

AWAKENER

There is one job I do know how to do
it is something I do do very well
I developed a technique without even knowing
designed to keep you awake forever

Implementing this technique made me few friends
people wake up in the middle of the night
wanting to kill me if I were in their shoes
I would feel exactly the same

If you've fallen into useless slumber
not taking who and what you are by the scruff
and shaking yourself a bit someone'll do it for you
does the baby hate the hand that pounds its back
in order to dislodge the object in its throat?

What was stuck in there was self-regard
looking at the world with you as epicentre
when your breath unblocked your mind was freed as well
you became part of a constellation
when you stopped being the sun

When you cease making your presence felt
you join the human race or else you go on sleeping
you can of course let the moment go
when wakefulness beckons instead of sleep
okay turn the other cheek and snore

I sit and watch and love you because I know you well
not just the body's excitement but what is in your eyes
and if I don't give up after you've tried to kill me
it's because beyond the body I really know what's there

You have loved before and you will love again
you are loved in this moment although you have forgotten
the body's effervescence is not just what you seek
the real love includes it but there's also more

The real love begins with consent to be concerned
with the love of other over and beyond yourself
if you can love another more than you loved even me
I will gracefully withdraw but until that time comes

You will find me in your every waking dream
torturing you with memory of what was what still might be
sleep will not give you oblivion you know too much for that
I'll keep you awake and watchful to the end of eternity

CHOIR PRACTICE AT ST. LUKES

The church is white and simple inside
do I remember it this way or not or has it never changed
memory plays tricks

Here the document exists I was baptized in this church
on May 3, 1950 on June 1 less than a month later
I emigrated to France with my parents
I was just under ten years old

What is it that makes a child of ten
insist on his own baptism my parents always said I forced
it on them my father always said it was because
I wanted to be an altarboy and swing the incense

Was it really about being a sort of actor
or was it about something else maybe it was the only pretext
my parents could understand at this point
I have to admit that I don't really know
I have forgotten almost everything from that time

But if a child forces non-observant parents to baptize him
is it really just to enable him to put on a show
or is there something else in play

What sounds like a herd of elephants assembles in the choirloft
interrupting my reflection Bloody assholes I think
why can't they go to the bar next door if they want to laugh
and shout then a moment of silence and a song suddenly rises
as if written in the hand of God Himself

My subliminal inheritance of Anglican hymn literature
is now kicked into life and soars above us all
true beauty is not the whole story but it brings us near

when we love we are rehearsing our Creator in ourselves

Whether love of beauty or love of show today it doesn't matter
what matters is that I saw something and that I came
to this place not to criticise but to praise

Nearly fifty years later I have kept my word
my word artless and guileless like that child by the fount
I was not to become the great artist that I dreamed of
but I have never ceased to celebrate and love
with simple words of candour I have kept my faith

IN THE GARDEN AT ST. LUKES

After choir practice I go and sit a while in the garden
it's sort of neglected and overgrown but beautiful
a squirrel comes right up to me expecting to be fed
and almost begins to nibble at my toes

Funny that no Memory remains of this amazing place
this pocket garden like a forest in the middle of the asphalt
garden of Eden in the midst of the West Village
all I recall is the gym where I played basketball
and the playground with a slide I played hockey there

I attended the school for a year or two that's all
is that enough to consider myself a member of this parish
the family house was sold yesterday I won't be back
my place placeless I pray in another language now

Presumably God will not worry about such technicalities
it's only me that feels uprooted not wealthy enough
to maintain a residence in the yuppified West Village
I am an emigrant in diaspora and I will die that way

If I could choose a place where I might come from
this would be it but of course the truth of the matter
is I don't come from here any more than I come from Paris
all are places of secondary residence transit areas

A place to hang your hat a sort of duty-free
where I come from is beyond all boundaries and frontiers
a stop-off between trains
what you or I cannot imagine
that is where I come from