

# The mayor of casterbridge essay



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This essay will demonstrate and analyse how Thomas Hardy uses the first two chapters of this book as a prologue to the rest of the novel. To establish this, this essay will include Hardy's style and use of language. This sort of style is quite unique, which is probably why he used it. Other important elements are the setting and how they are linked to Hardy himself, the themes and the way he exemplifies characters.

The main character, Michael Henchard, is said to be of fine figure and 'swarthy'. He wore a short, brown corduroy jacket, a 'fustian' waistcoat, tanned leggings, white horn buttons and white breeches. Also, he wore a straw hat. At the beginning of the narrative, Michael is holding a tool-bag.

This shows that Michael is a man of the trade. This flows with what Hardy says about Henchard being a 'skilled' countryman. Michael's entrance to the story is palpable, but until later on in the novel, we don't actually know his name. Until the 6th page, 3rd paragraph, Michael is referred to as, amongst other things, 'the man'.

This gives a bit of suspense as the reader wishes to read further to find out who this person is and what his name. The reader discovers that he is indeed the husband of Susan; the woman he is accompanying. He doesn't play the role of a husband or a father at all (we also find out that he and Susan have a baby called Elizabeth-Jane. He remains using similar behaviour until chapter two. The first time he actually opened his mouth to talk, was, when addressing a worker around Weydon-Priors.

The second time, one page later, was when he briefly replied to Susan in pg 4/5, when Susan is telling him to go to the 'Good Furmity Sold Here' tent at

the fair, instead of the ‘ Good Home-brewed Beer, Ale and Cyder ‘ tent. His disinclination to go to the furmity tent is shown when he says, “ I’ve never tasted it. ‘ At this point, he finally shows some responsibility as he ‘ gave way to the representations... ‘; the ‘ her’ being Susan.

His carelessness is again shown on page six, where he gets drunk from the excessive rum in his furmity. He then goes on further, when he states how he got married too young. Michael puts himself and Susan in great shame when he auctions her. At this point, we don’t know whether it’s the drink talking, or if he really feels this way. We are persuaded that Michael really wants to rid of his wife, when, on pages 8/9/10, he pursues his selling, until finally a bidder puts the money on the table and the exchange is made. Hardy shows that Henchard really is a malicious man, without any thought to his responsibility.

We know this by the language used; he talks badly of Susan; ‘ I married at 18, like the fool that I was; and this is the consequence o’t. ‘ We finally see the back of Susan, telling us that the exchange was true and complete. Overall, we see that Michael is a man who doesn’t see his responsibilities and likes to live a single person’s life. He is careless in most of actions and is easily taken under the influence of drink; the reason why he auctioned his wife. In Chapter Two, however, we discover, that Michael didn’t have the slightest clue of what he did the previous night.

This is shown as he thinks back of what he had done, and showed great regret. We know this as he travels around the fair in search of his ‘ wife’ and later takes a serious oath, for such an alcoholic as Henchard especially.

Michael then travels around the Fair in search of Susan. Later, around page 17, we discover Henchard to be making a vow as to not drink spirits for 21 years, as spirit was the reason why he lost his ex-wife; ' I, Michael Henchard, on this morning of the 16th of September, do take an oath before God here in this solemn place that I will avoid all strong liquors for the space of 21 years.

... His pledge is significant to the play because it changes his outlook; he becomes a less rowdy person; a Mayor. This also allows him to find Susan, as his perspective is broadened; he can sort out his priorities. Susan is first introduced at the same time as Michael.

She's described as being pretty and having a half-aphathetic expression. Michael and Susan have a declining relationship. Susan doesn't converse with Michael and just saunters along with him silently. As with Michael, we don't discover Susan's name at first.

This is probably because Thomas wants to set the scene first, then the characters, etc. Although we don't know that Susan and Michael are in wedlock, we do know that Susan is the mother of young Elizabeth-Jane. She and Michael don't converse until the dialogue where Susan encourages Michael to go the firmity rent, instead of the alcoholic tent; page 4. This proves that Susan is the most sensible out of the two. Although Susan may have made the most sensible choice, she still didn't escape shame and pain. She discovers Michael's bad side, as he has too much rum in his firmity.

We know that this isn't the first time, Henchard has behaved this way previously, as Hardy writes, ' The young woman his wife, who seemed

accustomed to such remarks... ' She isn't mentioned much, until the auction scene, when she tells Michael how his behaviours is inappropriate and irresponsible and is just making a fool of himself. Later on in page eight, Susan gets more serious, realising the great significance of Michael's actions; ' Come, come, it is getting dark, and this nonsense won't do. If you don't come along, I shall go without you.

Come! ' The repetition shows her concern and desperation to avoid the situation. Susan tries to maintain her dignity and pride by agreeing to all of the selling, probably to rid herself of such humiliation and torture. We know instantly that Susan regrets the whole ordeal as ' she went out of the tent sobbing bitterly. ' Although the furmity lady, only has a brief part to play in the story, she is still quite important. She is first mentioned in page five. She is described as ' haggish' and is said to be of fifty years of age.

She was wearing a white apron, reaching almost all the way around her waist. Her only actions were to stir the large pot of furmity, which consists of grain, flour, milk, raisins, currants, etc. She seems to be just a furmity lady, but Hardy's crone-like description of her fits nicely with her slyness as she laces the furmity with quite a lot of rum. She appears again at the bottom of the page when she served Michael and Susan a bowl of furmity. She has a quite a persuasive character as she convinces Michael to have some rum.

This meant more profit for her. Apart from the above, her last appearance was when the auction was maturing; she told Susan that it was the drink talking and that Michael didn't mean what he was saying. The furmity lady represents the working-class of Weydon-Priors. Especially as she is part of

the fair, she seems to have a nomadic life; always moving around to different locations.

As she is reacquainted with Susan later on, Hardy skilfully relates the firmity lady to the downfall of rural life, 'The turnip-hoer first had an appearance on page 3. He told Michael about the type of work available in Weydon-Priors. The turnip-hoer had a very brief appearance in the novel indeed. He did have quite a significant part, as the reader discovers that there was a lack of work for the working-class and that Weydon-Priors was a changing area, good for some, bad for most. He represents the economic state of the village and is a typical countryman.

The mention of the Fair almost automatically implies that it has some connotation in the anecdote. He had a hoe on one shoulder and a dinner-bag suspended from it as well. Hardy describes the turnip-hoer as being 'a pessimist'. This shows that he just saw things from the bad side and didn't really look for any good in anything. He probably used that word as he replied negatively to anything Henchard asked. Then, he mentions the Fair Day; the only way of getting any money in most cases.

We learn quite a lot about Wessex and the way of life there in the first few pages of Chapter One. This is due mainly to the turnip-hoer. From him, we learn that there is a shortage of jobs. Due to the time setting, it is quite obvious to those with knowledge of history, that it is the time of the Industrial Revolution. The chronicle fits in efficiently with the time setting, '.

.. before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span... ' ; this was during the pinnacle of the Industrial Revolution – 1709 to 1853.

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We then discover that homes are being knocked down to make way for the industrial buildings. Therefore, life must be quite hard for the working-class. This is shown by the turnip-hoer saying how there is a lack of employment; lack of money. We know this because, Weydon-Priors is at the threshold of being an industrial city. The only way of making money outside the industrial side, it seems, is to work in the Fair or sell horses.

The Fair is packed with people and full of life. Different activities and different fairs to visit, for example, toy-stands, waxworks, medicine men, and so forth. Hardy uses a varied form of vocabulary in this text, but most of the book uses a sophisticated range of vocabulary. Examples of sophisticated choices include: Hardy uses this wide range of lexis effectively to make an effective description of an object or person. By using efficient language, Hardy creates a good picture in the mind of the reader.

He does this by describing something with great detail. For example, when he first introduced Michael, he used great detail in order to produce sufficient imagery. “ The man was of fine figure, swarthy, and stern in aspect; and he showed in profile a facial angle so slightly inclined as to be almost perpendicular. He goes on to use analogous detail in describing his attire. It is quite obvious that Hardy likes to use detail in his descriptions.

This is required to produce a vivid image for the reader. The result of this is a strong and almost exact picture of the object or person in question created in the mind. This can help the reader understand further things mentioned in the story and the relevance and significance of things mentioned. The structure of Hardy’ sentences varies occasionally, but the overall lengths of

the sentences are long. This is typical of the time period; early 1900's This provides a neutral atmosphere, as shorter sentences or pauses give a tenser ambience. A good example of the use of shorter sentences, is during the auctioning of Susan, ' The sailor hesitated a moment, looked anew at the woman, came in, unfolded five crisp pieces of paper.

.. ' The lengths of the paragraphs also vary, but most of them are long, which is typical of the time period. When a more important scene is written in ' The Mayor Of Casterbridge', Hardy uses very long paragraphs to create a significant flow in the action. Apart from the narrator's language, there is the language used by the characters.

The characters' language varies from their class, but is quite similar. They use northern dialect and they don't pronounce all of the letters; this emphasises the setting of the novel. This presents the way northerners speak. An example of this vernacular is, '.

.. and this is the consequence o't...

. There isn't much dialogue until the auction scene. This creates quite a tense atmosphere with some suspense. A very significant factor of language, is the relationship between Michael and Susan. They don't speak habitually at all.

They converse a small amount at the Fair, only to talk about things like lodging. This is imperative as it clearly depicts the relationship between the two Henchards; they don't have a close affiliation and only communicate when necessary. Most of the early chapters are based on the theme of



marriage. This is because, Michael and Susan were married and Michael sold Susan because he was saying how fed up he was with marriage. The further actions made by Henchard were reflections to what he had done; he swore to give up spirits for twenty-one years, he went in search for Susan due to marriage and possibly love. At the scene of the auction, the only people who seem to have some reverence for the sacred bond of matrimony, are Susan and the firmity lady.

Susan is the only person who tries to put the whole state of affairs to a halt, 'Mike, Mike, this is getting serious. O! – too serious!' The repetition shows her concern. The firmity tries to reassure Susan that Michael is just under the influence of drink, 'Others just encourage Michael, 'There's them that would do that,' this shows that they find such an offer common. For the rest of the customers in the tent, it appeared to be a sort of entertainment. The economy plays quite an important part in the tale as well. This is because Michael and Susan first went towards Weydon-Priors, because Henchard was in search of employment.

Change is evident in the area of Weydon-Priors as the turnip-hoer told Michael of the knocking down of the houses, lack of vocation. The quality and style of life will obviously be changed by this new revolution. By mentioning or hinting the industrial revolution, Hardy sets the time and setting of the anecdote well, making it more realistic. Hardy uses the theme of nature in *The Mayor Of Casterbridge*, but only occasionally in the first two chapters. An example of Hardy doing this, is on page two, “.

.. half-apathetic expression of one who deems anything possible at the hands of Time and Chance except, perhaps, fair play. The first phase was that work of Nature.

.. ” As you may notice, Hardy used capital letters for the beginning of the three words Time, Chance and Nature. He might have done this to make the three words stand out and allow the reader to see their significance.

Time and Chance seem to control occurrences. Time; things are going to happen, it's just a matter of time when. Chance; sometimes. People can be lucky and have 'chance' on their side. Nature; the contrasts between man and nature. Fate seems to play a small, but quite important role in the anecdote.

Hardy uses this element skilfully. It assists the auction scene with the entrance of the sailor. It would have been quite hard for the sailor to hear the auctioneer's voice from outside; he was destined to meet and 'purchase' Susan and Elizabeth-Jane. Hardy shows how Henchard develops quite quickly in the prologue. He begins as a man who seems to be oblivious of his duties to his wife and infant. The main event which convinces Michael he has to revolutionize his conduct.

After getting under the influence of spirits, he humiliates his wife and then puts her on the market. When he becomes abstemious, he realises his faux pas and falls in to a state of remorse. The next day, he starts to search for his 'spouse'. After failing to locate Susan in the Fair, he makes an oath to 'avoid all strong liquors for the space of twenty-one years.'

.. ‘ This shows that he has realised that the main cause of the whole dilemma was the alcohol. Another example of him following a new route, is the narrator’s text, ‘...

seemed relieved at having made a start in a new direction. ‘ This is a sort of quest for Michael; to give up alcohol and to find his lost partner. The type of narration used is third person narrative. The reader is only given limited information as to what’s happening. The conscious narrator decides what and how information is revealed. An example of this is the concealing of Henchard’s name.

We don’t have full knowledge that Susan and Henchard are married; their relationship together. This makes the reader want to continue reading to discover the role and significance of the character. Hardy uses language effectively to get the appropriate mood and atmosphere. He uses sufficient imagery when he wants to give the reader a detailed description of the scene. He uses symbolism to assist this, e.

g. at the Fair, Hardy refers to the horses to represent Susan, as the horses are also being sold. He uses varied sentence structure to achieve tension. Although most other writers would use shorter sentences to create anxiety, Thomas uses commas as well.

An example of this, is at the end of CH 1. Hardy uses prolonged sentences, but with commas to create a depressing atmosphere. The whole of the story after the auctioning of Susan, is founded on that very act. The main outline of the first two chapters is quite simple.

Firstly, the couple enter Weydon-Priors. Then, they visit the Fair and go to a furniture tent. Michael gets drunk and offers to sell his wife, Susan. After much pondering, a sailor approaches Henchard and purchases Susan, who is accompanied by Elizabeth-Jane. Michael, the next morning, realises what he did in his drunken rage. He makes a vow to never touch any spirits for 21 years.

Michael finds that he has lost Susan forever, or so he thinks... After the selling of Susan, all of Michael's actions were based on that event.

Before CH. 3 continues, a lot of time passes; Hardy likes to use time in his writing. As you can see in the brief plot of the story above, all of the actions made reverberated the auction. Michael made a vow due to the auction, he went in search of Susan because of the sale, etc. Hardy cleverly makes an impression in the reader's mind at the beginning of the story. This makes the reader want to read further to discover the following events.

From this essay, I have learnt about Hardy's style, his use of things like Nature, Time and so on. I have learnt of Thomas' lexis and structure. The overall language he uses is different to other authors in the sense that he uses very sophisticated expression and refers to seemingly irrelevant things to achieve sufficient effects; symbolising. Also, we learn how Hardy develops characters and their identity, e.

g. Michael. His description also fluctuates to other publications, as he refers to things like nature, chance and time; he uses elements that might be relevant to him. He's a unique author.