

William Motherwell (1797-1835)

2 *Elfinland Wud*

An Imitation of the Ancient Scottish Romantic Ballad.

Erl William has muntit his gude grai stede,
(Merrie lemis munelicht on the sea,)
And graithit him in ane cumli weid.
(Swa bonilie blumis the hawthorn tree.)

Erl William rade, Erl William ran, — 5
(Fast they ryde quha luve trewlie,)
Quhyll the Elfinland wud that gude Erl wan —
(Blink ower the burn, sweit may, to mee.)

Elfinland wud is dern and dreir, 10
(Merrie is the grai gowkis sang,)
Bot ilk ane leafis quhyt as silver cleir,
(Licht makis schoirt the road swa lang.)

It is undirnith ane braid aik tree,
(Hey and a lo, as the leavis grow grein,) 15
Thair is kythit ane bricht ladie,
(Manie flouris blume quhilk ar nocht seen.)

Around hir slepis the quhyte muneschyne,
(Meik is mayden undir kell,)
Her lips bin lyke the blude reid wyne; 20
(The rois of flouris hes sweitest smell.)

It was al bricht quhare that ladie stude,
(Far my luve, fure ower the sea.)
Bot dern is the lave of Elfinland wud,
(The knicht pruvit false that ance luvit me.)

The ladie's handis were quhyte als milk, 25
(Ringis my luve wore mair nor ane.)
Her skin was safter nor the silk;
(Lilly bricht schinis my luvis halse bane.)

Save you, save you, fayr ladie,
 (Gentil hert schawis gentil deed.) 30
Standand alane undir this auld tree;
 (Deir till knicht is nobil steid.)

Burdalane, if ye dwall here,
 (My hert is layed upon this land.)
I wuld like to live your fere; 35
 (The schippis cum sailin to the strand.)

Nevir ane word that ladie sayd;
 (Schortest rede hes least to mend.)
Bot on hir harp she evir playd;
 (Thare nevir was mirth that had nocht end.) 40

Gang ye eist, or fare ye wast,
 (Ilka stern blinkis blythe for thee,)
Or tak ye the road that ye like best,
 (Al trew feeris ryde in cumpanie.)

Erl William loutit doun full lowe; 45
 (Luvis first seid bin courtesie.)
And swung hir owir his saddil bow,
 (Ryde quha listis, ye'll link with mee.)

Scho flang her harp on that auld tree,
 (The wynd pruvis aye ane harpir gude.) 50
And it gave out its music free;
 (Birdis sing blythe in gay green wud.)

The harp playde on its leeful lane,
 (Lang is my luvis yellow hair.)
Quhill it has charmit stock and stane, 55
 (Furth by firth, deir lady fare.)

Quhan scho was muntit him behynd,
 (Blyth be hertis quhilkis luve ilk uthir.)
Awa thai flew like flaucht of wind;
 (Kin kens kin, and bairnis thair mither.) 60

Nevir ane word that ladie spak;
 (Mim be maydens men besyde.)
 But that stout steid did nicher and schaik;
 (Small thingis humbil hertis of pryde.)

About his breist scho plet her handis; 65
 (Luvand be maydens quhan thai lyke.)
 Bot they were cauld as yron bandis.
 (The winter bauld bindis sheuch and syke.)

Your handis ar cauld, fayr ladie, sayd hee, 70
 (The caulder hand the trewer hairt.)
 I trembil als the leif on the tree;
 (Licht caussis muve ald friendis to pairt.)

Lap your mantil owir your heid,
 (My luve was clad in the red scarlett,) 75
 And spredd your kirtil owir my stede;
 (Thair nevir was joie that had nae lett.)

The ladie scho wald nocht dispute;
 (Nocht woman is scho that laikis ane tung.)
 But caulder her fingeris about him cruik.
 (Some sangis ar writt, bot nevir sung.) 80

This Elfinland wud will neir haif end;
 (Hunt quha listis, daylight for mee.)
 I wuld I culd ane strang bow bend,
 (Al undirneth the grene wud tree.)

Thai rade up, and they rade down, 85
 (Wearilie wearis wan nicht away.)
 Erl William's heart mair cauld is grown;
 (Hey, luve mine, quhan dawis the day?)

Your hand lies cauld on my briest-bane, 90
 (Smal hand hes my ladie fair,)
 My horss he can nocht stand his lane,
 (For cauldness of this midnight air.)

Erl William turnit his heid about;

(The braid mune schinis in lift richt cleir.)
Twa Elfin een are glentin owt, 95
(My luvis een like twa sternis appere.)

Twa brennand eyne, sua bricht and full,
(Bonnilie blinkis my ladeis ee,
Flang fire flauchtis fra ane peelit skull;
(Sum sights ar ugsomlyk to see.) 100

Twa rawis of quhyt teeth then did say,
(Cauld the boysteous windis sal blaw,
Oh, lang and weary is our way,
(And donkir yet the dew maun fa'.)

Far owir mure, and far owir fell, 105
(Hark the sounding huntsmen thrang:)
Thorow dingle, and thorow dell,
(Luve, come, list the merlis sang.)

Thorow fire, and thorow flude,
(Mudy mindis rage lyk a sea;) 110
Thorow slauchtir, thorow blude,
(A seamless shrowd weird schaipis for me!)

And to rede aricht my spell,
Eerilie sal night wyndis moan,
Quhill fleand Hevin and raikand Hell, 115
Ghaist with ghaist maun wandir on.

1832

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