



Individual Will Versus Imminent Will: A Study of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Caster Bridge*

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Abstract

The Mayor of Caster Bridge is a powerful artistic rendering of Hardy's philosophy of role of chance and fate. It illustrates beautifully how there exists a conflict between an individual's will and imminent will. There is a bitter conflict and the outcome of this clash is the tragedy of a number of major as well as of minor characters in Hardy's fiction. An individual thinks that he or she can do anything, but the role of chance and fate is so powerful that it prevents all the happenings according to an individual's will.

Article

If the first half of the nineteenth century is recognized by the humorous and satirical novels of Charles Dickens, undoubtedly the second half is determined by Thomas Hardy and his typical philosophy and architectural skills translated in the form of his fictional works.

So, whether it is Bathsheba or Tess, Jude or Henchard, their personalities are architecturally gigantic and thematically domineering to the extent that when pitted against the vast immensity of indifferent and callous nature or environment, they appear insignificant and small. Consequently, these heroes and heroines of Hardy are crushed to uphold the invincible power of the supreme will along with emphasizing the malignity of fate and human destiny.

In other words, every novel of Hardy in general and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in particular, is an artistic rendering the central

conflict between an individual's will and supreme will, or what David Cecil rightly calls as "an interplay between the characters and environment."¹ There is death of the hero and the heroine which constitutes the crux of the central thematic vision of the Hardy's novels.

The Mayor of the Casterbridge explores a poignant story of Weydon fair where the fair makes the fair foul and abhorrent. It illustrates the story of a poor hay-trusser, Michael Henchard who sells his beautiful wife, Susan, in bidding in the fit of drunkardness to a young sailor, Newson in five shillings that causes a stir in the crowd. Before her parting from her husband, Susan flung her wedding ring which Henchard finds next morning and he realizes his shameful act of last night. He swears that for the span of thirty one years to come, he will never touch any intoxicant.

This oath would mean a spiritual purgation, a look within, a self-introspection to purge himself for his shameful act in the fit of drunkardness. Weeks rolled on, months passed, years elapsed, but he found down in some distant part of the Wessex society. The sailor Richard Newson and Mrs. Newson Jane enjoyed a conjugal lifewith their daughter, Elizabethan Jane. Chance and fate play a prominent role in Newson's life as he is reported to be drowned and dead, and the widow with her daughter come in search of



Michael Henchard who rises from a hay trusser to the Mayor of Casterbridge with his hard labour.

Susan is informed of this fact, and finds Henchard busy at dinner party. He is now a man of principles, a big prosperous corn dealer, a pillar of the town. This is also a matter of chance that he gets Farfrae, a Scottish youngman's reply when he advertises for the post of a manager of manage the corn business.

In the mean while, Susan meets Henchard, but fears that her living with the mayor openly now would endanger his position as a man of principals and star of the town. Henchard wants to make amends to Susan. To do so, he thinks of remarrying Susan, because without this she might not agree to live with him as his wife. In order to executive this plan and consists frequently to them so that he could give the society an impression of this decision to marry Susan. And in the due course of time, both remarry and start living together.

Henchard comes across of this fact that Elizabeth was Newson's daughter and not his, and his own daughter had died three months after the sale his behaviour towards Elizabeth changes as he scolds and criticizes her and feels a real distaste for this girl, and she goes to live with Lucetta at high place Hall without knowing the relationship between Henchard and Lucetta.

In this way, The Mayor of Casebridge is a powerful and electrifying illustration of this interplay between man and his environment, or what Dorothy, Van-Ghent rightly calls, "the interaction between the character and fate in which the role of chance and fate is a dominant factor in a individual's life."²

Henchard finds himself in bewilderment and writes about his inability to

marry her. Elizabeth Jane is mad with joy when he gets the company of Farfrae, but the people of the society started making a comparison between Henchard and Farfrae. Henchard his he has revealed his top most secret of his business, and even fate also favour farfae as whatever he touches, he prospers in Role of chance and fater also plays its vital role as its brings decline and total falling Henchard's character moreover, the secret of his marriage Susan is known by Lucetta which is a belt from for Susan who is seriously ill and dies. David elaborates this view when he asserts that chance and fate play a powerful role in man's destiny It is this chance and fate that contributes to all the happenings and misfortunes, tensions and conflicts, struggle and defeat of human beings in life course which is central to the philosophy of Thomas Hardy. It is the concept of supreme will vis-a-vis individual's will which are invariable and at leggerhood and opposed to each other as David Cecil points out : "A struggle between man on the oe hand and on the other, an omnipotent and indifferent fate-that is Hardy's Interpretation of human life."³

After Susan's death, Henchard's disappointment multiplies apart from the decline of his name and fame as farfrae a his revival in business has over taken him chance and fate play its powerful role as the presence of Newson is revealed. Luce his requested Henchard for marriage, but finding his reluctant attitude, she prefers to marry farfrae. Now, farfrae, who was Henchard's rival in business, also a rival in law. Moreover, Henchard's grain's destroyed by heavy rain. Henchard, being frustrated, goes to incetta who deserts him badly. In this way, the immanent will is working against Henchard. Newson snatches away Elizabethan and makes Henchard a lonely and disappointed man. He



is deeply shocked when she hears how Henchard has tricked Newson into believing that she is dead.

Henchard has a strong desire to meet Elizabeth when he comes to know of her marriage with Farfrae but once again destiny is hard upon him as he meets Elizabeth, she treats him very indifferently. But after a period of time, she comes to know from Abel Whittle about Henchard's death and with his death, the task of immanent will is complete, the victim is completely overtaken and destroyed.

In this way, Thomas Hardy has presented a very tragic view of life and he seems to share Shakespeare's vision of King Lear, where Lear says :

"As flies to wanton boys are we to God;

They kill us for their sport."

However, the philosophical vision of Hardy will not be completely discussed and understood without understanding the omnipotent role of the cosmic forces of nature translated in terms of fate of man that thematically justifies the reappearance of Newson a man who is responsible for the final tragedy of all the characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is not the tragedy of a simple arithmetic equation of the rise and fall of

human beings within a given socio-cultural and psycho-spiritual complex; rather in the tragic death of a few characters. There is a powerful illustration of Hardy's central philosophy as a novelist where the human life is depicted as an inevitable and inherently doomed out of what after the death of Michael Henchard when she says:

"Happiness is, but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain and suffering."⁴

References:

- [1.] Davia Cecil, *The world of Thomas Hardy*, (Hutchinson University, Library, London, 1968) p. 57.
- [2.] Dorothy-Van-Ghent on *The Mayor Of Casterbridge* in Hardy A collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert J. Gueard (Englewood cliff : Prentice Hall, 1963) p. 80.
- [3.] David Cecil, *The world of Thomas Hardy* (Hutchinson University, Library, London, 1968)p. 68.
- [4.] Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (London : Macmillan, 1962) p. 387.