

# The Real Thing

Deven Philbrick

There's an outside  
    real,  
slung gun in the hot sun  
    and an inside  
real,  
    heart of the lunar  
movement of thinking  
    while writing  
while dreaming  
    while shitting,  
while playing an assailing wail  
    of screeches  
    on the jukebox  
of the interior—superior conquest  
conquistador no doubt.

The unraveling of one  
is the ultimately constitutive property  
of the other and  
therefore, its originary source,  
its murky womb and elegant  
tomb, deciduous bomb  
blown back by.

*By abiding the one we forsake the other.*

It never pays to think in puzzles  
    but words lose their currency  
in the liberal bazaar,  
    and it seems  
that all of the unraveling  
    is for nothing.

*THE REAL THING*

It is here that the two sorts of real merge, where the poem  
combusts, where the sunset eyes of time enlighten and corrupt  
and betray and nourish, and the architects of misery  
take off their own heads.

# Character

Deven Philbrick

*Symbol marked or branded on the body*

The character  
of the memory  
is such that if  
one remembers  
it correctly it  
doesn't have  
characters—

Characteristics of remembering,  
discovering, the scene through  
the window on that snow  
bedusted evening—

The memory is a coming to character.

*Alphabetic letter, graphic symbol standing for a sound or syllable*

The door swung open  
and the man proclaimed: “not speech, but snow.”

The child at the table coloring  
a picture of a sunset on a beach  
could hear the man identify the sketch  
as of a haystack.

*Symbol or imprint on the soul*

## CHARACTER

“Interpretation,” a woman later insisted, “is what allows me to see the picture one way and you to see it another.” The child doesn’t think of that woman as  
a character

### *A defining quality, individual feature*

Even a scream is an  
interpretive gesture,  
the memory’s meaning traveling  
with its sound,  
toward that unbearable tear in the seam of the scene  
where what is seen and what is heard are  
incongruous—the memory is  
of a shining, bright-eyed face,  
but the scream threatens  
like a siren.

### *Sum of qualities that define a person or thing and distinguish it from another*

Someone has crossed the lines  
and the snow, now, outside  
the window obscures the edges  
of that psychic field of vision  
into which the rememberer  
looks.

### *Person in a play or novel*

There are no characters  
in this memory,  
only shadows shifting,  
black, black, black,  
against the snowy white  
night.

# Self-Portrait

Deven Philbrick

A child discovers art  
when, in school,  
a teacher tells him  
to draw his own  
face.

Fractured and rapacious,  
the urge to build  
transmits itself  
into the minds of  
children  
under varying  
material and moral  
circumstances.

“To become a formed being—” which meant  
to form and inform, reform and perform

*the self in accordance with the rule  
of the other*

and darken the image with ink.

The child raises his hand backward.

*the political conditions  
of light and its aftereffects,  
of dreams and their  
component parts  
cannot reveal  
the child's experience.*

*SELF-PORTRAIT*

The picture will appear upon the wall  
There is no second chance at making self  
The mirror, once abstracted, plays its trick  
    inside of language,  
    its primordial condition  
    and existential homecoming,  
and offers only ostensibly  
an increased quantum of fidelity  
to the processes of reality  
that bleed out the child's  
    drawing.

Flesh-colored paper  
    they have  
    in these  
    schools.

The dimensions of the image  
    are infinite  
like a face inked over  
eyes and all.

# Trying to Tell the Story

Deven Philbrick

Datum of memory: *it was bed's edge we sat on*  
*feet reached floor*  
*but hardly*

Significance appears only  
after the abutting wall's been  
blown over, not the fourth  
but the fifth, between the I and  
the eye—needle it knew'd be  
threaded, need not remember  
to re-perceive.

Datum of memory: *hair birthed blood*  
*birthed skin*  
*birthed hair*

The poem's in black  
and white, as if written  
on a chalkboard  
but not  
quite. White, white,  
the color of clouds  
and sugar, *black as midnight*  
*black as pitch*  
The laughter doesn't carry  
over the wall.

Datum of memory: *a question of selection*  
*not natural*  
*but mad*

I don't care to remember  
it anymore, but if there is  
an I and it must, it would  
eliminate the conditional.

*iron away coil*  
*lament the inconvenience*  
*of birth by other*  
*orders*

*TRYING TO TELL THE STORY*

The data of the memory congeal into nothing.  
There is no constellation to glean from its star points.  
Only white pinpricks in a night sky, endlessly black.