

MA ENGLISH  
SEMESTER II  
PAPER IV  
FICTION  
THOMAS HARDY'S  
THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

-By Dr. Yogita Lonare  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Durga Mahavidhyalaya  
Raipur,(C.G.)  
Date – 12/08/2023

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR:**

Thomas Hardy was born on 2nd June 1840 in . Both his maternal grandmother Betty and his mother, Jemima, were notable and purposeful women with vigorous and lively minds, and from them Hardy drew his keen sensitivity and his tenacious intellectual curiosity. But in depth of character and especially in his quiet, unassuming determination, he seems more to have resembled his father, also Thomas Hardy, a builder by trade, who had inherited a genius and passion for music. After initial schooling in Lower Bockhampton, Hardy was transferred at the age of ten.

Though his first completed novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, proved to be too radical for publication. But in 1870, on the advice of George Meredith acting as a reader for the publisher Macmillan, he produced a sensational novel entitled *Desperate Remedies*, published by William Tinsley in 1871.

Hardy's second novel *Under the Greenwood Tree*, based upon the Hardy family experiences in the Stinsford Quire. Stephen commissioned *Far from the Madding Crowd* which, with quite strong editorial intervention, became a bestseller, allowing Hardy to abandon architecture, marry Emma Gifford, and become a full-time writer. However once united in matrimony – as so often the case in Hardy's fiction – the couple, who remained childless, became increasingly estranged and unhappy with each other. Hardy gradually excluded Emma from his professional life, and as his reputation as a novelist became more secure he sought solace elsewhere. Again as might be predicted from his fiction, Emma's sudden and unexpected death in 1912 at the age of 72 precipitated an intense outpouring of lyrical poetry – Hardy loving the woman dead and buried as he had never loved her in life.

*Laodicean* (1881), *Two on a Tower* (1882) and *The Well-Beloved* (1897) being generally regarded as more minor works; whilst the significantly autobiographical *The Return of the Native* (1878) is grouped with the major works of his maturity – *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). The latter three books which dealt with marriage, divorce and the hypocrisy of late Victorian attitudes towards women were described by Hardy as novels 'addressed by a man to men and women of full age'. Thus the Victorian novelist became a twentieth-century poet, publishing eight volumes of verse containing more than nine-hundred poems over a thirty year period, commencing with *Wessex Poems* in 1898.

*Wessex Poems* contained poetry written from Hardy's time in London onwards, including the poetry generated by the break-up of his relationship with Eliza Nicholls. *Poems of Past and Present* (1902) was, as the title implies, a mixture of old and new verse – of particular note is a section entitled 'War Poems', generated by Hardy's deep distress at the horrors of the Boer War. These poems were to prove strongly influential on the next generation of poets – the young men sent to the trenches of the Great War. For most of the first decade of the twentieth-century Hardy was engaged on what he regarded as his magnum opus – *The Dynasts* – an epic verse drama of the Napoleonic wars. Neither critics nor the general public have yet to share his enthusiasm for this immense work, with some readers troubled by the paradox of a man who abhorred war and spoke out publicly against cruelty to any living creature spending so much energy and enthusiasm on writing in detail about a military campaign. Hardy, however, stressed that as a true poet his works should be regarded as no more than 'a series of seemings' and that, at his most consistent, he could offer no more than a 'tentative philosophy' of life. The

horrors of the Great War were to dent his belief in a 'pessimistic meliorism' based upon 'loving-kindness', but he proved himself a survivor, visiting German prisoners-of-war in their compound at Poundbury and continuing to campaign against cruelty to animals, the innocent victims of man's inhumanity to man.

The Great War concluded, Hardy, who had received the Order of Merit in 1910 became the Grand Old Man of English Letters, visited at Max Gate in 1923 by Edward Prince of Wales, and befriended by the neo-Georgian literati. Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Virginia Woolf all made their way to Dorchester, and T.E. Lawrence, based at Bovington Camp, was a regular visitor. Hardy took all this in his stride, continuing to pursue a regular daily writing routine in the solitary confinement of his study until the last days of his life, the output of which was a further six volumes of poetry. Academic honours arrived in rapid succession - honorary doctorates from the universities of Aberdeen, Cambridge, and Oxford, and honorary fellowships from Magdalene College, Cambridge, and Queen's College, Oxford. Hardy died at Max Gate on the evening of 11th January 1928.

### **MCQs:**

1. At the beginning of the novel what is Michael Henchard's occupation?

Ans. hay-trusser

2. To whom does Henchard sell his wife?

Ans. A Sailor

3. The morning after selling his wife what pledge does Henchard make?

Ans. Not to drink for a period of 21 years

4. Upon arriving in Casterbridge, where does Susan Henchard predict that she and Elizabeth Jane will find Henchard?

Ans. In the stocks

5. Why does Susan insist on keeping hidden the fact that Elizabeth Jane does chores in exchange for a room at the end?

Ans. She fears that news of a daughter's duties will reach the mayor and bring shame on him

6. In a letter written on her death bed what does Susan confess to her husband?

Ans. Elizabeth Jane is not his daughter but rather the child of the sailor to whom he sold them

7. Why doesn't Henchard agree to remarry Susan rather than pursue his affair with Lucetta ?

Ans. He believes that honoring his duties to his first wife is the best thing to do.

8. Why does Henchard retract his demand that Farfrae no longer court Elizabeth Jane?

Ans. After learning the truth about her parentage Farfrae loses his affection for Elizabeth Jane and hopes that Farfrae will marry and take her away.

9. Who had enjoyed arranging to hire him as his business manager before meeting Farfrae?

Ans. Joshua Jopp

10. How does Henchard deal with Abel Whittle's failure to report to work on time?

Ans. He humiliates the man by sending Whittle into the fields without his pants.

11. How is the "day of public rejoicing" that Henchard arranges thwarted?

Ans. It rains

12. Why does Henchard take such a strong and immediate liking to Donald Farfrae?

Ans. Farfrae shares with Henchard a technique that makes ruined grains usable ?

13. What is the name of Lucetta's Templeman's estate?

Ans. High-place Hall

14. What ulterior motive prompts Lucetta to invite Eraser to live with her?

Ans. She hopes Elizabeth Jane will ensure frequent visits from Henchard .

15. Where did Lucetta live before moving to Casterbridge?

Ans. Jersey

16. How does Lucetta react when Henchard demands that she end her affair with Farfrae in order to marry him?

Ans. She tells him that she will love whomever she chooses.

17. What is Farfrae's initial reaction when asked to be mayor of Casterbridge?

Ans. He worries that he is too young for this position.

18. What is the name of the ceremony the town people perform to shame Lucetta?

Ans. A Skimmity-ride

19. Who cares for Henchard in his dying days?

Ans. Abel Whittle

20. What event causes Elizabeth Jane to sever her ties with Henchard?

Ans. She discovers that Henchard stopped her from meeting her biological father by falsely reporting her death.

21. How does Lucetta react to the town people's attempt to shame her?

Ans. She has an epileptic fit and dies.

22. How many guineas does Henchard sell his wife and child for?

Ans. 5

23. What's the name of Michael Henchard's daughter?

Ans. Elizabeth Jane

24. To what biblical figure does Henchard compare himself in his suffering?

Ans. Cain

25. What town does Henchard head towards after giving up on the search for his family?

Ans. Casterbridge

26. How old is Henchard when the novel opens?

Ans .21

27. At which restaurant Elizabeth Jane serves as a waitress to lower the cost of the room?

Ans. The kings arms

28. Where does Michael go after unsuccessfully searching for Susan and Elizabeth Jane?

Ans. Casterbridge

### **SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

1. What is the main theme of “The Mayor of Casterbridge”?

Ans. The theme of “The Mayor of Casterbridge” appears to be the arbitrary and almost always malign workings of the universe and blind chance upon the destinies of me.

2. What is the short summary of “The Mayor of Casterbridge”?



Ans. The novel tells of the rise and fall of Michael Henchard, who, starting from nothing after abandoning his wife and daughter, gains prosperity and respect and is reunited with his family only to lose everything through his own wrong-headedness, his vengeful nature, and a spate of bad luck.

3. Who is the real hero of “The Mayor of Casterbridge”?

Ans. The correct answer is Henchard. “The Mayor of Casterbridge” is one of Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels. Wessex was a fictional place that Hardy created in his novels.

4. What is the main theme of the story?

Ans. The term theme can be defined as the underlying meaning of a story. It is the message the writer is trying to convey through the story. Often the theme of a story is a broad message about life. The theme of a story is important because a story's theme is part of the reason why the author wrote the story.

5. What is the primary theme of the story?

Ans. A literary theme is the main idea or underlying meaning a writer explores in a novel, short story, or other literary work. The theme of a story

can be conveyed using characters, setting, dialogue, plot, or a combination of all of these elements.

6. What is the moral lesson of “The Mayor of Casterbridge”?

Ans. As a “Story of a Man of Character,” “The Mayor of Casterbridge” focuses on how its protagonist's qualities enable him to endure. One tends to think of character, especially in terms of a “Man of Character,” as the product of such values as honor and moral righteousness.

7. What are the three symbols in “The Mayor of Casterbridge”?

Ans. The Caged Goldfinch... In an act of contrition, Henchard visits Elizabeth-Jane on her wedding day, carrying the gift of a caged goldfinch. The Bull. ..The bull that chases down Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane stands as a symbol of the brute forces that threaten human life. ...The Collision of the Wagons.

8. What kind of a tragedy is “The Mayor of Casterbridge”?

Ans. In "The Mayor of Casterbridge", Hardy creates "the most valid and meaningful modern revival and adaptation" of an Aristotelian tragedy. Hardy combines the elements of plot and the presence of a tragic hero to induce a cathartic experience at the end of the novel.

9. What are the themes and symbols in “The Mayor of Casterbridge”?

Ans. Self-Destruction. Throughout the novel, protagonist Michael Henchard makes decisions while drunk, angry, proud, or jealous. ...

Familial and Romantic Love. ...

Loyalty to Duty and Commitments. ...

Humans and Nature. ...

The Past and Forgiveness. ...

10. What is the tragic flaw of Henchard?

Ans, He is presented with certain admirable qualities such as his overbearing generosity coupled with his staunch integrity. However, his tragic flaw, being his volatile and domineering personality completely governed by his emotions, his overwhelming pride, and his fierce temper begin to get the better of him.

### **Henchard as a Tragic Hero:**

Tragic hero refers to such a protagonist who continually suffers the tragic consequences despite of all his works, words or conducts pursued. Henchard was hubris' victim and as such it became the root cause of some of the tragedies to

become part of Henchard's biography. Besides there were other factors responsible for his life's tragedies .

Henchard in a downtrodden drunken state sells off his wife and daughter Susan and Elizabeth-Jane respectively to a sailor Newson for 5 Guineas. As it's said the importance of air is felt in its absence only; he, by the time could realize his mistake a tragedy was encrypted to his biography with he left with no family.

After a tragic start Henchard becomes the mayor of a town named Casterbridge but being pretty unsuccessful in his business he hires an honourable Scotchman named Donald Farfrae as his manager who not just helps him boost his business but also becomes his close friend. But the growing fame of Farfrae and his negligence by the people of the town becomes a cause of jealousy for Henchard and he begins despising his own manager and a dear friend thus yielding a tragic consequence of his firing Farfrae and not just losing a good manager and friend but also provoking another tragic incidence in his life; consequence of which he suffers later on in the form of Farfrae's becoming his business rival with more better skills than himself.

Another tragedy surpasses Henchard in the form of death of his re-courted wife Susan whom he got back again after a long span. Moreover her letter provokes Henchard to add up another tragic incidence for himself. Susan leaves off a note revealing Elizabeth-Jane's anagnosis of being Newson's daughter. This revelation turns astound Henchard indignant towards Elizabeth-Jane thus making her and own self estranged and alone respectively.

Henchard after his insolvency begins to live alone in small place; Elizabeth-Jane after Lucetta's marriage leaves their house and Henchard reconciles her with both living up together. But again he's overtaken by the tragedy in the form of Newson's return and enquiring about Elizabeth-Jane whom he fibs/lies of being dead as well.

But ere Elizabeth's marriage he turn up again asking her to meet him through anonymous letter. Realizing the truth contained in the future Henchard leaves her and the town. Later on he's even despised off by her daughter who became well aware of the ultimate truth when he comes with a congratulatory present on her marriage with Farfrae. Traumatically distressed Henchard returns back and just before half an hour of Farfrae's arrival he meets his tragic climax

Thus despite of all his temporary and fragile happiness Henchard receives ultimately leads him to add up to the previous mishap that occurred either of his misfortune or misdeeds. Throughout his life span, from his becoming mayor to his distressed decease, was the aftermath of his intimate and integral part of life called tragedy. Henceforth it can be fairly concluded that Henchard was a tragic hero.

## **A note on different themes in "The Mayor of Casterbridge".**

Ans. The value of a good name is abundantly clear within the first few chapters of the novel. As Henchard wakes to find that the sale of his wife was not a dream or a drunken hallucination. His first concern is to remember whether he diverged his name to anyone during the course of the previous evening. All the while Susan warns Elizabeth of the need for discretion at the Three Mariners Inn -- their respectability could be jeopardized if anyone discovered that Henchard's family performed chores as payment for lodging.

The importance of a solid reputation and character is rather obvious given Henchard's situation, for Henchard has little else besides his name. He arrives in Casterbridge with nothing more than the implements of the Hay-trussers trade. Throughout the course of the novel Henchard attempts to earn or to believe that he has earned his position please. However he is plagued by a conviction of his own wordlessness and he places himself in situations that can only result in failure. For instance, he indulges in petty jealousy of Farfrae, which leads to a drawn out competition in which Henchard loses his position as mayor, his business, entertainment he loves. More crucial, Henchard's actions result in the loss of his name and his deputation as a worthy and honorable citizen. When she has lost these essentials, he follows the same course towards the death of Lucetta whose demise is seemingly precipitated by the irretrievable loss of respectability brought about by the "skimmity-ride".

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a novel haunted by the past. Henchard's fateful decision to sell his wife and child at Weydon -Priors continues to shape his life 18 years later, while the town itself rests in its former incarnation.

Henchard's past proves no indomitable. indeed his banks the entirety of the novel attempting to right the wrongs of long ago. Succeeds only in making grievous mistakes but he never fails to acknowledge that the past cannot be worried or denied.