

## Oponentský posudek na bakalářskou práci Jitky Fantové „Pictorial Art in *The Return of the Native* by Thomas Hardy“

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The thesis is built on the premise that in his novels Thomas Hardy extensively employs pictorial art for characterization, landscape depiction, atmosphere and form. It is said that Hardy's opinions about art are not connected to some concrete school. He employs "older concepts" from classicism to very modern ones – coming even "before his time", e.g. in the postimpressionist mixture of beauty and ugliness (see page 9). The question of how to capture reality is at the basis of all art - pictures and novels alike, therefore, it is argued, Hardy's problem with "the contrast of what life is like and what life is": (page 9) can be confronted through analogies from the art of painting. The thesis proves that this view of Hardy's work is valid and indeed can yield some interesting insights in the novel's analysis.

Nevertheless, quite a few questions and problems arise:

1. If Horace's concept of *Ut Pictura Poesis* was already extremely influential for the classical painters of the eighteenth century, how exactly was it reflected in Hardy? The loose inspiration implied in the words "both give form to an experience or ... an impression of the world" is, of course, correct, but very vague. A more specific and clear outlining of the difference between the earlier applications and *The Return of the Native* is necessary.
2. In what way is the description of Egdon Heath "a major shift in Western aesthetics"? (page 12). Although introduced by an outline of the sublime in Longinus and in Burke, it is not clear at all what kind of "reaction" and "meta-statement" Egdon Heath actually is. This passage is a typical example of how the author of the thesis uses quotations from the works of other literary critics – as illustrations of certain views, which are then never explained away, and can sometimes prove counterproductive, even confusing. (In the subsequent passages dealing with Egdon Heath setting and later on pages 24-7 we get a lot of quotations and words on illusion, darkness etc. but do not return to the issues from chapter 2 either.)
3. It would be only appreciated if all the effort that went into researching the thesis arrived at a coherent statement (or at least attempted to probe such a possibility) about Hardy's notions about creativity (the above mentioned "contrast of what life is like and what life is") and how these could be approached through the pictorial arts. That is, to indeed explain the "original manner own to his artistic creed" (page 20). As such, the thesis is a string of quotations, critical opinions and flashes of analysis.
4. The sublime was not dealt with only by Longinus and Burke, but important are the shifts in Kant, and also e.g. Coleridge and Wordsworth and others (in theory and in practice) contributed. Which of these are Hardy's landscape "pictures" actually inspired by?
5. References to quotations are sometimes missing (e.g. what is the source for the quotations from Gilpin?) Objection could be made to the dating of 2009 on the cover of the thesis and the difference in titles for chapter 3 in the Table of Contents ("Pictorial Art") and on page 22 ("Pictorial Techniques").
6. What exactly is meant by the strange sounding expression "torn people" (page 14)?
7. The thesis could have been structured better. E.g. dealing with Hardy's novel and how it reflects or is influenced by or shifts the meaning of traditional concepts of e.g. the picturesque, the sublime etc. immediately after their introduction. Chapter 3 forgets them. The reader does get some implicit, between the lines, answers to the question how exactly the arts were important for Hardy, what they helped him in, when chapter 3 starts to look at the techniques themselves, but then we do not return to the theoretical concepts. It is then not quite clear what the purpose of chapter 2 actually is. The more relevant and interesting section is chapter 3 when we finally get some analysis. The artistic concepts dealt with in chapter 3 (chiaroscuro, Pre-Raphaelites...) are not at all related to chapter 2.

8. It is not quite true that the (Burkean) beautiful was “bound to elicit only superficial feelings of pleasure”. Burke rather talked of love and the enjoyment of life meaning “affection and tenderness”, nurturing and sensuous love. It is more or less explicitly associated with the feminine, even maternal. (E.g. in taste, it is identified with the sweetness of breast-milk). Burkean gendered discourse complicates matters (i.e. just as the role of the feminine was not just superficial, the beautiful had vaster consequences too).


9. The description of Eustacia as the side shadows of Sappho and Mrs Siddons is not necessarily Gothic but rather alludes to the heroine’s profile as another proof of her classical features. Greek coins with Sappho’s profile clearly show a striking Green nose and Gainsborough is reported to have had difficulties with painting Mrs Siddons in 1785 precisely because of her nose (he exclaimed “confound the nose, there is no end to it.”). By the way, Mrs Siddons also famously had a rather protruding chin. Black miniature profiles were also popular art objects in the eighteenth century and were drawn with the help of candles casting side shadows on the wall.

10. The usage of the quotation by Gregor and the immediately following passage on Mona Lisa is strange. They argue quite opposing things and their linking without additional comment is not possible. Gregor is hinting at the heroism of the goddesses of antiquity (in contrast with the lack thereof in Eustacia), while Pater is implying a lack of spirituality (?) in the expressions of classical statues of these goddesses. (For all this, see pages 32-3.) More reflection on the exact meaning of quoted critical views and more commentary is necessary.

11. Ultimately, after finishing the entire thesis, it becomes apparent that discussion is basically centered on the symbolic meanings of darkness and light. Of all artistic concepts and techniques past and present, what is disproportionately dealt with most is chiaroscuro. Even colour basically comes down as dark/black(red) and light/white. It may have made more sense to concentrate on and thus develop these issues.

Despite all my critical comment above, the thesis is recommended for defence. It displays erudition and orientation in the arts, it attempts critical reflection, in spite of some linguistic errors it also remains a highly readable text. As such it definitely fulfills all requirements for such work on the B.A. level. Therefore, I suggest the preliminary mark of very good to good (**velmi dobře až dobře**). The final result will depend on the oral defence of the thesis.

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