



Pessimism in the selected poems of Thomas Hardy

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Abstract— *The recurrent thought that good or positive will subdue and evil as well as negative will aggravate is known as pessimism. Thomas Hardy was trained as an architect but is famous as a poet and novelist of the Victorian Era (1837–1901). His view of life is mainly centred around this tendency. He has a different outlook towards life. He primarily focuses on the exposition of sufferings as his themes reflect. His main concern is to exhibit things in a miserable and pathetic state. He lost hope in life and thinks that the human condition will not improve. In his poems, death is not an escape from the weariness of life. This paper attempts to examine his pessimistic tendency by taking his few poems. His poems contain themes like death, loneliness, love and loss, war and its aftermath etc. Hardy's events of life also find space in his poems and play a very significant role in his pessimistic outlook. And especially the death of Emma shook him from the inside. He began his poetic career in 1898 with the publication of Wessex poems. Its setting is in the desolate and bleak landscape of Dorset. Until 1928, his death, he published eight volumes of poetry. He faces several bleak and pathetic conditions in his life like the Napoleonic Wars, World War, his near-death experience and most importantly death of Emma all contribute to his melancholic tone. The Victorian dilemma also touched his personality. However, his later poems exhibit a shift in his tone from melancholic to hopeful. In this article researcher has explored the pessimistic temperament in the selected poems of Thomas Hardy.*



Keywords— *Pessimism, Miserable, Deplorable, Weariness, Wessex, Melancholic, Dilemma, Optimistic.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Pessimism is the attitude that mainly focuses on negative outcomes. Nothing will be achieved desirably. The word pessimism has its origin in the Latin word 'pessimus' meaning 'worst'. A person with a pessimistic view always extracts negativity. Think of a glass half filled with water, a person with a pessimistic tendency finds it half empty. Here the meaning or purpose of life is somewhere missing. The main focus lies on the flaws, weaknesses, wrongs, and dark side rather than strengths. Furthermore, the primary assumption is that all positive or good things will not survive. Generally, pessimists have a negative and skeptical outlook, they question the validity of positive outcomes. Almost all these features are reflected in Hardy's several poems and novels.

Thomas Hardy (02 June 1840 – 11 January 1928) well known English novelist and poet belongs to the Victorian era (1837-1901). His style of writing is very unique. He attracts his audience through his different outlook towards

life. His peculiar view towards life discovers the sufferings of human beings. His work exhibits the influence of contemporary society. The Victorian age goes through various negative changes like the rise of poverty, child labour, and prostitution but at the same time there were several positive changes in terms of social and political development, we witness economic progress, industrialization, stable government, urbanization, and advancement in science and technology. But when we look into his poems we find deep depictions of the darker side of society. It is not bad to depict society realistically but always focusing on the negative side brings the impression that one is a pessimist. His realism is different and he believes that social evil cannot be erased from society and the human condition is getting worse day by day. His themes are centred around death, love and loss, inhuman ironies of war, ravages of time etc. Death is not an escape in his poems. His works like "Ah, Are You Digging on My

Grave?", "Channel Firing", "Neutral Tone", and "Darkling Thrush", all focus on pessimism and evoke pathos.

Objectives of the Study:

This research paper intends to explore pessimism in Thomas Hardy's selected poems, its origin, whether his selected poems reflect any hope and how he is a different realist. He is undoubtedly realistic but there is a lamenting tone that presents him partially accepting the situation and partially engrossed in it. There is a wide difference between pessimism and realism. Realism is the practice of accepting the truth with the intent of working on it to improve the situation. A person with a realistic attitude cannot conclude good or worse. He or she projects it as it is.

Research Questions

- 1- What is the reason behind Thomas Hardy's pessimism?
- 2- How is Thomas Hardy different from a realist?
- 3- Do Thomas Hardy's selected poems reflect any hope?

Methodology:

For the proposed research paper, an exploratory design is followed. The qualitative research methodology has been used. When it comes to research, then Data plays an important role, it is mainly of two types: Primary Data and Secondary Data. In this research, the original text of the poem serves as primary data through which the elements of pessimism have been analyzed. Further, the articles of other litterateurs on Thomas Hardy available in journals and encyclopedias serve as secondary data.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pessimism is the tendency to emphasize the darker side. Thomas Hardy is considered a pessimist as he always painted the dark, brutish version of life. Undoubtedly, there has been quite a lot of work on it, not only in areas of his poetry but also in his novels. Many critics and researchers felt that his pessimism has a deep root in his upbringing, deprived state of his life, relationship with two women; his cousin Tryphena Sparks and his first wife Emma Lavinia.

Gifford played an important role in the construction of the plot lines of his several novels. But others felt that his pessimism arises due to the age in which he flourishes and many find him realistic as well. In recent years a lot of study has been done on the modernist element in his poetry as well.

Thomas Hardy did not have a pleasurable and smooth life since childhood. He was born out of wedlock. His parents were married six months before his birth. And at the time of his birth, he was declared dead and about to be disposed of. According to Gibson, his faint cry made nurses realize he

was alive (1). At the very outset of his life, he experienced a near-death situation and the possible recounting of this incident by his mother instilled in him a different outlook towards life, especially a fascination for death, gloom and pessimism.

Hardy is a person who believes in myth, his work also contained biblical allusions. He depicts human beings in miserable and deplorable conditions. But he did not suggest any solution for it. He believes that person himself is responsible for his action and he also loses his faith under the influence of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Every aspect of his world is painted with hopelessness, darkness and horror. Faith in religion is also not working for people. But in the latter half of his life, he gradually turned towards religion and shed his pessimistic tendency.

Limitations

In modern times searching for data and resources is no longer complex. People can easily search it on the internet and several hardcopies are also easily available. In the present study the researcher has relied mainly on the reliable web sources which have been mentioned in the reference section.

Significance of the study:

This research paper will help the readers to comprehend Thomas Hardy's sources of pessimism through his selected poems. They will also realize the traces of hope in his poems and how he views life differently.

III. ANALYSIS

Channel Firing

Thomas Hardy wrote this poem in 1914 shortly before World War 1. This poem is bleak and melancholic in the sense that it deals with war, bloodshed, mass slaughter and violence. Here it signifies that in Hardy's poem, death is not an escape because the speaker of this poem is one among the dead. Corpses disturbed by the gunnery practices awoke from their graves and felt that judgement day arises. Skeleton mourns that nothing has changed, the world remains the same as it was during their lifetime. Not only corpses but insects seem frightened. Here Hardy raised a dead person to spread a positive message. Human issues are unsolvable because they are not interested in solving them. Thomas Hardy is lamenting that this world is addicted to bloodshed, and violence by using the word "indifferent". This poem also signifies the loss of religious beliefs among the people. These people are not paying any heed to their God. These people are not transforming the nation on positive terms. This poem reflects a little bit of hope as people get enough time to improve upon their situation. Again in this poem, he paints the whole world with

pessimistic shade, grim, dark, and loses its hope. Everything is hit by chaos, violence, and disturbances. Humans are more inclined towards materialistic life. This greedy nature drags them into a competitive world. Humanity is erased and humans become more and more selfish, and self-centered day by day. Here again, the poet loses his interest in the world and its inhabitants. This poem is realistic as it paints the real situation of loss and chaos as usually happened during wartime. But the tone as well as the mood of Hardy seems pessimistic as he concludes that human problems are unsolvable and nothing much contributes to changing the scenario.

Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?

Thomas Hardy first published this poem in September 1913, in *Saturday Review*. Hardy again in this poem, like *Channel Firing*, presents the surprising idea that the dead can hear others. His vision towards the dead is different. Skeleton seems buried deep inside the Earth but feelings and emotions are still alive. In both cases, the carcass is disturbed by the living people. The selfish and self-centered nature of human beings is revealed in this poem as well. Corpse kept guessing the visitor's identity but she failed to reach the correct conclusion. Hardy through this poem presents the dark reality that living humans don't bother about dead people. A dead woman thinks that her loved ones, family, and relatives, will remain forever faithful towards her. But this is her illusion, in reality, they have forgotten her earlier. Her husband went for a second marriage and thinks that she will not get hurt by this. Then she thinks about her relatives, who believe that there's no use visiting a corpse with flowers, this will surely increase their sorrow and doesn't bring the skeleton back to life. The loneliness of this corpse is emphasized by the poet and she is desperate for companionship. Even though the dog is self-centred, he, like humans, forgets about the owner's grave. The dog is usually perceived as a generous creature but in Hardy's world, he lost his generosity. Distrust in human beings is deeply embedded in this poem.

Neutral Tones

Written by Thomas Hardy in the year 1867 but published in 1898 as a part of his collection of poems named "Wessex Poems and Other Verses". The poem revolves around the theme of loss, disappointment in love and the pain evoked after the heartbreak which ultimately led to psychological trauma. The tone and atmosphere are bleak, melancholic, and depressing. He chose the winter season, which is famous for dryness and life seems to have stopped in this season. Winter is not the season for growth. Winter here also signifies coldness in their relationship. After getting cheated on in his love life he provides readers with a complete altercation regarding his perception of the world.

He mentions in the poem that, on that particular day when he and his lady love realizes their grim relationship, everything like the sun looks to fade as getting scolded by God, losing its warmth, leaves turned grey, land lacks fertility. All contribute to his misery and unhappiness. He describes nature in lifelessness, decaying, uneasy and unpleasant form. The few words left between them signify their loneliness and they don't like each other's company. Due to the loss of a relationship he compares his beloved 's smile with death, bitterness, and threatening. A smile makes you feel at ease, releasing all your tension but his view regarding smiling is very different. Several negative words he employed in this poem are chidden, starving, grey, tedious, lost, dearest, bitterness, threatening, deceives, and wrong. Unlike the optimistic person who decides to start a fresh life after getting cheated on in their love life, the speaker of this poem seems not to have overcome his past relationship. His voice exhibits that he is in deep regret at the same time filled with bitterness. Thomas Hardy is hopeless about his situation and thinks that there is no way to beat this situation. And after this experience, he realizes that love is meant to deceive others.

Darkling Thrush

Hardy wrote this poem on the eve of the new century, first published in 1900 in his collection entitled *The Graphic*. The word darkling in the title signifies dusk, lightless. Hardy here again chooses the winter landscape, an extended metaphor for the deprived, deplete and decaying state of Western culture. The extensive use of machinery and the advancement of science and technology transformed the whole scenario. It has not only an immeasurable effect on people but also disturbed nature. Due to the industrial revolution, people lost their interest in nature which ultimately draws people away from God. And as they are turned away from skepticism, uncertainty, doubt, hopelessness, and gloominess invade their path. Western culture seemed to have died, damaged without suggesting any hope regarding its possibility of rebirth. Due to winter life seems lifeless, cheerless, dull and barren. Amid this harsh climate, he is alone standing in the woods. His loneliness and isolation are visible in this poem which is the main cause of his pessimism. "Weakening eye of the day" refers to the sun with less warmth, people must have lost companions. "Tangled-bine stems" refers to intermingling, an intermix of several problems, exhibiting a disturbed state. Then he presents lawlessness, chaos, disturbances and absence of joy with the word broken lyres. In this poem again he sees nature and paints it with bleakness, dismal, dreary and gloomy. He compares land with the corpse, wind lamenting death songs and every aspect of life and growth seemed to have stopped. Gloominess reached the height when he says people lost their passion, describing

uncertainty regarding their future. He says in the poem that people are residing inside their houses enjoying warmth; this mainly signifies two things. First, people are not paying attention to God's word. They are completely submerged in their life and forgets about God's lessons. The second thing is that the poet himself may be disturbed in his personal life for some personal reason, due to which he paints everything dull, dark, gloomy and lifeless. This point is valid to the extent that he failed to understand the hope reflected in the thrush's voice. Instead of looking deep into its voice, he begins stressing its bleak appearance. Thrush is old and weak, and its feathers are in a disfigured state. Representing people that hope is still alive in him even after facing a lot of traumas. Hardy presents thrush in a deplorable state because he has meagre hope regarding the Western culture and the transformation of people. "I was unaware", in the last line of the poem demonstrates that Hardy lost hope regarding the betterment of the situation. He is unable to trace any hope.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the above analysis, the first conclusion is that his work exhibits penetrating insight into Victorian England. The Victorian dilemma finds an extensive place in his writings. People's separation from God, the decline in faith, and the loss of spiritual significance give rise to cruelty, deception, uncertainty, and hopelessness among the people. This is the major cause of his pessimistic attitude.

The second conclusion is that he looks at things from a different perspective. Corpses get a voice in his poems. The way he paints nature is bleak, dreary and gloomy, reflecting his different vision. His selection of themes like loss, pain and helplessness in all his poems revolves around more or less these ideas. Winter season serves as a background in almost all his poems. He picks all those aspects that best complement his perspective. The central message that human problems are unsolvable is quite disturbing for the readers and reflects him as a different realist.

The third conclusion is that slight hope is reflected in Channel Firing as people get time to improve upon their behaviour. Then in Darkling Thrush, he hopes for a golden future which reflects his gradual shift towards hope.

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