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The Poetry of Edward Thomas

A Linguistic Analysis of Selected Works

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I have undertaken a linguistic/stylistic analysis of selected poems of Edward Thomas. Thomas wrote 144 poems in the two years prior to his death on active duty in France in April 1917 at the age of thirty nine. He was a contemporary of members of the various schools of poetry which existed at this time, the Georgians, the Imagists, the early Modernists and the war poets being the most important. He shared the concerns, philosophic, and linguistic, with all these groups, but was essentially a unique voice. He eschewed equally the decadence of the late -Victorians and what he considered the excesses of the Modernists. To say he steered a middle course is not to do him justice. He tenaciously steered his own course.

Though appreciated by a small and largely insider group of literary critics, Thomas has been subject to unwarranted critical neglect. Surface readings of his works could bring accusations of a certain lack of colour and vitality. This combined with his refusal to be neatly categorized has contributed to his lack of status. I believe a true understanding of Thomas' works can only be achieved by a sustained linguistic analysis.

I have concentrated on ten works which I consider demonstrate the variety of Thomas' linguistic *modus operandi*. For convenience sake, and for the sake of a unified approach, I have grouped these works according to the major thematic concerns. The War and its effects on society and the lives of individuals with 'As The Teams Head-Brass'; the War as a personal meditation with 'Rain'; roads and tracks as metaphors for life's journey with 'The Path'; sections of countryside as correlatives of inner vision with 'The Hollow Wood', 'The Barn' and 'Over The Hills'; the linking of names, smells and memory in 'Old Man' and finally the forest as exemplar of mystery and death in 'The Green Roads', 'Lights Out' and 'Out In The Dark'.

My linguistic methodology has used as a main grammatical text Quirk and Greenbaum's *A University Grammar Of English*. I have drawn on the concepts of linguistic cohesion as discussed in Halliday and Hasan, and some reference has been made where appropriate to Charles Fillmore's theory of role relationships. Other grammatical and linguistic texts consulted are listed in 'The List Of Texts Cited'. The text of Edward Thomas' works throughout this study has been *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas*, edited by Professor R. G. Thomas (1978).

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Introduction

*Weighing the nuances, always linguistic,
of a Thomas or a Frost poem can exercise
more muscles than construing Eliot. (Longley)*

Edward Thomas was intensely interested in poetic theory and the workings of language. It was his bread and butter and private preoccupation for the seventeen years before his first poems were submitted for publication. The hesitations and rough edges of some works which may disconcert the uninitiated reader are not the result of a fumbling practitioner but of strong emotion pruned into shape by much thought, care, and meticulous attention to the techniques which he felt were true to feeling and the organic nature of the words themselves. Words were living, vital entities which would suggest their own usage to the receptive writer. (McDonald, 228). 'Choose me,/ You English words.' ('Words') The relative lack of recognition Thomas has received may be due in part to the apparently unostentatious nature of his unique stylistic features which though innovative, draw unashamedly on the living poetic tradition. Some of his works such as 'Adlestrop' and 'Old Man' are immediately intriguing. Others require a greater scrutiny to assess their true worth. In this study I have attempted by a process of close linguistic/stylistic analysis to do justice to a poet whose position in the history of twentieth century literature is largely underrated.

Edward Thomas wrote poetry only during the final two years of his life. From December 1914 until April 1917 when he was killed at the age of thirty seven, he wrote one hundred and forty four poems. Apart from the 'Last Poem' which was written in the January before his death, he wrote nothing after embarkation. Apart from a few pieces which appeared under the pseudonym Edward Eastaway, the bulk of his verse was published posthumously. Although recognition has grown over the years, Thomas' place in the history of English poetry has been largely overlooked -- and frequently misunderstood. He has been labelled at various times a nature poet, a Georgian, a late Victorian, a War poet, a proto modernist, and an English Romantic in the direct line of Wordsworth. Each individual label must be found wanting. Thomas fitted no one of these, but undoubtedly all, and was, from the perspective of the late twentieth century, greater than the sum of the parts. Stan Smith believes that the 'metaphysical and private gloom' evident in his verse was 'the situated response to a specific moment in the evolution of modern society: the mood of an era'. Thomas was responding to a conviction that his own age 'is party to some crisis in the relationship between words and thing,' a subject he would tackle in 'Old Man'. (Smith, 57; 59, 1976) Whatever the case, his problematic refusal to slot neatly into a poetic category must account for much of the critical neglect. Even a cursory examination of many of the poems reveals much that is original, with innovative reworkings of traditional material and an assured technical mastery. But his

wielding of a new broom was achieved with restraint. There is no sign of the dramatic linguistic experimentation of his Modernist contemporaries, Pound, Eliot and Joyce. Allusions to his predecessors which are scattered throughout Thomas' work were taken as proof of his being 'derivative in a bad way'. (Longley 70). Surface readings of country descriptions were seen as merely tired continuations of an already tired rural tradition, which the Georgians were doing nothing to revitalize. That fact that Thomas used the countryside to expose a complex and often mysterious world view was frequently overlooked, as was the evocative beauty of his acutely observed slices of rural life. Peter Mitchell has discussed Thomas' relationship with the Georgians at some length, taking issue with Leavis' 1932 judgement that Thomas was 'a very original poet who devoted great technical subtlety to the expression of a distinctly modern sensibility'. He asserts that while Thomas had his poetic roots firmly entrenched in the 'woolly pastoral' and sentimentalism of the worst of Georgianism, his better work transcended both the prevailing moods of celebration and melancholy. His emotional complexity and subtlety of expression generally set him apart from the 'ultimately disengaged pastoral of escape' that was the stock-in-trade of many of his contemporaries. (Mitchell, 359-366)

Thomas' role as a War poet deserves special consideration. W. Cooke lists in some detail the erroneous views held by a number of critics. Athalie Bushnell, after wrongly stating that the poems often had their background in the army hut or trench, states that '...very little of his poetry actually takes war or war incidents as its subjects. His poetry is nature poetry, taking simplicity, wonder and longing as its keynotes'. Coombes, extraordinarily, found only 'six or seven war poems'. John H Johnston considered that Thomas, along with Francis Ledwidge, 'refused to let the conflict interfere with their nostalgic rural visions'. Bernard Bergonzi stated that 'very few of Thomas' poems are actually about the war, even obliquely: in his loving concentration on the unchanging order of nature and rural society, the war exists only as a brooding but deliberately excluded presence'. (Cooke, 209-210) The truth of the matter is rather different. The War was an overriding presence in Thomas' work. It continuously impinged upon the central symbols and chosen imagery, and governed the interplay of syntax and meaning. The awareness of death, even from an early age, had, under pressure of depressive bouts, and domestic and work pressures, gradually intensified into a muted death wish, feelings which were crystallized with the outbreak of war and his eventual decision to enlist. Since these two years were the period when he was prompted to respond to the call to poetic expression, his works truly, as Robert Frost stated after his death, followed the 'Roads to France.' From 'Up In The Wind' to 'Out In The Dark' the growing awareness and barely concealed desire for death can be easily traced. Even the most transparent expressions of delight in the minutiae of country life are often darkened by a sombre shadow. Anthologists of the poetry of World War One have often represented Thomas as eager to respond to the call to arms by the solitary inclusion of 'The Trumpet' -- a less fervid example of unbridled patriotism than first appears -- and which was in fact among the last group of poems written in late 1916. A truer picture of his attitude to the public conduct of the War and the actions of politicians is found in 'This Is No Petty

Case Of Right Or Wrong: 'I hate not Germans, nor grow hot/ With love of Englishman.' His patriotism was both complex and fundamental, responding to the very soil of England of which he felt a part. 'The ages made her that made us from dust:/ She is all we know and live by, and we trust/ She is good and must endure loving her so'. The sentiment expressed is strongly reminiscent of Rupert Brooke's famous sonnet, 'The soldier', written the previous year: 'There shall be/ In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;/ A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware'. The bugle call is mocking and indifferent in the untitled 'No one cares less than I' : 'Nobody knows but God,/ Whether I am destined to lie/ Under a foreign clod... But laughing, storming, scorning,/ Only the bugles know/ What the bugles say in the morning,/ And they do not care when they blow/ The call that I heard'. Bloodshed easily translates into images of soil and fertility. In 'Blenheim Oranges' the speaker describes repeated patterns of seasonal change.'The Blenheim oranges/ Fall grubby from the trees,/ As when I was young - /And when the lost one was here - / And when the War began/ To turn young men to dung'. Death as a grimly ironic counterpoise to the habits of daily life is evident in 'A Private' with the carousing ploughman who 'slept out of doors/ Many a frozen night...now at last he sleeps/ More sound in France - that, too, he secret keeps'. The dialogue between the speaker and the travelling countryman in 'Man And Dog' exemplifies how allusions to the fighting infiltrate the description of country life. 'In 'seventy-four a year of soldiering/ With the Berkshires, - hoeing and harvesting/ In half the shires where corn and couch will grow. / His sons, three sons, were fighting, but the hoe/ And reap-hook he liked, or anything to do with trees'. Later in the poem:"So Alton I must reach tonight somehow:/ I'll get no shakedown with that bedfellow/ From farmers. Many a man sleeps worse tonight/ than I shall.' 'In the trenches.' 'Yes, that's right.'" Two four lined lyrics, 'The Cherry Trees' and 'In Memoriam' speak directly of the loss of young lives. To quote from the first: 'The cherry trees bend over and are shedding,/ On the old road where all that passed are dead,/ Their petals, strewing the grass as for a wedding/ This early May morn when there is none to wed'.

The 'true' trench poet might assault the sensibilities of the Edwardian reader with descriptions of 'trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud/ Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled' (Sassoon, 'Counter-Attack'); or the dead Boche, 'propped against a shattered trunk,/ In a great mess of things unclean'.(Graves, 'Dead Boche'); Thomas more subtly, with less obvious impact, but ultimately to more lasting effect, transferred the images of mutilation to a scarred and decaying countryside. Fallen trees abound. In 'The Wind's Song', in a 'lone pine clump', of the six trees, the tallest was dead, 'one a mere stump./ On one long stem, branchless and flayed and prone'. A fallen tree 'checks the sight' in 'The Path'. Trees are or have been felled in 'Fifty Faggots', 'The Barn' and 'As The Team's Head-Brass'.The representation of decline is a pervasive iconic presence. Sassoon's 'butchered , frantic gestures of the dead', (Counter-Attack) compares with the pathos of 'broken reeds,/ Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff', in the monologue 'Rain' where the speaker's private anguish becomes a part of the wider pain in the trenches: 'But here I pray that none whom once I loved/ Is lying tonight or lying still awake/ Solitary, listening to the rain'. In an analogous

example, 'The Owl', the comfort of an inn is 'salted and sobered' by the voice of an owl, 'Speaking for all who lay under the stars,/ Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice'. A country scene provokes unbidden the images of battle: 'Tall reeds/ Like criss-cross bayonets/ Where a bird once called.' ('Bright Clouds') The timeless symbolism of the forest poems adverts with the phrase 'this June' to historical reality in 'The Green Roads'. Speculation about the future after the disruption of the War hovers around the syntax of such poems as 'It Was Upon' and 'Fifty Faggots', and finds a focus in the final lines: 'Now I recall,/ This July eve, and question, wondering,/ What of the lattermath to this hoar spring?' and 'Better they will never warm me, though they must/ Light several Winters' fires. Before they are done/ The War will have ended, many other things/ Have ended, maybe, that I can no more/ Foresee or more control than robin and wren'. Even with no overt or peripheral reference to the War, the psychological stain of the carnage on society is reflected throughout Thomas' work with recurrent intimations of violence, death and decay: 'From the inn one watches, too,/ In the room for visitors/ That has no fire, but a view/ And many cases of stuffed fish, vermin, and/ kingfishers'. ('The Watchers') 'Cheap-jack, balloon-man, drover with crooked stick, and steer,/ Pig, turkey, goose and duck, Christmas corpses to be'. ('The Gypsy') 'I should like to be lying under that foam,/ Dead, but able to hear the sound of the bell'. ('The Child On The Cliff') 'But far more ancient and dark/ The combe looks since they killed the badger there,/ Dug him out and gave him to the hounds'. ('The Combe') 'And many other beasts/ And birds, skin, bone, and feather,/ Have been taken from their feasts/ and hung up there together'. ('The Gallows') In 'The Long Small Room' the dimensions of the room, 'long' and 'small' and 'narrowed up to the end', are suggestive of a coffin. In an article on War Poetry published in 1914 in *Poetry And Drama*, Thomas wrote: 'No other class of poetry vanished so rapidly, has so little chosen from it for posterity.' In his own case, he has happily been proved wrong. (Longley, 135, 1981)

In giving due recognition to the pervasive influence of the War on the poetry of Edward Thomas, it would of course be wrong to overlook other factors that gave rise to the special voice that emerged so precipitately in the final two years of his life. The War did not prompt the poetry; it gave an urgency to the poetry that was dormant, and, ironically, it provided financial security which enabled him to devote himself to his true literary vocation. The War did not provide the subject matter or thematic concerns, but it provided the edge and underpinning to express poetically the preoccupations that existed since childhood. One recurring theme throughout Thomas' work is the yearning for an unobtainable lost land, 'a perfect country of the imagination'. Leslie Norris and J.P. Ward both considered this a yearning after the land of his ancestors, an example of the sense of dispossession Smith has discussed: 'This is my grief. That land,/ My home, I have never seen'. (Home) There are few specific references to Wales; two that appear quite incidentally are 'The mountain ways of Wales' in 'Roads' and the haunting comment, 'Sweeter I never heard, mother, no, not in all Wales', in 'The Child On The Cliff'. (Norris, 90; and Ward, 105) D.W. Harding also felt that Thomas displayed a 'pervasive' sense of homesickness and nostalgia. (Harding, 8; 17) In the later

poems, as a preoccupation with death became more acute, the 'lost land' came to have a more specific location in the 'forest'.

Thomas' apprenticeship in poetry was served as critic, essayist and nature writer, his first book, *The Woodland Life*, being published at the age of eighteen. By the beginning of 1914 he had written over thirty prose books and thousands of articles and reviews. Helen Thomas has written of 'the hateful hack-work books written to the order of publishers, which though he did them well did not at all satisfy his own creative impulse, the damming up of which contributed largely to his melancholy'. But despite the frustration of this financially driven toil, the genesis of the poetry lay in the prose; the acute observation of the moods and colours of the natural world; the working through of his feelings of himself as an Englishman of Welsh extraction; the development of his personal symbols and his unique world view; his sense of the continuity of English poetry and deep interest in the mysterious workings of words and their power to represent 'the thing it is'. ('Old Man') It was Robert Frost who encouraged the switch to poetry. His friendship with Thomas, of whom he wrote, 'the closest I ever came in friendship to anyone in England or anywhere else in the world I think was with Edward Thomas', was mutually productive. Thomas' reviews of *North of Boston* were highly influential in establishing Frost's reputation in England, and Frost recognized the poetry in Thomas' prose. He claimed that he simply told Thomas to rewrite parts in verse form, 'in exactly the same cadence. That's all there was to it'. Thomas saw in Frost's verse what came to be the credo for his own: 'These poems are revolutionary because they lack the exaggeration of rhetoric... Their language is free from the poetical words and forms that are the chief material of the secondary poets. The metre avoids not only old fashioned pomp and sweetness, but the later fashion also of discord and fuss. In fact the medium is common speech'. (Works of E.T.,5) In the lengthy discussions the two men engaged in, Thomas found much that was congenial to his own developing poetic theory. Frost felt that it was 'the image of the living voice that informs the sentence' and that 'the living part of the poem is the intonation entangled somehow in the syntax idiom and meaning of a sentence'. (R.G. Thomas,32;1978) In his plea for a return to the use of the colloquial voice and the rhythms of speech in poetry Thomas was echoing Wordsworth's plea for the use of common speech in the *Preface* to the second edition of the *The Lyrical Ballads* in 1800. The aim was 'not to reproduce the spoken word, but the *effect* of the speech, and the speaker'. Literature was 'to make words of such spirit, and arrange them in such a manner, that they will *do* all that a speaker can do by innumerable shades, by tone and pitch of voice, by speed, by pauses, by all that he was and all that he will become'. (*How I Began* quoted in Works Of E.T.,6) An early admiration for the classic prose style of Pater came to be a highly critical view of what he perceived as 'encouraging meticulousness in detail and single words, rather than a regard for form in its largest sense' Pater used words as 'bricks, as tin soldiers, instead of flesh and blood and genius'. With this in mind, he declared that he wanted to 'begin over again with them [the ideas] and wring all the necks of my rhetoric--the geese'. (Vogeler,117) The new movements in poetry came in for equally damning criticism. Pound, he considered, exhibited confusion and 'eccentric speech', and his verses looked 'so extraordinary, dappled with French, Provencal, Spanish, Italian, Latin, and old English... with

crudity, violence and obscurity, with stiff rhythms and no rhythms at all'. The Imagists were dismissed tersely as 'imbeciles.' (Quotes from Longley,28;35) In dismissing what he considered as the worst excesses of the new, and of the artificial poeticisms of the late Victorians, Thomas strove to create a voice of integrity, a language 'not to be betrayed', and one that proved to be uniquely his own. He would not, and in a sense could not, divorce himself from his antecedents, placing himself without excuse in the line of Cobbett, Jefferies and Clare. Echoes from the past unobtrusively slip into his syntax and stanzaic forms. Shakespeare himself, and a glancing allusion to *The Winters Tale*, make an appearance in the historical panorama of 'Lob'. As Longley has discussed, the Romantic heritage is in evidence in 'October', with impressionistic reworkings of lines from Keats and Wordsworth. Both 'Lights Out' and 'Out In The Dark' appear to owe aspects of phrasing and cadence to Shelley's 'The Sensitive Plant' : 'For love, and beauty, and delight/ There is no death nor change: their might/ Exceeds our organs which endure/ No light, being themselves obscure'. The existential loneliness -- and 'wet' images - of 'Rain' recall the spirit if not the phrasing of Matthew Arnold, worked through via his study of Pater. 'The waters are too deep between us' evokes Arnold's 'To Marguerite': 'Yes! in the sea of life enisled,/ With echoing straits between us thrown,/ Dotting the shoreless watery wild,/ We mortal millions live alone'. Thomas wrote much blank verse and experimented endlessly with a wide variety of stanza forms and rhyme schemes, both traditional and formulations of his own, from the ten-line stanza form of 'The Other', to the rhyming couplets of 'The Green Roads' and the monorhyme of 'Two Pewits'. He wrote fourteen sonnets, and other poems which seemed to embody the ghost of the sonnet form. Line length varies from the often bisyllabic 'Words' and 'Bright Clouds' to the extended dialogues of 'Man And Dog', 'The Gypsy' and 'Wind And Mist'. He used internal rhyme quite extensively, and experimented with half-rhyme, an innovation more often attributed to his contemporary Wilfred Owen.

Thomas remained true to his linguistic principles. He used few Latinate forms, the most common etymology of his lexical choice being Anglo-Saxon, or Anglo-Norman. Trisyllabic words are relatively rare. Almost all words are in common use, their very accessibility foregrounding their unique qualities and application in a particular situation. Clichéd attributive terms such as 'dear', 'sweet', and 'strange' acquire a fresh significance. Occasional patterns of diction that brought stylistic echoes from the past were less lapses of judgement than a form of homage to the living tradition. In 'Adlestrop' the spare simplicity of diction and abbreviated syntax of the first two stanzas contrasts markedly with the mid-Victorian ambience of the second two. 'The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat./ No one left and no one came/ On the bare platform. What I saw/ Was Adlestrop - only the name.' (Stanza two) 'And willows, willow-herb, and grass,/ And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry./ No whit less still and lonely fair/ Than the high cloudlets in the sky'. (Stanza three) 'Aspens' contains an unusual Gothic- Romantic stanza: 'A silent smithy, a silent inn, nor fails/ In the bare moonlight or the thick-furred gloom,/ In tempest or the night of nightingales,/ To turn the cross-roads to a ghostly room'. Minor archaisms, eg 'naught' and 'aught', syntactic inversions such as 'The herb itself I like not' assert the links with his Georgian contemporaries and immediate

predecessors. Thomas had an acutely tuned ear for the nuances of country speech -- he considered the speech of the Surrey peasant to be a pure form of speech -- finely demonstrating the differences between the educated city speech of the speaker (himself) and his salt of the earth country characters in the represented dialogues in 'Man And Dog' and 'The Chalk-Pit'. His fascination with names created a whole sub-category of verse in which the sheer pleasure of the sounds of places and flowers mingled with the intrigue of their folk origins and ancient history: 'Wingle Tye and Margaretting/ Tye,-- and Skreens, Gooshays, and Cockerells,/ Shellow, Rochetts, Bandish, and Pickerells,/ Martins, Lambkins, and Lillyputs'. ('If I Were To Own') In 'Lob' the tumbling proliferation of place and flower names bears witness to the historical incarnations of Lob in his many guises and the endlessly inventive linguistic process of naming names: 'Lob-lie- by- the fire, Jack Cade, Jack Smith, Jack Moon, poor Jack of every trade'...'named Bridget-in- her-bravery, Love-in- idleness, Traveller's-joy and Jenny Pooter'. Folksongs were the authentic voice of 'true' poetry which Thomas was happy to adopt -- and adapt: 'Early one morning in May I set out,/ And nobody I knew was about./ I'm bound away for ever,/ Away somewhere, away forever'. ('Early One Morning') 'Will you come? / Will you come? / Will you ride/ So late/ At my side? / O, will you come?' ('Will You Come')

Longley discusses the often underrated importance of syntax in poetry, and its significance in any attempt to explicate the works of Edward Thomas. She describes his 'back and forth trawls for meaning', when an uncertain tone is worked through a series of trailing clauses marked by 'at least' and 'and yet' and 'if', in search of the key to some elusive idea. Freud wrote of the importance of these minor lexical items which reveal the underlying truth of attitudes, often unexpressed in the sequence of dream-like images which was the stuff of some Modernist poetry. The train of thought follows an apparently erratic course in 'The Barn': 'They should never have built a barn there, at all - - / Drip, Drip, Drip! -- under the elm tree./ Though then it was young. Now it is old/ But good, not like the barn and me'. A series of qualifications often subvert what has already been stated until some kind of resolution is reached, usually in the last two lines. The sentence connective 'but' constantly raises contradictory possibilities in a dogged search for the truth of a matter. Assertions are often couched in negative terms as in this cold dedication to his father: 'I shall be sorry for/ Your impotence:/ You can do and undo no more/ When you go hence,/ Cannot even forgive/ The funeral./ but not so long as you live/ Can I love you at all'. And in this tribute to Helen: 'none was ever was so fair/ as I thought you:/ Not a word can I bear/ spoken against you'. The final eight lines of 'Old Man' demonstrate the powerful effect of an unrelenting series of negatives. The deliberate inclusion of the often ragged syntax of the spoken voice easily fitted in with more formal rhetorical constructions. When Edward Garnett suggested that he should 'tidy up' 'Lob', Thomas refused, saying: 'It would be the easiest thing in the world to clean it all up and trim it it and have every line straightforward in sound and sense, but it would not really improve it. That was much the easier course of action'. (Motions,83) His aim was not one style at the expense of another. It was, as Kirkham states, 'the naturalization of form'. (Kirkham, 168) In my linguistic analysis of the poetry

of Edward Thomas, I have concentrated heavily on the grammar of each poem under consideration, in particular the intricacies of phrasing and syntactic structure. The lexical simplicity of Thomas' poems often masks a unique and complex world view which was expressed in a voice that owed much to what had gone before, but was also innovative and of its time. A close structural analysis builds on an intuitive reaction to explicate a multi-patterned mosaic. I have also drawn on concepts of linguistic cohesion as discussed in Halliday and Hassan, and some reference has been made where appropriate to the theory of role relations as outlined by Charles Fillmore. Phonetic patterning is an important but frequently unobtrusive component in all of Thomas' poetry. I have limited any detailed examination of this to a few examples where it seems especially pertinent such as 'The Hollow Wood'- I have chosen works which seem noteworthy examples in representing the dominant themes and preoccupations: the War in its effect on traditional country life in 'As The Team's Head-Brass'; the War as a personal meditation in 'Rain'; roads, tracks and paths in 'The Path'; close observation of a section of landscape in 'The Hollow Wood' and a broader perspective in 'Over The Hills'; the peculiar intermingling threads of names, smells and memory in 'Old Man'; the sense of continuity and organic change in 'The Barn', and finally, perhaps the most memorable and haunting of Thomas' symbols, the forest, in 'The Green Roads', 'Lights Out' and 'Out In The Dark'.

Chapter One

War, The Countryside, and Change.

As The Team's Head-Brass.

War , The Countryside And Change

As The Team's Head-Brass.

'As The Team's Head-Brass' is interesting as a poem which encapsulates various aspects of Thomas' thought and method. It examines his personal response to the state of England, the involvement of England in the war, and his own imminent involvement. Differing and often erroneous labels applied to Thomas (and considered at length in Cooke, Chapter 9) such as Georgian, rural poet who either ignored or could not come to grips with the reality of war, or, conversely, war poet writing within earshot of bombardments, may be considered with reference to this work. It was written in mid 1916 and reflects his self-examination prior to leaving his job as map reading instructor and applying for a commission with the likelihood of a posting to France. It is a poem of war and the countryside, an acutely observed slice of rural life which is permeated with the reality of the trenches; a meditation on destruction and regeneration, love and death and the place of the individual in the face of overwhelming historical forces.

Helen Thomas has described in *World Without End* her husband's pleasure in the routine activities of farm life, the seasonal rhythms and the traditional skills of the labourers. 'It is this full life of homely doings that I remember chiefly at the farm...the beautiful plough-horses with their shining brass ornaments... the wood-cutting and faggot-binding by men whose fathers had done the same work and whose father's fathers too... the lovely cycle of ploughing, sowing and reaping; the slow experienced labourers... who are as satisfied in their hard life as are the oaks and the swallows in theirs' (Cooke,42) Such an observational vignette forms the motivational trigger for this meditation.

As the team's head-brass flashed out on the turn
The lovers disappeared into the wood.

The initial position of the subordinate clause signals the emblematic importance of that brief moment in time, the flashing of the head-brass as the horses turn. The dominance of the coordinated verb-preposition in a line heavy with content words is both highly visual and suggestive of a moment of inspiration. It is the flash more than the action of the team which is charged with the most significance. At the same time, the succession of stressed syllables mimicks the strength and forward motion of the horses. The actions described in the first and second lines, on the surface quite unrelated, are bound together by the conjoin 'as'. This linking of disparate scenes and actions is a dominant stylistic feature of the poem, particularly the introductory, scene-setting first twelve lines. We are presented with a series of images, which progressively accrue an enigmatic importance; hints are made and apparently sidestepped only to resurface in another setting. The

actions of the lovers 'disappearing' into the woods and the flashing of the head-brass are instantaneous and simultaneous. The verbs and their concomitant prepositions, 'out' and 'into' have antonymous qualities, again suggesting their mutual significance; and the sometimes competing, sometimes collaborative impulses of the speaker towards introspection and sympathetic awareness of other people. 'Disappearance' has a sense of completed action. The lovers seem to be swallowed up by the wood, to exit from the poem, the field of vision of the watching man, and the consciousness of the reader, as soon as they appear. It is only later that we realise they are as important 'offstage' as are the dead and dying in France. This may be compared with 'Lovers' (written in 1915) where the young couple emerging from the woods are the object of much vocal and speculative comment. The flashing of the head-brass is an outwardly orientated, visual sensation in an open forum; the destination of the lovers is mysterious, possibly dangerous or sinister. One is reminded of Thomas' use of forest as symbol for sleep, death and the unknown with its ambiguous attractions as articulated in such works as 'The Green Roads' and 'Lights Out'. In the following lines the identity of the watcher to whose observations we are privy is established.

I sat among the boughs of the fallen elm
That strewed the angle of the fallow, and
Watched the plough narrowing a yellow square
Of charlock.

The stative verb 'sat' contrasts with the heavy physicality of the action of ploughman and team. The man's actions are all mental, in the working through of his attitudes about himself and the war and the wider community of which he lays claim by sitting 'among' the strewn boughs of the fallen elm. But his choice of location is telling. He has chosen to rest among the fallen in a premonitory -- perhaps-- acquiescence to fate. The classifying noun, 'the fallen', is now transformed into a modifier manipulating the popular euphemism for those killed in battle. Kirkham notes Thomas' use of the elm as a quintessential symbol for England, so the fallen elm has a broader sociological and historical function as well; a society in decline, a culture which was enfeebled long before the outbreak of war. In 'The Barn' and 'Fifty Faggots' the image of trees felled are also used. In the former a healthy 'old/ But good' specimen is sacrificed for the sake of a decayed barn, and in the latter the trees are cut for firewood which the speaker intimates 'will never warm me'. There is a suggestion that trees and man are equally helpless in the face of external forces: 'Before they are done/ The war will have ended, many other things/ Have ended, maybe, that I can no more/ Foresee or more control than robin and wren'. A phonetic chain links with a series of semantically linked lexical items to form a cohesive pattern throughout the poem. Repeated [l] sounds in successive sentences reinforce the relationships between motif and action: 'flashed', 'fallen elm', 'angle', 'fallow', 'plough', 'yellow', 'charlock', 'blizzard', 'felled'. The application of these effects is unobtrusive, and is considerably less in evidence during the twenty one lines of dialogue which form the middle section, when a representation of natural speech is attempted. Alliterative clusters

and slant vowels further enhance the prosodic features of connection; 'fallen', 'fallow', 'yellow', 'furrow', 'felled', 'blizzard', 'killed'; 'scraping', 'screwed', 'strewed'; 'clods', 'crumble', 'topple', 'stumble'. There appears an obvious semantic pattern of verbs, adjectives and nouns that describe items that are stricken, fallen, falling and dead. We see the broader picture: a fallen society attenuated to the extent that it is prey to natural and manmade hazards of storm and war. The miniature focus of stricken tree sheltering, or at least providing a temporary home, for a man who is 'fallen' in the Biblical sense that all are fallen, and, perhaps, in the personal sense that he has capitulated to his fate - simply by seeking a commission, or is it something far more fundamental? But the picture presented is far more complex. This overall negativity is counterbalanced by a more enduring natural force. The vocabulary of decline, violent death and decay makes an interesting comparison with the lexical choice of the trench poets. However remote from the frontline, the psychic imperative that drives Thomas' work is the same. In the context 'strewed', a stative verb, assumes an active, volitional force, with the boughs as agents that disrupt the progress of the team.

The semantic description of 'fallow' suggests dual possibilities. Its primary meaning is that of land left in order to restore fertility. It may also be land left to revert to a wilderness state. As an analogue to the state of England there is the suggestion that a period of regeneration will follow. Cooke describes the scene as sterile, with the fallen elm as the symbol of death. (Cooke, 239) I think rather the sense of potential fertility is dominant. Decay and new life are the basic seasonal pattern of the natural world. In 'Blenheim Oranges' Thomas describes the time 'when the war began/ To turn young men to dung', which for all its cynicism implies that within tragedy lie the seeds of new life.

Scraping along the share he faced towards the wood,
And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed
Once more.

The unconscious, and seemingly irrelevant action expressed in the first of the coordinated clauses, forms, by the orientation indicated in the preposition, a tacit acknowledgment of the importance of what is happening in the woods. The conjoin 'and' suggests not merely a sequential event, but the unacknowledged accord between the lovers and ploughman in an ambience of fertility. In line 33 there is a final gnomic comment on the course of the war and history, and the limitations of human perspective and understanding: 'If we could see all all might seem good'. 'Then', significantly poised at end line, demonstrates that the re-emergence of the lovers - as abruptly as they had disappeared - is a sign of this generalised 'good'. For the speaker, this 'fallow' time, emphasised by his reclining, inactive posture, is the time of rest and decision making between enlistment and embarkation-- though in a sense the die is already cast by his placement among the dead branches.

[I] Watched the plough narrowing a yellow square
Of charlock. Everytime the horses turned
Instead of treading me down, the ploughman leaned
Upon the handles to say or ask a word,
About the weather, next about the war.

The speaker's perspective, following the diminishing square of wild mustard, narrows mesmerically. The foregrounded colour attribute hints at the traditional association of yellow with cowardice, a subliminal nudging factor for the reluctant soldier. The line break after 'turned' forces an element of surprise in the following clause. The contrastive conjunct 'instead', implies that the action of treading down is the expected, perhaps preferred, alternative. The perceived menace of the horses, advancing like a line of cavalry is, of course, a fanciful interpretation, but illustrative of the watcher's mental state. His passive, supine posture (emphasised by the ploughman who must lean down to speak) both creates and courts the condition of danger. One notes that the agent of the menace is first fully depersonalised as the mechanical plough, then animated in the form of the horses; the true agent, the ploughman, has his participant role minimized by his absence from the anticipatory adverbial clause, and his placing as subject of the following main clause. The focus of the speaker may be traced from head-brass to plough, to horses, and finally to farmer. This conceptualization of the farm in particular and the world in general as dangerous places, is underpinned by the lexical pattern already described, and is the thematic counterbalance to the images of fertility and rebirth.

The balanced phrasing in 'About the weather, next about the war', reflects the equal importance of natural and man made forces which individuals are powerless to influence. Line length and enjambed lines mimic the rhythmic back and forth movements of the team; 'turn' and 'turned' are both at line end, ensuring that the eye follows the motion described. The familiarity with which Thomas employs the lexis of the countryside ('charlock', 'scraping the share',) indicates how natural was his choice of setting for such a meditation. The sound patterns of the words with their heavy consonants echo the metallic sound of implements and the muted thud of turning earth: 'Scraping the share he faced towards the wood,/ And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed/ Once more'. The repeated image of the flashing brass neatly rounds off the introductory section of the poem. The adverbial phrase 'Once more' reformulates the previous 'every time'; its stand alone status draws attention to the repeated actions described and subtly foreshadows the final lines of the poem when they, and so much else, will cease.

The delayed main clause in the first sentence of the second section implies the speaker's prior knowledge of life on the farm. This is revealed to be reported speech of the ploughman which introduces the long section of dialogue: 'The blizzard felled the elm whose crest/ I sat in, by a woodpecker's round hole,/ The ploughman said'. The seemingly irrelevant observational vignette of the embedded prepositional phrase, 'by a woodpecker's round hole', demonstrates Thomas' awareness of the interdependent functions of natural objects, a thematic thread more fully developed in 'Fifty Faggots'. There the underwood of hazel and ash 'In Jenny Pink's Copse' is cut for bundles of firewood which make a 'sheltering thicket for mouse and wren, 'and the following Spring nest sites for blackbirds and robins. That their eventual fate is unknown is an acknowledgement that the simplest seasonal routines will be disrupted by the War. The direct speech of lines 14-32 is characterised by a sequence of questions, answers and statements, punctuated by the regular movement of the team and consequently disjointed-- but still following a logical course from the particular to the general. The use of pronouns proliferates indicating the shared points of reference for ploughman and speaker, despite their differing social classes. In fact, this breaking down of social divisions is part of the pattern of breakdown and change evident throughout the poem.

'When will they take it away?'
'When the war's over.' So the talk began--
One minute and an interval of ten,
A minute and the same interval.

The elm, as a centrally important symbol, provides the initial impulse for the exchange. The anonymous third person plural pronoun is the common cultural reference for the faceless authority figures who make decisions. In 'The Barn' we find a very similar pattern, this time during the course of a dramatic monologue: 'They should never have built the barn there, at all-/...Tomorrow they cut it down'. In line 28 'they' develops referential specificity moving from vaguely designated authorities at home, to the German soldiers: 'The second day/ In France they killed him'. The focal shift is unsignalled; the overwhelming fact of war has created a bond of knowledge, mutual understanding and social concern. The ploughman's laconic reply encapsulates again another subtheme of the poem, the disruption to the functions of day to day living in all walks of life. The lexical simplicity of the dialogue and preponderance of grammatical words compares with the density of concrete nouns with specific application, and dynamic action verbs which characterize the prose sections of the poem. Anaphoric references and ellipsed phrases and clauses are the usual mode of informal spoken discourse - it is language stripped to its essentials where the emotional content of lexical items is dependent on what is not said.

'Have you been out?' 'No.' 'And don't want to,
Perhaps?'

In the course of monosyllabic question, reply, and further question which expands on the the previous reply, a breadth of mutual understanding is evident. The linked participle and preposition 'been out', and the concomitant 'come back', in line twenty one epitomizes the spare parlance of war, a process of lexical reduction in converse proportion to the enormity of the concepts discussed. They were either 'going', or had 'gone', 'out'; to 'come back' was a question of life or death. Another example of the euphemisms of war occurs in lines twenty two and twenty five where 'lose' and 'lost', like 'fallen,' are the everyday currency of tragedy. The sequential question of the ploughman with its ellipsed 'you' and the final position of the conditional adverbial, illustrates perspicacity and a certain delicacy of feeling. 'Perhaps' moderates any brusque effect and implied assumptions of reluctance or cowardice, and reveals a genuine curiosity. The rising intonation which the reader 'hears' expresses a fairly persuasive invitation to reply. There is a suggestion in the initial question, uttered without any overtly connected preliminaries, that the speaker is in uniform, a fact which would forestall any initiatory enquiries. Of course, implicit in the time lapse, elliptically and mimetically described in the immediately preceding two lines, is the possibility that the represented dialogue is the concluding portion of a longer unrecorded exchange. The ploughman's nudging 'perhaps' has the desired result:

'If I could only come back again, I should.
I could spare an arm. I shouldn't want to lose
A leg. If I should lose my head, why, so,
I should want nothing more...'

The three and a half line reply transforms almost immediately into an interior monologue, as the thinking through of the previous months (and probably years), is articulated. The semantic import of the lines depends on the conditional 'If', with the intensifying 'only' betraying the depth of longing, placed strategically midway through the poem. 'If' is repeated two lines later, reinforcing the emotional depth of the dilemma which haunts each impassive exchange. By July 1916 Thomas had made his decision. He wrote to Robert Frost at the end of the month: 'A new step I have taken makes a good moment for writing. I offered myself for Artillery and today I was accepted, which means I shall go very soon to an Artillery School and be out in France or who knows where in a few months. After months of panic and uncertainty I feel much happier again'. (C.P., 165). The fear of dying is manifest by reference to injuries to various body parts. Each is considered quite methodically. In other poems Thomas uses syntactic convolutions and elaborately subordinated constructions to reflect the working through of a dilemma. Here the process is articulated through a series of foreshortened statements representing the disjunctions and parataxis of the informal spoken word. The conflicting impulses that jostle for dominance can be traced through the subjunctives governing the semantic nuances of each statement. The modal auxiliaries 'should' (and the negated 'shouldn't') and 'could' occur six times in the course of the reply, teasing out into vocal

utterance the true state of the speaker's feelings and their inherent ambiguities. The first 'could', bracketed by the conditional and the adjunct 'only' (which here has an intensifying function as well as the sense of 'simply') is an appeal to the fates. The main clause is tagged on and truncated, the ellipsis leaving unsaid the reality embedded in 'go out'. The omission reveals an admission of a decision, which if already made, is unacknowledged. In the second short statement 'could' implies both the real but theoretical possibility of losing an arm and the preference for this as an alternative to more serious injuries. 'Spare' as a substitute for 'lose' suggests a positive interpretation, immediately triggering the next, firmly enounced statement in which the negative marker is responsible for the decisiveness of tone. The endline position of 'lose' produces a gap between verb and object creating a visual representation of the detachment of limb from limb. The repeated 'should' in the speaker's fourth speculative statement, 'If I should lose my head, why so,/ I should want nothing more', shows first a contingency function dependent on the conditional, then a prediction based on firm intent. The firmness again belies mixed motives and possible ambiguous interpretation. If he was dead he would have no more needs or desires. (There is an irony inherent in the alternative semantic description of 'want' as deficiency or lack in discussing lack of a head.) If the clause expresses a death wish there is a hint of the speaker's almost suicidal mind play as he imagines himself remaining passive as the horses tread him down. The interpolated 'Why, so' having an ellipsed declarative function ('so be it'), suggests acceptance as the concluding attitudinal mode of this exploration of motives and possibilities. Perhaps the dominant effect of the repeated 'should' is the unexpressed but primary usage of the word denoting obligation and logical necessity; when all is said and done the speaker feels it is his duty to 'go out'.

The dialogue between the two men reveals both the speaker's involvement in the preoccupations of wartime, and his detachment. He has been provoked to respond and examine his own feelings, to distinguish between purely selfish considerations and the plight he shares with all the other young men in England. An examination of the pronouns reveals the tensions at work. 'I' is repeated six times in three and a half lines, making a marked contrast between the speaker's slides into self-absorption and the relative self effacement of the ploughman. The conversation has moved from the non-human 'it', the fallen elm, to the recognition of a reciprocal relationship in 'Have you...?' through the egocentricity implicit in the string of 'I's, before the sense of the communal plight reasserts itself.

Have many gone
 From here?' 'Yes.' 'Many lost?' 'Yes, a good few.
 Only two teams work on the farm this year.'

The proforms 'many' and 'a good few' -- 'good' having also its approbatory sense -- refer to the particular farm community; 'my mate', 'him' and 'he' to a personal and familiar acquaintance. The anonymous and public 'they' gives way to the shared and private 'we', back to the speaker, 'I', and

finally to the corporate 'we'. 'If we could see all all might seem good'. As the ploughman speaks about his mate, the euphemisms of war give way to representational terms. The speaker enquires about the number of local men 'lost'; but the mate is 'dead', 'killed' by the Germans. The terms intensify with the closeness of relationship, the stative adjective transforming to the active, volitional verb with its judgmental, pejorative implications. The disruption caused by the war on the day to day workings of the farm is articulated in the link between the elm and the dead mate:

It was back in March,
The very night of the blizzard, too. Now if
He had stayed here we should have moved the tree.

The connections are many, suggesting the mysterious interworkings of chance occurrences and purposeful acts in the felling of the elm by the blizzard on the same night that the mate was killed. In these coincidental patterns of forces unleashed by human agency and natural power, the ploughman's sequential 'Now if', foregrounded at endline and echoing the conditionals of the speaker, emphasises again how the flow of human life depends on a constant pattern of cause and effect. That small chain of incidents, the mate going out and the stricken elm remaining where it fell, is the mutually recognised exemplar of the larger picture; the final 'if' at the beginning of line 34 makes explicit how the course of history is altered by the most minor events:

'And I should not have sat here. Everything
Would have been different. For it would have been
Another world.' 'Ay, and a better, though
If we could see all all might seem good.'

The present instant of the speaker sitting among the branches talking is linked in time with 'the second day in France...back in March'. The fate of two strangers is interwoven, and eventually, perhaps, identical. The three sentences from 'And I should not' are parallel in structure, with a string of subjunctives again driving the syntax. The orientation moves outwards from first personal singular pronoun as head of the noun phrase to the non-personal universal pronoun, and the extraposed substitute 'it'. The non-specific status of 'everything', 'different', 'another', and 'world', demonstrates the expanded focus of the two speakers as they shift to a general frame of reference. The ploughman's final comment is a form of proverbial, inclusive folk wisdom, acknowledging the inscrutable workings of fortune

Thomas' use of dialogue in 'As The Team's Head-Brass' was a method of clarifying and expressing ambivalent feelings, and perhaps a counter to excessive introspection. There is careful fidelity to the inflections and animations of the spoken word; this is designed to stand as the representation of a real encounter in a real world. (Not the reproduction of the spoken word, as Thomas would state

in *How I Began*, 'but the effect of the speech, and the speaker'.) Overt expressions of emotion are subsumed into extreme lexical simplicity. There are no abstractions, or psychological verbs and adjectives to explore what are in reality powerful feelings relating to life and probable death. Short sentences are the vehicle for this slow mutually developed meditation interrupted but not disturbed by the rhythmic actions of the team. Intersentential links, transitions and developments are maintained by connectives 'when', 'and', 'if', 'now if'; ellipsed clauses, 'And don't want to', 'a good few', 'and a better'; proximate negatives 'no', and 'don't'; and reinforcing and additive conjuncts 'too', 'now', 'for', and the colloquial 'ay'. All this reveals the open ended thinking and clear recognition of the speaker/poet of the complexities of the issues at stake; there is no certainty. Thomas' interest in the techniques of dialogue were often discussed in correspondence. To E.S.P Haynes he wrote of the novel they planned to write jointly: 'Dialogue will be my difficulty. If I do it at all, the most important speeches will have to be autobiographical, in which I am least bad'. Four years later he wrote to Gordon Bottomley of his inability to write 'imaginary conversations': 'When a person talks with me there are two monologues to be heard, not one dialogue'. (Smith, 167) These difficulties, if they did exist, are not apparent in 'As The Team's Head-Brass'. This bifurcated interior monologue has the authentic sound of two voices.

The reappearance of the lovers auspiciously encloses the observed and spoken action of the poem, apparently encircling images of destruction within these emblems of regeneration. When Thomas wrote of this 'one energy that propagates and slays' in *Richard Jefferies*, he linked in like manner these two antithetical forces. The final three lines form a sombre finale, marked, as in the last three lines of 'Fifty Faggots' with ominous forewarnings.

The horses started and for the last time
watched the clods crumble and topple over
After the ploughshare and the stumbling team.

This time the action of the horses is not accompanied by flashing sunlight on their brass headpieces. They 'start' meaning not just that they begin again, but that they jump in fear. The colon at the end of the preceding line suggests that it is the sudden reappearance of the lovers that causes this fright. This picture of vulnerability intensifies with the penultimate 'stumbling' and the association with the crumbling and toppling clods. The temporal adverbial 'for the last time', brings to a close the pattern of 'every time,' and 'once more'. The watcher is observing the close of the day's work and the end of a phase of history. Not just the war, but mechanization threatens to change rural life forever. The plough horses are an endangered species; it is not surprising that Thomas' working title for the poem was 'The Last Team'. Hardy's contemporaneous poem 'In Time Of The Breaking Of Nations' had the same setting but was less pessimistic in tone, emphasising the things that endure: 'Yonder a maid and her wight/ Come whispering by:/ War's annals will fade into night/ Ere their story die'. 'As The Team's Head-Brass' rests on patterns of antitheses: love and war, talk and silence, harmony and

disruption, past and future, passivity and activity. The Biblical swords and spears are as important as the ploughshares and pruning hooks. (Micah 4:3) The balance that is achieved through the integration of these opposing forces creates the underlying dynamic of the poem.

This depiction of a society at war and an individual in the process of making a major decision involving life and death, demonstrates Thomas' skill in employing a number of separate and interlinking techniques to create a complex linguistic composition. He has used of a number of key images to represent the public and private issues at stake, and their relationship with age-old fundamental processes: the stricken elm, the plough, the lovers and the wood, which revolve around the focal point and principal image of the flashing head-brass. A series of verb forms which infiltrate these images progressively build up a picture of decline and fall. The central portion of the poem, consisting of part dialogue, part interior monologue, indicates how a spare exchange of extreme lexical simplicity was used to articulate issues of intense emotional and social significance.

Chapter Two

War: A Private Meditation.

Rain

War: A Private Meditation.

Rain

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been 5
Since I was born into this solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none Whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain, 10
Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain 15
Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be towards what is perfect and
cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

In 1913 Thomas described in *The Ickniel Way* the progression of his thoughts as he lay in an inn bed listening to the rain at the end of a day's journey. The passage is sombre, often despairing, and frequently overwrought. Feelings of unworthiness, alienation, and an unbridgable separation from not just the rest of humanity but the whole of creation struggle for expression: 'There is nothing else in my world but my dead heart and brain within me and the rain without....Everything is drowned and dead, all that was once lovely and alive in the world, all that had once been alive....is now dung for the future...There is no room for anything in the world but the rain...It chants monotonous praise of the order of nature, which I have disobeyed or slipped out of. I have done evilly or weakly and I have left undone'. (Cooke 178-9) Gordon Bottomley described Thomas' life up to this point as 'little more than the agony of a swimmer upstream, and in a strong current against which he could scarcely keep his head cleared'. (G. B., *The Welsh Review* 173, Cooke 182) The essence of the experience was crystallized three years later in the poem 'Rain', the 'uncut stone' of Thomas' prose,

as Vernon Scannell described it, transforming the lengthy, rather rambling exposition of a psychological scenario into something which is focused and concise. The setting has changed, reflecting a change in Thomas' circumstances, from the room in a country inn to an army hut. There is a shift too, in the imaginative dynamic between inner and outer landscape, with the philosophic calm longingly recalled in the last line of the prose passage, achieving, in the poem, a position of central importance. The death wish which haunts both these works, and so much else that Thomas wrote, is considerably more controlled and contained in the poem, where, as I shall demonstrate later, a note of ambivalence and equivocation is finally dominant. In this extract from *Beautiful Wales* he could have been writing about himself: 'As will happen with men who love life too passionately, he was often in love with death. He found enjoyment in silence, in darkness.....and he longed even to embrace the absolute blank of death.....and he envied the solitary tree on a bare plain...under a night sky in Winter where the only touch of life and pleasure is rain'.

Rain had special significance for Thomas as a primary symbol. At times it externalized his state of mind, and at others acted as a wholly external force which had the power of moral arbiter. It could be omniscient, aloof, chiding, or life enhancing. It might engender sterility, death and annihilation. 'Everything is drowned and dead...all things....lie still and sleep, except the rain, the heavy black rain falling straight through the air that was once the sea of life'. (I.W., Cooke, 178-9) The power of annihilation could sometimes be seen as a positive force, as described in *The South Country*: 'At all times I love the rain...I like to see it possessing the whole earth at evening, smothering civilization, taking away from me myself everything except the power to walk under the dark trees and to enjoy as humbly as the hissing grass, while some twinkling house-light or song sung by a lonely man gives a foil to the immense dark force'. (Kirkham, 18) In 'Melancholy' a storm forms the backdrop to a self-indulgent mood of despair: 'The rain and wind, the rain and wind, raved endlessly./ On me the Summer storm, and fever, and melancholy/ wrought magic, so that if I feared the solitude/ Far more I feared all company'. Rain is a trigger point to explore a past moment of happiness in 'It Rains', and in 'After Rain' it frames an intensely observed image, that of parsley, in a country garden. Here, it is both symbol and reality, a moment in time recalled, and an evocation of an eternity of suffering and redemption. Within the eighteen lines of the poem, rain as a metaphor shape-changes constantly in organic response to multifaceted shifting patterns of thought, mood and memory

The word 'rain' is repeated nine times, inclusive of the title, eight times as a noun, once as a verb. The single word title suggests a possible exploration of the totality of significance of the symbol for the poet, linked to a time and place. But it is essentially a considered and deeply felt response to the larger fundamentals of the meaning of suffering, love and death, and the possibility of some form of personal transformation. The first word, without a determiner, echoes the title, initiating the pattern of repetition that occurs throughout. The spareness of its utterance and the lack of verb for the main clause foregrounds its physical dominance. The use of the existential construction, as in, for

example, 'There is nothing but rain, midnight rain...' starting with an unemphasised grammatical word, would have weakened the impetus of the insistent mimetic pattern which is maintained throughout the two sentences, as phrase and clause gather in length and complexity until the diminished and interrupted stresses evident in the last two lines.

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude and me.

The modification 'midnight' is both a temporal and a psychological indicator, conveying less of the negative loading inherent in the 'blackness' and 'darkness' of the *The Ickniel Way* passage, while still maintaining the same degree of intensity. The quality of 'midnightness' creates in a highly expressive manner the atmospheric mood of inner and outer world, encapsulating in emblematic form the ancient resonance and mystery of deep night. With the next noun phrase, 'nothing but the wild rain', the primarily subjective emotional application of the attribute of wildness creates a synthesis which defines the psychic climate of the poem. This continues in line two, with the -- again -- subjective projection of the mental state: 'On this bleak hut'. The negative partitive pronoun 'nothing,' with its concomitant 'but' transforms to positively assert the ubiquitous and total presence of the rain. But the unexpected enjambment with the prepositional phrase in line 2 immediately negates this assertion. The anonymous speaker has moved from the all-encompassing rain, to temporal awareness ('midnight') to awareness of mood ('midnight', 'wild' and 'bleak') to reality of location, (the hut) to an emotional response to surroundings ('solitude') and finally to a sense of self, 'me'. The absence of verb, already mentioned, in these two lines, means that the dynamic is supplied by the driving metre reflecting the persistence of the driving rain ('Black and monotonously sounding is the midnight and solitude of the rain' [I.W]), the motion inherent in the first three noun phrases, and in particular the use of the epithet 'wild'. The pattern of syntax has moved from generic term to transferred emotional attributes, to a psychological abstraction -- momentarily standing alone -- to, with the dramatic simplicity of the personal pronoun, a full awareness of the speaker himself. In the movement from outer to inner phenomena, the lines of demarcation between the external universe and the conscious individual are constantly blurring and being redefined.

Once aware of 'me', it is the thought processes of the self that dominate; memory, reaction to surroundings, ontological speculation and consciousness of death. (One is reminded of the Cartesian argument for the certain knowledge of existence, 'I think, therefore I am'.)

Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain or give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
Since I was born into this solitude.

The endline 'me' had a sense of finality, but the enjambed 'remembering' with its continuous aspect, and the temporal adjunct 'again' hints at the notion of compulsive action; self awareness must bring with it awareness of death. While this is a commonplace of human experience, the recurring nature of these problematic existential questions haunts and informs the poetry of Thomas, as in the attempts to recapture the lost moment of vision in 'Over The Hills'. The primacy of the sense of hearing evident in line four is reminiscent of the way in which aural perception is a bastion against death and dissolution in 'Lights Out' and 'Out In The Dark'. To hear is to be alive, and, perhaps, to be in control. The rain here has a representative function as a type of life force. The next verb phrase, 'or give it thanks', expands its role to that of supernatural power deserving of being given thanks. The overtly religious, and specifically Christian nature of the rain is more clearly defined in the fifth line, 'For washing me cleaner than I have been'. The water images of the first few lines now have the symbolic force of baptismal cleansing. There is some ambiguity about the temporal status of this clause. It may relate to the time of utterance (in the bleak hut listening to the rain) or as a concomitant, but unconscious, state associated with being dead. This is the only reference to the distracted expressions of personal guilt in *The Ickniel Way*: 'I have done evilly and weakly and I have left undone', a personal accusation which mingles with the formulaic Confession in *The book Of common Prayer*. 'I have done those things which I ought not to have done, and left undone those things which I ought to have done'. Here, a form of purification has taken place, with no sense of the rain as an implacable and accusing force. The solitude of line six echoes and redefines the solitude of line two. The earlier abstraction is restricted in time and location, and has, through the use of the repeated linking conjoin 'and', equal status with the rain and the speaker. In the latter example, solitude is synonymous with life because of its position in the phrase, and thus life equates with solitude -- an example of the Arnoldian separation of individuals. The preposition 'into' forms a complementary adjunct to the verb 'born', a combination with a distinctly Biblical cadence. Its dimensional aspect augments the sense of solitude being a totality into which the speaker is immersed. The demonstrative determiner serves to subtly conflate the solitude of the moment with the overarching existential solitude. The gathering complexity of the first sentence directs the orientation of the poem from external to internal, from the single word monosyllabic phrase, to a two word phrase, to clauses of increasing complexity in an expansive accrual of evolving ideas. The movement is from a personal to a world view where the ontological poles of birth and death are spanned, and from the notion of there being nothing but rain, to the concept that the rain encompasses all the complexities of the physical and moral life.

The increasing use of lexical items which contain religious overtones (in the sense that word choice, phrase construction and metre echo the Bible and Prayerbook) reaches a focus point in line 7: 'Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon'. Indeed, this is the pivotal point of the whole poem, and the final line of the prose passage. 'In a little while or in an age--for it is all one-- I shall have the full truth of the words I used to love, I know not why, in the days of nature, in the days before the rain; Blessed are the dead that the rain rains on'. The slight change from 'on' to 'upon' subtly

alters the effect of the line to one more rhythmic and formal and thus is a more explicit echo of the Beatitudes in St Matthew's Gospel. ('Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth', and so on.) This is both an invocation and a declarative illocutionary act, the use of the subjunctive indicating its formulaic nature. By transference, the subject of the relative clause, the rain, becomes the agent of benediction in place of the unexpressed subject, using the Christian symbol of water as the instrument of blessing. The colon emulates Biblical punctuation. But while in the Bible it ushers in a causal clause which conforms to prescribed pattern in a model of cause and effect, the lack of completion of Thomas' 'beatitude' professes a doubt or lapse in confidence. Indeed, the enigmatic nature of the utterance proves largely inscrutable to speaker and reader alike. The inexplicable personal significance as expressed in the quote above has yet to be made clear. The poem moves at once from the formulaic to the real.

But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake

The adversitative phrase 'But here' differentiates what is being said now from the previous generalized invocation, the anaphoric 'here' reasserting the shift in location from a meditative plane to the confines of the bleak hut and thoughts of the dead whom he has known. The second sentence marks the outward moving orientation from preoccupation with self to concern for others. In 'The Owl', it is the sound of an owl's cry which effected this outward shift and spoke 'for all who lay under the stars,/ Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice'. There, too, the speaker is in a place of shelter, at least temporarily removed from the fate of those in the trenches. The relative clause 'whom once I loved' is both personal and remote. The indefinite negative pronoun is markedly vague in application imbuing those referred to with anonymity, and with the indefinite time adjunct and perfective aspect of the verb, positions them in an unspecified and apparently distant past. The cumulative effect of the lexical patterns in the poem, proceeding vertically with a network of everchanging semantic features, builds up the principal psychological force at work, the consciousness of isolation: the initial monosyllable, the negative markers, 'nothing but', 'neither... nor', 'no love', 'not dissolved', and 'cannot'; the repeated use of personal pronouns, 'me' three times and 'I' five times in the first eight lines; the imagistic 'bleak hut', with its implied attributes of seclusion and littleness, the vulnerability of the 'broken reeds all still and stiff', the odd use of the indefinite article with a non-count noun in the phrase 'a cold water among broken reeds', which foregrounds the singularity of the water as opposed to it being an amorphous mass; the pathos of being 'helpless among the living and the dead'; and the refrain of 'solitude', 'solitude' and 'solitary' spaced at four line intervals. The cohesion evident in this groundplan of repetition and organic growth of thematic variation follows a circular motion. From external to internal world, from self-consciousness to sympathetic awareness of others who share the speaker's plight, back to the egocentric pull as the death wish reasserts itself. This movement is reflected in the more or less

regular long, shorter, short pattern of line length. Interestingly, this is a purely visual effect since all lines have an equal allocation of ten syllables.

The movement out is both a compassionate impulse and a projection of the speaker's mental state onto others. Stan Smith describes how the poem 'charts an obscure intuition of interdependence that underlies isolation', and notes Thomas' movement through solitude to sympathy in his work on Walter Pater: 'The waters are too deep between us...' (Smith, 174) Echoes of Matthew Arnold and mid-Victorian angst are here explicit. 'Yes! in the sea of life enisled,/ With echoing straits between us thrown,/ Dotting the shoreless watery wild,/ We mortal millions live alone.' ('To Marguerite') The dual impulses are traced in lines 8-14:

But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff.

The internal rhyme of 'lying' and 'dying' - which chimes with the repeated 'I' of the previous line, and 'tonight' - emphasises the shared semantic feature of the two verbs, that of a supine posture. (This is reinforced by the prepositions 'on' and 'upon'.) In fact almost all of the verbs in the poem are stative, describing cognitive processes: 'remembering', and 'I pray'; the passive 'washing me cleaner', which with 'I pray', and 'give it thanks', is a ritualistic verbal or mental action; sensory actions involving cognitive reactive processes such as 'hear' and 'listening', and life event verbs such as 'is dying', 'I shall die', and 'I loved'. As already stated the kinetic energy comes throughout from the background drumming of the rain which impels thought and animates the meditational process. The stative adjective 'awake', because of its proximity to images of death, brings with it the metaphoric sense of 'alive'. The condition and actions of those 'whom once I loved' reflect those of the speaker in the act of listening to the rain and lying down, and the state of aloneness. At odds with this outward sympathetic movement, this betrays an essentially solipsistic approach tacitly indicating the truism that there is no truly dispassionate and objective way to view the lives of others. The rhyming of 'rain' and 'pain' links the physical sensation with the rain, so that physical and climatic states are mutually charged with added significance. Pain, death and suffering have become imprinted with the rhythm and motion of the rain. In a sense Thomas has taken the pathetic fallacy to the extreme, and the external world has become an extension of self. The oracular

invocation has also evinced this conflation of states where agent and verb, 'the rain rains,' have become part of the formula of religious rubric. The interpolated adverbial 'thus' creates a pattern of cause and effect. The sympathy comes as a result of the pain, although perhaps this could be interpreted as being in sympathy with the speaker rather than with others. 'Helpless' adds a new dimension to the description of solitude, and 'the living and the dead' again defines humanity in terms of existential extremes. The ghostly presence of the soldiers in France haunts the anonymous references to the suffering and dead; the use of the present continuous in 'dying', 'lying' and 'listening', and the specific time and place markers 'here' and 'tonight' demonstrate an acute awareness of the reality of present affliction, and a presentiment that 'in a little while or in an age' he will be a part of it. The positional preposition 'among' suggests both proximity and separation, a shared fate and experience but recognition that the individual is always agonisingly alone.

The complex simile beginning 'Like a cold water among broken reeds/ Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff', poses some difficulties in interpretation. It presumably refers to the singularity of 'none', so that perhaps a particular individual is being thought of. The quality of coldness links semantically with 'still' and 'stiff' in line 14 so that the attributes build to a vividly suggestive image of corpses, the stillness contrasting with the dynamism of the rain. Thomas had used the phrase in *Light And Twilight* in 1911: 'I felt as though I were looking out of a grave where I lay all still and stiff'. (Cooke, 181) The postmodification of the adjectival phrase draws attention to the pathos of the picture, and the simplicity of the monosyllabic alliteration has a dramatically appropriate starkness. ('Still' in line 9 has ambiguous application, meaning both 'not moving' and the adverbial sense of 'remaining' awake.) The 'broken reeds' again suggest isolation in the midst of a shared fate, and the repetition of the noun phrase in the following line with the quantifying noun 'myriads' heightens the pathos and graphically portrays the extent of the portrayed carnage. The vowel glide in 'myriads', echoing with a slight variation the vowel sound in 'reeds', exemplifies the unifying effect Thomas achieved through his subtle use of half rhyme and assonance. The line breaks, too, with their enforced pauses, draw attention to these strategies: 'rain,' 'been,' 'upon'; 'dead,' 'reeds'; 'stiff,' 'death.' The next simile, 'Like me who have no love which this wild rain/ Has not dissolved except the love of death' has its genesis in the first. The broken reeds of the legions of the slaughtered reminds the speaker again of himself. But here the stillness and stiffness transforms from the physical to the emotional alienation he recognises in himself. We have here an inversion of the normal pattern for figurative language, where the vehicle becomes the tenor. In a sense the figure has gained such ascendancy that it achieves its own reality. The emotional coldness described in 'me, who have no love' refers back to line eight and may retroactively reinterpret those 'whom once I loved' to mean not simply thoughts of past times and old loves but the fact that the capacity to love is gone. The multivalent role of the rain is now transmuted to that of the agent responsible for this emotional sterility. In the end of *The Icknield Way*, Thomas wrote: 'The truth is that the rain falls forever and I am melting into it'. There the whole self is being absorbed into the totality of the rain in a process of personal annihilation. In the poem it is the social and domestic bonds of love,

and not the thinking rational self which has been 'dissolved'. It is interesting that the primary meaning of 'melt' is liquefaction as the result of heat, suggesting a more apocalyptic disintegration than the dissolution process of the poem. Time is an elastic commodity for the poet. Deep past mingles with the recollection of recent events; future certainties, premonitions and musing speculation mutate and collide to create a pliant present reality. 'In a little while or in an age-- for it is all one'. The demonstrative in 'this wild rain' speaks firmly of the here and now but the loss of love has occurred in the distant past. Awareness of being washed cleaner refers to recognition of the feelings of the moment, and a long drawn out process of spiritual growth. The verb 'remembering' must normally advert to past events, but here the speaker remembers a future certainty, 'Remembering again that I shall die'. The process of memory proves highly complex. As head of the noun clause in line three, 'Remembering' governs the remaining four lines of the first sentence, and through the associations of key content words, the active and descriptive themes of the entire second sentence. The initial memory act is consciousness of death, which leads in antonymous and linked sequence to 'born' 'dead' 'dying' 'pain,' 'sympathy' 'helpless' 'living' 'dead' 'broken' 'dissolved' 'death' and 'disappoint.' The thought of those 'lying still awake' governs the subsidiary sequence in this chain of memory, as the unfolding and expansion of subordinate clauses moves out from and reverts to the preoccupying and centralised thread.

The synonymous 'tempest' in the last line restates the 'wild rain' of the first, exaggerating and in a way typifying it. The mood of the last two lines has, however, undergone a shift: 'If love it be for what is perfect and/ Cannot ,the tempest tells me disappoint'. The loneliness and bleakness of the initial phrasing of the poem has been transformed to a guarded positive. Inherent in the structural components of the final three clauses is a pattern of conflicting impulses, hesitation and doubt. The fear (or acceptance) of the extinction of the senses, and thus of any sense of selfhood evoked in line four, 'and neither hear the rain or give it thanks', becomes an assertion of belief in the 'perfection' of death. The speaker's espousal of this ideal is undermined as it is uttered. The repetition of 'love' three times in three successive lines suggests a rueful, covert desire to recapture the lost love of family and friends, and an acceptance that while he is still alive the love of death can never be enough. The conditional marker 'if' introduces the note of doubt, which, combined with the postmodifying 'except' in the previous line, indicates a mind at work rethinking an apparently firm feeling. The three negative markers in the last four lines, 'no' 'not' and 'cannot', also negate as they assert. The formal sounding use of the subjunctive in 'If love it be' hints at a lack of confidence and is more suited to the theoretical tone which has been introduced. The parenthetical 'the tempest tells me', separating auxiliaries from verb, further devitalizes the strength of the death wish. The unstressed final syllable on the trisyllabic 'disappoint' sustains the note of equivocation right to the point of closure, and contrasts markedly with the robust, monosyllabic force of the opening word. Its psychological weakness means that the complex tensions inherent in the two lines prove to have the most dominant impact. Doubts about the perfection of death are also evident in 'Liberty'. The

three lines that follow the Keatsian protestation, 'And yet I am half in love with pain', speak of an attachment to a flawed existence:

With what is imperfect, with both tears and mirth,
With things that have an end, with life and earth,
And this moon that leaves me dark within the door.

There is often a shift in perspective at the end of Thomas' poems, an affirmation, sometimes couched in negative terms, of what has been tentatively proposed or laboriously and hesitantly worked through. In 'Rain' the move is from the intensely personal to more theoretical conjecture. There is a direct and confident use of 'I', while in *The Icknielld Way* it has been necessary to put the distracted utterances into the 'muttering' voice of 'a ghostly double beside me'. This sense of dissociation, evident in such works as 'The Sign-Post' and most clearly addressed in 'The Other' (both among the earliest group of poems), has largely disappeared. The repetition of 'I' and the presence of others so integrated with the presented self, means a powerful emotional energy drives the forward motion of the poem. The plight is so individual, at the same time so universal; and the rain is the sagacious voice of nature which informs this emotional drive. The change in emphasis from 'I' to the abstract concept of death in the final three lines marks a standing aside and a dilution of intensity.

The use of rain as a symbol and psychological indicator was of lifelong importance for Thomas. As early as 1902, in response to the stresses of financial and domestic worries and pressures of overwork he wrote: 'I am alright, except that a sort of nervousness...prevents me from writing....a sense of *something* coming, as if I had heard a report and waited for the other barrel... so all I can do is resolve myself into an ear that listens to ceaseless rain and an eye that merely watches the fire.' (R G Thomas, 101, 1985) 'Rain' demonstrates how Thomas has taken a raw expression of despair, expounded at length in prose in *The Icknielld Way*, and condensed it after a period into poetic form; emotion, if not 'recollected in tranquillity' then at least subject to reflective control: 'a remembered or recreated depression'. To use Kirkham's words this is a mix of 'diffused brooding sadness' and a 'sharp articulation of despair'. Coleridge's remark that 'When a man is unhappy, he writes damned bad poetry' may well be true, but the re-thought, remoulded despair of 'Rain' has created a memorable statement. (Kirkham, 283; 1973) The sharpness of emotion is still evident, but the tempering process is manifest in the infiltration of traditional religious phrasing, the sympathetic impulses outwards, and the final philosophic statements which seek resolution.

Chapter Three

A Silent Companion Always Ready For Us.

The Path

A Silent Companion Always Ready For Us

The Path

Running along a bank, a parapet
That saves from the precipitous wood below
The level road, there is a path. It serves
Children for looking down the long smooth steep,
Between the legs of beech and yew, to where 5
A fallen tree checks the sight: while men and women
Content themselves with the road and what they see
Over the bank, and what the children tell
The path, winding like silver, trickles on,
Bordered and even invaded by thinnest moss
That tries to cover roots and crumbling chalk 10
With gold, olive, and emerald, but in vain.
The children wear it. They have flattened the bank
On top, and silvered it between the moss
With the current of their feet, year after year. 15
But the road is houseless, and leads not to school.
To see a child is rare there, and the eye
Has but the road, the wood that overhangs
And underyawns it, and the path that looks
As if it led on to some legendary 20
Or fancied place where men have wished to go
And stay; till, sudden, it ends where the wood ends.

As an analogy for the course of an individual's life, roads are entrenched in the metaphoric stock of folklore, literature and religion. Fascinated by the mystery of destination, Thomas used roads as a primary symbol, an archetype adopted, as were forests and rain, as his own. His works are infiltrated by thoughts of 'over the hills and far away', and the hidden markers of fate lying round each corner; the cryptic wisdom and shrewd observations of the wayfarers and countryfolk met en route, and the choices presented by crossroads. Four stanzas from 'Roads' illustrate aspects of this fascination which link his own destiny with the pattern of historical forces:

I love roads:
The goddesses that dwell
Are my favourite gods. (1)

Roads go on
While we forget, and are
Forgotten like a star
That shoots and is gone. (2)

The next turn may reveal
Heaven: upon the crest
The close pine clump, at rest
And black, may Hell conceal. (7)

Now all roads lead to France
And heavy is the tread
Of the living; but the dead
Returning lightly dance: (14)

His own many walking tours were fundamental to the resolution of his restless and conflicting impulses and the depressions which beset him. He crystallized in a series of images the reverberant and suggestive essence of the commonplace recoverable from the process of walking, and the unfolding and everchanging panorama of the natural world. 'The Path' was written about March 1915, probably describing the shortcut taken by Thomas each morning as he walked from his home in Steep to his study up on Wick Green. It was a pocket of scenery known and considered over a period of time, the object of close observation whose significance gradually matured and developed.

It is quickly evident that that the central thematic image of the poem, the path of the title, is somehow buried in the middle of the first eight lines, dominated syntactically and by a concentration of related but diverse lexical items.

Running along a bank, a parapet
That saves from the precipitous wood below
The level road, there is a path. It serves
Children for looking down the long smooth steep,
Between the legs of beech and yew, to where
A fallen tree checks the sight: while men and women

Content themselves with the road and what they see
Over the bank, and what the children tell.

The initial present participle is detached cataphorically from its subject, the path. In between we have 'a bank', postmodified as 'a parapet', the 'precipitous wood', and the 'level road'. This postponed subject subsumes the semantic function of 'running' in the sentence, that of locational marker, to that of an active verb with an animate agent. The sense of forward motion thus suggested underlies the mythic concept of the road as an agential force that 'winds on forever'. (Roads) Thomas discussed this notion at length, and other aspects of the historical and psychological significance of roads and paths in *Icknield Way*. 'The earliest roads wandered like rivers through the land, having, like rivers, one necessity, to keep in motion. We still say that a road 'goes' to London, as we 'go' ourselves. We point out a white snake on a hillside, and tell a man, "That is going to Chichester." ... We may go or stay, but the road will go up over the mountains to Llandovery, and then up again over to Tregaron... Some roads creep, some continue merely; some advance with majesty, some mount a hill in curves like a soaring sea-gull'. (Longley, 1981) This is at odds with the poetic representations of a foreknowledge that the speaker's roads will and must end; the Green Roads that end in the forest, the Green Lane that ends a mystical moment when time and seasons merge 'and once more all is the same', the roads and tracks that deceive the travellers 'up to the forest brink', the conviction that 'Now all roads lead to France', and, in the present instance, the path which 'sudden... ends where the wood ends'. The complex postmodification of the bank focuses attention on the functional aspects of its location and achieves syntactic dominance. The use of the military 'parapet', its endline position visually emphasising its physical elevation, the volitional sense of the active verb 'saves', and the multisyllabic 'precipitous', phonically linked to 'parapet', heavily load the adjectival clause with the sense of perceived danger. The prepositional complement 'from' following 'saves' suggests an active threat from the woods. Lexical cohesion has created a microcosmic war zone where topographical features menace and defend. The lack of direct object implies that the 'saving' function of the bank is general in application; and the choice of verb, instead of the perhaps more likely 'protects', hints at the Christian doctrine of being saved from sin and damnation. The scenic markers that crowd the first sentence create the allegorical elements that inform the moral and physical groundplan of the poem: a protective structure that saves from a perilous fall, and the 'level road', the middle way which most will choose to follow. Prepositions shape the spatial dimensions of this groundplan. The path runs 'along' the bank -- indicating direction -- which is high above the wood 'below', the height being defined by the modifier 'precipitous'. The children look 'down' through the legs of the trees. In line 14, they have 'flattened the bank/ On top'. These are in deictic relationship to the 'level' road', the point of equilibrium. When considered in isolation these directional markers assume a metaphoric significance, with Biblical and folklore allusions readily suggested. The 'long, smooth steep', is inviting but dangerous: one slip would lead to a fall. And it is a 'fallen' tree which 'checks' the sight. The path deceptively 'looks/ As if' it leads on to some 'imaginary /Or fancied place'. (Line 22) In a comparable poem, 'The Combe',

'no one scrambles over the sliding chalk/ By beech and yew and perishing juniper/ Down the half-precipices of its sides...The moon of Summer, and all the singing birds/ Except the missel-thrush that loves juniper,/ Are quite shut out'. The high ground has generally positive values, the low negative. The spiritual peril in sliding and slipping and falling is evident in numerous Biblical references : 'Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction'.(Psalm 73,18); 'Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not'. (Psalm 17, 5.) Having set the scene, the final position of the main clause now leads directly onto an extended treatment of the path with the initial anaphoric pronoun 'it'.

The human, volitional verb 'serves' links in half-rhyme with the bank that 'saves', continuing the subtle personification of the landscape that continues throughout the poem. The beech and yew have 'legs', forming massive human figures. The fallen tree 'checks' the sight, the colon causing a caesura which mimics the action. In line 19 the wood 'underyawns' the road. From the speaker's adult point of view, the wood is another manifestation of forest, mysterious and to be feared, 'precipitous' and therefore dangerous. For the children, it is the 'long smooth steep', a series of positive attributes reflecting a manifestation of the child's mind style. The lack of noun complement converts 'steep' into a noun, suggesting that the quality of steepness has more impact than the slope itself, again indicative of the child's more open vision. (This is also perhaps a glancing reference to the village Steep.) The notion that children have clearer vision and a more open unfettered perception of the truth, a native wisdom that they share with birds, is developed here in a number of ways, and espoused in a several other poems, eg, 'The Brook', 'The Child In The Orchard', 'The Mill-Pond' and 'The Child On The Cliff'. In others a child's voice is assumed in nursery rhyme rhythms to articulate truths too simple for the mature mind: 'November's days are thirty:/November's earth is dirty,/ Those thirty days, from first to last:/And the prettiest things on the ground are the paths'.('November') In 'The Path' the verb complement in 'serves for' is a positive, enabling preposition, and if reformulated as the resultative adjunct 'so they can', reveals nature as a positive force in assisting the children's vision. Conversely, the prepositional form in 'saves from', evokes the sense of separation and deliverance. The children can see the wood without fear. The participle 'looking' has the sense of active engagement in the act of examining the observed scene; the adults merely 'see', a more passive manner of perception. The children's vision is 'checked', but by the external agency of the fallen tree. They position themselves to get a clear view, while the adults choose to walk where their vision is restricted by the bank. The differing ways of seeing described in the two balanced appositional units of the sentence -- 'children' form both beginning and end focus -- is foregrounded by the colon and the contrastive conjoin 'while'. (One notes at this point the thematic dominance of the sense of sight in this poem indicated by the number of related lexical items that deal with what is seen, and perhaps more significantly, what is not seen: 'for looking', 'they see', 'and the eye has but'; the dimensional markers already discussed, and the colour values listed in the middle section reinforce this.) The reflexive pronoun as verb complement in 'they content themselves' sustains the contrast between a vision that is unfettered and externally receptive

and one that is blinkered and inward looking. The etymological implications of 'content' suggest a state of self-containment and self-satisfaction; and the repetition of the noun in the manner adverbial 'with the road', reminds again of the importance of its prior premodifying attribute 'level', foregrounding its position as the mean between high and low.

The fallen tree, a type, not subject to hyponymous distinction like the yew and the beech, is an emblem used by Thomas in several poems discussed in this study - 'Fifty Faggots', 'As The Team's Head-Brass', 'The Barn' and 'The Wind's Song'. It is suggestive both of the war dead (as in popular euphemism) and as an emblem of moral decline. It is a point of focus, narrowed by being 'between' the tree legs, the goal of their 'looking', and an impediment for the children; a memento mori that death will bring not the enlightenment of traditional religious belief, but the cessation of all sensory perception. In a pattern of lexical collocation, there is the hint that the tree has 'fallen' down the precipitous slope -- though this is not likely to be so. The declining trend of such phrases as 'precipitous wood below', 'looking down', 'fallen tree', 'over the bank', 'crumbling chalk', and 'flattened', follows a similar pattern to that found in 'As The Team's Head-brass'. Here this is in counterpoint to the forward motion of the bank 'running along', and the path that 'trickles on', and 'led on' (line 20). The yew is a traditional emblem of death, interestingly not the specific point of focus, but an atmospheric prop. In 'The Combe' we recall, 'no one scrambles over the sliding chalk/ By beech and yew and perishing juniper'. The atmosphere of death is not so pervasive as in 'The Ash Grove': 'Half of the grove stood dead, and those that yet lived made/ Little more than the dead ones made of shade'.

The path, winding like silver, trickles on,
Bordered and even invaded by thinnest moss
That tries to cover roots and crumbling chalk
With gold, olive and emerald, but in vain.
The children wear it. They have flattened the bank
On top, and silvered it with the current of their feet, year after year.

The motion inherent in the first participial clause, 'running on', is continued and modified with the simile, 'winding like silver', imaging both colour and metallic values. 'Trickles' has its base semantic association with liquids thus retroactively rendering silver as a molten metal. The path in motion and appearance is seen in terms of a river. 'Running' and 'winding' both have stative, locational qualities as well as a progressive and directional sense. This is also true of the adjectival participles in the next line, 'bordered' and 'invaded'. The non-specific place adjunct 'on' reinforces the underlying movement, a movement towards an unknown destination as indicated by the lack of complementation, dreamily slowing down from the speed of 'running' to the slower 'winding' and even more slow 'trickles'. This signals a shift to a more figurative mode of description, with a

pattern of metaphor making collocations developing. The syntax drifts mimetically, following a process of complex recursion with a series of postmodifying clauses. In a technique frequently adopted by Thomas, the subordinate relative clause develops a dynamic and visual dominance, in keeping with the action described: in this case the attempted domination of the path by the moss. Just as in the first sentence the path was syntactically 'buried' by a phalanx of scenic features and spatial markers, here the encroachment, rendered more sinister by the superlative modifier 'thinnest' is manifest by the series of colour and aureate qualities 'gold, olive, and emerald'. The superimposition of gilded, decorative and luxuriant qualities on the colour description gathers in the 'silver' of the first participial clause and the noun-verb conversion in line fourteen, 'and silvered it between the moss'. The path or Way, as an archetypal symbol, is in constant danger of being lost or obliterated, first by the obtrusion of diverting or dangerous distractions; and secondly by the more subtle -- but equally dangerous -- incursions of fanciful and futile speculation. The vulnerability of the path is indicated by the passive participles 'bordered', with its sense of being actively confined, and 'invaded', indicating a more aggressive and dynamic action by the moss and linking with the military 'parapet' in line one. (The parapet actively and volitionally 'saves', while the path is victim. Invasion is taking place even within the walls of the parapet.) 'Crumbling chalk' suggests the constant state of degeneration to which the path is subject. The process of gilding one's perception of the world and the dreaming, figurative trends of lexical patterning is abruptly curtailed with the negative sentential closure of the truncated final clause, 'but in vain'. The negating may refer to either the main clause verb 'trickles' or the action of the moss 'trying' to cover the roots and chalk. If the former, there is the sense that the whole path and journey is 'vain', a gloomy prognosis; if the latter, the tenor of the metaphor is more hopeful -- the incursions of an illusory inner life will not prevail. The negative lexical climate thus initiated, at a point almost exactly half way through the poem, now infiltrates the remainder.

The initial position of 'The children' in the mono-clausal sentence 'The children wear it', draws attention again to the generic status of children and men and women in the poem and the inherent characteristic differences of youth and age in response to the natural world. The speaker in this poem has an unobtrusive presence, the personal individual response subsumed to more generalized philosophic observation. The use of the definite article in the second and third mention of 'children' brings a subtle degree of familiarity, but the time adjunct 'year after year' suggests their classification as a type; a feral, active type who interact with, and are part of the environment, and who leave marks of their presence. In *The Icknield Way* Thomas wrote: 'On the fairly even and dry ground of the high ridges... the earth itself is unchanged by centuries of traffic, save that the grass is made finer, shorter, paler, and more numerously starred with daisies.' (Longley, 216, 1981) The children's actions are physical and tactile, they 'wear it', and 'flatten' the ban, and 'silver' it 'between the moss' (though we note with the positional adjunct 'between', that they co-exist with the moss and do not obliterate it. When they 'silver' the path they assist the natural process of the 'crumbling' chalk.) The foregrounded brevity of the sentence reinforces the implied comparison with the

timidity and ineffectuality of 'men and women'. The lack of a manner adjunct as complement to 'wear', most obviously 'down', invites the dual interpretation of the actual assumption of the path as apparel by the children, an indication of their wholehearted embrace of the natural world. Although the referent of the pronoun 'it' must be the path, its detached position separated by three lines of heavily descriptive language, lends a certain vagueness of application. 'It' comes laden with all the attributes just articulated, and the children are agents of wear on all these things. Perhaps their actions of 'flattening' reflect unconscious forces at work seeking the equilibrium of the level road. The manner adverbial 'with the current of their feet', links semantically with the liquid verb 'trickles', and the participles 'running' and 'winding', so the forward motion of the children merges into the fabric of the path. There is even the suggestion of a 'currency' - 'silver' collocation, with the children temporarily agents of the gilding process alluded to above.

The inter-sentential connective 'but' introduces a new, seemingly contradictory interpretation of the poem:

But the road is houseless, and leads not to school.
To see a child is rare there, and the eye
Has but the road, the wood that overhangs
And underyawns it, and the path that looks
As if it led on to some legendary
Or fancied place where men have wished to go
And stay ; till, sudden, the wood ends.

The two coordinated clauses both contain negative markers, the first a suffix to form a noun-adjective conversion, the second a negative verb auxiliary. 'Houseless', 'leads not', 'is rare', and the 'eye has but', all have a post-position negative construction, so foregrounding the contradictory semantic force working in the phrases. Habitations, house and school, are iconic indicators of a deserted landscape. The scene is described but what does not exist and what is not done. The coordinated clauses 'To see a child is rare there' and 'the eye has but' both continue the negative trend. Both suggest the impersonality of the narrative voice, in the first instance by the use of a subjectless infinitive clause, and in the second by indicating a shift of initiating agency from person to part, with the use of the definite article instead of a possessive pronoun denying any sense of personal identification. In 'The Combe' the scene is in part described by the lack of people: 'And no one scrambles over the sliding chalk.' In 'Under The Woods' an old section of woodland is described: 'There was no garden here,/ Apples nor mistletoe;/ No children dear/ Ran to and fro'. In a retroactive redefinition, the children of lines 1-14 assume a ghostly unreality; perhaps they were part of the metaphoric shadow pictures along with the path paved with silver, gold and emeralds. The three noun phrases, 'the road', 'the wood' and 'the path', restate the scene of the opening lines. Each grows in length and complexity, from the simple noun phrase 'the road', to the

wood and its dimension- defining relative clause, and finally the path which is doubly subordinated; the first clause contains an alternative modifier, 'legendary / Or fancied', the second an additional infinitive verb phrase, 'to go/ And stay'. This indicates the inherent lack of interest or suggestive power in the level road, and in mimetic, wandering motion, the endless tantalizing possibilities of the path. The low key anthropomorphism which has informed object and action throughout, gains a more obvious presence with the antithetical 'overhangs' - poised mimetically at endline -and 'underyawns'. These preposition - verb compounds create a scenic, atmospheric shift where the woods and their threat of danger have expanded spatially. As well as being 'below' in the preceding seventeen lines of the poem -- the space here has expanded from the lateral precipitous slope to a monumental gaping maw and the destination to which one may slip -- the woods now form an inauspicious canopy above. The woods, a type of 'forest', grow and dominate. The path, and the travellers who walk, or do not walk, are surrounded on all sides, as in 'Lights Out': 'The tall forest towers/ Its cloudy foliage lowers/ Ahead, shelf above shelf'. The illusion of the continuous 'running' path is beginning to fade. The relative clause that modifies the path, 'that looks/ As if it led on to some legendary/ Or fancied place where men have wished to go/ And stay' trails on, the syntax mimetic in its wandering ineffectuality. 'Looks', fallaciously read in its endline position as an active variant on the curious 'looking' of the children and the more passive but none the less volitional 'seeing' of the men and women and suggesting a sense of alert animacy, is reinterpreted by enjambment as 'appears', a precursor to a self-evident delusion which unravels as it is uttered. The unstressed determiner 'some', with modifiers 'legendary' (an historically known mythic truth) and 'fancied' (an expression of deep seated desire) begins to construct a pattern of unreality and unfulfilled dreams. This is continued with the perfect progressive and infinitive verb forms of the following subordinate clause, 'where men have wished to go'. The semi colon after 'And stay', forces a sentential suspension. Elided affixes on 'till' and 'sudden', and the pattern of arrest of the penultimate line, signals the abrupt cessation of dreaming speculation. The detachment of the pronoun 'it' from its referent, hints by its indeterminacy that the road ends as well as the path; and the foregrounded repetition of 'end' in a position of closure, demonstrates the completeness and finality of this end. The 'running', 'trickling', 'leading', forward motion of path and road, have in reality no goal and destination. Both alluring castles in the air and threatening woods have proved equally phantasmagorical. All thought, all consciousness, all conception of any future in life or death, is ultimately nullified.

Thomas found a philosophy which reflected his own in the works of the American psychologist William James. In Stan Smith's words, James 'sought to ground the subjective, insubstantial stuff of consciousness...within the objective material body of reality.'(93) 'The path opens up "vague vistas of a life continuous with our own, beckoning and inviting", yet returns ut at the end to "the mystery of fact" itself. (Smith, 119) The simultaneous significance of of an actual, 'ordinary' path and its correlative existence in the 'insustantial stuff of consciousness' is evoked throught the course of 'The Path'. Enjambed lines follow the forward, meandering motion, while syntactic arrests indicate

diversions, obscurities, blocks to progress or moral inertia. Lexical items depict in turn danger, the pursuit of dreams, and, with the encroachment of negatives, a fatalistic embrace of the void. Through these techniques, the poem, as Smith says, 'talks about itself', employing the path 'as a symbol of its own progress from start to finish.... poem and path alike depart from the main road, but they lead to no "legendary or fancied place", simply back to the ordinary mystery from which they started'. (Smith,120, 1986)

Chapter Four

Not Empty, Silent, Still, But Full Of Life of Some Kind.

The Hollow Wood, The Barn, Over The Hills.

Not Empty, Silent, Still, But Full Of Life Of Some Kind

The Hollow Wood, The Barn, Over The Hills

In this chapter I shall discuss three short poems which deal with different 'moments of vision'. The first, 'The Hollow Wood', succinctly describes dual layers of perception in which hallucinatory images overlay a precisely observed section of woodland. The second, 'The Barn' is of interest for its sustained use of interior monologue and the informality of the chosen lexis. The speaker allows his thoughts to meander as a farm building triggers reflections which encompass the self, history and seasonal change. 'Over The Hills' describes futile attempts to recapture a Wordsworthian vision of an expansive skyscape, an experience unappreciated at first, and ever after out of reach

Out in the sun the goldfinch flits
Along the thistle-tops, flits and twits
Above the hollow wood
Where birds swim like fish--
Fish that laugh and shriek-- 5
To and fro, far below
In the pale hollow wood.

Lichen, ivy and moss
Keep evergreen the trees
That stand half-flayed and dying, 10
And the dead trees on their knees
In dog's mercury, ivy, and moss:
And the bright twit of the goldfish drops
Down there as he flits on the thistle-tops.

'The Hollow Wood' is a compact example of the skill with which Thomas wove cohesive lexicosemantic patterns to create a unified collocation of syntactic, graphological and phonetic threads. The poem was the fifteenth he wrote, one of the group produced in his initial burst of productivity in December 1914. This short poem --consisting of two seven-lined stanzas, each composed of a single sentence -- is deceptively slight. A close examination reveals a taut technical control of a complex range of lexical relationships and hints of the thematic and psychological concerns which would govern the poet's work. From the earliest works to the last there is little

difference in the demonstrated restraint governing strong emotions, and the exact placing of their shadowy counterparts in the natural world. The inspiration and title possibly came from the patch of woodland near Gordon Bottomley's home in Cornforth, known as the Hollow Wood. Thomas had spent the previous weeks reviewing a collection of poems by William Morris including one titled 'The Hollow Land' (Ten years later Eliot would personify the concept in 'The Hollow Men'.) As was so often the case, the name had a particular resonance which imbued an unremarkable pocket of countryside with a unique and peculiar significance.

Five of the seven line beginnings in the first stanza consist of prepositional phrases. Line six is made up of two and the adverbial clause in line four has a space-describing function. The dominance of these phrases governs the lexical construction of the poem, determining the directional dynamic, and consequently the psychological shape, of the poem. Isolating spaces and defining parameters was a common concern of Thomas-- 'The Path' and 'The Combe' are comparable examples. The movement can be traced from a region beyond the deictic point of reference with the compound preposition 'Out in', to the horizontal axis 'along', to a parallel but lower place 'to and fro', its low dimensional status determined by 'below', and emphasised by the intensifying modifier 'far'. The lack of specificity of 'Out in' suggests a state of being as much as a place, and with the potent symbolic force of the prepositional complement 'the sun', has corollary suggestions of immersion in unfettered space, light and warmth. The practice of poems having as titles or starting with prepositional phrases that locate the subject in relation to its natural surroundings occurs frequently throughout Thomas' work, and is evident in such examples as 'Out In The Dark' (the title an antonymous echo of 'Out in the sun'), 'Over the Hills', 'Up In The Wind', and in the first lines 'Over known fields,' (A Dream), 'Between A Sunny Bank and the Sun,' ('Two Houses') 'Over the land,' ('Thaw'), and 'Under the after sunset sky,' ('Two Pewits'). The pre and postposition prepositionals dominate the noun and verb of the main clause, 'the goldfinch flits', but the motion of the verb gains its own significance by its reiteration in a position of arrest between the second and third coordinating prepositionals, and its extension by 'and twits': 'Out in the sun the goldfinch flits/ Along the thistle-tops, flits and twits'. The combination of monosyllabic sequence, the rhymed couplet and internal rhyme, and the regular metre mimetically foreground the described action, and neatly suggest the link between sound and motion. Locational specificity is achieved with 'Along the thistle-tops', which, in conjunction with line 3, defines the point of equilibrium in the poem. In 'The Path' the road is the middle point between the path running along the bank and 'the precipitous wood below'. The choice of 'thistle tops', with its implied quality of prickliness, subtly suggests a barrier to passage. This is another example of the partial or complete liminal halts to progress that are evident throughout the body of Thomas' work, and increasingly so towards the end; the path that 'had to be found/ By half-gaps that were stiles once in the hedge' in 'Over The Hills'; in 'Lights Out' and 'Out In The Dark' the divisions that separate life from sleep and death both invite and provoke fear, and are equally threshold and barrier.

'The hollow wood' in line three sounds the first premonitory note, its medial position in the stanza asserting its thematic importance. It defines the enclosed physical space in the woodland, creating a positive from a negative -- the sense of the presence of absence. The opening lines of 'Health' contrast an unusual state of ebullience on the part of the speaker with a sombre landscape. 'Four miles at a leap, over the dark hollow land,/ To the frosted steep of the down and its junipers black,/ Travels my eye with equal ease and delight'. In 'The Path' the wood 'underyawns' implying a gaping hole, and in 'The Combe' the steep drop is a 'mouth'. These poems, as in the present instance, describe a tract of steep falling land, a dramatic iconic representation of the multidimensional qualities of the perceived world. In the space that has created a natural amphitheatre in 'The Chalk-Pit' the speaker is haunted by what could have been. 'Its emptiness and silence/ And stillness haunt me, as if just before/ It was not empty, silent, still, but full/ Of life of some kind, perhaps tragical'. He does not want to hear the true history of the place: 'I prefer to make a tale', and later, 'Again and again I see it, strangely dark,/ And vacant of a life but just withdrawn'. The preference for 'making a tale' is a telling comment on the poet's propensity for peopling his spaces with an elusive haunting presence, or, as in this instance, with hallucinatory creatures. 'Hollow' more commonly modifies a count noun, in the lexical environment of the poem, possibly a log, trunk or tree. This subtle deviance in application suggests the peripheral figurative semantic descriptions of falsity, insincerity and lack of substance. It possesses, too, a faint suggestion of a sound quality, its proximity creating a distinctive contrast in resonance with the lightweight clarity of 'twitting'. (The meaning of 'twit' as a censure or reproach could well have significance here.) The postmodifying clause 'Where birds swim like fish' begins with a fulfilling of semantic expectations following the predicted syntagmatic chain, only to have these expectations abruptly overturned by the foregrounded incongruity of verb and simile. The departure from a more or less straightforward descriptive sequence comes at the exact mid-point of the stanza and sentence, in a midline position, without pause or change in intonation; the flow on from 'normal' to surreal is a seamless process. The dual modes of perception are both imbued with their own verisimilitude, both separate and the same. Birds and fish inhabit mutually exclusive environments, but share the same lexical subset. The interspecies transposition of function, in that the semantic description of 'swim' restricts it to water creatures, blurs the boundaries of natural law. It is the verb, not the tenor of the simile -in itself quite trite- which foregrounds the fact that the speaker is exposing layers of a mental landscape. 'Goldfinch' is a hyponym of the superordinate 'birds,' another subtle indication that the known and recognisable birds of the upper world are distinct from the mysterious birds of the lower. The image of fish in an alien, and lower, habitat occurs in two other early poems. In 'The Lofty Sky' the speaker states: 'I am like a fish that lives/ In weeds and mud and gives/ What's above him no thought./ I might be a tench for aught/ That I can do today/ Down on the wealden clay'. And in 'After Rain': 'The leaflets out of the ash-tree shed/ Are thinly spread/ In the road, like little black fish, inlaid'. The inherent superficiality of 'flit and twit' suggests the motion and voice of a surface environment. Perhaps it is a personal indictment of the ineffectual poetic efforts of the speaker, reminiscent of the thrush 'twiddling' his song in 'The Green Roads'. The paired verbs 'laugh

and shriek' metrically echo the preceding pair, vocal superficiality now superseded by a voice of near hysteria. The interpolated '--Fish that laugh and shriek--' positioned between the verb and its locative adverbial, is suitably intrusive, assertively drawing attention to a further distortion of natural boundaries. These birds may be like fish, but these are fish with human-emotional modes of expression. The relative clause articulates a double process. The hollow wood is not merely the objective correlative of the speaker's mental state, but it has, temporarily at least, adopted the behavioural indicators of a volatile emotional state. Internal rhyme and balanced phrasing in line six restore the kinetic energy of the poem to a state of equilibrium. The repetition in line 7 of 'hollow wood', an apparent redundancy, allows the syntax to draw to its natural point of closure by restating the iconic heart of the poem, and adding nothing in the way of new information, except, that is, for the additional modifier 'pale'. This emphasises the path that has been followed from line one. From 'outness,' up and beyond, we are down and within a confined space. The assumed qualities 'sun' brings with it of brightness, collocates -- albeit obliquely -- in the lexical environment of the poem with the paleness of the lower dimension. The downward and inward directional trend of the stanza, from sunlight to shade and out to sunlight again, is reflected graphologically in the shape of the poem, with line length tending to progressively diminish in the first stanza, and increase in the second.

The cohesive unity of these techniques has a mutually generative effect. I shall now examine how phonetic patterning mingles pervasively with lexico-syntactic sequences to reinforce these schematic patterns. The configuration of sounds working through what Leech calls the 'pathways of empathy and synaesthesia' exploits the latent suggestibility of the chosen lexis. (Leech 96-97) 'Flit' and 'twit' in isolation are inherently onomatopoeic; in combination the merging of movement and sound is presented in visual form, a phanopoeic effect Thomas exploited with considerable skill. The conjoined verbs, imitating the short erratic flight of the goldfinch, dominate the lexical pattern of the poem, in combination with the metre and the visual-syntactic variations of emphasis triggered through line breaks. The repetition of short [i] is superseded by the drift to long vowels, just as unvoiced consonants gives way to a predominance of voiced consonants, following the playing out of the internal pattern of contrast between sun and shade. Consonant and vowel link agent and action in a finch 'flitting' and 'twitting.' Agent, location and motion are linked by vowel and unvoiced consonants with the introduction of 'thistle-tops'. 'Finch' and 'fish' are similarly closely linked, their figurative identification acoustically reinforced. 'Swim' shares the vowel with 'flit' and 'twit', illustrating both the similarity of action and the difference, the labio-nasal [m] prolonging and retarding - in an underwater fashion - the quick, sharp movements of the finch. As already noted, the paired actions of the finch cohere with their figurative shadow partners, the fish who 'laugh and shriek'. (The mimetic property of 'shriek' is enhanced by its endline position, and the repetition of the unvoiced fricative in 'fish.' The lack of object for the action renders the vocal expression as a formless and incoherent utterance.) And in the second stanza 'the trees/ That stand half-flayed and dying' have brought the kinetic energy of the poem to the point closest to complete stasis. 'To and

fro, far below' directionally and metrically reflects these paired actions. The rounded vowels in 'Out', 'along', and 'above', suggesting a latent sense of open spaces, gain a change of focus in 'hollow wood'. Here, acoustic qualities of the variants of [o] and [u] combined with labial glides [w] and alveolar liquids [l], have the echoic resonance of an enclosed space, a technique which exploits the innate sound quality which 'hollow' possesses, in addition to its surface description as a space definer. The noun phrase is repeated in the last line of the stanza. Coming after 'to and fro', with the addition of the [l] in 'pale', and with a vowel shift in the first syllable of 'below' to create a half rhyme with 'hollow', this effectively reinforces the phonetic scheme. In lines 1 - 5 in the second stanza, the locational focus is firmly fixed 'below' in the hollow wood, where the only motion described is the the barely discernible processes of decay and death and the inexorable growth of parasitic organisms. There are observable here some notable shifts in sound patterns. Long vowels predominate: 'lichen, ivy', 'Keep evergreen the trees', 'half-flayed and dying', 'dead trees on their knees'. It is also worth comparing the metrical scheme of the first two lines of each stanza. Though irregular, the first skips along with a pattern of unstressed syllables, while the second is heavily stressed, strongly reflecting the environmental shift. Voiced consonants in initial and final position, most commonly [d], bespeak the atmosphere of decay: 'That stand half-flayed and dying/ And the dead trees on their knees/ In dog's-mercury, ivy and moss'. The concentrated alliterative effect of repeated [f] in the first stanza deepens to the voiced [v] in the repeated 'ivy' and 'evergreen', and the unvoiced [s] becomes dominated by the voiced [z] in the final position of 'trees,' 'knees' and 'dog's'. The unstressed 'like' in line four transforms iconically to an initial position in the foregrounded 'lichen'. In the final two lines of the poem, as the orientation of the speaker sweeps upwards and outwards again, the short [i]s and unvoiced consonants are again the dominant phonetic pattern: 'And the bright twit of the goldfinch drops/ Down there as he flits on the thistle-tops'. The rhyme scheme of 'The Hollow Wood' is irregular, with already described patterns of assonance, internal rhyme and half-rhyme creating a tightly woven pattern of phonetic cohesion. In this way the range of latent suggestiveness in the lexical combinations in the poem is tapped and exploited

In the second stanza the surreal world of laughing, shrieking, fish-like birds is supplanted by a concrete realisation of the organic culture of the woodland. The transition has without fuss been facilitated by the winding down process of consolidation and reiteration in the last two lines of the first stanza. The sharpening of focus from hallucination to tangible reality indicates that this, now is the real world. The specificity of the multiple subject, 'Lichen, ivy, and moss', explicitly evokes the known, sensual reality of a living, breathing environment, but one which is paradoxically vital in the process of decay. The long vowels and voiced consonants discussed above, along with the enforced pausing of the commas, suggest the slow progress of life-in-death and death-in-life, in sharp contrast with the erratic rapidity of motion in lines one and two. Life equates with motion, death with inertia. The sequential development of the poem leads to the conclusion that this is the unveiled truth of the hollow wood, which is Morris' 'hollow land' in miniature focus. The initial

position of the noun phrase and its botanic specificity contrasts the superordinate and therefore non-specific status of 'trees' in the next line, foregrounding the described dominance of these parasitic entities. The verb phrase 'keep evergreen' asserts the volitional, human and controlling faculty of the plants as agents of their passive hosts who are unable to sustain the 'greenness' of their own vitality. The sense of the trees being propped up, in some way lacking in integrity, ties in with the quality of hollowness. What is implied in the first two lines reaches fruition in the post-modifying relative clause 'That stand half-flayed and dying'. The verb 'stand' has an antonymous relationship with its post-modifiers, suggesting a stalwart but ultimately bootless claim to life. The implied agent of the verb 'flayed' is human. And the victim status of the trees, reinforced by the passive voice, with the preceding 'stand' and the prepositional phrase in the next line 'on their knees', evinces the low-key anthropomorphism that infiltrates Thomas' work, which shadows the carnage of the war. Trees are the usual representative symbols; in 'The Path' the children look down 'Between the legs of beech and yew, to where/ A fallen tree checks the sight'. Dead and dying trees, and trees that are lopped, felled or mutilated are constant iconic presences. 'The Ash Grove' opens with a broad view: 'Half of the grove stood dead, and those that yet lived made/ Little more than the dead ones made of shade.' A fallen elm is the central image in 'As The Team's Head-Brass'. In the vignette that is 'The Cherry Trees' the trees appear to move in sympathetic identification with the dead:

The cherry trees bend over and are shedding,
On the old road where all that passed are dead,
Their petals, strewing the grass as for a wedding
This early May morn when there is none to wed.

The dead oak in the heart of the forest in 'The Green Roads' embodies the loss of memory of past ages. The elm tree is to be sacrificed for the sake of the decaying barn in 'The Barn'. In 'First Known When Lost' a narrow copse only assumes significance when the trees have been felled: 'Now the woodman lops/ The last of the willows with his bill', to leave the soil 'bare as a bone,/ And black betwixt two meadows green'. Here as in 'Fifty Faggots' the transformation of the trees into firewood indicates a sense of faith in the future. 'Fresh-cut faggot ends/ Of hazel made some amends/ With a gleam as if flowers they had been'. In 'The Wind's Song' a lone pine clump provides a sombre backdrop, and later foil, for the speaker's mood. 'Of six, the tallest dead, one a mere stump./ On one long stem, branchless and flayed and prone'. 'The Chalk-Pit' like 'The Hollow Wood' describes not only fallen trees, but trees which are overgrown by other plants'. Some ash trees standing ankle deep in briar/And bramble...But see: they have fallen, every one,/ And briar and bramble grow over them'. The listing of these woodland plants is indicative of Thomas' familiarity with the woodland ecosystem, and his close observation and knowledge of plants, which was as intellectual as it was emotional.

The passive adjectival-verb form of 'half-flayed' with the coordinating present participle 'dying', both describe incomplete and continuing processes. In line four the process is complete with the manner prepositional now showing the trees in a prone position: 'And the dead trees on their knees'. In the metaphoric sense, the trees have been humbled and forced into submission. It is unclear whether the noun phrase 'And the dead trees' is a coordinated object of 'keep evergreen', or is a coordinated but separate noun clause with an ellipsed verb following in descriptive sequence. 'In dog's-mercury, ivy, and moss' repeats with variation the first line of the stanza in a pattern of consolidation similar to that of the first stanza. The re-presentation of phrases brings a concentration of the lexical base of the poem and a consequent intensification of imagery. There are no pauses, rethinks or second takes as are evident in such works as 'The Barn'. Short, enjambed lines and taut metric phrasing ensure a constant forward pace.

The colon signals a pause and the conclusion or recapitulation of what has gone before, so the conjoin 'And' in line six is not simply a third coordinated clause, but a final thematic statement recalling, linking and merging images from the first two lines of the poem: 'And the bright twit of the goldfinch drops/ Down there as he flits on the thistle-tops'. The qualities of brightness and light now have a sound application in modifying 'twit'. This represents a further conflation of atmospheric properties, augmenting the remembered fusion of movement and sound in line one and two. The line break at 'drops' forces a pause between the verb and its complementing preposition 'Down,' a movement which imitates the described action. The goldfinch, at first restricted to 'flitting' in its sphere above the liminal barrier of the thistle-tops, now has a point of contact with the world below, a hopeful, if ambiguous signal. This final illustration of the downward motion that has been constructed throughout the poem is the culmination of the complex pattern of cohesion I have attempted to demonstrate: the semantic drive of prepositions, the shape pattern of line length, enjambed lines and the lowering acoustic effect of long vowels and voiced consonants. The final line has a stylistic point of departure from the rest of the poem - two proforms, a place adjunct, and a pronominal: 'Down there as he flits on thistle-tops'. Previous second mentions are in the form of superordinates or hyponyms, members of the same ordered sets - parasitic plants, related verb forms - 'dead,' 'dying:' other less obviously related word groups - 'sun,' 'bright,' 'pale': and 'stand' and 'knees'; directional relationships including all the prepositional phrases and the verb form 'drops'; and the straight repetitions, 'goldfinch', 'flits', 'twits', 'thistle-tops', 'hollow wood', 'fish', 'ivy', 'moss'. The intensity of this pattern of lexical cohesion in the space of fourteen short lines, and the consequent preponderance of content over grammatical words, throws into relief the two insignificant terms, 'there' and 'he.' 'There', as an anaphoric reference, assumes the cumulative force of all that has made up the notion of the hollow wood; 'he' as a personal pronoun, bespeaks a curious intimacy which retroactively affords the goldfinch a considerable personal significance. The ellipsed article in 'on thistle tops' conversely leads to a universalization of reference, stressing their representative status as a point of equilibrium - a cogent point of closure for the poem.

The Barn

'The Barn' is typical of a number of Thomas' works which may be considered a form of interior monologue. A particular object, viewed by chance in the landscape, triggers a variety of observations, memory vignettes and comments on life and self. The informal, non-poetic lexis and phrasing, and the impression of random musing conveys an impression of poetry composed in situ, an array of thought processes frozen in time.

The poem starts apparently in mid-dialogue, either with the narrator's alter ego or an unknown companion. 'They should never have built the barn there at all.' This is a verdictive statement indicating judgment passed after a prior exchange. Stanzas one and two contain a number of similarly judgmental statements or predictions: 'Now it is old\But good, not like the barn and me... Tomorrow they cut it down. They will leave the barn...' 'Twould not pay to pull down... this place has no other antiquity.' The repeated mimetic verb, 'drip, drip, drip', interpolated conversationally between main clause and adverbial phrase signals the general linguistic informality of the poem; we sense that this is a work composed from the raw material as received sensory stimulus--sight and sound, an impression articulated. In fact, the phrase serves the function of explaining the initial statement. The tacked on conditional clause, 'Though then it was young', also suggests the awkward syntax of speech. The structure of the sentence adjusts in the process of formation to accommodate the continuing flow of associated ideas. 'It' in the phrase 'Now it is old' appears at first to have as its referent 'a barn', the dominant noun phrase of the first sentence - despite the qualities of youngness and oldness having a more obvious lexical connection with the tree. The ambiguity, immediately resolved in line four 'But good, not like the barn and me', is a further indication of the foregrounded feature of an unconsidered syntax.

Minor phrases such as 'at all', which has an emphatic function, 'maybe', which casts doubt on the statement just uttered, 'well', in this instance a persuasive appeal and 'I suppose', indicative of the speculative nature of a proposition, are all essentially informal conversational tags, alternately expressing confident assertions and recurring doubts. Contractions such as 'twould' and 'twas' which appear as anachronistic speech mannerisms are more likely to be a minor dialect marker. Elided articles and possessive pronouns such as 'fowls have [] foothold,' and 'with [] heads in [] air,' and the foreshortened 'A pity the roof will not bear,' have a subtle double function: they reflect the dominance of content words over grammatical terms, a feature which may be considered typical of interior monologue, and also the precision and pared down quality of poetic discourse. A shift from an informal tone to more normal poetic diction occurs in stanza three.

No abbey or castle looks so old
As this Job Knight built in '54,
Built to keep corn for rats and men.
Now there's fowls in the roof, pigs on the floor.

Phrases are balanced, and stress patterns more regular. The reference to Job Knight and the year lend a ballad quality to the quatrain. The metaphor in stanza five, 'Starlings used to sit there with bubbling throats/ Making a spiky beard as they chattered,' suggest long familiarity and impressions 'recollected in tranquillity.' Recollections of the more distant past seem to call for the use of a more formal lexis - the linguistic attitude has already been formulated. The thoughts of the present remain in their unrefined state. Incidentally, the personifying of the starlings could be an oblique comment on the nature of stream-of-consciousness: 'they chattered / And whistled and kissed, with heads in air, / Till they thought of something else that mattered.' The narrator's thought processes are given their objective correlative in the antics of the starlings.

The drift of the thought can be traced from content word to content word : barn to tree, young to old, acts of leaving to acts of pulling down, roof to thatch to grass to mower, foothold to sitting, fowls to starlings, antiquity to abbeys and castles. Despite the apparently random flow of thought, the subject and verb from line one, 'they...built', is echoed in the last line, 'they built.' The presence of the narrator is foregrounded at the beginning and the end of the poem. At the beginning, attributive qualities (of oldness and goodness) connect the landscape with the narrator. At the end, the juxtaposition of the observation 'It's the turn of lesser things', a generalized, and consequently somewhat enigmatic phrase, with 'I' could lead to the identification of lesser things with the person of the narrator. The passive entity of the barn and the elm, which may be cut down, or left, at the whim of 'them', transfers by association the passive and victim status to 'I', or to everybody who leads a gratuitous and precarious existence.

A theme of the poem is the interdependence inherent in the natural world, an organic interdependence which undergoes metamorphosis and decay. The elm grows old and acquires goodness. (It is not explained why this is 'Not like the barn and me'.) The barn was built to store corn, intentionally for men, incidentally providing for the rats. Now it is the shelter for pigs and fowls. The surviving thatch nourishes the grass, 'the best grass on the farm.' The starlings have given way to lesser things. Even the original purpose of the barn is subject to the idiosyncratic viewpoint of the narrator. 'Once I fancied 'twas starlings they built it for'.

The changing world is given definition by the use of temporal and spatial deictic markers which anchor the expressed perceptions in a particular person at a particular time and place. The effect is that of immediacy and involvement. 'They' who did the building are identified later as Job Knight and the time fixed at '54, but they who will do the cutting down of the tree, or the leaving of the

barn, are vaguely unspecified, belonging to the general class of people who are responsible for making decisions and getting things done. 'There', 'tomorrow', 'now', 'used to', 'but now', 'anymore', are deictically determined. Tense shifts from past perfect, 'they should never have', to immediate present, 'drip, drip, drip', to present continuous, 'now it is old', and 'what thatch survives', to the speculative future, 'they will leave the barn.'

This brief analysis demonstrates the ease with which Thomas integrated the lexis of casual speech into a deceptively low-key meditation on the nature of the links between self and surroundings.

Over The Hills

Often and often it came back again
To mind, the day I passed the horizen ridge
To a new country, the path I had to find
By half-gaps that were stiles once in the hedge,
The pack of scarlet clouds running across 5
The harvest evening that seemed endless then
And after, and the inn where all were kind,
All were strangers. I did not know my loss
Till one day twelve months later suddenly
I leaned upon my spade and saw it all, 10
Though far beyond the sky-line. It became
Almost a habit through the year for me
To lean and see it and think to do the same
Again for two days and a night. Recall
Was vain: no more could the restless brook 15
Ever turn back and climb the waterfall
To the lake that resta and stirs not in its nook,
As in the hollow of the collar-bone
Under the mountain's head of rush and stone.

'Over The Hills' describes the compulsive and recurring attempts to recall a time of insight, enlightenment or heightened perception -- and the ultimate futility of such attempts. The experience in the poem is obscure and depicted in an oblique fashion, highlighting not only the elusive and

unreliable nature of memory, but the not fully understood importance of trying to recapture these 'spots of time'. The title echoes the refrains of folk rhyme, recalling the child-perceived romance of a world of dimly understood possibilities, always just beyond the skyline. In Thomas' last travel book *In Pursuit Of Spring*, he describes a comparable day:

I had formerly gone up this cartway on a day so fine that
for many nights afterwards I could send myself to sleep
by thinking of how I climbed, seeing only these precipitous
banks and the band of sky above them, until I emerged into
the glory and peace of the Plain, of the unbounded plain
and the unbounded sky, and the marriage of sun and wind
that was being celebrated upon them. (R.G. Thomas, 222; 1985)

In the unpublished *A Memory*, written in 1910, Thomas wrote of an anonymous man who tries to remember the 'whole of one day in Spring. When the vision of it is before him he could not go when...he had arranged to go somewhere else. Several times it returned and he made a strong unconscious effort of will to switch it off' Later he becomes suddenly aware of its significance: 'I know what it is. I shall see this vision at the point of death and shall regret two things--the beauty of the earth and my folly in never going back and living again the long green day to its end.'
(R.G. Thomas, 28; 1978)

The poem demonstrates Thomas' integration of the outer and inner landscape. All aspects of the perceived world find their correlative in the mental processes of the speaker. That these processes are of primary importance is indicated in the first two lines 'Often and often it came back again/ to mind'. The initial position of the predicate, the repetition of the frequency adjunct 'often' followed by the almost redundant 'again' (which is repeated in line 14 following the proform 'the same') mimic and intensify the compulsion inherent in the attempts to recapture past impressions. The enjambed 'Was vain' after the line break at 'Recall' graphically illustrates the ultimate futility of the attempts. The verb choice of 'came back' indicates that the agent 'it', ie the day, moves under its own volition; the thoughts intrude from without in contrast to the speaker's attempts at recall in line 13, 'and think to do the same.' The cataphoric use of the third person neuter pronoun in the cleft sentence delays and thus gives focal prominence to what proves to be a lengthy, complexly coordinated subject. The delay, the primary semantic force of the verb, and the line break before the prepositional phrase first suggest a subject that is a count noun, and probably an animate noun. The act of seeing in lines 10 and 13 is specifically defined as inner vision by the concessory clause qualifying 'it', 'Though far beyond the skyline.' The string of infinitive verb phrases, 'to lean and see it and think to do' sequentially outlines the action necessary to stimulate recall. To lean 'upon my spade' suggests a requisite cessation of daily toil -- mental or physical slog -- in order to recapture the vision. (This inevitably invites comparisons with Wordsworth's sense of loss of vision, and its

attendant frustrations, even if the experience is less elevating.) The capricious workings of memory can be traced throughout the poem. Implicit in 'came back' is a sense of routine strength, but clearly not the intensity of 'suddenly/ I saw it all', where the end line position of the adverb signals the unexpected flash of insight. The downtoning adjunct in 'almost a habit' (line 12) minimises the positive power of the statement, and 'think to do the same,' further diminishes the sense of volitional force on the part of the speaker. 'Think to do' has a stative, inert quality, much more so than 'try.' Thinking is not doing. There is almost a suggestion of a paucity of will. The proform 'same' has ambiguous reference, meaning either the act of passing the ridge again, passing through the threshold into a transcendent vision, or merely recapturing the image. The experience of the day itself consists of an apparently arbitrary series of images described in a lengthy cleft sentence. The indeterminate pronoun 'it' is momentarily suspended from its referent 'day'; this is then described in a string of coordinated clauses, each with embedded subordinate clauses. The careful articulation involved in this complex recursion qualifies each statement with subtle shifts, extensions and reversals, so that the patterns of significance are constantly modified. Each subordination expresses the psychological correlative for its superordinate noun phrase.

The path is an archetypal symbol typically adopted by Thomas, one which has been discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Tracks, roads, lanes, bridges, borders, fences and stiles are frequently occurring emblems employed to indicate journeys to, arrivals at, and barriers blocking entrance to, places that may be sought or feared but which always exert a compelling fascination. The auxiliary in the verb 'had to find' dually suggests compulsion and hindrance, just as the half-gaps depict iconically partial impediments to progress. The hedge shares semantic description with the hills of the title, both variants on the theme of borders and edges. In 'The Green Roads' and 'Lights Out' the speaker is poised at the brink of an unfathomable region. In 'Out In The Dark' the barriers dissolve as the speaker is engulfed in darkness. Here he passes the barrier -- albeit with difficulty -- not into darkness or dissolution, but to see 'The pack of scarlet clouds running across/ The harvest evening that seemed endless.' With the animating metaphor, the clouds assume a feral presence. The participle is both stative, in the locative sense, and dynamic; the semantic alliance with 'pack' and its kinetic images of wolves and hounds prompts the latter interpretation, even if in the literal sense, the clouds were probably still. This effect of free-wheeling motion contrasts with the effort indicated in 'had to find' (line 3), and the limited spatial quality of 'half-gap'. This then expands without effort to the skyscape which encompasses not merely the space of the visible sky but a temporal dimension as well, 'the harvest evening that seemed endless.' The sense of expansiveness is diminished even as it is uttered by the limiting effect of 'seemed', and the immediate qualification of the time defining adverbials 'then / and after'. The strength of the metaphor is diluted by an anxious desire to assert the truth of the experience. The line break between 'then/and after' subtly emphasises the notion of the evening as a recurring memory. The inn, another common emblem in Thomas' work, representing the focus for social contact, espouses a sobering truth: 'where all were kind,/All were strangers.' The antithetical parallel phrasing and the elliptical conjoin 'but' suggest that

the qualities of strangeness and familiarity are not mutually exclusive but a fundamental fact of human relationships. It is both a comment on the isolation of all individuals (again in the manner of Matthew Arnold) and a *cri-de-coeur* of the speaker who feels the alienation from his fellows of one who is privy to insider knowledge. It has been suggested that 'kind' shares its meaning with kindred; though the speaker is 'of a kind' with the people in the inn he is still, and always will be, apart. (Smith, 69, 1986) The elliptical use of the proform 'all' renders a quality of anonymity-- unknown people in an unknown inn in an unknown 'new country'.

The trailing clauses of the first three sentences, with their dreamy forward motion and prevarication, is abruptly curtailed by the compact syntax of 'Recall / was vain'. This brief verdictive clause both summarises the theme of the poem and anticipates the concluding statement, reflecting the progression of a mind engaged in thinking about, musing on, and teasing out, phrase by phrase, an experience, deeply felt and not fully understood. As Andrew Motion has discussed, the divisions of the poem are less rhetorical devices than divisions between thought movements. The colon ushers in another atmospheric shift:

no more could the restless brook
Ever turn back and climb the waterfall
To the lake that rests and stirs not in its nook
As in the hollow of the collar-bone
Under the mountain's head of rush and stone.

The landscape described in the first fourteen lines, although mythic in its interpretation, is nonetheless rooted in recognisably real terrain. The final four lines deal strictly in the realm of allegory, an allegory which organically assumes a life of its own by extending into a simile. Hints of archaism (inversion of the negative marker in 'that rests and stirs not in its nook',) and Biblical cadences set the lines at one remove from the speaker and from the rest of the poem. The air of philosophic calm and resolution, and the sureness of tone is quite at odds with the earlier tentative reflections. The two negatives, 'no more' and 'stirs not', serve paradoxically to give weight and authority to what is essentially a gloomy and despairing conclusion. The reversal of the natural order of things throws into relief what is a desired state, 'The lake that rests and stirs not in its nook', under the protective 'mountain's head of rush and stone'.

The three poems discussed in this chapter all view the outer world in terms of the mental landscape. William James, whose philosophy struck a responsive chord in Thomas, 'sought clues to the way ordinary daily consciousness construed its meanings by investigating ...abnormal "momentary ravishments" '. Thomas knew that 'there was no consistency...in response to the landscape, which veers between astonishment, pride, terror and contempt'. (Smith, 93, 1983) Although referring to 'Wind And Mist', this comment is pertinent in discussing these poems. Each describes a quite

different response, presents a different need, or posits a different existential stance, which is reflected in the varying syntax, lexis and employment of rhetorical devices. The terse concision of 'The Hollow Wood', with its densely packed array of cohering phonetic features, has a controlling effect on the surreal images which obtrude on the consciousness of the speaker. 'The Barn', with its relaxed lexical informality and meditative syntax, accommodates the easy free-flow of thought, allowing for the unforced emergence of some conclusions on the nature of self in relation to historical change. Attempts to recapture a transcendent vision which overlays a remembered scene in 'Over The Hills' is described in terms of dreaming longing with long trailing sentences abruptly curtailed by an acceptance that 'recall is vain'. The tug of the dream, and the assertion of reality are dramatically represented by shifts in lexical nuance and variations in syntactic structure. The charge that Thomas 'lovingly concentrated on the unchanging order of nature and rural society' in a pejoratively 'Georgian' sense, is belied by even a cursory reading of these three poems. (Cooke,210).

Chapter Five

An Avenue, Dark, Nameless, Without End.

Old Man.

An Avenue, Dark, Nameless, Without End

Old Man

The nature and processes of memory were a recurring preoccupation for Thomas, and formed the major thematic concern of a number of poems. As I shall demonstrate, prescient images of the end-of-life future have much in common with images of earliest consciousness. In 'Old Man' the trigger of memory, the pungent scent of a herb, is the focus; and, as an interweaving concern, the mysterious significance of names and their relationship to the essential nature of the thing they name. The genesis of the poem was a plant which grew by the doorway of Yewtree Cottage where the Thomases moved in 1913. Helen Thomas wrote: 'By the door into the house we planted the herbs which [Edward] so loved. Rosemary, thyme, lavender, bergamot and old man were there, all direct descendants of our first country garden, which we had propagated from cuttings each time we moved'. (Motion, 164) The poem is heavily autobiographical, and forms a distillation of the central images found in the first few pages of Thomas' autobiographical fragment *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*. The opening lines are worth quoting in full:

When I penetrate backward into my childhood I
come perhaps sooner than many people to impassable
night. A sweet darkness enfolds with a faint blessing
my life up to the age of about four. The task of attempting
stubbornly to break up that darkness is one I have never
proposed to myself, but I have many times gone up to the
edge of it, peering, listening, stretching out my hands...

A little later, the young Thomas found himself 'on the forbidden side of a black fence which divided the back gardens of one street from a meadow...I had no sense of any end to the garden between its...fences: there remains in my mind a greenness, at once lowly and endless.' He describes his inability to 'call up images of my father and mother or of my brothers'. Of a book which his father read to him, 'Not a shred of the story is left to me.' Another book awarded as a school prize was *The Key To Knowledge*. The book disappeared, and 'from time to time down to the present day I have recalled the loss and tried to recover...something that would dissipate from its charm the utter darkness of mystery....There were times that I fancied that the book had held the key to an otherwise inaccessible wisdom and happiness, and the robbery appeared satanically sinister.'

(Autobiography, 13-26) The clear connexion between 'Old Man' and his most significant childhood memories indicates how important the work was in the development of Thomas' poetic theory

Despite its central thematic status, the concept of memory is not introduced, except by indirect implication, until the exact mid-point of the poem. 'And I can only wonder how much hereafter/ She will remember, with that bitter scent'. The first eight lined section has a dual focus of drawing attention to the significance of names, and a description of the plant. The idea of naming would appear initially to be the principal concern of the poem with the word 'name' being used four times, three times prominently in an endline position. The second sixteen-lined section presents the dominant image of the child plucking and sniffing leaves from the plant, and the final section with the speaker doing the same and his attempts to construct and 'fix' the pattern of his earliest recollections. The train of thought from 'Old Man, or Lad's-love, - in the name there's nothing', to 'Only an avenue, dark, nameless without end', follows a complex and oddly compelling course.

Old Man, or Lad's-love, -- in the name there's nothing
To one that knows not Lad's-love, or Old Man,
The hoar-green feathery herb, almost a tree,
Growing with rosemary and lavender.
Even to one that knows it well, the names
Half decorate, half perplex, the thing it is:
At least what that is clings not to the names
In spite of time. And yet I like the names.

The initial position of the alternate folk names for the aromatic plant Southernwood foregrounds the names themselves, and the fascination inherent in their ancient and unknown origin. That the names of places and plants was a source of pleasure and interest to Thomas is evident in a number of poems, most notably Lob where the eponymous man of all seasons and all periods in history, who himself bears numerous names, was the namer of the 'merry tree', and 'Bridget-in-her-bravery...And in a tender mood, he, as I guess,/ Christened one flower Love-in-idleness'. The name Old Man itself appears to have especial appeal because of its human manifestations on the highways and byways. All the wayfarers like Lob were seen as repositories of the inherited wisdom of ages and through their intimate knowledge of the natural world were perceived to have the 'true' poetic voice. All that was known and constructed by the educated poet was intuitively known by the countryman. Like Wordsworth's old Cumberland beggar, 'shovel-bearded Bob' and 'Old Jack Norman', the anonymous shepherds and huxters met on the road represented an essential integration of mind, body and surroundings that was a source of envy for Thomas. A link between 'Lob' and the poem under discussion is suggested in the last few lines of 'Lob': 'With this he disappeared/ In hazel and thorn tangled with old-mans-beard'. The line division at 'nothing' brusquely suggests that such fascination with names is bootless, but such an assumption is immediately qualified by the relative

clause, 'To one that knows not Lad's-love, or Old Man'. The apparently superfluous repetition of the names seems an almost teasing restatement to string along the ignorant. But it forces attention again on the intrigue and oddity of the two names and their antithetical character. The syllabic balancing, the beginning and end-line position of the names and their inversion suggests an underlying concern of the poem, the fundamental riddle of youth in age, and age in youth -- 'the child is the father of the man'. One glimpse of Lob's back proved him 'of old Jack's blood,/ Young Jack perhaps'. Repeated intergenerational patterns of behaviour, the importance of childhood memories for the inner life of the adult, and the compulsive desire to recapture the sensory experiences of childhood form the philosophic base of the poem. The dash at centre point of line one initially indicates an interpolated aside, a syntactic digression, as if an interesting but not especially important thought has occurred, but this turns out to be the superordinate clause, and the main theme carrier of the first section. The appositional postmodifying clause 'The hoar-green feathery herb', with its tone of clinical botanical description, contains in the modifier a reformulation of the emblem, a plant that is both young, 'green', and old, 'hoar', at the same time. The extended appositional phrase 'almost a tree', suggests for the first time that a particular specimen is being described, and not the species in general. This becomes explicit with the participial clause, 'Growing with rosemary and lavender', which indicates by the present continuous aspect of the verb and its specified location in relation to other plants, a familiar and personally known situation. Rosemary is traditionally a symbol of remembrance, and lavender cultivated for its longlasting scent. So both are fitting garden companions for Old Man, all three plants being strongly suggestive of past times. The importance of scent as a trigger for memory is at this stage only obliquely hinted at by the grouping of the plants.

The second and third sentences qualify the first, and in fact consist of a series of qualifications marked by the initial position of the concessory conjoin 'even', and the concessory prepositional phrase 'in spite of', the repeated quantifying adverbial 'half', the disjunct 'at least', and 'And yet'. The third sentence links and contrasts with what has gone before with the paired conjoins 'and yet'. By separating from the previous clauses and positioned at the end of the section, this forms a concluding statement on how the speaker feels about names. The simplicity of the attitudinal verb 'like' declares that whatever the complex nuances inherent in the previous seven lines, the final word lies ultimately in the obscure realm of personal preference. 'Names' has an agential function followed by the transitive verbs 'perplex', and 'decorate'. The objective noun phrase 'the thing it is' contrasts markedly with the botanical description of line 3. The foregrounded general application noun 'thing', followed by the neuter pronoun 'it', and the intransitive existential verb 'is', explicitly draw attention to ontological concerns. The essential nature of the plant consists of much more than colour, texture and type descriptions -- 'hoar-green feathery herb, almost a tree', -- however carefully articulated. The speaker's attempts to present for scrutiny and definition the 'thing it is', vary throughout the poem from the hyponymic 'herb', 'tree', and 'bush', and the different attributive and metaphoric guises which will be examined in greater detail later. In the face of such

complicated mind work, the verb 'perplex' gains a central semantic force; semantically, the names are agents, the 'thing it is', patient. But it is in fact the thinking, puzzling observer who is being 'perplexed'. For the time being the reformulated noun phrase 'what that is', remains elusive, but the search for definition continues throughout the poem. 'Clings' subliminally suggests an image of a tenacious creeper. Perhaps there is something about Old Man to be feared? The names assume an autonomous existence, which 'the thing it is', obstinately will not adhere to. The uneasy relationship between 'thing' and name will always perplex those who seek to solve the riddle, just as their origins will remain forever unrevealed. Lob has called the wren Jenny Pooter 'for reasons of his own'. And, 'He too could explain/ Totteridge and Totterdown and Juggler's Lane:/ He knows, if anyone. Why Tumbling Bay,/ Inland in Kent, is called so, he might say'. But, we infer, it is not for us to be privy to this knowledge. In 'Adlestrop' it is the ineffable significance of the name of a country railway station which occasions a 'moment in time', when nothing happens but the nothingness is charged with significance. Thomas pays frequent tribute to the act of naming, what Kirkham calls 'the primary act of the verbal imagination'. (Kirkham p108) That the names 'decorate' suggests that, superficially at least, they change and add to the significance of the plant or place. That they 'perplex' indicates a volitional act of rendering the 'thing' more intricate and complicated than it is. Names are intriguing and suggestive but they also may obfuscate. This initial eight-lined preamble did not form part of the prose version written three weeks before the poem. It is constructed along a pattern of 'thought moments', representing the vagrant disjunctions of the mind's voice, which Thomas was determined should be part of the poetic voice. The result is a mix of formal and informal with a pattern of syntactic digression and unpredictable recursive directions. Circumlocution juggles with elliptic brevity; the post-position negative as in 'clings not' (and 'like not') may be an echo of Victorian poetic diction, but it also serves to concentrate the negative impact with greater intensity than, for example, in the paraphrased 'what that is does not cling to the names', where the auxiliary adds to the series of grammatical words and cumulatively creates a diluted effect.

The reflexive pronoun in the initial noun phrase of the second section adverts back; its function is emphatic, but it appears to raise a series of questions. The herb as distinct from the name? As a botanical genus, or its elusive and mysterious essential qualities? The sentence focus on the object reinforces its central thematic importance. It dominates the subject 'I', who, with this second mention, begins fairly unobtrusively to establish his role in the scenario; initially as the anonymous juggler-of-concepts, then as an almost sinister observer of the child, to the arbiter of behaviour, and finally the lone figure struggling to recapture memory. The poem moves gradually from the theoretical, with an examination of abstract concepts, to a description of repeated patterns of behaviour, thence to a sense of the actuality of the scene being described. Conceptual hair-splitting gives way to a riddling examination of attitudes. 'The herb itself I like not, but for certain/ I love it'. The balanced contradictory clauses construct a proposition which is promptly overturned, a confounding of semantic expectations created by the pattern of the syntax. The periphrastic 'dislike',

or possibly 'hate', must be retrospectively reinterpreted. Focus is now seen to be more emphatically on the verb 'like' so the attitudinal intensification implicit in 'love' is no longer unexpected. This process must be seen as part of the underlying *modus operandi* of the poet, who is compelled to seek the truths beneath all surfaces. 'Love' comes to be seen as not merely an intensification of 'like', but as something different altogether connected with its present psychological significance for the speaker and predicted future significance for the child -- the latter a reenactment of the first. The connective 'as' in 'as some day the child will love it', indicates the equative status of the two noun clauses. The relative clause 'Who plucks a feather from the doorside bush' is delayed from its expected embedded position immediately following the noun phrase it modifies to juxtapose in a balanced pattern the two agents 'I' and 'the child', and their two identical actions, ie 'love it'. The delay also means that the central image of the child and her actions may be presented without distraction. The repetition of 'like' and 'love', on three successive lines, links the first and second sections, sequentially introduces the child, and emblematically binds adult, herb and child in a mutually dependant grouping. The confident use of the future tense in 'the child will love it', embodies a range of modalities, partly epistemic, partly predictive and inevitable (since the child is enacting the past, present and future actions of the man) and -- perhaps disguised -- a sense of volition. The verb form externalizes the mind style of the speaker, as of course it must, since the future is unknown, (and we note the vagueness of the determiner in 'some day') in the struggle to concretize what lies ahead. This is as much a concern of the poem as is the 'presence' of the past. When the child 'plucks a feather', it is a metaphoric collocation and extension from line three, 'The hoar-green feathery herb'. The speaker, interpreting the mind style of the child, has selected the most suitable attribute. In 'plucking' the plant the child is performing the first of a series of controlling, destructive actions which involve 'snipping', 'shrivelling', 'shredding', 'picking' and 'clipping.' The significance of these actions will be discussed a little later. The adjectival phrase 'door-side bush' and the prepositional phrase 'in or out of the house' further familiarize and define the location of the bush following on from line 4, the definite article indicating the house as the speaker's dwelling. The liminality inherent in these constructions suggests the importance of the threshold in the poem: the action of going into and out of the house, the waiting beside the door of the child, the 'lying in wait' of the man. In the course of the action described, no one actually enters the house. We are more conscious that 'Often' she 'runs off' after sniffing the herb. And the man is prevented from entering: 'I have mislaid the key'. The threshold must be interpreted as a preliminary or transitional stage of some as yet unknown process. The child has free entrance but often chooses not to do so, and the man is excluded by his own agency. That the child 'waits' and the man will be 'lying in wait', suggesting some sort of barring mechanism in place at the point of entry and exit, reminiscent of the hedge in 'Over The Hills', the thicket bordering the forest in 'The Green Roads', and the borders of sleep in 'Lights Out'. The free movement of the child in comparison with the adult is similarly portrayed in 'The Path' where the children roam the high path with facile ease and consequently 'see' further. The men and women 'content themselves with the road...and what the children tell'.

The *fronted time adjunct* 'often' foregrounds the repetitive nature of the actions described, imbuing them with a ritualistic quality. This is reinforced by the use of the present participle and the representative present throughout the poem: 'I sniff them and think and sniff again and try/ Once more to think what it is I am remembering'. When the child 'snips the tips', this is the first act in a gradual process of reducing the plant to its essential quality. The first representation is by name, Old Man and Lad's-love. This develops through a series of hyponymous and synonymous reformulations: 'tree', 'herb', 'bush', 'tips', 'shreds', and finally to the 'bitter scent'. The actions of 'plucking', 'snipping', 'shrivelling' and 'shredding' are the systematic and progressive attempts to discover 'the thing it is'. This representation is phonetically reinforced by alliteration and the mimetic 'clipped' short vowels in 'shrivelling', 'snipping', 'clipping', 'tips', 'sniffs', 'thinks', 'bitter'. Old Man has been reduced from 'almost a tree' through smaller size manifestations until it is just a scent -- the 'essence' that clings to the fingers. After this point the pattern is reversed, from 'scent', 'spray', 'hoar-green bush', to the names again, this time as negative presences (line 38). The adjunct 'at last' suggests both the temporal conclusion of the action, and the sense of the completion and limit of this process of reduction. The locative status of the prepositional phrase 'on to the path', the lowest point in relation to all other scenic props of house, child, man, garden rows, damson trees, hedge and so on, means that in the spatial sense as well, the plant has been reduced as far as possible. The active interference and control of the child, certainly in comparison with the more conscious but ineffectual efforts of the man, is indicated by the strongly dynamic nature of the verbs, and such devices as rendering as transitive the normally intransitive 'shrivelling', and the child 'running off', while the man not merely 'waits', but 'lies in wait'. Her 'thinking' is less an inert act of cognition than a dynamic activity, despite the object being, possibly, 'nothing.' This seeming contradiction draws attention to the semantic implications of 'nothing', implications which have resonant significance in lines 27 - 34 in the self-conscious acts of thinking on the part of the man. The repeated limiting adverbial 'perhaps' highlights the limited point-of-view of the speaker. With the comma it creates a pattern of arrest which draws attention to the nature of the thinking act, and the implications of 'nothing'. Thomas frequently and subtly redefines common words by such techniques as repetition when ellipted forms would be most likely, anastrophe, or the natural pause mechanism of enjambed lines. Here, verb and noun with their semantic implications of unconscious reverie, are foregrounded to compare with the all too self-aware man who must repeatedly 'try/ Once more to think what it is I am remembering,/ Always in vain'. And when he 'thinks of nothing', all the material objects that he seeks to visualise and recall are gone. Each name is articulated, each one with its negating marker, the accumulating nullity creating an ever-growing void with each mention. 'No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush/ Of Lad's love, or Old Man'. When 'perhaps' is repeated, qualifying a qualification, the observed mental processes are seen as theoretical and unknown. The reality of what is seen in the mind's eye is an almost unbearably sombre vision of lack. When the child 'sniffs/ her fingers and runs off' she disappears, as it were, offstage. The preposition 'off' negatively marks both position and direction. We know neither the path nor the destination, but we know the child moves, and is free to move, of her own volition,

carrying with her the scent or essence of the herb on her fingers, the agents and instruments of her 'plucking' and 'shrivelling' and 'clipping.' Her unconscious reverie in 'thinking of nothing' will be a conscious awareness of 'nothingness' when she is an adult, as she inevitably recreates the actions of the man.

The assertive contrastive time adjunct 'still', in 'The bush is still / But half as tall as she, though it is as old', implies a refuted expectation that the bush would be bigger. The correlative sequence 'as...as' has its equational base negated by the diminishing adjunct 'but' and quantifier 'half' in the adjectival phrase, and the reason for the denied expectation is expressed in the subordinate concessory clause. The pattern of qualifications, the careful truth of articulation evident in the the first section of the poem, again informs the syntactic pattern with main and subordinate clauses marked by the cautionary 'still', 'but', and 'though'. The differentiation indicated in 'half as tall' echoes the verbal modifiers in line six. The sense of relationships between things, connexions and contrasts, and the degree by which people and things mutually affect, or resist being affected in silent assertions of autonomy, is a subtheme of 'Old Man'. The expressions of height and age relations between the child and the bush indicate the identification of the two. That they are 'as old' (not, we notice, 'the same age') coheres with the suggestions of age and memory inherent in the lexical choice throughout, with the name of the herb, the 'ancient damson trees', the 'hoar-green bush', the 'shrivelling' process and the 'grey' shreds. The semicolon ushers in a resultative clause 'so well she clips it', whose elliptic, monosyllabic brevity and final repeated short vowels suggests a judgemental illocutionary act, with an undercurrent of warning. The adverbial 'well' may mean either 'it is as well', or that the act of 'clipping' is being done thoroughly. The relationship between the clauses indicates that the height of the bush is a threat, and that the active control of the child is necessary. Height as an ominous spatial value is reinforced three lines later with the slightly threatening image of the 'ancient damson trees/ topping a hedge'. Old Man is an invasive creeper; if it is symbolic of memory or the workings of the subconscious, then this must be kept in check. There is a curious dichotomy between the pronouncement 'so well she clips it' -- the internal judgement passed on the observed act -- and the reported speech act in lines 23 and 24, 'and me/ Forbidding her to pick'. The anticipatory position of the negative noun phrase 'Not a word' exemplifies the technique Thomas uses to foreground significant moments by an array of negative markers. Leech quotes Watt's philosophical point that there 'are no negatives in nature, but only in the human consciousness'. (Leech 104) The frequent use in 'Old Man' of negative particles, implied negation, and other negative markers creates an environment where the grammar of the poem follows a cumulative pattern of images that are erased, actions that render objects to a state of non-existence, impulses that are denied, thoughts that are non-productive, and finally the nullifying of all that makes up the sum of an individual life, the memory. But the paradoxical effect of all this is that the visual representations intimated by these negatives have a highly evocative psychological truth. In the utterance 'there's nothing in the name' we recognize that there is much in the name. If the 'thing' the herb is 'clings not to the names', then we are provoked to consider what that thing

is. The 'herb itself I like not', but this only proves to magnify the intensity of the speaker's feelings. The child might think 'perhaps of nothing,' but we recognise that something deeper than mere thought is taking place. She says 'not a word', creating a profundity out of her silence. And the only indication of words spoken, 'me/ Forbidding her to pick', though it has its own significance, has no impact on the child's actions. The third section has no less than twenty negative or neo-negative markers in the space of sixteen lines, which increase in density until the final line when the occurrence is five out of seven words. The conjoin 'and', and the limiting adjunct 'only' in the coordinated clause 'And I can only wonder', links the child's act of not speaking with the inability of the man to predict for the child what he is ultimately unable to discern in himself. The importance of what is seen in the garden, the props with which he attempts to create his own future memories, in reality are significant in how they are perceived now. The series of noun phrases with their correlative prepositional and participial phrases, 'garden rows, and ancient damson trees/ Topping a hedge, a bent path to a door,/ A low thick bush beside the door, and me/ Forbidding her to pick', are the closely observed images that, by their deliberate articulation, are forming the hoped for images of future recall. The inclusion of the speaker's own presence among the cohesively linked items describing a country garden, 'and me/ Forbidding her to pick', is a form of identification of the speaker with other items of the tableau; and it creates an awareness of the watcher being watched by himself. The enjambed participial clause unexpectedly extends the noun phrase so that 'me' now has an intrusive role, unlike the static but nonetheless significant role of the other items. Thomas took pleasure in watching his own children at play, a pleasure which had some morbid elements. In an article in *The Nation* entitled 'The Fear Of Death' he wrote: 'The man watched his children...They took no notice of the man watching...he could not keep his eyes off them. He devoured every motion and sound they made like a glutton who has no pleasure from the morsel in his mouth for anticipation of the one to come...his brain within his ears ached with the use of his eyes and with striving to recover the old order that used to make the garden and the house full...Then suddenly, the youngest child came running out and stood under his window, rapt in some thought or imagination... The man watched her and his pain ceased. He was nothing but eyes, and they saw nothing but the child. Slowly she moved away, with one, two, three, four, five steps to a gate, opened it musingly, held it open, and with a run let it bang, and herself disappeared'. In *The South Country* Thomas remembers seeing a child walking 'down a long grassy path in an old garden' who is content 'only to brush the tips of the flowers with her outstretched hands'. He imagines 'there was no end to the path', and sees her 'gravely walk on into the shadow and into Eternity, dimly foreknowing her life's days'. (Motion, 164). When an interactive process occurs in the form of the reported directive act, 'me forbidding her to pick', the formality of the participial and its undeniably imperative mood indicates the dominance of agent over patient. The negative directive and the nature of the act forbidden, ie 'picking', the designation of the watcher as authority figure (by the respective adult - child status, and the assumed entitlement of the adult to 'forbid') and the represented scene, a garden, combine to create an allegorical representation of the Fall in the Book of Genesis, complete with a deity figure and an act of disobedience. The ellipted object of the

transitive 'pick' sidesteps an unequivocal link between the fruit of the tree 'of the knowledge of good and evil' and the leaves of the bush. The knowledge is knowledge of one's own past, the continuum that creates the sense of self. The loss of innocence and sense of sin, and the expulsion from the garden, has only an oblique presence in the poem. The child's act of 'running off' is volitional. The object of the speaker's vain attempts at recall is itself elusive and obscured, and it is this rather than a discovered sense of sin which creates the painful sense of dis-integration. The spatial and directional dimensions lead the reader towards the door. The linear, boundary shaping of garden rows and hedge, the adjectival participial 'topping', which suggests the damson trees look into and dominate the garden, and the prepositions which focus the 'bent path' and the 'low thick bush' all suggest the door as a point of entry to a tantalizing other dimension.

Isolation of the modifiers and modifying phrases reveals how a systematic choice of lexical items has progressively created the sombre climate which culminates in the final line of the poem: 'hoar-green', 'feathery', 'half as tall', 'old', 'bitter', 'ancient', 'bent', 'low', 'thick', 'bitter', 'grey', 'lost', 'hoar-green', 'Old', 'dark', 'nameless', 'without end'. The 'hoar-green feathery herb' of line three has the positive height description of 'almost a tree'. In line 23 the same plant has been transmuted by the negative height value of 'low' and 'thick', and now has the small plant status of a 'bush'. Size, dimension, colour and age all shrink, darken and progress. The unlikely collocation of bitterness and scent amplify the odd attraction of the herb's smell. The connexion of 'bitter' with 'bent', 'low', 'old', 'grey' and 'ancient' associates the scent with the process of aging, an effect which is intensified by the heaviness of the voiced [s] in 'rows', 'damson' and 'trees', and the affricate [ç] in 'ancient'. The positive qualities of 'Lad's', 'green' and 'sweet' serve to highlight their respective antonymous qualities, which gain increasing lexical dominance throughout the course of the poem. From the relative neutrality of the first section and the 'young' dominance of the child's actions until her disappearance, the climate of the poem darkens unrelentingly. The unmodified 'path' of line 14 becomes 'bent' in line 22, with intimations of Biblical exhortations to make paths straight, and carrying with it the figurative sense of crooked or perverted. In the initial prose version of 'Old Man' the dynamic participle is used instead: 'The path bending round the house corner', a lexical variant with considerably weaker symbolic force (C.P., 444).

As for myself,
Where first I met the bitter scent is lost.
I, too, often shrivel the grey shreds,
Sniff them and think and sniff again and try
Once more to think what it is I am remembering,
Always in vain. I cannot like the scent,
Yet I would rather give up others more sweet,
With no meaning, than this bitter one.

An almost meditative pause is followed by the disjunctive prepositional phrase, 'As for myself', which forms the transition ushering in the final section of the poem. The image of 'me/ forbidding her to pick' prompts an examination of the speaker's own frustrated efforts to remember. The mimicking of the child's actions engenders a pattern of repetition as awareness grows that the ritual acts do not produce remembrance, or if indeed there is any substance to memory at all. The child thinks of nothing in an unconscious act of integration with the natural world, while the 'nothing' that the man faces is the thwarted result of intense mental effort. The reflexive pronoun again addresses the problematic issue of isolating the essence of the 'thing', adverting back to the tangled threads of meaning which culminates in 'The herb itself I like not'. The man is not merely separating his experience from that of the child, but there is also inherent a sense of a secret self, separate from the figure who watches and forbids. 'Me', and 'myself', have discrete identities, a *Doppelgänger* theme which Thomas fully explores in 'The Other'. The fronted position of the noun clause in 'Where first I met the bitter scent' suggests a sequence specifying a particular time and place, an expectation extinguished mimetically by the brevity of verb and participle 'is lost'. There is an irony in the trigger to memory being itself a forgotten experience. 'Lost' as participle refers to a completed act, but one which extends into the present. The single final action of 'sniffing' by the child (line 15), almost inconsequential in coming at the end of a series of actions, is represented as compulsive for the man. 'Sniff them and think and sniff again and try/ Once more to think'. Insistent repetition exacerbates the failure to remember, and the onomatopoeic configuration of the verb sequence 'sniff', 'think', 'sniff', 'think', with its combination of fricatives and short vowels, reinforces the causal link between the two actions. The schematic pattern of repetition in the final section extends and reinterprets all that has gone before, as the speaker re-enacts the child's actions, with the syntactic augmentation of the additive adjunct 'too', and frequency adjuncts 'again', and 'once more'. The laboured noun clause as object, 'what it is I am remembering', suggests the impotent mental struggle taking place; the preponderance of grammatical words, and replacement of one non-specific description of mental processes for another, indicate both the inaccessibility of the desired objective and the difficulties inherent in the verbal expression of such a struggle. The final adverbial phrase 'always in vain' restates by a conclusive reiteration what has been demonstrated by the lexical patterning and phrasal sequence of the sentence. Thomas used this phrase a number of times, usually as a final declarative statement after the description of a struggle to recapture a desired state or vision. In 'Over The Hills' there is a similar depiction of ritual actions performed:

It became
 Almost a habit through the year for me
 To lean and see it and think to do the same
 Again for two days and a night. Recall
 Was vain

Again the use of 'think' attests to an acute awareness of self, the dual consciousness always observing and painfully aware. The inner struggle continues with the subjunctives of the next sentence: 'I cannot like the scent,/ Yet I would rather give up others more sweet'. The negated modal auxiliary indicates thwarted impulses - self one overruled by self two, in a characteristic struggle between desire and reality. The fine distinctions of liking are part of the process of self examination that underpins the emotional climate of the poem: 'And yet I like the names', 'The herb itself I like not, but for certain/ I love it'. The names are 'liked', the 'herb itself' is loved but not 'liked', and the scent, though regretfully not liked, is the most important for its 'meaning', even if the meaning is elusive. On a number of levels 'Old Man' insists on the multivalent significance of all things, and the peculiar resonance which all things have in the human psyche. Love here is the emotion most connected with strongly felt instinctual reactions to the natural world, which are largely beyond verbal articulation. The ellipted object in the concessory clause 'Yet I would rather give up others more sweet,/ With no meaning', and the proform 'one' in the comparative clause 'than this bitter one', hints at an allegorical interpretation. This deletion and modification of second mentions would appear to have more than a mere grammatical function in light of the surrounding recurring patterns of repetition. The contrastive pronoun 'others', following the verb form 'give up' with the sense of severing ties with, and the comparative 'more sweet,' combine to suggest an oblique reference to a personal relationship.

I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray
And think of nothing; I see and hear nothing;
Yet seem, too, to be listening, lying in wait
For what I should, but never can, remember:
No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush
Of Lad's-love, or Old Man, no child beside,
Neither father nor mother, nor any playmate;
Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end.

The division of 'Old Man' into sections is less arbitrary than is first apparent. The first, third and fourth sections are of eight lines each, and the second of sixteen. The first portrays attempts at literal definition, a skeletal group of ideas which will be explored at length. The third examines the habitual actions of the man and the fourth the present reality of the failure to find past, present and future. The second vignette portraying the child sniffing the herb perhaps conflates two sections, fused at the point where the two central lines are enjambed: 'The bush is still/ But half as tall as she'. This illustrates the indivisibility of child and herb, shown in unconscious union. The man is in a continuous state of alienation because of his intense awareness. The simplicity of the first sentence in section four after the previous two complex sentences is noteworthy. There is a change of tense, and two new, though unrelated lexical items, signalling a subtle shift in linguistic climate and imbuing it with a curious understated strength. It is worth comparing the prose version here. 'I do

not wholly like the smell, yet [] would rather lose many meaningless sweeter ones than this bitter [] one of which I have mislaid the key'. (C.P.444) The replacement in the poem of the genitive relative clause by a detached sentence, and that after a section break, forces a separation of any semantic link between the two units. The oddity of the relationship between the physical act of 'mislaying' and a 'key' belonging to a scent is diminished in the prose by the relatively pedestrian sentence extension. The separation of the two in the poem paradoxically underscores their connexion. The present perfective aspect of the verb suddenly creates a sense of immediacy in comparison with the stative forms and habitual tense of the previous three sections. The ritual actions of plucking and sniffing have given way to an apparently one-off action. The sense of carelessness inherent in 'mislaid' foregrounds its semantic links with 'is lost'; the past continuous of the latter indicates an irremedial condition, with fairly heavy metaphoric loading. By contrast, the meiotic form of the former gives it a curious impact. The cohesive pattern of difficulty-creating situations in relation to entering the door is apparent throughout, from the the delaying tactics of 'waiting', 'plucking' and 'thinking', and 'lying in wait', to the putatively accidental 'mislaying' of the key. The traditional symbolism of the key gains force through its juxtaposition with the casual nature of the action. At this point it is of interest to compare some lines from T.S Eliot's 'Rhapsody On A Windy Night', published in 1917, with 'Old Man', written in 1914 but published in 1917 in *An Annual of New Poetry*. Eliot's work deals with a personified representation of memory and contains images of a road, the dark, a door, and another child who has an inscrutable inner life, and whose hands are the agents of a significant and noticeable action: 'So the hand of the child, automatic,/ Slipped out and pocketed a toy...I could see nothing behind the child's eye'. (Lines 38-40) Similar images of a delay before a door are described: 'Regard that woman/ Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door'. (lines 16-17) Eyes in the street try 'to peer through lighted shutters' (line 42) In the final section of the poem the lamp says: 'Four o'clock/ Here is the number on the door./ Memory!/ You have the key'. Although the syntax and narrative voice of the two poems is quite different, the imagistic patterns and lexical choice show striking similarities.

The final eight-lined sentence consists of a series of asyndetically linked clauses, which build cumulatively to the climax of anagnorisis in the crowded negativity of the final line. The build up and movement of the sentence charges each verb and noun phrase with a growing significance, with the clauses presented in order of increasing semantic weight. The simple present tense indicates both a timeless psychic reality and the tension of the momentary present. The pattern of simple coordinated clauses with a first person singular pronoun subject -verb-object construction gradually widens the field of sensory perception. These simple declarative statements become linked to the following clause by the semi-colon and anticipatory 'yet' which provides a focused point of departure for the rest of the sentence. The colon after 'remember' shows that the following multi-subject clause is in apposition to the preceding noun clause. The final semi-colon signals the long delayed climax. There is some similarity in the sequence of verb forms which follow the speaker's point of view in 'Out In The Dark'. Following a description of a habitual state-of-being, the fearful

immediacy of the present dominates: 'And star and I and wind and deer,/ Are in the dark together, -- near,/ Yet far,-- and fear/ Drums on my ear'. The speaker is again waiting passively, a victim whose victim status is more acute because of the intensity of his self awareness. The supine posture of 'lying in wait' in 'Old Man' illustrates this interpretation even more explicitly -- though there is, too, a hint of the predatory in the phrase. Similarly in 'As The Team's Head-Brass' the speaker sits in the path of the plough horses almost waiting to be trodden down. The coordinating conjunct 'and' links the progressive sequence of actions. As an unexpressed result of mislaying the key, the speaker sniffs the spray and thinks 'of nothing'. This triggers an exploratory awareness that sight and hearing also bring 'nothing'. As the senses grow more receptive, there is correspondingly less of the visual matter of memory to perceive. The reduction of the self to the actions of the senses finds expression in 'Lights Out': 'Its silence I hear and obey'; and, again, in 'Out In The Dark': 'and fear/ Drums on my ear'. There is a synaesthetic effect in 'listening...for what I should... remember'. Memories here exist in the form of sound, perhaps a recognition of the fact that hearing is considered physiologically to be the last viable sense before loss of consciousness in death. The olfactory sense is the key to the past, while the auditory faculty is indicative of immediate fate and future. Here the point of extinction is not reached. The sensory self is all too acute but the sense of smell is the only physically activated sensation. The visual reality of darkness is the final manifestation of consciousness. That the speaker 'lies in wait', for memories suggests that memory is a concrete concept and that it will 'arrive' of its own volition. From line 23 the first person pronoun, first as an object, then in reflexive form, then as subject, occurs twelve times. As the visible world retreats from grasp and is rendered null and void, the reiteration of 'I' is a desperate attempt to cling onto the only verifiable reality, the sense of self. The repetition of the conjunct 'yet' in lines 35-6, in an initial then medial position echoes the previous 'Yet I would rather give up', and 'yet I like the names', and continues the pattern of contrast and concession evident throughout. Different levels of motivation, impulse and action are at work, in a state of uneasy juxtaposition. 'Seem', indicates an apparent, not necessarily actual, state of affairs, with the suggestion of an obscured inner life. Attention is drawn to the distinction between the passive act of hearing and the active act of listening. The complexity of the superordinate clause beginning with 'Yet seems', with coordinated verb phrases (linked alliteratively), and embedded adjunct and concessory clause, all separated by commas, syntactically augments the anticipatory nature of the constituent parts. The noun clause 'What I should, yet never can, remember', is an extended negative describing a non-action as object, a rewriting of line 29, 'Try/ Once more to think what it is I am remembering'. The verb 'remember' in line twenty is again merely a possible future action projected onto the child by the man. The sense of frustration is intensely realised. The anticipation inherent in the line break position of 'lying in wait', is immediately thwarted by the nullity of the result and the cohesive sense of conflict again indicated by the modals, 'What I should, yet never can'. In the first three items of the list of non-appearing items, the setting of the poem is re-presented; the naming of the items, and the triple naming of the herb, is reiterated as in a mantra, in a simultaneous recreation of past, present and future. 'Beside' functions both as an additive adjunct, a synonym for 'as well', and a locative

preposition, placing the child in her, by now ritual, place at the doorside. The vain attempt to fix the substance of memory gives way, with the mention of the child in the penultimate line, to a progressive stripping away of all familial relationships and points of social contact. In addition to the *Autobiography* (as discussed above) the genesis of line 39 can be traced to the article 'Water Cress Man' in *The South Country*, where in discussing the independence and isolation of his character, Thomas wrote: 'He has never had father or mother or brother or sister or wife or child' (Kirkham 26). The generic typing of 'playmate' as a child noun adds poignancy to the depiction of isolation, and compactly presents the image of the child-in-the-man. The question is raised: whose father and mother are failing to appear? The inter-generational divisions slide and merge. And in the midst of the progressive disappearance of all locational props, where is the speaker's deictic base? The disintegration of all that has constructed the past is remorseless. The periodic sentence starting with 'I sniff' builds to an expository climax at 'remember' and to the final denouement at 'playmate'. After seven successive negative noun phrases, the expectation is built of a positive construction. Though in contradiction to the stated action of 'seeing nothing', the avenue is clearly and visibly presented. As a result of all the preceding anticipatory constituents, the limiting adjunct 'only', and the semantic weight of the extending postmodifiers 'dark, nameless, without end', the future is presented as bleak and hopeless. It is a 'seen' entity, a logical improbability that has been created out of nothing. The position of closure of 'end' is belied by the premodifying negative preposition 'without', paradoxically refusing closure. The dark past and the featureless future stretch out endlessly in both directions. The speaker has inevitably reached a road, and one -- an avenue -- which by definition is lined with trees, a sub-part of 'forest.' The totality of Thomas' symbols create a picture of living death. The subtleties and perplexities of names which have been so preoccupying do not count. To be 'nameless' is to lose all identity, and is a worse condition than darkness. (In 'The Word' Thomas describes, conversely, an antonymous concept, 'an empty, thingless name'.) The periodic build up of the final sentence has sureness of tone. However grim the conclusion a conclusion has been reached. The metric balance, with the stress falling evenly on the first syllable of each verb and noun phrase creates an intonational cohesion which contrasts with the pauses and arrests of the first section. Phonological elements have combined with the cumulative phrase pattern to create a growing suspense leading, in full adherence to the end focus principle, to the concentrated drama of the denouement. There is a similarity of balanced phrasing in the final lines of section two where the first picture is created -- a picture which will be systematically dismantled at the end.

In this tribute to the power of smells to stimulate thought and memory, Thomas presents a pattern of interconnected psychological insights of extreme subtlety. In a highly subjective treatment of a snatched moment in time universal truths may be discerned; but the complexity of the insights means that the process of discernment is on an instinctive rather than an intellectual or rational level. The herb Old Man has become for Thomas the focus for the stripping, delving search for memory which is at the same time a search for origins and a search for identity. In the

disintegrating scenario of the last seven lines, where what is found retreats to non-being as soon as it is grasped, Thomas' unappreciated but very real links with the modernist movement and the works of Yeats and Eliot are clearly evident. There is no certainty. Things do fall apart. The restless search for harmony is inevitably foredoomed. Expanding knowledge and insight lead only to a recognition of the limited nature of such knowledge and its inherent danger. But despite the depiction of gloom, 'Old Man' is also a celebration of a pure sensory experience, an experience which is evocatively depicted for its own sake in 'Digging': 'Odours that rise/When the spade wounds the root of tree./ Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed./ Rhubarb or celery'. In the final stanza the poem concludes that 'It is enough/ To smell, to crumble the dark earth'. Another childhood memory contributing to 'Old Man' was described in *The South Country*: 'lad's-love and and tall, crimson, bitter dahlias in a garden --the sweetness of large moist yellow apples eaten out of doors -- children'. (Motion 164) Senses converge in 'Sowing' when smell, taste, hearing and touch create the remembered sensations of an afternoon in the field: 'It was a perfect day/ For sowing; just/ As sweet and dry was the ground/ As tobacco-dust./ I tasted deep the hour/ Between the far/ Owl's chuckling first soft cry/ And the first star'. In another poem dealing with the vagrant sources of memory, 'The Word', the intertwined importance of names and smells is again stated:

Some things I have forgot that I forget.
 But lesser things there are, remembered yet,
 Than all the others. One name that I have not-
 Though 'tis an empty thingless name - forgot
 Never can die because Spring after Spring 5
 Some thrushes learn to say it as they sing.
 There is always one at midday saying it clear
 And tart - the name, only the name I hear.
 While perhaps I am thinking of the elder scent
 That is like food; Or while I am content 10
 With the wild rose scent that is like memory,
 This name suddenly is cried out to me.

In 'The Other' the emergence from the forest is greeted by an array of sensations, to be enjoyed before beginning the restless pursuit of the other self: 'Glad I was/ To feel the light, and hear the hum/ Of bees, and smell the drying grass/ And the sweet mint'.

'Old Man' is an intriguing poem', not least for the densely packed images drawn from Thomas' stock of memory. In miniature it is the story of his past life, and his future. It is perhaps the work which is most essentially an expression of the contradictions and preoccupations which haunted him in his search for identity, and one which makes few concessions to the reader. The flow of sentences, the pauses and hesitations, the accumulated pattern of images, and the relentless advance of negative

terms all combine to transform the relative neutrality of autobiographical prose into a highly atmospheric, cohesive whole. 'Old Man' has met with general critical approval, and is considered to be one of Thomas' most noteworthy works. Frost said it was 'the flower of the lot'. (Kirkham, 169) This judgement would appear to rest more on an impressionistic, emotional response to the images presented, than a rational interpretation of the highly complex thought base which constructs the philosophic strands of the poem, and which, by and large, appears to defy exact explication.

Chapter Six

Into The Forest

The Green Roods, Lights Out, Out In The Dark.

Into The Forest

The Green Roads, Lights Out, Out In The Dark.

In 'The Other' Thomas wrote:

The forest ended. Glad I was
To feel the light, and hear the hum
Of bees, and smell the drying grass
And the sweet mint, because I had come
To an end of forest, and because
Here was both road and inn, the sum
Of what's not forest.

In this poem, the world is divided into two regions, 'forest' and 'what's not forest'. The latter is characterised by light, pleasant sensory experience, a defined path and social interaction. 'Forest' by implication was the lack of all these things. It is not mentioned again in this poem. The manifestations of 'forest' were explored in a number of poems, most notably 'The Green Roads', 'The Dark Forest', 'Lights Out' and 'Out In The Dark', all written in the last few months of Thomas' life. 'Forest' had come to be a dominant personal symbol, an 'unfathomable' region that embodied all that was mysterious and beyond reach. Increasingly this came to be what lay beyond the threshold of death, a state that inspired dual impulses of longing and fear. In 'The Dark Forest' there is no individual presence in evidence. The three stanzas describe the unbreachable divide between those that dwell inside and those who are 'out': 'And evermore mighty multitudes ride/ About, nor enter in;/ Of the other multitudes that dwell inside/ Never yet was one seen'. 'The Green Roads' and 'Lights Out' describe the approach of the speaker to the borders of forest, an approach in which fascination vies with an almost clinical curiosity about the nature of the process. In 'Out In The Dark', Thomas' penultimate poem, the protection of the barrier has disappeared, as darkness and forest engulf the speaker in the last few moments of life. Three days after Thomas wrote 'The Green Roads' at Hare Hall on June 28 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme saw 19,000 young British soldiers dead, a grim continuation of the mass slaughter that had been taking place all year. After a stint as a map-reading instructor, Thomas had been promoted to Corporal, and had applied for a commission in the Royal Artillery, a move which significantly increased his chances of embarkation and active duty. The atmosphere of slaughter and a growing presentiment of death resulted in a poem which dealt not in spilt blood and entrails, but created a powerful symbolic evocation of the prevailing climate.

'The Green Roads' is written in couplets, the only poem written in this form. These generally follow a pattern of statement then amplification, in largely logical sequence. Unusually, the couplets are not end-rhymed, but each second line contains internal rhyme, and the last word of each first line is repeated throughout in an epistrophic pattern. Through this systematic syntactic and lexical parallelism, 'forest' is ensured of its psychological significance in a manner akin to what Leech calls the 'iterative procedure of ritual.' (Leech p84) The incantational resonance of the repetition ensures that the reader's attention is constantly directed in accord with the 'actors' of the poem, compelling all attention to be focussed on 'the forest.' In the universe of the poem, all objects and people are spatially orientated towards the forest. In fact the whole ground plan of the poem reflects the fascination with, and movement towards this goal. The noun phrase or phrases in each first line (with the exception of stanza eight) find their directional status in their following prepositional phrases which lead towards, look at, linger on the border of, or enter into the forest. The green roads end 'in the forest', the liminal boundary crossed. 'Someone' has gone 'to the forest'. The cottage looks 'at the forest' from an external point. The old man and the child seem compelled 'along the green road to the forest'. The trees and the oak are 'in the forest', while the thicket 'borders the forest'. And in the final recapitulation there is the suggestion of a general and inexorable forward progression with 'The old man, the child, the goose feathers at the edge of the forest'. The absolute impregnability of the oak, the symbol of extinction, is emphasised by its location in 'the middle deep'.

The noun phrases are lexically dominated by enigmatic primary symbols, all in various ways motifs of death, or life in relation to death, which have the power of simplicity and accessibility. This creates an elemental strength which imbues them with the force of archetype. The 'green roads' of the title, named three times in the first four stanzas, pose a problem of interpretation. If 'green' is taken in the figurative sense of one who is young and inexperienced and who is easily imposed upon, then the 'green roads' may represent the endless stream of youths coerced into fighting and death. For Thomas it became a truth by the beginning of 1916 that 'Now all roads lead to France'. ('Roads' stanza 14) If the relative clause 'that end in the forest' is taken as restrictive, rather than appositive as the lack of commas would indicate, then the green roads as a modifier-noun unit are defined and identified as the roads which must lead to the forest, ie death. The proximity of the colour values in the first two lines provokes a strongly contrasting, but mutually reinforcing, sense of youth and innocence, with 'strewn' indicating a process of mutilation by an unnamed agent and accomplished acts of random violation. The goose is a sacrificial victim, bred for slaughter. White feathers are a traditional symbol of cowardice, and were sometimes given in World War One to men who did not join up. The white bird, too, is an ancient symbol for the soul or conscience of man. This accretion of multiple associations, even unexamined and accepted intuitively, accounts for the power that hangs on each presented image. While the shadow of the War infiltrates the poem, the 'real' emerges in the adverbial 'this June', the demonstrative a reference to the immediate here-and-now of June 1916 (a temporal locator immediately recognisable to Thomas' own

generation), and the 'me' of the narrator. The old man and the 'child alone', are representative types, their anonymity indicated by the use of the indefinite article, and they lack of any consequent identifying characteristics. It is noteworthy, as Andrew Motions has pointed out, that there are no young men represented. Perhaps these are the young trees in stanza six, significantly already 'in' the forest, the result or inevitable goal of the living path of the 'green roads'. The historical immediacy of 'this June' deviates from the poem's lexical norm, which has the archaic, or at least non-modern, ambience of the fable or allegory. Other references to the War implicit in the symbolism suggest that this war is one of 'a host' of past ages. 'Towers' and 'castle keep', and the impenetrable 'thicket' reinforce the pattern of mythic associations. Despite the reality of his own involvement, Thomas often wrote of the War from the perspective of the sweep of history:

Time swims before me, making as a day
A thousand years, while the broad ploughland oak
Roars mill-like and men strike and bear the stroke
Of war as ever, audacious or resigned,
And God still sits aloft in the array ('February Afternoon')

When considering two clay pipes, one found dug up in a field, in 'Digging', the speaker identifies with soldiers from past battles: 'The one I smoked, the other a soldier/ Of Blenheim, Ramillies, and Malplaquet/ Perhaps. The dead man's immortality/ Lies represented lightly with my own'. In 'The Sun Used To Shine', a personal remembrance of friendship with Robert Frost, the War is first just another topic of conversation: 'We turned from men or poetry/ To rumours of the war remote'. The lexical choice becomes gradually infiltrated with images of war, past and present.

an apple wasps had undermined;

Or a sentry of dark betonies,
The stateliest of small flowers on earth,
At the forest verge; or crocuses
Pale purple as if they had their birth

In sunless Hades fields. The war
Came back to mind with the moonrise
Which soldiers in the east afar
Beheld then. Nevertheless, our eyes

Could as well imagine the Crusades
Or Caesar's battle

Sentence length in 'The Green Roads' varies considerably, sometimes crossing stanza boundaries, as in the first instance, and in the last long sentence which encompasses three stanzas. Other stanzas are self contained units, consisting of one or two short sentences, but all are linked anaphorically with preceding lines; for example, in lines 6 and 8 the cottages are referred to by the proforms 'one' and 'two' then 'one' and 'another'. Within the pattern of syntactic variation, there are few instances of prevarication, painstaking rephrasing and the loosely trailing clauses. (An exception is the embedded conditional 'perhaps' in stanza eight.) Instead there is a relatively stable series of statements, which helps to create a tone of philosophic calm. Whether interlinked through sentence chains or syntactically independent, every couplet serves to give particular visual emphasis to the individual subjects that make up the composite mosaic of the poem. The couplet divisions force a reflective pause, so the iconic significance of individual noun phrases are given due weight. Despite the apparently logical development of the syntagmatic chain of sentence and clause, there are a number of directional deviations worth noting. The first sentence is extended by enjambment into the second couplet with a simile, 'Like marks left behind by some one gone to the forest/ To show his track.' The purposive adverbial clause 'To show his track, is abruptly contradicted by the contrastive statement 'But he has never come back', which extends the simile in a non-typical manner, and performs the function of converting it from a figurative to a literal statement. 'Someone' now assumes an autonomous identity, and enters into the general narrative sequence of the poem. The entity created by the universal pronoun is further particularised as male by the pronominals 'his' and 'he'. The weakness of these grammatical terms contrasts markedly with the strong concrete realizations of the other 'actors', defining 'someone' as shadowy individual with a tenuous existence. 'Marks' too is a generic term, lacking the vivid particularisation of 'white goose feathers'. The polysyllabic structure of line three confounds the metrical pattern established in the first couplet contributing to a weakening effect -- possibly to prevent the establishment of a too defined metric pattern. The stanza divisions visually create a separate entity, but the internal sentence development means that 'someone' is a ghostly realization of what has been represented in the first couplet. The simile has slid inexorably towards what is real: the unseen but tangible presence of a life-that-is-gone, of one who has walked the green road. It is as if the real subject of the poem, the dead soldier, must be recognised and represented, not as a bloody corpse, but as a collection of symbols of sacrifice and death. The two sentences in the third couplet form a unified pattern, the second consisting of two balanced adverbial clauses: 'Round one the nettle towers; two are bathed in flowers.' Chiasmus enhances the balance of clauses in stanza four: 'An old man along the green road to the forest/ Strays from one, from another a child alone'. As before, the two proforms form a linked reference to the previous stanza. Stanza seven begins as a simple declarative statement, but then begins to trail somewhat arbitrarily with a loosely developing momentum, weaving from the oak, to the ages, to the visionary 'I' who sees the symbolic landscape, the restatement of which leads in circular fashion to the images described at the beginning of the poem. The consequential components of the sentence are indicated by the use of colons, the first of which identifies the 'ages' and the second which leads from the particular to the general. 'For the

tree is dead: all things forget the forest'. The interplay of sentence and stanza divisions sometimes obscures referential terms. There is a grammatical ambiguity in the phrase 'their memories are lost', which may be possessive to either the oak or the ages. Probably on the evidence of the next stanza, the latter is meant. Does the impersonal pronoun 'it' at the beginning of stanza six have as its referent the thicket, the thrush or the song? If the thrush had been in the initial position as subject, it would be the most obvious, but the prepositional phrase 'In the thicket' has syntactic prominence. Thicket and trees belong to the same lexical subset, so are most likely to be the two items compared. The demonstrative in 'That oak' particularises one of 'the trees' of the previous stanza, but it reverts in stanza eight to the superordinate 'tree'. This anaphoric fuzziness no doubt serves not to obscure, but to create a sense of the mysterious interdependence of these universal symbols.

Lexical patterns strongly reinforce the atmospheric unity that prevails throughout 'The Green Roads'. All the verbs are stative - 'looks', 'strays', 'bordering'; passive - 'are strewn', 'are bathed', 'are lost'; express accomplished acts - 'gone', 'has never come back', 'saw'; or indicate continuous states or recurring acts - 'end', 'twiddles', 'are', 'forget'. Those verbs that could arguably apply to the present, the 'straying' of the old man and the child and the 'twiddling' of the thrush, are seen as representative acts by their semantic correlation with the non-dynamic phrasing which dominates the grammar of the poem. The cyclical shape of the movement of images referred to above is reinforced by the stative and/or recurring nature of the described action. We are witnessing fundamental processes that are destined to be repeated. The positioning of 'see' at the stanza break, 'Excepting perhaps me, when now I see', gives it initially the appearance of an intransitive verb. The speaker appears in the role of seer in the Wordsworthian sense of the poet who sees into the heart of things via the natural world. Although it becomes evident that the verb has an object, the already established symbolic attributes of the old man, the child and the goose feathers serve to add weight to this reading of the phrase. Images of youth and age are contrasted by the repeated 'green', 'old man', and 'the child'; the 'trees that are young', and the 'old' oak that 'saw the ages pass'. Negative threads are subtly woven throughout the poem: 'That end' links semantically with 'left behind', 'gone', 'never come back', 'are lost', 'dead' and 'forget'. 'Stray' coheres with 'left behind', 'lost' and 'forget', suggesting those who are hapless victims, or at the very least careless and lacking in volition. The old man and the child share agency of the verb, but their separateness is demonstrated syntactically by their positions of contrasting nuclear prominence, and the final position of the post-modifying 'alone'. Although there is a clear antonymous balance with 'nettle' and 'flowers', the negativity of 'nettle' exerts dominance by being subject of the active verb 'towers', while 'flowers' is a passive subject. The verb forms tend to have a personifying function, subtly in the menace of the nettle 'towering' and the postmodification of the noun phrase 'the trees are young'; more obviously in the cottage 'looking' at the forest and the oak 'seeing' the ages pass. (The distinction between the active engagement of 'looking' as opposed to the relatively inert 'seeing' was also evident in 'The Path'.) The inclusive general noun in 'all things forget the forest,' suggests a universal consciousness, of which -- by virtue of its proximity -- 'I am a part.

Ten months after writing 'The Green Roads', on the ninth of April 1917, Thomas was killed by a shell blast while on duty at an Observation Post during the first hour of the Arras offensive. The lane leading to the military cemetery at Agny, France where he is buried is called La Rue Verte.

Lights Out

The intrusion of the personal in the last two stanzas of 'The Green Roads' comes as a surprise, but the speaker remains a detached observer, watching fascinated but at one remove, the age old drama of life-into-death at the edge of the forest. In 'Lights Out' the speaker is the prime actor, poised, knowledgeable and aware, at the brink. The first word of the poem is 'I' the last is 'myself'; and the present perfective aspect of the first verb 'have come' signals the immediacy of the situation. The expectant pause of the line break at 'sleep', emphasised by the comma, initiates a pattern of line endings in which we are confronted by cut-off points. These suggest liminal boundaries, borders, and endings, illustrative of the personal realisation of reaching the point of no return. The locational status of the divide is first 'border', the line separating the two states or conditions of wakefulness and sleep, and life and death; then the monosyllabic 'brink' in line 9. This is rendered more dramatically intense than 'border' by its onomatopoeic hard consonant -- and its more ominous meaning of an edge from which to fall. The determined emphasis on finality is achieved in stanza three through endline repetition, with a phrasal echo in line seventeen:

Here love ends -
Despair, ambition ends;
All pleasure and all trouble,
Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends, in sleep that is sweeter
Than tasks most noble.

The 'unfathomable deep forest' is a place that must be turned towards and entered (stanza four); and the pause on the brink provides an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the journey to the forest, and to construe from certain inklings the nature of 'forest' itself. The repetition of 'ends' maintains the infiltrated pattern of final boundaries that recur throughout Thomas' work, often boundaries that are made manifest in stealth and speed. The path 'that looks/ As if it led on to some legendary/ Or fancied place' in 'The Path' abruptly stops, 'till, sudden, it ends where the wood ends'. The green roads 'end in the forest' at the edge of the unknown. The hallucinatory idyll of Green Lane in 'The Lane' seems to breach the barriers of time, 'until/ The lane ends and once more all is the same.

Inclusive of the title, the first five lines presents six focal points: an army call with strong visual components, and a series of noun phrases including 'borders', 'sleep', 'forest' and 'way' -- and the initial reading of 'deep' as a noun. The subject of the poem is ostensibly sleep and the inevitable slide into oblivion, making use of the stock metaphor for dying, that of 'falling asleep'. As early as 1904, in *The Rose Acre Papers*, Thomas wrote that 'sleep is a novitiate for the beyond.' (Cooke p241) As a sustained metaphor for death, or more precisely the process of dying, it traces the gradual loss of consciousness when the will and sensibility must surrender to the physical imperative of tiredness. The psychological truth of collected figurative wisdom struck a responsive chord for Thomas. He often chose to tap the store of folk euphemisms for fundamental life processes in his poetry. Sleep was used again for death in 'A Private' and 'Man And Dog'. His use of the image of 'the fallen' for the War dead was used extensively, most notably in 'As The Team's Head-Brass'. Beside the primary symbol in 'Lights Out' of the forest, peripheral figurative associations enrich the textual imagery of the Poem. The title itself, an echo of the late night call in the army, and referring to a visual phenomenon, is not adverted to again. Its expressive bisyllabic brevity appealed to Thomas. He wrote to Eleanor Farjeon in early November, 1916: 'Now I have actually done still another piece which I call "Lights Out". It sums up what I have often thought at that call. I wish it were as brief - 2 pairs of long notes.' (C.P.42) Much of the conflicting impulses at the heart of the poem inhere in that succinct comment; the abrupt, unfussy transition from light into darkness was clearly an attractive proposition. Motions discusses 'this simultaneous recognition and acceptance of opposite elements in a single moment' in Thomas' work, a quality which Roert Frost referred to as 'opposing light' (Motions p55). The postmodifying relative clause beginning 'The unfathomable deep' which stretches across four lines, encompasses and merges images of water, forest and roads. 'Deep' at endline position is read as a noun, and with its liquid measuring modifier 'unfathomable' creates a strong sea image. At the same time attention is focused on associated semantic descriptions of 'unfathomable' -- unreachable, unknown, unplumbed -- by the arrest caused by the slight difficulty in pronouncing the phonic components of the polysyllabic word. (It was rare for Thomas to use a word of more than three syllables.) There is an effortless change of lexical function from noun to adjective as 'deep' now modifies forest. Enjambment creates a series of semantic double takes throughout 'Lights Out'. 'Lose' at the end of line three reads initially as an intransitive verb, creating a generalised abstract statement on the fate of humankind. The object, 'Their way', narrows and restricts the described action which is further qualified by the concessory adjunct, 'however straight'. The sentence persists with an alternative proposition into line five, 'or winding', which is again extended by an adjunct expressing temporal alternatives, 'soon or late'. (Motions sources lines 3-5 to an early English poem 'The Ploughman' which Thomas had included in his anthology *This England*.) (Motions 7.) The semicolon ushers in a final verdictive statement, 'They cannot choose', abruptly curtailing the series of syntactic tangents. The labyrinthine course of the first sentence accurately reflects the laboured course of the 'way'; each short line appears to have some kind of semantic closure, only to be teased out in further worrying

directions. The rhyme scheme, *aabccb*, controls the thought direction of each stanza. The first two *aa* lines are linked either by extension or apposition, while the extensions evident in the third line develop towards a rhymed conclusion in line six. The short clauses which complete stanzas one to four have a resolute verdictive tone, even when, paradoxically, they express doubt. The two word coordinated noun phrase which closes the poem is lexically minimalist, a final statement of selfhood. The pronominals trace the speaker's consciousness of self, moving outwards from the sense of personal predicament with 'I', to acknowledge the universal fate which he shares, 'where all must lose their way', to a position of detachment in line six, 'They cannot choose'. The proforms 'all', 'there', and 'they', are translated into a generic term in line 10 with the agential noun 'travellers', a label cohering with the path-describing terms, 'way', 'road', and 'track'. The labelling process continues to define the distance between speaker and others. Stanza three consists of generalized comments about the nature of human fate; these convert unequivocally to personal reference in stanzas four and five with the use of the personal pronoun five times, and in the last two lines, the genitive and the final reflexive, 'That I may lose my way/ And myself'. That the common fate is ultimately a solitary experience is overtly expressed in line twenty three, 'I must enter, and leave, alone'. In 'Out In The Dark' this isolation of the individual in a peopled universe is compellingly portrayed:

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

An intelligent universe is at work. The variant on the colloquial 'crack of dawn' in line 8 as a postposition genitive foregrounds dawn as a volitional entity; and the personified action of the 'road and track', in deceiving the travellers, is cunningly detached from its agent by a postmodifying relative clause, itself delayed by a temporal adjunct. The clarity of vision inherent in the succession of plosives, 'track', 'crack', and 'brink' -- t, k, and b, being among the 'hardest' on Leech's scale of consonants -- proves to be illusory. The softening of the final consonant in 'travellers', a process enhanced by multisyllables and feminine rhyme, and the proximate use of 's' in 'deceived', 'suddenly', and 'sink', finds its point of focal prominence in the echoing 'blurs'. The hard edges dissolve, and in line 26 the foliage is 'cloudy'. Spatial boundaries behind and ahead are losing their shape and definition. The lowering intonation of line 12 chimes with the described action, 'And in they sink', linking semantically with the 'unfathomable deep' of line two. The delayed completion of the main clause gives greater vitality to 'suddenly', and the comparative brevity of the final coordinated clause is a definitive point of closure. There is again a 'blurring' of reference, 'they' being either the roads and tracks or the travellers, and there is an apparent lack of concord between subject and verb. This ambiguity underlines the deceptive nature of a process in which all known

realities are disintegrating, and ontological boundaries are ceasing to exist. It is interesting to note that the sense of sight fades first; the act of hearing is the last conscious act before extinction. The oxymoronic statement 'Its silence I hear and obey', suggests a preternatural sensory awareness at the very point when the life of the senses is about to be nullified. The sound of silence is a felt sensation which cannot be blocked out. In 'Out In The Dark' auditory awareness remains after the coming of the dark: '-- and fear/ Drums on my ear'. The series of abstract nouns in stanza three describe the varied facets of the emotional being which are about to be extinguished:

Here love ends,
Despair, ambition ends;
All pleasure and all trouble,
Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends in sleep that is sweeter
Than in tasks most noble.

The repetition of 'ends' already referred to, stresses the hugeness of this loss, but also has an air of protesting too much. The process of articulation indicates a relish for life at odds with the stated desire for extinction. This is stated clearly in 'Liberty' with its overtly Keatsian echoes. 'And yet I still am half in love with pain,/ With what is imperfect, with both tears and mirth,/ With things that have an end, with life and earth,/ and this moon that leaves me dark within the door'. (The lexical play replacing 'death' with 'earth' is particularly pertinent.) There is more than a hint of Tennyson's Choric song from The Lotos Eaters in the last two lines of the stanza, and certainly the sentiments are similar in the reference to 'Music that brings sweet sleep.' In stanza four: 'Is there any peace/ In ever climbing up the climbing wave...Give us long rest or death, dark death'. In stanza six: 'There is confusion worse than death, trouble on trouble, pain on pain'. Although Thomas eschewed any adherence to formal religious belief, Biblical allusions are not uncommon throughout his work. (We have noted the adoption of the beatitudinal form in 'Rain' in Chapter Two) Notions of the futility of all human fret and concern echo the first chapter of Ecclesiastes. 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.' Kirkham states that in 'seeking to express the willing surrender of self and self-possession he consciously echoes part of what Jesus says' in Matthew 10, 39: 'He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it;' and he points out that the whole passage in Matthew concerns hearing and obeying. (Kirkham p134) Although the tone of resignation and willing surrender throughout 'Lights Out' is deceptive, it nevertheless contrasts markedly with the individual's impotence before the overwhelming predatory strength of the night in 'Out In The Dark': How weak and little is the night,/ All the universe of sight, / Love and delight,/ Before the might,/ If you love it not, of night'.

The warring impulses at work, between the longing for sweet sleep and the desire to cling to the sensate life of feeling, intellect and love, may be traced throughout the poem in the verb forms. The initial declaration, 'I have come to the borders of sleep,' describes a volitional act, but implicit in the

linking of this to the actions of 'all' in line three is the loss of willful agency. The modal auxiliaries indicate an imperative external source which governs human behaviour: 'All must lose their way...they cannot choose', which connects semantically with the malign intelligence of the roads 'deceiving' the travellers. The negatives in stanza four reveal the inner struggle:

There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would not turn from now
To go into the unknown
I must enter, and leave, alone,
I know not how.

The positive statement that is being made is undermined by the accretion of negative markers in the verbs, 'is not', 'would not turn', and 'know not', a negative affix in 'unknown', and negative implicature in the adverb 'alone'. 'Would not' is volitional; 'must', which governs 'enter' and 'leave', is ambivalent in implying external or internal compulsion. The absence of punctuation from lines 19 - 22 two suggests alternative stops, either after 'now' or 'unknown'. If the latter, there is a hint of a faltering of resolve. 'Enter' and 'leave' indicate opposing but complementary deictic points, deciphering the 'going' process in two ways, the positive entry into the 'unfathomable deep', and the pangs associated with the leavetaking from the known world of feelings, intellectual endeavour and domestic relationships. The careful articulation of the actions of 'turning', 'going', 'entering' and leaving' is strongly suggestive of the mental effort required in making these statements of intent or acquiescence to fate. The three commas in line 23 underscore this struggle, as syntax and punctuation continually resist the surface readings of the lines. In the final stanza, the simple present is used, 'Its silence I hear and obey.' The verbs are stripped of their auxiliaries, moving beyond all decision making, persuasion or coercion, and revealing an automaton response to a timeless pattern of fulfilment. The purposive clause, 'That I may lose my way/ And myself,' suggests, finally, a muted desire for oblivion. The line break foregrounds the distinction between 'My way,' and 'myself,' pointing to the individual's dual identity, the forward motion of life's journey, and their own essential identity.

The ambivalent attitude to death is an intriguing thread which runs through many of Thomas' poems. It ranges from a longing for the repose of oblivion, to a detached exploration of the journey to death and the process of dying, to the tangible fear shown in 'Out In The Dark'. The complex nature of this preoccupation with death, and his own awareness of possible accusations of seeking martyrdom were summed up in a letter to Gordon Bottomley: 'How nice it would be to be dead if only we could know we were dead. That is what I hate, the not being able to turn round in the grave and to say "it is over." With me I suppose it is vanity: I don't want to do so difficult a thing as dying without any chance of applause after having done it '(Motion,53).

Out In The Dark

Out In The Dark over the snow
The fallow fawns invisible go
With the fallow doe;
And the winds blow
Fast as the stars are slow. 5

Stealthily the dark haunts round
And, when a lamp goes, without sound
At a swifter bound
Than the swiftest hound,
Arrives, and all else is drowned; 10

And I and star and wind and deer
Are in the dark together, -- near,
Yet far, -- and fear
Drums on my ear
In that sage company drear. 15

How weak and little is the light,
All the universe of sight,
Love and delight,
Before the might,
If you love it not, of night. 20

'Out In The Dark' was Thomas' last published poem, written at High Beech, Epping Forest on the poet's last leave before embarkation on Christmas Eve 1916. It was prompted by a remark of his daughter Myfanwy. In November Thomas had written to Elinor Frost : 'We see nothing, only aeroplanes and deer in the forest. Baba... has no companions. She goes about telling herself stories... The forest is beautiful, oaks, hornbeams, beeches, bracken.' At the end of December he wrote to Robert Frost: 'We were very happy with housework and woodgathering in the forest and a few walks. We had some snow and sunshine on Christmas Day... Some of the time I spent at my

mother's house and in London buying the remainder of my things for the front', (C.P. 421, 423) In the poem this rural idyll is transformed into a dramatic monologue in which the speaker is no longer even permitted the illusion of willfully traversing the barrier, but is the hapless and helpless victim hunted down and enveloped by darkness. As Andrew Motion says, a Christmas card scene is reconstructed as a desolate reality where the drama of life-into-death is enacted. Thomas' interpretation of the dark as hunter had its genesis earlier. In *The Happy-Go-lucky Morgans*, his character described a similar scene: 'I went over again to the window and looked out. In a flash I saw the outer world of solitude, darkness and silence, waiting eternally for its prey.' (Motion, 135) This is the last of the forest poems, and one written within sight and sound of a real forest. Although the word is not mentioned, the sense of forest is pervasive. The brinks and borders of 'The Green Roads' and 'Lights Out' have disappeared. It is as if the symbol of forest, so powerfully suggestive for Thomas of all that is unknown and unexplained, of the smaller and greater mysteries of sleep and death, has finally been superseded by the generalized and nullifying force of darkness. Even the physical presence of the trees has been blotted out.

The predominance of the power of darkness is marked by the repetition of 'dark' in stanzas one and two and the change to its semantic twin 'night' in stanza four-- a fitting last word for the end line of the last poem. The anticipatory position of the adverbial phrase (and immediate echo of the title) in the sentence that makes up the first stanza also foregrounds the importance of the dark in the iconic patterning of the poem; the elemental forces of darkness and snow thus structurally dominate the subject of the sentence, and at this stage the putative subject of the poem, the fallow deer. The suggestion of vulnerability caused by this dominance is further enhanced by the repetition of their type, the fallow deer being one of the smaller species of European deer, and their careful designation as fawn and doe. Unprotected by a stag, they stand in analogical relation to women and children deprived of husband and father during times of war. Thomas exploits the powerful symbolic charge, engendered by the accretion of multiple historical associations, of the concept of darkness. From the Book of Genesis onwards, darkness has been the province of formlessness, ignorance and spiritual deficiency, the enemy of light. 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep...And God said 'Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness'. To be 'in the dark' is a traditional saying suggestive of blindness to the true state of things.

In stanza one, darkness is a state, at this point removed spatially from the speaker, and in terms of role relations, both the path and location of the deer. We assume it is their natural habitat from the timeless present aspect of the verb 'go.' The deer are 'out' in relation to the speaker and enclosed in, or surrounded by the dark. The sense of outness expands from a location of relative proximity to the more general climatic condition of the wind, and the vastly greater 'outness' of the stars. 'And the winds blow/ Fast as the stars are slow.' One notes the dynamic status of the verb form 'blow' (though it is also expressing a general truth of the way things are) and the stative adjectival 'slow' attributed

to the motion of the stars. The spatial shift articulated in the antonymous balanced phrasing, and the use of the conjoin 'And' to link with the first three lines, suggest two apparently contradictory possibilities: first that the 'going' of the deer about the course of their lives and the inevitable 'going' of their impending deaths is part of the same universal law governing the movement of the wind and stars; and secondly that these external forces are remote and impervious to the little ritual dramas of life and death enacted by sentient creatures. The cadence of lines 4 and 5 echoes the refrain of a folksong. (Thomas had a lifelong interest in folkmusic. Gordon Bottomley wrote of his pleasure in singing folk and army songs during their days together in late November 1916.

The animating metaphor in stanza two confirms the dark as agent of the poem. From an anonymous state, it is remade through semantic chain reaction, into an unspecified predator. 'Haunts' links phonetically with its half-rhyme 'hounds'; the metaphor is intensified by an assumed echo, as a mute 'hunts' is triggered. Thomas' anthropomorphizing of the dark as hunter had its genesis three years earlier. In *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* (1913) he wrote, 'I went out again to the window and looked out. In a flash I saw the outer world of solitude, darkness and silence, waiting eternally for its prey' (Motion, 135). The role of the deer as victims is more clearly defined, and the implied presence of the speaker as a vulnerable entity emerges. There is a gathering concentration of kinetic energy through the development of the first two stanzas. The simple present of the verb forms in lines 2, 4 and 5 suggest the enunciation of universal truths. In stanza two this is again the case, but there is now a sense of urgency. Events are being described apparently as they happen, in a dramatic representation of the sensations associated with the period immediately prior to death, 'When a lamp goes'. The sequence of events moves from the dark 'haunting', with a progressive aspect -and the manner adverbial 'stealthily' also indicates passage of time- to the speed and immediacy of the 'arrival'. The temporal adverbial clause 'when a lamp goes' is not simply a time indicator, but has a causative function as well. The use of the positive and comparative form of the adjectives - 'At a swifter bound/Than the swiftest hound' - impels the force of acceleration, so the abrupt cessation of movement at endline, followed by the unexpected 'Arrives', catches the reader unawares. The progress of the dark is reflected in the syntax. The delay of the complementary main verb, separated from its subject by three lines, augments the sense of stealth and speed. The passive voice of the final of the three coordinated clauses, 'And all else is drowned', marks, with its declining intonation, the end of the forward dynamic of the poem. Space, time and motion have contracted to this point. The paths, tracks and roads to traverse, the borders to cross, and any semblance of voluntary action has been rendered illusory. The speaker is apparently stationary, the preordained goal of the dark; his location is unspecified, and could, of course, be anywhere. The lamp could be the only domestic symbol in the poem, suggesting the protection of a shelter or house, a vain bulwark against the inevitable encroachment of death; the indefinite article suggests that it is the vulnerable token of the visible universe. (An early draft had '*the* lamp', favouring the first interpretation) 'Weak' and shedding 'little' light, it must inevitably 'go'. And the ellipped 'out' (its absence creating a mute link with the position of the deer in stanza one) suggests a more complete

extinction. The 'going' and the 'drowning' of line 10 form a contrast of motion with the 'swifter bound.'

Just as in stanzas one and two, the repeated use of 'and' has here indicated the progressive, linked and inevitable nature of the sequence of events which have taken place. Its use in stanza three creates the sense of a shared bond between speaker, star, wind and deer.

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

The repetition indicates an almost manic assertion of togetherness. The very companionship iterated by the syntax is undermined at the same time as it is uttered. The adjuncts 'near' and 'far', breathlessly and parenthetically interpolated, and separated by endline to stress their antithetical character, acknowledge this shared destiny and fundamental alienation. The archaic pre- and postmodification in the prepositional phrase 'In that sage company drear' in line fifteen affirms both the commonality of all creation and at the same time the lack of mutual comfort this affords. There is a curious lack of separate identity. In Thomas' fair copy 'I' does not even occupy an initial position in the sequence, the line reading 'And star and I and wind and deer'. In any case, it is mentioned only once. There appears to be, at this late stage, a subjugation of the ego, a sense of the littleness of self in the face of overwhelming odds.

The poem demonstrates an acute awareness of the sensory nature of the living being -- and the limited access to truth which the senses yield. 'How weak and little is the light,/ All the universe of sight.' The fallow deer are 'invisible', intuitively known but unseen, and inner and outer perception are equally subject to eclipse. The lamp, linked semantically with the weak and little light, is the feeble emblem of our deficient knowledge and vision. And our sense of hearing, though it will remain until the end, cannot protect, for the dark comes 'without sound.' The placing of the adverbial modifies both the main verb 'arrives' and the verb of the immediately preceding temporal clause, 'when the lamp goes'. The very silence that is engendered has its own peculiar power. Typically it is a greater noise which drowns out a lesser noise; here it is silence which drowns 'all else.' There is a doubly negative impact, with light extinguished and the absence of all sound. What is left is the paradoxical effect of soundless noise, '-and fear/ Drums on my ear', reminiscent of the silence that is heard and obeyed in 'Lights Out'. This articulation of palpable fear describes the final act of sensory awareness. And it is on this note of fear that the speaker steps back -- or out of the scene since there are no barriers or borders -- to enunciate his philosophic conclusion about the path

to personal extinction. The conclusion is bleak. There is no suggestion as in 'Lights Out' of a 'sleep that is sweeter/Than tasks most noble'. But it is perhaps less bleak than it would first appear. The conditional clause in line twenty, 'If you love it not', mitigates the force of the statement with possible ambiguous interpretation. If the pronoun 'it' has as its referent 'the light', the prospect is less dismal; the implication would then be seen as a plea to love the light with its 'love and delight', to cling to the emotional and sensory substance of life, and nullify the 'might' of night with its power to render void all physical pleasures and replace them with a vacuum. If 'it' refers to the night, then the power of darkness and oblivion is supreme and demands allegiance from the powerless individual.

The prosodic features of 'Out In The Dark' are worth a brief note. The single rhyme featured in each stanza drives the narrative forward relentlessly, emphasising the sense of inevitability inherent in the philosophic base of the poem. Each stanza progresses without hesitation, restatement or the appearance of thinking through the ideas. Inherent in the structure of the poem is the calm of acceptance exerting steely control over tangible fear. Monosyllabic words predominate, and there is a pattern of opposing qualities: 'snow', 'stars', 'lamp' and 'light,' and 'dark', 'drear' with 'night'; 'slow' and 'stealthily', with 'fast', 'swifter', and 'swiftest bound'; 'sage company drear' with 'love and delight'. The simplicity of the emblems attests their archetypal power. The muffled repetition of 'f' and 'v', particularly in stanzas one and three, echoes the snowy silence that forms such an important thematic and atmospheric feature of the poem.

The unknown, unfathomable region of 'forest' came increasingly to mean the state, or non-state, of death. In the forest poems, Thomas constantly sought linguistic forms to describe this state which he knew was beyond description. Paradoxically, the closer he moved to the reality of death, the more he retreated -- or moved aside -- into the language of symbol and myth. The increasing probability, perhaps desirability, of dying on active service brought with it an edge to the mix of fear, detachment and philosophical curiosity which permeates the stylistic features of these poems. Primary symbols are the dominant imagistic feature of 'The Green Roads', and the exploration of the process of dying in undertaken in mythic terms. The presence of the speaker figure as 'I' does not occur until the eighth stanza. In 'Lights Out' the speaker is a prevailing presence, eventually dominant and general statements on the cessation of human concerns give way to a purely personal utterance: 'There is not any book/ Or face of dearest look/ That I would not turn from now'. In 'Out In The Dark', 'I' is at one with the common plight of all animate and non-animate entities. The lexis of the poems is imbued with the ambivalence of conflicting desires, as the pull of life, love, domestic ties and intellectual endeavour vie with the desire for oblivion. In the final analysis, it is this struggle that informs the creative tension of these works.

Conclusion

Conclusion

In the forward to the *Collected Poems* which appeared in 1922 Walter de la Mare commented of Edward Thomas: 'When the noise of the present is silenced...his voice will be heard far more clearly; the words of a heart and mind devoted throughout his life to all that can make the world a decent and natural home for the meek and the lovely, the true, the rare, the patient, the independent and the oppressed'. If the language is overblown, the appreciation and sense of regret for an often neglected poetic voice rings true today. Critical opinion has grown in the last thirty years with important studies by Andrew Motion, Stan Smith, Edna Longley and Michael Kirkham helping to establish Thomas' rightful place in the history of twentieth century poetry, and going a long way to redress the balance. Attempts to pigeon-hole Thomas are ultimately bootless, and distract from an understanding and enjoyment of a special and distinctive poetic voice. He began to write verse at a time when poetry as an artform was being subject to innovation and experiment; a protracted period of post-Romanticism was drawing to its natural conclusion, and being jostled out of its position of dominance by such movements as the Vorticists, the Imagists and the more broad-based Modernists. The outbreak of World War One added a sense of urgency to the climate of change. Despite Thomas' trenchant criticism of the linguistic 'confusion', 'crudity', 'violence' and 'obscurity' of Pound and the 'imbecility' of the Imagists (Longley, 28ff;1986). Thomas frequently displayed the distinctly Modernist sense of 'brokenness and alienation from self and society and nature'. (Mitchell,362).His voice was no less distinct than other new voices, but it was certainly quieter, and consequently somewhat drowned in the clamour. The tentative tone, the hesitations and re-thinks, which could be taken for a woolliness of thought and technique were paradoxically a sign of tenacious determination to articulate his ideas in the truest possible form -- and to employ the most exact word for that particular circumstance.(Gaskell,377). To give free rein to the suggestive possibilities of living words was an imperative for Thomas in his lexical choice. Words were much more than merely the names of things, though this was a source of fascination in itself; they were a mysterious link with history, and fundamental in the search for origins -- a constant and preoccupying concern. A careful linguistic examination of a number of poems such as I have attempted to do in this study, reveals the variety and intricacy of the modes of expression which Thomas employed. The complexity of his thoughts demanded a constant and restless search for the right word, the right phrase, the right sentence and the right stanza form. His syntax was, in McDonald's words the 'expression of the deepest and stillest nature of his being'. (McDonald,239). Glen considered his 'disturbing, choked oliqueness' and 'hesitant contorted rhythms' were a sign of inability to cope with the emotional demands of the war. I believe Thomas could have written of blood and gore if he had so chosen -- he displayed exemplary courage in his life as a soldier -- but the sheer complexity of his response to the carnage demanded an indirect response. He did, in fact, take the more difficult course. The atmosphere of crisis and tension which Mitchell describes is more cogent for the syntactic hesitations and ambivalent constructions. Other poems, conversely,

are redolent with a confident and sensuous appreciation of the natural world which was the backdrop, double and collaborator for most of the poems. Edward Thomas wrote with great subtlety, in many modes and many moods. To give him his due requires some effort; there is no simple explication of what Thomas 'is about'. I hope I have gone some small way to demonstrate his linguistic skill, versatility and originality.

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