

Hardy and his guilt over emma



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Hardy's ' At Castle Boterel' has a similar approach to ' Under the Waterfall' - the vast difference between a joyful past to the bleak, empty present through visiting a physical place in nature which remains constant but where their lives have since deteriorated. This is exemplified through Hardy's focus on the weather where he recalls the memory as being in " dry March" which reflects the happiness the couple felt during this time, though in the present it is raining and so these happy memories are being tarnished by nature's cruel force and washing away Hardy's previous positive emotions to reveal his now raw, bleak sorrow. Steinberg states " the Earth's near-permanence is a kind of comfort in the face of Time's endless march" (Steinberg, 2013). Although human life is shaped by time nature remains untouched and permanent, and the juxtaposition between the two facilitates Hardy's recovery by reminding him of the contrast between human's mortality and nature's immortality.

Hardy describes how the hill in his memory " has been climbed... by thousands more" - the deep feelings he possesses for this place in his memory are only so for him, unreciprocated by the hills. Before and after Hardy's life many others would have passed the hills and made memories there, holding great significance for themselves whilst nature remains both indifferent and transcendent. Hardy reflects on the relationship between his current and previous self, shaped by time's passage. The metaphor " shrinking, shrinking... my sand is sinking" demonstrates how human life is limited and, over time, will come to an end. He recognises that he is disappearing into the landscape, though does not find this negative - he

acknowledges how he is distant from his previous self, the self whom he was with Emma, to his now current self who is gradually vanishing into nature. The metaphor also reminds the reader of how human suffering is only temporary in comparison to the eternal, omnipresent nature. In support of this the “primeval rocks” have been around since the earliest time of history, an everlasting aspect of nature. Hardy too writes of nature as providing comfort – “what they record in colour and cast/ is that we two passed” – as nature watches over humans perhaps like an eternal God-like force or as a parent watches over their children.

The portrayal of nature here clearly demonstrates how Hardy sees nature as a constant in the face of the grief he holds over Emma, reminding him of the insignificance of humans to nature’s superiority. Perhaps too Hardy’s poem can be viewed in support of Deep Ecology as the interests of humans, including grief and bereavement, are vastly insignificant compared to those of nature.

In ‘After a Journey’ time is drawing Hardy away from Emma, though the landscape brings him close to her. Written at “Pentargan Bay” Hardy is clearly using his revisiting of this place, which holds memories of a happier time, to show the constancy of his love for Emma. Commoner’s belief that “place matters as much as time” is shown as Hardy not only looks through the physical senses he sees in the present to connect with Emma but also through time. Once again Hardy’s feelings are represented through changing nature – “Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division”. As time passes the seasons change, as does Hardy’s life, as Emma’s death occurred in the autumn month of November which “wrought division” between them

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and so clearly a link between the changes in Hardy's life and the seasons can be concluded. The 3rd stanza describes how Emma's ghost leads him to a time and place where they were happy, where she was "all aglow"; now time has passed she is a "thin ghost". Time has also taken a toll on Hardy too, leading him to become "frail" and so a shadow of his former self.

Nature, unlike humans, will not grow old and so unlike Hardy, Emma and their love it will continue once they have disappeared from the world.

From looking through an eco-critical lens to analyse Hardy's 'Emma poems' it can be concluded that Hardy uses his connection with nature to relive his memories with Emma, to briefly bring her back to life in his mind and to aid him in the grieving process. His acceptance that he is only one temporary human being existing at one time on a permanent and eternal earth provides some comfort to Hardy, enabling him to come to the realisation that his sorrow and regretful mistakes and ill-treatment of Emma will pass, just like his life.

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