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**CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF MICHAEL HENCHARD IN
*THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE***

At the end of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the ruined Michael Henchard wills that no one remember his name after his death. This request is profoundly startling and tragic, especially when one considers how important Henchard's name has been to him during his lifetime. After committing the abominable deed of selling his wife and child, Henchard wakes from a drunken stupor and wonders, first and foremost, if he told any of the fair-goers his name. Eighteen years pass between that scene on the heath of Weydon-Priors and Henchard's reunion with Susan in Casterbridge, but we immediately realize the value that Henchard places on a good name and reputation. Not only has he climbed from hay-trusser to mayor of a small agricultural town, but he labours to protect the esteem this higher position affords him. When Susan and Elizabeth-Jane come upon the mayor hosting a banquet for the town's most prominent citizens, they witness a man struggling to convince the masses that, despite a mismanaged harvest, he is an honest person with a worthy name.

As he stares out at an unhappy audience made up of grain merchants who have lost money and common citizens who, without wheat, are going hungry, Henchard laments that he cannot undo the past. He relates grown wheat metaphorically to the mistakes of the past—neither can be taken back. Although Henchard learns this lesson at the end of Chapter IV, he fails to internalize it. If there is, indeed, a key to his undoing, it is his inability to let go of his past mistakes. Guilt acts like a fuel that keeps Henchard moving toward his own demise. Unable to forget the events that took place in the furmity-woman's tent, he sets out to punish himself again and again. While he might have found happiness by marrying Lucetta, for instance, Henchard determines to make amends for the past by remarrying a woman he never loved in the first place. Possessed of a "restless and self-accusing soul," Henchard seems to seek out situations that promise further debasement. Although Donald Farfrae eventually appropriates Henchard's job, business, and even his loved ones, it is Henchard who insists on creating the

competition that he eventually loses. Although Henchard loses even the ability to explain himself—“he did not sufficiently value himself to lessen his sufferings by strenuous appeal or elaborate argument”—he never relinquishes his talent of endurance. Whatever the pain, Henchard bears it. It is this resilience that elevates him to the level of a hero—a man, ironically, whose name deserves to be remembered.

Courtesy: Web Source, DDCE, Utkal University