

**Azad Hind Fouz Smriti Mahavidyalaya
Domjur, Howrah**

Semester 1

AEC
(ABILITY ENHANCEMENT COURSE)

Compulsory English

Unit 1 : Poetry

Afterwards
Thomas Hardy

Prepared by

Dr. Aditi Sengupta

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

July to December 2003

Afterwards

Thomas Hardy

When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
“He was a man who used to notice such things”?

If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid's soundless blink,
The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
“To him this must have been a familiar sight.”

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, “He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone.”

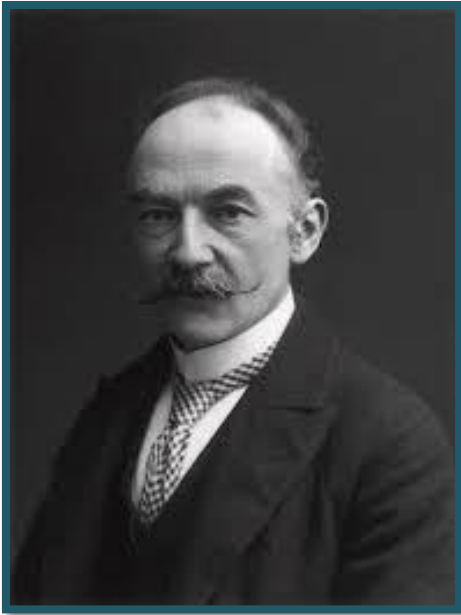
If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,
“He was one who had an eye for such mysteries”?

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
“He hears it not now, but used to notice such things?”



The Poet:

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was an English novelist and poet. Though a Victorian, he was influenced by Romanticism, especially the poetry of William Wordsworth. He was highly critical of Victorian society for the low status of rural people in Britain such as those from his native South West England.



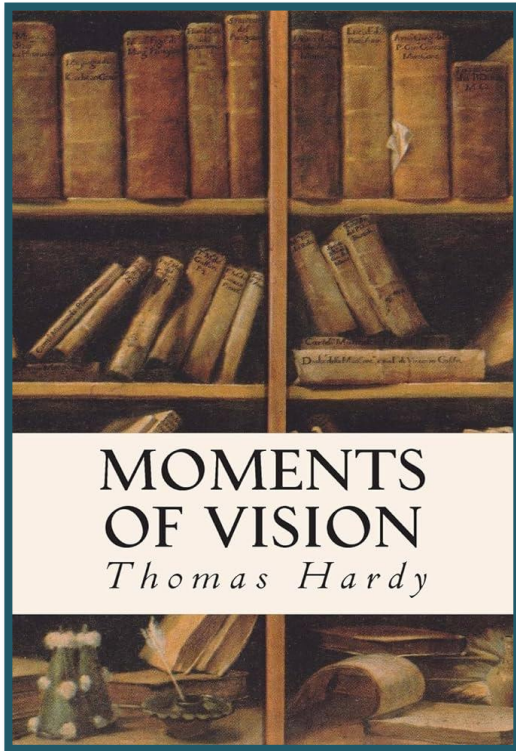
Thomas Hardy was born in Dorset (England) where his father, also called Thomas, worked as a stonemason and builder. His mother, Jemima was well read and taught him until he went to his first school. Hardy's formal education ended at the age of sixteen as his family was poor. He was apprenticed to James Hicks, an architect. Later, Hardy moved to London and joined King's College London. He even won awards from the Royal Institute of British Architects. But, Hardy never liked London because of the class hierarchy and his social inferiority and became interested in social reform. He read the works of John Stuart Mill and was deeply influenced by Mill's essay *On*

Liberty. After five years, owing to ill-health, Hardy returned to Dorset and decided to start writing.

Hardy's career may be divided sharply into two halves – from 1871 to 1897 he published only fiction; from 1898 to 1928, he published poetry. His novels like *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) are set in the semi-fictional region of Wessex in south-west England and depict characters in tragic social circumstances. Hardy published his first volume of poetry, *Wessex Poems* (1898) and it was followed by *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901). Hardy wrote a great variety of poems: lyrics, ballads, satire, dramatic-monologues and a three-volume epic closet drama, *The Dynasts* (1904–08) and experimented with stanza forms and meters. He also wrote several war poems inspired by the Boer Wars and World War I. Some of Hardy's most significant poems are in *Poems 1912–13* published after the death of his wife Emma in 1912. Although his poems were initially not as well received as his novels had been, Hardy is regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century.

The Poem:

Afterwards was published in *Moments of Vision* (1917). It was the last poem in the collection and Hardy's life.



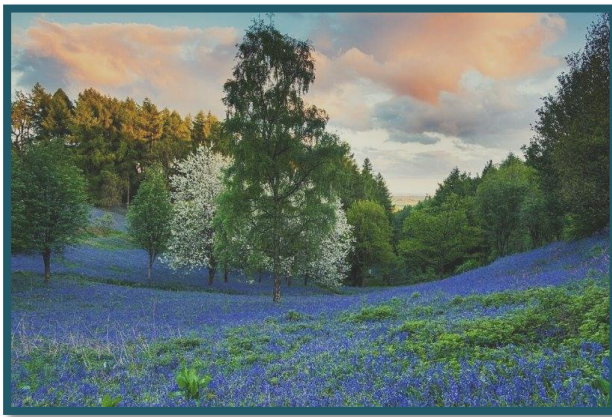
The poem depicts the speaker-poet's observation of the beauty of the natural world through beautiful images, and wonders about the neighbours' words and actions after his death. He (possibly Thomas Hardy himself) imagines his own death and wonders how his neighbours will remember him when he is gone. Life must end someday and after death, he will no longer be able to enjoy the things that once delighted and intrigued him. So, he hopes that other people will remember him from time to time, especially when they look upon the natural world. Through memory, the poem suggests, the dead can remain 'alive' in the memory of the living. This idea is consoling to a person who is about to leave the world behind.

The speaker knows the world will not end when he dies, but he hopes he will not be forgotten. He likes to think his neighbours will remember him as someone who “*used to notice*” the changing of winter into “*May*” so much so that the neighbours will remember him every spring. Similarly, he hopes that they will remember his happiness to see the “*full-starred heaven*” of winter and the “*nocturnal blackness*” through which hedgehogs secretly move. He hopes his neighbours will connect him with the natural world and remember the pleasure he took in it. The speaker even imagines people hearing his “*bell of quittance*” (i.e., the church bells ringing to announce his death) and remembering how he was sensitive to such sad sounds. The memory of the living people may in some way bring the speaker back to life. In short, the speaker hopes that, after he dies, he will not be totally gone from the world he loves so much. Though he will not wander in the natural surroundings or experience anything, he hopes that his love of the world will continue in the memory of the others – and therefore, in some way, he will live on.

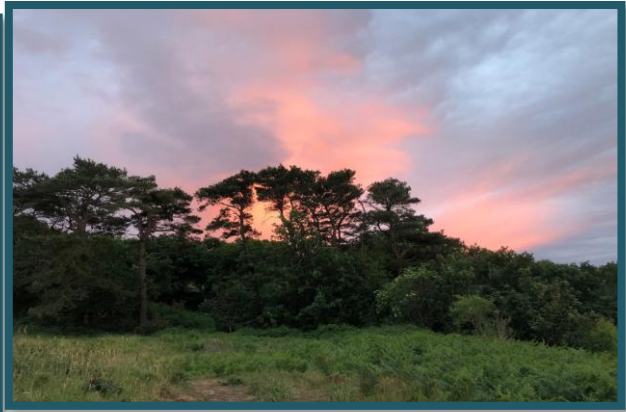
Stanza 1:

*When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
 And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
 Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
 “He was a man who used to notice such things”?*

When the present has shut its back-door (*latched its postern*) behind the poet’s life on earth (*behind my tremulous stay*) and the month of May flutters its happy green leaves as if they were wings of delicate silk (*Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk*), will the neighbours comment, he was a careful observer of the natural world and derived pleasure from his wanderings amidst nature.



~ Spring in Dorset ~



~ Dusk / Twilight ~

Stanza 2:

*If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid’s soundless blink,
 The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
 Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
 “To him this must have been a familiar sight.”*

During twilight (*in the dusk*) – like the silent blink of an eye – the nightjar bird (*dewfall-hawk*) flies across shadows to perch on a hawthorn bent by wind, someone looking on might think, he must have often seen such sights.



~ Dewfall-Hawk ~



~ Wind-warped Hawthorn ~

Stanza 3:

*If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, "He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone."*

The speaker wonders, if he dies in the middle of the night (*pass during some nocturnal blackness*), when moths flutter in the warm air and hedgehogs run secretively across the lawn, maybe someone will say, he tried (*strove*) to protect (*come to no harm*) such harmless animals (*innocent creatures*), but he could not do much for them, and now he is dead (*now he is gone*).



~ Moths ~



~ Hedgehog ~

Stanza 4:

If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,

Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,

Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,

“He was one who had an eye for such mysteries”?

If, on hearing that the speaker is finally dead (*stilled at last*), will the neighbours stand looking out of the door at the winter sky full of stars (*full-starred heavens*), and will those people, who will never see the speaker again (*those who will meet my face no more*) think, he was a sensitive observer (*had an eye*) of the mysteries of the natural world.

Stanza 5:

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,

And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,

Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,

“He hears it not now, but used to notice such things?”

The speaker wonders whether anyone will say, when his funeral bell or ‘death knell’ (*bell of quittance*) rings in the darkness of the night (*heard in the gloom*) – and the blowing breeze (*crossing breeze*) interrupts the bell’s sound (*cuts a pause in its outrollings*) until it can be heard again, as if a new bell had started ringing – he cannot hear the ringing bell, but he used to pay attention to things like this.



~ Death Knell ~

Short Questions:

1. Who has written the poem, *Afterwards*?
Afterwards is written by Thomas Hardy.
2. Name the collection of poems in which *Afterwards* was published?
Afterwards was published in ***Moments of Vision*** (1917) as the last poem in the volume.
3. Who is the speaker in the poem, *Afterwards*?
The speaker in *Afterwards* is an old man, perhaps Thomas Hardy himself, who was 77 years old when it was written.
4. What is the setting of Thomas Hardy's works?
The setting of Thomas Hardy's works is an imaginary place in South-West England called Wessex.
5. Where did Thomas Hardy live in England?
Thomas Hardy lived in Dorset in South-West England.
6. In what literary period did Thomas Hardy live and work?
Thomas Hardy lived and worked in the Victorian and Modern age.
7. What event does the title of *Afterwards* refer to?
The title *Afterwards* refers to the speaker's death.
8. What is the meaning of the word 'postern' in *Afterwards*?
The word 'postern' in *Afterwards* means 'back-door' or 'entrance at the back'.
9. What is the meaning of 'latched its postern' in *Afterwards*?
The meaning of 'latched its postern' in *Afterwards* is 'locked the back-door'.
10. What does the speaker mean by 'my tremulous stay' in *Afterwards*?
By 'my tremulous stay' in *Afterwards* the speaker means 'his life on earth'.
11. What happens in the month of May in *Afterwards*?
The month of May denotes spring when glad green leaves move like wings in the breeze in *Afterwards*.
12. To what does the speaker compare the leaves of May in *Afterwards*?
The speaker compares the leaves of May to 'delicate wings of new-spun silk' in *Afterwards*.

13. What is a dewfall-hawk?

Dewfall-hawk refers to the nightjar, a nocturnal bird that makes a jarring noise and was considered an evil omen of bad luck or death.

14. How does the speaker describe the flight of the dewfall- hawk in *Afterwards*?

The dew-fall hawk flies silently at dusk like the soundless blink of an eyelid in *Afterwards*.

15. What is 'wind-warped upland thorn' in *Afterwards*?

In *Afterwards* 'wind-warped upland thorn' refers to hawthorn trees with gnarled (twisted) branches in the wind.

16. What insects did the speaker see flying at night in *Afterwards*?

The speaker saw moths flying at night in *Afterwards*.

17. What creatures did the speaker see moving across the lawn at night in *Afterwards*?

The speaker saw hedgehogs moving across the lawn at night in *Afterwards*.

18. What are the 'innocent creatures' mentioned in *Afterwards*?

The 'innocent creatures' mentioned in *Afterwards* are moths, dewfall hawks and hedgehogs.

19. What does the speaker mean by 'I have been stilled at last' in *Afterwards*?

The speaker means when he finally dies by 'I have been stilled at last' in *Afterwards*.

20. What do the people do when they hear of the speaker's passing (death)?

The people stand at the door and watch the winter sky full of stars when they hear of the speaker's passing (death).

21. How is the winter sky described in *Afterwards*?

The winter sky is described as full-starred – full of stars in *Afterwards*.

22. What mysteries are referred to in "eye for such mysteries" in *Afterwards*?

The mysteries of the starry night sky of winter are referred to in *Afterwards*.

23. What is meant by 'bell of quittance' in *Afterwards*?

In *Afterwards* 'bell of quittance' means the bell that rings after a person dies – the knell.

24. What does the ringing of the 'bell of quittance' in *Afterwards* indicate?

The ringing of the 'bell of quittance' in *Afterwards* indicates that the speaker is dead.

25. At what time of the day does the speaker imagine he will die in *Afterwards*?
The speaker imagines that he will die in the gloom (dark night) in *Afterwards*.
26. What is the meaning of 'outrollings' in *Afterwards*?
In *Afterwards* 'outrollings' mean the ringing noise of the bell after the speaker dies.
27. What causes a pause in the ringing noise of the bell in *Afterwards*?
A passing breeze causes a pause in the ringing noise of the bell in *Afterwards*.
28. How does the speaker want his neighbours to remember him in *Afterwards*?
The speaker wants his neighbours to remember him as a sensitive observer of nature in *Afterwards*.
29. What is the central theme of *Afterwards*?
The central theme of *Afterwards* is remembrance of the dead or keeping the dead alive in memory.
30. What is the mood of the speaker in *Afterwards*?
The mood of the speaker is sad (melancholy) as he will not be able to see the beauty of the nature anymore after death.

