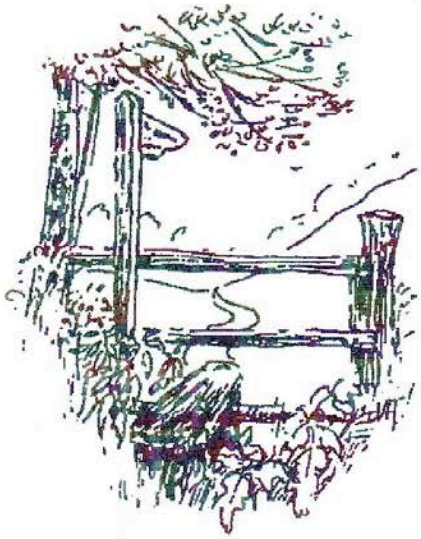
THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 74 **August 2015**

It appeared to be a collection of residences about as incapable of self-support as could anywhere be found – a private-looking, respectable, inhospitable place that made the rain colder, and doubtless, in turn, coloured the spectacles it was seen through. The name of its inn, the 'Leg of Mutton and Cauliflower,' may be venerable, but it smacked of suburban fancy, as if it had been bestowed to catch the pennies of easy-going lovers of quaintness.

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

Dr David Christopher Gervais
12th November 1943 - 13th May 2015

David Gervais joined the Fellowship more than twenty years ago, and was for several years a Committee member. Having retired early from Reading University, where he was a Lecturer, for health reasons, he refused to let persistent ill health interfere with his enjoyment of life, and members will recall him quietly holding forth about art or literature in pub gardens with a pint of beer in front of him.

David's scholarship was immense: he particularly loved the work of Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney and George Sturt, the last of which he believed deserved much greater recognition. But his interests and knowledge ranged far wider: Wordsworth, Hardy, Raphael, Botticelli- it did not matter. He loved Italy and things Italian, and it was while he was on holiday in Italy that illness finally caught up with him.

A liberal man in the proper sense of that word, he enjoyed discussion and argument, but was never aggressive, always listening and carefully considering the other person's point of view. Above all he made one look at things in a different light. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him and we send our sincere condolences to Marie-Marthe and his family.

Richard Emeny

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The Tim Wilton-Steer Collection

Having reported the planned Edward Thomas Study Centre in Petersfield Museum, I have also been asked to write something about the content of Tim's collection of Edward Thomas material which I am very happy to do.

Tim had a strong, almost compulsive, interest in ET going back at least thirty years. Like many of us, he initially tried to collect copies of all the titles, both prose and poetry, but he did not stop at that, as he extended his searches to include different editions, variants of binding, frontispieces, size and so on. Thus the collection includes five first editions of *The Woodland Life*, fifteen of *Feminine Influence On The Poets* and similar numbers of each title. Much of the Collection therefore consists of books, but I should emphasise that although Tim was an avid collector, he was not just a collector: he loved ET's work and knew it intimately. Among the books are many gems- copies signed by ET, others by friends such as Gordon Bottomley and James Guthrie and by Helen. Private Press items by The Pear Tree Press, Tragara Press, Whittington Press and many others. A number of the books were presented by ET to literary associates such as Gilbert Canaan, others to and from his family such as the McArthurs and his father. There are also a large number of books of criticism, literary history and the like, all connected with ET.

Apart from books, there is correspondence, some by or to ET, others connected to him such as from Robert Eckert to Roger Ingpen; eleven letters from

Rowland Watson to Claude Prance, a number to John Gold, a Lake District friend and many more. There are musical settings of poems, CDs and tapes. The Collection also includes articles and booklets as well as a few pictures and photographs.

A short article can only give a slight impression of the whole. What is important to stress is that Tim and subsequently his family have been very consistent in wishing the Collection to be used for study and research. They do not see it as a museum piece. To that end the Centre when fully operational will include facilities for research, and will be promoted as such. It is hoped that the Fellowship will hold events in it. In total there are over 1000 items.

Richard Emeny

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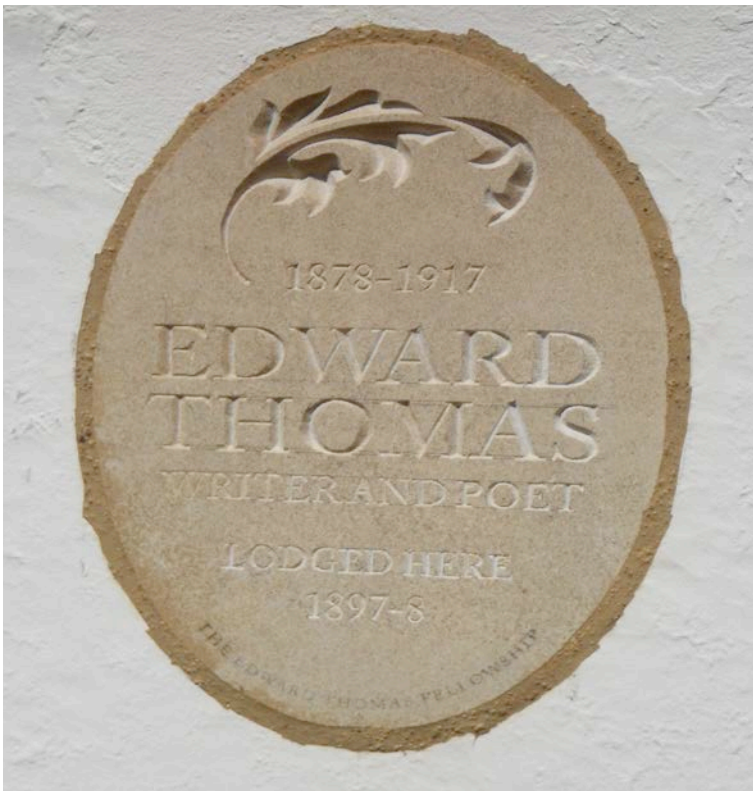
Unveiling of the Edward Thomas memorial plaque at 113 Cowley Road, Oxford

On the 16th May 2015 a group of members, together with the stonemason Richard Morley and his family, met to celebrate the unveiling of a plaque commissioned by the Fellowship at the house in which Edward Thomas lodged for his first academic year, 1897-98.

The ceremony, held in the rear garden, was opened by the Chairman, Richard Emeny, who acknowledged the Fellowship's gratitude to Andrew Smith M.P., to Margaret Keeping for her dedication in guiding the project through to fruition, to Richard Morley, and to the present owners of the house, Dominion Housing Association.



The plaque at 113, Cowley Road (Photo: Matt Dixon)

Richard spoke of how Thomas matriculated initially at Oxford as a non-collegiate student, a category introduced in 1868 to offer a University education without the cost of college membership. Whilst residing here Edward Thomas was studying Greek, Latin and Mathematics for Responsions, the first of three University examinations then required for an Oxford University degree. He was also studying for scholarship examinations in history and reading widely including Pater, Flaubert, Hardy, Jefferies, Don Quixote, Goethe, Boccaccio and Malory (R. George Thomas, 1985, 57) cited in Lucy Newlyn's 'Introduction' to Thomas' *Oxford* (2005, xvii).

Thomas won a scholarship to read Modern History at Lincoln College in March 1898, coming top in the general paper "because of the mature quality of his style and approach" (Thomas, 1985, 54 in Newlyn, op. cit.) and passed Responsions in June of that year. Richard's talk also reflected on the fact that Thomas had already written his first book, *The Woodland Life*, published by William Blackwood and Sons in the late spring of 1897 and continued to write for several literary journals. His daily routine would usually include 'a good walk in the afternoon' and Margaret Keeping read an extract from a letter written to Helen dated 27 January 1898 in which he writes that he has not yet walked far, "but my short walks, all in one direction have been full of pleasure, though quiet enough. It is a side lane half a mile off where thrushes and robins are always singing in the trees of its hedges. I can watch, too, the promise of the wild parsley that has now quite a long time floated its feathery green above the brown ditch" (unpublished letter now in Cardiff University Library, first reprinted in the ETF *Newsletter* 31, June 1994).

Gwilym Scourfield then read the following poem to us:

The Word
5 July 1915

There are so many things I have forgot,
That once were much to me, or that were not,
All lost, as is a childless woman's child
And its child's children, in the undefiled
Abyss of what can never be again.
I have forgot, too, names of the mighty men
That fought and lost or won in the old wars,
Of kings and fiends and gods, and most of the stars.
Some things I have forgot that I forget.
But lesser things there are, remembered yet,
Than all the others. One name that I have not--
Though 'tis an empty thingless name--forgot
Never can die because Spring after Spring
Some thrushes learn to say it as they sing.
There is always one at midday saying it clear
And tart--the name, only the name I hear.
While perhaps I am thinking of the elder scent
That is like food, or while I am content
With the wild rose scent that is like memory,

This name suddenly is cried out to me
From somewhere in the bushes by a bird
Over and over again, a pure thrush word.

In this poem (reproduced from p.93 in Longley, 2008, *Edward Thomas: The Annotated Collected Poems*), Thomas' exquisite remembrance and exaltation of birdsong concentrates our thoughts on the nature of memory and unsettles hierarchies of proportion and scale then prevailing in the printed word, and in poetry especially (Longley, 2008, p.247). 'Anything, however small, may make a poem; nothing, however great, is certain to' (*Maurice Maeterlinck*, 1911 p.28 in Longley, 2008, 246-7). It also destabilizes the notion of history, juxtaposing that which enters the written record ('kings and fiends and gods') with supposedly 'lesser things', the scent of the wild rose and 'a pure thrush word.' The distillation of the entire mood of the poem into this intense phrase catches us almost unawares, and is breathtaking.

Gwilym Scourfield reads 'The Word ' in the rear garden of 113 Cowley Road, Oxford (Photo: Ben Keeping)

Then out onto the pavement of the bustling Cowley Road for the formal unveiling of the very attractive stone plaque, and photos were taken of the plaque and the group. Prof. Stephen Gill had kindly arranged for us to visit Lincoln College where Edward Thomas studied for his B.A. in Modern History. His college tutor was the distinguished Welsh scholar of seventeenth-century political thought and educationalist, Owen Morgan Edwards to whom Edward dedicated his second book, *Horae Solitariae* (1902).

Front Quad, Lincoln College (Photo: Jay Armstrong reproduced here with kind permission of Lincoln College)

One enters first into Front Quad, where the leaves of an ancient creeper cover the walls to a depth of several feet. Upon his arrival at Lincoln in October 1898, Edward described his 'first delightful glimpse of the grey, main quadrangle of Lincoln, so quiet and deserted, filled with the gaudy crimson of flying creeper leaves' in a letter to Helen (Cardiff University Library, CA 14.x.98). Edward Thomas is thought to have resided in college in rooms immediately above what had been John Wesley's rooms on Staircase 5 on the west side of Chapel Quad, overlooking Turl Street. It is pleasing to see how many Oxford colleges, Lincoln among them, are moving towards more naturalistic planting and organic cultivation of herbs and other edible plants. The 16th May 2015 was my uncle, Edward Eastaway Thomas' birthday and I am in no doubt that he would be heartened by such a development. His loss is keenly felt and it was very moving to know how warmly he was remembered. He would have enjoyed this happy occasion immensely as would all of Edward Thomas' family, with my mother, Elizabeth Parkhurst, saying how much pleasure this would have brought *their* parents, Julian and Maud Thomas.

Julia Maxted

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The Extra Edward Thomas Summer Walk – Saturday 27th June 2015

Seven Fellowship members met for the fourth annual Extra walk at The Queen Elizabeth Country Park near Buriton on Saturday 27th June for a nine-mile walk led by Pam and Stephen Turner. In brilliant sunshine the walk started with Stephen reading "Over the Hills" to inspire us for the steep climb to the top of Butser Hill. All the way up we admired the wild orchids which seem so prolific this year. A lark sang overhead. Having reached the summit with its glorious views Margaret Ducker read "First known when lost". We could see The Shoulder of Mutton hill and Steep in one direction and the sea in the other. We stood and thought for a moment about Edward's words "Yes, sixty miles of South Downs at one glance" from "Wind and Mist" which Pam and Stephen had read at Edward's memorial stone on the Birthday walk in March.

We moved on along the ridge and soon started the steady descent to a lane which led us under the A3 road towards Buriton and our lunch stop. The village was somewhat busier than usual with a wedding celebration which appeared to be an all day event with conflicting times given for the ceremony. Nevertheless the Five Bells delivered our pre ordered lunch promptly. After lunch we lingered by the attractive village pond admiring the huge carp swimming slowly around. Pam read "The Pond" before we started the steep climb up to Head Down. At the top of the climb we made a slight detour to the Buriton Chalk Pits where Cynthia and Terry Lloyd read "The Chalk Pit", albeit at a different location to the one in the poem.

The walk continued through the forest along the ridge and then through a large field of oil seed rape to the road in a valley. A mile of road walking was a relief after battling through the crop. We re-entered the Queen Elizabeth Country Park with another climb up to the ridge. At a point where the view towards the sea opened up, framed by trees and abundant foxgloves, we stopped for our final reading. New member Benedict Mackay read "Song [1]" before we started the descent back to the Park Centre for a very welcome cup of tea and cakes. A little bonus was the exhibition at the Park Centre of Jan Harbon's art work. Fellowship members may recall that Jan designed the CD cover for "Fast Beats My Heart" which was a recording of the anthology compiled by Chris Brown for the 90th anniversary of Edward Thomas' death in 2007. The picture used for the cover itself was on display.

Anyone who would be interested in a similar walk in 2016 should contact Stephen 01252 810852 or stephenjturner1@aol.com) to register an interest and to be kept informed of future similar walks.

Stephen Turner

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To accompany him from Hay Lane up by Bassett Down, and along the inner and outer edges of the terrace below the Downs as far as Uffington, is like being a child again and going with an elder on a round of visits to a score of strange, but friendly and delightful relatives, farmers, keepers, gardeners, smiths, labourers, all showing their best sides to the holiday visitor.

- Thomas's review of *Villages of the White Horse* by Alfred Williams

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May Hill Celebration Day

May Hill village hall was the bustling centre for a day of celebration on Saturday June 13th . People from several counties joined the locals to enjoy all things 'arty', 'crafty' and poetic, which had been inspired by or produced on May Hill and its immediate surroundings.

The idea for the day was conceived by The National Trust as one of their 'spirit of place' events, and sprang from the fact that Edward Thomas started to write his important poem 'Words' 100 years ago in June, while sitting on the slopes of the hill. Thomas was on a cycling tour from Gloucester to Coventry and had cycled to May Hill with his friend, local solicitor and botanist, John ('Jack') Haines.

The day's events included two guided walks led by National Trust rangers and, at appropriate stops, poems and readings inspired by the hill were read. Some of these were written in the early 20th century by the local 'Dymock Poets', but there were also more modern ones by the walkers themselves. The rangers were on hand to explain their management of the hill and to point out flora and fauna of interest as well as to answer any questions. Unfortunately nearly all the poems and readings referred to the normally wide-ranging views from the hill, which were completely obliterated by fog and drizzle. Nevertheless, the walkers were undeterred and professed to enjoy the 'spiritual' atmosphere as we climbed the hill. There had also been a poetry competition for poems inspired by the hill for which first, second and third winners of National Trust vouchers were announced in the hall at lunch time.

For those not walking, there was plenty to occupy them in the village hall. Local schools were showing their pupils' amazing colourful and very professional artwork that had been inspired by the hill. Tall pines displayed themselves next to bushy hawthorns and there were imaginative views of the whole hill, even including a road at the bottom. At the entrance to the hall the side of a large awning had been used for anyone coming or going to add their artistic ideas to a huge wall painting depicting animals, birds and flowers associated with the village and the hill. Refreshments were available in the form of Fairtrade tea and coffee, a May Hill Ploughman's lunch and a wonderful assortment of cakes made by a local catering company.

Stalls in the hall included jewellery, curtain pulls and key rings made out of local wood and snoods, hats, jumpers and other clothing made from wool from sheep farmed on May Hill. Beautiful cards and pictures of May Hill in a variety of materials abounded and one local artist was selling self-illustrated books of her own poetry inspired by the landscape and nature of the hill. Another local artist's own illustrations decorated a book of some of Edward Thomas's poems. To add to the celebratory atmosphere, a local folk couple were playing their own suitably rustic music. The whole day reflected the wide variety of excellent local talent produced by our wonderful May Hill.

Heather Cobby

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"The Thomas Manifesto" by John Monks
Handout to accompany "The true story of how Edward Thomas became a poet"
New Numbers: New Approaches, University of Gloucestershire, 6 June 2015

Thomas wrote to Gordon Bottomley in 1912 that *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* was finished but he is 'keeping it by me to tone it down for a few weeks' (*LGB*, p. 220). Its opening sentences shed light on this remark:

> Walter Pater is a hero—our modern English half-hero, half-martyr of Style. In his essay *On Style* he showed us the French martyr, Flaubert, grunting, sweating at the "tardy and painful" labour of prose composition. He himself is thought of as another such labourer but without grunting and sweating, because he was for half his lifetime a fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, a modest, polite, and quiet man. He was accused of collecting beautiful words and phrases on slips of paper and then arranging numbers of them in an arabesque, which was called an essay. (*WP*, p. 9)

What really astonishes Thomas is how poorly Pater, the "half-hero of Style", can write:

> The language is colourless, and from beginning to end each word has a mere dictionary value, and not one conferred by the context and the writer's personality. (*WP*, p. 97)

> Contemporary gossip credited [Pater] with a 'wonderful style'. It was obviously a style which aimed consciously at accuracy and a kind of perfection ... It had not attained to being a 'wonderful style' except by causing wonder. … For it retained no sign of an original impulse in it. (*WP*, pp. 100-101)

> The stiffness, the lack of an emotional rhythm in separate phrases, and of progress in the whole ... The rarity of blank verse in [Pater's] prose is the chief mark of its unnaturalness (*WP*, p. 103)

> On almost every page of his [Pater's] writing words are to be seen sticking out, like the raisins that will get burnt on an ill-made cake. (*WP*, p. 213)

Thomas embarks on a series of declarations that amount to a manifesto for his own writing. Their developing line of thought reminds one of the unfurling of his thoughts in one of his poems.

> Certainly deliberateness and patience alone can hardly make any writing perfect, unless it be a notice to trespassers or a railway guide. I doubt if they could adequately frame an advertisement of a fowl-house for sale. There must be an impulse before deliberate effort and patience are called in, and if that impulse has not been powerful and enduring the work of its subordinates will be too apparent. (*WP*, pp. 198-9)

> … men understand now the impossibility of speaking aloud all that is within them, and if they do not speak it, they cannot write as they speak. The most they can do is to write as they would speak in a less solitary world. A man cannot say all that is in his heart to a woman or another man. The waters are too deep between us. We have not the confidence in what is within us, nor in our voices. ... But the silence of solitude is kindly; it allows a man to speak as if there were another in the world like himself; and in very truth, out of the multitudes, in the course of years, one or two may come, or many, who can enter that solitude and converse with him, inspired by him to confidence and articulation. (*WP*, p. 208)

> [It is the remoteness of words] not from speech, but from thought that can destroy a writer's style. … Much good poetry is far from the speech of any men now, or perhaps at any recorded time, dwelling on this earth. There would be no poetry if men could speak all that they think and all that they feel. Each great new writer is an astonishment to his own age [...] (*WP*, p. 209)

> [Literature] has to make words of such a spirit, and arrange them in such a manner, that they will do all that a speaker can do by innumerable gestures and their innumerable shades, by tone and pitch of voice, by speed, by pauses, by all that he is and all that he will become. (*WP*, p. 210)

> Only when a word has become necessary to him can a man use it safely; if he try to impress words by force on a sudden occasion, they will either perish of his violence or betray him. (*WP*, p. 215)

> Unless a man write with his whole nature concentrated upon his subject he is unlikely to take hold of another man. For that man will read, not as a scholar, a philologist, a word-fancier, but as a man with all his race, age, class, and personal experience brought to bear on the matter. (*WP*, pp. 215-6)

> When words are used like bricks they are likely to inflict yet another punishment on the abuser ... They refuse to fall into the rhythms which only emotion can command. ... Nothing so much as the writer's rhythm can give that intimate effect 'as if he had been talking.' Rhythm is of the essence of a sincere expressive style. (*WP*, p. 218)

As well as being a springboard for Thomas to liberate himself from Pater's influence, *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* reveals itself as a means for Thomas to lecture himself on the principles of good writing. How profoundly the writing of it influenced his literary development can be gauged from the content of his first letter of substance to his new poet friend Robert Frost. Referring to Frost's theories on the sound of speech in literature, Thomas said: "My 'Pater' would show you I had got onto the scent already," and in the same letter he momentously asks Frost "whether you can imagine me taking to verse" (*Robert Frost and Edward Thomas to One Another*, p. 10).

Sources:
Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley. ed. R. George Thomas. Oxford University Press, 1968 [*LGB*]
Walter Pater: A Critical Study. Folcroft, Pennsylvania: Folcroft Library Editions, 1974. (London: Martin Secker, 1913). [*WP*]
Elected Friends: Robert Frost and Edward Thomas to One Another. ed. Matthew Spencer. New York: Handsel Books, 2003

Dr John Monks (jbmonks@btinternet.com)

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"If I could live long enough": Edward Thomas, 1915 and war poetry
by John Monks

In December 1914 Edward Thomas wrote in Harold Monro's quarterly magazine *Poetry and Drama* that war poetry does not last.[1] Thomas was being true to a principle he had set out three years earlier in his study of the symbolist poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. He said then that whatever the subject, a "poem must not depend for its main effect on anything outside itself except the humanity of the reader."[2]

Today I would like to take those words as the starting point for considering Thomas's war poetry in 1915 and the effect his enlistment in the Artists' Rifles—a hundred years ago this month—had on it. This is broadly the brief I was given and it has been an interesting assignment. Particularly interesting because it casts light on some of the questions that surround our numbering Thomas among the war poets; interesting too because the beginning of 1915 was only a month after Thomas's poems began to flow, and what is certainly his best war poem "As the team's head-brass" came the following year.

On the other hand, a Thomas poem that is repeatedly included in World War One anthologies, "In Memoriam (Easter 1915)", signals the significance of the year; while Thomas's most anthologised poem of all, "Adlestrop", that celebrates the last glorious summer of pre-war England, was composed in the wintry early January of 1915 when news of the war's progress was dismal to say the least.

So 1915 raises issues about Thomas as a war poet: was he, for example, a war poet for only some of the time, in some of his poems? Or is Michael Longley, a poet who has drawn on Edward Thomas and the First World War in his own work, nearer the truth when he says: "If the cosmos of the poem is the Great War, then that's it."[3]

Put like that, it is perfectly possible in one sense to regard all Thomas's poetry as war poetry because it was all written after the declaration of the First World War, slightly less than half of it after he enlists but all while the war was in or on his mind.

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[1] 'War Poetry' in *A Language Not To Be Betrayed*, ed Edna Longley (1981), pp.131-35.
[2] Edward Thomas,*Maurice Maeterlinck* (1911), p. 28.
[3] Michael Longley, Andrew Motion and Jon Stallworthy, 'War Poetry: A Conversation" ed Santanu Das in *The Cambridge Companion to The Poetry of the First World War* (2013), p. 260.

The question I will ask is whether this background helps us to understand the poetry better.

Open an anthology of First World War poetry. Turn to Isaac Rosenberg's "Dead Man's Dump". Read of a man's brains splattered on a stretcher-bearer's face. Thomas never recorded anything like that because he wrote no poems after he embarked for France, so we need to explore how he achieves so much as a war poet with what some might call so little experience.

The best critical guide to this is Thomas himself. That passage on Maeterlinck I referred to also says that although a poem may have the flavour of its times by relying on some "transient interest"—political interest, for example—"sooner or later, it will be left naked and solitary … and if it does not create about itself a world of its own it is condemned to endure the death which is its element."[4]

If ever a class of poetry appears to depend for effect on circumstances outside itself it is war poetry. World War One poetry in particular is inseparable from how we think of that war today. When Thomas wrote his article on "War Poetry" for *Poetry and Drama* he had in mind the uprush of patriotic poems then appearing in the newspapers. The article's opening is scornful: "If they also serve who only sit and write, poets are doing their work well," Thomas writes. He goes on: "Whatever other virtues they show, courage at least is not lacking—the courage to write for oblivion," because "no other class of poetry vanishes so rapidly" as that written under the pressure of public patriotic motives.

It was easy for a critic with Thomas's acute ear to pick out the "bombastic, hypocritical or senseless" in the jingoistic heroic verses of the early months of the war. It is estimated *The Times* received 100 poems a day in August 1914 while in Germany that month more than a million poems are said to have been written—another aspect of Germany's superior war footing. Edward Osborn, who edited an anthology *The Muse in Arms* in 1917, remarked that the "bombardment of defenceless persons by 'concealed batteries of poets' had added a new terror to warfare."[5] But those were literate times. People read, wrote and sang their way through the First World War, and Thomas was right: most of it has been forgotten, even though deemed inspiring or patriotic at the time.

Thomas was a realist and knew that great poetry was not what the occasion required. Anything lofty and noble-sounding was the order of the day. Nor was he narrow-minded in his criticism. "These poems are not to be attacked any more than hymns," he says. Yet his parody of Milton—"If they also serve who only sit and write" — carries an unsettling charge, an ambiguity of response that one cannot quite ignore. Serve, in the context of the time, meant essentially one thing: serving the country's need by answering the call to volunteer. When Thomas was writing his article, casualty lists in the newspapers were growing daily. Volunteering was an act of courage as well as duty; actual oblivion a very likely outcome.

Thomas consciously or unconsciously conflates the actions of courageous volunteers with those of patriotic versifiers whose work is doomed to be forgotten. One could almost say it downplays soldiers' courage in the face of their own personal oblivion. Was it really the occasion to be tongue-in-cheek in this way? Was Thomas sounding a note of anti-war criticism as well as literary criticism? What does

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[4] Edward Thomas, *Maurice Maeterlinck* (1911), p. 28.
[5] *The Muse in Arms*, ed E. B. Osborn (1917), p. xii.

it tell us about his sensitivity to the war that helps us to understand him as a war poet? One of the emotions concealed within the jokiness, I suggest, is anxiety—Thomas's very natural worry about what the war will hold for him. Anxiety is a significant aspect of his war poetry.

Wilfred Owen in his sonnet "1914" sensed the war had imposed premature and global darkness:

> War broke: and now the Winter of the world
> With perishing great darkness closes in

and this darkness threatened to overwhelm European civilisation. The darkness that characterises Thomas's poem "The Combe" composed on 30 December 1914, is local by comparison:

> The Combe was ever dark, ancient and dark.
> Its mouth is stopped with bramble, thorn, and briar;
> And no one scrambles over the sliding chalk
> By beech and yew and perishing juniper
> Down the half precipices of its sides, with roots
> And rabbit holes for steps. The sun of Winter,
> The moon of Summer, and all the singing birds
> Except the missel-thrush that loves juniper,
> Are quite shut out. But far more ancient and dark
> The Combe looks since they killed the badger there,
> Dug him out and gave him to the hounds,
> That most ancient Briton of English beasts.

The poem, that confronts an unpleasant though familiar occurrence in the countryside, does not mention the war but it can nevertheless be construed as a war poem: the hollow of the combe, a natural place of safety for the badger, being a metaphor for the trenches being dug in Flanders that are darker when the English soldiers are "dug out" to be given to the Huns, so near in sound to the poem's hounds. The badger was given resonance as a symbol of immemorial England squaring up to modernity in *Wind in the Willows*, published in the vanished Edwardian summertime of 1908. Meanings in "The Combe" become complex through allusion, which contributes to the poem's power.

Another poem that generates uneasiness on a larger scale than its ostensible subject matter is "The Hollow Wood" written the following day, New Year's Eve. Here birds swim like "Fish that laugh and shriek", and trees are "half-flayed and dying" or are dead on their knees in dog's mercury, a highly poisonous woodland plant. This is nature turning against itself. The trees are described in terms applicable to victims of violence, and what is still lively and bright, the goldfinch's song, drops down into the horrific abyss. It is easy to sense the war, although again there is no mention of it. War may be present in both poems although it is far from being the only story these wintry nature poems tell.

On New Year's Day 1915, Thomas composed "The New Year", his third poem in three days. The poet describes meeting an old man raking leaves "up in the woods /that stormy New Year's morning". To the poet's "A Happy New Year" the

old man mutters "Happy New Year, and may it come fastish too" — which is what you might call a multi-layered response. What did the old man imply? Grumpiness at raking leaves; grudging politeness; a complaint about the weather—or a comment on the war, which had, after all, been forecast to be over by Christmas? Or does the answer carry all four of these meanings?

Before going over the top, sensing the war everywhere, we should take our bearings. Thomas's literary criticism suggests co-ordinates that help us to decide to what extent to read these poems as metaphors for the war. He wrote:

> We are almost certain that [poets'] words have often come to mean something different from what was consciously present in their minds when they wrote, and often more vast.[6]

So the backdrop of the war can be something "vast", a cosmos say, that the readers themselves supply. Thomas feels very up-to-date in discounting the importance of authorial intention.

But stressing the war rather than the poetry will often have the effect of making a poem feel less important as an object for consideration than its context. "In Memoriam (Easter 1915)" can confidently be called a war poem. As such it is one of Thomas's best known and is now most frequently encountered in World War One anthologies. The intensity of this setting has sentimentalised, even exaggerated, its poetic impact.

Familiarity may have dimmed their freshness, but consider the stiffness of the lines:

> The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood
> This Eastertide call into mind the men,
> Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should
> Have gathered them and will do never again.

There is the vagueness, unusual for Thomas, of the word "flowers" in the first line; the "churchy" "Eastertide" in the second; the ponderous title. The subject matter is grave but the short poem is rather monotone, conventional in thought and expression; only the downplayed pun hiding in the words "call into mind" sets up poetic resonance.

But remove the poem—rescue it, I might say—from the context of the World War One anthology where it hangs like a picture at an exhibition, and pair it with the short poem "Lovers" that Thomas wrote the previous day—5 April 1915, the day after Easter Day that year in fact—and there is a sudden opening up and complex feelings collide:

> The two men in the road were taken aback.
> The lovers came out shading their eyes from the sun,
> And never was white so white, or black so black,
> As her cheeks and hair. "There are more things than one
> A man might turn into a wood for, Jack,"

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[6] Edward Thomas, *Maurice Maeterlinck* (1911), p. 20.

Said George; Jack whispered: "He has not got a gun.
It's a bit too much of a good thing, I say.
They are going the other road, look. And see her run."
She ran. — "What a thing it is, this picking may."

The irony of "He has not got a gun" and "They are going the other road" combines into unspoken criticism of the lovers, he for not having enlisted, she for not having persuaded him. The poet of 1915 would not have been immune from Kitchener's message: "Your country needs YOU" and these lovers contrast with the other lovers of "In Memoriam (Easter 1915)" who have paid the price. In both poems the flowers are unpicked but for starkly different reasons, but nonetheless, Thomas's criticism of the lovers in the wood is muted, to say the least. It is to be regretted that these two mutually reflecting poems are split by frequent anthologizing of the second as a war poem when together they give a much more telling commentary.
Two sets of circumstances are held in balance in "Lovers": a humorous country sketch and the unmentioned vast bleak canvas of the war. In "A Private", also from 1915, the countryside is brought into closer contact with the war because the ploughman is "dead in battle"; but where his body lies in France is as much a mystery as where he slept many a frozen night out of doors on the downs after a night's drinking.

Appreciation of nature and observation of country ways of life were stock ingredients of poetry and prose in England at the start of the 20th century — Thomas built much of his early reputation as a prose writer on them. It is not surprising therefore that the countryside became a stock image for what the war was about. "Our own green land" as the Scottish writer Charles Scott Moncrieff described it, was in danger of invasion.[7] Charles Hamilton Sorley, killed at Loos in the autumn of 1915, wrote in the summer of that year: "England remains the dream, the background: at once the memory and the ideal."[8] This is the feeling Thomas captures in "Adlestrop", composed in January 1915, with its memory of a calm, settled, rural England, timeless as birdsong, but the date significantly emphasized: "It was late June". A timeless summer, but also a very particular summer, when a train made an unscheduled stop at a certain remote station in Gloucestershire in "late June": ie June 1914, before the war was declared. But casting "Adlestrop" as a war poem is an example of pushing the boundaries too far.

Other poems by Thomas in 1915 about the English countryside emphasize loss or sudden termination, even violence: In "Over the Hills", "Recall /Was vain"; in "The Cuckoo", "The cuckoo's note would be drowned by the voice of my dead"; doubt assails the memory of the rare and beautiful birdsong in "The Unknown Bird"; a violent storm bursts in "The Mill-Pond"; Jack Norman disappears in "May 23"; "The Path" ends "sudden—where the wood ends", a sudden death ending denying any further progress towards where "men have wished to go / And stay." These poems appear to speak of a threatened England, in some cases gone forever or becoming an intangible memory.

While the war made the sights and sounds of the countryside and their beauty more immediate and intense for soldiers and civilians alike, Wilfred Owen,

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[7] Charles Scott Moncrieff, "Domum (Omnibis Wiccamicis)".
[8] *The Letters of Charles Sorley* (1919) p. 275.

always a bit different, felt it was the English language that was being threatened: "Do you know what would hold me together on a battlefield?" he famously wrote to his mother. "The sense that I was perpetuating the language in which Keats and the rest of them wrote! I do not know in what else England is greatly superior."[9]

In his own way, Thomas expressed the same feeling. In the mental turmoil preceding his enlistment, he wrote "Words" in June 1915. "Words" is a celebration and an invocation of the English language that has from immemorial times been "as dear as the earth". The poet implores English words to choose him

> As the winds use
> A crack in the wall
> Or a drain
> Their joy and pain
> To whistle through –

Just as "Keats and the rest of them" were present in Owen's mind, so they were for Thomas in the extreme Keatsian negative capability or self-effacement of the request for words to choose the poet, and in the inspiration of Shelley's west wind. "Words" affirms language as poetry's DNA. This is perfectly in accord with Thomas's literary criticism: words do a poem's work by being continually "worn new" and not by relying on anything outside the poem, which would certainly include the war.

Edna Longley, commenting on Thomas's poems having all been written before embarkation for France, suggests they might be called "literature of preparation", because "as they explore the present and the past, they remember the future".[10] I think this is a very clear way of putting it. It expresses exactly the anxious recalling of what the future might hold that concludes "Fifty Faggots" composed in mid-1915. You do not need to know that the poem was written in the run-up to Thomas's enlistment to sense the jumpiness in the poet's state of mind.

> 'Twas a hot day for carrying them up:
> Better they will never warm me, though they must
> Light several Winters' fires. Before they are done
> The war will have ended, many other things
> Have ended, maybe, that I can no more
> Foresee or more control than robin and wren.

The jerky movement of thought between past, present and unsure future is given greater emphasis by the unsureness of the poem's form—it is a sonnet, unresolved by the time it reaches its 14th line, and given an extra line which itself has an extra syllable, to round it off with an inconclusive worry that the future is beyond prediction or control. But the war does not make an appearance until the 13th line. By then a mood has been established: nothing that human beings are involved with can be trusted to be permanent or certain: even the blackbird or robin—images of natural innocence—that will nest in the pile of faggots destined for winter fires, will

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[9] Wilfred Owen, *Collected Letters* (1967), p. 300.
[10] Edna Longley, 'Edward Thomas and Ivor Gurney' in *The Cambridge Companion to The Poetry of the First World War* (2013), p. 129.

do so because they mistakenly sense they are a nesting place that will remain for ever or "Whatever is for ever to a bird". War takes its place at the end of the poem both as a "reason" for the poet's state of mind, but also as a culminating image for human destructiveness of the natural order. In this way the poem expands beyond consideration of the poet's personal or other historical circumstances.

Thomas's "long series of moods and thoughts" before he enlisted—which is how he described the process to Gordon Bottomley[11]—have been well chronicled especially recently. From July 1915, after passing his medical for the Artists' Rifles, he can be counted among the ranks of the soldier poets, ranks being the operative word because it was not until a year later that Thomas applied for a commission. Did enlistment make a difference to his poetry? Can we distinguish the soldier poet from the civilian one?

It is an interesting question. Sometimes one cannot tell whether a war poet is in uniform or not. Consider these lines:

> "I cannot quite remember … There were five
> Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
> Whispered their dying messages to me …"[12]

And these:

> Mind that rut. It is very deep.
> All these ways are parched and raw.
> Where are we going? How we creep!
> Are you there? I never saw — [13]

These stanzas date from the beginning of the war but are by poets who were still civilians, Wilfrid Gibson and Harold Monro, though both were writing in the voices of serving soldiers. As the war progressed, the trench poet writing directly of first-hand experience of the Front became the defining figure of World War One poetry. Owen's poetry took on its mission to warn. Osbert Sitwell, who survived the trenches, wrote in 1917, "We are poets / And shall tell the truth".[14]

Thomas, however, writes no poems about military life in 1915 and in fact produces only one that engages directly with his comrades in arms, "Home—Fair was the morning", composed in March 1916. In a sense, as a soldier poet Thomas remains the same partial outsider he was all his life. The final lines of "Cock-crow", composed after he had joined up, illustrate this:

> And bright before my eyes twin trumpeters stand,
> Heralds of splendour, one at either hand,
> Each facing each as in a coat of arms:
> The milkers lace their boots up at the farms.

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[11] *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley* (1968), p. 253.
[12] Wilfrid Gibson, "The Messages".
[13] Harold Monro, "Youth In Arms".
[14] Osbert Sitwell, "Rhapsode".

This works on two levels. The final image is a stunning and beautifully managed surprise and emotional jolt, but it also links two separate worlds, the pastoral patriotic and the rural mundane, that the war has brought into conjunction. And Thomas, the poet, is attached to both. It is sometimes necessary to remember when considering war poetry is as refined as this, that war poems are not just the domain of the literary: this too is war poetry from a Tyneside soldier who also heard the "heralds of spendour" as Thomas did:

> I heard the bugles callin' an' join I felt I must,
> Now I wish I'd let them go on blowin' till they bust.[15]

Thomas wrote no poems at all from mid-July 1915 when he joined his regiment until mid-October, and then only five during the rest of the year, compared with 71 in the earlier months. Helen's affectionate comment that he meticulously kept his uniform's buttons and buckles brightly polished and everything in regulation order[16] supports the impression in his letters that his new army life absorbed him emotionally and physically. Only a private soldier knows what it is to be a slave, Isaac Rosenberg complained.[17] Nevertheless it was astounding how serving soldiers snatched a moment here and there for poetry: "Subalterns have been seen with a notebook in one hand and bombs in the other … in deep communion with the Muse" observed the trench magazine *The Wipers Times*;[18] while other ranks too seized the moment: Private George Mackinlay's "Sentry Go" for instance is subtitled "Lines written in Springfield Goods Station, Falkirk".

Equipped with information from Thomas's notebooks and other sources we can plot the dates of Thomas's compositions against his army postings. "The Thrush" from November 1915 was written the day he was ordered to stay behind as hut-orderly at Hare Hall camp in Essex while the others went on an exercise; "Rain" the following January was composed on his way home from camp on leave; "Out in the Dark" on his final Christmas Eve with his family before mobilization for France, for example. But isn't this exactly what Thomas would have disapproved of—this placing of appreciation within a narrative that depends on something else outside the poem?

I do have an answer to this but want to duck the question for a minute to suggest that enlistment does herald a change that can be felt in the poems. Thomas's watershed poem is "Haymaking", finished the day before he went to the Artists' Rifles Headquarters in London to enquire about enlistment. There is no mistaking "Haymaking" as an act of summing-up. Thomas gathers motifs—all of which are to be found in his country books and poems to date—into a composite picture of the English countryside, frames them in the poem and hangs them "out of reach of change" in the gallery of his patriotic anthology of English writers *This England* that was published of 1915. That, of course, is also the conceit in the poem, where the timeless scene is immortalized in a painting. Thomas makes it a kind of double image by his own poetic framing.

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[15] Quoted in *Tommy Rot: WW1 Poetry They Didn't Let You Read*, ed J. Sadler and R. Serdiville (2013), p. 292.
[16] Helen Thomas, *As It Was and World Without End*, combined edn (1972), p. 165.
[17] *Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. Vivien Noakes, 21st Century Oxford Authors series (2008), p. 292.
[18] Quoted in Randall Stevenson, *Literature and The Great War* (2013), p. 127.

"Haymaking" presents the England Thomas famously explained he was fighting for by picking up a handful of soil and saying "literally for this"—a gesture that may have had its origin in an much earlier one by Helen that she records in *World Without End*. She and Edward had just moved to their first home in the country, Rose Acre Cottage. She stooped down and took up a handful of earth and let it fall through her fingers, telling Edward, "There's nothing left to wish for. … we are in the country and it is spring."[19] If Thomas was recalling Helen's gesture in his own, it was fitting. Enlistment brought that period of the relationship between himself and England, and indeed with Helen, to a close.

After "Haymaking", self-examination and self-definition are dominant themes in the poems written around the time of enlistment. "Aspens", for example, composed while Thomas waited for his medical, clarifies—a touch truculently you might think—what makes the poet tick:

> Whatever wind blows, while they and I have leaves
> We cannot other than an aspen be
> That ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves,
> Or so men think who like a different tree.

"For These", completed on the day the doctors passed him, initially matches "Haymaking's" timeless country scene with the delights of living in the country; but then Thomas, newly-pronounced-fit-for-military-service, abruptly redefines the poet's attitude and states that the idyllic picture of England is not enough. "For These" ends with a prayer that defines the poet, not the land:

> For these I ask not, but, neither too late
> Nor yet too early, for what men call content,
> And also that something may be sent
> To be contented with, I ask of fate.

In the quartet of poems that ends the three-month poetic drought that coincides with Thomas's initial military training—"October", "There's nothing like the sun", "The Thrush" and "Liberty"—war and England are felt as incidental to the wider universe of nature and the seasons. It is the time of year rather than the place in the world that sets the poet's mood. "There's nothing like the sun", the first poem Thomas wrote at Hare Hall Camp, concludes with shattering effect after some daring pyrotechnics:

> But I have not forgot
> That there is nothing, too, like March's sun,
> Like April's, or July's, or June's, or May's,
> Or January's, or February's, great days:
> August, September, October, and December
> Have equal days, all different from November.
> No day of any month but I have said—
> Or, if I could live long enough, should say—
> "There's nothing like the sun that shines today."

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[19] Helen Thomas, *As It Was and World Without End*, combined edn (1972), p. 88.

There's nothing like the sun till we are dead.

We know the context is war. We sense urgency and anxiety, such as in the virtuoso and obsessive naming of every month of the year as if to take cover from fate by superstitiously leaving nothing out. But, and this is the point: anyone alive feels sometimes the same uncertainties about mortality.

But the final poem Thomas wrote in 1915 is undeniably a war poem. The biographical background to "This is no case of petty right or wrong" is well known. During his Christmas leave Thomas argued with his father about what he believed was his father's "rampant" patriotism. Thomas couldn't sleep afterwards.[20] His verse bursts into life as if in the middle of a dispute. Then he flings out a challenge:

I hate not Germans, nor grow hot
With love of Englishmen, to please newspapers.
Beside my hate for one fat patriot
My hatred of the Kaiser is love true:
A kind of god he is, banging a gong.

The feeling that this is clumsily expressed comes, I think, from the succession of inversions, "hate not", "love true", "a kind of god he is". The aim is forceful expression but it tips over into bluster. The "fat patriot" is an imprecisely referenced figure. Surely there were thin patriots who spoke and wrote jingoistically. Or is it Winston Churchill whose expedition to Gallipoli earlier in 1915 brought death to Rupert Brooke? Is it a reference to those who hypocritically profit from the war, or is Thomas simply using gratuitous insult? Or is it in reverse the kind of over-the-top, knee-jerk reaction that Thomas himself censures in his father's "rampant" patriotism? Certainly the reference to the Kaiser as "a kind of god" exciting love when contrasted with the poet's hatred of patriotism would have appeared close to sedition to some people in 1915.

It was far from unusual at the time to say one did not hate Germans as Germans; but World War One war poetry still has very far to go in terms of sensibility and experience before it reaches Owen's masterpiece "Strange Meeting" of 1918 with its great line: "I am the enemy you killed, my friend", the original version of which line was "I was a German conscript and your friend".

The final section of "This is no case of petty right or wrong" strays dangerously close to the kind of patriotic expression that Thomas himself censures in the "War Poetry" article with which this talk began. It is "unusually rhapsodic" for Thomas," Edna Longley remarks,[21] but there are, I think, two points to note especially about this puzzling poem: one is that Thomas's patriotic rhetoric contains no mention of sacrifice—the poet envisages being alive at the end of the war and at liberty to ignore what historians say about it; and then there is a contradiction at the heart of the poem—it appears to be acceptable for the poet to hate Germans as the enemy but not for newspapers to express the same policy.

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[20] *Elected Friends: Robert Frost and Edward Thomas to One Another*, ed Matthew Spencer (2003), pp 89 and 115.

[21] Edna Longley, 'Edward Thomas and Ivor Gurney' in *The Cambridge Companion to The Poetry of the First World War* (2013), p. 134.

So Thomas's poems of 1915 finish with an unsatisfactory war poem that is also his first overt war poem as a soldier-poet. I have interpreted other poems, composed either side of enlistment, as war poems by relying on knowledge of the circumstances—the cosmos, if you like—of their composition. These interpretations seem to me to add to the poems' depth and appeal. But in the process what has happened to Thomas's dictum that "Whatever the subject, the poem must not depend for its main effect on anything outside itself except the humanity of the reader"?

Thomas also wrote in the same critical work on Maeterlinck that a poem "has a simple fundamental meaning which every sane reader can agree upon," and that "above and beyond this each one builds as he can or must."[22] The danger in construing some poems that do not reference the war as war poems is in taking too much into account—the historical context or the poet's biography—that falls outside literary criticism so that the poem itself tends to be in the background. T S Eliot addresses this problem in his essay "The Frontiers of Criticism". "One can explain a poem by investigating what it is made of and the causes that brought it about," he writes, but he goes on, that to understand a poem it is also necessary that we should aim to grasp the poetry in its final realised state.[23]

I think Thomas's poetry shows the truth of both propositions. His is the poetry of a civilian and subsequently a soldier facing the anxieties that spring from the choice of uncertain survival, without a romantic sense of duty, at least as expressed in his poems, to nerve him; looking inwards and outwards, forwards and backwards, is natural for someone under that stress.

I have shown how our appreciation of the "cosmos" of the war, as Michael Longley put it, helps to explain some of Thomas's poems in terms of their response to circumstances and contextualises them as war poems.

But I have also pointed to the danger that the poetry can be overshadowed when a poem is viewed in the context of outside events or the poet's biography. Thomas's war poems are best understood as creating self-contained worlds. The poems achieve what they aim to do through the action of the words, free from anything extraneous "except the humanity of the reader".

Consider lines like these, from "There's nothing like the sun":

I have said
Or, if I could live long enough, should say
'There's nothing like the sun that shines today'

They will always have an effect, in peace or wartime; what matter that Thomas wrote them in an army camp?

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[22] Edward Thomas, *Maurice Maeterlinck* (1911), p. 21.
[23] T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), p. 100.
Randall Stevenson, *Literature and the Great war 1914-1918*, Oxford University Press (2013) and *The Cambridge Companion to The Poetry of the First World War* ed Santanu Das (2013) were both consulted for background for the talk.

Edward Thomas' Poem 'Adlestrop'

by Janice Lingley

Edward Thomas' poem 'Adlestrop' judiciously employs rhyme, alliteration, repetition, assonance and consonance to impose meaning on the varied and disparate verbal texture. The following suggests that the unevenness of register of the poem's diction is part of its meaning.

The poem takes the form of a first-person narrative describing, or rather annotating, a train making a brief, unscheduled stop at a small country station in the Cotswolds, on a very warm and still mid-summer afternoon. The incident spans what is stated to be no more than a minute in time. The narrative's component elements are mainly aural and visual. The hissing of the steam train and an unidentified person (apparently a passenger inside the train) clearing his throat, the implied station name-board, and the platform empty of travellers either alighting or joining the train, forms a preliminary. There then follows a repertory of the sighting of willow trees, great willowherb, meadowsweet, grass, a farm field with dry harvested hay, small high isolated clouds and finally the hearing of a blackbird's song.

It is known from Thomas' field notebooks that the incident described in the poem is autobiographical. The entry dated 24 June 1914, records details of a train journey Thomas undertook on the Oxford to Worcester express, towards what may well have been the destination of Ledbury. It is clear from these notes that the poem which finally emerged after a number of revisions was suggested, rather than dictated, by actuality.[1]

The identity of the I-persona is an enigma. The poem's opening implies a conversational response, addressed to an unidentified person, which is in a sense 'overheard', and suggests a retrospective discussion centering on the name 'Adlestrop.' But the significance of the name is then seemingly deferred. The express-train is foregrounded and its presence symbolised in the summary image introducing the second stanza – *The steam hissed*. The word 'hissed' has connotations of derision and aggression. The *st* sound, beginning and ending noun and verb, is emphatic, and is anticipated in the compounding of 'express' and 'train'. The digraph first occurs, and recurs, in *Adlestrop*, and is heard in *less still* (juxtaposed), *mistier* and finally *Gloucestershire*. These repetitions form a significant pattern of sound and sense. Moreover, the hissing of the steam engine and the passenger clearing his throat are in juxtaposition and as inarticulate sounds are notionally akin. They imply an identity of Man and Machine, which in some way is perhaps to subvert or impose negatively upon the utterance which follows. In the formulation of this line, Thomas perhaps was also conscious of the linguistic register of the primary meanings of 'express'. Some lines from T S Eliot's poem 'Little Gidding' come to mind:

> So I assumed a double part, and cried
> And heard another's voice cry: 'What! Are you here?'
> Although we were not, I was still the same,

[1] Edna Longley, *Edward Thomas, the annotated collected poems* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2008), p. 176)

Knowing myself yet being someone other – [2]

The I-persona does not attempt to describe in detail the scene viewed from the perspective of the train; but his perception of the significance it had for him *is* recorded. The recurrence of the place-name (line 8) as something seen rather than as something memorised – *What I saw Was Adlestrop* - permits its collocation – achieved by the cumulative repetition of the conjunction *and* (lines 9-10) - with the annotation of the rural scene about the station. This association of a rather distinctive and ancient rural English place-name with aspects of its attendant land- and sky-scape is said to be - *No whit less still and lonely fair Than the high cloudlets in the sky*. What is apprehended, it seems, is 'still', in the sense of enduring, 'lonely', in the sense of unique, and 'fair', in the sense of beautiful. The internal and end-rhyme of 'dry', 'high' and 'sky' brings to mind the opening lines of another poem by Thomas: *The Past is a strange land, most strange. Wind blows not there, nor does rain fall.*[3] The height of the rather poetic 'cloudlets' provides a hint of the sublime. The phrase *lonely fair* is culled from late eighteenth century verse and this contributes to the sense of a literary past.[4] The feeling of tranquillity, solitude and beauty asserted by the I-persona is reinforced by the rhyming of 'only' in *only the name* (line 8) with 'lonely' in *lonely fair* (line 11). The song of the blackbird apparently communicated to the poem's I-persona these ideas in quintessence. The 'and' conjunction is brought again into play, in the final stanza, to provide a link with the blackbird's song and then its extended identity with the song of *all the birds Of Oxfordshire* (which, it appears, the train has already traversed) *and Gloucestershire* (in which Adlestrop is situated).' The preposition 'for' in the phrase *and for that minute* (line 13) conveys not only the idea of duration, but also the sense of giving expression to, or symbolising.

The archaic and literary quality of lines 11 and 12 is presaged by the deployment of 'unwontedly' in the first stanza, which is contrastively linked by vocalic alliteration - afternoon, express, up - with the train's arrival. The modernity of the train is intended, it seems, to consort rather oddly, rather than mediate, with the register of 'unwontedly', and the use of the comparable language qualifying the village name and the features of the natural world which are its concomitants in lines 8-12. It is not only these literal images that are retained in the I-persona's memory but also, it would appear, the voices of the past.

This historical sense may be applied to the name 'Adlestrop'. For anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the philology of English place-names the medial *s* immediately suggests that the first element of 'Adlestrop' derives from the possessive form of what was probably an Old English personal name and that the second element must therefore denote some sort of area of settlement. The place-name has in fact been interpreted on the basis of the available historical evidence to mean 'Taetel's outlying hamlet'.[5] The poem's final line places emphasis by repetition on the word 'shire', suggesting perhaps an historical awareness of the ancient system of boundaries which originated in the ancient kingdom of Wessex.

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[2] T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets: Little Gidding* (1942), lines 97-100.

[3] The poem entitled 'Parting': Longley, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61, and the Note, p. 193: the expression is an adaptation of lines from Tennyson's *The Passing of Arthur*, on the subject of the Isle of Avalon.

[4] See Kelsey Thornton's article in the *Friends of the Dymock Poets Newsletter*, No. 62, August 2014, pp. 3-4. The expression 'lonely fair' is from James Macpherson's *Ossianic* poem entitled 'The Cave'.

[5] See the website of the Institute for Name Studies at the University of Nottingham.

So the words *I remember* of the poem's first line may be regarded as reaching further back in time than the lifetime of the I-persona. To this area of meaning may be adduced the sense of the word *mistier* and the phrase *farther and farther*, in the final stanza. The idea of collective bird song purports to be in aural identity with the reality of the single blackbird's utterance, but seems exterior to and beyond the time of the poem's narrative. The word *mistier*, suggesting opacity, does not register with the notion of aural experience, and is inconsistent with a clear summer's day. The word suggests a variation on the theme of, to use a rather trite phrase, 'the mists of time', and *farther*, distance in the sense of times past, rather than the literalism of distance travelled.

The viewing of the rural scene from the perspective of the speaker's identity as a passenger in a vehicle, whose large presence is 'unwontedly' an intrusion upon the scene nominally invoked, is essentially ironic. Man in identity with the Machine is something that Thomas explored at greater length and with more graphic irony in his visionary poem entitled 'Ambition', which predates 'Adlestrop' in the chronological sequence of the Longley edition.[6] The I-persona of this poem is both a personification of 'Ambition' and of the steam train he apparently venerates, and as such apes the expression of the Romantic poet. In exaggerated style, a solitary jackdaw, *racing straight and high* in the sky in imitation of the train's linear movement, and *shouting like a black warrior Challenges and menaces to the wide sky*, serves as a herald of the train's loud incursion into the rural valley compared with Elysium. Here is the description of Thomas' exceptional steam train.

> *A train that roared along raised after it*
> *And carried with it a motionless white bower*
> *Of purest cloud, from end to end close-knit,*
> *So fair it touched the roar with silence. Time*
> *Was powerless while that lasted. I could sit*
> *And think I had made the loveliness of prime,*
> *Breathed life into it and were its lord,*
> *And no mind lived save this 'twixt clouds and rime.*

The word 'prime' has some interesting connotations. It suggests the notion of the steam locomotive as a 'prime mover'. In engineering parlance, a prime mover is a machine that converts fuel to useful work. It is perhaps difficult to appreciate now the extent to which the English landscape was altered to serve the demands of the railway system. In the boom period of 1830-1850, vast areas were reshaped to provide the necessary causeways, embankments, bridges, cuttings, tunnels and viaducts for the mechanised track ways which were an essential component of the industrial revolution, and led to the creation of national markets. But the development of the steam engine also had a profound cultural impact. It became the archetypal symbol of the nineteenth century, an icon of the conquering of time and space. Turner's famous painting 'Rail, Speed and Steam' presented the steam locomotive impressionistically as a Romantic image. However, the notion of the 'prime mover' was first formulated by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle to conceptualise the belief that all motion in the universe was due to an 'unmoved

[6] Longley, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

mover'. It was developed by the theologian Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period as an image of the divine which was held to be perfectly beautiful, indivisible and in its entirety contemplative. The concept of the *Primum Mobile* is the fundamental organising principle of Dante's *Divine Comedy* ; in his poem 'Burnt Norton', T. S. Eliot describes it as 'the still point of the turning world'.[7]

The blackbird who sings in 'Adlestrop' is central to the birdsong which is *round him*. In his poem 'Words', birdsong is intrinsically a part of Thomas' feelings about the Englishness of the English language, and the involvement of its literature with the countryside – it sounds, he says, *Sweet as our birds To the ear*, and in the poem entitled 'Home', he says *one nationality We had, I and the birds that sang, One memory.* Apart from other poems in which Thomas expresses his appreciation of the mystical quality of birds and their song ('The Sedge Warblers' and 'The Unknown Bird' are notable examples), the revelatory nature of birdsong is expressed by two writers who were a significant influence on Thomas. The reader is referred to Robert Frost's beautiful sonnet on the subject of the Garden of Eden, 'Never Again Would Birdsong Be the Same'; quoted here is a passage from Richard Jefferies' essay 'The Pageant of Summer'.[8]

> I think the blackbirds when listened to are the masters of the fields. Before one can finish another begins, like the summer ripples succeeding behind each other, so that the melodious sound merely changes its position. Now here, now in the corner, then across the field, again in the distant copse, where it seems about to sink, when it rises again almost at hand. Like a great human artist, the blackbird makes no effort, being fully conscious that his liquid tone cannot be matched. He utters a few delicious notes, and carelessly quits the green stage of the oak till it pleases him to sing again. Without the blackbird, in whose throat the sweetness of the green fields dwells, the days would be only partly summer. Without the violet all the bluebells and cowslips could not make a spring, and without the blackbird, even the nightingale would be but half welcome. It is not yet noon, these songs have been ceaseless since dawn

In a literal sense, the train and its I-persona are only ephemerally part of 'Adlestrop' and its associations. Perhaps the feeling that lies at the heart of the poem is one of estrangement. The protocol of the situation presented is that the speaker cannot alight from the train and become part of what he sees. In the poem the train is said to arrive at Adlestrop; its departure is unrecorded.

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[7] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets: Burnt Norton*, line 62.

[8] Richard Jefferies, The Life of the Fields (1884) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 19. See also his essays entitled 'The Coming of Summer', in The Toilers of the Field (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1898), pp, 296-298, and 'The Hours of Spring', in *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans, Green & Co.,1889), p. 1. Edward Thomas was of course Jefferies' biographer.

The Poems of Edward Thomas
Translated into Japanese by Dr. Saeko Yoshikawa.

Dr. Saeko Yoshikawa is Associate Professor in the English Department at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies. She has published on Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Edward Thomas. Saeko is a regular visitor to the United Kingdom delivering papers on Wordsworth, Coleridge and Thomas. Her latest book is a translation of a selection of Edward Thomas's Poems into Japanese. Divided into seven groups, Words, Solitude and Longing, Seasons, Family and Home, Inhabitants of Earth, This England and War it contains some 70 poems. The poems are followed by a short introductory essay on Thomas's poems for general readers.

Whilst it may be said that Thomas is not well known in Japan, this beautifully produced book will go a long way to promoting his poetry and reputation in the future. The book is enhanced by prints taken from the Fellowship's collection of note cards.

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Colin G. Thornton

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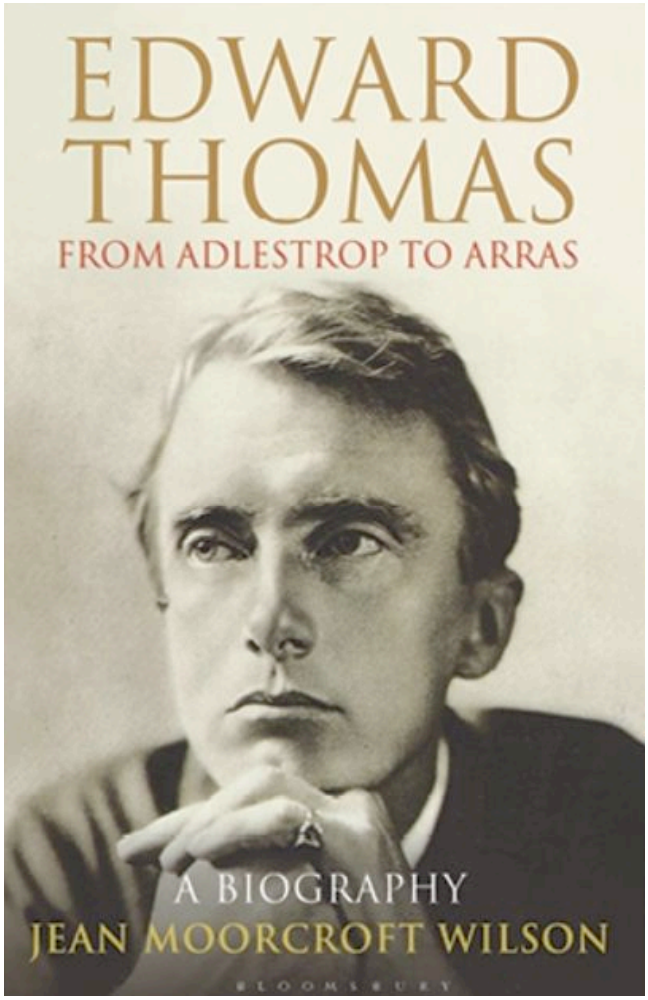
Other News

Jean Moorcroft Wilson's *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras* was published in May by Bloomsbury.



There were reviews in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The Spectator* and *The Literary Review*.

Richard Purver and Anne Harvey gave their talk *Edward and Helen Thomas in Battersea and Wandsworth* (originally delivered at the Wandsworth Society AGM on behalf of the Fellowship in March 2011) at the AGM of the Friends of Wandsworth Museum on 13 November 2014.

Guy Cuthbertson's article 'Warwickshire's Adlestrop: Rupert Brooke in the Forest of Arden' was published in *The War Poetry Review* (2014-15). That issue of *The War Poetry Review* also includes Adrian Barlow's 'The War against the War Poets' and a tribute to the late Jon Stallworthy.

James Riding's 'A Geographical Biography of a Nature Writer' was published in June in *Cultural Geographies* (online before print) and it is a geographical biography of Edward Thomas: 'It arranges itself around a single day walking in the footprints of Edward Thomas, across the South Downs […] with the Edward Thomas Fellowship – a literary society, who work to preserve the memory of the nature writer and poet, in the landscape he wrote of'. Riding refers to the Fellowship as 'a band of brothers' established 'to further perpetuate his life and work and to conserve the countryside known to Edward Thomas and recorded in his writings, by repeatedly walking it'. The article is available online at the *Cultural Geographies* website. James Riding is a Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow in the Department of Geography at the University of Sheffield.

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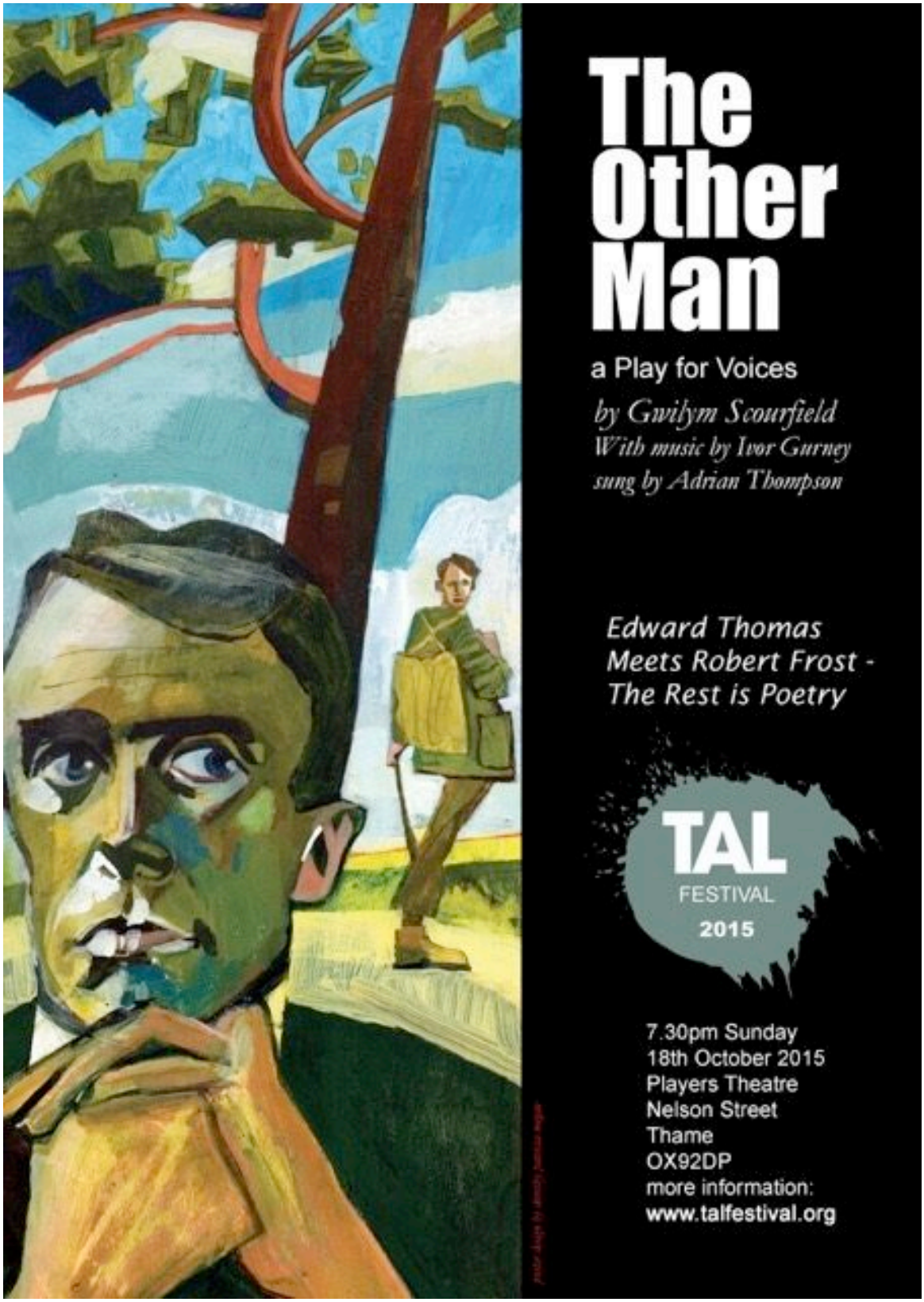

Back cover: May Hill, by a junior school pupil for the May Hill Celebration Day (photo supplied by Heather Cobby)