

A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

27 *The Weary Wedding*

O daughter, why do ye laugh and weep,
One with another?
For woe to wake and for will to sleep,
Mother, my mother.

But weep ye winna the day ye wed, 5
One with another.
For tears are dry when the springs are dead,
Mother, my mother.

Too long have your tears run down like rain, 10
One with another.
For a long love lost and a sweet love slain,
Mother, my mother.

Too long have your tears dripped down like dew,
One with another. 15
For a knight that my sire and my brethren slew.
Mother, my mother.

Let past things perish and dead griefs lie,
One with another.
O fain would I weep not, and fain would I die, 20
Mother, my mother.

Fair gifts we give ye, to laugh and live,
One with another.
But sair and strange are the gifts I give,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give for your father's love? 25

One with another.
Fruits full few and thorns enough,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give for your mother's sake?
One with another. 30
Tears to brew and tares to bake,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your sister Jean?
One with another. 35
A bier to build and a babe to wean,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your sister Nell?
One with another. 40
The end of life and beginning of hell,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your sister Kate?
One with another.
Earth's door and hell's gate,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your brother Will? 45
One with another.
Life's grief and world's ill,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your brother Hugh?
One with another. 50
A bed of turf to turn into,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your brother John?
One with another.
The dust of death to feed upon, 55

Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your bauld bridegroom?

One with another.

A barren bed and an empty room,

Mother, my mother. 60

And what will ye give your bridegroom's friend?

One with another.

A weary foot to the weary end,

Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your blithe bridesmaid? 65

One with another.

Grief to sew and sorrow to braid.

Mother, my mother.

And what will ye drink the day ye're wed?

One with another. 70

But ae drink of the wan well-head,

Mother, my mother.

And whatten a water is that to draw?

One with another.

We maun drae thereof a', we maun drink thereof a', 75

Mother, my mother.

And what shall ye pu' where the well rins deep?

One with another.

Green herb of death, fine flower of sleep,

Mother, my mother. 80

Are there ony fishes that swim therein?

One with another.

The white fish grace, and the red fish sin,

Mother, my mother.

Are there any birds that sing thereby? 85
One with another.
O when they come thither they sing till they die,
Mother, my mother.

Is there any draw-bucket to that well-head?
One with another. 90
There's a wee well-bucket hangs low by a thread,
Mother, my mother.

And whatten a thread is that to spin? .
One with another.
It's green for grace, and it's black for sin, 95
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye strew on your bride-chamber floor?
One with another.
But one strewing and no more,
Mother, my mother. 100

And whatten a strewing shall that one be?
One with another.
The dust of earth and sand of the sea,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye take to build your bed? 105
One with another.
Sighing and shame and the bones of the dead,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye wear for your wedding gown?
One with another. 110
Grass for the green and dust for the brown,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye wear for your wedding lace?
One with another.

A heavy heart and a hidden face. 115
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye wear for a wreath to your head?
 One with another.
Ash for the white and blood for the red,
 Mother, my mother. 120

And what will ye wear for your wedding ring?
 One with another.
A weary thought for a weary thing,
 Mother, my mother.

And what shall the chimes and the bell-ropes play? 125
 One with another.
A weary tune on a weary day,
 Mother, my mother.

And what shall be sung for your wedding song? 130
 One with another.
A weary word of a weary wrong,
 Mother, my mother.

The world's way with me runs back,
 One with another.
Wedded in white and buried in black, 135
 Mother, my mother.

The world's day and the world's night,
 One with another,
Wedded in black and buried in white,
 Mother, my mother. 140

The world's bliss and the worlds teen,
 One with another,
It's red for white and it's black for green,
 Mother, my mother.

The world's will and the world's way, 145
One with another,
It's sighing for night and crying for day,
Mother, my mother.

The world's good and the world's worth, 150
One with another,
It's earth to flesh and it's flesh to earth,
Mother, my mother.

* * * * *

When she came out at the kirkyard gate,
(One with another)
The bridegroom's mother was there in wait. 155
(Mother, my mother).

O mother, where is my great green bed,
(One with another)
Silk at the foot and gold at the head,
Mother, my mother? 160

Yea, it is ready, the silk and the gold,
One with another,
But line it well that I lie not cold,
Mother, my mother.

She laid her cheek to the velvet and vair, 165
One with another;
She laid her arms up under her hair,
(Mother, my mother.)

Her gold hair fell through her arms fu' low,
One with another. 170
Lord God, bring me out of woe!
(Mother, my mother.)

Her gold hair fell in the gay reeds green,
One with another:
Lord God, bring me out of teen! 175
(Mother, my mother.)

* * * * *

O mother, where is my lady gone? .
(One with another.)
In the bride-chamber she makes sore moan:
(Mother, my mother.) 180

Her hair falls over the velvet and vair,
(One with another)
Her great soft tears fall over her hair.
(Mother, my mother.)

When he came into the bride's chamber, 185
(One with another)
Her hands were like pale yellow amber.
(Mother, my mother.)

Her tears made specks in the velvet and vair,
(One with another) 190
The seeds of the reeds made specks in her hair.
(Mother, my mother.)

He kissed her under the gold on her head;
(One with another)
The lids of her eyes were like cold lead, 195
(Mother, my mother.)

He kissed her under the fall of her chin;
(One with another)
There was right little blood therein.
(Mother, my mother.) 200

He kissed her under her shoulder sweet;

(One with another)

Her throat was weak, with little heat.

(Mother, my mother.)

He kissed her down by her breast-flowers red,

205

One with another;

They were like river-flowers dead.

(Mother, my mother.)

What ails you now o' your weeping, wife?

(One with another.)

210

It ails me sair o' my very life.

(Mother, my mother.)

What ails you now o' your weary ways?

(One with another.)

It ails me sair o' my long life-days.

215

(Mother, my mother.)

Nay, ye are young, ye are over fair.

(One with another.)

Though I be young, what needs ye care?

(Mother, my mother.)

220

Nay, ye are fair, ye are over sweet.

(One with another.)

Though I be fair, what needs ye greet?

(Mother, my mother.)

Nay, ye are mine while I hold my life.

225

(One with another.)

O fool, will ye marry the worm for a wife?

(Mother, my mother.)

Nay, ye are mine while I have my breath.

(One with another.) 230
O fool, will ye marry the dust of death?
(Mother. my mother.)

Yea, ye are mine, we are handfast wed,
One with another.
Nay. I am no man's; nay, I am dead, 235
Mother, my mother.

1889

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