

The Dying of the Light

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November 24, 2005

(with apologies to Dylan Thomas)

It is in our faces. It is in our eyes. It is in our mannerisms, it is in our attitudes, it is becoming absorbed into our selves. It is them, of course, but it is us too. It is the system, we all know, more than it is them; it is the institutional outcome. But we are fading, our faces are darkening, and a picket fence and a fashionable apathy turn our hearts to pale wooden forgeries of themselves.

1 Do not go quietly into the night!

When the night is inevitable, and the darkness is upon us, we can bring ourselves to acceptance. We can resign ourselves and let the void approach, if resistance has no purpose, in the same way we come to accept our own mortality, our own insignificance, and other certainties, scientific though however unjust and humiliating. Nay, let it engulf us, we say in these circumstances, we need show no fear when fear is pointless! Indeed, though there is a spirit of anarchic freedom in rebellion against the forces of the universe, there is also a philosophic grace and calm which accompanies those who feel themselves as part of it, in equilibrium with it, as a participant in the inevitable change and flux, the cycle of birth and death, which fills out the life of the earth and the cosmos.

But this is not the present case. If we can see the night, and twilight is already well upon us, and we retain an inkling of a chance that the slide can be arrested, that the trajectory can be perturbed, and catastrophe avoided - then, we will fight. We can see the night now, all too close, all too real. But we can also see the light. The immediate past is already a shining relative utopia - imperfect, more accurately abominably atrocious, but *relatively* shining nonetheless. We were there, we didn't appreciate it, and there was no reason to appreciate it, but we are losing it. And the potentials for the future, which have always been with us, by necessity remain potentials with us now, as they were then.

What does the night look like?

Not a Hollywood post-apocalyptic dystopia. Not a Hollywood security state dystopia. Not Orwell's 1984. Not Soviet Russia. Not Nazi Germany. We must clarify it. It is not difficult to see.

Secure yourself. In your home, behind your suburban fences and your multiple alarm systems. But you cannot stay locked up forever. You must leave it. Preferably to drive, this avoids contact, but you will see people. You will see *people*, and it could be any one of them. Look around. Could it be *them*? Friends, relatives aside - co-workers and neighbours perhaps aside, but who knows? They are there, we cannot stop them, and the government cannot hold them back forever. They can give us no guarantees.

Avoid public transport, that's a target. Nervous entering tall buildings. Nervous near government buildings. Nervous near power plants, near infrastructure of any sort. They are all targets.

Our leaders told us there were threats to us! They say an attack is inevitable! We can all do our part for the security. Look around, be alert, and we do our best to avoid alarm, when we see one of the usual suspects. The usual suspects are identified - of course - by identifiable features. By the features that distinguish between all the colours of the crowd. By colour.

We cannot afford to place our trust lightly. Not out after dark! Suspicious of everything Muslim. Doubt, doubt about this religion. Shake our heads. They are not nice people. They blow each other up over there. These people must be stopped. We are trying, we are battling - maybe we still suffer the illusion that they hate us for bringing them freedom and democracy, a proposition ever more wrong on all fronts.

At the event, at the train station, at the airport - guard, guard, guard! On our guard! Police! Check, check, screen, screen. Criteria. Male. Young. Travelling alone. Agitated. Harassed because agitated. Agitated because harassed. Harassed because agitated because harassed. Stop. Search. Push them. Push them to new limits of indignity and discomfort. If they resist, pounce on them. If they run, shoot.

Unclear, think unclearly. Terrorists disagree radically with the government policy. Radical disagreement with the government policy is terrorist. "The government commits terrorism" - signed, sealed and delivered, guilty as charged. Seditious! Terrorist, they scream! Truth is no defence to seditious libel. Truth is not heard. The defence is not heard. Nor by a judge. No record, in secret. Detained. No call home. Control order. No airline will fly you anyway. This is prevention!

Prevent, prevent, prevent. A suspicion on reasonable grounds became a suspicion unspecified, became a suspicion of involvement with a suspect, became a suspicion of involvement not yet occurred. Arrest on propensity to act? Warrant without a judge, and detainment without contact. For months.

Feel our fear, you Asians! Feel our fear, those from the Middle East who choose to remain! We remark lightly that you all should be nuked: these comments do not pass our filter of human concern. Feel the full brunt of every ignoramus' doubt and mistrust in every walk of your life - and many a non-ignoramus, too. You will resent it, you resent it already. For those with a propensity to think radically, think it - intellectual honesty no longer exists anywhere else. For those strayed into contact with the criminal gangs, listen, their poison makes more sense now. Could they be right? Think. They urge

piety. They cite grievances, and they are right. Who can say that none will be swayed by the next, nonsensical, absurd, unimaginably criminal step, and swallow the incantation to atrocity?

You play into their hands, and they win. Their numbers grow, and so they will try more. And so they will succeed more. The law of large numbers applies. And so the security state ramps up again, the best possible response for their strategy. And so they win again.

Retreat to your castle. But you are not safe even there. The smoking gun might be a mushroom cloud. And who knows what you have been up to. Worse, who knows what they think you have been up to. Raid! Raid! In the deathly early morning, who knows. To see your books! Your thoughts! Your library record! Your phone, your computer, your activities. The thought police, at any time. And administrative detention. Months. No contact, no family, no friends. Possibly a threat. Surely? Never to know, and never for them to tell you, all is secret. Peace activists are a threat. War is peace.

Far away, the distant wars continue on the imperial frontier. The recalcitrant Babylonian masses refuse to accept the "democracy" which the rest of the world's huddled masses refused to accept for all of recorded history. And rightly so. They continue to refuse to accept the "democracy" of imperial authority and domination. They continue to fight it, and they continue to pin the empire down. The republic crumbles further every day. We know not where it ends: at best, stalemate, attrition, and slow oblivion; at worst, fascism, theocracy, apocalypse.

2 Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight, And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way

We are already half way there. It is twilight, and we can see it all around us.

Of course, we all know that it is remediable, at this stage at least. For there is a single, clear, precipitate cause of the supposed threat. Iraq. A single collective act by a cabal of nations. In this, o noblest of noble causes, we flourished with our trumpets, we saluted behind our flag, waving in martial glory. We played our part, even at the risk of attack on our home soil - we feigned the conflict of the hero torn between Scylla and Caribides. Such crocodile tears! Oh, were that it a noble cause, and that we were engaged in such a noble quandary!

For this supposedly noble cause was nothing of the sort, as we all know now. The clearest act of aggression in recent times, the supreme crime of international law for which the Nazis were hanged at Nuremberg. In international law the criminality of the offence is beyond a shadow of a doubt, and the leaders are war criminals. Prefaced by a flurry of propaganda consisting of a smattering of half-truths and an avalanche of lies - something that those of us with past experience saw coming - it was predicated on nonsense. A geopolitical manoeuvre, as cynical in its strategic motives as outrageous in the act. This was the

swagger of a global mafia boss re-confirming its supremacy - don't fuck with me! - by burning to the ground a country that was appropriately defenceless, suitably appropriating its wealth, and appointing a suitably pliant government. This was the new National Security Strategy in action. This was the greatest boon to terrorist organisations in recent times: an enemy to fight; repression to spread resentment and radicalism; violence to meet violence. Their numbers swell, not only there, all around the world. It takes impressive arrogance and stupidity to turn the easiest occupation of all time - deposing a ruthless dictator - into a cowardly defence from fortified zones against an unstoppable insurgency. They are all cowards, all against innocent civilians, by design or by indiscrimination. The glorious equality of violence that is the occupiers' law! Raiding random houses, employing the hitmen of the previous regime. Shooting into crowds, collective punishment, bombs on families, firing on ambulances, an embassy employing thousands, a puppet government, phosphorous and more in Fallujah. Still no water, still no hospital supplies, still no electricity, still no petrol. Fraudulent elections, political turmoil, a country falling apart. The consensus of the occupied and the immediate occupiers: get out.

And so, by engaging in terrorism, by committing the supreme international crime, by massacring civilian populations, by embarking on this "noble cause" we decided, in our consternation, that the threat of terrorism - by which we mean, terrorism against *us*; terrorism against them does not count - it induced was worth the risk. Oh, the gallantry, the heroic struggle of it all!

Hear them now! Hear the great man! Hear this so *small* man prate his nonsense now: the aggression had no consequences, they hated us in the first place!

The immediate solution is clear. In the meantime, rage we must.

3 Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.

I pray! Look at the pallor in your faces! Look at this unholy alliance of the politicians, here in the most serene republic! See the potentially progressive shrink, see the domination run rampant! And see this unedifying - nay, blasphemous - nay, satanic! - spectacle of Left and Right, seated around the table, all of them only too eager to sign away the life, to blot out the remaining dapple of the light with the strokes of their pens. See the small man grin, he is smiling ear to ear! For they have capitulated without a fight. They have happily strolled into the darkness, without a second thought, and taken the rest of society with them. Their concern is not a sober assessment of reality, but a flailing terror of potential events whose number is bounded only by the depravity of our imagination, and whose probability is small (no longer miniscule) but increasing with every new crime we commit.

Their logic is of survival. Reject the legislation, invading liberty, invading freedom, invading the power to think and to dissent, and when the attack comes

- precipitate from our noble cause of international war crimes - you will face the judgment that you did not do enough. Reject, and you are a feeble outcast to be crushed under their stampede of fear and loathing. Reject, and see them pound you for your softness! Accept, and when the attack comes, you say, they cannot accuse you of not trying - but you are wrong, you are as complicit in the aggression and provocation as anyone else. Or perhaps, or so we hope, accept, and the attack may not come. But to accept is not to reduce the risk - we have a police force and criminal law and procedure already! To accept is also to increase the harm, increase the fear, increase the antagonism, and thereby, increase the risk. But your thinking is not clear enough, and does not brook seditious truths. To you, it is much more concise, jangled, and inflamed with alarm: to reject is not only softness but suicide; to accept is to do *something* about it, which *might* help. No guarantees, the fear continues.

The fear strategy is a winning strategy. Clothed with an aura of power that many of us have not yet learned to view with intuitive contempt, the *small* man announces he has heard of a new threat, from on high! He cannot disclose his sources of course; he consults his oracles of intelligence in the inner sanctum of his temple. A threat! - or, a potential threat! - or, a threat of a potential threat! - or, an indication of a potential threat! - it does not matter. Any of the above is sufficient for his purposes. Clothed in the ostensible respectability with which a child views their teacher, they believe him. He has access to secret knowledge, that is his magic power. He has become a shaman, a very *small* shaman. And so, he turns from shaman to Caesar - a very *small* Caesar. He announces, this Caesar minimus, we must do something about it! We cannot argue with the threat, or the potential threat, or the indication of the potential threat - because that is revealed to Him alone, in his conversation with the gods. We grant him infallibility. Now he has become god - a very *small* god. Then we must do *something*, and what else but what he suggests? To dilute his suggestion is to fail to deal with the magnitude of the fear.

Many of us do not believe him - we have learned from history, we have *thought* a little too much to refrain from the obvious treason. But not enough, and the fear strategy dominates. As long as the potential progressives believe that many of us believe him, they do not deviate. Their survival instincts dominate: they are walking a tightrope to which their choice to become professional charlatans has led them. And when the potential progressives, the potential defectors to the people, fall into line, more of us believe. Their belief that we believe him leads us to believe him. It is self-fulfilling self-referential tragedy of the sort to which we have become accustomed from political institutions so far removed from everyday life. The elected dignitary does not think for herself, or inform, or persuade, or express her own opinion: she soothsays the public mind. If she divines bad omens, she acts accordingly, and in so doing confirms them.

Will any of these potential statesmen defect? There is no sign yet. Perhaps it is beyond hope to hear from them. Will it fall to the huddled, disconnected, tumultuous masses, this hotbed of fear and loathing, to educate itself? Or to the academics? Or to the practical women?

We have no faith in our own humanity. We doubt it, weakening our own

sense of justice and compassion, and in the process weakening that of others. We are sad, sad, pale, hunched, downcast creatures, treading slowly downwards, into the darkness. And while this pallor remains, the dignitary who makes one final stand, one impassioned plea for sanity - if we think it possible of these stuffy bureaucrats! - will be remorselessly attacked, lynched, and beaten to a pulp by all the politicians, pundits, academics, reactionaries and intellectual thugs of the world.

That which is routinely abused as softness is humanity - humanity which has not yet had a chance to express itself in public. That which is routinely ticked off as the virtue of a practical political man - namely 'toughness' - what a crime it is! In morals, it is a humdrum unscrupulousness. In theory, it is ritual indifference to the causes of conflict, and the overzealous repression of the effects. In action, it is the brainless brutality of the policeman's baton, writ on the global scale. And in background, it is a brainwashing that can only survive with the most superficial thoughts, a compliant media, and learned inattention to reality.

4 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

What are we to do? In sober judgment of probable reality, we are walking into the darkness; it will come. We will suffer losses to our liberties, to our rights, to our freedoms, for accepted nonsense travelling falsely under the names of their opposites. The nation, and more generally the world, will become a more fearful, more dangerous, more violent, more authoritarian place, along the lines described above.

We find ourselves in a position not so different to Dylan Thomas' dying father. We will not go gentle into the night. We will burn and rave at the close of day. We will rage. For there is no other response of a person who retains the minimum of sanity, and the minimum of solidarity and compassion, that constitutes their humanity.

Rage with anger, yes, of the usual constructive variety. The obvious antidote to injustice is righteous anger. But the obvious antidote to pandemic, malicious, deliberately spread fear is humanity, compassion and hope. Politics is full of self-fulfilling beliefs. Where supported by appropriate institutional forms, a belief leads to its fulfilment.

We all know - though no politician will say it - that we trust politicians as far as we can throw them. We all know - though no politician will say it - that they are driving fear down our throats and that all mainstream parties have succeeded in immediate capitulation. We all know - though no politician will say it - that we desire a society based on hope, not fear. Most of us know - and certainly no politician will say it! - that the immediate cause (and a substantial portion of the total historical cause) of the threats is the criminal behaviour of our own government and its allies, for which they ought to be punished. Most of us know - though we can hope that politicians might say it - that civil liberties are being thrown away entirely unnecessarily. Most of

us know - politicians included - that a principled, impassioned defence of these ultimately fundamental rights is missing, is obvious, and would attract much support, though it would be condemned by the forces of reaction. But some of us have an inkling that the supposed monolithic support for these forces of fear, xenophobia, and reaction, will not prove so monolithic, once people are presented with a proper assessment of the position.

If the night is to come, do not let it come gently. Even if there is pessimism of the intellect, there can always be optimism in the will. Don't believe a word they say - you know not to trust them in the slightest. Don't panic. The spread of ideas throughout society is an elongated and unpredictable process. We may become acutely aware of what we have let ourselves in for, soon enough.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light!