



Project  
**MUSE**<sup>®</sup>

*Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.*

---

## **Psychoanalysis and Romantic Idealization: The Dialectics of Love in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd***

Barbara A. Schapiro

American Imago, Volume 59, Number 1, Spring 2002, pp. 3-26 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: [10.1353/aim.2002.0007](https://doi.org/10.1353/aim.2002.0007)

AMERICAN  
**IMAGO**

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND  
THE HUMAN SCIENCES  
VOLUME 59 • NUMBER 1 • Spring 2002

 For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/aim/summary/v059/59.1schapiro.html>

BARBARA A. SCHAPIRO

**Psychoanalysis and Romantic Idealization:  
The Dialectics of Love in Hardy's *Far from the  
Madding Crowd***

*In Memory of Stephen A. Mitchell*

Perhaps the single most pervasive theme of Thomas Hardy's fiction, as J. Hillis Miller (1970) has pointed out, is that of "fascination—the love of a human being who radiates a divine aura" (114). In many of the novels, characters are driven by a romantic infatuation with an idealized other. Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native* (1878), for instance, is described as "idealizing Wildeve for want of a better object" (98), then replacing him with Clym Yeobright because of "the fascination which must attend a man come direct from Paris" (141). Angel Clare initially regards Tess as an immaculate "visionary essence of woman" (Hardy 1891, 103), while Tess loves him so passionately, he was "godlike in her eyes" (142); and Jude never loses his sense of Sue as an "ideality," indeed as "almost a divinity" (Hardy 1895, 164). Hardy's last published novel, *The Well-Beloved* (1897), presents the most focused elaboration of this theme as it follows Jocelyn Pierston's pursuit of an elusive idealization, the "Beloved," as it is incarnated in three generations of women in a single family.

From a Freudian or traditional psychoanalytic perspective, such romantic idealization is generally regarded as rooted in primary narcissism, in the infant's original experience of omnipotence and blissful merged union with the mother. The idealized other is considered to be a projection of the ego ideal, a substitute for the once primary and now lost narcissistic perfection.<sup>1</sup> Freud saw romantic love, like religion, as an illusion, and he believed the idealization that fuels romantic passion to be immature and dangerous. More recently, how-

ever, theorists from the relational school of psychoanalysis have suggested that idealization and narcissistic fantasy may in fact be necessary, healthy components of mature adult life. This revisionary psychoanalytic perspective allows for a less pathological or bleak view of romantic love, and it offers a useful lens through which to view the powerful theme of romantic idealization in Hardy's fiction.

As I have argued elsewhere (1986), the origins of Hardy's fascination with an idealized, erotic other can indeed be found in the dynamics of infantile narcissism and in the author's highly dependent and enmeshed relationship with his mother. While the focus of this paper is on the psychodynamics of Hardy's texts, not on his life, a brief look at his early personal history offers a context for examining the issues of idealization in the fiction. Hardy was the first of four children born to Jemima and Thomas Hardy. His conception was a premarital accident that led to a marriage that neither party reportedly wanted. Jemima suffered a difficult delivery, and one account tells of her casting the baby aside as dead before the midwife discovered that the child was in fact breathing. Biographer Michael Millgate (1982) suggests that that story may be apocryphal, but he describes how "Hardy was for some time after his birth no better than a 'vegetable,' so lacking in motion or discernible intelligence as to convince Jemima that she had borne an idiot" (16). Millgate speculates further that "Thomas and Jemima perhaps took little interest in, or feared to make any great emotional commitment to, a weakly child whom they had not wanted and who was unlikely to live" (16).

Such presumed neglect of the child's early emotional and narcissistic needs, particularly of the sort of mirroring and idealizing demands described by Heinz Kohut (1971), may have contributed to what Millgate calls Hardy's "prolonged immaturity" and to his "extreme emotional dependence upon his mother" that lasted well into his adulthood (1982, 22–23). In addition, Jemima was a moody, controlling, and strong-willed woman who dominated the household. Hardy's intensely ambivalent maternal attachment lay behind his unhappy, problem-plagued marriage with his first wife. Throughout his life, moreover, Hardy was subject to infatuations with idealized, inaccessible women. At the age of eight he

developed a crush on an obvious idealized mother-figure, a Mrs. Martin, who, according to Millgate, “overwhelmed the child with her cultivation, elegance, and voluptuousness” (1982, 47). Millgate notes that Hardy himself described his feeling towards her as “almost that of a lover” (1982, 47), but that, as with so many of Hardy’s attachments, “the relationship loomed larger in his imagination than elsewhere” (1982, 48).

Narcissistic conflicts and idealizations may have hampered Hardy’s actual relationships with women in his life, but they inspired his creative imagination and are worked out in complex and instructive ways in his art. Much contemporary psychoanalytic theory indeed suggests that the ideals, fantasies, and illusions of early narcissism are at the very core of the self and its capacity for emotional depth and creativity throughout the lifespan. Kohut (1971), for instance, has theorized that identification with an idealized parental imago is crucial to building a stable self-structure, and he contends that we never outgrow a healthy need to identify with ideals. As Stephen Mitchell (1997) explains, Kohut “regarded the capacity to sustain and actualize ideals to be a central component of mental health” (29). According to Winnicott (1971), human creativity always depends on the ability to sustain contact with the fluid boundaries and the subjective omnipotence and idealizations of early narcissism. Mitchell concludes that “all varieties of narcissistic illusions are generated throughout the life cycle: grand estimations of one’s own capacities and perfection, an infatuation with the larger-than-life qualities of others whom one loves and/or envies, and fusion fantasies of an exquisite merger with desirable or dreaded others” (1986, 165). For Mitchell, health lies in “the subtle dialectical balance between illusion and reality” (1986, 166). Narcissistic illusions are not in themselves pathological, he maintains, but may become so if the dialectical balance breaks down and “reality is sacrificed in order to perpetuate an addictive devotion to self-ennobling, idealizing, or symbiotic fictions” (1986, 167).

Mitchell was much influenced by the writings of Hans Loewald (1980), who likewise discussed the importance of maintaining “links” and open channels with developmentally earlier psychic states and processes. For Loewald, Mitchell explains,

an adult reality that has been separated from infantile fantasy is a dessicated, meaningless, passionless world. . . . For life to be meaningful, vital, and robust, fantasy and reality cannot be too divorced from each other. Fantasy, cut adrift from reality, becomes irrelevant and threatening. Reality, cut adrift from fantasy, becomes vapid and empty. Meaning in human experience is generated in the mutual, dialectically enriching tension between fantasy and reality; each requires the other to come alive. (1998, 849, 854)

Narcissistic idealizations and fantasies, in other words, are necessary to the experience of passion and to the ability to live an emotionally rich, creative life. What we need is not to renounce illusion or fantasy in favor of reality, as Freud would have it, but rather to hold both in a delicate, taut balance—a dialectical tension.

Hardy's finest novels, I suggest, demonstrate precisely that tension. The dialectic is apparent not only in the characterizations, but often in Hardy's imagery and narrative perspective as well. His passionate idealists are constantly knocking up against hard reality, and even if we see their romantic devotion as foolish or illusory—Jude's love for the fickle Sue, or Tess's for the hypocritical Angel, for instance—these characters' ability to hold on to their passion ultimately seems ennobling. As the narrator says of Eustacia, "The fantastic nature of her passion, which lowered her as an intellect, raised her as a soul" (Hardy 1878, 94). Passion relies on idealization and illusion, and Hardy's strongest characters are able to sustain their passionate ideals and illusions while *fully recognizing* and confronting opposing harsh realities. Dialectical tension between narcissistic illusion and awareness of external limits and reality also informs Hardy's descriptions and imagery of nature. At times the landscape is presented as fused or merged with the characters, or in the tradition of what has been called the pathetic fallacy, as a projection or external reflection of the characters' inner states. That representation is contrasted, however, with depictions of nature as wholly other, indifferent, and alien to human concerns, and with landscapes that emphasize boundaries and difference. The narrative perspective

too vacillates between omniscience and a pronounced recognition of the limits of the narrator's point of view. Hillis Miller calls Hardy's narrative style "subjective realism," a form of realism that "combines subjectivity and objectivity in a contradictory balance" (1970, 262). Such "subjective realism" can be understood as a product of the psychological dialectic that Mitchell and Loewald describe.

An intriguing scene from *The Woodlanders* (1887) plays precisely with this psychological tension that is so bound up with love in Hardy's world. The scene involves two characters, Grace Melbury and the young Dr. Fitzpiers, who have each, in typical Hardy fashion, been developing a romantic infatuation with the other from afar. Grace finds herself on a particular errand that forces her to call on Fitzpiers personally. The housekeeper shows Grace into the doctor's room, which she mistakenly believes is empty, and tells Grace to wait. Fitzpiers, however, is in the room, ensconced on the couch, asleep. Grace gazes nervously for a while at this reclining figure who has been so much at the center of her thoughts and dreams, then she turns to ring the bell for the housekeeper. With her back now turned to Fitzpiers, she suddenly sees him reflected in the mirror on the opposite wall: "An indescribable thrill passed through her as she perceived that the eyes of the reflected image were open, gazing wonderingly at her. Under the curious unexpectedness of the sight she became as if spell-bound, almost powerless to turn her head and regard the original. However, by an effort she did turn, when there he lay asleep the same as before" (128). Startled and perplexed, she runs out of the house.

In the meantime, Fitzpiers, we are told, "had opened his eyes for a few moments, but had immediately relapsed into unconsciousness, if indeed he had ever been positively awake. That somebody had just left the room he was certain, and that the lovely form which seemed to have visited him in a dream was no less than the real presentation of the person departed he could hardly doubt" (129). Yet as he glances out the window, he sees Grace, who has mustered up enough courage to return, "coming instead of going [which] made him ask himself if his first impression of her were not a dream indeed" (129).

Hardy is here playing with the intersection of dream and reality, of projection and perception, that is often involved with romantic desire. What if we could make our dreams materialize? If we could make the world over according to our desire? Grace has been fantasizing about Fitzpiers. That she sees him gazing at her only in the mirror suggests that what she is seeing is a reflection of her own desire or inner fantasy. Has inner desire magically transformed reality? The possibility is thrilling but also paralyzing and anxiety-producing. Subjective omnipotence can be terrifying in the loss of boundaries and confusion it implies. When Grace turns to look at the real man, however, his eyes are closed. Similarly, Fitzpiers later tells Grace, “I did not see you directly, but reflected in the glass. I thought, what a lovely creature! The design is for once carried out. Nature has at last recovered her lost union with the Idea!” (132).

In the novel, Fitzpiers is characterized explicitly as an idealist, a student of transcendental philosophy as well as a doctor. He tells Grace that he is studying “the material world and the ideal, so as to discover if possible a point of contact between them” (133). Hardy too is continually exploring this territory, looking for points of contact between our inner ideals, fantasies, and desires and the hard reality of the external world. His tragic characters are often idealists who get lost in the pursuit of their idealized projections. Hardy is well aware of the dangers of narcissistic solipsism; nevertheless, he is equally aware that idealized fantasies are intrinsic to romantic passion, and passion in Hardy’s universe is ultimately what gives meaning to life. In the novels, as in the above scene from *The Woodlanders*, the dialectical tension between the ideal and the real is not resolved but simply dramatized. In his richest, most complex work, neither side of the dialectic is devalued in favor of the other.

*Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), which many critics consider to be Hardy’s first fully realized and successful novel, centers on the theme of romantic love, and it plays with this same tension. The novel presents in the character of William Boldwood one of Hardy’s most extreme portraits of idealized romantic obsession. Boldwood’s passion for Bathsheba

Everdene, however, is only a more exaggerated, unbalanced version of the other characters' passions—of Bathsheba's for Frank Troy, of Troy's for the dead Fanny Robin, and of Gabriel Oak's for Bathsheba. Boldwood is initially presented as a dignified, severely restrained, and emotionally wounded man; we are told of a past rejection in love when he was a young man. Grief and rage underlie Boldwood's rigid self-control, and these feelings eventually explode to the surface. Boldwood's passionate idealization of Bathsheba is fueled by narcissistic loss, and by the needs and fantasies such loss generates.

Boldwood's passion is set in motion by a valentine that Bathsheba "so very idly and unreflectingly" sends to him (79). Several critics have noted the fact that at one point Boldwood places the valentine in the frame of his looking-glass. Linda Shires (1991), for instance, claims that "it is not an accident that Boldwood places the Valentine from Bathsheba in the corner of his looking glass, and then a day later jumps out of bed and catches sight of himself there, 'insubstantial in form' during a fit of 'nervous excitability.' Only being seen by Bathsheba will restore his form" (168). The mirror imagery here, as in the scene from *The Woodlanders*, associates the desired, idealized other with one's own self-reflection.<sup>2</sup> Boldwood, it seems, needs to feel reflected in or by an ideal other in order to feel real at all. His new-found passion for Bathsheba in fact becomes a vitalizing, self-transfiguring experience: "When Bathsheba's figure shone upon the farmer's eyes it lighted him up as the moon lights up a great tower. . . . There was a change in Boldwood's exterior from its former impassibleness; and his face showed that he was now living outside his defences for the first time, and with a fearful sense of exposure" (96–97). Boldwood's passion for Bathsheba enables him to realize himself emotionally and sexually (as suggested by the phallic tower) for the first time. Even in his misery over her rejection of him, he recognizes the value of the transformation his feelings for her have triggered. He tells her, "I don't reproach you, for even now I feel that the ignorant and cold darkness that I should have lived in if you had not attracted me by that letter—valentine you call it—would have been worse than my knowledge of you, though it has brought



this misery'” (157). Boldwood’s passion for Bathsheba is real; nevertheless, the narrator stresses that it is a passion based on a fiction, on an idealization that has little bearing on the real Bathsheba:

The great aids to idealization in love were present here: occasional observation of her from a distance, and the absence of social intercourse with her—visual familiarity, oral strangeness. The smaller human elements were kept out of sight; the pettinesses that enter so largely into all earthly living and doing were disguised by the accident of lover and loved-one not being on visiting terms; and there was hardly awakened a thought in Boldwood that sorry household realities appertained to her, or that she, like all others, had moments of commonplace, when to be least plainly seen was to be most prettily remembered. Thus a mild sort of apotheosis took place in his fancy, whilst she still lived and breathed within his own horizon, a troubled creature like himself. (98)

The commentary here on the idealized nature of Boldwood’s love introduces a narrative tension into the characterization. There is, on the one hand, respect and sympathy in the portrayal of Boldwood’s reawakening into passionate life, and on the other, a recognition of this passion as a solipsistic fantasy divorced from the reality of Bathsheba as a living, breathing, “troubled creature like himself.” The narcissistic nature of Boldwood’s love is further reflected in his selfish bullying of Bathsheba and in the uncontrolled rage that erupts when he learns of her love for Troy. Bathsheba is terrified by the “unreasonable anger” he unleashes towards her. The narrator states: “Boldwood’s ideas had reached that point of fusion at which outline and consistency entirely disappear. The impending night appeared to concentrate in his eye. He did not hear her at all now” (161). Boundaries disappear as Boldwood regresses to an infantile state of acute narcissistic rage. At one point during this scene, Boldwood is able to check his fury and redirect it towards Troy: “He dropped his voice

suddenly and unnaturally. ‘Bathsheba, sweet, lost coquette, pardon me! I’ve been blaming you, threatening you, behaving like a churl to you, when he’s the greatest sinner’” (161). It seems clear that Boldwood needs to protect Bathsheba from his own narcissistic rage more than he needs to shield her from Troy.

In one scene, Boldwood seems to make a genuine, self-sacrificing gesture of love in relation to Bathsheba, but even that act can be understood in a narcissistic light. After first attempting to buy Troy off, Boldwood overhears Bathsheba arrange an intimate assignation with the soldier, and he realizes that Bathsheba must indeed love Troy “to sell soul and body to [him] so utterly as she has done” (180). He then begs Troy not to desert her and even offers to pay him to marry her because “‘You love each other, and you must let me help you to do it’” (180). While seeming to sacrifice his own happiness for Bathsheba’s in this instance, Boldwood is nevertheless still attempting to control her life and to keep his ideal of her pure and unsullied. When Troy responds scornfully, revealing that he and Bathsheba have in fact already wed, it only intensifies Boldwood’s bitter sense of loss and betrayal. It further inflames his rage as well as his need to hold on to his compensatory idealized fantasies. Boldwood is never able to recognize Bathsheba as an imperfect, loving, and suffering human being apart from himself. Throughout the novel, she remains for him only an idealized fantasy—a fantasy that compensates for his deep sense of loss and deficiency. Bathsheba is the ideal other who also serves as a reflection or projection of an ideal self (what Kohut would call an idealized selfobject). Yet while Boldwood may be unable to recognize Bathsheba as a real, separate other, the text as a whole, through its narrative commentary and its characterization of Bathsheba, does so recognize her. The novel explores the dialectic between fantasy and reality that is always in play in love relationships. Some Hardy characters, however, are better than others at keeping that dialectic intact.

Of all the characters in this novel, Bathsheba has provoked the most critical controversy. Some have seen her as a selfish, cold, and controlling hussy, while others have read her

as masochistically passive.<sup>3</sup> Feminist views of Bathsheba range from Shirley Stave's (1995) celebration of her as a powerful pagan figure in the tradition of the Great Goddess, to Rosemarie Morgan's (1988) emphasis on her victimization, on her being "drawn, inexorably, into the web of male brutality and sexual domination that constitutes the darker world" (53) of the novel.<sup>4</sup> The characterization of Bathsheba contains split, idealized narcissistic projections as well as an awareness of and sympathy for her flawed, vulnerable humanity. Both the narrator and Gabriel Oak are able to sustain this dialectical tension in relation to Bathsheba; both are able to tolerate ambivalence and uncertainty in relation to the woman and to keep fantasy and reality in simultaneous play.

The introduction of Bathsheba's character features, once again, that favorite Hardyan image/symbol—the mirror. Believing herself alone as she sits atop her waggon on the road, Bathsheba unwraps a small looking-glass and

proceeded to survey herself attentively. She parted her lips and smiled.

It was a fine morning, and the sun lighted up to a scarlet glow the crimson jacket she wore, and painted a soft lustre upon her bright face and dark hair. The myrtles, geraniums, and cactuses packed around her were fresh and green, and at such a leafless season they invested the whole concern of horses, waggon, furniture, and girl with a peculiar vernal charm. What possessed her to indulge in such a performance in the sight of the sparrows, blackbirds, and unperceived farmer who were alone its spectators,—whether the smile began as a factitious one, to test her capacity in that art,—nobody knows; it ended certainly in a real smile. She blushed at herself, and seeing her reflection blush, blushed the more. (1874, 9)

A notable aspect of this passage is the omniscient narrator's announcement of uncertainty as to Bathsheba's real motives or her interior thoughts and feelings as she smiles at herself in the mirror. The narrator is not omniscient in this instance and

is unwilling or unable to penetrate the inner life of her character. The enforced limitation on the narrator's perspective here suggests an awareness of the limits of one human consciousness ever fully knowing another, and it reveals respect for the female character's otherness from the self and its projections. "Nobody knows" if Bathsheba's smiling at her reflection is vain and artificial—a testing of "her capacity in that art" of feminine wiles—or an innocent pleasure in her own natural beauty (which her artless blushing at her own image suggests). The narrator allows for both possibilities, just as Bathsheba's character throughout the novel sustains the tension of contradictory qualities: she is both manipulative and ingenuous, tough and vulnerable.

The paragraph that follows this passage continues in the same vein of speculation and ambiguity about Bathsheba's character. Now, however, the free indirect style of the narrative includes Gabriel's thoughts. We are told that "A cynical inference was irresistible by Gabriel Oak as he regarded the scene, generous though he fain would have been" (10). After noting that "there was no necessity whatever for her looking in the glass," as she does not adjust her appearance, the narrative continues: "She simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind, her thoughts seeming to glide into far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part—vistas of probable triumphs—the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won" (10). Immediately, however, this thought is checked and recognized as only a projected fantasy of the narrator/Gabriel: "Still, this was but conjecture, and the whole series of actions was so idly put forth as to make it rash to assert that intention had any part in them at all" (10).

The opening description of Bathsheba—sitting high on her waggon in her crimson jacket, lit up by the morning sun—portrays her with an idealized "glow," "lustre," and "charm," while it equally conveys anxiety about her capacity for manipulation and power over men. Here, as elsewhere in Hardy's fiction, the woman is represented as the ambivalent object of the male gaze. At the same time, however, that representation is countered by a competing perspective that acknowledges the

woman's separate, complex subjectivity. In the above passage, the narrator and Gabriel tolerate their ambivalent feelings towards Bathsheba and allow the woman her alterity and human mystery. The looking-glass imagery, with its implicit narcissism, also connects Bathsheba with Boldwood; like him, she may need to feel herself reflected, to have her existence mirrored and affirmed in order to feel real and alive. Her fiercely held independence, like Boldwood's, may defend against a more desperate neediness and deficiency. Bathsheba needs Gabriel to love her even if she cannot return his love and has no desire to marry him (much like Sue in relation to Jude). Thus she chases after him, following Gabriel's meeting with her aunt, to correct his impression that she has many suitors, just as she sends the valentine to Boldwood after he ignores her at the Corn Exchange.

More than active desire, fear of rejection and anxiety over abandonment seem to motivate Bathsheba in relation to men. Even her marriage to Troy, we learn late in the novel, was occasioned by his telling her he had "seen a woman more beautiful than [she], and that his constancy could not be counted on" unless she agreed to become his. Then, as she tells Gabriel, "between jealousy and distraction, I married him!" (196). The heartbreaking scene over Fanny's coffin in which Troy does coldly reject and abandon her is key to the psychology of Bathsheba's character. The scene enacts an intense, childlike terror of being deserted or denied by the beloved other—an ideal other on whom one is emotionally dependent and to whom one is erotically bound. As Bathsheba watches Troy lavish kisses on the dead Fanny (the young servant girl to whom Troy had previously been engaged), she implores him to kiss her, too. The narrator reports, "There was something so abnormal and startling in the childlike pain and simplicity of this appeal from a woman of Bathsheba's calibre and independence, that Troy, loosening her tightly clasped arms from his neck, looked at her in bewilderment" (230). For Bathsheba, to lose the ideal other's love is to lose her very self or identity, to be reduced to "nothing." When Troy announces that "in the sight of Heaven," Fanny is his true wife,

---

there arose from Bathsheba's lips a long, low cry of measureless despair and indignation, such a wail of anguish as had never before been heard within those old-inhabited walls. . . . "If she's—that,—what—am I?" she added, as a continuation of the same cry, and sobbing pitifully: and the rarity with her of such abandonment only made the condition more dire.

"You are nothing to me—nothing," said Troy heartlessly. (231)

Bathsheba's condition here is at the heart of Hardy's psychic universe, and it is a condition that applies equally to his male and female characters. The idealized erotic other holds the power, as the above passage demonstrates, both to define and destroy the self. Though Bathsheba comes to recognize fully Troy's flaws and is aware from the beginning of his womanizing reputation, we are told that she "unfortunately loved him no less in thinking that he might soon cease to love her—indeed, considerably more" (167). A diminished sense of her own worth only enhances his value.

Troy's idealized status and erotic attraction for Bathsheba are vividly captured in the sword-exercise scene. The setting of the scene, first of all, is a fine example of the way in which landscape often reflects interior psychological states in Hardy's fiction. The scene takes place in a "pit" or hollow among the ferns, "a saucer-shaped concave" that is "floored with a thick flossy carpet of moss and grass intermingled, so yielding that the foot was half-buried within it" (143). Critics have often remarked on the womb-like quality of this environment. The emphasis on the ground's yielding, intermingling, and absorbing aspects heralds the eroticism of the scene that ensues and is a symbolic reflection of Bathsheba's inner state. The narration is almost entirely from her point of view:

In an instant the atmosphere was transformed to Bathsheba's eyes. Beams of light caught from the low sun's rays, above, around, in front of her, well-nigh shut out earth and heaven—all emitted in the marvellous evolutions of Troy's reflecting blade, which seemed everywhere at once, and yet nowhere specially. These

circling gleams were accompanied by a keen rush that was almost a whistling—also springing from all sides of her at once. In short, she was enclosed in a firmament of light, and of sharp hisses, resembling a sky-full of meteors close at hand. (144)

Penelope Vigar (1974) has commented on “the subtle combination of the real and the fantastic” in this scene, on “the soft and voluptuous natural world and the artificial trance-like vision of Troy’s strange power” (107). The narrative description combines a precision of observation and concrete, sensuous detail with the subjective, fluid atmosphere of a dream; it holds the internal and the external, fantasy and reality, in balanced tension. For Bathsheba, the appeal of Troy’s sexual, phallic power here is that it is dangerous yet perfectly controlled and contained. Most importantly, she is the center and sole object of his focused attention. The narrator describes how even when Troy was half turned away, his eye was “nevertheless always keenly measuring her breadth and outline, and his lips tightly closed in sustained effort” (145). Troy’s sword perfectly defines her physical being. Such perfect knowledge of her bodily self is deeply erotic; the scene indeed casts Troy as Bathsheba’s perfect, ideal lover.

Thus when Bathsheba loses Troy, she loses an ideal of herself as well. (A similar dynamic is involved in Tess’s relationship with Angel, contributing to her delay in revealing her flawed past to him.) After the coffin scene, Bathsheba runs off and finds herself, as in the sword scene, in a marshy hollow. This hollow, however, reflects a completely different subjective state—one now shorn of the ideal other/self. The soft and yielding ground is no longer suggestive of a desirable erotic merging but of corruption and decay:

The ground sloped downward to a hollow, in which was a species of swamp, dotted with fungi. . . . [T]he general aspect of the swamp was malignant. From its moist and poisonous coat seemed to be exhaled the essences of evil things in the earth, and in the waters under the earth. The fungi grew in all manner of positions from rotting

---

leaves and tree stumps. . . . The hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences small and great. (233)

The split view of the soft and hollowed landscape—site of ideal erotic union and of malignancy and death—reflects a psychic split in relation to mother/nature/woman that runs throughout Hardy's fiction. His best work, however, is not mired in this primitive split, just as Bathsheba does not remain stuck in the swamp. What allows her to emerge from this malignant state is the sight, in two instances, of simple human fortitude and endurance: she observes a passing schoolboy, apparently "of the dunce class," patiently and persistently reciting his Bible lessons, and she sees her maid Liddy intrepidly crossing the swamp to reach her: "Liddy did not sink, as Bathsheba had anticipated" (234). If these two humble figures, through sheer determination, can prevail, so, it is implied, can she. Perhaps she can survive without the idealized other and the idealized version of her self he provided.

The end of the novel attests to Bathsheba's fortitude, endurance, and trustworthiness. Now she is represented less as a vain and flirty romantic than as a clear-eyed pragmatist, one able to cope, like Oak, with the harsh realities of life. One of the workhands affirms, "she's a brave girl who'll never tell a lie however much the truth may harm her" (283). After Boldwood shoots Troy, Bathsheba takes charge of the situation. As she cradles the dead man in her lap, the narrator proclaims, "She was the stuff of which great men's mothers are made. She was indispensable to high generation, hated at tea parties, feared in shops, and loved in crises" (291). Yet we still see Bathsheba running after Gabriel at the end only when she fears she may have permanently lost him. "I have thought so much more of you," she tells him, "since I fancied you did not want even to see me again" (303). Ultimately, however, Gabriel seems unable to replace Troy as the object of Bathsheba's romantic love or ideal passion. Many critics have remarked on Bathsheba's drained vitality at the close of the novel; the narrator indeed tells us that "she never laughed readily now" (308). In a justly celebrated passage on "camaraderie," the narrator extols Gabriel and Bathsheba's relationship as a form of love based on real knowledge of the other, on "knowing the rougher sides of each



other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality" (303).

This is a fine recipe if the romance can in fact break through the cracks in the stony reality. A marriage without romance or passion, even if based on affection, is not something most of us would choose. While Gabriel, as I shall discuss, is able to keep both romantic idealization and prosaic reality alive in his relationship with Bathsheba, Bathsheba seems unable to do the same with him. Perhaps because, for her, he has always represented safety and security, Hardy recognizes that she cannot afford to invest him with the sort of passionate idealization that put her so at risk with Troy. As Mitchell (1997) explains, "falling into intense, passionate idealization with someone you count on for safety and predictability is hazardous indeed. . . . There is too much at stake" (37). While for Bathsheba Gabriel represents only an unromanticized dependability and security, the text as a whole offers a more complex characterization of Oak, one which again involves a dialectical dynamic.

The critical views of Gabriel Oak are almost as divided as the responses to Bathsheba. Roy Morrell (1965), for instance, considers him a representation of the reality principle, a figure of "sturdy resistance, hard use and endurance" (60) in contrast to the "romantic unreality" represented by Boldwood and Troy. Michael Millgate (1971) and Robert Langbaum (1995), on the other hand, argue that in his faithfulness and unflagging devotion to his lady, Oak is also a figure of great romance. Rosemary Sumner (1981) sees Gabriel as a "dogged, rather paternal" character who lacks sexuality (56), while Susan Beegel (1987) believes he embodies a strong, procreative, and life-affirming sexuality. Just as Bathsheba's character manages to contain opposing attitudes, so the characterization of Gabriel Oak holds in play oppositional tensions: he is both a realist and a romantic, a dogged pragmatist and a passionate, idealistic lover. Of all of Hardy's characters, Gabriel Oak most successfully maintains that dialectical tension between subjectivity and objectivity, between idealized fantasy and recognition of reality, that relational theorists advocate.

Oak's initial view of Bathsheba, quoted earlier, as she sits atop her waggon and regards herself in the mirror, shares the previously discussed ambivalence and conflicting attitudes of the narrator. He witnesses her argument with the gatekeeper and generously pays her toll. After she departs without thanks, the gatekeeper remarks on her being "a handsome maid." Gabriel responds, "But she has her faults" (11). Oak's recognition of Bathsheba's flaws, however, does not prevent his idealization of her. The description of his next view of Bathsheba highlights the subjective projections and fantasizing involved in his relationship with her. The scene begins with Oak alone at night, looking at the stars and "impressed with the speaking loneliness of the scene" (15). He then realizes that what he first took to be a star low on the horizon is actually a light, glowing from inside a distant cowshed. He makes his way to the shed and peers through a hole in the roof, where he spies two women conversing inside.

Rosemarie Morgan (1988) interprets Oak's spying on Bathsheba here as an attempt "to subdue and reduce her. . . . In spying upon her he steals her freedom" (44). That reading seems to miss, however, the tone or feel of the scene and the characterization of Oak in the above description as the romantic loner and outsider, the isolated soul drawn to the distant glow of human connection, the "mysterious companionship" represented by the light in the shed. At first Oak cannot see the young woman clearly from his remote position on the roof. The narrative commentary at this point is significant:

Oak . . . became more curious to observe her features, but this prospect being denied him by the hooding effect of the cloak, and by his aerial position, he felt himself drawing upon his fancy for their details. In making even horizontal and clear inspections we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in. Had Gabriel been able from the first to get a distinct view of her countenance, his estimate of it as very handsome or slightly so would have been as his soul required a divinity at the moment or was ready supplied with one. Having for some time known the

want of a satisfactory form to fill an increasing void within him, his position moreover affording the widest scope for his fancy, he painted her a beauty. (16–17)

A moment later, we are told, the girl dropped her cloak, and “Oak knew her instantly as the heroine of the yellow waggon, myrtles, and looking-glass: prosily, as the woman who owed him twopence” (17).

In the above passage, the narrator is suggesting that our subjective fantasies and desires always influence our sense perceptions: “we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in.” As J. B. Bullen (1986) observes, Hardy “does not question the existence of material reality. He merely suggests that the interpretation of visual sensations is intimately dependent upon the temperament, nature, and psychological disposition of the perceiver” (82). Our subjective projections onto others are precisely what make those others emotionally meaningful to us. Like Boldwood, Gabriel’s “soul required a divinity” and was in “want of a satisfactory form to fill an increasing void within him.” Bathsheba becomes that form—the container of his idealized projections. Unlike Boldwood, however, Gabriel is equally able to see Bathsheba as “the woman who owed him twopence,” as a real, fallible human being who is simultaneously more and other than his projected ideal.

A curious fact about Gabriel is that he falls asleep repeatedly in the early chapters: once when he forgets to open a ventilating flue in his cottage and almost suffocates to death, again when his dog disastrously leads his entire flock of sheep off a cliff, and another time on a waggon full of hay that is moving, as he sleeps, into the vicinity of Bathsheba’s new farm, where a blazing fire is at that moment raging. Sleep in Hardy’s novels, as in the scene from *The Woodlanders*, is always bound up with unconscious desires. Robert Langbaum notes that “falling asleep is clearly the means by which Gabriel follows his destiny, fulfilling his deepest desires. Falling asleep will work the same way for Tess” (1995, 92). All of Gabriel’s sleep scenes ultimately result in closer contact with his beloved Bathsheba. It is indeed Bathsheba who saves him from suffocating: Gabriel wakes happily to find his head in her lap.

Questions remain, however, as to why such unconscious desires are equally associated in each case with death and destruction. Why should violent and destructive fantasies so often mingle with desire in Hardy's novels? One could think about it in terms of sexual and aggressive drives or an innate death instinct, but I am more persuaded by a relational psychoanalytic perspective that views desire as always risky and dangerous because it involves dependency. Passionately to desire another is to be dependent on that other's response; thus anger and aggression naturally accompany, and threaten, desire. As Mitchell (1997) explains, dependency is always potentially humiliating, and all of us, since we were once dependent children, have likely known some deep humiliation. Intimacy, he concludes, is therefore "necessarily dangerous for everyone. Aggression is love's shadow, an inextricable accompaniment and necessary constituent of romantic passion" (31).

Gabriel's character, along with Hardy's novels as a whole, allows for love's shadows, for the aggression and rage that inevitably accompany deep, passionate love. Whereas Boldwood needs to split off his aggressive rage from his idealizing love, Gabriel is able to contain and control his aggression and to keep both romantic idealization and aggression in play in his relationship with Bathsheba. Two scenes in particular—the sheep shearing and the lightening storm on the ricks—symbolically convey such controlled aggression. Both share much in common with the erotic sword-exercise scene as well.

In the sheep-shearing scene, the narrator describes how Gabriel dragged "a frightened ewe to his shear-station, flinging it over upon its back with a dexterous twist of the arm. He lopped off the tresses about its head, and opened up the neck and collar, his mistress quietly looking on" (115). If we agree with Shires (1991) that the ewe is an "emblem for Bathsheba" (170), the description becomes fraught with sexual and aggressive meaning. "'She blushes at the insult,' murmured Bathsheba, watching the pink flush which arose and overspread the neck and shoulders of the ewe where they were left bare by the clicking shears" (115). As in the sword-exercise scene, the phallic aggression is contained and controlled. In this case, however, the narration does not give us Bathsheba's point of view, but Gabriel's:

Poor Gabriel's soul was fed with a luxury of content by having her over him, her eyes critically regarding his skilful shears, which apparently were going to gather up a piece of the flesh at every close, and yet never did so. Like Guildenstern, Oak was happy in that he was not over happy. He had no wish to converse with her: that his bright lady and himself formed one group, exclusively their own, and containing no others in the world, was enough. (115)

The erotic attraction here, as in the sword scene, lies in the subject feeling itself to be the sole focus, the exclusive object, of the ideal other's intense gaze and attention. Self psychologists and relational theorists alike emphasize the importance for the infant of feeling itself mirrored and reflected in the loving gaze of its primary caretaker, its first all-important, ideal other. The erotic life of the adult, as psychoanalytic theory contends, and Hardy's symbolic imagery supports, derives from the earliest dynamics between self and other. Though the threat of loss and betrayal is implicit in the above passage, in both the castration imagery and in the reference to Guildenstern, the description of Gabriel and his "bright lady" forming "one group, exclusively their own, and containing no others" highlights a fantasy of perfect narcissistic union and exclusivity. Such fantasies are in themselves not pathological. A necessary part of erotic and passionate life, they only become problematic, as Mitchell argues, if reality is sacrificed in their addictive pursuit.

The scene on the ricks in which Gabriel conducts the streaks of lightning as they flash like "skeletons" in "a perfect dance of death . . . leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion" (193–94), offers another instance of an erotic fantasy that involves controlled aggression. "One of the grisly forms had alighted upon the point of Gabriel's rod, to run invisibly down it, down the chain, and into the earth. Gabriel was almost blinded, and he could feel Bathsheba's warm arm tremble in his hand" (194). The "infuriated universe" here reflects the rage, aggression, and violence that are always threatening to erupt within nature and within the self in Hardy's world. Gabriel is able to manage

and withstand that rage, and to protect the woman from the very aggression she incites. As in the sheep-shearing scene, however, the erotic fantasy is not shared equally by Gabriel and Bathsheba: "They both stood still at the bottom, side by side. Bathsheba appeared to think only of the weather—Oak thought only of her just then" (194). While Bathsheba remains the focus of Gabriel's idealized passion, Gabriel never assumes that role for Bathsheba.

Gabriel is fully aware of Bathsheba's flaws and limitations, but he is able, despite her often callous treatment of him, to keep his idealized view of her alive. On their wedding day, we are told that Bathsheba, "at Gabriel's request, arranged her hair . . . as she had worn it years ago on Norcombe Hill," and that "she seemed in his eyes remarkably like the girl of that fascinating dream" (306). Gabriel is still able to invest Bathsheba with the stuff of his dreams, which is the stuff of passion. Camaraderie is important, but so equally are the ideals and fantasies we weave into our relations with others, ideals which make those others emotionally meaningful to us. Gabriel is one of the few characters in Hardy's fiction capable of keeping the dialectic between fantasy and reality intact in his love relationship, and thus he is one of the few characters to enjoy a happy ending.

Even with Hardy's tragic characters, however, there is an understanding that the idealized romantic passion that drives them towards their tragedies is also what charges their lives with vitality and meaning. I agree with Michael Irwin (1998) that "Hardy's presentation of love is wonderfully adept at making us experience, or remember, the transforming power of passion" (134), and that while Hardy is aware that romantic love is an illusion, he urges us to "go for it, anyway: follow the instinct for joy" (135). If we are to experience life with any emotional depth, we need to invest others in the outer world with the feelings and fantasies of our inner world. Following Loewald, Nancy Chodorow (1999) asserts, "From a psychoanalytic perspective, projection and introjection, expressing and mediating fantasy, act to enliven and make personally meaningful a world that is otherwise intrinsically meaningless" (22). She argues that such projected fantasies, in the words of psychologist Robert Caplan (1988), permit "a subjective rather

than a mechanical experience” of the external world (Chodorow 1999, 22).

Idealized narcissistic fantasies are necessary to the experience of falling in love and to sustaining erotic desire. These fantasies need not be sacrificed to the recognition of reality and otherness but rather need to be held in dialectical tension with it. According to Michael Eigen (1993), “In optimal conditions one develops the capacity to be able to flexibly undergo and process both ‘ideal’ and ‘realistic’ dimensions of experience in a rich, well-nigh unlimited variety of ways” (102). While the majority of Hardy characters, unlike Gabriel Oak, do not achieve such balance and flexibility, the novels as a whole do. From a relational perspective, all the characters might be considered as representing the multiple inner objects (Fairbairn 1952), or self states (Bromberg 1998), or self-organizations (Mitchell 1993) of their creator. It is the work as a whole, and not any single character, that best reflects the author’s inner world and the manifold, dynamic nature of the individual psyche. Besides the characters, the shifting narrative perspectives and attitudes in Hardy’s novels also permit the reader to experience simultaneously opposing views. Through the “subjective realism” of Hardy’s style, we can identify with the characters’ inner states, their passions and fantasies, as they project those states onto others and the world around them; and at the same time, we are forced to recognize the conflicting realities of those others and of an obdurate external world that resists such projections. The novels sacrifice neither the ideal nor the real, allowing us to appreciate the importance of both to a personally meaningful and deeply lived life.

*Department of English  
Rhode Island College  
Providence, RI 02908  
Bschapiro@mediaone.net*

### Notes

1. See, for instance, Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984).
2. Judith Wittenberg (1986), interpreting this scene from a Lacanian perspective, argues that it represents “the self awakening to consciousness in awareness of the alienated non-self, the mirrored Other” (30). Lacanian critics would, of course, read all of Hardy’s mirror scenes in similar terms.

3. H. M. Daleski (1997), for instance, believes that Bathsheba, like Boldwood, is emotionally and sexually impaired by “a long-sustained sense of self-sufficiency” (65). She loses Troy, he thinks, because “she has proved incapable of really opening herself to him” (77). Richard Carpenter (1964), on the other hand, argues that Bathsheba’s problem is that she is too self-surrendering, indeed masochistically so: “Bathsheba longs to be dominated and violated by an aggressive male. . . . What she wants is to be raped” (341, 344). Peter Casagrande (1979) allies Bathsheba with an imperfect, infirm, and unalterable nature. Though Hardy sympathizes with her infirmity, he says, “she is an un-deliberate, inadvertent, unconscious agent of evil. Her actions are not within her control” (50).
4. Wittenberg (1986) and Shires (1991), also arguing from a feminist perspective, believe that Bathsheba’s character manages to blend and blur traditional gender polarities, such as masculine independence and feminine dependency. Ian Ousby (1981) highlights the oppositions in Bathsheba’s character as well, though he suggests they reflect less a harmonious blending than simple uncertainty and ambivalence in Hardy’s attitude towards women. Feminist critics Boumelha (1982), Ingham (1990), and Higonnet (1993) also focus on the contradictions, competing discourses, and multiple perspectives in Hardy’s male and female characterizations. They discuss such oppositions and shifts in terms of the instabilities of Victorian ideologies.

## References

- Beegel, Susan. 1987. Bathsheba’s Lovers: Male Sexuality in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In Harold Bloom, ed., *Thomas Hardy: Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House, pp. 207–26.
- Boumelha, Penny. 1982. *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*. New York: Barnes & Noble.
- Bromberg, Philip. 1998. *Standing in the Spaces: Essays on Clinical Process, Trauma, and Dissociation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.
- Bullen, J. B. 1986. *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Caper, Robert. 1988. *Immaterial Facts*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Carpenter, Richard C. 1964. The Mirror and the Sword: Imagery in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 18:331–45.
- Casagrande, Peter. 1979. A New View of Bathsheba Everdene. In D. Kramer, ed., *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*. New York: Barnes & Noble, pp. 50–73.
- Chasseguet-Smirgel, Janine. 1984. *The Ego Ideal: A Psychoanalytic Essay on the Malady of the Ideal*. Trans. Paul Barrows. New York: Norton.
- Chodorow, Nancy J. 1999. *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender, and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Daleski, H. M. 1997. *Thomas Hardy and the Paradoxes of Love*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.
- Eigen, Michael. 1993. *The Electrified Tighrope*. Ed. Adam Phillips. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Fairbairn, W. R. D. 1952. *An Object Relations Theory of the Personality*. New York: Basic.
- Hardy, Thomas. 1874. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Ed. Robert C. Schweik. New York: Norton, 1986.
- . 1878. *The Return of the Native*. Ed. James Gindin. New York: Norton, 1969.
- . 1887. *The Woodlanders*. Ed. Patricia Ingham. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- . 1891. *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Ed. Scott Elledge. New York: Norton, 1991.
- . 1895. *Jude the Obscure*. Ed. Norman Page. New York: Norton, 1998.
- . 1897. *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved & The Well-Beloved*. Ed. Patricia Ingham. New York: Penguin, 1998.



- Higonnet, Margaret R. 1993. Introduction. In M. Higonnet, ed., *The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 1–13.
- Ingham, Patricia. 1990. *Thomas Hardy*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Irwin, Michael. 1998. From Fascination to Listlessness: Hardy's Depiction of Love. In C. Petit, ed., *Reading Thomas Hardy*. New York: St. Martin's, pp. 117–37.
- Kohut, Heinz. 1971. *The Analysis of the Self*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Langbaum, Robert. 1995. *Thomas Hardy in Our Time*. London: Macmillan.
- Loewald, Hans W. 1980. *Papers on Psychoanalysis*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Miller, J. Hillis. 1970. *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Millgate, Michael. 1971. *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*. New York: Random House.
- . 1982. *Thomas Hardy: A Biography*. New York: Random House.
- Mitchell, Stephen. 1986. The Wings of Icarus: Illusion and the Problem of Narcissism. In S. Mitchell and L. Aron, eds., *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1999, pp. 153–79.
- . 1993. *Hope and Dread in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Basic.
- . 1997. Psychoanalysis and the Degradation of Romance. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 7:23–41.
- . 1998. From Ghosts to Ancestors: The Psychoanalytic Vision of Hans Loewald. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 8:825–55.
- Morgan, Rosemarie. 1988. *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*. London: Routledge.
- Morrell, Roy. 1965. *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Ousby, Ian. 1981. Love-Hate Relations: Bathsheba, Hardy and the Men in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. *Cambridge Quarterly*, 10:24–39.
- Schapiro, Barbara. 1986. Thomas Hardy and the "Well-Beloved" Self. In Lynne Layton and Barbara Schapiro, eds., *Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychology of Self*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 130–48.
- Shires, Linda M. 1991. Narrative, Gender, and Power in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. *Novel*, 24:162–77.
- Stave, Shirley A. 1995. *The Decline of the Goddess: Nature, Culture, and Women in Thomas Hardy's Fiction*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Sumner, Rosemary. 1981. *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Vigar, Penelope. 1974. *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality*. London: Athlone Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. 1971. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock.
- Wittenberg, Judith Bryant. 1986. Angles of Vision and Questions of Gender in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. *Centennial Review*, 30:25–40.