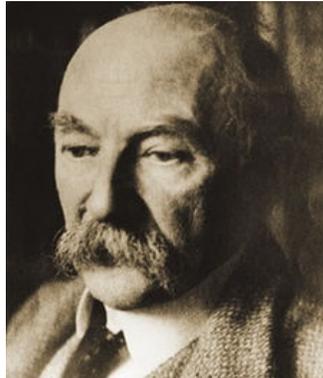


THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

by Thomas Hardy



THE AUTHOR

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was born in southwestern England to parents who passed on to him a great love for art, music, and literature. He was given little formal education, but taught himself French, German, and Latin. He was later apprenticed to an architect, for whom he went to work in London from 1862-1867. While in London, he began to write poetry - his first literary venture.

After leaving London, he took a job in Dorchester (the model for his fictional Casterbridge) as a church restorer, and continued his writing career, publishing anonymously at first, but then affixing his own name to his novels as they gained public acceptance. He always considered himself primarily a poet, and only wrote novels to support himself financially. Like Charles Dickens, many of his novels were published in serial form in magazines. His first novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, was published in 1872, followed by *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). The success of the second allowed him to marry and pursue writing full-time, but the public found his later works too shocking for their tastes, and the criticism of his last two novels was so great that he gave up novel-writing and turned his attention to poetry, and ultimately wrote more than 800 poems prior to his death in 1928. He was buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Hardy lived in an age of transition between the Victorian Age and the modern world of the twentieth century. His novels, though written in the serial format typical of the Victorian era, also reflect the changes in thought and social conditions occurring during his lifetime. He was raised in a Christian home, even writing strongly evangelical sermons at the age of eighteen and seriously considering a life in the ministry, but reading Charles Darwin led him to reject Christianity, and his fascination with the German philosopher Schopenhauer led him to postulate the cause of all things as an impersonal Unconscious Will, though he often longed for the security that was lost forever when he jettisoned his old belief system (see especially his poem *The Oxen*). *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, like his others novels, was written against the backdrop of the changing world in which he lived.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins in 1826 with a young couple, Michael and Susan Henchard, and their baby girl Elizabeth-Jane walking toward the village of Weydon-Priors. They clearly care little for one another, for they speak not a word as they travel. When they arrive at the village, they find a country fair and stop for refreshment. Susan steers Michael away from the tent where liquor is being dispensed in favor of a furnity tent, but Michael soon arranges to have his furnity spiked with rum. As he becomes more and more inebriated, he speaks disparagingly of his wife as a detriment to his progress in life, and when an auctioneer outside begins to auction horses, offers to auction off his wife to the highest bidder. She tries to stop him from making a fool of himself, but, obviously tired of his frequent humiliations, finally agrees to such a sale. After quite a bit of banter and discomfort, Susan and the baby are sold to a sailor for five guineas; she throws her wedding ring in her husband's face and the three of them leave the tent. Henchard then collapses at the table in a drunken stupor and goes to sleep. When he wakes in the morning and realizes what has happened, he curses his wife for taking him seriously and actually going through with it, then determines to amend his life. He finds a village church and swears a solemn oath not to touch liquor for twenty years - one year for each year of his life up to that point. He then begins searching for his wife and daughter, but realizes that he doesn't know the sailor's name. After months of fruitless effort, he gives up and settles in the town of Casterbridge.

Eighteen years later to the day, Susan and Elizabeth-Jane again walk toward Weydon-Priors. They are dressed in mourning because they have gotten word that Richard Newson, the sailor who had bought them, had died at sea. Elizabeth-Jane believes that Newson is her father, and knows nothing of her real father or the circumstances that separated the family so long before. Susan again approaches the fair and finds the same furnity-seller still doing business. She asks if she remembers a long-ago incident of a man selling his wife, and the old hag recalls it, telling Susan that the man had returned the next year, asking her to give a message, should the wife ever return, that he had gone to Casterbridge. Susan and Elizabeth-Jane then set off for Casterbridge, hoping to find the man who had treated them so shabbily eighteen years earlier. As they walk toward Casterbridge, the narrator tells the reader that they had gone with Newson to Canada, where they had lived for twelve years with little material success. They then returned to England, where friends of Susan, upon hearing of her true condition, assured her that her relations with Newson were unlawful. She decided that she could live with him no longer, but soon heard of his death at sea. She was determined then that the only right thing to do was to locate her lawful husband. She had not, however, told the truth to her daughter, and so wished to contact Henchard and propose that they remarry without disillusioning Elizabeth-Jane. It is in this frame of mind that they arrive in Casterbridge. Soon they hear the name of Henchard mentioned in the streets, and hear that the corn factor has sold overly-ripened grain to the bakers, leaving the town with no bread of any use to anyone.

As the women move down the street toward the town's largest hotel, the King's Arms, they hear banqueting within. They gather with the crowd outside, and discover that Michael Henchard is now the mayor of Casterbridge, but is in trouble with the people because of the defective corn he sold. He argues that he bought it without knowing that it was tainted. Susan, looking through the window, observes that Michael is abstaining from liquor while all the other men indulge. A stranger passing through town, a Scotsman named Donald Farfrae, hears the conversation and passes a note to the mayor, telling him that he knows of a procedure to make such overripe grain

usable. He then goes to a humbler inn down the street, the Three Mariners, and Susan and her daughter decide to stay there also, not sure how to proceed now that they have located Michael. While they are there, Elizabeth-Jane has several brief encounters with Farfrae and is very impressed by him. Susan is reluctant to take any action to contact her husband since Michael has become so prosperous, but Elizabeth-Jane, ignorant of their true relationship, convinces her to get word to their "distant relation by marriage" about their presence in the town. Meanwhile, Michael pays Farfrae a visit, is convinced of the feasibility of his method for treating the grain, and tries to convince him to stay in town and take a job as his manager. Farfrae refuses, insisting that he is going to America. Susan overhears the conversation, in which Michael refers vaguely to some shameful act in his past for which he is heartily sorry, and this encourages her.

The next day, Farfrae prepares to leave town, but Henchard convinces him to stay, and when Elizabeth-Jane goes to find Henchard, she is surprised to encounter Farfrae working in his place of business. She asks to see Henchard, but must wait until he finishes an interview with Joshua Jopp, who had been summoned to interview for the manager's job. Henchard informs him that the job has already been given to Farfrae, and Jopp storms angrily out of the office. Henchard then invites Elizabeth-Jane in and she delivers her message. Henchard, much moved, sends a letter to Susan arranging to see her that night, and enclosing five guineas - the amount of money Newson paid for her eighteen years earlier. That night, Michael and Susan meet at the Roman amphitheater in Casterbridge. After a brief conversation, he proposes that he court and marry her so that they can be together as a family again without Elizabeth ever needing to know of their shameful story. Susan agrees, but is unable yet to forgive him for his horrible treatment of her; she then returns to town, prepared to take up lodging there.

After Michael returns from meeting with Susan, he invites Farfrae in for a meal and confesses his past to him, seeking his advice as to how he ought to proceed. In the process, he reveals another complicating factor; he had recently traveled to the island of Jersey on business and had befriended a woman there whom he had promised to marry. Farfrae agrees that Michael's primary obligation is to Susan, and advises him to write a kind letter to the woman in Jersey, breaking off the relationship and explaining that his wife, whom he had thought to be dead, had returned; he even helps Michael draft the letter. In the weeks that follow, Michael spends increasing amounts of time with Susan and Elizabeth, and soon the two marry. Susan and Elizabeth are happier than they have ever been, enjoying the comforts of wealth for the first time in their lives, though Henchard remains distant and unemotional in his kind treatment of them. Meanwhile, the corn factor becomes increasingly dependent on Farfrae, both as a manager and as a friend and confidant. One day, Elizabeth receives a note asking her to go to a nearby granary at a given time. She appears and finds no one but Donald Farfrae, who has received a similar note. The two converse awkwardly, but appear to be developing some affection for one another, which was presumably the intention of the anonymous note-writer.

One day a conflict arises at Henchard's place of business. A workman named Abel Whittle is perpetually late for work, holding up trips to pick up grain in the process. Henchard warns him several times, and finally one day goes to his home and drags him out of bed, ordering him to get into the wagon and make the planned pickup despite the fact that the poor man had not yet put on his breeches. Whittle begs him to spare him the humiliation, but Henchard stands his ground. When Whittle arrives at the workplace, however, Farfrae countermands Henchard's order and tells the man to go home and get his breeches. The incident causes a rift in the previously close relationship between Henchard and Farfrae. Later, the Town Council plans a fair, and Farfrae

takes the initiative to organize activities. Henchard, jealous that his assistant will outshine him yet again, makes his own plans for a variety of outdoor games. When the day of the fair arrives, however, it rains, and no one comes to Henchard's site, while almost the entire town goes to Farfrae's location, for which he had the foresight to erect a canopy. Henchard, now more jealous than ever, informs Farfrae that his services are no longer required. After the dance, Farfrae walks Elizabeth-Jane home, and in a tender moment almost proposes to her, but stops himself. When Henchard finds out about their time together, he makes Elizabeth promise that she will never see Farfrae again, and writes a letter to Farfrae insisting that he respect his wishes in this matter. Farfrae, meanwhile, after considering leaving Casterbridge, decides instead to buy a small grain business and set himself up in competition with Henchard, though he tries hard to avoid stealing the older man's customers. As he prospers and Henchard's business declines, the older man's anger grows.

Matters are complicated with two new developments. Susan becomes gravely ill, and Henchard receives a letter from Lucetta, the girl in Jersey whom he had earlier been prepared to marry. She makes no demands on him, but he begins to consider how nice it might be to go through with the planned marriage should Susan die. As her condition worsens, Susan calls Elizabeth to her side and admits that she had written the notes drawing her daughter and Farfrae to the granary earlier, and tells Elizabeth that she had hoped that the two would marry. Because of the estrangement between Henchard and Farfrae, of course, such a thing is impossible. Shortly before her death, Susan writes a letter to Henchard and seals it, locking it in her desk with instructions that it not be opened until Elizabeth-Jane's wedding day. She then passes quietly away. Three weeks after Susan's death, Henchard reveals to Elizabeth-Jane that he is her real father, omitting any mention of the shameful circumstances of their early parting. The shock is difficult for her to handle, but he promises to give her proof in the morning. While searching for an appropriate document, he finds the letter Susan wrote before she died. She had sealed it imperfectly, so he reads it, ignoring the instructions to wait for Elizabeth's wedding day. In the letter he discovers that Elizabeth is not, in fact, his daughter - that his daughter died three months after their parting, and that Susan and Newson had produced the girl now living with him and had given her the same name as the dead child. Henchard believes it is now too late to tell Elizabeth the truth, so goes through with what he now knows is a lie, feeling only the taste of ashes in his mouth when the girl greets him the next morning as "Father."

Knowing now that Elizabeth is not his daughter, Henchard grows increasingly harsh and distant. He hardly speaks to the girl, and often criticizes her for minor faults. Because of her gentle character, she takes the entire burden of the estrangement on herself, and begins to wish that she were in the grave like her mother. Henchard, meanwhile, decides he would be better off if she no longer lived in his house, and sends a brief note to Farfrae giving him permission to court her if he still desires to do so. Soon after, when Elizabeth visits her mother's grave, she meets a young woman who treats her kindly and asks about her story; though she doesn't know it yet, this pretty young girl is Lucetta. She then tells Elizabeth that she is planning on moving to Casterbridge, and will want a companion to share her house - an offer to which Elizabeth readily consents. That night, Elizabeth walks toward the house she is to inhabit, and is surprised to see Henchard entering the door (Henchard had the day before received a letter from Lucetta telling him of her arrival in town and of her desire to go through with the marriage that had been put off by the sudden appearance of Susan). When Elizabeth tells him of the offer she has received, he coldly agrees, glad to be rid of her. She prepares to leave the next day, but when he

goes to her room and sees how hard she has been working to improve herself, he tries to get her to change her mind. She refuses, and only then, to his great surprise, tells him the name of the house to which she is going.

Lucetta immediately writes Henchard, telling him that she has inherited a fortune through the death of her rich aunt, and has changed her name to Templeman (he had known her as Lucette Le Sueur) in her aunt's honor. She tells him that Elizabeth's presence in her house will make it easier for him to visit her without arousing suspicion, and that he should come as soon as possible. He is offended by her machinations, however, and decides to visit only on his own terms. Lucetta begins to suspect that the presence of Elizabeth is a deterrent rather than an encouragement because of their falling out, and sends Elizabeth on a series of errands, then again invites Henchard to visit. She prepares herself carefully, but when her door opens, the man standing there is not Henchard, but Farfrae. He has come to visit Elizabeth, but Lucetta invites him to come in and sit. The two talk and find a sense of fascination with one another; by the time Farfrae leaves, he has forgotten entirely about Elizabeth and Lucetta has decided to keep Elizabeth around to prevent Henchard from visiting. When Henchard does arrive, she, insulted by his delay in answering her invitation, tells him that she has a headache and cannot see him until another day. In the coming weeks, Lucetta and Elizabeth look out their window at the market every Saturday, both with their eyes fixed on Farfrae. One day Lucetta slips out and meets him, returning with a flushed complexion that leaves no doubt in Elizabeth's mind as to what had occurred. Lucetta then tells Elizabeth in vague terms about her past experience with Henchard and her budding love for Farfrae, though she uses no names, and asks Elizabeth for her advice as to what she ought to do. Elizabeth refuses to venture a suggestion, but strongly suspects a growing attachment to Farfrae. Soon Farfrae begins to call on Lucetta and Elizabeth, but pays no attention at all to the latter, and Elizabeth is sure she is right about the affections of the two. Finally Henchard visits Lucetta and openly offers to fulfill their earlier promise to marry, but she puts him off, which puzzles him greatly. Later Henchard encounters Farfrae by chance, and tells him, without using Lucetta's name, that he had proposed to the woman from Jersey and that she had refused him. Farfrae tells him that he has done his duty, and they walk away from one another totally unconscious of the fact that they are courting the same woman. Soon after, Henchard and Farfrae chance to visit Lucetta at the same time, creating an awkward situation.

Meanwhile, Henchard is again in need of a foreman, so he contacts Jopp, the man whose place Farfrae had taken earlier. Jopp agrees, and Henchard instructs him to do everything possible to undermine Farfrae's business, underpricing and outbidding him at every opportunity. Because of Farfrae's keen business sense, however, every transaction makes money for Farfrae but turns into a loss for Henchard; even the changes in the weather seem to be on Farfrae's side. Henchard even goes so far as to visit a weather prophet, and occult figure who gives him information about the weather as harvest time approaches; when the information turns out to be wrong, Henchard incurs heavy losses. After these repeated failures, Henchard fires Jopp, who vows revenge. One night Henchard tries to see Lucetta and is refused entry, but hides nearby and watches her house, seeing her go out with Farfrae; he now knows who his rival is. Later he forces his way into Lucetta's house and tells her that if she doesn't accept his proposal of marriage, he will reveal the scandal of her past to the entire town. She then with great reluctance gives in and promises to marry him. Henchard then tells Elizabeth-Jane that this arrangement leaves Farfrae available to her, but she knows Lucetta loves Farfrae and that her love is reciprocated.

The next day Henchard is called upon to fill in for an absent magistrate in the courtroom. An old woman is brought in for disorderly conduct; she is no other than Mrs. Goodenough, the furnity seller in whose tent Henchard had sold Susan eighteen years earlier. She recognizes him, and before he can render judgment against her, she cries out the story of his guilty past, which he is unable to deny. Within hours the scandal is known to all in Casterbridge. When Lucetta hears the news, she decides she cannot risk marriage to such an unstable man, and travels to a nearby town to marry Farfrae in private. He is called away by some matters of business, and when she goes out to meet him, Elizabeth follows her, and the two are attacked by a rampaging bull. Henchard appears and rescues them, then suggests to Lucetta that they postpone their marriage and plan a long engagement. At that point, she reveals to him her marriage to Farfrae, and he storms away in anger. Farfrae has his things moved to Lucetta's house, and Lucetta goes upstairs to tell Elizabeth the news, planning to invite her to continue to live with them. Elizabeth, however, is mortally offended that Lucetta should not keep her promise to Henchard, and cannot bear to live in the same house with Farfrae, for whom she still has feelings. She moves out immediately.

As the news spreads, Henchard's fortunes decline rapidly until he is forced to declare bankruptcy. He handles the whole calamity honorably - so much so that the townspeople pity him. His business and buildings are purchased by Farfrae, who runs them with great efficiency and consideration for his workers. Henchard, meanwhile, moves into a few rooms in Jopp's cottage outside the town. Elizabeth tries to meet with her father, but he refuses to see her or anyone else. One day Henchard is standing on a stone bridge outside town when he is approached by Jopp, who informs him that Farfrae has bought his old house and most of his furniture; the news throws Henchard into an even blacker depression. But soon Farfrae himself appears, offers Henchard a job, and even suggests he come to his old home as a boarder. Henchard accepts the job offer, reasoning that he had started his career as a journeyman, but refuses the room, knowing that living in the same house with Lucetta would be unbearable. A few days later, the twentieth anniversary of his vow arrives, and he again begins drinking heavily. He is determined to get revenge on Farfrae, who has now become the mayor, and whom he considers to be the font of all his trouble.

One day while he is working, Lucetta appears, and Henchard speaks to her with bitter sarcasm. Elizabeth, who has been in a position to observe much of her father's behavior, becomes increasingly convinced that she has a duty to warn Farfrae of the potential danger to which he is exposing himself. She tries, but is unable to frame her words clearly, and he pays little attention to her obscure hints. One evening, Henchard visits Farfrae and asks for the letters still stored in the safe of the house. Farfrae has no idea that they are letters from Lucetta to Henchard, written when she was trying to persuade him to go through with his promise of marriage to her, and retrieves them. Henchard then reads a number of them at random without revealing the identity of the writer; Lucetta overhears the recital and is fearful that Henchard intends to destroy her marriage. Later, Lucetta sends word to Henchard that she wants to meet him alone - ironically, in the same desolate place where Susan had met him when she first came to Casterbridge. She begs him not to reveal the secret of her past, and asks him to return the letters. He reluctantly agrees and, being a man of his word, wraps them up and sends them to her the next morning. Unfortunately, the messenger he chooses is Jopp, who continues to nurse grudges, both against Henchard for firing him and against Lucetta for refusing to recommend him for a recent opening. He stops at a tavern on the way to the Farfrae house, unwraps the letters, and begins to read them; soon the whole town knows Lucetta's secret. When she gets the letters, she burns them immediately, thinking herself safe at last.

At the tavern, two notable events transpire besides the reading of the letters. The outraged peasants plan a skimmity-ride - a sort of procession in which the effigy of an unfaithful wife is paraded through the town - to show their contempt for the new mayor's wife, and a stranger appears, dressed oddly, but apparently in possession of plenty of money. Two weeks later, a member of the royal family passes through town. Great preparation is made for the brief ceremony, and Farfrae as mayor is to give a short address. Henchard, dressed shabbily, asks the Town Council if he may participate, but they refuse. He decides to get involved anyway, and pushes his way in front of the royal carriage when it arrives. Farfrae firmly moves him aside and completes the ceremony. Meanwhile, Jopp encourages his friends to carry out the skimmity-ride that very night. Several who overhear the plan conspire to warn Farfrae. Henchard, humiliated by the way Farfrae treated him in front of the whole town, sends a note asking Farfrae to meet him at the granary. When the latter arrives, he finds Henchard on the third floor with one hand tied behind his back. Henchard challenges him to a wrestling match in which the winner throws the loser through the trap door to his death forty feet below, then attacks him. Henchard wins the match, but is unable to kill his former friend.

After Farfrae leaves town in the middle of the night, Henchard hears the sound of the skimmity-riders in the distance. Lucetta hears the sound as well, and quickly discerns the purpose of the procession. Elizabeth comes in and tries to get her away from the window, but Lucetta, pregnant with her first child, insists on seeing the skimmity-ride. Fearful that her husband will see it and reject her, she suffers a seizure. Henchard goes immediately to find Farfrae and catches up with him on the road out of town. He tells him the news, but Farfrae refuses to believe him after their recent encounter in the granary, thinking Henchard intends him further harm. He then continues on his journey. Henchard returns and seeks news of Lucetta's condition, but can find out nothing. When Farfrae finally arrives, Lucetta's condition is desperate. She breathes out a brief confession of her prior relationship with Henchard, and dies before the dawn of the new day.

Soon Elizabeth comes to check on her father, and the two obviously are growing in their regard and affection for one another. No sooner does Elizabeth lie down to rest, however, than the stranger from the tavern comes to the door. He introduces himself to Henchard as Newson, the sailor who had bought Susan at the fair twenty years before. Apparently when Susan had become convinced that their marriage was a sham, he felt it better to allow her to believe that he was dead, and he had lived in Newfoundland ever since his ship had sunk at sea. Having heard of Susan's death, he now sought his daughter. Henchard, faced with the prospect of losing one he so recently had hoped to regain, lies to Newson and tells him that she, too, is dead. At that, the sailor sorrowfully leaves town on the next coach. Henchard, sorry for what he has done, pursues Newson but is unable to catch him. He then walks along the river to Ten Hatches, intending to drown himself. When he gets there, he sees the effigy of himself from the skimmity-ride floating in the water and takes this as a sign that he should continue to live. When he returns, Elizabeth welcomes him, and when he takes her out to Ten Hatches and shows her the effigy, she offers to move in with him to take care of him and keep him company. He gives thanks to God for the first ray of light he has seen in quite a while.

Farfrae, attempting to deal with his grief, decides not to press charges against the organizers of the skimmity-ride, fearing to publicize further the history of which Lucetta had informed him on her deathbed. He soon arranges for Henchard to take charge of a small seed business, and for a year Elizabeth lives with him quite contentedly. But Henchard fears daily the return of Newson, which would inevitably cause him to lose the daughter he has come to love and

depend upon. Soon a new fear arises; he notices that Elizabeth's room is full of books - far more than they could afford - and that she often encounters, seemingly by chance, the young widower who had once been the object of her affection. When one day he sees Farfrae kiss her, he is convinced that his days of happiness with Elizabeth are soon to come to an end. In a fit of jealousy, he even considers telling Farfrae that she is an illegitimate child to put an end to their relationship.

Soon the budding relationship between Farfrae and Elizabeth becomes evident to all, and Henchard begins to imagine the inevitable separation from his only source of consolation. Then one day Newson returns. He has discovered that Henchard lied to him, and he wants to see his daughter. When Elizabeth receives a letter asking her to meet an unknown person at Farfrae's house, she shares the letter with Henchard, who tells her she must go, then informs her that he intends to leave Casterbridge forever, giving her the seed business and returning to manual labor. She sees him off that morning. After his departure, she meets Farfrae and returns to his house for a joyous reunion with Newson, whom she believed to be dead. He tells her everything, including Henchard's lie, and she now understands her stepfather's abrupt departure. They then proceed to make plans for the upcoming wedding. Henchard, meanwhile, stops at Weydon-Priors as an act of penance, then continues until, fifty miles from Casterbridge, he finds work. He continually thinks of Elizabeth, and when he hears of the impending marriage, he decides to go back and beg her forgiveness. He purchases a caged goldfinch as a wedding present. He arrives too late for the ceremony, but stands outside the reception watching the festivities. He leaves his simple gift and sends a message to Elizabeth that a stranger wishes to see her. When she comes out, she calls him "Mr. Henchard" and rebukes him for his callous deception. He promises that he will never trouble her again, and wanders off into the darkness. A month later Elizabeth finds the birdcage with the dead goldfinch inside under a bush, and realizes that her father meant it as an apology. She goes searching for him, finds him in an isolated shack, and discovers that he had just died half an hour before her arrival.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Michael Henchard - The central figure around whom all the action revolves. As a young man overcome by drink, he sells his wife and daughter at a country fair. He then vows to touch no liquor for the next twenty years, turns his life around, and eventually becomes a prosperous corn merchant and the respected mayor of the town of Casterbridge. His past catches up to him when his wife appears in Casterbridge, and he eventually loses his business, his office, and the respect of his neighbors, and dies friendless and penniless.
- Susan Henchard - The wife who is sold, she lives as the wife of the sailor who buys her, but after hearing of his death, she seeks out and remarries her former husband, leading to catastrophe for all concerned.
- Elizabeth-Jane Henchard - The daughter of Susan and Newson, though Henchard initially believes that she is the daughter from whom he had been separated (she had died three months later). Newson is the only father she ever knew, but she believes Henchard when he tells her he is her real father. She nurtures a secret love for Donald Farfrae, and eventually marries him.

- Mrs. Goodenough - The seller of furnity in whose tent Michael sells his wife and daughter; she also gives Susan the message that sends her to Casterbridge in search of Michael eighteen years later and reveals his secret when she is brought before him in court.
- Richard Newson - The sailor who buys Susan and Elizabeth-Jane; he is reported dead, after which Susan and their daughter seek out Michael, but he returns to complicate matters after Susan dies.
- Donald Farfrae - A Scotsman who wanders into Casterbridge intending to pass through on his way to America, but is convinced to stay by Henchard, who hires him as his manager. He and Henchard later have a falling out, and he eventually buys out Henchard's business, marries Lucetta, becomes mayor, then marries Elizabeth after Lucetta dies.
- Joshua Jopp - Originally summoned by Henchard for an interview, he arrives to find his job already given to Farfrae. After Henchard and Farfrae part company, Henchard hires Jopp, but soon fires him. His bitterness leads him to seek Henchard's downfall, and he organizes the skimmity-ride that leads to Lucetta's death.
- Abel Whittle - An employee of Henchard's whom he abuses for constantly being late to work; he later cares for Henchard after he becomes an outcast, and communicates news of his death to Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae.
- Lucetta Templeman (Lucette Le Sueur) - A woman from the island of Jersey who had been kind to Michael, spending time alone with him to the extent that rumors had spread because of their indiscretion. He had arranged to marry her, but was prevented from doing so when Susan unexpectedly reentered his life. Later, she moves to Casterbridge, employs Elizabeth-Jane as a companion, is coerced into a promise of marriage by Henchard, but eventually marries Farfrae, then dies from a seizure after being humiliated by the skimmity-ride.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“When she plodded on in the shade of the hedge, silently thinking, she had the hard, half-apathetic expression of one who deems anything possible at the hands of Time and Chance, except, perhaps, fair play.” (ch.1, p.5)

“For my part I don't see why men who have got wives, and don't want 'em, shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses. Why shouldn't they put 'em up and sell 'em by auction to men who are in want of such articles? Hey? Why, begad, I'd sell mine this minute if anybody would buy her!” (Henchard, ch.1, p.11)

“I, Michael Henchard, on this morning of the sixteenth of September, do take an oath here in this solemn place that I will avoid all strong liquors for the space of twenty years to come, being a year for every year that I have lived. And this I swear upon the book before me; and may I be struck dumb, blind, and helpless, if I break this my oath!” (Henchard, ch.2, p.24)

“He seemed to feel exactly as she felt about life and its surroundings - that they were a tragical, rather than a comical, thing; that though one could be gay on occasion, moments of gaiety were interludes, and no part of the actual drama. It was extraordinary how similar their views were.” (ch.8, p.72)

“Judge me by my future works.” (Henchard, ch.11, p.97)

“On Henchard’s part there was now again repose; and yet, whenever he thought of Farfrae, it was with a dim dread; and he often regretted that he had told the young man his whole heart, and confided to him the secrets of his life.” (ch.15, p.132)

“I wish I was richer, Miss Newson; and your step-father had not been offended; I would ask you something in a short time - yes, I would ask you tonight. But that’s not for me!” (Farfrae, ch.17, p.142)

“But most probably luck had little to do with it. Character is Fate, said Novalis, and Farfrae’s character was just the reverse of Henchard’s, who might not inaptly be described as Faust has been described - as a vehement gloomy being, who had quitted the ways of vulgar men, without light to guide him on a better way.” (ch.17, p.148)

“His bitter disappointment at finding Elizabeth-Jane to be none of his, and himself a childless man, had left an emotional void in Henchard that he unconsciously craved to fill.” (ch.22, p.191)

“Yes, it is, but it is not by what is, in this life, but by what appears, that you are judged; and I therefore think you ought to accept me - for your own good name’s sake. What is known in your native Jersey may get known here.” (Henchard, ch.25, p.228-229)

“Her experience had consisted less in a series of pure disappointments than in a series of substitutions. Continually it had happened that what she had desired had not been granted her, and that what had been granted her she had not desired. So she viewed with an approach to equanimity the now cancelled days when Donald had been her undeclared lover, and wondered what unwished-for thing Heaven might send her in place of him.” (ch.25, p.231)

“He would have preferred more honesty in his clients, and less sham ridicule; but fundamental belief consoled him for superficial irony. As stated, he was enabled to live; people supported him with their backs turned. He was sometimes astonished that men could profess so little and believe so much at his house, when at church they professed so much and believed so little.” (ch.26, p.240)

“O Farfrae! - that’s not true! God is my witness that no man ever loved another as I did thee at one time And now - though I came here to kill ‘ee, I cannot hurt thee! Go and give me in charge - do what you will - I care nothing for what comes of me!” (Henchard, ch.38, p.354)

“That performance of theirs killed her, but kept me alive.” (Henchard, ch.41, p.385)

“Who is such a reprobate as I! And yet it seems that even I be in Somebody’s hand!” (Henchard, ch.41, p.386)

“Thereupon promptly came to the surface that idiosyncrasy of Henchard’s which ruled his courses from the beginning, and had mainly made him what he was. Instead of thinking that a union between his cherished stepdaughter and the energetic thriving Donald was a thing to be desired for her good and his own, he hated the very possibility.” (ch.42, p.392)

“God forbid such a thing! Why should I still be subject to these visitations of the devil, when I try so hard to keep him away?” (Henchard, ch.42, p.397)

“Think of me when you are living as the wife of the richest, the foremost man in the town, and don’t let my sins, *when you know them all*, cause ‘ee to quite forget that though I loved ‘ee late I loved ‘ee well.” (Henchard, ch.43, p.403)

“I - Cain - go alone as I deserve - an outcast and a vagabond. But my punishment is *not* greater than I can bear!” (Henchard, ch.43, p.404)

“He had been sorry for all this long ago; but his attempts to replace ambition by love had been as fully foiled as his ambition itself.” (ch.44, p.412)

“Part of his wish to wash his hands of life arose from his perceptions of its contrarious inconsistencies - of Nature’s jaunty readiness to support unorthodox social principles.” (ch.44, p.412)

“Michael Henchard’s Will

That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me.
& that I not be bury’d in consecrated ground.
& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell.
& that nobody is wished to see my dead body.
& that no murners walk behind me at my funeral.
& that no flours be planted on my grave.
& that no man remember me.

To this I put my name

Michael Henchard.” (ch.45, p.430)

“And in being forced to class herself among the fortunate she did not cease to wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen, when the one to whom such unbroken tranquillity had been accorded in the adult stage was she whose youth had seemed to teach that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain.” (ch.45, p.432)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. The subtitles used in Thomas Hardy's novels often conveyed significant aspects of the social criticism in which he engaged in his stories. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was subtitled *The Life and Death of a Man of Character*, while *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was subtitled *A Pure Woman*. Evaluate these subtitles. Are they accurate descriptions of the protagonists? In ways do they support the social criticism found in the novels? Why were they bound to infuriate Victorian audiences, and in what ways did their reaction substantiate the criticism in which Hardy was engaged?
2. Compare and contrast the protagonists of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. In what significant ways are they alike? How are they different (aside from the obvious difference of gender)? Which do you consider the more sympathetic, and why? Be sure to support your comments with specifics from the novels.
3. Compare and contrast the idea of the inability of people to escape the past as presented in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. To what extent does Hardy's emphasis on the influence of the past constitute belief in Fate, and to what extent would Hardy champion the idea that people shape their own destinies? Answer the question using specifics from both novels.
4. Thomas Hardy was greatly influenced by Darwinism, and professed to believe in the possibility of progress as long as man recognized and maintained his proper place in the natural order. Yet he is often described as a pessimist - a label he rejected. Despite his protestations, one may legitimately argue that Darwinism leads inevitably to pessimism. How do Hardy's novels *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* illustrate this connection? Do the unhappy outcomes of the protagonists stem from their unwillingness to conform to the natural order, or are those tragedies the consequence of an impersonal or even malevolent Nature? Support your arguments with specifics from both stories.
5. The image of the circle, especially in connection with England's pagan past, is prominent in the fiction of Thomas Hardy. Discuss the significance of this image in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Give special attention to the symbolic significance of the Ring and Stonehenge, respectively, in the two novels. Does Hardy use the symbol in the same way in both stories? Compare and contrast his use of the circle, being sure to incorporate quotations from both novels.

6. Some critics have compared Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* to an Aristotelian tragedy. Does Michael Henchard qualify as a tragic hero? If not, why not? If so, what is his tragic flaw and how does it lead to his destruction?
7. When Aristotle described the essence of tragedy in his *Poetics*, the word he used to speak of the protagonist's tragic flaw was *hamartia*, the Bible's word for *sin*. The fact that Aristotle emphasized fate rather than culpability on the part of the hero tells us something about the extent to which his worldview differed from that of the Scriptures. Which version of *hamartia*, tragic flaw or sin, best describes the cause of the downfall of Michael Henchard in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*? To what extent, then, does the novel present a biblical view of human responsibility and the causes of man's misery?
8. Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* differ in many ways, including their settings - the first is set in a small town, while the second moves among a number of rural locales. How do these settings influence the plots of the stories? How do the settings serve as vehicles for the author's social criticism?
9. Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is subtitled *The Life and Death of a Man of Character*. Would you describe Michael Henchard as a man of character? Why or why not? What does Hardy's subtitle indicate about *his* idea of what constitutes a man of character? Support your answer with specifics from the novel.
10. Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is subtitled *The Life and Death of a Man of Character*. Would this description of the protagonist also apply to Donald Farfrae? Which man do you consider more admirable, more a man of character? Why? Support your answer with details from the novel.
11. Discuss the role of class distinctions in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. How does the author delineate the differences among people of different social classes? How do these characteristics that separate one class from another contribute to the main themes of the novel? Be specific.
12. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). One of the central truths of Scripture is that sin cannot long be concealed, but will inevitably bear bitter fruit in the life of the sinner. How is this truth illustrated in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*? As portrayed by the author, are the calamities that befall the protagonist ultimately the consequences of his own sin, or are they more matters of fate? Support your argument with details from the novel.
13. To what extent do the leading male characters in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard and Donald Farfrae, function as foils for one another? Explain three important ways in which contrasts between the two men serve to bring out their characters in bolder relief.

14. To what extent do the leading female characters in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Elizabeth-Jane Henchard and Lucetta Templeman, function as foils for one another? Explain three important ways in which contrasts between the two women serve to bring out their characters in bolder relief.
15. Discuss the accuracy of describing the two leading male characters in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a man of emotion (Henchard) and a man of the mind (Farfrae). Do these stereotypes fit the two men? To what extent? What might Hardy be saying by emphasizing this contrast?
16. In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, both Michael Henchard and Lucetta Templeman are driven by their emotions, yet the two are in some ways very different. Though the townsfolk are unable to distinguish between the two when they organize their skimmity-ride, the author clearly values the integrity of the one while bringing out the flightiness of the other. In discussing key differences between the two, be sure to consider their attitudes toward the past, toward obligations, and toward social convention.
17. Discuss the role of women in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Are the female figures largely passive recipients - both victims and beneficiaries - of the actions of the leading men, or do they influence the story in significant ways? Support your argument with details from the novel.
18. Compare and contrast the two women involved with the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. How do the differences between Susan Henchard and Lucetta Templeman illuminate the character of the protagonist and help to communicate the major themes of the novel?
19. Compare and contrast the two women who marry Donald Farfrae in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. What are the most important differences between Lucetta Templeman and Elizabeth-Jane Henchard? How do these differences illustrate change and growth in Farfrae?
20. The story of Michael Henchard dominates the plot of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. He goes through many changes in the course of the novel, which spans approximately twenty-five years. What changes does he undergo in the last quarter-century of his life? What brings about these changes? In what important areas does he *not* change?
21. Several characters in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, most notably Susan Henchard and her daughter Elizabeth-Jane, express the conviction that life is fundamentally tragic and unfair. To what extent does the author share these sentiments? Would you describe Hardy more as a pessimist or a realist? Support your conclusion with details and quotations from the novel.

22. In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard takes an oath after selling his wife and daughter to avoid liquor for twenty years, concluding it by saying, "may I be struck dumb, blind, and helpless, if I break this my oath!" As soon as the twenty years have expired, he gets drunk and returns to his old ways. To what extent does his reversion leave him dumb, blind, and helpless? Support your arguments with specifics from the story.
23. The plot of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* involves four marriages - between Susan Henchard and her two husbands and Farfrae and his two wives. In which of the four were the partners best suited to one another? Which was the most ill-conceived? Support your choices with specifics from the novel.
24. In chapter 17 of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Novalis is quoted as saying that "character is fate." Does the author agree with this judgment? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with details and quotations from the novel.
25. In chapter 17 of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the protagonist is compared to Faust. Is this comparison legitimate? Is your conclusion affected by whether you consider the depiction of the sixteenth-century sorcerer found in Marlowe or Goethe?
26. To what extent is the protagonist of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* a man driven by his emotions? What are the consequences of his inability to deal with the challenges of life rationally? What is Hardy's assessment of this personality trait? From your own perspective, why is the ability to control one's emotions important for a happy life? Support your arguments with details from the novel.
27. In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard argues that "it is not by what is, in this life, but by what appears, that you are judged." Does the author believe this to be true? Do you? Support your answer from the novel and from personal experience.
28. Philosopher Bertrand Russell once said, "If there is a God, he must be the Devil." Would Thomas Hardy, author of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, have agreed? Support your assessment of his view of God using details and quotations from the novel.
29. In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the weather prophet, a practitioner of the occult arts, "was sometimes astonished that men could profess so little and believe so much at his house, when at church they professed so much and believed so little." Discuss the theme of hypocrisy as the author develops it in the novel. Does he see it as a controlling characteristic of human nature? Why or why not? How does it influence the progression of the plot and the development of the themes of the story?

30. In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the protagonist wavers constantly in his thoughts concerning religion. After being delivered from suicide, he cries out, "Who is such a reprobate as I! And yet it seems that even I be in Somebody's hand!" Discuss the role of Providence in Hardy's understanding of the universe. Does he believe in the intervention of God in the world, or does he merely see it as a convenient fiction to which his characters sometimes turn? Support your answer with specifics from the novel.
31. To what extent is the protagonist of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* a man constantly struggling with inner conflict? What are the central aspects of this conflict? Does he more often succeed or fail in these endeavors? Compare and contrast Henchard's struggles with those described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:14-25.
32. At the end of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard tells Elizabeth-Jane that "though I loved 'ee late I loved 'ee well," while in William Shakespeare's *Othello*, the protagonist describes himself right before his death as "one that loved not wisely, but too well." Compare and contrast these two men and their declarations. Is either one accurate, or are the speakers giving themselves more credit than they deserve? Why or why not?
33. Both Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and William Shakespeare's *Othello* have much to say about the importance of reputation. Compare and contrast the views of the two authors on the importance of a good name, being sure to cite incidents, characters, and quotations from both works in your answer.
34. Compare and contrast the protagonist of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard, to Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Give special attention to the strengths and weaknesses of character and the extent to which their self-destructive behavior brings about the downfalls of both men.
35. In chapter 43 of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard compares himself to Cain. Is the comparison an accurate one? Consider the characters of the men involved, their sins, and their punishments.
36. Near the end of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Michael Henchard tires of life, and the narrator gives as one reason the inconsistencies he observed - "Nature's jaunty readiness to support unorthodox social principles." What does Hardy mean by this? Is he commenting on the inconsistencies of Nature or the incompatibility of moral principles with the operations of the world? Support your conclusion with details and quotations from the novel.
37. Discuss the significance of the will left by the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. In what ways does it place an exclamation point on the major themes of the novel? Support your assessment with specifics from the story.

38. Whom would you consider the most admirable character in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*? Why? In supporting your choice, consider character, words, actions and reactions, and explain why your choice is to be preferred to other possible candidates.
39. Discuss the chief psychological qualities of the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Among his strengths (such as determination, endurance, adherence to his word) and weaknesses (such as insecurity, fear, stubbornness) which are the most prominent and have the greatest effect on the outcome of the story? Support your conclusions with specifics from the novel.
40. In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the past plays a huge role in the fates of the leading characters. But what about the past history of the town? As in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the author is fascinated with the ancient history of Britain. How does this ancient history influence both stories, especially in the parts of the novels where ancient structures serve as settings for the action? What is Hardy trying to say when he makes such prominent mention of England's pagan past?
41. Clearly the past cannot be changed, but can it be overcome? Answer this question in the context of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. What does the author believe about the dead hand of the past? How would a Christian answer differ from the one given by the author? Be sure to use specific incidents and quotations from the novel and from Scripture to support your answer.
42. The downfall of the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is hastened by the coincidental appearance of three figures from his past - Susan, the firmity woman, and Newson. While such coincidences may strain the credibility of the plot, they do communicate something of the worldview of the author. To what extent does Hardy show himself to be a believer in Fate? Does he view the universe as personal or impersonal, benevolent or malevolent? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
43. Discuss the impact of scientific innovation as it is presented in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. When one contrasts the old methods practiced by men like Henchard and the new techniques incorporated by Farfrae, which does the author seem to prefer? Does he demonstrate more nostalgia for the old ways of life or an enthusiasm for the new, or some combination of the two? Support your conclusions with details from the story.
44. Birds stand as bookends to the action in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; a bird flies through the firmity tent at the beginning, and Michael Henchard buys a caged goldfinch as a wedding present for Elizabeth-Jane near the end. In what sense do these birds serve as symbols of Henchard himself? Discuss the connections that may be drawn and explain why the author introduces these symbols at the beginning and end of the novel.

45. Discuss the role of sin and repentance in the life of the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Note particularly the means by which Henchard seeks repentance and his success in finding redemption. What is Hardy seeking to communicate through the experiences of this troubled man? Is his picture of these things biblical? Why or why not?
46. Discuss the role of sin and repentance in the life of the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. During his seasons of regret, does Michael Henchard ever really repent for his sins? Why or why not? Be sure to support your conclusion with quotations from each incident you choose to discuss.
47. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 says, "When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it." One of the strengths of the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is his integrity in this area of life - his determination to fulfill the vows that he makes. Though the most obvious example of this is the vow of sobriety he takes after selling his wife and daughter, he makes other promises as well. Assess his character in this connection, considering not only his faithfulness in fulfilling the vows he takes, but also the motives that drive him. On this basis, would you consider him a "man of character"? Why or why not?
48. The action in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* takes place in the years prior to the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), which occurred during Hardy's boyhood. How does placing the story in the years immediately preceding this momentous change in British agriculture enhance the sense of struggle between past and present, between the old and the new, especially with regard to the business dealings that play so prominent a role in the novel?
49. Discuss the role of the peasants who appear periodically in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Does Hardy intend them to serve merely as comic relief, like the Mechanicals in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or do they also play the role of a Greek chorus, like the Common Man in Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*, commenting on the action and thus serving as a mouthpiece for the author? Give evidence for both roles and discuss which is more important, supporting your conclusions with details from the novel.
50. The Bible places great value on truth-telling, and even describes God as One for whom lying is impossible (Hebrews 6:18). Evaluate the protagonist of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* on the basis of the biblical standard of truthfulness. Under what circumstances is he willing to lie, and when does he insist on telling the truth? How do the consequences of these choices confirm that Bible's teaching on the subject?

51. The plot of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* takes the shape of a bell curve, and the novel might well be titled *The Rise and Fall of Michael Henchard*. What event would you consider to be the turning point in the novel - the incident that separates the rising action from the falling action? Note that, while the narrator's comments at the beginning of chapter 31 identify this turning point with the testimony given by the furmity woman in court, other earlier possibilities exist, such as the firing of Farfrae or even the reappearance of Susan. Defend your choice with specifics from the story.
52. Many critics consider Michael Henchard, the protagonist of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, to be the author's most complex and fully-drawn character. What about Henchard would lead them to draw this conclusion? Discuss issues such as ambiguity, inconsistency, and a combination of good and evil that make him three-dimensional, and thus more real, to the reader.
53. In Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the author presents the protagonist as one who is undone by Fate, the malevolence of an impersonal universe, and the inescapable consequences of his past actions. One might also argue, however, that Michael Henchard is a man who acts in persistently self-destructive ways. Every time he has an opportunity for happiness, he himself destroys it by doing something stupid or impetuous. Discuss the validity of ascribing Henchard's downfall to his own choices rather than matters beyond his control.
54. Consider the moral dimensions of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Do you consider the protagonist a pitiable victim or the recipient of what he deserves because of his actions and choices? In considering Michael Henchard's culpability, be sure to incorporate biblical teachings concerning a man's responsibility for his behavior.
55. Discuss the role of competitiveness in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. To what extent is the protagonist's downfall brought about by his insistence on seeing every situation in which he finds himself as a competitive challenge, particularly with regard to his greatest rival, Donald Farfrae?
56. Discuss the character of Susan Henchard in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. What do her actions, especially her willingness to agree to being sold by Henchard and her willingness to return to him eighteen years later, tell you about her as a person? Do these traits cause you to sympathize with her? Why or why not?
57. Thomas Hardy was raised in a Christian environment, but ultimately lost his religious faith. He retained, however, a knowledge of Scripture that led him to use frequent biblical allusions in his writing. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, some have noticed similarities between the central relationship involving Michael Henchard and Donald Farfrae and the biblical narrative of Saul and David. What similarities do you see between the two stories? To what extent are the messages to be derived from the parallel narratives similar, and in what ways are they different?

58. In Aesop's tale of *The Tortoise and the Hare*, we are told that "slow and steady wins the race," that the consistent plodder is more likely to succeed than the impetuous sprinter. To what extent is Aesop's moral illustrated by Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*? Who in the story would represent the tortoise, and who the hare? Would Hardy have agreed with Aesop's assessment of the best way to approach life? Why or why not?
59. Discuss the importance of rain in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Be sure to consider its symbolic significance as well as its role in shaping key plot elements. Do the situations in which rain appears indicate that even Nature is against Michael Henchard?
60. Consider the use of images of light and darkness in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Discuss three specific examples of Hardy's use of this imagery and comment in detail on the symbolism he intends the reader to perceive.
61. Compare and contrast Michael Henchard in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* with Heathcliff in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* as men driven by their passions. Are both passionate in the same way, or do the objects and characteristics of their passions differ? Be sure to consider as well the ways in which the two authors evaluate the passionate natures of their protagonists.
62. Evaluate the self-understanding of the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. To what extent does Michael Henchard really know himself? How does his lack of self-understanding contribute to his downfall? Pay special attention to key turning points in the plot where his knowledge of himself, or lack thereof, is revealed.
63. Three inns - the King's Arms, the Three Mariners, and Peter's Finger - play an important role in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. How do these settings both advance the plot and communicate important information about the social classes of the town? In what ways do the scenes that take place in the inns convey the author's assessment of class divisions in the England of his day?
64. Jane Austen used the term "true wit" to describe a character who learns from experience. She believed that such a character should always be the center of any novel, since the lessons learned by that character would also be the lessons learned by the reader. In your opinion, what character stands out as the "true wit" in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*? Why? Support your assessment with specifics from the novel.
65. Critic Bruce McCullough argued that "The world, as pictured by Hardy, is a place of disaster where sinister powers are at work to thwart man. The evil outside man, in Hardy's view, is greater than the evil in man." How accurate is this assessment when applied to Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*? When evaluated in the context of Scripture? Support your answer with details from the novel as well as specific passages from the Bible.

66. Critics have often noted that the novels of Thomas Hardy are notable for their absence of villains despite the depressing outcomes at which the stories arrive. For Hardy, even disreputable characters like Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* deserve sympathy. Some have suggested that this is true because Hardy's fatalistic worldview eliminates human responsibility. Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with details from the novel.
67. British novelist Thomas Hardy believed that human life is controlled by fate - that people are basically helpless in the face of an impersonal universe. *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* all share this theme. Choose two of these novels and compare and contrast the ways in which the characters are subject to forces beyond their control. Be sure to cite specifics from both of the novels you choose.