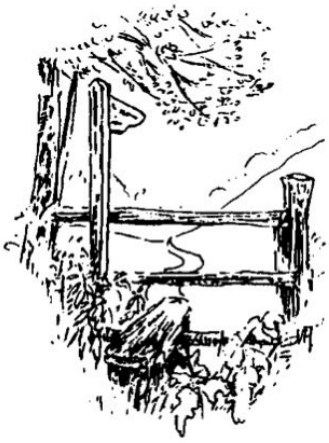
THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



Suddenly my mind went back to the high dark cliffs of Westminster Abbey, the blank doors and windows of endless streets, the devouring river, the cold gloom before dawn, and then with a shudder forgot them and saw the flowers and heard the birds with such a joy as when the ships from Tarshish, after three blank years, again unloaded apes and peacocks and ivory, and men upon the quay looked on; or as, when a man has mined in the dead desert for many days, he suddenly enters an old tomb, and making a light, sees before him vases of alabaster, furniture adorned with gold and blue enamel and the figures of gods, a chariot of gold, and a silence perfected through many ages in the company of death and of the desire of immortality.

The Heart of England

NEWSLETTER 85 January 2021

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Thanks as always are due to those providing reports, articles and information for the Newsletter. Please send them to me by post or by email to the editor's address above.

Chair's Welcome and Report

Welcome to the Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter number 85 for February 2021.

As some of you will not have received a copy of the latest eBulletin I hope those that did will excuse my repeating that introduction again, which begins with a thank you for being a member of the Edward Thomas Fellowship during 2020, which has been a difficult and frustrating year for everyone with many plans made and then changed due to circumstances largely beyond our individual control.

There have been events that have not taken place - such as the annual Birthday Walk and the June Study Day - and others that have 'sprouted' in their place - such as the first digital Edward Thomas Literary Festival. There have also been friends and acquaintances who have suffered from the dreadful pandemic that has blighted our lives over what is now almost twelve months, and your committee would like to pass on their condolences to those who have been bereaved as a consequence.

As we come to the end of 2020 - truly a year like no other for so many reasons - I and your committee also would like to send you our greetings and best wishes for a happier 2021.

Looking ahead to 2021

It is clear that we will not be 'rid' of Coronavirus any time soon - indeed it is more than likely that it will be something we all have to 'live' with and 'manage' for several years yet and it may not be that we start to see a 'new normal' evolving in 2021.

With that in mind, at our meeting in November, your committee agreed on some changes to dates and events in the first half of the year. These are summarised here and full details will appear later.

1. This Newsletter is being published a bit later than usual to allow for inclusion of the 2020 AGM reports and Agenda;

2. The 2020 AGM will again be virtual and the 'pack' - in a similar format to that posted out last year - is included with the Newsletter. Instructions are included on how members may vote on resolutions and appointment / re-appointment of committee members;

3. The Annual Birthday Walk will not take place in March - it did not seem appropriate in the circumstances to even schedule it in;

4. Keep a lookout for details of a short, members-only, digital event in March; and

5. The format of the Study Day, currently scheduled for 12 June 2021, will be reviewed at the next Committee Meeting in March.

If you have an email address and would like to receive copies of the eBulletins – which are published intermittently depending on need between Newsletters – please do so by completing the 'Consent' form which can be found under the 'Keeping In Touch' section of the Fellowship's website - https://edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk/keeping-in-touch/.

Finally, new members are always welcome to join the Committee and if you would like to know more about the work we do and how you might be able to help, I would love to hear from you – mitchjd.etf@outlook.com.

Jeremy Mitchell

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A Note from the New Editor

Firstly, I would like to thank the committee of the Edward Thomas Fellowship for placing their trust in me by asking me to edit the Fellowship Newsletter. A confession - I have never edited anything in my life before - but I am determined to repay their trust by doing my best to maintain the high standards set by previous newsletter editors. Secondly, I would like to thank my immediate predecessor, Julia Maxted, for the invaluable help in putting Newsletter 85 together.

While continuing to publish pieces by academics and experts on Thomas, as well as by the man himself, I would like to provide some space in the Newsletter for the 'readers' voice' to be heard. Collectively our members have a tremendous wealth of knowledge and opinions about the life and works of Edward Thomas and it is my hope that the Newsletter can provide a forum in which that knowledge and those opinions can be aired and shared. Consequently, our next Newsletter will feature a Letters Page to which all members are invited to contribute. Letters can be sent to me, by post or email (contact details above) and a selection will be published in Newsletter 86.

All of you reading this Newsletter decided at some point to join the Edward Thomas Fellowship. What was it about his life and work that drew you to him? I would like to invite you to write about your own experience of this for publication under the heading, 'How I Came to Thomas'. If you would like to do so, please contact me for further details. Thomas is best known today for his poems. Which is your favourite and why? If you would like to write a piece about your favourite Thomas poem for publication, again please contact me.

Finally, if any members become aware of any newly published Edward Thomas – related books which they would like to review or see reviewed in a subsequent newsletter, do please get in touch. That's all in the future. For the present, I hope you find Newsletter 85 both interesting and enjoyable.

David Kerslake

The Edward Thomas Literary Festival 2020 Report.

At very short notice, with only a few weeks in which to organise and market it, this three-day, digital event at the beginning of October celebrated the life and work of poet Edward Thomas. Organised in partnership with Petersfield Museum, it was designed to offer something for the ardent Thomas fans as well as those new to the poet. I hope many of you were able to attend at least some of the sessions.

Over the three days 28 events took place, involving 44 speakers and relationships were re-kindled or established with other organisations including the Robert Frost Society in the United States. Over 2,000 'attendees' watched the events live or on subsequent recordings – considerably more than one of our 'live' events would have reached.

This was the only event the Fellowship felt able to offer to members this year due to Covid, and careful consideration is being given to those that may take place during 2021. In the meantime, as a digital 'first' there was some encouraging feedback, which included:

"Wonderful film. Please can we have more next year? Well done everyone.''

"I really enjoyed this programme - such perception and great to watch the interaction between the two poets and to follow their thoughts and speculations. Michael Longley's bursting admiration of and enthusiasm for ET's poetry was a great foil to the quieter reflectiveness of Andrew Motion. One of my favourite programmes of the Festival."

"Outstanding event! Length entirely justified by exceptional content. Most impressively structured. The rehearsed (very moving) readings were balanced by learned but spontaneous discussions. The transatlantic nature of this event gave insights both into the lives of the two poets, and on current US and British views of poetry. Greatly appreciated!"

"Just to say a big thank you to you all for the Edward Thomas Festival, your huge involvement and guests."
I really didn't know much about Edward Thomas but thanks to the Festival I certainly can now enjoy his poems, appreciate his love of the local area and will think of him whilst out walking.''

I was particularly honoured to participate as host of the conversation between Michael Longley and Andrew Motion, which was a very enriching experience and one which I will cherish for many years to come, as well as to facilitate the evening session of readings and discussion around the relationship between Edward Thomas and Robert Frost.

I am also very grateful to all the participants who came together at short notice and contributed so much, so willingly.

We are planning, together with Petersfield Museum, to make this an annual event so please keep a look out for further news about this. In the meantime, there will be a members-only digital event in March – date to be confirmed – which will again be an opportunity to listen to some new speakers and readers, although on a greatly reduced scale, probably for a maximum of three hours, with breaks.

Further details will be announced on the website or in an eBulletin when known – please register your consent to receive eBulletins (if you do not already do so) to ensure you do not miss out on this

information. You can do this by following this link and completing the Consent Form on the website: https://edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk/keeping-in-touch/

If you attended the Festival and have any feedback you would like to provide, or ideas for future sessions I would love to hear from you – mitchjd.etf@outlook.com.

Jeremy Mitchell

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The Edward Thomas Study Centre at Petersfield Museum

I had by now hoped to be able to bring you news of the opening of Petersfield Museum and the Study Centre, which was originally scheduled for October 2020 – but the pandemic and national / local lockdowns caused inevitable delays.

Having said that, practical completion took place in November when the buildings were 'handed back' to the Museum team and, at the time of compiling this article, fit out of the new galleries and the Study Centre is underway.

The current timetable allows for completion of the fit out by the end of January at which time the Tim Wilton Steer books, and those in other small collections recently added (see later), will be put back on the shelves and re-numbered during February.

The new racks in the Study Centre will be nine shelves high and in total comprise some 60 metres in length of shelving, including cupboards, and should be sufficient to accommodate what are now in excess of 2,300 books, magazines and Journals.

In addition, there is a multitude of newspaper cuttings, magazine articles and other papers still to be researched and catalogued – a project to keep us busy for many years. If you , or anyone you know, would like to be involved in this research, or volunteering in the Study Centre, please do not hesitate to contact me – mitchjd.etf@outlook.com – as we will especially be in need of extra support once the Study Centre has re-opened.

Donation of books by Lesley Lee Francis

In October, following the Literary Festival which she had watched, Petersfield Museum was contacted by Lesley Lee Francis – the granddaughter of Robert Frost – and she offered her personal collection of books relating to her grandfather's time in England between 1912 and 1915.

These books, numbering just over 100, include several first editions from poets such as Rupert Brooke and the Dymock Poets, which have an important connection to Thomas as well. As it was Lesley's wish that these books should find their way to the Study Centre I was pleased to facilitate this gift on behalf of both the Museum (where I am a Trustee) and the Fellowship. (For tax reasons the gift had to go to the Museum as they are a registered charity and the Fellowship is not).

The books had to be shipped from Arizona, where Lesley lives, and the Museum was able to obtain a grant from the Friends of the National Libraries for £1,400 towards the shipping costs.

Lesley's collection will greatly enhance the 'Robert Frost' section in the Study Centre, and help to broaden its reach to those who are interested in the work of Robert Frost as well as that of the Dymock Poets.

Donations of other small collections

The Fellowship has also directly received two small collections of books that can be added to those already held as they enhance the availability of books for general reading and research, rather than just reference.

The first has been donated by the widow of long-term Fellowship member Gordon Ottewell, who I am sure was known to many of us, and the other by the family of the late John G. Beavan, who was distantly related to Edward Thomas through his mother.

Priority now has to be given to filling in any 'gaps' in the large collection we now have and I envisage a period of consolidation as we settle into the Study Centre.

Other acquisitions

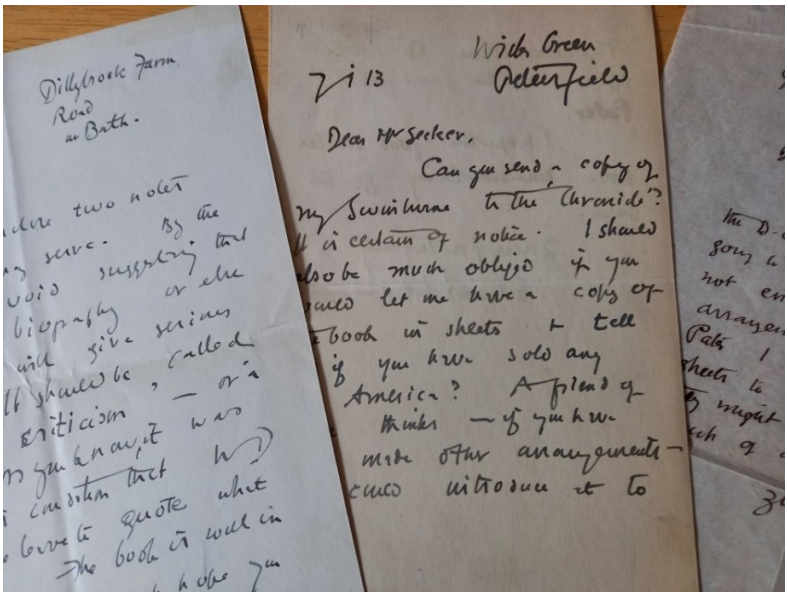
Due to the further generosity of the Friends of the National Libraries (FNL), and the agreement of Petersfield Museum, whose services had to be used to facilitate the transaction (as a registered charity), the Fellowship has been able to acquire three Autograph Letters from Edward Thomas to the publisher Martin Secker.

All three letters were written between January 1912 and January 1913 and refer to a period when Thomas was beginning to find it more difficult to have his work published. Two were written from Steep and one from Dillybrook Farm, near Bath (the latter was close to the home of Clifford Bax and Thomas spent quite a bit of time there when preparing and writing *In Pursuit of Spring*).

These letters were being sold by a New York dealer, originally for £4,800 and once the price had been negotiated down to £3,800 a grant was obtained by Petersfield Museum, on behalf of the Fellowship, from the FNL for £3,500. The balance of the purchase price was paid from the Fellowship's new 'Purchase Fund' which has received both general donations and others specifically for this purpose.

These letters – copies below – will go on display in the Study Centre when it re-opens, alongside first editions of the books to which they refer.

The Committee would like to express their gratitude to the Friends of the National Libraries without whose generous support the purchase of these letters, the gift from Lesley Lee Francis and the acquisition at auction in June 2018 of the letter from Robert Frost, would not have been possible.



We look forward to welcoming you to the Study Centre later this year – Covid permitting.

Jeremy Mitchell

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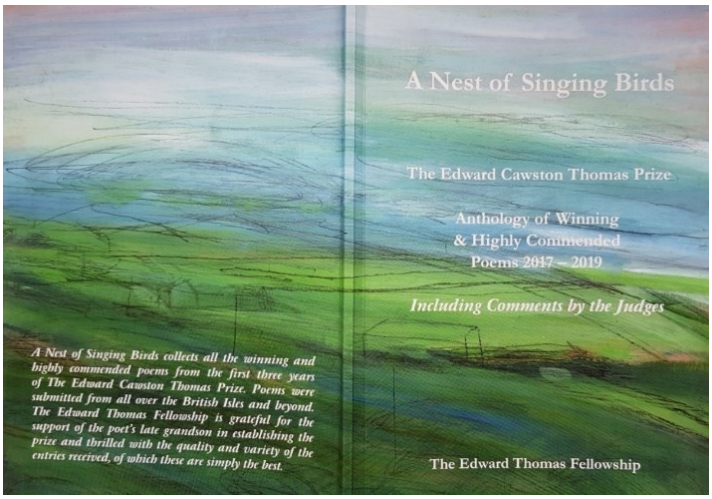
The Edward C. Thomas Poetry Competition 2021

The 2021 Competition's closing date was the 18th January and the results should be available by mid-February, when they will appear on our website. Over five hundred poems were received, most of very good quality. Jane Draycott is again the judge.



A Nest of Singing Birds, published by the Fellowship is a collection of poems chosen from entries to the Edward Thomas Fellowship's 2017, 2018 and 2019 Poetry Competitions. It includes the prizewinning and highly commended poems of each year. The natural world, including human life as one element in it, together with memory and the past, inspires many of the poets. Not surprisingly, many poems showed that their authors had learned from Thomas. The qualities identified by Edna Longley and Andrew Motion, among others, were often apparent – that sense of thinking aloud, the quiet spoken voice, attention to small details and a modern sensibility. We have included the Judges' Reports (by poets Jenny Lewis and Jane Draycott) for their very instructive commentaries and insights, which will be of special value to those thinking of submitting poems to magazines or competitions in future.

Copies are available from David Kerslake, 3 Bream Close, Calne, Wiltshire, SN11 9UF for 5 GBP, (plus £1.50 for postage and packing) or from Margaret Keeping, Competition Coordinator, 66 Fairacres Road, Oxford OX4 1TG.

Margaret Thompson

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Obituary – Frances Guthrie

Frances Guthrie was the great niece of James Guthrie, a close friend of Edward Thomas, an artist, writer and printer. His Pear Tree Press books now command high prices. Also cousin of Robin Guthrie, the artist and creator of the well-known linocut of Edward, Frances was entrusted with all the family archives. She was writing a biography of her great uncle.

Following Drama College, she became a successful actress: there is a delightful photograph of her as Wendy with Janette Scott as Peter Pan and John McCallum as Captain Hook in a production at the Bristol Old Vic in the early sixties. She made the transfer from stage to television, appearing in many

productions: Happy Ever After, Hugh and I, Hotel Paradiso, Yorky and Probation Officer, to name but a few. There is a comprehensive filmography on the Internet.

At some time in the 1970s Frances largely withdrew from acting and lived quietly in her London flat. She became an early and loyal member of the Fellowship, and was conspicuous on walks by wearing clothes more suited to South Kensington than The Shoulder of Mutton. "Who is that pixie?" I was once asked, "And why is she wearing those heels?" Somehow she always managed to return to Bedales with no trace of mud on her and no sign of exhaustion, while the rest of us looked like scarecrows.

As Guthrie archive holder, Frances was always generous in allowing the Fellowship to use material from it, and especially the Robin Guthrie linocut, which we had made into a card and is constantly popular. Her interest in fine printing was probably inherited from James, her great uncle and she was a council member of the Private Libraries Association for many years.

Her death this summer went almost unnoticed because of preoccupation with the pandemic, but those who knew this gentle, quiet lady with a lovely smile will always feel privileged to have known her and will miss her both as a friend and a lover of Edward Thomas's work, of which she had a deep knowledge.

Richard Emeny

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ARTICLES

Edward Thomas as the 'Superfluous Man':

A Talk for the Edward Thomas Digital Festival by Anna Stenning

What follows is an article based upon Anna's recent talk at the inaugural Edward Thomas Digital Festival. Anna is a Wellcome Research Fellow at the University of Leeds. Her research interests include nature writing, life writing, global disability studies, autism, psychology, environmental fiction, narrative studies and 19th and early 20th century British and American literature. She teaches on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in literature and creative writing. Anna also edited the highly rated Edward Thomas – A Miscellany, which was reviewed in Newsletter 79.

> 'It was a good day Arthur, that first brought you to Abercorran House,' said old Ann, as she went to the door to deliver the stray pigeon to its owner.
>
> 'Yes,' I said, a little pathetically for Ann's tastes and with thought too deep for tears, at least in her company. I looked round the kitchen, remembered the glory that was Abercorran … Philip .. Jessie … Roland …… Aurelius. It was no unselfish memory, for I wished with all my heart that I was fifteen again, that the month was April, the hour noon, and the scene the yard of Abercorran house, with the family assembled, the dogs, Aurelius, Mr Torance (there

being some days left of the Easter Holidays), yes, and Higgs also, and most certainly the respectable Mr Stodham.

'Yes it was a good day,' continued Ann, returning, 'if it had not been for you we should never have known Aurelius.'[1]

Introduction

Edward Thomas published his only full novel, *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* in 1913. In this essay, I argue that the novel and its character of Aurelius, who is described in the novel as 'the superfluous man', played a pivotal role in Thomas's ability to turn to poetry. Aurelius, - who is an itinerant visitor to the Morgan family home – represented the world of the imagination, beauty and heroism, in contrast to the world of fact and commerce that Thomas had occupied as a reviewer and countryside writer. Furthermore, thinking 'through' Aurelius gave Thomas permission to write about himself.

Thomas thought of himself as like Aurelius in that he lacked the disposition that would allow him to prosper, because he was concerned with the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of life over and above his material circumstances. During the first decades of the 1900s, Thomas observed that the spirit of liberal individualism was increasingly hostile to difference, and that this accelerated as the national project was that of avoiding a supposed racial degeneration that would lead to Britain's demise as a global power.

Through Aurelius and other characters from *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans,* who were based on people he had known in his childhood and on aspects of himself, Thomas came to see that his version of the superfluous man – unlike his ancestor in Russian literature, to whom Thomas probably owed the term – was necessary for the flourishing of civilisation. Aurelius and the numerous other poets, misfits and wanderers who appeared in the novel were essential to the novel's imaginative world. At the time of writing in the lead up to WW1, efforts to create a welfare system through the medicalisation of both mental and social difference, contributed to the moral marginalisation of those who had formerly been treated with tolerance. The utilitarian spirit meant that the individual could be sacrificed for what was thought of as a greater economic good. Thomas's novel, however, suggested that the economic good was based on an overly narrow concept of value.

Thomas's novel *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* also demonstrated a growing recognition at the time that fictional characters should not be seen as simply vehicles for carrying the author's thematic interests, or driving the plot. Instead, the reality of characters may be understood in terms of their interdependence, both with each other and the reader. It is only if we are willing to give life to what may be thought of as a minor character, to Aurelius and to the servants, children, lodgers, dogs

and even pigeons that inhabit Abercorran House, that we recognise the truth of maxims derived from Aurelius' possible namesake, Marcus Aurelius, as Guy Cuthbertson has noted.[2]

The stoic truth, as opposed to the epicurean sentiment that seemed to dominate Thomas's era, was 'That which is not for the interests of the whole swarm is not for the interest of a single bee'.[3] In this essay I argue that, rather than lacking a coherent point of view, as some reviewers have suggested, the novel's power lies in its creation of an imaginary world in which the superfluous – those who depended on others for their survival and sense of purpose – had a home that they had lost in the real world.

The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans was dedicated to Thomas' mother and father. In a letter to his friend Gordon Bottomley, he described it as 'half-memory, half-fancy, and a welsh family (mostly memory) inhabiting it – and collecting a number of men & boys, including some I knew when I was from ten to fifteen'.[4] To the extent that it was fiction, it exaggerated the qualities of the real-life characters, and his own childhood was not 'happy-go-lucky', although it was sometimes happy. In that same letter, Thomas explained that he felt he had achieved something new in this work, since it allowed him to create greater continuity between events and characters.

Aurelius is introduced to the Morgan household through the narrator, and unlike the other adult male characters in the novel he has no title – he is known simply as Aurelius – probably in indication of his low social status. He came and went at random to Abercorran House and we are told that he writes poetry. When he is described by outsiders, he is treated with derision or worse, as a 'foreigner' or womanly. But to the narrator Arthur, he is 'the first man I ever met who really proved that man is above the other animals as an animal. He was really better than any pony, or hound, or bird of prey, in their own way'.[5] He is described as having been an 'under-gardener, a bookseller's assistant, a trainer to a troupe of dogs in a travelling circus, as a waiter, as a commercial traveller and a sailor'.[6]

It isn't clear who the real-life version of Aurelius may have been – and it seems possible that he is the 'one' who is entirely a fiction, or a fiction constructed out of other fictions. Guy Cuthbertson suggests that he might have been based on Thomas's friend from the 1890s, the poet Charles Dalmon, who is elsewhere compared by Thomas to the 17th-century cleric-poet, Robert Herrick.[7]

Unlike the real-life Dalmon or Herrick, we are told that Aurelius has obscure origins – he is described as a gypsy, as Italian and yet he knows the ancient stories of Wales. He describes himself as 'begotten out of the moonlight by an owl's hooting'.[8] We are told he has 'no perception of religion' although the narrator describes him as one of those 'who invented God and all the gods and godlets'.[9] Others say he has 'something wrong with him', that he is clean 'like a woman'.[10]

While unlike Thomas in other respects, Aurelius seems to epitomise aspects of what Thomas saw as his own deficits, that he thought that he, too, had something wrong with him. Thomas, was

once described by a school friend as 'exceptionally reserved'[11] and was critical of his own self-consciousness, because, according to his own standards, it was a sign of either vanity or wickedness. In general, he did not write about himself *as* himself until just before he began writing poetry. His inhibition meant that he wrote about himself through aliases and doubles, including the characters of Philip and Arthur in *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*. I argue that Thomas began to see his reserve as resulting from a constitutional difference of temperament and ideology from his peers. As this difference became more pronounced by historical circumstances, he began to see its potential as a justification for his writing.

Background: the superfluous man elsewhere in Thomas's prose writing

Edward Thomas, did not wish to 'cast others in his own image' as he saw others doing. In his 1909 work, *The South Country*, his fictional alter-ego is spiritually unable to join in with his peers who seem to find strength in mocking those they regard as beneath them, 'everyone armed not with the power to take away our bread – to the old, the poor, the women, the children'.[12] In Thomas's other incomplete autobiographical 'Fiction', also written around this time, he tells about preparing for the civil service entrance exam, and his fear of being 'buried alive' or becoming like his peers, who he thought, possessed 'vacuity without leisure, indolence without refinement'.[13]

In his 1909 countryside book *The South Country*, Thomas had described himself – as the apparent real-life narrator – as both 'superfluous' and 'unfortunate" and as depending on 'sanitation, improved housing, police, charities and medicine' for survival.[14] Thomas's use of this term at this time may connect to the English version of Turgenev's story *The Diary of the Superfluous Man* that had been translated by Constance Garnett. In *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*, it is the character called Aurelius who is described as superfluous, and as I go on to explain, Aurelius is central to Thomas's move to writing about himself as himself. This is because Aurelius allowed Thomas the space to imaginatively connect his 'literary' and spiritual interests, even if the move was not one that he had explicitly set out to make. Through Aurelius, Thomas connected his love of nature with his sense of anxiety about the future for people such as himself, who lacked the social sense and 'those strong tastes and impulses which, blinding men to what does not concern them, enables them to live with a high heart'.[15]

As others have previously observed, the lead-up to WW1 – and the relative decline in paid-for work – offered Thomas a chance to explore new forms of writing. Through them, he seems to have wanted to be able to write his very self back into existence. This was a period in which he wrote four works of autobiography, the essay 'Ecstasy', the travel books *In Pursuit of Spring* and *The Icknield Way*, and his critical biography of his earlier hero, Walter Pater. Through the countryside books and autobiography, especially *How I Began* and the *Childhood of Edward Thomas*, he began to talk about himself *as himself,* which allowed him greater room to communicate his ideas and feelings to the reader.

However, Thomas's reviewers, as Thomas himself, seemed to have thought that his first novel was lacking. He described it as a little more than a series of essays, rather than a novel. But in its fragmentary state and in his focus on placing 'real' characters, he anticipated some of the ideas that were taken as defining features of the modern novel. Through bringing to life the character of Aurelius and the conditions that led to his disappearance, Thomas epitomised the attitudes of the emerging, Georgian social order.

The month of December in 1910 is the time that Virginia Woolf famously asserted that there had been a change in human character, which required a subsequent change in the novel to accommodate it. It was a time during which, Woolf argued, relations between 'masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children' shifted.[16] In her essay *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, she furthered observed that 'when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature'.[17] Woolf does not state whether these changes are positive or negative, but she makes it clear that the value of the modern novel is its ability to show the results of this upheaval on the individual spirit, rather than to list the changes that would be necessary to remedy it. She discerns this capacity in certain Victorian novels and in the literature of the new Georgian period, in which characters are drawn from many social spheres and given reality, rather than simply reduced to their social role. The communal, collective world was unsustainable, as it required a social order that no longer existed. What Woolf and Thomas were concerned with, I would argue, was the survival of the self once this order had been lost. In distinction to Woolf, however, I believe that what Thomas was interested in was the survival of a different sort of self – one that was intrinsically interdependent, rather than necessarily 'independent' as Woolf saw it.[18] This means that even though he recognised a change in social circumstances was inevitable, he believed that something of the older order – that did not depend on the triumph of the individualist elite – could survive.

The *Happy Go-Lucky-Morgans* refers back to several decades earlier than 1910, but also, in its present, to immediately after Woolf's watershed. It demonstrates the interests in character that Woolf expounded, including what had formerly been thought of as minor characters such as servants and children. I argue that Thomas's employment of these themes make more sense if you understand the novel as a commentary on the present – that is to say, that the vanishing utopia of Abercorran House is important, not only because of its role in shaping the character of the narrator, but because of how its loss signals the conditions of the present. The loss that is felt is in this case that of interdependent selves that can now only be recognised in literature.

The characters of *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* play a significant part in conveying – although not explicitly stating – Thomas's views. This would be missed if we focus only on the explicit statements of the narrator as a guide to the author's intentions. That is to say, that the form of novel allows for a playful elaboration of these themes. Perhaps it has been missed because we have sought to read Thomas's prose as we might be inclined to read his poetry, which is as the expression of a 'singular' point of view that can be interpreted only by those with a similar kind of genius. Yet,

we know that Thomas, like his friend Robert Frost, wanted to be a 'poet for all sorts and kinds'.[19] Fiction and dramatic poetry offered a chance to think about the way 'truth' emerges between different points of view.

This position is revealed through the relation between the narrator and Aurelius. Arthur Froxfield, has by the time of telling, presumably succumbed to one of the jobs as a clerk that Thomas at times seems to have felt he was destined for and revisits Abercorran House in the attempt to bring the past to life. Aurelius, who is presumed dead by Ann, has no material existence but still has the ability to conjure up vanished forms of life. Mr Morgan describes Aurelius as wise because he lives 'for today' and not for any age.[20] Morgan claimed that Aurelius knew that England in the 19th century 'did not allow any but a working man to die of starvation unless he wants to'.[21] However, Arthur's adult realism and Aurelius' childlike dependency seem focused on the recovery of a spiritual ideal that seems to have no place in the world of 1910. This idealism is revealed in love of the house that seems better than any of its individual parts, and in the servant Ann's acceptance of what cannot be changed. As Aurelius exclaims, upon hearing that the family may have to move, 'Let the National Gallery Go, let the British Museum go, but preserve the Morgans and Abercorran House'.[22] Abercorran House has treasures more precious than the sequestered colonial artefacts of the British Museum. Within the walls of the house and its sprawling garden, there had been a community of humans, animals and ideas, which in turn represented the intangible realm of the imagination and the spirit. The pseudonymous narrator Arthur Froxfield, it would seem, is in adulthood, a superfluous man, too, but he only becomes fully aware of this through his reflections on what had become of Aurelius. It is what has led to the events described in the novel's present – in which Abercorran is now the name of a street but not a house, and the Morgans have returned to Carmarthenshire – that concerns me in the rest of this essay.

The superfluous man in *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*

While many have noted that Thomas's novel serves as a record of a vanishing Victorian sense of security represented by the idyllic Abercorran House, few have mentioned that the novel also spoke of its 'time of telling', which was the period just before the war. At the beginning of the novel, we are given a description of the loss of the garden, which itself seems to anticipate changes to the situation of the characters. The generous garden of Abercorran House, known by the inhabitants as the Wilderness, has been sold off as building land. Formerly the home of jackdaws and elms, its destruction seems prescient of some greater loss. In Arthur's words:

> 'The lilies and the carp are no longer in the pond and there is no pond. I can understand people cutting down trees, it is a trade and brings profit, but not draining a pond in such a garden as the Wilderness and taking all its carp home to fry in the same fat as bloaters, all for the sake of building a house that might just as well have been anywhere else or nowhere at all'.[23]

Like the sold-off pigeons that return, only to be reunited with their new owners by Ann, Arthur Froxfield has returned to Abercorran House in search of something that no longer exists, instead, he is able to recall the spring he spent together with his friend, Philip Morgan before Philip died. Through visiting the yard in which he had spent so many hours with his friend, the narrator comes to realise that he is only able to bring to life these memories through his conversations with Ann while she is caretaking it.[24]

Much more is revealed in the conversations between Arthur and Ann. These conversations give an indirect picture of Thomas's own feelings about his present. It was a world in which the narrator felt that he, like Aurelius, had no place. This indirect representation of Arthur's fate is where we might locate Thomas's feelings of his own plight.

This is perhaps best conveyed by the words of David Morgan, who is the oldest son of the Morgans and who had long-since returned to Wales. His mother revealed that he lived apart from men in a tower in the mountains somewhere near Laughern. This was because he believed that he was the son of an alien species that had once included nymphs and fauns, who were despised by men because they 'they lived as if time was not, yet could not be persuaded to believe in a future life. Mrs Morgan explains that 'they must be something like Aurelius'. As the child of one such, Morgan 'could abide neither with the strange race nor with the children of Adam'.[25] This position of isolation produced a distinctive perspective:

> 'Before he came amongst them he had been thinking grandly about men without realising that these were of a different species. His own interference seemed to him imprudent. They disgusted him, he wanted to make them more or less in his own image to save his feelings, which, said he, was absurd. He was trying to alter the conditions of other men's lives because he could not have himself endured them, because it would have been unpleasant to him to be like them, their hideous pleasure, hideous suffering, hideous indifference'.[26]

While this double-alienation produced a kind of madness in David Morgan, it also led to the urge to find unity among the greater "complexity, which confuses us".[27] Through moving outside of civilisation in 'Morgan's Folley' he dedicated his life to trying to discern beauty in lives that he felt he could not understand. This same urge, both to discern a greater meaning in life and to find order, seems apparent in Edward Thomas, who R. George Thomas described as leading him to 'recoil from any form of life that was not earnest, spiritually fruitful and socially useful'.[28]

Thomas's search for spiritual and social purpose seems to be evident in his writing about Walter Pater, also in 1913. Disagreeing with his emphasis on a purely aesthetic life that he had found in the Victorian essayist, Thomas sought instead to base his writing on lived experiences:

> 'Unless a man write with his whole nature concentrated on his subject he is unlikely to take hold of another man. For a man will read, not as a scholar, a philologist, a word fancier, but as a man with all his race, age, class and personal experience brought to bear on the matter.'[29]

This meant that the writer should introduce what might be considered superfluous to another. The 'superfluous' or common, or that which was beyond immediate economic value, seemed to link Thomas's aesthetic quest with his social understanding. For Thomas, the search for something 'outside' of our immediate rational understanding is the same thing that produces the wonder of poetry.

Like David Morgan, Thomas's realisation comes from his experiences of despondence. In *The Icknield Way*, through the whispering, insinuating inner voice that he described haunting him in early hours during his journey on The Icknield Way, Thomas described the feeling that at some point in his adult life he had stepped outside the order of nature: 'I am not a part of nature. I am alone. There is nothing else in my world but my dead heart and brain within me and the rain without'.[30] As this narrative proceeds, he explains that conscious thought is itself what prevents him from being part of nature. The same consciousness can imaginatively, at least, consider itself able to achieve self-transcendence: 'the truth is that the rain falls for ever and I am melting into it'.[31] It is only through imagining the 'other' that self-transcendence is possible.

In his essay on ecstasy in literature that he wrote shortly after *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*, Thomas suggests that modern psychological science may describe this as madness, but this is not how it is experienced to the subject. For 'ecstasy occurs when a man is 'exalted outside of himself' and in a trance-like state 'there could be no fine literature without ecstasy.'[32] The state of being 'outside of oneself' is described in this essay as likely to produce 'poetry, heroism or love', but these were objects of uncertain value in Thomas's time of writing *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*. A value for love, poetry and heroism, which seem to be shared by the householders and their visitors, seems to belong to Thomas's childhood in the last decades of the 19th century.

When Mr Morgan explains that the Victorian age will not allow 'any but a working man to die of starvation unless he wants to',[33] he expresses Liberal attitudes to Victorian social welfare, in which the poorest would be assisted through 'outdoor relief', but the working poor had to choose between fending for themselves or moving to workhouses. Philip and Arthur love Aurelius because he possesses skills that they admire – skills with animals and at telling stories. But adults seem to scorn him or to be uncomfortable around him. He is only employed on an occasional basis, and he seems to have little exploitable commercial value:

> 'What we want is efficiency. How are we to get it with the likes of this Mr. What's-His-Name in the way? They neither produce like the poor nor consume like the rich, and it is by production and consumption that the world goes round, I say. He was a bit of a poacher, too. I

caught him myself letting a hare out of a snare, letting it out, so he said. I said nothing to the squire but the chap had to go'.[34]

The Liberal government that was elected in 1906 started to look at ways in which it could ensure a strong and healthy workforce. There were a number of health measures introduced to the social causes of poverty over which people were thought to lack control. However, in 1904, a Royal Commission sought to re-examine 'existing methods of dealing with idiots and epileptics, and with imbecile, feeble-minded or defective persons not certified under the Lunacy Laws'.[35] The Commission was the result of a eugenic discourse that had gathered momentum in the years before the turn of the century. This mean that adults who were unable to provide for themselves constituted a menace to social stability and a threat to the strength of the nation.

The rise of eugenic social attitudes in Edwardian England

The categories of 'mental defective' and 'moral imbecility' were coined for reasons that seem both designed to genuinely assist with the social effects of those who could not look after themselves, and reinforce bourgeois social norms that meant that those who were already struggling could risk facing new levels of difficulty. The terms of 'mental defective' and 'moral imbecility' lacked any clear medical definition, and could not be linked to any concrete illness. So, as Jens Grundler has explained, from the late 1870s onwards, concepts of 'born criminals' drawn from the pauper classes, who were 'tainted' by hereditary disposition and were 'incurable', began to diffuse into older medical knowledge about the mentally ill.[36]

This meant that moral attitudes combined with scientific psychiatry as it was practiced, by way of the 'pseudo-sciences' of heredity 'degeneration', produced a call for the enforced segregation and institutionalisation of those seen as deviant from newly emerging social norms. This narrowing down of the idea of normalcy was the flip side of the creation of the welfare state. Through the Mental Deficiency act of 1913, the government had powers to detain those who were thought of as 'moral imbeciles' in labour camps and asylums. It was this combination of social and medical perspectives, manifest in newly emerging powers of administrators that allowed for the creation of a new category of human who was pathologically estranged from society by nature. It is this discourse that seems to inflect Thomas's discussions of Aurelius. At the same time Thomas seems to suggest that 'the deviant' – or what he calls 'the superfluous' – are necessary for society's spiritual flourishing.

In Thomas' novel *The Happy Go-Lucky Morgans*, when we first hear about Aurelius we hear from his former landlord, it is in these terms – something wrong with him – possibly criminal. The narrator defends him in the following terms:

> ‘When that squire’s agent called his under-gardener a superfluous man, he was a brute and he has wrong but he saw straight. If we accept his label there must always have been some superfluous men since the beginning, men whom the extravagant ingenuity of creation has produced out of sheer delight in variety, by-products of its immense processes. Sometimes I think it was some of these superfluous men who invented God and all the gods and godlets. Some of them have been killed, some enthroned, some sainted, for it. But in a civilization like ours the superfluous abound and even flourish’.[37]

At the time when Thomas referred to himself as a superfluous man he was finishing *The South Country*, while working as a civil servant, despite fearing that his neurasthenia was returning. According to R George Thomas, Thomas doubted his own efficiency and believed that he was not earning his stipend.[38] Within *The South Country*, one of Thomas’s aliases talks about himself as having a horror at the gap between his spiritual needs and his ability to fulfil these in meaningful employment.

As Peter Howarth has observed, superfluousness has positive associations in Thomas’s mind, as that which allowed for a kind of imaginative freedom.[39] It also seems to connect to Thomas’s ideas on non-human nature. Aurelius is described as showing that man is superior to other animals ‘as an animal’ and the other superfluous characters that people Thomas’s prose – including wayfarers and itinerant workers – seem to have a higher-than-average regard for the welfare of other species. Thomas is described by R. George Thomas as possessing this same spiritual hunger. He is constitutionally unable to seek solace in material wealth. Yet, this puritanical austerity meant that he was hardly able to be a happy and loving husband, let alone a happy father. It seems that it was only when he finds in poetry a way to express these impulses that he could be content.

Thomas is clear that such ideas would be thought of as madness – and his essay on ecstasy he connected this to what might be thought of as madness. But Thomas takes away the moral implication of this and looks for its practical benefits in creativity. This means that what Thomas says about Aurelius – who is described as ‘the most lightsome of men’ and a ‘poet’ – suggests the value of acknowledging difference to both morality and art. It is only through openness to alternative values to our own that we can develop our own moral worth:

> ‘Calming us with its space and patience, the country relates us all to Eternity. We go to it as would-be poets, or as solitaries, vagabonds, lovers, to escape foul air, noise, hard hats, black uniforms, multitudes, confusion, incompleteness, elaborate means without clear ends, – to escape ourselves; and we do more than escape them. So vastly do we increase the circle of which we are the centre that we become as nothing. The larger the circle the less seems our distance from other men each at his separate centre; and at last that distance is nothing at all in the mighty circle, and all have but one circumference. And thus we truly find ourselves’.[40]

Even if we don't understand other people's motivations, or consider them 'rational', there is a value in behaving as though they have intentions, as Thomas had his character David Morgan try to explain. This seems to be the attitude that Thomas advocates towards non-human nature, and it is the attitude shown by Aurelius, who is fired for releasing a hare from a trap.

If we only focus on efficiency, we miss not only a broader spiritual perspective on our lives, but risk undermining our own chances of survival. Thomas suggests that the rational efficiency that was so valued by his peers is unlikely to be that which allows for our physical, let alone our material survival.

'How little do we know of the business of the earth, not to speak of the universe; of time, not to speak of Eternity. It was not by taking thought that man survived the mastodon. The acts and thoughts that will serve the race, that will profit this commonwealth of things that live in the sun, the air, the earth, the sea, now and through all time, are not known and never will be known. The rumour of much toil and scheming and triumph may never reach the stars, and what we value not at all, are not conscious of, may break the surface of eternity with endless ripples of good. We know not by what we survive.'[41]

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Edward Thomas's 'Owl': Missing a Feather? By Simon Johns

Simon is a freelance writer and editor based in Herefordshire and describes himself as 'a near-lifelong reader of Edward Thomas'. Here he explores one of Thomas's most admired poems; 'The Owl'.

One evening of heat, unseasonal heat – it was late May – I was sitting in the book room with the window wide open, and I heard a tawny owl calling from the trees a short way out in the dark. It was a gladdening sound. I hadn't heard an owl so close to the house for two or three years, and when a once neighbourly bird drops out of hearing – swifts, say, or cuckoos – it's hard these days not to take it as an ominous sign. But here, repeatedly, undeniably, was an owl.

Near or far, I love the calls of the tawny owl. This one, maybe a female, was giving out a softer, more solfeggio version of the textbook *kewick*: something more like *keway*. I put my elbows on the windowsill and harked for an answering *tu-whit-tu-whoo*, but all I heard was *keway*, *keway*… Her mate was out of my earshot, or perhaps not there at all.

An owl's call is the catalyst and crux of Edward Thomas's 1915 poem 'The Owl', and although he doesn't give the bird a name, it seems reasonable to assume he'd heard a tawny. Or does it? At an estimated population of 50,000 pairs in 2005, *Strix aluco* is the UK's most abundant owl, and the New Naturalist Library's authoritative volume *Owls* describes it as "the typical owl". But it also says that in the 19th century the tawny was often referred to as less common than the barn owl, and that its population only began to rise with changes in woodland and a decline in the number of gamekeepers in the early 20th century. Here's room for doubt.

Perhaps firmer ground is offered by the poem's lines "a most melancholy cry / Shaken out long and clear upon the hill", which it's not fanciful to take as a commentary on the tawny's tremulous hoot. And in line ten, "no merry note" is surely a nod to what is surely a tawny in Shakespeare's song 'When icicles hang by the wall' at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost*:

When blood is nipped, and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl:
Tu-whit, tu-whoo! – a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

Tawny, or not tawny? That is a question to which only Thomas knows the answer. But there's something perhaps even less knowable in 'The Owl' to consider, and for that it's worth reading the whole thing. My source is *The Annotated Collected Poems*, edited by Edna Longley.

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the North wind; tired, yet not so that rest

Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.
All of the night was quite barred out except
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry

Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,
But one telling me plain what I escaped
And others could not, that night, as in I went.

And salted was my food, and my repose,
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

It's one of Thomas's better known poems, appearing in anthologies, biographies, critical studies and more. Recent Thomas biographers Matthew Hollis and Jean Moorcroft Wilson both refer to it; the poet Bernard O'Donoghue, remembering student days in *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry*, recalls being 'fixated' on it; *Birds Britannica*, that superb compendium of avian lore old and new, quotes ten lines of it. It's not hard to see why. There's the numinous bird at its heart, and the strong sense of occasion, of situation; there's the poet's compassion, his ethical mettle. 'The Owl' is a poem of conscience and of witness, a waypoint in a decision-making process that ended with Thomas signing up for war and his own death. All these distinguishing marks commend it to the editor as they do to the reader.

But here I need to confess to a sleight of hand; perhaps you've already spotted it. I've added a word – or rather, if my hunch is correct, restored one that dropped out. The word, in line three, is 'not'. What? *Added a word*? This sounds like a wild idea verging on insolence, and much as I'd like to say that someone else has had it too, I have to admit: I can find no ghost of that 'not' – or remark on its absence – in any of the books I have access to, or anywhere on the internet. I've searched high and low, Boolean and Bodleian. Well, not yet in that august institution, but it may come to that.

Let's go back to the beginning. As conventionally printed, the first stanza of 'The Owl' reads like this:

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

The scenario is as follows. The poet, one of English literature's great walkers, was nearing the end of a walk. Edward Thomas could be a companionable wayfarer, famously so with Robert Frost, but on this occasion he was alone, and his thoughts were his own. The weather wasn't perfect, and (as soon becomes apparent) it was getting dark or was dark already. He assessed his condition. He was hungry, but the pangs were tolerable; he was cold, but again, bearing up well. In the poem's first two and a half lines, he's engaged in what Longley calls "careful discrimination between degrees of discomfort", and in each case the word 'yet' is the fulcrum of the balance.

But now there's a problem – or at least a puzzle. Unlike the way the first two work, the third 'yet' introduces a degree of discomfort – in this case of fatigue – so strong that the prospect of easing it is the prime concern. Why? The change of tack has no obvious logic, and the 'yet' grates: there seems to be nothing to yet about. If this were a third balance, it would have only one arm. Can this be what Thomas intended? He was a thoughtful poet, and the more I read 'The Owl', the more I wonder if he really meant to follow those two instances of careful discrimination with a statement so unequivocal.

That's the accepted printing. But what happens when we add (or restore) the 'not'? For one thing, the poem gains rhetorical consistency: the third 'yet' now has the same compositional function as the other two. But more than this, it seems to me that the very purpose of the poem is enhanced – its act of bearing witness is clearer and more coherent – if it proceeds from what is now a characteristically wry allusion: "tired, yet not so that rest / Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof". The walker knew his destination, and the thing under the inn roof that in foretaste seemed sweeter than rest was a mug of ale.

If this reading is correct, and all three kinds of discomfort were perfectly bearable – "Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I", which is to say not very – then the contrast between the poet's mildly felt needs and the hardship endured by "all who lay under the stars" is so much the sharper. And let's not forget the poem's first word, 'Downhill', which now looks not only like a topographical term but also a nod to the easiest kind of walking. (And it's still a signpost for the direction of the poem as a whole, a forecast of the comedown in the poet's state of mind.)

Other words now light up differently, too. 'Sweetest' and 'salted' make a more telling pair of sensory-metaphysical opposites; 'sobered' and 'rejoice' look back more pointedly to the initial mood of anticipated merriment. A good walk, a drink, a meal, a fire, the warmth of the familiar inn; and then the owl's cry. As the poet thought of soldiers and poor and reassessed his condition, the measure of his moral discomfort – even guilt – was the gap between his situation and theirs. Five months after writing 'The Owl', Thomas enlisted.

* * *

How sturdily does all this stand up? I can immediately think of a couple of knockdowns, and there are bound to be others. The weightier, formulated as a question, goes: if such a widely anthologised poem were missing a word, how could the lacuna (*noun*: an unfilled space, a gap, a missing portion in a

book or manuscript) escape the notice of so many readers, including printers, professors, poets, even the author himself – for more than a century? To which I might reply, in the form of another question: is there ever an explanation for an oversight, other than the oversight itself? And it's always hardest to see what isn't there.

A second objection is that adding a word adds a syllable, and the line would now have eleven instead of ten. Granted, most of the lines in 'The Owl' are decasyllabic, but not all. Line twelve, "And others could not, that night, as in I went", also has eleven; and besides, it's very often a loose-limbed prosody with Thomas. Loose-iambed, you could say.

If omission there was, it happened upstream of the poem's first appearance in print. Six months after Thomas was killed at the start of the Battle of Arras in April 1917, London firm Selwyn & Blount published 64 of his poems as a slim hardback book with the undemonstrative title *Poems*, and 'The Owl', on pages 12 and 13, does not have a 'not' in the third line. We need to go further back.

The notes in *The Annotated Collected Poems* give 24th February 1915 as the date it was written, and according to Longley, Thomas wrote up "fair (more or less) copies" of most of his poems in notebooks that are now held by the Bodleian and the British Library. Next came a typescript produced for submission to the poet's publisher – his friend Eleanor Farjeon was "his principal typist" – and then there were the proofs. There must also have been at least one other copy, submitted with a companion poem in January 1917 – under a different title, 'Those Others' – to the *Nation*, which had previously published some of Thomas's prose. (The newspaper declined them later that month.)

Each new copy, made manually, opened a door to human error; and as anyone who works in publishing will confirm, the smaller the error, the harder it is to catch. Longley says that "the printer's typescript of *Poems* […] clearly passed through Thomas's hands", but this will have been in late 1916 or early 1917, when the poet was preparing to go with his artillery battery to France and, as Matthew Hollis puts it in *Now All Roads Lead to France*, "seemed fully absorbed in army life". These were circumstances far from ideally suited to the careful work of preparing a text for press.

As for the proofs, Thomas didn't see them at all, having been by then – February – posted Orderly Officer to Group 35 Heavy Artillery Headquarters in Arras; Farjeon and another trusted friend, John Freeman, handled them in London on his behalf. They had not come out well. In *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras*, Jean Moorcroft Wilson says "the typesetting was careless and inconsistent and made Thomas's verse look like prose on occasions". Hollis is more blunt: the proofs were "a mess".

But the fact that *Poems* wasn't an unruffled production doesn't in itself prove that mistakes crept in; and although I haven't yet been able to consult the first draft, fair copy, typescript and proofs of 'The Owl' – they're not available online – I know that even if I do, they may not settle the 'not' hypothesis one way or the other. "Like other poets killed in the First World War, Edward Thomas bequeathed a degree of textual uncertainty", writes Longley, and "some issues will always remain undecidable".

On the one hand, this is disheartening. But on the other, it puts the imagination to work, and imaginative thinking about poetry is never a bad thing. Indeed, it can't be entirely outlandish to picture the poet with his notebook, writing in a hurry, his thoughts faster than his pen – "the best of fountain pens is slow", he wrote in the essay 'How I Began' – and wonder if the 'not' was dropped by Thomas himself.

* * *

"I never had noticed it until / 'Twas gone", he wrote at the start of another poem, 'First Known when Lost', and loss is a thread that runs through much of his most personal writing, particularly the poetry; even 'The Owl' can be read as a poem about loss – a loss of ease. As Paul Kingsnorth puts it in his essay 'The Poet and the Machine', Thomas "was in love with the lanes and the downs and the people who called them home, and he knew […] that these things were flaming down a dying arc. He knew he would love and lose, and he wrote to understand how to live with that".

A century and more after the poet's death, loss is part of the lexicon. Species loss; biodiversity loss; habitat loss. Were Thomas's ghost to keep us company on a downhill walk toward the end of an evening, what losses would he notice now? Birds, no doubt, and hedgerows; quietness, perhaps; even inns. He always liked a good inn. As for the gladdening cry I heard on the stuffy air in May, it hasn't – as far as I know – been repeated. But then absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and I tell myself that the revenant bird may, hopefully, call again. For love of Edward Thomas and tawny owls, I'll keep listening.

Notes

Books mentioned or quoted from in this article: *Owls* by Mike Toms (William Collins, 2014), volume 125 in the New Naturalist Library; *The Annotated Collected Poems* by Edward Thomas, edited by Edna Longley (Bloodaxe Books, 2008); *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry*, edited by Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn (Enitharmon Press, 2007); *Birds Britannica* by Mark Cocker and Richard Mabey (Chatto & Windus, 2005); *Poems* by Edward Thomas (Selwyn & Blount, 1917; facsimile edition Imperial War Museum, 1997); *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* by Matthew Hollis (Faber and Faber, 2011); *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras* by Jean Moorcroft Wilson (Bloomsbury, 2015); *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist* by Paul Kingsnorth (Faber and Faber, 2017).

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Edward Thomas, Antonio Machado and the Other Man by Jeremy Goring

Jeremy taught History at Goldsmith's College and is the author of 'Antonio Machado – The Authentic Voice of Spain' which was published in paperback in September 2020 by Xlibris UK. In the following article he compares Machado's life and work with that of Edward Thomas.

Antonio Machado (1875-1939), whom Spaniards regard as their finest twentieth century poet, and Edward Thomas, whom many of his countrymen hold in equally high esteem, were near contemporaries, but their paths never crossed. Each was probably not even aware of the other's existence.

At first sight Thomas and Machado do not seem to have had much in common. While the one earned his living as a writer the other earned his as a school teacher. While the one was an essayist who became a poet, the other was a poet who, at the end of his life, mainly wrote prose. While the one was almost unknown in his lifetime, the other was so famous that almost everyone in Spain knew his name.

In other respects, however, the two poets did resemble each other. For one thing they both loved walking. In the land of Coleridge and Wordsworth there was nothing unusual about a poet spending as much time as Thomas did out walking. But in Spain it seems to have been rare for a poet to walk any further than the distance from his front door to his favourite café. Machado, by contrast, took every opportunity to go rambling through the countryside. His love of the landscape that he walked through is clear from his collection of poems called *Campos de Castilla* (1912) and, after he had left Castile, he retained vivid memories of his time there. In the spring of 1913, now living in Andalusia, he addressed a poem to an old friend to ask him how the *campos* of Soria was looking.

> Palacio, good friend
> is spring
> already dressing the branches of the poplars
> by the river and the roads? On the highland
> by the upper Duero, spring is late
> yet beautiful and gentle when it comes!
> Do the old elms
> have a few new leaves?
> The acacia trees must still be bare
> and the mountains of the sierra full of snow…
> Are brambles in flower
> among the grey cliffs,
> and white daisies

in the slender grass?
On those belfries
by now the storks must be turning up.
There must be green wheatfields
and brown mules in the seeded furrows,
and peasants who plant the late crops
with April rains. By now the bees
are sipping thyme and rosemary.
Are plum trees in flower? Are there still violets?...
Palacio, good friend
are there nightingales on the riverbanks?[1]

No other Spanish poet had such a keen eye for the varied wonders of the natural world. At the very time when Thomas was cycling through southern England 'in search of spring', Machado was travelling mentally through the countryside of Castile.

Machado sometimes felt that, as he travelled on his own, he was accompanied by someone else. In a poem called 'Portrait' he wrote, 'I talk with the man who is always at my side',[2] and in his 'Proverbs and Songs' he had this advice:

Look for your counterpart
who's always alongside you
and is always your opposite.[3]

As is well known, Thomas also felt that at times there was someone else alongside him – or just ahead of him – as he journeyed. In 'The Other', one of his longest poems, he talks of trying to catch up with this man. In the last verse he writes:

And now I dare not follow after
Too close. I try to keep in sight,
Dreading his frown and worse his laughter.

On his cycle ride to Somerset in 1913 the Other Man would appear at various points and engage him in conversation. Thomas seems to have been irritated by the presence of this character who asked too many questions, was faddy about food and fussy about where he stayed the night. Jean Moorcroft Wilson has pointed out that 'the introduction of the 'Other Man' into *In Pursuit of Spring* suggests that he might at last be dealing with a long-repressed side of himself'.[4] He had undergone analysis

with a disciple of Jung and would have been aware of the concept of the 'shadow', which represented the part of himself that he didn't want to engage with.

Machado, on the other hand, while familiar with Freud, had probably not read any Jung. Although born on the same day – 26 July 1875 – he would not have been able to benefit from the insights of the great Swiss psychologist. Terms like 'individuation' would probably not have meant anything to him, although at some level he may have understood what the process involved. But his 'other man', unlike Thomas's, was evidently a welcome companion with whom he was happy to talk; in 'Portrait' he referred to him as 'this good friend/who has shown me the way to love humankind'.[5] Machado's other man, whose role is to teach him things he doesn't wish to know, bears a closer resemblance than Thomas's to Jung's 'shadow'. His willingness to listen to 'the other' suggests that he was in some ways more self-aware than Thomas. He clearly had an understanding of what depth psychologists call 'projection' – and of what Jesus spoke about in terms of 'motes' and 'beams'.[6] 'I look inwards rather than outwards,' he wrote in a self-analytical survey in 1913, 'and recognise the injustice of criticising in my neighbour what I am aware of in myself.'[7]

Both Machado and Thomas suffered from bouts of depression, so severe on occasion that they were driven to contemplate suicide. If it is true that people get depressed if their angry feelings have been turned inwards against themselves, neither man was an exception to the rule. Both clearly had much to be angry about. Thomas was angered and frustrated by his marriage to Helen, which he said was 'continually encrusting his soul'.[8] Machado's marriage to Leonor, 19 years his junior, which ended when she was still a teenager, did not disrupt his creativity. What probably angered and frustrated him (as it did Thomas) was having to spend so much time earning his living when he wanted to be free to exercise his gifts as a writer. In both cases relief from depression eventually came at the close of their lives. As Jean Moorcroft Wilson has pointed out, when Thomas was about to leave for France early in 1917, his friends noticed that he seemed happier than he had ever been; and Helen suggested that he now had 'little time for depression'.[9] After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Machado found a legitimate target for his pent-up anger: he announced that he would put his pen at the disposal of the Republic and proceeded to hit out at the crooks and cowards that had betrayed it. When he spoke in public his friends were surprised that this man, hitherto so quiet and melancholy, now talked in a voice 'charged with anger'.[10]

Uprooted from the land they loved, Thomas and Machado both died in France, their bodies buried in a foreign field. It seems that at the last, in the midst of war, they had attained some peace of mind. If their inner conflicts had been resolved and their inner divisions healed, they might no longer have had encounters with what Thomas called the 'Other Man'.

Postscript

A poem of Machado's that Thomas would probably have appreciated includes this oft quoted couplet: 'Walker, there is no path, /paths are made by walking.'[11] Its truth applies equally to two men who, in their poetry, trod paths that no-one had ever trodden before. As Ted Hughes said of Thomas and Lorca said of Machado, every poet that followed after him would be in his debt. That was clearly something else that the two men had in common.

References

[1] Alan S. Trueblood, ed., *Antonio Machado: Selected Poems*, 123.
[2] *Ibid.,* 101.
[3] *Ibid.*, 179.
[4] Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Edward Thomas: from Adelstrop to Arras,* 232.
[5] Trueblood, 101.
[6] *St. Luke*, 7, 3-5 (Authorised version)
[7] Jeremy Goring, *Antonio Machado: the Authentic Voice of Spain*, 236.
[8] Wilson, 81.
[9] *Ibid.*, 399.
[10] Goring, 190.
[11] Willis Barnstone, *Border of a Dream: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado*, 281. Barnstone translates *camino* as 'road', but in this instance 'path' is more appropriate; later in the poem Machado uses *senda,* which both literally and figuratively means 'path', in place of *camino.*

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Edward Thomas Books in the Claude Prance Collection by Terry Lloyd

In an email to the retiring editor Julia Maxted, Terry Lloyd, a long-standing Fellowship member, provides an interesting update to an article about the avid book collector Claude Prance, first published in Newsletter 48 and entitled 'An Edward Thomas Collection'. Terry writes:

The article describes a treasure trove of ET related books, but the final comment from the Private Libraries Association implies that the collection is now lost. "The author Claude Prance has died and the PLA is unable to trace his heirs". The good news is that the collection is safe and well, if somewhat distant from Petersfield, in the National Library of Australia,
see https://www.nla.gov.au/selected-library-collections/prance-collection with an excerpt below.

‘Claude Prance (1906-2002) was born in Portsmouth, England, and was educated at the Philological School and St John’s College at Southsea. He joined the Midland Bank in 1923 and served at various branches in southern England. He enlisted in the Royal Air Force in 1941 and saw service in North Africa and the Middle East. In 1945 he returned to the Midland Bank and held various managerial posts at its head office in London until his retirement in 1966. He and his wife then went to live on the Maltese island of Gozo. In 1980 they emigrated to Australia and settled in Canberra.

The Library purchased portions of the library from Prance in 2000. The Claude Prance Collection comprises 975 items. The largest and most significant group are books relating to the essayist and poet Charles Lamb (1775–1834) and his circle. There are also 250 books by or relating to the poet Edward Thomas (1878–1917), and a small number of titles on English natural history *belles lettres*, book collecting and bookplates.

As a young man, Prance had a strong interest in English literature, particularly the literature of the early nineteenth century. He contributed essays and articles to various literary magazines in Britain and the United States and published a selection of them in his first book, *Peppercorn Papers* (1965). In retirement, he wrote several books including *The Laughing Philosopher* (1976), *Companion to Charles Lamb* (1983), *Essays of a Book Collector* (1989) and *The Characters in the Novels of Thomas Love Peacock* (1992).

Prance joined the Charles Lamb Society in 1936 and was vice-president for many years. He was an enthusiastic book collector, with a library of over 8000 volumes, and was a member of various book-collecting organisations. His collection was mainly focused on English literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, but he also collected books on British theatre, natural history and cricket.

The Lamb Collection includes books by Charles Lamb and his contemporaries Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Clare, George Dyer, Leigh Hunt, Thomas Hood, Robert Southey, William Hone, Bernard Barton, William Hazlitt, Samuel Rogers, Thomas De Quincey and J.G. Lockhart. Of special note are a first edition of Lamb’s *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833), a second edition of Coleridge’s *Poems* (1797), with additional poems by Lamb, an annotated copy of George Dyer’s *Poems* (1801), Sara Coleridge’s *Phantasmion* (1837), a limited edition of Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1885) and a complete set of the *London Magazine* (1820–24).

The collection also includes several editions of poems and essays by Edward Thomas, several works published by the Beaumont Press, and works by Edmund Blunden, Walter de la Mare and Richard Garnett.’

FROM THE ARCHIVE

In this and each subsequent newsletter, we will be publishing one or more articles drawn from our archive of Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletters, which stretches all the way back to October 1980.

That this is even possible is due to the diligence and dedication of two long standing members. Thanks are therefore due to Dr. Marie-Marthe Gervais for collating and managing the archive and Colin Thornton for his work on keeping the Index to the Newsletters up to date. This is a great help to members, researchers and Editors. Thank you both, your efforts are much appreciated.

To get things started we reprint below an article by Ken Watts. Ken sadly died in February of last year. Richard Emeny, Shirley Reynolds and Benedict MacKay all wrote about their fond memories of the great Wiltshireman in our last newsletter.

The article, in which Ken describes Edward Thomas's friendship with 'Dad' Uzzell, appeared in Newsletter 27 in August 1992 and is printed here by way of a further tribute to Ken.

In the article Ken wrote that David Uzzell had once been a gamekeeper for the Goddard family and had lived in a cottage at Hodson Bottom near Swindon, where Helen Thomas had claimed that she and Edward spent their honeymoon. Subsequent research led Ken to conclude that this was not in fact correct and so he followed up his first article with a second to set the matter straight.

A Lasting Acquaintance - David Uzzell by Ken Watts

Edward Thomas, in 'The Childhood of Edward Thomas', described the elderly Wiltshireman who befriended him in his youth at Swindon 'a lasting acquaintance'. In his definitive biography of Edward Thomas, Professor R. G. Thomas suggested that this man's influence upon the young Edward Thomas was considerable and that 'the example of David Uzzell was before him for the rest of his life.' The influence of David Uzzell can hardly be over emphasised, yet David Uzzell has always remained a shadowy figure, mentioned by the biographers, yet never researched.

Edward called him 'Dad' in the Wiltshire manner of addressing elders, and David Uzzell provided a surrogate father figure at a time when the young Thomas was experiencing difficulties in his relations with his father. The relationship with 'Dad' became even more important when Edward's literary mentor, James Ashcroft Noble, the father of Helen Noble, his future wife, died in 1897 when Edward was only 18. 'Dad' Uzzell educated the young boy in country ways and lore, and accompanied him in his explorations of the land around Swindon, the countryside of Richard Jefferies. His importance to Edward Thomas is reflected in the number of times that 'Dad' Uzzell appears, sometimes only thinly disguised, in his writings from the early essays, such as the one entitled 'Dad' of 1895, in the Colbeck Collection to the major poem 'Lob' which Thomas wrote towards the end of his life.

Thomas first met David Uzzell beside the canal at New Swindon in about 1895. He later described him as 'old enough to be my grandfather', but in another description he is 'a stiff straight man, broad-

shouldered and bushy-bearded'. This seems to be a description of a not very old man. Anyone above the age of fifty appears old to a youth of seventeen and David Uzzell lived to send a moving letter of condolence to Helen when Edward was killed in 1917. This letter – which reveals its author as literate but possessing a highly individual form of phonetic spelling, is printed as an Epilogue to John Moore's 'Life and Letters of Edward Thomas'. From this letter, the description of David Uzzell in Edward's writings, and the letters sent to him in John Moore's 'The Life and Letters of Edward Thomas', it can reasonably be concluded that David Uzzell must have lived from about 1840 to 1920. This would make him only 55 when he met Edward Thomas, and 77 when he wrote to Helen in 1917.

It is therefore a matter of some interest to find that David Uzzell was buried at Swindon on 13th December 1919 aged 78, his home being given as 6 St. John's Terrace, Swindon Old Town. When his age of 78 is extended back from 1919, we arrive at the year 1841 when the birth of David Uzzell is recorded at Pool Keynes to John and Sarah, nee Cook, who had at least nine children between 1839 and 1857. The father and grandfather were John Uzzells, and there were uncles named William, Thomas and Charles, which is significant in view of the fact that David Uzzell's three sons are referred to by Edward Thomas in a letter of 22nd December 1910 as 'Bill, Tom and Charley'. Edward tells us in 'The Childhood of Edward Thomas' that he 'got to know' these sons, who treated their father as 'an equal, but in misfortune'.

From their father's letter of 1917 to Helen Thomas, we find that Bill was the eldest, and it seems probably that Edward named them in order of seniority. In his December 1910 letter Edward Thomas also mentioned that Bill was a sweel and Charley a lamplighter; and in 'The Childhood of Edward Thomas' the eldest is described as 'a bald old Indian soldier, often out of a job', the youngest (Charley?) as 'a rambling character … brown as a berry from harvesting, his large blue eyes glittering, his fair hair bleached like hay'. Thomas also recorded that when he first met David Uzzell he 'lived with his wife under the roof of a son who was in the (railway) factory' and goes on to mention that this was the middle son (Tom?). In an undated letter to 'Dad' Uzzell, Edward refers to 'Tom with his good looks and equally good temper', and mentions his child. There are still many Uzzells in the Swindon telephone directory, many no doubt descended from these three sons of David Uzzell.

When Edward Thomas first met 'Dad' in the mid-1890s we have seen that he was living with his son, presumably in the railway village at New Swindon, as his son worked in the railway factory. This would account for the fact that their early activities were based around the Wilts and Berks Canal and the country west of Swindon towards Wootton Bassett. Later in the 1890s 'Dad' somehow obtained a job as a gamekeeper at Burderop Park and their activities were transferred to the Burderop area immediately west of Chiseldon. It is probable that Uzzell was the keeper at Burderop from about 1896 until probably about 1911 when he was 70, because in 1897 the Thomases visited him at the gamekeeper's cottage at Hodson, and in a letter dated December 1910 Edward Thomas asked Dad to

cut him ‘a good tapering stick’ from his ‘estate’. In his extreme old age David Uzzell moved into Old Swindon where he died.

Many of the Uzzells came from David’s birthplace of Pool Keynes where the name goes back to 1701, others from nearby Somerford Keynes where the name appears in the sixteenth century. At the time (1841) of David’s birth both villages were in Wiltshire. They were later – in 1897 – transferred to Gloucestershire and I suspect this may explain Edward’s playful reference to ‘his best Gloucestershire accent’ in a letter of July 1915 to David Uzzell who, having been born a Wiltshireman, may have resented the transfer of his native village to Gloucestershire. There is also the conclusion of ‘Lob’ which owes much to the character of ‘Dad’ Uzzell and ends:

‘Young Jack, perhaps and now a Wiltshireman

As he has oft been since his days began’.

Edward was always inclined to pull ‘Dad’s’ leg in his letters, which is an indication of their easy and relaxed relationship, despite the disparity of 37 years in their ages. On December 21st 1909 he wrote: ‘I wish I could afford to keep a gardener who would not do much work; then I could have you’.

David Uzzell is described in ‘The Childhood of Edward Thomas’ as:

‘having done some poaching in his younger days. Odd-job man under a wood-ward, militiaman and latterly outdoor assistant to grocers, he had not had time to become very respectable.’

Edward Thomas then paid tribute to the character of his friend:

‘I supposed him to be a wicked old man until I came to believe that all men were radically like him but most inferior in honesty. He was not in the least unseemly or obtrusive but grave and roused very rarely to his Shakespearian laughter and the words, ‘well, well what a thing it is’.

Thomas adopted this saying and introduced it into several of his writings.

In her introduction to ‘The South Country’, Helen Thomas recorded that ‘people who were honest and direct’ appealed to Edward Thomas: it was these characteristics that attracted him to David Uzzell, and explained his admiration for simple country people.

Among the references to ‘Dad’ in ‘The Childhood of Edward Thomas’ perhaps the most memorable is the description of him eating his picnic dinner:

‘He being toothless had to chew prodigiously, his nose and beard almost meeting at each bite, to get through his brown bread and watercress … His eating grimace amused me, the simplicity of his meal, and his thanks to God for it impressed me’.

We also have a thinly-veiled description at the start of ‘Lob’ written in April 1915, and a manuscript entitled ‘Dad’ in the Colbeck Collection which was written in 1895 soon after Thomas first met its

subject. This is printed in full on pages 14 to 16 of Professor Thomas's 'Edward Thomas: A Portrait'. From it we learn that 'no man at his age ever had a straighter back, that we were sure of, straight and strong it was as the ground ash stick he always carried' that he 'had a whole store of out of door knowledge that he was quite ready to impart, and that 'he could make a walk supremely interesting and was indeed a charming companion on any expedition in the fields'. Thomas also notes in this piece that 'he was bitter against the Church and State, though a truly more orthodox man never breathed', and he 'insisted that there was a separate system of law for rich and poor'. 'Dad' ends with the statement that:

'Latterly Dad had sobered much when he was no longer able to perform his old feats of strength and daring. To make amends for the past perhaps he had turned tee-totaller and finally Salvationist. It was a strange step from poacher to street corner preacher, but was doubtless sincere. He was loudest against 'these new religions; his woodland life and really intense sympathy with Nature could not overcome his adherence to traditional views of religion.'

Edward's reference to 'Dad's' 'woodland life' is interesting because two years later he entitled his first book 'The Woodland Life', no doubt because it contained much country lore learned from David Uzzell.

Another description of 'Dad' occurs in an essay 'A Man of the Woods' which was included in the posthumous collect 'Cloud Castle' in 1922. This contains references to his 'soldier's life', his 'interchangeable crafts of poacher and gamekeeper' and to the fact that 'keepering and poaching rank together in his education'. The essay, which nominated its subject as 'David', ends with a pen portrait:

'David, the old poacher and soldier, 'traveller' once, perchance, is keen-witted and thoughtful; at times a light smile plays gracefully about the wrinkles of time and trouble in his cheek. At night, when he gathers his boys about him, there is grave talk and bandied jest, and thrusts of wit. Perhaps in the midst of the 'godship' one is ailing, and inevitably he suffers doctoring with long, dark, bitter draughts of mysterious tea'.

When he was the keeper at Burderop, David Uzzel occupied the only cottage to the west of the road through Hodson Bottom. This was the cottage that had formerly been the home of keeper Haylock who had befriended Richard Jefferies and consequently was immortalised in 'The Gamekeeper at Home'. The remarkable coincidence of the Haylock-Jefferies relationship being succeeded here by the Uzzell – Edward Thomas friendship established for this humble cottage a place in the literature of the English countryside. It was to this cottage that Edward Thomas brought Helen Noble, his future wife, for a visit in 1897 which she so movingly described in Chapter 3 of 'As it Was' and by so doing gave us our best insight into the delightful characters and lifestyle of 'Dad' and 'Granny' Uzzell.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For most of the facts about David Uzzell I am indebted to Mrs. Margaret Lilley of Maidenhead, a member of the Uzzell family who is at present researching the history of that family.

The Swindon Advertiser did not notice either the death or the funeral.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Underland – A Deep Time Journey by Robert Macfarlane. (Hamish Hamilton 2019 – 488 pages)

Robert Macfarlane's Underland is a profoundly serious and important book, dealing as it does with issues of human survival and destruction, the past and future and especially our present in the context of the natural world during the Anthropocene.

It is also for the most part a compelling read, rich with the unexpected and certainly to me the unknown, explored through the author's habitual method of organised encounters with enthusiasts, some amateurs, others professionals, all experts by experience. His approach in some ways re-enacts Thomas's in his topological works, which of course Macfarlane knows, though the encounters are more extended and the author more extrovert than Thomas. They also both share an approach to writing which is lyrical and which often refers to other writing.

Though confined to Europe the subjects 'mined' are varied and numerous, their common feature being that of being underground. Sometimes this is intrinsic – caves and caverns, mycorrhizal bodies below Epping Forest - others as a result of human agency seeking to conceal, preserve or extract. The science is very comprehensible and intriguing. Who would know that astrological research for Dark Matter is carried on from a potash mine under the North Sea, or that an eighth of the world's biomass is under the ground? I had heard of some but not all the cave paintings he explores, and had heard of the Paris Catacombs but not of the gatherings there by hipster 'urban explorers'.

His exploration of the permeable nature of limestone and consequent caverns and underground rivers forms an extraordinarily visceral read: this reader was muttering – 'No Robert, don't let's do this!' He comments himself that to read of claustrophobic experiences is to engage physically in a way that is like nothing else in reading. But with the fear comes an ecstasy that he sees as countering the Thanatos of cavers, hundreds of whom have in fact died. The sinkholes he visits on the Slovenia/Italian border were witness to Fascist/Communist atrocities that he exposes movingly with a debate on the dichotomy of enjoying a beautiful landscape with a dreadful violent history.

The last third of the book is set in Norway, Greenland and Finland where the theme is chiefly ice, or sometimes ice and plastic. It is harder going in every sense and a harder read (perhaps a little too much of the old mountaineer emerges). But the subjects are ominous, oil drilling off the Lofoten Islands destroying the sea bed, the breaking away of cathedral-sized bergs of ice from the Arctic icecap as he watches, and the formation of a substance known as 'plastiglomerate' all remind us of the probably irretrievable damage we have done to the planet.

In a final section on the disposal and storage of spent fuel rods from the nuclear industry - with a half-life of four and a half billion years - Macfarlane finds some grounds for hope. In Finland and New Mexico these deposits are to have warnings created which are intended to last for thousands of years, possibly into a post-human future. Their design has involved a panel of 'anthropologists, architects, archaeologists, historians, graphic designers, ethicists, librarians, sculptors and linguists as well as geologists, astronomers and biologists.' These efforts, like those of the people he has encountered, show a people 'committed to shared human work rather than retreat and isolation.'

Maybe the best we can do, however imperfectly, he reflects, is to try to be better ancestors. It is a thoughtful and humane ending to a book that is packed with six years of research used in the context of cheerful adventures together with people who inevitably become friends.

Margaret Keeping.

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Simplify Me: The Life of Keith Douglas by Richard Burton (Infinite Ideas Limited 2020 – 272 pages)

This is a timely publication commemorating the centenary of Keith Douglas and the75th Anniversary of the ending of the war in which he died. Killed by a mortar shell on 9th June 1944 in Normandy, at the age of 24, Douglas had already achieved a great deal, although he did not live to see the best of his work in print. However, since his death, he has become recognised as probably the greatest poet of the Second World War and one of the finest British poets of the twentieth century.

This is only the second biography of this charming, difficult and gifted man and there can be little doubt that Richard Burton has been meticulous in his research. School, university and military records, letters, diaries and interviews are examined and quoted in great, sometimes rather excessive detail. However, what emerges, is a revealing account of Douglas's youth and the development of a very individual character.

Keith Castellain Douglas was born in Tunbridge Wells on 24th January 1920. He was only 4 years old when his father ran off with the home help. He clearly idolised his father who had won an MC in the

Great War, but he never saw him again, refusing to meet him when his father made overtures some twelve years later. His mother was in poor health and left in financial straits. After prep school, Keith went to Christ's Hospital where a generous attitude to the payment of school fees was a tribute to his precocious talent. He wrote stories, poems and proved to be an accomplished artist. He was a keen and vigorous games player and committed Army Cadet. Even at the age of seven he had described himself as 'a militarist'! He could be a difficult pupil and Burton quotes examples of Douglas defying authority with a sense of injustice, a trait that he would take with him into the army. In a letter written in early 1940 he described himself as 'a very defiant and rude person with vulnerable but concealed feelings and the wrong attitude towards most people.' He was also blighted by depression what he called his 'Bete Noire', 'the beast on my back'.

At Merton College, Oxford his tutor was none other than Edmund Blunden, who encouraged him in his poetry writing. Douglas both edited and contributed to "The Cherwell", even, on occasions, writing the bulk of the magazine himself. He also found time to conduct a series of passionate love affairs in which he did not always cover himself with glory. As Burton comments, 'he was clearly very needy.'

All this was set aside when war broke out. By June 1941, Douglas had been posted to North Africa as a tank commander in the Sherwood Rangers. Although often impatient with authority, he saw himself as a professional soldier. He was so anxious to see action that he famously deserted his post as a camouflage officer to join his unit at El Alamein. He wrote of his experiences in a prose piece 'Alamein to Zem Zem.'

Although 75% of his poetry was written before he saw action, Keith Douglas is best known for his war poetry. He bears comparison with the poets of the Great War like Owen, Sassoon, Rosenberg and, of course, Edward Thomas. He did not think that his generation had anything new to say about the futility of war. He also believed that the relative mobility of modern warfare 'does not give the same opportunities for writing as the long routines of trench warfare.' Burton goes on to quote another veteran of the North African Campaign, Vernon Scannell, who wrote that the poets of the Second World War were not protest poets for they 'could not be disillusioned because they held no illusions to start with.' Douglas had no doubts about the need to stop Hitler even if he held some reactionary views, including anti-Semitism.

Douglas certainly did not lack humanity or compassion, but the poetry that describes his war is deliberately dispassionate. He acknowledged his debt to the earlier generation (in "Desert Flowers" he writes 'Rosenberg, I only repeat what you were saying') but his poetic voice is his own. In Vergissmeinnicht' he returns to the scene of a battle three weeks before and finds the rotting corpse of a German soldier whose gun had hit Douglas's tank 'like the entry of a demon.' Beside the body is 'the soiled picture of his girl' who has written the message 'Vergissmeinnicht' 'forget me not'. Douglas sees the scene through her eyes and so preserves his detachment:

But she would weep to see today

How on his skin the swart flies move;

The dust upon the paper eye

And the burst stomach like a cave.

Unsentimental, but not lacking in compassion, Douglas, the professional soldier, concludes the poem:

For here the lover and killer are mingled

having one body and one heart;

here death, who had the soldier singled,

had done the lover mortal hurt.

What Burton calls Douglas's 'unblinking view of death' appears again in "How to Kill"

Now in my dial of glass appears

the soldier who is going to die.

He smiles, and moves about in ways

his mother knows, habits of his.

The wires touch his face: I cry

NOW. Death, like a familiar, hears

……

How easy it is to make a ghost.

Douglas himself was obsessed with his own death. He had not seen action when he wrote, "Simplify me when I am dead" but he knew it would come. He was a man in a hurry, anxious to see his work in print, perhaps not wanting to disappoint posterity.

His death, coming as it did after the D Day landings was due to a certain rashness. He should not have been away from his tank when the stray mortar shell killed him. His death mirrors that of

Edward Thomas. Both took their soldiering seriously, both achieved much in their short careers. In his biography of Keith Douglas, Richard Burton gives us a rounded picture of a very individual voice, a very individual man. It is hoped that this volume will encourage a greater interest in him. It seems a travesty that the last sentence of the book reads 'Keith Douglas remains largely ignored.'

David Ennals

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The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us by Nick Hayes (Bloomsbury Circus 2020 – 464 pages)

Any readers familiar with New Nature Writing will find this book easy to navigate around - a travelogue with historical and literary references, woven together with lyrical and engaging prose. But what is more surprising is the radical way Hayes deals with the topic of trespassing, and uncovers some of the dark secrets behind property ownership.

Part travelogue, part polemic, the book is summarized in its marketing flyer as: *'A journey across England through the eyes of a trespasser and a meditation on the fraught and complex relationship between land, politics and power'*. The scope of the book is too wide ranging, however, to be summed up in a single sentence.

Each chapter has an animal's name as its single word title (Cow, Fox, Dog) and includes an act of trespass by Hayes on private land. We follow him over fences and through hedgerows, across many country estates, armed with only a pencil and a sketchbook to record his observations. The book contains 11 black and white double spread illustrations (drawn by the author): a lithograph of a building or stately home, viewed furtively from the cover of dense foliage, as a would-be trespasser might see it. The style is dreamlike, surreal and sometimes foreboding.

The book opens with the Kinder Mass Trespass of 1932- an act of wilful trespass and civil disobedience, which involved violent scuffles with gamekeepers and led to the arrest and trial of six of the ringleaders at the Derby assizes. The battle to free Kinder Scout was finally won in 1953 when the Peak District National Park was established. In 2000 the Countryside Right of Way Act (CROW) was a further step forward, giving people the right to wander wherever they chose over open access land. However, certain types of trespass still remain a crime under English Law. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 introduced criteria to arrest people for the newly invented crime of 'aggravated trespass', which means that the police have the power to remove people from private land if they have met for any common purpose: ramblers, ravers, hunt saboteurs and protesters of all kinds fall within this remit. Hayes skilfully argues that although your right to peaceful protest is secured by

the European Convention of Human Rights, if you do it *'anywhere but your back garden or a highway, you can be arrested and sent to jail'.*

Hayes traces the 'cult of exclusion' caused by land and property ownership back to William the Conqueror. Under Anglo-Saxon rule vast tracts of land were recognised as a vital source of subsistence for all peasants of the area to graze their cattle and pigs, take wood, dig peat or fish the ponds - a kind of Middle Age version of the Welfare State. But after the Norman Conquest much of this became Crown Property by virtue of a 'land grab' by the ruling classes. By 1200 almost 2000 deer parks were established for use by the king and his barons for hunting. Anyone poaching deer or game faced the strictest of penalties. It is here that we first come across references to 'trespass' in its most primitive form.

In 1531 Henry VIII introduced the Egyptian Act to rid the land of a migrant group that posed a threat to the countryside: the gypsies. Hayes makes the point that: *'it was not their race, origin, or palm reading that upset the order of the state, it was their mobility'*. After the end of the Napoleonic wars, when the returning conscripts roamed the land, the new Vagrancy Act of 1824 was passed to deal with the deviant wanderers. Such a vagrant was deemed 'a rogue and vagabond' and even 'an incorrigible rogue'. William Wilberforce objected to the Act on the grounds that *'it was not punishing any particular crime but, rather, the symptom of a social problem'*.

Throughout the book Hayes demonstrates his skill and versatility with language , moving effortlessly from sparkling prose *'thick bands of dog rose hang like vines from the trees whose branches intersect over the path like the folded fingers of a chess player'* to salty down -to- earth speech *'the dog sniffs piss like a doctor listens to a heartbeat'*.

The concept of walls is explored in the chapter 'Sheep' - from the Great Wall of China to the West Bank barrier; from the Berlin Wall to the *Mauer in Kopf* (wall in the head).Hayes argues that a wall is: '*a technology of division. Its presence alone creates a simplistic binary logic that imposes the idea that one side is separate from the other, and moreover, that both sides are opposed to the other'.* He continues his exploration of 'Enclosure' – the name given to privatization of land that began in the early thirteenth century and reached its zenith in the eighteenth, to provide pasture for sheep. It was the Church and State that had access to property and power in the sixteenth century. Bibles were only available in Latin, to the privileged few - *'the final mystical wall that prevented access to the common man'* - and were kept locked away in local churches behind the altar. It was William Tyndale who had the audacity to challenge the norm and bring out an English translation that could be understood by a simple ploughboy. As Hayes puts it*: 'His translation of the New Testament was arguably the single most dramatic de-privatisation of power in the history of England. It was an act that undermined the centralised power of the state, as much as the Church'.* A large proportion of the James I Bible was Tyndale's work, and we have him to thank for the words: 'Forgive us our trespasses'.

In ‘Cow’, Hayes tramps across the magnificent Charborough estate of Richard Drax, current MP for South Dorset, who boasts the longest brick wall in England. The business that propelled Drax’s forebears into the premier league of landowners was the sugar plantations of Barbados. Much of the chapter explores the history of the slave trade and how it financed more walls around the commons of England. Hayes maintains that the Abolition Act was also a victory for the slavers, who continued their businesses and *‘used their compensation to make new land purchases, build new houses and, in the Drax estate, raise a new brick wall to keep out the commoners.’* Because slaves were defined in British law as the ‘inalienable property of their masters’, their abolition meant that the owners had to be compensated for their loss, and used it to build up large estates in England.

Women’s rights and gender inequality are explored in ‘Spider’. From the witch hunts of the 16th century to the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp and Grow Heathrow, it seems that the law has often stifled women’s rights. As Hayes argued, the Greenham Common women worked tirelessly to find creative ways of protesting about the cruise missiles in Berkshire. As with the witch trials there was a salacious interest in sexuality. Some were arrested, some branded lesbians. Buckets of maggots and dog excrement were thrown, and the camp was set ablaze on a number of occasions. Then in 1987 Reagan and Gorbachev signed a Nuclear Forces Treaty and the first missiles left Greenham two years later. The nuclear threat had been de-escalated, thanks (in part) to the women’s protest campaign. The scale of the civil disobedience was calculated by Hansard as 812 trespasses across the perimeter fence in the fifteen months from January 1987. The women even put their names on the bolt-cutters to make sure they were arrested. In 1992 the courts ruled that the perimeter fence at RAF Greenham was unlawful and had not been erected with ministerial consent.

The author picks apart the meaning of ‘aristocracy’ as he tramps illegally across the Highclere estate - the setting for ‘Downton Abbey’. In Greek, it literally means ‘rule by the best’ and takes *Noblesse oblige* as its core concept. Having access to the best education, by the trappings of privilege, the aristocracy are better suited to high-minded thinking, and can serve the public interest by supplying top rank politicians and public servants – or so the theory goes. For Hayes this is a masterclass in self-delusion. A third of Britain is still owned by the aristocracy who receive farm subsidies amounting to millions of pounds each year. He makes the point that unlike welfare benefits to those most in need, these subsidies are neither means-tested nor capped. Some landowners, such as Lord Salisbury, have registered their land to businesses based offshore to reduce the tax burden. If a Land Value Tax had been introduced, as proposed by Lloyd George in his 1909 budget, then new infrastructures such as Crossrail or HS2 might well have been entirely paid for without taking money out of the public purse.

Perhaps one of the most compelling chapters in the book is when we see Hayes helping out at the Jungle Camp in Calais. It is then that we realise that he is no ivory-towered writer, but an activist prepared to dirty his hands to expose injustices in the system. Some of the scenes he uncovers are shocking: *‘the acres of mud, carved up with deep tyre ruts, the collapsed tents, poles broken by the wind and people dressed head to toe in bin bags’*. Then there was the *‘constant unspecified threat’* of

the CRS- a civilian reserve corps of the French police, who would delay the delivery of hot food, confiscate shoes and blankets, and sometimes drive migrants miles out of town and leave them on the roadside to walk back to camp. One evening just after midnight, Hayes was caught in a CRS tear gas attack: *'The gas had entered my chest and my lungs were beginning to sting. I could barely see, it hurt to breathe and suddenly I felt a desperate sense of disorientation'.* Like Orwell before him, Hayes believes that nationalism is an ideology that organises the world into a simplistic binary class system, good versus bad that ignores complexity, nuance or context. A psychological neurosis which expands on Freud's idea of collective narcissism which *'involves an inherent self-belief in one group's unique superiority'.* The power of the media in fixing the dominant ideologies of a nation is alluded to, and how *'through repetition of a consistent perspective on world views, they create what sociologists call doxa - a belief so widely held in society that it becomes seemingly self-evident: it requires no explanation and receives no scrutiny'.*

Trespassing on water, rather than land, is explored in the final two chapters: *'Water is the ultimate element of trespass … it has no respect for borders'* and is *'a nightmare for property lawyers'.* Rivers and their banks are subject to a category of law known as Riparian Rights. Although the Crown owns the water that flows down the river, the landowner holds the rights to the river bank up to halfway across the river. If a wild swimmer or canoeist uses a section of river they officially need permission from each and every one of the property owners of the banks. Clause 33 of the Magna Carta seems to establish the principle of free passage along England's rivers, but Angling Associations dispute this, claiming that '*there is no universal right for people to canoe on non-tidal waters'*. Anglers and canoeists are thus often at loggerheads over the rights to certain stretches of water.

Hayes pumps up his inflatable kayak before embarking on a journey down the River Kennet from Aldermaston to Reading and then along the Thames to London. He paddles through Sonning and Wargrave and spends the night in Henley on Temple Island. After Hurley, Marlow and Cookham he has an encounter with gamekeepers at the Cleveden estate. A few more bends in the river and he arrives at Windsor Castle. He is still paddling through Runnymede, Chertsey and Walton-on -Thames when the chapter ends.

In the grounds of Windsor Castle there is a tree called the Herne Oak – mentioned in Shakespeare's 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'-which is haunted by the ghost of a former Windsor Forest Keeper. In pursuit of this folklore tale, Hayes arrives by train at Datchet station, equipped with sleeping bag, sketchbook and inflatable kayak. He heads north along the Thames Path to Victoria Bridge. The land surrounding Windsor Castle, including the Home Park, opposite him, is Crown Land, and the penalty for trespassing there is a year in prison. He paddles downstream to Queen Elizabeth's Walk to survey the scene, then spends the night under canvas on the banks of the river. He is up at dawn paddling downstream to the avenue of limes, beyond which lies the Herne Oak. We are on tenterhooks to see whether he will disembark from the kayak and take his chances in a mad dash across the Home Park

to reach the oak before the security guards reach him. He considers his chances either way, and leaves us guessing at what really happened next.

Hayes has taken us on a journey across England, and we have seen it through the eyes of a trespasser. His book has revealed how much of the countryside is indeed out-of-bounds. Excluded from 92 per cent of the land and 97 per cent of the waterways, it leaves us feeling uncomfortable, at the walls that divide. For behind some of them is: *'a story of exploitation, enclosure and dispossession of public rights, whose effects continue to this day'.*

Mike Cope

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His Imperial Majesty: A Natural History of the Purple Emperor by Matthew Oates (Bloomsbury Wildlife – June 2020 - 416 pages)

Many of you will know Matthew Oates as a member of the Fellowship and a writer and poet very much in the Edward Thomas tradition. Primarily though he is a naturalist who worked for many years for the National Trust. His particular specialism has always been butterflies and since his retirement in 2018 he has had the time to devote himself to the pursuit and study of that one butterfly which has so fascinated and absorbed him since his schooldays, the Purple Emperor. This delightful book is the result of his dedication to both understanding more about this elusive butterfly and to ensuring its future. I was keen to review it as I had so thoroughly enjoyed Isabel Tree's account of the rewilding project at the family estate at Knepp Castle *(Wilding* 2017). One of the great successes over the two decades of that project has been the explosion in numbers of the Purple Emperor butterfly there and Matthew Oates has been involved in this from an early stage and has said that his book would not have been possible without the revelations of Knepp, where a more open, unmanaged landscape has made closer observation of the butterfly much more possible.

Growing up in the immediate post-war years I was familiar with a range of garden butterflies; Peacocks and Tortoiseshells, Cabbage Whites and lots of little blue ones, but I never regarded them with particular attention. I liked them well enough and in later years, as they have become more scarce, I have tried to grow plants that would attract and nourish them in my garden but, I'm sure, like many of you reading this, I have never taken an academic interest in lepidoptery. So, an entire book devoted to a single species, a natural history of one butterfly, might seem, in prospect, a rather daunting read; but fear not, this turns out to be an entirely entertaining and fascinating account.

To give you a flavour of what is to come, I can do no better than to quote a little from the introduction:

Welcome to the world of the Purple Emperor, the one the Victorian butterfly collectors saluted as His Imperial Majesty (or HIM), the Emperor of the Woods and the Lord of the Forest, to name but three of many salubrious epithets. This is the one butterfly that they most wanted to possess, to form the centrepiece of their precious collections. This is the one today's butterfly enthusiasts most want to experience and understand. …….. The book's aims are, simply, to inspire and enable people to go out and study, record and fully appreciate this, the most magical and enthralling of butterflies.

Even if you are not inspired to be so actively involved, the extract gives you a flavour of the enthusiasm and delight which infuses this study. The author makes no apology for anthropomorphising the Purple Emperor, this 'fantastically strong and entertaining character'. He recounts the extraordinary and often bizarre lengths to which Victorian collectors would go to obtain their prize, but much of the book bears witness to the painstaking and often physically taxing extremes to which the author and others of the Purple Persuasion have gone, and continue to go, to further the understanding of this species.

This butterfly biography is totally absorbing but I am afraid that feminists will find that the world of the Purple Emperor is a very male one. Whilst the female may be a little larger, the shining iridescent blue and violet wings are a feature only of the males; they are the beauties, the female must make do with a less spectacular brown. The males spend time flying amongst the treetops, defending their territory and attacking anything they see as a threat, even birds. They descend from these heights to search amongst the sallows for females to mate with, swiftly returning to their more lofty world. The females, meanwhile, apparently deliberately avoiding any further contact with their aggressive male counterparts, continue to seek amongst the sallow bushes where they will lay their eggs, going to great lengths to select leaves that will provide suitable nourishment for the emerging larvae.

Matthew Oates has pursued his observations of the Purple Emperor through all the stages of its life cycle and thanks to him we now know immensely more than we did about this engaging butterfly, although not all; as he is himself admits at the end of his chapter on the pupal stage, 'studying [this] has driven me to the brink of mental derangement'. Along the way though he has charted his progress in such an open and engaging way, that one is drawn inexorably into his own fascination and admiration for this spectacular insect.

Finally, because you are certain to want to know where this amazing butterfly is to be found, the author has compiled a very informative Appendix, detailing something of the history and the current position of the Purple Emperor by region and county.

That this butterfly has long been considered a rarity has been in part owing to its habit of flying high in the woodland canopy where it has been difficult to observe closely. What Matthew Oates's researches reveal is that it is far less of a specialist in terms of habitat than had been supposed. It can quickly colonise and flourish in new nature land and the creation of and investment in new woodland

in response to the threat of climate change should enable it to thrive and become far more familiar to us all. The book's final plea is that we should recognise what a stupendous butterfly this is and help to give it the future it deserves. Matthew Oates has certainly opened our eyes to this bold and brazen character and I cannot wait for my first sighting.

As I was writing this review, I began to wonder about Edward Thomas's relationship with butterflies. I searched my memory for any mention but whilst numerous references to particular trees and birds and plants came to mind, the only butterfly seemed to be that one who perched contentedly on the hot stone, as if

> 'he[were] the first of insects to have earth
>
> And sun together and to know their worth.

So, like His Imperial Majesty, a very singular butterfly.

Barbara Kinnes

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NOTICES

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