

Notes for classroom teaching
B.A. Part - II, Paper - IV

Symbols in The Mayor of Casterbridge

In an act of contrition, Henchard visits Elizabeth on her wedding day, carrying the cage of a cage & gold finch. He leaves the bird in a corner while he speaks to his stepdaughter and forgets it, when she coolly dismisses him. Days later, a maid discovers the starved birds which prompts Elizabeth-Tone to search for Henchard whom she finds dead in Abel Whittle's cottage. When Whittle reports that Henchard didn't eat, he unwillingly ties Henchard's fate to the bird's both lived and died in prison. The Finch's prison was literal, while Henchard's was the inescapable prison of his personality and his past.

The bull that charges down Lucetta and Elizabeth stands as a symbol of the brute forces that threaten human life. Malignant, deadly and bent on destruction, it seems, it seems to indicate the unnamed facet that Henchard with an opportunity to display his strength and courage, thus making him more sympathetic in our eyes. When a wagon owned by Henchard collides with a wagon owned

by Farfae on the street outside
of High-place Hall, the intersection
bears more significance than is a
simple traffic accident. The violent
collision dramatically symbolizes
the tension in the relationship between
the two men; it also symbolizes
the clash between the two men.
It also symbolizes the clash between
tradition, which Henchard embodies,
and the new modern era, which
Farfae personifies.