

# Bookmarks

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## In the footprints of Edward Thomas

Submitted by James Frank Riding to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of  
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# Abstract

This thesis muddies the idea of singular being, tracing the footprints of nature writer and poet Edward Thomas, from the beginning of his epically creative final four years, to the site where he died in 1917, during the Battle of Arras. It is presented as a series of engagements with landscape, writing, and poetry; affective mapping, chasing memory-prompts, *bookmarks* and the shock of the poetic. The journeys seek to return to an 'open' idea of the geographical imagination, negating a negative, reductionist form of geography; shifting the focus away from sociologically determined notions of mobility. A resident of England for all his life, but with Welsh heritage, Edward Thomas believed he belonged nowhere. His texts: little time capsules, admixtures of social commentary, environmental action, and personal musings, are archaeological exercises, presenting a complicated picture of loss, demonstrating the value of artistic imagination. Loss - and subsequent estrangement from the world - would become his poetic source. This thesis is about trying to understand the relationship between poetry - indeed all 'land writing' - and place. How it affects in-place, what it does in-place? To understand this relationship properly it was necessary to consider why, as humans, we write? To find out what the subjective condition of the poet, or writer, emerges out of - in order to relay the experience of meeting poetry in-place. Edward Thomas began as a nature writer and became a poet after much agonizing. This made him a useful subject (object) (neither). Furthermore he suffered a long period of introspection and had a knowledge of Freud and psychoanalysis - which he underwent in 1912. This was played out in what Edna Longley (2008) terms; 'poetic psychodrama.' His poems often feature a split self or switch between patient and analyst (Longley, 2008). *The Other Man*, is his doppelganger, who he plays himself off against: the poems are, as such, multi-voiced, counterpointed, intersubjective. Deleuze and Guattari wrote in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988: 3): 'since each of us was already several, there was already quite a crowd.' Edward Thomas knew this all too well. From the beginning of this ambulatory homage my psyche became inextricably linked with his.

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