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Gaze of the Self

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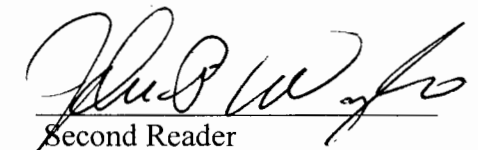
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Master of Arts
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Thesis Mentor



Second Reader

Gaze of the Self is a publishable collection of poetry completed by Benjamin A. DeBlock as part of the requirements for the Master of Arts in English at Seton Hall University. A critical introduction on the poetry of Mark Doty precedes the author's own creative work. DeBlock's poetry blends the metaphysical poetic style of late 18th century poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, with a more contemporary free verse style and word play similar to Mark Doty and John Ashbery. However, this collection of poetry is not limited to any one of these writing styles. DeBlock takes his observations, thoughts, emotions and responses to life's journey and challenges thus inviting his readers to walk across the landscape of his own life experiences. Regarded as "Joycean" in style and rhythm, DeBlock's *Gaze of the Self* pays homage to poets of the past all while forging a way through contemporary poetic style in his experimentation with verse, form and thematic structure.

An Allegiance to the Epidemic: A Walk with Mark Doty

At first glance, Mark Doty's poetry begs for attention and invites his reader to take a walk across the American landscape. His many collections of poetry and prose bridge the gap between what is real or tangible with the imagined or false. A reading of Doty's poetry is much like a walk with Thoreau, or, a conversation with Whitman or Frost. However, it does not end with the natural; in fact, this is just a beginning, a vehicle Doty employs to drive his metaphors of life's struggles, beauties, and the changing landscapes of personal experience. Doty does not sprint past the objects of nature; his walk is slow, deliberate and inviting. Tim Dean writes, "He is a great poet of the description, having learned from Elizabeth Bishop how to look at objects closely yet obliquely, seeing more in them than is ostensibly there" (2). If there was a pathway leading from the rural and pastoral into the bustling city, this would be Doty's poetry. His poetry is the link between Whitman's natural world and the city life. Doty remarks, "I've always been a poet who wrote about urban life because I love the layers and surprises and the jangly complexities of cities" (Doty 1). Doty's direct approach to the urban world, while paying homage to his love for the rural scenery, is unmatched by any other modern poet. His work is a cross-country adventure wrought with energy, feeling and a confessional element that unites reader and poet. No other modern day poet paints the sadness of the loss of life with so vivid and vibrant description.

Mark Doty's third volume of poems, *My Alexandria*, came in the wake of the biggest challenge of his life. Wally Roberts, Doty's partner of twelve years, tested positive for HIV. His battle became a force not only for Doty personally, but in his poetic endeavors as well. Doty invites those who can sympathize and relate to the AIDS epidemic and those who must be informed. The central poem in *My Alexandria*, "Demolition," is an extended metaphor for the

AIDS epidemic. Dean writes, “Doty’s poetic speakers find beauty everywhere, even or especially in ruin” (2). Doty has a remarkable talent; his ability to dig through the wreckage and uncover the remains of a lost treasure is central to the entirety of his work. His work is not a sad lament or a long drone of the voice of heart ache. It is arguably praise for the devastations of life experiences and the voice of triumphant victory. As Tim Dean remarks, Doty’s poetry is a deliberate invitation into the personal; his global approach bridges the gap between reader and speaker, making the intangible, tangible and the private, public. Tim Dean argues, “Doty’s originality lies in his making AIDS part of his poetic perspective, rather than treating it simply as an object of contemplation or analysis” (1). Doty does not hide behind or shy away from the discussion of the AIDS epidemic. Rather, he infuses all of his writing with the struggles, truths and language of AIDS. Doty explains, “AIDS is no longer something I write about, but it is part of the way I see or speak” (Dean 1). “Demolition” provides a stage on which the reader and speaker can act and interact with each other.

The theme of “Demolition” blends the literal with the figurative. What is interesting is Doty’s casual tone in his discussion of abandonment and loss. The first stanza reads:

The intact façade’s now almost black
in the rain; all day they’ve torn at the back
of the building, “the oldest concrete structure
in New England,” the newspaper said. By afternoon
when the backhoe claw appears above
three stories of columns and cornices... (1-6)

The destruction of this historic building draws a massive crowd in this New England town. The structure, according to the speaker, is the oldest in New England. Doty begins to set the tone of

the poem through the voice of the speaker. The question then arises as to where in a demolition is there beauty? The beauty seems to be more of an ironic beauty, “façade’s almost black/in the rain...” (Doty 1-2). Why does Doty choose “black,” and, further, how does he make the image of black, beautiful? In response to Dean’s comment, Doty is seeing “more than is ostensibly there.” Perhaps the beauty is in the preparation for something new. It is not known to the reader in the first stanza what exactly is “beautiful.” However, as we progress through the poem, it becomes more apparent. Doty commented that AIDS becomes part of the way he sees life, nature and in turn becomes the voice that echoes beauty. The tone begins with an almost elegiac praise of a building that was once home to travelers, most likely to become luxury housing, leaving behind the memory of an old boarding house. The first line of the second stanza reads, “the crowd beneath their massed umbrellas cheer” (Doty 7). Why do they cheer? Is this an expression of the masochistic nature of human beings and the draw we have to destruction and loss? Doty responds to this question in the third stanza:

We love disasters that have nothing to do
with us: the metal scoop seems shy, tentative,
a Japanese monster tilting its yellow head
and considering what to topple next. It’s a weekday,
and those of us with the leisure to watch
are out of work, unemployable or academics... (13-18)

The question then arises as to how this poem serves as a metaphor for the AIDS epidemic. Do we not as humans watch as others suffer the devastating and destructive force of the AIDS virus? The contention here is that Doty observes those with free time cheering at the demolition of this once famous building. It was home to travelers, bakers and florists. Their memory held in “the

ghosts of their signs faint above the windows” (Doty 11). Doty is recording the day’s events, almost as if the day represents the long, slow destructive force of the AIDS virus. The speaker does not seem to be enjoying the demolition or experiencing the same feelings as those around him. The first line of the fourth stanza reads, “. . .joined by a thrust for watching something fall” (Doty 19). The German word for this is *Schadenfreude*, finding enjoyment or pleasure in the troubles or sufferings of others. Is this an expression of how we as Americans see those who suffer from the AIDS virus? The metaphor of the destructive force of AIDS paints a vivid and ironically beautiful portrait of the reality of this epidemic.

Furthermore, Doty’s use of language to extract the beauty from the ashes expresses his ekphrastic poetic style. His art translates the beauty hidden in the landscape, in the “Demolition” in particular, and transcribes it onto the page in words. Dean writes, “Often Doty’s speakers become enraptured by what they gaze upon; his attentiveness to the life around him is so acute that sometimes his poems depict the speaker’s blending with the objects of his regard” (2). This ability to gaze and reconstruct the gaze into interpretive art is the central theme in Doty’s poetry. This style is to be chased after and emulated. To imitate this Polaroid poetry becomes the goal of many developing modern day poets. Doty has two distinct qualities, both present in “Demolition,” that prove to invite readers and make his experiences tangible. First, the extended metaphor and second, the beautiful voice of his speaker draws a vast array of readers. In relation to “Demolition,” the experience of the AIDS virus may be foreign to many readers. But the demolition of an old building can be seen on television, in our neighborhoods and thus is tangible, relative to our own lives. The beauty is in AIDS taking on the figure of the giant wrecking ball, tearing through the old bakery and florist. Its force is destructive, tangible and presented in a visual and stunning experience. The contention here is that Doty invites the reader

into his world to experience the destruction that he strives to overcome. His attitude towards those who perhaps look on and enjoy the deterioration is expressed throughout his works. Furthermore, his open and expressive stream of consciousness beckons attention. However, it is not narcissistic, but confessional in the sense that Doty is informing and interpreting the epidemic from a personal perspective.

How does a poet take the mundane and paint a beautiful portrait with words? In his review, Tony Whedon remarks, “With his rhapsodic inclusiveness, Doty performs a kind of meditation through which the wounds of memory are healed” (Whedon 1). This meditation does not seem to have an end. Doty flows through the memories, told in the perspective of daily observations and occurrences. The seriousness of life’s issues and struggles are diluted, presented to the reader through a voice that is soothing and inviting. His dedication to both the past and the present express his feelings for “desire and loss” (Shoaf 1). Indeed the detail and his dedication to the human struggle beg the reader’s attention and force the reader to respond to global issues. Doty’s poem, “A Display of the Mackerel” seems to be this mundane discussion of a seemingly trivial event. The poem begins:

They lie in parallel rows,
on ice, head to tail,
each a foot of luminosity
barred with black bands,
which divide the scales’
radiant sections... (1-6).

Again, Doty’s chronicle of a trip past the supermarket warrants a response that leads to questioning. What does Doty see in the fish display that inspired this poem? Clearly, Doty has

tapped into to this creative and beautiful force present in the window. The description of the Mackerel is deliberate and well informed.

The scene is utter simplicity but begs closer analysis. He compares the display of the Mackerel to “seams of lead/ in a Tiffany window” (7-8). Why does Doty employ this slanted metaphor? One would not look to the Tiffany window for lead, and, certainly, not stop by the fish market to gaze at a display of Mackerel. Doty reverses the normal behaviors we follow in our quest to experience that which is beautiful or visually stunning. In so doing, his speaker anticipates and then dictates to the reader what is beautiful, albeit unconventionally beautiful. What is interesting is the beauty that presents itself, seemingly without intention. The moment seems impersonal, and, as the poem leads the reader to believe, is meant to uphold a certain level of separation. We can argue that Doty’s speaker has found beauty in the dead Mackerel; the same beauty that permeates his other poems. The speaker describes the Mackerel as “the wildly rainbowed/ mirror of a soap-bubble sphere” (11-12). The image goes from abstraction to this moment of epiphany. It seems elusive, yet the simple image of a “soap bubble” invites the reader to see the beauty held in the speaker’s gaze. This transformation from a local experience to Doty’s global vision raises further questions. The speaker begins to discuss a hypothetical situation:

Suppose we could iridesce,
like these, and lose ourselves
entirely in the universe

of shimmer—would you want
to be yourself only,

unduplicatable, doomed,

to be lost? (31-37)

Doty is raising the issue of individuality. Tim Dean writes, “a poem of ecstatic description, he invites the reader to consider becoming as impersonally beautiful as the fish” (Dean 2). The poem speaks through a paradoxical voice. This paradox, beauty in the “impersonable” defines the very intention of Doty’s poetry. His walk through the city seems deliberate and calculated leaving the reader to dig for a deeper meaning. The beauty in the poetry is in the simple honesty and invitation Doty leaves behind.

Doty’s simplicity, at least in language, targets public life and engages in a conversation between the public and the private. Doty remarks, “I’m wanting my own poems to turn more towards the social, to the common conditions of American life in our particular uncertain moment...I’m trying to talk about public life without resorting to public language” (Wunderlich). Both “Demolition” and “A Display of the Mackerel” serve as models to Doty’s intention of bridging the gap between public and private. “At the Gym” further encompasses Doty’s explanation of his work. His speaker is set in a gym, observing the members’ workout routine. This poem seems to suggest a level of vanity inherent to all men. The language is somewhat private, specific to body-building, yet the theme investigates a more objective depiction of man. The poem begins on one bench, where men have left sweat behind. “This salt-stain spot/ marks the place where men/ lay down their heads,/ back to the bench” (Doty 1-4). The setting is clear and specific, welcoming the reader to a common place. The question comes to mind as to why Doty has chosen the gym setting. The bulk of Doty’s work moves across landscapes, either rural or urban. “At the Gym” is unique as the setting is both public and private. However, it remains true to Doty’s style as it once again makes observations and subtle evaluations of man.

“Demolition” reacts to an intrinsic human condition, to gawk and perhaps scoff at other’s misfortunes; “A Display of Mackerel” is more playful yet beckons the reader to come closer and engage in conversation with the universal versus the individual; “At the Gym” continues with this pattern, but serves as a micro-narration of man’s vanity. Together, these poems encompass Doty’s vision in writing poems on America, to America.

On the surface, “At the Gym” seems to be the speaker’s observations at a gym. However, the language offers more to the overall theme and poetic intent. The second and third stanzas read:

and hoist nothing
that need be lifted
but some burden they’ve chosen
this time: more reps,

more weight, the upward shove
of it leaving, collectively,
the sign of where we’ve been:
shroud stain, negative... (Doty 5-12)

The language emphasizes motion, simply the upward motion of perhaps a heavy barbell.

Metaphorically, Doty seems to be calling attention to man’s quest for physical beauty, and, moreover, ego. As humans, many of us desire more, whether it be monetary, property, or, in this case, physical gain. What is the goal in pushing the body to sweat and tears? Doty writes:

...gaining some power
at least over flesh

which goads with desire,
and terrifies with frailty.

Who could say who's

added his heat to the nimbus

of our intent, here where

we make ourselves:

something difficult. (Doty 16-24)

Doty is challenging his reader. The language suggests a painful and difficult journey into what Doty alleges to be human. The poem questions the true intentions of why we as humans are concerned with the physical appearance of the body. Doty suggests this to be “power over flesh.” Does he contend, then, that we push ourselves simply to gain power, a power that ironically resides in vanity? This is ironic in the sense that vanity is a force that debilitates and destructs. The power Doty refers to is arguable within the psyche. It parallels the notion that to look good is to feel good. The speaker suggests this routine to be “power over beauty/ power over power” (Doty 26-27). What is the power? The answer seems to be ambiguous, as the poem continues into a sentimental tone. Doty suggests that beneath the muscle, sweat and physical beauty resides a tender side. However, Doty then reverts back to vanity, as the speaker states, “our will to become objects/ of desire...” (29-30). The contention here is that Doty is calling attention to what is perhaps another fault or error in the human condition, we strive for physical beauty simply for validation.

In Mark Wunderlich's interview, Doty comments, “And I like poems in which one gets the feeling of meeting a person...” (7). Perhaps Doty is introducing his readers to the self. As his

poetry is an evaluation of life and life's journeys, every reader can locate a home in the poetry. The poems discussed evaluate three levels of the human condition. These works serve as a microcosm of Doty's overall theme in his poetry. The individual is a component of society; therefore, society serves as a greater representation of our personal lives. It is easier to observe and react to others and what we engage in on a daily basis than it is to reflect on our own condition. Doty's poetry forces the reader to reflect inwardly as they respond to his public evaluation of American life. In a sense, Doty plays the therapist and has his audience speaking back the poem. He effectively calls attention to the individual without probing his reader. The reader finds himself engaged in the work, thus the personal evaluation and questioning follows. Perhaps the majority of Doty's readers conclude, "this sounds like me."

Projecting the local or private life onto the public screen serves as a mirror reflecting the individual. Doty calls attention to life and to his readers subtly in style and language. Without a conscious awareness, the reader begins to observe and evaluate their own flaws and thus becomes conscious of them. Our inherent imperfections cannot always be eliminated. However, Doty's aim is to draw attention to them, much like the campaign to raise AIDS awareness. Perhaps our defective nature will devour like a virus. This poetry raises private questions expressed in the public realm. It is not a question of who we are, but why we are. The why completes Doty's metaphorical bridge between public life and private life. We can observe others and judge, but to judge the self and see true character takes wisdom and perhaps adventure. Doty's poetry is the adventure across landscapes, engaging the individual with life and bringing his own observations to the forefront of the conscious mind.

The City

I've breathed in the city walking from village to village.
Nights out in the alphabet zoo -it's the letter city.
Halloween every day at least on St. Marks.
The queer air every day, only on Christopher.
Traffic jammed, stinking waiting in lines of nine to five
Some wait for a train out of Penn Station.
Hit up the park and sheep's meadow
With her green grass and mounds but where'd all the sheep go?
If it's in the name they should exist...
I've sat on my rock in this meadow and spoke to my therapist.
Not human, but the park. My rock the couch, my pad the ear, my pen my voice.
Homeless sleep, seemingly careless...but they do care.
The homeless are elite. More elite than you or I. You can support them, but can't be them.
It's your money they want, not your conversation.
See the lines, ducks, swans...the foul smell all around.
Up my nose the city goes
In spring and summer the piss raids the open air.
But when it snows the city is alive, at least in the park.
For a moment it's white, Rockefeller's tree crusted, glistening.
Skater's glide in circles until hot chocolate is served.
The plows with their sand and salt turn beauty into a muddy mess.
Piles of sand and snow like giant mounds of cookie dough parked on every corner.
Never sleeping, day's a party, night's the same. Bryant park, the park above the archives,
stretches from Fifth Ave to Sixth, the Avenue of America...
The suits line the bars, always an excuse to have a stiff martini-happy hour, raise, fired, divorce,
they use them all. Sun goes down, night club lights blaze. Try The Guest House, or Lotus,
always single women looking for a free drink.
Hold on to it; can't share the city's secrets but try to rise above with me.
The euphoria it breathes always lusting for more.
The memories on the face of the mirror lie
in disarray.

What's Left?

When you're Alzheimer's got real bad, you put on your Alzheimer's attire.
You know, the white gown, the slippers, the messy hair.
Back and forth you wandered, you already balanced your checkbook.
It's funny, to me, that checkbook isn't even real. They told us to take it away.
I put the keys to the car, yes, I know it is your car, but the keys are in their place.
Remember we sat and read the paper?
Remember when you called Dick an "asshole?"
Maybe we should go back to when the ink was wet and the paper dry.
You watched me work and you never said it but you loved me.
You in the window and now the other you wanders inside the window
But I can't seem to find the place you left.
Remember when we ate filet and you laughed because I didn't know
what hollandaise was and I was supposed to but didn't?
Some things seem like make believe but I believe you made these things
but don't have a home to put them in.
What is it like to have a broom but no floor to sweep?
A key and no car to drive-
A glass and no water to quench the thirst of loneliness-
You are a map with no road signs, lines with latitude and the long ones,
What are they again? See, there it is again, you said it,
Ok. The theatre is black, but a show will begin, I know.
I know the real you is still there, hiding, somewhere underneath the mask of this disease...
The one we couldn't pronounce when we were little, so it was just called old timers disease.
You said his name before, he is real, he's not a pronoun, say his name, just once.

Tomorrow

Guilt eats away like your cancer.
Selfish to never make tomorrow happen.
For two weeks you called and asked me when I would be coming back again.
 "Tomorrow," I replied.
 A few tomorrows were here and gone
 But not the tomorrow you hoped.
 Left you waiting and wondering
 But tomorrow never came.
 I got the call, they said you were gone.
 You were supposed to wait until tomorrow came.
 You said you would hold on, to see my first born.
 Why did you leave so soon?
You said you couldn't take it, the disease that took your wife, was taking you.

We used to go for drives in the Corvette and the convertible Z28.
 You let me take the Vette to my prom, remember that?
You stood on the corner and waved us off. You used to say that Emily
was a young Audrey Hepburn-long dark hair, deep dark eyes and a smile that
 you said even turned you on at your age.

 Now you wait but not here.
 You left, now tomorrow will never come.
 Time seemed endless until your end was here.
You left because your tomorrow seemed too far away.
 I hope you didn't leave because of me.

 Our time was supposed to be longer.
Yet now alone without you I wonder what your tomorrow is.
 Who do you see?
 What are you doing?
 Do you have a busy schedule?

 In all my yesterdays these blocked our tomorrow.
 I can hear your sighs when I told you the fun I was having.
All you wanted was for one of my yesterdays to be your tomorrow.
 To sit and listen to you play Phantom on the organ
 or drink wine and talk about my women.
 My tomorrow might come but not with you.
 A box or a jar maybe a picture and kind words.
 Not you, though.
 I'm sorry you left before tomorrow ever came.
 Now you sit on someone's mantle, all of you.

To Roethke
From a Frustrated Professor

Your poem on the page
Made all the students crazy.
I said you meant no rage
Such a reading was not easy.

We talked until the words
Leapt from text to air;
They hung on with hope
Then came the dreadful stare.

It's but one way to see it,
Suggested prof to pupe;
Think back to when you were a kid,
Then may you think this cute.

I beat them on their heads
With a text all torn and tattered;
Wait, we get it, it's what you said,
But their surrender did not flatter.

You

Dedicated to Marena Lobosco
From English 303

You've been our Virgil, muse,
Mentor.
Gates of knowledge, feared, your hand
Protector.

We've grown from seeds your inspiration
Watered.
Once hopeless, lost, seasons change
Wither.

Your ark of wisdom, place to
Hide
From crashing surf, rising
Tide

Is just for me fair for
All?
You explored the meaning, answered
Call.

Home free, together journeyed, completed
Self
You'll go on your own 'cross seas 'n'
Shore.

Paradox of an end, wanting
More.

You 2

I retract my prior dedication and erase all the
sentiment.
You, Marena, were supposed to go to
Tuscany.
We gave you the book, something about the Tuscan
Sun.
I wrote in it, you cried, that kind of
story.
For what, though? We should've gone out for
coffee.
No, I thought it would be too difficult with you
leaving.
I called you our Virgil, muse, mentor, blah, blah
blah.
Now you're just a wandering Odysseus in mid-
America.
We used to be hopeless, what with British Lit and
such.
I think you are the hopeless
one.
How does one plan to live in Tuscany then settle in
Minnesota?
I once told you that you were an ark of
wisdom.
I retract that
too.
Now I wonder what just really
is.
Certainly it can't be ditching Italy for some internet
spouse.
Here's the new paradox of means and ends
unjustified.
You left me waiting, wanting more so I rhymed it with
shore
To make you smile and, to be honest, see you
cry.
Not in a bad way, but in some narcissistic
way.
I wanted your attention.

Puzzled

Following you through your disease was like a jigsaw scavenger hunt.
There was a picture in your mind but no surface to put it on.
Once you said, "sometimes I say things I shouldn't hear."
I laughed, but there is your wisdom. You know what you mean but we don't.
Pick up the pieces, quickly, they're falling
if you put those papers in their places they
will be lost for ever
What papers I do not know but to you they
mean the world
if there is anymore meaning in your world

I wonder why the picture may seem clear
yet no edge defines the boundary of past
and now what comes tomorrow we have no clue

endless ramble that must come
to end to meet the beginning where it all
began I ask and wonder but who are the big men on the hill
and then the papers haunt again but he's not here
I know but I am and I will place a vase where it belongs
Your worries intrigue me but I'm still confused I've picked up the papers,
But you put them back and then you yell at me to pick them up I've looked out the window
But I don't see the big men maybe they are from your childhood
Your conversation hits a fork in the road when we eat dinner but I don't know where you are
going
In your eyes you look so desperate every word is on the tip of your tongue, but the lasso of
disease has you tied up.
I can't replace what's irreplaceable nor repair
what's irreparable but perhaps another story to tie
the old knot and begin anew is the best answer
to the story that goes and never seems to hit a
cul-de-sac to return it back or the bumper on the
pinball your words I know have a destination or maybe
the ball is stuck in destiny and we the paddles await a
return only noise and lights to tease but truth eludes in
every way like the ideas trapped inside you

You've been so well you Muse
You used to read my work and tear me apart, only to make me stronger
you've led like Virgil but now you plunge into Dante's hell
why have you fallen so when after reaching so high the lives you've inspired, the minds you
shaped like putting new stars in the sky
yet you the show of
meteor so beautiful falling fast I've made my wish

let it be true

Bring back your memory, replace the pieces that float
In the vacuum of this disease I want to see your puzzle again.

Mangled Words of Love and Hate

Words of love in poetry make me sick
Try to write a hundred and follow some twisted plot.
I thought I was in love with you, but I write about why I'm not.
We lived a life the world's fashion.
Got high and fornicated, my love just a façade for
lustful romance.
Time passed as did our lust, or maybe just yours.
There's no worry about trust when lust is on the line.
I'm sure new lust is just around the corner.
But I think back to when I was high
Hours and hours I spoke you listened
Babbling on and on about why I loved you.
There are more words to describe this anger,
But I've said enough already.

A dry life

I was bored so I staggered from bar to bar.
"Hello," she smiled and took my hand
Leaving the bar behind.

Drink and repeat, drink and repeat.
Like the instructions for dandruff shampoo
But they want me to be dry.

The dry life is like a sock.
Your life sucks?
Ha, tumble a day in mine
Static, unchanging, clinging hot.

You think your life is boring?
Ha, try dry and heartless
Hot, permanently pressing, tossing

Bored?

I didn't take
The sock!
Blame me? You fool.
Ignorant son of a...
Look behind the

Hamper.

Life dissolved, dampened by Jack and Coke.
Endless drinking, snorting, sniffing
Chasing love but finding

lust...

Accuse me of crimes I didn't commit,
Guilty of pleasure, though.

Addiction

Like heroin, no, not a Heroine,
You kill me slowly yet feed the addiction.
I look to you for rescue, but you let me fall, quickly.
You seem to fulfill yet leave me unsatisfied after the high of your breath fades.
You're a labyrinth, twisting turning
concocting story here and hear
the way you rationalize
the lies of words laid down.
Down you went for pleasure;
Down I went to please her.
The only time my addiction seems so sweet.

Over there, somewhere, unsuspecting you love to control
As if my life was yours to direct
waiting to be the player in your
little tragedy... fulfilling
unfulfilled desires of fantasy...

No hero here, just want to avenge the loss
of self you stole from me, left wondering,
who am I?
You wished you had it-
The power of me, being me
How're we to know
Your mission clear
Steer away, shy away but don't
Be shy to admit her presence is
Anything but a gift.

I wish I could have her, just one more time.
The itch turns to a burn, sour, spoiled.
But her words so sweet
the sweat that runs your inner
thigh that never chills-
It's warmth the home for weak
A week later it's old news.

Your best head lines the page
Of papers gathered high
In the corner now I wait alone
To master the hook
or wiggle free from the bait you
Dangle in my eye that
Cannot see more clear than

The fog that leads the way
I wander aimlessly fixed
To fulfill a need.

Needless to say
the prick that fills you
empties me.

An Hour Massage

Lying naked the thin sheet hides my beauty
As I slowly melt into your table.
First tick the saliva runs.
Second tick the wave pulses, rising up.
Still, prostrate, soaking in the field of euphoria.
Tense yet no idea how fast one's free.
It's not like that, not right now.
Too soon, but the feeling is in the tip
Each finger finding home pressing the magic spot
Releasing the toxin that holds it tight.
Six hundred ticks, journey begun.
Waterfalls chirping nature's noise,
Soothing deep, oil field swells
Deep within working out the kinks of life
Your fingers creep up slowly where they shouldn't go, closer still missing, yet
Touching it but only in my head-

The hand's thousand clicks tick and tick
no touch closer, deeper than that which sits inside
waiting, wondering

Thirty six of a hundred times the tick resonates
loudly as conscious looms and primordial fades away
left by our Freud.



At the Window

An image of power, wealth and persuasion;
drenched by a tide of tangerine sorbet.
Splashed with raspberry, strawberry, but no lime.
All sweet, no bitter, flowing not tacky.

The blinding light of lies seems to grasp,
where are you? Lost, fast asleep?
Not needy, but necessary the desire of all
Desires.

Sometimes you say it's all within;
From the outside you look so welcoming, but within you're hardened steel.
Once I couldn't ask for a brighter sun, a warmer sun
than the one I love that greets me at the window of my
Heart.

You are the rising sun, the warmth you provide.
Hot, heating power and more kept inside.
You burn and melt, come and go.
Fried by your look, just go down.

Sometimes I wish I were far north,
Where I don't have to see your face for half the year.

Being

In golf the one who achieves the hole-in-one buys a round.

Why loose when one wins?

There's only one number one,
so what's the point of placing?

In poetry we can be free, but

In free verse why an end?

The man on the corner lives in box.

He feeds his dog more than himself.

Why smile when you look so emaciated?

If life ends in death then why begin?

Why be full when starvation waits?

Why be strong when fear is in remission?

Are questions rhetorical or rhetoric questioned?

Who am I when you are no one?

If I were you and you I, would you be me?

Is my conscience thought or thought consciousness?

Why strive for freedom when self contained?

Why fall in love when love inevitably fails?

The paradox of being...let me be.

Cryin' Blues

Oh, mama, mama, why'd he take your baby away?
Said, mama, mama, why'd he take your baby away?
I sit here eyes ain't cryin', hearin' you and daddy pray.

Lord called you up to heaven, liftin' you up today.
Said Lord picked you, up, that's right, joinin' you 'n' your baby today.
Oh mama, mama, my eyes still ain't cryin, eyes dry and gray.

What I do now, mama? I went out and shot a man.
Why'd I take his life? Oh no, mama I killed a man.
Oh justice tied tight 'round my neck, before White eyes I stand.

Now the gallows' wood is creakin' cryin'.
Swayin' heavy but dem eyes still ain't cryin'.
Release the floor, now my soul is flyin'.

Where's my soul goin' mama, I thought I'd rise to you.
Oh no mama, I ain't getting no closer to you.
Lord I need another chance, prayin' you let me through.

No pearly gates openin' up for me.
Oh, Lord, ain't openin em up for me.
"You killed a man. I have no room for Thee"

Them tears are flowin' from the well.
I guess I'm sayin' good bye mama, here in eternal hell.

My Metamorphosis

In vivid dreams I dreamt
Ovids Metamorphosis.
Great fire in the sky spreading
Golds to burgundy, tangerine to grapefruit.
The painters cart has taken fire in the sky.
Spilled paint running wild,
Wondering what I'm watching
Melting sun, dripping clouds?
Slowly melting Ovid runs into
Dali's decadent display.
Ross's happy clouds swallowed
Up by lustful lava flows in this
Portrait of purity. Two entwined
Mingled madness
Musician singing rocking on ROY's
Trippadellic wings.

Deserted

The winds hot breath crawled slowly
Down the sand dune's spiny corpse.
Searing sun scorching foot of mountain
As tumbleweed rabbits hopped and rolled.
Cacti erect so stiff in guarding earth
Venom slithers her way through S-turns here
To coils there, calculated she is in every move, coiled
Tight springing sprung
Needles fixed, piercing, ejaculating paradox of
Beginnings end.
Lifeless, lost, lowest creature
Stinking, stalking from a mile high
Battle cries of plunder gotten
Evil preys upon the rotten bodies.

Dinner on the Hudson

Sitting here waiting, the service sucks.
At least I have a cigarette to burn away the boredom.
Slowly the smoke spirals its
way past my distant gaze

Candle light like a
thousand rockets dances off the table
chants and clapping, photo's flash grasping a
a view that is loved by so many, but hated in terror.

My mind wastes away as I watch, not intently, distant.
Laughter, clattered silverware, course bar language
What are you saying? You gesture fun, excitement.
I am lost as a bystander, captivated, intently
As the assassin, stop your commotion.

Don't stop
candle light reflecting night
two cities sit outside the window. One stands tall across the river, the other
floats upside down, weaving, bobbing on the Hudson's shoulders.
The empire tall, used to be taller but cut down by hatred.
The river dances
Reaching far across the mile wide.

Feeling the Day

A setting sun sprays tints of
marigold just as your vibrant
Skin.
Your smile fades as your lips purse
passion fixed to
Begin.
Secrets you hide are like the moon pulling
The tide of my fear, crashing upon the
Shore of your body.
The distant ocean tosses sand and shells,
Her own treasures.
Washed up, discarded for filthy birds to peck and
peck.
In you and the ocean the paradox rises. You ebb and flow,
bitch...but I love when you moan.
Like a black sky, fireworks exploding
raining fire and ash in complicated patterns
a smiley face, a heart...I see a bit of you.
An empty sky, though, the show is over.
No stars, no clouds, no moon...
As the hour ends you go, perhaps another
display in someone else's sky.

I Want

Silence. Scanning. Eyes.
Dancing seeking passion on
the inner walls, your fortress
standing tall guarding pleasure

left unattended.

Scared? Hurt? I'm lost in you
lips wet, waiting
Wonder; heart racing like lost

Child.

Seeking, searching
someone lift me up, thrust from the
Racing and rampant, drawn closer, closer

Can we? Closer hot breath
Heating, heeding lust can we?
I don't know
Don't leave.

Letter From an Alcoholic

It's a tide that rises strong then tears away and erodes your beach.
Then you feel like you're the banana and it's the blender.
Flick hangover's switch and grind the brain, decorating the walls and ceiling.
It's an incredibly awful feeling. Yet the scotch
Is like a campfire in summer, popping, shooting hot embers down the throat-
Followed by the sweet flavor of the oak and pine trees. Perhaps a little taste will
Be ok.
One taste then the rest of the full bottle that began on the shelf
Staring back in motionless beckoning. The empty bottle seems to taunt.
They add up and the years tick away. There's no deposit for the empty life.

Back in some meeting where anonymity is the focus, yet first you ask my name.
Does it end or will something new begin?
I wonder.
It's tough, this whole notion of thinking clearly
When vision is blurred.
Quite a paradox, but I can't think without seeing the bottle.
Or, perhaps vision is clear but thought is blurred? The life is anything but unclear
everyone knows it, those who don't belong gesture, laugh.
It's home to the largest group of quitters.
Who do I follow now? There's a fucking head ache. You quit and then you have nothing.
The only thing you ever did diligently and with a little desire and dedication is now the enemy.
It's a big fucking paradox. Take it away but what do they give you in return?
A title marked, "Remanufactured."

Love Lost, Love Gained

The creator created, desires destroy;
Oh, Muse, sing creatures of love
we feel for love, long for feeling.
I feel like Odysseus left on the island.
Yet I stayed, no return, still alone, loneliness;
Chasing pleasure, desire, lust not love
I sit and wait again on the shore.

Betrayed battered busted reef;
Don't heed the warning, beauty suffers- lost
rebounds soggy-bottom
broken relations coral deadened, removed from habitat transplanted in
self-pity, guilt wash me
upon rocky shore

Jutting jetties eyeful beauty touch of death.
Crashing waves, ship wrecked soul.
Glued together, super glue
words that mend
meant all the world's love.
Give it, take it, tidal ebb
Feelings as sand grains float form
Beaches of pain, pleasure.
Care, words.....end
Love no more? Listing-lost-life,
Left alone? A Seagull sits, king of the dusted dune
Live lonely gull scavenger, thief hunting, hurting
Stealing

Electricity, live charged heart lived.
Lifeless, shock waves lost
Fill me, pulsating, craved. Empty, shallow desires
Slip past the doubts of fate set free, fate set free.

Love lustful, love physical
spiritual, free or in body
(embodied?)
Love conscious or
consciousness of love?
Evolving landscape raising mountains, forming, shaping;

love as clay, spirit rest- raging river
rolling stone smoothing out the bumps, satisfaction finally got.

The hunger ravages fueled by the fire of rage.
Love as spirit spitting embers, hot.
Carrion comfort like false hope burning despair guzzling, grueling
conflagration, gone, lost
Love burned final burn, or, just a beginning
Gray ash fuel for future growth?

Love incomparable in body lost
Farmer fallow field is love
Raking reaping relentless, nothing
love, rain drenched earth
Luscious, moist appetite for growth.

Your love a hoe, my hollow heart
A fallow heart, infertile, no birth
Of seed to fruit, filth feels like dirt
I fell into soil rich,
here I rest, buried.

Hidden, not gone, yet tucked
Away
don't look at love-
the blinding eye, blink, a stone.
I'm victim

Love as clay reshaped in spirit
Abounds new life in you
Moist earth, no foot prints of travel
Choose a new direction and put rest
Restless desire.

Earth known love incomparable
To the love you have for me
Like ocean to earth the paradox of floods revive.
Salt in water
Parched, quench me.

Lust

You sat next to me in some seminar
And wrote childish notes on my book.
Wait, I think I have the story wrong.
That's funny, the whole love at first sight business. I can't remember.
Here it is. Some orientation I came in on my Harley and biker boots
with the red bandana tied tight, background for my blue eyes. Ammunition.
I had no target to shoot a glance at until I saw you. I got that
Funny feeling, kind of hard to describe but it was there.
It was love at first, but not in sight
A love that was felt, in my body, hot.
It didn't take long, the whole introduction to your little bed.
In hind sight it was too small. My feet dangled off the end or
my head hit the wall. Deep I traveled no end for me
Breathless, gasping a motion riding loud and rough like a bike but now
Purity left behind, new road endured.
One, two, sometimes three or four we'd lay and laugh all sweaty, nasty.

Where am I? I wander wondering what the hell happened.
Left you behind in search of nothing, or something better.
Nothing is found when lust is sought
Can't break free from the freedom of heartless, loveless, desires the only visage, semblance of
"love."
I traveled to a new cave and found the same little dangling stalactite that seems to drip endlessly.
It too is vast and I love, or lust, whatever it is it pleases all the same.

Night Stalker

As I sleep I'm caught in the battle between the conscious and unconscious.
Something beckons to come closer and touch it, death I think.
Panting, clawing, smokes hand tight, airless night.
Clouded eyes, melted memories drip dry
Down these ashy cheeks.
Fear a memory, extracting evil breath
Choked awake then back to sleep
The death preys over me.

Stalker no prejudice you hide but reveal your breath.
Not sure if you are taking or giving all dreams lived, every dream dreamt.
Awake to nightmares end, tragedy of breathless
Last breath dead end.

Grip my hand tearing layer after layer, one then all
Skeletal remains tact by muscle
Weakened carbon black my soul wash clean.
Slipped free, slipped free life left
Behind.

Die to be free
Free from death not breath nor life
Taken freedoms form
Flight fast, flight fast.

Spring in South Orange

Walking under a canopy of fresh blossoming trees, surrounded by the cacophony of
Sneezes and coughs.

Fighting to see through teary-blood shot eyes, the backdrop is blue, the breeze calm.
The smell of catfish and semen permeate the nostrils, the olfactory price for visual beauty.
Cherry blossoms or so they say.

There really is nothing cherry or seemingly cherry-like in the pungent smell and acrid taste left
on the taste buds by the seeds of procreating flowering trees.

The transition from winter's burning wind and steel-cold grip irritates some while exciting
others.

You are like spring; yesterday so bitter, today so calm. Yet you irritate me so, no matter your
climate.

It only gets worse... a pill will clear the itchy eyes and throat coated in nature's seed, it's a
bitch.

Next you're hot and sticky, breathless, mugging the very life from me.
Your heat drains my desire, ringing motivation and drive from my pores.
The sweat a mark of irritation, the nuisance your humid temper breaths.

I talk of the infidelity of finding another; one pleasant, perfect, welcoming.
I go to her and the same prevails.
Her breath just as hot, her tears as wet, but she bathes in sandy beauty.

For a moment I can dream, but there you wait patiently for my return.
It's the mother in you, the nature of the game that always eats away at me.

The Addict's Lament

It only takes a few glasses of a fine single malt before it hits.

Who am I kidding, even Johnny Black can shoot a stream of a craving,
unavoidable desire for the pick me up that seems to put you down so hard.

The euphoria, numbness, tingle and teeth that feel like porcelain-
The seeds of evil.

Take it away, gone, life is normal for a moment. Where is it? You got? How about you?

Everyone has it. It's 1978 all over again. "Scarface" glamorized it, Motley Crue boasted
how many grams they blew from here to Tokyo.

You hear a story about a relative, late '70s rolling around in his '77 Stingray,
a fucking blue bullet that would blow the panties off the girls he passed.
Maybe it was just the mirror in the dash...a MacGyver sort of contraption that folds out,
big enough for a gram or two, pull it out, cut it, sniff, sniff, sniff...

"I got allergies" that's what they all say. Funny, you ever get allergies in the winter?
Fifty now and he won't touch the stuff. The challenge is when it touches you...
look that little rock straight in the eye that stairs back at you. Resist?
I bet you can't. It burns a hole in the nose, the pocket...leaves you broke.

Rock bands and celebrities, there's a story. It seems to be ok for the celebrity addict.
Hi, I'm Charlie, I'm a coke-head. Hi, Charlie. Here's a new sitcom for you.
Thanks for coming in.
It's different for all the rest.

"You mind stepping out of the car sir?"
In my pocket it awaits confiscation. If he turns away I can blow the whole thing.
I already have separation anxiety.

The Park (Part 2)

The Park is an orchestra:
screaming children violin cries
swaying trees conductor's arms
foreplay of thumping bass the lover's moan
Crickets peeping keeping time.

Nature's gift, pieces combined
composed of life tightly knit.
Daffodils, tulips, lilies laced
A solid quilt, comfort embraced
Golden gills mingle in ponds of cheap wishes.

Young lover's passion agonized lust.
Feared unforeseen pleasure comfort's fort;
Inside is beauty's mystic trance
Beast the one that steals the soul
Hold the parks beauty tight, beastly city be still.

City walls of concrete, steel
thoughts and minds mangled in
menacing noise yet nature naïve
turns troubles free, hold tight
beast, comfort me.

The Watcher and the Watched

Look at the white lilac in full bloom;
bleached white, vibrant life held in rich green stem.
Slick squirrel slicing through the air;
chasing tail, nut-thief scurrying, are you a friend or an enemy spy?
Blue-jay browsing, is that your tree?
Your scowl so angry, look away!

To be a watcher is challenging.
I watch, you're watched
I bet you do not
 know

I watch, but eyes can't change speed.
I can't keep up with falling leaves
drifting farther, giant trees.
Pin-cushion clouds pierced by planes
smearing melted marshmallow.
Eyes trail into the sun
falling spots, down, down, into blackness
count the transparent worms that fall into
green grass, erect screaming sun-
drenched-life bleed through its
veins. People crowd, tangled, entwined.
Asian, Black, White, Hispanic
Weaved as one within one's sight.

The watcher the watched-
Green leaves brush strokes on white blue-sky canvas;
bright yellow sun splattered, giant oven
heating bricks sizzling- scorching child's feet.
Bodies glisten, golden tanned.
Frisbees flung up, up climbing air current like stairs,
Dog lunging kicking dirt, sod flying; leaping, soaring free
stealing disk, "good boy!"

As the watcher am I weird?
The exhibitionists perform before the voyeur.
Which one am I?

Porcelain Doll

Looking deep, deeply within
Realization lost, dream begin
You think you're all
That anyone could want
What with your face so pretty why not?

Feel it, touch it, it's cold, right?
That it is, cold, don't get close.
Warnings fair, don't step there
It's all here

Can't fathom the loss
Felt without you
At least for now

I'll go away
For you

Goodnight

Strike-Out

Fraggle Rock was
fun for a five
year old.

At six
I said,
“forget it,
baseball
is my call.”

“Rock ‘N’ Fire!”
Father screamed
from bleachers sun
gleamed off his orange
lens Blue-Blockers,
baseball fans favorite wear.

I ‘rocked ‘N’ fired’ three more
years I never tired. Ten, eleven,
minors to majors

Opening day, twelve,
perfect pitcher
practice pitching Pop
and I.

Wind up, WHOOSH!
S-T-E-E-E-R-I-K-E ONE!

Wiping
sweat from
my brow, Pop, you
stood out in the crowd.
“Throw the curve!”
A new pitch, I had
the nerve.

Wind up
snapping
seams seemingly
div
ing
like
a
swatted
fly
bat swung over top, umpire's cry
"S-T-E-E-E-E-R-I-K-E T-W-O!!!"

Over top
my leather laced
glove eye to eye
we meet your dirt-
mixed sweat

mud faced
and scared look
out it's coming I'm
telling you beware
are you ready?

Wind-up
WHOOSH!
Dancing leaping

F
A
L
L
I
N
G

S-T-E-E-E-E-R-I-K-E T-H-R-E-E!!

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