

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.