

Track 62: Section 4, lines 251 to end

This too the traveller of the worlds must dare.
A warrior in the dateless duel's strife,
He entered into dumb despairing Night
Challenging the darkness with his luminous soul.

255 Alarming with his steps the threshold gloom
He came into a fierce and dolorous realm
Peopled by souls who never had tasted bliss;
Ignorant like men born blind who know not light,
They could equate worst ill with highest good,

260 Virtue was to their eyes a face of sin
And evil and misery were their natural state.
A dire administration's penal code
Making of grief and pain the common law,
Decreeing universal joylessness

265 Had changed life into a stoic sacrament
And torture into a daily festival.
An act was passed to chastise happiness;
Laughter and pleasure were banned as deadly sins:
A questionless mind was ranked as wise content,

270 A dull heart's silent apathy as peace:
Sleep was not there, torpor was the sole rest,
Death came but neither respite gave nor end;
Always the soul lived on and suffered more.
Ever he deeper probed that kingdom of pain;

275 Around him grew the terror of a world
Of agony followed by worse agony,
And in the terror a great wicked joy
Glad of one's own and others' calamity.
There thought and life were a long punishment,

280 The breath a burden and all hope a scourge,
The body a field of torment, a massed unease;
Repose was a waiting between pang and pang.
This was the law of things none dreamed to change:
A hard sombre heart, a harsh unsmiling mind

285 Rejected happiness like a cloying sweet;
Tranquillity was a tedium and ennui:
Only by suffering life grew colourful;
It needed the spice of pain, the salt of tears.
If one could cease to be, all would be well;

290 Else only fierce sensations gave some zest:
A fury of jealousy burning the gnawed heart,
The sting of murderous spite and hate and lust,
The whisper that lures to the pit and treachery's stroke
Threw vivid spots on the dull aching hours.

295 To watch the drama of infelicity,
The writhing of creatures under the harrow of doom
And sorrow's tragic gaze into the night
And horror and the hammering heart of fear
Were the ingredients in Time's heavy cup

300 That pleased and helped to enjoy its bitter taste.
Of such fierce stuff was made up life's long hell:
These were the threads of the dark spider's-web
In which the soul was caught, quivering and rapt;

This was religion, this was Nature's rule.

305 In a fell chapel of iniquity
To worship a black pitiless image of Power
Kneeling one must cross hard-hearted stony courts,
A pavement like a floor of evil fate.

Each stone was a keen edge of ruthless force

310 And glued with the chilled blood from tortured breasts;
The dry gnarled trees stood up like dying men
Stiffened into a pose of agony,
And from each window peered an ominous priest
Chanting Te Deums for slaughter's crowning grace,

315 Uprooted cities, blasted human homes,
Burned writhen bodies, the bombshell's massacre.
"Our enemies are fallen, are fallen," they sang,
"All who once stayed our will are smitten and dead;
How great we are, how merciful art Thou."

320 Thus thought they to reach God's impassive throne
And Him command whom all their acts opposed,
Magnifying their deeds to touch his skies,
And make him an accomplice of their crimes.

There no relenting pity could have place,

325 But ruthless strength and iron moods had sway,
A dateless sovereignty of terror and gloom:
This took the figure of a darkened God
Revered by the racked wretchedness he had made,
Who held in thrall a miserable world,

330 And helpless hearts nailed to unceasing woe
Adored the feet that trampled them into mire.

It was a world of sorrow and of hate,
Sorrow with hatred for its lonely joy,
Hatred with others' sorrow as its feast;

335 A bitter rictus curled the suffering mouth;
A tragic cruelty saw its ominous chance.

Hate was the black archangel of that realm;
It glowed, a sombre jewel in the heart
Burning the soul with its malignant rays,

340 And wallowed in its fell abysm of might.

These passions even objects seemed to exude,—
For mind overflowed into the inanimate
That answered with the wickedness it received,—
Against their users used malignant powers,

345 Hurt without hands and strangely, suddenly slew,
Appointed as instruments of an unseen doom.

Or they made themselves a fateful prison wall
Where men condemned wake through the creeping hours
Counted by the tollings of an ominous bell.

350 An evil environment worsened evil souls:
All things were conscious there and all perverse.

In this infernal realm he dared to press
Even into its deepest pit and darkest core,
Perturbed its tenebrous base, dared to contest

355 Its ancient privileged right and absolute force:
In Night he plunged to know her dreadful heart,
In Hell he sought the root and cause of Hell.

Its anguished gulfs opened in his own breast;
He listened to clamours of its crowded pain,
360 The heart-beats of its fatal loneliness.
Above was a chill deaf eternity.

In vague tremendous passages of Doom
He heard the goblin Voice that guides to slay,
And faced the enchantments of the demon Sign,
365 And traversed the ambush of the opponent Snake.

In menacing tracts, in tortured solitudes
Companionless he roamed through desolate ways
Where the red Wolf waits by the fordless stream
And Death's black eagles scream to the precipice,
370 And met the hounds of bale who hunt men's hearts
Baying across the veldts of Destiny,
In footless battlefields of the Abyss
Fought shadowy combats in mute eyeless depths,
Assaults of Hell endured and Titan strokes
375 And bore the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal.
A prisoner of a hooded magic Force,
Captured and trailed in Falsehood's lethal net
And often strangled in the noose of grief,
Or cast in the grim morass of swallowing doubt,
380 Or shut into pits of error and despair,
He drank her poison draughts till none was left.

In a world where neither hope nor joy could come
The ordeal he suffered of evil's absolute reign,
Yet kept intact his spirit's radiant truth.

385 Incapable of motion or of force,
In Matter's blank denial gaoled and blind,
Pinned to the black inertia of our base
He treasured between his hands his flickering soul.

His being ventured into mindless Void,
390 Intolerant gulfs that knew not thought nor sense;
Thought ceased, sense failed, his soul still saw and knew.

In atomic parcellings of the Infinite
Near to the dumb beginnings of lost Self,
He felt the curious small futility
395 Of the creation of material things.
Or, stifled in the Inconscient's hollow dusk,
He sounded the mystery dark and bottomless
Of the enormous and unmeaning deeps
Whence struggling life in a dead universe rose.

400 There in the stark identity lost by mind
He felt the sealed sense of the insensible world
And a mute wisdom in the unknowing Night.

Into the abysmal secrecy he came
Where darkness peers from her mattress, grey and nude,
405 And stood on the last locked subconscious's floor
Where Being slept unconscious of its thoughts
And built the world not knowing what it built.

There waiting its hour the future lay unknown,
There is the record of the vanished stars.

410 There in the slumber of the cosmic Will
He saw the secret key of Nature's change.

A light was with him, an invisible hand
Was laid upon the error and the pain
Till it became a quivering ecstasy,
415 The shock of sweetness of an arm's embrace.
He saw in Night the Eternal's shadowy veil,
Knew death for a cellar of the house of life,
In destruction felt creation's hasty pace,
Knew loss as the price of a celestial gain
420 And hell as a short cut to heaven's gates.
Then in Illusion's occult factory
And in the Inconscient's magic printing-house
Torn were the formats of the primal Night
And shattered the stereotypes of Ignorance.
425 Alive, breathing a deep spiritual breath,
Nature expunged her stiff mechanical code
And the articles of the bound soul's contract,
Falsehood gave back to Truth her tortured shape.
Annulled were the tables of the law of Pain,
430 And in their place grew luminous characters.
The skilful Penman's unseen finger wrote
His swift intuitive calligraphy;
Earth's forms were made his divine documents,
The wisdom embodied mind could not reveal,
435 Inconscience chased from the world's voiceless breast;
Transfigured were the fixed schemes of reasoning Thought.
Arousing consciousness in things inert,
He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass
The diamond script of the Imperishable,
440 Inscribed on the dim heart of fallen things
A paeon-song of the free Infinite
And the Name, foundation of eternity,
And traced on the awake exultant cells
In the ideographs of the Ineffable
445 The lyric of the love that waits through Time
And the mystic volume of the Book of Bliss
And the message of the superconscient Fire.
Then life beat pure in the corporeal frame;
The infernal Gleam died and could slay no more.
450 Hell split across its huge abrupt façade
As if a magic building were undone,
Night opened and vanished like a gulf of dream.
Into being's gap scooped out as empty Space
In which she had filled the place of absent God,
455 There poured a wide intimate and blissful Dawn;
Healed were all things that Time's torn heart had made
And sorrow could live no more in Nature's breast:
Division ceased to be, for God was there.
The soul lit the conscious body with its ray,
460 Matter and spirit mingled and were one.

End of Canto Eight