

## LANGUAGE IS A FRACTURED THING

Strip away the grading rubrics, the style guides, the peer reviews, the professionals with their practiced airs, the newscasters in their prime time slots, and you find that our language is a fractured thing. It is as murky as an elder's youth, as fragile as a swaying bridge, as fickle as a scheming prince, as fertile as a teeming field. For what can you recover from a word? Hungry creature that devours histories, absorbs echoes, saltatory fugitive from catalogues and rules: trace its age and grasp at its root to find a gecko's tail. Its meaning escapes you. Nothing can be known except its use. Usage. All grammars alive and dying. Every word a question particle, every language pictographic.

But you try. You read and write, scream and listen, peel and strip back the paint on the tower of codes, deluge that it is, clawing at the stitches in your eyes, affix by affix, stem by stem, field by field, and nothing is left. Your fingernails are gone and you know everything. There are no reasons, only facts. No derivations, only histories, No truth but what has happened. No meaning but what was said.

We are taught in schools that professional prose should be as objective as possible, which is a way of saying that its meaning can be reconstructed from the dictionary.

The only mysteries left, in this everlit world, are the exceptions. A haunting, pernicious, irregular word. Your grandfather's peasant grammar. When copilot tries to correct your love letters. A Freudian slip, an unintentional pun, a forgotten verb that forces you to settle for second-best. "If perfect writing were to exist, then there would be no such thing as style."

And what do we learn from the forgotten and the wrong? From those foolish voices that cry against knowledge? We learn the glacial flow of sounds, the conquest of peoples, we hear dead men speak their mother tongues, we glimpse the characters of our friends and those far away. We glimpse them in the nakedness of their mistakes.

Because everyone is expected to know everything, it is only through compassion that we come to know each other. That we know there is a human on the other side of the screen.

We learn the secret parts. The forgotten. The discomfitingly familiar. The unglorious. The deliberately suppressed. In the ashes of a village, the ghost of a child calls for his mother. We hear this. We find it in our own language; we find it in each other.

At the bottom of the wreck, there we also find our selves, fractured.

## SUBSTANCE UNCOLLAPSIBLE

We hold ourselves just above nothingness, as a bridge by its keystone, as a star by its churning seethe, as a wave by the fathoms that slumber beneath it. Forced by our flesh to be something other than the blameless void, and a heart beats as a metronome for silence, breaking its hang into rise and fall, wax and wane, the ungraspable stillnesses of consciousness in time.

The body moves unradiantly because it must choose a direction. Every injury and degradation strips away the inborn symmetries that it clings to because it imagines that spacetime is its birthright. But it is not a manifestation of a form, it is not a fallen angel, and the arrow of time points only towards exile. Towards the unpleasant truth that we live because we are forced to live. A speck of shadow from dust on a mirror. In a swimming pool, the bloom of blood. A stain on a perfection that would eat us alive, except that we are cursed to be made out of matter.

Existence endures because there is nothing below it but the void. It flourishes because it is wrong. Because there are infinitely many ways to be wrong, and only one way to be correct. Because only the void is correct. We speak because we have to say something. Now comes a blow, and what makes us scream is the pain which is, also, a part of ourselves. We beg the question of ourselves.

To stare mutely back at eyes that are begging you to speak is to be dead, to be a non-entity, to plead the fifth in the court of god and be rendered untouchable.

Compassion is the fruit of the recognition of brokenness, when the other comes with his limbs in a bag and his body in his hands. You trace the breakage of symmetry in the contour of his being, in the scars it leaves on eternity. His brokenness is discovered in how he breaks the world. And he is, like you, a thing that is forced to live, and the logic of empty heaven implies that the fact that he shouldn't exist is equivalent to the recognition that he does.

And from these aberrations is born a new symmetry, that between you and the other. For a soul-switch would mean a different life, but a life nonetheless. We refigure ourselves, first hedonically, then morally. From the twinges in our joints and the scent of the herbs in our garden it would almost be possible to derive who we currently are. The moment changes, the shadow sweeps the dial, and the new symmetry shows itself to be reincarnation. The compass and escapement, the laws of proportion, trespassed by a word, a touch, whereby we poison ourselves with the presence of the other.

Nor can we ever truly hear ourselves speak, not even in a recording, without the light inside someone else's eyes.

Nor can even the smallest particle be collapsed to nothing, because the vacuum, too, is alive.

## THE DISQUIETUDE OF ROTATION

Your tongue is touched by the leg of some squirming thing which leaves, as you spit, a trace on your puckered lips and, somehow, an itch at the back of your throat. So you swallow, but there it is again. A tingle in your two front teeth. A crick in your jaw that you clench away. You suck in air but something keeps your lungs from fullness and, coughing it out, it is there, again, behind the cough. It is the energy of the cough. The seesaw reach that you create as you chase it around the emptiness that is yourself. The disquietude of knowing that rest is temporary, that you can never be completed. Meanwhile, these contortions which ripple through you are undetected by those who listen as your words tumble out.

Grasp at someone else and find it there, in the interval, yawning, impassable. Wrap your arms around your companion and there it is, the membrane between you, the brush of skin on skin that declares your separation, reminds you of the dislocation of your desire beside yourself. You cannot engulf anything. Nor can you ever banish the unwelcome things which your eyes, engorged by the absence of them, rotate in their sockets and project into your dreams. Every confession raises questions. Every word leaves something unsaid. So you shut your mouth, tape your eyes, plug your nose, hold your breath. And your silence speaks volumes.

The pendulum betrays itself in its paracme swing. Adjacency comes to mean separation and then opposition. The paranormal becomes the antinormal; parallel lines never meet.

A double negative makes a positive. And every statue stands as a monument to the day when its plinth is rubble and its kingdom is myth. Speak the past to tell the future. To know that you cannot say a single thing, nor forge a single chain, that will bind the same way forever.

For all bonds lose their color, shed their quality, become nameless things, memories that you and I were once joined together, somehow, even in infinite ways, even in our antipodality.

The arrogance of Babel was not the unity of its builders but the conceit of cumulation. It was the weight, itself, which collapsed the tower and remade it a wellspring, a refuge, a mine of untold riches, a story. Fracturation and vision are attained in the same poison bite: the vision of good and evil as separate things, the fracturation of a tree that sprawls on forever. The fracturation that we recognize by light through a prism, by the geode's crooked smile, far beacons that hold us adrift in the same quicksilver thirst which we pass on to our children, as our obsequies become their Halloween scares.

When you, too, feel your joints turn to stone and your limbs fall to dust, remember that you are no child of space, no traveler of compass measures, but far, far smaller, perched upon nothingness, being of the void, creature made of cuts alone. And for all you try to hold firm, to fix the center, rest assured that there is magic in the tumble of your reflections across the pith in the world that is gouged out by your existence.

And when you go, it will be a scream that you hear without

knowing, for the first time, whether it is sorrow or joy, yours or someone else's. The pith and the firmament, the flame and its tapestry dance, each the shadow of the other as you trace out your last rotation.

There is nothing that we can take from you but that which you bequeath. Nor can we ever reconstruct you, for it is no easier to scry the forgotten past than the unseen future. The apple's curse is that knowledge transforms the knower. Therefore: any soul which steps into the tomb of your memory is a friendly one—it is your own.

And we shall remember you not as you wish to be, in all your Sunday finest, but as a son to a father, when we dare to think that, someday, we might even surpass you because you are as mortal as we.

## LIFE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

There, beneath brambles, is the grave of a man with no children. His sphere and cylinder in their carved proportion, made, like you, of infinite cuts, arguing burden and lightness. The mind, entombed, yearns to have been inevitable, to still be invokable. The site is gone. What remains are his toys, invented, undiscovered, the gore and roman plate, the frame above the castle walls, the ship that sailed on solid ground. And in his final compass sweep, his blood on a soldier's hands, we remember him through a myth we know to be false.

A life is called by fate, once or a few times, to do some impossible thing. To pry a secret from closed doors, pluck a soul from a body, project an image of god. To meet the wilderness, unclaimed by earthly doctrine, beyond your palace walls, beyond even the comfortable slavery of obscurity or ambition. In the moment of need, earth itself abandons us, suspends us below an ungraspable heaven. Your heart, the fulcrum of a quiet grief that waits for you and only you to shatter the mobile in its sway.

For there is music in a tightrope and terror in the winged word that pierces, at once, the membrane of the other and yourself. In the effluvia are found parcels of your world, transformed that they may understand, in their knowing glimmers, in their bloodied limbs. Fate gives us, in the end, only a few chances to slough our grieving shells, call forth the world as it soaks up our breath and scatters it beyond the parcellation of space.

To command the hushed stage, without audience, without



quoted verse, where the proof of your existence is the ringing in the barrier of your teeth.

In your victorious earthward thud, you feel the soul trapped in stone, resonant, tremulous, and come to see that earth holds heaven inside, heaven which is emptiness. And the recognition of emptiness is the end of nihilism, which injects into everything the fullness of matter, the fantasy of the observer as golem, animated by some gaze that lives beyond piercing. The fragile hubris of a latex glove, the refusal to be taken by divinity.

To be a prince is nothing, for the pauper dwells more earthly than you. Neither can the pauper ever be prepared for the trials he shall face in the tent of the presence. You shall face them in moments of weakness, when the soil stains your furrows, the stars spin their liquid song, the center falls away, and there remains only the bow and the target, the eye half-closed, your soul in its starlight grave, and the hypnagogic realization that you are speaking the only word that you will ever say.

There is, of course, never enough time, never enough skill in your leaden step. You live in the space between the joints that you carve. The castle and its flattering court escape your hands which hold only your own spine, to snap, to see the lifeblood gushing in its helix dazzle, when you know your love is mortal. Know that even a divine word of yours will be buried in false memory, faded by sun, rotted by the wetness of the earth, because it is yours. It belongs to a being that is blessed to die.

Nor could memory or glory ever testify to its correctness. It is spoken to the world itself, so the world judges, in its secret tremor, and in the piercing of yourself you are the world, and you judge. You condemn yourself. You cede the dearest part of yourself, as ashes in a river stream, and it is remembered only in the cryptic way of birdsong, the scars in a grain of sand, the fright in the eyes of a sacrifice, the seep of blood in thirsty soil.

And someday, under a different heaven, upon a different earth, his war machines are children's toys and his formulae are fodder for bookworms. Brambles thrive on everything. But all the erudition of our age cannot save even one of the countrymen for whom he died. It is the barrier of time that keeps us impotent, dollar-store geniuses that we are, who would otherwise dare to tell him that he was not great, dare to reassure him that he was not alone.

And you, inchworm on a skyward bloom, yearning for immortal heaven. Holding high those falling scales, unaware that your melting wings are the best of you, that your disintegration is your meaning, parabolic in your fall, attaining in the burning of yourself the perfect geometry that abhors an earthly thing like you.

## THE RICHNESS OF THE INVARIANT

Comfort comes in the shape of a weave which glides, placidly, like ice beneath a skater's blades, and offers a symbol for every thought, coordinates for every mark on an infinite plane whose horizon proves that you shall never surpass its bounds. The castle pretends that its walls are invisible and there is room enough for everything. You wake, day by day, to each new slice of names and faces, because knowledge can be possessed by no one. The whirl proceeds unmeasured. And all that remains, beneath the shear and the shuffle, is the logician's atomic truth, invariant and therefore necessary, which bears no content and forms the end of every argument.

And all of this treasured convenience rests on the idea that things can be sectioned into parts. Where pebbles are counted, weighed in their defined variety, where the house tilts its own scales. On one side the thronging masses stand, the machines in their slick array, and you, on the other, found always wanting.

Symmetrize again to find that the world, too, is full of want. Every breath holds a question unanswered. The conquest of space creates, in its own wake, the snarl that confounds the ruler's parade. The state of play exceeds the rules that it solves; its cliches are catalogued nowhere. It is because the colossus is alive and growing that we may find, in its forgotten parts, the desert bones whose cracks are the fragmentation of space itself. For complexity is nothing other than the upward deferral of responsibility, and there are only so many necks to hold the wrath of an eye that scours the world.

So where did you go, when you roamed your childhood carefree? Can you find those alleyways again? Those clades which your tiny soul disturbed, hollowed out by sound, scribbled in the margins of a city block. And the river of time changed your solitude into something precious.

Then you would know the print of every fractured place. The holes in a mantle that promises more than it gives. The sandy line between words and sounds, thoughts and their regurgitation. With shattered eyes and broken bread, you find abundance in the hollows of a machine whose gearing you trace down, far down, to reach no foundation but that of doubt and self-reference. Where the heavy oil floats its rusted scraps deeper into the shame of its inferior parts and its incompleteness.

Now you see that every lofty phrase and high syntax is a play in a game built entirely of mistakes. So you devour cathedrals whole. You embrace a stranger as if they were all sin and shame and proud and forgotten bits, and you watch them snap together. Not parts in a scheme, but something deeper. The obliqueness of misremembered space, untethered from flat reckoning. The resonance of an empty field. The character of something wrong. The vision of what the soul must be that brings such blunders to life.

For it is a soul that makes a cathedral out of rubble, and there is no true reading but the tracing of scars. And every individual speaks a different tongue which can never be catalogued, only witnessed apophatically, as an aberration from a canon which is, itself, shattered.

Contra Jung, it is not our own psyches which we find in the darkness between measured blocks, nor a code that yields a plaintext. But there is yet a correctness in the wash of confusion, a correctness, overlooked by the world, that can only be defined in hindsight: the correctness of a riddle, of repentation.

Our fortunes are counted as the raffle drum turns, where it is not a number that dwells unmoved, nor the center of an empty cage, but the unpronounceable name of the presence behind the theater, known through its choices and accidents, its surges and fleeting pauses, its cryptic nepotism towards the attuned. Here where the scales lean with every tome stacked against you, where the years cleave down and sequence you, every language becomes magic because it aims at something impossible.

For there will always be more to analyze, to synthesize, more dust to gorge upon in your erudition. Give up the game you cannot win. Forget the versal dream and dive, beneath the hull and rusted flakes, beneath the words that people think they mean and the convenience of being understood, beneath the spoiled ease of fluency, and there, below the platform, you will find ground enough to stand, where the lever moves the world.

And when you feel small, remember that the world itself is an ancient thing whose caverns are opened and never conjured. Homecoming reaches the wandering soul. In the final turn of fate, not even the slightest advantage is given to one and not another, for heaven and earth appear to all. Nor shall you

ever number your own gifts when you see that every force is a linkage, every fire demands its fuel, and there is, in truth, no difference at all between reading and writing.

And, if you say, in your welling pride, that your heart is a chamber that echoes the sea, that your soul is lambent valley fog, that your cords are flayed by bronze-tipped song, that your tiredness is not age but history, uncatalogued and irreducible, that the heath recomposes itself for you, as you turn, the two of you, in your parallax dance, and you hold the other within yourself and know, by resonance, by portent, that every haven is a center, every glance is uncharted territory, secrets live and die in curtain-folded space, and all emptinesses are interwoven, tassel-braided, then—and only then—can you lay claim to the richness of the invariant of the world.