

Far from the Madding Crowd— An Introduction

Date of Publication

Far from the Madding Crowd was originally published in a serial form in 1873–74 in a periodical called “Cornhill Magazine”. It appeared in book form late in 1874 and its first edition of one thousand copies was exhausted within a couple of months. The reviews of this novel were favourable, though not very enthusiastic. One reviewer found it an original and amusing story but complained that the very humorous dialogue was too subtle and intellectual for the peasants of Dorset*.

Hardy’s First Major Novel

Far from the Madding Crowd was Hardy’s first major novel, his earlier three published novels (*Desperate Remedies*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*) being his apprentice-work. The novel tells a leisurely tale of the countryside where, as in the Forest of Arden, “they fleet the time carelessly”. There is a Homeric quality of timelessness—“In Weatherbury three or four score years were included in the mere present”—of breadth and spaciousness about it, symbolized by the lengthy description of the medieval, church-like barn, and Bathsheba’s singing of a ballad at the shearing-supper to the piping of Gabriel’s flute, while “the shearers reclined against each other as at suppers in the early ages of the world”. And there is something of the same quality in Bathsheba’s instructions for the decking of Fanny Robin’s coffin.

The Title

The title of this novel is derived from the following stanza of Gray’s famous *Elegy, Written in a Country Churchyard*:

Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn’d to stray;
Along the cool sequester’d vale of life;
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

It is possible to interpret the title in an ironic as well as literal sense. Literally, the scene of the story is laid in the quiet countryside, far away from the strife

* Dorset is the name of a territory in Southern England. The scene of *Far From the Madding Crowd* is laid in a region of England to which Hardy has given the name of “Wessex” and of which Dorset is a part.

and struggles of city crowds. But, ironically, even in the countryside which seems so quiet and peaceful there can be tumult and confusion, both external and in the mind of man.

The Rustic Characters

As for the chorus of rustics, it is true that, when Hardy wrote this novel, only three or four years after the Education Act of 1870, half of them, probably more, would be illiterate, with a vocabulary of only a few hundred simple words. But Hardy was not a realist in the sense of being an accurate recorder of dialogue; he was a poet who wrote prose for a living, and descriptions of Nature and dialect speech were the two nearest approaches to poetry open to him. Here is Henery Fray's comment on Bathsheba: "Pride and vanity have ruined many a cobbler's dog. Dear, dear, when I think of o' it, I sorrows like a man in travel!" Here is Jan Coggan on the subject of church and chapel: "I bain't such a fool as to pretend that we who stick to the church have the same chance as they, because we know we have not. But I have a feller who'll change his old ancient doctrines for the sake of getting to heaven." And here is Joseph Poorgrass on drink and a multiplying eye; "Yes; I see two of every sort, as if I were some holy man living in the times of King Noah and entering into the ark....I feel too good for England: I ought to have lived in Genesis by rights."

"Marry" and "marriage", the Key-words of the Novel

The plot, as in all Hardy's major novels except one,* is that of a woman, the central character, and two or more men. It is interesting to note how Hardy, with his own marriage approaching, emphasized either consciously or unconsciously, the words "marriage" and "marry". It is true that all the novels have much to do with marriage, but here the key-words are those which Bathsheba so recklessly wrote on the valentine she sent to Boldwood: "Marry Me!" They are also the key-words of the non-marriage sub-plot, so entreatingly repeated by Fanny to Troy: "You said lots of times you would marry me. Shall it be tomorrow?" Fanny writes to tell Oak that she is going to be married; and Oak in his prosperity calls to see if Bathsheba would "like to be married", but is repulsed with a negative reply. Troy marries her, however, and it is not long before he tells her that a ceremony before a priest does not make a marriage, and Bathsheba warns Liddy: "If you ever marry—God forbid that you ever should! You'll find yourself in a fearful situation; but mind this, don't you flinch. Stand your ground, and be cut to pieces." Troy is supposed drowned, and Boldwood renews his suit: "If you marry again, marry me!" Troy returns, Boldwood shoots him, and Oak's turn has come again; but it is Bathsheba who coaxes him to ask "whether you would allow me to marry you after all". It is a happy ending to a pastoral romance or minor

Most Representative and Balanced of the Wessex Novels

Far from the Madding Crowd is perhaps the most representative and balanced of the Wessex novels, combining the typical features of the other major novels but without developing any one of those features to an extreme. It is in fact a kind of golden mean among Hardy's major works. Its balance may account for its great popular success in its own time, a success not without disadvantages for Hardy; for in combination with *Under the Greenwood Tree*, it created an audience inclined toward the bucolic and one which was unable to comprehend or appreciate his later, grimmer work. However, in *Far from the Madding Crowd* Hardy developed some of his most characteristic and effective modes, from the centrally tragic figure to the symbolic landscape and to the rustic chorus. In it, especially, we see in clear form for the first time the mythic and psychological patterns which he was to employ so effectively as he went on. In later novels he enriched and further developed each of these modes.

Grounds for this Novel's Claim to Greatness

Far from the Madding Crowd is the first of Hardy's works to make a claim to greatness. The basis for its claim is its treatment of an abiding moral problem, man's relations to his environment and to others; and the claim may be respected, and finally conceded, on the grounds that an old philosophy of the necessity of the dominance of reason over passion is not merely re-stated, but is renewed in terms of a modern vision of nature in which the role of man is reduced, but his significance enhanced.

The Merits of this Novel

Coming after *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a novel of astonishing confidence; as the successor to *Under the Greenwood Tree* it is a book of extraordinary amplitude. Unmistakably a major work, it is nonetheless quite different in kind from Hardy's later fiction, and it seems the first duty of criticism simply to celebrate its unique virtues—the bold theatricality of the narrative progression, the rich yet strictly functional evocation of setting, the earth-bound poetry of the dialogue. Never again was Hardy to be quite so lavish in the humorous exploitation of rural dialogue, or even in the invention of incident: *Far from the Madding Crowd* includes, often in close juxtaposition, a profusion of natural and domestic disasters, mysterious disappearances and dramatic reappearances, the opening of a coffin, a revenge-murder, and last-minute reprieve from the gallows.

The Most Characteristic of Hardy's Novels

Far from the Madding Crowd marks the end of an apprenticeship, and it has rightly been seen as the "most characteristic" of Hardy's successful novels. It has all the ingredients of a ballad tale; it strikes a balance between rural strength and rural weaknesses; its lovers are the three stock types—the

and Troy get married, and Boldwood's hopes come to nothing. Boldwood's disappointment in love makes him very bitter and gloomy.

The Consequences of Troy's Love-affair with Fanny

Soon the course of Bathsheba's life takes an unhappy turn. She discovers that her husband had once developed a love-affair with a girl called Fanny Robin. She comes to know that Troy had seduced the girl and then deserted her. Fanny Robin dies of child-birth in the Poor House at Casterbridge. As Fanny Robin had been a maid-servant of Bathsheba's, Bathsheba undertakes to make arrangements for the burial of Fanny. Fanny's coffin is placed in Bathsheba's house for the night to be buried in the morning. It is on this night that Bathsheba's suspicion about the love-affair which had once existed between Fanny and Troy is confirmed. The same night Troy, on seeing the dead body of Fanny, experiences a strong feeling of remorse and repentance at having deserted Fanny. He decides not to live with Bathsheba any more and, leaving her, goes away.

Troy Killed by Boldwood

Soon Bathsheba receives a report that Troy has been drowned. Actually, however, Troy is still alive. Thinking Bathsheba to have become a widow, Boldwood once again pleads his love to Bathsheba and urges her to promise that she will marry him some day. So pressing and vehement is Boldwood's appeal that Bathsheba feels compelled to give him the required promise. Just at that time, however, Troy bursts upon the scene and claims Bathsheba. Both Boldwood and Bathsheba are stunned to see that Troy is alive. Under the stress of his emotion, Boldwood fires a gun at Troy and kills him. Boldwood is tried by the court and sentenced to death. But as a result of a mercy petition submitted by the people of Weatherbury, the sentence of death is commuted to imprisonment during Her Majesty's pleasure. It has been found that Boldwood had not been in his right mind for several months before the shooting.

The Marriage of Bathsheba and Gabriel

Finding herself lonely and friendless, Bathsheba agrees to marry Gabriel Oak, and the story ends with the long-delayed union of these two. Gabriel Oak is at last rewarded for his loyal service and devotion to Bathsheba. ♡

Far from the Madding Crowd— Critical Appreciation

The Plot

Far from the Madding Crowd novel has an interesting, gripping plot. We read the story from chapter to chapter breathlessly. We are deeply engrossed in the fortunes and vicissitudes of various characters. The feeling of suspense is created at many places and we are very anxious to know what happens next. Love being the chief subject of the story, the novel acquires an even greater interest. Different types of man's love for woman are depicted, leading to different results. Indeed, Hardy is a very successful maker of plots. The story abounds in dramatic scenes and situations. Bathsheba's infatuation with Boldwood's vehement declarations of love, Bathsheba's drive to Bath at night and Troy, the demonstration of sword-play, Bathsheba's chase by Gabriel Oak and Jan Coggan, the saving of the ricks by Gabriel Oak from fire and against rain, Troy's remorse and repentance on seeing the dead Fanny in the coffin and his harsh words to Bathsheba—these are some of the highlights of the story. These scenes and situations are most arresting and dramatic.

Characterization

Hardy is a great creator of character. The various characters in this novel are made to live before us. Bathsheba with her vanity, love of flattery, impulsiveness, courage, and self-confidence remains in our memories long after we have read the novel. Gabriel Oak with his unwavering loyalty and devotion; Troy with his irresistible manner of talking and his dash; Boldwood with his serious and gloomy nature and his volcanic passion—these too are specimens of Hardy's realistic and convincing characterization. Even the rustics, Joseph Poorgrass and others, are made to live in the pages of the novel. The various portraits drawn by Hardy in the story are true to life. We feel as if we had been brought into close and personal contact with the characters. We share their feelings, their passions, their experiences, their sorrows, etc.

Philosophy of life

This is one of the early novels of Hardy. But his philosophy of life is clearly indicated here. This novel shows Hardy's belief that man is destined to suffer. Gabriel Oak's hopes of becoming an independent and prosperous

shepherd-farmer turn to dust. His love for Bathsheba remains unfulfilled for a long time. Fanny's end is most tragic. Boldwood meets a sad fate. Bathsheba's life is completely wrecked, though her marriage with Gabriel at the end of the story consoles us to some extent. Thus all the characters are made to suffer. They suffer partly on account of their own faults and follies and partly on account of the cruelty of circumstances. The element of chance and accident, which is so marked in the later novels of Hardy, is not absent from this novel. Often it is an unforeseen, accidental happening which causes the unhappiness of human beings in the novel. The element of malicious chance or accident is indicative of Hardy's belief in a cruel, hostile fate. The only persons who are happy in the novel are the rustics who have no desires and aspirations. Hardy seems to believe that a state of desirelessness is the only means to happiness. But though Hardy is a pessimist, he is not a cynic. He seems to hate life, but he loves human beings. Life is full of sorrows and misfortunes, but human beings are essentially good. Such is Hardy's philosophy of life.

Humour

The novel has a happy ending; but the story is, on the whole, sad and tragic. Although Hardy is a writer of tragic novels, he provides rich, sparkling humour in his novels. This humour is provided chiefly by the rustics. We are greatly amused by the conversation of the rustic characters like Joseph Poorgrass, Jan Coggan, and the old maltster. Their humour is, of course, unconscious. We are amused also by the oddities of the rustics. The stories of the the shyness, timidity, and cowardice of Joseph Poorgrass are most funny. The maltster's desire to be regarded as older than he really is, is quite amusing. The weakness of Joseph Poorgrass and Jan Coggan for liquor also proves to be a source of fun, though it has a disastrous effect on Bathsheba's life. Besides, humour is provided by many remarks and comments made by Hardy is the course of the narration. The element of humour in the novel relieves the tension of the story which is, on the whole, one of sorrow and suffering.

Local Colour or the Pastoral Character of the Story

The scene of almost all Hardy's novels is laid in a region of England to which Hardy gives the name of Wessex. In the novels of Hardy, Wessex comes to have a real and living character. The pastoral character of this novel is emphasised by such rustic occupations as sheep-washing, sheep-shearing, and the buying and selling of sheep at the annual fair at Greenhill. The local colour in the novel is also created by Hardy's minute and detailed descriptions of the landscape and scenery around Norcombe Hill and the village of Weatherbury. Reference are made also to farming, harvesting, hay-making, the having of bees, the transactions at the market in Casterbridge and so on. These further emphasize the rural background of the story of the novel.

Style

Hardy is one of the greatest prose-stylists in English fiction. He has an astonishing command of the language. All the resources of the language are at his disposal. The wealth and scope of his vocabulary are amazing. This is seen not only in his descriptions of the landscape and the scenery but also in his portrayals of character and his pictures of human moods and of all shades of human feeling, even the subtlest. His style cannot be called simple. The average reader will find his style rather tough. But for the initiated reader, Hardy's style is a source of great aesthetic pleasure.

knows how to give without any expectation of any return. He is an undemonstrative type of lover. He does not know how to flatter a woman nor does he know the art of pleading his love. His fidelity to Bathsheba is remarkable. From the time that he saves her corn-ricks from fire without knowing that the owner of the ricks is Bathsheba till the very end he serves Bathsheba whole-heartedly and ungrudgingly. Though he is employed as her shepherd, yet in actual fact he performs all the duties of a bailiff. He superintends her farm and her property without in any way making a show of the service that he is rendering, so much so that in the initial stages Bathsheba does not even know the amount of work he is doing in her service. He saves her corn-ricks from rain and storm by working single-handed when all the other men including Troy are lying heavily drunk in the barn. He exposes himself to a great risk from lightning but he does so without any sense that he is doing any special favour to Bathsheba. Nor is Bathsheba blind to the services that he renders to her. In fact, towards the later stages, she leaves the entire charge of her farm to Oak. He becomes indispensable to her. Therefore, when he decides to leave her service, Bathsheba feels greatly worried. She calls on him to ask the reason why he is leaving. On this occasion, in the course of the conversation their union is decided upon.

His Sense of Duty

We see the essential sincerity of his nature not only in the manner in which he looks after the farm of Bathsheba, but also in the way in which he serves Boldwood. In the case of Bathsheba we could say that it was his love

for the woman that prompted him to serve her, but his selfless service of Boldwood leaves no doubt in our minds that the man is temperamentally loyal and has a strong sense of duty. In fact, he places duty before everything else. He scolds Joseph Poorgrass when the latter delays the coffin of Fanny by stopping to drink at a road-side tavern. His conscientious regard for duty is one of his foremost qualities.

His Simplicity

Gabriel Oak is an extremely simple-minded person. He is completely free from all deceit, guile, and trickery. He is so simple-minded as to be almost tactless. When he tells Bathsheba's aunt that he wants to marry Bathsheba, he does so without any preface. The moment Bathsheba's aunt says that Bathsheba has a dozen or more admirers, he beats a hasty retreat. He is tactless enough to tell Bathsheba that he had seen her masculine antics on horse-back while she was riding to town. He also tells her, when she gives him her hand, that he was not thinking of kissing it—a tactless remark which naturally offends her. When subsequently he tells her his prospects in life so as to try to prevail upon her to marry him, he tactlessly says that he had previously been thinking of marrying a woman with money. Even towards the end of the novel, it is Bathsheba who, more or less, takes the initiative in prompting him to propose marriage to her. He is a reserved, reticent type of lover.

His Straightforwardness

Gabriel Oak is quite outspoken and straightforward. He chides his mistress for having played a coquettish trick on Boldwood. He frankly tells her that her behaviour has been most objectionable. On one occasion, Bathsheba dismisses him from service for this outspokenness. He does not mince matters even to please Bathsheba. When on a second occasion she asks him to quit her service, he reminds her of her previous dismissal of him and subsequent reinstatement, and refuses to leave.

Endurance of Misfortune

Gabriel has a philosophic attitude towards life. He endures his misfortunes calmly and resolutely. When his dog has driven his sheep over the precipice and he finds them all lying dead at the foot of the hill, he does not curse his luck. In fact, he thanks God that he was not married. He bears this loss courageously and, after disposing of his belongings, sets out in search of a job. Unable to find employment at the hiring-fair, he feels no shame in making a little money by playing upon his flute—an art in which he is well versed. He shows the same patience in his love for Bathsheba. Though she does not respond to him for a long time, he does not feel gloomy or depressed like Boldwood. Even when Bathsheba is married to Troy, he does not complain or grumble. When subsequently Boldwood is wooing her, he does not put forward his claims. Though his love is disappointed for a long time, he remains calm and courageous.

An Expert Shepherd

He is well versed in all the arts of a shepherd. In fact, he possesses an exceptional skill as a shepherd. He tends his own sheep and subsequently Bathsheba's sheep with great care and affection. He is an adept in sheep-washing, sheep-shearing, etc. When Bathsheba's sheep have burst into a field of young clover and have got poisoned, he is the only person in Weatherbury who can save their lives by performing a skilful operation on them to let out their blood. He also shows a great ingenuity and skill in saving the ricks of Bathsheba first from fire and then from rain and storm. He possesses a creditable knowledge of the position of the various stars in the sky, and can judge the hour of night or day by looking at the position of the stars or the sun.

His Self-respect

Though he loves Bathsheba deeply, he is not without self-respect even in his relations with her. When she dismisses him from service for his frank condemnation of her conduct towards Boldwood, he immediately goes away. When Bathsheba sends him a signal of distress, he refuses to come unless he is asked with more politeness to come. It is only when Bathsheba sends him a written appeal that he agrees to come. He is not the cringing type of lover who would efface his dignity and self-respect for the whims of his mistress.

His Kindness and Sympathy

He is by nature kind-hearted and sympathetic. He feels very sad at the premature and tragic end of his two hundred sheep. When he meets Fanny Robin by chance, without knowing the girl, he offers her a shilling on seeing her distress even though he is himself a needy person at that time. Later, he feels a great sympathy for Boldwood in the latter's disappointment in love and at his sad fate. When Boldwood was trying to court and win Bathsheba, Gabriel did not enter into any rivalry with him but kept his own love under control.

His Modesty and Humility

Gabriel Oak is a modest and humble person. As Hardy tells, he walks about as if he did not have much claim upon the spaces of this earth. Even when he has become Bathsheba's bailiff, he does not try to boss over the workmen. He does not lose his head. At no stage in the story do we find him swollen with pride or with a feeling of his own importance. His work and services are valuable, but he does not seem to be conscious of his own worth. He does not parade either his skill as a shepherd or his worth as a bailiff. This humility or modesty lends a further charm to his personality.

His Literary Taste

He is not an illiterate or uneducated person. He is a man of literary taste. He has a small collection of books from which he derives knowledge as well as pleasure. His collection include *Paradise Lost*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*,

Robinson Crusoe and *The Young Man's Best Companion*. He had acquired more sound information from these books by his close study than many men of opportunities do from a big library. His literary taste gives him a certain refinement and culture and raises him much above the various rustic characters in the story

His Funny Side

Gabriel's Oak is not without his funny side. Hardy's description of this man in the first chapter is, to a large extent, comic. We are told that he was a man of general good character on working days, that he went to church on Sundays not from any religious motives but merely as a formality, that during the sermons he often yawned. When his friends were pleased with him, they thought him a good man; when they were displeased with him, they thought him a bad man; when they were neither pleased nor displeased, they thought him partly good and partly bad. He carried a watch which was so big that it could be called a small clock. This instrument was several years older than Oak's grandfather. Being too old it had lost its value as a watch because either it went too fast or not at all. Then there is a comic reference to his bodily dimensions. His height and his breadth could have lent a certain dignity and importance to his body but he could not make a proper use of his dimensions. Gabriel's extreme simplicity and tactlessness which we have already noted above, are also a source of amusement to us. On one occasion, when he was handed a dirty cup, he remarked that he did not mind dirt as long as it was pure. We also feel amused when he makes up his mind never to play on his flute in the presence of Bathsheba because someone has told him that he looks ugly when playing upon the flute.

No Puritan

It may be pointed out, further, that Oak was no puritan. He liked a drink and a chat in the Malthouse, but he was not excessively addicted to drink as were the other workmen. He took his pleasures in moderation.

ne possesses an
d subsequently
dept in sheep-
urst into a field
n Weatherbury
them to let out
ng the ricks of
le possesses a
e sky, and can
ars or the sun.

espect even in
e for his frank
ely goes away.
ome unless he
a sends him a
e of lover who
stress.

ery sad at the
meets Fanny
ling on seeing
ime. Later, he
tment in love
in Bathsheba,
wn love under

ells, he walks
s earth. Even
oss over the
o we find him
His work and
is own worth.
a bailiff. This

literary taste.
nowledge as well
m's Progress.

A Character-Sketch of Sergeant Troy

An Exceptional Being

Sergeant Troy was no ordinary person. He was an exceptional being. His circumstances and his temperamental inclinations had combined to make him exceptional.

Lived in the Present

Sergeant Troy believed essentially in the present. He was neither interested in the past nor in the future. Memories of the past were a burden to him and expectations about the future were irrelevant. He felt and cared for what was before his eyes only. That being so, he could be regarded as one of the most fortunate persons in the world, because memories are really a disease while expectations generally bring about disappointment. What he never enjoyed he never missed; but he knew that he enjoyed what most people missed.

A Dissembler

He was moderately truthful towards men. But to women he told extravagant lies. This habit used to win him popularity at the very outset of his entrance in any form of society. He was a fairly well-educated man. He spoke fluently unceasingly. He had the knack of being one thing and seeming another. For instance, he would speak of love and think of dinner; he would call on the husband to look at the wife; he would seem eager to pay and really want somebody else to pay. Thus he was a dissembler.

His Vices

He had his vices, but his vices were not of the kind that quickly come to notice. For this reason, though his morals had never been praised, disapproval of his morals had frequently been softened with a smile. His vices were often the off-spring of impulse while his virtuous conduct was always the result of cool meditation. He gambled, he drank, and he sought the pleasures of love.

A Flatterer

Sergeant Troy had a wonderful power of flattering women. He would flatter a woman in the most extravagant terms in order to charm and win her. It was chiefly by his exaggerated compliments that he produced a favourable effect upon the mind of Bathsheba. On his very first, accidental meeting with her, he said that he was thankful to her for giving him an opportunity to see her beautiful face. Even when Bathsheba scolded him for speaking so

familiarly to her, he said that he was thankful for beauty even when it was thrown to him like a bone to a dog. He told her that he had never seen a woman as beautiful as she. On his next meeting with her, he paid more compliments to her and sought her permission to meet her off and on. He said that she was the type of woman with whom a hundred men would fall in love. But the climax to this flattery of Bathsheba was reached in his thrusting his gold watch upon her as a gift. He told her that her beauty had struck him instantaneously just as lightning strikes instantaneously. Indeed, he flattered her so much on this occasion, that she was filled with a perplexed excitement. In this respect, Troy was different from both Gabriel Oak and Boldwood. Neither Oak nor Boldwood had the art of flattering a woman. Troy believed that in dealing with women the only alternative to flattery was cursing and swearing. There was for him no third method. He believed that, if a man treated women fairly, he would be lost.

His Treatment of Fanny and of Bathsheba

We cannot forgive Sergeant Troy for his villainous conduct towards Fanny Robin. He seduced her after giving her assurances of marriage and then took her appeals for marriage lightly. It is true that he did make an appointment with her in order to marry her and that it was Fanny's own fault that she failed to keep that appointment. But Sergeant Troy felt more relief than regret at Fanny's failure to keep the appointment with her in order to marry her and that it was Fanny's own fault that she failed to keep that appointment. But Sergeant Troy felt more relief than regret at Fanny's failure to keep the appointment with him at the fixed hour. If he had been genuine or sincere, he could have made another appointment with Fanny. But it is quite clear that he had merely been flirting with Fanny for pleasure and not because he loved her truly. By failing to marry her, he was directly responsible for Fanny's most tragic and heart-rending end. Likewise, his love for Bathsheba was also a fleeting passion. As soon as he had tasted her beauty, he seemed to tire of her. His initial ardent manner as a lover soon changed into a matter-of-fact, routine attitude towards her. Therefore, after Fanny's death he left Bathsheba without much hesitation.

His Remorse

In assessing Sergeant Troy's moral character, we must take into account the remorse and repentance that he experienced when he saw the dead body of Fanny. He had made a sincere effort to contact Fanny and had taken some money with him also to help her in her distress. The sight of the dead Fanny aroused his conscience, and he felt that he could not forgive himself for his wickedness. He said that, in the eyes of Heaven, Fanny was his true wife and that Bathsheba was nothing to him. A ceremony before a priest, he said, could not make Bathsheba his wife. He erected a tombstone on the grave of Fanny and planted flowers there. His conscience rebuked him so severely for his faithlessness towards Fanny that he decided not to live any longer with Bathsheba. All this we have to admit. But these are poor amends for the

wrongs he had done to Fanny. He was guilty of an unpardonable crime against womankind. No matter how leniently we try to judge him, we cannot exonerate him of his guilt. His romantic and sentimental conduct after the death of Fanny has very little meaning and, as for his deciding not to live with Bathsheba any more, he would have left her in any case because he had begun to tire of Bathsheba.

A Selfish Man

In fact, he was not the sort of man who could stick to any woman. In his love of women, he was utterly selfish and was led merely by his passion and his lust, and not by any sincerity or loyalty. His desertion of Fanny is inexcusable. His subsequent treatment of Bathsheba is also reprehensible. Ultimately, the motives which prompted him to return to Bathsheba were mean and ignoble. He returned to Bathsheba not because of any love for her but because he had failed to earn a decent living. We feel that the end he meets is richly deserved by him. We feel not the least regret when Boldwood shoots him dead.

His Social Charm

We cannot deny that Sergeant Troy possessed a certain personal charm which women found irresistible. Apart from his skill in flattering women, he was a dashing young soldier. He was an accomplished swordsman. Indeed his sword-play had as much part in captivating the heart of Bathsheba as his flattery. His handsome appearance, his smartness, his dash, his art of conversation and of flattery combined to make him a lady-killer. But his faults were more numerous than his accomplishments. He was a liar; he was unscrupulous; he was callous; he was selfish; he was faithless, fickle and inconstant; he was a gambler and a drunkard. Indeed, we should have no hesitation in calling him the villain of the story.

A Character-Sketch of Farmer Boldwood

His Seriousness of Mind

Farmer Boldwood is depicted as an unusually serious, solemn, sober, sedate person. He led a life of philosophic aloofness. He presents a sharp contrast to Sergeant Troy's gay nature, optimism, and lively interest in the world. Boldwood was a gloomy person. He never enjoyed any of the pleasures of life. He never mixed with people; he had no social contacts; and he led a solitary life. He had been known for a long time as a confirmed bachelor. He had never shown any interest in women, though it was rumoured that his unusual seriousness and indifference to women were result of some early disappointment in love. Whatever be the reason of his indifference to women, he had been known to be averse to their company. Several girls tried to win his heart but he had remained unmoved. He did not even take any notice of Bathsheba when she made her first appearance in Casterbridge market among the farmers. In fact, his indifference wounded Bathsheba's vanity. Farming, buying and selling were Boldwood's only concerns. This abnormal nature of Boldwood was due to some touch of insanity that he had inherited from an ancestor. An uncle of his, we learn, had suffered from insanity.

His Passion for Bathsheba

The valentine, which Bathsheba sent to Boldwood unthinkingly, caused a great stir in the depths of Boldwood's heart. The words "Marry me" produced a strange effect upon him. He could not forget the letter or its contents. In fact, the valentine completely occupied his thoughts. After learning from Gabriel that the handwriting on the valentine was that of Bathsheba, his curiosity about the writer was further aroused. On the following market-day in Casterbridge, therefore, Boldwood looked at Bathsheba greedily. She was the disturber of his dreams. It was as if Adam had awakened from his deep sleep and suddenly seen Eve. He inspected Bathsheba closely and thought her beautiful. His eyes followed her wherever she went. He had conceived a passion for this woman. This passion soon developed into a mania. His mental equilibrium was disturbed. His nature was such that either he felt no emotion, or an emotion ruled him completely. He took the earliest opportunity to contact Bathsheba and to tell her of his passion for her. He pleaded his case with great emphasis and sincerity and proposed marriage to her, though in vain. But even her refusal did not diminish his passion. Nothing mattered to him now except Bathsheba. Once again he pressed her to agree to become his wife, but that also did not yield

any fruit. Subsequently she married Troy; and Boldwood lost all interest in life. He became indifferent to his farm and he felt gloomy all the time. His hope of marrying Bathsheba revived when Troy was reported to have been drowned. Now he was ready to wait for seven years in order to marry Bathsheba. But his passion was not to be fulfilled and he met a sad fate. Indeed, we are astonished at the volcanic passion that lay beneath the tranquil and calm exterior of Boldwood. When these volcanic fires were ignited, nothing could bring them under control. He paid a heavy price for being so abnormally passionate.

The Touch of Insanity

There is not much doubt of the streak of insanity in Boldwood's nature. The mercy petition addressed to the Home Secretary on Boldwood's behalf was based upon definite evidence of that touch of insanity. In a locked closet was found an extraordinary collection of articles. There were several sets of ladies' dresses, silks and satins, poplins and velvets; there was a case of jewellery, bracelets, and lockets and rings, all of fine quality and manufacture. These things Boldwood had been buying from time to time and keeping them in a closet in anticipation of his marriage with Bathsheba. All these articles were carefully packed in paper, and each package was labelled "Bathsheba Boldwood." This was definite evidence of a mind crazed with love. There is no doubt that his passion for Bathsheba was responsible for this mental derangement.

His Sympathetic Nature

Boldwood was essentially a kind-hearted man. He had acted as a guardian to Fanny Robin, and he had got her a job under Bathsheba's uncle. His concern at the disappearance of Fanny was great. Subsequently he felt very sad to learn of the tragic end of Fanny.

An Essentially Good Man

Leaving aside Boldwood's wild and uncontrollable passion for Bathsheba, we must admit that he was a thorough gentleman. He was fair in his dealings with everyone. He offered Gabriel a share in his farm. He also expressed his appreciation of Gabriel's conduct in keeping his love for Bathsheba under control and not entering into a rivalry with himself over Bathsheba. He was respected by all. There was nothing crooked or dishonest about him. Indeed, we feel sorry for him when he is sentenced to death and heave a sigh of relief when his sentence is commuted to imprisonment during Her Majesty's pleasure. The people in Weatherbury also felt much relief on learning that Boldwood was not to be hanged. Nor can we blame him much for his shooting of Troy. It was only when he found that Bathsheba was unwilling to go with Troy and that Troy was using force with her that he fired the gun. After shooting Troy, he wanted to shoot himself also, and failing to do that he went straight to the police station and surrendered himself. In the court he confessed his guilt and did not try to put up any defence or any excuses.