

**The Going**, the first of the 1912-1913 poems on the death of Emma Hardy on 27 November, 1912

Why did you give no hint that night  
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,  
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,  
You would close your term here, up and be gone  
    Where I could not follow  
    With wing of swallow  
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

as if you didn't care  
end your time alive

ever anon – ever again

    Never to bid good-bye  
    Or lip me the softest call,  
Or utter a wish for a word, while I  
Saw morning harden upon the wall,  
    Unmoved, unknowing  
    That your great going  
Had place that moment, and altered all.

lip me – give, with your lips

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

    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.

the cliffs near St Juliot, Cornwall  
swan-necked – long beautiful neck  
beetling - projecting

Why, then, latterly did we not speak,  
Did we not think of those days long dead,  
And ere your vanishing strive to seek  
That time's renewal? We might have said,  
    "In this bright spring weather  
    We'll visit together  
Those places that once we visited."

ere - before

Well, well! All's past amend,  
 Unchangeable. It must go.  
 I seem but a dead man held on end  
 To sink down soon. . . . O you could not know  
     That such swift fleeing  
     No soul foreseeing--  
 Not even I--would undo me so!

Emma Hardy died on the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> November 1912. It appears that Hardy had not realised how ill she was; he was shocked at her death. He and Emma had been estranged for some time, although they continued to live together at Max Gate. Perhaps this is why he had not noticed her increasing frailty. Her death prompted an outpouring of poems, of which 'The Going' is the first.

The first four verses are very much centred on 'you' (Emma). Verse one: 'Why did you give no hint ... that ... You would close your term here!' Verse two: 'Your great going / Had place that moment, and altered all.' Verse three: "Why do you make me leave the house / And think ... it is you I see?" Verse four: 'You were she who abode / ... far West.' In verse five the focus moves to 'we', and what, as a couple, they might have said and done. In the last verse, the focus moves to Hardy, the desolate widower, undone by his wife's sudden 'going'.

Hardy calls the poem 'The Going' but he largely avoids the word death. He refers to Emma's death as 'close your term here, up and be gone / Where I could not follow'; as 'your great going'; as 'blankness'; as 'your vanishing', and as 'such swift fleeing'. He uses the word dead only twice. In the penultimate verse, he asks with remorse why they did not think of the happy days when they first met, 'those days long dead ... and strive to seek / That time's renewal?' That hope has now died with Emma's death. The second time he uses the word dead is in the last verse, describing himself: 'I seem but a dead man.' This means that the emphasis of the poem falls on how different everything seems without her, 'and altered all'. She has gone where Hardy cannot follow, cannot ever see her again, cannot ever speak to her again. He keeps thinking that he sees her and finds nothing but 'darkening dankness' and 'yawning blankness' – emptiness. The suddenness of her departure is dwelt on: 'quickly', 'such swift fleeing' and Hardy's inability to get his mind round it.

The structure and literally the shape of the verses is unusual. The syllable count is all over the place. In verses 1, 3 and 5, the longer lines have syllable counts of 8, 9, 10 and sometimes 11 syllables. The strangely short lines 5 and 6 in each verse have sometimes 5, sometimes 6 syllables. Verses 2, 4 and 6 have shorter first two lines, more of the length of lines 5 and 6. What is the effect of this?

Verses 1, 3 and 5 all start with the cry or the question Why? 'Why did you give no hint that night ...!' 'Why do you make me leave the house ...!' 'Why then latterly did we not speak ...?' The punctuation follows what is happening. In the first verse, the opening line runs on to the next, re-enacting 'that quickly after the morrow's dawn' Emma left this life. Then the third line slows, reflecting Emma's calm and indifference. The short lines detailing Hardy's desire to follow her, 'to gain one glimpse of you' and his inability to do so are of course run-on lines. Does the shape of this verse, and that of the following alternate verses, give the outline of an hour glass, conveying through shape as well as through the sense and movement of the lines the suddenness of the

changes brought about by time? Not long afterwards he was to write 'The 'Convergence of the Twain', where the verses' shape is the shape of the sunk vessel, the Titanic.

Light, dark and time feature prominently in the first three verses. Verse one opens with the night before Emma's death, and the next morning, the day she died (27<sup>th</sup> November 1912).

Why did you give no hint that night  
That quickly after the morrow's dawn, ...

In verse two,

While I  
Saw morning harden upon the wall,

... your great going  
Had place that moment ...

In verse three

In darkening dankness

Is it that Emma has gone from the light of this world into the darkness, that is, the unknown, of the next? Or are all these mentions of light and dark, night, dawn, morning, more importantly awareness of time, together with words like 'while' and 'quickly after' and 'that moment'? Time that brings such unforeseen changes, time that alters everything. The change from life to death in the first two verses; the change from love to indifference in the fourth and fifth verses. Time that was not well used, in the fifth verse, with its attendant thoughts of all that might have been.

Mistakes that are made. (This is a constant refrain in Hardy's novels and poetry – for example, 'A Trampwoman's Tragedy' and 'A Sunday Morning Tragedy'.)

In each case, the verse crying out, 'Why did you!' 'Why do you!' 'Why, then, latterly did we not?' is followed by the differently structured verse containing reflections, feelings, memories. 'Why did you give no hint ...?' is followed by Hardy's reflection that Emma left with no good-bye and he, watching daylight lighting up the wall, knew nothing of what was happening to her upstairs in her attic bedroom. 'Why do you make me leave the house / And think for a breath it is you I see?' is followed by his vivid memory of her as she was in Cornwall in 1870 when they first met. 'Why, then, latterly did we not speak..?' is followed by the desolate realisation that nothing can be changed now: 'Well, well! All's past amend, / Unchangeable.'

The poem insists on how absolute is the difference made by death. Again and again in the first two verses Hardy describes this. 'I could not follow ... ever anon' (ever again). Here the rhymed words play their part: 'dawn' (when Emma died), 'be gone' (her death; that was how gone was often pronounced in those days), 'ever anon' (ever again). 'Never to .. or ... or ... altered all.' (Here the structure does the insisting: never.. or.. or.. followed by the assonance of 'altered all' and the finality of the stressed monosyllable 'all' at the end of the verse.)

In verses 3 and 4 Hardy thinks he can see Emma. First he thinks 'for a breath (a moment, and how ironic that he uses the word breath which is synonymous with life) it is you I see.' He thinks (and he moves into the present tense, to convey the immediacy of his impression) that he sees her at dusk 'at the end of the alley of bending boughs' and the enjambed four lines mimic the bending boughs and make the reader peer through them wondering if Emma can be seen. She can't, and the short 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> lines and the short stressed monosyllable 'me' at the end of the verse make this irreversible. Next, Hardy sees Emma in memory in verse 4, the Emma he first knew. He repeats

the phrase 'You were ..'. This is a beautiful and romanticised Emma in a romanticised landscape: 'swan-necked' (with a long graceful neck), 'who rode / Along the beetling (overhanging) Beeny Crest.' In all four verses, Emma has been in control. She left without giving any hint of her intention, she makes Hardy leave the house, she makes Hardy think that he can see her in the garden, she was the one riding along the cliffs who, 'reining nigh me, / Would muse and eye me', while he was the passive one.

Juxtaposed to the memories of Emma the beautiful, the penultimate verse considers what might have been with its repeated consecutive 'did we not'; 'did we not speak, / Did we not think...?' It adds ('did we not') 'strive to seek / That time's renewal?' This verse is full of verbs, full of the actions that they did not take, 'speak', 'think', 'strive to seek', 'might have said', 'visit together'. The word 'we' is repeated, followed by the phrase 'We'll visit together...'. This verse considers the togetherness they once shared and failed to rediscover, not taking the opportunities they had.

And so to the sixth verse: 'Well, well! All's past amend, / Unchangeable. It must go.' The heavy cesuras bring the pace almost to a standstill. The half finished sentences and faltering rhythm show the articulate Hardy unable to find words for his feelings:

'I seem but a dead man held on end  
To sink down soon. ... O you could not know  
That such swift fleeing  
No soul foreseeing -  
Not even I – would undo me so!

The sequence of poems Hardy writes on the death of his wife are all elegies, the Greek-derived word for a lament for the dead. Elegies frequently offer an extended poetic consideration of the problem of death, but Hardy does not necessarily follow the conventional path. Critics have read the tone and feelings in the poem in different ways. Some detect irritation, almost a tone of squabbling 'Why did you give no hint ...?' as well as grief and remorse. Some find anger and accusation, on the way through to guilt and tenderness.

F B Pinion writes, in his *A Commentary on the poems of Thomas Hardy*:  
'*Veteris vestigia flammae*, the traces of old love (Virgil, *Aeneid*). The implication is that Hardy's love was renewed by regrets – not to mention Emma Hardy's written reminiscences... and his return to Cornwall in March 1913. Like George Eliot's Amos Barton, 'now he re-lived all their life together, with that terrible keenness of memory and imagination which bereavement gives'. There could be no pardon, he felt, for his inadequacy and the selfishness of his indifference in their later years. Regret and romantic memories mingled to create the inspiration ...'

Alan Pound writes, in *York Notes Advanced*:

'Previous elegies, such as Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, had followed a conventional pattern which paralleled the normal processes of mourning and coming to terms with the loss of a loved one: shock at the person's death, followed by despair, resignation and finally reconciliation. The Poems of 1912-13 reflect this pattern but with significant variations. The early poems, 'The Going', 'Your Last Dive', 'The Walk' and 'Without Ceremony' do follow convention in that they record Hardy's shock at Emma's death. In common with the elegiac tradition there is a refusal to believe she has died. ...

‘In conventional elegiac sequences the next stages of the cycle show the distancing of the poet from the dead loved one ... ‘I found her out there’ is one of the most conventional elegies in the sequence. ... It goes against the grain for Hardy, with his profound sense of an indifferent universe, to sentimentalise nature as a site where Emma can be reborn in spirit. .... ‘The Voice’ is undoubtedly the bleakest poem of the sequence and it marks a return to despair. Conventional elegiacs have therefore largely failed Hardy.

... the creation of a an ideal image of Emma, young, vital and warm in the core poems of the sequence set in Cornwall. ...After attempts to give Emma a voice in the sequence ‘The Haunter’ and ‘The Voice’, Hardy settles for vision.’

In *Thomas Hardy Selected poems* Tim Armstrong writes: ‘The first seven poems of the sequence express a sense of rupture (split, parting) and shock, a ‘difference’, as ‘The Walk’ puts it, between then and now. They alternate between addressing her as ‘you’ and third-person recollections. Hardy models the opening of his sequence, ‘The Going’, on Coventry Patmore’s 1877 volume of domestic elegies, ‘To the Unknown Eros’. Patmore’s ‘Departure’ opens more consolingly than Hardy’s poem on lost opportunities:

It was not like your great and gracious ways!  
Do you, that have nought other to lament,  
Never, my Love, repent  
Of how, that June afternoon,  
You went,  
With sudden, unintelligible phrase,  
And frightened eye,  
Upon your journey of so many days,  
Without a single kiss, or a good-bye?’

Here is Hardy’s opening to ‘The Going’  
Why did you give no hint that night  
That quickly after the morrow’s dawn,  
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,  
You would close your term here, up and be gone  
    Where I could not follow  
    With wing of swallow  
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

Never to bid good-bye  
    Or lip me the softest call,  
    Or utter a wish for a word ...’

## Literary terms

Very often writers highlight important words. They do this with:

Alliteration – several words starting with the same letter or sound, for example, ‘bleared and black and blind’.

Assonance – same vowel sound in different words, for example, ‘abode’, ‘sloped’.

Cesura – a break or pause in the middle of a line of poetry.

Consonance – same consonants in words that contain different vowel sounds, for example, ‘bode’, ‘boughed’.

Enjambement or run-on lines – when there is no punctuation at the end of a line of verse and it runs straight on to the next line.

Onomatopoeia – the effect when the sound of a word reflects its meaning, like ‘plash’.

Personification – when something that is not human is referred to as if it is a person, for example, the Titanic, ‘still couches she’.  
The effect is usually to exaggerate some aspect of the topic.

Repetition – repeated word or meaning.

Rhyme – very similar to assonance; same vowel sound and final consonant, for example, ‘say’, ‘decay’. Masculine rhyme – when the final syllable is stress, as in ‘say’ and ‘decay’. Feminine rhyme – when the final syllable is not stressed, as in ‘growing’, ‘showing’.

Rhythm – the musical beat of the line, with stressed and unstressed syllables (the stressed syllables will be the important ones). The different rhythms have different names. Trochee (trochaic): strong light, strong light; iamb (iambic): light strong, light strong; dactyl: strong light light, strong light light; anapaest: light light strong, light light strong. If puzzled, try Wikipedia which is very clear on the subject.

Then there are technical words for the number of lines in a verse or stanza.

Quatrain – four lines in a verse

Sestet – six line

Octave – eight lines