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(ABILITY ENHANCEMENT COURSE)

Compulsory English

Unit 1 : Poetry

Afterwards
Thomas Hardy

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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.”

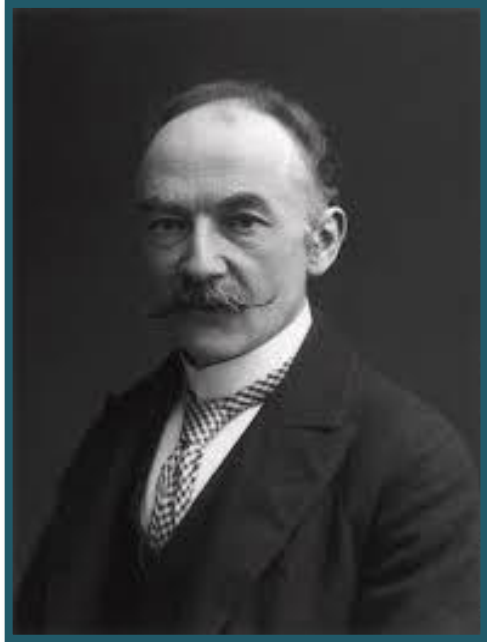
If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, “He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone.”

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.

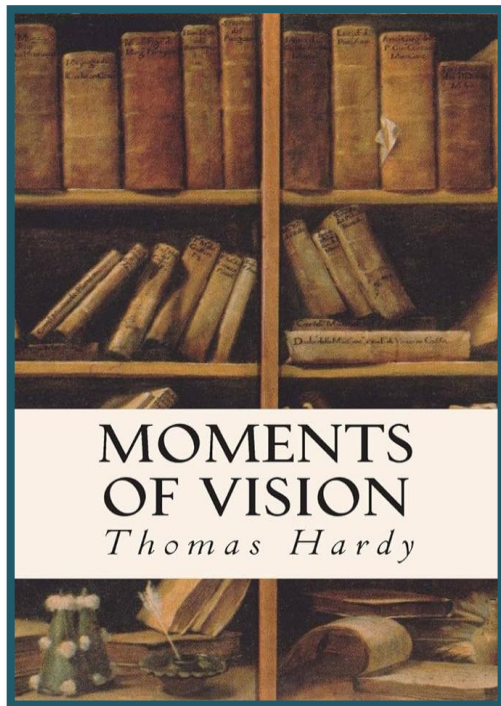


Thomas Hardy was born in Dorset (England) where his father, also called Thomas, worked as a stonemason and builder. His mother, Jemima was well read and taught him in childhood. Hardy's formal education ended at the age of sixteen as his family was poor. He was apprenticed to James Hicks, an architect. Later, Hardy joined King's College in London. He won awards from the Royal Institute of British Architects. But, he never liked London because of the class hierarchy and was 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, Hardy returned to Dorset and decided to start writing.

Hardy's career may be divided 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 region of Wessex in South-West England, and tell stories about people in tragic social circumstances. Hardy published his first volume of poetry, *Wessex Poems* (1898) which was followed by *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901). Hardy wrote a variety of poems: lyrics, ballads, satire, dramatic-monologues and a three-volume epic closet drama, *The Dynasts* (1904–08). He also wrote war poems inspired by the Boer Wars and World War I. Some of Hardy's most significant poems are in the collection, *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 the collection called, *Moments of Vision* (1917). It is the last poem in the collection and also of Hardy's life.



The poem depicts the speaker's observation of the beauty of the natural world through images, and wonders about the words / actions of his neighbours 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 (afterwards), he will no longer be able to enjoy the things that delighted him. He hopes that people will remember him from time to time, especially when they look upon the natural world. 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 seasons – from winter into "May" so much so that people 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 move stealthily (in secret). He hopes his neighbours will connect him with the natural world and remember the joy he felt in nature. The speaker even imagines people hearing his "bell of quittance" (the church bells ringing to announce his death) and remembering how he was sensitive to such sad sounds. The remembrance of the 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 feel 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.

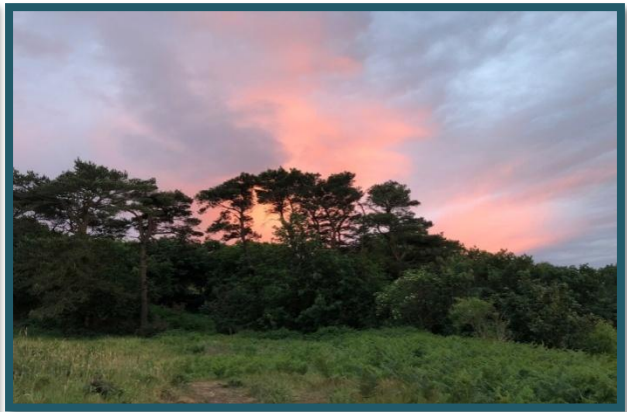
Stanza 1:

*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 speaker-poet’s life on earth (*behind my tremulous stay*), and the month of May flutters (*flaps*) its happy (*glad*) green leaves like wings of delicate silk (*Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk*), will the neighbours say, he was an observer of the natural world and derived pleasure from his wanderings in 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 (*a dewfall-hawk*) flies across dark shadows to perch (*alight/ sit down*) on the branch of a hawthorn tree bent by wind (*wind-warped upland thorn*), 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 (*pass*) in the middle of the night (*during some nocturnal blackness*) when moths fly in the warm air and hedgehogs run secretively (*furtively*) across the lawn (open space / field) maybe someone will say, he tried (*strove*) to protect (*come to no harm*) these small 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 dead (*stilled at last*), will the neighbours stand at their doors, looking up at the winter-sky full of stars (*full-starred heavens that winter sees*), 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 ‘death knell’ (*bell of quittance*) rings in the darkness of the night (*heard in the gloom*) – and the blowing breeze (*crossing breeze*) interrupts the ringing sound of the bell (*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 poet-speaker's death.
8. What is the meaning of the word 'postern' in *Afterwards*?
The word 'postern' 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' is 'locked the back-door'.
10. What does the speaker mean by 'my tremulous stay' in *Afterwards*?
By 'my tremulous stay' means 'his life on earth' which is temporary (*tremulous*).
11. Who has latched the postern in *Afterwards*?
'Present' has latched the postern – the poet-speaker imagines that he is dead at the present moment.
12. What happens in the month of May in *Afterwards*?
The month of May means spring-summer season in England when green leaves move like birds' wings in the breeze.

13. To what does the speaker compare the leaves of May in *Afterwards*?
The speaker compares the leaves of trees in May to the 'delicate wings of new-spun silk'.
14. What is meant by '*Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk*' in *Afterwards*?
The poet describes new leaves growing in spring with fine veins that are delicate like new-woven silk.
15. What is a dewfall-hawk?
Dewfall-hawk refers to 'nightjar', a nocturnal bird that makes a jarring noise and is believed to be an evil omen of bad luck / death.
16. 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.
17. What is 'wind-warped upland thorn' in *Afterwards*?
The '*wind-warped upland thorn*' refers to hawthorn trees growing on higher regions with branches that have gnarled (twisted) in the strong wind.
18. What insects did the speaker see flying at night in *Afterwards*?
The speaker saw moths flying at night.
19. What creatures did the speaker see moving across the lawn at night in *Afterwards*?
The speaker saw hedgehogs moving across the lawn at night.
20. What are the '*innocent creatures*' mentioned in *Afterwards*?
The '*innocent creatures*' mentioned in *Afterwards* are moths, dewfall hawks and hedgehogs.
21. What does the speaker mean by '*I have been stilled at last*' in *Afterwards*?
The speaker means when he finally dies.
22. What will the people do when they hear of the speaker's passing (death)?
The people will stand at their open door and watch the winter sky full of stars when they hear that the poet-speaker is dead.
23. What is meant by 'passing' in *Afterwards*?
In *Afterwards*, '*passing*' means 'death'.
24. What are 'full-starred heavens' in *Afterwards*?
The 'full-starred heavens' refer to clear winter skies full of stars.

25. How is the winter sky described in *Afterwards*?
The winter sky is described as 'full-starred' or full of stars.
26. When are the skies 'full-starred' in *Afterwards*?
The skies are full of stars in winter nights.
27. 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*.
28. What is meant by 'bell of quittance' in *Afterwards*?
The 'bell of quittance' means the bell that rings after a person dies – the knell.
29. What does the ringing of the 'bell of quittance' in *Afterwards* indicate?
The ringing of the 'bell of quittance' (knell) indicates that the poet-speaker is dead.
30. 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).
31. What is the meaning of 'outrollings' in *Afterwards*?
The 'outrollings' mean the ringing sound of the bell / knell after the speaker dies.
32. What causes a pause in the ringing noise of the bell in *Afterwards*?
The blowing breeze causes a pause in the ringing sound of the bell.
33. 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.
34. 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 nature after his death.
35. What is the theme of *Afterwards*?
The theme of *Afterwards* is the poet-speaker wondering about the thoughts / actions of people after his death.
36. What is the message of *Afterwards*?
The message of *Afterwards* is remembrance of the dead or keeping the dead alive in memory.