

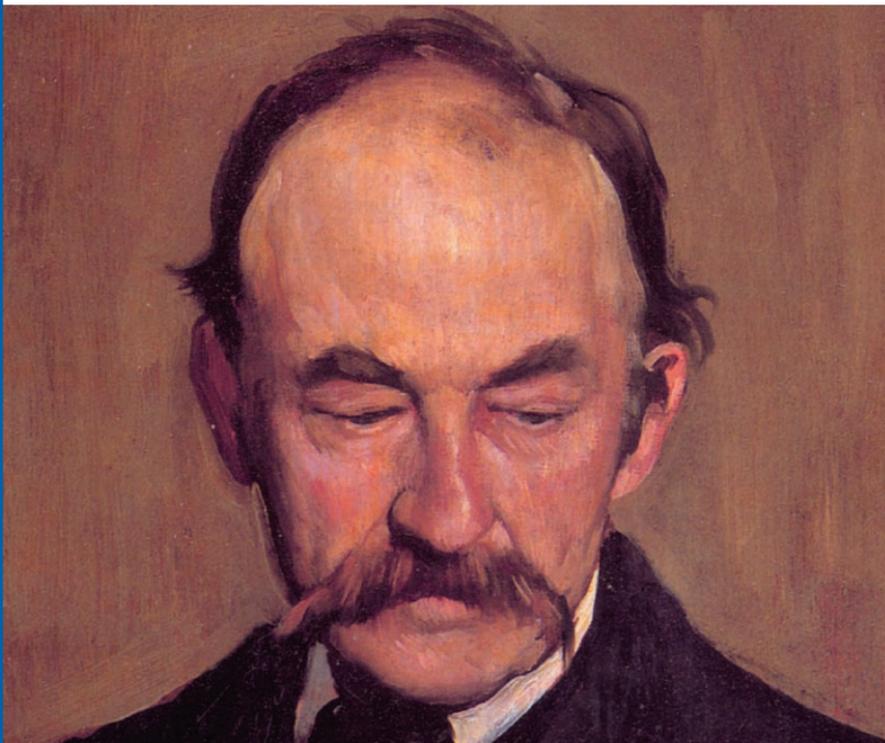
NAXOS
AudioBooks

Thomas Hardy
Winter Words

Poetry and Personal Writings

Read by **Bruce Alexander** and **Janet Maw**

POETRY



NA237312D

1	The Oxen *	1:58
2	So begins <i>The Life of Thomas Hardy</i> △	1:18
3	A Church Romance #	2:15
4	The Self-Unseeing *	2:03
5	Neutral Tones *	1:18
6	When I Set Out For Lyonesse *	3:47
7	Poems of Childhood and Home △	0:31
8	Domicilium *	2:36
9	During Wind And Rain #	1:26
10	The House Of Hospitalities *	0:49
11	Night In The Old Home *	1:15
12	Wessex Poems △	1:41
13	A Trampwoman's Tragedy #	5:10
14	At The Railway Station *	1:23
15	One Ralph Blossom Soliloquizes * #	1:22
16	The Ruined Maid #	1:47
17	The Lost Pyx *	3:42
18	Great Things *	1:14
19	Weathers *	0:50
20	Snow In The Suburbs *	1:20

21	The Fallow Deer At The Lonely House #	0:59
22	Poems Past And Present △	1:58
23	In Tenebris I (From Psalm 102) *	1:10
24	In Tenebris II (From Psalm 142) *	1:55
25	Wessex Heights *	2:49
26	At Day-Close In November *	0:36
27	Shut Out That Moon #	1:14
28	The Five Students *	1:58
29	A Commonplace Day *	2:11
30	I Look Into My Glass *	0:40
31	Nobody Comes *	0:51
32	Exeunt Omnes *	1:03
33	Satires Of Circumstance △	0:52
34	The Workbox *	1:32
35	'Ah, Are You Digging On My Grave?' #	1:56
36	In Church *	0:47
37	In The Cemetery *	0:42
38	At Tea #	0:44
39	At A Watering Place *	0:46
40	The Curate's Kindness *	1:52

41	The Rash Bride *	5:45
42	Poems of Love And Loss △	2:15
43	A Countenance *	0:58
44	The Contretemps *	3:00
45	Plena Timoris *	1:14
46	Molly Gone *	1:37
47	A Broken Appointment *	0:54
48	The Division *	0:35
49	The Photograph *	1:54
50	Thoughts Of Phena At News Of Her Death *	1:26
51	Her Death And After *	6:56
52	Her Immortality * #	2:25
53	A Night In November *	0:37
54	He Prefers Her Earthly *	1:01
55	Poems of 1912–1913 △	4:42
56	Under The Waterfall * #	2:45
57	The Going *	3:10
58	The Frozen Greenhouse: St Juliot *	0:52
59	I Found Her Out There *	1:12
60	The Haunter #	1:29

61	The Voice *	0:59
62	His Visitor #	1:22
63	After A Journey *	2:02
64	Beeny Cliff: March 1870 – March 1913 *	1:21
65	At Castle Boterel *	2:13
66	Poems of Faith And Doubt △	1:53
67	Before Life And After *	0:59
68	In The British Museum * #	1:05
69	In The Servants' Quarters *	2:32
70	Epitaph on a Pessimist *	0:18
71	The Darkling Thrush: 31st December 1900 *	1:33
72	The Convergence Of The Twain: Lines On The Loss Of The Titanic *	2:01
73	Men Who March Away *	1:25
74	Channel Firing: April 1914 *	1:52
75	A Christmas Ghost Story: Christmas Eve, 1899 #	0:55
76	Drummer Hodge *	1:31
77	In Time Of 'The Breaking Of Nations': 1915 *	0:39
78	Afterwards *	2:23

Total time: 2:16:50

Bruce Alexander * Janet Maw # Neville Jason △

Thomas Hardy

Winter Words

Thomas Hardy, born in 1840, died in 1928, does not fit comfortably into the categories of English literature. For a start, he was (most unusually) both novelist and poet, both experimentalist and traditionalist, in form as much as in content. He was a poet from his youth, a novelist in middle age, and a poet again until his death.

The ideas about poetry which he articulated in diaries, notes and prefaces were simple and direct – ‘poetry is emotion put into measure’; or, ‘the mission of poetry is to record impressions, not convictions’. Some critics and readers of his own day commented adversely on his technique, not understanding what he was trying to do, and on his ideas, wrongly considering him a pessimist.

He tried to explain the technique: ‘As to rhythm’. Years earlier he had decided that too regular a beat was bad art...He knew that in architecture cunning irregularity is of enormous

worth, and it is obvious that he carried this into his verse, perhaps in part unconsciously, the Gothic art-principle in which he had been trained – the principle of spontaneity, found in mouldings, tracery and such-like – resulting in the ‘unforeseen’ character of his metres and stanzas, that of stress rather than of syllable...’ (*Life of Thomas Hardy*). And he defended himself against the charge of pessimism: ‘that these impressions have been condemned as “pessimistic” – as if that were a very wicked adjective – shows a curious muddle-mindedness. It must be obvious that there is a higher characteristic of philosophy than pessimism, or than meliorism – which is truth...’ (*General Preface, 1912*).

Yet it remains the case that the dominant note of Hardy’s poetry is an acute sense of loss – loss of faith, loss of love. For Hardy, time and human insensitivity combine to destroy the person and his personality: if, as Larkin

says, the essential instinct of art is to 'preserve', then this is certainly true of Hardy. The poem itself is an act of defiant preservation, asserting the value of the human spirit in spite of all that time and its agents can do:

Ah, no; the years, the years;

Down their carved names the rain-
drop ploughs.

The 'names' represent individuals – feelings, people – while the impersonal rain-drop, agent of what Housman calls 'heartless, witless nature', embodies all that opposes the precious, albeit transient, in human life.

It was only after Hardy's death that the literary world began to realise what it had lost. W.H. Auden commented favourably on Hardy's 'hawk's vision, his way of looking at life from a very great height'; Ezra Pound said that nobody had taught him anything about writing after Thomas Hardy died; and Philip Larkin declared that Hardy's *Collected Poems* were 'many times over the best body of poetic work this century has so far to show'.

Adverse critical comment has resulted from a common modernist

misconception of what makes great poetry – John Crowe Ransom, for example, in claiming that Hardy was 'a great minor poet...and a poor major poet' clumsily mistakes the personal, idiosyncratic, small-scale voice of Hardy for 'minor' work, failing to realise that greatness has to do with expression, feeling and insight, not 'big' ideas, clever literary allusions and self-conscious importance.

When the work of T.S. Eliot (and Ezra Pound) has dulled into datedness, Hardy's will survive, and be loved. Perhaps we should leave the last word to F.R. Leavis, not normally known as an admirer of Hardy: 'the single-minded integrity of his preoccupation with a real world and a real past, the intentness of his focus upon particular facts and situations, gives this poetry the solidest kind of emotional substance. There is no emotionality. The emotion seems to inhere in the reality recognized and grasped.'

Notes by Perry Keenlyside

Notes on the Poems

The Oxen Hardy movingly and simply expresses his nostalgia for the religious faith he has lost, imagining the Christmas story as it might be experienced today.

A Church Romance The poet touchingly evokes the first meeting of his parents-to-be. 'New Sabbath' and 'Mount Ephraim' are old psalm-tunes.

The Self-Unseeing The dreamy atmosphere suggests a lack of awareness in the characters that their innocent world will disappear forever.

Neutral Tones Stark language and imagery evoke a feeling of despair: the lovers have arrived at a moment of bleak truth.

When I Set Out for Lyonesse 'Lyonesse' is an old word for Cornwall. Hardy thought, along with an American admirer, that this was perhaps his 'sweetest lyric'.

Domicilium The title simply means 'home'. This is the earliest of Hardy's surviving poems, written between 1857 and 1860. He tells us how his home was poised on the edge of what

he later called 'Egdon Heath', the wild setting for his novel 'The Return of the Native'. 'Esculents' are vegetables.

During Wind and Rain This remarkable poem mimics in its sound and movement a cry of despair at time's ruthless destruction of precious people and places.

The House of Hospitality The poet is haunted by memories of childhood Christmases.

Night in the Old Home Ancestral ghosts counsel resignation and unreflecting tranquillity.

A Trampwoman's Tragedy Hardy thought this old-style ballad his most successful poem: certainly the storytelling is brilliantly strong and economical.

At the Railway Station, Upway A little boy innocently offers to comfort a convict by playing his violin for him.

One Ralph Blossom Soliloquizes An example of sly humour in Hardy – he is amused by the idea of an old womaniser escaping punishment through mortal illness.

The Ruined Maid Hardy draws a poignant and humorous contrast between the Dorset peasant girl and her old friend who has become a successful prostitute in London.

The Lost Pyx A priest miraculously recovers 'the Body of Christ Himself' and is thus able to give communion to a dying man.

Great Things An exhilarating celebration of simple pleasures.

Weathers A much-anthologised and charming poem, written with a countryman's eye.

Snow in the Suburbs Hardy characteristically shows compassion for the animals in the snow.

The Fallow Deer at the Lonely House The title is almost a poem in itself. An exquisitely understated mood-piece.

In Tenebris I 'In the darkness'. Language and syntax are stripped to the bone for this terrifying description of a state almost beyond despair – the state of absolute emptiness.

In Tenebris II The brilliantly-controlled long lines spell out Hardy's uncompromising vision of life, and the

way in which he feels excluded because he will not express facile optimism.

Wessex Heights Again Hardy spins a long line in this poem which powerfully evokes the poet's absolute isolation – he is an outcast, feeling more like a ghost than an alive member of society.

At Day-Close in November A simple but deeply touching statement about ageing and the passage of time.

Shut Out that Moon The poet asks that we resort to 'mechanic speech' rather than dwell on memories of earlier happiness: their recall is too painful.

The Five Students Not literally 'students': Hardy and his closest companions are referred to here. 'Dark He' is certainly Horace Moule who committed suicide in 1873. 'Fair She' is Mrs Hardy.

A Commonplace Day A dull day ends. The poet senses a vague regret, perhaps a faint reflection of some positive intent somewhere in the world, now aborted...

I Look Into My Glass If his heart were as 'shrunk' as his ageing skin, he would

be spared painful feelings of regret.

Nobody Comes Hardy's sense of isolation is increased by the impersonal 'whang' of a car which speeds by him.

Exeunt Omnes The poet's world is compared to a fair closing down in the evening: he alone remains. 'Kennels' are street gutters.

The Workbox The carpenter husband presents his young wife with a workbox made from a length of wood also used for a coffin. What her husband doesn't know is that the dead man within that coffin is a former sweetheart of his wife's...

Ah, Are You Digging on my Grave?

A dead woman asks who disturbs her grave. Her little dog has been burying a bone, not (as the woman had hoped) showing its love or loyalty.

In Church The powerful preacher is a vain hypocrite.

In The Cemetery Mothers squabbling over the whereabouts of their children's graves do not realise that they have all been moved to accommodate the laying of a new drain.

At Tea The young wife does not

realise that the tea-time guest is an old lover of her husband's.

At a Watering-Place A man explains to his friend that the pretty young bride-to-be strolling with her lover was until recently his mistress. Ignorance is bliss, perhaps...

The Curate's Kindness An old man going to the workhouse is disappointed to find that a 'kind' new rule will force him to stay with the nagging wife he had hoped to escape...

The Rash Bride A young carol-singer is heartbroken to discover that the pretty young widow he loves has married another.

A Countenance Her features may have been irregular, but they were charming nevertheless...

The Contretemps Two young people mistake each other for the lover they await. Impulsively they decide to form a new relationship...

Plena Timoris A pair of lovers, meeting on a bridge, are chilled to discover that a jilted girl has drowned herself below.

Molly Gone A late poem (1917)

which affectionately recalls a now-dead female companion; either Hardy's first wife, or his sister Mary.

A Broken Appointment The poet wishes at least that his lover, rejecting him, might show some compassion.

The Division A sharply-realised evocation of separation both geographical and emotional.

The Photograph An old photograph of a woman burns in the grate: the poet feels its destruction as if it were really the person rather than the picture which is eaten up by flames.

Thoughts of Phena At News of Her Death Hardy, in what is clearly an autobiographical poem, wonders about the life of a former lover.

Her Death and After An old lover tricks his way into adopting an unwanted child.

Her Immortality The poet's dead mistress can only live in his memory; he swears to live as long as he may.

A Night in November A leaf blown in through the window is like the touch of a vanished hand.

He Prefers Her Earthly The poet prefers to think of his dead lover as she

really was, rather than as some grandiose natural manifestation.

Under the Waterfall Probably inspired by the passage in Emma Lavinia's 'Some Recollections' where she describes the loss of a picnic tumbler.

The Going The poem is full of a sense of disturbed equilibrium, with its rhythmic and syntactic lurches: the feeling of raw grief is extraordinary.

The Frozen Greenhouse: St Juliot Hardy remembers Emma Lavinia's childish grief at the loss of some greenhouse plants. Now, years later, she lies cold in the grave while the greenhouse thrives.

I Found Her Out There Hardy regrets that his wife is buried far from the western ocean within whose sound she was brought up. Yet perhaps her 'shade' will 'creep underground/ Till it catch the sound/ Of that western sea...' The fancy is both original and touching.

The Haunter With his usual capacity for empathy, Hardy imagines that his wife's shade has forgiven him for the coldness he showed her in later years:

she goes 'straight to his side' if he 'but sigh'.

The Voice Hardy does not know whether he really hears his late wife's voice, or whether it is merely the 'wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward'. 'Wistlessness' means 'lack of awareness'.

His Visitor Once again Hardy puts himself in the place of Emma Lavinia, imagining that she revisits the place 'where I lived with you for twenty years and more'. The indifference of the place and its current owners encourages her to return sadly to the twilight world of her fellow ghosts.

After a Journey This closely argued, densely expressed poem is charged with feeling: the poet, revisiting the Cornish coast, is moved to an ecstatic assertion of continuing unity with his dead wife.

Beeny Cliff The poet recalls a scene of courtship with exalted energy, expressed in long, lilting lines; only towards the close does he articulate the bleak truth that 'the woman...will laugh there nevermore'.

At Castle Boterel A defiant assertion

of the value of individual human experience, set against the 'primaeval' cliffs: however much they have seen of 'Earth's long order', the important thing for the writer is that they 'record in colour and cast...that we two passed'.

In the British Museum An ordinary 'labouring man' marvels at the fact that the 'time-touched stone' he sees once 'echoed/ The voice of Paul'.

Before Life and After The poet muses about the glory and innocence of the time before mankind was corrupted and asks how long it will be before the return to such a state.

In the Servants' Quarters A powerfully dramatic retelling of the story of Peter's denial of Christ.

Epitaph on a Pessimist This cynical reflection on life anticipates Larkin's 'They fuck you up, your Mum and Dad'.

The Darkling Thrush Written at the turn of the last century. Hardy muses on the contrast between his own bleak thoughts and the unexpected hope which he hears expressed by 'an aged thrush', battered by the elements.

The Convergence of the Twain Hardy's famous poem on the loss of the 'Titanic'. Instead of focusing on individuals or the technical details of the sinking, Hardy's 'hawk's vision' looks at the disaster from a sardonic, philosophical perspective. Man's vanity is punished by the ruthless 'Immanent Will'.

Men Who March Away Written in September 1914, this is an uncharacteristically straightforward expression of patriotic faith.

Channel Firing God reassures the dead souls buried in the churchyard that they have been disturbed by the usual folly of mankind: 'gunnery practice out at sea' prefaces probable war. It is not yet time for 'the judgment-hour'...Written in April 1914, the poem is uncannily prophetic.

A Christmas Ghost Story Prompted by the Boer War and written on Christmas Eve, 1899. The phantom of a dead British soldier wonders why the world has yet to adopt the pacific values of Christianity.

Drummer Hodge Hardy (unsentimentally) anticipates the idea of Brooke's 'If I

should die...': Drummer Hodge will become a part of the veldt in which he lies dead.

In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations' With powerful simplicity and poignant understatement, Hardy avers that the essentials of life – agriculture and human love – *will* go on, regardless of war's barbarity.

Afterwards Hardy's modest farewell: perhaps people will remember him as an observant countryman – 'a man who used to notice such things'. For Hardy, the apprehension and appreciation of the little things in nature stands for the importance of truth in *all* things.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside



Bruce Alexander is best known as Superintendent Mullett in *A Touch of Frost* and has appeared in many other TV shows such as *Berkeley Square*, *Casualty* and *Peak Practice*. He has also played major roles in the theatre, notably with the RSC. He is a director of ACTER which annually tours Shakespeare to US campuses. He has featured in the Naxos AudioBooks recordings of *Macbeth* and *Oedipus*, and reads Plato's *The Republic*.



Janet Maw has worked for many years in theatre, television and radio, making her screen debut as Elizabeth Jane in the BBC TV series *The Mayor of Casterbridge* followed by Eleanor Bold in *The Barchester Chronicles*. She has played the murderess Martha Prebble in *The Cater Street Hangman*. Numerous roles in theatre have included Juliet at the Old Vic. More recently, she has been a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company and is heard regularly on radio.



Neville Jason trained at RADA where he was awarded the Diction Prize by Sir John Gielgud. He has worked with the English Stage Co., the Old Vic Company and the RSC as well as in films, TV and musicals. He is frequently heard on radio. As well as *Remembrance of Things Past*, he also reads Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, *The Castle of Otranto*, *Far From The Madding Crowd*, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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Cover picture: Thomas Hardy.

Thomas Hardy
Winter Words

Poetry and Personal Writings

Read by **Bruce Alexander** and **Janet Maw**

This selection of Hardy's poetry does full justice to its humanity, integrity, humour and evocative power, ranging from charming anthology pieces such as 'Weathers' to the great love poems he wrote after the death of his first wife and the meditations on war and philosophy.

The poems – nearly 80 in total – are set in the context of his life and thought, including personal writings by him and those closest to him.

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