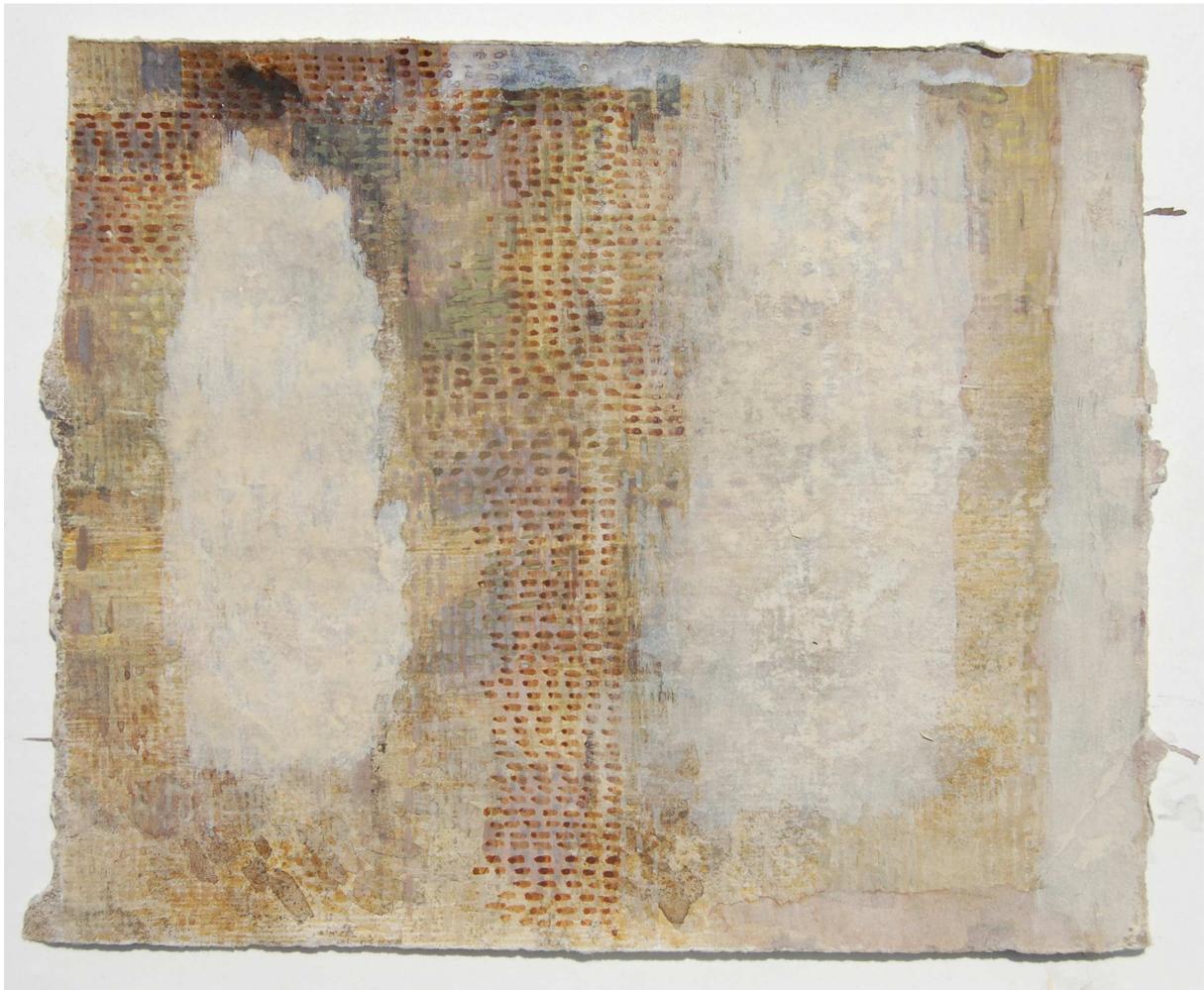


# ESSAYS

Supplementing the Retrospectives issue of *Agenda*  
Vol 46 No3



John Hacker whose paintings are on the front and back cover of the Retrospectives issue

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Tony Roberts: Maxine Kumin at Fifty

Shanta Acharya: *To Taste That Various, Universal Bliss:*  
The Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore

## Francis O’Gorman

Francis O’Gorman is a Professor of English at the University of Leeds and is currently editing Swinburne for Oxford University Press.

### Remembering Edward Thomas

This essay considers the implications of a peculiarly though not exclusively British habit of remembering Edward Thomas ‘with love’, even to the extent that readers name the time and place where they first read him. Examining the oddity of ‘loving’ a poet so wary, in his poetry, of emotional connections, this essay explores the framing issue of the way memory changes feelings, a topic about which Thomas writes suggestively himself. The essay considers the personal implications for Thomas of this work of memory, musing himself on whether he will be remembered as a poet, but also considers the more abstract of issue of how texts themselves are remembered, and how Thomas’s searching account of the changeful work of memory on the topic of ‘what really happened’ might stand as an implicit critical statement about the nature of recollected texts. Thomas, provocatively, allows a reader to infer a challenging question for literary critics—his own task for many years—about the potential difference between what is read and what is remembered of what is read. The essay concludes with the observation of another, and almost uncanny, way in which Thomas ‘intrudes’ into the reader’s processes of remembering texts, confusing a text with an experience, by considering the capacity of ‘Adlestrop’, and what ‘Adlestrop’ describes, to become part of what feels to be the reader’s own memory.

Edward Thomas has a habit of being remembered, and often ‘with love’. This is a habit peculiarly noticeable for British, and particularly English, readers, who are often, but not exclusively, men. Andrew Motion remembers him, for one. ‘Edward Thomas was the first poet I fell in love with’, Motion said in 2010: ‘I was sixteen, from a country background in which books and writing played no significant part, and [I] felt he was speaking to me about things I knew’. The words frame reading as romance, a teenage crush. Thomas ‘made me feel I had walked up to the largest and most abstract things in my head’, Motion continued, ‘but that when I looked down at my shoes, they were covered in real rain drops, real grass flecks, real dust’. Thomas grasped both ideas and hard, solid things. His poetry was of mind and the matter of the countryside. And this affection remained for the former Poet Laureate and author of *The Poetry of Edward Thomas* (1980): ‘In the forty years since I first read Thomas, my love for his writing has deepened continuously: he is one of the handful of poets I find absolutely necessary’.<sup>i</sup>

The feeling is not unique. The Scottish academic and poet Robert Crawford says, mildly, that ‘a small number of his poems have pleasantly haunted me since school’,<sup>ii</sup> but Kevin Crossley-Holland ‘care[s] deeply for his poems’. Crossley-Holland, poet and Anglo-Saxonist, remembers reading Thomas first too—as a small boy, poring over ‘my parents’ well-thumbed copy of *The Icknield Way*’.<sup>iii</sup> Others go further, but the pattern, the attraction, the narratives of recollection are similar. In 2010, the writer David Constantine told *The Guardian* newspaper: ‘I began reading Edward Thomas in a cold winter 40 years ago’, when ‘I found the blue hardback *Collected Poems* secondhand on Durham market, and by the fire in our strange habitation under the castle mound, nobody else at home, I read him at once, entire, knowing ever more certainly, poem by poem, that I loved him, he would be with me for life, I would learn from him’.<sup>iv</sup> Constantine recalls Thomas, the poet of location, by remembering, as do others, the location of his first reading. Tangible places, actual settings, belong in these

scenes of reading. 'My schoolgirl's handwriting tells me on the title page of my copy of Thomas' *Selected Poems* that it's been in my possession since 19th December 1979',<sup>v</sup> says the Cumbrian poet and academic Helen Farish. Why, exactly, *is* that? When the poet Carol Rumens' discussed Thomas in *The Guardian* in 2008, she prompted a range of confessions from readers. His poetry is, she had said, 'intensely emotional and self-searching', and emotion was admitted in return: 'I am very fond of Edward Thomas'; 'I don't think I've ever read an Edward Thomas poem I didn't love'.<sup>vi</sup> Remembering Thomas is a kind of romance. Andrew Motion is not wrong to have asked in 2007 'Why *do* so many poets love Edward Thomas[?]'<sup>vii</sup> And it is not poets alone.

I do not propose to answer this question in a direct way. Precisely why Thomas is loved is not, for the time being, my concern. Instead, this essay thinks about what this habit of remembering with love suggests not only about Thomas himself, but more implicitly about poetry, and literary writing, as a remembered artefact, a remembered experience, more generally. Thomas is both a text in my essay and a pretext. He is, in this somewhat experimental form, an object of study and an opportunity to think about the business of studying, of examining literature as something not simply read but as remembered in the light of what Thomas' poetry suggests about the entanglement of knowledge and feeling with temporality. The first curious thing, then, from the point of view of the poems themselves, is that Thomas himself is a writer wary of emotional connection. I do not only mean that he was a difficult and prickly individual. I mean that his poems are, as readers readily recognize, aloof from bonds, affective connections. Sympathy is rarely privileged between figures within the poems, nor, very often, between the reader of the poems and the implied author. The sentimental connection, the link of affection or of affect, is intriguingly absent in these texts watchful of the heart's boundaries. Matthew Hollis, Thomas's most recent biographer, is not wrong to observe that in 'only two of Thomas's 142 collected poems do people kiss'.<sup>viii</sup> That may serve as a plain emblem of the poetry's many other emotional reticences. Thomas can upset connections brutally. 'P.H.T.', a bitter reflection on Thomas's father, ends with that hard row of monosyllables where the solitary oneness of each word seems to make visible the separation, the detachment Thomas cannot achieve until his father is in the grave: 'not so long as you live | Can I love you at all' (p.169). The greatest surprise is the poem's candour about a disastrous paternal relationship (and it was disastrously read by Helen too, who thought the lines applied to herself). But there is something uncomfortable in reading a poem we should not. Reading 'P.H.T.' has the awkwardness, the embarrassment, of an accidentally over-heard confession, almost a session in psychotherapy. Thomas, after all, had met Godwin Baynes, the psychoanalyst, in 1912, and his first treatment had taken place in April that year. John Stuart Mill's notion of the '*overheard*' as a defining quality of lyric is recast as intrusion.<sup>ix</sup>

But there are more curious forms of failure to connect. Perhaps the Victorian genre of the dramatic monologue is dimly audible behind the two speeches of 'A Gentleman':

'He has robbed two clubs. The judge at Salisbury  
Can't give him more than he undoubtedly  
Deserves. The scoundrel! Look at his photograph!  
A lady-killer! Hanging's too good by half  
For such as he.' So said the stranger, one  
With crimes yet undiscovered or undone.  
But at the inn the Gipsy dame began:  
'Now he was what I call a gentleman.  
He went along with Carrie, and when she  
Had a baby he paid up so readily

His half a crown. Just like him. A crown'd have been  
 More like him. For I never knew him mean.  
 Oh! but he was such a nice gentleman. Oh!  
 Last time we met he said if me and Joe  
 Was anywhere near we must be sure and call.  
 He put his arms around our Amos all  
 As if he were his own son. I pray God  
 Save him from justice! Nicer man never trod.' (p.34)

The poem transforms the well-recognized tug of sympathy against judgment—Robert Langbaum's phrase<sup>x</sup>—by confusing it in a poem that declines to be a dramatic monologue, which refuses to give the central figure opportunity to speak. What kind of sympathy or judgment might there be for a voice that cannot even be 'overheard'? There may be hints to help the reader decide on the question of gentlemanliness, a concept under severe pressure in modern culture. The first speaker, it may be, is doubtful, as one with 'crimes yet undiscovered', and, perhaps, a hypocrite. Because the second is a Gipsy, are readers invited to assume she must be naturally tolerant of crime? Judgment and sympathy are simultaneously present *in posse*, and suspended. But the 'gentleman' remains stubbornly absent. Peter Howarth, situating Thomas in the period of Modernism, notes aptly that Thomas' poems 'are often meditations on somebody [else]'s words'.<sup>xi</sup> But what is most notable here is that the central 'somebody' is not permitted words at all.

The quest for the identity of Lob, met while 'travelling | In search of something chance would never bring' (p.36), is a tempting model for the reader's inquiry into many of the characters that populate Thomas's poetry, leaving so few textual traces behind—a detail, a trait, a word. Most often, we 'know' them from a sentence or two (though in fact we know of Lob from four sentences). 'Keats must always share his pleasure either by letters or poem',<sup>xii</sup> Thomas wrote in 1916. But sharing a strong emotional connection, with fragmentary people hardly known, was rarely Thomas's own business. Felt sympathies are fugitive. Readers know that Bob Hayward liked women, but loved trees; we know nothing of Jenny Pinks except for the copse named after her;<sup>xiii</sup> we know nothing of the owner of the clay pipe in 'Digging' except that he was a soldier at Blenheim, Ramilles, or Malplaquet. We are not even sure of that. And who is the mysterious woman of 'Celandine'? The poem, dated in manuscript to 4 March 1916,<sup>xiv</sup> does not, like 'A Gentleman', allow her to speak or permit the reader to know anything as definite as that scrupulously annotated day and month and year. The woman has the pale presence only possible to a figure in someone else's memory, a memory that is mistrusted anyway. The poet remembers her when he sees the celandines, then doubts his thought—then doubts his doubts. 'But this was a dream', Thomas's poem concludes,

the flowers were not true,  
 Until I stooped to pluck from the grass there  
 One of five petals and I smelt the juice  
 Which made me sigh, remembering she was no more,  
 Gone like a never perfectly recalled air. (p.84)

The synaesthesia, the smell that brings back her memory becoming a sound that cannot be quite remembered, blurs what kind of recollection this is. It is hard for the poet, let alone the reader, to fix the experience in the mind, even if at some level the reader may recognize the faintness of this erotic memory as something like their own memory. At the end, the woman has become a tune only half recalled. She is not quite 'no more' (two words where the reader

equivocates about where to place the stress, as if we cannot quite be sure of how even to describe her not being there). But she belongs in the past, as an ‘air’ is only an archaic term for a melody. The final words slow, almost drag, the pace of the writing back with that triple adjectival cluster, the thickening of ‘never perfectly recalled’. The lost woman may have a magnetic pull on time’s pulse, but we cannot be sure of much else beyond her teasingly erotic *diaphanéité*.

‘Understanding’, remarks T.S. Eliot, speaking of David Jones’s *In Parenthesis* (1937), ‘begins in the sensibility’.<sup>xv</sup> Yet Thomas keeps coming back to human relationships where sensibility dips out of sight, where readers cannot be entirely sure of what, if any, sensibility is called upon. Perhaps in turn, Thomas is drawn to locations where paths cease, where ‘The lane ends’.<sup>xvi</sup> There is a self-reflexive fondness for places, like his poems, where links are not made easily; where they exist as possibilities more than achievements. He notices creatures that are alone, solitary, too. The birds of these texts are habitually unaccompanied, the chaffinch, the thrush, the blackbird, robin, and wren, the unknown bird. We remember the name—and the absence of plurals. It is part of the surprise of ‘Adlestrop’—one of Thomas’s ‘most loved and best remembered poems’,<sup>xvii</sup> says Matthew Hollis, reusing those key terms—that there are countless birds. But what would be more of a surprise would be to find a pair. Those who remember Thomas with love, then, tell us, oddly enough, something rather un-Thomas-like, ‘unThomasy’, as the critic Guy Cuthbertson would say, about the poetry itself, restless of filiations and affiliations, of felt connections.<sup>xviii</sup> But strangely, this suggestive difference between how a poet is valued, the affection we have for him, and the emotional territory of the poetry is in itself provocative about Thomas’s writing on the history of feeling. There is an almost uncanny way in which Thomas’ poems point to how memory changes what has been experienced, how the terms of recollection can be aslant the precise details of what had once been experienced. Those poems, I think, may in the end point quietly to themselves as things to be remembered too. Cryptically, they invite reflection on their own reception, and, beyond that, on a substantial question about how literary texts remain in the mind after reading, and become, as the stand-in for the original experience (if ‘stand-in’ is quite the right term), the object of critical thought and evaluation. Reading Thomas on memory, readers are caught up with his own speculations on history in the very act of thinking how they remember him. Perhaps Thomas’ fascination with poetry that reaches for the spontaneity and naturalness of speech is relevant here. The ‘utility of oral sources for the historian’, says Alessandro Portelli, endeavouring to define the distinctiveness of oral history, ‘lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory’.<sup>xix</sup> Those changes, Portelli remarks, are revealing of individual efforts to make sense of the past against a notion of ‘what really happened’. For Edward Thomas, the changes he probes as part of the work of memory belong with a puzzled effort of how to situate the past too, to stand in relation to it, and to find exact words to describe that relationship. But the changes ‘wrought by memory’ are not so much about better sense, about a remodelling of the past in more logical terms. They are for Thomas about emotional temperatures, about how the poet feels about the past, and the ways the past changes its relation to the present affectively, changes its identity, when felt from a distance. In turn, Thomas implicitly raises the subtlest questions about the composite nature of reading-shaped-through-recollection, inviting readers to consider what a text is, and how far a difference between an ‘actual’ text, once actually read, and a remembered text is important in locating significance, in plotting what we feel about what we have read, in making a poem part of a reader’s own emotional life, and in the work of the literary critic.

‘When we two walked in Lent’, Thomas writes, already calling on the penitential in Christian seasons,

We imagined that happiness  
Was something different  
And this was something less.

But happy were we to hide  
Our happiness, not as they were  
Who acted in their pride  
Juno and Jupiter:

For the Gods in their jealousy  
Murdered that wife and man,  
And we that were wise live free  
To recall our happiness then. (p.26)

This is not one of Thomas's best poems—the geese of rhetoric, to borrow his own phrase, have not entirely been strangled. And Classical mythology feels an alien presence in Thomas's recollections, as if the poem has momentarily ventriloquized Yeats. But the difference between the lived moment, and the memory of it is not alien to Thomas, and is part of his common ground. In the final stanza, there is wisdom in hiding happiness, and peril in declaring it. But the first stanza's proposition is not that. The couple were not hiding content, but unaware that they were experiencing it. They thought happiness was less, as 'less' as a word is almost a verbal stump of 'happiness'. Happiness seems only available retrospectively, to exist with fewer qualifications when preserved in history, as photographs, in Susan Sontag's memorable phrase, 'give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal'.<sup>xx</sup> Remembered history; history that has been changed by memory: such histories have a life and significance of their own. They are what we live with, after the event, so that in an important way they become the past.

In 'October', the work of memory is opened up in more complicated operations because the poem charts the absence of a clear future from which to remember. Anxiety lightly threads its way into the experience of thinking about how the past becomes recollection. 'The rich scene', Thomas says, in the first poem he wrote after enlisting,

has grown fresh again and new  
As Spring and to the touch is not more cool  
Than it is warm to the gaze; and now I might  
As happy be as earth is beautiful,  
Were I some other or with earth could turn  
In alternation of violet and rose,  
Harebell and snowdrop, at their season due,  
And gorse that has no time not to be gay.  
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. (p.58)

Rarely does the turn of a line modify meaning quite so much in Thomas. 'I might | As happy be as earth is beautiful', he writes—words that, on their own, might readily be taken for (suburban) nostalgia for an England imagined as a peculiarly rural. But the real significance comes with something like a *volta*: 'Were I some other'. Happiness is that which can be imagined for someone else, another version of the self such as that tracked in 'The Other'.

Happiness can be posited, though: ‘Some day I shall think this a happy day’, but that is a future that cannot be exactly located, a time ahead that can only be envisaged in the spondaic poise, even the prosiness, of ‘Some day’. Intriguingly, in a poem about how the future might change memory, Thomas’s poem remembers pieces of Keats—on melancholy; in the disconcerting repetitions of ‘happy’ in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ (1819); in those Keatsian words ‘cool’, ‘earth’; in the splitting-up and scattering of Keats’s line to Benjamin Haydon, ‘He of the rose, the violet, the spring’.<sup>xxi</sup> In the middle of thinking about how memory might change feeling, Thomas offers reading that is remembered and reconfigured. The past’s significance is not static but mobile: it is open to negotiation and dependent on how we feel about it later. Sentimental bonds are not fixed in time, but possibilities; and our emotional coordinates that root us to what we think we felt in the past cannot be assured.

Something of the same idea is laid out amid the syntactical hesitancy, the inversions that take sentences back to nuance meaning differently when Thomas contemplates the import of ‘The Wind’s Song’:

Dull thoughted, walking among the nunneries  
 Of many a myriad anemones  
 In the close copses, I grew weary of Spring  
 Till I emerged and in my wandering  
 I climbed the down up to a lone pine clump  
 Of six, the tallest dead, one a mere stump.  
 On one long stem, branchless and flayed and prone,  
 I sat in the sun listening to the wind alone,  
 Thinking there could be no old song so sad  
 As the wind’s song; but later none so glad  
 Could I remember as that same wind’s song  
 All the time blowing the pine boughs among.  
 My heart that had been still as the dead tree  
 Awakened by the West wind was made free. (p.168)

The poem’s quibble is on the tipping of ‘sad’ into ‘glad’. The wind’s song alters as it is remembered. That curious word ‘nunneries’ at the end of the first line half hints, it may be, at the Religious who have forgotten, or tried to forget, their earlier lives before entering the ‘close copses’ of their enclosed communities. But remembering the past finds something better than the present for the poet—or rather *will*, for the final gesture is to imagine what memory was like once the present had become the past, once the changing agent of temporality has revised and reshaped or released the emotional significance of what once had happened.<sup>xxii</sup> Perhaps it was the central ambition of Thomas’s psychoanalytical therapy to alter how he felt about the past, to persuade him that he could change powerful feelings about personal history and obtain a kind of liberation from it. But his poetry’s searching of emotional changes fits into no obvious therapeutic pattern, for it is never anger or bitterness or trauma that is hidden by a change of heart. What is more striking in this emotional re-bonding with history is the persistence of elegy even in the very invention of happiness, where Thomas’ content is found only after the event; a retrospective condition that can, sadly enough, be remembered but not lived.

Uniquely in his generation, Thomas searches the way in which a man or woman might live with memories that are known to be different from what was felt at the time. Wordsworth charted the changing memories of the past, not least through the three major states of *The Prelude*, and was intrigued by the difference between an expectation (a memory of what other people had encouraged him to feel) and his actual memory of an event. But that is not

the same as Thomas's nuanced sense of two states of feeling about the same event, held up for examination in a single brief poem. Writing poetry when he thought he may not be remembered as a poet, Thomas certainly did not wish to be remembered for the hack publications, up to four books a year, with which he had just about sustained his life. That had been a torment to him, as his friend Lascelles Abercrombie's later life was marked by a worry that he had not fulfilled his early ambitions, and would leave only a minor achievement behind.<sup>xxiii</sup> That was, more famously, the matter on which Cyril Connolly wrote so memorably too. Changing memories, altering how Thomas himself might be remembered as a writer, was, if nothing else, a matter of personal significance and, in the face of the War, urgency. In 'Old Man', Thomas thinks of the feathery flowering plant *Artemisia abrotanum* ('Old Man', 'Lad's-love'), and a child playing around it:

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 scene,  
Of garden rows, and ancient damson trees  
Topping a hedge, a bent path to the door,  
A low thick bush beside the door, and me  
Forbidding her to pick. (p.86)

There is both fretfulness and wonder in this wondering about how futurity will look; a consideration of the selective, shape-changing nature of future memories made plain in a child's mind. Peter Howarth shrewdly notes that the 'poem's present is not just about failing to remember but simultaneously becoming somebody else's history'.<sup>xxiv</sup> Yet there is also an anxiety about *not* becoming someone else's history. Thomas provocatively makes those strong words 'She will remember' stand on their own, seemingly decisively, at the beginning of a line, as if they are free-standing, declaring confidence in what is to come. But of course they are preceded by the questioning: 'I can only wonder how much hereafter | She will remember'. Confidence is not the point: the child's memories will be her own, and beyond the poem's control. So what *will* she remember? There is a frisson of pleasure and a twinge of anxiety in this poem from a writer who could have surety neither that he would survive the War, nor about how his achievement as a largely unpublished poet would be remembered. And these anxieties are not the less if we remember that 'Lad's-love' is sometimes called 'Maid's Ruin' because of its folk association with male virility. What will this unnamed girl's life be? Will she be a ruined maid, too? 'Perhaps the happiest childhoods are those which pass completely away', Thomas said in *The South Country* (1909), 'and leave whole tracts of years without a memory'.<sup>xxv</sup> This little girl might remember nothing. Such forgetfulness, such forgottenness, might be a sign of a happy childhood. Forgetfulness, after all, is not always repression. But, to be sure, it would be a calamity for the posthumous life of a poet.

There is unease in 'The Unknown Bird' too, where Thomas frets about his memory's capacity to adapt, like a photograph's capacity to be altered in the darkroom. 'I cannot tell', he says, 'If truly never anything but fair | The days were when he sang, as now they seem' (p.114). The syntax almost stumbles over itself to reach 'sang', while 'as now they seem' reverts to clarity, familiarity. Has 'seeming' ironed out the roughness of memory too? Immersed in writing that has proved so memorable, so attractive to the vocabulary of remembered reading experiences, Edward Thomas' poetry cannot avoid suggesting to the reader, somewhere in the corners of thought, the implicit questions not only about how texts record memories, but about how memories record texts. As the paths that do not quite

connect hint at the reader's experience in not establishing strong emotional bonds with speakers or with the poet in Thomas's poetry, these recurrent reflections on the shifting capacity of memory in relation to feeling invite, as unobtrusively embedded fragments of criticism, intriguing inquiries about the act of criticism itself and about the play of sentiment in analysing remembered poetry. 'These Things that Poets Said' recognizes in an obvious way that responses to texts can be conditional, contingent, and liable to change through time:

These things that poets said  
Of love seemed true to me  
When I loved and I fed  
On love and poetry equally.

But now I wish I knew  
If theirs were love indeed,  
Or if mine were the true  
And theirs some other lovely weed: (p.136)

Poetry's relationship to temporality is one of modification: the text in this sense is not stable but, like Thomas' own memory of his past, subject to reappraisal. Yet the ruminations on the work of memory elsewhere extend and develop this sense that what we thought we remembered, probing the emotional stability of the original or originating experience and its later life in the mind and heart. It is worth noting that Thomas did not inherit any clear formulations of the work of memory in reading, which even now is hardly a matter of study. It is easy to think, indeed, of Matthew Arnold's 'The Study of Poetry' (1880), and his invention of the touchstones, instances of greatness against which other poetry must be read. Touchstones concern evaluation, they are cases of unchanging excellence, and they involve the most general conception of poetry reading as the identification of permanent and static, of reading as at its best when it does not involve change, where any changeful operation of memory is discarded in preference for the clarity of judgment in the reading itself. Re-reading the touchstones is only to confirm a view of them, not to alter it, and it is certainly not to perceive new meanings other than those that confirm the original evaluation. If memory has intervened, it will have distorted, so re-reading must repair the damage done by enabling re-acquaintance with 'the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it'.<sup>xxvi</sup> But Thomas's sense of the impossibility of returning to the 'strange land, most strange', of the past ('Parting', p.127), and of his alert apprehension that remembered experience has a life, a character, and an inescapability of its own, suggest, it may be, the significance of memory in understanding what we think we know and what we think we feel about it, even if memory posits something we also know to be different, or probably different, from the original.

It is hard, in critical discourse, to find a sense of poetry-as-remembered even as readers talk more about what they remember than about what, exactly, they have read. Indeed, in poets' consideration of how poetry stays in the mind, poets themselves have seemed, oddly, uninterested (W.H. Auden on Yeats is a conspicuous exception). Consider the recently deceased poet and novelist Constance Urdang's '*On Rereading the Poets*' from *Alternative Lives* (1990):

Thinking about the mad poets,  
The drunken, the drugged, the dead poets,  
The forgotten ones, those half-remembered  
For badly remembered lines, misunderstood,

Admired for the wrong reasons, and too late,  
I am amazed at the persistence of poetry.

Like the secret writing of children  
That becomes visible on paper held over a flame,  
Obstinately, the old lines come to life  
Letter by letter, stuttering across the page,  
Confounding criticism, fanned into breath  
Over and over, making themselves new again.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The freshness of the poem disguises its essentially Arnoldian claim that re-reading, and the return to the ‘old lines’ that come ‘back to life’, is a counter to that which memory has simply distorted. Feelings here are the same. ‘[Half] remembered’ or ‘badly remembered’ lines are corrected by re-acquaintance. Memory’s work is to be undone, even in a poem that, in its unrhyming state, asks us to be oddly unaware of memory’s work within the poem itself. Once-read poems seem simply to be the same again as at first—they come ‘back to life’ as once they were: the possibility of (half-) remembered texts as objects of knowledge is excluded; the significance of texts about which our feelings may change is unmentioned. That strange and largely uncharted, but peculiarly lived expanse of changing mental territory, which is the product of memory’s work with earlier experiences of reading, lies mostly beyond the reach of words, outside acknowledgement, even if it is the ground of most of our experience of texts.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In ‘The Unknown Bird’, Thomas remembers the bird’s call, the notes of that otherworldly bird-poet, distinctly: ‘I had them clear by heart and have them still’. But he cannot be sure that he remembers either the actual moments or the real moods in which he heard them at first, separate from how ‘now they seem’ (p.114). The emotional bond has changed over time. Politically, Thomas’ thinking about memory’s work may remind readers, obviously enough, to be careful about nothing less than how national history is framed, to be watchful of the active, selective work of nostalgia in constructing ideas of England before the First World War. When Thomas ruminates that some day, he may look back on this or that moment as a happy one, he quietly fashions a warning about the tempting notion of Edwardian England as some rural idyll, a naiveté and innocence cruelly shattered by the War. Thomas’s fascination with how a man might situate himself emotionally in relation to a felt past that is different from how the past felt is, apart from anything else, a suggestive commentary on such forms of history, on the creation of affective myths in national biographies of calamity. But in terms of literary criticism, Thomas permits his most watchful readers to meditate on the differences that may linger between what they have read, and what they later imagine they feel about it. I do not mean that those who declare their ‘love’ for Edward Thomas have, simply, mistaken him, allowed in a sentimental fuzz between the text and their memory of it. In forming an affective bond with a remembered poet so watchful of affective bonds is neither a paradox of Thomas’s reputation nor a contradiction in it, but a searching critical statement about it. Remembering Thomas in this way indirectly points to the poems’ own rich involvement with memory’s alchemical work on emotion, on the re-establishment of felt connections after time, on the value of the feeling after the event. Remembering Thomas is a peculiarly intimate thing, and in remembering him with love readers propose themselves, even in the language of romance, as taking an even more intimate possession of him in memory. Perhaps that, in the end, points to another one of Thomas’s most intriguing achievements as a writer on feeling and memory with which I end: his ability, distinctive indeed, to persuade us with a few words about memory that *his* memory is ours.

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. (p.48)

Is it merely a function of the realism of this poem that it has become so familiar, not just as a text but as a memory that is someone else's but which has become so intimately possessed by readers that we feel it is our memory, *my* memory? I fancy to myself that I can still hear that cough; remember that lonely sky; and feel that luminous sense of bird-crowded Englishness. How *is* this, and what could or should criticism say about it? Thomas is absorbed with how memory changes what can be felt about the past, so that the remembered poet is also the poet who makes us question, probingly, what we remember of that which Keats would call the heart's history. But, here, in Thomas's most remembered poem, the text asks us to think not about memory that changes *what* is remembered, but about writing that changes *who* remembers it. Thomas is a poet who stays in memory, and prompts many to confess even the exact date and place where they first read him. But here at Adlestrop, he takes a step further in his almost uncanny work with text and memory. He becomes, for a moment, a poet who takes over, through a process I find hard exactly to explain, my remembering, so that his memory, on that trip to see Robert Frost, quietly becomes mine, though I have never been to Adlestrop. It is the strangest but also the most coherent turn in the work of this poet of changeful memory. It reveals with a deeper intimacy, a gesture of possession of our own histories, how the act of remembering texts can, as Edward Thomas seems persistently to imply, be quite different from the mere matter of 'what actually happened'. Poetry not only changes *in* memory, it seems: his small collection of poems allows us to see that, on occasions, a poem might even change what memory is. Thomas is, I think, the most challenging twentieth-century writer on the topic of what, precisely, a critic refers to when he or she speaks of a text that has been read, because he is so brightly interested in the interplay of time with judgment, of history with feeling. He reminds us, in turn, to think harder about the potential differences, and bracing implications for criticism, between what we have read, and what we remember of what we have read, and perhaps, even, what we *say* we remember of what we have read. That is a legacy which is indeed—worth remembering.

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## NOTES

Many thanks to members of the English Research Seminar at Queen Mary, University of London, to whom I read a version of this paper on 19 January 2012, and for their constructive comments. Particular thanks to Alan Davis, University of Lancaster, for extremely insightful comments on Thomas and an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>i</sup> Andrew Motion, 'The Poem and the Path', *Hudson Review*, 63 (2010): 19-54 (p.19).

<sup>ii</sup> Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn, ed., *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry* (London: Enitharmon, 2007), p.98. For a volume of poems paying tribute to Edward Thomas, see Anne Harvey's compilation, *Elected Friends: Poems for and About Edward Thomas* (London: Enitharmon, 1991).

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/dec/04/edward-thomas-david-constantinehero?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>, accessed 8.ix.11.

<sup>v</sup> *Branch-Lines*, p.116.

<sup>vi</sup> See blog comments on <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/dec/04/edward-thomas-david-constantinehero?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>, accessed 8.ix.11.

<sup>vii</sup> *Branch-Lines*, p.11.

<sup>viii</sup> Matthew Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (London: Faber, 2011), p.281.

<sup>ix</sup> *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. by J.M. Robson, 33 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963-91): i.348.

<sup>x</sup> See Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), especially Chapter 2.

<sup>xi</sup> Peter Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.87.

<sup>xii</sup> Edward Thomas, *Keats*, facsimile edition (Cheltenham: Cyder Press, 1999), p.20.

<sup>xiii</sup> 'Women He Liked'; 'Fifty Faggots'.

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/document/1123/872> (The First World War Poetry Digital Archive), accessed 3.x.11.

<sup>xv</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'A Note of Introduction' to David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber, 1961), p.viii.

<sup>xvi</sup> 'The Lane', p.164.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Now All Roads Lead to France*, p.203.

<sup>xviii</sup> Guy Cuthbertson, 'The Teenage Poet and the Edward Thomas Poem', in *Branch-Lines*, pp.51-63.

<sup>xix</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p.55.

<sup>xx</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1978), p.9.

<sup>xxi</sup> John Keats, 'Addressed to [Haydon]', *The Complete Poems*, ed. by John Barnard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.75, l.5.

<sup>xxii</sup> It is worth noting that remembering Shelley is also caught up in this remembering, as Keats belonged in 'October'. This is no revolutionary 'West Wind', but one that only personally revitalises, a recasting of Shelley's appeal, 'Be thou, Spirit fierce, | My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!' into intimacy, into a balm for a private mind ('Ode to the West Wind', *The Poems of Shelley, 1819-1820*, ed. by Kelvin Everest, Jack Donovan, Michael Rossington, and Cian Duffy (Harlow: Longman, 2011), ll.61-2.

<sup>xxiii</sup> 'Fortune, I like to say, was against me; but that is only to console myself. Men make their own fortune. What has played the deuce with me is not fortune, but ambition. The finest curse you can put on a man is to wish him an ambition which he cannot attain—or, even better, which he can only attain to lose it irrevocably. Mine was an ambition that would have harmed no one: it was but to live in the country and write poetry. I was not equal to it. Is fortune to blame for that? Only in this sense that I am what I am', Lascelles Abercrombie, *A Personal Note* (Toronto: Basilike, 1974), unpaginated.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism*, p.71.

<sup>xxv</sup> Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (London: Dent, 1993), p.98.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry' (1880), first issued as the Introduction to T.H. Ward's *The English Poets*, in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by R.H. Super, 11 volumes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-77), ix.163. On this general topic, see Francis O'Gorman, 'Matthew Arnold and Rereading' forthcoming in *The Cambridge Quarterly*, May 2012.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Constance Urdang, 'On Rereading the Poets', *Alternative Lives* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), p.25.

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<sup>xxviii</sup> For one text that looks carefully at an imagined reader's experience in terms of memory and forgetting, see Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Recognizing the role of forgetting in the reading experience of (long) nineteenth-century texts often issued over long periods of time, Dames links the partial memory of fiction with that fiction's own investigation of partial memories, of the nostalgic construction of national histories through omission.

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## John Greening

John Greening received a Cholmondeley Award in 2008. His most recent publications are *Poetry Masterclass* and *Hunts: Poems 1979-2009*, both from Greenwich Exchange. Oxford Poets (Carcenet) are bringing out his next collection, *To the War Poets*, in 2013. His website is [www.johngreening.co.uk](http://www.johngreening.co.uk).

## Braided Syntax: Amy Clampitt (1920-1994)

Although she was only born three years later than Robert Lowell, Amy Clampitt did not have a poem accepted by a leading journal until the year after his death, when *The New Yorker* took one; and her first major collection did not appear until the year of Elizabeth Bishop's *Complete Poems*, in 1983. *The Kingfisher* was an instant success and required a realignment of the history of American poetry: how had this Iowa poet escaped notice for much of the century? Why were we not reading her alongside Lowell and Bishop? The fact was, she had been writing novels and waiting for them to come back from publishers – that, and working with the Oxford University Press and as a librarian at the Audubon Society (America's oldest wildlife conservation movement). It was only in the 1960s that she 'reluctantly concluded that I must be a poet if I was a writer of any kind'.

One of the attractions of Clampitt's work in the 1980s was its celebratory mood, something rarely encountered since the deaths of Plath and Sexton. For Lowell, 'enthusiasm' had been a euphemism for mania; for Clampitt it is what we usually understand it to mean. Her poetry positively gushes, breaking lines and stanzas and even words in a torrent of image and feeling and idea. In an obituary, Jean Hanff Korelitz recalled how Amy Clampitt 'gave the impression of having reached a certainty of purpose in her life, and so there remained no reason not to give herself over to every permutation of delight. Hence, everything made her ecstatic: music, growing things, small kindnesses, and perhaps most of all, the vast plunderable depths of language.' Korelitz also relates how when she phoned Clampitt for the first time, her husband (she married late) answered and told her she was 'outside *skipping*.'

The very first poem in *The Kingfisher* invokes Marianne Moore, and Clampitt's childlike delight in the glorious variousness of existence, her encyclopedic knowledge of flora and fauna, of what is blossoming in the interstices of the everyday, may remind us of her. But there is 'the English Romantic tradition' too: Wordsworth and Coleridge and especially Dorothy [Wordsworth]. She felt a special affinity with the ever-observant, life-loving Dorothy and wrote a play about her (*Mad with Joy*). Her poems from *Archaic Figure*, 'Grasmere', 'Coleorton' and 'Rydal Mount', must count among some of the finest tributes ever made to the Lake Poets. The debt to a later, more eccentric Romantic, Gerard Manley Hopkins is unmissable: she not only prefaces *The Kingfisher* with 'As kingfishers catch fire...', but unapologetically poaches phrases ('gall and gash') and adopts his mannerisms (vanishing-and-emerging-from-under-the-briny-/deep act...). This is not just a feature of *The Kingfisher*. In 'Thermopylae' from her 1987 collection, *Archaic Figure*, she incorporates (unnecessarily, I think) 'brute beauty, valor, act, air, pride, plume'. Unlike Marianne Moore, whose poems are also littered with quotation and allusion, she does not bother with quotation marks. Were Clampitt's own voice not so idiosyncratic, the poems would not withstand this. Good poets will always steal.

Amy Clampitt makes frequent raids on English Literature, especially in the Keats sequence from her second book, *What the Light was Like* (1985) and the third section of

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*Archaic Figure* (1987) ‘A Gathering of Shades’, with its George Eliot and Dorothy Wordsworth poems – and one splendid Lewis Carroll sonnet. But her writing is of a peculiarly American type, both in its ability to praise out loud (‘I’m naturally noisy’, she once said) and in its commanding, Jamesian syntax. Where other poets follow the image, the line, the juxtaposition, the rhyme, the play of (or refusal of) traditional metre, for Clampitt it is the sentence that controls everything. She has written several dozen single-sentence poems: something that might have been learnt from Whitman, as suggested by Willard Spiegelman in the Clampitt issue of *Verse*, but which was certainly following Elizabeth Bishop’s example: as Spiegelman points out, the opening 36 lines of Bishop’s ‘The Moose’ are all one sentence. One cannot but admire the sheer virtuosity of syntax in ‘A Scaffold’, which also juggles some convincingly witty rhymes with its enjambments. At best, the one-sentence technique can keep a poem airborne effortlessly, like a glider on a thermal. At worst – and I am thinking of a poem such as ‘Easedale Tarn’ from *Westward* – it can sound like a politician engaged in a filibuster.

When Clampitt plays too ambitiously with line-breaks and metres, she is inclined to trip up (see ‘Exmoor’): the sentence pulls the poem where it wants to go. Her somewhat turgid sestina, ‘The Reedbeds of Hackensack’, with its sludgy phrases (‘the vulgar, the snugly ugly’) contrasts revealingly with those written by Bishop. The sestina is essentially a syntax-driven form, but the seven repeated line endings are fundamental to its success. Elizabeth Bishop chooses plain words for hers: *coffee/crumb/balcony/miracle/sun/river* in the early ‘A Miracle for Breakfast’; *house/grandmother/child/stove/almanac/tears* in the later ‘Sestina’. Clampitt’s much more extravagant choice is: *reeds/asphodel/Hackensack/ugly/fraudulent/civility* – and she dispenses with the seventh repetition in the *envoi*. The result is a work that is characteristically rococo, where even the witticisms and lighter references get sucked under by a clutching allusiveness (Shakespeare’s sonnet, William Carlos Williams’ *asphodel*):

...shall I compare thee, Mincius, to the Hackensack?  
Now Italy knows how to make its rivers ugly,  
must, ergo, all such linkages be fraudulent,  
gilding the laureate hearse of a defunct civility?  
Smooth-sliding Mincius, crowned with vocal reeds,  
coevals of that greeny local weed the *asphodel*...

Nevertheless, those novels Clampitt worked at for much of her life taught her a great deal about the virtues of a good prose style; and there is narrative interest as well as increasing humour in her 1985 volume. I would particularly recommend her satirical allegory of the working mother, ‘A New Life’, and some of the other studies of city life in the ‘Metropolis’ section. Her ironic allusiveness in ‘Real Estate’ is entertaining (‘Something there is that doesn’t/love a Third Avenue tenement...’) but there is genuine exasperation here at the vulgarity and speed of development in her beloved New York. The half-rhymed couplets make for some glittering satire. Striking, too, is ‘High Culture’, which makes a brilliant leap between a budding amaryllis and a violinist putting on a bright gown before a concert. But Amy Clampitt does not have Elizabeth Bishop’s gift for the soaring, spacious enjambment, or the plain conversational register. Diction and information tug at her poems, weighing them down, making a smooth flight hard to achieve. Helen Vendler compares the effect to ‘small electrical jumps’ by which her poems refuel themselves. They are only lyrical in a very halting, Modernist, Weberian sense. Indeed, ‘Sunday Music’ (one of several

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contemplations of great composers) would be a rewarding source of commentary on Clampitt's own approach to writing

But it is the delight in minutiae that establishes Amy Clampitt in a direct line with Emily Dickinson – to make one little room an everywhere. Although, being a twentieth-century American, she loves to carry the contents of her little room to the rest of the world, too. Part of her envies the earlier poets' metrical, moral and emotional certainties. She opens her penultimate collection, *Westward* (1991) by putting 'John Donne in California', and wondering, much as Bishop did in 'Questions of Travel', whether it is better to imagine powerfully than to visit. She implies that we travel because we can never be 'at home' in this age; and any modern poem can only offer a 'frail wick of metaphor' – i.e. cannot hold a candle to Donne, Dickinson or any of the Old World writers haunting her work.

*Westward* is perhaps Amy Clampitt's most lyrical and clear-voiced collection and there is a unity and universality to its poems that is absent from the Greek studies of *Archaic Figure*. This is probably because the work is driven on a powerful wind from the Prairies, culminating in the long poem of reminiscence about that region of her childhood. The spirit of the Greyhound Bus traveller pervades the book, captured in touching incidents such as 'At a Rest Stop in Ohio', whose loose *aba* tercets and plainer than usual diction map the poignancy of the child's cry in the lonely terminus: 'Bound though/it may be for the city/of the angels, snow//warnings intervene,/to discommode a mother/ebony of cheekbone...' But there is still a tendency to look for the obscure word, the polysyllabic alternative. 'Small' is not good enough: it must be 'minuscule'. Poets should, of course, resist the obvious choice of language, and this is absolutely the right procedure in writing a contemporary nature poem, such as those in the 'Habitats' section of *Westward*, where oats have 'pendent helmetfuls/of mica-drift', for example, and the studies of alder, beach-pea, blueberry would surely have had Dorothy Wordsworth's approval. But Clampitt's best poems are those that follow the swift clear current of her feelings rather than the muddy eddies of etymology. *Westward's* fine title poem, about a visit to the Isle of Iona, manages to navigate both: she stands 'at the brim of an illumination/that can't be entered, can't be lived in', and concludes that the only 'surety,/reprieve from drowning' can be in 'names'. Iona is not only a religious community, St Columba's early centre of Christianity, but also where many of the graves of Scottish monarchs are to be found, presumably with their 'names' on them. Clampitt's mind runs on the contrast with her own 'prairie eyeblink', its nameless pioneers and ponders 'the mind's/resistance to the omnipresence of what/moves but has no, cannot say its name'.

Her final collection, *A Silence Opens* (1994) is, as Mary Jo Salter notes in her foreword to the *Collected Poems*, valedictory in mood. There are indeed a good few elegies and a translation of a Canto from *The Divine Comedy* but there are also various occasional poems, studies of birds and trees and much more travelling: Italy, in particular, and England again – a memorable stay in the Yorkshire Dales, where a stream the equal of Inversnaid's catches her ear, 'peat-/dark in spate, hour by hour/engorged with braidings'. Readers are likely to be struck by the skeletal closing poem, 'A Silence', where Clampitt's typographical spaces are (Salter again) 'a visual hint both at God's silence and at poetry's limitations'.

In the end, it is not so much for the engrossing literary snapshots, the poems of place and displacement, the nature sketches, memories of 'the Prairie' and wonderful transmutations of city-life (that cataract in the New York subway in 'Times Square Water Music') or even for the poems of music and the visual arts that we will remember Amy Clampitt. It will be for her elegies: 'Burial in Cypress Hills', 'My Cousin Muriel'... In particular, those that draw on deeper personal energies, where a 'hairline fracture' in the busy, fascinating, glittering surface world widens 'to a geomorphic fissure' – perhaps concerning love (as in 'The Kingfisher'), most powerfully concerning death: her mother in 'A

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Procession at Candlemass', her father in 'Beethoven, Opus 111', both from her 1983 collection.

The latter poem makes a fascinating comparison with Anne Stevenson's recent 'Arioso Dolente'. Stevenson is remembering her father and how he would shout advice to her as she practised Beethoven's Opus 110. Amy Clampitt chooses the next piano sonata, Beethoven's last, and commemorates her father's trapped 'radical' heroism in the prairies by setting it against the composer 'ventilating,/with a sound he cannot hear, the cave-in/of recurring rage.' 'Beethoven, Opus 111' begins by reminding us what a struggle it will always be to raise high art in the lowlands, 'a downward wandering/disrupting every formal symmetry'. Clampitt takes us to 'tornado country' and tells us the anecdote of how her father determined to root up and burn all the local poison ivy in the fencerows, to 'disrupt/the givens of existence', like Beethoven defying convention and breaking piano strings ('a disintegrating surf of blossom/opening along the keyboard, along the fencerows/the astonishment of sweetness'. The result for her father was 'a mist of venom' and a shirt of Nessus 'worn like a curse'. Beethoven's whirlwind rages and his revolutionary stubbornness are shrewdly combined here, then set against what 'art' was usually understood to mean in Iowa in the poet's childhood: something pretty and decorative to remind the farmer that he 'is not a clod'. Clampitt is frustrated that there is no understanding of the language of suffering Beethoven speaks, a language which could voice the very agony that the Prairie-dwellers have experienced, had they ears to hear. But no, art does not get beyond 'silk and perfume' or perhaps 'a chromo of a Hobbema/tree-avenue' on the Steinway. Any potential audience in the 'fencerows' of the stalls, might be briefly astonished by the sweetness, but nothing more. The poem ends with another memory of Amy Clampitt's father in the open air, this time stopping his car to 'dig up by the roots a flower/he'd never seen before', planting it at home, but finding it would not thrive. The imagery speaks plainly of what it means to be inescapably rooted in a particular place, and how a certain spirit can make 'the blister shirt of the intolerable' into a work of art, a magical walking on air. Clampitt suggested that the Op.111 sonata be played after her ashes had been buried beneath her favourite birch.

The title, 'A Procession at Candlemas', might suggest some royal funeral cortège, but this celebrated elegy is about a Greyhound Bus in a traffic jam. The Prairie-born poet links her movement west for her mother's funeral with that profoundly painful American myth of the extinction of the buffalo. In a language as direct as she ever achieved, Clampitt tells us 'Sooner or later/every trek becomes a funeral procession' and the poem embodies her refusal to accept that her mother is dying in the way it keeps shifting upwards to happier fields, 'towards scenes of transhumance': sheep, llamas, exotic Kurdish women, then tentatively approaching the topic again through the idea of 'Candlemas', the feast commemorating the 'purification' of the Virgin Mary (in the bleak month of February). The feminist implications of this have been much discussed, but the immediate ironic significance is that the poet's mind is obviously on the relationship with her mother 'curtained in Intensive Care' (those curtains in themselves rather suggestive of a religious ritual) and Clampitt keeps the 'processional' in a broader context by describing the traffic's 'lighted candles' passing Arlington cemetery. She uses the Greyhound as a metaphor for the vulnerable, isolated human soul (as she will again in 'A Rest Stop in Ohio') and keeps the broader picture in mind as the bus reaches 'a Stonehenge/of fuel pumps' where 'the bison hulks slantwise/beside them, drinking' and the gew-gaws on sale highlight the inconsequential nature of contemporary life. Clampitt gently reminds us (there is no angry hectoring in her work) how we blithely call a place 'Indian Meadows' forgetting in the 'papoose' of our ego both 'Indians' and 'the westward-trekking/transhumance, once only, of a people who,/in losing everything they had, lost even/the names they went by'. The second section of this diptych

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casts its net even wider, contemplating the role of ‘Athene, who had no mother’, whose own ‘processional’ was very much male-inspired, before jolting us back to the matter in hand: ‘Daylight, snow falling, knotting of gears’, more detritus of the material world, and several stanzas’ description of the landscape, a distraction from ‘the undertow’ of terror and a more assertive confrontation of women’s issues:

Where is it? Where, in the shucked-off  
bundle, the hampered obscurity that has been  
for centuries the mumbling lot of women,

did the thread of fire, too frail  
ever to discover what it meant, to risk  
even the taking of a shape, relinquish

the seed of possibility, unguessed-at  
as a dream of something precious?

The poem moves to its conclusion through ‘the long-unentered nave of childhood’, with a brief hint of that famous image from the Venerable Bede of human life being like a sparrow passing through the feasting hall. But here there is a very American, almost Frostian ‘small/stilled bird, its cap of clear yellow/slit by a thread of scarlet’ to lead the poet back to ‘the mother/Curtained in Intensive Care’ (repeated like a response in a church service) and the image once again of the moving traffic.

Further Reading:

Amy Clampitt

*Collected Poems* (Faber, 1997)

Bonnie Costello (ed)

*Verse* (Vol 10, No.3, Winter 1993: *Amy Clampitt: Poems, Essays, Tributes*)

Helen Vendler

*The Music of What Happens*, (Harvard, 1998)

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## Tony Roberts

Tony Roberts was educated in England and America. He has published three poetry collections: *Flowers of the Hudson Bay* (Peterloo), *Sitters* (Arc) and, in 2010, *Outsiders* (Shoestring Press). His poems, reviews and essays appear regularly in the literary press.

## Maxine Kumin at Fifty

The arrival of Maxine Kumin's second selected poems, *Where I Live*, prompts this retrospective. Now in two collections the fortunate reader can take a fifty year journey through Kumin's fertile imagination, through memory and "the mild hills of New Hampshire" from 1960 – 2010. One of the attendant pleasures will be the echoes of Thoreau, Frost, Moore, Auden, Anne Sexton (and Annie Dillard, too). We have our own poets to honour, but in her 85<sup>th</sup> year we ought also to admire one who has contributed such a sustained, accomplished performance to American letters.

Maxine Kumin was born in Philadelphia in 1925. Although Jewish, she attended nearby Catholic schools and then Radcliffe. Although she wrote poetry from an early age, it was the close friendship Kumin forged with Anne Sexton which became the defining moment in her literary career and led, among other honours, to a Pulitzer Prize. She has been Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress and held a number of residencies at American universities. In 1976 Kumin and her husband moved to a farm in Warner, New Hampshire, where they bred horses. They have two daughters and a son.

*Selected Poems 1960-1990* gives the fruit of nine collections taking us from Kumin's Jewish roots in Philadelphia in her debut volume, *Halfway* (1961), published when she was thirty-six, to *Nurture* in 1989. Corresponding with Peter Davison for *The Fading Smile* (1994), Kumin wrote of her meeting with Sexton in 1957 at the Boston Centre for Adult Education and the continuity of Sexton's influence beyond her suicide in October, 1947:

I think that I was able to grow much more personal in my poetry because of her shining example. The problem was talking about family, parents, personal considerations. That seemed very dangerous and very fraught with feeling, so that seemed very daring.

Kumin's poetic territory and voice were established in the opening verse of the title poem of her first collection:

As true as I was born into  
my mother's bed in Germantown,  
the gambrel house in which I grew  
stood halfway up a hill, or down,  
between a convent and a madhouse.

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There is a weaving of memory and imagination here, an ironic tone, the beginnings of collusion with the reader, a conversational lyric style and, supremely, a formal discipline. Despite her private anxiety, Kumin seems to be the most centred of poets and even here finely balances herself both literally and psychically. However, for her as for many other poets – and particularly those of her generation awkwardly described as ‘confessional’ – the exploration of identity begins. Hence the poem also introduces the first of many self-styled “tribal poems”: poems about Kumin’s cultural identity and family.

In “On Being Asked to Write a Poem for the Centenary of the Civil War” deals with her Jewish great-grandfather who:

strapped needles up and notions  
and walked packaback across  
the dwindling Alleghenies,  
his red beard and nutmeg freckles  
dusting as he sang.

The poem ends with her observation that “in a hundred years/ all stories go wrong” and it is worth remembering at the outset that, although Kumin’s generous voice is part of her attraction, the poet and her persona are not *exactly* one and the same. In an interview for the Interlochen Arts Academy, Michigan 1977, Kumin made the point that:

the *I* is the persona that the poet is hiding behind..... Sometimes  
it can be very much a persona poem, and sometimes it can be  
quite an autobiographical poem.

Alternatively, to create space between the *I* and the self is to create imaginative room for the poet to shape experience. Having said that, *The Privilege* (1965) seems to explore Kumin’s cultural confusion quite directly. In “Sisyphus” her burden is both pushing the legless man past the nunnery and failing to acknowledge her identity:

He called  
me a perfect Christian child.

One day I said I was a Jew.  
I wished I had. I wanted to.

The basket man is gone; the stone  
I push uphill is all my own.

In “The Pawnbroker”, a conflicted elegy for her father “comes again upon the desperate issue of autonomy”. According to the poet, it follows, “a strict rhyming pattern, a kind of enabling legislation to write the poem”. It opens with the words, “The symbol inside this poem is my father’s feet”. They are “small white feet” bare as he lies awaiting cremation. They hint at something unused, unexpressed about his life.

Another facet of Kumin’s quest for identity is the dream poem. Its significance she explained in a 1974 interview:

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Although I lived in a safe America my father's relatives  
were going into the ovens. I was a natural candidate for  
nightmares and I think we never outrun those early  
shadows. I tend to respect my dreams, perhaps overmuch, as  
I respect the unconscious and revere the things that arrive in  
the unconscious unbidden. Almost everything in my poetry  
in some way comes up through those pipes.

“Quarry, Pigeon Cove” is an early example (“The dead city waited,/ hung upside down in the quarry”). Where it impresses is in the imaginative detail of its surreal perspective:

A dog was swimming and splashing  
Air eggs nested in his fur.  
The hairless parts of him bobbed like toys  
and the silk of his tail blew past like milkweed.

Not every reader will find dream poems satisfying, however. “The absence of any kind of touchstone”, which Kumin notes in such poems, is the very reason. Dream poems have obvious symbolic significance, but they lack real experience. The title poem of her next collection, *The Nightmare Factory* (1970), is a case in point. The “dream machines” offer a catalogue of nightmarish terrors, but takes us nowhere except to generalised fear.

The collection opens up into the fresh New Hampshire air with poems like “Watering Trough”, where a Victorian bath does animal service. As well as the utility of the move, of our forefathers being replaced by cows and horses, there is the comic sense in which the two are as one:

let there be always  
green water for sipping  
that muzzles may enter thoughtful  
and rise dripping.

Poems set in rural New Hampshire increase in significance in the course of Maxine Kumin's career and are frequently among her most satisfying. They are life-affirming but not sentimental, being always keenly observed. On and around her farm issues of identity are, if not resolved, then at least given perspective.

*Up Country* (1972) won the Pulitzer Prize, confirming Kumin's reputation. “Creatures” gives us the poet as naturalist, immersing herself in close contemplation of pond species. More unusual in its arresting idea is “Stones”, where minerals are on the move, a nocturnal species (“The moving of stones, that sly jockeying thrust/ takes place at night underground, shoulders first.”) This imaginative perceptiveness modulates inevitably into dream and the honey mushrooms of “The Dreamer, the Dream”. Infinitely more sobering is the poem “Woodchucks”, a powerful meditation on human violence. The poem is nominally about woodchucks and man's cruelty in the natural world. The opening line (“Gassing the woodchucks didn't turn out right.”) and our knowledge of Kumin's tribal sense, alert us to the echo of mankind's barbarity to fellow human beings long before the last line confirms it. *House, Bridge, Fountain, Gate* (1975) took its title from Louis Simpson's *North of Jamaica* in which the poet had written, “it is as though things are trying to express themselves through us.” Kumin responded very positively to this because, as she explained, “I believe so strongly in the naming and the particularizing of things.” The book features some of Kumin's

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strongest tribal poems. They recreate a lost childhood on the eve of war, full of poignant and pointed recollections:

In three years Laura will wake with  
a headache that walks down her neck stem  
and puts her into a wheelchair.  
She grows patient as an animal.  
After that I prefer not to know her.

("Sperm")

Kumin is encumbered by restrictions ("my queer pinched life") but privileged. She must look elsewhere to the victims of the times:

Warsaw will excrete its last Jews.  
My father will cry like a child.  
He will knuckle his eyes, to my terror,  
over the letters that come from the grave  
begging to be sponsored, plucked up, saved.

("The Thirties Revisited")

Why has the poet returned to this period? She tells us in "Life's Work" that "the midnights of my childhood still go on".

On the evidence of the selection, *House, Bridge, Fountain, Gate* is as strong a collection as Kumin has published. It ends with her cycle of 'Amanda' poems, impressive in their accessible love and pain, in which she looks unsentimentally to the end.

Let us ripen in our own way –  
I with my back to the trunk  
of a butternut that has caught  
the fatal red canker  
and on my knee  
this skillet of your old foot.

("The Agnostic Speaks to Her Horse's Hoof")

*The Retrieval System* (1978) is not an easy collection in its bleakness, but it is another fine one. The unquiet dreams include the panic of a barn catching fire, in which all the loved ones must first be imperilled before they escape. "Angels" revisits moments where these eponymous figures fail to console, as with the suicide of Anne Sexton which took place after a lunch with Kumin in October 1974. Her death reappears in "How It Is":

I think of the last day of your life,  
old friend, how I would unwind it, paste  
it together in a different collage,  
back from the death car idling in the garage,  
back up the stairs, your praying hands unlaced,

Also painful, are the 'losses' of grown children, as they move away emotionally and geographically. The excellent "Seeing the Bones" deals with this separation, the necessary

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adjustment to the absence of her ‘European’ daughter, caught very well in the following image of faith:

How many seasons walking  
on fallen apples like pebbles in  
the shoes of the Canterbury faithful  
have I kept the garden up  
with leaven of wood ash, kitchen leavings  
and the sure reciprocation of horse dung?

There are fine New Hampshire poems in *The Retrieval System*, also, where life struggle, decay and death find some kind of harmony. Just as there is the lovely, soulful “Late Snow”, there is the repressed terror of “How It Goes On” to balance it, a poem which deals with the trading of an “unwise/ewe lamb” and offers a meditation on human cruelty (“this dark particular bent of our hungers”).

In 1982 Maxine Kumin published *Our Ground Time Here Will Be Brief, New and Selected Poems*. There is more geographical relocating here. Her rural New England neighbour, Henry Manley (82), remains in spirits. “*You can’t look back,*” he says, but of course the poet can especially since, as the time-zone chart in one poem’s epigraph reminds us, “*Just remember that everything east of you has already happened.*” There are happy moments and memories, such as “Continuum: a Love Poem” which begins:

going for grapes with  
ladder and pail in  
the first slashing rain  
of September rain  
steeping the dust  
in a joyous squelch

However, conviviality is laced with change and loss. A “Family Reunion” ends with “So briefly having you back to measure us/ is harder then having to let you go” and in “Leaving My Daughter’s House” the poet confesses, “And no matter how hard I run I know/ I can’t penetrate my daughter’s life”. Old thoughts intrude, old losses. “Itinerary of an Obsession” (from which the epigraph above came) and “Apostrophe to a Dead Friend” return to Kumin’s lifelong loss of Sexton:

Soon I will be sixty.  
How it was with you now  
hardly more vivid than how  
it is without you,

“In Memorium P. W. Jr. (1921-1980)” is a longer poem which deals, in five sections, with the wasting disease and death of a brother. It is elegy by way of fond memory, though typically it includes the unflinching, “My whole childhood I feared cripples”:

Something entered people, something chopped,  
pressed, punctured, had its way with them  
and if you looked, bad child, it entered you .

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*The Long Approach* (1985-6) refers in fact to the landing pathway preferred for the ease of horses in flight. The poems here travel, as does the mood since it comes to encompass global dread. In “You Are in Bear Country” a Canadian government advice pamphlet opens in a fine mood. Subsequent poems return to Kumin’s childhood and her mother:

I give her back the chipped ruby goblets.  
I hand over the battered Sheffield tureen  
and the child I was, whose once-auburn hair  
she scooped up like gems from the beauty-shop floor.  
(“The Chain”)

There two enjoyable, cheerful upbeat poems, “Appetite” and “Introducing the Fathers”. Then we are on the French border with Kumin’s grandchild. Soon the mood darkens, in keeping with war and nuclear worries. Even in “my spiny hillside farm in New Hampshire” an electric storm is enough to evoke again a “first strike” terror and “After the Harvest” proclaims, “Now all of the gods agree, no part of the main/can survive the nuclear night.”

The final selection in *Selected Poems 1960-1990* is from Maxine Kumin’s 1989 collection, *Nurture*. In the title poem she affirms:

I am drawn to such dramas of animal rescue.  
They are warm in the throat. I suffer, the critic proclaims,  
from an overabundance of maternal genes.

Yet the heart of the message in this selection is her affirmation of kinship with all other species. In “Sleeping with Animals”, for example, the poet keeps her “covenant” with a pregnant broodmare:

What we say to each other in the cold black  
of April, conveyed in a wordless yet perfect  
language of touch and tremor, connects  
us most surely to the wet cave we all  
once burst from gasping, naked or furred,  
into our separate species

The nine poems which precede it deal in different ways with our neglect, abuse, or wrongheaded treatment of the endangered: caribou, penguin, manatee (sea cows), whales and such. Man is a born meddler with species, “who, sizing up the prospects of the few/ in saving one, eradicated two.” (“Homage to Binsey Poplars”). Kumin’s concern for the environment and its life forms is, in my view, most successful when it is rooted not in tv documentaries or in her reading but in her daily experiences. Such is the case with her bear poem, “Encounter in August” and with “Custodian”. “Custodian” is wonderfully alert, a poem which recounts her spotted dog’s seasonal capture and release of frogs (“The ride untroubled in the wet pocket/ of the dog’s mouth”). It ends with ‘Roberta Frost’ humanism:

Nothing is to be said here  
of need or desire. No moral arises  
nor is this, probably, purgatory.  
We have this old dog,  
custodian of an ancient race of frogs,

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doing what he knows how to do  
and we too, taking and letting go,  
that same story.

In its reluctance to draw a moral the poem is amusing, puzzled and large-hearted. Other poems in the selection deal with favourite subjects: time spent in Salzburg with her daughter and grandson, her past, Anne Sexton's reputation and –inevitably – old age: “We are growing into one sex, a little leathery/ but loving, appreciating the air of midday (“Distance”).

*Where I Live New and Selected Poems 1990-2010* selects from the five volumes since *Selected Poems 1960-1990* and adds twenty-three new poems for good measure. Kumin is nothing if not prolific. “Credo” the first poem in the selection from *Looking for Luck (1992)* uses an old Kiowa legend in order to establish what the long-time reader of Maxine Kumin's poetry might have already concluded of her love of the land: that it has become increasingly spiritual over the years. Here she considers the legends and thinks of her relationship with horses:

I believe in myself as their sanctuary  
and the earth with its summer plumes of carrots,

its clamber of peas, beans, masses of tendrils  
as mine. I believe in the acrobatics of boy  
into bear, the grace of animals  
in my keeping, the thrust to go on.

In her later sixties, though one poem travels to Bangkok, another to Alaska and a third alludes to motels around the country, she is mostly nearer home, describing the birth of a foal (in “Praise Be”), haymaking, the dispersal of rats when a dump becomes a landfill, an old neighbour's reminiscences and her own.

In *Connecting the Dots (1996)* – possibly a stronger selection of poems – the poet's old bachelor farmer neighbour, Henry Manley, breathes his last (fittingly in a monologue) and the children return home in the title poem, to visit and assess their aged parents:

We're assayed kindly  
to see if we're  
still competent  
to keep house, mind  
the calendar  
connect the dots.

The Kumins have a clean bill of health, shovelling pine sawdust in “Chores” and light-heartedly complaining of the farm's endless chores, or riding into the wonder of doe watching in the “October dapple”. Much emotion is invested in the poems, “Letters” and “October, Yellowstone Park”. In the former, Kumin recalls a summer camp letter home to her mother. It is a longish poem which deals with their sometimes difficult relationship:

Your laugh, your scarves, the gloss of your makeup,  
shallow and vain. I wore your lips, your hair,  
even the lift of my eyebrows was yours

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but nothing of you could please me, bitten so deep  
by the fox of scorn. Like you, I married young  
but chose animals, wood heat, hard hours  
instead of Sheffield silver, freshcut flowers,  
your life of privilege and porcelain.

There is a coming-to-terms in the course of this painful, confessional poem (“Little by little our lives pulled up, pulled even./ A sprinkle here and there of approbation”). Perhaps appropriately, Anne Sexton returns in “New Year’s Eve 1959” (a reminiscence of her lifelong friend dancing) and in “October, Yellowstone Park”, where Kumin is “above a brace of eagles launched in flight” and addresses the friend whose “cigarette-and whiskey-hoarse chuckle” is always in her ear.

In 1998, Maxine Kumin was severely injured in a horse-riding accident, suffering “a hangman’s fracture” of the neck. Not surprisingly, then, *The Long Marriage* (2001) has one eye on oblivion, though its heart is in the natural world, woolgathering around her farm with Wordsworth and Marianne Moore, meditating on “a rapture of blackest humus” in “The Brown Mountain”:

What dies out of us and our creatures,  
out of our fields and gardens,  
comes slowly back to improve us:

One poem only makes reference to the accident. Yet others deal with man’s inhumanity (“Identifying the Disappeared”, “Bringing Down the Birds”) and the title poem, while celebrating Kumin’s personal good fortune, fears for a future faced alone:

the bowels’ terror  
that one will go  
before  
the other as  
the clattering horse  
hooves near.

Guilt stalks *Jack and Other New Poems* (2005). The selection opens with thoughts of the Vietnam war, prompted by extreme weather conditions in “New Hampshire, February 7, 2003”. “The Sunday Phone Call” brings back the poet’s dead father, “The Apparition” a pet dog:

That night the old dog works  
his way back up and out  
gasping, salted with dirt  
and barks his familiar bark  
at the scribble-scratched back door.

Auschwitz returns in one poem, in another a hospice; a third deals with brutally discarded pets. In “Summer Meditation” the poet tells us:

I want to sing  
of death unbruised.  
Its smoothening.  
I want to prepare

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for death's arrival  
in my life.

Nevertheless it seems she cannot, because of its finality. In the meantime there is guilt and in the title poem, "Jack", it is the poet's own, for allowing her "big-nosed roan gelding" to be sold by a neighbour.

The poems that stand out in the selection from *Still To Mow* (2007) are again those that deal with Maxine Kumin's own experience: farm chores, memory, love:

Marriage dizzied us. Hand over hand,  
flesh against flesh for the final haul,  
we tugged our lifeline through limestone and sand,  
lover and long-legged girl.

("Looking Back in My Eighty-First Year")

In these poems, her humanity shines as clearly but more memorably than in those poems that deal at second hand with "torture revelations" and man's inhumanity to man. Her anger and frustration are perfectly justified but, arguably, prose might be a better medium for them. These poems – and there are a number of them – *as poems* lack what Henry James called "felt life"; they belong to all our nightmares. Better to do what she tells us she did in "During the Assassinations":

During the assassinations  
I marched with other soccer mums.  
I carried lemons in case of tear gas.  
*I have a dream* became my dream.  
I stood all night  
on the steps of the Pentagon.

*Where I Live* begins with the new poems, in two sections. The first tell us about her home, her dogs and horses, her dread:

Only we, sunstruck in this azure  
day, must drag along the backpacks  
of our past, must peer into the bottom muck

of what's to come, scanning the plot  
for words that say another year, or not.

("In the Moment")

Although the occasional temptation to preach returns with "The Whole Hog", a blast at factory farming and our support of it, there is too the tenderness of loss. In "The Taste of Apple" there is an affecting description of the death of her old horse:

I poured  
a libation of apple juice for the earth to welcome his corpse –  
some drops spilled on his chestnut flank and some dribbled  
on his cheek and splashed onto his yellow teeth as he lay  
deep on one side and my hand shook – I could hardly see –  
rocking my grief back and forth over this kind death

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the taste of apple wasting in his mouth.

The second section of new poems returns to the world of men, poets to be exact. There are reminiscences of Kunitz, Meredith, Milosz and Auden. Then there are Kumin's beloved Victorians, Coleridge and the Wordsworths, and particularly "Dorothy who gave so much and got so little".

Writing of herself in the third person, Kumin once noted: "The poet would define these two themes – loss of the parent, relinquishment of the child – as central to her work." Her readers would add the poet's lifelong exploration of her roots in family and nature. In her own words: "I would say that the distillation of everyday life experience is exactly what I am trying to particularize and order in poetry." At that she has been consistently good throughout a very long career.

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## Shanta Acharya

Shanta Acharya was born in India; she won a scholarship to Oxford, where she completed her doctoral thesis before going to Harvard as a Visiting Scholar. Her study, *The Influence of Indian Thought on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, was published by The Edwin Mellen Press, USA. Her latest poetry collection, *Dreams That Spell The Light*, her fifth, was published by Arc Publications, UK, in 2010. A widely anthologised poet, Shanta has published over 300 poems in major publications in the UK, USA, and India. [www.shantaacharya.com](http://www.shantaacharya.com)

### *To Taste That Various, Universal Bliss:*

## The Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is among the finest poets of modern times and widely recognized as a brilliant, creative genius produced by the Indian Renaissance. His song, 'Janaganamana-adhinayaka', is the national anthem of India, and that of Bangladesh is also a Tagore composition. Tagore wrote poetry throughout his life, but he also wrote songs, stories, novels, plays, essays, literary criticism, memoirs, dance dramas, books for children and travelogues. He is included among the most important visual artists of his time. His achievements are manifold – a pioneer in education, an advocate of women's equality, to being a deep ecological and holistic thinker.

His sense of the world, not seen from any narrow nationalist angle, was clear, calm and unprejudiced. He believed in local (individual) independence and global interdependence. He saw the connection between science and spirituality, economic freedom and self realization, politics and ecology, international cooperation and individual rights, reason and imagination, art and business. In "A Defence of Poetry", Shelley wrote: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Tagore was such a man. And more, as his poetry draws upon a myriad influences. This largesse is reflected in his creative output. In his poetry we encounter a rainbow of consciousness where Indian classical and folk traditions mingle with western thought, Sufi mysticism and Buddhist teachings. His ability to synthesize eclectic influences in creating a deeply humane and inclusive view of the world is relevant. Tagore's ideas continue to find contemporary resonance.

His family background, no less unique, contributed to Tagore's benevolent influence on his society, particularly the way his life and art helped to reconcile educated Bengalis to a dual heritage – cosmopolitan and Indian. His grandfather, Dwarakanath Tagore (1794-1846), had acquired estates, mills and factories, founding a huge business empire. He aspired to make Bengal and Calcutta – then the second imperial city after London – centre of an Anglo-Indian sphere of prosperity and influence. Dwarakanath died in London, fully accepted by the international business community and feted by Queen Victoria. The culture and civilization into which Rabindranath was born was in many ways more advanced than that of England.

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Tagore was an artist in the high Victorian sense and was more versatile than his European contemporaries.

Commenting on Tagore's legacy, John Bayley wrote: "Like Tolstoy he was an aristocrat, with all an aristocrat's instinctive confidence and self-assurance, fetched from generations of position and authority. That factor – hardly conceivable any more today – is historically of great importance. Tagore could be seen not only as one of nature's great men, but a great man by social temperament and class origin. In 1913 the Nobel Prize would hardly have been awarded to an unknown Indian, however talented." But, "living a life of Faustian creativeness, running estates and building schools like Tolstoy, and even his own university at Santiniketan, he none the less strikes one today as a vessel of tranquility and repose, an ikon not of 'oriental wisdom' or anything of that sort, but of deep understanding and comprehensiveness."<sup>1</sup>

Tagore's message is one of universal humanism. In the words of Satish Kumar: "As a master of his craft, Tagore combined the purity of poetry with a purpose for living."<sup>2</sup> Tagore's writings lift the human spirit and restore human dignity. His concept of *jiban-debata* (life god) or the creative principle "connects Tagore's own poetic creativity with the creative process of the universe as a whole," explains William Radice.<sup>3</sup> This ability to see different points of view and reconcile them into a transcendent vision remains his legacy. For Ketaki Kushari Dyson, Tagore's poetry is "characterized by an impressive wholeness of attitude: a loving warmth, a compassionate humanity, a delicate sensuousness, an intense sense of kinship with Nature, a burning awareness of the universe of which we are part."<sup>4</sup>

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The bulk of Tagore's vast literary output was in Bengali. Though he was the first non-European to win the [Nobel Prize in Literature](#) (1913), Tagore was not awarded the prize for his considerable achievements as a poet in Bengali. The lack of suitable translations made the task of appreciating Tagore's remarkable poetic genius difficult. The book that won him the prize, *Gitanjali* (1912) contained Tagore's own re-creations in poetic prose of verses from the Bengali *Gitanjali* (1910).

While *Gitanjali* (1912) took the West by storm, Tagore suffered from bad translations of his work. He was partly to blame; being busy himself he authorized such versions for publication without adequate supervision. In many cases, his readers had no idea whether they were reading a translation or an original text in English. Tagore's enormous popularity in Europe, the USA and Latin America, was thus based on texts often produced from indifferent English translations of his work. Other factors also contributed to the decline in Tagore's image in the English-speaking world. Changing fashions in the Anglo-American literary scene, Tagore's repudiation of the knighthood after the Amritsar massacre, his open condemnation of the cult of nationalism in India and espousing internationalism when the country was going *swadeshi*, his rejection of organized religion and Hindu revivalism (Tagore even left the Brahma Samaj which his father headed), his popularity in inter-war Germany resulting in his work being associated with the rise of Nazism/ Fascism – all took their toll.<sup>5</sup> In India, till he won the Nobel Prize, Tagore was criticized by the Bengali press as an anglophile. Emerging Indian poets writing in English (Dom Moraes and Nissim Ezekiel included) also dismissed Tagore.

A recent article about Tagore in *The Guardian* by Ian Jack asked the question:

Is his poetry any good? The answer for anyone who can't read Bengali must be: don't know. No translation (according to Bengalis) lives up to the job, and at their worst, they

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can read like In Memoriam notices: “Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark” is among the better lines. Translator William Radice thinks that Tagore’s willingness to tackle the big questions, heart on sleeve, has made him vulnerable to “philistinism or contempt”. That may be so ... perhaps the time has come for us to forget Tagore was ever a poet, and think of his more intelligible achievements. These are many. He was a fine essayist; an educationist who founded a university; an opponent of the terrorism that then plagued Bengal; a secularist amid religious divisions; an agricultural improver and ecologist; a critical nationalist. In his fiction, he showed an understanding of women – their discontents and dilemmas in a patriarchal society – that was ahead of its time. On his 150th anniversary, we shouldn’t resist two cheers, at least. <sup>6</sup>

In attempting to write about Tagore’s poetry, I do not feel the need to defend it. His poems recommend themselves to me as they do to millions of readers. The existing translations in English by Dyson and Radice, among a few others, are enough to help me find my way into the mind and art of the extraordinary poet. These translations manage to create a space in which the voice of Tagore comes across. When other competent translations appear in time they too will enhance our understanding and appreciation. I welcome them just the way one looks forward to reading a new version of poems by Rilke, Akhmatova, Cavafy, Lorca, or for that matter, The Mahabharata.

Both Dyson and Radice successfully capture the pulse of Tagore’s poetry, its exceptionally rich and musical qualities. As the *London Review of Books* observed: “Among the English translations available of Tagore’s poetry, Ketaki Kushari Dyson’s selection *I Won’t Let You Go* perhaps captures more successfully than any other the sensuous Bengalingness of Tagore’s works, and the particularity of the weather, both inner and outer, in which the poems exist.” The *Poetry Review* endorsed the book with: “Dyson has succeeded in these new translations in restoring a sense to the reader of Tagore’s real and remarkable genius as a poet. Short of learning Bengali one does not see how our sense of him as a poet could be bettered than it is by reading her versions... if any translation can put Tagore back on the map where he belongs, this one should do it.” <sup>7</sup> The challenge lies with translating Tagore’s work into other languages, be they Indian or European. In this article, I concentrate entirely on translations in English.

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Tagore’s personal vision of the interconnectedness of the universe is best expressed in his poetry. His transcendent yet passionately human vision comes across forcefully in many of his poems. In “Earth” (dated 11 November 1893, from *Sonar Tari*), for example, Tagore writes: “Deep is my desire/ in country after country to identify/ myself with all men; to be born/ as an Arab child in the desert, fearless and free,/ ...; to explore/ cold stone mansions, Buddhist monasteries/ on Tibet’s plateau; to drink grape-wine/ as a Persian in a rose garden; to ride/ horses as an intrepid Tartar; to be polite/ and vigorous as a Japanese; to toil/ with dedication as in the ancient Chinese land/.../ Oh, to be a naked barbarian, sturdy, robust, fierce,/ neither to duties nor to prohibitions geared,/ bound by nothing – neither customs, nor scruples, nor doubts,/ nor a sense of mine and thine, nor the fever of thought;/ one whose life-flow always rushes unchecked...” <sup>8</sup>

The majesty of such a point of view is its Godlike open-endedness, the willingness to embrace diversity; he is Everyman and more. This sense of the self spilling out to embrace the universe, the Universal Self, reminds us of the Romantic poets as much as the American

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Transcendental poets, of Blake's "Auguries of Innocence" (To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower,/ Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,/ And eternity in an  
hour) and Whitman's "Song of Myself." Tagore's celebration of the Self is affirmed when he  
writes: "Take me back/ to the centre of that wholeness, whence continually/ life germinates in  
a hundred thousand ways/ sends out shoots and buds, whence songs burst/ in a million  
melodies, dances emanate/ in countless gestures, where the mind flows/ in torrents of ideas  
and emotions..." (Earth) With him we taste "that various, universal bliss, all elements  
together/ united with all."<sup>9</sup>

The earth is a mother whose hands hold not 'infinite riches' but 'unfinished pleasures' ("On  
Her Powerlessness").<sup>10</sup> The vulnerability of the earth comes across poignantly as she clings  
to all her offspring, saying 'I won't let you go' to the tiniest blade of grass that springs from  
her womb, and she is as powerless to prevent their departure just as Tagore's young daughter  
is to prevent her father's going away to his place of work. At the same time, mother earth is  
all Nature, the cosmic maya whose ultimate authority is inviolable. "If it is true that a part of  
the function of poetry is to remind us, magically, what our relationship to the earth is, then  
Tagore's poetry fulfils that role most admirably. Directly and indirectly he reminds us  
constantly of our bond with the earth, and nature is for him both a direct and proper subject  
and a perennial fountainhead of imagery,"<sup>11</sup> Dyson reminds us in her introduction.

Tagore's faith in the unity of man and nature is manifested admirably in *Gitanjali*. He  
refers to "this our planet with its treasure-store/ Of joys and pains – this place unknowable,/  
Unfathomable – is – just like a mother's/ Breast – fully familiar after all." In this poem, he  
also uses the image of mother and child when describing life and death. He begins with "our  
stunning dwelling-place on earth," where he is no stranger as some inscrutable power had  
taken him in his arms as would his own mother. He then speaks of life and death as the two  
breasts of a mother. "If I have loved this life so very much/ I'll love Death too when I can see  
him clearly?/ A child – for fear of losing the warm touch/ Of his mother's breast – begins to  
wail. But then,/ Moved to her other breast, he's calm again."<sup>12</sup> The idea/ image is accessible,  
his message universal.

This metaphor of death as friend, lover, soul-mate comes across powerfully in a song,  
reminding one of St John of the Cross' Dark Night of the Soul: "It is a stormy night/ and you  
are coming to meet me,/ o my friend, my soul-mate!// The sky weeps like/ someone in  
despair,/ my eyes know no sleep./ Beloved, I throw open my door/ and look out again and  
again./ O my friend, my soul-mate!" The main idea of *La noche oscura del alma* refers to the  
painful experience that one must endure when seeking to grow spiritually and unite with God.  
In Tagore's poem, he reverses the concept: "...in what depth of darkness/ are you coming  
across, o my friend, my soul-mate!"<sup>13</sup> It is not Tagore who is suffering, but God too in  
coming to him.

In *Gitanjali* one encounters Tagore's 'true self' as he pointed out in a letter to William  
Rothenstein: "These poems of mine are very different from other literary productions of the  
kind. They are revelations of my true self. The literary man was a mere amanuensis – very  
often knowing nothing of the true meaning of what he was writing."<sup>14</sup> There is no doubt that  
*Gitanjali* is the work of a deeply spiritual man. In poem after poem in his *Song Offerings*, he  
expresses his innermost thoughts as if in a confessional. He writes with utter humility, baring  
his innermost self: "You've made me limitless ... At that nectar touch of yours/ my heart has  
lost its edges/ and with that vast ecstasy/ words gush out."<sup>15</sup> Or "I know/ That you will take  
the rudder/ If I let it go./ What's to be, will of itself be:/ This struggle to steer/ Leaves me all  
at sea."<sup>16</sup>

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The Hindu concept of Atma (self) and Paramatma (Divine Self), the Bhakti tradition sits along side the mysticism of Sufis, *Baul* singers, Vaishnavites (who view the world as a play between Krishna and Radha; Tagore was deeply influenced by poets like Jayadeva and Chaitanya), Shaivites (whose image of the cosmos is Shiva's dance) and western Platonists. None of these influences is mutually exclusive. The direct approach to God acknowledging His supremacy, identifying the self with the Supreme Being, the notion of God as King, or life's journey being a search for God/ the Divine Lover – all affirm the brotherhood of man and the acceptance of man's place in the universe. Tagore brings together aspects of this transcendent reality in his poetry:

This is my prayer to thee, my lord – strike, strike at the root of all poverty in my heart. Give me the strength to lightly bear my joys and sorrows. ... Give me the strength never to disown the poor and bend my knees before insolent might. Give me the strength to raise my mind high above all daily trifles. And give me the strength to surrender to my strength to thy will with love.<sup>17</sup>

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In an essay, written in 1917, Tagore wrote: “‘Know Thyself’ is not the final truth; ‘let thyself be known’ is also of great importance.... So it is that my inner religion fails to lock itself up within itself – it must necessarily go on making itself known to the outside in various ways that are both apparent and still not apparent to me.”<sup>18</sup> *Gitanjali* may have become his way of letting himself be known to the world. Here are poems that speak of concepts like ‘who am I?’ as well as the price and burden of fame. But he speaks essentially from the heart: “He who by my name is kept in hiding/ Within the prison of that name is dying./ Everything else by day and night forgetting./ Towards the sky that name forever piling./ I lose within its dark/ My own true spark.”<sup>19</sup>

It is poignant therefore when he writes: “I’m finished with shouting for attention/ Instead, soft words in the ear/ I’ll express my feelings henceforward only in songs/ I’m finished with shouting for attention.”<sup>20</sup> Here is a man who confesses in defeat: “The necklace I’ll hang round your neck/ is my badge of defeat.”<sup>21</sup> Or tired of the world aspires for some peace: “Allow me just to sit with you for a bit./ for a brief time merely/ Whatever work I have in hand today/ I’ll finish later/ Allow me just to sit with you for a bit.”<sup>22</sup>

The poems in the *Gitanjali* phase reflect a period of intense spiritual crisis and personal suffering. Tagore had suffered great personal losses – his wife died in November 1902, nine months later his daughter Renuka died of tuberculosis; in 1905 he lost his father, and in 1907 his son Samindranath died of cholera. In 1918, his eldest daughter also died of tuberculosis. There were other deaths too, much earlier in his life; he lost his mother when he was fourteen. His sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi, a couple of years older than Rabindranath, was to become a close friend when she married his brother Jyotindranath and entered the Tagore household at the age of nine! Artistic and sensitive, she took keen interest in contemporary culture and writing, and remained a formative influence on the budding poet. In 1884 Kadambari Devi, childless, committed suicide; her earlier attempt at ending her life had been unsuccessful.

Much of Tagore's pain and anguish, grief and suffering, desire and passion were transmuted into understanding, faith and compassion. Everything has a purpose; from everything there are lessons to be learned. There are poems in *Gitanjali* that speak of surrender and love in such a deeply experienced manner they read like prayers.

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Day after day, O lord of my life, shall I stand before thee face to face. With folded hands, O lord of all worlds, shall I stand before thee face to face.

Under thy great sky in solitude and silence, with humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face.

In this workaday world of thine, surging with toil and struggle, among bustling crowds shall I stand before thee face to face. And when my work will be done in this world, I king of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed passages from *Gitanjali* are used in Unitarian worship to this day. There is a hymn, 'Now I Recall my Childhood', based on *Gitanjali* 97, 'When my play was with thee I never questioned who thou wert' in the British Unitarian hymnal, Hymns for Living (Lindsey press, 2001 reprint), No 299.<sup>24</sup>

The connection that Tagore makes between poetry and spirituality/ self-realization is not new. In the classical Sanskrit tradition, poetry was recognized as a form of knowledge, (*vidyā*), in addition to its significance as an art (*kalā*), *alamkāra*, ornamentation, *shringara*, *riti*, style. Tagore places himself at the heart of such a tradition when he identifies the perfect poem as being "the *kabyer kalebar*, or 'poetic body', in which metre, rhyme and language are fitted together in a decorous and harmonious way," and "combined with *jnana* (knowledge) and *bhava* (feeling)."<sup>25</sup>

Tagore's best known poem expresses his ideas of life and poetry admirably: "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;/ Where knowledge is free;/ Where the world has not been broken up/ into fragments by narrow domestic walls;/ Where words come out from the depth of truth;/ Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection;/ Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way/ into the dreary sand of dead habit;/ Where the mind is led forward by/ thee into ever-widening thought and action -/ Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."<sup>26</sup>

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It would be limiting to think of Tagore's poetry as being simply 'high-minded'. His deep spiritual foundations freed him to think clearly, explore unreservedly his life and world. His poetry displays an astonishing range – he is a great love poet; he writes movingly about loneliness and bereavement; he is a poet with a keen insight into the psychology of children, and he empathised deeply with the oppressed and those less fortunate.

Faced with death and loneliness early in life, Tagore wrote in "The Suicide of a Star" (1882), a poem most likely triggered by the attempted suicide of Kadambari Devi: "A burning lump of coal, to hide its dark heart,/ maintains a continuous laughter./ The more it laughs, the more it burns."<sup>27</sup> In "Invocation to Sorrow," he confesses: "Oh, how lonely this heart is!/ Just do this, nothing else:/ come close, life my heart's face,/ set your eyes on it/ and gaze./ This homeless heart/ wants a companion/ that's all..."<sup>28</sup> He could be writing about himself as much as his sister-in-law or about any person in need of love. The concept of the homeless heart can also be traced to Bengal's *Baul* singers who were wandering minstrels singing of their search for and love of God. According to Dyson, this poem may have been written while his brother and sister-in-law were away on holiday.

In "Endless Death" composed a year later, he asks: "Life, is it then a name for a handful of deaths – / an aggregate of dyings?/ Then a moment's a cluster of a hundred trivial deaths – so much fuss over a naming!/ As death grows, so will life."<sup>29</sup> In "Desire," he acknowledges: "I think continually: where is she today?" Not having told her his innermost thoughts, he writes: "Ah, how long she was near me, and I said nothing!/ And the days went by, one after

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another./ Laughter and jokes, throwing words at each other/ within them lurked the heart's intended hints." He speaks of "two minds could spend an eternal night together – / in the sky no laughter, no sound, no sense of direction,/ just four loving eyes waking like four stars!"<sup>30</sup>

By this time, Tagore was married and in two poems titled "Breasts" No 2 and "The Kiss", both written in 1886, he expresses his delight in the sexual discovery of his adolescent wife. "The Kiss" especially strikes the reader as being modern and contemporary in its conceit: "Lips' language to lips' ears./ Two drinking each other's heart, it seems./ Two roving loves who have left home,/ pilgrims to the confluence of lips./ Two waves rise by the law of hope/ to break and die on two sets of lips./ Two wild desires craving each other/ meet at last at the body's limits./ Love's writing a sing in dainty letters,/ layers of kiss-calligraphy on lips./ Plucking flowers from two sets of lips/ perhaps to thread then into a chain later./ This sweet union of lips/ is the red marriage-bed of a pair of smiles."<sup>31</sup>

In "The Amatory Conversation of a Young Bengali Couple," Tagore explores the relationship between a married-couple, on their wedding night, when the bride cries: "I want to sleep with my Nan."<sup>32</sup> This humorous poem is also a fine piece of social satire on child-marriage. In 1883, Tagore married the ten year old Mrinalini. Child marriage was common. Taking into account his experience of his older brother's married life, Tagore struggled not only with his own child marriage but also that of his daughters. Regardless of his objections, he was powerless to go against tradition as long as his father was alive. However, the deaths of his sister-in-law, his wife and his eldest daughter left him with a deep sense of guilt and remorse. These deaths merged into a profound sense of loss enhancing his appreciation and understanding of the plight of women. Women played a key role in Tagore's life – both by their presence and absence.

Considering his relationships with women, apart from his wife of course, were largely platonic, in "Straightforward," Tagore expresses with a refreshing directness the power of sexual desire. The refrain – "This love between us two/ is a straightforward affair." – appears at the end of the first two paragraphs. It becomes – "Our couplings in springtime/ are straightforward affairs." – in the next two verses, and ends with "But this union, love,/ is a straightforward affair!" He captures powerfully both the innocence and experience of love.<sup>33</sup>

Tagore's ability to understand and represent a child's point of view is an essential aspect of the man. In "Remembering" he writes poignantly about the loss of his own mother: "I don't remember my mother./ Only this: when I sit by the window/ of my bedroom/ and look at the far blue sky,/ it seems to me my mother's looking at me/ with steady eyes./ Long ago she used to hold me on her lap/ and look at my face./ That's the look she has left/ in all the sky."<sup>34</sup> In "An Offer of Help," (*Shishu*) a child asks his mother: "What's the matter today?/ Haven't you had a letter from Dad?" And then offers to write a letter himself if she gets him paper and pen. "You'll see, I'll make no mistakes;/ from *ka* and *kha* to cerebral *na*/ I'll write Dad's letter for him, I promise!"<sup>35</sup> In "Hide-and-Seek" the child imagines turning into a *champa* flower, yet all the time his attention is on the mother. The child does not for a moment imagine leaving his mother. The idealism and realism that children display is not lost in the man. The evocation of the child in his works reminds us of Wordsworth's "The Child is father of the man."

In Tagore, the connection between mother, nature, child, man is seamless. It may have something to do with the influence of the *bhakti* tradition where God becomes a mother, father, a child, a lover – not just a lord and master. In a poem, from *Naibedya*, Tagore describes "this unknown, unbounded/ mystery" as "entirely familiar/ as my mother's breast, very much mine./ Unmanifest, beyond cognition, this awesome power/ has, to my eyes, assumed the shape of a mother."<sup>36</sup> Nature in Tagore is akin to the veneration of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God in the Christian tradition. Tagore's poetic utterances spring from

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a tradition which is familiar with the worship of God as Mother. The most important annual festival in the Bengali calendar is that of Durga, who is worshipped as a Supreme Mother.

The many references to nature, the seasons, especially the monsoons, in his poetry remind us of Kalidasa. But Tagore's use of nature imagery is startlingly original. Lines like – "... the wind/ idly prattling on a bed of leaves"<sup>37</sup>; "The wind blew from the east, my home's direction/ like the sighing of distant relatives who missed me"<sup>38</sup>; "On either side stood a /young kadamba tree – / growing like sons"<sup>39</sup>; or describing a boy, an orphan, "like a weed that springs up by a broken fence,/ not tended by a gardener,/ receiving sunlight, gusts of wind, rain,/ insects, dust and grit;/ which sometimes a goat crops off/ or a cow tramples down/ which doesn't die, gets tougher,/ with a fatter stem/ and shiny green leaves"<sup>40</sup> – reveal the poet's skills in capturing life in all its hues. In *Patraput*, on discovering a wild flower, whose name is unknown, he writes: "It belongs to the universe's infinite unfamiliar wing,/ where the sky's nameless stars also belong." He names it "Peyali, Miss Cup" and goes on to add: "it enjoys the unspotted freedom that comes/ from not being cared for, not being bound by caste./ It's a Baul, living on society's edge."<sup>41</sup> In "Tamarind Flower," Tagore refers to an aged tamarind tree standing "like a guardian-god/ or an old family servant/ as ancient as Great-grandfather."<sup>42</sup>

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In "Earth", Tagore writes: "Take me back/ to the centre of that wholeness, whence continually/ life germinates in a hundred thousand ways/ ... where the mind flows in torrents of ideas and emotions, .../ I wish/ to taste that various, universal bliss/ in one moment, all elements together./ united with all."<sup>43</sup> His intensely inclusive vision meant he believed in the transformation of genius into action/ experience. In "Against Meditative Knowledge," he emphasizes the need for action: "Those who wish to sit, shut their eyes,/ and meditate to know if the world's true or lies,/ may do so. It's their choice. But I meanwhile/ with hungry eyes that can't be satisfied/ shall take a look at the world in broad daylight."<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, in "Play", he concludes profoundly: "Well, maybe it's play, but one which we must join/ .../ What would be the point of leaving it all and sitting/ silently in a dark corner of the self?/ Know that you are but a child in this vast world,/ in the cradle of infinite time, in the sky's playground:/ you think you know it all, but you know nothing!/ Pick it up – with faith, humility, love –/ that grand toy – coloured, musical, scented –/ which your mother's given you. Well, maybe it's dust!/ So what? Isn't it dust beyond compare?/ Prematurely senile, don't mope, sitting alone:/ you won't be an adult till you join the merry-go-round!"<sup>45</sup>

Many strands – philosophical, religious, social, political, educational, ethical and ecological – went into the making of Tagore's world. He absorbed myriad influences and integrated them into a personal vision. He could move from the literal to the symbolic, from a tiny detail to the vast cosmos, his poetry reflecting the Upanishadic concept of the seamless unity of all creation. He inhabited both the centre and the edge. His poetry is without labels, simply recording an authentic spiritual journey that enriches his readers. In *Gitanjali*, Tagore wrote: "I'm here merely to sing your songs/ Allow me a tiny place at your court to do so/ I'm here merely to sing your songs."<sup>46</sup> His world-view as expressed in his poetry is accessible; it would benefit us to see the world as he did.

Tagore may not have been a systematic philosopher, but he was of considerable contemporary relevance as a thinker, and continues to be so today. He was prophetic when he wrote: "A hundred years from today/ who are you, sitting, reading a poem of mine,/ under curiosity's sway –/ a hundred years from today?"<sup>47</sup> A hundred years from now there will be

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others reading his work, admiring the man and the culture that nourished such a rich flowering.

**Notes:**

1. John Bayley, "Intimate precision," *Poetry Review* (UK), Spring 1993, pg 22.
2. Satish Kumar, *Resurgence* (UK), No 266, May/June 2011, pg. 1.
3. *Gitanjali*: Rabindranath Tagore, translated by William Radice (Penguin Books, India; 2011), pg.lxxvi.
4. *I Won't Let You Go: Selected Poems by Rabindranath Tagore in a new expanded edition*, translated by Ketaki Kushari Dyson (Bloodaxe Books, UK; 2010), pg. 38.
5. *Ibid*, pg. 43-44.
6. *The Guardian*, 7 May 2011.
7. *I Won't Let You Go*, Blurb on back cover.
8. *Ibid.*, pg 99.
9. *Ibid.*, pg 101-102.
10. *Ibid.*, pg 105.
11. *Ibid.*, pg 58.
12. *Gitanjali*, translated by William Radice (Penguin Books, India; 2011), p. 92-3.
13. *I Won't Let You Go*, pg. 254.
14. *Gitanjali*, translated by William Radice, pg.xv.
15. *Ibid*, pg. 7.
16. *Ibid*, pg. 64.
17. *Ibid*, pg. 96.
18. *Gitanjali*, translated by William Radice, pg. lxxvii. From Tagore's essay *Of Myself* (*Atmaparichay*)
19. *Ibid*, pg. 44.
20. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
21. *Ibid.*, pg. 8.
22. *Ibid.*, pg. 51.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 83.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. xxxvi-ii.
25. *Ibid.*, p. lxvi.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 95.
27. *I Won't Let You Go*, pg. 80.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 82.
29. *Ibid.*, pg. 83.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 87.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 85.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 90.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 141-142.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 166.
35. *Ibid.*, pg. 146.
36. *Ibid.*, pg. 143.
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 108.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 88.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 137.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 179-180.

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41. Ibid., pg 216.
  42. Ibid., pg 222.
  43. Ibid., pg 101-102.
  44. Ibid., pg. 118.
  45. Ibid., pg. 104.
  46. *Gitanjali*, translated by William Radice (Penguin Books, India; 2011), pg. 21.
  47. *I Won't Let You Go*, p.111-112.

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