

SL

Poetry

Because Getting Anywhere Takes a Long Time

Matthew Lippman

Tommy called to say he'd like to come over. And we walked into the room, and he said, "I've decided to move on." And as soon as he said it, he started crying. And his crying told me everything I needed to know. — Robert Kraft

Last night I watched this documentary on The New England Patriots called *The Dynasty*. It's a 20-year story with names like Belichick and Brady and Kraft.

I'm not a big football guy but I'm a big heart guy.

It bleeds all over the asphalt every day when I think about birds or my kids or my friends Michael and Mark.

I never played football.

I'm too short and don't have enough guts.

All that blood and those muscles burning like small piles of leaves after a day with the rake.

Everyone who has ever been interviewed about football says words like *brotherhood* and *team* and *men*.

I love that word, *men*, because I have never been one, at least for now.

Then, in this documentary, Robert Kraft says, *And his crying told me everything I needed to know.*

It was as if the whole history of humankind's sadness was alive in Bob's face — may I call him Bob? —

like crying was the only way out and in

to everything and everyone in the arc of everything.

I mean, that was it,

like we could solve the magnanimous tumult of agony and joy in the act of crying.

Who needs pads and little leather balls that float through the air, and fields of green and sweat and blood and inches?

Oh, I love that, when they say

football is a game of inches.

Because getting somewhere, anywhere, always takes a long time,
through a lot of glass and steel and mass and bodies
falling over other bodies and buildings and corporations and each other.

I think football is stupid and beautiful and everything that is wrong with humanity
and I think Bob Kraft feels the same way.

But this is a lie and I am making it up for this poem.

This is what I am not making up: I taught his grandchildren.

I taught them English Literature in high school and I loved them and they loved me
and you know why?

Their hearts were always crying all over the whiteboard and desks;
their words were little boats of tears, the ones they used in their poems and essays
like *goldenrod* and *harmony* and *harpsichord*.

It was smart that they never used words like *gridiron* and *touchdown*
and *65-right on the swivel, hike*.

And I am not name dropping because I hate football.

I am just saying that when Mr. Kraft said that about Tom Brady
what he was saying about everyone

was what we all know —

that words don't mean anything

and maybe that is why football is not stupid

because bodies are not stupid

and we all have to figure out ways to use our bodies

to say, *you are my beloved and I will die for you,*

so if that means that one 300-pound man

has to push another 300-pound man out of the way

to prevent the quarterback from getting broken in half

so be it.

When Mr. Kraft said, *I knew everything in the world about his tears,*
I knew that he knew that tears were everything,
that tears had nothing to do with winning or losing or draft picking or NFL-ing.
I knew that he knew that tears were the obliteration of words
and this is why we have to smash them,
because words are the thing that get us most in trouble
whether we are in the stands drinking Bud Light,
on the sidelines calling the plays,
or in the end zone, shaking our ass
after making the one-handed grab
over the helmeted head of a collapsing corner.

Matthew Lippman is the author of six poetry collections. His latest collection, *We Are All Sleeping With Our Sneakers On* (2024), is published by Four Way Books. His previous collection *Mesmerizingly Sadly Beautiful* (2020), also published by Four Way Books, was the recipient of the 2018 Levis Prize.