

Hardy vs Hopkins: A Comparative Reading of 'Hap' and 'God's Grandeur' for More Communicative and Cooperative Interactions in EFL Settings

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*T*his article focuses on the comparative study of two poems by the 19th century leading literary figures who introduced two different worldviews related to man's existence on earth. What makes the article so interesting is that the two worldviews—the two completely different perspectives introduced through the poems—shed lights on how the poets perceived the world in different ways with regard to man's relation to nature although they lived in the same period and in the same setting with the same cultural background that the poems were intended to hold up a mirror to reflect on and react to for a thorough understanding of the cultural milieu. The reader will be presented with the poems and their semiotic interpretation (1) to understand better what lies behind the narratives in the deeper layers of the sense and the value of the whole texts, (2) to compare the views presented by the poets through the discussion points used in the chart for the comparison/contrast, and (3) to get engaged in more cooperative interaction, which will in turn help acquire the language better by focusing on language use in meaningful contexts provided by the literary texts.

Keywords: Hardy, Hopkins, Hap, God's Grandeur, Communicative and Cooperative EFL Interactions

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*I*n the wake of modernism that would find much more attention in the next coming century proposing completely different doctrines from what constituted their philosophy of life to the beginning of the enlightenment, the two poems written in the same period provided the readers with two different perspectives in order for them to better view the world they were living in. While *Hap* (Abrams, 1993, p.1694) displayed a more pessimistic attitude towards life, for man appears to be suffering in a world hostile to man's existence, *God's Grandeur* (Abrams, 1993, p. 1546) showed why man should be happy on earth created solely for man to live in harmony with nature designed and protected by divine providence. The philosophy underlying *Hap* foregrounds the necessity to create a world designed by man not to suffer from *crass casualty* that controls what ever happens in this world. The world seems to have been designed by a vengeful god as a penal settlement where *man's loves lost proves to be his ecstasy*. Man as the minute creature in this universe should not be that hopeless, because man is absolutely able to take control over whatever happens no matter how cruel nature has been to man's existence. That modernist movement from god-centred universe to man-centred one would definitely introduce a new world designed around man-made values imposing an order upon the chaos created by vengeful god. *God's Grandeur*, however, draws a picture of a benevolent universe particularly designed for man to live happily ever after. As is clear from the title of the poem, tough written almost in the same period as *Hap* was, it presents a God centred- world where God with all grandeur graciously endows man with whatever he needs on the earth. Nature is not at all against man's existence, but rather it is already designed in such a way as to be in the service of man, creating all that he needs in a continuous fashion. Comparative reading of the poems can be done by dividing the class into groups assigned to discuss their points of view with reference to the concepts that the poems are thought to have developed around. Group discussions are then carried over into a whole-class debate in order for the two groups to communicate across their views by standing their firm ground and defending either what Hardy or Hopkins proposes through their poems. After in-depth study of the poems through reading for the sense and for the value, the in-class activities of discussion and debate over the concepts their views can be conducted through pair work, group work and whole class for oral communication.

Hardy generally draws a gloomy picture in his works in which man endures all the consequences of the choices of vengeful God, who creates all the troubles man has to endure in a self-renewing cycle by means of the subalterns, purblind judges or the natural laws. Therefore, his poems, according to Hardy, are “unadjusted impressions” and “diverse readings of phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change” (Hunter et al., 2007, p. 609). Man as the tiny wanderer seems to get caught up in situations over which he does not have any control. His characters encounter perpetual misfortunes, as whatever happens proves to be out of sheer crass casualty, i.e., by coincidence, which leaves no chance for them to change their disastrous destiny into benevolent one. In this sense, *Hap* is a typical example for the reader to understand his pessimism and the theme of perversity of fate. He believes that there is no order, because, to Hardy, even a malevolent order would be a sort of consolation to human heart condemned to life-long endurance due to vengeful God’s grim satisfaction, *schadenfreude*, that is, “enjoyment obtained from the misfortunes of somebody else” (Spilsbury, 2010, p. 6). This sort of divine retribution is due to man’s primal sin committed in heaven, which resulted in man’s Great Fall from Eden. What he indirectly communicates is that man must throw off the shackles of corrupted faith by designing a new world around his own values if man is to be happy in his existence on earth.

If God, full of hatred, would ever call to me from up the sky,
Laugh at me and take revenge while looking down on me,
whining on earth suffering from all troubles coming from the forces on high,
And tell me that my grief, due to loss of hope and love, turns into his
Ecstasy and his hatred become greater than ever before.

Just because I have lost all my hopes and chances to become happy in the years
To come, I would bear it, hold myself tight and die. Believing that I have never
Deserved such anger I would feel a bit all right, though. Knowing that God is more
Powerful than me and had given me the tears I shed in such unbearable
situations, I would cry and endure whatever made me so helpless.

That is not the way it is. Whenever joy comes to fill my heart, I lose it as it is
Destroyed instantly. I do not know why hope fades away at once. Life becomes so
Cruel in this uncaring world that dicing time gives (man) no chance to be glad,
Half-blind judges never allow any possibility of joy to come down to earth
Although it had scattered bliss just as pain all around me.

Table 1: Reading within the text for the Sense of the poem

As for interpretation, in Hap, Hardy speaks of perversity of fate that brings unhappiness to man on the earth. The disastrous and ironic coincidence controls whatever happens on the earth, which is against man's existence. This fate often causes sorrow, frustration, loss or regret. The speaker is a typical ordinary man representing mortal lot living in a cruel and uncaring world. He is a man of failure complaining about the irony of human destiny in a universe ruled by chance. This intellectual being appears to be aware of all the natural forces governing the whole system, if there is any. Hardy uses his faculty of reasoning to question the validity of the teachings of their religion by creating a hypothetical situation and respond to it reasonably well. To Hardy, there must be a design, no matter how perfect it is, that could be imposed upon chaos and disorder he finds both in his heart and in the universe. Even a malevolent design, not necessarily a benevolent one, would be reconciliation between man and nature in a world that gives no chance to those caught up in situations that they have no control over.

Why God is vengeful and looks down on man and becomes happier when man loses his hopes and love is hard to understand. When man gets a chance to become happy, he loses it right away. Purlind Doomsters, half-blind judges, refer to either natural forces controlling everything, as they are all non-anthropomorphic, hostile to man's existence on the earth or to some people holding the absolute power in their hands. He tries hard to cherish hope in his heart to be happy, but he believes that he cannot lead a happy life, as bliss is strewn around his hard life as pain. There is nothing he can do to change the course of events the other way around. He says he is a meliorist, one who believes that the world may be made better by human effort; however, his inability to believe in the government of the world by a benevolent God appears to be his characteristic gloomy mood, regarded as a part of late Victorian pessimism. Hap is a typical example depicting his characteristic mood, "his insistent irony when faced with moral and metaphysical questions" (Abrams, 1993, p.1693). For Hardy all that exists in the universe is indifferent to this little suffering thing in the Penal Colony designed by a vengeful God. The Penal Colony turns out to be penal setting where man appears to be hostile to the existence of his own specie in the modern world—man-centred universe which turns out to be nonanthropomorphic no matter how perfectly it was designed by pure modern mind around similarities only to bring peace and happiness to the tiny wanderer referring to man roaming on the planet earth.

This modern world though created around man's values to make the earth a better place for man to be happy is a monolithic whole that rejects differences with a hideous pattern of injustice, a decisive refusal to respect the autonomy of other people. In the process of time man becomes the oppressor and the oppressed, turning the whole world into battle-ground where the governed lot fights a losing battle.

Gerard Manly Hopkins (1844-1889) on the other hand, portrays a keenly critical eye of the 19th Century. Under the influence of prominent philosophers and theologians he was interested in another movement known as the Broad Church theology. Nevertheless, he entered the Roman Catholic Church and decided to become a Jesuit priest, which created distrust among the religious circles at the time. For the rest of his life he worked as a priest and a teacher at different educational institutions in various

cities. He was a professor of classics at University College for a period of time. Hopkins was a highly outstanding poet, a prominent literary and religious figure as well, known for his striking use of meter and diction. His works published posthumously in 1918, “twenty-nine years after his death, can be better understood if they are restored to Victorian age out of which they developed” (Abrams, 1993, p. 1544).

His poem can be restated as follows: The world is full of God’s magnificence, and it is so clear that it flames out at every instant second when you look at any being created. That same brightness you find gathers to greatness like the beauty of black similar to the ooze of oil shining everywhere to remind man of this divine creation. However, this highly intellectual being cannot realise how great the beauty of nature is. Being charged with the grandeur of God, nature can never be spent although generations have come one after another without recognizing God’s grandeur due to being seared with trade, bleared with money and smeared with toil. Nature is filthy now with man’s smudge (dirt, greasy marks) everywhere, but still freshness exists in deep down things, even at the bottom of the ocean. This freshness repeats itself in a circular fashion, as the sun sets in the west leaving the world in the dark with the lunar beauty on top and rises again on the other edge of the world shining to reflect that unyielding magnificence. The warm breasts fill up the sky with their bright wings in the morning while The Holy Ghost over the globe protects and charges the world with his never-ending grandeur glittering continuously.

Hopkins’s world is absolutely in harmony with all the forces of nature which offers what man needs to lead a blissful life since the Almighty, the absolute transcendental being graciously endows man with all the miraculous providence and unending privileges of life. The unique design, the *inscape*, is the stamp, a distinctive mark, on each being, which proves the existence of the Holy Ghost, continuously watching over the world. Inscape is the distinctive identity of each being and man is in a state to recognize its unique design. This cognitive attitude towards the existence of all beings without reservation is the concept of *instress* that motivates the intellectual being to probe deeper into the divine creation to define his self concept to know who he is. The human being, the most individually distinctive being in the universe is required to recognize the inscape of other beings in an intellectual act, *instress*. This act of recognition of individual identity of each being enables one to appreciate its specific distinctiveness. It is safe to put it the same way as Abrams asserts (1993: 1545), “Ultimately, the instress of inscape leads one to Christ, for the individual identity of any object is the stamp of divine creation on it.” However, man rejects all the values of the past because his heart is “seared with trade, smeared, bleared with toil”, exploiting whatever exists in the world, which prepares his tragic end sooner than ever expected.

When Hardy and Hopkins are compared in terms of their views of the world, the opening line of *God’s Grandeur* captures the eye and reaches the mind of the reader, as it says something completely different from what Hardy emphasizes, which sets the tone of the poem entitled *Hap* from the very beginning till the end. The image of vengeful God in *Hap* changes into the image of protecting God in *God’s Grandeur* with all his grandeur shining over the bent. In a modern world created around man’s values with money in the centre, man becomes “seared, smeared and bleared with toil” devastating the world to make it more cruel and hostile to spiritual life. Man becomes



hostile to nature while they produce to satisfy their desires, meet their needs and enjoy themselves as best they can without ever noticing that they become indifferent to the mother earth day by day. There is this constant strife between nature charged with the grandeur of God, and man who is insensitive, with a philistine heart, portraying a waste land, as man cannot see any beauty but money in a world deprived of all moral and spiritual values and distinctive identity of each being.

Concepts	Hap	God's grandeur
Design	There is no grand design made by a benevolent God, as man suffers in a world ruled by chance rather than laws.	There is God-designed universe where man has the potential to live since they are all provided with whatever they need to exist.
Destiny	irony of human destiny in a world that is hostile to human existence on earth.	lots of divine providence for man to develop and rise above their nature to deserve what is expected of them.
Beliefs	no belief God in its traditional sense as God appears to be vengeful and makes men suffer on earth	absolute belief in Benevolent God as God bestows all the blessings upon man endless and every where
Values	Traditional values are rejected.	Traditional values are maintained.
A New Centre/Order	Man-centred universe is required to create a human-friendly centre for men's own happiness.	The already existing centre is absolutely anthropomorphic, since the whole nature is designed for this end.
Similarities/Differences	Similarities are emphasised over differences to form a new society around purely anthropomorphic values for creating a more human friendly world.	Every single creature exists in their own habitat to represent difference, a different, distinctive identity to create a world in harmony.
Meliorism	This nonanthropomorphic world can only be made better by human effort, which must be accomplished sooner.	It is not that nature is against man, but rather it is man that is against nature. Men create their own tragic end.

Figure 1. Comparing/contrasting *Hap* and *God's Grandeur* with regard to the given concepts

In Hardy's own world natural forces are against man's existence on earth since they are all indifferent and hostile to this suffering little thing whose pain and unhappiness become God's ecstasy in such an uncaring world. In Hopkins' world nature is created to reflect God's magnificence, and it is charged with it to maintain man's existence although man displays hostile attitude towards nature exploiting, devouring, eating up into the deepest part of the earth and consuming whatever exists to the fullest extent. Hardy is totally against that sort of resigned wisdom, as his characters suffer in a cruel and uncaring world where they are caught up and tied down in the hierarchical order imposed upon them for centuries. When he published *Hap* in 1898, he proposed a change from the humdrum, the mundane looking for new horizons to shed more light on the results of that sort of disastrous ironic coincidence that foregrounds perversity of fate. He put the blame on the natural forces calling them *purblind doomsters* that prepared such a cruel, wicked world for the miserable multitude that had

no chance to change their hap right round. If there were this ironic coincidence that cast pain about man's pilgrimage on the earth—the penal settlement—then there would be a chance to rise up to stand the wickedness, for it is man's right to pursue his own happiness on earth. *Crass Casualty* caused by vengeful God fills up the whole scene. The nature with all its forces is absolutely hostile to man's existence without having any order, let alone a malevolent one.

Hardy's attitude towards life and nature represents a pessimist view coated with anxiety stemming from all sorts of abomination endless and every where, while Hopkins has a better look at the same thing from a different perspective with all shades of religious mind. In response to Hardy's static nature and man-centred universe foregrounding man's status developed around secular philosophy with respect to all other subalterns dangerously limiting man's liberty on earth representing a penal colony created for the tiny wanderer to suffer because of his primal sin, Hopkins puts premium on highly dynamic nature, which requires man to make use of intellectual capacity so as to recognize the divine creation by highlighting the significance of constant change renewing almost everything in nature in a continuous fashion. This self-renewing nature of all the existing creatures—animate and inanimate—requires the admittance of creative power, the sublime beauty. To put it very simple: man exists on the earth to instress the inscape—the distinctive identity of each being as *the stamp of divine creation* on each individual being representing their unique design.

The new age was the harbinger of new perspective for man to comprehend and acknowledge his place in the universe using his faculty of reasoning to oppose to what happens in the world ruled by disastrous ironic coincidence, which undeniably helps develop perversity of fate in an uncaring and cruel world. What lies behind the perception of life they had already adopted was the fact that miserable lot were at the mercy of the privileged few as the latter held the power and wealth because of the beliefs and religious teachings of the past that preconditioned their view of the world without questioning the validity of their centuries-long doctrinaire teachings. Hopkins does not believe any perversity of fate imposed upon man on earth by means of subalterns that act upon the commandments of the vengeful god, because he firmly rejects concept of vengeful god and establishes his teachings upon his own observation of God's grandeur found in nature and in the whole universe. There is no need to develop pessimistic attitude towards what happens all around, as it is not nature that is against the existence of man, but rather it is man that is against nature. Subalterns are not the forces of abomination that prepare tragic destiny of the tiny wanderers in their penal colony, the earth, as human-friendly nature is charged with the grandeur of God bestowing upon man all the privileges pertaining there to. The sort of vantage point provided through such a comparative study enables the reader to have a better perspective to see the world afresh.

In conclusion, this study, focusing on what Hardy proposes as opposed to what Hopkins does, simply portrays a thorough picture as to how and why Hardy creates the inner conflict greater than ever before, which requires the reader to resolve it once and for all, in order to provide a firm ground to stand. The reader feels the need to make his/her moral choice, as s/he finds themselves in the middle of the road of life, man's

pilgrimage on the earth, while fervently discussing the validity of the two distinct world views. Through a lucrative, intellectually profitable debate over what Hardy and Hopkins express and defend in their works, students enhance their cognitive capacity and linguistic competence to improve their communicative performance by defending their views through newly learned appropriate linguistic corpora. Preparing a flow chart with the grids reserved for the concepts chosen to compare and contrast the world views of the poets practically helps students to create concise statements, if appropriate, in order for them to formulise what to say while presenting their points of view. Traditional in-depth study of literary works can be developed and carried over into communicative in-class activities for the benefit of the learners, as they help develop their linguistic and communicative competence in the long run with the added bonus of showing them how to become intellectual and respectful members of their society.

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