

Track 4: Book One, Canto Two, Section 2, lines 186 to end

Till then no mournful line had barred this ray.
On the frail breast of this precarious earth,
Since her orb'd sight in its breath-fastened house,
Opening in sympathy with happier stars
190 Where life is not exposed to sorrowful change,
Remembered beauty death-claimed lids ignore
And wondered at this world of fragile forms
Carried on canvas-strips of shimmering Time,
The impunity of unborn Might's was hers.
195 Although she leaned to bear the human load,
Her walk kept still the measures of the gods.
Earth's breath had failed to stain that brilliant glass:
Unsmear'd with the dust of our mortal atmosphere
It still reflected heaven's spiritual joy.
200 Almost they saw who lived within her light
Her playmate in the sempiternal spheres
Descended from its unattainable realms
In her attracting advent's luminous wake,
The white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss
205 Drifting with burning wings above her days:
Heaven's tranquil shield guarded the missioned child.
A glowing orbit was her early term,
Years like gold raiment of the gods that pass;
Her youth sat throned in calm felicity.
210 But joy cannot endure until the end:
There is a darkness in terrestrial things
That will not suffer long too glad a note.
On her too closed the inescapable Hand:
The armed Immortal bore the snare of Time.
215 One dealt with her who meets the burdened great.
Assigner of the ordeal and the path
Who chooses in this holocaust of the soul
Death, fall and sorrow as the spirit's goads,
The dubious godhead with his torch of pain
220 Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world
And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.
August and pitiless in his calm outlook,
Heightening the Eternal's dreadful strategy,
He measured the difficulty with the might
225 And dug more deep the gulf that all must cross.
Assailing her divinest elements,
He made her heart kin to the striving human heart
And forced her strength to its appointed road.
For this she had accepted mortal breath;
230 To wrestle with the Shadow she had come
And must confront the riddle of man's birth
And life's brief struggle in dumb Matter's night.
Whether to bear with Ignorance and death
Or hew the ways of Immortality,
235 To win or lose the godlike game for man,
Was her soul's issue thrown with Destiny's dice.
But not to submit and suffer was she born;

To lead, to deliver was her glorious part.
Here was no fabric of terrestrial make
240 Fit for a day's use by busy careless Powers.
An image fluttering on the screen of Fate,
Half-animated for a passing show,
Or a castaway on the ocean of Desire
Flung to the eddies in a ruthless sport
245 And tossed along the gulfs of Circumstance,
A creature born to bend beneath the yoke,
A chattel and a plaything of Time's lords,
Or one more pawn who comes destined to be pushed
One slow move forward on a measureless board
250 In the chess-play of the earth-soul with Doom,—
Such is the human figure drawn by Time.
A conscious frame was here, a self-born Force.
In this enigma of the dusk of God,
This slow and strange uneasy compromise
255 Of limiting Nature with a limitless Soul,
Where all must move between an ordered Chance
And an uncaring blind Necessity,
Too high the fire spiritual dare not blaze.
If once it met the intense original Flame,
260 An answering touch might shatter all measures made
And earth sink down with the weight of the Infinite.
A gaol is this immense material world:
Across each road stands armed a stone-eyed Law,
At every gate the huge dim sentinels pace.
265 A grey tribunal of the Ignorance,
An Inquisition of the priests of Night
In judgment sit on the adventurer soul,
And the dual tables and the Karmic norm
Restrain the Titan in us and the God:
270 Pain with its lash, joy with its silver bribe
Guard the Wheel's circling immobility.
A bond is put on the high-climbing mind,
A seal on the too large wide-open heart;
Death stays the journeying discoverer, Life.
275 Thus is the throne of the Inconscient safe
While the tardy coilings of the aeons pass
And the Animal browses in the sacred fence
And the gold Hawk can cross the skies no more.
But one stood up and lit the limitless flame.
280 Arraigned by the dark Power that hates all bliss
In the dire court where life must pay for joy,
Sentenced by the mechanic justicer
To the afflicting penalty of man's hopes,
Her head she bowed not to the stark decree
285 Baring her helpless heart to destiny's stroke.
So bows and must the mind-born will in man
Obedient to the statutes fixed of old,
Admitting without appeal the nether gods.
In her the superhuman cast its seed.
290 Inapt to fold its mighty wings of dream
Her spirit refused to hug the common soil,

Or, finding all life's golden meanings robbed,
Compound with earth, struck from the starry list,
Or quench with black despair the God-given light.

295 Accustomed to the eternal and the true,
Her being conscious of its divine founts
Asked not from mortal frailty pain's relief,
Patched not with failure bargain or compromise.

A work she had to do, a word to speak:
300 Writing the unfinished story of her soul
In thoughts and actions graved in Nature's book,
She accepted not to close the luminous page,
Cancel her commerce with eternity,
Or set a signature of weak assent

305 To the brute balance of the world's exchange.
A force in her that toiled since earth was made,
Accomplishing in life the great world-plan,
Pursuing after death immortal aims,
Repugned to admit frustration's barren role,

310 Forfeit the meaning of her birth in Time,
Obey the government of the casual fact
Or yield her high destiny up to passing Chance.

In her own self she found her high recourse;
She matched with the iron law her sovereign right:

315 Her single will opposed the cosmic rule.
To stay the wheels of Doom this greatness rose.
At the Unseen's knock upon her hidden gates
Her strength made greater by the lightning's touch
Awoke from slumber in her heart's recess.

320 It bore the stroke of That which kills and saves.
Across the awful march no eye can see,
Barring its dreadful route no will can change,
She faced the engines of the universe;
A heart stood in the way of the driving wheels:

325 Its giant workings paused in front of a mind,
Its stark conventions met the flame of a soul.

A magic leverage suddenly is caught
That moves the veiled Ineffable's timeless will:
A prayer, a master act, a king idea

330 Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.
Then miracle is made the common rule,
One mighty deed can change the course of things;
A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.

All now seems Nature's massed machinery;
335 An endless servitude to material rule
And long determination's rigid chain,
Her firm and changeless habits aping Law,
Her empire of unconscious deft device
Annul the claim of man's free human will.

340 He too is a machine amid machines;
A piston brain pumps out the shapes of thought,
A beating heart cuts out emotion's modes;
An insentient energy fabricates a soul.

Or the figure of the world reveals the signs
345 Of a tied Chance repeating her old steps

In circles around Matter's binding-posts.
A random series of inept events
To which reason lends illusive sense, is here,
Or the empiric Life's instinctive search,
350 Or a vast ignorant mind's colossal work.
But wisdom comes, and vision grows within:
Then Nature's instrument crowns himself her king;
He feels his witnessing self and conscious power;
His soul steps back and sees the Light supreme.
355 A Godhead stands behind the brute machine.
This truth broke in in a triumph of fire;
A victory was won for God in man,
The deity revealed its hidden face.
The great World-Mother now in her arose:
360 A living choice reversed fate's cold dead turn,
Affirmed the spirit's tread on Circumstance,
Pressed back the senseless dire revolving Wheel
And stopped the mute march of Necessity.
A flaming warrior from the eternal peaks
365 Empowered to force the door denied and closed
Smote from Death's visage its dumb absolute
And burst the bounds of consciousness and Time.