

DSE 1 A

General English

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Thomas Hardy : Ah, Are You Digging on my Grave ?

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Text

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,
"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?
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
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!"
— "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...
Why flashed it not to me
That one true heart was left behind!
What feeling do we ever find

To equal among human kind
A dog's fidelity!"

"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
It was your resting place."

Analysis and Critical Appreciation: The poem titled "Ah, Are You Digging On My Grave?" was first published in the Saturday Review in 1913. The poem is woven with multiple threads of humour, pessimism, sentimentalism, and romanticism. The poem has a distinctive conversational style of its own. It encourages the reader to participate in the unveiling of its layers of meanings. The melancholy strain is heard in the very beginning when the dead one lying under a grave expects the digger to be her loved one. The poem begins abruptly in a dramatic way: "Ah, Are You Digging On My Grave, / My loved one?- planting rue?" The reply from the other was quite unexpected and informative when it says; "No: yesterday he went to wed/ One of the brightest wealth has bred." The dead one's beloved person is quite sure that as his dead mistress is transported to the other world, i.e. the world of the dead, nothing can hurt her anymore. The man is indifferent and unsentimental and quite practical when he says: "It cannot hurt her now. . . That I should not be true."

The buried one is impatient to know the name of the digger, "Then who is digging on my grave?/ My nearest, dearest kin?" The uncaring, unconcerned, dispassionate world does not care for the deceased one. The world of the living remains undisturbed, unaffected. Nothing can dampen the spirit of their life. They say,

. . .What use?

What good will planting flowers produce?

No tendance of her mound can loose

Her spirit from Death's gin.

The assumption of the identity of the digger arrests the readers' attention. The readers become restless along with the dead woman to know who the digger is. The chance of the enemy to be the digger is negated soon as the enemy has decided to resolve conflict with the dead lady. The unidentified digger informs again,

Nay, when she head you passed the Gate

That shuts on all flesh soon or late

She thought you no more worth her hate,

And cares not where you lie.

Here "Gate" symbolizes the gate of death. It means the dead one has moved from the world of the living to that of the dead. So, she is beyond any kind of hatred, jealousy which she faced while she was living.

The next stanza is revelatory as the digger discloses his identity to her:

--O it is I, my mistress dear,

Your little dog, who still lives near

And much I thought my movements here

Have not disturbed your rest?

The dead lady finds “one true heart” at last. It is her pet dog which digs her grave. The proverbial loyalty of the dog to its master and mistress is encapsulated beautifully, “ What feeling do we ever find/ To equal among human kind/ A dog’s fidelity.” The concluding stanza is humorous, pathetic, realistic and ironical when the dog upsets the lady’s expectations:

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

It was your resting place.

The last stanza being illuminating and philosophical gives an idea of detachment. Nobody is concerned about the dead. The dead should be detached from the bondage of expectations.