

A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

22 *May Janet*

“Stand up, stand up, thou May Janet,  
And go to the wars with me.”  
He’s drawn her by both hands  
With her face against the sea.

“He that strews red shall gather white, 5  
He that sews white reap red,  
Before your face and my daughter’s  
Meet in a marriage-bed.

Gold coin shall grow in the yellow field,  
Green corn in the green sea-water, 10  
And red fruit grow of the rose’s red,  
Ere your fruit grow in her.”

“But I shall have her by land,” he said,  
“Or I shall have her by sea,  
Or I shall have her by strong treason 15  
And no grace go with me.”

Her father’s drawn her by both hands,  
He’s rent her gown from her,  
He’s ta’en the smock round her body,  
Cast in the sea-water. 20

The captain’s drawn her by both sides  
Out of the fair green sea;  
“Stand up, stand up, thou May Janet,  
And come to the war with me.”

The first town they came to 25  
There was a blue bride-chamber;

He clothed her on with silk  
And belted her with amber.

The second town they came to  
The bridesmen feasted knee to knee;                    30  
He clothed her on with silver,  
A stately thing to see.

The third town they came to  
The bridesmaids all had gowns of gold;  
He clothed her on with purple,                            35  
A rich thing to behold.

The last town they came to  
He clothed her white and red,  
With a green flag either side of her  
And a gold flag overhead.                                    40

*1866*

(From *Ballads of the English Border*. Ed. with Introduction,  
Glossary and Notes by William A. MacInnes. London:  
William Heinemann, 1925)