

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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