

Track 49: Section 1a, lines 1 to 274

Awhile on the chill dreadful edge of Night
All stood as if a world were doomed to die
And waited on the eternal silence' brink.

5 Heaven leaned towards them like a cloudy brow
Of menace through the dim and voiceless hush.

As thoughts stand mute on a despairing verge
Where the last depths plunge into nothingness
And the last dreams must end, they paused; in their front
Were glooms like shadowy wings, behind them, pale,
10 The lifeless evening was a dead man's gaze.

Hungry beyond, the night desired her soul.

But still in its lone niche of templed strength
Motionless, her flame-bright spirit, mute, erect,
Burned like a torch-fire from a windowed room
15 Pointing against the darkness' sombre breast.

The Woman first affronted the Abyss
Daring to journey through the eternal Night.

Armoured with light she advanced her foot to plunge
Into the dread and hueless vacancy;
20 Immortal, unappalled, her spirit faced

The danger of the ruthless eyeless waste.

Against night's inky ground they stirred, moulding
Mysterious motion on her human tread,
A swimming action and a drifting march
25 Like figures moving before eyelids closed:
All as in dreams went slipping, gliding on.

The rock-gate's heavy walls were left behind;
As if through passages of receding time
Present and past into the Timeless lapsed;
30 Arrested upon dim adventure's brink,
The future ended drowned in nothingness.

Amid collapsing shapes they wound obscure;
The fading vestibules of a tenebrous world
Received them, where they seemed to move and yet
35 Be still, nowhere advancing yet to pass,
A dumb procession a dim picture bounds,
Not conscious forms threading a real scene.

A mystery of terror's boundlessness,
Gathering its hungry strength the huge pitiless void
40 Surrounded slowly with its soundless depths,
And monstrous, cavernous, a shapeless throat
Devoured her into its shadowy strangling mass,
The fierce spiritual agony of a dream.

A curtain of impenetrable dread,
45 The darkness hung around her cage of sense
As, when the trees have turned to blotted shades
And the last friendly glimmer fades away,
Around a bullock in the forest tied
By hunters closes in no empty night.

50 The thought that strives in the world was here unmade;

Its effort it renounced to live and know,
Convinced at last that it had never been;
It perished, all its dream of action done:
This clotted cypher was its dark result.

55 In the smothering stress of this stupendous Nought
Mind could not think, breath could not breathe, the soul
Could not remember or feel itself; it seemed
A hollow gulf of sterile emptiness,
A zero oblivious of the sum it closed,
60 An abnegation of the Maker's joy
Saved by no wide repose, no depth of peace.

On all that claims here to be Truth and God
And conscious self and the revealing Word
And the creative rapture of the Mind
65 And Love and Knowledge and heart's delight, there fell
The immense refusal of the eternal No.

As disappears a golden lamp in gloom
Borne into distance from the eyes' desire,
Into the shadows vanished Savitri.

70 There was no course, no path, no end or goal:
Visionless she moved amid insensible gulfs,
Or drove through some great black unknowing waste,
Or whirled in a dumb eddy of meeting winds
Assembled by the titan hands of Chance.

75 There was none with her in the dreadful Vast:
She saw no more the vague tremendous god,
Her eyes had lost their luminous Satyavan.

Yet not for this her spirit failed, but held
More deeply than the bounded senses can
80 Which grasp externally and find to lose,
Its object loved.

So when on earth they lived
She had felt him straying through the glades, the glades
A scene in her, its clefts her being's vistas
Opening their secrets to his search and joy,
85 Because to jealous sweetness in her heart
Whatever happy space his cherished feet
Preferred, must be at once her soul embracing
His body, passioning dumbly to his tread.

But now a silent gulf between them came
90 And to abysmal loneliness she fell,
Even from herself cast out, from love remote.

Long hours, since long it seems when sluggish time
Is measured by the throbs of the soul's pain,
In an unreal darkness empty and drear
95 She travelled treading on the corpse of life,
Lost in a blindness of extinguished souls.

Solitary in the anguish of the void
She lived in spite of death, she conquered still;
In vain her puissant being was oppressed:
100 Her heavy long monotony of pain
Tardily of its fierce self-torture tired.

At first a faint inextinguishable gleam,
Pale but immortal, flickered in the gloom
As if a memory came to spirits dead,
105 A memory that wished to live again,
Dissolved from mind in Nature's natal sleep.

It wandered like a lost ray of the moon
Revealing to the night her soul of dread;
Serpentine in the gleam the darkness lolled,
110 Its black hoods jewelled with the mystic glow;
Its dull sleek folds shrank back and coiled and slid,
As though they felt all light a cruel pain
And suffered from the pale approach of hope.

Night felt assailed her heavy sombre reign;
115 The splendour of some bright eternity
Threatened with this faint beam of wandering Truth
Her empire of the everlasting Nought.

Implacable in her intolerant strength
And confident that she alone was true,
120 She strove to stifle the frail dangerous ray;
Aware of an all-negating immensity
She reared her giant head of Nothingness,
Her mouth of darkness swallowing all that is;
She saw in herself the tenebrous Absolute.

125 But still the light prevailed and still it grew,
And Savitri to her lost self awoke;
Her limbs refused the cold embrace of death,
Her heart-beats triumphed in the grasp of pain;
Her soul persisted claiming for its joy
130 The soul of the beloved now seen no more.

Before her in the stillness of the world
Once more she heard the treading of a god,
And out of the dumb darkness Satyavan,
Her husband, grew into a luminous shade.

135 Then a sound pealed through that dead monstrous realm:
Vast like the surge in a tired swimmer's ears,
Clamouring, a fatal iron-hearted roar,
Death missioned to the night his lethal call.

140 "This is my silent dark immensity,
This is the home of everlasting Night,
This is the secrecy of Nothingness
Entombing the vanity of life's desires.

Hast thou beheld thy source, O transient heart,
And known from what the dream thou art was made?
145 In this stark sincerity of nude emptiness
Hopedst thou still always to last and love?"

The Woman answered not.

Her spirit refused
The voice of Night that knew and Death that thought.

150 In her beginningless infinity
Through her soul's reaches unconfined she gazed;
She saw the undying fountains of her life,
She knew herself eternal without birth.

But still opposing her with endless night
Death, the dire god, inflicted on her eyes
155 The immortal calm of his tremendous gaze:
"Although thou hast survived the unborn void
Which never shall forgive, while Time endures,
The primal violence that fashioned thought,
Forcing the immobile vast to suffer and live,
160 This sorrowful victory only hast thou won
To live for a little without Satyavan.
What shall the ancient goddess give to thee
Who helps thy heart-beats?
Only she prolongs
The nothing dreamed existence and delays
165 With the labour of living thy eternal sleep.
A fragile miracle of thinking clay,
Armed with illusions walks the child of Time.
To fill the void around he feels and dreads,
The void he came from and to which he goes,
170 He magnifies his self and names it God.
He calls the heavens to help his suffering hopes.
He sees above him with a longing heart
Bare spaces more unconscious than himself
That have not even his privilege of mind,
175 And empty of all but their unreal blue,
And peoples them with bright and merciful powers.
For the sea roars around him and earth quakes
Beneath his steps, and fire is at his doors,
And death prowls baying through the woods of life.
180 Moved by the Presences with which he yearns,
He offers in implacable shrines his soul
And clothes all with the beauty of his dreams.
The gods who watch the earth with sleepless eyes
And guide its giant stumblings through the void,
185 Have given to man the burden of his mind;
In his unwilling heart they have lit their fires
And sown in it incurable unrest.
His mind is a hunter upon tracks unknown;
Amusing Time with vain discovery,
190 He deepens with thought the mystery of his fate
And turns to song his laughter and his tears.
His mortality vexing with the immortal's dreams,
Troubling his transience with the infinite's breath,
They gave him hungers which no food can fill;
195 He is the cattle of the shepherd gods.
His body the tether with which he is tied,
They cast for fodder grief and hope and joy:
His pasture ground they have fenced with Ignorance.
Into his fragile undefended breast
200 They have breathed a courage that is met by death,
They have given a wisdom that is mocked by night,
They have traced a journey that foresees no goal.

Aimless man toils in an uncertain world,
Lulled by inconstant pauses of his pain,
205 Scourged like a beast by the infinite desire,
Bound to the chariot of the dreadful gods.

But if thou still canst hope and still wouldst love,
Return to thy body's shell, thy tie to earth,
And with thy heart's little remnants try to live.

210 Hope not to win back to thee Satyavan.
Yet since thy strength deserves no trivial crown,
Gifts I can give to soothe thy wounded life.

The pacts which transient beings make with fate,
And the wayside sweetness earth-bound hearts would pluck,
215 These if thy will accepts make freely thine.
Choose a life's hopes for thy deceiving prize.”

As ceased the ruthless and tremendous Voice,
Unendingly there rose in Savitri,
Like moonlit ridges on a shuddering flood,
220 A stir of thoughts out of some silence born
Across the sea of her dumb fathomless heart.

At last she spoke; her voice was heard by Night:
“I bow not to thee, O huge mask of death,
Black lie of night to the cowed soul of man,
225 Unreal, inescapable end of things,
Thou grim jest played with the immortal spirit.
Conscious of immortality I walk.

A victor spirit conscious of my force,
Not as a suppliant to thy gates I came:
230 Unslain I have survived the clutch of Night.

My first strong grief moves not my seated mind;
My unwept tears have turned to pearls of strength:
I have transformed my ill-shaped brittle clay
Into the hardness of a statued soul.

235 Now in the wrestling of the splendid gods
My spirit shall be obstinate and strong
Against the vast refusal of the world.

I stoop not with the subject mob of minds
Who run to glean with eager satisfied hands
240 And pick from its mire mid many trampling feet
Its scornful small concessions to the weak.

Mine is the labour of the battling gods:
Imposing on the slow reluctant years
The flaming will that reigns beyond the stars,
245 They lay the law of Mind on Matter's works
And win the soul's wish from earth's inconscient Force.

First I demand whatever Satyavan,
My husband, waking in the forest's charm
Out of his long pure childhood's lonely dreams,
250 Desired and had not for his beautiful life.
Give, if thou must, or, if thou canst, refuse.”
Death bowed his head in scornful cold assent,

The builder of this dreamlike earth for man
Who has mocked with vanity all gifts he gave.

255 Uplifting his disastrous voice he spoke:
"Indulgent to the dreams my touch shall break,
I yield to his blind father's longing heart
Kingdom and power and friends and greatness lost
And royal trappings for his peaceful age,
260 The pallid poms of man's declining days,
The silvered decadent glories of life's fall.

To one who wiser grew by adverse Fate,
Goods I restore the deluded soul prefers
To impersonal nothingness's bare sublime.

265 The sensuous solace of the light I give
To eyes which could have found a larger realm,
A deeper vision in their fathomless night.

For that this man desired and asked in vain
While still he lived on earth and cherished hope.

270 Back from the grandeur of my perilous realms
Go, mortal, to thy small permitted sphere!

Hasten swift-footed, lest to slay thy life
The great laws thou hast violated, moved,
Open at last on thee their marble eyes."