Everything I Love Restored

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Everything I Love Restored

By

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BA, Saint Louis University, 2011

A THESIS

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

In

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With an Emphasis in Poetry

May, 2011

Advisory Committee

Steven Schreiner, PhD
Chairperson
Glenn Irwin, MFA
Shane Seely, MFA
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
Table of Contents

Finally a Consistent Poetics 1
Platonic Squad 2
The Symbolic 3
Getting Over It 4
Red and Regret 5
Allure 6
Of the Educational Variety 7
Agon, Girls, Guilt 8
Sublimated 9
Everything I Love Restored 10
Condition Center 11
The Strength to be Normal 12
“Eleana” Returns 13
“I have this Condition...There is no Center” 14
Losing Weight 15
Keyword: “Flat” 16
You Have to be Beaten Down 17
Breaking and Entering Again 18
One for the Boys in Vienna 19
Recuperation at the Cheshire Inn 20
Little Tom Leaves Me for the Ivory Tower 21
The Cream Always Rises to the Top 22
It Could Happen to Anyone 23
Fractured Healer 24
Extra 25
Supplant 26
Another Reaction Formation (Secret) 27
Prescription 28
Apostrophe on South Grand 29
And He Used to Think He’d Die in a Bar Fight 30
Fragmented on Broadway 31
Becoming Person C 32
Red and I on Route 3 33
Loose 34
All Out of (a) Joint 35
Comfort While Waiting on the Number Two 36
Another Guy in Love with His Case Manager 37
Negative Capability 38
My Project 39
Flawed Genius 40
My Contention 41
Fabulist 42
The Wants 43
One Morning and 44
Sonnet Upon His Meds 45
Tiny Sutra for Glen 46
On the Way to Wildwood  47
It Dawns   48
Fragment on the Highway  49
He Finishes Roundly  50
Glad All Over   51
Everything is as it Should Be  52
Endymion at 40   53
State-Sponsored Poet   54
He Gets a Check  55
Differentiation   56
Getting it Together for the Charity Girl  57
Synchronicity at Barbara Allen’s   58
A Small Slip of Paper  59
School of Resentment  60
Earning the SSI   61
You Call it Bondage   62
You Gotta Hurt  63
Off His Meds, a Portrait  64
Speaking Old and Young   65
Chicago   68
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.
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,
ear 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.
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.
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—
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 pawnning 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.
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.
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.
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 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.
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
grew 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.
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.
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
bellyflossping 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.
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.
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’etre. 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
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.
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.

“And 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.
Anyone I’d ever wronged
could’ve looked at me then
and taken great pleasure
in the fact that

differentiation

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 dreamed 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 vespers 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, errupt
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.