

Track 54: Section 2, lines 119 to 235

As from a womb obscure he saw emerge
120 The body and visage of a dark Unseen
Hidden behind the fair outsides of life.
Its dangerous commerce is our suffering's cause.
Its breath is a subtle poison in men's hearts;
All evil starts from that ambiguous face.
125 A peril haunted now the common air;
The world grew full of menacing Energies,
And wherever turned for help or hope his eyes,
In field and house, in street and camp and mart
He met the prowling and stealthy come and go
130 Of armed disquieting bodied Influences.
A march of goddess figures dark and nude
Alarmed the air with grandiose unease;
Appalling footsteps drew invisibly near,
Shapes that were threats invaded the dream-light,
135 And ominous beings passed him on the road
Whose very gaze was a calamity:
A charm and sweetness sudden and formidable,
Faces that raised alluring lips and eyes
Approached him armed with beauty like a snare,
140 But hid a fatal meaning in each line
And could in a moment dangerously change.
But he alone discerned that screened attack.
A veil upon the inner vision lay,
A force was there that hid its dreadful steps;
145 All was belied, yet thought itself the truth;
All were beset but knew not of the siege:
For none could see the authors of their fall.
Aware of some dark wisdom still withheld
That was the seal and warrant of this strength,
150 He followed the track of dim tremendous steps
Returning to the night from which they came.
A tract he reached unbuilt and owned by none:
There all could enter but none stay for long.
It was a no man's land of evil air,
155 A crowded neighbourhood without one home,
A borderland between the world and hell.
There unreality was Nature's lord:
It was a space where nothing could be true,
For nothing was what it had claimed to be:
160 A high appearance wrapped a specious void.
Yet nothing would confess its own pretence
Even to itself in the ambiguous heart:
A vast deception was the law of things;
Only by that deception they could live.
165 An unsubstantial Nihil guaranteed
The falsehood of the forms this Nature took
And made them seem awhile to be and live.
A borrowed magic drew them from the Void;
They took a shape and stuff that was not theirs
170 And showed a colour that they could not keep,

Mirrors to a phantasm of reality.
Each rainbow brilliance was a splendid lie;
A beauty unreal graced a glamour face.
Nothing could be relied on to remain:
175 Joy nurtured tears and good an evil proved,
But never out of evil one plucked good:
Love ended early in hate, delight killed with pain,
Truth into falsity grew and death ruled life.
A Power that laughed at the mischiefs of the world,
180 An irony that joined the world's contraries
And flung them into each other's arms to strive,
Put a sardonic rictus on God's face.
Aloof, its influence entered everywhere
And left a cloven hoof-mark on the breast;
185 A twisted heart and a strange sombre smile
Mocked at the sinister comedy of life.
Announcing the advent of a perilous Form
An ominous tread softened its dire footfall
That none might understand or be on guard;
190 None heard until a dreadful grasp was close.
Or else all augured a divine approach,
An air of prophecy felt, a heavenly hope,
Listened for a gospel, watched for a new star.
The Fiend was visible but cloaked in light;
195 He seemed a helping angel from the skies:
He armed untruth with Scripture and the Law;
He deceived with wisdom, with virtue slew the soul
And led to perdition by the heavenward path.
A lavish sense he gave of power and joy,
200 And, when arose the warning from within,
He reassured the ear with dulcet tones
Or took the mind captive in its own net;
His rigorous logic made the false seem true.
Amazing the elect with holy lore
205 He spoke as with the very voice of God.
The air was full of treachery and ruse;
Truth-speaking was a stratagem in that place;
Ambush lurked in a smile and peril made
Safety its cover, trust its entry's gate:
210 Falsehood came laughing with the eyes of truth;
Each friend might turn an enemy or spy,
The hand one clasped ensleaved a dagger's stab
And an embrace could be Doom's iron cage.
Agony and danger stalked their trembling prey
215 And softly spoke as to a timid friend:
Attack sprang suddenly vehement and unseen;
Fear leaped upon the heart at every turn
And cried out with an anguished dreadful voice;
It called for one to save but none came near.
220 All warily walked, for death was ever close;
Yet caution seemed a vain expense of care,
For all that guarded proved a deadly net,
And when after long suspense salvation came
And brought a glad relief disarming strength,

225 It served as a smiling passage to worse fate.
There was no truce and no safe place to rest;
One dared not slumber or put off one's arms:
It was a world of battle and surprise.
All who were there lived for themselves alone;
230 All warred against all, but with a common hate
Turned on the mind that sought some higher good;
Truth was exiled lest she should dare to speak
And hurt the heart of darkness with her light
Or bring her pride of knowledge to blaspheme
235 The settled anarchy of established things.