

IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL . . .

A Postmodern Everyman, compounded of the usual Promethean admixture of Memory & Desire, walks into Reeder's Alley & overhears 'It's all funhouse mirrors misted over with Karmic Blowback.' As synchronicity would have it, our Pilgrim, once settled in a favorite reading chair, encounters the following quote from Goethe: "There is no safer way to avoid the world than through Art; there is no safer way to be linked to the world than through Art."

It merits mentioning in this context that in his late-life "A Long Saturday (a reference to Easter Saturday): Conversations" with Laure Adler, the great critic/philosopher/polymath George Steiner states that in terms of the sheer magnitude of their achievement, the works of Dante, da Vinci, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Goethe, MozArt, & Beethoven -- what one might call the Seven Wonders of the European World over the past 700 years -- are not likely to occur again, which is, as I suspect you'll agree, a decidedly sobering assessment.

Which necessarily brings to HeArt & Mind the following quatrain from T. S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding,' the last of T. S. Eliot's magisterial "Four QuARTets" ::

"We die with the dying: / See, they depArt, & we go with them. / We are born with the dead: / See, they return, & bring us with them." To 'echo' Eliot once again, may these fragments console & shore us against our seeming ruins . . . for "I was neither living nor dead, & I knew nothing, / Looking into the HeArt of Light, the Silence." (these lines being from TSE's "The Waste Land," which was published during the 'annus mirabilis' of 1922, along with Joyce's "Ulysses" & Wittgenstein's epochal "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus," which was the same year that R. Maria Rilke's "Duino Elegies" & "Sonnets to Orpheus" were completed.) To quote Rilke, "There is no place that does not see you. You must change your life."

So much for W. B. Yeats's 'Monuments of unaging intellect.' Here's G. Steiner's prognostication from nearly 20 years ago: "Computation, information theory & retrieval, & the ubiquity of the global internet enact far more than a technological revolution. They entail transformations of awareness, of habits of perception & ARTiculation, of reciprocal sensibility which we are scarcely beginning to gauge . . . Can the 'Lessons of the Masters' survive this sea-change, this onrush of mass democracy & its media? I believe they will, even if it is in unforeseeable guise."

Here's how Steiner wraps up his Master Class: "Argument should end in Poetry: "O {hu}mankind: Take guard! / What says Deep MidNight? / The world is Deep. / Desire -- Deeper even than HeArtAche: / But the Greater Longing is for Eternity, / Deep, Deep Eternity!" (from Nietzsche's "Thus Spake Zarathustra," 1885).