

Class 5 : Landscape

B. Stops Along the Way

1. Main title 3 (poets' pictures)

I called the first hour "Journeys with John." Now we come to poetry, and "Stops Along the Way." Each poem is about visiting, discovering, or remembering a place. Two come from the first quarter of the Twentieth Century, the others from its last decade. I originally started with a poem by Robert Browning, but my wife pointed out that I had no women in the class, so I am starting instead with *Twilight: After Haying* by **Jane Kenyon** (1947–95). It is filled with a keen sense of the countryside, probably in New Hampshire, where she lived; indeed, I put it first because it connects with my earlier pictures of *Haymaking*. But it is different from the others in my little anthology, because it is not really a stop on a journey. Indeed, despite the clarity of her descriptions, it seems to be really about something else; can you say what it is? The reader is **Jon Joseph**.

2. Jane Kenyon: *Twilight, after Haying* (Jon Joseph)

3. — text of the above

So what is that about? You may or may not know this, but Kenyon was diagnosed with leukemia and died when she was only 47. At the time, she was Poet Laureate of New Hampshire.

4. Adlestrop, Gloucestershire

Adlestrop is a village in the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire in England. It is pretty, but then most of the villages around there are. People remember the name because one day a train stopped there unexpectedly and one of the passengers, poet **Edward Thomas** (1878–1917), wrote about it. This one is literally a "Stop Along the Way." **Richard Burton** reads it.

5. Edward Thomas: *Adlestrop* (Richard Burton)

6. — text of the above

That was short enough to hear it again. This time, listen especially for the *journey* the short poem makes in terms of diction; does Thomas's diction (and Burton's) change as the poem moves on?

7. Edward Thomas: *Adlestrop* (Richard Burton, repeat)

8. — text of the above (repeat)

On paper, the poem looks pretty conventional: sixteen lines, four stanzas. But how does Thomas use the form, or perhaps work against it or around it? Where does the punctuation fall? Which stanza is the most conventional? When Thomas writes "No whit less still and lonely fair | Than the high cloudlets in the sky," is this a momentary lapse into poesy, or does he need it to prepare for what follows?

I did not give a date for this poem. In fact, it was **published in 1917**. Does this alter what you feel about it? If I now say that it was **written in the summer of 1914**, thus before World War One had started, does this alter your reaction again? And if you know that Thomas was killed in the War...?

9. Edward Thomas and Robert Frost

When I chose a poem by **Robert Frost** (1874–1963) for my next selection, I had no idea that there was any connection between the two poets, one American, the other quintessentially English. But in fact, they were such close friends that Thomas had thought of emigrating to America to live with Frost. There is an excellent article from THE GUARDIAN that I have put online, and I urge you to read it. Frost had come over to England in 1912 in a bid to relaunch his career. Thomas, who was at that time only a prose writer, was one of the first critics to recognize Frost's genius; and Frost in turn spotted the poetry lurking in Thomas's prose, and urged the Englishman to write it down, just as he spoke. And it was Frost's publication of *The Road Not Taken* that finally spurred Thomas to enlist, to fight for the land he loved; he was killed at Arras only a few weeks later.

Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is a later and marginally less famous poem, but it is clearly another "Stop Along the Way." On paper, it looks almost identical to the four-quatrain form of Thomas's, yet listen for how it is different. Here is **Frost himself** reciting it.

10. Robert Frost: *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* (recited by the author)

11. — text of the above

Unlike Thomas, Frost ends every line with a rhyme; what does this do? A conventional scheme would be abab, cdcd, and so on—yet what does Frost do? [aaba bbcb ccdc dddd] What is the effect of the repetition of the last line? Frost playfully puts a thought into the mind of the little horse, yet never says what he himself is thinking. Why does he stop?

It is an easy segue from this to another poem about stopping in the woods, *Lost*, published by **David Wagoner** (1926–2021) in 1966. I must say I had never heard of the poet, but apparently he had as great a fame as the nature poet of the Pacific Northwest and Frost had as the bard of New England; he also served two decades as the Chancellor of the Academy of American poets. And there are about a dozen readings of *Lost* on YouTube, with or without images and background music, so he seems to have found a popular audience. So I'll play it twice, once with an anonymous male reader and simply the words on the screen, and once read by a woman, **Leigha Horton**, with an accompanying video. How much does the tone of the speaker's voice affect your appreciation of the poem? Do the images enrich the words, or confine them?

12. David Wagoner: *Lost* (audio only)

13. David Wagoner: *Lost* (video by Leigha Horton)

14. — text of the above

I'll ask the same things again: How much does the tone of the speaker's voice affect your appreciation of the poem? And do the images enrich the words, or confine them? Does the poem establish its own pace

at which it should be read, and if so, how? Wagoner capitalizes three words that do not begin lines or sentences, one of them occurring twice; what does this do? How might you bring it out in reading?

Seamus Heaney (1939–2013) always had a gift for describing the rural detail of his native Ireland (it's my part of the world also). Here, in *Postscript* (1996), he urges you to take a very specific trip, and yet it too ends up surprisingly about being lost. **Heaney himself** is reading it.

15. **Seamus Heaney: *Postscript* (read by the author)**

16. — text of the above

This is clearly a specific place experienced on a specific occasion; how does Heaney get us to imagine and share the experience? If you had the necessary skills, do you think you could enhance the poem by making a video to accompany Heaney's reading? How, if so, or why not? Is there any one line that particularly takes you by surprise, and what does it do?

If time, I'd like to play one more poem in which the writer urges you to imagine a journey. So specific is the imagery of the Yorkshire moors in *Directions* (1998) that I assumed the poet, **Joseph Stroud** (b.1943), was English. But no, he was born and bred in California, and still lives there. Which makes one ask why he chose this subject, and what is the experience behind it. See if you can answer. Alas, there's no one but me to read it.

17. **Joseph Stroud: *Directions***

Only two questions: Who is that figure walking toward Scar House? And in what time frame?

18. **Main title 4 (Constable: *The White Horse*)**