Openings
Also by Jeremy Hooker

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Mapping Golgotha: A Selection of Wilfred Owen’s Letters and Poems.
Edward Thomas: The Ship of Swallows
For Mieke
21 April 1983

After the Poetry Festival at Cambridge from Thursday evening until Monday night.

Mieke—how aware of each other we were at once, how easily and naturally we talked and touched. We stayed up alone together all night on Saturday, at Göran Printz-Pålsson’s, talking and making love. I walked back across Cambridge to Glen Cavaliero’s on a grey, wet morning, streets almost empty, birds singing loudly and sweetly in gardens. Went to bed at 8 and slept on and off until 1, waking to the strange sensation against my neck of the tiny silver dolphin on a chain which she had given me, and the questions often in my mind since then—Is it true? Is it possible? Can we be so suddenly in love?

From the first I met old friends and made new ones: Glen, Clive Wilmer, Göran & Ulla, John Matthias, Michael Longley, David & Judy Gascoyne, Chris Sykes & Patrick Sullivan from Lumb Bank. Christopher Middleton has a remarkable quality of stillness; he is self-disciplined, a man who watches, listens, remembers people. It was characteristic that he should give a speech of thanks to the organisers at the end, and do it beautifully.

On Sunday morning I went with John Matthias to see Doug Kinsey’s sequence of monotypes, After the Fall, at Caius. These will surely be widely known in time. If not, they should be, their images are at once so expressive and made with such craft and compassion. I have never seen a sequence of modern figurative paintings that has moved or impressed me more.

Jean Earle read first at the Festival. I read with her, Michael Longley, and Nassos Vayenas, from Rethymnon in Crete. For me, Jean Earle’s reading was the most moving and effective of all the readings I heard. Not the best performance or the most applauded—far from it, there were several kinds of very accomplished performances. Jean Earle was inside her poems and they were in her; she read them from the inside, and almost entirely from memory, communicating the integrity of each poem by giving herself to it and not manipulating the audience. Other readers, notably Franco Fortini & Yuna Moritz, gave, in different ways, the emotional movements of their poems. Yuna Moritz seemed to be acting in her poems, not acting them for us. A fine distinction but a real one. I’m not moved by the poet as actor vis a vis the audience, although every good reading is to some degree an enactment. I was moved too by Peter Levi reading his elegy for Anne Pennington; it was as if we were hearing him reading to her.

William Empson was so indistinct that only a phrase or sentence was clearly audible, but although he read badly, it was strangely affecting to hear him read the famous poems—especially “Slowly the poison the whole bloodstream fills”—largely because this was an historical moment, and we were hearing him perhaps for the last time.

A few words and the livingness of all that has happened since last Thursday is reduced to images and shadows. Here a gesture, there something someone said… But I know this isn’t the truth, any more than these notebooks which are, in a sense, my life… Love alone is true, both the current in and between people that
is the real life of any time, and the knowledge lovingly held. In setting something down I have felt the current slipping between my fingers. Love comes only with sharing, going out from oneself, receiving another in, responding to the world together.

A cold, tiredness, my old fatalistic streak—a few days pass and I’m given miserably to doubt. Mieke, your dolphin touches my skin but I can’t know that you haven’t already gone back entirely into your old life in your work and your own place. I scarcely dare hope that the need which I felt in you was like mine, and the capacity to give and to accept is always with you, as in the special intensity of that time. I dream of a nature like yours, and I’ve no reason to trust my dreams. Nor any reason to distrust you.

At Hayford, Pennington
The photo of my grandfather, Tom Hooker, as a boy (c. 1885) with his uncle, Mr Humby, leaning on a donkey, in a group of estate workers, sitting or standing, each holding the tool of his or her work, was taken at Warsash House. This house, their workplace, was knocked down years ago, but I remember its dovecote, which, as a small boy, I walked past on the way to Sunday School. The School was on the way to the shore, and, apart from the dovecote, I can only remember the coloured pencils we were given to draw with, and one in particular, a stubby mauve pencil, which always comes to mind when I hear the word mauve. I’ve always associated the photograph with a Warsash estate, largely because the hedge behind the group stirs some strong but obscure memory of such hedges associated with the gravely soil of the area. But it was only yesterday that my parents placed it for me, and incidentally called up some memories of my own.

23 April
On not hearing the cuckoo, or only a doubtful, very faint distant echo at the bottom of Hazel Road, but finding violets, stitchwort & bluebells on the bank by Kings Huts.

On Wainsford Common. Forced a scratchy way through undergrowth and muddy clay to the river, Sway Tower upstream as grey as oaks & alders not yet in leaf. Birds singing, but no cuckoo.

Under trees by the river, its brown eddies, gravel shoals, banks of silt and quick clear pebbly runs, and walking back—rich warm orange of berberis in the garden and my father in his old hat & overcoat stooping to a task—I see and feel how happy my life has been, and is.

24 April
Early morning. Dad, in his dressing gown, his mass of white hair standing on end, has just brought the usual morning cup of tea. Through my window, looking out at Penn Cottage and Wheathill, I can see the space between them filled with fresh green leaves of the Buckles’ horse chestnut tree. The phrase in my mind just now
was “a shower of all my days”. Time to make peace with you, Dylan Thomas.

Mieke rang last night: “I am just as insecure as you”. As long as we feel the same!

Later, when I went to see Sean Street, he talked about his visit to Max Gate and the party on the lawn celebrating the publication of Michael Millgate’s biography. He went into the room where Thomas Hardy wrote *Jude*, which was also the room in which he died. Eating strawberries & cream and drinking white wine on the lawn, Sean imagined quizzical eyes looking down from the blank windows. Like me, though, he’s impressed by Hardy’s complete absence. He left only his writings to haunt us.

Coming here a few weeks ago I felt restless and strange. Thanks mainly to my parents, I have come to feel at home again. The area no longer feels strange as it did when we were visiting or thinking about it from Brynbeidog, but is now familiar again. Not exactly as before, of course—I could never again find that unselfconscious participation which must precede all thinking about place; but without an unseeing, taken-for-granted attitude, either. For now, a certain magic, a preternatural sharpness about the look and feel of things, may have gone; but it has gone with anguish, with the intensity of that frustrated longing to come back.

25 April

Yesterday morning I took the children to Victoria Country Park. The water was high when we arrived, grey blue under a grey sky, and rough, in a strong wind. Yachts cut through the water on their sides, fishing boats dipped and rose at the bows, white horses were driven across the surface, and a big tanker with a black hull rode at anchor out on the middle. A broken sky of blown cloud; blown smoke over Fawley. The tide ebbing formed a waterline of gleaming orange stones, shells, countless fragments of smooth glass, white blue green. The IOW ferry as it passed looked small on the broad channel and against the farther shore. After the children had swung on a rope and played on the shore Emily sat at the foot of the wall and wrote a poem:

the shells that roll under the sea
the wav's that roll and seif [swerve]
in the sun.

Afterwards I drove back to Wales, in rain, but as I approached Plynlimmon the sky was clear on the other side of the mountains, and I came down to a mild dry evening.

29 April

Setting out to walk to work I saw the postman arriving but decided to wait in hope until the evening or late afternoon—the difficult hour. Words of a psalm on the slate side of a ledger tomb near Llanbadarn church porch:
SO TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS
THAT WE MAY APPLY OUR HEARTS TO WISDOM

Jackdaws nesting in gaps alongside the slate clockface on the tower. The daffodils are dead now among the tombs & mounds. In places the graves form a wild, buried garden of terraces and ridges. Under grass, nettles and brambles many stones—whole families of stones—stand up with a solemn and touching dignity. Herb Robert with scarlet leaves are out in the walls, and overhead on the path uphill hawthorn leaves, blackthorn blossom, and occasionally—the freshest, sappiest green of spring—horse chestnut leaves. Dandelions have risen fiercely everywhere. Violets like tiny faces meet the eye with their look.

1 May
At Blaen Cwrt with Gillian Clarke and Dave Thomas; sawing logs in light rain; sitting by a big fire that shot sparks up the chimney, smoke curling “like fern” on the walls, while rain beat loudly on the tin and perspex roof. Sodden fields around, hedges & hedgebanks, sheep, misty distances—these and the earth underfoot, the shaly rock, mossed wood greening my hands, and sawdust, make me feel again the very ground of Brynbeidog. Here’s the horse chestnut tree which, on my first visit years ago, was full of little black cats with green eyes, in crooks between branches, looking down through leaves.

19 May
A cold, wet, intermittently stormy May. Election fever gripping the advertising agencies.

On Tuesday I went with Dave to Cardiff for R. S. Thomas’ 70th birthday celebration at the Sherman Theatre in the evening. After a showing of John Ormond’s moving film, R. S. read. Trousers at half-mast as usual, his books & sheets of poems in a gas mask bag. He was evidently in good spirits, and quite relaxed afterwards, though his hands shook at the beginning of his reading. I spoke to him briefly; he’d heard that I’d been living in Winchester, and when I told him I was back in Aberystwyth, he said: “the right place for you”.

Not a good month for me here, whether the right place or not. Shut in. Now I wait in suspense to see whether M. will be able to come tomorrow, or whether her brother’s serious illness will prevent her at the last moment. I have been lethargic, depressed; a week ago I was blaming the department, our isolation in box-like offices, but then realized it was my withdrawal from people, my failure to write. Nothing truer than that we receive but what we give.

20 May
When Roger Garfitt came with Nigel Wells to read last night, Nigel was standing in for Frances Horovitz. Frances is weak; it was thought that an operation would clear her cancer, but it didn’t. The months ahead will be critical.
M. rang this morning. She was called to her brother’s bedside yesterday; he is in a desperate condition and there was clearly no question of her being able to come.

It isn’t true to say I’m not disappointed for myself; the prospect of our being together for the next few days has helped to carry me through recent weeks. But the fact of a probable death, the fact of her grief for a dearly loved brother: these are stunning and numbing. Twelve days ago on her birthday, she was so happy. I read in Marcus Aurelius before getting up that a healthy state of mind is to be ready for anything.

21 May

To Mieke: in her brother’s illness

All day the stillness of a storm that will not break.
After sudden violence of downpour, thunderclap,
the same clouds shutting out the hills,
the sea a grey flagstone at the town’s back door.

I tried to reach you.
The shadow of my hand moved on the paper heavily, marking the space between us.
I sensed you far off, in a deeper stillness, beside the hospital bed.

If I were Dafydd
I would send my seagull over the mountains, across England and the North Sea.
Where you lie with eyes open in the dark it would come to you, bringing love and sleep.

25 May

Wednesday

To Cardiff airport before dark—a big moon in the clear sky, hills in red light—to meet M.


Thursday
Mid-morning: went with M. to meet the children off the train at Cardiff station. Lunch outside a pub on Caerphilly mountain. Visited the castle, where Joe & Emily climbed on the walls, and were thrilled by the leaning tower, the moat, and the vastness of the place. A row on Roath Park Lake.

Friday
Took Joe & Emily to Llangwyryfon in the afternoon, and they visited the school. All the children shy of one another. “A bit embarrassing” (Joe). Saw Mari and met Bill Tyler in the road, waiting for his children. Drove past Brynbeidog. Just a glimpse of the house through the sycamores; but I didn’t linger, the new owner was pulling in at the gate, and I didn’t want to go in. Back in Aberystwyth we played the slot machines at the King’s Hall before having a splendid spaghetti supper which M. prepared.

Saturday
To Harlech in rain, along tortuous narrow roads. Visited the castle, where the children walked round the battlements. Then had a picnic among the dunes at Shell Island, and rolled tyres on the huge sandy beach. Gathered starfish & shells. A cold wind.

Sunday
To see Gill & Dave at Blaen Cwrt on another damp morning. Left at 12. Picnic lunch by Llangorse Lake. After two more stops, at a motorway café, & for a snack in Devizes, we reached Pennington and my parents’ home at Hayford early evening. I left M. there and took the children back to Winchester, seeing Sue briefly, and making the round journey in little more than one and a half hours. Supper with Mum & Dad. To bed in separate rooms.

Monday
Up at 5.30. Crossing the Forest we saw a fox disappearing into roadside undergrowth, and young rabbits along the verge. Donkeys at Brockenhurst. Time of cow parsley, snowy hawthorn, white & pink horse chestnut candles. Waited with M. at Eastleigh airport until it was time for her to board the plane. The sad poetry of an almost deserted departure lounge, squared linoleum like a runway, with at first one other passenger—a middle aged man—pacing slowly up & down.

31 May
I won’t write of M. We speak and write to each other. I never dreamt of such warmth and fullness, or of the seeing and understanding that are a person.

I’m so blind in some ways or so self-doubting that it takes M. and Gill to make me see how important I am to Joe & Emily, how much they love me, and I often feel that the children understand me better than I understand them or myself. It was wonderful being with them, all of us together.
4 June
To Margam with Peter Lord for the opening of the Sculpture Park. My invitation came from Lee, and I walked round the Park with him & Kate & their boys. A fascinating place: landscaped parkland and gardens with rhododendrons and azaleas below high rocky bluffs; ruins of the Cistercian abbey; the burnt-out shell of the mock-Jacobean great house; the fine 18th century orangery. As we climbed through oak & beech woods and through heather & bracken on the open hillside onto high bare moorland, the smoking steel works of Port Talbot came into view, with the channel and the English coast beyond, and Gower cliffs to the west. It rained as we walked on the top and the day was close. Glynne Williams was at the opening, and I saw Shout and his other works. Lee’s Head of Staz also impressed me, as did a magnificent Frink head. But there was a lot that was only whimsical or a formal game, clichés of contemporary sculpture, which looked especially vacuous against the medieval ruins and the modern industrial forms.

Peter was in a negative mood all day, partly because of his extremely critical yet ambivalent attitude towards art in general and sculpture in particular at present, and his conviction that work in the Park should be a response to its environment and the culture of Wales—which little was. We came back through Newcastle Emlyn, stopping for a meal in a new bistro. He then vented his frustration by probing me—it was more nearly an attack—about my lack of involvement with a people, and what he sees as my passive acceptance of English cultural conditions that make poetry inaccessible except to a tiny minority. I was too tired by this time to do much more than tug at the knot in my mind.

10 June
Tired and depressed after a long night listening to the election results. In the end what had once seemed unbelievable was made to seem inevitable, partly as a result of the polls. It's been hard in recent weeks to believe how serious the issues are: thought in Britain that can't be turned into a slogan or a mindless catchword is allowed no public existence. I know the defeatism & demoralization widely apparent on the left, where there's more passion in the hatred for Mrs Thatcher than in defence of humane values. The Election was won and lost mainly because the real passion of conviction was in her, and in reaction against her, instead of in any vision of the society we want.

15 June
We live in a world of unreality and dreams. To give up our imaginary position as the centre, to renounce it, not only intellectually but in the imaginative part of our soul, that means to awaken to what is real and eternal, to see the true light and hear the true silence… To empty ourselves of our false divinity, to deny ourselves, to give up being the centre of the world in imagination, to discern that all points in the world are equally centres and that the true centre is outside the world, this is to
consent to the rule of mechanical necessity in matter and of free choice at the centre of each soul. Such consent is love.

Simone Weil, ‘Forms of the Implicit Love of God’

19 June
Cuckoo, from high on the wooded slopes of Cwmrheidol. Buzzard over Devil’s Bridge, smaller than a winged seed. I sat with Peter in hot sun on the bank behind his house.

Midsummer Day
Climbed Pendinas with Dave in the evening, sun occasionally visible as a red bar through grey cloud. *Hush* of sea on the beach, hoarse and sibilant; the grey town shadowy & mysterious. M. rang late: a breath of laughter & wine.

27 June
In Winchester, memories of family life springing up to torment me.

Dusty the dog chased swallows on the rugby field, the birds keeping low as if to encourage him, then swerving out of reach. The limes over the stream were light and cool. Warm glow of red brick. Echoing strokes of the Cathedral bell. Did I ever really live here?

Took Emily for a picnic lunch to Horsebridge Mill, where Mary Casey lived as a child. A coot & its chicks on the clear waters of the Test below the bridge. The river and all the grounds are private so we walked along the lane, under elderflowers & wild roses, and ate our sandwiches in a gateway. We picked plantain and played “soldiers” with them, moving slowly from bridge to bridge and through Houghton. Emily’s company and her enjoyment greatly cheered me. It was a delight being with her. Even so, I couldn’t help realizing that I’ve never seen a more exclusive place even in Hampshire. And this only a few miles from where my grandfather, “Pop” Mould, as a boy, scared rooks from the corn.

Back in Winchester I sat with Emily in the park watching cricket; as we did last summer, down the steps from Monks Road and over the iron bridge, yards from the family home. Now I saw the place Sue & I living in Wales had long dreamt of. Like last year, Joe & his friends were swimming and playing fully clothed in the river by the School of Art.

Did I expect to be as “free” as Sue says she is, and to grieve no longer? I must learn to watch these feelings pass. And to love the children less selfishly.

A love like M’s that draws me out… I’ve so much to learn, so much to unlearn.

To Emily

A year later I see
the hare in front of us
on the misty downland ride,
keeping the same distance;
the ladybirds you counted
on weeds beside the wheat.

We sat at last to sketch a tree
but secretly drew each other:
father and daughter.
I caught the exact angle
and shape of your sandal.

A year later I see—
as though this morning
we had gone out early
in the dust and the dew,
leaving the others asleep.

30 June
Poetry reading at Leamington. A good evening with Keith Turner and friends.

I took Mother to stay overnight with her sister, Midge, who talked family
history and brought out photographs. Sarisbury Green Carnival 1914, Pop Mould
with his wife and young family driving in a procession of traps & carts, several
of which belonged to him. Granny Elkins. The Fulford family (Mother’s aunt &
uncle & their children) at Bishopstone, the downland ridge behind them. Mother
as a young woman dandling a child—Midge’s eldest daughter—in the water at
Brownwich (Brinidge, as Mother always pronounced it).

The mystery of other people’s lives; all the greater when they are ancestors,
strange familiars. How hard it is to believe in personal death, though nothing is
more evident. Figures of the long-dead, in the fullness of their lives. But what they
“say” isn’t simple, whatever it is. There’s a depth here I can’t fathom. They speak of
life as well as death, and of the mystery of kinship.

Pop was highly sexed, a great lover of women. Learning this, I felt immediate
sympathetic recognition! Without this we must all look like period-pieces to each
other across the generations: which is a total denial of life, and another instance of
the picturesque. We are the same flesh.

Midge was born between two boys: James Mould who lived for 10 months,
and another—possibly Charles—who lived 2 weeks.

Such unlived lives are the most haunting, with an excruciating pathos, all
the more for the name belonging to no consciousness, no conscious claimant.
Mother was shaken by Midge’s insistence that Pop hated and ill-treated her
because she survived and these boys didn’t. For Mother, he is her model of patience
and kindness, gentleness and generosity; she finds it almost impossible to believe
that he could have treated anyone else differently. For me, remembering his blue,
watery eyes, his benevolent domed head, he is suddenly turbulent, alive. I think
especially of my brother Tony, and this grandfather is suddenly more “ours”, and
we are more “his”.

15
Seeing more of the life of others, I feel myself too less knowable, impossible to contain in an image, and with this feeling life moves and expands.

2 July
Brockenhurst station. 6.30 a.m. A grey morning, the platform deserted. The second hand travels round the illuminated face of the station clock, and the minute hand jerks forward with a tick as it passes the 12.

Later, on the boat train to Harwich, I get into conversation with the young American sitting opposite me. Steve Kraus, from Minnesota: a doctor of tropical medicine who has already worked in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and other places in the Far East, and intends to devote the next 15 years of his life to working in the Third World. We talked on the train and most of the time on the crossing to the Hoek. He comes from a large Catholic family and was brought up on a farm, now over 1000 acres, but it started with a grant of 5 acres from Abraham Lincoln to his great grandfather. Steve talked about the shortness of memory in America, and of the bitter and divided feelings arising from the Vietnam War, which are being suppressed. He was a student in the sixties; now his younger brother is a National Guardsman, and Steve remembers when the National Guards actually shot students. His America is the country of small communities, farms, the Mississippi, vast tracts of wilderness, like that in which his father taught him as a boy to hunt and shoot. Reagan's America, the Moral Majority, the materialist dream and even the great cities, are all alien to him. So is the American solution of throwing technology at Third World problems; for him, the first need is to understand the people and their cultures (he was reading a book on Buddhism and had recently spent a fortnight in a Buddhist monastery in Thailand) while the doctor's task is to treat the whole person.

We were on deck when the coast of Holland came into sight—at first, the flare stacks, tanks & cranes of a giant refinery, completely still, with no sign of life. Steve likened it to a city after a nuclear war, but it was friendlier to my eye. He was going on to meet his Thai girlfriend in Copenhagen, and we parted with an exchange of addresses.

M. was waiting when I got through Customs and drove me back to Groningen: misty vistas of long straight motorways, a first impression of flat meadowland, cows and windmills, canals, new, brick houses with stepped gables, all neatly ordered.

8 July
80 Korreweg
On the roof garden looking out over aerials, chimney pots, red roofs of Groningen, church spires, the great gothic spire of Martinikerk, the water tower, trees and tower blocks. It is hot, hazy, after two similar days which ended in storm: rain, lightning, crashing thunder, but no relief; afterwards a thicker, more steamy heat. How quickly the full days go, days & nights of love! How soon I forget the feel
of days alone; even now when I’m no longer alone, but the distance between us creates longing! But now that’s only a thought. Here’s fullness, everything given.

9 July
Woltersum. The broad, brown canal under a silver-blue sky. Great barges low in the water, heavily laden, flying the Dutch or German flag. We sit on the bank beside the path and people on the barges and motor boats wave to us. Flat fields seen through gaps between poplars stretch into the distance on the opposite bank. Like a gallery of Dutch landscape paintings, the gaps frame a far view of trees grouped round red-brick farmhouse and barn; light through the gaps lies on the water in an arc, like the strokes on a clockface. A solitary gull settles on the water. All around us, the long summer grasses.

On to Eemshaven, to a meal of fish & wine in a restaurant raised on stilts high above the shore. Silver-grey mud, silver-grey water, tide coming in and the German coast across the sea becoming a clearer, more definite blue. Salt in the air after warm inland smells of hay & manure. Later the sun sinks, a smoky red globe, on a landscape of vast fields, dykes, windmills. The windmills haunt the land—if very tired or even a little unbalanced mentally, it would be easy to see them as giants or a strange, disturbing kind of creature; they have such presence, their sails (usually three are visible) raised like arms or wings, their towers shaped like helmets or shells. A Ruysdael painting of a windmill by the shore hung in my bedroom when I was a boy; now the image deep in my mind comes to life again.

10 July
To Emmeloord in the Polder: a mere 30 years of history in the towns and villages and on the surface of the earth, in a landscape designed by an architect and a geometrician. M’s mother gave me a beautiful blue tile, a plant for my parents, and her blessing: “All is good”.

11 July
In this flat country where so much is earth, water and sky the stones left by the Ice Age and either gathered together into small groups or placed singly in a garden or by the roadside provide a counterforce: a sense of the primitive and the irregular to set against the predominantly manmade order. This is even truer of the cromlechs—hunebed—like those we saw on the way back from Emmen: long narrow constructions of great boulders with passages underneath. At first, on the flat sandy soil, they look “out of place”, as the cromlechs in the Preseli mountains or in Wiltshire or Ireland do not. But here depth of time emerges slowly as an impression on the mind while in those other places it’s the first thing you see.

24 July
In Cambridge, at Kim Landers’. M is asleep on a mattress on the floor beside me. After our travels in the last fortnight, an opportunity to set down a few impressions.
In Amsterdam, faces in the Rijksmuseum, a gallery of faces: *The Nightwatch, The Jewish Bride*, Rembrandt’s mother, portraits by Hals, Vermeer’s still-life figures, and the original of Ruysdael’s mill. Faces in the city streets; a sweating hot-faced American evangelist working himself up in front of a crowd outside the station. Dark interiors, sunlight in the streets, opaque canals; a beautiful city, with many young, ravaged faces.

In Zeeland, drinking wine by candlelight in a garden surrounded by cornfields, beyond them a dyke and the sea.

Slow journey from Sheerness to Victoria stopping at every station; midnight arrival, exhausted, at Brockenhurst.

A day in Dorset. Knowlton, the ruined medieval church inside a Bronze Age circle. Tower against circle, stone against earth, reddish brown sandstone and white flint against grass and surrounding corn; encircled stillness amidst the crosscurrents of the fields.

On Hambledon: making love in a grassy hollow surrounded by purple thistles, fields below golden yellow, white, all the many shades of green; patterns within patterns, smoke from the first stubble burning but an as yet almost untouched summer, with dynamic lines in fields of straw, and house-high piles of bales in other fields.

Joe’s birthday: at the Beaulieu Motor Museum. A good time for us all, beginning with lunch at the pub on the waterfront at Eling. Norleywood after dark, moon two days from full between black pines, churr of a nightjar from the woods. A sudden upsurge of sadness—for time passing, for Joe so open-natured and vulnerable, for all the days & nights when I’m not with them.

Hurst: horned poppies against the castle walls, deadly nightshade growing from shingle, a pair of terns trying to distract us with their cries. White, elegant lighthouse, ugly grey castle. The cottages and former pub are up for sale; we share a fantasy of living there, for a year if no longer, and plan our Hurst “book”. Blue sky, blue sea, Island & Needles chalk-blue.

**29 July**

At Moor Farm, Reepham with the Grandjeans. The sculptor’s house. Here in particular I notice forms: the shipshape red roofs of house & barn, with tiles like waves; the field track sweeping down to the house in its hollow; fields of pinnacled corn, fields of sugar beet; sculptures in the garden and in the barn studio. Everywhere the presence of things made or being made. And the weather is hot: blue sky and a few brushstrokes of white cloud. High summer: deep country.

Our last day & night together for a while. Waking in the night I felt I could see time passing. The garden & fields were an eerie grey with looming, darker
masses of trees and shrubs; high up, a waning moon. Images may be like pebbles collected from places visited—hard and definite in the mind as pebbles turned over in the pocket. We had come in from an evening with Dick & Afkham Davis, who had been very welcoming although also very tired; now in the early morning half-light I turned over a few images from the past month… I am in the garden, Guy is sitting naked at our lunch table on the grass, M. is lying closeby reading Robert Gittings’ essay on Frances Bellerby, Kate is playing music indoors and Lee is working in his studio with an electric drill on a block of stone. Two of the four brown chickens are pecking under the apple tree, which is full of sparrows chirping loudly. Earlier, walking with M. up the lane from the village, I said that we are never slow enough to see much—in a hedge, for example, the eye darting from butterfly to grass to shadows of nettles and fall of light, sees nothing clearly. We are too quick in the wrong way; all around us is slow or fast as we are not. Peculiar shapes, shadows of apple leaves, sway and quiver on the typescript pages she is reading; a jet rumbles high up; the hens are still picking under the other tree, but Guy has gone indoors without me noticing, and now with ducks quacking on the pond I become aware of the garden behind me. But I could never catch this last month, not a minute of it; only live and work from the life we share.

14 August
A day beginning with my parents driving me to Brockenhurst station at dawn, a hare & rabbits by the roadside, sky hard and clear as a polished precious stone, with the scratch of a vapour trail, the high-flying jet momentarily a burning star when the sun caught it, ghosts of mist hanging at head height over gorse, deer beside the railway line through the Forest—and coming to an end with a train speeding through darkness towards Groningen, as I talked and drank lager with a young Dutch couple, the girl a student of Dutch and English, the young man a biologist working to develop a potato resistant to the night frosts of early spring. And in the meantime towns and landscapes slowly falling away, and the North Sea, at first soft, greeny blue with patches of sandy light, then a dark slate-blue, creased, wrinkled, and approaching the coast of Holland, through lanes of tankers at anchor, past the spidery form of an oil rig, divided by wavy lines of scum.

16 August
Another early morning train journey—Groningen—Hanover—Berlin—a reflection of the round red sun travelling beside us on the water of a dyke, but now, as I write, the sun is higher, white, we have already crossed the border into Germany, though the flat landscape here is much the same, hares & lapwings in green fields, herons flying over water, barges on canals, here and there a relic of the war.

17 August
A visitor to Berlin first sees space—the size and layout of the city, with wide, straight roads, blocks of buildings, parks. He next sees history—in memorials
and place names, and in the public consciousness of history—the consciousness which, for example, rebuilds the Reichstag in its original monumental and barbarous form, and puts on inside it an exhibition of German history, where all day Hitler shouts again on film, the masses assent passionately to total war, and images of the ruined city shadow its present remade form—as if the ghosts of bombed & burnt-out buildings existed inside the present buildings. And if he sees history at first in individual names and actions—Bismarck, Walther Rathenau, the conspirators of 17 July, Rosa Luxemburg & Karl Leibknecht, Van der Lubbe—he is then overwhelmed by the sense of history as a force shaping generations and moulding individual lives even in their most intimate parts and in their apparent freedom of will.

Coming from the Reichstag yesterday, I was overwhelmed by this sense. And today I saw the power of world history in the Wall, and against it, unbearably poignant, wreaths for those who have died trying to cross. Without warning, tears came to my eyes at the instant I saw them and knew what they were, in that place of massive, impersonal power. In this city I can only see how little of ours is truly our own… Here history is no longer a word or a subject or a romantic preoccupation with tradition and ancestry, but a living power more terrifying than the most savage ancient god.

18 August

On the S-Bahn to East Berlin. First a long wait on the border behind a party of French schoolchildren. Then a long, hot day of walking about the city, with cool intervals in restaurants, under trees, at the graves of Brecht & his wife (simple, plainly lettered stones, near to sepulchral “houses”—family tombs pockmarked by bullets—and Hegel’s grave).

Far fewer cars (none of them expensive) and people than in West Berlin; far fewer shops; no advertisements; none of the glitter, noise & garishness of the streets where everything is for sale. But the East Berlin we saw wasn’t “grey” either. Here, wherever possible, the monumental architecture of an imperial past has been preserved, converted to use by the new order, and exists alongside the new—most impressive, the television tower, its long sensitive needle on a bubble of stone & glass reaching far into the sky. We watched young soldiers changing guard, goose-stepping, outside the building where the eternal flame commemorating the war dead is kept burning; their faces trembled; they weren’t deadpan like guardsmen in London. We visited Berlin Cathedral, which is being renovated, its sombre dome reflected in the tinted glass of a large new building opposite. We looked down from a gallery onto the floor littered with debris, and high up into the roof, over religious plaques and sculptures still keeping their bright paint on the scarred walls. It made a sinister impression in its heavy grey stone: brother to the Reichstag, a massive embodiment of late imperial pride masquerading as a church of Christ, in a style borrowed from another time.

Hot and tired, we dozed briefly on the edge of a park. I lay flat out on the grass, my brother Tony nodded off close by. Mieke noted the astonished and
disapproving looks of the other people in the park, where everyone kept to the
paths and no one stepped on the grass. Later we took the S-Bahn to Treptower
Park and walked to the Russian War Memorial—a formidable landscaped work,
awe-inspiring, and moving. The difference between this and the monumental
museum pieces scattered all over the city is that this means what it is.

But what could we really know, beyond the seriousness of purpose in all we
saw? Buildings, memorials, fountains, statues of workers, open spaces: a cultural
façade, with little to indicate what life feels like for people on this side. No signs
of the sickness everywhere evident in the West, where the sight of madness or
confusion is common on the streets, and in many faces the naked desire to exploit
or be exploited, to consume or be consumed, is frightening. But our impressions
here were of a carefully arranged front, the life behind it unknowable on a brief
visit.

Walking from the theatre along Unter den Linden at night we saw a large
shapeless yellow moon over the city roofs. The moon was dusky red when we saw
it again from the train window, behind the head and ritual gestures of a tall man
with a Slavic, Dostoevskian face, and a crippled foot. He was returning from the
East drunk on vodka bought from the international shop (drinkers regularly make
the journey for this purpose) and he talked loudly at us, not aggressively, but from
some strange and lonely foreign place. “Atlantis” and “Einstein”, often repeated,
were the only words I understood. He was probably convinced in his mind he was
offering us a key to a mystery.

We none of us have our meaning alone: I realize this very strongly here, and see its
truth in many more ways than I could now say. And here in the West the constant
pressure is to act as if only the contrary were true, and meaning something we stole
or bought from others, or found apart from them, in our selves & our appetites.

The last evening of our visit Tony took us to Teufelsberg and Teufelsee. We had
eaten and drunk well but were sober though dozy & heavy with the dream-like
after-effects.

First, a huge, man-made hill, grey & dusty under dry vegetation, a space-
age American radar station on the top. Berlin lay below us in every direction as
far as we could see, extending beyond dark pinewoods in the foreground, and
visible mainly as tall blocks, factories and towers, including the rival television
towers of East and West. Whether there are really wild boar in the pinewoods,
as Tony claimed, I don’t know, but the idea of their presence contributed to the
atmosphere. This was the end of another hot day and the sky was smoky blue-grey
& tarnished rose, with a light that brought out the darkness of the woods and the
buildings. We were standing on the only hill in the city—created from the rubble
of its ruins after the war and concealing unimaginable things under the surface,
besides the burnt-out trams & lorries that a man who’d worked on its construction
had told Tony were there.
It was darker when we went to Teufelsee, where a few people were swimming naked in the brown, unhealthy-looking water surrounded by trees—white heads apparently without bodies moving across the surface. The lake is said to be very deep, and dangerous, and it looked both. Here we unexpectedly met an acquaintance of Tony, a painter perhaps in his thirties, who is himself confused and who has taken a great interest in Julie, for “spiritual” reasons. Julie was with him beside the water when suddenly she cried out in childish excitement, and continued shrieking with delight as a tiny frog hopped across the ground and the young man gathered it in his hands and placed it in the water. There was a strangeness immediately visible in his eyes but we could tell nothing of his mental state or its causes except from what Tony said as we drove away: that he has an unnaturally intense relationship with his father, who was in the SS.

This detail in this setting again touched the nerve that we felt running through the city, a painful, exposed nerve that many Berliners feel but fewer see or want to see. It may be that being with Julie made us especially sensitive to this, because she’s more disturbed than ever and there’s always tension in being with her. On another memorable occasion we walked in hot sunshine round the lakes of a local park in Charlottenburg, and saw first the well-dressed old woman who walks up and down Sybelstrasse every day from early in the morning, and is said to be looking for her son killed in the war. Then we saw the boy who sits on a park bench turned away from other people and feeds sparrows which land on his body and eat from his hands, while Julie, in a bad mood, was muttering to herself as she fed the ducks or collected twigs and plants and any rubbish she could conceal from Tony. Here we found a badly injured hooded crow and M. carried it back, nursing it gently in her arms. Julie, now walking beside me and concerned for the crow, kept saying how moving she found it and asking me: “How could you put this into words, uncle?”

21 August
We left Berlin at midday in sweltering heat. Through East Germany to Marienborn, armed guards checking passports, stations empty except for guards and the dogs they use to sniff under the train in case anyone is concealed there; more armed guards in West Germany, in different coloured uniforms… The heat continued fatiguing, and towards evening, nearing the Dutch border, a terrific storm broke in front of the train—sudden blaze of purple zigzags against dark cloud—and we went into and through it, rain sluicing the windows and all around us heavy darkness. Hours later, when after several changes we arrived very tired at Groningen the streets were wet and the storm was rumbling and flashing outside the city.

28 August
Day after the annual Bommen Berend festival in Groningen. Leaving at 8.30 a.m. from the beautiful waterfront in the centre of the town I sailed with Hans & Agnes in a party of people aboard an Aak—one of the old flat-bottomed ships, rather like a barge with sails, formerly used for carrying grain, stones, turf, etc. on the inland