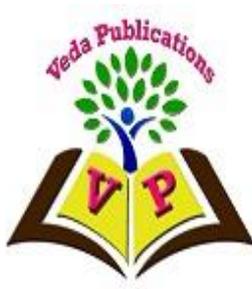




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**MELANCHOLIA AND PESSIMISM IN SOME OF THOMAS HARDY'S POEMS**

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Jouf University, College of Arts, Saudi ArabiaNora.h.alsaeid@ju.edu.saDOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.9113>**ABSTRACT**

Thomas Hardy is one of the poets of the nineteenth century and a pioneer of the twentieth century's poetics. More than two thirds of his poems dealt with many topics that are not absent, as they fluctuate between frustration, pessimism, loss, pain, death and life. One of the poet's creations, the unidentified speaker used it to express his point of view about life, death, despair, and other beautiful negative topics. These works require a lot of research and study to decipher the cause of the despair and depression that clouded the works of the poet Thomas Hardy. Despite the pessimistic view of life in many of his poems, it is, from the critics' point of view, attractive in its presentation. Where his pessimism is not considered a disease, but rather a point of view worthy of study and analysis. This paper will shed light mainly on the seeds of the poet's pessimism and how he presents the literary pessimism in a very attractive literary device.

Keywords: *Thomas Hardy, Nineteenth-Century Poetry, Darwinism, Pessimism, Concepts of Life and Death, Emma Poems, Immortality*



INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is a creative poet who drew the attention of his generation and followers not only to his genius, but to his distinctive view of life. His poems are marked by symbolic connotations of his pessimistic view of life through unauthorized symbols. These signs are understood between the lines. His sad writings need careful reading, as behind these writings there are many mysteries. Despite his sad and pessimistic writings, they carry many aesthetic and literary aspects that need analysis and literary taste. Thus, his pessimistic outlook is attractive to critics and researchers due to its ambiguity. The poet's melancholy view of life has its roots and inherited from special circumstances in his childhood and adulterous life. The poet's personal life, his relationship with his family, and his upbringing had a great impact on creating an unbeautiful view of life. The poet lived his childhood life with his mother, who closed the door on him without friends. The poet did not enjoy to his childhood, but turned from a child to a serious adult. His mother, Jemima, is described by Claire Tomalin as "powerful, rather than tender," with a "dark streak of gloom and anger" (43). Then with his grandmother who was spending the night with stories full of horror and ghosts. The circumstances that his village went through, including heinous crimes and the burial of people in front of his eyes, had a dark impact on his life. When he decided to marry, he married a religious woman influenced by spirituality. (Ramazani, 959)

The poet's reading of the Bible and his study of ancient tragedies and philosophical and scientific works were the basis for the formation of his dark view of life. Ernest Breneck indicated that there are

more than 600 Bible stories in his works (43). Evelyn Hardy mentions that when Hardy arrived London 1861, he brought with him two letters from Bible (57). After the age of 27, the poet read Charles Darwin's book, *The Origin of the Species*, and it had a great influence that made the poet deviate. Thomas Hardy began to think in a different way, which is that if there was a God running the universe, he would have been able to relieve the pain, tragedies and sorrows of people. As for the poet's influence on Greek writings, the poet read Roman and Greek stories and studied French, Latin and German languages, and this influence appeared in many of his fictional works. In Saturday Reviews, he finds many articles about the disputes between Christianity and Science (Bloom, 18). Thomas Hardy read many works of contemporary writers as Thomas Huxley, Thomas Carlyle, Walter Pater and John Ruskin, as well as the poetry of Robert Browning and Algernon Charles Swinburne, which helped to the development of his pessimistic and philosophical view (Gossin, 44). Hardy believes strongly by the idea of Fate, he is a determinist who believes that Man is not controlled by God but by the circumstances. Thomas Hardy thinks that the man is circled by "circumstances, inflicting cruelty on one another, or pursued by a malign destiny." (Abrams, 112). All these family and societal circumstances made the poet lose the sense of the joy and beauty of life. On the contrary, it built the feeling of frustration and loss in the midst of this universe that is governed by external circumstances which are outside human control. And the poet's reading of the Greek tragedy also made him feel that God is the cause of man's misery, because God is jealous of man's happiness (Sanders, 464), so the final way out for man is death. Since death will cause



alleviation of all those tragedies experienced by human beings.

Accordingly, the poet resorts to poetry to express personal stories and confessions of his pessimism. The poems are an important file that reveals secret documents about his closed life. His grief was not personal. Rather, the poet reveals that his grief turned to be a universal grief associated with the sorrows of the others. His poems show notions of death, grave, frustration, sadness, ...etc. The poet wrote more than 900 poems many of them inspire the meanings of hardness, loneliness, sadness, death, and disappointments. Some of the titles of the poems suggest death and fantasies of funeral, execution, and grave images 'The Fading Rose', 'Are you Digging on My Grave', 'The Portrait of a Woman to be Hanged', and many others which recall death. Other titles of poems give the impression of last moments, last chances and loneliness as 'Hap', 'Missed Train', 'A Broken Appointment', 'The Last Leaf', 'Come Not; Yet Come!'. Other titles inspires frustration, gloominess, and darkness as "A wish for Unconsciousness', 'Neutral Tones' , 'The Impercipient', 'The Flower's Tragedy', 'Murmurs in the Gloom', 'How Great My Grief'. Indeed, if one wants to defend the poet and consider him a humanist or a realist, one might not be able to do so, because that the titles of the poems will give a first impression of the negative content of the poem.

DEATH

The poet is not satisfied with the sadness and gloominess that surround his life, but rather turns to universalize them which make those sorrows appear as a cosmic formula. For him, every man's life is surrounded by sadness and misery which disturb his

dreams. His poem 'First or Late' depicts a formula that grief and joyless cannot meet each other, if joy comes early, grief come late. The poet repeats the same cosmic formula that sadness and joy do not meet, and this is due to the fact that sadness envies man for happiness in 'Going and Staying'. According to Blackmur, Hardy is imaginatively free "most purely when responding directly or personally to death or the dead " (72). Death, for the poet, is an inevitable and comfortable end for all human beings. It is a kind of a beautiful escape from the frustrations and tragedies of life, and the grave, for him, is a place of rest. In his poem "She at his Funeral" describes grave as a "resting place" (1). And the notion of immortality will never be found but in death: "The eternal thin in mon,/ That heeds no call to die" (Heredity, 11-12). Death, for Thomas Hardy, is a form of punishment, a form of self-flagellation. In 'The Woman in the Rye' the speaker is a wife wished for her husband's death one day, and when he died, she wished that she would be punished with the same punishment. Punishment is a Divine judgment. Death is a form of justice: "Everybody else, then going / And still left when the fair was" ('Exeunt Omness', 1-2). Death is a path that all people must take, like their predecessors, and it is the end of every existing being. In his poem 'Looking Across', the poet wishes to take the same fate that five of his family already have taken: " And my wraith asks. Why/ since these calm lie/ Are not five out these" (23-25). So, the calmness of the grave brings the comfort and tranquility that man lacked in his life. The poet repeats the same wish in 'Life and Death after Sunrise', where he wrote this poem at the beginning of his influence on the Darwinian concept. Clearly, the poet's belief in the idea of life and death as a



cosmic cycle are identified in most of his of the lines. Perkins surmises from Hardy's poetry "that the only possibility of meaningful social intercourse is with the dead" (151). In the verses of the poem, two men meet and ask about the latest news: "A man meets the one with waggon,/ "well" the waggoner says, "what's the news" (18-20). The birth of baby Jack and the death of John is a natural, cosmic cycle. In his poem 'Saying Good Bye' the recurrence of farewells is considered a cosmic routine of our daily life: "we are always saying / Goodbye, goodbye/ in work, in playing" (1-3). Southworth states that the concept of death for Thomas Hardy cannot be described in a complete negation or affirmation, but rather characterized by indifference (460). This attitude of indifference can be seen easily in 'Regret Not Me' when he says: "I lie uncaring" (3) because death will free him from the earthy sorrows. He prefers to sleep "beneath the sunny tree" (2) "peacefully" (3). Death is still the easy escape from the fears of worries of life where "there's no more to be done or feared" ('After The Last Breath' 1-2). The poet escapes from the earthy world to "another sphere/ where no pain is" ('Why Do I' 12-13). The death worries him only in the idea that he will sleep alone. In some poems, the poet expresses his concern, which remains the source of his sadness, that he will not remain in the memory of his lovers, where the image of the dead will gradually fade in the minds of his people. The source of sadness is the lack of loyalty and insincerity of the husband and children. The idea that a person is alone after death is the cause of the poet's depression. The poet looks to a stage beyond death in his poem 'To Be Forgotten', it is the second death. It is death in the memories of the lovers and friends and families. The idea is repeated in the poem 'Ah,

Are You Digging in my Grave', 'His Immortality', and 'Her Immortality'. In such poems Hardy succeeds in describing awful settings for death to create a balance between aesthetics and philosophy. 'Her immortality' explains Hardy's anxious proliferation after death. In 'Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?', the poet adopts a humorous way to endue his anxiety after death.

ESTRANGED LOVE

The poetry of Thomas Hardy shows his suffering during the forty years that he lived through from the lack of integration of his love, not on the contrary feelings of pain, regret and endurance." However, as she later describes, "What makes these poems remarkable...is the precise nature of that regret" (O'Rourke). Although many of the poems were written by the poet, only five of them clearly showed his failure in love and alienation with the relationships he lived. In 'Her Dilemma,' he illustrates a stage of the poet's attempt to break free from the boundaries of love, especially in his relationship with Emma. There is a question that arises as to why the poet tries to free himself from the bondage of love, even though such relationships are personal decisions that were not imposed on the poet, but were of his own choosing. Claire Tomalin presents a logical analysis that the poet's period of moving to London in 1862 and living alone was able to complicate many love relationships with many London girls. But during the same period, he held a kind of love of another kind, which is his love for poetry, and he found his attachment to this type of love more than any relationship with any girl he met during that period. (73). The poet's deepening of poetry in that period made him merge with the open



culture of London, which had a great influence on a young man of Thomas Hardy's age. That girdle built in him the idea of the impossibility of finding the right person who would correspond to the poet's new ideas. His poem 'Her Dilemma' bears so many thoughts that so much disappointment in finding the right person. The poem rejects common notions of organized marriage and family formation. Thus, the idea of marriage became the first bleak cloud that clouded the poet's life. All the negative adjectives imply meanings of frustration and disappointment as: "sunless" (1), "mildewed" (2), "uneven" (2), "wasted", "antique" (3) and "dull". Also negative verbs are used to support as: "were silent" (1) and "broke"(4), plus the nouns "nothing" and "monotones" (4).

In his quatrains poem 'Neutral Tones', the poet shocks the reader, as instead of making the reader enjoy the romance of the meeting between two lovers, the beloved looks at her lover, wants to leave and stay away from him. Because it is still late, with differences and struggles in the past, the current emotional feelings could not forget the previous pain, "[y]our eyes on me were as eyes/ that rove over tedious riddles of years ago."(4-5). He opens the poem with gloomy atmosphere: "We stood by a pond that winter day" (1), and ends with the same: "And a pond edged with greyish leaves"(16). The poem uses many words that indicate the strangeness and melancholy of the meeting between the two lovers. The poem also contains many words that do not fit each other as in "love deceives" (13) and the smile is ""the deadest thing"(9) he has ever seen. Feelings of depression and despair cloud the general atmosphere of the poem, and the hero does not try

to find any kind of solution to ease the intensity of the meeting, but rather accepts the idea of deceiving love as it is.

Feelings of acceptance in his previous poem turn into rebellious feelings that are completely opposed in his poem 'Shut Out that Moon'. The poem opens with a very disappointed mode and with the poet's desire to close the window so not to see the moon again as it is the end of his happiness: "shut out that moon" (1). This stealing moon had stolen a lot of the poet's youth and happiness. The poet tries to avoid many scenes that may provoke feelings of love that have ended in the past. In this poem, the poet explains that the reason for his sadness is that his beloved was not worthy of all that love, that she was disguised as a mistress "[s]he wears too much the guise she wore" (3), and that she deceived him in one way or another for long time "With years-deep dust"(5). The poet concludes the poem that life and love were not what he had hoped for "[t]oo fragrant was Life's early bloom" (23), and here the poet summarizes one of the sources of his pessimism, which is the failure in love. In his poem 'And There was a Great Calm', the poet fills the poems with many negative feelings toward WWI. There are "much despair" and a lot of "anger" (2). The negative feelings are universal emotion for "young, weak and old" (4).

THE LOSS OF HIS WIFE

There is a large part of the poet's sadness and pessimism about life, and that dark look lies in the poet's grief over the death of his first wife, Melia or Emma. In many of his poems, the poet expressed his wish to meet her once and often imagine her calling him to discover that she was an illusion. In the poem



'The ruined Maid', the poet depicts "O, melia, my dear, this doe everything crown/ who could have supposed I should meet y in Town (1-2)". The poet realizes that it is impossible to meet his wife again in the same place: "now you are not as you were" ('The Voice', 2). In the same pessimistic tone, the poet remembers the places he used to meet his late wife and tries to recall memories in the same places. In the poem 'A Dream or No', the poet asks why he went to the same places, "Why go to Saint-Juliot tone? And he repeats the same experience and the same inquiry in his poem 'At Castle Boterel'. The poet always expresses his great remorse because of his lack of interest in his faithful wife and his preoccupation with her. This regret is repeated in many of his poems. In one of his poems, the poet writes on the tongue of his wife that she is his life partner, but he "never sees [her] faithful phantom" ('The Hunting', 3). In his poem 'Without Ceremony', the poet regrets that he could not say good-by to her. Another poem sees her ghost when Hardy was in the garden and some trees bent musically and form stone shadow, he imagines ghostly form of Emma. The shadows "shaped . . . / . . . the shade that a well-known head and shoulders / Threw there when she was gardening." ('The Shadow on the Stone', 20-21), Hardy's recurring remorse is expressed again in his poem 'The Going', in which he uses the words "going" and "vanishing" (31) instead of the word death. He refers to Emma's death as in "close your term here, up and be gone / Where I could not follow"(4-5) and "your great going"; 'blankness' (19); "your vanishing" , and as "such swift fleeing" (40). The word dead is used twice, when he regrets the past days: "those days long dead ... and strive to seek / That time's renewal?"(30-31), and when he refers

to himself: "I seem but a dead man." (38). The poet's crying out of her death is clear, the poet can not express his feelings in words:

I seem but a dead man held on end

To sink down soon. ...

O you could not know

That such swift fleeing

No soul foreseeing –

Not even I – would undo me so! (38-43)

When the poet went to Stinsford Churchyard where his wife was buried, the poet realized that one day he had wounded her. In his poem "When Oat were Reaped" he remembers that wound : ' I wounded one whow's there'(3). Sometimes the poet considers neglecting his wife a great crime that he did not realize when she was alive. In his poem 'The Rift', considers himself as an unconscious criminal since he never " never ... knew or gussed [his] crime" (9). And if the poet was more affectionate with his wife, he gave her a lot to be happy : "[he] would have trod besides [her]/ To guard [her] feet all day"('Known Had I', 2-3). William Morgan mentioned that Thomas Harry's feelings of remorse from time to time are among the dilemmas that led him to a lot of sadness and despair (227).

CONFLICTS BETWEEN FATE AND RELIGION

In 'A Wish For Unconsciousness, 'the poet depicts life in a constant struggle. He portrays life as something unbearable and this is a source of the poet's pessimism. This struggle with life led the poet not to believe in the existence of God, which makes it difficult to believe in heaven. In 'Hap', the poet explains the cause of sadness and conflict in life,



which is blind chance not Destiny, not God, is the source of suffering. The suffering experienced by man is not due to the wrath of God, but rather because of blind coincidence

Religion is of no use to him and its relationship to the fence is very weak and influenced by the scientific orientation of the nineteenth century. In his poem 'Christmas 1924', he expresses his disappointment and despair. The poet expresses his loss of hope in religion to be a reason to live in peace. Fate is connected with grief in 'How Great my grief' in which he dues the cause of his grief to his fate. The poems of 1859 depict a stage after the poet loses his religion and tries to find a convincing scientific explanation for the events in which man live. In 'The Respectable Burgher on the Higher Criticism' he doubts the existence of Adam: "[t]hat clerks and people must prepare/ To doubt if Adam ever were" (2-3). And "David was no giant-slayer," (8). In the 17 lines of 'God's Funeral', the narrator of the poem describes the sighting of a slow-moving procession "across a twilit plain". The body seen seems to be a man "at first seemed man-like" (10). But later transfers "to an amorphous cloud of marvellous size" (11) or "endowed with wings of glorious range". Despite this, in his 'The Dynasts' the poet did not completely separate from the church, but rather he was reading the Bible and enjoying hearing the sounds of music emanating from the church, and he tried to find a kind of complete religion for the sake of man. Man is governed by necessity and not by free will. He is a dwarf of the external cosmic forces that control his life. However, the poet sees that man is trying to resist external forces. This Free Will is an

illusion that cannot be achieved in a universe dominated by the forces of external nature.

Even in the poet's dealing with the philosophy of history, we find that he addressed it in terms of Free Will. In some of his poems he discusses the idea of the Free Will and Necessity. Apollo writes in his article "The Moira of Aeschylus and the Immanent Will of Thomas Hardy." That "The elements of Necessity within and Free Will Within run through many of his poems" (433). Immanent Will is unconscious and blind, Dickinson writes that "the central essence of the whole scheme of the universe is the Immanent Will, fabric of modern philosophy. The Immanent Will is a blind, unconscious force." (532). The point being made here is that God has been viewed by theologians in many different ways, with somewhat agreement with them. Smith writes that "the immanent Will is rarely conceived by the poet as deliberately malignant, but supremely blind and therefore indifferent" (332). Thus, it sees that his loss of Christianity stems from spiritual struggle. That is Fate is impersonal and eternal power which is independent of Free Will and not controlled by God. And Determinism, on the other hand, acknowledges the idea that the man's struggle against his fate and is active. So, the humans have no control over will. In his poem 'The Convergence of the Twain', he presents the sinking of the Titanic as a Fate controlled accident.

The confusion between Immanent Will and Free Will is clear in 'Convergence of the Twain'. While Man build the great Titanic, the Immanent Will "that stirs and urges everything" planned to end its life. Immanent Will runs through many lines of the poem. It is the fate which: 'Prepared a sinister mate / For



her ... / A Shape of Ice.' (10-11) to make the disastrous encounter between the ship and ice. The use of the past tense indicate that is encounter was previously planned as "they seemed", "they were bent", "Said "Now!" (16, 19, 31) The Immanent Will refers to Fate which disturbs human cycle of life.

CONCLUSION

Hence, it becomes clear to us that the poetics of Thomas Hardy is a philosophical view of his own that is not linked to religious thought, but rather Hardy's philosophy, and this is the source of the attraction in his poetry. Although the poems of the poet Thomas Hardy are autobiographical, there are often mediators and speakers on his behalf. The speaker is often in the image of a woman. And also from the aspects of creativity and politeness in the poet's pessimistic philosophy, as it mixes depression with hope, and merging between life and death, and between immortality and mortality. The presence of many paradoxes and dualities is the source of the attractiveness of Thomas Harry's poetic works. Likewise, one of the reasons for the attractiveness in the poet's pessimistic works in dealing with the idea of death and life from a far-flung view is the idea of heaven and hell and an orthodox view. In spite of the fact that the poet that the poet lost his Christianity early in his life, yet one may see that in his poems there are many references to Biblical legends, which indicate that he was Christian in nature. Worthy to say, the poet's pitiful philosophy of Man, God, and death are borne out from personal indications as death of his wife losing his Christianity. The burden of his elegies lie in his sadness and being obsessed by helplessness. Thus, in most of his poems, he records the continuous suffering and strivings of human

beings in a very universal attitude. One may never find any keys of joy or ecstasy between the lines, but only serious satires and ironies of a gloomy and sad nature of human life.

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