

Section B

TIME AND CHANGE

William Barnes (1801 – 1886)

Woak Hill – page 26

A West Country poet and schoolmaster who was ordained in 1848, he pursued a lifelong campaign to rid English of classical and foreign influences. His many admirers included Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Hardy. Whilst he is considered one of the best lyric poets, the difficulties of his Dorset dialect greatly limited his audience. The majority of his poems depict the Dorset landscape, country customs and childhood with freshness, humour and affection, but the death of his wife resulted in poems of grief, such as *Woak Hill* and *The Wind at the Door*, which are among his finest pieces.

William Blake (1757 – 1827)

A Poison Tree – page 30

He did not go to school, but was an apprentice engraver before becoming a student at the Royal Academy. From 1779 he worked as a bookseller's engraver and in 1784 set up his own print shop. He was acutely aware of political and religious oppression and the suffering of the poor. During his time, neither his poetry or art attracted an enthusiastic audience, and a lifetime of hard work failed to bring him riches. His last years were passed in obscurity. It was some four decades after his death before his reputation as a lyric poet would be established, particularly through the powerfully symbolic and vivid imagery of his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. His rediscovered engravings had a significant influence on the development of Art Nouveau.

Arthur Hugh Clough (1819 – 1861)

The Latest Decalogue – page 28

A Liverpool-born poet. In 1829 he entered Rugby, perhaps the most important independent school in nineteenth-century England. His intellect made him a model student and everyone thought him destined to distinguish himself in any career he chose. He was plagued by religious doubts and uncertainties, and was as radical in his politics as he was in his faith, all of which inspired his poetry. The satirical *The Latest Decalogue* is among his most celebrated pieces. His experiments in extending the range of literary language and subject were ahead of his time.

He spent much of his latter years helping his wife's cousin, Florence Nightingale, lobby for reform in hospitals and in the nursing profession.

Mary Coleridge (1861 – 1907)

The Poison Flower – page 30

A poet and novelist who was the great-great-niece of poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Although her time was dominated by caring for ailing parents, she still managed to publish five novels and four books of poetry. Her poems are often melancholic.

Walter de la Mare (1873 – 1956)

The Listeners – page 23

He was born in Kent and was related on his mother's side to Robert Browning. He was educated in London at St. Paul's Cathedral Choir School. His career as a writer started from about 1895 and he continued to publish to the end of his life. He was a novelist and poet who wrote for both children and adults, with his reputation being established in 1912 by the volume *The Listeners*, his most anthologised piece. In it, supernatural presence haunts his poems in the form of those listeners and watching eyes that fill the empty places once inhabited by men. The title poem of the collection is often considered one of his best. In his favourite themes of childhood, fantasy and the secret and hidden world of nature, commonplace objects and events are invested with mystery and often with an undercurrent of melancholy. His novels have been reprinted many times in horror collections because of their ghostly atmosphere. He is buried in St Paul's Cathedral.

Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928)

The Darkling Thrush – page 27

Apart from a period in London as an apprentice architect, he spent all his life in Dorset. In 1874 he gave up architecture for writing and took to travelling in Europe with his wife. He would spend several months of every year in London where he revelled in the admiration of the literary and aristocratic society, but resented the reviews of 'pessimism' and 'immorality'. He published 11 major novels in 24 years. From the late 1890s, partly owing to attacks on the 'obscenity' of his 1896 novel *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy devoted himself to poetry, but his late start held back his reputation. As with his novels, most of Hardy's poems reveal his love and observation of the natural world, often with strong symbolic effect, deeply rooted in his rural background and often colloquial. He was deeply affected by his loss of faith and by the death of his first wife, and explored issues of failed love, of time and of life's tragic ironies. Philip Larkin, for whom Hardy's 'dominant emotion' is 'sadness', thought him the best poet of the century.

Robert Herrick (1591 – 1633)

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time – page 25, *Dreams* – page 31

The son of a prosperous goldsmith, he entered St John's College, Cambridge, in 1613 and later moved to Trinity Hall. He was ordained a priest in 1623 and by 1625 had become well known as a poet. He was one of the army chaplains on a disastrous expedition led by the Duke of Buckingham in 1627, and was rewarded for his service in 1630 by being appointed at Dean Prior in Devon. He did not initially enjoy the barren isolation of this rural life, though his poems show that he developed feelings for folk customs and festivals. A happy rather than passionate love poet, he is regarded as one of the finest English lyric poets whose style gives grace to the subjects of love, transience and death that obsess him.

Thomas Hood (1799 – 1845)

I Remember, I Remember – page 22

He faced long struggles against poverty and illness with courage and good humour, traits reflected in his work. Hood largely wrote humorous and satirical verse, often making use of his remarkable skill with puns.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 – 1889)

Spring and Fall – page 25

He was strongly influenced by the poetry of the devout Anglicans George Herbert and Christina Rossetti. He became a Jesuit in 1868 and, considering the writing of poetry too self-indulgent for his faith, burned his early poems. It would be some four years later before he would compose more poems having decided that it might not necessarily conflict with Jesuit principles. The event that prompted his need to write again was the sinking of the *Deutschland*, whose passengers included five Franciscan nuns exiled from Germany for their faith, resulting in his most ambitious work *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. In 1874, studying theology in North Wales, he learned Welsh, and was later to adapt the rhythms of Welsh poetry to his own verse, inventing what he called “sprung rhythm”. Hopkins served as preacher or assistant to the parish priest in Sheffield, Oxford, and London, and as parish priest in the slums of Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow. He was appointed in 1884 Professor of Greek and Latin at University College, Dublin, which plunged him in to prolonged depression. This resulted partly from the large volume of ‘uninspired’ examination papers he had to read, but mainly from his sense that his prayers no longer reached God. Apart from a few uncharacteristic poems scattered in periodicals, Hopkins was not published during his own lifetime. His good friend Robert Bridges (1844-1930), whom he met at Oxford and who became Poet Laureate in 1913, served as his literary caretaker: Hopkins sent him copies of his poems, and Bridges arranged for their publication in 1918. Hopkins is considered to have produced some of the greatest English poems of faith and doubt.

Alfred Edward Housman (1859 – 1936)

‘Into my heart...’ – page 24

He was educated at St John’s College, Oxford. He was a classical scholar and was appointed Professor of Latin at Cambridge in 1911. In 1896 he published, at his own expense, *A Shropshire Lad*, which included *‘Into my heart...’*. The volume was set in a half-imaginary Shropshire, the ‘land of lost content’, with the ballads often addressed to, or spoken by, a farm-boy or a soldier. This collection grew in popularity during the First World War.

Edith Nesbit (1858 – 1924)

The Gray Folk – page 31

She wrote 44 novels in total, best known as the author of *The Railway Children*, *The Treasure Seekers*, *Five Children and It* and *The Phoenix and the Carpet*. She was married to journalist Hubert Bland, and counted HG Wells, Bernard Shaw and Noel Coward amongst her friends. She founded the Fabian Society with her husband and spread her radical political beliefs through her writing and lectures.

Laetitia Pilkington (1712 – 1750)

A Song – page 28

The first biographer of Jonathan Swift, she was divorced, imprisoned for debt and later scandalised 18th century London with the details of her unconventional life.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 – 1822)

Ozymandias – page 24

The Romantic poet entered Eton College at the age of twelve, and finally moved on to University College, Oxford, in 1810, by which time he had already privately published the Gothic-horror novelettes *Zastrozzi*. A conventional upbringing made him unhappy and rebellious, developing an idiosyncratic, sensitive nature and a refusal to conform to tradition. His eccentric dress and behaviour, along with his hobby of performing scientific experiments, earned him the name 'Mad Shelley'. In 1811 he eloped to Scotland with sixteen-year-old Harriet Westbrook. They became actively involved in political and social reform in Ireland and Wales, writing radical pamphlets in which Shelley set forth his views on liberty, equality, and justice. Shelley became friends with the radical English philosopher William Godwin. He fell in love with the sixteen-year-old daughter of Godwin and the feminist author Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Godwin (author of *Frankenstein*). They were married in 1816 after Harriet drowned herself.

In the summer of 1816, while travelling in Europe, Shelley met Lord Byron and developed an enduring friendship that proved an important influence on the works of both men. In 1818 he wrote the sonnet *Ozymandias* before leaving England for Italy, where Byron was also living. The two men were at the centre of a circle of expatriate writers that became known as the "Satanic School" because of their defiance of English social and religious conventions and promotion of radical ideas in their works. On July 8, 1822, Shelley and a companion set sail from Italy, but their boat capsized. Ten days later their bodies washed ashore. Shelley's body, identified by an open volume of John Keats' poems found in his pocket, was cremated on the beach. His ashes (except for his heart, which Byron reportedly plucked from the fire) were buried near Keats' grave in the Protestant cemetery in Rome.

James Shirley (1596 – 1666)

Death the Leveller – page 32

A poet and dramatist who was educated at St John's College, Oxford, and St Catherine's Hall, Cambridge. He took Anglican order in 1619 and was curate in a parish near St. Albans, where he remained until his conversion to the Catholic Church. He was a schoolmaster until 1624. His faithfulness to his religion is evident in his work. He enjoyed great popularity as a playwright, and before 1640 he had produced over thirty plays. During the London plague of 1636-37 when the theatres were closed, he went to Dublin where he produced three or four plays. During the Civil War of 1642 to 1644 he fought as a royalist under the Duke of Newcastle. The defeat of the royalist cause saw him return to London and to a career teaching at the academy in Whitefriars, although it would not be long before he turned to writing again. In 1646 he wrote the *Contention of Ajax and Ulysses*, a dramatic debate interspersed with song, among which is *Death the Leveller*, a favourite with Charles II and of horror to Oliver Cromwell. James Shirley was the last of the great Elizabethan dramatists linking the Golden Age with the period of the Restoration. He is often reminiscent of Shakespeare. He borrowed

characters, situations, and ideas, and enriched them with his own poetic language. A critic said of him that what he borrowed from others lost nothing in his hands.