

Poetry Group report by Marilyn Normanton

‘O to be in England/Now that April’s there’ is the well-known first line of Robert Browning’s “Home-Thoughts, From Abroad” and a suitable starting point for this month’s selection of poems about Place. We hear the homesickness of a traveller, his memories of a burgeoning English Spring, with blossom and birdsong. In that same landscape we may see “The Barn”, described by Edward Blunden, with its ‘Rain-sunken roof...Dishevelled eaves...And idly-pencilled names and jests upon the posts within.’

In “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost, a traveller comes across ‘Two roads diverged in a yellow wood / And sorry I could not travel both ... I took the one less travelled by,/ And that has made all the difference.’ A metaphor for the choices we face in life perhaps.

Thomas Hardy’s “Beeny Cliff” looks back to a time when he and his wife ‘laughed light-heartedly aloft’ as they looked over the ‘opal and sapphire of that wandering western sea.’ That happiness didn’t last and after his wife’s death he seems to look back with some guilt and regret. ‘What if still in all its chasml beauty looms that wild weird western shore/The woman now is – elsewhere -... and will laugh there nevermore.’

For those of us who love the strange and wonderful place names found on an OS map, John Betjeman’s “Dorset” is a treat. As the parishioners of ‘Binghams Melcombe, Iwerne Minster, Shroton, Plush,’ scrub up for church, we see ‘Gloved the hands that hold the hymn book, which this morning milked the cow.’

Gerard Manley Hopkins “Inversnaid” describes ‘This darksome burn, horseback brown/His rollrock highroad roaring down. ... Degged with dew, dappled with dew/are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through.’ He finishes with a plea for Nature, ‘O let them be left, wildness and wet;/Long live the weeds and the wildness yet.’

Some of our local poets featured in this month’s selection with Meg Peacocke’s “Sightseers in New York City”, giving us a bird’s eye of ‘The toy cars going and stopping,/The random moves of dots we assume/to resemble ourselves.’ Sharing the view is a ‘young black man ... pointing out/ to his visiting folks just where/he lived above the deli ... meeting their proud astonished eyes.’

“Riverbank” by Ray Lee describes a ‘droning Bee heavy Day, where ‘Leaves shimmer./A stone/Clops/Against bedrock.’ And ‘Downstream/Children shriek.’

Mike Catling’s “Glasshampton Monastery Garden” is a powerful evocation of the serenity found ‘in this garden of tranquillity’, where ‘Silence here seeps into my soul’. ‘And with this silence the soul’s ear cupped/to enjoy the symphony of silent music.’