

## Peter C. Fernbach

### Impressions

I always thought I could write for miles about Coltrane  
Miles about Monk and miles about the beauty of a D major chord  
Struck note by singular note, coming down like a Sunday in June:  
Dewy and promising: a sweet surrender. Or, I thought that, music  
Behind me, guiding my pen with smooth, confidently spaced arpeggios  
Could lightly awaken, like softly outstretching after the first streams of  
Lazy Sunday light, some cooing muse that wouldn't be so vulgar  
As to be necessarily seen when felt. Or, so I thought, the curious melodies  
Resonating around the freshly painted red room, could conceive  
Some corollary and equally astonishing truth within the whiskey jar of mind.

But, years and rolling years after pressing these thoughts into practice,  
I am still just made of the old disjointed dissonance of blood and bone  
That shakes and coughs, like my elderly lawnmower, and needs a push to get going:  
My old lawnmower that comes out of its tomb late on Sundays, when the heat is  
A dead weight and Monday morning a vague pressure. And, always an unwanted labor,  
the mangy and unruly grass groans, in need of some work to make it presentable.

Afterwards, sipping cold lemonade on the deck, I don't think about the  
Craftsman lawnmower shearing the wall, or the birdlime churned up and spat  
On the lawn, or the glass that ground it to a halt. I am simply happy  
About my work: the glowing mirage of light over the landscape,  
Like early Monet is – not music – but still pleasing to a tired eye.

## A Logic

A sentence is a railroad between people:  
A sturdily constructed steel path between  
Peopled cities of this state and that.  
Together with the indirect goodwill  
Of engineers and the unseen kindness  
Of steel workers, we pack a freight  
Of meaning and send it along the line  
With roaring internal combustion  
And no fear that our freight  
Will be, from theft or spoilage, adulterated.

But on this train, a heavy monster that only  
Looks alive, we, from our growing distance  
As we squint, see the passengers, a kind of  
Freight, bounce around, unstable as Pop Rocks  
And impossible to pin down. We know there is  
No malice in their unthought movements  
Though we wouldn't mind having a closer  
Vantage point from which to watch our cargo.

And as the train moves further and further off  
Our weariness and distance start playing tricks  
Of the mind and, it looks as though passengers  
Can occupy more than one space at the same time  
Like Warholdian afterimages. Which is the real one?  
And then, distraught, we realize that our packages  
Once seemingly strapped in place also blur  
Like the most elemental building blocks  
Of the universe, into a cloud wherein multiple  
Semantic positions seem occupied simultaneously  
Unlike the mighty train that thunders on  
Its tracks, unquestioned and self-assured.

## **Fusion**

From the outside of the house  
Grey vinyl siding, newly done and happy in its place  
You wouldn't know, by appearances  
That something as important  
Or as delicate as nuclear fusion  
Was going on inside.

And, indeed  
Nothing with that gravity was going on.  
But after a few glasses of wine  
It sure feels like every move is a wager  
Greater than any high-bet table in Vegas  
Or more severe than any nuclear mishandlings  
Chernobyl or otherwise  
That reached me at a distance  
Over the airwaves.

Like those who deal in Uranium  
I choose my moves slow and deliberate:  
The risk-benefit analysis  
Carefully calculated prior to action.  
But, sometimes, the unexpected demands  
Quick, decisive action without thought;  
And sometimes, reflex betrays me.  
Thoughts and actions spiral away  
Like fractal patterns with their own life  
And the fate of the world is out of my hands.

## Crab Apples

That summer Resistance and Class Consciousness  
Were things with no name: vague impulses  
Born of the agitating pressure between  
The Haves, throwing our friends all over  
The Profit-Making-World, and The Have-Nots  
Arranging every living detail for the gain of others.

It began innocent enough, with a ten dollar baseball bat  
And crab apple baseballs picked from an orchard by three  
Abandoned houses past the field by my house, until Nandoo, the son of a physician  
Who was never home cranked a homerun that put Mattingly to shame  
And crashed into the windshield of a passing Cadillac. We all cheered  
Without thought, more genuine than on the school field; once thought returned  
We dropped everything and ran like hell: "Fuck, are they coming?"  
"No, they drove away." "What are we waiting for?" "Let's do it again!"

Returning through the field that fell around us like a welcome veil  
We chattered like old women who had witnessed a miracle  
And danced with a giddiness we didn't know we'd lost.  
That day we turned vandalism into an entertainment industry  
That was two parts organized crime, three parts civil disobedience:  
We had nothing personal against any victim; it was strictly business.

For a year the enterprise flourished and brought us all  
That young Americans could ask for: girls, notoriety, tributes.  
We were Intoxicated Faustus' driving careless  
Into a bubble that looked like a castle.

There were scares of course, and the threat from cops and moles  
Was an imminent danger that we always two-stepped  
Even after Car 157 traced footsteps nearly to my door.

The next June we were an organized force of Freedom Fighters  
Gaining loyal members from school districts we'd barely heard of.  
At our height, we had eighteen people out with a record twenty seven hits  
On one vehicle: a semi taking transmissions from the GM Powertrain facility  
In Tonawanda, which would lose 1,300 jobs in the next year, to parts unknown.

The end began, as most do, like a tiny dot barely noticeable, a tumor  
We'd rather ignore. He had a black shirt and jean shorts. He was somebody's  
Uncle, employed as a groundskeeper across the street from the houses  
At Hunt Real Estate – a guy who really believed in the virtues of hard work  
But who would be downsized and embarking on his vocation of drink within the year;  
Whether he had eavesdropped on information given in confidence  
Or his mowing the lawn that Saturday was just tragic happenstance  
No one will ever know; But, by the time I saw the giant mower  
with no body on it, he was already across the street; and the chase was on.

## **Love Itself Will Not Unfind**

Love itself will not unfind  
But proper placements of syllables -  
“You,” and “I,” and “Love”;  
Syntax of bodies –  
Hands curling around neck  
(In love or on)  
Limbs flailing  
(In love or no)  
Loud voices resonating  
(Songs of love or no)  
Will often (unfair, unneeded) jar forever  
Into hapless, unshapely NOW.

## Understanding

I keep thinking  
I'll come upon a lakeside village  
In the desert  
Known as  
Understanding.

But, what I've come to  
Understand through this pilgrimage  
Is that the water there  
Know as fascination  
Will do:

The greatest home (hope?)  
Is fascination still.