A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

16  The King’s Daughter

We were ten maidens in the green corn,
   Small red leaves in the mill-water;
Fairer maidens never were born,
   Apples of gold for the king’s daughter.

We were ten maidens by a well-head,
   Small white birds in the mill-water;
Sweeter maidens never were wed,
   Rings of red for the king’s daughter.

The first to spin, the second to sing,
   Seeds of wheat in the mill-water;
The third may was a goodly thing,
   White bread and brown for the king’s daughter.

The fourth to sew and the fifth to play,
   Fair green weed in the mill-water;
The sixth may was a goodly may,
   White wine and red for the king’s daughter.

The seventh to woo, the eighth to wed,
   Fair thin reeds in the mill-water;
The ninth had gold work on her head,
   Honey in the comb for the king’s daughter.

The ninth had gold work round her hair,
   Fallen flowers in the mill-water;
The tenth may was goodly and fair,
   Golden gloves for the king’s daughter.

We were ten maidens in a field green,
   Fallen fruit in the mill-water;
Fairer maidens never have been,
   Golden sleeves for the king’s daughter.
By there comes the king’s young son,
   A little wind in the mill-water;
“Out of ten maidens ye’ll grant me one,”
   A crown of red for the king’s daughter.

“Out of ten mays ye’ll give me the best,”
   A little rain in the mill-water;
A bed of yellow straw for all the rest,
   A bed of gold for the king’s daughter.

He’s ta’en out the goodliest,
   Rain that rains in the mill-water;
A comb of yellow shell for all the rest,
   A comb of gold for the king’s daughter.

He’s made her bed to the goodliest,
   Wind and hail in the mill-water;
A grass girdle for all the rest,
   A girdle of arms for the king’s daughter.

He’s set his heart to the goodliest,
   Snow that snows in the mill-water;
Nine little kisses for all the rest,
   An hundred fold for the king’s daughter.

He’s ta’en his leave at the goodliest,
   Broken boats in the mill-water,
Golden gifts for all the rest,
   Sorrow of heart for the king’s daughter.

“Ye’ll make a grave for my fair body,”
   Running rain in the mill-water;
“And ye’ll streek my brother at the side of me,”
   The pains of hell for the king’s daughter.

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