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Cain

Once you are dead, you can only exist as a fiction -- what the blood of Abel said.

1

The fear of the blank page.
The fear of the inadvertent confession.

All confessions must be put in question.

The fear of night, of dreams deep in pain.

The pain of lost love.
The pain of having once been known, of having once known an other.

Of being one self.

Not fear, then, not fear.
Pain.
Pain of the blank page, pain of words on the page.

The pain of confession.

And the wall of fire, flaming upward and snaking its way between oneself and another.

God is the wall of fire.
God alienating humanity from humanity. The myth of incarnation increasing alienation, suggesting what could have been, what should have been, placing on our weary shoulders once again the burden of achievement.

The burden of always being assessed, implicitly evaluated.
Thus God offers no compassion, only pity.
No feeling with, only feeling for.
We are always being condescended to.

2

Old women, their bones cracking from years of bearing flesh, sing songs from their youth, ballads of promises broken.

Young men, morphine mad, paranoid, certain of conspiracy to maim.

3

The mathematician anthropomorphizes God as mathematician, the physicist as physicist. Why not, then, the philosopher as philosopher, the poet as poet?

Of course, the theologian: self-knowledge.

By virtue of his self-consciousness in Western tradition, God is a *de facto* theologian. But does he have a system? Does he read Calvin with horror or amusement?

And what of the pain in this ward?
God's fateful ignorance, his failed anthropology.

4

Why should humans be so shocked at God's failures? His frequent absences? His muddling through? Have we placed a burden of achievement on a God who cannot bear it?

"It is one thing to make a star," he said, "something quite different to protect a child. A star sparks from my fingertips at the simple prompting of a thought. For the child who is in danger, I may as well be sleeping."

Cain tried to smile. He had never questioned God's motivation. Who could say where God's heart was? So Cain pursed his lips and kept silent.

To understand God's powerlessness toward the human would mean beginning to understand his love: so much like our own.

5

The poetry about God creating the universe in the early chapters of Genesis clearly suggest that when God rests on the seventh day, he is not resting from WORK; the Deuteronomist's reading is a misreading. God rests from PLAY, the play of creation. Do we realize how much fun God has imagining and making? God's "work" is both meaningful and enjoyable. Thus the creation story cannot be used to support an ideology of work which wants us to feel guilty if we are not working or "churching." If we are in God's image, our primary purpose is play; we are most God-like when we are children.

Unfortunate, then, that we tend to think of God as father, when we might do better to think of him as child.

6

To be deemed worthy of release.
To be released, not abandoned.
Not from darkness to light, but from darkness to darkness.

7

Bone joined to bone.
The supple stretch of skin over bone.
What was once shattered, the foundations shaken, repaired piece by piece, shaft by shaft,
joint by joint.

But how does one warm the bone?

“What we could be!” shouted the old man, mildly, his feet planted in the soil. He knew about the life of bones. He could smell them. “There is no bone that will not have dust for flesh!” he prophesied.

8

Dogs barking,
children’s voices scuttling across the road.

You need only hear the gull cry to ascertain the wind beneath its wings, to see the curling waves upon the shore.

What does it mean, then, to say that God is not present?

Must God walk through the door like a woman, touch the skin of the sleeping child, lay soft kisses on her shining hair?

What if God’s presence is not Self-presence, but Presence unaware of itSelf?
What if God does not know that he is God?

Bridge over the abyss;
Abyss with no boundary!

God comes and goes like the wind. Now swelling our northward sail, now uprooting ancestral trees, now cooling hot skin, now knocking down the walls of our homes. All in innocence.

For God to become Self-aware would be to lose his innocence.

God eating of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. His first step towards humanity.

“Judge not, that ye be not judged; the measure you use will be measured against you.”

The beam in God's eye.
His eye plucked out.
His goatly self cast into the outer darkness.

O how can we save God from himSelf?

9

The necessity of hiding the child.
The imminent arrival of Herod's gestapo.

“When they arrive,” Cain said, “I shall not take up the bow and arrow or the sword. I will not answer violence with violence.” “Easy for you,” said the others, “you have only daughters.” They did not know about the hiding child. Nevertheless, one of them still admired his principle. “Your trust in God is very great,” she said. Cain looked at her, replying, “It has little to do with trust in God, whose absence gives meaning to our trouble. It is the soul that concerns me.” She seemed puzzled and asked, “What's the difference?”

To hide the child successfully, he must do it without knowing where he had placed the child. The work of the left hand. And hope the child would not cry out. Thus, watching Herod's butchers search (weren't they even now claiming a pig for themselves?), he could not give away the child's hiding place by uncontrollable shifts in apprehension. Meanwhile, he gathered his daughters in his arms and hoped for the sons of his friends.

10

“I love you,” she said.
“What does that mean?” he asked.
“I can't say, exactly,” she replied.

How could she explain that the meaning of an utterance is decided as much by the listener as by the utterer?

But Cain knew that this question should really be posed to God, if indeed God is love. If the

cliche about actions speaking louder than words offers any truth, then most of us must confess that we remain unloved by God. A painful confession.

Saying "God loves you" put in question, perhaps even rendered meaningless, by God's inaction, his perpetual slumber.

"Actions speak louder than words":

God's abandonment of the young husband and father who rakes his brother's knife over his own throat after hours of weeping and calling on God to give him hope.

God's sustained indifference toward the hungry and beaten children of the world.

Yet Cain also knew that some were willing to do the work neglected by God. Others were quite happy to simply attribute to God those things which would have come to pass anyway. And still others work hard to construct a reality for God which they will deny to human beings.

God's triumph: a succession of apocalypses, a surging tide of human suffering and pain.

11

What separates God from humanity: not sin, but the experience of pain. The mystery of humanity which God cannot solve: the human body in pain. But we want God to know this pain. Why else would church officials transform a crucified, suffering Jewish prophet into the second person of the divine trinity?

Yet this is the very thing that alienates God from Jesus, that establishes their difference, their separation, their alienation from one another.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus is not forsaken because he now bears the sins of humanity as a scapegoat offering for a blood-loving God (that is the casuistry of commentators and imperceptive theologians). This cry originates in Jesus's sudden realization that his pain and suffering are unknowable to God. Like every human Jesus must experience his pain alone and more torturously for realizing at this moment the absence and indifference of the God he so passionately loved.

12

Cain stopped to rest at a well on the outskirts of the city. More dust than water, his body and breath expiring, he peered into the water.

Still, after all these years, the mark.