

Dark Marks: A Serious Consideration

by janus

An personal exploration of the Dark Mark.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Why Do I Wear a Dark Mark?

Why, indeed, you may ask. I seem polite, considerate, even solicitous, and I surely am. But this is the result of striving for gentleness. It is often the case that one overcompensates for weaknesses and that overcompensation then becomes one's primary presentation.

This essay deals in dark themes. I will warn you, as I always warn. Perhaps darkness of the mind is recognised and feared less than is physical darkness. It is more treacherous! But this is first an essay of hope. For only out of darkness can true light come. Without darkness there is no division, and one lives in a perpetual half-light, in a transitional season with neither summer's warmth nor winter's chill. What a dark statement this is in itself!

You like it under the trees in autumn,

Because everything is half dead.

The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves

And repeats words without meaning.

In the same way, you were happy in spring,

With the half colours of quarter-things,

The slightly brighter sky, the melting clouds,

The single bird, the obscure moon--

The obscure moon lighting an obscure world

Of things that would never be quite expressed,

Where you yourself were not quite yourself,

And did not want nor have to be...

Motive for Metaphor, Wallace Stevens

Put simply, I wear a Dark Mark because I do not understand this half-light. It confounds me, and I fear it in others. It is outside of my field of experience. I have grown enough that I strive to react with patience where I once would have responded with panic or the despair of the chronically alienated. I mostly succeed, but the Dark Mark lets everyone, including me, know exactly where I stand.

I wear a Dark Mark to remind me to be good.

I believe in redemption and the forgiveness of sins. I believe in God, our Father, and I believe that God is Good. Perhaps someday I shall believe that God is Love, but for now I believe God is Good, and that the leap of faith is the acceptance of the unprovable that Good is better than evil. And I believe that to work for our Father is to work for Good. And I believe that if we fall, fail, or are mistaken and misled, then as long as we repent and rededicate ourselves, we are Divinely forgiven. This forgiveness is beyond doubt, for we awaken new each moment, free to serve in Goodness again. The possibility of forgiveness and redemption is inclusive for all humanity of any creed or none. All people have the opportunity to turn from the past of even a moment and pledge themselves, like Brownies in Britain long ago, to do their best.

A Dark Mark reminds me that I have fallen in my efforts, yet have been forgiven. It reminds me that I have learned and that though I shall fall again, I shall again be forgiven as I strive to become a better person. A Dark Mark is a sign of what has been. It is a brand seared into the fine inner skin of my forearm by the fire that has taught me and made me whoever I am, as I stand simply before you. Even as I have turned from another in alienation, which is my particular vice, the Dark Mark reminds me that, as in the past, with introspection and compassion I may do better the next time.

Reascendance to innocence is possible! And this new innocence is deeper, more true, more responsible than naiveté. As in Blake, it is innocence from experience.

For unto whomsoever much is given, even of darkness and experience of him shall be much required...

The Bible, Luke

Among other reasons, I wear a Dark Mark because I joined the Death Eaters in what I refer to, inaccurately, as my misspent youth. I say inaccurately, because a youth spent in gaining knowledge, hard-won, is not exactly *misspent*, no matter how objectively inadvisable one's activities. I would not now do what I did, but from that time I learned what it was to follow a glowing dream, what it was to fight a war, and what it was to lose a war. You may think this hyperbole, but there truly was a war here in my time, albeit without violence, and there were soldiers, though they carried no weapons. There were few here who joined the losing side.

But one man's dream is another's nightmare, *and vice versa*. And after a war, the losing side is vilified. There is no other way to justify the sacrifices made by the victors save for them to cast the losers as evil and instigators of darkness. They *must* be evil for the victors to be good. During the war, each side casts the other as such, but after the war, the victors are universally believed. The ideology is unimportant. Indeed, one's own dream, brought into systematic reality, may well become one's *own* nightmare.

I wear a Dark Mark to signify that I have known darkness. I have compromised my principles. I have, in weakness and despair, worked for things in which I did not believe. I have seen high thoughts brought low and worthy humans sacrifice themselves for nothing. And all this on both sides! Now, times of darkness are different for everyone, and all people believe they have lived through dark times. All people believe they have suffered darkness and had darkness done unto them. But, *apart* from darkness, all people have sat with their fellows and shown their teeth in delighted laughter because the forbidden was suddenly possible.

Perhaps one has drunk a little wine at a quilting bee. Perhaps one has gone dancing at a fashionable club in a large and improbable hat. Perhaps one collects sea shells and treasures one that was once taken from a nude beach. Though the feeling is universal, each person's private pride is clasped to the chest of that individual alone. And each believes it has been a taste of darkness. Thus 'recruitment' is possible. Recruitment is a recognition, and an acknowledgement of that self-perceived wildness and individuality, otherwise hidden, of course.

This experience of proto-darkness is the most precious and most closely guarded part of people. It is the part of them which they bring out as intimate secret to connect them with one another, and to establish bond. It proves that they are individuals with identity beyond their appearance of conventionality. It proves that they are, in fact, human. It renders them distinct. It ensures that they are not interchangeable with anyone else and thus that their essential indispensability is not challenged.

Ah, but this sense of self is fragile - the most fragile part of the human psyche! What fear people bear that it might be lost! Faced with true difference, their thin facade of identity is shredded, leaving intolerable poverty of soul. And how do they react, swift and even thoughtless, to protect themselves from the tidal wave of alienation that rises to crush and drown them in their sudden nakedness? They react by almost instantly inflicting rejection, castigation, and even violence upon the different one.

How many times have you seen that look of horror and revulsion in the second before a face closes and you are destroyed to its bearer? How often has time frozen for that brief second as you look into a person's eyes and see them recognise what you are? What cruelty it is to interrupt such people's growing awareness of the world! What cruelty it is to incite them to commit this sin of hatred, even through your very existence, with your differences, your darkness, or even your pure light and strength. What cruelty it is to eclipse their world and throw it into shadow and insignificance. What cruelty it is to use *sectumsempra* upon their spring life with its newly sprouting wealth of tender green shoots and tendrils. What cruelty to cut into the soft loam at their feet an abyss so deep and bottomless, edged with rocks so sharp and impassable, that people are severed forever from their own primal innocence of knowledge *or* deed.

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread,

For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of Paradise.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The Dark Mark is also the equivalent of the Mark of Cain. It is a mark earned by the murder of one's brother. It is a mark set upon one to separate one from humanity.

I wear this sigil because I need to remember that I am marked and should not utilise this Dark Art of simple being. This reminder is not just for self-protection, but to preserve the integrity of others. It is the outward sign of the inward brand. And so I strive for gentleness, cautiousness, and the most faultless politeness and consideration I can muster, though I sometimes fail. There is ever temptation otherwise!

Among other things, to be a Death Eater means that you know death and have partaken of it. Death is unmistakable. It is the end of your soul. It is the descent into nihilism, when your life is over and there is no hope, yet you live on. You have eaten of death and taken it upon you, and within you.

In this shadow-life, you realise you are separated from those who yet live in the grey ruins of your former life. You realise they are no longer alive in your world. There is a wall between you and all humanity. You have killed your brother, for he is no longer a member of your world. He does not know the terrible truth of death and is no longer truly with you. Communion is not possible. This knowledge again is sure. Your brother has not changed. He is still the same man he was before - his life goes on in the same way. You have banished him from your world, rendered him unreal. Your world is the only one you may truly inhabit, and in it you have killed him. And you are marked surely upon your soul. Perhaps upon your forehead, as in Biblical lore? Perhaps by something in your eyes?

But even without the skull and snakes, a Death Eater, you wear a Dark Mark.

There was not one boat between me and an unemphatic horizon. I was home from the field of agony or whatever you want to call it; I was home from it. I was dead.

Panama, Thomas McGuane

There is another meaning to the words also. To be a Death Eater means to eat death. The words do not say 'Death Dealer.' To be a Death Eater is not to be a killer, it is to be a master of death, it is to be one who consumes death itself, as wood, or even paper, is consumed in a fire. It is a defiant and arrogant reach for immortality. It is, as well, the laugh of brilliance, the recognition that dreams may become real, that one may become so real oneself that one may *Live forever*. It is to reach in pure infinite line beyond the very stars, to be ever more, ever better. Oh, the arrogance, the need for repentance for again murdering one's brother. And yet...

And yet again, there is the other striving for immortality. There is the will to do good. There is the will to have effect in order that acts, words, and influence may spread throughout all time as stones cast into still water, spreading ever outward in multiplying goodness and perhaps understanding. Is this arrogance?

But there is more than that.

I also wear a Dark Mark to remember that I am one of other Death Eaters. I am not alone! But not everyone with an inward brand wears it upon their forearm. I am a poor judge of others. And often I hide myself. If I am as successful as I intend, I must realise that others are equally successful, and perhaps equally poor judges of character. I could never know if another is a Death Eater. But those who truly are members of this band need care from their fellows, for a Mark is not easy to bear. And because I can never know who is a Death Eater, I must be gentle, polite and considerate to all. True care is different than the dutiful protection that is necessary to offer the others. True care is a heartfelt and willing geas, born of gratitude and love, for the sake of the struggles and humanity of your spiritual kin.

Wearing a Mark also means that, rarely, there is that bright and instant communion, when the sun of recognition lights across the face of another. I ever watch and wait for signs and wonders. A discovered Mark means discovered joy. A Mark means such relief, in contrast to the loneliness of cautious internal isolation, that there are no words to express it. I wear a Mark that others may know me, as I know them, when we have the courage to reveal to one another the curling skull and snakes, our darkness and our hope. What light! What wonder! What miracle that one is not a sole survivor overlooking an alien landscape!

Now, when the light of reason fails

And fires burn on the sea;

Now, in this age of confusion, I

Have need for your company,

For I am a wild and a lonely child

And the son of an angry land,

Who now, with the high wars raging nigh,

Would offer you my hand,

For we are the children of darkness and

The prey of a foul command.

Children of Darkness, Richard Fariña

I wear a Dark Mark because it is a sign of the pain that makes us human, and because that sign connects us in communion of humanity, and because that is all there is to want - that peace that is stronger than death.

I have faith that we will meet our loved ones again, that they will live in Heaven, waiting, and then live with us once more. And this is another way of eating death and rendering it impotent, a temporary state before it passes forever. What is eating death but a search for immortality, not just for us but our loved ones?

Look inside, to remember the glimpses of the souls of your dear companions, your fellow Death Eaters, your cherished friends. It is not possible that such vision of the infinite, such pure beauty as the rainbow that breaks when the is sun viewed through tears, such timeless and archetypal wonder should *end*. How could it be possible that the struggle against banality and meaninglessness should end in... nothing? It cannot be. That peace of communion and rest amidst one's struggles can only be eternal.

But we above you, ever more residing,

In the æther's star translumined ice,

Know not day nor night nor time's dividing,

Wear nor age nor sex for our device.

All your sins and anguished self-affrightings,

murders and lascivious delightings

Are to us but as a show

Like the suns that circling go.

