

THE ALTAR OF ARTEMIS

(By Aleister Crowley. From *The Soul of Osiris*. 1901)

WHERE, in the coppice, oak and pine
And mystic yew and elm are found,
Sweeping the skies, that grow divine
With the dark wind's despairing sound,
The wind that roars from the profound,
And smites the mountain-tops, and calls
Mute spirits to black festivals,
And feasts in valleys iron-bound,
Desolate crags, and barren ground;—
There in the strong storm-shaken grove
Swings the pale censer-fire for love.

The foursquare altar, rightly hewn,
And overlaid with beaten gold,
Stands in the gloom; the stealthy tune
Of singing maidens overbold
Desires mad mysteries untold,
With strange eyes kindling, as the fleet
Implacable untiring feet
Weave mystic figures manifold
That draw down angels to behold
The moving music, and the fire
Of their intolerable desire.

For, maddening to fiercer thought,
The fiery limbs requicken, wheel
In formless furies, subtly wrought
Of swifter melodies than steel
That flashes in the fight: the peal
Of amorous laughters choking sense,
And madness kissing violence,
Ring like dead horsemen; bodies reel
Drunken with motion; spirits feel
The strange constraint of gods that clip
From Heaven to mingle lip and lip.

The gods descend to dance; the noise
Of hungry kissings, as a swoon,
Faints for excess of its own joys,
And mystic beams assail the moon,
With flames of their infernal noon;
While the smooth incense, without breath,

Spreads like some scented flower of death,
Over the grove; the lovers' boon
Of sleep shall steal upon them soon,
And lovers' lips, from lips withdrawn,
Seek dimmer bosoms till the dawn.

Yet on the central altar lies
The sacrament of kneaded bread,
With blood made one, the sacrifice
To those, the living, who are dead—
Strange gods and goddesses, that shed
Monstrous desires of secret things
Upon their worshippers, from wings
One lucent web of light, from head
One labyrinthine passion-fed
Palace of love, from breathing rife
With secrets of forbidden life.

But not the sunlight, nor the stars,
Nor any light but theirs alone,
Nor iron masteries of Mars,
Nor Saturn's misconceiving zone,
Nor any planet's may be shown,
Within the circle of the grove,
Where burn the sanctities of love:
Nor may the foot of man be known,
Nor evil eyes of mothers thrown
On maidens that desire the kiss
Only of maiden Artemis.

But horned and huntress from the skies,
She bends her lips upon the breeze,
And pure and perfect in her eyes,
Burn magical virginity's
Sweet intermittent sorceries.
When the slow wind from her sweet word
In all their conchéd ears is heard.
And like the slumber of the seas,
There murmur through the holy trees
The kisses of the goddess keen,
And sighs and laughter caught between.

For, swooning at the fervid lips
Of Artemis, the maiden kisses
Sob, and the languid body slips
Down to enamelled wildernesses.
Fallen and loose the shaken tresses;
Fallen the sandal and girdling gold,

Fallen the music manifold
Of moving limbs and strange caresses,
And deadly passion that possesses
The magic ecstasy of these
Mad maidens, tender as blue seas.

Night spreads her yearning pinions,
The baffled day sinks blind to sleep;
The evening breeze outswoons the sun's
Dead kisses to the swooning deep.
Upsoars the moon; the flashing steep
Of Heaven is fragrant for her feet;
The perfume of the grove is sweet
As slumbering women furtive creep
To bosoms where small kisses weep,
And find in fervent dreams the kiss
Most memoried of Artemis.

Impenetrable pleasure dies
Beneath the madness of new dreams;
The slow sweet breath is turned to sighs
More musical than many streams
Under the moving silver beams,
Fretted with stars, thrice woven across.
White limbs in amorous slumber toss,
Like sleeping foam, whose silver gleams
On motionless dark seas; it seems
As if some gentle spirit stirred.
Their lazy brows with some swift word.

So, in the secret of the shrine,
Night keeps them nestled, so the gloom
Laps them in waves as smooth as wine,
As glowing as the fiery womb
Of some young tigress, dark as doom,
And swift as sunrise. Love's content
Builds its own monument,
And carves above its vaulted tomb
The Phoenix on her fiery plume,
To their own souls to testify
Their kisses' immortality.

LOT

(By Aleister Crowley. From *The Soul of Osiris*. 1901)

TURN back from safety, in my love abide,
Whose lips are warm as when, a virgin bride
I clung to thee ashamed and very glad,
Whose breasts are lordlier for the pain they had,
Whose arms cleave closer than thy spouse's own!
Thy spouse—O lover, kiss me, and atone!
All my veins burst for love, my ripe breasts beat
And lay their bleeding blossoms at thy feet!
Spurn me no more! O bid these strangers go;
Turn to my lips till their cup overflow;
Hurt me with kisses, kill me with desire,
Consume me and destroy me with the fire
Of blasting passion straining at the heart,
Touched to the core by sweetnesses, that smart
Bitten by fiery snakes, whose poisonous breath
Swoons in the midnight, and dissolves to death!

* * * * *

Turn to me, touch me, mix thy very breath
With mine to mingle floods of fiery dew
With flames of purple, like the sea shot through
With golden glances of a fiercer star.
Turn to me, bend above me; you may char
These olive shoulders with an old-time kiss,
And fix thy mouth upon me for such bliss
Of sudden rage rekindled. Turn again,
And make delight the minister of pain,
And pain the father of a new delight,
And light a lamp of torture for the night
Too grievous to be borne without a cry
To rend the very bowels of the sky
And make the archangel gasp—a sudden pang,
Most like a traveller stricken by the fang
Of the black adder whose squat head springs up,
A flash of death, beneath a cactus cup.
Ah turn, my bosom for thy love is cold;
My arms are empty, and my lips can hold
No converse with thee far away like this.
O for that communing pregnant with a kiss
That is reborn when lips are set together
To link our souls in one desirous tether,
And weld our very bodies into one.
Ah fiend Jehovah, what then have we done

To earn thy curse? Is love like ours too strong
To dwell before thee, and do thy throne no wrong?
Art thou grown jealous of the fiery band?
Lo! thou hast spoken, and thy strong command
Bade earth and air divide, and on the sea
Thy spirit moved—and thou must envy me!

* * * * *

Our love must lie beneath thy bitter ban!
Thou petty, envious God! My King, be sure
His brute force shall not to the end endure;
Some stronger soul than thine shall wrest his crown
And thrust him from his own high heaven down
To some obscure forgetful hell. For me
Forsake thy hopes in him. We worship, we,
Rather the dear delights we know and hold;
The first cool kiss, within the water cold
That draws its music from some bubbling well,
Looks long, looks deadly, looks desirable,
The touch that fires, the next kiss, and the whole
Body embracing, symbol of the soul,
And all the perfect passion of an hour.
Turn to me, pluck that amaranthine flower,
And leave the doubtful blossoms of the sky!
You dare not kiss me! dare not draw you nigh
Lest I should lure you to remain! nor speak
Lest you should catch the blood within your cheek
Mantling. You dared enough—so long ago!—
When to my blossom body clean as snow
You pressed your bosom till desire was pain,
And—then—that midnight! you did dare remain
Though all my limbs were bloody with your mouth
That tore their flesh to satiate its drouth,
That was not thereby satisfied! And now
A pallid coward, with sly, skulking brow,
You must leave Sodom for your spouse's sake.
Coward and coward and coward; who would take
The best flower of my life and leave me so,
Still loving you—Ah! weak—and turn to go
For fear of such a God! O blind! O fool!
To heed these strangers and to be the tool
Of their smooth lies and monstrous miracles.
O break this bondage and cast off their spells!
Five righteous! Thou a righteous man! A jest!
A righteous man—you always loved me best,
And even when lured by lips of wanton girls
Would turn away and sigh and touch my curls,

And slip half-conscious to the old embrace.
And now you will not let me see your face
Or hear your voice or touch you. Ah! the hour!
He moves. Come back, come back, my life's one flower!
Come back. One kiss before you leave me. So!
Stop—turn—one little kiss before you go;
It is my right—you must. Oh no! Oh no!

A SAINT'S DAMNATION

(By Aleister Crowley. From *The Soul of Osiris*. 1901)

YOU buy my spirit with those shameless eyes
That burn my soul, you loose the torrent stream
Of my desire, you make my lips your prize,

And on them burns the whole life's hope: you deem
You buy a heart; but I am well aware
How my damnation dwells in that supreme

Passion to feed upon your shoulders bare,
And pass the dewy twilight of our sin
In the intolerable flames of hair

That clothe my body from your head; you win
The devil's bargain; I am yours to kill,
Yours, for one kiss; my spirit for your skin!

O bitter love, consuming all my will!
O love destroying, that hast drained my life
Of all those fountains of dear blood that fill

My heart! O woman, would I call you wife?
Would I content you with one touch divine
To flood your spirit with the clinging strife

Of perfect passionate joy, the joy of wine,
The drunkenness of extreme pleasure, filled
From sin's amazing cup. Oh, mine, mine, mine,

Mine, if your kisses maddened me or killed,
Mine, at the price of my damnation deep,
Mine, if you will, as once your glances willed!

Take me, or break me, slay or soothe to sleep,
If only yours one hour, one perfect hour,
Remembrance and despair and hope to steep.

In the infernal potion of that flower,
My poisonous passion for your blood! Behold!
How utterly I yield, how gladly dower

Our sin with my own spirit's quenched gold,
Clothe love with my own soul's immortal power,
Give thee my body as a fire to hold—
O love, no words, no songs—your breast my bower!

NON SUM QUALIS ERAM BONAE SUB REGNO CYNARAE

(By Ernest Dowson. From *Poems*. 1905)

LAST night, ah yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine
There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed
Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;
And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, I was desolate and bowed my head:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,
But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.