

Prompt and Passage

In this excerpt from Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), Michael Henchard and his daughter Elizabeth-Jane are reunited after years of estrangement. During this separation, Henchard has risen from poor seasonal farmworker to wealthy mayor of a small country town, while Elizabeth has supported herself by waiting on tables at a tavern. Paying particular attention to tone, word choice, and selection of detail, compose a well-written essay in which you analyze Hardy's portrayal of the complex relationship between the two characters.

Of all the enigmas which ever confronted a girl there can have been seldom one like that which followed Henchard's announcement of himself to Elizabeth as her father. He had done it in an ardour and an agitation which had half carried the point of affection with her; yet, behold, from the next morning onwards his manner was constrained as she had never seen it before.

The coldness soon broke out into open chiding. One grievous failing of Elizabeth's was her occasional pretty and picturesque use of dialect words-- those terrible marks of the beast to the truly genteel.

It was dinner-time-- they never met except at meals-- and she happened to say when he was rising from table, wishing to show him something, "If you'll bide where you be a minute, father, I'll get it."

"Bide where you be," he echoed sharply, "Good God, are you only fit to carry wash to a pig-trough, that ye use such words as those?"

She reddened with shame and sadness.

"I meant 'Stay where you are,' father," she said, in a low, humble voice. "I ought to have been more careful."

He made no reply, and went out of the room.

The sharp reprimand was not lost upon her, and in time it came to pass that for "fay" she said "succeed"; that she no longer spoke of "dumbledores" but of "humble bees"; no longer said of young men and women that they "walked together," but that they were "engaged"; that she grew to talk of "greggles" as "wild hyacinths"; that when she had not slept she did not quaintly tell the servants next morning that she had been "hag-rid," but that she had "suffered from indigestion."

These improvements, however, are somewhat in advance of the story. Henchard, being uncultivated himself, was the bitterest critic the fair girl could possibly have had of her own lapses-- really slight now, for she read omnivorously. A gratuitous ordeal was in store for her in the matter of her handwriting. She was passing the dining-room door one evening, and had occasion to go in for something. It was not till she had opened the door that she knew the Mayor was there in the company of a man with whom he transacted business.

"Here, Elizabeth-Jane," he said, looking round at her, "just write down what I tell you-- a few words of an agreement for me and this gentleman to sign. I am a poor tool with a pen."

"Be jowned, and so be I," said the gentleman.

She brought forward blotting-book, paper, and ink, and sat down.

"Now then-- 'An agreement entered into this sixteenth day of October'-- write that first."

She started the pen in an elephantine march across the sheet. It was a splendid round, bold hand of her own conception, a style that would have stamped a woman as Minerva's own in more recent days. But other ideas reigned then: Henchard's creed was that proper young girls wrote ladies'-hand-- nay, he believed that bristling characters were as innate and inseparable a part of refined womanhood as sex itself. Hence when, instead of scribbling, like the Princess Ida,--

"In such a hand as when a field of corn

Bows all its ears before the roaring East,”

Elizabeth-Jane produced a line of chain-shot and sand-bags, he reddened in angry shame for her, and, peremptorily saying, “Never mind-- I’ll finish it,” dismissed her there and then.

Her considerate disposition became a pitfall to her now. She was, it must be admitted, sometimes provokingly and unnecessarily willing to saddle herself with manual labours. She would go to the kitchen instead of ringing, “Not to make Phoebe come up twice.” She went down on her knees, shovel in hand, when the cat overturned the coal-scuttle; moreover, she would persistently thank the parlour-maid for everything, till one day, as soon as the girl was gone from the room, Henchard broke out with, “Good God, why dostn’t leave off thanking that girl as if she were a goddess-born! Don’t I pay her a dozen pound a year to do things for ‘ee?” Elizabeth shrank so visibly at the exclamation that he became sorry a few minutes after, and said that he did not mean to be rough.

These domestic exhibitions were the small protruding needlerocks which suggested rather than revealed what was underneath. But his passion had less terror for her than his coldness. The increasing frequency of the latter mood told her the sad news that he disliked her with a growing dislike. The more interesting that her appearance and manners became under the softening influences which she could now command, and in her wisdom did command, the more she seemed to estrange him.

Essay One

In Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy depicts an inherently one-sided relationship, where one party valiantly attempts to please the other to no avail. By using irony, tone, and contrasting diction that indicates both Henchard’s coldness as well as Elizabeth’s docile warmth, Hardy reveals Henchard to be a harsh, misogynistic, and elitist individual that entirely contrasts with Elizabeth’s humble and innocent personality. Although Henchard loves his daughter inwardly, he outwardly can only express his shame and distaste, increasing the distance between father and daughter. Henchard’s shame in regards to his daughter and her social status is indicative of his shame in regards to his failings as a father and his past.

Henchard is introduced to Elizabeth as an “enigma,” evoking images of something distant and foreign to her. They are from entirely different social classes, making it difficult for them to relate to each other with a sense of shared experiences. Henchard exacerbates this distance with his immediate “agitation ... his manner was constrained.” This constrained behavior reflects the love for his daughter that is constrained within him; perhaps he is not ready to reveal it, and thus emotionally shields himself with a veil of cold distaste. While Elizabeth is described with diction evoking warmth such as “pretty and picturesque,” Henchard is described with “coldness ... truly genteel.” This cold refusal to look upon his daughter, in addition to his own elitist views, are revealed by his belief that dialect words are “terrible marks of the beast.” Perhaps it is because he was not always rich that Henchard tries so hard to associate himself with the upper- class and adopt their elite and condescending notions. He cannot bear to look upon his daughter, as she reminds him both of the social class he once belonged to as well as the pitiful existence he abandoned her in. In other words, Henchard’s coldness may be indicative of his guilt for the manner in which Elizabeth lived.

This preoccupation with elitism and social class is repeated when Henchard declares his daughter “fit to carry wash to a pig-trough,” to which Elizabeth reddens “with shame.” This act of reddening is repeated by Henchard later, implying that their feelings of shame may not be so different. While Elizabeth is ashamed to have disappointed her father, Henchard is ashamed that her “disappointing” behavior is his own fault. Hardy shows Elizabeth’s humility and obedience by listing

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her changes in lexicon, including “greggles” to “wild hyacinths” as well as “hag-rid” to “indigestion.” But her father remains her “bitterest” critic, especially of her handwriting; this is ironic because he himself is “uncultivated ... a poor tool with a pen.” This hypocrisy reveals two things: one, that her father’s views are partially built on unfair and misogynistic standards, and two, that his expectations for his daughter are based just as much on her “failures” as they are on his own. He is ashamed by his own “uncultivated” nature, which he attempts to hide by having Elizabeth write his legal document for him. But Elizabeth remains unchanged, with “elephantine ... round, bold” handwriting, and an undying obedience and willingness to “saddle herself with manual labor.” But for all her efforts, she is never able to receive the warmth hidden “underneath” Henchard; the more she changes to meet his expectations, “the more she seemed to estrange him.” Once again, this is indicative of the fact that Henchard’s lack of affection has less to do with her social class or behavior and more to do with his failures. He cannot look upon her without being ashamed of both his past and present; he is ashamed by his own harshness, even as it reforms his daughter in a manner of his supposed liking.

By using diction and tone contrasting the two characters, Hardy establishes their relationship as one filled with distance, torn by Henchard’s shame in regards to both his past mistakes and social class.

Essay Two

In the excerpt from Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Elizabeth-Jane is reunited with her father, Michael Henchard. Their interactions with each other during this time reveal the complex relationship between father and daughter. It is only made more complicated by Henchard’s varying degrees of “passion” and “coldness” and Elizabeth’s meek nature, resulting in a relationship devoid of real communication where neither person really understands the other.

Since the very beginning, Henchard’s reappearance in Elizabeth’s life has been nothing short of an “enigma” to her. Her original announcement is full of “an ardour and an agitation” that makes Elizabeth almost think he cares for her, but then he becomes “constrained” and cold. Henchard also possesses a penchant for pointing out the pettiest of Elizabeth’s mistakes, so often in fact that with her obedient humble nature, she begins to believe that speaking and acting the way she does is her own fault, calling it a “grievous failing” when she speaks how she is used to speaking, in “pretty and picturesque” common dialect, and believing it an “improvement” each time she “no longer” says a word in the improper way.

From Elizabeth’s point of view, it seems as though her father does not care for her. However, since Henchard tends to hide his emotions or be unable to express them, there is no way to know exactly why he behaves the way he does towards Elizabeth-Jane. It is possible that having risen from rags to riches himself, he may want the same for his daughter, for her to end up in a better place than he is in. He does ask whether Elizabeth is “only fit to carry wash to a pig-trough” when she errs in her speech, implying that he wants her to be doing far greater things than manual labor. Unfortunately for Henchard, Elizabeth’s docile character causes her to willingly do work, “manual labors,” to ensure that she would not be burdening another. This kindness and generosity is not what Henchard wants from his daughter, he wants a “proper young girl” who will uphold his reputation. In contrast to him, however, Elizabeth is the type to have been a strong figure for women had it been many years later, but “other ideas reigned then.”

Due to their many differences and Elizabeth’s status as a young woman in the late 19th century, father and daughter are unable to communicate their differences and their relationship stays in a sort of limbo, with “protruding needle rocks” which only hint at “what was underneath,” and which only served to further “estrange him” from her.

Essay Three

In the story *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), written by Thomas Hardy, the author shows how one's social upbringing can cause such tension and hatred. Hardy is able to showcase this through his tone, word choice, and also as a result of his selection and attention to detail.

Hardy set his tone right from the beginning of this particular excerpt from *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This became evident when he stated, "He had done it in an ardour and an agitation..." (Line 4-5) By stating this in the first few sentences, the reader is able to feel the tension that already exists. This shows the reader that the relationship between the two is not all roses, but rather almost hatred and conflicting. The tone is also set through Hardy's word choice, which helps show his portrayal of the complex relationship between the two characters.

An author's word choice plays a huge role in the overall tone and theme in a passage. Hardy shows this when he states, "coldness" (Line 9), "Grievous" (Line 10), and also "She reddened with shame and sadness." (Line 21). By using these particular words, the reader is able to greatly analyze the situation and all the feelings that come with it. The author makes sure he includes no happy and fulfilling words in this particular excerpt. This allows the reader to understand that there is some kind of bitterness between these two characters. This is an example of how Hardy pays attention to his selection of detail.

Hardy becomes very specific throughout the excerpt in order to add greater depth and meaning. For example in Lines 28 and 29, he stated, "that she no longer spoke of "dumbledores" but of "humble-bees." The author chooses to be very specific when it came to her vocabulary changing. This showed that Elizabeth went from taking in a past, proper English sense, to the more modern English that we use today. This allowed the reader to visualize how greatly Elizabeth's attitude and actions change due to one situation.

Thomas Hardy was able to provide a good portrayal of the complex relationship between the two characters, Henchard and Elizabeth, by using tone, his word choice, and also his attention to the selection of detail. The tone and word choice showcased the bitterness and tension between the two characters while his selection of detail allowed the reader to see and understand how much and how Elizabeth changed her attitude and actions.

Essay Four

Thomas Hardy used tone, diction, and detail very well to compose a story such as this one. This excerpt from "The Mayor of Casterbridge" portrays a clear complex relationship between a father and daughter. Hardy's use of literary tools is a key part of understanding this complex relationship.

Hardy used diction as one of the main components of this piece. "An agitation which had half carried the point of affection with her," Thomas Hardy uses words like "agitation" leading to "affection" by choice. This is to help the reader understand the contrast of these two words and make the reader think twice. In line 16 Elizabeth offers to get something for her father, but instead her father insults the way she speaks and compares her to someone "only fit to carry wash to a pig trough." Both incidents mentioned above imply both love and hate or kindness and egotism, very opposite feelings or actions.

Elizabeth-Jane constantly followed orders and took the negativity because she knew no different, she was constantly in an environment where contradicting emotions was a continuous occurrence.

By denoting the excerpt it is clear that Henchard and his daughter had a complex relationship. Seen through environment, diction, and tone it was evident the two characters were very different causing the complexity of their relationship.