

# A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THOMAS HARDY'S *THE GOING*

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## 1. Introduction

'*The Going*' is one of Hardy's poem which was written shortly after the death of his wife, Emma Hardy, in December, 1912. He wrote many poems during 1912 - 1913 while grieving his wife's death. In this poem, Hardy is looking to the past, reconsidering the relationship between himself and his wife. The past has a double meaning for him. There are contrasts between happiness vs. unhappiness and brightness vs. darkness in the past. Through out this poem, we can see that Hardy is stuck in the past. Emma's sudden death was an unexpected one for Hardy, so he is confused between past and present. This poem is remarkably powerful as well as quite influential and continues to appeal to readers today.

I will analyze the text semantically first, then research grammatical features such as tense, pronouns, modality, adverbs, verb phrases, active and passive voice. I will then analyze how the grammatical aspects are effective in creating the meaning.

Lastly, I will examine Parallelism and Deviation in this poetry and comment on the effectiveness.

## 2. Interpretation of the poem

Two characters appear in this poem, the speaker and the lady of the blessed memory. I consider that the speaker to be Hardy and the addressee his deceased wife, Emma. He uses a monologue style in this poem. I feel that these are dialogues between Hardy and Emma, though we cannot see any reply from her, her answers are hidden in this poem. He is also talking to himself and recalling having paid court in Cornwall. Three scenes are presented in this poem, one of the scenes takes place in his house, the second is in Cornwall where they paid court to each other. The third scene is at their house in Maxgate.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Stanza

Emma Hardy died on 27<sup>th</sup> of November, 1912, shortly after, this poem was written.

Appealing to Emma for response, Hardy, 'I', is asking why she has passed away without saying anything or what she had been thinking about him. Hardy hadn't noticed at all what she had been thinking or how she had been seriously ill. For example: 'give no hint', 'where I could not follow', 'With wing of swallow'. The poem was written to convey lament, sorrow and loneliness.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Stanza**

Hardy's 'I' continues to speak to his wife about why she has passed away without saying good-bye, or anything. After her death, he discovered how significant her presence and existence was to him. For example: 'your great going'. Their relationship has changed completely after her death. He also realized that he had been misunderstanding her for a long time.

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> Stanza**

This scene is presented at their house in Maxgate; it outlines how Emma spent her time there. This stanza also starts with 'Why'. The interrogative sentence with 'why' is repeated alternately in each stanza. Hardy solicits her response persistently. At the same time, he asks himself about the reasons for their disconsolate life and his irritation and he is upset about their lack of communication. For example: 'where so often at dusk you used to be', 'Till in darkening darkness', 'Of the perspective sickens me!'

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Stanza**

This scene is presented in Cornwall where they spent their happy courtship. He recalls the past with regard to himself and Emma and he also explains how happy they were or how pleasurable their life was. For example: 'Along the beetling Beeny Crest', 'And, reining nigh me', 'Would muse and eye me', 'While Life unrolled us its very best'.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Stanza**

This scene is returning to the present. This stanza also begins with the 'Why?' interrogative form. He is asking again why they did not speak, and according to the context, maybe they talked about going to Cornwall. We can suppose that they had never been there after their courtship, so Hardy regretted that he had not taken her there. In this stanza, the pronouns change from 'you' and 'me' to 'we'. He questions whether they could have renewed their time or they could have amended their miserable life, but he knows that it is too late.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> Stanza**

'Well, well!' shows that everything is over. Time passes and the reality is facing him. The reality is that his wife is dead, and he cannot change anything. Nobody could have foreseen her sudden death, even she, herself could not have known. For example: 'To sink

down soon ... O you could not know', 'That such swift fleeing', 'No soul foreseeing', 'Not even I - would undo me so!'

### 3. Tense

In this section tense selection will be categorized to show the temporal dilemma Hardy is faced with.

Results of Analysis

Table 1.

	Present Tense				Past Tense		
	Event	Habitual	State	Instantaneous	Event	Habitual	State
1 <sup>st</sup> stanza	—	—	—	—	4	—	—
2 <sup>nd</sup> stanza	—	—	—	—	4	2	—
3 <sup>rd</sup> stanza	—	3	—	—	—	1	—
4 <sup>th</sup> stanza	—	—	—	—	2	5	—
5 <sup>th</sup> stanza	—	2	—	—	1	2	1
6 <sup>th</sup> stanza	—	2	2	1	2	—	—

In the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stanzas, the past tense is always used, perfectly and neatly. In the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stanzas, the speaker is in the present, but he speaks using the Event Past and the Habitual Past Tense. Also in the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza, the Past Tense (Event and Habitual) are used exclusively. Here, the speaker is looking back to the past and describing the aspect of his wife. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza, except for '*you used to be*' the Present Tense (Habitual) is used. The scene is of the past incident, but Emma's daily proceedings are described in the Present Tense. It makes them very vivid and realistic. In spite of his regret in previous stanzas, this shows that he is rather irritated by her behaviour; I can see his ambiguity and ambivalence in that stanza. In the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> stanzas, the Past Tense (State Past, Habitual Present and Event Past) and the Present Tense (State Present, Habitual Present and Event Past) and the Present Tense (State Present, Habitual Present and Event Present) are in use alternately. This shows that Hardy is confused between the past and the present, though he perceives his present reality or actuality, he is still in a dilemma between regret and abandonment.

#### 4. Pronouns

##### Results of Analysis

Table 2.

	1 <sup>st</sup> person pronoun	2 <sup>nd</sup> person pronoun	3 <sup>rd</sup> person pronoun	Demonstrative pronoun	Relative pronoun	Possessive pronoun	Of pronoun	Where pronoun
1 <sup>st</sup> stanza	1	1	—	1	1	1	—	—
2 <sup>nd</sup> stanza	2	—	—	—	1	1	1	—
3 <sup>rd</sup> stanza	2	1	1	—	—	—	—	1
4 <sup>th</sup> stanza	2	1	2	1	1	—	—	—
5 <sup>th</sup> stanza	1	1	—	2	1	—	—	—
6 <sup>th</sup> stanza	2	1	1	—	1	—	1	—

As stated previously, Hardy uses various kinds of pronouns in each stanza. Remarkably in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> stanzas, the pronoun, ‘*you*’ is used, but in the 5<sup>th</sup> stanza, it is replaced by ‘*we*’. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza, the pronoun, ‘*you*’ is not described, but semantically ‘*you*’ is hidden in the context. In the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza, ‘*you*’ is used, but ‘*I*’ is replaced by ‘*me*’ in the same stanza. So, why were the pronouns ‘*you*’ and ‘*I*’ replaced by ‘*we*’ in the 5<sup>th</sup> stanza? Of course, ‘*you*’ is Emma and ‘*I*’ is the speaker, Hardy himself. I think that in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> stanzas, Hardy questions both his wife and himself about past incidents. The 4<sup>th</sup> stanza differs from the other stanzas semantically. The plural pronoun, ‘*we*’ is inclusive of the addressee, so that the pronoun, ‘*we*’ implies Emma and Hardy. In the 5<sup>th</sup> stanza, the plural pronoun, ‘*we*’ implies that their broken relationship was caused by themselves and he asks why they did not communicate with each other. Here, he admits the lack of communication as their common fault. I can feel their harmony and his wish to become reconciled. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stanzas, there is a remarkable contrast. The two stanzas use the pronoun ‘*me*’, the objective form twice. By using ‘*me*’ instead of ‘*I*’, the subjective form, these lines add to semantic strength or stress, and also sound very rhythmical. Though the two stanzas use the same personal pronoun ‘*me*’, the objective form,

semantically they are in contrast and there are some differences. The 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza gives us the impression of darkness, boredom, irritation and anger. The image of the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza is brightness, joy and happiness. I feel that Hardy represents the contrast between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stanzas, by using the same pronouns; the objective form.

## 5. Modality

The use of modal verbs will be examined in this section. In the 1<sup>st</sup> stanza, '*would close*' – past tense, reported speech which refers to probability, is used. These modal auxiliary verbs indicate to the reader that an unexpected incident has happened to him. '*could not follow*' – past tense, negative form which refers to possibility and ability (and perhaps probability), is used. According to F.R. Palmer, 1965, there appears to be the same restriction in the use of '*will*' and '*shall*' for the past time references. They occur quite regularly in '*would*' and '*should*' forms for reported speech. According to Palmer, 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 forms couldn't quite clearly deny the actuality of the event. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stanzas, modal verbs are not used at all. I imagine that the factuality of these stanzas gives a strong impression to the readers. In the 4<sup>th</sup> stanza, '*would muse*' – past tense which refers to possibility. '*Might have said*' – past perfect tense which refers to a little less certainty about the possibility and a lesser degree of obligation is used in the 5<sup>th</sup> stanza. The '*Might*' seems to refer to a little less certainty and that it implies their lack of communication. It further indicates that Hardy is distrustful of himself and that he doesn't remember exactly what they have talked about. In the last stanza, three modal verbs are used: '*must, could and would*'. '*Must go*' – present tense which refers to obligation, certainty and conclusiveness. '*Must*' also expresses necessity with effect, and it implies the necessity of their reunion by using the modal verb – '*Must*'. As I have stated in the 1<sup>st</sup> stanza, same forms are used: '*could not follow*' – past tense and negative form, '*would undo*' – past tense. In the 1<sup>st</sup> and last stanzas, the same modal verbs are used, it implies that the speaker is reporting the event, the fact, and also denying the actuality at the same time.

## 6. Adverbs

I have excerpted how adverbs are used here, and classified them semantically. I quote "An Outline of Collegiate English Grammar" by K. Tanaka, 1987. Adverbs are semantically divided into the following classes:

Results of Analysis

**Table 3.**

Adverbs of Place	4
Adverbs of Time	9
Adverbs of Manner	4
Adverbs of Degree	2
Adverbs of Cause	1
Adverbs of Assertion	2

Adverbs of Time are used most frequently here. We can infer that Hardy was keenly conscious of time and the passage of time. This is also related to the Tense. We can also visualize how sudden Emma's death was, and according to adverbs like 'quickly, ever, anon, never, latterly, ere and soon', it was not an expected reality for him. It is quite interesting to study the adverbs of manner used here, which are semantically important. It is easy for the reader to imagine that after her death he was in a state of shock, but at the same time he examined himself and thought and about their relationship introspectively.

### **7. Verb Phrases**

Here, I will distinguish between simple verbs and complex verb phrases in this poem. Results of Analysis

**Table 4.**

Simple Verbs Total:	27	Complex Verb Phrases Total:	11
base form	13	modal auxiliary +lexical verb	8
-s form	1	primary verb +lexical verb	2
-ing form	3	other +lexical verb	1
Ed/changed vowel	10		

As I have stated above, Hardy uses more simple verbs than complex verb phrases. He uses 13 base forms out of 27. Base form gives us an actual impression and they sound like a factual statement which doesn't change or which will not change. There is a certain contrast between the present reality and the past, good memory. He represents it techni-

cally. As far as the complex verb phrases are concerned, he is using 8 modal auxiliaries + lexical verbs out of 11. As I have already stated as to the modality, they refer to obligation, certainty, possibility, necessity, permission and ability. The 8 modal auxiliaries + lexical verb phrases which are used here are the past tense modals. R. Quirk, 1990 claims that, “The past tense modals can be used in the hypothetical sense of the past tense.” I feel there is a hypothetical meaning which is hidden in this poem. I think that Hardy indicates his internal ambiguity through this poem.

#### **8. Active and Passive Voice**

It is quite interesting to notice that Hardy uses only active voice throughout the poem, there is not a single use of the passive voice. I consider he intentionally used this simple style. By using the active voice, the sentences could be simpler and clearer. They are very straightforward, but on the other hand, they have a complex meaning; they illustrate the stance of the author as well.

#### **9. Parallelism and Deviation**

Among the 6 seven-line stanzas, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> stanzas take one shape, and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> stanzas take another. The shapes of regularity are foreground perfectly. The verses begin with the interrogative adverb ‘*why*’ alternately in stanzas 1, 3 and 5. I can observe the parallelism of rhyme unification. The poem has one rhyme-scheme stanza, ‘ababccb’ which is completely regular. There is also regularity and deviation as to the length of the lines. Here the parallelism is foreground. From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> stanzas, each stanza is composed of one sentence. There is a deviation in stanza 5, which has two sentences. There are four sentences in stanza 6. The speaker’s statement and confession last long in stanzas 1 to 4, but the context is getting shorter in stanzas 5 and 6. The effectiveness of a long sentence in each stanza makes it more poetical, formal, and rhythmical. On the other hand, in stanzas 5 and 6, they seem dialogic and more informal, so that the speaker seems to be talking to her as if she were there. This is how he creates the reality.

I will also make some observations on syntactic parallelism and deviation.

3<sup>rd</sup> stanza:

bending boughs

darkening darkness

There is a parallelism phonologically. Two of them consist of verbs + nouns. Alliterative patterns are the same, so that it sounds very rhythmical and impressive.

4<sup>th</sup> stanza:

You were she ((who abode)) embedded

S P C A P

You were the swan-necked one ((who rode)) embedded

S P C A P

There is a repetition of clause structures which are constructed by Subject + Predicate + Compliment + Adjunct + Predicate. Here, the speaker illustrates the same person twice, differently. It implies an emphasis and makes a great impact on us as readers.

Red-veined

swan-necked

By repeating the compound words, it makes the sentences rhythmical and poetic. We can appreciate the effectiveness of syntactic parallelism that makes them rhythmical, poetic, and emphatic in meaning.

5<sup>th</sup> stanza:

did we not speak

Did we not think

These are interrogative forms and the same kind of structures; only the verb '*speak*' is replaced by '*think*'. As I have mentioned before, this repetition indicates their lack of communication. They didn't speak and think of each other. Thus, both the parallelism and deviation indicate an emphasis in meaning.

we'll visit

we visited

There is also a repetition: the same pronouns and verbs are used, and the only difference is the Tense. The first one is written in the present tense, and the second is in the past tense. The parallelism and deviation are foreground here. As I have stated before in terms of Tense, Hardy is confused about the past and the present. This is a repetition, but there is a contrast of time. He both presents the glory of the past and shows his regret.

## 10. Conclusion

I have been mainly concentrating my attention upon grammatical features in this poem. After the above analyses, I recognize that Hardy is keenly conscious of the past. It seems that he adheres to or is a slave to past memories or incidents, because of his misconceptions of his wife. There are two key memories of the past for him: the days when they spent their courtship in Cornwall and the days when they did not have any meaningful communication,

misunderstandings. In the past, there is a clear contrast: happiness and lamentation, brightness and darkness. The past has double meaning to him. Hardy is looking to the past, admitting his faults, but he is still in confusion; in other words, he is in ambiguity. He is in a dilemma between the past and the present. He still struggles with himself to face his present reality. Sometimes, the past and the present are mixed up in his mind, and that makes him confused. He indicates to us his uncontrollable struggles. We can also see his internal grief. As I have stated before, he also uses some techniques linguistically to make the poem poetic and rhythmical to represent the realities. Grammatical analyses were quite useful to see the author's style and main theme, as his style is composed of various aspects of language.

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