Far from the Madding Crowd Study Guide

Far from the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy

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Contents

Introduction

In December 1872, having already published several moderately successful novels, Thomas Hardy was approached by the editor of *Cornhill*, a respected literary magazine, to write a story to run in serial form. The resulting book, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, was a popular attraction for the magazine and Hardy's first critical success. It was first published in serial form in *Cornhill* between January and December 1874, and then published the same year in London in book form. Hardy had already published several novels, but this was the first of the five novels that would assure his place in the annals of literature.

The plot of *Far from the Madding Crowd* concerns a young woman, Bathsheba Everdene, and the three men in her life: one is a poor sheep farmer who loses his flock in a tragedy and ends up working as an employee on Bathsheba's farm; one is the respectable, boring owner of a neighboring farm who takes Bathsheba's flirtations too seriously; and the third is a dashing army sergeant who treats her like just another of his conquests. In chronicling their hopes, plans, and disappointments, Hardy presents to readers a clear example of Victorian romanticism. At the same time, his understanding of the lives of farmers and ranchers in rural England makes him a forerunner to the realistic tradition in literature.

Wessex, the location for *Far from the Madding Crowd*, is an imaginary English county that Hardy colored with fine details throughout the course of his writing career. It is similar to Dorset, where Hardy lived most of his life, but its fictitious nature gave the author freedom to describe the landscape at will. Hardy wrote *Far from the Madding Crowd* in the same Dorset cottage in which he was born and which his grandfather had built in 1800. Though fictional, the residents of Wessex□farmers, land owners, laborers, servants, and the like□are considered true representations of people living at the time the novel was published.

Author Biography

Thomas Hardy was born June 2, 1840, in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, England, and he died there eighty-eight years later. His major novels, including *Far from the Madding Crowd*, take place in an intricately imagined English county he called Wessex, which he patterned on Dorset.

The town where Hardy was born, Higher Bockhampton, was poor, but Hardy was born into a line of skilled laborers. His father was a master mason, as was his grandfather, and throughout his childhood it was assumed that Hardy would be a mason also. In 1856 he was apprenticed to an architect and went to live in Dorchester, the county seat, where he was to live for most of his life. After gaining full status as an architect, Hardy took up writing poetry, but was not successful in getting his works published, and so he turned to writing fiction. In all, he published fourteen novels between 1871 and 1895. His first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, was published in 1871. In 1872 he published *Under the Greenwood Tree* anonymously, and in 1873 he published *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. None of these initial works garnered much critical attention from the literary establishment.

Far from the Madding Crowd, published in 1874, is considered the first of Hardy's five important novels. The other four are: *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). While these five novels are considered important works in the canon of British literature, Hardy published numerous other novels, short stories, sketches, travel writings, and poetry that received less attention.

Hardy's novels are known for their frank portrayals of love and sexuality, and as a result he was subject to harsh social criticism in his time. After the publication of *Jude the Obscure*, he grew tired of being surrounded by controversy, and so he gave up writing fiction and focused on poetry. His distinguished poetry career lasted for more than thirty years, until his death on January 11, 1928. His body was buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, next to the remains of Charles Dickens. Before his interment, Hardy's heart was removed and buried in Dorset.

Plot Summary

Chapters 1—4

The first chapter of *Far from the Madding Crowd* introduces Gabriel Oak, a hardworking farmer. One day, tending his fields, he sees a wagon with a beautiful girl in it. When her driver goes to pick up something dropped on the road, the girl, thinking no one can see her, takes out a small mirror and examines her face. Oak later observes the same young woman and her aunt caring for a newborn calf through a cold night.

Oak finally talks to Bathsheba Everdene, returning a hat that she has lost. She is flirtatious. Oak, smitten, goes to call on her at her aunt's house to ask her to marry him. She refuses, explaining, "I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know."

Chapters 5—10

One morning Oak hears that Bathsheba has left town. Not long after, he suffers a tragedy: an inexperienced sheep dog chases his flock through a fence in a hill, and most of them fall over a cliff and die. Oak is forced to sell all he has in order to pay back money he borrowed, and he ends up homeless.

After several months, Oak is traveling, looking for work. He comes across a barn on fire and takes the lead in fighting it. The barn is located on the farm Bathsheba inherited from her uncle. At the suggestion of her workers, Bathsheba offers Oak work as a shepherd, and he accepts. Traveling to the malthouse to find lodging, Oak runs into a pale girl who is later identified as Fanny Robin, and he gives her money.

Chapters 11—19

Fanny Robin goes to a town where the military regiment that had been in Weatherbury has been sent, and summons Frank Troy to come to the window. She asks when he is going to marry her. He tells her soon.

Bathsheba notices William Boldwood, who owns the farm next to hers, in the market, and comments that he looks interesting. Her maid Liddy explains that he is a confirmed bachelor. On Valentine's Day Bathsheba and Liddy decide to write an anonymous valentine, and Bathsheba decides on a whim to send it to Boldwood. The wax seal with which she closes it says "Marry Me."

Oak receives a letter from Fanny Robin, repaying the money he gave her and mentioning that she is going to marry Sergeant Frank Troy. Boldwood, who has been thinking constantly about the anonymous valentine, has Oak identify the writing as

Bathsheba's. Soon Boldwood asks Bathsheba to marry him. She explains that the valentine was a joke, but he swears his love and says he will ask her again.

Sergeant Troy waits at All Saints' Church to marry Fanny. She shows up an hour late, saying that she mistakenly went to All Souls' Church. Annoyed, Troy now refuses to marry Fanny.

Chapters 20—34

Boldwood's love for Bathsheba grows, although she is disinterested. She discusses Boldwood with Oak, who says she should consider marrying Boldwood after the trick she played on him. Because Oak criticizes her behavior, Bathsheba fires him.

With Oak gone, no one feeds the sheep. The sheep break the fence and get into a field of clover, which makes them sick. The only person around who can heal them is Oak. Bathsheba sends him a note begging him to come back, saying, "Do not desert me, Gabriel."

Boldwood asks Bathsheba to accept his proposal when he returns from his trip. That night, walking home, Bathsheba meets Sergeant Troy, who is back on furlough from his regiment. He flirts with her in the dark. A few days later she finds him helping her workers tend her farm. In private, he demonstrates his swordsmanship and then steals a kiss. Oak later warns Bathsheba that Troy seems dishonest.

When Boldwood returns, Bathsheba declares her love for Troy. She leaves for Bath, where Troy has gone on vacation. When Boldwood next sees Troy, he offers him money to marry Fanny. Troy indicates that he and Bathsheba have already been intimate, so Boldwood offers him even more money to marry Bathsheba and make an honest woman of her. Troy takes the money and then announces that they are already married.

Chapters 35—40

Having used Bathsheba's money to buy his way out of the army, Troy establishes himself as the head of the farm. After the harvest, he provides hard liquor to all of the farm hands. Oak, meanwhile, senses a storm rolling in that could ruin the crops. When he goes to the barn, everyone is passed out and no one is available to help him save Bathsheba's harvest except Bathsheba herself. Oak races to cover the stacks while the storm rages. The next day he meets Boldwood, who has allowed his own harvest to be ruined.

Weeks later, Bathsheba and Troy run into Fanny Robin. Troy does not introduce the women to each other, but, seeing Fanny dressed in tatters, gives Fanny all of the money he has and promises her more if she will meet him the next day. Chapter 40 details Fanny's trek by foot through the dead of night to the poor house in Casterbridge.

Chapters 41—47

Bathsheba and Troy fight when he asks her for money, and he leaves. Liddy brings news that Fanny Robin has died, and Bathsheba sends one of the farm hands to bring back her body.

On Fanny's coffin, the people at the poor house have written the contents in chalk. Oak finds the man who was sent to retrieve the coffin at the malthouse. Oak notices the casket says "Fanny Robin and child," and erases the mention of the child, to protect Bathsheba.

Bathsheba, however, becomes suspicious. She goes to where the casket is and opens it with a screwdriver, finding the corpse of an infant child with Fanny's. Troy comes in and sees it too. He declares that Fanny was the love of his life, that Bathsheba means nothing to him. He runs away, and she locks herself in her room. After erecting an expensive tombstone for Fanny, Troy flees town. Swimming at the shore, a currant pulls him out to sea, where a boat picks him up.

Chapters 48—51

Word soon comes that Troy has drowned. Oak becomes the bailiff of Bathsheba's farm and also of Boldwood's. Months later Boldwood learns from Liddy that Bathsheba will not consider marrying again for seven years after Troy's disappearance, and so Boldwood counts the days.

At a fair late in the summer, Troy, who has been traveling with a carnival, notices Bathsheba and disguises himself. Boldwood, taking Bathsheba home from the fair, begs her to promise to marry him after six more years; when she stalls, he gets her to promise to announce her decision by Christmas.

Chapters 52—57

Boldwood throws a festive Christmas Eve party. He makes it clear he expects Bathsheba to agree to marry him in six years and offers her an ornate diamond ring. Troy enters the party and insists that Bathsheba leave with him. Boldwood shoots Troy and tries to shoot himself before the farm hands stop him.

While Boldwood is imprisoned and sentenced to die, facts come out about his mental state. In his house are found packages of women's clothes with the name "Bathsheba Boldwood" on them. In the end, he is not sentenced to death.

At the grave where Bathsheba has had Troy buried with Fanny, she runs into Oak, with whom she has not talked in months. He explains he stayed away because he was afraid people would gossip that he had designs on marrying her himself, and she encourages the idea. The novel ends with the marriage of Oak to Bathsheba.

Characters

Cainy Ball

Cainy is the boy who is appointed assistant shepherd to Gabriel. His mother named him Cain because she was confused about the story of Genesis, and thought it was Abel who killed his brother.

William Boldwood

Boldwood is a bachelor, about forty years old, who owns the farm next to the Everdene farm. He takes responsibility for Fanny Robin when her parents die. Bathsheba Everdene first becomes aware of Boldwood when he comes to visit soon after she takes over her uncle's farm. Her maid explains that Boldwood is a confirmed bachelor and shows no interest in women, which spurs Bathsheba to send him an anonymous valentine.

The valentine starts Boldwood thinking about women. He becomes convinced that he is in love with Bathsheba. Because he is used to business interactions and not personal ones, he pressures her to marry him and is confused when she is reluctant. When she marries Troy, Boldwood feels she has been stolen from him and lets his farm go to ruin. After Troy is thought dead, Boldwood interprets the fact that she will not remarry for seven years to mean that at the end of that time, she will marry him. When she says she will give him an answer at Christmas, he prepares a lavish party, assuming she will become his fiancée.

When Boldwood is jailed for killing Troy, the extent of Boldwood's delusions becomes apparent. Locked closets are found in his house, full of dresses, furs, and jewelry, all inscribed to "Bathsheba Boldwood," with a date seven years in advance, when he expects her to marry him. Because he is clearly insane, Boldwood is not hanged for Troy's murder.

Jan Coggan

Coggan is introduced as a man who often stands witness to weddings and baptisms in the county. When Oak arrives at Weatherbury, he takes a room at Coggan's house. Coggan becomes a confidante who knows the truth about Oak's past relationship with Bathsheba.

Bathsheba Everdene

Bathsheba is the central figure of the novel. At the beginning of the novel she is around twenty years old and poor, helping to tend her aunt's farm. She is vain. The first time

Oak sees her she takes out a mirror and examines her face, unaware that anyone is looking. She flirts with Oak but does not accept his proposal of marriage because she does not believe he can put up with a strong-headed woman like herself.

When an uncle dies and leaves her his farm, Bathsheba takes control. She fires the bailiff for stealing, and instead of hiring another bailiff, she takes on the duty of managing the farm herself. She still has the flirtatious girl in her, though, and on Valentine's Day she sends an anonymous valentine to the stuffy bachelor who lives next door. When he takes this claim of love seriously, she feels guilty and finds herself unable to refuse him outright.

Bathsheba is a conscientious employer. She gives her workers bonuses when work is going well. When news arrives that Fanny Robin, who worked for her uncle, has died, Bathsheba arranges for the body to be brought back to Weatherbury, to be buried in the local cemetery.

When she meets the dashing Sergeant Troy, she falls for his extravagant flattery, falls in love with him, and ends up marrying him. He spends her money, ignores her, and almost ruins her farm. Throughout these difficult times, she relies on Oak, both for help in managing her farm and as a sympathetic ear to listen to her troubles.

Bathsheba becomes a colder, more pragmatic person after Troy leaves. She is hesitant to give Boldwood any hope of marrying her, because she is concerned about the way she hurt his feelings in the past. She focuses on business and tries to forget about men.

In the end, when Boldwood is in jail and Troy is dead, Bathsheba rekindles the same playful, flirtatious relationship with Oak that she had at the beginning of the novel. She recognizes his loyalty through all that has happened and realizes she has loved him all along.

Henry Frey

Frey is one of the workers on the Everdene farm. He always signs his name "Henery" and is often called that by the other workers.

George

George is the sheepdog who helps Gabriel Oak tend his flocks, and he is later brought to Weatherbury to help Oak with Bathsheba's sheep.

Matthew Moon

Moon is one of the workers on Bathsheba Everdene's farm.

Gabriel Oak

Oak is one of the novel's most important characters. In the beginning, he is a farmer. Though his farm is not a large one, it is secure. When he meets Bathsheba Everdene, he asks her to marry him. Soon his flock of sheep is wiped out in an accident, and he has to sell his farm to pay his bills. When he cannot find work as a bailiff, or foreman, of a farm, he looks for a job as a shepherd. He is hired at the farm Bathsheba has recently inherited.

Hardy presents Oak as a conscientious and intelligent worker, who intuitively understands the problems of grain and livestock. Oak is completely devoted to Bathsheba, watching after her farm so that she will profit from it. Unlike Boldwood, who is never able to get over the idea of Bathsheba's rejecting his offer of marriage, Oak goes for years without mentioning the feelings that he once had for her. He does not forget about his love, but instead channels it into labor on her farm. Oak takes on a brotherly role for Bathsheba in her romantic entanglements with Boldwood and Troy. She goes to him for advice about men, even though they are both aware of their romantic past.

Oak becomes Boldwood's friend. Boldwood recognizes and admires the way Oak is able to control his love for Bathsheba and also admires Oak's skill as a farmer. When Boldwood devotes his time to pursuing Bathsheba, he hires Oak to watch over his farm as well as hers. A less confident man than Oak would have refused to help another man court the woman he loves.

In the end Oak tells Bathsheba he plans to go to California. This decision, like other decisions in his life, is not made for his own benefit, but because he does not want people to gossip about Bathsheba, since they all know he is in love with her. Her decision to marry him in the end stems from her clear understanding of how much he means to her.

Pennyways

Pennyways is the bailiff of the Everdene farm. Soon after Bathsheba takes over the farm, she catches Pennyways sneaking out of the barn with half a bushel of barley, and she fires him. He later turns up at the Greenhill Fair, where he recognizes Troy as one of the performers. His attempt to point out Troy's presence to Bathsheba does not work, and he then becomes Troy's accomplice in Troy's drive to reestablish himself at the farm.

Joseph Poorgrass

Joseph is a very shy man, and the other farm workers kid him about it. He has a weakness for alcohol. When he is supposed to bring Fanny Robin's body back to the

Everdene farm, he stops at the Boar's Head along the way and stays so late drinking that he cannot make it back in time for the funeral.

Fanny Robin

Fanny is a tragic young woman who is used by the womanizing Sergeant Troy and then abandoned. She ends up malnourished and pregnant. Fanny worked on the Everdene farm for years and leaves a few days after Bathsheba's arrival because Troy's company was relocated. She goes to the new barracks to ask when Troy will marry her. After she is late to the wedding ceremony because she went to the wrong church, Troy refuses to marry her. Troy runs into her after he is married to Bathsheba. Fanny is destitute. Troy wants to help her, but she dies before he can get money to her.

Oak tries to keep secret the fact that Fanny dies unmarried and with a child. When Troy finds out about it, though, he shows that he is truly sad. Instead of his beautiful wealthy wife Bathsheba, he declares that Fanny was his only true love.

Jacob Smallbury

The son of "the maltster," who owns the tavern in the village, Jacob is around sixty-five years old.

Liddy Smallbury

Liddy is the daughter of William Smallbury and the handmaid of Bathsheba Everdene. She is about the same age as Bathsheba and serves as a confidant from time to time.

William Smallbury

Son of Jacob Smallbury, William is about forty years old and is described as having "a cheerful soul in a gloomy body."

Laban Tall

Tall has recently, in middle age, married for the first time. He is bossed around by his strong-willed wife, Susan. Hardy describes him as "a young married man, who having no individuality worth mentioning was known as 'Susan Tall's husband.'"

Susan Tall

The new wife of Laban Tall is presented as a domineering woman who makes all of the decisions for the couple.

Frank Troy

Sergeant Troy is presented as a contradiction. Throughout the novel, his actions show him to be an opportunist and a womanizer. He is first introduced as responding to Fanny Robin, who has walked miles in winter to the town to which his battalion has moved. Fanny asks Troy when he is going to marry her, but Troy says he cannot come out and see her. Then there is laughter inside the barracks, as if he is mocking her. He does agree to marry her, though, but when she shows up late to the wedding he uses it as an excuse to call off the wedding. In courting Bathsheba Everdene, Troy shows himself to be skillful and witty.

In his marriage to Bathsheba, Troy exhibits confidence. He swindles Boldwood out of money Boldwood offers Troy to make Bathsheba an honest woman, taking the money although he and Bathsheba are already married. Troy spends Bathsheba's money on liquor for the farm hands, who are not used to hard liquor, and as a result almost ruins a year's work. He also loses heavily at the horse races.

On the other hand, he is, at heart, a romantic. When he hears of Fanny's death, he is truly grieved, to such an extent that he is willing to lose his comfortable position as Bathsheba's husband. He tells Bathsheba she means nothing to him, that Fanny was his true love. He erects a tombstone to Fanny that says he was the one to put it up, despite the scandal that could ensue. He then runs away, eventually joining a traveling show, in order to forget his one true love.

In the end Troy returns to being a scoundrel. He is dragging Bathsheba out of the Christmas party, saying she should obey him, when he is shot by Boldwood and killed.

Themes

Unrequited Love

Much of the plot of *Far from the Madding Crowd* depends on unrequited love□love by one person for another that is not mutual in that the other person does not feel love in return. The novel is driven, from the first few chapters, by Gabriel Oak's love for Bathsheba. Once he has lost his farm, he is free to wander anywhere in search of work, but he heads to Weatherbury because it is in the direction that Bathsheba has gone. This move leads to Oak's employment at Bathsheba's farm, where he patiently consoles her in her troubles and supports her in tending the farm, with no sign he will ever have his love returned.

Oak's feelings for Bathsheba parallel Boldwood's feelings for Bathsheba. Given the fact that Bathsheba sends Boldwood a provocative valentine, sealed with the strong message "Marry Me," Boldwood has good reason to believe she might love him. On the other hand, she tries to extinguish any such belief, telling Boldwood repeatedly she will not marry him. Unlike Oak, who is willing to take Bathsheba at her word, Boldwood looks for the slightest sign in what she says that there may be a chance she may change her mind. Since she is not strong or direct in her refusal of him, there is always room for him to believe that she is softening.

Bathsheba herself suffers a similar unrequited love for Sergeant Troy. She feels he is mistreating her once they are married, but she cannot help herself because she loves him so much. He, on the other hand, is not capable of a stable love relationship. When they argue over the fact that he is lying about the trip he plans to take to see Fanny, and Bathsheba regrets how much she used to love him, Troy can only mutter, "I can't help how things fall out . . . upon my heart, women will be the death of me." When he is thought to have drowned, though, Bathsheba still thinks enough of him to go on waiting, to see if he will come back.

Catastrophe

This novel focuses on the way that catastrophe can occur at any time, threatening to change lives. The most obvious example occurs when Oak's flock of sheep is destroyed by an unlikely confluence of circumstances, including an inexperienced sheep dog, a rotted rail, and a chalk pit that happens to have been dug adjacent to his land. In one night, Oak's future as an independent farmer is destroyed, and he ends up begging just to secure the diminished position of a shepherd.

Potential catastrophe occurs throughout the novel, but Oak, having suffered already, uses skill and diligence to avert it. For instance, Bathsheba's flock is almost ruined as swiftly and thoroughly as Oak's flock is, on the day that Bathsheba dismisses Oak from her farm. It is only because Oak returns to his post, after forcing Bathsheba to ask him

back, that most of the sheep survive. Then a thunderstorm arrives the day the harvest is complete. The rain could ruin the barley, corn, and wheat, destroying Bathsheba financially, if the grain is not covered. This catastrophe is averted because Oak works through the night in the rain to protect the harvest. Sergeant Troy, who is supposed to be the master of the farm, sleeps off the hard liquor that has rendered him and all of his farm hands useless. With these episodes, Hardy shows that catastrophe can cause ruin, but it can also sometimes be avoided when care is taken.

Social Hierarchy

This novel offers modern readers a clear picture of how important social position was in England in the nineteenth century and of the opportunities that existed to change class, in either direction. In the beginning, Oak and Bathsheba are social equals: he is an independent farmer who rents his land, and she lives on her aunt's farm next door to his, which is presumably similar in value. The only thing that keeps her from accepting his proposal of marriage is the fact that she just does not want to be married yet. After Oak loses his farm and Bathsheba inherits her uncle's farm, there is little question of whether they can marry□their social positions are too different. She is more socially compatible with Boldwood, who owns the farm next to hers and is in a similar social position.

Unlike societies in which the social hierarchy is rigid, the situation in rural nineteenth-century England did offer opportunity to those in the lower positions to move up. With hard work, Oak works his way up to bailiff of both Bathsheba's and Boldwood's farms. Earning more money, he also has the social status that comes from being trusted with such a unique position. Still, at the end of the book he does not think that he has risen socially high enough to marry Bathsheba, as indicated by the fact that he offers to leave the country, rather than give anyone the idea he might think himself worthy of her. He has risen enough socially by this time to have their marriage accepted, however, and the rest of society has nothing but good will for them.

Style

Realism and Romanticism

Far from the Madding Crowd is considered by some to be a solid example of realism, a literary style that arose in Europe in the last half of the nineteenth century. The early half of the century was dominated by romanticism, which encouraged writers to emphasize their imaginations. Romantic writers, as a rule, focused on individual expression, and thus produced works that often featured elements of the supernatural and almost always showed the world as a projection of the individual's emotions. In response to the excesses of romanticism, which some writers felt took literary works too far from the way that most people actually experience the world, realistic fiction began in the 1840s in works by writers such as Gustav Flaubert and George Eliot. Because romantic writers often presented the world as being changeable by sheer willpower and, therefore, were inclined toward happy endings, realistic writers tended to show the harsher aspects of life. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the realistic world view is represented most clearly in the way Oak's flock of sheep die, suddenly and senselessly. It is also presented in the way that Hardy exposes the social standards of his time by making Fanny Robin not only a jilted woman but also pregnant out of wedlock. On the other hand, there are many romantic elements in the book. The way that the thunderstorm in chapter 37 mirrors the emotional turmoil of Gabriel and Bathsheba is a standard romantic idiom. The book's many strained coincidences constitute romantic device (such as the fact that a boat picks up Troy before he drowns and Troy subsequently encounters Bathsheba at the Greenhill Fair, to name two examples). The book's happy ending, with the longtime acquaintances finally free to admit their mutual love and marry one another, is a sign that, for all its realistic elements, this novel is basically a romantic novel.

Denoument

The word *denoument* comes from the French, and literally means "the unraveling" or "the untying." It is used in literature to describe the part of a novel that comes after the climax, when the excitement has peaked and readers gain an understanding of what life will hold in the future for the surviving characters. In this novel, the climax comes at the Christmas party when Boldwood kills Troy. This climax carries on into the next chapter, "After the Shock," in which Bathsheba dresses her husband's body and finally cures herself of his hold on her. The *denoument* occurs the following March, when Oak and Bathsheba, having had time to accept the shocking developments that removed the main obstacles from their way, find themselves able to playfully admit their love. For readers, it is clear that the shock of Troy's sudden return and just as sudden murder will not negatively affect Bathsheba. The future of the novel's two main characters is just as clear: they will live happily ever after.

Historical Context

Wessex

Critics often point out that Hardy created Wessex, the imaginary setting of many of his novels and poems, to resemble Dorset, located along the southern coast of England. His use of the word "Wessex" first appears in *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

There actually was a historical use of the word "Wessex": it was a kingdom in southern England, dating back to the invasion of the Saxons in 494 a.d. Though it underwent changes over the course of centuries, its most permanent configuration approximated that of the modern counties of Hampshire, Dorset, Wiltshire, and Somerset. It was in this place that King Arthur held domain over the Knights of the Roundtable, giving the area an important historical distinction. By 927, though, this kingdom had been absorbed into the greater polity of England.

By the nineteenth century the name "Wessex" had receded far into history. The use of this word for the area serves as a reference to the ancient myths and customs still practiced in rural municipalities across southern England in Hardy's time, but it is also an indicator that Hardy was not writing an exact history of any particular location. Still, the similarities between Dorchester and Wessex are so pronounced that whole books have been written tracing the connections of the fictitious county to specific locations in the Southwest England.

Urbanization

In the late nineteenth century, country life in England was under attack from many sides. For one thing, industrialization was on the rise. In part this was the effect of the Industrial Revolution, which had started in England in the previous century and by Hardy's time had spread across western Europe. Factories, clustered in the cities, offered wages beyond anything workers could hope to gain if they stayed in the farm towns of their parents and ancestors, so many workers moved to urban areas, which led to the overcrowding and pollution that has been recorded so graphically in Charles Dickens's novels about London in the 1830s and 1840s.

In addition, English farms lost a great deal of profitability when the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846. The Corn Laws, which had been in effect in various forms for over 400 years, were controversial throughout the nineteenth century. Supporters said the laws protected English farmers from market fluctuations by assuring them of a high price for what they grew; opponents felt they hampered industry by paying tax money to subsidize farm-owning landowners. When the Corn Laws were repealed, farm wages plummeted. The result was that many people whose families had been farmers for generations, if not centuries, found themselves relocating to urban areas.

To some degree, then, Hardy's stories of Wessex offered displaced farmers an outlet for the nostalgia they felt when they looked back to the land on which their families had worked for generations. Hardy's rustic characters are not necessarily kind or wise, but they always have the characteristics that one would identify with country people: folk wisdom, tradition, and a sense of community, which are all absent from city life. In addition, Hardy is credited with capturing the nuances of workers in the rural south of England better than any other writer.

Critical Overview

Far from the Madding Crowd was Hardy's breakthrough novel. He had published three books before it, which generally left critics unimpressed. As Dale Kramer notes in *Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy: The Novels*, reviewers of Hardy's early works

were struck by the seemingly uncoordinated, coincidence-laden plots, and also by the rural settings where the sense of time was that of an idyll, by fantastic implausibilities mixed with poetic revelation of inner identities, and by the folklore of "Wessex" that resisted the importunities of modern existence.

Kramer later continues,

By the time of *Far from the Madding Crowd* even critical reviewers realized they were dealing with substantial works calling for judgment not in relation to popular writers of the day, but in relation to recognized masters.

Once Hardy's literary importance was established, critics were still divided in their analysis of his work. He faced tremendous pressure from his Victorian audiences for his frank portrayal of sexuality, such as an unmarried woman like Fanny Robin being buried with her infant child, yet still loved by her neighbors and the man who had impregnated her. Hardy stopped writing fiction in 1895, after his novels had been attacked by critics who had called his fiction "vulgar" and "disagreeable." Still, there had been many positive reviews from critics who recognized him as one of England's finest writers. Hardy turned to writing poetry at age fifty-six. Because he was already a major literary figure, it was difficult to dismiss his poetry, though critics tended to pay less heed to it than to his fiction.

Throughout the twentieth century, Hardy's work held its place at the forefront of world literature. Still, the contradictions in his work afford new readers ample room for formulating contrasting opinions. Richard C. Carpenter explains the wide range of feelings readers have had about Hardy's novels this way:

If he *is* great, he is bound to be problematic, showing new sides to new generations, demanding that we wrestle with him as with an angel and take a few falls before we realize what sort of man he is.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature. In this essay Kelly argues that questions about Hardy's artistry in the novel are wrongly founded on whether the characters are too flexible to be believed.

Bathsheba Everdene, of Thomas Hardy's 1874 novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*, has been known to readers over the generations for her fiery beauty. The book details her romantic involvements with the three most sought-after bachelors in her county: Gabriel Oak, William Boldwood, and Sergeant Frank Troy. One reason for the book's enduring popularity is certainly the fact that it has two conclusions. First, Bathsheba ends up as a classic tragic heroine, able to have whatever she wants until her own success thrusts her into misery. After that, the book reverses order, and Bathsheba is presented as a romantic, almost comic heroine, who, despite the suffering that the world inflicts on her, is able to find happiness in the end.

Since the novel's first publication, critics have faulted Hardy for this ambiguity, just as audiences have found it very satisfactory to see a strong-headed and beautiful woman brought low and then redeemed within the same story. Novels can be satisfactory without being artistically honest. The strength of Hardy's plot line as true to life depends on how well he controls the main characters. If they are true to their characterizations, then the novel can ride them through the high points and low points to offer an honest look at the fictional world he presents. If, on the other hand, he allows them to change their basic personalities for his convenience in spinning a crowd-pleasing plot, then *Far from the Madding Crowd* can be considered just well-written and popular, but not necessarily a work of literature. This distinction, true of most books, requires even closer examination in this one because Hardy pummels his characters with such intense circumstances that it is not always easy to tell if they remain consistent.

Readers first encounter Bathsheba when Oak does. She is seated regally atop a wagon filled with her possessions, attended by a Norcombe commoner, and, when she thinks no one is watching, she sneaks a glance at herself in a mirror. That glance says that she is vain, but what is not made clear is exactly who she thinks her beauty is for. If she is concerned about how she looks to the driver, then it could be said that she values the admiration of everyone, no matter how lowly in status, no matter how unlikely a suitor. It could also be argued, though, that the secret glance in the mirror has more metaphysical implications: Bathsheba is not all that concerned with how her looks impress others, but is even more self-centered than that, and is concerned only with impressing herself. The fact that a mirror necessarily concerns outside appearances seems to indicate that this scene is about the face that she presents to the outside world; however, in her actions further in the book, with the workers at the farm she inherits, Bathsheba shows no desire to attract working men.

Her action is important because it is the first thing that attracts Oak to her, and Oak's judgment in all other things seems pretty good. As Peter J. Casagrande wrote in his essay "A New View of Bathsheba Everdene": Oak shows an "ability to observe the

defects of non-human nature (the loss of his flock, the fire, the storm, the bloated sheep)" which allows him the flexibility he needs to make adjustments

to observe, minister to, and finally to marry the faulty Bathsheba. The novel thus associates the imperfect nature of its heroine with defective non-human nature and offers in Oak an example of how to cope with the unregenerateness of things.

In other words, Casagrande assumes that what he elsewhere calls Bathsheba's "aggressive coquetry" is a flaw in her that places her in a category beyond human nature, instead of viewing it as the awareness of "self" that in fact defines human nature. That Oak understands Bathsheba better than she understands herself can hardly be argued, which leads readers to the frustrating conclusion that Bathsheba would be much happier throughout the book if she would only listen to Oak. What can be argued, however, is why, if she grows as a person throughout the book and becomes more human, that makes her a good match for farmer/shepherd Oak at the end.

Oak does in fact have the sort of understanding of nature that one expects from someone who spends his time observing the land, the skies, and animals, but he spends little time in the presence of other people. The novel mentions several times how useless his watch is to him, and how much more reliable his reading is of the alignment of the stars and planets. In this context, the love-at-first-sight that stirs in him when he sees Bathsheba staring at herself does not fit into an easy interpretation. It is not clearly the condescension of a man determined to redeem a woman from the sin of vanity. If Oak is attracted to her precisely because of her interest in herself, not in spite of it, then the novel's message would be that narcissism is as natural to humans as growing wool is to sheep. Bathsheba's interest in her self, then, would not be the flaw that critics tend to associate with her, but a benign part of her nature.

The ways in which Bathsheba interacts with the other men, though, certainly seem to indicate a tragic flaw as, after their involvement with Bathsheba, one ends up dead and the other goes to prison for having murdered him. Here too, though, there is room for seeing Bathsheba either as an instigator or as a victim of her own nature. The greatest sin she appears to perpetrate in the book comes when she attracts farmer Boldwood. It comes on an idle Valentine's Day, when she feels isolated. With nobody to send a card to, she decides to send one to the farmer who once tried to stop at her house for a social call, though she told the servants to send him away because she did not feel presentable enough. Here, too, Bathsheba's motives can be interpreted in different ways, ranging from childlike to cunning. Hardy explains her rationale for sending the valentine as a lark, an act of playfulness, down to her affixing a seal that says, "Marry Me." Hardy does, though, have it follow two incidents, at the sheep wash and at the Corn Market, where Boldwood fails to take any notice of her, raising the question of whether Bathsheba's flirtation is not as innocent as is presented, but is rather intended, subconsciously or not, to punish Boldwood for failing to give her the attention she desires.

Her attention changes Boldwood completely, from a man who is disinterested in women to one who is willing to devote his life to one, from there to the delusional extreme of

buying clothes and presents as gifts with which to shower Bathsheba seven years later. This "new" Boldwood is perfectly consistent with the dour loner he is when he enters the book. He is a mystery throughout, and the only difference from beginning to end is that he starts out a respected but aloof member of the community. He is pitied when people realize that Bathsheba has rejected him; and, as he tries to regain respect, his desperation is fueled by his own awareness of how apparent his desperation is. Boldwood's tragedy might be viewed, as it often has been, as his victimization by a vain woman, but his self-professed love for Bathsheba is so impersonal, so removed from the facts of the situation, that it is clear he is bound to have his self-esteem damaged by someone, somewhere.

Bathsheba's humbling marriage to Troy, who turns out to have not only fathered Fanny Robin's child but to care more for Fanny after her death than for his wife, is often referred to as the converse of the Boldwood situation, because Troy courts Bathsheba lightly, with no clear interest in her once he has won her love. Aside from trifling, though, the effect of Troy's story has little in common with Bathsheba's. While her flirtation with Boldwood seems to be a way of killing time, his is a more pathological diversion from his true self. It is clear that his love for Fanny is true, even though he does not realize it while it is in his power to act. He avoids her when she visits his barracks, and he takes the slightest excuse to back out of marriage, and he marries Bathsheba instead, but when Fanny is dead he thinks nothing of throwing away his comfortable lifestyle as a landed gentleman as he releases his heartfelt grief. Bathsheba flirts with Boldwood when she has nothing else to do, nothing to lose; Troy flirts with Bathsheba at the expense of the one true love of his life. This can be seen as a sign that she is a temptress, a distraction, except for the fact that their relationship is initiated by Troy and advanced at every step of the way by him. The only way to presume that Bathsheba is responsible for taking Troy away from Fanny is to see him as somehow not responsible for his own actions□being driven by his social-climbing, woman-chasing nature□while at the same time thinking that Bathsheba should be accountable for hers.

After the series of tragedies that mark Bathsheba's life, the novel comes to a happy ending because of Gabriel Oak's patience. Throughout the story, he offers Bathsheba a shoulder to cry on and some sound advice (which she takes sometimes, but often does not). After Boldwood goes mad, Troy returns, and the two of them come to tragic ends, Bathsheba becomes available again. Now somewhat wealthy, Oak is close enough to being her social peer that a marriage would not be unreasonable. And the personal characteristics that may once have made him seem lacking are nothing compared to the competition. If Oak once seemed impetuous in asking Bathsheba to marry her, she has Troy's hotheaded behavior to compare it to. If he seemed too awkward around a woman, he is positively graceful when compared to Boldwood.

In the end, the question of whether this is an honest novel comes back to whether readers can accept the fact that Gabriel Oak waits so long for Bathsheba Everdene. It does strain credulity that he would be such a good sport as to watch the world implode around her and then step up with a new offer of marriage once the dust has settled. If Oak views her as a pretty woman he can love in spite of her vanity, then it would be right to question whether Hardy has painted Oak as too angelic to be true. But there is

plenty of evidence in the novel that Oak is more than just a smitten shepherd, that he knows exactly what he is getting with Bathsheba. And there is also enough to this story to believe that Bathsheba may be beautiful, and she may be interested in herself, but that the events that ruin some of the men who encounter her spring from their own characters and not from some sort of spell cast on them by her vanity.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on *Far from the Madding Crowd*, in *Novels for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Adaptations

An abridged audio edition of *Far from the Madding Crowd* is available from Blackstone Audiobooks. Released in 1984, it was read by Jill Masters and is available on both cassette and compact disc.

Another audiocassette version, read by Hugh Rose and Kate Young, was released in 1980 by Century Publishing of Houston, Texas.

An unabridged audio version, in cassette and compact disc form, was released in 1998 by The Audio Partners. It is read by Stephen Thorne.

A big-screen blockbuster adaptation of this book was made in 1967, with an all-star cast including Julie Christie, Alan Bates, Terence Stamp, and Peter Finch. It was directed by John Schlesinger. Produced by Warner, it is available on Warner Home Video.

A more recent film version, done for public television's Masterpiece Theatre series, stars Paloma Baeza as Bathsheba Everdene, Nathaniel Parker as Gabriel Oak, and Jonathan Firth as Frank Troy. Directed by Nicholas Renton, it was released on videocassette by Anchor Bay Entertainment in 1998.

An unusual adaptation of this novel of lust and passion was the one done by London's SNAP People's Theatre Trust, adjusting the story of Bathsheba Everdene for a children's audience. A videotape of this production was released by Globalstage in 1998. It is recommended for audiences aged 12 and up.

Readers can find hundreds of online links to articles about this novel and about Hardy himself at the Web site of the Thomas Hardy Association (http://www.yale.edu/hardysoceaders).

Topics for Further Study

Research modern methods of raising sheep and make a chart comparing them to the practices described in the novel.

Find a recording of pastoral flute music, like the music that Gabriel Oak might have played, and present it to your class with an explanation of its history.

Hardy eventually quit writing novels because of public criticism of the sexuality displayed in his books. Try to imagine how this story would have gone if Fanny Robin had not been carrying Sergeant Troy's baby when she died. Would Troy have been able to stay with Bathsheba after Fanny's death, and if so, where would their relationship have gone? Write a short play featuring their dialog after Fanny's funeral.

Some readers are surprised to find that people sent valentines to each other in the 1870s. Research the history of Valentine's Day, and present the different customs associated with it throughout the ages.

Compare and Contrast

1870s: England begins its shift from a farming economy to an industrial economy, as foreign imported meat and produce drive down farm wages. Over the next few decades, the population shifts from rural to urban settings at an unprecedented rate.

Today: Britain has one of the world's most sophisticated industrial economies. Only about two-fifths of the land is usable for farming, and the country is only about 4 percent forested.

1870s: A woman carrying a child out of wedlock would be shamed into traveling on her own in poverty rather than returning to her own town and facing disgrace before her friends and neighbors.

Today: The social stigma against unmarried women is greatly diminished as the practice has become more common throughout the past three decades.

1870s: It is considered highly unusual for a lone woman like Bathsheba to run a farm by herself. Most women who have come by farms through inheritance rely on bailiffs to tend to day-to-day operations.

Today: A lone woman running a farm would be notable today primarily because a majority of farms are owned and run by corporations.

1870s: A piano in the house is the mark of affluence for a woman living on a farm. Gabriel Oak promises Bathsheba that, if she marries him, she will have one "in a year or two."

Today: Full-sized pianos are again a sign of luxury; electric keyboards, however, can produce similar sound quality for a fraction of the price.

1870s: News is spread by word of mouth, most often at a public gathering place like Warren's Malthouse in the novel. Shepherds rely on natural signs to predict coming changes in the weather.

Today: Even the most remote locations have access to twenty-four-hour-a-day news and weather channels, as well as Internet access for up-to-the-minute information.

What Do I Read Next?

Far from the Madding Crowd was the first of Hardy's Wessex novels to draw serious critical attention. While similarities exist throughout all of his novels, readers who like Bathsheba Everdene will probably appreciate Eustacia Vye, the heroine of Hardy's next novel *The Return of the Native* (1878).

When *Far from the Madding Crowd* was first published, it was rumored to be the work of George Eliot (pseudonym for Mary Ann Evans). Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*, first published in 1872, is considered by many to be her masterpiece.

Emphasis is often placed on the connection between Hardy's characters and the setting of his novels. One scholarly work that examines the subject closely is Noorul Hasan's *Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination* (1982). Hasan's work has enough depth to dedicate an entire chapter to *Far from the Madding Crowd* and point out nuances that a modern reader might not at first appreciate.

One of the best and most detailed biographies of Thomas Hardy is Martin Seymour-Smith's *Hardy* (1994), considered by many to be the most authoritative book on the author's life.

Further Study

Lock, Charles, "Hardy and the Nature of Fiction" in *Thomas Hardy*, St. Martin's Press, 1992, pp. 84—138.

This chapter of Lock's study of Hardy focuses on Hardy's artistic theory, drawn from his fiction and other writings.

Ray, Martin, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy: Allusions and Annotations*, Thomas Hardy Association, 2003, CD-ROM.

Hardy's works in general, and this novel in particular, are packed with references to folk songs and other writers. This work catalogs the exact sources for references to Shelley, Wordsworth, Milton, Tennyson, Swinburne, Byron, and Keats, along with Shakespeare and the Bible.

Stewart, J. I. M., *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography*, Longman, 1971.

Stewart gives detailed background information for each of the major novels.

Zabel, Morton Dauwen, "Hardy in Defense of His Art: The Aesthetic of Incongruity," in *Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Albert J. Guerard, Prentice-Hall, 1963, pp. 24—45; originally published in *Craft and Character in Modern Fiction*, Viking Press, 1957.

This essay is thorough in its references to Hardy's writings about art and the critics who doubted him.

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Carpenter, Richard, "Thomas Hardy Revisited," in *Thomas Hardy*, Twayne's English Author Series, No. 13, Twayne Publishers, 1964, pp. 15—16.

Casagrande, Peter J., "A New View of Bathsheba Everdene," in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Dale Kramer, Barnes & Noble Books, 1979, pp. 51—53.

Kramer, Dale, "Thomas Hardy, Then to Now," in *Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy: The Novels*, edited by Dale Kramer, G. K. Hall, 1990, pp. 2—3.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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