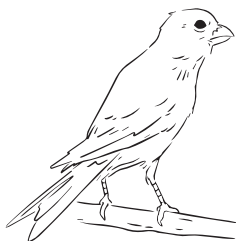


WORLDVIEW GUIDE

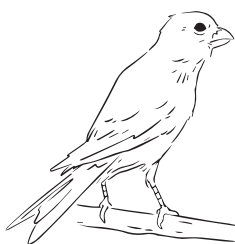
FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD



Matthew Huff

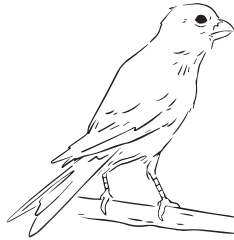
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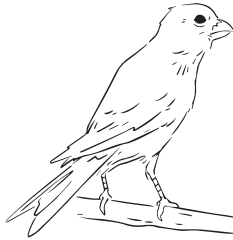


INTRODUCTION

“I shall do one thing in this life—one thing certain—that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die” (37).¹

So declares Gabriel Oak, one of many suitors vying for the affections of Bathsheba Everdene, a spirited woman fighting for her femininity and her freedom against a turbulent, often hostile environment. In a time when the Edenic fields of England were giving way to the industrial machinery of the modern world, Gabriel’s promise and Bathsheba’s curious response move us all to wonder: How might the human heart remain constant amidst the restlessness of a madding crowd?

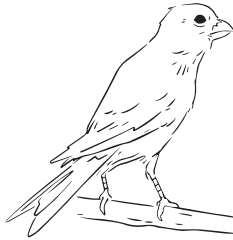
1. All quotations are taken from the Canon Classic (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2022).



THE WORLD AROUND

Life in Victorian England rang with prosperity and paradox, top hats, and typhoid fever. In many ways, England stood at the center of the world, enjoying the calm of *Pax Britannica*, the luxury of economic growth, the thrill of industrial progress, the pride of imperial expansion, and, of course, the fruit of Charles Dickens's world-famous pen.

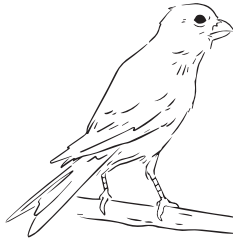
Yet, beneath the widespread opulence and optimism of the nation lay a teeming world of poverty, crime, and despair. Sparked by the incessant thrumming of factory life (complete with child labor and corporate greed) and fueled by an increasingly utilitarian education system and Charles Darwin's startling redefinition of humanity, the Victorian parade brought a crushing wave of dehumanization. As the upper classes warmed themselves with their glittering superficialities and rich claret, many others functioned like cogs in the clock, knowledgeable of his or her place in society with little opportunity of rising above it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) lived in an extraordinary time—one foot striding the wild heaths of England, the other stepping into the looming shadows of the twentieth century, a barren world he predicted would offer “little cause for carolings.”² This gloomy sterility he foresaw stands in direct contrast to the pastoral beauty and grandeur of his home in southwest England, the region he affectionately dubbed “Wessex” and which became the semi-fictional setting for all of his major novels. The son of a stonemason, Hardy grew up near Egdon Heath in Dorset, and his lifelong preference for its old, rural landscape over the thoroughly modern London is particularly evident in his choosing the name “Wessex” for his setting (and later his own dog!) as the term is an

2. Thomas Hardy, “The Darkling Thrush,” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44325/the-darkling-thrush>.

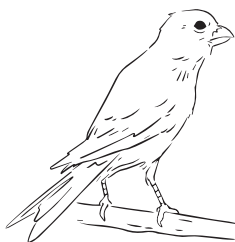


WHAT OTHER NOTABLES SAID

“*Far from the Madding Crowd* was the first of Thomas Hardy’s great novels, and the first to sound the tragic note for which his fiction is best remembered.” ~Margaret Drabble in her introduction to the *Modern Library edition*³

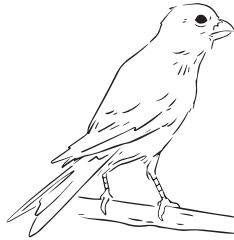
“[Henry James] calls Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* a merely clever, superficial imitation of George Eliot; the suspicion that he was dealing with anything more than the average novel of the day never crossed his mind apparently. He complains of its inartistic narrative and diffuseness, suggesting that there should be a rule limiting the length of a novel to two hundred pages—this just after he finished his own *Roderick Hudson*, in two volumes.”

3. Margaret Drabble, “Introduction,” *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Modern Library, 2001), xiii.



SETTING, CHARACTERS AND PLOT SUMMARY

- *Setting:* Several locations in Hardy's Wessex, primarily Weatherbury, during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century.
- *Bathsheba Everdene:* The protagonist of the novel, Bathsheba is a beautiful and strong-willed farm manager who tries to maintain her independence as she encounters three separate suitors. While Bathsheba's courage and assertiveness win her the loyalty of her farm workers (and her suitors' attention), her vanity and impulsiveness cause her to spiral downward through the course of the story.
- *Gabriel Oak:* Bathsheba's first suitor, Gabriel is a strong and compassionate shepherd who works on Bathsheba's farm and serves as her moral guide throughout the various challenges



WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

Hardy's tendency for distilling the dramatic, and often classically tragic, elements of his work into the local, provincial affairs of his characters appears immediately in the opening chapter of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In fact, Hardy himself considered that the

magnificent heritage from the Greeks in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its action in an extent of their country not much larger than the half-dozen counties here [in his novels] reunited under the old name of Wessex. [...] [T]here was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose.⁷

In this telling statement, Hardy suggests there is “quite enough human nature” at the *local* level and that epic tragedy can be, perhaps even *should* be, concentrated into a

7. Thomas Hardy, “General preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912,” *Far from the Madding Crowd* (London: William Collins, 2015), x.