

## **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.