

## Edward Thomas Fellowship Poetry Competition 2018 – Judge’s Report

One of the really great pleasures for me in judging this competition has been the opportunity to immerse myself in so many poems which in their language and tone rekindle the spirit of Edward Thomas himself. Landscapes, both internal and external, of many memorable and private kinds unfolded for me as I read and re-read, including (wonderfully) an extraordinary number of poems evoking birds and birdsong. Not surprising, of course, but an unexpected richness of subject matter which was a delight to encounter just at this moment in the calendar.

Among all the powerful resonances that Thomas set echoing across English poetics of the last century, perhaps the strongest has been his enduring model of the charged epiphany held within a brief lyric frame: this is something all three prizewinners, and many of the commended poems, achieved beautifully in their structures and imaginative development. The mysterious, unsettling subtlety and psychological sense of place in the first prize winner ‘**Sojourn**’, is so finely held within its unfolding rhyme-patterning that I think even after many re-readings I still probably haven’t exhausted the intricacy of association held within its *terza rima* framework. It’s a haunting, complex poem charged with wonder and uncertainty - a powerful fusion very skilfully achieved.

Deciding on a final winner from amongst three such strong top contenders was extremely hard, and I was grateful for the double second-prize award. ‘**The Bench**’ like ‘**Sojourn**’, works with beautiful musical attention in its highly personal, closely focused narrative, carrying us spellbound towards its simple elegiac resolution. That’s a quiet power which is a rare achievement, and much to be admired. In many ways, though very different poetically, the wonderfully vivid and superbly detailed narrative of ‘**Rosary**’ achieves a similar final resonance, far more visionary and dramatic, but with the same impressive sense of vision and confident authority.

Edward Thomas is above all the poets’ poet, and he has come vividly alive for me again as a result of reading so many strong poems in this competition, so my thanks for that are warmly due to all the poets I’ve read, even though sadly not all can make it to the final selection.

JD 23Feb 2018