And to illustrate the sense of pleasure a good book is able to provide, let us compare it with what Proust says of the Countess Potocka:

> ... they are unable to renounce those pleasures, they are captivated because the comtesse is always herself, that is to say somebody that no-one else could be, drawn in because one never knows what is going to happen with her from one moment to the next, because she is, not inconstant, but constantly changing.[37]

A book's time (like man's time) is set. All books, however, provide a glimpse of eternity – at the very least in that moment of creation by the writer.[38] And no one can predict how long this moment will last. From this perspective – although Proust is not explicit – the uniqueness of every moment, every smile, every puddle of rain (and we could go on...), becomes the latent promise of permanence. Art, therefore, creates a kind of distillation of life in which we live more truthfully and with greater intensity; in which we are given the opportunity to create a "flagship" out of our every weakness. Art is a space separated from the world, a space to which in some mysterious way we still have access, and in which our own insignificance, frailty and transience become a gateway to eternity. As Proust said: "Nothing lasts, not even death" (Rien ne dure, pas même la mort!).[39]

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37 Proust, "Le salon de la Comtesse Potocka", *Chroniques*, p. 61. English translation available at <http://www.yorktaylors.free-online.co.uk/potocka.htm>, [accessed 16 April 2016].

38 We find an identical idea in Borges: "The joy of writing is not measured by the virtues or failings of the end product. Every human work is contemptible, affirms Carlyle, but its execution is not." Borges, "Prólogo", *Los conjurados*, p. 14.

39 Proust, *Essais et articles*, p. 244.

Out in the open: *The Pocket Book* of Edward Thomas

Justin Quinn

1

The Edwardian period in English poetry is not yet modernist, but neither can it be gathered back into Victorianism. It does not try to "make it new" (in Ezra Pound's phrase) by abandoning traditional rhyme and meters, thus catapulting itself into modernity; equally it is not simply poetry of the *fin de siècle* – such a label implies that it is merely marks the end of an era, its resources insufficient for dealing with the twentieth century. In recent years, we have rediscovered this period in order to question conceptions of both the Victorians and the modernists, finding in Edwardian literature forces that propel its works into the future, making writers such as Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster and John Galsworthy our contemporaries, as much as James Joyce, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf, albeit in different ways.

The rising reputation of the poet Edward Thomas is an index of this general shift. Before this, he was consigned to minor categories such as Georgian poetry and Nature poetry. When W. H. Auden was totting up his poetic influences in "A Thanksgiving" (1973), he named Thomas as important, but only at the beginning of his, Auden's, career. For many decades, Auden was considered to be the attentive scribe of the modern world, able to set a poem in the transit lounge of an airport before anyone else. Edward Thomas, on the other hand, never lived to see such a transit lounge, and indeed it seemed anomalous that he had even survived into the twentieth century, let alone its second decade. As anomalous as Hardy who survived till 1928, a Victorian ghost who hadn't been told he was dead. Or Robert Frost, who died in 1963. The historiographers of modernist poetry had difficulty with these lives and afterlives, and Lionel Trilling even went so far as to figure Frost as a radical modernist

involved in "the terrifying process of the disintegration and sloughing off of the old consciousness".[1] Once a point like this is made, Modernism loses its explanatory power – for Frost, like Thomas, did indeed revise the tradition, but both poets went a different way from Pound, T. S. Eliot and William Carlos Williams.

Antony Easthope saw Thomas as part of the empiricist tradition, whose poems deploy "an 'I' who is coherent and self-possessed, a unified subject, secure in its ability to affirm 'I remember', 'I saw'."[2] Easthope is too quick to push Thomas into a retrograde anti-Modernism, overlooking his radical erasures of the self, both in the poems and his ideas of poetic tradition. More helpfully, Edna Longley subtly "reinserts him into the Edwardian period",[3] arguing that:

> Thomas's poetry destabilises authority, perception and time in a spirit often regarded as peculiar to modernist aesthetics. It does so with precise reference to environmental and epistemological issues latent in his immediate historical context. And it exhibits a kind of historical imagination usually precluded by the premises of American and Irish modernism.[4]

By reading him as both as a poet of war and ecology, she connects him with a more wide-ranging revaluation of Modernism, compelling us to find new ways to consider poets as diverse as Frost, Yeats and Auden, not as mere exceptions or anomalies, or modernists in spite of themselves, but as central poets in a tradition that flowed into the Northern Irish renaissance; following her lead, we can see his poems informing poets such as Richard Wilbur, Derek Walcott and Joseph Brodsky.

Questions of the canon will occupy me here, not only through readings of Thomas's poems within such an Edwardian frame, but also through his own figurations of the poetic tradition in the anthology, *The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs of the Open Air* (1907). This overlooked volume reconfigures the relations between nation and poetry, rejecting chronol-

1 Lionel Trilling, "A Speech on Robert Frost: A Cultural Episode", *Partisan Review*, Summer 1959, 26, p. 452.

2 Antony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 180.

3 Edna Longley, *Poetry and Posterity*, Highgreen, Bloodaxe Books, 2000, p. 23.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

ogy and conservative notions of canonicity, in favour of other patterns, too radical to be co-opted by either Victorianism or Modernism. Thus my approach complements Longley's, as it views the Edwardian period, not as dull interregnum, but as contemporary resource for our understanding of the poetic tradition – whether writing poems or writing about poems.

2

The most significant figuration of the English poetic canon in the nineteenth century was Frances Turner Palgrave's anthology, *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*. First published in 1861, it went through several further editions, in which poems were added, dropped and rearranged. Christopher Ricks has remarked that one of the reason's for the anthology's success was Palgrave's "having a good ear, especially when it listened to Tennyson".[5] Prospective anthologists will always draw the interested advice of writers, but Tennyson insisted his own work be omitted from the book; rather we have a canon which leads to and explains his pre-eminent position in his time, and is a monument of Victorian taste.

The work is arranged chronologically, beginning with a poem by the late sixteenth-century poet Thomas Nashe. His "Spring" alludes lightly to an even older English song, "Sumer Is Icumen In", from the thirteenth century. The anthology is divided into four books. The first brings us up to the mid-seventeenth century, that great opening flourish of the English lyric tradition. The second book, beginning with John Milton, goes to the cusp of the eighteenth century, ending with John Dryden, who straddled both periods, both politically and poetically. The third, which covered the eighteenth century, had perhaps the hardest task of all – to make a collection of lyric poems from an age that excelled in longer narratives and philosophical meditation.

The last and longest book pays honor to the Romantic poets. Here Tennyson's career is iconic: his early work, to 1833, is suffused with Keatsian fragrances and ease, but after the death of his close friend Arthur Henry Hallam, he becomes the eminent Victorian, mournfully rejecting such

5 Ricks, Christopher, "The Making of *The Golden Treasury*", in Christopher Ricks (ed.), *The Golden Treasury*, London, Penguin, 1991, p. 449.

temptations in favour of moral and religious probity, its stolid expression often achieved in spite of Tennyson's own loucher instincts. The romantics haunted other Victorians, most notably Matthew Arnold, who wrote in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864):

> It has long seemed to me that the burst of creativity in our literature, through the first quarter of this century, had about it in fact something premature; and that from the cause its productions are doomed, most of them, in spite of the sanguine hopes which accompanied and do still accompany them, to prove hardly more lasting than the productions of far less splendid epochs.[6]

His unease rather reflects doubts about his own era, rather than the preceding one. In "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse", he would characterize himself and his fellow Victorians as "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born [...]".[7] While Palgrave, along with other Victorians, might have demurred at Shelley's politics, Byron's morals and the profusion of sensuous pleasures in Keats, he still gave them the greatest representation of all. The Romantics both dazzled and puzzled the Victorians in equal degree.

Balancing such elements are patriotic poems of lesser quality, such as James Thomson's "Rule, Britannia!" and Thomas Campbell's "Ye Mariners of England"; as well as poems that indirectly bolster the English Protestant cause, such as Henry Wotton's "Elizabeth of Bohemia". These pinion the anthology within a nationalist – even jingoistic – military tradition, and their presence changes the way we read other poets, such as William Wordsworth, who becomes a more stalwart patriot in Palgrave's presentation than he was in fact. Neither does the reader get more than a glimpse of Shelley's revolutionary rage from Palgrave's selection. To present this poet without politics reminds us of Samuel Johnson's remark about seeing dogs walk on their hind legs: "It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

6 Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time", *Essays in Criticism*, London, Macmillan, 1865, pp. 6–7.

7 Matthew Arnold, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, Kenneth Allott (ed.), London, Longmans, 1965, p. 288.

A further important aspect was the title. Palgrave lamented that in his day "a book is no more a treasure to be kept and studied and known by heart".[8] (Another way of talking about poems that comes into currency during this period is as "gems".[9]) The editor has mined the subterranean seams to extract the precious stones and metals from English earth. These become the "treasure". But Palgrave went further, calling it a treasury, which reminds us of the Treasury of England, established in the twelfth century, and to this day is the highest office of executive power in Britain (this is illustrated by the fact that 10 Downing Street is the office of the First Lord of the Treasury, who also and usually is the Prime Minister). This figures the poetic canon on the model of an English political institution, suggesting that both poetry and politics have, ultimately, the same general goal: nation building. Such a title reinforces the nationalist declarations of Thomson and Campbell in the book.

This is the familiar story of cultural value appropriated by nationalist criticism. The pattern proliferates in European nations throughout the nineteenth century. Yet Britain was not merely another European nation; it was master of one of the largest empires the world had ever seen. Palgrave's book played an integral role in imperial pedagogy, taught from Ireland to India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[10] One prominent imperial educationalist wrote to Palgrave from Bombay in 1862 to say that the *Golden Treasury* would "be suitable as an English class-book for the higher native students. [...] English poetry is to these people what Homer is to us."[11] While Ricks views this as a noble impulse, others may see it as an example of imperialist narcissism, as pedagogues use their students to witness how British culture is equated with that of ancient Greece. The higher natives may well have learned a different lesson from that which their teachers intended.

It was also an extremely popular book having sold over 650,000 copies by 1940.[12] Its penetration through anglophone culture throughout the world was unprecedented, providing a foil for many Modernists, but also a vital

8 Quoted in Ricks, *The Golden Treasury*, p. 437.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 438.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 444.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

influence on poets such as Patrick Kavanagh, Theodore Roethke and Philip Larkin. Though it fell out of favour in the second half of the twentieth century, school textbooks still took their bearings from Palgrave well into the 1980s. I picked it up only when I was around forty, and, like the man who reads *Hamlet* for the first time at that age, I found it to be full of quotations, both from the poems I had been taught at school, and from the conversation of my parents' generation. In 1900, a later anthologist bore witness to this influence, when he wrote in the preface of his own collection that:

> Few of my contemporaries can erase – or would wish to erase – the dye their minds took from the late Mr. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*: and he who has returned to it again and again with an affection born of companionship on many journeys must remember not only what the *Golden Treasury* includes, but the moment when this or that poem appealed to him, and even how it lies on the page.[13]

The editor was Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, whose *Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1900*, appeared in 1900. This differs from Palgrave by going a further three centuries into the past, beginning with "Sumer Is Icumen In," which he titles "Cuckoo Song." Also, instead of a "treasury" in the title the book bears the imprimatur of one of England's oldest and most prestigious universities – an institutional association of a different, and arguably more substantial kind. But both books have a sequential chronology (though, unlike Palgrave, Quiller-Couch does not divide his material at all). There is simply a single, continuous sequence of poems covering almost a millennium, culled "from wheresoever the Muse has followed the tongue which among living tongues she most delights to honour."[14] This means America, and it also means that English poetry is the best in the world. Quiller-Couch figures this editorial work in terms of imperial appropriation: "To bring home and render so great a spoil compendiously has been my capital difficulty."[15]

13 Arthur Quiller-Couch, "Preface to the First Edition", in Arthur Quiller-Couch (ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1918*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1939, p. xi.

14 *Ibid.*, p. vii.

15 *Ibid.*

Sequential chronology in such anthologies necessarily creates parallels with history, as though the poetry is a reflection of growing imperial glory. Certainly, Quiller-Couch encourages such parallels in his preface. Nationalism as a cultural discourse encouraged such arrangement of poetry and other literary genres, and usually described a progression from crude, yet forceful beginnings ("Sumer") to sophisticated civilized poetry (Tennyson, Browning, et al.). Imperial histories such as Thomas Babington Macaulay's *History of England from the Accession of James II* (1848) to the late flowering of Winston Churchill's *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (1956–58) presented British power as a necessary consequence of national character, as revealed through their narratives, explaining how glory most delights to honor Englishmen, as Quiller-Couch might put it.

It may well be asked whether sequential chronology in such anthologies is necessarily nationalist or imperialist. After all, later British anthologies employ the structure but are anti-imperialist in their approach, for instance Simon Armitage and Mick Imlah's *Penguin Book of Poetry from Britain and Ireland* (1998). This is true, but even if used for radical postcolonial readings of poetry, such a framework has always pegged poetry's development to the nation – no matter how cured of flag-waving imperialism. Irish poets only find themselves in such an anthology as Armitage and Imlah's because of political facts that have little to do with poems.

Moreover, while sequential chronology may well seem the most natural way to structure the materials, it is nevertheless abstract and artificial, imposing continuity of tradition through later textual scholarship rather than actual influence from one generation to the next. An extreme example of this is *Beowulf*, one of the first poems in Old English, but by no means a founding document, as it did not come to wider awareness till the early nineteenth century. It is abstract because, with each passing century, there is an increasing tradition that influences the poet. For instance, to come upon the Romantic poets in either Palgrave or Quiller-Couch, one primarily understands them as reacting to what Arnold described as the "classics of our prose" in the preceding century. Yet the range of influences, continuities and negative reactions was more various than this. Moreover, as poets become more conscious of the tradition between them, it often leads to what Matthew Campbell discusses as the "synthetic construct", in which later poets adopt the style and lexicon

of earlier phases, best exemplified in the work of Thomas Chatterton.[16] Throughout the nineteenth century, the progress of English poetry was marked by forceful retrospective modes, as well as lateral excursions into dialect in William Barnes and Samuel Ferguson. Again, it will be observed that chronology does not rule out such alternative narratives – in fact, it enables us to construct them more precisely. Yet this begs the question, "more precisely" in what way if not to shore up imperialist, nationalist or crypto-nationalist (as in the recent wave of postcolonial criticism) readings of culture and history. Such an idea of precision is based once more on an abstract Cartesian conception of time, which is not invalid, but neither does it have necessary priority. Sequential chronology is not the natural basis upon which narratives can be built, rather it is merely one further such narrative. That is has been established as primary over the preceding centuries, and that such primacy has been used for a range of political and cultural reasons, becomes immediately apparent when an anthology proposes a different chronological system, as Edward Thomas arranges the poetic tradition in the frame of a single day.

3

When Thomas published his *Pocket Book of Poems and Songs of the Open Air* in 1907, he made a remarkable statement in his prefatory note:

> This anthology is meant to please those lovers of poetry and the country who like a book that can always lighten some of their burdens or give wings to their delight, whether in the open air by day, or under the roof at evening; for I have gathered into it much of the finest English poetry, and that poetry, at its best, can hardly avoid the open air.[17]

On the face of it, this hardly seems noteworthy. Palgrave's anthology, as well as Quiller-Couch's, were also considered "knapsack books", to be carried by travelers on journeys (which Quiller-Couch refers to above

16 Matthew Campbell, *Irish Poetry Under the Union, 1801–1924*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 1.

17 Edward Thomas, "Note by the Compiler", in Edward Thomas (ed.), *Pocket Book of Poems and Songs of the Open Air*, London, Grant Richards, 1907, p. vii.

in his homage to Palgrave), as well as soldiers going into battle. What is remarkable here is Thomas's reference to the "open air", echoing his own title. The implications of this only become clear as we read further in the anthology, and in Thomas's work, but at this stage we can at least remark that it places poetry in a very different environment from a treasury or a university. In American usage a "pocket book" is a wallet, but for Thomas, it was simply a book to be slipped in one's pocket when going out the door for a day's excursion.

The collocation, "open air", though still widely used in English, had a particular provenance for Thomas in the work of the nature writer Richard Jefferies, who published a book entitled *The Open Air* in 1885. Thomas made a selection from Jefferies's work, remarking in the preface that "Air and sun so cleaned and sweetened his work that in the end the cleanness and sweetness of Nature herself become inseparable from it in our minds."[18] The implication of this, and the preceding comment from the anthology's preface, is that the writing should breathe the air of the open countryside, both when it is being produced and when it is being consumed. Thomas, as we shall see, wishes to lead English poetry out of the nation's representative institutions and link it – line by line, stanza by stanza – to the hills, the forests, the suburbs and the seasons. Again, this may seem a modest goal, part of the Victorian and Edwardian fad for literary tourism, as Andrea Zemgulys describes it, when she remarks that:

> Through material markers and published descriptions, whole counties became "Shakespeare's" or "Wordsworth's" and entire city neighborhoods "Johnson's" or "Dickens's"; particular buildings, houses, and streets became historic for their association with the living activities of the celebrity such as walking, breathing, and gardening, and further including those activities of beloved *imaginary* characters.[19]

18 Edward Thomas, "Introduction", in Richard Jefferies (ed.), *The Hills and the Vale*, London, Duckworth, 1909. Reproduced as e-book, Project Gutenberg.

19 Andrea Zemgulys, *Modernism and the Locations of Literary Heritage*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 3.

Once these identifications were documented, middle-class tourists took holidays in such locations, at once asserting the cultural value of their country and themselves. This is a market for which Thomas wrote exhaustively in his travel books. Yet, in both the anthology and poems, Thomas connects the English landscape with English literature in a different way.

In place of a sequence of centuries, Thomas takes a single day's journey as the structure of his material. First, there is "the invitation", which tempts the reader or poet out of his home, beginning with Housman's "Reveille", which sounds a repeated imperative: "Wake".[20] Then the order changes to:

> Up, lad, up, 'tis late for lying:
> Hear drums of morning play;
> Hark, the empty highways crying
> "Who'll beyond the hills away?"[21]

The next sections are: "The Start in the Morning", "Wayside Rest", "Village and Inn", "The Footpath" and "Evening". The last poem in the book is Quiller-Couch's first, "Sumer Is Icumen In". The arrangement is thematic, but Thomas allows himself much sea-room in his choice of poems for each section – for instance, it is unclear why "The Lady of Shalott" is included under "The Footpath" or "All Around My Hat" under "Wayside Rest".

One consequence of this organization is that poets from different eras and dialects are mixed together throughout. Thus Housman (1859–1936) is followed by the seventeenth-century dramatist, Richard Brome; then an anonymous poet; then Edmund Spenser, anonymous, Sir Walter Scott, Geoffrey Chaucer, Arthur Hugh Clough and so on. Such a promiscuous chronology makes archaic registers collide with contemporary ones, suggesting historical simultaneity. I remarked above on the artificial nature of sequential chronology; is not Thomas's approach, then, not equally bizarre? Certainly, while Housman's speech is closer to the idiom of the late Victorian period, Chaucer's is distant. Yet such an organization accords with Thomas's intuition about the landscape itself. History

20 Thomas, *Pocket Book of Poems and Songs of the Open Air*, p. 3.

21 *Ibid.*

is always on the surface – either of the land itself, or in the speech of those who work the land. Our memory of the past is an integral part of our perception of the present landscape. As he puts it in "February Afternoon": "Time swims before me, making as a day / A thousand years".[22] The difference in idiom between Chaucer and Housman, which would seem to suggest they belong at opposite ends of a spectrum of English poetry, are for Thomas distractions from more fundamental commonalties. In his poetry, this is figured by the birdsong that he encounters in the countryside. Here is the octet of "February Afternoon":

> Men heard this roar of parleying starlings, saw,
> A thousand years ago even as now,
> Black rooks with white gulls following the plough
> So that the first are last until a caw
> Commands that last are first again, – a law
> Which was of old when one, like me, dreamed how
> A thousand years might dust lie on his brow
> Yet thus would birds do between hedge and shaw.[23]

It is striking that the phrase "a thousand years" occurs three times in the course of a sonnet that is about a single winter afternoon. This connects with Thomas's idea of the way that history mediates our relationship with the natural world: to imagine that we can perceive these particular starlings on this particular afternoon without being formed by the generations that have inhabited the land before us is unrealistic. Yet he also insists that this does not mean that history stretches sequentially back from our present awareness, like the centuries of poetry in Palgrave and Quiller-Couch. He clearly says that sequence is baffled, as "the first are last", and then changed back, suggesting a continuous random re-ordering. This is "a law" that arises out of humans' interaction with the land itself, not one that was constructed by society without reference to the land, and it is analogous to his intuition that the English poetic tradition, itself another set of songs, like the birds, also cannot "avoid the open air".

22 Edward Thomas, *The Annotated Poems of Edward Thomas*, Edna Longley (ed.), Highgreen, Bloodaxe Books, 2008, p. 109.

23 *Ibid.*

Thomas expressed his dissenting opinion unambiguously, when he rejected the institutional conception of history, in favour of another:

> The truth is that, though the past allures me, and to discover a cathedral for myself would be an immense pleasure, I have not historic sense and no curiosity. I mention these trivial things because they may be important to those who read what I am paid for writing. I have read a great deal of history – in fact, a university gave me a degree out of respect for my apparent knowledge of history – but I have forgotten it all, or it has got into my blood and is present in me in a form which defies evocation or analysis. But as far as I can tell I am pure of history.[24]

It is important to him here that he finds the cathedral unmediated by culture, without a guidebook or encyclopedia. It must erupt into his daily experience unimpeded by explanations. This is not to say that he wishes to see such a cathedral as merely one more object of contemporary experience, equivalent in value and texture to, say, a suburban house. Rather, the pastness of the object will be more immediate if it is not encrusted in paragraphs of historical research. This recalls another arresting image: "A dolmen rises out of the wheat in one field, like a quotation from an unknown language in the fair page of a book."[25] The dolmen is a relic of another age, and yet it is no less present to our experience than the wheat field: the two phenomena occur simultaneously; one does not precede the other in our vision.

In his selection of Richard Jefferies's essays, Thomas places "Choosing a Gun" first: the essay recounts how Jefferies rejects modern, industrial weapons in favour of older models made by artisans. This leads him to a consideration of the way in which man and gun move through the countryside:

> That would be sport. An imperfect weapon – well, yes; but the imperfect weapon would somehow harmonize with the forest, with the huge old hollow oaks, the beeches full of knot-holes, the mysterious thickets, the tall fern, the silence and solitude. It would make the forest seem a forest – such as existed hundreds of years ago; it would make the chase a real chase, not a foregone conclusion. It would equalize the chances, and give the buck "law." In short, it would be real shooting.[26]

Jefferies expresses a nostalgia for forests "such as existed hundreds of years ago", but at the same time he asserts that those forests can and do return when we move through them properly, that is, when we give ourselves, as well as the bucks, law, by withdrawing from industrialism to an older idea of craft. Thomas follows Jefferies's intuition through his assertion in *The Pocket Book* and his poems that the past is always recuperable.

Such recuperation takes various forms, above all in the form of songs. *The Pocket Book* includes a range of work, from the sophisticated literary art of poets like Wordsworth and Swinburne, to Housman's imitation of English ballads, to ballads themselves, accompanied by musical notation. One is implicitly encouraged by Thomas to lie down in a field and hum the notes, or play them on a small whistle, allowing the songs in the book to mix with the songs of English birds in the trees above. Thus, Thomas's spectrum stretches from complex literary artifice to birdsong. No one song is more archaic than another if it can be spoken or sung in the open air in this way; all those he includes are songs of England and its land. Thomas ties this law, through rhyme, to the old English word for a small wood, or copse, "shaw", making that archaic and dialect term current again, thus recuperated.

This is particularly apparent in the large number of works by anonymous authors in the anthology. Romanticism encourages the following generations to view poetry as self-expression, yet such poems and songs are accretions of many generations – adjusted, transposed, revised, expanded and contracted with each performance. They are like a house that has been partially rebuilt every few decades over many centuries. Time and human labour have been mixed into it in equal measure. Rather than self-expression, such ballads and songs have a collective authorship that invokes the history of the performative community, or even the land itself, where all those preceding generations now lie.

24 Edward Thomas, *Prose Writings: A Selected Edition*, vol. II, *England and Wales*, Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn (eds.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 255.

25 Quoted in Edward Thomas, *Prose Writings: A Selected Edition*, vol. I, *Autobiographies*, Guy Cuthbertson (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 89.

26 Jefferies, *The Hills and the Vale.*

Whereas Housman's "Reveille", like many other European poems of the nineteenth century, simulates this effect, Thomas in his own poetry marks the distance of his own poems from it. Nowhere is this more apparent than in "The Penny Whistle":

> The new moon hangs like an ivory bugle
> In the naked frosty blue;
> And the ghylls of the forest, already blackened
> By Winter, are blackened anew.
>
> The brooks that cut up and increase the forest,
> As if they had never known
> The sun, are roaring with black hollow voices
> Betwixt rage and a moan.
>
> But still the caravan-hut by the hollies
> Like a kingfisher gleams between:
> Round the mossed old hearths of the charcoal-burners
> First primroses ask to be seen.
>
> The charcoal-burners are black, but their linen
> Blows white on the line;
> And white the letter the girl is reading
> Under that crescent fine;
>
> And her brother who hides apart in a thicket,
> Slowly and surely playing
> On a whistle an olden nursery melody,
> Says far more than I am saying.[27]

This poem, one of Thomas's finest, establishes itself in strongly visual terms, contrasting the moon with the blackness of the forest, parts of which, seemingly, have never even been touched by the sun. This is then cross-hatched by auditory phenomena – those "black hollow voices / Betwixt rage and a moan." The third stanza moves from the natural figurations of the landscape to those created by human labour – the charcoal,

27 Thomas, *The Annotated Poems of Edward Thomas*, p. 50.

the caravan, the linen, the tended primroses – but the same monochrome patterns play through them also. We are not told much about the relationship between the sister and brother, but we wonder if the letter is from a parent or her lover, and whether the brother hides in the bushes because he in some way disagrees with the communication. Or Thomas could be suggesting that he is faun-like, spending his waking hours in the woods, playing on his whistle, closer to the natural world than his sister?

These surmises artfully distract us, as Thomas prepares to turn the poem in another direction in the final line, where he suddenly makes us aware of two things: first, that he himself is implicated in the scene as observer and commentator; and second, that he has not said much of substance, or at least not as much as is contained in the penny whistle's tune. Folk melody is contrasted with sophisticated lyric poetry, and the latter is found wanting. There is an implication, bolstered by our reading of Thomas's poems, that folk melody encodes more experience, stretching over generations, encompassing all possible fates, including those of the speaker himself. A lyric poem – the type Thomas writes – might be merely self-expression, a flimsy thing compared to the tune played on the penny whistle, which not only expresses the historical experience of a particular community, but which is also knitted into a particular landscape. Thomas was happy to include recently discovered ballads from Westmorland in *The Pocket Book*, reminding us that the regional integrity of folk melodies was still strong at the end of the nineteenth century.[28] Like the songs of birds, this is the music that the land makes, as it uses humans for its instruments.

In its demotion of self-expression, the poem, like others by Thomas, is anti-Romantic. But neither British Romanticism, nor European more generally, can be collapsed to the single phenomenon of self-expression, as it also found propulsive force in folk ballads; so at least in this sense he happily inherits Romantic practices (especially from William Wordsworth). A further consequence is that it allows Thomas to avoid the demand – so common in the Victorian era – for art to be morally edifying. There is no moral or other content to the tune of the penny whistle – it is merely the sound of the natural environment. (In this respect, Thomas is a loyal follower of Hardy.) A third consequence of Thomas's engagement

28 *Ibid.*, "Note", p. viii.

with the landscape and its songs (whether sung by birds or hidden brothers) is that he learns to assert a subtle patriotism of an unimperial kind, one that rejects ideas of Great Britain and the British Empire, in favour of England. The following passage, from Thomas's travel book, *The South Country* (1909), describes an old house and its inhabitant:

> He goes into a cottage that stands worn and old and without a right angle in its timbers or its thatch any more than in its apple trees and solitary quince which all but hide the lilac and massed honesty of the little garden. This is a house – I had almost said this is a man – that looked upon England when it could move men to such songs as, "Come, live with me and be my love," or –
>
> "Hey, down a down!" did Dian sing,
> Amongst her virgins sitting;
> "Than love there is no vainer thing,
> For maidens most unfitting."
> And so I think I, with a down, down derry.
>
> For a moment or less as he goes under the porch I seem to see that England, that swan's nest, that island which a man's heart was not too big to love utterly. But now what with Great Britain, the British Empire, Britons, Britishers, and the English-speaking world, the choice offered to whomsoever would be patriotic is embarrassing, and he is fortunate who can find an ideal England of the past, the present, and the future to worship, and embody it in his native fields and waters or his garden, as in a graven image.[29]

Such a "graven image" suggests a fixed icon for nostalgic desire, but Thomas's Old England is exhilarating only in those moments when it erupts into the present, like the dolmen in the wheat field. These provide the dramatic moments in the prose, and are raised to even higher art in the poems. Englands of various ages – old, medieval, contemporary – mix together, and they are all equally present to experience – an experience, we must note, that finds itself outside the normal channels of patriotic imperialism.

29 Edward Thomas, *The South Country*, London, Everyman, 1993, p. 55.

4

It may be asked whether Thomas here, in his rejection of modern formations of England, is indulging in rural nostalgia, yet the two poems he refers to in this passage come from *Englands Helicon*, a collection of Elizabethan verse first published in 1600. Christopher Marlowe is the author of "Come Live with Me" and the author of "Hey, Down a Down" is given there as "Ignoto" (possibly Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, or Sir Walter Raleigh). Thomas's paragraph seems, *prima facie*, to be nostalgic, but the full text of the Ignoto poem itself is nostalgic for a time "When women knew no woe, / But lived themselves to please, / Men's feigning guiles they did not know"; whereas now their world is "A jealous hell, a painted show".[30] This suggests the endless regression of an "ideal England" into the past, of the kind that Raymond Williams described in *The Country and the City* (1973), as each generation is convinced that a purer English countryside existed in the past. Williams then looks at the particular historical period that a later generation envied, and finds that the earlier writers in their turn looked back further. "Where indeed shall we go," Williams asks, "before the elevator stops?"[31]

> One answer, of course, is Eden [...]. But we must first get off the escalator, and consider its general movement.
>
> Is it anything more than a well-known habit of using the past, the "good old days", as a stick to beat the present? It is clearly something of that, but there are still difficulties. The apparent resting places, the successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred but which then start to move and recede, have some actual significance, when they are looked at in their own terms. [...] [W]hat seemed a single escalator, a perpetual recession into history, turns out, on reflection, to be a more complicated movement: Old England, settlement, rural virtues – all these, in fact, mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought to question.[32]

30 A. H. Bullen (ed.), *England's Helicon: A Collection of Lyrical and Pastoral Poems Published in 1600*, London, Lawrence and Bullen, 1899, p. 152–153.

31 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 11.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Following Williams's intuition, we are prompted to ask what did such rural retrospectives mean for Thomas during the Edwardian period. By arranging the poems of *The Pocket Book* according to the hours of the day, and stages of an excursion (somewhat like the way Auden would later arrange his sequence "Horae Canonicae" around the Christian offices of daily prayer), Thomas tested the English tradition anew against the open air and open land. He also implicitly sent readers to experience the poems in the landscape itself, and possibly sing them there also, in the fields during the day, or the inn at night. This is a work of restoration, or recuperation, a reminder that poetic tradition is strengthened not by placement in treasuries or universities, but by being experienced in the land of the country itself, during its days and seasons, as the body ages and is replaced by others, who then pick up the book we have dropped from our hands when we die.

Tradition, figured in this way, is not merely a collection of heterogeneous objects discovered in the landscape, each from a different historical period: they address us in different forms and with different strengths, and some even seem to anticipate our gaze. The dolmen, with its ancient markings, seems to say nothing to us, but what if it bore inscriptions relating to political life in 1907? "An Excelente Balade of Charitie" by Thomas Chatterton seems to gaze away from us, back towards an even Older England, but Wordsworth, time after time, in *The Pocket Book*, seems to be taking us into account, for instance here, in "To the River Duddon, Farewell":

> I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
> As being pass'd away. Vain sympathies!
> For backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
> I see what was, and is, and will abide;
> Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
> The Form remains, the Function never dies;
> While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
> We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
> The elements, must vanish; – be it so!
> Enough, if something from our hands have power
> To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
> And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,

> Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
> We feel that we are greater than we know.[33]

The river makes the poet think of his past, but that then prompts him to look in the other direction – towards "what will abide", and Edward Thomas is waiting there, as anthologist, inhabitant of English land and (bringing these two roles together) poet. It may be only a trick of the light, but Wordsworth's poem, as it lies in Thomas's *Pocket Book*, seems to be as much about the English poetic tradition as about this river in north-west England. Critics too frequently find metaphors of poetry within poems themselves; this case is different insofar as Thomas, with Wordsworth behind him, is pursuing identity – those moments when the land of England is indistinguishable from the songs of England. From this comes "power / To live, and act, and serve the future hour", even as our bodies decay.

There is an identity of another kind implicit in the poem. Wordsworth reaches forward, even as Thomas reaches back, and Thomas, in poems such as "It Was upon a July Evening", "The Thrush", "Song [2]" and "Some day, I think", repeats Wordsworth's gesture of looking into the future. The links of tradition are forged primarily by repetition, just as a rhyme scheme is made by recurring phonemes. Having given themselves over to the "power / To live and act, and serve the future hour", both poets have ceded most of their personal identity, and blur one into the other. The self – which one strand of Romantic poetry strives to express – is erased, as poets give themselves over to song. Our great claims to being brave, mighty or wise fade with our bodies, the form and function of songs remains. Again, it is worth emphasizing that neither Wordsworth nor Thomas think that poetry serves, as Shakespeare thinks it does in the sonnets, to immortalize particular selves. Rather it is merely another type of song that persists over England, mixed in now with the noise of highways, industrial plants, the sound of rain and the birds of different kinds.

It is hard to say whether this is nationalist or anti-nationalist. Certainly, we note that Thomas proudly fought in the British army, dying to serve a future hour. Matthew Hollis, in his biography of Thomas, *Now*

33 Thomas, *Pocket Book*, p. 262.

All Roads Lead to France (2011), views this as the culmination of his life and work, quoting a statement of September 1914: "I am slowly growing into a conscious Englishman."[34] But Thomas's work as both poet and anthologist can read as a departure from the positivistic values of sequential chronology, national tradition, and empire, in favour of an approach that prefigures phenomenology, in many ways a further illustration of Martin Heidegger's philosophy of language and poetry along with Rainer Maria Rilke and, above all, Georg Trakl. In "The Origin of the Work of Art", a lecture first delivered in 1935 and published in 1950, Heidegger remarks that:

> Genuinely poetic projection is the opening up or disclosure of that into which human being as historical is already cast. This is the earth and, for an historical people, its earth, the self-closing ground on which it rests together with everything that it already is, though still hidden from itself.[35]

Thomas's anthologizing and his poetry are such disclosures of the actual earth of England and its songs, conveying his acute awareness of the historical fate of that land's people, not as expressed in chronological abstraction, but in immediate sensory experience of the lay of the land. This was hidden from itself – that "self" is both the land and its people – by narratives of appropriative nationalism that took on imperial dimensions. Yet mention of Heidegger and a date like 1935, a year after his resignation as Rector of the University of Freiburg, reminds us of the way in which such phenomenology of the earth and of a historical people can be both a rejection of nineteenth-century positivism and also an embrace of a form of nationalism whose virulence and violence were unprecedented. One debate of European philosophy in the last few decades concerns the question of whether Nazism is inherent in Heidegger's phenomenology, and it necessarily pertains to Thomas's growth into the "conscious Englishman" who went to fight the Germans. From his letters and biography we know that Thomas would have abhorred such a consequence of his

34 Quoted in Matthew Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas*, London, Faber and Faber, 2011, p. 161.

35 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (trans. Albert Hofstadter), New York, Harper and Row, 2001, p. 73.

love of England; yet it is possible that he was not aware of all the forces implicit in his re-invention of tradition.

Roger Griffin explores the connections between Modernism as aesthetic praxis and fascist politics, seeing them both "as outstanding examples of the 'modernist state'".[36] If modernist art was often disposed to think of itself as "standing on the threshold of a new world", then fascist politicians such as Hitler and Mussolini, despite their disparagement of particular modernist artists, employed such chiliastic terms to further their aims. What they viewed as the crisis of their times required a definitive break with past tradition (even as they took selected elements into their new paradigms – be they aesthetic or social). In anglophone criticism, the links between modernist artists such as Eliot and Pound has been explored exhaustively over the last three decades. What causal connection there existed between such radical aesthetic maneuvers and consequent political movements in Europe is difficult to resolve. Nevertheless, Griffin's story helps negatively define Thomas: yes, his work as poet, anthologist and critic emerged out of a dissatisfaction with many aspects of nineteenth-century British culture (many of which I have referred to in my discussion of Palgrave and Quiller-Couch), but that does not result in a sense of crisis, characteristic for modernist artists. As Thomas puts together line after line in his sonnet, arranging the rhymes, he ensures the continuance of a poetic tradition that stretches back far beyond Victorianism, Romanticism, with roots in seventeenth-century lyric poetry, and perhaps most firmly in the even older song of "Sumer Is Icumen In". Here is Thomas's account of a July evening, rich with conflicting versions of the past and prophecies of the years ahead. His *patria* holds all of these possibilities, and does not impose a single meaning. This is an open tradition resting in, or emerging from, an open land, beneath the open air:

> It was upon a July evening.
> At a stile I stood, looking along a path
> Over the country by a second Spring
> Drenched perfect green again. "The lattermath

36 Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Houndmills, Palgrave, 2007, p. 1.

Will be a fine one." So the stranger said,
A wandering man. Albeit I stood at rest
Flushed with desire I was. The earth outspread,
Like meadows of the future, I possessed.

And as an unaccomplished prophecy
The stranger's words, after the interval
Of a score years, when those fields are by me
Never to be recrossed, now I recall,
This July eve, and question, wondering,
What of the lattermath to this hoar Spring?[37]

By attending to Thomas, one finds a way to avoid the discourse of modernist exceptionalism – often presented, by default, as the only way out of the dead end of positivism. Thomas, Frost, Trakl, Rilke, Yeats, Paul Valéry, Bohuslav Reynek and Osip Mandelstam are strong poets at the centre of European poetry, who reject the patterns of the previous century but who nevertheless cannot be co-opted to a modernist narrative of crisis and re-invention; indeed their monumental achievement demands parity, if not more, with poets who wished to overhaul the expressive possibilities of their art. This poem is a Shakespearian sonnet, patterned in a Petrarchan manner, yet its traditional form does not preclude hermeneutic uncertainty; rather it will not let us escape it, as unrealized lattermaths mix with various versions of the past. It is hard to see how a poet – or for that matter a citizen – could credibly progress from such an intuition to political action that mustered England's population under one flag, singing one song, according to one story of themselves. Such a prophecy remains, in Thomas's poetry, unaccomplished; instead, one sets out into the open air next morning, whistling another tune, different from the day before.

37 Thomas, *The Annotated Poems*, pp. 126–127.

D'Annunzio: Poet of paradox

Jiří Pelán

Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938) was one of a number of poets and writers at the end of the nineteenth century behind whose creative output lay a combination of motive forces.

In true romantic tradition, D'Annunzio desires first and foremost to speak for and of himself; in holy egotism he seeks to give account of the events of his life and his many and various feelings, sensations and emotional experiences. As we know, his poems are often to be found in embryonic form in his *Journals* (Taccuini) and letters,[1] so the starting point for his poetic message is clearly the empirical facts of his life's journey and their original record in prose.

It is also true, however, that this kaleidoscope of autobiographical material is systematically stylised according to the cultural trends of the day. As a result, the collected writings of D'Annunzio offer a vast repository of motifs, ideas, formal techniques and, quite often, textual extracts that had been influential from Parnassianism and Naturalism to the arrival of the Avant-gardes. His exceptional gift for period pastiche enabled him to rhapsodise at one moment in the spirit of Carducci, or the French Parnassians or English Pre-Raphaelites, and in the very next, equally brilliantly, to echo the style of Laforguist or Verlainean intimism.[2]

1 See Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Lettere a Barbara Leoni*, B. Borletti (ed.), Firenze, Sansoni, 1954; Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Lettere d'amore a Barbara Leoni*, Federico Roncoroni (ed.), Milano, Es, 2014. There are myriad biographies of D'Annunzio. For example, *Vita di Gabriele D'Annunzio* by Piero Chiara (Milano, Mondadori, 1978) and the seminal work of Paolo Alatri, *Gabriele D'Annunzio*, Torino, UTET, 1983. More recent titles include Annamaria Andreoli, *D'Annunzio*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2004; and Giordano Bruno Guerri, *D'Annunzio. L'amante guerriero*, Milano, Mondadori, 2008.

2 For Benedetto Croce this was sufficient reason to see D'Annunzio as a skilful plagiarist. See his *Problemi di estetica e contributi alla storia dell'estetica italiana*, Bari, Laterza, 1923, p. 491: "Quando l'opera [d'arte] c'è, non si risolve nelle fonti; e, quando si risolve, l'opera d'arte non c'è."