

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,*

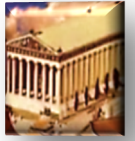
*Or at most of a pebble's size
Compared with the great Himalayas.
Do mountains listen to our prayers?
No. What they can do is apprise*

*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.
Each word in every aphorism
You give precisely the right twist.

The Truth is a Cretan Lie?

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,
Says to the rushing stream, I am.*

*Who dares to look into the soul?
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
To poison? So the soul must burn
Its tears dry, or we are but fools*

*Of loss. Come, Oscar, sit beside
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
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.*

*[This aphorism sounds suspiciously familiar,
Oscar. I believe it concludes Rilke's Sonnets to
Orpheus. You are a busy reader!—Mr V]
Each man steals the thing he loves, dear.*

Now Heraclitus is 'pre-plagiarising' Blake.

*For the briefest moment I am in the
kitchen of Heraclitus' house in Ephesus.*

Back in Cell C.3.3.

