Book Reviews

G. Glen Wickens. *Thomas Hardy, Monism, and the Carnival Tradition: The One and the Many in The Dynasts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. 255. $63.00 cloth.

In his *Essay on Laughter* (1911), Henri Bergson argues that laughter "is incompatible with emotion.... [It] is, above all, a corrective" and one that "must make a painful impression," since "indifference is its natural environment" (Bergson 166, 176, 10). Central to Bergson's theory of the comic is his idea that the purely mechanical in human affairs is always comical, an idea that can be seen operant in Hardy's *The Dynasts* (first published in three volumes in 1904, 1906, and 1908), with its hugely indifferent Immanent Will, spirit-populated Overworld, and puppet-like human characters. Although Hardy studies constitute a notably crowded field, this work has long baffled readers, and so critical approaches to *The Dynasts* are few and far between. As G. Glen Wickens points out in the introduction to his compelling and scholarly study of Hardy's most neglected major work, this neglect may stem, in part at least, from its generic indeterminacy. To begin with, Hardy effectively threw critics off the scent with his characteristically misleading labeling of the text, calling the poem an "epic-drama." As a result, most critics have (quite naturally) focused on the epic conventions in the poem. Harold Orel (1963), Chester A. Garrison (1973), Susan Dean (1977), and Katherine Kearney Maynard (1991), for example, all stress the poem's epic qualities and scope: some critics, like Dean and Amiya Chakravarty (1938), see *The Dynasts* as inherently visionary and organic. In contrast to this visionary epic tradition in reading the poem—and draw-

ing primarily on Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of novelistic discourse and the carnivalesque—Wickens argues that *The Dynasts* be read, not as either epic poem or closet drama, but rather as Hardy's last and longest novel. Wickens's reading clearly moves the poem into the comic or ironic/satiric tradition and away from the epic, which, as Bakhtin suggests, is always problematically hierarchically and ideologically determined.

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It is certainly true, as Wickens points out, that many treatments of the philosophical basis of *The Dynasts* have effectively ignored its "serio-comical" elements. Indeed, very few readers have noticed the comical/satirical side to much of Hardy's fiction and poetry. Yet laughter is of enormous importance in Hardy's work, as it is in *Rabelais and His World,* where Bakhtin suggests that carnival, festival, and folkloric traditions all incorporate a kind of controlled subversion of the dominant order. Wickens convincingly argues that the folk-festive element, so clearly seen in novels like *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* also operates in *The Dynasts.* It is not, he says, that *The Dynasts* needs to be read in light of the novels, but that both the novels and the poem can be read in terms of their use of carnival (Wickens xvi).

The Dynasts conforms to Bakhtin's theories of carnival in a number of ways; for example, "[t]he clowns and fools of folk humour reappear in various low figures who unmask the pretensions of dynastic authority to speak for the good of the whole nation" (Wickens xvi). In terms of its treatment of time, the poem is also more satirical than epic. *The Dynasts,* Wickens argues, is "a carnivalesque novel in touch with the inconclusive present rather than a lofty epic with no place for indeterminacy and little room for laughter in its representation of thought and events" (4). The carnival culture of the menippean satire, as defined by Bakhtin, includes imagery of the grotesque body; and this kind of imagery figures prominently in *The Dynasts,* right from the beginning of the poem, in, for example, the aerial perspective description of Europe. The idea, as Bakhtin points out, is to "contemplate the world on the broadest possible scale" (Bakhtin 190), to incorporate multiple voices and genres in a heteroglossia, and to blend the highest with the lowest in terms of social position and behavioral convention. Above all is the disruptive power of scandal:

> Very characteristic for the menippea are scandal scenes, eccentric behavior, inappropriate speeches and performances, that is, all sorts of violations of the generally accepted and customary course of events and the established norms of behavior and etiquette, including manners of speech. These scandals

> are sharply distinguished by their artistic structure from epic events and tragic catastrophes.
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> Scandals and eccentricities destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of the world, they make a breach in the stable, normal ("seemly") course of human affairs and events, they free human behavior from the norms and motivations that predetermine it. (Bakhtin 191)

As Wickens suggests, these are the very effects that can be seen in such episodes in the novels as the skimmity-ride in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*—a carnivalesque "moment of absolute reversal, when the master and slave switch positions" (Wickens 111). Wickens compares this scene of authority challenged to the mock execution of an effigy of Napoleon on Durnover Green, Casterbridge, in the poem. In both works, the transforming effects of laughter happen through scandal.

Wickens's book is divided into eight chapters, the first three of which analyze the "novelistic range of voices in the Overworld" (xv). The fourth chapter examines the use of parodic doubles and the blending of verse and prose in *The Dynasts.* Chapter 5 looks at the use of carnival in Hardy's representation of the Napoleonic wars, while Chapter 6 invokes Bakhtin's ideas about speech genres to discuss Hardy's treatment of time and history in the work. Chapter 7 focuses on the changing image of the "crowds" in war, and the final chapter examines Hardy's "chronotopic imagination" as it presents time and space and the great shifts brought about by historical events and by small moments. Each chapter, in other words, covers an aspect of Wickens's overall argument, and together they build up a subtle and coherent reading of this fragmented and difficult work. Wickens's aim is not, as he says, to restore *The Dynasts* to its early position as a "great" work or "the greatest" of Hardy's works, but to illuminate the text through a particular focus on its blending of carnival tradition and monistic theory. One of the most valuable insights in this very fine book is its pointing up of Hardy's ability to represent multiple perspectives in a work. As Wickens argues, "The spectacle of kings and emperors has a different look when viewed through the prose consciousness of soldiers, servants, street persons, or country folk" (xvi), a perspective that we would be wise to remember in these days when our collective understanding of events like wars in the wider world is constantly being shaped by often dangerously monologic voices.

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Brad Bucknell. *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce, and Stein.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. xii+288. 32 music examples. $90.00 cloth.

Brad Bucknell's *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* is one of a bevy of recent interdisciplinary studies of literature in relation to other arts. This trend is probably a consequence of the spread of digital technologies throughout the developed world. After one experiences the fusion of text, image, and sound on a DVD or the World Wide Web, mixed-media communication ceases to seem impure or exceptional. Artists' books, visual poetry, film intertitles, *lieder* cycles, book illustration—the genre-wilderness between art forms is now open to academic settlement.

Most inter-art forays concentrate on particular case studies. Brad Bucknell's *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* is no exception. The book's centerpiece is an extended analysis of the perversely speech-imitative, madrigal-inspired score for Ezra Pound's opera *Le Testament de François Villon* (1923). Nearly as absorbing is the final chapter's argument