

AN OLD MAN AND A SMALL CHILD

One of them looks into the camera,
not posing exactly, but loving
its impersonal caress. He's done this
before, already developing his face.
The other, holding the child, looks off
at an angle 90 degrees from the line
of the shot. It's likely he was
unaware of the little tick of light
signalling this instant. His skin is worn,
a leathery texture, sundown, contrasting
sharply with the child's pale, interior smoothness.
With his wide eyes he could be a putto
let loose from the cathedral ceiling
to spread his impish delight and mischief
among the supplicants. The old man seems
to be listening to something, lest it escape
his innate skepticism, his fond hope.
His gray chin whiskers barely graze the almost
golden hair of the little boy nestled
against his chest. Their visible hands—
the man's right spread on the boy's back, fingertips
toward the lens, the boy's curled into the man's
shirt—make a circle of the affection
inattentively running through them.
If their positions were reversed—the boy
in profile, the man face on—there'd be no hint
of where their mutual life comes from,
how it courses, how sufficient it is.
These two people, 70 years between them,
show no inclination to movement, no
interest in whatever happens next.