

Beginning

A man grows from the home he was born into, journeying through all the strange lands of childhood and of youth. People loom out of nowhere, walk with him, then are gone; landscapes resolve round him, then pass back and dissolve.

At last the journey extends a third of its length, and he emerges from thickets and mists into broader, more definite scenery. He is discovering himself, the deeds, the people that are his. He climbs a hill, confident to scan the distance with its questions, its riddles, ranged like spectres on the land.

- What is this life of his: and what should he do with it? -

- Who are those others: and how should he approach them? -

The land, it folds and flows, rolling on to the seam of sky while these questions pervade its every teeming detail.

It is time to face a new way.

He turns to look farewell at his home world, erstwhile unquestioned, now newly made strange. Its daily familiar details seem clearer suddenly, like a small sunlit country of childhood memory. His eyes recall its streets and the savour of passers-by, wrapped now in unbreakable innocence.

He turns and it is gone.

Ahead of him spread smogs in patches and avenues; there are cities where towers multiply and ruins flicker; people swarm along plains, through valleys, over rivers; the air is harsh with music and flying machinery.

He descends and the tumult wraps about him. Cornermen hand him newspapers, speaking machines shout hurried events, and beneath the hustle an intimation grows of horror. Grinning faces crouch out of alleyways. Weapons are slapped from hand to hand. And

he hears of massacres; they flare; they erupt on the land like bombursts.

What is this world, that it can contain such lurches?

He ransacks the clouds, the trees, the buildings for clue, but their surfaces, blank, suggest no force within. People speak, bustling past, but their theories are unravelled, torn, by the wind. In distances between mouth and ear, through separating air amid object and eye, the entire world transmutes into vapour; and branches, bricks, cumulonimbus and men's notions, slide to become fragments of a ghostly production. All things unarguably, confidently solid, become nothing so certain as the man's mere existence: he knows only that he is, and has pressure of feeling.

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He stands at the threshold to a cavern, vapours rushing before his gaze.

He steps into the cavern, incense rising from earth's cracks.

A resonance reaches his ears, intoning of bygone poets.

Deep in the cavern he finds no walls but fire. Here are the silent furnaces of human awareness. Their fires burn away his dross till he shares the nature of the furnaces. As they burn so does he burn. As they glow so does he glow.

He feels the glow, its life and power. It spreads to invade all things. It burns to infuse all things. It swells through all, till at full flood it comes towering, overpowering, and the world is made fresh again. Humans could not avoid it: it is the inescapable birthright of consciousness.

He steps back, away from the furnaces, away through whispers of trailing thought.

He has found answer in a cavern.

Will it still be answer in the outside world?

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He leaves the cave, steps through trees and tangles, returns to the bustle of his race.

All should be different now, deeper, more resonant. Yet nothing in his world is altered. All is as unreckoning, as casually destructive as before.

So the glow is contradicted.

He scans afresh the faces passing in the scarred, electric streets of the city, and tries to understand, to understand what can have happened. He sees the eyes, restless or glaring; sees mouths, grimacing or muttering. Everywhere he looks, faces are aimed only in focused directions, full of close-up worries or hopes. And no room remains for anything other.

They are stunted.

They are walls, those faces. They bar entry to anything unwelcome. Whistling, glaring, frowning, those faces hide themselves in self-assertion. They batter away the glow, they jail it away and maim it, for to let it emerge would be too strong a surrender.

The man is baffled. How can humankind be two species, a glowing or a stunted one by turns, as though the two dispositions need never touch?

He needs a larger oracle.

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It is night. He stands again on his hill.

Bit by bit, he glimpses the malady's immensity; sees it rise before him in enormous steps.

– It is not just the few who are infected but the whole human race –

A step further.

– The material world too seems wrenched out of joint with its own beauty –

Furthest step of all.

– As he watches the whole cosmos seems torn apart and hollow, half dead –

He looks to the stars, remote, baffling, almost barbarically different to him. What can have happened? Out there should be all the Deeps and Wonder that humans so need, but they

are separate, cut off from it all. What aboriginal calamity can have so swept the universe that its creatures are left stunted, agitated, committing terrible self assertions out of mere ignorance?

He stares on till earth fades to a dream...

All this must have begun somehow.

Through, beyond, the stars he looks...

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Where is the beginning?

Silence...

At the deep of Deeps there is concentration. At the Ground where the breath of stars is exhaled, there is a Centre. Packed pure enough to explode with births of cosmos, its essence is Rightness.

There emerges a Chaos, blazing, beautiful, content as a woman in love. It extends, the fabric of commencement, ready to receive.

Far far back, beyond the beginning of beginnings, a point of Agitation, awesome seed, descends. It flashes into the oceans of Chaos, dancing forth order, siring the upward and downward, leading out worlds like a string of jewels.

But it contains also excess.

Love and pain make up that excess. They give awe to the Agitation as it goes straying, wandering forth, falling far down, towing planes in its wake, deep and away into the Nothing.

It does not know where it goes, that Agitation. It must improvise on the moment. In front is all hollowness; behind, all Rightness. And the pain of this schism grows on all sides. A primordial howl sears through the cosmic dream. But love, only love, lays pathways for its passage, carrying it to confront such agonies gladly.

Through a void, vastly resonant, burns the loving, painful Agitation; and it lays

creation, widespread in its wake.

Till it goes too far...

Too hastily...

And the Centre is lost...

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All that remains is Agitation.

It disintegrates into fragments. An archaic snow, more ancient than time, spreads and descends, slowly, steadily. And every tumbling fragment is buffeted by a strange longing – for a yearning permeates Creation, a yearning for a Rightness no longer even known about. The fragments have love and have pain, but the Rightness is now more myth than memory.

What are they, these fragments? They feel themselves descending, fabricating ever heavier layers. Stars spread out past them, worlds.

What are they? They feel matter punching through their innards. They begin grinding into orbits.

The earth is there.

And the fragments have taken on bodies. They feel blinded, violent. Their flesh is stretched over bars of bone, their blood a dumb prayer. They prowl, they reach for what is not there.

Their agitation is all that can guide them.

From their movements comes a moaning and a raging.

Human, dreadfully human, they assert against their blindness. Killings spurt forth. Terrible in their confusion, they seize their relief through war.

And the cosmos darkens. The darkness is of their blood. It makes a throbbing. A strong, anguished throbbing.

Births and deaths move with the throb.

Races migrate, their feet travelling with the throb. Cities rise, then crumble, their inhabitants receding with the throb. The bereaved sit, their tears pressed out by the throb.

Menacing clouds stalk over spans of millennia...

Pain!

And there is birth...

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The man looks around.

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It is daylight, and he is standing on his hill. The night has receded with its half-felt, half-glimpsed myths. Slowly he retrieves himself, rewinding what was cast into blankness. By bits his world fits back together.

He remembers himself: he is a man who has grown from the home he was born into. He is a man who has questioned the stricken cosmos.

What can he make of its answer?

He studies the people in daylight once more with their endless kindness, complacency and illogic. They flow through the streets, along paths, spread across plains, speckle the uplands. Clouds squat over their journeys. Seas brood at their frontiers. Unheard stars send whispers to insinuate and dissolve around their travellings.

And he grasps what the blankness said...

– In the Beginning was the Descent –

– Out of the Descent came the Limitation –

– So to reverse the Limitation, reverse the Descent –

The furnaces call again, the silent furnaces of human awareness.

His nostrils detect faint incense, his ears the chanting of long-dead poets. Here where it is lofty, smoke comes rising through cracks in the ground.

He listens as the mists speak:

– Go to the heart of chaos; let the Ancient King speak –

He hears as the mists speak:

– The journey will consist of words –

Incense rising from earth's cracks. Chanting of bards. A hilltop with the clear solemn
view of millennia.

It is ready to begin.