REMAINS OF THE DAY:
TIETJENS THE ENGLISHMAN

Dennis Brown

Englishness is not what it was. In 1972 Philip Larkin wrote in 'Going, Going':

> And that will be England gone,
> The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
> The guildhalls, the carved choirs.
> There'll be books; it will linger on
> In galleries; but all that remains
> For us will be concrete and tyres.
>
> Most things are never meant.
> This won't be, most likely: but greeds
> And garbage are too thick-strewn
> To be swept up now, or invent
> Excuses that make them all needs.
> I just think it will happen, soon.[1]

Since then, many poets have made the break-up or decay of Englishness a major theme. Tony Harrison has given us an England of them and '[uz]', further frayed into multi-ethnic complexities.[2] More recently the 'Bloodaxe poets',[3] hailed as a triumph of margins over the centre, have almost revelled in metropolitan and suburban decay. Peter Reading, connoisseur of neo-Thatcherite grot, the second volume of whose *Collected Poems* was published in 1996,[4] has yoked horrendous tabloid news items and cardboard box-land by violence together to conclude in quasi-Anglo-Saxon apocalypse:

> …horror unbearable
> universal insanity senility wrath
> weariness indolence insomnia earth shall

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('Untitled')[5]

Even the urbanely New Formalist Glyn Maxwell has looked beyond the zany hyperreality of a teenager's Welwyn Garden City to notice: 'The Burnt-out, the Despite,/The muffled in their homes and heaps'.[6] While Linton Kwesi Johnson has given us all a right dubbing throughout his protest-poem – 'Inglan's a Bitch'.[7] So on the poetry front, at least, Englishness is not what it used to be. But then it never has been.

In *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, edited by Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, Robert Colls notes:

> Englishness has had to be constantly reproduced, and the phases of its most intense reproduction – borne as its finest moments – have simultaneously been phases of threat to its existence from within and without.[8]

In his contentious book *England and Englishness*,[9] John Lucas has succeeded in indicating that a poetic battle of Britain has been waged since at least the Glorious Revolution of 1689, so the 'Moment of Bloodaxe', as some might call it, is not so exceptional. What Colls and Dodd's book calls particular attention to is the way the Great War, especially, caused a 'threat' to Englishness – that war, of course, which Ford Madox Ford fought in, and which is represented at the heart of his *Parade's End*.[10] In a chapter from *Englishness*, Alun Howkins quotes an anecdote from Clive Aslet's *The Last Country Houses* where an officer at the front had the magazine *Country Life* 'sent out to the trenches as a symbol of what he was fighting for'.[11]

Whatever quite Ford was fighting for, it probably included 'two gross of broken statues/…a few thousand battered books' (as Ezra Pound put it in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley'), and I think the tetralogy's commitment to cultural continuity makes it reasonable to consider it in terms of contemporary discussions about both Englishness and masculinities. Certainly, Ford's earlier work indicates his 'fascination with Englishness'[12] – especially in the trilogy *England and the*

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English.[13] The key figure in *Parade's End* is Christopher Tietjens, an Englishman, whose distance from, say, Edward Ashburnam has much to do with the Great War and Ford's modern memory. So my primary instance from the book will not be the often-noticed opening in the railway compartment, but one where Tietjens is at the front – mediating in idealised fashion among such highly-strung 'Britishers' as Cockneys, Canadians, Welshmen, ex-miners or millenarians. The passage is from the second volume, *No More Parades*:

> The other captain rambled on in front of him. Tietjens did not like his talk of the circle and the millennium. You get alarmed, if you have any sense, when you hear that. It may prove the beginnings of definite, dangerous lunacy. . . . But he knew nothing about the fellow. He was too dark and good-looking, too passionate, probably, to be a good regular officer on the face of him. But he *must* be a good officer: he had the D.S.O. with a clasp, the M.C., and some foreign ribbon up. And the general said he was [. . . .] He wondered if General Campion knew what a Vice-Chancellor's Latin Prize man was. Probably he did not, but had just stuck the piece of information into his note as a barbaric ornament is used by a savage chief [. . . .]
>
> The repressions of the passionate drive them mad [. . . .] He seemed to see his draft: two thousand nine hundred and ninety-four men he had had command of for over a couple of months – a long space of time as that life went – men he and Sergeant-Major Cowley had looked after with a great deal of tenderness, superintending their morale, their morals, their feet, their digestions, their impatiences, their desires for women. . . . He seemed to see them winding away over a great stretch of country, the head slowly settling down, as in the Zoo you will see an enormous serpent slowly sliding down into its water-tank [. . . .]
>
> Intense dejection, endless muddles, endless follies, endless villainies. All these men given into the hands of the most cynically care-free intriguers in long corridors who made plots that harrowed the hearts of the world. All these men toys, all these agonies mere occasions for picturesque phrases to be put into politicians' speeches without heart or even intelligence. (*PE* 295-6)

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The enemy of Englishness here is not 'Fritz' nor the German High Command, but individual 'lunacy' or corporate anarchy.

So Ford, brought up among arty Pre-Raphaelites, Ford the collaborator with Conrad (inventor of Kurtz), Ford editor of the radical *English Review*, Ford who rolled on the carpet at Ezra Pound's poetic archaisms, Ford contributor to *BLAST* – whose wildness led to the editor, Wyndham Lewis, being summoned to 10 Downing Street for an explanation – Ford the passionately adulterous creator of the 'Good Soldier', constructs an even better soldier – one whose fundamental Englishness will survive whatever intrigue or High Explosive may throw at him: 'I am the master of my fate:/I am the captain of my soul'.[14] A key proto-Modernist is here playing a conventional late-Victorian card to shore up the ruins of English manhood. For English manhood is synonymous with sanity. Everything that threatens this becomes foreign. Talk of the millennium suggests 'dangerous lunacy' and its utterer 'too dark and good-looking, too passionate', whatever his officer-credentials. General Campion, Tietjens' preposterous god-father, who will later both demote and appear to cuckold him, evidently sponsors this 'foreigner' so his remark about Latin Prize men is rendered 'a barbaric ornament [. . .] used by some savage chief'. The men under his command – potentially anarchic Cockneys, Canadians, Welshmen etc – with their 'morale, their morals, their feet, their digestions, their impatiences, their desires for women' become animalised as 'an enormous serpent sliding down its water tank'. And the politicians playing with all these lives are wholly reified – 'without heart or even intelligence'. Anything which threatens our Englishman's sanity is alien. In this the 'other captain' has a point in objecting to noise. 'By God, he was perfectly right'. The heart of darkness must be kept at bay at all cost.

Faintly ridiculous as some of the idiom may now appear, Tietjens stands for a psychic reality beyond either nationality or gender – the fragility and necessity of what Freud tended to call Ego or even Superego but has more recently been reworked by British psychoanalysis in terms of a model of containment. The model has

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particularly been developed by another Great War veteran, who also produced a fine book about the war (*The Long Week-End*),[15] Wilfred Bion, one-time President of the British Psycho-Analytical Society. In *Attention and Interpretation,* Bion wrote:

> According to his background a patient will describe various objects as containers, such as his mind, the unconsciousness, the nation; others as contained, such as his money, his ideas.[16]

Donald Meltzer has described the container more lyrically:

> At the nucleus of this private core is the mysterious, sacred nuptial chamber of the internal objects, to which they must be allowed periodically to withdraw to repair and restore one another…these internal gods [. . .] are the superior, most evolved segment of the human mind [. . . .][17]

The 'container' needs to be able to withstand or incorporate all possible forms of 'lunacy'. At the beginning of the Second World War, Wilfred Bion was set by the War Office to study forms of officer leadership, and began developing group psychoanalysis.[18] The group leader, to be successful, must act as a form of 'container' for the anxieties of the group as a whole, to preserve it from anarchy. A loss of containing ability either on the personal or group plane might lead to Craiglockhart War Hospital, as it were – a historical shattering of English manhood recently examined in Pat Barker's trilogy.[19] Even when a shell-burst erases three weeks of his life and his memory-stock, Tietjens merely returns home to restock his mind from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. I am simplifying the issues, but arguably Ford does too. He knew enough about the psychic realities at stake (as well as the psychoanalytic jargon of the twenties) to wish to preserve his hero's sanity and leadership role, and hence his status as Englishman, against all the odds.

This determination gives rise to one of the most extraordinarily weird and wonderful discussions of Englishness in twentieth century literature. It is in *Some Do Not . . .*:

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> It has been remarked that the peculiarly English habit of self-suppression in matters of the emotions puts the Englishman at a great disadvantage in moments of unusual stresses. In the smaller matters of the general run of life he will be impeccable and not to be moved; but in sudden confrontations of anything but physical dangers he is apt – he is, indeed, almost certain – to go to pieces very badly [. . . .]
>
> Tietjens had quite advisedly and of set purpose adopted a habit of behaviour that he considered to be the best in the world for the normal life. If every day and all day long you chatter at high pitch and with the logic and lucidity of the Frenchman; if you shout in self-assertion, with your hat on your stomach, bowing from a stiff spine and by implication threaten all day long to shoot your interlocutor, like the Prussian; if you are as lachrymally emotional as the Italian, or as dryly and epigrammaticaly [*sic*] imbecile over unessentials as the American, you will have a noisy, troublesome, and thoughtless society without any of the surface calm that should distinguish the atmosphere of men when they are together. You will never have deep arm-chairs in which to sit for hours in clubs thinking of nothing at all – or of the off-theory of bowling. On the other hand, in the face of death – except at sea, by fire, railway accident or accidental drowning in rivers; in the face of madness, passion, dishonour or – and particularly – prolonged mental strain, you will have all the disadvantage of the beginner at any game and may come off very badly indeed. Fortunately death, love, public dishonour and the like are rare occurrences in the life of the average man, so that the great advantage would seem to have lain with English society; at any rate before the later months of the year 1914. (*PE* 178-9)

Englishness betokens normality, as opposed to the 'later months of the year 1914' – abnormality, 'lunacy', foreignness: the Other. And such Englishness is specifically linked with an ideal of masculinity.

The context of Tietjens' somewhat batty meditation is an interview with Lord Port Scatho resulting from the sinister machinations of his fiendish wife Sylvia, who represents a restless, inchoate, destructive 'feminine' Otherness to our hero's sane English normality. It does not seem to occur to Tietjens (or perhaps Ford?) to

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question Sylvia's behaviour as abnormal, un-English or even 'lunatic'; she is, after all, a woman. The binary opposition involved is as compulsive as Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics*[20] might wish it to be. And, of course, such a masculinist construction survived the Great War and way past the second one. Both Antony Easthope in *What a Man's Gotta Do*[21] and Lynne Segal in *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities Changing Men*[22] have interesting things to say about typical 1950s men. Segal, with Lacan's writing in mind, sums it up like this:

> the promise of phallic power is precisely this guarantee of total inner coherence, of an unbroken and unbreakable, an unquestioned and unquestionable masculinity.[23]

Tietjens' masculinity, however, is represented as neither 'unbreakable' nor 'unquestioned'. Ford teases the reader at various points not only with the possibility that his hero might break down – 'he was mad and seeing himself go mad' (*PE* 564) – but also that he has broken down – as his girl Valentine believes: '"He appears to be mad"' (*PE* 653). Valentine does not see 'lunacy' as a loss of either Englishness or manhood. Indeed, it is precisely at this point in the story that she is willing to become Tietjens' physical lover. But Ford does seem to see it in those terms – some, after all, do not; and a man can only stand up if he can keep his head when all around are losing theirs. And even Mark, Christopher's brother and rival, does not break down when he succumbs to paralysis in *Last Post*: in fact, he self-consciously makes an Iago-like decision: '*From henceforth he never would speak word*' (*PE* 679), similarly pluming up his will.

In the major decade of literary modernism, when selfhood was typically represented as dynamically fragmentary, *Parade's End* is remarkable for bringing a highly modernist stylisation to bear on shoring up traditional English manhood, even in the post-Great War era when Groby House will pass to an American woman and the title to a French woman. There'll always be an Englishman, even if he is

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marginalised away from the national centre of a low dishonest decade. The Groby Great Tree – proto-Lacanian phallic signifier – may be cut down, and Tietjens' legitimate heir alienated from him by Sylvia, but he has Valentine and the coming child to sustain him. As Mark reflects: 'Christopher no doubt was wise in his choice. He had achieved a position in which he might – with just a little more to it – anticipate jogging away to the end of time, leaving descendants to carry on the country without swank' (*PE* 831). What more could a true Englishman desire? The drift is similar to that in D. H. Lawrence's near-contemporaneous *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – the authentic Englishman is no longer to be found in the Country House or in charge of the nation's affairs. Yet he remains, unbowed if somewhat bloodied: 'A good man', as the dying Mark says to Valentine.

However, *Parade's End* renders the 'Condition of England' as one of decline if not fall – of 'remains'. And it does so partly by using a shortened genealogy. As Alun Howkins shows in *Englishness*, a dominant myth of the time was of an Elizabethan 'Merrie England', lasting until the 1680s. That is where the Tietjens' line is about to begin. As Valentine ruminates toward the end: 'Christopher was eleventh Tietjens of Groby [. . . .] Number one came over with Dutch William, the Protestant hero!' (*PE* 811). This is an almost Irish Unionist mythology of Britishness holographed over a simulacrum of Yorkshire grit. Guilt towards a usurped catholic family is linked to a fanciful genealogical curse in Ford's post-war mythologisation. Perhaps the shorter time-span is deployed to salvage the overall historical destiny of Englishness. George Herbert of Bemerton, after all, lived well before the Glorious Revolution – an inheritance which the Tietjens put roots *into*, as it were. And while the wooden butler-narrator of Kazuo Ishiguro's Booker Prize book *The Remains of the Day*[24] has served the appeasing, if not fascist, Lord Darlington – whose weekend parties seem traceable back to Ford's 'endless muddles, endless follies, endless villainies' (*PE* 296) – it is arguable how representative of their land most Englishmen would find this

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1930s' butler's almost unbelievable up-tightness. England is the land he sees – and the other characters he meets who are more inclined to 'bantering'.

'Get you to bed. . . . I will come and examine you' (*PE* 836), says the 'much-liked' doctor to pregnant Valentine at the end of the tetralogy – Englishness will continue. From the standpoint of the double millennium, *Parade's End* stands out as perhaps the most comprehensive fictive exploration of Englishness which the twentieth century produced, and one highly relevant to current multi-ethnic and post-devolution Britain. For, to repeat Colls's point: 'Englishness has had to be constantly reproduced'. 'History is now and England'[25] remains a priority for cultural thinking in terms of national identity. Derek Walcott, a St Lucian who has, nevertheless, recently been championed (unsuccessfully) for the Laureateship, has hymned, as it were, a transplanted England:

> A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone,
> Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next
> Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake,
> Ancestral murderers and poets…/
> My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.[26]

There is a similar ambivalence about the English legacy in Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987) – a title pointing directly back through allusions in *Parade's End* to the famous painting by Ford's grandfather, Ford Madox Brown. However, Jarman has also published more positive-sounding titles – *Little England/A Time of Hope* and *Today and Tomorrow*.[27]

In addition, the inter-nation complexities of *The Last Post* (final book of *Parade's End*) – Mark Tietjens' belief in a 'single command' (French) to bring European peace, Christopher's implication in selling the country's antique heritage to Americans, Marie-Léonie Riotor's transformation into Lady Tietjens – not only speak to current political squabbles between Europhiles and Little Englanders but also

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foreshadow the wry, trans-national and multi-ethnic pyrotechnics of Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) – 'Lord Methwold is recently dead [. . .] his wife is the sole – and uncontested – beneficiary [. . . .] This country mansion is now hers; also the town house at Campden Hill Square [. . . .] Spenta Carma has received the news of her good fortune [. . .]'.[28] However, recent poems also continue Ford's gentler English infatuation:

> Leave it now, leave it; give it over
> to that all-gathering general English light,
> in which each separate bead
> of drizzle at its own thorn-tip stands
> as revelation.
>
> (Geoffrey Hill, 1998)[29]

> A dream of English watercolourists
> all spread out on the hills: the sky is blue…./
> Hills on the horizon
> breed and open till the light has all….
>
> (Glyn Maxwell, 1998)[30]

Something lovely of Englishness endures 'without swank', and akin to those lines of Herbert which help Tietjens preserve his sanity against all that the Great War can throw at him:

> Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
> The bridal of the earth and sky….

NOTES

1. Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: The Marvell Press and Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 190.

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2. For 'them & [uz]' I and II, see Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems*, second edition (London: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 122 and 123. For 'multi-ethnic complexities' see, e.g., 'v', *Ibid*, pp. 235-49.

3. See, especially, *The New Poetry*, ed. Michael Hulse *et al.* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1993), including the Introduction.

4. Peter Reading, *Collected Poems 2: Poems 1985-1996* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1996).

5. *Ibid*, p. 295. See also further 'Untitled' poems in Peter Reading, *Work in Regress* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1997), pp. 43, 50, 54, 57.

6. From 'In Herrick Shape for Her', Glyn Maxwell, *Out of the Rain* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1992), p. 78. For 'a teenager's Welwyn Garden City' see 'Tale of the Mayor's Son', Glyn Maxwell, *Tale of the Mayor's Son* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1990), pp. 10-14, and for 'Garden City Quatrains', Glyn Maxwell, *Rest for the Wicked* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995), pp. 51-3.

7. Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Inglan's a Bitch', *The New Poetry*, pp. 187-8.

8. See *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920.*, ed Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 299. Since writing this essay, I have become aware of the flood of commentary on Englishness and the British which has attended the issue of constitutional devolution. See, for instance, the republication of Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1996) and Bill Bryson, *Notes from a Small Island* (London: Doubleday, 1995), Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People* (London: Michael Joseph, 1998), Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History* (London: Macmillan, 1999), Simon Heffer, *Nor Shall My Sword: the Reinvention of England* (London: Phoenix/Orion, 2000), Andrew Marr, *The Day Britain Died* (London: Profile, 2000). There have also been many recent books on nationalism and 'place myth'. My own more recent thoughts on Englishness have been somewhat prompted by some essays in *Contemporary Writing and National Identity*, ed Tracey Hill and William Hughes (Chippenham: Sulis Press, 1995) and are reflected in my chapter 'The Last of England', Dennis Brown, *John Betjeman* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999), pp. 36-50.

9. John Lucas, *England and Englishness: Ideas of Nationhood in English Poetry 1688-1900* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1990). Some of the issues have been updated

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in John Lucas, *The Radical Twenties: Aspects of Writing, Politics and Culture* (Five Leaves Publications, 1997).

10. All references to Ford Madox Ford, *Parade's End* (London: Penguin, 1988): henceforth *PE*.

11. *Englishness: Politics and Culture*, p. 78.

12. The phrase is from Colin Edwards' essay 'Dates and Infidelities: Ford Madox Ford and national history', in *Contemporary Writing and National Identity*, pp. 93-101. Edwards effectively quotes Ford's 'conviction' that: 'I was not English'; however, I do not think it 'rash to presume' that Tietjens represents 'some kind of ideal form of "Englishness"' (p 99). My earlier view about this is indicated in 'No Brain Could Stand More', Dennis Brown, *The Modernist Self in Twentieth-Century English Literature: A Study in Self-Fragmentation* (London: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 58-66.

13. Ford Madox Hueffer, *England and the English*, comprising *The Soul of London*, *The Heart of the Country* and *The Spirit of the People* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1907). See also *An English Girl* (London: Methuen, 1907). For details of Ford's (Hueffer's) earlier career see Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, Vol. 1: *The World Before the War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). I am grateful for discussions about Ford's early work with my Ph.D. student Jenny Plastow.

14. W. E. Henley, *Echoes*, IV, 'Invictus. In Mem. R. T. H. B.' (*Bloomsbury Dictionary of Quotations*, 1994, p. 178).

15. Wilfred R. Bion, *The Long Week-End 1897-1919: Part of a Life,* ed. Francesca Bion (London: Free Association Books, 1986). Bion was in the early Tank Corps and would probably have been awarded a Victoria Cross had he not spoken his mind, after a disastrous attack, to a Campion-like superior.

16. Wilfred Bion, *Attention and Interpretation* (New York: Jason Aranson, 1923), p. 122.

17. Donald Meltzer, 'Foreword', Meg Harris Williams and Margot Waddell, *The Chamber of Maiden Thought: Literary Origins of the Psychoanalytic Model of the Mind* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1991), p. xvi.

18. See, for instance, W. R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (London: Tavistock, 1972).

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19. See Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Viking, 1991), *The Eye in the Door* (Viking, 1993) and *The Ghost Road* (Viking, 1995). For a discussion of the psychological issues involved and their relation to notions of English manhood, see Dennis Brown, 'Pat Barker's Trilogy: Total War, Masculinities, Anthropology and the Talking Cure' in *Pat Barker*, ed Sharon Monteith (forthcoming).

20. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985).

21. Antony Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do: the Masculine Myth in Popular Culture* (London: Paladin, 1986).

22. Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities Changing Men* (London: Virago Press, 1994).

23. *Ibid,* p. 102.

24. Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989).

25. T. S. Eliot, from 'Little Gidding', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T S Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 197.

26. From 'Ruins of a Great House', Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 20. There is also a magically diffused 'Englishness' within his *Omeros* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).

27. See Derek Jarman, *The Last of England* (London: Constable, 1987); *Today and Tomorrow* (London: Richard Salmon, 1991); *B Movie: Little England/A Time of Hope, 1981* in *Up in the Air: Derek Jarman's Collected Film Scripts* (London: Vintage, 1996). Jarman's films *Jubilee* (1978) and *The Tempest* (1979) are also highly relevant. Elsewhere, I have suggested connections between Jarman's and Sir John Betjeman's rendering of England. See *John Betjeman*, pp. 42 and 68, n. 11.

28. Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), p. 310.

29. Geoffrey Hill, *The Triumph of Love* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 26-7.

30. From 'Edward Wilson', Glyn Maxwell, *The Breakage* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 33.

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