

Structure of the novel the mayor of the casterbridge essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



It is often said that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is the best tragic novel ever written by Thomas Hardy, though not many will agree. The measure of success of a work of fiction relies on how well or poor the author has unified his story and controlled its impact. Hence we will scrutinize on the structure of the novel and how these elements of fiction intertwine and producing its complete unified effect. It is worth to note here that the plot, character, point of view, setting and theme make up the structure of a novel.

Furthermore, in discussing its themes, we will need to take the plot, character, point of view and setting into account. Therefore, we will discuss on how these elements generate themes, make a comment on human conditions and thus how they enhance *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This essay contains an assessment for the themes: immortality of Fate and evolution of Casterbridge; and a final part analyzing the novel's dramatic effectiveness. Fate is indestructible in Hardy's opinion and it acts as the motivator of events or actions which bring down the main character Michael Henchard.

How Fate works we will look into the author's manipulation of his characters, perspectives and plot. There is one perspective saying that the main plot of the story revolves around the main character and it cannot be mixed with sub-plots that revolve around secondary characters. However, in this novel, Hardy clumps all characters in one place and the plot and the sub-plots intersect with each other, twisting and complicating matters, especially for Henchard. The characters are woven tightly together, with many overlapping relationships: Henchard has a relationship with Lucetta, who also has a relationship with Farfrae.

At the time that Lucetta first flirts with Farfrae, Elizabeth-Jane is seeing him. Lucetta is well aware of that fact, because Elizabeth-Jane stays with her. Elizabeth-Jane, of course, is Henchard's stepdaughter, and Farfrae is his rival. The closeness of all the main characters helps to strengthen the conflict within and between Henchard and the people around him. When Lucetta marries Farfrae, Henchard feels betrayed and defeated. When Elizabeth-Jane goes back to her real father (Newson), Henchard feels deprived of love from a child.

It is as if Fate has influenced these secondary characters' free will to run away from Henchard. No matter how hard he tries to pull them back to him, he fails. Thus, Henchard feels dejected and performs self-seclusion and ultimately dies in vain. With these, it is shown that Fate is so overwhelming that it can be shape-shifted into the form of human, determines to bring Henchard down. First person's point of view allows us to get into his mind and know his motives and nature. We find that Henchard is essentially weak through his will at the end of the novel.

It is arguable that during his life he is harshly aggressive towards people. He haunts Lucetta, Elizabeth and Abel Whittle, for example. But we must not neglect the significance of the will's appearance at the end of story which reveals that he wishes that 'no murrers walk behind me' and 'no man remember me'. This means Henchard regrets the bad things he did to other people and that he never meant to hurt them. It is his impulsiveness and ego that wrecks his rational judgement. He is no evil. To put it simply, Henchard

is solely good-natured. On the other hand, we have the peasants' point of view as well.

Hardy uses the town chorus' point of view, which matches Henchard's, to topple him down. The village rustics purely hate the higher-positioned persons in the village. They talk about them with sarcasm and ill-manneredly. Hardy exposes us into their deep conversation, allowing ourselves into their ring. Coney lamented " how folk do worship fine clothes". Jopp reads out aloud Lucetta's passionate letters and he intends to " shame her". Then they all decided that the letters serve as a " good foundation of a skimmity-ride", which is the " funniest thing under the sun".

Therefore, the mischievous plan by them are made to shame Henchard, who consequently paralysed by his unhappy temperament. Here, Hardy wants to emphasize that the motives by the peasants (which are exposed through Hardy's narrative) bring Henchard down, and these motives are only devices by which the unseen malicious power (Fate) has its way. One noticeable feature in this novel's plot is that it is highly influenced by chance and coincidence. Although the main and subsidiary plots are realistically portrayed, Hardy uses a great deal of coincidence in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Susan's return after eighteen years, the reappearance of the ' firmity woman', and Newson's return are glaring examples of coincidence. Henchard put his future on the line when he plays a game of chance, by investing a large sum of money betting for a bad weather. Predicting the weather or

divination does not give a hundred-percent assurance as it cannot be calculated using the scientific law. Rain or shine has the equal chance to happen and Henchard tempering with chance determines his rise and fall. Ultimately he loses his business and money as the weather turns out to be fine.

In this sense, the outcome cannot be known because of our ignorance of the exact causes of a phenomenon, such as the weather. The cause of a phenomenon, as a Hardy's reader can guess, may be prejudiced by Fate. These improbabilities emphasize Hardy's belief that man is not in control of his own destiny, but is ruled by Fate. In conclusion, the use of chance and coincidence does effect the development of this novel's plot. The evolution of Casterbridge serves as another theme of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The sight of the traditional village giving way to modernism can be seen by observing the characters and plot.

The characters could represent the theme of the novel, that is, Henchard and Farfrae. The rustic and traditional values are incorporated into Henchard, who apparently is the mayor when Farfrae enters the village. At the same time, he also owns a hay-and-corn business; in which he makes deals with handshakes and relying on memory, and measuring stocks with his arms. Hardy is always deeply conscious, however, of the process of change itself and many of the relics or methods of earlier days which are constantly being swept away.

Thus, we are then presented with Farfrae, who comes into the village with a reason-and-modern thinking. When he enters Henchard's company, he uses intelligence and his logic to upgrade the business. He has a very sharp mind and writes every transaction in ledger books. While Henchard makes deals with handshakes, Farfrae makes them with contracts. There is also a gossip about how Farfrae has saved Henchard's business by introducing modern methods such as "ciphering and mensuration" - instead of the old-fashioned chalk strokes and measurements that Henchard has always used.

When Henchard's business flourished in wealth, it becomes obvious that Farfrae's methods in handling business is far better than Henchard and people are turning more to him now. Here Hardy wants us to focus on seeing who has more advantage than the other. Henchard is figuratively frail and he needs to step aside to make way for a younger man with fresh and effective ideas to take control of things in order to make progress. While Henchard's influence to the village gets weaker and weaker, Farfrae develops rapidly without pause. All of Henchard's wealth and possessions are transferred to Farfrae, including the mayoralty.

We now see the transition of power from Henchard to Farfrae, to mark the evolution of Casterbridge. In relation to the characters above said, the fall of Henchard and the rise of Farfrae motivate the plot of the novel. The two developments of the character correlate to each other. Farfrae's sharp mind in business which outwits Henchard causes the decline in Henchard's business. Then with all the scandals that arise concerning him and other

series of unfortunate events falling on top of him, he loses his business and consequently his mayoralty too.

These events leave the mayor post empty and Farfrae seems to be the most eligible man for it. Farfrae's vast progression in his hay-and-corn business and his humble attitude towards people win the hearts of the village's community members. Thus, he is elected to be the next mayor of Casterbridge. At this point, the readers get the idea that each event that befell on each character affects the other. The transition of wealth and possessions symbolizes the shift of power between the old and the new, which is from the traditional into modern hands.

These are the foundations of creating a theme of the revolution of Casterbridge. The structure of this novel can also create dramatic effectiveness aside from determining themes. Hence we will look into the setting of Casterbridge and the plot or design of this novel. Hardy paints a picture of a Casterbridge hamlet which reverberate tranquility and its rustic life. Repeated and detailed descriptions of the inhabitants, neighborhoods, and architecture of Casterbridge, form a motif throughout the novel. The reader is made to vividly see the Ring, the two bridges, the courtroom, and Mixen Lane.

Furthermore, there is also a detailed description of the "Palladian" High Street Hall and the studded door with an eerie mask on top of its arch. This presents us with the place's histories which creates a mystifying atmosphere around it. Many critics view the descriptions as interrupting the narrative,

but they are essential in so far as they give a vivid presentation of the setting and keep the pace of the story from spiraling out of control. The transformational stage of the settlement into a modern industrial one should not be hasty as it will not come as a shock to the readers.

The time of the story is set in 1840s, during which England is undergoing an Industrial Revolution. Meanwhile, Casterbridge is an agricultural land which covers fields of hays and corns which its villagers depend upon. Casterbridge is a working-class town, a place of labour and tradition. We must remember that Hardy came from a working-class background and was born just in time to catch a glimpse of that English rural life which is later swept away in modernization. Thus, the arrival of the seed-drill machine sparks a change to the environments of the village.

It stands out oddly to its dull surrounding. It creates quite a shocking effect to the readers, who have been accustomed to the rural life and background of Casterbridge. All in all, Hardy's description of settings in this novel brings the story's pace into moderation and 'digestible' for his readers; and that it also amazes his readers by bringing in a contrast to contemporary setting. The plot develops in a typical bell-shaped curve. The first chapters introduce the main characters and give a flashback to reveal how Henchard sold his wife and daughter.

Once Susan returns to Casterbridge, the rising action begins, as Henchard meets with one challenge after another. His main concern, however, is to hide his past so his good reputation and fortune in Casterbridge will not be

lost. The climax occurs in the courtroom scene when the 'furniture woman' exposes his past. From that point forward in the novel, the falling action shows a series of events that rapidly lead Henchard into losing everything, including his good name, his business, his home, and his daughter. The conclusion centers on Henchard's pathetic death and will and Elizabeth's ironic attempt to find him and ask forgiveness.

Another view noted that the narrative of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is episodic because the novel was originally serialized in 20 magazine issues. Since this novel was written in installments, it is easy to understand why so much suspense is used in the plot from chapter to chapter. In addition, the novel may be divided into five sections: Chapters I and II - the auction and oath; III-XIX - from Susan's return until her death; XX-XXX - from Lucetta's entrance until her marriage to Farfrae; XXI-XL - from Henchard's bankruptcy until Lucetta's death; and XLI-XLV - from Newson's appearance until Henchard's death.

Each section develops an important link to Henchard's downfall. Each part opens with Henchard asserting the strength of his character and ends with Henchard's strength being undercut. For example, at the end of section one, Henchard lost all contact with his family. At the end of section 5, ultimately, he has died unremembered. We might think of the plot in terms of five descending lines, marking the downward movements in Henchard's fortunes. With these, the readers are moved to tears, sympathize Henchard for Hardy's deterministic nature in putting Henchard down.

Apart from that, the chapters are short with a lot of action packed into each of them. Many of the chapters are filled with dramatic scenes, especially the ones in the courtroom where the 'firmity woman' exposes Henchard's past, where Henchard is reading his letters aloud to Farfrae, where the skimmity-ride takes place, and where Henchard attempts at a reconciliation with Elizabeth-Jane on her wedding day. Each of these scenes is filled with a sense of pathos to draw the tragic novel together.

In conclusion, no matter how the plot develops, it certainly creates a drama of tragedy and emulsifies the emotions of the readers into a feeling of sadness yet shocking. To cap it all, Thomas Hardy is capable of creating a tragic (if not most) novel of its time, with his brilliant use of dualisms such as rise and fall. The rise of a society, the evolution of Casterbridge, costs the fall of an individual, Henchard. Then, modernism is slowly taking over the old conventional ways. In other words, the elements of The Mayor of Casterbridge's structure synchronize well, thus creating a symphony of tragedy.