

'time's unflinching
rigour' in 'at castle
boterel' and



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Having studied 'At Castle Boterel', a short poem written by Thomas Hardy in the early twentieth century, and 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion', a short story written by him in the late nineteenth century, it appears that Hardy is interested in the ideas of love, time and human mortality. Hardy writes about his own past experiences. The poem 'At Castle Boterel' is written about his love for his Cornish wife, Emma Gifford. Hardy is particularly interested in the perception of time and the way in which human life follows the pattern of time, and this is shown in both the short story and the poem.

Hardy's interest in time can be linked to the quotation 'Time's unflinching rigour' in the poem 'At Castle Boterel'. He is also interested in the way that the physical landscape never changes, and how there is a wide span of unchanging time. This is quoted in the first line of the short story, 'Here stretch the downs; high and breezy and green, absolutely unchanged since those eventful days'. This quote, especially the words in *italics*, tells us that the landscape never changes, and it outlives many generations of human life. The landscape has been around forever and has witnessed all the events of human life.

This emphasises the fact that human life is insignificant, as humans die while the landscape lives on forever. Through this very quote, we learn that Hardy is interested in the movement of time and the idea of human mortality.

Hardy's use of the unchanging landscape provides a background for transitory human life. In 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion' Hardy skips through time very quickly, as he significantly misses out periods of time.

This point cannot be specifically linked to a quotation, but we do know that Hardy skips through time because, for example, we hear very little about Phyllis's engagement to Humphrey Gould. Her engagement was obviously not as important to her as her love for Mattheus Tina. This tells the reader that Hardy is very interested in the movement and perception of time. We are also told that Hardy attempts to literally cheat time, and he does this by not writing the same amount for specific events in the story. This, in my opinion, creates an awkward read, as time throughout the story is not spread out equally. This is done in an attempt to defeat 'Time's unflinching rigour'.

We are made aware that Hardy misses sections of time because Phyllis recalls some events more than others, because some events are more important to her than others. In the story Hardy is able to defeat 'Time's unflinching rigour'. He can control time within his narrative. Having studied 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion' we are told that Hardy is interested in how one moment in time can change the whole life of an individual. We know this because the execution of Mattheus Tina, although it only lasted for a short period of time, changed Phyllis's life forever. Hardy draws attention to the fact that one moment, even if it lasts for only a few seconds, can be the most important moment in a person's life.

Hardy is interested in the trickery of time, and he experiments with this in the short story. Hardy, throughout the short story, attempts to defeat 'Time's unflinching rigour'. This is indicated as Phyllis, in 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion' attempts to defeat 'Time's unflinching rigour' by tending Mattheus Tina's and Cristoph Bless's graves, as she is trying to make her memories of them live on forever. This is quoted on the last page <https://assignbuster.com/times-unflinching-rigour-in-at-castle-boterel-and/>

of the novel, ' While she lived she used to keep their mounds neat; but now they are overgrown with nettles, and sunk nearly flat'. This tells us that Phyllis attempted to defeat time by visiting their graves. Writing the executed names down in the parish death book, told on the penultimate page of the short story, successfully defeats ' Time's unflinching rigour' as the soldiers are forever remembered in writing.

Phyllis is finally defeated by ' Time's unflinching rigour' when she dies at the end of the story. Hardy also tells us that memories can be distorted. One of Hardy's objectives in writing the story was to write about events so they can be remembered because memories don't last forever. Hardy writes the story as a novel to capture the images and emotions throughout the story. We are told that Phyllis's love lives on throughout the story, as she tends their graves and tells her story to the narrator who repeats the story. This is an example of where ' Time's unflinching rigour' is defeated.

Hardy also indicates to us that one's attitude to certain things change as time goes on. Hardy uses clothing to tell us this. This is quoted, ' The British uniform of the period, with its immense epaulettes, queer cocked-hat, breeches, gaiters, ponderous cartridge-box, buckled shoes, and what not, would look strange and barbarous now'. This quote, especially its final part, tells us that people's attitudes to things change over time. For example, the quote tells us that the soldiers clothing of the past would look ' strange and barbarous' now, however this would not have been so about two centuries ago. People's attitudes change with time.

This is another example of Hardy writing about the trickery of time. By writing the short story 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion', Hardy wanted to make the point about 'Time's unflinching rigour' and asks us if human existence can defeat it. He tries to say that time goes on forever but you can escape from it. He tries to tell us that it is possible to escape from 'Time's unflinching rigour'.

We are also told in the story that although love may only occur for a short period, memories live on, however not eternally. We are told that memories can be distorted. One also learns that the landscape never changes for hundreds of years, and this brings about the idea of how human life is insignificant and inferior compared to the landscape. The time period, in which the story was set, was a time in which women were not given the same freedom and responsibility in marriage as they are today. Back in the nineteenth century, English women were sometimes even trapped in marriage.

This can be linked with Phyllis's engagement to Humphrey Gould, and also the fact that men control her life. Her lifestyle in the story depends on the men in her life; for example, she deeply relies on Mattheus Tina and her father, who literally control her life. This can be linked with the idea that circumstances change as time goes on. This is because, back in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, women were not given the same freedom as they are today.

Social attitudes to life, e. g. the life of women, change as time goes on. This fact also proves that Hardy is interested in the movement of time. If the

story were to be told routinely, for example day-by-day, then Hardy would be following 'Time's unflinching rigour'. However, by writing the short story, Hardy attempts to defeat time, and one way in which he does this is by not equally spreading out time throughout the story.

This tells us that Hardy can control time within his narrative. The poem 'At Castle Boterel', written by Thomas Hardy, is about an old man reminiscing about the past, when he and a lady once had a good time. The poem is actually written about his Cornish wife, Emma Gifford. 'At Castle Boterel' describes experiences that Emma and Hardy once shared, before her death in 1912.

Again, as in the short story, the movement of time is another major theme, in which Hardy is deeply interested. 'At Castle Boterel' is a very personal and autobiographical poem. Hardy writes, 'And to me' in the sixth stanza. It is very personal as it is about his memories of his time with Emma. In the poem, Hardy tries to defeat time by reliving a memory, i.

e. visiting the castle. This proves that he, in the poem, attempts to defeat 'Time's unflinching rigour'. This is very similar to the short story, as the poem is also linked to the themes of love and mortality. The poem is much more immediate, as it is about Hardy's past experience, and this adds an extra personal touch to it.

In the second stanza, the use of the present tense in the word 'climb' tells us that Hardy has defeated time. Throughout the poem, Hardy attempts to cheat time so he can evoke memories of his past love for Emma. This is very similar to the short story, as Hardy also attempts to cheat time by

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connecting Phyllis with her love for Mattheus Tina. Hardy clearly opposes 'Time's unflinching rigour', as it is acting as a barrier between him and his memories of Emma.

In the fifth stanza, the idea that the landscape is eternal while human life isn't is introduced. As in the short story, this shows that human life is insignificant. People are changing, while the landscape doesn't. We are also told that the landscape records what has happened. This is quoted, ' But what they record in colour and cast.

Is- that we two passed'. This quote tells us that the landscape recorded that Hardy and Emma once visited Castle Boterel. The fifth stanza emphasises that everyone's perception of time is different. Hardy tells us what is important is that our perception of time allows us to escape ' Time's unflinching rigour'. This is quoted when Hardy writes ' to me' in the sixth stanza. His personal perception of time allows him to escape from ' Time's unflinching rigour'.

We are told that in Hardy's mind, no time is as precious to him as the short time he spent with Emma at Castle Boterel. This is quoted in the forth stanza, ' It filled for a minute. But was there ever a time of such quality, since or before'. His time with Emma at the castle only lasted briefly but it contained such ' quality'. Again, this is similar to the short story, as we are told that one small moment in time can change an individual's life forever.

Just like the execution of Mattheus Tina and Cristoph Bless changed Phyllis's life forever, Hardy's short time spent with Emma changed his life as well.

From this quote, we can sense that, like the short story, Hardy is very

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interested in the trickery of time. In the poem, Hardy looks back into his memories of his time with Emma. This is quoted when Hardy uses the words ' I look behind' and ' I look back'.

This can be linked with Hardy's use of words in the penultimate stanza, which proposes that Emma has vanished from the castle but the memory still lies there- obvious in the quote, ' The substance now, one phantom figure. Remains on the slope'. In this quote, the ' phantom figure' is a projection of Hardy's memory, as if he wants to see her there. If one was to take a pessimistic view of the matter however, one could say that the ' phantom figure' was ' Time's unflinching rigour' which was watching over Hardy and stopping him from reliving his past. There are two ways to interpret the ' phantom figure'- one optimistic and one pessimistic. The poem ' At Castle Boterel' has literally immortalised Hardy's and Emma's love for each other.

Their love has escaped from ' Time's unflinching rigour'. The poem is about how their love was destroyed by time and also how time has immortalised their love for each other, as Hardy has written it down on paper as a poem for people to read forevermore. Therefore, by writing about his love for Emma as a poem, Hardy had escaped from ' Time's unflinching rigour'. However, in reality, in the last line of the poem, Hardy had realised that he has been defeated by ' Time's unflinching rigour'. This is quoted, ' And I shall traverse old love's domain. Never again'.

This quote also suggests that Hardy is old and death is near. The poem's ending creates an uneasy and negative feeling. This may be because Hardy

realises he will never love anyone else as dearly as he loved Emma or perhaps he will not have the opportunity to experience a similar love with anyone else. 'At Castle Boterel' is mostly written in a nostalgic tone.

Hardy's memories are fighting against 'Time's unflinching rigour', which has destroyed his physical relationship with Emma, but not his memories. Hardy cannot remember exactly what happened at Castle Boterel- all he can remember is his love for Emma. The poem accepts the enervating effect of time and the inevitability of death. It is a particularly sad poem, as the reader feels Hardy's emotions for Emma, and this is why, I think his memories for her are better being written in a poem.

'At Castle Boterel' and 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion' are very similar because they both contain loving memories and Hardy attempts to control time in both. Both are centred around love and Hardy uses the landscape to suggest 'Time's unflinching rigour'. They both show how love may not be able to cheat time, however it does in 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion' as Phyllis's love for Mattheus Tina lives on forever. There is a theme of mortality in both the story and the poem.

For example, in 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion', the soldiers are executed for desertion. Also, in both pieces there is a distance between the event happening and the story being told. This difference in time allows Hardy to manipulate time. The main similarity however is that they both explore the movement and perception of time.