

Hardy's elegies are  
poems recollected in  
tranquillity essay



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The death of Emma Gifford caught Thomas Hardy by surprise as the death of his wife was unexpected. This unfortunate event caused Hardy to go into a form of shock and despair which forced his mind to cast back to forty years before, when he first met Emma, and to all in love with her again. After a death people go through a number of emotional stages which are enigmas in themselves, this was quite bizarre in Hardy's case for the past number of years the couple had grown apart, they were both firm-footed individuals with their own ideals, opinions and views. Being a writer Hardy had some very unorthodox opinions, when he didn't mean what he said and he had a mind to express these ideas in public.

Undoubtedly these were probably attempted to be suppressed by his embarrassed wife who was trying to keep up appearances in public who found it difficult to relate to a man that shuts himself up in his study and writes his novels and lyrics not speaking to her from one end of the morning to the evening. On the other side of the coin Hardy was becoming aware that Emma grew increasingly insane with every day that past, there was a streak of insanity that ran in her family so it seemed a plausible view. He expressed these ideas in the poem 'The Interloper'. Aspects that drew Hardy away from his marital relationship with Emma was his work which became very demanding as his novels were very popular.

Also Hardy's attentions were drawn toward a married woman: Florence Henniker, whom he seemed to fall deeply in love with, they seemed to be quite similar in character as she was an authoress it was she who also introduced him to Florence Dugdale: his future wife. Hardy believed that pain and death were realities that he could not over look, as he once stated: '

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What is heroic is a man with pessimism. ' The definition of pessimism is: ' To have the ability to put up with solitude, pain of heart distress, poverty and still carry on' This was a level of mentality that Hardy couldn't maintain, when Emma died he went through what critics called ' the Black Period' which was when his life became disorganised and he had celebrity scouts pestering him for novels and poems. Eventually Wessex Heights was published as a result of this, the general theme among this collection of poems was pain, loneliness and despair.

It was at this time that Hardy also wrote a collection of poems, when he fell in love with Emma again and seemed compelled to compose what is now known as the Elegies: memories. When Hardy wrote these he supposedly and appropriately put them in perspective with a line from the Aeneid: ' Veteris vestigial flammae' or in English ' scars of the old flame'. The first of these poems is called ' The Going' this was written only a month after Emma's death. It conveys his first reactions to his loss by speaking to her directly: confessional poetry.

During The Going Hardy varies the stress from the usual short/ long iambic one. This poem appears to be unstructured, almost unpredictable it seems that Hardy is thinking this through for the first time and realises new things in each stanza. There is a jaunting rhythm which helps emphasise the drama and adds anger and passion to the poem. It paints a picture and tells you a lot about their relationship. Hardy talks to his wife like an angry parent talking to a child in an angry but also desperate tone of voice.

One of the themes in the elegies seems to be one of motion, this is emphasised in the Going as 'with wing of swallow' where Hardy shows that like a beautiful creature she disappeared swiftly and idealistically into the skies. Also swallows emigrate and disappear at certain times of the year, but they also return unlike Emma. It seems that in the next line Hardy realises this and says: 'To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!' and in the last line in the next stanza, 'and altered all.' By speaking to Emma directly he draws the reader nearer to him other poets don't address or talk directly to their subject, this makes them seem distant and not related or closely linked to the reader. Whereas Hardy uses words like 'why', 'I', 'you', 'me' and 'we' these seem more personal and remind the readers that Hardy is still human and enhances the universally relevant factor of the poems.

In the first stanza it seems to be the primary thoughts following the death, he blames her death on Emma as if she did it to punish him, there is also a hint of solitude and loneliness: 'up and be gone, where I could not follow' In the second stanza you can see how highly Hardy holds her in his esteem. He talks of her death as if a great being has passed on: 'That your great going, had place that morning, and altered all.' He seems to be remorseful over his behaviour on the morning of her death, that on the morning of her death he was, 'unmoved and unknowing', not realising that she had died. You can sense his guilt and hatred for his ignorance on that occasion. In the third stanza it appears that the guilt has set in and he is now haunted with memories of her, Hardy expects to see Emma walk around a corner one day: 'And think for a breath it is you I see, oh the perspective sickens me!' The

way that Hardy writes, with the words he uses, it is almost as if he is painting a vivid picture, displaying a potent image in your mind.

He does this well in the fourth stanza: These poems depict memories that were long since forgotten a strong sense of the past which cannot be escaped. Hardy had a period of time imprinted in his mind like when you can feel how you felt at that moment in time, when you smell something and memories come back so real and vivid in your mind, and you feel as if you have gone back in time. In the fifth stanza Hardy might have identified the source of his guilt and he talks of how their latter relationship lay in ruins, they didn't go on outings together and didn't appreciate each other's company. Another poem in the Elegies that demonstrates this strong personal link with the reader is 'The Haunter' only in this case it is in the first person from Emma's perspective. In 'The Haunter' Emma is haunting Thomas she follows him and visits places they once did before together in their youth.

It appears that they are haunting each other, Emma is physically but Hardy dotes on memories and retraces their footsteps that they once walked before. I feel that this poem demonstrates a sort of irony as he is desperately lonely and misses her and yet she is with him but he can't see it. One could say that this is Hardy's pessimistic side emerging because when people die you are left with memories of them some say that they will always be with you because they will live on inside you, I believe that this is a very idealistic point of view but if it can be sympathised with it could help lull the pain of the death of a loved one. One of the points that I feel Hardy is trying to propose is that he knows that she is there but that isn't enough, he needs her physically, to comfort him and make him feel secure. Even though <https://assignbuster.com/hardy-elegies-are-poems-recollected-in-tranquillity-essay/>

people say that she is present he can't see her. Maybe there is also a factor of remorse for things were left unfinished between the two and he wants to speak to her and he is looking for her in his surroundings and also she too wishes to speak to him.

Personal speech is also demonstrated, by her exclamation which adds to the dramatic atmosphere it sets. Each stanza in 'The Haunter' has exactly the same structure, as if Hardy wants to stress the haunting of the couple to each other, like a mirror effect, each reflects the other. On every alternate line all the stanzas have the same endings: 'know, go? , do, thereto!' This could also be accentuating the mirror effect, but it creates a sound appropriate to the title. The elongated vowel sounds produce the stereotypical noises of ghosts, which perhaps originate from the howling of the wind.

When you read 'The Haunter' you can feel her pain and desperation, she is lonely just like him longing for their partners company you can also learn that she seems frustrated for she regrets the way they spent their past years apart. In 'The Walk' you get the feeling that Hardy is starting to accept the absence of Emma. He talks of going out for a walk as he always has done, nothing is different everything is the same. There are soft tones in this poem and like 'The Haunter' the stanzas are identical. This might be for a different reason in this poem, because it is about how in two experiences, before and after Emmas death, the scenery hasn't changed it is exactly the same as before, just like the verses. Only after her death the feeling is different and he knows that she isn't there for him when he returns.

If he stayed on his walk then he could fool himself that she were still alive, for there would be nothing there that would prove him otherwise. Hardy's life didn't revolve around Emma for they were drifting apart and had been doing for sometime, even though his life didn't centre around his wife it didn't mean that she didn't matter to Hardy, for we know that she did for he wrote what some people would describe as 'the greatest love lyrics of all time' about her. She was part of him, part of his past, his youth and his happiness. I do believe that the Elegies are universally relevant to all readers for they show you the raw emotion that Hardy felt during these times.

However did he feel like this when he wrote 'The Going' for example? To that question I feel compelled to say yes. I suppose this is because I believe that people act and do things in a certain way when they follow their heart and not their head. To be able to express these feelings the way that Hardy has done, successfully would be enormously challenging. Maybe Hardy was capable of translating recollected emotion onto paper in tranquillity, however I would consider the circumstances, being that Emma died only one month before 'The Going' was written. Could Hardy have discovered the death of his wife, gone through an emotional trauma found peace and calm and written the emotional roller coaster that 'The Going' is, only one month after Emma's passing..

. I don't believe so.