

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