

A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

20 *Lord Soulis*

Lord Soulis is a keen wizard,
A wizard mickle of lear:
Who cometh in bond of Lord Soulis,
Thereof he hath little cheer.

He has three braw castles to his hand, 5
That wizard mickle of age;
The first of E[a]stness, the last of Westness,
The middle of Hermitage.

He has three fair mays into his hand,
The least is good to see; 10
The first is Annet, the second is Janet,
The third is Marjorie.

The firsten o' them has a gowden crown,
The neist has a gowden ring;
The third has sma' gowd her about, 15
She has a sweeter thing.

The firsten o' them has a rose her on,
The neist has a marigold;
The third o' them has a better flower,
The best that springth ower wold. 20

The kisses that are her mouth within,
There is no man knoweth of any one;
She is a pure maid of her body,
The best that standeth under sun.

And Eastness was a bonny castle, 25

It lay upon a lea;
Red wine for Annet, and white for Janet,
And water for Marjorie.

But Hermitage is a fair castle,
The fairest of the three; 30
Soft beds for Annet, silk sheets for Janet,
Nane sheets for Marjorie.

He made them a' by strong cunning,
That wizard great of hand;
The twain to fall at his life's ending, 35
The third alway to stand.

He made them a' by hell's cunning,
That wizard full of ill;
They burnt up Eastness and cast down Westness
But Hermitage standth still. 40

There be twenty lords in that border,
Full twenty strong lords and three,
They have sworn an oath for Lord Soulis,
Weel wroken of him to be.

They have set a meeting at Emmethaugh 45
And upon the Lilienshaw,
They will be wroken of Lord Soulis,
His body to hang and draw.

They have broken bread between them a'
At Ottershawe that's ower the lea, 50
They wad plunder Eastness and harry Westness,
But Hermitage they let be.

They watered steeds by the wan Wellhaugh
Under the sweet leaves green;
Frae the Yethburn head to Christenbury, 55

To ride they were full keen.

When they were come to the Yethburn spait,
I wot their knees were wet;
When they were come to the Yethburn head,
There was no porter at the yett. 60

When they had won to the Bloody-bush,
I wot their sides were sair;
Before they were well upon that border
They had mickle sorrow and care.
“O gin we were at the sweet Wellhaugh,
Under the merry leaves fair!” 65

Before they were well on the other side
He sat a sair east them between;
“O gin we were by the Emmetburn
Under the little leaves green, 70
Between the birks and the Emmet water,
We had the lesser been.”

When they came on that weary border,
He sent an ill thing them amang;
“We winna ride ower to Hermitage, 75
The wa’s they are too strang;
But we will ride to the low castles,
Though the ways be ill to gang.”

Out then spak Burd Marjorie’s lover,
He was a fair man of his face; 80
“Gin I may be wroken of Lord Soulis
I have sma’ care of my place;
“Gin I may be wroken of Lord Soulis
I have sma’ care of ony thing;
Of the wine for shedding, the sheets for wedding, 85
The kirk for christening.

“I have sma’ care of my sad body
Upon the ground to gang;
Gin I wist where I might be wroken of him
I wat give it to him strang.” 90

Out then spak May Janet’s brother,
He was a stout knight and a keen;
“He has sent his devils us amang
To work us trouble and teen.

“Gin I wist where I might be wroken of him, 95
Betwixen dark and day,
I wad give baith my soul and body
To hell to fetch away.”

Out then spak Burd Annet’s father,
He was a good man full of age; 100
“Ye’ll speir at E[al]stness, ye’ll speir at Westness,
But no at Hermitage.”

They turned their horse-heads round about,
Rode low down by the sand;
And a’ the way they went upon, 105
The devil went at their hand.

The first castle they came to,
It stood upon a sea;
The least worth chamber in a’ that castle,
It was a’ whalestooth and sandal-tree. 110

“O whatten a may is yonder may.
Sae fair to see upon?”
“O yonder is my daughter Annet,
Out of my ha’s was gone.

“Gin ye’ll come hither to me, Annet, 115
God’s grace of me ye’se have.”

“I wadna gang out, my auld fool father,
Gin ye were graithed in your grave.”

“Give me three kisses, my daughter Annet,
Before my mouth is cold.” 120
“I winna come forth for nae man’s greybeard,
Till my bairn be a sennight old.”

He turned his face against the sea,
His heart break right atwain;
“The fire of hell for your body, Annet, 125
Ere ye behold me again.”

“Pull off the green, and the goodly green,
Put on the black, the black,
For my father is ridden to Wearyland,
I doubt he’ll never win back.” 130

They turned their horse-heads round about,
Rode high upon a hill;
And a’ the gate they gaed about
The devil them garred gang ill.

The neister castle they came to, 135
It was hard upon the low champaign;
The least worth bower in a’ that castle,
It was a’ white siller and green stane.

“O whatten a may is yonder may
That is sae great of her body?” 140
“O yonder is my sister Janet,
Was stolen by night frae me.

“Gin ye’ll come hither to me, Janet,
God’s love of me ye’se hae.”
“I wadna gang out for nae brither, 145
Though ye were dead the day.”

“O ye’ll gang down to me, Janet,
For God’s sweet mercy and mine;
For I have sought ye the lang lands ower,
These eight months wearing nine.” 150

“I winna gang forth for nae brither,
Though his body should be lorn;
I winna gang forth for nae man’s face,
Till Lord Soulis’ bairn be born.”

He turned his face against the brigg, 155
His heart brak right in three;
“The sorrow of hell for you, Janet,
And the world’s sorrow for me.”

“Take down the red, and the bonny red,
Set up the black, the black: 160
For my brother is ridden to Wearies wood,
I wot he’ll never win back.”

They turned their horse-heads round about,
Rode back a day and twain:
And a’ the rivers they rode upon 165
The devil rode at their rein.

The third castle they came to,
It was the castle of Hermitage;
There is nae man may brake the sides of it,
Though the stanes therein are great of age. 170

“O whatten a may is yonder may,
That looks like ony flower?”
“O yon is my very love, Marjorie,
Was borne out of my bower.”

The bower Lady Marjorie was in, 175

It had neither white cloths nor red,
There were nae rushes to the bower floors,
And nae pillows to the bed.

“O will ye come down but a very little,
For God’s sake or for me? 180
Or will ye kiss me a very little,
But six poor kisses and three?”

She’s leaned hersell to that window,
For sorrow she couldna stand;
She’s bound her body by that window, 185
With iron at her hand.

She’s sworn by tree and by tree’s leaf,
By aits and rye and corn,
“Gin ye hadna come the night,” she says,
“I had been but dead the morn.” 190

She’s kissed him under the bower-bar
Nine goodly times and ten;
And forth is come that keen wizard
In the midst of his men.

And forth is come that foul wizard, 195
God give him a curse and care!
Says “The life is one time sweet to have
And the death is three times sair.”

Forth is come that strong wizard,
God give him a heavy day! 200
Says “ye shall have joy of your leman’s body
When April cometh after May.”

Between the hill and the wan water
In fields that were full sweet,
There was riding and running together, 205

And many a man gat red-shod feet.

Between the wa's and the Hermitage water,
In ways that were waxen red,
There was cleaving of caps and shearing of jack,
And many a good man was there dead. 210

They have taken that strong wizard,
To bind him by the hands:
The links of airn brast off his body
Like splints of bursten birken wands.

And they have taken that foul wizard 215
To bind him by the feet:
The links of airn brast off his body
As berries that are burst with heat.

They have putten fire upon his flesh,
For nae fire wad it shrink: 220
They have casten his body in the wan well-head,
For nae water wad it sink.

Up then gat the fiend Borolallie
Bade them give ower and let be:
"Between world's fire and world's water 225
He gat a gift of me;
Till fire came out of wan water,
There's nane shall gar him dee."

"A rede, a rede, thou fool Borolallie,
A good rede out of hand; 230
Shall we be wroken of Lord Soulis
By water or by land?
Or shall we be wroken a great way off,
Or even whereas we stand?"

And up it spak him, foul Borolallie, 235

Between the tree and the leaf o' the tree;
"Ye maunna be wroken of Lord Soulis
By land neither by sea;
Between red fire and wan water
Weel wroken ye shall be." 240

And up it spak him, foul Borolallie,
Between Lord Soulis and them a':
"Ye maunua be wroken of Lord Soulis
Betwixen house and ha';
But ye maun take him to the Ninestane rigs 245
And take his life awa'."

They have taken him to the Ninestane rigs
His foul body to slay;
Between the whins and the whinstanes
He had a weary way. 250

They have taken him to the Ninestane rigs
His foul body to spill:
Between the green broom and the yellow
He gat a bitter ill.

They had a sair cast with his foul body, 255
There was nae man wist what to do;
"And O gin his body were weel sodden,
Weel sodden and suppit in broo!"

And out it spak him, foul Borolallie,
Says "whatten a coil's this coil? 260
Ye'll mak a fire on the Ninestane rigs,
For a pot thereon to boil."

And out it spak him, foul Borolallie,
Say[s] "whatten a din's this din?
Ye'll boil his body within the brass, 265
The brass to boil him in."

They boiled his body on the Ninestane rigs
That wizard mickle of lear;
They have sodden the bones of his body,
To be their better cheer.

270

They buried his bones on the Ninestane rigs
But the flesh was a' clean gane;
There was great joy in a' that border
That Lord Soulis was well slain.

1909

(From *Ballads of the English Border*. Ed. with Introduction,
Glossary and Notes by William A. MacInnes. London:
William Heinemann, 1925)