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The Accursed

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“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!-prophet still, if bird or devil!-

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,

Desolate, yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted –

On this home by Horror daunted –tell me truly, I implore –

Is there- is there balm in Gilead? –tell me –tell me, I implore!”

Quoth the raven, “Never more “.

(Edgar Allan Poe The Raven line 85-90.)

The story of man seems to be a long story of his effort to comprehend the world around him and his grappling with his failures therein and the resultant anger at what is beyond him. Is Man cursed and doomed with self delusion, perennially? Adam’s tragic fall, to earn his accursed freedom, perhaps set the stage for it all. His being thrown out of the Garden of Eden puts him in a situation where he is ‘condemned’ to his freedom. Then there is the Cain concern. According to genesis Cain was cursed by God to wander about aimlessly, and that when he worked on his farm, the earth would not yield any crop because it had received Abel’s blood. And when Cain complained that the punishment given to him was hard and that he would be found out and even get killed, God put a mark on Cain (some believe God put a mark on his forehead to protect him).The interpretation of this “mark” seems varied and interesting. One interpretation is that Cain was tanned (with darker skin) to save him from being harmed. So through tanning was God making Cain invisible and thus safe? In spite of the fact that Cain had killed his brother –a heinous crime, God protected him and let his tribe increase. One wonders if God preserved his bloodline for some greater purpose or even, to strengthen the belief of hope and salvation for the doomed. If the existence of God is a necessity of Man, hope of salvation is essential for the wretched, the miserable and the condemned.

Modern man- busy as he is, complimenting himself for achieving peace, progress and freedom; proves himself rather a true descendent of the accursed and the condemned Cain. With his insatiable thirst for too-much and too-soon, he is perhaps the most tormented, restless wanderer in human history. Trapped in his own findings of the complex world around him and also perplexed by the barren world within, he stands aghast, tearing the air at every

bewildered step. He has lost touch with himself as he fails to find a centre to hold him, and his predicament in this chaotic world where everything slips fast into shadows:

*“...Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the shadow.”*

(T.S Eliot: Hollow men)

And it refuses him any identity or even fulfilment, when assuredly nothing but all the nine circles of hell seems well in place and man cries out:

*“... I saw multitudes
To every side of me; their howls were loud
While wheeling weights, they used their chest to push.
They struck against each other; at that point,
Each turned around and, wheeling back those weights,
Cried out: why do you hoard? Why do you squander?”*

(Dante’s Inferno: fourth circle)

The story of his progress sneers at him-where all the medical advancement- increasing the number of years (age span), those so to say, extra years of life are in most cases, the most crippling and depressing, as Yeats has said “what shall I do with this absurdity” and again “an old man is but a paltry thing”, “a tattered coat upon a stick”. And if life means more misery and more pain should anybody yearn for it or even want it at all? For in this sense, our medical wisdom has merely prolonged our suffering. Knowledge and sin really seem related, making man feel the burden of earthly existence. Here in the hope of sucking out the liquid vitals from the depths of earth, man with the best of his technological know-how stretches thin to cork so much as the spit of hate and anger of the oil -well (in the gulf of Mexico), that beats man blue and his mean looking face is besmeared with the paradox of his struggle. He is isolated and incapacitated by the pre deterministic forces, for he is cursed with imperfection and much to his disillusionment, the world does not always connect logically. His isolation and his loneliness is again the burden of his past. Adam experienced it before

the birth of Eve and after his fall he was forsaken by his Lord and condemned to the whirlpool of his existence.

Today man, a shattered visage, seems truly accursed-wandering aimlessly (here aim itself is meaningless), each soul bleeding naked and pierced- through with paralytic loneliness like Saul Bellow's Herzog, a professor who has lost it all...relations, friends, rationality ,sense of belonging, himself and even his psychic well being, to his own surprise there are long awkward pauses in his communication and his classroom lectures and he frantically tries to reach himself through letters written to the dead and alive, but never posted. In every walk of life man is pushing himself to the rockiest edges to succeed and to gain recognition, yet fancy cheating fails and this very recognition becomes his cross and he gets nailed when he looks the happiest to those around him. Samuel Becket has put it thus:

“Is there no enduring crown to be won

Is there no way in my soul's sickness

That does not lead to damnation”

In fact the stark reality and horrid hollowness is so subjective, so private that he is muffled back to the dust vile. The forces beyond man bent upon proving him only too weak, helpless and insipid-hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, shuffle and reshuffle of the galaxy and also the free and frequent visitations of aliens now (even if it is a creation of man himself, it only proves his bafflement at his own creation) so sometimes he blames them for raising storms and sometimes refers to them as friends (perhaps in the hope of not rousing their anger and cause more damage) as it is in the words of T.S.Eliot:

....All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,

All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,

But nearer to death no nearer to God

Where is the life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries

Bring us farther from God and nearer to dust.

(T.S.Eliot in Choruses from 'The Rock')

No wonder then, there are dark drooping shadows crawling over the bridge of life, dragging along the corpses of the slimy beasts. The loud projection of the giants in the field of politics peeled to pigmy size as the warm gaze of the big yellow orb melts the full size caved divinity to a silent thin flow. In his helplessness man finds the “red-eyed scavengers “creeping on all

sides. With all his knowledge, with all his wisdom, modern man is pushed to the abyss where he craves for blissful ignorance and the life of the unknown-acknowledging what God told Moses (in the book of Moses):

“...no man can behold all my work, except he beholds all my glory; and no man can behold all my glory, and afterwards remain in the flesh on the earth”.

Forlorn and condemned standing on the colossal wreck of his achievements, drained purple by exhaustion, man becomes a picture of the hollow groans of the dying leviathan. As the illusions of appearances make man a self-delusionary; riding the high horses of fantasy, he shouts his freedom gesticulating towards the heavens only to feel the earth beneath cut through and the land in front slip into the greater waters and into oblivion. Free he is indeed, to feel the weight of his dust and despair, spreading awkwardly in his space of immense pain, till his home going funeral. Peace remains a difficult desire with guns roaring constantly, changing merely the place and shade of reason and reality, and even when they fall silent the miseries of the people do not end with the silence of guns, but they open new and even more obnoxious chapters of human suffering. So the soldier who blows the complex cave-mountains to bits, at the height of the celebration of his victory quietly shoots himself and he knows not why. Man indeed is the centre of the circle of pain. And Life becomes then, an awful tale of depravity and disgrace. Now it seems ritualistic. It doesn't matter where it happens because it proves strong enough to surround and to paralyze him... So much of devastation & destruction no doubt, adds to the psychodynamics of his existence. Such stressful life leads to depression and from there it goes on and on & there is no end to it. One sometimes wonders where things went wrong and why; man-the civilized creature, at the height of his evolutionary process should crawl-about in mud in search of material wealth and not even hesitate to tear each other apart- now even eating raw flesh! Or is it, the early man did it out of ignorance and compelling need and modern man with his treasure of knowledge, too has his 'reasons' for taking it 'raw'? Are the compulsions deep rooted - too deep to be washed off by his emancipation, progress and refinement? 'Tabula rasa'! – I see it spread out from that greater mind or a time call... Ever since that slime of earth was breathed into, the rumbling became increasingly louder and resounding. The urge to Lord- over and command to rule has perhaps, always been there. Adam overstepping in the Garden of Eden, Cain measuring it over with his humble brother Abel-getting rough with him and likewise, the ancients in an attempt to transfer the soul of their man-God to a 'vigorous successor, before it has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay', killed him at the earliest symptom of his failing power...curse, curse and curse...man is truly accursed...it seems a time travel. It is said that in the native town of Plutarch, a ceremony called the 'expulsion of hunger' performed where a slave was beaten with rods of the agnus castus and turned out of door with the words, 'out with hunger and in with wealth and health'. Iphigenia was sacrificed for favourable winds, by her father Agamemnon- Laius sent his infant child with the connivance of his wife - the child's mother, to be killed, to secure his own life. There is this story of a king of Sweden who sacrificed nine of his sons to Odin at Uppsala in order that his own life might be spared. Or again, a man clad in skins led in procession through the streets of Rome

every year on the fourteenth of March, beaten with long white rods and was then driven out of the city. The past converges on the present and there they blend.

The picture is clear-Adam, Cain, each of the Greek divines ...the greater and the lesser ones equally - Christ on the cross, there an ageing saint Peter bleeding to death, here a horrified priest burnt alive. The mystic king of fire and water not allowed dying a natural death- they stabbed him to death in Cambodia. They call it sacrifice perhaps-a helpless sacrificial animal looking heaven wards under a glittering blade. An untouchable poor orient forced out in a humiliating freezing night without water or warmth; small skeletons of glorious temple- offerings dumped in the backyard. And there a black whipped to the bone marrow for his 'disgusting' brown skin at Ohio, softly whispering: 'I am your darker brother -so I was made to believe?'. A girl splashed acid for not hiding her pleasant looks - a woman buried alive with her out- stretched bloodied arms for touching a book and a bag, to know more. A son hand in hand with a stranger slits his father's throat for being poorly. There still it is, for rationalism does not always succeed in discrediting the belief in witchcraft to avoid the custom of burning witches, planting corpses all over- tons of them, cactus sprouts from our festering wounds.

Here nations browbeat with their power of destruction-the power to destroy is their strength, the strength to over- throw even those, legitimately posted and loved- the courage to change the man made law manipulating authority and mutilate god's words according sanctity to horrific commandments, to walk into territories and smoke through shelters, gas the hospitals and melt down orphanages and schools, breathe fire through valleys and sulphur rain the caves, blast the layers deep down and blown to bits the mighty and the majestic mountains. So one man crooked as could be- concentrating on camps, stiffens his neck further and bloats at each disfiguring. Those loud tricksters welding with hollow words, reducing the offspring of the Great Patriarch to Robots- willing to tearing themselves to bits through the aghast -atmosphere. Many a cringed creatures busy with ball, bottles, crystals and the stinking fluids in remote forbidding structures working day and night to liquidate the reminiscence of flesh and blood-to get out of those cursed jars a breed of men no longer men but clanking brains tossing and bouncing, the far stretches of formidable planet. Strange objects are cutting through space- to trample the inhabitants and 'eat their oxygen.' In a bizarre show of bravery, men forced to jump on a shining sword or cut and spread their soft organs out. A chimpanzee intrigued at the similarity and the difference, clutching the tail of a baby baboon flings it in air and tosses its head against the rock- smashing its brain. The thrill of the crack makes it repeat the ritual- singing:

'There is shadow under this red rock,

(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),

And I will show you something different from either

Your shadow at morning striding behind you

Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;

I will show you fear in a handful of dust’.

(T.S Eliot: The Burial of the Dead)

The air rants with ‘the hollow roar’ of the dying. Man is in the words of C.G Jung, “...the worst conceivable disappointment of the hopes of mankind.” Again a Tieresias humiliated for his accursed blindness (or was it for seeing what men of intellect could not see.) The truth of it all is unbearable and beyond the mortal men-the truth of the nakedness of creation.

Hark! Who walks stealthily far and wide leaving every patch of the garden burnt and barren? Men eat mud with gangrene-infected hands and stagger on their broken knees, ranting the air with ‘we are the Legion’.

The thorn -bird watching far above burdened with the aches and pains of the notes of life, orchestrates to swoop down from its gyre - painting the thorn red- staring hard with fogged eyes at the slime and the sloth and whispers the sob, ‘Is the Savior here’? And somewhere near in the half burnt bushes, watched an oil soaked dying raven who groaned ‘cursed they were and cursed we too are’ “...this is the way the world ends not with a bang but a whimper.” And long after the wait is over, yet still the wait for a nobodaddy goes on and on and on