

***Far from the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy**

1. Hardy's emphasis on fate is often compared to the interventions of the gods in the Greek plays. In those plays tragic outcomes are triggered by violations of the natural order (i.e. acts offensive to one or more of the gods and perhaps to human society as well). What triggers the tragic outcomes for Fanny Robin, Frank Troy, and William Boldwood?
2. The rustics who work the land, tend the sheep, and gather at Warren's malt house have been likened to a Greek chorus. Can you support this analogy? What function do the rustics serve in the novel?
3. Hardy uses the third person omniscient point of view in this novel. What effect does that have on our understanding of the interplay of character and fate? For example, consider the scene in which Bathsheba finally succumbs to Sgt. Troy's charms. What are some other examples in which we know more than the characters?
4. Hardy was a champion of Wordsworth's poetry and generally agreed with Wordsworth about the importance of nature in shaping the better traits of humanity. With that information in mind, what role does the Dorset countryside play in the novel? Classify the characters based on their relationships with nature.
5. Both Gabriel and Bathsheba's names allude to Biblical history. To what do their names allude? How are these names appropriate for their characters?
6. What is the thematic significance of each of the major characters: Gabriel Oak, Bathsheba Everdene, William Boldwood, and Sergeant Frank Troy? Which character is the novel's protagonist(s)? Which the antagonist(s)?
7. In what sense(s) is Bathsheba a dangerous character, dangerous to herself and to others? Why does she respond to Gabriel Oak's proposal to her in Chapter IV by saying that she needs someone who will tame her and that Gabriel is not that person?
8. In Chapter IV, Bathsheba tells Gabriel, "I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent: and you would never be able to, I know." How is Bathsheba "tamed" over the course of the novel, and who is responsible for her transformation?
9. How does the subordinate plot concerning Fanny Robin and Sergeant Troy serve as a contrast to the main storyline?
10. What do Bathsheba Everdene and Fanny Robin have in common, and how do they differ? And what does Hardy's portrayal of these two women reveal about Victorian moral standards?
11. How is Gabriel Oak connected to nature? Cite instances in the novel where he shows his deep connection with nature. Discuss how this connection works to his benefit, and how it benefits or hurts those around him.
12. In Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Troy, and Farmer Boldwood, Hardy has depicted three very different suitors in pursuit of Bathsheba Everdene. What distinguishes each of these characters, and what values does each of them represent?
13. The title of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, borrowed from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," celebrates the "cool, sequestered" lives of rural folks. Is the title ironic

or appropriate?

14. To which of the characters does the novel's title best apply, taken as it is from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"?

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life,
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

15. Hardy is often referred to as a "disappointed Romantic." How true is this claim?

16. Why is the pastoral landscape of this novel important? Why could this novel not have taken place in a different setting?

17. *Far from the Madding Crowd* is the first novel in which Hardy uses the name "Wessex" to describe the region of southwest England where he locates most of his stories and novels. Why did Hardy create Wessex when the places inside it are real? For example, in *Far from the Madding Crowd* Weatherby is the actual town of Puddletown. Why didn't Hardy just keep the actual names?

18. According to the scholar Howard Babb, Hardy's depiction of Wessex "impinges upon the consciousness of the reader in many ways . . . as mere setting, or a symbol, or as a being in its own right." How does environment serve as an integral part of this novel?

19. Prehistoric sites, such as Stonehenge, crop up repeatedly in Hardy's novels. What is their purpose? How are they related to Hardy's use of authentic west England dialects?

20. Time is a theme that weaves throughout the story. One example may be found in Chapter XVI, when Frank Troy stands rigidly in All Saints Church awaiting Fanny's delayed arrival while a "grotesque clockwork" agonizingly marks each passing moment. Where else does Hardy employ the theme of time, and what purpose does it serve?

21. What evidence is there that Hardy believed life was ruled by fate, or sheer luck? Cite instances where luck, fate and/or coincidence played a strong role in the story. How does this relate to the tragicomedy genre, and where are elements of the tragicomedy seen?

22. Two particular episodes in *Far from the Madding Crowd* are often cited for their profound sensuality: Sergeant Troy's seduction of Bathsheba through swordplay (Chapter XXVIII), and Gabriel's sheep-shearing scene (Chapter XXII). What elements does Hardy employ to make these scenes so powerful?

23. At the end of the novel, Hardy describes the remarkable bond between Gabriel and Bathsheba: "Theirs was that substantial affection which arises . . . when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard, prosaic reality." How does this relationship serve as a contrast to other examples of love and courtship throughout the novel? Consider Bathsheba and her three suitors, as well as Fanny Robin and Sergeant Troy.