

## THE REAPER

I N middle music of Apollo's corn  
She stood, the reaper, challenging a kiss ;  
The lips of her were fresher than the morn,  
The perfume of her skin was ambergris ;  
The sun had kissed her body into brown ;  
Ripe breasts thrown forward to the summer breeze ;  
Warm tints of red lead fancy to the crown,  
Her coils of chestnut, in abundant ease,  
That bound the stately head. What joy of youth  
Lifted her nostril to respire the wind ?  
What pride of being ? What triumphal truth  
Acclaimed her queen to her imperial mind ?

I watched, a leopard, stealthy in the corn,  
As if a tigress held herself above ;  
My body quivered, eager to be torn,  
Stung by the snake of some convulsive love !  
The leopard changed his spots ; for in me leapt  
The mate, the tiger. Murderous I sprang  
Across the mellow earth : my senses swept,  
One torrent flame, one soul-dissolving pang.  
How queenly bent her body to the grip !  
How lithe it slips, her bosom to my own !

The throat leans back, to tantalise the lip,  
The sudden shame of her is overthrown!  
O maiden of the spirit of the wheat,  
One ripening sunbeam thrills thee to the soul,  
Electric from red main to amber feet!  
The blue skies focus, as a burning bowl,  
The restless passion of the universe  
Into our mutual anger and distress,  
To be forbidden (the Creator's curse)  
To comprehend the other's loveliness.  
We cannot grasp the ecstasy of this;  
Only we strain and struggle and renew  
The utter bliss of the unending kiss,  
The mutual pang that shudders through and  
through,  
Repeated and repeated, as the light  
Can build a partial palace of the day,  
So, in our anguish for the infinite,  
One moment gives, the other takes away.  
(I, the mere rhymers, she, the queen of rhyme,  
As sweeps her sickle in the falling wheat,  
Her body's sleek intoxicating time,  
The music of the motion of her feet!)

I swoon in that imperial embrace—  
Lay we asleep till evening, or dead?  
I knew not, but the wonder of her face  
Grew as the dawn and never satiated.  
She knew not in her strong imperial soul  
How hopeless was the slavery of life,

How by the part man learns to love the whole,  
How each man's mistress calls herself a wife.  
I tired not of the tigress limbs and lips—  
Only, my soul was weary of itself,  
Being so impotent, who only sips  
The dewdrops from the flower-cup of an elf,  
Not comprehending the mysterious sea  
Of black swift waters that can drink it up,  
Not trusting life to its own ecstasy,  
Not mixing poison with the loving-cup.  
I, maker of mad rhymes, the reaper she!  
We lingered by a day upon the lawn.  
O thou, the other Reaper! come to me!  
Thy dark embraces have a germ of Dawn!