



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

“Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who Is the Fairest of Them All?”

**The Importance of Public Opinion in
Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd*.**

B.A. Essay

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SUMMARY

The importance of local public opinion is a driving force within Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*. The main characters Gabriel Oak, Bathsheba Everdene, Mr. Boldwood and Sergeant Troy are all influenced by the varied opinions of their rural society. Bathsheba is considered to be beautiful, and is therefore wanted as a wife by all three major male characters. Gabriel is constantly worried about Bathsheba's reputation. Troy loses the love of his life because he cannot swallow his pride when he is made to wait at the altar in a church, because the woman he was going to marry was delayed. Mr. Boldwood, preferred among the public as a superior suitor, is driven to action by Bathsheba's hoax valentine and the interest, which the rural community of Weatherbury has taken in her. Despite the pastoral charm of this novel, it has a certain realism; depicting the way that fickle nature plays an important role in the survival of the main characters. Another aspect of this realism illustrates the way that human pride and vanity can often be the downfall of an individual. The significance of Public opinion is also a part of this realism.

The Importance of Public Opinion in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

In Thomas Hardy's fourth novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*, public opinion is a major influencing factor when it comes down to the behavior and decision-making of the main characters. Although Hardy stressed the capriciousness of these opinions of a temperamental public on the very first page of the novel he uses it as a narrative device, giving the reader information on characters through the opinions of the members of local society. With this warning the reader needs to be careful not to take these views at face value, or at least to try and weigh up the situation in which these opinions are given. In doing so, they are often more revealing about the speaker's own character than the object of their evaluation. These public opinions in Hardy's novel are based on prevalent social etiquettes of the rural 19th century. In the novel the main characters are bound to the public's opinion of themselves. On a good day, Bathsheba is a kind, young, beautiful woman and even a good farmer, Gabriel Oak a friendly and diligent shepherd, Sergeant Frank Troy a dashing soldier and Mr. Boldwood a respectable gentleman and decent marriage material. On a bad day, Bathsheba is self-absorbed, proud and a bad farmer, Gabriel Oak is ugly, Sergeant Frank Troy a womanizer and Mr. Boldwood a madman. Of these three men, who are all in love with Bathsheba, though to different depths and degrees, Gabriel is the only one who did everything in his power to keep her on the good side of public opinion by defending her behavior and honor every time it is questioned. This leads to their eventual happy-ending marriage. Public opinion therefore plays an important part in the novel as a narrative device and a motivation for both displays of fickle and amiable sides of human interaction, which then shapes the reader's opinion of both the public and its victims and adds to the realism of the novel.

To make the phrase “public opinion” clear it is defined in the Oxford Dictionary of English (Kindle version) as: “views prevalent among the general public” and “opinion” as “a view or judgment formed about something, not necessarily based on fact or knowledge”.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* Hardy brilliantly brings together realism and the pastoral showing the reader both the majesty and ruthlessness of both nature and humans.

Yet the falsification and artificiality of traditional pastoral have been rigorously excluded from Hardy’s account. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) there is no perpetual summer, no frolicking sheep, no piping shepherds who live without care. Instead, there are many realistic details of actual rural life: sheep die, storms threaten, shepherds have misfortunes both “amorous and pastoral,” peasants work, and unhappiness and despair are spattered over the second half of the story. Before the novel’s essential realism, prettiness disappears. (Bloom, 40)

This is underlined by many of the novel’s characters having tragic endings, such as Fanny Robin, who dies after giving birth to Troy’s illegitimate child. She walks miles to get to Troy only to discover that her lover married another woman, Bathsheba. Troy was destroyed by the news of her and his son’s death, which led him to almost drown in the sea and then run away from Bathsheba, only to be killed by a deranged Mr. Boldwood when he found out that Troy was still alive after all. The heroine also suffers greatly when she marries the “wrong” man and then later gets bullied into promising herself to Mr. Boldwood; although she has a happy ending she suffered greatly for the most part of the novel. The piping shepherd Gabriel suffers from the beginning when his efforts to become an independent farmer are thwarted by a dog, which rounded up his pregnant ewes and chased them to their death, until he finally gets to marry Bathsheba at the very end. Instead of Gabriel playing his flute in a meadow full of sheep in a

pastoral way, he uses it to play for money in a market, when he has lost everything and has no other way of earning money. "He had sunk from his modest elevation as pastoral king into the very slime-pits of Siddim" (Hardy, 31). Gabriel also has a near death experience when he falls asleep in his hut. He is then rescued by Bathsheba, which steers his heart towards her. Although he does not highlight the cruel truth about some of the minor characters their problem surface occasionally. An example of this is Liddy. She envies Bathsheba's position to be able to turn down marriage proposals. "How sweet to be able to disdain, when most of us are glad to say, "Thank you!" I seem I hear it" (Hardy, 60). She is just a farm worker and might not ever get a chance to marry anyone. This is a good example of what Patricia Ingham writes about Hardy's social issues. Ingham maintains that Hardy does not work with social issues as Dickens does in the way of detailed generic narration or a chronicle of the working class. The novels do not happen at one certain time in history, either, but are vaguely placed sometime in the 19th century. The realism Hardy applies shows the effects that poverty has on the characters disposition and spirit along with their circumstances. Social issues of the rural working class surface naturally within Hardy's novels (107-108). Ingham also notes that Hardy's 'Wessex' is partly fictionalized and by setting the novels there he intended the novels to be a representation not a presentation of rural life (105). Another example of Hardy's realism within the novel is when we see Gabriel, in the beginning of the novel, at a crucial moment in his life when everything he has worked for the last ten years has failed. Hardy shows the reader the resilience of Gabriel when he recovers from the shock of losing all his ewes and livelihood when he pities his ewes and their unborn lambs and then thinks of Bathsheba and is grateful that he had not married her and make her destitute as well. By showing the reader that Gabriel thinks first of others before he starts feeling sorry for himself, much is learnt about his character. Hardy does not highlight how Gabriel toiled these ten years or how horrible his situation is but how he copes with his difficulties. Losing his ewes meant that he had to go back to working for

other farmers as a bailiff or a shepherd, putting him in the path of Bathsheba Everdene.

Hardy's social realism works in the way that dire circumstances do not only affect the body of the character but their mental health as well. Hardy realistically shows how much public opinion influences the decision making of the characters. "Hardy employs many points of view instead of one-almost all his important actions are carefully framed by observers" (Bloom 64). These opinions shape the outline of the novel and manipulate the life decisions of the main characters of the novel.

Hardy's preoccupation is with the damaging effect of social inequality, exploitation, and the imposition of rigidly authoritarian moral views upon individuals. ... His only generic treatment of them is to be found in the highly stylized groups of rustics commenting chorus-like on the events which befall central characters. (Ingham, 107)

Far from the Madding Crowd is a story of a young woman on her quest to find a suitable husband while taking a social leap from being a farm girl to becoming a farmer. All the while trying to do so respectably as a young woman without guidance from an older relation or a friend of her status. Lack of guidance and Bathsheba's young enthusiasm makes it demanding for her to take the "right" choices. While enjoying the freedom it brings her to be unmarried she knows that eventually she has to marry. Realizing what kind of a husband she both wants and needs takes considerable time and effort.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdene over time accepts all three suitors – the penurious half-aristocratic Troy, the wealthy landowner Boldwood, and the (variously) farmer, shepherd and bailiff Gabriel Oak; the "right" choice can only be confirmed by the melodramatic elimination of the rivals." (Boumelha, 130)

In the second paragraph on the first page of the novel, Hardy touches on

the subject of public opinion and satirizes it by describing the way the general public sees Farmer Oak, showing how in fact these opinions have a lot to do with whether they were having a good day or not:

Or, to state his character as it stood in the scale of public Opinion, when his friends and critics were in tantrums, he was considered a rather 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. (Hardy, 3)

This also shows us how Hardy manipulates readers by beginning the text by describing to us the delightful smile of Farmer Oak, comparing it to “the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun” (Hardy, 3). In this way he ensures that the readers initial thoughts on him are good, for the sun and smiles are usually a good thing and the reader is immediately sympathetic towards Gabriel Oak and by presenting images of him throughout the novel in a nostalgic and pastoral way, despite his often cruel fate, the author ensures the readers’ good will towards him for the rest of the novel. Hardy also stresses his average appearance and behavior in many ways, as for example when he describes how he went to church every Sunday, which was important in 19th century rural society, proving he is a kind-hearted man, although Hardy mentions that during the sermon his mind would wonder, which might make him even more agreeable, especially to the modern-day reader.

Hardy continues his middle-of-the-road description with more than just Gabriel’s social ethics. Gabriel is not a young man, nor is he an old one:

He had just reached the time of life at which “young” is ceasing to be the prefix of “man” in speaking of one. He was at the brightest period of masculine growth, for his intellect and his emotions were clearly separated... In short, he was twenty-eight and a bachelor. (Hardy, 4)

He is neither unattractive nor handsome, which Hardy describes by comparing him to the statues of two of Jesus' Apostles: St. John and the traitor Judas Iscariot. St. John being the beautiful one and Judas, the traitor, the ugly one, which once again shows us how public opinion decides that Judas must have been as ugly as he was bad. This underlines the gray color of Gabriel's moral values:

Gabriel's features adhered throughout their form so exactly to the middle line between the beauty of St. John and the ugliness of Judas Iscariot, as represented in a window of the church he attended, that not a single lineament could be selected and called worthy either of distinction or notoriety. (Hardy, 7)

The men in the malt house describe him as both ugly and beautiful. When Gabriel plays the flute for them he is told that he looks like a strangled man or a scarecrow. However when he had stopped playing, the same men seemed to think him quite handsome (Hardy, 53).

A good word from the Malter gets him on the right side of the public because he knew his grandfather and father who apparently are in favor with the general public. Gabriel also makes a good impression for himself in front of the farm workers when he appears in their hour of need and helps extinguish the fire that threatened to ruin Bathsheba's crop. He also shows them that he is a polite man by not making a fuss over the dirty mug and God-forgive-me and gritty bacon that had accidentally been dropped outside before being served. This seemed to be enough to prove Gabriel's general pleasantness. "Ah, he's his grandfer's own grandson! – his grandfer were just such a nice unparticular man!" said the maltster" (Hardy, 45).

Hardy has been criticized for his fascination with the mediocre in the way that almost all his sympathetic characters seem to be extremely average and middle class. Lawrence wrote about how it seemed he killed off or made the characters of more noble birth worse off than in the beginning (Lawrence, 46-51).

This can easily refer to the characters in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, especially Gabriel Oak, who is the very manifestation of the average and is by far the most sympathetic character of the novel and always seems to do the right thing in all circumstances.

When the reader first encounters Mr. Boldwood, Liddy describes him as “Forty, I should say – very handsome – rather stern-looking – and rich” (Hardy, 59). This is just after she has complained about his impertinence at riding up the footpath, right up to Bathsheba’s door. Mr. Boldwood’s reputation goes downhill from there on. Bathsheba is then told about the countless women who have tried and failed to marry him and how he is not even vaguely interested in them. He had been written off by his society as a “hopeless man for a woman” (Hardy, 59). This, of course, interests Bathsheba and her vanity ensures that she would observe whether Mr. Boldwood takes her beauty in as she is so used to everyone else doing so. During church Liddy thinks it interesting to notice that everyone in church notices Bathsheba and gives her admiring looks, except for Mr. Boldwood who is indifferent towards her as he has been with all the other ladies. Mr. Boldwood does not properly notice Bathsheba, until he receives the valentine from her with the words: “Marry me” on the seal. When he finally looks at her he thinks she is good-looking but does not really believe his own opinion, not until he gets confirmation from the public does he really believe she is actually striking in appearance. She could not be beautiful to him unless she is beautiful to everyone else in the parish. Only when he realizes that she has been causing a stir among the men in their society does he start thinking about her as a possible wife. From that day onwards his strange obsession for her begins, without so much as having talked to her or gathering information on anything else concerning her personal traits other than that her looks are appealing. Property and attractiveness are more than enough to convince him of her worth instead of getting to know her a little better.

Was she really beautiful? He could not assure himself that his opinion was true even now. He furtively said to a neighbour, “Is Miss Everdene

considered handsome?”

“O yes; she was a good deal noticed the first time she came, if you remember. A very handsome girl indeed.” (Hardy, 92)

Following that sanction of public opinion, Mr. Boldwood pursues Bathsheba until the day he dies. He does not even give in when Bathsheba refuses him, nor when she has supposedly been widowed after Troy's disappearance.

He saw no absurd side to the follies of life and thus, though not quite companionable in the eyes of merry men and scoffers, and those to whom all things show life as a jest, he was not intolerable to the earnest and those acquainted with grief. Being a man who read all the dramas of life seriously, if he failed to please when they were comedies, there was no frivolous treatment to reproach him for when the chanced to end tragically. (Hardy, 94)

There are some people in the parish of the opinion that he had been scorned by a lover when young and he is not liked by the more sociable and light-hearted people of the parish. Nevertheless he is always good towards Gabriel even though he notices that Gabriel has affections for Bathsheba and they generally got on well together, Gabriel being a down-to-earth man. Their common interest in and goodwill towards Bathsheba guarantees their generally decent companionship. Hardy never reveals what actually had wounded Mr. Boldwood and made him the way he is in the way of reserve towards women but he hints that he was a scorned lover.

Nobody knew entirely; for though it was possible to form guesses concerning his wild capabilities from old floodmarks faintly visible, he had never been seen at the high tides which caused them. (Hardy, 95)

This gives the reader a hint of what to expect from Mr. Boldwood and that Bathsheba is out of her depth in her dealings with him. This again concurs with Lawrence's theory about Hardy's idealization of the middle class. Mr. Boldwood being a rich landowner and used to getting what he wants goes overboard when it comes to getting Bathsheba's hand in marriage. Buying gifts for her and then storing them in a cupboard labeling them to Bathsheba Boldwood. By the end of the novel he has become deranged and kills Sergeant Troy in a fit of passion before giving himself up to the authorities. Another bad end to a rich character. When the reader becomes acquainted with Sergeant Frank Troy for the first time he treats Fanny Robin, the girl he supposedly loves, poorly because he does not want to come across as weak in front of his fellow soldiers. The reader then knows that Troy is without a doubt the man that Gabriel and Mr. Boldwood talked about when the former got the letter from Fanny explaining about their strange meeting in the dark and that she planned to get married to Troy.

The high wall being that of a barrack, and marriage being looked upon with disfavor in the army, assignments and communications had probably been made across the river before that night. (Hardy, 68)

The public opinion of soldiers was generally not a good one and the reputation that Troy had made for himself led Mr. Boldwood to believe that Fanny would most likely not be arriving married to Weatherbury as she planned and that she was in a bad situation. Nevertheless Troy planned to marry her and would have done so, if it had not been for his embarrassment of appearing to have been betrayed by his lover. When walking into the church, where he intended to marry Fanny, he was embarrassed because there were a few people watching him including a group of young girls. At first he made it look as if he did not care, but then when he had waited there for half an hour, while the girls were tittering, whispering and giggling, he was humiliated enough. Even though he knew later on that Fanny had gone to the wrong church by accident, his ego and pride had been bruised: "Tomorrow!" and he gave vent to a hoarse laugh. 'I don't go

through that experience again for some time, I warrant you!” (Hardy, 91). He leaves Fanny at the church and never sees her alive again, instead of swallowing his pride and coming back the next day, not knowing that he was leaving his unborn son as well as his lover behind to die.

When Troy meets Bathsheba for the second time, then knowing who she really is, he keeps on flattering her and justifying it by saying that he is only telling her what everyone was thinking and saying about her behind her back. It was the general public opinion that she was beautiful and he should not be scolded for telling her so. By doing so he flatters Bathsheba’s vanity so that she starts to enjoy his ingratiating forwardness. He gets her to admit that she knows that she is considered beautiful. ““But you know they think so’? ‘No - that is – I certainly have heard Liddy say they do, but...’ She paused” (Hardy, 135).

After Troy is lost at sea he comes back to England, traveling with a fair act, playing Turpin in the play “The Royal Hippodrome Performance of Turpin’s Ride to York and the Death of Black Bess.” Troy does not immediately come forward as himself after seeing Bathsheba at the play. He is scared of being thought of as cruel if he just appears out of the blue without letters or warnings, having pranced about England as a part of a show, when Bathsheba was mourning her supposedly dead husband. If he had, then Boldwood might not have shot him because Bathsheba had not promised him anything yet. This shows the reader how self-absorbed Troy really is. He knows he is putting Bathsheba through a horrible ordeal, but does not make this the reason why he does not want to be recognized, which would have, maybe not redeemed him, but at least softened the perception that the reader has of him. The reader then learns that the reason he does not reveal himself to his wife is because he needs to have the amity of the people in the parish in order to live there again and they might have found it hard to be fond of him if they found out the truth about his whereabouts.

Were he to make himself known, that chapter of his life must at all risks be kept for ever from her and from the Weatherbury people, or his name would be a byword throughout the parish. He would be

nicknamed “Turpin” as long as he lived. Assuredly before he could claim her these few past months of his existence must be entirely blotted out. (Hardy, 273-74)

Troy cares so little for Bathsheba that he is even more worried that he would be assigned an annoying nickname than her believing he was dead. Owing to the fact that Troy is the illegitimate son of a nobleman, he was sent to school and had a posh upbringing, and this, according to Lawrence, makes him destined to be an antagonist in the novel because he is neither middle class nor average.

Even though it has been written that Hardy’s attitude was often “bitter towards women” (Eugene, 47), depicting them as vain, fervent, lacking self-discipline and sometimes even capricious, it cannot be denied that he had an uncanny insight into both women’s vices and merits. The first time both Gabriel and the reader encounter Bathsheba, she is examining herself in a mirror for no apparent reason than looking at her own complexion. It is an important scene within the novel where she smiles at her own beauty and then blushes with vernal charm. This incident illustrates to the reader that Bathsheba is both exceptionally beautiful but highly vain. The reader is made aware of her vanity again when Gabriel overhears a conversation between Master Poorglass and Billy Smallbury about their new mistress Bathsheba: “‘Yes – she’s very vain. ‘Tis said that every night at going to bed she looks in the glass to put on her nightcap properly.’ ‘And not a married woman. Oh, the world!’ “ (Hardy, 35). Her vanity has thus been noticed and remarked upon by Gabriel, the gatekeeper, and her workers at her new farm. Her beauty is always remarked upon as well.

There was a bright air and manner about her now, by which she seemed to imply that the desirability of her existence could not be questioned; and this rather saucy assumption failed in being offensive, because a beholder felt it to be, upon the whole, true. (Hardy, 15)

This is what Gabriel was thinking one of the many times the reader witnesses his

thoughts on Bathsheba while he watches her without her knowing about it. Later in the novel Bathsheba is called the “Queen of the Corn-market” in Casterbridge (Hardy, 135). She is so used to being noticed and watched that she finds it peculiar if she is not gawped at by someone.

...she could have been not above the height to be chosen by women as best. All features of consequence were severe and regular. It may have been observed by persons who go about the shires with eyes for beauty, that in Englishwomen a classically-formed face is seldom found to be united with a figure of the same pattern, the highly-finished features being generally too large for the remainder of the usual frame; that graceful and proportionate figure of eight heads usually goes off into random facial curves. Without throwing a Nymphaean tissue over a milkmaid, let it be said that here criticism checked itself as out of place, and looked at her proportions with a long consciousness of pleasure. From the contours of her figure in its upper part, she must have had a beautiful neck and shoulder; but since her infancy nobody had ever seen them. ...Had she been put into a low dress she would have run and thrust her head into a bush Yet she was not a shy girl by any means; it was merely her instinct to draw the line dividing the seen from the unseen higher than they do it in towns. ... Rays of male vision seem to have a tickling effect upon virgin faces in rural districts; she brushed her with her hands, as if Gabriel had been irritating its pink surface by actual touch, and the free air of her previous movements was reduced at the same time to a chastened phase of itself. Yet it was the man who blushed, the maid not at all. (Hardy, 15)

After seeing Bathsheba's unladylike behavior on the horse on her way to Tewnell Mill, and without thinking tells her about it, she bolts before he could fully comprehend his mistake in telling her. She was a woman and was not supposed to be playing around on a horse let alone riding it like a man. Thinking she was alone she felt she could treat herself to some fun but little did she know about

Gabriel hiding in the bushes.

His want of tact had deeply offended her – not by seeing what he could not hope, but by letting her know that he had seen it. For, as without law there is no sin, without eyes there is no indecorum; and she appeared to feel that Gabriel's espial had made her an indecorous woman without her own connivance. It was food for great regret with him: it was also a contretemps which touched into life a latent heat he had experienced in that direction. (Hardy, 17)

Shortly after Bathsheba has taken her place as the farmer she fires the bailiff, Pennyways, for stealing grain and to shock her farm workers even more she decides to be her own bailiff. At the malt house, few of her laborers have their say about Bathsheba's doings so far and talk about her as being too proud to take on a new bailiff. Fueled by the angry Henery who is after the job of bailiff for himself. They also criticize her for buying new things for herself, things that she does not really need, like a new piano, mirrors and clocks. "Seems her old uncle's things were not good enough for her. She've bought all but everything new" (Hardy, 83). They have negative opinions about Bathsheba and when Gabriel hears them talk about her in this manner he scolds them and even threatens them. They try to make him feel the same way by pointing out Gabriel should have been made a bailiff and how she does not allow him to use the dead lambskins for his work. But Gabriel, being in love with Bathsheba supports her and scolds them for talking badly about their mistress (Hardy, 84).

Bathsheba is afraid of what her workforce think of her and her male companions. When Troy tries to give her his watch, as a joke to begin with, an extremely valuable family heirloom, she has to chase him around the field to make him take it back while feverishly hot and bothered. Running around a young sergeant would not look good to her workers. She does not think about what would be said if they noticed that she was about to sneak out to see Troy do his sword-exercise, however because then she was

actually falling for him.

In the beginning of the novel Bathsheba runs after Gabriel, to correct a fib that her aunt had just told him about the number of suitors supposedly wooing her. She does not want people to think she has many suitors.

“It was quite a mistake – aunt’s telling you I had a young man already,” Bathsheba went on. “I haven’t a sweetheart at all – and I never had one, and I thought that, as times go with women it was *such* a pity to send you away thinking that I had several.” (Hardy, 23)

Here the readers first come across her rash behavior as she rushes after Gabriel moments after he asks her aunt for her hand in marriage, without realizing the potential misunderstanding it could bring about. Gabriel sees her running after him and believes that she is so excited by the proposal that she wants him to know straightaway that she accepted. Poor Gabriel is not to be the last man to suffer because of her rash decision-making.

“What I meant to tell you was only this,” she said eagerly, and yet half conscious of the absurdity of the position she had made for herself – “that nobody has got me yet as a sweetheart, instead of my having a dozen, as my aunt said; I *hate* to be thought men’s property in that way, though possibly I shall be had some day. Why, if I’d wanted you I shouldn’t have run after you like this; ‘twould have been the *forwardest* thing! But there was no harm in hurrying to correct a piece of false news that had been told you.” (Hardy, 24)

This was nonetheless a cruel thing to do, giving Gabriel hope again just after being denied by Bathsheba’s aunt, as we read about Gabriel buoyancy when he thinks he is going to marry her after all.

When Mr. Boldwood first came to Bathsheba’s house he did not meet her, but instead asked the boy Teddy Coggan about her appearance. Being offered

money from Boldwood he happily agrees with whatever he said, therefore agreeing that Bathsheba was a respectable old lady.

“She is a staid woman, isn’t she, my little man?” and I said, “Yes.”

“You naughty child! What did you say that for?”

“’Cause he gave me the penny!”

“What a pucker everything is in!” said Bathsheba, discontentedly when the child had gone. (Hardy, 60)

This annoys Bathsheba; no young woman likes to be referred to as old, especially by the supposedly most prominent bachelor in the parish. Bathsheba being young and vain is gravely insulted by this remark and it sparks the longing for his attention in Bathsheba. The fact that Liddy notices that Boldwood is the only man in the parish who does not stupidly gawp at her also plays a crucial part in Bathsheba’s vanity driving her to send him a valentine, but those two together were too much for her. Her maids inform Bathsheba that many girls had tried and failed to capture Boldwood. The general view that Boldwood is hopeless and does not notice women in general also sparks a competitive, naïve and vain nature in Bathsheba, which leads to her to send her the valentine to Boldwood. To her it is all thought of as fun and games because she is used to getting people’s attention and her workers thought that they would be a good match. The fact that Liddy notices that Boldwood is not interested in her only makes her even more vexed. “Still, it was faintly depressing that the most dignified and valuable man in the parish should withhold his eyes, and that a girl like Liddy should talk about it” (Hardy, 76).

Bathsheba, realizing that that Mr. Boldwood’s proposal had not escaped her farm workers’ notice, asks Gabriel to tell her how they had reacted to it. Gabriel tells her that they were sure that Mr. Boldwood and herself would be getting married before long and that it was a good thing as Mr. Boldwood was a respectable man of means. This annoys Bathsheba and she asks Gabriel to make sure her workers know she is not going to marry him. Gabriel gives his own

opinion on the matter, which does not go down well with Bathsheba, and she fires him on the spot.

My opinion is (since you ask it) that you are greatly to blame for playing pranks upon a man like Mr Boldwood, merely as a pastime. Leading on a man you don't care for is not a praiseworthy action. And even, Miss Everdene, if you were seriously inclined towards him, you might have him find it out in some way of true loving-kindness, and not by sending him a valentine's letter. (Hardy, 105)

This opinion gets him fired, that is, until she needs him again. She could not handle the truth about herself. Her anger towards Gabriel is also partly due to the fact that Gabriel's actions lead her to believe that he is finally content with the idea that she would never marry him. Her vane mind dislikes the idea that a man could get over her although she is not right in interpreting Gabriel's feelings; it is almost as if she wants him to suffer for not being her sweetheart.

The public opinion on Bathsheba's marriage prospects is based on Boldwood and her social status being the same and that they would both profit by their marriage.

In every point of view, ranging from politic to passionate, it was desirable that she a lonely girl, should marry, and marry this earnest, well-to-do, and respected man (Hardy, 101).

Bathsheba's valentine also affects her conscience, for she knew she had brought about Mr. Boldwood's attention. His persistent manner convinces Bathsheba that she had no other choice than to marry him. If it had not been for Troy's timely arrival, she would have.

The reason why Bathsheba and Gabriel marry in the end is because Gabriel has decided to leave her farm in order to squash the rumors that he is there, waiting slyly to inherit Boldwood's farm and then marry Bathsheba. When

Bathsheba realizes that he is going to move away she reaches out to him and they agree to marry each other.

“The top and tail o’t is this – that I am sniffing about here, and waiting for poor Boldwood’s farm, with a thought of getting you some day.”

“Getting me! What does that mean?”

“Marrying o’ ‘ee, in plain British. You asked me to tell, so you mustn’t blame me.” (Hardy, 312)

Gabriel decides to move away because he thinks the rumors might harm Bathsheba’s reputation. Having been there for her for such a long time, all the while suffering because he loves her, he does not leave for himself, not until he is scared of harming Bathsheba’s reputation does he remove himself from her side.

The local public’s opinion in this novel is thus the reason behind important actions that are taken by the characters within the novel; most important are Troy’s refusal to marry Fanny because of his wounded pride, Mr. Boldwood’s decision to ask for the opinion on Bathsheba’s appearance, and Gabriel’s decision to quit his job as a bailiff and move away from Bathsheba. The farm workers’ opinions on other characters in the novel steer the reader’s opinion of characters in certain directions like Bathsheba’s vanity and self-absorption. It depicts three suitors competing for Bathsheba’s hand and gives a realistic picture of love, reciprocated or not and lovers bonding over common interests and ideas. Despite the idealizations of middle class norms, reality consists of both human strength and weakness of mind. The importance of being accepted and being part of society directs people onto paths they might not otherwise have taken.

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