, and the fall will occur because of the permanent characteristics of his nature, since Farfrae is a cold, selfish and a calculating man who ignores the feelings of others, (Kramer, 1975: 74) which in turn causes the loss of his popularity. The town people begin to discern his shallowness (Millgate, 1970: 225) and realize that power has corrupted him; the plot suggests that someone who combines business acumen and sympathetic insight will in time topple him (Kramer, 1975: 79). Kramer (1975) explains "that the actions of the characters and their fate connote the *recurring nature* of human actions and . . . the [feud] between Henchard and Farfrae has antecedents, and will recur continually with other men with conflicting manners of life." (Kramer, 1975: 71; the emphasis is mine). This is because the

second cycle, or "looped orbit" possesses all the elements necessary for completion except the appearance of Farfrae's destroyer (*Ibid.*, 79). Accordingly, the novel's unity depends both on the final destruction of Henchard and on Farfrae's arrival at a position in the cycle at the end of the novel, which is analogous to Henchard's at the beginning of the relationship between the two men (*Ibid.*, 79). At the same time, the novel's ending suggests that the earlier way of life did not possess the inner resources that would enable it to struggle for its existence, thus rendering it virtually helpless; (Holloway, 1963: 53) paradoxically enough, it also suggests that the newly ushered age does not embody great promises since it has arrived at the hands of power-hungry men like Farfrae.

Where the universal history of mankind is concerned, Hardy's tragic plot in *The Mayor* works simultaneously on personal and historical levels, to portray the universal as well as the particular, through the evocation of the Roman history of Casterbridge. For this reason, Hardy's plot is patently Aristotlean: Like Aristotle, Hardy maintains that "the best fiction, like the highest artistic expression in other modes, is more true, so to put it, than history or nature can be." (*Personal Writings*, 117). For this reason, Hardy's evocation of Roman history, that functions to emphasize the repetitive nature of human experience, is significant in that Hardy transforms the socio-economic changes of rural Dorset in the 1830s into something durable, that is universal, by turning the particulars of a historical epoch into a pattern of human experience. He succeeds in achieving his purposes through the evocation of the Roman history of Casterbridge. In this way, the tragedy of Henchard and the idea of social change develop together (Kramer, 1975: 70). To achieve his purposes, Hardy presents Casterbridge as town haunted by history. The narrator evokes the Roman presence through the bloody history of the Roman Amphitheatre in the town by saying:

It is impossible to dig more than a foot or two deep about the town fields without coming upon some tall soldier or other of the Empire, who had lain there in his silent obtrusive rest for a space of fifteen hundred years. . .

The Amphitheatre was a huge circular enclosure. . . It was to Caster-bridge what the ruined Coliseum is to modern Rome. . . its association had about them something sinister. Its history proved that. Apart from the sanguinary nature of the [gladiatorial] games

originally played there, such incidents attached to its past as these: that for scores of years the town-gallows had stood at one corner; that in 1705 a woman [Mary Channing, wrongly accused of witchcraft] who had murdered her husband was half strangled then burnt there in the presence of ten thousand spectators. (*The Mayor*, 55; 56)

Hardy deliberately emphasizes the bloody history of the “circular” Amphitheatre. J. Gerard Dollar (2006) says that the Amphitheatre proclaims the circularity of all history: the cruelty of gladiatorial sports is repeated centuries later in the brutal execution of Mary Channing, and even recently as the narrator informs us (Dollar, 2006: 300) about “pugilistic encounters almost to the death had come off down to recent dates.”(*The Mayor*, 56). It is as if the past time cannot escape from the Ring, but can only turn back upon itself (Dollar, 2006: 300). For this reason, John Paterson (1963) says that the allusion to the collective punishment of Mary Channing foreshadows the collective punishment that Henchard receives at the hands of the predominantly underground mob, the residents of the infamous Mixen Lane.

Earlier in the narrative, Henchard decides to meet his estranged wife Suzanne in the Ring to make amends. However, the reunion in the Ring suggests that he is doubling back upon himself, and that his story, along with that of his tragic predecessors, is trapped within a circle of infinite repetition (Dollar, 2006:303) Henchard’s imprisonment in time, his inability to break out of the circle repeats the past (*Ibid.*, 303). This signifies that Hardy’s allusions to earlier figures of tragic stature, Job, Saul, Lear, and others, suggest some of the roles which Henchard is doomed to play² (*Ibid.*, 303).

Like the time pattern, the tragic plot in *Mayor* with its emphasis upon a single protagonist and upon the course of his downfall, is equally Aristotlean (Kramer, 1975: 70). In the novel, Henchard’s pride, his passion and his ambition become the condition for his downfall and destruction. Henchard sells the town bakers wheat damaged by damp, and debases the bread of an embittered population (Paterson, 1963: 96; 102). Therefore, as in Classical tragedies, the corruption of those in power will eventually be exposed (*Ibid.*, p. 107). The weather, the angry mob, and the sudden reappearance of the furmity woman, who witnesses Henchard’s sale of his wife in an auction, all combine as forces of retribution that cause Henchard’s downfall. In

other words, the scheme that Hardy employed in *Mayor* combines Aristotle’s dictum of stature within a society with Comte’s idea of cyclic change (Kramer, 1975: 22). He brings the two elements of cyclic change and of tragedy together because the manner in which *The Mayor* illustrates the cyclic theory is quite impressive because Hardy draws both upon the idea that moral failure follows upon worldly success, and upon the awareness that the grounds for man’s destruction are innate in his individual selfhood (*Ibid.*, p. 71).

The conclusion of *The Mayor*, verifies Michael Wheeler’s view that the scholarship on Hardy’s work analyzes his treatment of time in *The Mayor* in relation to his comments on Comte’s “looped orbit,” (p. 207) yet with a marked *distinction* between them. Even though Hardy adhered to Comte’s cyclic view of change, he drew a distinction between the Comte’s Positivist idea of cycle as a “looped orbit,” by which he predicts change, development, and progress and history as a “true cycle of repetition,” by which he evidently means mere non-accretive redundancy. He rejects the purely static quality of the classical cyclicism, looking instead at the evolutionary meliorism of man’s lot (Kramer, 1975: 71), which justifies why Hardy opted to use the prototype of the plots Classical tragedies. The novel’s conclusion itself forms a dramatization of what Hardy calls the “looped orbit” of history. Henchard’s efforts to put the past behind him fail because the past will persist, and his experience will turn circular to prevent him from escaping his past. This is because the process of history as Hardy sees it is not linear; it is a regression rather than a progression (Page, 2001: 10) and reflects Hardy’s view that that “history moves backward and forward simultaneously.” (Dollar, 2006: 303). Hence, the novel’s setting-amid all the remains of several cultures whose qualities have helped in shaping modern life-sustains the enunciation of a concept of history (Kramer, 1975: 71). More importantly, the setting functions to reflect the fact that the ordeal of Henchard is the ordeal of the tragic hero set back by phenomenon outside his control (Karl, 1977: 376) proving once again that Hardy’s characters are caught “between and compromised by conflicting values—those that are inherent in Nature, . . . , and those which have been fabricated by man.” (Vigar, 1974: 147).

The “conflicting values . . . inherent in Nature” as Penelope Vigar puts it, register the impact of Darwin principle of random selection on Hardy’s outlook on man’s place in the universe because the principle

suggests chaos. Plot in Hardy's fiction operates as a kind of *analogue to Nature* (Mallet, 2000: 163); emphasis mine). For this reason, *chance*, that is coincidence, functions in the *Wessex* novels, as an equivalent to fate; it is a force that "operates in this world without conscious design; even though it is not a controlling force in that it does not direct man, it frequently seems to evoke malignity than benevolence." (Karl, 1977: 367).

As a force beyond human control, chance, which stands for Nietzsche's concept of the "Immanent Will" frustrates the efforts of those characters who desire to change their lives or, as Jill Larson (2001) maintains, to escape the past, to wipe the slate clean (Larson, 2001: 80). *The Mayor*, Henchard remarries his wife Susan when she reappears two decades later to set things right, but chance puts him face to face with the furmity woman who exposes his secret, and together with the weather and his rivalry with Farfrae, they collaborate to seal Henchard's fate.

Hardy's fiction illustrates that the most vital, the most richly endowed, generally fail to survive or to leave any progeny (Mallet, 2000: 166). By contrast, unwilling characters who do not challenge the world are the ones who survive (Hillis Miller, 1970: 5). It is a paradoxical situation, and the paradox lies in the fact that those who seek self-assertion are invariably "doomed and curtailed," (Beer, 1983: 240), while they rest survive through the shallowness of their mind because they neither challenge the world nor question its absurdity. As such, many Victorian novelists, including Hardy, did not believe in one's ability to change the course of history and influence the historical forces as "the past was no longer peopled with giants and heroes." (Sanders, 1978: 3). This is the result of the complications of modern life, and Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest whereby Nature is seen as indifferent and harsh (*Ibid.*, p.4). They manifest themselves in Hardy's *Wessex* novels through portraying the human condition "as the outcome of laws themselves defective and do not take account of us." (Beer, 1983: 237). At the same time, Hardy refrains from attributing the downfall of his protagonists to a specific element. Simon Gatrell (2003) contends that Hardy's narrative rests in "uncertainty, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason." (*Tess*, p. xx). Hardy undermines "the reliability of his tellers by letting them mouth *contradictory* statements, by showing their biases, by featuring how much they are culturally constructed, by letting them enter the fictional world, and by mocking

them." (Shires, 2003: 40; the emphasis is mine). This is the case in *The Mayor*. In the novel, Hardy uses the incident of Henchard's sale of his wife and child to function as the bearer of the novel's moral direction. The act itself is objectionable, but as calamities augment, it becomes evident that the punishment outweighs Henchard's crime, to the extent that it confuses the reader. The situation becomes even more complicated because Hardy subverts what the narrator says and leaves no room for the reader's judgment to tilt completely for or against his protagonist. Ultimately, Hardy's narrators "are divided, confused, indifferent . . . about the characters whose lives they see and tell. . . . They usually do not tell but leave gaps of interpretation." (Shires, 2003: 41). As a result, the analysis of the various voices of Hardy's narrators reflects Hardy's belief that there is multiple incompatible knowledge and interpretations existing at the same time (Hillis Miller, 1970: 41). It also encompasses the "troubled Victorian response to reality and to post-Victorian condition of modernity." (*Ibid.*, 41).

Hardy's attitude toward history is reiterated in *Tess*, and testifies to the fact that he never wavered from his conception of the process of history. *Tess*, one of Hardy's most tragic novels, narrates the life of Tess Dubryfield, a sixteen year old peasant girl, who has never set foot outside her village, Mallott, and who eventually faces a tragic death because of her family's abject poverty. Early on in the novel, Parson Tringham, the village parson and antiquarian, informs Jack Dubryfield, Tess's drunkard father, that he is a descendant of the aristocratic line of the d'Urbervilles. Jack is elated by the news, even though it does not afford any financial benefits. Nevertheless, "its mystique gives the dissipated Jack occasion to celebrate ostentatiously, and sets the wheel of Tess's fate spinning forward. It is their mighty connections- and the tangible rewards they hope it brings-that prompt the Dubryfields to send Tess to 'claim kin' with the Stoke-d'Urbervilles family of Tantridge." (Rogers, 2001: 2).

A victim of her parents' greed, Tess departs from her village and falls into the snare of Alec d'Urbervilles who, after seducing her, abandons her to face the shame of giving birth to an illegitimate son. Her pregnancy brings further calamities on her family. The village parson refuses to baptize the baby, or allow his burial in sacred ground when he dies as an infant; eventually, the village decides to evict the family from their cottage soon after Jack's death on the grounds that it Tess's sin has corrupted the village and its purity must be restored. The irony is

that the family, which has nowhere to go, awaits its destiny at the village church door. To support her siblings, Tess works in a dairy farm of Talbothay until she meets and marries the college educated Angel Clare.

Both Alec and Angel contribute to Tess's downfall: compelled by a guilty conscience, and believing in making a fresh new start, Tess confesses her past to Angel on their wedding night because the letter she pushes under his door earlier is trapped under the rug. Just as chance intervenes to hamper Tess's plans, Angel turns his back on Tess for he accuses her of being a fallen woman, even though his own past does not correspond with his name. Tess finds work in Flintcomb-Ash farm, but because of economic hardships, the proprietor cannot keep her for more than a season. Having nowhere to go, Tess becomes Alec's kept woman. Meanwhile, Angel undergoes a transformation and rejoins Tess; however, it is too late, for Tess murders Alec and the police arrest her at Stonehenge to face death by execution.

As a historical novel, of contemporary rural England, *Tess*, like *The Mayor*, has two concurrent time zones, one that focuses on the socio-economic factors that force an innocent woman to be left alone in the midst of a society that scorns her misfortune, and another that links the present to the past through Stonehenge and Tess's aristocratic lineage. As a novel of contemporary life, Hardy designed it to epitomize the fate of individuals brought under the slow shifting of class supremacies (Fleishman, 1972: 189) and the changing attitudes toward Christianity. To fuse the temporal with the cosmic element that universalizes the novel's concerns, Hardy also includes the roles of Nature and Chance, that is of "Immanent Will," in collaborating with the historical factors in causing Tess's tragic death. Together, these elements epitomize Hardy's attitude toward history and the human predicament in a harsh and senseless universe.

Within the context of the novel, Tess is a character in her own right, but she is also a representative of the victims of the historical forces, that is, the socio-economic factors that affected rural England at the time of the novel's composition. For this reason, *Tess* "may be read as a *symbolic* historical novel, a chief alternative to the conventional realism of popular historical fiction." (*Ibid.*, 189; emphasis mine). It is a historical symbolic novel because the historical process is not recorded temporally, as it would be in a more straightforward historical novel, but spatially as is required for an arrangement of symbols. (*Ibid.*, 192). In fact, the opening

chapters of the novel display an immediate and insistent emphasis on historical processes, so that from the start the characters are not seen as mere individuals. The discovery of John Dubryfield's ancestry states the basic theme of the novel, notably what the Dubryfields have been and what they have become (Kettle, 1951: 50). The link between the past and the present enables Hardy to place his characters in a broad historical context (Page, 2001: 187) to examine the pattern of the historical process.

As a victim of poverty, Tess represents the impact of the economic hardships that England faced during the agricultural depression. The depression that began in the 1870s was fostered in part by the completion of the first transcontinental railroad across the United States in 1869 that made it easier and cheaper for American goods to compete with British goods. Rural workers unable to get jobs flocked to British cities, causing urban population to double between 1851-1881. Less profitable farming meant that farms had to become larger to turn a profit, so smaller farms were bought out by larger farm owners. Workers were also losing their jobs because of the mechanization of agriculture. Machines, like the steam threshing machine, like the one at Flintcomb-Ash farm in *Tess*, made workers less in demand. The owner of Flintcomb-Ash lets Tess go because of the prevailing economic hardships. Hardy criticizes the practice in "The Dorchester Labourer," (1883).

Another factor that affects the peasantry that Tess represents pertains to the destruction of the old yeomen class of small-holders and peasants, a process going on vigorously at the time of the novel's composition through the appropriation of lands by the wealthy investors who had reaped the benefits of the industrial revolution. With respect to the appropriation of lands, Arnold Kettle (1951) explains that *Tess* is a parable for the decline of the English peasantry, a long established social and economic group possessed by a distinctive culture. The disintegration of the peasantry reached its final stages in the latter half of the nineteenth century. With the extension of capitalist farming for profit, not for sustenance, the land-workers became wage-earners and the old yeomen class of small-holders and peasants was bound to disappear. The developing forces of history were too strong for them and for their way of life. Since their way of life had been proud and deep-rooted, its destruction was necessarily painful and tragic. Accordingly, *Tess*, who depicts the eviction of the

Dubryfields from their ancestral cottage, forms a symbol of its destruction (Kettle, II 1951: 49).

As a symbolic historical novel, these symbols of the historical forces manifest themselves in the victimization of Tess at the hands of Alec, who represents the new powerful bourgeoisie, and Angel, whose intolerance stands for the disappearance of Christian values, in addition to Nature, that is, the landscape, where Tess faces numerous hardships, as well as the element of Chance, that prevents self-determined individuals from achieving their goals by putting the past behind them.

Where the issue of the conflict between the old and the new class systems is concerned, *Tess* dramatizes the on-going clash in the countryside. In this respect, Shannon Rogers explains that Alec, who is not an authentic d'Urbervilles, and whose family acquired its wealth in the industrial North, represents Britain's *nouveau riche*, and his seduction of Tess symbolizes the new middle-class aristocracy that rapes England and has stripped it of its prior grandeur, so that it is against this backdrop of economic conflict that the clash between past and present is played out (Rogers, 2001: 1). Besides, the fact that Tess suffers at the hands of Alec, Angel, and society as a whole reflects that *Tess* is a staunch criticism of the sexual and social hypocrisy found in English society in Hardy's times. Hardy's sympathy is for the lower classes, especially women who suffer the rigidity of the English moral code that spins Tess into an endless tragic spiral. For Hardy, "customarily morality. . . adds to social misery. . . It plays in the tragedy of Tess the role of the villain. It pervades her social surroundings, causes in her own soul a sense of guilt. . . and pushes her persistently." (Dave, 1985: 154) Angel's father, Pastor Clare, pleads with his son to forgive Tess, but Angel, having "renounced religion for the new light of scientific thought . . . embraced social customs. Angel is alienated from the vicarage [and from] his father's residence that symbolizes traditional Christianity. . . In the father and in the son are contrasted the essential old faith and the new humanism." (*Ibid.*, 159-60). Hardy comments on Angel's character by saying: "This advanced and well-meaning young man [Alec]. . . was yet the slave to custom and conventionality." (*Tess*, 162).

Unlike Angel, Tess has minimal education, yet her humanism is more authentic than is Angel's. When Angel chastises her on the grounds that she is a fallen woman, Tess retorts by saying: "Don't for God's sake speak as a saint to a sinner, but as yourself to myself - poor me."

(*Ibid.*, 117). She also tells him: "I would rather you kept the craze [of religion] so that you had kept the practice [forgiveness] which went with it." (*Ibid.*, 399). Before Angel abandons her, Tess pleads with him by saying: "I must cry out to you in my trouble - I Have no one else . . . if I break into some dreadful snare, my last state will be worse than my first." (*Ibid.*, 291). Eventually, when Angel forgives Tess and they are reunited, it is too late to save Tess because she awaits her arrest for murdering Alec. Before her arrest, she tells Angel "I never could bear to hurt a fly or a worm, and the sight of a bird in a cage used often to make me cry." (*Ibid.*, 437). Tess is not a villain, and murdering Alec is merely a "gesture of the revenge of instinct. . . [against a] spiritually impotent man." (Dave, 1985: 90).

Tess's arrest at Stonehenge forms an inevitable symbol of the ritual sacrifices that were offered on those stones and affirms her status as a victim, (*Ibid.*, 90) and it functions to place temporal time next to cosmic time through Hardy's portrayal of Tess (as a victim of her social circumstances) in terms of images of prey in a harsh environment. Tess's hardships commence when Alec makes her fall into a snare that he sets for her on her way home. Travelling by carriage from Tantridge to Chaseborough, Tess's horse dies, giving Alec the opportunity to seduce her, so that the seduction of Tess is closely related to the distance she has to walk; the physical distance itself causes Tess's fatigue and provides Alec with opportunity (Van Ghent, 1963: 83). The landscape plays another role in leading Tess back to Alec. After the collapse of her marriage to Angel, Tess finds work on the dairy farm of Flintcomb-Ash. The farm is situated in a barren region, reflecting the harshness of the work, and the desolation of Tess's life, as the work is made hard by stony soil, cold wind, rain, snow, and callous masters (Holloway, 1963: 55). Unable to keep her job, Tess becomes Alec's kept woman. In this respect, Dorothy Van Ghent explains that Nature [and society] play a vital role in determining Tess's fate: the tradition laden landscape and Nature, as part of the setting, are essential in understanding the novel's tragedy: the countryside and the folk, are in fact, unnamed characters in *Tess* and they play a major role in determining Tess's fate. According to Van Ghent (1963), "*the earth is primarily not a metaphor but a real thing. . . and it constantly acts on its own, motivating human purposes, to encounter, to harass them, detour them, seduce them, defeat them.*" (Van Ghent, 1963:83; emphasis is Van Ghent's).

Hardy's evocation of the essential harshness of rural

life and the hazards that Tess encounters while travelling aims at revealing "the naturalistic premise of the book. . . the conditions of earth in which life is placed. . . By constructing the *Tess* universe on the solid ground. . . of earth as First Cause, mysterious cause of the Causes, Hardy does not allow us to forget that what is most concrete in experience is also what is most inscrutable." (*Ibid.*, p. 85).

Next to depicting the role of Nature for the purpose of raising Tess's predicament to universal levels, Hardy equally emphasizes the decline of Tess's aristocratic lineage to connect the past with the present. Hardy refrains from idealizing the past because he believes that it has outlived its time and it must pay for the mistakes of its past (Holloway, 1963: 8). Tess's death symbolizes the death of the old regime; as Fleishman (1972) explains, the bitterness of the final chapters of the novel implies that the crimes of the d'Urbervilles are sufficient to dispel any nostalgia. The past is dead; the present is death-dealing- especially to an anachronistic survivor like a peasant girl who has the strength of personality of an aristocratic family. Hardy's sadness is not at all for the family, only for the descendant: it is not historical institutions in themselves that are valued, only the great individuals among them (Fleishman, 1972: 195-96). Hardy withdraws sympathy from the d'Urbervilles, who represent their class by saying:

Thus, the Dubryfields, once d'Urbervilles, saw descending upon them the destiny which, no doubt, when they were among the Olympians, they had caused to descend many a time, and severely enough, upon the heads of such landlords as they themselves were now. So do the flux and reflux - the rhythm of change - alternate and persist in everything under the sky. (*Tess*, 394)

Tess's conviction that she can overcome her past with stoicism reflects her belief in illusions; as a protagonist who incarnates the old order, Tess carries within herself a character trait that causes her destruction. John Holloway (1963) explains that

This dreamy unreality in Tess is no personal quirk. It results from her heredity, and is reflected in both her parents. . . Hardy is at pains to stress that among the country folk,

degeneration of an old stock is common enough. The stock is in decline. It seems a positive disparagement of the old order. The contrast with Henchard is revealing. Quietly, but clearly, Hardy indicates that in Tess, there is something self-destroying. So, there was in a sense in Henchard. (1963: 55)

Tess's stoic belief in overturning the past, of taking control of one's destiny, has led to the degeneration of the old order because it "did not possess the inner resources upon which to make a real fight for existence. The old order was not just a less powerful mode of life, but ultimately helpless before it through its defects." (*Ibid.*, 53). The futility of holding on to illusions of self-determination is central to *Tess*, and is reflected in Hardy's statement, the inevitable will occur because "the flux and reflux - the rhythm of change - alternate and persist in everything under the sky." (*Tess*, 394). Tess's attempts to overcome the past are blown away like a handful of dust because Chance, society, and nature, the elements that form what Nietzsche calls the "Immanent Will," will swerve her from her course to become a victim of what Hardy calls "the flux and reflux," (*Ibid.*, 394) of the historical process, that is, of Comte's "looped orbit," the pattern of the human condition that humbles whoever takes control of his destiny. Tess never understands why she is never given another chance for she wonders at life saying: "I shouldn't mind knowing why - why the sun do shine on the just and unjust alike." (*Tess*, 398)

Tess's tragic import pertains to the fact that she does not understand how things stand in this world: had she been a passive observer of life, she might not have had to wonder about life. Within the context of *Tess's* universe, the folk survive through fatalistic outlook on life; unlike Henchard, who attempts to impose his will on the course of their destiny, or Tess who believes her confession to Angel will redeem, they never fight back as they are not active agents and accept life for what it is. Her perplexity about the world reflects Schopenhauer's views in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) that "the world is [unknowable, and in this world] the individual is unimportant . . . [and] gratification is impossible." (43) Hardy is fully aware of Tess's dilemma; for this reason, and in emulation of Schopenhauer, he says:

We don't always remember as we should that in getting at truth, we may only get the true nature

of the impression of an object, etc., produces on us, the true thing itself being still, as Kant shows, beyond our knowledge. (*Life*, 247-8)

Because involvement for Hardy is superfluous and futile, whoever questions what befalls him after attempting to take control of his destiny, as Tess does, is bound to be disillusioned: for the victim of history, consciousness is the consciousness of impotence, of determination by external forces, and of the repetitive patterns of all human careers (Fleishman, 1972: 196). Hardy deliberately closes the novel with the scene of Tess's arrest in Stonehenge to underscore the repetitiveness of human experience. The novel's conclusion emphasizes "the idea of the present . . . as . . . a repetition or reincarnation of the past." (Hillis Miller, 1970: 102) and it reflects Nietzsche's influence, who maintains that "since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain." (62). Accordingly, even though *Tess* is set within a specific time frame, it appears to transcend time. Hardy displays the interplay between the past and the present through the closing scene at Stonehenge because it has the same function as the Roman amphitheatre in *The Mayor*. Ancient edifices in *The Mayor* and *Tess* also function to underscore the futility of human endeavor: everything crumbles back to earth, including human effort, and the anonymity of human effort becomes more visible when measured against geological time. On visiting Tintren Abbey, Hardy remarked on its age by saying: "But compare the age of the building with the marble hills from which it was drawn." (*Life*, 93). For this reason, Dorothy Van Ghent explains that the two crumbling ancient edifices, the Roman amphitheatre and Stonehenge, that "have fallen into the earth . . . speak mutely of the anonymity of human affairs; their presence suggests also the classic pattern of the Mayor's tragedy, the ancient repetitiveness of self-destruction, and provide thus a kind of guarantee . . . of the heroism of the doomed human enterprise." (Van Ghent, 1963: 83). Nevertheless, Hardy's portrayal of his characters ignores their puppet-like status in the scheme of things. He salutes their strength of character and their capacity for endurance by raising them to the level of tragic heroes and heroines (Fleishman, 1972: 181) Tess's heroism manifests itself in her determination "to allow the wounds inflicted by

others to heal, and to deal with life through an infinite capacity for sorrow and . . . self-reliance, even in the most harrowing of circumstances (Buckler, 1980:369). Hardy's allusion to Aeschylus in the novel (*Tess*, 1980: 364) "reincarnates a pattern of tragic experience already present in the earlier masterpieces of Western literature." (Hillis Miller, 1970: 105).

Hardy's *The Dynasts* is an epic-drama in verse that depicts Napoleon's rise and fall and focuses on the Napoleonic Wars from The Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 till The Battle of Waterloo in 1815, and it registers the dire consequences of those wars on European nations. As a historical literary text, *The Dynasts* focuses on Napoleon as a charismatic figure and a courageous leader, who is also a megalomaniac seeking to subdue Europe (Harvey, 2003: 136). Unaffected by the suffering he has unleashed, Napoleon is nevertheless subject to nightmares about the officers he has been obligated to sacrifice. As Hardy follows Napoleon's gradual reduction, especially after his defeat in Russia at The Battle of Borodino, from an imperial figure to one of simply of human scale, he takes on a tragic dimension (*Ibid.*, 136). Through a vision of the appalling carnage he has caused, and the protesting gaze of his fallen officers, he comes to recognize the ironic disparity between his view of his destiny and that preordained for him by history (*Ibid.*, 136). In fact, Napoleon recognizes the operation the futility of the Will when he says: "Why hold me my own master, if I be/ Ruled by the pitiless Planet of Destiny." (*The Dynasts*, 363).

As in the *Wessex* historical novels, Hardy's major literary concern in *The Dynasts* was to reveal his outlook on history by juxtaposing temporal time next to cosmic time through following Napoleon's fall from power and glory and connecting it to the fate of previous megalomaniac. As in *The Mayor* and *Tess*, Hardy also invokes the mysterious forces of history that subdue the likes of Henchard, Tess, and Napoleon in the form of the "Immanent Will," or "The Overlord" as Hardy call it in *The Dynasts*.

To achieve his literary concerns, Hardy turned from the novel form to the epic form (with a whole set of supernatural beings who represent cosmic forces) in dramatic representation because he needed a form that allows him to display the machinations of history on a grand scale, and at the same time "express his unique historical imagination [because Hardy] goes beyond the historical novelist's vision of society's reaction to war."

(Fleishman, 1972: 198). The Napoleonic era was a counterpart of Homer's the *Iliad*, and Napoleon himself "must have seemed to Hardy the last figure in Western European history to whom epic stature could be ascribed", (Haynes, 1971: 161) but a modern hero nonetheless: Napoleon is wise but he defies the world, and as a result he finds himself standing lonely and isolated like the rest of Hardy's protagonists. Accordingly, "Napoleon provided a dramatic example of the theme of defeat [by cosmic forces, and of the way one ends up] of a man lonely among the multitudes. Besides, Napoleon appears of all men the most determined, the absolute master of fate and [he] leaves the commentary to a set of supernatural beings "to dramatize the relation of man (in the person of the epic hero) to the controlling forces of the universe." (Haynes, 1971: 161).

Where cosmic time is concerned, Hardy includes the supernatural spectators of terrestrial action to function as impersonated abstractions, or Intelligences that function "as emanations of the "Immanent Will." (Buckler, 1980: 359). They appear under a variety of names like The Overlord, The Ancient Spirit of the Years, The Spirit of the Pities, their attendant Choruses, the Shade of the Earth, the Recording Angles, and many others. In fact, Hardy uses the epic form to delineate the rise and fall of Napoleon because the epic enables him to look before and after, and examine the process that shapes history. The Choruses in *The Dynasts* provide the epic with a cosmic vision because they "are able to see the whole expanse of history at a glance." (Hillis Miller, 1970: 8). Hardy leaves it to the Choruses in *The Dynasts* to comment on the events and to link Napoleon's attempts of self-determination to previous attempts to reveal their futility in the face of the "Immanent Will." They are introduced, not, as Hardy points in his "Preface" as systemized philosophy, but to give by their comments a universal significance to the particular events recounted. (Drabble and Stringer, 2003: 432). Since the central theme of *The Dynasts* revolves around the futility of struggle because of the way the forces that rule the world, that stand for the "Immanent Will," inflict suffering on self-determined individuals, Hardy verifies it in the epic theme in the opening of *The Dynasts* by saying: "What of the Immanent Will and its designs?" (1) The epic theme implicitly foreshadows the ending, notably Napoleon's downfall in Waterloo. In the final scenes of *The Dynasts*, Napoleon stands alone, helpless to alter his pre-determined destiny. As darkness blots out Napoleon and

the human scene for the last time, the Ancient Spirit of the Years points to the epic moral by saying:

Worthless these kneading of thy narrow thought
Napoleon; gone thy opportunity!
Such men as thou, who wade across the world
To make an epoch, bless, confuse, appeal,
Are the elements of ages' chart
Like the meanest insects on obscurest leaves
But incidents and grooves of Earth's unfolding;
Or as the brazen rod that stirs the fire
Because it must. (*The Dynasts*, 374)

Given the attitude of the cosmic forces toward a brazen figure like Napoleon, one comes to realize that in Napoleon, "the paradox of human power and human helplessness of will and necessity, emerges as a vast comic irony." (Haynes, 1971: 163). The paradox lies in Napoleon's belief that he can "fashion his own destiny, as opposed to how things turn out. Initially, being a true megalomaniac, Napoleon is of the conviction that he is capable of shaping the course of his destiny, for he says:

Some force within me, baffling my intent
Harries me onward, whether I will or no.
My star, my star is what to blame – not I
It is unswerveable (*The Dynasts*, 224).
As the years pass by, Napoleon moves from one victory to another until he faces his first defeat in Borodino. There, he begins to question his own motives for waging a war on Russia, and begins to recognize his limitations for he says:
That which has worked well will work! Since
Lodi Bridge
The force I then felt move moves on
Whether I will or no: and often times
Against my better mind . . . Why am I here?
— By Laws imposed on me inexorably!
History makes use of me to weave her web
To her long which aforetime _ figured mesh
And contemplated charactering (*The Dynasts*, 330).

As Napoleon eventually comes to realize at Borodino, Time in *Dynasts* "is intermediately the Spinner of the Years and . . . Nature or Mother Earth . . . is powerless to change the way things are. Humankind are . . .

automations, and as such are incapable of seeing the reality in which they are." (Haynes, 1971: 164). In fact, *The Dynasts* is replete with images of worms and of crawling "insects on obscurest leaves" (*The Dynasts*, 330) that reflect the insignificance of mankind in the universe. Man's tragic stature in Hardy's epic emanates from the disparity between the way things are and one's inability to grasp the *status quo*.

As an artist is concerned with the human predicament, Hardy differs from the historians of the Napoleonic era in that the historian, as Aristotle puts it in the *Poetics*, is concerned with "what may happen" (25) that is, with the historical details; by contrast, Hardy is concerned with "what may happen [because] poetry tends to express the universal." (Aristotle, 1970: 25). As in his historical novels, Hardy is aware of the circularity of the historical process, that is of the "looped orbit" and of the significance of the "Immanent Will" in determining the fate of Napoleon as well as the course of history. Accordingly, he describes it by saying:

A Will that will, above the will of each
Yet the will of all conjunctively;
A fabric of excitement, web of rage,
That permeates as one stuff the weltering
whole. (*The Dynasts*, 328-9).

Granted that Napoleon causes carnage throughout Europe, Hardy is not concerned with expressing an outrage against the abrogation of war. As Fleishman (1972) explains, "Hardy is neither for or against Napoleon" (201) because he is primarily concerned with the human condition encompassed in the figure of Napoleon. In Hardy's *The Dynasts*, Napoleon is a typical Hardian hero, full of grandiose projects, blinded by egotism, limited by circumstance, brought to a partial recognition of his true situation – a tragic hero. His peculiar interest lies in his fatalism that spurs his downfall (Fleishman, 1972: 205) because Napoleon in *The Dynasts* believes that he is destined for greatness and that history is on his side. When luck eventually evades him and he begins to understand the way things are, The Spirit of the Years comments on his transformation by saying that Napoleon is: "of the few in Europe who discern/ The working of the Will." (*The Dynasts*, 179). Accordingly, Hardy differs from the historian who records events because *The Dynasts* provides us with a "spectacle of pity and terror, which makes the work tragic in spite of its formal divergences from traditional tragic dramas." (Fleishman, 1972: 204). Meanwhile, it is the

Chorus that expresses the lesson we should learn from the panoramic vision of Napoleons escapades in Europe. Ultimately, Hardy wants us to recognize how "the cosmic Will deflate our dynastic delusions" (Buckler, 1980: 359; 361) as *The Dynasts* leave us with a chastened wisdom not to fall prey to our delusions of glory and self-determination.

To conclude, Hardy's historical texts focus on the universals because, "after all, it is not improbabilities of incident but the improbability of character that matter." (*Life*, 176). He defends artistic truth by stating that "the best fiction, like the highest artistic expression in other modes, is more true, so to put it than history, or nature can be." (*Personal Writings*, 117). On another occasion, Hardy reaffirms the superiority of the truth of fiction to that of history after the Aristotlean model by stating that "This reproduction [of nature in fiction] is achieved by seeing into *the heart of things* . . . by means of the imagination." (*Personal Writings*, 197; the emphasis is Hardy's). Hardy's observations on history and the supremacy of the imagination over history are essentially Aristotlean. For this reason, he composed his historical works with the conviction that "the author's impressions about life have value because they point to a pattern that is actually there. They have truth value, even if the truth is an unpalatable one." (Jones, 2006: 521). On the other hand, granted that a novel becomes "historical" when history becomes the prime mover of the narrative, it can only be truly historical when it fuses the temporal with the cosmic element through encompassing the artist's personal outlook on life. Accordingly, the *Wessex* novels and *The Dynasts* form a dramatization of Hardy's convictions of his times, and express a vision of the world rather than giving an accurate picture of an age (Guerard, 1949: 5). Hardy's historical texts are replete with the tragic defeat of characters and it reflects a vision that recognizes the absurd confrontation between the aspirations of the human consciousness and a universe indifferent to them because the human world of hopes and fears are superfluous to the impersonal universe. (Dave, 1985: 3-4; 18-19). For this reason, the three strands of power of chance, the impersonal operations of natural laws, and the inevitability of change, that form the basis of the Darwinian argument, come together to underlie most of Hardy's work, (Mallet, 2000: 161;162) with the result that his novels reflect a deep-rooted mistrust in "a theory of benevolent human progress." (Sanders, 1978: 241).

ENDNOTES

1. On the comparison between Henchard and other figures of tragic stature like King Lear, Job, and Saul, among others, to whom Hardy alludes in the novel, see Brown, pp, 43-6; and Pinion, pp.41-2; 57.
2. Hardy defines a tragedy according to Aristotle's attributes of hermatia, or the tragic flaw, which

causes the downfall of a hero, by stating that: "A Plot or Tragedy should arise from the gradual closing of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambition, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions." (Hardy, *Life*, 1984, 278).

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