

A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

24 *The Sea-Swallows*

This fell when Christmas lights were done,
 (Red rose leaves will never make wine)
But before the Easter lights begun;
 The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne.

Two lovers sat where the rowan blows 5
 And all the grass is heavy and fine,
By the gathering-place of the sea-swallows
 When the wind brings them over Tyne.

Blossom of broom will never make bread,
 Red rose leaves will never make wine; 10
Between her brows she is grown red,
 That was full white in the fields by Tyne.

“O what is this thing ye have on,
 Show me now, sweet daughter of mine?”
“O father, this is my little son 15
 That I found hid in the sides of Tyne.

“O what will ye give my son to eat,
 Red rose leaves will never make wine?”
“Fen-water and adder's meat.”
 The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne. 20

“Or what will ye get my son to wear?”
 (Red rose leaves will never make wine)
“A weed and a web of nettle's hair.”
 The ways are sair fra' the Till to the Tyne.

“Or what will ye take to line his bed?” 25
 (Red rose leaves will never make wine)

“Two black stones at the kirkwall’s head.”
 The ways are sair fra’ the Till to the Tyne.

“Or what will ye give my son for land?”
 (Red rose leaves will never make wine) 30
 “Three girl’s paces of red sand.”
 The ways are sair fra’ the Till to the Tyne.

“Or what will ye give me for my son?”
 (Red rose leaves will never make wine)
 “Six times to kiss his young mouth on.” 35
 The ways are sair fra’ the Till to the Tyne.

“But what have ye done with the bearing-bread,
 And what have ye made of the washing-wine?
 Or where have ye made your bearing-bed,
 To bear a son in the sides of Tyne?” 40

“The bearing-bread is soft and new,
 There is no soil in the straining wine;
 The bed was made between green and blue,
 It stands full soft by the sides of Tyne.

“The fair grass was my bearing-bread, 45
 The well-water my washing wine;
 The low leaves were my bearing-bed,
 And that was best in the sides of Tyne.”

“O daughter, if ye have done this thing,
 I wot the greater grief is mine; 50
 This was a bitter child-bearing,
 When ye were got by the sides of Tyne.

“About the time of sea-swallows
 That fly full thick by six and nine,
 Ye’ll have my body out of the house, 55
 To bury me by the sides of Tyne.

“Set nine stones by the wall for twain,”

(Red rose leaves will never make wine)

“For the bed I take will measure ten.”

The ways are sair fra’ the Till to the Tyne.

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“Tread twelve girl’s paces out for three,”

(Red rose leaves will never make wine)

“For the pit I made has taken me.”

The ways are sair fra’ the Till to the Tyne.

1866

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