

The Conflict between Metaphysical and Human Agencies in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

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Received 01-05-2025

Revised 08-05-2025

Accepted 01-06-2025

Published 06-06-2025



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Abstract:

The present paper explores *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy for understanding the author's metaphysical perspectives--particularly his stance about the role of metaphysical Power and human free will in determining not only the life of Michael Henchard but also the lives of other characters in the novel. The study problematizes the conventional recognition of Hardy as an agnostic atheist, and his purportedly consequent stance in favour of secular perspectives that attribute Michael Henchard's tragedy to his own character traits. Contrarily, this paper aims to focus on Hardy's ambiguities with regard to the factors that played the most determining roles in the world of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* thereby revealing his lack of an absolute position as regards the existence and the role of a metaphysical Power.

Key words: Metaphysical; Agnosticism; Providence; Fate; Chance

Introduction:

The Mayor of Casterbridge, one of Thomas Hardy's major novels, revolves around the life and tragedy of Michael Henchard who, in spite of committing the damnable crime and sin, phenomenally rose in social and economic status. But he soon began to suffer setbacks one after another until he met the tragic end of his life. It is found that in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, like in most other major novels of Hardy, there are widespread allusions to the agents of the supreme Power as the most determining force that can be accounted for by the theological determinism. However, alongside such force, Hardy also allowed for the causal processes for the events and incidents in the novel.

Research Questions:

The current paper attempts to find the answer to the following questions—1. What are Thomas Hardy's ambivalent positions regarding the question of existence and the determining role of a metaphysical Power? 2. Is Hardy's metaphysical perspective a downright agnostic atheism? 3. Does Hardy have any absolute stance as regards either agnosticism atheism or agnostic theism?

Objective:

In order to duly answer the questions mentioned above, the paper aims to find the extent to which Hardy attributed the outcome of one's life to one's own character traits and the extent to

which he attributed that to the interference of a supreme Power. In the process, I shall scrutinise Hardy's actual perspectives about such metaphysical subject matters as the existence and role of a supernatural Power.

Significance of the Study:

Hardy did not have any consistent attitudes regarding the existence of a metaphysical Power. Though his scepticism can be easily identified, one can also find plethora of elements throughout his writings that can be construed as some kind of theistic belief that may not be as much in a Christian sense as in a broadly metaphysical sense. The critics generally recognise the dualistic attitudes of Hardy represented in novels and poetry. Yet, most critics' judgments in favour of Hardy's agnosticism and his siding with the secular causative forces seem somewhat one-sided. Hence, the significance of this paper lies in its exploration of one of Hardy's major novels *The Mayor of Casterbridge* dispassionately focusing on those tendencies of Hardy that problematise the general verdict about Hardy's perspective about the question of the Supreme Being, and in the crystallisation of the novelist's actual position about the matter.

Methodology:

The method followed for this research is the qualitative one. That is to say, it is not based on any empirical study. It is rather library-based and explorative in nature. Collection of information was done based on content analysis. Both the primary and secondary sources have been used. As typically used for research in the field of Arts and Humanities, the MLA (Modern Language Association) style (9th edition) has been used in this study.

Theoretical Framework:

For examining Hardy's metaphysical perspectives as depicted in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the analyses and arguments in this paper have been underpinned by certain metaphysical concepts such as Aristotle's concept of chance, Descartes' idea of God's absolute

independence, different kinds of agnosticism, Saint Aquinas' concept of providence, and concept of fate and determinism of various kinds.

Literature Review:

The difficulty in evaluating Hardy's actual position as regards the metaphysical subject matter was because Hardy frequently changed his perspectives. Miller says with references to T. S. Eliot that the latter hated Hardy as a "village atheist" for "ranting against the deity" (45). The statement about T. S. Eliot rightly suggests Hardy's ambivalent position in the way that, despite being a village atheist, he spoke against God in an impassioned way.

Hardy observed in January 1890, "I have been looking for God for 50 years, and I think that if he had existed, I should have discovered him. As an external personality, of course--the only true meaning of the word" (F. Hardy 224). His statement amounts to the negation of the true existence of God as an external Being. Rimmer, however, argued that Hardy's statement is a proof of his faith in a Supreme Being (20). Nevertheless, from such statement the critics in general deduce that Hardy was an atheist. But then, when Hardy came under severe criticism and was accused of atheism after the publication of his last novel *Jude the Obscure*, he resented the criticism and commented "all the literary contortionist jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic as if I were a clamorous atheist" (Jedrzejewski 38).

One of the observations of Terry Eagleton offers an interesting viewpoint that attempts to explain the reason of Hardy's purported atheism. According to Eagleton, Hardy had a perspectival view about the world. He derived the view from such theorists as Darwin and Nietzsche. He associated Hardy's perspectival thinking with the irony that the latter invented. Eagleton defines irony as a result of the perspectival clash and argues that Hardy's atheism resulted from the fact that multiple perspectives prevailing in the world could not be reconciled so as to form a totality. For Eagleton, God is the term signifying the point

where these divergent perspectives meet and become the whole. Hardy's "evolutionary view" disallowed the view of "totalization" or "meta-discourse". However, Egleton holds that even in case of the existence of God, for Hardy He would have no relevance (16).

In the 1890s, instead of adhering to a radical model of agnosticism, he began to adopt a flexible form of agnosticism that could make room for some facets of Christian creed thereby making some sort of reconciliation with the leading form of Christianity (Hands 38). In fact, Hardy's attachment to Christianity which was ingrained in him from the early stage of his life is manifest in his portrayals of characters. Clym, a grandson of a clergyman despite having the philosophical intellection of an agnostic, became a saint, so to say, at the end of the *The Return of the Native*. Besides, he acquired in Paris knowledge of "ethical system popular at that time" (Hands 61). Gabriel that means in Hebrew the man of God possessed the humility of a Christian. Besides, his occupation as a shepherd has a religious connotation.

Despite often using his rational faculty regarding the question of a controlling supernatural Power thereby at times denying the knowability of God and at times even speaking of his disbelief, Hardy was emotionally attached to the Church. Besides, Hardy often used Christian values as the mechanism for "influencing" the attitudes of the readers towards the characters and their moral positions (Schweik 58). Almost all the major novels of Hardy contain a good number of allusions and references to the Biblical elements. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* are the perfect examples of this kind. Miller argues that "*The Mayor of Casterbridge* overtly affirms that the reader should think of it as taking its place within the vast panorama of Hebrew-Christian classical literature and scripture"(45). Such attachment of Hardy to Christianity as represented in his novels was at variance with his attachment to the agnostic strain of philosophy that is found in his

personal life, and also in novel such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

Hardy's ambiguity is mostly associated with his outlook towards metaphysical subject matter. And, this can be traced both within the boundary of special metaphysics as well as the general metaphysics. The claim of Deborah L. Collins that Hardy was a human oxymoron was borne out by Hardy's dual thoughts expressed in his novels and poetry. Overall, his fictions and poetry bear the marks of influence of such thinkers as Darwin, Spencer, Huxley Comte, Hume, Mill, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Von Hartman (Jedrzejewski 60). In Hardy's personal writings, Hardy recognised the fact that he was fascinated by the agnostic ideas of some of the thinkers mentioned, and their ideas are represented in novels such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.

The dilemma between Human and Metaphysical Agencies:

Although the dualistic tendency of Hardy about the cause of Michael Henchard's tragedy as depicted in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is clearly noticeable when one looks at his overall attitudes across the novel, the inhuman act of sale of wife at the Wedon-prior fair was primarily attributed to the inborn character of Michael Henchard. It was both a criminal and sinful act. Some kind of punishment is customarily associated with sinful and immoral act whether its basis is rooted in the social construction of moral codes evolving with the advance of civilization and culture, or in the divine revelation. Judging an action from moral point of view is a common human practice. It also raises the question of right and wrong regardless of if human life and society are seen as mechanical and self-sustaining or leave some scope for the role of the supernatural Deity. Henchard's punishment may or may not come from a supernatural Deity. It had dual possibilities of its origin. Obviously, for Hardy, one of the causes of Henchard's miseries was his fate resulting from his character. The role of character is highlighted as Hardy wrote, "But most probably

luck had little to do with it. Character is Fate, said Novalis, and Farfrae's character was just the reverse of Henchard, who might be described as Faust has been described---as a vehement gloomy being who has quitted the ways of vulgar men, without light to guide him on a better way" (124).

Unlike Farfrae, Henchard's character had the destructive traits. But his character traits alone did not ruin him. They alone did not determine the future events that led to his tragedy. The power that played the role in causing his fall was the fate. Apart from its meaning associated with the human character, it has a metaphysical meaning too. In the second category, it is an agency that depends on, and is derived from a higher Power (Joad 59-60). Obviously, in the case of Michael Henchard, what the metaphysical fate brought for him was not entirely unconnected with his character.

In addition to associating Henchard's fate with his character traits, Hardy was aware that the supreme Power or God as the regulator of the fate, did not take kindly to Henchard's act of immorality with the underlying assumption that the Power had a bias in favour of morality. In fact, Hardy's concepts of fate were not limited to the meaning of fate that Novalis used in a personal sense as determined by one's character traits. Simon Gatrell observes that "Hardy was attempting in the novel (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*) to draw a distinction between a religious understanding of a causative force and a secular one" (60).

However, when Hardy presented his idea of fate in the novel, it was presented as actively involved in meting out punishment to those who breached the moral code. It was, however, contrary to his general conception about the supreme Power as amoral. Almost all the major characters of the novel were aware that they were guided and governed by an invisible Power. The power of an Unmoved Mover dominated the thoughts of the major characters. Hardy made the presence of a higher Power constitute the overarching atmosphere of the novel where the

characters were mostly found haunted by the interference of that Power.

Jagadish Chandra Dave, however, opined that Henchard's nature and character were responsible for the punishment (65-66). Likewise, one may argue that the assumption of an interference of higher intelligence, either of religious or of broadly metaphysical nature, in the process leading to the total annihilation of Henchard is unwarranted. Nevertheless, it also can be argued that there happened a number of events throughout the novels that had little to do with Henchard's character traits per se. They happened only by chance, bypassing the rationally explainable processes of cause and effect. However, there were a complex series of causes and effects behind these events too. Yet, one wonders why those events happened in that particular time, place, and to that particular person. Considering the roles that those chance-events played, and the way they did, one can perceive the presence of a supernatural Power. It appeared that this Power took over the responsibility to redress the balance lost in that village fair. Hardy is, in fact, found to allow for both the rational and theological explanation for the events. With regard to such ambiguities, Simon Gatrell referred to the two different explanations given by Hardy's narrator about the diversion of Farfrae's attraction from Elizabeth to Lucetta. He wrote that "there is a perfectly adequate sequence of cause and effect in the previous chapters to account for the growth of attraction between Lucetta and Farfrae, and yet we are told here that such a rational explanation is illusory, and that Elizabeth-Jane's personal malignant star had in fact caused it all" (63).

The Act of Providence and Fate:

One of the crucial moments of the novel is the return of Susan and Elizabeth to Casterbridge and their discovery that Michael was the Mayor of Casterbridge. Besides, another turning point in the plot is the advent of Donald Farfrae. Nobody knew, except Hardy himself, the irony in Michael Henchard's being deeply moved by the note that Farfrae had sent to him in the "King's Arms".

Impressed by Farfrae's unusual ability, Henchard instantly went to meet him at the "Three Mariners" inn and offered him an employment. The following day, the Scotchman, in response to Henchard's emotional appeal for his staying back, said with a flush, "I never expected this---I did not! It's Providence! Should anyone go against it? No, I'll not go to America; I'll stay and be your man" (Hardy 79)!

That was how Farfrae looked at the cause of his change of mind and the eventual acceptance of the Mayor's offer instead of going to America. Providence implies the existence of a loving God and His care to lead His creatures to a positive goal (Aquinas 270). Regarding Farfrae's perspective about the supernatural intervention as the cause of an event, Simon Gatrell wrote, "There is a conventional Christian overtone to the word Providence; and his religious (if not Christian) understanding of causation is made clear in a parallel phrasing at a similar moment of decision (his acceptance of the mayoralty of Casterbridge)" (60).

The way in which Henchard's effort to restore harmony failed seemed to be a mockery of fate. Though Henchard spared no pains in compensating the damage caused by his sinful act, he had to face this ironical turn of events. One should expect that the lapses of his character should be accounted for. He should not go unpunished. But the nature of punishment he underwent was remarkable. It had nothing to do with the law of the land. Neither did the society excommunicate him nor did Susan herself lodge a complaint against him in court.

Henchard could have arguably tried to have the negative effect of his earlier mistake lessened by unfairly using his power. But instead, he castigated himself and chose a difficult path for perfection. Considering the degree of his corrective measures, he perhaps could have derived a more sympathetic judgement, perhaps even pardon, from a human punishing agency. It is true that his effort to maintain his justness and tolerance of his pain made the folks of the town

sympathetic to him. Daniel R. Schwarz argued, "The novel comes full circle and makes Henchard, who had borne throughout the onus of moral opprobrium, the object of considerable compassion. When as a lonely man he reverses his journey of twenty-five years earlier, walking from Casterbridge to Weydon-Priors as an act of penance he engages our sympathy" (57).

Nevertheless, Henchard's impulsive nature, though tempered with rational judgement got the better of him. It was a major weakness of his character that led to the negative result. After the discovery of Elizabeth's real father, Henchard almost lost his equilibrium. It was ironical to discover that Elizabeth Jane was not his daughter. Henchard's sudden rude attitudes towards Elizabeth shocked her who incidentally came across Lucetta. The latter offered to give her the shelter in her home near the market. Lucetta's coming to Casterbridge was to marry Michael Henchard. He began to feel bad for his step daughter once she left him. It was as if "fate again comes to play when he starts missing her" (Begga 11).

When Lucetta Templeman was waiting for Henchard, she found Donald Farfrae at the door. The coming of Farfrae was by chance. The word chance is often commonly used to refer to an unusual event the cause of which is invisible or unexplainable. Aristotle supported the view that chance exists, and some purpose also may be attributed to it. With reference to Aristotle, it is argued that when something is done or something occurs for a purpose but it is done or it occurs unusually, i.e., by coincidence, due to unusual accident that is meaningful, it is considered to occur by chance (Dudely 27). Farfrae actually did not come for Lucetta. But they fell in love with each other in a dramatic haste. Henchard became sidelined, and so was his step daughter. The sudden love affair of Farfrae and Lucetta led to their marriage to the shock of both Henchard and Elizabeth.

Henchard's delay in meeting Lucetta alone could not be the only reason behind her rejection

of him. Lucetta was not likely to be so suddenly won over by a stranger who had incidentally become Henchard's rival. One may argue that the loss of Lucetta can not be attributed only to Henchard's character traits. Rather, there might have been the involvement of an external force behind Lucetta's new direction and the consequent insult of Henchard. The force may be called fate or Providence. It seemed that for committing the sinful act, the Power would not be pleased until "the total humiliation of the offender and the ultimate restoration of the order offended" (Patterson 93).

Lucetta found in Farfrae what she did not find in Henchard. In the worldly terms, she could match someone better than Farfrae, but she did not look for any other source of happiness. As in the case of some other major characters, in the case of Lucetta too, Hardy emphasised on the role of fate—a decreeing agency of the supreme metaphysical Being. "For the ancient Greeks and Romans, Fate was a vaguely-defined power which controls all beings" (Cowburn 145). About fate, Hardy wrote, "Yet having decided to break away from Henchard one might have supposed her capable of aiming higher than Farfrae. But Lucetta reasoned nothing: she feared hard words from the people with whom she had been earlier associated; she had no relatives left; and with native lightness of heart took kindly to what fate offered" (179).

Lucetta accepted with an attitude of resignation what was offered to her by fate. She had no hand behind Farfrae's coming. He came to see Elizabeth Jane. But nobody could predict what would really follow. Though there might have been some apparent causes for the incidental mutual infatuation, at the most it could have been momentary. Given the fallout of that meeting, one would also agree with Hardy that Farfrae's coming to Lucetta's life was determined by fate. Besides, looking at the whole spectrum of the events, one would also assume that the intervention of the supernatural Power in Farfrae's romantic relationship with Lucetta, is closely connected

with that of the same Power in the series of punishment that Henchard was undergoing.

Now the lady who sheltered Elizabeth robbed her of her 'undeclared lover'. What an irony! She again was at the receiving end of what she least desired. Such conflict between what she desired and what she received was nothing new in her life. About the sad state of Elizabeth's life, Hardy wrote, "Continually it had happened that what she had desired had not been granted her, and that what had been granted her, she had not desired. So, she viewed with an approach to equanimity the now cancelled days when Donald had been her undeclared lover, and wondered what unwished-for thing Heaven might send her in place of him" (180).

She was distressed by her inability to exercise her free will, but she was not totally devastated. She had the hope that Heaven might send her a substitute for Farfrae in some form or the other. Perhaps, her belief in the divine guidance enabled her to bear her pain calmly.

Henchard's Ambivalence and Predicament:

Intending to surpass Farfrae in business, Henchard again resorted to hiring a manager. He again employed Jopp, a needy man. Henchard based his expected profit on a probability of weather conditions. In Casterbridge, the prices of corns fluctuated depending on the good or bad harvest. Henchard chose this way of gambling for outshining Farfrae. For Henchard, the certainty of the success of his plan depended on the certainty of a foul weather in that season. Hence, he was desperate to learn the weather condition in advance.

Superstitious as he was, Henchard met a weather prophet. The latter assured him of the coming of a foul weather meaning that there would be bad harvest. As such, Henchard purchased grain in a huge amount. But his hopes were dashed because, contrary to the prognostication of the "weather prophet" there came excellent sunny weather. Hence, the prices of the grains dramatically fell. Henchard did not

wait with patience--a quality that he lacked in some crucial moments. After the disastrous loss, he chalked it up to an external force rather than to his flawed plan. Hardy commented, "at this turn of the scales he remained silent. The movements of his mind seemed to tend to the thought that some power was working against him" (190).

His perception that some Power was against him entrenched itself deeply in his mind especially after the biggest sin that he had committed in the Wyedon-Priors fair. His sense of guilt originating from that incident kept haunting him. Like Hardy's ambivalence about his ideas about the Power's stand towards the issues of morality and immorality, Henchard's ambivalence regarding his superstitious belief was also noticeable in the following words, "I wonder if it can be that somebody has been roasting a waxen image of me, or stirring an unholy brew to confound me! I don't believe in such power; and yet—what if they should ha'been doing it! Even he could not admit that the perpetrator, if any, might be Farfrae" (Hardy 190).

Henchard's strategy to profit substantially thereby surpassing his "upstart" rival was simply a gambling with "the whim of the Nature". It had had half the chance of success from the very beginning. His superstitious nature drove him to seek guidance from the mysterious man. Basing his business strategy on something as uncertain as that, was not a wise decision. Besides, dismissing Jopp unceremoniously was also impulsive on his part. Because of a combination of bad luck and his impulsive nature, Henchard lost all his means, and eventually became an employee in Farfrae's company.

Though there were some vices in him, Henchard, as already mentioned, showed human and humane qualities. His keen awareness of duties, sense of fairness, his commitment to his family, his eagerness to set things right, his compassion for the needy were not entirely motivated by self-interest. Attesting to this improvement of Henchard, Geoffrey Harvey wrote, "His better nature emerges in his efforts to

repair the damage of the past in his treatment of Susan and Elizabeth Jane, and also Lucetta" (72).

Sadly, his positive qualities did not earn him as much rewards as punishment that his negative qualities earned. One doubts whether Henchard's sufferings were proportionate to his crime and moral lapses (Schweik 259). Henchard could not escape the nemesis. The supernatural agent never ceased to trail him. The return of the furnity-woman was again suggestive of that. When the lady recalled that the Mayor had sold his wife and trashed his moral authority to judge another criminal, he accepted her opinion.

For justice, Henchard left his chair. By doing so, he did a disservice to his own career and personal life. He could have overruled the lady's statement as nonsensical. He did not do that for his sense of integrity. The news reached the ears of Lucetta as it reached everywhere in Casterbridge. She was terrified by the news of Henchard's past misdeed. It can be argued that the perceived Power did not reward him for his truthfulness and his attempt "to avoid wronging anybody". It was the irony of fate that Farfrae who had been merely an employee in Henchard's company, became the owner of his house and furniture. Henchard, now sheltered in Jopp's cottage, assigned him to carry the poorly sealed packet of letters to Lucetta as she had demanded them. Jopp, as a result of his anger with both Henchard and Lucetta, who had turned down a request of favour, opened the packet at "Peter's Finger" at Mixen Lane, and disclosed the past affair between Henchard and Lucetta. The disclosure led to the skimmington that in its turn led to the disastrous consequence to Lucetta.

When Henchard pinned all his future hopes for living with his step daughter, a source of motivation for reorganising his miserable life, fate had something else for him. One morning, Henchard found Newson at his door. He was not in the least expected. But the appearance dashed his hope of making a fresh start. Newson was alive and back to reclaim his own daughter. Afraid

of losing his precious possession, though not his own, Henchard contrived a lie again.

Henchard committed another sin though he did it for saving himself. Still, his lie was an immoral act, and Henchard worried about the possibility of losing Elizabeth. In Hardy's opinion, music could be a great help for Henchard at this moment of emotional crisis. But he could not remember one. Focusing on Henchard's pitiability, Hardy wrote, "But hard fate had ordained that he should be unable to call up this Divine spirit in his need. The whole land ahead of him was as darkness itself; there was nothing to come, nothing to wait for" (281).

Henchard might have proposed but God disposed. Newson's return was not again in Henchard's hands. The faults in his character had nothing to do with Newson's return. It was an event that definitely happened as a result of a concatenation of causes, but Henchard was not the immediate cause. From another perspective, one may attribute Newson's return to the interference of a Power. Henchard himself attested to his feeling of the involvement of such Power on several occasions such as the one in which he, seeing his effigy in a pool, thought that it was a miraculous Sign. He said, "Who is such a reprobate as I! And yet it seems that even I be in somebody's hand" (Hardy 284)!

Fearing the possible return of Newson and the disclosure of his lie, Henchard planned to leave Casterbridge. He shocked Elizabeth by his plan and one day, started out. He could not go farther away than fifty miles by a highway that connected Casterbridge--the centre of his focus not only because he, as the former Mayor, had had a hand in its development but also because his Elizabeth Jane was left there. Then on her wedding day he appeared before Elizabeth through the back gate after much preparation and hardship but only to be snubbed and greeted with the cold address of "Mr. Henchard" by Elizabeth. He then again left Casterbridge and Elizabeth, and trod the path running out from the town. He was followed by nobody but Abel Whittle to whose mother the former Mayor had been 'kind-like'. He

eventually made his last journey alone in a dilapidated cottage attended by none other than Abel.

Hardy's portrayal of the tragic hero is doubtless very powerful, but he is unforgiving and brutal in his treatment of Michael Henchard who is great as a man. His greatness lies in his striving to be a better man and in his relentless fight against the evil. His choice of the difficult path for perfection was to overcome the negative effect of the monstrosity of his sin of which he became aware over the time. But he was an unfortunate man who, for some mistake or the other, failed to live happily in company of his family and friends. His persistent realization that a metaphysical Power or God controlled his life was based on his intimate experiences of not only his own life but also the lives around him. Barring some exceptions, his effort was to improve the conditions of his own life as well as the conditions of the lives of the others. But alas! the effect of that sinful act of having sold his wife and by extension, his infant was not, in Hardy's scheme of the world something that Henchard was likely to easily overcome. Hardy clearly suggested the possibility of the role of the supernatural Power for thwarting his every move to be stable in life.

According to C.E.M. Joad, the terms such as Fate, Providence Chance, Prime Mover are actually the alternative terms for Hardy that have been used to refer to God (49-50). From the theoretical perspectives of metaphysics, such terms are the agents of God and are referred to, throughout the novel as the determining agents for the lives and events of the characters. But that is not the only perspective of Hardy. He also explained the events in the novel from the perspective of the general processes of causation.

Time and again, Hardy made it clear that Michael Henchard's effort for absolution was fraught with the possibility of failure as it was not entirely within his ability. But, Henchard did not blame anybody or any agency for his repeated failure. His self-deprecation and humiliation were

hardly bearable. Henchard is probably difficult to forget despite his wish to be forgotten forever.

Conclusion:

One of the central assumptions that Hardy puts forth in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is that an individual's character traits are at times the actual determinants of their life's course. In other words, it is one's character that largely shapes one's fate. This proposition is influenced by Hardy's borrowing of the idea from the German Romantic thinker Novalis. In the context of the novel, there is considerable truth to this dictum, particularly when examining the life of Michael Henchard, whose downfall can be attributed, to an extent, to his own temperament and personal flaws. But then, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, there are a good number of occasions in which the correlation between the causes and consequences is hardly found. That is to say, individual character traits are found to have little to do with the consequences he or she faces. In such situations, some other agency or "Will" as the cause/s than character traits alone appear as the most determining factor as regards the reality of a character. Fate represents a Power, not necessarily benevolent, that Hardy acknowledged as responsible for the condition of the human lives. Considering Hardy's acknowledgement of a controlling Power or God, it is not justifiable to regard him as only an agnostic atheist as is commonly done both in the contexts of his real and fictional world. It is rather more justifiable to regard him as an ambivalent agnostic atheist for his ambiguous perspectives about the existence of the Supreme Power.

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