FROM SHAKESPEARE TO AUTOFICTION

Approaches to authorship after Barthes and Foucault

Edited by Martin Procházka

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

From Shakespeare to Autofiction

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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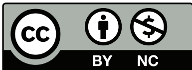

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In the name of the father: Darwin, scientific authority and literary assimilation

Niall Sreenan

Introduction: Darwin and 'author function'

In his essay 'What is an author?' Michel Foucault addresses what he calls the 'paradoxical singularity' of the author's name in literary writing and its complex role in mediating the relationship between the author and the text (1998, 209). Literary writing, or écriture in Foucault's terms, has less to do with a canon or 'literariness' than it has with a type of writing that Barthes in 'The death of the author' insists 'can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, [or] "depiction"' (1977, 145). Foucault describes écriture as being characterised by an

> interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier [...], the creation of a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears.
>
> (1998, 206)

Foucault's essay is both an expansion upon Barthes' foundational work and a critical response to it. The difference in terminology they deploy to describe the fate of the author is instructive. Where Barthes seems to insist on the author's 'death', with the implication that the author of écriture is now a non-being, Foucault prefers the term 'disappearance', enjoining the reader to pay close attention to what takes its place. 'It is not enough,' he states, 'to repeat the empty affirmation that the author

has disappeared [...]. Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance' (1998, 209).

Central to Foucault's development of Barthes' influential essay is the notion that along with the death of the author a transposition of the 'empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity' occurs, creating a *de facto* 'author function' without specific characteristics: an individual without individuality (Foucault 1998, 208). Barthes appears to espouse a theory of writing free from representational or signifying certainty in which the author is dissolved by the possibilities of the text. However, Foucault cautions that this assumption engenders a dynamic whereby the complexities of writing, or the text in question and its relation to an empirical author or implied author-function, become obscured by an empty space – which, in reality, is occupied by an implicitly transcendental and adaptable but invisible authorial figure. In this instance the author's name, unlike the proper name of an empirical author from which it becomes uncoupled, comes to represent an abstraction; it designates something marked only by its supposed absence. Thus the supposed 'death' of the author does not create nothingness; it rather transforms the author's name into a sign for nothingness. Furthermore, this assumed absence leaves a space in which critical and interpretive foundationalism of authorship is once more re-entrenched.

According to Foucault, then, the author and his name is not a replaceable or insignificant element in discourse; it is not capable of receding into non-being. Rather, it is a crucial but shadowy element of discourse which 'characterise[s] a certain mode of being of discourse' (Foucault 1998, 211). The author function elevates discourse beyond what Foucault terms 'ordinary, everyday speech' (1998, 211) or what Barthes might call 'ordinary culture' (1977, 142) to a discourse 'that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status' (Foucault 1998, 211).[1]

Few names have been allotted such specifically extraordinary and paradoxical status as that of 'Charles Darwin', the use of which in literature and literary criticism is the focus of this chapter. Bruno Latour calls him 'Saint Darwin, this Father of the Church', suggesting that the author of *The Origin of Species* and the theory of evolution by natural selection has become a substitute for God in the largely secular, author-less, Western scientific imaginary that his work was instrumental in bringing about (Latour 2009, 467). As I have pointed out, for Foucault the 'death of the author' does not signal the actual absence of authorial power, but the creation of an implicit yet sometimes obscure author function.

According to Latour, and also to Jacques Barzun (1958, 66–7), the name 'Darwin' signifies the death of divine authority – even, Latour points out, as it acts as a metonymic placeholder for the discourse of biological evolutionary theory as such. Thus Darwin displaces the authority of a transcendent, religious God with an evolutionary scientific one, while simultaneously signifying the supreme authority of the scientific discourse that brought about the death of God. This sense of the paradoxical nature of Darwin's author function as a signifier for the divinity of scientific authority is confirmed by the various ways in which Darwin's name, and theory, are deployed in a multiplicity of discursive contexts. This chapter focuses on the use of Darwin's name and thought in literary and literary critical contexts, each of which registers the authorial significance of the named discourse they use to different degrees and highlights the specific complexities of Darwin's author function.

Foucault's notion of the 'founders of discursivity' (1998, 217–18) is a useful theoretical touchstone to describe the fate of Darwin's name in the history of scientific and literary discourses. For Foucault, the figures of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche each inaugurated exceptional forms of discursive thought – the development and transformation of which is not defined by an adherence to their inaugural concepts and authorial power, but by the fact that their names are associated with founding the conditions for the production of further creative discourse. For Foucault, therefore, one can be Freudian without simply repeating Freud's ideas, as was the case for Jacques Lacan, but by developing and transforming Freud's foundational concepts in a variety of discursive contexts – even in ways that might be implicitly opposed to Freud's psychoanalytic approach. In this chapter I shall be asking whether, or to what extent, it is possible to read the afterlife of Darwin's name and theories in the same way.

In the chapter that follows, I shall examine a number of examples of literary, literary critical and scientific usages of Darwin's name and assimilations of his theory, in dialogue with the work of both Barthes and Foucault on the author. There are two primary points that I wish to address. The first is the complex singularity of Darwin's name and writing in relation to the concept of the 'author function' (Foucault 1998, 211–19) – which, I shall be arguing, can be productively viewed, in the light of Foucault's characterisation of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, as 'transdiscursive' (1998, 217). The second is the potential for 'non-scientific' writing, especially in the form of the novel, to demonstrate this transdiscursive possibility. Looking at works by Thomas Hardy and Émile

Zola, the novel, I shall then argue, offers us literary discursive space in which to explore the transdiscursive potential of Darwin's thought, by circumventing the epistemological demands made by scientific discourse associated with Darwin's name.

'Literary Darwinism': Darwin's name and effects of scientificity

The French writer and critic Armand Lanoux, in his influential biography of Émile Zola, describes an encounter between Zola and Edmond and Jules de Goncourt. Zola, he writes, directed an outburst at the brothers that outlined the rationale for using biological sciences as a central conceptual and methodological pillar of the literary Naturalist artwork:

> *Les caractéres de nos personnages sont détérminés par les organs génitaux. C'est de Darwin! La literature, c'est ça*![2]
>
> (Lanoux 1962, 102)
>
> [The actions of the characters we write about are determined by their genital organs. That's what Darwin says and that's what literature is!]

No mention is made of the encounter either in the Goncourt brothers' detailed autobiographical notebooks, nor in any of Zola's own correspondence. Indeed, according to David Baguley, in a study of the genetic relationship between Zola and Darwin, the story is almost certainly a fabrication, a symptom of the overweening, biographical, creative licence of Lanoux (Baguley 2011, 203). Although this seemingly innocuous anecdote reflects with a certain literary economy the reductive scientific dogmatism of Zola's thought in his literary-scientific manifesto, *Le Roman expérimental* (Zola 1880), Baguley points out that it erroneously associates Darwin with Zola's quasi-scientific realist method and greatly overstates the importance of Darwin to Zola's wider scientific idioculture. Aside from a handful of allusions in three of his novels, and a brief mention of Darwinism in the theoretical work on the Naturalist novel mentioned above, Darwin's name is largely absent from Zola's extensive œuvre. Neither his correspondence nor his voluminous preparatory *ébauches* indicate any direct or rigorous engagement with Darwin's texts (Baguley 2011, 203).

Baguley's essay suggests that the erroneous practice of making simplistic connections between Darwin and Zola, as well as the

widespread and durable critical myth that the latter read the former, can be traced in part to Lanoux's biographical licentiousness. However, this anecdote also invites us to make a couple of theoretical assertions regarding the dynamics of naming and authoriality in the encounter of scientific discourse and literature. In *Le Roman expérimental*, Zola actually makes a passing allusion to Darwin: 'I ought to touch upon Darwin's theories; but […] I should lose myself were I to enter into details' (Zola 1893, 19 [1880]).

Zola's use of Darwin's name can be interpreted in two ways. It may be viewed in Barthesian terms, asking how this apparent allusion to Darwin's science instead works as a sign for an allusion; it produces for Zola the *effect* of scientificity as much as the effect of reality, the combined outcome of which is the bolster of the pretensions of Zola's literary Naturalist method. Or it may follow Baguley's line of reasoning – as well as the critical assumptions against which he argues – and examine whether Zola's notebooks or correspondence justify this allusion. Both the Barthesian method and that of Baguley produce the same outcome: Zola seems to have been fabricating his knowledge of Darwinism. However, the latter method shows the success of Zola's gesture. Where he simply uses Darwin's name, this invites critics to attempt to take that sign as an indication of either Zola's comprehensive engagement with, or total lack of knowledge of, Darwin's actual work.

This tension in Zola's writing between its avowed scientificity and its literary materiality is also remarked upon by Thomas Hardy, Zola's contemporary. He writes in 'The science of fiction' (1891) that 'M Zola, in his work on the *Roman Expérimental*, seems to reveal an obtuseness to the disproof of his theory conveyed in his own novels' (Hardy 2001b, 107). Hardy, who criticised shallow forms of mimetic 'realism', claimed not to require the authorial prestige of scientific facticity to inject his work with a shallow sense of modernity or epistemological glamour. 'To advance realism as complete copyism, to call the idle trade of story-telling a science,' he writes of literary Naturalism, 'is the hyperbolic flight of an admirable enthusiasm', but an ultimately misguided enterprise (Hardy 2001b, 107). Rather, Hardy argued, one should actively seek to create 'the illusion of truth' which penetrates deeper into reality than the use of scientific names and allusion (2001b, 108).

Arguably, this is precisely what Zola did do. Nevertheless, Hardy was also attracted to Darwin's name, as well as the ideas to which that name was attached. In Hardy's autobiography, compiled by his second wife Florence Hardy from correspondence, notes, memoranda and

other writings, Hardy is described as an 'early acclaimer' of *The Origin of Species*, and he also attended Darwin's funeral in April 1882 (Hardy 1997, 148). Elsewhere he undertakes a monumental piece of scientific and literary citation, claiming as his primary intellectual influences Spencer, Hume, Mill, Huxley and Darwin (Weber 1940, 246–7). Though perhaps done in the service of literary expedience, rather in an effort to make unjustified claims regarding his scientific erudition, this attests to the unique cultural capital associated with Darwin for Hardy, Zola and their readers.

The perceived cultural capital of Darwin's name extends also to literary criticism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in France and England respectively, Ferdinand Brunetière and John Addington Symonds published works of literary history and criticism that appropriated Darwin's name and, superficially, Darwin's concepts. Their works, *L'évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature* (Brunetière 1890) and 'On the application of evolutionary principles to art and literature' (Symonds 1890, 1: 42–83), sought to describe, with the aid of biological evolution, the development of literature as a form of art and both the emergence and the extinction of literary genres.

For both men, Darwin's methods seem less important than the epistemological significance they ascribe to them. This allows them to wield Darwin's science as a transcendent scientific method with which to understand literary history.

It is precisely this authorial transcendence that Gillian Beer's 1983 work on the dialogue between evolutionary discourse and the nineteenth-century novel implicitly critiques by emphasising the specifically literary texture of Darwin's writing. However, this work too, entitled *Darwin's Plots,* also makes use of Darwin's name to define Beer's critical corpus and narratological approach. In so doing it implicitly places Darwin at the origin of a cluster of highly influential narratological tropes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Such has been the influence of Beer's work, and perhaps so powerful is the scientific cultural capital associated with Darwin's name, that – as George Levine points out in his Foreword to Beer's *Darwin's Plots* – it has spawned an entire 'Darwin Industry' in the humanities. For Levine, this attention to Darwin in literary criticism in particular 'expanded even beyond the imagination of those who already understood how enormously rich and fertile Darwin's thought remained' (Levine 2009, ix). However, one consequence of the growth of a 'Darwin Industry' is the return of discourses such as

those of Brunetière and Symonds, in which Darwin's name represents transcendent scientific truth.

This occurs most suggestively in the development by the critic Joseph Carroll of a literary critical ethos he calls 'Literary Darwinism'. Carroll is the most prominent in a cadre of loosely affiliated literary scholars who seek to bring a synthesis of evolutionary natural selection and genetics to bear on the study of literature.[3] The fundamental critical thesis, as expressed by Carroll, is that

> all knowledge about human behaviour, including the products of the human imagination, can and should be subsumed within the evolutionary perspective.
>
> (DiSalvo and Carroll 2009)

Literature, it is argued, is an 'adaptation' to the demands of natural selection and should be understood, like other adaptations, as being produced by it. The key concept is subsumption. This methodology of adopting non-discursive 'knowledge' derived from Darwinian science is aimed at subsuming all other forms of critical thought; it is equally committed to the idea that all human behaviour, including literary discourse, is subsumed by the evolutionary demands of evolutionary survival. Such an approach derives from the work of the scientist Edward O. Wilson, who in *Consilience: The unity of knowledge* (Wilson 1998) rejects the discursive, relativist conceptions of truth espoused, according to him, by so-called 'postmodern' philosophy. Instead Wilson espouses the fusion of all forms of human inquiry under the umbrella of a rationalist, positivist, scientific epistemology.

Numerous critiques have been waged against this work. But, as with Brunetière (1890) and Symonds (1890, 1: 42–83), I am interested here in how the deployment of authorial power bolsters the epistemological aims of the literary Darwinist project. Regardless of their fealty to Darwin's thought or the veracity of their speculations, Darwin's name is used in these literary critical discourses primarily to signal a rejection of the Barthesian and Foucauldian notion of écriture, as well as the manner in which their discourse should be received. Under the rubric of 'Literary Darwinism', the name 'Darwin' is a metonymic placeholder for their use of positivist, rationalist epistemologies. Yet these, paradoxically, insist on the independent truth value of scientific discourse even as they rely on the authority of Darwin's author function and cultural capital.

Darwin, Darwinism and transdiscursivity

Barthes (1977) suggests a historical reason for the author's significance to writing prior to the authorial parricide enacted by contemporary writing (and Mallarmé in particular). He writes that

> The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual [...] It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the person of the author.
>
> (1977, 142)

The importance granted to the name 'Darwin', however, can be read as more than an exemplary instantiation of this historically produced, pre-Mallarmean reification of the individual. For Social Darwinian theorists such as Herbert Spencer, Darwin's theory of 'the struggle for life' underlined the natural authority of pre-Darwinian conceptions of capitalism and individualist market rationalism – both premised, like natural selection, on competitive relations between self-interested individuals (Hawkins 1997, 85–6). This idea gained considerable popular currency through the work of Spencer, whose capitalist adaptation of the work of Darwin, Mike Hawkins suggests, anticipated the recrudescence of neo-liberal forms of capitalist economics in the 1970s and 1980s (1997, 98).

The veneration of Darwin's name and work in contemporary pseudo-scientific literary critical discourses, then, can also be understood as a culmination or symptom of the combined intellectual currents that provided the intellectual conditions preceding the emergence of Darwinism in the nineteenth century (and the concomitant rise of capitalist ideological hegemony in Britain). Literary Darwinism is a re-canonisation of Darwin's major contribution to biology, the 'struggle for survival', which accompanies and intensifies the braided historical and intellectual forces of individualism, rationality, science, empiricism and capitalism that Barthes describes. The deployment of the name 'Darwin', then, is more than a reflexive veneration of these currents. In reifying Darwinism and its singular author, this deployment is a celebration of the primacy of the individual and its place in a naturally competitive milieu.

How is it, then, that several decades after Barthes proclaimed the death of the author, the sciences today maintain the author's existence,

as well as all the ideological and historical implications this bears? Foucault's complementary historical analysis in 'What is an author?' (1998, 205–22) seems unable to account for this development. He notes how the author's role in science and literature followed divergent paths prior to the nineteenth century and the shift that occurs, in Barthes' view, with Mallarmé. Foucault notes that literary texts up until the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries were circulated, read and accepted with no issue as to the author's anonymity – or the lack of an author function with which to classify it. Scientific texts, by contrast, were only considered 'true' in the Middle Ages once the author's identity was confirmed. A reversal occurred, Foucault says, when science took on anonymity to indicate a superior, unbiased and repeatedly testable truth. Literary texts, on the other hand, have since the eighteenth century become discursively inseparable from their author function (Foucault 1998, 212 –13).

The socio-historical process that Foucault describes here, and the divergent fate of the author function in science and in literature, present themselves as contrary to the state of affairs I have described up to now. Where scientific truth takes on anonymity as its epistemological guarantor, so-called 'Darwinian' literary criticism demands the opposite: specific authorial identity.

Contrary to Foucault's schema, then, Darwin's author function is not reducible to that of a scientific discourse which disavows its author(s) in the name of anonymity and objectivity. Instead, Darwin seems to represent a singular kind of author function, offering positivist discourses the capacity to use the name 'Darwin' as a paradoxical symbol for scientific truth independent of historical and cultural indexes. However, Beer's work shows that such an attempt to abstract Darwin's work is by definition problematic, since Darwin's writing and thought are inseparable from their cultural and literary contexts. Indeed, further exploration of the various assimilations and reinterpretations of Darwin's work suggest that Darwin's thought is radically open to interpretation and transformation.

I have already gestured at the way in which Darwin's work, especially the theory of natural selection, is bound up with nineteenth-century individualism and capitalism – and I have identified Herbert Spencer's work as instrumental in solidifying this connection. However, Darwinian evolution by natural selection was equally interpreted as natural authorisation for socialist and communist ideologies.[4] Figures such as Engels (1978) and Peter Kropotkin (1972) saw in evolutionary Darwinism the confirmation that socialism and communism, rather than individualist competition, were innate in the natural order. Kropotkin,

in particular, theorised that contrary to Spencer's reading of Darwin, co-operation ensured survival; socialism was thus integral to human evolution. What Freud characterised as Darwin's 'Copernican' revolution did not engender merely one type of discourse – scientific, literary or otherwise. It rather produced a diverse range of often antithetical concepts and theories, all of which emerge from a single authorial source (Freud 1963, 284).

Of the authors who write works of such discursive productivity and malleability, Foucault observes:

> They are unique in that they are not just authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts.
>
> (1998, 217)

However, he is very careful not to include scientists in this category of 'transdiscursive' texts, settling instead on the figures that Paul Ricœur calls 'masters' of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (1970, 30–8). Might one legitimately ask whether Darwin could not be included within this particular pantheon of transdiscursivity? Certainly, as I have briefly demonstrated, Darwin's work has engendered the possibilities for other texts – texts that we can call 'Darwinian', but which have not been authored by Darwin. However, it is clear that in the positivistic discourses of literary Darwinism, Darwin's name has fallen foul of the scientific orthodoxy his work has spawned. In these works, where Darwin's name is both repressed and revered, these critics lay claim to an authentic, scientific Darwin, while insisting that anonymity bears the guarantee of truth. It is thus towards literary writing that we should turn to illuminate the transdiscursive character and singularity of Darwin's writings.

Zola and Darwin: the case of *Germinal* (1885)

Hereditary science provides the architecture and methodological premise of Émile Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* novel series; it also, as Susan Harrow has pointed out, forms part of its thematic substrate (2010, 94). Many of Zola's characters are haunted by an atavistic, hereditary taint that prevents them from achieving their ambitions, condemns them to tragic endings and confirms the scientific determinism built into the formal impetus and thematic preoccupations of the Naturalist novel. As I have illustrated, the extent to which we can read Zola's commitment

to naturalism and determinism as a corollary of an assumed interest in Darwinian evolution is arguable. However, in Zola's novel *Germinal* (Zola 1978), which takes as its theme the eternal war between capital and labour and the possibility of revolution, a discussion of Darwin by the novel's protagonist connects the British naturalist's work to a much broader theme than that of biological evolution.

Étienne Lantier, the novel's protagonist and an incipient, self-educated Marxist revolutionary, foments a worker's strike in the fictional mining town of Montsou. Having witnessed the violent and catastrophic failure of this strike, Lantier asks:

> *Darwin, avait-il donc raison, le monde ne serait-il qu-une bataille, les forts mangeant les faibles, pour la beauté et la continuité de l'espèce*?
>
> (Zola 1978, 490)
>
> [Was Darwin right, then? Would the world forever be a battleground on which the strong devoured the weak in pursuit of the perfection and continuity of the species?]

The question invites us to consider whether the apparently inescapably tragic character of natural selection – 'the survival of the fittest' and the death of the unfit – can be reconciled with an emancipatory politics, and whether the Naturalist novel itself can address this question.

If Zola read Darwin's work at all, it was likely to be in poorly and tendentiously translated or in significantly attenuated form (Prum 2014, 391–9). As if to anticipate the critical objections that his fact might initiate, Zola deploys a playful, metafictional gesture that acknowledges his own ignorance and addresses the reception of Darwin in France in general. Earlier in *Germinal* he writes:

> *Étienne, maintenant, en était à Darwin. Il en avait lu des fragments, résumés et vulgarisés dans un volume à cinq sous; et, de cette lecture mal comprise, il se faisait une idée révolutionnaire du combat pour l'existence, les maigres mangeant les gras, le peuple fort dévorant la blême bourgeoisie*.
>
> (Zola 1978, 490)
>
> [Étienne had now got as far as Darwin. He had read this and that, as summarised for a popular audience in a volume costing five sous; and on the basis of his patchy understanding he had come to see revolution in terms of the struggle for existence, the lean eating the fat, the strong people devouring the pallid middle class.]

Here Zola's assimilation of Darwin, although it seems visible only through apparently shallow nominal allusion, offers us an implicit critique of our desire to put Darwin into interdiscursive circulation without attempting first to apprehend the complexity or breadth of his work. Such a critique is, by extension, applicable to the process of authorial canonisation. Darwin's name is used just as Foucault suggests it might be: a literary abstraction devoid of empiricity, with a tenuous connection to the works associated with that author and in which the nuances and contradictions these works contain are effaced by glib, ideologically bullish assumptions. And yet Zola's naming of Darwin paints an image of the way in which nineteenth-century European audiences received his work and the way in which Darwin's paradoxical author function arose. Even as new 'texts' and new thought were being created by the nuance and malleability of Darwin's writings and theories, his name became a crepuscular entity, both radically present in a range of discourses and devoid of individuality and contradiction.

Thomas Hardy's novels: Darwin as scientific authority

Thomas Hardy's treatment of Darwinism, in contrast to that of Zola, does not engage in ironic metafictionality. In fact Hardy, despite his avowed support for Darwin, does not mention his name at any point in his fictional corpus. However, unlike Zola, Hardy does engage with the large themes of Darwin's work: man's place in nature, life as a constant struggle and the fraught dynamics of reproduction and sexual relation that mark the human as much as the animal. It is upon the last that I wish to focus here.

Numerous critics have identified in Hardy's novels a preoccupation with sexuality and the vicissitudes of courtship, the strained conditions of which in Victorian England are evoked so well by Hardy in his novels (Higonnet 1993; Wright 1988). Hardy himself affirmed that realism consisted not of the representation of the abject, as in Zola, but of the realistic representation of 'relations between the sexes', and in Darwin we find suggestive material for the way in which Hardy goes about such a representation (Hardy 2001a, 97). The mechanics of sexual selection outlined in Darwin (1871) are, briefly, as follows: the male of a species competes with other males for possession of or access to a fertile female, while the female in turn exercises a form of aesthetic judgement on the male. This results in males being bedecked with feathers and instruments of war while females remain, it is assumed (and observed), comparatively passive and unadorned (Darwin 1871, 253–320). The dynamic at play here

is easily perceived in Hardy's early work, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (Hardy 2005). In this novel, published in 1872 soon after *The Descent of Man,* the central female protagonist navigates the courtship efforts of three competing male suitors. Similarly in *The Return of the Native* (Hardy 2013) three male suitors compete for the hand of one female, Eustacia Vye.

Hardy's staging of the dynamics of sexual selection does not, however, serve to naturalise the dynamic of the male as an active agent and the female as a passive one. Rather, Hardy's dramas of sexual relation work discursively to subvert these dynamics of hetero-normativity, focusing instead on the eroticism of sexual relation rather than its instrumentality. At a ritual Christmas dance, Eustacia arrives dressed as a male character in a folk play, 'revealing herself to be changed in sex, brilliant in colours, and armed from top to toe' (Hardy 2013, 163). She conceals her face and 'natural' gender in order to observe in secret the object of her sexual desire, Clym Yeobright, the returned native, who is present at the gathering.

Already the presumed schema of agency in Darwinian natural selection is subject to a reversal. Here Eustacia does not merely perform the active 'male' role; she enacts it by inverting the subject–object relation implied by the Darwinian schema. Additionally, the role that Eustacia plays is that of the aggressor, a heavily armed knight tasked with destroying its enemy, the comparatively feminine Saracen knight. She does not only take on the agency of a sexual aggressor, but also that of the invader and of the chivalrous knight. Here sexual relation is suffused with its own performativity, with the shifting dynamics of gendered roles and, in the outrageous dress of the players, the flamboyant eroticism of these dynamics.

Hardy, explaining the ritual preparations for such a performance, remarks that the costumes the players wear are outrageously showy and unnecessarily garlanded affairs:

> They insisted on attaching loops and bows of silk and velvet in any situation pleasing to their taste. Gorget, gusset, basinet, cuirass, gauntlet, sleeve, all alike in the view of these feminine eyes were practicable spaces whereon to sew scraps of fluttering colour.
>
> (Hardy 2013, 158)

This decoration results not from the competitive male instinct to impress females, but from the aesthetic sense – and creative desire – of their female companions; they drape their lovers with ribbons, scallops and silk

in a manner 'pleasing to their taste'. Such gestures suggest the agential primacy of female desire in such a schema, or at least the fluidity of agency in sexual relation. However, perhaps, more significantly, it also depicts the 'relations between the sexes' as an encounter that is experienced and made pleasurable for its own sake; for the experience of creativity, for the intensities of colour and form that it produces, not merely as a precursor or instrumental lead-in to the act of reproduction.

Such eroticism and the creative possibilities of Darwinian sexual selection in relation to a philosophy of sexual difference provides the basis for Elizabeth Grosz's radical re-working of feminism in her work *Becoming Undone* (Grosz 2011). Developing the feminism of difference espoused by Luce Irigaray, Grosz sees in Darwin's work on sexual selection the basic affirmation that sexual relation is a form of creative repetition and not merely 're-production':

> Darwin's work can be understood as an analysis of the proliferation of nothing but differences: differences without any hierarchical order, without fixed identities or biological archetypes [...] differences generated for their own sake.
>
> (Grosz 2011, 167)

Such a theoretical move is consonant with Deleuze's insistence in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 2004) that it is in Darwin that the notion of 'individual difference' enters the scientific imagination. The evolutionary biologist August Weissmann, Deleuze asserts, made an 'essential contribution' to Darwinian biology when he demonstrated 'how individual difference finds a natural cause in sexed reproduction: sexed reproduction as the principle of the "incessant production of varied individual differences"' (2004, 248–9).

Hardy's scene of a Christmas folk play, read through the prism of Darwin's writing, leads us to a new Darwin – a new text, if you will. Darwin's writings were not merely productive for Hardy's literary imagination; in their assimilation through Hardy's fiction, discursive possibilities continue to proliferate. Mobilising the name 'Darwin' to denote scientific authority, rather than the totemic name attached to a radically open corpus of texts, effectively ossifies Darwin's author function. This is reserved for a mode of discourse ideologically aligned with scientific epistemologies and ontologies. In contrast, Hardy's work alludes silently to that of Darwin. Through this he allows the careful reader to see in Darwin's thought – through the quotidian drama of human life – the possibility to undermine normative modes of thought in biology.

Conclusion

Darwin's writings and the name associated with them are singularly unclassifiable according to the vulgar taxonomies of science or literature. Foucault's definition of the founders of discourse omits Darwin – and natural science more generally. The focus in Foucault on Freud and Marx seems to denote a conveniently anthropocentric conception of transdiscursive possibility, at least in the sense that neither Freud nor Marx were avowedly concerned with 'the human'. Assimilations of Darwin such as that of Elizabeth Grosz – as I have read it in Hardy – offer us a broader conception of transdiscursivity as a category, as well as suggesting a divergent, post-human trajectory for Darwin's thought in critical philosophy.

I have approached Darwin's work through the writings of Foucault and Barthes on the author – for it is the image of the author, in the past and today, which is the most visible aspect of Darwin's writing. Allusion and appropriation defines its presence in many discursive contexts. Yet when we start to excavate these allusions to and co-options of Darwin's name, we can begin to glimpse the complexity of Darwin's writing, as well as the relationship between the author and these texts. I have attempted to show that in the novel, especially in those novels written in response to the revolution in biology that occurred in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, these complexities and paradoxes can be most suggestively articulated. For the novel – by virtue of its literariness, which can be said to have become uncoupled from the idea of expression – allows for a freer engagement with Darwin's writings, unburdened by the epistemological fantasies of positivism. Following on from this, the novel becomes a discourse on equal footing with Darwin – or perhaps vice versa – in which science and art co-mingle, producing new thought, new questions and new discursive possibilities.

However, the perils of this type of engagement have to be recognised. If it is not treated with the critical care and attention it deserves, such engagement can itself contribute to the very process of authorial abstraction, which empties the name 'Darwin' of all substantive, empirical meaning and nuance.

Notes

1 Barthes uses the term 'ordinary culture' to describe a mode of discourse and a mode of being in relation to discourse that is 'tyrannically' centred upon the figure of the author. This he contrasts with modes of being of discourse that emerge after Mallarmé, which, in contrast, suppress 'the author in the interests of writing' (Barthes 1977, 142). Foucault, on the other

hand, describes everyday speech as that which does not possess an author function, and which therefore does not possess a specific status merited by the authority of such a function (1998, 211). Both authors use the idea of banality or the quotidian to describe a discourse and a way of relating to discourse that has at its core a deep desire for authorial attribution, in order to designate an appropriate means of receiving the text.

2 All translations from French are by the author.

3 'Literary Darwinism' is the title given to the discipline by its *de facto* leader, Joseph Carroll (2004; 2011). Brian Boyd is an example of a critic whose outlook is less strident than that of Carroll and who describes himself, more reflexively, as a representative of 'evocriticism' (2009, 384–97). However, his work is guided by the same commitment to advancing human knowledge through 'Darwinian' analyses of literary works.

4 D. A. Stack's analysis of socialist responses to Darwin offers a comprehensive view of the reception of Darwin by Marxist and socialist thinkers (2000, 682–710). See also Engels (1978) and Kropotkin (1972).

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