

ODE

OPEN, opal doors,
O mists that roaming strew
long unvisited moors ;
open, womb of the rain, lap of the dew ;
let run this most sweet limpid string ;
let steal its winding course
through
peat and moss
the slender hidden force ;
and the bird sing, sing,
even to a note unheard in the unflecked blue,
to a still listening ear,
where hillocks roll and grasses toss
in the light, wistful year.

New-born, rillet, start to run.
See, caught by the sun,
a gnat alighting trace
innumerable wrinkles on its hand-breadth face :
see it swerve
to shun a miniature rock ;
a counter shock
has tangled all those ripples into lace ;
diamonds flash
and darken on a stronger curve
and heavy swing. Recoil.
A clear way and a sudden dash.
Now swirling recollection.
Clouted weeds embroil
its passage in a slow dejection.
Run, rivulet, upon a path of pebbles.
Pause.
Meditate.
Absorb the light ;
gather dreadful weight ;

Blackfriars

rush with impetus new volume trebles.
Heaped the impatient water gnaws
enthrottling banks,
springs to freedom and expanse.

Unless along its marges
its flow is scarcely visible for poise ;
its shallow clarity
the universe enlarges,
till the pole dive to unreality.
All, unless the inspiring sun,
but water has a voice :
hum and rustling in a rhythm unknown,
inviting to rejoice.

Empty the ears of every soft sound
in the moss,
in the air around ;
from the eyes
banish the vision of repose,
when the waters narrow and rise,
with an action of fetched breath,
and, rounded, plunge as to the hazard of death.
Glassy column and sheet
stand rigid at their fiercest speed ;
crash and explode at their feet ;
growl and churn ;
and climb the slippery stair ;
to return,
and recede
in skeins of incredible hair ;
around exhilarated, absent flesh
hiss and swish afresh.
A cool slide
into a well-like, deep, tree-shaded pool ;
where a school
of light and dark flecks play and hide.

Flow, placid stream
 past birches at the brim ;
 islet and stony holm,
 divide the water pendant branches comb ;
 borne away
 fall'n flowers, and dropped scales
 which served their day.
 Lo, a seed,
 provided in an hour of need
 for flight or navigation, gaily sails.
 Some frequent and monotonous jar,
 call, bark or thud,
 echoes against a cliff afar,
 behind a wood.
 Patient and attentive, hush
 every murmur ; break
 silently in alcoves of moaning reed and rush ;
 sweep to obliteration over the pebbly bar.
 The lake.

Not such a long descent
 of many assembled rills,
 but the republic lies in craterous hollowed hills ;
 where the toppling, the precipitous,
 those of even pace,
 the slow,
 are for a long day pent.
 Come all to a metamorphic flow,
 they wind, heavily changing place ;
 and in their winding smother
 one another,
 and knot with other selves ubiquitous.

Grope upon the uneven prison floor ;
 deeper haunts and darker cells explore ;
 fill unechoing caves ;
 break, waves,

Blackfriars

where banks are steep ;
sob, sob along the tantalising shore,
so low a sudden onrush were escape ;
sink and almost sleep ;
drown without place or shape.

Roam on the common face of the many waters' fate ;
move at the will of the breeze ;
rustle and swing like the trees
in the liquid wind.
Float as a stony plate,
till the sun rescind
work in the stagnant air
of the jewel-making frost,
with never a care
for its cunning crossed.

The sun in its strength
lifts from the lake's defenceless length
shadowless clouds ;
anon,
come evening, and of the crossed beams of sun and
moon
no ray longer warms,
there are seen forms
some call elves ;
which, suiting the notion, as they glide
among themselves,
from side to side
lean, and swaying swing like shrouds
of nightly dancers, nor yet less light.
The child has reported the sight and gone to bed ;
the sport is over the night-breeze led ;
spirits that were never there
fold their garments in the air,
lay them flat and smooth as they ever were.

Out gallops a riderless stream.
 Its long delay
 a sleep and a dream.
 Now it is night and day;
 now it is winter and spring;
 wild or meek as they run
 the waters rustle and swing,
 pitch and fold,
 answering in diamonds and gold
 to the rays of the sun;
 echoing the sky
 where they lie
 tranquil and deep in a torn rock trough;
 enticing enough
 to strip the young of their shirts and shoes.

' Come, earth-born too,
 dive in the mellow flood;
 sting your skin;
 startle your blood;
 here is matter to gambol in.
 ' You have seen the sky never more blue;
 you have seen the salmon leap
 as a fierce silver C;
 you have heard the blackcock's angry call,
 the curlew's mournful trill;
 where a million living creatures thrive,
 where scarcely rocks sleep,
 what is awake and alive
 and not you?
 ' What would you do;
 where would you be;
 would you forgo or lose
 the birthright of all?'

Farewell, swamp and glen,
 dappled hills,

Blackfins

sundew and midge.
With longer strides
to the ways and the towns of men;
to the bellowing sea,
to its salt and rocking tides;
to serve snoring mills
in tangled gloom;
polish the smooth sides
of long embankment walls;
thread narrow arches
between arrow-faced buttresses.
Dare hinder it now, the river
through burst banks sprawls,
turning fields to unbidden meres;
waking sleeping engineers
with the nightmare fall
of a new steel bridge,
over which loaded lorries and new cars
should have raced to help and doom.
By what marshalled force and forced marches
how to deliver
the threatened metropolis,
and obliterate the scars?

Beyond the last town
shapeless dimensions all but lie;
weariness of mud brown
listlessly returns the colours of the sky.
Undaintily, long loaded jetties tread
in shallow filth, to find
the groping channel in its bed.
Its voice no more than a weak lap, an inarticulate
moan;
films of ooze from fouler depths renewed,
a bobbing horror by squawking gulls pursued,
replenish its fetid breath;
in the watches of death

Ode

with riches piled and honour strown.
Dredgers grind.
Traders skulk
and await the signal to discharge
petrol or ores.
Pass it in the time in which a barge
fulfils its freight of stores
for a distant hulk.

While windmills still gesticulate,
dim, motionless, the river seems to wait
upon the first salt kisses of the ocean's lips ;
where a white pharos heeds the ships.

JOHN GRAY.