



Hardy, Hardy!
Masculine heroism in Far From the Madding Crowd
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L'étude se concentre sur les modalités d'inscription de l'héroïsme masculin dans *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Cette catégorie rend compte de la construction des personnages principaux, y compris de Bathsheba, tout en révélant les failles de ces derniers. C'est une forme plus diffuse de la masculinité qui est qualifiable d'héroïque. Elle transforme le chaos ambiant en cosmos, ce monde construit par les hommes, pour leur intérêt propre, et qui répond à la définition du patriarcat.

Far from the Madding Crowd (FMC) is apparently not a novel without a hero, judging by the eight occurrences of the word or its derivatives. In fact, Thomas Hardy's metafictional indications hint at a potential proliferation of the valorized figure. In particular, Joseph Poorgrass, a member of the "Wessex chorus", is unexpectedly labelled "Hero Poorgrass" (42: 222), the narrator unsurprisingly refers to Francis Troy as "the hero of his story" (46: 243), while it is reported that Bathsheba Everdene once "heroically" (31: 159) fights for her reputation. However, irony is clearly intended for self-conscious Poorgrass, and possibly Troy, who is indeed the hero of "his" own story only, for in the end, he comes to feature the melodramatic villain of Hardy's tale. As for Bathsheba, she actually strives to disentangle her dress from Troy's spur in a scene of comic overtones. Still, the adverb "heroically" being gender-blind, it may felicitously blur sexed identities and align with the approach to masculine heroism in the novel – or not. Such a reading is substantiated in the text itself, and is not contradicted by narratorial notes marking characterization as subjectively relative, for instance when referring to Gabriel Oak:

(...) when his friends were in tantrums, he was considered rather a bad man; when they were pleased, he was rather a good man; when they were neither, he was a man whose moral colour was a kind of pepper-and-salt mixture. (1: 7)

It follows that Hardy creates a fictional site of tension which at the same time relies on the traditional notion of masculine heroism and problematizes it, revealing his critical posture as well as his reverence for grand narratives of masculinity.

It is sometimes claimed that the "pastoral tale with the title of *Far from the Madding Crowd*" (*Life of Thomas Hardy*, quoted in FMC 327) is located in a Virgilian "golden age" of bucolic perfection – but Wessex is no timeless idyllic locus. It turns out to be a battlefield where three historical forms of masculine heroism figuratively fight for supremacy, while the poetics of space freely superimposes open fields of agriculture, bourgeois fields of self-culture and Elysean fields of combat.

Indeed, before he can even lay claim on an apotheosis, Troy has to demonstrate the qualities required in a would-be hero. In a very classic way, he stands as a warrior ready to serve and protect the city, and diegetically founds his masculine heroism on conquering aggressiveness. Not only does he appropriate Bathsheba's belongings by wedding her, but he also manifests his virility by impregnating Fanny. All "brilliant in brass and scarlet" (24: 127), the sergeant is pictured in the full "*aurora*

militaris" (28: 145) of his uniform, later dazzling Bathsheba with the skilful wielding of his phallic sword. Almost a "living thing" (28: 143), this scintillating weapon mesmerizes the young girl, whose point of view is selected to offer a glimpse of female fascination for such a spectacular, almighty device, which leaves her panting, "powerless to withstand or deny" (28: 146). It serves as an extension of Troy's colonizing self and ultimately proves deadly to a caterpillar. This bathetic mock epic disqualifies the character, whose Grecian name, French mother and putatively aristocratic, though illegitimate, origin estrange him from the community of Casterbridge and its surroundings. He is not introduced as a horse-rider because he really is a Trojan horse himself, smuggling in artificial heroism and genuine blackguard dealings. This *Id* figure restricts its diegetic deeds to the seduction of young, untaught country girls and pathetically ends up capering on horseback in a circus which happens to stop by Greenhill Fair (50: 261). Troy's reputation is further blemished by the critical narrator's insistence on his tendency to disguise himself, pointing out his feminization on one occasion, when he puts on Bathsheba's hiving dress (27: 141). This cumulatively marks him as a superficial, untrue and insubstantial character. In consequence, if heroes are to be met near Weatherbury high and low, they should be found outside the Army – or in other words, long gone are the days of military glory.

William Boldwood represents a later type of masculine ethos, which comes to civilize the world and rule society once order has been established and secured thanks to previous warring heroism. "[T]is a gentleman! I see the top of his hat" (9: 61), Liddy Smallbury exclaims to introduce the gentleman-farmer who, with Bathsheba's own "gentleman-tailor" (8: 52) of a father, form the Victorian heroic class of craftsmen, traders and entrepreneurs who build a peaceful society based on exchange, and ensure that it integrates every citizen in the economic network. Their field is that of finance, investment, profit or capitalisation, and with them, the deed of the warrior is superseded by the expertise of the manager. Boldwood is definitely one of them. He is the affluent man in the *dramatis personae*, who exploits Lower Weatherbury farm, driving a racy "low carriage [...] behind a horse of unimpeachable breed" (12: 75) or else riding his horse on a visit to Bathsheba. This centaur-like figure is a monument to his own class and a model to the whole society, "erect in attitude, and quiet in demeanour", whose main feature is an aura of "dignity" (12: 75) which permeates his world, "where the atmosphere [is] that of a Puritan Sunday lasting all the week" (14: 80). The effort to master the impulse implied by his last name is stamped on his first name, for boldness is tempered down by the strong will spelled out by "Will I am". His manliness turns into an exercise of self-discipline with an impact on his attitude towards the world, as demonstrated by his appearance with a "crop or stick" (9: 61), the symbols of the power that Troy's sword materializes. He emerges as an ideal, fatherly *superego* figure who assists Fanny Robin in getting both an education and a position, or helps Gabriel Oak move up the social ladder by offering him to become first his bailiff then his partner. This completes his characterization as a wise man contributing to the wealth of the nation in more ways than one. However, Hardy denounces this posture as an untenable act. Boldwood's "unreasoning devotion to Bathsheba" and "the wildness of his dream" (49:254) reconnect him with the darker side of human nature, staging the collapse of this exemplary citizen who disruptively indulges his passion in a significant fit of narcissistic blindness leading to the murder of Troy. And yet, Boldwood's diegetic disappearance is soon compensated for by the perspective of thriving Gabriel taking up the business, once he has learnt that measure and computation will ensure decency, respect and admiration in a basically capitalistic society, and enterprise need not even be adventurously hazardous. Risks will be insured, as heralded in the inaugural "Pastoral Tragedy" of the ewes, and marriage can yield financial opportunities, in Bathsheba's own words: "marry a woman with money, who would stock a larger farm for you than you have now" (4: 29).

This quasi gentrification is only hinted at in the novel, and Gabriel rather blends in with the "Weatherbury folk" (6: 36), as shown by his welcome at Warren's malthouse and subsequent sharing of "a bit and a drop" there (7: 42). This manly gang may still not qualify as a class, but they constitute the main fulcrum of energy in the text, and derive their unacknowledged greatness from their manpower and labour force. They offer a new reading of heroic masculinity which is blatant in its manifestations but not in its implications. It can be said to spell out a narrative of empowerment, portraying workers who harvest crops and breed cattle, dominate nature, and fertilize the world. As for shepherd Oak, he may not be a diegetic part of the "Wessex chorus", but he definitely sings bass in the local church choir (56: 298), hopefully in unison. Bearing the same first name as his father and grandfather, Gabriel Oak is often lacking, at least, partially in individuality, which constructs him as the embodiment of the whole rural group, in an attempt to reconcile the generic and the idiosyncratic in him. He occasionally seems to stand out from his community, but in fact, he represents them at their best and incarnates hope for the underdogs' capacity to come to the fore. He is depicted heroically

fighting the fire in a rick of straw: “He at once sat astride the very apex, and began with his crook to beat off the fiery fragments which had lodged thereon” (6: 40). The equivalent scene repeats when he faces an “infuriated universe” (37: 194) with a storm threatening stacks of barley or wheat ricks, and manages to cover them in thatch (37: 191-196). Later completed by his ability to save the clover-sick sheep (21: 112), his outstanding resourcefulness is stressed in over-dramatic purple patches which stage him dexterously wagging his own phallic shepherd crook and “trochar” (21: 111) to great effect, with traditional props giving the scenes enlarged scope. Gabriel is given pride of place to meet the requirements of literary composition, and in him intersect character and personality. He features a novelistic crossroads of personal concern and democratic representation of common people, offering a variation on Hardy’s previous unpublished tale entitled “The Poor Man and the Lady—by the Poor Man”. However, shepherd Oak too “has [his] faults” (1: 11), and fails to reach the standards of heroic masculinity since he passively witnesses the love of his life’s first promising to wed fixated Boldwood then actually marrying rakish Troy. His inadequacy is revealed in his poor impersonation of the perfect suitor, complete with “guano and Roman cement” (4: 25) hair-oil and a waistcoat “patterned all over with sprigs of an elegant flower uniting the beauties of both rose and lily without the defects of either” (4: 25). The narrator’s irony introduces distance, although not of a malevolent sort. Still, this ludicrous appearance, though consistent with the opening portrait of Gabriel – a grotesque “rudimentary sketch” (1: 7), is incompatible with exemplariness. Anti-heroic characterization also relies on his not altogether foolproof care of animals. He does not properly train the puppy of his old shepherd-dog George, which results in “a heap of two hundred mangled carcasses [*sic*]” (5: 33), then he terminates the poor dog, grazes the skin of a sheep (22: 117) and kills another one in a scene of uncompromising realism: “Gabriel missed his aim in one case [...] striking wide of the mark, and inflicting a mortal blow at once upon the suffering ewe” (21: 112). More important in terms of class representation, although he boldly resists instrumentalization by ignoring Bathsheba’s order to return and look after her sheep, he finally caves in (21: 112). All these faultlines in the character point to the basic failure of the “rustic chorus” to emancipate themselves and achieve truly heroic stature in the text, and the narrator emphatically portrays them as infantile drunks. In this respect, Joseph Poorgrass’s “multiplying eye” (42: 222) reveals their warped vision of social reality and resulting incapacity to construct a dis-alienated vision for themselves. In brief, they only “provide a certain amount of comic relief” in the text (Guerard, 123).

It has become apparent that normative masculinity in its hyperbolic, heroic version subsumes male characterization while constructing men as failures at the same time. And yet, their heroic contribution to the debates on gender might lie in their capacity to reconcile traditionally separate determinants and offer an open definition of man *in situ* as a plastic identity borrowing freely from both conventional masculinity and femininity, blending rather than bending gender. In the same perspective, Hardy himself proves heroic in reformulating strict gender identity as mere gendered identity, matching feminized men with a masculine woman. Bathsheba’s femininity is of course amply explored, but it does not define her entirely. It might seem more relevant to replace the notion of heroic masculinity with that of masculine heroism in an effort to fathom a female character, but Hardian terminology often points to the contrary. Still a daring sight in 1874, this New Woman would understandably not go unnoticed in 1840’s fictionalized Dorset – by characters and narrator alike.

The narrative dwells on unexpected physical exertions, imposing an image of a female active body in defiance of the traditional representation of femininity. The daring unconventionality of her attitude is thrown into relief early in the narrative, when Bathsheba, “who wore no riding-habit, looked around for a moment, as if to assure herself that all humanity was out of view [...] satisfying herself that nobody was in sight” (3: 17-18), for no-one could ever understand or accept such a manly posturing as hers: “she seated herself in the manner demanded by the saddle, though hardly expected of the woman” (3: 18). This act of bravado is amplified in one of bravura, as the young girl breaks into acrobatics, when she “dexterously drop[s] backwards flat upon the pony’s back, her head over its tail, her feet against its shoulders, and her eyes to the sky” (3: 18). What might qualify as tom-boyish antics (an interpretation introduced in the text through Henery Fray’s comment that “[s]he fled at [Pennyways] like a cat—never such a tomboy as she is” (8: 57)) retrospectively reads as a necessary initiation to serious physical accomplishment, when the diegesis has her hurriedly ride on her own to Bath, by night and in the rain, in order to stop Troy’s potential murder by Boldwood. Further down, her body is literally tested in the field when the storm rages around and most men on the farm are dumb with alcohol. Her courage is emphasized by Liddy Smallbury’s refusal to come out and help,

while the accumulation of active verbs in quick succession stylistically conveys an image of efficient responsiveness to hardship: "She instantly took a sheaf upon her shoulder, clambered up close to [Gabriel's] heels, placed it behind the rod, and descended for another" (37: 193). Readiness to face danger becomes the index of heroism, provided it is no longer recreational, while the narrative reconfigures idiosyncrasy into exemplariness.

Scenes of physical duress find more purely psychological counterparts in the staging of resolute determination. Bathsheba is repeatedly portrayed as a very strong-willed person, as if in Hardy's Wessex, women who would be respected and admired had to sublimate their own sex in heroic proportions. This does not rate very high in womanhood but fits the masculine streak in Bathsheba, in contrast with other female figures such as Liddy Smallbury and Fanny Robin, whose characterization relies on their lack of stamina. She also overshadows most of the male *dramatis personae*, whose acceptance of her terms rings like resignation and promotes her high above common men. Some narrative strings are pulled so that this free mind might become an independent person through inheritance. She is consequently in a position to make decisions for herself, and instead of being dragged to Norcombe Hill by her aunt (2: 16), she can finally assert herself by stating her intention to do better than them all at Upper Weatherbury farm, relying on modal "shall" to convince her audience: "I shall be up before you are awake; I shall be afield before you are up; and I shall have breakfasted before you are afield. In short, I shall astonish you all" (10: 68). It is only fitting that this masculine heroism should confuse men, and on two occasions, Poorgrass's stammering audibly and visually hyphenates the two genders: "sir—ma'am I mane" (10: 64). Hardy resorts to the same technique and the possibility of gender-crossing is once more alluded to when Bathsheba questions her own identity: "I hope I am not a bold sort of maid—mannish?" (30: 155) with extra emphasis on Liddy's answer, one of awe and embarrassment: "O no, not mannish; but so almighty womanish that 'tis getting on that way sometimes" (30: 155). Such a formidable woman with her masculine identification spectacularly out-mans men by speaking her mind. For instance, she turns down Gabriel's proposal in a striking, matter-of-fact way showing that she can both understand and cope with reality: "I have hardly a penny in the world [...]. I am better educated than you—and I don't love you a bit: that's my side of the story" (4: 29). Refusing to repress her strong emotions, she is intellectually capable of restoring her speech to its general perspective of aversion to matrimony, and insists that she would "*hate* to be thought men's property" (4: 27). She more openly achieves a heroic stature and assumes a masculine position when she once again has her way and extirpates a renewed proposal from Gabriel, concluding: "it seems exactly as if I had come courting you" (56: 303). This final note rings with the opening indication that she smilingly anticipates love plots in which she could prove her worth in the war of the sexes while "hearts were imagined as lost and won" (1: 10). She projects herself within her own tale, one filled with "far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part" (1: 10), in an act of individuation which defines her as a full subject, pitting her story against man's – one usually termed history. This explains why Bathsheba's narrative is indeed one of empowerment with liberating effect for so many female readers.

The heroism of Bathsheba's psychological self-assertiveness is given social and political relevance when the young girl conquers the public scene, away from the domesticity reserved for angels in the house. Thanks to her occupation, the mistress of Upper Weatherbury farm cuts an astonishing figure of emancipation and significance. Her statutory achievement is dramatized through a piece of dialogue:

'Where is your master the farmer?' asked Gabriel [...] 'Tisn't a master; 'tis
a mistress, shepherd.' 'A woman farmer?' (6:
41)

The conventional expectations are euphonically referred to through the phrase "master the farmer", but precisely in order to deny them afterwards, in a feminist move of resistance to the norm. In the end, a performative reconfiguration of identities promotes the heroine to the status of "woman farmer", a social oddity though a clear syntactic possibility and semantic opportunity. The social dimension of the exchange is underlined by the exclusive designation of people through their profession, in a locus where Bathsheba becomes the *axis mundi*, as the "Mistress" (10: 64). The narrative aptly depicts life on her farm, a universe ruled by an able-bodied, resourceful woman who hires Gabriel, sacks him along with bailiff Pennyways or rewards and retributes "her men" (10: 64). Most striking is the whole chapter devoted to her first performance as a paymaster, or rather paymistress, who alters the system inherited from her late uncle with the over-determined act of topping their wages with a few additional shillings. Her domination is accentuated by her capacity to

impose a perspective, reducing men to their function on her estate and giving her personal evaluation of their beings in monetary terms. Bathsheba's authoritative and authoritarian personality sets its stamp on her question to Poorgrass, and thus tilts the gendered balance of power with reifying consequences for the subaltern: "And what are you?" (10: 64). There is phallic heroism in her aggressive castrating influence on the flock of men, who mostly lie low in front of her, so that she even has to brace them up, referring in denegative sweetness to her destructive potential: "'Matthew Mark, did you say?—speak out—I shall not hurt you,' inquired the farmer kindly" (10: 65). The message is further carried through when she has Gabriel teach her to sharpen tools: "let me hold the shears" (20: 104). She symbolically tries them out on the shepherd – possibly on Boldwood too – asserting her ascendancy, which she reinforces by self-sufficiently proclaiming that she has "formed a resolution to have no bailiff at all, but to manage everything with [her] own head and hands" (10: 64). Hardy grants her a superhuman characterization, revealing that such is the price to pay by women who would not to be taken advantage of and seek acknowledgement in a man's world. In significant contrast to the only occurrence where she is passively carried on a waggon, very much like Gabriel, this exceptional character is depicted on horseback in three episodes, quite unlike Gabriel, enjoying a ride in an indecorously masculine way, getting to a fire site as the representative of authority and rushing to Bath to save a life, and so legitimately joins the community of centaurs.

Reversing traditional roles might be emancipatory for Bathsheba and associate her with a prestigious form of heroic masculinity, but it remains entangled in ideological patterns, which are obliquely reinforced. In other words, such a phrasing as "our heroine" (51: 274), with the insistence on an ominous possessive adjective, might single her out as the champion of men's values, or at least provide the occasion to reassert their supremacy. Indeed, the notion of heroism validates existential itineraries from a given perspective; it follows that Troy's, Oak's, Boldwood's or Bathsheba's feats mirror and echo the dominant ideology. The definition of this form of heroism, definitely a masculine one, is easily laid down, but its manifestations might occasionally prove harder to locate in the text. They will tentatively be sought in depiction of complex situations whose final outcomes testify to the victory of man's normative system of thought and conduct.

The most dramatic example is found in Hardy's preliminary creation of an energetic, resourceful heroine, who is set apart from other women, as has been seen. Afterwards, disqualification is secured when her singularity meets with rebuke and her resistance to conformity constructs her as little better than a barbarian figure. To a certain extent, thus, she is instrumentalized to enable the emergence of heroism in men within a clear-cut binary system where different sexes could not possibly share the same qualities. In order to recuperate the unruly female, it is necessary that she undergo institutional gender re-assignment, leaving her a much more manageable person. In the process, the novel didactically reports society's judgmental assessment of her personality, sometimes in hazy references to femininity, for instance when Henery Fray resents her unwomanly, outspoken and unsweetened mode of address: "Her emblazoned fault was to be too pronounced in her objections, and not sufficiently overt in her likings" (22: 118). Condemnation is more radical, though, when her aunt, Mrs Hurst, laments her niece's non-conformity, claiming that she is "too wild" (2: 26). The statement is given monstrous proportions through the use of a redundant intensifying adverb, since no-one could be found wild enough. Moreover, Bathsheba's incapacity to govern her own nature explains why she was never able to become a governess for others. Failing to fit into the social fabric, she remains a parasitical burden to her family. The animal metaphor rings in a dramatic speech of self-denial, which originates in male consciousness, when she admits to her flawed nature: "I want somebody to tame me" (4: 29). Once the heroine's imperfection has been spelled out, Hardy strives to shift the acceptation of "want" from other people's evaluation of Bathsheba's needs, to her own inclination towards voluntary servitude. It is in this civilizing reformation that heroic masculinity might be found too. The author skillfully metamorphoses the young girl who is "too independent" (4: 29) into a decent, respectable woman who acknowledges her debt to Boldwood, entreating him to "forgive" her (19: 101), admitting that she "owes" him to marry him (53: 286). She also confesses to her reliance upon Gabriel, whom she begs not to "desert" her (21: 111). Even her financial independence is endangered by her marriage with spendthrift Troy. It is significant that although she once fantasized about being the heroine of "dramas in which men would play [only] a part" (1: 10), she finally bonds with Fanny – and indirectly with Troy's mother – by sharing her bondage when she identifies as a "victim" (43: 231) of male conspiracy. Once the taming of the shrewd girl has been completed, the narrative can more fully develop the plot dealing with the mating of the girl shrew.

To this effect, Hardy draws a virile triangle composed of Oak, Boldwood and Troy, with Bathsheba standing in the middle as the pretext for them to prove their worth. The reader is aware that they are being tested so that the final outcome might strike him or her as an example of retributive coherence. In fact, they rival for the possession of Bathsheba's person, tapping into the semantic field of appropriation. Gabriel warns his fellow reader: "I'll make her my wife, or upon my soul I shall be good for nothing" (4: 24), but the narrative reverses the proposition, and since he proves a good man, he can eventually call her "my wife" indeed (57: 307), in spite of the young woman's moderate attraction to him as made clear early in the novel (4: 29). Boldwood seems to idealize her in an apparently mad fit of devotion, but the idolization reifies Bathsheba, whom he calls "my treasure" (31: 159). His diegetic destiny might read as a case study in psycho-pathology, but most of all, it publicizes some men's tendency to reduce women to fetishes or trophies. This is suggested by Boldwood's final decision to find satisfaction in buying a pricey wardrobe complete with accessories, which he keeps in boxes tagged with the inscription "Bathsheba Boldwood" (55: 294). As for Troy, his ownership is emphatically asserted when he repeatedly enjoins his wife to follow him to their home, now his house: "Come with me: come! [...] Come, Madam, do you hear what I say?" (53: 289). Husbands' proprietorship of their wives is so fundamental to the patriarchal system which prioritizes men over women that Boldwood himself is called upon to help enforce the androcentric regulations, ejaculating: "Bathsheba, go with your husband!" (53: 289). However, the identities of her successive suitors and actual husbands are immaterial to the fundamental inscription of masculine heroism as a capacity to mark the world after men's liking. Long before the love plot unravels, Bathsheba is introduced in a founding episode of narcissistic contemplation in "a small swing looking-glass" (1: 9). Her blushing means that she discovers someone unexpected in the mirror, a hint at her cleft identity. In fact, it is not herself she sees but what men expect her to be. She now fully incarnates their desire, while an identifying sex, a sexualized fate and a gendered pattern of behavior are imposed upon her. This alienation finds expression in her smile, the transposition of men's satisfaction. More importantly for the matter at hand, masculine heroism in this case consists in shaping the young girl into an object capable of reflecting male excellence by playing her part as the prize granted to the worthiest man of the diegesis.

The patriarchal structure which ensures men's domination finds support in most of the *dramatis personae* to reinforce and adapt the moral structure of heteronormativity, since it is "everybody's business" (53: 284). First and foremost, the male, mostly omniscient narrator imprints his phallocentric vision of the world on his narrative. He produces his credentials thanks to his learned formulations, with occasional Latin phrases, for instance in this description of Bathsheba after Troy has reclaimed her:

She was in a state of mental *gutta serena*; her mind was for the minute totally deprived of light at the same time that no obscuration was apparent from without. (53: 289)

His reliability is heightened by references to his responsiveness to the universe and special connection to nature, usually phrased with poetic inflexions. For instance, in a praiseworthy description of the sky, he notices that "the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, timed by a common pulse" (2: 12). Such a comprehensive, extensive and exclusive viewpoint builds up a superior ethos for him, one based on an understanding of nature which in return naturalizes his claims and narrative. He has rhetorically endowed himself with the power to word the essence of things. Unsurprisingly, his interpretation of Bathsheba relies on his perception of her nature as a woman, which ultimately articulates sexist prejudices, such as the reference to "[w]oman's prescriptive infirmity" (1: 10). This misogynistic project echoes in the organization of the diegesis, which often dwells on Bathsheba's need of Gabriel, for example. This display of men's relative superiority over women originates in a discourse on woman's fundamental weakness and irrelevance. The androcentric order of things is reasserted as much as it is protected by the "Wessex chorus", giving thematic as well as structural and poetic coherence to the text with a systematic exploration of the semantic field of patriarchy as a male preserve with male prerogative. For instance, the "Weatherbury folk" (6: 36) almost legitimize Bathsheba's unfaithful father for committing "the seventh" (8: 52), the farmers at Casterbridge corn market evaluate the heroine's character from their phallocratic perspective, concluding that "[t]is such a shapely maid, however, that she'll soon get picked up" (12: 74), the soldiers in Troy's barracks derisively refer to Fanny Robin's gullibility by mocking their womanizing friend (11: 72), and the gossips in All Saints church pass humiliating judgment on Troy's being stood up on the very day of his wedding, when "titters and giggling

bec[o]me more frequent” (16: 92), as indirect reminders of what a man should not tolerate. These watches hold the community together by setting the main narrative situations in their rightful perspective, in an effective reassertion of the norm. Even the final conception of union bears the mark of social control at its highest, since the couple formed by Bathsheba and Gabriel is to be construed as a partnership. In other words, it is very close to “the mere business compact” evoked by Boldwood (53: 286) and offers the community increased opportunity for the management of individuals or their sexuality. It prescribes restrictive, unimpassioned roles, for example as a house-bound husband who is socially located and thus predictable or malleable. Of course, men still enjoy greater freedom than their wives and reign supreme over the couple, in compliance with an analogical conception of society which connects the microcosmic structure of the family and the macrocosmic one of the human kind or mankind. Concerning the Establishment at large, surgeon Aldrich, parson Thirdly or the unnamed judges in Casterbridge determine who is dead, where people can be buried, according to their morality, and what the lot of criminals will be. They are in fact the archetypal representatives of patriarchy and their everyday deeds organize chaos into a cosmos fitted to their own advantage. They unassumingly deploy their heroic masculinity by securing a *status quo* which echoes in the final words of the novel, uttered by choric Joseph Poorgress in smug contentment: “since ‘tis as ‘tis, why, it might have been worse, and I feel my thanks accordingly” (57: 308).

Hardy’s demonstration led him to introduce an independent young girl and reconfigure her into an obedient woman who gives up her romantic dreams in order to breed sheep and feed the country. Such a maternal function runs deep in Bathsheba’s characterization, as from the beginning of the novel, patriarchy has sealed her extra-diegetic fate by having Gabriel mention a future full of “babies in the births—every man jack of ‘em!” (4: 28). This vision can be explained by Hardy’s choice to compose a comedy celebrating the spring ritual of rejuvenation and imminent rebirth. The social function of this literary genre is reasserted, stressing the matrimonial dimension of the regenerative pattern while in this proselytizing text, men once more lord it. Although casualties are reported, their sacrifice is not useless and seems to meet with the author’s approval. However, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) will shift perspectives when the heroine is immolated to preserve the social order, angry fathers and pitiless gods rather than surrender to their requirements of repression and frustration. Her apotheosis reads in terms of martyrdom, which truly secures a heroic stature for her, though definitely not a masculine one. However, fifteen years have elapsed since *Far from the Madding Crowd* was published, offering Hardy time to develop a more mature form of fictional heroism.

Works cited

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