

When “a Pastoral Romance” Becomes “a Classic Love Story”: Thomas Vinterberg and David Nicholls’ 2015 Adaptation of Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd*

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Abstract: The article discusses the 2015 adaptation of Thomas Hardy’s 1874 novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* in the context of earlier adaptations of Hardy’s texts. It focuses on the modifications introduced in the adaptation process, especially those concerning the female protagonist, Bathsheba Everdeen, aimed at making her more “modern” and balancing her independence, unusual for the 19th century, with the adaptors’ urge to make her the heroine of a romantic love story, which in Thomas Vinterberg’s film surprisingly comes to the foreground.

Key words: adaptation, Thomas Hardy, Victorian novel, Thomas Vinterberg

Gdy „powieść pastoralna” staje się „klasyczną historią miłosną”. O adaptacji filmowej powieści Thomasa Hardy’ego *Z dala od zgiełku* w reżyserii Thomasa Vinterberga

Abstrakt: Artykuł stanowi omówienie najnowszej adaptacji filmowej powieści *Z dala od zgiełku* Thomasa Hardy’ego, wydanej w 1874 r., w kontekście wcześniejszych adaptacji filmowych powieści tego autora. Przedmiotem analizy są przede wszystkim modyfikacje wprowadzone w procesie adaptacji, a w szczególności te, które dotyczą postaci głównej bohaterki. W filmie z 2015 r., do którego scenariusz napisał David Nicholls, a który wyreżyserował Thomas Vinterberg, postać Bathsheby Everdeen uwspółcześniono, tak by była ona bardziej wiarygodną i ciekawszą dla współczesnego odbiorcy, a fabułę filmu skonstruowano w taki sposób, by bez modyfikacji głównych wydarzeń jej motywem przewodnim stała się historia miłosna, która w powieści Hardy’ego (tudzież we wcześniejszych jej adaptacjach) nie jest tak oczywista. Artykuł omawia sposoby, w jaki cele te osiągnięto.

Słowa kluczowe: adaptacja, Thomas Hardy, powieść wiktoriańska, Thomas Vinterberg

Thomas Hardy is one of those Victorian novelists who, over time, joined the ranks of the 'cinematic' ones. A number of articles¹ elaborating on the affinity of Hardy's literary techniques to those of the cinema have been published, and there are critics like John Wain² (1965), or David Lodge³ (1977), who argue that in the way Hardy used verbal description in his novels he actually "anticipated" film form. It might be one of the reasons for which his fiction has been of interest to various adaptors since the very beginning of the cinema's existence. During his lifetime three of his novels were adapted into silent films: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (twice – in 1913 and 1924), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1915) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1921). When *Tess* was to be filmed, Hardy expressed the following view in his 1911 letter to the publisher: "I should imagine that an exhibition of successive scenes from *Tess*... could do no harm to the book, & might advertise it among a new class."⁴ He apparently perceived the new medium as an opportunity to broaden his potential audience to those unlikely to read his novels. He had proved his interest in reaching beyond the circle of readers only, having himself adapted two of his novels for stage (*Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1882 – in collaboration with J. Comyns Carr – and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in 1924).

Unfortunately, none of the silent film adaptations of Hardy's novels survived to our times, although some accounts of their making, as well as reviews, exist.⁵ The first Hardy novel to be adapted in the sound era was *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1929) and subsequent decades brought about a number of film and television adaptations of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967), *Jude the Obscure* (1971, TV mini-series), *The Wessex Tales* (1973, TV mini-series), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1978, TV mini-series) and *Tess* (1979). The film and television productions of the 1990s and the early 2000s reflect a revived interest in Hardy's prose, with the following selection of titles: *The Return of the Native* (1994, TV), *Jude* (1996), *The Woodlanders* (1997), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1998, TV), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1998, TV), *The Claim* based on *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (2000), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (2003, TV) and *The Return of the Native* (2010, set in the 1930s U.S.). It has to be noted, though, that as Paul J. Niemeyer observes, adaptors have remained interested mostly in what Hardy called "Novels of Character and Environment,"⁶ from among

¹ See T. Wright, 2005, "Hardy as a cinematic novelist": Three aspects of narrative technique" [in:] *Thomas Hardy on Screen* T.R. Wright (ed.), CUP 2005, pp. 8-19.

² See J.Wain, 1965, Introduction to Thomas Hardy, *The Dynasts*. 1904, 1906, 1908. London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, pp. v-xix.

³ See D. Lodge, 1977, "Thomas Hardy as a Cinematic Novelist" [in:] Lance St. John Butler (ed.) *Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 78-89.

⁴ Thomas Hardy quoted in P. Niemeyer, 2003, *Seeing Hardy: Film and Television Adaptations of the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, McFarland, p. 14.

⁵ See P. Widdowson, 2005, "The silent era: Thomas Hardy goes way down east" included in *Thomas Hardy on Screen* edited by T.R. Wright, CUP, pp. 50-62.

⁶ P. Niemeyer, *op. cit.* p. 22.

the writer's vast literary output. The point Niemeyer is making, is that the contemporary image of Hardy is constructed on the basis of adaptations among which we have a limited number of novels (unlike, e.g., in the case of Dickens, most of whose works have been adapted for film or television, some even multiple times). Nothing has changed in this respect so far, as the most recent, 2015 adaptation of a Hardy novel, is again that of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which will be subject to further analysis here.

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874) is Hardy's fourth novel, but the first of those set in Wessex and considered among his "great" works,⁷ as well as his first major success. In the novel we can find traces of what was to develop in his later works, "the astonishing mixture of the grim and the grotesque,"⁸ among others, but also a fairly unexpected happy ending and a female protagonist surprisingly un-Victorian in her ambitions and temper. Elizabeth Drew in her 1965 *The Novel: A Modern Guide to Fifteen English Masterpieces* observed that "[f]or Hardy, a story with only three deaths in it, one life sentence and a final marriage between the two chief characters can almost claim to be a comedy,"⁹ while Niemeyer notices that "[i]n some respects, [*Far from the Madding Crowd*] is a novel that not only invites readers to find a haven from the city, but to find a haven from the rest of Hardy's fiction" and it is the "friendliest and most appealing of Hardy's novels."¹⁰

Although the novel was generally well received when it was originally published, not all the critics expressed a positive opinion about Hardy's achievement. Henry James turned out to be very critical in his review for the *Nation*: "Every human in the book strikes us as factitious and insubstantial; the only thing we believe in are the sheep and the dogs. But ... Mr Hardy has gone astray very cleverly, and his superficial novel is a really curious imitation of something better." As far as Bathsheba, the protagonist, is concerned, she seemed to James "inconsequential, wilful and mettlesome,"¹¹ impossible to be liked. Surprisingly, it is that very novel of Hardy to which

⁷ The novels generally acknowledged as Hardy's "great novels" include *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). D. H. Lawrence considered *The Return of the Native* to be first of them (see Mark Kinkead-Weekes' biography of the writer *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912-1922*, p.160), while Margaret Drabble, in her review quoted frequently in the contexts of the more recent editions of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, calls it "the first of Thomas Hardy's great novels, and the first to sound the tragic note for which his fiction is best remembered." (see, e.g. Bloomsbury webpage, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/far-from-the-madding-crowd-9781847496300/>)

⁸ T. Wright, 2005, "Hardy as a cinematic novelist": three aspects of narrative technique" [in:] Wright, T.R. (ed.) *Thomas Hardy on Screen*, CUP, p. 6

⁹ E. Drew, 1965, *The Novel: A Modern Guide to Fifteen English Masterpieces*, p.143.

¹⁰ P. Niemeyer, *op. cit.* p. 62.

¹¹ H. James 1874/1986 quoted in Schweik, R. C. *Thomas Hardy. Far from the Madding Crowd: An Authoritative Text. Backgrounds. Criticism*. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, p. 367.

James' own work, namely *The Portrait of the Lady*, demonstrates certain similarities, which I will return to in my discussion herein.

Far from the Madding Crowd, set in rural Wessex, features a female protagonist, Bathsheba Everdene, a young, self-confident woman of some education and initially no money, who first attracts Gabriel Oak, a good-hearted and morally stern farmer (reduced by the unfortunate circumstances to the position of a shepherd, having lost his herd), whose marriage proposal she rejects. Having inherited her uncle's farm Bathsheba becomes a farmer herself, employs Oak as a shepherd, and eventually becomes an object of her wealthy neighbour's, Mr Boldwood's, desire (which requires, however, certain flirtatious effort of her own). With the two men both respecting and admiring her, she chooses and marries a third, Sergeant Troy, the least deserving, as she will soon discover, but the most daring in the way he courts her. The troubled marriage ultimately fails when Troy's former lover dies having miscarried their child, which devastates Troy and leads him to reject and desert Bathsheba. Sometime later, although being pronounced dead by drowning, Troy returns, thus spoiling Boldwood's budding hopes for marrying the widowed Bathsheba. Troy's sudden appearance throws Boldwood completely off balance, which ultimately results in the former being shot by the latter. Such an ending, abrupt and unexpected, sets Bathsheba free to marry Gabriel, who steadily supported her all those years and whose presence she eventually finds essential both for her private life, and for running the farm. The novel ends with the quiet wedding of the two.

The popularity of the novel – high in Hardy's times – is usually explained as resulting from its being a version of pastoral romance, as Niemeyer claims.¹² Reading *Far from the Madding Crowd* mainly as a nature novel became less frequent in the 1990s, when critical attention was attracted by the construction of gender roles in Hardy's text or by the use of the language. However, even in more recent readings, the pastoral character of the novel comes to the foreground, as e.g. in Shirley Staves's *The Decline of the Goddess* (1995) Gabriel Oak emerges as a nature god and Bathsheba as a pastoral queen.

Despite certain inconsistencies in the development of the main characters and some abrupt solutions, the novel is still considered as one of Hardy's greatest achievements. Like other of his major novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd* has attracted a number of adaptors willing to transpose it to another medium, be it the theatre, opera, or film. As mentioned above, Hardyco-adapted part of the novel for stage in 1882, and in the twentieth century the novel was adapted for the screen three times: into a silent film in 1915 (a British production, a copy of which has been lost, dir. Laurence Trimble), a feature film in 1967 (the first surviving feature film adaptation

¹² P. Niemeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

of a Hardy novel, dir. by John Schlesinger, starring Julie Christie, and a television film in 1998 (Granada, starring Paloma Baeza, Nathaniel Palmer and Johnathan Firth). The 21st-century cinematic adaptation comes from 2015 and was directed by Thomas Vinterberg, a Danish director formerly associated with the Dogme film movement, with the screenplay written by David Nicholls.

The new adaptation brought back the memory of John Schlesinger’s film, which was both praised and criticised, being faithful to the literary text while – paradoxically – very strongly reflecting the fashion and perspective of its own times. James Welsh in his 1981 article on that film ends his considerations stating that “The film in fact includes most of the story’s dynamics; and though it may at times seem superficial and weak on points of character motivation, it provides an interesting basis for the discussion of what may be possible and tolerable in the process of adapting a ‘classic’ novel to the screen.”¹³ Schlesinger’s film is generally praised for capturing the spirit of the novel, for sticking to the novel’s plot, and for the depictions of farmer Boldwood and Sergeant Troy. Julie Christie, although as vain as Bathsheba should be, looks a bit too modern, while Alan Bates’s Gabriel Oak is made “a rather wooden piece of background furniture.”¹⁴ However, the more time passes from the moment of the film’s release, the more positive the critics’ attitude towards it seems to be (see, e.g. Fuller 2015).

The 2015 adaptation is much shorter than the other two,¹⁵ which already indicates certain condensation of the plot, reduction of subplots, as well as of the role of some of the characters. The shooting plans revealed in 2013 suggested that the new adaptation was to be “raw and revolutionary.”¹⁶ It turned out to be far from either, which does not mean that it is not worth critical attention. On the contrary – it constitutes a conspicuous example of appropriation of the novel’s main character to make her attractive to the 21st-century audience. The strategy which was used during the marketing campaign presented the film as “Based on the Classic Love Story by Thomas Hardy,” and in the most frequently distributed posters, as well as in the trailers, *Matthias Schoenaerts’ Gabriel Oak appears as the object of the ultimate love of Carey Mulligan’s Bathsheba, caught in a romantic pre-kiss moment. It is worth mentioning, that the poster of the 1967 adaption foregrounded Bathsheba, surrounded with images of her three suitors, much smaller in size, and the phrase advertising the production read: “A wilful*

¹³ J. Welsh, 1981, “Hardy and the Pastoral, Schlesinger and Shepherds: *Far from the Maddening Crowd*,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* (Vol 9, No. 2), p.84.

¹⁴ J. Welsh, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁵ It lasts only 119 minutes, while Schlesinger’s film and the television adaptation are 169- and 216-minute long, respectively.

¹⁶ S. Bull, 2013, “Carey Mulligan sports period costume as she starts shooting ‘revolutionary’ new take of *Far From The Maddening Crowd*”, *MailOnline*

passionate girl and... the three men who want her!," suggesting a sexual rather than romantic context.

The angle taken by the 2015 producers in advertising the film reveals the eventual choice Bathsheba Everdene makes, hence the viewers can wait comfortably for Bathsheba and Oak's getting together, eventually, despite her initial rejection of his marriage proposal. The promise of the love story appears not only in the mentioned-above posters and trailers, but also in the interview with Vinterberg, who admits that he aimed at presenting the story in which "[l]ove can overcome anything, being an antidote to modern cynicism,"¹⁷ and that he "wanted love to prevail."¹⁸ That is quite clearly a departure from what Thomas Vinterberg was doing earlier, first as a Dogme director, and even later on as well, e.g. in the production preceding *Far from the Madding Crowd – The Hunt* (2012).

Besides turning Hardy's novel into a "classic love story," the Vinterberg/Nicholls adaptation makes Bathsheba a more likeable character and deprives Hardy's story of some of what may be called its awkwardness (which Schlesinger's film faithfully rendered). In my further considerations here I will refer to those three areas of adaptive modification: the female protagonist, the Gabriel-Bathsheba plot and the novel scenes bordering on the grotesque or the macabre, which are dropped.

Hardy's novel opens with Gabriel Oak and large part of it is narrated from his perspective. It is through him that the readers get the first glimpse of Bathsheba and from him comes the first characteristics of the novel's female protagonist – or rather a diagnosis of Bathsheba's problem: seeing her admire her own reflection is a mirror, then being "carelessly glanced over" by her, Gabriel concludes: "she has her faults... And the greatest of them is... Vanity."¹⁹ The way Hardy develops Bathsheba's story and shows the misjudgements and mistakes she makes suggests that it is that very vanity which leads to the young woman's misfortunes – she starts the flirtatious game with farmer Boldwood, because he seems to ignore her, then she falls blindly for Sergeant Troy, because he is the first one to flatter her, to call her beautiful. The film takes a different angle; it opens with Bathsheba's voice-over introduction, with the scene in which we can see her dark silhouette against the stables door, when she is about to go for a ride, wearing a smart riding outfit, with pants, not a skirt, and she refers to being orphaned early, hence "being accustomed to be on her own. Too accustomed. Too independent." The dominant feature, then, signalled to the viewers in the very first scene – or rather communicated directly – is the protagonist's independence, which she also gives as the reason for her later rejection of Gabriel's marriage proposal. As Mulligan, playing the part of Bathsheba,

¹⁷ T. Vinterberg, 2015, Interview.

¹⁸ T. Vinterberg, M. Schoenaerts, 2015, Interview.

¹⁹ T. Hardy, 1874/1986, *Far From the Madding Crowd*. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, p.11.

says; the story is "not about a girl who wants to get married. That's actively what she doesn't want. Her agenda is about her own life."²⁰

The only scene in the film which refers to Bathsheba's vanity is that in which she gives Gabriel an explanation for deciding to marry Troy, who simply mentioned a woman more beautiful than her, so "somewhere between jealousy and destruction [she] married him". Mulligan's Bathsheba falls blindly for Troy not as the novel suggests out of her vanity. The film indicates the biological mechanism of this attraction – Bathsheba, kissed, experiences lust for the first time in her life and becomes vulnerable, driven by hormones rather than anything else. Unlike the other two suitors, Troy shows her no respect and he appeals to her at the biological level.

The film focuses on Bathsheba's urge for independence, not so much related to her actual financial status, but certainly strengthened by it. Bathsheba treasures her freedom and that prevents her from plunging into marriage with either Gabriel or Boldwood. Quite ironically, both suitors promise her "the piano" – apparently a symbol of a Victorian wife's ultimate happiness – at which she smirks and after Boldwood's offer she answers: "But I already have a piano." In the novel in Oak's proposal scene Hardy consistently evokes Bathsheba's vanity, her urge to be admired: "...for a marriage would be very nice in one sense. People would talk about me, and think I had won my battle, and I should feel triumphant, and all that. But a husband... he'd always be there, as you say; whenever I looked up, there he'd be."²¹ Although the adaptation does not include that part, it retains another passage, which sounds somewhat contradictory to Bathsheba's otherwise headstrong expression of independence and acknowledged self-reliance. Rejecting Oak she says, as she does in the novel: "If I were to marry, I'd want somebody to tame me and you'd never be able to do it."²² That "taming" takes place, as some critics argue, at the end of the novel, and it cannot really be observed in the film, which I would like to return to further on.

In the declared independence, including the financial one, too, Bathsheba emerges as an entirely contemporary character (the "taming" element being, however, disputable) that the 21st-century viewers could easily identify with. Carey Mulligan calls her "The anti-costume-drama heroine,"²³ in her strength, independence, courage and consistent rejection of the two decent suitors. In a scene at the corn market, when Bathsheba takes up the duties of the farm owner, developed in the film into a dialogue in which Bathsheba negotiates the price of her corn with one of the farmers, and wins, she consequently gets noticed not only as a woman – hence a curiosity at the

²⁰ See C. Mulligan quoted in M. Gibson 2015 (May 18). "It's a Madding, Madding World. A Hardy heroine gets an update," *Time*, p.51.

²¹ T. Hardy, *op. cit.* p.28.

²² *Ibid.* p.29.

²³ See C. Mulligan quoted in M. Gibson *op. cit.* p.51.

corn market – but as a stern trader, and emerges as a “business woman”-like character, not really possessing that feature in the novel. The reviews of the 2015 adaptation stressed the modifications Bathsheba underwent. Lucasta Miller in her article for *The Guardian* notices that “Hardy’s heroine is a paradoxical character, designed to provoke, tease and confuse the reader just as she does her suitors. The new film, in contrast, presents a Bathsheba who is ‘hygienic’ for modern audiences: an empathetic, egalitarian modern feminist, self-empowered but not motivated by power,” while Megan Gibson writing for *Times* warns the potential viewers: “Don’t let the Victorian setting fool you: this heroine manages to achieve the very contemporary dream of having it all.”²⁴

Vinterberg’s Bathshebas presented on the one hand the way Gabriel sees her: erring but worthy of affection; on the other we also see the world from her perspective and we can understand her dilemmas. This is one of the reasons for which she appears to the viewers as much more likeable than the character in the novel. Another reason for that is the lack of the occasional rather misogynistic remarks that Hardy’s narrator passes, commenting upon Bathsheba’s actions and life-choices (e.g. “Bathsheba, though she had too much understanding to be entirely governed by her womanliness, had too much womanliness to use her understanding to the best advantage”²⁵). What contributes to the viewers’ interest in her is her apparent affection for Gabriel, communicated at the visual level, but not admitted. There are numerous scenes illustrating their relationship from its very beginning in which she takes apparent pleasure watching him perform traditionally masculine tasks: dipping the sheep (an activity she eventually joins, a scene added in the adaptation), sharpening the sheers, or piercing the sheep when bloated. Gabriel’s attraction for Bathsheba is steady and the gazes exchanged between the two show that she knows it. The film also suggests through Bathsheba’s facial expressions and her body language that she loves Gabriel from the beginning but seems unaware of that till the very end of the story. The novel reveals only Gabriel’s feelings towards her, seemingly unreciprocated. In the case of the film the viewers wait for Gabriel to take his proper place, promised by the posters.

The ending of the film is also more romantic than that offered by Hardy – not only because the two lovers reconcile and kiss, but mainly because there is more actual affection shown in the way Bathsheba chases Gabriel. The final horse-riding scene mirrors an earlier one in which she chased him to ask for help with her dying sheep; the scene is designed in the film differently than in Hardy’s novel to show Bathsheba’s affection for the shepherd, not only her desire for his professional skills. The novel, despite revealing the actual feelings acknowledged eventually by Bathsheba, gives

²⁴ M. Gibson, *op. cit.* p.51.

²⁵ T. Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147.

an impression, first of all, of the woman's final acceptance of the fact that she needs Gabriel, not so much that she desires him. The film's ending leaves the viewers with the conviction that Bathsheba will be ultimately fulfilled in the relationship, not only as a farmer. By focusing on the love story ending happily the film narrative loses the novel's tone of having a woman taught her place, which the feminist critics, in particular, found in the ending in which Bathsheba proposes to Gabriel as to prevent him from leaving her. Unlike the book, then, the film would not so easily undergo a feminist reading as "a male discourse intent on taming the heroine."²⁶ "Taming" is the term which reappears in the reviews of Hardy's novel. In 1966 Friedman in his article "Innocence, Expansion, and Containment" notices that "the form of the story Hardy tells deliberately takes shape as a 'taming' of the heroine. The action is therefore planned to allow the broadest possible scope of what James finds objectionable: the young lady's high-spirited, mannish tendencies; gradually to chasten, torment, and weaken her; and finally to make her manageable – in fact, to make her beg to be managed."²⁷ Hardy's Bathsheba is vain, flirtatious, and self-confident in her independence. She makes costly mistakes but, having learned her lesson, appreciates the man who stood by her side and proposes to him to make him stay. In that the critics saw "the taming," no longer present in the adaptation which focuses on love that "prevails."

I would like to return here to the previously mentioned Henry James' critical opinion of Hardy's novel. His criticism concerned, among other things, the female protagonist. Much as James disliked Bathsheba, he wrote six years later a novel, which at certain levels seems to remain in a dialogue with Hardy's text, and surprisingly bears a number of similarities. Those similarities, however, have come to the foreground recently, with the release of the 2015 adaptation discussed here, as that film brings back the memory not so much of James' *The Portrait of a Lady*, but of Jane Campion's 1996 film adaptation of it. There are certain striking similarities between some of the events, names and coincidences in the two texts. Sergio Perosa in his "Comment: Portrait of a Lady Far from the Madding Crowd" published in *The Hudson Review* points to the most obvious similarities: the main protagonists' youth, energy, and independence lost after they inherit considerable wealth, which is intended to guarantee their independence, and become easy prey to men who do not deserve them. They both get involved in the fatal relationships despite the advice and warnings from those, who care. Both have three suitors (Boldwood and Oak versus Caspar Goodwood among them, in whose case the names seem to correspond), and chose the worst ones, knowing that they are impoverished. Both are made entirely

²⁶ L. Shires, 1993, "Narrative, Gender and Power in *Far from the Madding Crowd*" [in] Higonnet, Margaret R. (ed.) *The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*, University of Illinois Press, p.50.

²⁷ T. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

vulnerable after the first kiss in their lives – that is what the films stress in the visual representation. And both marriages fail, although in Isabel's case the novel's ending suggests her becoming more insightful of her moral and emotional situation upon her return to Osmond, and the film's ending is open, since we never learn whether she returned to Osmond or not. "[S] tripped of the flesh and psychological complexities" as Perosa²⁸ puts it, the two plots, the female characters who populate the two distant worlds, become surprisingly alike: supposedly strong and independent, become vulnerable when skilfully seduced. Undoubtedly, the two novels remain in dialogue, and so do the films, although the relation of influence has been reversed in the case of the latter.

Besides modifying the Bathsheba–Gabriel relationship and making the female protagonist less irritating, the 2015 adaptation condensed the source text's plot by reducing some of its elements. Lucasta Miller in her 2015 article in *The Guardian* notices that Vinterberg's film "pushes the more mannered elements of the story to the margins, almost as if in embarrassment. In doing so, it 'normalises' what is in reality a deeply unsettling book, and, despite some good performances, neutralises much of its power." Those "mannered elements," contributing to the earlier mentioned certain "awkwardness" of Hardy's novel, omitted in the 2015 adaptation, include the unsettling scene in which Troy humiliates Boldwood, who is trying to bribe him out of the marriage with Bathsheba; a large section of the scene over Fanny Robin's coffin (Bathsheba is not at all hysterical, unlike in the novel, she retains self-dignity, devastated, but quiet, not begging Troy to choose her); the symbolic scene of Bathsheba hiding in the boggy hollow, losing her voice, and then returning only to hide away in fear of facing Troy who humiliated her greatly expressing overtly his attachment to Fanny rather than her; and the presumed-dead Troy playing the highwayman Dick Turpin in a fairground show, remaining unnoticed, but actually managing to touch Bathsheba's hand. Those scenes can be found in Schlesinger's 1967 film, incorporated into its narrative, with their grotesqueness somehow well-fitting. Vinterberg's "classic love story" makes Bathsheba appear much more level-headed. The modifications also make Boldwood seemingly less sociopathic – rather serious and stern, and unhappily in love. However, the fact that the scene of the attempted bribery, vital for suggesting Boldwood's insanity and desperation, is missing, occludes the motivation for the final murder. In the novel the grudge Boldwood holds against Troy is well rooted in the earlier cruel, calculated act of humiliation.

The last element of the novel, the rendering of which into the film form I would like to refer to here briefly, is its pastoral quality, for which it has been unanimously acclaimed by most of the critics to date. Schlesinger in the 1967 adaptation not only presented Bathsheba and her three unfortunate

²⁸ S. Perosa, 2016, "Comment: Portrait of a Lady Far from the Madding Crowd", *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 69, Issue 3, p. 367.

suitors against the rural landscape, but also included a number of scenes depicting various aspects of farm workers' life. Vinterberg's film explores the visual qualities of the landscape, but due to the focusing on the romantic plot it gives the viewers only as much of the beauty of the surroundings, or of the dangerous powers of nature, as is necessary to illustrate Gabriel's attention, affection and support. It has to be admitted, though, that the most visually impressive scene in terms of its natural setting is that involving Frank, not Gabriel –the scene of Troy's sword play in the "hollow amid the ferns," as Hardy symbolically called the place of Bathsheba's erotic awakening. The scenes from the farm workers' life are in Vinterberg's films introduced only to make it possible for Bathsheba to spot Gabriel at work, to show her watching him in those numerous instances, in which the traditional direction of the gaze is reversed: more frequently than not, it is Bathsheba's gaze that rests on Gabriel, not vice versa.

With the rural setting of his novels, and the characters in most cases belonging to lower classes, Thomas Hardy is not exactly the type of Victorian novelist that fits into the present vogue for the Victorian period. However, the fact that *Far from the Madding Crowd* was readapted in 2015 into a major feature film with a wide distribution suggests the apparent attractiveness of that particular novel, be it its happy ending, or a female protagonist unusual in her ambitions. The paradox lies in the fact that Vinterberg's film, visually "lush" and "lavish,"²⁹ was advertised as a costume "chick flick," while the name of the source text's author attracted mostly those, who are aware that it is not the only way Bathsheba's story can be read.

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²⁹ D. Huntley, 2015, "*Far From the Madding Crowd* – Thomas Hardy, Light and Sumptuous," *British Heritage*, p. 67.

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- Far From the Madding Crowd* (2015), dir. T. Vinterberg, BBC Films/DNA Films.
- The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), dir. J. Campion, PolyGram Filmed Entertainment.