

Cat vies with Hard Drive for my Soul

This poem was suggested by the book “The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World.” by Iain McGilchrist, to whom the poem is dedicated. He writes about the two hemispheres of the human brain and the tension between them. For we are at odds with ourselves and whichever sphere is in the ascendant at any one time is reflected in the world and conditions we make around us as a race. For the purposes of this poem, I have called the brain’s right hand side “Cat” and the left hand side “Hard-Drive.”

A Confession of Bias

I wish myself cat
cats-eyes
cats-ears

I wish myself cat-alive
cat alert,
sonar centre,

electric
lithe advance.
Hard-drive blunts me

splits
and thickens me
Hard-drive weighs on me

like a hump,
an imperialist
goiter.

Cat asleep

Ears at attention
sharp as bayonets

still scanning,
reading.

And eyes though closed
still reckon

keeping the captain
abreast of all our weathers

as he paces
alone

on the bridge.
Any time now

those eyes will blaze
open

and cat will rise
and crouch

and bare teeth
and pounce.

Hard Drive in the bath

Hard-drive specialises
in mean look
and fierce straight line.

Curves dismay him
They hint at softness
and lying back in the bath.

You don't bathe for joy,
proclaims Hard Drive, but for profit,
an increase of power and standing.

So yes, bathe often
but with vigour
and never lie back.

Hard-drive comes alive

Hard-drive waits for nobody
and never gives way.

To pause is life-threatening
and to make allowance for other life

risks invasion
by gargoyle

possession
by Dracula.

I shall force my will
on the landscape.

I shall stamp myself on the earth
like a brand.

Hey mother, do you see
this corpse at my feet

this victim at my hands ?
Until the moment

of victory
I had not arrived

O mother, mother,
I was not born.

Cat in the Sun

Cat glories in the sun.
He sees it a mile off
and knows he belongs there.

He rolls in the hot dust
and delights in that sliding, grain by grain,
inwards to the skin
to play among the follicles.

Hard Drive can't bear to look.
Instead he fixes on the horizon
in case typhoon is threatening there
or the barbarian horse
have broken through at last.

Hard Drive busies himself
on his preventive measures,
glancing with contempt
to where Cat lounges,
absorbing the sun's heat,
cat ears pointy,
muscles flexed.

Hard Drive begs to go hunting

Gimme routine
rages Hard Drive,
you're unsettling me,
gimme something that stays
the same, gimme repeats,
gimme quarry to
run down, gimme
victims, gimme
leave to blame.

Cat's astonishment

Cat spends all his life astonished.
His astonishment exhausts him
so he sleeps and then, on waking,
is astonished all over again.

Interview

So what do they make
of each other, these two,
Cat and Hard Drive
forced to travel on opposing sides
inseparable ?

He leans over me
snarls Cat, he positions
himself way beyond his station.
He eclipses my sun.
He has tricked me into a cage.

He frightens me, rages Hard Drive.
Every pace we take along the path
wears on me. It is like walking
chained to a fire-storm.
I never sleep.

Conclusion

It is cat who carries the weight
of true being,

who loves and suffers
in his worn flesh

the seasons, the wild heath.

Hard Drive lives in panic, a life-long
franticness to avoid

being overwhelmed. The fears
of Hard-drive

will overwhelm us all.

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