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Gender in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*

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Gender in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of English
James Madison University

by Rachel Christena Nelson

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For my siblings Johnny, Mary, and Danny—my best friends and greatest blessings.

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Abstract

This text explores the characters of Maggie and Tom Tulliver from George Eliot's 1860 novel *The Mill on the Floss* and the characters of Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak from Thomas Hardy's 1874 novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*. It connects the two novels by way of the relationships between these main characters. In both cases, the female character struggles with the confines of Victorian societal limits for women based on their gender. In *The Mill*, Maggie constantly struggles against the wishes of her older brother, and while Tom is arguably an antagonistic force in the novel, this article contends that Tom is necessary for Maggie's development and her resistance to gender expectations. Because of her brother's inability to recognize the limitations Maggie faces, she is able to unite her love for her traditional family and her desire for progressive independence—but only through tragedy. In *Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba faces similar challenges because of her expectation to marry according to the custom for her sex. Although Gabriel is typically discussed as either a stoic hero or a hindrance to Bathsheba's agency, this article discusses him as a nuanced character. He plays a similar role to Bathsheba as Tom does to Maggie, despite the differences between the two main male characters. The conclusion of *Madding Crowd* has previously been seen as either a stifling of Bathsheba's independence or a happy ending for the conventional marriage plot, but this article discusses the ending as reconciliation between friends that reveals the patriarchal hero's recognition of his limitations to protect the "weaker sex" and all those he believes to be in his care, whether it be his flock of sheep or Bathsheba. In this way, it is revealed that Bathsheba does not need Gabriel Oak's care or his dogged worship—both are insufficient—instead, Bathsheba merely needs companionship.

Introduction

While Maggie and her older brother Tom from George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* find themselves set in the early Victorian period and Bathsheba and Gabriel come much later in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, these two sets of characters reveal the insufficiency of their society's binary gender system. These two novels should be discussed in terms of gender because of the centrality of male-female relationships, whether familial or romantic.

In the following chapters, I will explore how George Eliot's Maggie is not merely a character that subverts the arbitrary expectations imposed upon her by her brother, her family, and the society of St. Ogg's, but she is a character who seeks to unite the traditional with the progressive. By this, I mean that Maggie seeks to unite her own desire to be an integral part of the home and caretaker for her family with her desire for autonomy and choice in relation to her own life. Her brother is not purely an antagonistic force that pulls her towards her duty to her family, but he is also a force that propels her to realize the impossibility of such a choice, between her traditional values and her desire for agency. I argue that the tragedy of Maggie and Tom's deaths unites these two seemingly irreconcilable ideas as it unites the seemingly irreconcilable siblings.

I will also explore how Bathsheba from Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* struggles against the traditional marriage plot because of her inability to fit into either a completely feminine or completely masculine identity. By this I mean that she is unable to submit to marrying Gabriel within the first few chapters as a woman would be expected to when asked by a man of some little property because, in her own words, she is "too independent" and she would "hate to be thought men's property in that way" (Hardy 37, 39). Likewise, she is unable to run her own farm without being expected to marry amongst her Weatherbury neighbors

because of her biological sex. I also argue that Gabriel struggles with his desire to protect Bathsheba, as he would watch over his flock of sheep, and his desire to control her actions, as a patriarch would. Although this novel concludes with the marital union of Bathsheba and Gabriel, I contend that this reveals their friendship—rather than submission on Bathsheba’s part or domination on Gabriel’s part—and it reveals their acceptance of the ways in which the other disobeys the binary system they both face.

George Eliot’s *The Mill* was published in 1860, just six years after Coventry Patmore’s first publication of the poem “The Angel in the House” and five years before John Ruskin’s *Of Queens’ Gardens*. Both of these works expose this period’s belief in male’s and female’s different capabilities and duties. While Patmore expresses excessive adoration for women, he also expresses the belief that “Man must be pleased; but him to please/Is woman’s pleasure,” even if “she loves alone” (“The Angel in the House” 9.1-2, 22). Ruskin expresses similar beliefs, stating that:

The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender... But the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision... Her great function is Praise... By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial... But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her” (Ruskin 20-21).

In this way, readers can better understand what Tom expects of Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*. He is supposed to do the hard work in the public sphere, while she is supposed to remain innocent, simple, and passive as the queen of the home. Although supposedly cherished, she

must devote herself to her family, even when it seems unreciprocated. These beliefs are apparent in Gabriel's early treatment of Bathsheba, as well. He believes that there is nothing "stupider" than for her to say that she "shan't marry—at least yet," even though she tells him she does not love him (Hardy 38).

Women in the nineteenth century were not expected to act like Maggie, who runs off for more than a day alone with a man, nor were they expected to turn down practical proposals from 'good' men or manage a farm on their own without a bailiff like Bathsheba. Because these two women act in such controversial ways, these two novels should be examined for how they comment on views from society at the time, such as Patmore's and Ruskin's ideas about gender. I argue that both novels use their heroine to criticize this confinement of women into the private sphere, proposing that gender expectations are arbitrary.

This, as it stands, has been said before. In the 1980s and 1990s, many feminist scholars, such as Linda Shires, Rosemarie Morgan, and Marianne Hirsch discussed gender in Victorian novels. After all, the end of the Victorian period marked the emergence of the so-called New Woman. From the time of Florence Nightingale in the 1860s until women gained suffrage in the early part of the 20th century and the pants-wearing, bicycle-riding professional woman emerged, much had changed in terms of gender expectations. This continued to change up through the 1960s and '70s. However, the late 20th century marked the overlap of Second and Third Wave Feminism, which meant a broadening of how feminism is defined. So why does my argument matter, if definitions have expanded and conversations about these works have already happened?

The following chapters are important because, despite the important work accomplished in the 1990s, the 1990s are now nearly two decades behind us; and, yet, gender is as discussed

today as it was then, if not more so. In arguing that Tom and Gabriel are not the antagonistic forces that scholars like Rosemarie Morgan proposed, I give fair treatment to the male characters in these novels, as well as the female characters. I recognize in my arguments that the gender binaries that restrict Maggie and Bathsheba also restrict Tom and Gabriel, despite the fact that the dichotomies reinforce Tom and Gabriel's positions of power over their female counterparts, while working to subjugate Maggie and Bathsheba. I also introduce the idea that each pair experiences personal development because the other pushes them to do so. Rather than merely fighting against each other, the arbitrary split between the sexes works to bring them closer to understanding one another. In so doing, I hope to move the conversation closer to understanding how people understand one another, regardless, or perhaps, in spite of gender.

Chapter I: *The Mill on the Floss*

In *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot creates a complex set of characters that challenges expectations for women from the provincial St. Ogg's society in which the characters have been placed. This complexity is shown most poignantly in the relationship of Maggie Tulliver and her older brother Tom. Maggie feels pressured by her brother to submit entirely to the imposed limitations of her gender. Additionally, she is pressured by prospective lover Stephen Guest and friend Philip Wakem to reject her familial and societal obligations to submit to her elder brother's judgment. Stephen, originally the intended for Maggie's cousin Lucy, urges Maggie to follow desire and elope with him. Philip, a school-time rival of Tom's and the son of Mr. Tulliver's greatest enemy, urges Maggie to visit him in the Red Deeps and eventually marry him. Although Maggie occasionally submits to their wishes just as she occasionally submits to Tom's wishes, Maggie does not fully commit to the life of pleasure Stephen offers her, the life of friendship Philip could give her, or the life as devoted sister and housekeeper that Tom wants for her. Instead, Maggie struggles against these options, belonging neither to the traditional way of life and the expectations of her brother Tom, nor to the different aspects of modernity that Stephen or Philip try to offer her. By this, I mean that Tom attempts to dominate Maggie's decisions and independence because he expects her to adhere to a life dedicated to her family and their happiness instead of her own, while the two love interests Stephen and Philip try to offer her sexual excitement and social status or intellectual respect and companionship, respectively. Because Maggie is faced with multiple, competing sets of values she seeks a seemingly impossible reconciliation between her desire for independence from Tom and her desire for submission to him. She is unsatisfied with both options because each extreme limits her. She fluctuates between protector and protected and masculine and feminine, which calls attention to

the arbitrary nature of human-created dichotomies; rather than be one or the other, Maggie's character is a blend.

In scholarly criticism, Maggie is discussed as doomed regardless of her choices because of the gender restrictions of her male-dominated world, such as in Marianne Hirsch's "Spiritual Bildung: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm." She is also discussed in terms of how her female bildungsroman being interlaced with her brother's development is "an interrogation of the old" as in Susan Fraiman's essay (Fraiman 139). I argue that Maggie should not be evaluated based upon her success or failure as a limited female figure in a patriarchal society, nor should she be evaluated in terms of feminine development and manipulation of genre. Rather, Maggie as a character exposes how discussion of her as feminine or masculine is limiting in itself, either condemning her to failure or lifting her up as a hero. By either praising or condemning her gender reversals, her individual complexities are swallowed up and she has no place left in such a divided world. She is essentially lost in the gap between her intelligence and her emotion—or her traits which are arbitrarily labeled as masculine or feminine, respectively. On one side, Maggie is unable to be the stereotypical sensitive homemaker and doting female because of her desire for agency, while on the other side, Maggie is unable to gain respect for the stereotypically male traits of intellect and rational thought that she indubitably possesses.

I argue that Maggie is not entirely some feminist crusader, nor is she a docile traditionalist. Here, a feminist crusader would be a figure that seeks to destroy the traditional society comprised of the people of St. Ogg's—people like the Dodsons and Tullivers. A docile traditionalist, on the other hand, would be an individual entirely resisting the disintegration of a binary gender system, complete with the maintaining of strict regulations and roles for both males and females. Maggie "lives in the liminal zone between traditional and modern

arrangements of gender and power” (Esty 150). Maggie aches to fuse her own identity with the existence of gendered identities around her, rather than completely destroy the system she was raised in. In this way, Maggie fits in neither extreme end. Instead, she is attempting to find the middle, neutral ground even as she is continually required to make choices that question the possibility of such a neutral space. Her period of martyrdom and self-denial when under the sway of the philosophy of Thomas á Kempis in Book Fourth reveals the insufficiency of seeking out one way of living or the other. It serves as another example of how Maggie is unfulfilled by the simplicity of having only two options for each choice—to adhere to expectation or to upend them.

Maggie attempts to turn to emotional satisfaction after satisfaction through intelligence has failed. According to Marianne Hirsch, female protagonists can either conform to an inner life, sealing their fate as undeveloped, limited puppets who serve only to get married like Cinderella or Snow White, or they can resist that reduction into a passive life, making a “willful withdrawal” into self-development like Antigone (Hirsch 24). In this way, Maggie would be doomed to follow “a discontinuous, circular path which, rather than moving forward, culminates in a return to origins, thereby distinguishing itself from the traditional plot outlines of the Bildungsroman” regardless of whether she chooses to abide by her family’s expectation to retain tradition or whether she chooses to thwart that tradition (Hirsch 25). I argue that, rather than follow either of those “circular paths,” Maggie seeks to reconcile the two, forming a new path that could promise the success that Hirsch deems impossible, in order to plunge ahead.

One of the first scenes in which the precocious Maggie appears is centered on her reading and sharing of a controversial book, even though it is “not quite the right book for a little girl” (Eliot 67). Would it be the right book for a little boy? The result of Maggie’s intrusion into the

male conversation is to be admonished in a “patronising tone” for not reading “prettier books” that suit young ladies (Eliot 67). In this way, Maggie is confronting not only the expectations for her age, but also the expectations for her gender. Because of this transgression, she is consequently relegated to seeing after her mother and the domestic duties of the house, only to find her way to “a dark corner behind her father’s chair” to play with the doll that she “had an occasional fit of fondness” towards “in Tom’s absence” (Eliot 67-68). The doll she turns to offers no solace, just as her brother would not fulfill the need if he were at home. Both her brother and her doll are unsatisfying. Likewise, the fulfillment a girl would be expected—by the nineteenth-century society of St. Ogg’s—to find at helping her mother in the home falls short for Maggie and is instead inflicted as a sort of punishment that she eludes by hiding in the shadows. She is removed from the male adult conversation only to reject the place at her mother’s side. That, too, is rejected in order to play with a doll, but she finds no joy in that either. Her only option at this point is to turn away and resign herself to the dark corners of the room. She has not yet forged that new path—a combination of traditional and modern or the outer and inner life—that could promise her success and happiness. Even her traditionalist father realizes that she is an unusual subject in her given time and place; he declares that she knows “what one’s talking about so as never was” (Eliot 69, 66).

Her mother, to whom Maggie was supposed to retreat to in this scene, believes Maggie to be “half a idiot i’ some things” because she is forgetful in running errands. According to Anna Marutullo, “Although Maggie cherishes the spaces of early childhood, she refuses to adhere to their domestic constraints, and as a result, finds herself not only identified as difficult and devilish... but also swept to the side of her family home” (Marutullo 2). If Maggie were swept aside by her mother, who already believes in Maggie’s naughtiness, this scene would merely

reaffirm Mrs. Tulliver's attitude towards her difficult daughter. Because the dismissal comes from Mr. Tulliver, who is proud of his daughter's intelligence, this scene shows to what extent Maggie is excluded and isolated from her family and their society; she is rejected even by her biggest advocate. In this scene, Maggie is, quite literally, swept to the side because of her unusual intelligence that will inevitably "turn to trouble" (Eliot 66). After all, Maggie's cleverness is "no mischief much while she's a little un, but an over 'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep—she'll fetch none the bigger price for that" (Eliot 60). Maggie is tossed between an authoritative space and a domestic space, or, according to Hirsch, "the outer and the inner life, the dichotomization that propels man outside and confines woman inside" (Hirsch 24). Because she is too confined to inner life to belong alongside her father and remain a part of the discussion concerning a worldly education, while also being too intelligent and motivated to withdraw entirely into the space occupied by a traditional, simple woman like her mother, Maggie is irreparably alone in the house.

Ironically, this scene from Maggie's childhood takes place as Mr. Tulliver discusses the upcoming education of Maggie's brother. While Maggie's quickness in reading generates shame in the foreground, Tom's lack of interest when it concerns traditional book-learning hardly dampens the hopefulness of his future in the background. In this way, regardless of ability or ambition, Tom has more potential for that success simply because of his gender. While this may not be surprising in a nineteenth-century novel, it nonetheless defines both Tom and Maggie. Tom will adhere to his role as future leader of the family, regardless of if he fits into the business world or at the head of decision-making, while Maggie already struggles with her role as future housekeeper. Despite Maggie's capable intelligence and desire for scholarship, she is pushed aside to make way for her brother, even though he is physically absent from this scene and he is

“slow with his tongue... reads but poorly... an’ you never hear him say ‘cute things like the little wench” (Eliot 69). Maggie’s father laments the “topsy-turvy” nature of having “stupid lads and ‘cute [acute] wenches” (Eliot 69). Mr. Tulliver also believes it to be a “pity” that Maggie was not born a boy because “she’d ha’ been a match for the lawyers, *she* would” (Eliot 68). The emphasis placed on the “she” here suggests that Tom is, in some ways, unfit for the education of a gentleman and businessman, and certainly less fit than Maggie would have been had she been born a male. After all, “Girls were educated for a life of dependency; they were trained to be homemakers, denied the opportunity to develop skills which would enable them to claim a place in a man’s world” (Gunes 104). Maggie, then, cannot utilize the intelligence she possesses in the outside world. This turns Maggie into an outcast within the sphere she is supposed to reside in; she is shoved to the shadows by those who are supposed to love her most. Much like the women drowned as witches in her unfit book *The History of the Devil*, Maggie is misunderstood and reduced to either an unfortunate victim or a guilty sinner—either way she is condemned (Eliot 66). Maggie is conscious of the injustice of her book, just as she is conscious of the injustice of her situation.

Maggie’s loneliness resulting from her quashed potential creates a need within her to find the approval she has been denied. Because she thinks it “evident” that people find her “silly and of little consequence,” Maggie seeks affection and protection, mainly from the brother she adores and wishes to care for, in order to find her usefulness, even as she is continually turned away (Eliot 74). I argue that, after her expulsion from her father’s conversation, Maggie views her only acceptable path to be to “go on with” her patchwork “like a little lady,” to adore the male figures like Tom in her life, and to eventually “keep his house” as an adult (Eliot 61, 81). The restrictive nature of the expectations her parents have for her and her brother in both

childhood and adulthood influences Maggie's motivations throughout her life. She internalizes her parents' dismissal of her as a child and holds onto these ideas as an adult. She believes her only path to be the path her family chose for her, even though she personally disagrees with it. Maggie believes that Tom is "brave" like "Samson," and if a lion ever should threaten her, he would come to her rescue (Eliot 86). This, too, is dismissed as "silly," much like Maggie herself, because, as Tom says, "the lion *isn't* coming" (Eliot 87). When judged for practical value by Tom, both Maggie's words of devotion and Maggie herself are dismissed as insignificant. Rather than having her care for her brother be reciprocated, Maggie becomes further ostracized by her brother, who cannot relate to either her imaginative intelligence or her powerful emotion.

Even though "the need of being loved" is the "strongest need in poor Maggie's nature," Tom claims to rescind his love every time he becomes cross with his sister (Eliot 89). Essentially, he does not come to save her from any of her "lions" (Eliot 87). For Maggie, the existence of threats to her happiness, success, and well-being are real and recognized, as when she relates to the drowned women in *The History of the Devil*. For Tom, however, no lions or obstacles exist for himself or for his sister. He believes that Maggie's concerns are petty and insignificant even though she feels their significance deeply. Maggie, first blocked because of her unwelcome cleverness, is then blocked from the only avenue of usefulness for a little girl who cannot seem to do anything quite right—devotion to family. "What use was anything if Tom didn't love her? O, he was very cruel... She knew she was naughty to her mother, but she had never been naughty to Tom—had never meant to be naughty to him" (Eliot 89). Tom is more of an authority for Maggie than her own mother, who is characterized as a woman that Mr. Tulliver picked because "she wasn't o'er 'cute [acute]" and because "she was a bit weak, like" (Eliot 68). Tom takes control of his sister, expecting her to acquiesce to his demands like his mother does to

his father. After all, Tom “shall be a man,” while Maggie is “only a girl” (Eliot 87). To Tom, this seems to be the natural progression and the only path to follow. To Maggie, this path is frustrating and unfair. Tom’s relationship with Maggie, then, is a source of conflict for her, while only being an occasional inconvenience to him when she does not follow her expected duty towards him. He sees his job clearly—to provide for and protect her—but he is unable to see how Maggie struggles to follow the expectations he and others have for her.

Maggie’s rebellious actions contain indispensable pieces of her nurturing habits. As soon as she finds herself amongst the gypsies, Maggie laments “I want my tea so,” while also changing her disdain for her bonnet into a welcome comfort (Eliot 174, 178). She immediately wishes herself back into her role within the Dodson and Tulliver families of St. Ogg’s, even after Tom’s repeated punishment. Later in life, when misfortune strikes the family, Maggie takes on additional plain sewing work to help the family even as she fantasizes running away; she remains because of the “one father and one sorrow” she shares with Tom and her idea that there are other happinesses besides her own that she is responsible for (Eliot 285). She cannot forsake her restricting life at home with her family because she feels she has a duty to and an affection for them, even if rational thought, her friend Philip Wakem, powerful emotion, or even her desire for Stephen Guest calls on her to do so.

Just as Maggie contradicts the expectations for her intelligence by being adept at reading, Maggie falls short of fully submitting without protest to her brother. This is evident in childhood during Maggie’s visit to Tom at Mr. Stelling’s house. According to Susan Fraiman, “Maggie’s wishes to learn Latin... typify her futile efforts to make Tom’s *Bildung* her own” (Fraiman 141). In trying to prove herself worthy of Tom’s love and protection, she attempts to gain the education she was denied. She not only strives to reach a potential that only she sees in herself,

but she also strives after Tom's narrative as a boy who will become a man and "make a nest for himself" (Eliot 65). Rather than finding peace by learning alongside her brother, the two "tend, rather, to pull each other off balance, to conflict with and contest each other" (Fraiman 141).

While it is true that Tom is a source of conflict for Maggie, I argue that Tom is not merely an antagonistic force that pushes Maggie further down. Instead, he is a force that drives Maggie towards her own development, thus making him a less negative force than has been suggested. Maggie does not try to coopt Tom's development; but, rather she tries to make room for her own alongside his. Tom, here, is subjected to the same problematic reduction that plagues the heroine. Tom "feels unhappy and threatened by his sister's intellectual ability, and thus he continuously displays aggressive attitudes towards her to establish himself as superior in intellect" (Gunes 109). Tom, through this scene at Stelling's, allows us not only to see the problems Maggie faces and how she attempts to overturn them, but it also shows us Tom's vulnerability. He, too, is expected to achieve success according to his sex. Both children are simultaneously trying to prove that they are worthy of the space society has left to them and prove that they are worthy of the role they play in their sibling relationship. But because Tom has the advantage of his sex, he is often perceived in a negative way by more recent readers, while Maggie is championed as a hero for attempting to seize Tom's *Bildung*. Maggie is left unsupported and undermined by Tom's harsh words, and she is told by Tom's schoolmaster that girls have "a great deal of superficial cleverness: but they couldn't go far into everything. They're quick and shallow" (Eliot 220-221). This reinforces Tom's claim that "girls can't do Euclid," which in turn dents Maggie's previously held belief that she should be proud of her quickness (Eliot 220). Instead, her "quickness" is suddenly a "brand of inferiority" (Eliot 221). Maggie learns that even her intelligence—her main source of pride—is inferior to Tom's simply

because it is she who possesses it. The value of her intellect is not inherently inferior, but rather, the value placed upon her intellect is much less than the value placed upon Tom's intellect.

Because Tom is able to 'win' this sibling contest, he is seen as the antagonistic force even though it is the Mr. Stellings of society that quash Maggie's intellectual victory. Maggie is undermined while Tom is reassured.

This reassurance of Tom makes him more of a "Rhadamanthine personage, having more than the usual share of boys' justice in him—the desire to hurt culprits as much as they deserve to be hurt" (Eliot 107). He, of course, never believes that he deserves the punishment of such a black-and-white justice system because the black-and-white system maintains his superiority while it subjugates his competition—Maggie. Because he enforces this system upon his younger sister, Maggie rejects the decidedness of judging one way or the other—making her repeatedly regret and reconsider her decisions and forcing her to make choices that she feels are impossible. She is able to recognize the injustice of such a system because of Tom's blindness to it. Maggie never fails to react, to her own chagrin, as when she runs away in tears after the jam puff incident or when she runs away to be with the gypsies, full of the emotional, irrational understanding of a child. Her fits of emotional rebellion against these injustices and reductions—or the moments when "demons" somehow take "possession of Maggie's soul"—are boilings up of her resentment for this simplistic system (Eliot 161). Her rebellions are perceived as irrational, rather than the rational response to injustice. Ironically, Maggie's intelligence works alongside the expected traditions of love and devotion, rather than in its normal position as an opposing force to emotion. In these instances, emotion becomes the issue that drives Maggie away from others, even though emotion is supposed to be a championed female virtue. It would appear, then, that these qualities are fluid—not belonging on either side of a feminine-masculine scale. I argue that

the relationship between Maggie and her brother draws out the fluidity of such qualities. Rather than being binaries themselves, or being opposing forces, Tom serves as a complement to his sister. He is a catalyst and a constant by which we can see Maggie's development and struggle. He, as a black-and-white character who advocates for black-and-white categorization of individuals, brings out the necessary complexity of Maggie and the way in which she spills over into categories not expected for her.

For example, Maggie is often shown to be a "spitfire" who is too full of emotion. So not only does this character have extreme intelligence, she also has extreme emotion. Although it is most certainly a stereotype to say that the female side of Maggie's character is the irrational and the emotional, while the male side of her is her intelligence and ambition for worldly knowledge and scholarship, it is important to note that Eliot's construction of pitting the irrational against the intellectual within Maggie reflects the conflict between Maggie and her brother and the division between the sexes. According to Joshua Esty, "Eliot does not simply cast doubt on the idea that societies or individuals improve over time, but asks the more radical question of whether societies or individuals can be said to possess any kind of continuous identity over time" (Esty 144). The questionable nature of retaining a single identity throughout one's life also puts into doubt the idea that Maggie is a unified character at all. If Maggie is as indeterminable as Esty suggests, she can hardly belong in Tom's world made up of this-or-that kind of definitions.

Unable to reconcile herself with Tom's simplified system of value judgment, Maggie turns to a friendship with a rival of Tom's—Philip Wakem. In childhood, this attachment is a replacement for the equal relationship that she unsuccessfully sought with her brother. With this replacement sibling, Maggie tries to find an outlet for her "unsatisfied intelligence and unsatisfied, beseeching affection" (Eliot 253). She hopes that, unlike her brother, Philip "would

think her rather clever” while also listen to her eyes that “seem trying to speak—trying to speak kindly” (Eliot 252, 260). In this way, Philip would value her as Tom had not. It is at the moment when Maggie first expresses her growing interest in Philip that Tom announces the surprise he has for Maggie—the sword that he attempts to impress and shock her with. With the sword, Tom attempts to remind Maggie of his superior, masculine knowledge, being “happy in this spectator of his military performances, even though that spectator was only Maggie” (Eliot 255). He subconsciously attempts to regain his power over her attention to keep Maggie disciplined, doting, and degraded. He was, after all, unaware of Maggie’s “lions” and Maggie is now aware of his blindness even as she believes in her own silliness. She is yet unaware of why she believes herself to be deserving of Tom’s justice. Because Tom sees her unjust condition as natural, he is only trying to restore that natural order with this martial display, rather than actively trying to subjugate her. By dangling things that she wants in front of her and then taking them away when she fails to comply—such as when he promises to take her fishing, takes Lucy to the pond in Maggie’s stead, or revokes his love, understanding, or forgiveness—Tom is trying to tame Maggie’s independent thought because he feels it as unnatural when she moves outside of her position as the less important sibling.

Maggie tries to rectify her youthful transgressions that threaten her role as an inferior female by distancing herself from parts of her character to better fit Tom’s definition of what she should be. Maggie becomes more successful at being the dutiful sister because “we learn to restrain ourselves as we get older. We keep apart when we have quarreled, express ourselves in well-bred phrases, and in this way, preserve a dignified alienation, showing much firmness on one side, and swallowing much grief on the other.” (Eliot 91). Rather than learning to expand her youthful desire for intelligence, Maggie learns to smother it by governing herself by Tom’s rules,

attending a boarding school for girls, and by following the “path of martyrdom and endurance” advocated in Thomas á Kempis’ book, which she discovers in Book Fourth (Eliot 387). In self-renunciation, Maggie reconciles herself to be a part of the “emmet-like Dodsons and Tullivers,” even though the narrator states that even the reader “could not live among such people. You are stifled for want of an outlet towards something beautiful, great, or noble: you are irritated with these dull people” (Eliot 362-3). If even the reader is assumed to be unable to exist among these simple-minded country people governed by traditional expectations, Maggie is assumed to be equally unable to cope with such an existence—especially an existence that denies her natural inclination towards “masculine wisdom” and “peculiarly masculine studies” (Eliot 380). After all, “things out o’ natur niver thrive” (Eliot 82).

Despite Maggie’s temporary success at self-renunciation, and thus her success in bending to female expectation for a time, Maggie’s independent thought cannot be erased. Even her martyrdom is her choice—not the choice of others. In some ways, her self-denial is an act of independence and selfishness. According to Paul Yeoh, “Eliot’s depiction of Maggie’s blundering efforts to “apply” the *Imitatio* reveals that self-serving performances of martyrdom are all too readily conflated with genuine Christian sacrifice and forbearance, and saintly emulation is fraught with moral temptations” (Yeoh 4). The authenticity of Maggie’s sacrifice is called into question because of her regression back into having desire for love, independence, and knowledge via her meetings with Philip Wakem in the Red Deeps, and ultimately, her forays with Stephen Guest. Maggie has desires that cannot be crushed or fulfilled. Self-renunciation is not a path to happiness, despite Maggie’s attempt to gain happiness through sacrifice. What makes this important to note is that Maggie sought out sacrifice because of her awareness that

she could not exist either in Tom's sense of the world nor in her own. Rather than attempting to create a space for herself as she had in the past, Maggie attempted to erase herself completely.

I argue that although Maggie saw no way out through compliance, rebellion, or erasure, she was able to reconcile the many pieces of herself in the tragic conclusion of *The Mill on the Floss*. The ending of the novel reinforces rather than undermines Maggie's complexity. I contend that the tragedy serves to unite brother and sister in the space between their previous division and join them in their troubles. This opposes the idea that the ending has "no symbolic or metaphorical value" and that "it is only the dreamed-of perfect accident that gives us the opportunity for the dreamed-of heroic act" (Leavis 45). My reading of the conclusion reconciles the tragedy. Rather than having their unification at the end oppose the way in which brother and sister clashed throughout their lives, the end demonstrates how sorrow truly brought them together throughout life and unto death. This supports my idea that throughout the novel Tom and Maggie repeatedly reconcile their differences and bridge the gap between them, as when they are united at the end of Book Fifth by their father's death. Despite their inability to constantly maintain that union and understanding in life—as a result of Maggie's choices and Tom's hardheadedness—"in their death they were not divided" (Eliot 657). Just as the siblings are able to come together in the flood and in their sorrows, the apparent opposing sides created by gender expectations and a flawed binary system are able to come together. They are not in opposition to each other, just as Tom is not truly Maggie's adversary.

Chapter II: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Far from the Madding Crowd centers on the relationship between Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene over time, making the analysis of these two characters vital in understanding gender in the novel. The first way of reading the characters praises the novel's temperate hero Gabriel Oak and criticizes Bathsheba's autonomy and complex emotions, while the second, epitomized by Rosemarie Morgan in her book *Women and Sexuality in Hardy*, criticizes Oak as a figure who "attempts to subdue and reduce" Bathsheba (Morgan 44). Both extreme ends of criticism, however, fall short of reconciliation between the two competing narratives and thus in understanding the ultimate reconciliation and marriage of Oak and Bathsheba. In reducing Bathsheba and Gabriel to either admirable or deserving of disapproval, the discussion of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* is guilty of furthering that which it attempts to denounce, namely the reduction of individuals into strictly dichotomous ideals of gender. Even though some criticism, especially the work of Linda Shires and Barbara Schapiro, has attempted to rectify this reductionist tendency by claiming that Hardy's characters can maintain contradicting traits and behaviors in a unified figure, most scholarship about this novel utilizes the binaries it criticizes by employing ideas about gender as if the reconciliation of two genders is necessarily significant in understanding a character. I contend that although Bathsheba and Gabriel both provoke discussions about strict Victorian gender roles, as complex characters, they cannot be fully defined by fixed terms, whether that be by their masculinity, femininity, or the expression of both simultaneously. Because these two main characters fall short of successfully managing societal rules for their gender, I argue that these two characters cannot be either completely praised nor completely disdained; they cannot be analyzed merely in terms of how their genders define them. In defining characters through gender, one becomes

guilty of what one poses as the problem. To circumvent this, I must first explain how defining Oak and Bathsheba based on their binary genders limits their usefulness in the discussion of Hardy's novel as a novel that challenges such binary gender roles.

According to Barbara Schapiro, Bathsheba "has provoked the most critical controversy" because "Bathsheba's character throughout the novel sustains the tension of contradictory qualities: she is both manipulative and ingenuous, tough and vulnerable" (Schapiro 11, 13). This frustrates readers because it makes it nearly impossible to judge Bathsheba as a black-and-white, good-or-bad character. This tendency for readers to determine Bathsheba according to dichotomies matters because if Bathsheba is seen as irreconcilably to blame for all her tragedies, the novel becomes a straightforward, conventional marriage plot based around Gabriel Oak and his struggle to get a beautiful wife and her struggle to submit. I argue that rather than being a conventional marriage plot with Gabriel as hero, this novel is Bathsheba's tragedy, in which she tries again and again to control her own marriage plot. Blaming her for her choices, even if they were the wrong ones, ignores Bathsheba's innocence and naiveté while blaming her for attempting to make her own decisions. In this way, Bathsheba is set up for failure regardless of if one sees her as an innocent victim or a capricious heartbreaker.

Although Barbara Schapiro discusses Bathsheba's contradiction in terms of the "dialectic between fantasy and reality that is always in play in love relationships," her understanding of Bathsheba's ability to exist despite her contradictory characteristics supports the idea that, rather than being traditionally feminine or traditionally masculine, Bathsheba is simultaneously and ambiguously both (Schapiro 11). Bathsheba can be described both as a "fair product of Nature in the feminine kind" and as a "tomboy" (Hardy 17, 72). Bathsheba is often mistaken for a man, as when she first encounters Sergeant Troy in the dark and he asks if she is a woman after the

conversation has already begun (Hardy 156). Later, too, her agility as a horse-riding figure obscures her gender and the “two varieties... of humanity” force the assumption from the servant woman Maryann that she is either a woman or a “gipsy man” (Hardy 199). Because “a woman was out of the question in such an occupation,” she is assumed to be a man (Hardy 199). She rides a horse like a man and she acts as owner and managing bailiff to her farm, and thus, Bathsheba behaves in many ways like a man, according to her employees. This masculinity, however, does not diminish her femininity, nor does it detract from her esteemed position as mistress of the farm amongst community members. This confluence of differing, and traditionally opposing, gender expressions is important in understanding Bathsheba as a character because rather than being defined by one gender identity, she is a complex, yet unified character, defined in spite of gender. I argue that, despite this ability of Bathsheba’s to exist outside of her gender, she is not entirely successful. She arguably experiences the most tragedy in the novel.

According to William Mistichelli, Bathsheba is “extremely attractive to men and deeply fond of ‘women’s things’ (Mistichelli 53). Mistichelli uses her love of knitting and flowers as examples of her femininity, but in addition to her superficial likes, Bathsheba also possesses a “peculiar vernal charm,” which significantly connects her to the assertion that she is a “fair product of Nature,” rather than merely connecting her to arbitrary human gender norms like knitting and gardening (Hardy 16, 199). Rather than being charming simply because of her shallow adherences to normative expectations, Bathsheba is described here as naturally charming, much like springtime in the country. In this way, she is not only tied to traditional, arbitrarily feminine likes and dislikes, but she is also tied to motherhood and birth as if her charm is connected with her ability as a woman to bear children. This connection, too, is arbitrary

because Bathsheba does not have any children with her first husband, nor is her role as a character centered around her potential for motherhood. Therefore, her charm does not originate in any feminine connection to a natural birth cycle, nature, or material goods. Attempting to align Bathsheba with nature is a way of reducing her into her gender role as a woman, even if it is less explicit than saying that she likes flowers and pretty things.

According to William Mistichelli, Bathsheba has an “androgyny that is essential to her” (Mistichelli 53-54). Defined as “having the characteristics or nature of both male and female” by Merriam-Webster, androgynous seems to be an insufficient term to describe Bathsheba. Because she possesses both traditionally masculine traits as well as traditionally female traits, Bathsheba can certainly be described as androgynous, but she cannot be defined as merely androgynous, just as she cannot be reduced to either feminine or masculine. This difficulty of categorization and tendency for reduction through definition begins to beg the question as to whether Bathsheba can be defined in terms of her gender. In defining Bathsheba’s character, one may be as limiting as those in the Weatherbury community who attempt to treat her according to their own definitions and expectations.

Despite Bathsheba’s masculinity, or rather her perceived masculinity, she is an object of desire and admiration for at least three men. According to Ellen Sprechman, she gains the attention “of the patient, steady ‘angel in the house’ (Gabriel Oak), the spurned lover, cast aside for a more desirable figure (Boldwood), and the sex object (Sergeant Troy)” (Sprechman 31). In this way, Sprechman harnesses terms generally used to categorize women. By turning the three male characters of this novel into Coventry Patmore’s ‘angel in the house,’ a spinster who was jilted, and an object to be used for pleasure, Sprechman gives Bathsheba the power she is denied in the novel by giving her a patriarchal position in her own marriage plot. While I agree that

Bathsheba holds power over these three men, I contend that her power is easily toppled, not because she is a woman, but because her failure in holding onto power as a woman reveals the arbitrary nature of such power—when given to both men and women. By this I mean that Bathsheba’s tragedies as a result of her subverted power and poor choices brings out the importance of equality and companionship amongst the sexes when love and marriage are involved. William Deresiewicz discusses similar ideas in his article “Thomas Hardy and the History of Friendship Between the Sexes,” in which he explores “how such friendship became possible in England, and how its development depended on women becoming both ‘free’ and self-sufficient” (Deresiewicz 56). He cites Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as one of the foundations for his argument that “they must become the equals of men, and their bond with men must become a relationship of equals: friendship” (Deresiewicz 56). I argue that, through trial-and-error with the wrong men, Bathsheba is ultimately successful in her independence. After all, it is Bathsheba who suggests the marriage with Gabriel at the end of the book—not Gabriel. Therefore, she is ultimately successful in the marriage plot with Gabriel because of her ability for agency and her attempts to control her own fate, as well as Gabriel’s ultimate submission to being her friend, rather than her protector and leader.

In addition to holding a powerful position, she gains the admiration of Weatherbury’s community. She is described as “young and attractive” with a “bright face,” which is certainly praise that one might hear in regards to a beautiful woman, but it could also be used to describe any gender (Hardy 15-16). Because Bathsheba is described in such gender-neutral terms, neither her traditionally masculine traits nor her traditionally feminine traits are the ones that make her most appreciated by or desirable to the people of Weatherbury. If cherished solely for her feminine beauty or solely for her masculine mastery in managing her own farm, Bathsheba

would be esteemed purely because she meets or defies the society's expectations for her. Instead, she is admired as an individual—regardless of her gender. And while this may seem to be reducing her to simply “unique,” I argue that it is not her uniqueness, but her assertion as an independent self that garners esteem. After all, Bathsheba can hardly be considered unique; she is a beautiful young woman who marries the hero.

Discussing Gabriel Oak solely in terms of his gender also unnecessarily limits the understanding of this character. “Just as Bathsheba's character manages to contain opposing attitudes, so the characterization of Gabriel Oak holds in play oppositional tensions” (Schapiro 18). Gabriel Oak is the “pepper-and-salt mixture” of the “brightest period of masculine growth,” characterized by his handsome and reassuring appearance (Hardy 14-15). He is nothing special, but in this way, he embodies the perfect simple country man of rural England, perfect for a situation in which “at home by the fire, whenever you look up, there I shall be—and whenever I look up, there will be you” (Hardy 38). He exhibits his masculinity by acting as guardian to Bathsheba, much like his role as shepherd for his sheep, and he sticks by her side in an almost doglike manner. Some critics refer to his guardianship as more paternal than romantic, and even Bathsheba thinks of him as a sort of brother for much of the novel.

Oak, then, as a protector for his flock and a protector for Bathsheba, exhibits traditional masculinity. It is, however, important to note that Gabriel Oak, much like his dog, was unable to save his sheep from running off a cliff to their death—or perhaps drove them to it through neglect or direct action. This reflects the way in which he was unable to stop Bathsheba from making poor decisions that ultimately hurt her, like pursuing and marrying Troy or awakening monomaniacal obsession in Boldwood with an ill-advised valentine. In this way, Oak's protective masculinity seems insufficient; something is missing from this novel if it is reduced to

a pastoral story about a male protector presiding over a vain young girl with destructive, emotional tendencies. Read in such a way, readers miss the dynamic character development of both Bathsheba and Gabriel as they realize the need for mutual respect and friendship, thus missing the novel's critique of attempting to sustain happiness via power or desire in the institution of marriage. Gabriel Oak, although well-intentioned, is not equipped to make Bathsheba's decisions for her; instead, he is an individual with desires and troubles of his own, who often attempts a somewhat self-righteous correction of his female peer. Linda Shires states:

According to conventional Victorian standards, the appropriate husband for Bathsheba would be the man who could protect her from her woman's weaknesses by giving her security and the wisdom of his maturity. Perhaps these are the values that Oak promotes when he defends Boldwood's marriage offer. However, in terms of the novel, Boldwood is not the right man for Bathsheba—Oak is. And Oak is eminently incapable of protecting her from her sexuality or her choices. He can only watch as she moves in her own way to her moment of self-discovery. (Shires 63)

According to Linda Shires, Gabriel Oak betrays this internal battle with his sexual desire and want of control during the sheep-shearing scene. "On the occasion of sheep-shearing. Oak slips with the knife. Sexuality and jealousy have mastered him momentarily" (Shires 171). Even the stoical Gabriel Oak is subject to his sexuality and masculinity. Sexual desire ultimately is unable to determine the right course of action, whether it be for Gabriel or Bathsheba. Because Gabriel can be driven by his own desire, he cannot or should not be responsible or capable of making decisions for Bathsheba.

Gabriel Oak's patriarchal devotion can be "represented as a form of caretaking more than biopolitical domination" in which "we see him to be feminized, filling the place of the absent mothers of these lambs" (Kreilkamp 476). Ivan Kreilkamp argues that Gabriel Oak is a nurturer more than he is a domineering patriarchal figure. Rather than attempting to reign over Bathsheba by asserting masculine dominance, his protection stems from his desire to care for Bathsheba in much the same way that he cares for his sheep. In this way, Gabriel Oak's protection of Bathsheba, too, could alternatively be interpreted as similar to motherly affection and care, which was a one of the major tenets of Victorian femininity. In some ways, Gabriel Oak is able to be more of a traditional mother than Bathsheba's mother was—the woman who was willing to remove her wedding ring in order to pretend she was "committing the seventh" with her husband—just as he is able to be more of a mother than Bathsheba, who fails to produce children in her marriage with Sergeant Troy (Hardy 66). He, too, is the one that continually blushes—not Bathsheba—which is "a curious nature for a man" even though "'tis very well for a woman" (Hardy 27, 62-3). "Oak's traits of passivity, modesty, and trusting patience belong to the gender role that Victorians attributed to the female, a role most explicitly defined (as the opposite of Bathsheba) by the chorus of locals... He does not... attempt to repress the feminine in himself. Rather, he attempts to repress male desire" (Shires 166). As in the case of Bathsheba, I argue that Gabriel is not a character that can adequately be defined as purely masculine or feminine, or even androgynous. Rather, he attempts to reconcile the competing definitions of his character's gender by repressing any force that attempts to dominate any other piece of his characterization, namely, his masculine desire.

Both Bathsheba and Gabriel grapple with the ways in which their expected gender presentations break out of the categories available. Bathsheba struggles to be both independent

and feminine, while Gabriel struggles to protect and nurture Bathsheba despite his own potentially dangerous desires to control her. William Mistichelli contends that “transference of sexual traits—the adoption by women of attitudes or roles commonly held to be exclusively male, or vice-versa—in one sense promises a greater share of creative power and self-determination. At the same time, because these choices run counter to that which is socially condoned, they pose a serious threat to those who engage in them” (Mistichelli 54). In this way at least, both Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak seem to embody this dual-sexuality that condemns them to tragedy. So why, then, does Thomas Hardy’s novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* end with their long-awaited marriage?

This marriage comes about gradually, as both Gabriel and Bathsheba recognize their faults. As Gabriel suppresses masculine desire in himself, he becomes less of the self-righteous voyeur and more of a friend to Bathsheba. By the end, he shares his desire to leave England for America with Bathsheba, not because he no longer cares for her, but because he recognizes his inability to possess her as a wife and the way in which people will talk of the two of them if he remains in her employment with such a known desire. When she is distressed at the news, saying that she is now “more helpless than ever,” he cites her “helplessness” as his reason for going (Hardy 363). He has successfully withdrawn his wish to control her through protective influences, just as he has overcome any risk of taking advantage of Bathsheba’s vulnerability. It is through her misery at recognizing the impending loss of “the only true friendship she had ever owned” that drives her to visit him (Hardy 367). Their union is not particularly romantic because “pretty phrases and warm expressions” are “unnecessary between such tried friends” (Hardy 368). The narrator asserts at this point that:

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 not 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.

(Hardy 368)

By the end of the novel, then, Gabriel conquers his desire to possess Bathsheba, thus gaining her friendship. Their union comes only when he is able to recognize the limitations of his masculine power and she is able to recognize the fault in her previous longing to be desired and worshipped—but never truly possessed—like some sort of feminine goddess.

Despite the lack of a tragic blow at the conclusion of this novel, the reversal of traditional gender roles and the inclusion of traits that fail to match expectation creates the obstacles necessary for earlier, frequent tragedies. In this way, readers might expect Hardy to end the novel tragically. Perhaps that is why Rosemarie Morgan argues the marriage of Bathsheba and Gabriel is a form of tragedy because as a result of the union, “Bathsheba is but a ghost of her former self” and “Bathsheba's fearless spirit is finally broken” (Morgan 56-7). After all, in the final chapter, Bathsheba is said to “never laugh readily now” (Hardy 373). Unlike Morgan, however, Linda Shires believes the ending is a “validation of friendship as the only fitting rationale for marriage” (Shires 166). I contend that the novel concludes in their marriage as a way of satisfying the expectation that the two were bound to be together, whether as friends, family, or lovers, but through that satisfaction, it is revealed that such a belief—that Bathsheba must marry Gabriel—is incorrect. Bathsheba, regardless of her traditional marriage plot ending, still endured

tragedy. That tragedy does not become lessened by her marriage to Gabriel, as could be hoped; instead, the tragedy becomes more poignant, not because Gabriel Oak succeeds in “taming” or suppressing the heroine, but because Gabriel Oak’s efforts hardly matter, even when readers start to hope that he can be the one to make Bathsheba happy. I argue that the marriage ending of *Far from the Maddening Crowd* is not a way of subduing Bathsheba. It is a way of showing the inevitable tragedy that is only punctuated with brief periods of respite. After all, some of the locals share their pessimistic belief that the way Gabriel refers to Bathsheba as “his wife” will be spoken “a little chillier” in about twenty years (Hardy 373). The novel, too, ends with Joseph Poorgrass, a farmhand, saying “But ‘tis as ‘tis, why, it might have been worse, and I feel my thanks accordingly” (Hardy 374). This makes the ending not necessarily the happy ending one could have hoped for in a typical love story; but, rather, it is a story in which the two main characters accept their faults and accept the faults of the other, as they accept the imperfect nature of human relationships.

I contend that even though Joseph Poorgrass believes the union means “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone,” I argue that Poorgrass, because he is not aware that Oak intended to leave the country and leave Bathsheba alone to run the farm, is unable to recognize Oak’s transformation in conquering his previously self-motivated desires (Hardy 374). While it is true that early in the novel Gabriel saw Bathsheba as a vain and beautiful figure who would be a lovely farmer’s wife, by the end, Gabriel does not offer Bathsheba a “nice snug little farm” or “a piano in a year or two” (Hardy 36-7). He instead offers to let her have her independence from him. She, too, has changed. Instead of wanting to be “a bride at a wedding” but “without a husband,” Bathsheba now marries Gabriel at “the most private, secret, plainest wedding that it is possible to have” (Hardy 38, 369). The changes in the two characters signal the acceptance they

have for each other because they no longer need anything but each other to entice them to marry. Oak no longer expects material goods to gain a woman's hand, and Bathsheba no longer expects him to offer it.

In conclusion, this novel challenges a binary system for gender definition because Hardy explores the relationship between Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene as a relationship that evolves as the two recognize their own limitations, the limitations of others, and the way in which equality can break down those limitations. While the ending is not a tragedy, it is also not an erasure of the previous tragedies that shape the plot. Rather, this novel serves to break down gender expectations by exposing the heartbreak that accompanies such a system instead of ignoring the amount of struggle needed to overcome such obstacles.

Conclusion

These two novels, connected by the interpersonal relationships of Tom and Maggie and Gabriel and Bathsheba, are useful in understanding the many ways in which gender can be expressed, whether today or in Victorian England. Although many people in the time period no doubt subscribed to Ruskin and Patmore's ideas about 'the weaker sex' and the specific duties required of either sex—like the Tullivers of St. Ogg's or the country people of Weatherbury—George Eliot and Thomas Hardy were not of those beliefs. This is evidenced by the ways in which their characters circumvent social expectations and gender roles in order to criticize the need for such a thing.

If one reads Maggie as a character who struggles as a result of the gap between the supposedly opposite desires she possesses—to please and serve others and to fulfill her need for agency—the criticism in the novel becomes one of the arbitrary origins of such a gap and the forces that have created it. This is important because, if one reads Maggie and her indecisiveness as the root cause of her trouble, or if one reads Tom as the source of Maggie's pain, one risks blaming individual characters for the faults of humankind in general. One would also risk praising Maggie too heavily, as if she deserves one's pity as a helpless victim. Doubtless, she would not want to be pitied as a character without choice; she does, after all, continually assert her right to have a choice.

If Bathsheba is read to be likeable or unlikable, one fails to see how the ways in which she abides by or breaks the expectations for her gender influence how she is seen by others, including readers. Instead, Bathsheba should be read as a growing character, who fails again and again to show the infallibility of individuals, including fictional characters. If one finds that they feel pure disdain or pure admiration for Bathsheba, I argue that this signals the need to further understand why that is so. Because Bathsheba is a nuanced character, much like Maggie, it

reveals one's own gender expectations to understand her in black-and-white terms. In this way, perhaps, some Toms with "Rhadamanthine" tendencies still exist.

Future conversations about gender in the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy could include even wider definitions of sex and gender. As understanding of intersectionality, feminism, and gender evolve and expand to include more individuals, the understanding of such characters as Maggie Tulliver, Tom Tulliver, Bathsheba Everdene, and Gabriel Oak could be explored in terms of sexual orientation and gender expression.

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