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‘Metre and Mourning: ‘Thomas Hardy’s “The Going” and *Poems of 1912-13*’

John Hughes

Writing to Edward Clodd after Emma’s death, Hardy confided: ‘Yes, what you say is true. One forgets all the recent years & differences & the mind goes back to the early times when each was much to the other – in her case & mine intensely much’.¹

The changes in tone recall the emotional tension that continually emerges in the voice of *Poems of 1912-13*. Hardy’s words – initially stoical – collapse inwards, and the final appended phrase renders his friend something like a proxy for the person Hardy can no longer address (‘- in her case & mine intensely much’). This article explores how the shifts of tone and perspective in the poems similarly convey the radically disjunctive nature of bereavement. One moment the speaker is downcast and inwardly ruminating on his sense of present loss. The next he is drawn to reminisce, and open to the alluring or tormenting visitations of the past that draw him back to a time when the future beckoned, and his words could voice intimacy.

Specifically, my focus will be on how extensively Hardy uses metre as the expressive vehicle for such vocal and affective divisions. In so doing, I will concentrate on ‘The Going’, the inaugural poem in the collection. I take it to exemplify the ways in which so many of the main features of the collection’s explorations of self, love and time are readable through a close study of a poem’s internal drama of rhythm and the voice. To take an obvious example, consider the wrenching intensity of the opening stanza of ‘After a Journey’:

Where you will **next** be **there’s no knowing**,

The unpredictable metrical beats (in bold) conveys the speaker’s subjection, as he waits in desperate unknowing for the revitalizing flashes of memory. The line tails off with the flat reiteration of ‘**no knowing**’. This unstressed feminine ending enacts the

sense of protracted negation, as the reader is momentarily left in limbo, scanning the space between the lines. Then, the word ‘facing’, with insurgent stress on the first syllable of the line, surprises speaker and reader alike:

Facing round about me everywhere,
With your **nut-coloured hair,**
And **gray** eyes, and **rose-flush coming and going.**²

The material of the language is here transfigured, as the past inundates the present. Emma’s ghost, with her rose-flush coming and going, possesses the rhythm of the lines, and the words recover the corporeal expressivity of her vivid youth, when she held the romantic initiative. The physicality and romance of this recovered scene are inseparable from the now invigorating rhythm as the speaker, hitherto hollowed-out and detained by loss, finds himself now ambushed by the influx of time past.

Before he wrote ‘After a Journey’ Hardy presumably went back to Pentargan Bay, the scene of the poem, in order to recover the sensations and images of his youthful courtship with Emma. However, what the verse and rhythm show is how little it is within his conscious control to revive the past. Rather, the poem shows that it is the sensations of the past that break into his dejected mind and revive him. As he acknowledges, it is Emma’s ghost that brings him here again, and he is wholly subject to her unaccountable, capricious visitations. The past has its own power, breaking into the present, and reincarnating him also, for these fugitive, phantasmatic moments as the young man again. For such flashing instants he is drawn to her gray eyes, as she moves around in front of him, facing him ‘everywhere’.

Metre is an indispensable part of the intimacy and modernity of Hardy’s poetic vision in such ways as the poetry opens and closes, without resolution, between the different, incommensurable dimensions of past and present. For the reader too it is the privileged vehicle by which we inhabit the dynamics of this disconnected and unsecured subjectivity as it confronts time, and its innate contingency, desire, and subjection. In the process, metre reveals also how entwined is the philosophical reach of Hardy’s work with his literary innovation. As the following pages aim to show, his originality as a writer is inseparable from the ways that the material enactments of his

language shape his rigorous, wide-ranging ruminations on temporality and consciousness. So, in this example, we have seen it irresistibly transmits and expresses what the speaker also insists on: that he has not so much revisited the scenes of the past, as entered a place where the past can revisit and enter him, and astonish his mind with its singular force, and incursive reality. Again, in acknowledging also the modernity of Hardy's writing in these respects, one might observe how these features of 'After a Journey' inevitably provoke a comparison with Proust's scenes of involuntary memory, in the great work that that French admirer of Hardy will begin to publish in 1913.

Perhaps because of its evident inspiration, *Poems of 1912-13* is often described as an outpouring of grief. Nonetheless, it is a major paradox that so much poetic fertility and expressivity came out of a personal predicament of such dispirited inexpression and loss. One can identify the generative ratio of these poems with their transformation of the grinding daily round of grief into an art that is expansive and expressive. But it is worth describing this a little further. Every reader knows that irony was always Hardy's stock in trade. Yet I have been suggesting that an essential part of the singularity and power of this collection derives from the particular way it not only intensifies and ratchets up the ironies, but locates them within this speaking voice. That is to say, in this collection the speaker does not simply preside ruminatively and ruefully over his words, as Hardy customarily does. Instead, the speaker appears at stake within them, his subjectivity twisted and torn by loss, solipsism and powerlessness.

This raises the vexed question of the autobiographical aspect of *Poems 1912-13* (and even Hardy's own motivation in writing the poems). Perhaps the best way of approaching this is to describe a little more closely how the poems fundamentally express the self as a divided system, the speaker's experience configured over and again as a ramifying, intersecting series of contradictions and double binds. For example, in 'The Going' one swiftly comes to an awareness of the speaker's urgent desire to speak, his wish to renew conversation with his dead wife in and through the poem. However, at the same time we glean that this desire is itself an outcome of his tortured awareness of the lost opportunity of this marriage in which conversation was refused. Which is to say that one quickly surmises that the marital situation came

increasingly to be one of failed conversation and tense silence, and an implacable daily shunning of each by the other. We realise that his passionate words are now inflected first by the sharp, remorseful sense that when the couple could most have spoken to each other, they implacably chose not to; and second by the desolating recognition now that now he must speak with her, but it is impossible... Thus, for example, his direct address to Emma in 'The Going', 'The Voice', or 'After a Journey' appears haunted by this recoiling sense of a strange, awfully appropriate, kind of poetic justice, where the daily avoidance of speech in marriage has generated this impossible, unappeasable desire to converse. The diabolic irony that braces his words is that this impossibility of speech is a replication, even consummation, of the wilful estrangements of the marriage. The empirical refusal of speech in marriage has found its dismal fulfillment in the metaphysical denial of voice in death.

Consequently, there is a distinctive yet manifold tension within this stricken voice, as it projects itself across a blank void to Emma. He is condemned to a limbo of regret, as he addresses himself to the phantom voice or figure who (he wishfully imagines) is summoning him to answer. Ironically too, as his voice lives uncertainly on, it does so itself as a phantom of verse, his words an emanation of someone who feels himself no longer fully alive, nor yet dead either. But there is another ironic twist here too, since death ironically replicates complex patterns of exclusion that played within the marital relationship. So we can note in particular that the poet's current desire to speak to Emma in fact projects him back before the marriage, when there was a face to face between them. This is another way of saying that within the poems it is noticeable and striking that love and marriage are never represented as having coincided. There are for instance, no joyous depictions of youthful marriage, or of a wedding. Rather, love appears either as the future, expansive hope of ardent courtship, or as the hopelessly belated, self-excoriating passion of bereavement.

One can develop this perception by noting also that it is a further important part of the magic of their courtship as represented in the poems that Emma herself is associated with the lure and glamour of a world that attracts rather than includes him. In the poems, she is figuratively associated with Cornwall, as its presiding spirit, but Hardy exists on the threshold of this world, as a passive figure whose ardour is always mixed with anxiety, even as she turns to him. Mutuality, responsiveness and

expressivity are repeatedly represented and imagined as if they were tantalizingly within her gift. He represents himself as someone who observes rather than claims her, as if perpetually waiting for her to speak, and to renew his world. Clearly then (according to the kind of interpersonal logic I am teasing out) one can read his current situation, where he feels his identity at stake in his pursuit of her, as the fullest - if most ironic - fulfilment of this affective pattern. In the present as in the past, passion was driven by the fear that one might or excluded from the world of the beloved. Now he pursues Emma again. Though she is a ghost, he feels himself once again at her disposal, as if it is only she who might reinvigorate him once more and return him to the land of the living.

This is perhaps a rather protracted discussion, but I have found it essential to explicate important specific aspects of the key point mentioned above: that what is *sui generis* about this collection is that irony is not simply the perspective that the speaker controls so much as a consuming personal predicament that now controls him, and grips his riven voice. So what can one say about the autobiographical, even therapeutic or ethical, dimension in these poems? Centrally, one needs to acknowledge that it is difficult, perhaps impossible to separate the intensity of the poems from a personal intention. This is of course confounding for academic readers, schooled in all the usual critical caveats and academic protocols. After all, students have long been taught to feel that their expert status is bound up with resistance to the easy identification of poet and speaker, and indeed even that any such identification is ruled out *tout court*, as a theoretical *faux pas* of the kind that betrays the naïve reader.

However (and it is a big 'however'), can the poems be read at all in any meaningful way, if we separate the voice in the poem from the grieving individual of the winter of 1912-13? Certainly, most critics necessarily end up respecting and depending on the connection. To take a representative example, Ralph Pite insightfully reads the collection as a whole as a quasi-therapeutic work of mourning. Pite claims that in *Poems of 1912-13*:

Grief involves putting an end to grief... Hardy's poems move from inertia towards the moment when he can definitively accept and regain the past through writing poems that

celebrated Emma and Hardy's love for her... the sequence is psychologically acute about the grieving process. (Pite, *The Guarded Life*, p. 416)

In this respect, Pite can be identified with a critical tradition that sees the collection as comparable to Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (or even Patmore's *To the Unknown Eros*), in enacting a sequential process or narrative of mourning that works through grief towards an eventual resolution, or at least accommodation, with loss.³ It is an obvious irony that loss should inspire poets such as these to such eloquence, but this can conceal yet another, more important, irony. Such a poet, as Tennyson put it, was one who felt compelled to sing. But this was because his lyricism here was bound up with the desire to have done with words, to supersede grief by expressing it:

I do but sing because I must,
And pipe but as the linnets sing:
(*In Memoriam*, XXI)⁴

In a similar vein, Tim Dolin claims that Hardy is exceptionally forging in *Poems of 1912-13* 'a lyric of self-exposure'.⁵ In some ways one might quibble over the idea of exposure, since Hardy is not a poet given to obvious or confessional kinds of self-disclosure. However, I take Dolin importantly to be indicating how to how uniquely driven the collection is by the need for personal expression, and how inescapable some notion of the therapeutic is in our understanding of the internal logic of these poems, as they set out to use speech to liberate the self from the burden of what is otherwise unvoiced.

Turning to the poems themselves then, in what ways might we identify them with the speaker's need to communicate, and escape from the prison of grief? An important part of the answer is found in the internal logic of the poems, in that each proceeds from some datum of purely private experience that threatens to become radically privative unless it can be turned outwards into words. Over and again, a poem shapes itself as a subjective response to some mundane, yet haunting and divisive, pretext. It is as if each poem sets out to unravel a painful knot in the speaker's soul, to alleviate an obsessional thought, or intense impression that holds him in thrall: she left without saying goodbye; he did not bury her near the sea; the

water falls unchecked on her grave; the whistling north wind makes him fancy he hears her voice; he returns to a place they visited together, tantalized by the unaccountable visitations of the past; an uphill stretch of road makes him remember a conversation many years ago in 'dry March weather' (Hardy, *Collected Poems*, 351).

In the case of 'The Going' this is all heightened by the encompassing fact we have already touched on. His speech is perpetually divided by the fateful irony that his words are now unavailing, that they are both endlessly provoked and endlessly refused by Emma's final obliviousness. The see-sawing rhythms of the poem's speech and of its larger structure convey both these things: his sudden, irrepressible starts of passionate address and his relapses into drained, stalled, hopelessness.⁶ But specifically, as the title of 'The Going' suggests, it is the suddenness of the situation from which he writes that is important. His words register his sense that he has to respond to a new situation, one in which he feels himself bereft or abandoned. At the same time, the poem's title also refers to an essential metaphor, even a fantasy, that underlies the poem, and from which it unfolds. This is the idea not of Emma's death, but of her abrupt 'going'. The trope introduces Emma's personality, since as Rosemarie Morgan observes, Emma was given to sudden departures, and it was her 'habit of upping and leaving without warning'.⁷ In such ways, the speaker's figure of speech strikes this note of intimate recognition, as in 'Lament' ('How she would have loved / A party to-day!').

Yet this trope of departure and personality contains its own coiled ironies, as indicated by the speaker's attitude and tone of bewildered astonishment. His words betray someone struck and taken aback by something newly business-like and independent about his wife's final departure. It is as if she has finally become herself in some new way that has allowed her to turn the tables on him. So, by a strange chiasmus, the pair have now also exchanged places. He is no longer in the ascendency, and is now the one forsaken. This shock surfaces in the tones of his speech – by turns peremptory, insistent, and reproachful, as well as fervent. He desperately wants to converse with his departed wife, to redeem the past. However, he also wants to close up conversation on his own terms: perhaps even to be the one who has the last word, so as no longer to be the one hanging... To the fantasy of her going thus is added the fantasy of Emma as manifesting in death a new and strange self-

possession. Hardy's words convey his feeling that in death she is not only going, but *leaving*, and leaving *him*. In this aspect, marital conversation also reveals its underside of marital contestation, and the commonplace cruelty of marriage where the power to propose can sour into the power to dispose. Now, she turns back on him all the power-play of the marriage that we can surmise from the poem: the daily indifference and avoidance, the wilful extinction of conversation, the desire for the upper hand...

So how can one specifically relate these wide-ranging, contradictory and ironic features of speech to Hardy's uses of metre in a poem like 'The Going'? It might seem that Hardy's uses of metre no longer need defending or championing, given the work of Dennis Taylor in particular in highlighting the rigorous, knowledgeable, experimental and virtuoso aspects of his work in this respect (not to mention the persistent championing of his technical expertise by Ezra Pound, Phillip Larkin, or Donald Davie, amongst so many others). Yet one might still wish that there was more close observation of the inwardness of Hardy's poetic expressivity with his metrical innovations.⁸ After all, this was one area in which Hardy's intentions, as a poet and craftsman, were indisputable and his investment total. Justifiably, he felt that the subtlety and originality of his metrical accomplishment was both at the heart of his writing, and beyond the ken of his critics:

He shaped his poetry accordingly, introduced metrical pauses, and reversed beats; and found for his trouble that some particular line of a poem exemplifying this principle was greeted with a would-be jocular remark that such a line 'did not make for immortality'.⁹

The reading that follows mostly traces the effectiveness of certain metrical motifs as they are employed throughout 'The Going'. But to begin with, I want to frame the discussion by highlighting two important motifs of metrical innovation that are employed by Hardy in 'The Going' and elsewhere. The first motif is the double off-beat/beat combinations (broadly making for anapestic effects); and the second is the use of virtual or implied off-beats (which I take as corresponding to what Hardy calls 'metrical pauses').¹⁰ The first of these (two unstressed beats followed by a beat) is an anapestic motif that is often passingly associated by Hardy throughout the collection with the youthful allure of Emma's lightsome and youthful grace. It often

imparts, momentarily, an inspiriting musicality and momentum to the rhythm, but while also evoking the speaker's impression that her nimble mobility is fused with, and reveals, the romance of the landscape that she traverses:

Why go to *Saint-Juliot*? What's **Juliot** to me?

I was *but made fancy*

By some *necromancy*

That much of my **life claims the spot as its key**.

Yes, I have had dreams of *that place in the West*

*And a maiden abiding / Thereat as in hiding; ('A Dream or No',
Collected Poems, 348)*

I see what you are doing: *you are leading me on*

To the spots we knew when we haunted here together...

I am just the same as when

Our days *were a joy, and our paths* through flowers. ('After a Journey', *Collected Poems, 349*)

Expressively, as this suggests, this animating rhythmical motif can be tracked in the collection as a signature of his sense that she was leading him into a transfigured reality, identified with the beguiling enchantments of Cornwall. In this way, the metrical device becomes a vehicle for the ways the poems communicate not simply Emma's youthful individuality, but also, as has been suggested, the infectious and vibrant power of individuation that he felt she promised his more passive self, as he stood on the threshold of this world, and their life together. If Emma is his muse, then, it is because she continues to inspire him, and offer him a voice, both personal and poetic. However also, as suggested, this association of Emma with movement, voice, corporeality, and place is itself also ironically transmuted in 'The Going'. Within the context of death, it comes to incarnate his imaginings of her swift and peremptory departure to where he cannot follow. The ardent anxiety of youthful love - that she incarnates and promises him a new world - is now ironically reprised and transposed in his felt exclusion from the world of death to which he imagines her as having flown. And in the process he is consigned to an intolerable silence, and a

world that appears endlessly mute, inescapable, and without the power to move.

What of the second motif? I take Hardy's 'metrical pauses' as corresponding to what Carper and Attridge call virtual [o] or implied [ô] off-beats. Here there is no syllable. However, the unheard off-beat provides the necessary metrical spacing between successively stressed beats. Throughout this poem, (as so often in Hardy), these unheard off-beats are in creative tension with the first motif, since they inform the verse with the speaker's sense of the blank, incursive, atemporal nature of death. We can clearly see the same interplay, for instance (associating the double off-beats with romance and movement, and placing them in creative tension with the implied off-beat that conveys the annihilations of death) in the final lines of the second stanza of 'Music in a Snowy Street'. First the double off-beats (marked as -o-) conjoin with the following beat, as in an anapest (-o- B), and give full rein to the speaker's imagining of the 'spry springing feet'

-o- B -o- B
Of a century ago
-o- B -o- B
And the arms that enlaced
-o- B -o- B
As the couples embraced,

And then, in the lines that follow, the implied off-beats (marked as ô) suggest the silent, disintegrative work of death, as youthfully pliable, enlacing arms become old bones beneath the gray slabs of stone:

o B o B ô B
Are silent old bones
-o- B o B ô B
Under graying gravestones. (Hardy, *Collected Poems*, 735)

In a comparable way, in 'The Going' the contrast between these two metrical motifs - the double off-beat and the ghostly off-beat - articulates the inner unresolved

dialectic of the speaker's thinking of loss in the poem. He moves back and forwards between the fictive imagining of her death as one more going, on the one hand, and on the other, his unsparing acknowledgement of the invisible metaphysical event of death, and the utter change and transformation it has brought about. This pattern clearly runs through the poem as an intractable contradiction within the grieving mind. The speaker oscillates between attempting through metaphor to think about death within the mundane texture of life, and contrarily acknowledging that its strange, instantaneous power is unthinkable, unrepresentable, and irreversible. The reading that follows will explore further how Hardy continually uses metre to register the impossibility of living this tension between these two, equally necessary yet mutually exclusive, frames of thinking. The mind blanks before death's resistance to knowledge, and so must fall back again on merely imagining it. At the same time, the mind is aware also at some level of how its fictions are themselves a cover for what cannot be represented but only acknowledged - death's invasive, subtractive power of erasure, absence, nothingness.

Turning to the metre of the poem itself, in the first four lines of 'The Going' (*Collected Poems*, 338-39), we can see the rhythm's expression of the obsessive circuits of the speaker's grieving mind. First, he begins by forlornly attempting to address and reason with his wife. His voice starts and stops, one moment rising with a certain febrile insistence, the next falling back:

B -o- **B** o **B** O **B**
 Why did you give no hint that night
 o **B** o ô **B** -o- **B** o **B**
 That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
 o **B** o ô o b o **B** o **B**
 And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
 -o- **B** o **B** o ô b -o- **B**
 You would close your term here, up and be gone

First, the double off-beats set up an anapestic rhythm that tropes her death as a characteristically sudden, wilful departure. Preceding the beat (in bold), these impart an urgent imploring tone to the speaker's words, in conjunction with their reiterated imagining of the impetus of her hasty parting as one more empirical going ('Why /*did*

you give /... after the morrow's/... you would close/...and be gone...Where I could/ not'). Accordingly too, Hardy desires to make himself heard by her, launching his words as if they could follow in pursuit... But then, the second motif, the implied off-beat, suggests the mystery of death as an unknowable, incisive, metaphysical event that silently cuts into our world as if from some other dimension. In this respect, as suggested above, death is at once utterly invisible and utterly transformative. This is given here in the imperceptible pauses after 'quickly', 'calmly' and 'here'. The implied off-beats invisibly separate and go between two syllables, incarnating in the expressive world of the poem this faceless and imperceptible, yet fatal, division in the fabric of time ('That quickly [ô] after the the morrow's dawn, And calmly [ô] as if indifferent quite, You would close your term here, [ô] up and be gone'). At such moments the metre registers what cannot be represented or known: the unperceived, lethal instant of Emma's death.

By such means, then, the metre suggests the alternations and tensions in the speaker's divided mind as he recurrently fails to overcome the blankness of death, and calls out to Emma. However, the final phase of the stanza offers also a different movement of mind. He now acknowledges the irrevocable nature of her passing. The spasmodic contortions of the early lines yield to the lyricism of the image of the swallow:

- o - B o B o
 Where I could not follow
 o B o B o
 With wing of swallow
 o B o B -o- B o o B
 To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

Sonically, these lines take on a new graceful motion. The cadenced shorter lines create a local spiraling mellifluousness, through rhymes ('follow/swallow'), run-on lines, and looping echoic or alliterative effects ('Where ... With wing ... gain ...glimpse'). The metre, using repeated feminine endings, also contributes a beautiful sense of weightlessness, defying iambic regularity through a graceful prolongation that conveys how a swallow on the wing defies gravity with its circling phases of

sweep and glide. Clearly, Hardy asserts here the incidental, fugitive, lyricism that will infiltrate the collection throughout. Yet the implacably rigorous complexity of his mind also asserts itself, since his words ('where I could *not* follow') also belie the graceful movements and beauty of the verse itself. He acknowledges to himself that he cannot emulate the movements of the swallow that he associates with Emma's parting, and conveys thereby his bitter sense of the impossibility of ever following or seeing her. It is worth emphasizing the difference and continuity in these respects between these lines and those that preceded them, since in both phases of the stanza movement was both evoked and extinguished. But there is more to it too, in that whereas in the early lines the interplay of imagination and reality was a function of the *succession* of incommensurable attitudes, here it is a function of their *coexistence*. So, the tenor of these words, their music and lyricism, may threaten momentarily to carry us away. However, Hardy's word 'not' communicates how his lyricism harbours an unshakeable, all too literal, awareness that he can never see her again (any more than a swallow could fly with one wing, perhaps; or one swallow could make a summer; or one solitary swallow could follow those who have gone before). In this way, the lines still communicate, though in another form, Hardy's rending and characteristic sense that his desire for transport is as impossible as it is ineradicable.

In the second stanza, this broken dialectic of grief now takes another turn. As in the second stanza of 'After A Journey', 'The Voice', or 'I Found Her Out There' the speaker falls back within his deflated interiority. Appropriately, the rhythm now reflects a more quiescent, reflective and ruminative idiom, the first two lines contracting to end-stopped three-beat lines:

B -o- B o B
 Never to bid good-bye,
 o B o o B o B
 Or give me the softest call,

One metrical marker of this shift is a falling away of the anapestic effect. Hardy now employs successive (rather than double) off-beats (italicized in the following sentence). This gives a sense of time experienced now as immobile passivity, as flat detention or empty suspense, as in 'give *me the* softest call ... *utter a* wish for a word

... morning *harden upon* the wall'. The speaker sees himself here as someone who had perhaps unconsciously waiting for a soft call, a word. Yet he now re-imagines the moment-by-moment advent of the morning light as itself hard and rejecting:

o B o o B -o- B o B
Or utter a wish for a word, while I
O B o B o o B o B
Saw morning harden upon the wall,

Amidst the bitterly sorrowful negativity of these lines, the initial stresses on 'softest' and 'harden' make these two antonymic words stand out all the more. Indeed, their metrical prominence and proximity can make us ponder their dual significance beyond the obvious facts that one refers to a tone of voice, and the other to an effect of light... One might passingly wonder for instance, whether there is any further significance in this provocative pairing, if it is indeed one? Most importantly, I would say, the conjoining of 'softest' and 'harden' superposes an implicit registration of the speaker's later, inner reactions to Emma's passing onto his depiction of its outer actuality, as morning came. So the words convey both the shock of this former scene, and the current dynamism of the speaker's later unfolding psychological process and reactions. But how does this work? Clearly, the metrically pointed conjunction of 'softest' and 'harden' expresses the speaker's regret that the two had not exchanged softening words. Conversely, too this wish in association with the word 'harden' unfolds something more complex, though still implicit. This is his emerging awareness (as it were in the moment of speech) of how implacably in waking it was the daily hardening of the heart, the habitual turning away, that was second nature as consciousness gathered and asserted itself. Thus the pairing dynamically enacts a dawning sense of the regret that pains him as he speaks: that waking led to this then-habitually conscious, closing-off of emotional possibility. Further, his words suggest also his dim but agonized sense that this hardening was implicitly taking place at the very moment of Emma's passing: a fact that now strikes him as unconscionable, tormenting, and grotesque. In such a way, then, the metrical joining of the two words moves beyond outer emphasis to provoke and enact the dynamic unfolding of voice and consciousness. In such ways too, the psychological veracity and emotional force and meaning of the poems can be seen as voiced, even

provoked, by the dynamics of metre. And it is a further marker of Hardy's inspiration in these poems that it is precisely this developing, liminal, thought – that the two might have softened to each other and renewed their intimacy - that finds its way to full and explicit consciousness in the penultimate stanza.

Yet the desire that the marital pair might have overcome their own polarizing opposition is of course now a forlorn one. It is also importantly an outcome of the larger recognition in the stanza, that death itself extends the logic of a marriage composed of such daily mutual annihilation and habitual blankness. The irony that compasses the speaker round is that each now remains unchangeably enclosed - him within his interiority, and Emma within her grave - as if in dreadful fulfillment of the wish whereby the pair had effectively boxed each other in by their daily refusals of intimacy and openness, their self-hardening refusals of speech. Irony takes the measure of this situation again, as the speaker - as in the previous stanza - brings such a perception towards consciousness. This is evident in another, more obvious, pairing of words - 'unmoved' and 'unknowing' which takes up a line on its own. This pairing similarly expresses, like 'softest' and 'harden' both his actual unconsciousness of her death as it happened, and the later wish that things could have been otherwise. Bitter self-knowledge reverberates within these words, since the negations of the past imply the contrary but hopeless desire that the two could formerly have spoken, that they could have once again moved or known each other:

o B ô o B o
 Unmoved, unknowing
 o B o B o
 That your great going
 o B o B o ô o B o B
 Had place that moment, and altered all.

Once again here the implied off-beats correspond to the unfathomable excess of death. The first suitably divides 'unmoved' and 'unknowing', as if metrically enacting the two ways death resists his consciousness here – firstly, as an empirical reality of which he was unaware, and secondly, as a metaphysical event that is itself unknowable, and outside of experience. The implied off-beat in the final line

(between ‘moment’ and ‘and’) similarly and eloquently suggests the temporally divisive work of death as an event that alters all. As such, the off-beat, approximating to death as an event outside of the connective work of time and mind, helps underline both the shortcomings and the inevitability of Hardy’s recourse to the metaphor that would seek to identify Emma’s death as if it were a part of life, as if it actually were, in fact, merely a ‘great going’.

In the third stanza, the use of double off-beats returns as the metrical signature for the speaker’s excited imagination of Emma, whose ghost now seems to draw him on:

B -o- B o B o B
 Why do you make me leave the house
 o B -o- B -o- B o B
 And think for a breath it is you I see
 -o- B -o- B o o B o B
 At the end of the alley of bending boughs
 -o- B o o B o B o B
 Where so often at dusk you used to be;
 B o B -o- B o
 Till in darkening dankness
 o B o B o
 The yawning blankness
 -o- B o o B o B
 Of the perspective sickens me!

The gathering sense of Emma’s tantalizing presence infiltrates and overturns the speaker’s sense of reality (“Why /do you *make* ... for a *breath*...”). Within this stanza there is a sense of vertiginous excitement. He feels summoned by her, as in ‘After a Journey’, so that the past appears on the verge of returning. The second line again uses rhythm in obedience to a logic of enactment that draws us in and on. This is apparent, for instance, in the way that rhythmical insistence serves wishful hallucination, since to fit in with the insurgent double off-beat pattern we can imagine we hear the word ‘that’ where no such word exists (And *think* / for a *breath* / it is you / [**that**] I see// At the *end* of the *alley*). However, this pattern soon suddenly stalls,

with the more desultory successive off-beats (in bold following) that convey the actuality of a mind searching, but now falteringly, for the vision of Emma whose apparent imminence is now receding ('alley **of** bending boughs... so **often at** dusk'). And once again, too, the two short lines create a decisive counterpoint as the speaker takes stock. Alliteration, feminine endings and internal rhyme - 'darkening dankness/ yawning blankness' – condense and rhythmically convey his reflexive consciousness of a lowering, see-sawing sense of repetition and emptiness. Once again rhythm enacts the sickeningly conclusive return of feelings of loss, and anticipates Hardy's phrasing of how this empty perspective 'sickens me'.

In the next stanza, though, the mind enters a more stable perspective of voluntary reminiscence. Here the speaker summons Emma rather than the other way round, as he turns to address and evoke her in association with vivid scenes from the past. The metre underscores the precision of Hardy's physical recall. He depicts her in the beauty of the Cornish landscape, in the intimate moments of their eye contact, and in the thumping, thrilling corporeality of their precipitous rides '*along the beetling Beeny Crest*':

B o b o o B
 You were she who abode
 -o- B O B o B
 By those red-veined rocks far West,
 B -o- B O B o B
 You were the swan-necked one who rode
 o B o B o B o B
 Along the beetling Beeny Crest,
 o B o B o
 And, reining nigh me,
 o B o B o
 Would muse and eye me,
 o B o B o o B o B
 While Life unrolled us its very best.

In this stanza, the mind slips the leash of time, and finds solace in the reinvigorating memory of their shared, youthful sense of futurity. The chimerical sense that Emma's

ghost had been drawing him on yields here to this remembered time ‘far West’ when the actuality of the time to come had united them, offering an unfolding, even exhilarating, dimension. This world is full of forward-pressing rhythmical pulse, and vividness. Indeed, within this pulsating world of youthful passion, colour, pleasure, and possibility, even the ancient and immovable ‘red-veined rocks’ appear transfigured and embodied. The stanza’s vitalizing principle is epitomized in the final lines. The internal rhyming, rhythmical and echoic effects of sound (‘ning’/ ‘nigh’; ‘me’/ ‘muse’/ ‘me’) capture the unfolding face-to-face between the pair, as she reins her horse to look at him (‘And, reining nigh me, / Would muse and eye me’). The stressed word ‘muse’ suggests how mutual scrutiny was compounded with the amusement, reciprocity, and eye contact that would play between them. In this romantic scene, as always in Hardy, the mind is incarnated through the sensitivities of the body. The self expresses its individuality or ‘soul’ (one of his favourite words) through inspiring physical accidents and pleasures, as here in the indefinite, involuntary, prolongations of this scene where lovers meet. This sense of a corporeal event of correspondence, pleasure and sympathy applies also to the way that the descriptions of Emma are equally descriptions of Hardy’s own inner landscape of response, as his sensibility registers and adjusts to hers. His mind rhymes, and composes a common rhythm, with hers, as she reins her horse in to look at him, or as he watches, and now movingly conveys, her own spirited adjustments to the lie of the land as she rides and hoofs it along the ‘beetling Beeny Crest’. In such episodes, everything changes as the chances of love foment a mutuality that opens into the future, generating a movement forwards that will reprise itself in the narrative of the marriage.

The pendulum swings in the poem are never more apparent though than between this stanza and the following one, where the vibrant memory produces a tormenting sense of punitive regret. The rhythms become expressively discordant and knotted:

B o B o o O o B ô B

Why, then, latterly did we not speak,

The strikingly ugly, disintegrative arrhythmia of this line suggests the contortions of a

mind blanking, now in full acknowledgement of this life-defeating refusal to speak, of their failure, after all, to amuse or respond to each other. Passion thus returns once again in an ironized form. The speaker suffers the regretful, torturing awareness that the wilful silence of marriage is now finalized for all eternity by death. Irrevocably now, he is closed off from conversation with his wife, and his only recourse is to these shapeless phrases, these flailing words. He is captive to his obsessive musings on their failure to recapture or renew that lapsed connectedness:

B -o- B -o- B o B
 Did we not think of those days long dead,
 o B o B o O B o B
 And ere your vanishing strive to seek
 o B o B o
 That time's renewal?

His words track a closed loop between bitter despair (we *never* did, we *never* can...) and the consuming yearning that things could have been otherwise (we *might* have done...). This reiterative wish - that they could have recovered the lost joys of the past - is evident metrically in the return of the anapestic double off-beat/beat pattern that here passingly imparts impetus to the lines and evokes those lost joys of the past: 'Did we not **think** of those **days** long dead'...?

In the stanza's closing section he expansively responds to this suggestion with a novelist's mind. He scopes an imagined scene and conversation that could have brought resolution, and present solace:

o o B o B
 We might have said,
 -o- B o B o B o
 "In this bright spring weather
 o B o o B o
 We'll visit together
 o B o B o B o
 Those places that once we visited."

The line ‘In this bright spring weather’ begins with a sprightly double off-beat, followed by three consecutive stressed syllables, ‘*bright spring weather*’, that take time from the implied off-beats between them. Here Hardy brilliantly and movingly uses this metrical motif (the implied off-beat) for once to transmit a counter-sense of what life gives, rather than of what death takes. As a consequence, the lines image something eternal and redemptive that subsists in the leisurely spaciousness of the speaker’s imagining of this scene of spring’s renewal, where the two occupy a happy indefinite interval, and where ‘weather’ rhymes with ‘together’.

However, according to the now familiar dialectic, the last stanza begins with the flatly emphatic reiterations of a final reckoning that sweeps aside such fancied resolutions. The initial phrase ‘Well, well!’ sets the tone of invariance with two emphatic beats, and the first four lines depict again the undeniable, stock-taking, logic of loss (‘All’s past amend, / Unchangeable. It must go...I seem but a dead man...’). Finality here is a matter also of syntax and punctuation, of tolling full stops, and the ironic use of enjambment in the third line where the run-on after the word ‘end’ enacts the speaker’s lowering sense of his own false continuation as a ‘dead man held on end / To sink down soon’. The ponderous, dragging rhythms - incorporating emphasized off-beats, beats, and implied off-beats – underline this sense of someone drained of vitality and desire, on the point of collapse, exhausted and oppressed by the tedious, familiar stations of his grief:

B ô B ô O B o B
 Well, well! All's past amend,
 o B o ô o O B
 Unchangeable. It must go.
 o B -o- B o B o B
 I seem but a dead man held on end
 o B o B ô B o B o B
 To sink down soon . . . O you could not know

As in earlier examples, the implied off-beats or ‘absent beats’ insist in the metrical pattern without being materially incorporated within it. They are once again associated with death, which is itself both absent yet also discernible, and which is

now importantly a disintegrative influence that extends, as suggested, to the speaker's sense of himself. He now feels himself as no longer simply inhabiting the world of the living ('I seem but a dead man held on end'). The equivocations of irony now dominate his own self-awareness, his sense that he is becoming indistinguishable from corpse and ghost, merely detained between life and death. His existence lacks any power to sustain itself, and is now bordered by an insistent silence and power of absence. He is subjugated by this felt sense of imminent annihilation, and the torsions of his grief. His mind turns between memory and a sense of his own death, a split expressed metrically by the implied off-beat, and typographically by the ellipsis:

o B o B ô B o B o B
 To sink down soon . . . O you could not know

One final time, in this closing movement of the poem he turns in imagination to address Emma ('O you could not know'). And once more, though the end of the poem looms, the lines become for a short interval taken by the enlivening musicality associated with her. Alliteration, couplet rhyme and feminine endings fleetingly impart a tripping internal fluency to these lines before the final line recapitulates the irresolvable dialectic that has marked the poem:

o b o B o
 That such swift fleeing
 o B o B o
 No soul foreseeing –
 o B o B ô -o- B o B
 Not even I -- would undo me so!

In this closing line, he draws together the whole poem, voicing and identifying himself as someone utterly dislocated by grief. The implied off-beat disarticulates the line before the reprised double off-beat ('*would undo*') immediately follows it to convey, for the last time, the speaker's ironic, disjunctive, spectral world of loss, longing, and absence.

¹ Cited Ralph Pite, *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* (London: Picador, 2006): 415.

² Thomas Hardy, *Complete Poems*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976): 349.

³ Peter Sacks is another critic who reads the poems broadly in these terms. See Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spencer to Yeats* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1985).

⁴ Alfred Tennyson, *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 366.

⁵ Tim Dolin, "The *Early Life and Later Years of Thomas Hardy*: An Argument for a New Edition," *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 58 (2007): 705.

⁶ By a further poignant irony, it also brings to mind how in 'I Found Her Out There' it was another - silent, rapt and expressive - kind of obliviousness that led to his falling in love with Emma, as he would gaze at her while she would 'sigh at the tale / Of sunk Lyonesse'. In both cases too, Emma's unawareness of him creates a kind of astonishment, though in 'The Going' this obliviousness has another aspect, as if it were part still of an ongoing marital drama.

⁷ Rosemarie Morgan, "Thomas Hardy", *Victorian Poetry*, 48, no. 3 (2010): 386.

⁸ For what it is worth, my own suspicion is that wariness might be bound up with critical disquiet about the thorny issues of intentionality that are themselves bound up with the poetry, in ways I am exploring here.

⁹ F. E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1975): 301.

¹⁰ I follow Derek Attridge's innovations in metrical transcription, developed in his book with Derek Carper, *Meter and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2003): 147.

B beat [emphasized syllable]

b beat [unemphasized syllable]

[B] virtual beat [no syllable]

(perceived at the end of trimeter lines, as in ballad stanzas)

o offbeat [unemphasized syllable]

O offbeat [emphasized syllable]

-o- double offbeat [two unemphasized syllables]

(one – very rarely, both – of the two syllables that comprise an off-beat may be emphasized (=): =o-, -o=, =o=)

[o] virtual offbeat [no syllable, perceived offbeat]

ô implied offbeat [no syllable, necessary rhythmical pause]

~o~ triple offbeat [three unemphasized syllables]

(exceedingly rare in stricter metrical styles)