

Critical analysis the welsh hill country



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“ The Welsh Hill Country” begins with a devastating picture of a landscape which was beautiful many years ago but which now has lost its lustre. The poetic speaker firstly describes the desolate moor and in the last stanza he introduces a farmer who in spite of finding this gloomy panorama is still farming the land. Therefore it seems that the central tension of the poem is the contradiction between the preconceived notion of the Welsh countryside and the reality of the landscape.

The principal themes are the decay of natural beauty and the pessimism of being able to return to this idyllic era. The poem is divided into three main stanzas; each stanza discussing an important part of life in the countryside. Before analysis of the poem stanza by stanza, we must first address the central tension of the poem illustrated in the first line of each stanza. The poetic speaker seeks to deconstruct the preconceived notions that foreigners (i. e. the English) have about the Welsh countryside and instead portray the brutal reality of the landscape however unattractive it is.

This is evident in the use of the phrase “ to far for you to see” (line 1, line 7) and “ too far, too far to see” (line 13) - the poetic speaker is trying to illustrate the immense gap between the preconceptions of a Wales that is alive, green and flourishing and the starkness of Wales as perceived by the poet, a Welshman. In the first stanza of the poem, the poetic speaker talks about the sheep on the Welsh Hills. However, his representation of the sheep is far from idyllic. The poetic speaker presents as with sheep that are diseased; this is evident in the poet’s use of the words “ foot-rot”, “ fluke” and “ maggot” (line 2).

Again, the use of these words and the negative connotations associated with them coupled with the idea in line 5 of the sheep being arranged “romantically” highlights the central tension of the idealistic view countryside and the reality of the countryside. Ideally the setting for this scene should be grassy and therefore green, however, the poetic speaker once again highlights the central tension of idealistic versus reality describing the landscape as “bleak” (line 6). Furthermore the use of the word “stone” (line 6) shows how the landscape is less than idyllic for the sheep as they have nothing to graze on.

In the second stanza, the poetic speaker talks about the houses which he sees on the Welsh hills. The houses are in a state of ruin and are uninhabited. Again, the central tension of the poem is displayed by presenting the reader with a village that is stagnant rather than full of life. This is evident where the poetic speaker use the words “moss”, “mould” (line 8) and “nettles” (line 9); these are all features of nature which occur where there is the absence of people and nature is left to stagnate.

Again, this same feature is evident in the man made objects on this landscape portrayed in the “cold chimneys” (line 7), “cracked doors” (line 8) and “holes in the roofs” (line 11) showing that human life is not abundant in the Welsh countryside. This absence of life, representing the gap between the preconceptions of Wales and the reality of the Welsh countryside can be seen in the fact that the “houses stand empty” (line 10) and the fields are “bare” (line 12). In the third stanza, the poetic speaker talks about the lone farmer who is present on this countryside landscape.

Evidence of the decay of the Welsh countryside can be seen primarily in the fact that the farmer is the only inhabitant of the landscape. Again, the tension in the poem between idyllic preconceptions of a vibrant, healthy Welsh countryside and the brutal reality is evident in the fact that the farmer is suffering from a “slow pthisis” [an illness] (line 14) and he is “wasting” (line 15) away. Furthermore, much like the houses in the second stanza, the farmer is decaying in a natural, biological sense but also in a man-made physical sense evident in the poetic speaker's portrayal of his “ripped coat” (line 15).

The pessimism of the poetic speaker as regards the notion of the Welsh Hills being able to return to the preconceived notion of a Wales that is healthy, green and alive is evident in the use of the word “dead” (line 18) representing the finality of the state of the Welsh countryside. There is a structural parallelism between the first and the third stanza; this can be seen in the use of the disease metaphor, that is to say, the affect of the disease and how it is exhibited occur in the same order.

Also the repetitive use of the disease metaphor and the use of assonance rhyme on the first and third line of each stanza represent the monotony of this existence on the Welsh Hills. In conclusion, the poetic speaker successfully portrays the extensive gap between the preconceived ideas of the Welsh countryside and the brutal reality of what is actually occurring there. The notion that the countryside is decaying and the pessimism associated with this is represented in each stanza with the disease eating away at the sheep, the houses falling into ruin and the man, also diseased, withering away.