

# [Discuss ways in which edward thomas presents memory in ‘aspens’.](https://assignbuster.com/discuss-ways-in-which-edward-thomas-presents-memory-in-aspens/)

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“ Empty as sky, with every other sound No ceasing, calls there ghosts from their abode” Discuss ways in which Thomas presents memory in ‘ Aspens’. In your answer, explore the effects of language, imagery and verse form, and consider how this poem relates to other poems by Thomas that you have studied. Memory is presented as either a way of life or a community of change, as demonstrated in ‘ Aspens’, ‘ Old Man’, ‘ Aldestrop’. He does this through the variety of techniques such as change in form, use of imagery and alternations in the tone of each poem to explore memory.

As well as this, Thomas explicates the devastation of emptiness due to the consequence of war, which is portrayed through the use of soft consonantal sounds or the use of sibilance to carry the silence through the poem as it does in the places described in each poem. Quatrain A, B, A, B combined with the iambic pentameter shows regularity in the stresses of the beat, which reflects the motion of the Aspens as they sway consistently in the breeze. Alternatively, the regularity in the rhythm could reflect the beat of the hammer of the Blacksmith’s, as mentioned in the second stanza to emphasise how the vignette was once active, busy and lively.

This is also seen in the sonnet byRobert Frost, Acquainted with the Night, where iambic pentameter could have been used to reflect the constant depressive state the poet experienced at the time. This contrasts with another of Thomas’ poems, ‘ Tears’, where his thoughts are disjointed and disorganised as he tries to recollect hismemories. Thus the use of free verse and an 18 line stanza, unbroken, is appropriate as it reflects how he struggles to remember. Despite this, the whole stanza is in iambic pentameter but Thomas has used this technique in order to reflect what is going on in his memory.

For example, the last 6 lines of the stanza regulate, as all are of the same length, which expresses the formality of the soldiers marching and their systematic organisation. In comparison, ‘ Old Man’ has an irregular structure and this use of free verse conveys Thomas’ uncertainty in dealing with the subject of memory. It would be deemed applicable to say that the struggle to reminisce is present in ‘ Aldestrop’ as Thomas uses the hyphen at the end of the first line to show the pause in his recollection, as seen similarly and previously in the first line of ‘ Tears’ as the use of two hyphens portrays Thomas’ thought process.

The theme of emptiness is seen throughout Thomas’ poems. The wartime poet writes of his memory of livelihood and activity in villages, such as the one described in ‘ Aspens’, and then how it begins to disappear as a result of war. This is shown as the village is left with a ‘ lightless pane and footless road’ causing the village to appear as ‘ empty as sky’ and this simile gives a sense of vastness of the effects of the war, emphasising on the emptiness in the poem. Further, the mention of the ‘ cross-roads to a ghostly room’ explicates that the village is so empty that it is leading nowhere.

This metaphor is ironic as cross-roads are suggestively open gateways and a sense of choice in direction. However this connotation is altered as Thomas uses the metaphor ‘ ghostly room’, to portray the vacant village and this is supported by the cross-roads as they lead to emptiness and isolation. This is also seen in ‘ Old Man’ as the paradox ‘ only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end’ gives a sense of no lead despite the fact that an avenue should lead somewhere. It is clear here that Thomas’ state ofdepressionis reflected in this last line as the imagery conjures connotations of death, gloom and finality.

The emptiness is also portrayed in ‘ Aspens’ as Thomas describes the ‘ ghosts from their abode’, which suggests he is referring to the ghostly memories of the village, comparing them to how things have changed. We also see emptiness in ‘ Aldestrop’ as Thomas explains how the unexpected stop is ‘ bare’. The reason for this could be because the train was not due to stop at Aldestrop; on the other hand it could indicate the effects of wartime, particularly desolation. Loss of memory is seen in many of Thomas’ poems through different ways.

Edna Longley, critic, points out that the part of the mind that remembers is the same part of the mind that generatespoetry- the subconscious and comments that in ‘ Old Man’ ‘ perhaps / thinking perhaps of nothing’ is a rhetorically cunning line break. The verb ‘ think’ is central to the poem as is the verb ‘ remember’. Particularly in ‘ Old Man’ Thomas uses the metaphor ‘ I have mislaid the key’ to present his attempt of recollecting his first memory of the plant, Lads-Love. He portrays this as tantalising as he can ‘ think of nothing’ when sniffing the herb, which suggests he finds loss of memory as frustrating.

This is shown from the anaphora of ‘ no’ at the end of the poem as it rightly expresses that the more he tries to remember the less likely the memory will reappear, which further shows his frustration of struggling to regain his memory. Despite this, Thomas makes it clear that the memory brings him sentimentality and this is clearly important to him. He shows that although the smell of the bush is ‘ bitter’ he admires the plant because it brings back memories of his daughter. In comparison, Thomas also mentions that names are important in ‘ Aldestrop’ as ‘ I remember Aldestrop -/ The name’ suggests that the name brings every detail for him.

A sense of change in community is seen in various poems by Thomas, due to the effects of war. Most specifically, ‘ Aspens’ shows clearly how vibrant and animated the village was once before through the onomatopoeic sounds ‘ clink, the hum, the roar’ as they reflect the vivacity that was once present before the war. This is contrasted as the silence is emphasised through the dominance of sibilance through ‘ a silent smithy’ and ‘ a silent inn’, which emphasises the hollow atmosphere.

The silence is further shown by the sibilance in the penultimate line ‘ ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves’, which allows the silence of the trees to continue through to the end of the poem. A sense of change is also seen in ‘ Aldestrop’ as Thomas uses the metaphor of ‘ all the birds’ to represent the people of England as they suffer from the effects of the war as a whole. The fact that Thomas mentions countryside towns such as Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire shows how much Thomas values traditional English scenery and therefore shows his devastation of the effects of war.

Thomas uses lots of different techniques in order to portray memory through a communal change, emptiness and as a way of life. Through his language, structure andsymbolismwithin his poems, the reader is able to understand Thomas’ thoughts about memory (those being that it is frustrating to have ‘ mislaid the key’ and how memories can change over time) and relate their own experiences with Thomas’ due to his profound and truthful portrayal of memory.