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
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.”
“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
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.

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
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
   In these days as in mine!” 35

1914

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