

Ode to Lethe

I.

Not some ice-fastness thawing with the Spring
By freshet-falls sustains thee – no, nor feed
Dark creeks of wailing, sorrow, or of flame
 Thy eerie stream;
But rather clouds the gentle storm winds bring
Through every season, lend thee life by rains –
 And lave the lands,
Washing through worlds, breaking the rocks to sand.

II.

The ages dull the hard and sharp of earth;
And stone and gem by rivers drain below
The sunlit tracts, in dark gloom finding place
 Where thou dost flow –
Where specters gain requital for their worth;
And those hard-scourged, thy waters yearn to taste:
 But some mere drop
That should Hell's deem undo, by memory's loss.

III.

Their tongues thee praise – for mercy lendest thou
In world and age unmerciful: The cruel
Reign from their thrones on earth, in heaven, hell
 Alike... Thy pools
And eddies drown them though, whirling the proud –
So tyrant scepters sway for but a spell;
 And woe, like strength,
Swift falls from sight and sense, fleeting away.

IV.

The caves drip, spirits' voices clamor – die;
The great Night and the Dream enclose thy soul.
By palace of Hell's king and cypress tree
 Thy wavelets roll:
Indifferent visitants to scenes of sighs,
Uncanny flowerings, figures of grief –
 Impassioned not,
All blithe to Night's veiled terrors and the dark.

V.

Strange forms of creatures sup upon thy wave,
Oh stream of blessed unknowing; and they race
From thence to life again, on upper earth –
 Anxious to chase
Vivacious loves and pleasures Nature gave
Them once, when in some ancient hour their birth
 Erupted soft –
Fair childhood eon, now no longer lost.

VI.

So run the ages – life renewing aye;
And thou, fed by the world's rain, foster'st this:
Yet still, a dark bird hovers where thy creek
 Must meet and kiss,
At end of all, remembrance that hath died...
A blackbird perches – thing of silent beak –
 Upon gray stone,
Greeting thy breaking ripples, all alone.

VII.

Not Melancholy, Beauty, Pleasure, Joy
Thou findest on thy course, where ends our life –
But rather Emptiness, Silence, and Sleep:
 That cease of strife
Which is the calm land nothing might destroy,
For that it liveth not... Nothing shall weep
 In nothingness,
Soft fields beyond keen ache, beyond sad bliss.