

## Friends Beyond

WILLIAM DEWY, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough, tranter - carrier  
Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's, kin - relations  
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie in Mellstock churchyard now!

"Gone," I call them, gone for good, that group of local hearts and heads;  
Yet at mothy curfew-tide, mothy – a time when moths are flying; curfew-tide - twilight  
And at midnight when the noon-heat breathes it back from walls and leads, leads – a lead roof

They've a way of whispering to me—fellow-wight who yet abide fellow-wight – fellow human being  
In the muted, measured note  
Of a ripple under archways, or a lone cave's stillicide lone cave's stillicide – drops of water falling in a lonely cave

"We have triumphed: this achievement turns the bane to antidote, bane – poison, hurts antidote - healing  
Unsuccesses to success, unsuccesses - failures  
Many thought-worn eves and morrows to a morrow free of thought. thought-worn – tired out with  
thinking and worrying

"No more need we corn and clothing, feel of old terrestrial stress; \*  
Chill detraction stirs no sigh; detraction - criticism  
Fear of death has even bygone us: death gave all that we possess." bygone us –ie we are not afraid of  
death any more

W. D.—"Ye mid burn the old bass-viol that I set such value by." bass-viol - cello  
Squire.—"You may hold the manse in fee, have absolute ownership of the manor house  
You may wed my spouse, may let my children's memory of me die."

Lady.—"You may have my rich brocades, my laces; take each household key;  
Ransack coffer, desk, bureau;  
Quiz the few poor treasures hid there, con the letters kept by me." quiz – mock, or peer at;  
con – read, pore over, inspect

Far.—"Ye mid zell my favorite heifer, ye mid let the charlock grow, mid – may; zell - sell  
Foul the grinterns, give up thrift." ginterns – granary bins; give up thrift – stop being careful with money  
Wife.—"If ye break my best blue china, children, I shan't care or ho. ho – be anxious

All—"We've no wish to hear the tidings, how the people's fortunes shift; shift - change  
What your daily doings are;  
Who are wedded, born, divided; if your lives beat slow or swift.

"Curious not the least are we if our intents you make or mar, make or mar – carry out or spoil  
If you quire to our old tune, quire to our old tune – sing the hymns to the old tunes we know  
If the City stage still passes, if the weirs still roar afar." \*\*

Thus, with very gods' composure, freed those crosses late and soon  
Which, in life, the Trine allow  
(Why, none witteth), and ignoring all that haps beneath the moon,

crosses – difficulties in life  
the Trine – the three aspects of God  
witteth - knows

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough,  
Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,  
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, murmur mildly to me now.

\* corn and clothing – food and clothes; terrestrial stress – the stress we felt when we were alive

\*\* stage – stage coach; weirs control the amount of water flowing in a river

This is another of the poems from *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* published in December 1898, but including many poems written in the 1860s. The frontispiece of *Wessex Poems* shows the gate of Stinsford churchyard, Stinsford being Hardy's parish, so maybe this is the churchyard he is describing.

The first thing to do when you try to read 'Friends Beyond' is to reach for the Oxford English Dictionary online. So many of the words are obscure, like 'stillicide', or are dialect words, some of them the Dorset dialect words that the people buried in the churchyard would have used.

The poem opens with a list of the names of those 'local hearts and heads' buried in Mellstock (Stinsford) churchyard: William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow, the Squire and Lady Susan, as well as Robert's, John's and Ned's kin. In fact, William Dewy, his son Reuben, Farmer Ledlow and Robert Penny are characters from Hardy's novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Tranter Reuben is introduced in Chapter 2 of *Under the Greenwood Tree* as 'Dick Dewy's father Reuben, by vocation a "tranter," or irregular carrier'. The kin of Robert, John and Ned are their relations or family, and the squire is a title given to the country gentleman who took the lead in village matters and probably lived in the big house. In this poem it sounds as if his wife was 'Lady Susan', maybe the daughter of some peer of the county. Characters such as the Squire and his wife are characters you would find in Hardy's novels and also in Trollope's. Some of these characters return in other poems and novels, such as 'The Dead Quire' of Christmas 1901, and Chapter 17 of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

In the second verse it becomes clear that this poem is written from a first person point of view and in the third and fourth verses it emerges that the 'I' of the poem is listening thoughtfully and respectfully to what the dead have to say. He does this at twilight or curfew-tide, the time when the curfew bell used to be sounded. Hardy knew of the folk belief that moths were associated with the souls of the dead, hence his mention of 'mothy curfew-tide.' It must be summer time as not only are there moths, but also even at midnight the church walls and lead roofing are 'breathing' back the warmth of the summer's midday. The whisperings of the dead to which Hardy listens so attentively and affectionately are conveyed through the repeated s sounds of 'whispering', 'stillicide', 'unsuccesses to success.'

Hardy establishes a contrast between the 'local hearts and heads' who are 'gone' (dead), and himself, 'fellow-wight (fellow human being) who yet abide' who is still alive. Yet he makes the dead a part of the present by describing their whispering in the present tense: 'They've a way of

whispering to me.’ He says that they whisper in the ‘muted measured note’ of water, a ‘ripple’ or ‘stillicide’ which means drops of water falling. I am not sure of the significance of the water but certainly the sounds of the words are gentle with the repeated m’s in ‘muted measured’ and the watery l’s in ‘ripple’ and ‘stillicide.’

By now the patterning of the verses has become evident. Two long lines of fifteen syllables (trochaic octameter) sandwich a short line of seven syllables, also trochees. The word at the end of the short middle line provides the rhyme for the two long lines in the next verse. Maybe the long lines suggest the long experience of the dead and the short line is something like a distillation of that experience for the listening poet? As is quite often to be the case in Hardy’s poems about death, the tone is unexpectedly cheerful. ‘We have triumphed; this achievement turns the bane (poison, hurts in life) to antidote (healing), / Unsuccesses (failures) to success.’ And in the next verse, ‘terrestrial stress’ has been left behind – its exhausting effects increased by the repeated sounds in ‘terres’ ‘stress’ - and ‘chill detraction (criticism) stirs no sigh.’ Death seems not to be feared but rather to be embraced with pleasure: it brings ‘triumph’, ‘antidote’, ‘success’, ‘death gave all that we possess.’

After these two verses of general introduction to the great benefits of death, we are given individual contributions. William Dewey is quite happy for his much valued bass-viol (cello) to be burned and the Squire doesn’t mind if ‘you’ (the living?) have absolute possession of his mansion house (‘hold the manse in fee’), marry his wife, and allow his children to forget all about him. Lady Susan, who seems to have owned a considerable number of treasures, is quite ready to have her coffer (box where money and valuables were kept), desk and writing desk ransacked, to have her letters read and her treasures mocked. Descending to rather more mundane levels, the farmer and his wife are untroubled by the prospect of people still alive selling the best heifer (young female cow), letting the weeds (charlock), grow in the fields, allowing the granary bins to get fouled up and the best blue china broken. (‘Grintern’ is a Dorset dialect word for granary compartments or bins, ‘ho’ means be anxious and ‘mid’ means may.)

Then the dead give a joint summary of another two verses. They are completely uninterested in the news and who has got married or split up. They aren’t bothered whether the living pursue the intentions of the dead or wreck them; whether the living sing the hymns to the tunes the dead used to enjoy, whether the stage coach from the city still goes past and whether the river water from the weirs can still be heard roaring from far away. (Weirs regulated the flow of water in a river and were much used in Dorset where meadows used to be irrigated intentionally at certain times in the year. This fertilised the meadow and promoted early spring grass to feed the lambs. You can find out more about Dorset water meadow management from <http://www.farm-direct.co.uk/farming/history/watermeadow> and also from [The Development of Water Meadows in Dorset during the ...](http://www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/25n1a5.pdf) [www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/25n1a5.pdf](http://www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/25n1a5.pdf)

In the penultimate verse, the poet thinks over what the dead have told him. They have the ‘composure’ (the calm) of the gods because they are free from the difficulties which God ‘the Trine’ allows to beset the living, both early and late in life. Although why God should allow this, no-one knows. The dead ignore all that happens ‘all that happens beneath the moon’ – only Hardy uses the shortened version of the word happens, with its reminder of ‘hap’ meaning chance – beneath the moon, herself a changing sphere. They ‘murmur mildly to me now’. The gentle m m n of ‘murmur

mildly to me now' take us back to the m m n, the 'muted measured note,' of the third verse. Everything that the dead have said is in the present tense. It is relevant now.

You could interpret this poem as meaning, what is the point of all the worry in life? And, why does God allow all our sorrow – as Hardy asked in 'Hap'. But the serene and rather cheerful tone suggest to me a much less bitter and resentful meaning, a freedom in life after death more in tune with the feeling of which Hardy was to write in 1904 when his mother died and he pictured her as having 'escaped the Wrongers all.'

## Literary terms

Very often writers highlight important words. They do this with:

Alliteration – several words starting with the same letter or sound, for example, 'bleared and black and blind'.

Assonance – same vowel sound in different words, for example, 'abode', 'sloped'.

Cesura – a break or pause in the middle of a line of poetry.

Consonance – same consonants in words that contain different vowel sounds, for example, 'bode', 'boughed'.

Enjambement or run-on lines – when there is no punctuation at the end of a line of verse and it runs straight on to the next line.

Onomatopoeia – the effect when the sound of a word reflects its meaning, like 'plash'.

Personification – when something that is not human is referred to as if it is a person, for example, the Titanic, 'still couches she'. The effect is usually to exaggerate some aspect of the topic.

Repetition – repeated word or meaning.

Rhyme – very similar to assonance; same vowel sound and final consonant, for example, 'say', 'decay'. Masculine rhyme – when the final syllable is stress, as in 'say' and 'decay'. Feminine rhyme – when the final syllable is not stressed, as in 'growing', 'showing'.

Rhythm – the musical beat of the line, with stressed and unstressed syllables (the stressed syllables will be the important ones). The different rhythms have different names. Trochee (trochaic): strong light, strong light; iamb (iambic): light strong, light strong; dactyl: strong light light, strong light light; anapaest: light light strong, light light strong. If puzzled, try Wikipedia which is very clear on the subject.

Then there are technical words for the number of lines in a verse or stanza.

Quatrain – four lines in a verse

Sestet – six line

Octave – eight lines