

William Motherwell (1797-1835)

*5 Halbert the Grim*

There is blood on that brow,  
There is blood on that hand;  
There is blood on that hauberk,  
And blood on that brand.

Oh! bloody all o'er is  
His war-cloak, I weet;  
He is wrapped in the cover  
Of murder's red sheet.

There is pity in man —  
Is there any in him?  
No! rush were a strange guest  
To Halbert the Grim.

The hardest may soften,  
The fiercest repent;  
But the heart of Grim Halbert  
May never relent.

Death doing on earth is  
For ever his cry;  
And pillage and plunder  
His hope in the sky!

'Tis midnight, deep midnight,  
And dark is the heaven;  
Sir Halbert, in mockery,  
Wends to be shriven.

He kneels not to stone,  
And he bends not to wood;  
But he swung round his brown blade,  
And hewed down the Rood!

5

10

15

20

25

He stuck his long sword, with  
    Its point in the earth;  
And he prayed to its cross hilt,  
    In mockery and mirth.

30

Thus lowly he louteth,  
And mumbles his beads;  
Then lightly he riseth,  
And homeward he speeds.

35

His steed hurries homewards,  
Darkling and dim;  
Right fearful it prances  
With Halbert the Grim.

40

Still fiercer it tramples,  
The spur gores its side;  
Now downward and downward  
Grim Halbert doth ride.

The brown wood is threaded,  
The grey flood is past,  
Yet hoarser and wilder  
Moans ever the blast.

45

No star lends its taper,  
No moon sheds her glow;  
For dark is the dull path  
That Baron must go.

50

Though starless the sky, and  
No moon shines abroad,  
Yet, flashing with fire, all  
At once gleams the road.

55

And his black steed, I trow,  
As it galloped on,  
With a hot sulphur halo,  
And flame-flash all shone.

60

From eye and from nostril,

Out gushed the pale flame,  
And from its chafed mouth, the  
Churned fire-froth came.

They are two! they are two! —  
They are coal-black as night,  
That now staunchly follow  
That grim Baron's flight.

In each lull of the wild blast,  
Out breaks their deep yell:  
'Tis the slot of the Doomed One,  
These hounds track so well.

Ho! downward, still downward,  
Sheer slopeth his way;  
No let hath his progress,  
No gate bids him stay.

No noise had his horse-hoof  
As onward it sped;  
But silent it fell, as  
The foot of the dead.

Now redder and redder  
Flares far its bright eye,  
And harsher these dark hounds  
Yell out their fierce cry.

Sheer downward! right downward!  
Then dashed life and limb,  
As careering to hell,  
Sunk Halbert the Grim!

1832

(From *The Poetical Works of William Motherwell*. With  
Memoir by James M'Conechy. Second ed. enlarged. Glasgow:  
David Robertson, 1847)