

# Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia Anglica IV (2014)

**Ewa Panecka**

PPWSZ in Nowy Targ, Poland

## LOSS MADE GOOD: JOHN CLARE AND EDWARD THOMAS ON POETRY AS A HEALING SUBSTANCE

### Abstracts

The essay seeks to establish the significance of the mood of 'loss made good' in the poetry of John Clare and Edward Thomas, who are often labelled as 'poets of nature.' Rather than follow the reductive stereotyping, the author attempts to identify the extent of distance between the poet and the persona which reflects Clare's and Thomas's views concerning linguistic and literary representation. For both poetry functions as a healing substance, but each strives to achieve regeneration by employing a distinct creative sensibility. Thomas believes that the word can grasp and control the reality, whereas Clare refuses to ascend into symbol for fear of misreading nature.

**Key words:** poets of nature, creative sensibility, loss made good, literary and linguistic representation

Any form of categorization in poetry is bound to appear reductive. I will argue that it does not give justice to the author and can be misleading to a reader or student of literature when an introductory note or a handbook classifies a man of letters as 'poet of nature' or 'writer about the country.' In order to demonstrate possible pitfalls of generalizations which rely on thematic affinity I have decided to offer a close reading of two poets of nature: John Clare (1793–1864) and Edward Thomas (1878–1917), who represent different literary backgrounds, with Clare classified as a member of the 'self-taught tradition' and Thomas associated with the five Georgian anthologies edited by Edward Marsh between 1912 and 1922. However, confining the poets to their respective literary circles means committing another error of hasty judgement; although Clare is currently ascribed to the self-taught tradition which embraces peasant poets of the unlettered muse, including Stephen Duck, William Cobbett, Robert Bloomfield, George Green and James Hogg, some critics, Kelsey Thornton among them, emphasize the literariness of Clare, locating his diction within a broader foundation and thus challenging reductive stereotyping. Thornton claims that Clare's descriptive and observational skills are "imbedded within more complex literary and cultural practices."<sup>1</sup> Similarly,

<sup>1</sup> K. Thornton, "The Complexity of Clare", [in:] R. Foulkes (ed.), *John Clare, a Bicentenary Celebration* (Leicester, 1994), pp. 41–56.

though Edward Thomas is counted among the Georgian poets some readers recognize in his voice an original distinct sensibility that distinguishes him from Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, D. H. Lawrence, John Masefield or Robert Graves. R. S. Thomas, a poet who acknowledged his own debt to Edward Thomas, observed: "Much of [Edward Thomas's] surface material was the same as Georgians', but his treatment of it was different. A different sensibility was at work."<sup>2</sup> As well as identifying a number of connections between the two 'poets of nature,' I will try to illustrate how they differ in their conceptions concerning linguistic and literary representation. Notwithstanding the differences, they both seem to share the belief in poetry as a healing substance, where loss can eventually be made good.

Both Clare and Thomas present nature with an almost metonymic attention to detail. On first reading their poems seem unromantic, appealing more to the reader's appreciation of verisimilitude than to their faculty of imagination. A closer analysis, however, will reveal that beneath the surface structure of imitating the reality the poems betray a creative sensibility akin to Wordsworth's 'inward eye,' which is well visible in one of the most popular verses by Thomas, *Tall Nettles*:

Tall nettles cover up, as they have done  
 These many springs, the rusty harrow, the plough  
 Long worn out, and the roller made of stone:  
 Only the elm butt tops the nettles now [...]

The poem has to be appreciated for its photographic fidelity to the detail: the local scene is gradually constructed, displaying specific objects (the harrow, the plough, the roller) discarded all over the farmyard, with nature neglected and nettles gathering dust. While Thomas demonstrates a Georgian 'devotion to the concrete,' a melancholy 'forlorn' note can be heard. But the sensation is a fleeting one; eventually the reader feels cheered up and reassured that the scene will forever stay there, regularly visited: "these many springs."<sup>3</sup>

John Clare has a different method of arranging the scene. His *The Beans in Blossom* is a sonnet, where each couplet presents a different little scene staged as part of a 'nature's spectacle':

The south-west wind! how pleasant in the face  
 It breaths! while, sauntering in a musing pace,  
 I roam these new ploughed fields; or by the side  
 Of this old wood where happy birds abide,  
 And the rich blackbird, through his golden bill,  
 Utters wild music when the rest are still. [...]

---

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in: S. Perry, "In Search of Something Chance Would Never Bring: the Poetry of R. S. Thomas and Edward Thomas", *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 59(24) (2007), p. 586.

<sup>3</sup> T. Pinkey, *D. H. Lawrence and Modernism* (Iowa City, 1990), pp. 39–44.

However, in this theatre all scenes are interrelated, happening at the same time, with the wind 'breathing pleasantly,' the blackbird singing, the cows tossing the mole hills, and the bees collecting pollen. The actions happen simultaneously but they are also consecutive; when viewed from the perspective of the poet, who is walking out in the field by the wood, delighted by the scent of beans in blossom, they seem to follow a chronological order.<sup>4</sup> Like in Thomas's *Tall Nettles*, in Clare's poem there is a concentration on detail, visible, for example, in the observation that the blackbird is always the last to finish singing: "utters wild music when the rest are still." However, while Thomas presents nature as a static mode, Clare's landscape is always dynamic. In order to illustrate the regularity the analysis shall contrast and compare description in another pair of poems: *Adlestrop* by Thomas and Clare's *Evening Primrose*.

*Adlestrop* is the most frequently anthologized piece of Thomas's poetry. All readers remember it.

[...] 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.

When the train draws up at Adlestrop, on a hot day in June, the scene becomes frozen: "Someone cleared his throat. / No one left and no one came / On the bare platform." The landscape looks still, like in *Tall Nettles*, but the setting is specific. The place has a name: 'Adlestrop,' further detailed by "willows, willow-herb, and grass, / And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry." The still nature comes to life with a song of the blackbird which, like in Clare's sonnet, has a leading voice among "all the birds / of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire." And yet the reader has a feeling that nature, though given a fair share of the particular and the descriptive, is not the poem's theme because the focus in *Adlestrop* falls on the speaker. Nature remains still until the speaker comes to grips with his own experience; birds start singing as soon as man assumes control and releases the world from the stupor.

John Clare's *Evening Primrose* presents a reversal of roles: nature acts as she pleases, following her own rhythm, regardless of man's gaze. In the sonnet there is

---

<sup>4</sup> R. Lines, "Clare's 'Rough Country Sonnets'", [in:] J. Goodridge (ed.), *The Independent Spirit. John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition* (The John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994), pp. 160–161.

a detailed account of experience which comes from genuine and expert observation gathered by a naturalist:

When once the sun sinks in the west,  
 And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;  
     Almost as pale as moonbeams are,  
     Or its companionable star,  
 The evening primrose opens anew  
 Its delicate blossoms to the dew;  
 And, hermit-like, shunning the light,  
 Wastes its fair bloom upon the night,  
 Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,  
 Knows not the beauty it possesses [...]

The evening primrose is the flower of the night, a hermit who cannot stand the gaze of the day and intruding onlookers. Clare focuses on the fragility and delicacy of the primrose: "dewdrops pearl the evening's breast" when the primrose "opens anew / Its delicate blossoms to the dew." Sadly, the beauty of the primrose is lost, wasted on the night which "knows not the beauty it possesses." The poet creates an ambiguous context: one may either assume that the night, 'blindfold', caresses the flower, or that the primrose lovingly touches the night which is unaware of the flower's gratitude for hiding it so well before the day's gaze. In the poem nature is described in great detail and, unlike in Thomas's *Adlestrop*, she leads her own, independent life, outside man's controlling intrusion.

Having analyzed Thomas's and Clare's modes of description the argument shall concentrate on the ways they employ the persona. It seems that in Thomas's poetry the figure in the landscape is the emanation of the poet's mind, whereas nature reflects, in fact, the poet's nature. For Clare, however, physical landscape is not psychic landscape: his persona is an unintruding observer who distances himself from the scene. In the belief that poetry is not the same as the reality, Clare avoids the risk of misreading nature. In order to illustrate the difference it should be revealing to offer a reading of two poems which have the word 'owl' in the title, Thomas's *The Owl* and Clare's *The Fern Owls Nest*, with the aim of establishing the extent of distance of the persona to the scene.

The first poem was written in February 1915. It is a monologue of a soldier who was lucky enough to survive the battle, maybe about Thomas himself.

[...] Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,  
 Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.  
 All of the night was quite barred out except  
 An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry  
  
 Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,  
 No merry note, nor cause of merriment.  
 But me telling me plain what I escaped  
 And others could not, that night, as in I went.

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

Hungry, starved, cold and exhausted, the soldier "had food, fire and rest" at an inn, and temporarily seemed to have regained control over his life, trying to separate himself from the horrible experience: "All of the night was quite barred out." The persona's 'comfortable numbness' becomes, however, disturbed by the voice of an owl: "an owl's cry, a most melancholy cry." The cry of the owl is like projection of the subconscious, 'the uncanny' sense of guilt; he escaped while other soldiers could not. The persona loses self confidence: the voice of the bird makes his "food and repose salted and sober." Nature's voice is indeed the poet's voice, a symbolic state of the persona's mind.

Clare's poems reveal a very different relation of man and nature. The persona in *The Fern Owls Nest* is 'the weary woodman,' who is 'rocking' burdened by a bundle of wood and hears the fern owl cry. To him, the voice does not carry any symbolic connotations. The bird 'whews' and 'wizzes,' flying over the head of the woodman who seems to be unaffected by the commotion and 'tramples near' the nest, which is hidden among heather and thorn. He goes on with his own routine, letting the fern owl lead her life as she pleases.

[...] He goes nor heeds he tramples near its nest  
 That underneath the furze of squatting thorn  
 Lies hidden on the ground and teasing round  
 That lonely spot she wakes her jarring noise  
 To the unheeding waste till mottled morn  
 Fills the red East with daylight's coming sounds  
 And the heath's echoes mocks the herding boys

The persona is just an element of the scene while the bird remains in focus. Rodney Lines aptly comments: "Clare's vision of nature [...] embraced the simultaneousness of what he saw and the interconnectedness of everything combined with a feeling of movement itself is a product of a poet who experienced and felt the countryside, rather than the eighteenth-century rural observers like Thomson that he had first started with."<sup>5</sup> Like in all Clare's poems, nature is dynamic; a lot happens 'in the crowded heath.' The reader has to appreciate how much the poet knows about fern owls, about their song that can be heard only during the night: "she wakes her jarring noise / To the unheeding waste till mottled morn / Fills the red East with daylight's coming sounds," and about their nestling routine. Fern owls do not nest on trees because their fingers are too short and too weak to embrace branches: they lay eggs on the ground.

Thomas's speaker is sure that language can represent reality; though occasionally he displays insecurity of perception, like in *Adlestrop*, the crisis of

---

<sup>5</sup> Lines, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

subjectivity is overcome and he regains control over experience and nature ('I remember,' 'I saw'). In Thomas's poems nature is the poet's nature, the persona is the poet himself "secure in his ability to handle experience in verse."<sup>6</sup> For Clare, however, a landscape cannot find a literary representation in verse unless it is related to the perceiver's knowledge, or memory.<sup>7</sup> The difference between the poets shall be further explored through a close reading of Thomas's *Words* and Clare's *Song*.

Out of us all  
That make rhymes,  
Will you choose  
Sometimes –  
As the winds use  
A crack in the wall  
Or a drain,  
Their joy or their pain  
To whistle through –  
Choose me,  
You English words?

I know you:  
You are light as dreams,  
Tough as oak,  
Precious as gold,  
As poppies and corn,  
Or an old cloak:  
Sweet as our birds  
To the ear [...]

The poet humbly addresses words, imploring that they should choose him rather than others who 'make rhymes.' The context reminds the reader of Ted Hughes's *Thought Fox*, where writing poetry is likened to capturing wild animals. In *Words* the poet is not a hunter for words; he is himself hunted while words play 'hide and seek' with him; in fact, he becomes a crack in a wall, a drain, a vehicle which words may choose to travel by, loaded with pain and joy. Words live their own life: the poet compares them to nature, to oak, poppies, birds and rose for they possess nature's attributes: they are 'sweet to the ear' and 'tough as oak,' old as hills and 'worn new,' young as streams. Words live close to man:

---

<sup>6</sup> R. Leiter, "On Edward Thomas", *The American Poetry Review*, 12(4) (1983), p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> P. Chirico, "Writing Misreadings: Clare and the Real World", [in:] J. Goodridge (ed.), *The Independent Spirit. John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition* (The John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994), p. 129.

[...] Strange and sweet,  
Equally,  
And familiar,  
To the eye,  
As the dearest faces  
That a man knows [...]

Thomas has English words in mind: he places his scene in specifically English settings, surrounded with “sweetness from Wales, from Wiltshire and Kent, and Herefordshire.” The poet wants to be “fixed and free in a rhyme,” trusting that words can represent reality. When he announces: “I know you,” it reads like his manifesto, a declaration of Thomas’s poetic creed.

In order to illustrate that he “believes what he preaches<sup>8</sup>” the reader should turn to the poem *Digging*:

[...] Odours that rise  
When the spade wounds the root of tree,  
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,  
Rhubarb or celery;

The smoke’s smell, too,  
Flowing from where a bonfire burns  
The dead, the waste, the dangerous,  
And all to sweetness turns. [...]

The poet ‘thinks with scents,’ which brings to mind T. S. Eliot’s ‘smell a thought’ and ‘think a rose’ from his essay about metaphysical poets.<sup>9</sup> “The dead, the waste, the dangerous” are burnt out and they come back in “smoke’s smell” which turns into sweetness of a new life, “the fire and the rose are one.” Robert Leiter points out another literary influence, of Seamus Heaney, who also wrote a poem entitled *Digging*: “There is the same [as in Thomas] need in Heaney to possess the earth, his past, using words as a fixative.<sup>10</sup>” In the final stanza of his poem *I Never Saw That Land Before* Thomas declares:

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

---

<sup>8</sup> A. Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London, 1999), p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot on Tradition, Poetry, Faith and Culture*, ed. F. Kermode (New York, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Leiter, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

The poet wants to be faithful both to the language and to the land, the whisper of nature would be betrayed if rendered in words which sounded false and inadequate.

Unlike Thomas, John Clare is sceptical about the extent of literary and linguistic representation. In *The Fern Owls Nest* the woodman was indifferent to the bird, he nearly trampled her nest. What the reader knows about the fern owl he learns from the poet himself, who demonstrates an encyclopaedic competence of a naturalist. For Clare, in order to be fully realized, a landscape or a natural scene has to be associated with some linguistic or other cognitive context, otherwise it will be ignored, meaningless to the perceiver and the reader, like the fern owl making no difference to the woodman. The same pattern can be seen in Clare's *Song* [I peeled bits of straws]:

I peeled bits of straws and I got switches too  
 From the gray peeling willow as idlers do,  
 And I switched at the flies as I sat all alone  
 Till my flesh, blood, and marrow was turned to dry  
 bone.  
 My illness was love, though I knew not the smart,  
 But the beauty of love was the blood of my heart.  
 Crowded places, I shunned them as noises too rude  
 And fled to the silence of sweet solitude.  
 Where the flower in green darkness buds, blossoms,  
 and fades,  
 Unseen of all shepherds and flower-loving maids –  
 The hermit bees find them but once and away.  
 There I'll bury alive and in silence decay.

I looked on the eyes of fair woman too long,  
 Till silence and shame stole the use of my tongue:  
 When I tried to speak to her I'd nothing to say,  
 So I turned myself round and she wandered away. [...]

*Song* treats about pains of unreturned love. The poet employs nature to idle uses: he peels bits of straws and makes willow switches in order to chase flies. He can find solace only in the solitude of his own mind; the green flower he is talking about is not part of nature but acts as a symbolic representation of the poet's own, isolated world "unseen of all shepherds and flower-loving maids." The communication isolation is rendered in the images of darkness, silence and decay: 'flower in green darkness buds, blossoms and fades,' 'bury alive,' 'silence decay.' 'Crowded places' are contrasted with self-contained 'sweet solitude,' where the poet, mute, isolates himself from the outside world. There is alienation and failure of communication here, physical landscape is not psychic one: for Clare, life is not fully realized until it finds expression in poetry. The poet cannot cope with impossibility of linguistic and literary representation: "I looked on the eyes



of fair woman too long / Till silence and shame stole the use of my tongue: / When I tried to speak to her I'd nothing to say." The speaker could not express his love, he only 'sent sighs' behind the woman and 'walked to his cell,' which aggravated his sense of isolation. The declaration from the final part of the poem: "My ballroom the pasture, my music the bees, / My drink was the fountain, my church the tall trees" recalls Thomas's *Words*, where being faithful to the language is defined as being faithful to the land. In fact in *Song* the poet faces a crisis of faith, which Paul Chirico, referring to another poem by Clare entitled *Perplexities*, calls 'the response of excessive communication isolation.'<sup>11</sup>

In the poetry of Edward Thomas such occasional moments of creative crisis are always overcome: his vision implies a synthesis of nature and man. When subjective perception achieves a symbolic dimension the poet regains control over his verse and the world. Thomas's vision accentuates the wholeness and not separation between the sublime beauty of creation and the ordinary, mundane reality, which is well illustrated in *As the Team's Head Brass*. The poem betrays Thomas's affinity with the style of Robert Frost, whose influence has been long debated. To me, the verses recall Frost's *Mending Wall*, a monologue of a farmer who is in conflict with his neighbour. In Thomas's poem the exchange between the poet and the farmer is written in the language of the reader, a casual chat. Their worlds meet when the ploughman returns after each round and asks a question or makes an observation while the poet either answers or comments. As always, in Thomas's poetry individual perception acquires a broader, symbolic dimension. The poet is sitting among the boughs of the fallen elm which has not been taken away because there is no one around who could do it. The ploughman's mate was killed in the war on the night of the blizzard, the same one that felled the elm. The natural (the external) and the human (the internal) come together in the painful moment. The poet says: "I should not have sat here. Everything would have been different. For it would have been another world." Why does he regret having sat there? Perhaps if he had not he would not have learnt that many people from the village had gone to the war and quite a few lost their lives. Still, the ploughman seems to believe that there is harmony in the world, even if we are unable to see it: "Ay, and a better, though / if we could see all all might seem good." After the ploughman's conclusion the poet's sense of control over the reality returns: the lovers who had disappeared into the wood in line two of the poem 'came out of the wood again,' the horses resumed their round, the poet stood there 'watching the clods crumble.' There is no distinction between the local truth, the life of the village, and the eternal truth, the life of the elm tree or rather its death which recalls man's. Although there is a momentary hesitation in the persona: ('I should not have sat here'), he concludes the poem with a sense of order regained.

The poetic vision of Clare seldom finds a reconciliation between the human and the natural, which can be observed, for example, in his poem *Vision*. The poem is full of hiatuses, contradictions, with the poet torn between dramatic, ultimate choices. The spiritual is opposed to the physical or the sensuous, but

---

<sup>11</sup> Chirico, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

the poet enjoys neither; he lost 'the love of heaven above' while the 'lust of earth' he 'spurns.' He cannot count on heavenly or earthly love, but he finds 'heaven's flame.' As 'loveliness grows in him' the poet boldly declares himself 'the bard of immortality.' In his proud rejection of all, heaven, hell and earth, the speaker seems to have become larger than life, a prophet or spiritual leader, a bard of immortality.

I lost the love of heaven above,  
I spurned the lust of earth below,  
I felt the sweet of fancied love,  
And hell itself my only foe.

I lost earth's joys, but felt the glow  
Of heaven's flame abound in me,  
Till loveliness and I did grow  
The bard of immortality. [...]

In Clare's vision the human is not the natural, to the poet the earth is 'but a name.' While Thomas insists on the wholeness of his vision, Clare seems to believe that life and art are two distinct domains. When in his other poems nature is the fixing centrality which the poet refuses to see as symbolic because tangible existence is not eternal truth, in *Vision*, enlightened by the 'eternal ray' he recalls a trumpet of prophecy, a Shelleyan 'unacknowledged legislator of the world,' speaking 'in every language upon earth / on every shore, o'er every sea.' Unlike Shelley, however, Clare does not compare himself to or identify with west wind, with nature. To him the poet is the bard of immortality, free and eternal.

"Loss made good" is the title and initial assumption of this essay. Characteristically, the poems selected for the analysis: Thomas's *Tall Nettles, As the Team's Head Brass, The Owl* or Clare's *Song and Vision*, all treat about a sense of loss. The loss means losing friends, companions, or a beloved woman. It may also involve nostalgic contemplation of the days long gone. The loss can relate to the persona's or the speaker's sense of perceptive or creative crisis, like in Thomas's *Adlestrop* or Clare's *The Fern Owls Nest*. Each of the two poets, consequently, finds solace according to his own conception of linguistic and literary representation: Thomas believes in the redemptive power of words (*Digging, Words*) and Clare consistently refuses to link the physical with the psychic landscape, letting nature lead her own life, undisturbed or undiscovered by the persona (*Evening Primrose, The Beans in Blossom*). Thomas makes loss good by asserting verbal control over experience while Clare achieves the same goal by avoiding ascent to a symbol.

Both Clare and Thomas were complex, sensitive men of delicate if neurotic personalities. Clare spent twenty seven years of his life in an asylum after his mind gave way under stress and disappointment connected with an unfavourable reception of his poems. Edward Thomas died young, killed by the blast of a shell at the Battle of Arras in 1917. John Clare's asylum was a blessing to his weary mind; though confined, the poet could wander about the countryside, was treated kindly and with respect, and encouraged to write poetry. Edward Thomas gave up reviewing poetry, the occupation which he hated and which cost him a spell of

depression. When he enlisted it turned out that the war was his 'macabre blessing in disguise.' Under the threat of death, his own and his companions', he started writing poems.<sup>12</sup> Loss was made good, not only in poetry, but also in the poets' lives.

The essay will be concluded with personal confessions of Clare and Thomas, where the poets reveal bouts of melancholy, a sense of isolation, introversion and self-pity; one almost feels that perhaps they would not have wished the verses to see light and betray their author's frankness of self-exploration. Or perhaps private loss was 'made good' when painful emotions found their way to poems? Here is a fragment of *I Am* by John Clare:

I am – yet what I am, none cares or knows;  
 My friends forsake me like a memory lost:  
 I am the self-consumer of my woes –  
 They rise and vanish in oblivious host,  
 Like shadows in love's frenzied stifled throes  
 And yet I am, and live – like vapours tossed [...]

The language of the poem is direct. The poet, who is confined to an asylum, forsaken by friends, by his dearest, a 'self-consumer of his woes,' dreams of a place where he could abide with God, in a shelter which recalls sweet dreams of his childhood, with grass and the vaulted sky. It is a very personal poem, written by a very different Clare, a man who still tries to make loss good, hoping he can find relief in death, 'untroubling and untroubled':

[...] I long for scenes where man hath never trod  
 A place where woman never smiled or wept  
 There to abide with my Creator, God,  
 And sleep as I in childhood sweetly swept,  
 Untroubling and untroubled where I lie  
 The grass below – above the vaulted sky.

Edward Thomas also wrote autobiographical poems, of which particularly sincere were those about his father, whom he feared and shunned.<sup>13</sup>

P. H. T.  
 I may come near loving you  
 When you are dead  
 And there is nothing to do  
 And much to be said.

---

<sup>12</sup> M. Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (London, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> In the letter to Robert Frost Thomas complained that his father treated him cruelly. Quoted in Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 603.

To repent that day will be  
 Impossible  
 For you and vain for me  
 The truth to tell. [...]

It takes courage to admit hatred towards one's father, openly declaring that the feeling will not go before he passes away. Here loss is made good by the poet's uncompromising honesty, his direct confession of intimate and painful traumas.

I intended to demonstrate how Edward Thomas's and John Clare's poetry can act as a healing substance. Edward Thomas believes in the power of words which can grasp, control, and ultimately shape reality. His own career as a poet turned out to be a macabre blessing in disguise; although by writing poems he relieved his troubled mind of mundane concerns, his voice was soon silenced by the blast of a shell. John Clare believed that when the moment of the poem is over, life will go on. According to him, though art is not life, observation and appreciation of nature can heal a weary heart.

## Bibliography

- Chirico, P. 1994. "Writing Misreadings: Clare and the Real World". In: *The Independent Spirit. John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition*. Ed. J. Goodridge. The John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust.
- Easthope, A. 1999. *Englishness and National Culture*. London.
- Hollis, M. 2011. *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas*. London.
- Leiter, R. "On Edward Thomas". *The American Poetry Review*. 12(4).
- Lines, R. 1994. "Clare's 'Rough Country Sonnets'". In: *The Independent Spirit. John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition*. Ed. J. Goodridge. The John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust.
- Perry, S. 2007. "In Search of Something Chance Would Never Bring: the Poetry of R.S. Thomas and Edward Thomas". *The Review of English Studies*. New Series. 59(24).
- Pinkey, T. 1990. *D. H. Lawrence and Modernism*. Iowa.
- Thornton, K. 1994. "The Complexity of Clare". In: *John Clare, a Bicentenary Celebration*. Ed. R. Foulkes. University of Leicester Department of Adult Education.

## Primary sources

- The Midsummer Cushion*. 1990. Ed. K. Thornton and A. Tibble. Ashington and Manchester.
- 100 Poems by 100 Poets*. 1987. Selected by H. Pinter, G. Godbert and A. Astbury. New York.
- The Later Poems by John Clare*. 1964. Eds. E. Robson and G. Summerfield. Manchester.
- The Poems of Edward Thomas*. 2003. With an introduction by P. Sacks. New York.

## **Odzyskując to, co utracone: John Clare i Edward Thomas o poezji, która leczy**

### **Streszczenie**

Tematem eseju jest cierpienie jako impuls kreacji w poezji Johna Clare'a i Edwarda Thomasa, autorów należących do różnych tradycji literackich. Clare zaliczany jest do „poetów-samouków”, a Thomas reprezentuje nurt gregoriański. Choć używają zupełnie innych środków wyrazu, często określa się ich po prostu jako „poetów natury”. Celem autorki jest analiza odmiennych sposobów kreacji świata rzeczywistego (czy też naturalnego) w poezji Clare'a i Thomasa, która zakłada, że cierpienie osobiste może być inspiracją dla procesu twórczego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** poeci natury, wrażliwość percepcji, cierpienie jako impuls twórczy, świat naturalny a poetyckie środki wyrazu