

Force of nature:
storms in hardy's far
from the madding
crowd



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In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Thomas Hardy uses nature to influence the actions of his shepherd and shepherdess protagonists, Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak, in two separate episodes involving rain storms. The conflict of Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* centers upon Bathsheba Everdene's battle with and between her three suitors, Gabriel Oak, William Boldwood, and Francis Troy—and the battle involving the suitors themselves. Each of these four characters faces internal conflicts with his or her own desires, motives, and emotions, in addition to conflicts with each other. The plot follows Bathsheba's relationship with each of these men and climaxes with a physical meeting of the three suitors, in which one is shot dead. Bathsheba and Gabriel seem to share the role of protagonist, but Gabriel is ultimately seen as the hero of the novel. The novel is set in the fictional area of Wessex, England in the equally fictional shire, Weatherbury. These places represent Hardy's vision of the ideal rural setting. Though a time period is never specified, the reader assumes that the novel takes place during the late Victorian period, when Hardy lived and wrote. Hardy uses a third person omniscient narrator in order to provide the reader with insight into each character's thoughts and situations. His characters are very in touch with nature, especially the main characters, who are a shepherd and shepherdess. Throughout the novel, nature acts as a driving force or a symbol of a character's actions and choices. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy uses parallel episodes that pertain to nature, such as fire in the hut and hayricks and rain on the farm and at the grave to compare and contrast character motives and development, as well as to accentuate the overall themes in the novel.

In both chapters mentioned, nature provides the outlet for certain character traits to be revealed. In Chapter XXXVII, the storm serves as an overarching symbol of Troy's destructiveness in Bathsheba's life. The physical storm, as well as the storm that Troy causes in Bathsheba, inspires a greater sense of protectiveness in the already devoted Gabriel. Additionally, these elements allow Bathsheba's true feelings to shine through as she spontaneously confesses that she "...care[s] a little for [Gabriel's] good opinion..." for "it would be dreadful that [he] should always think mistakenly of [her]" (p. 286).

Chapter XXXVII covers the scenario in which a great storm approaches Bathsheba's farm, where uncovered hayricks lie. The storm awakens Bathsheba and she heads to the ricks to find Gabriel thatching. She asks Gabriel where her husband is, as he had promised "...that the stacks should be seen to..." (p. 282). However, "...they are all neglected!" (p. 282). While Troy neglected his duties to Bathsheba and the farm while getting the farmhands drunk in the barn, Gabriel took on responsibilities that were not his and saved the ricks from the storm. In this chapter, Hardy emphasizes the beauty of the destructive storm. Though it could have destroyed all of Bathsheba's harvest, and did destroy Boldwood's, the majesty of the storm is most highly revered. Through narration, the reader sees that Gabriel, in contact with the love of his life, realizes that during the storm, "...love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe" (p. 284). Also under the influence of the majestic storm, Bathsheba "[spoke] more warmly to [Gabriel that] night than she had ever done whilst unmarried and free to speak as warmly as she chooses" (p. 288). This chapter shows Gabriel's heart of gold in the midst of turmoil and Bathsheba's true emotions for Gabriel begin to show through her stern front.

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Gabriel's protectiveness is shown through his willingness to sacrifice his own safety for the protection of the hayricks, and, in turn, the protection of Bathsheba's harvest's profit. Hardy's narrator contributes, mentioning that Gabriel speaks to Bathsheba "gently as a mother" (p. 287). During their work upon the ricks together, Bathsheba says, "' Gabriel, you are kinder than I deserve!" (p. 285). Additionally, upon Bathsheba's final departure from the ricks and Gabriel, she says "' Thank you for your devotion, a thousand times, Gabriel! Good-night—I know you are doing your very best for me'" (p. 287). This quote, nearing the end of the chapter, shows the emerging relationship between Bathsheba and Gabriel that the nature of the disastrous storm inspired.

The parallel chapter, Chapter XLVI, emphasizes not Gabriel as a suitor, but Troy. Though the courting and marriage between Bathsheba and Troy has ended, this chapter serves to emphasize Troy's true character, undeserving of Bathsheba, or any woman's true devotion. The two storms serve to contrast each of these suitors and foreshadow Bathsheba's final destination of marriage to Gabriel. Chapter XLVI opens at the Weatherbury Tower, beside the graveyard in which Fanny Robin is buried, and describes in detail the gargoyles with water spouts. In Chapter XLVI, a storm comes through the graveyard where Fanny Robin is buried. A gargoyle's spout from the Weatherbury Tower funnels a stream of water onto Fanny's grave where Troy had prepared a shrine for her. In a matter of time, the storm destroyed all of Troy's work and left the grave in shambles. Troy awoke to find the storm's destruction and was immediately dismayed. He abandoned the grave and carried on, "eluding grief by simply adjourning it" (p. 359).

However, upon Bathsheba's visit to Fanny's grave and realization that Troy had erected the monument for Fanny, she asked that Gabriel assist her in refurbishing the grave, moving the gargoyle spout, and replanting the flowers in honor of Fanny. It is later mentioned that around Fanny's grave are "...flowers so carefully planted by Fanny's repentant lover..." (p. 357). This statement makes apparent Troy's reluctance of his actions. However, the reader's empathy is quickly revoked after the rain storm destroys his handiwork and he abandons all efforts. Hardy emphasizes Bathsheba's newfound compassion. Though emotionally destroyed by Troy's storm, she finds in her heart the motivation to rebuild Fanny's grave. Later it is evident that Bathsheba had hope of Troy's return. Bathsheba's motives are clear, but her actions show a growing compassion. In addition to showing true character in these chapters, Hardy uses the same natural elements to motivate changes in his characters throughout the novel. Hardy uses these two chapters to exemplify a growing change in Bathsheba. In Chapter XXXVII, the reader sees an inkling of respect for Gabriel's opinion on behalf of Bathsheba. The incident with Gabriel on the ricks serves as a catalyst for the transformation of Bathsheba seen in Chapter XLVI. In Chapter XXXVII, Gabriel's natural instinct to protect is drawn out by the approaching storm. He questions himself, " Was his life so valuable to him after all? What were his prospects that he should be so chary of running risk, when important and urgent labor could not be carried on with such risk? He resolved to stick to the stack" (p. 281). Gabriel willingly puts himself in harm's way to protect Bathsheba's harvest. This parallels to his willingness and attempts to protect Bathsheba from Troy, the storm. Though Gabriel doesn't change much during the story, Hardy uses nature and the changes in Bathsheba to

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emphasize Gabriel's loyalty, honesty, and dedication. In this chapter, it is also apparent that Bathsheba's coldness towards Gabriel is melting. The reader sees physical touch between Bathsheba and Gabriel as she "... clutch[es] him by the sleeve" and he is caught "...holding her arm" (p. 283). Here, as the intensity of the magnanimous storm is described, Hardy uses nature to draw Bathsheba and Gabriel into close contact. Originally, upon Gabriel's proposal and then throughout the story, Bathsheba tends to push Gabriel away. However, during this storm, Bathsheba confesses her trust in Gabriel and draws both physically and emotionally closer to him. While Bathsheba's changes in Chapter XXXVII pertain mostly to her relationship with Gabriel, Chapter XLVI relates those changes to her character as a whole. Bathsheba remains the same in that she continues to have a romantic interest in Troy, despite proof that he is untrustworthy and unworthy of her attention. Bathsheba does, however, change in her compassion. Throughout the story, the readers sees Bathsheba's concern for Fanny after Fanny's disappearance and then death. However, Chapter XLVI, physicalizes this concern as Bathsheba takes on the responsibility of refurbishing Fanny's destroyed grave. When Troy's work at Fanny's grave was destroyed, Bathsheba, with the help of ever faithful Gabriel, replants the flowers, has the spout repaired, and cleans the gravestone. Bathsheba shows compassion and selflessness that she did not exhibit in the other sections of the novel. Additionally, in Chapter XLVI, the reader sees a lack of change in Troy. Though his love for Fanny is evident, his selfishness is shown even more strongly when he abandons her grave after his work was destroyed. However, Bathsheba's compassion makes up for Troy's lack of true caring. Troy, on the other hand, abandoned the grave and his previous efforts after <https://assignbuster.com/force-of-nature-storms-in-hardys-far-from-the-madding-crowd/>

seeing the destruction of the shrine. While Bathsheba's growth is positive, Troy reverts back into selfishness. Changes in the characters, as well as their traits, lend to overarching themes and symbols within the novel as whole. Hardy uses nature to foreshadow events and thus nature acts as an element of fate.

As previously mentioned, storms, usually bringing destruction, tend to symbolize Troy. In both chapters analyzed, Troy is involved in actions transpiring during a storm. In Chapter XXXVII, the storm both symbolizes and foreshadows the destruction that Troy has and will have on Bathsheba's personality and life. Chapter XLVI finds nature acting as fate and punishing Troy. During the storm on the hayricks, Troy is in the barn with the drunken farm hands whom he is responsible for. Troy was also responsible for protecting the ricks, but fails to do so. Essentially, his presence brought destruction to the farm, as the storm also did. Bathsheba's affections towards Gabriel during the first storm also foreshadow her true feelings for him that become embodied in their marriage later on. While nature acted as both a symbol and element of foreshadowing in Chapter XXXVII, nature serves as an element of fate in Chapter XLVI. In Chapter XLVI, nature, by means of a rain storm, acts as fate punishing Troy for his wrongdoings to Bathsheba and in retrospect, Fanny Robin. The storm that comes after the burial of Fanny acts as a disciplinary by ruining Troy's hard work on Fanny's grave. It appears to be a sense of karma, to punish Troy for the way he manipulated Bathsheba. Bathsheba truly loved Troy, so in return for his wrongdoings, nature took from him his true love during natural birth and then nature destroyed the shrine he made for her. This incident seems to

embody the idea that Troy himself is a destructive storm by yet again turning his actions into destruction. Nature, in the form of storms, ultimately shapes Troy and Bathsheba as characters, and in turn highlights the character traits of Gabriel.

Within the novel, nature serves to emphasize character traits, catalyze actions, and symbolize thematic elements. While Chapters XXXVII and XLVI focus mostly on Bathsheba's changes as a character, Chapter XXXVII highlights Gabriel's character traits and Chapter XLVI characterizes Troy. Both chapters also symbolize Troy's influence over Bathsheba's life. The storms become symbolic of Troy's mistakes and wrongdoings. Nature, these storms, in particular, contribute to making Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* a pastoral novel. Nature is central and heavily described, lending to the importance of natural semblance in the novel; especially concerning Bathsheba and her suitors. Hardy also uses the contrast between Gabriel and Troy to emphasize the idealization of rural life.

Works Cited

Hardy, Thomas. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. New York: Bantam Dell, 1982. Print.