

Analysis of in tenebris

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Psalm 142, verse 2: "No man cared..." This Biblical verse applies perfectly to "In Tenbris", a poem written out of despair for the society Hardy in which lived. He expresses his pity and contempt for the materialist citizens and power hungry rulers. The rhyme scheme is a playful and simply happy one (abab), something similar to a child's poem. This frisky rhyme scheme is in sharp contrast to the mood of the poet and the feel of the poem. The pattern may reflect the optimism of society, which is in fact, hollow and full of grief. It is worth noting that each stanza ends with the word 'here'. It may be a cryptic attempt to tell the reader that he is not being noticed, or 'heard' (a homophone). Just as most readers would ignore the double meaning behind 'here', the society is ignoring Hardy's cries and warnings. The poem exhibits dusty/smoky imagery. Unlike sunny weather, dusty weather may symbolize allusion. In dust or smoke, we can't see properly, and hence don't realize the reality of what's going on around us. The people of his society are blind and fooling themselves with their optimism. Perhaps that is the message he wishes to send to his readers. Images of wind and breezes symbolize how this happiness is temporary, like our stay in this world. "Breezily go they breezily come; their dust smokes around their career" The poet uses sarcasm as a unique way of expressing his feelings. It also emphasizes the graveness of the situation: "And my eyes have not the vision in them to discern what to these is so clear". Hardy talks about the reason for their happiness and optimism. He implies that there is nothing to be happy about; these blind people see something that's not there. "Their dawns bring lusty joys, it seems their evenings all that is sweet" indicates that lusty joys have sexual implications. It is unlikely that the poet, being a man of nature, considers sex the ultimate sweetness. The people around him, apparently

feel they're enjoying the best of their times. It is Hardy who knows that there are things to life other than money, power and sex. There's nature which holds endless elements waiting to be explored. Thomas Hardy is famous for his pessimistic poems; naturally, extreme optimism would irritate him. Hence, a sense of hatred against the rulers can be seen in the poem. The rulers or elite class give the impression that everything's fine in their kingdom, their subjects along with themselves are happy and are living the best times of their lives: "All's well with us" and "Our times are blessed times". Their entire lives (similar to our) revolves around their career, and new ideas to make money. In a hectic life like this, they often forget to appreciate things of beauty like nature or religion: "Their dust smokes around their career". The ones (like the poet) who complain are whiners. They'd complain even if everything was right. "Rulers ought to rue". 'Ruers' isn't a word of the English dictionary. The poet made up this word to reflect their made up stories about perfect lives. However, the poet implies that the only thing these rulers will be affected by is Nature. When Nature "echoes back the shouts of many and strong", they'll realize how wrong they were in indulging in evil practices. Perhaps nature echoes by natural disasters. The poet feels alone. As if he's the only one who recognizes the causes for misery and pain. He alone is miserable in a world of optimistic people. "There are many smiles to a tear." "Let him in whose ears the low-voiced Best is killed by the clash of the First, Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst, Who feels that delight is a delicate growth cramped by crookedness, custom and fear, Get him up and be gone as one shaped awry; he disturbs the order here." The last stanza exhibits a newfound confidence in the poet. It's a sudden shift from the miserable,

whining person to a condescending, authoritative one. However, this stanza is written from a third person's view, possibly the elite class of society. Hardy refers to himself as 'he' and yet repeats the same thing he mentioned in the previous stanzas: He just doesn't belong in that time. The stanza describes Hardy from a different point of view. There is a contrast between the Best and the First. Keep in mind that this is the elite class speaking here. So, according to them, the best would be the exact opposite of what Hardy believes to be the best. The First may symbolize nature, as it was the first thing on earth. On the other hand, the 'Best' may be new technology developing in that era. The best is low voiced, kind of like devil whispering in your ear. Society wants to get rid of those who give preference to Nature over technology people like Hardy." Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." In the age of new developments and industrialization, some believed that spending money on these inventions wasn't justified with people dying of hunger and poverty. According to them, in order to move forward, a look at the poor (worse off) was required. People like Hardy. " Who feels that delight is a delicate growth cramped by crookedness, custom and fear." Delicate growth gives us an image of a flower growing. Images from nature are deliberately inserted in the poem to emphasize their lack of appreciation of Nature. This delicate growth, love of Nature is cramped by what other people might think. I mean a person who does nothing but sit by flowers all day will encourage people to talk about him. Plus, the love of nature was being replaced by love for technology which he considered to be "crooked". Moreover, in that time people had low tolerance to pre-marital sex. Hardy may be referring to it as love was also cramped by custom in those days. His parents had made love before

marriage too, and had become the topic of discussion for many years. People like the poet didn't belong in the society. Instead of describing society as in the first three stanzas, Hardy describes himself. It is possible that he justifies himself and his views to his readers.