

Comparative Analysis of British and American Poetic Traditions: A Study of Hardy, Frost, Bishop, and Schuyler

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Abstract. The purpose of this essay is to compare British and American poets to identify their common features through the examples of works by Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, and James Schuyler. Each poet exemplifies unique cultural and stylistic traits: Whereas Hardy's deterministic outlook and focus on the nature of fate is formalized in the manners of Britain, Frost relies on the transcendentalist sense of American individualism ingrained by nature. Bishop spans the two traditions, thus incorporating the British tradition's measured tone with the American tradition's observational approach. Schuyler, in her desire to be modern, rejects formalism in order to give voice to the mundane world in free verse. Collectively, these poets present the history behind the various poetic structures and contents within different cultures, and how a transatlantic exchange enlivens contemporary poetry.

Keywords: Poets, literary traditions, poetic structures.

1. Introduction

British English and American English are two intertwined literary traditions in the English language poetry having emerged from two different yet related societies. This essay will explore the unique characteristics of each tradition through a comparative analysis of four poets: Two poets emerged from Britain: Thomas Hardy and Elizabeth Bishop and two poets from America: Robert Frost and James Schuyler. Aiming at distinctions and interactions of British and American poetry this essay outlines the relevant themes, form, language, and poets' attitudes toward nature, the self, and society to demonstrate how those traditions developed and influenced modern poetic practices. Their visions are national but also cross the Atlantic divide; they perform their cultural and ethnic identities or backgrounds, but their texts tell global narratives.

2. Thesis Statement

While British and American poetic traditions differ in their stylistic and thematic concerns, the selected poets—Hardy, Frost, Bishop, and Schuyler—demonstrate a nuanced exchange of ideas that has enriched the landscape of modern poetry.

2.1. British Poetic Tradition: Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) is rightly considered the representative of the British poetic tradition, the contemplation of the picturesque nature and the feeling of fatalism prevailing in his work. Thus, the tone of Hardy's poetry remains pessimistic, set up because of the impact of the Victorian attitude on the one hand and the concept of the elected world, and human finitude on the other. In "The Darkling Thrush," Hardy presents nature as a bleak and powerful force, using imagery that emphasizes decay and despair: Apparently, she has this to say of the land: "Some of the land was rough like the teeth From the Century Jonathan Clay" (Hardy, 1900). According to Bailey (1970)^[1], this portrayal of nature indicates a rather typical tendency of British poetry – an element of pessimism – where nature stands for an omnipotent principle that is beyond people's control.

According to Bailey (1970), Hardy has chosen themes that reflect his uncertain attitude to religion and his interest in science. This sense of disbelieving both religious and scientific rationalization of suffering is also clearly seen in Hardy's allowance of fate as whimsical and sometimes vicious. In

“Hap,” Hardy says, “If but some vengeful god would call to me,” which means he wants any force that might justify suffering in life (Hardy, 1898). These existential queries of wandering and this philosophically solemn contemplation of life’s arbitrariness tie Hardy’s work in with traditional English concerns and focus on the formal aspects of imagery and lineation, even while they pursue such very English ends, rooted in both observation and rumination.

2.2. American Poetic Tradition: Robert Frost

Robert Frost (1874-1963) remains one of the most renowned American poets popular for a non-romanticistic manner in treating the concepts of nature and the individual’s existence. Where Hardy always describes nature as cruel and uncaring about man’s fate, Frost stands for nature as a realm of self-consciousness where people stare into their decisions and personality. In Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” 1916 the road splitting in two represents choices hence reflecting the American Dream of free individualism. This poem with the now famous last stanza which said, “I did take the one less traveled by / And that has made all the difference” brings out individualism and the ripple effect of a choice one makes (Pritchard, 1984)^[5].

Frost uses accessible language, and there are the shared tones of ordinary speaking; blank verse is employed, making it easier for the audience to understand his poems. This style correlates with the aesthetics typical for the American tradition: no mystification, using straight language and topics comprehensible to the readers, and their everyday experiences. It does not take away the depth of his work, because it enables Frost to put a lot of profound issues underneath the simplicity of the verses.

According to Pritchard (1984)^[5], Frost reflects people’s feelings and their guy seamless and complex nature in which life is often reflected because of an individual’s actions. In ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ (1923), Frost vividly paints a picture of the lovely woods, deep and dark promising, however, the speaker cannot indulge in its beauty due to responsibilities that he has to fulfill. The tension between complexity and clarity touched on in this case qualifies the American poetic tradition of presenting complexity within the simplest language and allowing the reader to find personal relevance and further meaning within Frost’s country frames (Pritchard, 1984)^[5].

2.3. Intersection of British and American Influences: Elizabeth Bishop

Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) occupies a rather special place in the context of modern poetry: following British traditions, she at the same time remained one of the most American poets. Everything that comes out of her hand is detailed; her understanding and depiction of the landscapes, objects and even feelings as fixed and distinctly edged as the British propensity for order and control. The representation of this approach is evidenced in Bishop’s “At the Fishhouses” published in 1955 by its rich imagery and complete descriptions of sea and its environment. For example, she says, “Cold dark deep and absolutely clear,” which not only describes the physical properties of the water but also makes one feel the environment of the scene (Bishop, 1955). This is a vivid sense of place that is very significant for Bishop and her poems: they do not get lost in generalizations or abstract emotions, but are securely anchored in the particularity of experience, at the same time they carry with them suggestions and overtones of the universal. For example, Travisano (1988)^[9] pointed that Bishop’s poetry is the combination of British technique and American willingness to write about the inside world, so the poet can write about herself and at the same time – about everyone, without becoming overly sentimental. Many of her stylistics can be compared to journalism – she seems to describe everything while not expressing emotions herself. For instance, “One Art” (1976) published in the *Great American Desolation* is all about the art of losing and Bishop’s cold calculations; “The art of losing isn’t hard to master.”. The poem rises from petty missing things to deep funeral of a self and although the subject matter becomes quite depressing the language along with the skillful avoidance of exploitation of sad imagery by Bishop makes the poem very absorbing. Such a slight and measured approach to loss, although portraying strength, does not propagate an overt British emotional restraint that most probably has been learned in America (Travisano, 1988)^[9]. Bishop’s discrete, mainly observational writing is influenced by the British poetic formalism, while her concern

with American subjects such as place, memory and personal experience point to American literary New Sentimentalism. According to Costello (1991)^[3], and very fittingly in my view, Bishop's poetry avoids sentimentality, and instead spins a 'quiet' politics of resistance and acknowledgment across formal/national boundaries. Bishop popularizes their ordinary daily experiences and thus draws readers into her work on deeply personal and universal levels. This fusion of the British traditions of restraint and the more expressive American freedom is typical of Bishop's manner and has earned her the reputation of a poet who can manage to translate the best of both worlds.

2.4. Modern American Poetic Innovation: James Schuyler

James Schuyler (1923–1991), linked with such movements as the New York School of Poets, is typical for the trends of modern American poetry including the turn to free verse, the focus on the urban environment, and the preference of the everyday experience. Schuyler's poetry is characterized by her ability to focus on the mundane aspects of life the same way any other person would, and in a very casual and rather analytical way at that (Schuyler, 1997)^[7]. For instance, in "Hymn to Life" composed in 1974, Schuyler says, "The heat is going on and off. There are no readers of poems" which is employed by a poet who specializes in trivial and fleeting moments. Distinctly, Schuyler's poetic idiom departs greatly from the formality of standard British verse, and one detects the gifted spontaneity that characterizes America's modernist poetry (Schuyler, 1974)^[7]. According to Lehman (1999)^[4], Schuyler's writing can be best characterized as 'Ordinariness' as his poetry commonplaces tender's democracy to everyone. In contrast with the metaphoric vision or rigorous grams of other poets, Schuyler's language is plain and linked to such initial experiences of urban life. It does so in harmony with modernist tenets recognized to undergird much American poetry's straightforward confrontational impact, free from ambiguous figuration. His poetry doesn't contain what could be referred to as substantial plots and hardened structures containing rather the digest of the brief impressions and dramatically reflected every day (Ward, 1993)^[10].

Shapiro (2007) points out that Schuyler describes things as they are in the present and his basic observations are indicative of a new cultural sensibility of American poetics that reduces the traditional formalist approach that dominated poetry before. In Schuyler's rejection of conventional meter, he can chronicle the chaos of today's world as only an American poetic voice could. His concern with prose, with such features as the shift of weather, and alterations in routine, transforms the mundane into poetic, denying the concentration on great ideas or poetic conventions and structures (Corbett & Young, 1991)^[2]. Through her poetry she puts the triviality of life into rhymes and gives aesthetics to the ordinary, thus erasing boundaries of what can be a material for poetry. This breaks the traditional concept of what can be constitutive of poetic material in 20th-century American poetry and demonstrates the fluidity and experimental nature of poetry in America (Lehman, 1999; Mikics 2017)^{[4][11]}. From his work, Schuyler blows the lid off poetry, just as one would expect an American to do –leave alone the fact that he embraced the mundane as did his countrymen.

3. Comparative Analysis of Themes and Forms

3.1. Hardy and Frost: Nature and Existential Reflection

The comparison of Hardy and Frost on the one hand and Bishop and Schuyler on the other hand provides an excellent opportunity to spot major thematic differences and differences in style, which reflects the general difference between British and American poets. Thomas Hardy possesses something that might be called a typically British worldview: structurally pessimistic, existentially questioning human's position in the universe and emphasizing formal organization. This style is well illustrated in Hardy in his depiction of the forces of nature as ruthless on the suffering of mankind. For instance, in his poem "The Darkling Thrush" of 1900, Hardy words the gloom of nature in the words "The land's sharp features seemed to be / The Century's corpse outleant". The gloomy background signifies the winter as well as Hardy's overall pessimism concerning mankind's fate, whereas the indifferent nature observes human suffering (Bailey, 1970)^[1]. Thus, the existential

reflection in the poem under discussion is presented by Hardy using structure and rhyme which points to the British feature of formalism reminiscent of the Victorian and Romantic periods in the development of British poetry. Thus, where Baudeleire sees simplicity and a sort of cosmic unity in nature, Robert Frost's approach is much more American and much more modern, for his work stresses subjectivity, individual freedom, and ambivalence. Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (1916) makes it possible to trace this difference quite vividly. In the poem, the two roads in the woods represent options and initiatives as an emblem of liberty and accountability that Americans are recognized of in America. Whereas Hardy's landscapes encode a kind of pre-deterministic vision of life the landscapes of Frost are places of possibility and subjective reflection. He writes, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— / I took the one less traveled by," emphasizing the role of the individual decision in the choice of a man's fate(Pritchard,1984)^[5]. Frost follows a colloquial style, often uses blank verse, and his poems sound like conversations, in large part contributing to the American tradition of making poetry simple and close to the ordinary language. This difference in depiction of nature has ethnicity undertones; while Britain poetry is more communal, that of America is more individualistic.

3.2. Bishop: Bridging Traditions

Elizabeth Bishop remains in the curious Mid-Atlantic position; she may be 'English-trained', but her poetics align with the legacy of math and science, melding British with American school of poetry. The references to her writing prove that she is concerned with details of the British poetic tradition but at the same time, she is an American poet burdened by the demanding tradition of place. In "At the Fishhouses" (1955), Bishop describes a cold, coastal landscape with painstaking detail: One such image included "Cold dark deep and clear" which summarizes the physicality of the location as well as the introspective value that comes with it. The place is also representative of Bishop's inner world and British humor and isolation while her emphasis on place relates her work to the general American poetry's preoccupation with the particular over the universal(Travisano,1988)^[9]. Bishop's poetry is not emotionally demonstrative; she employs little sentimentality and even Chekhovian detachment in tab to let her descriptions speak for themselves. This approach can best be described as reflecting the British influence on her work – regarding the structure and the tone of her stories – as well as the distinctly American focus on the individual's point of view and the introspection characteristic of her output(Costello,1991)^[3].

3.3. Schuyler: Modernist Experiments and the Mundane

The lyric poems by James Schuyler, however, go hand in hand with most of the post-World War II modern American poetry, which avoids complex forms and structures of poets of the earlier periods and tends to be free, colloquial, and interested in the most mundane aspects of the American metropolis. Schuyler is associated with the New York School of poetry and his work is particularly typical for the American poetry of the latter half of the 20th century in its free-verse lyrical spontaneity and subjectivity. This is all elaborated in Schuyler's "Hymn to Life" 1974 where she mentioned, "The heat is going on and off." A poem line comprising of two 'No one's' shall include no punctuation between them resulting in / Listen to poetry" intertwining Normalcy with implicit philosophical contemplation of life (Reed& Burt,2014)^[6]. It can be seen from this line that Schuyler wants to document the fluidity of life, clearly, an area far removed from the concerns of British poetry which was heavily inclined toward philosophical themes (Mikics,2017)^[11]. In the manner of portraying Schuyler's poetry, Lehman (2008) explained that Schuyler embraced living in the mundane world which makes poetry part of the population in society. This approach is typical for modern American poetry with its focus on the present moment, improvisation, and the search for new forms.

3.4. Themes of Fate, Freedom, and Memory

In terms of themes, one can pinpoint that many British poems pose the problem of fate, nature, and pain, to which Hardy's poems bear witness. The pessimistic view of life and the portrayal of nature in prose of Hardy points out the submission to the trials and the limitations of life (Mikics, 2017)^[7]. This more so manifests in his poetry where he paints a reality that the affliction of man is predetermined and the natural world, uncaring. This theme can hardly be considered peculiar only to Hardy as it is again traced throughout British poetry drawing from the historical tradition of proactive contemplation of life's questions in British literature. On the other hand, American poetry from the persona of Frost is notably independent and their choices reflect the core value of America as a country- independence^[8]. The methods of individual contemplation and choices concerning one's future, when enclosed in nature, represent the major focus of the Americans' belief in the ability to define one's self-identity and life path despite the major uncertainties of their lives (Pritchard, 1984)^[5]. Bishop and Schuyler continue to exemplify how the poetic traditions of the British and Americans may converge and transform.

The observational method benefits the topic of place and memory of Bishop to convey themes under the British tenor of emotions, yet it reflects American adventurous understanding. As in "One Art" (published in 1976), Bishop writes of loss and grieving but seems to fully understand the inevitability of losing while writing in a rather cool manner. This combination of voice and verse demonstrates Bishop's resolution of British tradition and Specific individualistic vision with the restraint of British poem and open American reflection (Pritchard, 1984; Travisano, 1988)^{[3]:[9]}. Schuyler's concentration on the space of the cities and the place of the average person deconstructs the conventional themes for poetry and replaces them with presence and change, which reflects on American poetry as an active process. They describe real-life everyday situations, which makes his work quite different from the introspective and formal character of most works in British poetry. That is why Schuyler's poem "February" is a good example of such an approach: what he offers is the ability to observe the daily repetition of tasks and turn them into poetic objects. Such a concern with the immediacy of experience, the physical, and the ephemeral concerns reflects the defining shifts of American poetry's modernist experiments – where a range of phenomena heretofore deemed unworthy of poetic treatment was probed and given aspirational value (Mikics, 2017)^[11].

These differences also indicate the formal differences of the poets, as well as the differences between the traditions of Britain and America. Particularly, Hardy does not violate the sheer set of stringent constraints of structured rhyme and meter that conforms to the British formalist tradition where the tight form is synonymous with the thematic preoccupations with destiny and order. Meanwhile, a blank verse that Frost employs makes the work more conversational and makes it Asadian rather than Global in an American mode but still formal. What might be perceived as delicateness and formalism in structure, recall the preference of the British tradition, while observational realism together with emphasizing scenarios links Bishop to the American one. Schuyler does not write poems in any kind of format; her free verse and casually informal writing style can be said to epitomize the kind of experimentation of 20th-century American poetic style where traditional poetic forms are jettisoned or exploited (Lehman, 1999)^[4].

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the poetry of Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, and James Schuyler demonstrates two different but connected traditions of British and American poetry. Whereas Hardy is visionary and poetic in his recording of British existentialism, Frost's emulative encapsulates American identity problems with individualism and nature. Bishop links British formality and precision with American envisioning, but Schuyler fully adopts America's free verse tendency toward edginess and the commonplace as in the experimental turn that American poetry took. From these poets, one can discern that British poetry is inclined towards some kind of conventional forms and ratiocination, meanwhile, American poetry is known more for its positive freedom, accentuation, and

creativity. This transatlantic dialogue has given richness to the field of modern poetry, so it has taken some courses that contribute to facing contemporary literature. That such traditions continue, the exchange between British and American poetic practices is proof positive of poetry as an art form's ability to remain ever relevant in relating human events, triumphs, failures, and experiences.

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