



# MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

Review by  
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## ABOUT THE BOOK

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a novel written by Thomas Hardy and was first published in 1886. The story revolves around the protagonist, Michael Henchard, and examines themes such as fate, guilt, and the impact of one's past actions on their present life.

The novel begins with a young hay-trusser, Michael Henchard, who gets drunk at a fair and impulsively sells his wife, Susan, and their young daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, to a sailor named Newson. Consumed by remorse, Henchard decides to abstain from alcohol for 21 years and starts a new life in the town of Casterbridge. Over the course of the next two decades, Henchard becomes a successful businessman and earns the respect of the townspeople. He eventually becomes the Mayor of Casterbridge, gaining wealth and power. However, his guilt over selling his family never truly diminishes and continues to haunt him.

Meanwhile, Susan, believing her husband to be dead, returns to Casterbridge with her daughter, Elizabeth-Jane. She sets up a furmity stall, which is essentially a food stand, and begins a new life. By an unfortunate coincidence, Susan and Elizabeth-Jane end up living in the same town as Henchard. One day, Henchard encounters a Scottish businessman named Donald Farfrae and recognizes his leadership and business skills. He invites Farfrae to work for him as his manager, which sparks both admiration and jealousy in Henchard. As Farfrae's popularity grows, Henchard's jealousy intensifies, leading to a strained relationship between the two men.

Henchard's life takes a turn for the worse when Susan unexpectedly dies. He is overwhelmed with guilt and decides to confess his past to Elizabeth-Jane. However, before he can do so, he discovers that she believes Newson, the sailor who bought her from Henchard, is her father. Henchard decides to keep his secret to himself, fearing that he will lose Elizabeth-Jane's love and respect if she finds out the truth. As the story progresses, Henchard's grip on power and fortune weakens.

His business suffers due to his mismanagement and Farfrae's rising success. Henchard's reputation also takes a hit when it is revealed that he illegally sold grain to a private buyer during a time of scarcity, causing significant hardship for the people of Casterbridge.

Ultimately, Henchard's downfall is sealed when his past catches up with him. It is discovered that Henchard's wife, Susan, had a legal husband before marrying him, making their marriage invalid. As a result, Henchard is disgraced and loses his position as Mayor. Farfrae, having gained the trust and admiration of the townspeople, takes over as the new Mayor of Casterbridge. In the end, Henchard's life ends in tragedy. He becomes a broken and isolated man, living in poverty and regret. Elizabeth-Jane, who has come to learn of Henchard's true identity as her father, tries to reconcile with him, but Henchard dies before they can properly mend their relationship.

Overall, The Mayor of Casterbridge Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet who lived from 1840 to 1928. He is best known for his novels, which explore themes of love, fate, and social constraints. Hardy's works often depict the struggles and complexities of rural life in Victorian England. One of his most famous novels is "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," published in 1891. The book tells the story of Tess, a young woman from a humble background who is thrust into a world of wealth and aristocracy. Through Tess's relationships with the aristocratic d'Urberville family, Hardy examines issues of class, gender, and sexuality. The novel is known for its tragic ending and its exploration of social injustice.

Another well-known work by Hardy is "Far from the Madding Crowd," published in 1874. This novel follows the story of Bathsheba Everdene, a strong-willed and independent woman who is pursued by three suitors. Like many of Hardy's works, this novel delves into themes of love, marriage, and societal expectations. It also explores the changing agricultural landscape of rural England during the Industrial Revolution.

Hardy's writing often reflects his own experiences and observations of the changing world around him. Born and raised in rural Dorset, England, he had a deep connection to the landscape and people of the countryside. His works often depict the beauty and harshness of nature, as well as the struggles of ordinary people living in rural communities. In addition to his novels, Hardy also wrote poetry, which is highly regarded for its lyrical and evocative language. His poems often explore similar themes as his novels, such as nature, love, and the passage of time. Some of his well-known poems include "Neutral Tones," "The Darkling Thrush," and "The Ruined Maid." Despite his success as a writer, Hardy faced controversy and criticism during his lifetime. His frank depictions of sexuality and unconventional portrayals of women challenged the moral standards of Victorian society. However, his works continue to be celebrated for their depth and insight into the human condition.

Overall, Thomas Hardy is considered one of the great writers of the 19th century, known for his powerful storytelling, memorable characters, and incisive social commentary. His works continue to be studied and enjoyed by readers around the world.

## PLOT

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Overall, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* tells a story of redemption, loss, and the consequences of one's actions. It explores the complex nature of human character, highlighting the lasting impact of past choices on one's present and future.

## MY THOUGHTS

As I say, I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed this novel given that it is not as popular as some of Hardy's others. The novel's pace, the revelations and turns of plot, the drama of certain scenes all contributed to my enjoyment. I should add that I also enjoyed the wonderful illustrations by Robert Barnes. Twenty illustrations were included in this edition for the first time since the original serialised publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in 1886.

