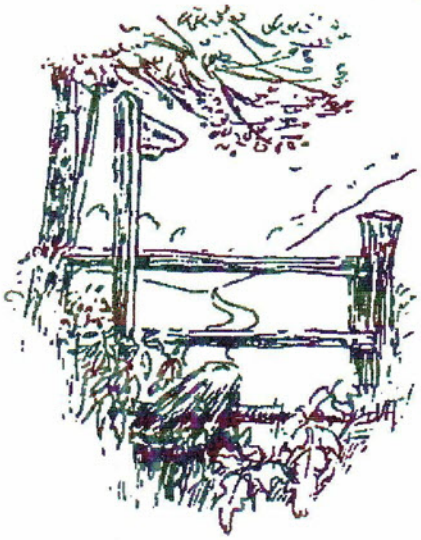
THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 73 **January 2015**

Many days in London have no weather. We are aware only that it is hot or cold, dry or wet; that we are in or out of doors; that we are at ease or not. This was not one of them. Rain lashed and wind roared in the night, enveloping my room in a turbulent embrace as if it had been a tiny ship in a great sea, instead of one pigeon-hole in a thousand-fold columbarium deep in London. Dawn awakened me with its tranquillity. The air was sombrely sweet; there was a lucidity under the gloom of the clouds; the air barely heaved with the ebb of storm; and even when the sun was risen it seemed still twilight. The jangle of the traffic made a wall round about the quiet in which I lay embedded. I scarcely heard the sound of it; but I could not forget the wall. Within the circle of quiet a parrot sang the street songs of twenty years ago very clearly, over and over again, almost as sweetly as a blackbird.

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Please send material for the next Newsletter as a Word document in an email attachment. Thank you. Please note that the gap between the appearance of the print version of the newsletter and its appearance on the web has been extended from six months to two years.

A Note from the Chairman, Richard Emeny

After a dozen or more years in post, our Treasurer, Larry Skillman, has decided to retire at the AGM in March 2015. Over his period in office the Fellowship's activities have increased considerably and Larry has coped manfully with the additional work. We are enormously grateful to him for all his help over the years, particularly in administering the finances of the Study Days and the subscriptions in general, in this essential if undramatic role. We wish him well for the future.

The post of Treasurer is now vacant and we would welcome volunteers from among members to fill it. An accountant is producing a simplified system to record the figures and produce the accounts. Thus, while the position remains as important as ever, it should prove easier and certainly less time-consuming in the future. There is no need for the Treasurer to be an accountant. If you would like to consider filling the post and joining the Committee, please contact the Secretary, Ian Morton, to discuss it in greater detail.

The plans for the purchase of the police station in Petersfield by the Petersfield Museum are progressing steadily. Meanwhile, various Committee members kindly spent about five days listing all the items in Tim Wilton-Steer's collection. Since then some more have come to light and we anticipate that there will be approximately 2000 items altogether. Work continues on the collection and we will keep members abreast of progress both in the purchase and with the collection as it happens.

Finally, as has previously been reported, we plan to unveil a plaque commemorating Edward Thomas's stay in Cowley Road, Oxford while he was a non-collegiate student. Quotes from stonemasons have been received, and all being well we will be able to unveil the plaque later in 2015. The total cost will be about £1000 and we are appealing for donations from members who would like to contribute to the plaque and its installation. While the Fellowship is happily solvent, it has a number of commitments over the next three years of the centenary of the First World War which require extra support. Any contribution, however small, will be very welcome. Any excess would be used as part of general funds If you would like to contribute, please send your donation to Ian Morton, whose contact details are at the front of the newsletter.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for their continuing work and those members who have helped in various ways, usually in the background, in the creation of a Northern Group and the Facebook facility for instance. Without them the Fellowship would struggle.

The Tim Wilton-Steer Collection and Study Centre: During August various Committee members spent five days listing all the items in the many boxes that have been donated to the Fellowship by Hilary, Tim's widow. The total amounted to more than 1800 items. Since then, a further three boxes have been passed to the Fellowship; their contents have yet to be listed. It proved hard but fascinating work and something of a party atmosphere was maintained, David and Marie-Marthe Gervais kindly entertaining everybody one evening. Currently the collection is stored securely while negotiations for the purchase of the police station by the Trustees of the Petersfield Museum go ahead. That they are prolonged is not a surprise in view of the sensitivities surrounding the sale. All being well, 2015 should see it completed, after which refurbishment to museum standard can be started. Following that, the collection can be transferred to the new Centre. We will keep members up to date with progress.

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Richard Pasco, 18th July 1926 – 12th November 2014

Richard Pasco together with his wife, Barbara Leigh-Hunt, was a long term member of the Fellowship. After drama college he followed the traditional apprenticeship of rep. acting in many of the classics, which he later reprised in the RSC and sometimes on television. Everything from Euripides to Moliere, Shakespeare, John Osborne and David Hare was grist to his mill, and he had a remarkable voice and presence when performing which made his every appearances extremely memorable. On a number of occasions Barbara and he performed and recited for the Fellowship, most recently and very movingly at the memorial service for Myfanwy in Eastbury Church. There are few actors left of his experience and quality. We send our condolences to Barbara and William.

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Note of the latest meetings of the Fellowship Committee held on 29th November 2014

Chairman the Chairman reported two donations, one in memory of the late Richard Pasco, an actor who loved Edward Thomas' works.

Finances; The Treasurer reported that the Fellowship's finances are satisfactory for normal operations but a detailed analysis of future requirements is underway.

Membership; The Secretary reported that membership stood at 393.

Social Media; The web site continues to be one of the most important channels for communicating with the outside world. Visits stand at approximately 2,000 per month. Most contacts are from UK but there have been visitors from U.S.A., Finland, Germany, China and France. Members's use of the Facebook page is growing.

Petersfield Museum Tim Wilton-Steer Edward Thomas Study Centre; The Chairman reported that discussions continue satisfactorily. The Tim Wilton Steer collection had now been catalogued

Programme of activities up to and including 2017;. The Birthday walk in 2015 will be on Sunday 1st March and detailed planning has started on a Study Day in June and an event to be held over a weekend in Steep in September 2015. 38 members have signed up for a visit to Agny in April 2017.

113, Cowley Road, Oxford; Discussions continue with the stone mason appointed to make and fix the plaque marking the site of Edward's first lodgings in Oxford.

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The Birthday Walk, Sunday 1st March 2015

The Walk: The Birthday Walk is the main annual gathering for Fellowship members. As in previous years, there will be two walks during the day, and members are welcome to join either or both walks. Both walks will start at the car park of Bedales School, Church Road, Steep, GU32 2DG, where parking and toilets will be available throughout the day.

Those coming on the morning walk should meet in the car park between 10:00 and 10:30 am. Walk sheets will be available on the day and can also be downloaded from the ETF website (from early February onwards). The morning walk – a strenuous 4 miles – will start at 10:30am prompt and will include a visit to 2 Yew Tree Cottages and the memorial stone on the Shoulder of Mutton Hill. The afternoon walk (approx. 2 miles) will start at 2:30 pm from the car park of Bedales School, and will include a section of The

Shipwrights Way. Members of the Fellowship will read appropriate poems and prose during the walks and at the end of the lunch break.

Refreshments: for full details of lunch, please use the enclosed booking form.
Please wear appropriate clothing and footwear (walking boots or wellingtons) for both walks.

All those participating in the walks do so at their own risk.

We shall end the day at Steep Church, around 4pm, where tea will be available at a modest cost. This will be followed by the Fellowship's short AGM and the Birthday Tribute, which will include readings from the poetry and prose of Edward Thomas.

For further information about the walk, please contact the organiser, Mike Cope (email: mike@copedr.freeserve.co.uk), although all relevant information will be available on the ETF website from early February onwards.

As usual, we will be having supper at the Jolly Drover, Liss, near Petersfield, on the evening of Saturday, 28th February 2015. If anyone would like to be there, please contact the Hon. Secretary, Ian Morton, to arrange the necessary booking (tel: 01934 835357; mobile: 07557 653691; email: ianandbreeda@btinternet.com).

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Dymock Conference 5 - 7 June 2015

Dymock Conference 5-7 June 2015 at the University of Gloucestershire's Francis Close Hall Campus in Cheltenham. This conference is being organised by the School of Humanities and the Special Collections and Archives, in conjunction with the Friends of the Dymock Poets and the Edward Thomas Fellowship, in order to celebrate our shared interest in the Dymock Poets in the context of the First World War.

Friday afternoon/ evening: Conference Dinner and Premiere of a play about the Dymock Poets and the Special Collections and Archive. This play is being written by postgraduate students on the MA Creative and Critical Writing, and supported by the Janet Trotter Trust. It will be a co-production of Eleven Places Theatre Company and Dreamshed Theatre Company. A conference dinner will follow.

On Saturday, there will be a mixture papers and presentations about the collection of papers held in the University, including Linda Hart speaking on Rupert Brooke, David Gervais speaking on Edward Thomas and Jeff Cooper speaking on Lascelles Abercrombie. Other contributions will be made by academic staff in the School of Humanities. Lunch will be provided on Saturday and there will be a drinks Reception in the evening, with musical accompaniment. On Sunday, the Friends of the Dymock poets will host a walk around Dymock. Coach travel will be organised.

Further details will be provided at the end of January, including the cost of the conference, but if you would like to register your interest, please contact humanities@glos.ac.uk

Dr Debby Thacker, School of Humanities, University of Gloucestershire

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Bedales and Churcher's Edward Thomas Day: Sunday 16 November 2014

In order to mark the 100th anniversary of Thomas' poetic flowering, Bedales and Churcher's schools held a day of talks, readings, walks and commemoration in Steep and Froxfield. Guy Cuthbertson turned his talk into a short piece for the Bedales website and alumni:

It was a miraculous birth, the birth of a poet, in this patch of Hampshire in November 1914: Edward Thomas began to compose 'Up in the Wind', a poem about the White Horse pub (and, for this miraculous birth, unlike another, there was plenty of room at the inn). Thomas was 36 years old. But where did the poet Edward Thomas come from? He was in many ways an Edwardian war poet, and the poet emerged out of the prose writer, the man who had been appearing in print for two decades before the poet was born. Indeed, 'Up in the Wind' grew out of a prose sketch, 'The White Horse', dated 16 November.

As an editor of Edward Thomas's prose for Oxford University Press I have been keen to promote his prose and argue for its influence on his poetry. I have also tried to show that Thomas's prose and poetry reflect the age he lived in. If we look at the opening lines of 'Up in the Wind' we see how much they depict the England that Thomas had explored on foot and in print. We see topics that characterise Edwardian life: we have London and its struggle with the countryside, we have the motor-car and the train, we have 'home' and 'work' as themes, we sense the class system, we have the strong, militant woman, we find a celebration of wildness and toughness, we see that this is a poem about identity and individuality. Take that thoroughly Edwardian masterpiece *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) or E. M. Forster's 'Condition of England' novel *Howards End* (1910), and, in some way or other, you will find the same things. And behind these novels, as in 'Up in the Wind', there is a Thomasy topic, the temptation to reject civilised bourgeois life in favour of the open road and the open air, and a scepticism about the value of the normal middle-class education (a scepticism shared by John Haden Badley). Thomas once declared that he loved birds (the feathered kind) more than books; Leonard Bast in *Howards End* is literally killed by books.

Thomas was obviously happiest in the countryside but even his rejection of city life, with its office jobs and commuting, was a rather Edwardian fashion. This was the age of 'Back to the Land' movements, the countryside cult and a primitivist celebration of tramps and gypsies. When Bedales was founded in 1893, and especially when it opened at Steep in 1900, it seemed to usher in this 'Back to the Land' era. Leonard Bast walks out of London one night and into the countryside; as does Thomas in *The Heart of England*. And those men who ran off into the South Country were only extreme versions of all those Edwardians who moved out into new green suburbs. Thomas was the author of countryside books like *The South Country*, *The Heart of England*, *The Country*, *Beautiful Wales* and *In Pursuit of Spring* and these books would have been primarily published for people in towns, cities and suburbs.

Then to this Edwardian prose writer devoted to the English countryside, there was added the influence of an American, Robert Frost. He too was one of those educated men who wanted to be a farmer and live under thatch, and in his ideas about poetry there is a pursuit of what might be natural rather than artificial. Perhaps Frost's influence has been exaggerated but his encouragement was certainly important, and he and Thomas spoke about 'sentence sound' during 1914, especially during August in the early days of the war. And then the war itself was inevitably an influence too. But Thomas was an Edwardian war poet who wrote about the war by writing about the countryside of places like Steep, about owls, horses, journeys, rain, and inns.

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Inhabiting Steep: Houses in Edward Thomas's Poetry

by Edna Longley

My first visit to Steep was in 1978 for the centenary of Edward Thomas's birth. I recall being surprised to find that Steep and its surroundings actually existed: that this was no purely poetic countryside. Nor was it frozen around 1914. But perhaps distance from the actual Steep has helped me to see that the landscapes of Thomas's poetry are ultimately metaphysical and symbolic. That includes the houses in them. Not all his 'house poems' are set in Steep or Hampshire. But Steep was where Thomas mainly lived, and where he did his thinking about houses, habitation and home.

A key idea of Thomas's, a post-Darwinian and pre-Green idea, is that we human beings should think of ourselves as 'inhabitants of the earth'. His ideal 'Nature-study' would 'show us in animals, in plants, what life is, how our own is related to theirs, show us, in fact, our position, responsibilities and debts among the other inhabitants of the earth'. For humans, inhabiting the earth, 'dwelling' as it's now called, usually involves some kind of house. What stands out biographically about Thomas and houses is how often he moved house, and that he never owned one. In and around Steep itself, he moved twice: from Berryfield Cottage to Wick Green to Yew-tree Cottage. And he was often more generally on the move: walking the roads of southern England and Wales to gather material for his country books; leaving home to get the mental and physical space to write those (and other) books; doing or seeking literary business in London. Roads would become a major symbol in Thomas's poetry, its deepest structure that of the journey. And his poetic roads are mostly rural: they bypass the built environment of city streets. 'Roads' ends by relegating 'the roar of towns/ And their brief multitude'. All this might seem to marginalise houses, even if four poem-titles contain the word. Several poems celebrate nomads who have no house, who sleep out of doors – closer to the earth. Yet the relation between houses and the natural environment focuses what 'inhabiting' the earth or Steep means to Thomas. Houses and other buildings figure staging-posts on his poetic journey: cottages, mills, barns, farmsteads, a 'manor farm', a 'mountain chapel', 'the caravan-hut by the hollies', 'the inn, the smithy, and the shop' in his Steep poem, 'Aspens'. The list of Thomas's 'dwellings' extends to birds' nests, 'a woodpecker's round hole' and, more ominously, the 'fir-tree-covered barrow on the heath'.

The first poem to mention a Steep house (Yew-tree Cottage) is the second poem that emerged from a prose chrysalis: 'Old Man'. This 'bush' or 'herb', like the memories that enter the poem, has itself got a history. Gordon Bottomley gave Thomas a cutting of Old Man for the Wick Green garden, from which a further cutting travelled to Yew-tree Cottage and potentially into future memory: 'some day the child will love it/ Who plucks a feather from the door-side bush/ Whenever she goes in or out of the house …' 'Old Man' moves from that scene to its dark shadow, thereby laying down tensions that will shape later poems: 'No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush/ Of Lad's-love, or Old Man, no child beside,/ Neither father, nor mother, nor any playmate …' This suggests the instability of earthly dwelling, since all the features that make up house and home have dissolved. The relation of house to garden also matters. Thomas's poetry usually represents gardening in positive terms, as an interaction with Nature that engages all the senses and harmonises mind with body: a way of truly 'inhabiting the earth'. We can hear the inner harmony created by this interaction in the movement of 'Sowing' and 'Digging', where he speaks as

gardener. The contrasting rhythms also befit different gardening tasks and gardening seasons:

It was a perfect day
For sowing; just
As sweet and dry was the ground
As tobacco-dust.

I tasted deep the hour
Between the far
Owl's chuckling first soft cry
And the first star … ('Sowing')

Today I think only with scents, –
Scents dead leaves yield,
And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
And the square mustard field,

Odours that rise
When the spade wounds the root of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery ...
('Digging')

Thomas's poems cannot be neatly divided into those with a psychological emphasis and those with a cultural or historical emphasis. All his images flow in both directions. But I will look, first, at poems in which houses have a primarily cultural meaning; second, at poems in which they have a primarily psychological meaning; and, finally, at 'house poems' written before Thomas went to France in early 1917.

Some positive images of houses in Thomas's earlier poetry are associated with his decision to enlist (July 1915). They suggest the special brand of patriotism, which influenced that decision, and which helped to make him a poet. In a parallel with Yeats's grander houses, they symbolise the culture and traditions that Thomas as 'soldier-poet' was doubly defending. One such poem is 'The Manor Farm' with its sunlit Priors Dean setting. Another is 'Haymaking', which Thomas included, along with 'The Manor Farm', in his wartime anthology *This England*: a testament of cultural defence. The word 'house' appears in only one line of 'Haymaking', but a climactic one: 'All was old,/ This morning time, with a great age untold,/ Older than Clare and Cobbett, Morland and Crome,/ Than, at the field's far edge, the farmer's home,/ A white house crouched at the foot of a great tree …' This house or home marks traditions stretching a long way back: 'a great tree', a deep England which encompasses literature and art ('The Manor Farm', too, stresses the words 'old' and 'age'). Thomas's highly pictorial poem affirms this tradition by consciously adding to it: 'Immortal in a picture of an old grange'. Yet the continuities represented by this pastoral epiphany are receding. 'Immortality' is a condition 'beyond the reach of change'.

Other 'house poems' more directly register 'the death of rural England': economic 'change' that has depopulated the countryside since the late nineteenth century. And rural depopulation was now taking a new form as young men went to war. 'A Tale' sums up many stories:

There once the walls

Of the ruined cottage stood.
The periwinkle crawls
With flowers in its hair into the wood.

In flowerless hours
Never will the bank fail,
With everlasting flowers
On fragments of blue plates, to tell the tale.

This derelict cottage and garden are returning to Nature – a process that Thomas may approve. A tough element in his ecological thinking is that he does not see human beings as earth's most desirable inhabitants. Anticipating the perspective of Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens* (2014), he can contemplate a post-human earth with equanimity. Here he hints that the rooting periwinkle is actively making for the wood, that its direction is inevitable: the 'flowers in its hair' could be celebratory garlands. Yet 'A Tale' records human traces: 'fragments of blue plates'. The cottage survives in the poem, at least. And the poem is itself a fragment, an everlasting flower, a proof of interaction between humanity and Nature, even if 'everlasting flowers' are not quite the real deal.

In 'The Mill Water' and 'House and Man' returns to Nature have a darker aspect. 'The Mill-Water', a Steep-set poem, concerns more than a specific moment in economic history. It's also more than an elegy for a vanishing rural England or even for men leaving 'home' to go to war. This poem implies the broader vulnerability of humanity to the natural forces that we seek to harness. The poem's soundscape reinforces the way in which a natural sound has overwhelmed 'The music of the mill-wheel's busy roar'. Nature also 'roars' in Thomas's poems (trees, starlings, the 'strange stream' in 'A Dream'), but its roars tend to prevail or to be apocalyptic symbols of war. 'The Mill-Water' ends with the water's voice, not the mill's: 'Only the idle foam/ Of water falling/ Changelessly calling,/ Where once men had a work-place and a home'. Similarly, the house in 'House and Man' is not yet abandoned, but appears under siege: 'One hour: as dim he and his house now look/ As a reflection in a rippling brook,/ While I remember him'. Like the ruined cottage, this house is being reclaimed by Nature. 'It was dark with forest boughs/ That brushed the walls and made the mossy tiles/ Part of the squirrels' track'. The 'man' in the poem's title isn't only a specific man, just as the mill isn't only a specific former work-place and home. He personifies our less successful attempts to 'inhabit the earth', to maintain a 'house'. His whole being has become 'ghostly', worn out rather than animated by exposure to Nature. In contrast, the forest takes on quasi-human life as it 'murmurs' or reverses the human gaze at Nature: the trees 'look' upon the house. There's also a parallel with 'Old Man' in that man and house are dropping out of memory too, just barely registered, once again, by the poem itself. Living in Steep seems to have ensured that trees, wind and rain would symbolise threats to human 'dwelling' in Thomas's poetry.

'Home' is the dialectical opposite of 'House and Man':

Often I had gone this way before:
But now it seemed I never could be
And never had been anywhere else;
'Twas home: one nationality
We had, I and the birds that sang,
One memory …

Like Thomas's 'gardening poems', 'Home' celebrates interaction with the natural world. But this poem's ecosystem goes further in attaching 'nationality' and 'memory' to the birds singing on 'oaktop' and 'elm'. That contrasts with the sinister human qualities attributed to the forest in 'House and Man': the 'murmur' which renders it alien. In 'Home' humanity and Nature speak or sing the same language: the April evening 'Mean[s] the same thing' to both. Inhabiting Steep and inhabiting earth coincide. The final image of a labourer and his cottage seals an ethos of at-homeness: not only in Steep, but also on earth, on the earth as 'home'. The labourer's 'tread/ Slow, half with weariness, half with ease' and his 'sawing' affirm what sound and rhythm have already 'said':

And, through the silence, from his shed
The sound of sawing rounded all
That silence said.

The two poems just discussed have a psychological as well as cultural dimension. The man in 'House and Man' might strike us as paranoid; the homecoming in 'Home' hints at inner respite or healing: 'I had come back/ That eve somehow from somewhere far'. The psychological spectrum of Thomas's poetry ranges from 'discontent' to suicidal depression. 'For these' is a poem of discontent, which centres on a prospectus for the perfect house and garden, an ideal 'home':

A house that shall love me as I love it,
Well-hedged, and honoured by a few ash-trees
That linnets, greenfinches, and goldfinches
Shall often visit and make love in and flit.

The first three quatrains list images of harmonious habitation. They project a microcosm that embraces 'The lovely visible earth and sky and sea', and maintains an ecological balance: 'what the curlew needs not, the farmer tills'. The relation between house and trees, birds and humans, is again reciprocal. Yet the last quatrain pulls the rug from under this Eden:

For these I ask not, but, neither too late
Nor yet too early, for what men call content,
And also that something may be sent
To be contented with, I ask of fate.

On the one hand, the initial imagery of dwelling symbolises the inner harmony that the speaker both lacks and desires. On the other, the poem implies that human beings require something more from 'dwelling' than do 'linnets, greenfinches, and goldfinches'.

'The New House' is bleak throughout. Thus far, Thomas's poetic houses, however interiorised, have been mostly defined by exteriors: that is, by their position in a landscape. This poem explicitly 'moves in'. The house is the Red House at Wick Green, built by Geoffrey Lupton. The Thomases disliked the house: partly because it became associated with a child's physical, and Edward's mental, illness. But its exposed position and its modernity (it was 'new' in a double sense) may always have been problematic. Thomas soon complained about the 'intolerable swishing of wind and rain', and they would eventually swish into the poem:

Now first, as I shut the door,
I was alone

In the new house; and the wind
Began to moan …

Nights of storm, days of mist, without end;
Sad days when the sun
Shone in vain: old griefs, and griefs
Not yet begun …

The house's exposure to weather came to symbolise psychic disturbance, differently dramatised in the longer poem 'Wind and Mist':

Doubtless the house was not to blame,
But the eye watching from those windows saw,
Many a day, day after day, mist – mist
Like chaos coming back – and felt itself
Alone in all the world, marooned alone …

'Wind and Mist' at once exemplifies and acknowledges the subjectivity of Thomas's 'houses: 'Doubtless the house was not to blame'. This Thomas-persona also mentions that 'the house-agent's young man/ … gives no heed to anything I say', and his own narrative is an effort to convince a stranger who admires the house and its 'view'. Presumably, 'The New House' and 'Wind and Mist' have never been quoted in any sales-pitch for the Red House. As an 'interior', 'The New House' symbolises, not how humanity inhabits the earth, but the mind the body – though perhaps those modes of habitation can never be quite distinct: 'The New House' has links with 'House and Man'. But in this case the house mostly exists in the speaker's head: it *is* the speaker's head, tormented by demons, a locus of 'dread', 'grief', 'sadness': 'But I learnt how the wind would sound/ After these things should be.'

As with Thomas's cultural houses, his psychological houses can assume a more positive aspect. In 'The Other', his allegorical journey into the self, his concept of 'an inhabitant of the earth' crosses from prose to poetry. The overall dynamic of 'The Other' accepts that its journey is infinite: there can be no lasting point of rest. But here, as in 'Home', some kind of respite occurs: a respite which again bridges psychological and cultural meanings, which connects the mind inhabiting the body with humanity inhabiting the earth. The speaker's divided self becomes 'one', as do the house and natural features in this emblematic landscape:

Had there been ever any feud
'Twixt earth and sky, a mighty will
Closed it: the crocketed dark trees,
A dark house, dark impossible
Cloud-towers, one star, one lamp, one peace
Held on an everlasting lease:

And all was earth's, or all was sky's;
No difference endured between
The two. A dog barked on a hidden rise;
A marshbird whistled high unseen;
The latest waking blackbird's cries
Perished upon the silence keen.
The last light filled a narrow firth

Among the clouds. I stood serene,
And with a solemn quiet mirth,
An old inhabitant of earth.

Two phrases link architecture with Nature: 'crocketed' trees, 'cloud-towers', while 'everlasting lease' connects with the 'everlasting flowers' in 'A Tale'. There's also an echo of Henry Vaughan's 'The Retreat': 'felt through all this fleshly dress/ Bright shoots of everlastingness'. But Thomas gives 'everlasting' a post-Darwinian inflection, making it an earthly rather than heavenly adjective. 'Lease', as interesting a word as 'everlasting', belongs to the vocabulary of renting houses, with which he was so familiar. But it transfers that vocabulary from 'inhabiting Steep' to 'inhabiting the earth'. 'Everlasting lease' is an oxymoron, bridged by assonance, which affirms a deeper right to habitation than that of renting or owning a house: the right of 'An old inhabitant of earth'.

'I built myself a house of glass', Thomas's most succinct symbolic version of his psychological problems, is an even bleaker 'interior' than 'The New House'. 'A house of glass' suggests somebody living wholly inside his head, imprisoned by solipsism: 'I built myself a house of glass:/ It took me years to make it'. In his letters Thomas calls himself 'an isolated self considering brain', and refers to a psychic 'callosity' which only some 'accident' could breach. The speaker of 'I built myself a house of glass' appeals: 'Would God someone would break it'. In fact, the sense of respite in 'Home' and 'The Other' implies that inner barriers can be breached: 'No difference endured between the two'. And an 'accident' or a decision was about to 'break' the glass. A month after writing this poem, Thomas enlisted in the Artists Rifles. All Thomas's symbolic houses are situated on the road 'to France'. But his later 'house poems' mark new stages of the journey – especially those written after a further decision (to join the Artillery) had brought him closer to the trenches.

While Thomas's poetry maintains a dialectical and ambiguous relation to the war (as to everything), its darker avenues get darker. 'Two Houses' is a consciously dualistic poem, which exploits houses' double aspect to bring ambiguity to the surface. 'Habitation' and death converge. 'Two Houses' can be read as a poem of leave-taking for war: bisected between home or England and a murky horizon. The 'smiling' farmhouse of the first two stanzas recalls 'Haymaking' and the 'sunny' 'Manor Farm'. Yet this emblem of settled continuity has become less accessible, perhaps illusory, perhaps a trap that lures to war:

Not far from the road it lies, yet caught
Far out of reach
Of the road's dust
And the dusty thought
Of passers-by, though each
Stops, and turns, and must
Look down at it like a wasp at the muslined peach.

The second two stanzas twin the farmhouse with a ruin: 'as if above graves/ Still the turf heaves/ Above its stones'. The dead take over the poem's ground: 'And the hollow past/ Half yields the dead that never/ More than half-hidden lie:/ And out they creep and back again for ever.' Is this 'other house' the 'past', the present, or the future?

Enlistment introduced a new kind of 'house' into Thomas's poems. 'Bleak hut' in 'Rain' and 'cold roofs' in '"Home"' suggest what 'inhabiting' an army camp means. The adjectives conjure up the opposite of 'home'. And, like 'the new house' beset by moaning wind, Thomas's 'bleak hut' pelted by 'midnight rain' symbolises a dark interior state. Moving from depression to death-wish, the poem has connections with the times when

Thomas almost committed suicide. But 'Rain' embraces other deaths too: 'Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff' alludes to the war dead. '"Home"' begins with more upbeat weather: soldiers enjoying a walk in the snow. The repeated adjective 'fair' is applied to interior as well as exterior conditions: 'Fair was the morning, fair our tempers, and/ We had seen nothing fairer than that land/ Though strange'. There's an emergent sense of bonding. But then 'the word "home"' disrupts all bonds, as the men register its distance and difference from 'cold roofs'. On the road to war, 'home' inhabits inverted commas.

Soon after writing '"Home"', Thomas wrote three happier poems for his children, which he called 'the household poems'. They constitute a form of poetic will-making in which Essex parishes or, rather, their evocative names, compose a symbolic inheritance:

If I should ever by chance grow rich
I'll buy Codham, Cockridden, and Childerditch,
Roses, Pyrgo, and Lapwater
And let them all to my elder daughter.
The rent I shall ask of her will be only
Each year's first violets, white and lonely,
The first primroses and orchises.
She must find them before I do, that is.

'Letting', 'rent': Thomas's 'household poems' echo 'everlasting lease' in 'The Other'. It's once again a question of habitation: not of owning but of belonging or of earning rights. The paternal legacy hinges on how to 'inhabit the earth' – also on how to defend Thomas's cultural values. Later in this poem his legacy becomes 'everlasting', still in the currency of flowers: 'But if she find a blossom on furze,/ Without rent they shall all for ever be hers'. Furze/ gorse/ whin flowers all year round.

The house in 'Gone, gone again' is a London house. Thomas wrote the poem in September 1916 when he was training at the Royal Artillery School. This new way of inhabiting London, where he grew up, seems to have prompted a depressive retrospect:

Gone, gone again,
May, June, July,
And August gone,
Again gone by.

Not memorable
Save that I saw them go,
As past the empty quays
The rivers flow …

In the fourth quatrain, the war darkens the mood still further: 'when the war began/ To turn young men to dung' – perhaps one of Thomas's digs at Brooke's 'corner of a foreign field'. In the second half of the poem, the emotion of the first half is crystallised by an 'old house' in both its exterior and interior aspects. Culturally speaking, this house, as much as the ruined cottage in 'A Tale', may represent a vanishing England. Thomas resented how rural traces in the London of his childhood had been obliterated by urban and suburban development: 'Look at the old house,/ Outmoded, dignified,/ Dark and untenanted …' As with the houses in 'Two Houses', Thomas underlines the emblematic aspect of this house as the 'house' of life and death: 'In its beds have lain/ Youth, love, age and pain.' The likeness between speaker and house is stressed: 'I am something like that;/ Only I am not dead'. The

end of 'Gone, gone again' recalls 'I built myself a house of glass', except that here 'broken' glass evokes desolation rather than liberation: 'Not one pane to reflect the sun'. The echo may hint that 'Gone, gone again' is partly a retrospect on Thomas's decision-making about the war.

'The long small room', written in November 1916, may refer to Vivian Locke Ellis's house where Thomas sometimes lodged to write his books. That view is strengthened by the imagery of writing: 'my right hand/ / Crawling crab-like over the clean white page'. But this 'writing room' is ultimately the symbolic locus where Thomas wrote all his books, and the interiorised house is again the 'house of life': 'Only the moon, the mouse and the sparrow peeped/ In from the ivy round the casement thick …' The emblem seems less negative than in 'Gone, gone again'. The speaker 'likes' the oddly shaped room, and his retrospect is more dialectical and multifaceted. Life retains its mystery at least:

When I look back I am like moon, sparrow and mouse
That witnessed what they could never understand
Or alter or prevent in the dark house.

Again, the house is shared with other creatures, and bound up with the natural world: with ivy, with 'willows in the west'. As an earthly habitation, it's a summation of the other houses in Thomas's life and poetry. The poem ends with a further ambiguous prospect on the road to France. Its final images combine short-term and long-term horizons: the speaker's writing hand 'crawl[ing] on towards age'/ 'The hundred last leaves stream upon the willow'. The poem that Thomas wrote just before 'The long small room' was 'Lights Out', which deliberately faces into 'the unknown' or unknowable: here represented by forest rather than house. Between these poems, between trees and house, Edward Thomas, an 'old inhabitant of earth', takes provisional leave of it.

This essay is a revised version of a talk given in All Saints Church, Steep, on 11 September 2014.

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Edward Thomas Dining with Friends in London

by Shahed Power & Shaun Theobald

At the outset of his writing career Thomas was conscious of his lack of experience, of direction and of contacts but he needed work. Henry Nevinson, the journalist and literary editor, just returned for the first time from covering the Boer War, describes Edward Thomas in early 1901. Thomas had gone to see him to seek work. Thomas was asked whether he would like reviewing work and on what subject. "He replied that he knew nothing of any subject, and was quite sure he could not write, but certainly he did want work of some sort." Nevinson persuaded him to undertake a short review of a scholarly work.[1] Thomas's membership of literary dining groups in London in the early years of the century provided him with companionship and intellectual sustenance, bringing him into contact with theosophists, folklorists, and dramatists in relaxed surroundings. This brief article looks at the evidence for three such venues in the Leicester Square-St Martin's Lane area.

When he moved from Balham to the village of Bearsted near Maidstone in Kent in September 1901, Edward Thomas adopted a regular schedule where at least one day a week he would journey to London, sometimes even staying overnight.[2] Having completed his business, negotiating for book reviews and commissions, he would head towards Charing Cross Station and home, but stop off on the way to meet with friends and colleagues in a vegetarian restaurant - St George's.

St George's Restaurant was run by the 'real tennis' (what was known at the time as racquets) and lawn tennis star Eustace Miles. Miles, born in 1868, had been educated at Marlborough and King's College, Cambridge. He seems to have become prominent in lawn tennis in 1898. Apart from the Restaurant, Miles owned a publishing company and the Pure Food Stores. Though Thomas was experimenting with vegetarianism in the 1900s, it is likely that the location of the restaurant on his way to the station would have been an important factor in his choice of this venue.

There has been some confusion amongst biographers as to the exact location of St George's Restaurant though contemporary sources appear to be more clear-cut. In providing directions to Robert Frost in 1913, Thomas describes the restaurant as being in St Martin's Lane and upstairs while the poet Ralph Hodgson tells Frost that it is "next to the Coliseum in St Martin's Lane close by Trafalgar Square."[3]

The Post Office Directory for 1906 lists a restaurant at 37 St Martin's Lane. While there is some ambiguity about the precise location of the restaurant, in all probability it was close to the Coliseum and on St Martin's Lane, and therefore a short distance from the Strand and Charing Cross.[4]

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[1] Nevinson, *Changes & Chances*, p.195.

[2] Eckert, *Edward Thomas*, p.96.

[3] Thomas, *Selected Letters*, p.88; Walsh, *Into My Own*, p.151.

[4] The Post Office Directory for 1906 lists a restaurant at 37 St Martin's Lane beside the name John Anthony Hodge. No name is given for the restaurant though the Coliseum comprised nos. 32-35 St Martin's Lane which would fit in with Ralph Hodgson's description. Hodge could be the 'live-in' manager while Eustace Miles was the owner. Number 37 is given as being on the corner of Turner's Court, somewhat up from Chandos Street and would have provided access to the backs of 40-42 Chandos Street. Unfortunately there are no entries shown for 40 or 42 Chandos Street (the address often provided in later biographies for St George's) which may indicate that it is non-residential and maybe where the stores for Miles's Pure Food Stores were as that is the address provided on some

There is a richly descriptive contemporary account; Lieutenant-Colonel Newnham-Davis published an advice manual in 1899 entitled *Dinners and Diners: Where and How to Dine in London* which provides a evocative description of St George's Restaurant in St Martin's Lane:

I found the St George's Restaurant to be a red brick building of an Elizabethan type, with leaded glass windows and with a sign, whereon was inscribed "The famous house for coffee," swinging from a wrought-iron support. The windows on the ground floor had palms in them, and the gaze of the vulgar was kept from the inner arcana by neat little curtains.... The room on the first floor was a nice bright little room, with white overmantels to the fireplaces, with one corner turned into a bamboo arbour, with painted tambourines and little mandolins and pictures, and an oaken clock on the light-papered walls, with red-shaded candles on the tables set for four or six.....The waitress with the red flower put down a bill of fare before me, and I learned that my dinner was to be--

Hors d'oeuvres

Mulligatawny soup or Carrot soup

Flageolets with cream and spinach

Fried duck's eggs and green peas

Lent pie or Stewed fruit

Mixed salad

Cheese

Dessert[5]

As his diaries witness, at various times over the next decade and more writers, artists and painters such as Ralph Hodgson, Arthur Ransome, W.H. Hudson, W.H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, Ashley Gibson, Jesse Berridge, John Freeman, Stephen Reynolds and in later years, before the First World War, Rupert Brooke, Robert Frost, and D.H. Lawrence met with Edward Thomas at St George's Restaurant for tea.[6] Some, like Frost, were invited, while others knew that Thomas would be there at around tea-time on a certain day of the week. The list of addresses of editors and publishers in his diary for late 1901 makes one appreciate how much Thomas would have valued the company of his friends after hard negotiations with editors for work earlier in the day.[7] It is hard to imagine that an extended conversation over many years would only focus on literary 'gossip' and the lightweight. Rather, this must also have been an opportunity to discuss writing and exchange ideas, with

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leaflets for the concern. There were dining rooms at no.39 and coffee rooms at no.43. The corner of Chandos Street and St Martin's Lane was sited at 28 and 29 St Martin's Lane, and was the "Chandos", presumably the same 'Chandos' where on 8 March 1905 Thomas encountered the "most obscene barmaid in the world."[NLW MS 22904D, f.2] From his diaries it is apparent that Thomas was very familiar with this area.

[5] Newnham-Davis, *Dinners and Diners*, pp.90,93.

[6] NLW MS 22904D, 22903B, 22907B, 22906B, 22909B, 22910B, 22911B

[7] NLW MS22901B, f.1-2.

contemporary writers and intellectuals. St George's Restaurant would have become a *de facto* salon.

Similarly, the publisher's reader Edward Garnett presided over lunches at the Mont Blanc restaurant on Gerrard Street (today marked with a blue plaque) which commenced informally with just W.H. Hudson and Garnett in September 1901, drawing in others of their acquaintance over the years. Edward Thomas seems to have joined the Mont Blanc lunches in 1905.[8] Another routine was established. On the days he was in London, he would meet with editors and publishers in the morning, lunch at the Mont Blanc, tea at St George's and then travel home on the train.

At this time, Thomas was a regular contributor to the *Daily Chronicle* following on from his interview with Nevinson described above. It opened other publications to his writing.[9] He referred to Nevinson as "my greatest patron."[10] Early in 1899 Henry Nevinson had succeeded to the post of literary editor of the *Daily Chronicle*. He had quickly scrapped those reviews "appalling in dreariness" and published others in a series of literary supplements. He had inherited a Agood staff of reviewers@, and before he resigned at the end of 1903 Ahad worked that staff up to about the finest set of literary critics then to be imagined, and it was an age of literary criticism.[11] Edward Thomas was one of those that he had encouraged.

Nevinson's staff of reviewers gave him a farewell dinner in December 1903. The farewell dinner took place within the function room attached to the Hotel Previtali, Arundell Street near Leicester Square. Neither the hotel nor the street exists any longer but P.G. Wodehouse provides a description of the street in a novel published in 1915. He describes Arundell Street as "the bottleneck opening of the tiny *cul-de-sac* ...less than forty yards in length," off the north side of Coventry Street, shaped "like one of those flat stone jars in which Italian wine of the cheaper sort is stored." [12] A list of those present at the dinner gives a good idea of the sort of company that Edward Thomas kept while reviewing for the *Daily Chronicle*. There are two sources for those present at the dinner, one in Edward Thomas=s diary[13] and another in Nevinson's diary.[14]

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[8] Scoble, *Fisherman's Friend*, p.98; Thomas, *Selected Letters*, p.44.
[9] Moore, *Edward Thomas*, p.57.
[10] Thomas, *Selected Letters*, p.28 [letter of November 1903].
[11] Nevinson, *Changes & Chances*, pp.190-191. Nevinson's resignation was so that he could devote himself to working for the Macedonian Relief Fund. His interest in the Balkans dated back to his first trip to Greece in 1894.[Nevinson, *More Changes More Chances*, p.2ff.; *Changes & Chances*, p.131ff.]
[12] Wodehouse, *Something Fresh*, p.7-8. Confirmed by Ordnance Survey map of 1894.
[13] NLW MS 22902B, f.69.
[14] Bodleian MSS Eng. misc. e.612/ 2

Farewell Dinner for Henry Nevinson on Saturday 19th December 1903
Henry Woodd Nevinson (1856-1941)

Sport
Theodore Andrea Cook (1867-1928)
William Lancaster (1851-1922)

Ireland; India; politics
Sydney Brooks (1872-1937)
H Caldwell Lipsett (1869-1913)
Mrs N Florence Dryhurst (1856-1930)

Law; politics
John Hartman Morgan (1876-1955)

Folklore; primitive beliefs
Edward Clodd (1840-1930)
Alfred Cort Haddon (1855-1940)
Eleanor Podmore (born 1861)

Folk Revival
Evelyn Sharp (1869-1955)

Theosophy
Florence Farr Emery (1860-1917)

Psychical Research
Frank Podmore (1856-1910)

Miscellaneous
George Kenneth Menzies (1869-1954)
Vaughan Nash (1861-1932)
James Milne (1865-1951)
Tighe Hopkins (1856-1919)

Drama
William Archer (1856-1924)
George Alexander (1858-1918)
Louis Frederick Austin (1852-1905)
Henry William Massingham (1860-1924)

Art
Robert Langton Douglas (1864-1951)

Literary (poetry; literature)
Arthur Waugh (1866-1943)
Hubert Bland (1856-1914)
Edward Thomas (1878-1917)
Clarence Rook (1862-1915)

History
Martin Andrew Sharp Hume (1843-1910)

Plus unidentified Kathleen and Oisin

Space precludes a discussion of all those present at the dinner but three people can be examined in greater detail, because the subsequent correspondence of the first two gives us a clue as to one of the topics of conversation at the dinner and the third because her interests would run alongside Thomas's own in later years. The first two are Edward Clodd and John Hartman Morgan, whose friendship with Thomas had often been fractious (maybe caused by Morgan regarding him as a rival in the early part of their careers),[15] yet he was to be a proposer for a Civil List award for Thomas. He would have a high profile legal career, being part of the defence team in the trial of Sir Roger Casement.[16] Morgan was to write to Clodd in 1924 to remind him of their meeting at the dinner and to thank him for his introduction to Thomas Hardy: "to that meeting I owe my friendship with Thomas Hardy."[17] It was obviously a friendship that meant a great deal to Morgan. Clodd's house on the Aldeburgh (Suffolk) sea front was the venue for occasional weekend gatherings of 'congenial companions.'[18]

Another at the dinner was Evelyn Sharp, the youngest sister of Cecil Sharp whose name is linked with the English Folk Revival. Both Evelyn Sharp and Henry Nevinson would become part of the Folk Revival movement. The revivalists believed that the traditional music that could once be found among the people was now only to be found in rural areas, threatened as it was by the commercial vulgar urban music, particularly in the music hall. It had survived in these rural areas because of their inhabitants' lack of education, their isolation and communion with nature. It was an urgent mission, for the songs had to be collected from the remaining folk singers before they were gone. Such rural popular culture would also counter the Continental calumny that England was Aa land without music@. The English Folk Revival was part of a wider, pan-European movement to reconfigure the significance of 'folk' art (in music, for example, Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók in Hungary[19]) and redefine nationality and national identity.[20] Indeed, Thomas himself was drawn into the fringes of the movement. He compiled an anthology of poems and songs for his wife Helen, published in 1907, that included some Westmorland folk songs.[21]

These venues and companionships are extremely interesting in their own right, but what might they tell us about the ways Thomas' writing developed? Arguably, there are patterns of influence that can be seen in these social encounters and restaurant meetings that provide rich context to Thomas' intellectual development, his reasons for going to war and the genesis of his poetry. In a widely cited conversation recorded by Eleanor Farjeon, Thomas – justifying his decision to go to war – described what he was fighting for by "picking up a pinch of earth. 'Literally, for this.' He crumbled it between finger and thumb, and let it fall."[22] There is a contrast here between protecting that which one values from harm (shielding the soil in the hand) and at the same time celebrating its difference from contrasting values (revealing it by letting it fall from the hand.) But there is also a logical link between both aspects of this gesture. English earth is precious because it is *distinctive*; because it is precious it should be defended. The crumbled earth is profoundly connotative: it is earth, *English* earth, England, English culture, English rural culture.

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[15] See for example [December 1903] NLW MS 22915C f.58.
[16] See 'Brief to counsel for the defendant upon trial' amongst the Roger Casement Papers on the National Library of Ireland website.
[17] DC Clodd: Letter from John Hartman Morgan to Edward Clodd, 29 May 1924.
[18] Such as Thomas Hardy & J.M.Barrie: Millgate, *Thomas Hardy*, p.290.
[19] Chalmers, *Béla Bartók*, pp.44-46,51-54.
[20] Sykes, 'Evolution of Englishness.'
[21] Boyes, *Folk Revival, passim; cf.* Thomas, *Songs of the Open Air*, p.viii. Cecil Sharp's important *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* was also published in 1907.
[22] Farjeon, *Edward Thomas*, p.154.

Poetry also becomes a form of defence, a way of protecting and preserving.. As readers of Thomas will instantly recognize, the wonderful late flowering of poetry that extends his writing career does much to celebrate the richness and unique diversity of English rural culture. And, of course, its fragility. For instance, *Lob*. When the narrative voice of *Lob* looks back, the possibility of re-encountering Lob, emblematic Englishness, is seen as futile; "To turn back then and seek him, where was the use?". It is only later that one of the inner narrative voices, the "squires son"', asserts more confidently that "he [Lob] never will admit he is dead"; although at the end of the poem the meta-narrator can only sustain "one glimpse of his back" from this more confident voice as it disappears through a hedgerow.[23] However fragile this vision of England is, the poem itself celebrates – makes marmoreal,in the way the poem lives on in literary memory – a glorious panoptical vision of English folk culture, expressed with precisely the language and mythology that the English Folk Revival was trying to preserve and resurrect.

If the farewell dinner for Nevinson, and his other dining and social engagements, illuminates the ways in which Thomas developed as a writer, they also show something of his significance. Although the climate of opinion is changing rapidly now, not least because of the active championship of the Fellowship, in the past various dubious *canards* have been attached to Thomas' legacy and reputation: that he was just 'a War Poet'; just a 'Georgian'; intellectually isolated. His pre-War career has often been seen as merely a sequence of frenetic journalism, immiseration and domestic disharmony that only served to 'put the bread on the table' and did little to aid his writing. This is clearly not so. Thomas at St George's, at the Mont Blanc and attending Nevinson's farewell dinner is an active participant in an important discourse about culture, politics, ideas, art and what was becoming an increasingly urgent and topical debate about concepts of nationality, identity and English culture. Early 20th Century London was a capital city in every sense: the capital of England, a global financial capital - and banker for the Empire – and a generator of, and site for, accumulated cultural capital. It is fascinating to walk up St Martin's Lane today and think of Edward Thomas as an active participant in this rich cultural and intellectual exchange, just as walking past 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury creates an evocative sense of the stellar convergence of Pablo Picasso, André Derain, Aldous Huxley, John Maynard Keynes, Ernest Ansermet, Duncan Grant *et al* at the last-night party for the 1918-1919 Diaghilev ballet season held on 29th July 1919.[24]

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Gradations of the Dark:
Haunted Space in the Poetry of Edward Thomas

by John Lingard

Edward Thomas published In Pursuit of Spring, his last successful prose work, in April 1914. It records a journey on foot and bicycle through the south and west of England. In Chapter 6, he is in Wiltshire and passes through the valley of the Frome to Trowbridge where he will spend the night. He arrives at dusk, his favourite time of day. Thomas does not stay long at his guest house that evening:

> I went out into the village at about half-past nine in the dark, quiet evening. A few stars penetrated the soft sky; a few lights shone on earth, from a distant farm through a gap in the cottages. ... The road was visible most dimly, and was
> like a pale mist at an uncertain distance. When I reached the green all was still and silent. The cottages on the opposite side of the road all lay back, and they were merely blacker stains on the darkness. The pollard willows fringing the green, which in the sunlight resemble mops, were now very much like a procession of men, strange primaeval beings, pausing to meditate in the darkness. (1914: 213)

Michael Kirkham suggests that the darkness is almost a temptation for Thomas who admits that he could "walk on thus, sipping the evening silence and solitude, endlessly" (1914: 215). Thomas "does not say, but a little reflection tells us that beyond the gateway where he stopped and looked at nothing, which marked the boundary of the silence calling to him, is death" (Kirkham 1986: 17).

It is not surprising that Thomas should have kept this as an intimation in a book intended for popular reading. He is less cautious in some unpublished field notes of 11 and 17 December 1913:

> East Grinstead. 11th December 1913. East Grinstead Fair

> Drawn up at fork to Turner's hill etc. are a lot of little traps and small rough ponies. A balloon seller. Gypsies coming in with sham flowers and "My lucky gentleman" and "You've got a lucky face." But she had a much luckier face in reality. Lots of caravans drawn up between Selfield and Grinstead—begging money or half pipe of tobacco. (2004: 192)

> 17 December. Two more gypsies with that rascally Bacchic music at Selsfield house door, one has mouth organ, the other drums, tambourine, lacking cymbals—they play "over the hills and far away" and "If I were Mr. Balfour."

> 4:15 p.m. How different two days ago when I looked from a highish road (? or from railway near Warham) over a houseless lowish but hollow wooded country, nothing but gradations of inhuman dark (beginning to get misty at nightfall),
> as of an underworld and my soul fled over it experiencing the afterdeath – friendless, vacant hopeless. (2004: 192-93)

These field notes by Thomas and Chapter 6 of In Pursuit of Spring establish a rhythm which informs many of his strongest poems. In each case, the writer begins in an ordinary daylit social world. Then he takes a real or imaginary journey away from light and the mundane, through dusk, into a darkness which he finds dangerously alluring. The crepuscular or dark space is haunted: by pollard willows changed into "strange primaeval beings," or by myth, when a "hollow wooded country" appears as the "gradations of an inhuman dark" and the ancient underworld. Kirkham suggests that this space emanates from a "larger awareness of the dark, non-human world outside the circle of light created by human consciousness, memory and desire" (1986: 120). Thomas's haunted space is ambivalent. It opens onto nothing or a realm of potential metaphor. His modernity, which has been charted by Andrew Motion (1980) and Stan Smith (1986), is revealed in this ambivalence. Thomas's haunted space is either T.S. Eliot's waste land or the same poet's "drained pool" in "Burnt Norton" (1969: 172), a source of spiritual and creative rebirth. This space is liminal, no man's land in its original sense of an "unclaimed tract of usually barren land" (Steinmetz 1997: 888), or in its better known connotation from the Great War as the killing ground between trenches. This space reflects for Thomas what Jan Marsh calls the "idea of reaching the edge of what can be known and—perhaps—touching what cannot" (1978: 119). What follows is an attempt to trace Thomas's gradations of the dark through a selection of his stronger poems, beginning with one drawn directly from the field notes of December 1913.

Two almost simultaneous events triggered Thomas's shift from prose to poetry. One was time spent with Robert Frost in 1914. Thomas had known Frost since December 1913, but their friendship grew in August 1914 when the American poet pressed him to nudge some of the more promising prose into verse. "Thomas, who for so long had been unable to discover a satisfactory means of self-expression, was offered the best opportunity of attaining it just as the war threatened to deprive him of it. Frost's encouragement had the urgency of a last chance" (Motion 1980: 87-88).

"A fortnight before Christmas" is a fine tribute to the value of this encouragement. What had been flat and discursive in the field notes becomes a confident flow of rhyming couplets so casual in tone that we are hardly aware of the verse form:

> A fortnight before Christmas Gypsies were everywhere:
> Vans were drawn up on wastes, women trailed to the fair.
> "My gentleman," said one, "You've a lucky face."
> And you've a luckier," I thought, "if such a grace
> And impudence in rags are lucky." (2004: 36)

With the rhythm of a television documentary Thomas now cuts twice. First the woman's brother plays "Over the hills and far away" on his mouth-organ; then the memory of his music creates a characteristic turn, analogous to the volta of an Italian sonnet:

> That night he peopled for me the hollow wooded land,
> More dark and wild than stormiest heavens, that I searched and scanned
> Like a ghost new-arrived. The gradations of the dark
> Were like an underworld of death, but for the spark
> In the Gypsy boy's black eyes as he played and stamped his tune,
> "Over the hills and far away," and a crescent moon. (2004: 37)

Here Thomas attains his own poetic voice with a movement into distance and darkness. The self-pitying conclusion of the field note dated 17 December 1913 changes to something focused and legendary. There is a slight but vital shift from "nothing but gradations of inhuman dark," where "inhuman" is redundant, to "The gradations of the dark" which is terse and memorable. The embarrassing sequence of adjectives—"friendless, vacant, hopeless"—has gone, and the mythic echoes are now distanced and haunting: the poet feels "Like a ghost new-arrived" in "an underworld of death." Thomas's bouts of severe depression, and what Michael Kirkham calls images "of posthumous living: the ghost self that in his isolation he continually feels himself to be" (1986: 42), occur in both field notes and poem. The difference in the poem is that he has erased self-pity, as Thomas Hardy does in "Poems of 1912-13," where Hardy and his late wife Emma Lavinia Gifford feature as alternatively haunter and haunted (1976: 338-58). The slightly mawkish field notes of 17 December are universalized through a clearer system of allusion to Greco-Roman mythology. The crescent moon may be Diana the huntress or John Milton's "Astarte, Queen of Heav'n, with crescent horns" (1958: 16). The hopelessness of the concluding field notes has disappeared. Now the writer returns from the underworld to celebrate his new-arrival as a creative writer.

This rhythm, this movement from an observation of people, animals, or things, to a darker epiphany, has been clearly traced by Q.D. Leavis:

> The characteristic poem of his has the air of being a random jotting down of chance impressions and sensations, the record of a moment of relaxed and undirected consciousness. The diction and movement are those of quiet, ruminative speech. But the unobtrusive signs accumulate, and finally
> one is aware that the outward scene is accessory to an inner theatre. (Quoted in Cooke 1970: 105-06)

Leavis's point that "unobtrusive signs accumulate" in Thomas's poetry is important. It suggests that the moment where gradations of the dark seem to begin is prepared for by slight shadows earlier in the poem, just as the sestet of an Italian sonnet is hinted at in the octave. "The Mill Water" illustrates Leavis's point:

> Only the sound remains
> Of the old mill;
> Gone is the wheel;
> On the prone roof and walls the nettle reigns.
>
> Water that toils no more
> Dangles white locks
> and, falling, mocks

The music of the mill-wheel's steady roar.

Pretty to see, by day
Its sound is naught
Compared with thought
and talk and noise of labour and play. (2004: 85)

Nature in the form of water and a plant best known for its stinging leaves have reclaimed our early-industrial territory. The water once harnessed like a work-horse to turn the millwheel "toils no more," the verb ignoring the fact that water is indifferent to natural or man-made obstacles. Men toil here no more, not the water. Stan Smith's reading of these verses reminds us that Thomas is a modern poet, not just a Georgian pastoralist:

> This is nature released from the bondage of toil, certainly, finding its playful satisfactions in the kind of dalliance that graced earlier and less self-conscious pastoral. But such careless dangling...leads at once to a slimy mocking – a mere imitation of the music of work, but also taunting it from a position of complete and malevolent irresponsibility. It is merely "Pretty to see," superficial, but also deceptive, concealing its real and ancient malice. (1986: 71)

This menace emerges suddenly in the fourth stanza:

Night makes the difference.
In calm moonlight,
Gloom infinite,
The sound comes surging in upon the sense:

Solitude, company, -
When it is night, -
Grief or delight
By it must haunted or concluded be.

Often the silentness
Has but this one
Companion;
Wherever one creeps in the other is:

Sometimes a thought is drowned
By it, sometimes
Out of it climbs;
All thoughts begin or end upon this sound,

Only the idle foam
Of water falling
Changelessly calling,
Where once men had a work-place and a home. (2004: 85-86)

Night makes the difference: a fitting epigraph for Thomas's poetry, even for the haunted spaces of Gothic tradition from Ann Radcliffe to Stephen King. The fears of Gothic heroines are always most intense in darkness or moonlight. In these five stanzas the irrationality associated with terror or horror in literature is accentuated by a struggle between sound and sense. It is also felt in the erratic punctuation. The first three daylight stanzas are each

neatly concluded by a period, as if the self-contained quatrains reflect an ordered social world. The last five stanzas do not stop. The erratic series of commas, dashes, colons, and semi-colons, link an irregular flow which reflects the writer's changing response to night and the surging water. In the water's "calling" there is death and echoes of earlier poetry where a body of water seduces a man into thoughts of drowning. In the penultimate song in the Wilhelm Müller/ Franz Schubert song cycle Die schöne Müllerin, the mill-stream invites the miller to find "die kühle ruh" (1968: 53) cool rest] in its depths. Housman's Shropshire lad feels a call to "strip and dive and drown" (1967: 26) in his native pools and rivers. Thomas's version of this motif is more complex because this dark inner theatre offers the temptation to end all thought, yet becomes a source of poetic creation. A thought can drown in the sound alone of the water, but it can climb out of it as if transfigured. Beyond that moment of artistic self-realization, there is the knowledge noted by Kirkham that poetry is a luxury on this desolate site "Where once men had a work-place and a home."

The writer's ambivalent response to the water's calling matches Thomas's knowledge of the danger and necessity of his own clinical depressions: "But seriously I wonder whether for a person like myself whose most intense moments were those of depression a cure that destroys the depression may not destroy the intensity—a desperate remedy?" (qtd. in R. George Thomas 1985: 162). "Aspens" is a metaphoric exploration of this self-analysis. In this poem, the desolate site is proleptic. The poet's here and now is the heart of an idealized village community. The sound of the aspens' leaves lure him, however, into a vision of future ruin: a site peopled only by ghosts. Again we have Thomas's own words as a guide to the poem's thought-world. In 1909 he wrote to Gordon Bottomley: "As to modern subjects I can do little with more than one character and that one is sure to be a ghost (of a pretty woman or a nice old man) or else myself. So far the best things I have done have been about houses" (qtd. in R. George Thomas 1985: 168). Aspens has a house, but Thomas overreaches himself with more than one ghost:

> All day and night, save winter, every weather,
> Above the inn, the smithy, and the shop,
> The aspens at the cross-roads talk together
> Of rain, until their last leaves fall from the top.
>
> Out of the blacksmith's cavern comes the ringing
> Of hammer, shoe, and anvil; out of the inn
> The clink, the hum, the roar, the random singing –
> The sounds that for these fifty years have been. (2004: 83)

A number of Leavis's "unobtrusive signs" accumulate in these two stanzas. Aspens are what they are: a type of tree. But Housman had given them an ominous association in "Along the field as we came by":

> And sure enough beneath the tree
> There walks another love with me,
> And overhead the aspen heaves
> Its rainy-sounding silver leaves;
> And I spell nothing in their stir,
> But now perhaps they speak to her,
> And plain for her to understand
> They talk about a time at hand
> When I shall sleep with clover clad,
> And she beside another lad. (1967: 31)

Housman and Thomas would also have know that the Sibyl of Cumae wrote, spelled, her prophecies on the Sibylline leaves. More sinister is the reference to cross-roads. Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable notes:

> All excluded from holy rites (criminals and suicides) were at one time buried at cross-roads. The ancient Teutonic peoples used such places for holding sacrifice and they thus by association came to be places of execution. (Evans 1985: 292)

The reader will only grasp at the end of "Aspens" the poet's identification with the trees. Thomas's fondness for rain is everywhere evident in his writing, and the last leaves falling at the edge of winter foreshadow his own abandonment of writing in favour of the war. As in "The Mill-Water," the gradations of the dark emerge early:

> The whisper of the aspens is not drowned,
> And over lightless pane and footless road,
> Empty as sky, with every other sound
> Not ceasing, calls their ghosts from their abode.
>
> A silent smithy, a silent inn, nor fails
> In the bare moonlight or the thick-furred gloom
> In tempest or the night of nightingales,
> To turn the cross-roads to a ghostly room. (2004: 84)

In a chapter from Edward Thomas entitled "A Haunted Landscape," Smith writes of the Poem "Two Houses" (2004: 87-88):

> The poem here rips the ideological "surfaces" of "harmony" of this vision of landscape, to reveal that it is in reality a haunted landscape full of ghosts and dark echoes of historic brutality and oppression…. The ghost is one of the commonest tropes in Thomas's poetry. His English landscapes are in fact, peopled primarily by ghosts, usually associated with memory and the return of the past. (1986:66)

The only unusual feature in "Aspens" is that the ghosts occur as prophecy. This is not to say that the war and pre-war rural unemployment had not already begun to silence the countryside. What Smith calls the "magical emptiness of the land" (1986:32) was already in place. The solitude of his poems and prose may be chosen but almost inevitable given their historical moment. The ghosts in "Aspens" foreshadow those in "Roads" written in late 1915 or January 1916 when the horror of war by attrition could no longer be "kept dark" by civil or military authorities:

> Now all roads lead to France
> And heavy is the tread
> Of the living; but the dead
> Returning lightly dance. (2004:98)

Like the mill-water's sound, the whisper of the aspens "drowns" the hum of human activity, especially at night.

In a letter to Eleanor Farjeon, Thomas corrected what he felt to be her misreading of the final stanzas: "About 'Aspens' you missed just the turn that I thought essential. I was

the aspen. 'We' meant the trees and I with my dejected shyness" (2004: 210). His use of 'turn' makes it more likely that he was conscious of imitating the volta of Italian sonnets:

> And it would be the same were no house near,
> Over all sorts of weather, men, and times,
> Aspens must shake their leaves and men must hear
> But need not listen, more than to my rhymes.
>
> What ever wind blows, while they and I have leaves
> We cannot other than an aspen be
> That ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves,
> Or so men think who like a different tree. (2004: 84)

The trees must shake their leaves and Thomas must explore his gradations of the dark. It is his calling. No one must listen to trees or poet, but the last line challenges those who "like a different tree" – happy endings – to re-evaluate their reading habits (Smith 1986: 84-85).

Like John Keats's "To Autumn," Thomas's "It Rains" helps to make its readers "rather sharers in a process than witnesses of a result" (Thomas qtd. in Smith 1986: 98). The main difference is the modern poet's impoverished subject matter. Keats's early autumn is almost too rich in its "mellow fruitfulness" (1970: 513). Thomas has only: rain, a fence, a deserted orchard, parsley (a common white flower with a long stalk, known in England as cow parsley and in North America as cowparsnip), and twilight:

> It rains and nothing stirs within the fence
> Anywhere through the orchard's untrodden, dense
> Forest of parsley. The great diamonds
> Of rains on the grassblades there is none to break,
> Or the fallen petals further down to shake.
>
> And I am nearly as happy as possible
> To search the wilderness in vain though well,
> To think of two walking, kissing there,
> Drenched, yet forgetting the kisses of the rain:
> Sad, too, to think that never, never again,
>
> Unless alone, so happy shall I walk
> In the rain. When I turn away, on its fine stalk
> Twilight has fined to naught, the parsley flower
> Figures, suspended still and ghostly white,
> The past hovering as it revisits the light. (2004: 113)

The hallmarks of Thomas's poetry are evident in the first stanza: a liminal wilderness; rain; no character other than the observer; nothing stirring; no man's land. However, the scene does have that form of suspense created by an empty room as the curtain rises on a play.

Characters do enter in the second stanza: the observer who seems to have trespassed by climbing the fence or opening a gate, and two ghosts, one his former self, the other a girl he was once in love with. The seeker is "nearly as happy as possible." Thomas had already described his pleasure at feeling like a ghost: "At the time I was a great deal nearer to being a disembodied spirit than I can often be. … This pleasure of my disembodied spirit … was an inhuman and diffused one, such as may be attained by whatever dregs of this our life survive after death" (In Pursuit of Spring 1914: 210). A photograph of the author printed in R. George Thomas's 1985 biography shows Thomas "In dejection at Berryfield Cottage,

October 1907" (1985: opp. 183). The quality of the original plate, the transmission from plate to print to copied print in a book, combine to give Thomas a ghostlike appearance.

Like the stalk of the parsley flower in the last stanza, this pleasure of a disembodied spirit is almost fined to naught. However, the turn in "It Rains," perhaps indicated by the word "turn" in line 7, is Thomas's most subtle and quietly triumphant one. We now learn how he has, paradoxically, been able "To search the wilderness in vain though well." In line 8, an already fine stalk has been "fined to naught." It is like the freeze-frame ending of a film. All we are left with is a flower so common as to be often unnoticed, and itself about to be extinguished by darkness. The poetic triumph is to have turned a mundane image into the source of powerful metaphor: "The past hovering as it revisits the light."

Thomas's mastery of lyric form did grow, in the sense that there is a greater number of poems close to the quality of "It Rains" in the later months of his short poetic career. However, this must be qualified by the fact that two of his strongest poems, "Old Man" (2004: 9-10)) and "Out in the Dark" (2004: 132-33) were written, the former at the start, the latter at the end of his poetic career. "Old Man" is a conversation poem of the type pioneered by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and rediscovered by Robert Frost and Edward Thomas. Frost's "The Wood-Pile" from *North of Boston*[i] (1969: 101-02) is the Frost poem that may have influenced "Old Man" the most, though Thomas has absorbed and perhaps surpassed the American poet's deceptively casual, conversational technique. Of all Thomas's poems it comes closest to Leavis's "random Jotting down of chance impressions and sensations, the record of a moment of relaxed and undirected consciousness." At the same time, we can sense how "the unobtrusive signs accumulate," culminating, in the last stanza, in one of the most powerful examples of the poet's "inner theatre." So random is the effect of the first three stanzas that Stuart Sillars finds in the poem a postructuralist "dissolution of the self and dissolution of language relation to objects" (1999: 178; quoted in Longley 2008: 151). Edna Longley also stresses "Old Man's" startling modernity when she notes that the first stanza holds "the human and non-human creation in a precarious intertextual balance" (2000:151). The anonymity of speaker, child, and space, adds to the uncertainty which is the poem's essence. The herb is either "Old Man" or "Lad's Love'; these names "Half decorate, half perplex, the thing it is" (2004:). Its Colour fluctuates from hoar-green to grey. The speaker does not like the plant, yet loves it. He forbids the child to pick the leaves, yet allows her to clip the bush "so well" as to stunt its growth.

The last stanza of "Old Man" is the finest turn turn in Thomas's poetry. After the disconcertingly heuristic journey of the first three stanzas, he begins the fourth with a straightforward confession of failure "I have mislaid the key." Since the key must refer to the herb with its strange bitter scent, the words stand for frustrated memory; but there is a literal meaning he has *mislaid* the leaves' "grey shreds" on the path, almost deliberately perhaps, because the herb brings him continually to the brink of revelation, meaning, identity, certainty, only to disappoint:

> as for myself,
> Where first I met the bitter scent is lost.
> I, too, often shrivel the grey shreds,
> Sniff them and think and sniff again and try
> Once more to to think what it is I am remembering,
> Always in vain.

However, as in "The Mill-Water," that dissolution of the self and language Sillars describes reveals, in that strange avenue, Thomas's gradations of the dark at their most mysterious and intense

> I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray

And think of nothing; I see and I hear nothing;
Yet seem, too, to be listening in wait
For what I should, yet never can, remember:
No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush,
Or Lad's Love, or Old Man, no child beside,
Neither father nor mother, nor any playmate;
Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end. (2004: 10)

The greatest paradox of a poem about paradox, uncertainty, and, in a way, *nothing,* is that it should produce, in this last stanza, eight blank verse lines of such haunting beauty and power. In Smith's reading of "Old Man," the withholding of meaning" becomes "the very guarantee of its richness and authenticity" (1986: 128). The avenue's vanishing point is charged with threat and promise.

In her book The Gothic Impulse in Contemporary Drama, MaryBeth Inverso traces the refinement of Gothic space in literature from the haunted castles and ruined abbeys of Ann Radcliffe, through the domestication of the Gothic in Victorian novels, to the twentieth-century when any space can become Gothic. She quotes William Patrick Day's contention that "the Gothic world in its purest form [is] all atmosphere and no substance, all suggestion, possibility, inference, and suspense, totally without certainty" (1985: 30). Day's description of the Gothic world seems well-suited to Thomas's haunted spaces where indeed atmosphere, suggestion, and uncertainty reign. In "Out in the Dark" (2004: 132-33), the last poem he approved,[ii] through including it in a letter to Eleanor Farjeon, can only *infer* that the poet is in a room looking at a darkened window:

Out in the dark over the snow
The fallow fawns invisible go
With the fallow doe;
And the winds blow
Fast as the stars are slow.

Stealthily the dark haunts round
And when a lamp goes, without sound
At a swifter bound
Than the swiftest hound
Arrives, and all else is drowned.

And I and star and wind and deer
Are in the dark together, - near,
Yet far, - and fear
Drums on my ear
In that sage company drear.

How weak and little is the light,
All the universe of sight,
Love and delight,
Before the might,
If you love it not, of night. (2004: 132-33)

Beginning and ending in darkness, "Out in the Dark" is Thomas's final and most detailed analysis of his gradations of the dark, his inner theatre. The five-line stanza with one repeated rhyme is unique in his collected poems. Kirkham notes that this "single rhyme,

relentlessly, monotonously repeated, blankets the poem in sameness – as the darkness itself subdues life to the one power of night" (1986: 133). The house was High Beech in Epping Forest. Thomas wrote the poem in Kent where he was training at the Artillery School. However, he is looking back to his last home. In a letter to Elinor Frost dated 27 November 1916, Thomas wrote:

> Except on Saturdays and Sundays and holidays we see nothing only aeroplanes and deer in the forest. Baba [his youngest daughter Myfanwy] has no companions. She goes about telling herself stories…. The forest is beautiful, oaks, hornbeams, beeches, Bracken, hollies, and some heather. … There are 7 or 8 miles of forest, by 1 or 2 miles wide, all in the high ground, with many tiny ponds and long wide glades. (2004: 238-39)

Aeroplanes and deer. In three words, Thomas sums up the two worlds he was to surrender to most completely: war and nature. His enlistment was as far from jingoism as any soldier's could have been in the Great War. One could say he fought and died to defend the original no man's land of southern England and Wales with its forest tracts, ponds, and above all roads which "wind into the night" (2004:97).

In "Out in the Dark," Thomas moves straight to the darkness. The forest idyll of his letter to Elinor Frost is only there as atmosphere, possibility, suggestion. The first line establishes with deft economy that it is a winter night and that the writer is probably looking out of a window onto darkness. The following lines introduce three elements belonging to the "dark, non-human world outside the circle of light created by human consciousness" (Kirkham 1986: 120): deer, winds, and stars. The deer would be "pretty to see by day," but are now invisible: part companions in the dark, part other, in league with the darkness.

In the second stanza, Thomas intensifies the power of darkness by an association with hunting hounds; the startling effect of "Arrives," suspended by enjambment, makes the dark seem as inexorable as fate. The third stanza addresses the liminality of everything outside consciousness. Felt one way, winds, deer, and star, are "company" almost in the sense of good companions, as well as non-human entities. of beings. They cannot, however, eliminate human fear. This explains the odd use of "sage" and "drear" in the fifth line. A contemporary "translation" of these adjectives might be "wise," and "uncanny" in Sigmund Freud's sense of "*unheimlich*." In an essay of 1919, Freud defined the uncanny—"*das Unheimliche"* —as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (1985: 340): a definition that Thomas might have recognized as answering to his own gradations of the dark. Star, wind, and deer are sage because they do not fear the night. They are drear because this absence of fear is *unheimlich*—for most people; but for Thomas, with his attraction to darkness, the absence of fear is indeed "known of old and long familiar."

The final stanza is a confrontation with the darkness in Thomas's mind and contemporary Europe. Day claims that the Gothic world is "totally without certainty." The last line of Thomas's "Old Man" exemplifies this definition: both writer and reader are left with "Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end" (2004: 10). There is uncertainty at the end of "Out in the Dark." Does, for example, the pronoun "it" refer to light or night or both? If the closeness of Freud's the uncanny and Thomas's gradations of the dark is valid, it is probable that the pronoun refers back to night. A love and acceptance of night and darkness make light and life more precious.

Edward Thomas was killed on April 1917 by the blast from a German shell at the battle of Arras. He had been directing artillery fire from an observation post at the edge of that other No Man's Land which has become a symbol of modern warfare. Thomas died little more than three months after writing "Out in the Dark." Alun Lewis's moving elegy

for his fellow Welshman ends with the view that "the voice that called you/ Was soft and neutral as the sky." For Lewis, Thomas moved *deliberately* away from England, family, and life itself, "Till suddenly at Arras, you possessed that hinted land" (1981: 27). This is memorable but unjust. Thomas did not choose to die. There is death in his poetry, but it is present as part of those gradations of the dark he needed to explore were he to find "a language not to be betrayed" (2004:112). His enlistment was both as honest and as brave as his poetry; the war gave him poetry, a revelation of nature as essence. To fight was not suicidal but a necessary defence of that essence. "Literally, for this" (qtd. in Wright 1981: 24) Peter Sacks's recent (2004) re-evaluation of the poems is more balanced than Lewis's and closer to the what I would see as Thomas's true reasons for enlisting:

> That their clear-throated celebrations increasingly … collide with an adverse historical world – the destruction of a beloved rural environment, the carnage of mass warfare in which the poet himself would be killed – this is one measure of their mature depth, their grit, their surviving claim on our attention as we turn between what might be two equally ruinous centuries. (2004: xii)

"The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime" (Grey 3 August of 1914). These words by Lord Grey of Falloden have become so famous that they are now almost unquotable. In The Pity of War, Niall Ferguson, fearing his readers will wince at the speech itself, merely comments that Grey's "most famous utterance was a speech about fading illumination" (1998: 57). For Edward Thomas, the words were new and powerful He absorbed, then compressed them into half a line of his last great poem:

> Stealthily the dark haunts round
> And when a lamp goes, without sound
> At a swifter bound
> Than the swiftest hound
> Arrives, and all else is drowned.

Thomas could make the familiar strange: an empty railway station, roads, a common flower, a door, an abandoned mill, a herb with a bitter scent, an owl, a speech worn to shreds by repetition. We cannot see the moon in the same way again after reading "The new moon hangs like an ivory bugle/ In the naked, frosty blue" (2004:26). Similarly, the words "When a lamp goes" can send us back to Grey's speech, especially fifteen years into what may indeed be another ruinous century, with an understanding that there is prophecy in what for long has seemed cliché.

NOTES

[1] In his 1914 review of *North of Boston*, Thomas described Frost's poems as "revolutionary because they lack the exaggeration of rhetoric" (quoted in Smith 12).

[1] In 1978, R. George Thomas added "The Sorrow of True Love" to the collected poems. It had been found in the poet's wartime diary by his grandson, and is now listed as number 144. Thomas wrote it on leave in England in January 1917. The poem, with strong Yeatsian echoes, is not, I believe, Thomas at his best and he might not have wished it to be published, had he lived through the war.

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Links Between Edward Thomas' 'The Glory' and Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life'
by Martin Brooks

This research note follows claims that Edward Thomas' double-sonnet 'The Glory' is 'Wordsworthian', 'of Richard Jeffries' or 'Prufrockian'.[25] It briefly sketches arguments for reading 'The Glory' as a response to Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life', so contending that Thomas' poem appropriates Shelley's constructions and terms to interpret humans' knowledge of absolutes as limited. 'The Glory' hierarchically positions knowledge of life over the perception of love. This hierarchy is conspicuous in later autobiographical poems such as 'And you, Helen', which assays human-felt 'loveliness' a lesser gift than absolute knowledge of 'myself, too'.[26]

Thomas' letters acknowledge appropriation from Shelley in a circumstance where possessing self-knowledge is a quality of a supernatural being. Thomas' celebrated 'Lob' appropriates a line of Shelley's Adonais to give Shelley agency over Lob's 'mood' as though he possessed Lob's self-knowledge. In April 1915, Thomas confirmed to John Freeman:

> The other line is, I fear echoed from a line in Adonais
>
> He, as I guess,
> Had looked on Nature's naked loveliness
>
> But isn't it all right, or mayn't Lob have been tender or had a mood?[27]

Thomas disassociates himself from the agency controlling Lob's mood; he allows for Shelley to be responsible for this countryside eidolon's affect. Thomas draws Shelley's poetry into the extra-mundane countryside of his own poetics:

> No man can see hill and valley as but a pictorial arrangement of forms and colours: no man sees only with his eyes. He sees with the aid of hunter and sailor and husbandman, and also of poets and perhaps alien brood, Callimachus, Virgil, Shelley, Emily Brontë.[28]

However the tradition accompanies men, Thomas argues its extra-visible workings are best perceived by a potentially 'alien brood' of poets. 'Shelley', in Thomas' prose, indicates the presence of extraordinary logic. The Shelley of Feminine Influence on the Poets permits the writer casuistic reasoning:

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[25] Respectively, citations of Andrew Webb, Edward Thomas and World Literary Studies. (Cardiff, 2013), 170; Edna Longley, 'Notes', Edward Thomas, Edward Thomas: Annotated Collected Poems, ed. Edna Longley, (Tarset, 2013), 234; J.P. Ward, 'The Solitary Note: Edward Thomas and Modernism', The Art of Edward Thomas, ed. Jonathan Barker, (Bridgend, 1987), 57.
[26] Edward Thomas, Edward Thomas: Annotated Collected Poems, ed. Edna Longley, (Tarset, 2013), 117.
[27] 'The Letters of Edward Thomas to John Freeman', The Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter, xxxviii (1998), 12.
[28] Edward Thomas, The Country, (London, 1913); facsimile, (Cheltenham, 1999), 52-3.

> There is much of the poetry of Shelley and of Spenser, for example, written since they knew a woman, which has no mention of woman, and yet is full of love and fit to awaken and satisfy love. The proof is that the heart of youth when it is most loving fastens upon their words for its expression.[29]

This passage exemplifies the appropriation of the 'alien' poet to justify the 'alien' in works written by Thomas. The argument: Shelley's is great love poetry because we read it as great love poetry. We read the work as great love poetry because something in it has made it great love poetry. We are driven to read the work as great love poetry by an effect of this affective something. The cause of this something is not apparent. In Thomas, references to Shelley indicate the inexpressible; it is fitting Thomas expropriates 'The Triumph of Life' to depict mortality struggling for expressivity amidst absolutes.[30]

The expropriation, 'The Glory', is attuned to stress the ineffable of life. Shelley's poem leaves the narrator's question 'what is life?' partially unanswered. The unfinished answer begins with 'Happy'. 'The Glory' follows this answer to cypher 'happiness' as inaccessible knowledge of life. In both poems, the definite knowledge of life requires a vocabulary not readily apparent and both attempt a solution by grasping the unknown Life in a visual lexicon. To the speakers, Life need not have a shape, but is nonetheless described as a shape.

Shelley's narrator sees 'a Shape' sat in a chariot, 'bent' with a 'Tempering the light' and Rousseau claims 'A Shape all light, which with one hand did fling / Dew on the earth'. (ll. 93, 352-3)[31] In phrasing comparable to 'fling', 'shape' and tempered light, the speaker of 'The Glory' contrasts his state with 'the lovely of motion, shape and hue, / The happiness I fancy fit to dwell / In beauty's presence'. (ll. 10-12)[32] Kirkham describes Thomas' shape as a 'mirage' contingent on the 'lovely' vocabulary the speaker wishes to transcend: 'The lovely … here raises the mirage of something beyond love and the lovely'.[33]

Shelley's lines force a sublunary vocabulary on the supernatural 'shape all light' by describing it with hands and feet and sitting down. These lines produce tension between an absolute of otherworldly luminosity and a materialist vocabulary. The tension allows the separation between speaker and 'Life' to frustrate the speakers' distinctions of self and world; the speakers' show incomplete knowledge of what 'self' is. An expression of frustration with words' limitations, 'The Glory' intensifies this focus on a speaker applying the vocabulary of contingency to the being of necessity. Thomas' speaker admits his search is for 'something sweeter than love' (l.4); that 'The Glory' then describes a 'shape' as 'lovely' is a tacit admission of the speaker's contingent, quotidian vocabulary. As Thomas intends to make plain, these accounts of life-as-shape juxtapose vocabularies against forms that triumphantly evade apprehension.

The quotidian is emphasised by the metaphor that provides a frame for each poem; the poem's length is the span of the day, which, itself, stands for the span from birth to death. Thomas' speaker asks 'And shall I ask at the day's end once more / … what I can

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[29] Edward Thomas, The Prose of Edward Thomas, ed. Roland Gant, (London, 1948), 126-7.
[30] Edward Thomas, Keats, (London, 1916); facsimile, (Cheltenham, 1999), 51.
Those interested in Edward Thomas as a melancholic will likely note the similarity between emotion caused by the 'ineffable' and Robert Burton's principle definition of melancholy in The Anatomy of Melancholy: 'a kind of dotage without a feaver, having for his ordinary companions, fear and sadnesse, without any apparent occasion'. (op. cit. Drew Daniel. The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance, (New York, 2013), 92)
[31] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Triumph of Life', Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Fiona Sampson, (London, 2011), 108-126.
[32] Edward Thomas: Annotated Collected Poems, 87.
[33] Michael Kirkham, The Imagination of Edward Thomas, (Cambridge, 1986), 100.

have meant / By happiness?' (ll. 21-3) This question and the question it raises go unanswered. The parallel in the unfinished closing lines of 'The Triumph of Life' is readily apparent:

> 'Then, what is Life?' I said … the cripple cast
> His eye upon the car which now had rolled
> Onward, as if that look must be the last,
>
> And answered … 'Happy for those whom the fold
> Of' (ll. 544-8)

The shared metaphor encourages Thomas' readers to view the two poems as expressions of the same narrative. Thomas' poetics absorbs these lines, and the asemic meaning they cue, to have Shelley's 'happy' also cypher for the fugitive 'happiness I fancy fit to dwell / In beauty's presence' and the lost time perhaps 'happy oft and oft before'. (ll. 11-12, 25) 'The Glory' contrasts 'love' with 'the sublime vacancy', a void from which the indefinable is manifest. (l. 6) This indescribability is of the same order as the Shape's coming from a 'realm without a name'. (l. 396) Vacancy that prevents naming is reflected by the Thomas' fruitless search for the experience of 'happiness'.

Thomas' Dantean lines to start the search for 'happiness', 'Shall I now this day / Begin to seek as far as heaven, as hell', echo 'The Triumph of Life' where Rousseau speaks of before the Shape took his memory: 'Whether my life had been before that sleep / The Heaven which I imagine, or a Hell'. (ll. 332-3) In having heaven and hell be metaphors of lost knowledge 'The Triumph of Life' allows for their irreparable bifurcation into an either/ or relationship. Focusing this relationship, 'The Glory' permits 'happiness' may be found in only one of 'heaven' or 'hell'. Thomas uses Rousseau's memory-loss phrasing for his search motif as though indicating the search's object is within the self; this re-use of phrase reinforces the Shelley's sentiment that Heaven and Hell are but metaphors for self-knowledge.

The appearance of these metaphors in 'The Glory' is affected by links between Shelley and the Commedia. Ll. 471-6 of 'The Triumph of Life' explicitly refer to Dante's journey:

> Behold a wonder worthy of the rhyme
> Of him whom from the lowest deaths of Hell,
> Through every Paradise and through all glory,
> Love led serene, and who returned to tell
>
> The words of hate and awe; the wondrous story
> How all things are transfigured except Love

Again, Heaven and Hell, but here linked by 'Love' as a constant. In the hierarchical organisation of 'The Glory', this 'Love' is adapted by Thomas' poetics, which we must view as absorptive. The lines may appear to destabilise the hierarchy of 'love' inferior to 'happiness' as apparent in 'The Glory', but, while Thomas does not explicitly deal with 'Love', he provides us a logic capable of absorbing it into his poetics. The structure of his difficult simile 'Or must I be content with discontent / As larks and swallows are perhaps with wings?' need not imply dissatisfaction (ll. 19-20); Edna Longley notes it 'could work the other way: by raising the status of "discontent"'.[34] By this reasoning, meaning is hidden in

[34] Edward Thomas: The Annotated Collected Poems, 235.

the inverse of the apparent. Through the same manoeuvre, the constancy of 'Love' may be seen a limit on those seeking to transcend it into that knowledge given as 'happiness'.

Further semantic resemblances confirm the intertextual relationship and shape it into a narrative. The near-synonymy of the titles is relevant in determining Thomas' intentions. 'The Triumph of Life' puns on 'triumph' as noun, the march triumphant, and verb, defeating an opponent. 'The Glory' employs Shelley's paronomastic strategy and adds an extra register of response to Life's triumph. 'Glory' has a verb form analogous to defeating an opponent (cf. Exodus 8:9 in the King James), a noun synonymous with that of 'triumph', and a further noun for praising an external entity (cf. 'glory be to…'). 'The Glory' allows Shelley's pun and expands meaning so the unknown can be observed and praised. The glorification acknowledging the unknown's triumph is in contrast to the known, required to offer this praise, but unworthy of receiving it.

Cut from the day's 'core' at the poem's end, the speaker of 'The Glory' then resembles Shelley's Rousseau. Memory loss and musing on happiness 'oft and oft before' ingeminate Rousseau on life 'before that sleep'. The 'fast pent' speaker is trapped as Rousseau stuck rooted to observe the eternals. Thomas' ending question 'How dreary-swift, with naught to travel to / Is Time?' (ll. 27-8) is then the opening of Shelley's poem, 'Swift as a spirit hastening to his task / Of glory and good'. (ll. 1-2)[35] The glory of Shelley's daybreak is recast in 'The Glory' by a snared speaker, aware he is held from higher knowledge of being, who now views the good's unexplained appearance as mere dreariness.[36] Unfortunately for the speaker, intertextuality returns the 'swift' end of his narrative to the 'swift' start of Shelley's; his day must always recommence. Thomas interpolates Shelley to ensure the hierarchy of happiness and love remains standing unaffected.

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A Short Note on Oldfields
by Jeff Cooper

Many of you will have been to Oldfield House, a short walk across the fields from Little Iddens where Robert Frost lived, as it is renowned as the place where the Thomas family stayed in August 1914. But what was Oldfields like in those days?

What you may not know is that Oldfield House, as it is now known, was originally one of a number of cottages in the hamlet of Oldfields (or more usually, Old Fields) when the Thomases were staying there. At that time there were at least another 5 cottages in the hamlet, all of them small (three or four rooms each) and occupied by farm labourers and their families. Most of the houses in the hamlet went derelict between the wars because of mechanisation and the economic downturn in the countryside, and have since disappeared (although you can see the remnants of one: a pile of bricks and a pump).

Oldfield House, originally built in the 17th century, stood out as the most substantial cottage in the area, and unlike the other houses it had nearly 1.5 acres (about two-thirds of a hectare) of land with it. Although the house is now covered in thatch, in Edward Thomas's day it was tiled, and until shortly before the Thomases stayed there it was called Old Leasow.

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[35] Ralph Pite's chapter 'Shelley, Dante and The Triumph of Life' argues 'The Triumph of Life' begins with a citation of Purgatorio I & II. (Evaluating Shelley, eds. Timothy Clark and Jerrold E. Hogle, (Edinburgh, 1996), 197-211)

[36] A further link for enquiries into autobiographical melancholy. If Thomas has chosen the voice of a Dantean figure turned into a tree, he evokes the suicides of Inferno Canto XIII.

Living in the cottage were Charles Edward Chandler and his wife Elizabeth, both 44 years old when the Thomases stayed there. He was a retired army sergeant, living off his pension. They had lived in Edgbaston, Birmingham before moving to Oldfields in about 1912, although the property wasn't actually owned by the Chandlers. They rented it, probably from Noah and Fanny Clark of Brighton. While the Thomases were there, Mr Chandler was summoned to Hereford to prepare himself for being called back into the army: the Great War was calling.

It's now difficult to know the house's original layout as it has changed enormously, with many additions being built. But we can be sure that with two adults and four children (three of their own plus Peter Mrosowsky, the Bedales student who was with them) it was probably a bit of a squeeze alongside the Chandlers.

By a small coincidence, in 1918 Edwin and Lucy Thomas – presumably no relation – purchased the house.

Particular thanks to Peete Stewart and Helen Pull for helping me with this note.

Oldfield House as it is today

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Reviews

Edward Thomas, Birdsong & Flight by Judy Kendall (London: Cecil Woolf Publishing, 2014), 84pp.

Editors of poetry anthologies have not always been particularly kind to Edward Thomas. Perhaps this is due to the nature of the poems, which have a meditative, slow-burning quality that rewards an overall appreciation of the entire opus and how the individual poems speak to each other, rather than a narrow focus on a few 'Greatest Hits'. What we usually find is 'Adlestrop', a poetical selfie (dare we imagine the tousled poet in front of the 'Adlestrop' sign as he lifts his pen and notebook at arm's length, leaning back into the window and its sun-heated glass?), a distillation of his main concerns, perhaps, but one which does not so fiercely examine them with the self-criticism or anxiety of the pricklier poems such as 'This is no case of petty right or wrong' or 'No one so much as you'. But what we do have in 'Adlestrop' is firstly a blackbird, and then 'all the birds/ Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire'. And the more we think about Thomas and his eloquent strides around the countryside throughout his life, the more birds appear as persistent sentinels and watchers of both the skies and him: the song-hoarding semi-ghosts at the edge of the picture. In *Edward Thomas, Birdsong & Flight,* part of the Cecil Woolf War Poets series of monographs, Judy Kendall, editor of *Edward Thomas's Poets* and *Poet to Poet: Edward Thomas's Letters to Walter de la Mare*, and author of *Edward Thomas: The Origins of his Poetry*, examines what she calls the 'parallel universe' of birds in his poetry and the variety of contradictions and perspectives they offered him – from the sky, from the trees, from the Earth's floor.

Kendall's short but precise book is split into sections that examine the role of nests, 'jizz' (a bird-watcher's word for the 'indefinable combination of characters' that help an ornithologist to identify birds in the field), flight, and song. She considers manuscript discrepancies and deploys close reading of Thomas's use of 'bayonets' describing reeds to show the importance of the way the eye uncovers meaning in image. Her analysis ranges widely amongst Thomas's prose, letters and other contemporary poetry, drawing some illuminating comparisons with poet and climber Geoffrey Winthrop Young. Kendall also includes haikus by modern poets and considerations of the latest theory of bird-flight by John Videler to show how the Thomassy view of birds still resonates today amongst thinkers of various disciplines. She skilfully demonstrates how birds revealed their elusive and contradictory nature to Thomas along with their 'alternative means of perception or seeing', and how they also provided an example of a kind of Negative Capability by the way in which they interacted with landscape and Man.

Birds were rarely far from Thomas's sensibility and he was still writing about them in the War Diary, shortly before his death ('Frosty and clear and some blackbirds singing at Agny Château in the quiet of exhausted battery' (28 March 1917)). Kendall demonstrates how they played a crucial role in the development of his thought about the relationship of human endeavour and Nature, and how he drew inspiration both from their freedom to roam and their loyalty to particular locations and what this told him about the connection of living things to their rocks, and stones, and trees. This book uncovers the detail in that relationship, but remembers too that it is not always what birds offered overtly that Thomas was most interested in, but what Kendall calls 'the importance of not seeing fully'. It was what birds intimated, and the traces they left behind on their travels, that often counted more, however mistier and mistier.

James Lowe

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Thank you Mr Thornton for a Book Recommended!

In ETF Newsletter 72 Colin Thornton reviewed "*Last Words for Edward Thomas*" by Giles Watson (http:/ / lulu.com/ shop/ giles-watson). I had recently read Thomas's war diaries and was intrigued to see this tribute.

Though Colin refers to the images accompanying Giles's poems, a "picture (really) is worth a thousand words" in this book. The illustrations are genuine enhancements. I particularly liked the cover photograph, a solarised image of a small bird set against natural briars with barbed wire in its field; a visual metaphor for Edward Thomas like none I have seen! You can almost hear the brave, clear song emanating from its ensnarement. Another from the 'Flanders Field Exhibition, Ypres' of buttons and debris is particularly evocative. Watson's visual inclusions are balanced with his text as well as the much-celebrated collaboration of Ted Hughes and Fay Godwin in "*The Remains of Elmet*."

Prior to owning the book, I had thought Watson's decision to use fragments of Thomas's diary to begin his own poems to be an unethical arrogance, an impudent theft from a defenceless much-loved poet; a chance to capitalise on another's greatness. Sacrilege even! But the book is anything but this. It is almost reverentially dedicated to Thomas's genius, providing some imagery entirely in keeping with Thomas's own delights (...(a) "tell North by skeins of crying geese whose chevrons fill the dusk ..."; (b) "The sun and the wind are drying the mud/ but the mortar and shell, they will harrow/ us into the ground, then fledge us around/ with fine green feathers of yarrow.")

Some I didn't like. (That is when one's contrasting selection enables one to doubly enjoy their choice!) Rarely, however, are there moments when Watson's poetry doesn't work, (that have the signature of Thomas's poetical dreads - i.e. when we 'feel' the writer scrawling across the page struggling for the 'nth edit; though I suspect this is more my unique perception. Other readers may wince in entirely different places.)

Watson makes no special claims for his own poetic skills. This work is quite clearly produced in deference. Thomas devotees may need to swallow some prejudices, but I commend this little book of poems as a valid complement to our empathy with those last hours of a great poet's life and work. Colin Thornton suggested you could believe Watson was in touch with Thomas's thoughts. I agree. Watson hopes his book contain "little tributes to (T's) genius." They certainly are for me - with an added celebration of Edward's amazing visual acuity suggested by the fine photographs.

Gwilym Scourfield

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Other News

Jean Moorcroft-Wilson's biography of Edward Thomas will be published by Bloomsbury in May 2015.

***Roy Campbell**: Poet of Two Wars* by Richard Emeny was published by Cecil Woolf in the 'War Poets' series in 2014.

Robert Crawford's biography of T S Eliot, *Young Eliot*, will be published by Jonathan Cape at the end of January 2015.

***Branch-Lines**: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry*, an Enitharmon Bestseller, originally published in 2007, was published in a new edition in the autumn of 2014.

The National Trust are organising a poetry and arts day on Saturday June 13th 2015 at May Hill. The Edward Thomas Fellowship and Friends of the Dymock Poets are invited to attend and to read poems inspired by the Hill. Local artists will display work inspired by the Hill in the Village Hall and there will be guided walks up the Hill when poetry connected with the Hill will be read. Other attractions in the field of interpretive art, possibly including contemporary dance and music are being explored. Connected with this is a poetry competition to be judged by a well-known poet with cash prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd entries. Poems can be any length up to 40 lines and must relate to the landscape of May Hill. The closing date for this is 1st May 2015 and the entry fee is £5 per poem. Please send cheques payable to the `National Trust` and entries to the National Trust – Heart of the Cotswolds, Ebworth Centre, The Camp, Glos. GL6 7ES.

The Great War at Sea Poetry Project: greatwaratseapoetry.weebly.com and greatwaratsea.blogspot.co.uk. The Great War at Sea Poetry Project was set up by Michael 'Bully' Shankland to research examples of this genre but also to consider the lack of attention such work has received in subsequent decades after the Great War.

Silence is a new audio CD of Edward Thomas's poetry by Jack Sheeran and it includes fourteen poems (jacksheeranaudio.weebly.com)

The Friends of the Dymock Poets Spring Day at Bromsberrow Village Hall on 21 March will include a talk by Guy Cuthbertson on 'Wilfred Owen and the Dymock Poets' and a talk by Anne Harvey on Eleanor Farjeon. The talks are open to non-members if they book in advance. http:/ / www.dymockpoets.org.uk/ Events.htm

Back cover: Edna Longley


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