

The Mayor Of Casterbridge

by
Thomas Hardy

Powered By



Pdf Corner

**First
Published**

1886

The Mayor Of Casterbridge Pdf

By

Thomas Hardy



This version of pdf is

Re-designed by

[Pdfcorner.com](https://www.pdfcorner.com)

© Copyright Reserved 2018

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	p.3
II.	Thesis	
1.	Context	p.4
2.	Plot Summary	p.4~p.6
3.	Analysis of Mayor Characters	
3.1	Michael Henchard	p.7
3.2	Donald Farfrae	p.7~p.8
3.2	Elizabeth-Jane Newson	p.8
3.4	Lucetta Templeman	p.8
4.	Mayor Themes	
4.1	Cruel and Arbitrary Fate	p.9
4.2	The Importance of Character	p.9
4.3	The Tragic Hero	p.10
III.	Conclusion	p.11
IV.	Bibliography	p.12

I. Introduction

This is a short analysis of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, a novel by Thomas Hardy. The goal of this paper is to gain insight into the world of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and to identify the underlying messages the author is trying to convey. I have divided the paper into the following sections: context; plot summary; character analysis; major themes and conclusion. While the context and plot summary provide basic understanding of the novel, the individual analysis of the major characters is intended to provide deeper understanding of the characters, and thus provide a clearer view of what we ultimately seek: the underlying messages and ideologies of Thomas Hardy.

II. Thesis

1. Context

Thomas Hardy (2 June 1840 – 11 January 1928), was an English writer. He was born at Higher Bockhampton, England. Though Hardy is mostly famous for his novels, [he considered himself to be a poet and wrote novels mainly for financial gain only](3). Hardy fell ill with pleurisy in December 1927 and died in January 1928. It is interesting to note that [though his ashes were buried in the famous Poets' Corner, his heart was buried in Stinsford, in the same grave as his first wife, Emma.] (3)

Hardy's tragic novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, subtitled *The Life and Death of a Man of Character*, is set in the fictional town of Casterbridge, based on the town of Dorchester. [This story, according to Hardy, was inspired by three actual events: the sale of a wife by her husband which was reported in a local newspaper, the uncertain harvests caused by fluctuating weather (which ruin Henchard's business), and the visit of Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, to Dorchester in July 1849.] (3)

The Mayor of Casterbridge the novel that brought fame to Hardy. It's publication in 1886 marked the beginning of the richest period in Thomas Hardy's twenty-five-year career as a novelist.

2. Plot Summary

Michael Henchard, with his wife Susan and baby daughter Elizabeth-Jane, arrives at Weydon Priors. This traveling hay-trusser looks for a job in the town market place. Unable to find any, he becomes irritated. The family enters a furmity-tent nearby, and Henchard winks at the "furmity-women", signaling her to fill his bowl with some rum. Shortly afterwards, the intoxicated man engages in an argument with his wife. After he rashly auctions off his wife and daughter, he falls asleep.

Henchard wakes up the next morning, unable to believe what he has done in the previous night. Filled with remorse, Henchard searches for his family. The vain search ends when he again arrives in Weydon Priors. After vowing to abstain from liquor for twenty-one years, Henchard sets off for the town of Casterbridge, only telling the "furmity-woman" of his destination.

Eighteen years later, Susan and Elizabeth-Jane step into the market of Weydon Priors. They believe that Newson, the sailor who had earlier purchased them, has died in the sea. While they search for Henchard, Elizabeth remains oblivious of the actual truth; all her mother tells her is that they are searching for a distant relative. Susan learns from the “furmity-woman” that Henchard headed for Casterbridge. Therefore, Susan sets out to find him there. On reaching Casterbridge, she is surprised that Henchard has established himself as an important pillar of the town; he has prospered in the corn and hay trade and has even become the mayor.

Hesitant to immediately confront her husband, Susan takes her daughter to stay in the Three-Mariner’s hotel. That very next night she meets Henchard secretly, in the ancient Roman ruin of Casterbridge. Overwhelmed by guilt, Henchard agrees to remarry

Susan and take care of Elizabeth-Jane. They also decide that Henchard will pretend to court Susan as if they have never met before, for they fear Elizabeth and the townspeople will learn of their disgrace.

Meanwhile in the hotel, Elizabeth-Jane runs into the young Scot, Donald Farfrae. The two youngsters are deeply attracted to each other. Farfrae has greatly impressed Henchard by demonstrating his technique of reviving bad wheat. Thus Henchard persuades him to stay in Casterbridge as his business manager.

Henchard’s fondness for Farfrae blooms in an instant, but the feeling also fades away just as fast. As Farfrae demonstrates superior ability and outdoes Henchard in his own trade, small conflicts arise between the two men. Henchard becomes alienated from Farfrae. In the end, Henchard fires his young partner and forbids him to meet with Elizabeth-Jane. Unfortunately Susan dies from sickness not long afterwards, leaving Henchard a letter that informs him that Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter. Their daughter died long ago in infancy; the current Elizabeth-Jane is Newson’s daughter. At the news Henchard’s attitude undergoes a complete change, and his warm, paternal love for Elizabeth-Jane suddenly turns into coldness and indifference. Now he despises both of whom he has loved earlier.

Lucetta Templeman, a young woman who formerly took care of the dejected Henchard, reaches Casterbridge. She has come to marry Henchard after inheriting a vast fortune from her lately deceased aunt. After settling in the Town, Lucetta cleverly befriends Elizabeth. She successfully persuades her friend, who cannot bear Henchard much longer, to stay with her in order to provide her with an excuse for Henchard’s visit. Henchard, however, ignores Lucetta. While disappointed by his

indifference, Lucetta meets Farfrae. They fall in love and within a short time they marry.

Having lost all his friends and loved ones, Henchard undergoes a great decline. His business fails due to his rash attempts to harm Farfrae financially. The prosperous merchant goes bankrupt. He has no option but to work for Farfrae. Even worse, the furmity-woman shows up and unveils Henchard's sordid past. The mayor resigns. At the same time, twenty-one years of abstinence has come to an end, and Henchard resumes his habit of drinking heavily.

Apprehensive of Henchard revealing their previous relationship, Mrs. Farfrae begs Henchard to return all the letters she had sent him. Henchard agrees, and asks Jopp, his old foreman, to deliver the package of letters for him. However, Jopp stops at an inn and gets drunk. He reads the letters out loud. A "skimmity-ride", a humiliating parade portraying Lucetta and Henchard together, is held by the towns people after discovering the two's relationship. Lucetta, unable to withstand her own shame and misery, falls sick and dies.

Not long after Lucetta's death, the supposedly lost sailor, Newson, knocks on Henchard's door, asking for Elizabeth. Henchard, taken by surprise and fearing that he might lose his sole support, tells him that Elizabeth is dead. Newson departs in sorrow. One day, Newson again returns to town. Unwilling to confront him, Henchard tells Elizabeth that he is leaving Casterbridge. He claims that he might be an obstacle between her and Farfrae as their love is becoming more apparent everyday. Elizabeth learns of Henchard's lies when she reunites with Newson, her true father. Elizabeth and Farfrae marry.

Henchard leaves Casterbridge working again as a traveling hay trusser. He returns to Casterbridge when he hears of Farfrae and Elizabeth's wedding. Henchard gets treated with unexpected coldness from Elizabeth-Jane. Without saying anything in self-defense, he leaves. Elizabeth-Jane regrets her attitude, and sets out with Farfrae to find Henchard. They are too late. Henchard dies alone in the countryside, leaving only a bitter will hoping that no one shall remember his name.

3. Analysis of Major Characters

3.1 Michael Henchard

From the title *The Mayor of Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character*, it is obvious that Henchard is the main protagonist. He is a man with numerous flaws and a sordid past. He is a man that dies alone without a penny to his name. He is tortured by fate but endures them all, and is thus a real man.

Henchard is rash, impulsive, irritable, and also somewhat arrogant. The quick affection Henchard feels for Farfrae on their first meeting quickly turns to hatred. The affection he displays for Elizabeth undergoes a similar change when Henchard discovers Elizabeth-Jane's true identity; he becomes cold and critical of her instantly. Henchard's actions are guided by his emotions, and thus he sacrifices his wealth and loved ones.

It is undeniable that Henchard commits an irreversible crime in selling his wife, but it must be noted that he is filled with regret the next morning. Henchard, in truth, is not a bad man. He is determined. Due to this character trait he is able to abstain from drinking for twenty-one years, and rise from being a mere hay-trusser to becoming a successful merchant and a mayor. Furthermore, there is an essential kindness in his personality; he takes care of his employee, Whittle's, mother by keeping her well-supplied with coal and food during winter.

Michael Henchard, who shoulders his cruel fate alone, is truly a tragic hero.

3.2 Donald Farfrae

Donald Farfrae, the young Scotsman, serves as a foil to Michael Henchard. Whereas Henchard is tall and strong, Farfrae is short and frail. Whereas Henchard is rash and irrational, Farfrae is calm and logical. While Henchard sticks to conventional business and farming methods, Farfrae is enthusiastic to experiment and change. Farfrae is a man of knowledge.

Gentleman like, Farfrae's qualities soon prove favorable as he rises to join the elites of Casterbridge and becomes the mayor. He is in several occasions "saintly kind", such as when he tries to help the bankrupt Henchard even when he is clearly aware of the animosity Henchard holds toward him.

Despite his laudable qualities, Farfrae is too perfect a person to sympathize with. He is as calm and logical as always when his wife, Lucetta dies. It is easier to identify with Henchard than with Farfrae, for Farfrae seems to lack depth and feeling.

3.3 Elizabeth-Jane Newson

Elizabeth is a kind hearted and simple, she constantly believes in the goodness of people. This innocent girl is not the main focus of the novel. Although she is often seen as relatively non-static because of the intellectual and social improvement she forces on herself, her character does not change much. For example, she has always been overly concerned about manners. At the beginning of the novel, Elizabeth-Jane is uncomfortable when her mother goes to the furmity tent, because respectable people do not go there. Later, Elizabeth-Jane finds Lucetta's marriage to Farfrae improper, for she has already promised to marry Henchard.

In spite of her difficult life, Elizabeth-Jane is not a bitter person. She is made truly unusual by the fact that anything she suffers she can resolve quietly, whether it is when Henchard acts coldly towards her or her friend Lucetta marries her beloved Farfrae. Elizabeth-Jane's importance is reflected in her unnatural tendency to literally make the best out of everything.

3.4 Lucetta Templeman

Lucetta arrives in Casterbridge to be viewed as a rich lady of high social status. Lucetta is ambitious. In spite of her past she wants to marry well and live a good life. To attain her goal and win Henchard to her, she cleverly befriends Elizabeth-Jane. However, she proves herself to be undetermined when she vacillate after arriving at Casterbridge, quickly falling in love with Farfrae and marrying him.

Lucetta displays many similarities with Henchard, particularly that her downfall results from the combination of cruel fate and her own mistakes. However, Lucetta is portrayed as an imprudent character rather than a tragic heroine, for she lacks Henchard's determination and acts according to her whim.

4. Major Themes

4.1 Cruel and Arbitrary Fate

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* character seems to play a greater role than fate in causing Henchard's misfortunes. Most of the time Henchard's misfortunes obviously result from his own shortcomings. Having said that, the idea of an arbitrary fate is a central theme in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Examples of cruel, arbitrary fate are already apparent at the beginning of the novel. As there are two shops offering food at the fair, and Henchard is encouraged by Susan to enter the one seemingly not selling alcohol, it is by chance that Henchard becomes intoxicated, and then commits his terrible error. Then, a sailor who by coincidence has both the money and the heart to accept the offer of Henchard appears. The man also happens to be a sailor going to Canada, far beyond Michael's reach when he searches for his wife and child.

Fate has an incalculable impact on Henchard's life. If Susan had not returned, Henchard might be living happily ever after with Lucetta. Had the weather not fluctuated, Henchard might not have gone bankrupt. Had fate not been so cruel, Henchard's life would probably have been better.

4.2 The Importance of Character

Hardy wrote, "It is not improbabilities of incident but improbabilities of character that matter." (2) Character is probably the most important theme of the novel. Henchard struggles with two things in his life, his own nature and Fate. Fate may create the situations for the characters, as mentioned earlier, but their personalities ultimately determine the directions of their life.

With luck, Henchard meets Farfrae and the disaster of bad wheat is thus solved. However, even when Henchard shows enormous generosity towards the young man, his tempestuous temper only intimidates Farfrae. Henchard, furthermore forces himself into reckless attempts to harm Farfrae, resulting in his fall from grace to poverty. Lucetta's overly sentimental nature causes her to do dangerous things for love. Character is just as responsible for the miseries of mankind as Fate is.

4.3 The Tragic Hero

The main protagonist Michael Henchard is probably the most developed, if not the only fully developed character in this novel. The remaining “major characters” are little developed, either made quite unnatural by their character traits, or quickly abandoned, as is the case with Susan.

Henchard possesses flawed, but unquestionably real human qualities and emotions. This makes him a tragic character that is easy to identify with. His misfortunes may sometimes evoke sympathy as well as contempt in the minds of the readers. Hardy seems to be conveying the message that real men are not necessarily ones that are perfect, but are individuals, such as Henchard, that endure their unfortunate lives. Ultimately, this tragic hero is our connection to the *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, enabling us to apply the novel’s themes to our life.

III. Conclusion

The Mayor of Casterbridge / The Life and Death of a Man of Character is one of Thomas Hardy's most famous novels. As the title suggests, the novel concentrates on the one man, Michael Henchard. Hardy considers Henchard as the "Man of Character" due to his great ability to endure everything. The novel's predominant themes include the existence of a cruel and arbitrary fate, the importance of one's characters, and the idea real men are men with determination.

The themes are linked closely to fate and inevitability. Therefore, it is possible to infer that Thomas Hardy might be a believer of one the several fate-related ideologies, such as fatalism. As has been shown, most of the themes of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are reflected in events surrounding the main protagonist, Michael Henchard. Therefore, one possibility for future assignments may be to analyze several of Hardy's other novels and compare and contrast their main characters, in hope of finding similarities between the underlying messages of the novel. In doing so one would be able to clearly establish a set of the author's fundamental beliefs.

IV. Bibliography

- (1) Sparknotes, <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/casterbridge/>, (2008/1/13)
- (2) Victorian Web, <http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/pva300.html>, (2008/1/10)
- (3) Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hardy, (2008/1/14)
- (4) Thomas Hardy, 2003, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Published by Penguin Classics