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 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?

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

The Voice:

As in "The Haunter" Hardy imagines Emma trying to communicate with him. The poem is in the first person, and Hardy is the speaker, imagining that Emma calls to him, telling him that she is not the woman she had become after forty years of marriage, but has regained the beauty of her youth, of the time when her and Hardy's "day was fair".

Imagining he can indeed hear her, Hardy implores Emma to appear to him, in the place and wearing the same attire which he associates with their early courtship. Hardy introduces, in the third stanza, the mocking fear that all he hears is the wind and that Emma's death has marked the end of her existence - that she has been "dissolved" and will be "heard no more".

The lively anapaestic metre of the first three stanzas gives way, in the final stanza, to a less fluent rhythm, capturing the desolate mood of Hardy as he falters forward, while the leaves fall and the north wind blows, as Emma (if it is she) continues to call.
The poem begins optimistically with a hope that Emma is really addressing Hardy but by the end this hope has been replaced by a belief that the "voice" is imaginary. Though the vigorous anapaestic metre of the poem helps convey this initial hope, it proves unwieldy for Hardy, as is evident in the clumsy third stanza, where "listlessness" is rhymed with Hardy's unfortunate coinage "existlessness", and we find the gauche and repetitious phrase "no more again" in the stanza's final line.