

Track 18: Section 1, lines 1 to 189

A silence sealed the irrevocable decree,
The word of Fate that fell from heavenly lips
Fixing a doom no power could ever reverse
Unless heaven's will itself could change its course.

5 Or so it seemed: yet from the silence rose
One voice that questioned changeless destiny,
A will that strove against the immutable Will.

A mother's heart had heard the fateful speech
That rang like a sanction to the call of death
10 And came like a chill close to life and hope.
Yet hope sank down like an extinguished fire.

She felt the leaden inevitable hand
Invade the secrecy of her guarded soul
And smite with sudden pain its still content
15 And the empire of her hard-won quietude.

Awhile she fell to the level of human mind,
A field of mortal grief and Nature's law;
She shared, she bore the common lot of men
And felt what common hearts endure in Time.

20 Voicing earth's question to the inscrutable power
The queen now turned to the still immobile seer:
Assailed by the discontent in Nature's depths,
Partner in the agony of dumb driven things
And all the misery, all the ignorant cry,
25 Passionate like sorrow questioning heaven she spoke.

Lending her speech to the surface soul on earth
She uttered the suffering in the world's dumb heart
And man's revolt against his ignorant fate.

30 "O seer, in the earth's strange twi-natured life
By what pitiless adverse Necessity
Or what cold freak of a Creator's will,
By what random accident or governed Chance
That shaped a rule out of fortuitous steps,
Made destiny from an hour's emotion, came
35 Into the unreadable mystery of Time
The direr mystery of grief and pain?

Is it thy God who made this cruel law?

Or some disastrous Power has marred his work
And he stands helpless to defend or save?

40 A fatal seed was sown in life's false start
When evil twinned with good on earthly soil.

Then first appeared the malady of mind,
Its pang of thought, its quest for the aim of life.

45 It twisted into forms of good and ill
The frank simplicity of the animal's acts;
It turned the straight path hewn by the body's gods,
Followed the zigzag of the uncertain course
Of life that wanders seeking for its aim
In the pale starlight falling from thought's skies,
50 Its guides the unsure idea, the wavering will.

Lost was the instinct's safe identity
With the arrow-point of being's inmost sight,
Marred the sure steps of Nature's simple walk
And truth and freedom in the growing soul.

55 Out of some ageless innocence and peace,
Privilege of souls not yet betrayed to birth,
Cast down to suffer on this hard dangerous earth
Our life was born in pain and with a cry.

60 Although earth-nature welcomes heaven's breath
Inspiring Matter with the will to live,
A thousand ills assail the mortal's hours
And wear away the natural joy of life;
Our bodies are an engine cunningly made,
But for all its parts as cunningly are planned,
65 Contrived ingeniously with demon skill,
Its apt inevitable heritage
Of mortal danger and peculiar pain,
Its payment of the tax of Time and Fate,
Its way to suffer and its way to die.

70 This is the ransom of our high estate,
The sign and stamp of our humanity.

A grisly company of maladies
Come, licensed lodgers, into man's bodily house,
Purveyors of death and torturers of life.

75 In the malignant hollows of the world,
In its subconscious cavern-passages
Ambushed they lie waiting their hour to leap,
Surrounding with danger the sieged city of life:
Admitted into the citadel of man's days
80 They mine his force and maim or suddenly kill.

Ourselves within us lethal forces nurse;
We make of our own enemies our guests:
Out of their holes like beasts they creep and gnaw
The chords of the divine musician's lyre
85 Till frayed and thin the music dies away
Or crashing snaps with a last tragic note.

All that we are is like a fort beset:
All that we strive to be alters like a dream
In the grey sleep of Matter's ignorance.

90 Mind suffers lamed by the world's disharmony
And the unloveliness of human things.

A treasure misspent or cheaply, fruitlessly sold
In the bazaar of a blind destiny,
A gift of priceless value from Time's gods
95 Lost or mislaid in an uncaring world,
Life is a marvel missed, an art gone wry;
A seeker in a dark and obscure place,
An ill-armed warrior facing dreadful odds,
An imperfect worker given a baffling task,
100 An ignorant judge of problems Ignorance made,
Its heavenward flights reach closed and keyless gates,
Its glorious outbursts peter out in mire.

On Nature's gifts to man a curse was laid:
All walks inarmed by its own opposites,
105 Error is the comrade of our mortal thought
And falsehood lurks in the deep bosom of truth,
Sin poisons with its vivid flowers of joy
Or leaves a red scar burnt across the soul;
Virtue is a grey bondage and a gaol.

110 At every step is laid for us a snare.
Alien to reason and the spirit's light,
Our fount of action from a darkness wells;
In ignorance and nescience are our roots.

A growing register of calamities
115 Is the past's account, the future's book of Fate:
The centuries pile man's follies and man's crimes
Upon the countless crowd of Nature's ills;
As if the world's stone load was not enough,
A crop of miseries obstinately is sown
120 By his own hand in the furrows of the gods,
The vast increasing tragic harvest reaped
From old misdeeds buried by oblivious Time.

He walks by his own choice into Hell's trap;
This mortal creature is his own worst foe.

125 His science is an artificer of doom;
He ransacks earth for means to harm his kind;
He slays his happiness and others' good.

Nothing has he learned from Time and its history;
Even as of old in the raw youth of Time,
130 When Earth ignorant ran on the highways of Fate,
Old forms of evil cling to the world's soul:
War making nought the sweet smiling calm of life,
Battle and rapine, ruin and massacre
Are still the fierce pastimes of man's warring tribes;
135 An idiot hour destroys what centuries made,
His wanton rage or frenzied hate lays low
The beauty and greatness by his genius wrought
And the mighty output of a nation's toil.

All he has achieved he drags to the precipice.

140 His grandeur he turns to an epic of doom and fall;
His littleness crawls content through squalor and mud,
He calls heaven's retribution on his head
And wallows in his self-made misery.

A part author of the cosmic tragedy,
145 His will conspires with death and time and fate.
His brief appearance on the enigmaed earth
Ever recurs but brings no high result
To this wanderer through the aeon-rings of God
That shut his life in their vast longevity.

150 His soul's wide search and ever returning hopes
Pursue the useless orbit of their course
In a vain repetition of lost toils
Across a track of soon forgotten lives.
All is an episode in a meaningless tale.

155 Why is it all and wherefore are we here?
If to some being of eternal bliss
It is our spirit's destiny to return
Or some still impersonal height of endless calm,
Since That we are and out of That we came,
160 Whence rose the strange and sterile interlude
Lasting in vain through interminable Time?
Who willed to form or feign a universe
In the cold and endless emptiness of Space?
Or if these beings must be and their brief lives,
165 What need had the soul of ignorance and tears?
Whence rose the call for sorrow and for pain?
Or all came helplessly without a cause?
What power forced the immortal spirit to birth?
The eternal witness once of eternity,
170 A deathless sojourner mid transient scenes,
He camps in life's half-lit obscurity
Amid the debris of his thoughts and dreams.
Or who persuaded it to fall from bliss
And forfeit its immortal privilege?
175 Who laid on it the ceaseless will to live
A wanderer in this beautiful, sorrowful world,
And bear its load of joy and grief and love?
Or if no being watches the works of Time,
What hard impersonal Necessity
180 Compels the vain toil of brief living things?
A great Illusion then has built the stars.
But where then is the soul's security,
Its poise in this circling of unreal suns?
Or else it is a wanderer from its home
185 Who strayed into a blind alley of Time and chance
And finds no issue from a meaningless world.
Or where begins and ends Illusion's reign?
Perhaps the soul we feel is only a dream,
Eternal self a fiction sensed in trance."