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The Great Chain of Vibrancy: Scalar Remanences in Contemporary Climate Change Fiction

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Biographical note

Jean-Michel Ganteau is Professor of Contemporary British Literature at the University Paul Valéry Montpellier 3 (France) and a member of the Academia Europaea. He is the editor of the journal *Études britanniques contemporaines*. He is the author of three monographs: *David Lodge: le choix de l'éloquence* (2001), *Peter Ackroyd et la musique du passé* (2008) and *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Vulnerability in Contemporary British Literature* (2015). He is also the editor, with Christine Reynier, of four volumes of essays: *Impersonality and Emotion in Twentieth-Century British Literature* (Publications Montpellier 3, 2005), *Impersonality and Emotion in Twentieth-Century British Arts* (Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2007), *Autonomy and Commitment in Twentieth-Century British Literature* (PULM, 2010) and *Autonomy and Commitment in Twentieth-Century British Arts* (PULM, 2011). He has also co-edited, with Susana Onega, *The Ethical Component in Experimental British Fiction since the 1960s* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), *Ethics and Trauma in Contemporary Narrative in English* (Rodopi, 2011), *Trauma and Romance in Contemporary British Literature* (Routledge, 2012), *Contemporary Trauma Narratives: Liminality and the Ethics of Form* (Routledge, 2014), *Victimhood and Vulnerability in 21st Century Fiction* (Routledge, 2017) and *Transcending the Postmodern. The Singular Response of Literature to the Transmodern Paradigm* (Routledge, 2020). He has published extensively on contemporary British fiction, with a special interest in the ethics of affects trauma criticism and theory, and the ethics of vulnerability, in France and abroad (other European countries, the United States), as chapters in edited volumes or in such journals as *Miscelánea*, *Anglia*, *Symbolism*, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, and so on.

Abstract

This article provides a reading of Cynan Jones's *The Long Dry* (2006) in the light of one of the topoi most closely associated with the Renaissance's, i.e., Tillyard's great chain of being. Starting from a consideration of what can be considered as the novel's neo-baroque aesthetics displaying a strong taste for correspondences, it shows how the hierarchical system of the times is replaced by a more horizontal one in which human exceptionalism is shown to be problematical in the context of a period dominated by neo-materialist, post-human considerations. It goes on to address the sense of bafflement inherent in the revision of our conception of scale in the singular so as to reveal a plurality of scales as an evocation of a neo-sublime evocation of the Anthropocene and its attendant hyperobjects. It concludes on the prevalence of interdependences between human subjects and their natural and cosmic environment, promoting a vision of the living world as radically embedded and submitted to the material experience of transcorporeality.

Résumé

La grande chaîne vibrante : rémanences scalaires dans la fiction climatique contemporaine.

Cet article propose une lecture du roman de Cynan Jones, *The Long Dry* (2006), à la lumière de l'un des topoi les plus étroitement associés à la Renaissance, à savoir la *great chain of being* de Tillyard. En se fondant sur ce que l'on peut considérer comme l'esthétique néo-baroque du roman, avec son goût prononcé pour les correspondances, l'article s'attache à montrer comment le système hiérarchique de l'époque est remplacé par une configuration plus horizontale dans laquelle l'exceptionnalisme humain s'avère problématique dans un contexte dominé par les considérations néo-matérialistes et post-humaines. Il aborde ensuite le sentiment de perplexité inhérent à la révision de notre conception de l'échelle au singulier pour révéler une pluralité d'échelles comme évocation néo-sublime de l'Anthropocène et des hyperobjets qui l'accompagnent. Il conclut sur la prévalence des interdépendances entre les sujets humains et leur environnement naturel et cosmique, promouvant une vision du monde vivant comme soumis aux enchevêtrements et à l'expérience matérielle de la transcorporeité.

Keywords

Cynan Jones, *The Long Dry*, Anthropocene, climate change fiction, correspondences, embeddings, exceptionnalism, great chain of being, interdependences, posthuman, scales, sublimity, transcorporeality

Mots clés

Cynan Jones, *The Long Dry*, Anthropocène, correspondances, échelles, enchevêtrements, exceptionnalisme, fiction climatique, *great chain of being*, post-humain, sublime, interdépendances, transcorporeité

In the spring of 2020, when this article was supposed to have been originally presented in embryonic form at the SAES conference, we were all trying to come to terms with the first lockdown and striving to make sense of an event that we were not especially equipped to account for. A sense of awe and bewilderment had taken hold of the community, we were for the first time in decades confronted to measures that made biopolitics, an abstract category in many ways, very concrete indeed. Using Rosie Braidotti's terms, we were discovering that 'zoē exceeds bios and ignores logos' (Braidotti 208). As we were fumbling our way through our first meeting with the sanitary crisis, our sense of bafflement recoiled with difficulty: we could not conceive of events of such magnitude that we had come to experience directly for the first time in our existences. Sideration reigned supreme. Had the situation been the object of a fictionalisation through film or novel, sublimity would have been in order, as we would have been situated at a remove from the terrible events and would therefore have been able to derive some delight from the observation of the scene. But there were no ready-made fictions that we could cling to for immediate reassurance and resilience seemed to be a retreating possibility.

What we were witnessing were the effects of what Andrew Morton has called a 'hyperobject':

A hyperobject could be the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades. A hyperobject could be the biosphere, or the Solar System. A hyperobject could be the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium. A hyperobject could be the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture. (1)

Such examples underline the sheer magnitude of the hyperobjects, thereby raising the issue of scale, one of the buzz words in contemporary ecocriticism and more especially Anthropocene studies. Whether they refer to or are the result of natural phenomena or human activities, hyperobjects share a set of characteristics that Morton describes in the following way:

Hyperobjects have numerous properties in common. They are viscous, which means that they ‘stick’ to beings that are involved with them. They are nonlocal; in other words, any ‘local manifestation’ of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject. They involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to. . . . Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time. (Morton 1)

Globality, magnitude, invisibility, these are the common traits of hyperobjects as forces that seem to be located on a plane of existence different from ours and are perceptible only through the effects they have on individuals, populations and the environment—natural or not—in which those are embedded. Indeed, such a conception of the human subject as entangled in a milieu of living beings and quick matter and dependent on hyperobjects that stand above and elsewhere and seem to be both nowhere and everywhere at the same time may evoke a secular version of the ‘great chain of being’ that was made popular in EMW Tillyard’s groundbreaking *The Elizabethan World Picture* published almost eighty years ago (1943).

Issues relating to scale are at the heart of the conception of what is known as the great chain of being, that emblem of humanism and the Renaissance that in fact, Tillyard tells us in unambiguous terms, is inherited from the Medieval cosmogony: ‘Protestantism was largely a selection and a simplification of what was there all the time’ (Tillyard 7). The issue of scale, or rather scales, in this context, may be apprehended in at least two ways: first as the great chain envisages a *hierarchy* from the lowest (inanimate) to the highest (God), through various strata of the living world, namely ‘man.’ In Tillyard’s terms, ‘*cosmic* order was yet one of the master themes of Elizabethan poetry’ (Tillyard 14, emphasis added); secondly, as this vertical organisation is based on order, itself relying on degree: ‘God created as many different kinds of things as he did creatures, so that there is no creature which does not differ in some respect from all other creatures and by which it is in some respect superior or inferior to all the rest.’ (Tillyard 27) Such a vision of degrees refers to the image of the links on the chain and the rungs on the ladder that both differentiate and encompass all their components. My point is that in contemporary literary evocations, the *scala naturae* of the times seems to reappear in a secularised context, in partial, spectral fashion, admittedly. It makes contemporary texts, and more specifically those belonging to the category of climate (change) fiction, resonate with their predecessors from the Renaissance and thereby helps us trace a move from humanism to post-humanism, from anthropocentrism to the contemporary dismissal of exceptionalism.

This is what I address in this article by successively attending to the figures of correspondences, bafflement and interdependence, taking once again my lead from Tillyard who saw in the Elizabethan world picture ‘a chain, a set of correspondences and a dance’ (Tillyard 2). My demonstration is based on a reading of Welsh novelist Cynan Jones’s *The Long Dry* (2006).

Correspondences

The Long Dry chronicles one day in the life of a farmer and his family on a small estate, a few miles from the sea. As indicated by the title, it signposts its concern with climate change from the very beginning and it presents the reader with a series of events of a portentous nature: the day starts with Gareth, the protagonist, discovering that a new born calf died during the night, then goes on with the death of another one, still born, and the disappearance of a cow that is heavy with calf, running away from the heat to find shelter in the earthy remains of a pond. On the selfsame day, the vet comes to put Curly, an old dog and the family’s favourite, to sleep, we are given access to the protagonist’s and his wife Kate’s doubts as to the possibility of living on the farm for too long, and are privy to their son’s plans to go away and start a new life. Shockingly, a rogue prolepsis (‘rogue’ because it is conditioned by an unprepared bout of

omniscience in a novel in which internal focalisation is otherwise used consistently) announces the death of their little girl, eight days later, after eating a lethal mushroom. In other terms, it is a narrative that starts with portents and forecasts tragedy, signposting the workings of fate and its enmeshing with individual destinies.

Of course, God is missing from Cynan Jones's chain of beings, but a fairly good sample of earthly materials and beings are arrayed in their vibrancy. The circadian structure implies a great deal of focus on and attention to ordinary details that are generally kept below the level of visibility. This is the case with the passages evoking the texture of the earth, the quality of the soil, various representatives of the vegetal world ('the sedge' is the title of a section) and the state they are left in, the animals, from the insects to the mammals, complete with Curly the dog, who taught little Emmy how to walk, and the stray cow, whose perceptions and decision are given through internal focalisation. Of course, the human characters are not neglected in the evocation. A detail may be reminiscent of the great chain of being of yore, when Gareth remembers one of his father's childhood experiences in which a little boy reported to the teacher that he had seen an angel on his way to school, on a subzero morning:

And there in the ice, where the fall began, was a girl, catching the light like spider thread, with her white shawl spread out around her in the frozen water.

It was years before they were told that she had drowned herself because she'd found she was with child . . . (Jones 30)

As suggested in this umpteenth reference to problematic birth, correspondences are rife in this tightly woven narrative, linking up the cows, the angel, Kate and her miscarriages, to take but one thematic strand. Similarly, references to electricity, a latter-day avatar of the ether, abound, gravitating around the image of the magnetic storm, in relation to the eponymous concern, climate change:

The rain stopped; that day the sun came out hot and fast and deliberately. There had been a geomagnetic storm. Epileptics had fits, and people prone to strokes or with weak hearts were ill, some died. The electric things of our body went wrong in many people. The swallows came early, and that day a cloud of racing pigeons and one white dove landed at the farm. They came suddenly and curiously and were very lost. (Jones 17)

It might be tempting to see in these lines an example of pathetic fallacy, the protagonist projecting his anxiety and disarray onto the elements and dwellers of the world. Still, the scientific orientation anchors the evocation in a more objective context, based on the observation of physical phenomena. Elsewhere, Gareth and Kate's teenage son, Dylan, averts his gaze from the land and chooses to concentrate on the promises of the town, with its night clubs 'and bare arms and small skirts and white skin bluing in the epileptic lights' (Jones 26), the paronomasia (electric/epileptic) announcing 'the electric sound of birds' (Jones 73) to be heard many pages thence. The impression that the reader is left with is that the traditional correspondences that strictly used to respect the criteria of degree and order (God/king/lion/eagle/dolphin/gold, etc.) have made room for derangement and leaking out, as if the principle of strict parallelism had been replaced by that of contagion the magnetic/electric/epileptic being conflated together and affecting all rungs on the ladder. This is certainly reminiscent of the 'crisis of Degree' that René Girard saw at work in Shakespearean drama and analysed at length in *A Theatre of Envy*, where mimetic desire when it is internally—and imperfectly—regulated, leads to the demise of the social order (Girard 424–425). Of course, the Renaissance context in which Girard analyses such a crisis is radically distinct from the one in which Jones's novel was produced, in epistemological terms, and its manifestations in Shakespeare's plays essentially affect interpersonal relations at the level of the family and the body politic. Still, the 'crisis of Degree' does provide an apt image of the *degradation* of

relations and, by using the religious frame of the great chain of being the better to abuse or at least warp it, *The Long Dry* anchors itself in a new tradition, i.e., that of climate change narratives that, in Timothy Clark's words, provide a 'juxtaposition of the trivial and the catastrophic' (Clark 14), even while situating it in the wake of what Catherine Bernard diagnoses as a crisis making microcosm and macrocosm converge, conflating the historical and the cosmic (44). Through the use of warped correspondences, a sense of the cosmic is built into the text, which makes for the circuitous, metaleptic evocation of hyperobjects, introducing a sense of the contemporary sublime that was absent from the clearly ordered, accessible cosmogony of the Renaissance—even when it was affected by the Girardian 'crisis of *Degree*.'

Bafflement

As already suggested, bafflement is one of the main effects deriving from the presentation of hyperobjects concurrent with the Anthropocene. Fiction may choose a low-key, spectral approach, as is the case with Sarah Hall's *Haweswater* or *The Carhullan Army*, for instance, or address the issue full on, as in the works of such precursors as J.G. Ballard (*The Draught*) or, more recently, Jeanette Winterson (*The Stone Gods*) or Ian McEwan (*Solar*). Now, as underlined by many commentators, one of the aesthetic challenges that the Anthropocene raises is that of adapting the novel's intrinsic interest in the individual and human agency—which fuel the narrative dynamics—to a shift of agency that has become prominent in the light of recent discoveries, among which catastrophic events linked with climate change. Admittedly, the issue of human agency as pitted against the adverse currents of fate is not a brand new one: Greek tragedy brings into play this dialectic as a mainspring for its plots, and such structures have been imported into the medium of fiction for quite a long time. Still, Adam Trexler evokes the challenge of 'the yet-pervasive origin story of literature, shifting attention from author-geniuses to texts in a complicated material world,' which he goes on glossing in this way: 'Perhaps the central question . . . is how climate change and all its *things* have changed the capacity of recent literature' (Trexler 13, original emphasis). In other terms, novels like *The Long Dry* address the difficulty inherent in the presentation of problems of scales that defy immediate apprehension. Admittedly, fiction boasts some tools that make it germane to such challenges: genres and modes (tragedy, SF), poetic devices (tropes like the metalepsis), the ability to present psychological phenomena (perception, sublimity, denial, etc.), among others. Besides, the novel has always been intent on etching individual destinies against larger backgrounds (historical and sociological ones, primarily). And of course, the evocation of scales is at the heart of the great chain of being whose presence still manifested itself in the poetry of the eighteenth century, Tillyard tells us (Tillyard 26). From this perspective, conflating 'the domestic and the interplanetary' (Trexler 26) may not appear as something totally revolutionary for literature in general and for the novel in particular.

The Long Dry sets out doing this by multiplying reference to dryness and drought almost to saturation, which grants figural opaqueness to the narrative as a correlative of the heightened resistance of the material world that the human protagonists keep bumping into, as if the densely repetitive prose were used to promote an experiential rendering of the new difficulties. Moreover, the novel makes an indirect presentation of the hyperobject of climate change that intervenes on another, global plane, and can only be presented circuitously, through its effects—the enduring drought, the death of calves, the disarray of pigeons:

The electronic particles in the crystal, moving between different ion in the structured path, turn the ore magnetic and tell the pigeons their way.

They've also found iron . . . in their inner ear—the things which give them a sense of where they are in the air, of the space they move through. If the earth's geomagnetics are wrong, they get lost. (Jones 90)

Such passages provide powerful metaleptic presentations that allow the reader to fumblingly apprehend (but less fumblingly so as the references accumulate) the sheer *extent* of climate change despite its limited visibility. Of course, they express a powerful sense of vulnerability, affecting the whole of the natural world in which human subjects are embedded and of which they are part and parcel. In the glimpse and, possibly, revelation of such vulnerability lies some experiential, destabilising knowledge of the multiplicity of scales.

In fact, it looks as if one of the main differences between the scalar vision of the Renaissance and its recent avatars lay in the fact that the *whole* of the strata of the great chain of being, encompassing the minute and the cosmic, used to be a norm onto itself, whereas in the contemporary period, paradoxical as it may seem on account of the advances in science and technology charactering the last four centuries, the standard of perception should be reduced to *one* plane. This is suggested by Timothy Clark, in a chapter of his influential study on ecocriticism subtitled ‘The Terrestrial as Norm’: ‘one scale forms a kind of norm for us, the usually taken-for-granted scale of our day-to-day existence and perception’ (Clark 29). The power of climate change fiction in general and of *The Long Dry* in particular is to make the readers pay attention to the multiplicity of norms of perception, which systematically involves a process of defamiliarisation, hence a destabilisation.

The sense of bafflement and awe inherent in such apprehensions is compatible with the literary presentation of trauma, as has been underlined by several critics (among whom E. Ann Kaplan who, in her work on dystopia, has championed the contested category of PreTSD) and possibly hails from the romantic tradition of the sublime that presents the reader with magnitudes conversant with the infinite or, more relevantly in a secular context, the unlimited. As with more traditional sublime evocations, the readers of climate change fiction may be presented with passages where the object of contemplation or, more particularly here, partial perception, is too huge for the imagination to apprehend it as a whole, hence the mixture of pleasure and awe for the viewer and, vicariously, the readers. By transposing such thematic and aesthetic topoi into a secular context, *The Long Dry* reminds us that ‘[t]he anthropocene . . . demands an imaginative sense of scale; it requires that we “scale up our imagination of the human”’ (Vermeulen 139). On step further, it taps the ethical dimension of the sublime which, in its ambivalence, fails to apprehend a totality while drawing attention, even if negatively, to its presence and magnitude. In other terms, the sublime defamiliarisation intrinsic in the experience of a plurality of scales wields a considerable ethical power in that it makes the readers pay attention to the limited scope of its norm of perception, allowing them to realise that perception is a cultural construct and possibly getting them to shift the goal posts of their observation. This is what Pieter Vermuelen suggests when he tackles the issue of responsibility and agency (against the grain of the critical doxa on the subject, as regards the latter):

The anthropocene inserts the human into geological deep time as a responsible agent. Deep time, in the anthropocene, is not the human’s other, but rather another plane on which it cannot but exert agency. If anything, it further augments human responsibility and agency: the human is the force that has decisively contributed to global warming, mass extinction of species, and rising sea levels, but it is also the only power that can consciously intervene in the destructive movements it has unleashed. (139)

Interdependence

As suggested earlier, the Elizabethan world picture rested on a set of correspondences based on parallelisms between elements hailing from diverse domains of existence (the animal, the vegetal, the mineral, etc.) but belonging to the same rungs of the ladders in each of these domains. Such horizontal relations seem to be organised in terms of parallelism and echo, which indicates a fairly low level of interdependence. Still, when considering the chain in its vertical, hierarchical dimension, Tillyard insists on the relatedness of all elements: ‘Everything had to

be included and everything had to be made to fit and to connect.’ (Tillyard 6) Elsewhere, he comments on the basic principle of inclusion in a chain of solidarity in which the higher is always dependent on the lower, and *vice versa*: ‘it made vivid the idea of a related universe where no part was superfluous, it enhanced the dignity of all creation, even the meanest part of it’ (Tillyard 31). Despite a strict assignation to a specific rung on the ladder, each item, in its paradigmatic relations, was thereby related to and solidary with the others. I would say that this type of literary conceit is naturally compatible with a neo-materialist vision of life that postulates a continuum of vibrancy (the word is Jane Bennett’s, admittedly) of which the human is a part and not the centre. This is one of the tenets of ecology and of ecocriticism, Hubert Zapf reminds us, in his *Literature as Cultural Ecology*: ‘one central axiom of ecological thought is universal interconnectedness’ (Zapf 11).

Now, speaking of interconnectedness implies of necessity evoking the issue of interdependence, hence vulnerability. In fact, as soon as a being is dependent on other ones, the failure of sovereignty and autonomy inherent in the demands of physiological needs, for instance, becomes apparent. As indicated by Nussbaum in her reading of Greek tragedy and poetry, human nature is *orectic*, i.e., turned towards the world and the other on which and whom each individual is dependent through the effect of appetite and desires (Nussbaum 357). This postulates a basic openness of the subject that the literary text is notoriously well-equipped to express. For instance, the analogy between the female body and the earth is a topos that has been lampooned by feminist critics and that *The Long Dry* indulges in when evoking Kate’s body, smitten with barrenness like a wasteland and ironically evoked in terms of fertility in several passages seen through Gareth’s perspective:

On the third time they told her she couldn’t have children then. She was thirty-four and damp like autumn, not wet in the way young women are, like spring, but damp and rich and earthy, and it didn’t seem right that she could not have a child. She was fertile and hungry, like fallen leaves. (36)

The Keatsian echoes of a craved-for ‘mellow fruitfulness’ are expressed in lines in which the simile (‘like autumn’) becomes effaced to leave room for the metaphor (‘damp and rich and earth’), suggesting a community of being on the same plane.

Elsewhere, in the above-quoted passage devoted to the pigeon, the emphasis is on the way in which living organisms are compounded of elements of the mineral world, which leads the narrator to round off the section in the following words: ‘It makes you wonder what crystals run through us, what drops of salt? Because something in us gives us a sense of where we should be, too, if we listen.’ (Jones 90) These words are evocative of the tenets of new materialism and more specifically of Donna Haraway’s observations on the porosity of organisms, including the human subject, when she insists: ‘I am a creature of mud, not of the sky.’ (Haraway 3) More specifically, they relate to her concept of the “contact zone” (Haraway 4) referring to the entanglement between subject and environment, and among species which Stacy Alaimo evokes in the following words: ‘Potent ethical and political possibilities emerge from the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature.’ (Alaimo 2) In the preceding words evoking Kate’s maturity but also the pigeon’s and the human subject’s common mineral inheritance, the stress is on transcorporeality, which sees bodies as ‘sites of interconnection’ (Alaimo 4) and makes clear that ‘the substance of the human is inseparable from “the environment”’ (Alaimo 2). From this perspective, human exceptionalism—let alone individual sovereignty—are exposed as myths through the novel’s insistence on the materiality of the body: clearly the hierarchical vision of the Renaissance, with its promotion of relationality based on a strict order, is given a new twist in the radical and literal vision of trans-corporeality as commonality. Unlike the early modern conception of the human body encompassing all other items of the physical world (an image evocative of that of

the body politic, the monarch encompassing all of the subjects), the trans-corporeal perspective provides the vision of a radical exteriority and openness in which frontiers blur to leave room for the figure of a common materiality. Indeed, Alaimo's dialogue with Elizabeth Grosz leads her to quote from the author of *Volatile Bodies*: 'we need to understand the body, not as an organism or entity in itself, but as a system, or series of open-ended systems, functioning within other huge systems it cannot control through which it can access and acquire its abilities and capacities' (Alaimo 10). This leads her to consider some examples of transcorporeality, among which food that she defines as 'the first basic transcorporeal substance' (Alaimo 12) and possibly the most obvious source continuity between bodies and their (natural) environments. In *The Long Dry*, food is also an instrument of death, as demonstrated by Emmy eating the lethal mushroom that will kill her, a radical way of showcasing the openness of bodies and their susceptibility to otherness, hence ontological vulnerability. One other central illustration of direct transcorporeality lies in contamination from the sheep, as the origin of Kate's miscarriages were caused by chlamydia transmitted to Gareth 'in fluids from handling the sheep' (Jones 49).

This is what Karen Barad may have in mind when she defines 'entanglements' and explains that to be 'entangled' implies 'lacking an independent, self-contained existence' (ix). The characters in *The Long Dry* and the world surrounding them are entangled, dependent on each other, and submitted, ultimately to the same forces and a common destiny in the context of climate change. This vision is based on what Barad has defined as 'intra-action,' that she takes to be the 'mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (33). The intimation is that '[i]ndividuals do not preexist their interaction; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating' (Barad ix). Such an evocation ties in with Haraway's conception of existence not so much in terms of *being* as in terms of *becoming* and, more specifically, "becoming *with*" (27, emphasis added), resorting to the Tillyardian figure of the dance in a new, unexpected way: 'all the actors become who they are *in the dance of relating*, not from scratch, not ex-nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral to *this* encounter' (Haraway 25, original emphasis).

Clearly, the novel's insistence on correspondences, the realisation that there is such a thing as a plurality of norms from which to perceive and attend, and the demonstration of the inevitability of embeddings and entanglements relies on the idea that 'the self is co-extensive with the environment' (Alaimo 89), which is at the same time a way of exposing the 'fantasy of human exceptionalism' (Haraway 11). From this point of view, I would argue that Jones's novel develops an ethical and political vision of literature as ecological force (Haraway 27), in which the reader's responsibility is solicited on account of disclosures as to the reality of vulnerabilities and entanglements, in a vision of interdependences that has evolved crucially since the Renaissance. In fact, what appears from a confrontation with Tillyard's description is an evolution from humanism to post-humanism that is predicated on a vision of the human as de-centred and entrapped in a horizontal chain of entanglements in which the cosmic vision of the Renaissance world, which set great store by materiality, is given a twist in the context of a new-materialist turn that grants prominence to interactions and intra-actions. Under these circumstances, the readers are made to attend to new relationships between the human and the non-human, to attend to ordinary realities that were either invisible to them or too obvious to be seen, to accept their reliance on matter and to develop new responsibilities for their natural environment. This is confirmed in Esther Peeren's evocation of *The Long Dry*: 'This positions the contemporary rural not so much as a realm in which the presence and centrality of the human is naturalized through its proximity to and cultivation of nature, as is the case in the conventional idyll, but as one in which the human and the natural are deeply intertwined.' And it is on account of this specificity that she classifies Jones's novel in the category of the

‘posthuman rural idyll’ (Peeren n.p.). From *The Long Dry* and, admittedly, a raft of contemporary novels, emerges a ‘posthuman environmental ethics’ (Alaimo 24) that it is the responsibility of the novel to bring to the fore so as to shift the reader’s attention to the new, hidden provinces of the ordinary and solicit the reader’s responsibilities.

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