



RESEARCH PAPER

The Role of Henchard's Character in Loss and Profit of His Business in the Novel the Mayor of Casterbridge

Muhammad Afaq*¹ Maheen Shah² Nasim Gul³

1. M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST), Kohat, KP, Pakistan
2. M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST), Kohat, KP, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST), Kohat, KP, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** | Afaqtk88@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

To identify and explore the role of Michael Henchard's character in loss and profit of his business in Thomas Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, a qualitative research method is used in this study. The novel portrays the protagonist's journey from being a poor helpless hay trusser to a successful mayor and businessman of the town who finally ends up meeting a miserably tragic downfall at the end of the plot. The article discusses whether Henchard was driven by fate to the misery or was that his own decision making ability (character) that was flawed. The text of the novel is used as primary source of data collection. Many other research articles, journals and books served as secondary sources for data collection. After a diligent analysis of the textual data the researcher reaches to the conclusion that the novel is a great presentation of indeterminism. Through the protagonist's character Hardy has depicted the philosophy of 'Character is Fate' in a very artistic and realistic manner. As per findings of the study it is strongly recommended that other scholars may work on the role of fate in Hardy's characters, the impacts of genetics on his characters' lives and his profound philosophy of pessimism and nihilism are yet to be discovered areas where further research could easily be carried out.

KEYWORDS Henchard's Character, Loss, Profit, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Thomas Hardy

Introduction

Michael Henchard is a powerful person with lots of energy. The central character of Thomas Hardy's novel 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' (1886) is Michael Henchard, a wealthy grain trader. Although he has wonderful attributes, they stand in stark contrast to other, less desirable traits. As a result, he will make an effort to atone for his actions with his wife Susan, but he will continue to act hastily and impetuously when interacting with others. When fighting Farfrae, he insists on binding one of the arms since he is so sincere and upright that he will not withhold even a single penny of his wealth from administrators of his failed company. His honesty is praised by the administration as well. He treats Abel Whittle's mother with kindness and generosity. Henchard gives Donald Farfrae a start, which is very much to his credit. These are only a few examples of Henchard's integrity and kindness.

On the other hand, Henchard's darker aspects of the character are far more obvious. He has no qualms about punishing Abel Whittle harshly for being late, and his friendliness and generosity to Farfrae takes on an overwhelming and possessive tone. Although his

pride is admirable, it frequently develops into abhorrent egoism. As a result, his pride prevents him from telling Elizabeth-Jane about his past, and during the book's finale, he is unable to bring himself to the position to inform her about the truth of his deception of Newson. Once more, it is his pride that fuels his rivalry and resentment towards Donald Farfrae but despite his clear character defects, Henchard is capable of intense love. He develops the fortitude to bear the pain brought on by his own misdeeds in silence, and it is this determination that withstands the wrath of something like heavens that endows him with vast height.

Thomas Hardy's masterpiece is really *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. It was released in the middle of Hardy's writing career. It adhered to Hardy's method of writing tales that took place at the intersection of traditional and contemporary culture. The tragic story of the hero Michael Henchard, who supported himself by trussing hay is told in this book. Intoxicated, he sold his daughter and wife to a sailor named Newson. He swore he would not drink for 21 years in order to make up for his sin. The scene abruptly changed to 18 years back when Susan, Henchard's wife and daughter Elizabeth Jane returned to Wessex. They searched for Michael Henchard, who was already the wealthy and honorable mayor of Casterbridge. Unfortunately, Henchard's obstinate nature contributed to his wretched existence, which included having his sweetheart leave him and marry his nemesis, having his adopted daughter passed away a long time ago, having his stepdaughter despise him for hiding the truth from her, and ultimately dying alone. Michael Henchard was brilliantly crafted by Thomas Hardy. His obstinate nature has been so vividly portrayed that the mayor himself appears to be standing directly in front of the readers. Hardy shows his palms folded back and eyebrows knotted. Another standout aspect of the narrative was the description of the Casterbridge and Wessex landscapes. Hardy depicted a lovely village that saw significant transformation as a consequence of the industrial revolution during the time of transition. It was a time when the industrialization brought mechanization to the countryside and changed the way industry was produced. People's minds also altered in response, which led to coexistence and conflicts between the conventional and the modern mindsets.

Hardy is primarily a story teller and should be viewed as a chronicle of moods and deeds. He lived in the age of transition. The industrial revolution was in process of destroying the agricultural life, and the subsequent shifting of population caused disintegration of rural customs and traditions. It was a period when fundamental beliefs like religious, social, scientific and political were shaken to their core. Hardy read *Darwin's Origin of the Species* and his essays and reviews, both of which were to influence his views towards religion. Hardy could not reconcile the idea of a beneficent, omnipotent deity with the fact of omnipresent evil and the wicked tendency of circumstances towards happiness.

About Casterbridge

The effect of Hardy's upbringing, geographical history, and architectural studies could be seen on every page of his Wessex novels. His characters frequently demonstrate all the emotions, dislikes, loves, and enmities that a life in the country seems to engender, such as is the scenario in "The Mayor of Casterbridge" but the people are always real as they are based upon individuals he knew growing up, people he had read about in songs and ballads, especially people whose terrible backstories he had discovered during his early architecture apprenticeship. Long, skillfully written paragraphs that describe the surrounding landscape, the structures, the roads, the business, and the entertainment that make up Casterbridge's surroundings are also included. This literary work has a life and a reality because there had been a Hardy's comfort with this specific place, which he named "Wessex."

In Hardy's worldview, the fight between humans and humans as well as between man and fate dramatizes the human situation. Usually, fate or the random forces of the universe have the final say. Fate is all-knowing and in its blindness, disregards the misery of humans. The Mayor of Casterbridge appears to occasionally show this malevolence of the fate. However, Henchard, a victim of the fate, is also the worst moral violator, suggesting that there is a reason for the agony he goes through. Henchard's fortitude and desire to endure pain and hunger in order to atone for his misdeeds also contribute to the novel's hopeless conclusion. This feature distinguishes the book as a particular application of the Hardy's philosophy.

The novel is the one bright book of life. (D.H. Lawrence)

There are several elements which build the edifice of novel. Following elements are the specific parts of the novel:

1. Theme
2. Point of view
3. Dialogue
4. Conflict
5. Plot
6. Characterization
7. Setting

The genre of the novel has encompassed an extensive range of types:

- Historical novel
- Picaresque
- Gothic
- Sentimental
- Biographical
- Autobiographical
- Epistolary
- Science fiction
- Mysterious
- Romantic
- Psychological

The final blow comes when the 'furniture women' appears and exposes Henchard's past crimes. He loses all his credibility or trustworthiness and surprisingly admits all his guilt. After this Elizabeth wants to reconcile with him but all remains in-vain. He returns all the letters of Lucetta to Jopp but he discloses them to the town's people and then they arrange a 'skimmity-ride' throughout Casterbridge with Henchard's and Lucetta's effigies parading in the locality. When Lucetta sees herself paraded in mimicry, she dies of the shock caused by this shameful parade. Henchard, who becomes extremely poor lives with Elizabeth Jane. Now he is completely dependent on Elizabeth Jane because she is the only source of joy for him as he begins to accept her as his own daughter. One day, Newson the biological father of Elizabeth Jane returns looking for his wife and daughter, but Henchard lies to him and says that both of them are dead. After hearing this, Newson goes away. Henchard begins to fear he will lose Elizabeth as well. Farfare, now as a widower, starts a new relationship with Elizabeth Jane. Newson, returns to Casterbridge and learns the truth

about his daughter. Elizabeth Jane shocks when she learns about her past and disowns Henchard.

Ultimately Henchard leaves Casterbridge as a penniless man. A few months later he hears about wedding ceremony of Elizabeth Jane. Henchard desperately wants to see his daughter and to apologize for lying to her but when he appears on her wedding, Elizabeth feels annoyed with him and treats him like a stranger. Henchard with his broken heart goes away and says nothing in self-defense. Only Abble Whittle, his former employer, is there to fulfill his needs. He dies in his severe depression and despair of life.

Operational Terms

Indeterminism

It is the belief that all human actions are not primarily predetermined by preceding conditions or causes as by personal free will and deliberate choice making.

Character

Character refers to the strength of mind, individuality or the moral strength possessed by a human being.

Fate

It refers to the presumed cause, force or divine will that drives the events in human lives.

Free will

It refers to the person's ability to choose according to his own inclination, motivation or will power.

Casterbridge

It refers to the imaginary town in the novel where the protagonist was living.

Literature Review

'Analysis of the Tragic Character in The Mayor of Casterbridge by Andri Hermansyah' Thesis, 2009, Ahmad Hidayatullah State Islamic University' English Alphabets Faculty of the Adab as well as Humanities, Jakarta, Thomas Hardy's novel serves as the study's analytical unit. The goal of the research for this study is to determine how the horrific character of Henchard is portrayed in the book and how his pride-driven demise occurs. The theory of tragic character is used to qualitatively analyze the collected data. The author comes to the conclusion that Thomas Hardy portrays Henchard's ascent and fall after gathering and investigating the data. Hardy presents Henchard as an unknown common man. Due to his perseverance, ability to convince Farfrae to work for him, and ability to refrain from consuming alcohol, he transforms from being nothing to becoming something. However, Henchard's success is short-lived. Due to his poor character and mistakes in judgement, he reverses his direction from something to nothing.

Thomas Hardy, who is viewed as the last novelist of Victorian era, stood out from his contemporaries in many ways. "The phenomenon of similarity" is one of them. It hurts rather than helps the fictional characters. The dissertation that Thomas Hardy represents naturalism by viewing life from the point of view of a tragedy writer is supported by the abundance of catastrophes in his works. If we consider that Hardy lived in an era of abrupt scientific advancement & rapid changes to traditionally accepted values, it might not be so

challenging to comprehend his pessimistic outlook. This study explores whether Michael Henchard from *The Mayor of Casterbridge* can indeed be viewed as a victim of fate and destined for failure or a character fairly driven by his own decisions. There will also be a discussion about whether or not his tragic ending was caused by his personality defects. It will be determined that Michael Henchard's devastation was caused by dark forces within his personality rather than by the black games of the destiny (Smith & Elder, 1886).

While studying Thomas Hardy, readers find two distinctly prominent philosophies of 'Character is destiny' and 'Destiny is Character' in his literary works. The mayor of Casterbridge was driven by immanent will as will to some extent as many researchers have analyzed this literary piece in view of determinism. According to one of those sources Henchard was blindly driven by natural law into the auction of his wife and daughter. He was supposed to be affected by the bad weather. It was that indifferent law of nature that made Newson reappeared in his life transforming all his happiness into a permanent discomfort and ultimately a miserable death. (Afaq et al., 2022)

Research Design

The researcher has adopted qualitative method in carrying out this research as in Literature, mostly this method is used. This research design is concerned with establishing answers to the whys and how of a phenomenon. Qualitative method of a research includes observations, textual analysis and interviews. Unlike quantitative research, a qualitative research deals with statements and ideas. It allows a researcher to an in-depth exploration of ideas and experience.

Data Analysis Technique

The researcher has analyzed and described the data collected through descriptive qualitative analysis of the text. The Character of Henchard is closely studied. The proper focus on the actions and decisions taken by Henchard helped the researcher to find out how much his character struggled to achieve in life and how despite all his efforts he lost everything at the end of the novel. The researcher evaluated all those quotes and lines from the novel especially of Henchard that shows that his character is responsible for his gain and loss in the business. Through this technique the researcher has conducted the research study and met the findings of the problem in the study.

Textual Analysis

To comprehend the purpose of the study, the qualitative data is collected and analyzed through textual analysis. In order to draw a suitable conclusion, the researcher has critically examined the study's primary research objectives, the primary and secondary data pertaining to the book "*The Mayor of Casterbridge*."

According to Terry Eagleton's book "*How to Read Literature*," the word "Character" derives from the Greek word "Kharkter" (engraved mark), which was used in ancient Greece to leave a distinctive mark. Since then, it has come to mean a characteristic, unique to a particular person that we might think of as the signature of the person. Character is the whole of a person's intellectual and moral traits (Eagleton, 2013 p. 48).

Likewise in his article "*The Fate of Michael Henchard's Character*," Simon (2000) describes Michael Henchard's character as an arrogant, fiery, motivated by imperious ambitions, careless of consequences, brutally honest, but destructive of himself and others around him. Therefore, it is abundantly evident from the story that Hardy offers a concrete

example of the protagonist's own shortcoming. Despite his positive traits, his impulsiveness and arrogance cause him to be oblivious to the sensitivity of the circumstances, which causes him to cause himself a lot of problems. He intentionally makes such abrupt decisions that are not in his favor but he keeps on making them in order to satisfy his personal ego and selfish gains.

"Some folks want their luck buttered" (Hardy, 1886, p.184)

Readers see that Hardy treats Henchard's character sometimes as mere a puppet in the hands of fate which indifferently drives it to a miserable life. Peterson (1959) affirms in his work *The mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy* that it is evident from the textual examples that Henchard lacked those qualities of a strong character owing to which he could have made many fruitful opportunities for him but he willfully chooses to be denaturalized by the decisions he had taken himself.

"I won't be a slave to the past. I'll love where I choose." (Hardy, 1886, p.113)

Ramel (1994) narrates that Hardy's characters are portrayed in such a manner that they often take fruitless attempts from their will power that prove to be harmful for their life struggles in the later stages. Henchard not only unties the bond with his wife Susan but also abandons his daughter Elizabeth Jane (125; ch.19). In this context, Hardy's emphasizes Henchard's rise and fall via character rather than fate. The work is, as its title implies, an account of the instability, annoyance, accomplishments, and failures of a specific guy. Henchard's misery is a direct outcome of his own actions and conduct. There are passages in the book that blatantly imply that Henchard's pains, mental anguish, and the ups and downs of his business are completely out of proportion to his wrongdoings.

"Fundamental belief consoled him for superficial irony" (Hardy, 1886, p.229)

Spivey (1954) suggests that although Hardy wrote many tragedies but many of them lack some essential aspects needed for an exact definition of a tragedy. He is of the view that many of the tragedies by Hardy lack the consistency of tragic flaw in his characters as many of them are constructed to be defeated by the paralysis of the will. The characters make certain choices that become irreversible later on in their lives and ultimately lead them to a downfall.

Elaine Showalter (1988) has showed Henchard's decisions as his own mental flaws which cause him a lot to lose afterwards in his life. For instance the auction of his wife Susan to Newson in a drunken state of mind despite her innocence and meekness was his own freewill choice. After awakening from the sleep Henchard realizes that he had committed a blunder but what had been done could not be undone at that moment. Even after when Susan returns after a long time to him, he tries to make willful amends. He should have make an apology to Susan for what he had done to her eighteen years ago but he sends a letter mentioning those exact amount of money for which he had sold her at a furmity auction.

The relevance of the character is immediately apparent in the opening pages of the book, when hay-trusser Michael Henchard travels with his wife and daughter in search of employment to improve his family's standard of living. Unfortunately, he is still unable to find employment. He brings his family to the tent of a furmity vendor out of discouragement and contempt, where he drinks alcohol and loses his wits after a few serves. In this scene, viewers get their first glimpse of Henchard as a young, impoverished, reckless, furious, and impulsive man who, while intoxicated, sells his wife and daughter.

"For my part I don't see why men who have got wives, and don't want 'em, shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses... why shouldn't they put them up and sell 'em by auction to men who are in want of such articles. Hey! Why, begad, I'd sell mine this minute, if anybody would buy her!" (Hardy, 1886, p.30)

He fails to understand why wives who are unwanted by their husbands should not be divorced. The researcher has already addressed Henchard's perception that his family prevents him from becoming a wealthy and successful man. He hopes to achieve some sort of respectable position in society.

"The ruin of good men by bad wives, and, more particularly, the disappointment of many a promising youth's high hopes and aspirations and the extinction of his energies by a young, imprudent marriage." (Rodden, 2014).

This claim demonstrates Henchard's excessive ambition and the hopes and objectives he had but was unable to realize due to his family. "I married at 18, like the fool that I was," he claims. He waved his hand in the direction of himself and his family in an effort to draw attention to the exhibit. (Hardy, 1886, p.9)

As a result, he becomes the town's mayor and launches his own corn company after selling his wife and daughter to a poor hay-trusser due to his unwavering ambition and struggle. He advances socially throughout the entire town and makes a lot of money selling corn and hay.

According to Ravi K. Sinha's *"A Critical Analysis of The Mayor of Casterbridge,"* Henchard swears to abstain from alcohol for a period of 21 years following the scandalous incident in which he sells his wife while intoxicated. Thus, as a result of his courage, tenacity, and strong character, he is elected Mayor of Casterbridge.

The strong desires are compared to a type of energy by John Stuart Mill (2001, 55). He contends that while strong desires and this energy can sometimes result in good things, they can also have the opposite effect. According to Mill, those with strong, vibrant impulses can move forward in the direction of success and love. The transformation of desires into success can be illustrated by looking at Henchard's ascent to the position of Mayor and his acquisition of the reputation of a prosperous and successful corn merchant in the community as opposed to his initial state of penury at the novel's beginning.

Henchard, as portrayed by Hardy, is undoubtedly a very ambitious and vivacious character. He is driven by a strong desire to succeed and become wealthy. He thus rises to a respectable position and becomes a prosperous businessman in Casterbridge as a result of his character. As people comment on Henchard's position in the story, saying "He is a pillar of the town," readers can see how Henchard advances in his social standing. He is now a respected citizen and a successful corn merchant. Henchard's company grows stronger (Hutton, 1963).

Conclusion

In order to address the issue of whether Henchard was forced into his misery by fate or his own decision-making (character) was flawed, the researcher has identified all the textual examples and provided a thorough analysis. The novel is a fantastic example of indeterminism, the researcher concludes after reading and analyzing the textual data. Hardy has portrayed the idea that "Character is fate" in a very realistic and artistic way through the protagonist's character. The most obvious manifestations of Henchard's flaws are his overindulgence in alcohol despite being alarmed by the furnace maker and his wife

Susan, his unwilling sale of Susan to Newson for only five guineas, his purchase of a large quantity of wheat without taking the weather into account, and his firing of Farfrae and firing out of Able Whittle from his business. These actions led to Henchard's downfall. Had he desired, he could have acted differently, but in order to assert his dominance, he continued to drink, insisted on selling his wife, bought a large quantity of wheat, and purposefully removed Farfrae and Able Whittle from their positions. The conclusion that can be drawn from the foregoing discussion is that Henchard's ambition and zeal made him the Mayor of Casterbridge, but that his rise was overshadowed by his personal character flaws, which ultimately caused him to fall. Henchard was doomed to a pitiful death by his own character. His character flaws—impulsiveness, rage, pride, and jealousy—played a significant role in determining how his life turned out. His impulsive choices weren't good. He made decisions that were either driven by rage, frustration, or jealousy, which indicates that he had the power to make different choices but chose not to. The negative aspect of Henchard's personality is what caused him to lose his name, career, business and life.

Recommendations

All we know, the researcher humbly acknowledges and confesses, is that we know nothing at all. The researcher did his best to invent something new for readers of literature in this novel, though. Although this thesis is far from perfect, the researcher is optimistic that it will satisfy the need in the literary community and will be useful to both English literature students and critics. The researcher is of the opinion that much more research needs to be done on this book and that there are still a lot of intriguing things to be learnt about this subject. Other scholars and students may examine how fate played a part in a character's demise, as well as examine other characters and various themes in the book.

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