

NAXOS

AudioBooks

COMPLETE
CLASSICS
UNABRIDGED

Thomas Hardy
Wessex Tales

Read by **Neville Jason**

CD 1

1	Preface	4:04
2	An Imaginative Woman	7:51
3	The Marchmill family accordingly took possession of the house...	7:06
4	She thoughtfully rose from her chair...	6:37
5	One day the children had been playing hide-and-seeek...	7:27
6	Just then a telegram was brought up.	5:31
7	While she was dreaming the minutes away thus...	6:10
8	On Saturday morning the remaining members...	5:30
9	It was about five in the afternoon when she heard a ring...	4:36
10	The painter had been gone only a day or two...	4:39
11	She wrote to the landlady at Solentsea...	6:26
12	The months passed...	5:12
13	The Three Strangers	7:58

Total time on CD 1: 79:14

CD 2

1	The fiddler was a boy of those parts...	5:57
2	At last the notes of the serpent ceased...	6:19
3	Meanwhile the general body of guests had been taking...	5:13
4	Now the old mead of those days...	5:21
5	No observation being offered by anybody...	6:13
6	All this time the third stranger had been standing...	5:31
7	Thus aroused, the men prepared to give chase.	8:01
8	It was eleven o'clock by the time they arrived.	7:57
9	The Withered Arm Chapter 1: A Lorn Milkmaid	5:22
10	Chapter 2: The Young Wife	8:55
11	Chapter 3: A Vision	6:13
12	At these proofs of a kindly feeling towards her...	3:52
13	Chapter 4: A Suggestion	4:34

Total time on CD 2: 79:35

CD 3

1	She mused on the matter the greater part of the night...	4:42
2	Chapter 5: Conjuror Trendle	6:53
3	Chapter 6: A Second Attempt	6:47
4	Chapter 7: A Ride	7:27
5	And then the pretty palpitating Gertrude Lodge...	5:02
6	Chapter 8: A Waterside Hermit	7:30
7	Chapter 9: A Rencounter	8:06
8	Fellow Townsmen Chapter 1	5:26
9	Talking thus they drove into the town.	6:14
10	Chapter 2	6:39
11	They both remained standing for a few seconds...	5:43
12	She had remained standing till now...	7:49

Total time on CD 3: 78:23

CD 4

1	Chapter 3	6:34
2	Chapter 4	8:52
3	Chapter 5	6:01
4	After that he went back to the bedroom...	8:24
5	Chapter 6	8:42
6	The tone of her latter words was equivocal...	6:08
7	Chapter 7	6:07
8	Barnet's life at this period was singularly lonely...	5:17
9	Chapter 8	4:50
10	Barnet took the first letter...	7:46
11	Impulse in all its forms characterised Barnet...	7:41
12	Chapter 9	3:05

Total time on CD 4: 79:34

CD 5

1	The barmaid sighed again, and raised one of her hands...	5:46
2	The newly-arrived gentleman went back to the hotel...	6:01
3	She gave him her hand and then they sat down.	8:07
4	She watched him safely through the gate...	4:50
5	Interlopers at the Knap Chapter 1	5:09
6	They were travelling in a direction...	6:37
7	Chapter 2	5:46
8	The footfall ceased, and they arose...	6:57
9	His mother gazed upon him in grieved suspense...	7:19
10	Chapter 3	6:26
11	The general conversation thus begun...	7:26
12	The heart of Darton was subject to sudden overflowings.	6:54
13	Chapter 4	2:07

Total time on CD 5: 79:35

CD 6

1	When the Christmas holidays came...	7:08
2	As this child learnt to walk and talk...	3:53
3	Chapter 5	7:12
4	He waited and waited to hear from Johns...	4:54
5	Anniversaries having been unpropitious...	4:30
6	The Distracted Preacher Chapter 1: How His Cold Was Cured	5:48
7	Stockdale sat down...	7:42
8	When they were laid open...	7:16
9	Stockdale sat in the deep chair...	5:28
10	Next day he had better fortune...	4:07
11	Chapter 2: How He Saw Two Other Men	6:22
12	Chapter 3: The Mysterious Greatcoat	6:30
13	Stockdale went into his room and lay down as before.	8:38

Total time on CD 6: 79:35

CD 7

1	One morning, on looking from his window...	3:05
2	Chapter 4: At the Time of the New Moon	5:40
3	Lizzie soon ascended a small mound...	4:37
4	Stockdale went forward and said at once...	7:14
5	Chapter 5: How They Went to Lulstead Cove	5:54
6	The hired carriers paced along over Chaldon Down...	6:33
7	While Owlett thus conversed...	7:26
8	Chapter 6: The Great Search at Nether-Moynton	6:19
9	By this time not a male villager was to be seen...	7:37
10	The smugglers remained in a blank silence...	5:47
11	Chapter 7: The Walk to Warm'ell Cross and Afterwards	5:33
12	'Well, Lizzie,' said Stockdale...	6:06
13	The road was lonely, and after nightfall...	7:37

Total time on CD 7: 79:35

CD 8

1	Stockdale was leaning with his elbow on the mantelpiece...	5:37
2	One day, two years after the parting...	4:45
3	A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four	7:14
4	'The flocks my father had charge of...'	5:55
5	'All this time I had not waked Uncle Job...'	6:22
6	The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion Chapter 1	3:33
7	It all began with the arrival of the York Hussars...	6:41
8	Chapter 2	7:48
9	Chapter 3	5:38
10	The next time that she saw him...	6:28
11	Chapter 4	4:42
12	Phyllis had thus braced herself...	4:39
13	Chapter 5	5:03
14	On the open green stretching before her...	5:01

Total time on CD 8: 79:35

Total time on CDs 1–8: 10:35:06

Thomas Hardy

(1840–1928)

Wessex Tales

Thomas Hardy was born near Dorchester on 2 June 1840, the son of a stonemason. As his family lacked the means to send him to university, he was apprenticed to a local architect. He went on to study architecture at King's College, London, where he won prizes awarded by the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Architectural Association. However, he was not happy living in London, and after five years he returned to Dorset, deciding to devote himself to writing.

In 1870, he met and fell in love with Emma Gifford, and they married three years later. Although not an entirely happy marriage, Hardy was devastated by her death in 1912 and his *Poems 1912–14* are an elegy to her memory. His first novel failed to find a publisher and the next two were published under a pseudonym. The first novel published under his own name, *A*

Pair of Blue Eyes, based on his relationship with Emma, appeared in 1873. The success of *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) enabled him to become a full-time author. During the following 25 years he produced 10 novels. His first short story was published in 1865 and his first collection, *Wessex Tales*, appeared in two volumes in 1888.

Wessex, Hardy's invented geographical destination, was based on the West Country he knew so well, in and around his home in Dorchester. Unlike Essex, the ancient title of the country of the East Saxons which still exists as the name of an English county, the name 'Wessex', the land of the West Saxons, had long ago fallen into desuetude until resurrected by Hardy as the imaginary setting for his stories and poems. The map Hardy drew of his fictional Wessex is a fascinating mixture of real and

invented place names; key towns such as Bristol, Bath and Southampton are given their real names, whilst other names, such as Exonbury, Melchester and Knollsea, are his invented titles for existing places.

Hardy's Wessex is an England of the past, fast disappearing even during the author's lifetime, a rural society untouched by the Industrial Revolution; where country folk lived in almost unimaginable isolation; where lack of proper medical care rendered every illness potentially fatal; where deeply embedded superstitions guided people's actions; where men were hanged for sheep-stealing or shot for desertion, and smuggling was the only way out of poverty for many who lived by the sea.

Like the place names on Hardy's map, the stories themselves are a mixture of fact and fiction. Some are based on real events, others are pure invention. Sometimes the two are so intermingled that even the author himself may be unsure which is which. Hardy writes in a footnote on *A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four* that he thought he had invented what he considered the rather unlikely situation of a sighting of Napoleon Bonaparte on these shores, only to learn years later that

the story was already extant and accepted locally as a fact.

But, however far-fetched a tale, the great pleasure was in the telling. At a time and in a place where life was brutally harsh; where there was little or no available entertainment and even a travelling troupe of actors would have been a rarity; where there were few books available, even to those who were literate, the telling of stories was an important part of life, and a naturally accomplished storyteller able to weave a spell over his listeners, such as Solomon Selby in *A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four*, would have been a highly valued member of the community.

Life's Little Ironies, the selection of short stories which followed *Wessex Tales* in 1894, might well have been the common title of both books. The ironies of fate is a theme which also runs through *Wessex Tales*; unexpected outcomes, unintended results, missed opportunities, aspirations mocked by life's brevity, the unforeseen accidents which alter lives. In *An Imaginative Woman*, the protagonist is cheated of her longed-for meeting with her fantasy lover; in *The Three Strangers* a mistaken identification frees the felon from the scaffold; in *The*

Withered Arm the cure for a magical injury is discovered to have been effected at too high a price; in *Fellow Townsmen* the social and amorous situation of the two friends is switched topsy-turvy by events, and the wished-for unions turn out not to be the expected ones; again in *The Interlopers at the Knap* the expected marriage is not the one that takes place, and the results have unexpected consequences.

Hardy was a realist, and the results of fate's ironic twists are not always happy ones. One of the few stories in the collection which has a conventional 'happy ending' is *The Distracted Preacher*, and Hardy writes in a footnote for a later edition that he is giving the public what it wants, rather than what he would prefer to write:

The ending of this story with the marriage of Lizzy and the minister was almost de rigueur in an English magazine at the time of writing. But at this late date, thirty years later it may not be amiss to give the ending that would have been preferred by the writer to the convention used above. Moreover it corresponds more closely with the true incidents

of which the tale is a vague and flickering shadow. Lizzy did not, in fact, marry the minister, but – much to her credit in the author's opinion – stuck to Jim the smuggler, and emigrated with him after their marriage, an expatrial step rather forced upon him by his adventurous antecedents. They both died in Wisconsin between 1850 and 1860.

Perhaps it was a happy ending after all, if not a conventional one.

Hardy's novels, such as *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, have earned him an immortal place in the pantheon of English writers. *Wessex Tales*, many written for periodicals such as *Blackwood's Magazine*, are the work of one of the world's great storytellers. Whether fictional or based on fact, as their author says, 'the stories are but dreams', and generations have been enchanted by them.

Notes by Neville Jason



Neville Jason trained at RADA where he was awarded the diction prize by Sir John Gielgud. His first appearance in the theatre was in Peter Brook's production of *Titus Andronicus* starring Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. He is a former member of the Old Vic Company, the English Stage Company, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Birmingham Repertory Company. Roles include John Worthing in *The Importance of Being Ernest*, Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, Christian in *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Robert Browning in *Robert and Elizabeth*. He is a trained singer and has

appeared in numerous musicals including *The Great Waltz*, *1776*, *Ambassador*, *Lock Up Your Daughters*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Irma La Douce*, *Robert and Elizabeth* and *Mutiny*.

Television appearances include *Maigret*, *Dr Who* (The Androids of Tara), *Hamlet* (Horatio), *Crime and Punishment* (Zamyatov), *Emergency Ward Ten*, *Dixon of Dock Green*, *When the Boat Comes In*, *Angels*, *Minder*, *Dempsey and Makepeace*, *The Richest Woman in the World*, *The Dancing Years*, *The Magic Barrel* and *Windmill Near a Frontier*. Films include *From Russia with Love* and *The Message*. He has been a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company three times, and may be heard in radio plays, documentaries and arts programmes. For Naxos AudioBooks his readings include Vasari's *Lives of the Great Artists*, *Freud*, *War and Peace*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Favourite Essays*, *The Once and Future King*, *Evgenii Onegin* and *Remembrance of Things Past*, both unabridged and abridged. He plays Antonio in *The Tempest*, and has directed productions of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As a director he was awarded Talkies awards for *Great Expectations* and *Poets of the Great War*. As a reader he won AudioFile Earphone awards for *The Captive*, *Time Regained*, *The Once and Future King* and *War and Peace* (Best Audiobooks of the Year 2007 and 2009).

Credits

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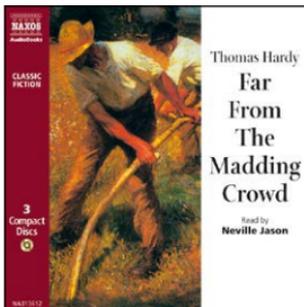
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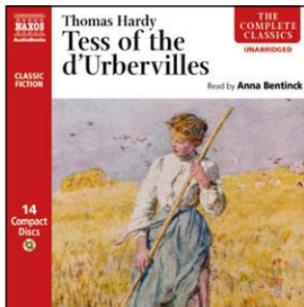
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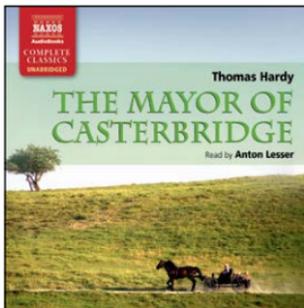
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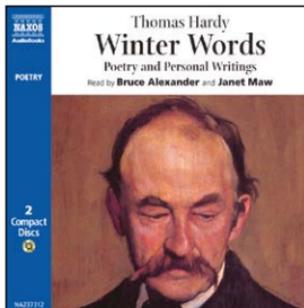
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