

A close-up, painterly portrait of a woman with voluminous, wavy blonde hair. She is wearing a red dress with a small, repeating pattern of blue and white flowers. Her hand is raised, touching her hair near her temple. She has a soft smile and is looking towards the camera. The background is dark and textured, suggesting a wooden wall.

gallery
players
present

Far From The Madding Crowd

by thomas hardy
(adaptation by jessica swale)



sir john mills
theatre



Far From The Madding Crowd

Far From The Madding Crowd – A Timeless Classic

Thomas Hardy's *Far From The Madding Crowd* is one of the great, enduring stories of Victorian literature.

Originally written in 1874 and published anonymously as a monthly serial in *Cornhill Magazine*, Hardy revised the text extensively for the 1895 edition and then made further changes for the 1901 edition.

Although written and set in a bygone age, *Far From The Madding Crowd* retains a contemporary feel, despite its period setting, because its heroine is presented an intelligent, defiantly independent woman, who is determined to live life on her own terms and doesn't intend to marry just so she can enjoy the protection of a husband.

Set in Hardy's fictional county of Wessex in rural south west England, the novel deals with themes of love, honour and betrayal, which are played out against a backdrop of the seemingly idyllic, but often harsh, realities of a farming community in Victorian England.

It's a world ruled by centuries of tradition and the timeless march of the seasons. The story is Hardy's love letter to English rural life that he romantically relished and idealised.

Hardy first employed the term "Wessex" in *Far from the Madding Crowd* to describe the partly real, partly dream-country that unifies his novels of South West England. He found the word in the pages of early English history as a designation for an extinct, pre-Norman conquest kingdom, ruled over by Alfred the Great. In the first edition, the word "Wessex" is used only once, in chapter 50; Hardy extended the reference for the 1895 edition. The village of Puddletown, near Dorchester, is the inspiration for the novel's Weatherbury. Dorchester, in turn, inspired Hardy's Casterbridge.

However, it is the believable characters and the identifiable situations, rather than the period settings, which have ensured that the story has struck a chord with successive generations. Bathsheba Everdene is no shrinking violet, she is an intelligent, hard-working, pragmatic young woman who has inherited a slightly run-down farm and she is determined to turn its fortunes around.

When she is living with her aunt, learning how to work the land, she catches the eye of local shepherd Gabriel Oak, who she later employs to look after estate while she keeps the books and enters the male-dominated world of the corn exchange to get the best prices for her produce.



Far From The Madding Crowd

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One of the greatest aspects of Hardy's novel is the fact that his heroine, Bathsheba, is far from perfect. She is fallible, which not only makes her far more interesting as a character but also makes her much more believable. There is nothing more boring than a predictably, perfect hero who essentially the reader on how to live their life.

Bathsheba may think she knows her own mind but she is not immune to making mistakes. The need to be independent frequently clouds her judgement. Usually perceptive and practical in matter of farm management, Hardy shows, time and again, she is unable to see the best thing for her as a person.

She continually overlooks the fact that Gabriel Oak is clearly besotted by her, she rejects the advances of her wealthy neighbour, Mr Boldwood, because she does not want to be possessed and yet she marries the charismatic and unreliable Sergeant Troy, a man destined to bring shame and near ruin to her ordered world.

Thomas Hardy cleverly writes Bathsheba in such a way that we are never completely sure that she is completely given herself over to Troy. Is it a marriage of convenience, one of her pragmatic decisions, or is it true love? We are never entirely sure.

It is this ambivalence which keeps readers coming back for more, it makes Bathsheba an enigmatic heroine, someone who is hard to second guess and makes her an intriguing character for the ages.





Far From The Madding Crowd

Production Team: -

Director – Helen Clarke
Original musical compositions and musical direction – Emily Bennett
Movement and transitions – Wade Ablitt
Stage design and puppetry – Dave Borthwick
Lighting – Will Dowe
Sound – Steve Rowe
Costumes – Angela Silburn
Properties – Kerry Lecomber
Stage manager – Georgie Beard
Rehearsal photographs – Gabby Dean
Publicity photographs – Dave Borthwick
Poster photograph – Will Dowe
Poster and programme design – Steve Taplin
Programme content – Andrew Clarke
Front of house – Mike Wadman, Judy Wadman, Norman Rutterford, Sue Goodall, Maggie Mudd, Margaret Haddock, Ian Quikfall, Sheila Garnham
Scenery – Dave Borthwick, Norman Rutterford, Steve Wooldridge, Helen Clarke
Swordwork Training – Ann Pearce

Acknowledgements: -

Jon Taverner, Steve Cooney and Penny Griffin - Eastern Angles
Chris Finbow - Museum Street Methodist Church, Ipswich
Suzanne Hawkes and Felixstowe Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society
David Henshall – East Anglian Daily Times
Alan Ayres – Co-op Juniors
Sarah Fitch – Chuckles Costume Hire, Felixstowe
Brian Lecomber

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Far From The Madding Crowd

Thomas Hardy – Champion of the People

Thomas Hardy was both a product of his age and a romantic. He embraced the mass communication of the Victorian era but also yearned for a simpler rural existence. He collected and wrote folk songs to prevent them dying out as people moved from the countryside into the towns and cities. He felt that as the industrial revolution gathered pace, then people would forget their heritage.

He sought to preserve that heritage and capture the spirit of rural living in his novels and poems. A Victorian realist in the tradition of George Eliot, he was influenced both in his novels and in his poetry by Romanticism, especially William Wordsworth. He was highly critical of much in Victorian society, especially on the declining status of rural people in Britain, such as those from his native South West England.

While Hardy wrote poetry throughout his life and regarded himself primarily as a poet, his first collection was not published until 1898. Initially, therefore, he gained fame as the author of such novels as *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). During his lifetime, Hardy's poetry was acclaimed by younger poets (particularly the Georgians) who viewed him as a mentor. After his death his poems were lauded by Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden and Philip Larkin.

Many of his novels concern tragic characters struggling against their passions and social circumstances, and they are often set in the semi-fictional region of Wessex. Hardy's Wessex eventually came to include the counties of Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Hampshire and much of Berkshire. Two of his novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, were listed in the top 50 on the BBC's survey *The Big Read*.

Born on June 2 1840 in Higher Bockhampton (then Upper Bockhampton), a hamlet east of Dorchester in Dorset, Thomas Hardy was the son of a stonemason and local builder. His mother Jemima was well-read, and she educated Thomas until he went to his first school at Bockhampton at the age of eight. For several years he attended Mr. Last's Academy for Young Gentlemen in Dorchester, where he learned Latin and demonstrated academic potential but because Hardy's family lacked the means for a university education,





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his formal education ended at the age of 16, when he became apprenticed to James Hicks, a local architect. Hardy trained as an architect in Dorchester before moving to London in 1862; there he enrolled as a student at King's College London. He joined Arthur Blomfield's practice as assistant architect in April 1862 and worked with Blomfield on All Saints' parish church in Windsor, Berkshire in 1862–64.

Hardy never felt at home in London, because he was acutely conscious of class divisions and his social inferiority. During this time he became interested in social reform and the works of John Stuart Mill. After five years, concerned about his health, he returned to Dorset, settling in Weymouth, and decided to dedicate himself to writing.

In 1870, while on an architectural mission to restore the parish church of St Juliot in Cornwall,[11] Hardy met and fell in love with Emma Gifford, whom he married in Kensington in the autumn of 1874. In 1885 Thomas and his wife moved into Max Gate, a house designed by Hardy and built by his brother. Although they later became estranged, Emma's subsequent death in 1912 had a traumatic effect on him and after her death, Hardy made a trip to Cornwall to revisit places linked with their courtship – his Poems 1912–13 reflect upon her death. In 1914, Hardy married his secretary Florence Emily Dugdale, who was 39 years his junior. However, he remained preoccupied with his first wife's death and tried to overcome his remorse by writing poetry.

Hardy became ill with pleurisy in December 1927 and died at Max Gate just after 9 pm on January 11 1928, having dictated his final poem to his wife on his deathbed. His funeral

was on January 16 at Westminster Abbey.

Hardy's work was admired by many younger writers, including D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. In his autobiography *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Robert Graves recalls meeting Hardy in Dorset in the early 1920s and how Hardy received him and his new wife warmly, and was encouraging about his work.

Far From The Madding Crowd





Far From The Madding Crowd

Cast:-

Gabriel Oak

Dafydd Westacott

Bathsheba Everdene

Leanne Wilcox

Sergeant Francis Troy, Farmer

Ben Maytham

William Boldwood, Old Man

Thomas Haigh

Fanny Robin, Cello

Beatrice Carpenter

Mary-Ann, Innkeeper

Jenni Horn

Liddy Smallbury

Charlotte Deverell

Cainy Ball, Potboy, Guitar

Dermot Gardiner

Jan Coggan, Farmer, Trader, Mrs Kipperring, Tambour

Eustace Clarke

Joseph Poorgress, Shepherd, Innkeeper, Trader, Penny Whistle, Trumpet

Dave Wren

Mrs Hurst, Mrs Tall, Mrs Twill, Matthew Moon

Charlotte Curtis

Wagoner, Serving girl, Cainy Ball [Friday's performance], Viola

Imogen Tink

Jeb the Dog, Laban Tall, Trader, Birkin, Accordion

Wade Ablitt









Far From The Madding Crowd

Far From The Madding Crowd on Screen

The power and the drama contained in Far from the Madding Crowd has the ability to speak to different generations and therefore has been a perfect subject for adaptation for the big screen.

Cinema was not slow in seeing the potential for love and passion set against a wild, rural landscape. Head strong characters and the beautiful countryside made a perfect combination for box office success.

The first adaptation came in 1915 when American director Laurence Trimble adapted and shot a silent drama film in Britain, starring Florence Turner, Henry Edwards and Malcolm Cherry. Little is known about the production, apart from its being shot in authentic locales in Dorset. After the film's premiere on November 16 1915, at a private screening at London's West End Cinema, The Times wrote that Hardy "can have little reason to complain of the way in which his work has been handled. ... One feels that the country in which the action is laid is really the Wessex of the novel and that the farm, the cattle, the sheep are the genuine ones over which Gabriel Oak watched with such care."

The next adaptation didn't happen for another 50 years when, in 1967, British director John Schlesinger, hot from his success with Billy Liar, secured the rights and created a modern masterpiece. The script was very faithful to Hardy's novel and was shot largely on location in Dorset and Wiltshire.

Cinematographer Nicolas Roeg made the most of the rolling countryside while Schlesinger brought career defining performances from his stars Julie Christie, Terence Stamp and Alan Bates. The film was a huge hit in the UK but was a huge commercial failure in the US.

By 1998 television was wanting to get in on the act and Granada teamed up with US Cable channel WGBH-TV in Boston, to produce a sumptuous TV movie starring Paloma Baeza, Nathaniel Parker, Jonathan Firth and Nigel Terry.

Although, the film used many of the same locations as the 1967 film, the language was rougher and the presentation less stylised than Schlesinger's take on the story.

In 2015, Hardy's Far From The Madding Crowd was reinvented for the 21st century by Danish director Thomas Vinterberg. Emphasising Bathsheba's independence rather than her romance with Troy and Gabriel, the British film starred Carey Mulligan alongside Matthias Schoenaerts, Michael Sheen, Tom Sturridge and Juno Temple.

Again, the film was shot in Dorset (Sherborne, Mapperton, and Beaminster) but on this occasion, it proved to be a huge hit on both sides of the Atlantic. Carey Mulligan won huge praise for her performance, giving Bathsheba such dignity and resolve, and some critics suggested that not only was it better than the 1967 adaptation starring Julie Christie but served as a worthy companion piece to Hardy's original novel.



1967



2015

Far From The Madding Crowd

1998



1915





Far From The Madding Crowd

Change in the Countryside

Life in the countryside had remained unchanged since the dawn of time. It was a life ruled over by the changing seasons. There was a time for planting, sewing, breeding, feeding, harvesting and taking to market.

During a 12 month cycle, each year had its time-honoured way markers. Communities tended to be small and you either worked on the land or you were a skilled craftsman – a builder, carpenter or blacksmith.

But, by the mid 19th century significant change was underway. Horses may still have worked the land, the country may still have needed to have been fed but the industrial revolution was attracting many young people to the towns and cities with the promise of higher wages and a better life.

Factories were swiftly replacing the small cottage industries. Craftsmen were being lured away from their rural idylls to work on production lines in smoky, overcrowded, disease ridden slums – at least that's the way that Thomas Hardy saw, a man who adored the purity of rural life.

Hardy became a social campaigner, fighting to improve the conditions of those living in towns and cities, even as he himself moved back to the countryside of Dorset.

The coming of the railways had not only made the country smaller – journey times had been dramatically reduced – it had increased demand for manufactured goods and allowed the transport of raw materials and finished products to be sent quickly and cheaply to anywhere in the UK.

Britain was swiftly moving from its traditional rural lifestyle, centred round the village and farming to a centralised world in which manufacturing was king. Raw materials were no longer harvested from the landscape in a piecemeal, sustainable way, but ripped from the ground, or in the case of wood felled, in vast quantities to feed the need of Britain's global production commitments.

Hardy's rural, relatively isolated south-west may have been more insulated against these changes but even here Hardy could see that change was not only inevitable but had all ready started. He tried to keep his vision of rural life alive in his work but the rural economy was evolving and in 100 years mechanisation would drive both the horses and farm-workers off the land but that's another story for another day.



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Directors Notes

When I first read *Far from the Madding Crowd*, I was amazed that a Victorian male novelist should have created such a proud, intelligent female character as Bathsheba Everdene – a woman who is determined to live an independent life on her own terms. And extraordinary that, in 1874, he should put into her mouth a statement like:

"It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in a language chiefly made by men to express theirs."

Bathsheba is by no means a perfect romantic character. She is impulsive and at times selfish, but always strives to be better – and that is what makes her so compelling.

There have been various stage adaptations of the novel, but when I looked at them, the one that stood out was that by the award-winning playwright Jessica Swale. I had seen and loved her play *Nell Gwynn*, which won the Egerton Foundation New Play Award in 2015. Her version of *Far from the Madding Crowd* captures both the cyclical rhythms and traditions of rural life, and the often-painful emotions of people struggling to find their way in life. It contains both humour and truth, and portrays characters that were written over 100 years ago as people you could bump into today, which is incredibly powerful.

I was thinking of the National Theatre's powerful production of *War Horse* when I approached local musician and composer Emily Bennett about including some original in our production. We were so fortunate that Emily came on board – she has written some absolutely beautiful music that perfectly evokes the countryside, the weather and the rural year. We have some wonderful actor musicians to embed the music in the fabric of the play.

Our stage designer, the multi-talented Dave Borthwick has created puppets of the animals – the sheepdog, sheep and lambs – that we need to bring the story fully to life.

It has been a challenging but exciting rehearsal process, and the whole cast has helped bring together what you will watch this evening. I am thrilled with what we have created – a blend of performance, music, puppetry and physical theatre.

I hope that, with seats on two sides of the acting area, you really feel part of our story!



Enjoy.

Helen Clarke

gallery players present



Hilary Mantel's

Wolf Hall

adapted for the stage by
mike poulton



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