

ODE TO VENUS CALLIPYGE.

WHERE was light when the body came
Out of the womb of a perished prayer?
Where was life when the sultry air,
Hot with the lust of night and shame,
Brooded on dust, when thy shoulders bare
Shone on the sea with a sudden flame
Into all Time to abundant fame?

*Daughter of Lust by the foam of the sea!
Mother of flame! Sister of shame!
Tiger that Sin nor her son cannot tame!
Worship to thee! Glory to thee!
Venus Callipyge, mother of me.*

Fruitless foam of a sterile sea,
Wanton waves of a vain desire,
Maddening billows flecked with fire,
Storms that lash on the brine, and flee,
Dead delights, insatiate ire
Broke like a flower to the birth of thee,
Venus Callipyge, mother of me!

Deep wet eyes that are violet-blue!
Haggard cheeks that may blush no more!
Body bruised daintily, touch of gore
Where the sharp fierce teeth have bitten through
The olive skin that thy sons adore,
That they die for daily, are slain anew
By manifold hate; for their tale is few.

Few are thy sons, but as fierce as dawn.
Sweet are the seconds, weary the days.

Nights? Ah! thine image a thousand ways
Is smitten and kissed on the fiery lawn
Where the wash of the waves of thy native bays
Laps weary limbs, that of thee have drawn
Laughter and fire for their souls in pawn.

O thy strong sons! they are dark as night,
Cruel and barren and false as the sea.
They have cherished Hell for the love of thee,
Filled with thy lust and abundant might,
Filled with the phantom desire to free
Body and soul from the sound and sight
Of a world and a God that doth not right.

O thy dark daughters! their breasts are slack,
Their lips so large and as poppies red;
They lie in a furious barren bed;
They lie on their faces; their eyelids lack
Tears, and their cheeks are as roses dead;
White are their throats, but upon the back
Red blood is clotted in gouts of black.

All on their sides are the wounds of lust
Wet, from the home of their auburn hair
Down to the feet that we find so fair;
Where the red sword has a secret thrust,
Pain, and delight, and desire they share.
Verily pain! and thy daughters trust
Thou canst bid roses spring out of dust.

Mingle, ye children of such a queen,
Mingle, and meet, and sow never a seed!
Mingle, and tingle, and kiss, and bleed
With the blood of the life of the Lampsacene,
With the teeth that know never a pitiful deed
But fret and foam over with kisses obscene—
Mingle and weep for what years have been.

Never a son nor a daughter grow
From your waste limbs, lest the goddess weep ;
Fill up the ranks from the babes that sleep
Far in the arms of a god of snow.
Conquer the world, that her throne may keep
More of its pride, and its secret woe
Flow through all earth as the rivers flow.

Which of the gods is like thee, our queen ?
Venus Callipyge, nameless, nude,
Thou with the knowledge of all indued,
Secrets of life and the dreams that mean
Loves that are not, as are mortals', hued
All rose and lily, but linger unseen,
Passion-flowers purpled, garlands of green !

Who like thyself shall command our ways ?
Who has such pleasures and pains for hire ?
Who can awake such a mortal fire
In the veins of a man, that deathly days
Have robbed of the masteries of desire ?
Who can give garlands of fadeless bays
Unto the sorrow and pain we praise ?

Yea, we must praise, though the deadly shade
Fall on the morrow, though fires of hell
Harrow our vitals ; a miracle
Springs at thy kisses, for thou hast made
Anguish and sorrow desirable ;
Torment of hell as the leaves that fade
Quickly forgotten, despised, decayed.

They are decayed, but thou springest again,
Mother of mystery, barren, who bearest
Flowers of most comeliest children, who wearest
Wounds for delight, whose desire shall stain
Star-space with blood as the price thou sharest
Sweet with thy lovers, whose passing pain
Ripens to marvellous after-gain.

Thou art the fair, the wise, the divine!
Thou art our mother, our goddess, our life!
Thou art our passion, our sorrow, our strife!
Thou, on whose forehead no lights ever shine,
Thou, our redeemer, our mistress, our wife,
Thou, barren sister of deathlier brine,
Venus Callipyge, mother of mine!

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