*****Putting Myself to School***

***A Talk with Heraclitus***

*I have been reading Heraclitus, my Dears, over the shoulders of a handsome youth with pale blue eyes, a student at*

*the Sorbonne. I am moving beyond the aesthetical Platonism I so long espoused in life, to a stranger, more anarchic*

*aesthetics of the fragmentary and the metamorphic, inspired by the luminous aphorisms of the great Ephesian sage.*

*As I read, he comes alive before me, in mid-discourse. Sorrow sets the scene of the dialogue in my cell in Reading.*

1. *Metaphysical Singing Lessons*

*The way up and the way down are*

*The same. For falling is a flying*

*Down, flying a falling up. Think dying*

*And living in the singular.*

*The logic of infinity*

*Renders equivalent the man*

*And child, their intellectual span*

*Differing infinitesimally.*

*Paired with the highest term, the X,*

*A = B, for A and B*

*Share equal inequality*

*With the* Logos*: mere mental specks,*

*Or at most of a pebble’s size*

*Compared with the great Himalayas.*

*Do mountains listen to our prayers?*

*No. What they can do is apprise*

*The human mind of its dimensions.*

*Listening not to me but to*

*The* Logos*, you will gain a true*

*Grasp, amid meaningless dissensions,*

*That all is One.* They are seeds of fire,

Your aphorisms, inflammations

Of paradox whence revelations

Arise as from a Phoenix-pyre!

*My style bespeaks the way things are.*

*Apparent opposites commingle*

*In the* Logos*; there, not a single*

*Inch separates the near and far.*

And the child, humblest of these terms,

Can partake of divinity.

God wants to be a child, to be

A giant among mice and worms.

Highest and lowest interlace

In a mock-epic-and-burlesque

Dialectic. God weeps. The grotesque

Has sublime features on its face.

*All things are One, but this same One*

*Is made of differences and changes.*

*Fire steers all things, but fire estranges*

*Wood into smoke; it melts the stone.*

*Plato, the Golden Liar, would fable*

*A realm of deathless, changeless forms.*

*But through the universe there storms*

*The Fire, and change alone is stable.*

2. *Chapter Two: The Logic of Becoming*

We cannot step into the same

Stream twice, you say; and in the stream

Of consciousness what thought or dream

Does not elude its very name?

The Archetypes dissolve in traces

Of faces made of other faces

The Self half-writes and half-erases

In its becomings and its mazes.

*On temple steps I’d often play*

*At draughts with children: for theirs is*

*The Kingdom, theirs the eternal bliss*

*And freshness of a dawning day.*

*A mere child’s riddle made a fool*

*Of Homer: ‘What we do not see,*

*That we take with us’. (‘Lice’ is the*

*Solution.) Thus life is a school*

*In which the lesson’s always just*

*Beginning. In perpetual*

*Inception stands the mind. We all*

*Choose whether we would burn or rust.*

3. *A Question for the Tutor*

But, Heraclitus, great one, say

How, in a world of flux and fire,

You can at all assert a higher

Principle, *Logos* or *Arché*?

For is not fire *Arché*, the source

And order of all things everywhere?

(Which Anaximenes calls *air*,

Whilst Thales calls it *water*, of course.)

*Fire is the primal element,*

Arché. Logos *is understanding*

*Precisely why there is no standing*

*Still: for the Fire is an* event*.*

The *Logos* is a paradox,

*Is* Paradox… I have been right!

I usually am. Even crazed at night

I make more sense than laws or locks.

You are the *Arché*’s anarchist.

*Logos* is a paralogism. *The Truth is a Cretan Lie?*

Each word in every aphorism

You give precisely the right twist.

4. *The Tears of Things, the Consolation of Philosophy*

Ah, what a god-like mind you had,

Great sage! You saw the cosmic play

Of things—and yet you wept, they say.

*The passing of all things is sad*

*To those with souls. In souls that* know*,*

*There is a love that would abide*

*Upon the grassy riverside,*

*And heal the water of its flow.*

*Of all Becoming, we, the Being,*

*Endure among the things that fade*

*And see all that is made unmade.*

*And from this flight there is no fleeing.*

*Soul is a fiery logogram*

*Composed of strife. For the same one*

*Who says to the still stone,* I run*,* [*This aphorism sounds suspiciously familiar,*

*Says to the rushing stream*, I am. *Oscar. I believe it concludes Rilke’s* Sonnets to

Orpheus. *You are a busy reader!*—Mr V]

*Who dares to look into the soul? Each man steals the thing he loves, dear.*

*It is a deep well, and the well’s*

*Depth harbours truth, but ah, what else*

*Is truth but sorrow for the Whole?*

*To know is to lament. Thought pools*

*In tears. Does not still water turn Now Heraclitus is ‘pre-plagiarising’ Blake.*

*To poison? So the soul must burn*

*Its tears dry, or we are but fools*

*For the briefest moment I am in the*

*Of loss. Come, Oscar, sit beside kitchen of Heraclitus’ house in Ephesus.*

*This oven; let the small fire warm*

*You with the thought that in this form,*

*Too, gods are present, and abide.*

Then shall I make a dim gas-light *Back in Cell C.3.3.*

My vestal fire, Hephaistos-gift?

*All life is sacrifice. We lift*

*Our lives unto the gods in bright*

*Hecatomb with our every breath.*

*We are sacred, set apart to sift*

*Blessing from curse, and make a gift*

*Of loss, yes, even unto death.*

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