

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter includes a brief description on meliorism and how Hardy perceives the idea. Besides, in this review, the thesis writer also explains the literary theories that are used as her tools in answering her problem. The literary theories in this review are the theories on the elements of poetry.

2.1 Meliorism

Meliorism, in general, is a “view that the world is neither completely evil nor completely good, but that relative amounts of good and evil are changeable, that good is capable of increase” (Runes, 1959). It can also be defined as “the compromise between optimism and pessimism which affirms that the world may be made better by rightly directed human effort” (<http://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/english/hardy/contexts/relphil/philosophy.html>). It opposes optimism and pessimism since a meliorist is not extremely pessimistic or optimistic in attitude. It is a view whose basic tenet is “to improve the world through the sympathetic balance of optimism and pessimism, love and loathing, and happiness and pain” (<http://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/english/hardy/contexts/relphil/tragic.html>). Anyone who holds this view does believe that the future may be brighter indeed since “the world tends to become better” (<http://www.meliorism.com/>).

Thomas Hardy reveals himself as a meliorist by defining that his standing is in the middle ground – between the extremes of optimism and pessimism. Pessimism is “an attitude of hopelessness toward life and toward existence, coupled with a vague general opinion that pain and evil predominate in the world” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1959, p.632). It is “the tendency to emphasize or think of the bad part of a situation rather than the good part, or the feelings that bad things are more likely to happen than good things” (<http://humanityquest.com/topic/Definitions/index.asp?theme1=pessimism>). While, optimism is “the view inspired by wishful thinking, success, faith, or philosophic reflection that the world as it exists is not so bad

or even the best possible, life is good, and man's destiny is bright" (Runes, 1959, p.220). Hardy is not purely a pessimist, but, on the other hand, he is not purely an optimist either. He does not look on either the bright side of things or the dark side of things only. He believed that "birth and coming to consciousness" is "a kind of original doom", but he could nevertheless "respond with compassion to human (and animal) suffering" and bring an enthusiasm, "a reformist zeal to bear upon evils" (Millgate, 1982, p. 410-11). Furthermore, the evils in the world are perceived as "potentially susceptible to amelioration or even eradication" (p.411). Hence, for an evil as war, Hardy confidently declared that "not to-day, not to-morrow, but in the fullness of time, war will come to an end, not for moral reasons, but because of its absurdity" (p.410). Hardy could also remain endlessly alert to the possibility, however faint, of some hope.

For him, it was no good pretending that pain did not exist or did not matter. However, he "was also aware that there is much in the world that is wonderful and precious: human love, for instance, and the beauty of nature and art (http://www.talkingto.co.uk/ttth/html/ttth_print.asp?quesID=1079&AuthorID=7). With this awareness, he still had some hope and thoughts that things could and indeed did get better and that the future might be very bright, but, in his point of view, "the melioration had to start from an honest facing of human suffering" (<http://benturner.com/other/hardy.shtml>) or in other words, from the exploration of reality.

These detailed depiction on meliorism and how Hardy perceives this idea are going to be used in the analysis since the thesis writer wants to know how meliorism is reflected in Thomas Hardy's poems.

2.2 Literary Theories

Each genre in literature has its own elements. Like fiction and drama, poetry also has the elements of poetry. Through these elements, a poet can express what he feels and what he believes. Those elements, generally, are divided into sound and sense. However, frequently, the significance in Hardy's poetry is transferred to matter in the prose sense of the word since he

“seeks in poetry severity rather than delight” (Evans, 1966, p.209). Therefore, the thesis writer only makes attempts to see the sense elements in his four selected poems to know how meliorism, the view that is often declared by Hardy to be his practical philosophy, is revealed through his four best poems. The theories dealing with diction or the choice of words, imagery, symbol, allusion, metaphor, simile, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, overstatement, and tone are employed to find out the ways meliorism is revealed in Hardy’s poems.

Diction refers to “the specific words and types of words selected by a writer to produce a desired effect” (Roberts and Jacobs, 1989, p. 582). “In a broad sense, poetic diction is something every poet employs, in that he selects certain words for a poem and excludes others” (Kennedy, 1971, p. 45). The choices are often determined by the subject and the emotional response the poet wants to evoke in the reader. An example of this choice of words can be found in Hardy’s poem, “To an Unborn Pauper Child”. The negative words contained in the first stanza of the poem such as “Doomsters”, “Travails and Teens”, and “fear” seem to have been chosen by the speaker to reveal his pessimistic attitude towards life. On the other hand, the positive words such as “health”, “love”, “friends”, and “joys” are used to show his hopeful attitude to life. Thus, considering the possibility that Hardy had selected certain words and excluded others to reveal meliorism in his poems, the thesis writer focuses on Thomas Hardy’s diction or the choice of words in the analysis.

Related to the choice of words, knowing the meanings of the words can also be useful to know why the poet chooses certain words and excludes others. Moreover, the words in the poems possess not only dictionary meanings, but also many associations and suggestions. Every word has at least one denotation, which refers to “a meaning as defined in a dictionary” (Kennedy and Gioia, 1995, p.650) and also has connotations. Connotations refer to “the emotional, psychological, or social overtones that words carry in addition to their denotations” (Roberts and Jacobs, 1989, p. 578). In other words, the connotations are “what it suggests beyond what it expresses” or “its overtones of meaning” (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p.37). In “The Darkling

Thrush”, for example, “gray” is used by the speaker to create a gloomy atmosphere not only because it denotes the mixture between black and white, but also because it connotes dreariness or gloom. Therefore, the denotative and connotative meanings of the words are analyzed in relation to the poetic diction employed by the poet.

Another tool used to analyze the poems is imagery. Imagery can be defined as “the representation through language of sense experience” (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p.49). The most common type is visual imagery, but “an image may also represent a sound (auditory imagery); a smell (olfactory imagery); a taste (gustatory imagery); touch, such as hardness, softness, wetness or heat and cold (tactile imagery); an internal sensation, such as hunger, thirst, fatigue, or nausea (organic imagery); or movement or tension in the muscles or joints (kinesthetic imagery)” (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p.49). It is “a peculiarly effective way of evoking vivid experience” and since “it may be used to convey emotion and suggest ideas as well as to cause a mental reproduction of sensations, it is an invaluable resource of the poet” (p. 51). Imagery can suggest the poet’s ideas. Then, it can be concluded that this element of poetry might be one of the ways Hardy uses to reveal his melioristic point of view through his poems. The use of imagery can be found in the first stanza of “Afterwards”, which presents the image of the “green leaves” of the “May month” along with theme of death:

When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
“He was a man who used to notice such things?” (1-4)

In addition, it is important to identify and analyze the imagery in the poems because “poets often choose their imagery according to some principle of selection and develop it with some meaningful pattern in mind” (Hoepfer and Pickering, 1990, p.59). Poets do not create imagery just to present a series of pictures or other sensory impressions; instead, they want to “transfer their own ideas by the *authenticating* effects of the vision and perceptions underlying them” (Roberts and Jacobs, 1989, p. 611).

The next tool, symbol, can be defined as “something that means more than what it is” (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p.80). “A symbol is an image that expands in meaning through the friction of emphasis until it inflames the imagination”. “A symbol remains what it is as an image, but it also takes on new and tenuous meaning” (Hoepfer and Pickering, 1990, p.76). “The symbolic meaning is richer than a mere comparison” (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p.82). Symbols are also varied in the degree of identification and definition given to them by the authors. Poets often use symbols in their poems in many ways. A single word, action, setting, character, and situation may be presented as symbols or may be symbolic if the poet designs them to represent ideas or values. So, when the poet has chosen to use a particular symbol, it might be done to reflect a particular belief or point of view. In this case, Hardy might employ this element of poetry as well to reveal meliorism in his poems. One example that can be given is the “coppice gate” (1) in “The Darkling Thrush” that is used to symbolize the time setting.

Just as symbolism enriches meaning and represent the ideas of the poet, so does allusion. Allusion is “a brief reference to a person, place, phrase, or event drawn from history or literature” (Hoepfer and Pickering, 1990, p31). It is “like a richly connotative word or a symbol, a means of suggesting far more than it says” (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p. 120). It also may have a powerful emotional effect. It is “a means of reinforcing the emotion or ideas of one’s own work with the emotion or ideas of another work or occasion” (p. 121). Historically important and well-stated words might have an emotional impact that transcend their denotative meaning. It can be seen in Hardy’s poem “In Time of ‘The Breaking of Nations’”. The title is taken from a verse in the Old Testament, ‘With thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms’ (Jeremiah 51: 20). This quoted verse refers to the historical event when God destroyed Babylon. This allusion is apparently used to describe the ravages or the madness of war since Hardy wrote the poem at the time of the First World War in 1915. Thus, it can be seen that “the use of an allusion allows poets to reinforce an

argument by illustration, to compress complex ideas into brief phrases, and to suggest thoughts they may not wish to state directly” (Hoepfer and Pickering, 1990, p.31).

Metaphor is the other element of poetry which is also applied further to answer the statement of the problem. Metaphor is “a statement that one thing is something else, which in a literal sense it is not” (Kennedy, 1971, p.87). Its other term is “implied comparisons” (Hoepfer and Pickering, 1990, p.64). By using this figure of speech, a poet asserts that two things which are essentially unlike are identical, instead of merely similar, without using any connective words. For instance, it can be seen in the second stanza of “The Darkling Thrush”: “The ancient pulse of germ and birth/ Was shrunken hard and dry” (13-14). “The ancient pulse of germ and birth” stands out as a stunning metaphor. It is a metaphor for the old century. On the other hand, metaphor can also suggest the poet’s idea. A metaphor is “useful to poets” primarily because it offers “a mechanism for stating abstract truths through specific images” and also contributes “intellectual stimulation, emotional connotations, a conciseness” (Hoepfer and Pickering, 1990, p.65).

While a metaphor thus merges identities, a simile expresses a similarity. Simile is “a comparison of two things indicated by some connective, usually *like*, *as*, *than*, or a verb such as *resembles*” (Kennedy and Gioia, 1995, p.680). Similar to metaphor, simile is used for comparing things that are essentially unlike and this figure of speech can also suggest the poet’s idea. An example of this element of poetry can be found in the first stanza of “The Darkling Thrush”: “The tangled bine-stems scored the sky / Like strings of broken lyres” (5-6). The plants are illustrated to be similar to a broken musical instrument to suggest that nature is crumbling as the century comes to an end. Thus, this figure of speech is also applied in the analysis.

Personification is another form of implied comparisons. It can be defined as “the portrayal of an idea, object, or animal as having human traits” (Hoepfer and Pickering, 1990, p.70). It is really a subtype of metaphor, “an implied comparison in which the figurative term of the comparison is always a human being” (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p.64). It

allows the poet to describe with energy and vitality what might otherwise have remained inanimate or lackluster. One example of personification can be found employed in the first stanza of "Afterwards". The first stanza of the poem begins by personifying the "Present" which "has latched its postern" to describe the end of the narrator's life. Since personification can also suggest the poet's idea, its existence in the poem is identified and analyzed further.

Closely associated with personification is apostrophe. Apostrophe is "a way of addressing someone or something invisible or not ordinarily spoken to" (Kennedy and Gioia, 1995, p.687). It "consists in addressing someone absent or dead or something nonhuman as if that person or thing were present and alive and could reply to what is being said" (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p.65). Apostrophe can be found in Hardy's "To an Unborn Pauper Child". The speaker addresses the unborn pauper child as if it could answer him.

Next, synecdoche as a kind of metonymy can be defined as "the use of a part of a thing to stand for the whole of it or vice versa" (Kennedy and Gioia, 1995, p.88). This figure of speech can also be found in Hardy's poem, "To an Unborn Pauper Child" in the third stanza. The speaker uses the "wombed souls" (13) to refer to the pauper child.

A poet can also emphasize a truth by overstating it. This kind of figurative language is called overstatement. Overstatement or hyperbole occurs when a poet wants to "emphasize a point with a statement containing exaggeration" (Kennedy and Gioia, 1995, p.687). It is "simply exaggeration, but exaggeration in the service of truth" (Perrine and ARP, 1992, p.101). An example of this can be found in "To an Unborn Pauper Child" when the speaker wishes that he could find a place where not even one tear and one qualm could destroy tranquility.

The last device that is going to be used to analyze the poem is tone. Tone may be defined as "the writer or the speaker's attitude toward his subject, his audience, or himself" (Perrine, 1969, p.162). "In poetry, tone is likewise important" (p.162). In determining the tone, it has to be done by

analyzing the other elements of poetry. Like what Perrine said in his book “Almost all the elements of poetry indicating its tone: connotation, imagery and metaphor; irony and understatement; rhythm, sentence construction, and formal pattern” (p.163). An example of this is the word “fervourless” (16) that suggests the pessimistic or hopeless tone in “The Darkling Thrush”. In this case, it is important to recognize the tone of a poem, especially concerning the topic of this thesis since meliorism itself can be revealed from the creation of attitude in the poems. That is why tone is employed as a tool in analyzing the poem.

In conclusion, the four poems contain all of these elements of poetry; diction or the choice of words, imagery, symbol, allusion, metaphor, simile, personification, apostrophe, synecdoche, overstatement, and tone. Considering the possibility that meliorism, the view that is held by the poet is revealed through these elements, in the analysis, these elements of poetry are used as the tools to find the answer to the statement of the problem.