

A Grammatical Analysis of Tense & Modality in Two of Thomas Hardy's Poems of 1912-1913

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Abstract

The present study grammatically approaches two of Hardy's 1912-1913 poems, "*The Going*" which was written only a month after Emma's death, and "*The Haunter*", which came into existence in 1913. The study is based on the hypothesis that Hardy is more involved in the past in those poems that immediately followed Emma's death, whereas he is more concerned with the present in 1913 poems. The feeling of guilt, confusion between the past and present, and how he could finally overcome his suffering will all be revealed in the grammatical analysis the researcher will embark on. The grammatical analysis will focus on tense and modal auxiliaries used in the two poems. It will show how these devices were used by Hardy, and how an analysis of such devices can lead to an interpretation of the two poems.

**تحليل نحوي لإثنين من قصائد
الشاعر توماس هاردي ضمن مجموعة
قصائده التي كتبها عام ١٩١٢-١٩١٣**

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المخلص :

ترمي الدراسة الحالية إلى إجراء تحليل نحوي لإثنين من قصائد الشاعر توماس هاردي ضمن مجموعة قصائده التي كتبها عام ١٩١٢-١٩١٣ والقصيدتان هما (The Going) التي كتبها بعد وفاه زوجته (إيما) بشهر واحد و (The Haunter) والتي كتبها عام ١٩١٣. تقوم هذه الدراسة على فريضة أن هاردي كان منغمسا في الماضي في القصائد التي تبعت موت زوجته مباشرة في حين انه كان أكثر اهتماما بالحاضر في قصائده لعام ١٩١٣. إحساسه بالذنب والحيرة بين الماضي والحاضر وكيف استطاع في نهاية المطاف أن يتغلب على معاناته كل هذه الجوانب سيتم كشفها من قبل الباحث من خلال القيام بتحليل نحوي . وسيركز هذا التحليل النحوي على زمن الفعل والأفعال المساعدة المستخدمة في القصيدتين وكيف استخدم هاردي هذه الأدوات وكيف أن تحليل مثل هذه الأدوات يساهم في تفسير هاتين القصيدتين .

1. Introduction

Thomas Hardy has written a number of poems after the sudden death of his wife, Emma, on the morning of Nov. 27, 1912. These poems, which were published with other groups of poems in "*Satires of Circumstance*", are a sequence of elegies, in which Hardy implores the guilt he felt for his neglect of Emma over the latter years of their marriage. He, as critics believe, uses his writing to absolve himself of this guilt.

The present study will grammatically approach two of Hardy's 1912-1913 poems, "*The Going*" which was written only a month after Emma's death, and "*The Haunter*", which came into existence in 1913. The study is based on the hypothesis that Hardy is more involved in the past in those poems that immediately followed Emma's death, whereas he is more concerned with the present in 1913 poems. The feeling of guilt, confusion between the past and present, and how he could finally overcome his suffering will all be revealed in the grammatical analysis the researcher will embark on.

The grammatical analysis will focus on tense and modal auxiliaries used in the two poems. It will show how these devices were used by Hardy, and how an analysis of such devices can lead to an interpretation of the two poems.

The researcher will first give an introduction to Hardy's poems about Emma, followed by the presence of the past in Hardy's poems, and brief critical analyses of the two poems. Then, he will analyze the poems grammatically to arrive at some concrete conclusions measured against the hypothesis.

1.1 Introduction to Hardy's Poems of 1912-1913

Hardy was still "on very cold and distant terms with his wife", Emma, when she suddenly died. Her death was a bitter shock to him. Having looked back over the years, he could remember their early marriage years when they had been young and in love. He realized that much of what had been happened since seemed to him to be more his fault than hers. Also, he found a manuscript among Emma's papers, entitled

"*What I Think of my Husband*". This deepened his feeling of guilt. This shock pushed him to write poem after poem about her (Williams,1976:39). Pinion(1968:12) states that in the poems of 1912-1913, a sequence of 21 poems written after Emma's death, Hardy's grief was great, and he was conscious of his neglect of his wife and of her loyalty.

Bailey(1970:57) illustrates that in Hardy's early poems of 1912-1913, Emma's death is treated, and the poems represent the frozen and factured states of grief. He adds that his poems about his deceased wife restlessly move between the recent past and the present, in which Hardy seeks to trace clues of her death.

1.2 The presence of the past in Hardy's Poems on Emma

In 1912-1913 poems, where Hardy is grieving his wife's death, Hardy is looking to the past, and reconsidering the relationship between himself and his wife. Richardson (1975:43) shows that, from the first poem, "*The Going*", there is the presence of their first encounter:

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

Over the course of the ensuing poems the reflections on the distant past predominate. Davie (1973:59) comments that "*I Found Her Out There*" is a rumination on the location of their first meeting, and in "*The Voice*" the ghost explicitly states that it is her younger self, the self that the poet fell in love with, who is doing the haunting:

*Woman much missed how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were*

*When you have changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.*

The poet conjures vivid images of the object of his love 'as I knew you then, Even to the original air-blue gown!' Pinion (1977:32) declares that in "A Dream or No" there are more distinct pictures: 'Fair-eyed and white-shouldered, broad-browed and brown-tressed.' This intensifies in "After a Journey", where a lost and bemused poet is compelled to visit his lover's 'olden haunts', and is surrounded by a vivid but evasive presence:

*Where you will next be there's no knowing,
Facing round about me everywhere,
With your nut-coloured hair,
And gray eyes, and rose-flush coming and going.*

The references to the past are concentrated in specific memories. The motif of the woman riding that is seen in "The Going" is based on a specific incident in the couple's courtship, and is picked up in the poem "Beeny Cliff": 'The woman now is - elsewhere - whom the ambling pony bore'. This memory then becomes the subject of "The Phantom Horsewoman", where the poet becomes obsessed by the 'ghost-girl-rider' (the poet is here referred to in the third person, a masterful way of remaining objective while disclosing the obsessive ness of the vision that he sees 'everywhere in his brain - day, night'.)(ibid:34).

Bailey (1970:91) discusses that the best example of this 'presence of the past' is reached in one of the very best of the poems here, and indeed in Hardy's entire output, "At Castle Boterel". Once again the poet views the past from a firmly rooted present. The distinction between past and present is dramatized by the contrasting weather between the two scenes, which also symbolizes the differences between the two states of mind described by the poet:

*As I drive to the junction of lane and highway,
And the drizzle be drenches the wagonette,
I look behind at the fading byway,
And see on its slope, now glistening wet
Distinctly yet*

*Myself and a girlish form benighted
In dry March weather.*

"*At Castle Boteref*" is a perfect imitation of life. The poem's journey to an understanding and assessment of his love - substance and phantom - is the pattern of his life's journey of forty years to that same assessment. Like a photographer sorting his negatives, he has superimposed over the picture of the first journey the experience of the second. Out of that experience he has created a final, new, whole understanding of the life's long pursuit; and when we achieve such an understanding of experience, we no longer need to worry at it - it can lie down in peace. In the poem, as in his life, Hardy reaches the final sharp clarity of that moment before it fades away (ibid).

2. The Going & The Haunter: Critical Analysis & Meaning

2.1 The Going

"*The Going*" *, like most of the pieces in this section, is written in the first person; here Hardy evidently speaks for himself. The poem is in the form of a monologue addressed to Emma, containing many questions, the answers to which only she can supply.

Hardy asks Emma why she did not alert him to her imminent death, but left him "*as if indifferent quite*" to his feelings, without bidding him farewell: neither softly speaking words of parting, nor even asking him to speak a last word to her. He notes how, as the day dawned, he was unaware of what was happening to his wife, and of how this "*altered all*".

* The interpretations of the two poems are taken from J. O. Bailey, *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy: A Handbook and Commentary* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1970).

Hardy asks Emma why she compels him to go outside, making him think, momentarily, he sees her figure in the dusk, in the place where she used to stand, but ultimately distressing him as, in the gathering gloom, he sees only "*yawning blankness*" and not the familiar figure of Emma.

Turning back to the days when Emma's youth and beauty captivated him, Hardy wonders why, in later years, the joys of their courtship were neither remembered nor revived. He imagines how they might have rekindled their love by revisiting the places where they met while courting.

Finally Hardy concedes that what has happened cannot be changed and that he is as good as dead, waiting for the end "*to sink down soon*" and, in conclusion, informs Emma that she could not know how so sudden and unexpected a passing as hers could distress him as much as it has.

The metre of the poem is surprisingly lively, though the rhythm breaks down in the disjointed syntax and brief sentences of the final stanza. The brief rhyming couplet in the penultimate two lines of each stanza exaggerate this jauntiness, which seems rather inappropriate to the subject of the piece.

Though the reader sympathizes with Hardy's evident grief, it is difficult not to be a little impatient with his tendency to wallow in self-pity. He reproaches Emma for leaving him, and thinks despairingly of his and her failure to rekindle, in later years, their youthful affection: yet, one feels that this is a tragedy largely of his own making. He has, after all, had some forty years in which to "*seek/That time's renewal*". The fact that he only expresses regret at his failure to do so when the possibility has been removed by Emma's death casts doubt upon the sincerity of his grief.

2.2 The Haunter

Imaginatively, and most pathetically, Hardy writes this plaintive and moving poem from the point of view of Emma. It is written in the first person, with Emma as the imaginary narrator. It is almost as if, in putting these words in the mouth of Emma (who, in the poem, sees Hardy as oblivious of her presence) Hardy is trying to reassure himself that she forgives him and continues to love him. Though Hardy does not know it, Emma's

phantom follows him in his meanderings, hearing, but unable to respond to, the remarks he addresses to her in his grief.

When Emma was able to answer Hardy did not address her so frankly; when she expressed a wish to accompany him Hardy would become reluctant to go anywhere - but now he does wish Emma were with him. She is, but he does not know this, even though he speaks as if to Emma's "*faithful phantom*".

Hardy's deep love of nature appears in his choice of the places where he walks, the haunts of those given to reverie: where the hares leave their footprints, or the nocturnal haunts of rooks. He also visits "*old aisles*" (whether the aisles of churches or natural pathways in woods and copses is not made clear). In all these places Emma's ghost keeps as close as "*his shade can do*". "*Shade*" is ambiguous: it is used here to mean "*shadow*" (Emma is as close as his own shadow to Hardy) but the term more usually means "*ghost*" - which is evidently very appropriate here. Again, Emma notes that she cannot speak to Hardy, however hard she may strive to do so.

Emma implores the reader to inform Hardy of what she is doing, with the almost desperate imperative: "*O tell him!*" She attends to his merest sigh, doing "*all that love can do*" in the hope that "*his path*" may be worth the attention she lavishes on it, and in the hope that she may bring peace to Hardy's life. The lyrical trochaic metre and subtly linked rhyme scheme seem in keeping with the optimistic content of the poem, unlike "*The Going*", in which the liveliness jars with the sombre, self-pitying character of the piece. Instead of (as in "*The Going*") reproaching Emma, for leaving him without warning, here Hardy celebrates her essential fidelity and benevolence which she retains, even in death. While the idea of Emma as the faithful phantom is, of course, entirely fanciful it is strikingly plaintive and touching.

3. Analysis of Verb Tense in the Two Poems

In this section, the researcher will analyze and categorize Hardy's selection of tense, so as to show how Hardy communicates with his deceased wife, moves between worlds, and how he is confused between the past and present.

3.1 *The Going* *

The number of present and past tense in Hardy's "*The Going*" has been incorporated into the following table:

Table 1: Tense in Hardy's "*The Going*"

Tense Stanza	Present Tense	Past Tense
1	-----	4
2	-----	6
3	5	1
4	-----	7
5	1	5
6	5	2

* Tim Armstrong, Thomas Hardy Selected Poems (London: Longman, 1993).

In the 1st and 2nd stanzas, though the speaker is in the present, he uses only the past tense. He is asking why she, Emma, passed away without saying anything or what she had been thinking about him. Hardy hadn't noticed at all what she thought about him, or that she is seriously ill. The negative past tense used, "*why did you give no hint*" and "*I could not follow*", is used by Hardy to hide his neglecting her, as if he had no idea about her illness. Meanwhile, this negative form of the past tense reveals, to readers well acquainted with Hardy's biography, that Hardy is regretful for the way he was living with his wife and that he feels guilty for not treating her well. Regret and guilt make him more concerned with past, which he now wishes he can change. Therefore, the past tense is used.

In the third stanza, unlike the 1st and 2nd, Hardy uses the present tense more than the past, five in present and one in the past. The five present verbs here move us to the present Hardy is living "*Why do you make me leave the house/ And think for a breath it is you I see*". The 3rd stanza, where the present tense prevails, comes as a consequence to the preceding stanzas, 1st and 2nd. It expresses what Emma's death caused to Hardy, and how it forced him to suffer "*The yawning blankness/ Of the perspective sickens me*".

Hardy's confusion between the past and present, death and its aftermath, becomes clearer when we see Hardy in the fourth and fifth stanzas returning back to the past. He once

again expresses his regret that the joys of their courtship, in later years, were neither remembered nor revived, "*why did we not speak*" / "*Did we not think of those days long dead*". The bitter present pushed Hardy to focus, in those two stanzas, on the past which they, he and Emma, could have made better. That is why the negative past is used, where it is implied that he had the chance to make the past happier but he didn't.

In the 6th stanza, Hardy once again turned to the present, where five present verbs are used. This stanza is the final consequence of the past, which Hardy presents to readers, "*All's past amend, / Unchangeable*". Hardy, with that great regret and sorrow inside him, tells that he is now no more than a dead man.

A general look at tense used in the six stanzas composing the poem reveals that each two each two stanzas in the past are followed by one in the present. This can first denote that Hardy's current suffering mainly comes from the past, the time at which he did not treat his wife well. Also, it implies that his deepest sorrow lies in his regret for the past more than in Emma's loss.

3.2 *The Haunter*

The results of analyzing the use of past and present tense in Hardy's "*The Haunter*" can be summarized in the below table:

Table 2: Tense in Hardy's "*The Haunter*"

Tense Stanza	Present Tense	Past Tense
1	10	2
2	4	6
3	9	-----
4	11	1

As the table reveals, the dominant tense used in this poem is the present, which Hardy used 34 times, whereas only 9 times the past was in use. This is significant and relevant to the main theme and idea of the poem. Hardy here tries to stress to himself that his wife, Emma, still communicates with and loves him. His regret for not treating her well during her life, which is shown in poems written immediately after her death, begins now to vanish. For instance, in "*The Going*", Hardy uses the

past tense more than the present, where it is shown that he is still in dilemma between regret and abandonment. Hardy's confusion between the past and present is also expressed.

In the 1st stanza of "*The Haunter*", the main tense used is the present. It is an attempt from Hardy to convince himself that Emma is still close to him, can hear his speech, and is trying to communicate with him, "*I haunt here nightly*" and "*hover and hover a few feet from him*". In the 2nd stanza, the dominant tense is the past, as Hardy, through the speaker, refers to past events. When Emma was alive, Hardy did not usually invite her to join him, nor did he ever speak to his wife frankly and intimately, "*when I could answer he did not say them:*". After her loss, he now wishes she goes with him wherever he intends to go, "*now that he goes and wants me with him*". In this stanza, Hardy's regret for the way he was living with his wife is apparently uncovered.

In the 3rd stanza, all 9 verbs used are in the present. The present tense here used to emphasized that Emma's ghost keeps close to Hardy and accompanies him to places "*only dreamers know*". This stanza can be looked at as a response to Hardy's regret depicted in the 2nd stanza. It implies that Emma forgave Hardy and that is why she is communicating with him now, and is present in his world.

In the last stanza, the 4th one, the present tense again dominates. There are (11) present verbs, and only (1) past verb. While the past verb "*befell*" refers to Hardy's grief for her loss, all the present verbs used indicate the main aim behind writing this poem, that Emma is not angry for Hardy's past behavior to neglect her, and she instead continues to love him, "*Tell him a faithful one is doing / all that love can do.*"

4. Analysis of Modal Verbs in the Two Poems

In this section of the research, the implications of the modal verbs used by Hardy in the two poems will be analyzed. First, a brief introduction to the definition of modality and modals will be given, and then the researcher will provide analyses of the modals in the poems under scrutiny.

4.1 Modality and Modal Verbs: Introduction

A number of semantic criteria have been proposed for the definition of 'modality'. The criterion now widely accepted is given by Lyons (1977:452), who refers to modality as the speaker's 'opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes'. Palmer (1986:16), on the other hand, presents a more general survey of modality as a typological category. He draws attention to the subjective nature of modality, and thereby defines it as 'the grammaticalization of speakers' (subjective) attitudes and opinions'.

Of the types of modal expressions in English, modal auxiliaries are the one which has received most attention among researchers. A modal verb is characteristically used with other verbs to express mood or tense. In English, the modal auxiliaries are can, may, must, ought, shall, should, will, and would. It is important to realize that these "modal verbs" have no meaning by themselves. A modal verb such as *would* has several varying functions; it can be used, for example, to help verbs express ideas about the past, the present and the future. It is therefore wrong to simply believe that "would is the past of will": it is many other things. The meanings expressed by modal auxiliaries are usually connected with ideas of doubt, certainty, possibility and probability, obligation and permission, or lack of these (Palmer, 1986: 21).

4.2 Modal Verbs in "The Going"

Two modal verbs have been used by Hardy in the 1st stanza of "*The Going*". The first one is *would* "*You would close your term here, up and be gone*", which in its past form, indicates to the reader that an unexpected incident has happened to Hardy, i.e. Emma's death. In fact, Hardy here conceals and denies his knowledge about how serious her illness was. Another modal verb, *could not* which refers to possibility or ability in the past, is used in this stanza "*Where I could not follow*". According to Palmer (1965:79), the past tense *could* and *would* do not normally have the implication of actuality if there is reference to a single action in the past, whereas the negative form *couldn't* clearly denies the actuality of the events.

In the 2nd and 3rd stanzas, modal verbs are not used at all. This can be attributed to the factuality of these stanzas which gives a strong impression to readers. More clearly, Hardy in these two stanzas is describing real events that are happening with him. In the 4th stanza, only one modal verb is used, *would* in " *Would muse and eye me*". This modal expresses a possibility in the past contrary-to-face statement. The "*might have said*" in the 5th stanza indicates a little less certainty and it implies the lack of communication between Hardy and Emma during her life. It further shows that Hardy is distrustful of himself and that he does not remember exactly what they have talked about.

In the last stanza, three modal verbs are in use. First, *must* in the present form refers to the obligation, certainty and necessity. It implies the necessity of their reunion "*Unchangeable. It must go*". Second, *would* and *could not*, as in the 1st, are used in this 6th stanza "... *O you could not know*" and "... *would undo me so!*". This denotes that the speaker is reporting the event, the fact, and also denying the actuality of the event at the same time.

4.3 Modal Verbs in "The Haunter"

An analysis of the 1st stanza of "*The Haunter*" uncovers two modal auxiliaries: *shall* and *cannot* are used. The use of *shall* with first person pronouns usually denotes or expresses advisability, where it is possible for the action to happen. Here, Emma is directing the question to the readers who work as intermediary to tell Hardy that she is trying to communicate with him "*How shall I let him know*". Hardy, in his use of possible *shall* putting the speech in the mouth of Emma, is trying to relieve himself of the guilt he has feeling of. At the end of the stanza, the negative form of the modal verb *can* is used, where Hardy envisages that Emma is listening to and hearing him, but she is unable to answer. The modal verb *cannot* expresses the inability of Emma to speak to Hardy "*But cannot answer his words addressed me-*".

In the 2nd stanza, the modal verb *could* is used twice. It expresses past possibility which is not realized. This implies that there was a chance for the event to happen in the past, but it did not. When Emma was alive and able to answer, Hardy did

not take the opportunity to talk to her "*When I could answer he did not say them:*" and "*When I could let him know*". Also, another modal verb is used in this stanza, *would*. The modal *would* is used to express past contrary-to-face statement. This illuminates that Emma was willing to join Hardy the places he visits, but this did not come true, as Hardy never asked her to join "*How I would like to join in his journeys*". The three modal verbs used in this stanza all refer to things that were possible to happen in the past. This explains Hardy's regret for the past which he is now unable to change.

In the 3rd stanza, it can be noticed that one modal auxiliary is used *can*. Now Emma is speaking of the present stressing that she is with him now and "*close as his shade can do*". This modal verb, which denotes ability, is used to emphasize that she is able to attend his present living. Similarly to the 3rd stanza, the same *can* is used. This is again to show that she is able to do for him what "*All that love can do*". Moreover, it can be seen that Emma is now asking the reader to tell Hardy, without using *shall* to ask advisability how to tell him, as he did in the 1st stanza.

Thus, we see that in the first two stanzas, modals expressing "advisability", "inability" and "possibility" are used, before Emma can make a communication with Hardy and when Hardy was still living in the past which he wished he can change. In the last two stanzas, on the contrary, only the verb *can* is used. This is a technique by Hardy to convince himself that Emma is communicating with him, and she forgave him for the years of neglect from his side.

Conclusions

Having analyzed two of Hardy's poems about Emma, the researcher has arrived at some concrete conclusions. First, it has been found that Hardy's poems written immediately after Emma's death in 1912 differ from those written in 1913. In the poems of 1912, Hardy is more concerned with the past, and he implicitly presents his regret for his neglect of his wife over the latter years of their marriage. In those of 1913, Hardy's confusion between the past and the present began to

disappear. He is, in those poems, living in the present and presenting to readers that Emma is trying to communicate with him to tell that she forgave him.

Secondly, it has been concluded that grammatical analyses of Hardy's poems about Emma are useful to arrive at objective interpretations. Through the present study, it has been found how the analysis of verb tense and modal verbs in Hardy's "*The Going*" and "*The Haunter*" led to revealing the main themes of these poems.

Finally, the researcher believes that further studies focusing on the analysis of other grammatical aspects and devices like adverbs or pronouns will also have fruitful results towards an understanding of Thomas Hardy's poems about Emma.

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