

” *Αβυσσος*

This is th’ abyss! Implacable disease  
Ssprings from the black defilement of that kiss,  
That foul embrace that moulds these agonies.  
This is th’ abyss!

A serpent was my whore; her hellish hiss,  
Her slaver venoms soul and strength; life flees  
Repugnant from the corpse-caress. Ah, this

Rots blood and body; see, the liquor’s lees  
I drained, whose pangs are fierce with Syphilis.  
Christ God, damn soul, but quench the pain of these!  
This is th’ abyss!

\* \* \*

This is th’ abyss. Behold wherein I lurk  
The lazar-house my mind, wherein do work  
The horrid charnel-priests, whose loathly song  
Sickens my soul, and quells the spirit strong.  
Hell-fire within my heart! and poisoned blood  
Through every vein and artery pours a flood  
Of devilish pain. This is th’ abyss indeed;  
Fears on my mind and pains on body feed,

Serpents of hell that gnaw my bones, nor quench  
The fires of torture with the sickly stench  
Of many a venomed drug, that clings and cleaves,  
An clutches like a dead man's hand, and weaves  
Its subtle scheme of agony through me.  
Is God to help a mortal? Or are we  
Caught in Fate's mesh without a hope to 'scape?  
Ah! look around! In every darksome shape!  
Fearful, nude Venus grins. Alcione  
Mocks with her sickening smile. Hill, moor, and lea  
Make me to hate them. Only Clytie there,  
Wild arms thrown wide, an agony of hair  
Streamed fierce behind her, seems to sympathize;  
Through selfish, yet despair in both our eyes  
Gives us a link of love. The darkling room  
Is fearsome; one red light throughout the gloom  
Thrills my void veins with horror. On the couch  
The gruesome hound with sleepy stare doth crouch.  
His red hard eye upon me. Every shelf  
Of noisome books reflects my hideous self!  
Lucky I burnt my picture! Snakes on floor  
Writhe, lick my legs, I fear them. By the door  
Yon horrid panther snarls. His eye inspires  
Fresh torments, to invade my soul with fires  
Too angry to assuage, and in its glass  
I see myself. I hate myself, alas!

More than all these. I cannot rid me of  
Myself, my hates, my tortures, or my love ;  
My golden-haired Greek goddess, who divines  
In me a god, who cannot read the lines  
Of anguish on my forehead, neither scent  
The poison of breast, blood, and excrement !  
I gnash my teeth in impotent despair  
That I may never hold her heavenly hair  
Again, nor bite her lips, as once my teeth  
Met in her cheek, to cull a rosy wreath  
Of blood upon it, nor assuage the pangs  
Of love with hardy limbs, and dolorous fangs,  
And sweating body, crimsoning with gore,  
As her mad mouth devoured me. Never more  
Though years decay ! With them my blood decays,  
My bones rot inwardly, the venom'd days  
Sink shaft on shaft of agony, the years  
Bring new distortions, miseries, and fears ;  
New torture to my spirit, and forgot  
Of God, and health, and loveliness, I rot.  
Outward, my face and breast have leprous sores ;  
Inward, my filthy blood ; its poison pours  
Corruption through me. In the eyes of man  
I am contemned, the haughty one. God's fan  
Is eager on my threshing-floor ; his rod  
Smites no vain stroke. Oh, how I curse thee, God !

What is my aid? But yet to Satan's power  
I lend my utmost vigour for an hour,  
To wrest Thy damned throne from out thy hands!  
My aid? How shall I burst thy bitter bands,  
Strike off thy shackles, from thy fetters break,  
I, whom Thy name appals, whose vitals quake  
At the dim thought of Thee? Have mercy, Christ!  
Who suffered on the cross, who sacrificed  
Thy heaven for three hours. Ah! pity me,  
For years, not hours, condemned to agony  
Thrice Thine! Have pity, hear me, virgin queen,  
Whose pangs of childbirth were seven times more keen  
Than all, since love and memory of joy  
Thou hadst not, but the fear of shame to cloy  
Even the hope of motherhood. But I,  
Cut off from love and joy; its memory  
One black hell of distorted pain; my shame  
More horrid than that first unholy flame,  
That burnt my blood, and flung me in her arms,  
Whose filthy kisses and thrice loathly charms,  
Her purple lips, her acrid redolence,  
Her black lewd limbs, her breasts, whose foul incense  
Smoked like hell's mouth though pendulous they hung,  
Her devilish black belly, and her tongue  
Sharp as a tiger's tooth, lured on my lust.  
Oh! God in heaven! It is turned to dust

And dung and corpse-flesh! I can see even here  
(For changeful spectres haunt me) how a tear  
Of blood stood on my breast at her first bite:  
And day grew dusk, and twilight turned to night,  
And her vast coffin stood at hand. And there  
Naked as hell, legs wide flung out in the air,  
She lay and called me 'Satan'. As I came,  
Feeling a Satan, such a deathly flame  
Of lust of loathliness was kindled here  
In my bad blood, I leapt upon the bier,  
And consummated all the strange desire  
That burnt and branded all my blood with fire,  
Buried my teeth and limbs in swarthy flesh,  
While blood and sweat begat desire afresh,  
And yet twelve times the black womb vomited,  
And we lay there chilled bitterly, and dead,  
While thy lewd minions covered with a pall  
Our prostrate bodies, and with musical  
Loud voices raised the chant of funeral,  
Turned to fierce blasphemies, and words obscene.  
Nine hours we lay as dead, and then my queen  
Writhed in my arms again, and blood leapt up  
To our fresh kisses to fill full the cup  
Of horror to the brim. Again as dead  
Were we borne forth, and then—Can I forget?  
I gripped thy glossy throat. My fingers met

Crushing through the skin and muscle, nerve and vein,  
And in that supreme agony of pain  
I drained myself of lust! That final clasp  
Was consummated in thy dying gasp!  
The frightful struggle ended; I leapt high,  
Caught sword, bared breast, and hurled myself to die,  
But thy mad slaves attacked me. These I slew  
—So I half guess—the next thing my soul knew,  
I was alone and naked in my bed.  
The sword, snapped, on the floor, with hateful red  
Blotches of blood, and clots of bloody hair  
On its infernal steel. And unaware  
Of thy last gift I slept. I have it now,  
Thy gift from Hell's door! Would to God somehow  
I had thee once alive—to slay again!—  
Ah! Who crawls in upon me like a vain  
Damned ghost? Ugh! blotchy spectre! Fiend, aroint!  
Ah Christ, he creeps toward me; every joint  
Quivers with passion; he will tear my eyes!  
Away! more liquor! come, green cockatrice!  
Come, filthy draught of fire! green dancing fiend  
On serpent's vomit and whore's spittle weaned,  
Fire my fierce brain! resolve my rotted heart!  
Fill me with drunkenness! How changed thou art,  
Body, from that these women loved so well!  
God! will they still lust after me in Hell?

But this is Hell! Aha! if you were me,  
Blind staring cripple yonder, you should see  
Whether I lie! A cripple are you then?  
Look upon me, the leper among men,  
The corpse among the living! Intercede,  
Good pitying pitiable Christ! My need  
Is viler than my sins! Old sins, you tire!  
Come, some new devilry to reinspire  
My lips with frenzied laughter! Vain, ah, vain!  
Th' extreme of pleasure and the worst of pain,  
I have tasted all. No more, all hope must end—  
Hope! Damn that word! It mocks me like that friend  
Who comes to see me daily—I shall die  
Happier if I kill him; so shall I  
Reap on his body the last tare of lust,  
And shrivel back into my primal dust  
Filled with all worms and hornéd beasts with wings,  
The reptile that sweats acrid juice, and stings  
With bloody teeth and tongue! Oh, all the room  
Spits fire and dung, and vomits forth a spume  
Of tawny sickly death! All blotched and dark,  
The putrid air is vital with a spark  
Of fiery eyes of yonder filthy hound!  
God! I am reeling brain and body! I swound!  
The floor heaves up! The worms devour my breast!  
Beasts and lewd fish and wingèd things infest

Each vital part! Screech, rats! more liquor! Come!  
Rumble, you rotting whore-skin of a drum!  
I care not! Scream, you rats! Snakes, bite and hiss!  
Hell's spawn, I mouth you with this putrid kiss!  
Satan! Damnation! This is the abyss!