

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD AND THE ENDURANCE OF TRUE LOVE

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Abstract

True passion for Hardy is one that transcends sexual passion, it is the combination of experiencing hardship and suffering together in similarity of pursuit which produces a sort of metaphysical bond beside which the sexual passion with dissemblers like Troy seems evanescent and insignificant. True passion abides through trials together and mutual respect and understanding through trials. While Gabriel seems sexually tame at first it is his character and honour which in the end draws Bathsheba to him in place of the dissembling Troy, through an enduring passion which transcends sexual passion to prove to be a metaphysical union of like minds. While Gabriel Oak is not chivalric or charismatic like Troy, it is his steadfastness, enduring devotion and loyalty and true dedication to Bathsheba that eventually wins her heart.

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Far from the madding crowd is Thomas Hardy's tale of Bathsheba Everdene, a young farming heiress and the choices she is presented in love: Gabriel Oak, Troy and Mr Boldwood. Bathsheba is of a rather wilful and restless temperament and feels initially though Oak proposes to her that he is not good enough for her or strong enough to tame her and satisfy her restlessness and wilfulness, a man whom she deems worthy for this cause if Sergeant Troy, who turns out to be an arch dissembler whom she invests wrongly in passion as he spends all her inheritance at race horsing and leaves her ruined while he proclaims at Fanny's funeral that he never really loved Bathsheba. It thus turns out that while sexual passion and conquest was what drew Bathsheba initially to Sergeant Troy, these turn out to be ephemeral fancies as Troy proves to be her ruin and destruction

"And you mean, Frank," said Bathsheba sadly – her voice was painfully lowered from the fullness and vivacity of the previous summer – "that you have lost more than a hundred pounds in a month by this dreadful horse racing? O Frank, it is cruel, it is foolish of you to take away my money sp. We shall have to leave the farm; that will be the end of it!"

"Humbug about cruel. Now there 'tis again- turn on the water works; that's just like you."

"But you'll promise me not to go to Budmouth second meeting, won't you?" she implored. Bathsheba was at the full depth for tears, but she maintained a dry eye.

“I don’t see why I should; in fact, if it turns out to be a fine day, I was thinking of taking you.”....

“But you don’t mean to say that you have risked anything on the race next Monday too! “ she exclaimed with an agonized look.

“There now, don’t you be a little fool. Wait till you are told. Why Bathsheba you have lost all the pluck and sauciness you formally had and upon my life if I had known what a chicken hearted creature you were under all your boldness, I’d never have- I know what. (Hardy 1978: 318-19)

Bathsheba now has all her illusions about Troy shattered- he is a swindler, a dissembler who had married her to gain access to her wealth and how is prodigally spending her wealth to naught all the sexual bedazzling and taming of her Troy had previously demonstrated proves to be destructive in the light of his prodigal behaviour which is to swindle her of her fortune and to spend everything till it comes to naught. Troy even borrows money from Bathsheba for Fanny whom he is civil to for the sake of obtaining the money but realizes that his marriage to Bathsheba is in decline and the person he really loves is Fanny.

Directly he had gone, Bathsheba burst into great sobs- dry eyed sobs, which cut as they came, without any softening by tears. But she was determined to repress all evidences of feeling. She was conquered; but she would never own it as long as she lived. Her pride was indeed brought low by despairing discoveries of her spoliation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own. She chafed to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard, her whole soul was in arms, and the blood fired her face. Until she had met Troy, Bathsheba had been proud of her position as a woman, it had been a glory to her that her lips had been touched by no man’s earth – that her waist had never been encircled by a lover’s arms, She hated herself now. In those earlier days she had always nourished a secret contempt for girls who were slaves of the first good looking young fellow to salute them. She had never taken kindly to the idea of marriage in the abstract as did the majority of women she saw about her. In the turmoil of her anxiety for a lover she had agreed to marry him; but the perception that had accompanied the happiest hours on this account was self sacrifice rather than promotion and honour. Although she scarcely knew the divinity’s name, Diana the Goddess whom Bathsheba instinctively adored. That she had, never by look, word or sign, encouraged a man to approach her- that she felt herself sufficient to herself, and had in the independence of her girlish heart fancied there was a certain degradation in renouncing the simplicity of a maiden existence to become the humbler half of an indifferent matrimonial whole- were facts now bitterly remembered.” (Hardy, 1978: 333-34)

Bathsheba realizes she has been sexually as well as socially conquered, Troy has deflowered her as well as gained access to her wealth and degraded her by spending all her wealth recklessly on lost purposes as well as a reunion with Fanny whom he truly loves in place of Bathsheba. To be thus exploited and made a mere means to Troy’s vulgar and degrading ends places Bathsheba in a position of infinite regret, she realizes that sexual conquest and passion were meaningless when unaccompanied by the good character she had encountered in Gabriel Oak but whom she had rejected out of a whim that he was not sexual enough to tame her, All the desire for sexual taming by a chivalrous man when she discovers the truth about Troy- that he was an arch – dissembler and swindler who would ultimately prove to be her ruin. All this ruin is seen in the scene where Troy is faced with the corpses of Fanny Robin and her dead child fathered by Troy, whom Troy kisses gently and Bathsheba implores him to kiss her too for she loves Troy more than Fanny Robin. However Troy reacts violently to this suggestion. “This woman is more to me, dead as she is, than you ever were, or are, or can be,” Troy then calls

Fanny Robin his “very very wife” He also adds heartlessly : “You are nothing to me- nothing. A ceremony before a priest doesn't make a marriage. I am not morally yours.” (Hardy, 1978: 361) Troy thus shows his true colours in this scene: Bathsheba was a mere means to an inheritance, whom he does not love at all and whom he merely views as a sexual and social conquest, who is meaningless to him now that he has conquered her. Boldwood seems indifferent to Bathsheba at first but kills Troy when Bathsheba reveals Troy had deflowered her as Boldwood is now consumed with an obsessive pathological passion for Bathsheba. Boldwood then faces consequences and is imprisoned for killing Troy, thus clearing the way for Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak to be reunited as true loves.

In contrast to the ruin faced with Troy is the steady and enduring love if not passion that she finds with Gabriel Oak at the end, whose sturdiness and steadfast nature proves to be more of an enduring love she can live with in a happy union at the end of the novel:

They spoke very little of their mutual feelings: pretty phrases and warm expressions being probably unnecessary between such tried friends. Theirs was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and of the best till further on. The romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. This good fellowship, *camaraderie*- usually occurring through similarity of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate, not in their labours, but in their pleasures merely. Where however, happy circumstance permits its development, the compounded feeling proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death- that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, beside which the passion usually called by the name is evanescent as steam. (Hardy, 1978: 458-59)

True passion for Hardy is one that transcends sexual passion, it is the combination of experiencing hardship and suffering together in similarity of pursuit which produces a sort of metaphysical bond beside which the sexual passion with dissemblers like Troy seems evanescent and insignificant. True passion abides through trials together and mutual respect and understanding through trials. While Gabriel seems sexually tame at first it is his character and honour which in the end draws Bathsheba to him in place of the dissembling Troy, through an enduring passion which transcends sexual passion to prove to be a metaphysical union of like minds. While Gabriel Oak is not chivalric or charismatic like Troy, it is his steadfastness, enduring devotion and loyalty and true dedication to Bathsheba that eventually wins her heart.

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