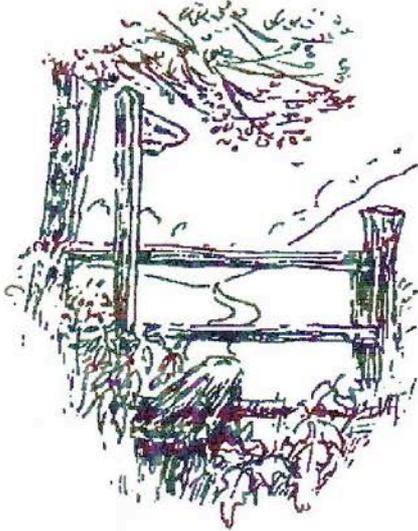


# THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 68

August 2012

If there was any grave immediate difficulty it was the Conservatives. Now my feeling was that even the rank and file of the party were tainted by opposition to good. They were callous, cynically content with what they had and contemptuous of what others wanted. They drank and smoked and cared nothing for humanity. I recognised them in railway carriages. Their laughter caused me to shiver – it was hostile to the very foundations of my being. They were more often old than young, stout than lean, fair than dark. Some of them combined in a manner peculiarly disconcerting to me keenness and easygoingness. But what of the leaders? I thought them inhuman superhuman Satanic figures, ordaining corruption, and enjoying it. They were immoral, without conscience. They lacked human feelings. The cry of a poor man was no more to them than the cry of a rat. They were haughty, sinister, and hard, perhaps laughing or splendid, but unworthy to exist except in romance and poetry. What would have been their redeeming feature if it had not been so disturbing to my ideas was the beauty of their women. I formed my standard of beauty from photographs of ladies of title in the magazines, and these of course were practically all Conservatives, like their husbands and fathers.

## Contents

ETF events	3
How Edward Thomas Died	5
FDP	6
'Armistice Day'	7
Elizabeth Harris	8
Gerald Roberts	18
The Olympics	25
Hiraeth	26
Book Review	27
Other News	29

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### The Edward Thomas Fellowship

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**Please send material for the next Newsletter as a Word document in an email attachment. Thank you.**

**Newsletters on the Website:** the University of Gloucestershire has been digitising back numbers of the Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter so that the entire archive will be available on the Fellowship's website. The University has an extensive Edward Thomas collection at its campus at Cheltenham, which is the home of the Dymock Poets Archive. It will use the fee for the digitisation to develop its poets, writers and artists collection.

Since the first issue in 1980 the Newsletter has become a storehouse of archive and critical material on Edward Thomas, much of it unpublished elsewhere. The aim is to develop the Newsletter's potential as a resource for both pleasure and academic research.

Authors should contact us if they object to their articles being displayed on the website. The point of contact is the Hon. Secretary, Colin Thornton, [colingthornton@btopenworld.com](mailto:colingthornton@btopenworld.com), Tel: 01983 853366 - Colin G. Thornton, 1, Carfax, Undercliff Drive, St. Lawrence, Isle of Wight, PO38 1XG. Back issues of the newsletter can also be purchased from Colin Thornton.

The address of the Fellowship website is [www.edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk](http://www.edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk).

Access to the newsletters' rich resource of original material will be for everyone, but Fellowship members will continue to have exclusive access to the print version of the latest issues, which will not appear on line until two years after publication.

**Please note that the gap between the appearance of the print version of the newsletter and its appearance on the web has been extended from six months to two years.**

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### An Extra Walk -September 2012

The Fellowship has organised a walk in the **Steep** area on **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September**. The walk, led by Stephen Turner will be an all day strenuous walk of between 8 and 10 miles with some steep climbs. Walking shoes or boots will be essential.

Numbers are limited, and places need to be booked by **Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September**. Please book by telephone on **01252 810852** or email at [stephenjturner1@aol.com](mailto:stephenjturner1@aol.com)

Meet at Bedales School car park at **10.00 a.m.** Lunch will be taken at a local Inn and may also be booked when reserving a place on the walk. There will be a picnic spot nearby for those wishing to bring their own lunch.

There will be readings en route during the day. We should finish the walk by 5 p.m.

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### Visit to the Edward Thomas Collection in Cardiff University's Humanities Library on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012

The Cardiff Collection was instituted by Professor R. George Thomas and is the largest single collection of Thomas material in Great Britain. Professor Thomas secured the core collection from Helen Thomas and subsequently from Myfanwy over a number of years. Additions were made from other sources to add to its completeness. Considering that Thomas held a three day bonfire of letters and documents before joining the army, it is remarkable that so much remains, not just in Cardiff but elsewhere too. There are in Cardiff for instance, several thousand letters including many to Helen from an extraordinary variety of people. Nearly seven hundred alone are between Helen and Edward.

Letters aside, there are over three hundred drafts of manuscript or typescript versions of one hundred and fifty poems, notebooks, scrapbooks of cuttings, seven scrapbooks of reviews written by Thomas, many papers belonging to the Thomas family and friends, the books in his personal library at the time he joined up, and, most evocative of all, his pocket watch stopped at the precise time of his death and a well smoked clay pipe. This is just a brief summary and can give only a small idea of the riches in the Library.

On 16<sup>th</sup> May a small group of members met at Cardiff and were given a tour of the Collection, during which they were able to handle some of its most priceless items. We also were shown examples of the development of digitisation of the detailed catalogue which should be online by the end of the year. Additionally, a grant has also been made to enable some of the contents to be put online as part of the centenary of 1914. This will make access to individual items much easier. Progress of this and other news of the Collection will be reported in the newsletter from time to time.

Apart from the Thomas Collection, we were shown the impressive and beautiful collection of early printed books and incunabula held by the Library.

We are most grateful to Peter Keelan and Alison Harvey for putting such a fascinating afternoon together for us. Several members were quite overcome by the richness of what they saw. Peter and Alison want the Collection to be used as much as possible. Access is easy, especially compared with other libraries such as the Bodleian and the study area is comfortable and spacious.

If anyone would like a copy of the summary list of items in the Cardiff Edward Thomas Collection, they should contact Richard Emeny, Melrose House, 4 High Street, North Petherton, Bridgwater, TA6 6NQ, telephone: 01278 662856, email: [remeny@halswell.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:remeny@halswell.fsnet.co.uk).

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**Study Day - Quaker Meeting House, St Giles, Oxford, 30 June 2012**  
 'Edward Thomas: Adlestrop and Beyond'

John Monks organized another excellent Study Day. Professor Patrick McGuinness, poet, academic and novelist, spoke in the morning. He is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Oxford University and a Fellow of St Anne's College (although he lives in Wales and has learnt Welsh), and he was one of the contributors to *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry* (2007). His talk was wide-ranging and perceptive. It was interesting to hear him discuss Thomas and Modernism, even suggesting that Thomas comes *after* Modernism. Following lunch, baritone Philip Lancaster presented and performed a recital entitled "'Piercing Solitude and Silence": Song settings of Edward Thomas'. Pianist Helen Jones accompanied him skilfully on the upright piano in the meeting room. Robert Macfarlane was the afternoon speaker: his new book, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*, was recently published by Penguin and has rightly received much praise and publicity. He has also written an introduction to Thomas's *The South Country*, and is the author of *Mountains of the Mind* and *The Wild Places*. In his talk, he showed that Thomas thought a lot about thinking, and thought *with* landscape.

### The Chairman's View

This year's Study Day must rank as one of the very best of the many the Fellowship has mounted over the years and it was good to see over sixty members in the audience. We had two speakers who complemented each other perfectly. Professor Patrick McGuinness, poet, academic and Booker long listed novelist, and Robert Macfarlane, author of several books about walking and the wilder parts of Great Britain and senior lecturer in English at Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

Patrick McGuinness spoke about new ways of considering Edward Thomas's writing, in particular his relationship with time. He drew analogies with Proust and Alain Fournier, analysing Thomas's varied use of tenses. He also pointed out how international Thomas was, as his reviews of for instance Japanese and French symbolist writers show. One might add to this his views on Nietzsche. One of Thomas's main themes was continuity, which Patrick believed needed as much explanation as change; the poetry however, tends to be 'polytemporal'. He also highlighted Thomas's habit of listening and overhearing the speech of others.

Robert Macfarlane explained how Thomas had informed his recent book, *The Old Ways*, and how walking and thinking became one and the same and thought and knowledge being absorbed through being part of the natural world. He identified in Thomas a sense of participation with birds and even inanimate objects such as stones, as evidenced by his writing about Minsmere.

As an interlude between the two speakers we were privileged to hear the tenor, Philip Lancaster, accompanied by Dr Helen Jones, the pianist, singing settings of Edward Thomas poems. Philip's voice will be well known to members because of his broadcasts on the BBC, but he has also scored for orchestra Ivor Gurney's choral setting of 'The Trumpet' and has become an acknowledged specialist in early twentieth century British music and poetry. The recital was a treat indeed.

Altogether this was a vintage day, well located in the tranquil meeting room and garden of the Friends Meeting House in St Giles. We are most grateful to the speakers and musicians, and especially to John Monks and his family who organised and ran the day so ably.

Richard Emeny

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### **Is the Noise of a Rock Concert Like Shellfire?: How Edward Thomas Died**

Not long after Helen Thomas received the telegram announcing her husband's death, Edward's battery commander, Capt Lushington, wrote to her in commiseration, also explaining that the shell that had caused his death had made no mark on his body- his heart had simply stopped. Initially, Helen and the Thomas family believed this account to be no more than a kind fiction written to disguise the fact that like so many victims of artillery fire, Edward had been blown to bits. It was only after Edward's belongings were returned to Helen that they began to believe Lushington's version. Members who have seen the contents of his pockets at the time of his death, perhaps at an Imperial War Museum exhibition, have seen the strange creases and corrugations that items, notably paper, suffered. These support Lushington's account. After the war he became a friend of the Thomas family and they accepted his version wholeheartedly. It seems that a vacuum or disturbance of the air created by a passing shell had indeed stopped his heart and caused the damage to his possessions. Chris Throndsen, a former Royal Artillery officer, who has accompanied the Fellowship on several of its visits to Thomas's grave at Agny, confirmed that death by this means, though rare, was well known in the army.

Recently, Belgian scientists have inadvertently added to the evidence. They studied four unconnected cases of young males who had suffered lung damage and found that they had all been attending a rock concert, a night club or been driving with loud music in the car at the time; two had been standing close to the loud speakers when the incident happened. It appears that the damage occurred when pressure waves caused by loud music caused rapid compression and decompression within air filled body cavities. This caused air to leak into the pleural cavities 'similar to the effects of blast injury'. All four had experienced severe chest pains. In one case a young man suffered a second attack when driving just after he had installed a 1000 watt base box in the boot of his car. All four made a full recovery after one to three days in hospital.

While the Belgian study was concerned primarily with lung damage, it provides support for the idea that a massive change in air pressure caused Edward's death because of the effect this can have on internal organs. Capt Lushington seems to have been correct in his conclusion of almost a century ago.

*I am indebted to Peter Payan for sending me a copy of the article describing the Belgian scientists' research. He tells me that on occasions he stops boy racers and tells them that if they feel a sudden chest pain they must go to hospital immediately as they might have ruptured their lungs. He says the warning always works!*

Richard Emeny

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**Photographs from the Awareness-raising walk for the Dymock Poets' Paths  
taken by the Friends of the Dymock Poets on Sunday 27 May 2012**

There are ongoing problems with the paths around the poets' cottages in Leddington that the Friends of the Dymock Poets hope to address in the future.



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## Armistice Day

by Rev. W. H. Hamilton

If Edward Thomas or Rupert Brooke  
 Or the maker of that good Marlborough book  
 Could have lived on if I had died  
 I hope I should have sunk my pride,  
 Though futile deemed I war and wrong,  
 And been more proud to die for song.

Or if some certain friends of mine  
 Who fell in France and Palestine  
 Would have lived still instead of me,  
 Perchance unhesitatingly  
 I then had leapt when rang the drums.  
 I know that when November comes.

But they who knew me not or knew,  
 Went out as if 'twere nought to do,  
 And gave their song and friendship rare  
 To death, as though they did not care  
 Worthy who were the gift they brought.  
 I have been died for – who has not?

1934? © W. H. Hamilton

I found this poem as a newspaper cutting inside a book called *Echoes Re-Echoed: An Anthology of St. Andrews University Verse*, compiled by the Alumnus Association of the University of St. Andrews (St. Andrews: W. C. Henderson, University Press, 1934). The book publishes four poems by Hamilton. The cutting, from an unidentified newspaper (probably a Scottish paper), seems to be dated '10/11/34'. At 'that good Marlborough book', there is a footnote saying 'C. H. Sorley'.

It is at least of interest because it mentions Edward Thomas at a time when Thomas's poetry was still not so very widely known.

The copyright holder (if there is one) has not been traced.

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**Edward Thomas**  
by **Elizabeth Harris**

(This is the second half of a chapter from Elizabeth Harris's PhD thesis. The first half appeared in the last newsletter.)

**Nature**

Edward Thomas approaches nature as an outsider and watcher, one who loves the countryside, community and characters but is not a native to it. Although he tried to play down his London upbringing, the reason he saw the country as 'supernaturally beautiful' was because it had 'London for a foil and background'.<sup>1</sup> His educated, literary background made his time in the countryside a meeting between culture and nature which created new ways of seeing. The people he met could not ground him to the place through ancestors and his meeting with nature is a cultured one. He was knowledgeable about agricultural work but it was not his livelihood and education and circumstance made him view their work aesthetically and through its portrayal in literature. Seamus Heaney wrote that place could be lived illiterate and unconscious or learned literate and conscious<sup>2</sup> but Thomas seems to walk the line between these two states, creating an 'equable marriage between the geographical country and the country of the mind'<sup>3</sup>

The city also influences all as a determining hidden subtext. It is not simply a scapegoat for all the ills of society. In his poem 'Goodnight' the speaker is at ease with life in the suburbs, finding on the 'homely streets' that the 'friendless town is friendly'. This unusually bright mood leads the reader to question the extent to which the meeting with any place in the poems is due to personal state of mind. But London has been previously described by him as being, although not somewhere he wants to live, likened to awe in nature when he says; 'The sublimest thing I know is the sea, and after that London, vast, complex, ancient, restless and incalculable.'<sup>4</sup> He also recognises something in the universal desire to be elsewhere and the irony of the opposite draw of those from the country to escape to the cities, admitting that 'Countrymen...still admire London'.<sup>5</sup> His honesty prevented him from the hypocrisy of wishing to keep the countryside free of weekend visitors from the city. He accepted the economic and social democratisation that opened it up to more people, the dependency (though lessening due to cheap agricultural products abroad) of the city on supplies from country and the more emotional needs of city dwellers for the antidote of visits to the country. He even wished city dwellers could spend more time immersed in nature as the 'relief' of contact with it was sought by 'insufficient numbers and for too short a time'<sup>6</sup>

When Thomas wrote that 'the pleasantest of English county men made by chance or design'<sup>7</sup> he is talking about the work of men not of a divine being. His sense of place is created by human and non human influence, but not divine ones. Like Hardy, Edward Thomas gives the world no order that comes from a divine creator but does not feel as much

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Thomas, *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1983), p.38.

<sup>2</sup> Heaney, p.131.

<sup>3</sup> Heaney, p.132.

<sup>4</sup> *The Country*, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> *The Country*, p.22

<sup>6</sup> *The South Country*, p.139.

<sup>7</sup> *The Country*, p. 57.

sadness over this as Hardy. The absence of God made his poetry more open to exploration and personal reaction to place and created a human centred investigation into the deep and ancient impulse to absorb ourselves in nature. Thomas' dislike of organised religion goes back to hated Sundays spent in stiff clothes in dark buildings instead of wandering around Wandsworth Common and began an interest in looking to the earth rather than to the sky and believing in the nature centred mysticism of Richard Jefferies. Nature replaces God in the poems as a humbling, unstoppable force that makes man realise the frailty of their mortality. Nature is not always benign and Thomas' relationship was not static but changed according to mood and perception. His poems do not depict nature as a frozen image of a rural idyll but as an independent life force with a constantly shifting and evolving identity. The effect of countrymen such as Jefferies and David Uzzell and their wisdom gave meaning to place and life where God was removed and he took more relevance from them as a guide to living than any religious text. For Thomas it is not the loss of God from men's lives that is regretted but the lost relationship with nature and the vanishing traditions and communities that leave men so isolated. The force of nature is sublime and humbling enough to replace God and in 'The New House' it rages outside, shouting its separateness, defining its difference in brute force to the speaker who shelters in the new house which seems to share its character with him. Any supernatural influence is also human, with a sense of places being haunted by past inhabitants adding another layer to the mental mapping of place. Edward Thomas himself has now become a part of this layering of meaning, as his poems that 'live in the imagination' going beyond the visual to add another cultural layer of significance for readers who visit the places he described.<sup>8</sup>

Leavis picked up on the psychological aspect of Thomas' poetry, saying 'the outward scene is accessory to an inner theatre'<sup>9</sup>. The link between the internal state of the poet and his perspective on external surroundings is undoubtable as it is for many poets and his language is bleak and bare when his mood is likewise. The rhythm of walking and contrast of the self with nature results in self analyses, as John Muir observed on walking at night; 'going out, I found, was really going in'.<sup>10</sup> However, nature is more than simply an 'accessory' to his own emotions, his sense of place is real. A large part of Thomas' love of nature stems from its autonomy from him, its difference and what he often sees as its superior qualities. He prevents himself from overlaying the landscape with a false narrative, as in 'The Chalk Pit' where the urge to imagine false events having occurred in a place that seems mysterious and quiet, is defeated by the centrality of truth to his representation. One speaker hopes that such a haunted seeming place had some big, 'perhaps tragical' event once as his imagination has combined with 'another place, | Real or painted'. His image is threatened by the reality of the place being used as a refuge for 'free thought, free love' for a countryman and various girls. His companion is someone who lives near the place and rejects fancy, wanting 'the truth | Or nothing'. For him it is enough to 'breed a mystery' in the 'imperfect' friendship between trees and men, without needing imagined drama. At times there is 'something inaccessible in the heart of nature'<sup>11</sup> that expresses itself in the sad and haunting element of his work. In returning to nature Thomas cannot shed himself and brings his psychological problems with him to the fields. But often nature can soothe his moods and in poems such as 'March 3<sup>rd</sup>' where he is surprised by the beauty of 'the day unpromised' he feels contentment and humility 'Because we know how lucky we are'.

Edward Thomas' countryside is not an unpopulated and untouched Eden where he can be perfectly at one with himself. His poetic landscape is full of humans and of their marks on the lands. He shows compassion for the poor, for wanderers, gypsies, tramps and

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<sup>8</sup> Heaney, p.132.

<sup>9</sup> Leavis, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Linnie Marsh Wolfe ed., *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), p, 427.

<sup>11</sup> Marsh, p.9.

chancers, all of whom appeal to an idea of freedom balanced with his rationalising knowledge of how hard the reality of rural poverty could be. The patchwork of workers and wanderers build up an idea of community and of people with a deep knowledge of their local ecosystem and history. Eliot looks for continuity through culture and a studied knowledge of anthropology, Thomas' search is through physical encounter and folklore. Thomas' search is also more fruitful as he does discover the endurance of names, language and traditions in the present. He realises before Eliot that poetry assumes 'continuity rather than breakdown between ourselves and the past'<sup>12</sup>. It takes Eliot until 'The Four Quartets' to find this. The subjects of his poems are not literary, aristocratic or powerful but ordinary. His rural characters are not like those seen in Romantic poetry who are twisted to elicit certain emotions from the readers. The Dad he knew in Swindon was not a Simon Lee character at odds with the modern world but a man whose son worked in a factory and who used guile and cunning to survive. Although he is sometimes guilty of idealising rural people he does not patronise.

For Edward Thomas 'England was more than a geographical expression'.<sup>13</sup> His construction of place was multisensory and layered. Certain animals, such as birds populate many of his poems, combining the mystery of their life through instinct with their common presence (at that time) making them familiar to most readers. This refiguring of the familiar prompts a reassessment of the ordinary. The birds' difference to humans is shown in their strange instinctual awareness of time and season but they also seem to be trying to send a message to people that is lost in translation. They celebrate a different type of knowledge to what is prized by humans. At times Thomas associates himself with aspects of nature such as in 'Aspens' where he finds an affinity between himself, his writing and the trees. Both poet and trees can only 'shake their leaves and men may hear | But need not listen'. The speaker makes clear the association; 'We cannot other than an aspen be' but hints at the loneliness of this difference from others who see both speaker and tree as ones who 'unreasonably grieves'. The poem aligns the speaker more to nature than to men, and admits the inescapability of our own characters and selves.

Thomas' countryside was not wild but peopled, bearing the signs of human contact and at its most radiant when people and environment exist in harmony. Place names are integral in that they carry with them a human presence and reveal human perspectives on areas. The human traces on the landscape also provide evidence to the changes in the British countryside. Thomas' dislike for cultivated or landscaped scenes may have come from the 'waste of gorse and hawthorn-thickets'<sup>14</sup> of Wandsworth Common where his exploration of nature began or they may have reflected his own often disordered emotions. However, they were also literal representations of the countryside which had become overgrown and unruly. 'The Barn' is a poem about human marks on the landscape and the ability of nature to adapt to accommodate it into the ecosystem. The crumbling barn outlasts the elm, useless to men and so taken over by nature that the speaker 'fancied 'twas starlings they built it for', before it becomes too full of holes even for them and the next species take it over. The deserted buildings and thriving wildlife are a sign of a struggling agricultural economy and when read in conjunction with the reduced plough teams, disappearing wanderers and absence of weddings in his other poems, reveal an important aspect of the social history of the British countryside.

Writing at a time when rural England was getting emptier, his poetry is often about the delight of encounter. These encounters are often with vagrants who wander through the depopulated countryside as free spirits, very different from Thomas' situation but also echoing his sense of homelessness. He also has the skill of being able to depict people using

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<sup>12</sup>*Poem and Last Poems*, p.1.

<sup>13</sup>*The Happy-go-Lucky Morgans*, p.123

<sup>14</sup>Moore, p.1.

just a few choice descriptors. 'Man and Dog' shows the social history of a single man in one fleeting meeting and short conversation. The man has led a full life but one that reveals the social deprivation of the period. He has been 'navvying on dock and line | From Southampton to Newcastle-on-Tyne, - | [...] a year of soldiering.. | hoeing and harvesting'. His sons are at war and he is alone apart from the loyalty of a mongrel dog who's 'company, | Though I'm not'. A similarity is suggested between the dog's poor hunting skills and the man's apparent uselessness to society which have pushed him to the margins despite his service to the country and hard work. However, as in many of these poems the character disappears 'in the twilight of the wood', without a sense of he or his types being seen again. In 'May 23<sup>rd</sup>' the appearance of 'Jaunty and old, crooked and tall' Jack Noman is 'welcome as the nightingale'. His equal pleasure at meeting an old man as to a more typically poetic nightingale shows the warmth of Thomas' feelings towards countrymen. The conversation in the poem seems brief and casual but the specific date stays in the speaker's head as 'The day Jack Noman disappeared'. The suddenness of his absence has a poignancy that seems to link to a wider grief of the dying out of such men.

There is a tendency to idolise rural people as embodying all the attributes the poet believed he lacked but similarly to the landscape they are represented with respect for the sense of history, wisdom and rootedness they unconsciously possess. 'Lob' is a winding, historical exploration of a ubiquitous type of man, particular only to rural areas. The initial encounter with the 'weather cut' man with a 'land face, sea-blue-eyed' is again brief and informal but it seems to answer his 'search for something chance would never bring'. But having found this archetypal English man he also loses him and begins a new search to rediscover his character. The identity of the man he met is lost in a maze of names and places suggested by those who admit 'Everybody has met on such man as he'. The encounter with a single man grows to an encounter with an essential Englishness, a type of man 'English as this gate' who is a namer of flowers and places, a keeper of forgotten knowledge and history. The poem extends further to locate this man in legends, fairy tales and wars, 'dying at Waterloo, | Hastings, Agincourt and Sedgemoor' but living still. Behind the poem is the speaker's desire for his knowledge, self assurance and rootedness. A single encounter gets lost in a history of names and places but all the while retaining the essential essence of the ideal rural man he refers to as 'my ancient' as a prototype of his less happy self. The surety of an essential and permanent Englishman cements Thomas' affection for countrymen who wander like his man did and are firmly part of the land. But this way of life is becoming unfeasible as the poverty and obscurity of these men grows. The modernist interest in anthropology echoes Rousseau's praise of natural, primitive man but Thomas does not fall into this nostalgia. Like his worldly friend David Uzzell, the rural people in Thomas' poetry are world wise and speak of the war, their social standing and the places they live with authority and a sense of history. He recognises that 'a country life is neither more easy nor more simple than a city life'<sup>15</sup>. He champions outsider and thrills at the thought of 'little-used roads' known 'to lovers, thieves, smugglers, and ghosts'<sup>16</sup> an attraction heightened by the restraining financial and family responsibilities he was burdened with.

### Psychology

What separates Edward Thomas from many Georgian poets is the fact that he was not a weekend visitor to the country or someone who simply drew aesthetic pleasure from it as a counter to their mainly urban, hectic life. He had a dependency on it for his psychological wellbeing. He wrote to his friend George Bottomley that he was 'never so well as when I am rid of the postman & all company walking 20 or 30 miles a day'<sup>17</sup>. He was diagnosed as

<sup>15</sup> *A Language not to be Betrayed*, p. 201.

<sup>16</sup> *The Icknield Way*, p.3

<sup>17</sup> Bottomley, p.163

suffering from neurasthenia, which we would now call depression which was occasionally severe. In addition to medical reasons for this, the condition was exacerbated by the amount of what he regarded as hack work he had to undertake to look after his family. Despite the numerous cures and diets he tried, he knew himself that the best form of relief was to go walking alone in the countryside. His shy self-consciousness meant he had only a few close friends, and the claim that he had 'enormous difficulty in experiencing himself together with others'<sup>18</sup> echoes the alienated persona of many of the poems. His poems consist of a solitary figure wandering the country searching for something of meaning just as Eliot's characters wander through London. The difference is that Thomas does find meaning and vibrancy in his landscape.

At times Edward Thomas' poems describe the self at one with the ecosystem and at time as apart from it. The times when he feels a part of nature are his most content, for example in 'Home' where on returning home he feels 'one nationality' with the birds who welcome him back,. But this sensation is rare and the fragility of his happiness is suggested by the lack of further interrogation of it, preferring to listen as 'The sound of sawing rounded all | That silence said'. His moods change throughout the poems but nature stays independent and constant. Sometimes his awe of the natural world can help diminish his gloom. In 'Beauty' the speaker describes his mood as 'Tired, angry, and ill at ease', bleakly composing an epitaph for himself as 'all that no one loved of him | And that loved no one'. It is only when he looks outside of himself to 'the misting, dim-lit, quiet vale' that he finds 'what yet lives in me'. Nature does not cure his sadness but it consoles him and gives hope. His self esteem is at its highest when he feels a part of the natural world and starts believing that in nature and in him 'Beauty is there'. When the loss of connection with nature seems irrevocable the effects are devastating. One devastating bout of depression heightened by a solitary night listening to a downpour showed that at his lowest ebb he felt; 'I am not a part of nature. I am alone. There is nothing else in my world but my dead heart and brain within me and the rain without'<sup>19</sup>. Sometimes nature could not remedy his depression and in one of his darkest, bleakest poems, 'Rain', the elements do not alter his feelings but seem to counsel him to death which 'Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint'. The relentless 'midnight rain' reflects the speaker's despair which is unyielding and blots out all but 'the love of death'. An atmosphere of loss, sadness and decay haunts the speaker in 'Gone, Gone Again' as he listlessly watches the seasons pass him without concern for his grieving state. Time has not altered the cycle of the seasons but it has ravished him. The link between himself and nature seems broken and a new unhealthy affinity grows between him and the 'Dark and untenanted house'. The melancholy is not only private though, it is also a wider grief over the war battles which 'turn young men to dung'. The speaker's single saving feature is that he is 'Still interested and breathing', still looking at his surroundings despite feeling as smashed as the windows in the shell of the house. At these points in his poetry the external landscape is a negative reflection of his internal, psychological vision.

When Edward Thomas describes the towns as being 'complicated and divided; they end in confusion'<sup>20</sup>, he reveals much about himself, what he is wished to escape and his reasons for craving time in the country. The city is associated with his childhood self and the disappointed ambitions his father had for him. His walks in the country became a search for his true self, separate from family responsibilities and work. This is an intense process of self scrutiny and psychological exposure that distinguishes him from Georgian poets and at some points pre-empts psychoanalytical theory. This quest for self knowledge is apparent in many of them poems but is explored most vividly in the strange and very modern 'The Other'. In this poem the search for a completion is given literal form as the speaker pursues

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<sup>18</sup> Cooke, p.17.

<sup>19</sup> *The Icknield Way*, p.281

<sup>20</sup> *The Country*, p.13.

his doppelgänger unstoppably through the countryside, with no plan but 'To watch until myself I knew'. The objective of his pursuit remain ambiguous but the prospect of meeting his double fills the speaker with 'a new desire, to kiss | Desire's self beyond control'. His pursuit over miles is addictive because he comes to believe that if he finds his other self he could 'confess' and 'bore him and to let him bore me' until they can forge a perfect understanding with all past trauma healed. When the dreamed of meeting occurs though the speaker fails; 'I said nothing. I slipped away'. This anti climax is similar to Prufrock's moment of crisis which is also deflated by the fear which blocks self expression. There is no epiphany at the end of the poem, just a weary realisation that this pursuit is to be his vocation for the rest of his life. Death seems the only resolution to the division and the exhausted acceptance of this is shown in the stilted last lines; 'He goes: I follow: no release | Until he ceases. Then I also shall cease'.

Although Thomas' perception of external landscapes is often linked to his internal emotions they also always exists as a reality outside of himself. Nature is real and he knows that it will carry on existing when he is no longer present to witness it. His attitude to nature fluctuates with his moods and in the blackest of these comes the wish for obliteration, the allure of a death without an afterlife, where all self doubt, prickling agitations and financial hardships vanish. In many of Edward Thomas' poems there is the presence of Thanatos, the desire of the poetic 'I' to be dissolved into unconsciousness. The oblivion of death is likened to the loss of memories of childhood, where looking backwards ends in the comforting image of an 'impassable night. A sweet darkness enfolds with a faint blessing my life up to the age of about four'.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to his happier poems which are about well loved locales, death seems a state of placelessness, sometimes explored through familiar landscapes like forests and roads, sometimes faced as strange and unknown. In 'Home' death is seen as a return to a place both known and unknown; 'My home, i have never seen: | No traveller tells of it, | However far he has been'. The allure and the fear of death both stem from its strangeness and the price of leaving a known place for an unknown one weakens the speaker's resolve. There is a tragic weighing up of the risks of suicide and the awareness that he value of what is left behind may be realised too late. The poem's conclusion is to keep on going, although life is painful and wounding. By the time Thomas came to write 'Lights Out' death was no longer a concept to toy with but an overwhelming possibility. At one point in his life he had taken a gun out to the forest with him and threatened suicide, now he 'cannot chose' the time of his death. In response to genuine fear the speaker grounds death in images of what he loves and is familiar, softening the thought of mortality thinking of it in terms of night, forests and sleep. There is the suggestion that if death is like nature then there is nothing for him to fear. He does not lose his composure but accepts he 'must enter, and leave, alone'. Bravely he does not change he atheistic convictions at the point of death but continues his conviction of it being an emptiness where he 'may lose my way | And myself'. In keeping with his honesty throughout his writing Thomas is forthright and direct in facing death and these last few poems are him writing his goodbyes. 'When First' sees him reflecting on the past and taking leave of a loved hillside as he walks 'Down it the last time'. The poem has an intensity that again reflects his lack of self deception at his chances of survival nor denies his previous attraction to death, noting that the war brings 'something I was waiting for'. Unusually for Thomas' poetry, the poem ends with a statement of certainty and bare emotion; 'One thing I know, that love [...] Will grow, and louder the heart's dance | At parting than at meeting be'. In his last published poem 'Out in the Dark' he allows fear to enter the poem again as he muses on a shared moment of silence on Christmas Eve between him, the deer and the night. A sense of being overwhelmed or engulfed by darkness where 'all else is drowned' is the same sense of losing the self which is desired in earlier poems but here provokes 'fear | Drums on my ear'. All light is swallowed

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<sup>21</sup> *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*, p. 13.

by darkness but the hesitation of the last line, 'if you love it not, of night' still shows fragments of his attraction to the night, the reality of his night walks overcoming the darker imagery of his metaphor.

Edward Thomas' poetry is full of indeterminacies, equivocations, hesitations and questions. In contrast to these uncertainties and his own crippling self-consciousness, nature has a singularity of purpose and a self-determining impulse to fulfil its aims that he admires. His honesty meant that he would not accept illusions of happiness and his poems are unflinching in their portrayal of unhappiness, the most gruelling of his personal lows resulting in the most intense poems. Even his most light-hearted poems have their delight crossed with pain, as in 'Digging' where contentment is seasoned by the melancholy backdrop of a bird's song. Happiness is found in the poem through the giving up of self in exchange for thinking 'Only with scents.' The poem is full of the simple sensuous pleasures of working with the soil and concentrating on something outside of the self. However, the clashing robin's 'Sad songs of Autumn mirth' highlight the temporary nature of this reprieve. Although the misery of depression dogged his private life, the intense psychological aspect of the poems is what makes them original and what 'sets his poetry apart from the great mass of pleasing nature poetry which has been produced since the war, is also an intensity of suffering.'<sup>22</sup>

## War

Edward Thomas is known in equally as both a war poet and a nature poet. The two themes are woven together in his poetry as the war lurks as a shadow behind the quiet country scenes and informs his dedication to detail as he records an England that now seemed fragile and under threat. The war motivated him to capture the places he loved in poetry before he had to leave them. He wrestled with the decision over whether to enlist or move to America to be near to his close friend Robert Frost. He was of an age where joining up was not compulsory and he knew his own mind well enough not to be swayed by propaganda, but in the end his social conscience and love of his country overruled his reservations about fighting. He saw England as 'home and heaven too'<sup>23</sup> and when he had made his decision he told his friend whilst he crumbled soil between his fingers that he was doing it, 'Literally, for this'<sup>24</sup>. He was repaying what nature had given him throughout his life. Although he writes about the countryside rather than the trenches, his poetry never descends into rural escapism. He faced the war bravely and in full knowledge of the risks. When he writes directly about the war it is in terms of the loss of rural people and the resulting changes this had on the English countryside. He reflected that if he had loved Britain before was aesthetically, but now it was under threat of invasion he went beyond words into action to fulfil this commitment. He was personally and poetically involved in the war but his first priority, as ever, was the countryside.

The war entered Thomas' poetry through direct reference and symbolism. Mud changed from being important because it allowed him to recognise the contrasting beauty of the sky, to being an added element of soldier's suffering; 'mud and worse things to endure.'<sup>25</sup> Discussions of the war seep into his encounters with rural people and with friends; 'We turned from men or poetry | To rumours of the war' ('The Sun Used to Shine'), and his thoughts moved from local matters to events abroad. The change can be seen in 'The Cuckoo', where the sound of the human world blocks the speaker from hearing and

<sup>22</sup>John Lehmann, *The Open Night*, (London: Longman's Green and Co, 1952), p.83.

<sup>23</sup> *The Happy-go-Lucky Morgans*, p.123.

<sup>24</sup> Eleanor Farjeon, p.154.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Spencer ed., *Elected Friends: Robert Frost and Edward Thomas to one another*, (New York: Other Press LLC, 2004), p.187.

interpreting the call of a bird. All the old associations of the birds as heralding the coming of summer are lost, replaced by the remembered call of a country man who 'died that Summer'. The sense of disconnection from nature is referred to as 'deafness', a term which emphasises the immensity of this loss. The overwhelming emotion behind the poem is sadness that the cuckoo's song has been 'drowned by the voice of | my dead.' and a sense that war has irrevocably altered all things for the speaker. The season which should bring new life has brought death; 'I must remember | What died in April | And consider what will be born | Of a fair November' (The Thrush).

The disruption of cycles and rituals go beyond the speaker's personal experience and in many poems the customs and habits celebrated by rural communities have disappeared. In 'The Cherry Trees', the trees are laden with blossom because the war has ensured that 'all that passed are dead'. The trees seem to be in mourning for the loss, bent over and 'strewing the grass' with their petals as if 'for a wedding' although 'there is none to wed.' The countryside is deserted, the people who belong there are exiled and compassion and sorrow are shown through the emptiness of place without people. In 'In Memoriam (Easter, 1915)', the breakdown of ritual and emptiness of nature without human presence is linked to the permanence of love. Easter brings death but, as Eliot would also later observe, no new life. Nature flourishes but the flowers 'should' have been picked by lovers. The enjambment of this word highlights how unnatural the absence of lovers in the landscape is and the assertion that such couples 'will do never again' shows the finality of the loss. The human story and tragedy is reflected in the land.

Edward Thomas recorded an England which was changing before his eyes and a rural community whose members were disappearing as they were first uprooted to foreign lands then killed by modern warfare. In 'As the Team's Head-Brass', the quiet voice of the speaker observes typical rural activity being marred by the effects of the loss of men to the war. The landscape is marked by their absence and the fallen elm remains fallen until the unknown time 'When the war's over.' The affect of a single death is significant the consequences of loss are considered by the ploughman who philosophically muses that 'Everything | Would have been different.' had his friend not died. Events far away and separate to ordinary people alter their lives and the places they live. The cycles of country life struggle on to a lesser extent in this poem, with the lovers going into the woods and farmers sowing crops but the 'stumbling' of the team and the horses starting out 'for the last time' foreshadows endings. There is a sense of displacement and sadness in people who seemed so linked to a place being sent away to such violence. This is explored in 'A Private' which mourns for a 'ploughman dead in battle' and displaced forever from his home county. This uprooting seems wrong for a man who knew one place so well as to name a single bush he slept under 'Many a frozen night, and merrily'. The specific and detailed knowledge the man had of his surroundings is contrasted to the anonymous and foreign land in which he dies. The disappearance seen in the poems in the old country men and in the larger context of emigration to the cities has now reached the younger countrymen, in a more permanent way. The absence of such men (which include Thomas himself) from rural places, displaced onto foreign soil was the central tragedy of the poetry but it is documented quietly and without explicit comment. Even when the subject is not mentioned directly the war alters the readers' interpretation of the poems. When reading 'The Gallows', which describes dead animals displayed by gamekeepers, it is hard not to think of soldiers on the wire in no man's land who 'hang and flap in rain and wind'.

Thomas' compassion for the soldiers shows how his poetry goes beyond the 'inner theatre' to social concerns. Unlike Brooke he did not bow to patriotism but was cynical about the reasons for war, claiming that 'the papers tell no truth at all about what war is and what soldiers are'<sup>26</sup>. 'The Owl' reveals some of the reasons behind his decision. The poem

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<sup>26</sup> Cooke, p.49

relies on the opposition of his comfort with the hardship of those in the trenches. The speaker has chosen to spend the day outdoors and his condition is not desperate, being 'hungry, and yet not starved; | Cold, yet had heat within me' so that the available fulfilment of these needs should bring him easy contentment. However, once these immediate needs have been sated, his conscience is troubled by the repeated call of the owl outside in the cold night. Again, war has transformed his reading of nature and the owl's 'melancholy cry' carries a clear message of 'what I escaped'. After this knowledge he is 'Salted and sobered' by the bird's message and his sensitive sadness for 'Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.' suggests that the speaker will soon join them rather than dwell in guilty safety.

From a personal and literary perspective, Thomas' death itself is the central tragedy and the poems carry with them a sense of what is to come as he pays a final tribute to the countryside which had played such a large part in his life. Enlisting took away any choice in when he was to die. He knew the batteries division he had joined was particularly dangerous and the survival rate low. In his final poems we can see him signing off and saying his goodbyes to those closest to him, poetically passing on the places which he loved to his children. He joined the army because of his love of the English countryside and his war diaries in France still see him looking to the natural surroundings and finding parallels to the counties he loved, although he did not dwell too long on the thought of them or else he 'could not endure it | For a day longer' (Home). His war diaries show him still looking at weather, landscape and birdsong surrounding him. His finale simile of 'Roads shining like river uphill after rain'<sup>27</sup> shows him still drawn to the same features in France that had fascinated him in England. As always, people are also prevalent in his thoughts and memory, especially his friend and mentor Robert Frost who gave him the confidence to start writing poetry and to whom he wrote; 'You are among the unchanged things that I cannot or dare not think of except in flashes.'<sup>28</sup> It is a huge loss not to know how his poetry would have developed had he lived since, despite its craftsmanship and assurance, he had only just begun writing poetry. In Edward Thomas' last few letters he wants to live because he wants to be a poet. Poetry saved his life before he lost it.

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<sup>27</sup> *The South Country*, p.12.

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**Edward Thomas's Melancholy**  
**By Gerald Roberts**

Edward Thomas's childhood was marked by many of the features that gave rise to the depressed personality of later life. Born in Wandsworth, South London, as a young boy he roved in the half-country that still existed around Merton and Wimbledon, a mixed area of developing streets and housing, interspersed with original common and woodland. Ruskin, who had known the same area as a boy, complained as an older man of rural peace being replaced by the rubbish of modern development, squalid, unimaginative, and poor 'food' for children.

In this distinctive setting Thomas came to interpret the Nature that he was to know with such intimacy later in his life, and to write about it in a series of articles that he collected in *The Woodland Life* published in book form in 1897 when he was not yet 20. It was a small success for a very young author, but ominous for his literary future by his enthusiastic adoption of the romantic, semi-poetic style of the period, against which he was to turn with such determination in his later criticism and verse. It was a book that gained him prestige with family and friends, but pointed his literary ambitions in the wrong direction, his choice of vocabulary and syntax deriving from current convention and not from an independent mind:

The frosty night has done its work, and what were erstwhile glowing green leaves are now fast-spreading the sward with a sombrely yet sumptuously coloured carpet

The Thomas family was headed by a father whose creative interests were limited, was spiritually agnostic, and his ambitions restricted to his life as a Civil Servant and on his son making a career in the same profession as himself. In later life, it was only his mother whom Edward was willing to talk about, but even she, in common with attitudes of the period, gave precedence to his father's views. These early, if discreet differences, between father and mother, contributed to the later stubbornness that Edward was to show in avoiding a professional future resembling what his father desired. As for religion, like the Richard Jefferies, whom he was already reading and admiring for his countryside writing, it played little direct part in his upbringing. The Sunday church-going was imposed on him by his parents and he remembered it with displeasure for the rest of his life and never took church-going or religion seriously.

At school the young Thomas met some academic success that won him a small scholarship to study history at Lincoln College, Oxford. His evident literary skills and interests also won him the love of Helen Noble, a relationship that had to be conducted discreetly as far as his father was concerned. Eventually, it resulted in a secret marriage. By this time his father had already been disappointed by his son's failure to get a first at Oxford, and by Edward's lack of interest in anything except a literary career. If Edward's temperament had been more at ease with the role of rebel and his marital position less demanding, he might not have been affected by this disharmony with his parents, but these early difficulties helped to shape a personality that was rarely freely of the pricks of conscience and the feeling that personal happiness would always be short-lived.

The melancholy of his youth marked both his prose and later poetry, and his letters to friends like Gordon Bottomley, the dramatist, reflect much of his troubled consciousness about himself. For of all people Thomas was aware of the problems of his character and of his difficulties in overcoming these. When he wrote to Bottomley in June 1904, his career as reviewer and essayist was in full swing, but he was finding the work hard and poorly paid, and the responsibilities of married life and family were weighing upon him (he always

admitted his own blame at the troubled state of his domestic life). He told him of his 'terrible moods here [*in the Thomas's cottage in the Weald*] and long fits of despair and exhaustion'. Yet to this litany he added, 'but the short intervals have been very sweet'. Alternations between depression and exhilaration were the particular mark of Thomas's melancholy: 'If you knew my almost daily agonies of fury, despair, violent resolve, and dull resignation', he wrote, and no heedless egotist he wished for Helen's sake, as much as his own, that he could make himself a better husband for her:

I would give you back yourself...  
And myself, too, if I could find  
Where it lay hidden and it proved kind.

Again and again he lamented what he called his 'self-consciousness', as in July 1913 to the talented and sensitive Eleanor Farjeon: 'You see the central evil is self-consciousness carried as far beyond selfishness as selfishness is beyond self-denial...and now amounting to a disease'. Some years before this he had tried to confront the problem with medical advice, declaring that a doctor (presumably Godwin Baynes, who became an eminent psychiatrist) hoped to cure him of 'the elaborate self-consciousness which he says is at the root of everything wrong in me'.

Baynes's judgement is at least superficially borne out by the introverted character of the prose and especially poetry of Thomas, but a cure was less easily effected, and Thomas continued to be racked by self-doubt and self-repugnance, however concealed to all but his closest friends: 'I was told the other day that I seemed a calm dispassionate observer with no opinions', he wrote, adding ironically: 'I am glad to hear I was enjoying life'. His self-analysis in his letters to Bottomley is perhaps hardly different from that of other individuals affected by melancholy, and mixed with the complaints of lack of energy, familiar, for example, in the letters of Hopkins:

Why have I no energies like other men?...I was told the other day that I seemed a calm dispassionate observer with no opinions...Yet think of the pain going on living and not being able to do anything but eat and drink and earn a living for 5 people

Religion, as already explained, he rejected contemptuously but ideas of madness and suicide were not far from his mind. The revolver he kept in his desk, which Helen had seen with dread, became the focus of the short tale 'The Attempt' where the central character, like Thomas, takes a weapon into the woods with him, but returns, humiliated, at not having used it. In this state of mind, not knowing which way to turn, he told Bottomley: 'I am now uniformly low-spirited, listless, almost unable to work, and physically incapable. I have no idea what it means, but I crawl along on the very edge of life, wondering why I don't go over the edge'.

As he was aware, in his lucid moments, that what he was confronting was the complex nature of his own personality, and that the experience of depression had to be balanced with those moments of insight and fulfilment which still did come his way: 'I wonder whether for a person like myself whose most intense moments were those of depression, a cure that destroys the depression may not destroy the intensity'.

Many of these moments are recorded in verse: in 'Adlestrop', 'The Glory', 'Old Man' and others, when perception takes the poet beyond the simple present into a raised state of feeling, not necessarily fulfilling, but disturbing in its intimation of a level of existence normally unreachable and, in ordinary human terms, inexplicable.

Schizophrenia dogged him. Too often, like a person hearing his own voice, he found himself as one looking on at his own experience, as when, telling Bottomley of overhearing passers-by of his house near Petersfield remarking, 'How fortunate are they within those

walls', the thought came into his mind: 'I know it. I have thought the same as I came to the house and forgot it was my own':

'I have thought: 'Twere happy there  
To live.' And I have laughed at that  
Because I lived there then.' 'Extraordinary'.

And in the mysterious 'The Other', the poet attempts to track down his double to confront him and come to grips with what this 'other self' might be, but is only disappointed in his pursuit. This sense of nursing two personalities is apparent in such a seemingly innocent remark as where he writes of 'going to the country to escape ourselves', which if not interpreted as a conventional metaphor for relaxation and enjoyment carries a more sinister suggestion: the Thomas of family life and domestic living was transformed in countryside surroundings.

Not surprisingly, Thomas accepted the word melancholy as an appropriate self-description (he wrote to a correspondent that he had 'a very persistent attack of depression' but it was a term he used more rarely), and Helen, his wife, struggled to contain his often profound lack of self-esteem. Early in their acquaintance she noted 'this darkness in his soul which...found peace in Nature, but not in me'. She wryly and honestly noted that when he joined the army in 1916 the 'black despair' retreated, and it is significant that this experience of service-life (as an anti-depressant) he shared with other melancholy sufferers.

The Gloucestershire poet Ivor Gurney's life of struggle against personal emotional problems was at least for a time healed by his army life, leading him to remark: 'I feel that nowhere could I be happier than where I am'. Gurney, like Thomas, loathed the petty rules and restrictions of military life, but delighted in the companionship of the ordinary soldier. Its regulated existence satisfied, at one level, his basic needs and ensured his contact with the community of his fellow-men.

So unlike Gurney in background and education, T.E. Lawrence fled the publicity and futility of civilian life for the communal society of the Army and then the RAF. Here, the ordered existence, by taking away his freedom and independence, brought him rest after a career of frustrated ambition. The case of Alun Lewis, the Second World War soldier and poet, is also significant, since he not only refused to consider joining up in the first place, and when he did, periodically vented his rage against the Army's ways, yet over and over again he declared his enjoyment of the company of the ordinary soldier and took a full and active part in battalion life as an officer.

Hopkins's decision to join the Jesuits – so often seen by admirers as well as critics as 'soldiers' fighting in 'God's Army' – was for him a commitment to a deliberately austere life, an escape from aesthetic and sensuous temptation. Clearly too it was much more in its appeal to someone of such a naturally religious temperament, but he recognised in the Jesuit discipline what was necessary for him to devote his life to God.

That Thomas was 'cured' of his depression by army life is a simplification, if only because there was for him no life after the army to demonstrate its long-term effect. But there were indeed causes connected with his recruitment that contributed to a radical change in his outlook. Volunteering took him away from the worries of domestic life, the need to look after his growing family, the effort of working in the same (small) house with his children around him, and a wife whose concern and love for him he often (however selfishly) found oppressive.

His entry into the Army also coincided with a growing realisation of his ability as a poet and in fact the first publication of his verse. Helen herself noted that his writing until then had not expressed 'his own creative impulse, the damming-up of which contributed largely to his melancholy'. This new creative period in his life unhappily coincided with the

last years of it, and what Thomas's artistic achievements would have been after his years at the front we shall never know.

But as has already been suggested there were aspects of service life itself that helped to drive out melancholy. The shared and compulsory military discipline, however futile it often seemed, left no opportunity for the tortured writer to exercise his own choices and decisions, relieved him and his family of normal financial concerns, and brought him face to face with members of his own English society which under normal circumstances he might never have encountered.

Behind these practical reasons, there was also an overarching principle for his volunteering which could be described as a fulfilment of his deepest self. He answered Eleanor Farjeon's question why fight, by picking up a handful of English earth and replying 'Literally, for this', and his poetry (and indeed his prose) demonstrates the significance of English country-life for his whole being. Whether or not this signifies patriotism - a word of which Thomas was very suspicious - it clearly reflects the fullness of his commitment to fighting for his country.

His poetry (as well as his prose when it is most personal) is marked by melancholy in a variety of forms. The solitariness that is the result of the individual observer recording his experience, or the near-silence that is part of the experience is often a vital part of the Thomas poem. 'The sound of sawing rounded all / That silence said.' These are situations that challenge the very nature of the poet's art and insight by their demands on meticulous selection of language and compression of idea. One of his reviewers wrote of the effect of his poetry as of 'a man talking quietly to himself'. Thomas wrote: 'Concentration, intensity of mood, is the one necessary condition in the poet and in the poem', and his most successful poems bear witness the achievement of this. The natural sounds in his poems are often the only ones that challenge the silence.

The introspective character of Thomas's own personality lends itself to an interpretation of Nature which intensifies the melancholy of the experience. His sense of a Nature which holds a meaning that was in the end beyond the comprehension of man is echoed in the sober reaction of a number of writers to the English countryside. Rider Haggard devoted many years to working his East Anglian estate and remarked that

There are few things that give rise to reflections more melancholy...than the contemplation of any piece of ground to which we chance to be attached, and to see and walk upon day by day...How many generations...have taken exactly the same interest in those identical fields....And the land itself? Scarcely changed.

Mrs Swithin in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* saw the sadness (and beauty) of Nature in the fact that 'It'll be there...when we're not'. Thomas's experience of Nature was as much mystical as tragic, a gateway to deeper perception which by its very character could not be further described and analysed. As early in his writing career as *Horae Solitariae*, in the essay 'February in England' Thomas had described a semi-mystical experience on a dawn walk:

'Everything was the same as of old---yet not the same. I seemed to be on the eve of a revelation. I could have wept that my senses were not chastened to celestial keenness, to understand the pipits as they flew. In a short time the common look of things returned.'

These 'short times' were characteristic of his mystical experiences, and it is one of them which dominates the movement of 'Adlestrop', from the conversational yet reflective beginning, 'Yes, I remember Adlestrop', to that exalted moment when the bird-song unites into an overwhelming, all-embracing chorus:

And for that minute a blackbird sang  
 Close by, and round him, mistier,  
 Farther and farther, all the birds  
 Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

In the collection 'Rest and Unrest', the story 'The First of Spring' presents a central female character who is a sort of alter ego for Thomas, a would-be poet, keen country-walker, yet partially crippled (as Thomas saw himself, metaphorically, in his domestic and professional dissatisfactions). As she walks, 'The weather which filled her with a desire to do more than she had ever done before, left her at the same time as weak as a child and on the edge of inexplicable tears'. These are not tears of simple grief, but reflect a deeper sense of human inability to attain a higher level of experience.

So, in Thomas's 'Tears' which he comes close to shedding, the hounds on Blooming Meadow and the young British soldiers told him 'Truths I had not dreamed, / And have forgotten since their beauty passed.' This sense of something lacking, which when revealed, would bring both insight and fulfilment, is common in Thomas's writing. His own personal consciousness of failure and inadequacy is somehow relieved by a sense that a meaning might exist which would put his being at rest. In 'Old Man' the memory that would provide a meaning is lodged beyond the edge of consciousness, and the 'dark' 'avenue' is hardly an image of life-enhancing hope, but it tempts, at the same time as it denies, access.

His idol Richard Jefferies, whose observation and description of English country life he so much revered, passed on to Thomas the sense of a Nature that, if one could only understand it, would answer man's sense of incompleteness. Inevitably, this feeling was allied to a vision of Nature that idealised the land, the people, and lamented, romantically, the vanishing of an older, more noble time. For Jefferies, this was not an unalloyed nostalgia: realistically in painting agricultural life as it was in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, its narrowness and harshness did not escape him, yet he still declared: 'To understand a nation you must go to the cottager'. His faith in English agricultural society directs his writing to a concern for all things rural, in the same spirit as Thomas finds his heroes and 'characters' in those who inhabit the countryside. His 'Lob' revives a patriotic picture of an older England, a figure who 'lives yet' and 'never will admit he is dead'.

Nostalgia, a sense of sadness for what is past and the desire to revive and revisit that past, remains one of the strongest expressions of the mood of melancholy. That such a mood is present in Thomas is undeniable, yet it remains in conflict with a more critical side of himself that rejects sometimes brutally any temptation to self-indulgence and self-pity. 'Leaving Town' in 'The Heart of England' describes the 'intolerable longing' for the unattainable by the character of the boy, but the author's approach is a mixture of sympathy and superiority: the child, after all, is a child and its longings the rather pitiful symptoms of an immature personality

But over the work of Thomas lingers the insidious suggestion of death as a destination to satisfy disappointed ambitions and unfulfilled longings; in the words of Alun Lewis, his admiring follower, 'Death was the ultimate response that he, despite himself, desired'. 'Despite himself' because so much of Thomas spoke for the pleasures of life in his enjoyment of Nature, his friends, and literature. His prose and poetry reflect the joys of living in Nature, as well as the melancholy and mystery. But, even from the early 'Horae Solitariae', describing a summer-walk in Kent, he reflects 'How beautiful is death'. Later, in 'Wales', he tellingly describes the Welsh character Morgan Rhys in terms which might sum up the writer's own mentality:

He found enjoyment in silence, in darkness, in refraining [?] from deeds, and he longed even to embrace the absolute blank of death...and he envied the solitary

tree...under a night sky in winter when the only touch of life and pleasure was the rain.

Significantly, Thomas wrote of a writer he much admired, that Richard Jefferies 'was often in love with death', and added 'he longed even to embrace the absolute blank of death, if only he could be just conscious of it'. This fascination for the experience, or at least knowledge, of death underlies several poems by Thomas. Under the metaphor of 'The Dark Forest' he alludes to the mystery of the adjacent states of life and death as countries that cannot know each other, 'Nor can those that pluck either blossom greet / The others, day or night'.

The forest metaphor recurs as an image for sleep in 'Lights Out', but it requires little imagination to interpret the poem as a commentary on Thomas's reactions to the thought of death for himself (all these poems were composed after he had enlisted as a soldier when France was a likely destination). The decisive last verses are a clear acceptance of the poet's willingness to die:

There is not any book  
Nor face of dearest look  
That I would not turn from now  
To go into the unknown  
I must enter, and leave, alone,  
I know not how.

The tall forest towers  
Its cloudy foliage lowers  
Ahead, shelf above shelf;  
Its silence I hear and obey  
That I may lose my way  
And myself.

And the final poem that Thomas seems to have written (December 1916) reiterates this love-death:

How weak and little is the light,  
All the universe of sight,  
Love and delight,  
Before the might,  
If you love it not, of night.

The message, presented in a negative to cloak its disturbing nature as well as suggest the ambiguity of its appeal, implies that the writer *does* love the idea of death and wish for entry into the mysterious forest. The other natural symbol to which Thomas and Lewis turned to express their fascination for death was Rain. In the most death-dominated of all his poems he speaks of his love for rain, as one who has

No love which this wild rain  
Has not dissolved except the love of death,  
If love it be for what is perfect and  
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Rain is a force which seems to represent a power superior to and different from

all human existence; as he declares in 'The Icknield Way', 'Now there is neither life nor death, but only the rain'. The same elemental symbol appeals to both T.E. Lawrence and Lewis, whose 'All day it has rained' expresses less an attraction for than an acceptance of the spirit of indifference to human affairs which it inspires: 'Now it is the rain / Possesses us entirely, the twilight and the rain.' And as Aircraftsman Ross lies under the roof of the communal hut he expresses his longing for all that the rain represents:

Without in the darkness the rain affirmed itself. Closer columns of raindrops bore down on the supine earth and drove all life to cover. Lights out came at last, to my craving ear. Silence wiped out their horrid babel [of the men] and let the rain-sound, already ruling the outer air, win the dark hut and rule it too.

For Thomas, melancholy is an amalgam of mood and sensation, merging with moments of insight and even exhilaration, ultimately inexplicable in their nature. Their mysterious nature is demonstrated in the treatment of the theme of knowledge in his poetry, knowledge which the poet may sometimes possess, sometimes be frustrated by. In 'March' he accepts happily the sound of thrushes singing all night:

to me all was sweet: they could do no wrong.  
Something they knew – I also while they sang  
And after.

But, precisely what they and Thomas knew may only be guessed at. In 'The Glory' his overwhelming emotions at the experience of a beautiful morning inspire a succession of questions, leaving the poet despondent and dissatisfied:

Shall I perhaps know  
That I was happy oft and oft before,  
Awhile forgetting how I am fast pent,  
How dreary-swift, with naught to travel to,  
Is Time? I cannot bite the day to the core.

What one 'knows' is a mystery. True the blackbird has found 'it', but the poet has to ask,

Shall I now this day  
Begin to seek as far as heaven, as hell,  
Wisdom or strength to match this beauty...  
In hope to find whatever it is I seek,

and that he knows 'naught of'?

In 'The New House' the eeriness of the sound of the wind around it seems to allow him partial understanding of the future without definiteness of detail: 'All was foretold me; naught / Could I foresee'. And the conclusion is a melancholic insight into the irresistible passage of time: 'But I learned how the wind would sound / After these things should be.' The deepest experiences recorded in his poetry finally remain incomplete and unexplained, without material finality. They mingle exhilaration and menace, insight and ignorance, and reflect a yearning for a level of understanding beyond simple definition. The expression of such marginal and intangible experience is the great achievement of Thomas's verse.

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### Edward Thomas and the Olympics?

Rowing: 'It is a fine lesson in eloquence to listen to the coaches shouting reprimand and advice, in sentences one or two words long, to a panting crew.'

Weightlifting: 'Physic being in vain, I am reduced to ¼ hour of dumbbells'.

Cycling: 'Yesterday I started on a long bicycle ride to a friend but gave it up exhausted & dispirited a third of the way'.

Running: 'After running and walking for more than two hours that sunny morning we found ourselves together, clean out of London and also out of the chase, because he had gone off on a false scent and because I ran badly.'

Archery: 'The swift with wings and tail as sharp and narrow / As if the bow had flown off with the arrow.'

The long jump: 'I am almost proud to love both bird and sun, / Though scarce this Spring could my body leap four yards'.

The high jump: 'Another was "like my brother Roland, and if he had been alive now he could have jumped over spiked railings up to his own shoulder, though he was not a little man."'

Sailing: 'When their sails appeared in the bay, it was known that calm had settled upon the sea as in the first year, and men and women went down to welcome them. Those summers were good both for man and beast.'

Boxing: 'finally, everyone at that moment had something better to think of, because Jack and Roland had put on the gloves'.

Diving: 'Now those young men were poor and rough, and they were unmarried. They watched the women swimming and diving and floating as if they had been born in the sea.'

Equestrianism: 'Who was the lady that rode the white horse / With rings and bells to Banbury Cross?'

Swimming: 'There was a Gypsy caravan close to the path, three or four horses scattered about, an old woman at the fire, and several of the party in the water. I hurried on because I saw that the swimmers were girls. But there was no need to hurry.'

The javelin: 'A man of Eindride's company struck him with a javelin between the shoulders, and he died.'

Football: 'we joined a football club and played matches with some regularity. Sometimes when the sodden ball was like lead it was but a sad pleasure and not that if in punting one kicked the ball full in one's own face; but as a rule the full game, or any sort of game, or just kicking about till it was dark, was all I wanted.'

Shooting: 'the carpenter lifted his gun and pointed it at the retriever who had his back turned and was burying a bone in a corner of the field. The carpenter fired, the old dog fell in a heap with blood running out of his mouth'.

Tennis: "'Tennis balls, my liege", and other phrases had to be uttered with a grin and received with a grin'.

Walking: 'But the walker is vanishing. Games take away their thousands'.

### Hiraeth: A Lost Word

When it was first promulgated to put the Fellowship's Newsletters onto our website, it was agreed that we would proof read them and remove any minor errors, spelling mistakes et cetera. The process was simple and a very pleasurable task wherein the proof readers would collate their findings and then forward a final draft to Lorna Scott the Archivist at the University of Gloucester who would with John Monks correct the errors prior to scanning the newsletters in preparation for Martin Haggerty placing them on the website. A pleasurable enough task and one that led us to being side-tracked on more than one occasion as we progressed through the back numbers. One such article side-tracked me enough to delve deeper into a particular sentence within an article written by Susan King, (Newsletter 50, August 2003) who was intrigued by a word that she once knew and then forgot.

The article, 'A Personal View of Edward Thomas's Poem, "Home"' examined the poems called 'Home.' She wrote:

*"Edward Thomas wrote three poems called 'Home,' a subject which touched him deeply, and upon which he often contemplated. In all three poems, his primary topic is not the simple, heart-warming home that forms the theme of so many Scottish ballads, but a mystical, ethereal home, elusive and only half-glimpsed. This infinitely deep feeling is linked inextricably with the quest for happiness and content. It is an intangible concept for which there are no words in the English language. Richard Jefferies came across this problem when writing about the same concept in The Story of my Heart. I once discovered, and then lost, a Welsh word which seemed to express this communing between spirit and place.\* It may be that more words expressive of similar concepts exist in Welsh, or existed in the ancient British language which preceded it.*

*\*If any reader knows this Welsh word, which passed tantalisingly through my reading matter and vanished, I would love to hear from them!"*

An examination of later editions of the Newsletter revealed no further references to the article despite her plea for assistance. It was then that I became intrigued by the elusive word that Susan King knew and then forgot, but where to start. The clue lay in the article itself, 'similar concepts exist in Welsh'.

From her description and from my research, I think that the word she is looking for is hiraeth; it seems to combine all the elements that both she and Richard Jefferies felt. So here is an Englishman's poor attempt to describe that feeling via the Welsh word hiraeth.

Hiraeth (n), Hiraethu (v), Hiraethus(adj).

Untranslatable, generally rendered in the English variously as "nostalgia" (but much more organic and aching than this); "home-sickness" (but more active than this, and need not be confined to "home", can extend to any feeling of place or sense of belonging); "yearning" (closer, but needs a touch of sorrow to get the real thrust); "longing" (again, a bit too inactive to convey the proper sense).

Hiraeth contains a sense of physical organic force or charge, redolent perhaps of the way particle physics work. As if there is a physical cord between person and place, which is tugged, and whose tug can be physically, even painfully, felt. Also there is an essential spiritual element or dimension in hiraeth, akin perhaps to Psalm 42 "as a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs..." I apologise for being so orotund, but I feel, hiraeth is not capable of translation, and can be captured only by going around it like so many Sioux braves pondering a wagon train!

Colin G. Thornton, Hon. Secretary

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### Book Review

Judy Kendall, *Edward Thomas: The Origins of His Poetry*. Pp. xvi + 240 (CREW series of Critical and Scholarly Studies). Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012.

In the highly ambitious *Edward Thomas: The Origins of his Poetry*, Judy Kendall outlines what she calls the poet's composition process. She concurs with Edna Longley's view that Thomas should be considered an 'ecological' poet, by emphasising the role of natural surroundings to his writing. For Kendall, the most relevant experiences of the environment to Thomas's poetry are physical displacement and transit, natural growth and decay, and the significance of hearing and evoking birdsong. Kendall's book certainly sheds light on a multiplicity of under-explored factors in Thomas's work: from the importance of 'unfinishedness', inspired by oral and Japanese literature; to the context of contemporary scientific exploration of the mind, and the influence of diverse world literatures outside of the 'English line'.

However, Thomas's evocation of a relation between writer and environment is more complicated than Kendall suggests is attributable to syntax, content and sentence shape alone. Edna Longley has already demonstrated that immersion in the environment influences metre and rhyme.<sup>29</sup> With regards to the sounds of water in 'Gone, Gone Again', 'Interval', 'The Mill-Water', and 'Rain', 'Innumerable natural phenomena and processes leave similar sound tracks, from the directly onomatopoeic to unobtrusive trace-elements' (Longley, 1986: 67). In 'Aspens', Longley suggests, it is the play of metre and speech which sounds like 'the whisper of Aspens'.

Kendall considers the extent to which birdsong can mediate between speaker and environment: the bird conveys the 'emotional charge' of the environment. However, she believes that bird song is 'untranslatable' in 'If I Were to Own': for Kendall, this also means it is mysteriously separated from human experience and more intimately connected with the land. In her analysis of 'The Unknown Bird', Kendall argues that the poem 'articulates not the [bird] song but the distance between the song and human language'. Elsewhere, she relies on this untranslatable language as something that encourages awareness of sensation rather than a more conscious awareness of the repetitive nature of the bird's song (p141).

In her analysis of 'Home', however, she develops the idea of 'the language that is written into the environment' (26). It is the language 'the trees and birds' used; which allows that 'what was hid should still be hid'. This is different from a language capable of 'articulating or describing the environment', which she elsewhere describes as a language 'written into the environment'. However, confusingly, Kendall returns to consider that this process of articulation brought about by connection with a natural environment might actually constitute a 'universal language', using the terminology of Thomas's review of Hudson's *Green Mansions*. Kendall doesn't mention this but in 'March' Thomas suggests a direct grasp of the bird's meaning is attainable, and illustrates this idea of a 'universal language':

What did the thrushes know? Rain, snow, sleet, hail,  
Had kept them quiet as the primroses.  
They had but an hour to sing. On boughs they sang,  
On gates, on ground [...]  
Something they knew - I also, while they sang

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<sup>29</sup> Edna Longley, *Poetry in the Wars* (Tarset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 1986).

Whereas a language written into the landscape evokes how Wordsworth 'found in stones the sermons he had already hidden' and the pantheism of Emerson, Thomas's universal language is more sceptical than that of a natural religion. Thomas's version of a 'universal language' could perhaps be a component of meaning that is pre-conceptual – what Robert Frost calls 'sentence sounds'. This might fruitfully be found to coincide with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Henri Bergson's views on how language distorts the nature of experience. In connection with Robert Frost, who had read Bergson, the American critic Robert Bernard Hass says:

To Bergson, words, like scientific concepts, are discrete units of thought that organise in a useful manner a continuous stream of constantly changing sensations. Although words help us communicate ideas, they inevitably distort consciousness by fixing the heterogeneous flux of experience into imprecise generalisations. (Hass, 2002: 139)<sup>30</sup>

Hass shows that Bergson believes that a writer can create the impression of the 'mobility of consciousness' through a use of language that 'provides the reader with a sustained equivalent of that experience' (140). In the essay 'The Soul and The Body', Bergson says:

words ... will not convey the whole of what we wish to make them say if we do not succeed by the rhythm, the punctuation, by the relative lengths of the sentences and parts of the sentences, by a particular dancing of the sentences, in making the reader's mind, continually guided by a series of nascent movements, describe a curve of thought and feeling analogous to that which we ourselves describe. (Hass, 140)

William James, who read Bergson, also believed in the importance of 'reinstatement of the vague and inarticulate to its proper place in our mental life' (From *Psychology, The Briefer Course*, in Hass, 191). Kendall acknowledges Thomas's debt to James. For Hass, it is the metrical patterns that provide the constraint against which the 'audial imagination' reacts that ensure the beauty of Frost's poetry. For Kendall, the vagueness necessary for a realistic account of experience is provided by the content, sentence structure and visual aspect, rather than the sound qualities. Kendall's concern is to show how engagement with a human dimension in the environment provides the 'jolt' necessary to provide 'changes in pace, mood and direction that help form the resolution to each poem'. Presumably, however, this 'jolt' wouldn't work without the speaker's initial absorption into the landscape.

Kendall returns to the idea of 'language of the physical landscape' in her survey of the relations between Edward Thomas's poetry and oral literature. While we might take issue with her attribution of ecological essentialism to folk traditions, she rightly indicates a link between oral traditions and poetic diction. She reminds us that Thomas praised contemporary writers Ralph Hodgson and W.H. Davies for drawing on a Wordsworthian approach to language. In Frost, Thomas esteems a development from Wordsworth to 'colloquialism'. Thomas celebrates Hodgson for evoking the 'ballads which were sold in the street and stuck about inn walls two hundred years ago' (Kendall, 32). As well as suggesting that folk tales serve in Thomas's imaginative connection with the past, Kendall correctly highlights the roles that children's rhymes, stories and proverbs played in creating an imaginative link with non-human nature for the poet.

While uncovering many of these important threads – and there are some very good analyses here – there is a lack of a feeling for the openness of the conclusions reached. The

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Bernard Hass, *Going by Contraries: Robert Frost's Conflict with Science* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2002).

tone of *Edward Thomas: The Origins of his Poetry* suggests that findings are conclusive, whereas the work presented here is exploratory. While there are some very keen insights into the relationships between Thomas and his contemporaries, for instance, there are many awkward phrases. The prose rhythms risk multiple interpretations and confusion, for example, in the following:

This emphasis on sound as inhabiting the birds' physical structure and environment forms a parallel with the process involved in artistic creations. It echoes particularly the tendency in Thomas's and others' descriptions of poetic composition to resort to imagery drawn from activities such as building and architecture, focusing on the provision of dwellings, as if the creator needs to dwell within the environment in which the composition process occurs, or the environment, indeed, needs to dwell within the creator. (126)

By way of complicating some of the conclusions that Kendall makes, Thomas's poetry suggests to me that birdsong and human song can communicate in comparable ways; pre-conceptually; deeply felt; reflecting our common evolutionary origins. Without wishing to suggest that my own arguments are conclusive, I believe that the experience conveyed to the reader in many of the poems is of the natural environment impacting on consciousness, which is achieved through contrast between the driving impulse of a consciously directed metre and the unwieldy material of experience, reflected in syntax. In line with the 'openness' Kendall praises in Thomas's poetry, I will close by asking you to consider whether or not proximity between human mind and birdsong is apparent in 'The Word': 'This name suddenly is cried out to me/ From somewhere in the bushes by a bird/ Over and over again, a pure thrush word'.

Anna Stenning

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### Other News

**Robert Macfarlane** wrote an essay on Edward Thomas for *The Literary Review*, July 2012.

In *The Observer* on 15 July 2012, Robert Macfarlane chose as his summer reading volume two (*England and Wales*) of the OUP edition of Edward Thomas's prose.

'**Adlestrop**' is included in *Poems for a Quiet Moment* compiled by the Arts Forum of the Royal Marsden Hospital, London, to raise the spirits of those spending time in the hospital. 'Silver' by Walter de la Mare is another of the poems.

In *The Guardian* on 3 May 2012, Derek Walcott commented, 'When I come to England, I don't claim England, I don't own it. I feel a great kinship because of the literature and the landscape. I have great affection for Edward Thomas and Philip Larkin, but there's still this distance: looking on at what I'm admiring, separate from what I am.'

**Jean Moorcroft Wilson's** new full-length biography of Edward Thomas will be published by Bloomsbury to coincide with the centenary of WW1.

**Michel W Pharand** reviewed the American edition of Thomas's *Autobiographies* in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, volume 55, issue 1, 2012. 'If *Autobiographies* is any indication, the other volumes are likely to become indispensable resources for the rediscovery of a large and neglected part of Edward Thomas's oeuvre.'

**Friedhelm Rathjen**, a member of the ETF for many years, has produced a collection of passages from *Finnegans Wake*, which he has translated into German: James Joyce, *Winnegans Fake: Aus dem Spätwerk*, Herausgegeben und übersetzt von Friedhelm Rathjen. The book is printed in a limited edition of 111 copies, all numbered and signed by the translator (not the author, unfortunately). Publisher: EDITION ReJOYCE ([rejoyce@gmx.de](mailto:rejoyce@gmx.de)).

**Linda Hart's** review of *Now All Roads Lead to France* and *The Red Sweet Wine of Youth* appeared in *Contemporary Review*, March 2012.

**Words into Wood** (Edward Thomas Fellowship, 2010) was reviewed by Miles Wigfield in *Parenthesis*, Spring 2012. 'So there you have it: a letterpress book well printed and bound, containing some of Edward Thomas's best verse and illustrated by some of our foremost wood engravers. What more could you ask for?'

**Wilfred Owen:** From 'Doomed Youth' to the Battle of the Sambre, November 1918. The Wilfred Owen Association & IWM London present Jean Moorcroft Wilson & Max Egremont. Saturday 10 November 2012 at 2.30 p.m. The Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ.

Max Egremont, 'The Last Phase': How bad was the Allies' position in the last months of 1917, after Ypres and Passchendaele? Was it possible to imagine defeat? Why was this transformed during 1918, after the huge German advances of the spring? Was there any truth in the Germans' 'stab in the back' claim that politicians had betrayed a still defiant military? The roots of the catastrophe of the 1930s are already apparent in the last year of the First World War. But can they be traced further back, even to 1914?

Jean Moorcroft Wilson, 'From Owen's "Doomed Youth" to his Doomed Youth': Owen's full flowering was a late one. Fertilized by his meeting with Sassoon at Craiglockhart War Hospital for Neurasthenic Officers in August 1917 and nurtured by his own experiences of the 'pity of war', it died with Owen himself in one of the last Allied engagements in November 1917, the Battle of the Sambre.

Tickets £10, to include refreshments. Concs for seniors and students £7.50. Tickets available from IWM London, in person or online at [iwm.org.uk](http://iwm.org.uk) and from S W Gray (until 20 October), 35 Pashley Rd, Eastbourne BN20 8DY Tel.01323641520 or [swgray@talktalk.net](mailto:swgray@talktalk.net) Enquiries: tel. 020 73872394

**Lesley Lee Francis** has written a long review of *Now All Roads Lead to France* for the Robert Frost Society's *Robert Frost Review* no.21. See [robertfrostociety.org](http://robertfrostociety.org) (under news and events).

*The Dark Earth and the Light Sky*, a play about Edward Thomas, written by Nick Dear and directed by Richard Eyre, will be at the Almeida Theatre 8 November to 12 January. Pip Carter will play Edward Thomas, and Shaun Dooley will play Robert Frost.

*Adlestrophes or The Poets Make an Excursion to Adlestrop* (2012) by R. K. R. Thornton can be obtained from the author at 2 Rectory Terrace, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 1XY, [rkrthornton@btinternet.com](mailto:rkrthornton@btinternet.com), with a cheque to R. K. R. Thornton for £5 (to include p&p). *Adlestrophes* is now in a second expanded edition, and it is a series of versions of Thomas's 'Adlestrop', 'written to explore how other poets might have addressed Thomas's material'. We are given poems about Adlestrop by 'A prose writer', Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, William Wordsworth, William McGonagall, A. C. Swinburne, Thomas Hardy, G. M. Hopkins, A. E. Housman, Rudyard Kipling, Ernest Dowson, Robert Frost, A. A. Milne, e e cummings, and 'A Modern Poet'.

**Opposite and back cover: illustrations by R. K. R. Thornton from his *Adlestrophes*.**

