

Two Poems

by [T. P. Bird](#) (November 2020)



Trinker, Walter Gramatté, 1922

While on the Bank of the River Styx—
Just After a Supper of Beans & Franks with Duchamp,
Cocteau, Cage, Sartre, and Foucault

*Last sound, the world going out without a breath:
Too proud to cry, too frail to check the tears, and
Caught between two nights, blindness and death.*

—Dylan

Thomas, from his unfinished poem, "Elegy"

I.

Earlier in the evening, five
voices filled a small, dim
cottage by the River Styx:
a cockeyed conversation
between modern vanguards—
an artist, a poet, a composer
and two philosophers—let loose
temporarily from the confines of
an endless tongue-tied, eternity.

These men had helped opened up
the 20th Century to absurdity,
nihilism, and eventual despair.

My curiosity of culture, and this
poem, had brought them here for
one night—to hear from whence
it all came.

We shared a meal together
of beans and franks, bottles
of cheap wine and baskets of
stale bread, and exalted in the
imagined glow and heat of a
burning hearth. Unfettered voices
merged—likened to wind and rain
in a furious storm—while sudden
shouts flew up like the sound of
the agitated beating of large wings.
I just listened in silence to their
pointless talk of fragmentation
and chance.

II.

After the meal and outside
on my own, while the others

continued in their ad hoc
immunity from death's silence—
I walked along the dark river,
noticing I left no tracks
in the ever-present snow.
I thought upon the night's
conversation, but remembered
no cohesion in their dialectic—
only a forced synthesis of the
irrational. Reality seemed a
distant star.

Walking along the
River Styx, the night was dark,
still, and deeply cold—with a
feeling of emptiness at having
been “deliberately destroyed.”
Yet, my breath—a chilled fog
before me—assured me I was
still alive and writing at my desk.

My faith in antithesis was affirmed:
“If a thing is true, the opposite is

not true; if a thing is right, the
opposite is wrong.”

Otherwise, I have become nothing.

Of Tributaries, Rivers, and Seas

I.

Every day—thoughts, emotions, moods,
affections, desires and decisions flow into
the bed of my psycho-spiritual river like
tributaries; smaller rivers, streams, mountain
run-offs make their way into the steady current
of life and living. Eventually, all merge into
the future—joining together the steady
currents of many rivers into deeper waters.

II.

When the heart bursts forth with certain

human passions—love, joy, jolts of sudden happiness, a sense of well-being, and mercy for the needs of others—tributaries run faster and rivers swell to good abundance. We then say, the river looks healthy today.

III.

But, when the mind becomes troubled with rejection, frustration, disappointment, fear and anger—self control breaks down; unlovely passions like sudden storms, cause flood waters to rush into our rivers, overflowing the banks, possibly taking down what we have built up.

IV.

If one looks glibly, the tributaries flowing into our psychic rivers are clean—seemingly free of heart's corruption and toxic ideology. Yet, without careful watching, they are now filling with the litter of pessimism, fear, the irrational, hatred, bigotry, and violence. The

sad debris of cultural ignorance is finding its way into moving waters, polluting our rivers, ruining the sea of our collective consciousness. Remaining in such waters, we could lose our old memory of good and evil, right and wrong, and why it matters that we know the difference.

To many, our rivers may look healthy, but deeper within their waters, dangerous currents and obstructions may await the unwary, soul-weakened swimmer.

The danger of a sorrowful drowning is real.

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