

## **A Study on Literary Devices of the Poem “The Voice” by Thomas Hardy**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to explore the literary devices of the poem “The Voice” by Thomas Hardy. It is based on L.G. Alexander theory which can provide the reader a vivid picture of literary devices involved in a poem. It studies how Thomas Hardy uses literary devices in the poem to attract readers’ interest and to enjoy it in the way readers do not foresee. Furthermore, especially the learners who have to study literary devices can apply this as a tool in order to recognize the indirect expressions on the poem or to convey abstract ideas or concepts of the poet. The study of literary devices indicates the way the whole poem has been built and these devices become apparent as soon as the meaning of the poem has been found.

**Keywords:** literary devices, the voice, L.G. Alexander Theory

### **Introduction**

Poetry is an imaginative awareness of experience through meaning, sound and rhythmic language choices, so as to evoke an emotional response. Poetry uses forms and conventions to suggest differential interpretation to words or to evoke emotive responses. Devices such as assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and rhythm are sometimes used to achieve musical effects. The uses of ambiguity, symbolism, irony and other stylistic elements leave a poem to be interpreted in many ways. Poems frequently rely their effects on imagery, word association and the musical qualities of the language used. The interactive layering of all these effects to generate meaning is what marks poetry.

### **Aim and objectives**

The aim of this study was to study literary devices of the poem “The Voice” by Thomas Hardy. To serve this purpose, the objective had been set as follows –

- to investigate and analyze three kinds of literary devices, “Structural, Sense and Sound devices” based on the theory of L.G. Alexander.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical Background**

According to the theory of L.G. Alexander, data were collected from the three perspectives by means of structural device, sense device and sound device. The poem “The Voice” is written by Thomas Hardy. The theme of the poem is loss and hope. The poem consists of four stanzas which are constructed around a regular rhyme scheme of abab.

#### **Structural Devices**

The most commonly used structural devices in poetry are Contrast, Illustration and Repetition.

- i. **Contrast** is a rhetorical device which identifies differences between two subjects, places, things or ideas. Simply, it is a type of opposition between two objects highlighted to emphasize their differences.

- ii. **Illustration** is an example which usually takes the form of a vivid picture by which a poet may make an idea clear.
- iii. **Repetition** is a literary device that repeats the same words or phrases a few times to emphasize an idea again and again.

### Sound Devices

Sound devices are used to convey and reinforce the meaning or experience of poetry through the skilful use of sound. Alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, assonance and rhythm are sound devices. These have difficult names but they are not as hard as they look. All of them add considerably to the musical quality a poem has when it is read aloud.

- i. **Alliteration** is also called head rhyme or initial rhyme, the repetition of the initial sounds (usually consonants) of stressed syllables in neighboring words or at short intervals within a line or passage, usually at word beginnings, as in *wild* and *woolly* or in the line from the poem *Darkness Lost*: "From somewhere far beyond, the flag of fate's caprice unfurled,"
- ii. **Onomatopoeia** is the formation or use of words which imitate sounds like *whispering*, *clang*, *sizzle*, *buzz*, *swish*, *jangle*, etc.
- iii. **Rhyme** is a type of echoing which utilizes a correspondence of sound in the final accented vowels and all that follow of two or more words but the preceding consonant sounds much differ as in the words *bear* and *care*, *night* and *knight*.
- iv. **Assonance** is relatively close juxtaposition of the same or similar vowel sounds, but with different end consonants in a line or passage, thus a vowel rhyme as in the words *date* and *fade*.
- v. **Rhythm** is an essential of all poetry, the regular or progressive pattern of recurrent accents in the flow of a poem. The measure of rhythmic quantity is the *meter*.

### Sense Devices

A poet often uses sense devices to fix our attention on one object while comparing it with another. It may be said that the quality of a poet often depends on his ability to bring together objects and ideas which are connected.

- i. **Simile** is the rhetorical term used to designate the most elementary form of resemblances: most similes are introduced by *like* or *as*. These comparisons are usually between dissimilar situations or objects that have something in common, such as "my love is *like* a red, red rose."
- ii. **Metaphor** leaves out *like* or *as* and implies a direct comparison between objects or situations. "*All flesh is grass*"
- iii. **Personification** is used when abstractions or inanimate objects are treated as human or given them human attributes, power, or feelings. "*nature wept*" or "*the wind whispered many truth to me*"
- iv. **Apostrophe** is used when the poet detaches himself from the reality and addresses an imaginary character in his work. "*Busy old fool, unruly Sun,*"
- v. **Oxymoron** is used when two opposite ideas are joined to create an effect. The common oxymoron phrase is the combination of an adjective proceeded by a noun with contrasting meanings. "*cruel kindness*" or "*living death*"

### Biography of the poet

Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhamtop, Dorset, England on June 2, 1840, the eldest son of Thomas and Jemima. His father was a stonemason and builder; his mother passed on her love of reading and books to her son. Hardy was somewhat of an isolated life on the open fields of the region. His school education lasted until he was 16, at which time he

was sent to an apprenticeship with a local architect. By 1862, when he was 22, Hardy left for London to work as a draftsman in the office. During this time, Hardy was influenced by the works of Charles Swinburne, Robert Browning, and Charles Darwin. Poor health forced Hardy to return to his native region in 1867. Hardy education was interrupted by his work as an architect. He wanted to become an Anglican minister. But lack of funds and his declining interest in religion swayed Hardy away from that avocation and more towards a self-study of poetry and writing. Hardy tried his hand at writing when he was 17 and wrote for years while he was a practicing architect. His first novel manuscript *The Poor Man and The Lady* (1867-68) was rejected by several publishers.

A second story *Desperate Remedies* (1871) was accepted and published. By 1870, Hardy was sent by his employer to begin a restoration project of the St. Juliot Church in Cornwall. Here he met his first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, whom Hardy married in 1874. Hardy was quite prolific during this period, writing some 900 poems on a variety of subjects. In 1912, Hardy's wife, Emma, died. Much of his later poetry reflects her loss. Their marriage was not happy; however, after her death, he regretted their estrangement and his lack of care for her during her illness. This poem *The Voice* is one of the elegiac poems written after the death of his wife, Emma. In 1914, Hardy married Florence Emily Dugdale, with whom he lived until his death on January 11, 1928. His body was buried in Stinson, England, near the graves of his ancestors and his first wife, Emma.

([http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Hardy](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hardy))

### **Theme of the Poem**

The poem "The Voice" is one of the elegiac poems written after the death of Hardy's wife, Emma. Though for several years they did not speak to each other even while living under one roof, Emma's death unleashed a wave of complicated feelings in Hardy. In this poem, Hardy imagines that she calls out to him, but it could be the wind.

The voice that calls out to him belongs to the woman whom he misses most now. He says that she is changed now but he remembers those days when she was all to him. He remembers her as she was in those fairy days when they used to wait for each other in the town, she in an "air blue" dress that he remembers well. But now he is not sure whether it is not just the wind as she has moved beyond existence and her voice will never be heard ever again. This realization makes the poet stumble forward. Leaves are falling all around making the end of the cycle of growth. The keen north wind catches him as it blows through the thorns. And then he hears the voice again. The poem is filled with eerie images of a ghostly voice calling out from beyond. It is late autumn and that helps to reinforce the notion of death.

The theme is loss and hope – and loss again. The hope is that the voice is actually hers, not a figment of his imagination, born of a deep desire to be reunited, coupled with of separation. In some ways it is a double loss he suffers here Emma left him the first time at her death, and now, he imagines she leaves him again, as he recalls the youthful and lovely girl he fell in love with. In some ways, it is a more devastating loss because for a moment he had thought and hoped that that young woman had come to him from the graves and that in some ways, perhaps they could recapture what has been lost to them. He cannot be sure of what – if anything he has heard, but his acute sense of repeated loss is painful for him to bear. We get the impression that the love he had for her still burns as deeply as it had during their life together.

### Research Methodology

Firstly, the types of literary devices in the poem “The Voice” were categorized according to the theory of L.G. Alexander: structural devices, sound devices and sense devices. Then, the total numbers of literary devices were calculated using the separate tables.

### Data Analysis

Table (1) Analysis of the Structural Devices.

Structural Devices		
Constrast	Illustraion	Repetition
-	-	"Call to me, call to me"

Table 1 shows that among the three structural devices: contrast, illustration and repetition, the use of repetition: “call to me, call to me” was found in the poem.

Table (2) Analysis of the Sound Devices.

Sound Devices	Alliteration	woman much missed where you would wait for me to wan wistlessness faltering forward wind oozing thin through the thorn norward
	Onomatopoeia	-
	Rhyme	were, fair town, gown listlessness, wistlessness here, near forward, norward falling, calling you, view (internal rhyme)
	Assonance	Travelling across the wet mead to me here
	Rhythm	<b>Woman much missed</b> , how you <b>call</b> to me, <b>call</b> to me, <b>Saying</b> that <b>now</b> you are <b>not</b> as you <b>were</b> <b>When</b> you had <b>changed</b> from the <b>one</b> who was <b>all</b> to me, <b>But</b> as at <b>first</b> , when our <b>day</b> was <b>fair</b> .  <b>Can</b> it be <b>you</b> that I <b>hear</b> ? Let me <b>view</b> you, then, <b>Standing</b> as <b>when</b> I drew near the <b>town</b> <b>Where</b> you would <b>wait</b> for me: <b>yes</b> , as I <b>knew</b> you then, <b>Even</b> to the <b>original air-blue gown</b> !  <b>Or</b> is it <b>only</b> the <b>breeze</b> , in its <b>listlessness</b> <b>Travelling across</b> the wet <b>mead</b> to me <b>here</b> , <b>You</b> being ever <b>dissolved</b> to wan <b>wistlessness</b> , <b>Heard</b> no more <b>again far</b> or <b>near</b> ?  <b>Thus</b> I; <b>faltering forward</b> , <b>Leaves</b> around me <b>falling</b> . <b>Wind</b> oozing <b>thin</b> through the <b>thorn</b> from norward, <b>And</b> the <b>woman calling</b> .

Table (2) presents that there are altogether 5 alliterations: “woman much missed, where you would want for me, to wan wistlessness, faltering forward, wind oozing thin

through the thorn norward” in the poem. There is no use of onomatopoeia. The rhyme scheme of the poem is abab, cdcd, efef, and ghgh. The rhyming words are “were/fair, town/ gown, listlessness/ wistlessness, hear/near, forward/ norward, falling/calling”. The only one internal rhyme in the poem is “you/view.” The use of assonance can be seen in the line “Travelling across the wet mead to me here.” The poem is composed of four quatrains, the first three quatrains is similar and the fourth one describes a change of subject and mood. The rhythm of the poem is irregular, changing significantly in the fourth and final stanza.

Table (3) Analysis of the Sense Devices.

Sense Devices				
Simile	Metaphor	Personification	Apostrophe	Oxymoron
-	But as at first, when our day was fair (line 4)  Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward (line 15)	Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness (line 9)	Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me (line 1)	Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward (line 15)

The four sense devices were found in the poem. They are metaphor, personification, apostrophe and oxymoron. The use of simile was not found in the poem.

### Findings and Discussion

This study attempted to investigate and analyze three kinds of literary devices of the poem “The Voice” by Thomas Hardy. It was found out that all three kinds of literary devices were used in the poem. The total number of literary devices found in the poem is presented in table 4.

Table (4) The total number of literary devices found in the poem “The Voice”.

Literary Devices		Total
Structural Devices	Contrast	-
	Illustration	-
	Repetition	1
Sound Devices	Alliteration	5
	Onomatopoeia	-
	Rhyme	7
	Assonance	1
Sense Devices	Rhythm	4
	Simile	-
	Metaphor	2
	Personification	1
	Apostrophe	1
	Oxymoron	1

### Structural Devices

In this poem, contrast and illustration cannot be found in structural devices. Only repetition can be found in the first line of the first stanza in Table 1.

*“Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,”*

The repeated phrase “call to me” makes it sound like the poet is pleading with the dead woman – like he wants her to be calling him. But second “call to me” even sounds like a command, like he is issuing an imperative “Call to me, dead lady!”

### Sound Devices

As shown in Table 2, the rhyme scheme of the poem is abab, cdcd, efef, ghgh. The rhyme scheme in this poem is usual for a quatrain. The poet skillfully uses internal rhyme in line 5 as shown in Table 2.

Under the column “Assonance,” the underlined letters in the extract are vowels that are repeated to create assonance. It is employed deliberately to avoid the jingling sound of a too-insistent rhyme pattern. The poet deliberately uses assonance to add rhythm and music by adding internal rhyme to the poem. It can also enhance musical effect of the poem.

#### i. Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds and examples of it can be found in this poem as shown in Table 2.

*“Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,”*

In this line, the repeated “m” sound makes us know that the speaker of the poem is speaking to a woman who he misses most now and gives us a thought that he addresses a dead, non-existent or inanimate person.

*“Where you would wait for me:*

In this line, the repeated “w” sound describes that the poet wonders if it is the wind that he hears calling across wet meadow.

*“You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,”*

The expression of repeated “s” sound conveys the sound of breeze.

*“Thus I; faltering forward,”*

In this line the repeated “f” sound describes that the realization of beyond her existence makes the poet stumble forward.

*“Wind oozing thin through the thorn norward,”*

The repeated “th” sound describes that the keen north wind catches the poet as it blows through the thorn.

#### ii. Rhyme

This poem by Thomas Hardy clearly has an abab rhyme scheme in each stanza, with a new set of rhymes for each. Each of the rhyme is exact except for those in lines 2 and 4 in the first stanza *were* and *fair* are approximate or slant rhymes. This distinct and regular pattern of rhyming serves to add steadiness and consistency to the images and themes of the poem, something for us to examine more closely on our own.

#### iii. Assonance

In this poem, the poet introduces imperfect rhyme in words such as *mead* and *me* (line 10). The use of this assonance that exceed the regular rhyme scheme makes the poem incredibly dense.

#### iv. Rhythm

This poem is written in quatrains (four-line-stanza) of dactylic tetrameter. Dactylic tetrameter means that each line of the poem has four feet and that each of the poem's feet is a dactyl. A dactyl is a foot that is made up of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. So in the first stanza of the poem, we get this pattern:

*Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me  
Saying that now you are not as you were  
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,  
But as at first, when our day was fair*

The middle part of the poem is fairly straightforward. The poet contrasts the happy past in the second stanza of the poem with the unhappy present in the third stanza. The rhythm of the last line is irregular in both stanzas. In the second stanza, the crowded syllables describe the poet's excitement as he waits for his love to arrive. In the third stanza, the missing syllables describe the woman's voice fading away in death.

*Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,  
Standing as when I drew near to the town  
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,  
Even to the original air-blue gown!*

*Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness  
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,  
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,  
Heard no more again far or near?*

In the last stanza the dactylic rhythm breaks down almost completely. The focus of the poem switches from the woman to the poet himself. The change is marked not only by the change in rhythm but also by a switch from the alternating one and three syllable rhymes to two syllable rhymes.

*Thus I; faltering forward,  
Leaves around me falling  
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,  
And the woman calling*

#### Sense Devices

##### i. Metaphor

The use of metaphor can be found in line 4 comparing *a day* with a human feature of beauty *fair*. And *the thorn* in line 15 is also a metaphor for the poet's state of mind at that time. As he comes to the realization that it was not the voice of his wife, *the thorn* captures the uncomfortable, painful loss and even the guilt he feels.

##### ii. Personification

The use of personification occurs in line 9. Personification is giving human traits, motives, actions to inanimate objects. In line 9, *the breeze* is personified with the human trait of *listlessness*.

##### iii. Apostrophe

There is an apostrophe to *woman* in line 1. An apostrophe is an appeal to someone who is absent or to something that is inanimate. In this case, the apostrophe is to a woman who is not present.

#### iv. Oxymoron

In line 15, the poet uses the phrase *oozing thin* which is an oxymoron, both thick and thin at once. The two words with opposing meanings are used together intentionally to effect on the speaker of the poem struggling to live with the loss of his wife.

Among the three kinds of literary devices, the use of sound devices is mostly found. The most recognizable sound device used in this poem is rhyme. These rhymes help to make the poem musical. In the poem, regular rhyme scheme aids the memory for recitation and gives predictable pleasure. And the other noticeable sound device is alliteration. Alliteration makes this poem useful to establish a mood when the repeated sounds are soft or make use of internal sounds. After all, Thomas Hardy is trying to use a concentrated blend of sound and imagery to create an emotional response.

### Conclusion

It is known that a poem can talk more than other literary works such as drama and prose because it creates a speaking picture of something. Although poetry is more unhampered, it has a special and specific characteristics. They are literary devices: structural devices, sound devices and sense devices. In this paper, literary devices of the poem “The Voice” have been analyzed and studied. The imagery that the poet uses in the poem appeals to the auditory and visual senses so readers can have vivid imagination in their mind eyes. In this poem, he uses sound devices more than the other two. He handles rhymes with great care. Moreover, he also uses internal rhyme and assonance (imperfect rhyme) to avoid the jingling sound of a too insistent rhyme pattern. These sound devices can enhance harmonious rhythm and musical quality of the poem. The other two devices can also help the reader to realize the theme of the poem. I also hope this paper is helpful to the learners of English in studying literature (especially poems).

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## Appendix

### The Voice

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,  
Saying that now you are not as you were  
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,  
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,  
Standing as when I drew near the town  
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,  
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness  
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,  
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,  
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I; faltering forward,  
Leaves around me falling,  
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,  
And the woman calling.

**Thomas Hardy**