

## **Thomas the Rhymer Libretto by Peter Soteres**

**Scene 1: A Scottish tower in the middle distance. Two young Lords and one young Lady are walking and talking as they approach.**

### **Together**

To the tower of Thomas the Rhymer we go,  
To Thomas the Truth-Teller's home.  
The sun shines so fair on the bloom of our youth,  
To Thomas' dwelling we roam.

### **First Lord**

I've long had my eye on my father's lands,  
He's an old man of wasted days,  
I dream upon all of the good I could do  
When the old blighter passes away.  
Imagine the peasantry singing my praise, Nobility crowds to my banner  
The Priest's in the pulpit, our patronage Displayed for our family's honor.  
My kith and my kind are straight by my side, Glad to serve one so wise  
All bending the knee to John Balliol And the glory that follows betide.

### **Together**

To the tower of Thomas the Rhymer we go,  
To Thomas the Truth-Teller's home.  
The sun shines so fair on the bloom of our youth,  
To Thomas' dwelling we roam.

### **Lady**

Oh, I feel as lucky as any lass can Surrounded by kinsmen and friends  
For I am betrothed to a wonderful man, The sailor Sir Patrick Spens!  
He's gone off to Norway as fast as can be, Sails full 'cross the wide, wild  
sea, To bring back the Princess Margaret And then return dearly to me!  
Late, late yesternight I saw the new moon With the old moon in her arms  
And I dreamt that Sir Spens would soon be home  
To love me and keep me from harm.

### **Together**

To the tower of Thomas the Rhymer we go,  
To Thomas the Truth-Teller's home.  
The sun shines so fair on the bloom of our youth,  
To Thomas' dwelling we roam.

### **Second Lord**

A soldier's glory is what I seek And a soldier's glory I'll gain.  
The knights are amassing out Dunbar way To carry our brave lord's claim.  
I set off tomorrow to join the lads And stage with the horsemen so tall.  
I'll charge on the English invaders bold And win a free Scotland for all!  
The conflict is near and my temper is high As of battle I take my first  
dram And forge a link in the chain of my fame  
The unbeatable Sir Patrick Graham!

### **Together**

To the tower of Thomas the Rhymer we go,  
To Thomas the Truth-Teller's home.  
The sun shines so fair on the bloom of our youth,  
To Thomas' dwelling we roam.

### **First Lady**

Though he's said to be rough and reluctant of tongue...

### **Second Lord**

Though it's said that he's bound to the fay devil's own..

### **First Lord**

Though he shuns humankind, for an old hag he longs...

### **Together**

To grim Thomas' dwelling we've gone.

**Scene 2: Thomas' tower, his main chamber. He is shadowed and cloaked. The two lords and one lady approach him.**

### **Lords and Lady**

Thomas the Rhymer, why will you not speak?  
We've told you our purpose, we've told you our schemes.  
We've travelled the highlands to visit you here  
And drink from your river of dreams.

### **First Lord**

Pronounce on my father's near doom and on Balliol.

### **Lady**

Pronounce on my dear Sir Spens.

**Second Lord**

Pronounce on the glory of my martial fame...

**Lords and lady**

On your sentence, we three depend.

Your every utterance comes to pass.

Four decades you've kept to this cell

And shunned the friendship of all good men

Who could benefit from your council.

Won't you bestow upon us a word, A hint of our fame and the future?

Speak to us whether you're fairy or devil!

Why should you be so demure?

**Thomas (in a red robe)**

Out! Out! Here's prophecy to pierce you ere you fall,

Before another 80 seasons, death comes for you all!

Mayhaps you'll love, be loved, fall out of love, and then,

The long gray toil of middle age may creepingly begin.

**Lords and lady**

Come now, you cannot chase us off With vagaries and basics.

Where is the grim oracle of Earlston? Give us the specifics!

**Thomas**

Do I see and say what come to pass, or do my words create it?

Better I should seal my lips than utter what is fated.

Out! Get out! You darken my room with your youth!

The futures of the old are easier, so similar their truth.

Do you care the visions cut me and are borne from the edge of hell?

That your questions pierce me and I bleed what I foretell?

I swear by my white robes you will not like the words once said.

Knowing will drain the present of its pith,

and spare you not one droplet of regret.

**Lords and lady**

We stay, Rhymer. Concede and tell.

We will not leave though you rage and yell.

We've sworn to stay here with you Until you will give us our due.

**Thomas**

You want truth. Women and men want truth, yet give so little.

How much have I suffered split here in the middle

Between the lies of men and the inscrutable truths of elves.

Go and find a future for yourselves!

**Lords and lady**

We stay, Rhymer. Concede and tell.

We will not leave though your rage and yell.

We've sworn to stay with you Until you give us our due.

**Thomas**

Ai! Ai! Weave a circle round us thrice, avert your eyes with holy dread.

Your prophecy comes against all advice,

What I say now cannot be unsaid!

My riddle is I tell whole truths although I be but half a man.

My worser part Dances in bedeviled faerie limbo;

My better self here, sliced and broken hearted.

[To the First Lord]

You with your love of Balliol, that empty crown,

No side to take in Scotland to be found

To make you safe from ruin, friendless, faithless.

Or save the lives of John Comyn and William Wallace.

Soon you are broken beneath the English heel, Your people are serfs.

They curse your memory The only joyous people at your abuse,

Your siblings who will kneel to Robert Bruce.

**First Lord [threatening]**

Lies and more lies! You sit amidst the shadows

Hiding away from history; all hopes you blindly harrow!

I mock your grimace, cowl and all, I mock you to the boots Recast your

lies or I will draw and shake you to your roots!

**Thomas**

Faint spirit! Weak mind! Depart!

Wait you for the last pulse of your father's ailing heart!

You threaten me? I know the day I end!

Take the dimming ember of your self and get thee thence.

[First lord cowers and exits]

Ai! Ai! Weave a circle round us thrice, avert your eyes with holy dread.

My prophecy comes against all advice, What I say now cannot be unsaid!

[To the Lady]

Many will be the feather-bed That flutters on the foam;  
And many will be the good lord's son That never more comes home.  
You will wring your fingers white, Maidens will tear their hair.  
All for the sake of Sir Patrick Spens, For him you will see no more.

**Lady**

Thomas, I beg you now unsay such words of dreadful utterance  
I wish my story's end could be provided with another chance.

**Thomas**

Sad spirit! Gentle mind! Depart!  
You beg me to re-tell the truth once given.  
Now perhaps you see within your heart  
Why all companionship from me is driven.

[Lady stays, quietly grieving]

Ai! Ai! Weave a circle round us thrice, avert your eyes with holy dread.  
My prophecy comes against all advice, What I say now cannot be unsaid!

[To the Second Lord]

Good Sir Graham, your fate is bleak, Will you not flee the flood?  
The stones of Dunbar will not weep Deprived of one man's blood.  
Those rocks are old and have drunk deep The life of so many afore ye.  
No fame but the dross that corpses leave  
When the moss and weeds overgrow ye.

**Second Lord**

Nay I have known it since I left The safety of my glen  
Not half so mighty as I wish No greater than common men.  
But I will follow my life's thread To the high gray walls of Dunbar  
And measure myself for Scotland's weal Though history plow me under.

[Second lord straightens and exits]

**Thomas**

Brave spirit! Steadfast mind! Depart!  
Beyond death there's not much to scry.  
Of afterlives, on the fields of Dunbar, You will soon know more than I.

**Together [Thomas and Lady, and the voices of the two lords now offstage]**

Ai! Ai! Weave a circle round us thrice, avert your eyes with holy dread.  
His prophecy comes against all advice, What Thomas says cannot be unsaid!

**Thomas** [To the Lady]

What, you still here? What possesses you to stay?  
I am an old man or can you not discern it?  
I've no more truth to spill on this Spring day.  
The lesson's through and now you rue But never may you unlearn it.

**Lady**

What made thee so, sad Thomas the Rhymer?  
What curse and what unleashed it?  
You were not always thus they say, And might you one day release it?  
I see now the future's a dark, dark land  
Where the far shore is always the same.  
But of the past, I imagine you speak  
Without fearing for harm or blame.

**Thomas**

How came I so? So long since anyone asked.  
For me alone the future may be brighter than the past. How came I so?  
Wise Lady, so you question. I'll answer if you'll leave me when I'm done.  
Hold hands here and look back.  
See me as that younger man and see for yourself what made me as I am.

**Thomas**

Mouse will burrow, Lizards hide,  
All to try and stay alive. Squirrel will climb,  
The pink worm bores To stay aloof from predators.  
Deceitful nature has its way. If I'm not as I seem,  
It's only because the world is such, As any sage man would deem.  
The fox is sly, And the owl is, too,  
For doing what they need to do.  
The raccoon prowls, The spider builds.  
Prey struggles and hides from the killer's will.  
Deceitful nature has its way. If I'm not as I seem,  
It's only because the world is such, As any sage man would deem.  
Snakes will slither, The brown bears creep.  
Wisdom pranks while the innocent sleep.  
Tooth to bite, And claws that rend, Life spills where all deceptions end.  
Deceitful nature has its way.

### Scene 3: Young Thomas on a hillside

If I'm not as I seem, It's only because the world is such,  
As any sage man would deem. Ringlets snare, And corsets bind.  
Perfume addles the suitor's mind.

The herd is strong, The dance complex.

The better bare intent to vex.

Deceitful nature has its way. If I'm not as I seem,  
It's only because the world is such, As any sage man would deem.

**(He takes out a peacock quill and some parchment and begins to write.**

**Change of tune to a ditty)**

The viper hides in a dead man's eye And what looks like a sylvan scene, Is  
the deadly way of hunter and prey In Scotland in the Spring.

**(Throws parchment away, starts again... change of tune to another ditty)**

The wasp has a sting to bear its intents, And I have a peacock quill  
To pierce the young ladies with eloquence And insert myself into their  
will. I will, Assert myself into their will.

Dear Mary, or Maude, or Jilly, or Jane,

The same note will serve them all the same...

"Hmmm. As I recline in rhymer's glen to take recourse with nature. I  
think upon your many glories and the very grass does seem less verdant.  
The dappled clouds seem much like to this life, when your bright beauty  
only may shine through at intervals, between all gray... hmm... all gray...

**(Enter woman on horseback, the horse is gray, her dress is gray.)**

All... Gray.... (sings)

Lady, if the day could be, all gray

I would wish it to be so always... all gray.

Lady, I have wandered the dim hallways

Twixt bedrooms from Rum to Galloway

No one ever I've essayed

With such beauty – charm all grayed.

I thought it funny when I strayed,

Loved a hundred all of them halfway

Those women pale like mist this day See me on my knees, I pray

You'll take my service everyday I love thee all... gray.

### Woman in Gray

Thomas, you're quick with a word, my Rhymer,  
Quick with a word and yet slow with the truth.

How many ladies have learned from your primer,  
That things said in darkness turn daylight to ruth?

Ah rhymer, sweet rhymer, you come to this hill

For glib inspiration and wanton repose

How many fair ladies are loosed by your letters

While you stretch yourself out with the crows?

Don't open your mouth, don't let any word slip,

There is nothing to say to defend ye

I speak on behalf of the women you waste

When I say that you never could win me!

**Thomas**

Lady, it is fair all that you say, dear, I wish that I had never stayed here  
Writing these letters so insincere Wooing women with my false veneer  
And no substance to the tears.

Lady, I lay down at your feet here,

And swear I will ever adhere

To your service be it soft or severe.

**(Thomas endeavors.)**

It was all gray, now it's all clear, To your service I'll adhere.

**Woman in Gray**

Aye, you know many songs, ever the wooer,

But where is the man beneath all of this verse?

Truth wins you much when just one degree truer

Than the stark little lies that you offered at first.

You make oaths that bind you, on what do you swear?

You fish for young women, bait, hook, and then cast.

You think I'm a fool? Take a knee if you dare

And vow upon something that fixes you fast.

I'll not hear your usual attempts on this score,

Don't swear on your heart, or your eyes or the sea

Don't swear on the bones of your old sainted father,

No, only on Mary, the Virgin, our Queen.

**Thomas**

Lady, it is fair all that you say, dear, I wish that I had never stayed here  
 Lady, I lay down at your feet here, And swear I will ever adhere  
 To your service be it soft or severe. It was all gray, now it's all clear.  
 I take the knee with hand to heart, Look heavenward with all my art  
 And swear upon the Virgin's grace That none will ever take your place.  
 The predator now learns to pray And lives to love you day by day.

**Woman in Gray**

Aye, you know many songs, ever the wooer,  
 But where is the man beneath all of this verse?  
 Truth wins you much when just one degree truer  
 Than the stark little lies that you offered at first.  
 You make oaths that bind you, on what do you swear?  
 You fish for young women, bait, hook, and then cast.  
 You think I'm a fool? Take a knee if you dare  
 And vow upon something that fixes you fast.  
 Don't give me the usual attempts on this score,  
 Don't swear on your heart, or my eyes or the moon.  
 Don't swear on the bones of your old sainted father,  
 No, only on what matters most to you.

**Thomas**

Lady, it is fair all that you say, dear, I wish that I had never stayed here.  
 Your harsh terms pierce me so. I do not know what matters most.  
 I've spent a vain and fickle youth Avoiding things that smacked of truth  
 I thought them limitations for a fool. Now I am so unprepared for you.  
 What matters most? I must start By rummaging my long disused heart.  
 Tell me, and I will learn the part You give me. Teach love's art.  
 Let me serve and at service's end I'll say to what my heart did bend.

**Woman in Gray**

Your empty oath is binding?

**Thomas**

As chain to ankle, rope to wrist.  
 As ring to finger, finger to fist.  
 As core to the pear, as owl to the night.  
 As wooing to lies, and as tooth to a bite.

My oath is binding. I serve only you, Serve until that time I tell you true,  
 The thing that affixes my oath to you.

**(Thomas falters.)**

**(A thunderbolt, and the woman in gray becomes an ancient hag.)**

**Woman in Gray/Crone**

So then be bound! Your paper heart flutters.  
 It will beat better when soaked through with blood.  
 Here I am, the object of all your fine stutters.  
 Your passions now dry but your eyes soon flood.  
 What say you now of my fine features fair?  
 The straw of my hair, my shift long and rent?  
 What do you like more, my cataract stare?  
 Or the stoop of my shoulders, my aged back bent?  
 Come faithful! Come Thomas the Rhymer, it's time.  
 The oath has been sworn, the woods now await.  
 You serve at my whim, take my arm and we'll mime  
 What young lovers flesh out ere meeting their fate.

**(Speaking)**

Yes, you'll take this old hag into the woods. You've sworn your oath, to  
 me you'll be true! Or will you turn back? You swore to serve until you  
 told me free, the thing that affixes your oath to me.

**Woman in Gray/Crone and Thomas Together**

As chain to ankle, rope to wrist.  
 As ring to finger, finger to fist.  
 As core to the pear, as owl to the night.  
 As wooing to lies, and as tooth to a bite.  
 Our oath is binding. We grimly serve,  
 Until to each what we deserve.

**Thomas speaking**

Let the record show, I do not dispute it. I swore to you, and with you I go.  
 No matter what tricks, no matter how old. No matter how gray.  
 No matter how cold. I swore to you, and with you I go.

#### **Scene 4: The Journey**

**(Utterly dark, only voices – maybe brief flashes of light)**

##### **Thomas**

There are sounds. There are only sounds.  
For three days you have led me here in darkness.  
We entered a cave I'd never seen before  
In Ercildoun though I roved this land from childhood.  
We entered a cave I'd never seen before  
And went straight down.  
She disappeared into the darkness, and I followed. Straight down.  
Her voice ancient and weak  
And yet my only siren to hold me to the path.  
Her laughter bitter, her crone's stick clicks  
Upon the grike. In the dark, she taps, I do not turn,  
And we go straight down.  
No sleep. Only darkness and fear, and that crone's cane.  
She does not speak, I'm not sure she breathes,  
But forth she goes. Her crone's stick taps upon the grike.  
In the dark, she taps. What washed this stone  
To leave it smooth, flat, tiled and cracked? What wore it down?  
Upon the second day, a new sound, yea,  
The murmur of a sluggish subterranean sea. I heard  
The tide of it, the susurrus, a sucking noise, faint at first,  
Unnatural, cold and slow. Old and thick. I heard The slap of it,  
as a midwife strikes an infant, Still we go down.

##### **Woman in Gray/Crone**

Enough! Enough chatter. You swore to obey,  
Be silent now. Your paper heart flutters  
Like a flag of surrender, like a nightshirt on a line.  
It will beat better when soaked in remorse.  
You will be soaked in the truth of things soon, Once we've gone down.  
You don't know age's indignities yet. Dim eyes,  
The aching joints, unwilling limbs, the twitch and twinge Of life.  
After the pith of things, nought but dried skin And a bitter core.

Nought but bone and gristle, Rhymer. But we have a place and a  
purpose, leads us forth, So we go straight down.  
After the house has burnt, the char remains, the riprap Eaves and beams.  
After the heart has burnt, The thoughts remain,  
with blackened ends, regrets And foregone friends.  
The love engaged, the love enjoined. You hear the black sea  
approaching, you will soak soon Once we've gone down.  
Here in the dark, do you remember who I was just days ago?  
The woman of ample breast and jeweled eyes  
Was just a sack. The brain and viscera are still the same,  
I am that woman still. Tap, tap. Tap, tap. While you,  
Your cynical, wrinkled heart, must be made smooth,  
As we go straight down.  
Straight down, Rhymer! Do you hear the sluggish slap?  
The shore is near. It does not sound like any sea you know.  
You will soak soon. Our path lies on the other side.  
The slap of it, as a midwife strikes an infant. If you pause,  
You will stay here forever. We enter, now, I raise a light  
And down we go. Straight down!  
Remove your shoes, penitent, for down we go. Straight down.

##### **Thomas**

The light plays grimly on that oily surface. Not water, no.  
It pools and sticks upon the stony shore. No foam,  
It churns and on the land it clots like flotsam, but  
There's no life here. A sea of... oh, I'm ankle deep in it.  
Her withered arm holds the light high as she proceeds. A sea of blood!  
Straight in, straight down, or die. No tapping now.  
No sound except this perverse mockery Of nature. I  
t sucks at me, knee deep, now to the hip.  
She said that I would soak in it. Why do I follow?  
The silted earth pulses, the current is strong, how many lives  
To fill this tarn? To stay is mad, to turn around is folly,  
And so I follow her straight down.  
To chest, to shoulder, now unto my throat.  
To chin, To lower lip. The light goes out. The crone goes fully under.  
I tilt my head back and wade ahead, blood leaks into my mouth.

A horror. Ai, the horror. I thought that I could go somehow  
Untouched. That is the way of mortal man. I thought,  
I thought too much. And then went down.

**Scene 5: The Fork**

**(A single fruit tree and a three-way crossroads.**

**Thomas still dripping in blood.)**

**Woman in Gray/Crone**

We are close now.

**Thomas**

What are those shapes ahead? Why do they frighten me?

**Woman in Gray/Crone**

Do you trust me Rhymer?

**Thomas**

I have kept my empty oath thus far.

**Woman in Gray/Crone**

Far longer yet must nothing hold.

When they come, say nothing, or the consequence will lie heavy.

**(Figures approach from three sides. Spirits of heaven, hell and  
purgatory. By the end of the scene, the crone converts back to the  
beautiful Woman in Gray.)**

**Spirits of Hell**

What have you brought us fey lady? Brought from the living lands?

**Spirits of Purgatory**

Brought from the vales of deception and doubt.

Brought to our shadowed hands?

**Spirits of Heaven**

What have you brought us, pretender?

Brought naked and brought to the fore?

**Together**

Be it harlot or priest, be it soldier or thief,

There will always be room for one more.

ONE MORE.

We will always have room for one more.

**Spirits of Hell (surging forward against the press)**

We think he is ours, his cast Is decidedly sinful, it's clear.

Was it envy or pride, or did lust decide His conviction to follow you here?

**Spirits of Purgatory (surging forward against the press)**

We think he is ours, in his face

Are the eyes of a man who believes,

But it does not amount, for salvation's account Isn't paid,

so to him we will cleave!

**Spirits of Heaven (surging forward against the press)**

We think he is ours, his heart Is clotted with guilt, it's sure.

But when shameless liars, look up and aspire...

Well, what else is heaven for?

**Together and menacing Thomas**

ONE MORE!

Be it lover or miser, be it fool or despiser,

There will always be room for one more.

ONE MORE! We will always have room for one more.

ONE MORE! ONE MORE! ONE MORE!

**Thomas**

Where do we go?

**Lady in Gray (transformed)**

You were told not to speak! Follow!

**Thomas**

Purgatory? Not there!

**Lady in Gray**

Fool! Not Purgatory. The narrow path.

To the woods behind and above it. To the Fey!

**Together and menacing Thomas**

ONE MORE!

Oath takers and breakers, widows and widow-makers,

There's always room for one more.

ONE MORE! We will always have room for one more.

ONE MORE! ONE MORE! ONE MORE!

**(The Lady in Gray and Thomas pausing in the wings.)**

**(They flee.)**

**Lady in Gray**

What you would not give. I take. Now open your mouth.

**(Thomas does and she places a black marble under his tongue.)**

Silence for what comes on penalty of division. You think I jest?

Look upon me now! Neither Lady nor crone, but Queen of Elfenland.

**(Now Queen of Elfenland – magnificent in bearing and regalia. Thomas struggles to speak and cannot.)**

**Queen of Elfenland**

Did you think your doom would come to you in the form of extreme old age? There were no old maids among the many hearts you worked so hard to break.

It was youth that lured you, now womanhood presides, and you so mute.

Poor dove, so very mute. But then again, perhaps I do not mean you ill.

Listen and attend me well. The devil has homes beyond the rings of hell.

In Elfenland he revels, so we go to dance upon his whim. The nightmare

crow, The worm that walks, the face with mouths in place of eyes, the

Nan o' Nine Toes, All accountable to him, and keep us in our quadrilles

neat and fine.

I've soaked you and silenced you, now learn you songs of the Adversary's Reel. Shiver in black blood now cooled and stiffening.

We ascend to the King of Sin. How sure are you now of your empty oaths and lies, Rhymer, do you feel You might prefer the crone's long bony claw to this raw revel and reckoning?

**(She claps and Thomas claws at this throat, then swoons. Darkness.)**

**Scene 6: The Devil's Revel in Elfenland (Thomas clad in red.)**

**Queen of Elfenland**

Do not speak, on pain of death. My husband comes.

**Queen of Elfenland**

Yes, the King.

**The Devil**

Ah, who is this, Consummata?

**Queen of Elfenland**

You know I do not answer to that name.

**Thomas croaks.**

**The Devil**

So principled today? Oh very well. You fay are such changeable wights.

It's a shame you lack souls or I'd collect you with more... avidity.

What shall I call you then?

**Queen of Elfenland**

Call me Truance.

**The Devil** [laughing]

Aye, I like that! It smacks of double-speak and half-truths. Then tell me,

Truance, who is this that you bring bound to the dance?

**Queen of Elfenland**

He comes freely.

**The Devil**

He does not say so.

**Queen of Elfenland**

Perhaps you have his tongue, liege.

**The Devil** [shrugging]

The devil may have his tongue indeed. I have vaults as large as seas full of them. And as you well know, there is room for one more.

Always room for one more at the dance. But who will be your partner?

Your husband or your mate... pardon, your mute.

**Queen of Elfenland**

I would dance with you.

**The Devil**

Oh, even you cannot keep up with me. Not yet, Consummata. Not yet,

Hekate. Oh, I will call you what I please, Truance, and you will curtsy.

Come then, let's reel! Here is a small infernal taste.

**(Infernal music – the dance is abusive and the Queen cannot long abide the devil's pace.)**

The prank is in the prance, dear Truance. Step high! Step high!

I have spent the full five ages of men treading to and fro.

Again! Again!

Can you keep pace with the devil's own dance? Step high! Step high!

What is the strange light in your eye? Step high! Step high!

The fairies do not pray, Nor die, nor stay. Again! Again!

So little earthly in your flighty kind. Step high! Step high!



No clay, no divine breath in your breast. Step high! Step high!  
Spin then, water and air, confounded and fair. Again! Again!  
Yours the cruelty of carelessness. Step high! Step high!  
Bah! You wilt and the dance only begun. Step down. Step down.  
Take your mute and wend your way past my vices that attend.  
Again! Again! When the Devil visits Elfenland You bend. You bend.  
Dance or you will surely die. Step high! Step high!

**(The tune changes. Thomas is hurled to the arms of the Queen and they dance past the assembled vices.)**

Here the Nightmare Crow, the Nan of Lies,  
The Grunt of Sloth, the Bleeding Wrath!  
Here the Worm that Walks, the Rigid Lust,  
And more beyond the names and ken of men!  
Oh yes, step high! Step high!  
The Horn of Glutton and the Crook of Greed,  
The Face of Mouths where Eyes should be.  
The Canker of Secrets, and the Burden Grief.  
The Whore Despair, and the Wisdom Thief.  
Yes, step high! Step high!  
The Silence at the End of Worlds. The Cacophony of its Heralds.  
The Unremitting Prism of False Illusion,  
The Gray-Grim Cloak of Fell Delusion.  
Step high! Step high!

**Thomas (with visible effort, finds his voice)**

We die here lady, if the tune persists.

**Queen of Elfenland**

Silence! You dare! You had your bidding!

**Thomas**

I swore to serve, and here I do best service by breaking from your ill-  
advised devices.

**(There is a crash. The music desists. The light goes out. The Devil makes noises between laughter and bestial bellowing rage)**

**Queen of Elfenland**

Fool! You've understood nothing.

**Thomas**

Nothing is what I swore upon, and nothing I've understood.

**Queen of Elfenland**

One mortal must endure the dance without complaint. One mortal must  
endure the dance discretely.

For 15 lives of men I've brought a consort here

And 15 faithless consorts failed completely.

One Thomas must dwell here now, and the Devil's charm remains.

The Thomas of Lies will live with us and dance to Hell's refrains.

The best blessing I can give you is to send your doubled twin

Back to the hills of Scotland. We will not meet again.

A Thomas divorced from the lying, devious sprite.

Purified! Your better self may not survive the night.

You think our world is strange? Try yours, where truth is hazardous,

And virtue is lonely, dark, and dimly cavernous.

**Thomas**

Do not tear me from myself! The punishment is dire,  
the fault so slight when I reflect and both compare.

Others have done far worse, yet you will strand me

Cursed to honesty in lands of lies, violence and conformity.

I will be so very alone, even from my own person.

How will I face the days without the power of delusion?

A stark, daily dose of unremitting truth and fact,

No veil on past or future no fantasies intact.

**Queen of Elfenland**

From the gods who sit in grandeur, grace comes violent.

Your reasons are inadequate, your pleas misspent.

This court is not of peers, you cannot circumvent

The injustice of this doom. Give in, give vent! Resent! Torment!

**[Queen invokes and as she does reverts to crone]**

Invent! Lament! Advent! Dissent!

**Thomas 1 [earthly, crass]**

Discontent! Excrement!

**Thomas 2 [ascetic, monastic]**

Prevent! Reorient! Repent!

**Queen of Elfenland [now fully crone]**

Spent! Descent! Bent! Malcontent!

**[The spell is done]**

The words are said. Say farewell to your worst self.  
The gifts of my kingdom are said to smell of sulfur.  
Silly you thought you'd drown in blood and not suffer.  
Go back to your world and learn to speak in a mutter.

**Scene 7: Back on the hillside in Scotland**  
**(The Lady of Scene 1 is with him, the crone is at his shoulder.)**

**Lady**

So many words... and nothing untrue, yet.  
What did you swear to Thomas, what did nothing beget?

**Crone**

Drip, drip. Drip drip.

**Thomas**

The question was... the point is that sea of blood.  
I soaked in it... I know not for how long. The blood.

**Crone**

Drip, drip. Drip drip.

**Thomas**

Where did it come from? Was it Scotland, was it the past?  
Was it the blood of Christ, so horribly vast.

**Crone**

Drip, drip. Drip drip.

**Thomas**

And the thought occurred to me too, perhaps it was mine?  
Perhaps that whole ocean was me and my bloodline?  
Or many divided Thomases, or my twin's trapped in the fey  
At the devil's own whim... I do not know... but in later days

**Crone**

Drip, drip. Drip drip.

**Thomas**

I thought that I might mar myself. If this truth-telling fool  
Was my best self, perhaps I could abuse it, by cruelty  
Recast myself and perhaps undo the spell. Delusion  
in the man who cannot lie. This awful solitude breeds such confusion.

**Lady**

So many words... and nothing untrue, yet.  
What did you swear to Thomas, what did nothing beget?

**Crone**

Drip, drip. Drip drip.

**Thomas (disrobing down to his waist)**

I thought that I might mar myself, and so I said a thing.  
Upon a day I said that every time I wished to lie  
That it would cut my flesh, desire manifesting  
As harm, and so perhaps the Lady in Gray belie.

**Crone**

Drip, drip. Drip drip.

**Thomas**

Perhaps supply the chasm with my blood and spare...  
I know not whom. I only know the blood must come from somewhere.  
While also, sinning, I might fit myself to my dark twin,  
To make possible a return to the fey and our reunion.  
Nothing... I swore upon nothing, and here's the cost.  
I bleed that I might empty myself.... Nothing was ventured. All was lost.

**Crone**

Drip, drip. Drip drip.

Enough now Rhymer. You may delay, but truth is your fate.

**(The hoards of hell creep from one side of the stage, angels from the other. The women still attend him.)**

**Thomas (shirtless reveals a body crossed with bloody cuts and scars)**

My robes are white... white but soaked in my blood.  
And having bled for 40 years. It's no good... All to no good!  
The truths I told and the lies that I withheld  
Did harm alike to those who'd come to tell  
Me of their hopes and dreams. The words I said  
Were woven to the fates they had to dread.  
Not for mortals to pull one from the other  
To keep a future pure and stain the past, its mother.  
Whether I lived alone and silence kept,  
Whether I spoke, alike we strong a net,  
And I remained indifferent to all that came to me,

Mapping my pain, my blood, on their calamities.

**(He lies does and continues with fragments from scene 3)**

Deceitful nature has its way. If I'm not as I seem,  
It's only because the world is such, As any sage man would deem.  
The fox is sly, And the owl is, too,  
For doing what they need to do.  
Tooth to bite, And claws that rend,  
Life spills where all deceptions end.  
The herd is strong, The dance complex.  
The better bare intent to vex.

Deceitful nature has its way. If I'm not as I seem,  
It's only because the world is such, As any sage man would deem.

**(Becoming more delirious.)**

Dear Mary, or Maude, or Jilly, or Jane,  
The same note will serve them all the same... All gray, all gray.

**(To the lady at his feet.)**

Lady, it is fair all that you say, dear, I wish that I had never stayed here.  
Your harsh terms pierce me so.  
I do not know what matters most.

**Crone (singing still)**

After the house has burnt, the char remains, the riprap  
Eaves and beams. After the heart has burnt,  
The thoughts remain, with blackened ends, regrets  
And foregone friends. The love engaged, the love enjoined.  
You hear the black sea approaching, you will soak soon  
Once we've gone down.

Here in the dark, do you remember who I was not long ago?  
The woman of ample breast and jeweled eyes  
Was just a sack. The brain and viscera are still the same,  
I am that woman still. Tap, tap. Tap, tap. While you,  
Your cynical, wrinkled heart, must be made smooth,  
As we go straight down.

**Thomas (still singing)**

I thought it funny when I strayed, Loved a hundred, all of them halfway,  
Those women pale like mist this day. See me on my knees, I pray  
You'll take my service everyday I love thee all... gray.

**The Lady (still singing)**

As chain to ankle, rope to wrist.  
As ring to finger, finger to fist.  
As core to the pear, as owl to the night.  
As wooing to lies, and as tooth to a bite.

**Thomas**

My oath was binding. I served only you,  
Served until that time I tell you true,  
The thing that affixes my oath to you.  
And the truth is I do not know! I never knew!  
Was it the sky that day, the way the light  
Adorned you? Was it the weight of Scotland's past?  
Was it a dread of weightier things that chased  
My mouse-like heart to a smaller maze?  
I'll never understand the spell you cast.  
So much for truth... some meanings lie beyond,  
They're nothing and suspend the words that throng  
And try to map themselves on human texts...  
I was the rhymer and each line drags on, drags on,  
Waiting for its partner to track on  
Extending the breath, tempting the next... the next... the next...  
I tell you, these red robes are white, but soaked in blood.  
No good... No good!  
(The angels and devils approach, chanting  
There's room for one more! Fade to black.)