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Michel Morel

- 1 In the narrative field, *mise en abyme* does not operate independently from genre. The kind of distance it brings about varies in consequence, and is never unproblematic. This is what I would like to show in reference to the two looking-glass scenes in *Far from the Madding Crowd*: the first one in Chapter I, when Gabriel meets Bathsheba for the first time (Hardy 1986, 9-11), and the second one in Chapter XIV, when Boldwood contemplates the Valentine he has placed in the corner of his bedroom looking-glass (80-82).
- 2 We have come to call specular effects in art — that which has to do with visual reflections — *mise en abyme*, after Lucien Dällenbach's *Le Récit spéculaire*. The notion, defined by André Gide in his diary for 1893, and illustrated by him in his *Faux monnayeurs* in 1925, comes from heraldry and its frequent embedding of a smaller escutcheon within a larger one. The term “embedding” has unfortunately come, in recent years, to describe the status of journalists accompanying troops on the field of military operations, which actually makes it signify the contrary of *mise en abyme*: the journalist's position deprives him of any freedom of interpretation, and of any real distance. He is caught within the military apparatus and what it allows or not in matters of information. This is exactly what *mise en abyme* pits itself against since it brings out the reversibility of the inside-outside relationship and makes this germinal to-and-fro the origin and the site of meaning. In the simple visual case of a picture representing a room on whose wall one sees a picture featuring a room with a picture in it, a complex and contradictory reading ensues: the inner pictures can be said to lend a referential quality to the rooms on whose wall they hang, and consequently to naturalise them. And yet each visual stage from the embedded to the embedding keeps inverting such interpretation, up to the final or first one with a spectator who can never forget that what he or she contemplates is just a picture on a gallery wall. The existential status of the rooms and the pictures within remains undecided, the result being that mimesis is conclusively undermined and shown to be founded on an illusion. This is partly what happens in the two looking-glass scenes under

study, the whole construction apparently working in the opposite direction, that of credibility. In each, the protagonist contemplates her or his face reflected in a mirror. The chain of make-believe ricochets up to the reader, while conversely the chain of fiction starting with this reader implicitly contaminates the object of his or her contemplation. A temporary hesitation causes one to become conscious of the suspension of disbelief making all this possible. The pact with the text is foregrounded, if only for a fraction of a second, its “willful” side clearly contradicting the desire to believe which initiated it. Consequently, the text draws attention onto its own operations, temporarily causing the kind of distance said to be attached to the whole process of *mise en abyme*. A telling and fascinating example of such brinkmanship may appositely be quoted here: that of the indignant exclamation of a Cleopatra, played by a boy in Shakespeare’s time, complaining that: “Antony / Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.2. 217-219; my emphasis). In the two present scenes though, narration can hardly be said to go so far. It rather takes advantage of the temporary vacillation on the part of the reader to make his or her acceptance of the whole fictive construction even more intentional. One must consequently be doubly vigilant concerning *mise en abyme* in reference to a novel by Thomas Hardy, first because the appellation itself might be said to be anachronistic, and second, because the exact effects of its specular procedures are far from unmixed, if only because they are constitutively reversible.

- 3 A third element of complexity derives from the enunciative dimension relative to narration. As in any type of linguistic interchange between two persons, narrative enunciation automatically implies three implicit judgments on the part of the narrator, first on himself or herself, second on the message and third on the reader, these causing in turn three counter judgments from the reader on himself or herself, on the message and on the narrator, all this being enacted in the transient moments of a reading predominantly aimed at guessing what is going to happen. Such an axiological subtext clearly underlies the narrator’s guidance in both present scenes, for example in two flagrant cases concerning Bathsheba, one regarding the supposed “prescriptive infirmity” (Hardy 1986, 10) of woman and the other, Gabriel’s self-assured and down-to-earth pronouncement: “Vanity” (11). Here and elsewhere, the nearly automatic judgmental processes remain tacit and unarticulated. Close analysis is needed to undo the strands of such a multifaceted give-and-take and our role in it, which is what the idea of a *mise en abyme* dimension may help to achieve.

The blush in the looking-glass (Hardy 1986, 9-11)

- 4 “She blushed at herself, and seeing her reflection blush, blushed the more” (Hardy 1986, 9). Such is the chiasmus-like center in the description of the first encounter between Bathsheba and Gabriel. The narrative dispositive corresponding to this embedded silent tableau is the following: Bathsheba reacts to her own image in her swing looking-glass, under the silent “espial” (10) of a Gabriel observed by the narrator, a three-tiered vision that produces a kind of global voyeurism on our part. The roles played by Bathsheba and Gabriel are clear. Not so, the narrator’s. He for one is and is not looking through Gabriel’s eyes, by means of which he supposedly surveys the scene as a whole. This comes out very clearly when he suggests that: “A cynical inference was irresistible by Gabriel Oak, as he regarded the scene [...]” (10), a negative inference which actually continues the

immediately preceding remark by the narrator himself, on the frailty of women in general. We are thus made to react to and evaluate simultaneously Bathsheba's coquetry, Gabriel's reaction to it and the rather misogynous commentary, dubiously attributed to the apparently hesitating shepherd, "generous though he fain would have been". The word "performance" used in "what possessed her to indulge in such a performance" adds a theatrical dimension complementing the specular element. Such a complex show of appearances and artifice is ultimately and effectively naturalized by the narrator's pretended ignorance. He claims he is not able to explain the whole show to the actual spectators (birds, cat, shepherd, and reader) and the real meaning of Bathsheba's doings: "nobody knows", he affirms. The element of distance is consequently both suggested for a moment and immediately erased.

- 5 This both explicit and disguised narrative steering is made all the clearer by the names given to Bathsheba, a technical element which should always be watched closely. These are perceptibly modulated through the passage, delineating the narrator's actual stance. The heroine is first "a woman" (called "Miss" by her servant), then "the girl", "the handsome girl". She then becomes "Woman", "a fair product of the feminine kind", "Mis'ess's niece", "the maiden", and finally "a handsome maid". The qualifiers pass from "a woman", not to "the woman", as might have been logically expected, but to "Woman" and her supposed "prescriptive infirmity": "prescriptive" meaning "established or accepted by long usage or the passage of time", according to the Oxford Dictionary of English; in other words, what is well-known. Such infirmity had "stalked into the sunlight", a graphic expression calling up not only Eve in Milton's Garden of Eden, but the numerous representations of Venus Anadyomene (that is, rising from the waters). Moreover, the maiden is "red-jacketed and dark-haired": red might seem to connote, beyond the immediate note of elegance and charm, the passions and possibly the seductive tricks of an incipient Delilah, the dark hair introducing the partially axiological, hence oriented, relation with the "light", "golden" hair of Fanny (Hardy 1986, 215), in the same way as the dark-haired Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* by Scott, is both compared with, and opposed to the blond Rowena. The still innocent seductress is also shown to be on the move, unattached, on her pile of furniture, while unwittingly exhibiting at the same time the intimacy of the "dressing-hour in a bedroom", a stolen exposure which amounts, on the reader's part, to a kind of visual rape very close to something like voyeurism. The narrator partially denies this paraliptically, remarking that the gesture had a "novelty [...] it did not intrinsically possess" (10); not to forget the hardly anecdotal oxymoronic cat "affectionately surveying the birds around" (9); one could not be clearer. What Bathsheba actually thinks is only vaguely adumbrated by her "real smile" (9). Under the compounded gaze of the narrator and Gabriel, this smile becomes the seat of romantic battles: "her thoughts seeming to glide into far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part—vistas of probable triumphs—the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won" (10). In real fact, this actually is the generic contract proposed to us, between the opposed possibilities of romance and tragedy. Technically speaking the abstract vision suggested by her smiles, as shown in the mirror, does correspond to *mise en abyme* proper since the sentence itself may be said to encapsulate and summarize the whole plot in advance. It does indeed stand as a smaller narrative escutcheon embedded within the larger one of the novel itself. It makes fiction radiate from the very centre of what the novel would like us to think is a realistic moment: a young girl looking at herself in a mirror. The original smile has become

“smiles”, inducing a movement of passage into type and generality, in the line of the abstract qualifier “Woman” used earlier in the passage. All in all, the orientation is clear, though apparently noncommittal, a way of teasing us and rousing our expectations: “the whole series of actions was so idly put forth as to make it rash to assert that intention had any part in [the smiles] at all” (10). Such are the most striking elements in an introductory revelation scene fraught with ambivalent promises about the future relations between the two protagonists.

- 6 So *mise en abyme* and reflectiveness there are, but to what exact effects? The first and most important one is to make the reader pass judgment on Bathsheba’s self-admiration, and on Gabriel’s stock male response to it, all this in a scene ruled by a light touch of dramatic irony: we watch Bathsheba being watched, while she is unaware of it, and we are made to understand more about Gabriel than he does himself. In other words, this moment in the text seems to provoke a kind of unmasking of the two characters that sanctions, and this is the second effect, the cogency of female and male attitudes seen as very nearly biblical and eternal. Beyond these, and at the very centre of Bathsheba’s specular blushing lies the reference to genre, either romance or tragedy as the narrator suggests, or possibly both. What *mise en abyme* here brings to the fore is the true and exact generic nature of the text which it subtly validates by way of clarification, consequently intensifying the narrative’s main spring: anticipation and the incipient suspense concerning a coming love affair. So the scene corresponds indeed to a kind of illumination, close to epiphany, but the clarity it offers is both generic in its promises and axiological in its orientation. This is *mise en abyme*, in its average narrative efficiency: a paradoxical spring actually triggering suspension of disbelief.

“Insubstantial” reflections (Hardy 1986, 79-82)

- 7 That Hardy should have conceived the idea of Boldwood placing the Valentine in the corner of his bedroom looking-glass provides a thrilling insight into his sense of invention and the quasi-musical correspondences he conjures up and plays with. Again, the scene turns intimacy inside out, which is all the more striking in the case of an introverted and reticent man like the farmer. Again, dramatic irony prevails, but this time on the tragic side. We are indeed aware of what the befooled man does not know, that the card comes from Bathsheba and, as the narrator glibly comments, that its “motive [...] was of the smallest magnitude compatible with its existence at all” (Hardy 1986, 80), in other words, it is a mere joke. The scene as a whole is possibly more directly revealing than specular, yet reflectiveness plays a central part in it. The reflection of the farmer’s face first, in total opposition to Bathsheba’s in her own looking-glass: a face that is “wan in expression, and unsubstantial in form” with “compressed” mouth and “vacant” eyes (81). This disturbing and rather uncanny appearance is brought about by the moon’s “sheen” whose reverberation is reversed by the snow, “coming upward and lighting up his ceiling in an unnatural way, casting shadows in strange places” (81). So the visual chain here goes from the blurred nightly face lit by the inverted gleam of the moon to the narrator and the reader. But the moon itself reflects a hidden sun, which may remind us that Gabriel is the solar hero from his first description, his smile being said to be like “the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun” (7). Moreover, at the end of the chapter, his distant shape is outlined against the blazing sky of the early morning, even though to Boldwood’s eyes he seems “like a black snuff in the midst of a candle-flame” (82). Overall,

the Valentine moment is “distinctly queer [...] almost surrealistically distorted” (Schweik 439). Its strange light effect is continued by the winter sunrise that follows, with the same inversion of light (Babb 375). Here again, the *mise en abyme* seems to point out the informing generic dimension: the rather facetious, but reckless, Valentine suddenly assumes “tragic possibilities” (as Egdon Heath does in *The Return of the Native*). As to the naming of the character, it is simpler than in Bathsheba’s case, and suggests isolation. We seem to be denied access to this man’s inner world. He is repeatedly called Boldwood, also “the solemn and reserved yeoman” or “the bachelor” (in correspondence with the Valentine theme); this in opposition to Bathsheba in the former scene, or Gabriel here who is first called “Gabriel Oak” (when seen through Boldwood’s eyes), and “Gabriel” when described by the narrator. The difference in treatment is eloquent. The reflection in the looking-glass is now steeped in mystery, the mystery of the strange unplumbed and impenetrable depth of an ill-favoured destiny. Boldwood is already the perfect embodiment of the tragic hero in the grip of fate under the guise of a “mystified condition of mind” (Hardy 1986, 80) leaving him a prey to his “inner impulse” in “the groove of a series already started” (80). Here again, but less explicitly and more fragmentarily than in the first scene, we seem to be given something like the encased and condensed outline of the plot soon to unfold.

- 8 The underlying parallelism between the two specular scenes, and the two chapters, suggests a contradictory equivalence between Bathsheba and Boldwood through which both are reciprocally illuminated. If Bathsheba is equated with the red of life (her coat in the first scene, the seal of the Valentine), this red seal becomes a “blot of blood on the retina of [Boldwood’s] eyes” (Hardy 1986, 80). The open air and diurnal shine in chapter I stand in absolute contrast with the nocturnal “preternatural inversion of light and shade” (81) in Boldwood’s claustrophobic room, under “the mysterious influences of night” (80). Bathsheba reads future victories in her reflected beauty, Boldwood is left “uneasy and dissatisfied with himself” (81), as if what his image discovers to him remained beyond his comprehension and was vaguely threatening. Additionally, Bathsheba is bathed in spring light in opposition to Boldwood who is associated with winter and the time of year, the moment of day, when “the shades of earth are in the sky” (81). Both are shown to be equally solipsistic, the first being seduced by her own reflection like a she-Narcissus, the second feeling deeply disturbed by his distorted likeness and the fear of drowning in what the nebulous phantom-like outline suggests. One may add that the clash between the two seems unavoidable, each being paradoxically united to the other in the conceptions of love as possession, be it that of future lovers for Bathsheba, or the thought of an “ideal passion” (80) for Boldwood.
- 9 This mutually meta-scenic equivalence between the two reflective moments in the story confirms the hypothesis about *mise en abyme* as primarily discovering the generic essentials in view of both placing and confirming our reading exchange with the text. And this in spite of the fact that the sometimes flippant tone of the narrator seems to warn us about the dangers inherent in suspension of disbelief, either in the direction of romance or of tragedy. For instance, when he distances us from the story by a derisive allusion to Boldwood’s supposed love object (again, dramatic irony) as a “misty shape” whose “original was at that moment sound asleep and oblivious of all love and letter-writing under the sun” (Hardy 1986, 81); which may be a way of warning us against the equally misleading dimensions of romance and tragedy, bipolar temptations and extremes over which the final compromise of a love based on experience will diffidently prevail.

- 10 Another reflective moment, but simpler and more transitory, could be referred to in addition to these two scenes. When Troy arrives at the Christmas party like a ghost from the past, he is first discovered by the country folks in a nightly scene of collective espial: “The light from the pane was now perceived to be shining not upon the ivied wall as usual, but upon some object close to the glass. It was a human face” (Hardy 1986, 284). Here though, hardly any sense of distance is to be found; on the contrary the denied information concerning the reflected face, that is Troy’s, clearly shows suspense allied to something close to the weird, the concordant signs of a coming crisis.¹
- 11 A complementary remark should be made concerning the difference between *mise en abyme* and intertextuality. The tableau of Fanny and child in death is rendered all the more poignant by its inverted equivalence with the Christian iconography of happy divine maternity. Such cultural contiguity, here tragic, is based on comparison and the equivalence, or even the echoing between two analogous images or scenes. *Mise en abyme* works differently. It does not propose the fitting together of two different but allied realities, but the continuous splitting of a notion within itself and the conjunction of the clashing avatars thus produced. Due to a changed context, it makes the same inwardly dissimilar. Its semantic energy lies not in correspondence, but in an insuperable inner contradiction, the equivalent, on the oxymoronic side, of what is called a double-bind.

Beyond *mise en abyme*

- 12 Contrary to usual assumptions, *mise en abyme* in the two scenes analysed unexpectedly works in the direction of make-believe. It satisfies the natural reader — as one speaks of natural people —, a reader looking for the simple pleasures of story-telling as summarised by Charles Reade’s “Make ‘em laugh; make ‘em cry; make ‘em wait”, and illustrated in the mid-19th century by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, among others. It extracts the generic components at stake and immediately clinches their grip on us precisely because of the illusion of distance it affords us. It makes us think we understand it all, the central effect, strength, and danger, of dramatic irony. It is not only specular, but speculative; its visual mirroring opens out on a full panorama of musings and anticipations involving the future development of the story, along with philosophical (ideological, one should say) ponderings about life, love, man, destiny, etc. The fact that it plays with equal efficiency in the opposite directions of romance and tragedy confirms that these two are only the obverse and the reverse of the same coin. As André Jolles demonstrates in his *Formes simples* (Jolles 191-192)², tales (or romance) and tragedy derive from a unique conception in their positive or negative orientations: in fairy tales things turn out as we wished them to, in tragedy, as we feared they would. Such is the imperative rule of “poetic justice” or what Jolles calls “naïve morality”: the good must be recompensed and the bad punished according to their deserts, a major narrative force in Hardy’s novels. Hence our strong displeasure when our hopes are contradicted by ill-omened coincidences and mishaps (like Fanny’s going to the wrong church), and elsewhere our horror when little Father Time hangs himself. The same poetic justice can be said to provide the momentum of Jane Austen’s novels, particularly *Persuasion*. Its axiological pull prevails in most contemporary stories, be they written or filmic. By playing up to this while apparently making us stand back, what looks like *mise en abyme* in the two scenes begets a strange kind of distance that seems to deny itself, paradoxically nurturing the strongly affective approach of the child in us, and fortunate it is that it should do so. It is this unadulterated delight that

moves us so intensely when in the chapter “The two together”, Gabriel and Bathsheba are fighting the storm in absolute unison, while Troy is steeped in his drunken stupor and remains unbearably, but satisfyingly, inactive. We greet this first and fugitive evening of the scores with secret jubilation, even though we somehow acknowledge this is only the narrative machine working in us. Such are some of the pleasures of novel reading, particularly Hardy’s.

- 13 All in all, the narrative aptness of *mise en abyme* in the novel, and more generally dramatic irony, is that they make us accept and side with the axiological system at work. They allow the reader to think he or she understands all the facets of the situation, and can consequently diagnose its moral pros and cons, a constant spring making one automatically identify with whoever is unjustly spurned, for instance Gabriel in the long period when he is reduced to a helpless silence. The same effect can be said to work in favour of Boldwood when one sees him paralysed and condemned by his dogged innocence. *Mise en abyme* is put at the service of an all-powerful generic dimension. E. M. Forster was suggesting something of this when he famously wrote in *Aspects of the Novel* that in Hardy, “the characters are made to contribute too much to the plot” (Forster 101). *Far from the Madding Crowd* was written and published in “numbers”, that is serially in instalments of four chapters, as were Dickens’s and Thackeray’s novels. Everybody knows, if only because of our familiarity with televisual forms, the narrative consequences of such a type of narration in matters of suspense and what is called the characters’ psychology. More generally, it is my tenet that Hardy was well aware of what the “production” of the reader’s interest amounted to (see Grivel), and became more and more so. Such means and effects are the very foundations of the narrative genre itself. Their alliance with, and reinforcement by the necessities of tragedy, led him to a kind of artistic *cul-de-sac*, and consequently to the cessation of his writing in novel form after *Jude the Obscure*. Jude’s fictional itinerary that Thomas Hardy had thought out as a socio-cultural parable was cheapened and degraded by critics and public into a sexually deviant sensation story, an experience which was so eloquent and traumatic that it became terminal. This is only a hypothesis, but it seems the most convincing to me, since it refers us not to biography and the historical context but to the tensions at work in the version of narration that Hardy felt himself drawn to, and was, as it were, forced to produce by a sort of inner artistic compulsion.
- 14 The lessons of *mise en abyme*, in the form used by Thomas Hardy, are complex. On the artistic side, some critics there are who affirm that this novel is not Hardy’s best one. It all depends on what one expects. Writing about *Richard Feverel*, John Meredith’s first novel, Virginia Woolf observes: “The first novel is always apt to be an unguarded one, where the author displays his gifts without knowing how to dispose of them to the best advantage” (Woolf 1986, 228). *Far from the Madding Crowd* is not Hardy’s first novel, yet it is no exaggeration to say that the author was still in the early part of his career, and that his narrative choices are more clearly visible here in their essentials than in any of the more naturalistic stories to follow. It is not the least of its qualities that this novel still seduces us with its suggestion of novelty and versatility, if only in its hesitation between romance and tragedy. We somehow feel that the machine (be it the machine of narration and/or the machine of tragedy) has not won yet and does not “constrain” the writer, as Virginia Woolf says³, as it does in later novels, for instance in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* with the atrocious final solitude of the hero (the same coming back in *Jude the Obscure*). In particular, the visual play in the first looking-glass scene maintains a kind of lightness

and of freedom in the way we are allowed to interpret it. I am not sure, all things considered, that the pristine and rather mercurial quality of Bathsheba at her mirror is not what prevails most ambivalently in our memory of the book, at once for its attractiveness and its cautionary import.

- 15 This is not without consequences on the critical side. The approach I here put to use and advocate takes its lessons from the very contradictory procedures of *mise en abyme* as practised by Hardy in such scenes. The viewpoint it fosters, and requires, places one within the text, due to identification, but also without it, at the level of the processes one is made to activate. Whether the text shapes *mise en abyme* for this purpose or *mise en abyme* itself lends such a quality to it, we may then observe what the story as story implies, while at the same time concretising it (that is, projecting on it all that we are and know and believe at the moment of reading). This Janus-like critical posture is far from destroying the affective richness of the novel. On the contrary, it makes us more conscious of the emotions we are experiencing in the very moment of reading. To maintain this enlightened position is not an easy task, for due to identification, and counter-identification, the narrative mechanism is made ours, or rather it makes us his. We are plunged in it, and as Malraux suggests a fish in a bowl is in no position to see the bowl itself⁴, in the same way as one can never see oneself as others see one. Yet in these fleeting specular instants we are as it were given the opportunity of being simultaneously inside and outside. We become partly, or somehow, conscious of the relativity of our position as readers. Such is the curious insight that these two liminal scenes surprise us with. Reading them, it is impossible simply to sail through in pursuit of the story-line. One is forced, if only subliminally, to become conscious of the nature of what one experiences. This tenuous watershed between inside (the naïve reader) and outside (the reader as critic), suggests what to me is a most desirable critical approach, one that does not falsify the very personal and dynamic perceptions the text, any text, ignites, while at the same time remaining conscious of what the whole amounts to in matters of thought and real distance. I think this is the decisive lesson to be drawn from such scenes, a crucial lesson because it suggests that one may and can remain faithful to the opposite forces of persuasion and detachment in this narrative universe which for want of a better word we call “Hardy”.

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NOTES

1. Two other uncanny specular effects may be found in chapter V: the oval pond glittering "like a dead man's eye" (Hardy 1986, 33) and in chapter XIX: the circular sheep-washing pool becoming "a glistening Cyclop's eye" to birds on the wing (99), the latter example suggesting something of what Forster affirms in *Aspects of the Novel* about Hardy being "essentially a poet, who conceives his novels from an enormous height" (Forster 100).
2. "[...] il y a dans le conte une forme où l'événement et le cours des choses suivent un ordre tel qu'ils répondent entièrement aux exigences de la morale naïve, et qu'ils sont donc 'bons' et 'justes' selon notre jugement sentimental absolu. [...] Le tragique survient selon une formule brève mais parfaitement juste, quand ce qui doit être ne peut pas être, ou quand ce qui ne peut pas être doit être" (Jolles 191-192).
3. "The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour. The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn" (Woolf 1984, 149).
4. "Pour bien voir un aquarium, mieux vaut n'être pas poisson" (Malraux 170).

ABSTRACTS

The interest and attraction of the mirror scene in Chapter I of *Far from the Madding Crowd* is that it provides a kind of generic *mise en abyme*, which at this very early stage in the story amounts to the promise of a coming love affair. The possibilities of romance imbue this first mirror scene, whereas the possibilities of tragedy loom over the second more expanded one in Chapter XIV, when Farmer Boldwood places the Valentine in the corner of his looking-glass and then falls into a medley of vision, anticipation and sleep. *Mise en abyme* is a notion that should be discussed. The distance it causes is rarely what it is thought to be. Here, as often in fiction, it foregrounds the generic dimension and subtly reinforces the narrative grip on the reader. The revelation it seems to foreground is in fact part and parcel of our implicit reading contract with the novel. It works in the direction of make-believe and persuasion, and procures a kind of pleasure both suggesting and hampering actual distance.

L'intérêt et l'attrait de la scène dans laquelle Bathsheba se contemple dans un miroir au premier chapitre de *Far from the Madding Crowd* viennent de ce qu'elle propose une sorte de mise en abyme générique, qui à ce stade premier de l'histoire semble faire miroiter la promesse d'une histoire d'amour. Cette première scène de regard dans un miroir est toute entière imprégnée des possibilités de la romance, tandis que l'éventualité de la tragédie se profile sur la seconde scène, plus étoffée, qui joue sur la présence d'un miroir, au chapitre XIV. Boldwood place alors la carte de la Saint Valentin dans un coin de son miroir, avant de se perdre dans un mélange de visions, d'anticipations et de rêves. La mise en abyme est une notion qu'il convient d'interroger. En effet la distance qu'elle crée est rarement celle qu'on imagine. Ici, comme souvent dans les œuvres de fiction, elle met en avant la dimension générique de la scène et renforce ainsi subtilement l'emprise de la narration sur le lecteur. La révélation qu'elle paraît souligner est en réalité liée à notre contrat implicite de lecture du roman. Elle fonctionne dans le sens du « faire croire » et de la persuasion, et procure un type de plaisir qui tout à la fois suggère et prévient une réelle prise de distance.

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Mots-clés: distance, genre narratif, mise en abyme, miroir, narrativité, romance, tragédie

Keywords: distance, genre, mise en abyme, mirror, narrativity, romance, tragedy

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Michel Morel is Professor emeritus at Nancy 2. His field of research is the processes of reading activated by all kinds of text (from the press and popular writings to high literature). He is particularly interested in the affects, the original causes of our emotions, triggered at the double level of the actualization of genre by the individual text and its concretization by the reader. He consequently investigates generic processes, in particular narrative ones, and the critical valuations dependent on them. His approach is multidisciplinary. He has recently extended his study of forms to the axiological contents of rhetorical figures, and also to other domains of expression like poster, painting and architecture.