EDWARD THOMAS: Prose into Poetry

Talk given to the Richard Jefferies Society by Richard Stewart on the occasion of a Study Day held at Lawn Community Centre, Swindon on 29th July 2006

Before he died at Arras in April 1917, aged just 39, Edward Thomas had written about 40 books. That's nearly twice as many as Richard Jefferies, who had a comparable short life.

At one time Thomas was working on six books at once and he lived by the pen and fed his family by the pen: essays, articles, reviews and books.

He started early, copying Jefferies' style, to win botany essay prizes and thanks to the eminent critic and editor, James Ashcroft Noble, whose daughter Helen became Thomas' wife, he was soon having articles published in several magazines. It wasn't just influence, though. Thomas had a genuine talent for writing good prose. This is an extract from *Seen through the Willow Tree,* aged 16.

> In summer it is not so dense but that I can find the blackbird wherever it sings among its branches and not in winter so agile but that its changing patterns are conspicuous against the sky, its sound an appreciable sussuration using the harp strings of the wind.

By the time he met Robert Frost and took his first memorable steps towards poetry, he was a man of letters, an eminent and highly respected critic, chief literary reviewer for the *Daily Chronicle* since 1902 and earning in most years enough to support his family and at least one servant, and perhaps to push into the background his fear of lingering debt, a legacy of his Oxford days.

He was also part of a large literary circle, something Jefferies always lacked. His friends included Hilaire Belloc, Harold Monro, Ezra Pound, Walter de la Mare, W. H. Davies, Joseph Conrad, Gordon Bottomley, Wilfred Blunt, John Drinkwater, Wilfrid Gibson, Arthur Ransome, Eleanor Farjeon – and many more. These were not just casual acquaintances. Some were life-long friends, with whom he corresponded all his adult life, people he met, socialised with, stayed with when he needed to get away to concentrate on a time-limit book.

But there were problems , deep-seated literary and personal problems. The family lived in a total of 14 different homes and often Edward had to travel to research his books – to the Coastguard cottages at Dunwich off the Suffolk coast, for example in 1908, to write his Jefferies biography. Perhaps these many breaks helped his marriage to survive. Helen and her young family bore the brunt of a complex personality at one time deeply sociable, passionate and sensitive, but also subject to moods of depression, misery, self-loathing and melancholy. Notes found after his death even discuss suicide and its consequences. They were frank with each other, brutally frank sometimes, as this entry from Helen's *World Without End* testifies:

> There are no letters.
>
> Why tell me what is written on your pale wretched face? I am cursed, and you are cursed because of me. I hate the tears I see you've been crying. Your sympathy and your love are both hateful to me. Hate me, but for God's sake don't stand there, pale and suffering. Leave me, I tell you. Get out and leave me! [p.92]

These fits of anger and irritation at home were almost uncontrollable at times and Gordon Bottomley, in a letter dated December 1939, wrote:

> The marriage put him for ever out of his right road because it was premature and never let him have leisure and energy of spirit to find himself.

His working life was a constant round of writing and reading, walking or cycling to research books and though most of us probably have on our shelves well-thumbed copies of *The Icknield Way, The Hills and the Vale, In Pursuit of Spring* and my own favourite *The Heart of England.* Thomas also wrote *Maurice Maeterlinck, Walter Pater* and other books that he described using words like 'hack' and 'treadmill':

> 'Hasty compilations, ill-arranged, inaccurate and incomplete, and swollen to a ridiculous size for the sake of gain.'

As early as 1905 he wrote:

> 'Nothing is worthwhile and it is really wonderful how I persuade myself to work regularly. I have no joy, no hope, no responsibility, no certainty!

From 1910 onwards his regular sources of income diminished and the bouts of depression and introspective self-loathing increased. He was relentless in his pursuit of self-understanding but it was a dark world of despondency he was investigating. In late 1911 he wrote:

> I have somehow lost my balance and can never recover it by diet or rule or any deliberate means, but only by some miracle from within or without!

That miracle occurred within two years but first, a look at the poetic world in which Thomas was immersed, though not as a serious poet.

From his father he had 'The Children's Hour' and Longfellow, Welsh songs from his grandmother and songs were to be an important influence in his life. Their rhythm and cadence eventually shaped his best poetry. And if a song was new it would be sung repeatedly line by line to learn it, with Helen sitting at the piano, jotting down the notes. Songs permeate many of the essays in *The Heart of England,* even tunes written down at the back of the book.

His scholarship to his fourth school introduced him to the Aenid and Shakespeare, plus Byron, whom he disliked. Letters to friends discuss poetry and it is obvious Thomas had a comprehensive mastery of English poetry. He reviewed the poetry of W. H. Davies and many others, sat as a judge of prestigious poetry awards, was a frequent visitor to Harold Munro's Poetry Bookshop, wrote a pocket book of poems ad sonnets for the open air and also was the author of books on Keats, Swinburne, and *The Feminine Influence on the Poets.* He recognised the 'prose poet' in Jefferies, commenting in his introduction to *The Hills and the Vale* that this was:

> A poet with an outlook that is purely individual and though deeply human, yet of a spirituality now close as the grass, and now as the stars.

The poetry was already there, deeply embedded in his published prose - just two examples. First an extract from 'The Barge' (*The Heart of England*):

> Through the land went a dusky river, and in it a black barge with merrily painted prow. It was guided by a brown woman wearing a yellow scarf and she stood boldly up. In the midst of it a man played on a concertina and sang. The barge was light and high in the water; lonely and unnoticed, it threaded the long curves and still the concertina lamented and the tall woman stood boldly up. As it disappeared the dolorous air began to darken and I knew why that barge stood so high and light—because its cargo was merely all the flowers and the birds and the joys and pains of spring, the contentments of summer, the regrets of autumn, of all men and women who had lived through the now dying year; and no one claimed them, no one sought them, no one stood on the bank to salute them.

Second 'Entering Wales' from *Wales*:

> Between the bridge and the mountain, and in fact surrounded by streams which were heard although unseen, was an island of apple trees.
>
> There were murmurs of bees. There was a gush and fall and gurgle of streams, which could be traced by their bowing irises. There was a poignant glow and fragrance of flowers in an air so moist and cold and still that at dawn the earliest bee left a thin line of scent upon it. Beyond, the mountain, grim, without trees, lofty and dark, was clearly upholding the low blue sky full of slow clouds of the colour of the mountain lambs or of melting snow. This mountain and this sky, for that first hour, shut out, and not only shut out but destroyed, and not only destroyed but made as if it had never been, the world of the old woman, the coal-pits, the schools, and the grown-up persons. And the magic of Wales, or of Spring, or of childhood made the island of apple trees more than an orchard in flower. For as some women seem at first to be but rich eyes in a mist of complexion and sweet voice, so the orchard was but an invisible soul playing with scent and colour as symbols. Nor did this wonder vanish when I walked among the trees and looked up at the blossoms in the sky. For in that island of apple trees there was not one tree but was curved and jagged and twisted and splintered by great age, by the west wind, or by the weight of fruit in many autumns. In colour they were stony. They were scarred with knots like mouths. Some of their branches were bent sharply like lightning flashes. Some rose up like bony, sunburnt, imprecating arms of furious prophets. One stiff, gaunt bole that was half hid in flower might have been Ares' sword in the hands of the Cupids. Others were like ribs of submerged ships, or the horns of an ox emerging from a skeleton deep in the sand of a lonely coast. And the blossom of them all was the same, so that they seemed to be Winter with the frail Spring in his arms.

What is surprising is that, surrounded by all these strong poetic influences, Thomas could respond to Eleanor Farjeon in October 1913, who asked him if he had ever written a poem, that he couldn't write a poem to save his life. Not true actually, he wrote some poetry until his university days and of course Eleanor Farjeon's question was really 'Why not?'.

Within a few months he had met Frost, who was to prove the catalyst, but before exploring that relationship it is worth noting the words of another life-long friend, Jessie Berridge, who wrote of *His growing mastery of words and fastidious selection of them, his ear for the music of a phrase.*

Another long-standing friend, James Guthrie, wrote twenty years after Thomas' death that the poet in him evolved long before and that his poems were little different in texture from the best of his prose. I will look at sources of his poetry later.

It seems, until he met Robert Frost, that all the assurances of friends were not sufficient for Thomas to 'let go' and create what he later described to Frost, in a letter dated December 1914:

> I find myself engrossed and conscious of a possible perfection as I never was in prose.

The Frost/Thomas relationship has been compared to that of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon in Craig Lockhart Hospital in summer 1917, but Frost never altered words or suggested new ideas as Sassoon did. Frost, having read in *Pursuit of Spring* was convinced

that Thomas was a poet. Thomas called Frost *my only brother* and *the only begetter* of his poetry whereas Frost was more precise: *I dragged him out from under the heap of his own work in prose*. In June, July, August and October they were often together, sometimes in the Malvern area, border country near Ledbury, country similar to Frost's native Vermont.

In a letter dated December 1939 Gordon Bottomley wrote 'Frost was the precipitant in his life (I speak chemically). Wherever he touched Frost, things went right with him. Frost started his poetry'.

Thomas suddenly saw, through Frost, that the path of poetry was the only way to self-fulfilment, to live his life in the truth he had always sought.

They were of a similar age, Frost 39, Thomas 36, Thomas was more established in his career than Frost, who had come over to England to try to prove his worth as a poet after a decade of relative frustration in America. His robust, extrovert manner appealed to Thomas (and both Helen and Eleanor Farjeon said he drew Thomas to him like a magnet) who helped him with a very favourable review of *North of Boston,* a poetry collection full of what Frost described as 'language absolutely unliterary', many poems of narrative and dialogue, a few of which Thomas used himself in subsequent poems like 'Up in the Wind' and 'Wind in the Mist'. I must admit that I find these longer narrative poems of Thomas the least satisfactory but that also applies to Frost – many of his poetry collections are too over-balanced with long, somewhat tedious and largely uninspiring narrative/dialogue poems. That's perhaps just a personal opinion but if I stop to ask you to think of all the Frost poems you know, aren't the majority relatively short? The only ones I can think of which have any great and successful length are 'Mending Wall', 'Home Burial' and 'The Death of the Hired Man'.

Frost and Thomas both excelled at creating memorable images in a few brief lines:

> The way a crow
> Shook down on me
> The dust of snow
> From a hemlock tree
>
> Has given my heart
> A change of mood
> And saved some part
> Of a day I had rued.
> ['Dust of Snow']

> The Flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood
> This Eastertide call into mind the men,
> Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should
> Have gathered them and will never do again.
> [In Memoriam (Easter 1915)]

This sudden outpouring of verse, as if a great dam had been breached, produced 85 poems in the 7 months before he enlisted in July 1915 and with a view to eventual publication he used the pseudonym Edward Eastaway, an old family name, so if literary friends were reviewers they would not be biased in his favour. Over 40 poems followed from late 1915 to August 1916. Many of these were shaped in his head as he climbed up to the writing hut on the hill above his home or on the way home to Steep on the slow cross – country train:

Adlestrop
Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

For an aspiring poet, the maturity of the rhyming is incredible.

Despite my Quaker beliefs, I have to add that all the evidence also suggests that although Thomas was an efficient soldier, the life obviously suited him as a poet. Even during this poetic outpouring he spent 26 days working on *The Life of the Duke of Marlborough* . But it was the poetry that dominated. Six months after enlisting he had told many friends that he had never felt better in his lifetime or more balanced. In a 1915 letter from Gordon Bottomley to Lascelles Abercrombie, he wrote *I think the work has made some sort of new man and a poet out of Edward Thomas.* He had found his true sense of literary purpose, as a contented warrior.

Initially Bottomley selected 18 out of 40 poems to publish in an anthology of new poetry, March 1917. Two interesting facts now – first, although Thomas is sometimes included in the war poets, he in fact wrote no poems directly about the war in France. Second, the *Times Review* was unfavourable:

> An unconscious survival of a materialism and naturalism which the tremendous life of the last 3 years has made an absurdity.

What also produced such an outpouring of poetry in his last years of life was the sudden realisation that most of the poetry was already there, buried within the books, notes, and diaries collected over years of writing, cycling, walking and conversation.

To quote from a letter in November 1914 to W. H. Hudson: *I haven't any work now. But I don't find the war shuts me up. In fact it has given me time to please myself with some unprofitable writing.* This refers to his starting prose versions of his poems from 16 November 1914. To look in detail at just one example, here is the prose record, dated 17 November 1914, for 'Old Man's Beard':

> Just as she is turning in to the house or leaving it, the baby [Myfanwy] plucks a feather of old man's beard. The bush grows just across the path from the door. Sometimes she stands by it squeezing off tip after tip from the branches and shrivelling them between her fingers on to the path in grey-green shreds. So the bush is still only half as tall as she is, though it is the same age. She never talks of it, but I wonder how much of the garden she will remember, the hedge with the old damson trees topping it,

the vegetable rows, the path bending round the house corner, the old man's beard opposite the door, and me sometimes forbidding her to touch it, if she lives to my years. As for myself I cannot remember when I first smelt that green bitterness. I, too, often gather a sprig from the bush and sniff it, and roll it between my fingers and sniff again and think, trying to discover what it is that I am remembering. I do not wholly like the smell, yet would rather lose many meaningless sweeter ones than this bitter one of which I have mislaid the key. As I hold the sprig to my nose and slowly withdraw it, I think of nothing, I see, I hear nothing, yet I seem too to be listening, lying in wait for whatever it is I ought to remember but never do. No garden comes back to me, no hedge or path, no grey green bush called old man's beard or lad's love, no figure of mother or father or playmate, only a dark avenue without an end.

Just under 3 weeks later ‘Old Man’ was drafted at Steep:

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

The herb itself I like not, but for certain
I love it, as some day the child will love it
Who plucks a feather from the door-side bush
Whenever she goes in or out of the house.
Often she waits there, snipping the tips and shrivelling
The shreds at last on to the path, perhaps
Thinking, perhaps of nothing, till she sniffs
Her fingers and runs off. The bush is still
But half as tall as she, though it is as old;
So well she clips it. Not a word she says;
And I can only wonder how much hereafter
She will remember, with that bitter scent,
Of garden rows, and ancient damson trees
Topping a hedge, a bent path to a door,
A low thick bush beside the door, and me
Forbidding her to pick.

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.

You’ll notice between the two the correction to refer to ‘old man’ in the Artemesia family, rather than ‘Old Man’s Beard’ which is the wild clematis of country lanes.

"Dad" and Mrs. Uzzell in their Salvationist kit displaying their Old Age Pension book

People he met feature in some poems. Aged just 16 he met 'Dad Uzzell' near Swindon. Whether or not he ever lived at Hudson Bottom, he was a lasting influence, a man of the open air, roguish, hinting of illegality, an updated *Amateur Poacher.* The image of Uzzell, first described by Thomas as a *stiff straight man, broad-shouldered and bushy bearded* permeates several poems, especially 'Lob':

Lob
At hawthorn-time in Wiltshire travelling
In search of something chance would never bring,
An old man's face, by life and weather cut
And coloured,—rough, brown, sweet as any nut,—
A land face, sea-blue-eyed,—hung in my mind
When I had left him many a mile behind.

But one glimpse of his back, as there he stood,
Choosing his way, proved him of old Jack's blood,
Young Jack perhaps, and now a Wiltshireman
As he has oft been since his days began.

Many other poems can be traced back to earlier prose: thus his *Pursuit of Spring* has

> The inn door, which was now open, was as the entrance to a bright cave in the middle of the darkness. The illumination had a kind of blessedness.

And in *Heart of England*:

> And that little inn, in the midst of mountains and immense night seemed a temple of all souls, where a few faithful ones still burnt candles and remembered the dead.

Now listen to those promptings in 'The Owl':

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

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

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

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

His melancholy was still there, but it became something more positive, rounded, beautiful.

From the late night of 'Rain' described in *The Icknield Way* and 'close, perpendicular, quiet rain' in an untrodden lane in *Heart of England* comes 'Rain', one of my favourite Thomas poems but within its bleakness, as revealed by David Gervais in an Edward Thomas Fellowship newsletter article, 2002, there is a magnificent sense of music, cadence, rhythm, perhaps owing something to the lines from Wordsworth like:

> No motion has she now, no force
> She neither hears nor sees,
> Rolled round in Earth's diurnal course,
> With rocks and stones and trees.

> ***Rain***
> Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
> On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
> Remembering again that I shall die
> And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
> For washing me cleaner than I have been
> Since I was born into this solitude.
> Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
> But here I pray that none whom once I loved
> Is dying 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 for what is perfect and
> Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Not everything came from the past – his penultimate poem 'Out in the Dark' arose from his daughter Myfanwy's reaction to deer in the forest, outside their room with a Christmas tree, and the war-based 'This is no case of petty right or wrong' rose from an argument with his father about the war and the comment about it in a letter to Frost '*He showed that his real feeling when he is not trying to be nice and comfortable is one of contempt. I know what contempt is and party what I suffered was from the reminder that I had probably made Helen feel exactly the same'.*

> *This Is No Case of Petty Right or Wrong*
> This is no case of petty right or wrong
> That politicians or philosophers
> Can judge. I hate not Germans, nor grow hot
> With love of Englishmen, to please newspapers.
> Beside my hate for one fat patriot
> My hatred of the Kaiser is love true: —
> A kind of god he is, banging a gong.
> But I have not to choose between the two,
> Or between justice and injustice. Dinned
> With war and argument I read no more
> Than in the storm smoking along the wind
> Athwart the wood. 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.
> Little I know or care if, being dull,

I shall miss something that historians
Can rake out of the ashes when perchance
The phoenix broods serene above their ken.
But with the best and meanest Englishmen
I am one in crying, God save England, lest
We lose what never slaves and cattle blessed.
The ages made her that made us from dust:
She is all we know and live by, and we trust
She is good and must endure, loving her so:
And as we love ourselves we hate her foe.

Edward Garnett wrote that of Thomas' poetry that '*each of his poems in turn leads us deeper and deeper, - - - mirrors some fresh aspect of nature's character and prodigal loveliness.*'

Perhaps this poem sums up Thomas' literary career most succinctly and successfully:

The Long Small Room
The long small room that showed willows in the west
Narrowed up to the end the fireplace filled,
Although not wide. I liked it.
No one guessed What need or accident made them so build.

Only the moon, the mouse and the sparrow peeped
In from the ivy round the casement thick.
Of all they saw and heard there they shall keep
The tale for the old ivy and older brick.

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.

And what if he had survived the war? Would he, as mentioned to others, have joined Frost to farm, in America. What other poetic output would have followed? He died young, like Keats, like Shelley, or in our own times like Jim Morrison, Buddy Holly. Jimi Hendrix, Sylvia Plath. He died at the peak of his poetic powers whereas Frost, in his last years, was a spent force, the muse distant, and his final collection *In the Clearing* a thin echo of a formerly strong poetic voice.

I personally believe Thomas had much more to give as a poet. In *Edward Thomas A Portrait* R. George Thomas discusses in some detail his interest in mysticism. Poems like the powerful, prophetic 'Lights Out', and the mysterious 'The Unknown Bird' which probably has as many layers of intended and inferred meaning as Frost's 'Mending Wall', both are evidence of this mysticism.

Lights Out
I have come to the borders of sleep,
The unfathomable deep
Forest where all must lose
Their way, however straight,
Or winding, soon or late;
They cannot choose.

Many a road and track
That, since the dawn's first crack,
Up to the forest brink,
Deceived the travellers,
Suddenly now blurs,
And in they sink.

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

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

The tall forest towers;
Its cloudy foliage lowers
Ahead, shelf above shelf;
Its silence I hear and obey
That I may lose my way
And myself.

Another similar but shorter one, very different to most poems he wrote, is 'Swedes':

Swedes
They have taken the gable from the roof of clay
On the long swede pile. They have let in the sun
To the white and gold and purple of curled fronds
Unsunned. It is a sight more tender-gorgeous
At the wood-corner where Winter moans and drips
Than when, in the Valley of the Tombs of Kings,
A boy crawls down into a Pharaoh's tomb
And, first of Christian men, beholds the mummy,
God and monkey, chariot and throne and vase,
Blue pottery, alabaster, and gold.

But dreamless long-dead Amen-hotep lies.
This is a dream of Winter, sweet as Spring.

These and several others possibly point to the new and exciting direction Thomas' fresh poetic voice would have taken, had he not died.

Finally, Thomas and Jefferies. We all know the many connections but rather than give a somewhat obvious list of why Jefferies didn't become a successful poet, how about a simple one instead – he didn't need to be, as his prose was so good, so original at its best, so mystical on occasions and in its own way as enduring as Thomas' poetry. Also, consider how many famous writers you know who succeeded at both prose and poetry in their literary career – Lawrence, Hardy – any more?

To end, four examples, prose and poetry. Two from Thomas, two from Jefferies:

The first is the coming of spring:

Jefferies: ‘Hours of Spring’

> With snow and frost and winter the earth was overcome, and the world perished, stricken dumb and dead, swept clean and utterly destroyed--a winter of the gods, the silence of snow and universal death. All that had been passed away, and the earth was depopulated. Death triumphed, but under the snow, behind the charmed rampart, slept the living germs. Down in the deep coombe, where the dark oaks stood out individually in the whiteness of the snow, fortified round about with immovable hills, there was the actual presentment of Zoroaster's sacred story. Locked in sleep lay bud and germ--the butterflies of next summer were there somewhere, under the snow. The earth was swept of its inhabitants, but the seeds of life were not dead.

Thomas: ‘Thaw’

> Over the land freckled with snow half-thawed
> The speculating rooks at their nests cawed
> And saw from elm-tops, delicate as flower of grass,
> What we below could not see, Winter pass.

Then two attempts to grasp summer’s beauty:

Jefferies: ‘Pageant of Summer’

> I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird; from all of them I receive a little. Each gives me something of the pure joy they gather for themselves. In the blackbird's melody one note is mine; in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs..

Thomas: ‘The Glory’

> The glory of the beauty of the morning,—
> The cuckoo crying over the untouched dew;
> The blackbird that has found it, and the dove
> That tempts me on to something sweeter than love;
> White clouds ranged even and fair as new-mown hay;
> The heat, the stir, the sublime vacancy
> Of sky and meadow and forest and my own heart:—
> The glory invites me, yet it leaves me scorning
> All I can ever do, all I can be,
> Beside the lovely of motion, shape, and hue,
> The happiness I fancy fit to dwell
> In beauty's presence. Shall I now this day
> Begin to seek as far as heaven, as hell,
> Wisdom or strength to match this beauty, start
> And tread the pale dust pitted with small dark drops,
> In hope to find whatever it is I seek,
> Hearkening to short-lived happy-seeming things
> That we know naught of, in the hazel copse ?
> Or must I be content with discontent
> As larks and swallows are perhaps with wings?
> And shall I ask at the day's end once more
> What beauty is, and what I can have meant
> By happiness? And shall I let all go,
> Glad, weary, or both? Or shall I perhaps know
> That I was happy oft and oft before,
> Awhile forgetting how I am fast pent,
> How dreary-swift, with naught to travel to,
> Is Time? I cannot bite the day to the core.