

Grade 10 & 11 (*New Syllabus*)

Appreciation of English Literary Texts



Farewell to Barn and
Stack and Tree

By A.E.
Housman

Content Developed by : Mr. Nanda Gunasekare
R/ Kahangama Buddhist school, Rathnapura.

A.E. Housman



A.E. Housman was a popular poet and was born in 1859 in Worcestershire England. He was the oldest in the family of seven. His mother died on his twelfth birthday. He won a scholarship to St. John's College, Oxford. He had the privilege of being in company of some prominent literary figures in the caliber of Pater, Wilde, and Ruskin and the likes. He began his life as a clerk in the patent office for eleven years. Meanwhile Housman was making his name in the field of textual criticism by being engaged in some serious study works and research in the British museum. On the merit of his scholarship he was lucky to secure a placement in the university college of London. In 1896 he published **A Shropshire Lad** a compilation of his poetry collection consisting of his sixty three poems. In 1911 he became the professor of Latin in Cambridge and a fellow of Trinity College. In 1936 he passed away in a nursing home in his sleep.

***Farewell to barn and stack and
tree***

by [A. E. Housman](#) (1859-1936)

'Farewell to barn and stack and
tree,

Farewell to Severn shore.

Terence, look your last at me,

For I come home no more.

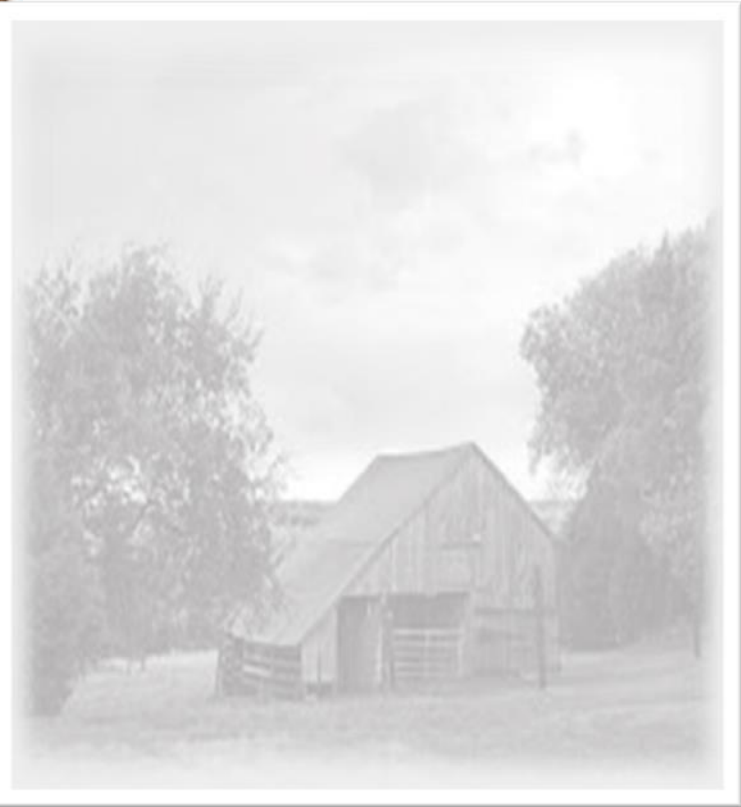
'The sun burns on the half-
mown hill,

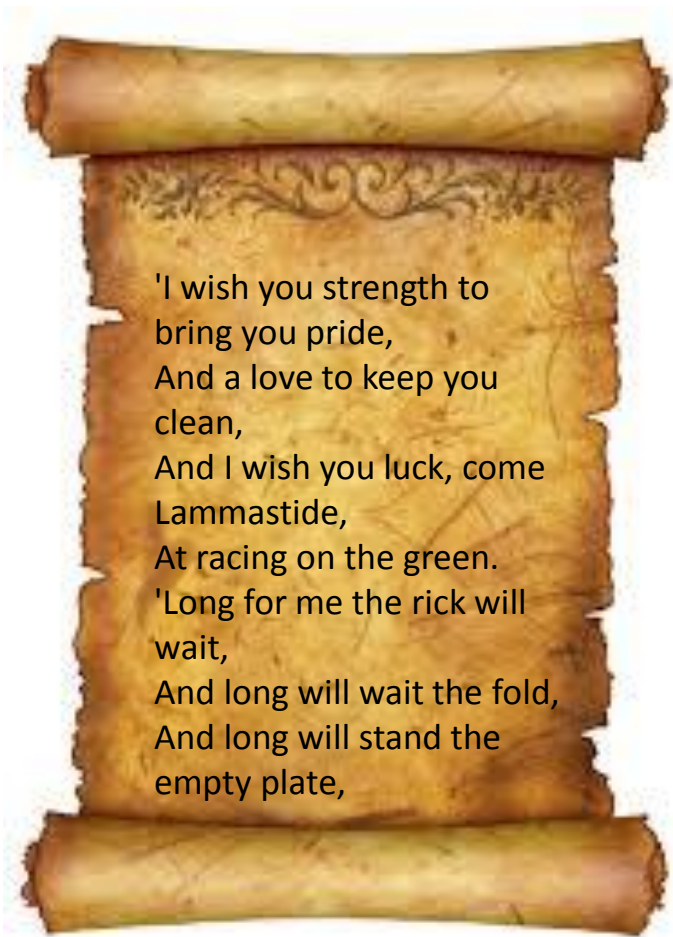
By now the blood is dried;

And Maurice amongst the hay
lies still

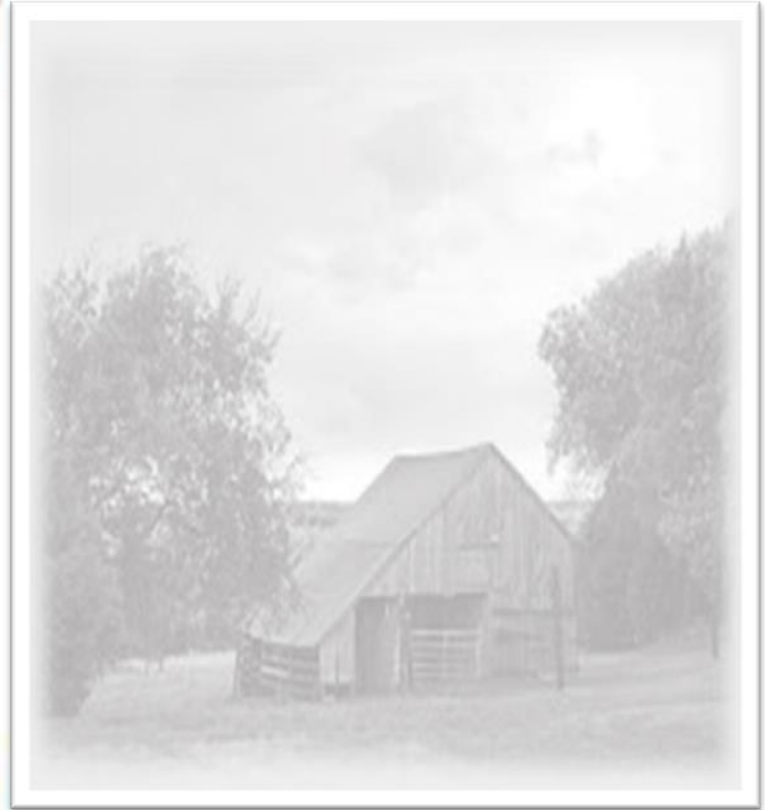


And my knife is in his side.
'My mother thinks us long away;
'Tis time the field were mown.
She had two sons at rising day,
To-night she'll be alone.
'And here's a bloody hand to
shake,
And oh, man, here's good-bye;
We'll sweat no more on scythe
and rake,
My bloody hands and I.





'I wish you strength to
bring you pride,
And a love to keep you
clean,
And I wish you luck, come
Lammastide,
At racing on the green.
'Long for me the rick will
wait,
And long will wait the fold,
And long will stand the
empty plate,



The poem

The poem does have some salient features of a ballad. Hence it could well be fair enough to treat it under the aforesaid genre. This form of poetry is distinct in techniques and versification. The ballads are also called folk poems since they are believed to be originated from agrarian societies. Ballads being originated in farming communities were not written but passed down by oral tradition from generation to generation. The traits which distinguish this form of poetry from others can be elucidated as follows.

- The term ballad has been derived from the Latin word "*ballare*" means dancing song.
- They originated among people who were free from literary influences and fairly homogenous in character.
- Every ballad is a short story in verse.
- Mostly it could be only one episode of a series of incidences.
- Use of colloquial language is an indispensable element in all ballads.



Contd.....

- The stanza in ballads is typical four lined segment with regular **abcd** rhyming scheme.
- The supernatural element can also be seen imperative in most of the ballads.
- Most ballads relate tragic tales though there are some exceptions with happy endings.
- Simplicity is an additional characteristic with simple structure, style and diction.
- Unlike other poems ballad has an abrupt and unexpected opening.
- Mostly the ballads are presented in the form of dialogues.
- Generally almost in all ballads *refrain* is a conspicuous character. i.e. refrain is a phrase repeated several times.

Glossary

Barn	large farm building used for storing grain etc..
Stack	a pile or heap of something. Here it could either be grain or hay.
Shore	beach. Here it refers to his country/village.
Half-mown	grass-cutting done half way.
Scythe	farming tool with a crooked blade used for harvesting.
Rake	farming tool; set of metal teeth horizontally attached To a long handle.
Rick	a stack of hay or etc..
Fold	a pen for sheep. i.e. an enclosed area for keeping animals.



Contd...

Glossary

Severn shore

a village by the river Severn in England. On the major rivers in the British Isle.

Lammastide

harvesting festival which generally falls on 1st of August every year in rural England. A made from the freshly harvested grain is ceremonially offered to the church.



A comment on the poem

The title “farewell to Barn and Stack and Tree” itself seems to carry a lingering sense of foreboding nostalgia which in other words shows some long painful and unwilling farewell. The length depicts his purposeful delay in bidding his adieu to a place which he would not probably set his feet on again. The poet presents the incident in a typical ballad style which gives a dramatic effect to the situation. The form of dialogue keeps the suspense very high and moving.

This seems to be the eventual tragic moment of a series of grievous mistrust, misunderstanding, hatred associated with adolescent love. It carries a cinematic effect with the use of emotionally charged language and relatively short lines. It is a crime scene where a murder has taken place. The assailant addresses a third party. He calls the person “Terence”. The vital information regarding the bone of contention that lead to this gruesome death is missing. Though the poem unfolds only the last scene of a troublesome triangular love affair where one gets cornered, reader can presume that it is a conflict between two siblings over their young mistress.

It is starkly obvious that the one who has perpetrated the crime is aghast and repentant over his heinous crime. He decides to run away with the hope of not coming back. “look your last at me, for I come home no more”.



Contd...

It seems to be the midday and they have been working at a barn “ the sun burns on the half-mown hill” “and Maurice amongst the hay lies still, and my knife is in his side”. All these evidences bare the fact that it is not premeditated or a first degree murder.

the third stanza bares enough testimony to prove that their day has unfolded as usual and they have been on some work assigned to them. The one who has committed the crime is in utter disgust and agony over what he has done in the third stanza. He laments over how his mother would feel about all these. He seems to feel sorry for his mother and the terrible pain this would inflict on her. “ she had two sons at rising day, to-night she will be alone”.

The mental agony of the miscreant is even more heightened in the fourth stanza with his uncontrollable out-pouring of shattered emotions. He knows for sure that he leaves the place for good which tortures him a lot. The last line of the fourth stanza is very forceful “ my bloody hands and I “ seems as if he literary makes a confession of what he has done.

The fifth stanza is explicit in throwing some light on what clearly has happened and over whom . It is a clear valediction to his mate wishing him good luck and love life which he hopes would make him forget the blood stained past. He reminds him of “Lammastide” the harvesting festival and the accompanying joys with “racing on the green”.



Contd...

The last stanza is filled with his overflowing emotions over his lost life. His utmost regret, remorse and painful adieu to his immediate familiar milieu is vividly magnified to almost palpable proportion with “rick ,fold, empty plate and dinner” which symbolize his known surroundings . He is going to miss all these in the future.



Literary Techniques

Ballad style	as mentioned above
Rhyming scheme	<i>a,b,a,b,c,d,c,d</i>
Images	barn stack and tree scythe,rake,rick,fold and empty plate
Rhythm	this gives a touch of a lyrical effect



Some questions suggested in T.I.M.

1. What is the situation that is hinted at here?
2. The speaker is taking leave of Terence. Who do you think Terence is? What is his relationship with the speaker?
3. Apart from human, the speaker takes leave of non-human/inanimate objects. What are those?
4. What is the speaker's predicament? Why does he leave? Does he want to leave?
5. What do the second and the third verses reveal about the strain/stress the speaker is going through?

Probable answers

1. It is a crime scene. The speaker seems to be remorseful and seemingly in a confused state of mind over the outcome of their hot argument erupted between them. He is in a hurry to leave the place for good.
2. It appears that Terence could be a neighbor or a friend who helps in his work. It seems this Terence is more than an ordinary friend since the way in which person in question addresses him.
3. The speaker takes leave of his familiar surroundings . He addresses the "Barn, stack, and tree". The rick and also the empty plate.
4. He has committed a murder and the deceased happened to be the brother. This could in fact be a result of a troublesome triangular love affair they had.

It's quite obvious that he cannot stay here any longer for several reasons. He would face litigation and the other is that he cannot face his mother.

The tone of the speaker is clearly suggestive that he doesn't need to leave and he seems to be remorseful of what he has done.

Probable answers

5. The second stanza is suggestive of the time. It's the mid noon and the man in question is gripped by the full weight of the situation. With the time it dawns on him the magnitude of the heinous crime he has committed.

The third stanza reveals his excruciating pain over the memory of his mother. This stanza mirrors his thoughts of how his mother would feel about this unlikely incident. It is packed with poignancy and deep regret of the speaker. His consciences is deeply wounded not because of the crime but of the pain it would cause to his mother.

