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Variations on Darwin

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The “passion for particularity” in *The Return of the Native*

Annie Ramel

- ¹ In her ground-breaking reading of Thomas Hardy, Gillian Beer argues that Hardy “shared with Darwin that delight in material life in its widest diversity, the passion for particularity, and for individuality and plenitude which is the counter-element in Darwin’s narrative and theory” (Beer 240). Hardy and Darwin, she writes, had in common a strain of “Romantic materialism” which is “a sensuously grounded response to the world of forms and life,” a delight in “the palpable, the particular” (Beer 37). Darwin, she also notes, had a quick eye for exceptions. In Hardy’s work, there is a contradiction between plot and writing: for plot is almost always malign or entrapping, while “the text in process awakens us to sensation full of perceptual pleasure” (Beer 222). The emphasis may be on “systems more extensive than the life span of the individual” (Beer 224), a fact which has often prompted commentators to connect Hardy and Darwin in terms of pessimism. Yet much of the beauty of his fiction comes from a focus on the present moment, on the “recuperative powers” of an individual, on his unquenchable “appetite for joy”. Hardy’s writing is

characterized by creative vacillation, by a shiftiness which survives the determination of plot. Life is devious and resourceful, constantly reassembling about new possibilities which lie just off the path of the obliterative energies of event. Happiness and hap form the two poles in his work. (Beer 229)

- ² In that polarity, Gillian Beer argues, Hardy is indebted to what she refers to as Darwin’s Romantic materialism.
- ³ Thus Hardy’s desire “to renew the fullness of *things in themselves*”¹ may be seen as an effect of Darwin’s impact. The Lacanian approach, as developed by Jacques-Alain Miller and Éric Laurent in a seminar, may be useful here.² According to J.-A. Miller, the rise of the discourse of science, from Galileo onwards, has caused the substitution of knowledge for meaning. In the Renaissance, the entire universe made sense: the macrocosm, microcosm, and the Body Politic were harmoniously ordered, and bound together in an analogical relation. The great “chain of beings”, which formed the whole of Creation, was organized by a divine plan. To the Elizabethans, there was “a special

providence in the fall of a sparrow”, to use Hamlet's words (V 2, 215). The Copernican revolution was the first onslaught on this vision of cosmic order, followed by the physics of Newton, the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and it was definitely challenged by the advances made in the nineteenth century in physics (the second law of thermodynamics), and especially in the fields of geology (Sir Charles Lyell), biology (Charles Darwin). J.-A. Miller calls “scientific metaphor” the substitution of knowledge for sense and rewrites as follows the Lacanian formula for metaphor, replacing the Name-of-the-Father and the desire for the mother with knowledge and meaning :

Science [...] as it emerged from Galileo onwards, and as it established itself with Newton [...] substitutes knowledge for meaning. And that substitution can be written as a metaphor like this: knowledge over meaning:

Knowledge

Meaning

which is properly speaking the scientific metaphor. The effect of the scientific metaphor, in signification, is silence. That very silence which Pascal made into a power that fills with dread: “the eternal silence of those infinite spaces fills me with dread.”³

- 4 What is repressed here by the metaphor is not the desire of/for the mother (as in the paternal metaphor), but meaning: the lost object is the vision of a meaningful universe. What emerges as predominant, above the bar of the metaphor, is knowledge. But knowledge, as J.-A. Miller argues, does not make sense. And in the nineteenth century, more than any previous scientific discovery, the Darwinian shift prompts this scientific metaphor, which brings about a split between, on the one hand, the social and political reality born of language, which alone makes sense⁴, and on the other hand the natural world, which is the object of science, but from which meaning has been expelled. Scraps of knowledge may be wrenched from it—mathematical knowledge, properly articulated, but devoid of sense. There is a left-over, an irreducible remainder: the Lacanian term for it is the “Real”. The Real is what subsists outside symbolization (Lacan 1966, 308), it stands for what is neither symbolic nor imaginary. No discourse can figure out “this 'grey and formless mist, pulsing slowly as if with inchoate life,' [...] the pulsing of the presymbolic substance in its abhorrent vitality”⁵. That analysis leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the “scientific metaphor” has, paradoxically, caused the emergence of the Real. No wonder Slavoj Žižek, after Alain Badiou, argued that “the twentieth century aimed at delivering the thing itself,” and craved for “the direct experience of the Real as opposed to everyday social reality” (Žižek 2002, 5). Awareness of the Real as a hard core of unsymbolizable reality is undoubtedly the subject of Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach”, expressing the disenchantment of a post-Darwinian world: the “grating roar” of the pebbles, of the “naked shingles of the world”, makes us hear a sound which is no intelligible voice—not the music of the spheres of the Elizabethans, but, in George Eliot’s words, “that roar which lies on the other side of silence” (Eliot 1872, 226), the dreadful vocal object beyond the eternal silence of infinite spaces.
- 5 However impossible it may be for science to give an account of the Real in rational, analytical terms, literature has the power to enmesh it in the reticulations of its texts—the flourishes of its letters, the sound waves of its poetics. The left-overs of science, the useless “litter” of language, are the subject-matter seized upon by men/women of letters. The Real is what never ceases to be written. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy—things that no scientific discourse has

the capacity to express, but which are the proper domain of literature—as George Eliot once admirably put it:

Suppose, then, that the effort which has been again and again made to construct a universal language on a rational basis has at length succeeded, and that you have a language that has no uncertainty, no whims of idiom, no cumbrous forms, no fitful shimmer of many-hued significance, no hoary archaisms 'familiar with forgotten years'—a patent de-odorized and non-resonant language, which effects the purpose of communication as perfectly and rapidly as algebraic signs. Your language may be a perfect medium of expression to science, but will never express *life*, which is a great deal more than science. (Eliot 1963, 287-8)

- 6 This may explain why, in Hardy's *Return of the Native* (as in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*), the focus is both on singularity and on the Darwinian vision of individuals dwarfed in the incommensurability of evolutionary time. As Gillian Beer convincingly argues, Darwin's perspective (like Hardy's) is twofold, balanced between the sombre vision generally known as "Darwinism" and a delight in the palpable, the particular. Darwin's materialism focuses on *things in themselves*, reversing "the platonic scheme which makes of things insufficient substitutes for their own idea" (Beer 36). The drive is towards the physical, away from language and ideas, away from the symbolic fictions that used to construct reality into a meaningful universe in a pre-scientific age.

- 7 Hardy, like Darwin, has an eye for exceptions and endangered specimens: for instance, Eustacia Vye is identified by "a red ribbon round her neck" worn beside her dark dress (360), just as Tess has a red ribbon tied in her hair. The detail is far from being insignificant: it is the stigma that brands Tess as fallen, Eustacia as a witch. Both women are singled out as tragic heroines, ear-marked by Fate, or, in other words, by evolution. Eustacia is "a solitary figure" (12), standing "singularly" (50) against the sky above Egdon Heath, careful to avoid the company of the men and lads making bonfires on November 5th. On Blackbarrow hill, she first appears as an anomaly in the landscape, a protrusion that comes in excess of reality, a surplus object that has to be displaced for the normal celebration to take place:

As the resting man looked at the barrow he became aware that its summit, hitherto the highest object in the whole prospect round, was surmounted by something higher. It rose from the semiglobular mound like a spike from a helmet [...] There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe. (11)

- 8 Eustacia, significantly referred to as a thing that cannot be "mapped", drops out of sight to enable the newcomers to take her place and light their bonfires. She too constructs her own bonfire, but it is an exception, being made not of furze, which is expendable wood, but of precious cleft-wood. It is also meant not for the community of Egdon residents, but for private enjoyment ("a little fire [...] that nobody else may enjoy", 27), and it is designed as a signal which only one person (Wildeve) can understand. It is unique, not a fire among other fires, but "the moon of the whole shining throng" (26). Fire is the element that defines Eustacia, as if her bonfire merely reflected the fire burning in her, thus making her true identification trait visible: "You could fancy the colour of Eustacia's soul to be flame-like. The sparks from it that rose into her dark pupils gave the same impression" (63-64). When Clym Yeobright sees her face for the first time, his eye is caught by "the ruddy glare from the west" reflected on the blazing panes of an upper window from which she is calling (184).

- 9 Red is also the colour of blood, and the blood-red stain is another feature that characterizes Eustacia. As she and Clym try to draw water from her father's well, her hands bleed from holding fast to the rope tied to the bucket (186). So she tells Clym about her other wound, the one caused that very morning at church by a woman who pricked her with a long needle because she thought she was a witch who had cast a spell on her children. She draws up her sleeve and discloses a "scarlet little puncture" on her round white arm: "A bright red spot appeared on its smooth surface, like a ruby on Parian marble" (186). Explicitly or implicitly, the young woman is repeatedly blamed for spells and curses, as when a mirror effect places Eustacia and Clym's mother in a deadly face-to-face relation: Mrs Yeobright has seen Eustacia looking at her from an upper window, while Eustacia has seen Mrs Yeobright knocking at her door—a door which she did not open. Clym's mother walks away from her son's house in the scorching heat of an August afternoon, to meet her death on the heath after an adder has stung her. The mirror effect is repeated in the scene in which an adder is caught so that its fat may be used to anoint the wound. The adder, with its "small black eye [...]" like a villainous sort of blackcurrant," stands for Eustacia, "the lonesome dark-eyed creature" (47) whose evil eye has stung to death the older woman:

The live adder regarded the assembled group with a sinister look in its small black eye, and the beautiful brown and jet pattern on its back seemed to intensify with indignation. Mrs Yeobright saw the creature, and the creature saw her: she quivered throughout, and averted her eyes. (297)

- 10 Mrs Yeobright is now the one who is marked by a red stain:

The foot [...] was swollen and red. Even as they watched the red began to assume a more livid colour, in the midst of which appeared a scarlet speck, smaller than a pea, and it was found to consist of a drop of blood, which rose above the smooth flesh of her ankle in a hemisphere. (296-97)

- 11 Though the fiery or blood-red spot is Eustacia's hallmark, it is also a sign of some general disorder that affects the Egdon community. In the second chapter, the reader's attention is first attracted by "a moving spot", which turns out to be a spring-van, "ordinary in shape, but singular in colour, this being a lurid red." The driver of the van is Diggory Venn, the reddleman⁶, and like his van he is completely red⁷. Diggory's blue eyes glare strangely "through his stain" (8), he occasionally "flushe[s] through his stain" (150). Like Eustacia, he is to some extent alien to his community (74-75), and he appears like a surplus object that protrudes into the field of vision. At the Quiet Woman Inn, he is sitting in a dark recess in the chimney-corner, totally unobserved, until he speaks and suddenly makes his "stain" visible:

From the niche a single object protruded into the light from the candles on the table. It was a clay pipe, and its colour was reddish. The men had been attracted to this object by a voice behind the pipe asking for a light. (224-25)

- 12 In fact the Egdon scenery is dotted with innumerable stains, spots, specks, blots, flecks, patches, etc. The heath itself is repeatedly called a "spot" ("a lonely spot" 30, a spot which is "a near relation of night" 3, etc.). "Spot" is a key-word, repeated again and again in the text, a symptom which never ceases to be written. But what is remarkable is that the "spot", or the "stain" disappears as if by magic after the expulsion of Eustacia, the tragic scapegoat. When Diggory Venn comes to visit Thomasin a few months after the death of her husband and Eustacia, he is no longer a reddleman. As if the stain had been caused by Eustacia. Now that she is dead, the surrounding air at

Blooms-End is "free from every taint" (390). Once the community has rid itself of its "witch", normality is restored, and the stain is erased.

- 13 What then does the stain stand for? A passage in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* may help to clarify this point: when Angel leaves Sandbourne after seeing the last of Tess, he "unconsciously" looks back, and his gaze is arrested by an object which forms a stain on a particular point of his field of vision, the vanishing point of perspective: "The tape-like surface of the road diminished in his rear as far as he could see, and as he gazed a moving spot intruded on the white vacuity of its perspective" (Hardy 1891, 371). The change of scale is clearly due to the Darwinian displacement of man, dwarfed by the very scope of evolution instead of being the center of creation. The spot is a surplus object which comes to occupy the "white vacuity" of the perspective. The void it fills is the blind spot that normally elides the field of the gaze, that is to say the "unspecularizable"⁸ object forever missing in the mirror image, or in any picture. For there is always more than meets the eye in a picture: that elusive spot is the Lacanian "object-gaze". *Objet a* has been defined as "a pure deficit in the symbolic order that does not have any imaginary protrusion to fill it out," a vacuum "sucking other objects into its place" (Kaye 56)⁹. The "object-gaze" is a form of *objet a*, and as such it is a hollow. If it is not "extracted", if it comes as a surplus included in the experience of a subject, it leads to the disintegration of his reality (in psychosis and in tragedy).¹⁰ That is what happens in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*: the obtrusive presence of the stain—a figure of the unrepresentable object-gaze—causes devastation in the lives of the protagonists, until its erasure brings back normality.¹¹ In *The Return of the Native*, it is the "evil eye"¹² that brings about the tragedy. Clym is literally blinded by Eustacia's flame-like beauty: he develops an acute form of ophtalmia; hence his mother's warning: "You are blinded, Clym [...] It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her" 194). As we have seen, Mrs Yeobright is killed by a woman's face (Eustacia's) looking at her through a window-pane (288). Window-panes cause pain until the gaze is pacified by the expulsion of the heroine/the erasure of the stain: when Clym and Charley try to pry into Thomasin's house after Eustacia's death, they find that "vision was hindered by the green antiquity of the panes" (409). The gaze is "tamed" by the translucent panes which serve as a *dompte-regard*. Pain can now find an outlet in tears, which veil the fiery object-gaze: "Charley wiped his own eyes, which were rather blurred with moisture" (409)¹³. The "cobweb of semblances" (Žižek 2002, 12) again veils the dazzling brilliance whose inclusion in reality formerly threatened to deliver the unspeakable, ultimate Real thing.

- 14 Of that ultimate Real thing, philosophical or scientific discourse can give no account. That is a point explicitly made by Hardy in two passages that echo one another, one in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and the other in *The Return of the Native*. In the two scenes the focus is on the eyes of birds that have witnessed horrendous scenes in regions "beyond the North Pole":

Strange birds from behind the North Pole began to arrive silently on the upland of Flintcomb-Ash; gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes—eyes which had witnessed scenes of cataclysmal horror in inaccessible polar regions of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived, in curdling temperatures that no man could endure; which had beheld the crash of icebergs and the slide of snow-hills by the shooting light of the Aurora; been half blinded by the whirl of colossal storms and terraqueous distortions; and retained the expression of feature that such scenes had engendered (Hardy 1891, 279-80).

- 15 On Egdon Heath, Venn observes such birds, and by looking at a white mallard "just arrived from the home of the north wind," he finds himself "in direct communication with regions unknown to man":

The creature brought within him an amplitude of Northern knowledge. Glacial catastrophes, snowstorm episodes, glittering auroral effects, Polaris in the zenith, Franklin underfoot—the category of his commonplaces was wonderful (Hardy 1878, 84).

- 16 But that "Northern knowledge" is bound to remain silent—the eternal silence of infinite spaces which Jacques-Alain Miller claims is an effect of science. For the bird, "like many other philosophers, seemed as he looked at the reddleman to think that a present moment of comfortable reality was worth a decade of memories." In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the spectral birds bring no record of what they have seen, they cannot uncover "the thing that lies beyond the semblance of the thing", to borrow Virginia Woolf's expression (Woolf 128)¹⁴:

These nameless birds came quite near to Tess and Marian, but of all they had seen which humanity would never see, they brought no account. The travellers' ambition to tell was not theirs, and, with dumb impassivity, they dismissed experiences which they did not value for the immediate incidents of this homely upland (Hardy 1891, 280).

- 17 Of the Thing beyond the semblance of the thing, no knowledge is deducible. The tragic eyes of the nameless birds may be a figure of the object-gaze, but as such they can only represent the unrepresentable. By what trick then does literature manage to convey to us a sense of that unknowable Real?

- 18 The pictorial arts know how to make space for the unspecularizable object-gaze: the device is known as anamorphosis in the genre of the vanity. In Holbein's *Ambassadors*, the strange uncanny object which comes as a surplus at the bottom of the painting assumes the shape of a human skull if we look awry at it—a hollow bone¹⁵ looking at us from the empty eye-sockets of the skull. In *The Return of the Native*, several descriptive passages read like vanities. For instance this scene, where the reference is to Dürer¹⁶, and which is the literary equivalent of a "vanity", showing how "the brilliant lights" may change into "sooty shades" depending on the shape and position of the "nimble flames":

All was unstable; quivering as leaves, evanescent as lightning. Shadowy eye-sockets, deep as those of a death's head, suddenly turned into pits of lustre: a lantern-jaw was cavernous, then it was shining; wrinkles were emphasized to ravines, or obliterated entirely by a changed ray. Nostrils were dark wells; sinews in old necks were gilt mouldings; things with no particular polish on them were glazed; bright objects, such as the tip of a furze-hook one of the men carried, were as glass; eyeballs glowed like little lanterns [...] for all was in extremity (15).

- 19 Behind the depiction of a joyful British celebration there lurks something sinister¹⁷. And those shadowy eye-sockets *look at you*, like the object-gaze in *The Ambassadors*. Anamorphic effects are everywhere in a novel that begins with bonfires (etymologically *bone*-fires) lit on the heath to celebrate November 5th—in a child's distorted vision of the night (69), in the long shadow advancing ahead of Clym (182), in the shadow projected on the ground by his mother's house (188). There is always more than meets the eye in Hardy's pictures. A slight turn of the gaze may suddenly allow a glimpse of the horror lurking just behind, as for instance when Clym's voice is heard unexpectedly after the tragedy: "starting *round* they beheld by the dim light, a thin,

pallid, almost spectral form, wrapped in a blanket, and *looking* like Lazarus coming from the tomb" (380, my italics, note the ambiguity of "looking")¹⁸.

- 20 Among the "surplus objects" of the diegesis, there is one which is both incongruous and familiar, in excess of reality yet included in the field of vision—the funerary "urns" dug out from nearby barrows, which the Egdon inhabitants use as flower-pots on their window-sills. The urn encapsulates the truth about the object-gaze as a figure of death, the urn is structurally speaking a skull. In the description of Eustacia's house it arrests the gaze like the hollow bone in Holbein's painting:

The only visible articles in the room were those on the window-sill, which showed their shapes against the low sky, the middle article being the old hourglass, and the other two a pair of ancient British urns which had been dug from a barrow near, and were used as flowerpots for two razor-leaved cactuses (121).

- 21 In another passage Christian Cantle tells Mrs Yeobright about a barrow that has just been opened, while Clym attended the operation:

"They have dug a hole, and they have found things like flowerpots upside down, Mis'ess Yeobright; and inside these be real charnel bones. They have carried 'em off to men's houses [...] Mr. Yeobright had got one pot of the bones, and was going to bring 'em home—real skellington bones—but 'twas ordered otherwise." (191)

- 22 Mrs Yeobright is very angry because her son, instead of bringing home the urn as a present to her, has given it to Eustacia, who is said to have "a cannibal taste for such churchyard furniture". She addresses sharp words of reproach to him ("The urn you had meant for me you gave away" 191), as though to signify to him that she who bore him in her womb is entitled to sharing a tomb with him! A little further on, Mrs Yeobright is sitting alone in her room while Thomasin is getting married. As Mrs Yeobright's eyes are "directed towards the open door," a sparrow enters through the door, and endeavours to go out by the window. But the bird flutters among the flower-pots (which we assume must be "flowerpots" dug from ancient graves), it has to be released by Mrs Yeobright (217). The surplus object bars the view and prevents escape¹⁹. Its spectral presence invades the field of the visible.

- 23 Furthermore, the novel plays on signifiers, for "urn" is contained in a number of key words, the most significant ones being "burn", "turn", and "return". Whether the funerary urns contain bones or ashes is immaterial, for the two are conflated in the bonfires, the *bone*-fires that reduce to ashes the furze faggots that feed them. "Burn" is of course a central signifier in a novel where death is a consummation devoutly to be wished, where the heath has undergone "a species of incineration" (277) on the day Mrs Yeobright sets out to visit her son, where the sun (or son?) stands directly in her face, "like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume her" (290), and where Clym's eyes are lit by a hot light, "as if the fire in their pupils were burning up their substance" (311). Burning is the central issue, but the novel is also the story of a man whose fate is sealed by his "return" to his native country ("if you had never returned to your native place, Clym, what a blessing it would have been for you" 276). Clym, estranged from his wife, sends her a letter asking her to return to him (351), but no "sound or signal of her return" ever reaches him (362). The only thing that will eventually return is the current in the vortex where Eustacia is drowned ("the vortex formed at the curl of the returning current" 375). "Turn" is found in words just as important in the narrative: for instance when Clym walks back home after a day's work on the heath and never turns his head, so that he does not see his mother following him (278). As a consequence, she will be "turned from his door" by her daughter-in-law

(300)²⁰. Diggory Venn has got rid of the colour red characteristic of his trade, and he tells Thomasin that he "turned so by degrees" (388). Finally, Clym Yeobright will "turn preacher" (402). Whenever words like "burn", "return", or "turn" are heard, we should overhear "urn", a signifier which produces anamorphic effects, not in the field of the visible but in that of sound, warning us of the vanity of all attempts to elude fate²¹.

- 24 So we have seen that access to the Thing can never be frontal: it has to be oblique. If the blot ceases to be viewed aslant, and shines full face into the eyes of the tragic characters, it means death for them. As Žižek argues, "when the gaze *qua* object is no longer the elusive blind spot in the field of the visible but is included in this field, one meets one's own death" (Žižek 1996, 94). That is exactly what happens to the characters in the diegesis. Mrs Yeobright is stung to death by the gaze of a woman looking at her from a window, or burnt by the rays of the sun/son on a scorching August afternoon. She is like the heron that she sees flying with his face towards the sun (the "occident") as she returns from her son's house. But our situation as readers is entirely different. To us the heron is a blot masking the mortal fire, shedding light like a halo:

He had come dripping wet from some pool in the valleys, and as he flew the edges and lining of his wings, his thighs and his breast were so caught by the bright sunbeams that he appeared as if formed of burnished silver (291).

- 25 The text shifts from natural history to the depiction of Nature as a symptom of the shock of Darwinian displacement. The resplendent vision is produced by an object positioned between the unsymbolizable Thing and ourselves, and sending around spectral effects, which foreshadow Conrad's mist, "in the likeness of one of these misty haloes that are sometimes made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine" (Conrad 138). The effects are audible as well as visible, for "burnished" is a variant in the "burn/urn/return" poetic series—but perhaps a softened version of the cruel "burn". The heron in this passage corresponds exactly to the "sublime object" as defined by Žižek:

The possibility of positioning an object relative to the drives arises because of what Lacan terms 'The Thing'. The Thing is a pressure-point that lies just outside the symbolic and imaginary orders, where the weight of the real is sensed. It is a place of menace, because it is where the deadly impulses of the drives are gathered... An object aligned with this point is said to be raised 'to the dignity of the Thing.' Rather like an eclipse, when a heavenly body becomes positioned between us and the sun, and appears surrounded by an aura of light so intense that we could never look directly at it, an object located in this way between us and the unsymbolizable Thing becomes as though irradiated by the drive, bathed in *jouissance*, transfigured, spiritualized and resplendent. Objects positioned in this way are referred to as 'sublime'. (Kaye 53-54)

- 26 Eustacia too is a "sublime object" in that sense. She is identified with the moon all along the novel, her bonfire being "the moon of the whole shining throng" (26). She and Clym meet on a particular night when there is an eclipse of the moon. Rather strangely, the eclipse is described not as a phenomenon obscuring part of the moon, but as the appearance of a stain, a surplus object: "While he watched [...] a tawny stain grew into being on the lower verge" (196). Clym will be destroyed by the "blinding halo" (201) of Eustacia's beauty. For the light of the moon has entered his eyes and reached the very point from which he sees ("he flung himself down upon the barrow, his face towards the moon, which depicted a small image of herself in each of his eyes" 195)²². But the reader is not blinded by the halo of the moon/Eustacia: he derives exquisite enjoyment from it. When Eustacia and Clym look at each other, remembering

"a certain moonlight scene common to both," "the calm fixity of her features sublimat[e] itself to an expression of refinement and warmth": "it was like garing noon rising to the dignity of sunset in a couple of seconds" (185). In that particular exchange of looks, Eustacia is "sublime" because the gaze is oblique—refracted by the act of remembering. Such is our gaze as readers. When Eustacia lies dead in her husband's house, she is a sublime object for both the reader and the surviving characters. The lethal stain has been erased, so that she is now the embodiment of whiteness:

They stood silently looking upon Eustacia, who as she lay there still in death eclipsed all her living phases. Pallor did not include all the quality of her complexion, which seemed more than whiteness; it was almost light. (381)

- 27 To conclude, we may note that what is restored is a cosmic order that fits in with the scheme of ruthless evolution, and that allows the possibility of an "eclipse" (i.e. a loss of brilliance of the moon). Eustacia is "more than whiteness", but language (the signifier "pallor") fails to define "the quality of her complexion". Language is both inadequate, in its signifying function, and the provider of a "surplus enjoyment" (*petit plus de jouir*) in its poetic rendering of the sublime aspect of the heroine. The literary text is less than whiteness—it cannot blind us. But it is also more than whiteness, for a few fragments of the lost *jouissance* remain encapsulated in its silent voice. For that joy, we are indebted to the "left-overs" of science—the useless "litter" discarded by scientists, which men/women of letters know how to fashion, conveying the sense of loss and displacement brought by modern science. Can it not be argued then that the influence of Darwinism on Hardy is most real in the poetics of his texts?

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NOTES

1. Gillian Beer ascribes this desire to Darwin (Beer 36).
2. "L'Autre qui n'existe pas et ses comités d'éthique", an unpublished seminar in twenty-two sessions by Éric Laurent and Jacques-Alain Miller, which took place from 20 November 1996 to 18 June 1997.
3. "La science [...] telle qu'elle s'est imposée à partir de Galilée, et telle qu'elle s'est affirmée avec Newton [...] substitue au sens le savoir. Et cette substitution peut être écrite comme métaphore ainsi: savoir sur sens, qui est à proprement parler la métaphore scientifique. La métaphore scientifique a pour effet, dans la signification, le silence. C'est ce silence même dont Pascal faisait une puissance d'effroi: 'le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.'" (Miller 203)
4. Such as political and judiciary institutions, religious rituals and beliefs, etc., the "fictions" which Bentham claimed were arbitrary, the useful symbolic fictions which organize our reality and are pure "semblances". (Miller, 131-133)
5. The quotation is taken from a science-fiction novel by Robert Heinlein, *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* (in Žižek 1992, 14).
6. "a person whose vocation it was to supply farmers with redding for their sheep" (7).
7. "One dye of that tincture covered his clothes, the cap upon his head, his boots, his face, and his hands. He was not temporarily overlaid with the colour; it permeated him" (7).
8. "[O]bjet petit a is the *unheimlich* surplus forever missing in the mirror image, i.e., 'unspeccularizable'" (Žižek 2001, 126).
9. *Objet a* "inscribes the presence of a hollow which any object may come into" (Dor 185).
10. "Lacan pointed out that the consistency of our 'experience of reality' depends on the exclusion of what he calls the *objet petit a* from it: in order for us to have normal 'access to reality,' something must be excluded, 'primordially repressed.' In psychosis, this exclusion is undone: the object (in this case, the gaze or voice) is *included* in reality, the outcome of which, of course, is the disintegration of our 'sense of reality,' the loss of reality" (Žižek 1996, 91).
11. Normality restored at the end of the novel means that objects are now *missing*: Diggory Venn waits till the moon rises to look for Thomasin's glove which was dropped under the maypole. Objects can now be lost, or given as presents, like the bed offered to the newly-married couple by the Egdon community, or the lock of Eustacia's hair which

Clym wraps up and offers to Charley (409). Wildeve was found dead with a bundle of banknotes in his pocket: if, according to Lacan, the psychotic "has his object in his pocket," can it not be argued that the statement also applies to the tragic hero? What is in fact restored is *objet petit a* as a hollow, a vacuum that any object may come into. A sign of the comic reintegration being achieved is Diggory Venn knocking his head against a beam and Thomasin checking that he has no bump ("she's put her hand to his head to feel is there's a lump. And now they be all laughing again as if nothing had happened" 409-410). When Thomasin moves back to Blooms-End, the ceilings are so low that the rooms necessitate "a sinking in the floor under the new clock-case she brought from the inn, and the removal of the handsome brass knobs on its head" (386).

12. "the true function of the organ of the eye, the eye filled with voracity, the evil eye." (Lacan 1986, 115)

13. A sign that the Symbolic has been restored is the "covenant" which Clym has made with his eyes: "In the words of Job, 'I have made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?'" (402). He will not set eyes on any other girl!

14. But ironically they "uncover some thing or other" that they relish as food!

15. Without forgetting that, ironically, "Holbein" in German means "hollow bone"...

16. Dürer invented anamorphosis according to many art critics. See Bullen for the connection between *The Return of the Native* and Dürer's work.

17. For instance the "gilt mouldings" are a foreboding of the terrible guilt that will harrow Clym and Eustacia, as well as a reference to Clym Yeobright's occupation in Paris (he worked as a "jeweller's manager" in a "blazing great shop" 106). Anamorphosis may also function as a poetic device involving the (silent) voice of the text, for in the passage just above we have phonematic chains suggesting a metonymic continuity from "ash" to "shine", "shone", "fresh", "British", or from "funeral" to "flames", "familiar", "festival," and "fresh" (15).

18. Clym also refuses to attend his cousin's wedding, arguing that he might be "too much like the skull at the banquet" (407).

19. A further anomaly is that the window is used for exit and the door as an opening for the gaze. After Mrs Yeobright's death, the flowers in the window will die for want of water, burnt to death like Clym's mother (322), and they will later be "revived and restored by Thomasin in the state in which his mother had left them" (388).

20. Another example: the dice-players' luck turns ("I said it would turn, and it has turned" 234), in a fantastic night scene where thirteen little lamps are formed by glow-worms ranged in a circle ("Why don't you burn, you little fools?" 234).

21. Other recurrent signifiers should be added to the list: words like "fern" ("the dying ferns" 336), "earn" ("he likes to earn a little" 301), "earnest" ("Yeobright resumed his reading in earnest" 241), "learn" (what Clym is desperately trying to do, wearing his eyes out through reading too much), "nocturnal" (268, 358), "taciturnity" (319), "burnished" (291), "furniture", "furnishing", "furnace", etc. One should also consider the insistent use of the letters of "urn" in "furze" (often coupled with "fern"), "mournful", etc. It is worth noting that the French song sung by Clym as he works cutting furze on the heath contains the letters "ur" in ten rhymes out of twelve: "jour", "parure", "retour", "amour", "nature", "court" (255).

22. What is annulled is the split between the eye and the gaze (Lacan 1986, 73).

ABSTRACTS

Gillian Beer argues that Hardy shared with Darwin what she calls "the passion for particularity." Hardy's relish in details is undoubtedly an effect of science for, as J.-A. Miller has shown, the rise of the discourse of science has caused the substitution of knowledge for meaning and, by way of consequence, the emergence of what Lacan will later call "the Real". Of the Real, science can give no account, but it is precisely the left-overs of science which are the proper domain of literature. In *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia Vye is such a sublime object failing to adapt to the demands of evolution: her figure on the heath stands "singularly" against the sky, her bonfire is unique—a fiery spot which is her true identification trait. The fiery (or blood-red) stain is Eustacia's hallmark, but the ubiquitous presence of the reddleman suggests that the whole Egdon community has somehow been contaminated. The stain is a figure of the Lacanian object-gaze, the unrepresentable object which should normally be "extracted", and whose inclusion in the field of the visible causes devastation all around. Only the death of Eustacia will erase the stain: by causing the disappearance of the surplus object, the expulsion of the tragic scapegoat, which achieve catharsis, is thus rewritten from the perspective of Darwinian selection.

Pour Gillian Beer, ce qui lie Hardy et Darwin, c'est la fascination pour le détail traduisant la diversité de la vie. Car la science de l'évolution, qui a substitué le savoir au sens—faisant ainsi émerger le Réel au sens de Lacan—a laissé une profonde empreinte sur l'œuvre de Hardy. Or, la littérature se nourrit de tout ce qui échappe ainsi au sens et aux sciences ; ainsi, dans *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia Vye se détache sur la lande, identifiée au feu ardent qu'elle allume, mais la tache rouge se dissémine, comme en témoigne le personnage du "reddleman". Cette tache rouge devient l'"objet-regard" lacanien, indice de l'indicible et du non-représentable, source de désastre en s'immisçant dans le champ scopique. Seule la mort peut laver la tache, expulsant le bouc émissaire, selon une logique inéluctable transposant la tragédie en extinction darwinienne.

INDEX

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