

The Poisoned Heart

The Black Sea

*The Pilot of some small night-foundered Skiff
Deeming some Island, oft, as Sea-men tell,
With fixed Anchor in his scaly rind
Moors by his side under the Lee, while Night
Invests the Sea, and wished Morn delays*

Milton, Paradise Lost I: 204-208

The poisoned heart lies like a sponge in a dish on the desk
(attention its only cure)

The swimming man strokes in a surge in the flesh that fails
(incomprehension his one thought)

These unknown iron straits that clamp life's passage
from youth's unconcern to old age past caring
late stage turn where
fate's page burns air

I swim the black sea
of unreleased grief,
poison hoarded all my life –

Is there not some rock on which to haul out
and shiver myself to death?

The Poisoned Heart

on a black starlit night, sitting outside
coming briefly to myself
I find the heart black
a sponge marinating in a glass dish,
the poison an ink, black and blue
oozing from it,
the body in soul's sorrow

sitting shivering on a ledge
above a faintly wailing sea
the heart poisoned, soaking
in an ink-black well of misery

Nigredo

This debt I owe myself –
the failure to be who I am, failure
to be one with whom I could live,
a guilt soaking my heart in black ink –
blackness covering all aspects
from however high a window to which I climb.
From the high tower I see black waters
pouring over the landscape,
the Deluge, an ablution of blackness, waters poisoned
by what they have washed. They have washed
with wretchedness and vinegar; so the inner debt
is transformed – despite it with love.
Now all things are brought forth and separated;
now all things are named;
now the soul shows its hands and the body its hands,
and what things are in the hands of the body
and in the hands of the soul are judged.
Nothing is discarded at this time; all is brought into view.
The soul is recalled from her lostness wandering;
matter gives up its ghost and lies down in its grave
a little while. The soul turns away,
her tears deluge, standing between good and evil
she acknowledges them both.
What has been done is given a name.
What has been entertained is acknowledged to have visited.
The child is claimed. Great wracking breath tears at swaying trees
and a hand grasps the poisoned heart that lies
not beating, soaking in its bath of ink. Now ink is squeezed out
in powerful surges of that great hand,
the heart gasping out its first few beats.

You Ask

you ask that I be aware of joy
rising from every cell
but I am in vesture
of this deep purple sorrow
the grapes of which I eat
 daily
communion with me
always

Why Shame?

because there are times when
it is the only poison that will heal,
when a tiny dose
is the only effective medicine.

when, as now, denial erected,
reasoned argument can have little effect
and shame alone can cleanse.

great damage done,
remorse by denial walled off, then
shame alone dissolves, so suddenly
that the entire wall fails.

Pain

A man on tiptoe, the water of pain
coming just up to his bottom lip
so that he can barely see and smell and breath
but can rarely speak above it
because when he opens his mouth the water of pain
sloshes in and all his words are colored
by pain. It is unbelievable
what I have lost by the work of my own hands;
it baffles me still, all that I did myself.
My own life confounds me.
When I crouch to reach or point or touch,
my hands wrap round with trailing vines of pain,
thick leaves clog my mouth, and
I take solace in having experienced this telling pain.

Relief

an immense stone block slides back:
relief
– the body
sick, turning black;
daily life a mountainous truth
to which I'm blind
as Dante's damned souls
blind to the near future,
an urgent Word –
like roots of plants that crack concrete
with the tremendous pressure of their growth –
that penetrates and crevices my dreams
body buckling like old pavement
dreams obstinately nonsensical
or frighteningly absent
as what was once planted, nourished
and then denied
breaks through, becoming unavoidable –
up-thrust through the floor
it obtrudes like igneous rock
driven out of the vents of the earth
until, its pressure released
the entire mountain chain falls back
into itself and into earth –
one of those Chinese puzzles
the key point pressed
the wooden piece slides suddenly into place
fitting the whole into one harmonious block
which can now be put down
keystone unlocked
no longer needing
to make itself so nauseatingly obvious.

Drought

the season's issue is aridity –
the throat in desiccation.
not bitter winter rain's lamentation, rather
the drying and dying susurrations,
cauterization
the withering coruscation
in which each plant stops clinging
to each leaf
and drops them as the soil cracks
in crenellations. dry ejaculation.
defloration.
not the suspended animation
frozen under snowfall effoliation
but unnatural summer season prolongation
when fruit should ripen in orange-red
inflagration; no summer's-end
harvest assignation but inflammation,
insufflation
of the parching cavity; ingravidation.
not black winter earth time of hibernation
no renewal now from stored
inhumation. all happens at the wrong time
the sterile time, the blighted time –
the watering not done,
the greenery yellowed to shredded brown
insidious ingemination, divagation
supination.

Call to Prayer

The stack wobbles as I try to carry it.
To carry this weight is what it means
to suffer the poisoned heart.
Unresolved troubles wear away mind and memory
and soul and self shallow and drain
like a water sinking into mud.
The poisoned heart soaks in its inkwell of black
miserere except when roused to venom,
and pain diminishes thought to a dull ache.
It is time to go into this wasteland,
to stop anesthetic work.
Of course this journey is taken up only after
all reserves are squandered.
Emptied at last, climb into the cooking pot
and set out rowing that night sea home.

The strangely fascinating story,
love that has abused,
the story that must not be told,
protection that has wounded,
the parent culpable, the God that never heals –
looking now for redemption in that strangely
fascinating place where secrecy is woven around
that which must not be said.
Though displayed openly it is
hidden by disbelief.
One who refuses to be healed by a lie
must lie wounded awaiting
that which is not to be found
in the place sought. It is there in the land
under the feet, in the land on which we look
at every step and on which every step is taken.

I Come At Last to the Door of My Own Heart

After long wandering, many wrong turns,
no guide but cold blind intellect
through inner ways dark to it
I come at last to the door of my own heart.
Dear God (if I am not praying to the sailing wind
that unwinds its long unfurling banner
sliding overhead) –

I remember lying in bed at 16,
this same rain on the roof
and the night made brilliant to me
by the love of a girl I never would have,
buoyed on surging seas under pelting rain
in which even now I go down drowning –

it is not that I am prompted now
to run out into the rain and look for her.
But the heart that loved
lies soaking in its black dish of poison –
the ink with which I write and rewrite
my grudges, resentments, ill treatment and loss.

I stay after school in a classroom long empty,
writing 100 times on the chalkboard of my soul
what should have been long ago erased.

The inner ways dark to intellect
are daylight to the heart.
I pull the long string I've tied to the stub chain
on the bare bulb overhead.
Turn it off. I have no need of it now.

Come and get me I'm ready to fight.
Come and get me I'm nearly lost.
Come and get me it's nearly light.