

Human's character in the mayor of casterbridge

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Self-Control, Temperament, and the Human Condition

In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the main characters experience different situations based off of their personal levels of self-control. These levels vary as according to each character, just like in real life, how everyone has a different tolerance of bad situations. As a consequence of tolerance, the main characters exhibit different tempers, whether it be quick and violent, or patient and calculated. We see from the very beginning of the novel that Michael Henchard has a short temper that eventually comes back to haunt him in the end. His volatile attitude has an extreme effect on how he reacts to situations. On the other hand, Donald Farfrae has the highest tolerance probably out of all the characters. He does not really show any passion about anything, and his actions are logical and calculated. Lucetta Templeman and Elizabeth-Jane Newsom both have aspects of Henchard and Farfrae, the opposite extremes. They represent people in general, for everyone has a bit of a temper sometimes, while maintaining patience at other times. The novel says something about the human condition, that we all have aspects of those different personalities and levels of self control. These aspects help determine what kind of person someone is, and how they deal with their every day lives. This is also addressed in Jonah Lehrer's article which discusses self-control, a major factor in a person's reaction.

Of all the characters, the Mayor, Michael Henchard, has the shortest temper and the least amount of evident self-control. It is obvious from the beginning that his quick decision making will get the best of him. He finds himself

drunk and willing to publicly auction off his wife and daughter: "Here-I am waiting to know about this offer of mine. The woman is no good to me. Who'll have her?" (Hardy 8). He lets his drunken mind make the hasty decision for him, and does not think of consequences. To sell your wife at the whim of a random instinct is obviously morally wrong, which does not occur to the man, because it is in his nature to ignore what is morally correct. This is an extremely unattractive quality in people, when they do not think of consequences for their actions. It ties into to fact that patience is just as important as having self-control. If Henchard had ignored the little feeling inside him that gave him his negative attitude towards his wife, he would have maybe thought twice about selling her. The problem could also have been solved by a conversation between the two. Levels of self-control effect behavior in general, as Lehrer writes about children's behavior in his article examining a social experiment: "...he noticed that low delayers, the children who rang the bell quickly, seemed more likely to have behavioral problems" (Lehrer). A low delayer is a person who cannot tolerate waiting for results, and needs immediate gratification. This is usually a bad thing, as seen in the novel, when a character jumps to quick decisions.

The consequences that Henchard faces are likely those that would occur in real life, for people who go overboard with their volatile temperaments. He ends up losing his job, this love, his home, his daughter, and eventually his life. These consequences resemble that of what a tragic hero would go through, and his low level of self-control is what brings him to that point. If he had been more understanding, and less likely to jump to hasty decisions,

he would not have lost everything important in his life. His high position of power means so much to him, yet he manages to lose it all to a man more forgiving than him. Henchard is a low delayer, in the way he cannot wait for situations to work themselves out. He must make decisions quickly without much thought. However, after the damage is done, Henchard often realizes what he has done: " But in the morning, when his jealous temper has passed away, his heart sank within him at what he had said and done" (Hardy 103).

Donald Farfrae is perhaps the complete opposite of Henchard, in the sense that he has the most patience. In the town, Farfrae is the person everyone loves, because of his cheerful personality. He is more personable than Henchard, as well as more forgiving. Instead of perpetuating conflict, he strives to solve them, as shown in an early dispute between Henchard and one of his workers who he tries to fire: "' Come,' said Donald quietly, ' a man o' your position should ken better, sir! It is tyrannical and no worthy of you'" (Hardy 98). This is one of the ways Farfrae differs from his opposite character, in their mannerisms. This quote is from a part when he attempts to calm down Henchard and avoid conflict.

In regards to Leher's article, Farfrae would represent the high delayers. These were the children who, when faced with temptation, would hold off until they were allowed it. These children, with the most patience, would end up more successful in life, because of their high tolerance to temptation, because they were able to " delay gratification and control their temper" (Lehrer). Farfrae displays this throughout the novel, as well as loyalty and respect to morals. His opposing character on the other hand has a shorter

temper and less patience and willing to delay gratification, which leads him to have worse behavior. When Henchard and Farfrae have a dispute and disagreement in the workplace, Farfrae decides it best to move his business elsewhere, not to be rude or isolating himself, but to avoid future disputes. It is similar to a fight between two little kids, when their parents tell them to be the bigger person and accept the disagreement. Farfrae decides to take the high road and move: " Meanwhile Donald Farfrae had opened the gates of commerce on his own account at a spot on Durnover Hill-as far away as possible from Henchard's stores, and with every intention of keeping clear of his former friend and employer's customers" (Hardy 108). This is considerate of Farfrae, to think of Henchard's business after whatever fight they had. Overall, his actions reflect his calm and patient manner, and his avoidance of conflict.

Next comes Elizabeth, who like Farfrae, has the inclination to avoid conflicts. She remains a quiet part of the back ground for a lot of the novel, not really contributing to any of the drama of the other characters. She keeps to herself and is intelligent, and refuses to be a part of major problems. This relates to Lehrer's article in the way that she is smart about her decisions: " intelligence is largely at the mercy When Farfrae, who she had feelings for, decided to be with Lucetta instead of her, she did not put up much of a fight. Also in different circumstances, she would try to protect people she cared about from drama or problems: " Elizabeth, wishing to shield the man she believed to be her father from any charges of unnatural dislike, said ' Yes'" (Hardy 154). Her instincts are those of pure ethics, for she does not wish

harm to anyone. Elizabeth-Jane represents the passivity that occurs in human nature. A person can be passive, aggressive, or a combination of both, and depending on the situation, it could be more appropriate to be one way than the other.

A quote from Lehrer's article struck the thought that the situations themselves are uncontrollable, yet the ways the characters reacted to them would determine their fate: " We can't control the world, but we can control how we think about it" (Lehrer). In a novel such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, frequent coincidences occur that shake up the characters. It is up to each one of their levels of self-control and their mannerisms in which they deal with each coincidence. Taking Lucetta's random arrival for example, there is no way Henchard can have avoided meeting her again, due to her coincidental meeting with Elizabeth-Jane in the cemetery. The situation is completely out of his control, yet the way he reacts to her arrival is completely in his control. Her stubbornness however makes it difficult for Henchard to deal with her, due to her constant avoidance of him. The volatile temperaments of the two characters clash, and this ends up leading to their demise.

Lucetta, as opposed to Elizabeth-Jane, is a bit more like Henchard when it comes to self-control, and displays a worse trait of human nature. She cares too much about what others think about her, a trait that is seen way too much in today's world. She also constantly goes back and forth between what she wants in a relationship and in her life. Her ever-changing mind causes unnecessary conflict in the novel, that can be credited in part to her

short temper. Her original relationship with Henchard gets thrown away as she falls for Farfrae instead. She only agreed to marry him after her return because she thought it was the right thing to do. However, she falls in love with Farfrae anyway, and forgets about everything else. This switch in her love interest, even after the death of Henchard's original wife, could be in part due to Henchard's temper that would repel a woman looking for a stable relationship. Lucetta is a complicated character in the way she strives to protect her status, just like Henchard. When the town finds out about the love letters and her affair, she immediately agrees to marry her past lover, just to appease the threat to her social status. Despite this promise, she still betrays Henchard and goes back on her promise.

A small moment in the novel that illustrates the attitudes of each character is when the four were eating breakfast, and both Henchard and Farfrae reach for a slice a bread that Lucetta offered to one of them: "Henchard took a slice by one end and Donald by the other; each feeling certain that he was the man meant; neither let go, and the slice came in two" (Hardy ##). Henchard, being stubborn in his thoughts and actions, angrily wishes Farfrae would let go of the bread. Of course, Lucetta meant the offer to be for Farfrae, since they were together at this point, yet Henchard refused to budge. She does not mean to cause this tension between the two, yet she does not do anything to stop it. Farfrae's patient manner causes him to hold his ground as well. Meanwhile Elizabeth-Jane sits and watches the situation play out awkwardly, but not contributing to it. This is a perfect example of how the character's personalities affect each other. They are all involved in

this love triangle, yet at the end, the only people who end up happy is Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae, coincidentally, the two characters who had the most tolerance and self-control. Patience is obviously key to being happy in life and having a good relationship.

The ways in which the characters interact are due to their separate personalities. This includes their levels of self-control, which is the most recurring factor in the novel for the four of them. This is because their actions are heavily based off of their ability to accept the bad situations and appreciate the good ones. With every coincidence comes a greater conflict, that eventually leads to Henchard's demise. All of his rash decisions lead to his daughter not wanting him in his life, which to him is the worst possible outcome. Despite how stubborn and ill-tempered he is all of his life, he just wants to be the father figure for Elizabeth-Jane, and does not realize he wants this role until the end when it is too late. He even buys her a wedding gift for her and Farfrae, the man who took everything from him. To see that Elizabeth-Jane has already replaced him with Newson is devastating, and he dies an unhappy man.

Overall, everyone has different levels of self-control and resistance to taking part in conflict. The opposite extremes are shown through Henchard and Farfrae, while combinations of the two are shown through Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane. These traits are evident in life because everyone has these aspects within them. The common traits include stubbornness, patience, hotheadedness, and levelheadedness. It raises the question as to whether or not a combination of these is better than strongly showing one or two of

these traits. We see from Henchard's decline that it is better to have a calmer temper, yet did Farfrae really succeed in getting all he wanted? It is really up to the person, and their amount of self-control.