The Haunter

He does not think that I haunt here nightly:
   How shall I let him know
That whither his fancy sets him wandering
   I, too, alertly go? -
   Hover and hover a few feet from him
   Just as I used to do,
But cannot answer the words he lifts me –
   Only listen thereto!

When I could answer he did not say them:
   When I could let him know
How I would like to join in his journeys
   Seldom he wished to go.
Now that he goes and wants me with him
   More than he used to do,
Never he sees my faithful phantom
   Though he speaks thereto.

   Yes, I companion him to places
   Only dreamers know,
Where the shy hares print long paces,
   Where the night rooks go;
Into old aisles where the past is all to him,
   Close as his shade can do,
Always lacking the power to call to him,
   Near as I reach thereto!

What a good haunter I am, O tell him,
   Quickly make him know
If he but sigh since my loss befell him
   Straight to his side I go.
Tell him a faithful one is doing
   All that love can do
Still that his path may be worth pursuing,
   And to bring peace thereto.

*The Haunter:*

Imaginatively, and most pathetically, Hardy writes this plaintive and moving poem from the point of view of Emma. It is written in the first person, with Emma as the imaginary narrator. It is almost as if, in putting these words in the mouth of Emma (who, in the poem, sees Hardy as oblivious of her presence)
Hardy is trying to reassure himself that she forgives him and continues to love him.

Though Hardy does not know it, Emma's phantom follows him in his meanderings, hearing, but unable to respond to, the remarks he addresses to her in his grief.

When Emma was able to answer Hardy did not address her so frankly; when she expressed a wish to accompany him Hardy would become reluctant to go anywhere - but now he does wish Emma were with him. She is, but he does not know this, even though he speaks as if to Emma's "faithful phantom".

Hardy's deep love of nature appears in his choice of the places where he walks, the haunts of those given to reverie: where the hares leave their footprints, or the nocturnal haunts of rooks. He also visits "old aisles" (whether the aisles of churches or natural pathways in woods and copses is not made clear). In all these places Emma's ghost keeps as close as "his shade can do". "Shade" is ambiguous: it is used here to mean "shadow" (Emma is as close as his own shadow to Hardy) but the term more usually means "ghost" - which is evidently very appropriate here. Again, Emma notes that she cannot speak to Hardy, however hard she may strive to do so.

Emma implores the reader to inform Hardy of what she is doing, with the almost desperate imperative: "O tell him!" She attends to his merest sigh, doing "all that love can do" in the hope that "his path" may be worth the attention she lavishes on it, and in the hope that she may bring peace to Hardy's life. The lyrical trochaic metre and subtly linked rhyme scheme seem in keeping with the optimistic content of the poem, unlike "The Going", in which the liveliness jars with the sombre, self-pitying character of the piece. Instead of (as in "The Going") reproaching Emma, for leaving him without warning, here Hardy celebrates her essential fidelity and benevolence which she retains, even in death. While the idea of Emma as the faithful phantom is, of course, entirely fanciful it is strikingly plaintive and touching.