UNIVERZITA KARLOVA – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Edward Thomas as a Critic

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí diplomové práce (supervisor):
doc. Justin Quinn, PhD

Zpracoval (author):
Bc. Jan Zikmund

Studijní obor (subject):
Anglofonní literatury a kultury

Praha, červenec 2021

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

V Praze dne 12. 7. 2021

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for their love and support, without which I would have never completed this thesis.

I am grateful to Tom McEnchroe, Michael Stein, Stephan Delbos, Joshua Mensch, Olga Stehlíková, and Graeme Dibble for their suggestions.

My thanks to Alison Harvey for assisting me when I was at Edward Thomas's archive at Cardiff University Library. Kinha de Almeida Guimarães helped me immensely by arranging to get a copy of Thomas's anthology *This England* to me in the Netherlands. Edna Longley offered invaluable advice during our meeting at the 2020 StAnza Poetry Festival in Scotland.

My supervisor, Justin Quinn, deserves special thanks for introducing me to Thomas's work, and for guiding me and encouraging me throughout my work on this thesis.

Table of Contents:

Introduction 5

1. Thomas as a Reviewer: Promoting Hardy's Poetry 12

2. Thomas as a Mentor: Nurturing the Super-Tramp 28

3. Thomas as an Anthologist: The Making of *This England* 44

Conclusion 57

Bibliography 62

Abstract in English and Czech 67

Introduction

After his return from Africa, where he worked as a Boer War correspondent, Henry W. Nevinson became the *Daily Chronicle*'s literary editor. This was no breathing spell for him, as the prominent English daily devoted a full page to literature. One evening in October 1900, "a person of unknown name" arrived in his office.[1] Nevinson was in no mood for visitors, but the young man made an impression on him:

> He was tall, absurdly thin, and a face of attractive distinction and ultra-refinement was sicklied over with nervous melancholy and the ill condition of bad food or hunger. Almost too shy to speak, he sat down proudly and asked if I could give him work. I enquired what work he could do, and he said "None." […] I asked if he would not care to try a short review of a scholarly book I was just throwing away; for if he could not do it, that would make little difference to me or to anyone else. I urged him repeatedly, and at last, with extreme reluctance, he consented, and nervously took his leave, just mentioning that his name was Edward Thomas.[2]

Other newspapers turned Thomas down (some in a "rude" fashion), and so the brief appointment with Nevinson was the only bright spot in his trip to London.[3] At the *Daily Chronicle* he began his stressful career as a freelance critic, which involved many more visits to the capital, as he looked for new commissions. His prolificacy, spurred by the need to support his family, became well-known. When, during one literary gathering at Mont Blanc café,

[1] Henry W. Nevinson, *Chances and Changes* (London: Nisbet and Co., 1923), 195.
[2] Nevinson, 195.
[3] Quoted in Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 92.

someone asked for Thomas's address, Edward Garnett quickly answered: "Every publisher in London has it."[4] Overworked, Thomas did not take the poke well.

In 1915, tempted to join his friend Robert Frost in the U.S., Thomas nearly got a New York or Boston address. His "proud and melancholy shyness," that Nevinson noticed, contributed to his eventual decision not to move oversees.[5] Thomas dreaded the idea of approaching American editors and was unimpressed by Frost's proposal to organize a lecture tour for him.[6] Instead, he voluntarily enlisted in the Artist's Rifles. Surprisingly, he ended up enjoying military training, and, according to Nevinson, "gained incredibly in health and stature and confidence."[7]

Shortly before enlisting, in his late thirties, Thomas started writing poetry and continued in the army, almost until his death in France at the Battle of Arras. His transformation into a poet was long anticipated by his close friends. A number of them – including Nevinson, Garnett, and Frost – encouraged him to try verse. The perception that Thomas was always a poet above all has outlived him. His reputation – which, as Edna Longley recently remarked, "has never been higher" – rests mainly on his 144 poems.[8]

The imbalance in the evaluation of Thomas's work is striking. In 1968, R. George Thomas observed that "the posthumous judgment of Thomas has been directed towards interpreting his poetry, dipping disdainfully into his prose works (when they were available), with a consequent neglect of all but a handful of his more accessible reviews."[9] R. George

---

[4] W. H. Davies, *Later Days* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), 49.
[5] Nevinson, 195.
[6] In June 1915, Thomas confessed to Garnett: "I can't help dreading people both in anticipation and when I am among them and my only way of holding my own is the instinctive one of turning on what you can call coldness & a superior manner. That is why I hesitated about America. I felt sure that unless I could make a friend or 2 I could do no good. Nor do I think that any amount of distress could turn me into a lecturer." Quoted in Wilson, 332.
[7] Nevinson, 196.
[8] Edna Longley, *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (London: Enitharmon, 2017), 9.
[9] R. George Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, ed. R. George Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 7.

Thomas was among the first to recognize that Thomas's literary career did not begin in November 1914 with his turn to poetry, but in November 1900 when the *Daily Chronicle* published his first review.

Recent times have seen a gradual change of attitude towards Thomas's criticism. In the past decade, Longley, Judy Kendall, and Andrew Webb have each published an important book-length study of Thomas's poetry and prose. However, none of them deal exclusively with Thomas's critical writing. For instance, Kendall's *Edward Thomas: Origins of his Poetry* (2012), as the title suggests, examines Thomas's prose to better understand his poetry.

The 2010s also brought two biographies: Jean Moorcroft Wilson's substantial *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras* (2015) and Matthew Hollis's *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (2011). Hollis devotes considerable space to both the historical context and Thomas's interactions with other writers, such as the Dymock Poets, Ezra Pound, and W. B. Yeats. While too unfocused for Longley's taste ("Hollis almost seems to lack confidence in Thomas since he surrounds him with so many figures"[10]), the biography succeeds in presenting Thomas as an integral part of the English literary scene in the first half of the 1910s.

In 2011, the Oxford University Press published the first two volumes of *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition*, which follows on Longley's *A Language Not to Be Betrayed: Selected Prose of Edward Thomas* (1981). The aim of the series, whose general editors are Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn, is to establish Thomas as a prose writer. To this day, four volumes of the series have appeared, and two more are forthcoming.

Volume V, edited by Francis O'Gorman, reproduces two of Thomas's literary studies, *Algernon Charles Swinburne: A Study* (1912) and *Walter Pater: A Study* (1913). One of the

[10] Longley, 10.

main arguments of O'Gorman's well-researched introduction is that "[the] two books provide a broken narrative of an as-yet voiceless poet journeying towards himself."[11] In "Swinburne, Pater, and Thomas's Journey to Poetry,"[12] the final part of the introduction, O'Gorman interprets Thomas's poem "Lob" as "the last metamorphosis of Thomas's Paterianism."[13] While O'Gorman is not wrong to connect both *Swinburne* and *Pater* with Thomas's poetry, his approach shows that scholars discussing Thomas's criticism usually end up at his poetry.

Thomas's biography, and particularly the fact that he enlisted only a few months after finding his gift for writing poetry, complicates the assessment of his criticism. As he was concurrently a critic and poet so briefly, his decade-and-a-half critical career is often seen only as necessary preparation for his development as a poet. Thomas's climatic but ultimately tragic war years overshadow the rest of his life, tempting some scholars to see his literary career "like an analogy, writ large, of the process of composing a poem,"[14] and his final months as the time when he became "the free spirit that he had always wanted to be."[15] Also considering the posthumous appreciation Thomas has received from renowned successors such as Ted Hughes and Andrew Motion, it is understandable that his poetry remains the centre of critical attention.

However, if – to paraphrase the title of Hollis's book – all roads lead to Thomas's poetry, where does his criticism stand? To consider it only for the way it informs his poetry implies that had Thomas not been a poet, the rest of his literary work would hardly be worth studying. Should Thomas the critic remain famous mainly for the sheer quantity of his output as a pitiful

---

[11] Francis O'Gorman, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition: Volume V: Critical Studies: Swinburne and Pater*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), xxv.
[12] O'Gorman, "Introduction," lviii.
[13] O'Gorman, "Introduction," lxiiv.
[14] Judy Kendall, *Edward Thomas: The Origins of his Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 7.
[15] Denys J. Wilcox, "Edward Thomas, Ezra Pound and the Square Club," *PN Review 86* (July – August 1992): https://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?item_id=3697.

early twentieth-century hack? Or was Thomas Seccombe right to call Thomas "the man with the keys to the Paradise of English poetry"?[16]

While this thesis does not provide definite answers to those questions, it argues that Thomas's criticism is strong and extensive enough to be examined independently of his poems. This is to question neither the excellence of Thomas's poetry (and the recognition it has finally received), nor the existence of the links between his poetry and the rest of his work. Yet Thomas worked as a critic voluntarily (he could have found another job) and enjoyed being a tastemaker. His critical texts and anthologies are still valuable today not only for what they reveal about his poetry but also what they tell us about Thomas's contemporaries and his milieu.

The aim of this study is to show that Thomas's prolificacy, caused by his demanding profession, may be seen as his advantage. He would likely be the first to admit that the tight deadlines under which he worked affected the quality of his writing (some of his texts are repetitive and clearly in need of copyediting). "Coining everything into hasty words is I suppose the punishment as well as the living of a journalist," he has told his friend Gordon Bottomley.[17] Still, not only did Thomas produce many excellent pieces of critical writing (most of them are included in *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*), but he was also remarkably knowledgeable and versatile, working simultaneously as a reviewer, editor of anthologies, biographer, and author of literary studies. His critical achievement is not based on one ground-breaking monograph but rather on countless smaller contributions that made him almost omnipresent on the English literary scene from 1900 to roughly 1915.

Though I consider a different aspect of his critical work in each of the three chapters, the common theme of all of them is Thomas's journalism. Chapters 1 and 2 both revolve around his reviews. The former explains his predilection for novelists turning to poetry, such as Thomas

[16] Quoted in Wilson, 95.
[17] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 221.

Hardy and D. H. Lawrence. I will be also interested in Thomas's views on Hardy's pessimism, which puzzled some of his contemporaries. Chapter 2 presents Thomas in a less detached role, as he was tirelessly guiding his friend, the tramp-poet W. H. Davies. In both chapters I examine some of his important reviews and identify the methods that he used to get his points across. I also discuss Thomas's articles in Chapter 3, when looking at his wartime anthology *This England: An Anthology from Her Writers* (1915), which, as I will show, reflects Thomas's aversion to jingoistic poetry.

This thesis is more concerned with Thomas's articles than his literary studies. R. George Thomas has criticized Thomas's books, bringing up the writer's own "frequent statement that he had no power for the sustained formulation of intellectual ideas."[18] It is true that Thomas's literary studies lack consistency – consistency in execution rather than consistency in argument. Thomas himself, with his characteristic gloominess, admitted in a letter to Harold Monro that reviewing suited him more than literary studies: "Low as reviewing is it is only for the day and can be shaken off, but continuous hack-writing of books seems to me worse, more damaging to freedom and reputation."[19] Literary journalism lies at the heart of Thomas's critical career.

Thomas evaluated other writers' books from the moment Nevinson gave him a chance almost until his death. I examine his critical texts because they have been overlooked but also because they are bold, insightful, and entertaining. Though he was both shy and proud when approaching editors, his texts betray neither of those qualities. He was demanding – as Walter de la Mare, who was a great admirer of Thomas's journalism, observed, Thomas believed that the "true cause" is "better served by an uncompromising 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' than

[18] R. George Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Edward Thomas: Selected Letters*, ed. R. George Thomas (Oxford: New York, 1995), xvii.
[19] Quoted in "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Oxford*, ed. by Lucy Newlyn (Oxford: Signal Books, 2005), xxxiii.

by an amiable 'All are welcome.''[20] But, as we will see in Chapters 1 and 2, he could also be encouraging and generous. Rarely does one encounter a critic who supported his favourite writers with such passion and persistence as Edward Thomas.

[20] Quoted in Matthew Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), 18.

Chapter 1

Thomas as a Reviewer: Promoting Hardy's Poetry

Edward Thomas's literary journalism is now remembered mainly for its quantity. His productivity was impressive: though he worked as reviewer for only a decade and a half, he wrote over 1,900 book reviews (at least two thirds of them have been preserved).[21] Between 1906 and 1912 he averaged more than a hundred full-length reviews annually, and, during one week in 1905, he reviewed thirteen books, from an 800-page biography of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky to a new edition of John Keats's poetry.[22] We even know the approximate word count of all his preserved reviews (over a million).[23] Added to Thomas's frequent complaints about the demands of his freelance work, it is unsurprising, then, that his frantic life as a reviewer evokes more sympathy than interest in critics.

Considering the immense number of his reviews (of various quality) and the fact that many of them are only available in Cardiff University's library, one regrets that Thomas never compiled a selection of his critical texts.[24] As a professional reviewer, he often wrote about

[21] Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 94.
[22] Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers & Reputations: Literary Life in Britain (1870–1917)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 149.
[23] R. G. Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, ed. by R. G. Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 9.
[24] In 1906, Walter de la Mare, who admired Thomas's reviews, likely suggested to Thomas that he should make a compilation of his articles. However, Thomas did not like the idea: "I have never dreamed of collecting my reviews. I live by them & that seems to me to be wonderful enough without sending the poor things out in fine raiment to beg once more." Edward Thomas, *Poet to Poet: Edward Thomas's Letters to Walter de la Mare*, ed. Judy Kendall (Bridgend: Seren, 2012), 29.

books that did not matter to him. By putting together his selected prose, he could have highlighted the books he admired and, also, showcased his best articles. However, the absence of such a book does not mean Thomas was indifferent to his reviews – he was collecting them, and when, in 1916, he deliberately burned all his received correspondence before leaving for France, he spared his reviews. Nor was he indifferent to the state of literary journalism in his country. In March 1914, *Poetry and Drama* published his article "Reviewing: An Unskilled Labour," in which Thomas advises reviewers to "cease expressing opinions and take to giving as plain and full an account of the book in hand, as time, space, and [their] own ability permit."[25]

Thomas benefited from his journalistic experience, especially when embarking on book-length projects. In Chapter 3, which deals with the making of his war-time anthology, *This England* (1915), I show how Thomas's articles help us understand some of his editorial decisions. His work as a reviewer allowed him both to form his opinions on literature and to obtain knowledge which he used when writing biographies and critical studies. For instance, when his book *Lafcadio Hearn* (1912) appeared, Thomas had already reviewed one of Hearn's short story collections, two volumes of his correspondence, and two books about the writer (a biography and a critical study). His regular presence in prominent newspapers also opened doors for Thomas – as in the summer of 1906 when, after reading Thomas's *Daily Chronicle* review of *Traveller's Joy* (1906) by W. G. Waters, publisher Grant Richards asked him to edit an anthology of songs for the open air that would become *The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air* (1907).[26]

While it is important to explore the ways Thomas's journalism informs the rest of his work, his articles are worth studying also because they illuminate the literary period that saw the rise of several writers still highly regarded more than a century later. His comments on

[25] Edward Thomas, "Reviewing: An Unskilled Labour," *Poetry and Drama* 2.5 (March 1914): 41.
[26] Wilson, 157.

writers such as Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, J. M. Synge, and W. B. Yeats might attract a broad spectrum of literary critics. Should Thomas be recognized as a critic, his critical work needs to draw interest from outside the fairly small group of Thomas scholars. A critical text might lose its purpose if readers focus exclusively on its author rather than on its subject. Thomas's reviews appear in two volumes of the *Critical Heritage* series (Yeats and D. H. Lawrence) and in *Robert Frost: The Critical Reception* (1974), but, generally, his influence is overlooked. For instance, as Edna Longley has observed, the index to *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost* (2001) cites Thomas only once, and he is also absent from most U.S. studies of Frost.[27]

This chapter explores one of the notable strands of Thomas's extensive journalism: his advocacy of Thomas Hardy's poetry. While I also bring in his articles on other writers, such as Lawrence and Synge, the discussion revolves around Thomas's critical responses to one writer. This approach allows me to follow the progression of his views on Hardy's work and contrast them with those of other reviewers. So, this chapter does not only aim to discern some of Thomas's tendencies as a reviewer but also, through Thomas's reviews, consider essential aspects of Hardy's poetry.

I chose Hardy as the focal point strictly for critical rather than biographical reasons. Thomas regularly corresponded with several writers, yet he and Hardy exchanged few letters (these related to the inclusion of Hardy's poems in Thomas's anthologies). Their lack of contact is not surprising considering the age difference between the two: when Thomas was born, Hardy at thirty-eight had already published seven novels. Still, given Hardy's late debut as a poet, Thomas witnessed the renaissance of his literary career, and, as I will show, was significant in bringing attention to Hardy's poetry.

[27] Edna Longley, *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (London: Enitharmon, 2017), 190.

Trevor Johnston's *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy* (2002) compiles all Thomas's preserved responses related to Hardy, revealing the extent of his preoccupation with the older writer. Between 1902 and 1913, Thomas devoted seven reviews both to Hardy's work and books on the writer while he also included sections on Hardy in both *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914) and *A Literary Pilgrim in England* (1917). The list of Thomas's published works shows that while Hardy is not the most reviewed author (Davies and Walter de la Mare easily beat him in this regard), Thomas influenced the reputation of Hardy's poetry by reviewing not only his new books of poems but also the critical literature on Hardy.

Johnson's collection is helpful, but not flawless. Leaving aside the high number of typos in the book, one wonders why Johnson spends so long in his introduction proving something that he cannot prove: Thomas's authorship of the unsigned review of Hardy's *Satires of Circumstance* (1914) published in *The Nation* in January 1915.[28] *Satires* contains perhaps the most memorable lyrics by Hardy, love poems to his dead wife Emma. While it would be intriguing to read Thomas's response to this collection, the review should not have been part of the compilation, for there is no evidence Thomas was the author, as Johnson himself admits.[29]

Even if Thomas wrote the piece, his interest in Hardy's poetry did not rest on the appeal of *Satires* – he had appreciated Hardy the poet before many others began to take his verse seriously.[30] R. G. Cox, the editor of *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (1952), has noted that "reviewers were at first inclined to treat [Hardy's poems] as the usual sort of indulgence

---

[28] According to Jeff Cooper, the review is likely to be by Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Nation*'s usual poetry reviewer and the author of *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study* (1908). Jeff Cooper, "Edward Thomas: Towards a Complete Checklist of his Published Writings," *Friends of the Dymock Poets*, 2017, accessed May 23, 2021, www.dymockpoets.org.uk/Checklists/Edward_Thomas_Writings_Checklist.pdf.
[29] Trevor Johnson, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, ed. Trevor Johnson (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2002), xi.
[30] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 25.

by an established prose writer, not to be taken very seriously. Their chief objections were that the poems were prosaic, awkward in style and form, and unrelieved in their pessimism."[31]

Thomas was drawn to some of the features of Hardy's poetry which puzzled other reviewers, but he saw them as strengths rather than weaknesses. Later in the chapter, I will examine Thomas's take on the bleakness of Hardy's poetry as well as his reluctance to judge a poem based on its moral. But first I will focus on his readiness to present Hardy's poetry as an improvement on his prose, and his reasons for such a daring claim.

The relationship between different forms of literature was an important theme for Thomas since his youth. In 1899, at the age of 21, he argued, in an essay entitled "The Frontiers of English Prose," that the literature of his day is marked by the "the apparent destruction of boundaries between poetry and prose, if not between verse and prose."[32] The essay, which holds a prominent place in Longley's *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, prefigures many of his subsequent articles and critical books in which, as Longley spotted, he is "always curiously interested in prose-writers who turn to poetry."[33] Longley mainly referred to Lawrence and Hardy.

Thomas did not review Hardy's first two collections of poetry, *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898) and *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901), but he dedicated two reviews to *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses*. In 1911, he reviewed F. A. Hedgcock's *Thomas Hardy: Penseur et Artiste* (1910). The three reviews complement each other by focusing on the same themes, such as the relationship between Hardy's prose and poetry.

[31] R. G. Cox, "Introduction" in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by R. G. Cox (London: Vikas Publications, 1952), xxxvii.
[32] Edward Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed: Selected Prose of Edward Thomas*, ed. Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), 136.
[33] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 36.

When Thomas responded to *Time's Laughingstocks* in December 1909, Hardy had been admired chiefly as a novelist. Realizing that some readers may approach Hardy's poetry with scepticism, Thomas sought to change their mindset already in the opening of his first review:

> It would be interesting to learn how a great prose writer regards his verse. He will have a tenderness for it as for the fairer and perhaps the elder child; but in what frame of mind does he who can say so much in prose and denies himself no subject or mood in it, turn to verse? Is it an instinct for finality in form, a need of limitation and strict obedience to rule, or a desire to express but not explain, or is it partly for the sake of the royalty of robes and the great tradition?[34]

Thomas is curious about rather than distrustful of the novelist's inclination towards poetry and puts forward mostly positive reasons for Hardy's late emergence as a poet, suggesting that it provides him with options that are absent from fiction. Both of his 1909 reviews are favourable but do not overtly elevate Hardy's poetry above his prose. Two years later, in his article on F. A. Hedgcock's study, he reveals his preference.

While appreciative of *Thomas Hardy: Penseur et Artiste*, Thomas notes that in contrast with the novels, Hedgcock only considers Hardy's poems "in so far they throw light upon Mr. Hardy's life and temperament."[35] This shortcoming prompts Thomas to spend a major part of his article promoting Hardy's poetry. "So good and pithy are the early poems," Thomas claims, "that Mr. Hardy was perhaps fortunate in withholding them until his reputation was made as a novelist."[36] What may sound as a deliberate overstatement is a serious remark. After acknowledging Hardy is thought of as a "novelist who writes unlovely verses," Thomas boldly

[34] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 66-67.
[35] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 24.
[36] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 24.

argues that "had these verses appeared earlier and had a just recognition, the novels could not but have seemed somewhat perversely artificial."[37]

The use of the adjective "artificial" is not accidental. Thomas comes up with a similar wording in his review of Lawrence's *Love Poems and Others* (1913). Commenting on the poems, he argues: "[m]ore than half are the quintessences of novels. Not mere novels in little, not mere sketches or embryos of novels; but, as it were, the tiny but solid beings of which novels are the shadows artificially made gigantic."[38] And, reviewing Synge's *Poems and Translations* (1909), Thomas notes that poems in this book do not overstate anything and "add, if that be possible, to our sense of the truth and sincerity of [Synge's] plays."[39] One must be careful to compare Thomas's claims from articles which do not deal with the same subject. But even though he might have had slightly different reasons for liking each of the three poets, the quoted passages from his reviews of Lawrence and Synge help illuminate his arguments in favour of Hardy's poetry.

Based on the quotes, Thomas believed both Lawrence and Synge achieve a cleaner writing style in poetry than in prose. His point had no relation to the length of the poems. Most poems in *Time's Laughingstocks* are fairly long, yet Thomas enjoyed their "brevity and solemnity."[40] In one of his reviews he argues that "only poetry could produce with such economy and sureness the effect" in pieces such as "A Tramp Woman's Tragedy" and "Sunday Morning Tragedy."[41]

Thomas admired Hardy's refusal to adorn his poems and noted that sonnets in *Time Laughingstocks* are "so unlike sonnets in spirit that many will read them without observing that

[37] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 24.
[38] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 105.
[39] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 87-88.
[40] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 67.
[41] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 71.

they have this form."[42] He also remarks Hardy is not afraid to explore intricate stanza forms, as in "The Noble Lady's Tale":

> We moved with pensive paces,
>   I and he,
> And bent our faded faces,
>   Wistfully,
> For something troubled him and troubled me.

Here Thomas illustrates that the poet, almost provocatively, employs a lyric stanza "for a narrative full of conversation."[43] But while Hardy indulges "in many varieties of rhyme and stanza,"[44] his poems remain condensed. After approvingly noting Hardy "laughs at the external beauty of verse,"[45] Thomas claims that in Hardy's poetry "[e]verything is sacrificed to truth; only a few words are sacrificed to rhyme and rhythm."[46]

In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry* (2007), Peter Howarth interprets Thomas's points on Hardy's style in a different manner. He believes Thomas was "always uncomfortable with what he felt was Hardy's manipulation of his material,"[47] and quotes from one of Thomas's 1909 reviews: "'Seldom does anything creep in,' Thomas complained, 'to give his work a something not to be accounted for in what he actually says'; later he called Hardy 'tyrannous' in allowing no 'richness and diversity of interpretation.'"[48] Howarth explains Thomas's criticism of Hardy by arguing that "Thomas's deepest ambition

[42] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 67.
[43] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 67.
[44] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 67.
[45] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 67.
[46] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 28.
[47] Peter Howarth, "Fateful Forms: A. E. Housman, Charlotte Mew, Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas" in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Neil Corcoran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 69.
[48] Howarth, 69.

was to free his own writing from over-control, in particular the self-conscious stylistic preciousness of his own former idol, Walter Pater."[49]

However, Thomas's 1911 review contradicts Howarth's claims. Commenting on an undisclosed passage in Hedgcock's book on Hardy, Thomas points out that:

> […] it was not useless but absurd to lament [Hardy] did not work like Pater or Stevenson. We prefer pedantry or slovenliness in detail here and there to pervasive dandyism. Mr. Hardy has no touch of dandyism. If he had it would have come out in his verse. There, as it seems to us, his qualities appear in their intensity, and in their most perfect harmony.[50]

Thomas favoured Hardy's terse and occasionally stiff poems over the excessiveness of Pater. Howarth is wrong to put the two writers in the same category as, for Thomas, their approaches to writing stood in stark contrast.

In his reviews, Thomas brings the reader's attention both to the focus and transparency of Hardy's poetry and suggests that Hardy's writing benefits from the constrains of a poetic form. His conviction that "Hardy says nothing in verse which he could not say – at greater length – in prose" explains why he perceived Hardy's novels as distorted and uneven.[51]

Thomas also preferred Hardy's poetry to his prose for another reason: he sensed Hardy's poems tend to be more personal than his novels. Or rather: he saw that Hardy's poems reflect his personality more clearly and naturally than his novels. In the above-quoted opening of his first *Time's Laughingstocks* review, Thomas speculates it was the novelist's "desire to express but not explain" that lured him to poetry. In his 1911 review, he argues that in some of the

---

[49] Howarth, 69.
[50] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 27.
[51] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 28.

novels, Hardy's voice becomes blurred as "the different ill-assorted aspects of the writer's mind obscure not only life but one another."[52]

Thomas again highlights not only the sense of control, which marks Hardy's poetry, but also the poems' sincerity. In his view, "[w]hat makes flaws in the novels is only an additional fulness of personality in the poems."[53] This praise does not apply to all Hardy's poems. Commenting on "Leipzig," set at Casterbridge's Old Ship Inn in 1813, Thomas argues the poet resembles "a street balladist" whose "thought spoiled the tune."[54]

Yet he applauds the poems "where [Hardy] speaks in his own person and largely of his own thoughts and experiences, where he is obviously and naturally the lord of the scene."[55] While he does not provide specific examples of such poems in 1911, he does so in his 1909 reviews – he particularly focuses on "The Minute Before Meeting," which he quotes in its full length:

> The grey gaunt days dividing us in twain
> Seemed hopeless hills my strength must faint to climb,
> But they are gone; and now I would detain
> The few clock-beats that part us; rein back Time,
> And live in close expectance never closed
> In change for far expectance closed at last,
> So harshly has expectance been imposed
> On my long need while these slow blank months passed.
> And knowing that what is now about to be
> Will all have been in O, so short a space!
> I read beyond it my despondency
> When more dividing months shall take its place,
> Thereby denying to this hour of grace
> A full-up measure of felicity.[56]

[52] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 28.
[53] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 27-28.
[54] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 28.
[55] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 25.
[56] Quoted in Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 71-72.

Thomas suggests the poet's thoughts and emotions, on display in this sonnet, also affect some of the longer, narrative poems that lack a lyrical subject: "[t]his one is particularly useful as showing probably the author's personality, and the tendency which controls the poems in which there are other actors."[57] In 1911, Thomas remarked: "[in Hardy's poems] his personality moulds and masters the facts of his life, while in the novels it is tyrannising over them but never governing."[58] When reading "The Minute Before Meeting" with this observation in mind, one sees the poem is based on a paradox: even though the poet cannot control his mind and stay in the moment, he is still able to assess the situation and recognize that he is "denying to this hour of grace / A full-up measure of felicity." The poet also implies that while he is rarely able to experience it, there is felicity in life. This message – difficult to discern but hopeful – was crucial for Thomas as he examined the unhappy nature of Hardy's poetry, a subject that both he and other critics could not avoid.

As R. G. Cox mentions in his introduction to *Thomas Hardy: Critical Heritage*, some reviewers of Hardy's first volumes of poetry complained the poems are "unrelieved in their pessimism." E. K. Chambers, for instance, suggests in his 1899 article on *Wessex Poems* that Hardy's poetry lacks variety: "[w]e do not conceal our opinion that Mr. Hardy's success in poetry is of a very narrow range. He is entirely dependent for his inspiration upon this curiously intense and somewhat dismal vision of life, which is upon him almost as an obsession."[59] Hardy's following collection first attracted similar objections. In his review of *Poems of the Past and Present*, T. H. Warren remarks: "[Hardy] prefers the seamy to the smooth side of life, and appears to think that it is necessarily the more real, or, at any rate, the more important. Life, he holds, is a poor business."[60] Later towards this 1902 article he adds, "[h]e has many fine and

---

[57] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 72.
[58] Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, 28.
[59] E. K. Chambers, "E. K. Chambers in *Athenaeum*" in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Vikas Publications, 1952), 327.
[60] T. H. Warren, "T. H. Warren, *Spectator*" in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Vikas Publications, 1952), 332.

original ideas and much sombre strength. But he has a morbid taste for the ghastly and the gruesome."[61] While Warren is not openly disapproving of Hardy, he seems bothered by his negativity.

Unlike Chambers and Warren, Thomas looked beneath the gloomy surface of Hardy's poetry. In his two reviews of *Time's Laughingstocks*, he asks readers not to be discouraged by Hardy's poems. "The book contains ninety-nine reasons for not living. Yet it is not a book of despair. It is a book of sincerity,"[62] goes one of Thomas's memorable Hardy statements. To illustrate his point, he brings up the ending of the poem "To Sincerity":

> Yet, would men look at true things,
> And unilluded view things,
> And count to bear undue things,
> The real might mend the seeming,
> Facts better their foredeeming,
> And Life its dis-esteeming.[63]

These six lines were important for Thomas – they appear in both his reviews of the collection. He praises Hardy for "looking at things as they are" without succumbing to self-pity, as in the first stanza of the poem "Let Me Enjoy:" "Let me enjoy the earth no less / Because the all-enacting Might / That fashioned forth its loveliness / Had other aims that my delight."[64] He calls the two quoted passages "a necessary key to the poems and to Mr Hardy's work as a whole."[65]

As Thomas also observes, in some poems, Hardy appears to be rejecting life, when he is, in fact, criticizing society. This is an important distinction. As an example, he quotes a stanza from "The Christening." In the poem, a child is being baptised to the joy of the congregation

[61] Warren, 332-333.
[62] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 69.
[63] Quoted in Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 69.
[64] Quoted in Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 72.
[65] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 72.

while his unmarried mother, who was presumably not allowed to enter the church, weeps at the door. Thomas perceives both the bitter and hopeful aspects of the situation. As he puts it, the poem "demands, if it does not foresee, a time when values and judgments will be truer than they are, when we of our day shall be held as callous as those who hung men for sheep-stealing."[66] He implicitly suggests the social dimensions of Hardy's poetry in which "worst tragedies are as much to transient and alterable custom as to the nature of things." That, according to Thomas, is a message "far from negatively pessimistic."[67]

Thomas's reluctance to object to the grim content of Hardy's poems is characteristic of his criticism. He rarely condemned a poem based on its moral or political message. Words like "shocking," "old-fashioned," and "immoral" were not a part of his vocabulary. Even his dismissal of most English patriotic poetry written at the outset of the First World War (which I discuss in Chapter 3) seemed to lie mainly in his dissatisfaction with its language and tone ("there is more in it of the shouting of rhetorician, reciter, or politician than of the talk of friends and lovers"[68]).

Thomas professed a liberal approach to the subject matter and argued that "a perfect poem may be written on a sparrow and a worthless one on the omnipresence of the Deity."[69] He came up with the quoted sentence when summing up the thesis of A. C. Bradley's *Poetry for Poetry's Sake* (1901), which he reviewed. As Longley has remarked, the sentence was "a key idea for Thomas."[70] In his review, Thomas praises Bradley for defining "poetic value" in a way "that distinguishes between the subject matter and the substance of a poem."[71]

---

[66] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 69.
[67] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 72.
[68] Edward Thomas, "Anthologies and Reprints," *Poetry and Drama* 2.8 (Dec. 1914): 384.
[69] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 27.
[70] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 27
[71] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 27.

Thomas's attitude to Hardy's poetry reflects his embrace of Bradley's criticism. Based on the passages quoted in this chapter, it would be imprecise to argue that Thomas champions Hardy's bleak themes. Rather, he shows that Hardy's poems, even the most tragic ones, transpire differently if one looks beyond their subject matter. He uses his reviews to bring the reader's attention to the irony as well as the control and transparency that mark the poetry. He also suggests that in poems like "The Darkling Thrush," included in *The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air*, and "The Minute Before Meeting" the poet succumbs to melancholy without denying the rest of the world hope and beauty. Watching the thrush, the poet perceives "[s]ome blessed hope, whereof he knew / and I was unaware."[72]

It seems Thomas's identification with Bradley, especially with his distinction between the subject matter and the substance of a poem, was profound. The term "substance" is elusive, but it reminds one of Thomas's descriptions of Lawrence's poems ("quintessences of novels" and "tiny but solid beings"), Hardy's "artificial" novels, as well as Synge's poems and translations ("poetry shrunk almost to its bones"[73]). Thomas's criticism of George Borrow's books ("Borrow really wrote about six prose-poems; yet he now wearies us with six bad books"[74]) from his article on Charles Baudelaire's prose poems belongs to this group, too.

These claims not only reflect Thomas's search for the essence of a literary work but also his belief in the high degree of transferability between prose and poetry – the fact that one can extract a poem (or more of them) out of a prose piece, and, at the same time, a poem can carry the nucleus of a prose piece. Some of Thomas's points suggest that he usually considered a poem's potential to work as prose as a desirable quality rather than defect. In one of his reviews of Robert Frost's *North of Boston* (1914) he remarks:

---

[72] Thomas Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: Poems Selected by Tom Paulin*, ed. Tom Paulin (Faber & Faber, 2001), 16.
[73] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 87.
[74] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 143.

> [Frost] would lose far less than most modern writers by being printed as prose. If his work were so printed, it would have little in common with the kind of prose that runs to blank verse: in fact, it would turn out to be closer knit and more intimate than the finest prose is except in its finest passages.[75]

Earlier in this review, Thomas's argues that poems in *North of Boston* are "revolutionary because they lack the exaggeration of rhetoric, and even at first sight appear to lack the poetic intensity of which rhetoric is an imitation. Their language is free from the poetical words and forms that are the chief material of secondary poets."[76] Thomas's points on Frost's *North of Boston* resemble his response to Hardy's poetry: he praised both writers for writing poems which do not state too loudly they are poems.

Thomas's critical exploration of the relationship between poetry and prose affected his own poetry. As Longley and other critics have documented, he based a surprisingly high number of his poems on his earlier prose writings (prose poems, essays, country books, etc.). Some of his highly regarded lyrics, such as "Rain," had existed, as parts of prose texts, years before they became poems. His articles on Hardy, Lawrence, and Synge show that, for Thomas, this process of creating, or rather re-creating, was more natural than one would expect.

Thomas's predilection for Hardy's poetry also illuminates his enthusiasm for Frost's *North of Boston*, which he rated higher than *A Boy's Will* (1913).[77] Thomas and Frost shared the conviction that the real value of Hardy's work lies in his poetry and Thomas's reviews reveal that, through their unpretentiousness and almost unpoetic nature, Frost's blank verse poems reminded him of some of Hardy's pieces.[78] But while in Hardy's case, Thomas showed the quality of his poems by contrasting them with his novels, he could not proceed the same

---

[75] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 127.
[76] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 126.
[77] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 129.
[78] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 191.

way with Frost. And so, he at least imagined how Frost's poetry would work if printed as prose, concluding that "[i]t is poetry because it is better than prose."[79]

In this chapter I have considered Thomas's life-long interest in writers who excelled in both poetry and prose. More attentively than most other critics, he examined either the gaps or the overlaps between the "versifying and prosifying" periods of those writers' lives.[80] The exploration of the frontiers of prose was one of the main concerns of his criticism since his early twenties. In Chapter 2 I will look at another crucial theme for Thomas – the relationship between simplicity and adornment, and between spontaneity and affectedness in literature.

[79] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 127.
[80] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 138

Chapter 2

Thomas as a Mentor: Nurturing the Super-Tramp

During his career as a literary journalist, Edward Thomas interacted with poets of varying talent and some of his more insightful reviews touch on books unfamiliar to most present-day readers. To examine only his articles on the great writers whose work still widely resonates today thus would result in a skewed view of both Thomas and the poetry of his time. So, having discussed Thomas in relation to Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence in the previous chapter, I now shift attention to a more puzzling theme: his long-term predilection for the work of W. H. Davies.

Davies was a Welsh tramp who might have never become a poet, had he not lost his leg when boarding a moving freight train during one of his North American adventures. This accident prompted him to return to the UK where he self-published a poetry collection, *The Soul's Destroyer and Other Poems* (1905). The debut was publicly praised by both Thomas and Arthur Symons while George Bernard Shaw wrote the introduction to his prose memoir, *The Autobiography of the Super-Tramp* (1908). In 1911, after Thomas and Edward Garnett's successful campaign, Davies received a pension from the Royal Literary Fund.

The support from influential admirers that Davies enjoyed early in his career starkly contrasts with his current status. Despite some noteworthy attempts to stir up the interest in his

work – such as Michael Cullup's 1983 essay "Recovering W. H. Davies"[81] – he tends to be remembered more for his extraordinary life than for the poems that often seemed dated even when they were first published.

Davies's insignificant position in twentieth-century British poetry is sometimes noted by Thomas scholars. Praising Thomas's judgment as a reviewer, R. George Thomas has however observed that his "enthusiasm for T. Sturge Moore, W. H. Davies and C. M. Doughty was qualified from the outset in the direction of our present-day assessment."[82] Edna Longley has argued that though Thomas appreciated Davies and Walter de la Mare, he "still held something in reserve" which only Robert Frost's *North of Boston* (1914) "brought out into the open."[83]

Longley is right to suggest *North of Boston* would rank higher than any book by Davies on a list of Thomas's favourite poetry. Yet it would be inaccurate to see his preoccupation with Davies only as a phase – for all his objections to some of Davies's books, Thomas never gave up on the poet. He reviewed eleven books by Davies, six of them multiple times. In total Thomas produced twenty-one articles on his work, not counting the reviews of Edward Marsh's anthologies, *Georgian Poetry* (1912-1922), reviews which mention Davies. Frost's arrival did not weaken Thomas's interest in Davies's work – his last published review, from August 1916, deals with Davies's *Child Lovers and Other Poems* (1916).

The sheer number of articles on Davies is impossible to ignore, notwithstanding his present-day reputation. I will examine these reviews because they provide a unique chance to see Thomas as a mentor, especially since he followed Davies from the start of the poet's career.

---

[81] Michael Cullup, "Recovering W. H. Davies," *PN Review* 47 (January – February 1986): https://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?item_id=5737.
[82] R. George Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, ed. R. George Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 10.
[83] Edna Longley, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed: Selected Prose of Edward Thomas*, ed. Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), xii.

While biographers have focused on the unlikely friendship between the two (Thomas first meeting Davies in a dosshouse and then helping him raise money for his new wooden leg, etc.), I will be interested in their literary connection.[84] The aim is not to decide if Thomas was right or wrong to believe in Davies but to follow him as he watched over the poet in reviews.

I will discuss Thomas's reviews mostly chronologically, beginning with his responses to Davies's first two poetry collections. His guidance of Davies allows us to look at Thomas's journalistic career from a different perspective than in Chapter 1 – he was closer to him than to Hardy or Lawrence, which showed in his reviews. The talented yet careless tramp also presented challenges that the critic perhaps had not faced before. But regardless of whether he was highlighting his strengths or exposing his weaknesses, Thomas had one priority: to aid the poet's long-term development. His encounter with Davies also confirms that in order for the mentor-protégé relationship to work, it should benefit both. Before looking closely at his assessments of Davies's work, let us see how the emergence of the new poet affected Thomas.

Despite being a formidable reviewer – T. Sturge Moore referred to him as the "opinionated savage youngster" – Thomas was always looking for talent.[85] In *Beautiful Wales* (1905) he gives a moving figure for this work:

> Nothing is to be compared with the pleasure of seeing the stars thus in the east, when most eyes are watching the west, except perhaps to read a fresh modern poet, straight from the press, before any one has praised it, and to know that it is good.[86]

Not only does Thomas express his passion for reading poetry, he also specifically mentions the pleasure of discovery, the solitary but satisfying feeling of recognizing a gifted poet before

---

[84] Davies's biographer, Richard J. Stonesifer, has referred to Thomas as "the man who more than any other had aided [Davies] in his own days of poverty." Richard J. Stonesifer, *W. H. Davies: A Critical Biography* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 107.
[85] T. Sturge Moore, *Some Soldier Poets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 84.
[86] Edward Thomas, *Beautiful Wales* (London: A. & C. Black, 1905), 44.

others. Such moments were precious for Thomas as, especially in the early 1900s, most contemporary poetry did not impress him. In the introduction to her 1981 selection of Thomas's prose, Longley likens his determination to find "the poet for the new age" to "a crusade, as he swims against the tide of reprints and rubbish, of critical and public indifference."[87]

Elsewhere, Longley singles out Davies and de la Mare as the young poets "in whom [Thomas] found a spark."[88] While Thomas was not immediately convinced about de la Mare – as Jude Kendall has pointed out, his reviews of de la Mare's first two books are "somewhat lukewarm" – his review of Davies's *The Soul's Destroyer* brims with praise.[89] The 27-year-old Thomas is certain this is the special talent he was looking for:

> I have often wondered idly how I should meet the apparition of a new poet – it was so easy to praise small and middling writers of verse – and now all that I can do is to help to lay down a cloak of journalists' words, over which he may walk a little more easily to his just fame.[90]

While the sentence from *Beautiful Wales* captures Thomas's enthusiasm for discovering outstanding poetry, this passage, written only about a year later, is a testimony to the seriousness with which he approached his role as a critic. As he acknowledged, he had been contemplating how best to respond to the new promising poets of the twentieth century even before he came across any of them. Both passages challenge Thomas's reputation as a hack-writer for whom reviewing was only an unrewarding source of income and distraction from his own literary pursuits.

[87] Longley, "Introduction" in *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, ix.
[88] Edna Longley, *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (London: Enitharmon, 2017), 25.
[89] Judy Kendall, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Poet to Poet: Edward Thomas's Letters to Walter de la Mare*, ed. Judy Kendall (Bridgend: Seren, 2012), 9.
[90] Edward Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, ed. Richard Emeny (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2004), 67.

As the personal remark from his review also reveals, Thomas was unsure how to introduce this book that he felt so strongly about. Accepting the responsibility for the still almost unknown poet, he was careful not to spoil the review with "journalists' words." Since for Thomas, Davies was no "middling writer of verse," instead of describing the poems, he devoted a major part of the review to them. His first review of *The Soul's Destroyer* includes thirteen two-or-more-line long quotations from the collection. In a letter to Gordon Bottomley, Thomas suggests he consciously based the review on quotes as he refers to his "page of quotations from Davies in the *Chronicle*."[91]

Thomas did not only rely on quotations. Trying to help the poet walk "a little more easily to fame," he came up with a bold comparison: "[i]t is also natural to [Davies] to write, much as Wordsworth wrote, with the clearness, compactness, and felicity which make a man think with shame how unworthily […] he manages his native tongue."[92] Commenting on this excerpt in *Under the Same Moon* (2017), where she discusses the impact of William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) on Thomas, Longley points out this was Thomas's "highest praise of Davies."[93]

While he primarily used the comparison to emphasize the main strength of the poetry collection and to make the reader interested in the new poet, Thomas perhaps also had another reason to bring up Wordsworth – a reason which reflects his involvement in Davies's career.

Being a poor tramp, who could not afford to buy new books and "hated the idea of borrowing [them]," Davies only read "second-hand books of the great classics."[94] Thomas confirms this in a letter to Bottomley: "When I saw him he had only a 6d. Wordsworth & Shelley … & and one or two strange miscellanies & gifts (of their own works!) from reviewers

[91] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 102.
[92] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 68.
[93] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 71.
[94] W. H. Davies, *Later Days* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), 39.

(not from me I assure you!)."[95] To upgrade Davies's scant collection of books, Thomas gave him, among others, another book by Wordsworth.[96]

Thomas first met Davies on October 11, 1905, before reviewing *The Soul's Destroyer*,[97] which means he knew about Davies's fondness for Wordsworth when writing the review. Therefore, the Wordsworth reference was likely aimed not only at the public but also at Davies. To be compared to one of the few poets he knew and admired no doubt pleased Davies, who anxiously followed reviews of his own work. Apart from praising the young poet, Thomas was also pointing the way forward as he saw Wordsworth as the perfect role model for Davies.

If Wordsworth was the perfect exemplar, then Davies, at least from Thomas's perspective, was the ideal protégé. "[C]ertain that *Lyrical Ballads* changed the game,"[98] to borrow Longley's words, Thomas was looking for a poet who would continue the tradition of English lyrical poetry without being overly imitative of his predecessors. At last, he came upon a man who met both conditions: "it must not be supposed [Davies's poems] are echoes," Thomas notes in one of his later reviews, "[t]hey would be more fitly described as poems that Herrick, Wordsworth and Blake left unwritten."[99]

Thomas concluded his 1905 review of *The Soul's Destroyer* with two points. First, he observed that Davies excelled in shorter poems, which "would, with a few exceptions, make an anthology of quaint and noble things."[100] In the following years, Thomas would often comment on the length of Davies's poems. Second, he signalled there is more to come from the poet

---

[95] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 103.
[96] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 103.
[97] Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 144.
[98] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 71.
[99] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 94.
[100] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 71.

("Mr. Davies has another book almost ready"[101]), likely not knowing that Davies's next collection, *New Poems* (1907), would bring him a great deal of frustration.

However talented, the tramp-poet lacked one crucial trait: patience. Or, as Cullup has put it: "he was too easily satisfied and doggedly prolific."[102] Davies had his debut in 1905 and died in 1940; during those 35 years, he published 51 books. Encouraged by positive reviews, he published *New Poems* only a year and a half after *The Soul's Destroyer*. Out of gratitude to Thomas's family, who were letting him stay in a cottage near their house at the time, he dedicated the book to Thomas and his wife Helen. Thomas likely wished he had been spared this compliment.

In early December 1906, a month before Thomas's three reviews, *New Poems* appeared in print, Bottomley received a troubled letter from the young critic:

> I send you William Davies' new book & should be most grateful if you could tell me what *favourable* things can be said about it. It is (as I knew all along) far below the first book, & yet I find some beautiful things in it. I am troubled to think that the book will be neglected or slighted in reviews and almost certainly not very widely sold—because I dared not discourage Davies by telling him boldly what I thought.[103]

As this passage shows, Thomas used his reviews to guide Davies when his private advice was not effective. Since he could not stop the poet from prematurely publishing his second collection, he faced a different challenge than in 1905. The question was no longer how to praise a book, but how to criticize it without damaging the author's reputation and also without disheartening him. Given that Davies was a free spirit, it was not unimaginable he would abandon writing for another activity at this early stage of his career.

[101] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 72.
[102] Cullup, "Recovering W. H. Davies."
[103] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 128.

Two weeks later, Thomas seemed inclined to take the easy way out and refrain from criticism in his reviews of *New Poems*: "I must think out a just & yet genial comment for his private eye," he wrote to Bottomley: "In print I shall praise him mainly because a reviewer has to shout like an actor if he is to be heard by the audience."[104]

Thomas eventually listened to his critical scruples and voiced some objections to book. He came up with a smart approach: he began his articles for *The Morning Post* and *The Daily Chronicle* by devoting the first few paragraphs to Davies's life and debut collection. Thomas wanted to remind the readers of the poet's background but also to point them to *Soul's Destroyer*, should they be puzzled by Davies's second book.

The enthusiastic opening allowed Thomas to be sharper in the rest of the review. Though he praised Davies's "capacity for observation and expression," he also indicated the poet's main weakness: the lack of concentration which ruins his longer poems.[105] Thomas, who complained to Bottomley that Davies has "no idea of proportion," was convinced that the poet should rely on his natural simplicity and abstain from writing elaborate poems.[106] As he put it his *Morning Post* review, "[h]is long poems, though they contain good things, invariably fail. They lure him into indefiniteness, incoherence, inconsequence."[107]

Thomas particularly disliked "Hope Abandoned," the 206-line work which is similar to the title poem of *The Soul's Destroyer* in that it depicts the dangers of drinking alcohol. The poem is difficult to paraphrase as, to quote Thomas, "it is not always easy to understand, and it is incoherent even when intelligible."[108] He had noticed Davies's struggle with long poems

[104] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 130.
[105] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 73.
[106] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 128.
[107] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 75.
[108] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 75.

before, but “Hope Abandoned” stroke him as so poor that, for the first time, he assessed the poet’s capabilities with brutal honesty:

> Perhaps [the long poems] demand purely intellectual gifts in which he is not rich, and they certainly put a severe strain upon his constructive faculty, which is weak; his poems either sing themselves through like an old air or they break up and fall.[109]

Thomas was not writing the poet off; he was only emphatically telling Davies he should stop overestimating his abilities and stick to his strengths. Thomas came up with the comparison “sing themselves through like an old air” as he preferred Davies’s spontaneous-looking, song-like poems to the pieces based on the poet’s unsatisfactory “constructive faculty.”

It is telling Thomas included no poems from *New Poems* it in his anthology *The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air* (1907), which he was compiling at the time. Thomas’s letters reveal he did enjoy some parts of *New Poems* but may have felt it would not be instructive to highlight any poems from this book in his anthology. Davies is represented by three poems from *The Soul’s Destroyer*: “Autumn,” “A Drinking Song,” and sixteen lines from “The Soul’s Destroyer.” The choice of a short lyrical poem, a drinking song (Thomas was a fan of Davies’s drinking songs), and an excerpt from a longer, uneven poem reflects Thomas’s points on the length and character of Davies’s poems.

For Thomas – who admitted to Bottomley he had known “all along” the poet’s second book would be a setback – the publication of *New Poems* was confirmation that Davies’s lack of self-criticism was a major impediment to his development. The poet’s struggles meant Thomas’s role as a mentor became even more important. Though disappointed, Thomas wished

[109] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 75.

to help Davies, and in the final sentence of his *Daily Chronicle* review he vows "to do what [he] can to ensure the future of this fascinating genius."[110]

It seems fitting to conclude this uneasy episode in their relationship with the protégé's words. This is how Davies looked back at the publication of *New Poems* in 1929:

> Unfortunately, my second book of poems was something of a failure, because of my foolish haste to publish again, as is usual with new authors. So that I felt considerably disappointed when Edward Thomas began to tell me how so many authors sing themselves out in their first book, and then have no more to say. But when my second book was followed by *Nature Poems* and my *Autobiography*, Thomas was then delighted to find that he had made a mistake.[111]

From 1908, when both *The Autobiography of the Super-Tramp* and *Nature Poems* appeared, until Thomas's death in 1917, Thomas remained consistent in his assessment of Davies's work, accenting similar points as in his reviews of Davies's first two books. The striking aspect of Thomas's supervision is the fact that he never demanded that Davies change. He neither pushed Davies in a new direction, nor attempted to shape the poet's style. From the first review to the last, Thomas treated Davies as a writer who, while not perfect, is still important, regardless of his flaws.

Perhaps due to Davies's free way of life, his spontaneous approach to writing, and his natural resistance to bookishness, Thomas perceived Davies's poetry as a mystery. In one of his reviews of *The Autobiography*, he calls the poet "a favourite of Providence," and points out it is "astonishing that poetry like his should arise out of a life so quiet, full and simple."[112] Elsewhere he argues some of the poet's formal imperfections are, in fact, "reassuring" as they

[110] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 79.
[111] Davies, *Later Days*, 25-26.
[112] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 92.

prove that "Mr Davies's good things come of just that inexplicable unconscious simplicity which used to be called inspiration and never had a more sufficient name."[113]

To persuade the public of the inspired nature of Davies's poetry, Thomas often stressed the poet's lack of education and his "little knowledge of facts,"[114] asserting "the only subject which Mr Davies knows anything about is tramping."[115] When he remarks in his 1910 article that Davies "has solved the most difficult questions without knowing it,"[116] Thomas anticipates the title character of his own 1915 poem "Lob" who "has thirteen hundred names for a fool" though "he never could spare time for school."[117] In the poem, Thomas depicts Lob as a simple but remarkable man who easily outsmarts a sage. Likewise, Thomas was not mocking Davies's ignorance but rather commending his unaffected attitude to life.

Thomas's fascination with the tramp's life and character deserves a closer look. Davies resembled Lob – he, too, was "wild / And wandered"[118] – and Thomas repeatedly listed his broad range of experiences, as in his second review of the *Autobiography*, "[i]n these years [in the US] he met a variety of men, in the open fields and woods, in saloons, in prisons, and on deck."[119] He knew "Wales, London, America, and Hell,"[120] Thomas quipped elsewhere. Irrespective of whether he was reviewing Davies's memoirs or his poetry, Thomas regarded him as a writer with authority – an authority based on his knowledge of life rather than knowledge of facts.

Thomas presented Davies as a person immune to some common vices such as calculation and egoism. Despite the years of poverty and hardship he never lost, to quote

---

[113] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 95.
[114] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 95.
[115] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 95.
[116] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 92.
[117] Edward Thomas, *The Annotated Collected Poems*, ed. Edna Longley (Highgreen: Bloodaxe, 2008), 78.
[118] Thomas, *The Annotated Collected Poems*, 77.
[119] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 83.
[120] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 67.

Thomas, “the innocence of an animal, frank, happy and bold, breaking many laws and rules with no shame and no remorse.”[121] During his travels, he committed minor offences, including stealing, but for Thomas, such incidents only proved that Davies’s mind was unspoiled by any norms and expectations. In Thomas’s view, Davies’s untamed nature enhanced his writing.

Other critics, too, were attracted to the tramp’s personality. Shaw, in his introduction to the *Autobiography*, praises the “innocence of the author’s manner.”[122] However, no one emphasized Davies’s “uncorrupted frankness”[123] and “wide humanity”[124] so vehemently as Thomas. His fixation on the writer’s extra-literary qualities seems problematic, though, because other readers – especially those who never met the writer – might be less receptive to Davies’s “love of animals and children and nature and poor men,”[125] which Thomas saw as an essential prerequisite for his work.

It was not the only time that Thomas rather stubbornly looked for parallels between a writer’s character and his work. In *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* (1913), he dissects Pater’s prose and detects countless flaws, from the “stiffness [and] lack of an emotional rhythm”[126] to the overuse of the adjective “strange.”[127] His fierce criticism (or, as Longley has put it, “the long battery”[128]) provoked mostly unfavourable reviews. In October 1913, a reviewer in *The Saturday Review* noted: “[Thomas] will not allow Walter Pater is a master of style. We cannot allow that Mr Edward Thomas is, in this assertion, a master of criticism.”[129]

---

[121] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 82.
[122] George Bernard Shaw, “Introduction” in W. H. Davies, *The Autobiography of the Super-Tramp* (New York: A. A Knopf, 1917), viii.
[123] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 85.
[124] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 68.
[125] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 85.
[126] Edward Thomas, *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1913), 103.
[127] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 82, 85.
[128] Longley, “Introduction” in *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, v.
[129] Quoted in Francis O’Gorman, “Introduction” in Edward Thomas, *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition: Volume V: Critical Studies: Swinburne and Pater*, ed. Francis O’Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), lvi.

The thorough analysis of Pater's style may overshadow another important feature of the book: the unsympathetic portrayal of the writer's life. Thomas described Pater's life as "celibate,"[130] "sedentary,"[131] and "almost ascetic,"[132] and argued that "[e]xcept in his inner life, so far as is known, he met with no adventures, ran no risks, never suffered."[133] He persistently stressed Pater's bookishness: "he speaks like a collector of the great and beautiful. He collected them from books, and pictures, not from life."[134] At times, Thomas was notably harsh as when he wondered whether Pater was sensible enough to experience the death of a friend.[135]

Thomas used these biographical remarks to prepare the ground for his criticism of Pater's prose. As Francis O'Gorman has observed, "Thomas's emphasis on Pater the viewer […] emphasizes a man unable to connect or to express emotion on paper."[136] Thomas saw the roots of the problem in Pater's seclusion, suggesting that a writer dwelling "in his pensive citadel" is more likely to become artificial and egoistic. [137] In his view, Pater's style, marked by its "detachment," possibly stemmed from his emotional detachment.[138]

In his introduction to *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition: Volume V: Critical Studies: Swinburne and Pater* (2017), O'Gorman identifies several problems in *Walter Pater*, such as the fact that Thomas borrowed some biographical details from unreliable sources.[139] Thomas also often misquoted Pater, which makes his objections less convincing.[140] More importantly, the book shows he was a critic who could be influenced by a writer's character. Though the format is different (a book-length study as opposed to a series of reviews),

[130] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 68.
[131] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 68.
[132] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 70.
[133] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 68.
[134] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 96.
[135] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 68.
[136] O'Gorman, "Introduction," xlix.
[137] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 71.
[138] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 101.
[139] O'Gorman, "Introduction," xliv.
[140] O'Gorman, "Introduction," liv.

he approached Davies and Pater in a similar manner. In both cases, he supported – or rather, weakened – his analytical passages (marked by extensive quoting and close reading) by statements relating the writer's personality.

To bring up *Pater* in the chapter on Davies is useful for identifying one of Thomas's tendencies. Also, since he described the two writers as polar opposites, his book about Pater complements his reviews of Davies, and vice versa. The well-travelled tramp transcribing his experiences in a straightforward but occasionally sloppy style was, for Thomas, the antidote to the ascetic aesthete and his elaborate writings. Thomas's objections to the latter illuminate his predilection for the former, especially when it comes to their respective methods of composition.

Thomas distrusted Pater's laborious methods (based on rewriting) as it was destroying, as O'Gorman has put it, "a spontaneous and organic logic."[141] This helps us understand why Thomas excused (or even felt reassured by) Davies's less refined texts. In *Pater*, he argues that "[e]ven carelessness or conventionality of language has its value as expression."[142] For Thomas, Davies's work was the prime example of that.

This chapter presents Thomas as a mentor, and yet some his statements in his Davies articles almost go against the idea of mentoring. It is difficult to direct someone whose work depends on spontaneity. Thomas knew he could not expect Davies to consciously work on his weaknesses and still keep his "inexplicable unconscious simplicity."[143] Still, instead of observing Davies's career from afar, he chose to play a part in his development. His main goal was to alert the poet to the perils of complexity; as discussed above, he did not like to see Davies getting entangled in long poems, and he encouraged him to learn from Wordsworth's clarity.

---

[141] O'Gorman, "Introduction," liv.
[142] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, 202.
[143] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 90.

Thomas protected Davies from the pressure to be modern and progressive. In his reviews, he assured the poet that he could be his own man: "Mr Davies is not a discoverer. There is no new order of beauty in any of his work. He has found no new fields, no new music. But he has found himself.…"[144] Referring to Davies's affinity with Wordsworth, Thomas argued the former's simplicity is "not quite so novel as it is natural."[145] He also attempted to turn Davies's old-fashionedness into permanence: "his work would have been as readable three centuries ago, and will be, if it survives, three centuries hence."[146]

While Thomas rarely dwelt on Davies's formal shortcomings (such as his use of "familiar words" and "well-known stanza forms"[147]), he was less patient in relation to the subject matter. As the time went on, Thomas more often complained that this poetry "opens no new worlds, nor makes any attempt."[148] In his review of *Foliage: Various Poems* (1913) he slams Davies for being repetitive, pointing out "several poems here would have been delightful had they not been echoes of more beautiful things in his other volumes."[149]

Thomas concluded his unfavourable review on an optimistic note, but the poet did not take the critique well. In May 1914, six months after the article had appeared, Thomas suggested to Bottomley that his reviews of the two problematic collections, *New Poems* and *Foliage*, had brought tension into his friendship with the poet: "The difficulty of Davies is greater. I have said the true thing perhaps twice in print – he thought it meant hostility tho I personally thought it would do him & me good that our position was not the blind adorer & the blind adored."[150]

Davies's predictable response to the negative criticism is less noteworthy than Thomas's thoughts on the literary relationship between him and the poet. As in 1906 and 1907, when

[144] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 92.
[145] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 94.
[146] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 94.
[147] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 95.
[148] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 94.
[149] Thomas, *Thomas on the Georgians*, 109.
[150] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 233.

examining *New Poems*, Thomas again manifested his honest approach to criticism by publicly voicing his objections to Davies's *Foliage*. Thomas thought that, as a reviewer, he should remain professional towards Davies and not turn into "a blind adorer" of his work. Also, he felt that a sharp review might help Davies's development more than insincere praise, or even an emphatic advice in private.

Thomas's belief in Davies's talent may puzzle readers today, but his twenty-one articles on the writer's work, as well as some of his letters relating Davies, are an invaluable source for Thomas scholars. Due to his premature death, Thomas witnessed only the beginnings of Frost's and Lawrence's careers, and we do not know whether he reviewed perhaps the most recognized volume of poems by Hardy, *Satires of Circumstance* (1914). Davies was almost the only of his favourites whose career Thomas could follow for more than a decade.

Apart from being his friend, Thomas also guided Davies, and monitored his progress (or lack of it) attentively, and at times anxiously. On several occasions, his enthusiasm for Davies made him reflect upon his role as a critic – for instance, when wondering how to introduce this unusual poet to the public, when discovering the fine line between constructive and harmful criticism, and when trying to establish a healthy relationship between a reviewer and a writer. Such reflections, touching on broader issues of literary criticism, make his reviews and letters (and not only those relating to Davies) particularly interesting. Thomas's articles will also play a key role in the following chapter, in which I will consider his editorial work, the aspect of his critical career that he may have enjoyed most.

Chapter 3

Thomas as an Anthologist: The Making of *This England*

Edward Thomas's literary career tends to be divided into two parts: his time as a critic (the 1900s and early 1910s) and his time as a poet (1914 until his death in the Battle of Arras). It is understandable that Thomas's poems, some of the best ever written in English, attract more attention than his critical work published during the First World War. However, as this chapter suggests, to draw a strict line between the two parts of his career is a mistake. Until his enlistment in July 1915, Thomas still worked as a freelance critic and his responses to the turbulent times deserve to be studied at least as carefully as his pre-war work discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

For a discerning critic like Thomas, the beginning of the war brought frustration. Bookshops and journals were flooded with jingoistic writing as the demand for work unrelated to the conflict decreased. According to Catherine Reilly, at least fifty wartime anthologies were published during the war.[151] In December 1914, only four months after Britain had declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary, Thomas remarked:

The worst of the poetry being written to-day is that it is too deliberately, and not

[151] Hugh Haughton, "Anthologizing War," in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 422.

> inevitably, English. It is for an audience: there is more in it of the shouting of rhetorician, reciter, or politician than of the talk of friends and lovers.[152]

This excerpt from his review-article, "Anthologies and Reprints," published in Harold Monro's magazine, *Poetry and Drama*, corresponds with Thomas's argument in "War Poetry." In the essay, included in the same issue of the magazine, Thomas warns that most poems written "under the direct pressure of public patriotic motives" usually have a limited shelf life.[153]

Apart from his articles, Thomas wished to counter the wave of bombastic writing by compiling his own war-time anthology. Despite the initial scepticism of his agent, Frank Cazenove, who had thought the market was saturated enough with anthologies about England,[154] Oxford University Press became interested and *This England: An Anthology from her Writers* came out in November 1915. Yet Cazenove's doubts proved to be partly justified as *This England* did not make a splash. Thomas's three books published that month (the anthology, the children's story book *Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds*, and the biography *The Life of the Duke of Marlborough*) only received "friendly useless reviews," as Thomas wrote to Robert Frost.[155]

Now, the anthology is largely forgotten, difficult to obtain, and most Thomas scholars mention it simply as the first published appearance of his poems. The decision to include two of his own poems under the pseudonym Edward Eastaway is noteworthy but the book deserves attention for other reasons. As I will argue in this chapter, *This England* is a carefully selected and well-structured anthology of poems and prose excerpts. I will be mainly interested in the making of the book, relying on Thomas's two above-mentioned articles in *Poetry and Drama*,

---

[152] Edward Thomas, "Anthologies and Reprints," *Poetry and Drama* 2.8 (Dec. 1914): 384.
[153] Edward Thomas, "War Poetry," *Poetry and Drama* 2.8 (Dec. 1914): 341.
[154] Matthew Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 171.
[155] Quoted in Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France*, 247.

his reviews, letters, as well as observations by critics, including Edna Longley and Jonathan Bate. My aim is to show how knowledge of Thomas's other critical outputs can help us understand his editorial decisions. By examining the anthology's prefatory note, its structure, and its notable inclusions and omissions, I hope to illuminate Thomas's views on the role of literature in the times of war but also his approach to the anthology as a medium.

As he died only a year and a half after the publication of the book, and he was more of a soldier than writer in his final months, *This England* was one of Thomas's last statements as a critic. This is true mainly due to the sheer scope of the anthology; there are excerpts from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as well as poems by Thomas's contemporaries; there are great poets like Chaucer, Milton, and Wordsworth next to anonymous or hardly known writers. The selection of prose is bold, as it includes the likes of Asser and Thomas Cromwell. All these pieces are divided into seven sections: "This England," "Merry England," "Her Sweet Three Corners," "London," "Abroad and Home Again," "Great Ones," and "The Vital Commoners."

The diverse content of *This England* reminds one of Thomas's first anthology, *The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air* (1907), which includes famous names but also lyrics by anonymous authors, ballads, and folk songs. In *The Pocket Book*, Thomas exposes his readers to lesser-known texts, such as three previously "unpublished sailors' songs" and "two little known songs from *The Compleat Angler*."[156] The emphasis on originality suggests that he compiled his book as a response to other anthologies which he read and often also reviewed. In his essay on *The Pocket Book*, Justin Quinn explains structural and thematical differences between Thomas's anthology and one of the literary monuments of the Victorian era, the immensely influential *Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the*

[156] Edward Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, ed. R. George Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 128.

English Language (1861) by Frances Turner Palgrave.[157] Though Thomas publicly paid tribute to Palgrave's anthology ("The culture of a whole age lay behind it. It was useful and delightful, and it was a force"[158]), in a letter to Gordon Bottomley he asserts he "must avoid the *Golden Treasury* obviousness" in his own book.[159]

Thomas also reacted to anthologies first published during his lifetime. As his correspondence reveals, when putting together *The Pocket Book*, he deliberately avoided material of other "open air" anthologies, such as Edward Verall Lucas's then popular *The Open Road: A Little Book for Wayfarers* (1899). In 1906, Thomas reviewed a new edition of *The Open Road* for *The Daily Chronicle*, and his familiarity with Lucas's book affected his own anthology. He admits in a letter to Gordon Bottomley that "in my endeavour to keep clear of what Lucas & other open air anthologies have used I daresay my poetry is not all good & not all popular enough to make £ 1500 out of it as Lucas did out of his genial *Open Road* anthology."[160] A few weeks later, he expressed similar doubts to Jesse Berridge.[161]

While it is not the purpose of this chapter to contrast *The Pocket Book* with other anthologies, it is useful to consider Thomas's focus on (if not obsession with) exclusivity. He exhibited both the ambition and stubbornness of a tastemaker and someone keen on participating in the canon-making process. He came across as a critic driven by his visions and need to respond to other critics while promoting his long-term favourites.

When looking at *This England*, this Thomas's characteristic becomes as prominent as in the case of *The Pocket Book*. Here is the editor's note to the book:

[157] Justin Quinn, "Out in the Open: *The Pocket Book* of Edward Thomas," in *Dusk and Dawn: Literature Between Two Centuries*, eds Šárka Grauová and Eva Voldřichová Beránková (Prague: Charles University Press, 2017), 333–355.
[158] Edward Thomas, "Reprints and Anthologies," *Poetry and Drama* 2.7 (Sept. 1914): 299.
[159] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 113.
[160] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 128.
[161] Edward Thomas, *Selected Letters*, ed. R. George Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 41.

> This is an anthology from the work of English writers rather strictly so called. Building round a few most English poems like 'When icicles hang by the wall' – excluding professedly patriotic writing because it is generally bad and because indirect praise is sweeter and more profound, – never aiming to what a committee from Great Britain and Ireland might call complete – I wished to make a book as full of English character and country as an egg is of meat. If I have reminded others, as I did myself continually, of some of the echoes called up by the name of England, I am satisfied.[162]

Jonathan Bate finds the prefatory note "unassuming," remarking "[t]here is nothing here of kings and queens, empire and war."[163] Yet the embedded clauses in Thomas's note are both direct and confident, openly opposing the flux of explicitly patriotic writing. His critique does not apply only to wartime books. As Edna Longley argues, "*This England* is the polar opposite of the anthology *Lyra Britannica*, which Thomas had reviewed in 1906. He condemns its editor for promoting 'rhetorical verse' … and for subordinating poetry to the realisation of the responsibility of every boy and girl born to the heritage of the glory of Britain.'"[164]

These are intriguing paradoxes: Thomas's prefatory note to a wartime anthology does not mention war while his 1906 review of *Lyra Britannica*, which blames the editor for confusing nationalistic rhetoric with poetry, would be even more relevant in 1914. Thomas's article "War Poetry" reveals two more paradoxes: he brings attention to the fact that Samuel Taylor Coleridge's troubled, ambiguous piece "Fears in Solitude" – "though no newspaper or magazine, then or now, would print such a poem" – has survived unlike many less modest poems written during Napoleonic wars.[165]

[162] Edward Thomas, "Note," in *This England: An Anthology from Her Writers*, ed. Edward Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915).
[163] Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 202.
[164] Edna Longley, *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (London: Enitharmon, 2017), 134.
[165] Thomas, "War Poetry," 341.

Thomas also points out that the origin of one of the finest martial songs, William Blake's "War Song to Englishmen," might disappoint some of its admirers. As he explains, the poem was written "in or before 1783, by one who became a red-capped Revolutionary and cared nothing for Pitt's England."[166] According to Thomas, Blake might have been inspired by seeing "the kings in Westminster or reading Shakespeare's plays" as he wrote "from a settled mystic patriotism, which wars could not disturb."[167]

For Thomas, not much in the previous three paragraphs was or would be paradoxical. It seems the purpose of "War Poetry" was not to assert that all poets writing about the war are wrong but to point out the complexity of the creative process. On the example of Blake and his "settled mystic patriotism," Thomas shows that powerful poetry often does not come into being on command or when the nation needs it. As he puts it: "by becoming ripe for poetry the poet's thought may recede far from their original resemblance to all the world's, and may seem to have little to do with daily events."[168] Thomas prescribes temperance, patience, and emotional distance from war, concluding that he "should expect the work of real poets to improve as the war advances, perhaps after it is over, as they understand it and themselves more completely."[169]

This England reflects most of Thomas's points from "War Poetry." In the winter of 1915, when putting together the material for the anthology, Thomas believed it was too early for most living authors to write about the conflict. As a result, he almost left out his contemporaries from his book. Not counting Thomas, the only contributors alive during the compilation of *This England* were Gordon Bottomley, Walter de la Mare, Charles M. Doughty, Thomas Hardy, and W. H. Hudson. According to his biographer R. George Thomas, Thomas

[166] Thomas, "War Poetry," 342.
[167] Thomas, "War Poetry," 342.
[168] Thomas, "War Poetry," 344.
[169] Thomas, "War Poetry," 344.

wished to add A. E. Housman (included in *The Pocket Book*) but he could not, for Housman (as Thomas wrote to Eleanor Farjeon) "always said No to anthologists."[170] The focus on texts from the past distinguishes his book from most anthologies published at the time as the popular ones, such as *Poems of the Great War* (1914), usually consisted of or were centred around new poems.

After examining Thomas's critical texts, the selection of his contemporaries becomes far from surprising. Thomas admired Hudson and was beguiled by de la Mare's poem "An Epitaph" which he also anthologises in *The Pocket Book* and quotes in *The Pursuit of Spring* (1914), and which, as Judy Kendall suggests, he likely alludes to in his poem "The Unknown."[171] In "War Poetry," he mentions Doughty and Hardy as the poets who, given their experience with previous wars, had the potential to come up with a meaningful reflection of the present conflict.[172]

Still, Thomas assigns Doughty a large space (four excerpts) in the anthology which may have puzzled readers then, as it may puzzle readers now. Despite the support of influential critics like Edward Garnett (who first recommended Doughty to Thomas[173]), Doughty's ambitious literary work has never won the hearts of English readers. It had, however, won over Thomas who reviewed all six volumes of Doughty's epic poem *The Dawn in Britain* (1906) consisting of 30,000 lines. Though the long poem is written in an elaborate, deliberately old-

[170] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 246. In 1907, Thomas included two poems by Housman in *The Pocket Book* without asking the author for permission. Housman was infuriated and chided his publisher Grant Richards, who also happened to be the anthology's publisher and who gave Thomas the permission: "You must not treat my immortal works as quarries to be used at will by various hacks who you may employ to compile anthologies. … Mr Thomas thanks me for 'a poem' [in the preface to the anthology], and prints two: which is the one he doesn't thank me for?" Quoted in Edgar Vincent, *A.E. Housman: Hero of the Hidden Life* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), 175–176.
[171] Judy Kendall, *Poet to Poet: Edward Thomas's Letters to Walter de la Mare* (Bridgend: Seren, 2012), 109.
[172] Thomas, "War Poetry," 344–345.
[173] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 118.

fashioned style – a literary style both Garnett and Thomas usually did not approve of – both critics were fascinated by the epic and likened him to Milton.[174][175]

Thomas, who had wished to include him in *The Pocket Book* but Doughty had refused,[176] was thrilled to get a consent from Doughty this time.[177] For *This England*, Thomas chose two excerpts from *The Dawn* (his favourite work of Doughty's), one being the same excerpt he quoted in his 1907 review of the poem:

> Grey Deep, how wholesome, to a shipman's eye!
> And who is 'scaped, from ape-faced world, not joys
> Look forth, o'ver thy vast wandering breast, abroad,
> From some lone cliff, and snuff up thy salt breath?
> Eternal flood! how thy waves' sullen sound,
> Doth seem, as mother's voice, to wakening child![178]

In the review, Thomas appreciates the excerpt, for the poet's style "allows of a fine simplicity in touching a simple matter."[179] In another review, Thomas praises him for depicting ancient Britain in an imaginative way, adding "… I had no worthy sense of the rich great age of this home of my race until I found it here." He also expresses his hope that one day "children will grow up with the emotion of this book in their breasts," as it presents "a harmonious view of early history and folklore and ancient monuments and the physical beauty of Britain."[180] It seems that for Thomas, *The Dawn*, which creatively describes ancient Britain and its culture,

---

[174] Edward Garnett*, Friday Nights, Literary Criticism and Appreciations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 128-129.
[175] Edward Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed: Selected Prose of Edward Thomas*, ed. Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), 134.
[176] Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 121.
[177] Thomas, *Selected Letters*, 106.
[178] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be* Betrayed, 77.
[179] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 77.
[180] Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 76.

was the perfect antithesis to the senseless, overly political, and potentially harmful anthology *Lyra Britannica*, and therefore it deserved to be part of *This England*.

Another pillar of Thomas's anthology is the already-mentioned "Fears in Solitude." It is the longest complete poem in the book. He did not make the same move as L. Godwin Salt in *English Patriotic Poetry* (1912) who had not overlooked "Fears in Solitude" but, according to Thomas, "[had] robbed it of all its particular character and most of its force by cutting out only twenty-two lines from the middle."[181] Salt chose one of the least ambivalent passages of the poem starting "But, O dear Britain! O my Mother Isle!"[182] Oddly enough, in *A Literary Pilgrim in England* (1917), his guide to special places of selected British authors, Thomas uses almost the same excerpt which makes his critique of Salt slightly unfair. However – unlike Salt, who calls Coleridge's lines "beautiful" and praises his "devotion" to the country in the preface to his book[183] – Thomas explains that apart from his love of England, Coleridge also "felt the country's need of humility."[184]

That Thomas refers to "Fears in Solitude" in two of his 1914 articles in *Poetry and Drama* as well as in his *Literary Pilgrim*, which he had finished shortly before he started compiling *This England*, suggests this poem was important to him at the start of the war and he wished to bring more attention to it. As Longley explains, "Fears in Solitude" was his ideal patriotic poem "because it internalised public events" and "criticizes British 'tyranny' and popular clamour for 'bloodshed.'"[185] In "War Poetry," Thomas presents the poem as a model for other poets tempted to reflect on the war, and in *This England*, he continues to promote the poem by allocating seven pages to it.

---

[181] Edward Thomas, "Anthologies and Reprints," *Poetry and Drama* 2.8 (Dec. 1914): 384.
[182] L. Godwin Salt, *English Patriotic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 33.
[183] L. Godwin Salt Salt, "Preface," in *English Patriotic Poetry*, ed. L. Godwin Salt, xlix.
[184] Edward Thomas, *A Literary Pilgrim in England* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2015), 180.
[185] Longley, *Under the Same Moon*, 147.

Coleridge's "Fears in Solitude" is one of the last poems of the section "Her Sweet Three Corners." This section (named after a line from "Trees," another of de la Mare's poems in the anthology) is the longest and perhaps the most crucial one in the book. Thomas devotes it mainly to English nature and countryside by including poems, for instance, about hills ("Two Shropshire Hills" by Charlotte S. Burne), trees ("Oak of Gloucestershire" by Thomas Fuller), and towns ("Portsmouth" by William Cobbett). Considering Thomas both wrote and reviewed country books, it is likely he put extra effort to compiling "Her Sweet Three Corners." It is no coincidence that the section brims with place-names, which, he believed, could enhance both poetry and prose. As he argues in a chapter on Hardy in *A Literary Pilgrim*, rustic names "emphasize the littleness, yet save it from abstraction." They matter even if the reader is not familiar with them: "the general effect of using local names with no significance for the stranger … is to aid reality by suggestions of gross and humble simplicity."[186]

The section is notable also because it is comprised of some of Thomas's longstanding favourites (Coleridge, Doughty, de la Mare, Hardy, William Wordsworth, and John Keats) as well as the two of his own poems. However, though his – or better Edward Eastaway's – "The Manor Farm" and "Haymaking" have a prominent place in the anthology as they follow "Fears in Solitude" and conclude "Her Sweet Three Corners," the reasoning behind their inclusion should not be overthought. As Matthew Hollis remarks, Thomas inserted his poems at the eleventh hour after his publisher asked him to fill two blank pages that had arisen in the typesetting.[187] Still, both poems, with their rural setting, perfectly fit not only the section but the book, which, as Thomas indicates in the prefatory note, is "full of English character and country."

---

[186] Thomas, *A Literary Pilgrim*, 145.
[187] Hollis, 247–248.

Let us now briefly consider the structure of *This England*. For Thomas, compiling an anthology meant more than assembling his favourite texts. As his 1914 review of seven new anthologies or reprints illustrates, he thought anthologies should have focus and structure. He argues that the weak spot of the seven anthologies does not lie in the bad taste of the editors but rather in their inability to "get good things that were also suitable."[188] Twice in his article he complains about the structure of a particular anthology: commenting on *Patriotic Poems* (1914), he sighs that "nothing in the selection or arrangement makes it either novel or classical";[189] while in *Poetry for Boys* (1914) he struggles to find "anything in the arrangement likely to make boys love verses better."[190] Thomas's points on the matter of structure correspond with his emphasis on originality – his belief that an anthology should surprise the reader. He was convinced editors should strive for novelty, both by including lesser-known works but also by arranging their books so that they present the more familiar works in a new context.

The structure of Thomas's anthologies reflects their purpose. Sections in *The Pocket Book* are named after parts of a day, from morning to evening, making it a convenient companion for long walks and day trips. As Quinn explains, such arrangement also allowed Thomas to mix old and new texts and avoid the sequential chronology of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*.[191] Whereas *The Pocket Book* serves as a book for the open air, regardless of the weather, season, or time of the day, *This England*, as Thomas indicated in a letter to Jesse Berridge, should convey "what England means to people."[192] In order to capture "Englishness" comprehensively, from all angles, Thomas put different sections into oppositions: "London" balances the mostly rural "Her Sweet Three Corners;" the part focused on the nation's kings

[188] Thomas, "Reprints and Anthologies," 299.
[189] Thomas, "Reprints and Anthologies," 300.
[190] Thomas, "Reprints and Anthologies," 300.
[191] Quinn, 342–343.
[192] Quoted in Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 328.

and other distinguished historical figures, "Great Ones," is followed by the section "The Vital Commoners" based on Chaucer's poems; and finally, texts in "Abroad and Home Again," such as Wordsworth's "I Travelled among Unknown Men," contrast England with foreign countries and provide a different perspective than other sections in the book.

Despite the range of the anthology, *This England* also speaks through its absences. There are almost no poems about the pressing themes of Thomas's present, such as enlisting and battles. In accordance with his article "War Poetry," Thomas left out those "turned into poets by the war, printing verse now for the first time,"[193] as well as Henry Newbolt and Rudyard Kipling. These two, according to Thomas, belong to "a professional class apart" and may not need to alter their poems because of the war. As he added with sarcasm, "[i]t was their hour, and they have not been silent."[194]

Thomas also omitted Rupert Brooke, the popular poet whose career he closely followed. Though he wrote largely positively of Brooke, he distrusted his patriotic sonnets published in 1914, and privately, in a letter to Frost, doubted their genuineness.[195] According to Longley, not only was Brooke unsuitable for Thomas's book, but the success of his sonnets might have spurred Thomas to compile his anthology. In her essay "Going Back to Edward Thomas," Longley argues that "[Thomas] conceived *This England* to counter the patriotic anthologies that starred Brooke's sonnets and spearheaded the cultural war effort."[196]

Further in the same essay, Longley brings attention to the similarity between the anthology and "Lob," a poem Thomas wrote shortly after completing the book, suggesting a relation between *This England* and Thomas's poetic origins.[197] Coming from a different angle,

---

[193] Longley, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 131.
[194] Longley, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed*, 131.
[195] Quoted in Hollis, 227.
[196] Edna Longley, "Going Back to Edward Thomas," in *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry*, eds. Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newton (London: Enitharmon, 2007), 36.
[197] Longley, "Going Back to Edward Thomas," 37.

Jean Moorcroft Wilson hints in her biography of Thomas at the possible influence of *A Literary Pilgrim* on *This England*.[198] R. George Thomas observed that the anthology resembles Thomas's articles in *The Last Sheaf* as they also evoke a conscientious picture of England.[199] While I present *This England* chiefly as a war-time anthology, connecting it with "War Poetry" and Thomas's reviews of other new anthologies, the remarks (however brief) by Longley, Wilson, and R. G. Thomas offer other approaches to *This England*. In any case, this overlooked volume, through its sheer scope and compact arrangement, complements Thomas's other literary outputs. Compiled in an eventful period marked by the war and his sudden discovery of his talent for writing poetry, it ranks among Thomas's last and most important works.

[198] Wilson, 320.
[199] R. George Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Edward Thomas: Selected Letters*, ed. R. G. Thomas (Oxford: New York, 1995), xiv.

Conclusion

"There is more to Edward Thomas's achievement as a critic than his apparent dismay about it," Francis O'Gorman recently pointed out, and this thesis has provided evidence to support that statement. Though worn out by his profession, Thomas never lost the desire to be a tastemaker. The perceptive reviews of the poetry of Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, and J. M. Synge, examined in Chapter 1, come from a discerning critic rather than a burnt-out hack. Thomas had an agenda that he pushed forward – already in 1899, aged 21, he observed that "[p]oetry had been too long and too harshly divided from prose."[200] His fascination with the relationship between poetry and prose made him an ideal reader of the novelists and playwrights turning to poetry.

Thomas possibly also welcomed Hardy's and Lawrence's poetry so enthusiastically because he was not particularly taken by the young poets of the English literary scene. However, he had a few favourites that he passionately supported. His advocacy of W. H. Davies, whom he praised for his innocence and simplicity, was part of his crusade against pretentiousness in literature. The friendship between the two writers reveals an overlooked aspect of Thomas's critical career: his ability to guide talented poets in his reviews. Chapter 2 illuminates the literary mentorship that Davies received from Thomas.

Thomas's editorial work, discussed in Chapter 3, is a testimony to the high expectations he had of himself. As letters to his friends confirm, he insisted on distinguishing his *Pocket*

---

[200] Edward Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed: Selected Prose of Edward Thomas*, ed. Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), 137.

Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air (1907) from other "open air" anthologies, even if it made the project more challenging for him. His continued striving for originality also influenced *This England: An Anthology from Her Writers* (1915), which – while published during the First World War – would likely not have looked significantly different if it had come out during peacetime. Thomas compiled it as a response to the jingoistic poetry that was in demand in the early months of the war, and to the anthologies that promoted such poetry.

All three chapters have illustrated the interconnectedness, or harmony, of Thomas's critical work. His reviews, literary studies, biographies, and anthologies complement each other. *This England* is a perfect example of that – barring the anonymous contributors, there are few writers in the anthology who Thomas did not discuss in his articles and books. Some of the poems and prose pieces which he included he had already quoted elsewhere. His editorial decisions seem logical because they are consistent with the arguments he made earlier. The same applies to Thomas's predilection for Hardy's poetry which, as I have suggested, was anticipated by his early essay "The Frontiers of English Prose." Thomas's consistency will, hopefully, make his criticism appealing for more scholars. His work represents, among other things, an intelligible outline of British poetry in the 1900s and the first half of the 1910s.

Due to the extensiveness of his work, I have covered only fragments of it. I present Thomas as a reviewer, mentor, and anthologist, but there are other parts of his criticism that need to be considered. One of them is his interactions with other critics. As Edna Longley pointed out, first in *A Language Not to Be Betrayed: Selected Prose of Edward Thomas* (1981) and later again in *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (2017), Thomas was remarkably active as a critic of criticism. I have touched on his appreciation of A. C. Bradley and the next step might be to find parallels between the two critics.

The focus on Thomas's relationship with Edward Garnett, the more prominent English editor, might be even more interesting. While they slightly disagreed on the poetry of Ezra

Pound (Garnett was more dismissive of it than Thomas), they both praised C. M. Doughty, Richard Jefferies, W. H. Hudson, and Robert Frost. It was Thomas who first recommended Frost's *North of Boston* (1914) to Garnett. Thrilled by the book, Garnett used his connections with American editors and, in August 1915, published a substantial article on Frost in the *Atlantic Monthly*.[201] In "A New American Poet" Garnett (who discussed the draft of the article with Thomas) echoes some of his friend's points. He also refers to Thomas in his 1917 article "Critical Notes on American Poets." I would argue that while Thomas never moved to the U.S., his ideas travelled there through Garnett.

If I were to expand on this study, another of the additional chapters would examine *A Literary Pilgrim in England* (1917), perhaps Thomas's most accessible critical book, in which he connects twenty-nine excellent British writers with various parts of the country, from "London and the Home Counties" to "Scotland." Virginia Woolf, who reviewed *A Literary Pilgrim* in October 1917, praised Thomas's style, noting that some of the critical passages "make his book like the talk of a very good talker."[202] The chapter would aim to show that the book is more than a series of biographies, instead – mainly due Thomas's extensive quoting and talent for close reading – it is an insightful literary study.

The third additional chapter would focus on a theme suggested by R. George Thomas: the business side of Thomas's career as a freelance critic. In 1968 he argued that "[t]o neglect the truth about Thomas's life as a writer means to throw away a useful key to the changing critical audience brought about by the Harmsworthian revolution in newspapers publication."[203] R. George Thomas was referring to the influence of Alfred Harmsworth, the press and

---

[201] Thomas warned Garnett that it might damage Frost "if you rubbed the American noses in their own dirt." Edward Thomas, *A Selection of Letters to Edward Garnett*, ed. by Edward Garnett (Edinburgh: The Tragara Press, 1981), 26

[202] Virginia Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume II (1912 – 1918)*, ed. by Andrew McNeille (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 162.

[203] R. George Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, ed. R. George Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 7.

publishing magnate (sometimes nicknamed the Napoleon of the Fleet Street). Harmsworth was an early pioneer or "tabloid journalism" and founded a number of cheap newspapers with mass circulation, such the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*. Also due to Harmsworth's success, Thomas ceased to be a regular contributor to the *Daily Chronicle* (whose literary section changed significantly after the departure of Henry W. Nevinson) and was forced to publish in weeklies, monthlies, and short-lived quarterlies that proliferated between 1910 and 1914. R. G. Thomas also noted that Thomas's article on "Reviewing: An Unskilled Labour" was a response to the changing nature of public critical debate.[204]

Thomas's struggles to find a place for his criticism are captured in his correspondence with his agent C. F. Cazenove. When compiling *Edward Thomas: Selected Letters* (1995), R. George Thomas regretted he could not include more from the correspondence. As he remarked:

> [The correspondence] remains an invaluable guide to the role of publishers – and the treatment of authors – in the decade before 1914. Obliquely, too, it testifies to the doggedness with which Thomas stuck to the chosen writing path that led directly to the sudden emergence of his poetry in late 1914.[205]

In these letters, archived in the C. C. Abbott Collection at Durham University, Thomas and Cazenove discuss the former's proposals for books he would like to write, as they try to convince publishers that, to borrow R. George Thomas's words, "there is a ready audience for [Thomas's] dominant interests."[206] In this chapter I would look behind the scenes of the life of the young critic and bring new insights about the state of (literary) journalism in this era. I would also identify themes that were important to Thomas, though he did not always have the

[204] R. George Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, 7.
[205] R. George Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Edward Thomas: Selected Letters*, xvi.
[206] R. George Thomas, "Introduction" in Edward Thomas, *Edward Thomas: Selected Letters*, xxi.

chance to develop them in a book. The chapter would thus complement the rest of my literary study.

Rediscovering the work of a critic more than a century after his death – and in my case, in a foreign language – presents some challenges. Thomas's criticism, often focused on his contemporaries, seems slightly more tied to the time he lived in than his poetry, which is highly regarded today. However, his best critical prose is as readable and thought-provoking as his poems and thus deserves more attention. This thesis is now complete, and yet, as the proposed ideas for further research suggest, there is still so much more to explore.

Bibliography:

Bate, Jonathan. *The Genius of Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Cox, R. G. *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*. London: Vikas Publications, 1952.

Cullup, Michael. "Recovering W. H. Davies." *PN Review* 47, January – February 1986. https://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?item_id=5737.

Davies, W. H. *Foliage: Various Poems*. London: Elkin Mathews, 1913.

Davies, W. H. *Later Days*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1925.

Davies, W. H. *New Poems*. London: Elkin Mathews, 1907.

Davies. W. H. *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*. London. A. C. Fifield, 1908.

Davies, W. H. *The Soul's Destroyer and Other Poems*. London: Alston Rivers, 1907.

Garnett, Edward. *Friday Nights, Literary Criticism and Appreciations*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922.

Hardy, Thomas. *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses*. London: Macmillian, 1909.

Hardy, Thomas. *Thomas Hardy: Poems Selected by Tom Paulin*. Edited by Tom Paulin. Faber & Faber, 2001.

Haughton, Hugh. “Anthologizing War.” In *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*. Edited by Tim Kendall. 421–445. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Hollis, Matthew. *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas*. London: Faber and Faber, 2011.

Howarth, Peter. “Fateful Forms: A. E. Housman, Charlotte Mew, Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas” In *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry*. Edited by Neil Corcoran. 59–73. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Kendall, Judy. *Edward Thomas: The Origins of his Poetry*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012.

Longley, Edna. “Going Back to Edward Thomas.” In *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry*. Edited by Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newton. 29–42. London: Enitharmon, 2007.

Longley, Edna. *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric*. London: Enitharmon, 2017.

Moore, T. Sturge. *Some Soldier Poets*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920.

Nevinson, Henry W. *Chances and Changes*. London: Nisbet and Co., 1923.

Quinn, Justin. “Out in the Open: *The Pocket Book* of Edward Thomas.” In *Dusk and Dawn: Literature Between Two Centuries*. Edited by Šárka Grauová and Eva Voldřichová Beránková. 333–355. Prague: Charles University Press, 2017.

Salt, L. Godwin. *English Patriotic Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912.

Stonesifer, Richard J. *W. H. Davies: A Critical Biography*. Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1963.

Thomas, Edward. *A Language Not to Be Betrayed: Selected Prose of Edward Thomas*. Edited by Edna Longley. Manchester: Carcanet, 1981.

Thomas, Edward. *A Literary Pilgrim in England*. Whitefish: Kessinger, 2015.

Thomas, Edward. “Anthologies and Reprints.” *Poetry and Drama* 2.8 (Dec. 1914): 384–388.

Thomas, Edward. *A Selection of Letters to Edward Garnett*. Edited by Edward Garnett. Edinburgh: The Tragara Press, 1981.

Thomas, Edward. *Beautiful Wales*. London: A. & C. Black, 1905.

Thomas, Edward. *Thomas on the Georgians*. Edited by Richard Emeny. Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2004.

Thomas, Edward. *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, ed. Trevor Johnson. Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2002.

Thomas, Edward. *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition: Volume V: Critical Studies: Swinburne and Pater*. Edited by Francis O’Gorman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Thomas, Edward. *Edward Thomas: Selected Letters*. Edited by R. George Thomas. Oxford: New York, 1995.

Thomas, Edward. *Lafcadio Hearn*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912.

Thomas, Edward. *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*. Edited by R. George Thomas. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Thomas, Edward. *Poet to Poet: Edward Thomas's Letters to Walter de la Mare*. Edited by Judy Kendall. Bridgend: Seren, 2012.

Thomas, Edward. "Reprints and Anthologies." *Poetry and Drama* 2.7 (Sept. 1914): 299–301.

Thomas, Edward. "Reviewing: An Unskilled Labour." *Poetry and Drama* 2.5 (March 1914): 37–41

Thomas, Edward. *The Annotated Collected Poems*. Edited by Edna Longley. Highgreen: Bloodaxe, 2008.

Thomas, Edward. *This England: An Anthology from Her Writers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915.

Thomas, Edward. *Walter Pater: A Critical Study*. London: Martin Secker, 1913.

Thomas, Edward. "War Poetry." *Poetry and Drama* 2.8 (Dec. 1914): 341–345.

Vincent, Edgar. *A.E. Housman: Hero of the Hidden Life*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018.

Waller, Phillip. *Writers, Readers & Reputations: Literary Life in Britain (1870–1917)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Wagner, Linda W. *Robert Frost: The Critical Reception*. New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1977.

Wilcox, Denys J. "Edward Thomas, Ezra Pound and the Square Club." *PN Review 86*, July – August 1992. https://www.pnreview.co.uk/cgi-bin/scribe?item_id=3697.

Wilson, Jean Moorcroft. *Edward Thomas: From Adlestrop to Arras*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Abstract

Long overlooked, the poetry of Edward Thomas (1878–1917) has enjoyed wide recognition in the past few decades. The same cannot be said of Thomas's criticism. Though he worked as a literary journalist for almost a decade and a half, critics have mainly focused on the final years of his life when, after the outset of the First World War, he voluntarily enlisted in the Artist's Rifles and began writing poetry. He died in France, at the Battle of Arras.

Since his youth, Thomas suffered from depression, possibly made worse by the demands of his profession (some years he reviewed over a hundred books). In contrast, the last stretch of his life seems to have been more fulfilling. Not only did military training prove beneficial for his mental health, but – encouraged by a number of his friends, including Robert Frost and W. H. Hudson – he metamorphosed from overworked hack-writer (as some still refer to him) to outstanding poet.

As most of his criticism precedes his poetry, scholars usually look at Thomas's reviews, anthologies, and literary studies to better understand his 144 poems. While it is important to explore the links between his poetry and rest of his work, Thomas's criticism is strong and extensive enough to be considered independently of the poetry. His books and articles may illuminate his emergence as a poet, but their original purpose was different – Thomas produced them to assess the work of other writers.

This thesis is the first literary study to focus exclusively on Thomas's criticism. Each of the three chapters identifies and examines a different aspect of the criticism and how it shaped

the literature of his time. Chapter 1 is concerned with his literary journalism, marked by his long-lasting preoccupation with the relationship between poetry and prose. I argue that his interest in “The Frontiers of English Prose” (the title of one of his early essays) explains his appreciation of the poetry of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence, both of whose fame was based on their novels.

Chapter 2 presents Thomas as a mentor. I examine his literary relationship with the tramp-poet W. H. Davies, whom he followed for more than a decade. Thomas reviewed Davies more frequently than any other writer, and, as this chapter illustrates, he used his articles not only to promote him but also to direct him. His guidance of the talented yet inconsistent and overly prolific poet provided new challenges for Thomas, as he tried to find the right balance between constructive and harmful criticism.

Unlike the first two chapters, Chapter 3 is centred on one book – Thomas’s war-time anthology *This England: An Anthology from Her Writers* (1915). I analyse his editorial decisions and connect them with some of his war-related articles, in which he criticizes jingoistic poetry that spread in England after the beginning of the conflict. The chapter also shows that Thomas’s experience of the war is reflected not only in his poetry but also in his journalism and the remarkable anthology.

Abstrakt

Poezie Edwarda Thomase (1878–1917) byla kritikou v anglofonním světě dlouho přehlížená, ale během posledních desetiletí se dočkala uznání. Jeho literárněkritická tvorba ovšem zatím příliš prozkoumaná nebyla. Třebaže se Thomas přibližně patnáct let živil jako knižní recenzent, badatelé zaměření na Thomasovo dílo se obvykle soustředí na konec jeho života, kdy během první světové války dobrovolně narukoval a zároveň začal psát poezii. Básník a literární kritik Edward Thomas zemřel při Bitvě u Arrasu ve Francii.

Již od mládí Thomase sužovaly deprese a jeho náročná profese (někdy recenzoval i přes sto knih ročně) tyto stavy ještě zhoršovala. Paradoxně ale svá poslední léta strávil s pocitem naplnění. Výcvik v armádě měl blahodárný účinek na jeho duševní zdraví. Navíc se z neustále přepracovaného literárního nádeníka (jak je stále ještě občas označován) proměnil ve výtečného básníka, a to i díky povzbuzování přátel, zejména Roberta Frosta a W. H. Hudsona.

Thomas napsal svých 144 básní až na sklonku své kritické dráhy. Literární vědci proto zkoumají jeho recenze, antologie a literární studie především proto, aby lépe porozuměli jeho poezii. Hledat souvislosti mezi Thomasovými básněmi a jeho ostatním dílem má jistě své opodstatnění, nicméně jeho podnětná a rozsáhlá kritická tvorba si zaslouží pozornost nehledě na úspěch jeho poezie. Thomasovy literárněkritické publikace zachycují jeho fascinující přerod v básníka, ale původně měly jiný účel: autor je napsal, aby se vyjádřil k tvorbě jiných spisovatelů.

Tato diplomová práce je první literární studií, jež se zabývá výhradně Thomasovou literárněkritickou činností. Každá ze tří kapitol se zaměřuje na jinou část jeho působení a ukazuje, jak Thomas formoval tehdejší literaturu. Tématem první kapitoly jsou jeho knižní recenze, z nichž je patrné jeho dlouhodobé zaujetí vztahem mezi poezií a prózou. Zájem o „Hranice anglické prózy“ (název jedné z jeho raných esejí) vysvětluje, proč si tak cenil poezie Thomase Hardyho a D. H. Lawrence, kteří byli tehdy známí zejména jako romanopisci.

Druhá kapitola představuje Thomase coby mentora a týká se jeho přátelství s básníkem a trampem W. H. Daviesem, jehož literární dráhu Thomas sledoval přes deset let. Davies byl předmětem jeho článků častěji než kterýkoli jiný autor a tato kapitola ukazuje, jak Thomas v recenzích tohoto básníka usměrňoval. Vedení nadaného, leč nevyrovnaného a příliš často publikujícího Daviese představovalo pro Thomas novou výzvu, neboť se musel učit hledat rovnováhu mezi konstruktivní a destruktivní kritikou.

Třetí kapitola se na rozdíl od těch přechozích zaměřuje na jednu konkrétní knihu – Thomasovu válečnou antologii *This England: An Antology from Her Writers* (Tato Anglie: Antologie od jejích spisovatelů, 1915). V této kapitole analyzuji jeho editorské počínání při sestavování antologie a dávám jej do spojitosti s několika články s válečnou tématikou, v nichž se ostře vymezil proti šovinistické poezii, jež se v Anglii množila po začátku války. Tato kapitola zároveň dokládá, že válka nebyla tématem jen Thomasových básní, ale také jeho článků a této pozoruhodné antologie.