



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report on MA Thesis

EDWARD THOMAS AS CRITIC

by

Jan Zikmund

Edward Thomas is not well known in the Czech Republic. Perhaps the main reason is that the dominant narrative of literary historiography in much philology in the country over the past few decades has emphasized high modernism. This is evident in literary research in various languages taught at the Faculty of Arts – French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, and, combining several of these, comparative literature. Two works indicate this trend: Martin Hilský's *Modernisté* (1995) and *Pokusy o renesanci západu: Literární a duchovní východiska na přelomu 19. a 20. století* (2016), edited by Anna Housková and Vladimír Svatoň. Thomas's poetry, written around the same time as many modernist masterpieces, doesn't fit this story, as it extends, rather than subverts, the pastoral tradition.

For many decades this accounted for his relative neglect in anglophone criticism also. However, several scholars have changed this, above all, Edna Longley, Lucy Newlyn, Guy Cuthbertson, and Matthew Hollis, persuasively asserting Thomas's importance for twentieth-century poetry. So, we are now able to view him as the peer of Robert Frost, Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Valéry, and perhaps in the Czech Republic Bohuslav Reynek.

Thus, if Zikmund had decided to provide a general introduction to Thomas's work, summarizing the contours of this advocacy and informing Czech readers of the poet's importance, he would have done Czech letters a considerable service. He has, however, chosen a different route. He has surveyed the state of Thomas criticism in English and



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decided to make a contribution, in the first place, to that discourse, rather than directly address a Czech readership. Both options are open to a scholar in Zikmund's position. Arguably, he has made the more challenging choice: he has had to immerse himself in the extant criticism, carry out original archival work in the United Kingdom, and also identify an important aspect of Thomas's work that has been overlooked by anglophone critics. He has judiciously chosen his topic of Thomas as a critic, and this has involved not only the study of Thomas's work, but also the oeuvres of a range of other poets from the turn of the century, such as Thomas Hardy and W. H. Davies. Even more broadly, in Chapter 3, Zikmund examines Thomas work as anthologist, which was the poet and editor's contribution to canon-making, with all its attendant questions.

I am pleased to say that he has succeeded wonderfully in all this work. One measure of my high estimation of his achievement, is that I asked Professor Edna Longley to be the external reviewer, which is unusual for an MA thesis. Longley is a world expert on anglophone poetry from Ireland and Britain; she excels both in literary polemic (as evidenced, say, by a book like *Poetry in the Wars* [1986]), and also manuscript research (e.g., she edited Edward Thomas, *The Annotated Collected Poems* [2008]). This is an exceptional MA thesis that, in my view, can stand up to scrutiny on a level far beyond the degree level. It is, then, almost superfluous to add that I recommend the grade of **1/výborně**.

Dr Justin Quinn (Associate Professor)

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