

Analysis of the shadow on the stone



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Thomas Hardy wrote "The Shadow on the Stone" after his wife's death, and the ghost he mentions is his wife's. The poem focuses on the realities of time and death. The poet's feelings are complex, which is reflected in the complex rhyme scheme of the poem. The title shows us how Emma has always been like a shadow for Hardy. When she was alive, she followed him and now that she's dead, according to Greek mythology, her soul has become a shadow. The stone in the poem is white as opposed to the black color of a shadow. Black may symbolize the evil way Emma was treated during the last years of her life. For convenience, I will analyze this poem stanza by stanza. I went by the Druid stone That broods in the garden white and lone, And I stopped and looked at the shifting shadows That at some moments fall thereon From the tree hard by with a rhythmic swing, And they shaped in my imagining To the shade that a well-known head and shoulders Threw there when she was gardening. A druid stone is a mystical stone of intuition and psychic wisdom. Another definition of Druid Stone is a stone made by the ancient Druids. Both these definitions apply to the poem as we will later see. The stone is a representation of Hardy. He broods (or thinks) a lot on Emma's death, which is why he writes poems. Moreover, he is a man of talent and skill and according to his fans-flawless. The color white is often connected to flawlessness or perfection. Apart from that, white also symbolizes purity. It may reflect Hardy's desire to be pure or clean his soul of the sins he has committed by neglecting his wife when she needed him the most. The stone, although beautiful and full of powers, is alone - a metaphor for Hardy. The alliteration in line three suggests a sense of peacefulness and calmness. It's as if everything is quiet when Hardy observes the garden. The shadows were probably formed by the trees behind Hardy. It's ironic how he

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describes the shadow so bluntly and in only one line as if he's been numbed. Perhaps it pains him to talk about his wife and describe her as if she was alive, or maybe he didn't want to get his hopes up as he knows it's only the trees. I thought her behind my back, Yea, her I long had learned to lack, And I said: ' I am sure you are standing behind me, though how do you get into this old track?' And there was no sound but the fall of a leaf As a sad response; and to keep down grief I would not turn my head to discover That there was nothing in my belief. The key words in this stanza are ' thought' and ' sure'. He knows it's only an illusion and yet still says he's sure she's standing there. The second line suggests he's already used to the fact that she's dead, explaining the numbness in the previous stanza. Hardy's question is answered by the one thing that always had his back: Nature. Generally, only dead leaves fall of trees. Nature sends a message to Hardy that his wife is dead. This also shows that the place was alive when Emma was alive and now that she's dead, so is the place. It is safe to assume that the season is autumn as leaves are falling. Autumn is the season of death and misery, setting up an excellent atmosphere for the poem. The last lines present the dilemma of the poem: He knows it's not Emma, yet doesn't want to turn around and confirm that fact. Maybe he wants to live in a delusion that Emma is there, watching over her. He probably doesn't have the strength to face reality. Yet I wanted to look and see That nobody stood at the back of me; But I thought once more: ' Nay, I'll not unvision A shape which, somehow, there may be.' So I went on softly from the glade, And left her behind me throwing her shade, As she were indeed an apparition— My head unturned lest my dream should fade. However, he wanted to turn around and see, face reality like a man. But then, decides against it. Hardy's

contradictory and complex feelings can be seen here. He is arguing with himself whether to check or not. In the end he finally decides not to look. The word 'unvision' is created by Hardy to describe a new feeling. He thought that there is no word in the English language to describe how he feels. Unvision may mean destroying an illusion. When he leaves her behind him throwing her shade, Hardy imitates his wife as she also went slowly, leaving Hardy behind. The hyphen after apparition describes a pause to think. She's indeed an illusion, he thinks (or is she?). The thought of the shadow being a ghost crosses his mind again. In the end, he finally admits that this wasn't real by giving it the word 'dream'. The sound effects in the last line are worth noting. The harsh 'd' sound suggests that the poet is hardening. He is trying to be strong but just can't gather up the strength to turn around.