

***THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE* – STUDY MATERIAL**

COMPILED FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

Setting and date

The book *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is one of Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels, and is set largely in the fictional town of Casterbridge, based on Dorchester in Dorset. The author intended Casterbridge to be an imaginative presentation of certain aspects of the town as he remembered it in the "dream" of his childhood.

Although the opening sentence of the novel states that the events described took place "before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span" the date of Hardy's own childhood places it rather later — in the mid-to-late 1840s.

First publication and early reception

Hardy started work on *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in the spring of 1884, after a three-year pause. He completed it in a little over a year, and it was first issued in weekly parts in January 1886, followed by full publication in May 1886. A reader for the publisher, Smith, Elder & Co. was not impressed and complained that the lack of gentry among the characters made it uninteresting. It was issued with a small print run of only 750 copies.

Hardy himself felt that in his efforts to get an incident into almost every weekly instalment he had added events to the narrative somewhat too freely, resulting in over-elaboration. However, he was deeply affected, telling a friend that the novel was the only tragedy that made him weep while writing it.

About Hardy

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in Dorset. Hardy's rural beginnings influenced much of his fictional settings. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* demonstrates Hardy's position in the shifting world of the times, containing parts of both Victorian and Modernist literary forms. Throughout the novel Hardy traverses through the effects of economic and cultural growth as witnessed in Weydon-Priors decline and the continually changing moral codes and conduct evidenced in the passionate and reckless character of Lucetta Templeman. Within the novel, Thomas Hardy uses a variety of major and minor themes alongside motifs and symbols that can be analyzed by looking at plot, character analysis and other literary devices used throughout the novel. This essay will attempt to analyze the themes of fate and chance alongside love.