Adlestrop

POEM TEXT

1 Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
2 The name, because one afternoon
3 Of heat the express-train drew up there
4 Unwontedly. It was late June.

5 The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
6 No one left and no one came
7 On the bare platform. What I saw
8 Was Adlestrop—only the name

9 And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
10 And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
11 No whit less still and lonely fair
12 Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

13 And for that minute a blackbird sang
14 Close by, and round him, mistier,
15 Farther and farther, all the birds
16 Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

SUMMARY

I do indeed remember the name "Adlestrop." I recall it because, one hot June afternoon, the fast train made an unscheduled stop in that little town.

The train's steam engine hissed; somebody cleared his throat. No one got off the train, and no one appeared on the empty platform. All I saw was the sign reading "Adlestrop."

And I saw willow trees, wildflowers, tall grasses, and still more wildflowers, and drying haystacks as still, lonesome, and beautiful as the little clouds high up in the sky.

For the minute that the train was stopped there, a blackbird whistled nearby. Around him, more faintly, further and further away, you could hear every bird in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire singing.

THEMES

THE UNEXPECTED BEAUTY OF THE EVERYDAY

Edward Thomas's "Adlestrop" is a poem about beauty that appears where and when you least expect it. When his train makes an unplanned stop in the unremarkable English town of Adlestrop, the poem's speaker doesn't know he's about to have an experience he'll remember all his life. As the train sits at the platform, the speaker slowly realizes that the countryside all around him is shot through with a beauty that he would never have noticed if he hadn't been made to stop and look at it. One of the more moving moments in this speaker's life, the poem suggests, happens simply because he's caught off guard, surprised by what's in front of him: the everyday world, carefully observed, can crack open to reveal extraordinary loveliness.

Adlestrop, the town where the speaker's train makes an unscheduled stop, is completely ordinary, a place so unimportant that, though the train stands at the station for long minutes, "no one" leaves or comes aboard. The speaker has nothing to do but look out the window, expecting nothing in particular from the view.

As it turns out, being made to sit still and look at a view he expects nothing from allows him to realize how very beautiful that view is. The meadows are full of "willows, willow-herb, and grass," and a "blackbird" whistles nearby. Soon, the speaker fancies he can hear "all the birds / Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire" singing around him, a rising chorus that spreads to the horizon.

None of these sights or sounds is unusual. In one sense, the wildflowers and blackbirds are as humdrum as Adlestrop itself. But the speaker's "unwonted" (or unusual) stop gives him the chance to sit still and pay some dreamy attention to something he might not otherwise have noticed. Caught off guard this way, he can see that the ordinary world is extraordinarily lovely; now he'll "remember Adlestrop" forever. Perhaps, this poem hints, that's always the way: break the shell of habit and familiarity, and you'll find unexpected beauty.

> **Where this theme appears in the poem:**
> * Lines 1-16

THE TRANQUIL LOVELINESS OF THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

"Adlestrop" is a wistful hymn to the distinctive quiet beauty of the English landscape. The poem's speaker doesn't need the stern grandeur of a Mont Blanc or a Helvellyn to inspire him: the simple birdsong and wildflowers around an unremarkable train station in Gloucestershire are moving

enough. To this speaker, the English countryside is an enchanted place, all the more lovely for its peace, simplicity, and familiarity.

When the poem's speaker declares, "Yes. I remember Adlestrop," his words might at first seem a little bit comical. "Adlestrop" isn't a place one would ordinarily speak of remembering: it's a tiny town in Gloucestershire, not exactly Paris. But it's Adlestrop's very small-town English tranquility that the speaker remembers so fondly. Waiting at the little town's train station one day, he begins slowly to appreciate the distinctive sights and sounds of the countryside around him, from the drying "haycocks" in the fields to the "meadowsweet" growing in the tall grass to the song of a "blackbird."

The peaceful rural beauty of the scene moves the speaker. So does the thought that this beauty is local, recognizable: he knows the name of every wildflower that grows in these fields. And he's delighted not just by the song of the birds around the quiet station, but by the thought that "all the birds / Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire" are singing. In other words, this is a specifically *English* congregation of birds, so rooted in the place that they practically have addresses. "Adlestrop" thus paints a picture of an Englishman's heartfelt affection for his native landscape.

Some readers have found this poem especially poignant because Thomas wrote it in 1914, just before the horror and chaos of World War I broke out; Thomas himself would die on the battlefields of France only a few years later. The picture of gentle, pastoral English beauty here is a last glimpse of a peaceful world soon to be lost.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 7-16

🔬 LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

As the poem begins, the speaker seems to be midway through a conversation—perhaps with someone else, perhaps just with himself. In response to an unheard question, he says:

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—

He remembers, that is, a little town in Gloucestershire. Perhaps he's one of the few people not *from* Adlestrop who remembers Adlestrop; it's a hamlet so insignificant that the "express-train"

doesn't even make a stop there.

One hot June afternoon, though, the train did stop in Adlestrop, "unwontedly" (or unusually) with the speaker aboard. What he saw that day will be the matter of this poem.

The speaker begins his story in a casual, everyday voice. The poem is written, roughly, in iambic tetrameter—that is, lines of four iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm, as in "The name, | because | one af- | ternoon." Edward Thomas treats this meter more as a guideline than a rule, though; he throws in extra syllables or shifts stresses around wherever he pleases, making his speaker sound as natural as if he were telling a story in the pub.

Though the speaker's tone is easy and anecdotal, the poem's pace suggests his stop in Adlestrop meant something to him. As he looks back on that afternoon, he sounds unhurried, thoughtful, and calm, as if he's sinking into the memory. Listen again to the first line, and keep an ear on the caesura:

Yes. || I remember Adlestrop—

That full stop means the word "Yes" stands alone for a moment. Think how much chattier this line would feel if the speaker breezed right along with a comma: "Yes, I remember Adlestrop." Not only does the period slow the poem down, it asks the reader to stay with that "Yes," starting the poem on a note of reflective acceptance, or recognition, or embrace.

The speaker's careful phrasings help to set a mood, too. The speaker remembers his train pulling into Adlestrop, not on a hot afternoon, but on an "afternoon / Of heat." That wording suggests that heat was the main feature of this particular afternoon: this must have been one of those days when the weather seems to press down on the whole landscape.

Similarly subtly, the speaker doesn't simply "remember Adlestrop." He remembers "Adlestrop— / The name." His memory of Adlestrop, in other words, isn't of the *town* exactly, only of its name. That name, as readers will see, comes to represent not just a town, but a whole variety of experience.

LINES 5-8

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

The express train's "unwonted" stop in Adlestrop, the speaker goes on, seemed inexplicable. "No one left and no one came" as long as the train sat there; the "bare platform" stayed empty, so quiet that the speaker could hear another passenger clearing his throat over the hiss of the steam engine. Under the June heat, hushed little sounds like these—brought to life by the whispery sibilance of words like "the steam hissed"—only threw the quiet into relief.

Listen to the way these lines move:

> The steam **hissed.** || **Someone** cleared his throat.
> **No one** left and **no one** came
> On the bare **platform.** || **What** I saw [...]

The [caesurae](#) here do precisely what the speaker's train does: stop unexpectedly in the middle of the line. Holding back the poem's momentum, the halting rhythm here creates stillness.

The [anaphora](#) of "**no one** left and **no one** came" likewise stresses just how empty and quiet the platform was. The swinging [repetition](#) of those words is evocative, too: the line nods like the head of a drowsy passenger.

In the last lines of the stanza, the stillness begins to break:

> [...] What I saw
> Was **Adlestrop—** || **only** the name

That lively dash makes a marked change after all those stop-and-start lines and draws special attention to an idea the speaker has returned to. Remember, back in the first stanza he specified that he remembered, not Adlestrop the town, but Adlestrop the *name*. Now, readers see why: gazing, mildly bored, out the window, he sees the signboard announcing the station.

Then, he looks beyond it.

LINES 9-12

> *And willows, willow-herb, and grass,*
> *And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,*
> *No whit less still and lonely fair*
> *Than the high cloudlets in the sky.*

As the speaker looks up and out over the Adlestrop platform, he realizes his train has stopped in a scene of perfect English beauty. Listen to his gathering pleasure as he describes what he can see:

> And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
> And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,

The landscape here isn't just beautiful to the speaker, it's *familiar*. He can identify every flower he sees by its common name: "willow-herb" and "meadowsweet" wave at him like old friends. Even the "grass" seems worth noting. The [polysyndeton](#) here (all those "and"s) suggests a gradual, appreciative accumulation of impressions, one beauty after another.

The speaker's vision of the fields beyond Adlestrop changes the very shape of the poem. All the [caesurae](#) here are gentle commas: little eddies in the flow of the speaker's verse, not full-stop dams like the caesurae in the first and second stanzas.

Absorbed by the beauty of the scene, the speaker seems almost to have floated right up out of his seat to hover lightly over the fields.

There's an airiness in his [imagery](#), too. The "haycocks" (or haystacks) he sees dotted across the fields echo "the high cloudlets in the sky": both are spread out, remote, lonesome. The lonely sky and the lonely fields mirror each other, creating a sense of wide-open space.

The speaker's vision of Adlestrop thus feels at once warmly familiar and strangely grand, as if this glimpse of middle-of-nowhere countryside might open a window on infinity. Adlestrop is a completely ordinary patch of English countryside; Adlestrop is endlessly beautiful; both of these things are true at once. If the train hadn't made its unscheduled stop, the speaker wouldn't have noticed the glory around him. Perhaps the ordinary can only reveal itself as extraordinary when the watcher is caught off guard.

There's also something a little *sad* about this beauty. This countryside scene is "fair," beautiful, but it's also "still and lonely." (Thomas was [far from the first Englishman](#) to feel something at once [moving and poignant](#) in the particular, like-nowhere-else quality of his native landscape.)

LINES 13-16

> *And for that minute a blackbird sang*
> *Close by, and round him, mistier,*
> *Farther and farther, all the birds*
> *Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.*

As the speaker gazes out at the countryside, transported by its quiet beauty, a sound breaks the stillness. Just "for that minute" that the train sat at the station, the speaker remembers, "a blackbird sang." Then:

> [...] round him, mistier,
> Farther and farther, all the birds
> Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

The speaker leaves it at that. He needs to provide no further remarks for readers to understand that this unexpected stop in an English field turned into something transporting, an unforgettable memory.

Some part of the moment's implicit joy comes from the [rhyme](#). So far, the poem has used simple, familiar perfect rhymes: *afternoon* / *June*, *came* / *name*, *dry* / *sky*. Here, Thomas introduces a [slant rhyme](#), and not one that any other poet had come up with before: *mistier* / *Gloucestershire*. (For those unfamiliar with the puzzling music of British place names, "Gloucestershire" is pronounced **GLOSS**-te-shirr.)

That exuberant, almost comically unexpected rhyme feels like a laugh of delight. But it's not an uproarious laugh. The joy is tempered by the soft awe of that misty, far-off birdsong; if the

speaker is laughing here, it's only silently, to himself, so as not to cut across the sound of "all the birds."

The name of Adlestrop, then, summons up for this speaker a very particular memory, but also a *kind* of experience. To have an Adlestrop moment is to be caught off guard by the world's beauty, brought to a halt when and where you least expect it.

This timeless moment of beauty, however, is also firmly rooted in time: this was one particular June afternoon in the past, an afternoon the speaker sounds nostalgic for now. Readers who know a little bit about Edward Thomas's life and times might read this poem as almost tragic.

This is a true story. Thomas was indeed blindsided by beauty in the little town of Adlestrop on June 24, 1914. Only a month later, World War I—the bloody, horrific, and largely pointless war in which Thomas (among millions of others) would die—began.

This poem's poignancy isn't just the poignancy of individual memory, then. "Adlestrop" is in some sense a premonition, a requiem for a peaceful, innocent world soon to be lost.

SYMBOLS

THE BIRDS

The chorus of birds that sings at the end of the poem symbolizes the distinctive beauty of the English countryside. These aren't just *any* birds, after all: they're "all the birds / Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire," birds that practically have street addresses. Their song thus feels like a hymn to a particular place in the world, reflecting the speaker's joy in his native landscape.

> **Where this symbol appears in the poem:**
>
> - **Lines 15-16:** "all the birds / Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire."

POETIC DEVICES

IMAGERY

Merely "the name" of Adlestrop, the small town where his train unexpectedly stopped for a few minutes one June, conjures up a vivid memory for the speaker. He shares that memory with readers through rich imagery.

It was "one afternoon / Of heat" when the train pulled into Adlestrop station, the speaker recalls—not a *hot afternoon*, note, but an *afternoon of heat*. This phrasing stresses that heat has been the distinguishing feature of this afternoon so far; it's been a long, warm, drowsy train ride for the speaker.

When the train stops, then, he's perhaps already feeling a little dreamy as he looks out the window and notes all the plants in the fields around him: "willows, willow-herb, and grass / And meadowsweet." Slowly, he gets caught up in the beauty of the scene. By the time he observes the dry "haycocks" (that is, haystacks), he's in a lyrical enough mood to observe that they're as "still and lonely fair"—as motionless, solitary, and beautiful—as the "high cloudlets," the scattered, tiny clouds up in the hot June sky. In this vision, the sky mirrors the earth; the heavens and the fields strike a melancholy chord.

This lonesome landscape isn't empty, though. It has its own musicians. A single blackbird whistles nearby, only to be joined by a chorus:

> [...] and round him, **mistier,**
> **Farther and farther**, all the birds
> Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Those misty distances of birdsong somehow feel both gentle and awe-inspiring. The song of the distant birds may be faint, but it's also all-embracing, filling up the scene to the horizon.

The speaker's imagery suggests that he's having the gentlest possible epiphany: a vision of overwhelming beauty that creeps into his consciousness as softly as a cloud blows across the sky.

> **Where Imagery appears in the poem:**
>
> - **Lines 2-3:** "one afternoon / Of heat"
> - **Line 5:** "The steam hissed."
> - **Line 7:** "On the bare platform."
> - **Lines 10-16:** "haycocks dry, / No whit less still and lonely fair / Than the high cloudlets in the sky. / And for that minute a blackbird sang / Close by, and round him, mistier, / Farther and farther, all the birds / Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire."

REPETITION

Repetitions help to evoke the speaker's magical experience at Adlestrop station. As the poem begins, the speaker declares:

> Yes. I remember **Adlestrop**—
> **The name** [...]

He goes on to tell his tale. Sitting unexpectedly at Adlestrop station, mildly bored and waiting for his train to get moving again, he gazes out the window:

> [...] What I saw
> Was **Adlestrop**—only **the name**

In other words, the speaker sees the signboard announcing Adlestrop Station—and then, beyond it, the fields, flowers, and

singing birds he'll remember forever. The repetition here suggests just how important "the name" of the town becomes in his memory. It's as if the signboard turns into a label for a whole glorious experience; when someone says "Adlestrop" to him now, the word summons up the scene.

Listen to the speaker's repetitions as he conjures that scene for the reader:

> And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
> And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
> [...]
> And for that minute a blackbird sang
> Close by, and round him, mistier,
> Farther and farther, [...]

There are three different flavors of repetition here:

- The [polysyndeton](link)—all those "ands"—suggests an abundance of natural riches: there's always another wildflower or tree to add to the list.
- Through the [polyptoton](link) of "willows, willow-herb," the flowers and trees seem to harmonize: their similar names suggest they *complement* each other (and just plain sound lovely, too).
- And the [diacope](link) of "farther and farther" suggests that the sound of birdsong pushes all the way out to the horizon.

Taken all together, these repetitions evoke an overflow of beauty and feeling: a landscape that stretches out in loveliness as far as the speaker can see.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "Adlestrop— / The name"
- **Line 6:** "No one left," "no one came"
- **Line 8:** "Adlestrop—only the name"
- **Line 9:** "And," "willows," "willow," "and"
- **Line 10:** "And," "and"
- **Line 15:** "Farther and farther"

CAESURA

The poem's [caesurae](link) subtly shape the poem's rhythm and mood.

In the poem's very first line, the speaker pauses:

> Yes. || I remember Adlestrop—

That period leaves that first "Yes" standing thoughtfully alone. In the moment it takes to say the word, the speaker gathers a whole rich memory—the one he's about to unfold in this poem. Think how different this line would feel with a comma caesura

rather than a period: "Yes, I remember Adlestrop" would sound chatty and bright. "Yes. I remember Adlestrop" feels slower, weightier, deeper.

All through the poem's first half, similar full stops create a halting rhythm that mirrors the scene the speaker describes. Listen to these caesurae:

> [...] one afternoon
> Of heat the express-train drew up there
> Unwontedly. || It was late June.
> The steam hissed. || Someone cleared his throat.
> No one left and no one came
> On the bare platform. || What I saw
> Was Adlestrop— || only the name

The abrupt pauses right in the middle of lines are an image of the speaker's journey: his train, too, abruptly pauses right in the middle of the line!

All these full stops suggest *stillness*. No momentum builds. The speaker, the train, the passengers, and the countryside are all nearly motionless; it's so quiet that the speaker can hear "someone clear[ing] his throat."

Notice, though, that something changes when the speaker describes how he saw "Adlestrop— || only the name" (that is, the signboard announcing the station). After all those periods, that quick dash launches the poem into the air.

As the speaker gazes out beyond the station, his caesurae change:

> And willows, || willow-herb, || and grass,
> And meadowsweet, || and haycocks dry,
> [...]
> And for that minute a blackbird sang
> Close by, || and round him, || mistier,
> Farther and farther, || all the birds
> Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

After the heavy periods of the first two stanzas, those light, quick commas feel airy and free as the fields.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Yes. I"
- **Line 2:** "name, because"
- **Line 4:** "Unwontedly. It"
- **Line 5:** "hissed. Someone"
- **Line 7:** "platform. What"
- **Line 8:** "Adlestrop—only"
- **Line 9:** "willows, willow-herb, and"
- **Line 10:** "meadowsweet, and"
- **Line 14:** "by, and," "him, mistier,"

- **Line 15:** "farther, all"

SIBILANCE

Soft sibilance evokes the hushed, almost sacred stillness of the countryside around Adlestrop.

When the speaker's train pulls into Adlestrop and unexpectedly stops, the world becomes very quiet. Adlestrop isn't exactly a bustling metropolis; there's "no one" on the platform waiting to board here, and no one disembarking. And on this June "afternoon / Of heat," it's so warm that the passengers are still. All the speaker hears, at first, is this:

> The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.

Those sibilant /s/ sounds evoke both the onomatopoeic hiss of the waiting steam engine and the general quiet all around; the loudest sound is another passenger's small *ahem*.

As the speaker, bored, looks out his window, the fields around him take part in this general hush:

> And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
> And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
> No whit less still and lonely fair
> Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

The hushed patterns of /z/ and /s/ sibilance here suggest that the whole scene is brilliant to the eye but soft to the ear: the only sounds here are grass and wildflowers moving softly.

Then, another sound creeps in—but still quietly:

> And for that minute a blackbird sang
> Close by, and round him, mistier,
> Farther and farther, all the birds
> Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

These final moments of /s/ and /sh/ sibilance make it sound as if even the "mist[y]" cloud of distant birdsong whispers *hush*.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "steam hissed," "Someone"
- **Line 9:** "willows," "grass"
- **Line 10:** "meadowsweet"
- **Line 11:** "still"
- **Line 12:** "cloudlets," "sky"
- **Line 13:** "sang"
- **Line 14:** "Close," "mistier"
- **Line 16:** "Oxfordshire," "Gloucestershire"

📑 VOCABULARY

Adlestrop (Line 1, Line 8) - A small English town in the county of Gloucestershire. Pronounced **ADD**-ul-strop.

Unwontedly (Line 4) - Unusually, unaccustomedly.

Willow-herb (Line 9) - A kind of sweet-smelling wildflower, usually bright fuchsia, pink, or red.

Meadowsweet (Line 10) - A fluffy white wildflower.

Haycocks (Line 10) - Piles of hay shaped like a cones or little huts.

No whit (Line 11) - Not a bit.

Cloudlets (Line 12) - Little clouds.

Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire (Line 16) - Counties in England. Gloucestershire is pronounced **GLOSS**-te-shirr.

⏱ FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Adlestrop" uses an unassuming shape: four quatrains, or four-line stanzas, in (very) loose iambic tetrameter. This form feels simple and familiar, like something from an earlier time; if it weren't for Thomas's allusions to the "express-train," this could be a Romantic poem from 100 years before he wrote or a Victorian poem from 50. By using such a recognizable shape, Thomas suggests that there's something timeless about both the beauty he describes and the experience of suddenly recognizing that beauty. The poem's form is as sweet, old-fashioned, and peaceful as the view from Adlestrop station.

METER

"Adlestrop" is written in a loose, flexible iambic tetrameter. Lines written in this meter are built from four iambs, metrical feet with a da-**DUM** rhythm. Here's how that sounds in line 11:

> No **whit** | less **still** | and **lone-** | ly fair

However, the poem doesn't stick very closely to its base meter. Thomas moves stresses around, adding or dropping syllables here and there. Listen, for example, to the rhythms of lines 6-8:

> **No** one **left** and **no** one **came**
> On the **bare** plat-form. **What** I **saw**
> Was **Ad**lestrop—**on**ly the **name**

The lines here share a certain family resemblance—they're all about the same length, for instance—but their rhythm is subtle, irregular, and organic, which helps to set the poem's anecdotal tone. The speaker, after all, is telling a story about beauty emerging unexpectedly from an apparently unpoetical setting.

His informal meter makes his story feel grounded and lived-in rather than high-flown.

RHYME SCHEME

"Adlestrop" uses a friendly old [rhyme scheme](#):

    ABCB

Like the landscape around the speaker's train, this pattern is so familiar that you barely notice it; it's the rhyme scheme of folk songs and nursery rhymes. Most of the rhymes the speaker chooses here are neat, familiar perfect rhymes: *afternoon / June*, *came / same*, *dry / sky*.

That simplicity lets the poem's final rhyme sing:

> And for that minute a blackbird sang
> Close by, and round him, **mistier**,
> Farther and farther, all the birds
> Of Oxfordshire and **Gloucestershire**.

The [slant-rhyme](#) pairing of "mistier" and "Gloucestershire" (pronounced **GLOSS**-te-shirr) comes as a witty, joyous surprise: unlike all the poem's earlier rhymes, this is a discovery, a rhyme no poet had used before. This changed tenor of the rhyme mirrors the speaker's changed feelings as he moves from mild boredom at a rural station into an epiphany.

👤💬 SPEAKER

The speaker is a voice for Edward Thomas himself, whose train indeed made an unexpected stop in Adlestrop on a late June afternoon in 1914. Moved by his experience, Thomas scribbled down notes that he would later shape into a poem—one of his earliest poems, in fact. Encouraged by his friendship with the American poet [Robert Frost](#), he had only recently begun writing verse when he composed "Adlestrop."

The speaker's eye for the way the ordinary world can unexpectedly melt into profound beauty marks him out as a poet born; like [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#) or [R.S. Thomas](#), he can see the wondrous in a common blackbird and an empty field. His unshowy, conversational poetic voice—"Yes. I remember Adlestrop"—emphasizes the idea that life doesn't need to be spectacular to be extraordinary.

🏞️ SETTING

It's pretty easy to pinpoint this poem's setting: it takes place at Adlestrop station, an unremarkable railway platform in a little town in Gloucestershire. Adlestrop is so unimportant, in fact, that the "express-train" the speaker travels on wouldn't usually bother to stop there: it's a tiny place in the middle of the fields.

It's Adlestrop's very insignificance that ends up making it so memorable and so moving for the speaker. Expecting nothing in particular from his surroundings when his train makes its unexpected stop, he has time to notice that the countryside is heartbreakingly lovely. The trees and wildflowers he sees out the window, the blackbird he hears, he could have seen and heard just about anywhere in England. But caught off guard, he's able to appreciate these ordinary beauties as great gifts.

ℹ️ CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Despite his obscurity during his lifetime, Edward Thomas (1878–1917) is now considered one of the most talented English poets of the early 20th century, as well as one of the most distinguished of those unfortunate writers whose careers were cut short on the battlefields of World War I. Thomas lived to see only one slim volume of his poems published (*Six Poems*, 1916). His second collection, called simply *Poems* (1917), was nearing publication when he died in combat. "Adlestrop" is among the poems gathered in this second book; written only a month before war broke out, it's often read as a poignant farewell to pre-war England.

Though he didn't gain literary fame in life, Thomas formed a now-famous friendship with the American poet Robert Frost, who lived in England from 1912 to 1915. The friendship was important to both men's development as writers, and Frost—who lived to become the best-known American poet of his time—went on to [elegize](#) Thomas in the poem "[To E.T.](#)" (Frost's classic poem "[The Road Not Taken](#)" also grew out of this friendship; it was in part a joke about Thomas's indecisiveness, one that Thomas [didn't find especially funny](#).) Frost once called Thomas "the only brother I ever had," and he arranged for the first U.S. publication of Thomas's poetry.

The two men were part of a literary circle called the Dymock poets, which also included the famous WWI poet [Rupert Brooke](#). The group dissolved after Frost returned to America and Brooke and Thomas died in the war—Brooke due to illness, and Thomas on the battlefield.

This poem's form is pretty simple and old-fashioned, and its heartfelt, faintly mystical affection for the English countryside could come [straight out of the Victorian era](#). But Thomas's experiments with [meter](#) also link this poem to [modernism](#), the inventive artistic movement that began to take shape around the turn of the 20th century.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Adlestrop" is a true story. Edward Thomas's train made its unexpected stop in Adlestrop on June 24, 1914—as it turned out, almost exactly a month before World War I broke out on July 28. Thomas's hymn to the tranquil beauty of the English countryside is thus charged with special poignancy: it wouldn't

be long before that peaceful world would be lost forever. Thomas himself would die on a French battlefield only three years later.

World War I was known, at the time it was fought, as "the war to end all wars" (a phrase that proved tragically inaccurate when World War II broke out a generation later). It began when assassin Gavrilo Princip shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which ruled a large section of Central and Eastern Europe at the time). Austria-Hungary accused their enemy Serbia of masterminding this assassination; Germany supported Austria-Hungary; Russia supported Serbia. Soon, chains of pre-existing alliances had pulled nearly all of Europe (and countries beyond) into bloody trench warfare in a snowballing catastrophe that would claim millions of lives. Thomas was only one of almost a whole generation of young men who would die on the dreadful battlefields of Europe.

📚 MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poem in Manuscript — See images of a handwritten draft of "Adlestrop." (https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/poems-of-philip-edward-thomas)

- The Poem Aloud — Listen to a performance of the poem. (https://youtu.be/bDUEwGR_gH8)

- Thomas's Legacy — Read about an event commemorating the 100th anniversary of "Adlestrop"—held in Adlestrop itself, of course. (https://www.witneygazette.co.uk/news/

11223115.special-train-makes-track-to-mark-centenary-of-edward-thomass-poem-adlestrop/)

- Thomas's Literary Afterlife — Read a celebration of Thomas marking the 100th anniversary of his death. (https://blogs.bl.uk/english-and-drama/2017/12/marking-the-centenary-year-of-the-death-of-the-poet-edward-thomas.html)

- A Brief Biography — Learn more about Thomas's life and work via the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/edward-thomas)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER EDWARD THOMAS POEMS

- Rain

💬 HOW TO CITE

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CHICAGO MANUAL

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