**Short Analysis of Edward Thomas’s ‘Rain’**

Edward Thomas’s poem ‘Rain’ was written in 1916, while Thomas was fighting in the trenches. What follows is the poem, followed by a brief analysis of some of its language, motifs, and images.

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain  
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me  
Remembering again that I shall die  
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks  
For washing me cleaner than I have been  
Since I was born into this solitude.  
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:  
But here I pray that none whom once I loved  
Is dying to-night or lying still awake  
Solitary, listening to the rain,  
Either in pain or thus in sympathy  
Helpless among the living and the dead,  
Like a cold water among broken reeds,  
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,  
Like me who have no love which this wild rain  
Has not dissolved except the love of death,  
If love it be towards what is perfect and  
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

In summary, ‘Rain’ is about Edward Thomas’s experience of sitting in a hut all night alone, listening to the rain falling and meditating on his death and on the fates of his fellow soldiers in the First World War. (Thomas would himself be killed at the Battle of Arras in 1917, a year after he wrote ‘Rain’.) Thomas expresses a wish that nobody whom he has loved in the past is now lying awake, wherever they may be, unable to sleep, or – worse still – is dying this night. And yet Thomas goes on to acknowledge that the ‘wild rain’ has ‘dissolved’ all of the loves he has ever felt – except the love of death. Death is perfect and, the storm raging outside seems to hint, promises release from all of the pain and hardship of life.

Repetition of the word ‘rain’ (eight times) as well as the iambic pentameter employed with its (largely) regular metre, help to convey the repetitive hammering of the rain on the roof of the hut, and the monotony of the sound. The repetition of the same or similar words at the ends of the lines also goes against the idea that this ‘verse’ is entirely ‘blank’: although Thomas’s poem has no formal rhyme scheme, the line endings can be analysed in terms of semantic or phonetic similarities: ‘rain’ ends three lines, and ‘die’, ‘dead’, and ‘death’ complete three further lines; ‘sympathy’ distantly rhymes with ‘me’ nine lines earlier, while elsewhere ‘awake’ and ‘rain’ rub assonantly up against each other, as do ‘reeds’ and ‘dead’. The freedom of the line endings and the blank verse allows Thomas to convey the sprawling nature of his meditations and the wildness of the rain, while the echoes and ‘rhymes’ (of a sort) at the end of certain lines suggests the limits of that worldview: he cannot embrace a wholly Romantic view of nature as one that provides solace and hope of renewal (as we often find in, say, Wordsworth).

Indeed, Edward Thomas is often considered a belated Romantic (as were many of the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century, with whom Thomas is sometimes associated), and ‘Rain’ contains many elements of Romanticism, harking back to Wordsworth, Coleridge, and others: the individual poet in a solitary environment, meditating on life and death and his own place in the universe, with such meditations often being inspired by the weather, elements, and natural world around him (here, embodied by the rain, of course). Yet there is no transcendent experience in ‘Rain’, only the hope of it in the future: death ‘[c]annot, the tempest tells me, disappoint’. But we will have to wait and see.

‘Rain’ is one of Edward Thomas’s best-loved poems, and offers a subtler view of the war than that offered by either the patriarchal Rupert Brooke (notably in ‘The Soldier’) or Wilfred Owen (in, for instance, ‘Futility’). But as our analysis of ‘Rain’ has attempted to show, Thomas manages to write a Romantic war poem that doesn’t romanticise the war itself. How pessimistic is this poem, and how celebratory? It partly its subtle ambiguity which makes ‘Rain’ such a fine poem.