

Allegorical Reading of Love and Marriage in *Far from the Madding Crowd*

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Introduction

Hardy continued to write novels, over and over again through his writing career, on the theme of love and marriage setting them in the rural areas of southeast England. It is certain that the popularity of his so-called “Wessex novels” comes, for one thing, from their vivid description of nature which Hardy’s poetic talent captured and presented to us. Nature, which is abundant in this novel is, nevertheless, not simply a setting in the novel which satisfies readers’ nostalgic taste. It functions in multiple ways and has much to do with the theme of love and marriage.

The 19th century was the age where various changes occurred in socio-economic aspects. The rise of the bourgeois class, especially after the revision of election law in 1832 and 1838 was remarkable, accompanied by the completion of the industrial revolution, which had been under way since the late 18th century. These drastic changes of the century are also reflected in Hardy’s works set in the late 19th century, for example, as Alec in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*—the representative of the newly-risen bourgeois class, and as the shredding machine—which symbolizes the industrialization of the agriculture, and the modernization of the agricultural system itself, which was to drive the d’Urbervilles out of their residence.

In most cases, Hardy’s characters, while seeking joy in life, fall victim to these changes—“the pain of the age” in Hardy’s phrase. However, Hardy did not just stop at reducing the tragic failure of love and marriage to socio-economic factors. Instead, he arranges a system of symbolism behind the social dimension—in other words, the semantic function assigned to nature in his works. This interplay among characters, the society, and nature is what characterizes Hardy’s works, and bring into his novels a cosmological dimension, even if the degree of its conspicuousness differs from one novel to another.

Hardy’s nature—which seems to bear this cosmological dimension—changed from a benevolent and regenerative one to the more destructive and enigmatic one—thus bringing about a change to the figures of love. In order to understand this, we have only to see the difference between *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Respectively written by Hardy at a relatively early stage and at the latest stage in the series of “Wessex Novels,” the two novels appear to make a stark contrast in that the former is tinged with an optimistic tone with the heroine married to the hero of the novel, settling into the society, while the latter is characterized by a shockingly pessimistic tone with the final execution of the heroine.

In this thesis, I shall discuss *Far from the Madding Crowd* (*FMC*), under the hypothesis that nature exists as the centripetal force in the development of the plot. First I shall focus on the development of Oak’s character in relation to nature, which supports the development or

downfall of the characters in the novel. Then I will show, by attempting to read the novel allegorically, that although this novel seems to be an optimistic pastoral romance, there potentially exists the motif of the invasion of modernity into rural districts—which is found in his later works. In regard to this, I shall focus on Troy. Finally I will expand that allegorical reading to the topic of the plot-making, discussing the contrast between Oak and Boldwood, as the tension between the benevolent nature and the destructive nature. I shall also refer to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as referential point when it is necessary.

I Oak's Development of Character

The novel starts off with the introduction of Gabriel Oak, who is described as a son of nature, and makes a very important comment about Bathsheba, when he sees her looking into a mirror—"Vanity." This remark not only shows how an honest man of nature like him feels about the artificial nature of a woman in general, but functions as a portent as to how the story will develop. It is Bathsheba's vanity that later makes her send a valentine to Boldwood, whose indifference to her presence Bathsheba cannot endure. It is also Bathsheba's vanity as a woman, in other words, her weakness in relation to men's artificial tributes, that makes her fall for Troy—the last man to rely on for to provide her with a happily married life. In both relations and their eventual consequences, Bathsheba's vanity certainly plays an essential role. In this sense, readers see Oak's remark in the first chapter, at least by hindsight, as something that penetrates and reverberates through the whole story.

That Bathsheba gets married to Troy then to Oak, and not to Boldwood seems at first odd, especially when we consider Boldwood's status as landowner with considerable means and a settled life, and Troy's wandering romantic way of life and Oak's lower social status. Sexuality, decency, and sincerity¹—factors which are remarkable in different ways in each of them—are multiply at work in the dynamics of this novel and drive the plot, sometimes inviting readers' expectations and sometimes betraying them.

In the early stages of the novel, Oak is excluded from the possibility of winning Bathsheba as a wife almost from the beginning. She is more socially ambitious, and Oak, who cannot tackle her well even when he has the hope of becoming an independent farmer, completely drops out as a suitor, after he loses his sheep in a tragic accident. As their second meeting after Oak's failed suit symbolically shows, they are divided by their new social status, as servant and mistress. "Far from the madding crowd" as the setting is, the rural society found here is not entirely free from the social distinctions which are directly related to the appropriateness of match-making between man and woman. Therefore the struggle to win Bathsheba as a wife is fought between Boldwood and Troy with Oak receding to the background.

However, the underdog in the struggle for love comes to the forestage at the end of the novel and successfully marries the heroine, with the rare tone, for Hardy's works, of optimism. This ending of the struggle over marriage has much to do with the type of society chosen as the background of this novel. Marriage cannot be separated from the type of society where it is institutionalized. The rural background of this novel plays a much more significant role than that of a mere setting which appeals to the reader's nostalgic feeling. It represents a moral or even

religious code, obedience to, or violation against which makes or breaks people living under the code. The making or breaking of love relations are also subject to this force.

Paradoxically the active pursuit of love played on the forestage of the novel bears no fruit, and receding to the background turns out to be a step towards the sphere of nature. Oak never relates to Bathsheba on the same plane as the other suitors relate to her. For Oak and Bathsheba are separated by the distinction of social status as mistress and servant, and Bathsheba takes no notice of him after she has declined his marriage proposal at the beginning of the novel.

Nowhere is this unsurpassable hurdle between them more clearly expressed than the scene of fire, where Oak has now lost everything and stands in humiliating contrast with Bathsheba on horseback: she has now risen to be mistress of her own farm. Oak, who once asked her to marry him, steps forward and says, "Do you want a shepherd, ma'am?" (*FMC* 41). However, the scene also foregrounds Oak's heroic image—as a man with quick judgment and dynamo-like action. We can find, therefore, the motif of selfless heroism beginning in this scene.

V. Hyman tries to find a development of character both in Oak and Bathsheba—from egotists to altruists—along which line he also delineates the difference among other characters. Oak and Bathsheba, as opposed to Boldwood and Troy, are changed into more self-detached persons through the hardships they experience in the course of events.

What is remarkable is that Oak grows surrounded with a more and more dignified atmosphere as he goes into and comes back from his miserable and humiliating experience. "He rises in her esteem as well as in social position until the formerly imperious Bathsheba becomes Oak's suitor and supplicant" (Hyman 47). The rise "in social position" follows his character development, not the other way around. First he is deprived of what he has had then he turns that experience into a step to gain a new selfless horizon.

Oak's dignity, or his self-detachment, in the scene of the fire remains as a consistent undercurrent of the novel, and this characteristic of his helps the community at a critical moment. He protects the ricks from the storm. "Putting aside his own hopes for success, he works toward keeping Bathsheba's property and person secure" (Hayman 47). On the other hand, characters who pursue what they want in an egotistic way in the novel, not only destroy others but also themselves. This is because their way of dealing with what happens to them is wrong, or in other words, they are "unfit" for survival. If the sense of communal continuity is secured in this novel it is neither Troy, who is killed, nor Boldwood who is now in prison. Who can do it but Oak who has settled down in marriage with the now chastened heroine?

Bathsheba is no less aware of the contrast between Oak's self-detachment and Boldwood's self-pursuit than are readers of the novel. "What a way Oak had, she thought, of enduring things. Boldwood, who seemed so much deeper and higher and stronger in feeling than Gabriel, had not yet learnt, any more than she herself, the simple lesson Oak showed a mastery of by every turn and look he gave—that among the multitude of interests by which he was surrounded, those which affected his personal well-being were not the most absorbing and important in his eyes. Oak meditatively looked upon the horizon of circumstances without any special regard to his own standpoint in the midst. That was how she would wish to be" (*FMC* 226). This mental attraction emanating from Oak makes an interesting contrast with the sexuality of Troy and the wealth of Boldwood when we think of the three different criteria to choose one's spouse.

Probably the development of the character accompanied by self-detachment is not possible without something bigger than human beings, whether that is God, nature, or tradition, which supports it. In the furthest recess of this novel nature exists as a receptor where Oak can develop and gain dignity—through everyday life.² After passing through much commotion, from the nightmarish love triangle with Troy and Fanny, to the uncertainty of Troy's state after his clothes are discovered on the shore, to Boldwood's relentless courting, Bathsheba becomes totally exhausted in life. Beyond her sphere of emotional life, stands Gabriel who continues to live his everyday life quietly but steadily like the sun that rises and falls day in and day out—or like the solid oak tree that grows year after year to produce the hardest, finest wood.

Thus the development of the character, which is inseparably connected to an idyllic milieu, can be traced in the course of Oak's life. Its uniqueness is that fitness or unfitness for survival, if I may use Darwinian terminology here, is decided along the line of self-detachedness. Self-detachedness becomes a mental virtue, which is one of the criteria in “sexual selection,” and a condition for survival at the same time, making contrast with the case of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where selflessness malfunctions and become even a fatal attribute for the character.

II Troy as the Representative of Modernity

Nature far from or back behind *Far from the Madding Crowd*, gives this novel its simplicity and depth, and has importance as the plane for Oak to develop his character enough to attract Bathsheba back. However, the major part of the novel focuses on the “Madding” aspect of the characters’ own self-creation in their struggle for love, to which I now shift my attention. Analysis of their love relations will also entail a possible allegorical reading of the roles they play in love and of the ending each character is led to. Troy, Boldwood, and Oak respectively represent modernity, nature’s destructiveness, and nature’s benevolence. In what follows, I shall consider Troy as representative of modernity and therefore, “the stranger” in the rural community, pointing out the adultery motif³ which appears on the allegorical level.

As A. Friedman notes, Hardy introduces Troy, as early as his first appearance, in a way that readers suspect a grain of illicitness in Bathsheba’s relation to him, given the promise of marriage she has already made to Boldwood. Their types, Boldwood—the respectable, and socially stable type, and Troy—the romantic, love ‘em and leave ‘em type, seem to underwrite this expectation. In short, the motif of adultery lurks here and it will hover around thereafter.

Troy appears to be, according to Tony Tanner’s terminology, “the stranger in the house” who is invited into a family and eventually commits adultery and subverts the peace and steadiness of family life. However, the matter is, in fact, kept in suspense. For, Bathsheba is not married, but has just promised to marry Boldwood.

As Friedman points out, Hardy plays a trick on readers’ imaginations twice, first by leading us to suspect an illicit relationship between Bathsheba and Troy as mentioned above. “For several chapters the narrative point of view is carefully restricted for the most part to other characters, who surmise the worst [about their relation]. In chapter thirty two Bathsheba, like a gipsy or a thief, disappears from her house and is tracked down on the highroad in the middle of

the night: she has stolen away from her retainers to run after her Sergeant lover. ‘‘Ladies don’t drive at these hours, miss, as jineral rule of society’’(Friedman 389). This mysterious behavior outside the “jineral rule of society” is enough to arouse readers’ suspicions about her illicit relation with Troy, which continue to mount as they follow her.

However, “Troy produces a marriage license. Having carefully misled us, Hardy melodramatically corrects us. Bathsheba’s history has apparently not been leading her into an illicit sexual experience . . . but directly into marriage” (Friedman 389). The point Friedman tries to make here is not simply about the conventional technique of a mystery writer, a mere reversal of anticipation. Friedman goes on to say, “Apparently: for, as we shall see, Hardy has not really misled us at all, and Bathsheba’s perfectly legal marriage will turn out to be exactly the ‘illicit’ sexual relationship he has so far been at pains to suggest” (Friedman 389-390).

What Friedman tries to indicate by the word “illicit” doesn’t have a legal connotation. He brings the matter of legitimacy about the man-woman relation from form to substance, from the legal level to the moral level. It is not long before their relation, after culminating in marriage, drops sharply to its pit-like lowest point, where “she experiences the utter abjectness of her dependence upon Troy’s light feeling for her—which, as he rapidly becomes indifferent to her, takes on more and more overtly the form of cruelty”(Friedman 390). I would like to carry Friedman’s shift of viewpoint from the legal to the moral—when he thinks of the matter of legitimacy—further to the allegorical, by means of which the problem of who is the real “stranger” reappears within the oppositional structure of modernity vs. ruralness in the novel.

Chapter thirty-six, “Wealth in Jeopardy—The Revel,” is pregnant with meaning and sheds light on our reading from this viewpoint. The rural gathering depicted here has a double sense. “This was the night which had been selected by Sergeant Troy—ruling now in the room of his wife—for giving the harvest supper and dance”(*FMC* 185). However, Troy does not forget to tell his guests, “Friends it is not only the harvest home that we are celebrating to-night; but this is also a Wedding Feast. A short time ago I had the happiness to lead to the altar this lady, your mistress . . .”(*FMC* 187). In short, this occasion functions not only as a ritual to celebrate the year’s harvest and express a sense of gratitude for nature’s blessing, but at the same time, as a public occasion where matrimony between the new master and Bathsheba is to be publicized and celebrated by the community members.

The fiddler’s remark best sums up the significance of this gathering. “‘Then,’ said the fiddler. I’ll venture to name the right and proper thing is ‘The Soldier’s Joy’—there being a gallant soldier married into the farm. . .”(*FMC* 186). The question is whether a soldier can really marry into a farm and settle down to be their good master. Hardy wisely synchronizes this gathering, which is supposed to have a ritualistic significance as the harmonious matrimony of the urban Troy into the rural community, with the natural process outside of growing storm.

As if to examine the authenticity of the ritual, and legitimacy of the new master, the storm is in the offing, gathering momentum. Troy cannot make an excuse, in this test, that he is new to the rural environment and therefore not accustomed to reading the signs of nature. For there is Oak, having a kind of role as a mediator between nature and new master in the community just as prophets had that role between king and God in ancient times. Oak, who is sensitive to the change that “every voice in nature was unanimous in bespeaking,” sends a message that there is

going to be a heavy rain, only to be answered by a messenger, "Mr. Troy says it will not rain . . . and he cannot stop to talk to you about such fidgets" (*FMC* 187).

The scene after the banquet, which Hardy describes through Oak's eyes, is itself a most eloquent comment on the wedding banquet. He captures the momentary phase like a still life—Folks are dead drunk. "Here, under the table, and leaning against forms and chairs in every conceivable attitude except the perpendicular, were the wretched persons of all the work-folk, the hair of their heads at such low levels being suggestive of mops and brooms. In the midst of these shone red and distinct the figure of Sergeant Troy, leaning back in a chair . . . the united breathings of the horizontal assemblage forming a subdued roar like London from a distance" (*FMC* 189). The Comparison of the "united breathing" to "a subdued roar" of "London from a distance" presents the scene as a debauched space, within the rural community, of Troy's own inviting. For it was Troy who forcibly recommended brandy to villagers, who were "unaccustomed to any liquor stronger than cider or mild ale," insisting "drinking should be the bond of their union," while at the same time turning a deaf ear to the most helpful advice from Oak (*FMC* 190).

This scene represents Troy as the intruding force of modernity into idyllic world. Accordingly the coming storm appears to be a reaction on the side of nature from which Troy is to be alienated. The ricks in the farm are saved by Oak's wits and action, and therefore, what would otherwise have been a fatal judicial mistake on the part of the master was spared a due punishment. However, nature's judgment on Troy is clearly expressed later on when Troy offers his token of condolence to Fanny's grave: rain floods away the flowers Troy placed before her grave and turns the beautiful scene into a dirty and grotesque one.

Not only is Troy regarded as illicit husband on the moral level but also he is depicted as "the stranger" in the rural community where people live in a true "bond" of harmony with nature. In that sense the marriage between Troy and Bathsheba is symbolically, if not legally, an illicit one, and brings about a confusion and disturbance in the rural community. Boldwood's aberrant response might be seen, on the allegorical level, as a revolt on the part of nature. Bathsheba, like many heroines in adultery novels, becomes subject to death (in her case, not physical but mental death). However, her "death" is not caused by the punishment of the outside moral code. Her death lurks within her illicit relation itself. Finally I will refer to Bathsheba's death aspect in relation to Troy's sexuality.

Although Bathsheba is engaged to Boldwood in the early stage of the novel, Troy, the sergeant on the move, suddenly comes in and steals the heart of Bathsheba, who has, up to that point, tantalized two men in love. As Friedman notes, Hardy presents the scene of their first encounter in such a way that readers can read it as metaphor that predicts what will follow: she is trapped.

Bathsheba receives an "instantaneous check" which throws her "off balance." She has been caught on, of all things, a spur. In the very first instant of their very first meeting, Sergeant Troy's spur (with Hardy's excellent aim) goes directly for the weakest spot in her defense, her skirt. ". . . something tugged at her skirt and pinned it forcibly to the ground." . . . Together they recite a magical spell, almost their catechism:

'Are you a woman?'
'Yes.'
'I am a man.'
'Oh!' (Friedman 388)

For the first time at this scene, she is trapped into a submissive position in her relation with a man. "she finds herself in 'a position of captivity'—'You are a prisoner, miss'—where she must absolutely forfeit something" (Friedman 389). Later, we will notice the repetitive development of the image of the "trapping" spur, in the highly aesthetic and sexual description of the sword practice: the dancing of lights, and reflections of sunlight in the sword attack Bathsheba from all sides and deprive her of the freedom of her body.

Troy is endowed with beauty and sexuality that together forms one of the criteria of sexual selection. However, sexuality functions, in most cases, as a trap in the Hardyesque world. It brings downfall to those who are lured to it and those who possess it, alike. For example, Tess becomes the target of Alec through her voluptuousness and sexuality.

The scene where Troy's marriage comes to the crisis conveys this point very effectively. It draws out to a conclusion the marriage between Troy and Bathsheba. Here the relation of the dead Fanny and Bathsheba is very subtle and complicated. They are placed in a relation of rivalry in a love triangle around Troy. However, when genderized, the scene clearly draws parallels between Fanny and Bathsheba. Fanny's death symbolizes the death of their marriage and the baby's implies that the relation between Troy and Bathsheba has come to a dead end with no future. "Troy tells Bathsheba that, before God at least, Fanny Robin is his "very, very wife!" "if she's—that,—what—am I?" and Troy says, "You are nothing to me—nothing. . . A ceremony before a priest doesn't make a marriage. I am not morally yours" (FMC 231). As Troy abandoned Fanny, so he neglects Bathsheba now.

It makes sense that Bathsheba wishes for death after this scene, and her overnight stay out in the field has been regarded, by critics, as a process for her to be redeemed and reborn in nature after the experience of death in regard to her relation to Troy.⁴ This eventual turn back to nature foreshadows, through symbolism, her eventual union with Oak.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the invasion of urbanity and modernity into nature is, as opposed to that in Tess, aborted, and the value of the rural region remains intact. (In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the idyllic sphere is encroached on by socio-economic change, which is brought about by the industrialization process under way in the countryside. Furthermore, "the sun" which functions as the symbolic center beyond the social dimension, appears as something destructive rather than generative) That fact is, in a way, shown in Bathsheba's course of life depicted in the novel. Bathsheba, occupying a place somewhere between nature, represented by Oak, and modernity, embodied by Troy, leaves Oak and goes on to Boldwood, then to Troy, but finally comes back to Oak.

III Two Aspects of Nature

Through the analysis of love relations so far, it has been shown that they cannot be reduced

to the plot of character's own creating. Nature, not remaining a mere background, interferes in the plot-making process. Characters are obliged to react to it in one way or another, and their reactions, in turn, have repercussions on the level of their love relations, thus their actions around marriage call in the abstract allegorical dimension. So far I have tried to point out the oppositional structure between nature and modernity by focusing on Oak and Troy. In the following analysis, I will shift my focus onto the two different sides of nature—destructiveness and benevolence—represented by Boldwood and Oak respectively, and expand the analysis further into their relation to the plot, which affects the figure of love in Hardy's works.

The scene of the night sky at Norcombe Hill—memorable enough for its beautiful and poetic effects alone, also conveys an image of the perfect harmony between Oak and nature, and, at the same time, the potential opposition between nature/cosmos and society/civilization that I have discussed above.

The thin grasses, more or less coating the hill, were touched by the wind in breezes of differing powers, and almost of differing nature—one rubbing the blades heavily, another raking them piercingly, another brushing them like a soft broom. The instinctive act of humankind was to stand and listen, and learn how the trees on the right and the trees on the left wailed or chaunted to each other in the regular antiphonies of a cathedral choir. . . The sky was clear—remarkably clear—and the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body. . . To persons standing alone on a hill during a clear midnight such as this, the roll of the world eastward is almost a palpable movement. The sensations may be caused by the panoramic glide of the stars past earthly objects, which is perceptible in a few minutes of stillness. . . (FMC 12)

The description of nature and night sky in this scene is, it is noteworthy, marked with “a sense of difference from the mass of civilized mankind, who are dreamwrapt and disregardful of all such proceedings at this time. . .”(FMC 12). After comparing the various sounds to “antiphonies of a cathedral choir,” and the movement of the starry sky to “the poetry of motion,” the narrator introduces “an unexpected series of sounds” of “Farmer Oak’s flute” which “began to be heard in this place up against the sky”(FMC 12).

Tracing the flow of the music back to its source, the narrator then presents the lone hut with a perfectly relevant image. “The image as a whole was that of a small Noah’s Ark on a small Ararat. . .”(FMC 12). The metaphor is not only poetically ingenious but also relevant proleptically, because readers are led to associate the civilized world which is described as “dreamwrapt” in this scene with the degenerate human civilized world which was “waterwrapt” at the time of the Deluge, and therefore the lone hut with Noah’s Ark which, after surviving the tempests, became a symbol of the harmony of human with nature and God. In this novel the tempests have yet to arrive.⁵

Nature, the harmonious side of which I have shown above, also has more defective, destructive, and tricky sides, which appear on various levels. For example P. Casagrande argues that Bathsheba can be considered to be on the same side as nature—in that they are both

defective. Nature sometimes needs amending: Gabriel comes to the rescue when Bathsheba's sheep become gas-swollen. He protect the ricks against the raging storm. Moreover, the tricky side hidden in nature sometimes makes an influence on the plot, as in chapter 5, where the V formed fence leading to the pit brings about the death of Oak's sheep and subsequently his downfall. Besides, Boldwood's symbolization of the defective and destructive sides hidden in nature is more significant than its superficial, phenomenal defects, which I enumerated above because we can find there a budding of that motif which will occupy Hardy's concern later—the enigmatic face of fate which controls human destiny.

Boldwood seems to lead a tranquil rural life day in and day out—in what may be called a repetitious and circular time. However, what seems like a perfect calmness of nature is, as the narrator comments with remarkable psychological insight, nothing more than a perfectly balanced stillness between two extreme forces, which can be toppled with a touch. Bathsheba touches the balance—with her valentine card.

H. Babb shows us the inner state of Boldwood, pointing out that one way Hardy uses nature is to use it as a symbolic vehicle to describe character. "The moon shone to-night, and its light was not of a customary kind. His window admitted only a reflection of its rays, and the pale sheen had that reversed direction which snow gives, coming upward and lighting up his ceiling in an unnatural way, casting shadows in strange places, and putting lights where shadows had used to be." (FMC 81) Babb comments on this passage,

In this instance the landscape does mirror directly the condition of Boldwood. For he had just been knocked head over heels, as it were, by the anonymous valentine sealed with the message "Marry me." . . . However tempted we may be at times to sympathize with Boldwood, I take it that we do feel his behavior to be unnatural and perverse from norm—Gabriel—in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Catapulted immediately to an emotional extreme by the valentine, Boldwood keeps thrusting his attentions on Bathsheba, through not one suit but two, and the violence with which he declares to her his love, or anger, or envy is world away from the restrained dignity that typifies Oak. (Babb 376)

Although a landowner and, therefore, considered to have taken firm root in the countryside life unlike uprooted Troy who is always on the move, Boldwood is not depicted in alignment with nature at all; infatuated with Bathsheba, he neglects his duty to take care of the ricks, and turns his back to nature like Troy. If Troy and Oak make a contrast in that one is suave, attractive to woman, and flamboyant, while the other quiet, homely, and clumsy—urbanity vs. ruralness in short—then Boldwood's and Oak's difference lies in that while they are the residents of the same rural milieu, they represent very different aspects of nature, one benevolence and harmony the other destructiveness and aberration, and as a result reach very different endings—one ending in marriage, the other in madness.

Thus Boldwood plays double roles in relation to the tragic lines that is also woven into this idyllic comedy with marriage ending; on the allegorical level his destructiveness represents the fearful and dangerous aspect hidden in apparently tranquil nature, which can be expanded, in the

motif line, to the destructive ill will of nature predominant in Hardy's later works. At the same time, he is victimized, as one character in the story, by the tragic line of the plot. It is Boldwood who finds the most ironic tantalizing ill will of nature in the reappearance of Troy on the very day of his wish-come-true. For Boldwood, Troy represents something unacceptable in life, the irony of fate in short, and Boldwood, it might be said, pulls the trigger at its enigmatic face.

However, it is his egocentric attitude that makes Boldwood see the arrival of Troy as an unacceptable irony of fate. This is what sets Boldwood in stark contrast with Oak, who comes to terms with what the course of events allocates him and gains his own selfless horizon. Boldwood also makes a contrast with Tess. Tess stabs Alec, who represents the most ironic face of fate when Angel unexpectedly returns to her, who is now married to Alec in a pleasure city: it was "last straw" for her. Angel is surprised at "the strength of her affection for himself" and wonders "what obscure strain in the d'Urberville blood had led her to this aberration, if it were an aberration" (*Tess* 304). Although Tess shares the motif of aberration with Boldwood, the author's description of her suicidal altruism and his viewpoint to sympathize with Tess as a "pure woman" leads readers to find nature in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*—"the sun" which shadows and influences Tess—as a totally defective and enigmatic one.

Although nature in *Far from the Madding Crowd* seems to have an ironic and enigmatic side, it nevertheless has moral consistency in its treatment of people. It tries people, and when their response is wrong, it appears in the most ironic face. Therefore, Boldwood's gunshot at Troy in the wedding does not threaten the harmonious whole, as opposed to Tess's stabbing of Alec, which completes the tragic tone of the whole by involving her further into the inexorable course of tragic fate. It is only a step to usher in the new phase—marriage union between Oak and Bathsheba. Those who respect nature will survive and those who don't will perish. This simple formula is what constitutes this novel's moral consistency. The major part of power and attraction of this novel probably lies in this simplicity and clearness.

The destructive side of nature, and its concomitant tragic line, is subordinated into the benevolence of nature. What characterizes the plot in *Far from the Madding Crowd* is its circular and regenerative time flow as opposed to the linear and deteriorating time flow which presides over *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The heroines' courses evidently reflect this difference. Bathsheba's choice of Troy implies the direction from the rural society, which is represented by Boldwood, a decent landowner, to the outside, which is represented by modernized, sexual Troy. Therefore their marriage, though legally right, conceives the motif of adultery on moral and allegorical levels as I already discussed. However, after brushing with death, she is saved by moving into the plane, where Gabriel stands, suffering and developing always one step forward. Their relation is reborn with the advent of spring. The harmony between man and nature, which was presented at the beginning in the scene of Noctomb Hill, once again presides over the last scene.

In contrast, the purification of Tess's love through stages toward Angel and her family does not save Tess from the "inexorable" process of the plot, which drives her out of society, not letting her settle down in marriage. Neither is she saved into the Providential plot, despite Hyman's comment that "Her experience with Angel transforms and purifies her love, she becomes the ideal type, the 'Apostolic Charity'" (Hyman 115)—as is symbolically shown in the

scene where Angel “did not answer” to Tess’s question “Tell me now, Angel; do you think we shall meet again after we are dead?”

Tess exclaims to Angel, who has come back from Brazil and now gained a viewpoint to see Tess’s true pureness, “It is too late!” Later Tess revenges herself on Alec, killing him, then rushes to Angel to retrieve the long aspired union with him. However, the escape journey she has with Angel is only to be short lived, surrounded by the “inexorable” outside force, which finally severs their relation again. In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* the clock cannot be turned back, and forces behind it—“the President of the Immortals” (*Tess* 314)—never lets their course of life converge into a happy marriage union.

Conclusion

Pastoral romance in *Far from the Madding Crowd* well conveys to readers the sound and steady, and above all, pleasurable way of living man used to have in the world untouched by the modernization. Man lived with nature, gaining wisdom through the direct contact with the natural forces, and respecting and conforming to the rhythm of nature. Man and woman appear, in this space, as the partners who live in and fight with nature together. This harmonious relation between nature and man is represented by Oak, who develops into a man firmly rooted in nature, finally gaining Bathsheba as his wife.

At the same time, I attempted to read, in this apparently optimistic pastoral romance, the budding of the pessimistic tone or enigmatic aspect of nature, which is to be found in his later works. Along this line, I shed light on the modernization process, which was foregrounded by the allegorical reading of the adultery motif in this novel, and on the destructive aspect of nature, which in Hardy’s world, exists behind social dimension and interfere with it closely. There Troy was interpreted as “the stranger in the family,”—modernity in the idyllic space, and Boldwood as destructive side of nature. Nature exists at the center of this novel as the centripetal point of the plot. Because of this weight of nature, character’s actions inevitably bear meaning in relation to it, bringing in the allegorical reading, and their love relations succeed or fail accordingly.

Even if it is possible to find the schema of survival and downfall in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, nature found there is basically a benevolent, and morally consistent pre-Darwinian one. What seems a partially ironic plot subserves the nature’s ultimate scenario through which modernity loses and ruralness prevails. Readers who identify with the honest underdog—Oak—will not find enigma but moral consistency in it.

Notes

¹ G. Beer refers to these three factors as the criteria for “sexual selection.”

² R. Williams points out the importance of everyday work in Hardy’s novels. “Work enters his novels more decisively than any English novelist of comparable importance. . . it is seen as it is, as a central kind of learning” (470).

³ T. Tanner says, in *Adultery in the Novel*, “we should remember that the apparently positive, benign, and reconciliatory word guest still carried with it the sense of ‘stranger,’ the foreign, the

extraordinary, even ‘enemy’—as though language itself recognized that the attempt to familiarize the alien could never be wholly sure of success . . .”(26)

⁴ Casagrande presents the opposite opinion, disapproving of the development of Bathsheba’s character. (455)

⁵ When it comes nature presented at this scene in a harmonious image will recedes to the background with Oak, but come to the foreground again when the tempests is over; this scene represents the structure of the novel.

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