In a Dark Time

By Theodore Roethke

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,
    I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;
I hear my echo in the echoing wood—
    A lord of nature weeping to a tree.
I live between the heron and the wren,
    Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What’s madness but nobility of soul
    At odds with circumstance? The day’s on fire!
I know the purity of pure despair,
    My shadow pinned against a sweating wall.
That place among the rocks—is it a cave,
    Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!
    A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,
And in broad day the midnight come again!
    A man goes far to find out what he is—
Death of the self in a long, tearless night,
    All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
    My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?
    A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
The mind enters itself, and God the mind,
    And one is One, free in the tearing wind.

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