The Sound of Silence

The Construction of Gender Through the Unsaid and the Use of Language in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor Of Casterbridge.*

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Abstract. This paper analyses how the language of the main characters from Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* mirrors (and occasionally defies) Victorian gender roles. We will see how the masculine characters in this novel tend to use a more aggressive language which features imperative forms, commands and future tenses in order to impose their point of view and reinforce their dominance, while the feminine characters are more likely to use polite requests, courtesy words and modal verbs to convey the same meaning. We will also discuss whether the female characters' silence might be considered a mechanism to subvert male dominance.

Keywords: Language, gender roles, silence, Victorian era

1. Introduction. Notions of femininity and masculinity in *The Mayor of Casterbridge.*

In order to analyse how the characters' language reflects gender roles and gender inequality in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, we should first establish the context in which the novel was written and published and also the time in which the novel is set.

The novel was first published in 1886, serialized in *Graphic* [1] and *Harper's Weekly* [2] from January to May; that is to say, it was printed in what is known as the late Victorian period, which goes roughly from 1850 to 1901. At that time, women's and men's roles were still sharply defined, and Victorian rigid moral code was still at play, as it was the culture of separated spheres, which established that public spaces were for men and private and domestic for women. Janet Wolff highlights that this separation between the public world of work and politics and the private world of the home is a consequence of "the cult of domesticity" which emphasizes "the sanctity and purity of family life, and the moral task of women as mothers and wives" (Wolff 14).

This gender-based segregation also affected cultural and leisure activities. On the one hand, women were supposed to enjoy activities like "reading, playing music or gardening" (Cunningham 159-60), which could be easily done at home and in complete solitude (and consequently in silence). On the other hand, "Those entertainments or cultural activities which did take place in the more public arena, like sports, were almost exclusively male" (Wolff 22). What is more, Cunningham claims that "the general rule was that any woman in a public place of leisure, and unaccompanied by husband or other suitable male, was a prostitute" (130). Women, then, were more likely to be isolated inside their own houses, and as a consequence their voices were silenced and only to be heard at

home. On the contrary, men could easily be heard and seen, and as social beings it was desirable for them to be eloquent.

We should also bear in mind that during the Regency and the Victorian period, women, and especially middle and upper-class women, were not allowed to express themselves or to talk about certain matters, such as adultery, suicide or prostitution. As Mª Teresa González Mínguez claims in "Jane Austen y la exclusión de la voz femenina en el periodo de la Regencia," we can see how female characters in Jane Austen's works are usually silenced. As an example, she quotes *Persuasion*'s Anne Elliot, who explains how women "lived at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us" (2010, 517). Women writers suffered this exclusion from the public spheres too, which affected their production. According to Ellen Moers, they were "barred from the universities, isolated in their own homes, chaperoned in travel, painfully restricted in friendship. The personal give-and-take of the literary life was closed to them" (64).

This theory of the separated spheres shaped relationships between both sexes throughout the whole Victorian period. Many women were confined at home, as the house was widely considered genuinely "a woman's place." The Ruskinian ideal of the natures and duties of men and women, precisely described in his book *Sesame and Lilies,* which was published in 1865, was still very popular in the 1880s. In "Of Queen's Gardens", the section of the book that is mainly dedicated to women's values, Ruskin claims that men's and women's characters are "separate." Man's power is

> Active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever was it just, wherever conquest necessary. (51)

On the contrary, he states about women that "Her great function is Praise" (51). He adds that a woman's place is

> By her office, and place . . . within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offense. This is the true nature of home — it is the place of Peace; the shelter … a vestal temple (51)

Alfred Lord Tennyson described the traditional distinction between men's and women's characters in his poem *The Princess (NAEL* 8.2.1225*)*, following Ruskin's ideas:

> Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
> For the sword, and for the needle she;
> Man with the head, and women with the heart;
> Man to command, and woman to obey;
> All else is confusion. (v. 437-41)

Hardy's contemporary readers were likely to be familiar with these ideas. However, by the time *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was published, things were beginning to change in a male-dominated England. Women started bringing light about gender inequalities and began challenging Victorian restrictive gender roles. Florence Nightingale had already published her *Cassandra* (1854), which attacked the Victorian family, essentially patriarchal, and the passive role and lack

of opportunities of Victorian women. George Eliot condemned domestic ideology and educational and professional barriers to women (Poplawski 481). As Poplawski claims, there were many other women who wrote about "The Woman Question" and were trying to force a "reform of the educational, political, legal and economic institutions or practices in the period" (375).

Fin-de-siècle literature showed how things were changing for women in the late nineteenth-century and displayed a whole range of female characters that embodied this new kind of women, who were educated, independent and who were not interested in marriage or motherhood. The rise of this new found freedom affected women's language: many women writers found their own voice and dare to explore new literary and linguistic possibilities, beyond those traditionally associated to women. However, women had to be very careful with how they expressed themselves. In 19th century England, those women whose behaviour was not feminine enough, according to Victorian gender roles, were labelled as "hysterical", "maniac" or "madwoman." This included those who didn't have maternal instinct, those who refused to submit to their husbands or fathers, were opinionated, spoke their minds, wanted to work, or decided to get a divorce, which was possible at that time thanks to the Divorce Act of 1857. As Showalter points out, "Moral insanity redefined madness not as a loss of reason, but as deviance from socially accepted behaviour" (*The Female Malady* 29). When it comes to language, a woman who raised her voice, talked too much, swore or was too bossy could be labelled as insane. In fact, many women were confined in asylums by their husbands if they talked about their infidelities or other issues that could ruin the man's reputation. This was the case, among many others, of Louisa Lowe, who was locked up in a psychiatric hospital because she had accused her husband of being unfaithful and had decided to abandon him. She requested an interview with the Commissioners in Lunacy in order to be discharged, but the commissioners (all male doctors) considered that she had to be confined to prevent her from "further tarnishing the reputation of her husband" (Nicholson 141). Those women were always advised to "keep quiet" so as to not make things worse. Silence, then, might be considered a way of protection for women, while a woman's voice was potentially dangerous for men's reputation.

Hardy includes in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* a female character (Lucetta) who embodies those women whose behaviour challenged the status quo and who were potentially dangerous, since they refused to be silenced or dominated. Nevertheless, the novel shows how women like Susan or Elizabeth-Jane (or even the aforementioned Lucetta) are forced to use silence for their own benefit, be humble and keep secrets in order to succeed, as we will see later. The novel's female characters are encouraged to gain independence and defy the theory of the separation of spheres, but paradoxically those characters who dare to push the boundaries even further, like Lucetta, are exposed, mocked and punished.

Thomas Hardy, then, shows in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the complexity of the late Victorian era, a period in which the old values were gradually being replaced by new ones. Hardy sets the novel in the mid-1880s, while the wife-selling event takes place eighteen years before. In that 18-year lapse, society had evolved quickly and greatly, especially in urban areas, while the rural world, as it usually happens, remained more conservative in matters of gender. Casterbridge is described as an "old-fashioned place" by Elizabeth-Jane; a point of view that

many contemporary readers might have shared. The narrator insists on that idea, and describes the town as an "antiquated borough" which is "untouched by the faintest sprinkle of modernism" (*Casterbridge* 27), thus condemning, as we will see later, Casterbridgeans' reactionary ideas regarding gender stereotypes.

The main female characters seem to represent a wide range of attitudes towards gender stereotypes and language: on the one hand, we have Susan, who uses silence to defy gender roles and to subvert male dominance. On the other hand, Lucetta refuses to be silenced and uses language to empower herself, thus subverting gender roles, and as a consequence she is eventually punished and transformed into a madwoman. Finally, Elizabeth-Jane, who manages to be conservative but progressive at the same time.

2. Feminine and Masculine Language in *The Mayor Of Casterbridge*

The Mayor of Casterbridge shows how language perpetuates and reflects, but also defies, traditional gender roles. It is interesting to see how the novel highlights, on the one hand, how language and silence exposes power imbalance between men and women, and on the other hand how words (and the absence of words) are a powerful weapon for women to subvert male dominance, as we will see later. Language, then, has the ability of reinforcing gender roles and perpetuating gender inequality, but it can also empower women. It is important to point out that while the characters' behaviour sometimes defies Victorian gender roles, their language is somehow more conservative in terms of gender construction. Margaret R. Higonnet argues that in Hardy's novels "resistance to the social code of gender is undermined by the reinscription of a gendered linguistic code." (Higonnet 28)

The novel's masculine characters, and especially Henchard, have a tendency to dominance, which is expressed through their language. For example, Henchard is prone to use imperative forms, such as these words to Farfrae: "You shall do no more to-night", "Now you shall!" (*Casterbridge* 72). When he talks to Susan or Elizabeth-Jane he uses future tenses to impose himself: "You'll take my surname now-hey?" (qtd. in Gamarra Aragonés 50). He also employs the pronoun "you" to emphasize his control over the rest of the characters, especially over Susan: "No, no, Susan, you are not to go [...]" (*Casterbridge* 70), "That I meet you, court you, and marry you" (*Casterbridge* 55).

It has been argued by critics such as Christopher Lane that Henchard, who is the embodiment of old-fashioned, aggressive masculinity, understands personal relationships and love in terms of domination. Robert Langbaum, for example, states that in Henchard "the desire for power replaces sexuality; he seeks to possess completely the people he loves or is unable to distinguish the pleasure of love from the pleasure of proprietorship" (130). Elaine Showalter claims too that "the nature of intensity of Henchard's need is not sexual. . . What he needs is a 'greedy exclusiveness,' a title; and this feeling is stimulated by male competition" ("The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge" 106). According to Robert Langbaum, Hardy suggests a homo-erotic element in Henchard and Farfrae's male bonding: "Henchard's sudden passion for Farfrae, which is striking after his coolness towards women, suggests homosexuality on his side" (129). His efforts

to control Farfrae might be a symptom of his feelings towards him. His aggressive character might have to do with these repressed emotions and desires. We read how Henchard prolonged "holding the young man's hand" when he tries to convince him not to go to America (*Casterbridge* 130) and when we watch the two friends through the eyes of Elizabeth-Jane, we realise she is somehow jealous of such a "Friendship between men and men; what a rugged strength there was in it, as evinced by these two" (*Casterbridge* 74). For Langbaum, this is the example "which best points towards homo-eroticism . . . Elizabeth-Jane keeps her eye on Farfrae as though she were competing with Henchard for his affection" (130).

However, Henchard is aware of what is expected of him as a man. Speaking openly about feelings is not a suitable or manly behaviour. This is why he thinks it is weird to talk about his personal life with Farfrae: "It is odd" said Henchard, "that two men should meet as er have done on a purely business ground, and that at the end of the first day I should wish to speak to 'ee on a family matter ..." (*Casterbridge* 73). Nevertheless, later on, during the wrestling match, Henchard confesses to Farfrae that "God is my witness that no man ever loved another as I did thee at one time. . ." (254) and then he declares that "I am a wretched man, but my heart is true to you still" (*Casterbridge* 266).

Regarding Henchard-Farfrae relationship, we may highlight that homosocial and/or homoerotic relationships in the Victorian era were not as rare as we might think. John Beynon claims that, in fact, "The [British] Empire was the site of 'masculinist imaginings' in which men could enjoy homosocial comradeship in physically challenging, arduous circumstances far from what they perceived to be the damaging influences of *the feminine*" (38).

Henchard undergoes a process of feminization, or "unmanning" according to Showalter, since when he acknowledges his feelings towards Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane, and performs an act of selfless love, he embraces his feminine side ("The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge" 101). We should take into account that virtues such as devotion, sacrifice and selfless love are traditionally womanly values and as such they have to be expressed in a more feminine language. Images that show this loss of virility are found many times in the novel. As Robert Langbaum points out: "Henchard's change after his self-defeat in the wrestling match is strikingly pictorialized" (132). We can also read that Henchard remained "in a crouching attitude, unusual for a man, and for such a man. Its womanliness sat tragically on the figure of such stern piece of virility". The narrator also states that he resembled a "fangless lion" (*Casterbridge* 254-5).

As a consequence, his language changes during the process. This feminization process becomes more intense as we approach the end of the novel. We can see how Henchard even recognizes he is no longer entitled to give orders to his stepdaughter. It is also interesting how at this point he uses a term of endearment (usually associated to feminine language, since it implies intimacy) instead of Elizabeth-Jane's name, showing this way his love for her: "I approve of anything you desire to do, Izzy" said Henchard. "If I did not approve, it would be no matter! I wish to go away. My presence might make things awkward in the future; and, in short, it is best that I go" (*Casterbridge* 289). Henchard's transformation is complete, since he is now prone to showing his feelings and speaking about them: "But he was no longer the man to stand these reverses unmoved" (*Casterbridge*

302). In the end, he sacrifices his well-being for his stepdaughter's sake: "Don't ye distress yourself on my account" (*Casterbridge* 303).

Regarding the main female characters portrayed in Hardy's novel (that is, Susan, Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane), they are quite different from each other and as a consequence they use a language of their own, to the point that language and the way they express themselves is usually key to understand the character's personality and motivations. However, the language employed by all the female characters has some things in common. For example, they usually tend to use a less aggressive language than men when asking for something. Instead of using imperative sentences or commands, which are ubiquitous in Henchard's speech, the women in this novel prefer to ask politely and use courtesy words, among other linguistic features. We can see, for instance, how Lucetta tries to make Henchard change his mind about marrying her. Instead of commanding him to do so, she employs a more "feminine" language and begs: "[...] please, don't argue it any more" (89). When Henchard discovers that she has married Farfrae, Lucetta asks for his forgiveness. Again, she is not using an imperative, but instead she asks for mercy: "Michael – pity me, and be generous!" (*Casterbridge* 284).

Another characteristic feature of the language of female characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is the use of intensifiers, which shows that women are more prone to show their feelings in a more emphatic way: "It is so plain to me now, father, it is [...] He [...] whom my poor mother married by such a strange mistake [...] was very kind-O so kind!" (*Casterbridge* 198-99). As we can see, the language employed by female characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* reflects their passiveness and the superiority of their male counterparts. We can also see in the use of silence a good metaphor of how Victorian women were voiceless in many situations. For instance, in a conversation that takes place between Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane, the narrator tells us that she "did not utter any objection", that she "breathed a sigh" and also "remained incompetently silent" (180-181). Elizabeth-Jane, then, is not capable of expressing herself through language.

The language of the novel's characters mirrors power imbalance between men and women, since the discourse of the male characters overpowers feminine discourse and as a result it is easier for them to impose their point of view. However, female characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* manage to use language and silence to their own benefit and to defy male dominance. In fact, even a minor female character like the furmity woman is capable of destroying or saving a man's reputation with the power of her words - or with her silence. The furmity woman is a central character in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and certainly a curious one. Although she is a secondary character that appears only a few times throughout the novel, her words have the power of changing the main characters' fate, especially Henchard's. We could argue that her words are the catalyst for both of Henchard's downfalls.

2.1. Susan Henchard / Newson: the subversive power of silence.

Susan Henchard/Newson might be considered a good example of the traditional, submissive Victorian women, whose role was mainly to stay at home and look after their husband and children. She would also embody the Victorian myth of "the angel of the house". Even Newson, her "buyer", describes her as a "warm-

hearted, home-spun woman." (*Casterbridge* 271) As such, she is associated to silence throughout the novel, to the point that her quietness is her most distinctive feature. From the beginning of the story she is considered a victim and is portrayed as a very quiet, almost voiceless woman: the wife-selling event that opens the novel makes us think of her as so. However, we can argue that Susan deliberately uses silence as a mechanism to diminish male dominance. When we first meet her, Susan is following her husband silently and passively: "What was really peculiar, however, in this couple's progress, and would have attracted the attention of any casual observer otherwise disposed to overlook them, was the perfect silence they preserved." (*Casterbridge*, 5)

Susan's silence is not a sign of submission, but her way of granting herself some space. According to Priyanka Singh: "In the company of indifferent man by her side, it is silence that promises Susan a space to breathe. It is freedom for her that liberates her from constant reaction to what is said and done." (71) Silence can be also seen as a protection for women, as we stated before.

As Henchard gets drunk because of the rum provided by the furmity woman, she remains silent, and takes care of her little daughter. Even when Henchard sells her in his improvised auction, she goes with Newson (the man who pays five guineas for her) without protesting or questioning the legality of the transaction. When Henchard gets drunk and then sells her, she does not yell at him or makes a scene. She simply agrees and leaves her bad-tempered husband for a kinder one. By doing so, she is attacking one of the most sacred institutions for Victorians – marriage. In Susan's behaviour we could glimpse some kind of defiance and self-esteem, although we might also consider that she is merely being submissive. However, we may argue that she is courageous enough to change words for actions. We should not forget that, while the auction is going on, she overtly defies her husband in front of everyone and answers back very ironically:

> "Will anybody buy her?" said the man.
> "I wish somebody would," said she firmly. "Her present owner is not at all to her liking!" (*Casterbridge* 11)

Although Susan remains silent for most of the auction, it might not be indicative of fear or submission: Susan is seriously considering what would be better for her and her daughter. She is silently making a decision, and in the end, she breaks her silence to make clear that she is willingly going with Newson: "Mike." She said, "I've lived with thee a couple of years, and had nothing but temper! Now I'm no more to 'ee; I'll try my luck elsewhere. 'Twill ne better forme and Elizabeth-Jane, both. So good-bye!" (*Casterbridge* 12). According to Singh, "It would be interesting to comprehend silence as a medium to reject male hegemony, privilege and dominance." (68)

This mutism and alleged innocence are also a characteristic that describes Susan and that was quite common and desirable in Victorian women. In Charles Petrie's words, "The stamp of masculine approval was placed upon ignorance of the world, meekness, lack of opinions, general helplessness and weakness; in short, recognition of female inferiority to the male" (184). Newson's final words

about Susan emphasize this idea of her as an ignorant, uneducated woman: "She was not what they call shrewd or sharp at all" (*Casterbridge* 271).

Henchard's answer to these words shows that he shares Newson's point of view: "She was not." He even blames her for leaving him after the auction, because he considers her "simple-minded enough to think that the sale was in a way binding" (*Casterbridge* 271). As we can see, Susan is not described by her words, but by what other people say about her. However, although she is labelled many times as "dumb", it is quite possible that she was merely playing the part and pretending to be simpler than she actually was, in order to make her life easier. She simply acted as it was expected of her. The fact that she remained silent about the real identity of her daughter proves that she is not as simple-minded as people thought. What is more: it is very possible that she knew perfectly well that the auction was not binding, but that she chose to go with Newson because she knew it would be better for her and her daughter.

After eighteen years, when Susan returns to Casterbridge looking for Henchard, she is not trying to get revenge. She doesn't even ask her husband for an explanation. Surprisingly, she is quite ashamed of meeting Henchard because she has found out that he is an important, wealthy person and she is not. Again, she strikes us as a submissive woman, whose role is not to lead, but to follow men's instructions, and her language seems to support this idea. For instance, when Henchard agrees to take care of her and Elizabeth-Jane and decides to remarry her, she utters "I am quite in your hands, Michael" *(Casterbridge* 70). She uses a submissive language which reinforces male superiority in order to make Henchard take pity on her.

In order to understand Susan's language and behaviour, we should take into consideration that in the late Victorian period women could hardly be financially independent. Susan is a widow now (or at least she thinks she is), so she is forced to find someone who provides for her and her daughter. So, perhaps, she is not being submissive: maybe she is just choosing the right words in order to persuade Henchard to take care of them and to make sure Elizabeth-Jane has an opportunity in life. The narrator explains clearly why she accepted to re-marry Henchard: "... she did not enjoy pleasantries on a situation into which she had entered solely for the sake of her girl's reputation" (*Casterbridge* 77).

Susan is sacrificing herself for his daughter's sake, showing a behaviour that is typically associated with women and mothers in the Victorian age. The narrator tells us about Susan's reaction to Henchard's marriage proposal: "The poor woman smiled faintly" (*Casterbridge* 77). Again, words are not necessary here: Susan is using her silence to subtly express disagreement. Her silence allows her to accept without giving her consent verbally, and since Henchard interprets her smile as an affirmative answer, she doesn't need to humiliate herself and verbally accept to marry the man who sold her 18 years ago.

We can argue, then, that Susan uses silence as a way of achieving her goals. We can see, for example, how she remains silent about Elizabeth-Jane's paternity, so that Henchard takes her in. It is only when she's about to die that she writes a letter that clarifies the identity of the girl's father.

2.2. Lucetta Templeman: the myth of the "fallen woman"

The character of Lucetta might be considered the embodiment of the Victorian myth of the "fallen woman." Even though she tries to overcome her past and at first shows no signs of repentance, this changes when she falls in love with Farfrae and marries him. Lucetta is not really ashamed of her previous romantic relationship with Henchard, which is a modern and unconventional standpoint in a society in which women had to remain chaste until their wedding day. She is determined to forget about her past and is willing to start a new life with her new love, Donald Farfrae. Lucetta considers that women are sometimes blamed and stigmatized for things that are not their fault, which is a very revolutionary statement. In the next excerpts, Lucetta calls into question the double standard that judges women more harshly than men. It is interesting how she uses the personal pronoun "I" to highlight her point of view:

> "I was thinking of- what happened sometimes when women get themselves in strange positions in the eyes of the world from no fault of their own." (*Casterbridge* 159)

> "...my only crime was the indulging in a foolish girl's passion for you with too little regards for correctness, and that I was what *I* call innocent all the time they called me guilty ..." (*Casterbridge* 165).

It is clear, then, that Lucetta does not agree with the restrictive Victorian moral code. She defies Victorian rigid moral code regarding romantic relationships and courtship ritual. Regarding language, she is not afraid of speaking her mind and leading the way in a conversation, even with men, which wasn't very ladylike in Victorian society. It is quite significant that she employs a language that mirrors her determination. We can see in the next excerpt how she uses again the personal pronoun "I" and the affirmative and negative form of the Simple Future tense to indicate that she is talking about a decision, a fact, and not a possibility. She wants to make clear that she is determined to live the life the way she chooses and with whomever she wants: "I won't be a slave to the past- I'll love where I choose" (*Casterbridge* 166)

She is also incredibly open about her past, which is quite ironic if we take into account that it is a secret about her past that ruins her life and drives her mad. Lucetta is the antithesis of Susan when it comes to language: while Susan uses silence as a shield, Lucetta talks too much, according to Victorian standards, and as a result she is destroyed by her own secrets. We could argue that Hardy is punishing Lucetta for trying to subvert gender roles and for using language in a way that was not desirable or suitable for women. The author is telling Victorian readers that not being discreet might have terrible consequences for women.

Lucetta defies the rigid Victorian etiquette and manners of addressing, which were especially restrictive regarding men-women interactions, which were regulated to the slightest detail. In his article "Etiquette for Ladies and Girls", Ardern Holt establishes how men and women should interact:

> A true lady should, more than all other things, take the greatest care not to wound the feelings of anybody... If a young lady walking with her father or brother meet a gentleman known to them whom they recognise, in returning their salutation

> he would raise his hat to her without knowing her, which she would acknowledge by the slightest possible motion of the head, but this would not constitute an acquaintance. Supposing she bowed to a gentleman of her acquaintance who was accompanied by a friend, he would raise his hat as well as her acquaintance… According to the strict etiquette a married lady or the one of the higher rank bows first. (qtd. in Poplawski 482)

In her first encounter with Farfrae, Lucetta does not conform to those strict rules. She acts as a straightforward woman who even makes Farfrae blush. Lucetta bluntly confesses to Farfrae that she likes him: "Quite otherwise- you are most interesting!" (*Casterbridge* 149). The narrator describes Farfrae's reaction with those words: "It was now Farfrae who showed the modest pink" (*Casterbridge* 149). Victorian readers would not empathize with a woman who defies etiquette and gender roles so overtly. Vanity was not a desirable attribute for women. Too much attention to physical appearance was also regarded as a type of mental illness in Victorian times, called "Intense Vanity" (*The Female Malady* 86).

The hypothesis of Lucetta as an example of the classic Victorian madwoman, a stereotypical female character in Victorian literature, might be confirmed at the end of the novel. Lucetta's nervous breakdown caused by the "skimmity ride" might indicate she is psychologically unstable. However, we should take into account that independent women like Lucetta, who refused to be submissive were usually labelled as mad, as we discussed in the introduction.

Although Lucetta embodies a new type of woman, who openly defies gender roles, including those which have to do with language, she employs a more "feminine" language when she wants to change Henchard's mind. We can see an example of pity as a way of subverting Henchard's dominance when Lucetta tells him to give her love letters back and asks for mercy: "Oh, Michael, don't wreck me like this." When hearing these words, Henchard "was disarmed" (*Casterbridge* 232) and agrees to return the letters in order to help her. He even asks her: "Well, what do you want me to do?" (*Casterbridge* 232), giving her the power of commanding him.

Henchard was deceived by Lucetta, who speaks in a more ladylike and submissive way just to trick him and make him return her letters out of pity for her. The narrator makes clear that Lucetta had selected "her poorest, plainest, and longest discarded attire" (*Casterbridge* 231) in order to make Henchard change his mind about the love letters she once wrote to him. Again, the narrator is showing us that is better for women to play the victim and use a submissive, pitiful language instead of being aggressive or belligerent, even if they are entitled to be so. This kind of language would work for men, who have to be dominant in order to be heard and respected, but according to Hardy this doesn't apply to women, since they have to at least appear to be weak so as to get men to do what they want. She was rewarded for being humble, as women were supposed to be, and eventually punished for not being so in the past.

However, despite being portrayed as a modern, independent woman, Lucetta sometimes shows a traditional sense of morality, even though she is aware that she has done nothing wrong. She is mainly concerned with keeping appearances and with his husband finding out about her pre-marital relationship with Henchard, as she supposes that he would react badly. She has discovered the power of silence and how dangerous words can be. Moreover, she thinks the news

of her love affair with Henchard would affect Farfrae's status and respectability as new mayor of Casterbridge. As wives were considered a property, what they did affected the reputation of the husband and consequently the family and the household. We should mention at this point P.A. Buckner's words on this matter:

> The married couple became one entity represented by the husband, placing him in control of all property, earnings and money. In addition to losing money and material goods to their husbands, Victorian wives became property to their husbands, giving them rights to what their bodies produced: children, sex and domestic labor. (137)

2.3. Elizabeth-Jane: the best of both worlds

Elizabeth-Jane is the only character that manages to integrate the public and the domestic, challenging the "separation of spheres" that, as mentioned in the introduction, was widespread in the late Victorian era. She finds it very important to be independent and to find a job that enables her to make a living out of it. She is not afraid of leaving the security of Henchard's house or working at the Three Mariners in order to pay for her and her mothers' lodging and later she works for Lucetta as a companion and housekeeper. After Henchard's bankruptcy, she works with him in Farfrae's yard. This kind of work was not considered one of the traditional "women's trades" that were mainly related to "teaching, dress-making and retail" (Wolff 14). However, she also embodies Victorian ladylike values, such as quietness, taste, service, piety and gratitude. This character manages to be modest and humble, and hardly ever expresses her deepest feelings. She, as her mother Susan, remains silent in many situations and is aware of what words (and secrets) might do to a girls' reputation. Nevertheless, she also uses a more "masculine" language, which reflects this double personality of hers (since she accesses both the private and the public spheres, that is, she can be feminine and masculine at the same time).

It is worth mentioning that the Elizabeth –Jane of the original serialization of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, published in *Graphic*, was somehow bolder and her behaviour was more "manly", according to traditional gender roles. In order to make Elizabeth-Jane more attractive to Victorian readers, Hardy changed some excerpts of the novel and transformed this character into a "womanlier" one, according to Victorian traditional values. In the first version of the novel, it is Elizabeth-Jane, and not Henchard, the one who stops and tames the bull and rescues Lucetta. When it comes to decorum, a value that is essentially feminine for Victorians, we witness how in the serialized version Elizabeth-Jane allows Farfrae to kiss her in public (which was certainly an inappropriate behaviour for a young lady). Those two scenes are substantially changed, or even discarded, in the ultimate version of the novel. We might guess that Hardy wanted to make Elizabeth-Jane a more likeable character for conservative audience, in order to successfully make her the spokesperson for his ideas. Pamela Dalziel argues that this revision of Elizabeth-Jane's characters was motivated by the illustrations drawn by Robert Barnes, who "attempted to win readerly sympathy for Elizabeth-Jane ... by representing her in terms of conventional notions of Victorian womanliness" (80).

According to Dalziel, Barne's drawings for Graphic persuaded Hardy to "moderate his initial Graphic portrayal of Elizabeth-Jane as a distinctly unconventional figure combining traditional 'feminine' virtues (patience, selflessness, fidelity, and so forth) with such 'masculine' traits as courage and assertiveness" (*Casterbridge* xxx). Hardy replaced a proto-feminist heroine, who defied stereotypical gender roles with a "more conventionally womanly character who might recommend herself to a conservative readership and serve a more acceptable spokesperson for his philosophical views" (*Casterbridge* xxx).

It should not be a surprise to the reader that Elizabeth-Jane's behaviour (as it happened with Susan) is prudish and chaste, although we know she falls in love with Farfrae and has feelings for him nearly throughout the entire novel. Elizabeth-Jane is aware of what society expected of her as a woman, so she knows it is not appropriate to openly show her feelings if she wants to be respectable. We should bear in mind how Ruskin praises "The perfect loveliness of a woman's Countenance" (53). We have an example of repressed feelings when Susan tricks both Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane and they find themselves alone in the granary. We know they both have feelings for each other, but neither of them is willing to express them. Farfrae doesn't even dare to touch her in order to clean her, since she was covered in "husks and dust" (*Casterbridge* 89). Even though they avoid physical contact, sexual tension is evident in this excerpt: "Donald Farfrae began blowing her back hair, and her side hair, and her neck, and the crown of her bonnet, and the fur of her victorine, Elizabeth saying 'Oh thank you' at every puff" (*Casterbridge* 89).

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Elizabeth-Jane dances with Farfrae. Even though she is having a good time, she doesn't want to be carried away by her passion, so she speaks this way to herself: "No, no. Elizabeth-Jane - such dreams are not for you!" (*Casterbridge* 104-5).

This is an example of how for Victorian women expressing their feelings was even more difficult than for their male peers. Bertrand Russell stated that: "In women who have been conventionally educated there is often a certain pride in coldness, there is great physical reserve, and an unwillingness to allow physical intimacy" (101). Paradoxically, a young girl was not expected to focus too obviously on finding a husband, although for most Victorian women it was a life's goal. Women were assumed to desire marriage because it allowed them to become mothers rather than to pursue sexual or emotional satisfaction. William Acton, a famous British doctor who studied sexuality during the Victorian era, wrote that "The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind" (235). According to this idea, Susan is represented as a sexless character, and she accepts to remarry Henchard just for her daughter's sake, but it is made clear that there was no "amatory fire" between them (*Casterbridge* 78). The narrator also describes Susan as a character so pale and thin that the boys called her "The Ghost" (*Casterbridge* 78).

As much as Elizabeth-Jane has some "manly" manners, she, as every female character in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, uses silence, if not for her benefit, for Lucetta's. Since she works for her, she witnesses the love triangle between Henchard, Lucetta and Farfrae, but she remains silent, even though she has feelings for Farfrae. However, although she manages to find out that Lucetta was romantically involved with her stepfather, she says nothing, thus avoiding a direct

confrontation between Lucetta's admirers. Elizabeth-Jane's failure to inform both Farfrae and Henchard might be considered a form of subversion. Since they lack some important information, they cannot be in control of the situation: Lucetta is, at least for a while. Elizabeth-Jane's faithfulness towards her employer might be even considered an example of sorority.

Elizabeth-Jane, who at first avoided judgement on Lucetta's past and seemed to understand her situation, condemns her behaviour later on, as she is contravening Victorian moral code. When she discovers that Lucetta's former lover is Henchard, she states: "And I say it is him (Henchard) or nobody for you" (*Casterbridge* 199). It is interesting to highlight how Elizabeth-Jane adopts a more masculine language, which reminds us of Henchard's abuse of imperative and exhortative sentences. Since she is adopting a masculine role (giving orders to a woman), her language suddenly turns more aggressive.

Her attitude and language are somewhere in between Susan's passiveness and Lucetta's boldness, and she can both use silence as a way of subverting male dominance (like Susan) and a masculine language to impose her point of view (like Henchard) and empower herself. Thomas Hardy is showing us his own prototype of a "new woman", who according to him should defy gender roles but only to certain extent.

Is Elizabeth-Jane echoing Hardy's point of view concerning the new woman's language, which reflects a change in women's behaviour? It could be so, if we take into account that Lucetta is punished at the end of the novel for speaking openly about her past and for overtly trying to subvert the Victorian moral code and gender roles, while Elizabeth-Jane, who in the end respects the Victorian gender-biased moral code, and knows when to be silent and discreet, is rewarded. Her patience, virtue and decorum (quintessential female qualities) enable her to be the great winner of the novel. Virtue, for Thomas Hardy, seems to lie in the middle.

Notes

[1] *The Graphic* was a British weekly illustrated newspaper, first published in 1869.

[2] *Harper's Weekly, A Journal of Civilization* (1857-1916) was an American political magazine based in New York City.

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