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Displayed Quotation in Edward Thomas's Short Fiction

MARTIN BROOKS

'ANTIQUITY', THOMAS'S NARRATOR REPORTS in 'February in England' (1902), 'the echo, the shadow – was the one thing real'. Seeing Roman ruins lit by Welsh sunset, he illuminates his observation with Virgil:

In a short time the ruins were lit by that weird light 'sent from beyond the skies,' just after sunset, when far-off things are dim, but near things are strangely near. Those who walked there took deep draughts of eternity,

'Secures latices et longa loblivia potant.'

A lark was scaling the clouds as day fell, and sang, though driven madly backward by the wind.¹

This is the eighth and final displayed quotation in the story, offering *Aeneid* VI. 715 ('drink the draughts that bring freedom from care and long oblivion') as something 'real' because it is antique, a reflection of 'antiquity' as it features in Thomas's early stories, a foundational mix of England's Roman ruins and classical texts taught to Victorian undergraduates. Setting the quotation in his story, Thomas cuts the reference to the forgetfulness of Lethe ('Lethaei ad fluminis undam': 'at the river Lethe's wave') in the preceding line: like a ruined building, the tag has lost part of its first manufacture,

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but, un-Lethean, the reader is expected to remember as much and fill in the ‘echo’ of a missing line. Antiquity is real to the people who live with it and recognise that there is loss intrinsic to the march of time. Performatively, then, the tag manifests antiquity rather than irresolution: Thomas uses the indented formatting to make the quotation stand out, encouraging readers to place it in a reverence for a deep past that he broadly characterises as ‘antiquity’.

In seven preceding indents over the fourteen pages of the story, Thomas has quoted and misquoted Tennyson (‘And the long ripple washing in the reeds’), Virgil (‘solemque suum, sua sidera norunt’), Coleridge (‘Is that a Death? and are there two?’), Keats (‘His palace bright, / Bastioned with pyramids of glowing gold ...’), Horace (‘In vacuo laetus [Thomas has ‘tristis’] sessor plausorque teatro’), Massinger (‘Matter! with six eggs and a strike of rye meal / I had kept the town till Doomsday, perhaps longer’), and Shelley (‘Until we hardly see – we feel that it is there’). The quotations may appear little more than a pass at Hazlittian or Elian familiar essay style. Notably, though, Thomas uses each as he does *Aeneid* VI. 715. He cuts material up, and his narrating supplies only very limited scaffolding, rarely more than a period or comma for introductory punctuation:

A steamer – the ghost of a steamer – passed under. I could hear a voice, perhaps two; I could see a form – the shadow of a form – flit past upon the deck.

‘Is that a Death? and are there two?’

But the ship slid softly away under her pyramid of almost motionless smoke.

Only the lines from Massinger come sourced. The quotations accumulate, gently encouraging the reader’s recognition of their sources, and together they rebuild their contexts from the knowledge expected in their readers of canonical literature and so aggregate towards the assertion that only antiquity, recognition of a forerunner past, is ‘real’ in England.

'February in England' exhibits a formal experimentation breaking into a linear travel narrative. Thomas's displayed quotations highlight select passages as important for interpreting the narrative in a way that is typical of his early fictions. Quotations let him draw the organising themes of his stories into prominence before the reader's attention. The short 'In Praise of Indolence' (1899), for example, is a character study of Marcellus, a poet and 'Such a perfect lover of Indolence Keats's fitfully devotional ode could not satisfy'. In keeping with Thomas's youthful fascination with Shelley, the story displays select lines from 'The Question' and, in a final, climactic sentence, the call from the 'Ode to the West Wind', 'Make me thy lyre even as the forest is!'² Keats could not satisfy Marcellus: he required Shelley's intensity to characterise his insatiable appeals to Indolence, a predicament which Thomas conveys by pushing the texts up for attention through displayed quotation.

Today, Thomas's fame is for the 144 lyric poems from his three last years. However, he published a large amount of short fiction throughout his career, more than 100 stories. They tend to fall between ten and twenty octavo pages, supplying character study more than action scenes or sharp 'well-made play' outcomes. After Thomas's death, Henry Nevinson remembered him in a letter to *The Nation*: 'He always professed himself incapable of writing stories or describing action. Indeed, he was a born essayist'.³ The displayed quotation, among Thomas's most-used allusive modes, represents a sea-change in how he conceived of the relationship between 'stories' and familiar essays in the formative years before he turned to poetry. Moreover, the shift in his use of displayed quotation suggests an enduring interest in formal experimentation, one which was key to his late-career construction of an authorial voice that united his prose and poetry. To experiment is often to learn from first-hand experience, and Thomas saw it as a step to writing with a personal stamp. His experimentation led to his lyric work including formal features that derived from his prose, its syntax and stops taking much from his two decades of considering how and why to display quotation in short fiction.

Thomas used displayed quotation frequently in his early-career short fiction, where it flagged themes for recognition. He changed tack in 1909, perhaps his pivotal literary year. That year saw him starting to view formal innovation and vocabulary as parts of a fundamentally unified depiction of the writer's psychology: they constituted 'style', a formal representation of the author's habitual ways of seeing the world. He turned on aspects of his earlier work as verbose and started to damn his and others' perceived rhetorical excesses as impersonal. He especially attacked Pater, whom he felt wrote word by word such that 'The conscious effects are not easily separated from the words so obviously used to gain them'.⁴ The change was sudden and totalising, and like much new life it arrived over the spring. In a letter of 15 March 1909 to Gordon Bottomley, he wrote of Arthur Symonds, 'he could never be what I should call quite sincere, that is why he had not style'.⁵ It was a consuming new thought for Thomas. In three unsigned *Morning Post* reviews printed in June and July 1909, he digressed from each author to launch redoubled attacks on Pater's style.⁶ For the rest of his life, Thomas sought to fold formal effects into his depiction of a narrator's or a poet's semi-conscious impulse to speak.

Leading up to this Damascene moment, Thomas experimented with displayed quotations as tag-like and thematic in his short fiction. He offered them as complete, focused punctuations. Largely drawn from the texts he encountered as an undergraduate, they gestured to sources he could expect a reader to identify. Although the canon came from his education, Thomas's result was unlike the schoolboy essays Connolly would describe as boys 'setting down their views ... to wind up with a quotation from Bacon'.⁷ As Lucy Newlyn has said, Thomas's habit was to lace quotation throughout his works, 'in a cluster, unsourced: a habit he shared with Hazlitt'.⁸ Although this habit is sustained in Thomas's familiar essays – Newlyn discusses 'This England', written in 1914 – it left his short fiction in early 1909. From then on to his death, Thomas's displayed quotations became both more fragmentary and more exemplary. His later style uses descriptive remarks to gesture at what the material could mean for the

characters. Evoking partial memories, the quotations are partial, separated from rather than signifying a whole. Thomas's formal experimentation took him from laying in themes for the story to lacing in formal expressions of thoughts happening in someone's head, anticipating the twisting, psychological patterns that propel much of his poetry.⁹ His snaking syntax in poems including 'The Wind's Song' and the double sonnet 'The Glory' evokes a complexity acquired in the short fiction to suggest his thoughts unfolding. From 1909, recasting the displayed quotation was part of Thomas writing more fragmentary, deliberately unfinished short fiction, and, in the case of *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* (1913), an idiosyncratic, disjunctive novel. In them he experiments with displaying fragmentation as a psychological effect, his narration breaking to flash quotations as examples of the thoughts and impulses driving his characters.

It was the familiar essayist's voice that brought displayed quotation into Thomas's early fiction. Throughout his career, he referred to stories and familiar essays as 'papers'. In his first decade writing, he treated the genres as adjacent and experimented with their overlaps: he printed them in the same collections with no distinctions between them, and the contents pages of *Horæ Solitariae* (1902) and the two editions of *Rose Acre Papers* (1904, 1910) take zero pains to separate the stories from the essays. Some of the pressure to conflate the genres was probably pragmatic: he would republish what were originally short stories as passages of the way-faring *The South Country* (1909), *The Icknield Way* (1913), and *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914).¹⁰ For such a busy writer, it was evidently sensible to sell the material twice.¹¹ *The Heart of England* (1906) is a disjointed set of imaginary travel narratives in England and Wales, its sixty-six short chapters giving it the air of a short-fiction collection disguised as a travel memoir for marketing's sake.

However, the later Thomas was far clearer on his stories' dissimilarity from his wider prose. In February 1909 he wrote to Gordon Bottomley with a distinction between stories and essays. Stories now attracted another word, 'sketches'. The word connotes incompleteness and spontaneity, downplaying

narrative architecture in favour of character. Thomas was writing 'not reviews, not commissioned books, not landscapes, but character sketches stories &c. Since the beginning of the year I have had an extraordinary energy on writing & have done nothing else'.¹² The character studies became two collections with Duckworth, *Rest and Unrest* (1910) and *Light and Twilight* (1911), that are exclusively short fiction. Writing them offered creative freedom from his regular, paid writing and the rote manufacture of 'grammatical, continuous narrative'.¹³ It was only after his death, when his friends worked their way through his remaining material, that his prose collections combined short fiction and familiar essays again. The titles of *Cloud Castle and Other Papers* (1922) and *The Last Sheaf: Essays* (1928) announce a return to the combined, collected Thomas.

When Thomas combined fiction and essay, he drew on the familiar essay's capacity to intrigue readers through shows of authorial affectation. The extent to which he was intentionally reproducing the style of Hazlitt, Lamb, and others is apparent in the wide use he found for such an essayist manner. Felicity James describes the Elian voice's pointed affectation, with Lamb using quotation and trope to alert readers to his own 'rhetoric of familiarity'.¹⁴ Thomas's early stories adapt the familiar essay's need for a present authorial voice by using appeals to genre and thematic displayed quotations. These exaggerate and emphasise the narrator's acts of self-construction. Thomas could be overt here, signalling the reader as he invokes precedents or launches experiments. When 'Isoud' (undated, later collected in *Cloud Castle and Other Papers*) moves from an autumn journey 'The other day' into a chivalric romance dream, Thomas tells the reader what conventions to expect, 'Night closes the story appropriately'.¹⁵ 'A Colloquy in a Library' (1900) embraces experimentation from the off. It resembles an attempt to adapt contemporary bibliophilic commentaries, including Leslie Stephen's *Hours in a Library* or Birrell's literary essays, into a short-fiction form. The piece announces its generic fluidity by opening with a playscript's *dramatis personae*, and displayed quotations further enhance the sense of inventiveness.

The Thomas-like narrator speaks to an unnamed friend, who describes the associations borne by books in his library. The friend's reading tastes and opinions are notably close to Thomas's own. The friend is an early version of the 'other men' doppelgängers that Andrew Motion observes throughout Thomas's prose and poetry, which tend to split between a mundane, blunt Thomas and an otherworldly twin.¹⁶ Against the playscript frame, the detachment of familiar displayed quotation serves to turn the voices of authors into speaking parts entering the dramatic stage as though unconstrained by the wider dialogue.

Gesturing at an ancestry, 'A Colloquy in a Library' associates its play of displayed quotations with Hazlitt's and Lamb's essays. The story closes when 'this Hazlitt' volume reminds the friend 'of a great lover of books; Corydon of — College, Oxford, with whom I dined as a small boy'. Corydon, whose appearance bears some resemblance to Hazlitt, held a dinner party pairing books with wines; 'my portion was a copy of "Elia", and I think there was nothing but Lamb upon the dish'. The conceit echoes Hazlitt's gustatory metaphors for reading.¹⁷ As it happens, neither Lamb nor Hazlitt comes into the story as a quotation: their presence is as admired forerunner figures, 'as yonder duodecimo "Elia" in gloomy levant'.¹⁸ Contemporary reviewers were swift to note Thomas's use of familiar style. The notice in the 30 August 1902 *Speaker* for *Horæ Solitariae* observed that Thomas's manner of quotation 'illustrates the author's unfashionable and scholarly familiarity with classical literature' but picked up on the intent behind Thomas's anachronisms and allusions. Rather than trace the title back to James Fitzjames Stephen's collected *Saturday Review* essays, *Horæ Sabbaticæ* (1892), which would be apt enough with Thomas starting to publish in the *Saturday* in May 1902, the reviewer directed eyes to Lamb's arcane familiarity. The collection's best essays, they wrote, 'are unmistakably and delightfully Elian'.¹⁹

For Thomas, the delights were in making a type of fiction that could be his alone. His early short fiction and familiar essay writing grow from his preference for the Romantic

Revival as a period for writers to be individuals. He had set about using displayed quotations, whether English, Latin, or Greek, in a way to resemble classical tags: they are detached from the narration and offered with an expectation that the reader will recognise them. Yet Thomas's approach is expansive, generating a second layer to each fiction's narrative. It runs against the nineteenth century classicism that proffered that 'genres are indispensable to poetry, and that generic classification is the proper basis of literary criticism'.²⁰ Latin quotations may have been outmoded in early twentieth century fiction but, ironically, Thomas's snub for contemporary fashion only modernised his writing. He was taking conventions associated with tags and employing them with formal idiosyncrasy that enabled a voice of highly personal expression. As Edna Longley writes, quoting Thomas on Symons's *Romantic Movement in English Literature* (1909), his was a fondness for individual authors, not movements or 'flounder[ing] in generalisations'.²¹ Manipulating displayed quotation was part of his desire always to inhabit a deeply personal literary form: one thinks of the terms of his praise for the 'myriad-minded lyric, with its intricacies of form as numerous and as exquisite as those of a birch-tree in the wind'.²²

The need for individuality in form was with Thomas long before his rejection of Pater's writing as too obviously crafted. In *Walter Pater* (1913), he argued that Pater offered 'meticulousness in detail and single words, rather than a regard for form in its largest sense' where all the words seem spontaneous because they share connotations and etymologies that reveal the writer's personal history and trains of thought.²³ Underlining his psychological intent, Thomas's arguments are an individuality-focused version of Hazlitt's position in 'On Familiar Style', a rejection of 'arbitrary pretension' and praise of 'the best word in common use' for 'adaptation of the expression to the idea';²⁴ and the association of spontaneity and verbal sincerity had its origins in the early short fictions which draw on familiar style to expand narratives, deploying displayed quotations to give his stories a distinctive, exaggerated familiarity based on their thematic appeal to recognisable works.

Collected in *Rose Acre Papers*, 'Rain' (?1901) might represent a peak of this style. It changes mode midway from familiar essay to fiction, with the change accompanied by Thomas introducing displayed quotations into the prose. The essay portion reflects on rain and art, 'The prejudice of poets against water has perhaps kept rain out of literature', without displayed quotation. Exemplifying rain's promise for writing, Thomas then sketches a memory of wandering to find the vacant 'Little House' with an old man outside 'repeat[ing] the speech of Lear: "Howl, howl, howl, howl, Oh! Ye are men of stones"'. Writing to Bottomley in 1909, Thomas identified houses as a habitual focus in his fiction: 'So far the best things I have done have been about houses. Have quite a long series – I discover, tho I did not design it'.²⁵ The quotations give the 'Little House' a voice, that it 'has said to me', 'itself cried', and 'It went on' with lines from *Richard II* IV. i, promising its dissolubility, 'Now mark me how I will undo myself' as an act of defiance against urban modernity. The house's displayed voice is in parallel pact with the howling Shakespearean and the blackbirds singing a seventeenth century song:

High trolлие lollie loe
 High trolлие lee
 Tho' others think they have so much
 Yet he that says so lies.
 Then come away,
 Turn country man with me.²⁶

The quotations mark the piece's transition from familiar essay to short fiction, adapting a stationary, descriptive perspective into a journeying story that returns to a dreamlike, idealised past. Portentous like Thomas's wartime departure poems, 'Early One Morning' and 'Gone, Gone Again', they reverberate with connotations of disappearance and departure. Their presence accumulates to add to the sense of a generic shift and to give a sense of the narrator discovering a route away from modernity. As often in Thomas's early short fiction, 'Rain' enables the reader to recognise similarities

between its displayed quotations and so hear them echoing along as counterpoint harmony to the narration.

In a thin, long column of the 31 March 1914 *Manchester Guardian*, Thomas printed 'Insomnia' (1913). It is one of his last short stories written before he committed to poetry. Unable to sleep, the narrator resolves to record the sound of the trees and a robin's song in verse so he might 'ponder it in the light of day':

To make sure of remembering I tried putting it into rhyme. I was resolved not to omit the date: and so much that the first line had to be 'The seventh of September'. Nor could I escape from this necessity. Then September was to be rhymed with. The word 'ember' occurred and stayed; no other would respond at all to my calling. The third and fourth lines, it seemed, were bound to be something like –

The sere and the ember
Of the year and of me.

... It was fortunate for me as a man, if not as an unborn poet, that I could not forget the lines: for by continual helpless repetition of them I rose yet once more to the weakness that sleep demanded.²⁷

With 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Pains of Sleep' in its deep lineage, the story traces back to a sleepless night Thomas spent in East Grinstead at the Locke Ellis's Selsfield House in September 1913. As Judy Kendall writes, the displayed lines and the phrase 'unborn poet' close the distance between Thomas's prose and his later poetry.²⁸ The displayed poetry is fragmentary for effect. It excludes the potential second line in an implied ABAB rhyme, a formal representation of it taking spontaneous shape from 'necessity' and being 'bound'. No longer collecting influential material in cool detachment to serve a summary thematic purpose, the lines express fragmentariness by emphasising their own incompleteness.

Although it supplies original poetry, not Coleridge or other precursors, 'Insomnia' reflects Thomas changing to make displayed quotation a psychological matter. Within the story, it depicts the narrator attempting to use poetry to remember a personally significant experience. Analogously to rejecting deliberate *mots propres* to prefer the words that an individual instinctively favours, Thomas was writing fiction where the displayed quotation represents individual memory emerging. The quotations his characters remember and commit to heart are there to mark their identity and motivations. Thomas used this approach to generate character sketches, with the psychodrama almost always represented indirectly. His changing opinion on Pater looks to have driven him from treating displayed quotations as recognisable tags. The displayed quotation's capacity to be fragmentarily incomplete, emphasised in 'Insomnia', now represented his authorial unwillingness to be declarative about personalities.

This combination of fragmentary recollection and an unwillingness to claim clarity would appear in the poems often, coming in diverse scenes with manifest formal experimentation. 'Old Man' shows Thomas accepting that the impenetrable memories from smelling a sprig are 'Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end'.²⁹ He is uplifted by the ambiguity of 'The Unknown Bird' calling 'La-la-la!' in uncertain stresses.³⁰ 'Like the Touch of Rain' recalls a lover's "'Go now"'. // Those two words shut a door / Between me and the blessed rain' that 'will not open again'.³¹ The Shakespearean 'There's nothing like the sun' uses a twisting syntax that undermines the memory, the medial word 'too' emphasised into a pivot's ambiguous lean: 'But I have not forgot / That there is nothing, too, like March's sun'. Is he remembering 'nothing' or the sun? The last line, 'There's nothing like the sun till we are dead' leaves the uncertainty poised.³² Representations of memory in his short fiction became a proving ground for this lyric formal invention. Go back to his earliest fictions and these recollections' incompleteness sit in marked contrast. In the story 'Broken Memories' (1898), for instance, Thomas recalls a woodland felled for suburban housing. The land is broken, but the memories remain

full, 'We cannot summon up any thought or reverie which had not in this wood its nativity'.³³ Despite its title, 'Broken Memories' shows Thomas confidently identifying memories and assigning them each a specific importance.

The transition between certitude and psychodrama was simultaneous and of a kind with Thomas's abrupt rejection of a Paterian style, and his reviews show his critical thought developing an analogy between fine words and authoritative tags. Reviewing Gorky's *Spy* in January 1909, he capped his praise by writing 'the story is often so subtle, e.g. in its depiction of states of mind, that it might well be an autobiography'.³⁴ Attending to 'states of mind' was a sharp change from what he wanted to praise when he reviewed Conrad's *Set of Six* short stories for October 1908. To Thomas, Conrad's stories revealed Conrad as a collector of fine things, 'the colour, both physical and spiritual, that is in the words ... 'Tis the colour, first of all, of a man who is vowed to beauty'. Thomas's example is of a kind with the sentences he would condemn in *Pater*, 'This is an admirable sentence: "In the colourless and pellucid dawn the wood of pines detached its columns of trunks and its dark green canopy very clearly against the rocks of the grey hillside"'.³⁵ The jump between the two approaches is suggested by his 1912 comments on Hearn's short fiction. Hearn found 'inspiration or strong emotion was impossible [living] in Japan; that all his work had to be forced'. Thomas's supporting evidence is 'When he writes anything beyond the length of a very short essay or story it is like a string of notes and quotations'.³⁶ Thematic or not, he could no longer enjoy short fiction resembling a miscellany of fineries. He sought psychological irruptions: impulses, moods, and 'strong emotion'.

The post-1909 stories use displayed quotation to punctuate rather than to parallel the narrative. No longer a tag, now a fragment, it stands out from the narration and displays its incompleteness. Like the consistency of a person's preferred words in speech or familiar style, it offers a partial example of what a character is thinking or feeling. Its display stands out, inviting the reader to consider why a character should think so. The stories play on the characters' preferences for

and reactions to the material, including descriptions of characters either speaking or listening to quotations. ‘Sunday Afternoon’ (1910), collected in *Rest and Unrest*, gathers its characters to sing two hymns. Thomas excerpts verses from ‘Pray without Ceasing’ and ‘Our God of love who reigns above’ which emphasise the displacement of suffering by belief. They illustrate the difference between the orphaned child Cathie, bereft and weeping, and the parishioner aunts and grandparents, who draw hymnal comforts. In relief against the parishioners, Thomas shows Cathie soothed only by remembering ‘the very same moon she used to see at her father’s house’.³⁷ The displayed quotation works as a focal point where we see who the characters are and how they differ from each other.

Often, in a deviation from his earlier essay-like fictions, the displayed quotation comes with a relational statement to make it a punch-out example of a character’s psychology. ‘Milking’ (1909) crescendos when the farmer Weekes remembers his wife Emily’s miscarriage. Questioning ‘the whole order of things’, he ‘began singing a verse of a ribald song which he did not know he remembered’:

Poor Sally’s face is plain
But Sally’s heart is kind –

And it was so singing that, without wishing it, he returned the question to the teeming womb and grave of the earth, to be swallowed up in the vast profusion of life and death...³⁸

The combination of folk song and ambiguous, traumatic memory anticipates ‘She Dotes’. This poem combines ‘dot-ing’ love and a Burton-like melancholy ‘dotage’ in a structure where the repeating fourth-line rhyme sounds out as if a refrain. In Thomas’s poetry, refrains are a form for unresolved, half-known thoughts returning to the speaker’s conscious awareness. Frequently, and just as for Weekes, the thought is deathly: see ‘The Gallows’, ‘The Green Roads’, or ‘The Gypsy’ to this end. In his later fictions, displayed

quotation was a step towards such returning refrains: the narration suggests how the quotation arrives unexpectedly, uttered with the same unpredictable force it uses to break through the orderly paragraphs.

This sort of use suffuses *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*, Thomas's 1913 semi-autobiographical novel. In the final chapter, 'The Poet's Spring at Lydiard Constantine', Arthur Froxfield narrates his counterpart Philip Morgan speaking in a manner 'as of mysterious understanding' and quoting from Shelley's lyrics. Arthur both identifies the quotations as Shelleyan and describes Philip's exaggerated utterances, 'in a voice somewhere between that of [Henry] Irving and a sheep, he repeated'. The format represents each displayed quotation as an instant that stands out to Arthur's memory. The passages are those Thomas commonplacéd into the fly-leaves of his teenage copy of Shelley's shorter poems, and the book appears in the novel: 'The fly-leaves are entirely covered by copies on his hand-writing of the best-loved poems and passages'. Yet, although satirising his own thoughts, Thomas depicts Arthur unable to get to the heart of Philip's Shelley obsession. Arthur remembers the spoken quotations as 'wild', excited responses to the spring landscape, 'I do not understand them any more than I do the Spring. Both have the power of magic'.³⁹ Philip does not know why he said them. Arthur does not know why he remembers them. The quotations illustrating the difference between Arthur and Philip are quite unlike the thematic quotations that Thomas had used in his earlier fictions. In 'An Autumn House' (1904; Thomas's edited version of a longer 1902 fiction, 'Autumn Thoughts'), say, quotations form a multitude that saturates the narrative with an anthropologist's argument about what English culture is. Come the flood of quotations in *Morgans*, Thomas had repurposed the device to probe why he – at least the 'Philip' part of him – would want to make such an argument at all.⁴⁰

It was now less important to Thomas that the quotations come from recognisable sources than that their excerpts invite the reader to ask, 'Why would the character say that?' This turn to psychology saw Thomas pulling on his arguments

against Pater to declare as well his distaste for allegories, where one is a symbol for two: 'this is not literature; as well might algebra be called literature. It is not deep enough'.⁴¹ In *Light and Twilight*, 'July' identifies quotations of 'Mont Blanc' (attributed to 'the poet') and 'Edom O'Gordon'. 'Edom O' Gordon' is lineated as though sung aloud, and the narration describes characters reacting to hearing it. But the dream narrative withholds any sense of resolution that would render the quotation a neatly allegorical text.⁴² He could never say explicitly what a quotation means, either for the character or for the story: it is as though Thomas sought a deeper suggestiveness than closure could allow. To him, suggestiveness marked Morris's superiority over Tennyson: for Tennyson 'allegorises where Malory makes unconscious symbols of great power, and in nothing is the laureate's inferiority so clear' compared to Morris, who 'creates a world or fragment of one which we cannot and do not feel compelled to try to locate'.⁴³

Thomas's highest goal was to write in the way that he or his chosen character thinks. Fragmentation could not stand allegorically for people broken into pieces or devoid of individuality, as would happen in 'The Waste Land': were he to do that, especially to represent social fragmentation, he would be coming too close to producing a cypher that would be incapable of letting the reader see as the character sees. So, in modern city scenes, Thomas's characters experience disturbance but retain selfhood. He guards against disruption by implicitly refusing to examine them down to any irreducible causal bedrock, and the outcome is that his fragmentary depictions of personhood enable the characters to retain overall psychological coherence. In 'A Group of Statuary' (1910), Thomas describes seeing a group of homeless people in London, 'so perfectly in keeping with its greatness and aridity', not as hollow beings but as 'fit lords of the scene, if they had but known', and possible for future archaeologists to see as Londoners' gods.⁴⁴ Rather than contend with, or deliberately fail, the challenge of showing personalities unassailably whole, his writing pictures them in partial silhouette.

These ideas were driven furthest by reading Coleridge. 'Kubla Khan' was his key model of fragmentation and would later inspire the poem 'A Dream'.⁴⁵ Its description of impulses arriving unexpectedly before vanishing irremediably bestows provenance and sincerity. The illusion of spontaneous happening was far more important to Thomas's fragmentation than the mere fact of short length could be. Compared to Keats's cut fragments, which Thomas saw as abandoned because 'the poet's language and philosophy and grasp of life do not build up around them, a world of suitable scale or atmosphere that is harmonious', he found a framework for concentration in the poems that Coleridge had apparently failed to control or recover.⁴⁶ Spontaneity gave Thomas a register for scenes in which the external causes of a character were both apparent and uncertain. 'July' is instructive here: when the focus character, Lawrence Garlon, remembers his lover, Margaret, he is compelled to sing stanzas of 'Edom o' Gordon' because, the narrator says, 'he must needs repeat them that he might see her turn to hide her tears and kiss them away'. For Thomas's writerly hand, offering this fragmentariness showed a craftsman capable of creating idiosyncratic speech. To his readerly eye, it was the mark of the writer's personality being taken suddenly by an auspiciously fitting impression, 'irresistibly intruding' as he found it in the 'fragments wild' of 'Religious Musings'.⁴⁷

In some ways, displaying a few lines snatched from memory was a highly practical approach to authorship. Never seeing himself as an author of thrilling stories, Thomas found writing dialogue that would represent characters' different inner lives a challenging task. His reviews of Richard Curle's collections *Shadows Out of the Crowd* and *Life is a Dream* show how he thought about this issue. Curle's 'grasp varies from time to time, and the result is imperfect harmony and reality ... Mr. Curle's emotional intensity and observation are at present best displayed when he speaks more or less directly for himself'.⁴⁸ As Motion has shown, doppelgängers let Thomas split himself and have the parts speak together, and fragments gave him a wider means of addressing the problem of evoking the truth of personality. Their form was Coleridgean, but the

application was arguably more Keatsian: treating displayed quotation as a fragment let him inhabit another's personality to present the type of poetic lines a character would favour or recall. This fragmentation dovetails with Thomas's 1910 interpretation of the lyric voice, 'in a sense unintentionally overheard, and only by accident and in part understood, since it is written not for anyone ... but for the understanding spirit that is in the air round about or in the sky or somewhere'.⁴⁹

Indeed, he was so taken with the combination of narrative explanation and silence that he found a union for it even in single-character fictions, a part-way step before it could appear in his lyric poetry. The first-person narrator of 'The Motor-Horn' (1911), a story put in the *New Statesman* before the *Ickniel Way*, quotes 'The Eve of St. Mark' after seeing car headlamps travelling on the dark hills outside his inn bedroom. He says the lines remind him of 'a great adventure' and, seeing the lamps, 'It was easy to imagine myself the partner in magnificent risks quite outside my own experience'. Yet he does not explain why motor cars should be 'an elfin storm from fairyland': all he offers is an incongruousness that suggests the English country lanes host his clash between old myth and new technology.⁵⁰ The combination of repose and sudden imagination sets this use of displayed quotation as the ancestor of 'The Owl', Thomas's striking poem of sudden war thoughts at home.

As so pronounced in 'The Mossy Shoes' (1913), Thomas had found a substitute for dramatic action. The page shows a striking and uncontrolled emergence when a ghost tells a traveller that her name is Daisy. The narrator describes her tone as 'giving the word a sort of brightness and sadness as the poet [W. H. Davies] does to the daisy in the poem which begins':

I know not why thy beauty should
 Remind me of the cold, dark grave –
 Thou Flower, as fair as Moonlight, when
 She kissed the mouth of a black Cave...⁵¹

The narrator's quotation tells the reader that the girl's voice sounds with her death. The traveller is the only one unaware

that she is dead and may vanish. This suggestive drama continues when she sings the refrain of 'Blow away the morning dew', the folk song of a woman who disappears from her potential lover. The narrator describes the lines with the same combination: the 'notes shivered upon the air with a wondrous sweetness'. These moves are entirely in keeping with Thomas's overarching dramatic reticence. The suicide story 'The Attempt' (1910) hinges on hinting at the Thomas avatar Traheron's wife's realisation of his mental crisis; the social satire of 'A Third-Class Carriage' (?1913) uses pipe-smoking as a lens through which to see thoughts arising in an old colonel's brain.⁵² Rather than have narrators who describe exciting events, Thomas was making character drama through vanishing, intimated interruptions to the narration.

Although displayed quotation let Thomas find practical ways around his trouble writing dialogue, it nonetheless sometimes became caught up with his punishing self-consciousness. He satirised himself frequently, with the satire balancing his ambition to help readers see as a character does with his own sharply perceived flaw of attempting too much to be like other writers. The dream story 'Saved Time' (1911) ends with Thomas falling back asleep. Inverting 'Kubla Khan', he finds nothing worth transcribing, 'I recovered the dream and heard much more from the shopman which it would be tedious or ridiculous to mention'.⁵³ In the 1910 'Hawthornden', the title character is another Thomas avatar, here discomfited by his common literary tastes. They prevent his self-expression, 'as the old literature had been well-sifted by the efforts of the very criticism he despised ... he discovered with some annoyance, that he read and thought – so far as he could express himself – very much like everybody else'. Hawthornden's obsession with his individualism is manifest in him 'late at night reading aloud in a deep voice poems on liberty, and even at breakfast [he] would relieve himself by muttering impressively'. A displayed quotation of the 'Ode to Liberty' offers Hawthornden speaking to express his most intimate fascination – being an individual in thought. It stands out from the narration, analogous to Hawthornden speaking unexpectedly and then refusing to explain himself to others.

Asked why he chose to speak the lines, he walks back from intimacy to be alone: 'he stirred his tea, and made haste to leave the table for the study'. Despite his plans of gaining a personal-but-literary voice, then, 'something always stood in the way – himself'.⁵⁴ The character wins a suitably bathetic death, collapsing after overexerting himself.

Thomas was attacking the temptation to parrot the pieces in his commonplace books rather than build a style that would show how the selection represents him individually. As several archives witness, Thomas compiled his building blocks in his commonplaces, notebooks, and flyleaves. Writing on Stevens's commonplaces, Milton Bates described *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets* as 'cultivated and jealously guarded against intrusion by any idiom or idea [Stevens] could not appropriate wholly for his own purposes', a protection for the 'integrity' of the author's imagination.⁵⁵ The flavour of Thomas's satires was to favour such 'integrity'. The 'Other Man' doppelgänger rebukes notebooks for easing him into writing without representing himself.⁵⁶ Thomas mocked his overwhelming Shelley obsession in *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*. He even took some aim at the 'Golden Book', his 1901 commonplace. The book contains excerpts and full poems, which include Yeats's 'The Moods' and Keats's 'Robin Hood', both decorated in black and red ink with Helen and signed 'e. h. Thomas. August. 1901'.⁵⁷ The intimacy of husband and wife sharing a commonplace evokes two minds uniting as they pick their favourite pieces. When Hawthornden bolts from the breakfast table, the scene lampoons Thomas's *meum et tuum* discomfort at how this sharing could diminish him. Notably, though, the attacks are for quotations that displace individuality. Thomas did not abandon his formally inventive use of quotation, which endures in his writing as an unspoken experimental impulse. Even in *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*, Thomas's satire is about Philip wanting to be Shelley, not for Arthur issuing pages of poetic fragments.

The practice of displayed quotation was bound up with Thomas's association of Romanticism with the freedom to experiment in the name of individual style, a freedom which

led to his 1914 poetry drawing on formal devices first developed in his short fiction. His verses' patterns and breaks might seem to be the features that distinguish poetry from prose; but his prose offered his poetry more than merely images and words that he might set into lines. Thomas's new commitment to poetry was sharp and sudden, yet his ways of writing it would be a continuation of his long prose career.

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NOTES

¹ Edward Thomas, *Horæ Solitariae* (1902), pp. 136-7. The story is annotated, with its quotations identified, in Edward Thomas, *Prose Writings: A Selected Edition*, gen. eds. Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn, 5 vols. to date (Oxford, 2011-), ii. 41-8.

² Edward Thomas, 'In Praise of Indolence', *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 1 Apr. 1899, 369-70.

³ Henry W. Nevinston, 'Edward Thomas', *The Nation*, 21 (1917), 70.

⁴ Edward Thomas, *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* (1913), p. 154.

⁵ Edward Thomas, *Letters to Bottomley*, ed. R. George Thomas (Oxford, 1958), pp. 181-2.

⁶ The group of unsigned *Morning Post* reviews: *The Egoists* by James Huneker, 28 June 1909, 2; *In Unknown Tuscany* by Edward Hutton, 5 July 1909, 2; *The Cliffs* by Charles M. Doughty, 22 July 1909, 2. Thomas pasted them into his scrapbooks of published reviews, now Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives, 424/3/3/1.

⁷ Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* (New York, 1948), p. 11.

⁸ Lucy Newlyn, 'Hazlitt and Edward Thomas on Walking', *E in C*, 56 (2006), 163-87: 169.

⁹ There are numerous accounts of formal structures in Thomas's lyric. See, for instance, Peter Howarth, *British*

Poetry in the Age of Modernism (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 64-107; Andrew Hodgson, *The Poetry of Clare, Hopkins, Thomas, and Gurney: Lyric Individualism* (Basingstoke, 2019), pp. 177-205; Andrew Webb, *Edward Thomas and World Literary Studies: Wales, Anglocentrism and English Literature* (Cardiff, 2013), *passim*; and Martin Brooks, 'Two Individuals: Edward Thomas's *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Daily News Reviews*', *Modern Language Review*, 118 (2023), 20-39.

¹⁰ Examples include the chapters 'A Return to Nature' of *The South Country* reprinting 'The Big Battalions' from *The New Age* (March 1909); 'Edlesborough to Streatley' of *The Icknield Way* reprinting 'The House with the Verandah' from *The Nation* (March 1911); and 'Guildford to Dunbridge' of *In Pursuit of Spring* reprinting 'Clays' from *The New Statesman* (July 1913). See also Richard Lowndes, "'When Speech Takes One Form and No Other": Edward Thomas and "The New Witness"', *Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter*, 42 (2000), 10-15.

¹¹ For financial pressures seen in Thomas's writing, consult Martin Brooks, 'Running the Household Poems: Edward Thomas and Money', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 50 (2021), 58-75.

¹² Letter of 13 Feb. 1909: Thomas, *Letters to Bottomley*, p. 178.

¹³ Edward Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914), p. 220.

¹⁴ Felicity James, 'Charles Lamb, Elia, and Essays in Familiarity', in Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford, 2020), p. 195.

¹⁵ Edward Thomas, *Cloud Castle and Other Papers* (1922), pp. 81-7.

¹⁶ Andrew Motion, *The Poetry of Edward Thomas* (1980), pp. 30-56.

¹⁷ In the *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, see 'On Wit and Humour's apothegms 'Spleen can subsist on any kind of food' and 'Wit is the salt of conversation, not the food' (1819; repr. New York, 1960), pp. 32, 38.

¹⁸ Thomas, *Cloud Castle*, pp. 119-36.

¹⁹ Pollux, 'A New Essayist. Review of "Horæ Solitariae" by Edward Thomas', *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 30 Aug. 1902, 585.

²⁰ David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford, 2009), p. 59.

²¹ Edna Longley, *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (2017), p. 68.

²² Edward Thomas, *A Language Not to Be Betrayed: Selected Prose*, ed. Edna Longley (Manchester, 1981), p. 63.

²³ Thomas, *Walter Pater*, pp. 215-16.

²⁴ William Hazlitt, *Twenty-two Essays* (Boston, Mass., 1918), pp. 204-6.

²⁵ Letter of 19 Oct. 1909: Thomas, *Letters to Bottomley*, p. 194.

²⁶ Edward Thomas, *Rose Acre Papers: Including Essays from Horæ Solitariae* (1910), pp. 108-26. See Thomas, *Prose Writings*, ii. 354-62, where the song's author is identified as John Chalkhill. Izaak Walton included it in his *Compleat Angler*.

²⁷ Edward Thomas, 'Insomnia', *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Mar. 1914, 18.

²⁸ Judy Kendall, *Edward Thomas: The Origins of His Poetry* (Cardiff, 2012), pp. 18-25.

²⁹ Thomas, *Annotated Collected Poems*, p. 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54. See also Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism*, pp. 87-8.

³¹ Thomas, *Annotated Collected Poems*, p. 118.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³³ Thomas, *Horæ Solitariae*, p. 108.

³⁴ Edward Thomas, review of *The Spy*, *The Bookman*, 35 (1909), 197.

³⁵ Edward Thomas, review of *A Set of Six*, *The Bookman*, 35 (1908), 39.

³⁶ Edward Thomas, *Lafcadio Hearn* (1912), p. 72.

³⁷ Edward Thomas, *Rest and Unrest* (1910), pp. 44-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

³⁹ Edward Thomas, *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* (1913), pp. 289-97. See Thomas, *Prose Writings*, i. 158-70.

- ⁴⁰ Thomas, *Rose Acre Papers*, pp. 92-107.
- ⁴¹ Edward Thomas, *Maurice Maeterlinck* (1911), p. 29.
- ⁴² Edward Thomas, *Light and Twilight* (1911), pp. 96-116.
- ⁴³ Edward Thomas, 'William Morris', *The English Review* (1909), 153-6: 155-6. For 'worlds' see also Edward Thomas, *Feminine Influence on the Poets* (1910), pp. 40-2, 84-7, 262.
- ⁴⁴ Thomas, *Light and Twilight*, pp. 21-2.
- ⁴⁵ See Lucy Newlyn, 'The Strange Romanticism of Edward Thomas', *E in C*, 67 (2017), 410-39.
- ⁴⁶ Edward Thomas, *Keats* (1917), p. 63.
- ⁴⁷ Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, p. 280.
- ⁴⁸ Edward Thomas, review of *Shadows Out of the Crowd*, *The Bookman*, 43 (1912), 57-8: 58; Edward Thomas, review of *Life is a Dream*, *The Bookman*, 46 (1914), 97-8.
- ⁴⁹ Thomas, *Feminine Influence*, p. 76.
- ⁵⁰ Edward Thomas, 'The Motor-Horn', *The Academy*, 81 (1911), 563-4: 564.
- ⁵¹ Edward Thomas, 'The Mossy Shoes', *The New Statesman*, 1 (1913), 210-12: 211.
- ⁵² Thomas, *Light and Twilight*, pp. 160-73; Edward Thomas, *The Last Sheaf: Essays* (1928), pp. 45-50.
- ⁵³ Thomas, *Cloud Castle*, p. 191.
- ⁵⁴ Thomas, *Light and Twilight*, pp. 123-4.
- ⁵⁵ Milton J. Bates, 'Introduction', in *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets: Wallace Stevens' Commonplace Book*, ed. Bates (Stanford, Calif., 1989), p. 2.
- ⁵⁶ Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, pp. 219-20.
- ⁵⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Don. e. 10, f. 18.