

Far from the Madding Crowd [1874] by Thomas Hardy

Session 4, March 2026 - Points to Ponder

1. **How realistic do you find Troy's 'Adventures by the Sea' at Lulworth Cove?**
2. **Why do you think Hardy creates this 'Adventure' for Troy? In what ways might this fit with Hardy's depiction of Fate or Chance throughout the novel, or is it just a convenient plot device?**

Unfortunately for Troy a current unknown to him existed outside, which, unimportant to craft of any burden, was awkward for a swimmer who might be taken in it unawares. Troy found himself carried to the left and then round in a swoop out to sea.

3. **What is your response to the passage below?**

Then Bathsheba said to herself that others were assured in their opinion; strange that she should not be. A strange reflection occurred to her, causing her face to flush. Suppose that Troy had followed Fanny into another world. Had he done this intentionally, yet contrived to make his death appear like an accident? Nevertheless, this thought of how the apparent might differ from the real—made vivid by her bygone jealousy of Fanny, and the remorse he had shown that night—did not blind her to the perception of a likelier difference, less tragic, but to herself far more disastrous.

When alone late that evening beside a small fire, and much calmed down, Bathsheba took Troy's watch into her hand, which had been restored to her with the rest of the articles belonging to him. She opened the case as he had opened it before her a week ago. There was the little coil of pale hair which had been as the fuze to this great explosion.

"He was hers and she was his; they should be gone together," she said. "I am nothing to either of them, and why should I keep her hair?" She took it in her hand, and held it over the fire. "No—I'll not burn it—I'll keep it in memory of her, poor thing!" she added, snatching back her hand.

4. **Consider the passage below. Hardy mentions madness here? In what ways might it be reasonable for Bathsheba to consider Boldwood as a husband? What evidence does Hardy give for his decision on 's 'madness'? Is the argument Boldwood concocts one that would make a good foundation for marriage? Think about how you would support your ideas.**

A great hope had latterly germinated in Boldwood, whose unreasoning devotion to Bathsheba could only be characterized as a fond madness which neither time nor circumstance, evil nor good report, could weaken or destroy. This fevered hope had grown up again like a grain of mustard-seed during the quiet which followed the hasty conjecture that Troy was drowned. He nourished it fearfully, and almost shunned the contemplation of it in earnest, lest facts should reveal the wildness of the dream. Bathsheba having at last been persuaded to wear mourning, her appearance as she entered the church in that guise was in itself a weekly addition to his faith that a time was coming—very far off perhaps, yet surely nearing—when his waiting on events should have its reward. How long he might have to wait he had not yet closely considered. What he would try to recognize was that the severe schooling she had been subjected to had made Bathsheba much more considerate than she had formerly been of the feelings of others, and he trusted that, should she be willing at any time in the future to marry any man at all, that man would be himself. There was a substratum of good feeling in her: her self-reproach for the injury she had thoughtlessly done him might be depended upon now to a much greater extent than before her infatuation and disappointment. It would be possible to approach her by the channel of her good nature, and to suggest a friendly businesslike compact between them for fulfilment at some future day, keeping the passionate side of his desire entirely out of her sight. Such was Boldwood's hope.

And Bathsheba's thoughts on Boldwood's 'fond madness'.

I believe that if I don't give my word, he'll go out of his mind."

"Really, do ye?" said Gabriel, gravely.

"I believe this," she continued, with reckless frankness; "and Heaven knows I say it in a spirit the very reverse of vain, for I am grieved and troubled to my soul about it—I believe I hold that man's future in my hand. His career depends entirely upon my treatment of him. O Gabriel, I tremble at my responsibility, for it is terrible!"

5. What is the following passage saying about wives and class? Many protagonists learn through adverse experience. How much as Troy learned from his experience?

Troy found unexpected chords of feeling to be stirred again within him as they had been stirred earlier in the day. She was handsome as ever, and she was his. It was some minutes before he could counteract his sudden wish to go in, and claim her. Then he thought how the proud girl who had always looked down upon him even whilst it was to love him, would hate him on discovering him to be a strolling player. Were he to make himself known, that chapter of his life must at all risks be kept for ever from her and from the Weatherbury people, or his name would be a byword throughout the parish. He would be nicknamed "Turpin" as long as he lived. Assuredly before he could claim her these few past months of his existence must be entirely blotted out.

6. What are your views on Bathsheba's statement?

It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs. My treatment of you was thoughtless, inexcusable, wicked! I shall eternally regret it. If there had been anything I could have done to make amends I would most gladly have done it—there was nothing on earth I so longed to do as to repair the error. But that was not possible.

7. How much has Bathsheba learned as the book draws to a close?

"But is it right? Some rash acts of my past life have taught me that a watched woman must have very much circumspection to retain only a very little credit, and I do want and long to be discreet in this!

8. In what way is Bathsheba a 'watched woman'?

The passage below is the workers commenting on Bathsheba and Troy. What evidence do they have for their comments? Do you agree with them?

"If he's alive and here in the neighbourhood, he means mischief," said the first. "Poor young thing: I do pity her, if 'tis true. He'll drag her to the dogs."

"O no; he'll settle down quiet enough," said one disposed to take a more hopeful view of the case.

"What a fool she must have been ever to have had anything to do with the man! She is so self-willed and independent too, that one is more minded to say it serves her right than pity her."

9. What is your view of the ending. Many critics see this as Hardy bowing to Victorian convention and framing Bathsheba in a typical domestic setting. What do you think?