



RETAINING THE PHANTOM: DESIRE, SYMPATHY AND THE RHETORIC OF THE ELEGY

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RETAINING THE PHANTOM:
DESIRE, SYMPATHY AND THE
RHETORIC OF THE ELEGY

BY ALLISON COOPER DAVIS

'Thoughts of Phena: At News of Her Death'

Not a line of her writing have I,
Not a thread of her hair,
No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
I may picture her there;
And in vain do I urge my insight
To conceive my lost prize
At her close, whom I knew when her dreams were upbrimming with light,
And with laughter her eyes.

What scenes spread around her last days,
Sad, shining, or dim?
Did her gifts and compassions enray and enarch her sweet ways
With an aureate nimb?
Or did life-light decline from her years,
And mischances control
Her full day-star; unease, or regret, or forebodings, or fears
Disennoble her soul?

Thus I do but the phantom retain
Of the maiden of yore
As my relic; yet haply the best of her – fined in my brain
It may be the more
That no line of her writing have I,
Nor a thread of her hair,
No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
I may picture her there.

(Complete Poems 38)

At first glance Thomas Hardy's poem 'Thoughts of Phena: At News of Her Death' seems deceptively simple. Perhaps this accounts for the relatively little critical attention given it, none of which examines the poem outside of its biographical significance in Hardy's life. The poem is, however, quite interesting on a number of levels, not the least of which is that its subject, Tryphena Sparks, was still alive at the time Hardy began to compose it.

Criticism thus far has focused on Tryphena's relationship to Hardy, and there has been much speculation about her possible roles as his lover, or as his former fiancée before Emma, or as the mother of his illegitimate child (Bailey 35; Seymour-Smith 96). While some critics are assured of Tryphena's role in Hardy's early life, others refute the evidence (Seymour-Smith 92-3) and all remains vague enough to let each reader believe whatever story s/he wishes. Tryphena was almost certainly Hardy's cousin, and his elegy for her shows that he did have a history with her of some sort.

I do not intend to hypothesise about the nature of this relationship; rather, I want to look at the construction of Hardy's elegy to examine the way that Hardy dissolves the female subject under a cloak of sympathy brought about by the elegiac mode and to discuss how we as readers participate in Tryphena's erasure. Ultimately, I argue, this poem establishes its critical importance both in and outside of Hardy's canon. Within his canon it gives us a new perspective on Hardy's more famous elegies for Emma. It also, however, demonstrates the inherent tension of the elegiac mode as a whole, as the rhetoric of sympathy created by this mode allows the poet to deconstruct his subject under the pretext of mourning. The poet privileges his voice in this deconstruction, so that his 'mourning' results in a display of his own poetic power rather than producing a memorial to the deceased. Hardy's poem about Tryphena, in particular, reveals this tension in the elegiac mode, as he dissolves the female subject in his attempt to 'control' her in his poetic text. My discussion of this poem argues for its recognition as an antecedent to Hardy's more famous elegies and for a closer examination of the rhetoric of sympathy created by the irony of the elegiac mode.

Hardy recorded the compositional history of 'Thoughts of Phena' in his notebook, dated March 5, 1890:

In the train on the way to London. Wrote the first four or six lines of 'Not a line of her writing have I'. It was a curious instance of sympathetic telepathy. The woman whom I was thinking of – a cousin – was dying at the time, and I quite in ignorance of it. She died six days later. The remainder of the piece was not written until after her death.

(qtd. in Bailey 95-6)

Hardy's journal entry is not entirely reliable, as his journals were later edited for the *Life*, so it is impossible to know how much of the poem was written before Tryphena's actual death, which occurred two weeks later (Seymour-Smith 94). Nevertheless, Hardy began what becomes an elegy while Tryphena was still alive. The second and third stanzas may expand on Hardy's suppositions about her final days, but the first stanza, probably fully composed before her death, still

imagines Tryphena as already dead – if not physically, at least emotionally separated from him. The process of grieving he begins, then, does not depend on her actual death, but implies his need to separate himself from her, and he begins and completes this process through writing her elegy.

As Peter Sacks explains in *The English Elegy*, the process of loss and consolation ‘require[s] a detachment of affection from a prior object followed by a reattachment of affection elsewhere’ (Sacks 8). When Hardy writes about Tryphena on the train, he first searches for a substitute to which he can attach his affection, so that he can begin the process of grieving. He looks for physical objects that would represent her, but since he has none, he writes, ‘Not a line of her writing have I./ Nor a thread of her hair’. Typically the mourner turns from the loved one to a sign of that loved one and finds comfort in the contemplation of this object as the representative substitute (Sacks 4-5). This process of substitution places the dead at a distance from the mourner, and gives relief to him by letting him escape from confrontation with his own mortality (Sacks 19). Hardy tries to imagine Tryphena at the end of her life, ‘What scenes spread around her last days’, but he realises he does not have an object or memory to which he can cling. His process of grief will instead dissolve her into a ‘phantom’ which he retains ‘as [his] relic’. He finds this abstraction of her, ‘fined in [his] brain’, superior even to a tangible reminder of her physicality.

John Paul Riquelme in ‘The Modernity of Thomas Hardy’s Poetry’ suggests that Hardy’s dissolution of his elegiac subjects demonstrates his rejection of the traditional comforts of the elegy (Riquelme 215). (Ramazani also notes this in ‘Hardy’s Elegies for an Era’, 141.) Riquelme forgets, however, that though the elegiac mode traditionally provides a movement from lamentation to praise to consolation, poets conventionally resist consolation (Howard 215). In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, for example, poets expressed a lack of consolation, but then found comfort by submission to God’s will. As early as the late-seventeenth century, they resisted consolation only to find acceptance through belief in poetry’s power and agency (Howard 223-24). The text of the elegy began to ‘serv[e] as a vehicle for the transformation of loss into gain, absence into presence, sorrow into solace, and also ... of the past into the wished for present and/or future’ (Howard 224). In his discussion of Hardy’s elegies for his wife Emma, Riquelme suggests that Hardy pushes the limits of the traditional elegy by refusing consolation altogether instead of turning to objects and receiving comfort in the process of mourning. I believe, however, that we must also consider the possible comfort implicit in his dissolution of the female subject – the comfort that arises from the retention of the phantom instead of the reality and the power of imaginative control this gives Hardy as a writer.

To understand this sort of consolation, one must begin by uncovering the connection between grief and gender. The propriety of mourning has been

gendered since the Middle Ages, and, as Allison Levy points out, Francesco Petrarch helped restrict feminine expressions of grief from the public sphere, advocating their confinement within the home (Levy 87). Public grieving, especially through the medium of poetry like the elegy, was typically a masculine domain, though some women did break this taboo. Similarly, Jennifer Vaught notes the close ties between the traditions of mourning and eroticism, and she explains how courtly love 'sanctioned the expression of melancholy' (Vaught 4). It became appropriate for men to use verse to express grief due to erotic desire, and Petrarch again influenced this tradition, because he claimed that the process of writing assuaged erotic grief. Whether the lover receives comfort from lamenting the beloved's cruelty in a sonnet, or whether the mourner receives consolation from the catharsis of writing, the notion that 'the loss of a friend or partner [was] a necessary condition of one's own creativity' was begun with Petrarch (Vaught 11). As Rebecca Laroche suggests, whether Petrarch writes of Laura while she is alive or dead, 'both ... types [of poems] depend on [her] absence, and the poems on the dead Laura are much like those on the living Laura. A common rhetoric of complaint underlies both erotic desire and elegiac lament' (Laroche 21). Petrarch's verses demonstrate the implicit power dynamic within each poetic mode, for each one depends on the silence of the subject and each privileges the poet's imaginative control.

Like the lover, the elegist writes of an absent beloved whom he desires and cannot attain. Since this language of desire underlies both modes, we should look at the feminine figure in both, in order to establish the consequences of this desire for her. Hardy's elegy for Tryphena, in fact, is imbued with latent desire. He calls Tryphena his 'lost prize', an adjective that implies a history of frustrated desire much akin to a lover's. Indeed, the whole elegy takes on a tone of frustration, for Hardy actually laments his inability to control Tryphena imaginatively through his poetic vision. He cries, 'And in vain do I urge my unsight/ To conceive my lost prize/ At her close'; his separation from Tryphena frustrates his desire for imaginative control, and this longing to contain her in a definite picture leads him to speculate, in stanza two, about how she might have lived during her final days. Even here, however, he cannot come to a definite conclusion. He can never appease his need to contain her until, in the third stanza, he creates a phantom substitute over which he can exert the imaginative control he lacks.

Sacks notes that 'The suitor, like the mourner, is engaged with 'a phantom of his own figuring'' (Sacks 238), and that fictionalisation marks courtship as well as mourning. Through fictionalisation the male poet exerts control over the feminine subject, objectifying her, silencing her, and recreating her to suit his own ends. Petrarch's sonnets set the standards for suitors, standards that include dismembering the female into hyperbolic images of beauty that become

grotesque when pictured realistically. Likewise, one rarely hears the feminine voice, and when one does, she often only expresses scorn.

When one examines the relationship between grief and gender, the connections between the Petrarchan love tradition of erotic grief and the elegiac grief expressed by Hardy's speaker quickly become apparent. I will now briefly examine two poems from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, written for Laura between 1327 and 1373, in order to further demonstrate the link between these two poetic traditions.

Sonnet 17

A bitter rain of tears pours down my face
blowing with a wind of anguished sighs
should my eyes turn to look at you alone
for whom I am divided from mankind.

There is no doubt your sweet and soothing smile
does calm the ardour of all my desires
and rescues me from burning martyrdom
as long as I keep my gaze fixed on you;

but then my spirits suddenly turn cold
when I see, as you leave, those fated stars
turning their gentle motion from my sight.

Let loose, at last, by those two amorous keys,
the soul deserts the heart to follow you,
and deep in thought it tears itself away.

(Petrarch 19)

Petrarch expresses erotic grief due to Laura's presence and her absence. When his 'eyes turn to look at' her, he exhibits outward grief that typically indicates mourning due to death: he weeps profusely, a 'bitter rain of tears', and experiences 'a wind of anguished sighs'. Petrarch admits that Laura's smile 'does calm the ardour of all [his] desires', but this happens as he gazes on her physical body. Thus Laura's body serves both as the site of comfort and torment for him, and her presence causes both erotic grief, through his desire, and, by the poem's end, elegiac grief at her absence. Petrarch does not describe Laura other than in reference to her 'sweet and soothing smile'. Her presence and absence inflict grief on him, but his poem relates his own suffering and does not address her as a complex subject.

In the third stanza Petrarch laments Laura's departure – whether this is her

temporary absence or her death he does not say, but regardless, the poem's conclusion emphasises how his 'spirits suddenly turn cold' as she leaves, and that his own spirit leaves him to follow her; she seems to cause a metaphoric death in him. She is simultaneously present and absent for him, much in the way the deceased are both absent and present for the living. Indeed, Petrarch's sonnets, part of the erotic love tradition, depend upon distance from Laura, for he cannot fully express his love for her unless she remains unattainable. The amount of grief he expresses becomes the measure by which he proves his love.

In addition to expressing erotic grief, Petrarch's sonnets often transform Laura from an actual woman into a spiritual being, for he must align her with spirituality so that she may serve as Muse. For example, in Sonnet 90, he writes:

She'd let her gold hair flow free in the breeze
that whirled it into thousands of sweet knots,
and lovely light would burn beyond all measure
in those fair eyes whose light is dimmer now.

Her face would turn the colour pity wears,
a pity true or false I did not know,
and I with all Love's tinder in my breast –
it's no surprise I quickly caught on fire.

The way she walked was not the way of mortals
but of angelic forms, and when she spoke
more than an earthly voice it was that sang:

a godly spirit and a living sun
was what I saw, and if she is not now,
my wound still bleeds, although the bow's unbent.

(Petrarch 145)

Petrarch first fixates on Laura's physical body, and he fragments her identity into images of physicality. He gazes on her, but cannot decipher her meaning, and he cannot decide if her face reveals a 'true or false' woman. Regardless of his confusion, however, he cannot help falling in love with her, but his attraction does not depend on knowing her or understanding her. Her physical body conditions his response.

But Laura cannot remain merely physical if she must serve the 'higher' purposes of art, and the next two stanzas demonstrate the way Petrarch begins transforming her from a physical being into a spiritual emblem. Although he continues to focus on her physicality, such as the movement of her body, he

privileges her spirituality, proclaiming 'The way she walked was not the way of mortals', and that hers was 'more than an earthly voice'. These phrases signal the way Petrarch dissolves Laura from an actual subject into an ideal as he begins to categorise her in spiritual, rather than earthly terms. The final stanza concludes this dissolution, as Laura becomes 'a godly spirit and a living sun'; she no longer exists as a female subject, for Petrarch has transformed her into an emblem of poetic creativity, Apollo being the deity of both the Sun and the poet.

This poem also blends erotic and elegiac language, for as Petrarch expresses his love for Laura in his praise, he also mourns her absence, due either to separation or her death. Her eyes have grown 'dimmer now' and her transformation from physical to spiritual being may indicate her death as well as her use as his Muse. The actual fact of Laura's death, however, does not necessarily matter. The separation between Petrarch and Laura, like that between Hardy and Tryphena, allows him to use her as a Muse. The grief he expresses signals his own authenticity as a speaker, so it is ultimately in his interests to transform or dissolve Laura to serve his poetic purposes.

One can speculate that Petrarch writes more to display his own creative power than out of true desire or mourning. The love poem, as Juliana Schiesari points out, is always much more about the speaker than in praise of the female subject (Schiesari 95). Schiesari examines a Petrarchan *elegy*, instead of a love sonnet, and notes how often he mourns more for himself than for the deceased. Petrarch's elegy ultimately 'subsumes [the dead's] identity into the depiction of [his] own display of grief ...' (Schiesari 100). His consumption of identity, she argues, signals that he mourns *less* than the elegiac mode might lead us to believe. This 'narcissistic reversal', as explained by Sigmund Freud, constitutes melancholia rather than mourning (Schiesari 97). Petrarch desires poetic power, and whether he writes erotic poetry or elegiac lament, the consolation he experiences comes from exerting imaginative control over his subject.

This, I argue, is the consolation Hardy receives when writing his elegy for Tryphena. As he transforms her from a real woman into a phantom, he creates an ideal of her based on his own needs as a poet, and not on an attempt to memorialise her as a complex subject. She becomes only the 'relic' of his mind, 'fined in his brain' so that only 'the best of her' remains. By exerting this control over the feminine subject, Hardy dissolves her, rendering her unknowable outside of his construction. This provides him with consolation, because it gives him imaginative control over the feminine (see also Devereux 142). As in Petrarchan love poetry, the male poet prefers the female ideal to reality, and Hardy's elegy for Tryphena represents the same desire for control of the feminine. Like Petrarch's Laura, Tryphena acts as Hardy's Muse, his reason for writing that poem, and she eventually becomes his phantom. He transforms her from woman to object, to memory, dissolving her in the process of 'comforting' himself.

Jahan Ramazani notes this transformation in Hardy's later elegies for Emma, arguing, 'In death [Emma] can be changed, troped, turned; in death her objectionable self can be effaced; in death she can be remade as the poet preferred her, as she was in the earliest stages of courtship when she could be little more than his imaginative projections' (Ramazani, 'Hardy and the Poetics' 966). What Ramazani does not note, however, is that this transformation of the female in Hardy's elegies begins with Tryphena, and not with Emma. Unlike his later elegies for Emma, Hardy has no objects, no journals, no recent memories from which to call Tryphena, so that he can 'summo[n her] only to occlude her' (Ramazani, 'Hardy and the Poetics' 970). Additionally, though Ramazani persuasively argues for Hardy's use of the female for his own melancholic purposes, he also forgets that we, as readers, are complicit in Hardy's dissolution of the female because of the sympathy created by the elegiac mode.

Because Ramazani focuses on Hardy's psychological state, he argues that Hardy's elegies for Emma show his guilt over his use of her as Muse. I believe, however, that Hardy's expressions of guilt can also work rhetorically to create sympathy between Hardy and his readers, and that this sympathy further works to focus the poem on Hardy himself, and further effaces Emma's subjectivity. I want to examine three of Hardy's elegies on Emma in order to demonstrate the ways in which Hardy creates sympathy rhetorically. While each one of Hardy's elegies is unique, I believe 'The Haunter', 'A Dream or No' and 'At Castle Boterel' show the continuation of the process of feminine idealisation and dissolution that Hardy begins in his elegy for Tryphena. I do not, however, intend to examine all of Hardy's elegies for Emma, since I want to turn instead to how Hardy's use of the elegy intensifies the rhetorical problems of the elegiac mode. Readers who wish an extensive discussion of Hardy's elegies for Emma might turn to Ramazani's excellent article 'Hardy and the Poetics of Melancholia: Poems of 1912-13 and Other Elegies for Emma'.

In contrast to 'Thoughts of Phena', Hardy allows Emma a voice in 'The Haunter' which seems to imply that he does not seek to limit or dissolve the feminine. Emma's voice, however, does not express feelings that seem likely in a woman who spent the last years of her life emotionally estranged from her husband. In 'The Haunter' Emma follows Hardy around, longing to speak to him. She blames Hardy for not speaking to her and not inviting her on his 'journeys' when she was alive. Now, he can never see her 'faithful phantom' (*CP* 284) and she lacks 'the power to call to him'. She wants Hardy to know that if he even sighs 'since my loss befell him/ Straight to his side I go'.

Though Hardy writes a voice for Emma, it is clearly his own voice. Instead of creating a poem in which Emma has a realistic voice that expresses freedom and independence, he removes her individuality and ties her to himself. She exists as a 'phantom' (note the repetition of the same word he uses to describe

Tryphena); she does not rest or enjoy a profitable afterlife because Hardy restricts her movements to those he makes. As Ramazani points out, Hardy 'grants Emma independence in giving her a voice of her own, but he also severely restricts that independence by making her voice one of submission' (Ramazani 'Hardy and the Poetics' 965). Hardy has Emma vow faithfulness, but her vows are idealised projections of Hardy's fantasies about Emma's afterlife. She does not express anger at the way he previously ignored her; instead, she remains faithful to him.

In fact, Emma's idealisation places her in the Petrarchan tradition of idealised female figures, for the distance between the unattainable beloved and the unattainable deceased both provide the poet with the 'grief' (erotic or elegiac, respectively) needed to create a rhetorically convincing poem. Emma's faithfulness reveals and reinforces Hardy's feelings of guilt, which rhetorically works to draw attention *toward* him and *away* from Emma, which, in turn, creates sympathy for Hardy even though she speaks. Ultimately, the reader reacts with sympathy toward Hardy, because s/he realises that Hardy regrets his previous treatment of Emma. The sympathy Hardy creates obscures the fact that he provides a false, overly simplified vision of Emma in which he dissolves the complexity of her subjectivity into his ideal 'phantom'.

'A Dream or No' most closely resembles 'Thoughts of Phena' in Hardy's desire to picture the female, contain her, and dissolve her. First, in the second stanza, he 'dreams' of Emma as 'a maiden abiding/ Thereat as in hiding;/ Fair-eyed and white-shouldered, broad-browed and brown-tressed' (CP 288). Again Hardy defines Emma within the Petrarchan tradition, in which he figures the female subject through pieces of her body. In stanza three he describes Emma as 'lonely' and explains in stanza four how he was drawn to her in order 'To take her unto me,/ And lodge her long years with me'. These lines give Hardy agency in choosing Emma. He takes her from her natural surroundings and 'lodges' in his home as his possession; he contains her within his own realm, which gives him control of her. In stanzas five and six, however, Hardy moves from remembering Emma's physicality and his possession of her to dissolving her:

But nought of that maid from Saint-Juliot I see;
Can she ever have been here,
And shed her life's sheen here,
The woman I thought a long housemate with me?

Does there even a place like Saint-Juliot exist?
Or a Vallency Valley
With stream and leafed alley,
Or Beeny, or Bos with its flounce flinging mist?

Suddenly, Hardy can no longer 'see' Emma. He wonders if she even existed; was she even part of his household? Instead of memorialising Emma in this elegy, he asks the reader to participate in a 'dream' in which she never existed in the first place. Rhetorically this allows Hardy to erase Emma completely, an ironic move in a poem that should memorialise her. The final stanza continues this erasure by removing even the places in which Emma lived. Of course these places continue to exist in reality, but Hardy's poetic removal of them – or even his implication that they should be viewed as a dream – indicates his need to control, contain, and dissolve Emma's subjectivity in order to receive comfort through writing.

This poem's questioning tone, especially as Hardy reduces Emma's individuality to that of a dream, has obvious correlations with 'Thoughts of Phena'. Both poems address the poet's inability to visualise the feminine subject and his need to contain her in a way that gives him some comfort. Unlike 'Thoughts of Phena', 'A Dream or No' ends more ambiguously, with Hardy questioning Emma's existence, rather than 'fining her' in his brain so that he can retain a 'phantom' of his own figuring, but these poems rhetorically function to erase their female subjects, either into Hardy's fantasy or into oblivion.

Finally, in 'At Castle Boterel' Hardy recounts a memory in which he and Emma climbed a hill together. Whereas in 'Thoughts of Phena,' Hardy explains that he has no memories with which to remember Tryphena, here he uses this memory of Emma to explore the significance of their relationship. He does not, however, create a memory in which readers can understand that significance through Emma's character or personality. Here, instead, Hardy does not even describe Emma at all. He writes, 'Myself and a girlish form benighted/ In dry March weather' (*CP* 292), and the stark contrast between Hardy's concrete self-definition and his depiction of Emma as a mere 'form' – not even womanly, but 'girlish' – continues to emphasise the way in which he prefers to memorialise her. Even choices of diction, like these, guide readers in their sympathies. As Mary Ellen Doyle suggests, diction is rhetorical and 'a single word or a metaphor can specify a [writer's] attitude ... and irrevocably condition – or confuse – that of a reader' (Doyle 17). Readers do not expect to sympathise with a 'form' or a 'phantom', but Hardy's forceful 'Myself' cries out in 'grief' and asks for sympathy from his readers.

Hardy next tells readers that what he and Emma did or spoke of during this moment in their relationship 'Matters not much ... It filled but a minute'. He trivialises the very experience he seeks to signify, so that when he next asks, 'But was there ever/ A time of such quality, since or before,/ In that hill's story?', the reader must pause to question to what, exactly, Hardy refers. He claims that 'to one mind' that moment on this hill was precious, even though 'it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore, /By thousands more'. He wants to elevate this fleeting moment in which he and Emma 'passed' that place, and he tries to

memorialise it by pointing out how the deep history of the 'Primaeval rocks [which] form the road's steep border' and 'Time's unflinching rigour' throughout history have not diminished the importance of this moment. The poem is ironic, though, because as Hardy refuses to allow readers' participation in this moment, he causes them to experience the way in which memory (like Time) removes the importance of events even from those who participate in them. The lack, or loss, that readers experience in their exclusion from Hardy's memory mimics Hardy's own loss. Here Hardy's irony again evokes a sympathetic response as the loss readers feel helps them recreate and recognise Hardy's own feelings of loss. Since they 'feel' what he felt, they have sympathy for him.

Finally, in the last stanza of this poem, Hardy claims 'one phantom figure/ Remains on the slope' regardless of Time's passing. Emma no longer has even a 'girlish form', as she did in 'A Dream or No'. Hardy dissolves her into a phantom, which begins 'shrinking, shrinking', both in physical perspective as he leaves that spot, but also in subjectivity as he reduces her over and over through the process of writing. Hardy, as with Tryphena, prefers to retain Emma's phantom as his 'relic' because it provides him with a Muse for poetry in which he can create a sympathetic response to his own grief, and, in turn, create poetry that gives him imaginative control over the feminine subject.

Many people may resist reading the elegy critically, because they believe it represents an authentic expression of grief. They might wonder why one would even attempt to deconstruct another's expression of loss. I believe resistance to examining elegies could arise from the sympathy created between poet and reader. Any resistance itself may actually indicate that sympathy functions as it protects the elegy's author from scrutiny based on his role as mourner. Historically, as M.C. Bodden explains, a reader was expected to 'associate nobility of character with a grandness of melancholy' (Bodden 56-7). Sentiments expressed during grief give authority to the poet – an unquestioned authority – and create a cloak of sympathy for the author. This cloak can mask the deconstruction of the subject and can create apprehension about even the examination of an elegy. I do not want to argue that Hardy's grief was not authentic, or that he purposely created these rhetorical situations in order to detract from Emma's subjectivity. Nevertheless, these poems do, in fact, work rhetorically to align our sympathies with Hardy's experience, and I believe this is a function of the elegiac mode, whatever Hardy's intentions. We should examine the way sympathy works to limit our reading of elegies, especially when the elegy, like Hardy's for Tryphena – or even those for Emma – involves circumstances that contain gendered power dynamics in which the male poet seeks to contain, limit, or dissolve the female subject.

This is the case with Hardy's 'Thoughts of Phena', a poem that commemorates Tryphena's death, but also contributes to her dissolution as an

active female subject. In the same way that Petrarch transforms Laura from actual woman to ideal object through his own need to create poetry, so too does Hardy appropriate Tryphena, changing her from a real woman into a phantom that fuels his poetry. And as we are expected to express sympathy with the lover's frustrated desire in Petrarch's sonnets, so too are we expected to sympathise with Hardy's grief as we read his elegies. But through the process of sympathy we not only participate in identification with the lover and the mourner, but the gendered power dynamic underlying both modes also places us in misogynistic roles. As we read Hardy's elegy and express sympathy with the speaker, we too participate in Tryphena's transformation.

As Amit S. Rai explains in *Rule of Sympathy*, sympathy always implies a power dynamic between a sympathiser and her object of sympathy. Rai notes, 'to exercise sympathy is always to be in some sort of position of privilege, however limited, however imaginary' (Rai 55). Sympathy is paradoxically created both through difference and similarity: 'To sympathise with another, one must identify with that other', yet a difference in situation must be present in order for sympathy to function (Rai xviii). By comparing the aesthetics of sympathy to Edmund Burke's concepts of the sublime, Rai explains how pain, as well as happiness, can be a moment of sympathetic identification: 'An observer could put himself in the place of the actual sufferer of pain; through an act of the imagination the subject's body becomes interchangeable with the victim's.' (Rai 28) The act of sympathy allows readers to change places with the writer of the text – to momentarily inhabit another role. When the writer mourns or experiences pain, we can experience delight akin to the sublime, because we are at a distance from the writer's pain and do not actually have to undergo it, yet we participate in the pain through sympathy. We have power over the writer, who may experience real pain, because we may remove ourselves from the source at any moment. In the act of reading an elegy, then, we can experience sympathy by identifying with the process of grief and loss, but we still may remove ourselves from the pain of grief by refusing to continue to read.

When we sympathise with Hardy, however, we play a *dual* role. We experience his pain at Tryphena's loss but, because his relationship to Tryphena involves a gendered power dynamic, we simultaneously experience his power over the female subject. In the moment of sympathetic identification, Hardy forces us into a misogynistic role, in which we become complicit with the female's dissolution. By reading Hardy's elegy only as his sympathisers, we condone Tryphena's transformation. We can avoid this role, however, by rejecting the cloak of sympathy and examining the way Tryphena ultimately disappears into Hardy's phantom, in a poetic mode that traditionally claims to memorialise its subjects. Only by being sceptical of Hardy's role as mourner –

especially in light of the circumstances of the elegy's composition – can we recognise Hardy's desire for control rather than consolation.

Hardy may have written out of true grief, perhaps desiring to give Tryphena (and eventually Emma) a type of immortality as the phantom in his mind, but nevertheless, we should not be so sympathetic as to ignore the rhetoric of his elegiac poetry. Tryphena's 'disappearance', signalled by the lack of critical agreement over who she was, what her life was like, and what potential role she played in Hardy's life, only further demonstrates the way she has become a phantom. Hardy effectively dissolves her by providing no details with which she can be identified. All that remains is pure speculation; the real Tryphena Sparks has vanished. When we read this poem – or any elegy – as willing sympathisers, we agree to participate in the subject's erasure.

Ultimately, then, we must be sceptical of the elegiac mode itself. When an author writes an elegy, tension exists between his desire to create a poem that memorialises his subject and his need to manage his own loss. The elegy simultaneously confronts the absence of the subject and the poet's wish to recreate the subject's presence on the page. The pleasure of reading an elegy comes from this ironic tension, and the reader can experience the pleasing angst of irony when s/he sympathises with the author's loss.

Though a feminist reading best demonstrates the ironic tension in Hardy's elegies, the rhetoric of sympathy created by this mode exists between all writers and their elegiac subjects. Even if an elegy does not contain a *gendered* power dynamic, it will contain a *rhetorical* power dynamic, and the tension that arises from this difference should be explored with this irony in mind. One might, for example, ask how Tennyson creates sympathy rhetorically in 'In Memoriam' or how Shelley does in 'Adonais'. Does the reader experience pleasure from the writer's grief? Does the writer seem focused on his own expressions of angst or does his poem memorialise, instead of dissolve, his subject? What is the rhetorical effect when gendered relationships exist between the same-sex mourner/mourned? Does this intensify the grief expressed by the writer or felt by the reader? (This is especially the case of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'.) And finally, we might ask, can an elegy produce a true memorial to the deceased, when the rhetoric of sympathy seems always to focus the work on the writer and not on his subject?

While this paper is not the place for detailed explorations of other elegies, we must always confront the poet's role in creating an elegy. We must ask if the poet truly memorialises his subject or if he creates a poem in which the protection of sympathetic readers shields his desire to manipulate ironic angst in an effort to demonstrate poetic power by creating a pleasurable poem. As Janet Todd suggests, 'Misery or adversity [could be] converted into pleasure by the sensitive poetical mind' through the pleasure of sympathy and through the reader's

knowledge of 'the aesthetic whole of human life' – which inevitably involves both joy and pain (Todd 54). Thus Hardy's intense irony, his 'refusal' to be consoled, as critics term it, must be read rhetorically as a technique in which he may manipulate the tension inherent in the elegiac mode itself. This ironic manipulation can only increase readers' sense of despair and their sympathy for Hardy, just as it continues to mask the way in which he dissolves his subjects.

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