



THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE: REALLY “THE MAN OF CHARACTER”

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ABSTRACT:

Thomas Hardy, a Victorian realist, is one among the foremost creative writers, who made significant contributions to the lives of English people and English literature. Much of his work deals with the declining rural society, specially focusing on the struggles of all shades of Wessex peasants. Hardy's characters are unforgettable. They stay enshrined in the hearts of sensitive souls. Hardy's narrative powers, his powerful language, his sense of outrage at social injustice and his depiction of the English countryside make him an all time favourite.

*Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a satirical novel meditating on the development of personal loss during the course of life. The novel is dominantly a satire on political and personal issues. The novel deals with some of the major humanistic issues prevalent in the nineteenth century England. Hardy chronicles the same through the character of Henchard. Henchard, the protagonist of the novel travels through different phases in his life where the persons and situations that he comes across outline one or another aspect of social life of nineteenth century England. The carefree attitude, the lack of ambition and a sense of inadequacy that he experiences during the initial stages of his life, his sense of disillusionment with life in general and in matters of love in particular, the irrelevance of the institution of marriage substantiated through the marital life of Henchard—these are some of the prominent attributes of life of nineteenth century England and Hardy has convincingly portrayed the same through the character of Henchard.*

Keywords: Hardy – economic condition – marriage – nineteenth century – *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is a satirical novel meditating on the development of personal loss during the course of life. The novel is dominantly a satire on political and personal issues. The novel deals with some of the major humanistic issues prevalent in the nineteenth century England. Hardy chronicles the same through the character of Henchard. Henchard travels through different phases in his life where the persons and situations that he comes across outline one or another aspect of social life of nineteenth century England. The carefree attitude, the lack of ambition and a sense of inadequacy that he experiences during the initial stages of his life, his sense of disillusionment with life in general and in matters of love in particular, the irrelevance of the institution of marriage substantiated through the marital life of Henchard—these are some of the prominent attributes of life of nineteenth century England and Hardy has convincingly portrayed the same through the character of Henchard. Critic Bijay



Kumar Das praised Hardy about his portrayal of his protagonist Michael Henchard in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism* as:

The emotional centre of the *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is neither Henchard's relationship to his wife's, nor his superficial romance with Lucetta Templeman, but his slow appreciation of the strength and dignity of his wife's daughter, Elizabeth Jane. Like the other woman in the book, she is governed by her own heart; man-made laws are not important to her until she is taught by Henchard himself to value legality, paternity, external definitions, and thus, in the end to reject him. A self-proclaimed 'woman-hater', a man who has felt at best a 'supercilious pity' for womankind, Henchard is humbled and 'unmanned' by the collapse of his own virile façade, the loss of his mayor's chain, his master's authority, his father's rights ...Hardy is really showing us the man at his best. (92-93)

Hardy brings the failure of marriage to limelight. A society that had not formulated any laws on matrimony allowed the irresponsible youth Michael Henchard to get into the marital life. When he was not able to balance his life, he decided to forsake his wife Susan by selling her to a strange sailor for few five pounds. Hardy recorded this incident in *TMC*, says, the historian E.P.Thompson in *Subversion and Sympathy: Gender, Law, and the British Novel* as "the sale of a wife". Sale of a wife was common in England like fistfights or pickpocketing. The historian notes that nearly "four hundred wife sales were described in provincial newspapers between 1800 and 1850 and speculating that many more may have gone unrecorded ...wife sales were understood as a form of rural divorce, as a tacit social accommodation to an unyielding legal dispensation". (50)

The opening of the novel portrays an economically downtrodden family consisting of father and mother and their daughter, making their way towards Casterbridge in search of a job that can sustain the family. This is an important economic aspect that must be borne in mind before being judgmental. The pathetic condition of their living is so dramatically picturised that the readers can easily visualize their poor economic status.

A young man and woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex, on foot—the thick hoar of dust which had accumulated on their shoes and garments form an obvious long journey lend a disadvantageous shabbiness to their appearance....(*TMC* 1)

Though the economic imbalance can be attributed to the personal prospects of each individual; it is also an undeniable fact that the society where a person lives also has a part to play in the lives of its citizens. Rural impoverishment was driving people to towns and slums were getting more and more congested. *TMC* takes place in a small town, marketing surplus agrarian produce. Life for many towns' people must have been difficult those days. The



unemployment and underemployment in the nineteenth century could have been the reasons for the failure of many marriages.

The origin and history of the English Family Law needs to be traced in brief here. The year 1857 marks a key turning point in the history of family law: Hardy is seen by some as marking the beginning of family law in its modern sense in his works. For instance Angel, the prig, admonishes his newly-wed wife Tess that no divorce is possible. "The rules governing the celebration of marriage had been put on a statutory basis in 1753, but the ecclesiastical courts continued to enjoy the right to decide whether or not a marriage had been validly celebrated, and the issue of capacity to marry was also determined by the canon law," (*Family Law in England And Wales* 22) writes Rebecca Probert. Divorce—in its modern sense of terminating an existing marriage and freeing the parties to remarry—was not then available, save by the costly process of a private Act of Parliament. Shockingly to modern readers, individual marriages to be nullified had to be carried to British Parliament for dissolution. "The ecclesiastical courts could, however, grant a divorce *a mensa et thoro*, freeing a spouse from the obligation to cohabit with an adulterous or cruel spouse. In the absence of a good reason for separation, the obligation to cohabit would be enforced through a decree of restitution of conjugal rights" (*Family Law in England And Wales* 22) prints out Rebecca further. If a separation was granted, financial provision for the wife would be ordered, the amount depending on whether she was innocent or not.

Secularisation of family law had to wait for long. In 1857, jurisdiction over such matters were transferred from the ecclesiastical courts to the new Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes. This new court was vested with the power to determine the validity of a marriage - although the principles in pith and substance remained substantially the same. More fundamentally, this new court had the power to grant a divorce (or a judicial separation, the successor to a divorce *a mensa et thoro*). As before, a husband had to show that his wife had committed adultery, as had been necessary for Parliament to pass an Act voiding the marriage.

A wife, by contrast, had to prove not only that her husband committed, adultery but also that this had been 'aggravated' either by his cruelty, by the incestuous nature of the adultery, by his committing the crime of bigamy or rape, or by his deserting the wife for a period exceeding two years; alternatively, she could seek to establish that he had committed sodomy or bestiality. Judicial separations could be granted to either party upon evidence of adultery cruelty or desertion without cause for a period of two years or more. But, despite such continuities in legal principle, the 1857 Act had a profound impact by making divorce available to a much wider range of persons. It would be too much to say that it made divorce accessible to everyone –the cost was still out of the reach of many – and the few hundred petitions received by the court in the first year of its operation seem minimal by modern standards. (*Family Law in England And Wales* 22)



This passage is quoted at length to drive home the point that a legal or ecclesiastical divorce was not all that way to obtain. A few thousand spouses must have been aggrieved to the point of separation, but only a few hundred divorce petitions were heard by the newly set up court. These acts and historical facts call for a deeper reading of the first chapter of *TMC*, in which the shameful auctioning of one's wife takes place. However, the inequality in The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 gave men the right to divorce their wives but denied the right to women to divorce their husbands. The marital laws in Britain were based on the idea that once women got married their husbands would take care of them.

Susan falls a prey to the immorality of her husband Henchard who lost his senses to sensual pleasures. Fully drunk and not in a conscious state he auctions his wife in the place where he lands before reaching Casterbridge. Henchard claims in the licensed furnity-tent, where he drinks the concoction with rum: "I married at eighteen, like the fool that I was; and this is the consequence o't" (*TMC* 6). Thus, the question remains open: Was it unemployment which made family a burden at eighteen or plain alcohol that triggered this shame?

Hardy too is sympathetic in a way, for he projects Jude too as a victim of a marriage into which he was trapped. Marriage, as an institution, in an unequal society, comes under a cloud: "...the frustration of many a promising youth's high aims and hopes and the extinction of his energies by an early imprudent marriage ... (6).

Susan could not have a stronger role in preventing her husband's loose morals. She has no other alternative except to accept the sale deed and go with her purchaser along with her daughter Elizabeth Jane. In her resentment, all that she could do is to disown her marital life: "...turned, and pulling off her wedding-ring, flung it across the booth in hay-trusser's face" (*TMC* 11). A former Clinical Director, Ronald W. Richardson says in *Couples in Conflict: A Family Systems Approach to Marriage Counselling* about an autocrat husband as: "...bad guys ...are often labeled as distant or autocratic husbands or fathers ...They are often seen, in our own emotional dramas, as the oppressors and as the cause of family problems" (121). But such discords cannot simply be explained away as issues of emotional incompatibility.

Susan is too meek to fight back for her rights. All that she does, throwing of the symbol of her failed marriage – her wedding ring on the face of her husband, is not in accordance with either ecclesiastical law or the English Family Law. Instead of resorting to prostitution or hard labor, she accepts the new life. And she surfaces after a gap of eighteen long years, enabling Hardy to introduce any twist and turn he wanted to introduce. She stages the come back only to find to her surprise that Henchard has scaled greater heights to be the Mayor of Casterbridge. It is not explicitly shown how he has come up in the ladder of political power. So, it naturally sends across the idea that anyone could come to the power if chance favours them.



The day after the inglorious auction, Henchard returns to his senses to realize the stupidity of his action. But he attributes the situation as the making of her own: "T'is like Susan to show some idiotic simplicity. Meek—that meekness has done me more harm than the bitterest temper!" (*TMC* 16)

Henchard tries later for an honest reunion with his family but he could not find its whereabouts. In solitude he realizes that he has become a man of nothing. He repents his addiction to drinking that has led to the loss of his family and vows not to drink in future. There is clue in the text to suggest that Henchard is a regular drunkard. Dropping his head upon the clamped book which is kept on the Communion-table in a church, a remorseful Henchard vows:

I, Michael Henchard, —do take an oath before God here in this solemn place that I will avoid all strong liquors for the space of twenty-one years to come, being a year for every year that I have lived. And this I swear upon the book before me; and may I be strook dumb, blind and helpless, if I break this—oath! (*TMC* 17)

Much like the villain Alec in *TD* who after victimizing Tess turns into a pious man and the society readily accepts his conversion. Henchard too after victimizing his wife repents and vows to become a man of morality. There is a difference in the temporary, religion-inspired conversion of Alec and the moral transformation of Henchard that is sustained by him for twenty one years. It is a self-imposed conversion.

In Shakespeare's plays it is said that there are only heroines who come to the rescue of men. In the three chosen novels of Hardy too, the heroines show some dominance over men characters. But alongside they also tend to seek solace in men. Tess cannot go away from Angel Clare nor can Arabella go away from Jude. But Susan has no other go after she receives the news of the death of Newson who purchased her. So she eventually plans to go back to her former husband Henchard.

After spending a displaced life in Canada, Susan tries to settle in Falmouth. It is now and here she receives the sad news of Newson's drowning in the sea while on a voyage. Though partly committed to Newson, she could not live happily nor since her marriage to Newson is not legally tenable. The disappearance of Newson in sea, in a way, is actually news of relief to her rather than news of grief. "The vague news of his loss at sea ... solved a problem which had become torture to her meek conscience" (*TMC* 25).

Susan, relieved from her guilty conscience following the death of Newson, sets her mind to search for her former husband. She embarks on a journey with her daughter Elizabeth-Jane to find out Henchard. At the furmity selling shop where the auction took place eighteen years ago, Susan is able to gather some vague information about the whereabouts of Henchard through the old lady who witnessed the auction back then and has faint memories about the incident. Thus



the mother and the daughter proceed on their way to Casterbridge to re-claim kinship. They find Henchard in a public dinner hosted by him. They find that he has not only become the Mayor of Casterbridge but has also become a busy corn merchant. They are proud of Henchard's growth, and Susan is extremely happy that he has stopped drinking. Susan is glad to hear from her daughter Elizabeth Jane that the only glass, in the Mayor's dinner, not filled with wine is that of the Mayor's. But presently they are in no position to express their happiness because they are actually strangers to the crowd and therefore they have to wait for a good time to reveal their identity first to the Mayor.

For the time being Susan and Elizabeth Jane stay in the Three Mariners Inn, next door to Donald Farfrae, a Scotsman making his way to America in search of his business prospects. Hardy again deals not with individuals, but with types. Henchard is of the old world; agrarian, anti-machine and volatile; Farfrae is of the industrialized world; calculative, machine-loving, innovative, and urban. He is identified by Henchard the busy business man to assist him in his business. But once again, the historical forces of production will always ensure that the more advanced method will vanquish the old and render it obsolete. By the time the deal between the two is half way through, there develops a warm relationship between Farfrae and Elizabeth Jane through their constant meetings as neighbours. Farfrae now accepts the offer of lodging and boarding provided by Henchard and moves there, vacating Three Mariner's Inn.

After considerable days of stay at the Three Mariners Inn, Susan decides to meet Henchard and disclose her arrival to get his support. Elizabeth Jane is happy at her mother's decision and is quite confident that Henchard will take them in. "...if he takes ...who are not related to him at all, may he not take as warmly to his kin?" (61). They identify Henchard's office and go there to meet him. His office shows Henchard's current influential position in society as well as his wealth. While they shuttle through the office to locate Henchard, Elizabeth happens to meet Farfare, her acquaintance in the Three Mariners Inn and through him Elizabeth finds out Henchard and reveals their identity and informs him of their sorry state after the death of Newson.

Henchard is actually happy to learn that his wife and daughter are alive and he has got his family back. As Newson is no more, Henchard can reclaim his family instantly. But this could not be done all of a sudden owing to his political position. Therefore he sends a note along with five pounds and five shillings to Susan through Elizabeth Jane. He sets this amount as the price to reclaim his family. It is for this same amount that he sold his family eighteen years ago. Now having repaid the money, his family would become his henceforth. He sends through the note his plan to meet Susan that night at 8'o clock in dark at a ruined secret place, the amphitheater, at the Ring on the Budmouth Road.

Henchard and Susan's meeting turns out to be a gateway to their reunion. Henchard confesses his guilt and the harm that he has done to Susan. He discloses his desperate living of



all these years with his fruitless search for his family. "I took every possible step to find you ...travelled ...advertised. My opinion at last was that you had started for some colony with that man, and had been drowned on your voyage out" (77).

Eventhough he finds out his family now, he could not readily acknowledge them and extend an open welcome. Being a respectable Mayor, he would not be able to disclose what really transpired in his life. That would spoil his reputation. So he arranges for their temporary stay at High-street until he finds suitable time and chance to re-marry her. Susan would stay there in her present identity as Mrs. Newson and in due course Henchard would court her and marry her accepting Elizabeth Jane as his step-daughter. There is a double irony here. As noted earlier, though by 1850s, the English family law had got the parliamentary nod and became the statute governing marriage and divorce, ecclesiastical law also existed along side. In this backdrop, Henchard is marrying the much - married lady again and accepts his own biological child as his stepdaughter.

...you and Elizabeth take a cottage in the town as the widow Mrs.Newson and her daughter; that I meet you, court you, and marry you, Elizabeth-Jane coming to my house as my stepdaughter ...This would leave my shady, headstrong, disgraceful life as a young man absolutely unopened; the secret would be yours and mine only; and I should have the pleasure of seeing my own only child under my roof, as well as my wife. (78)

At this point, Henchard has no courage to accept his mistakes. If not to the public, he could have at least revealed the truth to his daughter. But he is not prepared to risk his 'reputation'. He does not pay attention to the suggestions of Farfrae to whom he has foolishly revealed all his past life: "I think I'd run the risk, and tell her the truth. She'll forgive ye both" (84). Henchard refuses to listen and decides to maintain the 'secret'.

The day Henchard and Susan 'marry' Henchard loses his popularity among the public. Their marriage becomes the talk of the town and they criticize Mrs. Newson as "The Ghost... a mere skellinton" (*TMC* 87-88) and Henchard, "he do call himself a teetotaller" (*TMC* 90). His marriage is at the expense of his fame and also at the expense of forsaking Lucetta who has nursed him during his stay in Jersey, and in those lonely years.

...on account o' the loneliness of my domestic life, when the world seems to have the blackness of hell, and like Job, I could curse the day that gave me birth ...The young creature was staying at boarding-house where I happened to have my lodging; when I was pulled down-she ...nurse me ...Heaven knows why, for I wasn't worth it ...we got naturally intimate... It is enough to say that we honestly meant to marry. (*TMC* 83)



He has to break the promise that he made to this woman of previous courtship. Ultimately when Henchard 'marries' Susan what is right to Susan turns out to be something wrong to another woman. He wants to live with Susan, for which he has been craving all along. But if he has to win back his family he has to lose Lucetta.

Henchard's trust is such that he requests Farfrae to help him draft a letter of explanation to Lucetta. Poor Henchard, unable to tackle his own personal problems, struts around as a master ruling an entire mass and dispensing justice to them. With the letter drafted by Farfrae, he encloses a cheque and excuses himself to get away from Lucetta by saying that he has got his own family back. What he has done to Susan twenty one years ago is now replicated to another woman. Earlier he has transacted his family to the sailor for money; now he abandons another woman through his false promises. "Can it be that it will go off so easily" (85). Can things happen that easily to him? Is that what life is all to him? Farfare is an absolute stranger to him, except on the business grounds that is entrusted to him because of his efficiency. But Henchard has taken him into of confidence to disclose all his personal secrets, which is going to be his undoing.

Henchard receives a reply from Lucetta. She accepts what Henchard has decided for his future course of action and promises not to interfere in his life thereafter. She requests him to return all her passionate letters to him all through the years as she is going to move to Britol, where her relative would take care of her.

Unmindful of the consequences, Henchard decides to remarry Susan with Farfrae as witness. Susan too is happy that her daughter's future is secured. But Elizabeth wants only Henchard's shelter and protection but not any right as his heir. She wants to be known as whom she is—Elizabeth Newson—and does not want to get into a new identity of being known as Elizabeth Henchard. But Henchard would not approve of this. "I want to have her called Miss Henchard –not Miss Newson ...it is her legal name – so it may as well as be made her usual name – I don't like t' other name at all for my own flesh and blood"(93). But Elizabeth is determined to live in her original identity.

When Susan starts to live a comfortable life under the protection of Henchard, Elizabeth turns out to be a "town beauty"(101). But this epithet could not hide her hidden sadness of being a step-daughter to Henchard. She always wants her identity as Elizabeth Newson and not as Elizabeth Henchard. She considers herself as "an unfinished girl" (101). She gives more importance to education than for improving her looks. This shows her self-discipline.

Henchard who assumes that everything would go smoothly has to face his first struggle at his home when Elizabeth resists accepting him. His second struggle is in the domain of his business field, where Farfrae is slowly emerging as the workers' favorite because of his humanitarian concerns. The intelligence and humanity of Farfrae are revealed through a minor



character Abel Whittle, who works as a labourer in Henchard's Corn-factory. Unmindful of Abel's needs, Henchard threatens him "...I'll mortify thy flesh for thee"(102) and does so by punishing him to come to work without his breeches. Farfrae, revokes Henchard's order by sending the employer home to wear his breeches. Thus Farfrae, earns the good-will of the employees and of the Casterbridge population. Henchard, the Mayor and the owner of the same corn-factory gets beaten in his own home turf. People prefer going to Farfrae for valuing their haystacks than to the ill-tempered Henchard.

The Mayor now begins to worry about his image in the eyes of the public. Farfrae earns good name by treating all with courtesy and friendliness. Henchard becomes jealous of Farfrae's rising reputation. He ventilates his bitterness and jealousy, through an imminent termination thus: "Mr. Farfrae's time as my manager is drawing to a close..." (113) Farfrae hears this and a rift occurs. Farfrae dancing with Elizabeth Jane in a celebration rouses Henchard's anger as his high societal status would not let him accept his manager as his son-in-law.

Elizabeth, in love with Farfrae, could not express it explicitly owing to her father's strict instructions. "...when she felt her heart going out to him, she would say to herself with a mock pleasantry that carried an ache with it, 'No, no, Elizabeth-Jane ...such dreams are not for you!'"(117). When Farfare sets up a rival trade centre, Henchard's financial decline begins; but 'his daughter' is relieved as the shop ensures his proximity to her.

Farfrae's, trade flourishes owing to his more advanced equipage, in terms of physical, mental and emotional resources. "A stripling such as he", fast overtakes a veteran who is rendered obsolete. In mad anger he tries to smother any warm feelings for Farfrae in "his daughter".

However, Susan who reads her daughter's mind, approves of that bonding and prays that it should end in wedlock. She wishes the marriage to take place, before death could conquer her. An ailing and anxious mother, Susan contrives to arrange a meeting between the two, at a secluded setting. She is terminally ill and desirous of settling her account with life and men. She sends a sealed letter to Henchard with these words "Mr. Michael Henchard. Not to be opened till Elizabeth-Jane's Wedding-day" (124) on the envelope.

Having initiated her child's journey to a secure future, Susan dies. Her death is a shock to all especially, to Elizabeth who needs her now more than ever before. But Henchard is happy that he could claim his own daughter now more forcefully by revealing the 'truth' of her birth. He is all affection now. To a stunned Elizabeth, Henchard declares: "I who am your father and not Richard Newson—your mother and I were man and wife when we were young...your mother was too honest. We had thought each other dead ...and ...Newson became her husband" (128). Henchard gives the girl just that much information which is necessary for legitimizing his claim;



and he does not tell her the full of saga of an unholy auction carried out in an inebriated condition.

Having declared his genetic right over Elizabeth, Henchard expresses his wish to live with his daughter. He persuades her by an indirect compulsion of taking his name as her surname. It is the struggle of a middle aged man to clutch at any straw. "I'll do anything, if you will only look upon me as your father... 't was I that chose your name, my daughter... don't forget 't was I gave you your name... You'll take my surname now... it will be much more pleasant to me. 'T is legally yours" (129). He wishes her to be known as Elizabeth-Jane Henchard and made all arrangements for getting it declared so legally. The fateful moment, the hour to renounce arrives at the very hour of claim. Searching for papers in this regard, he finds a letter addressed to him with the restriction "Not to be opened till Elizabeth-Jane's wedding-day" (130)—a sealed letter to him from Susan, on the eve of her death.

Henchard, as impatient as ever, ignores the warning of his deceased wife and opens the letter. It reads:

...for the good of all of us I have kept one thing a secret from you till now—I have done it for the best. I shall be in my grave when you read this, and Elizabeth-Jane is not your Elizabeth-Jane—the child who was in my arm when you sold me. No; she died three months after that, and this living one is my other husband's. I christened her by the same name we had given to the first, and she filled up the ache I felt at the other's loss. (131)

Henchard is devastated. All his efforts to convince Elizabeth to use his name as her surname, now are reduced a mockery. He now analyses her features, only to find resemblance to Newson. The fateful letter leaves it to Henchard: "tell her husband of this or not, as you may judge; and forgive, if you can, a woman you once deeply wronged, as she forgives you" (131).

Henchard is completely broken; misery has taught him nothing but defiant endurance. He feels shrouded in darkness. He who has always longed to hear her daughter call him 'father', could not now approve of his step-daughter calling him so.

Henchard now begins to cold shoulder what is not his. But Elizabeth does not understand the reason for the volte face. She tries to rectify her shortcomings and engages herself in studying Latin and other subjects to improve her education and rise in the esteem of her 'father'. Almost all of Hardy's characters evince interest in studies. Even in *JtO*, Jude studies Latin grammar to improve himself. While engaged in studies, Elizabeth tells herself: "If I am not well informed it shall be by no fault of my own" (139). It underlines the fact that she is interested in studies but unable to continue the same earnestly. But Henchard is untouched by all her efforts. He now wants to wash his hands off.



With the new knowledge that genetically she is no relative of him, he changes his mind in controlling Elizabeth. He now writes to Farfrae: “—on consideration, I don’t wish to interfere with your courtship of Elizabeth-Jane, if you care her. I therefore withdraw my objection...” (142)

With a heavy heart Elizabeth, goes to her mother’s graveyard where she hopes to find some solace. There she meets a strange woman. Hardy employs now one of his usual contrivances and makes the miseries of Henchard complete. The only missing element is Lucetta, Henchard’s old love and Hardy contrives her meeting with Elizabeth in one of the most unlikely of venues. Driven out of her home, the entire family of Tess takes shelter in the ancient sepulcher at the churchyard of her famed ancestors. This graveyard meeting takes Elizabeth to board with Lucetta. Henchard’s “...what will be your address in case I wish to write to you?” (152), elicits the response ‘Town High Place Hall’. Henchard is shocked as his lady love Lucetta is also staying there. She has come to Casterbridge, to condole Susan’s death and eager to marry Henchard who is now alone. She indicates her wish in the letter by stating that “...by asking you to carry out your promise to me. I hope you are of the same mind...” (155).

Lucetta keeps writing letters to Henchard asking him to come and meet her. Henchard transacts much of his hay-trussing business, very near her place, but, Lucetta guesses that Henchard does not turn up to meet her there, as his daughter Elizabeth also shares the same lodging facility. So she writes another letter to Henchard, assuring him “...your daughter’s presence here may be the cause of your neglect; and I have therefore sent her away for the morning. Say you come on business—I shall be alone” (162). Lucetta deliberately sends Elizabeth out so that she could freely meet him. But Elizabeth is puzzled: “why she wants me to get rid of ...today”. (162)

The twists and turns that were so necessary, when Hardy serialized his novels to heighten suspense and retain the readers’ interest till the next installment was published, are introduced now. Lucetta, waiting to receive Henchard, instead is visited by Farfrae who comes looking for Elizabeth Jane. Lucetta, instantly erases Henchard and enshrines Farfrae in her heart. Henchard who arrives, just a few minutes after, is sent word through the maid. Lucetta knows that Farfrae had come to see only Elizabeth and not her. But she knows how to lure, like Arabella wooing poor Jude through false dimples. When Elizabeth arrives, Lucetta is glad and asks her “you’ll live with me a long time, won’t you” (171). Lucetta plans to use Elizabeth for her convenience, like a watch-dog to keep Henchard off.

It then becomes a practice for both the ladies Lucetta and Elizabeth, to watch the market regularly on every Saturday, as Farfrae transacts business there. Both the ladies are in love with Farfare. Lucetta happens to share her past history with Elizabeth-Jane for she wants some advice from her. When Lucetta expresses a desire to marry Henchard, he could not as he is already married to Susan gone missing for some years. And when Henchard, with Susan gone, is ready



Lucetta's eyes are riveted on Farfrae. A disenchanted Henchard tells her, "...You come to live in Casterbridge entirely on my account...yet now you are here you won't have anything to say to my offer" (186).

Michael Henchard is already well on his way to become a tragic hero. The tragic flaw in him, his drink, has in reality reduced him at the end of the first few pages to an orphan, in the practical purposes of the term. His wife and his biological baby – an infant that could have been his redemption and ensure the continuity of his line – are gone; gone for eighteen long years. At the end of the novel Henchard becomes a real orphan, in the total sense of the term. His wife Susan is dead. Through her dying declaration – made in writing – he understands his biological child has also died; and Elizabeth Jane on whom he showers all concern and thus cling on to life, is no child of his. The business that has brought him civil leadership and respect is declining. New ideas and new machines that he cannot understand arrive, along with a man who wields them well in the manner of the new times.

Lucetta, his heart-throb is back with a bang and one more mock marriage, there is a new meaning to his life, and a new hold. But, that is so close, yet so far off. Only thing that remains now is his reputation, as an alderman, and that position of respect ushers in his hour of deep shame.

In Hardy's presentation of his fiction, the reader is confronted with his sub-titles. After finishing the first half of the novel, the reader is deeply puzzled and finds it difficult to swallow Hardy's subtitles. How can Tess be a pure woman, as Hardy so strongly asserts in the sub title? It is to the credit of the master craftsman that, what appears so impossible initially to accept is shown and accepted as plain truth at the end. As shown in Chapter four, Hardy's passionate question on the recuperative power of nature over organic humans, the reader's skepticism vanishes.

In the same manner, *TMC* is given an impossible subtitle – The Mayor of Casterbridge 'the man of character'. That Henchard, who drinks, who dissipates for about the length of three hundred pages in the novel who is a moral wreck in these pages, begins to show his deep respect for truth, when he is confronted by the old furmity woman. Hiding behind the bush of this revelation, Lucetta marries Farfare.

An old woman is brought in front of Henchard for creating public nuisance. She turns out to be the old furmity shopkeeper who identifies Henchard and reveals the truth to the crowd that Henchard, the one who sold his wife for money to a sailor twenty years ago, is unfit to hear her case, as the drunken auctioning "proves that he's no better than I, and has no right to sit there in judgment upon me" (212). Henchard bluntly accepts the truth before a stunned assembly and moves calmly.



This positive trait asserts in him when he rejects Lucetta's offer of monetary help: "I'm not the man to sponge on a woman, even though she may be so nearly my own as you" (219-220). Lucetta is a cheater and no woman of worth, and, as Henchard says, "One word to this bran-new husband of how you courted me, and your previous happiness is blown to atoms" (222). But life holds more humiliation in store for Henchard.

Henchard goes bankrupt sells his house and furniture. His downfall elicits the sympathy of the people of Casterbridge. They ruminate on the rise and fall of this man thus: "...how admirably he has used his own talent of energy to create a position of affluence out of absolutely nothing- which was really all he could show when he came to the town as a journeyman hay-trusser, with his wimble and knife in his basket—they wondered and regretted his fall" (232).

Henchard decides to move out of the town Casterbridge. He could not stay idle and comes to work daily on the home premises like the rest of the labourers. Hardy pictures his condition clearly thus "...once flourishing merchant and Mayor and what not stood as a day-labourer in the barns and granaries he formerly had owned" (240). Henchard reconciles himself to his present position: "I have worked as a journeyman before now, ha' n't I? and "A fellow of his age going to be Mayor...'But 'tis her money that floats in upward. Ha—ha—how crust odd it is! Here be I, his former master, working for him as man, and he the man standing as master, with my house and my furniture and my what- you- may – call wife all his own" (240).

Henchard, in desperate condition, thinks that all these hardships are because of his foolishness. But the fall of Henchard and rise of Farfrae are historically determined. Farfrae, an intelligent and modern man utilizes the opportunities given by the old and obsolete Henchard. Critic Sudhir Dixit's putting the blame on the moral order is negation of the historical process:

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Henchard violates and disturbs the moral order and hence brings upon a retribution that works from without as well as within. Tess, Jude and Sue too suffer because what accuses them is their conscience which takes too seriously the external and rigid dictates of a moral code which is conventional and socially acceptable. (78)

While working in the field Henchard reveals to his friend Solomon Longways that he shall be released from his oath within twelve days."The oath to drink no spirituous liquid. In twelve days it will be twenty-one years since I swore it, and then I mean to enjoy myself..." (TMC 241)

True to his word Henchard starts drinking regularly at the Three Mariner's Inn. Under the influence of drink, he threatens Farfrae in front of others. Elizabeth-Jane is afraid of his father's nature and is with him always like a watch-dog.



Lucetta was unmindful of Henchard's condition. She was unaware of Henchard's job in the granary, when Lucetta encountered him. Henchard sarcastically hurt her like "Ah, ma'am we of the lower classes know nothing of the gay leisure that such as you enjoy!" (248). As an ex-Mayor and a hay-trusser, Henchard knew everything about the granary. He cynically said that Lucetta has also proved that she is of low class as he cheated Henchard after promising him that she will marry him.

Lucetta requests Henchard to return all her love letters of the past. Henchard puts them in a sealed parcel and asks Jopp to give the parcel to Lucetta. Out of trust, Henchard hands over the parcel to Jopp but the latter takes it to Mixen Lane and opens the parcel along with his friend, and reads aloud the letters written by Lucetta to Henchard. So the inmates arrange a "skimmity ride" (272) which was a form of entertainment that exposes wife's unfaithfulness to her husband. It shows that Hardy's interest in folk-traditions. "Skimmity" is a colloquial term in the Dorset dialect. As Norman Page describes this in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as

... the colloquial or dialect form 'skimmity' is used. Its enactment in Chapter 39 represents a violent eruption of the lawless, disorderly low-life of Casterbridge into the middle-class world of the main characters; somewhat ironically, though, the custom has its origins in a communal concern for morality and for the punishment of offenders, since its purpose was to express the moral outrage of the community by exposing those guilty of sexual misconduct... (391)

Casterbridge is in the mood of receiving a Royal personage. It is the duty of the Mayor to take care of the arrangements and procedures. Henchard, as a former Mayor approaches the council for getting permission to participate in the reception. It is denied by Farfrae who is now the Mayor of Casterbridge. A still Henchard step forward to the Royal Personage and greets the esteemed guest which Farfrae had to do in his capacity as Mayor. Henchard is forcibly pushed away from the place by Farfrae. Jopp, Henchard's former manager and friend, watching this, plans a skimmity-ride the same night itself to take revenge.

The skimmity ride takes place at an inappropriate hour for the Farfraes. Lucetta, big with Farfrae's baby, is waiting for her husband to return home from a business trip. Lucetta alone at home and waiting for the arrival of Farfrae hears some commotion. When she peeps out there goes the skimmity-ride, burning the effigies of Henchard and herself paraded on a donkey. Lucetta personally witnesses her public humiliation and gets upset. Convulsions rock her. A doctor is informed. Elizabeth-Jane helps Lucetta in such condition.

Lucetta gets shocked to see the effigies burnt, as she understands that Farfrae will soon get to know the truth. This skimmity-ride will definitely unravel the past that she has from Farfrae so carefully.



Henchard, the man of Character now, carries the news of Lucetta's critical illness to Farfrae with all the speed at his command; but the loss of his credibility in such that he is not believed and sent out. Upon his return Farfrae finds his wife dead.

Henceforth, Henchard begins to look at Elizabeth-Jane with warmth and affection. Even though "she was not his own; yet, for the first time, he had a faint dream that he might get to like to like her as his own—" (299). Elizabeth too is ready to accept her 'father' by forgiving all his roughness towards her and assures him "I have forgotten it. Talk of that no more" (311). But nothing good lasts long for Henchard and the next spoil sport arrives suddenly out of the blue.

Even as the adoptive father and daughter start living together, past all bitterness and bound by affection and the bond of affection starts to grow naturally, it is then, unfortunately, Newson, Elizabeth's biological father comes in search of his wife Susan and his daughter. A man believed to have died long ago, presumed dead for long, comes back alive hunting for his family. But Henchard is not prepared to sacrifice his only solace Elizabeth whom he now regards as his own daughter. He knows that Newson is here to take Elizabeth along with him. So he gives the preface lie to Newson about his daughter Elizabeth. His dogged reply to Newson's queries is "Dead" (340). Though Newson, the grizzled traveler readily trusts Henchard, Henchard's conscience torments him.

However Henchard could not take Elizabeth's presence to be perpetual. One day she would leave him. "There would remain nobody for him to be proud of, nobody to fortify him; for Elizabeth-Jane would soon be but as a strange, and worse. Susan, Farfrae, Lucetta, Elizabeth—all had gone from him, one after one, either by his fault or by his misfortune" (308).

Henchard justifies his action thus: "...the lie which had retained for him the coveted treasure had not been deliberately told to that end, but had come from his as the last defiant word of a despair which took no thought of consequences" (313).

In *A General Drama of Pain: Character and Fate in Hardy's Major Novels*, Bernars J. Paris compares *TMC* and *Tess*. He says:

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy's rhetoric reinforces the notion that character is fate. Circumstances play their role in Henchard's downfall, but his chief enemy is himself. Hardy presents Tess as an innocent, noble heroine, who is hounded to an early death by adverse circumstances ...In *Mayor*, Hardy's rhetoric focuses our attention on Henchard's character and invites us to contemplate it. The rhetoric of *Tess* focuses our attention not on Tess's character, but on Hardy's celebration and defense of it and on the external causes of her destruction. (28-29)



Unable to prevent his daughter's affair with Farefare which follows Lucetta's departure and to digest Elizabeth's impending separation, Henchard decides to leave Casterbridge and Elizabeth-Jane. He says to his daughter "My presence might make things awkward in the future...it is best that I go" (*TMC* 324). Henchard leaves Casterbridge with his tool basket which he bought initially to the town. He leaves Casterbridge alone; in the same manner he enters it – all by himself. What he earned was nothing. Elizabeth accompanies him till the over bridge and stops. He goes away. Farfrae appears there and escorts Elizabeth to his house to meet a visitor. It is none other than Mr. Newson—her father. With his blessings, Farfrae and Elizabeth decide to get married. Newson reveals about his arrival to Casterbridge nine months ago in search of Elizabeth. Now he discloses to Elizabeth Henchard's shocking reply: "the old rascal!—he said Elizabeth-Jane had died year ago" (328). According to the premonition of Henchard, Elizabeth gets angry towards him and says "...I would never forget him. But O! I think I ought to forget him now!" (328).

Meanwhile Henchard pursues his solitary journey and in its course, he discovers the road by which his wife entered on the upland twenty-five years before. Why he has come to such a pause? Pride, mortification, and poverty – in ascending order of importance. "...because of my cursed pride and mortification at being poor" (331). As in *JtO*, where all characters return to the starting point, ground zero, Henchard too comes back to the same spot where he commenced his life's pilgrimage. He always thinks of his daughter who is not originally his own. He longs for love and affection. He gets the news of the wedding of Elizabeth-Jane and Donald Farfrae on Martin's Day. He decides to go to the marriage and purchase a new cloth and a caged bird as a gift for Elizabeth's wedding. He reaches Casterbridge and enters into his former house through the rear gate. He enters through kitchen, leaving the caged bird under a nearby bush outside. From a distance, looking at Elizabeth Jane, he is overwhelmed with emotions: "call me worthless old Henchard...I see you have another—a real father in my place. Then you know all; but don't give all your thought to him! Do ye save a little room for me!" (*TMC* 339). It shows a deeply persistent Henchard who could elicit only this response:

I could have loved you always—I would have gladly...But how can I when I know you have deceived me so—so bitterly deceived me! You persuaded me that my father was not my father—allowed me to live on in ignorance of the truth for years,...my...real father, came to find me, cruelly sent him away with a wicked invention of my death, which nearly broke his heart. I love as I once did a man who has served us like this!" (239)

None in Casterbridge is worried over Henchard's absence. After a weak of her marriage, Elizabeth comes across a dead goldfinch and thinks it to be a gift of Henchard as a token of his repentance. Elizabeth begs Farfrae to find out the whereabouts of Henchard. They search and could not find him. Finally when they do find it is all over. Abel Whittle informs those, that



Henchard is dead for half-an-hour now. On a piece of paper, they find Henchard – the man of Character, who has punished himself more than God could do, telling them what not to do:

“That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me.

& that I be not bury'd in consecrated ground,
& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell,
& that nobody is wished to see my dead body,
& that no mourners walk behind me at my funeral,
& that no flours be planted on my grave.
& that no man remember me.
To this I put my name.

MICHAEL HENCHARD” (TMC 346).

R.G. Cox explains in his *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, Michael Henchard dies a proud and lonely death. “There is grandeur of conception about this shrewd, proud, illiterate, primitive nature, which even Mr. Hardy has yet painted for us in that strong and nervous school of delineation in which he excels so much”. (146-147)

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