

John Leyden (1775-1811)

3 *The Lai of the Ettercap*

A Fragment.

Now shal y tellen to ye, y wis,
Of that Squyere hizt *Ellis*,
 And his Dame so fre:
So hende he is by goddes mizt,
That he nis not ymake a knizt 5
 It is the mor pitè.

He knoweth better eche glewe,
Than y can to ye shewe
 Oither bi plume or greffe:
To hunte or hawke, bi frith or folde, 10
Or playe at boules in alles colde,
 He is wel holden cheffe.

His eyes graye as glas ben,
And his visage alto kene,
 Loveliche to paramour: 15
Clere as ambre beth his faxe,
His face beth thin as battle-axe
 That de leth dintes dowre.

His witte beth bothe kene and sharpe,
To knizt or dame that wel can carpe 20
 Oither in halle or boure:
And had y not that Squyre yfonde,
Y hadde ben at the se gronde,
 Which had ben gret doloure.

In him y finden none nother evil, 25
Save that his nostril moche doth snivel,

Al throug that vilaine snuffe:
But then his speche beth so perquire,
That those who may his carpyng here,
They never may here ynough. 30

His Dame beth of so meikle price,
To holden hemselves in her service,
Fele folkes faine wolde be:
Soft and swote in eche steven,
Like an angel com fro heven, 35
Singeth sothe that fre.

I wot her carpyng ben ful queynt,
And her corps bothe smale and gent,
Semeliche to be sene:
Fete, hondes, and fingres smale, 40
Of perl beth eche fingre nail;
She mizt ben Fairi Quene.

That Ladi gent wolde given a scarfe
To hym wolde kille a wreche dwarfe
Of paynim brode: 45
That dwarfe is a fell Ettercap,
And liven aye on nettle-sap,
And hath non nother fode.

That dwarfe he beth berdles and bare,
And weazel-blownen beth all his hair, 50
Lyke an ympe elfe;
And in this middel erd all and haile
Ben no kyn thyng he loveth an dele,
Save his owen selfe.

And when the Dame ben com to toune, 55
That Ladi gent sall mak her boune
A selcouth feat to try,
To take a littel silver knyfe,

And end that sely dwarfes lyfe,
And bake hym in a pye.

60

(From *Restituta: or, Titles, Extracts, and Characters of Old Books in English Literature, Revived.* By Sir Egerton Brydges. Vol. 4. London, 1816)