THE FARMING BODY IN THOMAS HARDY'S *FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD*

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Abstract

This paper discusses the state of the Victorian agricultural body as assessed and represented in Victorian literature and culture. Examining mid-nineteenth century periodical articles on English farmers and the mid- and late-century legislative reform movements in the military and agricultural sectors, I first demonstrate how Victorians re-configured the English agricultural body in juxtaposition to the military body within the discourse of Victorian heroism. Focusing on issues around the two groups' class, gender, and socio-economic status and on their overlapping roles in national and individual protection, I argue that the Victorian agricultural body worked as a central site to address both cultural anxieties and expectations about the condition of English society in times of national insecurity, brought on by intense international military and economic rivalries. I read Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) as a novel that reflects such contemporary concerns, arguing that Hardy explores the precarious position of the English agricultural body, positioning it as superior to the military hero. I suggest that Hardy in this novel envisions the English agriculturist, despite his susceptibility to changes in his surroundings, as an important Victorian economic body and an ideal heroic model that contributes to the emotional, economic, and moral regeneration of the English nation. Through farming protagonists who take control of both monetary and emotional currencies of agrarian society, Hardy provides a forward-looking vision of English farming life that embraces both stability and progress.

Parliamentary debates on the Enlistment Bill and the Repeal of the Corn Laws in the late 1840s and early 1850s made the Victorian military and farming body, in both its collective and individual senses, objects of public scrutiny.[1] Traditionally, the

[1] In general, I use the term 'body' to refer to actual physical parts and features of fictional characters in Hardy's novel. But when I say 'the agricultural body' and 'the military body', I use them in a sense that articles in mid-century agricultural periodicals like *Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette (GCAG)* and *Farmer's Magazine* called tenant-farmers 'the agricultural body' to emphasise their group identity bounded by a common destiny: the much-beset socio-economic conditions and disoriented sensibilities that tenant-farmers and soldiers faced and shared. For the periodicals' usage of 'the agricultural body', see 'The Corn Laws', *GCAG*, (14 Feb 1846), p. 110; C. W. H., *GCAG*, (25 July 1846), p. 505; 'Society for the Protection of Agriculture and British Industry', *Farmer's Magazine*, 15 (Jan. 1847), p. 72. 'The British Farmer' called tenant-farmers 'the most valuable body of agriculturists' (*Farmer's Magazine,* 22:2 (Aug. 1850), p. 92). Pamela Gilbert, in *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004) uses the term 'the social body' as 'a concept increasingly associated with spatial forms of

military was regarded as 'one of the great instruments of our national supremacy and pride'.[2] Agriculture was seen as 'the foundation of every other art, business, and profession'.[3] Even in the early 1840s, the idea of English farmers as 'the bone and sinew of the nation' circulated widely.[4] However, revealing a weakened and/or weakening status of the British army and English agriculture towards the mid-nineteenth century, military and agricultural reformation movements unsettled conventional ideas about these bodies as the origin of English stability, power, and prosperity.

The Enlistment Bill of 1847 proposed to filter out unqualified soldiers by limiting the time of service in the Army and altering the promotion system by purchase.[5] It came out of the concerns about the degeneration and contamination of the military body, as some felt the existing military system made 'the Army only the last refuge of an inferior class' and failed to offer soldiers an ideal environment to improve their and the nation's physical and moral conditions.[6] The Repeal of the Corn Laws enforced gradual reductions of the tariff between 1846 and 1849, hoping to lower food prices, which had been kept artificially high with the Importation Act of 1815, and to bring English agriculture out of the current stagnation. Supporters hoped these reforms would make the army and the farming community better prepared for future confrontations, one with international armed forces and the other with price competitions in the age of free trade. Despite the wide difference between the conservatives and the liberals, both were interested in finding a better way to protect English territory/land and the body of the nation and individuals.

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knowledge' (p. 4). In my reading of an 1850 *Punch* illustration, I point out contemporaries' topographical understanding of the social body of English tenant-farmers. I also examine soldiers' and farmers' physical, moral, legal, and economic conditions as discussed in the reform debates and periodical articles.

[2] Anon., 'Enlistment', *Illustrated London News* (*ILN*) (27 March 1847), p. 193.

[3] Robert James Merrett, 'The Gentleman Farmer in *Emma*: Agrarian Writing and Jane Austen's Cultural Idealism', *University of Toronto Quarterly*77: 2 (Spring 2008), p. 9.

[4] Anon., 'The Corn Exchange', *ILN* (29 Oct. 1842), p. 390.

[5] The Enlistment Bill that this paper is concerned with was proposed as the Army Service Bill between March and May 1847. It was passed as the Limited Enlistment Act of 1847, with the support of the Duke of Wellington, which shortened the length of military service from unlimited to ten years. The purchase was not abolished until 1871. See further discussions of English military reform movements in Hew Strachan, *The Reform of the British Army, 1830-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Edward Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914* (London; New York: Longman, 1980); Edward Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army, 1868-1902* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1992).

[6] Anon., 'The Enlistment Bill', *ILN* (1 May 1847), p. 278.

A look at some best-known contemporary periodicals, such as the *Illustrated London News* (*ILN*) and *Punch*, and specialised agricultural periodicals like the *Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* (*GCAG*) and *Farmer's Magazine*, reveals the Victorians' common concerns, regardless of their political stance and professional knowledge, about how to assess and represent the farming and military body that faced immediate social and legal reforms.[7] Articles and illustrations published in *ILN* and *Punch* juxtaposed images of English soldiers as national heroes or failures. The 1846 and 1847 issues of *ILN* are full of illustrations that highlight the valour and formidable stature of British soldiers: the process of raising the Wellington Statue in London and the portraits of soldiers in wars and military processions certainly invoked the cult of hero-worship in the public mind. Yet, *Punch* in the same years printed a series of illustrations of British soldiers that underscored the inefficiency and incapability of the military body in its failed efforts to protect the nation and its people.[8] The simultaneous circulation of contrasting images about Victorian soldiers as objects of glorification and contempt manifests the conflicted feelings about the British military body that were prevalent within the culture.

Between 1845 and 1847, *ILN* published a series of agricultural paintings that show a harmonised vision of the farming community, where the field labourers and farmers are visualised as idyllic, happy pastoral subjects.[9] Whether they project cultural nostalgia or desire, they certainly conceal contemporary reality – the severe agricultural depression. On the other hand, *Punch* delineated the middle-class tenant-farmers as physically and economically weakened by Corn-Law Repeal, constructing images of effeminate farmers and agriculture under one impending fate of bodily collapse and financial ruin. For instance, an 1850 *Punch* article, 'The Farmer's Story' (Figure 1), touches upon the protectionists' concerns about the 'reduced circumstances' of the tenant-farmer, who wails that he is 'utterly undone'.[10] In a way, this illustration plays down the serious state of the ruined farmer by caricaturing the farmer's body and his agonised verbal exclamations with *Punch*'s signature

[7] I chose *ILN* and *Punch* because they had the largest circulation rate and large middle-class readership in the mid-nineteenth century, and because I believe they both captured and affected the period's most prevalent views on soldiers and farmers. I chose the two leading agricultural periodicals *GCAG* (1841-1900) and *Farmer's Magazine* (1832-1881) as my other principal resources because, with their pronounced neutral position 'in the free-trade and protection struggle', they issued articles that examined the physical, moral, and economic condition of English tenant-farmers from objective perspectives (*GCAG* (Aug 11 1849), p. 505).

[8] A serialised caricature entitled, 'The Brook Green Volunteer', which was published in every 1846 *Punch* issue, makes jokes of soldiers' failed endeavours to perform their social and national duty.

[9] See the *ILN* series 'Agricultural Scenes'.

[10] Anon., 'The Farmer's Story', *Punch*, Vol. 18 (1850), p. 9.

humour. Yet, it evokes the reader's pathos towards the farmer's diminished form and incurs an alarming sense of anomaly in the nation's physical and economic constitution and its founding industry, agriculture. Here, the bankrupt body of a farmer is identified with that of the nation; the map of England with the word 'BANKRUPT' written over it resembles the contour of the weeping farmer sitting on a chair, with his hat dropped on the ground. By calling attention to the similarity between the topographical body of the nation and the individual body, the picture not only highlights the common fate of national and personal economic downfall but also suggests the common structural destiny of the two bodily organisms. Another 1850 *Punch* illustration, entitled 'The Real Unprotected Female' (Figure 2), anthropomorphises agriculture in the person of an old woman. Agriculture is no longer emblematic of the nation's backbone that upholds the healthy, vigorous, young male English farmer. Torn in the battle between the free traders and protectionists, the aged female Agriculture is bewildered and frightened by the two external male forces, revealing her to be the 'real unprotected female'.[11]

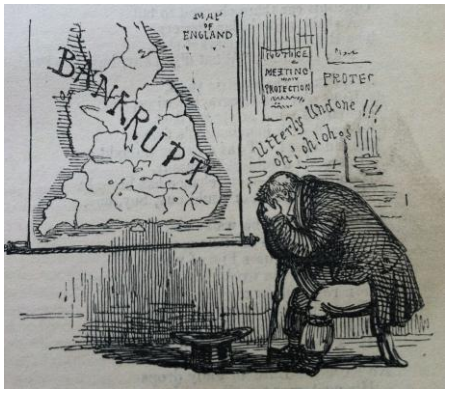
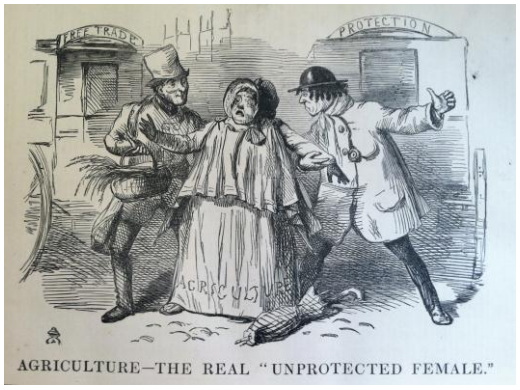


Fig. 1 'The Farmer's Story'



AGRICULTURE—THE REAL "UNPROTECTED FEMALE."
Fig. 2 'The Real Unprotected Female'

Also concerned with examining the state of the English farming body affected by the Repeal, *GCAG* and *Farmer's Magazine* employed a patriotic rhetoric that stresses the common corporeality and destiny of tenant-farmers, asserting that the condition of 'the agricultural body' affects 'our national, no less than our individual, welfare'.[12] Yet, they maintain a neutral tone in acknowledging British agriculture and the tenant-farmer as the nation's body to be preserved. Whilst they understand that protectionists 'desire the national defence' through the Corn Laws and encourage 'any attempt to rouse the spirit of the people in patriotic self-defence', they also

[11] Anon., 'The Real Unprotected Female', *Punch,* Vol. 18 (1850), p. 35.
[12] 'The Corn Laws', *GCAG* (14 Feb 1846), p. 110; 'Whatever may be the feelings', *GCAG* (25 July 1846), p. 505; 'Prospects of Farming', *GCAG* (25 Nov. 1848), p. 787.

appreciate free-traders' visions as a way to strengthen farmers' competitiveness in the international market.[13]

Examining the military and farming body through these two reform movements is important because both sectors shared human capital. In the nineteenth century, agricultural labourers were often metamorphosed into the military body, and the common soldiers, without capital and connections, often went back to agricultural life after discharge. Thus, it makes sense to think about how these bodies mattered to the Victorian public: economic problems that both the agricultural and military body raised represent the nation's concerns about, and interest in, envisioning an ideal economic body as the nation's heroic model.

Attention to the farming body is particularly important after the Repeal, as it pushed farmers to adopt a capitalist mode of business, which Victorians felt often turned benevolent farmers into inhumane and machine/profit-centred businessmen.[14] Under the new economic paradigm, however, the culture also perceived the farming body as an ideal body that could nourish the nation physically, morally, and financially. An 1842 *ILN* article, 'British Agriculture', discusses 'an exulting approval of the value, the importance, and the social benefit of' agriculture.[15] In another *ILN* article that same year, "The Roast Beef of Old England', the writer asserts how agricultural success works in tandem with military victory in the nation, remarking that 'the flourishing agriculture of happy England' results in 'the bone and sinew of her strength and energy in war'.[16]

This rhetoric, which emphasises the symbiotic relationship of the two sectors and bodies, coincides with the rise of the tenant-farmer's social status in the second half of the nineteenth century. It accompanied a series of legislations for agricultural reform, which gradually elevated the tenant-farmer from a subjected to an independent being.[17] Along with the ongoing debates about expanding the tenant's

[13] *GCAG* (8 Sept. 1849), p. 569.

[14] In 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' (1883), *Thomas Hardy's The Dorsetshire Labourer and Wessex*,. ed. by Roger Lowman, *Studies in British Literature*, Vol. 96 (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), pp. 51-74, Hardy introduces the profit-centred attitudes of the tenant-farmer class who 'takes strictly commercial views of his man and cannot afford to waste a penny on sentimental considerations' (p. 66).

[15] Anon., 'British Agriculture', *ILN* (16 July 1842), p. 145.

[16] Anon., 'The Roast Beef of Old England', *ILN* (10 Dec. 1842), p. 481.

[17] Unlike yeomen whose farms 'were their own, or directly under their control', tenant-farmers had a limited control in their use of rented farms (quoted in Robert Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 75). With a series of agricultural legislative reforms from 1851 to 1883, however, 'landlords found themselves subject to their tenants' claims' and the farmers' 'economic importance' to the landowners increased. See Edward Bujak, *England's Rural Realms:*

rights in Parliament, tenant-farmers themselves made continuing efforts to promote their own image and position in society. For example, leading Victorian farmers like James Caird and Phillip Pusey endeavoured to disseminate positive images of farmers as an innovative, scientific, and economically driven reasonable businessman and to dispel the conventional pastoral idea of farmers as archaic and ignorant.[18] *GCAG* and *Farmer's Magazine* diffused the idea of agriculture as 'a practical subject' and a 'business' and saw 'enterprising agriculturists' as playing essential roles in 'set[ting] a pattern of economy' with farm management.[19]

On the other hand, despite its continual significance for colonial expansion, the military body was losing its conventional popularity as a "national hero" figure with the general public, particularly by causing a constant economic burden to the nation. Like the 1847 reform, a series of army reforms between 1868 and 1874 aimed to effect 'a very cheap and most effectual' running of the army with 'a better class of recruit'.[20] While these reforms helped the military expenditure to be 'kept within tolerable limits' in the early 1870s, 'the cost of the army had risen' afterwards, as investigated by an 1887 Select Committee.[21] The dispersal of the army under the Localization Act of 1872 'increased the costs of holding military manoeuvres' in the following years.[22] In addition, undergoing a chronic shortage of recruitment at all levels, the British Army had to consider raising pension rates and salaries to improve both qualitative and quantitative conditions of the army.

As shown in the two debates that took place simultaneously, what was at stake for the nation was to find ways of improving farmers' and soldiers' economically,

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Landholding and the Agricultural Revolution (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), p. 139; p. 127.

[18] Both Caird and Pusey were founding members of, and main contributors to, the *Journal of Agricultural Society of England*. Caird was the 'main publicist' of high farming in the mid-century (Richard Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 6). Pusey, starting his career as a farmer, rose to become an MP for Berkshire in 1835 until 1852 (Martins, p. 15). See more discussions of English farmers' social position in Susanna Wade Martins, *Farmers, Landlords and Landscapes: Rural Britain, 1720 to 1870* (Macclesfield, Cheshire, U.K.: Windgather Press, 2004).

[19] *GCAG*, 20 Oct. 1849, p. 665; 'English Farmers vs. Foreign Farmers', *GCAG* (8 Sept. 1849), p. 571.

[20] For example, with the Army Enlistment Act of 1870 and the Army Regulation Act of 1871, the service term was shortened to seven years and the number of overseas soldiers decreased from 50,000 to 24,291, from which the government expected to keep the army young and have a reduced bill for pensions. See Strachan, pp. 70-72; Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 4.

[21] Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 199; *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 168.

[22] Spiers, *The Army and Society*, p. 200.

morally, and physically deteriorated bodies, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. Periodical articles' attention to these two groups indicate the endeavours that contemporary social critics undertook to re-assess and re-configure the social body of the Victorian soldiers and farmers, in order to envision an ideal Victorian body that would contribute to overcoming the nation's ills. The desire to make the farming and military body the basis of a fit and competent national body in both physical and economic senses underscores Victorians' need to merge stability and progress in a time of economic and cultural change.

Changing Agricultural Society and Competing Heroic Models in *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Far from the Madding Crowd is one of the few Victorian novels where main characters and events are largely free from family dramas of kinship and inheritance. Except for the inheritance plot in the beginning of the novel that initiates Bathsheba's career as a woman farmer, the idea of family connection or complication is insignificant not only to the narrative progress but also to character development. It is peculiar in a novel of this period, which takes place in an agricultural milieu, to draw more attention to individual relationships than familial ones. There is no mention of Gabriel Oak's and Farmer Boldwood's origins or family backgrounds and kinship ties. Although their origins are known among the townspeople, Sergeant Troy and Bathsheba Everdene are the sole reminders of their respective families.

Just as the central form of the agricultural industry has changed from family farming to capitalist farming by the mid-nineteenth century, the novel calls attention to the prevalence of the modern type of human relationship in a Victorian society where economic relationships rather than familiar/familial ties predominate even in agricultural society.[23] Accordingly, the novel delves into the human connections rooted in private emotional ties and economic bonds. All of the novel's events are examined in economic terms, and most of the characters are positioned in economic relationships, both literal and metaphorical, such as that of debtor and creditor, payer and paid, or investor and invested, etc.

Demonstrating the shift of cultural focus toward individuals' economic relationships, Hardy invites readers to turn their attention to the economic bodies and roles of his characters. Setting the novel in times when society was concerned about

[23] For more about the growth of English capitalist farms, see Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'Family Farms and Capitalist Farms in mid nineteenth-century England', *The Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 53, no. 2 (2005), pp. 158-191.

the precarious conditions of agrarian and military communities, Hardy particularly probes economic aptitudes and relations of the farming and military characters – Frank Troy and Gabriel Oak – through their life-paths and relationships with Bathsheba to envision who embodies a heroic English body. As John Peck has pointed out, Hardy insightfully captures the 'military resurgence' and 'changes in representing the military' since the mid Victorian period through his novels such as *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Trumpet Major* (1880), and *The Dynasts* (1904).[24] While Peck argues that Hardy revises a negative stereotype of Victorian soldiers of lower class, uneducated, and ungentlemanly backgrounds, I do not believe we can generalise that Hardy's military figures are inclined to positive descriptions and receptions. Given the conflicted feelings and visions toward the military and the agriculturist captured in contemporary periodicals, I instead argue that, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy re-evaluates the state of Victorian military heroes through Sergeant Troy by highlighting his inability to nourish the nation. And I suggest that Hardy brings in the newly emerged capitalist agriculturist Gabriel Oak as an alternative hero to replace the conventional soldier-hero as pillar of Victorian society.

In fact, Peck overlooks the narrative movement away from military heroism to the economic heroism of the English farmer. Earlier in the novel, by juxtaposing the demand of military recruitment and Oak's desperate need to get a job, the narrator almost envisions Oak's future in the military path:

> In the morning a regiment of cavalry had left the town, and a sergeant and his party had been beating up for recruits through the four streets. As the end of the day drew on, and he found himself not hired, Gabriel almost wished that he had joined them, and gone off to serve his country (p. 43).[25]

Making Gabriel Oak veer away from the path of soldiering at the country fair and wander to a neighbouring town for another agricultural job, however, the narrative forecloses the possibility of Oak's recovering the glorious past of a military career and heroism. Instead, it opens a way to configure commercial farming as an alternative path for Oak to achieve heroism as an agricultural businessman. Registering the changes in the Victorian heroic discourse on the two groups, Hardy shows how the society was giving more weight to the rise of economic heroism as

[24] John Peck, *War, the Army, and Victorian Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 115.
[25] Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* [1874] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 43. All subsequent references are to this edition.

envisioned by the English farmer's economic contribution and dismissing conventional military heroism as causing a national burden in both an economic and moral sense.

The Aesthetic and Economic Value of the English Farmer

Driven by his concern with what is at stake in defining English farmers' social, economic, and cultural identity in relation to Victorian society as a whole, Hardy searches for proper ways to determine Farmer Oak's value. [26] For example, the narrator notes different ways of valuing Oak, from 'the mental picture formed by his neighbours in imagining him' to how people tend to 'depend for his valuation upon his appearance than upon' his other capacities (p. 9; p. 10). In particular, when a 'dispute' arises about 'a difference concerning twopence between the persons with the wagon and the man at the toll-bar', the narrator draws the reader's attention to the question of how to rate aesthetic and economic values of the English farmer's body. When Oak gives out twopence to let Bathsheba pass through, he acts according to his own theory of money's worth: 'threepence had a definite value as money – it was an appreciable infringement on a day's wages' but 'there was something in the tone of twopence remarkably insignificant' (p. 12; 13). But Oak's failure to understand the money's worth from the other's perspective initiates a troubled relationship between him and Bathsheba. Being a prospering tenant-farmer, Oak makes a comparative evaluation of twopence as insignificant, but for Bathsheba it is an important sum. The reduced circumstance of Bathsheba who 'was going to be a governess once' forced her to 'stay with her aunt for my bare sustenance', she 'must help' Mrs. Hurst, who is not 'rich enough to pay a man to do' manual works (p. 32; p. 19; p. 36).

Although Oak saves her trouble, Bathsheba shows no signs of gratitude to Oak. As the narrator says, 'she might have looked her thanks to Gabriel on a minute scale, but she did not speak them: more probably she felt none, for in gaining her a passage he had lost her her point, and we know how women take a favour of that kind' (p. 13). By depriving Bathsheba of an opportunity to solve the problem independently and thus to prove herself her own mistress, Oak hurt her sense of pride and agency. At the same time, the narrator shows that there is another crucial reason for Bathsheba's ungrateful reaction other than her annoyance at Oak's monetary interference. Drawing particular attention to Oak's physical appearance, the narrator

[26] For the novel's interest in discussing the right value of the characters and Gabriel Oak's appreciation of 'the value of propriety', see Donald Eastman, 'Time and Propriety in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *Interpretations*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (1978), pp. 20-33.

implies that Bathsheba's aesthetic interpretation of his body resulted in her ingratitude. When the conflict at the gate is resolved, the narrator immediately comments on Oak's appearance:

> Gabriel's features adhered throughout their form so exactly to the middle line between the beauty of St John and the ugliness of Judas Iscariot as represented in a window of the church he attended, that not a single lineament could be selected and called worthy either of distinction or notoriety. The red jacketed and dark haired maiden seemed to think so too, for she carelessly glanced over him and told her man to drive on (p. 13).

Here, the narrator emphasizes the connection between Bathsheba's disregard of Oak's economic act and his physical body, which is neither aesthetically pleasant nor repulsive. The impossibility of determining the aesthetic value of Oak's body in specific terms causes Bathsheba to relegate Oak's philanthropic act of offering money freely – his economic chivalry and prominence – to a meaningless act that is not worthy of repayment, either in money or words.

Although Oak's economic superiority over Bathsheba is obscured by her aesthetic depreciation of his external features, Oak's body is dynamic, open to transformations as it moves between the poles of gain/production and loss/degeneration. As examined earlier in this paper, the farming body could be an agent of abundance and nourishment, or it could be emblematic of poverty and failure. Farmers in this novel are susceptible to external circumstances and changes, as the degree of their success is considerably affected by the difficulties in forecasting meteorological conditions and the resulting uncertainties of annual agricultural production. Fluctuations of Oak's economic standing in agricultural society are most apparently projected by the way he keeps changing his clothes in a job fair, in order to present himself in a number of different personae – from bailey to shepherd – to present his economic value to potential buyers of his labour power.[27] Failing to gain any position during the fair and losing all of his assets, Oak experiences an utter diminishment of his masculinity, as he is divested of his social and economic position. Hidden in someone's carriage and transported to where he has no

[27] Simon Gatrell discusses the role of dress as indicating the psychological state of Hardy's characters' in 'Reading Hardy through Dress', *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Keith Wilson (Malden, MA; Oxford : Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 178-193.

connection right after the fair in his search for basic means to sustain his life, Oak literally becomes nobody who is worth nothing.[28]

Soon after his socio-economic fall, Oak gains a position as a shepherd at Bathsheba's farm. There, he finds numerous chances to elevate his social and financial position. Hardy recognises the progressive potential of Oak's farming body, characterising it as the epitome of 'the world's health and vigour' and that of economic productivity and sensibility (p. 107). As the narrator acknowledges, Oak's 'special power' as a farmer is assessed not only 'morally, physically, and mentally' but also by his economic potential and competence: 'the basis of [Oak's] beauty' derives from his 'motions' and bodily 'fitness' for farm work (p. 16). Highlighting Oak's physical and economic contribution to the farm, Hardy particularly recasts Oak in the image of an ideal masculine body and emphasises his irreplaceable value in the community. The language that describes Oak who saves the farm from all kinds of physical and economic ruin invokes an unknown great military hero who did a 'great service' to the nation at war (p. 50). For example, Oak's fight with fire is like a battle with an enemy, as the narrator delineates the fire in shapes of living organisms such as 'knots of red worms' and 'fiery faces, tongues hanging from lips, glaring eyes, and other impish forms' (p. 48). Oak's excellence in his physical strength and leadership becomes more apparent, especially when it is compared to the farm labourers' physical and mental weaknesses that cause 'confusion' and 'commotion' (p. 49). Bathsheba, her maid, and the townsfolk notice the most conspicuous feat of Oak's physical movements and actions at a distance with admiration and awe, while watching Oak 'digging in his feet' in the fire and 'clamber[ing] up' and 'beat[ing] off the fiery fragments' (p. 49). People regard Oak, 'that bold shepherd up there', as their hero whose body is now most desired in Bathsheba's farm: Bathsheba, without knowing the shepherd's true identity, 'wish[es] he was shepherd here' (p. 50).

It is on the stormy day when the narrator, using a military analogy, specifically pictures Oak as a hero – a great saviour and protector of Bathsheba and her territory. The storm paralleled to a 'war' steals in with 'the lightning […] gleamed in the heavens like a mailed army' (p. 243; p. 245). While Troy taunts Oak's warning of a disastrous turn in the weather and indulges in revelry, Oak regards all signs of the impending storm as those of an invading enemy. Accurately measuring distances to each stack of grains, Oak 'mount[s]' up and down piles and 'protect the barley' with 'systematic thatching' (p. 243). 'Operating' methodical plans, Oak approaches one barn after another as if encroaching upon the enemy's territory in military operations

[28] For a discussion of the '(re-)aligments of gender and power,' see Linda Shires, 'Narrative, Gender and Power in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *Novel* (Winter 1991), pp. 162-177.

with utmost care: 'Driving in spars at any point and on any system inch by inch he covered more and more safely from ruin this distracting impersonation of seven hundred pounds' (p. 250). Being in an economic battle as well as a battle with nature and for love, Oak succeeds in minimising the economic loss of his lover's property. When Bathsheba witnesses Oak faithfully undertaking his duty at the farm *vis-à-vis* Troy's utter neglect, she comes to highly regard Oak's manliness and treat him as her true hero, unlike her first ingratitude to him in saving her from economic trouble at the tollgate.

During this endeavour, the spectre of a large amount of money occupies Oak's soul and mind. Yet, differentiating Oak from mean, selfish, deceiving capitalist farmers, the narrator describes a complete, manly Englishman who cares for the well-being of his neighbours with paternal attention despite his disappointment in love. He only thinks of the impact of lost money on a communal level: 'that of necessary food for man and beast – should the risk be run of deteriorating this bulk of corn to less than half its value because of the instability of a woman? "Never if I can prevent it!" said Gabriel' (p. 240). More concerned with protecting the resources of the community than Troy, Oak makes outstanding 'advancement' in agricultural business (p. 322). Although Oak was lowered to be Bathsheba's shepherd from a farmer who owns 'about a hundred' acres, years of devoted hard work at her farm promotes him to manage 'two thousand acres' of both Boldwood's and Bathsheba's farm (p. 22; p. 323).[29] Attending to the farm 'as if the crops all belonged to him', Oak gains a reputation as a 'trustworthy man' and establishes himself as a successful self-managing farmer (p. 323).

Unrequited love from Bathsheba does not divert Oak from his responsibilities as a farmer, which augments his importance in the narrative as an agricultural hero toward the end of the novel. However, the same love dejection results in the degeneration of another farming character in the novel, Farmer Boldwood: from a respected farmer to a failing farmer and a jealous murderer. Despairing of his romantic failure, Boldwood utterly gives up attending to his farm and causes a dismantling of his farm produce/property, which is a 'preposterous' behaviour for a farmer (p. 251). As shown in the changes of his bodily features such as his 'immobility,' impassiveness and a depressed/dejected look, he turns his own person into an 'abnormal' and enervated man (p. 235; p. 252). 'Liv[ing] secluded and inactive', Boldwood wishes 'ultimately to retire' and remain Oak's 'sleeping partner'

[29] 'The average size of a farm rented by a farmer in nineteenth-century Britain was 110 acres' (Cook, p. 235). Bernard A. Cook, 'Agriculture', in *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, ed. by J. Don Vann & Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Buffalo; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 235-248.

(p. 322; p. 254). Dismissing the vision of a good farmer in Bolwood, the novel reinforces Oak's value as a good, reliable farmer and lover who ends up owning a large portion of Boldwood's estate through partnership and Bathsheba's property through marriage. With this upward economic movement, Oak recovers his masculinity and social position as an invaluable, enterprising agriculturist who becomes a notable figure in the mid-century. Making Gabriel Oak's body symbolic of economic reliability, competency, and progress as well as emotional and physical resilience, the novel positions the farming protagonist as an English hero – and the significance of this body has been neglected in the scholarship of Victorian realist novels.

Purging Economic Parasitism and Degeneration of the English Soldier

Demonstrating unruly tendencies of Troy's economic and romantic behaviours, Hardy makes him an anti-hero of the novel and the agricultural community. His fate implies the deadly future of morally degenerate, non-productive, and non-economic English military bodies.[30] From the beginning of the novel, Troy shows a lack of economic activity/sense, preferring the pursuit of pleasure. With his light-hearted propensities, Troy is easily drawn to what appears outwardly over intrinsic value and the novel shows how problematic such an attitude is.[31] In Troy's and Bathsheba's first chance meeting one night at the fir plantation, Bathsheba is, literally and figuratively, ensnared in Troy's dissipated behaviours, which simultaneously disgust and interest her. Unable to move by Troy's trick of 'hooking' her dress to his 'spur', Bathsheba unwillingly gives Troy chances to study her body, and he continuously compliments Bathsheba for 'the sight of such a beautiful face' (pp. 162-163). His obsession with a woman's exterior features suggests his moral weaknesses towards women whom he tries to capture with his 'power of flattery' whenever possible (p. 167).

As he keeps trading his love objects for a better deal, Troy knows how and when to gain the most advantageous position in romantic relationships. Although he

[30] For a discussion of the novel's 'disciplinary force' 'on exposed and vulnerable bodies of Mr. Boldwood and Troy', see Richard Nemesvari, *Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism, and the Melodramatic Mode* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Invoking Foucault, Nemesvari shows how *FFMC* reveals 'changing attitudes towards the body' (p. 119).

[31] Troy's thoughtless gift of his family watch to Bathsheba is another indication of his inability to appreciate the true value of his long-held personal possession (the only physical remnant that marks his noble lineage) over what currently attracts him: Bathsheba.

loved Fanny Robin enough to want to marry her, Bathsheba erases his interest in Fanny during his stay in Weatherbury. His timely intervention to Boldwood's affair with Bathsheba lets him snatch Boldwood's chances. His associations with Bathsheba in Bath induce her surrender, by making her anxious to possess him as her own only due to his attractiveness to other women. His tendency to go for more "profitable" relationships leads Bathsheba to curb her sense of self-esteem as a woman and to marry him out of jealousy. Troy makes desired profit out of his marriage to Bathsheba, as Bathsheba pays to discharge him from the army and he becomes the nominal owner of her property.

Fitting the narratorial analogy of Troy to 'a Corinthian' who borrows tactics of 'other men's gallantries' to lure a woman and takes advantage from it, Troy is indeed a 'profligate idler', a 'shameless, brazen-faced' person, to use OED definitions. Hardy's invocation of biblical Corinthians, who indulged in licentious and sacrilegious acts of idol worship, sexual immorality and civil violations, mirrors Troy's wantonness and promiscuity. As shown in his diversions to gambling and luxuries, Troy turns out to be an overtly wasting man – not a suitable man to be a husband and master of the flourishing female farmer. His flirtations and sexual intimacies with Bathsheba and Fanny ruin the life of the two women: Bathsheba, although in legal marriage, agonizes over her unfaithful spouse and Fanny, who bears his child out of wedlock, cannot live as her former self and returns to Weatherbury as a dead body.

Whilst revealing Troy's serious moral defects through his heterosexual relationships, the novel simultaneously weighs the insignificance of his economic and aesthetic values, which unfolds in his role as a soldier. Not to mention his frequent leave and pleasure visits, Troy's career as a sergeant in the dragoons reveals the performative nature of the contemporary military profession that gave more emphasis on soldiers' 'military display'.[32] Looking at Troy's sword-practice, the narrator casts doubt on the soldier's conventional role in the protection of the nation and its people's physical and economic body: the visual effect of what Troy "performs" as a military duty fails to manifest the masculine vigour of English soldiers and reduces it to an ordinary activity.

Troy's sword show heightens the aesthetic value of his body and movement, as evinced in the precision and 'dexterity' of his movement that is beautifully controlled: 'checking the extension a thousandth of an inch short of your surface' with 'his lips closed in sustained effort' and 'with 'just enough rule to regulate

[32] Susan Walton, *Imagining Soldiers and Fathers in the Mid-Victorian Era* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010) p. 38.

instinct and yet not to fetter it' (p. 184; p. 183; p. 182).[33] Just as Troy's sword that 'never errs' looks 'like a living thing' to Bathsheba, the novel envisions Troy and the sword moving in cohesion as one spectacular body (p. 185; p. 181). But the narrative makes clear that his sword skills have nothing to do with producing any functional value for the nation and people, certainly not in preparation for future battles. It is performed to satisfy Bathsheba's curiosity and later to earn money in his theatrical career. This scene is particularly interesting in that Troy explains the positions of his sword-practice in terms that invoke a farmer's farming motions. He instructs Bathsheba in motions of 'cuts and thrusts' to follow him, 'as if you were sowing your corn […] hedging […] reaping […] threshing' (p. 182). In Troy's explanation, the 'strange and glorious performance of the sword-exercise' loses its glamour as something that only highly skilled soldiers can do, and it becomes familiarised as an act of a farmer's daily routine motions, both to Bathsheba and the reader (p. 180). Even a novice like Bathsheba is likely to imitate, and ultimately master, this blended formulation of the agricultural and military with some practice at the farm.

The use of an agricultural analogy for Troy's sword-exercise makes a stark contrast to the fact that Oak's agricultural role, as explained earlier, is often perceived in a military analogy which exalts Oak's disciplined masculine body. Oak's preparations for sheep shearing are pictured as those of warrior's at 'an armoury previous to a campaign' when 'peace and war kiss each other at their hours of preparation, sickles, scythes, shears and pruning-hooks mingling with swords, bayonets and lances in their common necessity for point and edge' (p. 131). Oak's working postures, observed by Bathsheba, with 'his figure slightly bent, the weight of his body thrown over on the shears, and his head balanced sideways' remind the narrator of 'Eros […] in the act of sharpening his arrows' to save Psyche from troubles (p. 131). Oak's worthiness is written into the image of him as a soldier before war and as his lover's protector and underwritten by the narratorial construction of the correlation between agriculture and soldiery.

Even after he leaves the military and becomes master of Bathsheba's farm, Troy continues his squandering behaviour and keeps identifying with the military, which exacerbates his moral and economic decline as well as the farm's. To officially announce his new mastership, Troy throws a festive supper where a fiddler strikes a tune, called 'The Soldier's Joy', as 'the right and proper thing' for 'there being a

[33] For the sexual implication of this scene, see Daryl Ogden, 'Bathsheba's Visual Estate: Female Spectatorship in *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 23:1 (Winter, 1993), pp. 1-15. Other critics such as Nemesvari have read this scene as indicating Troy's hyper-masculinity as he uses his phallic power over Bathsheba.

gallant soldier married into the farm' (p. 237). Although he no longer belongs to the army, the ex-sergeant resists fully transforming into a farmer: 'for though I have purchased my discharge from Her Most Gracious Majesty's regiment of Cavalry, the 11th Dragoon Guards, to attend to the new duties awaiting me here, I shall continue a soldier in spirit and feeling as long as I live' (p. 237). His clinging to the spirit and feeling of the English soldier indicates his unfitness for the new agricultural community that requires rigorous discipline and work to promote economic and technological advancement.

Keeping soldierly manners and neglecting Bathsheba's farm, Troy is a financial drain on Bathsheba: he constantly asks for money from Bathsheba for as betting on the horses and secretly supporting Fanny. Because he has no resources of his own, he has to keep soliciting, subjecting himself to Bathsheba's monetary power and suppressing his pride to get what he wants, marking him as effeminate and enervated. Begging and deceiving, he is an undesirable and unwanted body in their society as a result of his economic and moral depravity and perversion. Calling him 'a scoundrel' and 'a needy adventurer', the farm labourers wish Troy was 'dead' (p. 365). As one farm labourer says, 'I wish Troy was in – . Well, God forgive me for such a wish! [...] Nothing has prospered in Weatherbury since he came here' (p. 360). Troy, utterly 'beholden for food and lodging' to Bathsheba, becomes an unmanly man, epitomising economic parasitism, reckless consumption, and non-productivity (p. 330).

The arrival of Fanny's dead body at the farm shatters the foundation of Troy's and Bathsheba's marriage. The ensuing news of his drowning and presumed death makes Bathsheba an assumed widow, returning her to the marriage market. Bathsheba's status change from Troy's property to a potentially "re-sellable" object increases her value, still much desired and sought after by Boldwood and Oak. However, as if summarising his life path as a series of performances, Troy returns to a neighbouring town to Weatherbury as a member of a travelling theatre company, and again he tries to get the best deal out of his marriage but to no avail. When he happens to spot Bathsheba amongst the audience at one of his performances, the first thought that comes to Troy's mind is the comfortable life that could be secured by her side. By reclaiming his position as Bathsheba's legal husband, Troy can recover his social and economic position. But it is certain that his return would not promise any bliss to Bathsheba or profits to her farm. The consequences of his pleasure-seeking body do not suit the economy of the farming life. Moreover, finding and acting in the right moment is as critical to the success of love affairs as it is to the farming business. Yet, showing up at the worst possible moment, the Christmas night when Boldwood was planning his engagement to Bathsheba, Troy induces Boldwood's

deathly rage and the narrative escapes from its economic and romantic dead-end by getting rid of Troy. With the incarceration of Boldwood for the murder of Troy, the novel eliminates the two men who are emblematic of bodily and economic degeneration.[34]

Conclusion

As Oak becomes an economic success at the end and ultimately wins his final prize, Bathsheba, from Troy, the reader is left with a more progressive vision of the Victorian farming body as the heroic masculine body of the nation that promotes communal and national prosperity. On the other hand, the military figure Troy, who epitomises an old masculine ideal of muscular strength and martial display fails as a protagonist. With the demise and expulsion of the soldier, the novel reflects how the culture became less appreciative of military/muscular manliness; and it endorses the heroic role of the English farmer who contributes to society's economic stability and progress. As such, *Far from the Madding Crowd* values the Victorian farming body for its potential to both protect and improve the nation and people, and Hardy supports economic heroism as a new paradigm for the discourse of Victorian heroism and the narrative structure of the realist novel.

[34] I do not have time to pursue the point in this essay, but I would like to point out that the novel also positions Bathsheba as a new kind of female agricultural hero whose growth is achieved through economic education. Learning the centrality of economic responsibility in romantic and commercial affairs, she becomes an economic heroine: a reasonable, careful manager of her money and life.

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