

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

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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.