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Thomas Hardy's **FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD**

Elizabeth R. Nelson

托马斯·哈代的

远离尘嚣



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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND: Although Thomas Hardy was born into Victorian England, and is always considered a Victorian novelist, he shares a common interest with some twentieth century novelists. Like D. H. Lawrence, Ford Madox Ford and E. M. Forster, he is fascinated by England's past and her rural areas. The name "Wessex," as he himself explains, was taken from an old English history; he gave it to a district that was once part of an Anglo-Saxon kingdom.

He was born in this district, in Higher Brockhampton, near Dorchester (Casterbridge, in his novels), on June 2, 1840. Since he was a sickly child, he received his early education at home from his mother, who inspired his love of the classics. His father, a builder and contractor, gave him an early interest in architecture.

When he was about eight years old, he started school in Dorchester. His walk to school took him along country lanes, and he became familiar with rustic scenes. He continued school there until he was about sixteen, when he was apprenticed in the office of John Hicks, a Dorchester architect. He devoted much of his spare time during the years he worked here to his studies of the classics. In 1862, he went to London to work under a London architect, Arthur Blomfield. He continued his studies of the classics in London, both privately and by attending lectures at King's College. In 1867, he returned to Dorchester to work with Hicks in restoring churches.

LITERARY CAREER: While he lived in London, Hardy became interested in literature as a possible career. He wrote several poems and some essays, as well as a novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*

(1868). The novel was rejected by publishers and destroyed. George Meredith, already established as a novelist, advised Hardy not to write social satire, but to try to write a novel with a highly complicated plot. The acceptance of *Desperate Remedies* (1871), which was published anonymously, launched Hardy's career as a novelist. Another novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1872), was also published anonymously, but Hardy did not achieve literary success until the publication of *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874). That same year he married Emma Gifford, whom he had met while restoring a church in Cornwall. He and his wife eventually settled at Max Gate, Dorchester, where Hardy spent the remainder of his long life.

LATER LIFE: At Dorchester, he wrote his major novels, including: *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). The novels were usually serialized in magazines before their first publication. The "controversial" subject matter of his books upset Victorian readers, and Hardy reacted by abandoning the novel form. He devoted his later years to writing short stories and poems (particularly, *Dynasts: A Drama of the Napoleonic Wars*, which was published in three parts, in 1904, 1906 and 1908).

In 1912, his first wife died, ending a rather difficult marriage. He married Florence Dugdale in 1914; she survived him and wrote one of the most important Hardy biographies. He died on January 11, 1928, and his ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey.

INTEREST IN NATURE: In most of the Wessex novels, nature is pictured as a hard, unrelenting force. Eustacia and Wildeve (in *The Return of the Native*) are not sympathetic to nature, and are eventually destroyed by drowning. Some of this harshness can also be found

in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, in scenes such as the one in which the storm threatens Bathsheba's wheat and barley, and in the death of Gabriel Oak's lambs.

The major impact of nature in this novel, however, is of a happier tone. The descriptions include views of nature at its prime: warm spring and summer days spent in sheep washing and shearing, and cold winter nights when the stars are at their brightest. The descriptions are not included only for their beauty; they are integral since they set the atmosphere, and should not be skipped over, as if they were in the way of the plot development.

Hardy's perception of the world of nature is very accurate; small details, like the buttercups which stain Boldwood's boots as he walks through a field on a spring day, show us how wide-awake Hardy's senses were to external impressions of nature.

Moreover, the novel contains Hardy's most complete picture of farm life. To be sure, this life is not always easy, but it provides for happy times at the malthouse, and feasts after sheep shearing. Rural England is at its best here, and some of the atmosphere of older pastorals can be found in Gabriel's characterization, occupation and closeness to nature. When he plays his flute, the world of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* is not far off.

WESSEX: With the selection of Wessex as the setting for his novels, Hardy assured his success as a novelist. The area, familiar to him from his childhood, can be located on a modern map. The Anglo-Saxon kingdom includes those southern counties from Surrey in the east, to the Bristol Channel and the Devonshire-Cornwall border on the west. It is rich in legend in the history of England, including its

Celtic, Roman, Saxon and medieval past. (Stonehenge, with its mysterious stone ruins and the gigantic earthworks of Maiden's Castle, near Dorchester, lie within its boundaries.) Hardy's Wessex is generally confined to the area of Dorsetshire.

It was more than just a physical location for him, however; he prized the economic and social order it had represented, as well as the manners and customs that formed a part of that order. He mourned the passing of these native customs and the changing character of the villages during England's rapid industrialization. He found a way to preserve the old order by capturing it in his novels.

Although the dialect he created for his rustic characters was more often "literary" than accurate, it does convey the simplicity, common sense and humor associated with the natives of this region. The value that these rustic characters placed on the past is sensed in the frequent anecdotes (such as those indulged in by the ancient malster in *Far From the Madding Crowd*). Hardy's retreat to the privacy of Max Gate is almost symbolic of his choice of the past greatness of rural England as the focal point of his work.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD: The title was taken from the familiar, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," by Thomas Gray, the eighteenth-century poet. The poem describes the burial of the country people who lived "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." The title serves as an apt, though sometimes ironic, commentary on the novel.

The novel was a result of a request by Leslie Stephens, editor of the *Cornhill* magazine, for a serial. It appeared anonymously in *Cornhill* in 1874. It was first attributed to George Eliot, much to Hardy's an-

noyance. It can almost be termed "a novel of setting," since the rural life it describes forms the essence of the novel.

The plot is almost perfectly symmetrical, centering around Gabriel Oak. He is a prosperous farmer at the beginning, he suffers financial reverses, and he emerges as an even more prosperous farmer at the end. He meets Bathsheba Everdene and falls in love with her, patiently supports her through her romantic adventures, and finally wins her. There is very little wasted material in the story; incidents that seem to have little importance earlier in the book loom significantly later on. For instance, as Fanny leaves Frank Troy in his barracks, laughter is heard "hardly distinguishable from the gurgle of the tiny whirlpools outside." The gurgle of these whirlpools is recalled by the deluging rain that carries off the flowers on Fanny's grave.

Although Hardy never ignored the public's reactions to his serialized novels and won his success in popular magazines, he remained a craftsman who never lost sight of his own ideal of the novel.

OUTSTANDING FEATURES: In Hardy's novels the characters that succeed, and are generally the happiest, are the ones that remain in harmony with their surroundings. The best example in this novel is, of course, Gabriel Oak. The most interesting characterization, however, is the almost collective use of the rustics. They manage to retain their individuality, but they seem to have a communal personality. They view the action of their social "betters" and comment on it, in a Greek-chorus-like effect. In addition, they help the action to progress. A good example of this occurs when Joseph Poorgress is sent to bring Fanny's body back to Weatherbury. He lingers at the Buck's Head Inn so long that the body is brought to the churchyard

too late for burial. Her body is then taken to Bathsheba at Weatherbury Farm for the night, and Bathsheba has time to open the coffin and discover Fanny's child.

The comedy associated with the rustics is almost Shakespearian. Hardy sympathizes with even the silliest characters (such as Poorgrass), and never laughs at them. Even Poorgrass can join in the merriment, as the tales of his timidity are presented. High spirits are again in evidence when Coggan coaxes Poorgrass to sing his "ballet" at the shearing feast.

Less important than Hardy's skill in depicting his rustic characters, but a distinct feature of his writing style, is his wide use of allusion. The unusual number of references, both classical and Biblical, is astonishing. The most effective allusions are the Biblical ones, since they seem to echo the rugged strength of the pastoral setting. The choice of Bathsheba's name is an obvious device, but the use of Adam's first view of Eve as a comparison for Boldwood's awakening to Bathsheba's charms adds more substance to the episode. The comparison of Bathsheba to a nymph, or to Venus, is less subtle, and references to Thor, Jove, Cyclops, etc., are often weak and ineffective, as well as incongruous.

Literary allusions are also included, such as Gabriel's bird's-eye view of Bathsheba as Milton's Satan first saw Paradise, (from *Paradise Lost*), and the quotation from *Macbeth* to describe Gabriel's lack of skill in describing his feelings for Bathsheba.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD :

BRIEF SUMMARY

Gabriel Oak, a prosperous young farmer, meets a beautiful, though vain young lady (Bathsheba Everdene), whom he decides to marry. She refuses his proposal, however, since she does not love him, and is not yet ready to marry. He promises to love her always, but vows never to ask her to marry him again. Shortly after, her uncle dies, and she inherits his farm at Weatherbury. She leaves Norcombe, and Gabriel, already disappointed in love and unaware of Bathsheba's new position in life, suffers a grave financial loss when his sheep fall into a chalk pit. He is forced to sell everything he owns to pay his debts.

Since he is unsuccessful in finding a place as bailiff or as shepherd, Gabriel makes his way toward Weatherbury. He helps to put out a fire in a hayrick and hopes to get a place as shepherd on this farm. He is surprised to find that Bathsheba owns the farm. She hires him as shepherd and he goes to the local malthouse to inquire about lodgings. At the malthouse he is welcomed by the villagers; as the group begins to leave, news is brought of the dismissal of Bathsheba's bailiff for stealing, and of the sudden disappearance of Fanny Robin, the youngest of the maidservants at Weatherbury Farm.

Bathsheba decides to manage the farm herself and goes to Casterbridge to the grain market. She is annoyed when she is ignored by one of the farmers, Mr. Boldwood. He has led a solitary existence on the next farm, and he has a reputation for being a confirmed bachelor. On a wild impulse, she sends him an anonymous valentine,

inscribed "Marry me." From Gabriel, Boldwood learns that the handwriting is Bathsheba's, and his interest in her is aroused. He falls in love with her, and one day, as she and her laborers are involved in washing her sheep, he approaches and asks her to marry him.

She refuses this offer, and when he begs her again and again to accept, she asks for more time. She seeks out Gabriel as he is grinding shears and asks his opinion. Gabriel is still deeply in love with her, but answers her honestly; he strongly disapproves of her conduct. She is angered by his reply and tells him to leave the farm. Gabriel agrees to leave immediately. The very next day her sheep are injured, and she is forced to send for Gabriel. He ignores her first request and then comes to save the sheep, when she pleads with him not to desert her.

Meanwhile, Fanny Robin is reported to have run away with Francis Troy, an army sergeant. She follows him to his new post and anxiously inquires about their marriage. He seems hesitant about his plans, but promises to meet her as soon as he can.

At Weatherbury Farm the rustics gather to help shear the sheep. After the shearing, a gay feast takes place, and Boldwood appears to act as host. He again asks Bathsheba to marry him and she is sorry for her foolish valentine when she reveals about it five or six weeks after sending it.

That night, however, she accidentally meets Troy and is charmed by his manner and his good looks. She meets him again during the hay gathering and is secretly pleased by his compliments. She is further impressed by his daring swordplay; she refuses to see how unstable a

character he is, and that he has little beyond his charm to offer. Gabriel tries to warn her about Troy; though he still loves her, he advises her that marrying Boldwood would be safer than marrying Troy. She meets Boldwood and firmly refuses to marry him, although she pities him and is sorry for her foolish Valentine. When she reveals that she loves Troy, Boldwood speaks out violently against him. Bathsheba follows Troy to Bath to warn him about Boldwood; when Troy hints about another beauty who is interested in him, she marries him to be certain of keeping him.

Troy returns with her to Weatherbury, and Boldwood offers him money first to marry Fanny, and then to marry Bathsheba. Troy shows him the newspaper report of his marriage to Bathsheba and throws the money into the road. Boldwood swears he will punish him some day. Gabriel's disappointment and sorrow at this rash marriage increases as he watches the effect of the news on Boldwood. Boldwood allows his farm to deteriorate and seems to have lost his stability.

Troy celebrates his new prosperity at a harvest supper and dance. Gabriel notices signs of a threatening storm which could ruin Bathsheba's harvest, but Troy ignores his warnings and insists that the farm workers join him in an all-night drinking party. Gabriel, with Bathsheba's help, manages to cover the gathered sheaves and save the crop.

Fanny Robin again appears in the story, painfully making her way to a poorhouse in Casterbridge. She uses her last bit of strength to reach the door and is carried inside, evidently very ill.

Bathsheba has become suspicious of her husband's interest in Fanny

and guesses how strong the attachment had been. He learns that Fanny asks him to meet her at Casterbridge, and he rides there the same day that news of her death reaches Bathsheba. In charity, Bathsheba sends Poorgrass for the body and arranges to have it buried in the churchyard. He delays at the Buck's Head Inn and arrives too late for the burial. Fanny's body is taken to her last known home—Weatherbury Farm—for the night, and Bathsheba cannot resist opening the coffin. She discovers the secret that Gabriel has hoped to keep from her: buried with Fanny is her child that died at birth. Troy returns at this point and insists that Fanny meant more to him than anyone else could. He arranges to have an elaborate monument placed on her grave and he personally arranges flowers, which are washed away in the evening's rain. Troy leaves Weatherbury and apparently drowns, although his body is never found.

Boldwood again begs Bathsheba to marry him and she finally agrees, although she insists on a waiting period of seven years, when Troy would be legally dead, or some trace of his body might be found. Boldwood prepares a Christmas party, during which the engagement would be announced. A surprise guest arrives and reveals himself as Troy. He orders Bathsheba to return to the farm with him, and, as she shrinks back from him, Boldwood shoots him.

Boldwood is convicted of murder, but his death sentence is commuted to imprisonment when the villagers plead for his life. Troy is buried with Fanny; Bathsheba slowly regains her health and her composure. Gabriel decides to leave Weatherbury and England and tells Bathsheba of his plans. She suddenly realizes how dependent she is upon him and how much his love means to her. Her own feeling for him is not the reckless passion she felt for Troy, but a quiet respect for his fine character. Remembering that Gabriel promised not

to ask her again, she goes to his cottage and asks him to stay as her husband. He agrees that her request is as it should be; the two marry and enjoy a life of quiet serenity.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD :

DETAILED SUMMARY

CHAPTER I.

DESCRIPTION OF FARMER OAK—AN INCIDENT

Gabriel Oak is introduced in rather neutral tones; he is far from the dashing hero of many novels, and seems to be a solid young man of the community, neither overly impressive nor unrespected. His outward appearance is proper and staid, rather than charming or fascinating, and his neighbors know him for his good character and judgment. He is far from being insipid or colorless, however; even though he is simple and straightforward, he is not a weak man. He has an air of dignity and self-confidence, and shows a quiet assurance and maturity beyond his twenty-eight years. Although established on his own little sheep farm, he is still a bachelor.

As he is in a field one morning, he spots a waggon making its way down the highway, through a spur of Norcombe Hill. The waggon is colorfully painted and loaded with household goods. Perched on top of the waggon is a very pretty young woman, wearing a bright red jacket. As Gabriel watches, the waggon stops, and the waggoner announces that the tail board has fallen off, and that he will run back to get it.

The young lady takes advantage of the pause to untie one of the wrapped parcels near her. Once she has satisfied herself that no one is in sight, she unwraps the enclosed mirror and spends some minutes in examining herself attentively and with evident approval. Gabriel

realizes that she is vain; there is no practical need for her to use the mirror, she merely enjoys looking at her reflection, perhaps dreaming of herself as a popular beauty.

As the waggoner returns, she slips the mirror back into its wrappings and the journey is resumed. Gabriel follows the waggon at a short distance and sees it stopped at the toll gate. The young lady refuses to pay the extra two pence that the gate keeper demands, and Gabriel resolves the stalemate by paying the extra fee for her. She seems indifferent to his kindness, not even feeling the need for an expression of gratitude, and even seems annoyed that she lost her point of dispute. The waggon goes on and Gabriel discusses the young lady with the gate keeper. The keeper finds her beautiful indeed, but Gabriel points out that she has obvious faults. The keeper suggests "pride," and Gabriel sadly adds "vanity."

COMMENT: The novel begins, and will end, with Gabriel. He serves as a kind of touchstone by which we may measure the characters and events of the novel. The opening description hints of his reliability in this respect; he is a self-effacing young man and yet observant and interested in happenings about him. His concern for other characters is evidenced by his remote, but interested, study of the young lady, and by his offering to pay the trivial fee she owes. His shrewd perception and unromantic nature also makes the reader implicitly trust him as the point-of-perspective.

CHAPTER II.

NIGHT—THE FLOCK—AN INTERIOR—ANOTHER INTERIOR

A beautiful description of a clear, cold winter's night on Norcombe

Hill, and its effect on an observer, opens the chapter. A solitary visitor would be struck not only with the starkness of the chalk and soil covered ridge, but by the sounds and the sensation of motion, not only of the trees and grass, but of the earth itself. The skies seem more brilliantly colored, and the stars brighter and especially close. Suddenly, a sound different from those of nature's can be heard: Gabriel's flute.

The notes are a bit muffled, since Gabriel is playing inside his little sheep hut. This special hut resembles a toy Noah's Ark; it is mobile and serves the shepherd as a temporary shelter, when the lambing season demands his special attention.

Gabriel is especially concerned with the birth of the lambs, since he has only recently acquired the stock and land, and the status of independent farmer. His entire investment is bound up in the raising of sheep, so proper care both of the sheep and the new lambs is essential to his success, and the sheep must be supervised personally. Gabriel stops playing and leaves to inspect his flock. He returns with a newly-born lamb that needs some special care. He places the lamb near the small fire and quickly falls asleep.

The interior of the hut is comfortable, but simple; instead of windows, two round holes with wooden slides serve to let in air. In addition to Gabriel's flute and some food, the hut contains whatever equipment he might need to care for his sheep. When the lamb, now warmed by the fire, begins to bleat, Gabriel awakes, instantly alert. He leaves the hut to return the lamb to the flock, and searches the sky for signs to guess the time of night. Even after he realizes that it is about one o'clock, he remains charmed by the beauty of the view. He sees a light that he at first mistakes for another star and walks