'What to make of a diminished thing': nature and home in the poetry of Edward Thomas and Robert Frost 1912–1917

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ABSTRACT

'Ecopoetry' has been identified as a subset of nature poetry that proposes alternative modes of human inhabitation on the earth, often by focusing on what it means to be at 'at home' in nature. This is linked to the ecocritical interest in place-making, as an alternative to the homogenized spaces of capitalism. And yet the idea of place as 'home' or shelter has been criticised for its conservatism, and for the ways it ignores the dynamic simultaneity of the planet. This has urged some critics to focus instead on poetic evocation of space. Here I argue that Thomas's and Frost's poetry of home and 'extra-vagance' between 1912 and 1917 suggests the dialectical connections between our homes and other spaces, places and times. At the same time, these concepts convey both the necessity and limits of language to suggest these experiences. This version of home is constantly seeking its antithesis, forming what Éduard Glissant called 'rooted errantry'. While this idea is apparent prior to the poets' meeting, it becomes most prominent both during and after Thomas and Frosts' meeting, particularly in those poems that address the impact of nature on the human mind in 'wayfaring'.

In addition to my development of ecocriticism and ecopoetry, the study furthers Thomas and Frost scholarship by emphasising the philosophical, as well as poetic, influence of both poets on each other. This influence been underplayed by national affiliations in British criticism and, where it is explained, attributed to Frost's theory of the 'sound of sense' rather than to his philosophical interests. Further, national interests have undervalued the importance of Frost's stay in England to his mature poetic theorising: his learning from T.E. Hulme and his experiences of 'extra-vagance' and walks with Thomas, and have subsequently undervalued the importance of these encounters for Frost's poems written during and after this period. This alignment between Thomas and Frost highlights, at the same time, Thomas's critical difference from the Georgians.
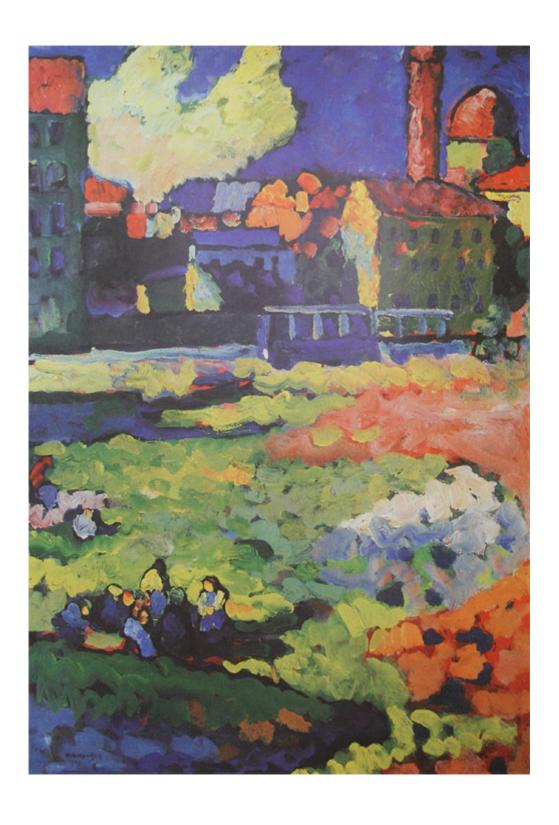
Thomas and Frost's physical and poetic extra-vagance prefigures Timothy Ingold's writing about 'wayfaring' (Ingold 2011). In addition, I argue that Thomas's and Frost's poetry of *référance*, dialogue and birdsong shows how the poets are concerned with representing the processes of experience, rather than presenting static ideas. After their likely contact with the philosophy of Henri Bergson, both poets seem to demonstrate that the processional and dynamic aspects of non-human nature resemble the forces that they observe in their own minds. Thomas and Frost illustrate how being at home, either in non-human nature or the mind, will always involve a process of negotiation with other conflicting impulses and 'otherness'. In doing so, they overcome the limitations of traditional pastoral poetry.

EPIGRAPH

Long ago men said that mankind was like an ants' nest, but they did not believe it. Only a theologian said it, and for joy of an ingenious invention, they repeated it as if it were a reality. But now we can see mankind so. It is not the spaces of stars that terrify us, but the spaces between one lover and the other, between a child and the dead that bore him.

(Edward Thomas 1911a: 99)

Image on following page: Wassily Kandinsky, *Munich-Schwabing With The Church Of St. Ursula*, 1908, oil on canvas, 68.8 × 49cm, Lenbachhaus Gallery, Munich <http://www.wassily kandinsky.net/work-5. php> [accessed 5 October 2014].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

A NOTE ON SOURCES

For biographical details on Edward Thomas, this thesis draws mostly on R. George Thomas's authoritative *Edward Thomas: A Portrait* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). This remains the definitive account, based on extensive archival research, the author's friendship with Thomas's wife, Helen, and access to 1,800 letters. For Robert Frost, I draw extensively on Lawrance Thompson's *Robert Frost: The Early Years 1874–1915* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967) and Jay Parini's Robert Frost: *A Life* (London: Heinemann, 1998). The Thompson biography is still the most authoritative, as part of a three-volume authorized life that was based on Thompson's interviews with the poet over twenty years. Following his unsympathetic account of Frost's personal relationships, writers such as Parini have offered a corrective.

The quotations from Robert Frost's *A Boy's Will, North of Boston* and *Mountain Interval*, and elsewhere where relevant, come from *Collected Poetry, Prose and Plays* (New York: The Library of America)*,* edited by Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson, hereby abbreviated to CPPP. This is the standard, authoritative version based on *Complete Poems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1949) and *In the Clearing* (first American edition, New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1962), which Frost saw through press. CPPP also includes a selection of formerly unpublished poems and the uncollected play *A Way Out*, in addition to the formerly unpublished plays *In an Art Factory* and *The Guardeen*. The chronology of individual poems is not always clear because Frost often retained poems for inclusion in later volumes. For additional help on dating poems I have drawn on Nancy Tuten and John Zubizaretta's (eds) *The Robert Frost Encyclopedia* (Westwood CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2001).

Where I quote Edward Thomas's poems, I draw on Edna Longley's *Edward Thomas: The Annotated Collected Poems* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2008). This edition uses the most comprehensive range of textual sources for titles and versions of individual poems, including *An Anthology of New Poetry* (from 1917, containing 18 poems by Thomas under the pseudonym Edward Eastaway), *Poems* (also from 1917, containing 64 of Thomas's poems under his pseudonym), *Last Poems* (1918), *Collected Poems* (1920 and 1928) and Edward Thomas's annotated printers' proofs of *Poems* from just before he died, only discovered in 1981. *Edward Thomas: The Annotated Collected Poems* provides dates for each poem. In Thomas's annotated printers' proofs of *Poems*, Thomas added many first-line titles (Longley 2008: 26). Unlike George Thomas in *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1978), Longley also includes titles that had been chosen by Thomas's friends for their central image – sometimes alongside first lines – such as 'Digging ("Today I think")',

'Home ("Often I had gone")' and 'Man and Dog', or from previous editors' choices. George Thomas's editorial work, while providing the basis upon which Longley's work exists, often leaves poems untitled, bracketed or numbered, creating a distance between the reader and the text.

INTRODUCTION

> The crowd is his element, as the air is that of the birds, and the water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for a passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heat of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, amid the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home, and yet to find oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre, and yet remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. (Charles Baudelaire 1995: 9)

The central proposition of this thesis is that both sensory experience and historical observation in particular places – especially where this enabled the poets to re-negotiate the idea of 'home' – have been overlooked as explanations of the early development of poetry by Edward Thomas and Robert Frost. I argue that this understanding of the dynamics of particular places helps us to explain the aesthetic innovations developed by the two poets, and has implications for the theoretical and ethical positioning of the poets as they have been dealt with in conventional criticism. I support my claim about the poets' views on place with reference to individual poems throughout the thesis – particularly those that address the idea of 'home'. As each implication is drawn out, I suggest how, in fact, Thomas and Frost anticipated the latest critical thinking about our cultural negotiations of nature and place.

My proposition contradicts the weight of criticism that focuses on Thomas's and Frost's poetic renderings of 'home' or place as representative of an essential nation or region. To understand what this implies for ecocriticism – the particular field of literary studies that addresses man's relationship to nature – we must, at least at first, separate the realms of the human mind or 'inner nature', society, culture and the ecosystem or 'outer nature'. Both national identity and ideology belong to the social and cultural realms and cannot be straightforwardly assimilated to an individual's 'inner nature'. While these two realms are mutually implicated, no prior judgement can be made about an individual's role in a society. Further, as I explain later, there are philosophical difficulties with ideas of essentialised regions or places, and such constructs are sometimes harmful both to social justice and to ecosystems. And yet depictions of fixed national identities with rigidly demarcated borders are common in literary criticism, the heritage industries, and media and political propaganda, as demonstrated by the successes of right-wing parties in the recent European elections. The global nature of environmental problems requires us to think beyond the scale of national borders and will challenge us to understand our own inner, as well as outer, natures.

As I argue in Chapter Two, with reference to Thomas's and Frost's shared tropes of 'home' and 'extra-vagance', the physical and imagined limits of the nation, region and place – including home – are shown to be porous. 'Extra-vagance' is a neologism from H.D. Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), and its meaning includes both movement beyond physical boundaries and a metaphorical movement of the mind beyond aesthetic and normative boundaries. Robert Frost redefines 'extravagance' to coincide with Thoreau's term and Frost uses it to describe both his poetic themes and his methodology. Edward Thomas's interest in the idea of 'Ecstasy' parallels Frost's interest in extra-vagance. In his 1914 essay on 'Ecstasy', Thomas affirms that the concept involves literal and metaphorical movement beyond an individual's bodily and mental limits: it is 'the word [which] meant the condition of being out of place, being out of the accustomed, if you like, the proper place; applied to the mind, it would mean insanity or bewilderment' (BC, 'Ecstasy', 5).[1] The two poets' interest in these related ideas allows us to consider their shared theoretical insights, and to begin to understand to what end their poetry drew on these physical and mental states. Exploring these neglected themes helps us challenge conventional accounts of our relationships to nature and place.

This project is titled '"What to make of a diminished thing": nature and home in the poetry of Edward Thomas and Robert Frost 1912-1917'. The embedded phrase is a line from Frost's poem 'The Oven Bird', and in Chapter One I describe how Frost linked his understanding of the ovenbird's song to his new poetic theory – this is, at first sight, what he 'makes' from the song. In the first instance, I am interested in showing readers how important the experience of immersion in an environment, or the phenomenal moment, was to Frost's and to Thomas's poetry, and how both poets showed that our experiences of the environment are always conditioned by our preconceptions and moods. Secondly, I am concerned with understanding the fictional speaker's experience of the ovenbird's song as suggesting something that is somehow diminished:

> There is a singer everyone has heard,
> Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
> Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
> He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
> Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.
> He says the early petal-fall is past
> When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
> On sunny days a moment overcast;
> And comes that other fall we name the fall.

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[1] New York, New York Public Library Berg Collection, 'Berg Coll MSS Thomas, E', '[Ecstasy] Two typescripts (original and carbon) of essay' [approx 1914].There is also a holograph draft of this essay which differs from the typescript version, but this is not referred to in the thesis because it appears to represent an earlier stage of Thomas's thinking.

He says the highway dust is over all.
The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

The speaker translates the bird song into a series of iterations around the nature of diminishment that enigmatically approach the bird's perspective as a 'mid-summer' and a 'mid-wood bird'. While the bird is anthropomorphised as employing such concepts as 'summer', 'fall' (in both senses), and 'highway', which allows the bird to serve as a metaphor for the poet in the middle of his life, the poem also suggests there may be a way in which the bird is simultaneously responding to its environment and its significance within that environment. Crucially, what is diminished is not defined – it may mean nature, or a sense of a relationship with nature, or the ability to conceptualise that relationship to nature. Thomas and Frost were aware that industrialisation and urbanisation apparently 'diminished' the status of non-human nature. However, since the bird 'knows in singing not to sing', Frost suggested that the meaning of the bird's song is not what he says, but what he 'makes'. What I will argue in the context of Thomas's and Frost's writing at this time is that the 'diminished thing' is poetry itself.

This poem introduces how Frost was and both poets were concerned with the normative dimensions of our relations with nature, how we may attempt to find solace in a nature that is oblivious of human values, and how these relations may feel diminished from certain religious understandings. Given that they choose to explore these ideas in poetry, rather than in prose, this suggests that the diminished thing that is poetry may be the best way we have to consider something as ephemeral yet important as a feeling of our relationship to the natural world. I explore this idea further in Chapter Three. The developments in psychology by William James and others at the turn of the century offered a way in which artists as much as scientists had access to the true nature of reality and could offer evidence for human creativity and value in an apparently oblivious universe. If things – even poetry and nature – were diminished, we could find solace in the value of our actions.

In raising the subject of 'nature' in their poetry, I wish to argue in favour of the critical and pragmatic value of the term nature in critical discussions despite its unpopularity in recent environmentally oriented criticism (ecocriticism or green studies). I argue in favour of a continued critical use of the term nature for comparable reasons to those offered by Laurence Coupe in *The Green Studies Reader* (2000): 'green studies debates Nature in order to defend nature' (5). To understand this it is first necessary to have an understanding of the different

connotations of the terms 'Nature' and 'nature', and here Coupe quotes Jhan Hochman in his *Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel, and Theory* (1998).[2] For Coupe:

> While the former is a rhetorically useful principle, it has often been associated with 'the highly suspect realms of the otherworldly or transcendental'. The latter is to be preferred in that it is more 'worldly': it denotes no more – but certainly no less – than the collective name for 'individual plants, nonhuman animals, and elements'. However, such a careful differentiation should not become a rigid distinction: 'For example, how classify apparently sensible, universal, N/natural patterns? Is number nature or Nature? […] Moreover, the main aim should be kept in mind: to differentiate between 'nature' and 'culture', so that 'culture does not easily confuse itself with nature or Nature, or claim to know nature as a rationale for replacing [it] with itself and its constructions'.

(Coupe 2000: 3)

On the one hand, we can see that a transcendent or spiritualised 'Nature' has been used to justify a disregard for human or non-human nature: the example Coupe gives is the medieval development of the classical idea of a 'chain of being' that supported feudalism (4). However, to argue that our understanding of nature is historically and culturally embedded does not mean that there is no nature apart from our cultural and linguistic constructions. Coupe believes that critics in 'formalist, psychoanalytic, new historicist, deconstructionist, even Marxist' traditions have gone too far in emphasising the linguistic and cultural dimensions of 'nature': such criticism 'has assumed that because mountains and waters are human at the point of delivery, they exist only as signified within human culture' (2). Coupe proceeds to argue for the importance of keeping 'culture' and 'nature' distinct, and for retaining a meaning of 'nature' that allows us to act to protect other species. Only then can we speak '*for* nature' (4).

Coupe's central argument for defending the usefulness of the term nature in critical debates is that it allows us to criticise dominant patterns of thinking and feeling:

> in invoking nature, it challenges the logic of industrialism, which assumes that nothing matters beyond technological progress. Thus, it offers a radical alternative to both 'right' and 'left' political positions, both of which assume that the means of production must be developed, no matter what the cost. (4)

The idea that nature is purely a 'construct' is comparable to the 'building' perspective that I describe and argue against later in this work.

While Edward Thomas sometimes spoke of nature in the sense of Nature, he critically examined his own usage, and demonstrated the term's evolution through time. Thomas was aware that man had overstated his own apartness from nature, and only tended to use nature to

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[2] Jhan Hochman, *Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel, and Theory* (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1998) 2-3.

refer to the 'matter' that is of interest to industry. In writing about Richard Jefferies, he explained to Walter de la Mare in 1908, he had overstated man's apartness from nature as a way to emphasise what he considered a superficial separation: in reality, for Thomas, 'Man seems to me a very little part of Nature and the part I enjoy least' (in R. George Thomas 1995: 51; see also Chapter One). The differences that Thomas perceived between non-human nature and human nature occasionally produced a feeling akin to religious awe in Thomas, but, as I explain in Chapter One, he was also aware of a cultural movement towards 'nature worship' caused by physical separation between town and country and the decline of formal religion, and he praised those contemporary writers who based their writing about nature on direct sensory experience and familiarity rather than on an escape from the perceived threats of the city (the 'foul air, noise, hard hats, black uniforms, multitudes' that he mentioned in 1913b: 55). In his writing about nature study in *The South County* (1909), Thomas proposed that Romanticism taught us an alternative to sentimental Georgian accounts of nature-human interactions. Through sympathy and sensory contact we can develop knowledge that produces ethical concern.

Edward Thomas often hinted that different cultures hold different understandings of 'nature', that these alternatives may influence our behaviour, and that language can preserve these meanings through time. He was aware of our tendency to assume the superiority of human products and constructions, to assume 'nature is only a house, furniture etc round about him' (in R. George Thomas 1995: 51). Moving on from Thomas's suggestions and towards a definition that will serve my own investigation of the poetry we can restrict the meaning of the term nature by including the qualifiers 'non-human' or 'inner' to produce a sense of 'nature' that includes the human and non-human alike. In doing so, we can take care to avoid the implication of a transcendent meaning referred to by Coupe as 'Nature' or a purely materialist connotation. This understanding is consistent with the current scientific viewpoint, which, in an amplified version of Hochman's perspective, would describe nature as everything in the universe that is constitutive of and determined by the laws of physics and which remains the subject of enquiry. I offer a further justification for using the term nature in my critical work through a consideration of Timothy Ingold's idea of the 'meshwork' in Chapter Four.

My discussion of nature is related to my arguments about the importance of place, and in particular the home place, in both poets' works. Developments in contemporary cultural geography and anthropology emphasise the ecological and social dynamics of particular places, in response to the supposed domination of place by space in capitalist culture. I argue that this work – which is removed from a focus on literature in itself – illustrates the usefulness and limitations of contemporary ecocriticism, particularly via its emphases on the fluxes of

ecosystem, as well as the Heideggerian concept of 'enframing' as a critique of modernity, and the relation to home place as 'dwelling' (see Chapter Two). Specifically, my own work illuminates problems with the ecocritical idea that poetry creates a 'timeless space'. This has implications for what are now referred to as 'nature poetry', 'pastoral poetry' and 'ecopoetry'. Nature poetry – including Thomas's poetry – was criticised by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973) for its frequent ideological conservativeness. In response to problems with nature poetry that stem from the idea of nature itself, environmentally minded critics have proposed that 'ecopoetry' is a subset of nature poetry that emphasises the 'ecocentric' perspective. They understand ecopoetry as poetry that pays attention to how our own being is dependent on more-than-human processes (Scigaj 1999; Bryson 2002). Terry Gifford in *Green Voices* (Nottingham: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2011) and Jonathan Bate in *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2001) suggest that an ecopoetics entails specific aesthetic innovations alongside environmentalist interest. However, Bate excludes political rhetoric from his definition of 'ecopoetry', which is a requirement that will be returned to in what follows.

This thesis shows that what concerned the poets in writing about nature and place sometimes lay beyond their abilities for verbal articulation. I argue that their recognition of this limit demonstrated an understanding of certain developments in contemporary philosophy that helped them to develop their own aesthetic ideas. Further, while many of my main arguments regarding aesthetics and ethics apply equally to both poets, because of their close association between 1912 and 1914, their poetic intentions and theoretical innovations diverge. Edward Thomas was more inclined to solitary encounters and reflections, and he became interested in conveying in poetry the movement of his thought as he worked through an idea. Robert Frost – who was keen, from the outset to be 'a poet for all sorts and kinds'[3] – wanted to capture the tones and rhythms of a believable speaking voice as it engaged with an interlocutor. Since the poets diverged in their personalities, histories, innovations and their ethical perspectives, I consider each poet separately in relation to an over-arching theme.

A central concern of this study, which has its own theoretical implications, comes from how the poets described their encounters with particular places. I demonstrate that both poets described places as constituted by relations that extend beyond the local and the present, via the poets' discussions of 'home' and its dialectical relation to the concept of 'extra-vagance'. To do justice to their work requires the anthropologist Timothy Ingold's (non-poetic) understanding of how physical and metaphorical wayfaring encompasses both the idea of 'home' and 'extra-

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[3] Letter to John T. Bartlett of 5 November 1913, in CPPP: 667-68.

vagance', as well as Ingold's idea of place as a 'meshwork'. The problems that I have alluded to that come from conceiving of place as a static and bounded entity are highlighted by the geographer Doreen Massey in *For Space* (London: Thousand Oaks, 2005) and *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), and further elaborated by Ingold in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

While both poets describe what I call, following Len Scigaj's *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets*, 'originary' experiences in the non-human world (see Chapter Three) – which are experiences that are both the cause and foundation of the poetic act – both Thomas and Frost were sensitive to the historical context of their encounters and how they framed these experiences in language. This has previously been demonstrated by Edna Longley's attribution of an 'ecohistorical' perspective to Thomas in '"The Business of the Earth", Edward Thomas and Ecocentrism'[4] and Terry Gifford's focus on Thomas's deconstructive tendencies (see below).[5] I propose that both poets (to different degrees) believed we should extend our ethical viewpoint to encompass different historical scales and contemporaneous spaces. This is considered in Chapter Four's discussion of wayfaring and Chapter Five's exploration of global cultural connections. I will consider the case for a reorientation of Thomas and Frost studies to encompass these perspectives, and for the idea that Thomas and Frost are relevant to current thinking, because they understood how language works, and because they anticipated ideas in contemporary cultural geography and environmentalism. Edna Longley goes as far as to say that Thomas was a 'prophet' of ecocentrism (Longley 2000: 25).

A further implication of this study for ecocriticism is the need for this movement to find ways to negotiate images of the globe and local specificities – both those that are 'conceptual' and those that indicate phenomenal experiences – without losing its grasp on the problems of nostalgia and rootedness. The current ecocritical emphases on the dangers of rootedness and benefits of a global imaginary ignore the ethical importance of our attachment to local places.

The dialectical tension between ideas of 'home' and 'extra-vagance' is present in both poets' writing before their meeting, in Thomas's prose and in Frost's poetry from *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston*. I suggest that Frost offered Thomas an example of how to combine impulses to find a home and to be extra-vagant, particularly through Frost's interest in Bergsonian theorising. Thomas's and Frost's poetry provided a sophisticated exploration of the fluxes of sensory experience, which was parallel to developments by the Imagists. In Chapter

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[4] Edna Longley asserts that Thomas's ecohistorical perspective consists in his poetry acting as a symbolic 'voice intermediary between earth and human beings' (Longley 2000: 46).
[5] See Gifford 2011: 28.

Three, I present those poems that show Frost moved beyond the 'sound of sense' through his association with Thomas. In my concluding chapter, I consider the variety of ways in which Thomas's and Frost's poetry explored the impact of nature on the human mind.

In what follows, I offer a brief overview of critical treatments of Thomas's and Frost's poetry, foregrounding those issues that remain contentious: Thomas's and Frost's alignment with modernist or Georgian camps, their respective reception within their national traditions, their ability to speak for a 'modern' consciousness, their theoretical innovations, and their political or philosophical insights. Most importantly, I begin to explore why their 'green' credentials have been overlooked in earlier criticism.

Jonathan Bate affirmed the importance of ideas of 'home' and 'dwelling' to poetry about nature, citing a poem by Thomas as an example of ecopoetry. Thomas's biography, on the other hand, revealed his scepticism with regard to the possibility of attaining a conventional 'home'. Richard Poirier, in *The Work of Knowing* (first published in 1977; edition used Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), has emphasised the role of Thoreauvian extra-vagance, of movement beyond bounds, in terms of both Frost's subject matter and his formal innovations. Critics such as Lucy Newlyn and Robert Macfarlane have explored the importance of walking to Thomas (Newlyn 2006; Macfarlane 2012a and 2012b). I propose that a sustaining tension exists between ideas of home and movement in both Thomas's and Frost's human–nature poetry, which challenges the relevance of Bate's notion of 'dwelling' to ecopoetry more generally (see later in this chapter and Appendix I for discussion of 'human–nature' poetry).

Combining these elements, I produce the central questions of this chapter. Is it possible that extra-vagance as movement beyond boundaries provides a metaphor for the theoretical innovations that Thomas and Frost made? What constitutes the boundaries of particular places? I propose that both poets, during their period of association, present the non-human features of particular places, and in doing so overcome 'boundaries' between human and non-human nature in ways that could be considered environmentalist. These features contribute to the formal innovations by the two poets, and help to clarify our understanding of environmentalist poetry.

Critical reception: Edward Thomas

The first critical commentary on Edward Thomas was the foreword to his posthumous first collection of poetry by Walter de la Mare:

> When […] Edward Thomas was killed in Flanders, a mirror of England was shattered of so pure and true a crystal that a clearer and tenderer reflection of it can be found no other where than in these poems […] England's roads and heaths and woods, its secret

haunts and solitudes, its houses, its people–themselves resembling its thorns and juniper–its very flints and dust, were his freedom and his peace. He pierced to their being, not through dreams, or rhapsodies, not in the strange lights of fantasy, rarely with the vision that makes of them a transient veil of the unseen. (Thomas 1920: ix)

A similar view is still held by those critics who see Thomas's work as the continuation of an 'English line' in poetry that extends from Wordsworth and Clare via Hardy and then Thomas to Larkin (Longley 1986: 30) and by those who suggest he offered images of an 'essence' of Englishness (Wisniewski 2008: 2). This is often supported by the fact that Thomas chose his English ancestral name Eastaway as the pseudonym for this first collection (Wisniewski 2008: 9). These critics see Thomas as offering an indigenous alternative to the international sympathies of modernism (Longley 1986: 118; Motion 1991: 5). Further, Longley links Thomas's death in the trenches to his poetic productions: his willingness to fight the threat of some European powers in France stemmed from the same impulse as his willingness to defend the English language and its cultural forms from foreign influence (2005: 73). Thus Thomas's feelings for England as a political entity are assumed and offered as justification for his support for 'English language and culture'. Thomas's ancestral Welshness, his interest in Yeats, and Frost's role are seen as 'trace elements' rather than central to his poetry (Longley 2005: 74). A related critical perspective views Thomas as a 'bridge' between English Romanticism and international modernism (Longley 1986: 47). In this thesis, I challenge the view that Thomas should be seen as outside transatlantic and European influences. I also take issue, extensively, with the idea that Thomas aims to offer 'essential' images of England. I describe how these related critical positions are often inconsistent and under-theorised.

While critics such as Longley and Motion dwell on the 'English context' of Thomas's work (Motion 1991: 5), in his 2009 essay 'Anglo-American anti-Modernism: A Transnational Reading', Andrew Webb emphasises the 'wider transatlantic context' of Thomas's writing, including his interests in European modernism, Irish, Welsh and American writers. Webb focuses on Thomas's avowals of patriotism for Wales in works such as *Beautiful Wales* (1905), and his review work on English language Welsh and Irish texts, including J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) which Thomas described in a letter to Gordon Bottomley as 'the greatest play of modern times' (2009: 172). Webb links these interests to Thomas's verse innovations, noting Thomas's reference to the imperative from Paul Verlaine's 'L'Art Poétique' (1874), 'Take rhetoric and wring its neck!", in both Thomas's poem 'Up in the Wind' and his letter to Frost on 19 May 1914 (Frost and Thomas 2003:10). Webb notes that French Symbolism – and not just Frost's verse – included 'nuance and speech rhythm' (Webb: 174-175). (I suggest that another French writer informed Thomas's and Frost's use of speech rhythms later on.)

Other critics relegated Thomas to the role of minor poetic talent, representative of Georgian sensibilities (Williams 1973; Enright 1980; Donald Davie 1979). Thomas associated with the Georgians and shared many of their inclinations, including his interest in writing about the countryside, his attempts at realism and use of everyday language. The most significant of Thomas's detractors was Raymond Williams who, in *The Country and the City,* criticised Thomas's 'sub-intellectual fantasy' of a version of the English country that had never existed (1973: 258). This represented a Marxist line of criticism that saw the Georgians as presenting the loss of 'arcadia' rather than observing the real conditions of rural life with which they were barely acquainted. It related to a strand of criticism that considered Thomas a minor poet because of his apparent failure to deal with social problems or other worthy poetic subjects, and his apparent failure to develop poetic forms able to deal with worthy themes. Thus, for Williams, the Georgians' accurate observations on the countryside were undermined by an 'elegiac, neo-pastoral mode' which included 'fauns, Pan, centaurs, The Golden Age, shepherds, Lycidas, swain, tryst, staunch peasants, churches, immemorial history, demigods, presences, the timeless rhythms of the seasons' (255-56). In *The Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse* D.J. Enright stated that Thomas's poetry was 'unamenable to high-level exegesis' because of its lack of ambitious themes (in Longley 1986: 30).[6]

Given an already-existing negative stereotype of the Georgians as dealing in pastoral nostalgia, in *New Bearings in English Poetry*, F.R. Leavis separated Thomas out from this movement, praising Thomas as 'a very original poet who devoted great technical subtlety to the expression of a distinctively modern sensibility' (first published in 1932; edition used 1971: 69). Leavis praised Thomas for his ability to record in minute detail the movements of his consciousness, through 'random jotting down of chance impressions and sensations, the record of a moment of relaxed and undirected consciousness' (69). This distinguished Thomas, who recorded 'modern disintegration', from Hardy, who

> is now seen to be truly a Victorian – a Victorian in his very pessimism, which implies positives and assurances which have vanished. [Hardy] inhabits a solid world, with the earth firm under his feet. (Leavis 1971: 57)

Leavis's idea would support a reading of the modern experience of 'home' as fragmented and dialectical, made up of 'impressions and sensations' rather than as a totalising idea. More recently, Andrew Motion reads Thomas's poetry for this same ability to record psychological states through a subtle use of syntax and idiom (1991: 30-57). Peter Mitchell, however, expands further on Leavis's concept of 'disintegration' and affirms that in Thomas's best poetry

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[6] D.J. Enright, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of Contemoporary Verse*, ed. by D.J. Enright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) xxviii.

he revealed a modern 'sense of brokenness from self and from society and from nature' (1986: 374).

Rather than seeing Thomas as a voice of 'disintegration', or Georgian nostalgia, Edna Longley moves between affirming his role as a continuator in an English tradition from Wordsworth to Philip Larkin, to an ecological poet, and back to the English-line view. Because Longley, as the editor of the leading edition of Thomas's verse (*Edward Thomas: The Annotated Collected Poems*), is the most prominent Thomas critic, and exemplary of British critics' attitudes to the relationship between Frost's and Thomas's development, her position is explored in some depth here. While her annotated edition underpins awareness of Thomas's technical mastery of the lyric form and the prose sources of his poetry, I aim to show that how her criticism in *Poetry in the Wars*, *Poetry and Posterity* and *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* has led to misunderstanding about Thomas's relationship to his nation and underplays the importance of the relationship with Frost. In emphasising Thomas's and Frost's influences from Romanticism, her studies tend to affirm symbolic significances that I argue are only tentative. Further, her Romantic reading also encourages the view that Thomas's (and Frost's) poems are pastoral elegies to a lost home rather than contemporary critiques, making them seem irrelevant to contemporary concerns. Finally, her arguments obscure both Thomas's and Frost's philosophical sophistication in understanding language and the human mind.

The first of Longley's two essays on British poetry in the 20th century, 'Edward Thomas and Robert Frost', addresses the same subject field as my own study, and the 'revolution' Frost and Thomas brought about in lyric poetry through their focus on speech sounds.[7] While Longley positions Frost as the principal instigator, she notes that Thomas had previously identified the importance of linking prose to mental and physical processes in his writing on Cobbett in 1912, and she shows how Thomas conceived of the role of the 'living word' in his critical writing on Walter Pater and Mark H. Liddell. While identifying Frost and Thomas as the key figures in this revolution of 'English' verse, she states that W.B. Yeats had simultaneously written about the importance of speech for Irish literature, and acknowledges Thomas's appreciation of Yeats (Longley 1986: 26; 42 and 56).[8]

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[7] Edna Longley, 'Edward Thomas and Robert Frost', and 'Worn New and the English Tradition', in *Poetry in the Wars* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1986).

[8] Longley quotes as follows from W.B. Yeats's 1907 collection of essays, *Discoveries*, reproduced in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 266: 'In literature, partly from the lack of that spoken word which unites us to ordinary man, we have lost in personality, in our delight in the whole man, blood, imagination, intellect, running together' (1986: 26).

In this essay, Longley separates Thomas and Frost (and Yeats) from modernism, in terms that make the movement synonymous with High Modernism rather than Imagism. She argues that modernism is necessarily an international style – including 'dappled verses', which are 'cosmopolitan in time or space'. For this reason, rather than focusing on possible overlaps between the various modernisms and the Thomas-Frost revolution in opposition to supposed late-Romantic literariness, she emphasises the strand of Thomas criticism that was most obviously based on English Romanticism (32). In Longley's survey, Frost's poetry was an outgrowth of English Romantic tradition into America. Setting their work in opposition to international modernism because of its interest in 'continuity' rather than 'transplantation', Longley asserts that Thomas's and Frost's (and Yeats's) myth was the 'parochial cosmos' (32-33).

In her second essay in *Poetry in the Wars*, 'Worn New and the English Tradition', leaving Frost behind, Longley considers Thomas's search for the 'spirit that has historically informed and interconnected the countryside, character, folklore, language and literature of England' (47). In other words, she argues that Thomas was in search of the essence of Englishness, and this was a calculated move against 'the Kaiser or Ezra Pound' (47). She asserts that this essence was sought in a sum of the interactions between people, nature and culture.

She bases her argument on what she calls Thomas's 'organic' conception of poetry, and supports this with a quote from Thomas's review of Australian poet A.B. Paterson in the *Daily Chronicle* of 8 February 1904:

> Poetry is a natural growth, having more than a superficial relation to roses and trees and hills. However airy and graceful it may be in foliage and flower, it has roots deep in a substantial past. It springs apparently from an occupation of the land, from long, busy, and quiet tracts of time, wherein a man or a nation may find its own soul. To have a future, it must have had a past. (in Longley 1986: 33)

She argues that this affirms Thomas's belief in an English 'spirit', founded in relations between people, nature and culture. However, from Thomas's statement we can only conclude that there may, in a loose sense, be a national character or 'soul' that is influenced by long contact with a terrain and, separately, that the 'soul' of a man may be influenced by a patch of 'trees and hill'. But this does not mean that the human individual's 'soul' and that of the nation are identical. Felix Guattari describes three 'existential territories', or ecologies, of the individual mind, of society, and of the ecosystem (1989: 13-14). For Guattari, national identity belongs to the social ecology, to group organisation of individual subjectivity (1989: 14). While mental ecology is not strictly circumscribed within the mind of one individual, it concerns the realm of the unconscious, and is the basis upon which our subjectivity is formed. For Guattari, social

ecology can encourage or discourage dissenting practices at the level of the individual subjectivity, and Thomas appears to veer between dissenting social and subjective presentations of 'Englishness' according to what his circumstances allow.

Longley's version of the individual 'soul', on the other hand, appears identical to the 'English spirit'. She suggests that the character Lob, in the poem by that name, is a figure for Thomas the poet. Yet 'Lob' is an oppositional character, who figures an attempt to invoke an alternative social ecology, rather than explicitly conveying Thomas's own fragmentary and unconscious version of 'England'. I argue that Thomas's oppositional meanings of 'home' exemplify an attempt to follow Lob's dissenting spirit.

In her 1996 essay, '"The Business of the Earth": Edward Thomas and Ecocentrism', Longley urges a historical and political treatment of Thomas's poetry which, she believes, has been obscured by the 'pincer movement' of modernist and Marxist preoccupations.[9] Despite her earlier view of Thomas as a poet responding to the threat of war, here she urges, against Raymond Williams, his reinstatement as an Edwardian rather than Georgian writer whose 'critique of a whole dimension of modern life' places him on the 'global political agenda' (2000: 24). She argues that Thomas was 'a prophet of ecocentrism' and 'cognate terms [...] biocentrism and geocentrism', 'not only conceptually, but also in terms of poetic structure' (2000: 24). For her definition of ecocentrism she quotes Robyn Eckersley, where it is a

> philosophy of *internal relatedness*, according to which all organisms are not simply interrelated with their environment but also constituted by those very environmental interrelationships. (in Longley 2000: 24)[10]

Here, Longley contends that Thomas conveyed the 'web' of human and natural life through syntax that reveals the 'interconnected web' of perceiver and object (41); the intrusion of 'speech' into song, suggestive of our need to learn the 'earthly text' (35); and finally, the use of metaphor that provides an imaginative link between man and nature. This discussion parallels my own development in this thesis of theories of environmental perception and poetic language which attempt to deal with Thomas's and Frost's poetry of nature. Longley also wishes to understand how Thomas's views on 'home' exemplify his attitudes towards non-human nature. She argues that Thomas's reference to forests and 'precariously placed or ominous dwellings'

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[9] Edna Longley '"The Business of the Earth", Edward Thomas and Ecocentrism', in *Poetry and Posterity* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2000) 23-52. First published in *High and Low Modernisms: Literature and Culture 1889-1939*, ed. by Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 107-31.

[10] Robyn Eckersley, *Environmental and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 49.

suggested his adoption of an 'eco-historical perspective' which posits human history as a finite component in natural history (42).

In her final essay that refers to Thomas, 'The Great War, history, and the English lyric', Longley returns to her 'English-line', Georgian, and anti-modernist treatment of Thomas, reinstating her organic conception of Thomas's nature poetry.[11] In this essay, she includes Thomas, alongside Wilfred Owen and Ivor Gurney, as one of those for whom the war, 'a matter of timing, of psycho-imaginative receptivity', caused their poetic tendencies to coalesce (Longley 2005: 60). She explains that the war encouraged Thomas to re-conceive of England as anti-imperial, ecological and dialectical. The ultimate result, however, was a kind of patriotism where alongside 'loving English landscape and culture, Thomas accepts the logic of putting his life where his poetry is' (73). She aligns Thomas with those poets, including Yeats, for whom the 'wartime moment is the story of how traditional forms internalize history as new complications of voice, syntax, diction, image', in opposition to 'collage' effects of the strict Imagists (77). For Thomas and Owen the war was fought to save the imaginative structures of England. Although here, again, she admits other influences on Thomas, including the Irish Revival and Symbolism, 'his alliance with Frost placed him on one side of an enduring Anglo-American debate about poetry and modernity' (75). While acknowledging that Thomas's idea of England was nuanced, she still insists that Thomas's interest was in continuing a conventional English tradition. Thomas's alliance with an American was, curiously, evidence of his patriotism.

However, here she distinguishes Thomas's subjective concept of Englishness from a social meaning of 'home' that prefigures the renewed social meaning of nation that I explore, with qualifications, in what follows:

> Thomas's 'England,' with its trace-elements of Yeats's Ireland, Frost's New England, and bardic Wales, is dialectical rather than unitary. He breaks nationality down further into 'a system of vast circumferences circling about the minute neighbouring points of home.' This makes poetry's own local specifics the model for a refigured England. 'Home,' a positive microcosm, dramatizes a return 'from somewhere far' to a locus where 'one nationality / We had, I and the birds that sang, / One memory.'
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> (Longley 2005: 74)

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[11] Edna Longley, 'The Great War, history, and the English lyric', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. by Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 57-84.

Longley asserts that, in Thomas's poetry, 'home' is a metaphysical shadow of 'England', which may offer a 'more complex story of nationality' (75). While this is indeed the case, home need not be a *microcosm* of England. Home as 'nation' in 'Home ("Often I had gone")' suggests that the local is a unique part of a larger composite. Even if a system of 'circumferences' moves from the particularities of home to a larger composite, this composite may consist of fragments that are intimate and specific, rather than idealised, and may extend beyond the traditional borders of nation.

In this article, Longley reflects on the importance of Thomas's imaginative engagement with the war as one dimension of his poetry of English landscape. She asserts that pastoral elegies for lost ways of living were disrupted by the sense of dissolution brought on by the war, modern ways of life and the unknown future (80). I consider below the case for considering Thomas a 'pastoral' poet, and if he can be described as such, how he experimented with the pastoral trope or tradition. Was Thomas really so naïve as to assume that only the war separated England from certain forms of life, that England was so very different from Germany in its path towards urbanisation, as Longley implies?

By contrast, W.J. Keith, in an earlier commentary, provides a more literal interpretation of Edward Thomas's poetry of nature and place. In *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), Keith describes how certain poets since, and including, Wordsworth have written about the impact of nature on the human mind. He also shows that they differ in their emphases on providing an accurate depiction – over a symbolic meaning – of non-human nature. Keith places Edward Thomas on a line that leads from Wordsworth to R.S. Thomas, and which includes Robert Frost (1980: 141). For Keith, the nature poem is sometimes a human-nature poem, in that Thomas was 'an independent associate of those who explore human consciousness as it defines itself against the ever-varying background and challenge of the natural world' (166). And while Thomas's poems

> can legitimately qualify as nature poetry, since the occasion of the poem is almost invariably a rural experience, the emphasis is firmly on the self, a self that is always alone, brooding on its responses, and continually preoccupied with the condition of being 'born into this solitude' ('Rain'). Thomas rarely offers us descriptive poetry for its own sake, and the effect differs from that of his earlier prose because here he concentrates on understanding the self rather than expressing or even flaunting it. (157)

Keith argues that while Thomas used description to render the 'essence of the scene', he was 'at once probing and analysing his own reaction' (159). Thomas, like Frost, was able to skirt 'the symbolic possibilities [of a scene], but never unequivocally committing either the reader or

himself to a meaning that extends beyond the literal' (165). Noting Thomas's expertise as a naturalist, Keith asserts that this results in a poetry which offers a 'compromise between specificity of facts and openness of interpretation' (165).

The significance of Keith's argument for my own enquiry is that, in this understanding, 'nature poetry' need not be uniquely concerned with simple descriptions of non-human nature, nor with static images of human nature, and can extend to include a consideration of human–nature interdependence that emphasises the dynamics of nature and the human mind. Thus, when Keith talks about the best nature poetry being at the same time poetry of human nature, he means that such poetry considers the human–nature relationship (4). Keith argues that such nature poetry includes aesthetic innovations by way of a self-consciously derived subject position. Importantly, Keith distinguishes Thomas's and Frost's use of symbolism from Wordsworth's instances of 'egotistical sublime' while acknowledging the importance of Wordsworth's experiments (127; 142).

However, a clearer distinction is needed between human-nature poetry, human–nature poetry and traditional nature poetry. 'Human nature' poetry, as Keith describes it, considers the impact of nature on the mind, although it may then emphasise the symbolic or transcendent meaning of this experience and offer it as evidence of an immanent deity. It differs from traditional nature poetry in that it ascribes a causative power to non-human nature, and thus manifests an interest in nature in itself as opposed to seeing it as a passive container for human life or as evidence for a pre-established divine order (6-7). Keith's distinction is supported by Wordsworth's imperative in 'The Tables Turned' from *Lyrical Ballads* that we should allow ourselves to be affected by the 'light of things':[12]

> And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
> He, too, is no mean preacher:
> Come forth into the light of things,
> Let Nature be your Teacher.

However, my earlier definition of nature also included the forces that affect human and non-human nature alike. Only certain writers show the variety of ways that man and nature are mutually entangled with each other and with the lifeworld, including with the cycles of life and death, and with the weather, without suggesting that such overlaps demonstrate a divine order or the existence of 'Nature'. What is unique about Thomas and Frost compared with those who

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[12] William Wordsworth [1798] 'The Tables Turned', in *William Wordsworth*, selected by Seamus Heaney (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) 32-33. The poem is reprinted from John O. Hayden's two volume edition of *The Poems* (London: Penguin, 1977).

came before is that, as I will explain, they studied the dynamics of nature without challenging us to find a meaning beyond the immediate or to reject the findings of contemporary science.

If Thomas's poetry of nature focused on the mind, could it address historical circumstances? The ecocritic Terry Gifford emphasises Thomas's social critique and historical sense. In *Green Voices*, Gifford begins by asking whether Edward Thomas's poem 'Women he liked' ('Bob's Lane' in R. George Thomas's 1968 edition) counts as 'nature poetry' or 'green poetry'. For Gifford, nature poetry is descriptive in a limited sense, and while green poetry or ecopoetry may also include a descriptive and reflective element, it must exceed this to include aesthetic innovation (2011: 7, 11). Thus, Keith's human-nature poetry would count for Gifford as ecopoetry, where it is writing that

> can contribute to a shift in sensibility rather than life-style. It can raise questions, often conveying a sense of the complexity of their contexts, which get resolved, even provisionally, in other discourses. (8)

Gifford charts the 'pejorative' status of 'nature poetry' as originating in the poetry of the Georgians which, with exceptions, offered 'merely descriptive', escapist and sentimental versions of the pastoral (27). For Gifford, the simple pastoral is guilty of a sentimentalising and ideologically freighted attitude towards non-human nature (2011: 11). Pastoral, for Gifford, has either been given the pejorative status assigned to it by Raymond Williams, where an idealised version of nature can be used to cover social injustices or, as in more recent ecocriticism, been given too much credit for invoking harmonies that never existed. In *Pastoral: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 1999) Gifford identifies post-pastoral literature as the literature that transcends these difficulties (see Chapter Four). It is

> literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language. (1999: 149)

Thus, in Gifford's view, post-pastoral literature may suggest a feeling of accommodation between man and nature and yet be critical of convention and nostalgia. Whereas Williams considers Thomas as a simple 'pastoral' poet, Gifford suggests an alternative. Both Gifford and Keith describe how Thomas was able to combine observation of external conditions with inner realities:

> The honesty of Thomas's poetry about a changing rural way of life at the turn of the century distinguishes his sensibility from the Georgians' explicit escapism. Thomas's anxieties, doubt and frank bewilderment complicate a poetry that explores several borderlands: the mythic Old England disturbed by the poet's stark experiences of the war; a Welsh family background and London birth giving distance rather than

identification with the myth of 'England' being supposedly defended; a feeling, like Thomas Hardy's, that faith in continuity had been undercut by modernism's scepticism and delight in the fragmentary; a tension between Hardy's belief in realism and modernism's insistence on the symbolic in poetry. (Gifford 1999: 82-83)

As we shall see, Gifford's reading does not require an ecopoet to read a mystical 'earthly text'. To emphasise Thomas's theoretical sophistication, Gifford discusses Edna Longley's and Stan Smith's different interpretations of Thomas's poem 'Women he liked':

> Many years since, Bob Hayward died, and now
> None passes there because the mist and the rain
> Out of the elms have turned the lane to slough
> And gloom, the name alone survives, Bob's Lane.

Gifford believes the poem allows us to choose between Bob's view and the community view, or to make our own judgement:

> If readers share Bob's view of nature, it is clear that the 'slough / And gloom' of the lane do not greatly matter. Great trees have a life there. But the community remembers Bob as having destroyed a pathway, and this is the irony with which Thomas chooses to conclude the poem. The tensions within the poem therefore ask a question about the reader's attitude towards nature which the poem itself does not resolve. Are the trees to be valued more than the lane? (28)

For Longley (in her *Edward Thomas: Poems and Last Poems* from 1973), the poem is a celebration of the countryman's perspective, of his organic relation with the countryside, while for Stan Smith in *Edward Thomas* (1986) the poem asks us to adopt the perspective of the community, and tells us 'Love can destroy that which it wishes to celebrate and enhance' (in Gifford 2011: 28). For Gifford, neither interpretation is quite right, as Thomas, anticipating deconstruction, asked us to apply our own valuation of nature. Thus, Gifford demonstrates that Thomas's thinking anticipates contemporary ecocritical awareness of socially-determined attitudes towards nature.

Gifford identifies a tendency in ecocriticism to require too little social commentary on 'nature poetry' and 'nature writing'; however, he asserts that historical criticism can make too much of social and cultural circumstance over individual subjectivity. He looks for a middle-ground in ecopoetry that includes social commentary and a sense of human–nature interaction. However, he does not test Edward Thomas's ecological credentials any further, to see if his poetry is able to offer a post-pastoral 'vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language' (1999:149).

In *The Song of the Earth* (2001), Jonathan Bate considers the importance of ideas of home to the Romantic poetry of nature, and the ways in which thinking about the nature of home can

suggest more ecologically responsible attitudes to human existence than those offered by modern technology. With reference to Heidegger's 1953 lecture, 'The Question concerning Technology', Bate argues that '"enframing" (*Ge-stell*) is the essence of modern technology' where 'Enframing means making everything part of a system, thus obliterating the unconcealed being of particular things' (255).[13] Drawing on Heidegger's 1951 essay 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' Bate suggests that poetry enables us to overcome this instrumental relationship with the world and is able to 'let being be' (265).[14] In language we are able to conjure 'imaginary ecosystems' (250-251). However, in his understanding of Heidegger's essay, Bate proposes that the language of poetry – beyond its linguistic particulars – reveals a condition of our being, that it 'bethinks us' in a way that allows us to conceive of such fundamental conditions as 'dwelling and alienation in their very essence' (260):

> Heidegger asks us to suppose that the poem is like the peasant farmhouse in the Black Forest: it gathers the fourfold of mortals, gods, earth and heaven into its still site in simple oneness. It orders the house of our lives. By bethinking us, it makes us care for things. It overrides dualism and idealism; it grounds us; it enables us to dwell. In this account, 'earth' is crucially different from 'world': 'world' refers to the historical mode of living, which for modernity means living in an instrumental relationship to the earth. To be attuned to the earth is to live another way, to respect the difference, the 'self-concealing', of entities even as they are 'unconcealed' in poetry. To be so attuned is, for Heidegger, to dwell. (262)

Bate's understanding of ecopoetry explicitly excludes observations on current historical or social circumstances: 'the controlling myth of ecopoetics is a myth of the pre-political, the prehistoric: it is a Rousseauesque story about imagining a state of nature prior to the fall into property, into inequality and into the city' (266). His reading of Thomas's poem 'Home ("Often I had gone")' for instance, posits the poem as a part of a Romantic tradition founded on sentimental awareness of our linguistic separation from nature, which implies that poetry may offer 'a vision of accommodated humans' (in Gifford's language) that is not possible in reality (276). However, by suggesting that poetry is how we learn to dwell and that only the poet is able to 'let beings be', he intimates that it is only the human, and specifically the poet, who can be responsible towards the planet.

Robert Macfarlane is another writer who describes the importance of experiential, as opposed to imaginative, experiences of writing and thinking about home in Thomas's poetry. Macfarlane's *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (2012a) is, unlike the other sources in this critical overview, a travel book about walking miles of footpaths in Britain and overseas, in search of the past, and

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[13] Bate cites 'The Question concerning Technology' [caps as original], in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977, repr. 1993).

[14] Bate refers to Heidegger's essay 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 160.

in the footsteps of other writers, including Edward Thomas. On another level it is a critical treatise on our 'being in the world', about the indivisibility of our mental and physical lives. Macfarlane has drawn on anthropologist Timothy Ingold's writing, and he is cited in the references to the text. In this way, for Macfarlane, walking opens up new paths in the writer's and reader's imagination – as Macfarlane describes it, walking allows us to 'reconnoitre inwards' (xi). Thinking and landscape are intimately related: walking is intellectual and imaginative as much as it is physical; writing and thinking are also physical activities.

While homing in on mainly British walkers and literary inheritances, Macfarlane endeavours to overcome a more Romantic sense of place. He seeks to discover the ways in which an individual can be 'scattered' as well as sustained by place. The 'social' nature of paths is itself perilous, as this origin requires a consensual act of making that is beyond the individual's control. The physical landscape can be perilous, and we can risk our own survival through following paths. Early on in the narrative we are given Macfarlane's view on how we engage with place. Through careful attention, we can understand how 'the land projects into us', and this has implications for the author's individual quest:

> As I envisage it, landscape projects into us not like a jetty or peninsula, finite and bounded in volume and reach, but instead as a kind of sunlight, flickeringly unmappable in its plays yet often quickening and illuminating. (2012a: 27)

Macfarlane highlights how place, as much as space, can be unconceptualisable. While he had set off to develop intimacy with historical walkers, including Thomas, he contends that he finds himself encountering 'new lives'. He considers a special sort of agency when he asks 'what does this land know of me that I cannot know of myself?' (27).

Throughout *The Old Ways*, Macfarlane talks of the entanglements that constitute our experience of the landscape. For example, drawing on Adam Nicolson's *Sea Room: An Island Life* from 2001, the Shiant Islands in the Outer Hebrides are:

> [a] 'web of connections': the seaways leading, like [Edward] Thomas's land paths, 'from everywhere to everywhere', joining deep ocean to coastal shelf to estuary to river to back country. I also recognise [Nicolson's] account of having been chronically 'shaped' by his 'island times' on the Shiants. 'The place has entered me', he wrote adoringly, 'it has coloured my life like a stain.' (111)

While walking reveals a special sense in which we are affected by the currents of the environment, Macfarlane writes that a human being is always 'marked' by its environment. His book serves as a way marker to this alternative conception of our being and an alternative reading of Thomas's poetry. He describes Thomas's concern for the unconceptualisable

'present-tenseness of nature': 'the chink of a blackbird in a hedge, the cool of starlight, the feel of a feather's vanes between the fingers' (325).

Here and similarly in his article for the *Literary Review*, Macfarlane considers Thomas's relationship to the idea of home, as demonstrated by his poems about trees, birds, forests and paths. Unlike Bate, Macfarlane believes that home as 'dwelling' is impossible for Thomas:

> Thomas sensed early that one of modernity's most distinctive tensions would be between mobility and displacement on the one hand, and dwelling and belonging on the other – with the former becoming ubiquitous and the latter becoming lost (if ever it had been possible) and reconfigured as nostalgia. He experienced that tension between roaming and homing even as it was first forming. (323)

This path towards an Ingoldian reading of Thomas (and Frost) is continued throughout this work. Macfarlane's idea of place as a 'web of connections' provides one sense in which we may consider Thomas's writing to be proto-ecological.

Thomas's critics are divided as to which national traditions he belongs to, and whether or not he is able to respond to a 'modern sensibility'. More recently, critics have begun to explore whether Thomas's poetry reveals ecocentric attitudes, and this is a question that I explore throughout this thesis. In turn, I will propose that Thomas's literary ecocentrism depends on his ability to transcend nationalistic thinking, and his ability to innovate with traditional poetic forms.

Edward Thomas's poetry has been posited as ecopoetry: because it asks us to question our anthropocentrism, and because it reveals awareness of how culture can contribute to a feeling of alienation from our earthly home. His many references to untranslatable birdsong have been taken as emblematic, suggesting one of three things; a permanent alienation from an 'earthly text' alongside a sentimental pastoral and literary 'dwelling' (Bate); his ecological connection with a uniquely British landscape that was only disrupted by the war (suggested at times by Longley); or his departure from the pastoral tradition due to the scale of modern disruptions in our relations with non-human nature (Macfarlane). On the contrary, I argue that Thomas's poetry of birdsong suggests a post-pastoral temporary accommodation with non-human nature, in spite of challenges posed by urbanisation, with a potential for renewed feelings of 'harmony' with the landscape.

In future chapters, I consider what Thomas's poems on 'home' suggest about his vision of 'accommodated humans', and whether Heidegger's formulation of dwelling is helpful to our understanding of this. While critics are divided about whether Thomas's interest in home

reveals an overt form of English nationalism or transnational allegiances, I explore this in the context of Thomas's poetic place-explorations and alongside his friendship with the American poet Robert Frost.

Critical reception: Robert Frost

As we have seen, Edna Longley positions Frost and Thomas within a 'parochial cosmos', which leads her to attribute a nationalistic vision of 'nature' and 'place' to Thomas. Frost's own commentaries on his development, however, encouraged critics to see his poetry as symbolic of regional and national ideology. A more nuanced understanding of his early poetry reveals his ambivalent relationships to the places he wrote about. The first American ecocritical exploration of his work, by Robert Bernard Hass, highlights Frost's indebtedness to European philosophy, and illuminates Frost's interest in accurately rendering sense perception, rather than idealising 'nation' and 'region'. Other critical debates encompass aspects of Frost's technique and subject matter, in ways that inform my own ecocritical analysis. If we bear in mind Frost's self-generated portrayal in his biographies, we can begin to understand the neglected aspects of his learning and indebtedness to both European and American thought. Further, we can link criticism of Frost's 'morals' to questions of ethics in ecopoetry.

A review of Frost's criticism must try to understand why he is considered a 'national sage' (Faggen 2008: 166). In the first critical responses to Frost's poetry, he is seen as a 'simple' poet of rural themes, and as an original writer who innovated with the rhythms of speech. For instance, F.S. Flint declared in *Poetry and Drama* on 13 June 1913 that 'It is this simplicity which is the great charm of the book [*A Boy's Will*]'. The most influential Imagist poet, Ezra Pound, asserted of *North of Boston* that 'Mr Frost has dared to write for the most part with success, in the natural speech of New England'. Calling Frost's poetry 'simple' was initially a term of praise, as it meant it did not resemble a stereotypically ornate Victorian poetry, 'the circumplectious polysyllable' as Pound put it (in Faggen 2008: 163).[15] Another prominent Imagist, Amy Lowell, reviewed *North of Boston* in 1914 for *The New Republic*, applauding the book's 'vividness', and implying that it possessed the directness aspired to by the modernists (in Faggen 2008: 164).[16]

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[15] Flint reviewed *A Boy's Will* in *Poetry and Drama* (13 June 1913) 250; Lowell reviewed *North of Boston* in *The New Republic* (2 Feb 1915) 81–82; Pound reviewed both *North of Boston* and *A Boy's Will* in *Poetry* 2 May 1913 (72–74). See Faggen 2008, 163-64.

[16] Edward Thomas praised Frost's work in three reviews for the British press. Significantly, Edward Garnett championed *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston* in the American publication *The Atlantic* in August 1915 (see Thompson 1970: 38-29).

Both Lowell and Pound also remarked on the prominence of New England life in *North of Boston,* 'putting New England rural life into verse' (Pound in Faggen 2008: 163). Lowell relished the darker side of the collection, where the 'modern New England town [...] is painted in all its ugliness' (in Faggen 2008: 164). Curiously, Pound suggested that rural New England life was prominent in the location-less *A Boy's Will*.

Frost's apparent simplicity and focus on rural life were denigrated by later critics who, from the 1930s, sought in him a degree of formal and political radicalness, and a more apparent interest in scientific progress, despite his continued popular success. In 1930, the poetry was criticised by Granville Hicks in *The New Republic* for its lack of 'the sense of belonging in the industrial, scientific, Freudian world in which we find ourselves' (in Faggen 2008: 165). Also in *The New Republic*, Malcolm Cowley asserted in 1944 that Frost's supporters admired him because they 'demand [...] that American writing be affirmative, optimistic, and, not too critical' (in Faggen 2008: 166). Yvor Winters' famous 1948 essay, 'Robert Frost, Or, the spiritual drifter as poet' criticised Frost's works from *Mountain Interval* ('The Sound of the Trees', 'The Road Not Taken' and 'The Hill Wife') for not offering a conclusive moral. He contended that Frost was a neo-Emersonian 'spiritual drifter' (without Emerson's religious conviction):

> He is an Emersonian who has become sceptical and uncertain without having reformed; and the scepticism and uncertainty do not appear to have been so much the result of thought as the result of the impact upon his sensibility of conflicting notions of his own era – they appear to be the result of his having taken the easy way and having drifted with the various currents of his own time. (Winters 1948: 567-68)

He criticised Frost's trust of instinct over reason in poems such as 'The Bear' and 'To a Thinker'. Further, he lamented the poet's employment of conversational phrases for their lack of precision (566). Yet since the 1950s a number of influential critics came to Frost's defence, finding greater theoretical and thematic complexity in his poetry. Of these, most notable were John Lynen and the later commentators on Frost's pastoralism, Reuben Brower, Randall Jarrell, Richard Poirier and Frank Lentricchia.

In Lynen's *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost* (1960), the author provided the first 'New Critical' extended close readings of Frost's poetry. For him, Frost's best poems were pastoral, and they were those where New England is a mythical realm or arcadia in which the wise shepherd bard may be heard. In these poems, Frost created a fictional realm that offered a perspective from which the poet could deliver insights. Lynen placed Frost's pastoral poetry in the category of idylls or eclogues, rather than georgics. The values found in these works were rendered equally true for town and countryside, since we are not confronted with a real countryside but with a mythical 'essence' of New England. Lynen's symbolic reading of Frost

found greater complexity in the poetry than earlier critics had, but rested on an organicist reading of Frost's New England. With reference to 'The Pasture', the poem Frost chose as the preface to his *Complete Poems,* Lynen asserted:

> It is important to note that the poem is an invitation: the poet invites someone, perhaps a person he loves, perhaps just a friend, to come with him and see the glimpses of delicate beauty to be found in the pasture. The implication is that the person invited knows little of such things. More important, he will have to be initiated into the special way of looking at them which makes them precious and meaningful. The leaves floating in the pasture spring, the little calf, so young it totters when its mother licks it, have the simplicity and innocence of pristine reality, and the poem implies that the average person is like the person invited. (1960: 22)

Leo Marx, a leading theorist of American pastoral, supported Lynen's symbolic reading of Frost's landscapes in *The Machine in the Garden* (first published in 1964; edition used 2000). However, he emphasised the limits to Frost's pastoral escape in terms of the employment of a spatially-defined precarious 'middle ground' between a community and wilderness, from which the poet-speaker must return and which may still be impinged upon by modern industrial society (2000: 258). He considered that in Frost's negotiation of 'natural facts' within the pastoral mode, the poet found meanings that provided psychological or metaphysical consolation. These consolations included recognition of the less-than-pristine state of contemporary nature, and yet the 'middle ground' remained idealised. Marx also highlighted the parallel between Frost's creative process and the pastoral trope of movement and return. Drawing on Frost's essay 'The Figure a Poem Makes' (CPPP: 776), Marx argued that Frost's creative work was 'a similar reaching out for gratification, a similar arrest of the centrifugal motion, checked in this case by the requirements of form, and then a denouement comparable to the hero's return' (260).

Marx's qualification of Frost's pastoral 'retreat' is further explored in John Kemp's *Robert Frost and New England: The Poet as Regionalist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979). Kemp's contribution to Frost scholarship is to re-appraise Frost's attitudes towards the places and environments he wrote about in the early collections, and to question the poet-speakers' placement as idealised observers. He challenges the notion that Frost's speaker plays the rural bard in *North of Boston*. With reference to 'The Pasture', Kemp asserts that while relying on the pastoral trope of retreat and return in this poem, 'Frost's speaker is a less convincing "swain" than Lynen would have us believe' (1979: 105). Further, the pastoral world is less idyllic than in Marx's account. It presents observations on real rural life:

> Rather than inviting us into a pastoral world, he asks us to share his exploration—a much more uncertain and ambiguous experience. 'The Pasture' does not promise, nor does *North of Boston* provide, the moral lessons and didactic social commentary of conventional regional literature. It would be a mistake to expect that the stone walls and woodpiles, the farms and mountains, the hired men and farm people will be interpreted or explained to us. We must go, as Frost's speaker goes, to observe and reflect on rural New England. (Kemp 1979: 108)

In *Pastoral, Pragmatism, and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* Anne Marie Mikkelsen also disagrees with the idyllic and traditionally moralistic dimensions of Marx's and Lynen's readings of Frost's early pastoral, and finds room for social commentary on modern life. She considers Marx's model too complacent towards the negative social changes brought about by industrialisation to adequately reflect the writing of the early 20th century. She believes that Frost – alongside Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams and John Ashbery – offered a 'pragmatic pastoral' which appraised changes to the nature of work after industrialisation (2011: 3). Rather than simply addressing his own circumstances in the industrial world, she believes Frost suggested how the poet can speak on behalf of less privileged speakers.

> Since Virgil's *Eclogues*, pastoral has foregrounded the economic and ethical situation of the poet and artist, questioning his ability to comprehend and sing of situations other than his own […] Addressing several major twentieth-century American poets […] I argue that despite discrepancies among their poetic practices, politics and regional affiliations, these poets resorted to the pastoral mode in order to question their roles in a democratic, yet still unequal, society. (Mikkelsen 2011: 5-6)

In what follows I consider how Frost's and Thomas's innovations on the pastoral mode offered social and environmental critiques. This challenges an ecocritical orthodoxy (undermined already by Gifford) that considers 'dwelling', rather than engaging with contemporary life, as the most ecological way that a poet-speaker can relate to place. If Thomas and Frost were interested in 'rootedness' or dwelling at all, they were equally interested in the forms of errantry they observed in their human and non-human neighbours, travelling salesmen, soldiers, birds, wild flowers, labourers, poets, tramps and the infirm, and how these wanderers' lives related to environmental and social conditions.

A further understanding of Frost's pastoralism can be gained by considering his interest in contemporary science. Counter to Winters' critique, in *Poetry and the Age* Randell Jarrell emphasised Frost's poetic intelligence as well as the psychological depth and tragic vision in Frost's poetry in his famous essays 'The Other Frost' and 'To the *Laodiceans'* (Jarrell 1953). Lentricchia, Poirier and Robert Bernard Hass argued that Frost's aesthetics were influenced by awareness of the latest developments in psychology, as well as offering a qualified continuation

of the Transcendentalist tradition. Robert Bernard Hass's arguments in *Going By Contraries: Robert Frost's Conflict with Science* (2002) – which offer the first ecocritical reading of Frost and are considered further in Chapter One – show Frost's poetic engagement with industrialisation and evolutionary science. These critics noted what Frost called in 'The Constant Symbol' his 'ulteriority' – 'saying one thing and meaning another', the messages hidden in his verse 'so the wrong ones can't find it' ('Directive').[17] This ulteriority includes hints at Frost's exposure to the French philosopher Henri Bergson. As we will see, critics since Lynen have highlighted Frost's interest in making the complexities of human experience available in the language of everyday speech. These critics vary as to whether they suppose Frost to be a poet of modern 'disintegration' or a continuator (nuanced or otherwise) of Romantic attitudes.

Reuben Brower, in *The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention* (1963), considered the relationships between Frost, Wordsworth and the Transcendentalists. He traced the origin of Frost's lyric voice to Wordsworth's and Emerson's contemplation of the objects of nature, quoting from Emerson's 1836 essay 'Nature', 'of essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf' (39). However, while Wordsworth and Emerson aspired to convey the impact of these objects on the human observer in simple language, only Frost succeeded in managing the 'double consciousness', of what is seen and its imaginative impact. Only Frost achieved a clarity of expression, through both Emersonian 'ancient speech' and in 'common things and feelings' (65). Brower asserted that Frost learned from Thoreau to pay 'attention to the object and to sensation' (72). However, it was Frost's version of poetic speech which provided him with a variety of ordinariness which allowed him to combine visionary and social modes of relating to the natural world (81-84).

In doing so, according to Brower, Frost followed Emerson's belief that moral truth must be tested in action – even if this was 'the making of a dream-truth' such as in 'Mowing': 'the earnest love that laid the swale in rows' (85). For both Emerson and Frost, this act consisted in the act of reverence and love for the common thing, which renewed man's social sense. However, for Frost, the moral truth was one that was 'the fruit of action *in* the moment' rather than a transcendental metaphysic (85). For Brower, this showed Frost's alignment with the epistemology of the pragmatists, William James and Charles Sanders Peirce (85; see also Mikkelsen, above).

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[17] The Constant Symbol', CPPP (786-91). First published in *Atlantic Monthly* (October 1946).

In *The Poetry of Nature* W.J. Keith (1981) suggests that Frost's influence by earlier 'nature poetry' did not prevent him from having a human foreground. Keith argues that Frost's poems with natural subjects effortlessly presented a natural object, which was both humanised and employed as a 'synecdoche' for a larger natural process, while remaining 'faithful to the mood that the poem conveys' (1981: 126). Robert Frost is situated both as intrinsically American, and as influenced by the English tradition of Wordsworth and Hardy, which is shown by his use of ordinary speech and by his employment of the traditional forms of nature poetry. Keith argues that in Frost's 'human nature poems', such as 'The Mountain', 'we find human beings defined and characterised by their responses to the natural world, or using examples from the natural world to illustrate the terms of worth of their own humanity' (131). In 'The Mountain', the poem approaches its subject by raising questions about the natural objects encountered: '[t]he poet insists on an active reader by bringing before him fragmentary incidents, occurring as they might in real life, and inviting him to puzzle out their significance' (133).

Frost 'activated' his reader through complications of the voice or voices of the poem and the poet. Since Frost avoided Wordsworthian didacticism in his early poems, we are encouraged to see ourselves in the various characters that encompass multiple points of view on a subject (137). Keith argues that, while meaning can be found in human encounters with nature, we need not assume that Frost had a single philosophical approach to the natural world. This means that Frost's 'inestimable value lies rather in his insistence that a more positive response to the problems facing twentieth-century man is possible without underestimating the magnitude of that challenge' (138).

In *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing,* Richard Poirier (first published in 1977; edition used here 1990), like Brower, linked Frost's inheritances from William James and Thoreau to the theoretical complexity of his poetry. Following Frost's Dartmouth College Address of 1962, 'On Extravagance: A Talk' Poirier described Frost's quest to find meaning in everyday experience, which linked Frost to the fleeting pragmatic truths of William James's philosophy (see Chapter One).[18] In particular, Poirier identified the importance to Frost of both accommodation to form in nature and in poetry, and the need to move beyond form, to be 'extra-vagant' as Thoreau had:

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[18] Robert Frost, 'On Extravagance: A Talk', CPPP: 902-26. This text is based on Frost's Dartmouth College Address on 27 November 1962. The editors Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson used material from Dartmouth College Library as it was collected in *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost: A New Critical Edition,* ed. by Mark Richardson (New Brunswick: Rutgers University doctoral dissertation, 1993) 328-49.

His poetry is a perpetual debate between, on the one side, the inherent necessity for form in language and in nature, which requires a dialogue of accommodation, and, on the other, the equally inherent human need for excursion beyond form (to note how often in Frost the human actions are equivalent to poetic practice) for taking a walk beyond the confines of home. (23)

In Thoreau's conclusion to *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* extra-vagance was also a self-affirmed formal and thematic device: to move beyond the physical limits of everyday experience, and to find an expression suitable to convey this altered consciousness (1854: 347). Poirier explained that Frost moved beyond Thoreau to show how one's will could accommodate itself to forms or bounds or seek to overcome them. For example, Frost was able to restrict his vocabulary to reach a general audience; and he attempted to overstep the bounds of decorum to provide enlightenment (Poirier 1990: 91).

In this thesis, I seek to explore the multiple ways in which Frost experimented with verse form to enable him to convey what he saw as contrary impulses, towards finding, maintaining or building a home and towards extra-vagance. This expands on Poirier's idea that 'Frost was yarded [or constrained] also by his ideas of the desirability of form, of metaphor, insofar as it tames "enthusiasm," and of sound, whereby constraints of metre and of voice work upon one another' (89). In Chapter Two, I consider how 'extra-vagance' was also a theme in Frost's poetry that circumscribed his writing about home. I suggest that this also proves a fruitful starting point to consider thematic and formal dimensions of Edward Thomas's poetry of nature and place. Thus, rather than suggesting that their poetry had its roots in a fixed national place, Thomas and Frost's encounters with non-human nature were extra-vagant. They innovated with poetic form to convey the dynamic interplay between impulses to find 'home' and to 'extra-vagance'.

Richard Poirier suggested that, for Frost, we must impose limits on nature for the sake of conceptual understanding. However, as we will see in future chapters, Frost's understanding of these barriers highlighted their artificiality and porosity. Frank Lentricchia and Robert Bernard Hass introduce the second aspect of Frost's understandings of nature, as a dynamic impulse within both the mind and the object perceived which can serve as the basis of poetic creativity. In doing so, they both explore Frost's critical thinking, and offer a more comprehensive approach to nature.

As well as showing the variety of critical reactions to Frost's poetry, I have attempted to show the ideas of those theorists who demonstrate the importance of non-human nature to Frost's poetry and his development beyond Romantic aesthetics. I have introduced critical differences as to whether Frost's nature poetry was primarily concerned with symbolic

meanings, or whether it explored the social and ecological dynamics of particular places and their impact on the human mind. I explored the various pastoral readings of Frost's poetry, a topic that is considered further in Chapter Four. Further, I have noted that critics differ as to whether they attribute a unified nature philosophy to Frost's work.

Theoretical approaches

I believe that the contemporaneous poetry of Edward Thomas and Robert Frost offers an insightful portrait of our relations with the natural world at a particular point in history. Their visions illuminate – in a comparable way – the function of nature in constituting and sustaining culture and human identity. Thomas's and Frost's poetry illustrates how environmentally-focused literary criticism should be conducted. The novel approach of this thesis is to draw on a theoretical approach that the poets themselves hint at in their writing and reading, rather than on a popular ecocritical aesthetics that draws on the phenomenologists Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger (see, for example, Bate 2001; Westling 1993). As we shall see in the following chapters, Frost and Thomas offered insights into the dynamics of nature and place that are borne out by the novel perspectives of Bergson and Bergson-inspired theorists.

I find that ecocriticism provides the best tools with which to consider the importance of non-human nature to literary texts. Beginning in earnest in the 1990s, ecocriticism identifies a persistent over-emphasis on the human dimensions of a text (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996). Its adherents suggest that we should instead understand cultural artefacts as produced in relation to nature. In doing so, ecocriticism links literary production to broader philosophical movements that emphasise the importance of non-human nature, and to historical concern with the scale of human impact on the planet. This need not exclude other concerns, such as human social inequalities.

In Thomas's and Frost's poetry, the individual's relation to external nature is not merely escapist, restorative or incidental. The relation to external nature is constitutive of a subject's identity, both mental and physical, through time. I take this ontological questioning – where they sought to understand themselves in terms of their connections with human and non-human nature – as central to their poetry. Phenomenology offers tools to analyse this proposition.

A phenomenologically-inflected ecocriticism, such as Jonathan Bate's consideration of Romanticism and its aftermath in *The Song of the Earth*, considers literary presentations of nature via their impacts on the mind and sensing body. While this provides a helpful starting point to approach subjective experiences of nature expressed in Thomas and Frost's lyric poetry, it does not adequately illuminate how literature serves as both an instigator and a

recipient of effects beyond the textual realm. However, it will remain part of my intention to consider how the phenomenological moment informs, and is informed by, other areas of our lives, such as our ethics and political ideology.

In terms of the ideological and cultural connotations of nature and place, the comparativist perspective in considering Thomas and Frost's acquaintance provides insight into national ideologies and the transference of ideas beyond nations. This fulfils a shortfall in current ecocriticism, which tends to follow the literary output of particular nations. It is also helpful vis-à-vis Thomas and Frost, who have been relegated to portraying the 'essential' properties of their home nations. By showing the overlaps in their thinking about nature and place, I highlight how sensitive both Thomas and Frost were to the transient, ecological features of the environment.

While seeking awareness of the impact of literature on the 'external' world as well as the human mind, my methodology also aims to avoid the reduction of a text to a set of historical circumstances or an ideology. In this way, I hope to find an ecocritical equivalent of philosophical pragmatism as proposed by William James. Pragmatism suggests a balance between acknowledging both the reality of material existence and the relative autonomy of the mental realm. In my understanding of pragmatism, the experience of art allows us to challenge our assumptions about our material needs, and may even alter our ideologies.

As suggested by the above, my route into this reading has been through considering the philosophy that is contemporary to the poets' writing, particularly that which moves beyond a Cartesian dualism, and illuminates the relation between self and natural world. Thomas and Frost were both widely read in the intellectual culture of their time, with Frost going so far as to teach Jamesian pragmatism to new teachers. Frost taught *Psychology: Briefer Course* and *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* at New Hampshire State Normal School between 1911 and 1912 (CPPP: 938) and Thomas both reviewed the latest works in literature, history and art theory, and underwent an early form of psychoanalysis. I find that this historical context illuminates both the lyric poems that consider the poets' experiences of the natural world, and the narrative poems, which prove more philosophically suggestive than has hitherto been recognised. In later chapters, I draw on recent theorists – most frequently Doreen Massey and Timothy Ingold – who have developed approaches to geography that follow the Bergsonian-line of process philosophy. I compare their insights with the poetic output of Thomas and Frost.

While this thesis does not seek to intervene in the history of philosophy (to analyse, for instance, the relationships between process philosophy and phenomenology), nor provide a comprehensive account of Bergsonian or Jamesian philosophy, it suggests alternatives to purely materialist or idealist philosophy as a basis for ecocriticism. Both my readings of the poems and methodological background will include forays into the philosophy. Rather than claiming that a unified philosophical theory is the source of either of their works, I will search for suggestive ideas that will have been within the reach of the poets' own readings. While I believe it would be a mistake to search for a direct causal role between the philosophy and poetry (which is in any case difficult to prove), I believe the writings of Bergson and William James contribute to broad cultural factors that influenced Thomas and Frost's poetic output. Further, this interest allows me to make important comparisons between Thomas's and Frost's poetry, and to compare and contrast their output with that of their contemporaries. Most importantly, it provides for interesting readings of the poetry that suggest how we ourselves might reconstruct our relationship with the natural world through poetry.

Within the analytical tradition in philosophy, a philosophical treatment of the emotions has been particularly elusive, especially in providing an account of how emotional states combine with cognitive states to address the external world. Lyric poetry can help to remedy this. Edward Thomas, in particular, offered an illuminating account of his own emotional states and their relations to his thought processes. Robert Frost's reading of William James fuelled his sensitivity to the challenges of conveying our emotional states, encouraging him to emphasise the role of sentence sounds in combination with everyday language.

Given my interest in the relationship between nature and the texts, I focus on Thomas's and Frost's recording of their engagements with non-human nature. As I have begun to explain, the title of this project, 'What to make of a diminished thing' (from Frost's poem 'The Oven Bird'), addresses the changed circumstances of man's relationship with nature, following urbanisation and industrialisation, and the Darwinian undermining of a harmonious nature that is the source of spiritual solace. While the circumstances of humanity's relationship with nature had altered, Frost affirmed that it is through non-human nature that we can rediscover our creativity: it is through experiencing the song of the bird that we are aware that 'the solid tree trunks sound again'. Similarly, the poetic song restores and reanimates our perceptions of non-human nature.

For Jonathan Bate, it is only literature that describes the experience 'of feeling at home, being gathered into oneness with the surrounding environment' which merits the name 'ecopoetry' (Bate 2001: 281). It is the successful 'attempt to transform into language an

experience of dwelling on the earth' that makes an ecopoem (199-200). In his somewhat confusing account, Bate suggests that the symbolic and formal properties of language are both able to convey this experience of dwelling – either through conjuring an 'abstract, disembodied zone of possibility' (251) or through the metrical properties of poetry which can evoke the sounds of nature as a 'quiet but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat' (75-76). While I disagree with the idea that language can convey an 'essential' dimension of experience, and find aspects of dwelling (with its emphasis on permanence) problematic, I share Bate's interest in what it is to be 'at home' in nature and the potential for poetic rhythm to communicate this. Bate leaves the idea based on rhythm unexplored.

Finally, this thesis focuses on events between 1912 and 1917. This period encompasses Frost's English stay and the time he was in contact with Edward Thomas. Many of the poems in Frost's first collection, *A Boy's Will*, were written before 1912, and Thomas's theorising about poetry also dates back to the beginning of the 20th century – these writings will also inform this thesis. However, I have sought to deal with an identifiable period to develop an understanding of the mutual implications of nature, home and place for the two poets' writings.

In the following chapter, I explore Thomas's and Frost's friendship between 1912 and 1917, and propose that the association and shared interests provided Thomas with an aesthetic and theme that enabled the English writer's transition to poetry. Finding a reading of Frost that emphasises links between his thematic interest in 'home' and 'extra-vagance' and his aesthetic innovations, I propose to investigate an ecopoetic model for Thomas and Frost that suggests their complex interdependence with particular places. Frost's reading in psychology provided Thomas with a model of how to consider the movements of consciousness as it responded to a particular set of circumstances. Moving beyond simple pastoral or a sentimental poetry of 'dwelling', I propose that Edward Thomas and Robert Frost transcended their Romantic inheritances and moved towards ecopoetry. These ideas are elicited further in what follows.

CHAPTER ONE – NATURE, POETRY AND PLACE

> 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.
>
> (from 'Old Man', Edward Thomas)

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a more in-depth overview of the themes identified in my introduction that relate to the central interests of this thesis: nation and region, and nature and the countryside. I will consider the poets' literary innovations and affiliations in the context of their biographies; Thomas's identification of the relationship between nature and literature, and Frost's understandings of 'nature poetry' and nature itself.

In terms of 'national' and 'regional' affiliations, my contention is that Thomas was both attempting to record particular places that he considered threatened by suburbanisation – the traditions and culture that he witnessed changing during his explorations in southern and western England – and hoping that his poetry of home would serve as a bequest for a renewed relationship between man and nature beyond the present. As already suggested, he opposed conventional understandings of 'Englishness'. Frost's regionalism was that of an outsider commenting on regional values, and he showed an awareness of the dynamics of particular places. Like Thomas, he combined observation on historical conditions in a dissenting spirit while proposing a renewed sense of place as home.

I then explore both poets' experiences of the countryside, and the literary inheritance of rural literature, expanding on my earlier hypothesis that the two poets offer poetry of the ideas of home and extra-vagance. I present the biographical circumstances that suggest why they focused on the evanescence of home, and introduce their discussions of the importance of non-human nature to their writing. At this stage, for both poets, home was the name of an idea that had different meanings depending on its usage. It was, at different times, the name for physical places, for a social realm, for feelings of comfort and harmony, and for a metaphysical condition that could be examined for its implications for our relationships to landscape, nation and place. Edward Thomas, in particular, was aware that his personal understanding of the word 'home' differed from consensual understandings, and that social meanings could change through time.

For both poets, extra-vagance was the impulse, both temporary and existential, that sought to undermine the possibility of a fixed physical home. Following the writer Édouard Glissant I suggest that their understanding of this tension resulted in their search for a kind of rooted errantry in Gloucestershire (see Chapter Two, below).

In the Introduction, I suggested that Frost's aesthetic theorising occurred in the context of his discussions with the Imagists and his shared interest with Edward Thomas in ideas of home and movement. Here, I explore in further detail Frost's idea of sentence sounds in the context of the intellectual climate of London between 1912 and 1917. I link this discussion of aesthetics to their understandings of nature.

Between 1912 and 1917 both poets changed their attitudes to place, region and nation. Frost declared in 1912 that there was no role for attachment to place in his poetry– he later considered that the nation was the root of all art; Edward Thomas proclaimed himself a 'conscious Englishman' after previously declaring love for Wales. However, Thomas's attitudes to 'England' were never those of a conventional patriot. In his prose writing, and also in his poetry, his confused English identity contrasted with a counter-hegemonic idea of home. As we shall see, Robert Frost found himself emerging as a poet in a nation that valued New England literature as a source of national values that were being disrupted by urbanisation and industrialisation. In his early poetry, however, Frost provided evidence that New England was also affected by suburbanisation.

As I previously discussed, Edna Longley links the motivation behind Thomas's enlistment to his impulse to write poetry. She connects Thomas's continuation of form and themes with Romantic poetry to the supposed threats of literal and literary (international) modernism. I argued her definition of modernism equates the movement with High Modernism rather than the Imagism that was contemporary with Thomas's verse writing. Further, I argued that considering the ideas of Imagism apart from questions of national affiliation will help us to understand Thomas's and Frost's poetry.

In *British Country Life in Summer and Spring*, Edward Thomas considered the role that literature could have in developing awareness of other species, and in doing so consented to Matthew Arnold's definition in his essay 'Maurice de Guérin' (1862-3); that literature could 'awaken in us a wonderfully full, new and intimate sense of them, and our relations with them' (1907: v).[19] Such poetry or prose was not so much descriptive as, in Arnold's words,

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[19] Matthew Arnold, 'Maurice de Guérin', in *Lectures and Essays in Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960) 12-39. Thomas does not provide a full reference to Arnold.

'interpretative'. In *The Country* (1913b), he considered the relationship between literature and the countryside through time. While, Thomas argued, earlier ages had less need to renew their intimacy with nature through literature, many contemporary authors wrote about the countryside as an escape from the pressures of life, a view that anticipated Terry Gifford's idea of the 'sentimental pastoral' (1999: 10). Only certain modern writers had an interest in the countryside in itself and could feel at the loss of one species, as Georgian poet Ralph Hodgson did, 'a sorrow both for the loss of beauty and for a wound given to an ancient order which passes man's understanding' (Thomas 1913b: 39). In this same, proto-ecocritical text, Edward Thomas showed an awareness of the cultural construction of ideas about the countryside, and throughout his prose, Thomas asserted the need to extend our cultural awareness towards the commonwealth of all life (see above).

Robert Frost did not consider himself a nature poet; he thought that this form precluded an interest in the human subject. However, landscape and the non-human figure throughout his early poetry. He suggested two alternative ideas of our relationships to non-human nature: in one we experience nature as harsh and indifferent to our concerns, which encourages the imposition of a stabilising form to mediate our experience. In the other, we have an intuitive affinity with nature and share its underlying principle, although this experience is unconceptualisable.

In my introduction, I described those critics who traced a link between Frost's aesthetic innovations and his readings of William James (and other Pragmatists). In this chapter, I describe how Robert Bernard Hass and Frank Lentricchia understand Frost's development beyond Kantian aesthetics. In William James both critics find a source for Frost's idea that poetry can offer pragmatic tools for the subject – such as stabilising forms to shape the chaos of nature. Moving deeper into the poetry suggests awareness of human affinity with the principle underlying non-human nature. Hass traces Frost's interest in a poetry of 'surfaces and depths' to Frost's reading of Henri Bergson's process philosophy.

Finally, I reflect on the theoretical approaches of this thesis, which combine phenomenology with historically-informed ecocriticism. The subsequent readings are those that the poets themselves steer us towards. Considering the philosophical inheritances of the authors provides greater awareness of the formal and thematic dimensions of their poetry, and provides new insights into contemporary debates around 'nature' and 'place'.

Nation and region: Robert Frost

Between 1912 and 1917 both Edward Thomas and Robert Frost change their avowed attitudes to their homes. During his visit to England in 1912 Frost told the American editor Susan Hayes Ward that 'location' had no role in his poetry. He wrote from his temporary Beaconsfield home:

> To London town what is it but a run? Indeed when I leave writing this and go to the front yard for a last look at earth and sky before I go to sleep, I shall be able to see the not very distinct lights of London flaring like a dreary dawn. If there is any virtue in Location – but I don't think that there is. I know where the poetry must come from if it comes. (Kemp 1979: 87)

This provides an insight into how Frost thought of 'region' while he was preparing *A Boy's Will*. In *Robert Frost and New England: The Poet as Regionalist* (1979), John Kemp argued that Frost's regional credentials emerged retrospectively in his account of his own poetry as a way of distinguishing himself from the academic and intellectual stances of European modernism. In a study of Frost's poetry based on Thompson's dating of individual poems in *The Early Years* (because later compilations of these poems obscure this) Kemp showed that Frost's early poems revealed an 'outsider's' perspective on regional values. The poet initially portrayed himself as a romantic adventurer seeking escape from society in *A Boy's Will,* and then as an intermediary between the reader and others struggling with regional values in *North of Boston* (Kemp 1979: 108). As Frost developed relations with critics from 1913, he portrayed *A Boy's Will* as a 'farm product', despite the fact that he was seldom actively engaged in farming during its production (Kemp 1979: 95).

Frost articulated the idea 'that he was disinherited [...] reduced to poverty' and suggested that he had been forced to farm for survival while at Derry (Kemp 1979: 97). However, instead of 'expressing their personal vision of a particular region, [the poems in *A Boy's Will*] evoke the generally familiar landscape of traditional nature poetry' (Kemp 1979: 70). Only in *New Hampshire* did Frost exemplify the values of his region. At this point Frost's regional identity responded to the national mood.

Joseph A. Conforti argues in *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (2001) that Frost's collections after *North of Boston* contributed to a broader cultural movement. This movement positioned New England – particularly Northern New England, away from the industrial south – as a repository of national values, and that Frost simultaneously became less critical of New England life. He

observes that '*Mountain Interval* is something of a conversion narrative – the poetic testimony of a newborn Yankee' (Conforti 2001: 278).[20]

This thesis addresses the period in which Frost transformed himself from a Romantic poet with no regional affiliation to one who became a New England sage. Conforti notes how Frost eased into his Yankee role upon returning from England, to 'deep hill' country in Franconia (2001: 277). Frost declared in later letter to Susan Hayes Ward 'I never knew how much of a Yankee I was until I had been out of New Hampshire a few months' (Conforti 2001: 271). From this point on,

> Frost's new personal and creative identification with Northern New England coincided with the emergence of the hill country as the imagined rural heartland. Frost eliminated Lawrence from his poetic representation of New England and downplayed his urban background, cultivating a narrative of rustic origins and identity. The poet-performer reassured audiences that the real New England continued to exist and that it could be located North of Boston – and north of Lawrence, too. He became the voice of a sometimes hidebound land of steady habits – a vital Yankee culture that seemed far more than a quaint relic in a region that was increasingly becoming Lawrence writ large.
>   (Conforti 2001: 272-73)

Whether or not Frost was self-conscious about choosing a rural life, there were biographical precursors of his involvement with the countryside. The period in England provided a time for Frost to learn from Edward Thomas the importance of attachment to particular local places. Frost would have been exposed to geolibertarian values by his father's friendship with Henry George (Thompson 1967: 12-13). He was introduced to the nature philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau by his mother (Thompson 1967: 70).

However, Frost's national affiliations became more essential as his poetry developed. Frost was increasingly concerned with American difference. In 'A Romantic Chasm' (1948), the English foreword to his *Collected Poetry*, he praised the important differences between American and British language since 'the fun only begins with the spirited when you take the word as a point of many departures' (CPPP: 802).[21] In his poem 'Does No One At All Ever Feel This Way in the Least?'(from *In the Clearing* in 1962) he asserted his wish for a renewed America:

O ocean sea for all your being vast,

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[20] Conforti laments that 'not a single critic has related Frost's emergence between World War I and the Depression to changes in regional life and identity' (268).

[21] Robert Frost, 'A Romantic Chasm', preface to the British edition of *A Masque of Reason*: Containing *A Masque of Reason*; *A Masque of Mercy* (Two New England Biblicals); Together with Steeple Bush and Other Poems (London: Jonathan Cape, 1948).

> Your separation of us from the Old
> That should have made the New World newly great
> Would only disappoint us at the last
> If it should not do anything foretold
> To make us different in a single trait.

Later on, Frost became increasingly interested in the cultural vitality of New England as a way to safeguard American difference. Linking himself to a landscape whose values he promoted – a 'milk and sugar country'– he emphasised that his own writing was also lively and fruitful (Conforti 2001: 277). In his 1937 address to Oberlin College, 'What Became of New England?' he explained how he saw the link between New England and American culture:

> the thing New England gave most to America was the thing I am talking about: a stubborn clinging to meaning, – to purify words until they mean what they should mean. Puritanism had that meaning entirely: a purifying of words and a renewal of words and a renewal of meaning. That's what brought them to America and what kept them believing in the reality of it. (CPPP: 757)[22]

Frost's New England identity was based on his burgeoning patriotism. In 1918 he offered an organic model for poetry:

> I am as sure that the colloquial is the root of every good poem as that the national is the root of all thought and art. It may shoot up as high as you please and flourish as widely abroad in the air, if only the roots are where they are. (CPPP: 693)[23]

The idea of 'rootedness' is something that I will return to. One particular episode highlights Frost's growing sense of his American identity in contrast to Englishness, and it occurred during his stay in Dymock. My account is based on Matthew Hollis's argument in *Now All Roads Lead to France* (2011), in combination with a subsequent article by Lascelles Abercrombie's grandson, Jeff Cooper (2013), and Lawrance Thompson's *Robert Frost: The Early Years* (1967). Hollis states that the incident was definitive in Thomas's decision to enlist (2011: 181).

In November 1914, Thomas was staying with the Frosts at Abercrombie's home, The Gallows in Ryton. While walking out woods (either Ryton Coppice or Cobhill Rough in Dymock) Thomas and Frost were accosted by a gamekeeper. The keeper, in all likelihood, asked them what they were doing, and told them they were trespassing according to the Game Act of 1831, since the woodland was used for shooting (Cooper 2013: 20). Frost, inflamed by the implication that he might be poaching, led Thomas to the gamekeeper's house, and tried to initiate a fight (Thompson 1967: 467).

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[22] Robert Frost, 'What Became of New England?', Oberlin College Commencement Address, 8 June 1937. First published in *The Oberlin Alumni Magazine* in May 1938.

[23] Holograph inscription in *North of Boston* entitled 'To Régis Michaud' from around January 1918, in the Dartmouth College Library. Michaud was associate professor of French at Smith College.

According to a local man, Ted Hill, the gamekeeper (one 'Bott') saw the poets off with a gun (Cooper 2013: 20). The next day Frost received a summons from the local policeman. The incident was resolved through Frost's host, Lascelles Abercrombie, but Frost felt stung that Abercrombie, and he believed the poet Wilfrid Gibson, had walking rights that he did not. Thompson reported that Frost developed 'a cumulatively resentful jealousy in his attitude toward his host [Lascelles Abercrombie] and toward the daily caller, [Wilfrid] Gibson' (Thompson 1967: 459). Frost believed that the incident reflected class-based snobbery on the part of the keeper and the other poets. Edward Thomas referred back to this incident right up to his time in the trenches in letters to Frost (Hollis 2011: 313; 327).[24] The incident highlights Frost's increasing self-identification as an American. As Frost explained to Raymond Holden in a 1931 interview:

> A well known English Poet [he names Lascelles Abercrombie but means Wilfrid Gibson], who had helped Frost a great deal in the process of settling in the [Gloucestershire] country, would not come to his aid when a large landholder had Frost up for walking through game preserve with his children, a kind of trespassing which is unknown in America. The American poet had thus felt the sting of being a trespasser on feudal lands; he had seen his children exposed to the insults of gamekeepers, the vulgarities of a society that has too many and too definite layers in it. (Quoted in Cooper 2013: 16)[25]

Nation and region: Edward Thomas

Before he began writing poetry after the outbreak of WW1, Edward Thomas wrote about local places and did not address the question of what England meant to him (save in *The Country* where he proposed an anti-imperialist vision of England). Matthew Hollis, in his 2011 biography of Thomas, notes that in 1908 Thomas described himself as 5/8 Welsh to his friend Duncan Williams (161). Prior to the war, Thomas talked of 'home' and patriotism with reference to Wales. He wrote in a notebook from Pontarddulais in1899:

> Day by day grows my passion for Wales. It is like a homesickness, but stronger than any homesickness I ever felt – stronger than any passion. Wales indeed, is my soul's native land, if the soul can be said to have a patria – or rather, a matria, a home with the warm sweetness of a mother's love, and with her influence, too. (Quoted in R. George Thomas 1985: 78)

Thomas's 1911 collected fiction, *Light and Twilight*, included a story about a young man, of Welsh origins, dying 'in a far land' (1911b: 26). In 'Home' the young protagonist hears

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[24] Matthew Hollis initially interprets this as Thomas's belief that he would be perceived as a coward if he did not fight for freedom of access to the land he loved (ß2011: 181). Plunkett's interpretation of these events is much more helpful; see his review of *The Art of Robert Frost*, by Tim Kendall, in *The New Republic* (13 June 2014), published online at <http://www.new republic.com/article/118046/art-robert-frost-tim-kendall-reviewed-adam-plunkett> [accessed 4 July 2014].

[25] Raymond Holden, 'North of Boston', profile of Robert Frost, *New Yorker* (6 June 1931) 24.

someone utter the phrase 'for your country', and recalls the first time he heard it, when his father took him to visit 'his' country as a child. His father tells him 'we will take the train at midnight, and before noon we will find a curlew's nest on the moor just by where the old battle was' (28). The narrator describes this first visit to Wales: the train journey from London, and the Welsh passengers who sang; those other things he remembers, including the dogs, inn, waterfalls and a castle. The soldier recalls this journey as he dies, thinking of 'his country ... not the land he had fought for' (ellipsis in original, 45). This soldier's circumstances coincide with aspects of Thomas's own life – his father's status as a Welsh speaker in London, childhood holidays to Wales from London – experiences that were related in his autobiographical and semi-autobiographical *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* (1913c), 'Fiction' 'autobiography', and 'Addenda to autobiography' (all written between 1912 and 1914).[26]

Thomas talked about his 'accidental cockney nativity' and his love of Wales (1909: 7). And yet, in September 1914, he described himself to his friend Jesse Berridge as 'slowly growing into a conscious Englishman' (Thomas and Berridge 1983: 6). However, he did not abandon his interest in local places. In '"Home" ("Fair was the morning")' Thomas described his feelings about his temporary home:

> 'How quick', to someone's lip
> The words came, 'will the beaten horse run home.'
>
> The word 'home' raised a smile in us all three,
> And one repeated it, smiling just so
> That all knew what he meant and none would say.
> Between three counties far apart that lay
> We were divided and looked strangely each
> At the other, and we knew we were not friends
> But fellows in a union that ends
> With the necessity for it, as it ought.
>
> Never a word was spoken, not a thought
> Was thought, of what the look meant with the word
> 'Home' as we walked and watched the sunset blurred.

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[26] 'Autobiography' was first published as The Childhood of Edward Thomas in 1938, although Thomas called it 'autobiography'. It was republished in *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition: Volume 1: Autobiographies*, ed. by Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 – referred to as Thomas 1911b in the bibliography) 181-272. 'Addenda to autobiography', based on the holograph notebook of that name and dated 15 Dec 1914 in the Berg Collection, was first published in this volume (Thomas 2011b) 273-82. 'Fiction' is a formerly unpublished notebook from the Edward Thomas Archive at Cardiff University, which was begun on 12 March 1914, was also first published in *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings* (Thomas 2011b) 283-328.

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The walkers are temporarily united by war to fight for 'England', but also divided by their attachments to local places (they lack the 'social sense' of nature alluded to earlier). Each knew 'what he meant' by home, but England was a shared idea of a temporary necessity. This kind of attachment was made more explicit in the essay 'England' from 1915:

> I believe that England means something like this to most of us; that all ideas of England are developed, spun out, from such a centre into something large or infinite, solid or aëry, according to each man's nature and capacity; that England is a system of vast circumferences circling around the minute neighbouring points of home.

(Thomas 1928: 111)

That Thomas identified England with rural England is suggested by the dominance of rural places in his poetry. This indicates Thomas's involvement with an intellectual culture that increasingly valued the countryside. Alun Howkins, in his social history of the countryside in the 20th century *The Death of Rural England*, explores how aspects of national imagery increasingly looked to the countryside as a source of social values following the 1880s:

> It has been widely argued that from the 1880s and 1890s perceptions of a 'crisis' within urban areas led to a fundamental, and critical, reassessment of the process of urbanisation and industrialisation which, contemporaries believed, had been characteristic of the nineteenth century. In this reassessment the urban in particular had been found wanting. Urban life, and in particular London life, it was argued, had led to the moral and physical decay of the English race or rather the poorer part of it.

And then:

> The solutions proposed to this problem all centred around the 'revaluation' of country life. It was argued that England (and to a lesser extent Britain as a whole) was 'naturally' a rural society and it was necessary for the nation to return to these roots if the decay of national life was to be recovered. This revaluation took many forms, ranging from the rediscovery of British traditional music and folklore to garden cities; from schemes for peasant proprietorship to the invention of a vernacular style in architecture.   (Howkins 2003: 25)

For Howkins, this vision of England was a southern one – with images of farmed land, churches, half-timbered houses and close hedgerows – and also a feudal one. However, while these concerns with the countryside in the lead up to 1914 were predominantly of the upper class, they were spreading 'downwards' to the middle and upper working classes, with the Clarion Movement encouraging, instead, a rural socialism, self-improvement through the open air, as well as new holiday camps (Howkins 2003: 26). This version of the nation did not, however, generally reflect any real changes in the social order of the countryside, which retained traditional social and cultural elements, even if these were now in decline. These ideas confirm Raymond Williams's criticisms of the pastoral as attributed to Thomas and the Georgians.

At first sight, Thomas's poetic and prose vision appears to support this contemporary image of a southern, rural England. The interest in the vernacular could be understood as a determining factor in Thomas's choice of continuing the English lyric tradition and aspects of a pastoral imagination. At the same time, Thomas hinted at his opposition to the traditional social structure of the countryside through his consistent sympathy with poachers, labourers and tramps, and his recording of changes to the lives of these inhabitants before, during and after the war.

During the war, however, Thomas was to make his strongest affirmation of patriotism in the essay 'This England', first published in 1914. Here, local place attachment required acceptance of duty to nation: 'it seemed to me that either I had never loved England, or I had loved it foolishly, aesthetically, like a slave, not having realized that it was not mine unless I were willing and prepared to die rather than leave it' (Thomas 1914a: 221). Although Thomas renounced straightforward nationalism or attachment to an actual political entity, a similar sentiment of duty to what is cherished is echoed in the poem 'This is no case of petty right or wrong', where England:

> is all we know and live by, and we trust
> She is good and must endure, loving her so:
> And as we love ourselves we hate her foe.

As well as 'This England' (1914a) and 'England' (1915) (collected in *The Last Sheaf* in 1928), Thomas also wrote the essays 'Tipperary' (1914b) and 'It's a long, long way' (1914c), produced the anthology *This England: an Anthology from her Writers* (1915) and wrote mythologizing poems about the English countryside such as 'The Manor Farm' (1914), 'Lob', and 'Haymaking' (1914). Thomas's essay 'England' provided the best explanation of how Thomas's localism combined with his mystical patriotism at this time: 'Throughout English history, you have two elements combined inseparably, love of the place where you "have your happiness or not at all", and a more fitfully conscious love of the island, and glory in its glories' (Thomas 1928: 103). Thomas's version of place attachment prefigured Martha Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism, which she develops from the Stoics. Her cosmopolitanism evokes a more optimistic version of Thomas's world-conscious clerks in *The South Country* who 'belong to no class or race and have no traditions' (1909: 86-87):

> The Stoics stress that to be a citizen of the world one does not need to give up local identifications, which can frequently be a source of great richness in life. They suggest that we think of ourselves not as devoid of local affiliations, but as surrounded by a series of concentric circles. The first one is drawn around the self; the next takes in one's immediate family; then follows the extended family; then, in order, one's neighbours or local group, one's fellow city-dwellers, one's fellow countrymen — and

we can easily add to this list groupings based on ethnic, linguistic, historical, professional, gender and sexual identities. (Martha Nussbaum 1994: np)

In this way, Thomas's place attachments need not have excluded the possibility of broader allegiances that made up what it meant for him to be a citizen. In *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* a character called Mr Stodham, who is a clerk and a lodger, argues for an historically-informed love of 'Englishness':

> I do not want you to praise England. She can do without receiving better than you can without giving. I do not want to shout that our soldiers and poets are greater than those of other nations, but that they are ours, they are great, and in proportion as we are good and intelligent, we can respond to them and understand them as those who are not Englishmen cannot. They cannot long do without us or we without them. Think of it. We have each of us some of the blood and spirit of Sir Thomas More, and Sir Philip Sidney, and the man who wrote 'Tom Jones', and Horatio Nelson, and the man who wrote 'Love in the Valley' [...] They are England: we are England. Deny England, and we deny them and ourselves. Do you love the Wilderness? Do you love Wales? If you do, you love what I understand by 'England'. The more you love and know England, the more deeply you can love the Wilderness and Wales. (Thomas 1913: 223-224)[27]

However, the characters only achieve a sense of 'exulting without self-glorification or any brutality' by singing the Welsh national anthem (221). England and Wales contend for the characters' allegiance in this novel. And yet Aurelius, the fictional poet, who appears to embody Thomas the poet, questions the 'historical' idea of national belonging by asking 'what about the London fog? What is the correct attitude of the patriot towards the London fog and the manufacturers who make it what it is?' (221). This interrogation of which historical features should constitute 'Englishness' – such as the unpleasant 'ecological' consequence of the economic system which was London fog – shows how far from resolved Thomas was in his notion of Englishness, and his dissent from traditional patriotism.

Some critics interpret Thomas's decision to enlist as straightforward patriotism in the light of the statements in his 1914 prose about his need to defend what he had previously been attached to only aesthetically, the English landscape. In doing so, they offer as support Eleanor Farjeon's assertion that Thomas had told her he was fighting 'literally for this', taking up a handful of soil (see for example Hollis 2011: 287). However, could have Thomas meant that he was fighting for the foundation of the landscape he formerly admired, and did he see this in ecological, cultural or political terms?

In the 1915 essay 'England' Thomas also described England as 'a place of innumerable holes and corners', an England that only exists in fragments of an older order. Stan Smith considers this Thomas's 'culture of evasion and elusiveness', which avoided totalising ideas of

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[27] The 'Wilderness' refers to the garden of the house in which Mr Stodham and his listeners reside.

Englishness and modernity (2000: 115). Whereas in the dominant strand of Edna Longley's work England has for Thomas an immortal spirit, for Stan Smith Thomas's England exists 'as a site of dispossession and abandonment' (116). Only with the war, and his epiphanic experience of the Dymock landscape rendered in 'The sun used to shine', did Thomas conceive of the possibility of a renewed 'Englishness', where a shared experience of the trenches could begin to form a more totalising idea:

> Amidst all that poking around in holes and corners as the key to Englishness, there is one image in Thomas's writings which almost leads on to a totalisation of national identity. In the essay 'This England' he writes of his moment of uncomprehending commitment when, in the heart of the country, he turned to look at the moon rising in the east, to realise for the first time that the same image hung over the Meuse in France, and over 'those who could see it there' – those 'soldiers in the east afar' of whom he writes in the poem which picks up and transmutes this prose passage, 'The sun used to shine'. (Smith 2000: 122)

For Smith, 'Thomas's use of the moon here' gestures 'toward a collective solidarity and vision' (2000: 122). However, Smith's cultural version of Thomas's Englishness – focusing on fragments of historical culture and the experience of the war – underplays Thomas's parallel, ecological 'England' that Smith himself hints at – where Thomas's '"pinch" of earth stands in for […] the "country" in which they are walking' (113). For Smith, this suggests a system of metonymic relations between the land and the nation.

Thomas could separate human cultural Englishness from the ecology of the English landscape. This was apparent in Thomas's contention in *The South Country* that he was one of the 'modern people who belong nowhere'. The claim was part of his awareness that movement was part of the experiences of any inhabitant – suburbanites and gypsies in particular – and that such movements had increased since modernity and had become the condition in which we live. As Smith indicates with reference to Thomas's paradoxical observation about gypsies in his *George Borrow*, 'such "modern people" are everywhere "foreigners but as native as the birds"' (118). Here, being 'native' and foreign were not in contradiction, because the Gypsies were culturally 'foreign' and yet practically and ecologically 'native'. This may also explain why the soldiers, who were culturally native and ecologically remote, only came to the speaker's mind in 'The sun used to shine' following the perception of the moon. This provides evidence for Thomas's 'ecological' meaning of England – as literally the ground upon which to walk (or the sky underneath which we walk). Ecological inhabitation could coexist with multiple local cultures.

Thomas's decision to enlist sat uncomfortably alongside his awareness, also in the poetry, that the war had become a dangerous form of employment for those affected by declining rural labour. The war became one factor that prevented reforms to improve conditions for the rural poor, despite Lloyd George's attempt to implement value-based land taxation (Short 1997: 33). This is suggested in the following:

> Since he left Christchurch in the New Forest, one
> Spring in the 'seventies, – navvying on dock and line
> From Southampton to Newcastle-on-Tyne, –
> 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.
> ('Man and Dog')
>
> The man you saw, – Lob-lie-by-the-fire, Jack Cade,
> Jack Smith, Jack Moon, poor Jack of every trade,
> Young Jack, or old Jack, or Jack What-d'ye-call,
> Jack-in-the-hedge, or Robin-run-by-the-wall,
> Robin Hood, Ragged Robin, lazy Bob,
> One of the lords of No Man's Land, good Lob, –
> Although he was seen dying at Waterloo,
> Hastings, Agincourt, and Sedgemoor too, –
> Lives yet. He never will admit he is dead
> Till millers cease to grind men's bones for bread.
> ('Lob')
>
> This ploughman dead in battle slept out of doors
> Many a frosty night, and merrily
> Answered staid drinkers, good bedmen, and all bores:
> 'At Mrs Greenland's Hawthorn Bush,' said he,
> 'I slept.'
> ('A Private')

These poems, as I explain later, not only memorialise such characters, but offer them up as representing alternative ideas of Englishness. Through loss of such characters and their ecological literacy and skills, war threatened the cultures of those local places Thomas cherished. It is one argument of this thesis that Thomas frequently critiqued liberal progressivism against local forms of being and knowing. However, for reasons that are hard to grasp – and explored further in Chapter Four – Thomas valued enlisting more than he opposed the status quo. Perhaps it was sympathy with the displaced countrymen that led Thomas to wish to share their plight, to be with those who 'keep me company / With their pattering' ('Roads').[28]

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[28] It is also possible that Thomas's decision to enlist was at least in part a suicidal impulse. Thomas recorded several long periods of suicidal depression (for example, see R. George Thomas 1985: 141-

Willingness to defend a political England was not an inevitable consequence of Thomas's love of the countryside. Thomas's prose writing about the countryside reflected either a mystical celebration of nature or the traces of the Back-to-the-Land Movement with its interests in the restorative effects of the countryside, the cultural potential of folk traditions and music that were prevalent in the late Victorian age. It is possible to imagine that Thomas's opposition to industrialism and love of many aspects of country life could have resulted in opposition to the industrialised nature of warfare in the First World War. Instead, Thomas often chose to record the impacts of industrialisation and war on the countryside – in particular places with at least partly discernible histories.

A regional vision is apparent in Thomas's earlier work – for instance his most famous prose work *The South Country* explored the imaginative impact of the South Downs, Cornwall and East Anglia. While ideas of a hegemonic 'England' and 'Englishness' became increasingly prevalent in his writing from 1914, in his earlier writing Thomas was more likely to evoke England synecdochally through rich evocations of distinctive local places.

In 'This is no case of petty right or wrong' Thomas suggested hope for the renewal of an England that remained intact, politically and ecologically:

> Two witches' cauldrons roar.
> From one the weather shall rise clear and gay;
> Out of the other an England beautiful
> And like her mother that died yesterday

However, the existence of the first witch's cauldron, promising 'clear and gay' weather, seemed to suggest the possible continuity of the natural environment even if political England ('an England beautiful') did not endure. Thomas's images of an England that might survive were ambiguous, in part through Thomas's awareness of his own conceptual limitations. In 'This is no case of petty right or wrong', Thomas declared that his own response to the demand to fight was emotional, rather than rational: 'Little I know or care if, being dull, / I shall miss something that historians / Can rake out of the ashes'.

Edna Longley notes how Thomas often shows the artificiality of his constructions of England in her ecocritical essay on Thomas (Longley 2000). She explains how in 'Haymaking' Thomas drew attention to historical scales that displaced the centrality of the human perspective. She calls this self-referentiality an 'ecohistorical' perspective:

42; also Helen Thomas 1988: 113-14; Hollis 2011: 90-91). Another possibility is that Thomas wished to test his own skills and limits: doubting the usefulness of his work at the camp, Thomas decided to enlist in the Artillery, instead of remaining with the Artists' Rifles as a sergeant-instructor (R. George Thomas 1985: 270).

The men leaned on their rakes, about to begin,
But still. And all were silent. All was old,
This morning time, with a great age untold,
Older than Clare and Cobbett, Morland and Crome,
Than, at the field's far edge, the farmer's home,
A white house crouched at the foot of a great tree.
Under the heavens that know not what years be
The men, the beasts, the trees, the implements
Uttered even what they will in times far hence –
All of us gone out of the reach of change –
Immortal in a picture of an old grange.

In 'Haymaking', the 'utterance' of immortality suggested by the scene resounds even while the speaker reminds us death will take us all 'out of reach of change'. Quoting from Jose Harris, who characterises the Edwardian experience that Longley draws on in this essay, Longley asserts:

> Although this freeze-frame suggests the rural English spirit of which Thomas had earlier wished to make a 'graven image', 'Haymaking' is also self-referentially conscious of frames within frames; and, like most other poems quoted in this essay, moves between 'different layers of historical time'. (Longley 2000: 39)[29]

Thomas, however, did attempt to offer a more totalising concept of 'Englishness' in his 1915 anthology *This England*.

> This is an anthology from the work of English writers rather strictly so called. Building round a few most English poems like 'When icicles hang by the wall', – excluding professedly patriotic writing because it is generally bad and because indirect praise is sweeter and more profound, – never aiming at what a committee from Great Britain and Ireland might call complete, – I wished to make a book as full of English character and country as an egg of meat. If I have reminded others, as I did myself continually, of some of the echoes called up by the name England, I am satisfied.
>
> (quoted in Bate 1997: 202)[30]

In this anthology Thomas included two of his own works – 'Haymaking' and 'The Manor Farm' (perhaps he could also have included 'Lob', written in early 1915, where the subject 'is as English as this gate, these flowers, this mire'). As Jonathan Bate explains in *The Genius of Shakespeare,* the longest complete poem included in the anthology was Coleridge's 'Fears in Solitude',

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29 Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 252.
30 Edward Thomas, 'Prefatory Note', *This England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915).

which differentiates sharply between Britain in the sense of its political institutions, which is dismissed as 'One Benefit-Club for mutual flattery', and the 'mother Isle' in the sense of a synecdochic representation of the local community and landscape which have nurtured the poet. (1997: 202)

Thomas's other inclusions in this anthology were Milton's prose; a quote from a speech by Cromwell; prose by Hazlitt and Edmund Burke; extracts from *Cymbeline*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV*, focusing on Falstaff rather than King Harry. Bate observes that 'Thomas forces us to consider the possibility that Shakespeare gives us his ideal Patriot-Englishman not in Henry V [...] but in old Jack Falstaff' (204). With regard to Thomas's own contributions to this anthology, in *Literary Englands: Versions of 'Englishness' in Modern Writing,* David Gervais explains that Thomas was not claiming to capture England's 'essence' in 'The Manor Farm', but 'a season of bliss unchangeable' (1993: 33). This is because he knew that,

> 'England', it seems, had to exclude more than just the brash public world of the patriot. Far from being 'timeless', even to mention it was to pose a question – one which Thomas had no easy answer to. This is why he wanted to put his anthology, like 'Haymaking', 'out of the reach of change'. (33)

Longley and Gervais differ as to whether the historical vision of 'Haymaking' offers a long-term ecohistorical view on a particular English place (Longley) or creates a snapshot of one dimension of Englishness that is considered by the poet to be threatened (Gervais). In either case, they suggest that the poem offers no mere Arcadian image of England that ignores the historical threat to the countryside or its people. It is a subjective image that is only properly understood amid the broader historical circumstances of its composition.

For Gervais, Thomas's 'real intuition' about England, however, is to be found elsewhere. Thomas believed that 'the name' of England was redundant 'if the feeling of England were present' (49). In poems such as 'Old Man',

> Thomas knew that names – whether of England or 'Old Man' – had limits in a way that his more patriotic contemporaries did not. His poem proves something unconscious, below language [...] The poet's feelings put him in touch with an unspoken reservoir of feeling in the child [...] What 'Old Man' shows us is that, in Thomas, England is always ringed round by such a penumbra and it is precisely that which makes it a richer thought in him than in any other poet of his generation. (Gervais 1993: 49-50)

The fact that Thomas saw Englishness as a loosely defined entity suggests that it would be unlikely he would wish to position himself exclusively in a self-consciously English poetry tradition. As we have seen, in 'The Great War, History and the English Lyric' Longley

definitively asserts that Thomas aligned himself with the English tradition from Wordsworth to Hardy, which she sees as incompatible with internationalist modernism.

Ezra Pound, as an Imagist, did indeed assert his inspiration from much earlier and more international figures. However, the first 'statement' of Imagism was provided by Frank Flint under the guidance of Ezra Pound in *Poetry* and did not require 'cosmopolitanism' or 'dappled verses'. It included the following rules for aspiring 'poetasters':

> Direct treatment of the thing, whether subjective or objective.
> To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
> As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome. (first published in 1912; edition used Pound and Flint 2005: 94)

The editor of *Poetry* commented that it 'will be seen from these that Imagism is not necessarily associated with Hellenic subjects, or with *vers libre* as a prescribed form' (Pound and Flint 2005: 95).

While in his reviews of *North of Boston* Thomas appreciated Frost because of his fulfilment of Wordsworth's poetic vocation to use ordinary speech – his 'healthy, natural delicacy' (Frost and Thomas 2003: 23) – Frost's verse in *North of Boston* also conforms to Flint/Pound's 'musical phrase' requirement. Thomas found something in Frost's verse that was absent in Wordsworth: the collection is '*more* than the beginning of an experiment like Wordsworth's' [my italics] (Frost and Thomas 2003: 24). Because of Frost's sympathy with his characters, he was able to create a 'unique type of eclogue' (24) that was 'without egoistic rhetoric' (16). Further, Thomas did not assert that the English tradition was exemplary for modern verse: his examples here were Wordsworth and Whitman. As Andrew Webb notes, in his reviews of *North of Boston* Thomas affirmed Frost's affinity with Whitman, who also incorporated speech rhythms into his poetry (Webb 2009: 173). This casts doubt on the English-line treatment of Thomas, both as an exclusive cultural commitment and as a conventional patriotic commitment.

Thomas and the Imagists shared a position on the need to overcome the perceived limitations of late Victorian poetry, and to renew the vitality of poetry, an aim that was continuous with comparable attempts in French and Irish Symbolism. As Longley herself explains, Thomas reviewed Arthur Symons's Symbolist-inspired poetry favourably (Longley 1986: 31). Yet something else, beyond the symbol, was needed for Thomas and Frost to find a way towards 'direct treatment of the thing'. Thomas and Frost shared these aesthetic commitments with the Imagists, and yet differed enormously in the cultural commitment of their poetry. As formulated by Peter Nicholls in *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*, Imagism is a

form of modernism where aesthetic innovation responds to the rupture in the nature of individual and collective experience and culture, in the face of technology, science and urbanisation:

> the Anglo-American version [of literary modernism] developed in part as a critique of modernity. Here the 'new' was a highly equivocal category, since cultural renovation was frequently projected as a *return* to the values of the previous age (the 19th-century Pre-Raphaelites, Britain's first real avant-garde, had already sketched this model of cultural decline and a compensatory 'return'). The modernism presided over by Pound and Eliot (one among several, but arguably still the hegemonic one) thus issued a call to order in the name of values which were explicitly anti-modern, though it did so by developing literary forms that were overtly modernist. (Nicholls 1995: 163-64)

Pound and Eliot called for changes in artistic practice to preserve cultural values that they saw as threatened by mass culture. They considered that the literature of the past offered the best guides to the ethics and aesthetics that could renew modern poetry. While Thomas and Frost also observed the 'severance' in individual experience and culture, their reactions were different from those of the Imagists. Thomas, as we will see below, observed a split in sensibility from the 18th century onwards – caused by urbanisation. Yet both poets wrote in the lyric form that had flourished in the 19th century. Further, they did not distance themselves from 'the masses', as the Imagists had, although they had an ambiguous relationship with public life.

In summing up the argument so far, Edna Longley thinks that Edward Thomas's concern with 'Englishness' manifested itself in a concern for the continuity of an English tradition, and hence an avoidance of foreign literary influences. This avoidance included modernism. Also, Longley believes that an interest in modernist forms required a rejection of attachment to local places. Against this, I've argued that Thomas was far from unsceptical about ideas of Englishness, and approved of other literary cultures in his criticism. In his own poetry, as we see below, he drew on American traditions and European philosophy through Frost. Thomas can be understood as hinting at a critique of contemporary culture (particularly the effects of industrialism) in so far as it affected marginalised individuals and nature.[31] Further, with regard to Thomas's interest in 'Englishness', we see that attachment to local places did not preclude more cosmopolitan concerns.

In the following section I consider the concepts of nature and countryside as they appear in both Thomas's and Frost's theorising. For Frost, the significance of the countryside gained

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[31] Thomas was open-minded about 'literary forms that were overtly modernist', for example in his initial praise for Pound's innovative techniques in his review of *Personae of Ezra Pound* for the *Daily Chronicle* (7 June 1909) and 'Two Poets' in *The English Review* (June 1909); in his review of *Exultations of Ezra Pound* in the *Daily Chronicle* (23 November 1909) and his review of Pound's *The Spirit of Romance* in the *Morning Post* (1 August 1910) (see Thomas 1981: 116-23).

momentum as he developed his identity as a regional sage as he refined his understandings of 'home' and 'nature'. This occurred as Frost grappled with his understanding of the impacts of Darwinian theory and industrialisation. Finally, to tackle another strand of Longley's disjunction between modernist and non-modernist poetic forms, I challenge the idea that poetry must concern itself with either the parochial or the global. Both Thomas and Frost developed global connections during this period. To begin this exploration, I consider both poets' attitudes towards nature and the countryside.

Nature and the countryside: Edward Thomas

Thomas's interests in 'home' and 'vagrancy' developed partly as a result of his own familial origins, partly from his interests in walking and natural history, and partly from a quest to find a society in which he felt at home. His own personal migrations both mirror and run counter to those of other marginalised individuals within his own time. If we begin with his own family, this helps us to understand the origins of his feeling of displacement and the occasions when he experienced a sense of harmony.

Drawing on material from the National Library of Wales, Brian James explains in 'The ancestry of Edward Thomas, the poet: 1878-1917' that Edward Thomas's father, Philip Henry Thomas, was born in 1853 in Tredegar and became a 'pupil teacher'. Sometime in the 1870s he moved to Swindon, where his father is assumed to have been an engine fitter for the Great Western Railway; by 1873 Philip had become a Board of Trade clerk in the civil service in London (James 1993: 83-84). In 1877 he married his second cousin, Mary Elizabeth Townsend, who had been brought up in Newport. Elizabeth's family, the Townsends, were from Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Berkshire, but had moved to Caerleon and then Neath in the 19th century (85-87). James states that 'Most of Edward Thomas's nineteenth-century forebears and relatives moved around, into and out of South Wales (with West Glamorgan as the main focus of their lives) in pursuit of work as skilled craftsmen and small traders' (1993: 93).

At the time of the poets' meeting, both had made an uncharacteristic move from city to country, in spite of their families' choice of urban lives. As we have seen, Edna Longley notes the urban-wards migration in the UK, with a particular emphasis on the growth in suburbs (2000: 27). Alun Howkins describes how '[i]n the 10 years before 1901 the rural population had declined by about 12 per cent' (2003: 8). This was mainly due to relatively good wages in the cities, but this was also provoked by the Great Depression in agriculture, where from the 1870s cheap cereals from North America had reduced the competitiveness of British wheat producers

(Howkins 2003: 9). Edward Thomas recorded both rural tourism and the middle-class gentrification of the British countryside in *The Country*.

Edward Thomas's 'countryside' consisted principally of the counties of Wiltshire, Hampshire, Sussex and Kent, those depicted in *The South Country* and in his many nature essays. He made his family homes in Kent (three locations between 1901 and 1906) and then near Petersfield in Hampshire (three different houses between 1906 and 1914). In his earlier life, his countryside consisted in the then-edgelands of his London home: Wandsworth and Clapham, as described by Helen Thomas in *Under Storm's Wing* (Helen Thomas: 1988).[32] While Thomas was particularly attached to Wiltshire and Wales, his writing took him to Suffolk, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Cornwall, the Midlands and Norfolk, and he regularly visited London for work. He studied in Oxford between 1887 and 1900. Even though he aspired to find home in the South Country, Thomas described a feeling of homesickness for Wales, and was drawn to the wildness of The Lake District, as demonstrated by his poem 'The Shieling' (see Kirkham 2010: 78). Throughout his life Thomas was an avid walker and traveller of rural England; many of his prose works were based on walks or cycle rides. As Robert Macfarlane explains in *The Old Ways*:

> Thomas possessed a pair of what Keats once called 'patient sublunary legs', and those legs carried him over thousands of miles of old paths, from the famous (Sarn Helen in Wales, the Icknield Way and the Ridgeway in southern England) to the local (Old Litton Lane and Harepath Lane, near his east Hampshire home) [....] Thomas used the old ways to keep himself in motion, for like [George] Borrow – whose biography he wrote and with whom he closely identified – he was depressive. Like Borrow, too, walking was one of the activities that could lift him from his depressions.

> (Macfarlane 2012a: 25)

The London edgelands became Thomas's home again as he became a soldier in 1915, while he was training in Loughton and Gidea Park. His last family home was High Beech from 1916. Thomas's final rural home was in the trenches of northern France. It is difficult to ascribe a single 'home' to Edward Thomas.

Edward Thomas's interest in the countryside was influenced by his early fascination with the Victorian writer Richard Jefferies (R. George Thomas 1985: 10-11; 14; 27; 131). Jefferies, as a countryman aware of the challenges of rural life, believed that '[t]o understand a nation you must go to the cottager' (Jefferies 1889: 199). Thomas reflected, with some irony,

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[32] First published as *As It Was* (1926) and *World Without End* (1931).

his own Romantic affinity with the labourer. One of his alter-ego characters affirms of an aged labourer he meets in the woods that

> every man who was ever any good had a little apple-faced man or woman like this somewhere not very far back in his pedigree. Where else will he get his endurance, his knowledge of the earth, his feeling for life and for what that old man called God? When a poet writes, I believe he is often only putting into words what such another old man puzzled out among the sheep in a long lifetime. (Thomas 1913b: 9)

However, in Thomas's prose writing about the countryside, it was very often the townsman's fascination with the countryside that concerned him. His wanderers were not only tramps, gypsies and labourers, but also fellow townsmen, such as the clerks in *The Country* and *The South Country*, and the ghostly double in *The Icknield Way*. This allowed Thomas to criticise his own approach to nature writing. While Thomas criticised the townsman's spectatorial attitude towards the countryside he described in *The Country* how only the modern townsman was sufficiently removed, both sensuously and intellectually, to want to write about the countryside. However, it was precisely this sensuous and intellectual detachment that threatened a writer's aesthetic merits. Thomas lamented that his earlier writing showed this detachment, which made his prose lifeless. As he explained to Eleanor Farjeon in 1915:

> If I am consciously doing anything I am trying to get rid of the last rags of rhetoric and formality which left my prose so often with a dead rhythm only. (Farjeon 1997:   110)

Following this line, in *The Imagination of Edward Thomas,* Michael Kirkham explores the connection between Thomas's views on what is missing from town life and his thoughts on the flaws of aestheticism. Kirkham describes how in *The Country* Thomas divided

> the aesthete's appreciation of nature, 'seeing it as the site for a house or a picnic, or the subject of a picture' [Thomas 1913b: 49] from that of the countryman, whose sensations, feelings and knowledge are all bound up with the sights, sounds and smells of the country; it is not a spectacle to him, but, as it were, flows in his veins. The townsman belongs with the aesthete and the writer of nature books among the spectators of, rather than participants in, life. (Kirkham 2010: 30)

For Thomas's town dweller, imaginative sympathy was more readily available than a sensuous engagement with non-human nature. As Kirkham indicates, this could result in a 'distorted image of natural life' such as 'a civilised people's concept of primitiveness' (31). Kirkham shows us that, in *The Country,* Thomas described how this was produced in Britain by the physical differences between the town and countryside that began in the 18th century. This encouraged a corresponding split in the consciousness of the population.

In *The Country*, Thomas explained that before the 18th century a man could shift between country and city ways of living without seeing either as a threat to the other, and he

could reconcile his own experiences of nature (and by this, Thomas meant knowing a particular place intimately) with the requirements of a social life (Thomas 1913b: 19). This suggested that it was our culture – supervening on this social relation – rather than human nature, that separated us from intimacy with non-human nature. As Kirkham comments, socially-constructed images of nature in modern man are often produced with 'an intense desire to possess what he cannot possess', to own the countryside (2010: 32). In modern literature, rather than observing the countryside in its historical condition, it is represented as though it exists precisely to release the townsman from the 'bondage' of his life (Kirkham 2010: 32).

However, Thomas realised that true love of the 'vast inhumanity of the universe' can only be appreciated once society has leisure time to appreciate it (1913b: 32). Hence the first 'lovers of nature' were the suburban dwellers of Thomas's own period. In Thomas's day, country literature was written for the villa dwellers, as an escape from urban living. Only when nature was no longer seen as a threat could the 'inhumanity' of the universe be appreciated and could we search for scales other than the human.

However, Thomas acknowledged that this attitude may reflect a kind of hubris. As he suggested in a letter to Walter de la Mare in 1908, civilisation has estranged us only 'superficially' from a nature that should still fill us with awe:

> You asked me to define Nature. I used it [in the biography of Richard Jefferies] vulgarly for all that is not man, perhaps because man contemplates it so, as outside of himself, and has a sort of belief that nature is only a house, furniture etc round about him. It is not my belief and I don't oppose Nature to Man. Quite the contrary, Man seems to me a very little part of Nature and the part I enjoy least. But civilization has estranged us superficially from Nature, and towns make it possible for a man to live as if a millionaire really could provide all the necessities of life, food, drink, clothes, vehicles, etc, and then a tombstone. (in R. George Thomas 1995: 51)

It was only for a few writers that an intimate knowledge of the countryside combined with an awareness of the limits of human perspectives. In *The Country*, Thomas affirmed that W. H. Hudson was able to write about the countryside in a way that conjured 'the spaciousness of the great globe itself'. Rather than highlighting the transcendence of nature, writers such as Hudson could indicate an awareness of orders that included but exceeded the human. As William Blake's visionary image of a flower related us to eternity, Thomas continued, literature about the countryside could expand our vision. An expanded environmental view, however, was compatible with concern for the human. Thomas went on to reflect on the Wordsworthian view that love of nature produces love of man, and yet he phrased it in a way that emphasised the naivety of most 'nature lovers':

Calming us with its space and patience, the country relates us all to Eternity. We go to it as would-be poets, or as solitaries, vagabonds, lovers, to escape foul air, noise, hard hats, black uniforms, multitudes, confusion, incompleteness, elaborate means without clear ends, – to escape ourselves; and we do more than escape them. So vastly do we increase the circle of which we are the centre that we become as nothing. The larger the circle the less seems our distance from other men each at his separate centre; and at last that distance is nothing at all in the mighty circle, and all have but one circumference. And thus we truly find ourselves. (Thomas 1913b: 55)

Thomas's views on nature, however, suggested a move from this Romantic idealism and towards ecocentrism. He sought a position that could combine emotional response with sociability, including sociability both within and between species, and between generations, and not the Romantic position that would rely on emotional responses towards nature and society that would aggrandize the sensibilities of the individual poet. In this way, his thinking appeared to adhere to the Modernist imperative to encompass all aspects of experience, not simply readily accessible emotional or intellectual responses, in poetry. Thus, Thomas's critique of modernity included concern about the effects of industrialism on man and nature, and concern about the ways that poetry could articulate these effects.

Thomas praised W.B. Yeats' poetry for its ability to combine 'natural magic' with a sense of sociability in a review of *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats* in the *Morning Post* on 17 December 1908:

He can plunge us, as few other poets writing in English can, into a world where all other values are changed and the parochialism of humanity is forgotten, or rather it is inconceivable that it should ever have existed […] At his best his poetry is fine because its symbols are natural, ancient, instinctive, not invented [...] it is out of place to disparage a poet of this magnitude who is as yet so little known though universally heard of. Nor would we leave the impression that he is only a poet of Nature, though we believe that his nature is so deeply moved by the unseen and old things that they are never entirely to be separated from any of his work. (Thomas 1981: 84-85)

As Stan Smith explains, Thomas's criticism of modern symbolism for its 'privacy' was suggestive of 'a crisis of a wider kind, in which "nature" itself is stripped of symbolic value' (1986: 129). Smith explains that for Thomas nature and the landscape could provide a ground for love and personal epiphany rather than a supernatural symbolism. Unlike for William James, where meaning proceeded from knowledge, Thomas's encounters with non-human nature revealed meanings that could not be articulated in language:

[I]t is in the continuing gap between knowledge and love that the mysterious meaningfulness of these chance, momentary encounters is bred. The subject will never master all these lost tongues: he has 'mislaid the key'. And indeed throughout Thomas's prose it is this indecipherability which adds peculiar poignancy to his vision.

Thomas affirmed man's interdependency and equal status with all species from something akin to a universal perspective in *The South Country*:

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

> (Thomas 1909: 26)

For Thomas, however, this grand scale should not prevent an attempt to comprehend 'our position among the inhabitants of the earth' (1909: 144). The pleasure acquired through sensory contact with non-human nature may combine with our modern love of scientific learning, to pursue this quest:

> Knowledge aids joy by discipline, by increasing the sphere of enjoyment, by showing us in animals, in plants, for example, what life is, how our own is related to theirs, showing us, in fact, our position, responsibilities and debts among the other inhabitants of the earth. Pursued out of doors where those creatures, moving and still, have their life and their beauty, knowledge is real. The senses are invited there to the subtlest and most delightful training, and have before them an immeasurable fresh field, not a field like that of books, full of old opinions, but one with which every eye and brain can have new vital intercourse. (Thomas 1909: 144)

In this way, Thomas suggested how the division in sensibility between sociability and sensual familiarity with a particular place could be healed. In suggesting that knowledge of relations with other species may help us increase the 'sphere of our enjoyment', Thomas echoed Wordsworth's contention in his 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* that humans gained pleasure from sympathy:

> What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions and deductions which by habit become of the nature of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment. (in Coupe 2000: 20)[33]

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[33] William Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (2nd edn, 1800)*, in Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University press, 1936).

Thomas argued that through art, informed by empirical experience, we could approach something like a social feeling for nature:

> [T]he reading of great poetry might well be associated with the study of Nature, since there is no great poetry which can be dissevered from Nature, while modern poets have all dipped their pens in the sunlight and wind and great waters, and appeal most to those who most resemble them in their loves. The great religious books, handed down to us by people who lived in closer intercourse with Nature than many of us, cannot be understood by indoor children and adults. (143)

Thomas's quest to investigate the true relationship between man and non-human nature seems to originate from his own sense of alienation from society. Frequently throughout the prose and poetry, Thomas described a feeling of rootlessness, which he attributes to his suburban childhood. In *The South Country,* he voiced these feelings through the character of a clerk who, like himself, was of Welsh descent and raised in London, in the chapter entitled 'A Return to Nature':

> I realize that I belong to the suburbs still. I belong to no class or race, and have no traditions. We of the suburbs are a muddy, confused, hesitating mass, of small courage though much endurance. (Thomas 1909: 85)

And then:

> My people have not built; they were not settled on the earth; they did nothing; they were oil or grit in a great machine; they took their food and shelter modestly and not ungratefully from powers above that were neither kind nor cruel. (87)

Thomas also described the need for a variety of rootedness in his later work, *The Country*, as if in response to his earlier questioning. His interlocutor, a clerk, talks of the need for a metaphysical 'something' to rest on. The narrator urges that he still has the country (13). As I argue in the following chapter, throughout the poetry, we can hear echoes of the idea that, even if we can only find fleeting pleasure in society and non-human nature, we are still free to wander and make our own society, to 'keep old paths open' like Lob, and to dwell in the 'mire' that is left behind by industrial progress. There is a sense that this can offer a renewed, dissenting idea of Englishness.

While Frost reflected less on the literature of the countryside, he exploited his adopted rural home as a source for his poetry. However, his contemplation of man's relationship with nature – similarly originating in personal displacement and disappointments – connected him to some of the most advanced thinkers of his era.

Nature and the countryside: Robert Frost

Frost's early life had been somewhat nomadic – his ancestors had left rural lives earlier than most. Belle Frost had grown up with a wealthy family in Columbus, Ohio, and William Prescott Frost came from Lawrence, MA (Kemp 1979: 44). Frost's parents lived an itinerant life because of their insecure jobs. The young Frost lived in San Francisco and then urban New England (Salem and Lawrence). Frost left industrial Lawrence, Massachusetts, 'the so-called immigrant city' where 'residents spoke more than three dozen languages by 1890', for Derry, New Hampshire. Derry, while less 'transformed' than Lawrence, was just south of the city of Manchester which 'had its own industrial and immigrant order' (Conforti 2001: 268). Frost's attempts at farming in Derry were unsuccessful – Frost was a 'less than enthusiastic and energetic farmer', and he sold the farm as soon as it became his (271). Conforti notes the omissions in Frost's poetic accounts of his life, from *North of Boston* onwards. Although Derry was heavily agricultural, it still had an industrial presence; 'yet Frost's "realistic" poetic representation of the area all but obliterated evidence that undermined its rural, Yankee attributes' (268).

When Frost left New England for England in 1912, he felt little attachment to the region as a source of his poetry. However, the critics who celebrated his writing in America were 'literary sophisticates with ties to New England' (Conforti 2001: 272). For them, critic Carl Van Doren asserts, Frost 'became the poetic tribune of authentic New Englanders, giving voice 'to the true way of the old Yankees themselves, as if he were the last of the Yankees and their essence' (quoted in Conforti 2001: 272).[34] Frost's work in *North of Boston* coincided with a cultural move, following Colonial Revival and the interest in the old New England that had been disrupted by urbanisation and migration, to re-locate the pastoral 'heartland' of New England in the northern hills. Against the fear of rural decline in the north and the degraded urban environments in the south, Frost portrayed 'a world of Yankee villages where an agricultural way of life prevailed' (264). However, rather than deriving from the burgeoning regionalism of New England, Frost's interest in rural subjects came partly through direct experience and partly through Romantic literature, both British and American.

There was an unprecedented movement towards cities in New England from the 1870s (Conforti 2001: 211). This, at the same time, was matched by a wave of tourism to Old New England. In both Britain and America, migration threatened the integrity of stable rural towns. There were those who could not establish themselves within either urban or rural ways of life –

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[34] Carl Van Doren 'Soil of the Puritans', in *Critical Essays on Robert Frost* ed. by Philip Gerber (Boston, Mass: G.K. Hall, 1982) 68-75

tramps and vagrants – who contributed to images of rural decline. Influxes of migrants in New England cities from impoverished Europe challenged a stable, regional ideal. In America, sons who had fought in the Civil War never returned to New England hill towns, and towns not served by railroads became obsolete (Conforti 2001: 211).

Some found opportunities to exploit these new possibilities for movement. In both England and America, writers and tourists, aided by the advent of the car age, experimented with rural living as a response to the perceived insalubriousness of the city. The Georgian poets produced poetry that celebrated an image of the real countryside for its sensuality and as a foil to the superficiality of urban life. In America, the New England Renaissance and Local Colour Realists of the 19th century highlighted varieties of New England experience, often in opposition to national ideals (see, for example, Conforti 2001: 234 and Kilcup 1998: 125); their characters can be seen as exemplars for Frost's cast in *North of Boston* (see Conforti 2001: 274).

Frost's home region was initially a refuge to enable the man to write poetry, which, after a stay in England, became a source for inspiration. Frost was also a walker, albeit a less ambitious one than Thomas, as demonstrated by his poems on walking. At first New England was a refuge, and then it became a part of the public poet's identity, a poet who represented the values of Old New England – a certain sort of Yankee simplicity, shrewdness and precision, exemplified by the New-England scion President Calvin Coolidge (Conforti 2001: 283). However, Frost's reflections on home in 'The Death of the Hired Man' suggested his personal deliberations about home, rather than regional values. The poem offers an idea of a home as a building, somewhere that can, in effect, be legally bought and which is implicated in the economic system, and another idea of home as refuge, as an inalienable right, and somewhere outside the trials of everyday life. Neither speaker refers to home as something earned by regional birth or belonging. A married couple are discussing their elderly hired labourer who has returned after leaving them for more lucrative work.

> 'Warren,' she said, 'he has come home to die:
> You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time.'
>
> 'Home,' he mocked gently.
>
>   'Yes, what else but home?
> It all depends on what you mean by home.
> Of course he's nothing to us, any more
> Than was the hound that came a stranger to us
> Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail.'
>
> 'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
> They have to take you in.'

'I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve.'

In the first two collections, however, Frost emphasised both the desire for home as refuge and the temporary nature of such refuges – that the human features of home places are unstable and will be overcome by natural forces. The natural features of the home place in 'The Death of the Hired Man' suggest the fragility of human-made constructs.

While Thomas and Frost sought home in the countryside, their economic and social precariousness meant they were only able find a temporary, fleeting sense of accommodation there. As well as being implicated in the social changes brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation, the two poets grappled with the impact of Darwin's theory of evolution. As Robert Bernard Hass points out and as I explain in the following chapter, Frost struggled with the violence and wastefulness of evolutionary nature. And as Edna Longley indicates and I discuss in Chapter Four, Edward Thomas was aware of evolutionary timescales.

In an interview with Fred Schott in 1947 Frost said 'Some have called me a nature poet. There's always something else in my poetry' (Frost and Lathem 1967: 114). In a letter to Louis Untermeyer from September 1934, Frost observed the significance of the human–nature relationship: 'Not even in the most natural of nature poetry was nature ever anything but the background to the portrait of a lunatic, a lover, or a farmer' (Frost and Untermeyer 1963: 243). This supports W.J. Keith's idea that Frost's nature poetry is sometimes human-nature poetry.

In an undated note, Frost suggested that nature is 'chaos' but that it provides 'a line' that informs us about creativity (Faggen 2008: 46). In his 'Letter to the *Amherst Student*' (published in *The Amherst Student* on 25 March 1935) he suggested the need for the human mind to impose order or 'form' on nature, for the sake of sanity and progress:

> There is at least so much good in the world that it admits of form and the making of form. And not only admits of it, but calls for it. We people are thrust forward out of the suggestions of form in the rolling clouds of nature. In us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself [...] The background is hugeness and confusion shading away from where we stand into black and utter chaos; and against the background any small man-made figure of order and concentration. What pleasanter than this should be so? (CPPP: 740)[35]

For Frost, form in nature was only fleetingly achieved by human effort, for instance in the creative act of poetry, or in any other productive act. In 'The Constant Symbol' (1946), Frost

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[35] In this statement, Frost echoes Ezra Pound's 1914 statement of Vorticism, his corollary of Imagism, where the artist is considered to be 'DIRECTING a certain fluid force against circumstance, as CONCEIVING instead of merely observing and reflecting' (Pound 2005: 97).

asserted that 'every poem is the epitome of the great predicament: a figure of the will braving alien entanglements' (CPPP: 787). It is also, according to 'The Figure a Poem Makes' 'a momentary stay against confusion' (1939, CPPP: 777). This is suggestive of the 'building' perspective considered in the following chapter – where nature is organised to meet a human end.   Yet, for Frost, the human-made form could only temporarily defeat the chaos of experience. The forces of Darwinian nature would contribute to the destruction of human-made forms.

Another view of nature is apparent in Frost's poetry, that nature and the mind operate on the same principle of the *élan vital*, which is constantly seeking to express itself in matter: 'it is this backward motion toward the source, against the stream, that we most see ourselves in' (CPPP: 238). This is demonstrated by the imagery in Frost's mature poetry – where the movements of rivers and trees are symbols of the life force that underscores the material universe and the fluxes of human consciousness. Throughout his work, Frost was interested in processes of coming into being, of change, process and flux in nature, with a particular emphasis on how this impacted on human experience.

These circumstances underpin Edward Thomas's and Robert Frost's interests in home and extra-vagance. On a personal level, they were concerned to find stability given larger displacements, and to conceptualise their relations with non-human nature in accordance with evolutionary theory. As we shall see in the next section, during the period of the poets' friendship their concerns with the tensions between attempting to find a home and venturing further afield provided both poets with a metaphor through which to consider their aesthetic theories. Frost, in particular, was aware of how contemporary philosophy emphasised the human mind's vacillation between creative and fixed forms of thought. Further, the poets' awareness of overlaps between their responses to the environment and those of the other occupants of the ecosystem led to what can be understood as their proto-environmentalism.

Aesthetics: Edward Thomas

In what follows, I argue that Thomas's and Frost's aesthetic theories were intrinsically tied to their views on nature in its broadest sense. Their theorising both reflected the latest views on the human mind, and was informed by philosophical views that questioned the contemporary scientific paradigm. One philosopher who addressed both was Henri Bergson. His relevance to ecocriticism is that he proposed that the conceptual realm – created to allow our purposeful action over nature – obscures our awareness of our experienced reality.

Bergson, a French mathematician-turned-philosopher, was hugely popular in Europe and America in the first two decades of the 20th century. As Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass explain in their introduction to *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, 'between 1909 and 1911, over two hundred articles about Bergson appeared in British Press alone' (1992: 3). The articles were not only in journals such as the *Lancet*, but also appeared in the *Saturday Review* and the *Nation*. In 1911, Bergson gave a series of public lectures in England, which were filled to 'overflowing' (Gillies 2003: 98). His philosophy appealed to modernist artists because of its opposition to reductive mechanism and intellectualism – both dominant forces in science at that time – restoring the roles of the mind, spirit and creativity to human endeavour. His appeal to non-intellectuals was that he appeared to deal with the challenge to the importance of the mental realm posed by mechanistic science (98). The key idea artists gleaned from Bergson was that reality transcends intellect and is better understood by intuitive, aesthetic faculties (Burwick and Douglass 1992: 3). Critics now assert that 'Bergson's ideas were crucial to the emergence of Modernism' (Gillies 2003: 95).

While Frost read Bergson, there is no direct evidence that Edward Thomas did. There are suggestions that he may have done: in his 1913-14 essay 'Ecstasy' (see also Chapter Two, below), he refers to Pater's art as 'pseudo-Bergsonian'. William James's writing, which drew on Bergson, was familiar to Edward Thomas, and he quoted James in his biography of Richard Jefferies and elsewhere (Kendall 2012: 91-94). As I have already indicated, Thomas differed from James in his interest in that which lay beyond conceptualisation, and this placed him in the company of Bergson.

I believe the strongest argument that can be made for an indirect influence of Bergson's philosophy on Thomas is the way that his poetry is amenable to analysis in terms of Bergson's idea of mental states as 'intensive manifolds', as discussed in Chapter Three. Bergson's inclusive' attitude to presenting his ideas – through translations and public lectures – would have appealed to Thomas and Frost's democratic impulses. One idea I develop here is that Frost acted as a translator' in Latour's sense for Bergson to Thomas, through their aesthetic discussions in 1914; it follows from this that Thomas was already amenable to these ideas.

Thomas's early poetic theorising – centred around his critical treatments of Symbolism, Aestheticism and other forms of 'rhetoric' – emphasised the importance of speech rhythms and other embodied rhythms in poetry. Thomas's interest in the poet's intimation of bodily rhythms provided a link between Thomas and Bergson who, we will see, suggested the creative possibilities of rhythm. Thomas first praised the physicality of William Cobbett's prose in an introduction to *Rural Rides* published in 1912: 'The movement of his prose is a bodily thing

[…] his style is perhaps the nearest to speech' (Thomas 1981: 168).[36] George Borrow's style was applauded for being like the speech 'of illiterate men of character' (Thomas 1981: 171).[37] Discussing the American writer Lafcadio Hearn, in his 1912 book on Hearn, Thomas remarked on the absence of 'natural sweet cadence' in writing for rhetorical effect:

> When he wrote a letter about something he cared for and understood, his words had a flow which was inseparable from their sense; but in this entirely self-conscious writing the spirit is never free to make music, or if one good cadence emerges the next will clash with it. (1981: 148)[38]

On the ethical side, Thomas condemned Lafcadio Hearn, as an aesthete, for insufficient ethical concern for his subject. This obliviousness also provided the aesthetic downfall of the writing, through its inattention to the natural forms and rhythms of expression. In a review of *North of Boston* for the *New Weekly* on 8 August 1914, Thomas praised Frost for precisely this demonstration of sympathy with the common man: Frost 'shows us directly less of his own feelings, and more of other people's, than Wordsworth did' (1985: 128). Thomas asserted of Algernon Charles Swinburne in 1912 that he was one of those 'who seem to shape their thought in order that it may fit a certain favourite type of sentence instead of allowing the thought to govern the form of the sentence' (Thomas 1981: 147).[39]

In 1913 Thomas criticised Pater for his absence of speech rhythms, for the 'exquisite unnaturalness' (of rhythm and diction) (1985: 161).[40] He considered that literature 'has to make words of such a spirit, and arrange them in such a manner, that they will do all that a speaker can do by innumerable gestures and their innumerable shades, by tone and pitch of voice, by speed, by pauses, by all that he is and all that he will become' (1985: 159). In the context of Thomas's earlier comments on the bodily rhythm of Cobbett's writing, Thomas seemed concerned that a writer should produce a sensory experience in the reader, rather than an idea. Further, as I will explain, Thomas's admiration for Frost shows us his belief that poetry should convey 'feelings' as well as ideas. Thomas's interest in rhythm as a way to convey feelings echoed Pound's contention in 1910 that poetry should use 'absolute rhythm' as a way to access the emotions.[41] The Imagists' relationship to Bergson is explored further in Chapter Three.

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[36] Edward Thomas, 'Introduction' in William Cobbett's [1830] *Rural Rides* (London: Dent, 1912) v-ii.
[37] Edward Thomas, *George Borrow* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1912) 250-51.
[38] Edward Thomas, *Lafcadio Hearn* (London: Constable) 45-52.
[39] Edward Thomas, in a review of Swinburne's *A Study of Shakespeare*, in *Morning Post* (9 September 1909).
[40] Edward Thomas, *Walter Pater* (London: Martin Secker, 1913).
[41] In the early stages of his career, Pound did not approve of metrical verse because it prevented both the direct expression of the personality of the writer and a more intimate presentation of the 'object'; however, he later became more tolerant of metrical arrangements (Hoffman 2001: 52-53). Pound made the statement about 'absolute rhythm' in his introduction to his translation of the poems by

Thomas's scepticism about the communicative capacities of language, as well as his interest in capturing the unfolding of consciousness through time, worked alongside his receptivity to the sound qualities of poetry. This sets the context for Thomas's aesthetic discussions with Robert Frost.

Aesthetics: Robert Frost

Robert Frost arranged a meeting with Frank S. Flint and T.E. Hulme on 1 July 1913, after initially encountering the two poets at the Poetry Bookshop in January 1913 (Parini 1998: 122; also see Chapter Three). Frost reported in a letter to Flint of 6 July that in their discussions of his poetic theory his 'ideas got just the rub they needed' (Frost 2014: 125). Frost was interested in Hulme as a philosopher and Hulme was widely known at this time for writing about Henri Bergson (Frost 2014: 118-19; see Chapter Three). Flint arranged for Frost to meet Ezra Pound, an influential critic and poet who subsequently reviewed *A Boy's Will* in May 1913 (Jackson 1994: np). Flint reviewed *A Boy's Will* in June 1913 and Frost voiced scepticism about Pound's judgement in comparison to Flint's in a letter of 24 June 1913: 'Ezra Pound manifestly made a mistake when he thought he knew how to praise my poetry for the right thing' (Frost 2014: 116). Gratitude to Flint was still on Frost's mind when he left England in 1915, as demonstrated by an unsent letter in which he thanked Flint for his friendship (Jackson 1994: np). This came after Frost gained Edward Thomas's friendship and influence, a fact that suggests it was more than friendship and reviewing that Frost needed from Flint. Frost later told Richard Poirier that 'he knew Hulme quite well', and he had visited Hulme's home regularly for Thursday evening gatherings (Thompson 1967: 441).[42] The meeting with Hulme and Flint may have helped Frost to separate himself from Ezra Pound's critical influence, and to learn from Hulme about his understanding of Bergson. According to Lawrance Thompson, Frost had already read Bergson's *Creative Evolution* with great enthusiasm in 1911 (Thompson 1967: 381-91).

Edward Thomas met Frost and Flint on 20 December 1913 on Frost's instigation, as a letter of 17 December 1913 attests (R. George Thomas 1995: 88), a fact that is not referred to in R. George Thomas's biography. Frost may have arranged the meeting between Flint and Thomas as a way to liberate Flint from Pound's critical influence (Jackson 1994: np).[43] It may have helped Thomas, too. Helen Thomas recorded that Frost and Thomas, during their month in

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Cavalcanti in *Translations* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1963) 23.

[42] See Richard Poirier, 'Robert Frost, The Art of Poetry No. 2', *Paris Review* No. 24 (Summer-Fall 1960). Online at <www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4678/the-art-of-poetry-no-2-robert-frost> [accessed 9 July 2014].

[43] Sarah Jackson's article quotes from six letters that remain unpublished from the Frost-Flint collection, housed in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin.

Gloucestershire, spent their time 'talking endlessly of literature and poetry in particular' (in R. George Thomas: 230). It is possible that Frost hoped Flint could have facilitated a meeting between Thomas and Hulme as Flint had for Frost, which could have helped Thomas to develop his own ideas further. The key points for this discussion, however, are that Frost read Bergson, received recognition of the philosophical basis of his verse theories by Hulme, and that Thomas and Frost shared ideas about poetry. Thus Bergson's and Hulme's philosophy were direct contexts for Frost's verse theory and indirect contexts for Thomas's verse writing.

Bergson's philosophy stemmed from his understanding in *Time and Free Will* (1889) of the scientific concept of time which, he believed, failed to do justice to our experiences of time and change. In the case of time, Bergson believed that contemporary physicists were wrong to suppose that time is linear and repeatable because he believed that observation of our inner states reveals instead the existence of durée réelle, or 'real duration', which is 'the irreversible succession of heterogeneous [mental] states melting into one another and flowing in indivisible process' (quoted in Burwick and Douglass 1992: 4). He thought that scientists had erroneously used a spatial metaphor to render time as a line that can be broken down into discrete parts. However, in the case of the mind, we understand that our inner life cannot be broken down into episodes moving along an imaginary line.

In Bergson's most famous text, *Creative Evolution* (1907), he developed the implications of his view of time for the concept of evolutionary change: 'to be conscious of real duration [...] is to become aware of continual novelty or generation by vital impulse' (in Burwick and Douglass: 4). The feeling for movement or becoming is real duration, which opposes the abstract concept of time in science. At the same time, awareness of our mental states in this way revealed to Bergson 'the reality of "intensive manifolds", [which are] acts of consciousness and acts of intuition, both of which also function as primary sources of aesthetic production' (quoted in Klein 1992: 224). Unlike a teleological version of evolution, where creation aims towards a fixed and essential species, the élan vital, or vital impulse, is constantly engaged in determining the new forms of life, and we are able to glean its operations through consideration of our own conscious states. This 'penetration of the inner takes us beyond ordinary cognition into the world of art' (quoted in Klein 1992: 223).

Bergson argued that we understand such truths through the faculty of intuition, which is the 'direct vision of the spirit by the spirit' (quoted in Klein 1992: 225). Awareness of our memories also reveals to us the operation of durée réelle, when through intuition we are aware that memories carry 'the totality of the past to the present' (225). That is, memories do not simply record the past but creatively reconstruct the past in the present moment. Intuition has to

work against the operations of the intellect, which is unable to comprehend the flux or qualitative multiplicity of our mental lives. The function of the intellect is an evolutionary adaptation, designed to enable us to act towards pre-given ends.

Bergson's 'vital impulse' suggested a pantheistic or spiritualised world view. My readings of Thomas's and Frost's poetry sometimes suggest a spiritualised view of nature or Nature. Bergson's view, however, can be distinguished from Transcendentalism in that he believed in the importance of both matter and spirit, rather than privileging the ideal realm of spirit. Key ideas from Bergson – qualitative multiplicity, real duration, constant becoming and intuition – are suggestive of Thomas's and Frost's aesthetic constructions of nature.

The American philosopher William James also offered a view that impressed both Thomas and Frost. In *The Principles of Psychology* James, like Bergson, was concerned with the mobility of our experience of our mental lives – what he called the 'stream of thought' (volume I, 1890). Robert Frost read *The Principles* during his time at Pinkerton (Thompson 1967: 231). In his essay 'On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings' from the 1899 publication *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (which Edward Thomas quoted from in his book on Richard Jefferies) James concerned himself with both the ethical and epistemological necessity of the existence of a variety of individual outlooks (Goodman 2009: np). James argued in favour of tolerating different points of view, and the impossibility of any person having a totalising conception of the truth. He had a particular interest in those, such as Wordsworth and Shelley, who found 'limitless significance in natural things' James ([1899] 1925: np).

Following this, James published *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) which addressed the psychological characteristics of individual experiences of the divine and of mysticism. James described, for instance, the possibility of fleeting moments of spiritual harmony and a sense in which the 'mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world' (in Goodman 2009: np), which prefigured Thomas's later interests in mysticism and self-transcendence as ecstasy.[44] In *Pragmatism* (1907), James explained his view that the truth of a proposition is a function of its usefulness in the course of a human life. He maintained that such truths – including the propositions of science – only hold for a certain time, as reality is constantly in process, in a way that is unamenable to human scrutiny.

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[44] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1916; originally published in 1902) v, 428.

The critics Frank Lentricchia (1975) and Robert Hass (2002) developed post-Kantian theories of Frost's aesthetics, which draw on both James and Bergson, and which attempt to describe how Frost overcame his Romantic inheritance, and how he could reconcile empiricism with his spiritual inclinations. From his understanding of Darwin, Frost was unable to accept the Transcendent Romantic response to nature, exemplified by Emerson, Shelley, Coleridge and occasionally by Wordsworth, where nature exists as a realm of purposive forms designed by a Transcendent creator for human contemplation. Evolution situated humanity in the evolutionary fluxes of creativity and destruction, and Darwin had disproved the theory of fixed forms in nature once and for all (Hass 2002: 2). In line with his readings of contemporary physics, Frost acknowledged the existence of a material realm operating under its own imperatives. However, this would leave Frost with the question of where human consciousness fitted in; how could we be at home in nature? Where does human value stem from in a mechanistic and evolutionary nature?

Kant had sought to overcome the alienation of the human subject from nature. For Kant, the immortal laws of nature provide a guide to human conduct, including in the realm of art. The artist who offers personal *impressions* of the object – rather than directly revealing their perceptions of the object – reveals knowledge of the material realm. Both Frank Lentricchia and Robert Bernard see Frost's poetry as supporting Kant's claim that knowledge can be attained through creative processes. Both see Frost as differing from Kant in the types of knowledge that can be acquired (Lentricchia 1975 150; Hass 2002: 17).

Both Hass and Lentricchia situate Frost's poetics 'in the intellectual context of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries' in a position between idealism and materialism (Hass 2002: 126). Hass explains that, whereas Kant had claimed:

> that man's organisational faculties of mind corresponded to the ideal forms of Euclidean space and time, a small group of philosophers and scientists claimed that humans' conceptual systems were limited, subjective constructs of the mind that helped them negotiate a reality that could never be known for certain. (Hass 2002: 5)

This 'group' included William James. Both critics support the notion that in Frost's poetry 'minds and objects are implicated with each other' (Hass 2002: 6) However, Hass and Lentricchia part company on Frost's inheritance from Emerson. Both see him overcoming a Romantic view that objects correspond to spiritual truths. Drawing on Frost's inheritance from Bergson, Hass argues that Frost's poetry suggests that spirit can be manifested in physical

forms. Lentricchia, on the other hand, relies on a Jamesian model to suggest how Frost overcame difficulties with Kantian aesthetics.

For Lentricchia, in *Robert Frost: Modern Poetics and the Landscapes of Self*, Frost opposed the notion that art involves the perception of Kantian 'intersubjective categories of knowledge' (1975: 9). In this critic's understanding, Frost shaped truths out of material experience to suit individual, psychological needs. Lentricchia focused on two meanings of landscape in Frost's poetry, whereby it is simultaneously a 'configuration of objects really there in nature and, as well, the phenomenological notion that any particular landscape is coherent because the mind of the artist makes it so' (4). In rendering the landscape, the poet revealed his 'personality' and 'conscious identity through time'. The objects in the landscape themselves were mediated by the poet's consciousness. Finally, the poet's subjectivity was constituted in his interrelationship with the landscape. Lentricchia focuses on the 'metaphorical' aspect of Frost's poetics, which show the poet attempting to reconcile himself with the world, which is often harsh and unyielding.

Robert Bernard Hass, on the other hand, identifies three stages in Frost's career, including an aesthetic phase, that draws most heavily on Frost's reading of Bergson, and a later metaphorical phase, whereby Frost began to draw on William James's instrumentalist account of knowledge in revealing the importance of poetic metaphors (Hass 2002: 129). In the final stage, Frost revealed his conviction about the cultural value of both scientific knowledge and poetry. Here, Hass argues, Frost reconciled Jamesian and Bergsonian views, and reflected – in Hass's view – the Bergsonian inspiration that the poet can detect the movements of consciousness towards the élan vital (15). All three stages of Frost's development, for Hass, rely on an

> aesthetics of 'surfaces and depths'. For Frost, since visual or conceptual surfaces always served as a barrier to the dynamic processes of actual experience, the poet was to make those surfaces as transparent as possible. (2002: 139)

This reveals the

> dichotomy between the world of our ordinary experience – one that we have constructed through mental activity – and the elusive world of confusing sensory stimuli that both precedes and necessitates our cognitive shaping of it. (123)

Hass believes that Frost learned from James that art abstracts from the flux of sensory stimuli yet cannot get to the true nature of reality beyond our experiences of the flux. From Bergson, Frost learned that 'matter, language and quantity were inadequate representations of a "true"

reality' (3). Hass argues that the distinction between Frost and Pound in their emphases on the visual versus aural responses to reality corresponded to whether they believed that 'poetic "truth" lay in 'temporal rather than spatial elements of experience' (139). He continues that from Bergson, Frost learned that spatial metaphors 'do not convey the dynamic processes of actual experience'. In fact, the visual or conceptual are barriers to rendering actual experience: 'Employing an intoned language that approximated to the sequential character of music, Frost, early in his career, sought to recreate in his poetry the fluid movement of consciousness' (139). Pound, on the other hand, thought that the image was the best way to communicate the objective side of experience uncorrupted by 'emotional excess' (190). For Hass, Frost was concerned with the subjective aspects of experience.

Frost's poetry, for Hass, is modernist in that it reveals the 'dynamic patterns of emerging consciousness', rather than continuing in the style of the outdated poetry of the late Victorian period. Rhetorical intonation allows for emotional expression through the transparent surfaces of poetry. The interplay between the formal constraints and the emotional nuances corresponds to Bergson's distinction between élan vital and matter (142). Frost's idea of the role of sentence sounds includes a transparent version of the forces operating in the intellectual static surface obscurity of Pound. The consequent contrast between form and matter corresponds to the emotional experience of flux: 'The synthesis of tone and form conveys the infinite variety of unfolding emotional states much better than the individual words that would fix them into rigid structures' (142).

To summarise the views of these two critics and their relevance for my argument, Hass argues that Frost thought we can intuit a reality behind static conceptual understandings, while Lentricchia focuses on Frost's interest in metaphorical truths. I will describe Frost's attempts to accommodate himself within the Bergsonian fluxes of human and non-human nature because I believe that these attempts were more important at this point in his development than his attempts to protect himself from a nature that was destructive of human meaning. I am interested in what Hass calls Frost's 'aesthetic phase' and will compare this with parallel developments in Thomas's writing. I will explore Frost's aesthetics in the context of his innovations in poetry about nature and the countryside, and his reflections on relations between human and non-human nature. I will also compare Frost's writing on his aesthetics with Thomas's criticism of verse, and suggest that both poets were aiming to convey a Bergsonian 'synthesis of tone and form' in their poetry, in ways that challenge rigid distinctions between human and non-human nature. Further, this contrast between the 'static' surface forms of poetry

and the flux of tones corresponds to the contrast between 'homely' and 'extra-vagant' impulses of the human mind.

CHAPTER TWO – HOME AND 'EXTRA-VAGANCE'

> Here is a poet who loves night as well as day, the 'bare November days' as well as the summer sunshine, paints for us not only the mosses, ferns and the flowers, the mountain lakes as well as ferns, but the portraits of men and women, no heroes or queens, goddesses or saints, but just every day men and women, very much like ourselves.
>
> (John 'Jack' Haines, GCA, D10828[45])

Introduction

Many ecocritical readings of place in Romantic literature, such as that offered in Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth,* address the nature poet's relation to non-human nature, with a particular emphasis on whether and how man is at 'home' in the environment. However, an account that develops this into an experience of 'dwelling' fails to deal with Thomas's and Frost's poetic treatments of movement as opposed to rootedness, displacement as opposed to alienation, the constructed nature of home places in their poetry, and the relations between poet and world. This chapter addresses the issue of how the poets used the concepts of extra-vagance, home and ecstasy to describe both their poetry and their interactions with the world in the period of globalisation. 'Dwelling' is explored at length because of ecocriticism's focus on its relevance to poetry.

The post-Marxist, process-oriented model for place developed by British geographer Doreen Massey emphasises both the physical and mental dimensions of place (1994; 2005). Her motivation is to develop a geographical account of political subjecthood, and to articulate the historical openness of the future. With her emphases on materiality as well as experience, Massey allows me to elucidate both the aesthetic and political dimensions of my project, which a conventional phenomenological reading might fail to address. Key to Massey's account of place is the importance of space: space is 'imbricated' with place, and cannot be separated from our experience of it. In *For Space*, Massey draws on the philosophy of Henri Bergson and is motivated by the vitalism of his *Time and Free Will*. This leads her to the idea that space is the dimension which allows for the possibility of heterogeneous multiplicity: space allows for the coexistence of multiple individuals through time (2005: 21). Since space is the domain of multiplicity, it allows for the production of relations that constitute place, and the negotiation of such relations, which results in the social realm. However, these relations are not already mapped out: this is not a 'coherent, closed system' (2005: 11). For Massey, place is an 'event'

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[46] 'Streets that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent', in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' by T.S. Eliot (1915); 'There died a myriad, /And of the best, among them, / For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization', in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (Ezra Pound 1920, in Rainey ed., 51).

in space. Other theorists, particularly ecocritics, set space and place in opposition. For example, for Lawrence Buell, drawing on geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, 'space as against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction, whereas place is "space to which meaning has been ascribed"' (2005: 63).

Thomas's and Frost's depictions of specific places are constituted by presentations of relations between what is particular and intimately known and that which lies beyond, as Massey's model suggests. This is the focus of their thematic discussions of extra-vagance and home: while home may offer a fleeting sense of harmony, it is a place that is constantly being constructed or reconstructed through movement (including imaginative movement) or extra-vagance, which may ironically produce experiences of homeliness outside of the home place. At the same time, poetic treatment of movement (itself a kind of 'extravagance') reconstitutes the identity of the subject, and this renewal offers a different, oppositional sense of being at home. I discuss the evocation of the mental and physical confines of the home place under the theme of home, and the breaking of such boundaries under the theme of extra-vagance. Movement beyond an individual's physical and psychic bounds can be called ecstasy which is 'the word [which] meant the condition of being out of place, being out of the accustomed, if you like, the proper place; applied to the mind, it would mean insanity or bewilderment' (BC, 'Ecstasy', 5).

While seeking to make theoretical interventions on the ecocritical treatment of place, this project addresses an under-examined phase in literary history. My focus on place in this thesis is illustrated by the poets' stays in rural Gloucestershire, and the choice of this location can be understood as due to its distance from the metropolis – in this case literary London of 1912-1917. Although Thomas was living in rural Steep, in Hampshire, and Frost in suburban Beaconsfield prior to their Gloucestershire stay, London offered the markets for both their work. Their homes were destabilised by the need to work and travel to London – they could have lived anywhere within commuting distance of the capital. Dymock and Ryton in Gloucestershire were just far enough away not to be reachable in a day trip from London. Thomas and Frosts' ambivalence to the city echoed the destabilisation faced by the modernists in the city (Eliot's 'insidious' streets, Pound's evidence of a 'botched civilization').[46] However, Thomas and Frost distinguished themselves from their modernist contemporaries through their regenerative experiences of the natural environment, and in their use of everyday language and traditional

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[46] 'Streets that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent', in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' by T.S. Eliot (1915); 'There died a myriad, /And of the best, among them, / For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization', in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (Ezra Pound 1920, in Rainey ed., 51).

literary forms, which offered them feelings of homeliness and continuum. Their journeys into the countryside also contrasted with the search for transcendence by the Georgians.[47]

An ecocritical consideration of Edward Thomas's and Robert Frost's writing about modern agricultural landscapes from 1912-1917 must also address how they engaged with and exceeded the tropes of wilderness writing (dominant in the American nature writing tradition) and pastoral conventions (the dominant 'Old World' nature motif). As well as the need to address the interpenetration of country and city, between local and global, during this period, the poetry challenges us to a consideration of the interpenetration of nature and culture.

The first premise of this chapter is that both Thomas's and Frost's poetry from 1912-1917 emphasises how a feeling of being 'at home' can be conveyed in terms of fleeting engagement with heterogeneous human and non-human nature. This allows for the feeling of homeliness to be instigated by multiple places, rather than uniquely in a birth place or a long-term dwelling place. The second premise is that these home places are generally portrayed, not as microcosms of larger regions or nations, but in their particularity, and as constellations of relations that ultimately encompass the globe. This suggests that their poetry can support Doreen Massey's dynamic conceptions of space and place.

I will then explore how this version of local place allows the poets to set the local in opposition to the national or international, and in doing so convey universal themes and ideas. Drawing on my earlier literature review, I illustrate how my reading of the two poets differs from critics who take the poets' writings about place in this period to be suggestive of microcosms of the national or exclusively concerned with a regional focus. This oppositional and dynamic version of local place provides the template for my argument against the idea of place experience as dwelling: place is shown to be fully temporal and spatialised, and therefore implicated in politics, and it is articulated through the moment of relation to human and more-than-human nature. Buell also emphasises the temporal natural of place attachment, which is subjective and socially determined, and the 'multiplication' and 'dispersal' of place attachment under modernization (2005: 72). Traditional writing about place, he acknowledges, concerns itself with 'bounded areas of small size', with threats to a place emanating from within (77).

Physical movement links Thomas and Frost to the Romantic wanderers, but also to contemporary interests in troubadours, Gypsies and folk song. In their searches for a felt relationship to the natural world, the poets travelled beyond the bounds of their home places. I relate the poets' wayfaring to the Thoreauvian idea of 'extra-vagance' and the American

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[47] See, for example, Lascelles Abercrombie's *Deborah* (1912), and *Speculative Dialogues* (1913).

pastoral, rather than to the explicitly spiritual journeys of Emerson, or the detached observation of the urban flâneur. Walking can also be understood as a variety of pilgrimage. We can see this, for example, in Lucy Newlyn's suggestion to link Thomas's walking to Hazlitt's dissenting influences, and to nomadic Unitarian preachers and radical Romanticism (2006: 168-182). Walkers met on route are thus Chaucerian 'representative people' (179). Yet the line I follow is to see Thomas's and Frost's movements as produced by the search for a felt relationship to the natural environment, to attempt to shift melancholic patterns of thought or memory, and to avoid hegemonic thinking that rejects multiplicity. Their commitments to the nuances of experiences of 'home' and 'extra-vagance' set the poets halfway between tradition and revolt, between inner and outer worlds.

In what follows, I outline the existing ecocritical treatments of place, and show how Doreen Massey's notion of place reframes human–nature interactions as the fleeting intersection of material trajectories through time. I then highlight the oppositional versions of home I discover in Thomas's and Frost's poetry, and explain the similarities between Thomas's and Frost's ecological homes and Timothy Ingold's formulation of 'wayfaring'. I fully introduce the ideas of ecstasy and extra-vagance, and their thematic and historical origins, and show that they are compatible with Ingold's idea of the 'meshwork'. Finally, I draw together evidence against a reading of home as dwelling place.

Towards a comparative ecocritical treatment of place

Why does understanding place matter from an ecocritical point of view, or from a wider literary critical perspective? Ecocriticism has shown us that nature and place have remained outside the scope of serious literary consideration until relatively recently (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996: xxxiii). In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Cheryl Glotfelty observes that early stage ecocriticism involved a consideration of how literature presents or omits nature in its depiction of places. This challenges both our aesthetics and our ethics: 'consciousness raising results when stereotypes are identified – Eden, Arcadia, virgin land, miasmal swamp, savage wilderness – and when absences are noticed: where *is* the natural world in this text?' (Glotfelty and Fromm: xxxiii, punctuated as original). Later environmentally-minded critics have suggested that literary presentations of place as a natural environment can raise our awareness of environmental destruction, and that the majority of such writing focuses on realistic conceptions of pristine 'natural' places which are increasingly difficult to find (Buell 2005: 22-23; Garrard 2012: 65).

The second-wave of ecocriticism identified by Lawrence Buell in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* asserted that 'a mature environmental aesthetics – or ethics or politics – must take into account the interpenetration of metropolis and outback, its anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns' (23). Buell's 'expanded' sense of environmentality encompasses environmental justice, as well as promotion of an environmental consciousness. Second-wave ecocritical treatments of place emphasise the interpenetration of nature and culture, so that we may seek to deconstruct the social components of our meanings of nature, or even attempt to do away with use of the term 'nature' as a distancing from the 'web' of which we are a part (Gifford 2011: 13, with reference to Timothy Morton's controversial 2007 *Ecology Without Nature*). Terry Gifford considers the first version of second-wave ecocriticism as the 'view that there can be no "innocent" reference to nature in a poem' since any 'reference will implicitly or explicitly express a notion of nature that relates to culturally developed assumptions about metaphysics, aesthetics, politics and status, that is, in many cases, ideologies' (38). The latter version, for Gifford, is more about 'challenge' than 'praxis'; I propose to continue using 'nature' as opposed to 'web' or 'meshwork' for referring to particular aspects of the world or experience, but interrogate the mediating and ideological functions of the term and elaborate the perspective offered by the word 'mesh'.

Environmental justice critics such as Ursula Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008) have questioned the relevance of literary presentations of local places in a globally-connected, scientifically informed world, urging an eco-cosmopolitan approach that emphasises the interconnectivity of places seen from a global perspective. In *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom*, Greg Garrard suggests that ecocritics' attachment to the idea of dwelling is prompted by concern to show the value of nature in 'practical existence', as opposed to the 'aesthetic tourist' mode of traditional pastoral and wilderness tropes. Garrard acknowledges that the georgic mode of writing about working on the land may demonstrate a sense of responsibility to the land (2012: 123). Through the use of the term by Martin Heidegger, dwelling can be associated with a mode of living that is outside technological and utilitarian valuation. Garrard asserts, however, that 'the social conservatism of an appeal to ancestry, family and tradition rooted in place seems intrinsic to georgic in its familiar and traditional forms', even while he acknowledges that a 'radical pastoral' might be possible (2012: 122; and 2000: 182-187).

Jeff Malpas, in *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), argues that this position on Heidegger's idea of dwelling – shared at one point by Doreen Massey and others – is based on a misapprehension of Heidegger's theorising about

place in the light of his involvement with the Nazi party. This has led critics to assert that, for Heidegger, place is timeless and eternal, and defined in opposition to 'others'. Focusing on Heidegger's opposition of place to homogenized space and on the idea of 'unfolding', Malpas argues that, on the contrary, Heidegger's place was 'essentially dynamic' and had a 'temporal character' (32). Heidegger's theorising about place and dwelling, Malpas notes, came after his involvement with the Nazi party, in his essays such as 'Building Dwelling Thinking', and by this point Heidegger had surrendered any interest in 'Blut und Boden' (20). The philosopher's theorising about place as 'homeland' rejected the idea of biological or racial definitions of the people, and was instead based on ideas of 'spirit', 'culture' and 'community' (23)

Malpas's own reading of Heidegger's later theorising on the idea of place considers the related terms *Ort*, or *Ortschaft*, which mean gathering or focus (rather than the more location-bound terms *Stelle* and *Platz* in earlier writing) and *die Ortschaft des Seins*, which means 'the place of being' (30-33).[48] In this way, although place implies a particular kind of unity or boundedness, it is

> tied to the idea of that from which something begins its unfolding as what it is, rather than that at which it comes to a stop; a concept of boundary as *origin* rather than as *terminus*. Significantly, both this idea of boundedness and that of focus or gathering are themselves closely tied to a conception of place as constituted through a gathering of elements that are themselves mutually defined only through the way in which they are gathered together within the place they also constitute. (Malpas 2006: 29; italics and punctuation follows original)

Malpas sees place as key to Heidegger's intuition of being, as the 'immediate grasp of being in our own "being-in" the open-ness of place' (3). Heidegger's struggle was, for Malpas, uncovering the nature of being in place without being able to get outside it. This is what Malpas calls Heidegger's 'topographical/topological orientation and method' (35).

Further, linking the idea of being-in to the discussion of presence in *Being and Time*, '[t]he presencing or disclosedness of a being is always a matter of its coming to presence in relation to other beings' (14). '[P]resencing or disclosedness is inseparable from the happening of a world'; and this 'happening' cannot be abstracted from our 'concrete and immediate experience of the world' in which we are ourselves involved (15). The only way we can understand such a gathering is through the idea of a particular place (16). Location and position are dependent on ideas of region and domain that themselves require 'the opening up of such a domain that occurs through place' (32). Thus dwelling is essentially temporal and spatialised. Malpas's 'translation' of Heidegger's writing on place informs my own discussions of dwelling.

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[48] Malpas refers to Heidegger's 'Seminar in Le Thor 1969', in Heideger's *Gestamtausgabe* 7, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000) 326-71.

Ecocriticism's interest in writing about place, and questions about dwelling, might also be approached via postcolonial arguments against the atemporalised space of globalisation. Laurence Coupe emphasises the link between opposition to unequal 'market liberalisation' and 'the overriding of local laws and customs which favoured the rights of ecosystems' (2000: 5). These arguments extend post-colonialism to the conditions of a globalised world market and global environmental threats and address the imposition of free-market and mono-cultural solutions on third-world nations by extra-national bodies such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO.

On the other hand, Greg Garrard demonstrates ideologically problematic images of the rural in advertising and, reiterating his belief in the conservatism of the georgic, argues that a focus on the local over the global cannot be justified in terms of an authentic escape from the 'corrupt modern world of simulation and representation' (2012: 189). But what of the difficulties of escaping from idealised images of the global? How can we write about the local or global in ways that acknowledge the homogenising impulses of globalisation? Is it possible to write about the local in a way that avoids 'the corrupt world of simulation and representation'? Which perspectives enable this?

Tim Ingold (2005) and Nigel Thrift (1999) engage with a dynamic notion of Heideggerian dwelling, which is contrasted with one idea of 'building'. Thrift explains in 'Steps to an Ecology of Place' that

> In the building perspective, space and time are neutral grids, or perhaps containers, over which and in which meaning is 'placed'. [Instead], space and time are what we labour to produce. (1999: 301)

For both Ingold and Thrift, dwelling is the human ability to find a sense of harmony through concern and care for nature. Ingold and Thrift find in Heidegger's essay 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' evidence for the idea that dwelling offers an ethical alternative to the building perspective. Thus for Ingold, in his essay 'Epilogue: Towards a Politics of Dwelling':[49]

> Every particular act of making or building begins with an end in mind and ends with a material object that one can then begin to use. Life, however, does not begin or end anywhere, but is rather carried on through the successive acts that punctuate its flow. Producing their life, human beings effectively produce themselves. The intransitive verb

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[49] Ingold notes that Heidegger uses the word 'building' in a sense closer to his own meaning of 'dwelling': 'building, then, is not a means to dwelling, nor does dwelling fix the ends, or the designs, which building goes on to implement. For to build, as Heidegger put it, "is already to dwell … Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build"' [ellipsis in original] (8). Ingold quotes Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 147.

'to dwell' aptly conveys this conception of the production of life as *a task* that has continually to be worked at. (Ingold 2005: np)

Ingold proceeds to argue that the production of life by humans is not simply the production of society: it is 'the interplay of diverse human and non-human agents in their mutual relationships' (2005: np). This interplay involves the movements, and the comings and goings of people and animals. It also entails the need to consider the porous boundaries of places, and the entwinement of nature and society. 'Dwelling' in such a world, where struggle, including with nature, plays a part, we do not experience a permanent sense of harmony, such as certain presentations of 'dwelling' seem to suggest. While retaining his emphasis on the importance of living with nature as opposed to a building perspective, Ingold later rejects the term 'dwelling' for its connotation of fixity in favour of the importance of 'wayfaring' (2011: 12). In *Being Alive*, he elucidates the term:

> My contention is that lives are led not inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere […]. I use the term *wayfaring* to describe the embodied experience of this perambulatory movement. It is as wayfarers, then, that human beings inhabit the earth […]. But by the same token, human existence is not fundamentally place-*bound* […] but place-*binding*. It unfolds not in places but along paths. Proceeding along a path, every inhabitant lays a trail. Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with the other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that lifelines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot. (Ingold 2011: 148; italics as original)

Jonathan Bate and Jeff Malpas illustrate the various interpretations of Heidegger's writing on place. As we have seen, Malpas traces Heidegger's concerns with home or *heimat* and place to a concern with the nature of being, which is a concern for being in place. While place as location or coordinate is part of our everyday understanding, a more fundamental meaning – which overlaps with Doreen Massey's account below – is the idea of place as the sphere of possibility of our being. Unlike those critics who find an essential social conservatism in Heidegger, Malpas asserts that there is no essential connection between home or heimat (homeland) and a people. In Heidegger's later writing on dwelling, Malpas locates the idea that place is a relation between us and other things. This includes the need for language to evoke the experience of encounter, which is a uniquely human challenge. While for Malpas, being in place is not the sole concern of Heidegger's account of dwelling, critics such as Ingold indicate that Heidegger's vision is anthropocentric, and reject his distinction between a human's 'being' in a world and an animal's merely 'existing' in its environment (Ingold 2011: 11). The rejection of this distinction is incorporated into Ingold's wayfaring perspective.

For Jonathan Bate, however, the human experience of dwelling is paramount. Bate and critics that follow his apparently more conservative variety of ecocriticism suggest that the

imaginative construction of home is itself outside nature. For Bate 'A home is a house in which one does not live but dwells'; poetry is the uniquely human way of 'dwelling' on the earth, which allows us to escape from a dominant utilitarian ideology (2001: 274). Language, through the creation of poetry, provides the relation to the non-human that allows us to reveal its being; however, in doing so, we are made aware of our alienation from the lives of non-human nature within a habitat.

The idea of dwelling provides recognition of the importance to our identities of feeling at home in nature and the idea of working with, rather than on, nature. As Thrift notes, such everyday experiences have been downplayed by theorists of modernity, who emphasise global narratives of 'progress' and the uniformity of globalised space (see above). However, as Ingold observes, our feelings of accommodation with nature are usually fleeting and intermingled with a sense of future paths to be followed. Further, Thomas and Frost both hinted that there are important poetic links between human and animal being in the world. I prefer to call this experience of temporary homeliness, following Ingold, 'wayfaring'.

While we can bear in mind the development of wayfaring out of writing on dwelling, the criticism of ideas of dwelling as rootedness can provide helpful insights. Place sensitivity is, following Val Plumwood, the need to register our material and emotional attachment to multiple places, rather than the singular 'home' that is emphasised in some versions of dwelling (2008: np). Given the Western World's colonial history and emphasis on mind-body dualisms, we are doubly prone to ignore the material basis of our attachments to particular special places. Plumwood calls the places that supply our material needs through natural resources or storing our pollution 'shadow places'. Hence, we must consider our tendency to search for 'one true home', which allows for the systematic degradation of less beautiful places or more distant regions. An awareness of this tendency leads us to an ethic of 'responsibility' to acknowledge the denied or shadow places, rather than to 'cherish' one particular place, even in the form of bioregionalism. This attitude of responsibility should bear in mind connections and interdependency, and the fact that exchange between places can be culturally and ecologically enriching.

Thus, whatever Frost might have said about the importance of his rural New England landscapes, it was industrial Lawrence, where his grandfather's mill was situated, that provided the inheritance to fund his stay in England. Did he overlook this material dependency in his writing in ways that are ecologically or socially harmful? Edward Thomas's work tied him to the economy of London, to the periodical press, and the suburban villa dwellers who consumed his prose writing, and yet he frequently criticised their modes of inhabiting the landscapes of

Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire and noted his own implication in these displaced economies. After the outbreak of the war, the salary offered by Thomas's soldierhood enabled him to write poetry, and connected him with those displaced labourers who had found themselves forced to enlist. Did his writing or soldiering make any difference to the rural poor or to the marginalised nature with which he sympathised?

There are increasing pitfalls of writing about place, given the increase in connections between places under globalisation. Can we require a writer be aware of ecological connections without admitting to cultural interdependency? Perhaps what is needed is a sense of humility towards writing about place, since a responsible writer is aware of the incomprehensible number of connections, both human and non-human, within which each place is enmeshed.

The importance of space

In the light of social constructivist arguments about the meaning of nature that highlight the cultural component of all language, literature, rather than the site it supposedly addresses, might be examined for the dialectical relations between an author's own interpretation of nature and communal narratives which exist about that place (Gifford 2011: 36-39). Invocations of place, as imaginative constructs partly constituted through our relationships with nature, can be culturally sanctioned or oppositional, and to understand this we must know more about a writer's circumstances (see for instance, Pite 2002 on Thomas Hardy; and Ebbatson 2005: 159-213, on Edward Thomas). For Doreen Massey, in *Space, Place and Gender*, places develop through time as a result of alterations in the network of physical and mental relations that constitute their identities and boundaries:

> Importantly, [place] includes relations which stretch beyond – the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside. Such a view of place challenges any possibility of claims to internal histories or to timeless identities. The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around and defining its identity in counter position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that 'beyond'. Places viewed this way are open and porous. (1994: 5)

As places change their meaning for individuals and communities through alterations to the constellation of relations that constitute them, so individuals can maintain or realign their identities through movement – or a lack of movement – across and within social spaces. Identities and relations are constructed simultaneously through each individual's spatiality.

In her later work, *For Space* (2005), Massey considers the relationship between space and place. Here, she challenges the supposed inevitability of neoliberal capitalist globalisation,

and its influence on geography, where space and place are converted into points in time and considered 'backwards' or 'advanced'. She argues that this ignores our everyday experience of places and what we know about their multiple stories and particularity. Massey identifies one manifestation of the impulse to resist globalisation in the withdrawal into a mythological local realm which mistakenly essentialises places. What results from this kind of resistance to globalisation is opposition to invasion and difference, and this opposition fails to address 'the real forces at work' that produce poverty and exclusion (2005: 6). Massey aims to understand the openness of place to change through time while realising the 'specificity and uniqueness' of places and the individuals that travel through them (96).

Massey then ventures into philosophical accounts of space and argues against the influence of structuralism which, through its search for meaning through structural oppositions, considers space in opposition to time as 'the stasis of synchronic structure' (39). Thus, as well as globalisation's emphasis on time over space, we have theorists such as Ernest Laclau claiming that the space of literature has obliterated the temporality of oral cultures. Massey argues instead that we are able to represent aspects of time and space as qualitative process, encounter or tendency, rather than 'results' – and as a form of embodied knowledge rather than a mediation. However, this requires a view of representation as 'active engagement' rather than as a 'mirror of nature', which obliterates the vitality of temporal existence (29).

Massey gleans from the vitalist philosopher Henri Bergson the importance of 'continuous coming to being', or the newness of things, which she believes is key to our experience of temporality. While Bergson did away with the idea of space and attributed this sense of 'newness' to the domain of time, Massey retains Derrida's view of space as 'setting aside'. This has led her to think of space as the domain of continuity, or duration – or the process of opening an interval for the emergence of open possible futures (2005: 47-56). However, while Derrida focuses on difference, Massey is interested in the construction of discrete multiplicity, which is a prerequisite for the experience of relations between things. Space is 'the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity' (10). Multiplicity is described as 'contemporaneous plurality', which allows for 'distinct trajectories', the sense of stories that have yet to be told – involving other spaces and times – rather than a single movement towards 'progress', which represses both temporal and spatial distance (70).

For Massey, space is created 'through practices of material engagement', including the means of production, and encounters with the non-human (61). Since space is made from the 'coexistence of multiple trajectories', we are able to draw upon space to challenge hegemonic power relations, by the 'raising of voices localised outside of [...] the accepted speaking space of

modernity' (64). This version of space also challenges the idea of an unfettered movement of capital under globalisation because it shows the limitations of individual humans to move freely around the globe. Further, the Western story of capitalism emphasises a movement from centre to margins rather than considering the real multiplicity of actual movements or their absence. A de-centred understanding of place also emphasises that local places are implicated in the processes of globalisation, rather than simply subject to them.

While space is the emergent product of relations between multiplicities, place is the 'constant emergence of uniqueness out of (and within) the specific constellation of interrelations within which that place is set' (68). Places are 'foci of the meeting and the non-meeting of the previously unrelated' which cannot be represented in their totality (71). Through their combination of space and time, places convey a sense of history as ongoing, of the presence of the past in the 'now', of the impossibility of 'going back home'. The idea of place as a meeting and conjunction of trajectories is elicited by the emphasis on mobility – of the human and non-human. Massey asserts that 'the countryside', in particular, allows us to develop 'an appreciation of the temporary nature of the constellation that is place' through presence of non-human nature (2005: 160). Massey argues that while cosmopolitan environmentalism may focus on 'a planet-scale projection of qualities of homeliness and rootedness', it is through images of the countryside that we are able to pay attention to the particular disruptions and migrations of non-human nature which depend upon the 'daily dynamics of bio-materiality' (2005: 97-98). Her writing suggests a model through which to understand the role of movement – by birds, labourers, tramps, and poets – in our experience of Thomas's and Frost's poetry of place.

Space and place: Edward Thomas

Thomas's 'A Private' at first evokes a place that appears static, as a constellation formed by a hawthorn bush on a Wiltshire down, the one-time sleeping place of the dead ploughman, the 'The Drover' pub, and an unnamed town:

> This ploughman dead in battle slept out of doors
> Many a frosty night, and merrily
> Answered staid drinkers, good bedmen, and all bores:
> 'At Mrs Greenland's Hawthorn Bush,' said he,
> 'I slept.' None knew which bush. Above the town,
> Beyond 'The Drover', a hundred spot the down
> In Wiltshire. And where now at last he sleeps
> More sound in France – that, too, he secret keeps.

As the poem progresses, however, the landscape widens out through a series of 'links and interconnections' – including a play on the meaning of 'sleeping well' – to encompass the familiar (and yet unnamed) private's burial place in the unfamiliar trenches of Northern France. Both down and trench are evoked through the story of a particular individual, and the individual is described through a relation to landscape. Space and time are also presented through the overlapping trajectories of the speaker, the dead ploughman, and the other inhabitants of the down. Thus, while neither place nor individual is named, we have the sense of the place as an event in the lives of interconnected inhabitants and organisms.

In 'Up in the Wind', the place consists in interconnections between a public house called 'The White Horse', 'eleven houseless miles', 'two railway lines', North and South Downs, farm land and a former common. Rather than producing an image of a timeless scene, Thomas evoked space and time through presenting the journeys and lives that led up to and beyond this moment – the road and rail travellers, the unnamed speaker, the dead charcoal burners and trees that have been felled, the barmaid and her family.

A similar idea can be found, to some extent, in the poems by Thomas that used folk song traditions but addressed contemporary conditions, to form a relational view of place and a sense of movement through time ('The Gypsy'; and 'An Old Song' [2]).[50] Here, the use of song lyrics produced another type of encounter that contributed to the poetic experience – an encounter with knowledge embodied in song. Thomas's places consisted precisely in the meeting of the perspectives of discrete individuals, rather than in one totalising idea. In 'The Gypsy', Thomas's speaker affirms that he enjoys these encounters and finds inspiration in them for his writing. (However, Thomas goes on to distance himself from the otherness he perceives in the gypsy, see Chapter Five):

> And I paid nothing then,
> As I pay nothing now with the dipping of my pen
> For her brother's music when he drummed the tambourine
> And stamped his feet, which made the workmen passing grin,
> While his mouth-organ changed to a rascally Bacchanal dance
> 'Over the hills and far away'. ('The Gypsy')

The knowledge and experience of the interlocutors displaces the centrality of the speaker, and suggests how the social realm is spatial and dynamic. (Thomas's use of the dialogue form and its ethical implications are considered further in Chapter Three.)

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[50] These poems contrast with those by Thomas in which abstract experiences or objects are presented as removed from social relations, recognisable places or everyday perspectives, of which 'Beauty' might be taken as paradigmatic, and which link Thomas to Aestheticism – see Chapter Four.

'I built myself a house of glass', on the other hand, describes a longing for relation, against the self-imposed barriers of the mind: 'Would God someone would break it' (see also the epigraph to this thesis). There is a sense in which modern life has produced a kind of privacy that can only be overcome in the 'out of doors'. At the same time, physical barriers can also protect against vulnerability. The ash grove, in Thomas's poem of that name, provides a temporary barrier against unnamed threats. Such spatial and temporal intervals – defined through relation, rather than difference – serve the purpose of marking out the experience of home. An ash grove 'welcomed' the speaker who 'was glad without cause and delayed' to discover a mysterious 'Interval' of content and respite that he is able to experience again in other ash groves. This evokes Massey's emphasis on place as a process of becoming, as a 'way', in 'Home ("Often I had gone")'; of space as the product of multiplicity (of man and ash grove); and of trajectories through time (the speaker's future movements). In 'Sowing', the period of gladness is defined by 'the owl's chuckling first soft cry' and 'the first star'. Presumably in the garden, the place is defined principally by a relation to 'sweet and dry' earth, rather than by fixed human boundaries. Both natural and human boundaries are porous, since they change their identities through time.

The word 'home' as it develops through the three of Thomas's poems of that name is shown to mean different things for the speakers, and these meanings diverge from consensual understandings. In this way, Thomas's poems reflect 'encounters' with individuals, places and language itself. The first poem 'Home', beginning 'Not the end', is an aching indictment of the way in which temporal distancing distorts the nature of experience, and magnifies past joys and pains. The speaker imagines a place that fulfils an idea of home as a sanctuary or refuge, and where there are comforts beyond anything presented by actual friendship, love and solitude. However, this is then dismissed because of the impossibility of escaping memories of past pains, and so the speaker prefers to confront 'what is not good'. Longings for a fixed 'home' place as a sanctuary or a refuge are dismissed as based on illusions (That land, / My home, I have never seen).

In '"Home" ("Fair was the morning")' the speaker contrasts a prolonged stay under 'cold roofs' that are not 'home' or pleasant, despite 'sleep, food and fellowship' with a walk with three companions out in a 'fair', snowy landscape (Edna Longley identifies this poem as based on Thomas's experiences in Hare Hall military training camp, in 2008: 282). The word fair is repeated in the first two stanzas and it is ambiguously applied to the land that is also 'strange'; in the following two stanzas the word home recurs without being fully defined. While the meaning of the words 'home' and 'homesick' are not made explicit, the speaker suggests

that all three walkers think of home as the county where they live and that this divides them ('Between three counties far apart that lay / We were divided and looked strangely each / At the other, and we knew we were not friends'). The speaker concludes that his sense of his relations with his comrades and towards this place threaten his identity ('this captivity/ Must somehow come to an end, else I should be / Another man'). Thomas hinted in this poem that his home was a particular and local place, and that it was not the 'nation' that he was apparently fighting for; nor was it the wintry landscape surrounding the camp that was beautiful but strange.

I explore Thomas's final dissenting idea of home in my analyses of 'Home ("Often I had gone")' and 'I never saw that land before', below. This idea of home consists of a feeling inspired by a temporary relation between human and non-human nature, and it is also presented in Frost's poems written after he met Thomas – in 'The Sound of the Trees' (1917), 'The Oven Bird'(1916) and 'Good Hours' (1915).

Space and place: Robert Frost

Robert Frost's dramatic narratives in *North of Boston*, and *Mountain Interval* invoke a relational sense of place. For instance, 'The Mountain' portrays the town of Lunenburg (MA), a mountain, and the 'scattered farms', river and pasture that lie between the town and the mountain (which he later discovers is named 'Hor'). The speaker is sensitive to the particularity of this place and his own location in this liminal space between town and country. The place is presented as the constellation of relations including speaker, mountain, pasture, and a world beyond that the traveller has come from. A sense of space – of coexisting multiplicity - is conveyed through the surprise encounter with the local inhabitant; a feeling of time through the tracing of individual trajectories:

> The mountain stood there to be pointed at.
> Pasture ran up the side a little way,
> And then there was a wall of trees with trunks;
> After that only tops of trees, and cliffs
> Imperfectly concealed among the leaves.
> A dry ravine emerged from under boughs
> Into the pasture.

The speaker also evokes the differences between his outsider's perceptions and interest in the mountain and those of a local interlocutor, for whom 'It doesn't seem so much to climb a mountain / You've worked around the foot of all your life'. This farmer has based his vernacular and possibly misleading knowledge of the mountain on hearsay. The place the speaker encounters has no centre: the mountain turns out to be no more significant than the hamlet or the pasture. The brook, which has never been seen by the farmer, is key to his version

of the place, and confers on it imaginative and symbolic significance that resonates with the speaker.

Other poems evoke a sense of spatial relations that the reader must navigate. The home place in 'Snow' is defined relationally, ''twixt town and nowhere'. In 'The Gum-Gatherer', the interlocutor's home is 'higher up in the pass'. The farm in 'In the Home Stretch' is metonymically 'apple, cherry, peach, / Pine, alder, pasture, mowing, well, and brook'. In all of these poems, we see how place is an event in the wanderings of the speaker or interlocutor. These examples suggest how the poetic rendering of particular places invokes overlapping individual, social and ecological domains, conforming to Guattari's *Three Ecologies* (see Introduction, above).

In the poems that I have discussed in this section, Thomas and Frost evoked 'coexisting multiplicity', were sensitive to historical process and, as we shall see, hinted that place 'encompasses the co-evolution of "earth" and "life"' (Massey 2005: 138). In *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present*, W.J. Keith argues, quoting the 19th century poet Charles G.D. Roberts, that the poetry of nature may be divided into that which 'treats of nature in some one of its many relations with humanity' and that 'which deals with pure description' (1980: 4-6).[51] Keith argues that Wordsworth was a pioneer of the view whereby the poet is an 'energetic participator' in nature. With reference to Wordsworth's 1850 *The Prelude,* Book II 'School-Time', Keith contends that Wordsworth was '[a]n active inhabitant of an "active universe"' and bore 'witness to a profound interchange between man and nature' (12). Keith maintains that modern nature poetry offers an intense awareness of this exchange: 'the relation of the human mind to all that exists outside it, the connection between interior and exterior landscapes, the inseparable links between man and his environment, all these are matters of central importance to the modern consciousness' (1980: 4). As I described in the Introduction, 'human–nature poetry' goes further than 'human nature' poetry by considering the relations of human and non-human nature to the laws that govern them both. The idea of place as an event in space, suggested by Thomas's and Frost's poems, supports the identification of this category.

Frost's academic speaker in 'A Hundred Collars' 'sees old friends he somehow can't get near' on return visits to his home town. For his female speaker in 'Home Burial', the child's burial mound penetrates the psychological limits of the home place, while her husband

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[51] Keith quotes the Canadian poet Charles G.D. Roberts in *Forum* (1897), which was reproduced in Roberts's *Selected Poetry and Critical Prose*, ed. by W.J. Keith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) 276- 81.

contemplates constructing barriers (such as a birch fence) that evade decay. The speaker in 'The Black Cottage' is concerned with the need for harder-to-reach places, surrounded by natural barriers, inside which unfashionable values may endure. In 'Mending Wall' the speaker positions himself between wild nature, as 'the something there is that doesn't love a wall', and the neighbour who erects senseless barriers against a non-existent threat to his pine trees. All these poems suggest a critical relation towards the isolationism of various strands of rural and urban culture, and at the same time they offer an awareness of our inclinations to seek out shelter. In doing so, they suggest difficulties with traditional meanings of 'home'.

In 'Bond and Free', Frost explicitly evokes our earthly need for 'wall within wall to shut fear out'. In 'The Exposed Nest', the artificial birds' nest is the construction of a boundary: 'something interposed between their sight / And too much world at once'. In Frost's 'The Generations of Men' and 'Ghost House' the home place is the remains of a cellar, which survives beyond the dereliction of a farming town. Permeable man-made walls are the most frequent metonym for the home place in Frost's poetry, but they are shown in the processes of construction, decay or abandonment. In 'An Old Man's Winter Night', the sounds and sights of the worlds inside and outside the house intermingle. For one of Frost's speakers, home is euphemistically 'Something you somehow haven't to deserve', where for her husband it is the idea of 'the place where, when you have to go there / They have to take you in' ('The Death of the Hired Man'). In both definitions the home place is produced through relationships with other individuals.

For Frost, metaphorical thinking was a way to order the chaos of experience. And yet, such thought could only provide a temporary respite. The metaphor in a poem would lose its instructional value over time for both the poet and the reader, and the poem would no longer help us to find meaning in chaos. In 'The Figure a Poem Makes' [1938] Frost stated that '[l]ike a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting. A poem may be worked over once it is in being, but may not be worried into being' (CPPP: 778).[52] In 'Education by Poetry', from 1931, Frost stated that we might be 'at home' in metaphor but this experience can only be fleeting (and as such it differs from Bate's idea of ecopoetics).[53] The 'figure' of a poem highlights its own limitations as a source of knowledge:

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[52] 'The Figure a Poem Makes' (CPPP: 776-78). Preface to *Collected Poems*, dated 11 January 1939 (New York: Henry Holt, 1939).

[53] 'Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue', Amherst Alumni Council Address (CPPP: 717-28). In *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost: A New Critical Edition*, collected and ed. by Mark Richardson (New Brunswick: Rutgers University doctoral dissertation, 1993) 125-36.

> No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life – not necessarily a great clarification, as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion. (CPPP: 777)

Frost's idea of sentence sounds, which is explored further in the following chapter, suggests a way that a poet can be 'at home' in language; Thomas's parallel is the 'thought moment'. And yet, we will see how any human construction – such as language, or a building – is open to natural forces that will ultimately overcome it. As we shall see in the next sections, creative expression is itself dependent on these temporary constructions. As Richard Poirier says, 'it can be said that restrictions, or forms, are a precondition for expression. Without them, even nature ceases to offer itself up for a reading' (104).

In the preceding, I considered the idea that place exists as a network of relations. For Timothy Ingold, place should be seen as the processes of the earth and sky, organisms and substances, which together constitute a 'meshwork' rather than a network. This means that, rather than seeing organisms as separate nodes in space, all beings are immersed in each other and the flows of the material universe. I propose that for Thomas and Frost, 'home' can also be understood as a meshwork, in Ingold's sense, rather than a network. As Ingold explains, quoting the geographer Torsten Hägerstrand, we should understand

> every constituent of the environment – including 'humans, plants, animals and things all at once' – as having a continuous trajectory of becoming. 'Seen from within', wrote Hägerstrand, 'one could think of the tips of trajectories as sometimes being pushed forward by forces behind and besides and sometimes having eyes looking around and arms reaching out, at every moment asking "what shall I do next"?' The entwining of these ever-extending trajectories, in Hägerstrand's terms, comprises the texture of the world – the 'big tapestry of Nature which history is weaving'. In this tapestry there are no insides or outsides, no enclosures or disclosures, only openings and ways through. Like Darwin's entangled bank, Hägerstrand's tapestry is a field not of interconnected points but of interwoven lines,   not a network but a meshwork. (2011: 64)[54]

For Ingold there are no boundaries to 'home' in the fully ecological sense. The destruction of a wall or roof is just the beginning of a new process. As we shall see later, however, human activity – including poetry – often relies on the positing of fixities, even if they just serve as the starting point in a new poetic journey.

Home as open and porous

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[54] Torsten Hägerstran, 'Geography and the study of Nature and Society', *Geoforum* 7 (1976) 329-34.

For Thomas and Frost the word 'home' was as much under negotiation as the site that it referred to. For both poets, what was 'homely' was a regenerative experience outside the home place: this was the case in 'I never saw that land before', 'The Ash Grove' and 'Sowing' (Thomas); and in Frost's 'The Vantage Point', and 'Birches' (as well as 'Stopping by Woods' from a later collection, *New Hampshire*). Sometimes, 'home' was used in its conventional sense to refer to a fixed abode, but then shown to fail to protect against external threats.[55] These places failed to offer a sense of comfort or ease and instead produced an all-consuming fear of the competitive aspects of Darwinian nature. In this sense, reflecting Frost's first meaning of nature referred to in Chapter One, nature was always thought to be destructive of man-made boundaries. This is explored in Frost's 'Storm Fear' and 'The Hill Wife'; and Thomas's 'The Owl', 'Wind and Mist', 'Rain', 'House and Man'.

However, here I focus on the poets' more positive reaction to nature's tendency to overcome human-made boundaries, where this tendency can provide an alternative meaning of being at 'home'. Both poets showed that they could experience a fleeting sense of accommodation with society or their surroundings in ways that defied conventional conceptual understanding. Home was thus 'open and porous' for both poets (invoking Massey's and Ingold's terminology). Environmental features were key to their poetic experiences of home – for instance in the experience of the weather. Both poets explored relations between their identities, place, space and time through their uses of metaphor and metonym: in doing so, they presented ideas of interconnectedness, renewal, and permeability, where experiences of new places or times provided crucial insights. While the search for a home might conventionally be seen as a desire for fixity or dwelling, the poets demonstrated that 'home' could also be produced by a rare feeling of interconnection, rather than a set of coordinates or a building.

'Extra-vagance'

Richard Poirier (in *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing*, first published in 1977) was among the first critics to draw attention to the complexities of Frost's poetry, tracing his inheritance to William James and the Transcendentalists. In particular, he referred to Frost's own criticism, in which Frost told us that we should understand his poetry as the process of finding meaning within the complexities of everyday existence. Poirier asserted that Frost sought journeys 'off

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[55] See Frost's 'The Hill Wife', 'Vanishing Red', 'The Fear'; and Thomas's, 'The Other', 'I built myself a house of glass' and 'What will they do?'.

into the sublime, back to the domesticated', to renew traditional forms of poetry, rather than imitate the domestic ornamentation of Victorian poetry (7). This meant that:

> His poetry is a perpetual debate between, on the one side, the inherent necessity for form in language and in nature, which requires a dialogue of accommodation, and, on the other, the equally inherent human need for excursion beyond form, or (to note how often in Frost the human actions are equivalent to poetic practice) for taking a walk beyond the confines of home. (Poirier 1990: 23)

The connections between actual mobility and ethical enlightenments in Frost's poetry have often been overlooked, in favour of the symbolic reading of an 'equivalent' poetic practice. While Poirier identified Frost's conflicting impulses between form or decorum, and extravagance, or the sublime, he did not explain how this might be based on real encounters, or environmental 'influences' as he later put it (100; 107). And yet Poirier showed that Robert Frost's use of the term 'extravagance' owed its origins to Thoreau's *Walden* but did not consider this in further detail. The appearance of 'extra-vagance' in the conclusion of Thoreau's text emphasised its centrality to the motivations behind Thoreau's literary project. Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau searched for an alternative way of life that would allow him to combine intellectual and emotional satisfaction, and he believed this could be found by 'living deliberately'. In the section indicated, Thoreau described the need to find a language and style to do justice to this new experience:

> I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be *extra- vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience [...] *Extra vagance*! It depends on how you are yarded. The migrating buffalo, which seeks new pastures in another latitude, is not extravagant like the cow which kicks the pail, leaps the cow-yard fence, and runs after her calf in milking time. I desire to speak somewhere *without* bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundations for a true expression.
>
> (Thoreau 1854: 347; italics and punctuation in original)

This suggests a use for 'extravagance' (and extravagant) and 'extra-vagance' (and extra-vagant) as tropes and themes – as a theme, the latter suggests movement beyond physical boundaries, from the Latin roots *vagāre,* to go or wander, and extra, meaning outside, except or beyond. The thematic treatment of extravagance deals with prodigality, wastefulness or waste – the threat of waste from nature or from irresponsibility. As trope, extravagance suggests a wasteful approach to poetry, the inclusion of unnecessary features or an inappropriate subject matter. As trope, extra-vagance initially alludes to the pastoral motif of retreat and return, or the wilderness quest.

While Frost's poetry is most amenable to the language of 'extra-vagance', I show that the neologism is relevant in discussions of Edward Thomas's poetic themes and forms. This

trope illustrates the relevance of Thomas's friendship with Frost to his own poetic theorising, and gives weight to my claim that Thomas's literary inheritances included the American Literary Renaissance. Equally, Thomas's momentary experiences of harmony with human and non-human nature can be understood to have influenced Frost's poetic themes after *North of Boston*.

Frost's extra-vagance suggested a sense of movement and return beyond everyday limits, rather than a journey from city to country or towards the West. It involved an awareness of one's ordinary conditions of bounds as 'yarding' or home, and a willingness to 'leap the cow-yard fence'. Extra-vagance also appeared as a formal device: for instance, as a simultaneous awareness of the need to restrict poetic diction for the sake of reaching a broad audience, and a willingness to extend one's vocabulary to offer the reader new understandings and ethics. Frost later described what he took to be the *thematic* 'extravagance' of poetry (which is 'extra-vagant' and 'extravagant') in a Dartmouth College Address in 1962, in his typically elliptical style:

> I could go right on with pretty near everything I've done. You know, there's always this element of extravagance. It's like snapping the whip, you know. Are you there? Are you still on? - you know. Are you with it? Or has it snapped you off? (CPPP: 907; see Introduction)

On one hand, the gesture of making poetry is wasteful; and on the other, this is an extra-vagant (although Frost did not use Thoreau's neologism) testing of the limits of knowledge. His examples of poetic extravagance included the poem 'The Most of It'. Frost asserted that the first line, 'He thought he kept the universe alone', was an extravagant statement, as an expression of an irredeemable grief. However, he continued, this poetic act would lose the sympathy of some of his readers who favoured being publicly economical with their emotions, as befitted their prudent, utilitarian culture. Frost hinted that extravagance was, however, a valuable aesthetic act in some contexts: it was a kind of extravagance that had limits. This suggested that Frost shared the Transcendentalist aim to renew our lives through art. As Poirier indicated, Frost's poetry 'is meant to show the local, accessible forms of extravagance in common life: it is an instance, so to speak, of how the grandeurs of Emerson can be accommodated to routine' (91). The extra-vagance of Frost's poetry contrasts with the undemocratic extravagance of Modernist poetry. With reference to his poem 'The Most of It' Frost stated:

> Take the one line in that, 'Some mystery becomes the proud.' See, you know where I got that? Out of long efforts to understand contemporary poets. You see, let them be mystery. And that's my generosity – call it that. If I was sure they meant anything to themselves it would be all right. (CPPP: 926)

As this quotation reveals, Frost believed that poetic 'extravagance' must be contained, making it synonymous with Thoreau's extra-vagance.

Thematic extravagance for Frost could be found in nature and the language which we must use to express it, which suggested that Frost agreed with Darwin's emphasis on nature's creative, as well as its destructive, powers. Frost's Darwinism was indicated by his emphasis on profligacy and waste in nature: 'I look on the whole universe as a kind of an exaggeration anyway, the whole business, see. That's the way you think of it: great, great expense' (CPPP: 903). For instance, in *The Origin of Species* Darwin asserted that

> We need not marvel at the sting of the bee, when used against an enemy, causing the bee's own death; at drones being produced in such great numbers for one single act, and being then slaughtered by their sterile sisters; at the astonishing waste of pollen by our fir trees; at the instinctive hatred of the queen bee for her own fertile daughters; at ichneumonidæ feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars; or at other such cases. The wonder indeed, is, on the theory of natural selection, that more cases of the want of absolute perfection have not been detected. (first published 1859; edition used Darwin 2007: 296)

Frost's Darwinism can be linked to Thoreau, who suggested that society follows nature's 'compound of regulation and randomness' in the creation of new forms (in Buell 2005: 44). This randomness is apparent in Frost's idea of 'far fetching' or the poetic use of language out of its usual place. Frost presented this idea in his 1918 essay 'The Unmade Word': 'what I have chiefly in mind is figurative fetching of fresh words to your use. The word lies in our everyday speech, practical, hard and unliterary' (CPPP: 696).[56] The example he used was his use of the word 'crazes' for the effect of ice melting on birches in the poem 'The Birches', which was a word he 'fetched' from pottery (CPPP: 696).

Thoreau's trope of extra-vagance focused principally on physical and linguistic movement beyond boundaries. The trope appeared in Frost's work as movement beyond everyday accepted boundaries of metre, rhyme, choice of vocabulary, the limits of an audience's imaginative sympathies, a sense of decorum and movement beyond the moral confines of the home place. Images of home and movement combined to suggest the limits of human constructions, and were reflected in the formal choices and dramatic incidents that will be elaborated upon in the following chapter. The Dartmouth Address informed us that poetry involved spending, 'abandon', or loss, but also that, implicitly, through its transgressions of acceptable behaviour or thought, such writing would allow us to convey and engender certain

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[56] 'The Unmade Word' was a lecture Frost delivered to Browne and Nichols School, on 13 March 1918. It was first published in Elaine Barry's *Robert Frost on Writing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973) 144-48 and reproduced in CPPP: 694-97

sympathies, and develop new moral understandings. Richard Poirier found in Frost's emphasis on home and vagrancy evidence of 'human sympathy' with ordinary readers who were bounded in everyday life and who, through imaginative excursion, hoped that 'home' would be more acceptable on return, or that their homes could be recreated (100-01). These imaginative excursions connect us to other types of vagrancy that are produced by industrialisation – the tramp and the itinerant labourer.

Particular poems address extra-vagance thematically. A poem can reveal the sense of joy at overcoming individual limits, opposing local and national or international bounds, or an appreciation of home seen from a distance. This is explored in Frost's 'A Late Walk', 'Hyla Brook', 'The Black Cottage', 'The Self-Seeker' and 'The Line Gang'. The movement of the poet 'out of beaten ways' is contrasted with the mechanical movement of information in modernity in 'An Encounter'. In the latter poem, the speaker ironically addresses the telegraph pole: 'Where aren't you nowadays / And what's the news you carry – if you know?'

And finally, other organisms share the impulse to move beyond their everyday bounds, as evinced in Frost's poem 'The Cow in Apple Time':

> Something inspires the only cow of late
> To make no more of a wall than an open gate,
> And think no more of wall-builders than fools.
> Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools
> A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit,
> She scorns a pasture withering to the root.

This poem re-animates Thoreau's escaped cow, and suggests Frost's sympathy with those who scorned pastoral conventions, which are already 'withering to the root'.

Edward Thomas's work is also characterised by a thematic extra-vagance: the impulse to move is exhibited in the vagrancy of 'Home ("Often I had gone")' 'An Old Song' ['1'], 'I never saw that land', 'Man and Dog', 'The Owl', 'The Path', 'Lob', 'Early one morning', 'In Memoriam (Easter, 1915)', and 'As the team's head-brass'. Perhaps the ultimate extravagance that Thomas addressed was WW1 – the literal waste of life. However, in Thomas's poetry, the waste of life in the trenches relates to the waste of agricultural labourers' livelihoods through industrialisation and the removal of trade barriers that came before. In 'Man and Dog' we see the labourer's wandering as a process of displacement that extends to other wars:

> His mind was running on the work he had done
> Since he left Christchurch in the New Forest, one
> Spring in the 'seventies, – navvying on dock and line

> From Southampton to Newcastle-on-Tyne, –
> In 'seventy-four a year of soldiering
> With the Berkshires, – hoeing and harvesting
> In half the shires where corn and couch will grow

The labourer's experience of the road to Alton is defined as just one in a series of relations that link all of his previous work places. The speaker's extra-vagance leads him to this encounter with the marginalised labourer, and this experience then informs the speaker's own experience of the landscape. The significance of such encounters in Thomas's poetry is that they show that what constitutes a place can no longer be seen as essential or timeless. Thomas's extra-vagance in Gloucestershire hints that a new conception of England may be available to those other travellers, the soldiers in the Meuse:

> 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 battles. Everything
> To faintness like those rumours fades –
> Like the brook's water glittering
>
> Under the moonlight – like those walks
> Now – like us two that took them, and
> The fallen apples, all the talks
> And silences – like memory's sand
>
> When the tide covers it late or soon,
> And other men through other flowers
> In those fields under the same moon
> Go talking and have easy hours.

Here, recognition that the moon rising in the east would be seen to those 'afar', provides an image of stasis, of an idealised England of territory and state, that temporarily overcomes perception of the present scene, and of the speaker's individual trajectory. Even the betonies are 'sentries'. And yet the apples 'undermined' are an ambiguous symbol, as Stan Smith notes – figuring a 'vulnerable national self' (2000: 127). Thomas's enlistment may have been precipitated by the possibility of a 'shared' understanding of England, by Thomas's wish to integrate with the nation state. And yet, his enlistment may also have been an 'ecstatic' gesture – a movement towards a more transcendent understanding of his own life.

For Thomas, ecstasy (in the essay by that name) came to be associated with 'the state of trance' and 'the withdrawal of the soul from its accustomed place in the body during a mystic or prophetic trance' (BC, 'Ecstasy', 5). While Thomas did not claim allegiance to any religious

faith, he considered ecstasy as the highest mode of human existence – 'It was my name for the faculty in man which came nearest to being, for aught I knew, illimitable and divine' (2). He distinguished ecstasy from habitual religious belief and ordinary empirical reflection, and considered that ecstasy was equally likely to produce 'love, heroism' or 'poetry' (1). For Thomas, the ecstatic trance may produce 'a taste of the happiness of Eternity' and 'oneness with God or Nature' (6), finding this origin for the use of the transcendent word ecstasy in medieval literature. Thomas noted how in contemporary and Romantic literature, the idea of ecstasy as trance linked to distraction through mental illness, romantic love, extravagance, eccentricity and intoxication, and believed that there were not only etymological but experiential similarities. In the mystical sense, however, he suggested that ecstasy allows us to become aware of a 'boundless world', in which space and individuality are erased (8). This echoes Thomas's contention in *The South Country* that the 17th century mystic Thomas Traherne was aware of the 'interdependence' of the world through his devotion to the 'infinite excellencies' of individual things (1909: 131-38).

Home and wayfaring

The idea of wayfaring (see earlier in this chapter) offers a more nuanced account of our experiences of place and space than the concept of dwelling. Through wayfaring we go beyond the escapism of sentimental pastoral and contribute not only to a dissenting meaning of 'home', but also to an understanding of how our movement can run counter to the forces of capitalism and progressivism. Wayfaring is a form of 'extra-vagance' that develops environmental literacy as we become aware of how the 'life of each [inhabitant] becomes bound up with the other' (Ingold 2011: 148). In emphasising movement and temporary relations, the notion of wayfaring draws our attention to the dynamic relations that make up places. In wayfaring, we emphasise the inhabitants' multiple 'trails', and no longer see space as an empty backdrop.

Wayfaring offers a version of the pastoral that is able to voice concerns about the environment and social justice, through its emphasis on the histories of other inhabitants. As it is anticipated in the poetry of Thomas and Frost, it offers a more complex pastoral than that which was offered by the majority of Georgians, who focused on leisure and stasis: the 'time to stand and stare' (W.H. Davies), Gibson's 'cosy cream-washed living-room' of the Old Nailshop, in Dymock, or Abercrombie's sublime themes and 'easy hours' among the Ryton Firs.[57] Consider Thomas's poem 'I never saw that land before':

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[57] See W.H. Davies' 'Leisure' from *Songs Of Joy and Others* (London: Fifield, 1911); Wilfrid Gibson's
    'The Golden Room' from *The Golden Room: Poems 1925-27* (London: Macmillan, 1927) and

I never saw that land before,
And now can never see it again;
Yet, as if by acquaintance hoar
Endeared, by gladness and by pain,
Great was the affection that I bore

To the valley and the river small,
The cattle, the grass, the bare ash trees,
The chickens from the farmsteads, all
Elm-hidden, and the tributaries
Descending at equal interval;

The blackthorns down along the brook
With wounds yellow as crocuses
Where yesterday the labourer's hook
Had sliced them cleanly; and the breeze
That hinted all and nothing spoke.

Here, the speaker is absorbed into a particular environment noted for its distinct ecological and temporal features – 'cattle, the grass, the bare ash trees, / The chickens from the farmsteads, all /Elm-hidden' (before the onset of Dutch-elm disease) and 'the labourer's hook' (which has since been replaced by mechanised hedge cutters) – and does not relate to an 'abstract, disembodied zone of possibility' (Massey 2005: 251). This reading highlights the idea of movement as extra-vagance, of breaking the bounds of daily experience, since this is a previously unvisited land. The speaker is fully engaged in relations to the environment: the meaning found in 'the breeze / That hinted all and nothing spoke'; the 'language' of the trees and birds; the regular end-rhymes and strong internal rhymes, all suggest an unexpected and fleeting feeling of satisfaction. While we may take this as evidence for a Romantic, reciprocal dialogue between ourselves and non-human nature, this isn't required – what is necessary is the imaginative link, a sense of relation brought about by identifying the sensual properties of this 'land':

I neither expected anything
Nor yet remembered: but some goal
I touched then; and if I could sing
What would not even whisper my soul
As I went on my journeying,

I should use, as the trees and birds did,
A language not to be betrayed;
And what was hid should still be hid
Excepting from those like me made

Lascelles Abercrombie's 'Ryton Firs' from *Georgian Poetry 1920-22*, ed.by Edward Marsh (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1922).

Who answer when such whispers bid.

The irregularities in the iambic tetrameter suggest a conflict between contrary impulses, between a longing for a final destination and a delight in momentary experience. The regular enjambments suggest a feeling of movement across human-constructed borders. Through this poem, Thomas hinted that a feeling of accommodation with non-human nature can inspire a creative act, when the poet is metaphorically able to answer the hints of wind, birds and trees. The 'affection' that the speaker affirms for this place suggests the 'delight' which for Frost is key to all poetry (CPPP: 777).

Jonathan Bate, in his account of ecopoetics, specifically excludes post-industrial humans from the possibility of dwelling in a habitat, because their use of language mediates their experiences of nature (2000). Thomas's and Frost's poetry, however, was concerned with the possibility of a kind of inhabitation where using language as a 'momentary stay against confusion' depended on a prior experience of movement or change. While long-term dwelling was interrupted by industrialisation, both poets showed that industrialisation need not prevent us from finding an accommodation with non-human nature.

For Bate, Romantic and post-Romantic poetry offers the imaginative construction of a particular, ecological relation with nature through the idea of 'home'. We return to our 'home' – the *oiko*s – through our nature as linguistic beings (2001: 76). Such a return is enacted through poetry which 'conjures up experiences such as alienation and dwelling in their very essence, not just in their linguistic particulars' (260, 271). Wayfaring suggests sensitivity to the ways in which dwelling and alienation are produced by historical circumstances. It allows us to see how we negotiate our home places rather than experiencing them as timeless.

For Thomas and Frost the phenomenal moment evoked in many of these poems about home was a fleeting sense of sensory satisfaction. Bate's account is far from a form of inhabitation that allows us to learn from the land, as well as from language. Frost and Thomas often suggested a poetics of wayfaring rather than dwelling, and shared with Virgil's *Eclogues* their search for a harmonious balance of art and labour as a particularly human form of wayfaring. Perhaps, the human impulse towards extra-vagance makes a permanent dwelling within a place impossible; however, as Massey reminds us, all of nature has its trajectories. Dwelling, contradictorily, distances us from an experience of negotiation and encounter. In all of these instances, formal aspects such as rhythm, perspective, diction, metre and rhyme provide the phenomenal evocation of these themes, which I explore in detail in the following chapter.

In her chapter for *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (2011), 'Passing Glories and Romantic Retrievals', the philosopher Kate Soper refers to a feature of Romantic nature poetry which she calls the 'envy of immanence', and draws attention to its usefulness in developing an environmental ethics (see also Soper 1995: 236-243). This feature reflects the importance of ideas of 'otherness' to ecocritical theory – both human and non-human – and to debates over the cultural mediation of all such ideas. Soper uses the idea of the 'envy of immanence' to refer to poetry, such as Wordsworth's 'Old Man Travelling', that

> reflects [...] the yearning for an immersion within the natural world, or closeness to it, that is associated either with animality or a peasant existence. Such poetry is also often written with a heightened awareness of the unreachable otherness of nature and the 'betrayal' involved in giving voice to its 'dumbness' and preconceptuality. Its inspiration can thus prompt a certain intellectual self-deprecation whereby the poet expresses regret for the self-distancing and alienation of expression itself. (2011: 20)

Soper finds this 'nature-culture dialectic' described by Theodor Adorno who, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, considers the Romantic impulses both to conceptualise natural beauty and to emphasise the limitations of such conceptualisations. And yet, Soper continues, 'even as nature transcends expression, anyone capable of experiencing its beauty feels compelled, Adorno tells us, to speak as a way of signalling the momentary liberation it affords from the confines of the enclosure within the perceiving and representing self' (21). Thus, any desire of escape from perceiving and representing is self-contradictory, because of the dependence of the 'envy of immanence' on the conceiving self.

However, Adorno sees room for a dialectic that includes the limits both of the discourses of history and of nature, through the ways that poetry about nature can suggest to us a world beyond conceptual determinations, but that this dialectic is itself achieved through a language. As soon as Thomas and Frost had invoked a fleeting experience of accommodation and immanence it was rendered in a language that emphasised its transience. At the same time they showed that to do justice to the experience they required alternative forms of knowledge.

In the following chapter, I consider further possibilities for how language itself may invoke an experience that is beyond conceptualisation. I draw again on Henri Bergson's theorising to illuminate two distinct categories of human thought which, rather than highlighting Romantic nostalgia for animality or peasant existence, suggest that preconceptual experience may be available as a resource to the human artist. However, as Soper explains, 'only a dialectic that registers both the objective otherness and the dependency on human representation [...] does theoretical justice to the connection between Romantic writing and green ideals' (22). This is a step beyond Bergson's theorising which I will address as the thesis develops.

The emphasis on the harmonious feeling of accommodation suggests Thomas's and Frost's ease with their literary inheritance, and yet the poets also demonstrated their awareness of the 'instrumentality' of language and its role in enabling human action. Both poets hinted at an understanding of the cultural construction of 'otherness' including that of non-human nature, and they showed this in their choices of language and traditional imagery. But how far do the poets go to challenge the ideological dimensions of their local cultures? How can poetry address the interdependencies between local and global places, and between human and non-human others?

Towards a poetry of relation

While this thesis considers the specificities of local places in the poetry under consideration, there is also the need to understand the 'entanglement' of all cultures in a globalised world. As Édouard Glissant explains in *Philosophie de la Relation*: 'We now […] enter into an infinity of detail, and conceive of multiplicity everywhere, which is non-extended and for us not to disentangle, unpredictable' (quoted in Kaiser 2012: 136).[58]

Post-colonial ecocriticism considers the ways in which global networks of power interact in local places, and the implications for both human and non-human nature. Specifically, it considers the impacts that empire has had on local places, and the discourses it has tried to suppress. In doing so, it exemplifies third-wave ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is attempting a 'third wave' that seeks to go beyond the traditional concern with nature writing, particularly of the American variety (first wave) and the second wave's concern with demonstrating the interdependence of nature and culture. The third wave, as identified by Scott Slovic and Joni Adamson in their introduction to the summer 2009 edition of *MELUS*, addresses the need to deal with the global nature of environmental problems, to transcend ethnic and national boundaries to encompass 'all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint' (quoted in Iovino 2010: 53).[59] In her essay 'Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism', Ursula Heise argues that ecocriticism needs to deal with global cultural difference. Inspired by Dipesh Chakrabarty, she asserts that 'the reality of climate change forces scholars in the humanities and social sciences to develop new theories of planetarity at the intersection of culture and environment' (2013: 642). While, for some ecocritics, ecological literature transcends the particularities of cultural production, other critics

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[58] Kaiser translates and quotes from Glissant's *Philosophie de la Relation*: *poésie en éntendue* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009) 27.
[59] Joni Adamson andScott Slovic, 'The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism', guest editors' introduction to *MELUS* 34.2 (Spring 2009): 5-24.

are keen to address the intersection of nature and culture in particular places and map the influence of international networks of power on national literature (638).

In their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley argue that while 'an ecological approach to literature is by definition not restricted by geopolitical borders, language and nationality', it must also recognise the ways in which civilization, which is geared towards a kind of progress that ignores geographic specificity, has often contributed to environmental degradation and human suffering in equal measure (10). This led DeLoughrey and Handley to develop a postcolonial approach, which emphasised the ways in which 'place encodes time, suggesting that histories embedded in the land and sea have always provided vital and dynamic methodologies for understanding the transformative impact of empire and the anticolonial epistemologies it has tried to suppress' (4). For this reason, these critics 'foreground the landscape (and seascape) as a participant in this historical process, rather than a bystander to human experience' (4). This requires awareness of 'nonhuman agency' and a 'recuperation of the alterity of both history *and* nature' (4). An ecocriticism that would address this requires a more 'nuanced discourse about the representation of alterity, a theorization of difference that postcolonialists, ecofeminists, and environmental activists have long considered in terms of our normative representations of nature, human and otherwise' (9). DeLoughrey and Handley explain that for us to articulate the 'otherness' of nature and local specificities, we must also emphasise the importance of developing a global imagination. In other words, ecocriticism, in addressing the alterity of nature, must seek to emphasise difference in non-hierarchical terms.

This broadening of perspective to encompass the global, however, does not necessarily open up a discourse beyond national borders. As Glissant was aware, most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root – rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other' (1997: 14). As Kaiser conceives of Glissant's arguments, we need to move away from an idea of the postcolonial as inherently tied to ideas of nation: 'cultural specificities need to be examined as formations *on the basis* of their quasi-Baroque and inescapable entanglements with other cultural and terrestrial forces' (133). Henceforth, the categories of self and other need to be re-configured as entanglements within the global meshwork.

As ecocriticism attempts to encompass the global intersection of nature and culture, it should move away from the anti-colonial emphasis on 'roots' and towards what Glissant calls 'errantry' in *The Poetics of Relation* (144). As Kaiser explains:

Glissant does not propose a free-floating detachment from localities (errantry remains rooted), and does not indiscriminately praise any form of nomadic travel, but only a specific one: a movement sustained by relational and horizontal spatial extension (not set on taking root in a 'predatory' manner), a movement that can even happen in the same place (in circles or spirals), but is set on change, drawing on the dynamic inherent to relating and distancing within an immanent totality. (2012: 132)

Like Ingold and Massey, Glissant emphasises that the world is in a state of unfolding. Glissant believes that individuals are identified through their relations with others but, unlike in Massey's formulation of identity and drawing on his understanding of Deleuze, he predicates 'Relation' as an inherent property of individuals beyond current actualised relations and including their histories. In this way, Glissant's idea of 'Relation' parallels Ingold's idea of organisms as a 'bundle of strands' rather than as discrete objects (Ingold 2011: 92). Glissant offers a metaphor for this sense of identity as:

an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other. (1997: 11)

Writing with his understanding of Caribbean literature in *The Poetics of Relation,* Glissant explores the notion of a poetics of relation between different cultures that emphasises both historical disruptions and interdependency. Reacting against hegemonic cultures of consumption and ideas of land as territory to be owned, Glissant argues that ecology can either serve to support a sacred mysticism or act as a political basis for relational interdependence (1997: 146). To avoid standardisation of consumption, post-colonial nations must 'make drastic changes in the diverse sensibilities of communities' (150). These changes include not only economic self-determination, but also concern for environments that form 'our taste' but which we must not 'force ourselves into' (152).

The sense that a place can be identified in relation to vanished cultures, other contemporary cultures, non-human nature and to a dominant culture can produce a baffling array of choices. To approach this idea, we must not merely think of 'the other' but implement an 'aesthetics of turbulence' that creates 'the other of thought', and allows us to 'join the dynamics to which we are to contribute' (155). Glissant's ideas can be understood as forming an aesthetic corollary of Ingold's meshwork, where, as we will see, we participate in the dynamic movements of all life rather than limiting ourselves to human enframings. Glissant encourages us 'to accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world not as simple and straightforward, with only one truth – mine' (154). From this, as Kaiser explains, we can choose to develop an

ethic which consists in 'a certain directionality: the generosity of following and tracing paths with others, of giving on-and-with' (142).

As we will see in Chapter Four, Thomas and Frost produced poetry of wayfaring, and in doing so they hinted at the importance of acknowledging multiple viewpoints. Through their poetic encounters they demonstrated the importance of our relational interdependence with non-human nature and they avoided a proprietorial mysticism. They showed that to understand our individuality as humans we must also comprehend our interrelatedness with human and non-human others.

Conclusion: against home as dwelling place

In the period leading up to the First World War, Edward Thomas increasingly professed attachment to England in his essays for the periodical press, 'This England' (1914a), 'England' (1915), 'Tipperary' (1914b), 'It's a long, long way' (1914c), in his anthology *This England: An Anthology from Her Writers* (1915) and in poems such as 'The Manor Farm' (1914), 'Lob' and 'Haymaking' (1914). This has led some critics to consider that Thomas sought to express an 'essential' England, and this has led to both praise and criticism of his poetic oeuvre.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, well-regarded commentators consider Thomas a poet who gave voice to an essential England – and to the continuation of an 'English line' of poetry. Longley asserts that for Thomas, as for Lob, 'His home was where he was free': 'Thomas himself wandered actually and imaginatively down the roads of England and life, finding "home" or "liberty" in unexpected harmonies of man and Nature' (1986: 48). However, in the same work she also places Thomas in a tradition of writers who are mysteriously able to articulate the landscape through an essentialised link between people, English literature and soil.

I observed here that Jonathan Bate considers that language offers a timeless connection to the earth. He believes we must invoke Paul Ricoeur's argument about literature offering projects, rather than representations: that we must invoke 'imaginary states of nature, imaginary ideal ecosystems, and by reading them, by inhabiting them, we can start to imagine what it might be like to live differently upon the earth' (2001: 250-251). From the epistemological idea that literature can allow us to contemplate different possible worlds, Bate makes the metaphysical leap that texts create a 'space' outside of time – an 'abstract, disembodied zone of possibility' which is somehow reconcilable with the physical earth (251). This seems to imply that Bate thinks we can directly refer to a physical realm that is at the same time equivalent to a world that consists purely of ideas. Bate argues that, for poetry, 'when we allow it to act upon us it seems able to conjure up conditions such as dwelling and alienation *in their very essence*, not

just in their linguistic particulars' (260). This is achieved 'when we stand in a site, open to its being, when we are thrown or called' (261). This 'uninterrupted space' is a 'divination of the immanent world as against a withdrawal to transcendent realm' (263). The cost of this version of dwelling in place, where we are in touch with an immanent 'Nature' and the essences of dwelling and alienation, is a loss of the possibility of history.

Heidegger was concerned that 'wonder' should be restored through a non-technological view of nature. In his *Discourse on Thinking*, he argued that this can be achieved through 'disclosing the beings of entities in language' (in Bate 2001: 258). Inspired by Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin, Bate believes that an ecopoem 'is like the peasant farmhouse in the Black Forest: it gathers the fourfold of mortals, gods, earth and heaven into its still site in simple oneness' (262). The experience this engenders is of 'earth', rather than 'world', and is therefore outside a historical mode 'which for modernity means living in an instrumental relationship to the earth' (262). Bate considers that the language of poetry can 'unconceal' the essence of nature (258).

An alternative view is offered here, in a new version of place that is developed by a subjectivity which is 'outwardlooking in its perspectives and in the awareness of its own relational constitution' (Massey 2005: 80). A subject's spatiality is evoked throughout Thomas's and Frost's poetry, in their focus on sense perception, actual and metaphorical boundary crossings and contact with other beings. Space and place emerge through active material processes, and, rather than directly representing experience, Thomas and Frost were concerned with showing the thrown-togetherness of our experiences in places, what it is like to encounter the trajectories of other material beings with open futures. Their poetry allows us a full realisation that 'nature has its trajectories, also, and the event of place demands, no less than with the human, a politics of boundary crossings' (Massey 2005: 160). Rejecting the possibility of an authentic home, Thomas's and Frost's poems of the period 1912-1917 suggest that 'home' and 'nation' are constructed and contingent, made out of boundary crossings and relations rather than the straightforward opposition of self and other. 'Extra-vagance' suggests that poetry itself benefits from immersion in the flows of human life and non-human nature.

In his analysis of Thomas's 'Home ("Often I had gone")', Bate argues that this is a poem about the naïve dwelling of labourers in the cottage, and the poet's sentimental dwelling through experiencing parallels between the bird's song and the labourer's sawing. Presumably Thomas was able to dwell because he could conjure for us the similarity between the phenomenological experience of birdsong and sawing, and he could convey in language the 'essential' nature of those experiences.

My reading of 'Home ("Often I had gone")' emphasises the fleeting experience of contentment which is produced through a sense of accommodation with human and non-human nature, which is itself dependent on temporal and geographic boundary-crossings, rather than fixed dwelling. For Thomas, the identification of 'home' with a 'way', suggested a process rather than a timeless state:

> Often I had gone this way before:
> But now it seemed I never could be
> And never had been anywhere else;
> 'Twas home;

The experience of this moment is shared by birds and man alike and, ironically, calls upon the idea of a common 'nationality', since the experience crosses human–nature boundaries:

>   one nationality
> We had, I and the birds that sang,
> One memory.
>
> They welcomed me. I had come back
> That eve somehow from somewhere far:
> The April mist, the chill, the calm,
> Meant the same thing familiar
> And pleasant to us, and strange too,
> Yet with no bar.

The speaker is far from alienated – he believes that he shares a memory with the birds. Both 'pleasant' and 'strange', the experience intimates something beyond reason, drawn out by the experience of April mist and chill, birds and calm, which is akin to ecstasy as it is 'with no bar'. It is out of the ordinary, an infrequent feeling of being accommodated by the landscape, which inspires a song of celebration (or so it seems to the speaker) in both birds and speaker. This feeling of limitlessness is produced against the constraints of seasons, of day and night, sound and silence which set the scene:

> The thrush on the oak top in the lane
> Sang his last song, or last but one;
> And as he ended, on the elm
> Another had but just begun
> His last; they knew no more than I
> The day was done.

The alternate-line rhyme is regular and this combines with an irregular stress and syllable pattern to create a feeling of strained harmony. The assonance between adjacent lines such as 'back' and 'far', and 'seemed' and 'been', further emphasises interconnections:

> Then past his dark white cottage front
> A labourer went along, his tread

> Slow, half with weariness, half with ease;
> And, through the silence, from his shed
> The sound of sawing rounded all
> That silence said.

The natural environment, for both speaker and labourer, provides material for creation and produces a sense of being immersed or drawn out rather than alienated. The encounter with the man sawing and the birds singing highlights the feeling of thrown-togetherness, where a feeling of homeliness is dependent on an awareness of overlapping trajectories and experiences. Thomas indicated the limits of language to describe a moment that was both 'strange and pleasant', and which combined silence and sawing.

Robert Frost's poem 'The Death of the Hired Man' contrasts the two definitions of home mentioned earlier with evocation of a fleeting contentment:

> Part of a moon was falling down the west,
> Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
> Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it
> And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand
> Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,
> Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
> As if she played unheard some tenderness
> That wrought on him beside her in the night.

This poem conveys to the reader a familiar, if ultimately fleeting, sense of environment intervening in the process of deliberation, of a break from rational thought and judgement. The mixture of anapaestic and iambic pentameter shows how Frost used rhythm to suggest the movements of the mind. The male speaker's ambivalence about his duties to Silas contrasts with the woman's apparent moral stability, and this is emphasised by what may be conceived as a stereotypically feminine accommodation with nature. However, Frost's and Thomas's poetry often shows that the fleeting sense of accommodation between human life and nature or society is achieved through 'extra-vagance', where conventional boundaries – of place, imagination, ethics or society – have been broken. Here, the morning-glory's transgression of the home's boundaries 'from garden bed to eaves' – which echoes the intrusion by the hired man – instigates the man's sympathy.

In their poetry of 1912-1917 Frost and Thomas conveyed the ideas of home and place as processes, as made up through movements and relations. While often in the poetry acts of physical movement or extra-vagance may be taken as metaphors for parallel ethical and spiritual journeys, or a creative experiment of 'far fetching' language, or an ecstatic transcendence of the self, we are never committed to a meaning that extends beyond the literal (see Introduction).

The next chapter explores the ways in which their extra-vagant poems hint at the movements of the mind actually engaged in thinking and feeling. In this way, the poets address the sensual and intellectual aspects of our experiences of the external world.

CHAPTER THREE: 'THOSE THINGS THAT POETS SAID' – HOME, EXTRA-VAGANCE AND POETIC FORM

Introduction

In my preceding arguments, I have maintained – following W.J. Keith – that nature poetry may communicate the impact of non-human nature on the mind, rather than purely serving as a description of non-human processes (Introduction). This suggests that, while such poetry includes observation on non-human nature, the important dimension is that it contains an evocation of how human nature is interdependent with natural processes, rather than serving as a colourful backdrop to human affairs. Such poetry, rather than being naively descriptive of an abstract 'nature' of which our observations always fall short, aiming to provide a full scientific record of the ecosystem, or offering fixed truths about human nature, acknowledges how our understanding of our emotional selves is dependent on our responses to the biosphere and to other inhabitants of the ecosystem. In drawing our attention to such interdependence, this human–nature poetry shows how the environment is partly constitutive of our own identity as it changes through time. Rather than suggesting the importance of the human subject over all that it surveys, this process of attention to the entanglement of thought and feeling in the natural environment makes us more attentive to other beings, as I explore further as this thesis progresses.

Thomas and Frost were human–nature poets in this sense, and Frost's poetry constitutes an American branch-line of nature poetry, a line which, by its multiple voices, was unique in how it suggested alternative viewpoints on human–nature interactions (Introduction). In my review of the criticism of Frost, I have suggested that his inheritance from the Transcendentalists – specifically H.D. Thoreau – was reflected in Frost's aim to extend the sympathies of the reader. Unlike his precursors he restricted himself to what was conceivable within the bounds of everyday experience and language (Chapter Two). Following Reuben Brower, I contend that only Frost, unlike his predecessors, was able to achieve a 'double vision', conveying both the experience and the impact of that experience (Chapter Two). Through the adoption of multiple viewpoints and his communication of extraordinary experiences alongside everyday encounters, Frost moved beyond the purely descriptive or symbolic nature poetry of his forebears to communicate human–nature interactions.

Frost's reliance on images of a search for or rejection of home was linked to his interest in experiences at the edge of our everyday awareness. My reading of Frost and Thomas demonstrates an alternative trajectory for nature poetry to the one Keith proposed. With my emphasis on the importance of Frost to Thomas I argue for a main-line route from British Romanticism, to Transcendentalism, to Frost and Thomas (rather than separate British and American main lines). In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Thomas followed Frost's

lead in conveying the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar to produce poetry rich in human–nature interactions, and I illuminate the first stage in Frost's career.

In the Introduction I began with the proposition that ecopoetry expresses an ecocentric perspective with both descriptive and reflective elements that transcend the naïve or ideological. In doing so, such poetry uses language and form to do 'ecological work' (Introduction). For Terry Gifford, post-pastoral literature, including poetry, is

> literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language. (1999: 149; see Introduction, above)

This echoes Jonathan Bate's assertion that ecopoetry is able to 'conjure up experiences such as dwelling and alienation *in their very essence'* (2001: 260). For Gifford, humans are not necessarily alienated from the world by their use of language. Both critics refer to poetry's ability to conceptualise the experience of being at home in nature and yet they overlook the ways in which poetry might suggest the limits of language, an idea that itself suggests our accommodation with, or situation within, nature's processes. However, Bate hints that the non-semantic properties of language may also convey our accommodation in nature. While ecopoetry, as the poetry of 'dwelling' 'is not inherently dependent on metrical form':

> However, the rhythmic, syntactic and linguistic intensifications that are characteristic of verse-writing frequently give a peculiar force to the *poiesis:* it could be that *poiesis* in the sense of verse-making is language's most direct path of return to the *oikos*, the place of dwelling, because metre itself – a quiet but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat – is an answering to nature's own rhythms, an echoing of the song of the earth itself. (Bate 2001: 75-76, see Introduction)

While ecopoetry is not necessarily metrical verse, Bate suggests that certain non-verbal features of poetry may contribute to the evocation of dwelling. To develop my earlier exploration of the notion of dwelling, suggesting its replacement with the idea of 'wayfaring', I suggest that the rhythmic intensification discussed below is the most important 'path of return to the *oikos*'.

While Terry Gifford does not maintain that Edward Thomas, whom he discusses, is an ecopoet, he asserts that Thomas challenged anthropocentric attitudes by leaving open various possible interpretations of nature in his poem 'Women he liked' (see Introduction).[60] In *Green*

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[60] He does not discuss Robert Frost.

Voices, Gifford quotes a review of 14 July 1903, which revealed Thomas's sense of the social construction of a 'fine summer's day':

> the poet may be aware that there is a diversity of conflicting categories of shared meanings in different social groups and one of those categories can be the expected poet's view. Thus Edward Thomas can ask, 'And as for seeing things as in themselves they really are […] what is a fine summer's day as in itself it really is? Is the meteorological office? or the poet? or the farmer?' (2011: 36)[61]

I argued earlier that Thomas challenged the social construction of the meaning of patriotism through his comments on the London fog in *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* (see also Chapter One, above). Thomas left it open to the reader to decide whether to construct his or her own meanings for these contested terms. Gifford implies that Thomas is a post-pastoral poet, one who is sceptical about finding shared meanings for certain terms, and one who has an ecocentric perspective; however, he does not address how Thomas's poetry more generally might do 'ecological work'. In this chapter I explore how the poetry of both Thomas and Frost does ecological work.

Those who have written about ecopoetry include the editors of *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013), Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street. Fisher-Wirth and Street focus on the American tradition in ecopoetry, commencing with the writing of Whitman, and including classics of modernist and contemporary poetry. The introduction by Robert Hass[62] considers evidence for American poetry's modernist impulse to show the limits of human perception and voice, and its quest to understand the emotional impact of developments in geology, biology and culture (Hass 2013: xliv). The editors' rationale for the selection of work in this volume is that the poems demonstrate ecocentrism and reflect human interdependence with nature. Street writes about the importance of

> a way of thinking ecocentrically rather than anthropocentrically. Of seeing the same things we've always seen, stuck on the same preoccupations, humming the same tunes off key, but with humankind as a contingent part of a much larger whole rather than the be-all and end-all of everything. (Street 2013: xxxviii)

The editors of this anthology limit their scope to American writers. This means they are unable to map ecopoetry's broader cultural and ecological connections, such as those between Thomas and Frost, which I explore further in the following chapters.

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[61] Gifford quotes Edward Thomas's review for the *Daily Chronicle* (14 July 1903).
[62] An American poet who is not the critic Robert Bernard Hass referred to throughout the remainder of this thesis.

By contrast, David Knowles's and Sharon Blackie's *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry* (2012) encompasses a wider selection of contemporary Western poetry. Like Gifford's interests, this collection is concerned with an ecocentric perspective, but the anthology limits its scope to poets with a modern awareness of environmental change. However, as Kate Rigby indicates in *Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Ecopoetry and Ecopoetics*, the collection does not include equally relevant poetry by less privileged voices, or poetry that is concerned with nature in inner cities or that addresses environmental justice (2014: np).

David Borthwick's introduction to *Entanglements* observes that certain contemporary poets show in their writing – both formally and thematically – our entanglement with the ecosystem. Such poetry need not be self-consciously ecocentric but it must address our relationship with nature:

> The central concern of ecopoetry is recognition of human entanglement in the world. It explores the relationships that humans have with a shared world, at once connected to it but also increasingly estranged from it. Ecopoetry seeks to question and renegotiate the human position in respect of the environment in which we are enmeshed. Its ethic is to oppose the violent assumption that the world exists merely as a set of resources which can be readily and unethically exploited for economic gain. (Borthwick 2012: xvi)

One way to show this entanglement is to imagine overlaps between the ways in which humans and non-humans engage with their environments. Curiously, the modernist poet T.E. Hulme's theorising about poetry suggested that the limits of human language can show similarities between our responses to the environment and those of other occupants of the ecosystem. Another way might be to show how all beings – whether or not they possess language – are concerned with 'dwelling' or inhabiting an environment.

In Chapter Two, I explored the significance of the 'dwelling' perspective in contrast to what Timothy Ingold calls the 'building' perspective:

> Every particular act of making or building begins with an end in mind and ends with a material object that one can then begin to use. Life, however, does not begin or end anywhere, but is rather carried on through the successive acts that punctuate its flow. Producing their life, human beings effectively produce themselves. The intransitive verb 'to dwell' aptly conveys this conception of the production of life as *a task* that has continually to be worked at. (Ingold 2005: np; see also Chapter Two)

This dwelling perspective, which Ingold elaborates through the idea of wayfaring, suggests how poetry might convey interactions between a mind and non-human nature, and how a place itself is constituted by the movements of human and non-human nature. I summarised Ingold's notion

of 'wayfaring' as the 'interplay of diverse human and non-human agents in their mutual relationships' (Chapter Two). While Bate's and Gifford's understandings of ecopoetry focus on how poetry might suggest the experience of being at home in nature, I believe that an ecocentric perspective can be achieved by showing the interplay of organisms in what Ingold calls the 'meshwork' (Chapter Two) . As Lentricchia explained, Robert Frost's nature poetry could at once invoke inner and outer landscapes (see Chapter One). When we respond to non-human nature we do not passively react to an external scene so much as we find ourselves 'being pushed forward by forces behind and besides' (Ingold 2011: 64 – see Chapter Two, above). These forces include elements of inner and outer nature.

If we are to communicate our experiences of non-human nature and place, we need to convey our interrelationships with the human and non-human elements of the ecosystem. If Massey and Ingold indicate that place is constantly in formation, in this chapter I aim to show how our minds are constantly in flux – thus any 'nature poetry' must aim to indicate the fluxes of both external nature and the mind. While Thomas talked of a 'universal language' of nature and the human mind, he also alluded to a variety of thought that defied conceptualisation. Thomas's and Frost's poems about birds showed links between our mental lives and the fluxes of the ecosystem.

Robert Frost sometimes suggested that metaphorical thought helped us to militate against the seeming disorder of nature. Yet for Frost such thought was always falling behind the nature of the world we tried to comprehend (Chapter One, above). Frost accepted that the mind is prone to the same impulse to movement or disorder, and attempted to convey how the processional aspect of our interactions with nature resembles the nature of reality apart from the mind. From Henri Bergson, Frost learned that 'matter, language and quantity were inadequate representations of a "true" reality' (Hass 2002: 3; see also Chapter One, above).

With these considerations in mind, I contend that there are three ways in which Thomas and Frost produced ecopoetry – in Gifford's senses of producing aesthetic innovation and encouraging an ecocentric perspective. The poets both conveyed the performative, embodied aspects of our experiences of non-human nature and David Borthwick's idea of entanglement. For the first two types of ecopoetry I focus on the poems Frost wrote or finished after he met Thomas:

1) Their poems explored the effects of non-human nature on the mind. In this case, the rhythms of the poems suggested the urge to fixity and the impulses to movement or extra-vagance provoked by an experience of human or non-human nature. Rather than merely 'describing' or

representing that experience, they aimed to produce an equivalent to that experience in the reader. This is discussed with regard to Thomas's poem 'I never saw that land before' and Frost's poem 'Good Hours' (1915). Other instances where the poets illustrated the impact of non-human nature on the mind, specifically the influence of the 'weather-world', are explored in the following chapter. I suggest that Thomas learned from Frost to pursue a theme of 'extra-vagance'.

2) These poems show that language is limited in its ability to do justice to an experience of non-human nature, a state of mind which is often out of the common and unconceptualisable. Following the critic Len Scigaj, I explain that the technique of 'référance' can draw on this limitation to redirect a reader's attention to his or her own experiences. I illustrate this with discussion of Frost's poem 'The Oven Bird' and Thomas's poems 'March' and 'Aspens'. I also show that while an individual experience of non-human nature may be beyond linguistic representation this can itself help us develop new conceptual understandings of our relationships to the environment. One such renewed understanding that Frost gained from Thomas was that 'home' is something that can only be achieved on a temporary basis.

3) A dialogue form is used to suggest the limits of the individual's point of view. While this technique is sometimes employed to gain our sympathy with a marginalised human speaker, it can also be used to generate sympathy with a non-human speaker and highlight commonalities between a speaker and a language-less interlocutor – for example in 'March' and 'Digging ("Today I think")'. Again, the experience that is invoked is one that unconceptualisable, and yet it is something that can be conveyed in a 'song' that has meanings for the speaker. The openness of this form allows for it to encompass a 'wayfaring' perspective.

In all of these examples, the poets demonstrated the inadequacy of language to convey their experience of their mental states. Paralleling the philosopher Henri Bergson, the poets showed that our mental states are what Bergson called 'intensive manifolds', which consisted in a series of processes that could not be reduced to conceptual understandings. The poets indicated the limits of the ability of language to convey these experiences; they also signalled our awareness of other processes that were akin to the fluxes of our inner landscapes, and they used the non-verbal dimensions of language to convey these intensive manifolds.

In the first half of this chapter, I consider the influence of Bergson's legacy on Thomas and Frost – via the translation of his work by T.E. Hulme – and how the theorist impacted on the aesthetics of the Imagists. I suggest that Frost's theorising about the 'sound of sense' disguised his true reliance on Hulme's translation, which was a reliance that enabled Frost's

deployment of rhythms and movements between tones that were suggestive of certain experiences rather than representative of specific mental states or images. On the other hand, Edward Thomas's writing before his meeting with Frost about 'thought moments' indicated that the English poet aimed to convey an experience of a movement of his mind rather than to represent fixed mental states. Thus, both Thomas and Frost both relied on tones of speech and poetic metre that would be familiar to the reader to convey the unfamiliar inner states. While, as we've seen, Thomas already had an interest in praising the embodied character of good literary writing – the sense of the poet-speaker's 'natural rhythms' (see Chapter One, above) – he did not produce this type of writing himself until after his conversations with Frost and his employment of 'extra-vagant' themes.

Following this discussion, I consider the three types of ecopoems described above in terms of the intensive manifold. In the Appendix I consider the various poetic forms that Thomas and Frost used, and the opportunities they offered for consideration of the human relationship with nature. In the use of all of these forms, however, there were tensions between the effort to reveal the poet's inner landscape, the human situation, and the poet's ability to invoke a natural landscape.

The importance of speech rhythms

What follows concerns Thomas's and Frost's appropriations of the rhythmic dimensions of poetry, and how speech rhythms can be seen to interact with metre. For the sake of my arguments, rhythm can be defined as it is by Hobsbaum in *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form* as

> the working machine of poetry, as metre is its ground-plan or blueprint. It is the variegation of metre according to the tones of the voice in which a poem is read aloud; this, in its turn being governed by both meaning and stress pattern. (1996: 188)

Rhythm can contribute to expression to a limited extent. In D.W. Harding's analysis in *Words Into Rhythm* (1976) rhythm is analogous to bodily gait, since our gait or posture may have both an aesthetic value and an expressive effect, and may occasionally be meaningful to another observer (150). A gait is expressive to the extent that it displays the discharge or potential discharge of energy (150). If we compare rhythm to gait, it can be seen to be personal to a speaker, and only partially understood by another. The idea of 'speech rhythms' suggests a 'metre dominated by the speaking voice, as against a metre which dominates the voice' (17).

Metre is a pattern that will be over-ridden if it fails to accommodate the rhythms of speech, which are themselves determined by meaning. Metre is conventionally defined as the

predominant pattern of feet, which can be divided into a regular number of syllables per foot, and number of feet per line. If this is the 'plan' then, according to Hobsbaum's definition, the poem is then constructed, either straightforwardly according to the blueprint, or with a skill that makes it into something over-and-above the metrical scheme. For instance, a syllable may be missed, for the sake of emphasising lexical meaning or establishing a different tone or rhythm; syntax may run over lines, altering the relative stress of subsequent syllables. These variations can also register emphasis for meaning within the blueprint of metre, and the energy of a mind moving beyond formal line endings.

Thomas's and Frost's interest in the importance of speech rhythms before their encounters with Hulme's writing on Bergson suggests their preparedness for Bergson. Hulme's writing about poetry before his translations of Bergson helps us to understand why he – and the other Imagists – focused on the image rather than on speech rhythms, and why Hulme moved away from Bergson.[63] Similarly, Thomas's and Frost's 'democratic' instincts help to explain why they chose to focus on sensual speech rhythms rather than on the image. However, the Imagists' interest in finding a new form to renew poetry was shared by both Thomas and Frost.

The limits of individual expression of emotion and the deadening effect of poetic language were common themes in Romantic and post-Romantic literature. Thomas and Frost hinted at a desire to combine individual expression an ability to communicate with a community of readers and writers. In his book on the Victorian writer and critic Walter Pater, written before meeting Frost, Edward Thomas affirmed that 'Nothing so much as the writer's rhythm can give that intimate effect "as if he had been talking". Rhythm is the essence of a sincere expressive style' (Thomas's 1913 *Walter Pater*, cited in Thomas 1981: 161; see also Chapter One) and he deplored what he saw as the absence of 'living and social words' in Pater's work. Frost talked about the need to be a poet for 'all sorts and kinds' (CPPP: 668) and also based his choice of metre on an individual 'mood'. As he explained to John Bartlett in February 1914:

> A word about recognition: In literature it is our business to give people the thing that will make them say, 'Oh yes I know what you mean.' It is never to tell them something they don't know, but something they know and hadn't thought of saying. It must be something they recognize. (Frost 2014: 174)

Frost's focus on readily accessible tones and sounds combined with a belief in the communicative properties of rhythms for certain subjective states. As we shall see below, Frost

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[63] Christos Hadjiyannis considers Hulme's contribution to Imagism and maintains both that there are a number of 'Imagisms' in Storer, Pound, Hulme and Flint rather than one centralising idea, and that Hulme's theorising remained consistent throughout his career (2013: 143).

believed that there were a limited number of available 'sentence sounds', a limit which effectively put a constraint on the extravagances of poets.

In January 1913, Frost met Frank Flint and T.E. Hulme at the Poetry Bookshop. These were two members of the Imagist group of poets and they later introduced him to Ezra Pound (Parini 1998: 122). After this meeting, Frost appeared at first sight keen to put his own theories about verse into terms as sophisticated as those he thought his new friends required (Walsh 1991: 123). This, however, downplays the real influence of Hulme's meeting with Frost. To understand this, it is necessary to consider the development of Frost's criticism, and the different ways that Frost's contemporaries drew on Bergson's theories.

In *Going By Contraries*, Robert Bernard Hass proposes two ideas which contribute to my argument about Frost's early poetic theorising: 1) that the Imagists focused on the obscure surface 'opacity' of the image, while Frost drew on the surface 'transparency' of sentence sounds (2002: 139) and 2); that Frost, following William James, believed the truths of science and poetry were only pragmatic tools (see Chapter One, above). While Hass shows the consequences of Frost's meeting with Hulme, he does not explain Hulme's initial interests in Bergson and how this deepens our understanding of Frost's theorising.

The importance of speech rhythms: Robert Frost

In Frost's theorising of the 1910s and 1920s, the sounds and rhythms of speech were key to the poetic making – or rendering – of experience. As he explained in a 1915 interview with Morris P. Tilley:

> There is the visual appeal of poetry. We all recognise so-called poetic words that visualise pictures for us. As this is the appeal to the eye, so there is a more important appeal to the ear. The music of poetry is not like the music of an instrument, however. It is something different. Music in poetry is obtained by catching the conversational tones which are the special property of vital utterances. There is the sense words convey, and there is also an emotional quality, an interpretative quality, in the tone in which the words are uttered. To gather these, because they are significant and vital and carry through the ear an appeal of sincerity, is a main effort in poetry ... [ellipsis in original] Conversational tones are numerous in dramatic poetry. As a result, the dramatic is the most intense of all kinds of poetry. It is the most surcharged with significance.
>
> (Frost and Lathem 1966: 25)

As early as 1894 Frost stated in a letter to Susan Hayes Ward that 'Sound is an element of poetry, one but for which the imagination would become reason' (2014: 25). Frost's interest in speech sounds was literary, rather than cultural. This did not mean that Frost was averse to

visual imagery: Frost's most famous poems of the period, including 'The Road Not Taken', 'Stopping by Woods' and 'Birches' centre on a visual image (often drawn from nature). But what Frost thought separated him from his contemporaries was the strength of his belief that meaningful sounds were the key to successful poetry. As he put it in a letter to his friend John Bartlett on 4 July 1913, 'I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense' (CPPP: 664).

Frost's first exposition on this theme of sentence sounds appeared in this letter to Bartlett, which he wrote from his bungalow in Beaconsfield. He introduced the idea that he wished 'to make music out of what I call the sound of sense', which he opposed to the 'harmonised vowels and consonants' of Swinburne and Tennyson (CPPP: 664). This letter was written just a few days after a key meeting with Hulme and Flint: Robert Frost met with Flint and T.E. Hulme on 1 July 1913, and he reported in a letter to Flint a few days later that his 'ideas got just the rub they needed' (6 July 1913, in Frost 2014:125). Frost indicated that he would be meeting Flint and Hulme again on 8 July. In a letter from 25 June 1913 Frost had asked to speak to Flint as a 'metrical' and Hulme as a 'philosopher', suggesting the link in his mind between poetic sound and ideas (Frost 2014: 118-19). As he explained to Bartlett, the sentence sounds were 'the abstract vitality of our speech' and 'pure sound – pure form' (CPPP: 665); they were, somewhat puzzlingly at first, the sounds of sentences 'without the words in which they are embodied' (664). Thus, Frost set himself apart from what he thought of as superfluous literariness of some of the Victorians and evoked the abstraction of the modernists.

In this same letter to Bartlett Frost explained that the cadences of poetry were achieved by breaking the 'irregularity of accent' of sentence sounds against the 'regular beat' of one of three metres. Thus, sentence sounds included a rhythmic aspect, which created a tension with the regular beat of metre. And this is what happens in much of his early poetry. Frost often showed – in lyric, dialogues, sonnets, tetrameters and pentameters – that a nearly strict iambic line could be dramatically varied by including the tones and rhythms of speech. In Frost's own later words ('The Figure a Poem Makes', 1939), '[t]he possibilities for tune from the dramatic tones of meaning struck across the rigidity of a limited metre are limitless' (CPPP: 131 – see Chapter One).

In a further letter to Bartlett of 19 January 1914, also from Buckinghamshire, Frost talked of the variation of accent according to sense. Frost believed that 'words […] adapt their sounds to persons and places and times' (671). This created a quandary – were the sentence sounds, which vary thus, entirely reproducible in written verse? Frost hinted to Bartlett that

sentence sounds were reproducible on 22 February 1914, explaining that the sentence sounds were found rather than created:

> The sentence-sounds are very definite entities. (This is no literary mysticism I am preaching.) They are as definite as words. It is not impossible that they could be collected in a book though I don't at present see on what system they would be catalogued.
>
> They are apprehended by the ear. They are gathered by the ear from the vernacular and brought into books. Many of them are already familiar to us in books. I think no writer invents them. (CPPP: 675)

And he continues this theme in a letter to Sidney Cox in December 1914:

> Just so many sentence sounds belong to man as just so many vocal sounds belong to one kind of bird. We come into the world with them and create none of them. What we feel as a creation is only selection and grouping. We summon them from heaven knows where under excitement with the audile [sic] imagination. And unless we are in an imaginative mood it is no use trying to make them, they will not rise. (CPPP: 681)

However difficult it might be to believe that we can exactly capture the 'abstract vitality of speech' or 'sentence sounds' in words, Frost made it clear that these sounds were 'discovered' rather than created, which set a limit on the creative role of the author. He suggested that 'sentence sounds' were something hard and fixed, in the scientistic language of Imagism. And yet Frost believed that sentence sounds could only be rendered within the limits of formal verse. As Faggen explains, 'Frost's dislike of free verse had very much to do with what he considered its inability "to catch" the fundamental sentence sounds of speech rhythms' (2008: 29). Frost described the process in a letter to John Cornos on 8 July 1914:

> It is as simple as this: there are the very regular preestablished accent and measure of blank verse, and there are the very irregular accent and measure of speaking intonation. I am never more pleased than when I can get these into strained relation. I like to drag and break the intonation across the metre as waves first comb and then break stumbling on the shingle. (CPPP: 680)

The image of metre serving as a buffer against speech rhythms in the way that waves encounter the resistance of land suggests that metre will first amplify then dissipate the irregular speech rhythms, and that metre creates the dominant force. However, Frost explained that the sentence sounds initially determine our choice of metre. For Frost in 'The Constant Symbol' in October 1946 (see Chapter One):

> There is something between the [instigating] mood and the vocal imagination (images of the voice speaking) that determines a man's first commitment to metre and length of line. (CPPP: 789)

An emotion, in combination with an imagined sentence sound, provides the poet with directions as to the appropriate metre. This later statement implied that for the reader, as was the case in Thomas's arguments on thought moments, metre was merely one of several guides to rhythm.

Thus, in Frost's theorising, it could be inferred that 'sentence sounds' were abstract 'images' that stood in a direct relation to a 'mood' – they had a referential capacity that was prior to their conceptual content. These sounds seemed confusingly to be both innate ('We come into the world with them') and discoverable through experience ('They are apprehended by the ear from the vernacular'). Frost seemed to be appealing to nativist arguments associated with Darwin's theories about the communicative properties of sounds, and the abstractionist principles of Hulme and the other modernists (see Frost and Lathem 1966: 6-7; Darwin 1871: 593). However, despite what Frost said, and whatever the connotative dimensions of words and tones, a reader must first determine the poem's verbal meaning. And further, the emotional tone that a reader attributed to a word would be determined at least in part by the social component of lexical meaning (see Stibbe 2014:1). If the poems were heard rather than read, the tones would be interpreted in conjunction with the words' lexical meaning. Frost affirmed something similar in a letter to his former student, Sidney Cox, in January 1914:

> I say you can't read a single good sentence with the salt in it unless you have previously heard it spoken. Neither can you with the help of all the characters and diacritical marks pronounce a single word unless you have previously heard it actually pronounced. Words exist in the mouth not in books. You can't fix them and you dont [sic] want to fix them. You want them to adapt their sounds to persons and places and times. You want them to change and be different. (Frost 2014: 168)

This suggested that, rather than being directly 'caught' by the poet, the tones and rhythms of poetry were reinterpreted by the reader or listener in accordance with his or her own circumstances.

These discussions left it far from clear as to what exactly Frost meant by 'sentence sounds'. How did they relate to the 'bodily' aspect of poetry that Edward Thomas was concerned with? How did they contribute to the dramatic qualities of poetry, as Frost believed they did? Firstly, I will explain T.E. Hulme's theories about poetry, to show both similarities with Thomas's and Frost's interests, and crucial philosophical differences.

T.E. Hulme was an English poet and thinker who, like Edward Thomas, died in 1917 in the war. Although he wrote less poetry than his fellow Imagists, he was considered instrumental in the formation of the 'group', and Pound included 'The Complete Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme' – consisting of five short poems – in his *Ripostes*, which was Pound's first example of the 'School of Images' (Pound 1912: 59). Hulme's lectures on poetry between 1908 and 1912

predated Ezra Pound's work with Richard Aldington and H.D. on an Imagist manifesto in 1913, and the Imagist declarations of Aldington in the *Egoist* in 1914 (Parini 1998: 126). A Conservative and classicist, Hulme rejected Romanticism for its elevation of the human and its disavowal of the teaching of religion. His education included periods at Cambridge studying philosophy, studying chemistry at University College London, and stays in Belgium and Canada. The overseas trips instigated Hulme's interests in French poetry and thought. According to Roger Kimball in ''The Importance of T.E. Hulme', Hulme was influenced in 1913 by a stay in Germany, where he encountered the aesthetic theories of Wilhelm Worringer (1997: np). In his 1911 review of French literature for the *New Age* Hulme stated that 'the spirit which finds expression in the Symboliste movement in poetry is the same as that represented by Bergson in philosophy' (1994: 58).[64] In the essay 'The Evolution of T. E. Hulme's Thought', Henry Mead explains that Hulme ultimately rejected Bergson due to the vagueness of the reality that is sensed by intuition, and for Bergson's romantic belief in human progress (nd: np).

Wilhelm Worringer, whom Hulme first saw in 1913, influenced Hulme's belief that abstraction was the best response to the flux of sense experience, and inspired Hulme's final critical writings. Mead explains that for Hulme abstraction revealed the mind's ability to impose order on the chaos of experience (nd: np). However, in 1913, Hulme was committed to continue writing about Bergson, and it was under this auspice that Frost met Hulme. In 1912, Hulme had been re-admitted to Cambridge, where he began to work on an English translation of Bergson that he called *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. However, towards the outbreak of the war, social unrest and Hulme's own politics led him to develop his interest in Classicism, which he had formerly developed in his 1910 essay 'Romanticism and Classicism'.

T.E. Hulme, the Imagists and Henri Bergson

Thomas Ernest Hulme was the conduit through which poets in Britain in the period 1912-17 encountered Bergson's writing. T.E. Hulme gave 'A Lecture on Modern Poetry' to The Poets' Club in London in 1908. In it, he described his dissatisfactions with contemporary poetry, including its inability to address the rupture of 'modern' experience. This required a new form to renew poetry and to restore a moral standard. Karen Csengeri observes Hulme's

> fear that the modern world, carrying with it a scientific and philosophical baggage from the Victorian past, was trying to merge the sphere of values with that of science. To allow the two to be merged could only lead to the destruction of the ethical.

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[64] My references to Hulme's writing are mainly from Karen Csengeri's edition of *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1994).

This echoed Edward Thomas's concerns about the progressivism of his father's generation (see Smith 1986: 26-28). Hulme's interest in Bergson was – as for many – due to Bergson's theorising that intuition could free us from deterministic thinking and the consequent obliteration of moral freedom.

Before his encounter with Bergson, Hulme found inspiration in the free verse of the French philosopher Gustav Kahn, who, according to critic Christos Hadjiyannis 'advocated vers libre on the grounds that it was better suited to express the "pensée plus complexe" [more complex thought] of modern times' (2013: 148). Hulme believed Kahn's free verse allowed for the movements of thought and experience, and did not fix experience into one totalising truth.[65] According to Hulme's 1911 'Notes on the Bologna Congress', modern art must convey the flux of modern experience, which he found expressed in Bergson's dictum: 'Somewhere at a great distance, Truth is hidden' (Hulme 1994: 105).[66] In his 1908 lecture, Hulme had asserted that the best way to convey the nature of individual experience was to employ simple objects conveyed in sensory detail, through vision or sound (in Hadjiyannis 2013: 53). From the symbolist poet Remy de Gourmont, Hulme gleaned that everyday, non-abstract language is more in tune with the contents of sense perception (Mead nd: np).

In Bergson's philosophy of 'intensive manifolds', artistic production – rather than conceptual reasoning – is most likely to reveal the nature of our experience of reality (see also Chapter One). For Hulme – before his move towards Classicism – the importance of Bergson's theory of reality was that it provided a vocabulary to describe what happens in art. Hulme picked out two ideas as key to Bergson's theory of art. The first is the 'conception of reality as a flux of interpenetrated elements unseizable by the intellect' (what Bergson called the 'intensive manifold') which is revealed to us through intuition. The second is the idea that the 'function of the intellect is so to present things not that we may most thoroughly understand them, but that we may successfully act on them', which means that the intellect restricts the objects of perception. Art is therefore 'an actual contact with reality in a man who is emancipated from the ways of perception engendered by action' (Hulme 1994: 193-194).[67]

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[65]However, Hulme maintained that he did not follow Kahn's dictum entirely. Free verse in English need not avoid regular patterns of syllable and rhyme (Hulme 1994: 105).

[66]'Notes on the Bologna Congress', first published in *New Age* 8/26 (27 April 1911), 607-08.

[67] The idea of freedom from the dictates of purposive thought also suggests a kind of helplessness, and Thomas described this in his writing about those individuals whom he called 'superfluous'. Thomas's superfluous man in *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* is one of those 'delicate instruments on which men play melodies of agony and sweetness' (Thomas 1913c: 49). Stan Smith described the presence of

For Hulme, in the essay 'Bergson's Theory of Art' (c.1911-12), the process of art was one of discovery, rather than creation, where the artist 'leaves the level where things are crystallised out into these definite shapes, and, diving down into the inner flux, comes back with a new shape which he endeavours to fix' (194).[68] The process of fixing this shape occurs through a particular 'vision of things'. In the case of literature, this vision comes through a striking, fresh metaphor or image, which will eventually need to be replaced as it becomes commonplace: 'Metaphors soon run their course and die. But it is necessary to remember that when they were first used by the poet who create them they were used for the purpose of conveying over a vividly felt, actual sensation' (195). For Hulme, in this essay, artistic expression in literature was the ability – innate to some individuals – to

> induce us to make the same effort ourselves by rhythmical arrangements of words, which, thus organised and animated with a life of their own, tell us, or rather suggest, things that speech is not calculated to express. Others get at emotions which have nothing in common with language; certain rhythms of life at the centre of our minds.

(1994: 196-97)

This process of the rhythmic arrangement of words 'animated with a life of their own' is suggestive of Frost's later theorising about sentence sounds, which also hints at a capacity distinct from conceptual thought. At this point in his writing, Hulme emphasised the artist's need to convey the movement of our mental lives.

In this same essay, Hulme explained that linguistic formulation distorted the nature of the artist's original experience through the objectifying impulses of language. This in turn required a compensatory action on the behalf of the artist. The artist needed to convey the 'freshness' of this experience. Furthermore, as an artist, you were 'driven to new means of expression because you persist in an endeavour to get it out exactly as you felt it'. Representation was less important than 'communication over of the actual contact with reality'. All art must have some basis in physical experience, however, since we must necessarily feel 'that the poet is describing something which is actually present to him, which he realises visually at first hand' (Hulme 1994: 200-203).

Referring to Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, Hulme explained in a series of lectures in the winter of 1911 that Bergson opposed a reductive view of reality explicable in mechanical or

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superfluous men – the watercress collector, the umbrella salesman – throughout Thomas's prose, and noted Thomas's self-identification as 'superfluous' in the *The South Country* (1986: 26).

[68] Notes for a lecture that were first published posthumously in *New Age* in 1922 as 'The Note-Books of T. E. Hulme', ed. by Herbert Read.

spatial terms alone, since this version of the universe only encompassed those parts of reality that Bergson called 'extensive manifolds' – those that were capable of being separated spatially. Things that were intuitively known and are seen as 'interpenetrating' rather than spatially isolable included free will and our mental lives (Hulme 1994: 173-174). Hulme referred to Bergson's analysis of his own mental states, such as annoyance. This analysis proved the degree of interpenetration of the intensive manifold:

> The feeling of 'annoyance' as it occurs to any one person is perfectly individual, and is coloured by his whole personality. Language, however, has to use, to describe this particular state of 'annoyance', the same word in every case, and is thus only able to fix the objective and impersonal aspect of the emotion. Every emotion is composed of a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permeate each other without any precise outline. In this lies the individuality of the emotion. As soon as you begin to analyse and to attempt to describe it in words you take away from it all the individuality which the emotion possesses as occurring in a certain person. (Hulme 1994: 176)

While we might share intersubjective ideas about the emotion of anger, any language we use to describe our experience of it will distort our presentation of it towards the impersonal element. Thus, with the whole of our mental life, while we cannot grasp our mental state by the intellect, we sense its presence at any moment. Using a 'crude metaphor', we can see our experience of our mental lives as though we were the cross section of a stream, where, although we couldn't see ourselves from the outside, we have 'a complete knowledge of [ourselves] as a complex sense of the varying directions of the forces pressing on [us]' (177). It is this personal dimension of an emotion that the artist seeks to communicate via the impersonal medium of language. The emotions interpenetrate, and we cannot represent them in language, but we can convey our intuition of them via a poetic presentation of a movement of consciousness.

Bergson suggested that the image could inspire an intuition of duration. Christos Hadjiuyannis notes that in *An Introduction to Metaphysics,* which Hulme himself translated in 1912:

> Bergson explains that, although it is very difficult to 'reproduce' the 'inner life' or duration despite the fact that, as he puts it, '[n]o image can replace the intuition of duration', different succinct images may succeed in triggering our attention towards intuition, which is the means through which we can access duration.
>
> (Hadjiuyannis 2013: 157)[69]

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[69] Hadjiuyannis quotes from Henri Bergson's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. by T.E. Hulme and ed. by Thomas A. Goudge (first published in 1912; this edition Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999) 27.

As we shall see below, Hulme's interest in the Image prefigured his writings on Bergson, and stemmed from his view that arresting language is essentially tied up with vision. What mattered for Hulme was the ability to carry over an original experience to the reader: for Hulme, metre and rhyme could also aid this communication (Hadjiuyannis 2013: 158). Hulme's focus on the Image is in part consistent with Bergson's contention that 'the Image has at least this advantage, that it keeps us in the concrete' (Bergson 1912: 16). However, for Hulme, the Image was the only way that a poet could accurately pass on the nature of our experience. This belief stemmed from an interest in the bodily nature of poetry, the idea that, as he expressed it in 1907, 'A man cannot write without seeing at the same time a visual signification before his eyes. It is the image which precedes the writing and makes it firm' (Hulme 1994: 25).[70]

Later, Hulme became tired of the Poets' Club and began associating with a group including Frank Flint and later Ezra Pound, which became known as the Secession Club. Pound and other Imagists took from Hulme an interest in conveying concrete visual objects, which was articulated in Pound's Imagist dictum, 'direct treatment of the thing' (see Chapter One). The idea of language as concerned with 'things' led Hulme and other modernists to consider the thingliness of language itself. As Andrew Thacker argues in his 2006 essay 'A Language of Concrete Things: Hulme, Imagism and Theories of Language', for Pound 'Language is made out of concrete things' (47). This is also apparent in Hulme's criticism of Jacob Epstein and Wyndham Lewis, where the 'abstraction in these works derives from a separation between humans and external nature, and from a rejection of the humanist desire to 'empathize' with natural forms' (Thacker 2006: 45).

However, neither Hulme nor the other Imagists rejected the communicative properties of sound. In fact, Pound insisted on the importance of rhythm to the expressive powers of poetry more absolutely than Frost did (Chapter One, above). Finally, Hulme, like the other Imagists, was concerned to show the unique aspects of individual experience, but he was the first to stress the importance of the Image.

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[70] This quotation comes from a collection of holograph notes by Hulme on language and style, held in the University of Keele Library and dated by Csengeri to circa 1907.

Hulme, the Imagists and Bergson: Robert Frost

Lawrance Thompson stated that Frost had already read Bergson's *Creative Evolution* with great enthusiasm in 1911 (1967: 381-91). Hass observes that Frost had encountered Hulme's writing before his arrival in the UK through the latter's writing for *Nature* (2003: 43). Frost's answer to Hulme's question of how poetry could communicate 'the actual contact with reality' and the 'movement of consciousness' seemed to depend on the poet's ability to reproduce the rhythms and 'tones of live speech' with the aid of metre. Frost focused most on Hulme's contention that the poet must use the 'rhythmical arrangements of words' (see above).

Robert Hass explains that the theory of sentence sounds echoed the following extract from *Creative Evolution* which described how the poet could achieve a directness of experience not accomplished in symbolic representation:

> When a poet reads me his verses, I can interest myself enough in him to enter into his thought, put myself into his feelings, live over again the simple state he has broken into phrases and words. I sympathize then with his inspiration, I follow it with a continuous movement which is, like the inspiration itself, an undivided act. Now, I need only relax my attention, let go the tension that there is in me, for the sounds, hitherto swallowed up in the sense, to appear to me distinctly, one by one, in their materiality.

<div align="right">(in Hass 2002: 199, note 33)[71]</div>

Frost's theory of sentence sounds based the expressive powers of poetry on a mixture of the rhythmic properties and the tones of speech as they were reproduced in the imperfect medium of language. The difficulty for the reader of moving from the metre to the appropriate verbal intonation and rhythm – which Frost did not acknowledge – could be seen to reflect the artist's original experience of trying to convey the tones and rhythms of live speech in ossifying language. Rather than focusing on 'fixing' the flux into static images, as Hulme eventually did, Frost addressed the movements of the mind, even though he conveyed his theory in terms of abstract speech forms. Like Hulme, Frost indicated that poetry should convey a sensory, as well as an intellectual, experience. Like Hulme, and like Worringer, Frost referred to sentence sounds as 'pure sound – pure form'.

However, unlike the Imagists, Frost chose to focus on poetic sounds, rather than on a complex of images that may have a more elusive connotation for a reader. As Hass explains, 'The synthesis of tone and form conveys the infinite variety of unfolding emotional states much better than the individual words that would fix them into rigid structures' (142, see also Chapter One). This idea complicates the notion that Frost attempted to mimic speech – instead, like

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[71] Hass quotes from Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1911) 209-10.

Thomas (below) he aimed to produce a poetic equivalent to the experience that was the founding inspiration.

Hulme, the Imagists and Bergson: Edward Thomas

Thomas had an interest in speech rhythms before his meeting with Robert Frost (see Chapter One). In his 1913 work on Pater, Thomas suggested that, as well as communicating speech rhythms, poetry should convey the movements of thought. I believe that what Thomas gained from discussion with Frost was an awareness of the interpenetration of mental states – what Bergson called intensive manifolds – and scepticism about language's ability to convey either an emotion or a thought. Thomas was concerned with expressing the 'flux' of our mental lives, rather than fixing it into static images: this suggests a way in which we can understand Frost's 'sentence sounds' *in spite of* Frost's actual assertions. Thomas's observations on the 'overheard' quality of lyric poetry hinted at the vagueness that comes about through trying to convey the flux of our inner experience, which would not be the case if there were definite 'sounds of sense'.

Like Hulme, Thomas seems to have been concerned about the effects of modern life on individual expression. In *The South Country* he described the feeling of joining a crowd in London.

> There is a more than human force in the movement of the multitude, more than the sum of all the forces in the arched necks, the grinding chest muscles, and the firm feet of the horses, the grace of the bright women, the persistency of the tall men and thick men. They cannot stop. They look stupid or callous or blank or even cruel. They are going about another's business; they conceal their own, hiding it so that they forget (as a drunkard forgets where he has hidden his gold) where they have hidden it, hiding their souls under something stiffer and darker than the clothing of their bodies.

> (Thomas 1909: 90)

However, he also believed that folk literature contributed to a collective understanding that could keep open alternative meanings and knowledge – like Lob's keeping 'clear old paths that no one uses'. Thomas suggested that folk literature could serve as a new impetus for poetry: 'Can [ballads] possibly give a vigorous impulse to a new school of poetry that shall treat the life of our time and what in the past has most meaning for us as freshly as those ballads did the life of their times?' (1909: 58). Thomas stated in the *Heart of England* that 'of all music, the old ballads and folk songs and their airs are richest in the plain, immortal symbols […] They are in themselves epitomes of whole generations, of a whole countryside' (1906: 217). As Robert Macfarlane wrote of Thomas:

Folk songs and footpaths are, to his mind, both major democratic forms: collective in origin but re-inflected by each new singer or walker. Radical, too, in their implicit rebuke to the notion of private property. (Macfarlane 2012a: 337)

There are those who, by their nature are so unusual that they have a particular difficulty in communicating their experiences to their generation. Thomas argued that 'The magic circle drawn round us all surrounds these in such a way that it will never overlap, far less become concentric with, the circles of any other in the whirling multitudes' (1913c: 50). He believed that lyric poetry could provide a means of individual expression for types such as these. However, we could never fully articulate our own, let alone another's, most intimate feelings.

Thomas discussed the overheard dimension of lyric poetry in his 1910 work *Feminine Influence on the Poets*:

Love poetry, like all other lyric poetry, is in a sense unintentionally overheard, and only by accident and in part understood, since it is written not for any one, far less for the public, but for the understanding spirit that is in the air round about or in the sky or somewhere. (Thomas 1981: 22)[72]

For Thomas, the poetic act in lyric poetry was to produce in the reader the feeling that she or he has overheard someone speaking to him or herself in a moment of heightened feeling. This suggested that, for Thomas, poetic writing was more idiosyncratic than the sentence sounds of Frost. However, in his 1913 work *Walter Pater,* Thomas affirmed:

It is, of course, true that writing stands for thought, not for speech, and that there is a music of words which is beyond speech; it is an enduring echo of we know not what in the past and in the abyss, an echo heard in poetry and the utterance of children.

(Thomas 1981: 161; see also Chapter One)[73]

Thomas's ideas on 'thought moments' first emerged in the context of his 20 September 1913 review of Mark H. Liddell's *An Introduction to the Scientific Study of English Prosody*, where Thomas how the author understood that 'the primary and essential element of all poetry is an aesthetic arrangement of "the moments of thought", which is his technical term for a phrase' (in Thomas 1981: 11). The rhythm produced by movement between these groupings was necessary for poetry. However, Thomas argued, so far Liddell had failed 'to reveal a quality in verse which has not been, or in the future may not be, revealed in prose' (1981: 11-12). For this, it seemed, a writer required a conventional metre.

Andrew Motion explains in his 1991 monograph, *Edward Thomas,* that for Thomas:

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[72] Edward Thomas, *Feminine Influence on the Poets* (London: Martin Secker, 1910) 91-92.
[73] Edward Thomas, *Walter Pater* (London: Martin Secker, 1913) 196-220.

The implicit rejection of the foot as the dominant metrical unit, and its accompanying emphasis that the phrase (or series of phrases) should be the ordering principle instead, leads him to take the natural English line not as the five regular feet of the iambic pentameter, but as eight to twelve syllables which avoid repeating patterns of weak and strong stress. It was this that informed his defence of Frost's verse to his friends. His claims that everyday speech cannot pass unchanged into 'effective' verse, and that a 'complicated and learned and subtle vocabulary and structure' may be compatible with the postures of the voice in intimate speech, are animated by his interpretation of rhythm. (1991: 81)

In addition to the division of a line into thought moments or phrases, D.W. Harding emphasises that there are two principles that determine our approach to choice of speech rhythm for any poetic line:

One is that the metrical set established in the lines may determine the choice between two or more available speech rhythms for the words; the other is that the sense of the words can lead us to adopt one out of several rhythms that can all be reconciled with metre. (1976: 25)

Motion concludes that the possible choices of rhythm according to metre, syntax or sense make it difficult to divide Thomas's own poems into their 'thought moments'. Motion's arguments imply that Frost was wrong to insist on the absolute independence of sentence sounds – Frost's equivalent of thought moments – from the 'words in which they are embodied'. Motion notes how syntax sometimes overlies stress for metre and spoken rhythms in Thomas's poems:

Seventy-six of Thomas's 142 poems are written in this variable blank-verse line, and all of them employ patterns of stress and pause which reflect a mind actually engaged in the act of thinking, rather than offering its concluding thoughts. His rhythm describes the movement of his mind, as well as the sound of sense. (1991: 82)

Peter Howarth, in *Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (2005), also concludes that syntax overlies stress for metre in Thomas's poetry: 'unintended, [Thomas's poetic] goal must be unpredicted and only found en route, and it is exactly the regular form that makes such distracted satisfaction possible' (2005: 67). If the reader follows the syntax, the achievement of form as regular metre or rhymes is only noticed in passing. This, in Howarth's analysis, reveals Thomas's 'suspicion of too-determined approaches to poetic goals' (67).

Thomas's theorising about the rhythms of speech and thought evinced the poet's scepticism towards language's referential capacity, in favour of 'the music of speech'. Thomas's poem 'Old Man' demonstrates how language may actually obstruct our experiences of a natural object:

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 herb itself I like not, but for certain
> I love it

Thomas's speaker explains that 'the thing it is' cannot be easily retrieved nor conveyed by language, despite the name's social connotations. Bergson stated that memories do not simply record the past but creatively reconstruct it in the present moment (see Chapter One, above). This may explain Thomas's speaker's difficulty in associating the herb's 'meaning' with his first acquaintance with it:

> 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.
>
> I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray
> And think of nothing; I see and I hear nothing;
> Yet seem, too, to be listening, lying in wait
> For what I should, yet 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 speaker's memory of the herb is in fact re-constructed as one dimension of the 'dark, nameless', avenue. Following Bergson's theorising, we can understand this as an analogy where the 'avenue' is the speaker's total mental life, with the darkness conveying one of the 'varying directions of the forces pressing on you' (see above).

In 'Words', Thomas again indicated the idea that words stand only indirectly for 'things', and have their connotations independent of his own usage:

> Out of us all
> That make rhymes,
> Will you choose,
> Sometimes –
> As the winds use
> A crack in the wall
> Or a drain,

Their joy or their pain
To whistle through –
Choose me,
You English words?

Thomas suggested that the sounds of words may enable the poet to convey social meanings beyond literal sense, since they allow him to 'whistle', as the 'winds use / A crack in the wall'. However, they may be 'Worn new' by current use – a broadening of associations in their users, such as those acquired through song ('With some sweetness / From Wales / Whose nightingales / Have no wings').

It is plausible that Hulme's indirect influence via Frost allowed Edward Thomas to expand upon his pre-existing awareness that the emotion behind a poetic utterance is not directly conceptualisable. Thomas believed that poetry resembled overhearing someone speaking to himself or herself; hence the difficulty we may have in determining the appropriate tone and rhythm in a line of Thomas's verse. However, this difficulty, paralleling Bergson's ideas, resembles the problems we have conveying the flux of our own experiences in words. The poet can only convey an 'echo' of an original experience through a rhythmic formulation of it, which becomes an 'echo' of an echo for the reader who must choose between a number of available tones and rhythms. However, as Thomas and Frost saw it, this remained the best way to convey the subjective dimensions of an experience, 'an echo of we know not what in the past and in the abyss', the only apparent alternative being the 'hard' symbols of the Imagists. Thomas's discussions with Frost and the putative influence of Hulme's writing via Frost, suggest why Thomas chose to write in a roughly metrical verse, which aimed to include the rhythms of speech as well as the movements of thought.

Home and extra-vagance – readings

Edward Thomas and Robert Frost demonstrated the effects of nature on the mind through their choices of poetic rhythm. Counterpointing regular metre with rhythms from speech, their poetry alternates between moments of expectation and satisfaction – between conforming to anticipation of regularity (analogous to the desire for 'home') and setting up that anticipation; between anticipating disruption (analogous to the desire for 'extra-vagance') and actual disruption. This reading builds on my interpretation of the putative influence of Hulme's theorising on Thomas and Frost. Their impulses to find home can be seen as instances of Bergson's intellectual thought, while the impulse to extra-vagance is the urge to seek beyond the confines of conceptual thought, to intuit duration. Further, the impulse to find home can be seen as an urge to 'build' in Ingold's sense – to act with a pre-determined end in sight, seeing

the rest of the ecosystem as materials to use. To build a home is to use the environment to pre-given ends. However, a recognition of the fluxes of our inner world can combine with an ecological awareness of the fluxes of the ecosystem to produce an alternative, ecological notion of home.

In the poems considered below, the fluxes of the mind are prefigured by awareness of the movements of others within the ecosystem. Thus, Thomas and Frost were prescient of Daniel Botkin's theorising in *Discordant Harmonies* (1990) – that the ecosystem tends towards flux, rather than stability. A sense of life as wayfaring emerges, where the poets' speakers saw life as a series of tasks to be accomplished with no pre-given end. In Thomas's poem 'I never saw that land before' the impulse to build a home can only be experienced for a temporary period, since the fluxes of the mind and the ecosystem are constantly pulling us towards extra-vagance. In 'Good Hours', Frost conveyed the mind's tendency to seek movement out of the confines of home.

While the tensions between the anticipations of fixity and flux can be seen in other poets exploring metrical verse (for example in Eliot's 'Reflections On Vers Libre' from 1917), I argue that these two poets are exemplary in relating this to altered relations with human and non-human nature: there is recognition that human and non-human nature are in a constant state of flux. Because the urge to regularity is dependent on prior irregularity, it is only a temporary state that cannot endure. Hence, the discussion of accommodation or movement always prefigures its own disruption.

Home and extra-vagance: Edward Thomas

Edward Thomas's poem 'I never saw that land before', reflects the struggle between the need to feel accommodated to homely limits (of language, metre, mind and place), and the urge to move out of self or place by transgressing those limits:

> I never saw that land before,
> And now can never see it again;
> Yet, as if by acquaintance hoar
> Endeared, by gladness and by pain,
> Great was the affection that I bore
>
> To the valley and the river small,
> The cattle, the grass, the bare ash trees,
> The chickens from the farmsteads, all
> Elm-hidden, and the tributaries
> Descending at equal interval;

The blackthorns down along the brook
With wounds yellow as crocuses
Where yesterday the labourer's hook
Had sliced them cleanly; and the breeze
That hinted all and nothing spoke.

I neither expected anything
Nor yet remembered: but some goal
I touched then; and if I could sing
What would not even whisper my soul
As I went on my journeying,

I should use, as the trees and birds did,
A language not to be betrayed;
And what was hid should still be hid
Excepting from those like me made
Who answer when such whispers bid.

This poem reveals a tension between the compulsion to move beyond the home place (to be 'journeying') and the accidental discovery of a region where the speaker feels accommodated and welcomed. This hints at Thomas's own 'journey' into poetry, with the subsequent possibilities for harmony that this produces. What is experienced – towards the place or the medium of poetry – is a fleeting state of affection, rather than a fixed 'goal'. This feeling – like the sensation of the breeze – cannot be directly expressed in language and it is one that precludes 'expecting' and 'remembering'. [74]

Visual images of man's earlier forms of living alongside nature – of blackthorns worked on by hand by a labourer, of houses hidden by elms, of a landscape symmetrically ordered by a river's tributaries – contribute to the feeling of harmony and reciprocation. However, the landscape is uncanny in the violence of the yellow wounds of the thorn, and the image hints at an aggressive form of stewardship that no longer respects the durability of the natural environment. And a language that would convey the precise nature of his feeling of harmony is not available to the speaker. He is unable even to articulate or even 'whisper' the complex affection that he feels for this particular place. He must compromise by accepting the expressive properties of poetry. However, the speaker does not remain at the site of harmony – and he has moved on in time to a point where he 'can never see it again'. The speaker only begins to articulate the harmony once it has passed – only then can he conceive of the meaning of the language used by 'birds and trees'. This reflects the dominance of action-directed reason over the intuition of duration. The speaker retains the hope that he will communicate this half-understood experience to someone else who responds to the 'whispers' of the non-human world.

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[74] See also Thomas's Dedication to *The Icknield Way,* where he described his attitude to walking as a source of literary inspiration (Thomas 1913d: v-vii).

The tensions between fixity and movement are conveyed through metre, rhyme and syntax. The phrasing includes what appear to be idiomatic expressions, those that appear oddly worded to reflect the mind struggling to conceptualise the emotion (the extra-vagant emotional world trying to accommodate itself to homely limits of language), and those inverted for the familiar pleasure of rhyme. Phrases dominate over metrical feet.

Hulme suggested that language is only able to convey the 'objective' aspects of experience. However, at the same time, we willingly succumb to the familiar possibilities of metre, rhyme and rhetoric, especially when there is a delay in their satisfaction. The loose form of iambic tetrameter connects this poem to the English lyric tradition. Idiomatic phrasing involves 'using, containing, or denoting expressions that are natural to a native speaker' (Fletcher 2010: np).

Hulme, following Bergson, suggested that rhythm could be used to capture the struggle to express the personal dimensions of an emotion. I suggest that the emotion conveyed in Thomas's poem is a fleeting sense of release or harmony – both through its thematic content, and through its provision of a means to intuit the non-verbal component of an emotion. As Hulme explained, a poem may allow us to intuit 'knowledge of the varying directions of the forces pressing on you' (see earlier in this chapter). We may intuit a feeling of release in if we respond to the strain in regular metre for the sake of thought movement (achieved through syntax and phrasing) followed by the release of this strain through a return to a regular metre. This occurs between the first and second stanzas:

> Yet, as if by acquaintance hoar [3]
> Endeared, by gladness and by pain, [4]
> Great was the affection that I bore [5]
>
> To the valley and the river small, [6]
> The cattle, the grass, the bare ash trees, [7]
> The chickens from the farmsteads, all [8]

The presence of trochees in line three and the anapaests in lines six and seven is counterpointed by the return to regular iambs in line eight. Even with the irregularities, most phrase units end with iambs – for example, 'as if by acquaintance hoar / Endeared' and 'Great was the affection that I bore / To the valley and the river small' and this provides a sense of order. Thus, while each line is 'irregular', the phrasing reveals a regular sequence. Even with the irregular beat, the rhyme of 'bore' and 'hoar' hints at a harmony to be achieved in what follows.

When metre combines with idiomatic-sounding phrasing (rather than inversions for rhyme or rhythm) we are presented with a fleeting sense of harmony between the speaker and

his surroundings. In this way the metre becomes a 'homely' limit that we recognise as the 'blueprint' for the poem. This can be observed in the final stanza. The complex rhythm in the following line is followed by a series of regular iambs to the end:

> I should use, as the trees and birds did,
> A language not to be betrayed;
> And what was hid should still be hid
> Excepting from those like me made
> Who answer when such whispers bid.

The easeful rhythm after what has preceded it conveys a feeling of satisfaction – however, it is only a satisfaction that is noticed in retrospect.

We can understand the urge to find 'home' as the search for the familiar, and the extra-vagant as the urge to deviate from familiar patterns to find new understandings. The metre is homely in that it is a familiar convention for both audience and poet, and it produces a pleasing aesthetic effect when counterpointed with rhythmic variation between phrases. The speaker draws our attention to these non-verbal clues by telling us that he is responding to the 'whispers' of nature, including the breeze, rather than to a human language. Through awareness of the fluxes of the ecosystem – what Timothy Ingold calls the 'weather-world' (discussed in Chapter Four) – the speaker finds an equivalent to the changes in his own inner world that can only be 'sung' rather than conceptualised. While Thomas's poem is about contact with a particular place, it is also about the impact of this place on his mind, and how this contributes to the broader movement of feeling. It also intimates the kind of society that the poet hoped to find with readers who respond to the 'whispers' of nature.

Home and extra-vagance: Robert Frost

In the majority of Robert Frost's poems from the period 1912 to 1917, dynamic patterns of reported inner or overheard speech combine with a regular iambic metre. Frost's idea of sentence tones 'thrown and drawn and displayed across spaces of the footed line' indicates that we should expect that sentence tones will be, to some extent, subsumed by phrases that have regular iambics (CPPP: 690-99). This is indeed present in many of Frost's poems, where idiomatic phrases overcome the bounds of the regular metrical form. For example, this is exhibited in 'Good Hours', from *North of Boston* (new to the American edition of 1915):

> I had for my winter evening walk –
> No one at all with whom to talk,
> But I had the cottages in a row
> Up to their shining eyes in snow.

And I thought I had the folk within:
I had the sound of a violin;
I had a glimpse through curtain laces
Of youthful forms and youthful faces.

I had such company outward bound.
I went till there were no cottages found.
I turned and repented, but coming back
I saw no window but that was black.

Over the snow my creaking feet
Disturbed the slumbering village street
Like profanation, by your leave,
At ten o'clock on a winter eve.

This poem describes a literal extra-vagance by the speaker to the limits of the town. As he walks away from his home, he gains and then loses a feeling of companionship with his fellow villages, who have gone to bed during his walk: they complete their domestic routines rather than join in with his extra-vagance. The poem can also be understood as describing the urge to move beyond the limits of everyday experience, in which case the speaker's act of repenting is linked to a less-than-sincere use of 'profanation'. However, the speaker hints that his quest for new experiences (for something beyond the familiar) does little to inspire the sympathy of his neighbours.

'Good Hours' is thematically close to Thoreau's conclusion to *Walden*, in which he imagined his fellow Americans as metaphorically 'asleep' to the realities he experienced. Thoreau was convinced that language could only approximate to our experiences of reality, and that we should strive to find a language that conveys our moral sentiment:

> I desire to speak somewhere *without* bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true expression […] The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly *translated*; its literal monument alone remains. The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures. (Thoreau 1854: 347)

For Thoreau, the villagers were likely to reject any statement they could not understand, to 'class those who are once-and-a-half-witted with the half-witted, because we appreciate only a third part of their wit' (347). Frost's villagers were literally asleep; and he set a trap for his readers to fall short of the poem's irony and self-reflexivity. His speaker's footsteps did not wake anyone up – all they disturbed was the street. While Frost hinted at a literal urge to move beyond the home place, a second level of meaning is pitched at the moral level of Thoreau's

exhortation. The speaker's creaking steps are ironically compared to religious profanation and at a symbolic level suggest a disdain for village custom, even if this disdain is not recognised. The speaker appears to be engaged in a processes of negotiating his identity in relation to his neighbours and his surroundings. Yet, despite this metaphorical 'extra-vagance', the poem demonstrates that the impulse to fixity or to build often counterpoints the urge to wander.[75] The speaker returns home.

Another level of meaning concerns Frost's poetic transgressions. Frost's metrical feet were metaphorically 'creaking' under the pressure of the sentence sounds, and this may have be as unnerving to his readers as his speaker's literal footsteps might have seemed to the imagined village inhabitants. Thus the poet's practice is revealed as the effort to maintain a balance between the impulse to seek the approval of one's readers and the urge to communicate new experiences. The poem addresses the need for 'creaking feet' rather than the regular feet of iambic pentameter. The poet metaphorically mapped out with his literal feet the process of overcoming and returning to a more regular poetic form. However, the poetic transgression is one that is permitted by the 'you' who gives the walker leave from their domestic obligations – the reader.

Thus, the thematic content of the poem draws attention to a variable poetic metre. This metrical irregularity, with anapaests and iambs, suggests the natural tendency of the mind to overcome a single force. However, the poem also displays the rhetorical device of anaphora, rather than purely idiomatic or unpremeditated phrases, which hints at the poet's concern to be understood. The poem conveys an intuition of the desire for movement – of the intensive manifold – through the variable spoken rhythms subsumed by iambic phrases. This reveals just one of the variety of ways in which Frost innovated with a generally strict iambic line using the 'tones' of the speaking voice.

Référance

In the previous examples, the familiarity of words and metre is counterpointed by unfamiliar or 'extra-vagant' rhythms. The rhythms may provoke an intuition of the movement of our mental lives. 'I never saw that land before' demonstrates that poetic rhythm may (when combined with a relevant thematic content) convey to the reader a fleeting feeling of accommodation with the non-human environment. However, the precise nature of this experience is beyond

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[75] Actual feet are used to suggest the process of overstepping homely boundaries elsewhere in Frost's first three collections, in 'Flower-Gathering' and 'The Self-Seeker'. These poems suggest the need for the poet to overstep metrical limits to challenge conventional systems of poetic worth.

conceptualisation. In Robert Frost's 'Good Hours', the variations in rhythm, in combination with the thematic content, may be seen to convey the urge to move beyond the bounds of (and then return to) the human-constructed home. 'Good Hours' and 'I never saw that land before' reveal the bodily nature of poetry, with their demands on the poet's (and reader's) auditory rather than visual sense. These two poems demonstrate an intuition of an intensive manifold, those 'emotions which have nothing in common with language; certain rhythms of life at the centre of our minds' (Hulme, see above).

One critic who focuses on the potential for the language of poetry to draw attention to our bodily inter-relatedness with non-human nature is Len Scigaj. He demonstrates in *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets* (1999) that ecopoetry, or sustainable poetry, can turn 'the reader's gaze toward an apprehension of the cyclic processes of wild nature' by a process he calls 'référance' (1999: 38). Scigaj believes that we can paradoxically use the shortfalls of language to invoke the perceptions that come about through our own phenomenal immersion in these processes. For Scigaj, 'language is an instrument that the poet constantly refurbishes to articulate his originary experience in nature' (29). The 'originary' experience is 'a perception of stimuli initiated by events in the natural world' (29). It is originary for poetry because it evokes the natural world as the primary 'cause' of all language. One of the processes of nature we share is the urge to movement, flux or 'extra-vagance'.

In the process of référance, language does not provide fixed concepts that mediate between subject and objects, but 'impede[s] the signifying process until the reader's gaze is thrust beyond language to perceive objects in their rich, colourful precognitive suchness' (48). In directing their readers' attention to originary experiences that serve as the basis of poetry, ecopoets demonstrate that natural systems are always greater than, and inclusive of, human systems of meaning (with the consequent realisation that nature is an 'equal' other). For Scigaj, référance also emphasises the text's worldliness, its status as a response to historical circumstances.

Référance: Edward Thomas

In 'March', Thomas demonstrated awareness of the inability of language to convey the experience of overhearing the birds. And yet, the experience of song and environment conjures a type of 'knowing' that is impossible to convey in language.

Then 'twas no time

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For singing merely. So they could keep off silence
And night, they cared not what they sang or screamed;
Whether 'twas hoarse or sweet or fierce or soft;
And to me all was sweet: they could do no wrong.
Somehow they knew – I also, while they sang
And after. Not till night had half its stars
And never a cloud, was I aware of silence
Stained with all that hour's songs, a silence
Saying that Spring returns, perhaps tomorrow.

The speaker resorts to repetitions of 'sweet', 'silence' and 'sang', such repetitions as for Scigaj 'impede […] the signifying process until the reader's gaze is thrust beyond language to perceive objects in their rich, colourful precognitive suchness' (48). We must refer to our own remembered experiences of birdsong in winter, rather than trying to comprehend the poet's own phenomenal immersion.

In Thomas's 1915 poem 'Aspens' the speaker describes how the noise made by trees outlives human sounds at a cross-roads:

All day and night, save winter, every weather,
Above the inn, the smithy, and the shop,
The aspens at the cross-roads talk together
Of rain, until their last leaves fall from the top.

Out of the blacksmith's cavern comes the ringing
Of hammer, shoe, and anvil; out of the inn
The clink, the hum, the roar, the random singing –
The sounds that for these fifty years have been.

The whisper of the aspens is not drowned,
And over lightless pane and footless road,
Empty as sky, with every other sound
Not ceasing, calls their ghosts from their abode,

A silent smithy, a silent inn, nor fails
In the bare moonlight or the thick-furred gloom,
In tempest or the night of nightingales,
To turn the cross-roads to a ghostly room.

And it would be the same were no house near.
Over all sorts of weather, men, and times,
Aspens must shake their leaves and men may hear
But need not listen, more than to my rhymes.

Whatever wind blows, while they and I have leaves
We cannot other than an aspen be
That ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves,
Or so men think who like a different tree.

Here, the unique trembling sound of the aspen blowing in the wind is suggested by the metrical irregularity, assonance and consonance in the final stanza: the tree 'ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves'. This reveals Thomas's interest in the unique properties of the aspen – the *populus tremula* – whose characteristic fluttering is caused by its flattened and flexible leaves. The fluttering tree in the ghostly room provides an image of the speaker's enduring and possibly unreasonable grief.

As well as making a point about the speaker's inner weather and the properties of the aspen, the poem conveys a message about its own form. Metrical regularity in earlier stanzas encompasses talk of human sounds, such as the smithy's anvil and random snatches of song from an inn. This suggests that Thomas believed poetic sound – at this point in history most often established by observing metrical schemes interspersed with melodic moments or the 'random singing' of harmonised vowels – needed to be renewed by attention to the fluxes of our inner weather. Compare the sing-song tone of the second verse, with the regular tetrameter, to the irregularity of the fifth, which addresses the feeling provoked by the sound of the trees, and the final stanza's speech-like cadences.

In 'Aspens' the increasing metrical irregularity hints at an experience that cannot be invoked in words alone – a feeling of a slowly accumulating intensity. While in 'I never saw that land before' Thomas drew attention to his restorative experience of immersion in a landscape, in this poem the poet referred to the trees' irregular shaking and suggested that this may mean different things to the reader. Thus, in 'I never saw that land before' the attention is more properly on the impact of non-human nature on the poet's mind. In 'Aspens' we are put in mind of our own experiences of hearing the aspen tree in its preconceptual 'suchness', since the poem cannot directly convey the speaker's emotional state: 'men may hear / But need not listen'. In hearing the poem, we may be brought to consider our own immersion in non-human processes, and to acknowledge that our moods alter our perceptions of non-human nature, and vice versa. This is not the poetry acting as 'intermediary' between nature and non-human nature as Longley suggests (see 'Introduction'), but a poetic form that aims to indicate the impossibility of directly representing experiences of non-human nature in language. At the same time, paying attention to shaking leaves can be compared to listening to Thomas's irregular verse – both require a recognition of their quiet but persistent music. This idea is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Référance: Robert Frost

Robert Frost's poem 'The Oven Bird' conveys a similar experience to that of Thomas's 'March the Third', although the regularity of the poem and its aphoristic ending offset the richness of the experience that is communicated.

> There is a singer everyone has heard,
> Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
> Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
> He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
> Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.
> He says the early petal-fall is past
> When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
> On sunny days a moment overcast;
> And comes that other fall we name the fall.
> He says the highway dust is over all.
> The bird would cease and be as other birds
> But that he knows in singing not to sing.
> The question that he frames in all but words
> Is what to make of a diminished thing.

As I explain in my introduction, the title of this thesis takes a line from 'The Oven Bird'. Both this poem and my argument address the nature that is the subject of much of Thomas's and Frost's poetry: it is, at least at first sight, the 'diminished thing' (see the Introduction). As such, it requires a new form of poetry that is able to deal with our awareness of Darwinism and industrialised nature, and the way that the mind is constantly in flux. Frost's bird 'knows in singing not to sing', and demonstrates a metaphorical awareness of the potential for a poetry that is informed by the tones of speech. Unlike 'Good Hours' the rhythms of the poem are less successful in communicating the tones of an individual speaking voice. Yet this poem is important because it shows the importance to Frost of how our perception of changes in external nature may signal and illuminate the changes in our own emotional lives. 'The Oven Bird' reveals the connections between our own experiences of mid-summer and those of other species. But, the bird's perspective is central, because it perceives before the speaker does that the season's maturity and abundance are simultaneously the point of its decline and loss: 'Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten'.

The repetitions of 'sing', 'fall', 'bird', and the idea of the oven bird knowing 'in singing not to sing' draw our attention to the inability of language to convey the phenomenal experience of the bird's song in the midsummer woods. We are directed to our own phenomenal experiences of summer decline. At the same time, we can also understand this poem as about poetic creativity itself. The decline in summer's fruitfulness, with a parallel decline in man's harmonious relation to it, may also mirror the diminishment of poetry by what Frost referred to

as the 'music of words'. As with Keith's reading, however, we must not overplay the symbolic reading of this poem to the expense of its literal meaning (see above).

Robert Frost's poem 'The Sound of the Trees' from the 1916 collection *Mountain Interval* displays metrical irregularities, which intensify as the speaker acknowledges the disconcerting effect of the trees' irregular 'speech' on his mental state: 'I shall set forth for somewhere / I shall make the reckless choice / Some day when they are in voice'. This is preceded by an invocation of the trees' 'speech': 'They are that that talks of going / But never gets away/ And that talks no less for knowing'.

> I wonder about the trees.
> Why do we wish to bear
> Forever the noise of these
> More than another noise
> So close to our dwelling place?
> We suffer them by the day
> Till we lose all measure of pace,
> And fixity in our joys,
> And acquire a listening air.
> They are that that talks of going
> But never gets away;
> And that talks no less for knowing,
> As it grows wiser and older,
> That now it means to stay.
> My feet tug at the floor
> And my head sways to my shoulder
> Sometimes when I watch trees sway,
> From the window or the door.
> I shall set forth for somewhere,
> I shall make the reckless choice
> Some day when they are in voice
> And tossing so as to scare
> The white clouds over them on.
> I shall have less to say,
> But I shall be gone.

As in Thomas's 'Aspens', the poet attempted to convey the sensation evoked by the trees. And as in Thomas's poem, the emotion provoked by this experience is ambiguous – leading to both a 'reckless' urge to move, and an intention to stay and 'suffer' their intrusive sounds. On a symbolic level, this poem encourages us to consider the penetration of nature into human-made constructs – as a threat against our urge to build. At the same time, an urge to move is hinted at through the combination of metre, syntax and counterpointing rhythms, as in Frost's 'Good Hours'. And yet the density of the language – including repetition of 'sway', 'noise' and 'shall'

– invokes an experience that cannot be conceptualised. Again, as with Thomas's 'Aspens', the poem shows that our perception of the non-human environment both affects and is affected by our inner weather.

Birdsong and home

Henri Bergson suggested that language obscures our direct access to our experiences of the world. Birdsong, on the other hand, offers an analogue for a poetry that is able to communicate our experiences of the fluxes of the environment. Thomas's and Frost's poems about birdsong demonstrate that our awareness of how birds react in their song to their environment can be used to indicate our own experiences of the non-human processes of life.

In the emphasis on sound, Thomas and Frost suggest a Bergsonian view of communication. Drawing on 'The Oven Bird' and Thomas's poem 'Sedge Warblers', I demonstrate how for both poets the sound of birdsong – metaphorically a 'natural language'– incites an originary experience of our mutual entanglement in the ecosystem. The lack of certainty about what this 'natural language' might mean is equivalent to our own lack of understanding about our own inner states.

Birdsong and home: Edward Thomas

For Edward Thomas, bird calls and song are described as both like and unlike speech. For example, in 'March':

> What did the thrushes know? Rain, snow, sleet, hail,
> Had kept them quiet as primroses.
> They had but an hour to sing. On boughs they sang,
> On gates, on ground; they sang while they changed perches
> And while they fought, if they remembered to fight:
> So earnest were they to pack into that hour
> Their unwilling hoard of song before the moon
> Grew brighter than the clouds. Then 'twas no time
> For singing merely. So they could keep off silence
> And night, they cared not what they sang or screamed

The birds, despite having no clear message, mark the interval between night and day. Their urge to communicate is intensified by the brevity of an interlude of respite from inclement weather. Following his perception of this, the speaker observes a silence 'Stained with all that hour's song'.

In the literal meaning of the poem the speaker, who recollects this experience, is able to imagine another transition, from winter to spring which 'returns, perhaps to-morrow'. This conceptual knowledge is not available to the birds and yet their song seems to suggest an immediate grasp of something that the speaker can only realise after it has passed. This poem has been taken as symbolic of Thomas's own urge to 'sing' or write poetry at a late stage in his career (Longley in Thomas 2008: 148) and yet the poem's strength lies in the clarity of its literal meaning.

Thomas's evocation of the meaning of birds' 'saying' challenged those anthropocentric attitudes that project human emotions onto the environment – such as Keats's association of the nightingale's song with unrestrained joy. In 'March the Third', the 12-hours' continuous birdsong celebrates something that cannot be named. It is not the near advent of spring, as in 'March', since spring is merely 'somewhere' ahead. The song marks one day where 'we know how lucky we are' simply to be alive, even on a day without 'seasonable sweets' (March the third is the poet's birthday). Both birds and men are enmeshed in nature's seasonal cycles, but only man aims to convey this in a conceptual understanding. Again, the birds' song hints at something in the environmental conditions that the speaker is unaware of.

In 'Sedge-Warblers', Thomas suggested that this bird's call provides a better guide to what we should seek in earthly existence than human conceptual categories such as 'sweetness'.

> Their song that lacks all words, all melody,
> All sweetness almost, was dearer then to me
> Than sweetest voice that sings in tune sweet words.

This poem records Thomas's search for earthly love, the contentment with 'short-lived happy-seeming things', not the divine nightingale of Keats's ode or the love of death or beauty. The birds' song, which is onomatopoeically 'Quick, shrill, or grating', also suggests a model for poetry that aims to capture the sensuous qualities of our experience of nature, 'a song to match the heat / Of the strong sun'. Such experiences stretch everyday language to its limits.

In Thomas's poetry, birdsong can communicate experiences that would otherwise demand verbal contortions; birdsong signals the qualities of our experiences that cannot be conceptualised and that alter as we try to recollect them. For example, in 'The Unknown Bird' the speaker overhears a song that is mysteriously 'sad' because it is 'too far off' for him to experience it in its full intensity. The predicates 'sad' and 'joyful' obscure the original sensory experience:

> Sad more than joyful it was, if I must say
> That it was one or other, but if sad
> 'Twas sad only with joy too, too far off

> For me to taste it. But I cannot tell
> If truly never anything but fair
> The days were when he sang, as now they seem.

Present recollection of the experience is that of 'fair' days, because of the way that memory actively reconfigures past experiences. Thus, the emotional dimension of the experience recollected is ambiguous – Thomas's poem shows how language may interrupt intuition's ability to re-construct the past in the present moment (see Chapter One, above). In 'Digging ("Today I think")', we are presented with the robin's complicated 'Sad songs of Autumn mirth', an evocation of the unconceptualisable sensual intensity of the present scene.

While birds and humans are implicated in the same natural processes of weather, life and decay, the birds in these poems demonstrate the existence of other perspectives, knowledge and scales beyond the human. It is the bird's song that instigates a sensuous awareness of these transitions in the speaker, and his or her greater sensitivity to these natural processes. In 'March',

>   'twas no time
> For singing merely. So they could keep off silence
> And night, they cared not what they sang or screamed;
> Whether 'twas hoarse or sweet or fierce or soft;
> And to me all was sweet: they could do no wrong.
> Something they knew – I also, while they sang
> And after

Birdsong reveals the crucial importance of what is overheard in Thomas's poetry for the ability ethically to engage with other speakers and with other parts of the ecosystem. Listening to birdsong suggests this process of overhearing 'others' whom we will never fully understand, despite our common evolutionary origins. The 'pure thrush word' has no direct connotation, but reminds the poet of the inevitability of spring's return ('One name that I have not – / Though 'tis an empty thingless name – forgot / Never can die because Spring after Spring / Some thrushes learn to say it as they sing'). As we will see, the process of overhearing in both Thomas's and Frost's poems is often framed by a lyric that incorporates traces of dialogue to indicate the ethical significance of perspectives other than the speaker's own.

Birdsong and home: Robert Frost

As we have seen in relation to Frost's poem 'The Oven Bird', birdsong may provide a model for a kind of poetry that reacts with nuance to its sensory surroundings, because such poetry employs terms that defy ordinary conceptual thought. In reading such poetry, we are reminded

of our immersion in the seasonal cycles of nature, and of our own phenomenal experiences of summer's decline. In this, Frost's poetry illustrates how the operation of the élan vital is something that the artist can discern in human and non-human nature.

Both Thomas and Frost, in their poetry of birdsong, proved that attentiveness to the fluxes of the ecosystem can provide a greater awareness of the impacts of non-human nature on the mind. This is an 'extra-vagant' gesture that requires us to go beyond the limits of our immediate awareness. It suggests an alternative to a 'building' perspective, where we impose our pre-given aims on the material world. It supplies us with a perceptual pleasure that is described further in the following chapter. However, we have a homely impulse to convey this in conceptual terms – an intellectual urge to convey the experience for the sake of action. In some of the above poems, rhythm is also used to communicate the personal dimensions of an emotion instigated by an experience of non-human nature; sometimes language is used to convey the difficulty of putting the originary experience into words.

Dialogue

One final feature of both Thomas's and Frost's poetry – which was, for Frost, inspired by his New England inheritance – shows how dialogue can be used to suggest the need for us to share the poet's ecocentric perspective. This feature shared by the poets offers further evidence for the cross-fertilisation of ideas beyond national borders. Frost used dialogue in *North of Boston*, and also in his plays written or published in 1917 or later.[76] Dramatic dialogue figures less often in Thomas's work, but where it is used, it can convey an ecocentric perspective.

Dialogue: Edward Thomas

In *Walter Pater* (London: Martin Secker, 1913) Edward Thomas argued that literature makes not an 'imitation' but

> an equivalent of speech. It has to make words of such a spirit, and arrange them in such a manner, that they will do all that a speaker can do by innumerable gestures and innumerable shades, by tone and pitch of voice, by speed, by pauses, by all that he is and all that he will become. (Thomas 1913: 196-220, in Thomas 1981: 159)

Thomas later emphasised that wasn't colloquial language that he – or Frost – sought, but, as he affirmed in a letter to Gordon Bottomley on 30 June 1915,

> absolute fidelity to the postures which the voice assumes in the most expressive intimate speech. So long as these tones & postures are there [Frost] has not the least

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[76]These include *A Masque of Reason* (1945), *A Way Out* (1917), the unpublished plays *In An Art Factory* and *The Guardeen*, *The Cow's in the Corn* (1927) and *A Masque of Mercy* (1947). Frost 'even intended at one point to follow up *North of Boston* with a series of "out-and-out" plays' (Grayley V. Heren, 'Drama', in *The Robert Frost Encyclopaedia* ed. by Tuten and Zubizaretta, 82-84, 84).

objection to any vocabulary whatever or any inversion or variation from the customary grammatical forms of talk. (Thomas and Bottomley 1968: 251)

It is the overall movement of the verse that concerned Thomas. The phrases of poetry contain individual rhythms, and a sustaining overall rhythm or gesture which is its original impulse. It is the 'idiom' of lived, personal, human, rather than abstract, experience that concerned Thomas, rather than an exact representation of speech.

The dialogue forms used in Thomas's and Frost's poetry of this period often culminated in confrontation with a marginalised 'other'. With the suggestion of dialogue within the lyric form in 'March', where a speaker seems to be engaged in an interpretative dilemma, Edward Thomas encouraged us to share in the speaker's subjective valuation of the importance of the birdsong.

> So they could keep off silence
> And night, they cared not what they sang or screamed;
> Whether 'twas hoarse or sweet or fierce or soft;
> And to me all was sweet: they could do no wrong.
> Something they knew--I also, while they sang
> And after.

Our sympathy is with the speaker who finds meaning and worth in birdsong – albeit one that is tentative and contradictory. Elsewhere, this same feature is used to initiate sympathy with other human speakers ('Up in the Wind'; 'House and Man'; 'Man and Dog'; 'It was upon'). In 'The Gypsy', as we saw in the previous chapter, the use of dialogue form destabilises a central perceiving subject. We find one of the origins of Thomas's use of dialogue in his friendship with Frost.

Dialogue: Robert Frost

For both Thomas and Frost, the translation of speech to poetry is 'dramatic'. Frost contends in his 'Preface' to a 1929 edition of his one-act play *A Way Out* that 'Everything written is as good as it is dramatic. It need not declare itself in form, but it is drama or nothing' (CPPP: 713).[77] He elsewhere explains that this includes lyric poetry, where we are presented with a speaker in an intrinsically dramatic situation (see Newdick 1937: 262). The drama results from the variety of perspectives – between the stasis of a single viewpoint and the extra-vagance of alternative points of view.

Frost's interest in dramatic poetry was supported by his association with the Georgians at Dymock: through Gibson's dramatic lyrics of everyday life; Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife, a*

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[77] Robert Frost, *A Way Out*, first published in *The Seven Arts* magazine in February 1917. The preface was added to a 1929 edition (New York: The Harbor Press).

play in one act (1909) and Lascelles Abercrombie's *The Sale of St Thomas* (1911). Ezra Pound also published the successful dramatic monologue *The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter* in *Cathay* (1915) during Frost's stay in England and the poem, like many of Frost's dramatic verses, invoked a fictionalised speaker who struggled to express a complex emotional state.

The suggestion of dialogue form – directly in dramatic monologues or dialogues, or through syntax that suggests overheard speech – is one striking way in which Thomas and Frost were extra-vagant. Creating a fictionalised dialogue between speakers or a monologue where the reader becomes the interlocutor develops a dramatic tension between different perspectives. There is no single authoritative subject.

In *Robert Frost and Feminine Literary Tradition* (1998) Karen Kilcup attests to Frost's influence by the dialogue traditions of Local Colour Realism. She contends that this connection enabled Frost to challenge the elitist status of poetry through its dramatic interest. Kilcup argues that the dialogue or monologue form creates the possibility of sympathy in the reader, through the form's assumed positions of intimacy. She demonstrated how, in Frost's usage, the forms gave voice to marginalised female characters. For instance, in Frost's monologue 'A Servant to Servants':

> the poet invites us to share a dialogue with the feminine voice of the narrator as she elaborates her vision with a clarity that she cannot perform with Len [her husband]. This dialogue involves a willingness to empathise, to expand our own ego boundaries as feminine readers willing to forego judgement for participation in a process, as Frost signals by repeatedly invoking the 'you'. (Kilcup 1998: 80)

'The Oven Bird', in its invocation of a bird 'everyone has heard', also suggests that the poet wished to generate sympathy in the reader. While not recording a dialogue, the poem invites us to change our perspective to consider what we are able to learn from the bird. Here, and in his 'wayfaring' poems, Frost showed the importance of encounters with other inhabitants.

Thus concludes my overview of the formal features shared by Thomas and Frost that contributed to their poetic rendering of our entanglement in the ecosystem, and how this might contribute to the development of a more ecocentric perspective. I have also aimed to show the influence of Hulme's reading of Bergson on both poets, with a particular emphasis on how Hulme's theorising demonstrated the fluxes of our mental states or 'inner nature'. I suggested that poetic rhythms could be used to convey the impulses to movement and fixity, paralleling a thematic discussion of home and extra-vagance, and how, following Bergson, language could obscure our memory of past experiences. I paid particular attention to poetry that considered the interdependence of inner and outer nature, or which used the limits of language to instigate awareness of our immersion in phenomenal nature. In all of the above, I have aimed to show

that language is doing ecological work in the poetry, in ways that do not require an essentialised idea of dwelling. Finally, the chapter emphasises the importance of a cross-fertilisation between literary cultures as a source for Thomas's and Frost's innovations.

While the poets did not always write what we would call ecopoetry, the works referred to in this chapter show that being 'at home' in nature always involves the interplay of 'diverse forces', in nature and in the human mind. Space and time are not static containers upon which we can impose our meanings (as suggested by the building perspective), and instead we experience life as 'the successive acts that punctuate its flow' (see above). How then do we encounter other individuals (human or otherwise) in place, and what does this contribute to poetry? How does the idea of wayfaring enrich our understanding of Thomas's and Frost's poetry? Wayfaring develops the poetry of dialogue and dramatic encounter. In the following chapter, I consider in further detail the poets' awareness of the fluxes of the ecosystem, in ways that suggest Thomas's and Frost's preference for 'wayfaring' over 'dwelling'. In doing so, I emphasise the importance of a contemporary theorist who derives some of his perspective from Henri Bergson.

CHAPTER FOUR: PLACE AND WAYFARING

> […] Me? I'm not off for anywhere at all.
> Sometimes I wander out of beaten ways
> Half looking for the orchid Calypso […]
>
> Robert Frost, 'An Encounter'

Introduction:

As we have seen, Edward Thomas was aware of the increased distinctions between urban and rural living since the 18th century, a trend that resulted in the social and physical transformation of Britain and other industrial nations (see Chapters One and Two, above). Because of burgeoning philosophical and psychological interests, there was a profound increase in the awareness of writers and other thinkers about the nature of the human mind. In some thinkers this combined with dissatisfaction with conventional accounts of scientific knowledge and the nature of economic and social progress, and with an interest in the importance of individual perspectives (Chapters One and Two above). For example, William James's writing suggested to Robert Frost that the truths of science and art are only pragmatic tools that do not get at the nature of reality (see Chapter One, above). This contributed to a view among many modern artists that art should instead reveal the transitory nature of human experience and knowledge.

Both Thomas and Frost demonstrated through their work an interest in how objects themselves change through time, through their social and environmental circumstances. Many of Frost's poems of this period focused on abandoned farms and homes.[78] Edward Thomas demonstrated an awareness of the changing nature of rural living in 'Up in the Wind' and, in *The Country*, contemplated an alternative urbanism, following Richard Jefferies' *After London* (1885):

> Old as the towns are so plainly–often stiff and rotten with age–we know and deeply feel that the oldest of them are as grass in the sight of the wind, the moon, even the hills. We know that it was all once 'country': we know without the help of 'After London' that it will all once again be 'country'. I like to see grass and flowers come down softly to take possession of any London soil that is, for a month or two, allowed to feel the sun, wind, and rain. (Thomas 1913b: 12)

With the changes to both the external world and mind, poetry became a way to cope with contrary impulses – to find fixity in the temporary constraints of writing, and to be 'extra-vagant' within socially defined limits. Thomas and Frost were wayfarers during their stay in

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[78]'Ghost House'; 'Directive'; 'The Generations of Men'; 'The Wood-Pile'; 'The Black Cottage'.

Dymock, and they found ways to renew themselves and their creativity in a new environment. However, the outbreak of war in August 1914 disrupted work opportunities as funds and former outlets for their work were being re-directed to the war effort (R. George Thomas 1985: 236). For Thomas, this was mirrored by the need for poets to demonstrate their usefulness from a social perspective. The urge to wander became an urge to escape either to safety or to respond to a perceived social call for action. Frost, after briefly considering enlisting in the British Army, chose to find a safe passage to return to the United States. Thomas veered between wanting to venture with Frost to America, finding work as a teacher, and deciding to enlist, ostensibly to protect his home country.

At the time of their meeting, Thomas was a more frequent walker than Frost, with a greater knowledge of other wayfarers, and a theoretical interest in those 'superfluous' to economic progress. Frost was more inclined towards personal heroics, towards the importance of the human will against external limit and being the exception rather than joining 'the drift of things' ('Reluctance'). His early poems of wayfaring focused as much on other speakers as what he could learn from non-human nature. Thomas was concerned with the limits of what can be known and written, and Frost with what could provide a 'momentary stay against confusion' ('The Figure a Poem Makes'). For both poets, walking was a form of resistance, as it allowed them to move away from dominant modes of perceiving and being. Walking encounters become much more prevalent in Frost's poetry after his friendship with Edward Thomas.

In Chapter Two, I addressed how poetry might explore a harmonious experience of place, of feeling at home in an ecosystem. Timothy Ingold, an anthropologist, finds in Heidegger's 'dwelling perspective' the notion that our lives are constituted in a process of interplay with diverse human and non-human agents, rather than through accomplishing a series of pre-defined goals (2011). Ingold begins with Heidegger's idea that there must of necessity be a state prior to our being able to build ('in the imagination or on the ground'), and it is in this metaphysical condition where we humans simultaneously develop our knowledge of place and ourselves (10). This mode of being in the world has implications for the ways in which we produce art. For Heidegger, language is uniquely able to convey the human dimensions of this being in place; yet for Ingold there is an understanding of our being in place that is shared by humans and other species, and this is acquired by 'wayfaring'.

For Ingold, the experience of wayfaring subverts a dominant yet latent view of the environment that separates 'knowing' from 'being'. In this view, the environment consists of objects that occupy spaces on a static surface. Places are locked into form through time; and the 'ground' serves as a divide between the immaterial social and cultural worlds, the worlds of

human-generated meaning, and of materiality.[79] Wayfaring, instead, emphasises the intertwinement of beings and environment in what Ingold calls 'the meshwork'. Further, wayfaring addresses how a subject (human or otherwise) learns through physical movement and how the social realm is constructed.

As we have seen, for Doreen Massey in *Space, Place and Gender*, our experiences of place involve the sense of 'coming-into-being' and fleeting, temporary relations between organisms. For Massey, spatiality is the dimension that allows for the possibility of organisms coming into contact; whereas place is the spatially defined, temporal manifestation of relations between organisms and non-human nature. For Ingold, however, our experience of occupying place is less important for our livelihoods than the knowledge we develop in moving. In Ingold's development of the idea of 'production' (including artistic production) he emphasises how our 'making' is a result of bodily engagement with the trajectories of other organisms and with the inorganic components of the lifeworld:

> Producers, both human and non-human, do not so much transform the world, impressing their preconceived designs upon the material substrate of nature, as play their part from within in the world's transformation of itself. Growing into the world, the world grows in them. (2011: 6)

Whether this 'production' aims at maintaining life or creating a piece of artwork, for Ingold it is constituted by the movement of different species and the lifeworld. This movement involves a particular way of inhabiting, rather than occupying, place.

Wayfaring

Ingold's account of wayfaring in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* develops out of his view of the nature of animal perception. For an organism (human or animal) to perceive, it must attune its movement to the object under perception. What it perceives are not 'things as such' but 'what they afford for the pursuance of its current activity' (2011: 11). The perception is productive as it allows the organism the means to continue its existence. Thus the movement of organisms in perception entangles them with the trajectories of other

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[79]Ingold considers the 'ground' as earth 'from which the organism derives both nourishment and support', rather than the ground as the surface of a planet as it would be viewed from outer space. The view of the ground as 'planet', Ingold demonstrates, can develop into a view of the human being projected 'beyond' the earth – in a spiritual or conceptual realm. For Ingold, this reflects the scientific quest to separate knowing from being (2011: 114).

organisms: the animal's movement is 'issuing along with things in the very process of their generation' (12). This distinguishes wayfaring from transport, which is concerned with the movement of a finished 'being'.

Following his reading of 20th century French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ingold argues that the perception of animal beings cannot be separated from what we might think of as the inanimate world. For what we perceive with – the living body (rather than a disembodied mind) – is 'stitched into the fabric of the world' (12). Thus, the animal wayfarer follows the paths of inanimate as well as animate nature. This means that to perceive is to trace 'the path of the world's becoming in the very course of contributing to its ongoing renewal' (12). This leads Ingold to conclude that the 'path' rather than 'place' is the primary condition of the animal's 'being' or 'becoming'. For Ingold, the figure of the line – which he finds in the writings of Bergson – serves as a symbol for the way life consists in the movement of organisms and materials through time (13). By focusing on the 'longitudinal trajectories of materials and awareness' we can begin to understand the world in the process of becoming, rather than in terms of pre-given ends (14). In doing so, Ingold believes he is able to avoid the means-end account of production that is involved in consumerism, and certain interpretations of evolutionary theory.

Through wayfaring, we become aware of our preconceptions about the ideas we have of 'ground' and of 'weather', and this in turn has implications for our knowledge of the world. Ingold argues that the real ground, as the surface of the earth, should be understood for its potential for important kinaesthetic forms of knowledge (2011: 125). Through wayfaring, rather than in transport along man-made roads, we are aware that the ground is a permeable interface between physical substances and the media of air and weather, which are constantly in the process of generation through physical and organic processes. In this way, knowledge gathered through wayfaring along the ground involves us in the processes of life. As individuals develop familiarity with a terrain walked by foot, 'its paths, textures and contours, variable through the seasons, are incorporated into their own embodied capacities of movement, awareness and response' (47).

In the following I consider examples of embodied and relational knowledge in Thomas's and Frost's poetry. Ingold contrasts these mobile forms of knowledge with the perspective acquired through what Ingold calls 'journeying', which is developed by 'observations taken from successive points of rest' (45). And it is only through this shared ground that we are brought into relation with other beings, and through shared movement we develop knowledge that is inherently 'social'. Walking, even in a city street, is social 'in the way

a person's movements – his or her step, gait, direction and pace – are continually responsive to the movement of others in the immediate environment' (43).

Knowledge acquired through wayfaring is key to Thomas's and Frost's evocations of place. As previously argued, both poets sought to move beyond the bounds of their home places in the effort to renew the experiences that serve as the bases for their poetry. Many of their speakers' movements followed the pattern of outward movement beyond everyday limits to the wild or semi-wild.[80] While this wandering was partly bounded by the pre-determined limits of the pastoral form, it also provided inspiration from unexpected encounters with other wayfarers.

Knowledge through wayfaring: **Robert Frost**

In 'A Late Walk' (*A Boy's Will*) Frost presented the elements of a fictional or actual ecosystem as his speaker walks out into a newly mown field. The speaker describes the sights and sounds of one autumn day that characterise his experience. He notes how the dew continues the levelling work of the harvester who has cut the aftermath, and the struggle of the birds to find food among withered weeds. The general condition of difficulty and decline is exemplified by a blockage to the speaker's path, suggesting that he, like the birds, is also struggling to make his way. He thus shares with the birds a relational knowledge through wayfaring rather than abstract reasoning, which highlights the speaker's interdependency with natural processes.

Frost's poem 'The Gum-Gatherer' (from *Mountain Interval*, first published in *The Independent* in 1916) has been described as a metaphor for the process of writing poetry (Kemp 1979: 167) and as Kendig notes, others 'credit the gum gatherer with eschewing society's constraints in order to make his own meaning of the world' (Kendig 2001: 140):

> There overtook me and drew me in
> To his down-hill, early-morning stride,
> And set me five miles on my road
> Better than if he had had me ride,

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[80] As well as these horizontal journeys through space which develop the speakers' awareness of their ecological interdependencies, there are figurative journeys either vertically or into a wild place such as a dark wood. These images of movements into the sky or 'wild' nature are principally symbolic rather than ecological: this is the case in 'Out in the Dark' (ET), 'Beauty' (ET), 'Bond and Free' (RF), 'The Hill Wife' (RF), 'Birches' (RF) and 'Stopping by Woods' (RF). While they do suggest the imagination's interdependency with the physical environment, these poems separate mind and body according to Cartesian dualisms – for instance 'Bond and Free' (from *Mountain Interval*) separates 'love' (which is bodily and clings to earth) and 'thought' (which can travel independently of the earth's 'chains'); in 'Beauty' Thomas considers a spiritual realm of beauty and love.

A man with a swinging bag for load
And half the bag wound round his hand.
We talked like barking above the din
Of water we walked along beside.
And for my telling him where I'd been
And where I lived in mountain land
To be coming home the way I was
He told me a little about himself.
He came from higher up in the pass
Where the grist of the new-beginning brooks
Is blocks split off the mountain mass—
And hopeless grist enough it looks
Ever to grind to soil for grass.
(The way it is will do for moss.)
There he had built his stolen shack.
It had to be a stolen shack
Because of the fears of fire and loss
That trouble the sleep of lumber folk:
Visions of half the world burned black
And the sun shrunken yellow in smoke.
We know who when they come to town
Bring berries under the wagon seat,
Or a basket of eggs between their feet
What this man brought in a cotton sack
Was gum, the gum of the mountain spruce.
He showed me lumps of the scented stuff
Like uncut jewels, dull and rough.
It comes to market golden brown;
But turns to pink between the teeth.

I told him this is a pleasant life
To set your breast to the bark of trees
That all your days are dim beneath,
And reaching up with a little knife,
To loose the resin and take it down
And bring it to market when you please.

Frost's wayfarer encounters a man who lives 'higher up in the pass' from where the two are walking. He reports how he learns – in exchange for information on his own dwelling place – about the environment where the other walker lives. The ground of 'grist', of rock broken up by the brooks, is unsuitable as soil for anything but moss and spruce. The spruce, however, produce gum resin, and this is what he harvests for market. We hear that this man lives in fear of a forest fire, which is a risk of living alongside those who are using the wood for timber. Following Ingold, 'The Gum-Gatherer' reveals knowledge of 'ground' that is in formation, rather than a static surface. The poem suggests the mingling of earth and air in the production of moss and trees, and the breaking down of those bonds in fire. Thus, the environment of 'The Gum-Gatherer' is in constant flux. As Kendig notes, Frost's speaker searches for meaning in the

gum gatherer's activity and decides that it must make for a 'pleasant' life (2001: 140-41). While the speaker apparently dismisses the gum-gatherer's hardships, he appears to be in search of forms of value and knowledge that combine pleasure and labour.

In 'The Wood-Pile', Frost's speaker wanders out into a frozen landscape without a predetermined objective:

> Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,
> I paused and said, 'I will turn back from here.
> No, I will go on farther—and we shall see.'
> The hard snow held me, save where now and then
> One foot went through. The view was all in lines
> Straight up and down of tall slim trees
> Too much alike to mark or name a place by
> So as to say for certain I was here
> Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.
> A small bird flew before me. He was careful
> To put a tree between us when he lighted,
> And say no word to tell me who he was
> Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought.
> He thought that I was after him for a feather—
> The white one in his tail; like one who takes
> Everything said as personal to himself.
> One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.
> And then there was a pile of wood for which
> I forgot him and let his little fear
> Carry him off the way I might have gone,
> Without so much as wishing him good-night.
> He went behind it to make his last stand.
> It was a cord of maple, cut and split
> And piled—and measured, four by four by eight.
> And not another like it could I see.
> No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.
> And it was older sure than this year's cutting,
> Or even last year's or the year's before.
> The wood was gray and the bark warping off it
> And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis
> Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.
> What held it though on one side was a tree
> Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,
> These latter about to fall. I thought that only
> Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
> Could so forget his handiwork on which
> He spent himself, the labor of his ax,
> And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
> To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
> With the slow smokeless burning of decay.

The undefined nature of the walk is evident in the pause to turn back and then the decision to continue in case there should be more to 'see'. The speaker describes the 'hard snow' underfoot

which occasionally gives way, and this hints at the wayfarer's awareness of the interface between substances of the earth and medium of the air. Rather than following a predetermined route, the speaker follows lines of 'tall slim trees'. Eventually, he encounters a small bird and a stack of felled maple. The path of the bird draws him on to the woodpile, which in turn directs his awareness to the clematis and a tree. This suggests that Frost understood that the wayfarer traces the paths of organisms in the process of becoming or changing, rather than responding to 'fixed' objects, even if he defined his speaker's location as 'just far from home'. The woodpile undergoes a 'smokeless burning of decay'. The speaker concludes that the woodpile must have been made by someone who 'lived in turning to fresh tasks'. The woodcutter is thus comparable to the walker, moving on without predetermined ends, and sustained by the pleasure of new perceptual experiences.

Knowledge through wayfaring: Edward Thomas

In 'Fifty Faggots', Edward Thomas's speaker considers the ongoing trajectories of the bundles of wood he revisits on a walk to 'Jenny Pink's Copse', which had been growing as underwood before he cut them, and which he believes will become a bird's habitat. He rediscovers them too late in the year for his own use – the swift has already come – and he implies that he will be unable to use them the following winter. For Thomas's speaker, as for Ingold, living in a habitat is as much a process of negotiation with other trajectories for the sake of ongoing survival and perceptual and imaginative renewal as it is a process of living in accordance with pre-determined plans. This is also the case in 'The Path', as much as it focuses on the visual scene:

> 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 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 between the moss
> With the current of their feet, year after year.
> 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, it ends where the wood ends.

Following Myfanwy Thomas's memoir, Edna Longley identifies this poem's origins in Thomas's walks with his children Merfyn and Bronwen to Bedales junior school along the path from his home at Wick Green (2008: 206-207). In this, the speaker (like the children) is identified as a wayfarer who, in Ingold's words, 'negotiates or improvises a passage as he goes *along*' (2010a: 126). Unlike the experience of the metalled road, the wayfarer follows a path that is 'Bordered and even invaded by thinnest moss / That tries to cover roots and crumbling chalk' and which runs along a bank that has been 'flattened' by children. The wayfarer is enmeshed in his environment, perceptually sustained by 'the road, the wood that overhangs / And underyawns it', and the path itself 'that looks / As if it led on to some legendary / Or fancied place where men have wished to go'; he does not appear to be motivated by a pre-determined aim. His path is dependent on the movements of other inhabitants, including those children who have flattened the bank previously. Even if the poem does not describe a particular walk it indicates how our senses are attuned to the features of the environment that are mobile and ephemeral. As I explain below, the physical process of wayfaring conveyed in this poem can serve as a symbol of the way that writing involves an 'extra-vagant' impulse to immerse ourselves in the materials of our experience.

In the poem 'November' Thomas considered the mutual involvement of the 'substances' of the earth, alongside other organisms and the medium in which they are immersed. Thomas's speaker encounters the variability and renewal of the ground – the mud, twig, leaf, flint, thorn, straw and feather; and the fields 'mashed by sheep'– and not a fixed surface. Through attention to the ground, Thomas showed that paths record the trajectories of other wayfarers, how they are 'With morning and evening hobnails dinted, / With foot and wing-tip overprinted'.

In 'November', Thomas's speaker recognises that he is an inhabitant of a realm that includes both earth and sky, which is what Ingold calls the 'weather-world':

But of all the months when earth is greener
Not one has clean skies that are cleaner.
Clean and clear and sweet and cold,
They shine above the earth so old,
While the after-tempest cloud
Sails over in silence though winds are loud,
Till the full moon in the east
Looks at the planet in the west
And earth is silent as it is black,
Yet not unhappy for its lack.

In *The South Country*, Edward Thomas addressed the importance of contact with the more-than-human world including the weather. He explained how this contact provided opportunities for experiences of joy, knowledge and health. In this text Thomas argued that our 'desire' to collect information about the world through science is limitless, but that this should be tempered by a Romantic impulse.

Thomas traced our awareness of the intellectual, physical and 'religious' pleasures of contact with nature to Romanticism. On the intellectual side, Romantic literature 'shows man in something like his true position in an infinite universe, and shows him particularly in his physical environment of sea, sky, mountain, rivers, woods and other animals' (1909: 142). On the physical side, Thomas acknowledged that Romantic literature showed us how the joy of the senses, of 'the whole frame' is gained by immersion in sunlight and the open air. Knowledge and pleasure combine in an activity that resembles wayfaring, which, Thomas showed us, helps us develop an ethical attitude to non-human nature (see also Chapter One, above).

This version of Romanticism comes from Wordsworth as an interest in love and sociability as well as in individual vision. As I explained in Chapter One, Thomas followed Wordsworth in believing that sympathy with human and non-human others produced pleasure. In this, Wordsworth suggested a different attitude to his Romantic contemporaries. As I noted with reference to Frost's theorising, Emerson's and Coleridge's Transcendentalist version of nature emphasized the significance of nature as intermediary with a benevolent creator, rather than endowing it with any inherent value. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge reacted against Enlightenment ideas of reason and material progress by emphasising feeling and imagination but, as Coupe explains, Coleridge 'remained subservient to his metaphysical systematising' (2000: 13). As I explore below, while Thomas did not demonstrate a belief in the Transcendent dimensions of Coleridge's nature philosophy, Thomas found inspiration in the way that Coleridge described the impact of non-human nature on his mind.

As I noted in Chapter One, Thomas commented that Frost was more successful than Wordsworth in generating sympathy with human subjects: Frost 'shows us directly less of his own feelings, and more of other people's, than Wordsworth did' (1981: 128). I explored in the previous chapter how both poets experimented with dialogue and dramatic encounters to emphasise the importance of other perspectives. This answers Coupe's demand for poets to speak 'on behalf of nature' (2000: 4).

The South Country includes numerous digressions into the nature of our occupation of the earth and it is a text that is itself an exercise in literal and metaphorical wayfaring. While the author attempted to identify unique features of the 'south country' (of Kent, Hampshire, Sussex

and Wiltshire) through information on buildings, settlements and inhabitants, Thomas's south Country is imaginatively interdependent with the West Country. The imaginative dimensions of the region must be separated from its physical presence:

> This is not the South Country which measures about two hundred miles from east to west and fifty from north to south. In some ways it is incomparably larger than any country that was ever mapped, since upon nothing less than the infinite can the spirit disport itself. In other ways it is far smaller – as when a mountain with tracts of sky and cloud and the full moon glass themselves in a pond, a little pond. (1909: 11)

In the spirit of wayfaring, in *The South Country* Thomas affirmed 'I never go out to see anything. The signboards thus often astonish me' (4). In Chapter Eight, entitled 'June-Hampshire-The Golden Age-Traherne', Thomas contended that knowledge acquired through perception, movement and the senses – through wayfaring – provides pleasure and ethical knowledge of our interdependence with other beings (141-46). Continuing this line of thought to a more intellectual endeavour (linked to the 'ecohistorical' perspective described below), in the chapter entitled 'History and the Parish–Hampshire–Cornwall', Thomas demonstrated the interdependence of intellect, senses and imagination in knowledge:

> Some day there will be a history of England written from the point of view of one parish, or town, or great house. Not until there is such a history will all our accumulations of information be justified. It will begin with a geological picture, something large, clear, architectural, not a mass of insignificant names. It must be imaginative […] The peculiar combination of soil and woodland and water determines the direction and position and importance of the ancient trackways; it will determine also the position and size of the human settlements […] What endless opportunities will [the historian] have for really giving life to past times in such matters as the line made by the edge of an old wood with the cultivated land, the shapes of the fields, with their borders of streams or hedge or copse or pond or wall or road, the purpose and interweaving of the roads and footpaths that suggest the great permanent thoughts and the lesser thoughts and dreams of the brain.
> (1909: 147)

Thomas considered that such knowledge – of the routes of roads and footpaths – reveals man's 'great permanent thoughts', suggesting that our current ways of occupying the land are temporary. Further, Thomas's historical perspective revealed awareness of the landscape's impact on the human community, as well as vice-versa. While there might have been some simple nostalgia in Thomas's desire to bring the past to life, he also emphasised the importance of knowledge relevant to the future, which 'should evoke the beginnings of the majestic sentiment of our oneness with the future and the past' (1909: 146).

Knowledge acquired by 'wayfaring' reveals the incompleteness of our knowledge of a world that is constantly in formation: this stands in contrast with hierarchical and categorical

forms of botanical knowledge such as Linnaean classification. As Thomas affirmed, 'Better a thousand errors so long as they are human than a thousand truths lying like broken snail-shells round the anvil of a thrush' (1909: 148). Timothy Ingold explores the idea that the knowledge of the world has been obscured by a false image of our occupation of the lifeworld and of our acquisition of knowledge. This image – which overemphasises the abstract a priori dimensions of thought – distorts the significance of our felt experience of the world.

Sky, earth and weather-world

Ingold maintains that, rather than living in a world furnished with objects, we inhabit a world in formation. For Ingold, there are in fact no objects in a world that is truly open. What Ingold, following Heidegger, means by 'the open' is the experience of life in the midst of things, rather than in the closed conditions of an experiment. In such a world 'beings relate not as closed, objective forms but by virtue of their common immersion in the fluxes of the medium' (Ingold 2011: 115). Rather than living 'on' the earth, according to Ingold, we live 'in' the earth, and participate in the complex system of relationships between the substances, the surfaces, and the sky. Organisms are involved in the fluxes of the substances and the medium, as they fix the substances of the air with those of the earth in their own processes of growth and decay. What we call the weather is another process by which the substance and medium intermingle.

Inspired by Heidegger's contention in the essay 'On the Origin of the Work of Art', Ingold considers what it means for an inhabitant to be 'of' the earth. Heidegger

> insists that the earth, 'that on which and in which man bases his dwelling', is not a material mass, and absolutely not a planet. It is rather the ground on which – or better, *in* which – we dwell. (112)[81]

For the 'inhabitant', weather highlights our connections and interdependences with other organisms, and teaches us about our dependence on the non-organic components of the biosphere:

> the inhabited world is constituted in the first place by the aerial flux of weather rather than by the grounded fixities of landscape. The weather is dynamic, always unfolding, ever changing in its currents, qualities of light and shade, and colours, alternately damp or dry, warm or cold, and so on. In this world the earth, far from providing a solid foundation for existence, appears to float like a fragile and ephemeral raft, woven from the strands of terrestrial life, and suspended in the great sphere of the sky. (73-74)

Ingold affirms that the inhabited world or lifeworld is composed of substances (such as the earth), surfaces (such as the ground) and the medium:

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[81] Ingold quotes here from Heidegger's 'On the Origin of the Work of Art', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

> For human beings the medium is normally air. Of course we need air to breathe. But also, offering little resistance, it allows us to move about – to do things, make things and touch things. It also transmits radiant energy and mechanical vibration, so that we can see and hear. And it allows us to smell, since the molecules that excite our olfactory receptors are diffused in it. (22)

The sky and earth are the main parts of what Ingold calls the weather-world, and our bodies are caught up in its dynamics. Ingold does not refer directly to poetry, but he considers that painters are aware 'that earth and sky blend in the perception of a world undergoing continuous birth' (74).

One of the constituents of the weather-world is light. Following Merleau-Ponty, Ingold argues that the experience of light is 'an experience of being in the world that is ontologically prior to the sight of things' (96). Thus we see 'in' the light, rather than seeing light as an object of perception. Similarly, we hear 'in' sound, rather than hearing objects. To do so, we must participate in the 'currents of a world-in-formation' including the rain, wind and sunlight (129). It is through our own immersion in these currents that we understand the landscape and ourselves in 'continuous formation' through the interplay of substances and air (130). As we find ourselves immersed in the weather world:

> light, sound and feeling [for instance, the sensation of wind] tear at our moorings, just like the wind tears at the limbs of trees rooted to the earth. Far from being enfolded into the body – as the concept of embodiment would imply – they take possession of it, sweeping the body into their own currents. (134-35)

In opening ourselves to the world, inhabitants may experience 'weather-related phenomena', which 'fundamentally affect their moods and motivations, their movements and their possibilities of subsistence' (73). Thus, experiences of the inhabited world are constituted 'in the first place by the aerial flux of weather, rather than by the grounded fixities of landscape. The weather is dynamic, always unfolding, ever changing in its currents, qualities of light and shade, and colours, alternately damp or dry, warm or cold, and so on' (73). Once we are aware of the currents of the lifeworld, we are able to work with the world, rather than imposing our meanings on it. The earth as home is no longer a fixed and essential space outside of time.

Sky, earth and weather-world: Edward Thomas

Edward Thomas observed that there had been a divide in the sensual and social aspects of human life from the 18th century, which had been brought about by the increasing divide between town and the country ways of living (see Chapter One, page 20). For Thomas, town life encouraged us to ignore our senses in favour of the intellect: 'We cannot make harmony out of the cities: often we think it a great benefit to become blind and deaf to them and without a sense

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of smell' (1913b: 11). Thomas referred to W.H. Hudson's *Idle Days in Patagonia*, to a scene where Hudson described days spent in isolation in the Argentinean forest: 'I did not know it – did not know that something had come between me and my intellect – until I lost it and returned to my former self – to thinking and the old insipid existence' (1913b: 27).[82] What Thomas repeated here is similar to the divide between the 'intellectual' and 'sensual' aspects of earth dwelling proposed by Ingold (see above).

Thomas's poetry began as a response to the weather, as described in his essay 'Insomnia'. His poems were 'weather rhymes', in that they attempted to describe how atmospheric conditions can be used to predict future weather. However, poems such as 'November', 'Digging' (see below) and 'March the Third' demonstrated Thomas's attempts to record and predict *inner* weather from atmospheric conditions, rather than to predict outer weather.

In 'Insomnia', written in 1913, Thomas described how he tried to capture the 'strange harmony' of hearing a robin singing in the wind at night by writing a poem.[83] As Thomas's most recent biographer, Matthew Hollis, explains, this attempt to write poetry was confirmed by a letter in to Walter de la Mare, on 7 September 1913 (Hollis refers to a letter in the Bodleian Library in Thomas 2011a: 27). In the essay, Thomas wrote about a weakness that overcame him one night as he lay awake. He subsequently became the 'prey of anything but sleep, anything real or unreal that comes to sight, touch or hearing': 'those poplar leaves in the bright street are mightier than I or any sleep' (1928: 40). Thomas described how he registered external sounds in his body; first a robin's song was oppressively monotonous – 'a note touched on the instrument of night by a player unknown to me' (41). Then:

> Gradually I found myself trying to understand this dawn harmony. I vowed to remember it and ponder it in the light of day. To make sure of remembering I tried putting it into a rhyme. I was resolved not to omit the date; and so much so that at the first line had to be 'The seventh of September', nor could I escape from this necessity. Then September was to be rhymed with. The word 'ember' occurred and stayed; no other word would respond to my calling.

And subsequently,

> by continual helpless repetition [of the lines of the new poem] I rose yet once more to the weakness that sleep demanded. Gradually I became conscious of nothing but the moan of trees, the monotonous expressionless robin's song, the slightly aching body to which I was, by ties more and more slender, attached. (43)

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[82] Thomas quotes from W.H.Hudson's *Idle Days in Patagonia* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893).
[83] Edward Thomas (1913) 'Insomnia', published in *The Last Sheaf* (1928) 39-44, and reproduced in Hollis's 2011 edition of Thomas's *Selected Poems*.

By trying to remember this experience in a line of rhyming poetry, the speaker was able to summon the 'weakness' required for sleep. In 'March the Third' a less troublesome feeling of 'harmony' issues from a particular combination of light and sound:

> Here again (she said) is March the third
> And twelve hours singing for the bird
> 'Twixt dawn and dusk, from half past six
> To half-past six, never unheard.
>
> 'Tis Sunday, and the church-bells end
> When the birds do. I think they blend
> Now better than they will when passed
> Is this unnamed, unmarked godsend.

In Pursuit of Spring describes a journey into English weather. In this book, Thomas travelled west, to the Quantocks, to witness the disappearance of winter – from the first song of the chiffchaff to celandine banks, clumps of elms and gorse patches. In parallel, he charted the process of his own mental spring, which he referred to as 'lucidity in the arms of gloom', and this awakening started by observing the effects of sunlight at the British Museum on his own mind (1913a: 21). These 'inner' and 'outer' springs overlapped as Thomas explored the movements of other species and another writer's perceptions of spring. It was in Coleridge's rendering of the Quantocks that Thomas found a rare combination of 'spirit and sense' (1913a: 280). He found in Coleridge's *Christabel* the idea that he should look for an indication of the end of winter rather than evidence for spring. In Thomas's book, neither spring nor winter, and neither human nor non-human nature were separated into strict categories. The fluxes of the outer weather and the movements of other species helped him to find his own meaning of spring.

Thomas implied that we live in a world in which substances and air mix and not 'on the ground', as the 'exhabitant' (Ingold 2011: 111). The wind characterises the experience of dwelling invoked in 'Up in the Wind':

> But I do wish
> The road was nearer and the wind farther off,
> Or once now and then quite still, though when I die
> I'd have it blowing that I might go with it
> Somewhere distant, where there are trees no more
> And I could wake and not know where I was
> Nor even wonder if they would roar again.

The poem's interlocutor wishes to block the wind from the dwelling place, as listening to it unsettles her mind, or 'tears at [her] moorings', to use Ingold's phrase. Contradictorily, the wind produces an ecstatic wish to become part of the ecosystem: to be dead and carried away by the

wind into an escape from human perceiving and signification. This is echoed elsewhere in Thomas's poem about the rain:

> But here I pray that none whom once I loved
> Is dying to-night 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,
> Like me who have no love which this wild rain
> Has not dissolved except the love of death,
> If love it be towards what is perfect and
> Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.[84]

In 'Rain', a poem that finds its source in *Icknield Way* (Thomas 1913d: 280-3), the sensual experience of rain falling on the roof of his shelter, combined with his melancholy mood, prevents the speaker from perceiving anything other than his solitude. Thus distanced from perception of a surrounding world, he thinks initially only of others suffering from pain or loneliness like himself. However, this becomes an ecstatic urge to merge with the storm, to be 'dissolved' and escape from his sense of entrapment in his mind to experience bodily flux. The currents of the lifeworld are endowed with the potential to alter the speaker's mood through (a fatal) effect on his body (see also the reference to this poem in Chapter One).

In several of Thomas's poems, the weather more pleasurably tempers the speaker's responses to objects. For example in 'April', he finds it the 'sweetest thing' when the sun 'resolved to shine at seven / On dabbled lengthening grasses' (implying the grass would be of indifferent worth to the speaker if the sun was not shining on it). In 'Haymaking', the sunshine after a storm makes the mill water appear 'happier than any crowd / Of children pouring out of school aloud'. The sunlight as it illuminates an agricultural scene becomes emblematic of a world of timeless content later on in the poem: the same is true of the sun-lit scene in 'The Manor Farm'. However, the first stanza of 'The Manor Farm' attests to the dynamic possibilities of weather for transforming the earth, where 'rock-like mud unfroze a little and rills/ Ran and sparkled down each side of the road'.

For Ingold, the experiences of light and sound are inseparable. In 'March', Thomas considered the outburst of birdsong during a short spell of sunlight before the end of day. Through light the speaker is able to perceive mountains, snow and hail, and the 'sweetness' of

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[84] The printer's typescript of *Poems* by Edward Eastaway has 'for' not 'towards' in line 17. Longley chooses the published version from *Poems* because while '"towards" might seem unidiomatic, it carries a resistant emphasis amid the assonantal build-up' (Longley 2008: 269).

the thrushes' song. It is through the combined experiences of light and sound that Thomas imagined the possibility of spring returning.

Sky, earth and weather-world: Robert Frost

Robert Frost produced far fewer poems with a reference to the weather than Thomas. Where he did refer to the weather, it was in imagined situations where human action was limited or even threatened. In Frost's 'Storm Fear', a blizzard hides visual perception of the world outside the house, so that the speaker's 'heart owns a doubt / Whether 'tis in us to arise with day / And save ourselves unaided'. However, in 'A Line-Storm Song', Frost revealed an awareness of the fluxes of substances (of earth and water) and the medium, and their effects on other occupants of the ecosystem:

> The line-storm clouds fly tattered and swift,
>   The road is forlorn all day,
> Where a myriad snowy quartz stones lift,
>   And the hoof-prints vanish away.
> The roadside flowers, too wet for the bee,
>   Expend their bloom in vain.
> Come over the hills and far with me,
>   And be my love in the rain.
>
> The birds have less to say for themselves
>   In the wood-world's torn despair
> Than now these numberless years the elves,
>   Although they are no less there:
> All song of the woods is crushed like some
>   Wild, easily shattered rose.
> Come, be my love in the wet woods; come,
>   Where the boughs rain when it blows.
>
> There is the gale to urge behind
>   And bruit our singing down,
> And the shallow waters aflutter with wind
>   From which to gather your gown.
> What matter if we go clear to the west,
>   And come not through dry-shod?
> For wilding brooch shall wet your breast
>   The rain-fresh goldenrod.
>
> Oh, never this whelming east wind swells
>   But it seems like the sea's return
> To the ancient lands where it left the shells
>   Before the age of the fern;
> And it seems like the time when after doubt
>   Our love came back amain.
> Oh, come forth into the storm and rout

And be my love in the rain.

While the storm is explicitly offered as a metaphor for a disturbance of human love, Frost described the impact of the storm in great detail. As the poem describes the fluxes of the weather-world, it simultaneously conveys their influences on the human body ('For wilding brooch shall wet your breast / The rain-fresh goldenrod'), on the ground ('And the hoof-prints vanish away') and mind ('And it seems like the time when after doubt / Our love came back amain'). This image of a walk into 'storm and rout' becomes a metaphor for the dynamics of human relationships. Its overt metaphorical message and fictive status, however, diminishes the sense of 'wayfaring' as a bodily process. The reader's gaze is directed towards their own experience of romantic turbulence, rather than their immersion in the ecosystem.

In many of Frost's early poems with a 'natural' setting, the effect of nature on the mind is often a figure for the difficulties of human love or survival faced with nature's apparent obliviousness of – or even hostility to – human aims and desires.[85] For example, this is explored in 'An Old Man's Winter Night' (*Mountain Interval*),'The Hill Wife' (*Mountain Interval*), and 'Home Burial' (*North of Boston*). However, Robert Frost's poems about the use of skills and the 'processional' nature of writing reveal his anticipation of what Ingold calls wayfaring and an interest in how creative activity itself depends on a relation to non-human nature.

Skills

For Ingold, the development of a skill is a matter of attuning movements to perceptions through time. A carpenter, for instance, 'is like the wayfarer who travels from place to place, sustaining himself both perceptually and materially through a continual engagement with the field of practice' (59). We 'walk, just as we talk, write and use tools, with the whole body' (46). The 'skill' is a form of knowledge – albeit one that is as material as it is 'mental'. Using a skill, such as sawing, is like walking in that it is 'processional, rather than successional; every step is a development of the one before and a preparation for the following one' (53). Though rhythmic and repetitive, sawing is not monotonous, because it requires constant attunement with the materials that we are working with, even from the process of planning (54). It also requires attunement with the rhythms of the environment in which our skilled activity is conducted. This gives value to the knowledge that consists in the 'coupling of perception and action', which is,

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[85]Exceptions to this include 'West Running Brook' (from the collection by that name) and 'Hyla Brook' in *Mountain Interval*. Here, the couples find a metaphor for human love and creativity in a common impulse in nature and the human mind – evidence of a creative spirit or the élan vital. See Hass 2002: 80-84. Hass relates this to Frost's 'metaphorical' stage.

in effect, independent of the ability to use language.

Skills: **Edward Thomas**

This variety of knowledge, which is developed through experience, rather than abstract formulae, is apparent in Thomas's poems 'Digging ("Today I think")', and 'Sowing'. In 'Digging', sensory information is used to attune movements to action, and to correct mistakes:

> To-day I think
> Only with scents, – scents dead leaves yield,
> And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
> And the square mustard field;
>
> Odours that rise
> When the spade wounds the root of tree,
> Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
> Rhubarb or celery

Rather than repeating mechanical movements, Thomas showed that digging is a matter of involvement with the perceptual environment, and this is a process of 'crumbling' the soil, while listening to the robin's song. Similarly, Thomas's poem 'Sowing' indicates that his speaker's task involves an immersive perceptual experience of his surroundings:

> I tasted deep the hour
> Between the far
> Owl's chuckling first soft cry
> And the first star.

As R. George Thomas explained, both Edward and Helen Thomas were skilled with traditional crafts because 'although they had professional parents, their grandparents and earlier ancestors were craftsmen' (1985: 217). Helen specialised in cooking, dressmaking and gardening, while Thomas's skills were in woodwork and also in gardening:

> When at home he spent regular hours in the garden, and his notebooks record the meticulous planning of it, increasingly shared with Helen […] Edward […] possessed many practical skills, and, like a good craftsman, he enjoyed imparting his knowledge to others. Even the severity of his comments on literary work submitted to him is that of master craftsman judging apprentice work […] Like a good journeyman, he fulfilled his contracts to the letter and supplied his promised manuscripts on time.
>
> (R. George Thomas 1985: 217)

We shall see below other ways in which Thomas's poetry composition may be compared to the use of a skill.

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Skills: **Robert Frost**

Robert Frost's poem 'Two Tramps in Mud Time' (from *A Further Range*) suggests how sense and perception are required to chop wood successfully, in a variety of kinaesthetic knowledge:

> You'd think I never had felt before
> The weight of an ax-head poised aloft,
> The grip on earth of outspread feet,
> The life of muscles rocking soft
> And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

In 'After Apple-Picking' Frost conveyed the skills required for apple harvesting:

> My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
> Toward heaven still,
> And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
> Beside it, and there may be two or three
> Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
> But I am done with apple-picking now.
> Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
> The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
> I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
> I got from looking through a pane of glass
> I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
> And held against the world of hoary grass
> It melted, and I let it fall and break.
> But I was well
> Upon my way to sleep before it fell
> And I could tell
> What form my dreaming was about to take.
> Magnified apples appear and disappear,
> Stem end and blossom end,
> And every fleck of russet showing clear.
> My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
> It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
> I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
> And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
> The rumbling sound
> Of load on load of apples coming in.
> For I have had too much
> Of apple-picking: I am overtired
> Of the great harvest I myself desired.
> There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
> Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall
> For all
> That struck the earth,
> No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
> Went surely to the cider-apple heap
> As of no worth.

This skill involves the attunement of the whole body, including even the instep arch of the feet

in clinging to the ladder. The activity is rhythmic and repetitive, but not monotonous. All senses are engaged with the apples, from the sight of their 'russet tint', to the ability to 'Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall', and hearing the apples fall into the bin. The 'scent of apples' is so intense as to induce a kind of stupor. In this way, apple picking is processional and repetitive – the picking and depositing of the apple in a barrel – rather than successional. From the outset, it requires attunement with the materials in the field of practice, including an implied awareness of the barrels to be filled.

While the poem describes the process of apple picking in detail, the grammatical form suggests that the speaker describes a dream version of a day's labour. As Mark Richardson observes, in talking of a possible 'fall', and in the 'strangeness' of his vision through the ice, Frost invoked both the 'mythical' and 'actual' significances of human labour.[86] With guidance from Richard Poirier's reading of the poem, Mark Richardson notes how Frost used phrases with a Transcendentalist significance – such as 'essence of winter sleep' – which simultaneously suggested human spiritual states as well as the feelings of this particular harvester (2001: 4-5).

Poems about literal wayfaring can also be taken as metaphors for the process of writing. This supports Ingold's contention that writing is *itself* a form of wayfaring. As Richardson suggests, the skills needed to pick apples – to exercise and release control of the apple at the right moment– are analogous to the poet's skilful combinations of controlled metre and rhythmic irregularities (5). Rhythmic writing is a form of wayfaring that combines impulses to fixity and flux. In this way, poetry itself becomes a way to join with the flows of the lifeworld.

Writing as wayfaring

For Ingold, in *Being Alive*, writing should be considered not as 'representing' the world through mental images, but as a process of opening pathways to experience – both material and mental – through the senses (2011: 200-201). In this way art, like an organism and its environment, is processional (encompassing the term 'performative' as a human process), and should not be understood as working towards a pre-given end. In the same way, landscapes themselves can be 'read' for the experiences they conjure, both imaginative and sensual – a process that cannot be repeated or pre-determined (202).

Here, Ingold's writing is illustrative of Bergson's idea of 'intuition' as a means to access 'duration' that cannot be conveyed with the static forms of words. With reference to Thomas's and Frost's contemporary, the painter Wassily Kandinsky, Ingold explains that art may aim to

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[86]As Richardson explains, the image of seeing through ice evokes Emerson's claim that after the fall we cannot be assured of the veracity of our perceptions (4).

capture 'inner truths that are ontologically prior to the outward form of things' (206). These truths, like Bergson's communicative rhythms, 'touch the soul and set it in motion' (206). Ingold's example from Kandinsky is the experience of hearing the Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky's piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which was composed in response to paintings by Viktor Hartmann. Movement Two, Ingold tells us, intended not to render a scene – to 'aim to depict the castle in sound' – but to 'evoke a feeling comparable to what one might experience in the presence of an ancient ruin set in the landscape' (206). And so with Kandinksy's paintings, as with Romantic and post-Romantic nature poetry, the aim is not so much description of an outer scene as conveying the feelings that the scene provokes (see Introduction).

The paintings that result are not so much objects, but 'things' with an internal and external aspect, which the viewer inhabits, as he moves 'through and among them, and by participating with his entire being in the generative movement of their formation' (207). Considering a painting thus, we observe a visible form that is, quoting Kandinsky, 'wrenched free from its habitual state and … emancipated from the tyranny of the practical-purposive' (quoted in Ingold: 207, with ellipsis from original).[87]In common with Bergson (and echoing Kant), Kandinsky and Ingold affirm that art involves a function of the mind that is free from purpose.[88]

Again, evoking Bergson's espousal of the élan vital as a force underlying matter and the mind, Ingold proposes that we find in the imagination 'the creative impulse of life itself in continually bringing forth the forms we encounter, whether in art, through reading, writing or painting, or in nature, through walking in the landscape' (208). In this way, Ingold evokes the 'textility of making' as an alternative to the idea that we impose form on matter, a view Ingold traces to Aristotle's metaphysics and the building perspective. He contends, 'Like life itself, a real house is always work in progress, and the best that inhabitants can do is steer it in the desired direction' (212). The entities in the material world should be understood as 'trajectories of movement, responding to one another in counterpoint, alternately as melody and refrain' (215). The work of art is a joining with the fluxes of the material world – an improvisation and an unfolding rather than the creation of a static form (216). In this way, it is like walking in a landscape: 'artists – as also artisans – are itinerant wayfarers' (216).

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[87] See *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art, Vol 2 (1922–1943)*, ed. by Kenneth. C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (London: Faber & Faber, 1982) 541-42.

[88] For Kant's writing about beauty's apparent 'purposiveness without purpose', see *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. by J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951) Sections V-VIII.

Writing as wayfaring: Robert Frost

Robert Frost alternated between talking of the work of art as the imposition of form on matter, 'a momentary stay against confusion' (CPPP: 777), and proposing a variety of dualist thought that opposed the treatment of non-human nature as inert matter. For example, in 'Mending Wall' he described how nature has its own paths and trajectories, as the something 'that doesn't love a wall':

> That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
> And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
> And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

Frost described in the letter to the *Amherst Student* that while form or spirit exists in nature, it 'reaches its height' in us:

> There is at least so much good in the world that it admits of form and the making of form. And not only admits of it, but calls for it. We people are thrust forward out of the suggestions of form in the rolling clouds of nature. In us nature reaches its height of form and through us exceeds itself. When in doubt there is always form for us to go on with.

> (CPPP: 740)

As in Ingold's exploration of writing, the form is 'suggested' to us by nature, and comes to us when we join with its currents. Robert Frost's poems about non-human nature can conjure the experience of joining the flows of the ecosystem – through literal wayfaring or experiencing the weather-world – in a way that opens pathways to experience. This is particularly the case when the poems use the limits of language to communicate a perceptual or sensory event without providing a fixed meaning for that experience. Thus the reader is encouraged to use the poem as a path to experiences of the extra-ordinary within the everyday, be that a conversation with a wanderer on a footpath ('The Mountain'); a cow bellowing at the sun ('The Cow in Apple Time'); an arresting bird call ('The Oven Bird') or the experience of a skilled task ('Mowing'). And this in turn suggests how our own writing can be founded on such experiences. Once we are aware that the impulse to write can feel like walking alone through winter streets, we have a grasp on the extra-vagance necessary for writing. Once we know that the rhythms of poetry need not follow the repetitive metronome, we can compose according to the beat of a step since we know that the movements of the mind echo the fixity and fluxes of the human step.

Writing as wayfaring: Edward Thomas

Edward Thomas's theorising indicated that writing is itself a bodily process. He admired prose that has a bodily rhythm which, like a stride, is unique to an individual. He says of Cobbett:

> The movement of his prose is a bodily thing. His sentences do not precisely suggest the swing of an arm or a leg, but they have something in common with it. His style is perhaps the nearest to speech that has really survived. (1985: 168 – see also Chapter One)[89]

Like Frost, he suggested that the rhythms of speech, writing and the mind echo the rhythms of walking: in 'As the teams' head-brass' he described the 'stumbling' motion of the ploughmen, which invoked the irregular beat of this poem. In 'The sun used to shine', the stop-start movement of the poetic lines, including the enjambment, reflects the walking pace and kinetic energy of the speaker and his companion.

> The sun used to shine while we two walked
> Slowly together, paused and started
> Again, and sometimes mused, sometimes talked
> As either pleased, and cheerfully parted

However, unlike Frost, Thomas was particularly interested in learning from the walking style of particular men – 'illiterate men of character' (1981: 171; see Chapter One)[90]. This may indicate – and there are hints elsewhere – that Thomas believed the countryman most expertly combined thought, speech and action. As he affirmed of Lob:

> 'But little he says compared with what he does.
> If ever a sage troubles him he will buzz
> Like a beehive to conclude the tedious fray:
> And the sage, who knows all languages, runs away.
> Yet Lob has thirteen hundred names for a fool,
> And though he never could spare time for school
> To unteach what the fox so well expressed,
> On biting the cock's head off, – Quietness is best, –
> He can talk quite as well as anyone
> After his thinking is forgot and done.'

In Lob's case, 'buzzing' is a response to sophisticated argument; Lob speaks only after he has thought deeply about something. This poem reflects Thomas's interest in the experience and knowledge of wayfarers and countrymen and it informs how we may read his poetry as a whole. With the prevalence of other values than poetry (or even his style of poetry), Thomas could not guarantee that his own poetic rhythms would be understood or 'heard' ('Aspens'). However, through likening his writing to a physical process that we can experience – such as the movement of the Aspen tree; or the trajectory of the wayfarer in 'The Path' – his writing provides a 'path' to experiences both of the world and the imagination if one thinks deeply enough.

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[89] Edward Thomas, 'Introduction' in William Cobbett's [1830] *Rural Rides* (London: Dent, 1912) v-ii.
[90] Edward Thomas, *George Borrow* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1912) 250-51.

While the path, in the poem of that name, is winding and precipitous, it offers more for the imagination and senses than the level road; in the same way, Thomas's writing risked falling into the bland smoothness of a regular verse – represented by the road – or the unfamiliar wildness suggested by the woods below (see also above). The poet shared the speaker's and children's valuation of the footpath, as Stan Smith indicates: 'The aureate language with which the poet describes the path suggests that he has travelled it and shares the children's values' (1986: 119).

This comparison between actual wayfaring and reading and writing poetry allows us to see how our own physical wayfaring can offer creative impulses. During 1914, Thomas took many walks with Frost in the border country between England and Wales. These walks provided personal and imaginative resources for Thomas's poetry. Both prior to and after his meeting with Frost, Thomas aimed to develop new styles and themes in his paid-for prose writing (see for example Farjeon 1997: 110; Longley 2008: 16). Through autobiography, autobiographical fiction and prose fragments, Thomas revealed his attempt to get to the 'essence of [his] perception'; an 'expression of the mind's fullness', of 'getting at the living, particular, essential reality of his experience' (Kirkham 2010: 148). He believed he had lost his ability to write with feeling and intellect in conjunction as a result of the weight of his commissioned writing. As R. George Thomas explained:

> The onset of the war, with the immediate prospect of the cessation of large areas of peace-time journalism, certainly jolted Thomas into a new way of thinking about public affairs. There is nothing to suggest that it disturbed his already well-formed opinion about the way he would write in the future. As his War Diary shows, he had found a way to adapt his mature gift of observation to the clear-sighted enthusiasm of the youth of seventeen who had embarked on the publication of *The Woodland Life*.

> (R. George Thomas 1985: 236)

Compare, for example, the following prose extract from the end of *In Pursuit of Spring* with another about the death of winter in *The South Country*:[91]

> I know that there are bland melodious blackbirds of easy musing voices, robins whose earnest song, though full of passion, is but a fragment that has burst through a more passionate silence, hedge-sparrows of liquid confiding monotone, brisk acid wrens, chaffinches and yellowhammers saying always the same thing (a dear but courtly praise of the coming season), larks building spires above spires into the sky, thrushes of infinite variety that talk and talk of a thousand things, never thinking, always talking of the moment, exclaiming, scolding, cheering, flattering, coaxing, challenging, with merry-

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[91] Frost suggested that *In Pursuit of Spring* offered 'accents' suitable for poetry – see the Introduction– and the book's observations served as the basis of Thomas's poem 'March'.

hearted, bold voices that must have been the same in the morning of the world when the forest trees lay, or leaned, or hung, where they fell. (Thomas 1909: 21)

They were beginning to wilt, but they lay upon the grave of Winter. I was quite sure of that. Winter may rise up through mould alive with violets and primroses and daffodils, but when cowslips and bluebells have grown over his grave he cannot rise again: he is dead and rotten, and from his ashes the blossoms are springing. (Thomas 1913a: 300)

While both extracts present spring through evidence of the end of winter, there is a huge difference in their style – between the rhythm and cadences – and their perspectives. This suggests that Thomas was indeed getting rid of his 'rhetoric' (see Chapter One).

Thomas's experiences of wayfaring – including the displacement caused by the war – and the fluctuations of his mental states are not the only concerns revealed through his poetry. The cultural conditions in the lead up to the war restricted the appreciation of any literary endeavour to a form of 'extravagant' activity – and, as I explore further below, Thomas and Frost both felt a sense of duty at least to comment upon (although perhaps not alter) social conditions.

The idea of martial valour would probably have been part of Thomas's discussions with Frost in the context of the war and the poetry that Frost had written up to this time. William James, despite being a pacifist, supported the idea of martial valour as of pragmatic worth if it served civilisation (1910: 468).[92] James's thinking may have encouraged Thomas to consider what, if any, kind of duty he felt to fight for a nation whose politics he was averse to. In Frost's 'Snow', from *North of Boston*, a speaker likens the imperative of martial valour to immersion in the weather.

> Well, there's—the storm. That says I must go on.
> That wants me as a war might if it came.
> Ask any man.

Frost's later poem 'On Talk of Peace at This Time' was written about the First World War:

> You know the depth of your appointed task
> Whether you can still bear its bloodiness.
> Not mine to say you shall not think of peace.
> Not mine, not mine: I almost know your pain.
> But I will not believe that you will cease,
> Nor will I bid you cease, from being slain
> Till everything that might have been distorted
> Is made secure for us and Hell is thwarted.

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[92] For James, a more sophisticated civilisation would promulgate martial valour in civil service (1910: 468).

The context of the war – and reflections on previous conflicts recorded in the landscape – perhaps suggest that Frost had a role in persuading Thomas to pursue more earthly projects than 'Ecstasy' or his 'Fiction', which Frost considered 'inured introspection' according R. George Thomas (1985: 232). In 'A Servant to Servants', Frost's character assures us that 'The best way out is always through.' Perhaps their walks to British Camp near Dymock had a role in their discussions with its reminder of earlier conflict. This may have produced Thomas's desire not to respond in merely 'aesthetic' or spiritualised ways about the landscape – and his daring to display an emotional response to the onset of the war both in poetry and in his enlistment. Edna Longley transcribed the following entry from Thomas's Field Notebook of 26 August 1914:

> a sky of dark rough horizontal masses in N.W. with a 1/3 moon bright and almost orange low down clear of cloud and I thought of men east-ward seeing it at the same moment. It seems foolish to have loved England up to now without knowing it could perhaps be ravaged and I could and perhaps would do nothing to prevent it. (2008: 296)

While Thomas could not fully conceptualise his feelings towards England, nor did he support England as a nation, he attempted to explore his feelings in his poetry. Sometimes his conceptual obscurity veered dangerously towards suggesting the nationalism that he cast doubt on in earlier prose – such as the mysterious 'all' of 'Haymaking' ('all were silent / All was old'), or the all-encompassing 'all we know and live by' of 'This is no case of petty right or wrong' (which reminds us of Mr Stodham's rhetoric in *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*, see Chapter One). This 'totalising' vision combined unsettlingly with his nuanced, more local poems referred to in Chapter One. However, the poems – as all writing – may have been written with the intention of serving a public need for a patriotism that Thomas himself was sceptical about. As the title of the poem suggests, Thomas questioned the availability of appropriate moral responses for an individual in a time of war – it was not the 'fat patriot's' case that was petty but the restriction of responses to simply 'right or wrong'. How someone has 'spun out' their meaning of England is a matter of 'individual capacity' (see Chapter One). Perhaps – as William James suggested – if the bravery is for social good, it can be justified or even transferred to different activities (James 1910). This is especially the case when such bravery involves 'self-forgetfulness' (1910: 468). This relates to another way to look at the 'bravery' of his enlistment. Rather than conveying a love of nation, it could be seen as a bravery of challenging the personal limitations of mind and body.

In 'Ecstasy', Thomas described the state whereby a man 'is exalted out of himself' – through madness, love, passion, intoxication, or immersion in nature (see also Chapter Two). It

is a state where we 'dream with our eyes open' (BC, 'Ecstasy', 7). In his essay on passion in contemporary fiction he observed an ecstatic urge in many contemporary writers, including Rabindranth Tagore and John Masefield.[93]Ecstasy was also, he believed, something that interested Arthur Machen (in 1902). Thomas continued:

> A book was written eleven years ago – a good book, too, Mr Arthur Machen's 'Hieroglyphics',– to show that there could be no fine literature without ecstasy. The writer said that ecstasy was 'the infallible instrument by which fine literature may be discerned from reading matter, by which art may be known from artifice, and style from intellectual expression'. (BC, 'Ecstasy', 13)

With its sensitivity to beauty, the state of ecstasy can perhaps be described as a feeling of 'immanence' that is unconceptualisable and beyond the intellect. It is a state that opposes 'the purely naturalistic look at life' which, with reference to William James, cannot provide contentment except for the 'thick-skinned' (BC, 'Ecstasy', 12-13). Thomas's examples of wayfaring suggested ways in which we can overcome our own psychic limits to conjure a creative or extra-vagant state, and Thomas was particularly interested in these ecstatic or epiphanic moments. However, most often these states came about through immersion in what Ingold calls the 'meshwork', for example in 'The Unknown Bird':

> Then
> As now that La-la-la! was bodiless sweet:
> Sad more than joyful it was, if I must say
> That it was one or other, but if sad
> 'Twas sad only with joy too, too far off
> For me to taste it.

Meshwork

For Ingold, life unfolds along trails that issue from multiple sources – each organism is such a line of growth, rather than an object bounded off from its environment. Lines of growth are not 'in' the environment but 'of' the environment: 'the trail winds through or amidst like the root of a plant or a stream between its banks. Each such trail is but one strand in a tissue of trails that together comprise the texture of the lifeworld' (Ingold 2011: 69-70). Organisms do not so much relate to each other as 'bring one another into existence' (68): 'It is within such a tangle of interlaced trails, continually ravelling here and unravelling there, that beings grow or issue forth along the lines of their relationships' (71).

Robert Frost's writing in 1939 about the act of composing poetry indicated that we

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[93] New York, The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature (BC), 'Berg Coll MSS Thomas, E,1902-1950', 'Essay on passion in contemporary fiction, typescript of unpublished essay'.

follow the 'line' laid by our past experiences into future experience, rather than composing according to pre-determined ideas:

> The impressions most useful to my purpose seem always those I was unaware of and so made no note of at the time when taken, and the conclusion is come to that like giants we are always hurling experience ahead of us to pave the future with against the day when we may want to strike a line of purpose across it for somewhere. The line will have the more charm for not being mechanically straight. We enjoy the straight crookedness of a good walking stick. Modern instruments of precision are being used to make things crooked as if by eye and hand in the old days.

<div align="right">(CPPP: 777)</div>

This also suggested Frost's scepticism towards the pleasures of work that is produced with repetitive perfection. We respond to the product we see as resulting from the operation of a human skill, which is irregular and processional. In this sense, poetry has the opportunity to reveal our commonality with other occupants of the ecosystem – the way our lives issue out from experience to experience rather than according to a plan. Neither Thomas nor Frost was exposed to the comprehensive ecological worldview that is available to Ingold. However, their poetry implied an awareness of how other species inhabit the 'meshwork'.

Rather than separating the environments of animals from the world of humans – as Heidegger had suggested by proposing that animals are closed to all but their immediate worlds – Ingold argues that animals' lives will not be contained but consist in 'interwoven lines' (2011: 81-84).[94] The term 'meshwork' comes from Ingold's reading of Henri Lefebvre.[95] The term signifies that individuals are not so much bounded by networks of relations or by physical limits (of enclosure) as immersed in 'flows' and 'counterflows' (85). The concept also helps us understand that the limits of place are not 'closed' but porous. As Ingold explains:

> The lifelines of organisms issue from the sites of their symbiotic connection, but in a direction that runs not from one to the other but forever in between, as the river flows between its banks in a direction orthogonal to their transverse connection. (83)

Ingold posits the meshwork as the fabric woven out of the 'lifelines of organisms' and which humans, even as writers, can join. 'Meshwork' is a metaphor for the relationship between organisms and their environment which relies on an image of an interlaced structure that opposes a view of the lifeworld as a static container for human life. The inclusion of 'work' by Ingold, with the connotation of something that has been produced, adds the element of

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[94] Ingold refers here to Heidegger's lecture course from the 1920s and 1930s which has been published as *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. by W. McNeil and N. Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[95] Ingold 'borrowed' the idea of the 'meshwork' in Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, trans. by D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 117–18.

movement and change to the picture.

However, the term 'meshwork' is unable to substitute for one dimension of the meaning of 'nature' which Laurence Coupe alludes to and which Jhan Hoch explains in further detail (Coupe 2000: 4-5). This is its value as something that enables environmental praxis. In maintaining nature as a category, as a 'temporary and strategic' fixity, we enable political action (Hochman 2000: 190):

> If green cultural studies is to be an effective politico-cultural tool in the service of nature and culture, it will need to study not only how to 'become' nature, how to attempt a merging with the real or imagined subjectivity of a plant, animal, or mineral, of air, water, earth and fire; it will also need to pull back and grant these beings and entities unromanticized difference, an autonomy apart from humans, a kind of privacy and regard heretofore granted almost exclusively only to those considered human. (192)

Whereas, at one level, we may gain imaginatively and intellectually from images of nature as a meshwork, as flux, relation or entanglement, these speculations may prevent effective political action that would be better achieved through emphasizing the differences between the human and the non-human realms, or between nature and culture. In line with Bergson's comments about conceptual reasoning, language is both flawed in accounting for reality and also the best tool the ecocritic has for describing it.

I suggest that we would be wrong to do away with a critical use of the term 'nature', since it is possible to use the term 'nature' in a nuanced, historicised way which draws on contemporary ecological thought (for example, when I refer to more-than-human or non-human nature). This can be compared to Thomas's simultaneous awareness of the historical construction of 'England', which reflects all of a culture's prejudice and understanding, and his own version of England which he perceived as being under threat. Thomas had a similar perspective on the uses of the term 'nature' by his contemporaries. The term 'nature' carries with it a history of usage that has changed and which allows for renewed understandings, and it permits us to draw on experiences from earlier or distant cultures. Because Ingold's explanation of the meshwork as 'the creeping entanglements of life' (see below) is a helpful model of human experience, it can be used to refresh our understanding of the term 'nature'.

As we have seen, for Thomas and Frost, nature (in the sense of something apart from the human realm) offered possibilities for a fleeting feeling of harmony, but only because we understand ourselves as responding to its flows, because we understand ourselves as depending on it for our pleasure, growth and survival. For Ingold, what we perceive in the world aren't objects but processes of coming-to-be, productive movements (117). The earth and the sky are 'manifolds of movement that are directly implicated in one another' (119). As we have seen above,

inhabitants live in this sky and weather-world, rather than 'on' the ground. Only where substances and medium mingle can we have life – and this is perpetuated by the process of life itself. When we live 'in' the land, we mingle substances and medium through respiration, and in doing so create the means for our own growth and movement. Since the task of the inhabitant is to 'gather' its world thus, we cannot separate inside from outside. As the living body is sustained by movement both in and out in respiration, so the 'dwelling place' is sustained by movements of inhabitants inside and out, rather than creating a 'container' against the weather world. It is only through mingling substance and medium in this movement that life can continue, and equally, 'the creeping entanglements of life will always and inevitably triumph over our attempts to box them in' (Ingold 2011: 125).

In 'The Man in the Machine and the Self-Builder' Ingold develops the implications of our inhabitation of the earth for his view of the human mind and identity. He shares with anthropologist Gregory Bateson the view that mind 'is not confirmed within individual bodies as against a world out there, but is immanent in the entire system of organism-environment relations within which all human beings are necessarily enmeshed' (2010b: 355). For Ingold, the mind 'reaches out into the environment along the multiple and ever-extending sensory pathways of the human organism's involvement in its surroundings' (2011: 236). In this sense, the mind tends to 'overflow its bodily moorings' (2010b: 356).

Thomas admired the 17th century poet and clergyman Thomas Traherne, and he described him in *The South Country* as 'concerned in all the world' and able to 'see the patterns which all living things are for ever weaving' (1909: 133). As I previously mentioned, Wordsworth's 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads* emphasised the pleasure that could be derived from sympathy with other lives. Several poems from my study suggest that humans grow in skill or enrich themselves perceptually or imaginatively by following the lines of movement of other wayfarers or organisms – for example, in 'Lob' (Thomas), and 'The Self-Seeker' (Frost). While Thomas lacked Ingold's terminology or ecological awareness, Thomas anticipated this variety of post-Nature nature.

Meshwork: **Robert Frost**

In 'The Self-Seeker', the speaker suggests the ways in which the wayfarer can be perceptually and imaginatively rewarded for following the lines of growth of other organisms.

> She's going to do my scouting in the field,
> Over stone walls and all along a wood
> And by a river bank for water flowers,
> The Floating Heart, with small leaf like a heart,

And at the *sinus* under water a fist
Of little fingers all kept down but one,
And that thrust up to blossom in the sun
As if to say, 'You! You're the Heart's desire.'

While the plant is anthropomorphized, even the imagined wayfaring sustains the injured man. Several other poems from this period represent the permeability of the inhabited world, the interpenetration of inside and outside: in 'An Old Man's Winter Night', the outdoor sounds (the roar of trees, and crack of branches) and light (the late-rising moon) penetrate the inner space of the house, while the inner noises are said to 'scare' the outside world.

In 'The Sound of the Trees', as the speaker listens to the wind in the trees he reaches beyond his body into the outside world. This listening interrupts conceptual thought; through such sound we 'lose all measure of pace / And fixity in our joys'. This is also a case of listening 'in' the weather – the speaker perceives the trees only through the movement of their leaves by the wind. The act of listening summons us to follow the sounds, which is an impulse that is temporarily resisted by the speaker. Through listening, we are drawn into the movements of the medium of the air; 'the sweep of sound continually endeavours to tear listeners away, causing them to surrender to its movement. It requires an effort to stay in place' (Ingold 2011: 139).

Meshwork: **Edward Thomas**

In Thomas's 'The long small room' the willows, sparrow and mouse draw the speaker's awareness outside the room in which he is mechanically engaged in writing, into a world in which time is registered in nature's processes:

When I look back I am like moon, sparrow and mouse
That witnessed what they could never understand
Or alter or prevent in the dark house.
One thing remains the same – this my right hand

Crawling crab-like over the clean white page,
Resting awhile each morning on the pillow,
Then once more starting to crawl on towards age.
The hundred last leaves stream upon the willow.

The 'nature' Thomas invoked is historicised, and includes the poet-speaker. All organisms are immersed in the flows of the weather-world and have little ability to 'alter or prevent' them. However, the mechanical writing contrasts with the poem's rhythm, which is varied rather than monotonous. The act of 'looking back' suggests one who has escaped from a monotonous sense of duty. Longley reads the willow as contributing to the image of a ghostly poet-speaker, but I believe that an awareness of Thomas's interest in non-human nature for its own sake indicates

that the tree provides an image of hope that exists outside the 'dark house' (2000: 316). Thus, the fluxes of the weather-world become an energising force, in contrast to the hardships of the room and labour. Although it is not a poem about a poet's 'wayfaring' (as walking or the pursuance of a task) 'The long small room' emphasises the speaker's immersion in the meshwork of inner and outer nature. If his writing is processional, rather than mechanical, he is able to feel energised, rather than oppressed, by the movements of outer nature.

An ecohistorical view?

An interest in 'wayfaring' does not include the inclination to seek out human history. Combining the experiences of wayfaring with a historical sense of human occupation of the land produces what Longley describes as an 'ecohistorical view' (2008: 22; 2000: 23-51). She argues Thomas's view was one 'whereby human actors and constructs share in a larger earthly drama' (1996: 24). For Longley, this perspective is 'ecocentric'; following Robin Eckersley she defines this term as

> a philosophy of *internal relatedness*, according to which all organisms are not simply interrelated with their environment but also constituted by those very environmental relationships. (1996: 24; see also the Introduction)

An ecohistorical view: Edward Thomas

Like Ingold, Eckersley, in Longley's account, considers the nature of production, which has been eclipsed by the Marxist interest in exclusively human relations. As Thomas's poetry considered the human and more-than-human forces of production, Longley evinces the poet's search for what I've earlier called a dwelling perspective, which questioned what it meant to be 'an old inhabitant of earth' ('The Other') and which relied on the speaker's awareness of his or her 'temporal, geographic and cultural setting' (2000: 26).

Longley asserts that Thomas's eco-historical perspective is best understood in the context of the changes that had happened during the Edwardian period, which affected humans and nature alike. In this period Thomas 'walked all over the south of England at a time when its suburbanisation, behind which lay agricultural depression, marked a new frontier, and perhaps limit, of the Industrial Revolution' (27). The changes were observed principally for their impacts on human inhabitants. Longley notes Thomas's view of suburban dwellers as a 'muddy, confused, hesitating mass'. She argues that, in his prose, Thomas displayed an awareness of the results of the repeal of the Corn Laws and the wider forces that contributed to the collapse of

rural communities and unemployment in cities (30). However, she notes that Thomas also observed the effects of industrialisation on non-human nature.

Thomas's ecocentrism is apparent to Longley in the concepts and structure of his poetry. She argues that its development is apparent in Thomas's travel writing and criticism of nature poetry, where he sought perspectives that encompassed the unity of nature and man. Uniting his 'ecocentrism' with his historical view, Longley charts how in *The South Country* Thomas showed concern for the mysterious interdependency that has enabled human life to continue and will do so into the future:

> How little do we know of the business of the earth, not to speak of the universe; of time, not to speak of eternity. It was not by taking thought that man survived the mastodon. The acts and thoughts that will serve the race, that will profit this commonwealth of things that live in the sun, the air, the earth, the sea, now and through all time, are not known and never will be known. (Thomas 1909: 127)

Longley finds in the references to the passing of millennia in 'Digging ("What matter makes my spade?")' and 'February Afternoon' not a concern for 'timelessness' but a way to comment on human 'powers that be' from the perspective of the ecosystem (2000: 34). In these poems Longley argues that Thomas suggested the limitations of human thought by inquiring 'into the oppositional habits [...] that produce wars' in which '"men" can only be "audacious or resigned"' or experience 'tears or mirth' (35). These human powers are compared in both poems to the life-sustaining properties of other components of the ecosystem, 'the living air' of 'Digging' and the starlings and processes of evolution in 'February Afternoon' (34-35). In 'Man and Dog', Longley explores how, rather than serving as a passive elegy for a passing way of life (as implied by Williams's critique), the poem's perspective indicates the ways in which all life is passing. Comparing the different scales of change and movement – from the man's labour to the outbreak of war and the movements of the robin – illuminates the interdependency and changes that are more or less favourable to ecological and social conditions (36).

An ecohistorical view: **Robert Frost**

Reading Thomas and Frost for examples of 'wayfaring' also suggests that each organism is understood as a 'process' of becoming – a historical process – rather than a bounded object. This illuminates one important sense of the idea of natural histories – that all organisms develop in time within the fluxes of the substances and media of earth and sky, and along the paths on which they interrelate. For Ingold, it is important that we understand this aspect of change, rather than attributing all non-human change to genetic information (2011: 8). In both wayfaring and with an 'ecohistorical' viewpoint what counts as a natural history need not exclude human

agency. However, only in the ecohistorical perspective is a contrast explicitly made between human and non-human nature and histories. As I have explained above, it is useful for the ecocritic to retain the nominal distinction between human- and non-human nature. From the perspective of the meshwork there is no difference between human and non-human nature; from the eco-historical perspective we can see that both human- and non-human nature are affected by both human and natural histories.

Robert Frost's poem 'The Line-Gang' suggests an overlap between an 'ecohistorical' perspective and a rendering of wayfaring. A poet-speaker imagines an encounter with a group of men engaged in constructing telephone masts:

> Here come the line-gang pioneering by,
> They throw a forest down less cut than broken.
> They plant dead trees for living, and the dead
> They string together with a living thread.
> They string an instrument against the sky
> Wherein words whether beaten out or spoken
> Will run as hushed as when they were a thought
> But in no hush they string it: they go past
> With shouts afar to pull the cable taut,
> To hold it hard until they make it fast,
> To ease away—they have it. With a laugh,
> An oath of towns that set the wild at naught
> They bring the telephone and telegraph.

This encounter with the workmen places the speaker in a situation that both shows other humans behaving mechanically towards non-human nature, and demonstrates a broader historicised attitude towards the 'meshwork' as source of materials for human use. The poet-speaker, on the contrary, knows how to work alongside nature's rhythms and processes. Rather than suggesting that one response is 'correct', and in spite of some of the extravagant emotional reactions to the tree-felling, the poem is ambiguous in its response to the technology. It highlights two historical 'enframings' of the forest, as a source of inspiration and as construction material; and of the telephone, as a 'living thread' or as a kind of noose. While Frost did not oppose technology (see, for example, the much later 'Kitty Hawk') and there is a heroic boldness in the men's 'instrument against the sky', he playfully suggested in this poem that it was the 'oath' of town, simultaneously a profanation and a vow, to destroy wild places rather than to learn to live with them. It was not so much the technology as its effect on the human agent that was problematic in this poem: for instance, people could no longer distinguish between the subtleties of poetic speech and language that was violently or monotonously 'beaten out'. In the final sections of this chapter, I explore more carefully the idea that Thomas and Frost were aware of how nature was historicised and how they contributed to an 'ecohistorical' perspective.

Observing rural life

Raymond Williams characterised Edward Thomas's poetry as exemplifying a Georgian impulse (shared by the Dymock Poets) to present the loss of an 'arcadia' rather than observe the real conditions of rural life with which they were acquainted; to use 'rural England as an image for its own internal feelings and ideas' (1973: 258). He believed writers such as Thomas offered a false history of alienation from an idealised countryside, rather than an image of the actual conditions for ordinary people who remained in the countryside. The 'part imaginary' England provided writers with room to project their 'sub intellectual fantasy'. Thomas was criticised specifically for his lack of both localised and historicised visions, for failing to listen to rural dwellers and for caricaturing them. With reference to Thomas's poem 'Lob', Williams asserted:

> The varied idioms of specific country communities – the flowers, for example, have many local names – are reduced not only to one 'country' idiom but to a legendary, timeless inventor, who is more readily seen than any actual people. (1973: 257)

Williams favoured writers who distinguished between their observations and their inner worlds and those who gave precedence to the outward scene over the inner theatre. However, in the case of 'Lob' and elsewhere, I believe that Williams was mistaken in his all-encompassing critique: the poem is, as Edna Longley indicates, localised in Thomas's South Country, and specifically Wiltshire (2008: 212). The historical period is identifiable too: Thomas was most concerned with those who were moving from land work to soldiering, and who had been displaced from the 'No Man's Land' of roadsides to that of the trenches. Williams also criticised Thomas for reducing 'labourers from human to "natural" status' (1973: 259). However, Thomas saw an identification with the 'natural' in terms of the skills involved in wayfaring. Williams quoted Helen Thomas's identification of her husband's admiration for those whose 'skill has come as the swallow's skill' (259). As we saw earlier in this chapter, the perspective of wayfaring values the coupling of perception with action. The swallow's expertise (in flying or hunting) involves a long apprenticeship in fine-tuning action to sense perception which would exceed any human attempts at skilled behaviour.

While there are clearly mythical and imaginative dimensions to Thomas's depictions of places and of labourers, it is difficult to see why this must be destructive of all literary merit. As we've seen in Thomas's poetry about birdsong, an imaginative engagement with other inhabitants can heighten the sense of connectedness, which may produce ethical concern. However, Williams rightly criticised the Georgian quest for images of timelessness and retreat – and the infusion of images from Classical pastoral – including in Thomas's poetry and prose. As

noted before, 'Haymaking' suggests 'a picture of a world out of time' (260).[96] Williams disparaged 'Lob' for a false separation of rural labour from other types of work: this distinction overlooked the poem's implied connections between agricultural decline and soldiering, and did not apply to Thomas's poem 'Man and Dog'. Williams linked Thomas's use of pastoral imagery and his mythologizing of 'Lob' as representative of 'Old England' to an interest in 'self-regarding patriotism' of the imperialist period (258). However, as I have explained in Chapter One and elsewhere, Thomas distinguished his 'localised' concept of national belonging from imperialist imagery. Further, Williams's contrast between 'Lob' and Hardy's 'In Time of "the Breaking of Nations"' does not seem to be valid: like Thomas, Hardy was concerned with a 'feeling' for the persistence of agricultural life.

Finally, Williams overlooked the ways in which Thomas offered what Williams attributed to John Clare and Wordsworth – a 'green language' – in which the isolated individual 'driven back from the cold world' sought through 'his own natural perception and language' found in the environment 'to find and recreate man' (132). Wordsworth perceived in the gentle agency of nature 'a principle of creation, of which the creative mind is a part'; as a result, the poetic wanderer was able to feel sympathy and community with the marginalised labourers and tramps he met on his route (127). The sentiment produced in relation to outward nature required a poetic expression as 'A language that is ever green / That feelings unto all impart, / As hawthorn blossoms, soon as seen, / Give May to every heart' (Clare's 'Pastoral Poesy', in Williams 1973: 133). While the feeling of community with man and nature that Clare sought was disappearing because of the enclosures and other changes, he still sought a way in quiet nature to talk of 'his own and others' humanity' (140). Through Clare's musings on nature, 'a feeling of the observer's life is seen and known' (133).

This version of nature, for Williams, was aligned with, but distinguished from, images of nature as a pastoral retreat. 'Wayfaring' can be understood as a variety of Williams' 'green

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[96]Edna Longley offers an alternative interpretation of 'Haymaking' in her essay 'The Business of the Earth'. Reading the poem in the context of other poems also written in July 1915, she suggests that 'Haymaking' is 'self-reflexively conscious of [its use of] frames within frames' rather than simply focusing on a 'graven image' of timeless agriculture (2000: 39). Thus, the poem's ending should be read as a 'receding and ambiguous wartime frame' (40) that depends on various sense impressions rather than just the pictorial frame of pastoral. This is emphasised through connections with the poems 'The Brook', 'The Word' and 'Digging' [2], described above, which in combination suggest the limits of human scales and communicative abilities, and possible ways that we might interpret non-human meanings. However, I am not convinced by this argument for 'Haymaking', for reasons explored further below.

language'; when we encounter other inhabitants as we move along paths through the world, we gain a sense of nature's creativity and our interdependencies with other beings that we are able to articulate. We see that Thomas and Frost attempted to find a language that matched the intensity of their perceptions and sensations. Further, as for Clare, the journey into the country can be understood as a protest at the felt absence of community in towns and villages. Commentators on the American pastoral suggest that circumstances at the beginning of the 20th century made human movement – including movement into the country – of increased significance to writers, and this is explored in the following, final section.

Alternative versions of the pastoral

Raymond Williams stated that the Georgians were prone to writing a purely nostalgic and oversimplified pastoral. But do pastoral forms ever offer the potential for social critique? Thomas's poetry can be described as pastoral, following ecocritic Terry Gifford's criteria, as it charts a journey of retreat from the pressures of urban life into the countryside for the sake of renewal and a sense of harmony (Gifford 1999). Gifford suggests elsewhere that the 'post-pastoral', while following the trope of retreat, overcomes social and ecological obfuscation as it poses one or more of six questions (2012: np):

> Can awe in the face of nature (e.g. landscapes) lead to humility in our species, reducing our hubris?
>
> What are the implications of recognising that we are part of nature's creative-destructive processes?
>
> If our inner nature echoes outer nature, how can the outer help us understand the former?
>
> If nature is culture, is culture nature?
>
> How can consciousness, through conscience, help us heal our alienation from our home?
>
> Is the exploitation of our planet aligned with our exploitation of human minorities?

Thomas's and Frost's poetry of 'wayfaring' meets the third of these criteria. The world that Thomas observed (for instance, in 'Lob') was often a repository of perceived values that were in danger of disappearing, and in this sense his view was nostalgic. However, Thomas was also an acute observer of what was present at that moment in terms of fleeting encounters between human and non-human nature. Robert Frost's poetry also charted a retreat from the village or dwelling place to the edges of wilderness for the sake of recuperation. Frost referred to the works in *North of Boston* as eclogues, and he identified influences in Theocritus and Virgil (Alpers 1999: 309). Nature was often rendered for its symbolic properties, rather than for its

own sake. However, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, Frost also observed temporary, fleeting interrelations between the human observer and other inhabitants.

Ann-Marie Mikkelsen finds American pastoral able to comment upon the negative social changes brought about by industrialisation. For Mikkelsen, Frost used the pragmatic pastoral to convey the experience of vagrancy in the New England landscape during the Depression. The poet was able to assume the role of those who have been displaced by industrialisation – tramps, migrant workers. In doing so the poet showed 'the artist's inevitable integration into the modern marketplace and public sphere rather than any sort of imagined removal'; this role also provided the artist with an opportunity to reveal 'alternative sources of value' (2011: 2; 46). Mikkelsen traces the origins of this role in the Pragmatists – including William James – and their ethics of community and individual responsibility. In Frost's poem 'Pan with Us' from his collection *A Boy's Will,* Frost's tramplike Pan takes on qualities of both poet and vagrant and

> personifies the multiple roles of the modern artist. Although it seems a casual act, even Pan's idle gesture of 'ravel[ling]' is far from unstudied ; a term that denotes processes of clarification and confusion at once, a 'ravel' suggests Pan's functions as cultural critic and artistic innovator [...] The philosopher and psychologist William James identified similar qualities in the Whitmanian tramp, identifying him as a paradigmatically pragmatic individual, an ideally dispassionate observer of a world in need of a rejuvenating moral and critical spirit. Deeming Whitman's tramp persona 'a worthless and unproductive being' whose disregard for social convention 'will change the usual standards of human value in the twinkling of an eye' , James offers observations that are applicable to Frost's tramplike Pan, whose odd 'ravel[ling]' evokes similar feelings of challenge and unease in readers. (2011: 2)

Mikkelsen emphasises the potential of the pragmatic pastoral to suggest alternative systems of valuation to those of social convention. By emphasising the 'extra-vagance' of artist and non-human wayfarer, as we've seen earlier in this chapter, the pastoral may also enhance our ecological awareness and perceptions of other sources of values.

Alternative versions of the pastoral: Edward Thomas

Edward Thomas was aware of William James's comments on British nature writer Richard Jefferies. Thomas quoted from James's description of Richard Jefferies' 'rapturous communion on the Downs, with the "earth, the sun and sky, the stars hidden by the light, with the ocean …"' Thomas continued:

> [James's] comment was: 'Surely a worthless hour of life, when measured by the usual standards of commercial value. Yet in what other *kind* of value can the preciousness of any hour, made precious by any standard, consist, if it consist not in feelings of excited significance like these, engendered in some one, by what the hour contains?'

Thomas's view of the artist was that he or she had a status that was close to that of a tramp. Aurelius, the itinerant worker and poet in the *Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans,* is among the 'superfluous' who 'cannot find society with which they are in some sort of harmony' (Thomas 1913c: 48). The squire's agent considers Aurelius's achievements as an under-gardener:

> What we want is efficiency. How are we to get it with the likes of this Mr What's-his-name in the way? They neither produce like the poor nor consume like the rich, and it is by production and consumption that the world goes round, say I. (1913c: 48; see also Chapter Three)

On the positive side, Thomas said of the 'superfluous' that sometimes they 'escape the necessity to spin and toil for others, and do not spend their free time in manacles' (40). Wayfaring as vagrancy can be one such escape for the superfluous, and it may help to produce an alternative, post-pastoral poetry.

Alternative versions of the pastoral: Robert Frost

Frost, however, was perhaps keener than Thomas to be tested by the demands of the marketplace, as he suggested in his early comments about his poetry.

> There is a kind of success called 'of esteem' and it butters no parsnips. It means a success with a critical few who are supposed to know. But really to arrive where I can stand on my legs as a poet and nothing else I must get outside that circle to the general reader who buys books in their thousands. I may not be able to do that. I believe in doing it—don't you doubt me there. (CPPP: 667-68)[98]

However, American critic Robert Bernard Hass emphasises how Frost's social critique had to combine with the poet's wish for critical success. He believes that Frost concurred with the values he found in Thoreau. These included 'a deep Jeffersonian conviction that in rural regions people can develop close bonds with natural landscapes that are physically nurturing and psychologically comforting' and that New England landscape can offer a respite from the 'fragmentation and alienation of modern life' (2013: 177-199). Hass acknowledges that Frost's pastoral landscapes could also be sites of opposition to idealising images. He believes that the particular demands of labour evoked in Frost's New England emphasise that

> [the] life of difficulty and struggle also resonates with the anti-pastoral themes of Virgil's *Georgics*. One of antiquity's great didactic poems that celebrates the transient beauty and fecundity of nature, the *Georgics* also describes a postlapsarian world in

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[97]Thomas quoted here from James's essay 'On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings', from *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (1899).
[98]Frost to John Bartlett, November 1913.

which both man and beast toil relentlessly to survive the onslaughts of nature. For Virgil, our fall from a distant Golden Age, a time when the Gods provided for humankind and 'wine' ran everywhere 'in the streams,' is not, as in Genesis, a consequence of original sin, but rather a condition imposed upon us by Jupiter. (182)

Hass reminds us that the life of toil is intrinsically linked to creativity for Virgil: 'As human beings struggle in their desperate circumstances "want should be / the cause of human ingenuity / and ingenuity the cause of arts"' (*The Georgics*, in Hass 2013: 182). Rather than a straightforward conservatism, Hass identifies this as Frost's respect for a rural tradition that requires that 'Bounds should be set' (from the 'Build Soil: A Political Pastoral', in *A Further Range*). Hass calls this 'the space between dissent and respect'. Virgil's *Georgics* supports a version of wayfaring as the development of life skills that are essentially tied to the creative process. Thus, the Georgic viewpoint need not be socially conservative – the 'bounds' that restrict human wayfarers are also the lines of their growth.

While Hass and Mikkelsen argue that Frost produced a tutelary, 'complex pastoral', British criticism – including ecocriticism – has tended to emphasise the use of traditional and romantic pastoral to obscure social relations, and henceforth, to neglect its possibilities for political commentary. Greg Garrard argues that 'both in popular and literary forms pastoral has tended to function in British culture in ways that are ecologically delusive' (2012: 53). Garrard links this to challenges for literature to register the findings of postmodern ecology, as opposed to its reliance on an antiquated holism that seeks an impossible harmony with an unstable non-human nature. However, Terry Gifford – drawing in part on American readings of pastoral literature – employs the concept of the post-pastoral to provide 'a vision of an integrated landscape that includes the human' and offers a 'discourse that can both celebrate and take some responsibility for nature without false consciousness' (1999: 148).

While Thomas failed to consider the full social conditions of the places he wrote about, Williams's dismissal of Thomas's writing as simple pastoral ignores the ways in which his writing, at its best, drew attention to the plight of historically marginalised individuals, including other species. Williams's Marxist reading, with its emphasis on working-class humans, requires that displaced humans and animals remain at the margins of our awareness. The ecocritic, however, is able to offer a more nuanced analysis of Thomas's pastoral and the accuracy of its observations.[99]

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[99]Thomas might be examined within the contexts of 'Back to Nature' and 'Back to the Land' movements of the 19th century, the latter of which he mentions, for example, in *The Country* (1913b: 14). However, according to Peter Gould in *Early Green Politics* (1988), by the beginning of the 20th century, socialism

The analysis of the post-pastoral provides a way in which we can consider how Thomas and Frost demonstrated ecocentric attitudes to nature and place (without requiring the aesthetic innovations characteristic of ecopoetry). In this chapter, I have explored how Thomas and Frost exhibit sensitivity to the ways our lives are intertwined with those of other organisms. Wayfaring offers an ecocentric perspective as it attunes us to our own immersion in the ecosystem. In this, it offers a variety of post-pastoral literature. We have seen that it is likely to produce 'epiphanic' experiences that cannot be rendered in language. In these cases, the limits to language can be highlighted through the process of référance, or through rhythmic effects.

What Edna Longley calls an 'ecohistorical' perspective historicises the experience of wayfaring, and suggests to us that we must understand how it is embedded within a culture. For instance, wayfaring as walking is only possible to the extent that it has cultural precedents, and is foiled by experiences such as the enclosures, the loss of footpaths, new approaches to agriculture or the onset of war. In this way, much as we may seek an ecocentric perspective, we cannot ignore our human need to be part of a social world which includes other priorities. For this to be possible, we must find ways to support our own inner ecology.

As we have realised through the third wave of ecocriticism, exploitation of nature is culturally linked to exploitation of our fellow humans (see Chapter Two). An attention to non-human others should be coupled with an interest in human inequalities. Our ecocentric perspective as ecocritics must include concern for the 'poetics of relation', a humility in the face of the innumerable connections that exist between one place and 'shadow places' around the world (see Chapter Two). And our humility with respect to other lives, both human and more-than-human, must be coupled with concern for the limits of human understanding. I return to consider this in further detail in my final chapter.

Wayfaring itself may preclude our experience of the ecosystem – some weather, for instance a snow storm, or heavy rain, is likely to obscure our interest in other inhabitants. Practising a skill (such as writing) may preclude awareness of what is going on elsewhere in our ecosystem. Here, we must rely on our conceptual understandings because we cannot always depend upon direct experiences to enable us to be concerned about environmental and social justice around the world. Conceptual understandings – rendered, for example, in poetry – can

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had become a centralised and urban movement, and 'Back to Nature' was already seen as an anachronism. However, Thomas demonstrates its influences throughout his poetry and prose, such as in the section of *The South Country* referred to earlier in this chapter (1909: 130-33). Thomas anticipated an 'ecocritical' version of Back to Nature with his emphases on scientific learning and social meanings.

provide the pragmatic tools to turn our concern into collective action.

And yet a poetry of wayfaring can reveal our intertwinement with 'others' within an ecosystem. Using référance we can indicate our language's inability to deal with experiences of immanence within the ecosystem – of processes that we can only begin to understand. Through a culturally-freighted language, we can begin to challenge dominant systems of valuation, by demonstrating our pleasure in perceptual experiences and use of skills. We can begin to challenge dominant cultural connotations of 'home' as a fixed dwelling place, in favour of the multiple places that offer feelings of sensual immediacy and coexistence with other organisms. We may begin to understand our own inner wildness or otherness, and develop awe at nature's creative and destructive impact on our own inner ecology. We do not need to leave the confines of a home place to be extra-vagant in this way. Perhaps the greatest humility we can register towards nature is the ecstatic response to our own bodily and psychic limits, which we may also struggle to convey in language. This idea is explored more fully in my concluding chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: HOME AND EXTRA-VAGANCE IN ECOCRITICISM

Introduction

Ted Hughes famously characterised Edward Thomas as 'the father of us all' in his reading for a memorial service at Westminster Abbey in 1985. The 2014 Ledbury poetry festival offered three Thomas-linked events; there have recently been a play and a novel on Edward Thomas; and there is talk of a feature film.[100] There are now six major biographies of Thomas, and one more to be published in autumn 2014.[101] Wilfred Owen has just two. Yet of academic studies, so far we have only a handful.[102] Thomas is thought of as a 'poets' poet', as revealed by statements by foremost poets Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and Geoffrey Hill (the former two also applauding Frost). He has only recently been recognised as a popular poet – but does this popularity depend on a version of Thomas to the taste of those 'villa dwellers' and nostalgic urban citizens who Thomas himself was so critical of? And how do we explain Thomas's popularity with poets?

Robert Frost's critical reputation has been damaged by Lawrance Thompson's damning biographies (Thompson: 1967 and 1970), while his role as popular poet has continued. But now there is renewed enthusiasm: with recent publication of Frost's letters, which begin to tackle Thompson's image of Frost as a dangerous villain. There is consequently an absence of contemporary academic readings of Frost, including accounts that draw on developments in ecocriticism. Ecocriticism itself has focused either on Romantic poetry or avant-garde poetic forms, rather than establishing connections with other forms. Unsurprisingly, Frost studies (by American academics) have remained traditional in their emphases on Frost's individuality; there is little to suggest the influence of Thomas's reviewing on Frost's career, or Frost's continued response to Thomas's poetry after Thomas's death (Longley 2014:1-15). It is seldom considered that Frost followed Thomas in his return to writing lyrics. If artists are 'antennae' of the race as

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[100]The talks at Ledbury are two readings of 'And you, Helen', by actress Juliet Stevenson of a poem written in memory of Helen Thomas by Deryn Rees-Jones; and a reading of Thomas's poems at Oldfields, where Thomas stayed in 1914. The novel is *A Conscious Englishman*, by Margaret Keeping (2013); the play is *Dark Earth and Light Sky* by Nick Dear; and the film is mentioned by Edna Longley in her most recent article on Thomas (2014). Some of the attention is due to the anniversary of the war. Matthew Hollis's biography, which focuses on 'the gamekeeper incident' (see Chapter One), received the 2011 H.W. Fisher Best First Biography Prize as well as the 2011 Costa Book Award for 'Best Biography'. Prominent writer and academic Robert Macfarlane's 2012*The Old Ways* also brought Thomas to attention through his focus on Thomas's travel writing and war diaries.

[101]Jean Moorcroft Wilson's *From Adlestrop to Arras* is due to be released September 2014.

[102]These include those by Robert P. Eckert (1937); Harry Coombes (1973); John Moore (1987); Stan Smith (1986); Andrew Motion ([1980]1991);and Matthew Hollis (2011).

Ezra Pound contended in 1967, perhaps only poets are able to appreciate just how prescient Thomas and Frost were of present attitudes.

An overview of existing criticism of Edward Thomas's and Robert Frost's poetry shows significant gaps. The readings– with notable exceptions by Robert Bernard Hass (of Frost), Terry Gifford and Stan Smith (of Thomas) – are narrow in terms of understanding the influences that Thomas and Frost themselves declare, and they tend towards treating as separate what are in reality overlapping traditions in British and American poetry. These readings essentialise the nature and places that are the subjects of the poetry, lead to an assumption that local places are microcosms of national ideals, and produce a diminished understanding of non-human nature as a creative source. Their emphasis is problematic aesthetically, ecologically and ethically, particularly given the continued popular responses to Frost in the US, and the new popular interest in Thomas in the UK.

As we have seen, both poets have received little attention to their critical sophistication, particularly as regards their philosophical inspiration. Trends in literary criticism were prejudicial to a fair judgement of their poetic merits: they were clearly not High Modernists; they were not particularly amenable to deconstruction because of the apparent simplicity of their poetry; they were in many ways opposed to the centralising tendencies of Marxist criticism. However, thanks to popularity among poets and the reading public, both poets are undergoing a critical revival.[103] Thomas and Frost may translate for us ideas in environmentalism that remain at the edge of our awareness and that are overcome by our regimented thinking. Because the ecological implications of their poetry are not explicitly stated there is the danger that these ideas will be ignored or misunderstood.

Further research was thus imperative with regard to Frost and Thomas scholarship. My study reveals, in particular, that the subjects of nature and place were underexplored in existing criticism. While Robert Hass's helpful guide explores the impact of Frost's avid reading of contemporary science and philosophy, he does not explicitly address Frost's evocations of non-human nature in particular places. While Terry Gifford highlights Thomas's historical consciousness and possible ecocentrism, he does not explicitly discuss him as a green or post-pastoral poet or consider Thomas's formal innovations. Stan Smith focuses on Thomas as representative of challenges to liberal progressivism and problematizes the idea of Thomas as a conventional patriot, but does not address the prescience of Thomas's thinking on ecological inhabitation.

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[103]See Plunkett 2014; Edna Longley 2014; Scuessler 2014.

The perspective of ecocriticism provides the tools to analyse an author's presentation of non-human nature. It reveals that the critic needs to be simultaneously aware of the historical construction of our use of the term 'nature' and the reality behind human designations (Coupe 2000: 2-3). Given that the first-wave of ecocriticism focused mainly on American representations of supposedly 'pristine wilderness', a second wave has responded by emphasising the interconnectedness of culture and nature: by noting the way 'nature' is culturally determined; by showing the way particular cultural constructions of nature may be used to validate human or animal exploitation; and by noting that there is no longer any nature untouched by human activity. Finally, the second wave considers how a focus on 'pristine' wilderness can divert attention from ordinary places and the people who depend on them. Both Thomas and Frost offer us journeys into liminal spaces beyond the edge of town and into the working countryside.

Ecocriticism has also tended to focus on ecopoetry rather than nature poetry, in part because of the criticism of nature poetry for its naive descriptive content, and because of ecopoetry's recognition of the interpenetration of human and non-human nature. But is nature poetry 'merely descriptive', or can it also be 'interpretative', as Edward Thomas himself suggested (see Chapter One)? Can nature poetry also demonstrate recognition of the interpenetration of nature and culture (without reducing one to the other)? In what cases should we distinguish nature poetry from ecopoetry, and can Thomas and Frost help us to do this, given that they wrote before the modern environmental movement existed?

Ecocriticism that focuses on ecopoetry has tended to draw on Heideggerian phenomenology as a tool with which to analyse how we can articulate our feelings of being at home on the earth. This has overshadowed other philosophies that oppose Cartesian bifurcation of the mental and material, including those that have influenced contemporary approaches in cultural geography. While we may wish to indicate how poetry can oppose our 'enframing' the biosphere, the emergence of psychology at the beginning of the twentieth century offers an alternative basis for poetic presentations of dwelling. This writing suggests how poetry might convey our urges to fixity and flux – to home and extra-vagance – through the concept of wayfaring. Ecocriticism has as yet failed to historicise its theoretical sources. In failing to contextualise its own premises ecocriticism can actually obscure what is unique about the texts it supposedly addresses, such as their cultural connections and positions in space and time.

We have seen that both Thomas and Frost were deeply influenced in theme and aesthetics by their readings of British and American Romanticism – specifically Wordsworth and Thoreau – and by European and American philosophy. This is the first study that fully expounds those

common links between the two poets. We can also begin to explore the dialogue that exists between Frost's earlier poetry and Thomas's writing. While this is invoked by Edna Longley, there is no current work in this area (2014: 233-234). Further, against those Frost critics such as Parini or Richardson who identify Thomas as but a minor figure in Frost's career, we can begin to re-evaluate the role that Thomas had in developing Frost's reputation in both Britain and America. As Longley indicates, Thomas is mentioned in just two of the forty chapters of Mark Richardson's 2014 anthology *Robert Frost in Context* (2014: 233). Again, while the contribution of Thomas to Frost's reputation has also been identified by Edna Longley, there are no full-length works that do justice to this claim (2014: 234-235).

The impact of Frost's friendship with Frank Flint demonstrates an under-explored dimension of Frost's time in England. In arranging for Frank Flint to meet Edward Thomas, Frost sought an informal transatlantic association that opposed the 'International' Pound and the English Georgians. This idea is missing from existing critical accounts of Frost's time in England, Walsh's *Into My Own: The English Years of Robert Frost* (first published in1988) and Lesley Lee Francis's *Robert Frost: An Adventure in Poetry, 1900-1918* (first published in 1991). While many British critics have discussed Frost's influence on Thomas in terms of 'the sound of sense', I argue that the impact of this friendship ran deeper. The association offered Thomas a whole new way of looking at our mental states and how we communicate them in language, a perspective gained from Frost's interests in William James and Hulme's translation of Henri Bergson. This supplemented Thomas's pre-existing awareness of the 'bodily' nature of poetic rhythm, and for recognisable speech sounds that could serve as a basis for rendering the subjective dimensions of experience. My findings came from exploring particular literary exchanges rather than attributing over-arching descriptions such as 'traditional' or 'international'.

The second finding for literary criticism is the benefit of making careful critical use of the terms 'nation' and 'home'. We can distinguish between the social, political and personal meanings of nation. This shows how we can find in Thomas a personal meaning of England that overlaps uncomfortably with what he took to be popular and political meanings of England, patriotism and Britain. It enables us to see how for Thomas home could simultaneously be somewhere he visited only once ('I never saw that land before'); somewhere threatened by the war ('The sun used to shine'); a patch that he re-discovered with new eyes ('Home ("Often I had gone")' or missed for its physical absence ('"Home" ("Fair was the morning")'), and a land that has never existed ('Home ("Not the end")'). He tentatively suggested that renewing our understanding of 'home' to accommodate altered circumstances could serve as a basis of

national belonging. In Frost scholarship, a nuanced understanding of his use of 'home' enables us to see how Frost developed a greater attachment to the particular region that served as the basis of *North of Boston* only after he had written about it. The subjective meanings of local, national and regional belonging altered according to his circumstances. During and shortly after his stay in England he revealed the influence of impulses to fixity and flux in 'The Oven Bird' (1916), 'The Sound of the Trees' (1914), and 'Good Hours' (1915).[104] Even before this time, in *A Boy's Will*, *North of Boston* and *Mountain Interval* he prefigured Ingold's idea of 'wayfaring' in his poetry about walking, skills, writing and home.

Finally, by extending our readings to transatlantic influences we can understand new dimensions in nature poetry that have formerly been overlooked. With reference to W.J. Keith's writing on Thomas, Frost and other writers in the Romantic tradition we see how nature poetry can explore the impact of nature on the human mind. This variety of nature poetry can be used to highlight an ecocentric perspective, as well as our entanglement in the weather-world, through human–nature poetry, in poems of wayfaring, 'extra-vagance' and 'référance'. I have explained how these modes of nature poetry as practised by Frost and Thomas gained their impulse from Bergson's theorising about the human mind when they experimented with rhythm and reference. In this way, they were able to make nature poetry compatible with the idea that we cannot directly refer to a representational reality.

This work also shows the help we may find by extending our disciplinary horizons, to encompass ideas from cultural geography and anthropology – for example, from Doreen Massey (see Chapter Two). In line with second-wave ecocriticism, these conceptions of place emphasise the dynamics of ecosystems, the usefulness of the Heideggerian concept of 'enframing' as a critique of modernity, and the ecological importance of finding an alternative to the 'building' perspective (see Chapter Two). I have discussed how the idea of dwelling can be clarified to avoid the need for invoking a timeless space outside of history. If we change our understanding of how dwelling relates to ecopoetry, we can see how such poetry may reveal Ingold's perspective of 'inhabitation'. This renewed definition of ecopoetry can apply to poetry that addresses both wayfaring and inhabitation (which is the human version of wayfaring).

My reading of T.E. Hulme's Bergsonian aesthetics suggests how Thomas and Frost were exposed to other thinkers who were also concerned about the difficulty of conveying the impact of nature or place on the mind through concepts alone. To understand the importance of this exposure requires an understanding of the broader philosophical context of the poets'

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[104]Sent to Sidney Cox in July 1915, see Hoffman 2001: 69.

writing – specifically developments in process philosophy and pragmatism that paved the way to renewed interest in the relationships between matter and mind. This context also offered the chance for writers and artists to think about their attachments to individual places. Doreen Massey's and Timothy Ingold's writings – both inspired by readings of Henri Bergson – help us to understand the poets' dialectical ideas of home and extra-vagance and what these ideas offer to contemporary social and environmental thinking. The poets' ideas of home and extra-vagance underline a political dimension of the poetry that has been hitherto underexplored and demonstrate how the poetic rendering of a subject's experience of space can oppose hegemonic narratives of progress. By following a process in space-time we understand that not all places benefit equally from industrial progress or urbanisation. To oppose the notion of space as a static backdrop to human plans and intentions, we must understand the heterogeneity of places and their diverse human and non-human inhabitants through space-time.

While evincing a sensual and perceptual immersion in particular places, both Thomas and Frost conveyed the idea that their experiences might be symbols of larger processes. The poets indicated that particular cultural conditions engender our responses to particular places, in ways that are more or less ecological (Chapter Four). The idea – implied in certain notions of ecopoetics – that literature could ever escape such enframings seems paradoxical. While we understand that immersion in non-human nature can sustain us on a subjective level, it is through a common language and cultural apparatus that we can generate intersubjective concern, and this is where we might benefit from shared symbolic meanings. Language, such as we noted from Hochman, offers a 'temporary and strategic' fixity that enables action (2000: 190). While we may be interested in multiplicity and entanglements, fixed conceptual categories 'ensure that plants and animals are granted separateness, independence and liberation (an apartness distinct from excusing and advocating separation because of superiority)' (Hochman 2000: 192).

Thomas and Frost prefigured contemporary ideas on the social construction of terms such as home, and suggested how we might question the ecocentrism of our own meanings. Another way in which the poets challenged their cultural enframings was through their use of dialogue and monologue forms which questioned the authority of a single speaker. As Edna Longley's 'ecohistorical perspective' suggests, moving between historical scales may alert us to alternative ethical approaches (see Chapter Four). In this chapter, I explore the insights that may be gained through alternative contemporaneous perspectives. The difficulty of escaping our own cultural perspectives does not mean that we cannot relate to a world beyond them.

My most important findings for the practice of ecocriticism include the fact that

Thomas and Frost observed the interconnections of local specificities and global dynamics. We have seen how language can be used to suggest its own limitations in doing justice to our experiences of non-human nature. Similarly, language can suggest the limits of its own ability to do justice to the human connections that we respond to in a particular place or through wayfaring. While ecocritics emphasise the dangers of images of rootedness, my readings of Thomas and Frost acknowledge the ethical and practical necessity of direct experiences of non-human nature and place.

In the following sections, I further elucidate two dimensions of my studies – the benefit of transatlantic perspectives on Thomas and Frost, and the importance of transatlantic perspectives in ecocriticism. The former aspect includes the unique perspectives on 'otherness' – both human and non-human – that we find in both poets' work. The dominance of particular constructions of nation and region reveals alternative relational modes of otherness. I discuss these in terms of Thomas's and Frost's responses to the otherness of human and non-human nature. Finally, I suggest the ways in which Thomas's and Frost's transatlantic perspectives are illuminated by Martiniquan writer Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation. In doing so, I highlight how any ecopoetic or post-pastoral literature should show humility towards the innumerable cultural and ecological connections between places. In this way, I conclude by discussing the implications of my study on Thomas and Frost for ecocriticism.

Transatlantic perspectives on Edward Thomas and Robert Frost

The transatlantic perspective allows us to understand the European philosophical and literary influences on Frost, and the Transcendentalist and Pragmatist influence on Thomas via Frost. It also permits us to draw upon other critical traditions, including the politicised American version of pastoral from Leo Marx onwards. Finally, it allows us to understand the innovative dimensions in the two poets' renderings of nature and place. In this theorisation, local places are understood as constituted by a subject's perception of their relations with what lies beyond – including across the globe (or in these two poets' case, across the Atlantic). In common with post-colonial ecocriticism, the transatlantic perspective permits us to map the influences of international networks of power on particular places, and the ways in which this affects human and non-human nature. A widening ecocritical perspective should also extend temporally – to consider the co-evolution of the human and non-human in time. This global perspective also allows us to broaden our ethical outlook, and to look for particular aesthetic innovations.

Specifically, a transatlantic perspective allows us to consider our understanding of the otherness of nature and human nature from the perspective of international networks of power.

While Frost and Thomas wrote about places at the centre of colonial networks, they mapped neo-colonial market forces that operated even within the colonial centre. By aligning themselves with colonial, human and non-human others – including those from other historical cultures – and noting the value of their perspectives, Thomas and Frost were able to illuminate alternative sources of value to market forces and capitalism. I suggest that Thomas and Frost provided a concept of 'non-hierarchical otherness' that stems from their encounters with these individuals.

A global perspective suggests particular aesthetic innovations. A poet's awareness of the spatial and temporal dimensions of a place requires a sense of vast interconnections that are often unconceptualisable. While the previous chapters explored how Thomas's and Frost's poetry conveyed the interconnectedness of individuals within a particular place and time, here I consider the ways in which their poetry treated connections that occurred between cultures, including through time. Édouard Glissant's concepts of Relation and totality offer us tools for the analysis of the poets' aesthetic innovations. Relation is Glissant's idea of a metaphysical force of a movement inherent in individuals that aims at hybridization. It is produced at the moment that an individual recognises both the difference and the validity of the perspective of the 'other' (Glissant 1997). Relation cannot be described analytically but only hinted at poetically. The totality-world is Glissant's idea of the non-reductive totality of the world that is produced through multiple strands of relation that include the dynamics of language, economy, and ecology all at once. It is only through an 'aesthetics of disruption and intrusion' that we can hint at this totality (151).

Frost and Thomas did not address all of the cultural relations in which the places they wrote about were enmeshed. For instance, Frost did not consider his own financial dependence on those working in the Arlington cotton mills, and scarcely addressed international migration into New England. Thomas infrequently addressed the lives of those who left the South Country for cities, and never mentioned those who went to the New World (including his relatives), nor those Commonwealth citizens fighting for the Entente powers in the trenches, nor the international labour corps. Through their poetry of référance the poets demonstrated an ecocentric attitude, and yet they lacked an awareness of other cultural perspectives. However, we have seen the ways in which extra-vagance and wayfaring allowed them to hint at the non-reductive totality-world.

Rather than positing a 'global environmental literature', independent of networks of power, I have attempted to show how the two writers sometimes dealt with local specificities while embracing certain cultural interdependence. In this way, their theorising is prescient of Glissant's post-colonial criticism in its emphases on the need simultaneously to comprehend

totality – the unconceptualisable global meshwork – and understand specificity and difference. In falling short, they show the difficulty of attaining this.

As Frost took issue with what he thought of as the 'harmonised' vowel sounds of late-Victorian poetry, Thomas was keen to avoid the aestheticism – the interest in beauty, the heightened tone and abstractions – that had characterised his early prose writing. For Thomas, this was a matter of returning vigour to poetry, rather than an overtly nationalist project. In Thomas's response to Frost's *North of Boston*, he praised the use of colloquial speech, linking it to Wordsworth's project. In Chapter Three, I argued that Thomas reacted against aestheticism in his aim provide a poetry that speaks of, and for, the ordinary man. In Thomas's careful attention to the language of belonging, he opposed an imperialistic attitude towards non-human nature. In his discussions of non-human nature, he subverted the idea of empire to talk of a 'commonwealth' of all beings (see Chapter One, above).

I have argued that Thomas and Frost challenged the commercialisation of British and American culture. This can be traced in their poetry of wayfaring, which values encounter (with human or non-human others) over any object of cultural or economic value. Further, wayfaring challenges the rigid demarcation of places according to geopolitical borders, and overturns the idea of places as either centres of powers or peripheries. This establishes a global dimension to their writing about place. In their shared interests in ideas of home between 1912 and 1917, Thomas and Frost described its fleeting, transitory nature. I have argued that this interest in home came about through a shared history of dislocation and homelessness that affected both writers, and which was characteristic of the industrial period for many individuals. While both poets have been accused of failing to deal with the challenges of modern life, their interest in alternative meanings of home signalled their response to a particularly modern challenge. Linking their experiences of dislocation to others who were displaced or devalued by the Industrial Revolution, including other species, demonstrated both a social and a proto-ecological awareness. I have traced this to Thomas's encounter with Frost's Thoreauvian extra-vagance – the adventure into the unknown within the home region – that inspired many of Thomas's poems.

However, while 'home' may be at least in part culturally and subjectively determined, the poets revealed that the urge to movement or extra-vagance is common to both human and non-human nature. While 'home' – as a historicised, permanent dwelling place – may be disrupted by forces both within and outside us, we can adjust our understandings to encompass the fluxes of human and non-human nature. As for 'Extra-vagance', Thoreau advised us, 'it all depends how you are yarded'. Thomas and Frost show us that our 'yarding' can include the

constructs of language, which must become more extra-vagant to address our conditions. The poets' interest in our urges both to be extra-vagant and to find a home can be traced to sources on both sides of the Atlantic. Thomas suggested to Frost that home can consist in a temporary feeling of accommodation with human and non-human nature and perhaps this came from Thomas's readings of Traherne and Wordsworth, from whom he learned about our interdependence with the world. Drawing on Jamesian and Bergsonian psychology as well as Thoreau, Frost explored the extra-vagances of nature and the human mind.

This discussion demonstrates the importance of addressing Thomas's and Frost's transatlantic cultural connections. Ecocriticism may also embrace the ways in which Thomas and Frost traced historical transformations within a culture. One aspect of a culture is how much or how little is valued as a worthy ethical subject. One of Terry Gifford's criteria for the post-pastoral suggests that a hierarchical sense of otherness promotes the exploitation of both 'non-human nature' and women or minority groups (2012: 26). What we currently regard as 'other' can be re-cast in favour of a poetry of connectedness or relation. As I explored in Chapter Three, Thomas's and Frost's uses of the dramatic dialogue and monologue forms provided an aesthetic innovation that affects our ethical response to non-human nature. By including the perspectives of these 'others', their work suggests an alternative valuation of non-human nature. By suggesting connections, rather than simply opposing hegemonic discourses, we can open new cultural paths.

Towards a poetry of relation: Edward Thomas

In 'Up in the Wind', the subject's marginal economic status can be compared to the impact of productivism on the land and ecosystem: what is produced is a monoculture in both senses. Thus the oppression of non-human others for the sake of profit is concurrent with human exploitation, and the loss of common-pool resources for the poor. The stone-curlew's habitat has been diminished in an attempt to drive up agricultural productivity:

> and there's a spirit of wildness
> Much older, crying when the stone-curlew yodels
> His sea and mountain cry, high up in Spring.
> He nests in fields where still the gorse is free as
> When all was open and common. Common 'tis named
> And calls itself, because the bracken and gorse
> Still hold the hedge where plough and scythe have chased them.

Glissant urges poets to seek innumerable connections, to vanished cultures, to non-human nature and to a dominant culture. Yet there are parallel difficulties to be found in 'translating'

pre-colonial culture and non-human nature. We can easily resort to primitivism and a yearning for sacred roots.

Thomas attempts to find a connection to the land through traces of a pre-colonialist age. In 'The Combe' Thomas looks to the badger as a symbol of an ancient England. Talk of an ancient Briton and the Celtic reference of the title of the poem evoke a pre-Saxon and Celtic-speaking land of what is now England, Wales and Southern Scotland. This reminds us of the 'imaginable England' Thomas describes in *The Country*. (A combe is 'a valley or hollow on the side of a hill', or a short valley running up from the coast; this originates in the old English *cumb*, deriving from Celtic):[105]

> The Combe was ever dark, ancient and dark.
> Its mouth is stopped with brambles, thorn, and briar;
> And no one scrambles over the sliding chalk
> By beech and yew and perishing juniper
> Down the half precipices of its sides, with roots
> And rabbit holes for steps. The sun of Winter,
> The moon of Summer, and all the singing birds
> Except the missel-thrush that loves juniper,
> Are quite shut out. But far more ancient and dark
> The Combe looks since they killed the badger there,
> Dug him out and gave him to the hounds,
> That most ancient Briton of English beasts.

Combes are a feature of the chalk landscape of the South Downs, the terrain of much of Thomas's poetry. The vegetation referred to is both the 'climax' trees of yew and beech, and the more recent succession of brambles, thorn and briar, which suggests that once the combe had been open to human access (possibly for chalk extraction). But the combes pre-date human settlement, and are features of 'the scarp slope which were formed by spring sapping and stream erosion probably during and immediately after glaciation when the chalk was impermeable as a result of permafrost' (LUC 2005: np). Thomas observed that the traditional practice of badger baiting with dogs, which had been illegal since the late 19th century, was a practice that still continued.

Thus Thomas evoked four time periods in this poem: the formation of the combes in geological history; the development of badger and then human populations, and the contemporary death of a badger. Edna Longley, in her notes to this poem, suggests that the

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[105] *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, edited by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, 9th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999).

badger's death demonstrated a recent de-stabilisation in our balance with nature and invoked the savagery of war. Further, she suggests this reference to ancient Britons may be 'a rebuke to imperial "Britain"' (2008: 171). Thomas linked the colonising impulse of contemporary Britain to its attitudes to other species.

Thomas's awareness of the layers of history – back to the Neolithic period – is also present in 'The Brook':

> Seated once by a brook, watching a child
> Chiefly that paddled, I was thus beguiled.
> Mellow the blackbird sang and sharp the thrush
> Not far off in the oak and hazel brush,
> Unseen. There was a scent like honeycomb
> From mugwort dull. And down upon the dome
> Of the stone the cart-horse kicks against so oft
> A butterfly alighted. From aloft
> He took the heat of the sun, and from below.
> On the hot stone he perched contented so,
> As if never a cart would pass again
> That way; as if I were the last of men
> And he the first of insects to have earth
> And sun together and to know their worth.
> I was divided between him and the gleam,
> The motion, and the voices, of the stream,
> The waters running frizzled over gravel,
> That never vanish and for ever travel.
> A grey flycatcher silent on a fence
> And I sat as if we had been there since
> The horseman and the horse lying beneath
> The fir-tree-covered barrow on the heath,
> The horseman and the horse with silver shoes,
> Galloped the downs last. All that I could lose
> I lost. And then the child's voice raised the dead.
> 'No one's been here before' was what she said
> And what I felt, yet never should have found
> A word for, while I gathered sight and sound.

The speaker invokes the concurrence of self, child, blackbird, thrush, butterfly, bird and buried horseman, and de-familiarises our experiences of each. The child and stream 'beguile' the speaker into a mystical or ecstatic state, which is enhanced through a rich sensory experience of scent of mugwort (a plant used in folk medicine), birdsong, the sounds of the brook and the sight of a butterfly. The 'unseen' birds emphasise Thomas's reaching out into his habitat – an act of ecstasy. The butterfly is anthropomorphically described as feeling 'contented' by the sun. The speaker is divided in his attention to the butterfly that suns itself on a stone and the water, the latter of which is speaking in 'voices'. Awareness of the sights and sounds of this place draws

out an association with the buried man, and the speaker imagines himself as both able to envisage a future without men and to be able to return to the pre-historic period. If the speaker is able to connect with the past or the future, it is only through non-human nature and the buried man. This suggests a kind of redemptive 'therioprimitivism' (where thērio, means 'wild animal' or beast in Greek and 'primitivism' is the artistic celebration of all that is not civilised).[106].

Freud thought of primitivism as a return of the repressed animalistic impulse in the case notes of the 'Wolf-man' (in Armstrong 2008: 142). The psychoanalyst linked animalistic impulses to the unconscious during the early stages of both individual and societal development towards 'civilisation'.[107] Freud described one patient's memory of a childhood dream of white wolves as a case of 'instinctive' knowledge of animals, whereby the child exhibits a 'hardly definable knowledge, something, as it were preparatory to an understanding' (in Armstrong 2008: 143).[108] In Thomas's poem, this might explain the child's utterance that 'no one's been here before', if we interpret the words as a demonstration of an instinctual proximity to wild nature and the primitive that the speaker somehow cannot express. Armstrong explains that for Freud, as for many interpreters of Darwinian evolution, the animal awareness is to be overcome for the sake of civilised values that enable society to function in an ordered way.

Another strand of thought would link Thomas's speaker's awareness of the scene to artists who valued the wild and the primitive as sources of the energy that was of value to modernity itself. This was embodied in Wyndham Lewis's second Vorticist manifesto, which stated that 'The Art-Instinct is Permanently Primitive' (in Armstrong 2008: 143).[109] A positive therioprimitivism may be one reason why Thomas evoked an experience of primitive man in a wild setting. Thomas's unusual stance, however, was to also suggest that the water also had a voice, and water that would 'never vanish and for ever travel.' The movement of the brook is suggestive of Bergson's 'flux' of sensory awareness, and the artist's diving down into it to glean creative impulse. The challenges of interpreting the scene recorded Thomas's struggle to dig into the landscape for meanings that transcended contemporary discourses on progress.

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[106] My use of the term 'therioprimitivism' stems from Greg Garrard's usage in *Ecocriticism*, where he posits its predication of the superior otherness of the animal (2012: 154). His use of the term originates in Philp Armstrong's writing on animals in the fiction of modernity. Armstrong argues that D.H. Lawrence offered a 'redemptive therioprimitivism' which is where '[a]nimality, at its most wild and untamed, was not the enemy of humanity but its possible, perhaps only, salvation' (2008: 143).

[107] Armstrong refers to Freud's 1915 *Totem and Taboo*, reproduced in *Sigmund Freud: The Origins of Religion* (London: Penguin, 1985) 148; 185-86.

[108] Armstrong quotes from Freud's *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918).

[109] Armstrong quotes from Wyndham Lewis's 'Manifesto-II' in *Blast!* 1 (1914) 33.

In 'Aspens', Thomas heard in the sounds of the aspens' leaves a plethora of meanings: talk of recent human history, including the weather, the ghosts of the smithy, inn and shop, and a future situation where humans were no longer present:

> All day and night, save winter, every weather,
> Above the inn, the smithy and the shop,
> The aspens at the cross-roads talk together
> Of rain, until their last leaves fall from the top.
>
>
> Out of the blacksmith's cavern comes the ringing
> Of hammer, shoe and anvil; out of the inn
> The clink, the hum, the roar, the random singing –
> The sounds that for these fifty years have been.
>
> The whisper of the aspens is not drowned,
> And over lightless pane and footless road,
> Empty as sky, with every other sound
> No ceasing, calls their ghosts from their abode,
>
> A silent smithy, a silent inn, nor fails
> In the bare moonlight or the thick-furred gloom,
> In the tempest or the night of nightingales,
> To turn the cross-roads to a ghostly room.
>
> And it would be the same were no house near.
> Over all sorts of weather, men, and times,
> Aspens must shake their leaves and men may hear
> But need not listen, more than to my rhymes.
>
> Whatever wind blows, while they and I have leaves
> We cannot other than an aspen be
> That ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves,
> Or so men think who like a different tree.

The aspen leaves' sounds suggest the communicative rhythms that I described in Chapter Three. While the trees are partly anthropomorphised with the attribution of speech, they also demonstrate an eco-historical perspective whereby the human may disappear from the landscape. In 'The Mill-Water', the sound of the gushing water is also suggestive of the communicative rhythms of Bergson's 'flux': 'All thoughts begin or end upon this sound'.

In 'The Mill-Water'–

> Only the sound remains
> Of the old mill;
> Gone is the wheel;

On the prone roof and walls the nettle reigns.

Water that toils no more
Dangles white locks
And, falling, mocks
The music of the mill-wheel's busy roar.

Pretty to see, by day
Its sound is naught
Compared with thought
And talk and noise of labour and of play.

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

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

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

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

Only the idle foam
Of water falling
Changelessly calling,
Where once men had a work-place and a home.

Unlike the aspens' variable talk, the mill water's message is 'changeless'. As it has 'haunted' grief or 'concluded' delight, its call appears to hint at the inevitable end of all human life. In both 'Aspens' and 'The Mill-Water' Thomas showed that his search for 'innumerable connections' led to an awareness of the eventual end of poetry itself. Bergson's 'flux' is both creative and destructive.

Towards a poetry of relation: Robert Frost

Robert Frost's 'The Self-Seeker' describes the plight of a mill-worker whose feet have been mutilated in an industrial accident. Frost suggested a parallel between the lack of appreciation for rare orchids and the low value that was placed on a mill-worker's physical integrity, within

the productivist system. Responding to his friend, the worker sums up his inability now to record the flowers as the loss of

>   all the flowers
> Of every kind everywhere in this region
> For the next forty summers – call it forty.
> But I'm not selling those, I'm giving them,
> They never earned me so much as one cent:
> Money can't pay me for the loss of them.

The mill-worker is not fully compensated for his loss of income, or his inability to pursue his passion to collect flowers. Wild nature's 'otherness' to the economic system parallels the mill-worker's marginal status in national systems of power and value. The progressivist system makes such labourers replaceable ('Everything goes the same without me there'), and its centralising tendencies have no value for the embodied knowledge of the worker. And in talking of the loss of 'blessed feet', the poet may have been alluding to his own fear of losing his creativity under the influence of market forces.

Frost's speaker in 'The Self-Seeker' believes that orchids have a value that transcends human economic exchanges. Elsewhere, Frost's poet-speakers suggest the poet's intrinsic valuation of nature and alignment with non-human 'others'. In 'The Line-Gang', Frost's speaker asserts opposition to industrialism as it was exhibited by the labour of a group of construction workers. They are installing masts for a telephone line and

> They throw a forest down less cut than broken.
> They plant dead trees for living, and the dead
> They string together with a living thread.

Whereas in 'Christmas Trees' Frost's speaker refuses the city man's valuation of his plantation of Christmas trees but still sees them in market terms, here Frost made explicit his antagonism towards those who 'set the wild at naught', and this attitude suggested an intrinsic value for non-human nature.

Robert Frost searched for the traces of historical occupations of the landscape from which to generate poetic images. In 'Ghost House', from his first collection (See Chapter Two, above), the speaker finds a house that is nothing but 'cellar walls' and a 'cellar'. The poem goes on to romanticise the ghostly yet 'sweet companions' that once inhabited this place. There is a romance of ruins in the 'vanished abode there far apart / On that disused and forgotten road'. The poem's speaker demonstrates nostalgia towards the earlier colonisers of the region in a compelling personal voice, but ignores the colonial legacy of violence to indigenous

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populations: this attempt to read the landscape demonstrates a yearning for sacred roots. In this way, Frost transferred European Romanticism directly to a New England landscape.

Frost asserted his concern to turn European values on their head in 'Pan with Us'. Here, the poet re-animated a European pagan myth in the New England hills. Yet unlike the European Pan, this God remained unworshipped since 'homespun children with clicking pails' 'see so little' and lack an imaginative engagement with the landscape. Frost's Pan is able to find 'music' in the blue jay's screech / And the whimper of hawks beside the sun'. However, Pan's creativity is foiled as his 'pipes of pagan mirth' are unable to animate the landscape of 'juniper' and 'fragile bluets' in a place that has 'new terms of worth'.

While 'Pan with Us' evoked a natural mysticism, 'The Generations of Men' and 'The Black Cottage' suggested the need to find alternative terms of worth in the region's history. In 'The Generations of Men', Frost satirises the search for a sense of connection through familial origins in the New England landscape. A Governor of New Hampshire has suggested that inhabitants should return to the home place of their colonial ancestors on a particular day of the year. The Stark family propose to meet in a town called Bow:

> They were at Bow, but that was not enough:
> Nothing would do but they must fix a day
> To stand together on the crater's verge
> That turned them on the world, and try to fathom
> The past and get some strangeness out of it.

Two unacquainted young Starks meet at the site of an ancestor's residence, which is now just an 'old cellar hole in a by-road'. They playfully try to connect to the long-deceased Starks, by exploring the cellar hole and its surroundings. The male Stark suggests 'I wanted to try something with the noise / That the brook raises in the empty valley.' After attempting to re-animate the voice of the girl's ancestor from the sound of the brook, the boy abandons the séance. Like Thomas's brook, this stream's voice is difficult to discern. Instead, the boy concludes that the current generation should look to ethical knowledge that earlier times have generated:

> But don't you think we sometimes make too much
> Of the old stock? What counts is the ideals,
> And those will bear some keeping still about.

The poem's speakers conclude that these formerly-held ideals are superior to any feeling for ancestral kinship. As previously observed (Chapter Two) 'The Black Cottage' also

considers the possibility that long-held regional values might serve for future generations, 'the truths we keep coming back and back to' (see also Chapter Two).

The 'otherness' discerned in poetic encounters is sometimes problematic. Edward Thomas talked of both gypsies and country people in comparison to birds; gypsies were 'as native as the birds' (Smith 2000: 118); and he admired those whose 'skill has come as the swallow's skill' (Williams 1973: 259). As observed in the previous chapter, such traits did not have the hierarchical connotation associated with the social Darwinist perspective that was attributed to Thomas by Raymond Williams (Chapter Four, above). However, Thomas's evocation of 'darkness' in the gypsy's eyes in 'The Gypsy' did suggest a sort of 'Green Orientalism'. In 'The Vanishing Red', Frost's narrative poem about a Native American killed by a miller, the 'Red Man' was zoomorphised by the poet as making a 'guttural exclamation of surprise'. Frost's miller sees this quasi-speech 'as coming / From one who had no right to be heard from'. Thus Frost both engaged with and challenged zoomorphist discourse about pre-colonial 'others'.

These poems provide evidence that Frost and Thomas searched for connections beyond the dominant culture. They discovered traces of vanished cultures, and sought connections to a land which forms 'our taste'. However, neither poet explicitly considered interdependence with contemporary cultures beyond the Atlantic to consider other kinds of relation. Yet their searches for connections for the marginalised others within their cultures suggests how this could have been achieved.[110]

Thomas's and Frost's engagement with non-human others invoked what Len Scigaj calls 'référance'. While for Derrida, our understanding of difference is grounded in relations between linguistic signs, Scigaj asserts the possibility of meanings beyond our conceptual understanding. As I have described, Glissant urges that we attempt to engage with diverse cultural understandings, from both the present and past, to produce a non-hierarchical aesthetics of the earth, of a totality that is unconceptualisable. Scigaj suggests using the limits of language to demonstrate our interdependence with nature. I have extended this to suggest that the rhythmic properties of the poetry contribute to their communication of experiences of 'home'. Thus, both for Scigaj and in my formulation in Chapter Three, in referring their readers' attention to originary experiences that serve as the basis of poetry, both poets were able to

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[110] In 'Swedes', a rare exception, Edward Thomas compared uncovering a pile of over-wintered vegetables to excavating a tomb in the Valley of the Kings. The achievements of the ancient Egyptians are less beautiful to the speaker than the unearthed swedes in winter sun by the corner of a wood. This, however, reveals more about Thomas's views on the atavism of the Edwardian interest in Egyptology than his awareness of Egyptian culture or history.

demonstrate that natural systems are always greater than, and inclusive of, human conceptual meanings. Both Glissant and Scigaj propose an aesthetics of relation, but only Scigaj highlights precisely how the limits of language can contribute to this.

While Scigaj focuses on syntactical features, Thomas and Frost experimented with rhythm in 'March the Third' and 'The Sound of the Trees' to suggest the poets' originary experiences in nature. In Chapter Three, I suggested with reference to 'I never saw that land before' and 'Good Hours' that rhythm can evoke a fleeting feeling of satisfaction, which could be elicited as a sense of being at home. However, in 'March' and 'The Oven Bird' the poet-speakers rely on syntactical effects which are closer to Scigaj's idea of référance.

The other within the human

Serenella Iovino has considered how recent ecocriticism embraces the breadth of human experience and extends third-wave understandings (see Chapter Two):

> Buell's first wave viewed the human by and large as an outsider in nature, whereas the second wave examined the human mostly as a socially constructed category. A third wave ecocriticism which could broaden this perspective should, in my opinion, take a step further in its ethical consideration of the human. (2010: 54)

This perspective should understand the 'otherness' within the human. Iovino defines this as a search to understand the wilderness of the body, the wilderness of the mind and the wilderness of the 'more than human':

> Examining this alien presence within the human is a way for ecocriticism to deconstruct the idea of humanity-qua-normality and to approach a more complex and inclusive type of humanism, a plural, and 'evolved' one. (55)

Iovino sees literature as potentially representing forms of otherness within the human; particularly when it focuses on a sensuous, rather than rational, reality. In a related manner, Louise Westling's contribution to the *Forum on the Literatures of the Environment* emphasises the need to move away from the Cartesian dualism and mechanism that led to a traditional humanist position, and towards a view that understands the importance of 'indeterminacy, contingency, and the interrelated-ness of beings and phenomena' as suggested by quantum physics (1993: 1103). For Westling, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy best articulates this position thought its emphasis on 'our participatory relation with the things we perceive, and the indeterminacy of our apprehension of the world in which we are embedded' (1104).

In the previous chapter, I explained how Timothy Ingold's philosophy of wayfaring suggests our participatory relations with other organisms, and Doreen Massey's philosophy of

place highlights the indeterminacy of our relations with the world. However, rather than suggesting that we are 'embedded' in an external world, following Westling's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty, Ingold highlights our co-constitution with the meshwork. However, conceptual understandings – developed as a necessary resource for human activity and social life – are able to obscure our interdependencies. Iovino's emphasis on the 'wilderness' within the human shows how language can encourage a feeling for an interdependence that is ungraspable but partly understood through relation.

The other within the human: Edward Thomas

Thomas and Frost both highlighted the 'wilderness' of the human (to use Iovino's phase). Thomas's poem 'The Other' is a disturbing account of the poet speaker's fictionalised pursuit of his doppelgänger. Edna Longley notes the origins of this poem in Thomas's psychoanalytic treatment during 1912 with Godwin Baynes, who was interested in Freud and later became a disciple of Jung (2008: 156-162). In particular, Longley traces the idea of the double in this poem to Freudian analysis: this version of the double involves the search for an ideal self that offers a self-critical awareness and incorporates our repressed ambitions (156-57). In this poem the other is an idealised, more appealing version of the self:

> I learnt his road and, ere they were
> Sure I was I, left the dark wood
> Behind, kestrel and woodpecker,
> The inn in the sun, the happy mood
> When first I tasted sunlight there.
> I travelled fast, in hopes I should
> Outrun that other. What to do
> When caught, I planned not. I pursued
> To prove the likeness, and, if true,
> To watch until myself I knew.

Longley also observes how this poem explores links between the poet's depression, non-human nature and his creativity. In particular, Thomas appeared to link melancholy itself to a state where creative 'powers' returned again after the speaker had sought out solitude and communion with nature. The poem is imbued with aspects of his real-life walks in Wiltshire and Sussex: it suggests that Thomas found an ecstatic experience of inhabitation after he abandoned his search for an idealised version of himself:

> And all was earth's, or all was sky's;
> No difference endured between
> The two. A dog barked on a hidden rise;
> A marshbird whistled high unseen;
> The latest waking blackbird's cries

Perished upon the silence keen.
The last light filled a narrow firth
Among the clouds. I stood serene,
And with a solemn quiet mirth,
An old inhabitant of earth.

Once the name I gave to hours
Like this was melancholy, when
It was not happiness and powers
Coming like exiles home again,
And weaknesses quitting their bowers,
Smiled and enjoyed, far off from men,
Moments of everlastingness.
And fortunate my search was then
While what I sought, nevertheless,
That I was seeking, I did not guess.

As Longley indicates, while Thomas was unable to fuse the disparate aspects of his own personality, his experience of non-human nature, the house and the ploughland allowed him to experience a temporary feeling of accommodation. Tracing this experience to Thomas's notebook accounts of Sussex and Wiltshire, Longley expands on the sense that this ecstatic experience is a temporary release from self-estrangement:

> After the disappointments of social intercourse, 'solitude' becomes intrinsic to self-discovery and to the integration projected on harmony with, and within, Nature. 'Naked' implies return to a primal state. The narrator communes with 'hidden' and 'unseen' things. The 'Other' (along with 'difference') vanishes from these stanzas, in which the two merge under the sign of 'one star, one lamp, one peace'. (2008: 160)

While Longley initially suggests that Thomas's psychic integration is merely projected onto non-human nature (which she initially figures as a mystical 'Nature'), she later explains that this ecstatic state is rendered as an experience of the ecosystem:

> 'An old inhabitant of earth' situates the speaker, healingly, not in the contemporary social world […] but in a community defined by an ecological sense of history. (161)

Thomas's integration of 'earth' and 'sky' hints at his awareness of our immersion in what Ingold calls the 'weather-world', and the ways in which we are part of the world in formation. This example shows Thomas's understanding of the porous limits between the human individual and the environment. In poems such as 'October' and 'Beauty', Thomas attempted to define a mood that is beyond categorisation, where happiness and sorrow combine:

> But if this be not happiness, – who knows?
> Some day I shall think this a happy day,
> And this mood by the name of melancholy
> Shall no more blackened and obscured be.

Longley notes that this is an example where 'Thomas adapts Romantic language to mutations within the psyche, and to traffic between the unconscious and the self that "thinks" and names' (259). Perhaps we can go further, to gloss this as Thomas's evocation of the Bergsonian 'intensive manifold'. The emotion (this time drawn out through experience of a landscape) cannot be conceptually labelled but it can be explored using Hulme's concept of the 'rhythms of life at the centre of our minds'. Thus the speaker's experience of 'melancholy' is distorted by associations we may have with the word, and can instead be understood as a peculiar variety of happiness. Thomas's poem 'Beauty' also suggests the ambiguity of the term 'melancholy', and a mental state of sadness that is infused with the possibility of its opposite:

> But, though I am like a river
> At fall of evening when it seems that never
> Has the sun lighted it or warmed it, while
> Cross breezes cut the surface to a file,
> This heart, some fraction of me, happily
> Floats through a window even now to a tree
> Down in the misting, dim-lit, quiet vale

These complex emotional experiences demonstrate the ineffectiveness of language in capturing our mental lives, and thus emphasise the 'wilderness' at the centre of the human.

The other within the human: Robert Frost

In two of Robert Frost's poems the issue of 'madness' is addressed within the context of the limits of language to convey individual experience. In 'A Servant to Servants', as we have previously seen, the poetic subject is unable to put into words her feelings about the burdens of her domestic duties:

> It seems to me
> I can't express my feelings, any more
> Than I can raise my voice or want to lift
> My hand (oh, I can lift it when I have to).
> Did you ever feel so? I hope you never.
> It's got so I don't even know for sure
> Whether I *am* glad, sorry, or anything.
> There's nothing but a voice-like left inside
> That seems to tell me how I ought to feel,
> And would feel if I wasn't all gone wrong.

The 'internal' voice is suggestive of Thomas's ideal other who provides a moral guide. The speaker cannot reconcile this impulse with the feeling of being 'all gone wrong'. While Richard Poirier correctly identifies this as an example of the human impulse to 'extra-vagance', to exceed the restrictions of decorum, he reads this poem reductively by suggesting that the subject

is not to be trusted in her account of her experience. Because the interlocutor never speaks, and because the account of the uncle's madness cannot be verified by the subject, Poirier believes the speaker is delusional. Thus, he suggests that the subject's extra-vagance is one example of the imagination's 'expression in the distorted form of obsession, lies or madness' (Poirier 1977: 113). Instead, we might note the problems the speaker has with using conceptual language to convey the depths of her experience. The unverified story of the imprisoned uncle is used by Frost as an example of the speaker looking for a root cause of her current anguish, rather than an attempt to 'make herself interesting' (113). This is supported by my arguments in Chapter Three about Frost's use of the dialogue form to generate sympathy with a marginalised subject.

Interestingly, like Thomas's speaker in 'The Other', the poetic subject finds a release from her anguish by immersing herself in the landscape:

> It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuit
> To step outdoors and take the water dazzle
> A sunny morning, or take the rising wind
> About my face and body and through my wrapper,
> When a storm threatened from the Dragon's Den,
> And a cold chill shivered across the lake.

Once again, we are put in mind of Ingold's weather-world. Escaping the confines of the home, the subject is accommodated by the movements of the lifeworld. In 'Home Burial' the female speaker experiences inconsolable grief following the loss of her first child. Again, language fails to articulate the anguish that the woman feels at the sight of the baby's burial mound:

> 'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried.
>
> She withdrew shrinking from beneath his arm
> That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;
> And turned on him with such a daunting look

The repetition of 'don't', interrupting the rough iambic pentameter, provides a possible rhythmic correlate to the emotion. Once again, we are put in mind of the 'rhythms of life at the centre of our minds'. Once again, the speaker flees the home place to find relief in getting 'air'.

In 'The Hill Wife', the speaker in the section called 'Loneliness' attempts to find solace in the garden birds, but this fails to console her because of their indifference to her plight. While glad to see them return, she realises the birds are concerned

> with each other and themselves
> And their built or driven nests.

In the sections called 'House Fear' and 'The Smile' the home place is threatened by the prospect of a human intruder. 'The Oft-Repeated Dream' describes the perceived threat of a humanised pine tree that scrapes the bedroom window. In the final section of the poem, the subject runs from perceived threats by human and non-human nature, and in doing so severs her 'ties' to her husband. Curiously, by refusing to acknowledge her own 'wild' fears, she is unable to voice her distress. When her husband seeks her out near a felled tree, she

> didn't answer – didn't speak –
> Or return.
> She stood, and then she ran and hid
> In the fern.

In all these poems, Frost hinted at the 'wildness within the human', which is an emotional state that is unconceptualisable. Each speaker, experiencing intense emotion, leaves the home place in order to find consolation in the weather-world or non-human nature – an experience that is elided as getting 'air', 'moments of everlastingness' or 'taking the wind'. Thomas's poet-speaker also finds relief through solitary walking in 'The Other'. This is hardly surprising, given that both Frost and Thomas found relief in solitary walking and encounters with 'wildness', seeking awareness of the weather-world.

Like the difficulty we have recognising all that occurs around us in a particular landscape, we may struggle to communicate the fluxes of our own inner world. While we may experience moods and sensations that are unfamiliar to us and even unfathomable, we can suggest their relations to the fluxes of non-human weather. Metric poetry can seek to convey these fluxes, and try to render a restorative feeling of stasis through a sympathetic speaker or regular form and language. This becomes a formal equivalent to a physical 'rooted errantry', which is similar to the dialectic of home and extra-vagance that has been explored throughout this thesis. It is not just through experiencing arresting sensory or perceptual experiences, extra-vagance or ecstasy, but also by seeking awareness of conceptual relations between human and non-human nature, that we are encouraged towards a more ecocentric outlook.

Future work

Because of the sheer quantity of readings of Frost, I have had to focus on particular critics who either support or oppose my premises in illuminating ways. My limit to a particular period of time has enabled me to engage with inconsistencies between the various critical treatments of Thomas and Frost, and their biographical and historical contexts. A full study of Frost's work

after *Mountain Interval* was beyond the scope of this work, but I would like to explore the evolution of Frost's ideas about wayfaring, and how this responded to Thomas's work. I focused on poems that suggest the possibility of feeling at 'home' in non-human nature, rather than those that suggest an actively hostile or utopian nature. It has not been my aim, not to show a systematic philosophical theorising in Thomas's and Frost's work, but to demonstrate the similarities in their poetic evocations of nature and home, and how these explorations corresponded with contemporaneous developments in philosophy. However, it would be beneficial to track the evolution of Thoreau's 'extra-vagance' from German Romanticism, including its origins in *Wanderlust* and *Fernweh*. Another fruitful area of research is to consider how Thomas's and Frost's ideas on wayfaring compare to other contemporaneous writings.

While I did not have direct evidence that Edward Thomas read T.E. Hulme or Bergson, I have presented circumstantial evidence that I believe is convincing. My reading of Hulme suggests that there is a shortage of 'green' readings of modernist poetry, and an exploration of how Imagism renders nature could serve further to enrich contemporary nature poetry and prose. In this way, we are able to move beyond a 'green Romanticism' that focuses on the fixed categories of pre-Darwinian nature.

Further, Thomas's and Frost's poetry of wayfaring indicates the 'processional' nature of a work of literature or art, in ways that are currently explored by performance artists. My reading of Ingold suggests a productive basis for understanding recent developments in 'walking art'. In future research, I would also like to develop Glissant's idea of a rooted errantry as an ecocritical paradigm. This could help us to reimagine human relations with the environment, when we combine a feeling of being at home in local places with a sense of the broader connections in which we are enmeshed.

APPENDIX: A NOTE ON POETIC FORM

As mentioned in the introduction, and following W.J. Keith, Robert Frost's poems from *A Boy's Will*, *North of Boston* and *Mountain Interval* have a human foreground – specifically a human or humans in a pastoral setting – but the subject is most often addressed via his or her confrontation with a natural object or event, which is a synecdoche for larger processes (see Introduction). Thus, the poems may feature a pastoral trope (and trace the movement of retreat) and still count as nature poetry. I would argue that the confrontation of the mind with non-human nature is more important than the 'retreat'; thus the particular version of pastoral may become a poetry of wayfaring and encounter, which is described further in Chapter Four. These nature poems may also count as 'ecopoetry' in Terry Gifford's definition, as described in Chapter Three.

Those lyrics where the 'human–nature' theme is prominent, despite the pastoral trope and consideration of human relations, include from *A Boy's Will*: 'The Tuft of Flowers', 'Mowing', 'Stars', 'Storm Fear', 'To The Thawing Wind', 'Wind and Window Flower', 'Going for Water', 'A Prayer in Spring', 'Waiting', 'In a Vale', 'In Hardwood Groves', 'The Line-Storm Song', 'My Butterfly', 'Reluctance', 'My November Guest', 'A Late Walk', 'Rose Pogonias' and 'Pan with Us'; from *North of Boston*, these include, 'The Pasture', 'Blueberries, 'The Wood-Pile', 'Mending-Wall' and 'Good Hours'. From *Mountain Interval*, these are 'The Pasture', 'Bond and Free', 'The Gum-Gatherer', 'The Line-Gang', 'Pea Brush', 'Putting in the Seed', 'The Exposed Nest', 'A Patch of Old Snow', 'The Cow in Apple Time', 'An Encounter', 'The Hill Wife', 'The Bonfire', 'A Girl's Garden', 'Locked Out,' 'Birches', 'Hyla Brook', 'Spring Pools' and 'The Sound of the Trees'.

Those pastoral poems (from the three collections) that do not fall into this category, and where a human relationship or sense of identity is of greatest thematic significance, include 'A Vantage Point', 'Christmas Trees', 'In the Home Stretch', 'The Telephone', 'Meeting and Passing', 'The Trial by Existence', 'In Neglect', 'Out, Out!', 'Brown's Descent', 'The Vanishing-Red' and 'A Time to Talk'.

Those of Edward Thomas's poems that are both 'nature poetry' and 'pastoral' in this sense include 'Up in the Wind', 'May the twenty-third', 'The Glory', 'The Green Roads', 'The Mill-Pond', 'Tall Nettles', 'Haymaking', 'How at once', 'Gone, gone again', 'The sun used to Shine', 'October', The long small room', 'Liberty', 'November', 'The Sheiling', 'The Gallows', 'Birds' Nests', 'Rain', 'Melancholy', 'As the team's head-brass', 'Thaw', 'Interval', 'The Path', 'The Combe', 'When first', 'Celandine', 'The Ash Grove', 'Two Pewits', 'I never saw

that land before', 'The Dark Forest', 'The Manor Farm', 'The Owl', 'Swedes', 'Sowing', 'Lob', 'Bright Clouds', The Cherry Trees', 'Early one morning', 'The clouds that are so light', 'It rains', 'In Memoriam (Easter 1915)', 'She dotes', 'For These', 'Fifty Faggots', 'Women he liked', 'March the Third', 'The New House', 'March', 'The Cuckoo', 'Over the Hills', 'The Hollow Wood', 'Wind and Mist', 'The Lofty Sky', 'After Rain', 'The Unknown Bird', 'Good-night', 'The Source', 'The Mountain Chapel', 'First known when lost', 'The Word', 'July', 'Ambition', 'A Tale', 'February Afternoon', 'Digging ("Today I think")' and 'Digging ("What matter makes my spade")', 'April', 'The Barn', 'Barn and Down', 'Two Houses', 'The Mill-Water', 'The Thrush', 'Aspens', 'After you speak', 'Sedge-Warblers', 'Under the Woods', 'Home ("Not the end")', 'Home ("Often I had gone")', '"Home" ("Fair was the morning")', 'There's nothing like the sun', 'The Penny Whistle', 'An Old Song' ('I' and 'II'), 'The Chalk-Pit', 'Health', 'Beauty', 'Snow', 'The New Year', 'The Brook', 'The Other', 'House and Man', 'Man and Dog', 'A Private', 'The Lane', 'The Watchers' and 'Out in the dark'.

All the above are principally lyric poems, which *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines as 'any fairly short poem expressing the personal mood, feeling, or meditation of a single speaker (who may sometimes be an invented character, not the poet)' (online edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Frost also produced many blank-verse dramatic dialogue and monologue poems during this period. Here, while the subject may be a pastoral 'character' that is shown to display features that stand in contrast to urban sophisticates, a key theme is again nature impacting on the human mind, in 'A Servant to Servants', 'Blueberries', 'The Self-Seeker', 'A Mountain'. This is the case even where the poet speaker is not actively involved in the dialogue, such as 'The Hill Wife', 'Snow', 'Home Burial', and 'The Death of the Hired Man'. Again, some of the poems are principally about human relationships and identity, including 'A Hundred Collars', 'The 'Generations of Men', 'The Housekeeper' and 'The Black Cottage'.

Thomas also produced lyrics that display the features of a dramatic dialogue although, as explained below, the dialogue is that of the speaker talking out loud to himself. Again, while the speaker is in a pastoral setting, the principal feature is often nature impacting on the human mind. Those poems that feature this sense of monologue include 'Adlestrop', 'The Brook', 'The Path', 'Old-Man' and 'Aspens'. Those that feature dialogue, including 'Man and Dog', 'May the Twenty-Third', 'The New Year' and 'Up in the Wind', still feature the subject of nature impacting on the human mind.

Frost's sonnets include innovations on strict form that demonstrate his willingness to create dramatic frustrations of expectations, similar to those achieved through his 'sound of

sense' theory, described below. As do his lyrics, the sonnets often feature the human-nature relationship and include 'The Oven Bird', 'Mowing', 'Into My Own', 'Putting in the Seed', 'After Apple-Picking', 'Range Finding'.

Thomas also produced a limited number of sonnets, of which only 'It was upon', 'February Afternoon', 'The Wind's Song' and 'A Dream' feature the subject of nature impacting on the human mind.