

Relationships with the Dead in Wordsworth's We Are Seven and Hardy's Digging

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"[One] can outlast death not in a divine after life but only in a human one. If the poet dies or forgets his beloved, he murders her" (Ramazani 131); Thomas Hardy's belief of the "poet's duty of [remembrance](#)" establishes the basis for his, "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?". "[Fearing] he abandoned his own wife before her death," Hardy wrote the poem to assume "the memorial responsibilities of the poet" (Ramazani 131). Whereas Hardy tries to atone for his sins "by continually grieving over his dead wife", the fuel behind William Wordsworth's "We Are Seven," is a question of being and existence (Trilling 57). This question stems from the fact "that nothing was more difficult for [Wordsworth] in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to his own being" (Noyes 60). Despite the vastly different intentions of the poets, Hardy and Wordsworth both depict relationships between the living and the dead in their poems; however, while Hardy humorously satirizes how the living forget the dead, Wordsworth demonstrates a child's [refusal](#) to acknowledge the dead as being gone.

In their poems, Hardy and Wordsworth both elicit the use of [conversation](#); however, the fictional conversation in "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?," contrasts the non-fictional dialogue in "We Are Seven". Hardy's poem "uses the ballad convention of 'The Unquiet Grave'- a dialogue between living and dead" (Johnson 48), in this case, between a deceased woman and her dog; Wordsworth's poem consists of an actual confrontation he had with a little girl when he traveled through Europe. Hardy's willingness to use disembodied voices for the intended purpose of creating...

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...ument Wordsworth brings up, the girl replies, "Nay, we are seven!" (Wordsworth 1333). She lacks the ability to accept death and "this [absence] of awareness [makes] the poem so touching" (Drabble 51).

What began as a simple everyday conversation finished as a didactic and somewhat emotional poem. Wordsworth, through a real life conversation, presents "the obscurity and perplexity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our inability to admit that notion" (Noyes 60). In direct contrast to Wordsworth, who did not intend to write a deep, meaningful poem, Hardy knew exactly what he wanted to accomplish by writing, "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave." People too easily remove the dead from their memories, and Hardy wanted to admonish his readers of the importance of remembering the dead; just because the dead are gone, they should not be forgotten.

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