

The Athanor

By Aleister Crowley

Libertine touches of small fingers creep
Among my curls to-night pale ghastly kisses,
Like mournful ghosts roused from their ruined sleep
By clamorous cries of murder. Strange abysses
Loom in the vista keen eyes penetrate,
Vague forecasts of immeasurable fate.

O thou beloved blood, that wells and weeps!
O thou beloved mouth, that beats and bleeds!
O mystic bosom where some serpent sleeps,
Sweet mockery of a thousand saintlier creeds!
Even I, that breathe your perfume, taste your breath,
Know, even this hour, ye are not life, but death!

No death ye bring more godlike than desire,
When seas roar tempest-lashed, and foam is flung
Raging on pitiless crags, and gloomy fire
Lurks in the master-cloud; corpses are swung
Helpless and horrible in trough and crest—
That death were music, and the lord of rest.

No death ye bring as when the storm is rolled,
An imminent giant on the sun-ripped snows,
Where icy fingers grip the overbold
Son of their secrets, and like springes close
On his choked throat and frozen body—Nay!
That death were twilight, and the gate of Day!

No death ye bring as his, that grips the flag
In desperate fingers, and with bloody sword
Flames up the thundering breach, while bastioned crag,
Glacis, and pent-house belch their monstrous horde
Of hideous engines shattering—this strife
Clears the straight road of Glory and of Life!

Nay: but the hateful death that stings the soul
Into rebellion; the insensate death
That chokes its own delight with words that roll
Mightier-mouthed than the archangel's breath;
The death that murders courage ere it drink
The soul's own life-blood on the desperate brink!

So, from the languid fingers in my curls
And dreamy worship of a woman's eyes,
I look beyond the miserable whirls
Of foolish measures woven in the skies;
Beyond the thoughtless stars: beyond God's sleep:
Beyond the deep: beneath the deadly deep!

Infinite rings of luminous ether move
At first amid the blackness that I seek:
Infinite motion and amazing love
Deaden the lustre of the night. I speak
The cry of silence, that is heard unspoken;
That, being heard, rings evermore unbroken.

Silence, deep silence. Not a shudder stirs
The vast demesne of unforgetful space,
No comet's lunatic rush: no meteor whirls,
No star dares breathe, no planet knows his place
In that supreme unquiet quietude.
I am the master of my own deep mood.

I am the master. Yea, no doubt I rule
The whole mad universe by will extended—
Who whispers then, 'O miserable fool!
This night thy might and majesty are ended;
Thy soul shall be required of thee'? I heard
This voice, and knew it for my proper word!

Yea, mine own voice: the higher spirit speaks,
Stemming the hands that guide, the arms that hold,
Even the infinite brain: that spirit seeks
A loftier dawn of more ephemeral gold—
Ephemeral, and eternal. Droop thine head,
O God! for thou must suffer this, I said.

Droop thy wide pinions, O thou mortal God!
Sink thy vast forehead, and let Life consume
The miserable life thy feet have trod
Beneath them, that thine own life in its doom
Fall, in its resurrection to arise
Stoop, that its holier hope may cleave the skies.

Power, power, and power! O single sacrifice
On thine own altar: let thy savour steam
Up, through the domes of broken Paradise;

Up, by Euphrates' unimagined stream;
Up, by strange river and mysterious lawn
To some impossible diadem of dawn!

So the mere orderly ruling of events
Shall change and blossom to a finer flower,
Until it serve to worlds and elements
For aspiration in the nobler hour—
Not mere repression, but the hope and crown
Of fallen hierarchies no more cast down.

O misery of triple love and grief
And hope! O joy of hatred and despair
And happiness! The little hour is brief,
And the lithe fingers soothe the listless hair
Less, and the kisses swoon to tenderer sighs
And little sobs of sleeping ecstasies.

No! for the envy of the infinite
Crushes the juice from out the poppy's stem,
And brown-stained fingers wring the petals white,
And weary lips seek lotus-life in them
Vainly: the lotus burns above the tomb—
Yea, but in thought's unfathomable womb!

For spiritual life and love and light
Climb the swayed ladder of our various fate;
The steep rude stair that mocks the hero's might,
Casts off the wise, and crumbles with the great.
Yet from the highest crown no blossom fell,
Save one, to bring salvation unto Hell.

O angel of my spiritual desire!
O luminous master of the silver feet!
O passionate rose of infinite white fire!
O cross of sacrifice made bitter-sweet!
O wide-wing, star-brow, veritable lord!
O mystic bearer of the flaming sword!

O brows half seen, O visionary star
Seen in the fragrant breezes of the East
O lover of my love, O avatar
Of the All-One, O mystical High Priest!
O thou before whose eyes my weak eyes fail,
Wonderful warden of the Holy Grail!

O thou, mine angel, whom these eyes have seen,
 These hands have handled, and this mouth has kissed!
O thou, the very tongue of fire, the clean
 Sweet-scented presence of a holier Christ!
Listen, and answer, and behold! My wings
Droop, O thou stronger than the immortal kings!

My flame burns dim! O bring the broken jar
 And alabaster casket, and dispense
The oil that flows from that supernal star,
 And holy fountains of the Influence.
Bring peace, and strength, and quicken in my heart
Mastery of night-fear and the day-flung dart.

Yea! from the limit of the fallen day,
 And barren ocean of ungathered Time,
Bring Night, and bring Eternity, and stay
 With white wings pointing where tired feet may climb:
Even the pathway where shed blood ran deep
To build red roses in the land of Sleep.

O guardian of the pallid hours of night!
 O tireless watcher of the smitten noon!
O sworded with the majesty of light,
 O girded with the glory of the moon!
Angel of absolute splendour! Link of mine
Old weary spirit with the All-Divine!

Ship that shalt carry me by many winds
 Driven on the limitless ocean! Mighty sword,
By which I force that barrier of the mind's
 Miscomprehension of its own true lord!
Listen, and answer, and behold my brow
Fiery with hope! Bend down, and touch it now!

Press the twin dawn of thy desirous lips
 In the swart masses of my hair; bend close,
And shroud all earth in masterless eclipse,
 While my heart's murmur through thy being flows,
To carry up the prayer, as incense teems
Skyward, to those immeasurable streams!

Breathe the creative Sigh upon my mouth
 That even the body may become the soul:
Cry, as the chained Eagle of the South,
 'A house of death,' and make my spirit whole!

Touch with pure balm the five mysterious wounds!
Come! come away! but not your mighty sounds!

O wind of all the world! O silent river!
O sea of seas! O flower of all the flowers
O fire! O spirit! Beam thou on for ever
Through æons of illimitable hours!
Kiss thou my forehead, let thy tender breath
Woo me to life, and my desire to death!

I shall be ready for it by-and-by,
That sharp initiation, when the whole
Body is torn with sundering pangs, and I,
The very conscious essence of the soul,
Am rent with agony, as when the pale
Christ heard the shriek of the dividing veil.

That awful mystery, its heart torn out,
Palpitates on the altar-stone of life:
That broken self, that hears the triumph-shout
Of its own voice beneath the falling knife,
When, like a bad dream changing, swiftly grows
A new soul's joy, a fuller-petalled rose.

Many the spirits broken for one man;
Many the men that perish to create
One God the more; many the weary and wan
Old Gods that die to constitute a Fate:
How many Fates then, think you, must control
The stainless aspiration of the soul?

Not one. I tell you, destiny is sure,
Yet moves no finger: though it tune my tongue,
My tongue shall tune it too: my words endure
As destiny decays: my hands are flung
In prayer to Heaven—nay, to mine own crown,
To raise myself, and not to drag it down!

O holiest Lord of the divine white flame
Of brilliance sworded in the temple sky!
O thou who knowest my most secret name,
Who whisperest when only thou and I
Make up our universe: bestow thy kiss:
Arise! Come, let us pierce the old abyss!

Rise! Move! Appear! Let us go forth together,

Into the solemn passionless profound,
Into the darkness, and the thrilling weather,
Into the silence louder than all sound,
Into the vast implacable inane!
Come, let us journey thither once again!