

Hopeful Pessimism in Thomas Hardy's Elegiac Ballads

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I. Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing hopeful pessimism created in the process of reshaping elegy from traditional into modern in the following ways. First, Hardy is not stable in his vision, as the single elegy contains simultaneously skeptical and hopeful images of Nature that create the ambivalence between doubt and faith toward a better future and the existence of God. Additionally, the setting with the prevailing image of winter and coldness essentially represents the pessimistic philosophy of the poet, which is interrupted by a particular sound and imagined feature of Hope. Second, the perception of Time explains the poet's nostalgia in an attempt of regaining his childhood faith which shapes his ambivalence. The poet mourns the Death on different occasions and features of melancholia are intertwined with the mourning process resulting in ambivalence on a non-consolatory ending. By making such an analysis the paper wants to show the cohabitation of hopeful pessimism, the oxymoronic outstanding features in Hardy's elegies of two different eras, and what distinguishes him from previous elegists and contemporary poets.

II. Summary

Thomas Hardy outstands among contemporary poets of the 19th and 20th centuries by his ambivalent vision applied in reshaping traditional elegy into modern which is vividly depicted in his elegiac ballads, such as: "The Darkling Thrush", "The Oxen" and "The Convergence of the Twain". The necessity of looking at elegies from this particular perspective lies in understanding the exceptional nature of the poet being in-between two Eras. Hardy refashions the image of the elegies of the Victorian era and Modernity by implementing his pessimistic philosophy going hand in hand with the images of Hope for faith and the future, resulting in a confusing dilemma of understanding the very meaning of the poems.

Three elegiac ballads such as "The Darkling Thrush", "The Oxen" and "The convergence of the Twain" were used to analyze and understand Hardy's paradoxical style of Hopeful Pessimism which at first glance is problematic to detect. Additionally, the effects of reshaping the aspects of traditional elegy into a modern one reflected his position in history as an elegist to be the transitional figure. The confusing dilemma of his poetic strategy of hopeful pessimism was understood through the close analysis of the form of the poem and the importance of ballads, the tone of the elegiac speaker, and the significance of coldness and winter as the setting of the pessimistic philosophy. Furthermore, the simultaneous implementation of the skeptical and hopeful images of Nature helped to comprehend the poet's attitude toward the future to be doubtful. In response to the condition of Post-Darwinian time, Hardy uses direct and indirect allusions to Christianity, while preserving his status as an agnostic. More the mockery of the dead in a public elegy resulted in the implicit presence of The Almighty God through the invention of "The Immanent Will". The concept of Time is closely connected with the presence and power of Death, in addition to that, time explains the melancholic aspects of the poet in the collision of past and present. By composing a poem in such an ambivalent tone, he creates a tension between his pessimistic philosophy of life and hope for a better future and the forgotten state of a religious person. Great poetry never simplifies neither does Hardy.