

Peter Fernbach

These Words

These words allow me
To step outside
The interminable flux of time
And say the things I should have said:
Render indelible
The meanings that passed ephemeral,
Like a breeze over an ocean current,
Or like the waves
Of temporarily squashed air
That got away from me,
Losing power even as they were born,
Before they could become solid, mature meaning.

These words commit me to paper,
And transubstantiate
The flesh, and the blood
And the soft, flashing orchestral arrangement
Of neural networks
That comprise this human's
Seat of discourse.

These words, locked in time,
And away from the wasting elements,
Away from the valley of follies and missteps
That frame my past, are a tribute,
Not just to 'should have' and 'could be'
But to the salvation of the moment:
The unsustainable you and I.

Let us now find release from the tyranny of words
And our own bloody pasts, unthinkable futures
And suffer out the truth
In a moment of shared silence.

Gravity and Impulse

It all runs on gravity and impulse.
The things that we did today in class
Were things I'd been walked through
As a student, scripts that had been seared into
My head, before I understood the world through
The cold calculus of dirty logic.

Peeling myself off the chair in my office
Was no easy feat, but I was urged by
The invisible hand of power or responsibility.
By 8:01 I was a dirty faced boy playing hooky.
Walking into class at 8:03
I had no plan, a few vague words and memories
Of past classes. I wrote the pre-fix "meta" on
The board, and, of course, I ended up giving you
The answer after I posed the question – "How does this
Change the meaning of a word?"
You all grasped at straws, and I found myself equally
Awkward in my explanation: "It indicates a concept
Which is an abstraction from another concept"
And then we all learned a little
About metaphors and metacognition,
Mostly spewing platitudes: "A comparison using 'like' or 'as'."
And no wonder this world has become
A capital producing work camp for the already-bloated:
The workers or becoming-workers are all given dry, understandable orders,
Told to perform some inconsequential task, then sent to the next
Station with bells and whistles, prodded along by bigger animals
In suits. The game looks official, but it's mindless, forgettable, especially
When we can strap on an iPod or graft ourselves to hope
Streaming through a TV screen.
What happened to this world – a stage?
All order of difference and development
Brimming over in spontaneous overflow.

It's not your fault class. The enemy is safe behind
Invisible stockades of false logic and polluted hope.
Your mission, now, is to leap above impulse
And the urge to agree, and ferret out the cold steel
Of coercion from the promise of all your desires.
Defy the natural gravity, cut the cancer out of
Your own heart, and dare to feel
The gravity of your own voice.

The Blooming Void

A lack
Of punctuation is
A sensuous airy expression
Openness
Like Molly's eight sentences
Modern man's closest glimpse at
Eternity
And natural process
She said looking out the window
Look everything is green it's spring
Spontaneous spring God's gift to man
I feel so beautiful at present

A lack of punctuation
Lends a certain ambiguity
Like the poem is the reader's
Rather than the writer's creation
Isn't it funny how the pronoun it
Can refer to a nonentity like lack
And how anything can mean everything
Or everything anything
My soul seeks connection
In disparate words phrases meanings
I want to scream in the flux
Forever adapt to the new
And therefore recognize the eternal
In each new thing

It's sexy – this undoing of punctuation
Like a void that must be filled
A vacuum
Like Molly's ethos or Pathos
It reflects or refracts emotion
Understated
Like me in jeans
And in that understatement
Wrapped up like a present

This undressing of words
Impels the reader to sink into
The text
And engage in a creative act of co-authoring
The gift of creation
The most brilliant
Present

No: The Power of the Negative

No, you may not have more time to complete
The coursework, because a class, like a football game
Is a time-bound entity. Can Norwood have that kick back?
Can Buckner have one last shot at that ground ball?
No, they can't; and likewise your results are in
And written on the books.

But, student, don't disparage, for this is how we learn.
The directions written into your hide
Are the ones you'll remember.

And take, as an example, my self.
When I was a child I wanted nothing more
But to speak, to communicate –
My mouth was numb: I was paralyzed,
Stupefied, at a loss for words.
This pain I felt visceral, and there was no outlet
But to cry.

Yet here I am, student, the arbiter
Of your grade in the language arts.
And all of this goes to show
That your love for me in the future
Paradoxically, perhaps unfortunately,
Will be inversely proportionate
To your dislike of me now.

Student, you are learning more now
Than you could have with a gentleman's D or C.
These are life lessons.
You are learning, my student, the power of the negative.

Difference of Opinion

I have many flaws
But I do not chronicle them,
Dilate upon them, and publish them for the public
Like Stephen Dunn.

I am suffering the pangs of pragmatism in a garden of airy dreams:
Not always a romantic adventure,
That much is true.

But I have a different take on art.
A certain artist conceived of their best work as “Sh*tting at light speed”
To fully understand my admiration of this quotation follow my logic:
Art is bequeathed from bodies ~ according to certain philosophers
“The world exists . . .it becomes, it passes away . . .its excrements are its food”
Art is our sustenance,
Let it be full of energy.

Stephen’s voice is monotone, brown, un-imaginative
Puttering,
Imploding and taking rather than exploding and giving.

Or perhaps there is a shadow of myself
Reflected in the page
That I am too weak to acknowledge.

Loss

Behind the handles of your eyes
Are the strings of your mind
And before there even was an "I"
They've been tugging at you from behind
TV billboards – a soft campaign
Sinking light persuasion deep
Until there is a confusion about
What is and isn't "I"

You saw fear and loathing
Read Kerouac
Grafted your soul to the anti-hero
Despised authority
And for all that I can't blame you
But, what I'm most sorry about
Is your blindness to the lack of solutions
What you've sought is a blissful death
And if you don't unglaze your eyes
You'll soon find half of that equation

I was walking through the living autumn
On Veteran's day, when everyone else was at the mall
And saw, scrawled unsubstantial on stone:
"Live every day like it's your last"
And I thought, what a stupid idea born of ignorance and impatience
And then I hesitated –
I would've reveled in that foolish advice ten years gone
And then I thought of you sitting in my class
More like a looking-glass
Spouting anti-authoritarian slogans
Trying to organize an academic coup
Throwing your hands up at politics
And it was like a mirror on classes past
Betraying the seeds of your hypothetical future dissertation
Then I looked at the swaying trees
All things pass
As I walked back to my car I scribbled these lines:

If tragedy is born from wasted potential
Then we've got a holocaust of goodwill
In the middle of a heaving nation