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From Pan to Arras:
Eleanor Farjeon and Edwardian Poetry

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Abstract

Eleanor Farjeon's poetry for adults is notable for reflecting some of the changes taking place in the literary and cultural life of Britain during the Edwardian period. Her early work relates to a range of cultural phenomena that extended from the Victorian into the Edwardian period. These include the figure of Pan, Symbolism, and anxiety about the modern metropolis. A number of developments occurred after she met Edward Thomas. Features that demonstrate his influence include detailed descriptions of the natural world and depictions of real people. Elements of Robert Frost's ideas about the sound of sense can also be detected. The interest in the spiritual that forms an important element in Farjeon's early work does not disappear but emerges transformed in poems such as "Easter Monday," which was written in response to Thomas' death in France in 1917. Extending the Edwardian period to include the First World War enables Farjeon to be seen as a participant in some of the broader developments taking place in English poetry during this period. Despite Farjeon's later reputation as a children's author, most of the poems discussed are aimed at adults, although some could be read by adults and children.

Keywords: Eleanor Farjeon; Edward Thomas; Edwardian; spiritual; poetry; First World War; Pan; London; poetic development; poetic influence; Dymock poets

Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965) is often thought of as a children's author, with her success in this area recognised by her receipt of the Carnegie Medal, the Hans Christian Anderson Award, and the Regina Medal. She also wrote the lyrics to "Morning has Broken," which was originally a children's hymn. In contrast, Farjeon's poetry for adults has received less attention, despite this being the main focus of her early work. *Pan-Worship and Other Poems*, published in 1908, was followed by several other collections, with the poems that concern her friendship with Edward Thomas extending into the First World War. Expanding the boundaries of the Edwardian period to include the war provides a productive context in which to examine Farjeon's poetry. The war's significant cultural impact and Edward VII's relatively short reign has meant that a number of authors have taken similar approaches. Jonathan Rose and Samuel Hynes both extend the period beyond the King's reign, and Kenneth Millard follows their example by including Edward Thomas in his survey of Edwardian poets. Millard characterises the Edwardian era as "the period of transition from Victorian to modern literature" (11). The aim of this article is not to suggest that Farjeon played a central role in this transition, but that she was a participant in this process. In order to demonstrate this, a selection of Farjeon's poems is examined in relation to a range of cultural phenomena that extended from the Victorian into the Edwardian period. These include the figure of Pan, Symbolism, and the modern metropolis. The range of themes demonstrates the extent to which Farjeon's work engaged with her cultural milieu. Farjeon's poetry began to develop in new directions after she became friends with Thomas, whose poetry is described by F. R. Leavis as possessing a "representative modern sensibility" (52). Farjeon and Thomas met in 1912, and his influence can be detected in her work. The poems that support this analysis demonstrate closer and more detailed descriptions of the natural world, as well as depictions of people who Farjeon knew or met in the countryside. The craft of these poems is more tightly controlled and features elements of Robert Frost's ideas about the sound of sense.

The seeds of Farjeon's poetic development were sown in her childhood. Born in London, Farjeon was the daughter of the novelist Ben Farjeon. Her education was provided by governesses and the access she

had to the books in the family home, of which there were eight thousand in the dining room alone (Farjeon, *A Nursery* 227). Together with one of her brothers, Eleanor played a game called TAR, in which they would take on the roles of different characters such as kings, mistresses, and knights in order to act out adventures in “Wonderland” (Farjeon, *A Nursery* 324). Given the importance of this game in Farjeon’s childhood, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the poems in her first collection *Pan-Worship and Other Poems* have an otherworldly quality to them, or feature knights, queens, fairies, and gods. Examples include “King Laurin’s Garden,” “The Old Grey Queen,” and “The Mysterious Forest.” The latter describes a “pale young queen” who steals “ghostwise” across the meadows along with other wraiths and phantoms (21). The influence of Victorian medievalism in these poems is enhanced by an interest in the mysterious and mystical. This concern is evident in Farjeon’s “Pan-worship,” which also draws on a cultural stream originating in a previous era. Nicholas Freeman identifies a “profusion” of writing about Pan between the 1860s and the First World War (“Nothing” 23). Although the limitations in poetic craft mark the poem out as one of Farjeon’s earlier works, it is nonetheless instructive because it demonstrates how Farjeon’s engagement with the natural world and the spiritual was informed by the literary and cultural context that surrounded her. The poem describes how a statue of Pan prompts a yearning for the enchantment of Arcadia:

If thou couldst speak, neglected, sneering stone,
Thou wouldst know how to answer me. Wilt thou
Not speak?... How still it is!... The noise of the world
Is shut about with silence!... If I kneel,
Bend and adore, make sacrifice to thee,
If to thy long-deserted fane I bring
Tribute of milk and honey – then if I snap
That loveliest pipe of all at the spring’s margin
And let the song of Syrinx from its hollow,
Nay, even the nymph’s sweet self – O Pan, old Pan,
Shall I not see thee stirring in the stone,
Crack thy confinement, leap forth – be again? (11)

Both Freeman and W. R. Irvin argue that the theme of Pan was interpreted in very different ways by the writers who adopted it (“Nothing” 24; 160).

Irwin contrasts “malevolent” depictions of Pan in texts such as Arthur Machen’s “The Great God Pan” with a range of “benevolent” interpretations (161). Although Farjeon’s poem expresses a hope for a benevolent Pan, the statue’s face is fixed in a sneer. Such an expression is an understandable response to the prevailing materialist view of the universe in which Pan is relegated to a stone statue. The poem’s anxieties about this situation and yearning for a Pan figure who can be perceived and worshipped contributes to a broader Edwardian cultural interest in transcending the limits of materialism. Hynes writes that “Victorian science may have made metaphysics obsolete, but it had not destroyed men’s metaphysical itch, and much of what one might generally call Edwardian science is concerned with the problem of restoring metaphysics to the human world” (134). Hynes refers to the work of Edward Carpenter, as well as to the Society of Psychical Research, whose members sought to use scientific methods to prove or disprove metaphysical phenomena (139). The yearning for Pan to “be” again in Farjeon’s poem demonstrates that she too experienced a “metaphysical itch,” even if she did not set out to contribute to the scientific approaches indicated by Hynes. Instead, the proposal that the poet might appeal to Pan by playing the song of Syrinx on the pipes encourages the view that art can also play a role in rediscovering the metaphysical dimensions of the natural world. The tribute of milk and honey suggests that the poem is itself an offering to Pan.

Farjeon’s use of archaic language in the quotation above emphasises the ancientness of the Greek tradition of Pan. This connection is accentuated by her use of Homeric epithets later on in the poem:

Lord of green woodlands, king of sun-spread plains
And star-splashed hills and valleys drenched in moonlight!
And I shall see again a dance of Dryads
And airy shapes of Oreads circling free
to shy sweet pipings of fantastic fauns
And lustier-breathing satyrs... (11)

Farjeon’s exuberant description of the nature spirits creates a sense of vibrancy in the landscape. This is enhanced by the ascending terms of rulership and the tumbling list of beings whose dancing and music adds to

the poem's longing for a spiritual connection with the natural world. Although it sounds dated to contemporary ears, Farjeon's use of archaic language continues a convention utilised in earlier Pan poems such as T. Sturge Moore's "Pan's Prophecy" (1904) and Robert Louis Stevenson's "Et Tu In Arcadia Vixisti," which appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1881. The latter poem is dedicated to Stevenson's cousin and describes someone who spent their childhood immersed in the tales of the ancient world, imaginatively inhabiting the dim forests of "Arcady" in whose glades the "Immortal Pan" dances (125). As in Farjeon's poem, the inspirited nature of antiquity is contrasted with a disenchanted experience of modern life:

Yet hope not thou at all; hope is no more;
And O, long since the golden groves are dead,
The faery cities vanished from the land! (126)

Farjeon's poem also ends on what might be read as a disappointing note. Despite the efforts to rejuvenate Pan, her poem concludes by returning to the impassive stone statue of Pan that dominates the opening. Yet although the statue's pointed ears are "numb," he is depicted as hearing:

... the wash and whisper of far waters,
The pale green waters of thin distant Springs
Under the pale green light of distant moons
Washing upon the shores of the old, old world
With a foam of flowers, a foam of whispering flowers... (12)

The landscape is still described in relation to the animating features of light and movement, but these are subdued; the moonlight is pale, and the foam of flowers only whispers. Farjeon's use of alliteration and repetition enhances the stanza's watery dimensions and creates a soundscape that emphasises the hushed mournfulness of the scene. The use of moonlight and a melancholy shoreline to evoke a sense of spiritual diminishment is shared with "Dover Beach." Yet where Matthew Arnold's poem emphasises faith, Farjeon's poem contains a tension between the speaker's ability to "believe" that Pan could "*be* again," and the phrase "I have a craving in me / For knowledge of thee as thou wert in old / Enchanted

twilights in Arcadia” (11, 9). Although Farjeon’s poem does not draw on scientific paradigms in the way that Carpenter or the Society for Psychical Research did, its quest for knowledge could be viewed in the context of esotericism, which Henrik Bogdan describes as “a Western form of spirituality that stresses the importance of the individual effort to gain spiritual knowledge, or gnosis, whereby man is confronted with the divine aspect of existence” (5). The failure to attain knowledge about Pan in Farjeon’s poem may be because the framework used is from the ancient world and cannot be easily integrated into the lived experience of Edwardian England. Yet despite the poem’s disappointing conclusion, the statue’s ability to hear and the “whispering” of the flowers leave open the possibility of an inspirited natural world that could be listened to and understood.

Farjeon’s search for spiritual connection is not limited to the natural world. Her poem “Fogbound” from her 1911 collection *Dream-Songs for the Beloved* describes an urban environment where the lack of genuine connection with the other is accentuated by fog:

‘Sisters! Brothers! remote procession!
I would love and be loved of you,
Give myself for your whole possession
Take yourselves as my human due: –

But my steps were as yours made noiseless
That none may know how we go and come: –
But you were all created voiceless
Even as I was fashioned dumb.

Each in his fogbound isolation
Who shall know how the other yearns? (22)

Farjeon’s poem can be viewed as part of a broader body of work that depicts the late Victorian and Edwardian city in poetry. Freeman argues that, while the theme of the modern metropolis was not particularly important for poets such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, William Morris, and Robert Browning, it took on greater significance for many poets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (*Conceiving the City* 24-25).

One of these was Arthur Symons, whose poem “London” also engages with the theme of urban fog:

And now there is no colour anywhere,
Only the ghost of greyness; vapour fills
The hollows of the streets, and seems to shroud
Gulfs where a noise of multitude is loud
As unseen water falling among hills.
Now the light withers, stricken at the root,
And, in the evil glimpses of the light,
Men as trees walking loom through lanes of night
Hung from the globes of some unnatural fruit.
To live, and to die daily, deaths like these,
Is it to live, while there are winds and seas? (*Fool of the World* 47)

The painterly treatment of the streetlamps and the atmospheric descriptions of light and crowds combine to create an alluring cityscape that is as toxic as it is beautiful. The strange tension between the natural world and the metropolis inherent in Symons’ organic metaphors and similes is also explored in Amy Levy’s “A March Day in London.” The poem describes how the spring weather, blowing through the grey town, prompts fever, restlessness, and mental unrest in the speaker:

What is the thing I fear, and why?
Nay, but the world is all awry –
The wind’s in the east, the sun’s in the sky.
The gas-lamps gleam in a golden line;
The ruby lights of the hansoms shine,
Glance, and flicker like fire-flies bright (19-20)

As night returns, “the town seems fair” and human mastery reasserts itself through the streetlamps and hansoms as well as the mist, which may be caused by air pollution (19-20). The speaker’s consciousness becomes less troubled than before and is permeated by a weary peace, yet the changes of spring have had a transformative effect, for within the depths of this state of mind lies a “grain / Of hopes that shall flower again” (20).

The strength of the organic metaphors used in the poems by Symons and Levy is a testament to their strength of poetic achievement. By contrast, Farjeon’s descriptions are significantly less vivid, indicating

that she was yet to fully come into her own as a poet. Nonetheless, the severe thickness of the fog in her poem corresponds to a pervading atmosphere of disconnection and concomitant social injustice. The streets are populated by “whimpering urchins” and a blasphemous drunk, as well as by lovers and a strange woman. All are seen as brothers and sisters and included in the longing for a life lived in a “common house” (Farjeon 22). The emergence of this way of life is linked to a “flash of a new Creation” whose clear flame can burn through the fog (22). There is scope to interpret this as divine intervention or perhaps the inspiration to create a fairer and more just society. Shearer West proposes that the atmospheric and fog-softened depictions of London by artists such as Claude Monet and James McNeill Whistler aestheticized the cityscape in a way that omitted its industrial features and social issues (56). Similarly, Freeman suggests that Walter Pater’s emphasis on a subjectivity of the individual detached from social or political contexts was influential for a number of writers (*Conceiving the City* 100). Freeman traces this in poems by Symons such as “Stella Maris” and “White Heliotrope,” observing that little interest is shown in the sensations and impressions of the other in the amorous encounters these poems describe (*Conceiving the City* 101). Symons’ “London” evokes the horror of the individual’s subjectivity becoming lost in the murky crowds, where other people begin to resemble trees and running water in a pattern that resonates with contemporary fears of degeneration. Farjeon’s poem portrays a similar crisis of urban selfhood, although, for her, the yearning to relate to the other and live within a “common house” offers a contrasting dynamic of connection. By including glimpses of people from different walks of life, Farjeon demonstrates a humanity that transcends the self and underlines her concern for the wider social environment.

A feature that emerges in a number of Farjeon’s poems is a quality of softness, or indistinctness. Similar to the fog in “Fogbound,” this is evident in the pale moonlight and foam of whispering flowers at the end of “Pan-worship,” as well as in the “world of wraiths and shadows” in “The Mysterious Forest.” In “Poplars at Night,” the trees are situated within “the moon-mist of the dusk,” while “Wild Hyacinth” describes the flowers as “a lost blue cloud from the azure spheres of sleep” (*Dream-*

Songs 27, 30). Another example is found in the opening to “Morning-vision”:

A sea that shimmers on the brink of light,
Emerging over shadow-boundaries
Silverly on a sleeping silver shore:
Phantom-land still, still silent mystery. (*Dream-Songs* 47)

The use of assonance and sibilance creates a soft musicality that enhances the visual descriptions of a liminal situation where the confluence of light and dark, land and sea, are imbued with mystery. According to Charles Chadwick, musicality is a key feature of Symbolist poetry because it achieves its effect through suggestion as opposed to the precision of words (5). Mystery is another important concern of Symbolist poetry, as emphasised by Symons in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (8). One of the reasons for this is intimated by Symon’s use of Thomas Carlyle’s definition of the Symbol as an “embodiment and revelation of the infinite” (3). Farjeon’s poem reaches towards this in its conclusion:

Then lo! the swift shrill flight of sudden gulls,
Up-circling whiteness sprayed against the blue,
The sweep of silver breasts and wheeling wings
That flash across the newly-risen sun
And cleaving through the dazzle of the day
Vanish like light dissolved in greater light
Or music drowned in heavenlier music. (47)

The musicality builds on that of the earlier section, with the use of alliteration and assonance emphasising the dazzling movement of light, colour, and form. Although the concluding lines are technically a simile, the gulls are nonetheless used to point towards the spiritual elements that lie behind the physical manifestations of the scene. As such, they still fulfil Carlyle’s idea that a Symbol should allow us to approach the infinite by blending it with the finite (199). Chadwick limits his categorisation of Symbolism to a small number of French poets who were writing between approximately 1850 and 1920 (52). Nonetheless, he traces their influence in the work of cultural figures as diverse as Richard Wagner, Marcel Proust, William Butler Yeats, and T. S. Eliot. Chadwick argues that,

although not Symbolists as such, these figures incorporate aspects of Symbolism in their work (52). In addition to “Morning-vision,” Symbolist aspects can be detected in some of the other poems by Farjeon examined so far. It is principally those indistinct elements that evoke a mood, or mystery that connect her work to that of the Symbolists. Her use of the elements of light, mist, and foam can be read as symbolic because their insubstantial nature points towards the spiritual.

As with Farjeon’s use of the themes of Pan and the modern metropolis, the Symbolist aspects in her work indicate that she was working with cultural impulses that were drawn from the nineteenth century and then developed in the Edwardian period. Some new developments can be detected in Farjeon’s poetry that was written after she met Thomas in 1912. One of Farjeon’s brothers knew Thomas, and she was invited to join them for tea with the Jungian therapist Godwin Baines and his fiancée (Farjeon, *Edward Thomas* 1, 4). Farjeon and Thomas began to correspond and became close friends. Thomas had long been earning a living writing reviews and “hack” books on a disparate range of subjects. He also wrote books about the countryside, and when Farjeon started reading his *Light and Twilight*, she asked if he had ever written poetry (Farjeon, “Walking” 11). Although Thomas dismissed this idea, the poetic aspect of his work in prose was also recognised by Frost a year later, when he encouraged Thomas to begin writing poetry. Frost and Thomas shared an interest in the natural world and in writing that, for the most part, left behind the ornamentation of the 19th century in exchange for a music that was closer to that found in everyday speech.

One of the activities that Farjeon carried out in the course of her friendship with Thomas was that of typing up his poems and sending them out to editors. This became particularly important once Thomas had enlisted to fight in the First World War. There are letters where they discuss editorial suggestions and changes, an indication of the insights that Farjeon had into Thomas’ work and the creative process behind it. This is in addition to the understanding that Farjeon had of what it was like to be with Thomas as a person:

To walk with Edward Thomas in any countryside was to see, hear, smell and know it with fresh senses. He was as alert to what was happening in and on the earth and the air above it as an animal in the grass or a bird on a tree. Just as certain friends who share their thoughts with you will sharpen your thinking, he had this effect, when you took the road together, of quickening your seeing and hearing through his own keen eyes and ears. (Farjeon, "Walking" 7)

Something of this sense of seeing the world through Thomas' eyes is evident in the title poem of *All the Way to Alfriston*, which was published in 1918. The poem adopts the perspective of the solitary walker found so often in Thomas' work:

All the way to Alfriston,
From Chichester to Alfriston,
I went along the running Downs
High above the patchwork plain,
Fantastical as Joseph's coat
With coloured squares of grass and grain,
Charlock-yellow, clover-green,
Reddening wheat and silvery oat:
And rivers coiling in between,
And roofs of little peopled towns. (5)

The reference to charlock recalls the "yellow square / Of charlock" being ploughed in Thomas' poem "As the Team's Head Brass" (29). Later on, the poem refers to mullein, sainfoin, Canterbury bells, golden toadflax, poppies, and chicory, echoing the botanical detail found in Thomas' work. Towards the end of the poem, the speaker's encounters with a baker, a smith, shepherds, and a gypsy recall the figures in Thomas' poetry, such as the girl in the pub in "Up in the Wind," or the ploughman in "As the Team's Head Brass." Nonetheless, Farjeon's reference to Joseph's fantastical coat and the bubbling lightness created by her use of lists clearly mark the poem out as her own.

All the Way to Alfriston was written at the request of the children of Robin Guthrie, who illustrated the poems with his engravings (Farjeon, *Edward Thomas* 158). Many of the poems make use of rhythm and rhyme in a manner that delights in the musical sounds of words, and it is one of Farjeon's books that could be enjoyed by both adults and children. The

sometimes slippery boundary between audiences is noted by Deborah Thacker, who uses the term “double-voiced” to describe texts by Farjeon that speak to both adults and children (33). Similarly, Anne Harvey relates how she chose not to distinguish between Farjeon’s poetry for adults or children when making her selection for the anthology *Like Sorrow or a Tune* (33). Although the themes of poems such as “Fogbound” and “Pan-worship” clearly demonstrate Farjeon’s ambition to write for adults in the early part of her career, there are also a number of poems which could also be read by children and adults. These include “Bronwen of the Flowers,” which was published in 1918 in Farjeon’s *Sonnets and Poems*:

Bronwen gathered wild-flowers
Up-and-down the lane;
Her gathering touch upon them
Sweeter was than rain.

Now a blossom overblown,
Now a bud begun –
Her eye that lightened on them
Was quicker than the sun.

One by one she named them,
Oh, she did express
In her pretty namings
All their prettiness:

Some were fit for virgins,
Some for merry dames,
And the love with which she named them
Was lovelier than their names. (28)

Bronwen was the name of one of Thomas’ daughters, and the emphasis on childhood and the naming of plants recalls his poem “Old Man,” as does the use of “sweeter.” “Sweet” is a word that features in many of Thomas’ poems. Examples include the “clear and sweet” sky in “November,” or the ground in “Sowing, which is “sweet and dry” as tobacco dust (79, 43). Often the word is used by Thomas to indicate special qualities of rareness and beauty, as found in the natural world, in song or language.¹ An obvious example that is close to Farjeon’s poem occurs in “Tall Nettles”: “I like the dust on the nettles, never lost / Except to prove the sweetness of

a shower” (70). In Farjeon’s poem, it is the touch of the child that bestows sweetness. This indicates the value of the interaction between human and plant, with the line open to a reading that acknowledges the perspective of the plant. The question of whether Farjeon’s work influenced Thomas is raised by Judy Kendall in *Edward Thomas’s Poets*. Kendall includes Farjeon’s “Poplars at Night” alongside Frost’s “The Sound of Trees” and John Freeman’s “Listening” as poems that form the context for Thomas’ “Aspens” (77-81). An emphasis on the communicative attributes of trees is shared by all four poems. “Poplars at Night” was published in *Dream-Songs for the Beloved*, which Kendall notes was produced in connection with *Orpheus: A Magazine of Mystical Art*, to which Thomas also contributed (77).

Despite the emphasis on detailed descriptions of the natural world in the two poems just discussed, Farjeon continued to write poetry that involved supernatural or mythical themes. An example of this is “The Storyteller,” from her 1918 collection *Sonnets and Poems*:

Over the hearth on which we burned
Brown beech-nuts, lichen-twigs, and cones,
I sat beside her while she turned
A forkèd wand within the pyre,
Until two little spirits of fire
Sprang from the hazel’s withered bones.
Then, with her eyes upon her branch
Pointed with ruddy nuts of flame,
Like one who has no power to staunch
The heart’s-blood flowing from his side,
She through her mouth undammed a tide
Of legends that I could not name: – (36)

As the poem continues, the story-teller’s mastery of language and narrative takes on a magical quality, with characters streaming into the shadowy room, only to disappear as the storyteller finishes and douses the flames. Farjeon’s inclusion of beech-nuts and pine cones helps to ground the poem’s magical elements and aligns it with the increased use of botanical details in “All the Way to Alfriston.” Despite the tidal metaphor and the dousing at the end, fire is the poem’s dominant element. The fluidity and mistiness of earlier poems has been replaced by the dramatic

boldness of the flame. This is personified in the figure of the storyteller, who is more present as a character than, for example, the queens and princesses of the medievalist poems. In comparison to these earlier figures, the storyteller represents a more direct expression of female power through her artistic ability to transport her audience and then return them to the real world. The storyteller does not achieve this alone but uses the fire and the tinder to help release the stories. The story is therefore created through a relationship with the natural world. The involvement of the protagonist as audience emphasises that this is also a shared human experience. The protagonist's role of listener enacts, by extension, our own role as the poem's readers, adding another dimension to Farjeon's work.

Although the three poems discussed provide evidence of developments that took place in Farjeon's poetry after 1912, these changes are not uniformly present across her work. Many of the sonnets in *Sonnet and Poems* are poignant, yet the language can sometimes be as mannered and archaic as that found in "Pan-worship," such as these lines: "Wilt thou put seals on love because men say / Love is a thing that certain time will steal?" (8). The focus on feelings is often conveyed through the use of metaphors instead of the description found in "All the Way to Alfriston" or "The Storyteller." It is possible that Farjeon used the Renaissance sonnets of poets such as William Shakespeare, John Donne, and Lady Mary Wroth as her models. Farjeon's sonnets from *Sonnet and Poems* were combined with twenty-five additional sonnets in *First and Second Love*. Although this later collection was published in 1947, the flyleaf states that the poems were written between 1911 and 1917. The outer world becomes more clearly delineated in the final four sonnets, which are addressed to Thomas. This reaches its culmination in the final sonnet, "XLIV Easter Monday (*In Memoriam* E.T.)" (referred to as "Easter Monday" hereafter).

In the last letter that I had from France
You thanked me for the silver Easter egg
Which I had hidden in the box of apples
You liked to munch beyond all other fruit.
You found the egg the Monday before Easter,
And said, "I will praise Easter Monday now –

It was such a lovely morning." Then you spoke
Of the coming battle and said, "This is the eve.
"Good-bye. And may I have a letter soon."

That Easter Monday was a day for praise,
It was such a lovely morning. In our garden
We sowed our earliest seeds, and in the orchard
The apple-bud was ripe. It was the eve.
There are three letters that you will not get.

April 9th, 1917 (56)

Much of the poem's power lies in the use of details that resonate beyond their status as things in themselves. Like the unread letters, this is the case with the seeds and the apple buds, which poignantly juxtapose Thomas' death in the Battle of Arras with the continuance of the life he was so closely connected to. Farjeon's use of these details indicates that her love for Thomas is intertwined with her own love for the elements of the natural world. The additional inclusion of the Easter motifs means that this love is related to the spiritual through the intersection of the poem's personal, religious, and natural elements.

The loose sonnet form allows the poem to adopt an unforced and conversational tone, which Farjeon may have learnt from Frost. She was exposed to Frost's ideas about the sound of sense through her friendship with Thomas and came to know Frost personally when she walked with him and Thomas in the countryside near the village of Dymock in the summer of 1914 (Farjeon, *Edward Thomas* 90). She describes how Frost outlined his ideas about the natural cadence of the human voice by calling to a man across a field. The distance was too great for the poets to understand the content of the man's reply, but the cadence of his speech was clear (Farjeon, *Edward Thomas* 90). By including quotations from Thomas' letters, Farjeon extends Frost's ideas by incorporating the patterns of cadence that can be found in correspondence. The exchange of gifts and letters casts the poem in the form of a dialogue, which makes Thomas' silence in the second stanza all the more powerful. Nonetheless, the continued address to "you" in the final line leaves open the possibility of an afterlife.

The lasting impact achieved by “Easter Monday” is demonstrated by its inclusion in anthologies such as *Scars Upon My Heart: Women’s Poetry and Verse of the First World War*, edited by Catherine Reilly, and its availability on a number of blogs and websites. These include *Poetry by Heart*, an initiative in the UK that encourages school-children to learn poetry from memory. The poem also appeared alongside Wilfred Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth” in the 2017/18 English literature poetry anthology for the Belfast-based CEA exam board (42). The poem’s moving treatment of loss is likely to be a factor in its popularity, the expression of which is supported by the strength of Farjeon’s use of poetic techniques. Perhaps one of the reasons that the poem rings true and is so successful today is that the innovations of Frost and Thomas that inform it make the poem familiar. The use of details and conversational elements supports a more complex and nuanced mode of writing that became increasingly valued after the First World War.

Although some of her earlier work is not as tightly crafted, it nonetheless bears seeds that flourished later on. The concern for the other in “Fogbound” encompasses the whole of humanity, even if the fog and hectic life of the city means that we only catch indistinct glimpses of the people on the streets. Later, in “Easter Monday,” the focus on love and friendship demonstrates a concern that is built on a more clearly delineated sense of the other as an individual.

The emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of the natural world in “Pan-worship” finds an altered expression in the buds, seeds, and Easter egg in “Easter Monday.” The poignant juxtaposition between the loss of Thomas and the freshness of new life is set against the associations of Easter with the overcoming of death. The Symbolist indistinctness of poems such as “Morning-vision” is less apparent in the post-1912 poems discussed here, although traces of it can be detected in the delicate softness that characterises the tone and descriptions of the natural world in “Easter Monday.” Although the poem is pervaded by this softness, its clarity of thought and diction gives it the kind of “modern sensibility” found in Thomas’ and Frost’s poetry. This achievement, when viewed together with her work on Pan, the city, and Symbolism, demonstrates that

Farjeon's poetry contributed to the broader developments that took place in English poetry during the Edwardian period.

Notes:

¹ For a further exploration of Thomas' use of the word "sweet," see Anna Stenning, "The Strange Sweetness." *Journal of the Friends of the Dymock Poets*, no. 17, 2018, pp. 36-42.

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