

William Motherwell (1797-1835)

9 *The Master of Weemys*

The Master of Weemys has biggit a ship,  
To saile upon the sea;  
And four and twenty bauld marinères  
Doe beare him companie.

They have hoistit sayle and left the land, 5  
They have saylit mylis three;  
When up there lap the bonnie mermàyd,  
All in the Norland sea.

“O whare saile ye,” quo’ the bonnie mermàyd, 10  
“Upon the saut sea faem?”  
“It’s we are bound until Norrowày;  
God send us skaithless hame!”

“Oh Norroway is a gay, gay strandè,  
And a merrie lande, I trowe;  
But never nane shall see Norrowày 15  
Gin the mermayd keeps her vowe!”

Down doukit then the mermaydèn,  
Deep intil the middle sea;  
And merrie leuch that master bauld,  
With his jollie companie. 20

They saylit awa’, an’ they saylit awa’,  
They have saylit leaguès ten;  
When, lo! uplap by the gude ship’s side  
The self-same mermaydèn.

Shee held a glass intil her richt hande, 25  
In the uthir shee held a kame,  
And shee kemit her haire, and aye she sang  
As she flotterit on the faem.

And she gliskit round and round about,  
Upon the waters wan; 30  
O nevir againe upon land or sea  
Shall be seen sic a faire womàn.

And shee shed her haire att her milk-white bree  
Wi' her fingers sae sma' and lang;  
And fast as saylit that gude ship on, 35  
Sae louder was aye her sang.

And aye shee sang, and aye shee sang  
As she rade upon the sea:  
“If ye bee men of Christian moulde,  
Throwe the master out to mee. 40

“Throwe out to mee the master bauld,  
If ye bee Christian men;  
But an ye faile, though fast ye sayle,  
Ye'll nevir see land agen!

“Sayle on, sayle on, sayle on,” said shee, 45  
“Sayle on, and nevir blinne;  
The winde at will your saylis may fill,  
But the land ye shall nevir win!”

It's nevir word spak' that master bauld,  
But a loud laugh leuch the crewe; 50  
And in the deep then the mermaidèn  
Down drappit frae their viewe.

But ilk ane hythit her bonnie face,  
How dark, dark grew its lire;  
And ilk ane saw her bricht, bricht eyne 55  
Leming like coals of fire.

And ilk ane saw her lang bricht haire  
Gae flashing through the tide,  
And the sparkles o' the glass she brake  
Upon that gude ship's side. 60

“Steer on, steer on, thou master bauld;

The wind blaws unco' hie."  
 "O there's not a sterne in a' the lift  
 To guide us through the sea!"

"Steer on, steer on, thou master bauld;  
 The storm is coming fast." 65  
 "Then up, then up, my bonnie boy,  
 Unto the topmost mast.

"Creep up into the tallest mast;  
 Gae up, my ae best man; 70  
 Climb up until the tall topmàst,  
 And spy gin ye see land."

"Oh, all is mirk towards the eist,  
 And all is mirk be west;  
 Alas, there is not a spot of light 75  
 Where any eye can rest!"

"Looke oute, looke oute, my bauldest man,  
 Looke out unto the storme,  
 And if ye cannot get sicht o' land,  
 Do ye see the dawin o' morn?" 80

"O alace! alace! my master deare,"  
 Spak' then that ae best man,  
 "Nor light, nor land, nor living thing  
 Do I spy on any hand."

"Looke yet againe, my ae best man, 85  
 And tell me what do ye see."  
 "O Lord! I spy the fause mermaidèn  
 Fast sayling out owre the sea!"

"How can ye spy the fause mermaidèn  
 Fast sayling on the mirk sea? 90  
 For there's neither mune nor mornin' licht —  
 In troth it can nevir bee."

"O there is neither mune nor mornin' licht,  
 Nor ae star's blink on the sea;

But, as I am a Christian man, 95  
That witch-womàn I see!

“Good Lord! there is a scaud o’ fire  
Fast coming out owre the sea;  
And fast therein the grim mermaydèn  
Is sayling on to thee! 100

“She hailes our ship wi’ a shrill, shrill cry —  
Shee is coming, alace! more near.”  
“Ah! wae is me now,” said the master bauld,  
“For I both do see and hear!

“Come down, come down, my ae best man, 105  
For an ill weird I maun drie;  
Yet I reckon not for my sinful self,  
But thou my trew companie!”

*1832*

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