

## THE TWO HOUSES

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(A study of the house image in the past-orientated writings of Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas).

THE house is one of the most pervasive images used by both Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas in their writings on the past. Edward Thomas remarks in a letter to Gordon Bottomley: 'So far the best things I have done have been about houses. I have quite a long series - I discover, tho I did not design it.'<sup>1</sup> Although this remark refers only to the prevalence of the house image in his prose his later poetry was to be equally prolific in the use of such imagery. Hardy has not noted this tendency in his work yet he, too, frequently resorts to the use of house imagery in his poetry. Both Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas share a mutual concern with the persistence of the past and in the work of both writers the image of the house plays a significant role in this regard. It is a nodal point upon which several of their different views on the inter-relatedness of past and present inevitably converge.

Houses are invoked by both Hardy and Thomas, but more especially by Thomas, to indicate that functional continuity of human life which bridges the temporal gulf separating the thoughts and mores of different generations. For Edward Thomas functional continuity is represented most powerfully by the farmhouse and most of the houses in his prose writings, especially, are farmsteads. In London he is conscious of 'people living in no ancient way'<sup>2</sup> but the farmer's life is fundamentally no different from that of his ancestors. In *The South Country* he describes a farmer whose 'fathers must have been in this land when Wolf Hanger was not a strange name for beeches over the hill' and goes on to comment on the functional continuity of farm life that imparts a solidity to all the farmer's actions:

<sup>1</sup>R.G. Thomas (ed), *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, London, 1968, p. 194

<sup>2</sup>*The Heart of England*, London, 1906, p. 7

Life is a dark simple matter for him; three quarters of his living is done for him by the dead; merely to look at him is to see a man five generations thick, so to speak, and neither nature nor the trumpery modern man can disturb a human character of that density.<sup>3</sup>

A ploughman with his plough and three horses in *The Heart of England* is associated with 'primitive forces'. The plough is said to reveal 'ancient simplicity' and the ploughman's purpose is 'to make odours fume richly from the ancient altar'.<sup>4</sup> The unchanging rituals of farm life, then, serve as a channel of communication between the remote past, the recent past and the present for Thomas and the farmstead presents itself to his view as the locus of this functional continuity. Having described a farmhouse with its alders and walnut tree, its ponds, orchard, grassy plot and elm-lined laneway he goes on to note the material and atmospheric evidence of its association with the past: 'In the overhanging elms flicker the straws of the long past harvest, and the spirits of summers and autumns long past cling to grass and ponds and tree.'<sup>5</sup> Another farmstead in *The Heart of England* is an amalgam of the contributions of several generations, testifying to the fact that these 'long dead generations' like their present day counterparts 'lived and worked and enjoyed'. The house is 'dark with panelling and heavy furniture of every age since it was built'. One member of the 'long dead generations' 'planted the spreading oak... that added the knolled pasture and cut the deep, stony lane that leads to it through the brook; another built the fruit wall and bought the copy of *Tristram Shandy* that stands with a hundred other books in the dining-room'.<sup>6</sup> So each past owner of the farmhouse has his share in the continuing life of the place and the farmstead therefore serves as a living witness to the confluence of past and present. Even a 'deserted farm' with 'decaying house' and 'doorless stables' still retains 'something of life' for Thomas and this he also attributes in part to the fact that 'the buildings bore upon their

<sup>3</sup>*The South Country*, London, 1932, p. 215

<sup>4</sup>*The Heart of England*, pp. 21-5

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 107-8

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 74-5

surface the marks of many generations of life, all harmoniously continuous'. Because of this, even such a derelict ruin of a former habitation 'could speak to a human spirit' and was 'capable of inspiring afresh the idea of immortality, to one who desired it'.<sup>7</sup> Finally, it must be noted that the farmhouse for Edward Thomas participates in a temporal continuum that includes the future as well as the past and the present. The farmer in *The Heart of England* when he takes up his stance amid the ancestral heirlooms of his farmhouse is aware not only of the 'long-dead generations' who 'lived and worked and enjoyed' here but also of the 'long tracts of time ahead and his farm and strangers of his own blood working in its fields'.<sup>8</sup>

Thomas's preoccupation with the continuity of the farmer's lifestyle and with the farmhouse as the locus of such continuity is that of the modern rootless city-dweller, 'living in no ancient way'. Thomas's awareness of continuity is always a spectatorial awareness. His recognition of the temporal dimension is usually conveyed through the externalities of a house's structure and outward appearance, e.g. 'No other one/So pleasant to look at/ And remember, for many miles...'. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that when he does write about a house he once owned in 'Wind and Mist' he tells us that even when he lived there he looked on it with a stranger's eye:

I have seen that house  
Through mist look lovely as a castle in Spain  
And airier. And I have thought 'Twere happy there  
To live'. And I have laughed at that  
Because I lived there then...  
Yes with my furniture and family  
Still in it, I, knowing every nook of it  
And loving none, and in fact hating it.

The farmhouse with its generations of continual contact with the soil is an image of rural rootedness for Thomas, ever conscious of

a rupture of continuity in his own personal past. One of the qualities he attributes to an 'antique red' farmhouse in *The Heart of England* is 'solidity'<sup>10</sup> and he envies a farmer the 'solidity' imparted by generations of rooted ancestry: '... three quarters of his living is done for him by the dead, merely to look at him is to see a man five generations thick ... I feel but a wraith as I pass by'.<sup>11</sup>

Hardy's treatment of functional continuity as represented by the house, on the other hand, is that of a writer who is himself 'generations thick' and who is aware of a personal link with the preceding generations. The traversing of an 'ancient thoroughfare' recalls to his mind the memory of his 'mother's form' or the hardships endured by his own 'sires... now perished and forgot'.<sup>12</sup> When he chronicles the fall of an old Norman family in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* the subject is revealed to have a personal interest for he mentions that his own family, the Hardys, among others, suffered a fate similar to that of the fictional D'Urbervilles. 'The Alam' is written 'In memory of one of the writer's family who was a Volunteer during the War with Napoleon'. Thomas Hardy, therefore, consciously participates in familial and racial traditions of which Edward Thomas, a generation later, is merely an envious observer. For this reason in his treatment of the house motif the past is evoked in an intimate domestic setting. The 'relics of house-holdry' which restore the presence of the dead in 'Old Furniture', for instance, date from the days of his mother's mother.

In Hardy's writing the persistence of the past in the present scene frequently takes the form of spectral manifestation. As is only to be expected, then, in Hardy's poetry houses are often transformed into haunts. This view of the house as a haunt may also arise from Hardy's participation in a rooted rural society where houses were family shrines passed on from father to son and were, therefore, redolent of the lives of many generations. An entire poem on the abiding presence of the 'bygone' is couched in the metaphor of 'spectral housekeeping':

<sup>10</sup> p. 111

<sup>11</sup> *The South Country*, p. 215

<sup>12</sup> 'The Roman Road', 'A Wet Night', *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, London, 1968

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 77

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 74-5

<sup>9</sup> 'Two Houses', *Collected Poems* by Edward Thomas, London, 1969

We two kept house, the Past and I,  
 The Past and I;  
 Through all my tasks it hovered nigh  
 Leaving me never alone  
 .....  
 As daily I went up the stair  
 And down the stair,  
 I did not mind the bygone there –  
 The present once to me.

(‘The Ghost of the Past’)

This use of the image of a haunted house as a general metaphor for the theme of temporal concurrence is supported by Hardy’s frequent recourse to the particular treatment of this motif in his poetry. In ‘The House of Hospitalities’ the speaker returning to a house which was the scene of former revels encounters the ghosts of his dead companions:

Yet at midnight if here walking  
 When the moon sheets wall and tree,  
 I see forms of old time talking,  
 Who smile on me.

‘Night in the Old Home’ also depicts the return of the dead to their old abode:

When the wasting embers redden the chimney-breast,  
 And Life’s bare pathway looms like a desert track to me,  
 And from hall and parlour the living have gone to their rest,  
 My perished people who housed them here come back to me.

They come and seat them around in their mouldy places . . .

The revenants of another poem likewise ‘seat them around in their mouldy places’, resuming their old positions on ‘The Garden Seat’:

At night when reddest flowers are black  
 Those who once sat thereon come back;  
 Quite a row of them sitting there

All human habitations continue to be tenanted by their dead occupants in Hardy’s verse. On rare occasions the past of a house, although tangible, remains inaccessible. In the poem ‘Silence’ the

withdrawal of the past is conveyed by the emphasis on ‘silence’, the auditory equivalent of the lack of communication implied by the absence of haunting:

But the rapt silence of an empty house  
 Where oneself was born,  
 Dwelt, held carouse  
 With friends, is of all silences most forlorn.  
 .....  
 It seems no power on earth can waken it  
 Or rouse its rooms,  
 Or its past permit  
 The present to stir a torpor like a tomb’s.

Despite its stubborn silence, the house of the poem is, nevertheless, visualized as a reliquary of the past, concealing it as does a tomb, forbidding the present to dispel its retrospective trance.

An interesting development of the theme of the persistence of the past, closely related to the haunting motif, is also to be encountered in Hardy’s use of house imagery. Hardy is greatly concerned with the impression made by human life on the environment, considering that the impact of human persons and happenings on their surroundings is such that these life haunts retain the indelible stamp of personalities and events. Applying this principle on a national scale he describes Britain as a land

Enchased and lettered as a tomb  
 And scored with prints of perished hands<sup>13</sup>

Such a vision of the engraving of a nation’s history on the landscape has a correlative and perhaps even a basis in the domestic sphere. Over and over again Hardy’s poems treat of the inscription of a human drama on the house that enshrines it. That interaction between people and house which results in so close an identification that the human, long after its demise, continues to subsist in the physical surroundings is adumbrated in the poem ‘The Ageing House’. Here the house shares the ‘slow effacement’ of its owner, its bright ‘red’ walls corresponding to the ‘fresh fair head’ of its youthful possessor just as, later, the fact the walls are ‘overspread

<sup>13</sup> ‘On an Invitation to the United States’.

with a mouldy green' reflects the decline of the proprietor whose 'head has aged'. Both human occupant and house have succumbed equally to the ravages of life's 'storms'. The importance which Hardy attaches to the house as a major material recipient of human influence is evident from the frequency with which he turns to this subject in his verse. Sometimes it is the 'mighty passion' of two lovers whose intensity imparts itself to the very walls that witness it, crowding out all later feebler romance. Such is the experience of the speaker in 'The Re-enactment'

That here some mighty passion  
Once had burned,  
Which still the walls enghosted,  
I discerned  
And that by its strong spell mine might be overturned.

I sat depressed; till, later,  
My Love came;  
But something in the Chamber  
Dimmed our flame –  
An emanation making our due words fall tame.

As if the intenser drama  
Shown me there  
Of what the walls had witnessed  
Filled the air,  
And left no room for later passions anywhere.

Similarly for one who has 'some vision/Of showings beyond our sphere' 'The Strange House' is filled with emanations of the past because of the 'mighty passion' once enacted within its precincts:

The house is old; they've hinted  
It once held two love-thralls,  
And they may have imprinted  
Their dreams on its walls.

The theme which in these poems is approached from a personal angle is treated from the house's viewpoint in 'A House with a History' where the 'memoried face' of the house is contrasted with the 'tabula rasa' of the owners' visages:

Mere freshlings are they, blank of brow

Their 'raw equipment, scenes and says' grate on the old house's sense of the past. The process of impressing human presence on the physical environment of the house is the subject of the first stanza of this poem:

There is a house in a city street  
Some past ones made their own  
Its floors were criss-crossed by their feet  
And their babblings beat  
From ceiling to white hearthstone.

The indentation of human footprints on a floor and the impact of the sound waves of human speech on the enclosed area of a room are acceptable facts of human penetration of the environment which help to render credible the idea of the persistence of the human personality in the scene. Again just as in the two previous poems cited the house is redolent of a 'larger phase /Of human ways' to the detriment of pettier lives which may not 'impress' but only 'afflict' it: 'Its prime has passed before'.

Hardy tends to use the language of script and engraving in describing the persistence of the past:

And *print* on thee their Presence as on me  
(*'The Two Houses'*)

And they may have *imprinted*  
Their dreams on its walls  
(*'The Strange House'*)

*Enchased and lettered* as a tomb  
And *scored* with *prints* of perished hands.  
(*'On an Invitation to the United States'*)

The phrase, 'prints of perished hands', actually effects a striking fusion of the imagery of human contact and of the permanence of that contact. The 'memoried face' of the 'House with a History' as opposed to the 'blank' brow of its owners suggests facial lines while the face of the old house in 'The Two Houses' 'wears furrows untold'. By the use of such phrases Hardy creates the impression of a hieroglyphic language which may be interpreted only by the initiated, by those who have 'some vision / Of showings beyond our sphere' and also likens this preservation of the past

which results from human pressures on the physical setting with the written chronicles in which history is stored up and made available to later ages. In 'At Castle Boterel' the landscape is actually regarded as a chronicler, its function being to 'record in colour and cast that we two passed'.

Although he rarely manifests any interest in the subject of man's influence on his surroundings, Thomas refers to the phenomenon in very similar terms. Commenting on this aspect of the enshrining of the past in a house he makes the following Hardy-esque observation regarding an old Vicarage:

Of how many lives the house has voicelessly chronicled  
the days and nights. It is aware of birth, marriage,  
death; into the wall is kneaded a record more  
pleasing than brass.<sup>14</sup>

Here the Vicarage is viewed as a chronicler and as a keeper of records and the reference to brass also conjures up a monumental inscription. The fact of its being a Vicarage even suggests that in its awareness of 'birth, marriage and death' its role is equivalent to that of the parish registers. The use of the haunting motif, however, implies a too positive acceptance of the incursions of the past into the contemporary scene for Thomas. The recovery of the past is usually, for him, a more tentative, uncertain and exploratory process, accounted for by such factors as the equation of spatial and temporal distance. Such is the functional continuity of the farmhouse, for instance, that, from a distance at which the eye is not distracted by any modern contrivance, it may foster the illusion of the recovery of past time:

... the house half a mile off seems to have been  
restored by this fair and early light to the seeming  
happy age in which it was built. The long, tearing  
crow of the cock, the click of dairy pans, the  
palpitating, groaning shout of the shepherds, Ho!  
ho! ho! ho!, now and then, even the whirr of the  
mowing machines, sound as if the distance that  
sweetens them were the distance of time and not  
only of space.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>*The Heart of England* p. 118

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 74-5

For a final appraisal of the divergent viewpoints of Hardy and Thomas in their application of similar imagery to a similar temporal theme we turn to two poems with remarkably similar titles: 'Two Houses' by Edward Thomas and 'The Two Houses' by Thomas Hardy. The resemblance is soon seen to be titular only.

Edward Thomas's two houses symbolize the present and the past respectively and the poem revolves the theme of tradition and change and the persistence of the old in the new. Characteristically where the subject of continuity is in question Thomas's house is a farmhouse. The poem, in fact, seems to embody the quintessence of Thomas's meditations on the farmhouse in his prose works. In appearance, it recalls a farmstead in *The Heart of England*. The description of the farmhouse in the opening verse, for instance, has several features in common with the farmhouse of the following prose passage:

Between the pool and the road is a house built squarely of stone.  
A tiled roof, where the light is always mellow as sunset in the  
various hues that sometimes mix and make old gold... Four  
large windows frame a cool and velvety and impenetrable gloom.<sup>16</sup>

Both the house of the poem and of the prose are situated by the water's edge, both are roofed with tiles, and, although bathed in mellow sunlight, both have also a cool and velvety aspect.

On one level, too, the comparison of the farmhouse of the poem to a 'muslined peach' with its connotations of harvest plenty and yellow peach tones picking up the colour of tiles and sun recalls another farmhouse in *The Heart of England*, 'a farmhouse on whose walls and roofs the hues of fruit and flower all meet harmoniously'.<sup>17</sup> Not only is the simile of 'the wasp' and the 'muslined peach' used as being redolent of harvest days, however. It is invoked as a symbol of the preservation of rural English riches from destructive contact with a predatory modern civilization. In *The Heart of England* Thomas refers to 'yellow wasps that give a touch of horror to the excellent and abounding life of perfect Summer'<sup>18</sup> and 'passersby' and 'wasp' are metaphorically equated in the poem. 'Muslined' as

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 81

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 103

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 186

applied to the farmhouse/peach suggests the protective function of inaccessibility and is thus linked with the situation of the farmhouse which is

Far out of reach  
Of the road's dust  
And the dusty thought  
Of passersby...

One recalls, in this connection, that the 'farms and byres' and hamlets of 'Lob' are also situated 'far out of reach / Of the road's dust':

Ages ago the road  
Approached. The people stood and looked and turned  
Nor asked it to come nearer, nor yet learned  
To move out there and dwell in all men's dust.

The threat which is overtly suggested in the 'wasp' simile is implied in the image of the 'road's dust' and the 'dusty thought of passersby' as well. It would seem that there is a certain similarity between Thomas's conception of the role of the farmhouse vis-a-vis contemporary life and that of E.M. Forster. In *Howards End* Forster refers to modern civilization in terms of travel and dust which are for him the images of a rootless society:

But the Wilcoxes have no part in the place, nor in any place. It is not their names that recur in the parish register. It is not their ghosts that sigh among the alders at evening. They have swept into the valley and swept out of it, leaving a little dust and a little money behind.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand the country dwelling for Forster, as for Thomas, represents rootedness, continual contact with the soil. When the Wilcox motor kills a cottager's cat, Margaret, Forster's mouth-piece in the novel, views the occurrence as an injury inflicted by a lethal modernity, living only superficially because of its rootlessness, on the deeper, more stable way of life of rural England, a life which participates in the earth and its emotions:

... she felt their whole journey from London had been unreal.

<sup>19</sup> *Howards End*, (Penguin), p. 233

They had no part with the earth and its emotions. They were dust and stink and cosmopolitan chatter, and the girl whose cat had been killed had lived more deeply than they.<sup>20</sup>

The titular farmhouse of *Howards End* emerges as a symbol of stability and continuity in the novel: 'it is the future as well as the past'.<sup>21</sup> Forster's thematic opposition between this stability and continuity of the rural dwelling and the dust and traffic of a rootless modern civilization would seem to offer an amplification of the tensions hinted at in the second verse of Thomas's poem.

The first two verses of 'Two Houses' are concerned with the continuation of the rituals of rural life into the modern age. The latter half of the poem, on the other hand, is devoted to a portrayal of the farmhouse's perpetuation of the past. The present is depicted as an edifice built on the ruins of the past. The stones of the old house are seen as the tombstones of its occupants, the humps of turf resembling graveyard mounds, but 'heaves' with its connotations of 'sighing' and 'laboured breathing' suggests that the dead are somehow still living, that the life of the past continues on. The place is, to quote a phrase used earlier by Thomas, 'alive with death'.<sup>22</sup> The mysterious, all-pervading presence of the past is finely rendered by Thomas's use of light and shade, which distinguishes the known from the unknown and at the same time points to the inextricability of their relationship. The house of the present is associated with sunlight. It is situated 'between a sunny bank and the sun'. Its tiles are 'warm'. The house of the past belongs to a land of darkness like 'the Combe', which was 'ever dark, ancient and dark'. The shadows of the sunlit scene are therefore used to suggest the pastness inherent in the present, the implication being that the past is as inevitable a part of the present as shadows are of sunshine. The use of sunlight and shadow to render the dual temporal aspect of the farmhouse seems an extension of a similar expression of duality by means of light and shade effects in *The Heart of England*: 'The red house was clear and hard in the grey air; yet with a richness and implicated shadow as of things sub-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316

<sup>22</sup> *The Heart of England*, p. 95

merged'.<sup>23</sup> Due to the sudden evocation of darkness after sunlight the kennel and the dog in the shadow of the sycamore tree are invested with an air of strangeness and otherness that distinguishes them from the 'pleasant' serenity of the present scene. The interplay of light and shadow to represent the interconnectedness of past and present is continued into the final verse. The river glints with light: 'flashing fast'. The echoes aroused by the barking of the dog, however, are 'dark echoes', the impalpability of the spectral past being evoked by this combination of negative olfactory and aural imagery. The phrase, the 'hollow past', with its acoustic and sepulchral connotations effects a fusion of the poem's horizontal and vertical approach to the past, suggesting both the spatial pervasiveness of the past through which the dog's barking resounds and recalling, too, the 'graves' already mentioned, the hollows in the earth where the dead generations lie buried. The epithet 'hollow' also evokes a sense of thinness and insubstantiality, setting the scene for the ghostly visitants of the final line. 'Half-yields' is pitted against its opposite 'half-hidden' and these motions of approach and withdrawal are re-enacted in the concluding line 'And out they creep and back again forever'. 'The dead that never / More than half-hidden lie' looks back to the 'graves' of the penultimate verse where the turf heaving above the stones offers a similar suggestion of the protrusion of the past into the present. The 'forever' with which the poem concludes projects the process of temporal overlapping to the limits of prospective time, uniting past, present and future in one continuum.

Hardy's poem 'The Two Houses' also treats of an old house and a new but here the new house is not a continuation of the old but rather its rival. An old house 'gray of gear' is contrasted with a 'smart newcomer' and the poem moves from the reckoning of a house's worth in material terms to a valuation of it in terms of the amount of human living it has experienced. Both Hardy and Thomas share a common recognition of the tangible presence of the past in the here and now as opposed to an antiquarian sense of its mysterious distance. Nevertheless they differ greatly in their method of rendering such an awareness of the availability of the past.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 112

Thomas's strategy, as his poem 'Two Houses' reveals, is to draw on natural phenomena to both symbolize and support his thesis. Accordingly as we have seen he illustrates his theme of temporal concurrence by comparison with the co-presence of light and shadow, sound and echo, by suggesting an analogy between gravemounds and the grass-covered foundations of an old house, both of which point to the protrusion of the dead into the living world, and also by verbal dexterity in the case of 'heaves'. Haunting in his poem is, at most, a tentative compromise between life and death. The dead are half-yielded to the living world, half-hidden from it. By contrast Hardy's 'The Two Houses' offers us the most lengthy poetic statement of his confidence in the survival of the dead through their incarnation in the physical setting. For one to whom no natural feature could compare in importance with the 'wear on a threshold' or the 'print of a hand'<sup>24</sup> a house is significant solely as a reliquary of human living. A 'cracked old hide / Loose casements, wormy beams and doors that jam' are defects more than compensated for by 'Presences from aforetime', while modern wood, fair hangings and good plumbing are worthless amenities in a house that 'has no sense of the have-beens'. The new house is scornfully dismissed as a 'heap of stick and stone', 'void as a drum'. The influence of human personalities and events on their environment has seldom been spelt out more clearly in Hardy's writing than in this poem:

Where such inbe  
A dwelling's character  
Takes theirs, and a vague semblancy  
To them in all its limbs, and light and atmosphere.

This statement of the assimilation of the material to the human in physical 'semblancy' complements the earlier suggestion of the house's mental absorption with the past, preoccupation being skilfully rendered in terms of occupation by the attribution of the verb 'obsess' to the ghostly tenants' presence:

Babes new-brought-forth  
Obsess my rooms; straight stretched  
Lank corpses, ere outborne to earth;  
Yea, throng as when first from the Byss upfetched.

<sup>24</sup>F.E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, London, 1933, vol. I, p. 153

This theme of the imprint of human presence on the environment ('And print on thee their presence as on me') is here combined with the second most Hardy-esque expression of the past's permeation of the present, the theme of haunting. The dead generations of 'The Two Houses' are not only perpetuated in the old house's 'semblancy to them in all its limbs and light and atmosphere' but they are also present as 'spectral guests'. In Thomas's poem the past is sub-ordinate to the present as shadows are to sunshine, the house of the past being but a 'half-hidden' ruin while the house of the present dominates the landscape ('No other one / So pleasant to look at and remember for many miles'). In Hardy's 'The Two Houses', however, the past almost overwhelms the present. The old house is 'packed' with 'Presences of aforetime', they 'obsess' and 'throng' its rooms. The recollection of past revels, of 'dancers and singers' and of bridal festivities, also suggests a crowded scene. The 'phantoms', too, are described as 'thin elbowers' which once more conjures up an image of a jostling multitude. By these means Hardy creates the impression that the past is crowding out the present. Again, the 'shades dim and dumb' are visualized as the permanent tenants of the old house while its 'tenants... in the flesh' merely 'come and go', another factor which contributes to the ascendancy of the phantom world. The present tenants, too, are scorned as 'blind folk... with souls unwoke' unaware of their 'sylph-like surrounders' so that once more the superiority of the latter is implied. Whereas Thomas in 'Two Houses' sees the past, present and future as one continuum, Hardy's poem focuses on the present only as a means of access to the past.

The house as an image of the persistence of the past is ubiquitous in the writings of Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas. Their use of this common image, as we have seen, highlights several significant differences in their approach to their temporal theme. Hardy participates in the rooted familial life of which the younger writer is merely an observer. Hardy's approach to the past, founded in this 'solidity' which Thomas envied, is positive and assertive where Thomas's tends to be exploratory and diffident. Finally Hardy's is a backward look, completely absorbed in the contemplation of the past, whereas Thomas is concerned with past, present and future as one continuum.

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