

Block

2

THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

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THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE:

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Block 2 of the English Honours course BEGC-110 (British Literature: 19th Century)

This Block is devoted to a very interesting novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy. You may find the language of the novel a bit difficult in places but with a little patience you're sure to enjoy reading it.

In **Unit 1** we have provided you with an introduction to the novel as well as a background to the Victorian age during which the novel was written.

In **Unit 2** we have given you a detailed chapter-by-chapter summary of the novel. This is, however, not a substitute for reading the actual novel, so please get your copies of the novel and start reading it.

In **Unit 3** we have analysed certain important aspects of the novel like language and style and the novel as a tragedy.

In **Unit 4** we have taken up the important characters of the novel.

Hope you enjoy going through this Block.

UNIT 1 *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*: INTRODUCTION

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Victorian Age: Background
- 1.3 Thomas Hardy: Life and Works
- 1.4 Opening Observations
 - 1.4.1 The Publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*
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 - 1.6.3 Role of Fate or Chance
- 1.7 Glossary
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall introduce you to Thomas Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. After you have read the Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- understand the Victorian age
- talk about Hardy's life and works
- assess the importance of the opening chapters of the novel
- outline the plot of the novel
- recognize the themes of the novel.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a nineteenth century English novel. It belongs to a different culture, a different age. Many of us may not have much knowledge of either English culture or nineteenth century England. So we may require some help with the difficulties that might arise, because of these factors. It is for this reason that we are with you throughout the novel,

which we have summarized in the next Unit for you. This summary should in no way be a substitute for reading the complete novel. Therefore, please get the novel and read it. This is absolutely essential and you will not be able to clear your exam unless you have read the novel. So no short-cuts please. You will find the discussions in these units much more meaningful if you read the novel first.

1.2 VICTORIAN AGE: BACKGROUND

Now get ready for a swift tour of the Victorian age and the early twentieth century. Victorian age, the period signifying the reign of Queen Victoria from her accession in 1837 to her death in 1901, was an age of contradictions. On the one hand, it was a period of incredible economic expansion and rapid change. Britain had become the mistress of sea and land, and its capital London had become the first urban capital of the world, the first metropolis. An urban economy based on manufacturing, international trade and financial institutions boomed, and the lay of the land changed with a rapidly enlarging city. Transport and communication facilities improved tremendously and distances shrank. England had become the workshop of the world, the world's banker as well as the world's policeman.

But on the other hand, it was also an age of paradoxes and uncertainties. The success of the nation reached its pinnacle and then began to wane. By the end of the 19th century, the euphoria, optimism and positivism of the earlier decades started dwindling to be replaced by doubts, skepticism and even pessimism. The gulf between the haves and the have-nots had widened. The traditional villages and towns observed a depletion of population as London and other industrial cities burst at the seams with people gathering there from all over. The phenomenon resulted in the emergence of a new suburbia, with slums and rookeries. Crime rate accelerated. A series of social reforms were initiated trying to address the problems and issues.

Ideologically too, the Victorian age sent contradictory signals. While religious and philanthropic movements gathered momentum, the very basis of belief systems crumbled. The concept of creation was questioned following the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. While family values were lauded and practiced, Queen Victoria herself towering as the emblem of customary domestic values, a bohemian life style started making its presence felt towards the end of the 19th century. These changes are apparent when we survey the literature of the times. Browning, one of the preeminent poets of the Victorian era had deemed that "God's in his Heaven/All's right with the world!" at the heyday of the Victorian period; but pangs of doubt trouble a pessimistic Matthew Arnold three decades later, who sees the present world as "a darkling plain /Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night." The world was slowly turning rudderless, with doubt and despair climaxing in the literature of the times. This was the world inhabited by Hardy.

1.3 THOMAS HARDY: LIFE AND WORKS

Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June, 1840 in the village of Higher Bockhampton in the county of Dorset, one of the poorest and backward

rural counties of England remaining unchanged for centuries. His father, also named Thomas, was a stonemason, builder and a fiddler who used to play in the local parish choir. His mother Jemima was the true guiding star of his life who, though, a housemaid and a cook before her marriage, was an avid reader of literary books. Hardy inherited his musicality from his father and his love for books from his mother. It is said that Hardy loved solitude and drew his impulses from the natural world around him. He received his schooling first from National school in Bockhampton and later at Mr. Last's Academy in Dorchester, a non-conformist school. Though he showed great academic potential, his formal education came to an end at the age of 16, when he was apprenticed to a local architect, John Hicks.

During his tenure there he came across the Dorchester poet William Barnes who influenced him to write nature poems and Horace Moule, a scholar who encouraged him to read Greek tragedies and contemporary English literature. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* had a profound influence on him. He read avidly and started writing novels and poetry which highlighted his concerns which he had gleaned from reading and observation, and foreshadowed the themes of his later prose fiction. Disillusioned with traditional Christianity, Hardy became more and more aware of human misery and loneliness. His fatalism stemmed from the hard realisation of an uncaring universe and the role of chance in human life. Disenchanted by London, Hardy returned to his native Bockhampton in 1867, worked for a while as an architect and then gave up his job to pursue a full time career as a writer.

His first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* was not published, and the next one *Desperate Remedies* was published anonymously. *Under the Greenwood Tree*, which followed, was favourably received, as was *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. *Far From the Madding Crowd* gained public notice and brought him financial success which was repeated by *The Return of the Native*. In the meanwhile Hardy, who had experienced several rejections from women, fell in love with Emma Lavinia Gifford, a Cornish lady, and married her. It is believed that *A Pair of Blue Eyes* was inspired largely by their courtship. They settled at Max Gate, a large Mid-Victorian villa, which Hardy had designed himself, which he considered his 'country retreat' – and this became his permanent abode. Though the couple had a happy and contented life, and shared several passions like travelling and cycling, as years passed, Emma grew estranged from her husband mainly due to the content of his fictional writings and his romantic attachments to artistic young ladies. Lack of offspring might have also been a reason for this. Though *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders* and other novels had gathered popular as well as critical acclaim, Hardy's last and greatest fictional works *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) shocked, dismayed and outraged the Victorian public with their subject matter. Considered too pessimistic, they accused Hardy of being too preoccupied with sex. Decried as 'Jude the Obscene' the hue and cry created by his last novel disturbed Hardy and made him give up writing novels altogether and return to his first love, poetry. Hardy considered poetry to be, "the heart of literature". In 1898 he published the Wessex Poems. Wessex is Hardy's fictional universe.

Strongly identifying himself and his work with Dorset, Hardy borrowed the name of the old Anglo-Saxon kingdom, coined the names of villages

and towns to represent actual places and even provided a map of the area. His novels were called Wessex novels and turning to poetry, he continued in the same vein. His greatest poems were written after the sudden death of his wife Emma in 1912. They are considered to be the “finest and strangest celebrations of the dead in English poetry”, according to the Hardy biographer Claire Tomalin. Shortly after Emma’s death, Hardy married Florence Dugdale, his secretary, who was forty years his junior. But he remained remorseful of Emma’s death. By this time, Hardy’s literary authority was acknowledged beyond dispute. A very prolific writer, he has written 14 novels, two plays, more than 40 short stories and over 900 poems.

Hardy was visited by several writers at Max Gate and he exercised tremendous influence on writers like James Barrie, Rudyard Kipling, G B Shaw, Virginia Woolf and many others. After his 87th birthday, Hardy grew weaker and he became ill with pleurisy. He died on 11 January, 1928 and had two simultaneous funerals. His body was cremated and ashes deposited in the Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey, while his heart was buried alongside Emma in Stinsford Churchyard in Dorchester.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) What is the imaginary fictional world created by Hardy? What is it named after?

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- ii) Which were the works that brought notoriety to Hardy

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- iii) What is the major philosophical tone of Hardy’s works?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.)

1.4 OPENING OBSERVATIONS

In this section let us discuss when and how *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was first published; how it is different from Hardy’s other novels and what kind

of novel it is. This background information will help us to understand the succeeding topics better.

1.4.1 The Publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

The Mayor of Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character, Hardy's eighth novel, was published in two volumes in 1886. It first appeared in serial form in a journal called *The Graphic* (1885). Most nineteenth century English novels were first published in serial form. This convention dictated the way the events were structured. As the story appeared in installments, it was important for the novelist to maintain the reader's interest in what would happen next. This is very similar to the serials we watch on television these days. How does each installment of these serials end? Yes, you're right; it does end on a sensational note, at a crucial point when our curiosity has been adequately aroused. And we wait anxiously for the next episode. Hardy was following this convention and when he published this novel in book form, he revised and omitted the unnecessary and sensational passages.

1.4.2 Difference from Hardy's Other Novels

The Mayor of Casterbridge is undoubtedly one of Hardy's most powerful novels. It is also different from Hardy's other novels. In most of Hardy's other novels we find more than one main character. In this novel, we read about the rise and fall in the fortunes of one protagonist who is described as 'the man of character' in the sub-title. It is the tragedy of one man not a group. One character dominates the story from the first page to the last. Secondly, most of Hardy's other novels are set on the timeless **Egdon Heath** but *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is located in the county town of Casterbridge. Casterbridge is the fictional name for Dorchester which is situated in the south-western region of England. This is the area that Hardy popularized as 'Wessex' in his novels. Thirdly, the novel has no dominant love interest as in most of Hardy's other fiction. Henchard's affair with Lucetta is only a minor episode in the scheme of the novel.

1.4.3 What Kind of Novel is *The Mayor of Casterbridge* ?

You will find the clue to this question in the title itself. It is the story of 'a man of character'. *The Mayor of Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character* implies that it is the story of an individual who becomes a mayor. As you read the novel, you notice that throughout there is an examination of the states of mind of the protagonist. We can understand his jealousies, his frustrations and his deep despair and to that extent the novel can be called psychological. But it is also social. It focuses on the individual in relation to society. Henchard has broken social conventions by selling his wife and he must eventually pay for it. The novel also comments on how social change affects human relationships. When he cannot keep pace with the new methods of agriculture, Henchard finds that others like Farfrae bypass him. And finally, the society that had raised him to the position of Mayor ultimately rejects him leaving him destitute and alone.

Though written in the eighteen-eighties, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is set in the middle of the nineteenth century. That was the period immediately preceding the repeal of the Corn Laws. This provides the historical context

of the novel. The story can be said to begin in 1831 and the main events take place from 1850 to 1856 though you will have noticed that the time-span is somewhat blurred. The novel can be seen as historical at one level as it recreates the life of an earlier period. What is important is not the actual dates or historical events but the impact of these events on the lives of the characters in the novel.

The Mayor of Casterbridge can also be read as a regional novel as it is set in a specific area of England with its specific way of life. As we have mentioned the novel is set in Casterbridge which is the fictional name for Dorchester. This county town is situated in 'Wessex', the fictional name that Hardy has given to the south-western region of England. The novel also has the stark quality of Greek tragedy, an aspect that we will discuss in Unit 3. What we wish to point out here is that it is possible to find elements of Greek tragedy, and certain features that allow us to read the novel as psychological, social, historical and regional. The distinctive quality of Hardy's novels is that you can respond to them in all these different ways. Let us keep these points in mind when we read the novel.

1.5 THE START OF THE NOVEL

Please take up the novel and read the first two chapters carefully. It would be helpful to read the chapter first and only then come back to this section after you have made some notes/observations. A useful starting point would be to ask, 'What is Hardy saying?' This will introduce us to the story. But even more important is the question, 'How is Hardy saying it?' This will lead us to examine Hardy's method as a novelist and what techniques he has used to create his effects. But at this point it is important to remember that no single chapter or chapters can be read in isolation from the rest of the novel. Nor can any chapter or chapters be taken as representative of the whole novel. We have to see the part in relation to the larger whole and to assess its place within that overall context.

1.5.1 Opening Paragraph

The novel opens with a detached and objective observation of the precise time and place. But this specific information is somewhat blurred when we are told that 'the scene for that matter being one that might have been matched at almost any spot in any county in England at this time of the year' The tone then becomes similar to that of the traditional story-teller with his 'once upon a time' beginning. From the general and universal opening, Hardy guides us to observe the specific details of Wessex life. We realize that the events that follow could only have taken place within that context and not just anywhere in England. Hardy thus incorporates the method of the traditional story-teller with his sophisticated analysis of social change in nineteenth century England. Don't you think that the technique Hardy has used in the opening scene is almost cinematic? It is as if we are seeing a film which opens with a broad panoramic view of the scene.

1.5.2 Introduction to the Characters

The camera then seems to zoom into focus on the details of each character. At the outset, we see a young man and woman carrying a child, approaching the village of Weydon-Priors. They are also moving towards the events

that will set the action of the novel into motion. For example, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, another of Hardy's novels, opens with a middle-aged man walking on the road. What strikes the reader is the detailed description of the characters and the background. The symbolic significance of the journey becomes apparent only as one reads on.

There is a man and a woman but we are told that there is no interaction between them as they proceed. This, to some extent, prefigures the shape of things to come. The man will continue along the path of life without any real companionship with any other human being. The lonely destiny of the man is quite clear from these opening passages. You must have noticed that the physical characteristics of the man and his wife are described first. We are then given hints of their dominant traits. The man is 'overbearing--even brilliantly quarrelsome' while the woman gives the impression of being meek and tolerant.

1.5.3 Seeds of Tragedy

The little family turns towards Weydon-Priors fair to take some refreshments after the day's long journey. They order a nourishing gruel, locally called furnity. The man has his portion of furnity laced with rum and this affects him. Soon he is intoxicated and decides to put up his wife for sale. (Some readers may find this incident highly improbable, but Hardy had read at least three newspaper reports of wife-selling.) The sale proceeds in much the same way as the auction of horses being conducted outside. But there is a difference. The otherwise meek Susan, the typical submissive wife, displays a flash of spirit and independence when she flings her wedding ring in the man's face. She then departs with the sailor, taking her child with her. Even in the face of humiliation, Susan keeps her dignity.

While negotiations for the sale of Susan are in progress, you will notice that the bizarre drama is interrupted for a brief moment by the advent of a swallow. The little bird flies above the heads of the company assembled in the tent and then flies away. Why does Hardy introduce the bird at this point? By delaying the actual transaction, is Hardy exciting the curiosity of the reader? Or do you think he is providing a symbolic contrast between the carefree life of natural creatures and the hostile oppression inflicted by one human being on another? It is possible that the bird episode performs both these functions. Perhaps this bird motif has some connection with the image of the dead bird in the cage at the end of the novel?

1.5.4 Narrative Voice

Have you been able to identify the voice that is telling the story? Hardy uses a third person narrator who draws our attention to significant details. The narrator does not take us into the minds of the characters and only interprets their mental state from their facial expression. The narrator is not part of the story but he does not efface himself either. Hardy's narrator is intrusive in that he sometimes comments on the action and interprets it for the reader. At other times the narrator makes use of the first person plural---'Neither of our pedestrians had much heart for those things and they looked around for a refreshment tent among the many which dotted the down.' Don't you think that the word 'our' draws us into a shared community of feeling with the narrator '?

1.5.5 Our Response to the Wife-Sale

From your reading of the first two chapters, you must have noted that the action gets off to an immediate start with the wife-sale. Which character did you sympathize with? In the first chapter, you undoubtedly felt for Susan's predicament. But after reading chapter two, how do you feel about Henchard? It is clear that his action is morally wrong but do we condemn him? No. Isn't it surprising that we do not judge him adversely? It might seem as if Hardy is subtly directing our responses and enlarging our moral sympathies.

The first two chapters form a sort of prologue to the main action. The last two chapters form the epilogue. Henchard ends up in exactly the same position that he had originally risen from.

In this section, we have looked at some specific examples of Hardy's narrative technique. The third-person narrator has outlined the background, introduced us to the main character and plunged us straight into the middle of the action. He is also shaping our responses and preparing us for the events to follow. But before we move to the next topic, let us see how well we can do this exercise!

Check Your Progress 2

- i) How is *The Mayor of Casterbridge* different from Hardy's other novels?

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- ii) What is the central event in the first two chapters? Give a brief description of it.

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit)

1.6 PLOT

A plot is the arrangement of events or incidents. It takes into account the ways in which these events or incidents take place. A well-structured plot has no irrelevant incidents. There may be sub-plots but their aim is to help further the main action in the story. A typical plot in a Hardy novel is essentially tragic. The protagonist is destroyed as a result of the series of events that follow a decision that he has taken at some stage in life. It is for this reason that Hardy's characters cannot be said to be puppets in the hands of fate. They are free to choose, even if this freedom is ultimately

meaningless in a universe which is indifferent to human destinies. Even as a child Hardy was aware of this. The fifteen year old Thomas would lie back in the sun with a basket over his head and wish that time would stand still so that he could stay in the same place with the same friends.

1.6.1 The Rise of Henchard

Let us now look at the main incidents of the plot. In a state of intoxication, Michael Henchard, a struggling hay-trusser, sells his wife to a sailor named Newson. His child Elizabeth-Jane goes with her. Immediately afterwards, he regrets his action and vows not to drink for the next twenty-one years. (But as we shall see, this particular incident will return as nemesis or revenge to undo Henchard later in life. This theme of fatality is common to most novels of Hardy.) During this time, he rises, to wealth and power in Casterbridge. Newson is reported drowned so his wife returns with Elizabeth-Jane, eighteen years later, to find Henchard, Mayor of Casterbridge. At the same time, Donald Farfrae, a young Scotsman, arrives in Casterbridge. Upon Henchard's insistence, he agrees to stay on as his manager. A deep friendship develops between the two men. Much as Henchard would like to make amends to his wronged wife, he cannot marry her immediately. The reason for this is that he must first break off the intimate relationship that he had forged some time before, with a woman named Lucetta in Jersey. Eventually Henchard remarries his former wife.

Don't you agree that up to this point Henchard's fortunes have taken a turn for the better?

1.6.2 Henchard's Decline and Downfall

Meanwhile, Henchard is increasingly jealous of Farfrae's growing popularity. He asks him to stop his attentions towards Elizabeth-Jane. Lucetta writes to Henchard to return her letters. He takes them to the coach in which she would be passing Casterbridge, but fails to meet her. Susan dies and Henchard now has the opportunity to tell Elizabeth-Jane that she is his daughter and not the sailor's. But before he can establish a close relationship with his daughter, he discovers his dead wife's letter disclosing the fact that Elizabeth-Jane is Newson's child. Henchard is alone once again. (Hardy explores this theme of isolation of the individual).

Henchard's attitude to Elizabeth-Jane now changes from fatherly concern to harsh indifference. She leaves him to become companion to Lucetta, who has now moved to Casterbridge on hearing of Susan's death. She had hoped to marry Henchard, but falls in love with Farfrae instead. (The triangle in man-woman relationships is a theme that recurs in Hardy's novels. The complication arises from the involvement of two men with one woman). Not only has Henchard lost the woman he coveted, but loses all his wealth when he buys corn on the advice of the weather prophet. The decision to buy the corn was his own and it is for this reason that one cannot lay the blame for his downfall simply on fate or chance. The fatal flaw lies in his character. His social decline begins when the furmity woman of Weydon-Priors fair, recognizes him and reveals his past sale of his wife, to the people of Casterbridge. Bitter and desolate, Henchard further learns that Lucetta and Farfrae are married.

Does it not seem as if everything has turned against Henchard?

Henchard's house and property now belong to Farfrae. (Hardy outlines the theme of the triumph of the new over the old and how material progress affects human relationships). Henchard is now employed by his former employee. His humiliation, it would seem, is complete. But that is not all. Farfrae, now the Mayor, forbids him to meet a Royal Personage when he visits Casterbridge. This results in a fight with Farfrae, but when Henchard has the upper hand, he spares his opponent's life. Henchard entrusts Lucetta's letters to a messenger, who having a grudge against the lady, delivers the letters to a mischievous gathering at Peter's Finger inn at Mixen Lane. They in turn organize a **skimmington-ride** in which they take the images of Henchard and Lucetta in procession across Casterbridge. On seeing her public disgrace, Lucetta falls into a swoon, never to recover.

Elizabeth-Jane returns to care for Henchard but this domestic bliss does not last long. This brief joy in the life of the beleaguered man is short-lived. Newson returns, and Henchard tells him that Elizabeth-Jane is dead. Knowing that his lie will soon be exposed, Henchard leaves Casterbridge. Newson returns and the father and daughter are re-united. Henchard returns with a gift for Elizabeth-Jane on the occasion of her wedding to Farfrae—a bird in a cage—but leaves when she coldly accuses him of deceiving her. Henchard dies soon after, tended only by the half-wit Able Whittle. His body is discovered by Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane. His final heart-rending note saying 'that no man remember me' is a fitting testament to his tragic life.

1.6.3 Role of Fate or Chance

As you have seen, chance and coincidence have a major role to play in Hardy's plot construction. What are the main improbabilities in the plot? Most people would find the wife-sale improbable. Moreover, Newson's return from the dead to destroy Henchard's happiness, is rather improbable and sudden. The fact that Lucetta fails to turn up when Henchard wishes to return her letters and the fact that these same letters fall in the wrong hands, are examples of the workings of chance. The failure of the weather can again be taken as another stroke of bad luck. It is quite a coincidence that the same firmity woman who has witnessed the wife-sale at Weydon-Priors should appear in distant Casterbridge, to recognize and denounce Henchard, who was sitting in judgement on her. The question is not whether these incidents are implausible or not. The point is that these misfortunes continue to hound one man. Is there some malevolent fate contriving to destroy Henchard?

Upon the publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy was afraid that the novel would be criticized as 'improbable'. Why then did Hardy risk such a charge? He did not believe in narrating ordinary or common place stories. He believed that a story must be 'worth the telling' if it is to be told at all. In short, the story must be unusual. It is for this reason that we must not look for strictly 'life-like' incidents. We have to assess the events within the context of the fictional world. You will have noticed that despite its reliance on chance and coincidence the plot is well constructed. Some readers find that Hardy's plot does not give his characters a reasonable chance of survival.

Would you agree with that? We will discuss this in relation to the theme of fatalism and Hardy's technique of characterization in unit 4.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) What is a plot? What is the pattern of a typical Hardy plot?

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- ii) Give some examples of chance and coincidence in the plot.

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.)

1.7 GLOSSARY

Egdon Heath : a name given to several local heaths or areas of flat wasteland covered with shrubs

Rookeries : overcrowded slums of London were known by this name and were the haunts of criminals and prostitutes.(as they were living like crows and rooks, nesting together and filling the surroundings with their hoarse cries

County town : town that has the right to send one or more representatives to parliament

Corn Laws : laws in Britain that were repealed (cancelled) in 1846 to regulate trade in corn

Prologue : introduction to a literary work

Epilogue : last part of a literary work

Nemesis : just punishment for doing wrong: derived from the name Nemesis, the goddess

Skimmington-ride : a procession parading the effigies of disgraced persons: similar to the donkey ride in our culture that parades the disgraced person with a blackened face and a garland of shoes round his neck .

1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit. we have given you:

- an introduction to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.
- a brief overview of Hardy's method as a novelist.
- an outline of the plot.
- the themes of the novel. One of the themes of the novel is the isolation of the individual in a hostile world. Another theme that Hardy explores is that of the complications that arise from the involvement of two men with one woman.

1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Wessex. After the old Anglo-Saxon kingdom.
- ii) *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.
- iii) Fatalism and Pessimism.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is different from Hardy's other novels because it has i) the central interest focused on one character ii) set in a town called Casterbridge, whereas his other novels are set in Egdon Heath and iii) carries no dominant love interest.
- ii) Your answer would focus on the wife-sale with the event leading to it and the possible motives Henchard has in selling his wife.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) A plot is the structure of the story; the ways the event are organized. The typical plot of a Hardy novel is tragic.
- ii) Some examples are: the failure of the weather, the arrival of the furmity seller after twenty-one years and the return of Newson from the dead.

UNIT 2 *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*: SUMMARY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Summary of Chapters 1-10
- 2.3 Summary of Chapters 11-20
- 2.4 Summary of Chapters 21-30
- 2.5 Summary of Chapters 31-45
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim through this Unit is to give you a summary of the novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. But this should in no way be a substitute for reading the complete novel.

By the end of this Unit, you will have a fairly clear idea about the main storyline of the novel and the main events. For the details, you must read the complete novel.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mayor of Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character was written in 1886. It is set in a fictional town Casterbridge which Hardy has based on Dorchester in Dorset, where he had spent his youth. The novel is one of Hardy's so called "Wessex novels" —a name which he coined for the counties of south-west England. He has set a number of his novels in this place.

2.2 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 1-10

Let us now go on to reading the summary of the novel.

Chapter 1

In the first chapter, Thomas Hardy introduces us to three of his main characters who will appear in the novel at different times. The main characters, Michael Henchard, his wife Susan and their infant daughter, Elizabeth, are going to the large village of Weydon, on foot. The wife is carrying their daughter in her arms. Their aloofness from each other is noticeable from the fact that there is no communication between them. We gather that the man, who appears to be aloof and uncommunicative, is a hay-trusser. The wife does not expect any affection from him and is quite indifferent towards him although her manner towards the child is very affectionate. The weary couple is looking for some refreshments and a decent lodge to spend the night.

On reaching the village of Weydon, the scene shifts to a fair ground where horses and sheep are exhibited. There are a lot of refreshment tents and they settle for a furmity- selling tent on the wife's insistence, although the man would have preferred the tent selling beer and ale. The haggish looking woman at the furmity-tent is slyly mixing the drink with rum and the man is quick to notice that. He has many basins of this concoction and is soon quite drunk. The conversation in the tent soon degenerates and, jokingly or otherwise, the hay-trusser offers to sell his wife just like the auctioneer selling the old horses in the field outside. The wife feels very embarrassed and keeps reminding the husband to stop joking but he is too intoxicated to pay any heed to her. He finally settles the price at five guineas. In that charged atmosphere an unknown sailor, standing in the doorway, throws down five British pounds and a few shillings and finally buys the woman along with the daughter. The sobbing wife bids the husband goodbye and saying that she will be better off elsewhere, goes along with her new buyer.

Chapter 2

The second chapter depicts the condition of Michael Henchard when he wakes up the next morning. He remembers the events leading upto the auctioning of his wife. He feels remorseful for his action and wishes to find his wife and daughter. He then finds a church in the village and takes an oath that he would "avoid all strong liquors for the space of twenty-one years to come."

His search, for his wife and daughter proves futile as he does not even know the name of the sailor who had bought his wife. Weeks change into months as he continues his search and at last he arrives at a sea-port where he gets a bit of information that the persons, answering somewhat to his description of his wife and child, had emigrated a little time ago. He gives up his search and travels south westwards till he reaches the town of Casterbridge.

Chapter 3

In this chapter the story is carried forward once again in the village of Weydon-Priors, after a lapse of many years. The reader learns that the young Mrs. Susan Henchard is now an older lady and a widow, as the sailor, Mr. Newson, who had bought her years ago from the first husband, had died at sea and the young daughter, whom the mother had carried in her arms, is now a young lady of eighteen. Susan now calls herself Mrs. Newson and she comes to the village in the hope of getting some information about her first husband, Michael Henchard. She has told her daughter that she is searching for an old relative. She also tells her that it was in this village that she had first met her father as now the young girl considers Newson to be her father. By a strange coincidence, she meets up with the same old lady who had entertained them in her furmity-tent years ago. Susan enquires if she remembers an evening long ago when a man had auctioned his wife. The furmity-woman gives out a big clue that the man in question had come the following year at the same spot and told the furmity-woman privately that if ever a woman asked for him she was to direct her to Casterbridge. Susan tells the daughter that she now has learned where their relative lived.

Chapter 4

This chapter tells the reader about Susan's dilemma whether or not she should tell her daughter Elizabeth Jane the truth about what had happened at the Weydon Fair long ago. She finally chooses to keep it a secret. There is also a description of how Susan has spent her life with Newson in Canada before settling at Falmouth. When a friend of hers ridicules her for accepting her position with Newson, Susan begins to question her relationship with him. Unfortunately, at this time Newson dies at sea.

Susan suddenly realises that their poverty-stricken condition is not letting her daughter develop her full potential. This thought makes her undertake the search for her former husband in Weydon where the furmity-woman mentions the name of Casterbridge. The manner of their journey, and the detailed description of the landscape near Casterbridge, as the duo approach the town, are the main highlights of this chapter. There are references to timber and brick houses, to agricultural and pastoral character of the people, to a grizzled Church with a massive square tower and to the entire quaintness of this primitive borough.

Chapter 5

By a strange quirk of fate, Susan and Elizabeth reach the main hotel in Casterbridge where a town-band is playing and a big crowd has gathered outside. From a bystander Elizabeth comes to know that a great public dinner for renowned people of the town is being hosted with the Mayor presiding over it. The Mayor happens to be none other than Michael Henchard, Susan's former husband, who, for the readers, now emerges after a lapse of more than twenty years. When Susan hears the name of the Mayor, she is transported to the old memories of her young husband. There is talk among the guests about the Mayor being a teetotaler because of an oath he has taken. On the complaint of some guests about the poor quality of wheat, the Mayor promises to appoint a new manager in the corn department.

Chapter 6

As the party and the revelry is progressing in the hotel, a passerby happens to hear Henchard's remark made to his critics complaining of the poor quality of wheat. The passerby writes a note and asks a waiter to hand it to the Mayor and asks him also if there is a less expensive hotel nearby. He then proceeds to a cheaper hotel called the "Three Mariners," as suggested by the waiter. Elizabeth Jane overhears the name of this modest hotel and tells her mother that they could also stay there for the night. Meanwhile the mother has also seen the Mayor. After receiving the note, Henchard also proceeds to the "Three Mariners" to look up the man who had sent him the note.

Chapter 7

Mother and daughter are seen going to the modest hotel and the reader is introduced to the couple who runs this place. Elizabeth offers to carry their meal to their small room and the landlady readily agrees. There is a sound of a bell and Elizabeth is asked by the lady if she could also take the meal to the occupant of the room who rang the bell. She obliges her and in the room sees the man who had given the note to the waiter. As their rooms happen

to be adjacent to each other, with just a thin partition separating them, they overhear some conversation going on in the man's room and learn that he is talking to the Mayor.

They soon gather that the man is one Donald Farfrae and the conversation is about some advertisement put out by the Mayor for a corn –manager. It is soon evident that the man knows a lot about corn and is on his way to America to try his luck in the trade there.

In the course of the conversation, Henchard tells the man about his expertise in hay, about his abstinence from drinks due to an old oath, and he also invites him to have supper with him in the hotel. Henchard also requests him to join his business if he, Farfrae, changes his mind about going to America.

Chapter 8

In this chapter, the mother and daughter are shown to be lost in their thoughts. Susan is inwardly happy to know that Henchard is repentant for having auctioned her years back and is truthful to his oath of abstaining from drinking. Elizabeth is observing the occupants and the scene of the 'Three Mariners' hotel. She finds that Donald Farfrae, the young Scotsman, has joined the guests and is regaling them with his ditties. There is a big applause when he finishes singing and sings again at the request of a woman in the audience. His countenance, conversation and music win the hearts of all present in the hotel. There is also a description of Elizabeth and the Scotsman meeting briefly on the staircase. Apart from introducing Farfrae, Hardy introduces the readers to some members of the lower classes in Casterbridge. These can collectively be referred to as the 'chorus', for, like in a Greek tragedy, they comment on the main characters, provide the humour through their quaint speech and down- to- earth observations, and provide multiple perspectives on the action.

Chapter 9

This chapter describes the approach of autumn in Casterbridge. Susan and Elizabeth watch Henchard and Farfrae walking together, immersed in deep conversation. Susan thinks of the Mayor's sudden liking for the young man and thinks that Henchard might also take a liking to them, his own kin, in an equally warm way. She decides to send Elizabeth with a note to him saying that a sailor's widow is in town to see him. Through Elizabeth, who paces up the High Street with the note, the author gives a detailed account of the high class houses that are ablaze with a variety of flowers at this time of the year. There is a description of the market-scene where yeomen, farmers, dairymen and town folk have come to transact business and Casterbridge seems to be the focus of the surrounding country-life. Elizabeth winds her way up to a store-house and is directed to an office where she comes face to face with the Scotsman. The reader comes to know that the young Scotsman has agreed to stay in Casterbridge to look after Henchard's business

Chapter 10

Before Elizabeth can go in to see Henchard, another man brushes past her. He is someone who has come for the manager's job in response to Henchard's advertisement. As Farfrae has already been offered the job, the

man goes away angrily. Henchard is glad to see the note although the thought of these ladies being imposters crosses his mind. He sends the reply through Elizabeth and also encloses five pounds and a few shillings for Susan— the same amount of money he had auctioned her for. He calls her to meet him at the Amphitheatre in the evening to establish her identity.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) What characteristic traits of Henchard and Susan are highlighted by the incident where he sells his wife after a drinking bout?

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- ii) What is the significance of the modest hotel the 'Three Mariners' in the novel?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.)

2.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 11-20

Chapter 11.

The place of the meeting is carefully chosen by Henchard as it is a very secluded huge circular enclosure. This chapter gives a very vivid description of the Amphitheatre as well as compares Casterbridge to old Rome in every street, alley and precinct. It also suggests an uncanny presence of the ghosts of the past as there stood the town-gallows at one corner where sinister punishments had been meted out to many and perhaps crimes were being perpetrated, unseen, even in these times.

It was here that Henchard meets his former wife, away from the prying eyes, and both talk about their respective lives spent away from each other. He is relieved that the daughter knows nothing about him. He then suggests that they should both stay in Casterbridge in an accommodation to be arranged by him and in due course of time, he would woo the widow, Susan, and marry her. Henchard is glad with his plan which would avoid any suspicion that could jeopardise his status.

Chapter 12

After seeing off Susan, Henchard goes back to the office and sees Farfrae working diligently on the files and books. Henchard, unlike the young

Scotsman, is more an athletic type than a scholarly one. He invites Farfrae to his house and it is not long before he pours out his past life to him sitting near the fire-place. He also mentions a young house-keeper who had nursed him once and their relationship had caused her much misery. Henchard, out of remorse, had proposed to marry her but that is the time when Susan had suddenly reappeared. In this state of dilemma, both he and Farfrae agree that Henchard's duty is more towards his former wife. As far as letting Elizabeth know her father's truth, both the men differ, as Farfrae, unlike Henchard, thinks that the daughter would forgive them both if they told her the truth. Henchard then sends a cheque to the lady he had proposed to marry had Susan not returned.

Chapter 13

After Henchard writes and sends money to the woman in Jersey, explaining the situation arising from the return of his wife, he sets about settling his ex-wife and his daughter, under her name of Mrs. Newson, in a rather lavish and comfortable way. He begins to visit them frequently and soon tongues start wagging. Mrs. Newson's pale countenance and low status is no match for Henchard's position in Casterbridge. Henchard's only concern is to make amends to Susan and to provide a good life for Elizabeth under his supervision. He can thus atone for his past sins.

Everyone, except Donald Farfrae, is surprised at Henchard's choice of a wife. Amongst the people who are critical and vociferous at his choice is the woman who had criticized Henchard in public and another one who had asked for another song from Farfrae in the 'Three Mariners.'

Chapter 14

Henchard is as kind towards Susan as a man, Mayor and churchwarden could possibly be. Susan's life is now filled with joy and Elizabeth begins to bloom with all the abundance of good things that now surround her. But Susan has an innate perception to not overdo things. The idea of changing Elizabeth's name from Newson to Henchard is once broached by her husband but Susan shows some resistance to it. Elizabeth, meanwhile, sees a great camaraderie growing between Henchard and Farfrae. Although the latter has also modernised Henchard's business transactions, Henchard does not let the Scotsman dominate the supervision of the business.

The chapter ends at the point where both Elizabeth and Farfrae come to a granary on Durnover Hill after receiving individual notes from someone to come there. The reader is made to believe that it is some kind of a hoax as no one turns up to meet the both of them. At this meeting Farfrae sings the same song to Elizabeth that he had sung in the 'Three Mariners.'

Chapter 15

This chapter talks of Elizabeth's transformation from a simple girl to one who becomes more conscious of dressing up fashionably. The reader is also made aware of Farfrae's rising popularity in Casterbridge and the author gives instances where Farfrae tries to overrule Henchard's commands. One is when a worker, named Abel Whittle, is reprimanded by Henchard for reporting late for duty nearly every day and is one day woken up by Henchard and asked to proceed for duty half-dressed. Farfrae orders him

to go back and come fully dressed and this is not liked by Henchard. In another instance, a deceased farmer's daughters give preference to Farfrae to evaluate their haystack. Although such misunderstandings are underplayed by Henchard, it is clear that the chinks in their friendship have begun to show and Henchard now regrets having disclosed his life's secret to Farfrae.

Chapter 16

Farfrae clearly has an upper hand in proving to be a better organiser and a more popular figure in Casterbridge than Henchard. During a National event, Farfrae asks Henchard's permission to put up an entertainment programme. Henchard also decides to organise some amusements in an open elevated green spot. Farfrae settles for a tarpaulin-covered arena for his programme. As luck would have it, the weather plays truant and torrential rain spoils Henchard's open amusement park and everyone goes to Farfrae's programme, including Henchard himself and his family. To make matters worse, when Henchard goes and sits in a dimly-lit corner in the pavilion, he overhears lavish praises of his manager whose modern methods of managing the corn business are appreciated. Some other townsmen like Alderman Tubber are quick to point out that Farfrae's abilities would soon overshadow Henchard's.

Chapter 17

After dancing with Farfrae in his pavilion, Elizabeth learns from an acquaintance the inappropriateness of the Mayor's step-daughter dancing in such a mixed throng. She feels embarrassed but soon after, as she moves to the dark and dense avenues, she finds herself face to face with Farfrae who has been following her. He tells her of Henchard's talk of dismissing him from his business. She feels sad at this prospect and once in her room, she feels a loving tenderness towards him. The news of Henchard and Farfrae falling out with each other is soon all over Casterbridge but in a turn of events, the reader is told that rather than leave the place, Farfrae has bought over the corn and hay merchant's business from a third party. Henchard is hurt at this action of his former manager and pleads his case before the friends in the Corporation, who, however, do not respond well as Henchard is becoming increasingly less popular now than ever before.

Henchard, on the rebound, tells Elizabeth not to see or entertain Farfrae and also writes to him to have nothing to do with his daughter. Farfrae decides to stay away, but very soon gets on a collision course with his former friend when their war of prices begins. Farfrae now has an official stall in the corn-market room, to Henchard's utter dismay.

Chapter 18

This chapter gives certain hints to the reader about where the events of the story could lead to. One is a letter from the woman from Jersey with whom Henchard has had a short intimate relationship. She is thankful for his monetary help but now wants that he return all her articles and letters in a packet and preferably deliver them personally, when she is passing in a coach through Casterbridge. He does as he is told but does not find her there.

Another event is the passing away of Susan. Before her death, Susan reveals to Elizabeth that the notes received by her and Farfrae to come to Durnover Barton, were written by her as she wants her to marry Farfrae. She has also written a letter just prior to her death and sealed it with the instruction that this should be opened only on Elizabeth's wedding day.

Chapter 19

After Susan's death, Henchard's foremost impulse is to let Elizabeth know about her real father. After his wife is "dissevered from him by death, his friend Farfrae by estrangement" he could not bear to distance Elizabeth through her ignorance. And so it is not long before he reveals the truth to her in this chapter. He also prepares to report this change in the Casterbridge chronicle. He is glad that Elizabeth readily agrees to this proposal even though the news had initially shaken her. He promises to her to be a good father.

But the bigger twist in the chapter comes when Henchard stumbles upon the letter Susan has sealed and left behind. As the seal has cracked and the letter lay open, Henchard reads it and faces the bitter truth that Elizabeth after all is not his but Newson's real daughter as his own had died three months after he had separated from Susan.

His melancholy mood is described by the author through a comparison with the surroundings of the bypath which he now walks on, along the North Eastern limits of the town and which embodies the mournful phases of Casterbridge. On his return he finds that as Susan thinks him to be her real father, she now wants to address him as 'father' instead of 'Mr. Henchard.'

Chapter 20

Henchard's attitude towards Elizabeth undergoes a sea-change after he learns that she is not his, but Newson's daughter. He becomes her bitterest critic. He resents her doing manual chores around the house. He also hates her handwriting which he says is not in 'ladies' hand. Her use of a particular dialect also irritates him. He also comes to know that she had once waited upon his rival Farfrae, in the 'Three Mariners.'

His resentment of the step-daughter grows to the extent that he now writes to Farfrae to carry on his courtship with her whereas he had objected to it earlier. Once, while visiting her mother's grave, Elizabeth comes across a woman and wants to find out more about her. On another visit she does accost her and narrates her entire life story to the woman except for the part of them being auctioned by the father. The lady offers Elizabeth the job of house-help-cum-companion and tells her that she will soon be shifting to a house called 'High Place Hall.'

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Henchard and Farfrae started their association on a friendly note but what were the reasons that made them grow apart?

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of this Unit)

2.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 21-30

Chapter 21

The detailed and vivid description of 'High Place Hall' is the main content of this chapter. Elizabeth, out of sheer curiosity, is seen standing at a proximity to the house and admiring it. She also sees a pedestrian go up into the house through the arched door but neither of them notice each other. Once back home, she mentions to Henchard about an opportunity she is getting to become more cultivated and he does not object to it. In fact he is somewhat relieved to have her off his hands. She meets her new employer and both fix up six o'clock in the evening when Elizabeth would be leaving her father's house to take up her new job. When Henchard sees her going away with her luggage, he tries to persuade her to stay as he had not realised that her moving out was actually to be so imminent. But she refuses and upon his asking her new address, she spells out the name 'High Place Hall'.

Chapter 22

In this chapter, the complexities of the relations between the lady at 'High Place Hall' and Elizabeth and also between the lady and Henchard are highlighted. The lady in question, whose name is given out as Miss Templeman, turns out to be Lucetta, Henchard's old intimate friend from Jersey. Henchard does not know this till she writes a note to him explaining why she could not meet him earlier while passing through Casterbridge. She is sorry to learn about the demise of his wife and now wishes to make amends for her earlier behaviour.

Henchard finds her ways subtle and worldly-wise when she suggests that he should visit her as a stranger and be introduced anew without Elizabeth knowing about their past relationship.

Lucetta also confides in both Elizabeth and Henchard separately that her present good fortune is inherited from her aunt Templeman, whose name she has now taken and has dropped the name Jersey from her life. As the corn-market is visible from her house, she often spots Henchard there on his business visits. She invites him to her place once and conveniently sends off Elizabeth on an errand to avoid her meeting with the father.

Chapter 23

Lucetta awaits Henchard's arrival but the visitor who is ushered in, is not Henchard. It is Farfrae who has come to see Elizabeth. Farfrae, as desired by Henchard to continue his courtship with Elizabeth, has found it a plausible idea and a way to make amends to Henchard. Little does he realise that instead of finding Elizabeth at her new abode, he would run into the mistress herself. Lucetta, as would seem to the readers, takes an instant liking to him and both have an animated conversation. The conversation 'enkindles' the young Farfrae's enthusiasm and he is quite 'brimming with sentiment,' while Lucetta, whose poverty in the past had met with rejection from society, only longs 'for some ark into which her heart could fly and be

at rest.' When Henchard arrives for his meeting with Lucetta, she feigns a headache and does not see him.

Chapter 24

Lucetta wants Elizabeth to stay with her for longer, now that she does not care for Henchard as much as before. The main past-time of the two ladies is to watch the hustle and bustle in the corn market below. Once when they go to the market, a new-fashioned agricultural implement for sowing seeds is on display. As they examine it curiously, Henchard arrives there and greets Elizabeth who introduces him to Lucetta. Farfare is also examining the implement that had been recommended by him. Lucetta tells Elizabeth that she has already met Farfrae in the morning.

In the course of their conversation at night, Lucetta hints that Elizabeth's step father is distant towards her. She also speaks about how women get themselves into difficult positions for no fault of their own and mentions someone known to her whom her lover had promised to marry, but could not, due to some reasons. Now that the obstacle had been removed, her former lover wishes to come back to her but she no longer wants him as her affections now lie somewhere else. She asks for Elizabeth's opinion in the matter and with a heavy heart Elizabeth realizes that Lucetta is concealing the names from her.

Chapter 25

It is clear by now that Farfrae is the second man in Lucetta's life and Elizabeth stoically resigns to her fate. In this chapter there is an unpleasant exchange of conversation between Henchard and Lucetta and it becomes clear that she is completely indifferent to his proposal of entering his life again. In fact, she finds his remarks rather rude when he hints at her newfound fortune and reminds her of her humble past. Just then she sees the lights of Farfrae's wagon with Farfrae riding a horse besides it and dismisses Henchard. Lucetta now wants to live on her own terms and as for poor Elizabeth, she seems to be just a poor spectator of Lucetta becoming the object of attraction for both her father and Farfrae. She now views everything with equanimity, leaving her future to the will of Heaven.

Chapter 26

The two main themes of the story are developed further in this chapter. The first is the undoubted affection that Lucetta feels for Farfrae. Henchard is desperate to find out if that is the reason for her scorning him and keeping him at a distance. The second is the rising rivalry between Henchard and Farfrae both personally as Lucetta's suitors, as well as professionally. To show Farfrae down, Henchard employs Jopp, who had earlier lost the job that Farfrae had got from Henchard, although Elizabeth warns him about Jopp's dubious character. Henchard's misfortunes begin to mount. He buys corn on the advice of a weather-prophet nick-named 'Wide-Ho', but when the weather fails, he loses everything. Most of his property and vast stores of produce, are now the possessions of his bankers.

Chapter 27

Farfrae appears to be a shrewder businessman than Henchard and knows the tricks of the trade of buying and selling. While Farfrae is striking gold in the market, Henchard is facing huge losses.

The chapter also describes a scene where Henchard's and Farfrae's hay-laden wagons cross each other and Henchard's over laden wagon topples over. He is quick to accuse Farfrae's waggoneer for the accident but is surprised to find that Lucetta and Elizabeth, who are both a witness to the scene, take up Farfrae's side. He is further perturbed to see both Lucetta and Farfrae together in a lonely, dim-lit lane. Later he forces his way into her quarters and again asks her to marry him. After she refuses, he blackmails her by threatening to reveal their intimacy. Henchard proposes again, this time in Elizabeth's presence, saying that this would leave Farfrae free to belong to Elizabeth. Elizabeth is quite intrigued by the familiarity between her father and Lucetta .

Chapter 28

This chapter serves the purpose of bringing in a bit of slapstick humour in the otherwise gloomy chronicle of the novel. By a strange coincidence, the furmity-woman who had witnessed the wife-sale twenty years ago appears on trial before Henchard, who is still the magistrate. She reveals his secret thus escalating his degradation in the eyes of Casterbridge society. The past will find you out, seems to be the implicit comment here. The exchange between Stubberd, the constable, and the furmity-seller are among some of the more hilarious scenes in the novel. Lucetta comes to know about the case and the reality of Henchard selling his wife long ago. She feels miserable to learn about Henchard's real character.

Chapter 29

This chapter describes a dramatic and adventurous situation in very vivid and minutely observed details. Out for a walk, Lucetta and Elizabeth are chased by a savage bull. They hide in a barn to escape the bull, but the bull charges into the barn after them. Henchard manages to save both of them and when Lucetta thanks him, he tells her that she could return his favour by letting his biggest creditor, Grower, know that she will be marrying him secretly in a fortnight as this would give Henchard a breather before he can face Grower. Lucetta firmly refuses to do this and the startling reason is that Grower is a witness to her marriage with Farfrae. She explains that the reason for this hasty marriage to Farfrae was that she would not have felt secure had she married Henchard as he had sold his wife once and also since she loved Farfrae she did not want to wait too long lest Henchard reveal the secret of their past intimate relationship to Farfrae. She, however, offers to lend Henchard money to tide over the perilous fortnight.

Chapter 30

Henchard now comes to know the true character of Lucetta and is livid with anger, refusing her monetary help. Meanwhile Farfrae gives short notice to his landlady and moves to Lucetta's house. Next step is to inform Elizabeth about this marriage and when the sounds of a band and revelry reach Elizabeth's ears, she wants to know what the commotion is all about. Lucetta reminds her of the story she narrated of a woman caught between her two lovers and Elizabeth, seeing the ring on Lucetta's finger assumes that she has married Henchard. When she learns the truth, she does not take to this impropriety kindly. Lucetta's real character is revealed to her too and she

immediately decides to leave and take up new lodgings. She examines her means of subsistence and moves to the same street where Henchard lives.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) What type of a person is Lucetta? Give examples to support your answer.

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- ii) What is the significance of chapter 28 in the novel?

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- iii) How does the irony of Elizabeth's changed relationships with those who matter to her influence her outlook towards life?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit)

2.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 31-45

Chapter 31

Henchard's downslide has begun very rapidly on two counts. The furmity-woman's disclosure has given him a bad name and secondly, he has by now lost his commercial buoyancy from rash transactions. His debtor's failure and one of his own men's misrepresentations cause his bankruptcy. Elizabeth is terribly pained by all this. However, to settle his debts, Henchard offers to give his personal fortunes such as his gold watch and his purse. The Commissioner finds this gesture very fair and all agree that the balance sheet has been made in all honesty without any evasions and concealments and no one has been wronged. There is now definitely some admiration for him in Casterbridge. Ironically, Henchard now lives in Jopp's house who has an upper hand over him. All his stores now belong to Farfrae.

Chapter 32

This chapter sees a brooding Henchard near a stone bridge where he meets Jopp who tells him that his furniture and house have now been bought by his arch rival Farfrae. Hardy's description of nature harmonises with the mental state of his characters. When he is given this information, we are told that "The land grew blacker and the sky, a deeper grey." Meanwhile, Farfrae also comes there and seems more cordial than ever when he suggests to Henchard that he could come and live in his old house which Henchard politely refuses. He has thoughts of shifting to some far-off shores, but chooses to stay back as Elizabeth now occupies his mind as she has been a great help and support in nursing him back from his temporary sickness.

Henchard approaches Farfrae for work as a journeyman hay-trusser. Farfrae is generous in employing him but all communication between them is done through a foreman. He is pained to learn that Farfrae is being considered for the Mayorship of Casterbridge. When he sees him in and out of his former house and going to his ex- lady love, he feels pangs of jealousy and sorrow and this makes him moody. The chapter ends with the information that Henchard has resumed his drinking habit.

Chapter 33

Henchard chooses the 'Three Mariners' to end his oath of not drinking. Being in a melancholy mood, the choir members offer a hymn to be sung and it is Henchard who chooses the hundred and ninth psalm to the tune of Wiltshire. The words describe a cursed man. Henchard sees Farfrae and Lucetta pass by, on the road below, on their evening walk and he indicates Farfrae to be the man in that verse. The performer says that he would not have played had he known it was for a living man. Henchard's hatred for his rival is all too clear. Elizabeth senses this and keeps an eye on her step father who might physically harm Farfrae.

Chapter 34

This chapter takes Henchard's hatred for Farfrae further. Elizabeth cautions Farfrae and later his lawyer, Joyce, also voices the same sentiment when Farfrae is thinking of setting up a seed-shop for Henchard's benefit. After learning from Joyce how Henchard was degrading him in the 'Three Mariners', Farfrae drops the idea of buying the shop and this further inflames Henchard's hatred. Farfrae, meanwhile, is asked to give his consent for Mayorship. Lucetta, after learning about the enmity of Henchard for her husband, is scared and wants to leave Casterbridge but Farfrae refutes this idea and makes up his mind to become the new Mayor.

Henchard, who is still in possession of Lucetta's old letters, now remembers them lying in a safe in his old house. He goes to an unsuspecting Farfrae who readily gives the packet to him. Henchard pulls out some letters and reads them out to Farfrae but does not reveal Lucetta's name much as he would have liked to, out of spite for them both.

Chapter 35

Lucetta, who has overheard the reading of some portions of her previous letters by Henchard to her husband, feels anxious and helpless. However, when Farfrae goes to the room and tells Lucetta casually how he had to

entertain Henchard at that odd hour and listen to his past life pertaining to some letters his ex lady-love wrote, Lucetta is relieved to know that her name had not been revealed by Henchard. To avoid any further complications in the future, Lucetta writes to Henchard to meet him at the Ring and wants a promise from him to return all her letters. He assures her that her secret shall remain a secret.

Chapter 36

On the way back, after meeting Henchard, Lucetta sees Jopp who wants her to recommend him to Farfrae as his working partner and also tells her that he knows her by sight from her Jersey days. She refuses to oblige him. Meanwhile Henchard tells Jopp to deliver the parcel of letters to Lucetta. Jopp is curious to know the contents of the parcel and lifts a seal to peer in. In an ominous twist, Jopp goes into Peter's Finger Inn on Mixen Lane, which is a dubious area of shady transactions, and reads the letters aloud to a mischievous gathering, who decide to organise a skimmington-ride which is an old tradition found in Casterbridge in which a procession is taken out to publicly proclaim the disgrace of an adulterous woman. The effigies of the woman and her lover are paraded on a donkey through the town. Hardy has used this custom to introduce some local colour in the novel. The next morning, Jopp delivers the letters to Lucetta which she burns and heaves a sigh of relief.

Chapter 37

An event now takes place when a Royal personage is to pass through the borough on his journey further west and has agreed to halt in town for half an hour. Elaborate decorations and preparations are carried out. People are seen converging in hundreds towards Casterbridge to see the great event. Henchard wishes to be of assistance at the ceremony but is denied permission by the council. He goes away disgruntled. There is a lively description of the entry of the royal carriages to the Town Hall and as the procession makes its way to the destination, Henchard disrupts the proceedings to wave his private flag in the left hand and touches the Royal visitor with his right hand, causing some confusion. Farfrae, however deftly salvages the situation. The episode leads to a lot of people mocking both Henchard and Lucetta. Even Farfrae is not spared. The reader is led to believe that these poor locals are hatching some jocular plot.

Chapter 38

In this chapter the reader is made aware of Henchard's intense anger after Farfrae jostles with him and seizes his hand to get away from the Royal Guest. To add fuel to the fire he has also overheard Lucetta telling the ladies that Henchard has had no role in assisting Farfrae to rise in society. A terribly hurt Henchard challenges Farfrae for a tussle on the top floor of the corn yard which has a trap door, that opens to reveal a high fall to the ground below.

The chapter describes the tussle between Henchard and Farfrae with the former managing to bring his rival near the trap door. But before the dangling Farfrae could be sent hurtling through the door, Henchard is swept with a tide of remorse and when their eyes meet, he confesses that he has not loved any man as dearly as Farfrae. Later he wants to go to Farfrae's

house to apologise but instead goes to the stone bridge in his brooding state. Farfrae also goes in a different direction and thus what has transpired in the yard remains a secret.

Chapter 39

After the fiasco at the yard, Whittle brings an anonymous note to Farfrae to reach Weatherbury. This, as the readers will soon know, is a well-intentioned contrivance of Farfrae's men to keep him out of the way of the notorious Mixen Lane group who are out to stage a 'skimmity-ride', with the effigies of Lucetta and her lover riding the donkey. Unfortunately Lucetta overhears the conversation of two maids who are discussing the route of the ride. Although Elizabeth enters just then and tries to keep the procession below out of Lucetta's sight and draws the blinds, Lucetta goes to the terrace and finds, to her utter horror, the striking resemblance between her and the effigy and faints.

Meanwhile, the constables and the lawyer are quick to reach the scene, but not a trace of the procession can be found even when they suspect the perpetrators to have originated from Peter's Finger at Mixen Lane. But even there, they do not find anything suspicious.

Chapter 40

Henchard goes to see Elizabeth and on learning that she has gone to Farfrae's house, he too goes there. He sees Lucetta upset and goes to fetch Farfrae from Weatherbury. Farfrae thinks of this too as a ruse and even after repeated pleas of Henchard to return to Casterbridge on account of Lucetta's illness, Farfrae totally distrusts him and refuses to return. Henchard goes back to tell the waiting group that Farfrae would not be back soon. Elizabeth is really sorry for Lucetta and Henchard likes this affection in her eyes for Lucetta and also feels a strange tenderness towards his step daughter.

When Farfrae returns and finds Lucetta really ill, he feels bad for having mistrusted Henchard. He is till now ignorant of the Skimmity-ride. Lucetta suffers a miscarriage but she is keen to have a heart-to-heart talk with her husband. What transpires between them that night and how much of her past Lucetta divulges to her husband, will never be known. When Henchard goes to see her the next morning, he learns of her demise. Hardy does not sentimentalise death or make it look abstract. So he concretises it in a simple homespun statement of the maid ..."they may knock as loud...she will never hear it more."

Chapter 41

Henchard has now lost both the women in his life. He feels lost and dejected and his only solace now is Elizabeth Jane who is equally caring towards her step father. He contemplates asking her to come and stay with him once again but misfortune once again befalls him in the guise of Newson who, it appears, has come back from the dead. He confesses to Henchard how the innocent, simple Susan was never the same again after a friend of hers had planted the idea in her head that her auction to Newson was only a mockery not to be taken seriously. Newson had not come back even after having been swept ashore in Newfoundland so that taking him to be dead, Susan would perhaps go back in search of her former husband which she had done. In

Falmouth, Newson had learnt about her death, and now has come to look for his own daughter. Henchard blurts out untruthfully that the daughter had also passed away one year after the mother's death. Although Newson goes away dejectedly, Henchard is apprehensive about his return after finding out the truth.

The reader once again finds Henchard in his favourite brooding place on the bridge with thoughts of drowning himself, but is prevented at the last moment by the sight of his effigy in the whirling waters. This is yet another instance of chance and coincidence. Not believing his eyes, he brings Elizabeth also to look at it and she hastily explains how it must have come there but since Henchard can't see the other effigy the matter is hushed up. Elizabeth now offers to come and stay with Henchard.

Chapter 42

Lucetta's death affects the three persons around her in different ways. Farfrae's first impulse is to wreak vengeance on the perpetrators of the mischief that have caused pain and the ultimate death of Lucetta. Elizabeth accepts the tragic event rather stoically and is undisturbed. Henchard's entire attention is now on the well-being of Elizabeth and in order to provide her all the comforts, he agrees to accept the small seed and root business offered to him by the Council. The business now grows steadily and Elizabeth and he enjoy the serenity of the pleasant, sunny corner in which it stands. Once he sees Farfrae looking intently at Elizabeth in the market place and remembers that the Scotsman had once shown interest in her. He spies on them and sees them meeting occasionally. Henchard is disturbed at their meetings and when he sees Farfrae kissing her, he cannot accept the situation of losing her to someone he despises. The thought of telling Farfrae that she is, legally, nobody's child, comes to his mind but he soon brushes aside the devilish idea.

Chapter 43

The growing proximity between Elizabeth and Farfrae, soon becomes the talk of the town. Henchard feels alienated when neither of the two broaches the subject of their relationship. He visualises himself as being no more than a mere obstacle in their way. Henchard often goes to a spot he thinks as being the meeting place of his daughter and his suitor and one day he runs into Newson there.

Thinking of the worst that could happen in this new scenario if the truth ever became known to Elizabeth, Henchard decides to go away from Casterbridge. No amount of persuasion by Elizabeth can make him change his mind. She sees him off till the bridge and the reader cannot but feel a complete sense of empathy with Henchard. There is a tragic grandeur in the suffering of this solitary figure.

Meanwhile, Newson arrives at Farfrae's house and recounts at length, the events of the past and how Henchard had lied to him on his first visit to Casterbridge about Elizabeth being dead. Elizabeth feels revulsion at Henchard's deceit. The conversation then shifts to the arrangements of the impending wedding of Elizabeth and Farfrae.

Chapter 44

The Mayor of Casterbridge: Summary

A forlorn Henchard travels eastwards and comes to the same spot in Weydon –Priors where the novel had begun. The memories of that fateful day twenty-five years ago come back to haunt him. He remembers his crime and the sobbing entreaties of Susan. He cannot bear to go any further and settles near a pastoral farm so that he can get news of Elizabeth. He soon gets to know that Farfrae and Elizabeth are getting married on Martin's Day. He is undecided about whether to go for the wedding or not. He finally decides to go and takes a fish cage as a gift, Elizabeth's salutation to him as "Mr. Henchard", when she sees him, is enough to make him realise her cold indifference. She tells him that she can never love anyone who has so deceived her. Henchard has no option but to guiltily back away from her house and her life.

Chapter 45

The last chapter and the preceding one, form a sort of epilogue to the novel. Henchard has always been a victim of accident, chance and circumstances, making him a wiser but sadder man. As for Newson, the lure of the sea draws him to make Budmouth his place of residence as he can get a glimpse of the sea from there. The bird cage brought by Henchard, and which he had left outside in the garden, becomes somewhat a mystery with a ball of feathers lying in it, but Elizabeth guesses it must have been her stepfather's wedding gift as well as a token of his repentance. She muses on the fact that Henchard had not expressed any excuses or regrets for his past follies and exonerated nothing, but had chosen to live as one of his own worst accusers.

Elizabeth fears he might do some harm to himself and on her insistence, Farfrae makes some inquiries and both he and Elizabeth set out to find him. There is a description of their search in various places before they spot a labourer who turns out to be Whittle, who once had worked for Henchard and has also been reprimanded in the past by his master for his tardiness. Ironically, Whittle and his mother to whom Henchard had always been kind, have given him shelter and service in his last days and now Whittle is the one to give the news of his demise. Henchard has also written his last wish of not letting Elizabeth know about his death.

Hardy, along with focussing on the more pleasant aspects of Elizabeth's married life, also hints at the persistence of the unforeseen and reiterates that "happiness is the occasional episode in a general drama of pain."

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Explain what is meant by "Skimmington –Ride. What bearing does it have on the novel?

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- ii) Who is Jopp and what is his contribution to the narrative?

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- iii) What makes Elizabeth hate Henchard for a brief spell and what makes her tender feelings towards him grow once again towards the end?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit)

2.6 SUMMING UP

In this Unit we have provided a critical summary of the novel. But as we have stressed before, this should in no way be a substitute for reading the complete novel.

2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Henchard is indifferent to the emotions of his wife and seems heartless. But his repentance the next morning reveals that he is after all not so bad at heart. His taking an oath to abstain from drinking for twenty-one years shows his tender side and his love for the family.

Susan appears to be a naive and timid wife, who can't stand up for her own rights. But she is also proud enough to not ask for Henchard's mercy for his demeaning act under the effect of liquor and declares that "Now I'm no more to thee; I'll try my luck elsewhere."

- ii) It serves as the meeting place of the three other main characters apart from Henchard, i.e. the mother-daughter duo of Elizabeth Jane and Susan and Donald Farfrae who is the second protagonist of the novel.

Apart from these characters some regular visitors to this hotel have also been introduced who form the lower classes in Casterbridge and can be collectively referred to as the 'chorus'. Like in Greek tragedy they comment on the main characters and provide humour through their quaint speech and provide a multiple perspective on the action.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Farfrae was younger and intelligent. He began to modernise the corn business of Henchard and at times he began to dominate the

latter. Their different approach to Whittle's late-coming is one such example. In another case, Farfrae's carnival was a bigger success than Henchard's and everyone praised the former's organizational skills.

Henchard cannot bear the fact that Farfrae is becoming increasingly influential in the social and business life of Casterbridge and is tortured by jealousy. Henchard also resents Farfrae's nearness to his daughter Elizabeth.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Lucetta appears to be an opportunist and a manipulative person. She is fickle-minded and not to be trusted.

As soon as she strikes it rich, she drops Henchard from her affections and prefers the more successful Farfrae and marries him. Later, she also tries to drive a wedge between the father and daughter.

She wants to hide her past relation with Henchard by pretending that they have just met so that even Elizabeth should be kept ignorant, and also prevents the meeting of the daughter and the father.

To play safe, she repeatedly asks Henchard to return her previous letters written to him during their courtship days.

- ii) This chapter describes a court scene between an accused furmity-woman who is presented in Magistrate Henchard's court and there is a hilarious banter between her and constable Stubberd. This hilarious scene of slapstick humour serves to lighten the mood of the reader in an otherwise gloomy chronicle of the novel.

"The past will find you out" seems to be the implicit comment in this chapter as this accused woman is the witness to the scene where Henchard had sold his wife to a sailor twenty years ago.

- (iii) Henchard's affection towards Elizabeth as his real daughter and the subsequent withdrawal of that affection when he learns she is not his but Newson's daughter, leave Elizabeth in a confused state. She is forced to leave his house and take up a job with Lucetta in order to learn the more polished and refined ways of life and learning.

Her one-sided love for Farfrae leaves her very hurt when the latter marries Lucetta and she faces the bitter truth that Lucetta, after all, is an unscrupulous woman without morals. All these bitter realities, rather than making her bitter and frustrated, teach her equanimity and patience to take all the adverse situations of life in her stride. In fact she is the only character who comes out as a poised and dignified humane personality.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Skimmington ride is an old tradition practised in Casterbridge. It is a procession organised to publicly proclaim the disgrace of an adulterous woman by placing her effigy along with that of her lover on a donkey and parading it through the town.

Hardy has used this to introduce local colour in the novel. This ride is important as it becomes the cause of humiliation to Lucetta and eventually leads to her miscarriage and subsequent death.

- ii) Jopp, a lesser known character, is the one whose place as a corn manager has been usurped by Farfrae. He is also the one who offers Henchard a place to live in his house when the latter has fallen on bad days.

It is Jopp, who, out of sheer curiosity as well as to show Lucetta down when she does not put in a word to Farfrae on his behalf for a job, opens the packet of her private letters. This packet has been given by Henchard to be delivered to Lucetta but Jopp reads them to his fellow friends before delivery and thus a Skimmington –Ride is organised.

- iii) Henchard had lied to Elizabeth's father, Newson, for fear of losing her to her real father, that she also had died soon after her mother Susan's death and Elizabeth despises him for this lie. However, when after her wedding, she sees the cage with the dead bird in her garden, she can relate that it was her stepfather's wedding gift to her but he had gone away without expressing any regrets. It was not in his nature to exonerate himself. He was his own worst accuser and this fact softened her heart towards the self-alienated man.

UNIT 3 *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*: ANALYSIS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Background
 - 3.2.1 Wessex
 - 3.2.2 Casterbridge
 - 3.2.3 Local Colour
 - 3.2.4 Place of Work
 - 3.2.5 Symbolic Significance
 - 3.2.6 Character and Environment
- 3.3 Language and Style
 - 3.3.1 Is Hardy a Careless Writer?
 - 3.3.2 Is Hardy's Language Difficult?
 - 3.3.3 The Two Styles of Hardy
- 3.4 Point of View
- 3.5 *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a Tragedy
 - 3.5.1 Greek Tragedy and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*
 - 3.5.2 Tragic Effect
 - 3.5.3 Hardy's Definition of Tragedy
- 3.6 Glossary
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- outline the role of background in Hardy's novels
- describe the effect achieved by multiple points of view
- assess the significance of Hardy's style
- discuss the elements of tragedy in the novel.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we provided you with a summary of the novel. By now I hope you have got the novel with you and are in the process of reading it. Let us now look at some aspects of Hardy's method as a novelist. This would involve discussing his use of background, the point of view from which the story is presented and Hardy's language and style. We shall also discuss *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a tragedy.

Please read the discussion critically. It is not necessary to agree with everything we are saying. You may have an alternative point of view which you can project by supporting it with examples from the text. It is important to do the check your progress exercises as you will agree with the old saying that practice makes a man or woman, as the case may be, perfect!

3.2 BACKGROUND

3.2.1 Wessex

Background has always played a major role in Hardy's novels. His native landscape and its associations had induced a profound sense of place in Hardy from his early days. He places his characters in an immediate background with the authenticity that comes from first-hand experience. Hardy's country is 'Wessex', the fictional name for the south-western counties of England. The landscape, life and customs of this area have been imaginatively transformed into the fictional world of his novels. It is because Hardy focuses particularly on this region that he is often called a regional novelist. Here it must be pointed out that the term regional novelist in no sense implies achievement of an inferior kind.

3.2.2 Casterbridge

The Mayor of Casterbridge, as you know, is set in a county town based on Dorchester. In short, Casterbridge is Dorchester and most of the places mentioned in the novel can still be found in Dorchester. It is an agricultural town surrounded by the heath. In fact there is hardly any clear cut distinction between town and country which seem an extension of each other. Just outside 'Casterbridge' we find Maumbury Rings, the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre, where Henchard and Susan meet secretly to work out their re-union. We are also told of the Roman wall, the tumuli and the fact that 'Casterbridge announced old Rome in every street, alley and precinct'.

It is clear that 'Casterbridge is a old, hoary place o'wickedness, by all account. Tis recorded in history that we rebelled against the king one or two hundred years ago, in the time of the Romans' as Buzzford would have us believe. Buzzford's sense of history is not very accurate as the Romans were not in Casterbridge, 'one or two hundred years ago'.

Casterbridge, however, is not only interesting to Hardy for its historical connections. It is also presented as the microcosm in which we can see the social changes that were taking place in Industrial England. We are told about 'the new-fashioned agricultural implement called a horse-drill, till then unknown in its modern shape in this part of the country, where the venerable seed-lip was still used for sowing' 'In the novel, these changes are not important in themselves, but in the effect that they have on human relationships. Henchard is still part of the old order and still believes in the feudal values of providing for his needy dependants, Abel Whittle's mother in this case. You will recall that Abel Whittle had looked after Henchard during his final days because he remembered how the latter had sent coal and potatoes to his mother. Henchard still represents older values. When he prevails upon Farfrae to stay on as his manager, he offers to 'settle terms in black-and-white if you like; though my word's my bond'. On the other hand, in an increasingly competitive society, it is the struggle for economic

dominance that sours the relationship between Henchard and his dearest friend Farfrae.

3.2.3 Local Colour

Can Hardy's interest in the historical aspect of the town be interpreted as a sort of nostalgia for time past? Perhaps, if one takes into account the extent of Hardy's fascination for folk tradition. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, he depicts the skimmity-ride in all its glory and spectacular detail. Hardy does not simply give us an account of the skimmity-ride to add colour to his description, but because he uses it as an important device in bringing about the complication in the plot of the novel. It is because of this ride that Lucetta dies, Henchard resolves to face life squarely once more and the possibility of the Elizabeth Jane-Farfrae union begins to take shape. When Mrs. Henchard dies, Mrs. Cuxom mentions the 'four ounce pennies' that the former had wished to be placed on her eyes. This instruction was no doubt based on the local belief that if anyone's dead eyes were left open, the person would become a ghost. Here again, the reference to this local custom rescues the scene from declining into sentimentality.

3.2.4 Place of Work

In Hardy, you will notice that the setting is also a place of work. When Elizabeth-Jane first enters Henchard's yard, she sees the hay barns and granaries and among them Farfrae busy 'pouring some grains of wheat from one hand into the other'. Lucetta watches Henchard and Farfrae at work from her window and decides to throw in her lot with the latter. It is important to remember that Hardy was one of the first novelists to describe work in detail. Earlier novelists had not described either work or workers to the extent that Hardy does.

3.2.5 Symbolic Significance

When Henchard decides to end his life, we are told that 'The whole land ahead of him was as darkness itself'. When Henchard dies it is on the bleak heath, in a remote cottage that has the aspect of a tomb, with its walls 'worn by years of rain-washings ... the thatch of the roof in ragged holes'. This is in direct contrast to Hardy's description of Casterbridge, when Elizabeth-Jane is on her way to first visit Henchard: 'the mossy gardens ... glowing with nasturtiums, fuchsias, scarlet geraniums ... snapdragons and dahlias' With hope in her young heart and the prospects of a good life seem to be echoed in nature itself which is described in all its glory. Even in Indian films, you must have noticed that when two people fall in love, we are taken to beautiful locales, with clear blue skies, gardens blooming with hundreds of flowers. In short, all nature seems to be rejoicing. On the other hand, a murder is usually accompanied by thunder, lightning and a dark ominous night. Background thus becomes part of the human drama assuming a semblance of joy or sorrow.

3.2.6 Character and Environment

Hardy has subsumed *The Mayor of Casterbridge* under his general label 'Novels of Character and Environment'. The role of environment then is of significance in the composition of the novel. The 'environment' is not only described realistically but it has symbolic implications as well, as we have

just seen. It is clear that even though Hardy is depicting destinies that have a universal significance, he is also placing his characters within a particular milieu. There is a characteristic interrelationship between environment and individual in terms of values, folk customs and dialect. Let us then examine the role of dialect within Hardy's overall use of language and style.

But before we move to the next topic, let us first attempt this check your progress exercise.

Check Your Progress 1

Please turn to Chapter 9 of the novel and read the first paragraph carefully—more than once if necessary. Now analyse Hardy's use of background here, keeping in mind the following considerations.: (a) what Hardy describes, (b) how Hardy describes it, (c) what time of year is depicted, (d) the character's state of mind and (e) the effect achieved. Write your answer in about 150-200 words. After you have completed your exercise, you can turn to the end of the Unit to check your answer. But do refrain from turning to the last page right away!

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit).

3.3 LANGUAGE AND STYLE

3.3.1 Is Hardy a Careless Writer?

T.S. Eliot has said that Hardy 'was indifferent even to the precepts of good writing: he wrote sometimes overpoweringly well, but always very carelessly'. This of course is debatable. For it is well known that Hardy was worried about his prose and studied the writings of Fielding, Addison, Scott and *The Times*, in an attempt to improve his style. Moreover, he revised and re-revised his writings before publication. An author who took such pains with his writing can hardly be called careless. But readers have often felt that Hardy's language is sometimes difficult. Did you have any difficulty reading *The Mayor of Casterbridge*?

3.3.2 Is Hardy's Language 'Difficult'?

Let us consider a few sentences from the novel. 'One would almost have supposed Henchard to see that no better *modus vivendi* could be arrived at With all domestic finesse of that kind he was hopelessly at variance'. Within a space of three lines, Hardy has used one Latin expression and one French word. Do you think that these are used as conscious attempts at appearing learned? Hardy has been criticized for trying to satisfy the snob tastes of his readership but what he is trying to do is to give a more precise expression to a particular feeling. 'The lugubrious harmony of the spot with

his domestic situation was too perfect for him, impatient of effects, scenes and adumbrations'. The difficulty of this sentence no doubt arrests the flow of the narrative. It is sentences such as these that cause the difficulty in Hardy's style. But Hardy is equally capable of writing flexible prose with direct biblical cadences. Consider the description of Henchard's first trip to Casterbridge: 'Then he said he would search no longer, and that he would go and settle in the district which he had for some time in his mind'. Now compare this with a sentence from the Bible: 'And there was famine in the land and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there' (Genesis 4.11.10). Did you notice the similarity?

3.3.3 The Two Styles of Hardy

Did you notice the two styles in the novel? As Raymond Williams has pointed out, one is the consciously educated style of the author while the other is the colloquial speech of the characters. The immediacy and the pathos of 'so many mouths to fill, and God a' mighty sending his taties so terrible small to fill 'em with' cannot be matched in educated speech. As you can see, there are two distinct styles here. On the one hand, direct fluency of the spoken idiom and on the other the striking and powerful prose of analysis. This latter style is sometimes marred by an excessive use of learned words, Latinisms, technical jargon relating to musical and architectural terms. Hardy is also accused of making frequent use of classical allusions so that we have references to 'Jacob in Padan-Aram'; Abel and Cain', 'David and Saul'. But it seems to us that rather than detracting from the style, such references deepen the effect of the narrative, adding extra dimensions to the meaning of the whole.

How then can we explain the two styles in Hardy? This problem can be related to Hardy's own position, situated as he was between the country and the city. Here was a writer living in the country and feeling with his characters but writing also for an educated readership. The problem was of connecting this sensibility with that of the educated man within the same personality. It was also a problem of accommodating the poet Hardy within the persona of the novelist Hardy. The fusion of these two diverse aspects has resulted in a style that is sincere, diverse, powerful, homespun and full of surprises for the reader.

Check Your Progress 2

Now turn to the last page in Chapter 39 and read the passage from 'No, no, no— d'ye think I'm a fool?— to the end. Attempt a critical appreciation of it basing it on the above discussion. Who are the speakers? Is the style appropriate to the characters? What tone does the narrator adopt? Does this tone change? What use does Hardy make of descriptive and narrative prose? Of dialogue? Are there some sentences that you find rather forced and consciously learned? These are some of the questions that you could ask yourself before you begin to write your answer. Write your answer in about 150-200 words. Don't turn to the 'Answers' section unless you have completed the exercise.

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3.4 POINT OF VIEW

We have already discussed the narrator's role in the opening chapters of the novel. Hardy relates his story through the voice of an omniscient narrator, who is generally an objective observer but who also occasionally comments on and interprets the action. But is that the only point of view in the novel? No. We also have the characters giving their opinions on one another and judging one another thus providing a multiple perspective from which the reader can get a multi-dimensional point of view. Moreover, the narrator himself assumes several roles---at times he is a historian commenting on days gone by, at others, he becomes the moralist interpreting the experiences of the characters for the reader. There are times when the narrator simply becomes this concealed observer in the manner of Henchard when he keeps a jealous eye on Elizabeth-Jane's meetings with Farfrae.

Telling us of Susan's situation years after the wife-sale, the narrator says: 'Of Henchard they heard nothing. To the liege subjects of Labour, the England of those days was a continent, and a mile a geographical degree'. From the eighteen eighties, the narrator looks back to the England of the eighteen thirties, gently arousing the reader's sympathy for the situation that then existed. When Henchard asks Susan to marry him after she returns to Casterbridge, we sense a certain hesitation on her part. We are also told that she wondered 'why she had countenanced deception at all, and has not bravely let the girl know her history. But the flesh is weak; and the true explanation came in due course'. While the narrator-as-philosopher explains Susan's overcoming her hesitation in terms of 'the flesh is weak' the narrator-as-story-teller implants suspense by his use of words like 'deception' and 'in due course'. The explanation of what this deception could be, is deliberately withheld until after Susan's death when we find that Elizabeth-Jane is not Henchard's daughter after all.

When Henchard decides to end his life, he stops on the brink of the stream as: 'on the water beneath there slowly became visible a something floating in the circular pool At first it was indistinct by reason of the shadow from the bank; but it emerged thence and took shape, which was that of a human body, lying stiff and stark upon the surface of the stream'. Here the narrator does not intrude upon the scene but lets us observe it from Henchard's perspective. The 'something' floating on the pool assumes shape for us just as it would have done for Henchard---gradually and with chilling effect.

There are occasions when the narrator becomes invisible, leaving the characters to construct the scene from varying points of view. When Henchard and Susan are married, the comments of the 'chorus' provide a perceptive and dramatic overview of the occasion. Henchard is described as

having 'a bluebeardy look about 'en' by Nance while another of the company counters that saying 'I wouldn't wish for a better man'. This method not only gives a multiple perspective on the character discussed, but the comments of the different persons tell us as much about them as about the persons they discuss. As the views of the characters are limited, no one opinion can be taken as final.

Whatever point of view the narrator adopts, the aim is clear. The narrator wishes to create a direct relationship with the reader so that his/her responses are directed in particular ways. By making us feel the joys and sufferings of his characters, he is enlarging our sympathies.

3.5 THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE AS A TRAGEDY

3.5.1 Greek Tragedy and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

We have hinted at the parallel between *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Greek tragedy. So far we have seen Henchard as a tragic hero, the lower class community of Casterbridge as the 'chorus' and the theme of retribution and doom that is common to most tragedies. Henchard is the tragic hero who has a flaw (hamartia) in his character---his extreme aggressiveness and the ambition that stems from wishing to be either the best or nothing. His pride (hubris) becomes apparent when he proclaims: 'I'd challenge England to beat me in the fodder business'. This arrogance and the desire to prove himself leads to the wife-sale. This in turn invites nemesis to set right the moral order of society that has been disturbed on this account. Then follows the conflict (agony) with an adversary, Farfrae in this case. Henchard faces one misfortune after another and ultimately dies, a bitter and lonely man. Greek tragedy also follows the convention of the unity of time, place and action. While there is no unity of time as the action extends over several years, there is unity of place, the action being set mainly in Casterbridge. Unity of action arises from the fact that it is the story of the life of one man. The connections with Greek tragedy are quite clear.

3.5.2 Tragic Effect

Drawing parallels between *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and Greek tragedy may be an interesting exercise but it is not helpful unless we try to understand the effect of tragedy that this novel conveys. What is significant is the tragic spirit rather than the labels and categories. Tragedy does not mean just a story with a sad end. It traces the downfall of a person of stature. 'Stature' does not necessarily imply rank or power but it implies intensity of feeling. Henchard is indeed such a powerful and intense person. We experience a sense of the tragic when we witness something fine being broken or bruised. This is what happens in the case of Henchard.

3.5.3 Hardy's Definition of Tragedy

How does Hardy define tragedy? He writes (notebook entry 1885) that tragedy is 'a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end in catastrophe when carried out'. However, the tragic effect goes beyond just the final catastrophe. It induces a feeling of regret for the passing away of something fine but at the

same time it endorses our faith in human worth. The final message conveyed is that man can be destroyed but not defeated. Most great tragedies evoke this feeling. Henchard has had our constant empathy and at his death, there is a feeling of pity and awe at the loss of such an intense character. The deaths of Lucetta and Susan cannot evoke a similar sense of waste. It is only Henchard's character which provides a sense of affirmation in human dignity.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Enumerate the various roles that Hardy's narrator assumes

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- ii) Does Hardy believe that art has a function?

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- iii) What constitutes the tragic effect of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*?

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(Check your answers with those given at the end of this Unit).

3.6 GLOSSARY

county	: in Britain, the largest unit of local government—somewhat similar to our districts
tumuli	: (Latin) plural of tumulus which means a mound over a grave; also called barrow.
microcosm	: representing the world on a small scale
Industrial England	: nineteenth century England when the development of industries was causing great social and economic change.
Nemesis	: punishment for wrong-doing

3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have covered some important aspects of Hardy's art as a novelist. You can now appreciate:

- how background is not just a setting but almost an active agent in the lives of characters;

- the intricacies of Hardy's extremely complex use of language and style;
- the multi-dimensional effect achieved by various points of view so that the reader's responses are sharpened and sympathies enlarged;
- how *The Mayor of Casterbridge* conveys a profoundly moving effect similar to that achieved by the great Greek tragedies.

3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

We find that Casterbridge is hardly separable from the country around it. Thus town and country mingle not only geographically but in terms of customs and values as well. The 'mellow air' suggests peace and quiet and points to the state of Elizabeth-Jane's mind. She is secure like the ship which has found its harbour. The prospect of 'imminent autumn' is pleasantly welcome. Hardy's description is so vivid that we can almost see the 'innumerable tawny and yellow leaves [that] skimmed along the pavement'. These leaves are personified, i.e. attributed human qualities so that they seem like 'timid visitors'. In fact Elizabeth-Jane is the timid visitor who will soon undertake an errand to inform Henchard of the arrival of her mother and herself.

Check Your Progress 2

The speakers here are Mr. Grower, the respectable burgess; the rather comical constable and the inmates of Peter's Finger inn. You must have noticed the authority in Grower's tone and the colloquial flavour of the less-educated of the characters. The whole scene is humorous and is written in the educated style of the author and the customary speech of the characters. The author's style includes literary allusions like 'the crew of Comus'. The tone of the narrator changes from the lightly humorous to the more serious. For example, take the last paragraph. The first sentence 'The constable nodded knowingly; but what he knew was nothing' is said in a light witty vein. What follows is more serious. Thus we find that Hardy achieves his effect by alternating styles and tones.

Check Your Progress 3

- Hardy's narrator is generally an observer who sometimes also comments on and interprets the action. The narrator is also a historian commenting on days gone by and at times a moralist interpreting the actions of the characters. Sometimes the narrator becomes invisible and withdraws completely. The reader is then left to construct the scene from the comments and actions of the various characters.
- Hardy does believe that art has a specific aim and function. It is for this reason that the writer must depict reality even if sometimes it is unpleasant. It is only by confronting these misfortunes in art that the reader is able to face them better in reality.
- A tragic effect does not merely constitute the final catastrophe in the novel. Henchard's death is tragic because it gives us the feeling of regret that something fine has passed away. At the same time our faith in human worth is endorsed, that a man like Henchard can be destroyed but not defeated.

UNIT 4 *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*: CHARACTERISATION

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Fatalism in the Novel
- 4.3 Characterization
 - 4.3.1 Henchard
 - 4.3.2 Hardy's Women
 - 4.3.3 The Chorus
- 4.4 Glossary
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we will examine another aspect of Hardy as a novelist—his art of characterization. We will also be taking up the theme of fatalism in this Unit. After you have read this Unit carefully, you should be able to: discuss the theme of fatalism in the novel; write character sketches of the major characters.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units we have provided you with an introduction to the novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. We've also spoken about the life and times of Thomas Hardy as these are very important to place the novel in context. We have also given you a summary of the novel as well as provided you with an analysis of the various themes and language used.

In this unit we shall draw some character sketches for you and also discuss the theme of fatalism present in the novel. But these are meant as samples and we hope you will supplement these from your own reading of the novel. For this you will need to refer to examples from the text, so do keep the novel at hand.

4.2 FATALISM IN THE NOVEL

You have seen that the basic pattern of the plot is tragic. It includes features such as the workings of mysterious coincidences and sudden twists of fate. As we have seen in the case of Henchard, everything seems to be against him. Casterbridge society turns against him, Farfrae, Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane no longer love him, and even the weather seems to go against him. How is he destroyed? Is it because of some blind fate? Or is it because of his own actions? Think about this and form your opinion. If we take up Hardy's oft-quoted statement from the novel that 'Happiness is an occasional episode in a general drama of pain' we are likely to come to the conclusion that

human beings are fated to be unhappy. Moreover, we get the impression that happiness and unhappiness are determined by some external agency and are totally beyond human control.

Similarly, we may take up the lines from Shakespeare's *King Lear* that Hardy quotes in the preface to *Tess*: 'As flies to wanton boys, Are we to the gods, they kill us for their sport'. Here again we get a pessimistic view of life. Human beings are reduced to the status of puppets whose destinies are being controlled by the arbitrary will of playful gods. We might hastily conclude that Henchard is a victim of blind malicious fate. However, it might perhaps be better not to pick certain statements and come to conclusions on the basis of these. One must look closely at the whole novel and try to understand the reasons for Henchard's downfall.

It is true that Hardy lived in an age of doubt and that he had lost faith in religion. Hardy felt that man was essentially alone in an indifferent universe and subject to the blind ways of fate. This pessimism towards the future is a constant concern in his fiction. But the way in which this pessimism and sense of fatality is worked into his novels is highly complex and cannot be explained simply. Hardy's technique of characterization and his realistic use of background prevent fate from becoming the dominant influence in the scheme of the novel. The protagonist is destroyed as a result of the events that follow his actions. As the tragedy arises from the action of the character and as the characters are free to choose, we can hardly call Hardy a fatalist in a simple sense.

At times it does seem as if Hardy's plot projects a universe that is hostile to human aspirations. Yet even within this universe, it is possible for man to live and die with dignity. Henchard, through sheer will-power and drive is able to succeed against all odds. We know that Henchard is only a wandering hay-trusser to begin with. But through sheer hard work and determination, he becomes the Mayor of Casterbridge. If this success soon turns to destruction, we can find the cause not in his 'stars' but in his own nature.

Henchard sells his wife according to his own free will and sets into motion the seeds of his own destruction. Most of the catastrophes in the novel seem to be caused by coincidence: the arrival of the furmity seller in Casterbridge to denounce Henchard after all those years and the return of Newson to claim Elizabeth-Jane just when she was the sole comfort in Henchard's ruined life. But as we know 'truth is stranger than fiction'. Another case of coincidence is the failure of the weather. But the decision to take the advice of the weather prophet, the decision to buy the corn is Henchard's. The root of the tragedy lies in Henchard's own uncompromising nature. It is this emphasis on 'character is fate', an aphorism that Hardy borrows from Novalis, a German poet, which saves the plot from becoming a mere illustration of his philosophy.

Check Your Progress 1

Even though the role of fate is important in Hardy's novels, a man's will and character also effect his fate.

Do you agree with this statement? It is quite usual in critical appreciation to have different points of view which may all be valid. When we put forward

a particular point of view, we should be able to provide enough examples from the text to support it. If you think that fatalism is the dominant factor in the novel, find evidence from the text to prove this (150 words).

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(Please check your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit)

4.3 CHARACTERIZATION

While reading *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, you must have noticed that in spite of his several drawbacks, Henchard still wins our sympathy. In real life, could you possibly have sympathy with a husband who sells his wife? The answer clearly is no. The fact that Hardy involves our sympathies with Henchard is a triumph of his technique of characterization. This indeed is one of the strong points of his art and he has created memorable and powerful characters such as Henchard, Tess and Eustacia among others.

How do we 'know' a character in a novel? There are some aspects we must keep in mind when drawing a character sketch. The first point to remember is that we must not simply describe a character's traits. For example, if a particular character spends the better part of the day preening in front of the mirror, we can safely conclude that he is 'vain'. This is the trait manifested by this action.

Let us presume that we have to write a character-sketch of X. The novelist can use several techniques to present this character:

- 1) The narrator may describe X;
- 2) Other characters in the novel may talk about him or her;
- 3) X may be presented in conversation with others and this may reveal some traits of his/her character;

- 4) His/her actions would further enable us to get a complete picture of his/her personality.

Hardy uses all these techniques and more. He usually begins by describing the outward appearance and then relates this to the character's inner nature. For example, Henchard's dark, fiery eye reveals his tempestuous nature. Hardy also makes use of imagery in order to reinforce the dominant traits of a particular character. For instance, Henchard's love for Farfrae is described as "tigeris"—this not only refers to its passionate, impetuous nature but also to its destructive potential. The ruined Henchard is likened to a '**Samson shorn**', a biblical allusion that effectively comments on his predicament.

If you keep the above guidelines in mind, you will be able to appreciate Hardy's subtle and complex approach to characterization. It is for this reason, we are not discussing all the characters, as we expect you to try to draw the remaining character sketches independently.

4.3.1 Henchard

Henchard, the central character envisaged on a grand scale, dominates the novel from beginning to end. He has a towering presence like the heroes of Greek tragedy. But while the heroes of Greek tragedy are men of rank and power, Henchard begins and ends life as an ordinary hay-trusser. While kings and generals were heroes in a feudal age, Henchard is the hero in a democratic age. Like the heroes in Greek tragedy, Henchard would rather 'break than bend' and he would rather opt for 'all or nothing'. Like them, he too has a tragic flaw—his aggressive and uncompromising nature. Hardy explores both the positive and negative aspects of this inherent trait. This aggressiveness is the source of ambition, the will to work and the desire to excel. When directed outwards, it brings Henchard wealth and power within eighteen years. While it is beneficial to him, it has proved destructive to others and resulted in the wife-sale, the dismissal of Jopp and Farfrae, and the humiliation of Abel Whittle. But when turned inwards, it leads to self-destruction. It corrodes his self-respect, so that he can no longer look into the eyes of people. It makes him suicidal and saps his will to survive to the extent that accelerates his final decline.

Hardy presents a visually vivid picture of Henchard so that, at the outset, we can even see the dust on his boots. He is 'six foot one and a half' in his socks and literally towers above the other characters who appear small, mediocre and colourless before him. In fact, they are perfect foils to this intense and powerful character. In Hardy, you will notice that the physical description is totally compatible with the mental states of the character. When Henchard is the successful Mayor at the height of his glory, he is described as a man with a 'rich complexion ... flashing black eye ... dark ... hair ... loud laugh'. Here is a picture of a confident man who has achieved much that he desired. But Hardy also tells us that the 'laugh was not encouraging to strangers' and that 'there was temper under the thin bland surface'. The potential for destruction is already there.

Henchard is domineering and impulsive. This becomes clear from the following examples: He develops an immediate and fierce attachment for Farfrae and cannot rest until he has achieved what he desired—Farfrae's promise to stay on as his manager. But this attachment is somewhat blunted

upon the arrival of Elizabeth-Jane, so that Farfrae wonders at the 'suddenness of his employer's moods'. Henchard, in an effort to assert his authority, humiliates Abel Whittle, yet he is not a mere bully. He has been generous to Abel's mother. The tendency to dominate subordinates springs from an extreme insecurity of his own identity and worth. Henchard acts on the spur of the moment even though he later regrets his impulse. For example, Henchard immediately regrets Farfrae's dismissal. Henchard may be rigid and rough but don't you think there is a certain tenderness and gentleness in his nature? This is best highlighted in his relationship with Elizabeth-Jane.

A simple, conservative and traditional man who conducts his business in a 'rule of thumb' manner, Henchard has no use for newly invented machines and progressive ideas about agriculture. His refusal to keep pace with changing times leads to his downfall. As we know, nineteenth century England was undergoing rapid changes. Industries were being set up and rural life and age-old values were being corroded. A flexible man like Farfrae could keep pace with these changes and he thrives and flourishes. On the other hand, an uncompromising man like Henchard refuses to change with the times and loses all.

Moreover, Henchard is a superstitious man who suspects that 'someone had been roasting a waxen image of him'. When misfortunes pile on him, he wonders if 'some sinister intelligence is bent on punishing him'. When Henchard is on the point of drowning himself, he sees his own image in the deep dark waters. He interprets that as an 'appalling miracle' and gives up the attempt. Henchard's resilience to misfortune is tremendous. A lesser man would have broken under the relentless pressure of disasters. But it is only Henchard who can stoically say: 'My punishment is not greater than I can bear'. This reassures us about the fortitude and courage of man in a hostile universe. Through sheer drive and will-power, Henchard the man of 'strong qualities' shapes his destiny when he rises from hay-trusser to Mayor.

This drive also instills discipline in Henchard so that he keeps his vow of abstaining from alcohol for twenty one years. He also shuns the company of women and the people of Casterbridge are rather surprised when he marries Susan. The marriage, as we know, is not dictated by amorous considerations but is carried out purely as a means of making amends for past neglect. Love does not enter the intimate relationship with Lucetta either. It is only after Lucetta's affections are transferred to Farfrae that Henchard's sentiments are 'fanned into higher and high inflammation'. Does it mean that Henchard is incapable of love? It is not that Henchard cannot love but that he loves too much. But his impulsive and possessive nature destroys his relationships with the two persons he cares for most---Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane.

The final effect of Henchard's death is tragic. Man can be defeated but not destroyed. He begins life defying circumstances and getting the better of them. But he finally goes down fighting with the forces ranged against him. Happiness may be 'the occasional episode in the general drama of pain', but it is within a man's hands to shape his destiny. We do feel that Henchard is engaged in an unequal fight---nature, society and his fellow-beings are all hostile, or at any rate, indifferent to him. Yet it is not because of some blind

malignant fate that Henchard is destroyed. It is within his own character that the seeds of his destruction lie. Hardy has made sure that the relation between character and fate is not a simple one. The effect conveyed is one that is implied in the aphorism borrowed from Novalis that 'Character is Fate'.

4.3.2 Hardy's Women

Henchard dominates the novel and all the characters exist only in relation to him. This is also true of the women characters. But this does not mean that they do not exist in their own right. They are secondary to Henchard but Hardy observes them with an eye to realistic detail. It is clear that Hardy has deep insight into feminine motives and feelings. He can see into girlish mannerisms and coquetteries as easily as he can understand deeper emotions.

You have seen that Hardy's women are not the extraordinary beauties that one sees in fairy tales or romances. His women are down-to-earth, flesh and blood characters who are not depicted as weak and helpless. Nor are they idealized. Hardy avoids these extremes. He is sympathetic to women and while he does show their imperfections, he does not unduly stress upon their weaknesses.

The three woman characters in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, all belong to different categories. Susan is the patient enduring sufferer, Lucetta the nervous and restless pleasure-seeker while Elizabeth-Jane the ordinary intelligent woman that we often meet in daily life. Let us look at each of them and assess their importance within the plot.

SUSAN HENCHARD: She is described as rather plain with the potential for attractiveness in her mobile face. The staylace dealer perceives her as a 'comely respectable body'. She appears meek and tolerant but when her husband goes too far (in the wife-sale), she is aroused into anger and she flings her wedding ring in his face. She is naive in that she does not understand that the sailor is not her legal husband. When he is declared drowned, she sets out in search of her long-lost husband Henchard. She is motivated purely by the consideration of providing a home for her daughter. What is remarkable is that she sets forth independently and succeeds in finding him, even if it is quite by chance. This would hardly presuppose a meek and clinging character. When she installs her daughter in her husband's house, she has succeeded in her aim. However, she never appears as the quiet capable person that she proves to be.

Why do we continue to think of her as meek'? It is because we are looking at her through Henchard's eyes. His responses are so powerful and the narrator's manipulations so subtle, that we see her exactly as Henchard does---a meek uncomplaining long-suffering person whose wrongs must be redressed but who is hardly worthy of love or respect. She is described as pale and faded, almost a 'skellinton'. This physical pallor coincides with the overall impression she creates. Casterbridge boys refer to her as 'The Ghost'. Symbolically, she is a ghost from Henchard's past and her arrival complicates his life for him. Hardy describes her as 'a poor forgiving woman' and this is in some ways Henchard's attitude towards her. Thus we see Susan through his eyes. She does not have a major role but it is through her that

Hardy sets the action of the novel in motion and causes the complication in the plot when she returns to Henchard.

LUCETTA LA SUEUR: The French name suggests foreign glamour. She belongs to Jersey and has lived a somewhat reckless life as an army officer's daughter. Henchard has shared an 'intimate' relationship with her and to that extent feels bound to honour his commitment to her. She is 'immoral' by Victorian standards and this unconcern for moral values has something to do with her alien antecedents. Yet Hardy does not call upon us to condemn this aspect of her character. In this sense, Hardy was a 'modern' born too soon, for he did not, subscribe to conventional standards of morality. His concept of morality is much wider and more humanitarian.

Lucetta is reckless, almost a soul-mate of Henchard in that like him, she is the author of her own destruction. When we first see her in Casterbridge we are told of her faded looks and perfect grooming which prompts the inhabitants of Mixen Lane to describe her as 'the proud piece of silk and waxwork'. She is opportunistic enough to make use of Elizabeth-Jane in getting close to her step-father. But she soon transfers her affections to Farfrae. She has no scruples about marrying him in secret. Though we are told of a happy marriage, she hardly exists in relation to Farfrae. It is somewhat pathetic that after her death, when Farfrae has learnt of the cause of her death 'a looming misery' is changed for 'a simple sorrow' as Farfrae reflects: 'it was hard to believe that life with her would have been productive of further happiness'. The effect of her death, as of Susan's is only one of 'simple sorrow'. It lacks the tragic grandeur that characterizes Henchard's end. Even though her motives and designs are carefully observed yet her role in the plot is primarily to heighten and intensify the rivalry between Henchard and Farfrae.

ELIZABETH –JANE: Elizabeth-Jane has no prominent traits and is observed with quiet realism. She is a selfless and unassuming girl who has inherited her mother's looks. She blooms with prosperity, but remains sober and subdued even in her days of plenty. She understands the dignity of labour and offers her services at the "three Mariners" mainly to defray the cost of their stay there. But she is also aware of her respectability and will not condescend to eat at the rather disreputable furnity stall when her mother stops there to enquire after Henchard's whereabouts. Elizabeth-Jane is tolerant, reticent and generous. We are told that 'knowledge—result of natural insight— she did not lack'. When provoked, she is capable of intense anger as she bitterly reprimands Henchard for his deceit in concealing her whereabouts from Newson. She is sensitive to the feelings of others and is willing to suppress her own desires so that those of others may thrive. She is a discreet friend of Lucetta, a loving daughter to Susan and a caring companion to Henchard when he is down and out. She is simple and Lucetta is able to manipulate her to further her own schemes. She is 'well liked' by Casterbridge society which, in general, spares no one from their critical observations. She expects no happiness in life and does not want to tempt fate by dressing well even when she can afford to. She has had a deprived life and Hardy sees that poetic justice is done when she finally marries Farfrae. What then is her role in the story? She is there to bring out

the more tolerant and loving aspects of Henchard's character, to accelerate the final crisis and to provide the final comment on the action.

Elizabeth-Jane is one of the more important secondary characters who, along with Farfrae, comes alive. Lucetta and Susan are hardly there. The three women are important within the plot because they help crystallize the crisis at three different stages in his life. It is the wife-sale that set the action in motion. Lucetta's arrival in Casterbridge furthers the theme of rivalry between the two men by adding another dimension. Henchard loves Elizabeth-Jane intensely and when she spurns him, his spirit is totally crushed and he accepts his end, a lonely and bitter man.

4.3.3 The Chorus

The chorus is an integral part of Greek tragedy providing the commentary on characters and events. They are usually the village elders who explain the actions that do not take place on the stage and have happened elsewhere. Hardy also uses a set of people who perform the same function. They comment on the characters and the main events in the story like Henchard's remarriage to Susan and subsequently her death. They organize the skimmington-ride that results in Lucetta's death. They provide the pathos and humour by their commentary. They are used as a technical device by Hardy to dramatize the events through their commentary as they do in the case of the Susan-Henchard remarriage. They provide the pathos in the event of Susan's death but they also put the whole event in proper perspective, rescuing it from degenerating into sentimentality.

Solomon Longways, Christopher Coney, Buzzford, Nance Mockridge and Mother Cuxsom are the more articulate members of Hardy's 'chorus'. They exist on the fringes of Casterbridge society, which takes great pleasure in denouncing the 'high and mighty'. They are disinterested observers whose comments on their social superiors are perceptive and varied. Their observations are an index to the prejudices and opinions of Casterbridge society. A dash of malice and sheer desire for fun have been the motivating factors behind the skimmity ride. The end result had not been visualized by the organizers. They provide the humour though their quaint dialect.

On the occasion of the Henchard-Susan remarriage, the chorus is gathered outside the church, and observes the couple as they emerge after the marriage. Their comments provide a humorous touch to the scene. Longways tells Mother Cuxsom: 'Here's Mrs Newson, a mere skellinton, has got another husband to keep her, while a woman yer tonnage have not'. Their down-to-earth approach neutralizes the sentimentality of Farfrae's nostalgic song. When Farfrae sings a tearful song about his faraway Scotland, Coney cannot help wondering aloud: 'What did ye come away from yer own country for young maister, if ye be so wounded about it?' Cuxsom's comment on Susan's death: 'And all her shining keys will be took from her ... and her wishes and ways will be all as nothing' heightens the pathos of the situation and at the same time transforms death from an abstract concept to concrete terms. It is the chorus that hints at the trouble ahead for Henchard when we are told that there is no 'good bread' at Casterbridge. They are the ones to initiate Farfrae's popularity. They are Casterbridge with its historical and traditional roots.

Check Your Progress 2

You have now had enough exposure to character delineation. As an exercise, we would like you to write in about 250-300 words the character sketch of Farfrae. Perhaps you should go back to the beginning of section 4.3 to look over the main points before you draw examples from the novel.

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4.4 GLOSSARY

- Tess and Eustacia** : unforgettable women characters in Hardy's novels *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *The Return of the Native* (1878) respectively.
- Samson shorn (biblical allusion)** : judge from Israel known for his great strength that was located in his hair. But when his hair was cut off by his wife Delilah, he became powerless like the down and out Henchard.
- Greek tragedy** : the hero is essentially a superior person who goes down fighting rather than admitting defeat. And it is because of this spirit that a moral victory is affirmed. Greek tragedy usually has a unity of time, place and action.
- Novalis** : German poet (1772- 1801)

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit. we have discussed:

- the instances of fate and coincidence that seem to contribute to Henchard's downfall. However, the seeds of Henchard's downfall lie in his own character.

- Hardy's deep insight into his characters and the various techniques he uses to project them as persons that 'live' and cast a deep and lasting impression on us.

The Mayor of Casterbridge:
Characterisation

4.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

If you have any difficulty, refer to Section 4.2. and substantiate your answer with examples from the text.

Check Your Progress 2

In your survey of Farfrae's character, we hope you have looked at Chapters. 6, 7, 8, 17, 23, 34, 39 and 42 of the novel for a fairly comprehensive view of his character traits.

