

7

Who goes amid the green wood

With springtide all adorning her?

Who goes amid the merry green wood

To make it merrier?

Who passes in the sunlight

By ways that know the light footfall?

Who passes in the sweet sunlight

With mien so virginal?

The ways of all the woodland

Gleam with a soft and golden fire –

For whom does all the sunny woodland

Carry so brave attire?

O, it is for my true love

The woods their rich apparel wear –

O, it is for my own true love,

That is so young and fair.

*

Notes

This was No. 8 in the 1907 edition.

This lyric is located in the forest – a favourite trysting site for lovers throughout history. The woody setting will be revisited in No. 14. The ‘merry green wood’ suggests Robin Hood – a staple of English folk mythology, and harks back to the ‘merry air’ of the previous song.

Colour (green, golden) and seasonal (spring) discourses invoked again. The natural fire here contrasts with the studious fire left behind in No. 6.

In his 1954 edition Tindall made much of the word 'go' here, pointing out that it serves as a euphemism in Dublin slang for both copulation and urination.

'Ways' – meaning 'paths' here – will recur later, assuming an increasingly dark resonance: 'ways of love' (No. 11), 'girlish ways' (No. 16), 'the way of memories' (No. 31), 'the ways that we shall go upon' (No. 32), and '[our love] Which now is ended in this way' (No. 33).

Note use of the interrogative mode in the first two stanzas, followed by two (excepting lines 11 and 12) in which the questions are answered.

Is the 'virginal' mien at risk out alone in the green wood?

Joyce was a meticulous grammarian: should it be 'Who is so young and fair' (L. 16)?