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**Desire and the Expressive Eye**

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## Unconscious Desires in “The Collector Cleans His Picture”

*Désirs inconscients dans « The Collector Cleans His Picture »*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

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The Collector Cleans His Picture  
*Fili hominis, ecce ego tollo a te desiderabile  
 oculorum tuorum in plaga. --EZECH, xxiv 16*  
 How I remember cleaning that strange picture!...  
 I had been deep in duty for my sick neighbour –  
 His besides my own – over several Sundays,  
 Often, too, in the week; so with parish pressures,  
 Baptisms, burials, doctorings, conjugal counsel –  
 All the whatnots asked of a rural parson –  
 Faith, I was well-nigh broken, should have been fully  
 Saving for one small secret relaxation,  
 One that in mounting manhood had grown my hobby.  
 This was to delve at whiles for easel-lumber,  
 Stowed in the backmost slums of a soon-reached city,  
 Merely on chance to uncloak some worthy canvas,  
 Panel, or plaque, blacked blind by uncouth adventure,  
 Yet under all concealing a precious artefact.  
 Such I had found not yet. My latest capture  
 Came from the rooms of a trader in ancient house-gear  
 Who had no scent of beauty or soul for brushcraft.  
 Only a tittle cost it – murked with grimefilms,  
 Gatherings of slow years, thick-varnished over,  
 Never a feature manifest of man's painting.

So, one Saturday, time ticking hard on midnight  
 Ere an hour subserved, I set me upon it.  
 Long with coiled-up sleeves I cleaned and yet cleaned,  
 Till a first fresh spot, a high light, looked forth,  
 Then another, like fair flesh, and another;  
 Then a curve, a nostril, and next a finger,  
 Tapering, shapely, significantly pointing slantwise.  
 'Flemish?' I said. 'Nay, Spanish . . . But, nay, Italian!'  
 Then meseemed it the guise of the ranker Venus,  
 Named of some Astarte, of some Cotytto.  
 Down I knelt before it and kissed the panel,  
 Drunk with the lure of love's inhibited dreamings.  
 Till the dawn I rubbed, when there leered up at me  
 A hag, that had slowly emerged from under my hands there,  
 Pointing the slanted finger towards a bosom  
 Eaten away of a rot from the lusts of a lifetime . . .  
 I could have ended myself at the lashing lesson!  
 Stunned I sat till roused by a clear-voiced bell-chime,  
 Fresh and sweet as the dew-fleece under my luthern.  
 It was the matin service calling to me  
 From the adjacent steeple.

- 1 "The Collector Cleans His Picture" (Hardy 2001, 617-618), published in the collection *Late Lyrics and Earlier* in 1922, is a narrative monologue. The opening of the poem ("How I remember cleaning that strange picture!...") might prompt the reader to think of theatre, as when a character enters the stage and performs a monologue. This free-verse poem – quite an unusual form for Hardy who is more likely to write rhyming verse than blank verse – creates an impression of intimacy: we seem to enter the psychology of the parson (antiquarian), who confesses:

All the whatnots asked of a rural parson –  
 Faith, I was well-nigh broken, should have been fully  
 Saving for one small secret relaxation,  
 One that in mounting manhood had grown my hobby. (l.6-9)

- 2 The poem shows a rural character, who invites the reader to compassion. This monologue is a very intimate, almost stolen, moment that Hardy is "captur[ing]". The poem offers an arresting moment of sensitiveness.
- 3 The narrator, a rural parson, collects works of art. One of them he has got from "a trader in ancient house-gear" (l.16) with "no scent of beauty or soul for brushcraft" (l.17). Yet the main focus of the poem is not the parson (an antiquarian) but the painting itself. The latter is the very point of attention which mesmerizes the collector. "The Collector Cleans His Picture" seems to exemplify Hardy's vision of how man's desires might engender counterfeit impressions; in other words, it shows how man might be misled by his desires. But what does the parson's eye really see? Is it just an illusion, or is it a way to discover a form of truth or to reveal reality?
- 4 To identify the nature of the eye, one has to consider who the gazer is: the parson. Hardy does not mention who this parson is. Could he be Hardy's Dorset mentor and friend, the poet and philologist William Barnes (1800-1886)? The latter was ordained in 1847 and became the rector of Saint Peter's Church in Winterborne Came (Dorset) from 1862 to his death. Indeed, in "The Collector Cleans His Picture", Hardy is following Barnes's writing style and lexicon.

- 5 For instance, Hardy often resuscitates Barnesian compounds, as Ralph W. V. Elliott explains:

It was probably Barnes's example, familiar to Hardy from his early Dorchester days, that inspired his own frequent recourse to this traditional English mode of word-invention – again in both senses of this word. Hardy wrote to Coventry Patmore on 11 November 1886: 'I have lived too much within his [Barnes's] atmosphere to see his productions in their due perspective'; and in his poem about Barnes, 'The Collector Cleans His Picture', by the use of such Barnesian compounds as easel-lumber, soon-reached city, artfeat, brushcraft, and grimefilms – whether deliberately imitative or not – Hardy is exemplifying the older poet's influence. (Elliott 174)

- 6 All those compounds – to which we could add "well-nigh" (l.7), "easel-lumber" (l.10), "soon-reached" (l.11), "house-gear" (l.16), "thick-varnished" (l.19), "coiled-up" (l.23), "clear-voice" (l.38), "bell-chime" (l.38) and "dew-fleece" (l.39) – are similar to Barnes's compounds. Dennis Taylor associates Barnes with this poem, and writes: "Barnes's son, W. Miles Barnes gave Hardy a copy of the Barnes biography by Leader Scott (Barnes's daughter), which Hardy read and marked. The book is the proximate source of two Hardy poems, 'The Collector Cleans His Picture' [...] and 'The Last Signal'" (Taylor 1993, 105, n12). However, even if the style of writing in the poem, more particularly the use of compounds, is similar to Barnes's, the parson described here cannot be Barnes at all, as we shall discover further down.

- 7 Indeed, what might reliably be heard as an echo of Barnes's writing is the compounds, but Hardy's and Barnes's visions of artistic creation diverge. Barnes wrote an article well-known to Hardy, entitled "Thoughts on Beauty and Art", where one can read:

Harmony, or beauty of colour, is of great effect in clothing, and decoration of buildings, and house-gear. For this end some may have what is called taste, or an inbred feeling of fitness and unfitness of colour – a gift more largely bestowed, for wise ends, on women. Some may win a skill in colour by observation of the works of nature and good art; and others may gain it through optics as a science. (Barnes 1861, 126-137; Dugdale 285)

- 8 For Barnes colours must be in harmony. In Hardy's "The Collector Cleans His Picture", the compound "house-gear" (l.16) might be heard as an echo of Barnes's assertion that "harmony, or beauty of colour, is of great effect in clothing, and decoration of buildings, and house-gear". Yet, as we read in Hardy's poem that "my latest capture/ Came from the rooms of a trader in ancient house-gear/ Who had no scent of beauty or soul for brushcraft" (l.15-17), we can see that the trader in the poem represents just the opposite of Barnes's "inbred feeling of fitness and unfitness of colour" – with his taste and vision of beauty in Art.
- 9 On this particular point, Hardy and Barnes differ. If Hardy concluded in *The Life* that "one may say, Art is the secret of how to produce by a false thing the effect of a true..." (Hardy 1989, 216), Barnes noted: "Manifold are the kinds of beauty, and of manifold kinds are the beauties of painting – the beauty [...] and the harmony, tone, and effect of colour, even with bad drawing, and in some cases, it may be with a want of depth" (Barnes 1861, 137; Dugdale 297). Barnes is definitely looking for harmony and claims that "We may [...] take a hint of the colour with which our door would harmonize with our wall and thus we may please our friends' eyes rather than try to deceive their sight with a more or less ungainly falsehood" (Barnes 1861, 135; Dugdale 295). Hardy's approach is quite the opposite, since he tries to offer psychological depth in the depiction in his poem; in other words, he

prefers thoughtful reading to colour and harmony – not just “Art for art’s sake”. As he wrote on 5 August 1888: “To find beauty in ugliness is the province of the poet” (Hardy 1989, 213). In Hardy’s vision, Art is therefore meant to get to a form of truth – either pleasant or awful –, it is not a mere question of harmony, beauty or even illusion, since in point of fact the sight of an artwork throws a light on repressed truth (“Art is the secret of how to produce by a false thing the effect of a true”). Consequently, how does Art lead us (the poet, the parson, the reader) to reach this “effect of a true [thing]”?

- 10 Part of the answer is the temptation man has to satisfy his constant curiosity. This interest is re-created by the poem’s narrator – and to some extent by the painting – through a mysterious place or through intriguing objects. In “The Collector Cleans His Picture”, the scene is not set in a church but in the parson’s house, just after midnight (“one Saturday, time ticking hard on midnight”, l.21).<sup>1</sup> A peculiar and puzzling atmosphere sets the Hardy-esque scene. Indeed, the entire poem reveals something formerly concealed in the painting, as the second stanza announces:

This was  
[...]  
Merely on chance to uncloak some worthy canvas,  
Panel, or plaque, blacked blind by uncouth adventure,  
Yet under all concealing a precious artefact.

- 11 The objects seem obscure, as they are “blacked blind”. The word “uncouth” is significant, as Hans Marchand etymologically brings together “unknown” and “uncouth”: “*couth* is orig. the second participle of OE *cunnan*, ‘know’” (Marchand 151). The “uncouth adventure” is therefore an “unknown adventure”. Beyond the painting, the parson’s wish is to try to unveil what he does not know or has not found yet. “Such I had found not yet” (l.15) is no canonical order for a sentence. It implies that the parson is not really sure of what he knows and what he does. He seems disorientated; is it necessary to do so? What is he looking for really? Yet, he is constantly mesmerized by the painting. It is the object of temptation: he has to see what lies beneath the opaque varnish.
- 12 There is a gradation in the poem. Line 23 “I cleaned and yet cleaned” is an echo of the first line (“How I remember cleaning that strange picture!”). As the collector is cleaning the painting, he is astounded to see a “first fresh spot” then “another, like fair flesh” appearing and last, a “curve” (l.26), which introduces him to a feminine body. Considering that “beauty spots” were added by women on their faces, in order to attract attention, the spot may also be interpreted as a form of seduction. The “curve” was also a subject of attention of Barnes in his article “Thoughts on Beauty and Art”, in a session called “Beauty of Form and Proportion” (Barnes 1861, 127-131; Dugdale 278-284). Likewise, Hardy is trying to find a proportion in his words. All the lines of this stanza seem to be harmonized in sound and shape. The /f/ alliterations enclosing the /ai/ diphthongs (“Till a first fresh spot, a high light, looked forth”, l.24) continued in the next line, with the presence of “another” at the beginning and at the end of the line (“Then another, like fair flesh, and another”, l.25), suggest a sense of continuity. The cleaning enables the light to shine on the picture and so to “highlight” the “fair flesh”. The words are short and beat the rhythm of these lines, while punctuating the gradual revelation of details: “Then another, like fair flesh, and another;/ Then a curve, a nostril, and next a finger”. The parson is wholly immersed in the process and cannot stop cleaning the canvas, just as he cannot help satisfying his human curiosity – almost a curse of the human condition. He cannot stop, as the words of the poem tell us: “Then another”, “and another” (l.25), “Then” (l.26), “Then” (l.29). Human desire seems endless. The imperious

need to "see" is present in the tension created by the rhythm of the poem. The beat is given by the striking stress of the trochees and the relaxing and jaunty rhythm of the dactyl in the third foot, right in the middle of the long lines (l.23-27). This classical imitation of Sapphics (see Taylor 1988, 259) emphasises the emotion of the parson and his burning desires. Is this tension caused by a feeling of longing? What kind of desire is it really?

- 13 Additionally, the biblical quotation under the poem's title, "*Fili hominis, ecce ego tollo a te desiderabile oculorum tuorum in plaga*", refers to Ezechiel in the Vulgate (XXIV: 16), translated as "Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke; yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down" in the Authorized Version (1611). In this passage, God is announcing the death of the prophet's wife. He then invites Ezechiel not to weep for the loss of his dead wife, and therefore not to respect the "mourning for the dead" (XXIV: 17). In the poem, the parson does not obey this biblical command since he cannot escape his "*desiderabile oculorum*", which is the scopoc drive or the desire to see what is "unknown" and "conceal[ed]".
- 14 As we progressively enter the poem, the first stanza describes the "rural parson" (l.6); the second one is the first moment of (tentative) identification, "a precious artefact" (l.14), and the third stanza is the discovery of some Venus, whose geographical origin is unclear: "Named of some Astarte, of some Cotytto" (l.30, emphasis added). Interestingly, the preposition "of" is used twice, instead of "by". Hardy could have extended his series of theonyms, since Venus is the goddess of love, the equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, who is not mentioned here and might be considered as the missing link. Aphrodite is the Greek theonym of various Semitic nouns "Ashtarte Ishtar" (Akkadian) and "Ashtoreth" (Hebrew and Phoenician) (Klein, entry "Aphrodite"). However, the poet associates Venus and Astarte to Cotytto, the goddess of lechery, a figure of Thracian origin and honoured in Corinth (Bailly, entry "Κοτυττώ" / "Cotyttō"). The latter's immodesty and lasciviousness is another proof that the priest in the poem cannot be Barnes. This is likely to be a provocation by Hardy, in a manner similar to A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909) in "Dolores": "Where are they Cotytto or Venus,/ Astarte or Ashtaroth, where?" (52<sup>nd</sup> stanza).
- 15 The adjective "rank" attributed to "Venus" (l.29) signifies excess and means here "lustful, licentious" (OED), "libidinous" (NSOED). The poem's narrator is supposed to be a parson yet this "ranker Venus" represents the *antithesis* of the Virgin Mary – an antithesis, moreover, that underlines the lecherous impression. This emphasis was, in fact, even more obvious in the manuscript, where Hardy wrote "warmer Venus" (Hardy 1979, 618, n29). The parson is tempted by this [half-seen] Venus and his human curiosity drives him to guess what is underneath the opaque upper layers which he is polishing away.
- 16 Gradually, the "cleaning" of the finally "rubbed" picture (l.33, last stanza) will reveal the illusory nature of the parson's "projection" (a figment of his imagination). Indeed, there are inner contradictions here between the biblical quotation, given just beneath the poem's title, referring to Ezechiel's "*desirable oculorum*" (XXIV: 16) and, in the collector's picture, the goddess "Venus" (l.29), who turns out to be "a hag". The painting is blasphemous with regard to the biblical quote, as the picture is beyond the pale of Judaeo-Christian morals. Venus, alias "Astarte" and "Cotyttō" (l.30) in the third stanza, is revealed to be a "hag" (l.34) in the fourth and last stanza. This transformation of the "ranker Venus" into a "hag" is a perfect example of "*coincidentia oppositorum*"<sup>2</sup>. The climactic point of the poem is the last sentence of the third stanza, where the parson is

"Drunk with the lure of love's inhibited dreamings" (l.32). The liquid /l/ smoothly continues, on the paradigmatic level, in the fourth stanza with "leered", "slowly", "slanted", "lusts", "lifetime", "lashing lesson" and "luthern". The sense of continuity in sounds (the repetition of the /l/ sound), contradicts the syntagmatic hiatus between the last two stanzas (with this transformation of the "ranker Venus" into a "hag"). The sense of oral flow and harmony belies the stark opposition between beauty (Venus) and ugliness (the hag).

- 17 Besides, the last stanza – which is the third moment of revelation – is an anticlimax compared with the one before. The frontier between dream and reality seems to be blurred. The noun "lure" (l.32) contrasts with the verb "leered" (l.33). After the attraction, there is now a movement of repulsion, as the verb "leered" attests. It is significant to notice that Hardy originally wrote "gazed" in the first and second editions of the collection (May and August 1922) (Hardy 1979, 618, n33). Now, "leer" connotes the idea of a sexual desire, the desire of the flesh, compared with "gaze", which does not apparently denote any idea of sexual desire or attraction. This disclosure brought by Hardy's revisions allows us to enter his own process of writing and the effect he sought to produce on the reader. The image given by "leered" is powerfully eye-catching. What is about to be revealed here is the parson's inner self, his most repressed unconscious.
- 18 As for the "finger,/ Tapering, shapely, significantly pointing slantwise" (l.26-27), it turns out to be pointing, once the rubbing is done, towards "a bosom/ Eaten away of [= by] a rot from the lusts of a lifetime" (l.35-36). After being venerated by her admirers, Venus appears as the symptomatic carrier of venereal diseases, whose "rot" supposedly eats her bosom. She is the Venus-hag who conveys Death. The image provided is one of horror:
- There is not always a clear dividing line between the kinetic appeal of the melodrama and pornography, and distanced aesthetic appeal. What is fascinating in Hardy is partly the sensational material itself, the shock and horror of the sex and violence, and also what is revealed in the particularized affective life of the characters, the uninhibited compulsions of pleasure and the perversions of desire. (Barbara Hardy 163)
- 19 How could we interpret this transformation from Venus into a "hag", an image of horror and death? Looking at the painting makes the parson see his inner fears. But could the painting also reveal a secret desire to see the horror? What is it that the parson truly wants? The "slanted finger" directs the parson's gaze to the hag's gaze ("there leered up at me a hag", l.33-34).
- 20 There are two perceptible visions in the poem. The picture which emerges from the title of the poem and the first line ("How I remember cleaning that strange picture!...") is the true portrayal of the parson, it reveals his soul, as in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – albeit Dorian, unlike the parson, clearly sees his own picture in the painting. The parson doesn't recognize his own self, until he sees an image of his desires reflected in the picture. Therefore, the Artistic process acts as a (distorting) mirror, or a means to help man to face who he really is.
- 21 The *ekphrasis* (the poem written by the parson – in reality Hardy -, and describing the picture) is to be differentiated from the "painting" (l.20), the literal and physical object at the core of the poem. It is the actual painting, the object, which stimulates desire and is the object of contemplation. The "eye" is the organ which enables the collector to perceive the ideal woman in "the guise of the ranker Venus" (l.29), who is an "unknown" or "imagined" woman, being herself the object of desire. The "hag", the unrepresentable

horror beyond imaginary representations, is as elusive as a phantom in this "uncouth adventure" (see *supra*).

- 22 The "ranker" Venus also appears in *Jude The Obscure*. After the purchase of the plaster reproductions of statues of Venus and Apollo, Sue Bridehead exclaims: "Well, anything is better than those everlasting church fal-lals!" (Hardy 1998, 94); whereupon the narrator apprises the reader that she almost regrets her deed: "[she] seemed almost to wish she had not brought the figures". Lexicographer Charles Talbot Onions (1873-1965) lays down that "fal-lal" dates from the eighteenth century and means a "piece of finery" as well as the notion of "something trivial" (Onions, entry: "fal-lal"). Sue refers to Apollo and Venus as contrasting the church "fal-lals" – frivolous artefacts and ornamentation – and tries to conceal the two pagan statues from her pious landlady, who is also her employer, fearing they would be perceived as blasphemous. Sue tries to argue that her figurine is a statue of Mary Magdalen – the sexual connotations in the novel, incidentally, are less striking than in the poem "The Collector Cleans His Picture."
- 23 Going back to the poem, the ideal woman is both present on the page and in the parson's gaze, and absent. In the third stanza, the image that the collector sees is fragmented, like the syntax in lines 24 to 26: "Till a first fresh spot, a high light, looked forth,/ Then another, like fair flesh, and another;/ Then a curve, a nostril, and next a finger". In the fourth stanza, her presence is ghostly, as well as eroticized ("under my hands", l.34; "a bosom", l.35; "the lusts", l.36). The only full possible image of her whole body appears in this last stanza in the form of a "hag". At this stage, the image of the woman becomes elusive and she is associated with "rot" (l.36). She is both present and absent. A return to reality is clearly brought about by the "bell-chime" (l.38) and the canonical syntax: "It was the matin service calling to me/ From the adjacent steeple." (l.40-41).
- 24 Beyond the field of syntax, Hardy's words and linguistic signs are interesting to look at as they are meticulously chosen and changed by the poet. In line 37, in the manuscript, Hardy does not use the dash: "- I could have ended myself ...", but, instead, "I could have ended myself ..." and, on the line above, he uses four suspension points for the ellipsis in the manuscript: "Eaten away of a rot from the lusts of a lifetime ...." instead of three suspension points in his later version, "Eaten away of a rot from the lusts of a lifetime . . ." This really means that Hardy wanted a break, between the horror figure of line 36 and the punishment the parson wants to inflict on himself. The dash is a salutary break on the page to stop the unsustainable vision.
- 25 The manuscript offers other significant differences:
- 1923 edition (*Collected Poems*), l.35-37:  
 Pointing the slanted finger towards a bosom  
 Eaten away of a rot from the lusts of a lifetime . . .  
 - I could have ended myself at the lashing lesson!
- Manuscript version  
 The significant finger pointed towards a bosom  
 Eaten away of a rot from the lusts of a lifetime . . .  
 I could have ended myself at the lashing heart-shook horror.
- 26 The manuscript makes it obvious that the finger is pointing towards a woman's bosom. However, the re-writing of the line provides the direction of this finger with a more visual impression: "the slanted finger". The graphic detail of the gesture is perfect. We can visualise this painting and like the parson, our "eye" is encouraged to follow the indicated direction. The visual effect is enhanced two lines further down with the added dash ("- I") in the 1923 edition. At this point, the observation of Hardy's meticulous



attention to words and punctuation shows that the poet tries to catch all the details of the painting so as to make the illusion visually possible: what the parson's eye perceives is also perceptible to readers. The poet makes the ephemeral moment of the collector's desire perpetual (on the page).

- 27 But what is exactly the "lashing lesson" (l.37)? Instead of this expression, the original text spoke of "heart-shook horror", which had a more Gothic and striking effect. By "lashing lesson", Hardy means that the parson reproaches himself with his physical "desire" and, dumbfounded, realises his own fancies. Yet, after such a long sleepless night, the "clear-voice bell-chime" (l.38) calls the parson back to his duties, and everything falls into place – the same parson, who after gradually cleaning and rubbing the painting, "uncloak[ed]" the canvas that the goddess of love might turn into a "hag", a polysemous term meaning either a "witch" or "an old woman with repulsive ugliness".
- 28 There is thus a double function of the painting: the temptation to know what is unknown or concealed (the actual object, the painting), the representation of the parson's suppressed desires (the "fantasy" in the true portrayal/ picture), as in "An Imaginative Woman", which shows a function of a photograph:
- Accidentally found in a hotel room, a photograph triggers the development of the narrative, acts as a symbol of the main character's suppressed desires and invites a conclusive statement on the dangers of blind trust in photography. (Straub 165)
- 29 In "The Collector Cleans His Picture", the man's look at his picture is thus a reflexion of his own being, made up of his own desires or "individual act[s] of imagination" (Barbara Hardy 164), which are mere illusions, a "lure" (l.32).
- 30 In "The Collector Cleans His Picture", Hardy teaches his reader that the painting is a lure with a glimpse of the truth underneath. The woman progressively changes into a lecherous character within the picture, as a way to reveal the parson's subconscious fears and desires: death (as in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*). Art acts thus as a tranquilliser and appeases man's inner soul. Only the description of the painting offers the possibility for the parson to transfer his inner fears (fears of lack, fears of death) into something creative and beautiful, the artistic nature of the object (here the painting). It is in the nature of the eye to pervert the object (although here, in point of fact, the eye has first ennobled the object). The translation into words of what a man's eyes see is the translation of a man's soul. If the parson finally becomes aware of his unconscious desires (and comes to the truth about himself), he is ready to let his fears go and realise that it is in the nature of human beings to be tempted, to "gaze". There is a connexion between the "gaze" and the truth of one's soul. Art is a means to disclose the repressed truth, in other words, to discover yourself as you are and to accept to deal with the reality of your life. Dorian indulges the weakness of his soul by hiding the painting in a remote corner of his mansion and depravity consumes his life. Unlike him, Hardy's parson blames himself for his physical "desire" and finally accepts to face reality as he hears the "bell-chime" calling to him (a form of repentance?).
- 31 Consequently, Hardy's lesson in "The Collector Cleans His Picture" is that the painting is an artistic mirror, which helps man to perceive "the effect of a true [thing]" by "making a covenant with [his] eyes"<sup>3</sup> so as to find inner peace. Once the parson-collector accepts to face his inner bad self and his own fears (the truth), the desire in his eye disappears.

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## NOTES

1. This might imply a kind of mystery as in the microcosmic life of the insects in "An August Midnight" (Hardy 2001, 113), or echoing, by contrast, "The weakening eye of the day" (l. 4) in "The Darkling Thrush" (150).

2. This notion appeals to Shafique Keshavjee, who uses it as the core of his thought in *Mircea Eliade et la coïncidence des opposes*. It is one of the founding principles of Nicolas de Cuse's thought. He was a German theologian and philosopher of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (1401-1464). The idea is well-known to Hardy, who rather uses this notion under the form "concordia discors" (l.13) in his poem "Genitrix Laesa" (Hardy 2001, 770-771).

3. At the end of *The Return of the Native*, the "gaze" (a deadly gaze throughout the novel) is pacified and Hardy refers to another Biblical quotation: "In the words of Job, 'I have made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid'" (Hardy 1999, 386).

## ABSTRACTS

This paper examines both Hardy's writing process and his vision of how man's desires might engender mistaken impressions. I will mainly focus on the poem "The Collector Cleans His Picture", whose central issue is the "gaze"; the gaze being a reflection of man's desires.

Here, the narrator, a rural parson (and antiquarian) collects works of art. However, the main focus in the poem is the painting itself – the very point of attention which mesmerizes the collector.

Gradually, the "cleaning" and "rubbing" of the picture will reveal illusive desire(s) in the parson. Indeed, there are inner contradictions within the poem between the biblical quotation, after the poem's title, referring to Ezechiel's "*desiderabile oculorum*" and, in the painting evoked in the poem, the goddess Venus, who turns out to be only an old hag. The painting is blasphemous with regard to the biblical quote, for the picture belongs to a different sort of context than the Judaeo-Christian world. The man's gaze on his picture reflects his unconscious, his desires, which seem to be mere illusions, a "lure".

Cet article vise à comprendre les procédés d'écriture de Hardy et sa perception des désirs humains pouvant susciter une vision altérée de la réalité. Le poème « The Collector Cleans His Picture », dont le sujet central est le « regard », miroir des désirs humains, retiendra notre attention.

Le narrateur, un pasteur de village, collectionne des œuvres d'art. Toutefois, le personnage principal n'est pas le pasteur mais le tableau, lui-même, objet de toutes les attentions qui fascine le collectionneur.

Le tableau progressivement « nettoyé », puis « frotté », révélera un (des) désir(s) illusoire(s) dans les yeux du pasteur. Des contradictions inhérentes au poème sont en effet visibles entre la citation biblique, sous le titre du poème, se référant à Ezechiel dans la vulgate : « *desiderabile oculorum* » et, dans la peinture du poème, la déesse Vénus qui se révélera être une vieille sorcière. Du point de vue de la citation biblique, la peinture est blasphématoire, car cette dernière ne s'inscrit pas du tout dans un contexte judéo-chrétien. Le regard qu'a l'homme sur ce tableau est une réflexion sur son être propre, issue de ses propres désirs, qui semblent être de simples illusions, un « leurre ».

## INDEX

**oeuvre** Collector Cleans His Picture (The), August Midnight (An), Darkling Thrush (The), Genitrix Laesa, Jude the Obscure, Return of the Native (The)

**Mots-clés:** poésie, langage, esthétique, art et vérité, désir, illusion, réécriture, ekphrasis, coincidentia oppositorum

**Keywords:** poetry, language, aesthetics, art and truth, desire, illusion, rewriting, ekphrasis, coincidentia oppositorum

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