

Station Island XI by Seamus Heaney / John of the Cross Songs of the Soul "La Fonte"

As if the prisms of the kaleidoscope
I plunged once in a butt of muddied water
Surfaced like a marvelous lightship

And out of its silted crystals a monk's face
That had spoken years ago from behind a grille
Spoke again about the need and chance

To salvage everything, to re-envisage
The zenith and glimpsed jewels of any gift
Mistakenly abased

What came to nothing could always be replenished.

"Read poems as prayers," he said, "and for your penance
Translate me something by Juan de la Cruz."

Returned from Spain to our chapped wilderness,
His consonants aspirate, his forehead shining,
He had made me feel there was nothing to confess.

Now his sandaled passage stirred me on to this:

How well I know that fountain, filling, running,
Although it is the night.

That eternal fountain, hidden away
I know its haven and its secrecy
Although it is the night

But not its source because it does not have one,
Which is all sources' source and origin?
Although it is the night.

No other thing can be so beautiful.
Here the earth and heaven drink their fill
Although it is the night.

So pellucid* it never can be muddied,
And I know that all light radiates from it
Although it is the night.

I know no sounding-line** can find its bottom,
Nobody ford or plumb its deepest fathom
Although it is the night.

And its current so in flood it overflows
To water hell and heaven and all peoples
Although it is the night.

And the current that is generated there,
As far as it wills to, it can flow that far
Although it is the night.

And from these two a third current proceeds
Which neither of these two, I know, precedes
Although it is the night.

This eternal fountain hides and splashes
Within this living bread that is life to us
Although it is the night.

Hear it calling out to every creature.
And they drink these waters, although it is dark here
Because it is the night.

I am repining for this living fountain.
Within this bread of life I see it plain
Although it is the night.

* (pellucid= transparent). ** (sounding-line= rope used to measure depth)

Questions for the Reflection:

Water

What role has water played in your life?

Were there significant vacations associated with water?

Did it involve family, friends, lovers?

Do you have a favorite body of water, stream, or river?

Do you have a favorite fountain, or has a fountain of some kind ever played an important role in your life?

What are the various feelings you have had around water? relief? fear? cold? welcome? relief?

Baptism

Do you remember your baptism? If so, what do you remember?

Have you witnessed a baptism that stood out for you in some way?

What do you remember?

Night

What does the recurring phrase, "although it is the night" mean to you?

Is it reassuring in any way? Frightening?

Can you relate the phrase to events or times you've experienced?

Imprisonment

Imagine John of the Cross kept in a tiny cell but able to hear the noises of the street below. Imagine his being able to hear a fountain, or the running of the Tajo River down the hill from monastery in which he was held.

Have you ever felt like you were trapped in a situation, yet were able to hear sounds from the outside world?

Does anything in your life make you feel imprisoned, stuck, or trapped today?