

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

2 *Ellen Irwin, or the Braes of Kirtle*

Fair Ellen Irwin, when she sate  
Upon the Braes of Kirtle,  
Was lovely as a Grecian Maid  
Adorn'd with wreaths of myrtle.

Young Adam Bruce beside her lay, 5  
And there did they beguile the day  
With love and gentle speeches,  
Beneath the budding beeches.

From many Knights and many Squires  
The Bruce had been selected, 10  
And Gordon, fairest of them all,  
By Ellen was rejected.  
Sad tidings to that noble Youth!  
For it may be proclaim'd with truth,  
If Bruce hath lov'd sincerely, 15  
The Gordon loves as dearly.

But what is Gordon's beauteous face?  
And what are Gordon's crosses  
To them who sit by Kirtle's Braes  
Upon the verdant mosses? 20  
Alas that ever he was born!  
[T]he Gordon, couch'd behind a thorn,  
Sees them and their caressing,  
Beholds them bless'd and blessing.

Proud Gordon cannot bear the thoughts 25  
That through his brain are travelling,  
And, starting up, to Bruce's heart  
He launch'd a deadly jav'lin!  
Fair Ellen saw it when it came,  
And, stepping forth to meet the same, 30  
Did with her body cover

The Youth her chosen lover.

And, falling into Bruce's arms,  
Thus died the beauteous Ellen,  
Thus from the heart of her true-love 35  
The mortal spear repelling.  
And Bruce, as soon as he had slain  
The Gordon, sail'd away to Spain,  
And fought with rage incessant  
Against the Moorish Crescent. 40

But many days and many months,  
And many years ensuing,  
This wretched Knight did vainly seek  
The death that he was wooing:  
So coming back across the wave, 45  
Without a groan on Ellen's grave  
His body he extended,  
And there his sorrow ended.

Now ye who willingly have heard  
The tale I have been telling, 50  
May in Kirkonnell church-yard view  
The grave of lovely Ellen:  
By Ellen's side the Bruce is laid,  
And, for the stone upon his head,  
May no rude hand deface it, 55  
And its forlorn Hic jacet.

1800

(From *Lyrical Ballads*. Ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones.  
The text of the 1798 edition, with the additional 1800  
poems. London: Methuen, 1968)