

“Let’s Praise the Mutilated World “
Caesura, October 15, 2021
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MUTILATED WORLD, by Adam Zagajewski

REMEMBER: Strategies for free writing and early drafts: “the language of the page should be considered temporary language, ripe with possibilities... (Poet’s Companion, Addonizio and Laux, 187).

- List at least five interesting or provocative or surprising words from the poems we read together.
- Five minutes to describe the mutilated or broken world of the last few years, list hardships, pain, news you couldn’t bear. Get it out there to share. Give us common ground of witness.

A few similarities in how these poems achieve power, meaning, and resonate.

- Poems of resistance and protest. Calling for action leaves room for a hope for change.
- Thankfulness, gratitude, a sense of a way out.
- Unflinching look at the painful events.
- Pausing, making space/time to witness, allowing a breath.

- Seeing the other side, another perspective.
- Ambivalence/uncertainty or doubt instead of resoluteness, which leads to believability.
- Revelation, epiphany (“Apparition,” Doty. “Beatific,” Smith.) Be careful not to come off as sentimental or forced.
- Poems of rescue and sacrifice realized through memory/hindsight (“What You Missed,” Modlin; “The Raincoat,” Limon), the body (“The Kiss,” Howe; “Grace,” Addonizio); light and dark as metaphor.-----

After DIAZ, “IT WAS THE ANIMALS...”

Prompt:

Use a structure of ambivalence and uncertainty. What happens when you try to see the other side? Is it possible only in the imaginary world?

I blame xxxxxxxxxxx but I’m glad that xxxxxxxxxxx.
I hated xxxxxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxxxxx.
but I was surprised to see xxxxxxxx and xxxxxxxxxxx.

Riff on that surprising image. Just witness. Don’t judge. Where does that image take you?

AVOIDING SENTIMENTALITY.

“Poems that are not sentimental allows tensions both to arise and to continue unresolved beyond the ending of the poem, which in turns allows the poem to continue to resonate in the reader’s thoughts and feelings” (Lockwood, 190). Strategies to toughen up a poem and avoid sentimentality:

- Use understatement instead of laying it on thick
- Be specific because sentimentality is abstract and bland. Use facts, careful observations.
- Avoid cliches not just of language but of perception
- Don’t avoid Darkness, danger and risk because sentimentality refuses to acknowledge dark or negative potential.
- Be objective, take a step back, create a distance between speaker/you/poet and the subject. Not always “this happened to poor me”

LOOK AT RELAX, ELLEN BASS, PAGE 5 and SMALL KINDNESSES, 14, DANUSHA LAMERIS.

PROMPT: Follow Bass. Make a list of “bad things” — some funny or lighthearted, irreverent, some serious and dangerous. Keep it distant from yourself. Use the universal YOU.

Or conversely, a list of small kindnesses. Title it: “mostly we don’t want to harm each other”

For further work — Include a turn: Brainstorm philosophical truisms, parables, fairy tales with lessons or morals, old wives tale. Structure the poem as Bass did, ending on an image from the parable.

READ MODLIN “WHAT YOU MISSED THAT DAY YOU WERE ABSENT”.

PROMPT: I WISH I LEARNED xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

What didn't you learn but should have? What did you learn too late? How does this relate to the world we're in today? What did you wish you knew when you were younger? Something about your bad habits, religious beliefs? who you know? politics? Something irreverent and funny? Include a weird fact or two.