



## Far from the Madding Crowd

*Thomas Hardy (1840 - 1928)*

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*Far From the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy, published anonymously in 1874, centers on its heroine, Bathsheba Everdene, a newcomer to the Wessex countryside who has come to live with her aunt. In short order she has three suitors: Gabriel Oak, a young shepherd who asks for her hand and is rebuffed, but hired by her nevertheless; William Boldwood, an older, prosperous and repressed farmer, whom she teases and refuses; and Sergeant Frank Troy, returning to his native country after military service, whom she marries. Troy proves to be a gambler and romantically attached to another. The hand of fate intervenes, secrets are revealed, and conflicts lead to desperate measures. Two of the three rivals come to grief, and Bathsheba finally sees the light of her one true and selfless friendship just as he is set to depart for California.

*Far From the Madding Crowd*, which takes its title from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", was Hardy's first major success. It appeared initially in serial form in *Cornhill Magazine* and was revised by Hardy in 1895 and again in 1901. It ranks 48th on the BBC's "Big Read" list of the best-loved novels of all time and 10th on *The Guardian's* list of the greatest love stories of all time. It has been adapted frequently for stage and screen, most recently in the 2015 David Nicholls film starring Carey Mulligan.

**Thomas Hardy** (June 2, 1840 – January 11, 1928) was an English novelist and poet noted for his realistic novels set in southwestern England in the fictional region of Wessex. He was born in Dorset in a hamlet known as Upper Bockhampton. His father was a builder and stonemason; his mother was well-read and tutored him before he attended Mr. Last's Academy for Young Gentlemen. He was apprenticed to a local architect before moving to London in 1862 to enroll in King's College London. After five years he returned to Dorset to pursue writing due to health concerns and an acute awareness of his social inferiority in the unforgiving English class system. The success of *Far From the Madding Crowd* in 1874 enabled him to give up architectural work and write ten more novels over the next twenty-five years. Like Dickens, his work challenged the morals of the day: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) was criticized for its sympathetic portrayal of a "fallen woman" and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) was for its frank treatment of sex. He gave up writing novels and turned to poet, publishing *Wessex* in 1898. He wrote in a variety of forms, often in colloquial diction, and centered on themes of disappointment and the perversity of fate. Hardy is now considered one of the finest twentieth century poets, having influenced Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, W.H. Auden, and Philip Larkin. He died in 1927 of pleurisy and is buried in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.