

# Pessimism Feature is Reflected in One of Thomas Hardy's Poems “*Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?*” As One of the Features of Modernism.

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## ABSTRACT

The study highlights pessimism as one of the features of modernism. The study displays Thomas Hardy's poem “*Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?*” The study shows how the poet reflects his pessimistic experiences in this poem. The objective of the study shows how the feature of pessimism played a big role in modernism. The study concludes that not pessimism is the only feature reflected in this poem but also other factors like selfishness, and narcissism. Birth and death are mores of life and no one lasts in this cosmos.

**KEY WORDS:** pessimism, death, modernism, selfishness and narcissism.

**DOI:** 10.7176/JLLL/91-03

**Publication date:** September 30<sup>th</sup> 2022

## INTRODUCTION

The precursor of pessimism is the Victorian era. Pessimism can be described as the result of a deep spiritual defect. The sensitive poets of the Victorian age were extremely prone to this pessimism. The age exposed a struggle between the industrial revolution and the forces of Christianity and faith. The advance of science destroyed much of the existing faith, it could not provide another spiritual anchor. As a result, many Victorian poets felt lost and lost their faith. In the texture of Victorian poetry, there runs a prominent line of pessimism, mostly in the work of the group of poets consisting chiefly of Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, James Thomson, and Edward Fitzgerald. By pessimism we mean, if not a philosophy of life, at least those who feel the dark side of things towards life-based. To express melancholy is not necessarily to be a pessimist unless this melancholy is got hold. Each individual in this life has his or her own view. People shape their lives according to the environment they live in it. The person himself or herself is the one who chooses to either live with a pessimistic or optimistic view. Many people are acquainted with a pessimistic view of life due to the terror they have encountered in the world. There is a difference between a pessimistic person and an optimistic person. A pessimist's nature leans toward a negative perspective while an optimist is considered to have a positive perspective toward situations. There have been many circumstances mankind has encountered, from killings, murdering, robbery, scare, and terrorism, all the way to the terrors of war which could lead to a pessimistic viewpoint. With all these catastrophes people have encountered throughout time, pessimism is considered to be a negative perspective. According to Cuddon (1976), much of the writing considered issues resulting from the industrial revolution, the influence of the notion of progress, and movements of political and social remedy. Sara (2006) mentioned that it has been a time of fast industrial development social disorder and scientific discovery of new ideas and theories arose, challenging accepted beliefs. Therefore, Victorian poetry was recognized for religious doubts, personal despair, pessimism, and uncertainty about life and the human condition. One of the most pessimistic Victorian poets was Alfred Lord Tennyson. Alfred Lord Tennyson was

born on 6th August 1809 in Lincolnshire, England. He was one of the eminent Victorian poets. He was fourth among the twelve siblings. He showed a talent for writing at an early age. He wrote an epic poem of almost 6,000 lines at the age of twelve. Alfred, Lord Tennyson is recognized as the most interpretative poet of the 19th century in the Victorian age. Tennyson was also known as a national poet. His poetry reflects many inclinations of his time that made his poetry well spread in his life. The poetry of Tennyson had been universal, it would have made him more common both during his time and after his death. His pessimism was reflected in some of his popular poems

Modernism, in its roomy definition, is a modern idea, notion, or, application of modern habits. Modernism describes the modernist movement, as a set of cultural practices associated with cultural movements, originally arising in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Modernism was a revolt against the conservative values of realism. According to Lewis (2000), modernism can be defined as the rejection of tradition and its repetition, integration, editing, summarization, revision, and parody in new styles. Modernism rejected the lasting certainty of enlightenment thinking. Samuel (1980) said that modern refers to many poets, movements, and many styles in the 20th century and 21st centuries. The term modern” also covers a broad range in the art world. It refers to literary works written since the onset of World War 1, [1914-1917] and it also refers to many experiments in content and form. The term “modernism” refers to an obvious break from past traditions. Modern poets belong to America and Britain and many other parts of the world.

Early Modern Poetry was in the form of compact lyrics: personal ideas and feelings often in a song-like style. These lyrics symbolized the modernist movement in the 20th century. The modernist movement started at the beginning of the 20th century roughly in 1965. It was an unexpected break from the traditional ways of viewing and interacting with the world. Experimentation and individualism had become virtues.

What characterized modern poetry is an open poetic form, free verse, discontinuous narrative, juxtaposition, intertextuality, classical illusion, borrowing from other cultures and languages enjambment, untraditional use of metaphors, and fragmentation. Multiple narrative points of view, use of colloquial idiom in place of poetic diction, and biting irony. According to Awan( 2015) modern poetry has also thematic characteristics are; the breakdown of social norms and cultural sureties, dislocation of meaning and sensation from its ordinary context, state of the hopeless or pessimistic individual in the face of a disorderly future, disillusionment, rejection of history, and the substitution of a mythical past, borrowed without chronology, product of the metropolis, nature as a romantic tendency, religion, humanitarianism, stream of consciousness, overwhelming technological changes of the 20th century, existentialism, nihilism, imagism, and surrealism. In the 20th century, many experiments have been made on the technique and diction of poetry.

Thomas Hardy’s perspective on life mainly originated from an ultimate pessimistic view where he supposed that human problems cannot be solved. Thomas Hardy portrayed his pessimistic views about humanity in his poem “*Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave*” is one of these poems.

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in the region of Dorset shire and went on to become a novelist and poet. According to The Norton Anthology (1962), Hardy most notable works include ‘Tess of the d’Urbervilles,’ ‘Far from Madding Crowd,’ ‘The Mayor of “Caster bridge,” and ‘Collected poems.’ Though Hardy considers himself primarily a poet, he is well known for both his novels and poems. He started his literary career with the novel ‘Far from the Madding Crowd’ in 1874. He published his poems first in the year 1898, though he started writing them long before that. He was a Victorian realist, and he acutely criticized the then-existing values and social pressures of people. A man lauded by senior poets and an inspiration to the younger ones, Thomas Hardy, died in 1928.

## METHODS AND MATERIAL

This study uses the descriptive and analytical method to achieve the purpose of the study to show how Thomas Hardy reflect the idea of pessimism as one of the features of modernism in his poem. “*Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?*”

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

It is an exciting idea produced by Thomas that the dead can hear others. People bury underground, after their death, but perhaps their soles and feelings are alive. In Thomas Hardy’s poem “*Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?*” The gloomy and ironic nature makes an idea that leads the reader to question the about dead people and their lives after death.

*Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?*”

*“Ah, are you digging on my grave,  
My loved one?—planting rue?”*  
*—“No: yesterday he went to wed  
One of the brightest wealth has bred.  
‘It cannot hurt her now,’ he said, 5  
‘That I should not be true.’”*  
*“Then who is digging on my grave?  
My nearest dearest kin?”*  
*—“Ah, no: they sit and think, ‘What use!  
What good will planting flowers produce? 10  
No tendance of her mound can loose  
Her spirit from Death’s gin.”*  
*“But someone digs upon my grave?  
My enemy?—prodding sly?”*  
*—“Nay: when she heard you had passed the Gate 15  
That shuts on all flesh soon or late,  
She thought you no more worth her hate,  
And cares not where you lie.”*  
*“Then, who is digging on my grave?  
Say—since I have not guessed!” 20*  
*—“O it is I, my mistress dear,  
Your little dog, who still lives near,  
And much I hope my movements here  
Have not disturbed your rest?”*  
*“Ah, yes! You dig upon my grave . . . 25  
Why flashed it not on me  
That one true heart was left behind!  
What feeling do we ever find  
To equal among human kind  
A dog’s fidelity!” 30*  
*“Mistress, I dug upon your grave  
To bury a bone, in case  
I should be hungry near this spot  
When passing on my daily trot.  
I am sorry, but I quite forgot 35*

***It was your resting-place.”***

The poem describes a dead woman buried in the ground and she was sleeping quietly suddenly, her grave has been disturbed by someone. The woman keeps guessing who the disturber is, and each time her guess is struck down. Every time the poet tried to surprise the reader with a new disturber which makes the poem creates a certain sense of sympathy for the speaker, Hardy uses this irony to convey his theme of death to say that the living people don't care about the dead. Kelly (1998) mentioned that Ruby in the poem ***“Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?”*** ***“This poem has a structure which is familiar, although not connected with poetry then turns everything on its head.”*** In Hardy's ironic humor he portrayed a dead woman who has high anticipation of the living people: her loved one will remain forever faithful to her; her family will continue to look after her exactly as they did in life: and even her enemy's hatred will not fade out. The poem put down her hopes and reveals them as vain and ridiculous. Hardy sets up his humor carefully, with a poet's attention to the language he uses.

In ***“Ah, are you digging my grave?”***, from his collection *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), which is clearly about death and the remembrance after death, a satiric turn by the poet displayed the expectations of the grave's inmate as bad and invalid. The poem, written in the form of a dialogue, is a good depiction of Hardy's often gloomy sense of humor, and of his tendency to expose romantic or passionate depictions of love, life, and death.

In the first stanza the poet presented a sad ironic event and depicts how the living people don't appraise the dead from the beginning, the speaker, who is a dead woman buried underground, thinks the one who visited her was her husband moving around her grave, but an identified speaker then tells her that he has gone to get married ***“the brightest wealth has bred.”***(Line 4). It is explained that the husband thinks that he ***“cannot hurt her now”***(5), and it comes as quite a surprise to find that the husband would be off getting remarried when his wife still expects him to be visiting her grave. The irony put into dramatic form the fact that her husband no longer appraises or thinks about his dead wife, and makes that fact all the more melancholy. Although people think that dead people would have no thoughts or feelings anymore. After finding out about her husband, the speaker's next guess is that it's her ***“nearest and dearest kin”*** (8) who come to visit her. The voice then goes ahead and explains to her that her family members do not feel that their mourning will be of any use in trying to lose her ***“from Death”*** (12). She was depressed when she knew that her family doesn't even find time to come visit her, which really serves to enforce the theme that the living people don't appraise or even have any interest in the dead. The speaker realizes that the few people to who she is closest do not have any appreciation or consideration for her feelings or desires this is a cruel reality, and the savage truth in this situation, really emphasizes the point that the living people should give the dead more appreciation and consideration.

In the last stanza of the poem, the reader becomes aware that the person who was visiting the grave is the speaker's dog, and this is when the impact of the irony reaches a critical point in showing Hardy's theme. When the speaker understands this, she becomes somewhat relaxed that at least ***“one true heart was left behind”*** and that someone remembers her. She expresses happiness and revels over how there is nothing ***“equal among human kind / A dog's fidelity”*** (29-30). That feeling soon vanishes, however, when the dog tells her that he ***“dug upon [her] grave / to bury a bone”*** (31-2) and that he ***“quite forgot / It was [her] resting place”*** (35-6). People usually consider a dog, as a symbol of loyalty and love for its owner as a very powerful choice of animal for Hardy to use because the reader expects to that at the very least the dog would have some lasting loyalty towards the owner. It comes as shock though to find that everyone has not only forgotten the speaker but has more or less completely deserted her. It is said that the dead are often forgotten and not taken into consideration or appreciated by the living. It leads to asking if anyone is really remembered or considered when they are dead. It also poses the question, that what if the dead actually do have thoughts and feelings just like humans do, and every day they are treated by people who don't take their feelings into consideration? Hardy's poem and its dark humor and wry nature have a very serious theme, and the irony is the most effective way in which it is depicted.

**Claire (2012)** mentioned that from her husband and her kin to her worst enemy and loyal animal friend, the deceased woman discovers that no one of them cares or even visits her grave. The dog does, she became optimistic but, mistakenly, the dog comes only to ***“bury a bone not to visit her”***. It shows as though the woman has not lived with those people and she has no memories with them; rather, everything that she was to them was vanished and locked, like herself, in the grave.

It is shown clearly that Thomas Hardy used cyclic marks of mockery to display one theme which is that ***“the most loyal among the living can dismiss the dead”***. The reader can infer that Thomas Hardy was trying to say that Victorian society was too closely intertwined, and while the separation could be hard on each other often times it would be necessary. Hardy also goes to great lengths to show that no matter what any person will be

forgotten after his/her death, whether it is a week or over many years. Hardy uses irony throughout his poem, "*Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?*" to accentuate his theme, "the most loyal among the living can forget the dead"

**Kebin (2022)** mentioned that the main theme of this poem is death, which also appears in several different forms throughout Thomas Hardy's work. There is a great deal of disappointment and pessimism expressed in this poem. Death and the afterlife are tragic things in this poem. The point Hardy makes is that there is no love or hate that lasts death. Although it is true that there is no love or hate that lasts long, death is a course of life. I think that this woman, despite her pessimism, is also selfish because she wants everyone she loves to be sad about her death, and close people should come and visit her and stop the motion of their life. We are people our nature is oblivion and this is the track of life and there is no room for her to grieve about people's ignorance after her death.

The poem "*Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave*" is completely and solely concerned with the notions of death and a subtle possibility of after-life. The poet tries to expound on death and remembrance of the romantic idea which inspires them. It is knowledgeable that death causes survival memories of the one who has passed especially to those who are dear to us. But Hardy destroys this notion to portray that death has always been a doomed end and memories do not remain but perishes with the individual concerned. Thus the concept of remembrance is very much delusional. I disagree with Hardy I believe that death is one of the mores of life like birth we are born and we are going to die or passed after a while. Oblivion is one of the aspects of life. By the time we forgot our dearest after their death and we ourselves are going to be forgotten, so we must not be pessimistic and selfish to force others to feel sorry and sad all the time.

Another Poet from the Victorian Era was Alfred Lord Tennyson who reflects the idea of pessimism and selfishness in his poem "*Break, Break, Break*" "Alfred, Lord Tennyson composed the poem "Break, Break, Break" in the year 1835. It was written about a sad situation and the demise of his close and dear friend Arthur Hallam. The poet laments the demise of a close friend, so the poem "Break, Break, Break" is an elegy written to Hallam. However, this sonnet remains a broad contemplation of mortality, desperation, pessimism, and selfishness of the poet through its ideas and themes. The only kind of continuation in the speaker's life is optimism itself since nothing will ever replace the death of this friend. No matter what happens, this person will "never come back" to the poet. In turn, death actually emerges as the only real thing in life, even if it forces people like the speaker to recognize that everything else about existence is impermanent. Death is a common theme of great poets; however, Tennyson deals with it in a sustained personal way. Tennyson wrote his poetry in the aftermath of the death of his best friend, Arthur Hallam. The poem "Tithonus" deals with the exhaustion of life in the world and the desire for death. the poem " His most famous and celebrated poem, "In Memoriam," is a long poem thinking about the afterlife and Tennyson's desire to die to join his beloved friend after death. All these things show a pessimistic view of Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Despair and pessimism were the major elements of Tennyson's life, and it also attached to his poetry. He suffered from his parent's death and the death of his close friend Arthur Hallam. Tennyson argues for despair in his poetry and talks about his struggle to use appropriate words for the expression of his feelings. He also demonstrates the importance of poetry in loss and sorrow. Some of his poems are excessively overwhelmed with grief and despair.

## CONCLUSION

Modernist and Victorian eras poets composed poetry to reflect their attitudes on society, the poets of the Modernist movement shortened their stanzas, used concise syntax, and ironically juxtaposed traditional meter and rhyme structure with doomed bleak tones to create anxiety within their poetry, which consider being one of the characteristics of Hardy Thomas poetry. Thomas Hardy belongs to the Victorian era and applies features of modernity to his poetry, so he is considered a contemporary and veteran poet. One of the most important features of modern poetry is Hardy's ambiguity in terms of language and meaning, which characterizes his era and the Romantic period that preceded it and is so pessimistic. However, Hardy stands apart from the Victorian and Romantic writers by occupying his own space. Using the ambiguity and features of modernity, he developed a satirical way of departing from the traditional style of the Victorian era. Hardy's poems showed an ambiguous tone due to this unusual style, suggesting that he was drawn to the features of modern poetry with its pessimistic features. According to Chakravarty (1970), Professor Ambercrombie believes that Hardy stands as a "portent of the modern age in poetry", so Hardy was seen as the contemporary father of English poetry because his pre-eminent style surpassed his era. Thomas Hardy broke these Victorian fundamentals by using: disjointed and concise syntax, shortened stanzas, and negative tones that contrast with the traditional form and rhyme scheme.

Hardy's voice shows his readers his pessimism through a deceased woman guessing who is coming to visit her after her death. Although it is clear that Thomas Hardy is one of the poets who knew how to portray his portrait which is full of discouragement, pessimism regret, and disappointment. It is known that death is a collapse of all interpersonal relationships- relations that are based on love and hate. Our personalities are based on the love or hatred that we obtained. The deceased woman in this poem feels pessimistic and sees that not only has she been forgotten by her most beloved, but also by her worst enemy. She is told that her enemy "cares not where you lie". As with her loved ones. This shows that neither love nor hate lasts in this life, so people should not be pessimistic and selfish after death like the deceased woman who was so pessimistic and selfish I believe that this woman although she is pessimistic and full of selfishness and egotism' narcissism because she wanted her beloved closed relatives, friends, and even her enemies to care about her after death is the course of life we gradually forget our dearest and life goes on. Life and death are courses of life.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor *Ali Othman Alghamdi* Dean of the College of Science and Arts Elmikhwa Branch El Baha University for his encouragement, in writing this research. I would also like to thank Dr. *Ahmed Almontsheri*, for his advice, and assistance in keeping my progress on this article. My grateful thanks are also extended to Professor *Osman Saad Ali* for his help in making the layout of the research.

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