



Thomas Hardy, Provincial Geology and the Material Imagination

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This essay explores the nineteenth-century traffic and exchange of fossils and natural-historical objects between province and metropolis as represented by two very different geological writers of the period, the fossil collector Gideon Mantell and the novelist Thomas Hardy. The men are connected through Mantell's *The Wonders of Geology*, the sixth edition of which (1848) Hardy read and utilised for his descriptions of the geological past in his third novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873). These two texts demonstrate a powerful investment in determining the meaning of the geological object according to the social and geographical spaces in which it is discovered, displayed, and discussed, so that the scientific object becomes the site around which complex cultural politics coalesce and sit in tension. In its consideration of the relationship between place and meaning in science, and in its focus on scientific material culture, this essay attempts to disrupt the current spotlight on the interrelationships between scientific law and narrative pattern in Victorian literary studies. Instead, it hopes to contribute to a discussion of the ways in which the novel's attention to scientific objects rather than narratives made it an important site of epistemological enquiry into the basis of scientific knowledge and the inseparability of that knowledge from the discourses and spaces which produced it.

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