

THE BLOOD-LOTUS.

THE ashen sky, too sick for sleep, makes my face  
grey; my senses swoon.

Here, in the glamour of the moon, will not some  
pitying godhead weep

For cold grey anguish of her eyes, that look to God,  
and look in vain,  
For death, the anodyne of pain, for sleep, earth's  
trivial paradise?

Sleep I forget. Her silky breath no longer fans my  
ears; I dream  
I float on some forgotten stream that hath a savour  
still of death,

A sweet warm smell of hidden flowers whose heavy  
petals kiss the sun,  
Fierce tropic poisons every one that fume and  
sweat through forest hours.

They grow in darkness; heat beguiles their slug-  
gish kisses; in the wood  
They breathe no murmur that is good, and Satan  
in their blossom smiles.

They murder with the old perfume that maddens  
all men's blood; we die  
Fresh from some corpse-clothed memory, some  
secret redolence of gloom,

Some darkling murmurous song of lust quite  
strange to man and beast and bird,

Silent in power, not overheard by any snake that  
eats the dust.

No crimson-hooded viper knows ; no silver-crested  
asp has guessed  
The strange soft secrets of my breast ; no leprous  
cobra shall disclose

The many-seated, multiform, divine, essential joys  
that these  
Dank odours bring, that starry seas wash white in  
vain ; intense and warm

The scents fulfil ; they permeate all lips, all arter-  
ies, and fire  
New murmured music on the lyre that throbs the  
horrors they create.

Omniscient blossom ! Is thy red slack bosom  
fresher for my kiss ?  
Are thy loves sharper ? Hast thou bliss in all the  
sorrow of the dead ?

Why art thou paler when the moon grows loftier in  
the troublous sky ?  
Why dost thou beat and heave when I press lips of  
fire, hell's princeliest boon,

To thy mad petals, green and gold like angels'  
wings, when as a flood  
God's essence fills them, and the blood throughout  
their web grows icy cold ?

To thy red centre are my eyes held fast and fervent,  
as at night  
Some sad miasma lends a light of strange and si-  
lent blasphemies

To lure a soul to hell, to draw some saint's charred  
lust, to tempt, to win  
Another sacrifice to sin, another poet's heart to  
gnaw

With dubious remorse. Ho! flame of torturing  
flower-love! sacrament  
Of Satan, triple element of mystery and love and  
shame,

Green, gold, and crimson, in my heart you strive  
with Jesus for its realm,  
While Sorrow's tears would overwhelm the warriors  
of either part.

Jesus would lure me: from His side the gleaming  
torrent of the spear  
Withdraws, my soul with joy and fear waits for  
sweet blood to pour its tide

Of warm delight—in vain! so cold, so watery, so  
slack it flows,  
It leaves me moveless as a rose, albeit her flakes  
are manifold.

He hath no scent to drive men mad; no mystic  
fragrance from his skin  
Sheds a loose hint of subtle sin such as the queen  
Faustina had.

Thou drawest me. Thy golden lips are carven  
Cleopatra wise.  
Large, full, and moist, within them lies the silver  
rampart, whence there slips

That rosy flame of love, the spring of blood at my  
light bidding spilt;  
And thy desires, if aught thou wilt, are softer at my  
suffering.

Fill up with Death Life's loving-cup! Give me the  
knowledge, me the power  
For some new sin one little hour, provoking Hell to  
belch us up.

So in some damned abyss of woe thy chant should  
dazzle as of old,  
Thy kisses burn like molten gold, thy visions swing  
me to and fro.

Strange fascinations whirl and wind about my  
spirit lying coils ;  
Thy charm enticeth, for the spoils of victory, all an  
evil mind.

Thy perfume doth confound my thought, new long-  
ings echo, and I crave  
Doubtful liaisons with the grave and loves of Par-  
thia for sport.

I think perhaps no longer yet, but dream and lust  
for stranger things  
Than ever sucked the lips of kings, or fed the tears  
of Mahomet.

Quaint carven vampire bats, unseen in curious  
hollows of the trees,  
Or deadlier serpents coiled at ease round carcasses  
of birds unclean ;

All wandering changeful spectre shapes that dance  
in slow sweet measure round  
And merge themselves in the profound, nude  
women and distorted apes

Grotesque and hairy, in their rage more rampant  
than the stallion steed ;  
There is no help: their horrid need on these pale  
women they assuage.

Wan breasts too pendulous, thin hands waving so  
aimlessly, they breathe  
Faint sickly kisses, and inweave my head in quiet  
burial-bands.

The silent troops recede ; within the fiery circle of  
their glance  
Warm writhing woman-horses dance a shameless  
Bacchanal of sin ;

Foam whips their reeking lips, and still the flower-  
witch nestles to my lips,  
Twines her swart lissome legs and hips, half ser-  
pent and half devil, till

My whole self seems to lie in her ; her kisses draw  
my breath ; my face  
Loses its lustre in the grace of her quick bosom ;  
sinister

The raving spectres reel ; I see beyond my Circe's  
eyes no shape  
Save vague cloud-measures that escape the dance's  
whirling witchery.

Their song is in my ears, that burn with their me-  
lodious wickedness ;  
But in her heart my sorceress has songs more sin-  
ful, that I learn

As she sings slowly all their shame, and makes me  
tingle with delight  
At new debaucheries, whose might rekindles blood  
and bone to flame.

The circle gathers. Negresses howl in the naked  
dance, and wheel  
On poinard-blades of poisoned steel, and weep out  
blood in agonies ;

Strange beast and reptile writhe ; the song grows  
high and melancholy now ;  
The perfume savours every brow with lust unutter-  
able of wrong.

Clothed with my flower-bride I sit, a harlot in a  
harlot's dress,  
And laugh with careless wickedness that strews  
the broad road of the Pit

With vine and myrtle and thy flower, my harlot-  
maiden, who for man  
Now first forsakest thy leman, thy Eve, my Lilith,  
in this bower

Which we indwell, a deathless three, changeless  
and changing, as the pyre  
Of earthly love becomes a fire to heat us through  
eternity.

I have forgotten Christ at last ; he may look back,  
grown amorous,  
And call across the gulf to us, and signal kisses  
through the vast :

We shall disdain, clasp faster yet, and mock his  
newer pangs, and call  
With stars and voices musical, jeers his touched  
heart shall not forget.

I would have pitied him. This flower spits blood  
upon him ; so must I  
Cast ashes through the misty sky to mock his  
faded crown of power,

And with our laughter's nails refix his torn flesh  
faster to the wood,  
And with more cruel zest make good the shackles  
of the Crucifix.

So be it! In thy arms I rest, lulled into silence by  
the strain  
Of sweet love-whispers, while I drain damnation  
from thy tawny breast:

Nor heed the haggard sun's eclipse, feeling thy per-  
fume fill my hair,  
And all thy dark caresses wear sin's raiment on thy  
melting lips—

Nay, by the witchcraft of thy charms to sleep, nor  
dream that God survive;  
To wake, this only to contrive—fresh passions in  
thy naked arms;

And, at that moment when thy breath mixes with  
mine, like wine, to call  
Each memory, one merged into all, to kiss, to  
sleep, to mate with death!