

Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

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Introductory Questions

1. What expectations may be set up by the novel's subtitle, "the life and death of a man of character"? What will the notion of "a man of character" come to mean?
2. In his preface Hardy claims that the novel's plot arises from three events, the sale of a wife, uncertain harvests, and the visit of a royal personage. Are all of these of equal importance? Does this recital give any indication of the themes which dominate the book?
3. If not, why do you think Hardy gives a misleading, or at least, irrelevant account of what is to follow?
4. Against what criticisms of his book does Hardy defend himself? Do these seem important to you? Does Donald Farfrae seem authentically Scottish, and if not, does it matter?
5. Is it clear from the opening chapters who will be the protagonist of the novel? If Henchard is not the sole protagonist, how does the shift in focus affect the reader's judgments?

Chapter 1

1. How is Henchard first described, in person and dress? What is his occupation? What does the narrator infer from his physical movements?
2. What do these descriptions seem to indicate will be the narrator's role throughout?
3. What do we learn of Henchard's wife?
4. What emotions/view of life's possibilities does the narrator attribute to her? Who or what is responsible for her lack of hope? What do you make of such abstractions?
5. How would you describe the novelist's style?
6. What ominous news do the travelers learn of the present state of Weydon?
7. How is the fair described? Why does Susan suggest that her husband should seek refreshment at a furmity tent? Is the outcome ironic?
8. How is the mistress of the furmity tent described? Furmity itself? What effect is created by such descriptions?
9. What illegal business does the furmity woman conduct, and with what consequences?
10. What grievance does Michael express? What prompts him to wish to sell his wife?
11. How do the others in the tent react to his pronouncements? Susan herself?
12. Who appears and bids for Henchard's wife? For what sum does Michael sell her?
13. What biblical echoes appear in this scene? What imagery is used to describe the tent as the sale is transacted?
14. What symbolic act does Susan perform as she leaves?
15. What beings are contrasted in their behavior with the quarrelsome humans within the tent?
16. Do the other witnesses feel remorse for this stunning act? Does Henchard?

Chapter 2

1. How does Henchard react to his deed of the previous night on the morning after? Whom does he blame?
2. Under what circumstances does he make an oath? Are there limitations to the oath?
3. What search for his lost wife does he undertake? Does it seem plausible that he should learn that “persons answering somewhat to his description had emigrated a little time before”?

Chapter 3

1. What changes does the narrator detect in the older Susan, now 37?
2. What does the narrator first emphasize in presenting Elizabeth-Jane? What does the reader assume are the facts of which Elizabeth-Jane is ignorant?
3. Will some of these assumptions later prove wrong, and if so, do you think the narrator has deceived his readers?
4. How does Susan describe her former husband to her daughter? Does she lie in her claim that Mr. Henchard had never known Elizabeth-Jane?
5. What has happened in the intervening years to the former woman and her wares? Is her decline symbolic?
6. What useful information does she provide the strangers?

Chapter 4

1. What do you make of the narrator’s remark that “An innocent maiden had thus grown up in the belief that the relations between the genial sailor and her mother were the ordinary ones that they had always appeared to be”? Since we later learn that Mr. Newsom was in fact Elizabeth-Jane’s father, would this revelation in fact have risked “endangering the child’s strong affection” or “losing her daughter’s heart”?
2. What had been the nature of Susan and Elizabeth-Jane’s life with Newsom? Where had they traveled? Had they been a congenial family?
3. What causes a breach in their lives? What do you make of Susan’s conviction that she can no longer live with a man who had treated her well for more than seventeen years? Does the narrator seem to share her view?
4. How does Newsom disappear from the plot? Does his reported death seem too convenient? What seems implied by the narrator’s reference to the “sailor, drowned or no”?
5. What are the traits of Elizabeth-Jane’s character, as the narrator describes them?
6. On what grounds does Susan decide to seek out her long-gone and formerly unloving past husband? Does the narrator approve?
7. What features of Casterbridge are first described? What are signs of its traditional, pre-modern ways?
8. In conjunction with what problems do they hear Henchard’s name mentioned? May this be ominous?

Chapter 5

1. How is Henchard’s character described as he sits at the mayoral banquet? Are all these descriptions borne out by, or relevant to, the story?
2. How does Susan Henchard react to the sight of her husband in his new setting of success? What is Elizabeth-Jane’s response?

3. Of what do the townspeople accuse them, and what is Henchard's response?

Chapter 6

1. What message from a stranger attracts Henchard's attention? What combination of circumstances brings Donald Farfrae, the two women, and Henchard to the same second-class hotel?

Chapter 7

2. What occupation does Elizabeth-Jane engage in to help defray their expenses, and on what grounds does this alarm her mother? Do you think that—even in class-conscious Victorian society—she may be too sensitive?
3. How does Elizabeth-Jane respond on first viewing the Scottish visitor?
4. What secret does Donald Farfrae impart to Henchard? Does he charge for this important knowledge? Are we supposed to infer that the new method will be successful?
5. What offer does Henchard make to the younger man?
6. When invited to drink, what revelations does he make? (ashamed of deed he performed when drunk years ago)

Chapter 8

1. Who has overheard his confession of remorse? What effect do such examples of serendipitous knowledge (one of many in this novel) have upon the plot? Could Hardy have accomplished his purposes by other narrative means?
2. How does Donald entertain his fellow guests at the hotel? What unusual quality, foreign to their own habits, do they notice in his songs? May some of their reactions resemble those of the author?
3. How does Elizabeth-Jane react to Donald's songs? What ballad stanza does he sing as he passes her on the stairway? What kindred reaction does Henchard feel?

Chapter 9

1. How does Susan react to learning of Henchard's sudden affinity for Donald Farfrae?
2. How does the narrator characterize the speech and mannerisms of the local market men?
3. What persuades Donald to remain as Henchard's manager?
4. In describing their agreement, why do you think the narrator refers to Michael Henchard as Henchard and Donald Farfrae as Donald?
5. Where does Henchard invite Donald to live?

Chapter 10

1. How does Henchard respond to Elizabeth-Jane's announcement that she and her mother have come to see him as a relative? Is he convinced that she speaks the truth?
2. What do we learn from the description of his household furnishings?
3. What concerns does Henchard's note to his wife reveal?
4. What symbolic enclosure does he send?

Chapter 11

1. What are some implications of Henchard's choice of a meeting place? Does it seem an appropriate setting for the couple's reunion?
2. What explanation does Susan give for her life with Mr. Newsom? Does this seem a bit legalistic in the light of the latter's good behavior?

3. For what does Henchard blame her? Has he changed in manner toward her in the intervening years? Has he repented of his past?
4. Are Susan's statements or answers regarding what he assumes to be their daughter misleading?
5. What plan does Henchard propose to enable their reunion, and why? What does he ask Susan, and how does she reply? Why do you think Hardy includes this detail of her passive resistance?

Chapter 12

1. What confession about his past does Henchard make to Donald? Does this level of candor seem in character?
2. What are some implications of Henchard's self-description as "something of a woman hater"?
3. What do we learn of Henchard's more recent entanglement? Is the nature of his past relationship with Lucetta made clear?
4. To what extent has he obligated himself to marry? What does he describe as the result of their previous aborted relationship on Lucetta?
5. What is their present relationship?
6. What role does he ask Donald to take in this affair? Does it seem inconsistent that in the past he was able to write his own letters to Lucetta, but is unable to do so now?
7. Does Henchard appear to have loved Lucetta, or to have greatly desired to marry her?
8. What advice does Donald give regarding how much of his and Susan's past to reveal to Elizabeth-Jane? What is revealed by the differing attitudes of the two men toward concealment?

Chapter 13

1. What characterizes Henchard's courtship of Susan? What motive does the narrator ascribe to Susan's acceptance of the pretence that they had not been married previously? Is this entirely plausible?
2. How do the townspeople in general react to his choice of wife?
3. What tone is set by the bandinage between Christopher Coney and Mother Cuxon? What ominous prophecy is made by Nance Mockridge?

Chapter 14

1. What changes does her new residence and prosperity make in Elizabeth-Jane's habits and health? Does it seem likely that her actual appearance would change with better food and circumstances, and if so, why?
2. What feature of her dress does the narrator especially note?
3. What change in Elizabeth-Jane's appearance from his memories of his daughter's infancy does he note? What may this portend?
4. What change in Elizabeth-Jane's formal name does he propose? What effort does Susan make to prevent this? Has she behaved rightly?
5. How does the narrator refer to the alternative of Elizabeth-Jane Henchard? Would this in fact have been her legal name?
6. What happens to Henchard's corn business under Donald's management?
7. What odd event causes Elizabeth-Jane and Donald to meet at the granary? What odd form of courtesy does he show her? What significance does this encounter

seem to have?

Chapter 15

1. What changes does the narrator describe in Elizabeth's mode of dress?
2. What punishment does Henchard inflict on Abel Whittle? Who intervenes to protest, and what is the outcome?
3. What other incidents evince the townspeople's greater trust in Donald's judgment than that of Henchard? How does Henchard react?
4. What does he blame for their lessened closeness, and is this an accurate interpretation?
5. Are there any biblical parallels for the relationship of Henchard and Donald? (Saul and Jonathan)

Chapter 16

1. What causes the Mayor's plan for a festivity for the townspeople to fail? By contrast, what enables Donald's plans for a dance to succeed?
2. What remarks of his fellow townspeople rub in the Mayor's social failure? Do you think such rudeness likely?
3. What rash act does Henchard commit? How does Donald respond?
4. What emotions does Henchard experience the next day? Is this a pattern which has occurred before?

Chapter 17

1. To what does Elizabeth-Jane ascribe her father's irritation at her dancing?
2. What does Donald seem to hint to Elizabeth-Jane as he walks with her?
3. Why is Elizabeth-Jane not entirely surprised at Henchard's dismissal of Farfrae? How does she respond to the thought that Donald may leave Casterbridge?
4. What odd test does she make to determine whether Donald can have a deep regard for her? What does this seem to assume about the nature of attraction?
5. How does Henchard respond to the news that Farfrae has established a corn-trade business in town? Can this have been surprising?
6. What promise does he extract from his daughter? What are the contents of the letter he sends Farfrae? Do these actions seem likely to have had their intended effect?
7. According to the narrator, what causes Farfrae's business to prosper? How do the two men, now competing business-men, behave toward one another?
8. How had Susan regarded Farfrae?

Chapter 18

1. What rupture in the Henchard family life occurs?
2. Before her death, what message does Lucetta send to Henchard? What does she desire him to do for her, and does he comply?
3. Does Henchard intend to comply, and what prevents him from doing so?
4. What last act does Susan perform before her death? What instructions does she place on her sealed letter to Michael?
5. What reflections does Elizabeth-Jane experience as she watches by her mother's bedside?
6. What past action does Susan tell her daughter she had done? Does it seem plausible that Elizabeth-Jane didn't recognize her mother's handwriting?
7. After her death, what does Mrs. Cuxom remember about Susan's character and

- preparations for death?
8. What macabre response to her last wishes by Christopher Coney is recorded? Why do you think Hardy included this detail?
 9. In whose voice does the narrator place the final eulogy for Susan?

Chapter 19

1. What is Henchard's motive for revealing his (supposed) paternity to Elizabeth-Jane? How does she at first respond?
2. What motive does the narrator ascribe to Henchard's telling Elizabeth-Jane that he and Susan had believed one another dead?
3. What symbolism is inherent in his request/demand that she change her name publicly? How will the timing of this change prove ironic?
4. What prompts Henchard to violate his wife's proscription against opening the letter until Elizabeth-Jane's wedding day? Does this seem an adequate excuse for violating one's wife's last and only wish?
5. What startling news does the letter contain? Does it seem likely that a mother would give two children the same name? That Elizabeth-Jane's lack of physical resemblance to Michael would not have been noticed?
6. How does Henchard/the narrator interpret Susan's desire to prevent Elizabeth-Jane's change of name?
7. What does Henchard do to verify Elizabeth-Jane's paternity? How does he react to this recognition? Could he have reacted differently?
8. What part of town does Henchard visit, and how does this nocturnal environment reflect his mood?
9. Why does Henchard determine not to tell Elizabeth-Jane of her paternity? Was this right?
10. What ironic change in attitude does Elizabeth-Jane display toward Henchard the next morning, and how does he react?
11. What does the narrator tell us had been Henchard's motive for his remarriage to Susan? Was this apparent before?

Chapter 20

1. To what traits of Elizabeth-Jane does Henchard most object? (her speech and handwriting)
2. To what kindly act to Nance Mockridge does he object? What information about the past does Nance reveal in revenge?
3. Should the fact that Elizabeth-Jane had aided in serving at a bar for a few hours have caused "scathing damage to [Henchard's] local repute and position"? Does this judgment reflect most on Henchard, the narrator, or the society of the time?
4. Whom does Elizabeth-Jane see at her mother's grave, and what emotions does she feel toward the stranger?
5. How is the strange lady dressed, in contrast to the local residents?
6. What political setback does Henchard experience?
7. What rather odd letter does he send Donald Farfrae at this juncture, and with what result?
8. Who overhears Elizabeth-Jane's expression of unhappiness in the graveyard, and what questions does she ask? How does she respond to Elizabeth-Jane's account of ways in which she had angered Henchard?

9. What invitation does Lucetta extend to Elizabeth-Jane? What complications does this seem to foreshadow?

Chapter 21

1. What are features of the house into which Lucetta has moved? Who enters as Elizabeth-Jane stands in a back passage?
2. How does Elizabeth-Jane broach the idea of leaving Henchard's home to him? Is it significant that she doesn't mention Lucetta's name? How does Henchard respond to her suggestion that she may leave?
3. What motive does Lucetta give for wanting Elizabeth-Jane to join her right away? Who has previously had a similar reaction to living alone?
4. How does Henchard react when Elizabeth-Jane prepares to move? When he learns that she will be going to High-Place Hall?

Chapter 22

1. What are the contents of the letter Lucetta sends to Henchard? What does she give as her reason for residing in Casterbridge?
2. Would her desire to learn how Henchard was situated require a decision to live in Casterbridge? What is the reader expected to think of Lucetta's letters and/or her behavior in love?
3. How does Henchard respond to the possibility that Lucetta may have acquired money in the interim since he had known her?
4. What further explanations appear in Lucetta's next letter to Henchard? What has been her motive in inviting Elizabeth-Jane to live with her?
5. Does it seem tactful for her to mention Elizabeth-Jane's views of his behavior in a letter to a man that she is courting?
6. What are some ways in which Lucetta entertains herself when alone? Does Elizabeth-Jane share this interest?
7. What part of her past does Lucetta wish to conceal, and why? Is it likely that a resident of Casterbridge who had never met her before should know of her reputation on the isle of Jersey?
8. On what grounds does Lucetta fear that Henchard will not visit her in Elizabeth-Jane's presence? What expedient does she use to encourage Henchard's visit? (sends Elizabeth-Jane on an errand and writes Henchard)
9. How has her attitude toward Henchard altered since her earlier enthusiasm?

Chapter 23

1. By what ironic accident does Donald Farfrae visit Lucetta at this juncture? What topics do he and Lucetta discuss?
2. What reason does the narrator give for Lucetta's interest in a "tradesman"?
3. What is the result of this visit?
4. When Henchard arrives, what message does he send up, and how does she respond?

Chapter 24

1. What is revealed by Lucetta's indecision over which dress to wear? Is it significant that she chooses the cherry-colored dress?
2. How do Henchard and Farfrae each respond to the new threshing machine, and what does this reveal about their respective characters?
3. What interrupts Henchard's conversation with Lucetta and Elizabeth, and with

- what results?
4. What fears does Lucetta express to Elizabeth, and are they calmed by the latter's response? Why do you think Elizabeth-Jane is presented as disapproving of her fellow women?
 5. What gives Lucetta cause to fear that her past may become known?
 6. When Lucetta tells Elizabeth that she has felt obligated to marry a former attachment but has found someone she likes better, how does Elizabeth respond? Does this seem unrealistically judgmental?
 7. What assessment of Lucetta's appearance does Elizabeth give? Does this seem a likely response to a friend?
 8. Does Lucetta resent Elizabeth-Jane's active interference in her life, and if not, why do you think this is so?

Chapter 25

1. When he calls to visit Lucetta, how does Donald respond to Elizabeth?
2. In what terms does Henchard phrase his proposal to Lucetta? Does this seem a gracious mode of wooing?
3. Does she give a reason for deferring acceptance? On what topic do they quarrel?
4. Does a double standard lie behind his words? The author and characters' preoccupation with Lucetta's past?
5. Do you think Henchard and Lucetta would have had a happy marriage?
6. What reason does the narrator give for her disinclination for "aiming higher than Farfrae"?
7. How does the narrator (through Elizabeth) contrast the respective attraction of Donald and Henchard to Lucetta?
8. How does Elizabeth-Jane respond to the loss of Donald's interest?

Chapter 26

1. What symbolic incident occurs when Henchard and Donald simultaneously visit Lucetta?
2. Whom does Henchard employ by way of intended revenge? What ominous instructions does he give to Jopp? Does Jopp share his employer's distaste for Farfrae?
3. What knowledge does Jopp have of Lucetta's past? What ominous outcome may this narrative detail foreshadow?
4. What causes Henchard to visit the fortuneteller Wide-oh? What is revealed by his attempted disguise? What are some implications of the Biblical parallel with the Witch of Endor?
5. What forecast does the fortuneteller give him, and with what results?
6. Whom does Henchard blame for his losses, and to what actions does this lead him?

Chapter 27

1. What disturbing suggestions are raised by the incident in which Henchard's employee and that of Farfrae block each other's wagons?
2. Under what circumstances does Henchard overhear a conversation between Donald and Lucetta? What do its upsetting contents prompt Henchard to do?
3. What reason does Lucetta give for her past desire to marry Henchard, and why has this changed?

4. Does this account seem consistent with her previous enthusiasm for him? Does the narrator approve of her response? (notes she has learned that Henchard is ill-tempered)
5. With what threat does Henchard extract a promise of marriage from Lucetta? Do you think that this threat, if carried out, would have been effective, and if so, why?
6. Were there other options for Lucetta?
7. How does Elizabeth-Jane respond to the news of Lucetta's promise?
8. What offer does Elizabeth-Jane make? Why do you think Lucetta refuses it?

Chapter 28

1. Of what is the old woman who appears before Henchard in his role as magistrate accused? What are some humorous aspects of her account? Do you think some of her speech has been censored?
2. What startling account from the past does this woman narrate, and what does she give as her motive in so doing?
3. How does Henchard handle the situation? Does it seem in character that a long-secretive man should confess in public?
4. What can be his motive for so doing? How would this have reasonably affected his expectation of a marriage with Lucetta or his relationship with Elizabeth-Jane?
5. How does Lucetta respond to the report of Henchard's deed? Is she skeptical? What does she do in response?

Chapter 29

1. Under what circumstances does Henchard rescue Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane from harm?
2. On what rural practices for moving cattle does the narrator blame the bull's charge? What are some rather dramatic elements of the situation? What qualities does Henchard show in this incident?
3. How does Henchard respond to Lucetta's thanks?
4. Who interrupts this scene, and is this interruption by coincidence? How does Donald react to the news of Lucetta's endangerment?
5. What act has Lucetta secretly performed? Does it seem likely that Donald would have wished such a secret marriage, or she likewise?
6. What favor does Lucetta refuse to perform for Henchard? Why is this necessary?
7. What reasons does Lucetta give for her hasty marriage in a seaside town? Were there alternate courses she could have taken?
8. On learning of her marriage, with what does Henchard threaten her? Would these revelations of necessity have destroyed her marriage with Farfrae?
9. What is revealed about Henchard's character by his refusal to permit Lucetta to pay his debts?

Chapter 30

1. When Lucetta tells the news of her marriage to Elizabeth-Jane, what judgment does the latter make? Does it seem likely that she would expect her friend to marry a man who had unwillingly extorted a promise from her, and a man she herself had not chosen to live with on account of his temper?
2. Why do you think Hardy includes Elizabeth-Jane's judgment that Lucetta was "in honor and conscience" bound to marry her first attachment? That she must remain

single?

3. What reason does the narrator give for Elizabeth-Jane's concern for literal propriety? Does this seem plausible?
4. Why does Elizabeth-Jane decide to live elsewhere, and how does she plan to support herself?

Chapter 31

1. In addition to the fact that the firmity woman's revelations about his past are passed by gossip through the village, what bad events occur to Henchard?
2. How does he behave when stripped of his possessions?
3. Who tries to comfort and help him? What is now her own situation?
4. What does she learn about conditions at Henchard's former workplace? Is Farfrae a model employer?

Chapter 32

1. What is the significance of the fact that Henchard stands on the stone bridge at the outskirts of Casterbridge?
2. Whom does he meet there, and with what consequences? What does Henchard learn about the fate of his former house?
3. What kind offer does Donald make?
4. How does Henchard behave as a worker in his old concern?
5. How old is Henchard now? Does this seem surprising?
6. What ominous anniversary occurs soon after?
7. Chapter 33: What spiteful act does Henchard manage to persuade his fellow drinkers to perform? What is significant about the fact that the curse is sung?
8. What seems its significance, other than its meanness?
9. What do we learn of the Farfrae marriage?
10. How does Henchard behave on encountering Lucetta? What characteristically unwise recourse does Lucetta take?
11. What ominous act does Elizabeth witness as Henchard and Farfrae stand talking in the barn?

Chapter 34

1. What warning does Elizabeth attempt to give Farfrae, and with what results?
2. What causes Donald to desist from his generous plan of helping Henchard to purchase a small shop? How is this reported to Henchard?
3. What does Donald tell his wife which causes her alarm? What outcome does she fear? What does she propose?
4. What honorific invitation is extended to Donald? (to become Mayor)
5. What does Lucetta ask Henchard to do? (to return their prior correspondence) Do you think this is wise?
6. What unintended consequences does this have? Does it seem plausible that Henchard would have left them there, and failing that, have concealed from Lucetta their whereabouts?
7. Does the narrator seem to agree that Lucetta has good reason to fear Donald's opprobrium if he should learn of her much-regretted youthful infatuation?

Chapter 35

1. As Henchard leaves Farfrae's house after the latter had read aloud the letters, what advice does Farfrae give? Is this good advice?

2. What plea does Lucetta make to Henchard? By this point, what outcome does the reader expect?
3. What imagery does Hardy use to describe the setting sun of that day? (216, "The sun was resting on the hill like a drop of blood on an eyelid. . . , " 216)
4. What prediction does Henchard make to her? What is her response? What does he promise? What will cause the promise to go awry?

Chapter 36

1. What stroke of fate kindles Jopp's anger at Lucetta? What inadvertency on Henchard's part causes the letters to be revealed?
2. In what symbolically appropriate place is the plot to shame Lucetta conceived? Are there elements of macabre humor in the portrayal of the inhabitants of Mixen Lane?
3. Would they seem likely upholders of the town's standards of propriety? On what grounds do these dregs of the town find Lucetta's letters scandalous? Why do they apparently fail to blame Henchard instead?
4. Under what conditions does a stranger appear, and whom does the reader expect he may be?
5. What outcome does the narrator predict will follow the revelation of the contents of these letters? What attitudes does this assume on Donald's part?

Chapter 37

1. What request by Henchard is rebuffed by the Council? Are they justified in making this decision?
2. What actions does Henchard attempt on the occasion of the visit of the royal party, and what may be his motive? How are his attempts frustrated?
3. Do all the poorer residents of the town wish to disturb Lucetta's peace through their parodic revelations?

Chapter 38

1. What violent act against Farfrae does Henchard perform? Was his deed premeditated?
2. What emotions does Henchard show when on the brink of killing Donald?
3. What sounds does Henchard hear as he loiters after his outburst?

Chapter 39

1. Who has sent a letter to Farfrae, and with what good intentions? How will these backfire?
2. What images are carried in procession by the denizens of Mixen Lane? How does Lucetta respond to the effigies of herself and Henchard, and what may this reveal?
3. Why don't those of good intention, such as Elizabeth-Jane, try to stop the procession? How does the doctor respond? The councilor Mr. Grower? The constables?
4. What causes the law enforcement officers' difficulties in finding the culprits? What clues are they unable to read, and why?
5. What damage to Lucetta's health is caused by the shock?

Chapter 40

1. On what errand does Henchard set forth? Why are his warnings in vain?
2. What news does Jopp give Henchard?
3. What final confidences does Lucetta share with her husband? Does her sudden

death from shock seem likely?

Chapter 41

1. What change now occurs in the relationship between Henchard and Elizabeth?
2. What do we learn of Lucetta's condition before her death?
3. Why is this an ironic moment for Newsom to appear? What lie does Henchard tell him? Why does the narrator seem to think he should have doubted Henchard's word?
4. What does the narrator tell us might have comforted Henchard at this moment? Does it seem inconsistent that this predilection hasn't been mentioned previously?
5. What act does Henchard intend to commit, and what prevents this action? How does he interpret the appearance of the effigy?

Chapter 42

1. Why does Farfrae refrain from prosecuting the perpetrators of the skimmity-ride? Do you think his grounds were reasonable?
2. What kind act does he perform towards Henchard?
3. How does the narrator respond to Donald's recovery from grief? How does Donald come to view Lucetta's death in retrospect?
4. What now becomes Henchard's new obsession?
5. From what vantage point does Henchard observe Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane's courtship?
6. What reasons does the narrator give for Elizabeth-Jane's fondness for the sea?
7. What plot does Henchard devise to thwart the courtship? Does this make sense? Is it likely to further his ill intentions?

Chapter 43

1. How does Henchard react to the ongoing courtship between Donald Farfrae and his daughter? How do others in the town react?
2. What causes Newsom's return? How is the news conveyed to Henchard, and how does he react?
3. Does it seem uncharacteristic that Henchard does not try to prevent his daughter from meeting Newsom?
4. What does Henchard announce that he intends to do? What has been Farfrae's role in bringing together Elizabeth and her father?
5. What characterizes Newsom's reaction on being reunited with his daughter?
6. What past deception by Henchard does Newsom reveal, and how do Elizabeth and Donald react? Is Newsom angry?

Chapter 44

1. What are Henchard's thoughts as he leaves Casterbridge? What occupation does he resume?
2. Does the narrator believe that he may have an improved future?
3. What news of Casterbridge does Henchard hear, and how does he respond?
4. With what does Elizabeth-Jane reproach him, and are these reproaches just? What reason does the narrator give for his silence in response?

Chapter 45

1. What discovery causes the others to realize that Henchard may have come with good intentions? What symbolism inheres in the death of an innocent, trapped songbird?

2. What do we learn about the circumstances of Henchard's death? What ironies are suggested by the fact that he is tended to by Abel Whittle?
3. What document is left behind by Michael Henchard on his death? What reasons are given for the fact that Elizabeth-Jane refrains from granting him the usual forms of burial? Could she have made other decisions?
4. What effect does Henchard's death—especially at this time—have on the tone of the ending?
5. What do we learn about Elizabeth-Jane's later life? Is Elizabeth-Jane's marriage presented as entirely happy? Why do you think Hardy fails to say much about her marriage and life with Donald?
6. Would you say that the book has a somewhat tempered but happy ending?
7. Does the final chapter tie up the narrative's loose ends?
8. What would you say is the novel's final tone? Would you say that the book has a somewhat tempered but happy ending? Is its tone of reserved fatalism earned?

Novel as a Whole

1. What role does the narrator play throughout the novel? Are there instances in which the narrator's explanations or interpretations seem unconvincing or intrusive?
2. How does the novel present themes of oral vs. written transactions? Does Henchard embody values of an earlier, more oral society?
3. What use is made of dialect and shifting language registers? Are these employed consistently?
4. What function do letters and overheard conversations serve in the novel? Could the plot have proceeded without them?
5. Is this novel a tragedy in the classic sense? If so, on what grounds? Alternately, does the novel center on Susan and Elizabeth Jane as much as on Michael Henchard, and if so, does this compound protagonist alter the tragic nature of the plot?
6. Can you think of earlier fictional precedents for Michael Henchard—say in *Wuthering Heights* or *Mill on the Floss*? What would you say are his tragic flaws? Are these psychologically plausible?
7. In 1886, would the choice of a hay-trusser's fortunes have been an unusual plot? What may be Hardy's motive in framing his tragedy around the rise and fall of a farm worker?
8. Which of the novel's characters are presented in greatest depth? Are Donald and Elizabeth as fully represented as is Henchard?
9. What qualities of Donald Farfrae are described in detail, and as perceived by others?
10. How are elements of melodrama, tragedy, and comedy combined throughout the novel?
11. What are some highly symbolic scenes structured to reveal and test character?
12. What are some instances of the novel's creation of theatrical or dramatic scenes or performances?
13. What views of women and expectations of female behavior are shown throughout the novel?

14. What views of sexual morality and family bonds are embodied in the narrative? What behaviors are expected/anticipated in men and women respectively? (men are possessive, good women unwavering)
15. Is the portrayal of Lucetta entirely fair? Sexist?
16. How do the novel's constant "coincidences" affect its plot and tone? Are these effective, even if not entirely realistic?
17. How are themes of concealment and dishonesty important to the plot? Gentility, false gentility, and class difference?
18. Is the theme of a trailing sexual past prominent in other fiction of the era? Are there instances in which a woman manages to escape her past?
19. How does Hardy represent the tone and interests of rural life? Of his rural and low-life characters?
20. Are his portrayals of the humble poor condescending? In what way are their low designs and blunt sayings used to further the narrative? Does Hardy entirely disapprove of their actions?
21. What are some folk elements embedded in the plot?
22. Where does the moral center of the book seem to reside?
23. What is added to the novel by its careful portrayal of setting? What aspect of the city and environs of Casterbridge does Hardy portray in most detail?
24. How is the novel's plot and characterization affected by the fact that it is organized around two sets of contrasts – Henchard vs. Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane vs. Lucetta?
25. What seems the role of gossip and public opinion in this book? Who are its sources?
26. Is it always malicious or evil? Does it seem to fulfill any moral purpose?
27. How is the novel's plot and characterization affected by the fact that it is organized around two sets of contrasts – Henchard vs. Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane vs. Lucetta?
28. What do you think are ultimately some of the values upheld by the novel? Is character fate, as Novalis remarked?
29. How is the reader supposed to respond to the story of a man whose actions are both ill-tempered and self-defeating? Can you think of precedents in Greek drama?
30. Is the book's attention directed more at Henchard or Elizabeth? What purpose is served by the creation of a dual protagonist? What roles do Donald Farfrae and Lucetta play with reference to the main characters?
31. What seem to be Hardy's views about the coming of modernity? Is he ambivalent? Which aspects of it does he seem to disapprove?