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# Everything I Love Restored

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*Everything I Love Restored*

By

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BA, Saint Louis University, 2011

A THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI—SAINT LOUIS  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

In

CREATIVE WRITING  
With an Emphasis in Poetry

May, 2011

Advisory Committee

Steven Schreiner, PhD  
Chairperson  
Glenn Irwin, MFA  
Shane Seely, MFA

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#### Abstract

It's no secret that my poetry documents my experiences in recovery from Schizophrenia. I feel like I have created a source that many years ago would have been consigned to silence. At the outset of my writing I was introduced to the Romantics and I loved trying to absorb their self-consciousness; if the Romantic Vision declares the connection between the self and the world, my own statement explores what happens when that environment turns inward and betrays the subject. I hope that I have shared a sort of urban shamanism while playing somewhat ironically with the language of psychiatry; I have tried always to explore what all of this has to do with language. I pray that my love for the poor is clear.

#### Acknowledgements:

For my wonderful sister who is a true poet; for the memory of my Mother and Father; for all my aunts and uncles and cousins; for the early poets in the loop who spurred me on; for Tom Reck and Richard Reiss at Lutheran South; for Vince and Devin and Matt Turner and my friends at SLU; for Eamonn and Glen and Mary Troy and John Dalton and Steve and Shane; for Kim and Julia and Catherine; for Mike and Tony and Al and Rass; for all my buddies who know who they are!!

Everything I Love Restored  
and Other Poems

Matthew Freeman

And they were all amazed,  
and were in doubt,  
saying to one another,  
What meaneth this?

Acts 2:12

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## Finally a Consistent Poetics

We are in the world  
but we are not of the world.

Let's say there's a little light in here tonight,  
that it isn't just wine-dark,  
that it isn't just a dream.

Let's say you took Apollo  
and hit him on the side of the head  
with a hammer.

Let's say you took Jezebel  
to your page-white bed  
and she marked you  
with a stammer.

## Platonic Squad

You're not going to  
sing your way  
out of this one—

look at you sitting  
there on the little bench  
with your hands  
cuffed behind your back—

you repeat you saw  
three white sprites  
last night in  
the tavern mirror

as the guy takes you weight  
and rolls your  
thumb along the black

and sits you back down—

no decentered dreamer has  
ever had a  
less propitious origin—

then it's out to the paddy wagon  
and down to Central, where

an Idea blazes in the morning sun,  
Perfection tugs at your heart,  
you get too cracked to be particular,  
you get too bound to let the lyrical  
ghosts in the heaven of a glass  
pass back through you.

## The Symbolic

If you live long enough  
you will become  
the Other.

Today I was at the  
new City Diner  
when Maggie came up—  
she's so cool, she  
and her girlfriend both  
have tattoos of the Hitchcock image  
of Jimmy Stewart going down the spiral—  
and when she refilled my cup  
she lightly mercifully  
touched my shoulder with her fingers.

I don't think I was so meaningfully  
touched since those burly  
orderlies held me down differently  
and the vacant nurse shot  
me full of Haldol and Ativan.

"I lie to women," I remember crying,  
before they came and gave me  
another shot. But that was so long ago.  
Now, as I write this, the workmen  
are remolding Grand by Lindell,  
near Jesuit Hall, where in another life  
I asked for an exorcist, where I  
jumped out of my car and chased Lacan.  
I can't write anymore.  
I have to go get an award.

## Getting Over It

I remember the touch,  
the touch that was  
always accompanied  
by the sound  
of ice cubes rattling  
in a glass of scotch.

Almost like the sound today  
of a used insulin needle  
knocking around  
in an empty can of chicken noodle  
soup as I threw  
my garbage down the chute.

## Red and Regret

There being no cure, he said (I was getting some strange wide looks from the occupational therapist while I was riding the exercise bike, the borderline witch was staring at me, "be decent" was written on it in marker, in a second I'd have to take a cold shower) we think you're fairly stable now. Not totally psychotic.

So I hit the streets and 12-stepped at the day hospital, got to see that Red'd drank himself onto disability, took a tower of trips,

you could tell when he had the shuttle driver put on modern rock and then lean back completely soothed, not on a bad trip at all, a whole hell of a lot better than prison, for Red had nearly killed a guy in a deal gone bad, and when he asked me how to play it my recommendation was to stop the bullshit—nobody gets better after one dose of Prozac.

And then some nurse or tech took Red's Doritos and he flipped out, wearing a do rag, big ropy arms, he started throwing chairs and overturning tables while three old gals huddled against me. I saw a big sheet of paper.

What I was thinking then was that I should have taken my old dog Murphy's paw, gently, I should have wet the sand in his eyes with my tears, I should have rubbed his bare ribs, put my head against his heart as they put him to sleep. Yes, that's what I was thinking.

## Allure

Back when he was at his absolute height  
(Colgate shaving cream, Rosicrucianism,  
Old Spice, obscure headaches)  
something came from under and sort of  
dug up his whole garden, if you will,  
uprooted all those flowers and then buried them.  
It was straight-up witchcraft, yo.

He would lie with Lesbia under his Grandma's quilt  
on the wooden floor under his loft  
and Lesbia would just barely touch his knee,  
he could hardly feel her finger, but  
when he went to embrace her she would pull away.  
So he would wait and wonder.  
After a while he could sense her finger  
along his belt—she would never undo his belt—  
and he could barely keep from crying out,  
he had to keep absolutely still, that was the game,  
he had to let the unconscious burst through his brain,  
he had to give up all power to sensibility,  
he had to be the swain sweating the vision of the Ideal.

Years later, when he finally came,  
he could hear his neighbor cruelly laughing in the hall.

## Of the Educational Variety

There was nothing more to be done with me once  
I'd begun claiming I was Chuchulain,  
mirroring the nurse's Irish accent.

So I got out and went down shady Delmar  
down Debaliviere to Talayna's where my mom  
had often spent our last dollar and complained when  
the order wasn't right. The barmaid appeared  
to be either worried or brimming with joy, she wanted me, too.  
Something infinitely familiar and symbolic was happening  
when the bouncer put a meaty hand on my shoulder.  
"I thought you knew you were banned, Freeman."

Somewhere deep in Forest Park was the girl with rays  
of light coming out her eyes, the transcendental  
bum who hid his mattress in the copse, my  
shoes were filling with mud and water,  
I was shocked by a mocking image of Lesbia  
kissing two guys by the statue of Saint Louis,  
Diana sat on the steps of the Art Museum with  
a crushing sexual sneer. My heart raced, I was  
a chubby dark-haired kid with all kinds of laurels.  
Unable to read the clouds, I made it to Del Taco:  
No service at the drive-thru without a car.

Back home through the hallowed basement  
and up to my top floor, disorganized,  
shit all ripped up in the primary process,  
the only order being  
a bottle of wine and loaf of bread on the window sill.

Agon, Girls, Guilt

I've gone to great pains  
elsewhere in elaborating  
on my view that  
epistemology—

and there's Johanna  
across the street  
on the roof of the apartment complex  
bathing herself  
in a galvanized tub  
and she's got  
golden ringlets and little  
tattoos—

so I may as  
well confess  
here my  
interlocutor in an  
apparent diminution of  
sequence and duration keeps  
repeating either  
"deum" or "damn"

and tried to throw a chair through the window  
yesterday when at that very moment,  
in an elusive ecstasy, I found the cure for Sisyphus.  
Darn. I just forgot Johanna's name.

## Sublimated

I noticed Red sitting by the  
phone bank looking particularly  
angry with his big hairy  
forearms and hairy chest  
having just got off with the  
Post-Dispatch trying to sell them  
on his story  
of unjust hospitalization

when this striking young doctor  
walked by wearing tight  
jeans under her lab coat and  
I mean she sure was pretty  
but Red was not impressed  
and he started shouting  
“I want you to get off your ass  
and draw up my discharge papers  
right now and I don’t want to  
hear any shit and you can give  
me my prescription  
before I sue your ass! Get on it!”

And over in the corner  
all I kept thinking about  
was the Constant Symbol, the  
Constant Symbol—where a heightened  
sense of presence could  
manifest itself—and how everything  
had to be sublimated  
or else what you would be reading  
would be just straight-up  
pornography.

## Everything I Love Restored

The angels are falling all over themselves,  
lights are quickly turning green,  
buses are coming early,  
I'm paying attention only to the backbeat, the cathexis.

I'd found myself in a South City boarding home  
after having been relegated into  
a diaspora of confusion, I couldn't  
bear the weight of the Virgin, I was

rather quick in assuming everyone was  
blind, I was losing my sight, some guy  
had handled a dirty bomb, some guy was  
in the CIA, it was the time for the assassins.

But then Jim Morrison came to take me on a trip.  
His leather had changed to corduroy. Wherefore, Jim?  
"After that heroin tub, when the soul sought  
Avernus, I went through the Program

in Purgatory. Old Cherry—you ruined each other—  
bit by a Cottonmouth hiking with her husband,  
bid me come forgive you and make you give it up."  
We followed these black demons to the door of the

Mellow Methodist church and I whispered to Cherry.  
We passed the spot where Seagraves got hit  
on the head with a brick by the brother of a young girl he'd  
kissed. Oh Jim, we went to the pawn shop

to get my guitar but I was a dollar short.  
Finally forlorn, Jim taught me to put  
my hand through my hair darkly, with affect,  
and to yelp loudly during the hilarious innuendo.

He taught me translucence, how to get back  
to the Celts, the Lakota. He showed me  
the raindrop on the petal on the windowsill  
in the breeze. We came to Jefferson Barracks.

Standing at my parents' grave I noticed a little  
something covered in the grass: the magic tessera dollar  
of completion! I'd died just like the art therapist  
had predicted and now I could get my gold guitar!  
Jim morphed into a mad girl in a Mercedes asking for gas money.

## Condition Center

I feel like nothing's foreign to me now.  
I fall like Icarus and nothing hurts,  
I swim in all the faces, all the skirts,  
nothing is strange, there's nothing I don't know.

Old Orpheus is knocking at the door  
and wants to know how to evade the curse,  
how to revive the drive that stops and starts.  
(align yourself and watch your instinct grow)

Yet some pervasive system lingers while  
the suffering abates a little bit.  
You mean to say a myth betrays this lack?

You mean I'm not confined to hospital?  
I'm on a date, I'm like, I'm on a date?  
I walk the grad school halls, I'm like, I'm back?

## The Strength to Be Normal

Now that I have the life I always wanted,  
living in public housing and writing poems,  
somehow having been delivered from fragmentation,  
sitting on my professor's porch swing  
rolling a cigarette in the now merely lambent wind  
with everyone at the party  
having taken me seriously against all odds,  
I find myself watching a documentary  
about a young songwriter about to lose his mind—  
oh those days Lesbia said  
you can't be going crazy if you think you are—  
and he seems to be famous only for being crazy  
and I'm thinking maybe I ought to stop Clozaril  
and let myself completely go again and then  
I remember my old case manager,  
Showstopping Sally, whom I thought I was gonna marry,  
and how I got in trouble  
for writing a wild epithalamium all over my walls  
with certain letters missing for hallucination  
and how I switched my big ring to my little ring finger  
and in the morning woke up without it—  
that was the icing on the cake  
then—everything was foreign—I couldn't  
read the walls anymore—it was  
that thing where you're naked and God  
is asking you exactly where you are—  
and was that past greatness but now  
waiting for the integration,  
I had to become the medicine man at length  
I was entered, I went down the steps three times  
and out and held the branches so they didn't stir,  
I had to protect myself from becoming too ecstatic,  
at the pharmacy I leaned back and closed my eyes  
and Sally kept whispering the word "big," I had given up on that,  
now it would be thousands and thousands of dollars at Barnes,  
now my sister would have to weep and wail again,  
no protection, no breast to lean on,  
the guy in the documentary wearing foil on his head  
in order to better receive communication from the aliens,  
now I have my new ring and I stand on Lindell looking at the mourners,  
now I give roses again to Julia and Donna, it's everything I always wanted—  
not to be called psycho on the Greyhound,  
not to collide with the big ironic gay bell in my head,  
just to watch the rising and falling of the chests  
of the sick and poor, thinking and wondering, beautiful.

## "Eleana" Returns

"Eleana" somehow got across to Eleana,  
and we sadly have no way of figuring it out.

We do know that after our solemn and sexual goodbye  
she went on to fuck the guy next to her on the plane.

Meaning moon, moon. Meaning we were merely a phoneme,  
we thought we were plenary, we thought we were signified;

we thought we were witty and fully hermeneutic when  
Eleana's devious friend took a shower at our place

and we chastely handed her a towel. The waste! Eleana in Japan,  
"modeling," circumstances unclear. We did hear she hooked

up with the bass player of a lesser-known hair metal band.  
We were driven to the frenetic phrase, stupid and bruised.

Some loser put a perfect drawing of Eleana under our door,  
nobody'd seen such beauty up so close ever before.

We played time's fool and were then unable to rest, at dusk we  
desperately shaved our chest, and in the end "Eleana"

darkly shifted across to us, and we wept when she came  
home and wouldn't pull her shorts aside for a

second before her mom showed up—oh deeply how we wept.  
Later, in our Mustang, while her mother slept

Eleana casually checked her nails and asked if we were done yet.  
Soon Poverty and Paranoia would ask if we were having fun yet.

“I Have this Condition...There is no Center”

My sister says I'm better than Rimbaud;  
and for such praise I suffer de riguer.  
I share my birth with Antonin Artaud—  
a black umbrella spread against the drear

and lonesome sky lets nothing of the wink  
you'd see when God allows two clouds to press  
and mingle. As I've sobered up, the drink  
awaits to drive me back to nervousness.

God smiles as He lets you down. My love  
was Lesbia—She crowned me with a laurel  
burned and cooked upon a Wiccan stove.  
We parted soon after a poseur's quarrel.

I suffer like a postmodern Camus.  
Oh frenemies, if you could wouldn't you?

## Losing Weight

Sometimes I go a good  
twelve or thirteen minutes  
without thinking  
about Lesbia

and what does  
suffering  
have to do with  
picking up a pen

and making marks  
on a white sheet  
of paper—

Keyword: "Flat"

Even the people who were paid to listen to him  
were getting sick of constantly hearing how  
he couldn't use his arms anymore, how he  
just sat there at the bus stop with his hands on his knees,  
how he couldn't fake it for girls, how he could  
no longer tell the difference  
between Mozart and Beethoven, they thought  
that since he'd stopped thinking that there was  
a radio device in his teeth then everything was ok.

He didn't want to change anyone, he didn't want  
to roll into the big city under a dark sky  
and get misunderstood, his poem was about the  
loss of a precursor and the restoration of the central  
element, giving Curly forty cents and a cigarette,  
his poem was about the winter without heat  
when his father lay remote under the covers,  
and the wealthy Real Ivory Thugs sleeping with the hot  
undergraduates, and how his Real was his expulsion,

but let's let the Redactor close his eyes and get critical:  
"It was written that the mockery of his will and drive  
was tied to the bright silver ring he lost down in  
the elevator shaft. You can't understand what he's  
kicking. You can't see him. God knows you've tried.  
Let's face it. You would have to have died."

## You Have to be Beaten Down

The only thing worse than an aggressive hippy  
coming up to you in clownish  
tie-dye and hemp necklace on Ninth Street  
when you are possibly on a date  
and bumming a smoke  
and asking you how to get  
to somewhere evidently called Angels  
with wide and winking eyes

is frantically finding a payphone to  
call your father to beg him  
for money to come home  
and upon picking up the receiver  
hearing no dial tone but only  
someone saying "let's kill him"

and dropping the receiver and running  
away and then everyone saying  
"you've got to find your voice" and  
thinking about that for three years

but actually the worst of all is beautiful  
Dr Valentine giving you a shot of Haldol  
and leaning her cleavage into you and  
telling you about side-effects and saying calmly,  
"tell me if you feel any stiffness."

## Breaking and Entering Again

It was in Manhattan naïve and  
we were still young and heavy-feathered,  
and Mahler bought these tabs from  
a gal named Minnie for ten bucks, she  
lived on St Mark's, we sat out front of  
Shades of Green and everything  
was glowing and breaking outward and  
Mahler started jumping up and down  
and screaming that nothing was happening  
when a squad car pulled up to us  
and rolled down the window and Mahler said  
we were just sitting there talking about girls  
but I got busted on a curfew violation  
and while I was sitting in the back behind  
the cop I looked at my grandpa's ruby ring  
I wore to prep school but saw myself pawning it  
with holes in my knees from praying, when  
Pain said, "Let's make everything clear. I will  
devour all your obfuscation." But then Obfuscation  
called to say, "Don't get all dissipated just yet. And  
remember all those Celtic books you read."

And Mahler said you're not crazy unless  
you rip up that ticket and throw it away  
so I did that and he leaned back and screamed  
and we strove all night whispering in the cheap  
hotel room where hookers brushed past our door  
we whispered call Dr Dick and have him call  
us a shrink and we looked at a *Playboy* and freaked  
and I saw Jimmy Page on an arabesque carpet  
but I don't know how we slept with this never  
things were not groovy, not far out, not innocent,  
not cool, and in the morning I took the  
weirdest possible shower somebody could take.

## One for the Boys in Vienna

I began by crossing myself  
every time I heard  
the Lord's name  
taken in vain—  
whether in print,  
on the screen,  
or in conversation.

After much striving  
I found myself doing it  
whenever anyone  
made a grammatical error.

Now we are saying this,  
we who despise  
all secrecy,  
we who have been  
too tuned in for a great while.

## Recuperation at the Cheshire Inn

I've been showered with so many completions  
lately that I've had to step back  
and question my own mortality—  
like I always used to do by the Masonic Temple,  
like I did that time I was eighteen  
and I walked in to see Lesbia  
pouring my Jack Daniels down the drain—  
but this isn't any bullshit,  
I can see the late phases, I can see the dead,  
it's only when I take a little Ativan  
that my consciousness makes more  
of an impression than my dream.

Today I was walking down Clayton Road  
with this delicate yellow rose for Julia—  
I was praying it wouldn't wilt, I was  
praying it wouldn't crumble in my backpack—  
and suddenly all the construction was done  
at the Cheshire Inn and the three o'clock bar  
was back open and the hotel looked cheerful  
and I took a big deep breath and walked over  
to the spot ten years ago I broke in and  
slid down the beer chute to avoid the bouncers  
after I'd been banned and sad and then got arrested—  
nothing was there but asphalt and a potted plant.

Now I've found my true subject, it's the wedding  
of the revision and attrition with the fullness  
and lament of repetition. Like I'm a bull  
in the china shop of time. Oh, don't say that.  
Like I've got Toddler Time over my knee  
and I'm spanking the shit out of him.

## Little Tom Leaves Me for the Ivory Tower

It's all coming true again,  
I scratched until I bled.

I was down in the trenches with Tom,  
we were keeping our heads down,

there was a horrible battle above us  
between these really big-thighed women

raging, one side was wearing gray and  
the other side was wearing dark gray,

they fought on and on the walls of the trenches  
were these muddy calendars

and while I always say I was fucked over by language  
each calendar had a bunch of dates marked

where I'd fucked someone else over with  
language, where I'd used

wretched innuendo and paranoid allusions,  
where I'd used secretive referents,

and it started raining really hard  
and the trenches started filling up

and as much as we wanted to avoid  
the battle it looked like we were going

to have to make a decision, we were  
implicated, but the calendars

were getting wetter and wetter and  
they began to fall apart—

all of a sudden Tom rises up in  
a tweed suit carrying a briefcase—

Tom, I'm lonely, where are you going?  
"I don't wanna get hit by lightning again!"

## The Cream Always Rises to the Top

Things started working out for me by the age of two—  
oh, there were some heavy heady days before then,  
down in the Irish ghetto, my dad setting  
me on the bar at O'Shea's where most of the guys drank Bud,  
this was before Guinness and gentrification, it  
was strange when someone ordered a Miller—  
but I cried and was terrible for the breast—  
someone noticed when you threw something at me  
I could catch it, I already had these great eyes,  
I swung the little yellow plastic bat so level,  
sometimes I would refrain and exclaim, "Ball,"  
and Jack O'Shea would dip his finger in Jameson  
and I would lick it as the skirts swayed closer,  
I fooled around with cords and electricity,  
boys tried on my Cardinal's cap but I pushed them down  
and skinned their knees, I was a great judge of character,  
the girls deferred to me as they brought their new boyfriends in,  
I would turn up my nose and scoff at them in my gentle way,  
my hair was so blonde that it was blonde when wet,  
these boyfriends tried to get to me with candy and Cardinal scores,  
I was always looking at maps and dreaming of Montana,  
I picked the winners in bar fights so it was useless to fight,  
once my dad left me on the pinball machine and  
I pointed out all the girls who would get pregnant first,  
I was chubby with curly hair, it was sunny, Churches got quiet,  
no one remembered my first word, I liked it right before the rain,  
the smell of cheap lager was always with me, and the body  
odor of Cardinal's fans who were dying for barmaids,  
passed out and bled, my magical year of fat two, flying,  
perched on the bar, my mom's eyes were so bright, we danced  
in the mist amid the swaying skirts at O'Shea's, numberless,  
clear, the best year of my life on the mount, a little lover.

## It Could Happen to Anyone

My high school buddy was a depressed young kid—  
he began to look like some kind of painter with  
messy jeans and tangled hair, he found himself as  
an artist and suddenly quit the football team—  
no one could understand why a sixteen-year-old  
would suddenly get so sullen and wear silk shirts  
and walk the halls with shoulders back and hips asway,  
he'd had good grades—even as he was overly fond of the bottle—  
but here came all this incomprehensible mercury.  
One day he went home early, school was no use and  
everybody was reading the wrong shit, and he opened  
a few of his dad's beers and started writing,  
observations, word-play, stuff of no origin, he couldn't  
understand what was happening, what is this,  
it was rough, he kept trying to evoke the purple sky  
and there was also something very American about it,  
and then on prom night he lay there writhing,  
truly green dying alone, his mom opened the door  
with a glass of scotch and said I know why you're home tonight  
and he said Get out Mom Get out, and he got into fights  
and they took him to this doctor in South County  
where all his rich messed-up classmates went  
and they talked about a lot of stuff—of course, he knew  
very well how to make his drinking look innocent—  
and the doctor figured he was depressed and prescribed  
some pills which naively the kid hoped would get him high;  
he didn't get high, nor did he write.  
His mom found an ashtray under his bed and that was it—  
he combed his hair and a Christian girl asked him out!  
Unbelievable! He still had good enough grades  
to get into a good school, maybe he would do Pre-Law,  
it might be too late to play football but he heard  
there were rugby teams at a lot of colleges... and now  
that he's an adult with a sweet ride and a good job  
sometimes he likes to drive around by himself  
and listen to old rock and roll, he'll roll down the  
windows and pick up speed when his favorite lines  
from Van Halen come around: "You know I've been  
to the edge, baby, and I stared and looked down. I  
lost a lot of friends there. I got no time to mess around."  
That's me, he thinks, big rising. So  
he drinks moderately, has a lot of tools in his garage.

## Fractured Healer

Even now I have hope  
(is it God)

as I weave in and out  
of the outdoor diners in the evening  
on Delmar  
and it's seventy degrees  
in December

and I come to Ranoush  
and the bejeweled beauties  
are laughing ridiculously

while I look into the distance  
at some reflection

that says  
maybe you should just start lying  
again

Extra

When I pass you on my way  
to the mailbox  
and eagerly smile

(though I don't fully  
smile because I do not  
want to expose  
my rotten teeth)

you don't know  
that I'm expecting  
that big black  
handwritten letter

condemning me to death.

## Supplant

It took me ten minutes to realize  
the cold wind was blowing  
through my cavities  
like an Aeolian lute of pain.

(I'd snapped my fingers  
to quell the  
ringing static on the radio)

Right where no bird sings,  
where the telephone meaningfully  
rings, something  
had been (violently) wrong with me,

before you know  
empathy makes your mouth  
hurt like it's been hooked—

I swiped my card  
and saw the security guard  
so lightly sleeping  
that I knew

every little thing had to be a miracle.

## Another Reaction Formation (Secret)

Melinda Money and I  
were pounding dollar draughts of Busch  
in this tarnished South City tavern  
where so far from home

anybody from the Brown School  
ought to easily spot  
ideas of reference or the Diablo;

but I, I turned in my chair  
and pointed toward the afternoon window.  
“They don’t get it all. Just look at them.  
Everybody on Washington Square had that  
strange gift which could turn the lowliest  
bum into a secret guru and the top  
guy on Wall Street into a panting paranoid.  
Did I tell you how I got bounced from the  
Arts and Science building when it opened?  
I was on this weird Stephen Foster kick.  
Some kid said when you just mention  
the CIA strange overcoats come asking around.  
And while that is true, I’ve found chicks don’t  
think it’s all that cool. You’re crossing the street  
and the stopped cars are just full of them laughing.  
Fine, I could go without sex forever. I’m  
the most belated guy in history. Except for Jesus.”

Oh Miss Money, secure somewhere now  
in your practice, please accept a  
private Kabbalah from a once promising  
scholar, descended to a townie:  
I’ve been having sex with sex.

## Prescription

Finally the drive was restored.  
You try to get close but  
you get smacked. Harold Bloom  
had my back. "I was born on  
the same day as Artaud," I cried.  
"Maybe that accounts for my verse."  
"That identification is correct,"  
he supplied. I'm happily cursed.

I was disgusted and upset and still  
all day long the wind moved  
and I twittered with the leaves. We  
made crazy stuff with construction  
paper and the girl with the  
widest eyes you've ever seen who  
just got kicked out of med school  
lay on a blanket at my feet in the  
the observation room and the  
high functioning maniac came in  
and complained that his consciousness  
was cleared and that everything had  
two meanings. No shit, Sherlock.

I've had the heightened sun, the heightened moon,  
I've gotten higher than Morrison ever dreamed.  
I've broken it down. God's promises are true.  
The Delmar visions become kinda blue  
in this elevated quotidian. But you  
still can't see me. What I'm kicking  
are the different discourses, the desiccation  
drowning in the oceanic tomb that  
the devil dreads. And all I have to do to  
become a genius is stop taking my meds.

## An Apostrophe on South Grand

Oh buddy, now that we know that  
I'm so much poorer than you  
and that you have this huge new flatscreen  
that plays Pandora somehow  
and that you have this fancy new home  
with new sofas and fashionable pillows  
and your girlfriend is wise and pretty  
and my gray dress socks are  
not really gray but used to be white,  
I peeped from the bathroom cracked door  
when the lights went low and the music  
went loud because I was afraid that  
there might be an orgy so when I  
found it was safe to come out everybody  
was pretending to dance, they asked me  
to join in so I pretended to dance too and  
I thought, "right now I am dancing,"  
so I had to leave and go up to the roof  
where scarcely could a star be seen  
and we joked, "no influence," though we  
knew that wasn't right, and your table  
was full and there was no place for me  
so I went and sat near the edge  
where I couldn't understand what you were saying,  
suddenly I think I've accidentally gone too far and  
figured out what my problem is,  
language under this distorted and  
enormous amount of pressure, how  
I try to sneak up on you in the center and croon,  
how I really haven't learned anything at all,  
if I had a kid there would be nothing to tell him,  
just this overwhelming sadness on the South Side,  
this disturbed squirrel coming up to me and begging,  
trying to get through, the saddest thing I've ever seen.

## And He Used to Think He'd Die in a Bar Fight

Oh wretched Matthew,  
some people eat mushrooms  
in order to see God

while you take a bunch  
of pills in order  
to not see the devil.

After the seventy-five minute  
MRI intelligence test nightmare  
you found yourself  
finding your bearings  
by the Chuck Berry statue,  
shaking off the sea legs,  
opening and closing your fists,

and when you sneezed  
this beautiful intelligent hipster girl  
blessed you

and you heard wedding bells,  
you felt like throwing up,  
you were tempted to just be random,  
just to make a bunch of sounds and gestures,  
but something else in you was rising,  
we'll call it belief and beautiful timidity,

because, Oh Martyr Matt, some ecstatic  
people never get the chance to  
sit alone sweaty in a crowded Houlihan's  
and pick up on the diabolical metaphor,  
the barmaid's turgid semaphore,  
and then race out of the bar in  
the rising wind and pray that the things  
they are saying have been said  
a long long time ago.

## Fragmented on Broadway

I stepped out of the boarding home  
and into the rain, I was some  
new electric theory in the head  
of a beautifully mixed up bitter humanist,

I had forgotten everything I was worried about,

and as I went along in the torrent  
up Broadway my shoes began to fall  
apart and my guitar case began to weaken,  
I rolled a cigarette under an overpass,

then I put on my huge black glasses  
at the bus stop and started moving my  
hands in front of me as if I were trying  
to find my way in the dark and when  
the bus pulled up I got on for free and  
said take me to the Center, I said take me  
to the flood,

and then I saw the pale angel  
sitting in the back and I took off my fake  
blind glasses and shrieked and everyone there  
looked calm and intelligent and it seemed  
they fit and felt good about themselves and  
had important places to go in suits and dresses  
so I pulled the cord and got off,

it was embarrassing to think I was chasing  
some elusive Idea in the rain and freed, forlorn,  
looking for the key to perception on Broadway  
when all along it had to be love, love, not this  
Gnostic revision dropping down like some  
dirty ambiguous dead dove.

## Becoming Person C

This was after I sweetly wrecked my car by the flowershop  
on Grand and Chippewa and woke up in the rain  
and saw all these little bits of glass  
on the ground and they looked  
like stars under the streetlamp and the  
cops came and I refused medical treatment  
and told them I did this for a living  
and called Livingston from a payphone  
and heard him chuckle because he'd dosed my Big Gulp  
and I'd seen raindrops exploding on my windshield  
so I hitched it back to Scholar's House  
with this guy who shared some nitrus and bud  
and mercifully passed me the cup,  
I went to Lesbia's door but she was with  
the weird Irish hoosier who wore sweatbands on his wrist,  
she took me aside and made out with me, though, as I bled, and  
I found this girl Laurel had trashed my room because  
we'd walked to the arch without a kiss,  
Oliver and I were supposed to drop out and ride the  
rails but he said he loved his girlfriend as much  
he hated her so he better stick around, he had  
told me he was a writer and let me read a poem, it  
seemed dated and strange and a year later I  
would hear it word for word in a Pogue's song,  
all I really wanted was to drink and drink in the sweetness,  
but things were going too fast and confusedly, I had to  
stand at the top of the library and get tempted to jump, I had to  
suddenly scream about the soul at a cocktail party  
where everything looked new and terrifying, who  
knew soon I'd be the paranoid impresario and tell the  
cabbie in Columbia I'd give him all my poems if he  
would take me to the airport and aid in my escape,  
who knew I'd walk into admitting and say this is going  
to sound weird but I need to talk to a female  
psychoanalyst in the presence of a male  
security guard, Sarah Mclachlan was writing  
songs about me and I needed to see her on the roof,  
strange nurses talking about "the change" and "hot flashes,"  
meaning the Legion, voices, Lesbia drifted away to form  
some punishing totem, they had me write my vampire  
masterpiece, the Given, and when the nurse and tech touched  
I blushed and felt innuendo hit me like a loose wire. Get this:  
Inexorably: Person C is sitting rigid in a blank coffee house  
and Persons A and B are talking ostensibly about ridiculous  
Person D but C knows it's really about him and he refuses to leave.

## Red and I on Route 3

Oh, so Red and I were in the back  
of this sweet white limousine  
with Red's new girlfriend who had  
short brown hair and big black glasses  
and an ironic shirt and Red had his huge  
hairy forearms and a Cardinal's hat  
and they were drinking champagne  
right out of the bottle  
as we sped up Route 3 to Brooklyn, Illinois,  
with the war-torn buildings on the  
side of the road and of course I  
was wondering how any of this  
was possible because Red and I had  
only been out of the hospital for five days  
but Red always seemed to know things  
like he created his own father  
and I could move but I didn't want to  
and then suddenly Red's girlfriend  
sneers at me and  
then they start making out  
but nobody knows that my sexuality  
is like when a cop's chasing a bad guy  
and the bad guy grabs an old man  
to take him hostage but  
the cop's like fine and shoots  
the old guy in the head completely  
simply finally taking the hostage out of the equation  
and that was me in the back of the limo  
nothing could hurt me so when we got to Brooklyn  
this guy on the side made a gesture with his hand  
like he was aiming at me and I didn't know where  
Red went so I simply started walking back from there in  
the direction we came and I rolled a cigarette  
because I had everything I needed and I  
gave a light to this beautiful hooker and I gave my last  
dollar to a beautiful junky and I saw the flood and  
the future because the highway smelled like death  
and I could see the stars above the arch  
oh Kim I'm writing this to you now please  
forgive me for mooching that coffee  
you are wonderful and brilliant and I  
saw the railroad tracks where the grass  
was overgrown and I saw the rocks and  
fast food trash and cigarette butts and broken  
CDs and one little shoe, one little doll, one little bike.

Loose

Weren't these the hands  
that held the baseball bat  
that hammered  
a hundred mailboxes  
in Barnhart, Missouri?

Weren't these the knees  
that knelt  
on the barroom bathroom floor  
when you went down  
on Helen  
in Manhattan?

And now you richly pay.  
And now you watch  
idly as your silver ring  
bounces in the elevator  
and the doors open  
and it goes down the shaft.

Goodbye to the graces, goodbye  
to watching the spacewalk with  
a stomach full of Hydrocodone and  
totally freaking out, goodbye to the  
Medicaid humility, say you're turning  
forty and haven't owned a thing, and  
goodbye to the girl you watched go,  
the girl who came to bum a smoke  
and was so beautiful in a short shirt  
and panties and sat on your bed and  
showed you her tattoos and said she  
liked guys who weren't aggressive and  
you nearly fainted and froze and there  
was a hole in your thinking and you  
merely let her go. Goodbye now, goodbye  
to order, to the altar, to ego.

## All Out of (a) Joint

Hey—I like witches and they like me.  
Even the ones with a little  
white streak in their otherwise black hair.

Strife got its ass kicked today.  
“Hot girl, hot girl, please  
turn toward me.” After too much

disturbing coffee I had to make two  
wretched calls—but first let  
me say just exactly how

it’s such a pity, oh a pity,  
to be so desolate and dark—  
oh to have that attraction  
advantage in the game—

but to have blond hair and  
be cheerful in appearance—  
oh, oh it’s a shame, a waste—

so first I called my GP (is  
it possible to find cancer in a  
blood test) and the test was OK

and then my beautiful pharmacy  
said that the Ativan was on the way.  
There’d only been a small mistake,  
I needn’t worry, I wasn’t going  
to have to be upset all month, I  
could let go the gentle discord, I could be  
bright and blonde and restored  
and breathe. What a switch! More fodder  
for the tender witch!

## Comfort Waiting for the Number Two

They'd like to tell you you  
won't find any unity here  
under the little tree by the bus stop  
that protects you from the  
wind and the rain where some  
weary soldier's  
overturned a shopping cart for a seat

and that's the second time a  
nurse has passed by and you'll  
have to remember to email her  
and ask quite seriously  
if you can pout your way to sex

and what the stoplight meant  
and what Lieutenant meant  
in the smoking area when she  
was three feet away and coming  
closer and he said "that's a moon shot"  
but she passed you a cigarette  
without touching you so you  
breathed everyone in and let them  
go but you wouldn't call  
that criticism or logic especially  
when the old school way was  
you had to get hit by lightning

and you would pass on to  
the Repeat in History, Medicaid  
your Mother, here at the new bus stop,  
the differing light wants you eloquent,  
something from the essence, Essene, and  
surely this has all been said before.  
Stay clean.

## Another Guy in Love with His Case Manager

I'm terribly sorry that  
I'm not that sorry  
that I haven't been myself  
for quite some time.

I have a speech prepared  
for all the girls on Delmar  
which explains  
all of the sordid tricks I played.  
I, too, dear Tom,  
acted like James Dean  
and drove like a nutcase.

How could this have happened?  
I was supposed to be a scientist.  
I was not supposed to change every day.  
I was not supposed to feel so bad  
about killing the Father-in-Letters  
and destroying all of his girls.

I'm talking about the gesture as signifier,  
the symptom as speech,  
ordering an ice water at the bar  
red-faced  
and then borrowing their phone  
and calling Behavioral Health  
and naming all these places in New York  
and saying get ready I'm coming in  
and making the reversal  
in the crazy rain with split shoes  
and the fragmented body  
and the fragmented ego—  
I'm talking about notes on the strange ebb  
while looking at cleavage.

## Negative Capability

It's getting pretty late now.  
You're going to have to  
quit thinking about witches.

Outside the wind is trying  
to stir things up, but everything's  
tied down too tight,  
too close to the ground.

Tonight you will dream about  
bellyflopping into a placid pool  
and spraying poolside three  
sunbathing beauties in bikinis.

Don't look at them too closely.  
They're getting ready to change their minds.

## My Project

Here I am living out  
Karl Marx's wet dream  
and it's all  
because of Ativan.

In the morning  
I get up and sing  
and during the day  
I sing a little  
and then at night  
I even lie down  
with a little whimper.

I don't know how long  
they'll let me live—  
how long anyone  
could live—

after turning the tables,  
ripping the curtain,  
revealing the sublimation.

There, I've said it: "Isaac."  
Here, I say again: "Cost of Living."

How prodigal, luxurious,  
to include everything,  
to be bemused by everything,  
to rip a page of propositions  
and fold it into an airplane  
and let it go up high  
from the top of Parkview Place.

## Flawed Genius

Too sad to read, bored with  
the things common  
to my world,  
I started walking downtown.

When I got down to Grand  
all these people in black  
were walking to church  
as if in a trance. I leaned  
against a wall and a cop came  
up and asked what I was doing.

“I was never really attracted  
to my mother,” I cried. “Outside  
of writing her a few songs  
I never really tried to please her.”

My mood started to change again  
when this guy walked by with  
a dirty bag filled with old shoes.  
Nothing stayed.  
I would put it in my memoir.

Sometimes when I took Ativan I  
could feel God’s love. I borrowed  
the phone at the Red Cross  
to call my sister. She reminded  
me of the dream of our old house,  
of the black mirror in the  
ghastly hall that  
had me lisping verse before I could crawl.  
She’s with me still, she and  
all the sane Meanads who are in my thrall.

## My Contention

When I was young I would have fought  
for country, women, or for naught

but careless phrases by the bar  
so eagerly I'd enter war.

But now whenever sordid scenes  
appear of men mauled by machines

or fists—lo! Even lowly words!  
My consciousness resists to such  
extent that thoughts are worse than swords.

## Fabulist

I was in New York again just off the train  
and I walked to the site of my  
expulsion and under the arch at midnight  
met this beautiful bank teller  
and we hit it off and talked and she  
took me inside the dark bank and  
we made out by the vault and beyond  
that huge uncanny lock were my  
notebook and pen and I was distracted  
as the beautiful teller was unbuttoning my shirt  
but she couldn't or wouldn't undo that lock  
so I went back out to the desolate city  
and I walked around for a while  
with no means to make any sense but  
knowing strongly that  
I was never down with difference and  
I smelled smoke as I was walking by NYU  
and I came to this sorority house on fire  
by the park and I ran in grandly  
and followed the screams and broke down  
a door on the third floor and found two girls  
in bras and panties and I put them under  
my arms and carried them out to safety  
amid the cheers of firefighters and cops  
and some newslady tried to talk to me  
but I left without a word and saw  
this lottery ticket blowing in the wind  
and I followed it around for a while and  
I was full of sorrow for the doctor I insulted  
after banging my head on the microwave  
bloody and I was sad I'd been in Bellevue  
and I was sad about the kid I punched at the party  
now here I was the same, the same, reborn, burned out.

## The Wants

Intensity: most poets never  
even get to see it. It's like  
you've got to look up at  
Mont Blanc and believe it.  
It's like you've got to be Essene  
and eat locusts and do Methadone  
and recant and star and claim  
to be more than you are and look.

There are a lot of guys out there  
with jobs. They've got mahogany  
chairs and really old wood  
thermometers on their walls. We're  
talking antique technique, they  
never knew the forest died.  
They turned and stole our gold.  
They got haircuts. And if they told  
the truth, what they remembered,  
if they reversed and let their  
lawns grow high, they still  
couldn't sustain the *raison d'être*.  
The whole construct would explode.

Now I live in this HUD building  
where Jim sifts through the  
ashtray looking for a smoke and  
you can say almost anything  
you want to say. It's totally huge.  
It gets so you don't mind the crying.  
And I want what every poor  
scribbler who comes along the  
way to say wants: to die  
without ever really dying.

## One Morning And

I had just witnessed three  
miracles I can't bother  
to tell you about because  
then you would know

who I am and who they  
are and who's my father  
and then everything  
would come crashing down

but I was at Chief's at  
nine am and hadn't been to  
bed and there was this soccer  
match on the flatscreen and the

thing was the ball just rocked  
back and forth with no end  
and the men were running  
without order which was quite

repugnant to my soul and as  
I realized this I became overly  
contrite and then Chief came out  
ready for work and smelling

like some masculine brute and  
wearing a thousand dollar suit  
and I felt like a slob and said  
goodbye without looking  
because I didn't have a job  
because I was too close to the root.

## A Sonnet Upon His Meds

When I came to without my Ativan  
on Lindell just outside Jesuit Hall  
the difference between me and the man  
who'd had a scholarship to SLU was real

enough to make you wonder how this guy  
who'd once made grades was wondering the streets  
confused, referred, looking up at the sky  
for meaning, tattered, having lost speech

and language all together. I went in  
the dormitory looking for an ex-  
orcist before the priest asked if I'd gone  
and missed my meds. Should I be saying this?

I patch my fractured ego as I can.  
I'm half a man without my Ativan.

Tiny Sutra for Glen

The last time  
I felt safe

was when  
I imagined myself  
writing this

while sitting on the bench  
outside Dirt Cheap  
at Hampton and 44

watching all the cars  
go by without  
worrying  
whether the drivers  
were  
looking at me

and never wondering  
what they were thinking

(like when you slightly  
turn your head  
and out of the corner of your eye  
you see your therapist glaring  
for just an awful moment and  
are you supposed to rip off your clothes  
or what or say that you finally get it  
the joke is on you fine you are God)

## On the Way to Wildwood

Red ran his hands through his  
hair while we were walking  
by the Episcopal church on Skinker.  
“My dick has no conscience,” he said.

He was carrying a forty in a brown bag  
and had these big ex-con hairy arms.  
When the bus came we got on and sat  
down across from this really rigid

lady who kept moving her pinky  
finger back and forth and smirking  
toward Red. She was headed toward  
the county and could tell that Red’s

dreams were all made by a machine.  
I’m a shy brainiac you shouldn’t try to see.  
Red always got the turnkeys to give him  
a smoke and of course he got laid

one minute out of lockdown. I’m considered  
kind of tough among the opera crowd.  
“My dick has no conscience,” he repeated,  
while something tacit took place between

him and the lady. I noticed she had a  
book on Engineering Physics sticking out of her bag.  
I’m waiting for justice, for my pretty professor to cry,  
“Oh Matt! Why do you tease us like this!”

## It Dawns

I really have to tell you  
that for much of my life I  
was too far out, too zoned out,  
sitting in the community room  
thinking I was breaking hearts,  
breaking codes, breaking it down.

Every morning they used to get us up  
before six and before we could smoke  
they would line us up  
and take our pulse and blood pressure  
and listen to our hearts and  
everybody would be tapping their  
toes waiting to smoke and then one  
day big Red with the hairy forearms  
and the fading Hilfiger shirt  
was like how disrupted could my  
vitals be after sleeping peacefully  
eight hours under Haldol  
and I thought about it

and I knew that so many of us  
were homeless or living in cruel basements  
too sick and eccentric to ever be touched  
and so they tried to  
comfort us in the morning but  
when I realized this my eyes went  
bright and then  
they knew that I knew so they  
didn't take my vitals after that,  
they just let me sit by the door and  
tap my toes, waiting to smoke.

## Fragment on the Highway

There was this strange misprision  
in the back of the golden SUV  
on the way to the Big Casino  
in the Sky with two captivating  
social workers up front  
like a million miles away

and Chief was driving with the  
windows up on Highway 61 and I  
could barely breathe because  
of the devil dual weed and he  
had taken a bunch of Ginseng  
and watched some quite interesting  
stuff and he was let loose mellow and  
sitting on top of the world

but I decidedly did not want to have fun  
with my worried whisper  
wondering if everyone were like me  
would there be buildings and bodies  
and the Gateway to the West  
and American Steel with dudes  
who had tools and could make decisions

and days ago I had asked the nurse  
what is this and  
he went "antipsychotic" and he let me  
go and I went so far down and some guy  
named AWOL and I did not go  
told me to cut my wrists  
and the Occupational Therapist asked  
if the Mellencamp were too loud and I tried  
to slip out and sign a different  
name in at the nurses' station  
and found out I had diabetes  
and I was like what the fuck when  
three student doctors came in and then  
I said I know my Object Relation  
and yes I want to fly but that's not  
physically possible and then all this medicine  
stale sorrow after getting unfortunately

free you call this free this is  
freedom Bruce Springsteen  
never felt like this did he

## He Finishes Roundly

Everything is totally and completely sane now.  
The maintenance guy—my dearest buddy—  
just got into the muck and mire  
under the elevator and retrieved my ring—  
the one with the stars on it I bought  
in New York right after my expulsion—  
the ring I'd dropped in the big shaft for a second time.

I've never been so lucky. The HUD manager  
was going around putting eviction notices  
under certain people's doors and when I  
came home there was a letter there but  
when I picked it up I found it was addressed  
to my neighbor. I've been passed over again.

And yet it's not exactly natural, reading like this.  
I've had to go so deep inside myself,  
I had to go so far down that stone spiral  
that when I finally came back up there  
was this great distance  
between me and the flowers and the clocks  
and girls. Not that I wanted anything different.  
I'm over that. Though I could pluck back some  
Primary Process Event, a pass made under the  
guise of some inappropriate Negative Transference.  
Again I've proved I'm too impure for the stigmata.  
There's this wall. Only language gets through.  
Suddenly asexuality is looking better and better.  
First they opened a New York-style pizza place up  
the street and then color returned and then  
the cashier's eyes got wide at the In and Out and then  
Phoebe suddenly dropped by to say "open up and let it  
out you will be forgiven" and I said "it's so  
pent it will go all over the place" and immediately she  
fell away and then I danced with my professor  
and now my hot therapist is The Angel of the Lord  
and I'm ready to be loved and wherever I go  
windows are opening and toes are tapping and when  
Seagraves and I were at the bus stop yesterday he said  
what's a few blocks up there on the right and I said  
that's the hospital where my mom died and he said I'm  
not sure but I think I just saw a bunch of fireworks go off there.

## Glad All Over

I'm always thinking  
about how those black crows  
would fill up the empty bush  
behind the  
Carondolet Residential Care Facility  
and how one Monday morning  
I walked by them  
to the Mellow Methodist Church  
and laid down my burden  
in the form of a bent expired license

but then time does its fickle thing  
and I vomit up ten years of medicine  
and my brain becomes  
perfect and whole  
and innocent and relaxed  
and I fall asleep in the old  
wooden loft with Lesbia

and there's a beautiful dead rose on  
the window sill and the part of me  
that can still see gets up and looks out  
at the window at the steps  
of the Masonic Temple  
where a group of familiar faces is forming  
among the shadows  
and though it's early in the morning  
it's dark enough to make out  
the headlights  
of the black  
line of cars passing  
and then something lets me go.

## Everything is As it Should Be

I walked out of Schnuck's and  
in the parking lot were these  
two squad cars sitting with their  
driver's windows next to each other  
so it seemed the morning was perfect  
and then I walked to the library  
and my fair-haired homeless buddy  
was getting bounced for having no shoes  
by the sweet library maiden whom I'd asked out  
cowardly over email and I said hi but  
she walked quickly away and then  
the homeless boy walked with me  
and said he'd been stripped of everything  
but I couldn't help him so I  
quickly gave him my blessing because  
I really had to go down  
to the Central Library and when I  
got on the bus there was this huge ex-con  
sitting across from me  
displaying formidable and aggressive  
body language and he asked several  
times if I wanted to go to war so I  
stayed still and slightly shook my head  
and then he said  
you need to go home and take your meds  
how did he know  
and there was some event down  
at the Central Library when I got off  
everyone was wearing black and beautiful  
dresses and inside they were holding  
glass cups of pomegranate juice and cheese  
was being served so I went through  
this long long corridor deeper to the bathroom  
and shut myself in the stall and prayed and  
when I emerged everyone was so kind  
and the brilliant girl in the beautiful black dress  
who I thought had had no mercy  
came up and kissed me on the lips.

Endymion at 40

I'm pretty much all Apollo now.  
Diana's sitting next to me,  
waiting for Call-a-Ride  
to take her to the dentist  
to get all that black shit  
from between her teeth.

"Why don't you go off and have sex with the sun," she says.

Her ride comes and she puts out  
her cigarette and grabs her  
celibate purse, the birds scatter,  
she gets up so tall and thin  
and looks like an arrow straight  
to your heart, former model  
who lost custody of her kids,  
and I'm tripped out on time now  
as if through my own fluttering  
the rules did not apply to me,  
I with my missing teeth,  
still secular and yet sexless,  
and I cannot get down with Diana's  
brown feet, I'm the medicine man,  
subject to all her weird pagan hints,  
subject as well to the new interpenetrating light.

## State-Sponsored Poet

Even so those fluttering birds  
but then  
after the drinking fountain  
ablution it seemed  
as if every word  
had been misapplied and strange,

the guest therapist  
walking in  
at three am  
with his melodic whistle  
I countered  
with my mournful one,

oh in another life I  
was the glib hubristic longshoreman,  
full of Guinness,  
stupidly rhyming,  
attaching value judgments,

brought low and decentered  
in Sunnyside,  
everyone looked the same,

not this flimsy apparition on Delmar  
with his PRN and SSI,  
his lists of gestures on the train,  
his phenomenally fluttering brain.

## He Gets a Check

Caught up in this strange stuff going on  
on Delmar, this sadness and repetition in  
University City, I walked into the

coffee house and immediately on my left was  
a beautiful girl wearing a purple beret and  
scarf and reading Heidegger and I looked at

her a little too long while I got my coffee and  
then sat down to read some strangely referential  
poetry and I kept glancing at this girl but

the last time I glanced I could feel the spirit  
of Enoch and she had turned her back to me  
and was comically holding her book open over

her head so I had to go completely down and  
for a day nothing came to me even though I  
bragged I had the keys to the hospital and

thought because I wasn't here I must be  
somewhere else and I was luckier than Icarus  
and I was deeply envied by everyone in

Scientology and my buddies who were against  
meaning were all mad at me because I'd  
made it to the center by simply letting go,

my uncle came out and accused me of malingering,  
so in an attempt at closure, an attempt at  
surpassing the spent diviner, I went back

with blinders and got my coffee the next day  
looking straight and she was there and I sat with  
my back to her and read and smoked and was

impressed with just the hint of eruption and had  
to run and have fun, the room was foreign,  
I was livid in the front and finally out from under.

## Differentiation

Anyone I'd ever wronged  
could've looked at me then  
and taken great pleasure  
in the fact that

there where the metaphor  
became reality

the guy with the lobotomy scar  
said he was my father but since  
I'd read some philosophy about  
"giving birth to your own father"  
my stomach was killing me  
and my guitar was as big as a cello  
and I kept crossing myself with ashes  
and Chief had moved to this place on Highland  
with 5A on his door so I drew  
6B on mine with a terrible ragged sign  
and I dreamt constantly of body language  
and when that Jakob Dylan song I loved  
came on it spoke to me so that  
"This Song is Speaking to Me Right Now"  
and the doctor said I had a lot of blood  
and the cleaning lady put on a wig to look like my mom  
and maybe this was because my parents  
smoked weed on the night of my conception  
or maybe it was 9/11 or the Other or Language  
or maybe it was because I owned the hospital  
and the labels were mine and not differentiation  
and when they said "you've got to find your voice"  
I thought about that for six years  
in a kind of hopeful hallucination  
and my throat opened up when I looked at the sky  
and I was destitute, dreaming, trying so hard to  
find the proper curse and carry it with me on the bus.

## Getting it Together for the Charity Girl

Now it hurts when I breathe.  
Now I'm walking among the birds.

Reality: that's what I'm talking about.  
Now I can sing whatever I want.

You cough. Fine. Now I'll cough too.  
Now the whole system is under my control.

But then we just we just weren't ready  
for this kind of cold. The pipes busted

and then the crazy old boiler went out  
so we plugged in three space heaters

and then the electric sparked and went out  
and it got down to fifty in the living

room and sad to see dad so old we ended  
up in a church basement where they were

serving four-inch subs "I guess I'll  
take the ham" and I rolled up my coat

for a pillow and drifted off as I could hear  
the motorized chairs buzzing about me

and I was like "dislocated" and I was  
like "dislocated" and the floor was hard

and I sleepily kept my hand on my  
wallet and now I'm like some

straight-up hardcore ballerina.  
Now my breathing is all lined up.

You said a bunch of stuff with the  
word "beautiful" in it so I did too.

Here we are on the level, our eyes mated,  
I can hear your white soft fingers

walking down the keys of that old  
disremembered piano in the corner.

## Synchronicity at Barbara Allen's

Sweet William drove down to Poplar Bluff  
from the North Country in his father's Grand Am,  
he followed the river alongside the silver maples,  
a winding hail at one point  
threatened to do away with his windshield,  
and when he sprung loose at Barbara Allen's  
he was hardly through the door and inside  
the close quarters before she took him by the arm  
and told him since he lost his mom she  
had a good book of recipes for one "pot"  
and there was a hot pan of chili on the stove  
and wouldn't he like a "warm bowl"  
and then suddenly her cell phone rang before  
Sweet William got his bearings  
and evidently someone asked for Bill  
so Barbara passed him the strange device  
and a heavy breather asked him if he were still  
going to Aunt Linda's but his Aunt Linda  
lived in Canada and he hadn't seen her in years  
so he gasped and bawled and Barbara Allen  
lightly tripped she down the basement stairs  
deeper until shadows splayed upon the walls  
by artificial light, Sweet William sat at the table  
with a Coors bicentennial ashtray from his youth,  
his dad's Grand Am and his mama's gone,  
Lord, make his bed so long and narrow,  
let his roses grow up on the churchyard wall,  
he'd been humbled or died,  
that's why everything doesn't just fall apart,  
that's why he won't be loudly boasting anytime soon  
he drove down to meet this girl named Barbara Allen  
and

## A Small Slip of Paper

Some strange reason  
kept Red cool,

kept him here sitting  
by the vending  
machine in the  
day room

while I'm reading  
a book about a  
weird healer,

up for SSI review  
and Red said

I guess you better go  
inside again

Center Pointe is the  
only place they  
still let you smoke.

And by the way,  
I knew it was no big deal  
to give anyone  
here my number:

who here would  
be able to hang  
onto a  
small slip of paper—

## School of Resentment

That vesper bell withdrew  
into the Halloween night as I stepped  
up to the reading upon brown desiccated leaves  
and contended through a flat of the kind  
my grandmother had loved but to live in  
and I waged through tattered sweaters  
toward the Diet Coke, impressive ice cubes, I felt stinky,  
when suddenly a cell phone dinged  
and a vestal black-haired girl with red lips said  
“I wish all those Hemingway types would  
just go off into the woods and shoot at each other”  
and truthfully I dug that  
so I camped against the wall until I was called  
and struggled out my words  
and drove for mercy alone, I sold four books,  
I was pointedly not wearing my messy Keds,  
I was never balled but blessed the ivory thugs  
for what they did not know  
as a champagne glass broke  
and a pale wraith with straw for hair said  
“and all those Homeric types ought to  
go down to wine country with their swords”

so I withdrew into the bath and locked the door  
and lit a smoke and used a towel  
to wipe pugnacious sweat upon my brow  
and heard outside the door—they didn’t know it—  
“why does *he* get to be the crazy poet?”

## Earning the SSI

In the preternaturally bright café  
where all you could hear  
was the overly cheerful and peaceful  
hunchback playing the flute

I felt the foundation begin to tremble  
and then the loudest bell ever  
went off in my head

as I turned toward the beautiful barista  
and I really felt sorry  
for this circle of guys who  
had to fight the body, who  
had to be so willful,

because I did not create myself as  
the star of my own illness,  
here at the heights, bound, outside,  
here at the crazily bright café  
where one more cup of coffee  
would break you from reality  
and

“what do you do”

and

“no I mean what do you do”

and if I could pout my way to sex  
yes I wonder if I could pout my  
way to sex, would that work,  
would that constitute work,  
because I did not make this all alone—  
called psycho on the bus, payphone ringing  
madly as I leapt by, messages from the sky,  
the brightest guy in the emergency room—

and as if all my life I've been waiting for it  
the door blows open and a breeze comes in and  
I'm keeping it cool in the café, I can hear  
the flute again, it's like being in the middle  
of this dream but there's no one to read,  
it's like leaning my shoulder on this foundation,  
it's like being subject only  
to all the things I haven't exactly seen.

## You Call it Bondage

I'm just a bunch of mud  
that God's breathing through—

I was having a cigarette  
outside of triage  
with the calm hippy nurse  
when she suddenly asked me,  
eyes ablaze,  
how long it had been raining.

"Death is only a failure of the imagination," I said.

I got out of there as the wind  
picked up, marking a gradual diminution  
of power and the weakening I-Will,  
I did or did not put out my cigarette,  
I was either supposed to look back or not,  
I remember that this was very important,

when the bus went by  
this guy—scratched his neck—  
I was doomed—I got the signal—

but the wind was gentle and inexorable,  
there was no one I had to worry  
about matching my rhythm,  
it was just me and the payphone,  
I didn't even have to pick up the receiver,  
fake it till you make it, I said,  
this is your first dream,  
here comes the wind, no worries, no wages.

## You Gotta Hurt

I was reading poor logical Wittgenstein  
and thinking about the case for human suffering  
when Truth came and tried to seduce me  
with its fluent musical persuasion  
but I was way too scattered, I was ready  
again to revolve into teenage revolt,  
I was twenty-nine years old.

After I left the Form Pharmacy  
I hefted my heavy guitar  
over to the Final Cause Café  
to sing for some Tautology Tips  
(language, lunacy, currency).  
The sweet waitress came out with  
a cup of coffee and asked if I dug Catholicism.  
Not wanting to dis on the mystery, I  
explained that the holes in the knees of my khakis  
were from praying. She said she'd come back later.  
It seemed a little as if she sighed and barely shook her head.  
That's right when I tried some controlled breathing.

Incredibly, I suddenly became aware that my problem  
was that I had to get back to the root,  
back to before I'd been decorated,  
back when I was teaching fort da to the nurses,  
back when I was hypnotic and always entering,  
back when I couldn't have been fixed—  
so what if it got me thrown out of school.

And that's how I ended up at the Real Restaurant.  
I'm always in the back, the very back, if  
my neck hurts I rub it—I moan all the time—  
Colleen's the cook, she's so into me. "You gotta hurt,"  
I always say, before I pick up my guitar and play.  
I'm happy—even if wealthy Colleen doesn't talk the same way.

## Off His Meds, a Portrait

So Grad School A calls dean's office of Undergrad B  
and finds he said some uncharitable things  
to beautiful Doctor X and threw  
some beer bottles out of his dorm room window  
which landed on Cabbie Y and he was  
unable to remain sober at Party L and wrote  
paranoid threatening letters to Undergrad B library  
accusing them of stealing his mail  
and, Grad School A learns from dean's office of Undergrad B  
who remembers him clearly after thirteen years,  
he was seen several times in the quad clearly wacked out.

So-called friends of his with ties to Grad School A  
suddenly cancel coffee and must have reported found info  
(related scurrilously from office minions in  
Grad School A admissions) to Coffee House D  
because when he shows up Barista Q's eyes dart funny  
and it's obvious that they have the goods on him,  
his therapist acts funny so now evidently  
he's seeing someone to tell him how he can't talk to him  
because (I think this is rather making sense—ed.) the therapist  
himself is part of the reason that he's seeing him;

Grad School B, where he happily ends up, leads him  
to consider Coffee House K, where at first, because  
everyone is so nice there, he thinks no one knows him.  
But then certain key words pronounced in a very  
telling way by Barista C seem to hint that not  
only do they know him there, they might even like him.  
He's now at a complete loss and considers making  
phone calls to so-called friends begging for mercy.

But suddenly some part of his brain—really a very small  
part, we'll call it T—knows that calling  
so-called friends who might obviously really  
still be his friends and might never have communicated  
with any college or coffee house and begging  
them for mercy might not (“Have you taken your meds” — God),  
at this juncture, be the way to go.

So weirdly T trips him up for good and he suddenly erases  
his nerves with a PRN of Ativan—no, sadly, he  
is not John the Baptist. He has to lose a few words. Clozaril tops him off  
and he hands in his plans successfully at architect school.  
Everywhere he goes! Everyone wants to be a famous architect!

## Speaking Old and Young

You come to find that you believe what you believe:

Tautologies conflating lips with fallen leaves.

When you were young, when you were seventeen, it seemed

the world would rip itself apart at hip and waist,

at fallen leaves and lips conflated with, displaced

among the most severe and sing-song book you saw

in all its dust among a coffeehouse kabal

of swaying pretty baristas who lived for what

was dead the moment that it passed the lips, whose hips

tautologies could merely represent in books

which grew more livid as they gathered dust and gained

that hard-won grey by which a separate word in age

imagines and deprives of petals, lips, process;

you come to understand that you believe, you feel,

almost exactly like you felt when you were young

and inexact and inexpertly drawn,  
except

that now you find it difficult to be  
dumb, taught,

to look at hips and lips and leaves and think  
she ought

to be with me, lest graying leave me sung—  
and yet

you wrote your dusty dreamy little book  
that sits

ignored by swaying baristas; young men  
look on

with curiosity, mumbling exact-  
ly where

you made that song and called it “Song Written  
in the

Exact Amount of Time it Took to Write  
it Down”

and flashed the process lightning through but you  
somehow

could never say what you were thinking true  
and now

you might, you might just say what you were then,  
and leaves

and know what you already know and lips  
and lines

that end with swaying of the hips, tauto-  
logies,

once more give back what was given to you,  
erupt

at lips who come to say there’s nothing you  
divine

was never constantly a fading line,  
a line

that ended like a fallen leaf exactly  
where  
it would.

## Chicago

Why not just say I need a little mercy here,  
why not say I miss someone terribly,  
why not go for broke  
and ask a pregnant lady if I can pat her belly,  
why not take the bus to Ladue and study fusion,

why not kiss someone goodnight on the stoop,  
why not jump in the stupid puddle,  
why not tie different colored yarn together  
whether the strands match or not,  
why not hold my cousin's hand on his death-bed  
and buy hazelnut coffee in the cafeteria,  
and cry, and not worry  
about counting the specific things of this world,

why not be a little less stressed out about the clock,  
why not get the jitters thinking about the sun,  
about the remote immutable mountain  
that you have not seen and can't imagine,  
why not happily pull some evasive trickery,

because you are thinking about someone who  
could not push a broom,  
or someone who is on a delicate space mission,  
I am talking about begging my father to pull over  
On Highway 40 after he bought a new Ford and got drunk  
and was swerving all over the place, I  
am talking about my mother then taking over  
and crashing against the guard rail,  
I am risking the family now,  
I am talking about my wonderful sister  
now who held her shit together in Chicago  
when I called and told her I was Christ,  
I am talking about Chicago now, I confess  
that when I was in Columbia I had visions of Chicago,  
I saw my sister's Jamaican roommate  
contorting herself in ecstasy, I saw myself  
getting slipped a mickey at the sorority party,  
crying on command, freaked out in a cab,  
coming for one revision and one revision only,  
I am talking about the bigtime letdown after the vision,  
the inability to see the connection, the  
bright empty beer can in the morning gutter,  
the weird resurrection, the weird resurrection.