“The Place on the Map”: Geography and Meter in Hardy’s Elegies

Eve Sorum

In 1884, while workers were digging the foundations and well for Thomas Hardy’s future home, Hardy found the remains of several urns and skeletons that appeared to be from the Roman period. This was a discovery that delighted him because, he wrote in his autobiography, “the only drawback to the site [had] seemed to him to be its newness.” Eager to share these findings, Hardy presented a paper to the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club (which he had joined in the early 1880s) on “Some Romano-British Relics found at Max Gate.” By this point Hardy was known for his interest in the southwestern region of England, which was already being called “Wessex,” the name he had given it in his novels. Hardy had grown up only a few miles away from the Max Gate site, and he describes in his preface to the “Wessex Edition” of his writing how his literary depictions of “landscape, prehistoric antiquities, and especially old English architecture” (Hardy was trained as an architect) were “done from the real.” As biographer Michael Millgate notes, Hardy’s nineteenth-century rural upbringing led him to know his own district with an intimacy which is today hard for most people to imagine, and early on he was aware of the imbrication of past and present in landscape. One poem, “The Roman Road,” points to the origins of this understanding, as Hardy relates how, with his mother “Guiding [his] infant steps,” they “walked that ancient thoroughfare.” For readers of his novels, Hardy’s curiosity about the juxtapositions of past and present in specific places is evidenced by the death of Tess at Stonehenge or, in The Mayor of Casterbridge, the ancient Mabury Rings—a Roman amphitheater, then town gullies, which becomes a site for pivotal narrative events.

Modernism / modernity

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H.C. Hardy explores such spatio-temporal layering—the sense that past and present coexist in certain places—not only in his novels, but also in his poetry, and especially, I argue, in his elegiac verse. In fact, Hardy’s experiments with meter in his later elegies demand a turn to geography because of the spatio-temporal relationships the prosody proposes. As Marjorie Levinson has recently claimed, “something funereal, melancholy, and haunted defines Hardy’s entire corpus,” and critics such as Ralph Pite and Wesley Kort have argued for a reconsideration of the role of place and geography in Hardy’s fiction. In this essay, I bring these two foci together to show how we can understand Hardy’s elegies more thoroughly through attention to their use of geography—the science of the description of the physical features of a place or region. This use allows Hardy to articulate loss as spatially bound and temporally shifting. Hardy’s elegies, as Jahan Ramazani has noted, are characteristic of modern elegies in their performance of a “melancholic mourning,” a label that points to the unresolved nature of his poetics of loss. One way that Hardy both expresses and contains this ambivalence is through geographic elements (maps, topographic features, toponymic references) as mediators of loss and presence. His poems thereby set up a relationship between the space of the verse and the charted places of Hardy’s England, effectively challenging the parameters of both elegiac poetry and geography. His prosodic and geographic experiments also point, I will suggest, to Hardy’s development of a particularly modernist form of mourning.

Hardy’s lifelong interest in geography originated in primary school where, he reports, he “excelled” at the subject (LI, 20). Until late in the nineteenth century, in fact, primary school was the only place where geography was taught. Their field not yet recognized as a university subject, early-nineteenth-century geographers became increasingly defensive about biological and geological sciences encroaching on their terrain. One of the main developments that grew out of the resulting efforts to define and expand the scope of geography was the thematic map, created by cartographers like Alexander von Humboldt, which departed from the topographic map in its presentation of “an argument about invisible phenomena, or phenomena undergoing change, or about interactions between phenomena” (HVT 250). One primary project in these maps was to formulate chartable spatio-temporal relationships. Humboldt experimented with different forms of graphic representation, including the use of graphs and tables alongside maps and, on the maps themselves, “isolines”—lines drawn between measures of equal values of a particular phenomena—which could reveal temporally deep relationships like the variation in phenomena over decades or centuries (HVT 252–53).

With these experiments, geography became not simply the charting of space as it is, but also as it was, and maps were able to represent this variation within a systematized space (HVT 253). Maps could provide, therefore, a method of understanding temporal shifts as spatial events.

By the late nineteenth century, the movement for a “new geography”—a term that the influential geographer Halford Mackinder coined in the 1880s—had transformed the field. Indeed, H. R. Mill claimed in a 1901 speech that “geography will be found to afford an important clue to the solution of every problem affecting the mutual rela-
SCORUM: “the place on the map”: geography and meter in hardy's elegies of land and people.” Under the guidance of Richard Strachey, the president of the Royal Geographical Society in the late 1880s, this new geography returned to the issues illuminated by thematic maps, stressing the “interpretation of present conditions through their physical evolution.” Geographers mapped the multiple layers of use in a particular place, and the data provided by what these geographers termed “regional surveys” could be collected and collated, it was proposed, into a map of human relations. The geographers and social scientists behind this new movement, including Patrick Geddes, H. R. Mill, Halford Mackinder, A. J. Herberston, and H. J. Fleure, argued that geography could act as the repository for studies of the relationship between past and present.

This science of space, which aligns with Hardy’s own sense of the historically and personally saturated nature of his surrounding world, provided an external structure—the surveys and maps—through which to mediate individual, social, and environmental change. Yet Hardy’s use of geography in his writing reframes, as well as represents, the discipline’s assumptions. The catalogue of Hardy’s library reveals his continuing interest in the field: he owned and annotated geographic manuals, guidebooks, and maps, which range from the mid-century textbook, A Manual of Geography Physical, Industrial, and Political (1864), to later books that grew out of the new geography’s focus on regions (A Handbook for Residents and Travellers in Wilts and Dorset (1898) and The English Lake District (1902), for example). Despite these influences, Hardy uses his deep understanding of the historically changed nature of space to reject the narrative of progress (that understanding past uses of space will lead to more perfect future uses) that the discipline supposed. We see this most clearly in Satan’s Circumstance, Lyrics and Recreations (1914), the book that contains Hardy’s famous elegiac sequence for his dead wife Emma—the “Poems of 1912–13”—as well as individual poems with titles that suggest the importance of place, such as “The Place on the Map,” “In Front of a Landscape,” and “Wessex Heights.” By turning to geography in his most elegiac lyrics, Hardy presents an interwoven past and present in which the mapped or physical places always reveal the inadequacy of the present and the inaccessibility of the past moment.

With this geographic focus, Hardy at first seems to be following in a long elegiac tradition of contextualizing grief within a pastoral setting that reflects the mourner’s loss. In Spencer’s “Astrophel. A Pastoral Elegy upon the death of the most Noble and valorous Knight, Sir Philip Sidney” (1595), one of the defining examples of the genre, the distraught poet’s lamentation transforms the natural world: “The woods, the hills, the rivers, shall resound/The mournfull accent of my sorrowing ground,” the poet proclaims, and nature responds accordingly: “Woods, hills, and rivers, now are desolate.” In Hardy’s world, however, nature is not so yielding, and the pathetic fallacy lies exposed. Hardy revises the conventional pastoral elegiac setting, transforming the regenerative space of nature into a series of charted or remembered spaces that thwart consolatory identification. Instead of nature containing and expressing the lost beloved so as to provide a substitute for the process of mourning, the natural world taunts the grief-stricken Hardy with its indifference—“Beezey did not quiver,” Hardy notes in “A Death Day Recalled”—and with its evanescent: “Does there even a place like Saint-Juliet exist?” he asks in “A Dream or No” (CP 350, 348). In “Wessex Heights,” a poem that precedes the Emma series, Hardy mourns the disappearance of the poet’s “simple self that was” and expresses a decidedly anti-elegiac fear and dislike of the dead, who emerge in the “lowlands” and the “great grey Plain” (CP 316). Here nature and topography map out the haunted and the safe spaces in his region, effectively trapping Hardy in those few high spots where he can escape the ghosts of his past.

This version of a poeticized place-memory differs from those imagined by Hardy’s predecessors. For example, throughout Wordsworth’s “Poems on the Naming of Places,” the natural landmarks become markers of (and often marked by the names of) beloved individuals, thereby transforming physical places from elements of an abstracted geography into a memory-laden and richly resonant topography. In the second poem of the series, “To Joanna,” Wordsworth describes how, “In memory of affections old and true, I chiseled out in those rude characters / Joanna’s name deep in the living stone:— / And I, and all who dwell by my fireside / Have called the lovely rock, Joanna’s Rock” (114). Here a specific memory of Joanna in situ inspires the poet (during a new encounter with the landscape) to create verbal signs—both the engraved name on the rock and the poem—that endow nature’s monuments with further meaning. Hardy, contrastingly, takes this form of poetic place-memory in his elegies and empties it of its generative function, producing instead lyrics that abstract the natural landscape into a map of those places that eschew personal meaning-making. The poem “Places” exemplifies this abstract mapping. Each stanza begins with a negation about the wider resonance of personally sacred spots (Hardy begins with the line, “Nobody says: Ah, that is the place”) (CP 352). On the one hand, Hardy ends with the claim, “Nay: one there is to whom these things…” (CP 353), that no one else’s mind calls back, “Have a savour that scenes in being lack” (CP 353), suggesting that the very writing of the poem is an affirmation of place-memory. On the other, however, this meaning only emerges in a memory-scape, rather than in a living and present landscape (the “scenes in being” and the “actual”). Place-memory proves fleeting and limited.

Even the last pieces in “Poems of 1912–13,” which tend to be read as successful culminations of the work of mourning where “the final figures of persistence seem to be inscribed on certain places in nature,” show a double-edged and complex side to nature’s function as recorder and stabilizer (TEE 254). For example, while Hardy claims in “At Castle Boterel” that what the rocks alongside the road “record in colour and cast /—that we two passed,” the emphasis on the space between “is” and “passed” suggests that the record is of their “passing,” or death, which has placed them (as a unit) irrevocably in the “past” (CP 352). The rocks record the loss, but as such present us with a blankness, an emptiness that signifies the absence at the center of the mourner’s consciousness. Moreover, the poet is the only reader of this geographic record, and he ends the poem with the proclamation that he will “traverse old love’s domain / Never again,” effectively foreclosing the possibility that the record will remain. Later, in the final poem of the series, “Where the Picnic Was,” we move from the seemingly permanent geological etchings of “At Castle Boterel” to the decidedly transitory and man-made “burnt circle” of grass left over from a picnic outing with Emma and two
At first glance, the map mentioned in the title seems to function as a touchstone for the speaker's nostalgic reveries on a past event. The speaker (whom Hardy identifies in the original subtitle, "A Poor Schoolmaster's Story") describes an act that takes place in his present moment, but that leads him into the past. This past, we soon realize, embodies multiple losses—a long-ago love affair that has lead to a pregnancy ("the thing we found we had to face before the next year's prime"), which would never be sanctioned by society and, presumably, resulted in the end of the affair. The speaker, however, begins with his view of the map, an experience that seems to be purely aesthetic in those first lines, as he notices the "varnished artistry" and the vibrant colors of the outlined land and water. Looking leads him to "mark," a term that, in its ability to mean both geographical measurement and the musical "marking" of time, suggests the spatial and temporal overlap this poem will chart. Such marking brings us back into the remembered scene, as the representation spurs the speaker to reconstruct the event. And yet we do not leave entirely the present-day scene of map-reading; the action is "unfolded" like the unfolding of the map and the place is remembered as a "spot"—a poetically resonant term for Hardy—as if the cartographic symbols have become the memory. Such a conflation therefore compels a return to the map in the third stanza, setting up the imbrication of memory and map that structures the poem. The speaker illuminates the relationship between abstract representation and remembered event in the first lines of the stanza: "This hanging map depicts the coast and place, / And re-creates therewith our unforgotten troubles case." Hardy's use of the verb "re-create" points to the double act of creation that this poem grapples with: the spatial (re)presentation that results in a temporal (re)generation. The original event becomes doubly elided behind these two different orders of recreation.

The stakes of this movement between map and memory are manifest in the meter of the very first lines. The meter and form of the poem seem fixed in our first impression: the quatrains follow the same rhyme scheme (aaba) and the shape of the stanzas stays the same, suggesting a pattern into which the language has been fit. Yet scansion of the lines reveals a more complex relationship between metrical space and marking time. Take the first line: "I look upon the map that hangs by me—." The line could be scanned as iambic pentameter with the stresses appearing regularly every two beats in the ten-syllable phrase. Yet placing equal stresses on all five of these syllables is awkward and does not account for the marked caesura at the end of the line; we could instead read the line as having three main stresses—on "look," "map," and "me" (words that suggest the central conflict of the poem). To do so means understanding the other two stresses (the "-on" in "upon" and "hanging" as secondary or even unstressed. We are left with a line that could easily be in iambic tetrameter with two of the feet having four syllables: unstressed, stressed, unstressed, stressed (or light stress). The metrical reading of the line would appear as follows, with light stresses marked with the forward slash (/):

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/   / \   /     \ / \ / ( \ \ ( dipodic trimeter)
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I look upon the map that hangs by me—
Such a scansion would allow us to take into account the final dash, allowing it to stand in for the final beats and giving a metrical place to the silences in this poem.

Close attention to Hardy's metrics in general seems important because of his interest in a major late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century debate concerning whether or not English verse was in essence dipodic. As Denis Taylor has shown, Coventry Patmore's influential and inflammatory 1857 essay on "English Metrical Critics" (later titled "Essay on English Metrical Law") had brought this issue to Hardy's attention. Though discussions of dipody remained on the fringe of prosodical debates, dipodic meter and Patmore's essay still surfaced in texts including Ormonde's A Study of Metre (1903) and the American George Stewart's Modern Metrical Technique (1922) and "A Method Toward the Study of Dipodic Verse" (1924). Dipody refers to the idea that a foot can have as many as four beats, which means that a rhythm that we might first identify as, say, iambic tetrameter, might also be considered a dimer with two feet of four syllables each. This theory entails more than the recounting and relabeling of feet. Rather, it suggests that a larger rhythmic pattern may contain a smaller one. A meter would be dipodic in particular if there seemed to be stresses with alternating levels of emphasis. Instead of having to count them all equally, one could see how they are part of a larger pattern of such alternating stresses. This means that one foot could contain both a primary and a secondary stress, the phenomenon that I discussed in the first line from "The Place on the Map." Moreover, dipodic theory suggests that the silences in the lines may be integral (and countable) parts of the metrical pattern. Hardy's interest in the measurement of silence is clear from passages he copied from Patmore's essay: "Unless we are [. . .] to regard every verse affected with catalexis (or a deficiency in the number of syllables requisite to make it a full dimer, trimeter, tetrameter, etc.) as constituting an entire metrical system in itself, which is obviously absurd, we must reckon the missing syllables as substituted by an equivalent pause."

Spatial absences must be accounted for in temporal measurements.

In this way, Hardy establishes an intertwined relationship between his metrical experiments and his thematic concerns, for a dipodic meter emphasizes the multiple times that can exist in the same verse space, none of which can be completely forgotten or abandoned. Indeed, Taylor has identified a number of Hardy poems where he experiments with a dipodic theory of meter and he argues that it is most used extensively in Hardy's elegies (HMP 95). Most significantly, a dipodic meter enforces a back-and-forth movement that emphasizes what is missing each time we settle on one rhythm. The sense of loss in both the present and the past becomes structurally irreversible. This codification of loss gestures to what critics including Matthew Campbell and Tim Armstrong have described as the "ghostly" nature of Hardy's elegiac metrical experiments. Referring to the same essay on "English Metrical Critics," Campbell notes that Patmore's theory of the immateriality of a metrical beat connects to Tennyson, Yeats, and, ultimately, Hardy's sense that "sounding the verse provides the material experience not only of the verse in its own time, but also the ghosts of other rhythms from the past." Armstrong continues this discussion of Hardy's allusions to other poets and their rhythmic experiments, describing the simultaneous "textual replacement and textual recovery" involved in Hardy's version of mourning. Yet a focus on dipody points us past the question of literary ghosting and towards the particularly temporal and spatial issues that the versification of loss presents. Dipodic theory works hand-in-hand with the elegy by making material the mourning process.

We can see the blurred boundaries between different times manifested thematically as "The Place on the Map" continues. While the past moment is aestheticized and made cartographic, the present is equally, if not more obscure. The map—not its context—is what we know of the present moment. And as the poem turns stanza four to the past scene, the line between map and scene begin to blur, despite the numbering of the stanzas that suggests a legible divide between these two time periods. Now the scene is distinguished mainly by its colors and lines, just as the map was in the first stanza, while the sky is described as having "lost the art of raining" (emphasis mine). Instead of returning to a contemplation of the map in stanza five, representation and remembrance become indistinguishable as the speaker reaches the climactic moment and the event that he cannot quite bring himself to describe. We are left with the ambiguous lines in the fifth stanza: "what in realms of reason would have joyed our double soul / Ware a torrid tragic light / Under order-keeping's rigorous control." The speaker will not specify who or what is keeping order (presumably those social norms that condemn pregnancy outside of marriage); in the context of the poem such order connects to the varnished lines of the map and to little outside of it, especially without the original subtitle and its suggestion that the scene takes place in a schoolroom.

We appear to return to the original divide between map and memory in the final stanza as the speaker describes how "the map revives her words, the spot, the time," and yet this gesture to Wordsworth's "spots of time" indicates the underlying loss that the poem charts. In Wordsworth's terms, the spots of time have a "renovating virtue" that enables poetic creation and proves the authority of the mind over the senses. Hardy's spot of time, however, is the abstract representation on the map that confronts the speaker, in the end, with his own silence and the impossibility of returning to that moment—a thwarted interpretive episode. The "charted coast stares bright, / And its episode comes back in pantomime" ends the poem. The speaker is distanced even more now than in the beginning from the past scene, which is no longer relived in rich detail, but instead experienced as pantomime, a term that suggests the simultaneously mute and exaggerated or absurd nature of the past event. Both the scenes of map-reading and the memory lose their temporal rootedness and distinction as the past enters into the present moment and the present transforms the past. In this way, the poem explores the simultaneity of seemingly distant moments through a geographically and metrically bound negotiation of loss and presence. Geography mediates memory and facilitates the mourning process, but it also thwarts the speaker’s desire to inhabit either past or present fully. The meter demands this ambiguity with verse lines that contain and suggest more than one "time," thereby presenting a record of always-present loss.

Hardy refines and revises this spatial vision of the elegy in his poetic sequence, "Poems of 1912-13." The structure of the whole sequence, positioned shortly after "The Place on the Map" in Satires of Circumstance, is the movement between Hardy's
home in Dorset and the Cornwall coast where he and his first wife Emma met—what Donald Davie calls his “stations in a personal purgatory.” 10 But the movement between past and present through a haunted topography and temporally shifting metre likewise occupies the poems on an individual level. I would like to focus on two of the poems that stand at the center of the sequence, “A Dream or No” and “After a Journey,” both of which display Hardy’s development of a geographically inflected metre and a metrical geography. In the first poem, Hardy follows a rigid metrical form that allows him to question the assumption that the natural world remains stable, and thereby to point to the resulting crisis of memory. With his turn to dipody in “After a Journey,” Hardy begins to synthesize the poetic and the geographic experience of negotiating a space that exists in two times.

The always-present loss that defines the meter of “The Place on the Map” emerges even more clearly in the title of the twelfth poem in the “Poems of 1912–13” sequence, “A Dream or No.” Set up as if it is presenting a choice of presence and absence, the terms actually offer only a movement between fantasy and negation, the ephemeral and the empty. The dichotomy undoes itself before it has even begun, and we are primed to enter into a world where decisions and perspectives become self-reflexive.

“A Dream or No” begins with two questions that get to the heart of Hardy’s concern with memory and place: “Why go to Saint-Juliot? What’s Juliot to me?” (CP 348; see full text of the poem in Appendix A). Specific locations in this poem both become the (questioned) impetus for movement and the clearest manifestations of the unstable nature of our experience of places. Ending the line with “me” sets the questions of motive and movement in relation to a spatially-based identity. While locations may define the self, self-definition is complicated by the instability of place over the course of the poem. Even in the first stanza, the stability and validity of the speaker’s perspective is challenged when he claims, “Some strange necromancy / But charmed me to fancy / That much of my life claims the spot as its key.” In these lines, Hardy sets up a chain of connection between communication with the dead, imagination, and geographical places. The links here are being questioned, however, rather than affirmed: The stable identity of the geographical “spot” is based on an act of imagination that grew out of what could be termed a memory or a haunting.

This first stanza is worth pausing over further, for lines two and three were changed from their original appearance in the first edition of Satires of Circumstance (1914), where they read, “I’ve been made but fancy / By some necromancy.” These lines, while less rhythmically regular than his later revision, propose a curious and evocative role for the poet who has been made into the imagined figure through this act of communication with the dead Emma. Thus we begin the poem not only with a possible link between memory, imagination, and place, but also in the original version with a gesture to the destabilization of identity in the face of such space and time travel. The meaning of a place is open to debate, and the person constructing that meaning is open to reconfiguration and (fanciful) invention.

Even though the role of place as key to identity and meaning is challenged in the first stanza, Saint-Juliot and its geography still structure the movement in the poem as the “spot” that the poetic imagination takes “as its key.” Thus Hardy’s description of how he traveled “coastward bound” to Saint-Juliot both indicates the physical movements that the poem charts and suggests how geography binds and shapes the dream as surely as do the measured stanzas. And yet the bounds of this geography are strangely ephemeral, as ghostly as the dead Emma. The place is not described in any tangible terms: he identifies it first as “that place in the West,” which harkens to the abstract geography of the spirit world as much as to an actual location in England. Aside from the lost beloved, the only other inhabitants that we see are the “sea-birds around her,” figures that are more of the wind and the water than of the land. Indeed, in the last stanza Hardy questions the very existence of Saint-Juliot and its surrounding geographical features. The poem ends on the “floundering mist” of Beeny and Bos cliffs, a description that transforms the geographical place into the very ghostly shape of the woman he imagines there. Through the conflation of place and figure, geography and memory, Hardy suggests that this quest to locate his loss will result not in resolution nor any materialization of the lost Emma, but in a dematerialization of the landscape.

“Such have I dreamt,” Hardy concludes after remembering their meeting.

In one way, the meter mirrors the insubstantiality of both the scene and the past. The first and fourth lines of the four line stanzas are in tetrameters, made up of an opening iamb and three succeeding anapests, which create a lifting, dancing effect. With their rising meters and regular stresses, the stanzas seem to “fling flounces” much in the same way as the misty cliffs. Yet there is a tedium to the inevitability of this rhythm, which has very little of the “cunning irregularity” (LII, 78) that Hardy described as being at the center of his art. As Donald Davie observed, what can offend us in Hardy’s poetry is how “its form mirrors a cruel self-driving, a shape imposed on the material, as it were with girded teeth.” “Self-driving” seems an appropriate term to use here; the poem takes place just before Hardy’s March 1913 trip to Cornwall to visit the sites of his early romance with Emma, and the insistent nature of the metrical movements suggests the rhythm of a moving car or train. Yet movement here has no obvious end: along with the meter, the rhyme scheme—abba, etc.—reflects the circular and binding nature of the poet’s reflections and limits the movements to the confines of the prosodically mapped space. And, accordingly, Hardy is trying to describe a tortured movement between belief and disbelief, past and present, dream and reality. With the meter providing and perhaps even requiring such a structure of mental and physical movement, the poet is unable to arrive at an answer to his original questions. In fact, the poet’s reflections only breed more questions in an appropriately parallel fashion. An inverse relationship develops between the meter and the geography, as if they are maintaining an internal equilibrium; while the meter becomes increasingly set and tyrannical in its rhythm, the geography loses its structure. The metrical map insistently replaces the physical and emotional topography.

This strange dance between a geographical/temporal location and dislocation brings us to one of the puzzles of Hardy’s poetry that Marjorie Levinson has provocatively articulated: “how can a discourse be at once so thingified... and at the same time, so blurred, foggy, and amorphous,” with explicitly “named suburbs, train stations,
holiday spots, etc." existing on the same plane as "landscapes that seem more like interior spaces" (561)? Levinson argues here that "in a world without spatial or temporal boundaries, loss itself disappears" (568). In "A Dream or No," however, with its self-immolating, spatially-based identity juxtaposed against a "self-driving" meter, loss does not disappear altogether. Instead it changes from being temporally and spatially located in the dead Emma to becoming the pattern of experience itself. The landscape of dreams and memory runs up against the space of the present moment, and the resulting collision involves a loss to both of those times and spaces; neither can bear the interpretive weight that the other wishes to claim. Loss becomes systemic—the meter does not allow for a working through of the absence, but instead only magnifies the original question. Thus the poem ends by asking, "Does there even a place like Saint-Juliet exist?" This question signals not only the loss of the dead Emma and her ghost, but also of Hardy's memory of his past relationship. Yet, with this reworking of the opening question, the poem also brings us back to toponymy (the study of place names) as the key to understanding what this loss might mean. The map must not only be reworked, but perhaps even entirely erased, for once the reality and meaning of one place has been questioned, all of the surrounding ones—Vallency Valley, Beeny, Bos—may be similarly lost.

A return to his experiments with dipodic structure in "After a Journey," the most metrically ambitious poem in "Poems of 1912–13," allows Hardy to resolve and (re)present the complications manifested by a landscape and meter that must negotiate past and present spaces. Again toponography and toponymy structure the poem, which begins, it claims, "After a Journey" (emphasis mine), but only allows the reader to reach that place—Pentargon Bay—after traversing the space of the verse:

Here to view a voiceless ghost;
Whither O whither will its whim now draw me?
Up the cliff, down, till I'm lonely, lost,
And the unseen waters' ejaculations awe me;
Where you will next be there's no knowing,
Facing round about me everywhere,
With your multi-coloured hair,
And gray eyes, and rose-flush coming and going.

Yea! I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;
Through the years, through the dead scenes I have trod you;
What have you now found to say of our past—
Scanned across the dark space wherein I have lacked you?
Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division?
Things were not lastly as firstly well
With us twain, you tell?
But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.

I see what you are doing, you are leading me on
To the spots we knew when we haunted here together,
In the second stanza the language of metrical measurement appears—"Scanned across the dark space wherein I have lacked you" (emphasis mine)—and we realize that the physical travel by the bay is made possible by metrical movements. Memory, the journey "across the dark space," is represented as scansion (the counting of metrical feet); this measurement of the past, Hardy hopes, will provide his "voiceless ghost" with some insight and impetus to speak. Yet she is silent, and he must speak for her. In this versification of memory, we gain insight into the project of the poem: an attempt to figure the unfigurable and to scan past moments by putting them into meter and charting them in space. Just as geographic place spurs memory, so does verse space, for the very forms of his poems provide the necessary shape and structure for his attempt to revisit the past. The opening alternating rhymes (abab) produce a forward momentum and a feeling of anticipation as we wait for the next line to connect back. The rhyme aids the rhythm in propelling the verse forward, even as it enforces a moment of return. The second quatrains, however, produces a quite different effect, breaking up the established pattern and installing one (addc) that emphasizes containment rather than movement. In this juxtaposition the driving forces of the verse connect to the poet's movements through space: he must engage in an almost harried trip around the Bay that provokes and is provoked by the circular motion of memory.

If we delve further into the meter, we can see how it performs a collapse of time within the verse space on both figurative and literal levels. The meter manifests absence and loss in the unspoken beats that occupy each line, which correlates with Dennis Taylor's reading of the poem as essentially didactic in structure. Taylor argues that the first line's apparent pentameter and the second line's tetrameter (followed by an overwhelmingly tetrameter movement throughout) set up "a metrical conflict" that makes us aware of the submerged extra stress latent in the following lines and "takes us up and down the scale of [English verse] history" in its play with multiple rhythms ("the tetrameter of popular song stanzas and the pentameter of the Keatsian ode"). Geographic and metrical time-travel thereby transform both Pentargon Bay and the poem into sites that register loss (the lost love, the past meters) even as they also master and rework that emptiness into a new shape and form.

Thus it becomes problematic to read "A Dream or No," as Peter Sacks does, as suggesting a primarily positive "assertion of continuous identity" and "Hardy's recommitment to his early love" (TRE 254). If we take into account the way in which this poem moves between metrical times and spaces (pentameter and tetrasyllable), the penultimate line, "I am just the same as when" carries less authority. If we have learned anything in this poem, it is that there is no such easy adherence to one time nor maintenance of one static space: the poem and poet will always be shifting between two times and spaces, if not more. The modern elegy as Hardy presents it does not simply involve repetition—one of the conventions of elegy that establishes continuity and control of grief (TRE 23)—but a repositioning that makes the return to the lost moment and place always new and jarring. The elegy balances between two times within a space that is defined by what it is not: "Scanned across the dark space wherein I have lacked you." Ramazani writes that "Hardy begets his poetry in the dark space of his lack" (POEM 58), but we could also think of it as a poetic shaping of absence—the materialization of that dark space into meter and the mapping of loss. "The Place on the Map," "A Dream or No," and "After a Journey" portray a geography and prosody defined by what is absent as much as by what is present. These poems thereby highlight the conceptual and material distance that cartographers themselves try to elide: the gap between immediate spatio-temporal experiences and a patterned understanding of them (and attempt to access them) provided by a map. Hardy here maps the gap between a real place and a past moment, creating a chart in which the loss—the hope and the bitterness of perpetual movement and unresolved mourning—provides the contour lines of the landscape.

With poems that enact this unresolved mourning through their presentation of a geographically and poetically imbued space-time, we see Hardy formulating a theory of spatial experience that has decidedly modernist overtones. As geographer Timothy Oakes has argued, place itself may be the site of "modernity's paradoxes and contradictions" where the "tension between progress and loss" is geographically expressed. While Oakes focuses on Hardy's novels as presenting us with an "unstable landscape of process" in which readers negotiate "a tense relationship between dwelling and detachment" (PPM 517, his emphasis), I think that his terms usefully illuminate how Hardy's elegies formally and thematically explore a version of this spatial paradox.

The experience of the subject in place will result in the subject displaced, and this displacement will be provoked and manifested by the multiple (and mutually exclusive) times at work within each place. As such, place no longer functions as "a site of both meaningful identity and immediate agency" (PPM 510, his emphasis), but as a site where identity is unstable and agency shifting. Even further, the poetry transforms each place into a new cartographic space in which the key is always changing and the most important map-reading occurs in the negative space.

This unwieldy version of map-reading leads us back to "Wessex Heights," which was the poem Hardy used to open Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries in the first edition. This original placement underscores the importance of picturing the poem's figurative and literal perspectives, for the verses thereby functioned as a primer to the lyrics that followed. "Wessex Heights (1886)," which moves towards a progressively more abstracted and identity-erasing lyric space, is an awkward piece to read because the tension between rhythm and words at times seems overwhelming (for full text see Appendix B). Hardy starts us with a seemingly static location:

There are some heights in Wessex, shaped as if by a kindly hand
For thinking, dreaming, dying on, and at crises when I stand,
Say, on Ingean Beacon eastward, or on Wylls-Neck westwardly,
I seem where I was before my birth, and after death may be.
(CF 319)

Although we begin the poem rooted in time and space—the title presents an identifiable place and a particular year—this sense of fixity is undermined by the end of the
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568 prosody’s interest in the times within lyrical space in order to suggest that the “place on the map” may be in fact the spot that evades, rather than enables, meaning-making. Thus the melancholic mourning that critics have characterized as central to modernist expressions of grief involves, in Hardy’s formulation, a Janus-faced prosody that maps a haunted terrain of loss.

Notes

This essay grew out of a talk I gave at the 2007 MSA conference, and I would like to thank my fellow panel members, Meredith Martin and Jess Roberts. I have been fortunate to have a number of readers for this piece at its various stages of development: my thanks and gratitude to Mary-Catherine Harrison, John Fulton, John Whittier-Ferguson, Patrick Baron, Paul Sorum, and Stephen Burt.

1. Thomas Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy by Florence Hardy, combined edn. (London: Studio Editions, 1994), 1 and 212; hereafter abbreviated LI or LII, to distinguish between the two volumes in this edition.

2. Hardy presented his paper in 1884, but it was not published in the society’s proceedings until 1909.


5. Thomas Hardy, “The Roman Road,” The Complete Poetry, ed. James Gibson (New York: Palgrave 2001), 295; hereafter abbreviated CP. Except when noted otherwise, all poems are from this edition. It is both of the new Hardy biographies published in the last few years, the authors mention this poem in their discussions of Hardy’s childhood. Clair Tomalin refers to this poem early on to highlight Hardy’s deep and lasting connection to his mother, Jemima [Thomas Hardy (New York: Penguin, 2007), 22], while Ralph Pite mentions it in his discussion of Jemima’s role as protector and companion to the young Hardy [Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life (New York: Picador, 2006), 49].

6. See the Oxford English Dictionary, online edition (1989) for a comprehensive definition of geography. I am drawing on both the first definition, which deals with the field—“The science which has for its object the description of the earth’s surface, treating of its form and physical features, its natural and political divisions, the climate, productions, population, etc., of the various countries”—as well as on the third definition, which focuses on the subject of study—“the geographical features of a place or region, the range or extent of what is known geographically.”


9. The two terms that I use in this sentence, space and place, have been the subject of discussion by both geographers and cultural or literary critics. Space, the more inclusive of the two terms, is usually designated as an 'a priori', abstract arena (see Worsley’s discussion in ‘Place and Space in Modern Fiction’). In The Production of Space (1974) trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, 1981), Henri Lefebvre challenged this Enlightenment model with his version of space as created by social processes. Yet, while space now is seen as constructed and, therefore, ideologically bound, it still functions as an inclusive term that can be applied to both physical and mental arenas. Place, on the other hand, is used to refer to, in the words of the geographer Timothy Oakes, “a site of both meaningful identity and immediate agency” (“Place and the Paradox of Modernity,” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 87.3 (1997): 510, emphasis mine; hereafter abbreviated PPM). These elements of place become, my paper argues, contested in the Hardy’s elegies.

10. Specifically modernist mourning has been the focus of a number of recent critical works. Rasmussen’s book is, of course, an early example of this. More recent discussions of the connections between modernist aesthetic concerns and the project of mourning occur in Alessia Ricciardi’s The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Patricia Rae’s collection of essays on Modernism and Mourning (Lewisesburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007); and Seth Moglen’s Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Inquiries of American Capitalism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). All of these works share a commitment to exploring the continuum between mourning and melancholia—a continuum that Rae, for one, asks us to revisit through an examination of the formal strategies of modernist texts that may offer “resistance” to mourning (16).

11. Anne Marie Claire Godlewski, “From Enlightenment Vision to Modern Science? Humboldt’s Visual Thinking” in Geography and Enlightenment, eds. David N. Livingstone and Charles W. J. Withers, University of Chicago Press, 1990), 237, hereafter abbreviated HVE. Pine usefully discusses some of the history of geography during the mid- and late nineteenth century (4–7). Geography was not a recognized field in universities until the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Royal Geographical Society began to push for this recognition in 1871, but it was only in 1896 that Oxford and Cambridge agreed to add geography to their curricula (Sir John Scott Keltie, The Position of Geography in British Universities (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921), 1–4). Halford Mackinder was the first reader in geography appointed to Oxford (in 1887), and he remained the only one until 1899, when Oxford established an independent school of geography and Mackinder hired A. J. Herrshott as a lecturer; Robert E. Dickinson, Regional Concepts: The Anglo-American Leaders (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 44).


15. Though I group these geographers together, it is important to note their different regional survey and their vision of its use exhibit differences. Mackinder, for example, saw the study of regions as a means of strengthening Britain’s relationship with its imperial holdings. Geddes, on the other hand, was interested in using surveys to understand the interactions between different regions and between humans and their environment, especially as a precursor to town planning and the development of natural resources (Meller, 133–37; in addition, see David Mathews, “Regional Surveys and Local Knowledges: The Geographical Imagination in Britain, 1918–1938,” Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 17.4 (1992): 484–90), for a discussion of this view of “locality as microcosm” (475).


17. Peter Sacks, in The English Elegy Studies in the Canon from Spenser to Yeats (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), gives one of the definitive explanations of the elegy, hereafter abbreviated TEE.


20. Even the the very use of the term “picnic” in the title of the poem suggests the transitory nature of this event. As the Oxford English Dictionary points out, the definition transformed by the mid-nineteenth century from a society version of a potluck, to an outdoor and informal meal (from Online Oxford English Dictionary draft revision, March 2000).


22. The Oxford English Dictionary gives as its first definition of “mark”: “To trace out boundaries for; to plot out (ground): to set out the ground plan of a building; (fig.) to plan out, design. It gives in definition 11 the following description and example: “To make perceptible or recognizable, by some sign or indication. 1904 Grove’s Dict. Music 1. 121: ‘The famous instrumentalists of the classical school... were accustomed to mark the natural accent... by a hardly perceptible prolongation of the first note of the bar’ (from the Online Oxford English Dictionary draft revision, March 2005).

23. This view of Hardy’s poetry is reinforced by his oft-quoted comment about his method of composition, which he describes in his Life: “Among his papers were quantities of notes on rhythm and metre with outlines and experiments in innumerable original measures, some of which he adapted from time to time. These verse skeletons were mostly blank, and only designed by the usual marks for long and short syllables, accented, etc., but they were occasionally made up of mere verse—such as, he said, were written when he was a boy by students of Latin prose with the aid of a ‘Gradus’” (LH, 70–80).

24. Denver Taylor discusses this in his comprehensive examination of Hardy’s metrical experiments and variations; Hardy’s Metres and Victorian Prosey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 87, hereafter abbreviated MPV.

25. Ormond references Patmore’s essay and is sympathetic to the idea of a foot containing “action and reaction, syllable and disyllable,” but he dismisses Patmore’s claim that dipody necessitates a silent foot at the end of every line (A Study of Metre (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 80). In his essay, George Stewart tries to make the proof for dipody meters more scientific with what he calls the “Dipody Index: an analysis of the stresses accorded different parts of speech in various poems,” “A Method Toward the Study of Dipody Verse,” PMLA 39.4 (1924) 569). The debate continues today. After hearing my presentation at the 2007 MLA conference, scholar and poet Stephen Burt wrote about it on a Poetry Foundation blog (http://poetryfoundation.org/bloom/2007/11/the_map_that_hangs_by_string), and several people responded to his entry with their own readings regarding whether or not “The Place on the Map” could be considered dipody.


30. The *Oxford English Dictionary* combines these two seemingly exclusive meanings in its first definition: “To express oneself through silent or imaginative gestures (also) to make an absurd spectacle or display of oneself, to go around behaving as though in a pantomime” (Online *Oxford English Dictionary*, draft revision December 2007).

31. Donald Davie, *With the Grain: Essays on Thomas Hardy and Modern British Poetry* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1998), 11. To the confusion of his readers, in most of his volumes Hardy arranged his poems in a haphazard order that accounts for neither the chronology of composition nor thematic similarities. In his defensive “Apology” at the beginning of his 1922 book *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (the title of which itself suggests a disrupted chronology and a retrospective process of creation), Hardy provides an inadequate explanation of this seemingly careless practice, claiming that “the difficulties of arranging the themes in a graduated kinship of moods would have been so great that it would be almost unavoidable with efforts so diverse” (L255). And while Hardy was known to be careless about certain elements of composition, most notably in the serializations of his novels, I think that a more satisfying reason behind his haphazard ordering is that, in terms of the way that Hardy saw space and time interacting, such juxtapositions are more true to life than would be neat chronologies of cause and effect.

32. Though in Cornwall, Saint Juliot is an English name and is pronounced phonetically, with the accent on the first syllable and the second syllable elided (JUL-yot).

33. “Fancy” is Hardy’s chosen term for the project of poetry, as he makes clear with his critique of Wordsworth’s choice of the word “imagination” in the Preface to the *Lyric Ballads*. He boldly rewrites Wordsworth’s formulation: “He should have put the matter somewhat like this: In works of passion and sentiment (not ‘imagination and sentiment’) the language of verse is the language of prose. In works of fancy (or imagination), ‘poetic diction’ (of the real kind) is proper, and even necessary” (LII, 85). See *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy: Volume II*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 88–90, for all of the variations between various editions and the holograph. In the 1915 edition, Hynes notes that the second line is slightly different “I was but made fancy.”

34. I read the middle two lines, which only have two stresses and are likewise set off by their indentations, as amphibarchs (+ / +), which create a similarly rhythmic movement, though one could also scan them as containing three feet (jamb, pyrhe, trochee). I find the amphibarch more convincing because of the galloping rhythm of the poem as a whole.


36. HMP 100, 98. Taylor’s reading of the first stanza goes as follows, with the circles used to indicate where some might read an accent and others elide (thereby allowing the lines to embody either a tetrameter or a pentameter meter):

Hereto I come to view a voiceless ghost:

Whither, O whither will its whim now draw me?

Up the cliff, down, till I’m lonely, lost,

And the unseen waters’ ejaculations we.

Where you will next be there’s no knowing,

Facing round about me everywhere,

With your nut-coloured hair;

And gray eyes, and rose-flush coming and going.

HMP 98

37. PPM 10, 511. Oakes makes his argument to counteract scholars who have claimed that modernity in general (and modernism, in particular) ignored and suppressed the idea of place (the local and specific) in favor of an abstract, totalizing space. See David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), especially Chapter 15, for a discussion of this Enlightenment model of space.

38. Samuel Hynes points out this choice of order in his explanatory note to the poem (*Complete Poetical Works*, 488).

39. 1896 was the year when Hardy was recovering from the uproar around *Jude* and when he wrote about his hope to express “more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion” (LII, 57). Armstrong describes this as the “crisis poem” (Haunted Hardy, 8).

40. Change noted in Hynes, 35. Hardy uses a number of amphibarchs in this poem, in particular at the end of the first half of the lines (“in Wessex” (1); “no comrade” (5), for example (stressed syllables are bold)). The same place in the line is also often held by unpauses or dactylics, which create that same feeling of urgency.

41. Taylor, HMP 96. We can see the possibility of a dipodic reading in the following stanza, for example (this reading is mine, not Taylor’s; he does not actually discuss the poem at any length in his book, though I use the same notation as he does above in “After a Journey”):

In the lowlands I have no comrade, not even the lone man’s friend—

Her who suffreth long and is kind; accepts what he is too weak to mend

Down there they are dubious and askance; there nobody thinks as 1.

But mind-chains do not clank where one’s next neighbor is the sky.