

## The Scapegoat in Hardy's Tragic Novels: Revisiting Ancient Theory

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Tess d'Urberville (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*) and Eustacia Vye (*The Return of the Native*) are tragic scapegoats whose function in the diegesis may be revisited in the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the field of our reality, there is always "more than meets the eye," because of the exclusion from it of what Lacan has called *object small a*. Not so in Hardy's tragic world, where the vacuity of the perspective is filled by an object which very nearly presentifies the "object-gaze" — one of the forms of *object small a*. That object is the heroine herself, who is singled out by a red stain and occupies in the visual field the place that should normally be a vacuum. A feminine figure of "unextracted" jouissance, she is a "spot" that comes in excess of reality, a surplus object whose very presence threatens her community with disintegration. Therefore she has to be sacrificed for *object small a* to be extracted and for the consistency of her community's "reality" to be restored.

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**T**ess d'Urberville and Eustacia Vye are both tragic scapegoats, whose exclusion from their community restores some kind of normality at the end of the two novels—*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*. Both heroines are ordinary, each being "a typical and random victim" (Frye 41) who belongs to the Wessex rural world: Tess is no more than "a fieldwoman pure and simple" (272), and Eustacia is one with the heath, whose solitude has come to impregnate her very being: "the solitude exhaled from the heath was concentrated in this face that had risen from it" (30). Yet in Hardy's tragic universe exemplarity and singularity are bound together in an impossible, oxymoronic relation: though Tess and Eustacia are typical, each is unique, and in some measure alienated from her community. Each is designated, ear-marked by Fate, doomed to a swift destruction that

will produce cathartic effects. I intend to revisit ancient theory in the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis, and to that purpose I will show how the two heroines occupy a very special place, which is normally left vacant in our reality: the place of *object small a* (object-gaze and object-voice).

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, there is something in Tess's appearance which catches the eye with irresistible power, an object whose presence is obtrusive, glaring and clamorous: it is the red stain which brands Tess as a fallen woman. The stain forms a paradigm whose first term is the red ribbon tied in her hair, which distinguishes her from the other girls. In *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia is similarly identified by "a red ribbon round her neck" which she wears beside her dark dress (360). She 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 5. 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)

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 (27), and it is meant as a signal which only one person (Wildevle) can understand. It is unique, not a fire among other fires, but "the moon of the whole shining through" (26). Fire is the element that defines Eustacia, as if her bonfire merely reflected the fire burning in her, thus making visible her true identification trait: "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 she laughs the sun shines into her mouth "as into a tulip" and lends it "a similar scarlet fire" (87). Dressed in her best attire, she "blazes with dazzling splendour" (88). When Clym Yeobright sees her face for the first time,

he is blinded by "the ruddy glare from the west" reflected on the blazing panes of an upper window from which she is calling (184). As she looks at Clym, "the calm fixity of her features sublimate[s] itself into an expression of refinement and warmth; it was like garish noon rising to the dignity of sunset in a couple of seconds" (185). Both Clym and Eustacia redden "like fire" or turn "crimson" on numerous occasions. The place which Clym deems fittest for Eustacia to live in is the "Galerie d'Apollon" in the Louvre, because, when the sun is bright, "the whole apartment is in a perfect blaze of splendour," with the rays darting from gold, silver, precious stones and enamel, "till there is a perfect network of light which quite dazzles the eye" (198). No wonder Clym is blinded by Eustacia's fiery beauty and develops an acute form of ophthalmia—though his mother had tried to warn him against her: "You are blinded, Clym . . . It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her" (194).

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: "she opened her hands. One of them was bleeding; the rope had dragged off the skin. Eustacia wrapped it in her handkerchief" (186). So she tells Clym about her other wound, the one caused that very morning at church by Susan Nunsuch, a woman who pricked her with a long needle because she thinks she is a witch who has cast a spell on her children. As Clym shows "an abundance of sympathy" ("I blush for my native Egdon," he exclaims), Eustacia 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). Clym returns home to his mother, his face flushed and his eye bright, the kiss imprinted on his lips lingering there like a seal, so that he hardly dares to enter the house, for it seems as if his mother might say, "what red spot is that glowing upon your mouth so vividly?" (192). A mirror effect has caused the red spot that ear-marks Eustacia to appear on Clym's face. Later, a similar effect will place Eustacia and Clym's mother in a deadly face to face relation: Mrs. Yeobright has seen Eustacia looking at her from an upper window (288), 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). It is now Mrs. Yeobright who is marked by a red stain: "Olly Dowden . . . examined the foot indicated. It 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).

Though the fiery or blood-red spot is Eustacia's hallmark, it is rather a sign of some general disorder that affects the Egdon community than a mark set on a definite individual. 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" (7). The driver of the van is Diggory Venn, the reddleman,<sup>1</sup> and, like his van, he is completely red: "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). Diggory's blue eyes glare strangely "through his stain" (8), and he occasionally "flushe[s] through his stain" (150). The children take him for a red ghost, "as if it had been dipped in blood" (25). He and his van appear as "a sinister redness arousing from a ravine . . . dull and lurid like a flame in sunlight" (149). Like Eustacia, he is to some extent alien to his community,<sup>2</sup> 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). 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), a spot which "returned upon the memory of those who loved it" (4), etc. Diggory Venn has his favourite haunt, "a certain secluded spot near Rainbarrow" (368) where he likes to park his van (236). "Spot" is a key-word, repeated again and again in the text, a symptom which never ceases to be written. But

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1. "a person whose vocation it was to supply farmers with redding for their sheep" (7).

2. See pp. 74-75.

what is remarkable is that the "spot," or, the "stain," disappears as if by magic after the expulsion of Eustacia, the tragic scapegoat. Thomasin utters "a slight scream" when Diggory Venn comes to visit her a few months after the death of her husband and Eustacia, for he is but "the ghost" of himself:

There stood within the room Diggory Venn, no longer a reddleman, but exhibiting the strangely altered hues of an ordinary Christian countenance, white shirt-front, light flowered waistcoat, blue-spotted neckerchief, and bottle-green coat. Nothing in this appearance was at all singular but the fact of its great difference from what he had formerly been. Red, and all approach to red, was carefully excluded from every article of clothes upon him. (388)

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

As in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, it may be argued that the stain has a quality of loudness—that it shouts like a silent cry. Something is shown in the field of the gaze *in lieu* of the voice. The same inability to tell their stories afflicts Eustacia and Tess, who can never speak when it is a matter of life and death for them to do so, and who end tragically because something that cannot be said remains stuck in their throats. The inn owned by Wildeve is significantly called "The Quiet Woman," "the sign of which represented the figure of a matron carrying her head under her arm" (39). The red stain of Eustacia's fire, which is compared to the moon amidst a "shining throng" of stars, is said to be a "quiet eye" (26-27). It is the sound of silence which is made audible by the stain. Voice in *The Return of the Native* has a peculiar quality; it is a spectral voice, "which floats freely in a mysterious intermediate domain," a voice akin to the "acousmatic voice" that Michel Chion writes about.<sup>3</sup> It is "the wild rhetoric of night" (52), the plaintive voice of the "blooming wind" upon the heath (8), a note "that bore a great resemblance to the ruins of human song which remain to the throat of fourscore and ten . . . a worn whisper, dry and papery," which is felt brushing "distinctly across the ear" like a sensation of touch (51). It is "the perpetual moan" kept by the trees at a place called

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3. The voice baptized "acousmatization" by Michel Chion is "an uncanny autonomization of the voice . . . the emergence of a voice that is neither attached to an object (a person) within diegetic reality nor simply the voice of an external commentator, but a spectral voice, which floats freely in a mysterious intermediate domain and thereby acquires the horrifying dimension of omnipresence and omnipotence, the voice of an invisible master" (Žižek, "I hear you" 92).

“The Devil’s Bellows,” “which one could hardly believe to be caused by the air” (280). The “shrivelled voice of the heath” (70) is not clear and loud, it is a throttled voice, which remains stuck in the throat, for the breezes filter through the “unyielding twigs” of the bushes “as through a strainer”: “It was as if the night sang dirges with clenched teeth” (80). Clym will try to silence the rasping noise of the wind on the night of Eustacia’s suicide, “stopping strange noises in windows and doors by jamming splinters of wood into the casements and crevices” (362), but to no avail: “the noise of the wind over the hill was shrill, as if it whistled for joy at finding a night so congenial as this” (367). For indeed the acousmatic voice has, according to Žižek, “the horrifying dimension of omnipresence and omnipotence,” it is “the voice of an invisible master” (“I hear you” 92), its obscene “joy” is boundless. The paradigm of the spectral voice culminates with “the roaring of a ten-hatch weir” (373) which rises above the din of the weather, at a place “which formed the boundary of the heath”—for we are on the limit between life and death, in the area which Lacan referred to as “between two deaths” (*Le Séminaire, VII*). It is in that pool that Eustacia drowns herself. The “invisible master” has ended his sport with her, but a few traces of that terrible enjoyment are left in the text, in the silent voice of the literary text that every reader “may joy to hear” in the *petit plus de jouir* (surplus enjoyment) afforded by the rhyme, which insistently repeats “hear” in “weir,” “near,” and “rear”: “it was the fall of a body into the stream . . . at a point near the weir . . . Wildeve . . . followed at once along the meadow track to the weir, a little in the rear of Clym” (374).

The human voice in *The Return of the Native* is most of the time “stuck in the throat”: as for instance when Clym’s ears are reached by “a sound between a breathing and a moan” (294), and when a moment later he realizes the ailing woman is his mother and he utters a silent cry: “the cry of anguish which would have escaped him died on his lips” (295). Or when Eustacia makes no reply “beyond that of her slight catch in her breath, as of one who fain would speak but could not” (311). On rare occasions the voice is “spilled out,” it resounds in uncanny tones, such as when Eustacia is pricked by a long stocking-needle at church by a woman who wants to “draw her blood,” and “a most terrible screech” (179) sounds through the church. The scene is narrated by a minor character, Christian Cantle, who relates how his immediate reaction was to hide “behind the bass-viol” so that he “didn’t see no more”—from which we logically infer that music is an ultimate curtain screening us from horror, and that the horror of a scream is some thing to be *seen* as well as heard. Which leads us to a strange characteristic of the floating voice that

prevails on the heath: it is a voice that makes us *see* with our ears—just as the red stain makes us *hear* with our eyes. The interchangeability of sight and sound is a recurrent theme, as in this passage about the mournful tone of the wind on the heath:

Its tone was indeed solemn and pervasive. Compound utterances addressed themselves to their senses, and it was possible to view by ear the features of the neighbourhood. Acoustic pictures were returned from the darkened scenery; they could hear where the tracts of heather began and ended; where the furze was growing stalky and tall . . . for these differing features had their voices no less than their shapes and colours. (82)

Or in this passage:

It seemed as if her ears were performing the functions of seeing as well as hearing. This extension of power can almost be believed in at such moments. The deaf Dr. Kitto was probably under the influence of a parallel fancy when he described his body as having become, by long endeavour, so sensitive to vibrations that he had gained the power of perceiving by it as by ears. (115)

What can be the meaning of that voice which makes us see with our ears, a voice which remains “stuck in the throat” throughout the novel, only to be released when Clym turns preacher, in a final resolution that shows how bonds may be mended within a community by the exclusion of one of its members? What can we make of the silent cry, the stain that ear-marks Eustacia (or Tess), and whose erasure restores order in the Egdon community once the tragic heroine is dead? To address questions which are at the core of Hardy's text, and which involve the complex relationship between the individual and the mass, it may be useful to turn to Lacanian psychoanalysis. In his seminar on anxiety (1962-63), Lacan introduced the concept of *objet a*, “the object cause of desire,” a “leftover” which is “real” and cannot be assimilated by the function of the signifier (*Le Séminaire, X* 204). To the Freudian “partial objects,” Lacan added two other objects, “object-voice,” and “object gaze,” which he claimed were two interrelated forms of *objet a*. First, it is important for us to understand that *objet a* is a gap, an object which is for ever missing—not an object coming as a surplus and protruding into our reality. As such, writes Joël Dor, it “inscribes the presence of a hollow which any object may come into” (185). For Sarah Kaye *objet a* may be defined as “a pure deficit in the symbolic order that does not have any imaginary protrusion to fill it out . . . As such, it acts as

a vacuum, sucking other objects into its place” (56). For our experience of reality to acquire consistency, *objet a* has to be excluded from it:

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, “I hear you” 91)

For the vocal object, the risk is that it might remain “stuck in the throat”:

The voice qua object is precisely what is “stuck in the throat,” what cannot burst out, unchain itself and thus enter the dimension of subjectivity. It is by no accident that, in his *Four Fundamental Concepts*, Lacan determines the *object small a* as the bone which got stuck in the subject’s throat: if the exemplary case of the gaze qua object is a blind man’s eyes, i.e. eyes which do not see . . . , then the exemplary case of the voice qua object is a voice which remains silent, i.e., which we do not hear. (Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom* 127)

*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native* are two novels in which the extraction of the gaze qua object and the voice qua object is problematic. In both novels the blood-red stain occupies the blind spot that normally elides the field of the gaze, and gives a figure to the unrepresentable, the “unspecularizable” *objet a*.<sup>4</sup> For instance, in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 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” (371). The spot is, as in *The Return of the Native*, a surplus object which fills the “white vacuity” of the perspective.

Žižek argues that voice functions as the *objet a* of the visual, as the blind spot from which the picture returns the gaze. Voice, he claims, points towards a gap in the field of the visible, it enables us to hear what we cannot see. In other words we hear things because we cannot see everything, which means

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4. “*objet petit a* is the *unheimlich* surplus forever missing in the mirror image, i.e., ‘unspecularizable’” (Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom* 126).



that voice can only reverberate if there is a void—"resonance always takes place in a vacuum," writes Žižek ("I hear you" 92-93). Therefore if the object gaze is not properly extracted, if no blind spot eludes our gaze, if there is no void, voice cannot be resonant. If the object-gaze is too real, then the object-voice logically becomes too real too. Voice then can only be mute, "stuck in the throat"—for the object-voice *par excellence* is silence. That is exactly what happens in *The Return of the Native*: a "shrivelled" voice that cannot be spilled out because of a surplus object stuck in the field of the visible—a spot filling "the vacuity of the perspective." The obtrusive stain and the failure of voice are the same phenomenon. But, argues Žižek, it is far more horrible to hear with our eyes than to see with our ears (for in our tradition voice vivifies whereas gaze mortifies). Munch's *Scream* renders present the failure of the voice: "in front of this painting, we 'hear (the scream) *with our eye*'" (93-94). In Caravaggio's *Testa di Medusa* we see "an image that stands for absolute death, for death beyond the cycle of death and rebirth, of corruption and generation":

Far more horrifying than to see with our ears—to hear the vibrating life substance beyond visual representations, this blind spot in the field of the visible—is to hear with our eyes, that is, to hear the absolute silence that marks the suspension of life, as in Caravaggio's *Testa di Medusa*: is not the scream of Medusa by definition silent, "stuck in the throat"? Does this painting not provide an image of the moment at which the voice fails? (94)

In the dance scene in *The Return of the Native*, little is said of the "lusty notes" of the East Egdon band playing on a "spot" of the heath (260). Instead, we have a visual description of the musicians "sitting in a blue wagon with red wheels, scrubbed as bright as new" (260), and the gaze turns anamorphic as "the hard-beaten surface of the sod, when viewed aslant towards the moonlight, [shines] like a polished table" (263). Suddenly the mouths of the wind-instruments turn into eyes staring at the dancers, as though some terrible Other was watching the scene. We hear (with our eyes) the sound of silence, while a deadly stillness prevails: "The air became quite still, the flag above the wagon which held the musicians clung to the pole, and the players appeared only in outline against the sky; except when the circular mouths of the trombone, ophicleide, and French horn gleamed out like huge eyes from the shade of their figures" (263).

This passage makes it clear that the "spot" is an anamorphic blot—a reading which is consistent with the idea of the stain as a "surplus object," an

incongruous object that intrudes into the field of vision. The red stain first appears when “red suns and tufts of fire one by one began to arise, flecking the whole country round” (13). Those red suns, “glowing scarlet-red from the shade,” look like “wounds in a black hide” (14), and make us sense the near-presence of death. We understand them to be “bonfires” lit on November 5, that is to say etymologically *bone*-fires, which cannot fail to remind us of the strange and uncanny object that bars the space at the bottom of Holbein’s *Ambassadors*, a fish-bone which assumes the shape of a human skull if we look awry at it (without forgetting that, ironically, *Holbein* in German means “hol-low bone”). On the following page the reference is openly to Dürer (the inventor of anamorphosis according to many art critics<sup>5</sup>) and the scene, drawn “with Dureresque vigour and dash,” reads like the literary equivalent of a “vanity”: it shows 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)

Behind the depiction of a joyful British celebration there lurks something sinister. 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]).<sup>6</sup> Anamorphic effects are everywhere in the novel: in a child’s distorted vision of the night (“the thorn bushes . . . had a ghastly habit after dark of putting on the shapes of jumping madmen, sprawling giants, and hideous cripples” [69]), in the long shadow advancing ahead of Clym (182), in the shadow projected on the ground by his mother’s house (“the chimney outlines and those of the surrounding tree-tops stretched forth in long dark prongs” [188]). There is

5. For a discussion of the relationship between Hardy’s and Durer’s work, see Bullen 99.

6. 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, emphasis added).

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 death of Eustacia and Wildeve (he is supposed to be in bed, recovering from the shock): "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, emphasis added). Clym refuses to come to his cousin's wedding, arguing that he might be "too much like the skull at the banquet" (407).

The tragedy occurs when the blot ceases to be viewed aslant, and shines full face into the eyes of the tragic characters. A community is put at risk when any surplus object standing for the unspecularizable object-gaze intrudes into the field of vision. Civilization requires that the gaze should be tamed in some way or other, and looking awry is one way of keeping the horror at bay.<sup>7</sup> Should an individual, by his mere presence, cause the object-gaze to be shown frontally,<sup>8</sup> death would be inevitable, and the exclusion of the trouble-maker a necessity. Indeed, in *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia is perceived as producing such an effect. Medusa-like, she kills by her gaze, or by being looked at. Clym is blinded by her beauty: "You are blinded, Clym," says his mother, "it was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her" (194). His sight grows accustomed to "the first blinding halo kindled about him by love and beauty" (201). Mrs. Yeobright is burnt to death by the rays of the sun on a scorching August afternoon: to avoid facing the sun (son?), she turns to the "soft eastern portion of the sky" which is "a great relief to her eyes" (291), but it is too late; she has been stung to death by the gaze of a woman looking at her from a window. 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. Suffice it to recall that, in the uncanny encounter of a double

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7. It may be argued that in Holbein's *Ambassadors*, the "hollow bone" at the bottom of the picture is precisely what gives consistency to the reality depicted in the upper part: those richly dressed ambassadors, surrounded with a panoply of objects denoting power, wealth and knowledge, can only exist as a community of learned men because of the blot at the bottom—a figure of the "extracted" object-gaze. The objects in the picture (the lute, the books, the terrestrial globe, the sundial, etc.) owe their existence to the vacuum at the bottom. No such plenitude would be possible without it. But it is important to point out that, should the horror be shown frontally, the reality of the ambassadors would dissolve into nothingness.

8. More exactly, should he be *believed* to cause the presence of the object-gaze—for such a presence can only be a fantasy.

(Doppelgänger), what eludes our gaze are always his eyes: the double strangely seems to look askew, never to return our gaze by looking straight into our eyes—the moment he were to do so, our life would be over. (“I hear you” 94)

That the object-gaze means death for those who encounter it is a point which is given a striking representation in Hardy’s text. For 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: it 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 a skull. In the description of Eustacia’s house it arrests the gaze like the fish-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). 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). 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 share a tomb with him! A little later, Mrs. Yeobright is sitting alone in her room while Thomasin is getting married. As Mrs. Yeobright’s eyes are “directed towards the open door” (217), a sparrow enters through the door, and endeavours to go out by the window. But the bird flutters among the flowers-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 escape—a further anomaly being 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).

What is most remarkable is the use which the poetics of the novel make of the signifier “urn”: for “urn” is contained in a number of key-signifiers,

the most important 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). His obstinate refusal to return to Paris, as his wife and his mother urge him to do, will bring about his downfall. 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, emphasis added). And there is one man whose heart does return “to its first quarters”: it is Wildeve, who returns to Eustacia after marrying Thomasin (264). It is a great credit to his reputation when it is discovered, after his death, that he had not meant to elope with Eustacia since he “at least intended to return the next day” (385). “Turn” is found in words just as important in the narrative: for instance when 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, emphasis added]). Returning home after a day’s work on the heath, Clym never turns his head, and does not see his mother following him (278). The consequence is tragic for Mrs. Yeobright, who will be “turned from his door” by her daughter-in-law (300). Later, Clym turns his eyes aside “that he might not to be tempted to softness” with Eustacia (334). As a result, Eustacia turns from him (334). 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 fate. 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).

The comic reintegration erases the red stain, as we have seen, thereby excluding the girl who does not want “to live on as a painful object, isolated and out of place” (354)—the tragic scapegoat whose sacrifice “purges” the community of its passions. Thus ancient Greek theory may be revisited in the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis: Eustacia (like Tess) occupies in the diegetic space a place which should normally be vacant, she fills the gap of *objet a*. A feminine figure of “unextracted” *jouissance*, she comes in excess of reality, she is a surplus object whose very presence threatens her community with disintegration. Just as witches have to be burnt to purge the community of unorthodox feminine *jouissance*,<sup>9</sup> she has to be sacrificed so that order may be re-established. An individual’s access to “reality” depends on the extraction/repression of *objet petit a* from it. Similarly, in tragedy, the exclusion of an individual, the scapegoat, restores the symbolic coordinates that give consistency to that community’s “experience of reality.” Eustacia’s body appears for the last time as an obtrusive object when three men probe the pool in which she has drowned herself: “something impeded their thrust . . . Venn vanished under the stream, and came up with an armful of wet drapery enclosing a woman’s cold form, which was all that remained of the desperate and unfortunate Eustacia” (377). A few hours later, Clym invites Diggory and Charley to see Eustacia: “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). What is restored is a cosmic order that allows the possibility of an “eclipse” (i.e. a loss of brilliance of the moon):<sup>10</sup> for the allusion here is obviously to the love scene between Eustacia and Clym, when there was an eclipse of the moon—the moon being identified with Eustacia in the novel. The eclipse had been described not as a phenomenon obscuring a part of the

9. It is women, not men, who usually get burnt as witches.

10. Eustacia is “more than whiteness,” but language (the signifier “pallor”) fails to define “the quality of her complexion” (381). 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 lying in all her glory.

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). Something had been added to the moon rather than subtracted from it. 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? Thomasin's maid busies herself drying the banknotes by hanging them on a line near the fire, so that they may be put in circulation again. 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" (409-10). 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). The only object that intrudes into the field of vision is Mrs. Yeobright's chair, but it is only noticed by Clym: "His mother's old chair was opposite . . . to Clym she was almost a presence there, now as always" (410).

Clym is the only character who does not take part in the comic reintegration. He somehow lingers on the threshold between life and death. The final paragraph shows him as a surplus object, described in terms that reminds us of a previous scene:

On the Sunday after this wedding an unusual sight was to be seen on Rainbarrow. From a distance there simply appeared to be a motionless figure standing on the top of the tumulus, just as Eustacia had stood on that lonely summit some two years and a half before . . . Those who ascended to the immediate neighbourhood of the Barrow perceived that the erect form in the centre, piercing the sky, was not really alone. (411)

But there is a major difference: Clym has "found his vocation" and turned preacher. The word "vocation" tells us that the speaking voice is now fully resonant. The vocal object is no longer "stuck in the throat": its "extraction" has opened up a void (the place of *objet petit a*) which makes reverberation

possible. The plaintive, spectral, “shrivelled” voice of the heath has been hushed. The red stain has been erased, leaving a hole, a blind spot, in the field of vision. We can no longer see everything, therefore we can hear something. Perhaps that is the reason why Clym does not follow the other tragic characters into death: his blindness is a symptom which saved him from the deadly encounter with the object-gaze. The narrator tells us that his ophtalmia, though no longer acute, will remain a persistent disease (407).<sup>11</sup> And among the Egdon inhabitants, some remark that “it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else” (412). Injudicious sarcasm<sup>12</sup>: for only a man *who could not see* all had the ability to turn preacher on Blackbarrow heath.

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11. Clym quotes the Book of Job: “I have made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” (402).

12. Injudicious sarcasm, but a clever amphibology.