

Preternatural Landscapes in Hardy's *Darkling* Thrush and Yushij's *It is Night*

¹Marwan Maho Abdi, ²Hogar Najm Abdullah

^{1,2} Department of English Language, University of Duhok, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

ABSTRACT

This piece of research studies Thomas Hardy's "Darkling Thrush" and Nima Yushij's "It is Night" and highlights some of the avant-garde strategies these writers have used in their poems. It analyzes these works' diction and figurative and symbolic language which are used as devices to elucidate and depict the speakers' subjective states through natural landscapes. Through utilizing a comparative approach the paper examines the similarities between two poems to suggest that Nima Yushij's familiarity with the symbolist trends and innovative approaches of Thomas Hardy, inspired him to model his Modernist Movement in Persian poetry after Hardy's style.

KEYWORDS: Modernism, Objective Correlative, Anthropomorphism, Preternatural, Avant-garde

1. Introduction

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) who is acknowledged as a transitional figure between the Victorian and the Modern era, wrote traditional poems which were a nostalgic call for older and simpler ways of living. His innovations in this field and his modernist attitudes towards history and humanity influenced numerous subsequent poets who endeavored to tackle with an unstable world, which was marked by an intense and rapid political, technological and socioeconomic change. Hardy's fragmented style, modernist attitudes and his experiments in metre, tone and diction are examples for his incessant attempt for creating the best medium for addressing the dilemmas of the Modern Age. Thomas Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush," which was first published with the subtitle of "By the Century's Deathbed" is a poem which commemorates the death the nineteenth century and the end of the

Victorian Age.

Nima Yushij (1895- 1960) who is considered as the father of the modern Persian poetry or Sher-e Now was inspired by the French Impressionists, Symbolists and other Modernist trends. "Yushij also called Nimā, born Ali Esfandiāri, was a contemporary Tabarian and Persian poet who started the she'r-e now ("new poetry") also known as she'r-e nimaa'i ("Nimaic poetry") trend in Iran." (poemhunter.com) He wrote poems which resonate Hardy's modernist attitudes in terms of form and content. Nima's acquaintance with the French Language and literature enabled him to revolutionized the course of the Persian poetry through announcing his departure from the classical methods and adopting an avant-garde style called she'r-e āzād, or the free verse. Nima's earliest narrative poem called; Tale (Afsaneh), published on November 1922, is labeled as the "first modern poem in the Persian Literature" which heralded a wave of literary revolution in Iran and enabled the modern Persian poetry to break free from the constrains of the classical rhymed verse. (Ghorbani, 2001, p.20) Nima's writings as Karimi (1995) contends were an incessant endeavor for manifesting

the deficiency and artificiality of the poetic craftsmanship or the manner of image-making, utterance and composition which he surmised as "san'at" in classical Persian poetry. (241) Similar to Hardy he attempted to experiment with appropriate mediums of representation to portray Modern Man's dilemmas in the fragmented modern age which he called the "Aches of Modernism" .

As one of the pioneers of the Modern English Literature, "Hardy declared his dissatisfaction with photographic representation as a model for literary representation and the form of realistic reproduction he favored was not a concentration on externals but seeing into 'the heart of a thing', a technique he described as realism," (Cronin et. all, 2002, p. 513-514) In the same manner Yushij tried to experiment with new methods for representing his emotions and subjective states. Mehdi Akhavan Sales (1979) in *Bed'atha va Badaye-eh Nima Yushij*, i.e., "The Innovations and Novelties of NimaYushij" elaborates on Nima's endeavour for creating "a series of concrete examples" for portraying the characters' emotional state and argues that, Nima does not merely refer to an emotion, but elucidates and depicts the process, i.e., "development of every thought and feeling" which shapes that emotion and this feature makes Nima's poems strikingly meticulous and photographic specified environment." (249). Yushij's view of objective images recalls T. S. Eliot's notion of objective correlative in which each internal state is associated with its external equivalent. "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art" as Eliot (1932) argues is to find an objective correlative which he considers; "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is

immediately evoked." (145) Based on this conception, the work of a poet must not merely convey the idea, rather it has to be a photographic portrayal of the meaning in its fullest sense. In accordance with this technique, the majority of the works of Yushij and Hardy are posited in natural setting, where natural elements are monopolized by the author to orchestrate and depict the character's subjective state.

Yushij's meditative poem, "It is Night" is a work which imitates Hardy's philosophical poem "The Darkling Thrush" in terms of projecting the character's internal conflict and emotional state through natural imagery. Both works orchestrate the speakers' sense of anxiety and uncertainty and the impending threat which is associated with the gloomy and blurred future. These works represent their speakers amidst a dark and ghostly nature while fear and terror reign over the night. This event however is filtered and represented through the poet's diction and figurative techniques which enhance the subjective statement through adding concise sketches and details to it. The dull, depressing and haunted setting of both poems is populated with mysterious animals (frogs and the thrush) and their ominous songs which pervades a sense of fright and mystery over the landscape. Hardy and Yushij, combine various images, sounds and activities and infuse them into the ominous silence, little by little, which eventually formulates the meaning they intend to convey. They both impose their own marks on nature, and this provides them with a penetrating vision which reaches out beyond the optical effects and unveils the hidden reality. Commenting on the poet's prophetic vision, Hardy remarks:

I don't want to see landscapes, i.e., scenic paintings of them, because I don't want to see the original realities – as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the

expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings. (Cited by Cronin et al 514)

Thus the world that lies beyond the optical verisimilitude is a supernatural, visionary and imaginative realm which envelopes the prophetic meditations of the speaker. Taking into account the two writers modernist trends and their choice of words, imagery, symbol, allusion, metaphor, simile, and anthropomorphism, we can suggest that Yushij purposely employed Hardy's prophetic view of nature and transformed it to a medium for his own context. Yushij's "magnificent, green panorama of Yoush and its prominent, foggy mountains covered with colorful maple forests" as Ghorbani asserts provided deep inspiration to Nima's poetry." (2001, p.20) It is evidently noted that Hardy's interest in the rural, natural, and the lives of the peasant in Dorset was parallel to Yushij's foggy, ever grey and rainy forests of Mazandaran.

Hardy's nature which is represented as "a hostile (or, at best, an indifferent) force, a tolerance for contradiction, and a deep pessimism about the potential for humanity to change its behavior" are elements which always stand out in Yushij's works (enotes.com). Both speakers of "It is Night" and "The Darkling Thrush" are typical Hardy characters, i.e., a meditative watcher who projects his internal chaos and emotional turmoil onto the surrounding landscape. Hardy's speaker who broods over the frozen landscape creates a setting which is haunted, ominous and deadly to portray his internal chaos and his sense of loss;

*When Frost was spectre-grey,
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. (qtd. in*

Ellmann and O'Clair, 71)

In the opening lines the speaker's meditative mood is underscored in a hostile context, where the "Frost" is "spectre-grey". The dullness of the ghostly and ominous situation is intensified by words like "Spectre" and "dregs" which are coined by Hardy to echo his world-weariness and despair for humanity in the age "Doubt". This is a Hardy archetypal scene in which a man who is surrounded by ghosts is meditating on his losses, while "preserving his identity in a friendless landscape only by the momentary intensity of his feelings" (Ellmann and O'Clair, 1998, p. 68) The tangled bine stems are the first symbolic reference to an elemental nature and are associated with the broken lyre's strings. This is a symbol which underscores the absence of harmony and the poet's spiritual and emotional aridity. This analogy heightens the emotional crisis through depicting nature's death which is the result of the dominant forces of "Frost" and "Winter". Frost and Winter are capitalized to denote their dominance and presence as the most important forces in the poem, while the bine stems which reminisce the summer, are dried out and this makes the winter seem harsher. In this bleak and colourless world, humans who are fearful of the impending threat of the "Winter" have sought refuge in their "household fires".

This interest in dark illusionary and preternatural is quality that is reflected in most of Hardy's works. "His intense feelings" as Ellmann and O'Clair argue "are usually expressed by or about ghosts as a way of displacing the human condition,..., of expressing afterthoughts rather than thoughts of keeping a residue, however ephemeral, from what is gone." (68) This quality and the poetic character's bewilderment and his meditations about the human condition and expressing afterthoughts are themes represented in Yushij's "It is Night" as well. This work employs a

series of metaphors associated with death to evoke a ghastly, gloomy and wintry situation which counterparts Hardy's landscape;

*It is Night
A night of deep darkness.
On a branch of the old fig tree
A frog croaks without cease,
Predicting a storm, a deluge,
and I am drowned in fear.*

This stanza projects the speaker's sense of anxiety, fear and frustration in a "Dark" age which is the result of War, Instability and dictatorship in Iranian context. In this historical context several military coups initiated by the Persian Cossack Brigade which was headed by Reza Khan eventually led to the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty. Similar to Hardy, Yushij's vision penetrates beyond the scenic paintings of the landscape and reflects the, deeper reality which is fathomable only through poet's imagination. Here the "old fig tree" represents a nature which is devoid of life and a "frog" which is the equivalent of Hardy's Thrush. The frog's ceaseless croaking establishes a fearful atmosphere which is imbued with a sense of anxiety and concern about future. This restlessness of the frogs to poet means an imminent storm and deluge. Similar to Hardy's provincialism, Yushij manipulates the local natural elements which were abundant in Mazandaran, to project his subjective state of mind. Thus the speaker's disquiet and fear is symbolized through the impending "Storm" and "Deluge" which are catastrophic natural phenomena devouring innocent human beings. The stanza's ending with fear encapsulates the poet's isolation and fear which is comparable with Hardy's character who is left alone outside while all humanity has "sought their household fires".

The second verse of both poems intensify the poets'

perception of the desolate and barren landscape through projecting a series of metaphors associated with death;

*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. (73)*

Here, Hardy anthropomorphizes nature in the wintry landscape and describes it as the "Century's Corpse" which is covered by the "cloudy canopy" while wind is lamenting his death. The poet later on describes the seeds of spring as "shrunken hard and dry" and this figuratively implies that the rejuvenating force that is believed to be at the heart of the nature is dead and thus he is doubtful about the coming of the next spring. The poet's despondency is projected onto the world in his last statement where he finds "every spirit" as "fervourless" and frustrated. This anthropomorphism and using natural landscapes for orchestrating the poet's innermost feeling are techniques which stand out in the second stanza of "It is night".

*It is night,
And with night the world seems
like a corpse in the grave;
And in fear I say to myself:
"What if torrential rain falls everywhere?"
"What if the rain does not stop
until the earth sinks into the water
like a small boat?"*

In this part the same images are formulated by Yushij to portray the speaker's sense of suffering. Here the whole "world" seems to be like a corpse in the grave which is highly parallel to the former image evoked in

Hardy's poem. The speaker's sense of doubt and questioning the future and worrying about the "unleashed evil" which might take over the whole world adds up a pessimistic tone to the ominous and dreary situation. Whereas Hardy is doubtful about the renewal of the life in the forthcoming spring, Yushij is fearful and concerned about the upcoming "torrential rain," i.e., the unleashed evil which is going to devour the whole world. In this way both poets formulate the same images; first they associate the speaker's subjective mood with the natural elements and then they recap the stanza with a sense of doubt about Humanity's future amidst the chaotic modern age.

The third Stanza, of "The Darkling Thrush" which marks a break in the tone of the poem, presents the second character of the poem, an aged thrush who "evokes the phoenix, a mythological bird with a beautiful song that self-reincarnates from its own ashes" (enotes.com) The image of the old bird's ecstatic evensong which is his attempt "fling his soul / Upon the growing gloom" and give vivacity and hope to the surroundings, resonates with the speaker's emotional state. In this desperate situation, both characters, the Poet and the Thrush hopelessly are endeavoring to find the last evidences that might suggest hope;

*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. (72)*

The bird's "full-hearted" and joyful song is something which is incongruous and contrasts the stark landscape, and this is noticed by the puzzled speaker who finds no reason for such "Carolings" in the surrounding

landscape which is imbued with death and desperateness. Here the speaker is incredulous at the bird's ecstatic singing and wonders which "terrestrial things" could make him so happy. However, words such as "blessed," and the capitalized "Hope," and the "terrestrial things" which limits the hopelessness to the earthly and not to the celestial, open the possibility for a spiritual or mystical reasons for the Thrush's behavior. The poem ends with a sense of bewilderment where the speaker acknowledges that he lacks the knowledge and is "unaware," while implicitly he suggests that there are possibly supernatural reasons for "His happy good-night air" and that the speaker might in time come to know the reason. Yushij's poem ends with the same hazy sense of unawareness where the speaker is not certain whether the "dawn" which stands for the future would be able to bring any change.

*In this night of awful darkness
Who can say in what state we will be
when dawn breaks?
Will the morning light make
the frightening face of the storm
disappear?*

He wonders about the human's condition in a "night of awful darkness", which is worsening due to the "Aches of Modernity". Juxtaposing the reality of the "face of the storm" which is highly emphasized with the "dawn of the next morning", leaves the reader with the same sense of doubt about a promising future for humanity. Similar to Hardy's tone Yushij suggests that parallel to "reality of the cold winter", the "frightening face of the storm" is not going to disappear. Both characters at the end of the poem are left with their harsh awareness of the bitter reality of the modern age which is represented through supernatural elements that are largely indifferent to Modern Man's needs or desires. The imaginative vision which pervades through both

works is the best example of the visionary trend in which was popular in nineteenth-century literature and adapted by the latter writers. Both Hardy and Yoshij regularly practice a synecdochic vision, which defines the art of observation as seeing the great things in little things. Both story tellers here as Cronin argues are equipped with a "intuitive power" that allowed them to "see in half and quarter views the whole picture, to catch from a few bars the whole tune" (Cronin, 2002, p. 516) Both poems' characters go through a process of meditating on the nature of life and finally they find no meaning and inspiration in the natural world. Similar to Hardy's modernist techniques, Yushij constructs exhausted landscapes and projects his speaker's interior life onto the natural elements. Both speaker's of the poems are isolated and anguished and their world-weariness and their loss of hope for humanity's future is echoed throughout the poem.

The aforementioned resemblances that are noticed in both poet's representational methods and thematic and technical aspects suggest that Yushij was affected by the same issues which formulated Hardy's philosophy and he tried to give voice to similar issues. The two poet's romantic style, their complicated characterization and portrayal of their characters' inner aspects through nature are examples that highlight the similarity in their representational methods. Based on the above reasoning it could be deduced that Yushij employed Hardy's modernist techniques to represent his characters who are the embodiment of the poet's subjective state as a person who cannot find meaning and hope in the present and in the dawning century.

References

1. Akhavan Sales. Mehdi. *Bed'atha va Baday-eh Nima*

Yushij. Tehran: Zemestan,1979.

2. Cronin, Caira, *A Companion To Victorian Poetry*. Germany, Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2002.
3. Eliot, Thomas Stearns. *Selected Essays*. London; Faber and Faber Limited. 1932
4. Ellmann, R. and O'Clair, Robert. *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998.
5. Ghorbani, Ahad. *An Annotated Contemporary Persian Poetry; Nima, Shamlou, Akhevan and Forough*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Maaz Publisier, 2001
<https://www.scribd.com/document/13482713/An-Annotated-Contemporary-Persian-Poetry-by-Ahad-Ghorbani>
6. Karimi, Ahmad, Hakak, *Recasting Persian Poetry*. USA, University of Utah Press, 1995
7. Zabihniya Omran, A. (2012). Tasir va nofoze romantike Hugo, Musset and Lamartine
8. bar Afsānehye Nima [The Influence offHugo, Musset and Lamartine's Romantic
9. on Nima's Afsāneh]. *Journal of Adabiyate Ghanaie*,19, 55-76.
10. "The Darkling Thrush - Modernist Attitudes in Hardy's Poem" *Poetry for Students* Vol. 18. Gale CengageNotes.com 19 Jan, 2019
<http://www.enotes.com/topics/darkling-thrush/critical-essays/essays-criticism#critical-essays-essays-criticism-modernist-attitudes-hardys-poem>
11. <http://iranianarchives.org/poetry/nima-yushij/168-it-is-night-by-nima-yushij>
12. <https://www.poemhunter.com/nima-yooshij/biography/>