

Lecture 13: The Line of Despair (II)

Introduction and Review: Following the introductory remarks, Professor Barrs continues to look at some early examples of “the line of despair” and their impact on modern culture.

The Line of Despair (II)

I. Introduction

II. “The Line of Despair”

- A. A shift in the concept of truth*
- B. The problem for the church*
- C. Inconsistent claim of relativism in “religious knowledge” and objectivity elsewhere*
- D. Examples of the line of despair (19th century)*
 - 1. Thomas Hardy’s “The Darkling Thrush” and “In Tenebris”*
 - 2. Tess of the D’Urbervilles*
 - 3. Stephen Crane’s “The Black Riders”*
 - 4. Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” (19th century)*
 - 5. Thomas Hughes, British Poet Laureate (20th century)*
 - a. Focus on the absurdity of nature*
 - 6. The Dodo’s race in Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland*
 - 7. Woody Allen’s Crimes and Misdemeanors*

III. Influence on Modern Culture

- A. Loss of truth - no objective knowledge*
- B. Loss of moral certainty - no objective values*
- C. Loss of meaning to history - no objective direction*
- D. Loss of individual purpose - no transcendence*

IV. Coping with the Line of Despair: The “Upper and Lower Story” Dichotomy

- A. A radical distinction between reason and faith*
 - 1. Rationality alone affirms post-modern hopelessness*
 - 2. The “need” for an irrational leap, or existential experience*
- B. An example: Sylvia Plath’s “Black Rook in Rainy Weather”*
 - 1. An “experience of meaning”*
 - a. We may affirm the experience according to Romans 1, but we must reject the notion that it is completely separate from the rational*
 - 2. The paradox of a hopeless hope*
 - a. Plath’s suicide*
 - b. Potential idolatry*