

Questions on Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)

Philip V. Allingham, Contributing Editor, Victorian Web; Faculty of Education, Lakehead University (Canada)

Section One: General Questions

1. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is one in a series of novels that Hardy set in an area the novelist called "Wessex." Where in England is this area, and why did he revive a place name that had not been used officially in 900 years?
2. The rivalry that develops between Henchard and his former protégé reflects the impact on rural Dorset of outside agencies and forces such as the Industrial Revolution. What evidence do we have in the novel of other outside forces that are changing the age-old way of life of the Wessex country folk?
3. Although Hardy uses the omniscient narrative points-of-view, for which characters does he lapse into the limited omniscient, and why?
4. In what respects is Farfrae's character "the reverse of Henchard's"?
5. What clues does Hardy furnish as to the story's initial chronological and geographical setting, other than using the term "Wessex"?
6. How does Hardy employ a social gathering to reveal Casterbridge's attitudes to the older Michael Henchard?
7. "As a class, they are simple, garrulous, intolerant, and unable to see beyond their own little lives." Members of the group described include Christopher Coney and Mother Cuxom. In the classical sense, how do they and their fellows constitute a "chorus"?
8. Most of the important businessmen in Casterbridge are associated in one way or another with the corn [wheat] trade. Why in the years covered by the novel was the Wessex corn trade so important to Britain as a whole?
9. In what ways do houses, dwelling places, and spots for congregation--particularly Casterbridge's three inns--reveal about the town's society?
10. How does Hardy use four overheard over the course of the book to advance the plot? See chapters 23, 27, 35, and 42.

Section Two: Specific Questions on Each Serial Installment

Installment One, "The Wife Sale": Chapters One and Two (*The Graphic*, 2 January, 1886)

1. At the opening of the novel, Henchard has difficulty tracing Susan and Newson because he is too embarrassed about what he has done to explain his motives; to what does he impute his irrational behavior? But what, suggests Hardy, is the real cause of the wife-sale?
2. What impact has the "grown wheat" had on Henchard? on the poorer people of Casterbridge?
3. The remark by the turnip-hoer that pulling down is more in the nature of Weydon-Priors (the village of Weyhill) indicates what about the lives of agricultural laborers in the early nineteenth century?
4. The phrase which best characterizes the relationship between Michael and Susan Henchard prior to the wife sale is "stale familiarity." What view of marriage does such a remark suggest on the part of the narrator?
5. What caused Henchard to sell his wife to the sailor was, according to the narrator, associated with Henchard's "introspective inflexibility." What does this phrase suggest about Henchard?

Installment Two, “Susan’s Return”: Chapters Three-Five (The Graphic, 9 January, 1886)

1. Between Chapters 2 and 3 there is a time-lapse; Hardy provides us with a number of clues as to how much time has transpired, including the apparent maturity of Elizabeth-Jane, Susan Newson’s careworn and aged appearance, and Henchard’s temperance oath approaching its date of termination. Since so much time has elapsed, why does Susan seek news through the old furnity vendor?
2. What impact has the “grown wheat” had on Henchard? on the poorer people of Casterbridge?

Installment Three, “Donald Farfrae”: Chapters Five-Six-Seven (The Graphic, 16 January, 1886)

1. What distinguishes “the young stranger” from the loungers outside The King’s Arms?
2. The Three Mariners is not Casterbridge’s best inn--why, then, does Elizabeth-Jane deem it “respectable” enough accommodation for herself and her mother?
3. How in these chapters does Elizabeth-Jane reveal through her actions and utterances the following qualities? A. Concern with respectable appearance. B. Independence of thought. C. Industriousness. D. Self- sacrifice.
4. Why does Henchard attempt to disguise himself when he goes to see Farfrae at the Three Mariners’ inn?
5. Why does Henchard confess his youthful alcoholism to Farfrae?
6. What part of his youthful indiscretion does Henchard omit? This omission is an example of plot manipulation since who else is listening to the conversation?
7. Why is Henchard initially attracted to Farfrae?
8. Henchard describes himself as “a rule o’ thumb” sort of businessman. Look up the origin of this expression: how does it ironically comment upon his character as both husband and master?

Installment Four, “Farfrae and The Casterbridge Chorus”: Chapters 8-9 (The Graphic, 23 January, 1886)

1. Why does Elizabeth-Jane shrink “from having anything to do with the ground-floor serving”?
2. How does coincidence bring Elizabeth-Jane into contact with Farfrae?
3. Donald Farfrae is a romantic figure right out of the novels of Sir Walter Scott: how does Hardy make him a sympathetic character in this episode?
4. According to a member of the village chorus, Casterbridge is afflicted with “lammigers,” “wanton hussies,” and “slatterns”: what aspect of his own society is he criticizing?
5. One of the Chorus is “old Coney”: what does the name mean, and what about the common folk of Wessex is Hardy implying through the name?
6. How does Hardy use the oral tradition of history for comic relief in Buzzford’s recollection of the rebellion against the King “one or two hundred years ago, in the time of the Romans”?

Installment Five, “The Reunion”: Chapters 10-12 (The Graphic, 30 January, 1886)

1. Hardy introduces Joshua Jopp here: why will he have cause to resent both Henchard and Farfrae?
2. What question does Henchard ask Elizabeth-Jane to verify the identity of the sender of the note?
3. Why is The Ring an appropriate location for Henchard and Susan to meet?
4. How does Henchard intend to recognize Susan as his wife without revealing their guilty secret to Elizabeth- Jane?

Installment Six, “The Mayor’s New Household”: Chapters 13-15 (*The Graphic*, 6 February, 1886)

1. In what sense does the marriage usher in “A Martinmas summer” for the new Mrs. Henchard?
2. Why does Susan look “startled” when Henchard asks her about the color of Elizabeth-Jane’s hair?
3. What was Susan Newson’s motive in keeping her daughter in ignorance of the wife-sale?
4. The mystery of the notes regarding a meeting at the granary on Durnover Hill is later resolved: who was the writer, and what intention lay behind the notes?
5. How does Henchard’s gift of “a box of delicately-tinted gloves” lead to Elizabeth-Jane’s becoming highly fashion-conscious? Hardy’s theory, of course, is that changing circumstances result in changes in character and taste.

Installment Seven, “The Rupture between Henchard and Farfrae”: Chapters 15-17 (*The Graphic*, 13 February, 1886)

1. How does the incident with Abel Whittle have disastrous consequences for the Mayor?
2. How do Henchard’s attitude and behavior towards Farfrae begin to cool in Chapter 15?
3. How may one apply Novalis’s aphorism that “Character is fate” to both Farfrae and Henchard?
4. How do allusions to Faust and Bellerophon add tragic dimensions to small-town businessman Michael Henchard?

Installment Eight, “The Discovery of Elizabeth-Jane’s Parentage”: Chapters 18-19 (*The Graphic*, 20 February, 1886)

1. How had Henchard compromised Lucetta’s virtue on Jersey?
2. Using the epistolary technique, what does Hardy reveal through the medium of Susan’s death-bed letter?
3. The Henchards had done everything they could to keep Elizabeth-Jane in ignorance of their former history; why after Susan’s death does Michael Henchard reveal it?

Installment Nine, “Elizabeth-Jane Meets the New Tenant of High-Place Hall”: Chapters 20-21 (*The Graphic*, 27 February, 1886)

1. “That dinner at the King’s Arms . . . had been Henchard’s Austerlitz”: to whom is Hardy comparing Henchard? What does the metaphor indicate about Henchard’s business and political fortunes?
2. Having forbidden Farfrae “to pay his addresses” to Elizabeth-Jane, why does Henchard now withdraw his letter in a short note?
3. Why does Lucetta invite Elizabeth-Jane to serve as her companion and housekeeper?
4. What ominous associations does the mask over the archway to High-Place Hall evoke?
5. Explain the following sentence: “She went to the boot-room where her pattens had hung ever since her apotheosis; took them down, . . . and put them on as she had done in old times.”
6. The phrase “Blood built it, and Wealth enjoys it” (Ch. 21) ironically refers to High Place Hall. Why has Hardy arranged matters so that Lucetta is the new tenant?

Installment Ten, “Lucetta Templeman”: Chapters 22-23 (*The Graphic*, 6 March, 1886)

1. What prejudice in his readers is Hardy playing upon when he describes Lucetta as being “of unmistakably French extraction”?
2. “Miss Templeman deposited herself on the sofa in her former flexuous position, and

throwing her arm above her brow--somewhat in the pose of a well-known conception of Titian's" tells us what about Hardy's narrator and what about Lucetta herself?

3. Like Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native* (1878) Lucetta is "flighty and unsettled"--what in her upbringing accounts for this disposition?

4. Hardy intervenes to prevent a young couple from being separated: apart from sheer altruism, what other motives might he have?

5. Why is it appropriate that Lucetta chooses the cherry-colored ensemble rather than the lighter one? Why does she regard this as an important decision?

6. Another import from outside the narrow confines of Wessex appears just after Lucetta's London dresses-- what is the technological innovation for, and who (logically) has introduced it?

7. The simile "as a flying machine would create at Charing Cross" points to a reader familiar with end-of-the-century scientific innovations--where, significantly, would this reader be located?

8. What is the purpose of Hardy's adopting the epistolary technique (Lucetta's three letters) in Chapter 22?

9. "'I like your company much!' said Lucetta." What "disagreeable necessity" now confronts Lucetta?

10. How does the close of Chapter 22 exemplify the "cliff-hanger" technique common in Victorian serials?

11. Why does Lucetta give "The neighborhood of Bath" rather than Jersey as her place of origin in conversation with Donald Farfrae?

Installment Eleven, "Lucetta Templeman, Elizabeth-Jane, and Donald Farfrae": Chapters 24-25 (*The Graphic*, 13 March, 1886)

1. In the opening paragraph of Chapter 25, Hardy alludes to the "Protean variety in [Lucetta's] phases, moods, opinions, and also principles." The term "Protean" is a classical allusion which when combined with "principles" suggests what about Lucetta?

2. In Chapter 25, how does the relationship between Lucetta and Henchard change? What motivates this change?

3. "Lucetta seemed to be outside this train of sentiment, her acquaintance with the Scriptures being somewhat limited" (Ch. 24). Why have Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane been alluding to "Ecclesiastes" and "Matthew," xxvi, 73? What is Hardy implying about Lucetta by indicating she has been "outside this train of sentiment"?

4. What "confession" couched as the story of "a person in whom she was interested much" does Lucetta make to Elizabeth-Jane, and why?

5. Through what objects does Henchard still have power of Lucetta?

6. "I won't be a slave to the past--I'll love where I choose!" cries Lucetta passionately. Explain whether Victorian readers would find her liberated or immoral in defying social convention.

Installment Twelve, "Michael Henchard's Downfall": Chapters 26-27 (*The Graphic*, 20 March, 1886)

1. What is the meaning of the bread-and-butter incident in Chapter 26?

2. Why does Henchard suspect someone has been "roasting a waxen image" of him? Note: As

late as 1961, at Reigate, Surrey (England), a summons was issued against a man of 72, alleging that he had sent a former employee an e-mail pierced by a needle, “thereby intimating to him that he had laid a curse on him.”

3. Translate “Zwailing along in such a gawk-hammer way” (Ch. 27). Why does Hardy employ dialect rather than standard English here?
4. Why does Henchard now send for Joshua Jopp?
5. Since Jopp is also familiar with Jersey, what secret does he probably know?
6. Why does Hardy describe “untimely rains” in summer as “Alastor” to the poor?
7. Why does Henchard pay a surreptitious visit to Wide-O (Conjurer Fall)?
8. How in Casterbridge society is such knowledge as Wide-O supposedly possesses the key to economic power?
9. What simple confidence game does Wide-O play to seduce the gullible into believing in his prophetic powers?
10. Why, despite Wide-O’s prognostication, do grain prices now rush down? What effect do these falling prices have on Henchard’s business?

Installment Thirteen, “Donald Farfrae’s Triumph”: Chapters 27-29 (*The Graphic*, 27 March, 1886)

1. “And the man who sold his wife in that fashion is the man sitting there in that great big chair.” The speaker of these lines is Mrs. Goodenough, who providentially returns as Henchard’s fortunes are at their ebb. What motivates the furnity vendor to accuse Henchard of selling his wife? What is the result of her accusation?
2. Who is Lucetta “bounding along” to meet? What has already occurred at this point in her relationship with Farfrae? Why has Hardy kept both the reader and Henchard in the dark?
3. In the incident with the bull, how do the reactions of the two young women tell us much about their characters? What might the bull symbolize?
4. How is Henchard’s offer of a longer engagement to Lucetta ironic?
5. Henchard needs to assure his chief creditor, Grower, that he and Lucetta are engaged: why? Ironically, Lucetta would like to help Henchard, but cannot: why?

Installment Fourteen, “A Secret Marriage”: Chapters 30-32 (*The Graphic*, 3 April, 1886)

1. In revising the novel for the volume edition, Hardy changed Elizabeth-Jane’s allusion to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans to an allusion to Book VII of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (“like the poet Ovid I’ve just been construing”). What may have motivated Hardy to make this change? What does reading a Latin author imply about Elizabeth-Jane’s intellectual and aesthetic capacities?
2. Who sees “that she [Lucetta] did not suspect the secret of her more reserved friend” in Chapter 30? What is this “secret”?
3. What is Elizabeth-Jane’s reaction when she learns of the marriage of Lucetta and Donald Farfrae?
4. What are the combined effects of the furnity woman’s report and Henchard’s debts, both the consequences of his rash temperament?

5. In Ch. 31, Hardy mentions among Henchard's creditors Farmer James Everdene of Weatherbury and his neighbor Boldwood, characters from Hardy's 1874 best-seller *Far From the Madding Crowd*: what effect would such an allusion have on a Victorian reader? Look up the term "intertextuality": how does it apply to this allusion?
6. In Ch. 31, why does Henchard say of his gold watch, "Tisn't mine by right?" What does the watch symbolize to the Victorian reader? Why will the down-going Henchard no longer need such a timepiece?
7. What happens to most of Henchard's property?
8. What is the reaction of the townspeople when Henchard's goods have been ticketed and the auction is in progress?
9. Although they work longer hours and are paid less, why do Henchard's former workers think they are better off under Farfrae's employment?
10. What is ironic about where Henchard goes to live at this point?
11. In terms of Henchard's triple identity as sensual, political, and business man, how has Farfrae triumphed over Henchard and usurped his place in each dimension?
12. In Ch. 32, Henchard's and Farfrae's positions are the reverse of what they were at the opening of the story as the younger man entreats his former employer not to emigrate: explain the nature of the irony.

Installment Fifteen, "Henchard's Hatred of the Successful Farfrae": Chapters 33-34 (*The Graphic*, 10 April, 1886)

1. How does Henchard trick the choir into cursing Farfrae? After learning how Henchard feels about him, what does Farfrae decide to do?
2. Explain the comic relief involved in the last time that the choir sang Psalm 109.
3. In the last Installment, we were told that Henchard's twenty-one year vow of alcoholic abstinence is due to expire in just twelve days (making him just 42): what are the consequences of this expiration?
4. Why does Hardy describe Farfrae and Lucetta as acting "like a bee and butterfly in league"?
5. How does Henchard employ verbal irony to taunt Lucetta?
6. Thanks to Elizabeth-Jane's meddling, what plan beneficial to Henchard does Farfrae resolve to cancel and why?
7. How do we know that Farfrae is still in ignorance of his wife's former relationship with Henchard?
8. How will Farfrae become "The Mayor of Casterbridge"? What are the implications of his assuming Henchard's former political office? Explain who is really the book's titular hero.
9. At the very end of this Installment, when he has the chance to avenge himself on both Farfrae and Lucetta by reading out her name, why does Henchard pass up his opportunity for delivering "oral poison"?

Installment Sixteen, “Henchard’s Hatred of the Successful Farfrae”: Chapters 35-36 (The Graphic, 17 April, 1886)

1. At the very beginning of this Installment, how might Lucetta jump to a false conclusion as a result of an overheard conversation?
2. What is ironic about Henchard and Lucetta meeting at the Ring?
3. For the meeting why does Lucetta select “her poorest, plainest, and longest discarded attire”?
4. In Ch. 35, Why does Henchard promise to return Lucetta’s letters? But, in fact, in Ch. 36 how does he return them? Note: Misdirected letters are characteristic of the Sensation Novels of 1860-1880 such as *East Lynne*.
5. What does Farfrae suggest Henchard do with these letters (not knowing, of course, that they are Lucetta’s)?
6. In his discussion with Lucetta, Henchard advises her to be honest with her new husband about her past indiscretion--why?
7. In Ch. 36, why does Hardy not label the loose whom women he describes in detail as “prostitutes”?
8. What does Jopp hope to gain when he mentions his knowledge of Jersey during Lucetta’s time there?
9. Why does Lucetta ignore Jopp’s implied threat to expose her secret?
10. Explain the nature and the meaning of the allusion in “Mixer Lane was the Adullam of all the surrounding villages.”

Installment Seventeen, “The Skimmington Ride”: Chapters 37-38 (The Graphic, 24 April, 1886)

1. If the story opens in the mid-1820s, we may conclude that the date at this point is the late 1840s; therefore, in all likelihood who is the male “Royal Personage” who is visiting Casterbridge [Dorchester]? More to the point, why is he visiting the town? How does Henchard’s behavior on this occasion increase the gulf between the former mayor and the town’s respectable citizens?
2. Why does the town council refuse Henchard’s request to be a part of the reception?
3. According to the second paragraph of Ch. 37, what is Casterbridge noted for?
4. Why does Hardy allude to “Pharaoh’s chariots” as the royal caravan moves off?
5. What seems to be Jopp’s intention in organizing the Skimmington Ride?
6. For what types of social transgressions were Skimmington’s apparently organized?
7. One of the most telling illustrations in Robert Barnes’s narrative-pictorial sequence for the serialized version of this novel is the wrestling match between Henchard (one arm behind his back) and Farfrae. How does Hardy use this contest to enlist our sympathy for the assailant, Henchard?

Installment Eighteen, “Henchard Down and Out”: Chapters 39-41 (The Graphic, 1 May, 1886)

1. Why, in fact, has Farfrae been summoned away from home? What about the note should have made him suspicious?

2. Euphemism was necessary in novels which, as Leslie Stephen, editor of *The Cornhill* remarked, might be read by the rector's daughters. Note this example: Lucetta's experiencing an [epileptic?] "fit in the present state of her health means mischief"--why?
3. What effect does the Skimmington have on each of the following: Jopp, Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard, and Farfrae?
4. Henchard has been contemplating suicide as he walks towards Ten Hatches weir: explain how a coincidence prevents him from doing so.
5. Why won't the servants at the Farfraes' house believe Henchard when he tells them where Farfrae has really gone?
6. When Henchard catches up with Farfrae on the road, what does he tell Farfrae?
7. How does the past turn up once again to haunt Henchard--this time, in the form of an unexpected visitor whose earlier unexpected arrival altered the course of Henchard's life?
8. Why does the servant remove the cloth from the Knocker on the Farfraes' door?
9. What motivates Henchard's lie to Newsom? This incident marks the end of the eighteenth Installment: what is the reader left wondering?

Installment Nineteen, "The Romance of Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane": Chapters 41-45 (*The Graphic*, 24 April, 1886)

1. What new worry absorbs Henchard? What is his solution?
2. Why did Henchard swallow his pride and accept the gift of the seed and root business?
3. Why is Henchard careful about quarreling with or otherwise upsetting Elizabeth-Jane?
4. The expensive fur muff and the abundant books in Elizabeth-Jane's bedroom are clues to what? How does Henchard attempt to confirm his suspicions?
5. Why, although disheartened when he learns that Farfrae is courting Elizabeth-Jane, does Henchard not interfere?
6. In Ch. 43, why does Henchard compare himself to the biblical Cain? In what other ways is the comparison apt?

Installment Twenty, "The Death of Henchard": Chapters 44-45 (*The Graphic*, 15 May, 1886)

1. "You can see he was kind-like to mother when she were here below, thou' a was rough to me." The speaker of these lines is ironically Abel Whittle. Why, on the surface, should we be surprised at Whittle's sympathy for Henchard?
2. The incident involving the death of the caged finch demonstrates how serious is the communication breakdown between Elizabeth-Jane and Henchard. Why does Henchard leave it as he does?
3. What characteristics of Henchard are revealed in his will?
4. Self-pitying and guilty, Henchard confronts Elizabeth-Jane for the last time: why does he so resent being called "Mister"?
5. "He walked to another spot; it was not really where the tent stood": what does Hardy indicate about the operation of memory?
6. What elements of Ch. 44 were cut or altered after serialization?

7. How has Henchard changed since the beginning of the story? How does he respond to seeing Weydon- Priors [Weyhill] again?
8. The incident involving the gift of the caged goldfinch points up the seriousness of the communication breakdown between Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane. Although he intended it as wedding gift, why does he forget it? How does its discovery affect Elizabeth-Jane?
9. Why has Henchard sought refuge with Abel Whittle of all people?
10. Study the will carefully: what does it reveal about Henchard?
11. The English nineteenth-century novel usually focuses on the thoughts and feelings of a character that Jane Austen termed “the true wit,” the character who learns from experience--we might use the term “developing character.” In the last chapter, how does Hardy make Elizabeth-Jane the story’s most prominent “true wit”?

Section Three: Close Questions

A Synopsis of Douglas Brown’s Essay on *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (London: E. Arnold, 1962).

Brown suggests that opening of the novel resembles “some grotesque old country legend,” but that it underscores “society in transition” as Hardy’s theme in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. “We are in the (a), the decade of Hardy’s boyhood; shortly we are about to enter (b) (the “Casterbridge” of the novels and short stories), where during those years the future novelist formed his deepest impressions and commitments.” When the mother and daughter thread the crowd in search of the aged (c)-vendor’s tent, the older woman’s lament suggests the poignant incapacity of the tight-knit local societies to withstand the shocks of change. Under modern stresses, such societies simply (d). She herself is to reappear among the human derelicts that these (e) and useful processes of social change have discarded, in Casterbridge’s (f) Lane.

Next, we meet (g) presiding at a civic festival: with the two women staring into the dining room of the (h) ‘s Arms we seem to experience the old vendor’s tent writ large. “From skilled laborer migrant in the country to corn-factor and mayor in the country-town he is still a representative (i). To the two women, his rise from laborer to mayor seems part of a fairy-tale metamorphosis,” which in a way it is since—as in the case of the rags-to-riches (j) —the change is after all but outward and brief. Next, we encounter the wandering Scot as he would appear to foreigners (k) home. “He has the magic knowledge of the Other World—that’s how his new techniques for (l) grain are felt here. He is the Canny Scot of tradition,” celebrated as the knowledgeable and sensitive wayfarer at the (m) Inn later. He is another migrant, heading for the new wheat-growing lands of (n), for the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 allowed the importation of cheaper, overseas grain into the English market.

“In attempting to indicate his repentance, Henchard sends Susan five (o), (or the equivalent in the new money of the day), a gesture that only repeats his initial offense, for he still sees human relationships in terms of cash.”

Part Four: Possible Topics for Composition

1. Look up the term “foil,” then explain at least THREE points of contrast between the characters of Donald Farfrae and Michael Henchard, OR between Elizabeth-Jane and Lucetta Templeman.
2. Show how Hardy employs moral, mental, and emotional conflict in the novel to create suspense. Provide ONE specific example of each type of conflict.
3. Discuss Michael Henchard as either an Aristotelian or modern tragic hero such as Sophocles’ Oedipus, Shakespeare’s King Lear or Hamlet, or Arthur Miller’s Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman or John Proctor in The Crucible. Discuss THREE points of comparison or contrast in terms of tragic theory. Utilize such concepts as *hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *hubris*, *nemesis*, *anagnorisis*, *catharsis*, and social status.
4. References to literature, art, the Bible, and the Classics abound in this novel. Demonstrate by specific reference to THREE such allusions how Hardy employed his wide reading to add depth and universal significance to his story of the rise and fall of a semi-literate hay-trusser.
5. Throughout the novel, but especially in Lucetta’s dilemma as to which of her suitors to marry, the character who stands for Victorian moral proprieties is Elizabeth-Jane Newson. What is ironic about Hardy’s making her judgments socially and morally representative of Victorian society?
6. In a sense, each of Hardy’s major novels is an anthropological document about a rapidly disappearing culture, that of rural, pre-industrial “Wessex.” From characters, events, and settings in the novel, describe what made this society great and why it is failing.
7. To what extent are the novel’s incidents determined by coincidence and by character? Determine which is the more powerful force in the plot.
8. Compare the customers, atmospheres, and functions of the novel’s three inns.
9. Determine whether Michael Henchard is a tragic hero in the Aristotelian sense, possibly by comparing him to such figures as Oedipus, Antigone, Lear, and Coriolanus.
10. How does each of the following elements determine the structure of the novel: A. overheard conversations; B. letters that go astray; C. the past coming back to affect the present; D. misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication.