

Far from the Madding Crowd [1874] by Thomas Hardy

Session 6, April 2026 - Points to Ponder

We will discuss these critical views of *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Hardy's story juxtaposes two different worlds or modes of being, the natural against the civilized, and it insists on the superiority of the former by identifying the natural as strong, enduring, self-contained, slow to change, sympathetic, while associating the civilized with weakness, facility, modernity, self-centeredness. (Harold Babb 1963)

The Spectator - 'the details of the farming and the sheep-keeping, of the labouring, the feasting, and the mourning, are painted with all the vividness of a powerful imagination'

Hardy's descriptions are breath taking

Henry James, vehemently disliked Hardy's work, remarking 'everything human in the book strikes us as factitious and insubstantial; the only things we believe in are the sheep and the dogs' (368).

Geoffrey Harvey contends that 'this is the first novel in which Hardy attempts to present an entire rural community, with its shared culture and human solidarity, set in a landscape he knows well' (22).

Hardy skilfully blended pastoral romance with melodrama and tragic.

"*Far from the Madding Crowd* is often classified as a pastoral novel, though it would probably be just as accurate to describe it as anti-pastoral" (73).

Hardy shows how chance can lead to the downfall of helpless people...Fate plays a major role in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Hardy, like Shakespeare, shows that destiny dominates individual free will.

Far from the Madding Crowd has a fast-paced plot with well-fleshed characters, building to unforgettable scenes of great drama and emotion and leaving much food for thought.

Claire Tomalin asserts that *Far from the Madding Crowd* 'is the warmest and sunniest of his novels' (126).

Bathsheba has been called an iconic female character and Hardy has been described as a 'feminist'- how far do you agree?

Hardy has been described as a 'progressive novelist' questioning various aspects of society -what do you think?