

William Motherwell (1797-1835)

1 *Clerke Richard and Maid Margaret*

A man must nedes love maugre his hed,
He may not fleen it though he should be ded.

— CHAUCER.

There were two lovers who loved each other
For many years, till hate did start,
And yet they never quite could smother
The former love that warmed their heart;
And both did love, and both did hate, 5
Till both fulfilled the will of fate.

Years after, and the maid did marry
One that her heart had ne'er approved,
Nor longer could Clerke Richard tarry
Where he had lost all that he loved. 10
To foreign lands he reckless went
To nourish love — hate — discontent.

A word — an idle word of folly,
Had spilled their love when it was young,
And hatred, grief, and melancholy, 15
In either heart as idly sprung;
And yet they loved — and hate did wane,
And much they wished to meet again.

Of Richard still is Margaret dreaming;
His image lingered in her breast; 20
And oft at midnight, to her seeming,
Her former lover stood confest;
And shedding on her bosom tears,
The bitter wrecks of happier years.

Where'er he went, by land or ocean, 25
Still Richard sees dame Margaret there;
And every throb and kind emotion

His bosom knew were felt for her.
And never new love hath he cherished;
The power to love with first love perished. 30

Homeward is Clerke Richard sailing,
An altered man from him of old,
His hate had changed to bitter wailing,
And love resumed its wonted hold
Upon his heart, which yearned to see 35
The haunts and loves of infancy.

He knew her faithless, nathless, ever;
He loved her, though no more his own;
Nor could he proudly now dis sever
The chain that round his heart was thrown. 40
He loved her without hope, yet true,
And sought her but to say adieu.

For even in parting there is pleasure,
A bitter joy that wrings the soul;
And there is grief surpassing measure 45
That will not bide nor brook control;
And yet a formal fond-leave taking
Is wished for by a heart nigh breaking.

Oh, there is something in the feeling,
And trembling falter of the hand, 50
And something in the tear down stealing,
And voice so broken and so bland,
And something in the word farewell
That worketh like a powerful spell!

These lovers met, and never parted; 55
They met as lovers wont to do
Who meet when both are broken-hearted,
To breathe a last and long adieu.
Pale Margaret wept. Clerke Richard sighed;
And, folded in each other's arms, they died. 60

Yes, they did die ere word was spoken;
Surprise, grief-love had chained their tongue;

And now that hatred was ywroken,
A wondrous joy in them had sprung.
And then despair froze either heart, 65
Which lived to meet — but died to part.

Clerke Richard, he was buried low
In fair Linlithgow; and his love
Was laid beside him there; and lo,
A bonnie tree did grow above 70
Their double grave, and it doth flourish
Green o'er the spot where love did perish.

(From *The Poetical Works of William Motherwell*. With Memoir
by James M'Conechy. Second ed. enlarged. Glasgow: David
Robertson, 1847)