

LOVE, BONE, FURY

I teach occasionally, not well, haltingly, in a rumbling nasal mumble, with a tendency to speak too fast and wave my arms in an alarming manner and shift recklessly from topic to topic like a man desperate to find the right gear in a borrowed car. I rant and rave and slide suddenly into anecdotes that often feature my hilarious daughter and melon-headed twin sons. I cannot go five minutes (or three sentences) without making reference to the genius poet William Blake. I wring my hands and stutter and mutter and recite shreds of poetry. Once, in the cracked guttural voice of a toad, I sang a song. I ask students sudden personal questions. I sail off into disquisitions about George Orwell and Flannery O'Connor and Li Po. I begin by talking quietly about writing, which is an ancient and muscular art, and end by talking passionately about love and bone and fury, because those things are in the very best writing.

As I shuffle toward the class I am to teach I always think darkly that I have nothing to say, because fine writing is hard to explain; it is made by terrific labor, rude honesty, and the irresistible urge to tell stories. But then I am in front of the class and I start to tell stories, among which the incredibly persistent story of a young Jewish carpenter hammered to a wooden cross and murdered and reborn, and of Gautama Buddha, who sat like a root under a tree before he saw the intricate weave of the world, and of the Irish genius Van Morrison, who sings the truth, and of Cú Chulainn mac Súaltainn and Finn mac Cumhaill, the roaring heroes of ancient Ireland, and my friend Blake, who saw angels bespangled in trees and who spoke to the prophet Elijah on Saturdays, and of my wife and children, whose love and stories sustain and save me, and the hour flies by and I have to be wrestled from the classroom by burly deans.

As I shuffle back to my office, my brain humming, I think three things: that the essence of teaching is the passing of enthusiasm to students; that the courtesy of students is, thank God, immense; and that it is relentless, it comes always, often unexpectedly, often unbidden, sometimes from muttering middle-aged men with bent noses and bad ties, who mill their arms and sing their delight like children open-mouthed in the sudden summer rain.

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Brian Doyle, Editor

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