Annotated Bibliography for Thomas Hardy

Poetry


Biography


Secondary Material


http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/hardy/pval41.html

Allingham thoroughly dissects “The Oxen” line by line while connecting it to the cynicism and faithlessness of Hardy’s poetry. The article proves how “The Oxen” characterizes Hardy’s loss of the faith he had as a child. The irony of this poem lies in its form—a traditional ballad portrays an anti-traditional, disillusioned theme. After examining the commentary on the poem, it becomes clear that it is a picture of Hardy’s fall from faith. The reader’s conception of Hardy as a great poet is further supported after examining how he manipulates the form of the poem to mimic its theme. This explication of “The Oxen” supports the reader’s belief that Hardy is desperately trying to believe like the rest of humanity, yet sees himself isolated.

Angyal argues that Hardy’s use of pessimistic and lamenting tones or emotions throughout his poetry “reflects the weariness” of those around him. Angyal connects these emotions to an analysis of Hardy’s major themes in *Wessex Poems,* specifically “Neutral Tones,” “Hap,” and “Nature’s Questioning.” He posits these major themes as disillusionment, betrayed love and meditation on nature. Angyal is very helpful in providing thematic insight to Hardy’s 948 poems, pinpointing main themes within Hardy’s poems. With these themes in mind, one can judge whether or not the poems truly fit into these categories or if there is a different overarching idea. Given Hardy’s personal beliefs, the reader is able to note how they play into the poetry as a whole.


Beach explains the many different terms Hardy uses to discuss the “directing power of the universe.” Nature has no sense of goodness or benevolence, according to Beach, and Hardy makes this belief clear in “The Mother Mourns” and his use of hostile weather in “If It’s Ever Spring Again” and “Snow in the Suburbs.” Hardy’s Fate is simply “natural causality” and does not reference man’s will at all, says Beach, and the Immanent Will is not concerned with the suffering of man though both direct the universe. The reader develops a complex picture of Hardy’s cosmos from Beach’s article, but is left wondering which view of these powers Hardy believes ultimately controls the universe. The clear and concise definitions of each of these terms
benefits Hardy’s reader who is at first puzzled over the many different ideas. The reader faults Beach for not mentioning Hardy’s extensive use of chance and coincidence.


Carpenter does not place a high value on the poetry of Hardy, criticizing his narrow range of themes and philosophy throughout his book. Hardy saw form and content as completely separable and failed to see the significance of his elaborate stanza patterns on his form, according to Carpenter. He posits that Hardy needed irony in order to lift poetry from mediocrity, but imposing irony on a situation was Hardy’s downfall. To reduce Hardy’s poetry to merely being obsessed with irony and a narrow-minded philosophy appalls the reader. On the other hand, one must note the thorough explications of Hardy’s best poems within this book. “The Workbox,” “A Night in November,” and “At the Drapers” prove Hardy’s excellent ability to write, and coming from an unfavorable critic, this praise of selected works emphasizes their grandeur.


Instead of accepting that Hardy lacked faith, Chapman contends that the Anglican Church and the movement of Puseyism in fact influenced Hardy. In Hardy’s “A Cathedral Façade at Midnight,” his distaste for this movement towards the elaborate ceremonies of the medieval Church is evident, says Chapman. Chapman posits that Hardy felt this movement was a result of men and women failing to realize the new age. This article supports the reader’s view that Hardy was not completely without religion, and citing “A Church Romance” and “Afternoon Service at Mellstock” prove Hardy’s reverence of traditional Church and its language. Hardy’s view of
science and nature were also “new age,” so his rejection of a movement that failed to recognize this new age only makes sense and supports Chapman’s thesis.


Dauner shows how the events of Hardy’s life shaped the themes of his poetry. She notes his change from a lightness of heart in “When I Set Out for Lyonesse” to his loss of faith in “The Oxen” to his characteristic irony in “Convergence of the Twain.” She examines the tone and subject matter of each of these poems in depth. Dauner’s article puts Hardy’s life side by side with his poetry, and the reader agrees with the presentation of Hardy as an autobiographical poet. The praise of Hardy’s capability of expressing many different themes—loneliness, faithlessness, and irony—and through his verse forms and rhymes counters the common criticism that Hardy’s verse had no form. The reader disagrees with Dauner’s tendency to equate the speaker of the poem with Hardy himself and must be careful not to make the same mistake.


Elliot asserts that Hardy’s poetry takes on two distinct but contradictory qualities of “hard etching and spectral atmosphere.” He states that Hardy’s poetry carves itself into the reader. Even Hardy’s most sincere pity that Elliot points to in “The Darkling Thrush” does not blur the sharp-lined images in his poetry. Elliot comments that the Will in Hardy’s poetry is a spectral being that stretches itself over all of his verse. The harshness that Elliot notices within Hardy’s poetry is very well defined in this piece, and the reader can connect his own idea of Hardy’s pessimism to these harsh, angular images. The downfall of this piece is that it does not deal
adequately with the spectral sense of Hardy’s poetry, neglecting even to reference a poem in conjunction with this assertion.


Gillies asserts that Hardy should not be relegated to the margins of modernism but is a true modernist. Hardy carries out the modernist tradition in “making it new,” as he takes tradition and twists it, making his modernism distinctly English. Part of Gillies definition of modernism is challenging the ideas of the day with what one believes gives a more accurate picture of the world, proving that Hardy does so through his use of time and religion in poetry. “The Convergence of the Twain” and “The Oxen” are cited in reference to Hardy’s belief in time while “After a Journey” and “The Darkling Thrush” are used in accordance with his religion. Gillies does an excellent job of explicating the definition of modernism and proving how Hardy’s poetry fits within the definition. The reader agrees that Hardy is a modernist after examining how he uses modernist views within his poetry. The weakness of the article lies in not explaining why Hardy was placed on the margins of modernism in the first place if he can be shown so clearly to be a modernist.


Graves strays from the typical explication of “The Convergence of the Twain” in positing that Hardy is likening the sinking of the Titanic to an ironic wedding. He shows, line by line and word by word, that the imagery used is sexual, that of a “maiden’s voyage” on her wedding
night. He asserts that the violence of the Titanic crashing into the iceberg is linked to the violence of cold “consummation” on the maiden’s wedding night. The sexual imagery Graves asserts within this poem is disgusting and violent. The reader is appalled at the explication Graves poses and does not agree with it at all. Imposing sexual tones on such an incredible poetic success seems to demean the greatness of the poem. Hardy’s poetry does not seem to be concerned with sexual themes, so it does not seem to follow that this one poem would be so horribly sexual.


In this excerpt, Hardy refutes the criticisms of his poems of 1912. The condemnation of his works as pessimistic is a result of a lack of intelligence in critics. Hardy states that he is not professing any specific philosophy or creating his own philosophy through his writings. Hardy counters criticism about his tragic voice in saying that the writer is able to respond in whatever expression his instinct leads to. This introduction is critical in examining Hardy’s poetry and supports the reader’s belief that Hardy is not simply a pessimistic poet. The reader is told by the poet himself not to try and find a common philosophy, and believes that Hardy’s poems do not exhibit his own philosophy but the combination of his beliefs and ideas.


Hornback asserts that Hardy’s use of coincidence along with the metaphor of time shape the extraordinary experiences of his poetry. Hardy’s Fate determines the outcome of actions, and
Hornback states that this coincidence is the center of Hardy’s universe. “Channel Firing” and “At Castle Boterel” exemplify time as a metaphor and not a concept; time shapes the themes and experience of the poems and emphasizes timelessness or adds historic resonance, says Hornback. The reader finds Hornback’s definition of Hardy’s fate essential to understanding his poetry, supporting Hardy’s idea that there is no external force (such as Fate) working upon the universe. Instead, Fate is what comes from man’s choices, beginning a string of causality. The discussion of the metaphor of time is thorough and supported with many different poems. The reader finds this book vital to understanding the different shapes time takes and the different effects it has in Hardy’s poetry.


Hynes attempts to counter the argument that the style of Hardy’s poetry is non-existent. He examines how Hardy makes a style out of lack of defined style, as seen in “A Broken Appointment.” He states that Hardy’s belief that man can find no order in the universe translates to the lack of order in his poetic style, but this lack of order is calculated and does not equate to formless poetry. Furthermore, because Hardy’s world is ruled by chance, chance also determines his style. This article is indispensable in understanding Hardy’s style as it explains why critics often find Hardy’s style inadequate. One’s notion that Hardy’s style is not without meaning or purpose is supported within this article, and he recognizes the sometimes awkward style of Hardy’s poetry as intended and indicative of the beliefs behind poem.

Kerrigan explicates eight of Hardy’s greatest poems in order to prove Hardy’s true greatness against negative criticism. Instead of being concerned with Hardy’s typically anthologized poems, Kerrigan chooses “The Self-Unseeing,” “Lying Awake,” “On the Departure Platform,” “Logs on the Hearth,” “Afterwards,” “The Pedigree,” “Life Laughs Onward,” and “During Wind and Rain,” supporting his choices with careful explication of structure and theme. Structural precision, the surprising revelations of the last line, and the high place other critics give this poem determine “During Wind and Rain” as Kerrigan’s first choice. Although the reader cannot believe that Kerrigan’s choices are unbiased, this short list points to some important poems not previously considered. The analysis of these helps the reader to come to a better understanding of how style and meter are intricately woven into Hardy’s poetry. The reader disagrees with the choice of “Life Laughs Onward” and “On the Departure Platform” as two of the top eight Hardy poems as there are other poems, such as “Nature’s Questioning,” more deserving in style and theme than these two.


Lentz asserts that Hardy’s traditional vision and disjunctive style make it natural for him to combine the spectral world with the living world, commenting on the different effects such combination has. Wessex folklore supports Hardy’s use of spirits as authoritative in “A Christmas Ghost Story” and “The Souls of the Slain.” According to Lentz, Hardy places irony in the voice of the ghost, detaching himself from irony’s cruelty. This is evidence of Hardy’s
disjunctive mode that juxtaposes the voices of the dead with those of the living and the eternal
ghost with the temporal situation. Because the spectral realm is a recurring theme, the reader
appreciates the clear definition of it and how it fits with Hardy’s style. Once again, one notes
another critic’s emphasis on tradition in Hardy’s work.


Lucas asserts that Hardy portrays reality vividly without illusions throughout his poetry
and comments on the necessity of Hardy’s sympathy towards this reality. He says Hardy’s
personality is inextricable from his poetry as in “I Need Not Go,” making his verse pure and
sincere. Lucas states, with reference to “Tess’s Lament,” that Hardy’s compassion protects his
verse from being too bitter and too ironic. Although Lucas contends that Hardy’s compassion is
necessary within his poetry, the reader does not see this point discussed adequately. As many
critics have dealt with the influence of Hardy’s personality on his poetry, the reader agrees with
Lucas’s claim that it makes Hardy’s poetry a reality. The differentiation between Hardy’s
personality influencing the poems and Hardy as the speaker of the poems is thoroughly explained
and helpful to the reader.


Marsden refutes the most common criticisms of Hardy’s structure and vocabulary.
Hardy’s style, Marsden posits, uses strict forms as a defense of his inability to control and order
his own emotions as seen in “Looking Across” and “I Look into my Glass.” In citing “The Man
he Killed,” Marsden asserts that Hardy’s rhythms are derived from his speaking voice and are
not merely colloquial. The reader appreciates the many poems supporting the ideas in this book.
It presents one of the best discussions of Hardy’s style, not shying away from the negative but incorporating it into that which makes Hardy notable. The reader agrees with Marsden’s interesting idea that Hardy’s rhythm is derived from his speaking voice, and notes how this is supported in the consideration of social class and local culture within the poetry.


Murry praises the relation of experience and emotion not only on a personal level but also on a universal level in Hardy’s poetry. In “The Drummer Hodge,” the emotion of the poem does not extend simply on a personal level, but on a universal level: the sorrow in this poem is “the sorrow of the spheres.” Murry claims that Hardy’s poetry of reaction to specific situations is also a reaction to the universe. “A Broken Appointment” does not crush the speaker’s hopes but those of humanity. The reader adamantly agrees with Murry’s discussion of the deeply personal emotion in Hardy’s poetry; one cannot read Hardy’s poetry without feeling sympathy towards the speaker or being shocked at the final outcome. Murry’s article supports the reader’s opinion that the emotion in Hardy’s poems is not confined to the personal experience within the poem but extends outwardly.


Page argues that Hardy’s poetry cannot be looked at as autobiographical but instead fictionalizes experience through narrow themes and moods. Hardy, Page praises, pulls away from the personal to the universal. “Without Ceremony” is Page’s proof that Hardy fictionalized
Emma’s death as sudden when really it was almost expected, proving this poem to not be autobiographical. Page criticizes Hardy’s themes as repetitious and colloquial, lacking final revelation. The reader finds this piece to be a cumbersome mix of criticism and praise, and he is left unsure of Page’s stance on Hardy’s poetry. The biographical element of Hardy’s poetry is hard to deny, and the reader does not see adequate proof given by Page to show that Hardy fictionalizes many of his experiences. While the reader admits that all of Hardy’s poems are not personal experiences, he does not think that Hardy could have written with such emotion without experiencing many of the events within his poetry.


Perkins deviates from categorizing Hardy’s poetry as pessimistic, stating instead that isolation characterizes his works. He posits that Hardy’s attentiveness to the condition of human suffering separates him from those who choose a limited awareness of the world, as the speaker in “The Man He Killed.” Perkins says that Hardy’s obsession with memory is proof of his isolation as he is dwelling within himself. Ultimately, Hardy cannot identify with “blessed hope” of “The Darkling Thrush” and sees himself as alienated from those around him who can identify with it. This article wonderfully contradicts the typical view of Hardy as a pessimist with an explication of “The Darkling Thrush” that is informative and thorough. The reader, who does not think of Hardy as a cynical old man, applauds the view of him as someone sympathetic to the whole of human suffering. One cannot simply criticize Hardy as a pessimist but must
look beyond the obvious to understand that what is behind Hardy’s often bleak perspective of humanity is this sense of isolation from human happiness as defined by Perkins.


Instead of criticizing what he calls Hardy’s “bad form,” Ransom posits that it endears the reader to the poet’s innocent condition and spontaneity of writing. Although Hardy cannot write with the greatness of a poet laureate, this does not show ignorance but a “quaintness” associated with his lack of higher education as in “The Experience.” Ransom also asserts that Hardy’s often-difficult meters do not hinder the ideas of his poems. This article falls among others trying to lift Hardy’s poetry from the dregs. The reader never considered Hardy’s lack of higher education when reading his poetry and does not find that it leads to ignorance or quaintness.

Hardy’s diction is unique to his poetry, an element that he manipulated in order to convey his ideas through poetry. The reader also opposes Ransom’s claim that Hardy’s “bad form” portrays an innocence of writing; as clearly defined by other critics and seen throughout his volumes of poetry, Hardy’s form was intertwined with his meaning, not spontaneous or bad.


According to Richards, Hardy’s compassion for human suffering shapes his vision of irony. Irony is a result of change and chance and how they shape man’s life and the manifestation of cruelty in the universe. Richards posits that Hardy’s irony is ultimately a
mockery of what ought to be by what is—the irony of human experience. Richards weakness in this article is not specifically referencing Hardy’s poetry. Instead of being a result of the Immovable Mover as some critics say, Hardy’s irony is a result of the world’s evil and unavoidable change. This article is helpful overall because it distinguishes between Hardy’s irony and his pessimism.


Schwartz contradicts the criticism that Hardy is a philosophical poet trying to convey his beliefs through his poetry. Because Hardy participates in a new scientific view but is conscious of the traditional view, his beliefs are necessary to prove disbelief as seen in “A Drizzling Easter Morning” and in the ambiguity of “God’s Funeral.” Schwartz states that Hardy does not make a direct statement of beliefs but instead interprets experiences through his beliefs. The reader agrees that Hardy’s poetry is not philosophic, but that his philosophies are adapted from the new views of the century and conveyed through his verse. This article is beneficial to the reader in pinpointing specific poems in which Hardy’s traditionalism contends with his modernism, a recurring note throughout the criticism. One cannot separate Hardy’s traditionalism from his modernism within his verse.


Southworth’s book critiques Hardy’s subject matter and style in six chapters, ultimately claiming that Hardy made no contribution to English prosody in his concluding evaluation. He
criticizes Hardy’s images as ornamental and void of inner passion, and his diction does not realize the power of words. Hardy fails to see his personal truths as universal and lacks ideals, according to Southworth. The claim that Hardy’s experimentation was merely half-hearted and not influential to English prosody shocks the reader in light of Hardy’s 700 verse forms in over 900 poems. Southworth’s final evaluation that Hardy did not contribute to English prosody is unwarranted when he has spent chapters praising Hardy’s colloquial diction and manipulation of language to intensify images. Criticizing Hardy as indifferent in the face of the raw emotions presented in his poetry is just not logical.


Taylor posits that Hardy’s poetry dramatizes how experiences develop and become rigid over time through his patterns of ideas. The pattern of man’s life looks much like a branching structure that slowly “obsolesces” as seen in “The Prospect.” Taylor also discusses the pattern of the moon in Hardy’s poetry, claiming that it shapes imagined visions and that the waxing of the moon is the illumination of the past set in waning life. Taylor’s article is tedious and wordy, presenting the reader with a somewhat jumbled idea of what he is trying to say. The reader agrees with Taylor’s idea that the world and our realizations within the world gradually obsolesce and become rigid in our memories as it can be seen through many of Hardy’s poems. On the other hand, the reader does not consider the branching pattern to be one of Hardy’s main images, nor is it essential to an interpretation of his poetry.

Yezzi examines the influence of Hardy’s poetry on American poetry, contradicting the idea that it dissipated when making its way to America. In comparing Hardy’s “During Wind and Rain” with American Robinson’s “Eros Turannos,” Yezzi connects not only the word choice but also the theme of unavoidable fate. Yezzi provides many more examples in the same way. Essentially, Hardy’s modernism influenced American writers away from the Americanized version of “thin gruel” modernism and the “blague” of postmodernism. Yezzi does an excellent job of juxtaposing American and British writers and shows the reader how widely the influence of Hardy’s poetry spread. The only thing lacking in this article is a defined distinction between what Yezzi considers American modernism and British modernism.
Exemplary Poem

“The Darkling Thrush”

I Leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter’s dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The land’s sharp features seemed to be
The Century’s corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

31 December 1900