

Edwin Muir (1887-1959)

3 *Ballad of the Flood*

“Last night I dreamed a ghastly dream,
Before the dirl o’ day.
A twining worm cam out the wast,
Its back was like the slae.

“It ganted wide as deid men gant, 5
Turned three times on its tail,
And wapped itsel the warld around
Till ilka rock did wail.

“Its belly was blacker than the coal, 10
It wapped sae close about,
That it brak the hills in pieces sma’
And shut the heavens out.

“Repent, repent, my folk, repent, 15
Repent and turn around.
The hills are sinking in the sea,
The world has got a stound.”

The braw lads woke beside their makes
And drowsy were their een:
“O I wat this is anither day 20
As every day has been.

“And we sall joy to-day, my luve,
Sall dance to harp and horn,
And I’ll devise anither play
When we walk out the morn.

“But on the neist high day we twa 25
Through the kirk door maun gae,
For sair I fear lest we sall brenn
In living fire alway.”

They looked around on every wa'
And drowsy were their een. 30
The day rase up aboon the east
As every day had been.

But Noah took a plank o' aik,
Anither o' the pine,
And bigged a house for a' his folk 35
To sail upon the brine.

"Gang out, gang out and ca' the beasts,
Ca' twa o' every kind
To sail upon this crackling shell
When a' the hills are blind. 40

"Ca' but, ca' but, and they'll rin fast
As sune's they hear your voice,
For they hae heard amang the hills,
I wat, a boding noise.

"They cry a' night about the house, 45
And I hae ruth to see
Sae mony innocent creatures die
For man's iniquity."

Noah's sons went out into the fields,
Ca'd twa o' every kind. 50
They cam frae the east, they cam frae the wast,
And followed close behind.

And some were brighter than the sun,
Some blacker than the coal.
The lark was wiléd frae the sky, 55
The serpent frae the hole.

And they were as meek as blessed sauls
Assoilzied o' their sin,
They bowed their heids in thankfulness
Whenas they entered in. 60

"Come in, come in, my people a',

The sea has drunk the plain,
The hills are falling in the flood,
The sun has downward gane.”

The rain it rained baith day and night 65
And the wind cam together.
The water rase in a lang straight line
Frae ae hill to the tither.

The Ark span like a cockle shell,
Ran east and then ran wast. 70
“Now God us save,” auld Noah cried,
“The warld is sinking fast.”

The beasts they hid amang the shaws
And loud and sair cried they.
They sabbed and maned the leelang night 75
And fought the leelang day,

That the creatures in the Ark were sair
Astonied at the sound.
They trembled sae they shak the house
As it were in a swound. 80

But syne there was nae crying mair
Across the dowie sea.
“I wat,” said Noah, “the warld is sunk
Frae plain to hill-top heigh.”

The first day that auld Noah sailed 85
The green trees floated by.
The second day that auld Noah sailed
He heard a woman’s cry.

And tables set wi’ meats were there,
Gowd beakers set wi’ wine, 90
And twa lovers in a silken barge
A-sailing on the brine.

They soomed upon the lanely sea
And sad, sad were their een.

“O tak me in thy ship, auld man,
And I’ll please thee, I ween.” 95

“Haud off, haud off,” auld Noah cried,
“Ye comena in to me!
Drown deep, drown deep, ye harlot fause,
Ye wadna list to me.” 100

She wrang her hands, she kissed her make,
She lap into the sea.
But Noah turned and laughed fu’ loud:
“To hell, I wat, gang ye!

“To hell the haill warld gangs this day,
But and my folk sae gude. 105
Sail on, sail on till Ararat
Lifts up aboon the flood.”

The third day that auld Noah sailed
There was nae sign ava’. 110
The water rase on every side
Like a weel biggéd wa’.

The astonied ships upon the sea
Tacked round and round about
Till the dragons rising frae the deep 115
Sucked a’ their timbers out.

Ane after ane, ane after ane,
They sank into the sea,
And there was nane left on the earth
But the Ark’s companie. 120

But every day the dragons came
And played the Ark around.
They lay upon the faem and sang;
It was a luvly sound.

“Why stand ye at the window, my sons?
What hope ye there to see?” 125
“We wad see a gudely ha’, faither,

Set in the green countrie.

“But we see naught but water, water,
We’ve seen this mony a day, 130
And the silly fishes in the faem
That soom around in play.”

“Sail on, sail on,” auld Noah cried,
“Sail on, sail on alway!
I wat we’ll sail about the warld 135
Until the Judgment Day.”

Noah sent a doo far owre the sea,
It flew into the south.
It stayed four days and cam again
Wi’ a leaf within its mouth. 140

Noah sent a doo far owre the sea,
It to the wast is ta’en.
It tarried late, it tarried lang,
And cam’na back again.

“O what’s yon green hill in the wast 145
Set round wi’ mony a tree?”
“I wat it is Mount Ararat
New risen frae the sea.”

He’s set the Ark for Ararat,
He’s plied her owre the faem, 150
He’s lighted down at Ararat,
And there he’s made his hame.

1925

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