

IRENĚ [THE SLEEPER]

'Tis now (so sings the soaring moon)
Midnight in the sweet month of June,
When winged visions love to lie
Lazily upon beauty's eye,
Or worse—upon her brow to dance
In panoply of old romance,
Till thoughts and locks are left, alas!
A ne'er-to-be untangled mass.

An influence dewy, drowsy, dim,
Is dripping from that golden rim;
Grey towers are mouldering into rest,
Wrapping the fog around their breast:
Looking like Lethë, see! the lake
A conscious slumber seems to take,
And would not for the world awake:
The rosemary sleeps upon the grave—
The lily lolls upon the wave—
And million bright pines to and fro,
Are rocking lullabies as they go,
To the lone oak that reels with bliss,
Nodding above the dim abyss.

All beauty sleeps: and lo! where lies
With casement open to the skies,
Irenë, with her destinies!
Thus hums the moon within her ear,
"O lady sweet! how camest thou here?
"Strange are thine eyelids—strange thy dress!
"And strange thy glorious length of tress!
"Sure thou art come o'er far-off seas,
"A wonder to our desert trees!
"Some gentle wind hath thought it right
"To open thy window to the night,
"And wanton airs from the tree-top,
"Laughingly thro' the lattice drop,
"And wave this crimson canopy,
"Like a banner o'er thy dreaming eye!
"Lady, awake! lady awake!
"For the holy Jesus' sake!
"For strangely—fearfully in this hall
"My tinted shadows rise and fall!"

The lady sleeps: the *dead* all sleep—
At least as long as Love doth weep:
Entranc'd, the spirit loves to lie
As long as—tears on Memory's eye:
But when a week or two go by,
And the light laughter chokes the sigh,
Indignant from the tomb doth take
Its way to some remember'd lake,
Where oft—in life—with friends—it went
To bathe in the pure element,
And there, from the untrodden grass,
Wreathing for its transparent brow
Those flowers that say (ah hear them now!)
To the night-winds as they pass,
"Ai! ail! alas!—alas!"
Pores for a moment, ere it go,
On the clear waters there that flow,
Then sinks within (weigh'd down by wo)
Th' uncertain, shadowy heaven below.

The lady sleeps: oh! may her sleep
As it is lasting so be deep—
No icy worms about her creep:
I pray to God that she may lie
Forever with as calm an eye,
That chamber chang'd for one more holy—
That bed for one more melancholy.

Far in the forest, dim and old,
For her may some tall vault unfold,
Against whose sounding door she hath thrown,
In childhood, many an idle stone—
Some tomb, which oft hath flung its black
And vampyre-winged pannels back,
Flutt'ring triumphant o'er the palls
Of her old family funerals.

[1831]