

Imagery and rustic thematic structure along with character of Oak from *Far from the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy

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Abstract - In *Far from the Madding Crowd* this is, for the initial time, referred to as 'Wessex'. In this rustic location, 'far from the madding crowd', Hardy was, sardonically, to inspect all sorts of polite [and ignoble] trouble and to reveal that the countryman's background are not necessarily chilly, sequestered' and that his internal life may be by no means soundless. He was chiefly fitted for this task by his origin and upbringing. Thomas Hardy was born in the hamlet of Higher Bockhampton in Dorset on 2 June 1840. His father was a designer and mason, and his mother, although a former serving-maid was a well-read woman of strong individuality and intellect

keywords - madding crowd, strife, storm, adverse, unfortunate, shepherd, disillusion, courtship, impression, Weatherbury

Introduction

Oak repeats the initial words of this passage from Ecclesiastes secretly after he thinks that Bathsheba has been insignificant with him and is about to marry Boldwood (Chapter 22). Hardy tempers the annoyance of it, however: 'This was mere exclamation - the foam of the storm'. Nevertheless the quotation- from Ecclesiastes does form a good preface to the subject of the novel, although one which must be tempered as Hardy himself has tempered it. Oak suffers upset and discontent from Bathsheba's negligent and often unaware behaviour. But he is a man who possesses the virtues, of patient strength and generosity which allow him sometimes to change adverse situation, always to endure them. By contrast Troy and Boldwood (in a sense both are 'sinners') are destroyed. As for Bathsheba, Hardy is at caution to exemplify and explain her complex nature - her heart is not purposely 'snares and nets' to entrap and annihilate the men around her-and she does attain greater astuteness and humanity. In assessing the novel, then, the reader needs to study these characters, asking definite questions about them. What merits does Oak possess which enable him to endure disaster? Why are Troy and Boldwood destroyed? How much does Bathsheba learn from difficulty and how far does she change? What does the location contribute?

Representation of oak like character of Oak

Significance of the name Oak: His last name is the first clue to his character; English oak is well-known for its power and toughness. But his Christian name should not be mistreated either. A study of the novel's representative structures will reveal the frequent juxtaposition of dim and light, Oak and Troy; and within this structure Gabriel emerges as the superior angel of God, opposite to the satanic Lucifer. The tone of Hardy's initial account of him is warmly comic; he is un-worldly, slightly messed up, solid and unassuming. But 'thoughtful people* (and the tone changes) find him modest, sensible and open minded. Hereafter we see him in action and learn both from what he does and think as well as from Hardy's own comments as author. One theme which will emerge is the influence individuals hold over their conditions and what they derive from them. Oak's strength here is obvious. His sheep are destroyed by an unfortunate combination of events, but we are told that his strength of character is confirmed by this happening; it leaves him with a 'dignified calm' and an 'indifference to fate' which is the foundation of sublimity (Chapter 6). In other matters - ones which significantly affect Bathsheba he is able to turn away or mitigate tragedy: he extinguishes her fire (Chapter 6), cures her sheep (Chapter 21) and covers her ricks (Chapter 37). He achieves these things by his bravery, staying power and good sense, as well as by understanding with and understanding of the natural world in which he lives. He has the humanity of the good shepherd; he lives with his lambing ewes and knows the stresses of the new-born lambs. In addition he understands nature's tokens of the coming rainstorm (Chapter 36) and regulates his life by the movement of the stars (Chapter 2). But his pleasure is not wholly effective: 'he stood still after looking at the sky as a useful appliance, and regarded it in an appreciative spirit, as a work of art incomparably beautiful' (Chapter 2). For all his sympathy with the natural world, however, Oak betrays requirement of judgment in his treatment of people. Examined bluntly, tact is the cooperation which intelligent and responsive people may sometimes have to make with their sense of sincerity.

Oak's view of Troy: Tact does not have to be the deceitful flattery of Troy, although it may not totally express one's true feelings. Hardy tells us that Oak's qualities will not grant him success with Bathsheba -his humility, and a superfluous moiety of honesty' (Chapter 4). We see this clearly as he admits that marrying her would not be clever and again when, 'torturing honesty to her own advantage', she asks his opinion of her conduct towards Boldwood (Chapter 20). It is sardonic

that she asks him because she counts on his 'objectivity of opinion' but is angry 'because the tutor saw her in the cold morning light of open-shuttered disillusion.' As her quandary becomes more pitiful so Oak learns to treat her with greater understanding, however, and to temper his strict honesty with humankind. He erases the chalked words 'and child' from Fanny's coffin 'in a last attempt to save Bathsheba from ... immediate anguish' but with a troubled sense of his own hopelessness to counteract the ironical circumstances accumulating for her (Chapter 42).

Oak's judgement towards Boldwood: Towards Boldwood he behaves with absolute bounty although he "speaks his mind as he warns the farmer of women's unpredictability, 'Her meaning may be good; but there - she's young yet' (Chapter 52). With Troy the matter is different. Oak excusably suspects his nature and motives and has every cause for resentment. Coggan perceives a source of terrible argument if Oak is honest, and advises insincerity, 'say "Friend" outwardly, though you say "Trouble house" within' (Chapter 35). In the next chapter Oak's action of Troy is remote but civil, and thereafter Hardy keeps them apart.

Bathsheba's view regarding Oak: Bathsheba perceives that Oak's power is derived from his selflessness, 'among the mass of interests by which he was surrounded, those which affected his personal well-being were not the most fascinating and important in his eyes' (Chapter 43). Unresponsiveness to fate can only arise from this sort of unselfishness; but his self-effacement nearly ends in losing him Bathsheba. So worried is he for the preservation of her good name and so apparently set on his vow at the end of Chapter 4 ('Then I'll ask you no more') that he nearly withdraws from her life. In her 'hunger for pity and sympathy' it is Bathsheba who finally seeks him out as he had forced her to do once before over the ill sheep. Their courtship is concluded with the 'good-fellowship' which Oak, but not Bathsheba, had understood as necessary as early as Chapter 4, 'And at home by the fire, whenever you look up, there I shall be- and whenever I look up, there will be you'.

Imagery serves as pendent of life

Use of figures of speech: Sometimes Hardy's use of simile and metaphor gives deeper meaning to a particular episode, and occasionally he sustains the use of a particular metaphorical idea throughout the novel. After the destruction of his flock, Oak thinks of Bathsheba as he stands beside a pond-'over it hung the attenuated frame of a chrome-yellow moon ... the morning star dogging her on the left hand . . . a breeze blew, shaking and elongating the reflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star to a phosphoric streak upon the water' (Chapter 5). With the pool sparkling 'like a dead man's eye' the whole scene evokes a feeling of tiredness and collapse. The moon is a 'skeleton' and the word 'dogging' implies threatening and enduring pursuit. The whole passage could be regarded as a depressing metaphor for Bathsheba's future relationship with Troy.

Moon as a primal symbol: She, the moon, is not broken by the buffetings she receives from fortune and he, the star ('How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!') has a short, but dashing, career. The connection of Bathsheba with the moon is made again later by Hardy; 'Diana [the chaste moon-goddess] was the goddess whom Bathsheba instinctively adored' (Chapter 41) and when Bathsheba makes her final visit to Oak he opens 'the door, and the moon shone upon his forehead' (Chapter 56). This metaphor is connected with Hardy's use of glow and dark and will be drawn into the specimen essay answer on this subject (see page 84). From the sixth paragraph of Chapter 42 Hardy creates a similar impression for the return of Poorgrass with Fanny's coffin. As it approaches, the haze takes the nature of mushroom; springy, ingrained, elastic.

Nature as a bigger symbols: The clear air becomes like an eye blinded by opacity, and the trees take* on human attributes: intent, but indistinct and shadow less like spectres, r beaded grey with the mist like old men. The words 'grey' and 'dead' are: repeated and the sound of a drop on the coffin only serves to intensify : the silence. Here Hardy has endowed the woodland with life only to -transform it to the grey stillness of death. The description is appropriate r to the action but it serves also to frighten into delay the man who, when * lost by night, once spoke to an owl (Chapter 8). By contrast, in Chapter 6, Hardy begins his description of the rick-fire in the simple terms of colour, shape and sound. But the passage ends with the evocation of devilishness as the fire takes on the Gothic, gargoyle face of evil. As with the doings of the church gargoyle (Chapter 46) .here is suddenly a sense that man's efforts are being thwarted by some malign power.

Evilness of human being: The evil and destructive redness of the blaze is associated with an image which Hardy maintains throughout the novel for Troy; that of a man whose whole appearance is of a stunning red. Bathsheba finds herself hooked to him 'brilliant in brass and scarlet' (Chapter 24) and when she goes to meet him for the sword-drill he is 'a spot of artificial red' in the distance (Chapter 28). Boldwood watches him return to Weatherbury, 'th lamp... illuminated a scarlet and gilded form (Chapter 34) and he keeps a scarlet jacket even as a farmer-he shines 'red and distinct' as Oak looks at the sleeping revellers (Chapter 36) and Hardy is careful to mention the jacket as they all emerge later. But when he dies 'scarcely a single drop of blood' has flowed; his association is with the brilliant redness of hell-fire, not with bloody destruction.

Thematic ambivalence

Troy is equally self-governing. The aid he lends with the hay and the bees is simply a suitable gesture. He has chosen not to belong to the centre of population and returns in a spirit of moral recklessness to wreak havoc as 'the impersonator of Heaven's persistent irony' towards Boldwood (Chapter 53). Boldwood's sense of blame is demolished by his passion. Practically, his affairs are neglected by his worry with Bathsheba, and finally his moral sense is overturned by the envious impulse which prompts the murder of Troy. Bathsheba is also handicapped - by her sex. Although her attendance as a farmer in the corn market is accepted, it is also undeniably a triumph to her as the maiden' (Chapter 12). As her farming career progresses it becomes clear that she does need sensible help with farmyard crises: the- burning ricks, the ill sheep, the exposed grain. These call for a strength and skill which she just does not possess. As mentioned earlier, Hardy views her femaleness as a handicap to her sense of moral liability too. She needs the 'kindly light' of Oak as a guide 'amid the surrounding gloom' of the final loneliness, fear and fear brought about by her earlier acts of female irrational wilfulness. A

reader might feel that a spirit of anti-feminism directs Hardy's depiction of Bathsheba. This would not be just, since he is clear that she is a woman of praiseworthy qualities who makes negligent mistakes but who comes to comprehend her own deficiencies which are made up by the joint venture of marriage.

Rural structure from the ignorant strife(Title)

The structure of the plot of *Far from the Madding Crowd* is really based on Bathsheba's performance. The general summary has indicated how divisions may be made although you should be cautious of applying them too rigidly; they are symptomatic of emphasis and are not exclusive. The novel also has a sub-structure, however, which serves both to create the rustic setting and, in a symbolic sense, to support the mood of the action. This sub-structure lies in the passing of the seasons. Oak loses his flock, and Bathsheba, in the winter. As summer approaches his staff fortunes rise and so do Boldwood's hopes of winning Bathsheba. At the height of summer Troy arrives, but fortunes begin to wane as he woos and wins Bathsheba. As winter approaches Fanny dies, Troy is lost and Bathsheba lives on in a spirit of laziness. Oak still increases his social standing and compensation. Bathsheba revives with the coil and as summer waxes so do Boldwood's renewed hopes of winning her. By the autumn sheep-fair more disaster is brewing; and in the dead of winter Troy is murdered, Boldwood jailed, and Bathsheba left in even deeper unhappiness and misery. With the second spring come new hopes, founded on the scene of a truly happier and secure future. In the second reading you should be ready to note down matters of more detail which are going to be of use in discussion of the novel.

At first sight a reader might think that Fanny's role is very small, and surely it is a curiously negative one. She appears in only five chapters and is unknown (except as 'Fan' in Chapter II) in all of them. With one exception these are also night scenes. In three later chapters her corpse is the subject of much conversation and the cause of an in turmoil and emotional scene between Troy and Bathsheba. In a further chapter, memory of her affects Troy's doings. In the first place, then, she serves to introduce a feeling of nervousness and mystery concerning her future and Troy's character. Oak is aware of the stress she is under (Chapter 7) and we gather this ourselves in Chapter 11 where the nervous girl has made all the practical actions for the marriage; some great fear must be prompting her reserve and effort. All this seems to be resolved, however, when Oak receives her cheerful and optimistic letter in Chapter 15. But then she makes her fatal mistake over the churches and is abandoned by Troy. From his treatment of her we discover his pitilessness, egoism and egotism. The mystery surrounding her trouble returns with her secrecy on the Casterbridge road, and the decree of the 'throb of tragic intensity' is anticipated by the complexity of her journey and the cheerlessness of the night.

If, alive, her role was passive, after her death she dominates the thoughts of all; first of Oak and Boldwood who wish to protect Bathsheba from knowledge of Troy's treachery then, intermittently, of the local people; then of Bathsheba herself; and finally of Troy. Most impressive is the gamut of emotions which Bathsheba runs in Chapter 43. She thinks of Fanny without charity and of herself as mocked by fate: 'events were so shaped as to chariot her hither in this expected, shy, yet effectual manner'. But after Troy appears all her indignant feelings about 'compromised honour, forestalment, obscure in maternity by another' are 'forgotten in the simple and still strong attachment of wife to husband'. The presence of Fanny's corpse is to heighten the emotional tension by which both Bathsheba and Oak come to express the truth of their feelings for each other 'I love you U than she did', 'You are nothing to me - nothing'. Finally, Troy makes an impulsive gesture of provisional remorse by orating Fanny's grave. When this effort seems spurned by dance he gives up such improvement and re-embarks on his, vard and reckless life. Fanny's role, then, is vital both for the plot-bringing events to understand for the aspect of the novel's symbolism which deals with 'chance and fate. However hard she may try to direct the practical affairs better life (her marriage, her safety in the workhouse, the second meeting i Troy) circumstances thwart her. Indeed she is finally used as a kind instrument in the hands of fate.

Impression of Moule on Hardy as the conclusion

From an early age this impressionable country boy was both surrounded by the traditional aspects of rural life- with its superstitions, folklore, culture and pastimes - and given an education, first in Bockhampton, then in Dorchester, which was the basis for his further self-education. In 1856 he was articled to a Dorchester architect but continued his studies with the guidance and advice of Horace Moule, the son of a neighbouring parish rector. Moule was a classical scholar, eight years Hardy's senior, whose friendship Hardy greatly valued, and whose suicide in Cambridge in 1873 may have affected the tone of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which Hardy was writing at the time. The suicide of Horace Moule in September 1873 was a culmination of years of increasing depression. It was a terrible shock to Hardy but it roughly coincided with the advent of Leslie Stephen as perhaps a more constructive literary mentor, Stephen advised the removal of several superfluous scenes from *Far from the Madding Crowd*, including one for the bailiff, Pennyways, and an episode concerning foot-rot in sheep as a source of miscalculated confrontation between Troy and Oak.

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