Routledge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature

HARDY DECONSTRUCTING HARDY

A DERRIDEAN READING OF THOMAS HARDY'S POETRY

Nilüfer Özgür

ROUTLEDGE

Hardy Deconstructing Hardy

Hardy Deconstructing Hardy: A Derridean Reading of Thomas Hardy's Poetry aims to add a new dimension of research in literary criticism, which has been partly overlooked—a Deconstructionist approach to Hardy's poetry in the light of Jacques Derrida's philosophy. Analysing thirty-four popular and less popular poems by Hardy, this volume challenges current references to Derridean Deconstructionism.

While Hardy is not conventionally considered a Modernist poet, he shares with Modernists an element that can be referred to as the linguistic crisis by which they try to get over the sense of anxiety against the backdrop of a chaotic world and problematized language. The forerunner of Deconstructionism, Jacques Derrida, exposes a long established history of logocentric thinking, which has continually been moving between binary oppositions and Platonic dualities. Derrida simply puts forward the idea that there is no logos, no origin and no centre of truth. The centre is always somewhere else; he identifies this as a—free play of signifiers. Consequently, the anxiety of the poet with modern sensibility to find a point of reference inevitably results in a—crisis of representation, or, in a problematic relation between language and truth, the signifier and the signified. This crisis can be observed in Hardy's poetry, too. For this purpose, this research focuses on four key concepts in Hardy's poetry that expose this problematic relationship between language and truth: his agnosticism, his concept of the self, his language and concept of structure, and his concept of time and temporality. These aspects are explored in the light of Derrida's Deconstructionism, with reference to poems by Hardy that heralded the Modernist crisis of representation.

This text will fulfil the function of reconciling theory with practice and become the manifestation of the importance of Poststructuralist criticism.

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To all who enjoy literature and philosophy

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Preface

This study rests on the discussion of semantic and linguistic instabilities in such poems by Hardy that appear to be less mimetic or less thematically organized within their placement in the collections. My argument dwells on poems that either have not been analysed in Deconstructionist light or have not been thoroughly referred to in Derridean terms. While some of the thirty-four poems analysed in Part 2 have been accepted to be among Hardy's best and most well-known poems, some of them have not been given so much attention. In short, there is no single principle or treatment by which the poems appear to be chosen for discussion in this research. There are sub-sections in Part 2 by which Derridean and Hardy-esque key concepts appear to manifest their challenge to the logocentrism, phonocentrism and phallogocentrism of the Western epistemology. Those sub-sections mainly explore some key concepts in Hardy, such as agnosticism, the self, language of negation, irony and temporality, by which Hardy, like Derrida, appears to present a challenge to metaphysics of presence through the language of poetry.

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Thank you all...

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1 Introduction

Thomas Hardy as a Threshold Poet and Precursor of Modernism in Poetry

The most prosaic man becomes a poem when you stand by his grave at his funeral and think of him.

—Thomas Hardy

1.1 Aim and Scope

In a post-Nietzschean world, it has become difficult to take for granted the validity of absolute truths because modern philosophy has radicalized the ontological and epistemological implications of human knowledge. From Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein to Derrida, twentieth century Western philosophy has emphasized that the Aristotelian mimetic representation of objective reality is no more in power as meaning always spills over the words or words cannot exhaust meaning in its totality. This kind of approach to language and reality underlines the idea that language pre-exists everything else; thus, all truth is textual. Poststructuralist theory proceeds to shed light on this “crisis of representation,” i.e., the rupture in the act of signification.

From this vantage point, Hardy’s poetry lends itself better for Deconstructionist analysis as it lays bare this problematic relation between language and truth, sign and referent. In all poems by Hardy, absolute truth is unavailable; it is either unknowable or located in the realm of “Crass Casualty” (as in “Hap”), thus evasive. The linguistic and semantic instabilities and convulsions in Hardy’s poetry unravel a sense of anxiety against the backdrop of a universe that works by accidents and random chances. Linearity and temporality in Hardy are partly disrupted; however, the concept of time appears to be at times coherent and harmonious as well. This unique sense of temporality also testifies to a problematized concept of the self, simultaneously unified and divided. Therefore, his poetic voice is most frequently seen as dramatized, doubled, distanced and multiplied. Hardy’s agnostic world resists rational explanation as much as his verse resists categorization and fixed linguistic formulation. In regard to these specifications pertaining to the nature of Hardy’s poetry, it is possible to view Hardy as the precursor of the Modernist poetic

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strain—a transitional poet with a modern, questioning mind and a language that constructs and deconstructs mimetic reality.

Considered in general terms, crisis of representation is taken here as the displacement of the Aristotelian idea that language is mimetic or representational of the external reality. Since antiquity, Western metaphysics has assumed that there is a harmonious relationship between language and meaning, referent and truth. However, crisis of representation implies first the questioning and problematization of the concept of truth itself. In other words, it may be taken as a challenge to “mimetic representation,” and as a linguistic crisis which lays bare the discrepancy between sign and meaning, the signifier and the signified.

In the words of Jacques Derrida, crisis of representation implies “the unconscious breaks to which the speech is liable” (*Of Grammatology* 6). This crisis of representation is a symptom, too, because it “indicates that a historico-metaphysical epoch must finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon.” Derrida asserts that

language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear, when it ceases to be self-assured, contained, and guaranteed by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it.

(*Of Grammatology* 6)

Therefore, he acknowledges that this is not only a linguistic crisis but also a bankruptcy of the dominant Western epistemology and ontology which, until the twentieth century, have been profoundly rooted in the Platonic metaphysics of presence.

Crisis of representation simultaneously connotes a transition from mimetic to symbolic truth, from modernity to Modernism. In the words of Rainer Emig, “symbolic truth hovers between a subject it cannot define without endangering and a notion of transcendental Truth it requires as an orientation yet is unable to reach” (210). It comes as no surprise that the oppositional move against the modernity of the Enlightenment with its ensuing instabilities of both identity and statements is also the starting point of Modernism (Emig 210).

In a similar line of thinking, Terry Eagleton states that the move from Structuralist to Poststructuralist theory of literature testifies to a move from semantic stability to semantic plurality. He maintains that the movement from Structuralism to Poststructuralism is, in part, a shift from seeing the poem or novel as a closed entity, equipped with definite meanings which it is the critic’s task to decipher, to seeing it as irreducibly plural, an endless play of signifiers which can never be finally nailed down to a single centre, essence or meaning (138).¹

Similarly, the groundbreaking strategies of Derrida's Deconstructionism rest on dismantling the essentialist and logocentric approaches of Western metaphysics of presence. The relationship between language and truth is not foregrounded in harmony and concord, but rather this relationship is a subject to such paradoxes and contradictions inherent in it, which threaten to tear apart a text's meaning altogether. Derrida calls to attention Plato's *Phaedrus* and refers to his term "pharmakon," a word which refers to both a medical remedy and poison. As suggested by Barry Stocker, these contradictory meanings provide a particularly convenient example of the contradictions that condition all language and all meaning (56). For Derrida, there is no possibility of communication in language without the possibility of contradiction (Stocker 56). Derrida argues that Plato's philosophy rests on a series of metaphysical oppositions. Metaphysics itself can be defined as the thought that relies on absolute oppositions. Derrida writes: "Plato thinks of writing and tries to comprehend it, to dominate it, on the basis of *opposition* as such" ("The Pharmakon" 103). For these contrary values (good/evil, true/false, essence/appearance, inside/outside, etc.) to be in opposition, each of the terms must be simply *external* to the other, which means that one of these oppositions (the opposition between inside and outside) must already be accredited as the matrix of all possible opposition ("The Pharmakon" 103). Derrida claims that "deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the non-conceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated" ("Signature Event Context" 329). Stocker emphasizes that in Derrida's strategy of deconstruction, the reversal of the hierarchy of two terms may be a strategy but cannot be the end goal (139). The reality defended by Derrida is that the two opposites contain each other and are mutually dependent. That does not suggest a harmonisation between them; they are always in contradiction but belong together (139). Therefore, it is important to grasp how Derrida practices the strategy of reversing the metaphysical oppositions. For this purpose, in the following section of this study, the self-destabilising nature of Hardy's poetry will be analysed in depth.

1.2 The Problem of the Sign

A brief trajectory of the concept of the linguistic sign will prepare the ground for a thorough discussion of the idea of linguistic crisis and crisis of representation. Rainer Emig comes to aid while he explains how the linguistic sign evolved into a binary model. Emig draws his analysis on Michel Foucault's model in *The Order of Things*, where Foucault traces the history of the relation between language and reality and he distinguishes three stages in the development of the sign (*Modernism in Poetry* 88). From antiquity until the Renaissance, the concept of the sign

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was commonly considered a tripartite one that consisted of the *signifier* (the element that represents—either as a material artefact, writing for instance or a sound, gesture, etc.), the *signified* (the reality it stands for), and the third element of *similarity* which related the two others (Emig 10). These three entities were imagined as concrete and real. Around the seventeenth century, “similarity” became integrated into the signifier and the signified and part of each, while disappearing as an external reference point. The sign was thus transformed into a binary concept while still retaining a linking element between its two parts (Emig 10).

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment posited an empirical universe and a rational human intellect. The idea of the Cartesian self, or the “cogito,” epitomized by Descartes’ statement “I think, therefore, I am,” rests on the binary model, too, and on a mimetic representation of reality. Keith C. Pheby mentions in *Interventions* that in Descartes’ philosophy, rational consciousness, or consciousness as representation, becomes, in the Cartesian meditations, the guarantor of certainty and knowledge (17). In Meditation III, Descartes writes:

I am certain that I am a thinking thing. But do I not therefore also know what is required in order for me to be certain of something? For in this first act of knowledge [*cognitione*] there is nothing other than a clear and distinct perception of what I affirm to be the case; and this certainly would be insufficient to make me certain of the truth of the matter, if it could ever come to pass that something I perceived so clearly and distinctly was false. And therefore I seem already to be able to lay down, as a general rule, that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true.

(“Of God, That He Exists” 25)

Therefore, the Cartesian self, taken as one dimension of the Aristotelian mimetic reality, celebrates the superiority of the mind and the senses. As Pheby points out, something true is that which man clearly and distinctly brings before himself and confronts as what is thus brought before him (represented) in order to guarantee what is represented in such a confrontation (17). The assurance of such a representation is certainty. What is true in the sense of being certain is what is real. Reality becomes that which is open to the mind’s act of representing. In this way then, the split between subject and object is generated. With the dawn of the Enlightenment, “true” knowledge becomes the privilege of the pure attentive intelligence (Pheby 17). Thus, we see language as completely confined to its representational role (18–19).

From the eighteenth century onwards, the linking element of similarity in the tripartite relationship disappears. According to Emig, the reasons for this are complex. Yet, it would not be wrong to assume that scientific advances, together with the ever-intensifying effect of the Industrial

Revolution, shook the belief in a predetermined order of things—which could be expressed in a stable concept of similarity. Instead, both objects and human subjects were granted individual power—and so were signs (Emig 11). This created gaps between human subjectivity and nature, which paved the way for Romanticism (11). It also spawned a more problematic concept of the sign, one that still consisted of the signifier and the signified, yet had greater trouble holding those two parts together. While the effects of this changed concept of the sign were felt in literature as early as the middle of the nineteenth century,² it took half a century more for it to be expressed in theory by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.

Saussure's Structuralism poses a bipolar relationship between the signifier and the signified. Although Saussure says that this relationship is unmotivated and arbitrary, he accepts this binary relationship as coherent. In *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure makes his acclamation:

the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material," it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract.

(66)

Saussure sees the linguistic sign as "a two-sided psychological entity where the concept and the sound-image are intimately united and each recalls the other" (66). While Derrida agrees with Saussure that this relationship is arbitrary, he disagrees that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the two poles. Terry Eagleton, too, discusses how Saussure's Structuralism falls short in acknowledging the disruption in the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the sign and the referent. Saussure argues that meaning in language is just a matter of difference. But this process of difference in language can be traced round infinitely (Eagleton 127). If every sign is what it is because it is not all the other signs, every sign would seem to be made up of a potentially infinite tissue of differences. Another way of putting forward Saussure's point about the differential nature of meaning is to say that meaning is always the result of a division or "articulation" of the signs (Eagleton 127).

In an interview with Julia Kristeva, Derrida stated that Saussure's binary concept of the sign, questioning the separable primacy of meaning—the transcendental signified—pointed a way out of metaphysics of presence ("Semiology and Grammatology" 34). But in terms of Derrida's teaching, adds Gayatri Spivak, we might simply say that

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Saussure was not a grammarologist because, having launched the binary sign, he did not proceed to put it under erasure (lviii).³ The binary opposition within the Saussurean sign is in a sense paradigmatic of the structure of Structuralist methodology (Spivak lviii).

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida opposes Saussure's linguistic theory by emphasizing that a clear distinction between the signifier and the signified cannot be fully made. Thus, Derrida exposes the Western metaphysics' preference for privileging speech over writing since Plato. In Aristotelian terms, the voice is considered the closest to the signified, whereas the written signifier is considered a derivative of the voice (*Of Grammatology* 11). By decentring the speech/writing opposition, Derrida presents his most powerful opposition to metaphysics of presence, phonocentrism and logocentrism. Derrida asserts that Saussure's theory of language also thematizes this phonocentrism and continues to expose the various dimensions of logocentrism and phonocentrism:

...We already have a foreboding that phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as *presence*, with all the subdeterminations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/ essence/ existence [*ousia*], temporal presence as point [*stigmé*] of the now or of the moment [*nun*], the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth).

(*Of Grammatology* 11–12)

Certainly, this logocentrism has something to do with theology, too. Derrida points at the connection between the linguistic sign and theology. "As the face of pure intelligibility, the sign," indicates Derrida, "refers to an absolute logos to which it is immediately united" (*Of Grammatology* 13). "This absolute logos was an infinite creative subjectivity in medieval theology: the intelligible face of the sign remains turned toward the word and the face of God" (13). The age of the sign is essentially theological. Perhaps it will never *end*. Its historical *closure* is, however, outlined (14).

In conclusion, Jacques Derrida's greatest contribution to Western philosophy and literature was his challenge to the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism. He identified logocentrism as the "exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire" for a "transcendental signified" (*Of Grammatology* 49). Derrida also acknowledged that the epoch that prioritized speech over writing had to come to a closure and that the very act of writing was a proof of a rupture in the episteme and in the structure in general. He exceeded the line of the traditional metaphysics by challenging the Saussurean Structuralism and by pointing at this rupture

in the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Saussure's Structuralism had dominated the field of linguistics and literary education for almost half a century. However, in an age in which Freud posited a fragmented self in opposition to the long-embraced idea of the "cogito," in an age of Existentialism and Nihilism, of Nietzsche, Sartre, Heidegger, Camus and Kierkegaard, it was no longer possible to take human language as a "safe haven" that reflected external reality.

1.3 Modernist Poetry and Its Contradictory Nature

In the light of the Derridean criticism, it is essentially possible to "deconstruct" any literary text, regardless of its chronological, cultural and intellectual context. Derrida himself argues in *Of Grammatology* that the act of deconstruction is not limited to only literary or philosophical texts (99). Moreover, in an interview with D. Attridge (1989), titled "This Strange Institution Called Literature," Derrida states that he "almost always writes *about, toward, for, in the name of, in honour of, against* literary texts ... and ... in response to solicitations and provocations" (9). His writings about literary texts, though he puts under question the term "literature" and "literary texts," concern contemporaries such as Mallarmé, Joyce, Celan, Bataille, Artaud and Blanchot. Derrida, however, does not accept them as a homogenous group. He suggests that "these 'twentieth-century modernist, or at least non-traditional texts' all have in common that they are inscribed in a *critical* experience of literature" (9). These texts operate a sort of turning back; they *are* themselves a sort of turning back on the literary institution. Derrida himself confesses that he is more easily "brought toward texts which are very sensitive to this crisis of the literary institution" (which is more than, and other than, a crisis), to what is called "the end of literature," from Mallarmé to Blanchot, beyond the "absolute poem," that "there is not" ("*das es nicht gibt*"—Celan) (9). Derrida opposes even the term *fiction* because not all literature is of the genre or of the type of "fiction," but there is fictionality in all literature (15). And it is through this fictionality that we try to thematize the "essence" or the "truth" of language (15). Although Derrida admits that he does not always agree with Paul de Man, one of the precursors of Deconstructionism, he accepts de Man's suggestion that ultimately all literary rhetoric in general is itself deconstructive, practicing what you might call a sort of irony, (or a "suspension," an *epoché*) an irony of detachment regarding metaphysical belief or thesis, even when apparently, it puts it forward, ... but there is something irreducible in poetic or literary experience (15). Obviously, in this interview, Derrida puts under erasure the whole institution of literature and literary text, and hints that while Modernist texts tend to be non-traditional in the sense that they subvert themselves, in fact, all literature has an inherent fictionality which subverts its very foundations.

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Nevertheless, if a distinction must be made, some texts appear to be “more mimetic,” i.e., more representational, whereas some others display greater tensions and ruptures in language. Though Derrida would not make sharp distinctions between prose and verse, it is in the nature of prosaic texts to be thought of as more “mimetic, representational” than poetry. Poetry is of figurative nature and relies on compact language that makes use of comparisons, metaphoric compounds and symbolism. Modernist poetry is controversial in its own way, in the sense that Modernist poets attempt to capture a sense of a “unifying principle,” but the material of language does not allow it. As a result, Modernist poetry fails to become largely “mimetic.” In support of this view, Rainer Emig argues:

Modernist poems are not mimetic depictions, mirror images of an environment that determine their shape and not that of their material, language...It destabilizes their authority, and questions their validity in a way much later recaptured theoretically in textual deconstruction...The poem violates the locutionary aspect of discourse by mutilating and obscuring the message until it eventually threatens meaning and interpretation altogether. It corrodes the illocutionary aspect, too: the modernist poem makes it increasingly difficult to locate its voice, its identity. It splits it up, disqualifies its fragments as mere quotations or irony, until it eventually unveils the very concept of subjectivity as far from stable...Yet there is also an equally strong tendency in modernist poems to present themselves as coherent and complete, as works.

(237–239)

Emig’s argument, in fact, summarizes a very important aspect of Modernist literature—its search for a “centre,” or a “unifying principle,” and its failure to establish a locus of meaning. According to Emig, the linguistic sign is also problematized in Modernist poems—“the sign, the all-too problematic connection between signifier and signified is overcome by a further reduction: now the signifier alone remains and guarantees the absolute control of signification” (237–239). Consequently, Emig’s emphasis might be one way of building a connection between Modernist poetry and Deconstructionist criticism.

A similar emphasis comes from Howard Felperin who pointed at the capacity of Deconstructionist criticism to defamiliarize literary texts. He suggests that “by scrutinizing the words on the page harder than New Criticism ever had, Deconstruction discovered not their translucent and free-standing autonomy but, in a radical defamiliarization, their dark, even opaque character as writing” (110). Moreover, Deconstruction discovered “not the organic unity that binds together irony, paradox and ambiguity in a privileged, indeed redeemed and redeeming language,

but unrecoverable rhetorical discontinuity” (110). Felperin lays bare the problematic nature of the linguistic sign and concludes that:

What emerges from...deconstructive reading is not the absence of a presence in the speaker, ..., but something more like the presence of an absence in the speaker, a mind or a voice which is simultaneously there and not there, a kind of revenant voyeur whose mode of existence, being posthumous or alienated, puts historical time and its own personal history into brackets or into abeyance. Needless to say, the aporia to which the poem leads in such a reading, its simultaneous offer and withdrawal of meaning, would be seen by Miller as the successful accomplishment of its literary and philosophical mission: to blow the cover on logocentricity, on the “tradition of presence,” with its epistemological and interpretive idealism.

(124)

In the light of the aforementioned references, the possibility of viewing Modernist texts as inherently incoherent and subversive is strengthened by the fact that literature and literary texts are self-reflexive and self-referential. They expose the already problematic relationship between sign and meaning, but this problematic relationship is not actually limited to Modernist texts only, or even to literary texts. However, Modernist and Postmodernist texts tend to admit, to “confess” openly this self-betrayal which other kinds of literary traditions might appear to deny or disguise.

1.4 Hardy’s Modernism

As a literary movement, Modernism is characterized by a reaction to its antecedents—Romanticism and Victorianism. Modernists turn away from the Romantic persona, the “Wordsworthian lyric ‘I,’” from its emphasis on subjectivity, and its primary domain of spiritual transcendence—Nature. Modernism distrusts the ideals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which underlined an optimistic faith in a scientific and empirical world of human progress. However, although Modernism was marked by disbelief in all human institutions, it still had, probably, something in common with Romanticism and Victorianism—this trait may be manifested by the artist’s endeavour to find a pattern, a unifying principle that would present a particular text as autonomous, as an independent logic. In Derridean terms, this principle would substitute the “logos,” or the “transcendental signified.” A case in point was T. S. Eliot, the pioneer of Modernist poetry and the founder of the school of New Criticism, who insisted that the poet distance himself from the poem and evoke the emotion by means of a set of images which he called the “objective correlative.” At the same time, Eliot showed recourse to “myth,”

through which he aimed to establish a poetic tradition. Eliot's use of myth, in fact, was the reflection of his search for origin, tradition, centre, in the face of a fragmented external reality and a split self.

Hardy wrote fourteen novels, but he did not choose to publish his poems until after the turn of the twentieth century; his preference to write poetry of more than nine hundred and fifty pieces shows that poetry was an inseparable part of his life. Namely, this enormous amount of poems was the zeal to utter his human impressions in the more figurative, condensed language of poetry. Hardy's poetic voice registers a mind that is conscious of a continual loss against the backdrop of a hostile universe; the self is distanced, impersonal or dramatized. Hardy's dramatized persona may be taken as the reflection of a modernist self. In Deconstructionist terms, it challenges the concept of the unified, Cartesian self; therefore, it is problematized. Hardy makes his own explanation in his Preface to *Wessex Poems*: "The pieces are in a large degree dramatic or personative in conception; and this even when they are not obviously so" (*Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems* 6). Naturally, terms like "dramatic" and "personative" may imply a more ambiguous sort of poetic voice. By choosing dramatic personae, the poet partly withholds his subjectivity, and thus he places himself in a less strictly defined area. Dennis Taylor, accordingly, states that this is not a theory of the modern persona we expect as the speaker of lyrics in the tradition of Browning and Pound ("Hardy as a Nineteenth-Century Poet" 197). Rather, Hardy, who regarded all his experiences as "seemings" and "impressions," (*Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems* 6) is suggesting a merging of personal and dramatic voice. The word "personative" is a rare word, suggesting neither the dramatic immediacy in Browning nor the aesthetic detachment in Pound, but an enmeshment in a conditioning language which is ancient and complex (Taylor 197).

William W. Morgan, on the other hand, discusses the paradox in Hardy's definition of "dramatized persona." He finds Hardy confusing on this matter. Morgan points that Hardy's frequent use of the designation "dramatic" to describe his work does not comply with much of his poetry which is "transparently personal" ("The Partial Vision" 244). Eventually, Morgan infers that Hardy's conception of dramatic poetry is much broader than the usual and that, for him, the dramatic does not stand in simple opposition to the personal (245). Thus, Hardy's conception of dramatic poetry becomes paradoxically a key to understanding the authentically personal voice which characterizes much of his poetry. In his Preface to *Time's Laughingstocks*, Hardy emphasizes again:

Now that the miscellany is brought together, some lack of concord in pieces written at widely severed dates, and in contrasting moods and circumstances, will be obvious enough. This I cannot help, but the sense of disconnection, particularly in respect of those lyrics

penned in the first person, will be immaterial when it is borne in mind that they are to be regarded, in the main, as dramatic monologues by different characters.

(*Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems* 190)

Morgan concludes that the message of the poet is clearer here: Hardy is saying that poems, the products of his own moods and circumstances, are in some sense personal utterances, and should also be regarded as the statements of created characters ("The Partial Vision" 245). It appears that one of the important things Hardy means by dramatic is, rather, simply, a *temporary* persona, mood, feeling, fancy or idea (246). His personae, even when they are versions of himself, are often making statements and expressing states of mind which are circumscribed by time and place and are not, in any permanent or complete sense, the attitudes of the poet himself (246). For Hardy, there are no rigid boundaries between the personal and the dramatic; a poem may be both at once (247).

The fact that Hardy nods toward Modernism is not only manifested by this idea of a dramatized self and double/plural self, but also by his experimental poetic language. The uniqueness and oddity of his word combinations, the juxtaposition of vocabulary apparently and internally irrelevant—all these point to the violence of the poetic language, a kind of violence that creates tension and forces meaning into diffusion and dispersion. These ruptures and incongruities in Hardy's language, the unusual wording, naming and representing lead to ambiguity, which foreshadows a new kind of sensibility, and lays bare the linguistic crisis which is characteristic of several Modernist poets.

John Powell Ward offers a discussion on Hardy's poetry in terms of "imperfection," and refers to cases and views that posit Hardy toward and simultaneously against Modernist poetry.⁴ Ward concludes his article with the suggestion that because of the Darwinian influence, Hardy is closer to the Postmodern world which today's poets inhabit ("Hardy's Aesthetics" 300).

Linda Shires sees that Hardy's poems are peculiarly modern in their "registering of instability and dislocation" ("Hardy and Nineteenth-Century Poetry" 265). Hardy's special achievement in nineteenth-century poetry, drawing out tendencies from his predecessors and contemporaries, is to explore the paradoxes and contradictions of sign/icon and referent (265). Moreover, he uses the multiple interactions of time, representation and subjectivity to critique not only the poetics he inherited but also the society, in which he lived, by throwing into question all "verities" as human, and thus contingent, constructions (266). Hardy's emphasis on chance, his distrust of easy sentiment or common sense—from romantic codes to institutionalized religion—his understanding of relativity of time as it interacts with the human subject, his remarkable

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