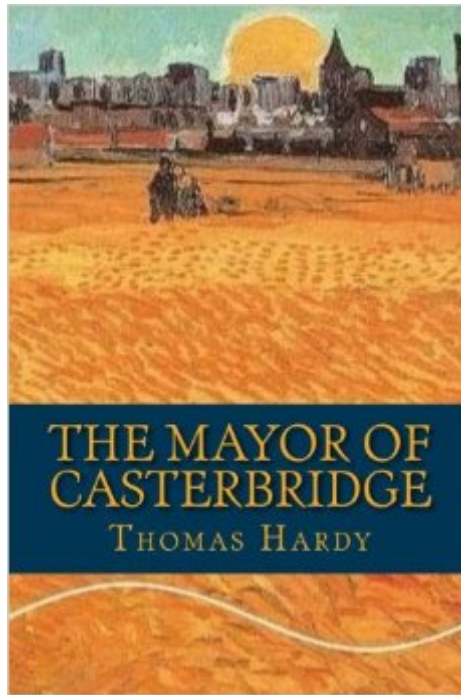


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The Mayor Of Casterbridge



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

Since I have decided to dedicate part of my time spent reading in 2003 to the classics, I started first with The Mayor of Casterbridge, not the most famous of Hardy's works but seemingly a good place to start. I will definitely read the other works by this author since I was so captivated by this book. The novel begins with the sale of Michael Henchard's wife and child to the highest bidder at a local summer fair. Henchard is drunk and his wife, tired of his habits, decides to leave with the sailor who bids on her and her daughter. Henchard wakes up the next morning, somewhat remorseful for

what he has done and vows not to drink for twenty-one years. The very next chapter picks up the story nineteen years later, with the return of the wife and child into Henchard's life. Henchard is now quite wealthy and is such an important man in his community, he is now Mayor of Casterbridge. From here, a series of wrong decisions and misunderstandings lead to the devastating conclusion. Hardy is well known for his tendency towards gloomy endings and this book certainly fits the mold. But he is also well known for his lyrical descriptions of the English countryside and describing a way of life which had disappeared even in his own time. There were beautiful passages about the hay carts being driven through town, loaded so high that people on the second floor of homes could reach out and touch the top of the hay. Small details abound, describing the sound of rain on trees and the smell of the local foods. But perhaps the most significant aspect of the novel for me was the feeling that Henchard had wished for everything that had happened to him, and all of his wishes came true, and thus ultimately his downfall.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is not Thomas Hardy's most famous or acclaimed novel, but in the opinion of this die-hard fan it is his best. The later Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure are generally considered his masterpieces, but while this lacks their epic grandeur and sociopolitical relevance, it is more immediately arresting, has a more conventionally interesting plot, and features one of literature's best tragic heroes. I give it the highest possible recommendation not only for fans but for anyone even remotely alive to literary greatness. Hardy in his day was nearly unique in mixing high literary elements with what would later be called pulp factors. Hard as it is to imagine, he was like William Faulkner and Stephen King in one - a true artist with mass appeal, both critically acclaimed and bestselling. However, his early nineteenth century rural English settings, heavy dialect use, eccentric vocabulary, and other characteristics make many current readers think his books slow going. The Mayor is the obvious exception, beginning almost immediately with one of the most arresting and unforgettable scenes in all literature - nothing less than a drunken man selling his wife and child to a stranger out of anger and disgust. As often with Hardy, it is based on a real incident, but he dramatizes so vividly that we cannot help being enthralled. The drama indeed reaches such a fever pitch in these first few pages that even those normally averse to classic literature can hardly help being pulled in. Such a beginning sets a very high standard, and it is a testament to the book's greatness that it never disappoints - and, indeed, hardly lets up.

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