



The WordSmith Prompts

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Tess of the d'Urbervilles – Thomas Hardy

Chapter Prompts

Phase the First – The Maiden

Chapter One:

‘Humour with serious undertones.’ Find examples to support that account of this opening chapter.

Chapter Two:

What elements in this chapter make it so visually powerful?

Chapter Three:

‘Novels and plays often tell the story of how human beings courageously attempt to survive, escape, or best of all transcend, their environment.’ What in this chapter suggests that survival or escape, at least, may be major aspects of the story about to unfold?

Chapter Four:

‘The sky can still fall on our heads. And [literature] has been created to teach us that first of all’ (Antonin Artaud). How, in this chapter, does Hardy remind us that unexpected disaster can suddenly befall us? How does he also suggest, towards the end of the chapter, one of the ways in which people deal with calamity?

Chapter Five:

How might we see Hardy, towards the end of this chapter, as prophetic?

Chapter Six (from a past IB exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

The action in a play or novel is often initiated or moved forward by things said by one character to another (or a character to himself) – in the form of orders, requests, promises or advice. Explore the use dramatists have made of such verbal devices, in plays or novels you have studied.**

Chapter Seven:

By what methods does Hardy heighten the drama of this episode?

Chapter Eight:

What new insights are we given in to Tess's character here?

Chapter Nine:

How do we get a strong sense in this chapter of the action moving forward?

Chapter Ten: (from a past AP exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

Novels and plays often include scenes of weddings, funerals, parties, and other social occasions. Such scenes may reveal the values of the characters and the society in which they live. Select a novel or play that includes such a scene and, in a focused essay, discuss the contribution the scene makes to the meaning of the work as a whole.*

Chapter Eleven:

Account for Hardy's success in recounting with both great delicacy and realism what is essentially a crude act.

Phase the Second – Maiden No More

Chapter Twelve:

What elements in this chapter, including Tess's own thoughts, work to undermine her?

Chapter Thirteen (from a past exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

'Man has to suffer. When he has no real affliction, he invents some.' Jose Marti, 1853-1895. Write about a novel or play in which a central character makes a major contribution to his own suffering. If the character comes to realise that (s)he is responsible in some way for what has happened to him, show how (s)he handles that realisation.

Chapter Fourteen (from a past IB exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

‘Ritual plays a large part in our everyday life, so we should not be surprised to find it as an integral feature of drama and prose fiction.’ Examine the use dramatists and novelists of ritual – either in its formal, public and grand form or as a personal, everyday and perhaps private activity.**

Chapter Fifteen:

Basing your response on this chapter, discuss the suggestion that the language Hardy uses to record the workings of Tess’s mind is inappropriate in its complexity and subtlety. If you agree with the suggestion, can you offer any defence of Hardy’s choice of style?

Phase the Third - The Rally

Chapter Sixteen:

By what methods does Hardy suggest that Tess’s relocation, as described in this chapter, represents an opening-up in the narrative, and perhaps in her life?

Chapter Seventeen (from a past IB exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

‘Among the most powerful tools at a storyteller’s disposal are suspense and surprise.’ Explain the difference between those two features of novels and plays, illustrating your answer from literature of quality you have studied.

Chapter Eighteen (from a past IB exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

What part does change, and in particular the tension between old and new ways of thinking and behaving, play in novels or plays you have studied? (In your response pay some attention to changes that look backwards, as well as forwards, in time.)

Chapter Nineteen:

How in this chapter does Hardy convey the tentative and uncertain nature of the process by which Tess and Angel come to know one another?

Chapter Twenty:

How in this chapter do the tentativeness and uncertainty of the previous one give way to a sense of inevitability?

Chapter Twenty-One:

Explore the theatricality of the two episodes in the earlier part of this chapter. How is it counterbalanced by the analytical nature of the later part?

Chapter-Twenty-Two (from a past IB exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

‘The course of true love never did run smooth.’ Illustrate that saying from plays or novels you know well, showing how the writer in each case makes use of love’s complexity and unpredictability to create a suspenseful narrative.**

Chapter Twenty-Three (from a past IB exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

How have differences in social class among the characters played a part in at least two plays or novels you know well?**

Chapter Twenty-Four:

How does Hardy create and sustain an air of sensuality in this chapter?

Phase the Fourth - The Consequence**Chapter Twenty-Five:**

How does Hardy make it clear in this chapter that there is no going back for Angel, but that he must go forward?

Chapter Twenty-Six:

‘The artist should be in his work, like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; he should be felt everywhere and seen nowhere’ (Gustave Flaubert). How in this chapter might we see the novelist controlling his narrative? Does that impact on our reading experience?

Chapter Twenty-Seven:

What aspects of this chapter might we find to be contrived, also?

Chapter Twenty-Eight (from a past AP exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

The eighteenth-century British novelist Laurence Sterne wrote, ‘No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man's mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time.’ From a novel or play choose a character or characters whose minds are pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict within characters illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.

Chapter Twenty-Nine:

Does Hardy prolong the suspense of this chapter beyond what is tolerable for the reader?

Chapter Thirty:

What does Hardy want us to feel for Tess at this point in the narrative?

Chapter Thirty-One:

Trace the changing moods of this chapter. Which one predominates?

Chapter Thirty-Two:

How does Hardy in this chapter suggest both an inevitable forward movement in the action and at the same time a haphazardness in its direction?

Chapter Thirty-Three:

Explore the use Hardy makes in this chapter of bizarre occurrences. Is it excessive?

Chapter Thirty-Four:

What details this chapter verge on the macabre? What narrative impact do they have?

Phase the Fifth – The Woman Pays

Chapter Thirty-Five:

Where does the true horror of this episode lie? By what methods does Hardy give it impact, for the reader?

Chapter Thirty-Six:

How do you think Hardy wants us to view Angel's behaviour in this chapter?

Chapter Thirty-Seven:

Does Hardy, in this chapter, provide any cause for hope for Tess and Angel, as a couple?

Chapter Thirty-Eight (from a past AP exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

In some novels and plays certain parallel or recurring events prove to be significant. In an essay, describe the major similarities and differences in a sequence of parallel or recurring events in a novel or play and discuss the significance of such events.

Chapter Thirty-Nine:

How in this chapter does Angel question some of the principles by which he has lived, and even betray one of them?

Chapter Forty:

How convincing is Angel's behaviour in this chapter?

Chapter Forty-One:

How might we see this chapter as a plea on behalf of all the vulnerable creatures of the world?

Chapter Forty-Two:

What elements of pathos can you identify in this chapter? How do they affect us?

Chapter Forty-Three:

How far does Tess appear to be succumbing to circumstances in this chapter?

Chapter Forty-Four:

Do we feel, as readers, that Alec d'Urberville's reappearance may hold out new hope for Tess, or bring her further trouble? (Give reasons for your answer.)

Phase the Sixth – The Convert**Chapter Forty-Five:**

'I cannot believe in your conversion to a new spirit,' Tess tells Alec d'Urberville. How convincing do we find his account of that conversion?

Chapter Forty-Six:

What is the principal irony in this chapter?

Chapter Forty-Seven:

What is the essential unfairness in this chapter?

Chapter Forty-Eight:

What is the narrative impact of Tess's letter? Pay some attention, in your response, to the way it is written.

Chapter Forty-Nine:

How in this chapter do we get the impression of events conspiring against Tess?

Chapter Fifty:

Explain the 'ghastly comicality' of Alec d'Urberville's appearance, as he is seen here.

Chapter Fifty-One:

Tess experiences 'a sudden rebellious sense of injustice' in this chapter. How does Hardy encourage his readers to share in that feeling?

Chapter Fifty-Two:

How do we get, in this chapter, a sense of things converging towards a climax?

Phase the Seventh - Fulfilment**Chapter Fifty-Three:**

How does our prior knowledge of events in Angel's absence affect our response to his thinking and behaviour in this chapter?

Chapter Fifty-Four:

What is the narrative significance and impact of Angel's return to some of the significant places in Tess's earlier life and his own time with her?

Chapter Fifty-Five:

'Tess was gone.' Explore the full meaning of that statement, within the context of recent events.

Chapter Fifty-Six (from a past AP exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

In great literature, no scene of violence exists for its own sake. Choose a work of literary merit that confronts the reader or audience with a scene or scenes of violence. In a well-organized essay, explain how the scene or scenes contribute to the meaning of the complete work.

Chapter Fifty-Seven:

How does Hardy create, in this chapter, a sense of time being suspended – but only temporarily?

Chapter Fifty-Eight:

Why do you think Hardy has chosen Stonehenge as a setting for this episode?

Chapter Fifty-Nine (from a past A Level exam; answer in relation to this chapter):

‘Life goes on, but literary texts must end.’

In light of this view, consider ways in which writers end their narratives, paying some attention to ways in which they convey the idea that ‘Life goes on’.

General Essay Prompts

Questions are ordered according to the SCASI structure (Setting, Character, Action, Style and Ideas), with some overlap among the various areas.

*Prompts modelled on past AP exam questions

**Prompts modelled on past IB exam questions

***Prompts modelled on past GCE A Level exam questions

Setting

1. How successfully, and by what means, does Hardy transport the reader to rural Wessex?
2. ‘History gives us the facts, sort of, but from literary works we can learn what the past smelled like, sounded like, and felt like, the forgotten gritty details of a lost era. Literature brings us as close as we can come to reinhabiting the past’ (Scott Herring).

How does Hardy, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, help us to ‘reinhabit the past’?

3. How far would you defend Hardy against the charge that he makes too great an effort, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, to introduce what might be called ‘local colour’ into his storytelling?
4. ‘Nothing can happen nowhere. The locale of the happening always colours the happening, and often, to a degree, shapes it’ (Elizabeth Bowen).

Discuss the setting of a novel, play or epic poem. Show how the setting helps us to understand what happens in the story, and identify ways in which what happens is affected by where it happens.

5. Many writers use a country setting to establish values within a work of literature. For example, the country may be a place of virtue and peace or one of primitivism and ignorance. Choose a novel or play in which such a setting plays a significant role. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the country setting functions in the work as a whole.*

6. ‘This story could not have happened anywhere else.’

Discuss the validity of this comment.

7. In Chapter Four Tess tells her young brother Abraham that she believes they live on a ‘blighted’ world. What in Hardy’s representation of the world, in the novel as a whole, would support that view?

8. ‘It is one of the tasks of modern literature to confront those aspects of society which make people unhappy.’

How far do the novels and plays you have studied (modern or not) fulfil this obligation?

9. ‘The more I see of the world, the more I am dissatisfied with it,’ says Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*.

In what respects does Hardy, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, appear to be dissatisfied with the world?

10. ‘Literature is the denunciation of the times in which one lives’ (Camil Jose Cela).

Does *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* support that suggestion?

11. How far have novelists you have studied developed a sense of community in their novels? Why have they thought it important to do that?**

12. ‘The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think’ (Edwin Schlossberg).

How successfully, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, has Hardy created such a context?

13. What part do economic factors play in novels or plays you have studied?

14. Discuss the importance of the novel’s physical setting, regarding both its impact on events and its symbolic significance.

15. ‘No human being ever spoke of scenery for above two minutes at a time, which makes me suspect that we hear too much of it in literature’ (Robert Louis Stevenson).

Is Hardy, in telling the story of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, open to the charge that he has paid too much attention to the scenery?

16. Explore ways in which writers whose work you have studied make use of natural elements (water, weather, fire, darkness, geographical features) in their stories.**

17. ‘And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency’ (Pauline Hopkins).

Choose a novel or play in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole.*

18. Show how in one or more works of literature you have studied a character's isolation (physical, social, psychological) within the work's setting plays an important part in the story. How does that isolation lead to either self-knowledge or self-destruction – or both?*
19. 'Although in poems, plays and novels we meet individual characters in a range of historical, social and cultural settings, their shared humanity allows us to engage with them, despite those differences in setting.'

Explore the settings of literary texts you have studied, showing how the 'shared humanity' of their characters allows the writing to transcend the limitations of time and place.***

Character

20. In what ways might we describe Tess as the 'heroine' of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?
21. 'Traditionally, the hero(ine) somehow represents the community and carries with him/her its hopes and fears.'
- How far would you regard this to be true of Tess?**
22. 'Almost at a leap Tess changed from simple girl to complex woman' (Chapter Fifteen).

'Men's lives are not progressions...nor are they a series of facts that may be enumerated & in their proper order understood. Rather they are a series of transformations, some immediate & shocking, some so slow as to be imperceptible' (Richard Flanagan).

In light of those two comments, explore the changes that take place in Tess during the course of the novel.

23. Examine Tess's attempts, as the story develops, to understand both herself and what is happening around her. Has she made any progress in either of those attempts by the end of the novel?

24. In Chapter Thirty-Two Angel describes Tess as 'the most uncalculating girl in the world.'

How might we reconcile that comment with Tess's ceaseless struggle to understand what is happening to her?

25. 'Women are the subtler sex – more varied in their attractions, more ingenious in their stratagems.'

In light of this view, consider ways in which writers present women.***

26. A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist of a bildungsroman. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.*

27. ‘In our world of ordinary men and women – living ordinary lives, frittering away their time on petty activities – it raises our spirits to read of individuals of intensity. They awaken our sense of the potential of humans.’

To what extent does one or more of the major characters in a novel or play you have studied ‘awaken our sense of human potential’? Does the experience raise our spirits?

28. Literature often depicts individuals who are, or who see themselves as, different from the people around them. Write an essay in which you explore some of the struggles that arise from such differences (real or imagined) in a novel or play you have studied.

29. ‘The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way’ (E. M. Forster).

By this standard, is Tess a round character?

30. A character's attempt to recapture the past is important in many plays, novels, and poems. Choose a literary work in which a character views the past with such feelings as reverence, bitterness, or longing. Show with clear evidence from the work how the character's view of the past is used to develop a theme in the work.*

31. ‘Nothing in his life
 Became him like the leaving it’ (Macbeth).

Discuss how true this is of the central figure in a tragic novel or play you have studied.**

32. ‘Writers are at their best when they focus on the imperfections in human nature.’

Show how some particularly powerful writing derives its impact from such a focus.***

33. ‘One of the most irritating and unworthy characters in literature.’

Discuss that judgement on Angel Clare.

34. Morally ambiguous characters – characters whose behaviour discourages the reader from identifying them as wholly evil or wholly good – are at the heart of many works of literature. Choose a novel or play in which a morally ambiguous character plays a pivotal role. Then write an essay in which you explain how the character can be viewed as morally ambiguous and why his or her moral ambiguity is significant to the work as a whole.*

35. Plays and novels often include characters who are unwholesome, or morally wanting. How do writers work to present such characters as being worthy of our attention and even of our sympathy?**

36. ‘An honest man can feel no pleasure in the exercise of power over his fellow citizens’ (Thomas Jefferson).

Explore the means by which, in a novel or play of your choice, one character attempts to exercise control over other people. How successful is he (or she)? How does the writer want us to feel about the character’s success – or failure?

37. In Chapter Fifty-Five Tess sees Alec d’Urberville’s apparent change of character as ‘less a reform than a transfiguration’.

Explore the accuracy and the implications of her perception.

38. ‘The principal characters of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* are differentiated not just by their personalities but by what they represent.’

Discuss that comment.

39. ‘The glory of the protagonist is always paid for by a lot of secondary characters’ (Tony Hoagland).

Relate that comment to *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*.

40. Examine the contribution made to *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* by its secondary characters (i.e. those other than Tess, Angel and Alec d’Urberville).

41. We have come to expect, of ‘good’ literature, that the characters in it should be unique. Some fine authors, however, have made very effective use of stereotypical characters in their work. Write about one piece of literature in which either the uniqueness of the characters or the fact that they are ‘typical’ is important to the success of the whole work.

42. ‘For the reader the most engaging relationships to be found in works of literature are those that involve feelings that are not, or may not be, returned.’

Discuss one or more works of literature in which such relationships play a major part, explaining why readers are likely to find that aspect of the works engaging.***

43. ‘In literature, as in love, we are astonished at the choices made by other people’ (Andre Maurois).

Are we at all astonished by the choices made in the course of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*? What do those choices add to the overall impact, or significance, of the story?

44. Explore the methods by which novelists have allowed us to see into the minds of their characters, and suggest, with examples, which methods have been most successful.**

45. ‘The artist should be in his work, like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; he should be felt everywhere and seen nowhere’ (Gustave Flaubert).

In light of that comment, assess the level of Hardy’s visibility in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, and consider what impact it has on the reading experience.

Action

46. A character’s attempt to achieve something he or she sees as important is central to many plays, novels, and poems. Choose a literary work or works in which a character undertakes such an attempt. Show with clear evidence from each of your choices how the character’s efforts are used to develop a theme in the work.*

47. Many novels record a process of discovery – of things from the past, of the detail of ongoing events, of possibilities for the future, of self, of others’ true natures, of truths about life and so on. Discuss the episodes in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* in which discovery plays a part, showing how they contribute to our understanding of the novel’s meaning and significance.***

48. ‘A searching after truth is one of the most fundamental aspects of story.’

How far is that true of one or more novels or plays you know well?***

49. A character’s need to undo past misdeeds (not necessarily his or her own) is an important driving force in some plays, novels, and poems. Choose a literary work in which a character attempts to put right something that has happened previously. Show with clear evidence from the work how the character’s attempts are used to develop a theme in the work.*

50. In many works of literature, past events can affect, positively or negatively, the present actions, attitudes, or values of a character. Choose a novel or play in which a character must contend with some aspect of the past, either personal or societal. Then write an essay in which you show how the character’s relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.*

51. In many works of literature a physical journey – the literal movement from one place to another – plays a central role. Choose a novel, play or epic poem in which a physical journey is an important element and discuss how the journey adds to the meaning of the work as a whole.*

52. What insights have you had into the way writers whose work you have studied choose the events to include in the stories they wish to tell, and also into how they decide how to arrange those events?**

53. A novelist has said of his work, ‘It is easy to begin and end a story, but figuring out how to hold up the middle is tough.’

How has a novelist you have studied ‘held up the middle’ in one or more of his or her novels?**

54. ‘Changes of pace in a novel or play – for instance, between episode and analysis – establish a rhythm that carries the reader (or audience) forward but at the same time can allow respite from the intensity of the action.’

Illustrate the truth of that statement from a play or novel you have studied.

55. Many narratives have one or more significant moments of crisis. Write about the significance of crises in the work of writers you have studied.***

56. Some of the incidents in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* have been described by critics as grotesque, bizarre or macabre (and Hardy uses two of those terms himself, in his narrative). Explore the nature and effect of some episodes in the novel to which one or more of those terms could be applied. Suggest which of them, if any, may have a negative impact on the reading experience.

57. Choose an implausible or strikingly unrealistic incident or character in a work of fiction or drama of recognized literary merit. Write an essay that explains how the incident or character is related to the more realistic or plausible elements in the rest of the work.*

58. In questioning the value of literary realism, Flannery O'Connor has written, ‘I am interested in making a good case for distortion because I am coming to believe that it is the only way to make people see.’

Write an essay in which you ‘make a good case for distortion,’ as distinct from literary realism. Base your essay on a work of recognized literary merit. Analyze how important elements of the work you choose are ‘distorted’ and explain how these distortions contribute to the effectiveness of the work.

59. ‘At every stage in the progress of his tale the novelist must rely on what may be called the *illuminating incident* to reveal and emphasize the inner meaning of each situation. Illuminating incidents are the magic casements of fiction, its vistas on infinity’ (Edith Wharton).

Select an ‘illuminating incident’ from a novel or play of literary merit and explain how it throws light both on the situation in which it occurs and on the meaning of the whole piece of work.*

60. Choose a single episode from a novel that you think would work well on stage, as part of a play, or as a scene in a film. Explain why you have selected that particular episode, and say what would make it an effective piece of theatre or cinema.

61. Show how in novels, short stories or plays you have studied writers use uncertainty as a means of introducing tension into their writing.**

62. How do separation and/or reunion provide heightened levels of intensity in works of literature you have studied? What do the examples you have used suggest about human nature and human needs?**

Explore marriage as an important element in prose fiction you have studied. Pay some attention in your response to the status of being ‘not married’, and to the pressures characters feel to marry.**

63. ‘One mark of a skilled novelist is the way in which he or she controls the flow of information given to the reader.’

Discuss Hardy’s control of this flow in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, paying particular attention to Hardy’s focus on what is happening in different locations.

64. The novelist E. M. Forster wrote that the basic quality of a good story is ‘that of making the audience want to know what happens next.’

How does Hardy work to make us want to know ‘what happens next’ in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*?

65. ‘The course of true love never did run smooth.’

Illustrate that saying from plays or novels you know well, showing how the writer in each case makes use of love’s complexity and unpredictability to create a suspenseful narrative.**

66. The breaking of ‘taboos’, or indulgence in forbidden behaviour, can be a source of tension and conflict in plays and novels. Show how this is the case in one or two pieces of writing you know well.**

67. Works of literature often depict acts of betrayal. Friends and even family may betray a protagonist; main characters may likewise be guilty of treachery or may betray their own values. Select a novel or play that includes such acts of betrayal. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the nature of the betrayal and show how it contributes to the meaning of the work as whole.*

68. ‘Betrayal,’ one novelist has written, ‘means breaking ranks and going off into the unknown.’

According to this definition, Angel has committed a massive act of betrayal. What is the nature of that betrayal, and what price do he and Tess have to pay for it?**

69. Explore the part played in the events of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* by letter and notes. Do they assist the narration in a plausible way?

70. ‘What is the best way of telling a story?’ (George Eliot, *Leaves from a Notebook*).

From your reading of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, what decisions do you think Hardy has taken about ‘the best way of telling a story’?

71. ‘Narrative point of view’ = who tells the story; ‘narrative voice’ = how they speak to the reader.

With reference or one or two pieces of fiction you have studied, explore the decisions taken by novelists about one or both of those aspects of their writing, and the effect of those decisions on the reader’s experience.**

72. ‘In the story, things fall apart; in the novel, things come together.’

Discuss this statement.

73. Explore the nature, impact and significance of climaxes and /or anticlimaxes in the narratives of writers you have studied.***

74. ‘In the end is my beginning.’

This has been said by an author to explain how he organises his writing. Examine one or more novels or plays to see whether their structure reflects a similar mode of planning.**

75. ‘Story involves action. Action towards an end not to be foreseen (by the reader) but also towards an end which, having *been* reached, must be seen to have been from the start inevitable’ (Elizabeth Bowen).

How true is this of the action of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?

76. Discuss the ways in which writers you have studied prepare their readers or audiences for the conclusion of the stories they are telling.**

77. It has been argued that the ending of a novel or play should offer ‘Not rounding off, but opening out’.

Discuss that idea in relation to one or more pieces of writing you have studied.**

78. ‘Nearly all novels are feeble at the end.’

How far can you defend novels you have studied against this criticism?**

79. The British novelist Fay Weldon offers this observation about happy endings: ‘The writers, I do believe, who get the best and most lasting response from readers are the writers who offer a happy ending through moral development. By a happy ending, I do not mean mere fortunate events - a marriage or a last-minute rescue from death - but some kind of spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation, even with the self, even at death.’

Choose a novel or play that has the kind of ending Weldon describes. In a well-written essay, identify the ‘spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation’ evident in the ending and explain its significance in the work as a whole.*

Style

80. Tess ‘spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality’ (Chapter Three).

What evidence is there in the novel as a whole of Hardy working to have his characters use language appropriate to the context in which they speak and to their own position within that context? How successful has he been?

81. ‘In literature the ambition of the novice is to acquire the literary language: the struggle of the adept is to get rid of it’ (George Bernard Shaw).

How ‘literary’ is the language of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*? Does that add to or detract from its success as a piece of fiction?

82. ‘The strength of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and also its weakness, lie in its style. Hardy explores with great sensitivity and intelligence the complexities and significance of what is happening in the minds of his characters, but to a degree which goes far beyond what is appropriate to their capacity for either thought or expression. In short, he over-analyses, using language which is ill-matched to the abilities of the people he is writing about.’

How valid that comment?

83. What varieties of style do you detect in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* – within the dialogue, the descriptive passages and the narrative?

84. Select a passage from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (a longish paragraph or two) whose style you see as typical of the whole novel, and analyse its stylistic features.

85. Explore Hardy’s creation in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* of powerful visual and sound effects.

86. ‘We create words, words create wonders’ (Chandan Sharma).

Show how in a variety of literary works you have studied writers use words to ‘create wonders’.

87. ‘Language is the key to the heart of people’ (Ahmed Deedat).

Show how writers whose work you know well use language to reveal ‘the heart of people’.

88. ‘Language exists less to record the actual than to liberate the imagination’ (Anthony Burgess).

In the light of that quotation, discuss the writers’ use of language in one or more literary works of quality.

89. ‘Some writers of fiction paint with a very broad brush and carefully avoid cluttering their writing with minutiae; others make full use of significant detail to add texture and deeper meaning to the stories they tell.’

Discuss the use of significant detail in novels or short stories you have studied.**

90. Write about the significance and effect of descriptive language as it is used by writers you have studied.***

91. Explore the many references to country life and nature in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and show how they add to our perception of what is happening in the story.

92. Symbols and images often play a significant part in short stories. Explore the use of such devices in short stories you have read.**

93. ‘I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again’ (Oscar Wilde).

What evidence is there, in fiction you have studied, of authors taking a great deal of care in polishing their work?

94. ‘Vigorous writing is concise’ (William Strunk).

Hardy’s style is not concise; does that mean it is not vigorous?

95. ‘Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree’ (Ezra Pound).

By that definition, would you regard *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as great literature?

96. ‘It is the process of argument and persuasion that most strongly engages us.’

In light of this view, consider ways in which writers use argument and persuasion.***

97. ‘Words can entice, compel us and can ensnare us.’

In light of this comment, consider ways in which writers present persuasive or seductive uses of language.***

98. Write about the ways writers you have studied use dialogue in their work.***

99. ‘DIALOGUE Must (1) Further Plot; (2) Express Character’ (Elizabeth Bowen).

Does the dialogue in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* pass that test - or challenge its premise?

100. ‘The tone of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is consistently sombre, which matches the grimness of the tale told but becomes wearisome at times. A few lighter moments would have given the novel some sparkle!’

How far do you agree with that statement?

101. ‘The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean; not to affect your reader, but to affect him precisely as you wish’ (Robert Louis Stevenson).

Discuss a novel you have studied (or a play or a collection of poetry), explaining how the way it is written has affected you.

Ideas

102. ‘The serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing’ (Chapter Twelve).

How far do the events of the novel as a whole bear out that adage?

103. ‘By experience...we find out a short way by a long wandering’ (Chapter Fifteen).

How well does that saying match the experience of one or more of the characters in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?

104. In Chapter Eighteen Angel quotes the Bible’s reference to ‘the removing of those things that are shaken...that those things that cannot be shaken may remain.’

What ‘things’, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, are shaken and removed? What if anything, after that has happened, remain?

105. ‘A classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say’ (Italo Calvino).

Using that standard, discuss one or more pieces of literature that you regard as classics, or likely to become so, giving reasons for your judgement.

106. Explore the part played by family in novels or plays you have studied.

107. ‘Love is a kind of madness.’

In light of this view, consider ways in which writers portray love and its effects.***

108. ‘Although all relationships strive for happiness, few achieve it. The presentation of such failures produces some of the most memorable writing in poems and novels.’

Show how in literary works you have studied the failure of relationships forms the basis of memorable writing.***

109. Examine the ways in which novelists whose work you have studied present stories of failure or suffering. What do you gather about the effect they are trying to produce in their readers?**

110. Explore the range of attitudes to social class we encounter in the novel. How do they help us to understand the causes, nature and outcomes of prejudice?

111. The relationship between men and women, and the differences in their roles in society, are central considerations in many works of literature. Discuss the part they play in one or more novels or plays you have studied.**

112. ‘Who was the moral man? Still more pertinently, who was the moral woman?’ (Angel, in Chapter Forty-Nine).

By the end of the novel, has Hardy begun to answer either of those questions?

113. ‘Literature illustrates the heights to which humans can aspire and the depths to which they can sink.’

Examine this spread of human behaviour in a piece of literature you have studied, and show how far the author makes any kind of moral judgement of his or her characters.

114. ‘Writers, readers and audiences delight in the spectacle of sinfulness.’

In light of this view, consider ways in which writers present sinfulness.***

115. Many works of literature deal with political or social issues. Choose a novel or play that focuses on a political or social issue. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the author uses literary elements to explore this issue and explain how the issue contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.*

116. ‘A great literature is chiefly the product of inquiring minds in revolt against the immovable certainties of the nation’ (Henry Louis Mencken).

What light does that quotation throw on Hardy’s purpose in writing *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*?

117. Some novels and plays seem to advocate change in social or political attitudes or in traditions. Choose such a novel or play and note briefly the particular attitudes or traditions that the author apparently wishes to modify. Then analyze the techniques the author uses to influence the reader’s or audience’s views.*

118. ‘The novel’s satire helps explain the novel’s tragedy.’

Discuss this comment on *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*.

119. Roland Barthes has said, ‘Literature is the question minus the answer.’

Choose a novel or play and, considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers any answers. Examine how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole.*

120. ‘The true test of piece of writing is whether or not, when the context within which it was written has disappeared, it continues to tell us things of importance.’

Judge *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* against this criterion.

121. ‘Lessons of wisdom have never such power over us as when they are wrought into the heart through the groundwork of a story’ (Laurence Sterne).

What if any ‘lessons of wisdom’ has *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* worked into his novel?

122. ‘The answers you get from literature depend on the questions you pose’ (Margaret Atwood).

What questions might we pose of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*? What answers might we receive?

123. How important is it for us to feel, at the end of a novel or play, that justice has been done? What sort of justice, if any, has been done by the end of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*?

124. How have one or more works you have studied relied on chance, coincidence or ‘fate’ as significant forces in their narratives?**

General

125. ‘What single thing makes *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* so special? Its outrage at the injustices of the world.’

Discuss that comment offering, if you wish, a different answer to the question.

126. ‘Each of us has the duty to seek that place in life from which he can best serve his generation’ (Alexander von Humboldt).

How does a writer you have studied attempt to ‘serve his generation’?

127. ‘The trouble with writing fiction is that it has to make sense, whereas real life doesn’t’ (Iain Banks).

How far and in what ways do literary texts you have studied ‘make sense’?

128. What, in the opening pages of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, will make the reader want to continue into the novel? What might make us decide not to read on? What would we lose if we did not do that?

129. ‘Literature is the art of writing something that will be read twice’ (Cyril Connolly).

For what reasons might we read *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* twice? (Do not include ‘to prepare for an exam’ as a reason.)

130. ‘Beneath beautiful appearances I search out ugly depths, and beneath ignoble surfaces I probe for the hidden mines of devotion and virtue. It’s a relatively benign mania, which enables you to see something new in a place where you would not have expected to find it’ (Gustave Flaubert).

How has fiction you know well helped you to ‘see something new’ in a place where you would not have expected to find it?

131. ‘The first sentence of every novel should be: “Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human.”’ (Michael Ondaatje).

What ‘order’ can you find in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*? Why is it ‘faint’? In what ways is it ‘human’?

132. ‘Literature is the art of discovering something extraordinary about ordinary people, and saying with ordinary words something extraordinary’ (Boris Pasternak).

Show how in one or more works of literature you have studied the writers have done one or other, or both, of those things.

133. ‘Fiction, with its preference for what is small and might elsewhere seem irrelevant; its facility for smuggling us into another skin and allowing us to live a new life there; its respect for contingency, and the unlikely and odd; its willingness to expose itself to moments of low, almost animal being and make them nobly illuminating, can deliver truths we might not otherwise stumble on’ (David Malouf).

What ‘truths we might not otherwise stumble upon’ does fiction you have studied deliver through the characteristics David Malouf lists above?

134. ‘Genuine bravery for a writer.... It is about calmly speaking the truth when everyone else is silenced, when the truth cannot be expressed. It is about speaking out with a different voice, risking the wrath of the state and offending everyone, for the sake of the truth, and the writer’s conscience’ (Murong Xuecun).

How does this comment help us understand the nature and purpose of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?

135. In every piece of writing some lines or episodes are especially significant and memorable. Show how some of these moments stand out in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and help the reader focus on an essential aspect of the novel.**

136. ‘If a reading of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* does not make us feel uncomfortable, not as members of one group or another, but as human beings, then the novel has not failed – but we have.’

Discuss that comment.

137. A critic has said that one important measure of a superior work of literature is its ability to produce in the reader a healthy confusion of pleasure and disquietude. Select a literary work that produces this ‘healthy confusion’. Write an essay in which you explain the sources of the ‘pleasure and disquietude’ experienced by the readers of the work.*

138. ‘What is wonderful about great literature is that it transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote’ (E. M. Forster).

Can we see that process working in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?

139. ‘The test of literature is, I suppose, whether we ourselves live more intensely for the reading of it’ (Elizabeth Drew).

Are we likely to ‘live more intensely’ for having read *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*? Whether your answer is yes or no, try to explain why.

140. ‘The liveliness of literature lies in its exceptionality, in being the individual, idiosyncratic vision of one human being, in which, to our delight and great surprise, we may find our own vision reflected’ (Salman Rushdie).

How is an ‘individual, idiosyncratic vision’ expressed in one or more works of literature you have studied? How attractive does the author in each case make the ‘vision’?

141. ‘Ultimately, literature is nothing but carpentry. With both you are working with reality, a material just as hard as wood’ (Gabriel Garcia Marquez).

What sense do we have, as we read *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, that Hardy is working with reality to produce something both shapely and functional?

142. By what variety of methods do writers you have studied establish mood and atmosphere in their writing?**

143. ‘Literature is analysis after the event’ (Doris Lessing).

How well does that phrase describe the structure and essential nature of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?

144. ‘The important thing in writing is the capacity to astonish. Not shock - shock is a worn-out word - but astonish’ (Terry Southern).

In what ways may *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* astonish us?

145. ‘The most important thing in a work of art is that it should have a kind of focus’ (Leo Tolstoy).

What would you regard as the ‘focus’ of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?

146. ‘A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling’ (Thomas Hardy).

Does *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* meet this criterion? If not, does it qualify in other ways as a story needing to be told?

147. ‘We do not live an equal life, but one of contrasts and patchwork; now a little joy, then a sorrow, now a sin, then a generous or brave action’ (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

How is that account by Emerson of the nature of life reflected in the structure and the action of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?

148. ‘All literature, however dark, has some light.’

Discuss that suggestion, illustrating your argument by reference to one or more works of literary merit.**

149. ‘It was a thousand pities indeed’ (Hardy’s comment on Tess’s situation, in Chapter Fourteen).

Elizabeth Bowen wrote of ‘The primary quality of the novelist – an all-embracing, Christ-like compassion’.

How far does a feeling of compassion permeate *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*?