

## Edward Thomas Fellowship Poetry Competition 2020– Judge’s Report

It has been a great pleasure, in a winter that has felt very low on sun, to have been asked to judge this year’s Edward Thomas Fellowship poetry competition and spend time in the generative, vivid worlds of so many new poems. My thanks as always are warmly due to all the poets who have submitted this year, even though sadly not all can make it to the final selection.

There were as always many personal, intimate poems as well as poems evoking a strong sense of place, poems of elegy and enquiry as well as wonder. I discovered several very enriching poems considering the lives of other writers, including Hardy and Plath, and also - in one fine poem - the artist Samuel Palmer. Many strong poems explored the relationship between the individual and nature, while others - more urgently now than ever – considered the relation between community responsibility and the organic world. The sense of imminent loss which is so closely related to that responsibility perhaps also connects with the high number of entries thinking in different ways about childhood, not least in the three winning poems.

In **Elena Croitoru’s** highly original **Playground**, the compelling voice of a now-grown narrator recalls a childhood winter scene playing inside the shell of an unfinished building in an unnamed ‘silenced’ town. The poem evokes simultaneously and with double immediacy both the child’s original apprehension of the time as well as the poet’s later understanding of the wider world in which the young person was growing up. I especially loved the detail of the cement dust that lay over the nettle leaves, recalling Thomas’ own ‘Tall Nettles’.

In **Jo Peter’s** **Snowfall**, another among the many submitted poems featuring a time of snow, the delicately balanced arrangement on the page suggests both the light, quiet of falling snow and the increasing possibility that the experience of it may become something only told to future generations of children as a kind of wonder-tale from the past - again brought to life with great present immediacy.

Something of that same lightness and resonance of ‘Snowfall’ permeates the child’s concentration in the beautiful overall winning poem **The Reader** by **Sue Davies**, in which a small girl practices her reading one-to-one with the poem’s narrator who observes around the child all the latent threat of trouble and violence in nature and the embattled world beyond. It’s an impressively subtle and searching composition and highly moving in the quietest of ways, as befits a worthy winner of this unique competition.

JD 23Feb 2020