

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

15 *The Orphan Maid*

From *The Legend of Montrose*

“Tuning her instrument, and receiving an assenting look from Lord Monteith and Allan, Annot Lyle executed the following ballad, which our friend, Mr. Secundus M’Pherson, whose goodness we had before to acknowledge, has thus translated into the English tongue.” —

November’s hail-cloud drifts away,
November’s sun-beam wan
Looks coldly on the castle grey,
When forth comes Lady Anne.

The orphan by the oak was set, 5
Her arms, her feet, were bare;
The hail-drops had not melted yet,
Amid her raven hair.

“And, dame,” she said, “by all the ties 10
That child and mother know,
Aid one who never knew these joys, —
Relieve an orphan’s woe.”

The lady said, “An orphan’s state
Is hard and sad to bear;
Yet worse the widow’d mother’s fate, 15
Who mourns both lord and heir.

“Twelve times the rolling year has sped,
Since, while from vengeance wild
Of fierce Strathallan’s chief I fled,
Forth’s eddies whelm’d my child.” — 20

“Twelve times the year its course has borne,”

The wandering maid replied;
“Since fishers on St. Bridget’s morn
Drew nets on Campsie side.

“St. Bridget sent no scaly spoil; 25
An infant, well nigh dead,
They saved, and rear’d in want and toil,
To beg from you her bread.”

That orphan maid the lady kiss’d, —
“My husband’s looks you bear; 30
Saint Bridget and her morn be bless’d!
You are his widow’s heir.”

They’ve robed that maid, so poor and pale,
In silk and sandals rare;
And pearls, for drops of frozen hail, 35
Are glistening in her hair.

1819

(From *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*. Ed. J. G.
Lockhart. Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1841)