

Thaw

Over the land freckled with snow half-thawed
 The speculating rooks at their nest cawed
 And saw from elm-tops, delicate as flowers of grass,
 What we below could not see, Winter Pass.

Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

Edward Thomas wrote most of his poetry at war, from 1914 to his death in 1917. *Thaw* sprouts from these fruitful years, whose output was in no small part inspired by close friend and contemporary, Robert Frost, who first encouraged Thomas to develop his prose into poetry. Though a defining fixation on nature, rather than war, distances him from his contemporaries (Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Rupert Brooke, to name a few), in the mere thirty-three words of the poem, Thomas conveys a profound impression of the impermanence of nature which probably isn't that far removed from the war he was fighting at the time.

Upon reading the poem I was struck by the poignancy of the final line ('What we below could not see, Winter pass.');

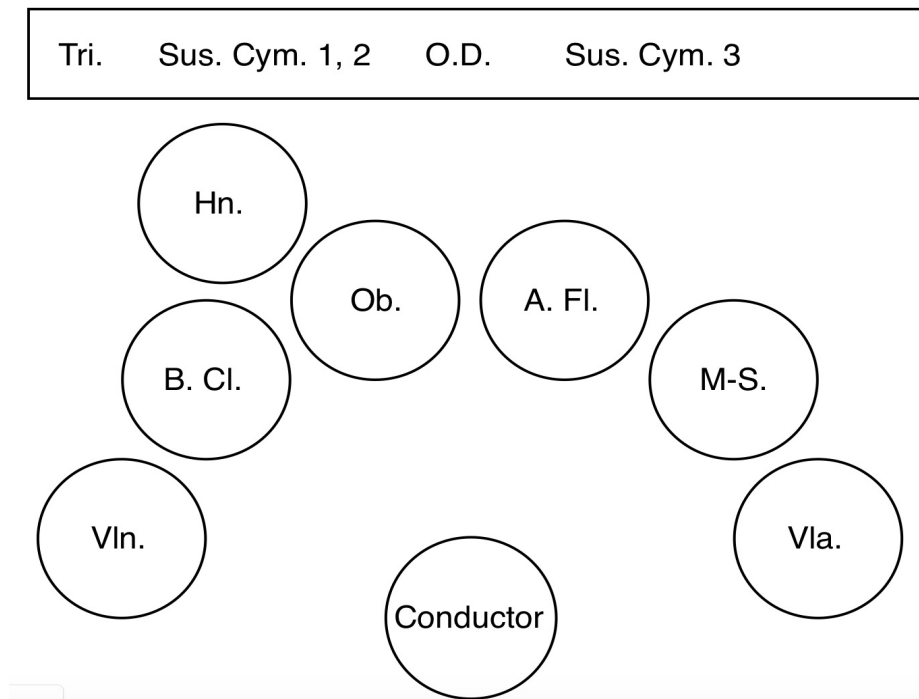
in particular, by the (false) connection I immediately drew to the more contemporary concern of global warming, and our collective responsibility and inability to see its consequences. Thomas even goes so far as to attribute blame to some 'speculating rooks'.

In contrast to Thomas's natural imagery, the percussion in *Winter Pass* is distinctly unnatural. A single oil drum sits at the centre of the ensemble, punctuating textural and harmonic changes, and eventually commandeering the narrative.

Throughout, the vocalist sits among the instrumentalists. At first, fragments of words emerge; then, drawn out, single words evolve into short phrases; finally, the closing line surfaces, bare.

Together, Edward Thomas and Robert Frost developed a theory of a 'sound of sense', founded on the notion that tones and words are coded with sonic meaning, through which poetry communicates most profoundly. According to this theory, with spoken word concealed behind closed doors, for example, a listener could still recognise their intended sentiment through the sound and cadence of the obscured words: their 'sonic meaning'. In such a light, I hope Thomas would have recognised my liberal setting of his wonderful words.

Percussion



Ensemble

Alto Flute [A. Fl.]
 Oboe [Ob.]
 Bass Clarinet in B \flat [B. Cl.]
 Horn in F [Hn.]

Percussion (2 players)

Triangle [Tri.]
 3 Suspended Cymbals (small to large) [Sus. Cym.]
 Oil Drum [O. D.]

Mezzo Soprano [M-S.]

Violin [Vln.]
 Viola [Vla.]

Notes

flz. in woodwind always denotes flz.

Staccato notation that begins on a slur or a tie in strings indicates where the note should be played with the bow starting on the string.

With the exception of *arco* and *pizz.*, techniques apply only to the notehead above which they are notated.

Where the notated diminuendo of the suspended cymbals exceeds its natural duration, the diminuendo should be extended by the application of imperceptible strokes.

The singer must be capable of singing without vibrato.

I use international phonetics throughout.

Transposing score

Duration: c. 5'

Key closed ●
 Rim only closed ○
 Key open ○

The Oil Drum

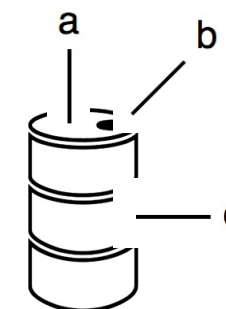
The drum should be steel, 200l, and empty. Incline the drum to suit the acoustic of the space.

There are three principal techniques required:

Striking (a) the centre of the top of the drum, (b) the rim of the drum, (c) the side of the drum.

These are notated on the staff, above the staff, and below the staff, respectively.

Diamond noteheads denote the use of hard sticks; standard noteheads denote soft sticks.



5 (senza flz.)

A. Fl. *p* *mf*

Ob. *p* *mf*

B. Cl. *p* *mp* *p poco cresc.*

Hn. *mf*

P. 1

P. 2

M-S. *pp* *mp* *f* *mp* *p*
ad lib. -----
[ou]

Vln. *f* *pizz.* *arco* *mp* *vib.* *pp* *f*

Vla. *f* *pizz.* *arco poco sul pont.* *mp* *gently*

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a woodwind and string ensemble. It begins at measure 5. The woodwinds (A. Fl., Ob., B. Cl., Hn.) play melodic lines with dynamics ranging from *p* to *mf*. The strings (Vln., Vla.) play a rhythmic accompaniment, with the Violin I part featuring *pizz.* and *arco* sections, and the Viola part featuring *pizz.* and *arco poco sul pont.* sections. The M-S. part has a melodic line with dynamics from *pp* to *f* and includes a vocal line with the syllable [ou]. The score concludes with a *p poco cresc.* instruction for the B. Cl. and a *gently* instruction for the Vla.