

Far From the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy

What are some implications of the title? To whom might it have appealed in 1874?

Chapter 1: Description of Farmer Oak: An Incident

1. Is there anything unusual about this novel's choice of protagonist? What do we learn about "Farmer Oak" even before any "incidents" have occurred?
2. What seems implied in the choice of his name?
3. Can you see any resemblances to prior nineteenth-century novels? (e. g., *Tenants of Wildfell Hall*, *Adam Bede*)
4. What characterizes the descriptions of his surrounding landscape?
5. How is the woman whom he views described? What does the narrator tell us are traits of all women?
6. What do we learn of her behavior and Oak's intervention? Are these entirely propitious?

Chapter 2: Night -- The Flock -- An Interior -- Another Interior

1. What characterizes the rhetoric of Hardy's landscape descriptions? Why do you think these are so extensive?
2. What instrument does Gabriel play? In what surroundings do we meet him? What do we learn about his past and financial situation?
3. What do we learn from Gabriel's viewing of the stars by night?
4. What is added by the frequent classical and historical allusions?
5. Under what circumstances does Oak again view the visiting "girl"? Does it seem strange that he should view the strangers unnoticed?

Chapter 3: A Girl on Horseback: Conversation

1. What is marked as unusual about the girl's riding habits?
2. What are some metaphors used to describe her?
3. What characterizes their second meeting?
4. What unfortunate lapse on his part next brings them together? For what does she chide him?
5. Why is she apparently reluctant to reveal her name? What are some associations of the name Bathsheba?
6. What characterizes their next (and future) exchanges?

Chapter 4: Gabriel's Resolve: The Visit: The Mistake

1. What "mistake" is referred to in the chapter's title? What gift does he offer in courting, and how does he present himself to Bathsheba's aunt?
2. Why do you think the aunt invents imaginary suitors for her niece? Why does Oak suspend his suit?
3. What do you make of Bathsheba's eagerness to deny a prior suitor, and her seeming change of mind as she listens to Oak's proposal?
4. What are some unintentionally humorous aspects of his proposal and of her answers?
5. What seems revealed about Bathsheba's character and values in her replies?
6. What is added to the scene by its physical setting?
7. What do you think of her chiding of her for her answers? Of her chiding of him for marrying without thought of money/ then for his acknowledgement that he hasn't chosen to be prudent?
8. Why do you think Bathsheba cuts off any possibility of a courtship?

Chapter 5: Departure of Bathsheba: A Pastoral Tragedy

1. What is the "tragedy" referred to in the title, and under what circumstances does it occur?
2. How does Gabriel respond to the news of his great losses? What do you make of the fact that he pauses to view a nearby pond?
3. What is the fate of the unfortunate dog and what moral does the narrator frame in response?
4. What is Gabriel's financial situation after this loss?

5. What accident causes him to hear two rural men talking of Bathsheba? What do they say of her?
6. What act of bravery does Gabriel perform en route to the farm now owned by Bathsheba? How does this determine his future occupation?

Chapter 7: Recognition: A Timid Girl

1. Who vouches for Gabriel as future employee?
2. How does Bathsheba react upon meeting him?
3. Whom does he meet in the woods, and what condition does she seem to be in?
4. What does she ask of him? What can he offer her?

Chapter 8: The Malthouse: The Chat: News

1. What are some features of Hardy's rustics? Do you think there is a bit of condescension in their portrayal?
2. What characterizes their speech?
3. What useful or interesting pieces of information do we learn from it?
4. What discomfiting stories are told about Joseph Poorgrass? How does the company respond to the topic of beer?
5. Of what does Gabriel inquire, and what are the answers? What do you make of the story that Mr. Everdene was only able to love his wife when he fancied they were unmarried?
6. What are the rustics' views of religion?
7. What news is brought of the bailiff? Do we feel sympathy?
8. What do we learn of the fate of Fanny Robin?
9. What books constitute Gabriel's library? Would they have been familiar and available works at the time?
10. What do they indicate about his leisure studies?

Chapter 9: The Homestead: A Visitor: Half-Confidences

1. Why won't Bathsheba greet the visitor who has come calling?
2. What do we learn about her maid Liddy?
3. What has Mr. Boldwood done for Fanny? What does Lydia report of him? What humorous reason does Lydia give for her unmarried state?
4. How are the farm workers who enter described?

Chapter 10: Mistress and Men: Inquiries

1. Is Bathsheba concerned for the fate of Fanny Robin? How does she behave toward her farm hands?
2. What unusual step has she taken in arranging her affairs?
3. What does she promise? Does this seem a wise promise? How will she treat them?
4. How does she behave toward Gabriel? To what does the narrator attribute her new manner?
5. What does the messenger William report of Fanny?
6. What ominous news is given of the movements of the nearby regiment?

Chapter 11: Melchester Moor: Snow: A Meeting

1. What characterizes the landscape described in the opening paragraphs? Is this a metaphor for the scene which follows?
2. How does Troy respond to Fanny's presence? To her pleas? What important promises has he forgotten?
3. How does she respond? What does the reader predict will be the outcome of their relationship?

Chapter 12: Farmers: A Rule: An Exception

1. What preoccupies Bathsheba as she sells her wares in the Casterbridge corn-market? What reaction do the male farmers have to her presence?
2. Do they refuse to buy from her?

Chapter 13: Sortes Sanctorum: The Valentine

1. To whom does Bathsheba intend to send her Valentine? What do you make of the fact that she changes her mind?
2. Is her decision really Liddy's responsibility, as she later claims?
3. Does the affixing of the seal, "Marry me," seem consistent with her character otherwise?
4. How are we to interpret the scene in which the bible is used for deciding on the recipient of the Valentine?
5. Is the narrator's claim that this was a thoughtless and innocent gesture with no meaning convincing?

Chapter 14: Effect of the Letter: Sunrise

1. What effect does the letter have on Mr. Boldwood? Does this seem consistent with
2. Liddy's account of his rejection of prior matrimonial advances? For whom is the letter handed by mistake to him? (Gabriel)

Chapter 15: A Morning Meeting: The Letter: A Questions

1. What account do the frequenters of the local bar give regarding their mistress?
2. What motivates Gabriel's entrance into the bar?
3. What threat does he make against anyone who might criticize their mistress? Does it seem strange that the others fail to wonder why he should feel such emotion regarding the matter?
4. On what grounds do the others attempt to incite him to resent his mistress?
5. What disappointment does he admit to? Would this have been a reasonable hope?
6. What are the contents of the letter Mr. Boldwood brings to him?
7. What does Gabriel do with the letter? How does he respond?
8. What new information does this give the company?
9. What unexpected question does Mr. Boldwood ask Gabriel? Does it seem strange that he would ask this question of a shepherd on the neighboring farm?

Chapter 16: In the Market-Place

1. What characterizes Mr. Boldwood's observation of Bathsheba in the market place?
2. After she notices this, what does the narrator tell us is now her attitude toward him?

Chapter 17: Boldwood in Meditation: A Visit

1. Later under what circumstances does he attempt to approach her, and why does he desist? (she is tending to sheep with Gabriel, Boldwood feels self-conscious and shy)

Chapter 18: The Sheep-Washing: The Offer

2. Under what circumstances does Mr. Boldwood propose marriage to Bathsheba, and how does she respond? What do you think of her response?
3. Does anything about this encounter strike you as strange by modern standards?

Chapter 19: Perplexity: Grinding the Shears: A Quarrel

1. What does the narrator give as Bathsheba's reason for not wishing to marry him?
2. What does Bathsheba ask Gabriel? Why does she ask him rather than one of the others?
3. What intervention does Bathsheba ask Gabriel to make in her farmworkers' reactions to her conversation with Mr. Boldwood? Does this seem a reasonable request?
4. Does Bathsheba wish Gabriel to feel continued attachment to her? What do we learn of her valuation of his opinion? On what grounds does she fire him? Do you think either he or she will have cause to regret their words later?
5. What opinion does Gabriel give of the incident of the Valentine?

and is this surprising?

4. What has changed in her second message? What brings about reconciliation?

Chapter 21: The Great Barn and the Sheep-Shearers

1. What does the narrator find remarkable about the great barn? Could this be said today?
2. At what task does Mr. Boldwood interrupt Gabriel and Bathsheba?
3. How is the freshly-cut wool described?
4. What causes Gabriel to wound a sheep, and how does Bathsheba respond? How does he respond to the gossip of the other shearers?
5. What does the narrator tell us is Gabriel's response to the incident?
6. What bible verse does the narrator claim that Gabriel now notices?

Chapter 22: A Pleasant Time: A Second Declaration

1. Is the harvest scene as portrayed unmitigatedly idyllic? What are some prophetic resonances in the songs with which they entertain themselves?
2. What manner does Bathsheba use toward Gabriel? What pointed gesture does she make in appointing seats at the harvest table?
3. To what does the "second declaration" of the title refer? How does Bathsheba respond? Are there any inconsistencies in her response to her suitor?

Chapter 23: The Same Night in the Fir Plantation

1. How is the location of Bathsheba's meeting with Sergeant Troy described?
2. What accident brings them in physical propinquity? How is Sergeant Troy described, and what are some implications of his appearance and speech?
3. Why doesn't Bathsheba escape? What remarks does he make to her, and in what tone?
4. Are there aspects of the setting which make these remarks improper? Does she take offense?
5. What remarks upon women in general are intruded by the narrator?
6. What erotic overtones inhere in this scene?
7. What information regarding Troy's past does Bathsheba learn from Liddy?

Chapter 24: The New Acquaintance Described

1. What features of Troy's character are remarked on by the narrator?
2. What means does he use for pleasing women? Why does it succeed?

Chapter 25: Scene on the Verge of the Hay-Mead

1. What flattering sentiments does Troy persist in repeating to Bathsheba in the sight of her workers?
2. What makes his advances different from those of her other suitors?
3. How does she respond? Do her reactions seem consistent with her character in other contexts?
4. What emotion does he profess? What unusual gift does he give her, and with what profession of sentiments?
6. What emotions in her does he seem to have stirred? What admission does she make to him?

Chapter 26: Hiving the Bees

1. What do you make of the fact that no one tells Bathsheba of Troy's sexual past, even though several are aware of it, among them Gabriel and Mr. Boldwood? Why does she not investigate?
2. What happens as she hives bees, and who appears to help her with this task? Are there symbolic elements to this scene?
3. What performance does she express an interest in seeing, and what seems ominous about the proposed setting?

4. What final act does he perform on leaving, and how does this affect her?

Chapter 28: Particulars of a Twilight Walk

1. What excuses does the narrator make for Bathsheba's infatuation? What can he mean by noting that Oak's "defects were patent to the blindest"?
2. What motivates Gabriel to remonstrate with Bathsheba on the dangers of Sergeant Troy? Would this have been expected from a farm manager?
3. What topics do they discuss, and what does she confide to him? On what grounds does she defend Troy?
4. What response does Gabriel make when she attempts to fire him for the second time? What does he state as a cause of resentment and what reason does he give for his residence on the farm?
5. What proof does he find that Troy had been lying to Bathsheba?

Chapter 29: Hot Cheeks: Tearful Eyes

1. How does Bathsheba behave when she hears her servants gossiping about her? How does she behave toward the faithful Liddy?
2. What creates renewed peace between these women? What emotions does Bathsheba associate with her love?
3. What concern does Bathsheba express when Liddy notes her fearsome aspect when angry?

Chapter 30: Blame: Fury

1. With what does Mr. Boldwood reproach Bathsheba? What is her response? Do you feel her defenses are justified? Does it seem reasonable that Mr. Boldwood should berate a woman for not accepting him who has declared that she does not love him?
2. Of what behavior does he accuse her? What is her reply? Does the extremity of his anger and grief suggest any possible bad outcomes? Does someone capable of threats of violence seem like a satisfactory future husband? What does Bathsheba fear?

Chapter 31: Night: Horses Tramping

1. From what vantage point is the account of Bathsheba's departure to Bath told?
2. What homely methods are used by Gabriel and his fellow farm worker to trace the presumed thief?
3. When they find Bathsheba, what does she tell them? Why does Gabriel suggest that the night's journey be kept secret from others?
4. What does the narrator tell us had been Bathsheba's intentions in heading directly for Bath? Do these make sense?

Chapter 32: In the Sun: A Harbinger

1. What comic intervention delays Cainy Ball from recounting his news of Bathsheba and Sergeant Troy to his rustic audience?
2. How do the rustics behave toward the anxious boy? How does Gabriel respond to the news?
3. What news does he give of Bathsheba? Which of his fellow laborers offers Gabriel understanding and sympathy?

Chapter 33: Home Again: A Juggler

1. Under what conditions does Mr. Boldwood find Sergeant Troy? What does he attempt to bribe him to do?
2. What expedient does Troy manage in order to enlighten Mr. Boldwood about Bathsheba's attachment to him? Does the entire procedure seem voyeuristic? What does Mr. Boldwood then wish Troy to do?
3. What accounts for his changed desire? Would anyone in fact know, and would this in fact have ruined her life, as Mr. Boldwood fears?
4. What ominous suggestion does Mr. Boldwood make in passing?

Chapter 35: Wealth in Jeopardy: The Revel

1. What ominous weather change is noted at the beginning of the chapter? Why are the other farm residents oblivious?
2. What characterizes the narrator's description of the music played at the feast?
3. What contrasting responses to the potential crop disaster is shown by Gabriel and Troy?
4. What unfortunate gift does Troy offer to the revelers? How do his wife and guests respond?
5. What small, ominous signs warn Gabriel of the approaching storm as he travels home? Why will none of the men help him save the crop?
6. What comic incident occurs as he visits Mr. Tall's home to fetch the key to the granary? What expedients does he manage to protect the wheat and barley?

Chapter 36: The Storm: The Two Together

1. Under what circumstances do Gabriel and Bathsheba finish saving the barley? What makes this operation so dangerous? What preliminary precaution saves their lives?
2. What characterizes Hardy's description of the storm? What damage does it cause?
3. What explanation/confession does she make to him? What does this seem to indicate about her judgment?
4. Are there any unconventional features in this conversation? What is its setting?
5. How does he respond to her thanks?

Chapter 37: Rain: One Solitary Meets Another

1. Do the other farm workers note what they have failed to do?
2. Whom does Gabriel meet when going home, and what confession does he make?

Chapter 38: Coming Home: A Cry

1. To what does the "cry" in the chapter's title refer?
2. How much time has elapsed since the Troy-Bathsheba wedding? What expensive vice does he confess to her?
3. Does the reader later come to mistrust his claim that he has needed a great deal of money to pay gambling debts?
4. Whom do they meet when riding in their vehicle, and what condition is she in? How does she respond to the sight of Troy?
5. What does Troy promise her? What account does he give of the incident to his wife?
6. What aspect of Troy's character is shown by his treatment of animals?

Chapter 39: On Casterbridge Highway

1. What is added to the chapter by Hardy's mode of narration? What emotions does it evoke in the reader?
2. What expedients does Fanny use to gain strength to continue her difficult journey? What is the fate of her canine helper?

Chapter 40: Suspicion: Fanny Is Sent For

1. What causes an argument between the married couple?
2. What does the narrator tell us have been Bathsheba's views of an ideal life?
3. What significant token does she note, and how does he explain it?
4. What news comes to the farm of Fanny Robin's fate, and who is the messenger? What can we infer by the gaps in his story?
5. How had Fanny died, and under what precipitating circumstances? Why had she traveled to the Union?
6. What preparations does Bathsheba make for bringing back her body?
7. What significant information about Fanny's past does she gain from Liddy?

Chapter 42: Fanny's Revenge

1. Whose house does Bathsheba seek in her anxiety, and why?
2. Why does she return to her own home? What strange act does she decide to do?
3. How is Fanny's infant described?
4. Under what circumstances does he approach the coffin? How does he react to the sight of the dead woman and child?
5. What claim does he make now that Fanny is dead? Does this claim become him?
6. What claim does the narrator make about Bathsheba's depth of response?

Chapter 43: Under a Tree: Reaction

1. Why does Bathsheba flee into the darkness? What does she experience during her night in the woods? Who finds her and what does she give as her reason for returning to the house?
2. How does she seek to avoid Troy? Is this strictly rational?

Chapter 44: Troy's Romanticism

1. What does Troy do to decorate Fanny's grave? What acts of nature conspire to frustrate his aim?
2. What seems significant about Hardy's description of the gargoyle?
3. What emotion does Troy experience for the first time?

Chapter 45: The Gargoyle: Its Doings

1. What prompts Bathsheba to examine Fanny's grave? What is unusual about the stone placed there?
2. What do she and Gabriel do to tend the grave? How are we expected to view her actions?
3. Whom does Bathsheba meet when she visits Fanny's grave? How does she respond to the inscription and derangement of its flowers?
4. How do we interpret her response?

Chapter 46: Adventures by the Shore

1. What strange and unexpected incident occurs to Troy after he leaves home?
2. What saves him, and what are his next adventures?

Chapter 47: Boldwood Again: The Clothes

1. What are Bathsheba's expectations for the future?
2. What news is brought to Bathsheba in the corn market, and how does she react?
3. Who attends her at this moment? How does she return home? What is revealed by an examination of Troy's clothing?
4. What ruminations does Bathsheba make on the fact that he had followed Fanny into death?
5. What does she finally do with the lock of Fanny's hair which Troy had kept in his watch?

Chapter 48: Oak's Advancement: A Great Hope

1. What changes occur in Gabriel's situation?
2. As Boldwood continues to hope Bathsheba will marry him, on what does he found his hopes? Does this seem the correct approach to a courtship?
3. What information does he gain from Liddy?
4. Does the chapter title seem to mislead the reader a bit?

Chapter 49: The Sheep Fair: Troy Holds His Wife's Hand

1. What characterizes the flocks of sheep on their way to the fair?
2. Troy to the area?

2. What is the result of his renewed proposal? In the end, will she keep this latter promise?
3. To whom does she confide her difficulties? Does this seem odd? What is his advice?
4. What does Bathsheba regret? Would she have accepted him?
5. What does the reader infer from the fact that she is “ruffled” by this circumstance for some time afterwards?

Chapter 51: Converging Courses

1. What great event has Mr. Boldwood arranged for Christmas?
2. What are Bathsheba’s emotions as she prepares for the party? Does she intend to stay long?
3. What warning does Gabriel give Mr. Boldwood as the latter confines his thoughts to him before the party?
4. Who has become Troy’s confederate? What has rendered Troy reluctant to rejoin his wife?
5. Of what event is he unreasonably critical?
6. What do you make of the fact that Bathsheba tells Liddy she is anxious at the thought of wounding Mr. Boldwood’s feelings? Had she worried about wounding Gabriel’s feelings in the past?
7. What new arrangement does Mr. Boldwood plan to make for Gabriel? Does his generosity affect Gabriel’s future social and economic standing?
8. What warning does Troy disregard as he sets out to surprise his wife at the party?
9. Is Pennyways correct? How would the novel have been altered had Troy walked quietly into his wife’s home during daylight, or sent a message to her before arriving?

Chapter 52: Momentae Horae Concurrunt

1. What is meant by the title of this chapter? Is it indeed the climax of the book’s many unexpected events?
2. What warning of future events is provided by the conversation of Mr. Boldwood’s employees?
3. At what point does Mr. Boldwood’s courtship of Bathsheba arrive? What do you make of the fact that she cries as she agrees to marry him six years hence?
4. How does she respond to his offer of a ring? Should he not have been warned by her distress?
5. What do those who leave for the tavern find as they approach it? What do the three resolve to do, and do they fulfill their intentions?
6. Under what circumstances does Troy enter the scene? Who recognizes him first and who last?
7. How does she respond to the sight? To Troy’s attempt to drag her away?
8. How is the murder described? What prevents Mr. Boldwood from committing suicide?
9. Is this entirely a mercy? Had Mr. Boldwood died at this juncture, how might the plot have been somewhat altered?
10. What elements of classical tragedy are exhibited in this scene?

Chapter 53: After the Shock

1. For what does the narrator praise Bathsheba? What are her actions directly following her husband’s death?
2. What has been unusual about her decisions?
3. What errand has Gabriel been asked to perform?
4. What condition does she fall into after the others arrive?

Chapter 54: The March Following: “Bathsheba Boldwood”

1. With what emotions do the gathered neighbors await Mr. Boldwood’s trial?
2. Why do they not attend his trial? Does this seem right?
3. What is the sentence? What new evidence is found in Boldwood’s home which buttresses a claim of insanity?
4. Do you think that obsessiveness would likely be taken as proof of insanity, then or now?
5. Who visits Mr. Boldwood the day before his planned execution? What ominous sight does he see as he leaves town?
6. What do we learn of Bathsheba’s emotions as she waits

3. How does she respond to Gabriel's intention to leave the farm?
4. What roles has he begun to fulfill on the farm?
5. How does she react to his letter of resignation?
6. What transpires when she visits him in his modest dwelling? What arrangements has he made since last talking with her?
7. What has caused the change in her sentiments?
8. What self-respecting rejoinder does Gabriel Oak make to her criticisms?
9. What do the narrator's remarks on the conjunction of comradeship and attraction suggest about their love?

Chapter 56: A Foggy Night and Morning: Conclusion

1. What kind of wedding does Bathsheba wish, and why do you think this may be so? What comic concealments must be made to conceal the upcoming wedding?
2. How do bride and bridegroom feel as the wedding approaches?
3. What welcome and celebration is brought by Oak's friends among the farmworkers? How does this contrast with their earlier reception of Troy?
4. What ominous warnings are made by the visitors privately?
5. Who gets the last word? How would you describe the ending? Do you think this fits the plot?
6. On balance, have the final scenes provided a fitting closure to the book?
7. Are there any elements of the plot or its emotions which still remain unresolved?

General Questions:

1. In general how would you describe Hardy's narrative voice? His choice of diction? What purpose seems served by the repeated use of classical sources and metaphors? Do the chapter titles help structure this story?
2. What is added to the plot by its setting in a contained and isolated space and with a constant set of characters?
3. What is added to the novel by the fact that the prominent characters such as Bathsheba, Mr. Boldwood, and Gabriel, frequently pour out intimate details of their lives to one another?
4. Does this practice suggest any other novels in a rural setting which you have read?
5. What roles are played by the same-sex pairings/friendships with Liddy and Coggan? How does Liddy's role contrast with that of Gabriel's friend?
6. Do the melodramatic features of the novel undercut or reinforce its effectiveness? Do Hardy's characters develop during the story? If so, which ones?
7. How are Hardy's descriptions of rural phenomena used to intensify the novel's emotions?
8. Does it matter that the setting is so fertile and suggestive of long-practised patterns?
9. What features of setting and imagery intensify the novel's erotic themes?
10. *Far from the Madding Crowd* was published fifteen years after Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Are there elements in the novel which suggest a Darwinian sense of nature and time?