Far From the Madding Crowd : the physics of light and literary description

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On a beaucoup écrit sur le regard dans Far from the Madding Crowd, *sur le regard masculin en particulier. Cet article porte lui aussi son attention sur l'œil, en étudiant l'intense évocation de la lumière et ce qu'elle donne à voir dans ce roman, en tant que celle-ci est informée par les notions d'action de la lumière dans la physique du dix-neuvième siècle. Prenant cinq passages qui impliquent successivement Bathsheba, Gabriel et Boldwood, cet article s'interroge sur la place de la vision subjective dans un roman qui a pour visée une peinture objective de la réalité. Mon idée principale est que la médiation de la physique et de la physiologie crée pour le lecteur une description de la vie humaine comme 'événement' scénique vibratoire, plutôt que comme portrait psychologique d'une impression ressentie par un personnage. C'est, dans la pratique, cette méthode de description externe qui donne aux personnages de Hardy leur dignité dans ses portraits d'une humanité prenant part aux processus d'un univers indifférent et contingent.*

A reader of *Far from the Madding Crowd* cannot fail to be struck by "the action of the eye" which is, as J.B. Bullen points out, "such a potent force in all the developing relationships of the book" (Bullen, 72). Stephen Regan in his essay 'Darkening Pastoral' for the 2009 *Companion* adopts Bullen's term "ocular drama", and many critics, including Penny Boumelha, Judith Bryant Wittenberg and Linda Shires, have explored how looks, gazes and perceptions operate to objectify Bathsheba Everdene as an object of desire, censorship or query. Judith Mitchell is trenchant in her critique of Hardy's "scopic economy" in which "female consciousness is elided in favour of the obsessive objectification of women by means of the male gaze" (Mitchell, 160). Rather than rehearse these productive approaches, this paper takes five moments in the portrayal of Gabriel, Bathsheba and Boldwood to argue for a reading of *Far from the Madding Crowd* that responds to the tensions between the physiology and the physics of the 1860s, between a view that sees the material world of our experience as a phenomenal production of our individual sensory systems, and one that sees it as composed of impersonal cosmic forces in which we happen to be included. According to 'The Profitable Reading of Fiction' (1888), the reader's task is to "catch the vision which the writer has in his eye" (Millgate 2001, 117) – the word 'eye', rather than the expected 'mind', offering a significant encouragement to read Hardy as much physiologically as psychologically – because the writer's "fictitious narrative" aspires to be "an illuminant of life" (*ibid.*, 120). The emission theory of light

upon which the metaphor depends, though scientifically moribund by the nineteenth century, has the virtue of discovering a reality outside the perceiver's mind to be irradiated, rather than secreting vision away in an inner chamber. In this spirit I will place the emphasis on the extraordinary attention that Hardy gives to the medium of light in this novel, within which the eye makes its discoveries.[1]

The most remarkable of these lit moments occurs late in the novel on the day of the Greenhill sheep fair, when the apparently drowned Troy has returned to Weatherbury as part of a circus troupe in the guise of Dick Turpin. Bathsheba enters the show-tent to find herself, seated alone in a reserved seat, the object of "many eyes [...] turned upon her" (262):

> The interior was shadowy with a peculiar shade. The strange luminous semi-opacities of fine autumn afternoons and eves intensified into Rembrandt effects the few yellow sunbeams which came through holes and divisions in the canvas, and spirted like jets of gold-dust across the dusky blue atmosphere of haze pervading the tent, until they alighted on inner surfaces of cloth opposite, and shone like little lamps suspended there.
>
> Troy, on peeping from his dressing-tent through a slit for a reconnoitre before entering, saw his unconscious wife on high before him as described, sitting as queen of the tournament. He started back in utter confusion [...]. […] here was Bathsheba in her own person and the reality of the scene was so much intenser than any of his prefiguring [...]. (262-263)

A 1996 symposium on the 'Present Status of the Quantum Theory of Light' in Toronto was introduced by Jean-Paul Vigier saying "Really, nobody knows what light is" (Jeffers, xix). The current consensus in favour of a wave-particle duality does not dispose of a strong feeling that persists that particles of light *travel:* so N. V. Pope attacks current convention in physics by saying "Lately it has seen photons as travelling intermediaries between things and our perceptions of them" (*ibid.*, 501). Such a characterisation is not, in its playful spirit, so far from Hardy's humorous observation which advances to a remarkable degree the sense of light as an entity in itself, independent of any significant object that it is allowing the reader to visualise. Hardy, in fact, could have read conflicting accounts in, for instance, Richard Potter's textbook of 1859 that continued to support the idea of light as "luminous corpuscles [...] flying off in *surfaces, sheets or shells",* and in Eugene Lommel's promotion of the by then accepted idea of light as "an undulatory movement" of transverse waves in a medium of aether in his more broadly popular book *The Nature of Light* of 1875.

In the ocular drama, strictly conceived, the paragraph is redundant; but, to take Sara Danius's suggestion in her distinction between *visuality* and *visibility*, that "If visuality is chiefly concerned with *seeing*, visibility is primarily concerned with the *seen*: both the thing-made-visible and the making-visible-of-the-thing-made-visible" (Danius, 15), then, especially in the second sense, we can see that this *visibility* is what preoccupies Hardy throughout his novel, whether it be in portraying Boldwood's passionate feelings, the history of Fanny Robin, Gabriel's love for Bathsheba or the revelation of Bathsheba's feelings to herself. By the standards of George Eliot or Meredith, we are allowed little penetration into the mental world of Hardy's characters, yet their "plight of being alive" (to take the phrase from *Tess*) is made remarkably visible to us, by the immersion of the reader in the atmosphere in which things in those lives are seen. So, here, when we pass to Troy's vision of things, "the reality of the *scene*" (my emphasis) is indeed 'intenser,' in our reading, for having been drawn through a trajectory larger than that managed by his consciousness, one of repeated contemplative experience ("The strange luminous semi-opacities of fine autumn afternoons and eves") that expands time and space, that then contracts attention upon the particularities of "holes and divisions in the canvas" and "inner surfaces of cloth", to close upon the small tenderness of "little lamps suspended there". This is not the light of fresh morning with which the novel opens in the description of Bathsheba and her furniture on the cart: there is a retrospective air to the "afternoons and eves" and the "little lamps" hint at evening, an intensely sad sensation for the reader who recalls that Bathsheba is only in her early twenties. What is made *visible* by such a paragraph is that this very particular drama is bathed in a light that has displayed many such dramas, which thus projects the action upon a scene that is not that of the individual consciousness alone, but of common human experience.

Much earlier in the novel Hardy famously writes, "In making even horizontal and clear inspections we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in" (17).

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[1] In this attention to light, I am preceded by Michael Irwin (2002) and Ruth Yeazell (2009), though neither of them examine *Far from the Madding Crowd* in detail.

This is one of those moments, again, where we can see the tendency of Hardy's art towards the physiological, for the earlier incarnation of this sentence is surely the observation from *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, as Knight is suspended one eighth of a mile above the sea which appears to be his "funeral pall", "We colour according to our moods the objects we survey" (*PBE*, 216). Now, in his next novel, "moods" has become the more bodily "wants within us", and the mental control (appropriate to Henry Knight) exercised in "objects we survey" is overtaken by the more urgent physical appetite of "whatever our eyes bring in". At its most extreme, the preoccupation of the eye usurps the rational faculties of the man, as "the large red seal [of Bathsheba's valentine] became as a blot of blood on the retina of [Boldwood's] eye" (80), the violence of the valentine's intrusion upon Boldwood's notions of his life made by the simile into a startling ocular defect in preference to a more conventional bruising of the heart.[2] To make the eye such an active participant in the various dramas of the novel suggests that Hardy's depiction of men and women is concerned with their capacity to discern, select and discriminate, and most readings of the novel become more or less judgmental discussions about the employment of those faculties. But to allow an unusual prominence to light itself is what lends *Far From the Madding Crowd* the dimension that takes the novel out of the George Eliot world and into one inhabited also by Conrad's characters and his preoccupations as a novelist. It is one where the physical elements of earthly existence are active participants in the drama, and man is a membrane for these physical forces, who must therefore protect his existence by intelligence and effort. A very vivid exemplification of this dynamic of interpenetration and resistance asserts itself when Gabriel's hopes of being an independent farmer are dashed by his young sheepdog driving his flock of ewes over the brow of a chalk pit:

> Oak raised his head, and wondering what he could do, listlessly surveyed the scene. By the outer margin of the pit was an oval pond, and over it hung the attenuated skeleton of a chrome-yellow moon, which had only a few days to last—the morning star dogging her on the left hand. The pool glittered like a dead man's eye, and as the world awoke a breeze blew, shaking and elongating the reflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star to a phosphoric streak upon the water. All this Oak saw and remembered. (33)

Gabriel's surveillance of Bathsheba has been much discussed, but this survey reads as if, in the words that Forster applies to Adela in *A Passage to India*, "she was no longer examining life, but being examined by it" (Forster, 245). Yet it is not self-examination: while the reader can easily find a correspondence in the scene to Gabriel's presumed state of almost suicidal despair in the "dead man's eye" and the "attenuated skeleton", there is no encouragement to interiorise or see the scene as reflected in Gabriel's eye. In contradiction to the narrator's statement at the end of Chapter 2 (see above), the impersonal light of the scene prevails over the temperament reading it. The glittering is not absorbent, and the reflection, when it finally arrives subject to an action of "shaking and elongating [...] without breaking", does not turn a face towards Gabriel (distanced throughout as 'Oak') but towards the moon. That the productions of light are not, here, viewed as the productions of Gabriel's eye, and are far more strange and dismaying, is confirmed by the extension of the final clause to the immeasurable distance of the morning star (Phosphor) and the stretching of its refracted form in water to an elemental streak, a non-human physics that enlarges and impersonalises the operations in the scene far beyond Gabriel's consciousness. It is, finally, as unexplanatory and untranslatable as Cytherea's vision of "sunlight streaming in shaft-like lines" in the earlier *Desperate Remedies*. Against this exposure to the dematerialising physics of energy, the simple gravity of the final sentence, so different in its rhythm, acts as a supreme statement of admirable human resistance; that Hardy does not seek to convey what Gabriel *understands* from this eidetic experience ensures that, for the reader, it propagates a sensation of the larger universe rather than being contained within the eye.

That "what our eyes bring in" are the productions of light with an independence from our senses – if only known to us as individuals *through* our senses – is nowhere more dramatically explored than in the famous chapter of Troy's sword-exercise in 'The Hollow Amid the Ferns'. It is here that light makes its strongest intervention in the drama. Bathsheba is transfigured at the hands of Troy, whose sword wields light as in a primal act of re-creation:

> 'Is the sword very sharp?'
>
> 'O no—only stand as still as a statue. Now!'

[2] See Toru Sasaki for a brilliant discussion of how this image concentrates ideas of possession in the novel, and of its possible derivation from *Middlemarch* (*Thomas Hardy Journal*, VIII:3, Oct.1992, 57-60).

> In an instant the atmosphere was transformed to Bathsheba's eyes. Beams of light caught from the low sun's rays, above, around, in front of her, well-nigh shut out earth and heaven—all emitted in the marvellous evolutions of Troy's reflecting blade, which seemed everywhere at once, and yet nowhere specially. These circling gleams were accompanied by a keen rush that was almost a whistling—also springing from all sides of her at once. In short, she was enclosed in a firmament of light, and of sharp hisses, resembling a sky-full of meteors close at hand. (144)

Dazzling light itself "shut[s] out earth and heaven" for Bathsheba, obliterating former life and creating for her a new "firmament", the word suggesting an apotheosis visited upon her, not striven for. Significantly, the reader is kept to Bathsheba's sensations of the transformed *atmosphere* – only in the final paragraph of the chapter, where we are told that the "minute's interval" in which Troy kisses her "enlarged emotion to a compass which quite swamped thought' and released 'a liquid stream" (146), are we given a representation of the sexual transformation experienced *within*, which, equally, is written in sensational terms. As readers, we are more in the envisioned, one might almost say visionary, and sounding air than we are in Bathsheba's mind. While we are positioned by the prepositional clauses to experience what she experiences – "in front of her", "seemed everywhere [...] yet nowhere", "from all sides", "close at hand" – what Hardy gives is not exactly, or simply, her point of view: "Beams of light" and "circling gleams", not Bathsheba's perceptions ("She saw/heard"), are the grammatical subjects of two successive sentences, and this optical terminology is extended to physics in "emitted", mathematics in "evolutions", and astronomy in "firmament" and "meteors". The enlargement created by such a language makes celestial figures (the firmament is the sphere of the fixed stars) that feature in the air as disclosures of light the dimension of our reading, rather than the afferent nerve ends of Bathsheba's subjectivity. The irony in "close at hand" points up the dichotomy of these two ways of reading here, as of so many passages in Hardy: Bathsheba's sense of this scintillating blade-work is felt palpably close, but in fact the whole scene is literally created by Troy's hand, he the meteor in Bathsheba's life who has quite consciously made himself "close at hand" in this exhibition of himself.

Of course, Bathsheba's exaltation comes at a cost. She, whose "rapidity of [her] glide" as a dextrous 'performer' on horseback we have witnessed, is now required to become a 'statue'. "Dexterity" has now passed "in its management" to "the hands of Sergeant Troy [...] in splendid temper for the performance" (145), and Bathsheba is encircled and "enclosed", to be re-created in a space that "would have been almost a mould of Bathsheba's figure" (145). If a new-born, sexually alive young woman has been disclosed to herself, it is at the cost of that self-possession which is the most inspiriting feature of Hardy's superb creation (and I am fully alive to the irony in the words I have used to highlight the problematic thrill Hardy's heroines provide a reader): "I shall be up before you are awake; I shall be afield before you are up; and I shall have breakfasted before you are afield. In short, I shall astonish you all" (68). That loss is figured as inherent in the moment of greatest pleasure accorded Bathsheba in the novel, and might be taken as Hardy's Manichean view that life's vital demand of sexuality destroys life's equally vital demand to maintain individual identity. However, that would be to read 'The Hollow Amid the Ferns' as entirely the product of Bathsheba's eye or the manipulations of Troy's hand, whereas the chapter is the display of an event in the evening light that has an imaginative life that persists beyond the individual sensational record. Hardy earlier writes of Gabriel's rescue by Bathsheba's prompt action from suffocation in his unventilated shepherd's hut:

> He was endeavouring to catch and appreciate the sensation of being thus with her, his head upon her dress, before the event passed on into the heap of bygone things. He wished she knew his impressions; but he would as soon have thought of carrying an odour in a net as of attempting to convey the intangibilities of his feeling in the coarse meshes of language. (21)

The terms of this delicate, luxuriating but almost anguished observation leads to the heart of my argument in this paper: impressions, of which sensation makes us viscerally aware, are our means of knowing our contact with the world; yet "the event" has an existence beyond that which subjectivity perceives, which belongs to another order of event in the vibrations of energy that constitute the world's spectacular process. "The event" and "his impressions" are not synonymous. Of course, Hardy here has Gabriel think exactly the opposite, that the event dies with the individual sensational record of it, and that "intangibilities of feeling" are incommunicable, a pained reflection familiar to the

Modernism that derives from Walter Pater; but in the *novel* it is not exactly so, for there is available to the reader a comprehensiveness beyond the impressions and the fortunes of the individual characters, and which does convey the odours precisely because of an ironic awareness of the nets, and because the participants in a scene contribute to the visual, aural and tactile field in which they participate, not only lock it up in their own sensory systems. As the modern physicist Eric Schneider puts it, "No organism is isolated; all are thermodynamically connected" (Schneider and Sagan, 295).

The incommunicable privacy of personal experience, if it belongs to any episode in the novel, is what is explored in the same hollow amid the ferns, in a very different season, in the paired chapter after Bathsheba has fled from Troy's heartless "You are nothing to me—nothing," uttered before Fanny's opened coffin. In practice, what Hardy writes is not a scene of self-examination, but one in which Bathsheba is drawn out of herself and into the processes of the world immediately around her. In comparison to the earlier episode, the first quality to strike the reader is a clarity and distinctness in things heard and seen that belongs to "a freshened existence and a cooler brain" (232). Each individually identified, the characteristic utterances of sparrow, finch, robin, squirrel and ploughboy build up a world outside Bathsheba, enquired into, providing orientation. She "could just discern in the wan light of daybreak a team of her own horses" (232), but Bathsheba's discernment makes each action of the horses a clear moment of visual attention: "She watched them flouncing into the pool, drinking, tossing up their heads, drinking again, the water dribbling from their lips in silver threads" (232). This visual care for each ordinary item of the unfolding morning not only confers upon them an independent non-instrumental existence, but *receives from them* in consequence a confirmation of organic participation in a world with its own processes. This happens most poignantly later when Liddy fetches her something to eat and warmer clothes, and returns "with a cloak, hat, some slices of bread and butter, a tea cup, and some hot tea in a little china jug" (234). The small reciprocities that involve the inner existence with a world outside oneself draw from Hardy – and here Bathsheba – a humility of observation in which the eye notices but does not seek to possess.

The light over the swamp above which Bathsheba has slept, though seen at a diametrically opposed point in the day, is made reminiscent of that which lit the "thick flossy carpet of moss and grass intermingled" (143) of her encounter there with Troy:

> A morning mist hung over it now—a fulsome yet magnificent silvery veil, full of light from the sun, yet semi-opaque—the hedge behind it being in some measure hidden by its hazy luminousness. (232-233)

The difference is that the earlier cast of light was the emission of "the marvellous evolutions of Troy's reflecting blade" (144), and the "luminous streams of this *aurora militaris*" (145) dematerialised his light-wielding arm to "a scarlet haze over the space covered by its motions, like a twanged harpstring" (145); in contrast, this natural morning light discloses with an extraordinarily heightened precision the "nursery of pestilences" (233) which the months' transformations have made of the hollow. The earlier episode had been sited in the air, and if Bathsheba had then been beguiled by the light itself she now, despite her saddened "listless gaze" (233), attends to what the light lights, that other great defining medium in Hardy, the ground. The description of the scarlet and saffron fungi constitutes one of the most palpably visual passages in the novel, and Penelope Vigar is surely right to suggest that the purely objective writing enacts the attraction for Bathsheba of "the enticingly rich and repulsive swamp", as she characterises it (Vigar, 109).[3] What saves Bathsheba from the morbidity of all that is implied by the swamp is not a resolve arrived at by thought, nor the immediate demands of the outside world, but something both more subtle and more convincing: she hears a boy passing who is trying to learn the collect by repetition of each word, and the narrator's comment is, "In the worst attacks of trouble there appears to be always a superficial film of consciousness which is left disengaged and open to the notice of trifles, and Bathsheba was faintly amused at the boy's method, till he too passed on" (233). To be saved from destructive introspection by a faculty declared to be a "superficial film", "disengaged" from inner, and therefore to modern thinking real and not superficial, anguish, but also thereby "open", capable of noticing "trifles" and being "amused" by the merely contingent – all of this places Hardy's reader in a world conceived more physiologically than

[3] It seems superfluous to add to the commentaries on the symbolism of this passage by Penelope Vigar, 1974, and Susan Beegel, 1987. Penelope Vigar's book, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality,* seems to be rarely referred to now, but her account of the ways in which Hardy's art eschews direct representation of internal states in favour of external impression coincides more nearly with the position taken by the present article than most more recent analyses. See especially pp.34-43.

psychologically, a world in which the contact of surfaces matters and, as in Alexander Bain's view, doubt is cast upon an unreachable and enduringly personal inner sanctum of impressions as being what experience amounts to (Bain, 61).

Ian Gregor says that Bathsheba "half-realises" the significance of her night by the swamp (Gregor, 54). We can say with more certainty that what Hardy depicts is a state of unarticulated, somatic, knowledge, rather than one that is cerebral and conceptualised. The most affecting moment in the novel is one in which understanding is a visual event which is preserved pictorially but not elaborated into a verbal realisation or a lesson.[4] Liddy seeks out Bathsheba who tries to warn her not to cross the swamp, but as she has lost her voice in the night atmosphere her words do not carry to Liddy's ears:

> Liddy, not knowing this, stepped down upon the swamp, saying, as she did so, 'It will bear me up, I think.' Bathsheba never forgot that transient little picture of Liddy crossing the swamp to her there in the morning light. Iridescent bubbles of dank subterranean breath rose from the sweating sod beside the waiting-maid's feet as she trod, hissing as they burst and expanded away to join the vapoury firmament above. Liddy did not sink, as Bathsheba had anticipated. (234)

Irresistibly, a moral reading connects Bathsheba's never forgetting with "All this Oak saw and remembered", yet the engraving upon memory is different, and that has much to do with the word 'transient'. Gabriel's is a solitary self-communing; "that transient little picture of Liddy", with its light stresses and repeated 'i' sounds, rhythmically projects outwards, towards the girl crossing the swamp, rather than draws inwards, as in Gabriel's act of self-command. Above all, the permanence of 'never forgot' is countered by a more fluid, a more airy, notion of transience: Liddy's little transit across the swamp, the brief passage of the picture that recurs to Bathsheba's inward vision, the course of a life crossed by the course of another's, something lightly-drawn and fitting the moment-by-moment nature of a life sensed in its shifting uncertainties – these suggestions in the cadence of the sentence mark the quality of the remembrance as peculiarly Bathsheba's, as that of a joy-seeking vigour that the novel chastens and stills. But the novel is not as schematic as to insist only upon a contrast in Bathsheba's and Gabriel's sober coming to terms with themselves in the dawn. In a strikingly analogous moment in the great scene of the storm, the beleaguered Gabriel, stunned by the reverberations of the fifth flash of lightning, is also vouchsafed a momentary picture:

> What was this the light revealed to him? In the open ground before him, as he looked over the ridge of the rick, was a dark and apparently female form. Could it be that of the only venturesome woman in the parish—Bathsheba? (192)

What the light reveals is one of the fundamental actions of a Hardy novel. The "morning light" discloses not only Liddy, but also, in true Hardyan manner, the gaseous bubbles displaced by Liddy's feet. They have their transit, their moment of expansion too, their processes in the transference of energy, alongside the pressing human concerns.[5]

In contrast with what I've said up to now, which has placed the emphasis upon the action of light in not only revealing, but creating, a scene, I would offer that the figure who strains most towards a psychological study in the novel is Boldwood, and one episode in particular points up the debate about subjectivity and the objectively given world, about whether the intense visualisation in the novels of Hardy is the expression of the eye/I that sees, as in a fully psychological novel, or whether it is a visibility accorded by the impersonal forces of light, as in a more physiological novel of externally observed action. The chapter's title, 'Effect of the Letter – Sunrise', projects both possibilities. As

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[4] The great nineteenth century physiologist and physicist Hermann von Helmholz writes: "In addition to the kind of knowledge that works with concepts and therefore is capable of being expressed in words, there exists yet another area of representational competence, which combines only sensory impressions that cannot immediately be expressed in words. In German we call it *das Kennen*" (*Vortrage und Reden* 1, 358, quoted in Meyering, 1989, p.195).

[5] A comparison of this scene with two others that must have contributed to its literary conception shows how far Hardy keeps to the world as observed through the sensations, as opposed to the moral, transcendental and even psychological dimensions that could have been extracted therefrom. See Ch. XXXVII, 'The Journey in Despair', in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, and Ch. XLII, 'Nature Speaks', in George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Both were published in 1859.

Boldwood thinks at night about the valentine that he has placed "in the corner of the looking-glass" (80), Hardy's writing moves as close as it does in this novel to free indirect speech to render Boldwood's thoughts, which operate like an inner eye, imaginatively creating a "vision of the woman writing": "Somebody's—some *woman's*—hand had travelled softly over the paper bearing his name; her unrevealed eyes had watched every curve as she formed it [...]. Her mouth—were the lips red or pale, plump or creased? —had curved itself to a certain expression as the pen went on— [...]" (80). These obsessive recreations are the reflected light, cast upon an as yet unknown woman's form, of the disturbance effected upon Boldwood's conception of himself: "her brain had seen him in imagination the while. Why should she have imagined him?" (80) That the re-visioning of *himself* – as far from Troy's "transient flash of the eye now and then" (130) as it is possible to be – is the fundamental process at work that Hardy seeks to portray, is confirmed by the position of the valentine in the corner of the looking glass, leading to the moment in which "he caught sight of his reflected features, wan in expression, and insubstantial in form. He saw how closely compressed was his mouth, and that his eyes were wide-spread and vacant" (81).

In this interior night-time scene, this new awareness of self is made visible by light which is itself reflected, not transmitted directly from its source, described with remarkable attentiveness:

> The moon shone to-night, and its light was not of a customary kind. His window admitted only a reflection of its rays, and the pale sheen had that reverse direction which snow gives, coming upward and lighting up his ceiling in an unnatural way, casting shadows in strange places, and putting light where shadows had used to be. (81)

The indirectness of this "weird light" as it is called subsequently, and the distancing effect achieved by the use of a detached language for the window that "admitted only" a reflection, and for the light's pallor having "that reverse direction" in being reflected from the snow, rather clinically observed, all collide unsettlingly with a strong invitation to the reader to draw into Boldwood's mind here, beginning with the personal present of "to-night", and finding in the unaccustomed angles and changed places of the light in the room a correlation for this unique psychological moment of unsettlement in the fixed and unbending man's life. The suggestive "putting light where shadows had used to be" concluding the paragraph, and after which he jumps out of bed to inspect the letter again, reads as Boldwood's own access to feelings previously hidden from him as he stares up at the ceiling sleeplessly. Vision, both for Boldwood and for the reader, in this episode is specular, that is, only gained from reflected light, both physically and as it is reflected by Boldwood's psychology (and we recall the reflection episode from *Desperate Remedies*). Surely the most intense expression in the novel of subjectivity by purely external description of what the eye sees, the passage recalls both the strong interest in light's refraction of the early century physicists, and also the physiologist's understanding of vision as inner representation that in the 1860s was drawing towards psychology; it displays in concentrated form how Hardy's pictures of people in their moments of crisis do not open an inner world of thoughts but keep to surfaces that connect his characters to the forces that surround them. In a manner very different from 'The Hollow Amid the Ferns', it too shows how what Hardy came so acutely to see in Turner – "What he paints chiefly is *light as modified by objects*" (Hardy's emphasis, *Life and Work*, 225) – he had already accomplished in his own writing (light as it falls on the shearers at supper would be another scene to examine). It is the capacity to hold together in the style of his writing this contradictory position, that of the physiologist for whom the world is experienced as unique vision, and that of the physicist for whom the world is the action of forces upon matter of all sorts, including the human, that gives Hardy's novels, and his characters, their dignity. The individual moral world is still found important amid the indifferent and "purely spectacular" one, to use Conrad's term.[6]

Rosemary Sumner sees in this scene "an astonishing insight into a disturbed personality" but that "the method of largely external description of behaviour used later in the chapter does not sustain this insight wholly effectively" (Sumner, 54). She aligns Hardy with Lawrence, but finds he falls short of the famous depictions of Mrs Morel shut out in the garden or "Anna Victrix" in *The Rainbow*, as the method finally "is not adequate for exploring Boldwood's unconscious" (54). She is right in that the disclosure of an inner world is more limited than in Lawrence; but in Hardy the scene does not

[6] For Michael Kearns, 1987, it is George Eliot and Henry James who find a language for the mind and, by omission, Hardy and Conrad who fail to do so. I am presenting what for Kearns and others is a limitation in Hardy's art as a strength.

exist to display the forces in the individual, it exists to display the forces in the scene that includes the individual. Regarded in this light, the narrative's evocation of the bleak dawn over the fields deliberately seeks, after the containment of the night room, a more distanced perspective on the lonely figure assumed into the new day that must be lived. Read psychologically, as the vision of the world through Boldwood's estranged eyes, the morning scene lacks the penetrating intensity of his night experience that we have just read; but the scene is neither a transcript of vision sent from Boldwood's inner world, nor entirely a "disproportioning" of the external world created by his disturbed mind: it is the picture of an estranging scene caused by the changed sources of light in sunrise over snow, an apprehension of the disconcerting newness and exhaustion in things that includes the condition of Boldwood's "listless(ly) noting" (82) rather than proceeds from it. There is no warmth or animation, rather a sense of vacancy: "the only half of the sun yet visible burnt rayless, like a red and flameless fire shining over a white hearthstone" (81). These are not Boldwood's thoughts, though the reader is free to associate such a vision with the newly revealed emptiness of his domesticity. Equally, Boldwood is not shown as finding any correspondence between himself and "the wasting moon, now dull and greenish-yellow, like tarnished brass" (82), nor even depicted as looking at it, but the failure of illumination cast upon the scene is consonant with the single, rather disengaged, human consciousness included in it. What Boldwood's eyes *do* see is recorded with such striking detachment yet minute precision – the glazed surface of the snow, bristling grass-bents encased in icicles, birds' footprints "now frozen to a short permanency" (82) – that a reader might think that these are no longer a landowner's proprietorial eyes "bringing in" and colouring such details with any sense of ownership or connection, precisely because there is no interpretation of the visual evidence in any way. In other words, while Boldwood's subjectivity is not the subject of the writing, the almost pedantically attentive picturing of the external scene conveys the striking absence of his mental engagement with it even as he is figured as the sole source of consciousness within it. He is very much of it, and not of it. While we gain no further insight into the internal and unconscious forces that are the cause of this displacement, as a depiction of the *effect* of the previous night's re-visionings Hardy's method of creating an external visual scene with no accompanying explicit comment about the psychology behind the viewing eye is an arresting one, exposing the visual subjectivism of the earlier part of the chapter to the impersonal light of day.

While Hardy's presentation of Boldwood mainly sees him enclosed within the subjectivity of the eye, Bathsheba more frequently is seen as an object in the light (making Hardy's presentation of her objectionable in the eyes of many readers). In the climactic scene in which Boldwood's threats prompt her clandestine night-journey to Troy in Bath, Bathsheba is first seen setting out for Yalbury after a small thunder-shower: "before her, among the clouds, there was a contrast in the shape of lairs of fierce light which showed themselves in the neighbourhood of a hidden sun" (156). As Boldwood says when they unexpectedly encounter each other, "Our moods meet at wrong places" (158): and the reading of *Far from the Madding Crowd* that I offer here is one that sees it as lighting the places at which moods meet. At the end of the chapter, after her unsought, sustained confrontation with Boldwood, those resting places for light in its "lairs" are gone and the distracted Bathsheba is less a woman in command of house and land and her journeys than a moment of mortality exposed to remote space whose illuminations have nothing to do with earth:

> Then she sat down on a heap of stones by the wayside to think. There she remained long. Above the dark margin of the earth appeared foreshores and promontories of coppery cloud, bounding a green and pellucid expanse in the western sky. Amaranthine glosses came over them then, and the unresting world wheeled her round to a contrasting prospect eastward, in the shape of indecisive and palpitating stars. She gazed upon their silent throes amid the shades of space, but realized none at all. Her troubled spirit was far away with Troy. (161-162)

Unlike the earlier description of "the roll of the world eastward" (12) that the reader associates with Gabriel on Norcombe Hill, Bathsheba is not granted the equanimity that allows you to "long and quietly watch your stately progress through the stars" (12). While Gabriel, comfortably joining the narrator in naming the stars, is at home contemplating the non-human expanses of the universe, the picture given of Bathsheba is the opposite of the sensation of "riding along" "caused by the panoramic glide of the stars" (12): it is of being propelled by an "unresting world" in the face of remote bodies that are "indecisive", "palpitating" and undergoing "throes" of an unimaginable kind. In Hardy vision is temperamental, and Bathsheba is unable to participate in the grandeur of the cosmic spectacle because of her all-too-human preoccupations; but, alternatively, the novel proposes a picture of

troubled humanity, constantly revolved, seen in the light of explosions on distant suns. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* Bathsheba is her most exposed representative.

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