

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

16 *The Moth-Signal*

(*On Egdon Heath*)

“What are you still, still thinking,”  
He asked in vague surmise,  
“That you stare at the wick unblinking  
With those deep lost luminous eyes?”

“O, I see a poor moth burning 5  
In the candle flame,” said she,  
“Its wings and legs are turning  
To a cinder rapidly.”

“Moths fly in from the heather,”  
He said, “now the days decline.” 10  
“I know,” said she. “The weather,  
I hope, will at last be fine.

“I think,” she added lightly,  
“I’ll look out at the door.  
The ring the moon wears nightly 15  
May be visible now no more.”

She rose, and, little heeding,  
Her life-mate then went on  
With his mute and museful reading  
In the annals of ages gone. 20

Outside the house a figure  
Came from the tumulus near,  
And speedily waxed bigger,  
And clasped and called her Dear.

“I saw the pale-winged token 25  
You sent through the crack,” sighed she.  
“That moth is burnt and broken  
With which you lured out me.

“And were I as the moth is  
It might be better far 30  
For one whose marriage troth is  
Shattered as potsherds are!”

Then grinned the Ancient Briton  
From the tumulus treed with pine:  
“So, hearts are thwartly smitten 35  
In these days as in mine!”

*1914*

(From *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*. London:  
Macmillan, 1930)