



Internet Lodge 9659
United Grand Lodge of England
Province of East Lancashire
<http://internet.lodge.org.uk>

Short Papers Competition 2007

*The opinions reflected by the author are not necessarily those of Internet Lodge,
The Province of East Lancashire or the United Grand Lodge of England.*

Paper 48/2007

Title

Darkness Visible

Author

Bro Tony Barstow – England

In his opening chapter of “Paradise Lost” (1674), John Milton seeks “to justify the ways of God to Man”, describing Hell as “a dungeon horrible....no light, but rather **darkness visible served only to express** sights of woe ...where **peace** and rest can never dwell” whilst in the concluding verses, Man’s capability for good is stated to be enhanced by his fall into darkness.

In his mock epic the Dunciad (1728), Alexander Pope challenges Milton’s Puritanism, describing the light of reason as “one dim **ray of light**” and “**darkness visible**, so much be lent, as half to show, half **veil** the deep intent”.

Walton Hannah’s book “Darkness Visible” (1952) parodies the paradoxical juxtaposition by “exposing” Freemasonry’s ritual to an uninitiated world.

In 1989, John Styron published his essay “Darkness Visible” in which his slide into depression is movingly chronicled, reminding us of the Jungian description of a journey into darkness- “ One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious”. (C Jung 1954)

It may surprise today’s scholars of Masonic ritual that “Darkness Visible” is a registered trade mark (under US and UK law) of Ross Heaven, an English therapist and author of several books on personal development. His “Exquisite Darkness” is a series of three residential workshops in which adherents are deprived of light to awaken an inner spiritual awareness and super consciousness –“stalking self knowledge” is the laudable quest.

There seems little doubt that the words of the third degree exhortation and charge intentionally echo the poetry of Milton and Pope. Why? The candidate is again deprived of light but now so are all the Brethren. By the “emblems of mortality” we might also understand the shadow side of our human psyche. As the ceremony progresses to its climax, all our sensory forces are focused towards the single point of the candidate being raised figuratively from death. Now we are reminded of an alchemical transformation. Notice how the language has changed from the passivity in the second degree- “ Let me now beg you to observe”- just as medieval alchemists were exhorted to use all their senses of perception, principally **observation** rather than **attention**. The clarity of these spoken words resonate in the darkness to enlighten our very souls:- “**Know** then **thysself**, presume not God to scan; the proper study of mankind is Man ” to quote Pope’s eponymous poem.

Whilst the light of reason alone is not sufficient, its “**glimmering ray**” begins a process of collective illumination, growing in intensity, not from without –but **from above or within**- by intuitive faith or divine inspiration born of self knowledge, bringing the aspirant especially ever closer to the centre of his microcosmos. By this poignant piece of ritual the fear of death in which is constellated many of our irrational fears and phobias, including the dark, is converted into glistening gold- “When there is a light in the darkness which comprehends the darkness, darkness no longer prevails”. (C Jung)

Short papers are intended to be read aloud in lodge meetings as a form of Masonic Education.

Whilst we encourage you to use them for their intended purpose they must not be reproduced for publication in any manner without the prior permission of Internet Lodge No 9659 E.C. or the author.

© 2008 Internet Lodge and the author