

A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

11 *Earl Robert*

O some ride east and some ride north,  
And some ride west and south;  
But the ae best gate that ever I rade  
Was a' for her red mouth.

O some wear blue and bonny scarlet, 5  
And some wear green and red;  
And it's a' for love of her yellow hair  
I'll wear but golden thread.

Gin this be Annie of Waterswa'  
That gars ye speak sae hie, 10  
There's nae man of your name Earl Robert,  
Shall get her fair body.

O when he came by Waterswa',  
The rain was sair and strang;  
Fair Annie sat in a bower-window, 15  
And her gold hair was grown lang.

Gin I might swim to ye, Robert,  
I wad never spare for gloves or gown;  
I wad never spare for the cold water,  
But I have sore fear to drown. 20

Now God thee hold, thou fair Annie,  
The wa's are hard to leap;  
The water is ill to swim, Annie,  
And the brigg is ill to keep.

Gin I should open to ye, Robert, 25  
I wis it were open shame;  
It were great pity of me, Robert,  
For I gang but sick and lame.

O twice I cuttit the silk string through  
That was upon my back; 30  
And twice I cuttit the gown away  
That wadna' haud me slack.

It's ill wi' me the night, Robert,  
It's weel wi' my leman;  
For the wine that comes in my fingers, 35  
I spill it on my han';  
And the meat that's in my very mouth,  
I wot it feeds a man.

Gin I may win to ye, Annie,  
The tane of us should weel fare. 40  
There's three men keep the ways, Robert,  
Between the gate and the water-stair.

I wot the night there's deep water,  
Runs red upon the brim;  
It's full between the wa's, Annie, 45  
This were but ill to swim.

There's rain the night in Carrilees,  
I wot the rain is rank;  
There be twa fathoms of strang water  
Between it bank and bank. 50

But he's rid out through Carrilees' brow,  
I wot, baith wet and wan;  
Annie lay in her chamber-window,  
She was a glad woman.

Between the gate and the water-stair 55  
He made him room to stand;  
The wet ran frae his knees and feet,  
It ran upon his hand.

And he's won through to her chamber,

He's kissed her neist the chin: 60  
"O gin ye'll keep me out, Annie,  
Is there ony will take me in?"

Up then gat her auld father,  
Between the wall and her bed feet;  
"Is there ony breath in your lips, Earl Robert, 65  
To gar a dead mouth smell sweet?"

He's tane her by the gold girdle,  
He's garr'd it break atwain;  
There's nae room here for Earl Robert,  
The ways are sae fou' o' rain. 70

He's tane a keen sword in his hand,  
He's set him to the wa';  
And the very heart's blood of Earl Robert,  
I wot he's garr'd it fa'.

Out then spake she, fair Annie, 75  
At the bed's foot where she lay;  
"There's a time for you the night, father,  
And a time for us the day.

"O gin ye dig na deep, father,  
I wot ye maun dig wide; 80  
And set my lord to the nether land,  
And my bairn to the green side.

"Ye'll set my head to his foot, father,  
That he be neist the sun;  
For a' that was between us twa, 85  
I think it's a' weel done."

1909

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