

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Thomas Hardy was one of England's most celebrated poet and novelist in the Victorian period. In his career, Hardy wrote some novels that gained worldwide fame such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Although considered overly pessimistic, his heavily criticized works actually describe the ugly reality of humans life. Hardy was awarded the order of merit for his distinguished achievement in literature.

Hardy began and ended his career with writing poetry, but it was his novels that made him remembered nowadays. His novels, including *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, are often considered to present pessimistic views of life. They are considered as such because they “convey a strong sense of fatalism” (Allingham). Fatalism itself is “a philosophical doctrine stressing the subjugation of all events or actions to fate” (“Fatalism”). This view revolves around the argument that there is a great force called fate which is responsible for everything that happens in humans’ life, including their misfortune. However, Hardy did not strictly follow this view. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy added his own opinion

towards fatalism, that “character is just as responsible for the foibles of mankind as fate is” (Wright par. 5). Compared to the general view of fatalism which regards fate as the only force that makes humans suffer, Hardy’s fatalism emphasizes that humans’ characteristics are also responsible for the misfortunes that happen in their life. In this novel, this argument can be proven through the portrayal of protagonist. Protagonist itself is “the leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel, etc” (“Protagonist”). Throughout the story, the protagonist is constantly facing bad situations. If the readers take a look at the protagonist’s life, they might understand Hardy’s idea of fatalism and why he created such a character.

The novel itself is a unique piece among Hardy's novels as he added the subtitle “*Life and Death of a Man of Character*” to emphasize that he wrote the novel as a study of a character, which in this novel is the protagonist, Michael Henchard. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is set in Hardy's fictional town of Casterbridge and this setting is one of the factors causing this novel to be an admirable work. This novel shows Hardy’s talent of using environment and events to shape the protagonist’s life. This talent of his also makes the protagonist look as if he represented reality, showing how he reacts in front of various situations. Henchard is the character that makes the novel stand out. He is a character that can make readers argue about whether he is a perpetrator or a victim in his miserable life. Either way, Henchard is not a perfect man and this fact makes him alive and become an appealing character to be analyzed.

## **Statement of the Problems**

The problems in this thesis are formulated as follows:

1. How is the protagonist portrayed ?
2. What is the purpose of the author in creating such a character ?

## **Purpose of the study**

This study is conducted for the following purposes:

1. To show how the protagonist is portrayed
2. To show the author's purposes in creating the character

## **Method of Research**

In this thesis, the method I used is library research. First I read Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Then, I collected information from books, Internet sources and dictionaries to help me understand more about the novel. After that, I analysed the novel by referring to one of the literary elements, which was the portrayal of the protagonist. Finally, based on the analysis of the novel, I drew the conclusion and wrote this thesis.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

I present my thesis in three chapters, which are preceded by the Approval page, the Table of Contents, and the Abstract. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of Study and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two presents the analysis of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Chapter Three contains the Conclusion, followed by the Bibliography and the Appendices.