

# Figurative Language and Loneliness in Sara Teasdale's Poems

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## ABSTRACT

This research discusses the sense of loneliness in Sara Teasdale's poems: *"Alone"*, *"Ebb Tide"*, *"Sleepless"*, *"The Treasure"*, *"Compensation"*, and *"Deep in the Night"*. The aims of this research are to explain types of figurative languages used in the six poems of Sara Teasdale, and to describe types of loneliness in those poems. Figurative language is applied to understand hidden meanings in the poems, and the application of Robert S. Weiss's theory divides loneliness into two types, those are social loneliness and emotional loneliness. This research applies intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. It employs a descriptive qualitative method. The source of data in this research is the six poems of Sara Teasdale: *"Alone"*, *"Ebb Tide"*, *"Sleepless"*, *"The Treasure"*, *"Compensation"*, and *"Deep in the Night"*. It is found in the result of the analysis that there are 6 types of figurative languages in 6 poems, those are: metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, metonymy, paradox, symbolism, and anaphora. It is also found that Sara Teasdale suffers from both social and emotional loneliness which is revealed through the figurative language analysis and theory of loneliness from Robert S. Weiss.

## Keyword:

Figurative Language,  
Loneliness, Social  
Loneliness, Emotional  
Loneliness

## INTRODUCTION

People who suffer from loneliness will feel isolated even in a crowd, and it leads them to feel empty, unwanted, and lonely. "Loneliness is unpleasant and can even have life threatening consequences. It has been linked to alcoholism, suicide, and physical illness" (Peplau & Perlman, 1982, Book 2). Loneliness is associated with poor social skills, unsociable and depression. Some people express this daunting feeling by writing a poem to relieve the pain by words. A poem is a type of literature, which is not only language, but also a tool to express feelings and emotions beautifully and aesthetically. According to Perrine (in Johnson and Arp 2016:713), stated that a poetry is not only related to our intelligence but also our senses, emotions, and imagination. A poem often contains figurative language to convey the meaning implicitly. To understand the emotion of a poem, readers cannot only read it, but they should also analyze every single word to find out hidden meanings that the poet wants to convey so as they feel the same flow of sentiments and spirit as the poet. In this study the writer will analyze several figurative languages applied in the poems, *"Alone"*, *"Ebb Tide"*, *"Sleepless"*, *"The Treasure"*, *"Compensation"*, and *"Deep in the Night"* written by Sara Teasdale. The writer intends to reveal the hidden meanings in the poems that depict the daunting sense of loneliness the poet suffers from.

Several previous studies explore the use of figurative language to gain deeper understanding about the meaning in a poem. The first previous study was by Bella

Agatha Fernando Rambe from Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya (2022) entitled *Figurative Language in Archie Randolph Ammons's Poem: An Improvisation for Angular Momentum* which shows the result that the poet uses eight kinds of figurative language, those are metaphor, simile, metonymy, personification, hyperbole, symbol, paradox, and allegory. Meanwhile, to identify the meaning contained in the poem, she applies denotative and connotative theory. The similarity of this study with the writer's is both discuss figurative language in poems to identify hidden meaning inside it. However, the difference is the previous study applies connotative theory to find implied meaning in the poem, while in this study the writer does not apply such theory.

The second previous study written by Dwi Nur Hasanah from Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo (2018) with the title *An Analysis of Figurative Language Used in Some Poems by Oscar Wilde*. Her study explains the use of figurative language in Oscar Wilde's poems help reader to interpret the meanings of poems. She analyzes ten selected poems of Oscar Wilde by using fifteen figurative languages. This previous study has similarity with the writer's research, which is analyzing figurative languages used in poems. However, the writer of this previous study takes poems with different themes although written by the same poet, meanwhile in the writer's thesis the poems are selected with the same themes which is loneliness.

The last previous study was written by Sri Rezeki from Universitas Negeri Medan (2021) entitled *Figurative Languages and Messages in Poems About Covid 19*. The writer of this study selects five poems about covid-19 on the internet, afterwards she identifies and analyzes figurative languages used in those poems. Besides, the writer also explains about messages contain in the poems. In addition, the writer also finds that social messages and moral messages are two types of messages found in the five poems. The similarity between this study and the writer's current research is both researches discuss about figurative language used in poems with descriptive qualitative method, meanwhile the difference is in the writer's research, there is no explanation about type of message as in the previous study writes, because in this thesis the writer wants to focus on exploring the sense of loneliness in the poems of Sara Teasdale.

This research applies theory of figurative language and theory of types of loneliness from Robert S. Weiss. According to Addonizio & Laux (1997), Figurative language is used to deepen and intensify the theme of a poem. It means that the role of figurative language in creative writing is to convey ideas indirectly in unique ways. Figurative language is one aspect of the text, especially poetry, that gives special esthetic value, (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014, p. 1).

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There are some figurative languages used in the six poems to explore the sense of loneliness:

**1. Metaphor**

“Metaphor is used as a means of comparing things that are essentially unlike” Perrine (in Johnson and Arp 2016:774). In other words, a metaphor is used to equate things that are different, but in using it does not need the words “like” or “as”.

**2. Simile**

Simile has its own characteristics that usually uses the words “as” or “like” to compare directly two different things. According to Perrine (in Johnson and Arp 2016:774), simile is a comparison between different things by using the words “like”, “similar to”, or “as” to compare unlike things.

**3. Personification**

According to Perrine (in Johnson and Arp 2016:778) “Personification is addressing non-human as if that thing were present and alive”. This figurative language depicts inanimate things like living beings.

**4. Hyperbole**

“Hyperbole is simply exaggeration that cannot be taken literally” Perrine (in Johnson and Arp 2016:815). This figurative language shows exaggerated statements that are not meant literally to function as emphasis of a message.

**5. Metonymy**

According to Perrine (in Johnson and Arp 2016:779) “Metonymy is the use of something closely related for the thing actually meant”.

**6. Paradox**

“A paradox is an apparent contradiction that is nevertheless somehow true” Perrine (in Johnson and Arp 2016:814).

**7. Symbolism**

According to Perrine (in Johnson and Arp 2016:286), “a literary symbol is something that means more than what it suggests on the surface”. A symbol can be described as something that represents a particular object.

**8. Anaphora**

Anaphora shows the repetition of words or sentences in a group of sentences or clauses to emphasize a certain message the poet wants to express.

Loneliness is characterized by feeling of emptiness, sadness, grief, or longing for companionship. It is because a person who suffers from loneliness feels isolated or disconnected from others, whether physically, emotionally, or socially. Cacioppo & William (2009) argued that social factors and personal factors are two things that cause loneliness. Social factor such as different cultures between two areas can lead to loneliness for individuals who have moved to new area where they feel unfamiliar with local habits and customs. This situation will make it difficult for them to interact with local people, causing them to feel ostracized and isolated. Meanwhile, loneliness can also appear because of personal factors. Personality traits especially introversions tend to difficult to build particular relationships.

Robert S. Weiss (1975) distinguished loneliness into two types, those are:

- 1) Social loneliness refers to the absence of a wider social network or community, colleagues, neighbors and friends. This kind of loneliness may be experienced by new homemakers who have moved to an area where they are newcomers.

Their husbands cannot fill the gap that is caused by the absence of friends or neighbors.

- 2) Emotional loneliness is related to the absence of a significant person of a close emotional attachment, such as partners and family. This type of loneliness occurs when a partner relationship dissolve through widowhood or divorced, causing the feeling of emptiness and abandonment. The presence of friends or neighbors cannot solve this feeling. This situation is only solvable by starting a new intimate relationship.

The problem statements of this study are: 1.) What types of figurative languages are used in Sara Teasdale's "*Alone*", "*Ebb Tide*", "*Sleepless*", "*The Treasure*", "*Compensation*", and "*Deep in the Night*"?. 2.) What are the types of loneliness in Sara Teasdale's "*Alone*", "*Ebb Tide*", "*Sleepless*", "*The Treasure*", "*Compensation*", and "*Deep in the Night*"?.

The objectives of this study are: 1.) To describe types of figurative languages used in Sara Teasdale's "*Alone*", "*Ebb Tide*", "*Sleepless*", "*The Treasure*", "*Compensation*", and "*Deep in the Night*". 2.) To explain the types of loneliness in Sara Teasdale's "*Alone*", "*Ebb Tide*", "*Sleepless*", "*The Treasure*", "*Compensation*", and "*Deep in the Night*".

## METHOD

The writer uses descriptive qualitative method in this study. This research is designed to identify figurative language used in the poems by Sara Teasdale. The writer uses figurative language as a tool to explore and define the types of loneliness portrays in each poem. By employing descriptive qualitative method, the writer will describe the meaning of the poems which related to loneliness.

In collecting data, the writer takes several key steps. The first step is reading the poems by Sara Teasdale several times to understand the meaning of the poems. After reading, the next step is highlighting particular lines that contain figurative languages and express loneliness. The last step is classifying the data based on types of figurative languages contain in the poems.

The next step after collecting data is analyzing it in order to find types of figurative language in the poems. There are several steps in analyzing the data. The first step is the writer analyzes type of loneliness by using figurative language and theory of loneliness found in the six poems of Sara Teasdale. After analyzing the data, the writer interprets the data based on the theories used and based on the writer's point of view. The last step is by making conclusion based on the result of the research.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this session the writer will explore the sense of loneliness more deeply in Sara Teasdale's poems "*Alone*", "*Ebb Tide*", "*Sleepless*", "*The Treasure*", "*Compensation*", and "*Deep in the Night*". This session will answer the statement of problems written in the previous session.

### 1. Types of Figurative Language in Sara Teasdale's "*Alone*", "*Ebb Tide*", "*Sleepless*", "*The Treasure*", "*Compensation*", and "*Deep in the Night*"

#### a. Metaphor

### *Metaphor in Sara Teasdale's "Deep in the Night"*

*"Love in my heart is a cry forever"*

The spot of metaphor is in the second stanza, precisely in the fifth line of the poem. This phrase shows the use of metaphor to explain hidden similarities between "love" and "cry". The love that is described is treated by the speaker as if it were equivalent to another unrelated object, and in this case, it is equated as the perpetual mourning. While other people may regard love as a blessing that its presence is welcomed with joy, the speaker has different view that it is communicated love will remain a misery with full of cry in the whole life. This is not without any reason. The reason love is regarded as a disaster is because of the unbearable yearning to a significant person that means a lot for the poet. Thus, based on the phrase above, it can be interpreted that the absence of the poet's partner turns love into a source of endless misery.

### *Metaphor in Sara Teasdale's "Compensation"*

*"And hours that go on broken wings,"*

A metaphor is applied on the line above. It reveals a comparison of two unlike things. The passage of time is compared to the struggles of a bird with damage of broken wings, unable to fly freely or smoothly. In this context, this metaphor conveys a sense of difficulty and limitation in the speaker's life, suggesting that time feels burdensome and challenging.

### **b. Simile**

#### *Simile in Sara Teasdale's "Alone"*

*"I am alone, as though I stood  
On the highest peak of the tired grey world,"*

The word "as" is used to compare a subject with another object. The phrase above displays direct comparison between the speaker herself with the world she stands. The "I" is having desperation that makes her to describe the world in a gloomy way. The "I" sees the world with no color or happiness just like her life which is full of grief. Besides, the imaginative portrayal for the world in gray color is also used. This phrase does not have any literal meaning, rather it represents hopelessness and dullness as if the speaker lives alone in this world without the presence of anyone.

#### *Simile in Sara Teasdale's "Ebb Tide"*

*"Come back like the sea with singing,"*

The return of the speaker's partner is compared with inanimate object which is "the sea". Based on the phrase above, it can be concluded that she is hoping for the partner

to come back soon amid her longing and bleak day by equalizing it with “the sea” to represent how she really wishes to meet him.

### **c. Personification**

*Personification in Sara Teasdale’s “Ebb Tide”*

*“A sea beach bleak and windy  
That moans the whole day long.”*

Personification is found in the second stanza, lines 7-8 of the poem. The lines above depict “the sea beach” as an inanimate object that seems to be a living being which has no ability to express his emotion. The speaker gives life to it as if a person who is moaning about his/her hardship moments to add dramatic effect for readers. Thus, the phrase above represents down moments of the speaker when her soul groans suffer from painful loneliness, and a dark sea image is created to make it more vivid so as this emotion sticks strongly in readers’ mind.

### **d. Hyperbole**

*Hyperbole in Sara Teasdale’s “The Treasure”*

*“All your love for me  
Surer than the spring,  
Stronger than the sea;”*

In the lines above, natural elements are depicted excessively to create bold effect about the speaker’s faith in the love she is waiting for. The natural objects “the spring” and “the sea” are described as if those are sturdier than anything, referring to an absolute certainty to underline that love in the speaker’s heart is unbreakable.

### **e. Metonymy**

*Metonymy in Sara Teasdale’s “Sleepless”*

*“My blood cries out to you all night in vain  
As sleepless as the rain.”*

The word “my blood” here plays as a substitution to replace something else which relates closely to the original object. The word “my blood” is used to describe the whole part of the speaker’s body, including her soul and heart that scream out in calling the presence of the partner desperately because they are physically separated.

### **f. Paradox**

*Paradox in Sara Teasdale’s “Alone”*

*“I am alone, in spite of love,  
In spite of all I take and give –  
In spite of all your tenderness,  
Sometimes I am not glad to live.”*

A paradox is applied in the first stanza, from line 1 until line 4. It depicts a contradiction that at first glance seems illogical, but the readers will get something more meaningful when they re-read the poem. It is portrayed that the "I" is alone, even when she receives love and all blessings as if the "I" admits that there is a companionship. That is a paradox.

### **g. Symbolism**

*Symbolism in Sara Teasdale's "Deep in the Night"*

*"Deep in the night the cry of a swallow,"*

According to Cooper (1978, Book 164), the word "swallow" plays as a symbol to represent hope when the speaker is tormented by grief and despair because of the absence of love. The speaker uses this type of bird to symbolize her hope for the return of her partner who is physically far away from her.

### **h. Anaphora**

*Anaphora in Sara Teasdale's "Alone"*

*"I am alone, in spite of love,  
In spite of all I take and give-  
In spite of all your tenderness,"*

The phrase "in spite of" is written three times in the first stanza to create an emphasis of a message in an artistic effect. It can be interpreted that even though the "I" gives and receives goodness from others, the fact is said explicitly that the speaker is not happy to live the life because she feels lonely and lack of attachment.

## **2. Types of Loneliness in Sara Teasdale's "Alone", "Ebb Tide", "Sleepless", "The Treasure", "Compensation", and "Deep in the Night"**

### **A. Social Loneliness**

#### **1.) "Alone"**

Through figurative language analysis that reveals some hidden meanings of the poem, it is interpreted that the speaker suffers from social loneliness. The depiction of the speaker's feelings refers to the absence of wider social network. The "I" in the poem feels alone with no companionship or someone she knows. This kind of situation triggers the feeling of isolated from society.

*"With earth hidden and heaven hidden,  
And only my own spirit's pride  
To keep me from the peace of those  
Who are not lonely, having died."*

The passage above is indicated the feeling of separation with no connection to interact with humans as living being because the "I" in the poem perceives desolate and isolated in this big world. Instead, it is confirmed that peace and pleasant feelings are for those who are dead. In other words, the "I" claims that to get rid of loneliness and

to gain stable state of mind is to die. This kind of thought can be emerged to someone who does not have social support.

## 2.) "Compensation"

Social loneliness is implied in this poem. It is described that the speaker is socially isolated in her own world. The hardship has been endured alone. The social loneliness can be seen in this line:

*"I should be glad of loneliness  
And hours that go on broken wings,"*

From the analysis of its figurative language, it is interpreted as losing strength in life when misery breaks the power of the speaker. The use of metaphor is implied to suggest that time passes painfully and slowly like a bird with broken wings cannot fly freely. This type of loneliness emerges when there is no social support from friends or neighbors when hardship strikes. In this case, the speaker does not have this kind of support to keep her going up. As the result, the "I" is lonely in down moments.

## B. Emotional Loneliness

### 1.) "Alone"

The first phrase indicates that the speaker suffers from emotional loneliness *"I am alone, in spite of love,"*. The phrase shows paradox that is portrayed the emotional loneliness that has reached the highest level in the speaker's soul in the first line, the first stanza. Numbness is felt in the speaker's heart even though she receives love from other people. The sense of solitude cannot be alleviated by this kind of love that has been given to the speaker. The "I" in the poem still perceives empty and sinks in deep grief due to loss of emotional closeness.

### 2.) "Compensation"

It is portrayed in this poem that the speaker lives without having a deeper connection with anyone. The third line is indicated the suffering from emotional loneliness, *"A thirsty body, a tired heart"*. This part shows the fragile heart without having meaningful relationship to anybody. It can be interpreted that the phrase "a tired heart" means as emotional exhaustion. It is conveyed the idea of a heart that has been through hardship, life's challenges, and emotional fatigue. There is no sense of belonging to a significant person because the "I" in the poem has no one to rely on. Solitude is caused by lack of attachment because the "I" faces down moments without emotional support from family or even lover. Then, in addition to social loneliness, the speaker is also emotionally lonely.

### 3.) "Ebb Tide"

According to the figurative analysis, it is indicated that the emotion of this poem strongly refers to emotional loneliness.

*"A sea beach bleak and windy  
That moans the whole day long."*

The use of personification above conveys a sense of profound desolation that emphasizes how the absence of a significant person affects the speaker's entire day and emotional state. The feeling of heartbroken is triggered by being far away from special someone and waiting amidst the uncertainty.

#### 4.) "Sleepless"

The use of personification in the second stanza strengthens the interpretation that the speaker suffers from emotional loneliness.

*"The autumn rain reverberates in the courtyard,  
Beating all night against the barren stone,"*

The phrase above shows the description of the rain in all night which creates an image of a cold, empty, and desolate environment that represent the speaker's feeling of loneliness. The rain ceaseless beating against the stone enhances the emotional loneliness due to the absence of a specific person.

Moreover, the use of metonymy in the ninth line of the third stanza "*My blood cries out to you all night in vain*" implies about the profound feeling of hopelessness because the speaker's body and soul deeply miss the beloved person every single day, indicating an unquiet state of mind.

#### 5.) "The Treasure"

It is interpreted that in this poem the speaker suffers from emotional loneliness. This type of loneliness can be seen from the first stanza.

*"When they see my songs  
They will sigh and say,  
"Poor soul, wistful song,  
Lonely night and day.""*

It is indicated in this piece of the poem that the speaker is emotionally lonely even though she is in a wide circle. The speaker is surrounded by a lot of people, but she cannot interact with them as a social being. This is because the speaker is missing a significant person that leads her into grief and alienation.

#### 6.) "Deep in the Night"

The lyric of the poem refers to emotional loneliness the speaker suffers from. Most of its dictions portrays deprivation of deeper connection between the speaker and a specific person.

*"Deep in the night the cry of swallow,  
Under the stars he flew,  
Keen as pain was his call to follow  
Over the world to you."*

It is described in the lines above that the speaker perceives profound of sorrow because of the absence of her lover. The words "to you" is written to indicate a significant person that is missing from the speaker's life. Being far away from a special someone can lead into loneliness and loneliness can lead into desperation.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the figurative language analysis in Sara Teasdale's six poems, it can be concluded that the speaker obviously suffers from loneliness. It is revealed that the phenomena of loneliness are caused by losing connection and lack of closeness with other humans. Social loneliness refers to the absence of wider social network, such as friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Meanwhile, emotional loneliness is triggered by the absence of a significant person, such as partners and family.

Through the use of figurative language and the application of theory of loneliness from Robert S. Weiss in the six poems, it is found that the speaker suffers from both social and emotional loneliness. It is revealed in some poems that the speaker feels disconnected to wider social network which causes her to suffer from social loneliness. Besides, it is also revealed that the speaker suffers from emotional loneliness because of the long separation from her partner. Moreover, figurative languages are applied in the six poems as a tool to dig the sense of loneliness more deeply. It is used to create the beauty of words and to enhance strong emotion of desolation and solitude through vivid natural images.

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