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Time and Understanding

Daniel Earl Sehr

University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

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PROJECT TITLE: Time and Understanding

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: Richard Kelly, Faculty Mentor

Date: May 8, 1998

Comments (Optional):



*Time and
Understanding*



*Time and
Understanding*

Danny Sehr

To Shannon

*You have been both inspiration and
irritation, but through it all, you cared.*

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Forward

What is it to understand someone? It seems to me to be the question at the crux of our relationship. Somewhere there among all the bantering back and forth of our wit and defiance this must be what we are ultimately pursuing. Sometimes we hold back ourselves and drop a veil over what we truly are, how we really feel; maybe it's because even we don't really know ourselves all that well. Other times we push our identities on each other so hard that they are distorted by the force and become only confused, sometimes grotesque images more monstrous than the horrors of past and present we conceal. For my part, I'm not sure that I can actually shed a clear ray of enlightenment on what I really am beneath the politician, the student, the writer, the suffering lover of things unattainable. In truth, I am an amalgamation of all these things and many more, sometimes too complex and contradictory for even me to grasp.

So for you and for me I now delve into the heart of my poetry. In writing I find both peace and conflict; with each page, I pass through the swirling winds of my being and emerge embattled and resolute. The pen gives me a profound understanding of my feelings even though it seldom gives me explanation. What I ask of you is that you allow yourself to fully fall into my writings and search for that definition of me which is so elusive. My commentaries within are not intended to serve as a critic's opinion on the literary merit of this collection of poems; in truth, most show little in the way of mastery of language or composition. Indeed, I most often find myself servant to the words. What is important is the progression and the background which I will illuminate. Poetry is often purposefully obtuse, only showing the reader glimpses of the reasons underneath the ink and paper. I peel back the surface and expose these undercurrents in all their honesty and absurdity. If you want to know me, know why I write, understand what it is

that I write about, for often the one place I feel at liberty to unleash my feelings is when my hand communes with the page. The words may seem simple or overdrawn, but the feeling is always true in aim. Never doubt the depth of these feelings.

Even poetry is an unsteady vessel to carry the contents of the man you know. What you read here is me in the morning of my existence when I am naked and defenseless. Read with wisdom and you will find some of the answers you seek; weigh what follows using the scales of time. In those places which you are the subject of my writings, consider when the composition took place and the circumstances underlying the poem. As with all things in life, time reigns supreme in this collection. Each poem is a snapshot, useful by itself, but when placed in its proper order among the rest of my works something greater emerges, a living, moving testimony to the writer. The writing becomes more than itself, it achieves the power to speak of things that I am incapable of on my own.



*High School
Freshman &
Sophomore Years*

High School – Freshman and Sophomore Years

I began writing poetry in what I consider a rather inauspicious way. On a Forest Hills United Methodist Youth Group retreat to Panama City Beach, Florida there was this girl. As you will soon see, the major subject of my writing throughout my life, and during this period in particular, is women. Not that this is a new phenomenon for male poets. But, dispensing with the digression, this girl's name was Shelley. At the time I was fifteen years old and she was one year older. I had known her for about a year before that summer trip, but for some reason in Panama City I developed this massive crush on her. She was beautiful (at least in adolescent terms) and comfortably aloof while still being accessible. The feelings, however, were not quite mutual; while she did like me, I was not the sun in her sky. To make a long, arduous story short, our relationship remained in this stage of me pining for her and her deflecting my advances for the next two years. Yet the bond between us remained curiously strong; it still does to this day. But that is a story that I will continue later.

So you see, Shannon, having my feelings for a woman alternately encouraged and snubbed is not a new phenomenon for me, as I'm sure it is not for the rest of the human race. As you read further, you will discover this is a theme that I continually address. So feel at home, my dear, you are not alone in my universe, but you do shine with a primary intensity over all others. What follows in this section is a poet searching for a voice on paper for things he could not express fluently in any other way. Indeed, that poet is still searching for a unique expression, finding it a times at the edge of his horizon only to have fall away again.

Ocean

The waves crash in the distance
As she does within my heart

Out of reach of my hands
But close enough for my ears

I look out upon the dark waters
Longing to be immersed in them

But chains of fear hold me back
From her

I can taste the salt in the air
From her velvet lips

But the ocean of her love
Is still out of reach

If I could only break these bindings
Or had just a few more feet of freedom

I am so close to her
But I stop just short, unable to progress

And all I can do is wait, and wait, and wait...

As I awake from my saddened sleep
I look to the sky

The moon stares down at me
Almost with pity

I try to run to the water
But the chains of doubt still grasp me

Now her smooth skin is only inches
From my shaking fingertips

Why must you taunt me so
Come just a few steps nearer

Can't you see me weep
Can't you hear me scream in agony

A sudden roar
Where is it coming from

Out there in the deepest
Innermost part of her soul

I can see it now
A huge wave, her passions exploding

It is rushing toward me
Why am I not afraid

It crashes over my head
Shattering my chains, releasing me

My inhibitions are suddenly washed away
As I am dragged into the ocean

I look back, seeing my body on the beach
Only the shell that held me prisoner

I am truly free now
One with her

No longer do I feel fear, doubt, frustration
Only pure and simple contentment

The sadness and distress
I once felt

I have left behind
In return for this deep, dark, wonderful ocean
Her

Commentary on "Ocean"

"Ocean" is among the very first poems that I wrote. While the exact order of their creation is an elusive piece of knowledge eight years later, most of the motivations for writing each poem are still very vivid in my memory. I composed "Ocean" on the Panama City trip while, you guessed it, sitting on the beach. It was a pleasant summer night and I remember scratching this out while reclining against a rather steep sand dune just across the road from the youth center where the group was staying. "Ocean" is truly a love story in the classic sense, complete with the boy desiring the girl from a distance but afraid to approach in fear of rejection when, at the nadir of his despair, the girl rushes in, makes the first move, and they both live happily ever after. Throw in a bit of dream weaving and an out-of-body experience to complete the picture. While I sometimes cringe when I read this, it is one of my favorite of my early poems because it so pointedly and honestly expresses the emotions I was experiencing over Shelley at the time. While the story did not end happily in real life like it does in "Ocean," its daydreaming essence and suffering optimism are indicative of the part of my nature that often conflicts with my more rational side. I've always told anyone who reads this poem that every great poet must have his horrible poem about the power of the ocean. This is mine.



Touch

One touch
Of my skin on hers
Nothing more
Nothing less
And I knew
What it was
All it was
And more
What is it
What do I think
As our lips
Like two feathers
In the dark night
Come together
Fluttering
Falling
Touching
My hand in her hair
Silky ornaments
Of her body
Nothing more beautiful
Than the golden brown
My eyes looking into hers
Our souls colliding
Passions mixing
Melding
Her lashes fluttering
Like birds
In a cool breeze
Brushing against mine
Holding each other
In perfect harmony
My heart racing
Hers in unison
Her legs around me
Breathing into me
Love
Now everything that is mine
Becomes hers
We are one
Inseparable
Insatiable
Eternally touching

Commentary on "Touch"

Just as poets must have their water poems, so too must they pen at least one about sex. "Touch" is another of the few that I wrote on the Panama City trip and it continues in the "Ocean" theme that Shelley and I were destined to be together. I wrote "Touch" from a metaphorically emotional point of view, but I find it humorous to read it again many years later and see the thinly veiled sexual connotations in it, particularly at the end. It's something else for a fifteen year old to write isn't it. At the time I was absolutely star-struck and thought that Shelley was the absolute pinnacle of perfection of all that was, is, and ever will be. This opinion changed later, but it would take me some time to shed this adolescent viewpoint. Sometimes, though, I am still the young boy hoping for physical contact to reassure me of the existence of doubted emotions. You, of all people, should know that is true.

Together

As the silence rolls over my soul
The waves of hope recede

Calmness fills me within
Yet calmness I do not feel

A sense of destruction pervades me
The destruction my own, inside

All that fills my eyes I need
But can never have

She alights upon my heart like a honey bee
Bringing me sweet pollen

My love flourishes
Nourished by her gentle acceptance

But then the sting of rejection
Permeates that delicate love

My heart wilts away
Its source of life cut off

Everything around me fades away
All that remains is her and my comatose soul

A dream?
It must be

She brings me out of my stupor
And the world becomes bright once again

No longer am I a man
But instead a bird, as is she

I spread my wings
And catch the soft breeze

Off I glide toward the heavens
Her at my side

At last we are truly together
If only in a dream

Perhaps I will one day awaken
To a transformed reality

Where there are no barriers between us
And we can truly be
Together

Flowering Love

I gaze into her eyes
The azure depths
The mirror of her soul

I am unknown to her
Or perhaps I am not
And she is mystery to me

By either method
I cannot drive
A connection between

Like in the dense forest
I can see her
But can she see me

I wish for the answer
Eluding my intellect
And confusing my heart

Thoughts race inside my head
Dreams and perceptions amidst
Truth and lie

The roar of passion
The chattering of fear
Swirling around my mind

Deafening are my feelings
The cry they emit
Deaf is she to them?

Soon questions will fly away
And solutions will replace
Good or bad, either one

I will discover the seed
Love's menial beginnings
Within her quivering heart

The sprout will come eventually
To new healthy rose
One bursting with the proof

And I will pluck away the covering
Knowledge flowing forth
To my eyes of desperate waiting

As I strip away the final petal
Of that fair foliage of the heart
I will surely find

She loves me
or
She loves me not

The Thing Most Desired

The thing I most want
Is the closest thing to me

All my life is worth to me
Is how happy her life is

And when all I do is for her
My life seems to fade away

Into the dark swirling torrent of emotion
And disappears into nothing

Not one glance of favor does she send
Toward my slowly dying heart

And when her eyes of ecstasy
Gaze into mine, paradise is found

If she could realize my love
Would she accept it or turn away

And if she already knows my feelings well
Does she not share them too

This must be the answer, surely
For the signals have been too strong to ignore

Everything I do is for her
And nothing is needed in return

Except some response
Indifference only makes the soul bleed a deeper red

Even anger or hate would relieve my pain
But no response do I get, so I wait on, friendship no solution

Why the hell do you wait?
What the hell do you expect?

All I want is her
And her to want me

You stupid fool
You must go on

I CANNOT!!!

So I will wait
And I will hope
For the thing most desired
The thing I can never have

Commentary on “Together,” “Flowering Love,” and “The Thing Most Desired”

These three poems are very similar to “Ocean” and “Touch” in the way they express raw emotion without much self-awareness. Also written on the Panama City retreat, if you read them closely you will notice that even in the short time of just a few days, I had begun to see some of the negatives in my feelings for Shelley – lies, foolish waiting, anger and hate. And there is not a clear-cut happy ending in any of them; rather they focus more on the hope of realizing that youthful dream of being with her against the realization that it was just that – a hope. Still though, a clearer focus on the maelstrom of emotion that my life was caught in at the time was still some time away.

Explore

Held inside
I look through another's eyes

I long to know this person
Within whom I am trapped

What is your name?
Who are you thinking of?

No reply do I hear
Then sudden darkness

Sleep
This is when I can really explore

Take measure of the soul of this man
See what he is made of

This void never ends
I feel no substance

What is wrong with you
Sweat, I must be getting close

I will find the core
Of this troubled man's conscience

Ah, his mind
This must be it

No, everything seems to be fine
He hasn't lost it...yet

Not mental, hmmm
How about physical

Not their either
He breathes, eats, moves like a normal human

What could it be
Yes

I know now
A heart problem

Of course
Wait, it's gone

Who has taken this man's heart
No surgeon, for the scars run too deep

No murderer
For the entrance was welcome

I wish I could know this
Thief of the heart, the most protected organ

She must be very good

Commentary on “Explore”

Yes, it's another one-word titled poem. The best way to describe “Explore” is to call it my first poem of psychological self-examination. Written a few weeks after I returned from the retreat, it questions the true nature of my feelings for Shelley, if they were true or just some infatuation. It is a poetic travel through my body in search of the source of the emotional pain that I was feeling over my unrequited love. To wrap “Explore” up into a neat package, it's discovery is that there was nothing wrong with me other than the fact that I had unwisely given away my heart. Still, though, you won't detect any anger in the poem for I felt none yet. Rather I was more in wonderment at the way my heart was being wrenched by this girl. It was, after all, the first time I really felt anything like it before. “Explore” was the first time I was able in my poetry to be more analytical, to give my rational side a voice in a creative venue most often ruled by my emotional side. As I have grown and matured, this type of poetry has been very useful to me in being able to reconcile these two often warring parts of my personality.

Another's Arms

Wrapped around you
Like a cocoon
Protecting from all danger
Providing all that is needed
All that is wanted
I feel your phantom breath upon my ear
Your absent whisper of gratitude
But his arms now hold you
And nothing I do can pry them away
His hand on your shoulder
Each touch killing a piece of me
I can't bear to look
But I must
Because I still see you
Not in his arms, but in mine
Happiness evades me
Nothing can replace you in me
Perhaps I don't compare to him
I don't know why
I must be blind
Every where I turn I see you
A perfect image
But then my vision is shattered
By him
Or is it shattered by you
Too many questions I have unanswered
Only you have the knowledge
That can quell these storms inside
Share it with me
I beg
The day may yet come
When my arms will surround you
And you will know me truly
Or that day may never arrive
I can never be certain
The only thing certain is death
So for death I wait
As I wait for you

Commentary on "Another's Arms"

I remember the moment that I conceived "Another's Arms" as if though it were only yesterday. It was during the ride back from a youth group ski trip, the first I went on, about six months after the Panama City trip. There was another guy on the trip named Steve; he was a good guy on all accounts except that he was encroaching on my emotional territory. Yes, Shelley and he did quite a bit of flirting on that trip. Needless to say, this irked me to no end. It was like some kind of unspoken betrayal of the nothingness that existed between Shelley and me. Steve was two years younger than I was, which only made me more angry. After all, how the hell could a little middle school kid compare to me. A very strange trip it was indeed. But, back to the story. On the ride back in a big tour bus Steve and Shelley sat next to each other. For a time Steve had his arms around her while she slept against him. He wasn't doing it to spite me so I didn't feel any anger towards him. It is much like I hold nothing against your side projects; after all, how are they to know. I was about two seats back and to the right, sitting by myself, feeling that cool loneliness that I sometimes feel even now. So I grabbed a piece of paper and something to write against and dug this poem into it. "Another's Arms" is crude to be sure, but I find it interesting personally in the way it describes both physically and emotionally the situation in a way which is just short of cold. If you want to take a peek behind some of my time-to-time jealousy, read and understand this poem. Those reactions in my youth have aged a bit and acquired a harder edge, but at their heart they are no different.

Angel

Some gaze to the skies
To look for an angel
But I need look no further
Than the angel in my world
She is remote, yet close enough
She shakes her head
Her hair falls down her shoulders
As a crystalline waterfall in the spring
Her chameleon eyes set upon me
She pierces my soul
A smile she sends
Diamonds contained by lips of fire
More valuable than the universe
Her velvet skin brushes past me
A cool summer breeze
And the faint scent of nectar
Simple, pure
Unchangeable, perfect
Heaven on earth

Commentary on "Angel"

On the very same trip some four or five hours later I wrote another poem – "Angel." What is unique about this poem is that I wrote it at the request of someone, a friend of Shelley's named Gina who also went on the trip. I very seldom write anything at the behest of someone. It feels very uncomfortable and forced. I experience the same feeling when I write for English classes. I have come to view this as a healthy diversion from the way I usually write – in the grip of emotion at one end or the other of the spectrum. I realize that it is good to move my sights to other topics and not be such a bleeding-heart romantic all the time. It hurts to do this, but it is a cleansing kind of pain, almost like I prove to myself that I can write about things other than women who move through my life. Although "Angel" is still about a woman, the funny thing about it is that I believe almost none of it. I basically created another speaker who did feel the way the poem does and used him as the tool of expression. It comes close to being a dramatic monologue, also known as the poet's way of lying to the reader without being accused or caught. While Gina was a beautiful girl, she certainly was not perfect and definitely was not heaven on earth by any stretch of the imagination. But she believed the poem, and that is something I guess. "Angel" acts like it is me but is really someone else. I have not written another like it since.

Her Poison

Complete and utter despair
Cutting off my air

All I had to gain
Being choked off by the pain

Over my soul a veil of black
Leaving no chance of going back

The life I once knew before
Now locked away behind my hell's flaming door

The torment which perverts my life
Causing all my inner strife

Was known but to a few
Who watched helplessly as the torture grew

With my last moments of existence I speak
A few whispered words ever so weak

If for only a second you could feel
The pain and its evil appeal

Then you, my dear, could surely tell
That you are the source of my personal hell

Never has one loved suffering so much
That he would endure it for one slight touch

From the hand that could make the pain disappear
And make the hopeless future become so clear

Why will you not lend me your love
Which I can see in your heaven above

One little piece of your heart would fill
The emptiness that has been so long so still

Can it be so hard to relinquish your kiss
When it would bring such infinite bliss

I hang on the verge of eternal damnation
Yet you still hold back my only source of salvation


Hear my cries above the din
Of all the others which are pushing in

I need you now more than ever
My rejection would be the final sever

Of my tenuous tie to this world
And into the burning depths of death will I be hurled

Oh, precious one, I am stricken with your disease
Administer the antidote, I beg of you, please

Without you I will be colored with death's evil dyes
But come with me and we'll soar the skies



Something Familiar

You lie to me
Maybe not even a lie
Just a little reservation
Enough for a scavenging doubt
To swoop down and pick apart
My bleeding, decaying trust
And I'm left with a bitter sorrow

So I'll just take a second
And sit down in my pity
Waiting for this feeling to pass
And a filling anger to rush in
Something sure and comforting
Something familiar

You said I want you
So much
You said I'm so turned on
You touched me and held me
For all to see
But now you're waiting on someone else
And now I'm left with starving hunger

So I'll just sit down right here
With my constant companions
Betrayal and denial
I'm once again the discard
At least it's something I know
Something familiar

There'll be no more hints
No more batting of lashes
No more questioning looks
In the darkness on a sofa
No more breaths of fresh air
No more of you and me
Making myself lose faith
Making myself be free

I'll keep sitting here alone
In my broken chair
Waiting for all feeling to pass
I know it's bound to happen soon
For it's always hovering near
Something familiar

If We Had Never Met

Sometimes when I think of you
Which is every moment, to be true
I wonder with each and every verse
Of my mind's thinking through
Is this friendship a curse?

If we had never met
Until just a few weeks ago
Would you really love me?
I will never know

If I wouldn't lay down my life for you
Would you want me a little more?
If I wouldn't betray all for you
Would you hold me when my heart is sore?

If I cared just a little less
Would you then call to say hello?
If I gave to you my soul not so much
Would you then not make me feel so low?

Is it such a horrible thing
To know me as no other does
To have my complete confidence
To all I am, will be, and was?

Does a friendship mean no more
Than a place to talk about other men
And an occasional opportunity
To see each other now and then?

If friendship is doomed forever
To a latent emotional bond
Then I wish I could trade this friendship
For the love that others from you have drawn

If honesty is my downfall
Then I'll be like the others to whom you endear
I'll put up a front, confuse you
And tell you what I think you want to hear

I won't listen to your problems
I won't watch over you
And protect you from the schemers
And the pain they put you through

This curse which is friendship
Which seems so perfect to me
To lead on to better things
Which I can desperately see

If it were better that we were strangers
And you thought you meant nothing to me
Then perhaps, though I don't understand how
My dreams would truth be

If I treated you like an amusement
Just a passing fancy
Would that attract you to me
And could I hold you in my arms,
 and kiss your lips,
 and maybe even then I could speak
 to you the truth so softly

Commentary on “Her Poison,” “Something Familiar,” and “If We Had Never Met”

I group these together because I don't remember in what order I wrote them, but also because they express the changing flavor of my feelings about Shelley. I use the word flavor for a reason. These are poems of anger. Recall the last time you got angry and try to remember the way that the saliva in your mouth seems to seep in like little salty streams from the very corners of your jaw, right behind your molars. Now think about that and read these poems. To be short about it, I was sick and tired of feeling betrayed and somehow just decided that I would strike back, at least on paper. In reality, my love turned to indifference. I remember vividly when at yet another ski retreat in Snowshoe, West Virginia (otherwise known as the home of Christy Hinkle) I busted me knee up pretty bad by hitting a tree with the back of my left leg going what seemed to be three hundred miles per hour. That was on the first day of the trip. On the rest of the trip I got to sit around in the hotel room and eat chicken soup. Oh yeah, and there was that one trip to the closest hospital the next morning. It was about twenty-five miles away and it consisted of two floors of some old house in a little run-down coal mining town. For some reason – perhaps it was my pathetic condition – Shelley was unusually affectionate to me. For example, one time she rushed out after me when I crutched out of her room and demanded a good-bye kiss even though my room was only two doors down. Trust me, that was very atypical of her. This indifference was the direct result of the anger I had felt shortly before. These three poems were the product of that anger, and once I was tired of the anger I moved on to this indifference stage. Shelley and I always seemed to be at different ends of love and hate for each other, never converging at one acceptable place. But we still are close, and I'll be living three minutes from her in Atlanta in less than a month. It will be interesting to see where both of us are at then.

I Lie

I say to you that I want to
I say to you that I do
I say to you that I can feel you
When you say to me that you're blue

I get you to come a little closer
For a moment it seems you are master
Then I turn the tables to disaster
Because I feel the creep coming on

So I lie
Yeah, so I lie
I lie to you and I lie to me
Without saying it cannot be

It's just a little story
When I don't say anything
A vow of silence unbroken
When I sense there is a cling

Now I speak to you of trust
That I lack in your kind
I see everything you're trying
Even though I am blind

I fill in the gaps
With delusions of great pain
I feel creep deeper
I don't care if I'm insane

So I lie
Yeah, I lie
Wounds spread by time
They alone are mine

I want you to see
All the nothing I portray
Suffer thrown equilibrium
Day after Day

And so I lie

Padded Cell

This padded cell
Holds me inside
Away from everything
Protection
From myself
I would hang myself
But my clothes are too weak to hold me
I would stab myself
But I have nothing sharp
I would bask my head against the walls
But the white foam is too thick
Constant death
I suffer
Hell on earth?
Or earth in hell?
Does it matter
Not really
Insanity comes
And insanity goes
Pain is constant, perpetual
Even the thickest walls
Can't stop this war in my head
Thoughts trapped in my mind
Never released
As I am trapped in here
Escape for mind and body
An impossible dream
This nightmare reality is all I'll ever know
No hope
No life
No love
No end to this
Six white planes
My world
My hell
Padded room
It will never go away
It's always there
Inside my head
Holding me back
Holding me back
Maybe I am mad
But how would I know

You may never know either
Your child
Your lover
Your parent
It may be inside them too
You'll never know
You can't ever see my padded room
All you'll see is my dark staring eyes
As I slowly build
A padded cell for you
Inside your head
Inside your mind
Inside your soul
Inside you

Commentary on “Padded Cell” and “I Lie”

I’m going to take my roommate’s advice on these two and just describe them very directly. “Padded Cell” and “I Lie” are poems dominated by frustration. The theme, the style, the tone all tell you the poet is beating his head against a wall, sometimes imagined, sometimes real. I do not recommend head-butting a real wall, but the emotional ones are often hard to avoid. Again, these two are about Shelley to a great extent, particularly “I Lie,” although “Padded Cell” is also about a more general frustration with life. At times, Shannon, “I Lie” could very well have been about you. Don’t mistake its biting edge for hatred, only for frustration. And for the opportunity to speak from your point of view in some kind of twisted attempt to make sense of you. I have always said that poets are insane artists trying to alleviate their condition by giving their illness to others through words. Sometimes I fit right into this definition.



*High School
Junior Year*

High School – Junior Year

My junior year in high school was one of great happiness at times and great turbulence at others. On the side of happiness, I developed a set of friends that I felt comfortable with for the first time in my life. This was in great part due to the fact that I gained more self-confidence during this time, a trait that I had been sorely lacking in past years. I attribute this much to the fact that I began playing on the varsity football team. I started my junior year, just one year after I began playing. While this may seem a bit trivial to some, the role of football in my life was very important. It taught me to be tough when necessary and I came to have confidence in my abilities on the field, and this feeling extended to my personal relationships. Since you have been and are an athlete (excepting your lack of ability to walk down stairs without injuring yourself), I'm sure you understand the positive effects that sports can have on a person's life.

The difficult times were connected to, and no big surprise here, two different women with whom I was involved. The first was named Gina (not the Gina for whom I wrote "Angel"). She was a six-foot-four senior basketball player at Franklin Road Academy. While we never really got involved, we came pretty close to it, and that threw a few curveballs my way. The second girl was Gayle, also a senior. She was the sometimes girlfriend of one of my best friends, Luke. I first spoke to Gayle when I ran into her in the hallway the day of a football game. She was putting some notes and pictures into Luke's locker to help inspire him to play well that night; Luke also started, opposite of me at left defensive tackle. After our conversation, Gayle started putting stuff in my locker too. From there we became very close friends and, eventually, we almost fell into a relationship. But, for reasons you shall see, we never made it that far.

The Game

The pressure, the disappointment, it seems insane
But it all is just a part of playing the game

There are no teammates in this lonely contest
The one competitor must give nothing less than his best

Sometimes, though, his best isn't enough
When faced by his opponent's iron-willed bluff

When the game has begun, there is not a single ally
One will live, and the others will all die

This fabled dual is not so much brutal
Rather the struggle is more one that is subtle

The blows and scars are buried far below the skin's top
Causing internal bleeding that no physician can stop

This foolish game, it is too old
To its repetitive trappings I have grown cold

The effort spent merits more than the prizes won
Yet little is to be shown when the struggle is done

My body is battered, bruised, and bloody
My brief time has taken its toll already

I will no longer give way to the game's utter waste
Never again will my tongue feel its bitter taste

Commentary on “The Game”

“The Game” is significant to this section of poetry because it stands out against the other poems I wrote during this year. I made this very late in the summer before I started my junior year at what was both the best and worst time to write a poem. I was on a double date with Luke and Gayle and another girl whose name I have forgotten. I was still feeling very negative effects from all the problems I had with Shelley (a point of interest – her twin sister’s name is Shannon) and therefore was not much enjoying the date. We were upstairs in my parents’ house watching a movie when, for some silly reason, I walked into my room and wrote this. So, you see, it was a good time because I needed to get this stuff out, and I did indeed feel better after I wrote it; on the other hand, it was a pretty rude thing to do to my date. And I caught a whole lot of hell for it the next Monday at school. Looking back on it I should never have gone on the date in the first place because I was not in anywhere near the right frame of mind to get involved with a girl. You see, Shannon, I have been on your side of the fence before too, and I understand the set of problems that comes with it. Perhaps this understanding makes dealing with you so difficult for me at times; it would be easier if I had not been there before and could just dismiss you into some hidden corner of my past. But I know we play or own little game, not like the one in the poem, but a contest of sorts none the less. The fact that I know the rules and the boundaries, ever changing though they may be, makes you that much dearer to me. Now, if you can pound any sense out of that statement, you truly are a Champ.

She Walked in the Room

She walked in the room
The smell of perfume
Announcing to all she was there
The heads, they all turned
And their souls quickly burned
With desire for the one so fair

She sat down beside me
And the heads followed quietly
Her elegance had captured the crowd
The men they walked by
With longing in their eyes
For the beauty thought none were allowed

But she didn't see them
Her sweet innocence believing
That no one could want her so
She says that she's boring
Not radiant and adoring
But so much better do I know

The men who walk by
They shoot for the sky
But she's too high for them to seek
The one that is seated
Fate and chance have cheated
And his opportunity is bleak

I wish I could tell her
Show her how stellar
That she is to all of mankind
Young and appealing
Kind and feeling
And always on my mind
She never leaves my mind

Commentary on “She Walked in the Room”

I’ll be brief on this one because I wrote it about something very simple. Gina, who at the time I wrote “She Walked in the Room” was a good friend of mine, thought that she was totally unattractive for some reason. To be honest, most girls I’ve seen who are six-foot-four are kind of freaky-looking. But Gina was definitely not; on the contrary, she was gorgeous. She was elected to be a Homecoming attendant that same year, but even that could not convince her. So I just penned out a few words about her feelings and the way that I thought the exact opposite.

Decide

Her sapphire lips and her diamond smile
I have thought of these things for such a long while

And now the struggle that takes place in my soul
Is to expel the same thoughts that made me seem whole

I so desperately look for the eyes of another
To help pull over my heart this lying cover

Looking for that last seed of hope to destroy
And disintegrating with it my final feeling of joy

The other I seek to stop my growing loneliness
Must either be a new experience or returning old bliss

And whence the time comes to make the decision
I foretell between my emotions an epic collision

Of what most certainly must lay before me
And of that which I know was never meant to be

When my judgement is made I know it won't require
That it is both what is better and what I in my heart desire

Commentary on “Decide”

The exact events that inspired “Decide” are hazy to me now, but I do remember that Shelley and I had reconciled our differences and were growing close again. At the time I was doing stuff with Gina; I wouldn’t exactly call it dating, but we were seeing each other regularly. It seemed to me at the time that I was faced with a choice – either go with the “new experience” or the “returning old bliss.” A difficult decision to make indeed. As it turned out, I didn’t end up going for either of them because of the entrance of Gayle into the picture. One thing that I do recall, though, is that during this time of my life I felt very at ease. Perhaps it was the fact that I thought I could pick between two girls both of whom I liked very much. In retrospect, I know that things were not nearly that simple. But the appearance of simplicity was a welcome change from the complex times from which I had just emerged. Know me for long enough and you will learn that simplicity will breed contentment within me for a time, but then I become bored with it and, unconsciously, do something to make things change. That change was waiting off stage just behind the curtain.

The Uncertain Moment

The Uncertain Moment comes
As time comes to be
When all that is sure before
Seems to exit eternally
 And the Uncertain Moment rushes in unexpectedly

That first fatal flaw sprang forth
When as my eyes looked lazily
At her beauty and perfection
My soul became trapped imperceptibly
 And the Uncertain Moment looked on undetectedly

I did not know then the toll
That desire quietly took upon me
The gentle tug of the unattainable
Became by emotion's burden impossibly
 And the Uncertain Moment crept closer unrestrainedly

The night had drawn nigh
And the stillness was set free
The salutary chantings once around
Were for the while driven aflee
 And the Uncertain Moment walked in uninvitedly

Her eyes were put away
And then it was so perfectly
The time to touch her face
With increased amiability
 And the Uncertain Moment came in irreverantly

My hand stretched out to her
And brushed her hair so silky
Her skin shined golden in my eyes
And I wet my lips and near gently
 And the Uncertain Moment crashed down unbearably

My head became shaken
With the brazen entrance of memory
So that before my eyes
The fear of being turned away was all I could see
 And the Uncertain Moment remained there unmercifully

Then she drew a strange breath
And she peered at me curiously
She spoke a few phrases
Which passed by my weakened perceptibility
 And the Uncertain Moment took leave unannouncedly

I look back upon those chances
And see how I squandered opportunity
One simple reason for my halting actions
Is that I must be too cowardly
 And the Uncertain Moment treated me unforgivingly

Perhaps there is still a hope
For the first time came a bit suddenly
But the next time that it arises
I must find means to abandon that fatal safety
 And the Uncertain Moment will not attack me unopposedly

Commentary on “The Uncertain Moment”

This poem is the most interesting one that I wrote about Gina probably because it is not really about her but rather it is about me, or at least me at one moment in time. The background on it is that she came over to my parents’ house and we were upstairs watching a movie – a Disney movie I believe. When it was over somehow we ended up sitting on the floor talking and listening to music. She laid down on her stomach and she must have complained that she was sore from basketball practice earlier that day because I started to rub her shoulders and back. Yes, the ever-dangerous massage was taking place. As I wrote in “The Uncertain Moment,” I didn’t really realize how much I liked Gina until this very instant. The poem is pretty descriptive of the things that went through my mind. You know the places you wander through in those lean seconds when you decide whether or not you should kiss someone. Of course, with our first kiss it was more like, “wham, throw ya against the wall, and go at it in the middle of a crowded room right by the bar.” But in some strange way that is very typical of you and me sometimes, isn’t it? Well, with Gina I never made that move. I still to this day wonder if she wanted me to, more as a curious fact I would like to know rather than some super-important life-changing nugget of wisdom. I sometimes still think back on that “uncertain moment” when I am in similar circumstances today. If you can get past the fact that for some odd reason I chose to end the last word of every stanza with “-ly,” I’m sure that the words on the page are pretty accurate as to what everyone goes through on that first kiss. And it’s also accurate in describing us every time we kiss. I notice that little moment of hesitation we both give; much later, it always makes me laugh.

Voices

I go through the day
Each and every day
Hearing the voices from all around
Talking in every way

Each and every verbal sound
Whether it be soft or loud
I care very little or nothing about
Through them I just go in or around

But every day I plan my route
So that I won't be without
The voice that soothes my soul
And pulls my heart from the past to now

Her words feel so very cool
And make my spirit again so full
The sound comes through the telephone
My mind settles back into a lull

That it seems that I've always known
I've memorized every pitch and tone
With each breath I can see her welcoming smile
And I feel for a while that I'm not alone

I sit and listen for a while
The distance of each soon-to-be mile
Dissolves like the light upon my floor
As I turn off the lamp in my normal style

My heart wishes there were more
My emotions are slowly torn
Knowing that her voice is still there
But with no hope of anything else in store

Commentary on “Voices”

“Voices” was the first poem I wrote about Gayle. I made it right after her and Luke broke up which is also when Gayle and I started to become very close. At that point in time I really didn’t think that there was any hope of something between us. Luke was my friend, although our relationship was severely strained by the breakup, and it just felt wrong to step in just a few days after they stopped dating and ask Gayle out. As it turned out, those days turned into weeks and months. Nevertheless, Gayle was a very special person in my life at the time and made me feel very good about myself. “Voices” is kind of an obtuse description of the way she and I would talk on the phone almost every night for two or three hours. It may seem a bit odd that we would do that if we weren’t going out, but at the time it was totally natural. To this day I have not found another woman that I could talk to for hours and hours and not get bored with like I could with Gayle. This is not intended as a slight to you or anyone else, and it would not surprise me if I do not again find that kind of person. I have changed too much perhaps. Our conversations were long and attentive and about absolutely nothing most of the time. That is what made it beautiful, though. It was like sitting there talking to her face to face even though we were twenty miles apart. Oh yeah, just a side note to finish up here: she had absolutely stunning blonde hair. I have a weakness for blondes, I have come to figure out. Try not to use that against me too much in the future.

All I Can See, All I Can Feel

Your breath falls softly on the back of my neck
I hear a faint whisper of a love song in my ear
Then your eyes look upon me, gentle, sincere
And I hold you tightly and draw you near
A cool breeze rushes in
Fanning the flames
Making our hearts catch afire again
My world is alright, nothing needs change
And time stands still, leaving us be
And the movie in my mind continues to roll
While all I can see is what could have been yesterday
But all I can feel is what really is today

Your lashes give a flutter
My heart gives a patter
Our lives, intertwined, are inseparable no matter
What time or people might bring
And my heart will sing
The gentle strains of contentedness -
"You are the water that quenches my thirst
You are the bread that feeds my hunger
You are the air that fills my lungs
You are the blood that pulses through my veins
Without you I am no man or living thing"
And the tragedy of truth is shown through in my life
As all I can see is what could've been yesterday
But all I can feel is what really is today

The sun pulls itself beneath the sky
And do my immortal thoughts lie
Down to sleep and remind me for another night
My arms feel empty
The room feels cold
And will be weeping
Until I grow old
For the love that was welling within my soul
That was there all along but I never told
To the one who needed to hear it most
Now the movie is over
No sequel to come
And the ending is sadly
No different than the one
That my life displayed

Love cultivated for a lifetime
Washed away by hesitation's first flood
And the cruel constrictions of time
Leave no hope of regaining my blood
Now you are going away
And I in your memory will surely fade
As you meet the others and go on your way
But before you leave I just have to say
All I will ever be able to see is what could've been yesterday
But all I'll ever feel is the cold reality of today

Small Thanks

How can I describe this one
that I feel so much for
words can do no more
Than darken the bright glow of her sun

How can I explain by mortal means
the joy and the fear
I've felt through the year
All because of her it seems

I don't think I've ever known
a friend to me more true
or for me anything would do
Save her to whom so close I've grown

Though our time together has not been long
I've never felt freer
more able just to see her
And just sit and talk or even sing a silly song

Whenever I catch a glimpse of that goldenrod
or smell her sweet perfume
like a spring flower in full bloom
A warmth fills my soul as if sent from God

She has seen the light and dark behind my eyes
and stood through it all
holding her self tall
A beacon to my troubled heart of ahead clearer skies

I feel down so deep inside whatever comprises my being
a singular simple desire
to hold her up higher
Than all the troubles caused by people and their scheming

What ever this feeling is I'm not really sure
but it never leaves me
it is something I always see
Even in the night when controlled thinking stops I feel secure

Every time she is near I feel myself stumbling like a child
to convey to her the care
which for me is always there
When the storms of life rise, making my troubles smooth and mild

To whatever terminus our relationship shall lead
I fear to see her go
taking the one constant from my life's shifting flow
With no one to whom I can desperately plead

I would be stooping low to say what I feel for her is love
it is that but much more
for the one whom I adore
Can only be properly and completely thanked in heaven above

No one could ever be more deserving of divinity
to be placed on a throne of gold
never to grow old
In reward for even acknowledging one as unworthy as me

I Feel You Slipping Away
Goodbye

I feel you slipping, slipping, slipping away
There's nothing I can do to make you STAY
I knew it was going to happen
I knew I had to let go
But the pain, I never knew
That it would so trouble my soul
The few miles you are from me now
Seem like a million
The distance that you will be soon
Is an eternity for my heart
I'm losing my inspiration
 My reason
 My companion
All I ever thought I needed -
I'm seeing you fade away
You're so far that I can't ever feel you again
I can barely even see you
And once when you stood so close and faced me
Now you are so far looking away into the future
All I'll ever know of you is the past
I wish more than any wish ever
That I could change time's flow and return
To the former days when it was simple
Before my emotions became cloudy
Mixed with passion and love
When I knew you purely and you
Knew only the surface of what I am
But you saw underneath the surface
Without realizing that my soul is like
The ocean
The surface looks bright and clear
But underneath is darkness so deep
That you can't stand to be in it long
I guess that's why you can't
Look at me anymore

I don't understand it
But I do
I don't understand you
But I do
I can't accept it
But I must

For the feelings which you may
Have once held for me
Now seem to have
Slipped Away
Never to be found again

Was my soul too deep?
Or its darkness too bleak?
Will I ever know?

Time will move forward though
And you will voyage to new worlds
I shall remain in this one
Left only with a longing look
Towards the sky
Watching as you slowly disappear
And all that is left is emptiness
In the sky
In my soul

No matter how far you travel
No matter where your journey leads
I will always keep a part of
What I have always felt for you
In a safe place in my heart
And when you hit stormy seas
I will never be too far
To hear your cry for help
And when that cry comes
I will be there for you
No matter what I have to do
Or the consequences of doing it
For you are more important to me
Than all the world
Than all the past
Than the future
Than myself
I will open the door to that place
In my heart
And let you enter in
To its warmth
 protection
 and affection

Though I may fade to a dim memory

Within your head
You will remain with me
A blazing fire
Your face shining bright
Your smile radiating peace and
Happiness
I will never forget you
I will never desert you
You will never lose me

So depart
For it is time
And though the regret and need
Tear their talons into my soul
I will survive
For I know that through these wounds
Pour my very essence
Into you
 My strength
 My compassion
 My love
You leave me filled
I watch you empty
Every emotion I had given to you
I am left only with the look
Of your beauty
That can never fade from my eyes
And the taste
Of your lips
The taste that will forever haunt me
And justly reward me
For the past
And remind me
Of the future

God be with you
In your new life
Please try to remember
At least
A shadow of me
As someone that made you his world
Even though you didn't know it
Goodbye

Please God, don't let her forget me

And please, oh please
Let our lives cross again

Goodbye
 Until eternity
 And the present collide
I will love you
Goodbye...

**Commentary on “All I Can See, All I Can Feel,” “Small Thanks,”
and “I Feel You Slipping Away”**

Although these three poems are important individually, I group them together not only because I wrote them very close together in time but also because they are all about the feelings I was experiencing near the end of the spring semester when Gayle was getting ready to leave for college. In the last two months that Gayle was in high school I fell deeply in love with her. Since then I have either never had that same level of love for another woman or have not felt it in the same heart-wrenching way. The back story is that I finally told Gayle how much I cared about her in the middle of the summer before she left to go to, this is funny, the University of Tennessee. I knew even then that it would have been better to just swallow my feelings and accept that nothing could happen between us. Nobody in their right mind who is going to college would want to be involved in a relationship with someone who is still in high school. But, never the one to take the most prudent course of action on these matters, I went ahead and spilled my guts. I still remember what she told me as we sat that night eating desert in the rotating restaurant atop the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza in downtown Nashville. She said, “If you would have said something a few months ago when I thought you were going to things would be different. But it just can’t happen now.” Well, that pretty much broke my heart in half, even though I knew there was no other answer for her to give. If you want the most honest appraisal of how I felt, “I Can Feel You Slipping Away” gives it. I wrote this epic – the longest poem I have ever written – for her to read, addressed directly to her. In fact, I gave it to her as part of a collection of the poetry I had written up until then. So, this is the second time around for me, although I want you to really understand what is behind my words; with her it was more of a desperate action of hopelessness. One last reach for something I knew I could not have. While the poem is a somewhat horrid

combination of self-pity and idol worship, it is still very difficult for me to reread in its entirety. It just brings back the memory of so many painful feelings and squandered chances; but it also calls forth the images of the good things Gayle gave me, things it took me a long time to realize. It may be difficult for me, as well, because I see some of that saddened boy in myself here at the end of college, moving on to a different life, leaving so many of the people I have come to love far away. Shannon, you are not Gayle, but you do share certain things with her that I cherish; and you have other unique qualities that complete you in my eyes. That makes it even harder for me to leave.

The One Left Behind

Being the one left behind
It is that with which nothing can compare
I feel a tearing at my heart
By the beast of utter hopelessness and despair

It is too stinging a pain
To have become so close to the dream
And reality rushes back in
The goal can never be achieved, it seems

I stand alone in the wilderness
And she so gently has left me behind
The spiritual emptiness I feel
Is more severe than that of any other kind

Unworthiness replaces quickly
What once was my unfounded heavenly expectations
And now I am only left
With the friendship and torture of my lonely contemplations

I cannot accept the idea
That from the fates this relation was never meant to be
But one thing I do know
Never will this crying heart which I once possessed again be mine

Commentary on “The One Left Behind”

This, the final poem I wrote while a junior, just at the end of the summer and after Gayle had left for college, expresses some feelings that I was not able to shed until I myself came to college. The events with Gayle left scars on me that still hurt well into my senior year; some of those wounds are still with me. They remind me not to let opportunities pass me by without taking a shot at them. To put a concrete image with those words, I would rather try to catch a speeding eighteen-wheeler than wait until it's almost passed and grab on to the back, only to be dragged along the ground. I choose to either stop it or get run over by it. When I wrote “The One Left Behind” I felt like the asphalt had torn off my skin and my mouth and eyes were filled with road dirt. Getting up and dusting myself off was a long, arduous process. I know, though, that doing that during my senior year, along with dealing with almost getting kicked out of school, opened the door for me to be the person that I am today. For the next year, though, I was incapable of feeling anything real for anyone else.



*High School
Senior Year*

High School – Senior Year

When compared to the writings of the previous three years, those done during my senior year are a very eclectic bunch. The central theme of most of my poetry – my relationships with women – is present but not as prominent. There are three poems in this section that deal with a girl named Lara whom I fell for, but it was a very short and painless fall. I just didn't have the spiritual energy left to try very hard or to be hurt very much. She ended up dropping me to take up with a former boyfriend. Lara and I were two very different people and, although she was very intelligent and we got along, there really wasn't anything between us on which to build. I knew that and it made things easier; also, the experience with Gayle taught me to protect myself better against being hurt. Thus, here you see the beginnings of the new poet – hard to understand, outgoing yet still holding back deep feelings, and at times paradoxical. Other things played a more major role in my life this year, primary among them the troubles I created for myself in February 1994. While on a school trip, I was arrested for doing something only a stupid, short-sighted eighteen-year-old would do – trying to shoplift a T-shirt from Ron Jon's Surf Shop in Cocoa Beach, Florida. What I did not know at the time was the Ron Jon's is notorious for catching and prosecuting the hell out of shoplifters who are legally adults. To compress a long, arduous story into a few sentences, I was informed by the fine people at Franklin Road Academy that I was to be suspended until the end of the semester and barred from attending any school functions, including my own graduation ceremony. I was allowed to complete my classes, and I did so, making the highest grades in my high school career. I still remember walking stone-faced out of the conference room when I was told the news, getting in my little white Buick Century, and driving down the Natchez Trace Parkway for about four hours, stopping only in Santa Fe,

Tennessee for gas and a coke. The few months that followed changed me tremendously. I tell the few people who I care to hear the story that I was a college student long before I came to college. It taught me to be self-reliant and responsible. So now I look back on the ordeal positively. It made me grow up. And when the school mailed my diploma to me a week or so after the graduation I have only seen on videotape three years after-the-fact, I placed it in the bottom of a box where it remains to this day and got on with the business of moving on with my life. I go into such detail here in the introduction because, oddly enough, I never wrote a single word about those times. It just never occurred to me at the time. But if you look closely enough at the poems in this section that are not about Lara, you can see that my topics were becoming more experimental and, dare I say, more mature even if the quality of the writing leaves something to be desired.

At Night

At night when I lay down to sleep
And the day's filled with memories I don't want to keep
I close my eyes and see you there

Your midnight brown shining hair
My mind conjures your mythical care
And I sink further into wishful thinking

I feel the gentle caress of your kissing
And all that in reality was missing
Appears to all have been true

I can wrap my arms tightly around you
And taste your salty lips anew
All my life finally makes sense

But then my whole body becomes tense
And my mind awakens with a painful wrench
And I find my arms clutching tightly to the air

Trying desperately to feel you there
My heart feeling the painful resonance of your imagined care
And the once wonderful dream is now more than I can bear

Memory Untold

You were so real then,
So much life and fantasy
Bundled up in only a thought.
A history of a past but
A few hours old, a history
Not true but certainly one
That was more right. The reality
Of two sentences exchanged
In a half stupor, a dozen
Or so stolen glances by me
In your direction, and your
Absence in only two hours had
No place there. And the
Reason you left had even less.
No, in that place everything
Was in focus; even while our
Physical beings were certainly far
Apart, our essences of being, or
At least what they should be, were
Impossibly together. A few scenes,
Some motion, some still, flowed
Before me. I was both participant
And observer, seeing all concurrently.
So many of those observations have
Left me, and the memory of most
Of those false pictures has
Slipped into that dark little nook
In the back of the mind where
All the best nocturnal visions
Seem to hide from the daylight.
Yet something still remained.
Even as I opened my temporal eyes,
A strange thing happened, a wonderful,
Torturous thing happened. Those eyes
Which we have that look inward
On the world of unbridled
Imagination didn't close, as they
Usually do. No, those eyes remained
Open. For just an instant, though
It seemed longer, the world
My body can touch and the world
Only my mind can touch were
Both there before me. Somehow

A piece of the world raging inside
Of me had overcome the
Obstacles of doubt and human frailty
That lay between it and physical
Reality. Somehow, that person in my
Mind had become real, you were real,
Or at least my heart's idea of you was
Real. For that moment, I could feel
Your lips pressed on mine, I could
Feel the curve of your thigh and knee,
I could see the enchanting
Deepness of the blue in your eyes.
Every nerve in my body was alive,
Each screaming out with joy and
A measure of disbelief. The suddenly
The light rushed in, stung my eyes,
And you faded quickly out of existence,
Or at least out of this existence. But,
Though you left so quickly, a memory
More vivid than any imaginable remained.
It was not a remembrance of a touch,
Or a smell, or a taste; no, it went
Much deeper than that. It reached
Areas of my soul not describable by
Human conscious understanding, but
Which all humans know. Maybe, for
Just a moment, you really were
Here. Maybe you had the same
Dream and I was there for you. With
All my waking consideration, I doubt
This to be the truth. Perhaps in
That short time between sleep and
Waking, realities did merge, either by
Some power or by simple chance. If so,
Maybe that person in my dreams will
Return; maybe, just maybe, you will come
For the first time. But even if neither
Happens, I will always have the memory -
A memory so strong and unique that it
Will never slip into that dark nook
In the back of my mind where wishful
Untruths go to hide.

Commentary on “At Night” and “Memory Untold”

Both of these are dream poems that are told from an awake viewpoint. “At Night” is not so much about a particular dream but about the half-hearted futility that I knew I was exercising in trying for Lara. “Memory Untold” very literally is about a dream I had about Lara. I had a dream just before I woke up about holding her and when I opened my eyes and was in that state in between sleep and consciousness I could almost physically feel her. I have had few dreams as vivid as that one, maybe because I had it right at the waking moment, maybe because I ate the wrong combination of Doritos and pizza the night before. Whatever spurred it, I did something that is also unusual for me. I immediately grabbed pen and paper and wrote it down directly into poem form. I generally write late at night just before I go to bed and it always feels a little odd to try it at other times. I occasionally will intentionally sit down and write when it feels least natural just to see what comes out of it. It’s a very hit-or-miss proposition, but I find that most of my poetry is that way in any case.

The Beast

The Beast raised its head
And made a lowly growl.
Her white teeth gleamed from
Behind somewhat pale brownish
Lips. Another growl, now more
Like a snarl. She raised back,
Pulling her shoulders high
And sticking her rounded chin
Towards the sky. Then she
Made her lunge, first at my
Ear, then at my neck. Each
Time the Beast's lips touched
My skin, each time her teeth
Scraped along my body, a gush
Of warmth went scrambling to
All my parts, yelling, screaming,
Waking everything up. The Beast
Had an appetite I knew I
Could not whet - an interminable
Desire for flesh, its salty taste,
Its rolling contour. She wouldn't,
Couldn't stop until she had completely
Fulfilled her carnal needs. She
Wanted it all - my ears, my neck,
My lips, my nose, my eyes, my
Hair, my chest, my chin. In a few moments
It was all over. I was done.
The Beast was done. I looked
Around trying to clear away the haze
That had filled my eyes. I looked
Left, then right, then down at my
Side. There the Beast lay, her energies
Spent, sleeping soundlessly. The
Insatiable monster she was only a
Moment ago had left her. She was
Now a slender, naked, small woman
Laying at my side, the curve of her body
Fitting perfectly the contours of my
Leg and hip. There the Beast lay,
Completely satisfied, at peace, happy.
As was I.

Commentary on “The Beast”

Watch out, it’s another sex poem. It is about Lara, not bestiality, and it is completely made up. I was sitting up on top of the roof of my parents’ house in Franklin when I wrote this one. We had a one-and-a-half floor ranch, so one of my bedroom windows gave me easy access to the top of the house and I used to go out there every once in a while and sneak a smoke and write or just sit and stare up at the stars. My parents moved out of that house and into a condo on the other side of town a few years later. I miss that spot on the roof. Nothing bad ever happened to me up there; it was a place where I would go when I just wanted things to be simple. And they always were. Everyone needs a place like that, and I want to find another one. “The Beast” means more to me as a vivid reminder of my brick-red-shingled sanctuary than it does as a poem about a girl. This also makes it pretty unique when placed among my other poems. Reading this poem gives me an odd and wonderful sense of peace, or at least a memory of it in tough times. It’s a place that I can always go to when I need it. So, in a way, I still have the roof to sit on in my mind if not in body as well.

December Breathing

Sandy beaches, palm trees swaying
Happy thoughts to remember
Foreign places in a foreign time
Cold late December
Sink deep in the chilled night air
Escaped warmth on exhaled breath
Reminds of the life burning inside
And the close gasp grasp of death
Shivers birth and break the body
Stealing bits and pieces quietly
But zero stops not at the bone
Instead strikes deeper secretly
The beaches still live here in this winter
More distant and of colder vitality
No vivacity is lost in the translation
But the season never questions life's mortality

Commentary on “December Breathing”

The only reason why I single this poem out from the rest of the non-female oriented works I created during my senior year is that I so clearly remember what I was doing when I wrote it. It was the Christmas break and I recall sitting up in my room at my parents’ house being completely bored. There was nothing on television, I didn’t feel like reading, and my parents had already gone to bed. With nothing of any worth to do, I grabbed a notepad and pen and went outside. Wearing only a pair of socks, shorts, and a T-shirt, I sat down on the front steps and just kind of looked around for a while. It was cold enough so that I could see my breath under the porch lights. I began to write without much direction and what turned out was “December Breathing.” It’s a pretty simple and straightforward piece, about little more than shivering and thinking about the beach and life and death. What strikes me about it is how I miss having the time to contemplate things like I did in high school. Things now seem so rushed all the time, mostly by my own choosing I will admit, and the few moments of solitude I have are either spent in sleep or recuperation from something or another. But in the past few months I have purposely taken more time to just think about things. All this business about graduating kind of makes me stop and consider the last four years, and there is a lot to think about. I often find myself searching for a single thought or memory that I can use to wrap up all these experiences into so that I can carry it with me forever, so that I won’t forget any of it. But I know that just isn’t possible. In a strange way, though, I am both happy and sad to have enough memories that I will surely forget some of them. I think sometimes that is why people live – not for the experience at that single moment in time. We so often let that pass by without batting an eye. Rather, it is so we can create images that will travel with us wherever we go. I guess I just have come to

recognize that what makes me a person, what gives me life, what makes me push on harder and farther is the past. After all, it is all that I know. The past is the standard that we all measure the future against. And with such an uncertain future ahead of me, I at the very least know that I will have memories to keep me company and can hope that some of them will follow me.

The Poets They Write

The poets they write of love and its ways,
About its twists and its turns and feelings betrayed.
The poets they write about life and its end,
Of its pain and nobility and the dooms it portends.
The poets they write about vases and paintings and poetry itself
And any ridiculous obscurity that seems to have rhymed wealth.

The poets they seem to have figured it out,
What everything in the world is all about.
The poets they know that love can break a heart
And believe that affection relates to distance apart.
The poets they know that the sky is blue
And everything else that is obvious, too.

The poets they are not as smart as they seem
And everything that they write cannot be believed.
The poets they use rhythm, rhyme, and allusion
To craft each polished verse of illusion.
The poets they know how to decorate with words
And how to make digression appear as truth inferred.

The poets are expert in the hawk and the handsaw
For the madness they examine is really their flaw.
The poets they use the tricks of their trade
To make the grounded reader confused and afraid.
The poets they know more about flourished writing
Than they ever will about living or dying.

Commentary on “The Poets They Write”

I like this poem because it is one of very few that I have written that has a turn of humor in it. Again, I wrote this in the second semester of my senior year, after I had been removed from classes. It came after writing a number of other poems addressing more serious topics such as religion, anxiety, and frustration, and I think I was just ready to lighten up a bit. “The Poets They Write” is a satirical jab not so much at poets in general as it is toward myself. The thematic undercurrent is basically that I was able to step back and reread some of my older poetry and just laugh at it. I still find humor in it, although I do treasure my early works, as I have already said, as a connection to the youth that I once was. I have since revised “The Poets They Write” twice, adjusting some of the lines so that it sounds more mature and comfortable than it did when I originally wrote it. Some of the more language-bending lines I have left in, though, because in a way they make even this poem an example of a poet using a very blunt instrument to describe a delicate topic. I rarely revise my poetry even though I know I should more often. But the real reason I write is to express and deal with emotion, and I am very careful not to alter these qualities. If I rework a poem until the original feeling that went into it is lost, it means nothing to me. And I write very selfishly – it is all for me and sometimes only I can really understand it. If someone else is able to catch a glimpse of truth in it, then I value that as a very special occurrence and consider that person all the more important to me for it.

The Miracle Cedars

We all can hear in the distance the drawing of our last breath
And feel the vibrations as the bells toll of death
But you can't ever prepare for the end
No one knows when the sovereign God above will send
That final angel into our presence

How can the skies with the sun at its zenith
Be blotted out with the vast void of despair and distress
And leave all those below with only the least of less
Their lungs gasping for air stolen away by the emptiness
Their teeth chattering for the warmth of the jewel in the sky
Skin clamoring for the touch of the soft breeze blowing by
How can they move on without the dependable sustenance
Without the warm summer days and shelter from the showers
Without the ambrosia scent of the budding spring flowers
Can anything of beauty ever grow here again
Can the sky ever be made bright again
Will a stalk of hope ever poke up from below the barren ground
Will the birds ever soar the skies and sing harmonious sounds
Or to this dark and substanceless world am I forever bound
Will the purpose of this grief ever be found

Again, again I cry out to thee
My fists are clenched in need
I shut my eyes to the lack that lay in front of me
But the chill still crawls inside my body
Denial after denial the pain remains
And my energy and resilience continue to drain
I want to feel my eyes burn when I look at the sun
I want to feel the grass wriggle between my toes
I want to feel a raindrop splatter on my nose
I yearn for all those things I now regret
Because I didn't truly feel them until they were in the past
Oh God, how can this endless internal dying last
How can I find the power to raise the sun from behind the mountains
To reform the clouds, to grow the green grass, to bring the rains
If I can't even bring myself to open my own eyes
And admit the emptiness of the skies

Take heart good friends in strife
Nothing is more precious than that treasure of life
Though the great cedar in the forest falls to the ground

Its death means new life will abound
From the waste of the great tree will sprout new buds
Which will grow to greater heights and command
The respect of all the skies and all the land
Is there not more substance in the spirit of a man
Than in the flesh of a single plant, nay,
In all the vegetation which spreads away and away
The ground will seem dead and heartless at first
But the infant forms of new life will come soon
And the sun shall once again block out the moon
God will give you the strength to use the new gifts given
And the toddler trees will be further driven
To the open sky and nourishing sun fed by remembrance
Of the salvation of the second chance
And the hurt and doubt and regret will be overshadowed
By the mighty new cedars that fill the expanse
Left by the old tree in its ancient stance
And all will look in wonder at the miracle of rebirth
As the old perishes so that its children could inherit the earth

The Prophet

The prophet stood before us
Speaking the sacred word
Telling of life's beauty
To all those whom him heard

"Love, joy, and peace
They have pleasures of their own
The pure in mind and spirit
Will surely find known

"But there is also the bad
That invades each person's life
Bringing along with it
Sadness and seemingly hopeless strife."

With these words the crowd
Went from its bright-eyed blush
To a sullen and shocked state
Covered by an endless hush

How could their beloved prophet
Stomp their hopes to the ground?
What happened to the message
Of love making the world go round?

The prophet looked out
At the crowd gazing at the ground
Why can't they understand, he thought,
This truth so profound?

There is so much more to my words
Than what they see as despair
And he parted his lips to speak
And drew in a breath of air

"You all must hear what I speak
Not with your physical ears
But rather listen with your soul
And dry up your needless tears

"True, life does not favor the righteous
The good so often meek disaster
But be confident in my promise
The evil will be far worse punished by the master

"Those that stay faithful to the course
Which I have now laid before you
Will gain the eternal riches
Which your father has given unto you

"Take strength in knowing this my brothers
Be as the children and the flowers of the field
Trust the provider to give all that is needed
And to heal all wounds that need be healed

"Cry out in joy and pain
He will hear your praise and lamentations
Know, friends, that his children in the end
Will be made higher than the world's mightiest nations."

The Scream

The scream is the words that are true
Spoken in a language only understood by you
This howl that is made by so many lungs
And transferred over so many tongues
It comes from deep within the soul
Expelling emotions in a thunderous toll
Unadulterated to every ear that may hear
Though it may be less than crystal clear

The scream may be of joy
As your victory has been surely won
And the sacrifices given to the cause
Have accomplished what needed to be done

The scream may be of sorrow
Over one's tragic loss
Not understanding the cruelty
Of fate's ugly dross

The scream may be of boredom
And its own unique scale of pain
When all diversions slip away
And emptiness in their place remains

The scream may be of frustration
Over life's wicked cheating
Feeling as if your mind and body
Had taken a useless beating

The scream may be of anguish
As happiness and love are snatched away
Seeming as if there will never be
The dawning of a bright new day

The scream may be of insanity
As the mind gives way to instinct
Because all of existence's reason
Suddenly becomes extinct

The scream may be of passion
When two lovers finally meet
After the long separation
Of just over a week

The scream may be of hunger
For the sustenance which you once consumed
But now your lack of foresight
Has left your appetite hopelessly doomed

The scream may be of life
For the first or second time
Whether the birth by water
Or the one of the spiritual kind

The scream may be of death
As life violently ends
Too many things left undone
Too many unthanked friends

Pray that your final scream
Is not issued as you die
For in peace can your soul
Never ever lie

If in your heart you know
That you had a few screams left
Expel those final mortal calls
With all your fiery heft

So when your soul does finally pass
Into the realm beyond
You know that your body has left
But your memory will never be gone

The Temple of the Soul

The temple of the soul, the body there to hold
A feeling that could never ever grow too old
All touching and sensation, two spirits' integration
And the emotion energy flows without inhibition
Not simply sexual, much more than physical
A happening that can be described only as magical
A tiny nibble on the ear, a quiet whisper she can hear
Cause the affections slowly but surely to appear
Fingers flow through her silky hair, than a long caring stare
Into her azure eyes shows the welcome that is there
Her forehead feels a mysterious kiss, and then her nose receives the same bliss
And I move slowly to the lips making sure that nothing do I miss
Next comes the meeting of my mouth and the place on her neck just south
Of the ear and west
My hand caressing the inside of her forearm, sensing from her no hint of alarm
As I enjoy the presence of her beauty and of her charm
The other palm massaging her back so slow, sensing from both of us a certain glow
Coming not merely from our crimson skin but from much farther below
Moving down the side of her thigh, not missing any of the smoothness that passes by
And my spirit spreads its wings within and starts to fly
Knowing well that the body is less than half as my digits explore the roundness of her calf
I feel a growing desire to do all in my power on her behalf
The outer shell is but a fashion for the inner content's ration
Which is the source and fuel for all of my life's true passion
But it can serve a faithful connection for it is much of the soul's reflection
And the removal of sensual affection would leave the soul without means of detection
For her each want and desire which never will expire
If placed near the warmth of my love's fire and the sweet music of my heart's poetic lyre

Hear the Gentle Tune

Hear the gentle tune of song.
Hear it crying out so loud.
Life and harmony are one,
Good and bad, times of love
Come together in a living strain.
The line cut short, a line so full
Yet it meant so much
Power repeating over,
Life it was not short
When it felt so much.
Sticatto joy and pain
Ending in refrain
He overcame
His time is truly here
O, can't you hear
Resounding joyful tears
Immortality in the end
Blissful notes are sent
The bars of life are bent
Barriers once begun
Now are overcome
Repeat the song of life
Forever sung so high
Eternal song and cry
Will never say goodnight.

Kernel of the Devil

You should have killed him. You know that
You wanted to. Stopping has only made you more
Pathetic than you were before, when you didn't
Do anything at all. He deserves to die.

It would have been wrong. It wouldn't have solved
Anything. Then his memory could have tortured me
Forever. I never would have been able to get rid of him.
The torment of his being alive feels eternal enough;
Kill him and it never would have ended.

But think of the pleasure you felt as your fist
Crashed through his nose. I felt it. I know
You did, too. For once he felt the pain inside
Of him, the pain that crawls through you.

Of course it felt good. But the pleasure was
Evil. It didn't solve or prove anything. It was
Your kind of pleasure. I felt you shudder with joy
When he coughed up blood on me. I heard you
Laugh when you collapsed onto the floor.

I tried to push you farther. You should have
Let me take control. I'm here to deal with these
Situations. You're there to study and think, not act.
He asked for me to come into control.

I did let you have your way, at least for a while.
I let the animal attack, to repay him for his transgression.
But you didn't know when to stop, and I almost
Didn't want to stop you. you wouldn't have been
The one to pay, to be held responsible.

I'm always the one blamed. You said that you
Don't know why you attacked him. But you know,
And everyone else knows. All of you have that kernel
Of the devil in you, a corner of ferocity.

But we control that viciousness and we do not
Become it. I stopped you from murdering him.
He did deserve it. He did ask for you to come out.
But I can hold you down in the darkest parts of my soul
Where no one can ever see you

You don't understand. You didn't lose control.
It was never me at all, just your pure anger unfettered
By inhibitions. I took care of the morality.
You were the evil that almost killed him.

Masked Words

A simple song, a simple poem,
Human books that seem so open.
Question the lying truths written
And numb feelings unfelt for if
They dare to be seen, the
Differences between two worlds
Will crush them. All words written
And all words spoken, they're
Merely masks that emotions
Wear; they show so little of
The truth yet so much of the
Essence. Parrying with words
Is a uniquely human skill -
Each promise a thrust, each
Lie a block. Weaponous words
As sharp as razors flash and
Fly, colliding and wounding without
Ever making contact, leaving
The attacker safely out of reach.
Words of War
Words of Peace
Words of Love
Words of Hate
They're all the same, only with
Different masks and different
Strategies.
The same results.
War destroys
Hate defiles
Peace lies
Love breaks
Common among all masks is
Fear only. Never can the mask
Be shattered, leaving the truth
Behind open to all criticism,
Defenseless to change,
Helpless to true truth. Without
Fear the mask crumbles to
Dust, the walls disintegrate.
Impossible this end. Too cruel
To the mask-wearers is
Nakedness. Each mask insures
That the others will never be

Removed. No single mask can
Exist without the others; all
Impaled upon the sharp points
Of Masked Words.

Three Acts

How is it that I do this thing?
Why is it that I have this thing?
Highest of all the lies that falsely ring
Of truth and fullness
Is the artful tempest in my soul of emptiness
What we men, I included
Try to do to make the conflict diluted
Humor, indeed, is brought forth in this war
Between the overmatched man and his foe
Himself, mentioned before

Misguided action is the first act in this comedy
With characters Man and his Idiocy
See the man stand on the side of the road
And traffic coming in an increasing heavy load
So the man, thinking the other side of the way disappearing
Jumps into what he hopes will be a fortunate clearing
No sooner does he do this than all goes black
And the Man lays in a bloody mess on his back
Round One to Idiocy
If Round Two is this good, it is a must see

Scene Two opens with the man still touched
By the injuries of Act One that leave him crutched
His little boat sinking in the midst of the lake
And swimming is difficult for his malefactions are no fake
So with a final splash and a pip
The cowardly captain goes down with the ship
And no raft or no rope
Will give him any hope
Idiocy triumphs again
Time for Man's third and final sin

The man sits by his campfire
When a spark jumps out and catches a briar
And the whole area lights with a blaze so bright
That no neighbor could miss the light in the night
So the man, though his lungs filled with water
And his skin can't feel the crawl of getting hotter
Builds up his four walls around the ignition
Hiding from those around his lack of volition
But any fool knows that confining the fire
Doesn't cool a thing but brings the temperature higher

And as his body fades away
And his mind goes astray
The man says whispering to the sky
"Idiocy isn't a very nice guy"

Now Act Four is unwritten, thank God perhaps
For the slapstick comedy only so long can last
Intriguing it is to wonder, though,
If man will raise from ashes aglow
And fly as Phoenix to a new birth
Nah - he'll probably just grow short in temper
And wide in girth
Laugh lightly, to you say I
For the Guilty laugh loudest and the Guilty laugh first
And at play's end, the Guilty usually leave the bad
And go home for the worst

**Commentary on “The Miracle Cedars,” “The Prophet,” “The Scream,”
“The Temple of the Soul,” “Hear the Gentle Tune,” “Kernel of the Devil,”
“Masked Words,” and “Three Acts”**

These poems fit together as a group within this section not because they are similar; they are not at all. The topics they address are very disparate. This is, strangely enough, the quality that ties them together. I wrote each in the time that I was restricted from going to school. I had a large amount of time to think about and do different things. Out of this came poems on subjects I had never before approached. I don't hold any particularly dear place in my heart for a single one of these poems, but they do fascinate me in the way they reflect the mindset I was in during my last few months before leaving for college. I felt displaced, in a kind of living limbo. I couldn't go to classes – I couldn't remember a time in my life that I wasn't going to school with the rest of my friends. Add into the mix the change of life I knew was coming with my college years and I had a lot of questions swirling around about a lot of things. During this time I learned how to expand my personal point of view, how to motivate myself, and how to both fight for some things and accept others. I have already said this, but it is still amazingly true to me – my experiences near the end of this year could have destroyed me, but instead they made me stronger. They made me grow up.



*College
Freshman Year*

College – Freshman Year

The first year of college is, I'm sure, one of new experiences for everyone who goes through it. Hell, some don't even make it through it. I remember very clearly when my parents walked out of my room – 405 Reese Hall – and left me on my own for the first time. I felt a strange mixture of fear and elation. When I finished high school I was completely ready to move on without looking back. I've more or less held that same opinion to this day, keeping steady contact with only three or four friends from Nashville. I was ready to change as a person, and during that freshman year I did a great deal. I didn't have a job, so my one focus was on school and having fun, at least for the first semester. I have never played more Nintendo and wasted more time in my entire life; classes didn't really present me with much of a challenge and I reeled off straight A's that year. I think, though, that I had to learn how to meander about without a direction in order to find the right way to go. As far as my poetry, I can divide it up into three periods: first semester, second semester, and the summer before my sophomore year. Following along the same lines as the previous section, most of the poems are on varied topics and in varied styles, although by now they have a more mature tone to them, even if the quality did not improve much. And I came out of the funk of my senior year. It was a wonderful experience to feel like I could leave all those problems behind and start fresh. Now, at the brink of another change, I feel totally different about it. I am leaving with good thoughts and memories now and feel more in control of my life than I did when I was eighteen. That is natural, I'm sure, and I am very thankful for it, this melancholy peace that I have now.

Tess's Star

I was lying on a grassy slope thinking,
Staring into the black sky, eyes unblinking;
And my skin began to loosen and the celestial world
Expanded, came closer, and its fingers curled
Around my soul and drew me into the night.

Tess, where is it that you did go
When the sky sank so low?

My body and my self peeled apart from
Each other and I saw my body become
Out of focus far below. High I soared,
A brightly radiating body going toward,
Which illuminated memory in the night.

And Tess, did that light so bright
Bring relief to your plight?

The light was for a short while,
But quickly it sank away mile by mile;
And my body drew me back into
The void which filled me completely through
And I stared again at the dark starry night.

Why, Tess, did you run
From the light of the right one?

It seemed awhile that I could stay.
Angel, I did not wish to go away
But I could not break free of the chains
Or unstrap myself from the cruel reigns
Plied on me by Trantridge's dark knight.

Commentary on “Tess’s Star”

This is one of the first poems I wrote as a college freshman. It is about the book *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* which I read for a British Literature class. While I never actually got all the way through the book (what freshman ever does?), I read enough of it that our class discussions completed the story for me. Basically, “Tess’s Star” is a dialogue between Tess and a character who simply asks questions, eliciting her story. The actual plot of the book escapes me now, but I do remember that there was a tragic love story involved. I don’t exactly know why it inspired me to write a poem; maybe it was remnants of Gayle somewhere in the back of my mind. I believe that this is one of the better poems that I wrote this year because it does not seem forced, and I was able to use language, meter, and rhyme without creating something that sounds childish. I think a big reason for that is that I went ahead and broke the rules I had set up in the first stanza when following them didn’t seem to work. Of course, this was at the same time I was learning how to successfully break class attendance rules and dorm alcohol and visitation policies without getting caught.

Weed Out the Weak

I can hear you
You're behind me
 I can feel your knife on my back
I can smell your
Stench of denial
 But my will will never come back

I can trust you
You won't leave me
 Sitting here in this waste
Now come closer
You will love me
 Don't put that shit in my face


CHORUS
You say that you want love
You say that you want peace
It's all just a damn illusion
You just try to weed out the weak

Press your life upon me
Say you want to go home
 But it's all just a fuckin' lie
Show me your solution
Rage is comfort in time
 I don't want to be like your kind

Now what you want to say
Say what you mean
 They're just not the fucking same
Your presence fills the room
But there's nothing there to see
 Now I know you're the one to blame

CHORUS

Weed me out
Don't weed me out
Weed me out
Don't fuckin' weed me out
Come to me
I tell you come to me
Let you see



Your death has got to be

One more time

Come to me

Don't come close

Or you will cease to be

Weed out the weak

You try to weed out the weak

Weeding out the weak

You can't weed out the weak in me

Commentary on “Weed Out the Weak”

The one interesting thing about this piece of work is that it is an attempt at a song. Lots of themes of betrayal and pain and smothering love all wrapped up between nice little choruses. If you can tell, it's not one of my personal favorites. I don't recall any particular reason why I wrote it; no one betrayed me that first semester. Maybe I was listening to just a little too much Metallica. Read it for what it's worth – the little metalhead trying to scratch out something like what he heard on his CD player.

Send the Sinner Down

Bury him with your standards
Bury him underneath
Send the Sinner down under
Send him disbelief

Can you see the Sinner suffer
Can you see him sweat
Shining lights of morality
Examining his head

Why don't you say
Why don't you do
 Do what you want to do
Send the Sinner down under
Send him underneath
Put him where he can't bother you
Put him where he can't see
Put him where he can't think
Put him where he can't feel
Put him on the defensive
Put him so far down

Do you think he can't see your charge
Coming after him
His age old bigotry abomination
Is just your closest kin

So you better
Send him down

Don't you wonder what happened to him
How he became unclean
Journeying through the pain and sorrow
That you haven't yet seen

He's seen the pain
He's tasted the death
He's felt the cold
And all the rest
One too many times he's fallen
Tasted the dirt and the dust
Now you try to abandon him
With all your righteous lust

Why don't you say
Why don't you do
 Do what you want to do
Send the Sinner down under
Send him underneath
Put him where he won't bother you
Put him where you won't see
Put him where you won't think
Put him where you won't feel
Put him where you won't feel
Put him where you won't feel
 His blood pulsing through your veins

Commentary on “Send the Sinner Down”

Here’s one that’s going to force me to be painfully honest about something that I did. I was walking back from class one first semester afternoon with a friend of mine and Humes Hall had some big sign up about Asian week, or something like that. I happened to utter what could be taken as a racial epithet; I meant it totally in jest. Well, she found no humor in it because her boyfriend (now husband) is Asian. She pretty much made me feel like total crap about it, a major guilt trip. I remember this so clearly because I had come from a private school that was about ninety-eight percent white kids with white parents. I had never really been exposed to many people of different races, religions, whatnot. Now, UT is not exactly a melting pot, but I have had the opportunity to experience many more cultures and people than ever before. Well, to try and release the guilt over this foot-in-the-mouth bungle, I wrote “Send the Sinner Down.” It is not a very good poem, but I do remember feeling a lot better after I wrote it, almost like I was able to release some demons and trap them within the poem.

Randominity

Does the performance thrill you?
Are you screaming or just yawning?
Is that all you hold dear?
Are you waiting for high-fives?
What the hell are you looking at?
If you put your arms down, would you look better?
Are you stoned or tired, I can't tell?
Do you think you're cool?
Is that cigar really lit?
Are you as evil and cunning as you look?
Are there more pieces to your life?
Are there more pieces to your life?
Would you really put your knife in an orange?
Does that gun feel cold against your bare skin?
Are you screaming or just yawning?
How often do you wash your hair?
Is that plastic making you hot?
Are you going to drink yourself to death?
If you have pointy heads, why are you laughing?
Do you have to floss your front teeth?
Are you thinking or posing?
Do you get out in the sun?
Doesn't it hurt to hunch over like that?
Is that blood or chocolate pudding that you're drooling?
Can the hammers see you below them?
Do you always look that goofy?
Does it suck getting old and wrinkly?
How do you make that thing do that?
Are you taking a shower?
Are you taking a shower?
Do you hate your vocal cords?
Why is there a monopoly above you?
Are you gonna crash when you land?
Is it comfortable having a shaved head?
Are you going to put some ice on your jaw?
Are you spontaneously combusting or just a dumbass?
Is that skirt too tight?
Does your acupuncturist know where you are?
Aren't those pretty wimpy stilts?
Is it cold where you are?
Where did you get those sunglasses?
Facelift?
Who is Erik?

Once again, where did you get those sunglasses?
How long did they throw you in jail for that?
Do you believe in life after death?
Do you believe in life after death?
Is that water purified?
Is it uncomfortable having all that paper stuck to you?

Commentary on "Randominity"

Sometimes I just relish in taking poetic license, and I went so far with it in this poem as to completely make up a word for the title. Randominity basically means not just one random things, but a completely random mixture of random things. That word describes this poem from my second semester. The background here is that, as most freshman do, my roommate and I tried to spruce the cinder block prison room walls up a bit by cutting a ton of pictures and ads out of magazines and sticking them all over the wall. We went so far with it that barely any wall was visible at all. So it was one boring early spring night and I had the big window opened up to let in the breeze. I was sitting at my desk with a small light on and nothing to do, or maybe I was ignoring something I should have been doing. I started at one end of the room and asked questions to the posters and pictures stuck and continued this all the way around to the other side of the room, all the while writing it down. It was pretty much weird stream-of-consciousness stuff. Just call me James Joyce. In the final question I wrapped up the entire rest of the poem by actually asking the wall itself what it was like to have all that paper stuck to it with sticky tack. Shannon, sometimes I go completely off into left field, and this is what happens.

Dancing in a World Unknown

Dancing, spinning, shaking your body
Round and round, you absorbed my soul
As a captivating blur.
Your piercing, darting looks, I was caught
By that world of flashing lights, burning
Straight to the core
Of my forever questioning soul.
You wore an image of warmth that invited
My mind to become yours.
I've painted you painstakingly stroke by stroke
Into the perfection of that night's desire,
A forgery of fulfillment.
I wanted to break the questioning bonds
Of all the adolescent yearnings
That never had a chance,
Of all the nights of imagined lust
With perfect women I had captured
In lonely bedroom dreams.
But destiny lives only in the dream
And the dream existed only in that place,
Not as part of me.
You were the free one in that world;
I was the one trying to break through
As question curled
A glassy glaze about my eyes.
I didn't truly know the weight
Of all that time
Had pressed upon that margin place.
And I enrapt in the drunken dream
Fooled my eyes into seeing you
As love, covering the counterfeit
Of love that snaked its way across the floor,
Mesmerizing my senses.
The life and truth of all the world
Was faded in the game you played.
Memory pulls me in sleep
Back into the contented ignorance
Of my place in your hazy, flashing world,
But the waking moment
Tears me away and splits the dream from my mind
And the questions always come again when morning
Calls me home.

Commentary on “Dancing in a World Unknown”

“Dancing in a World Unknown” is, I think, one of the best poems I have ever written. It isn’t exactly a dream poem but I injected a lot of dream-like qualities into it because that is the way I still remember what the poem is describing. I was the president of a student group called Students for the Advancement of Civil Liberties as a freshman and first semester sophomore. It was an organization we started as a class project for Political Science 107. The basic premise of the group, although we never really made it public, was to hold open forums on topics that were very controversial and see how much it irritated people. The first one was on “Satanism, Witchcraft, and the Occult.” To my amazement, we completely filled the University Center auditorium. In the spring we held one on “Alternative Lifestyles,” complete with a gay preacher, a firebrand Baptist minister, and a pair of dancing transvestites. We raised such a response that I actually got a little visit from Vice Chancellor Phil Schuerer. That was quite an interesting conversation I must say. Well, when we were putting together the “Alternative Lifestyles” forum, a girl who I can now only recall by the name the guys in the group gave her – skater chick – joined up for the ride. From what I hear she was pretty liberal herself, liking a little S&M now and then. Unfortunately, I cannot personally confirm these reports. Anyhow, after the forum we all went to a bar called Trumps, which basically was a gay bar. That’s where we found the dancers and the gay minister (he worked the lights for the drag shows). That was a very unusual night. After the female impersonators finished they opened up the stage for the audience to come up and dance. We all boogied for a couple hours and skater chick, of course, was pretty much the only female in the place. All of us straight guys were trying to dance with her and I know that she was completely loving it. She was an incredible dancer, very alluring, particularly mixed

with all the smoke and lights and alcohol. And that was pretty much all that happened. A couple nights later I dreamt about that night. The next day after I got back from classes I sat down and wrote "Dancing in a World Unknown" using the dream as a template, mixing it with the real memories I had. I only saw skater chick a couple more times after that, just running into here and there on campus. From what I heard she transferred to a school in California. That was probably a much better place for her than East Tennessee.

The Road Is Catching Up to Me

The road that I once travelled
The days I left behind
It's catching up to me now
And it's filling my mind
I can't seem to escape
The things that were then
And everywhere that I look now
The past is back again

We started out as friends
Nothing more than that
But each time that I saw you
I'd feel the gentle rap
Of my heart beating for you
So soft and unknown
And by the time you'd left
Oh how it had grown

The time I spent without you
Made that memory fade
I'd almost forgotten how
Every word that you said
Made my spirit soar higher
Made my life complete
But the meaning that once was there
It didn't really leave

Now that you're here again
The feelings have all rushed
Back into my heart and soul
Everything seems touched
By your magical presence
By your faithful light
And you fill my eyes
Every day and every night

I'm seeking the answers
To the past
I'm looking for the reasons
Why this feeling lasts
If only you could see
The questions inside
How they're still here

After all this time

We started out as friends
Nothing more than that
But everywhere that I look now
The past, it is back

Until the Day

Until the day the roses bloom year round
Until the day the guitar stops singing
Until the day the heart is o'erfilled
Until the day Camelot rules again
Until the day time is but a foolish dream
Until the day the ring turns green
Until the day the sun sets in the clouds
Until the day the world is filled
Until the day around is all inside
Until the day the phone rings and no one answers
Until the day you can't feel a warm shower
Until the day beer is no longer cold
Until the day Tara says yes
Until the day life is a continuous circle
Until the day God is within us all
Until the day all doors are unlocked
Until the day popcorn doesn't get burnt
Until the day eternity is now
I wait for comes

Waiting for Spring

The weight of an imagined world on my shoulders
All the time growing colder and colder
Can't ever seem to escape this pressure and despair
Can't ever seem to come up for air
I am always missing life flying past so quick
The void in my soul making me sick
Some disaster is always falling again and again
I'm always seeing the same four horsemen
Making way slowly between Scylla and Charybdis
The rock I taste and the hard place I kiss
And that world still pressing down on my heart
Waiting hopelessly for it to depart
Life in a victorious loneliness
Life full of bile and piss
Freezing to death beneath the unbroken ice
With a fractured view of stars and skies
Chained to the world dragging me down
No explanation, no reason, no sound
The cool water the world and I Tantalus
Alone in an intangible mush
The world always there, elusive, abusive, close at hand
Tattered and battered I await my final stand
I've reached the autumn, I look to the fall
Who knows if Spring really follows at all

Searching for Home

Does that home so far away,
Does that place still mean home?
Too too far removed from the past
The places that meant something once,
Maybe still mean something.
Once upon a time has faded,
Faded far into memory and now those
Pictures are but a painful backdrop on
The realities. Realities all too often painful.
Limbo is reality, neither here nor there
Nor in between - something not even in existence.
Home does not stay. It is an ever-moving
Vision, hallucination that is always one step
Ahead, leaving you in a hopelessly crowded
Loneliness. Undo the pain, grab a piece of the
Vision that never was nor ever will be, and
Pretend on happiness, contentedness.
Walk through the door and tread on the
Welcome mat that exists on in nightmarish
Dreams that can't be driven away.
Find the answers that the universe offers
That have no validity, only a fleeting eternal
Sense of comfort. Home is where the heart
Is, the heart that holds love unaccessible.
Search forever and search for never,
The both coexist in oblivion, that safe
Hiding place where, inevitably,
The hopeful search for the fruitlessness
Of home ends.



Static Continuum

The circles circle spin and spiral
Carry the passages of my life
Run round the infinite loop
That never begins and never ends
Caught in a world where the Point
The Life is only compulsion
Never realization

And Life runs its pattern far
Farther into the cold ground
Filling the cycle's desires
While leaving to their turn
Wishing only to follow to earth
Craving to catch fulfillment Life
Imprisoned cyclicity remains

Turn turn to the dirt
Cycling from one monotony
To the next and next and next
All around is only the circle
In circle unchanged unbroken
Chained to time unending still
Still from Life unrendering
And time cycle repeats replete
Respite reserved unrevealed
Circles spinning silently
Filling fruitless fathoms

**Commentary on “The Road is Catching Up to Me,” “Until the Day,” “Waiting for Spring,”
“Searching for Home,” and “Static Continuum”**

I wrote these five poems at various times during the second semester. The underlying theme of each is the passage of time and a man searching for his place in the world. In many ways I felt displaced yet again. I was getting ready to return home for the summer and when I came back to school I was going to be living off campus – the first time I had ever really had a place that was mine (even though I had three roommates). It was a time in my life that was at once both unstable and peaceful. I hadn’t dated a girl for more than a couple dates for two years by that time and this was starting to weigh on me a bit. I had a little feeling of loneliness that was starting to slowly grow. I also wasn’t sure how I felt about going home; I had been living on my own for a year then and I liked it, even though there were a lot of things I missed about Nashville. Perhaps I thought I was little more grown up than I really was, but I have always been that way. As it would turn out, that summer would be very enjoyable and starting a new, lengthy relationship with a girl was not far off. And that would be the last summer that I would ever go u
back to live at home.

Tightrope

Thought I'd left the circus behind
Thought I'd come back to something new
Past the clowns and cars and cannon fire
But I'm still walking the wire

Looking down to the breathless crowd
Watching the first rate lion tamer
Third ring status is so hard to shake
My best hope is the rope won't break

Stuck in a quaint aerial show
Without a net or a partner's catch
Steel cable in front, no return behind
And the Ringmaster pays no mind

I can still see far down below
Frayed ends of the net once there
Torn to shreds by countless falls before
Can't bear my weight any more

Quivering rope a quarter inch thick
Weary feet and legs to guide my trip
The big top of surprises at first holds excitement
But the tightrope view is much more despondent

Commentary on “Tightrope”

I returned for the summer to live at home and wait tables at a restaurant in Brentwood called Pargos. This is not that interesting except that Shelley was also working there. So, once again, she walked back into my life. It had been about a year and a half since I had last seen her, and we both had changed a lot; but that connection was still there. I remember the first morning I worked. I had to go in early at 9 A.M. to do some training stuff; at about 10:30 she came into work. I was standing at the bar smoking a cigarette, getting the lay of the restaurant and waiting for her to arrive. The look on her face was priceless – a stew of shock and surprise. I had told her I was thinking about working at Pargos but hadn’t told her anything definite. We got to spend a lot of time together that summer, and “Tightrope” is about the way I felt at the very beginning about it. It is a mixture of anticipation and wariness. My feelings for her had been dulled by time and I didn’t want to get into something with her and have it end badly. For the first time in a long time, though, my fears were not fulfilled. While our status remained at friendship for the summer, it was refreshing to be able to spend time with her in a mature, comfortable way.

Poem of Isolation #1

She came to my house
At night, innocent
Friendly drinking expected
The third one had lips
Loosened easily on vodka
And the life story poured forth
I know more about him
She preened
Than I do of you
Thought - so true
The hours became lean
The third travelled on
And it was us alone
In years in past this
Situation conjured dreams
And desires of a
Gullible, hopeful youth
But the years in present
Have taught the youth
Realism and hopelessness enough
So that this moment
Held no joyous expectations
Some surface talking
A short momentous silence
And then to the crux
I still don't know you
Six years and realization
How ultimately depressing
But sooner later than never
But six years of frustration
Have locked away
That otherworld of my heart
Where a dreamer still roams
No, she cannot have
Keys freely
No one can
To get the keys she must
Want too the knowledge
That comes with them
She finally broke her silence
Two obviously superficial
Courage builders
But there proved to be no courage

That she could find
I took her home
Said goodbye
And told myself
That's that

But that is never that
The dreamer screams freedom
And even the guard
Wants to give the keys away
But both are bound by chains
Built strong by time
Rejection's experience
Chains that will not give
Yet another riddle to be unlocked
The strongest, deepest lock of all
A self-imposed prison with
No doors, no windows
No escape from within
The guard and the dreamer
Both feel the sting of inclosure
And both fear freedom
To the sources of pain
Confusion outside
Hope stifled still remains
Dreams still move inside
But another must now
Break away the walls
With each wall hope tears down
Doubt builds another
Lost in a maze of decisions
She still is seen above it
And still drives my fears to build
And my hopes to break
And the dreamer to create hope
And the guard to protect fear

It Reminds Me

Every little touch
Every little word
Brings back clouded memories
Of a very different world
Times when you seemed mine
Seemed I understood
A germinating emotion
But of course it never could

Every little breath
Every little glance
Trusting the untruthful
I took another chance
Now I plumb the depths of vengeance
Waiting for the sign
That the hurt has finally drowned
And giving pain is mine

It reminds me of when
It was a lie
It reminds me of then
Just another lie
But as memory crashes on me
And I want hate to grow
Drinking in the anger
That's all you need to know

And as I limp toward eternity
One knee buckled back to hell
You assault my last support
And I sigh, oh well --

Cause it reminds I was a man
Reminds a marionetted dance
Reminds a spider's web
Reminds a cocooned death
Reminds a burning kiss
Reminds a Judas kiss

And I grovel on the ground
Throwing stones at your sound
Knowing you're not there
Wanting not to care

That it reminds me back
And all I can ask
Were you worth the effort
Of life lived in the past

Commentary on “Poem of Isolation #1” and “It Reminds Me”

There was another side to the summer with Shelley. It was inevitable, I guess, that some of my old emotions would stir from their sleep and rise to the surface. “It Reminds Me” refers to my struggle to drown these memories of the past. While the poem has a very biting, betrayed tone, this was for the most part an isolated feeling. I don’t remember the circumstances under which I wrote it. It could have been something as little as a cross glance or a faint show of affection that set me off. Of course, writing was how I dealt with it. The story behind “Poem of Isolation #1” is, in retrospect, pretty funny. Shelley came over one night after she got off work and so did Chip, a good friend of mine from Nashville. We didn’t do much, just sat upstairs in my parents’ house, played cards and talked, and drank Absolut screwdrivers. Chip is the one in the poem who has “lips loosened easily on vodka.” Well, when he’s had a few he likes to impart his entire life story on whoever will listen. At first this seems charming and open, but after hearing it about three hundred times it had grown a little stale to me. After he was finished, Shelley fired off out of the blue about how she knew Chip better now than she knew me. I’ve given you plenty of opportunities, I retorted, but you haven’t taken advantage of them. Then a curtain of silence fell across the room for what seemed like hours even though it was just a few seconds. Then she said something on totally different subject and we went back to drinking and bantering. I took her home a little later, said goodbye, and returned to my house and wrote “Poem of Isolation #1.” I think I was just very irritated at what she had said and, at that point in my life, was not ready to open up to her about anything in the past. The funny part of the night is that Chip went to the bathroom at some point (he goes to bathroom more when he’s drinking than any other guy I’ve ever known) and swears that when he came out he heard Shelley and I

kissing. Of course, we weren't. We never have. But to this day Chip will not believe me when I deny his allegations. I tell him that if I had kissed her, why in God's name wouldn't I confirm it. But I think he just enjoys telling that story to other people too much to listen to me. Chip is most definitely a storyteller, so I've stopped telling him he's wrong and just laugh when he tries to convince me that he knows what he heard.

The Man in the Moon

Where is the man in the moon now
That we need him most. The one
That we told all our dreams, all our
Troubles, the one who could set the
Senseless confusion in our minds straight.
Can't he see what this death has
Done to us? Has age and time removed
Him so far that we can't see him
Anymore? The one we both loved so
Is dead, and now the one that we
Both depended on is gone. The night
Sky is a haven no more, just an endless
Darkness too empty to give us solace.
You are all I have left now. Heavenly fate
Can take the moon, it can steal away
Love, but it can never separate those of
The same flesh. This bond is stronger
Than any cosmic force, than any
Earthly danger. I'll always be right here.
We'll always be together.
We'll always be together...won't we?

Always...

The Man in the Lake

The man in the lake is calling me
Back, Harkening to those humid summer
Days and musty summer nights when
We used to meet at the waterside. It
Wasn't much, really, just a place
Where a little creek emptied into a small
Round depression; and someone had built
A dock there - a place for diving in. That's
All there was; but for those few weeks,
It was my world. Water splashing,
Constant dunking, and laughter whose
Richness I have never since felt. It
Was all I could do to make myself wait
All day to see your sleek body immersed
In that muddy water and feel you swim
Past my side. Now the innocence seems
Unreal, the happiness almost too sincere.
I guess I've grown past being able to
Feel real, pure happiness. I still remember
Trickling drop by drop off the
End of your nose, your feet pounding on the
Dock as you ran to jump in, and our clothes
Strewn out across the dock, a testament
To our youth and freedom. Sometimes I still
Can feel the mud sting my eyes and taste
The sand on my tongue, and the man in the
Lake calls to me, to make a trip into the past,
To another world that only you and I ever
Lived in.

Commentary on “The Man in the Moon” and “The Man in the Lake”

These two poems were inspired by the movie “The Man in the Moon” starring Reese Witherspoon. I don’t know if you’ve heard of her before; she was also in the “Lonesome Dove” TV miniseries. She’s from Nashville and I’m an acquaintance of hers. Not that any of this is related to these poems, so we’ll move on. The movie is about a young girl visiting some relatives out on a farm somewhere and she developed a crush on this older guy. The one problem: her older cousin is his girlfriend; oh, and the fact that he is killed in a tractor accident also gets in the way. I was lying on the end of my bed at home watching it and for some reason I just felt like writing, so I did. I banged out both of these in about half an hour. “The Man in the Moon” is a dramatic monologue told from the point of view of the Witherspoon character at some point before the movie is over and the boy is killed. “The Man in the Lake,” which is a much better poem, is also told from her point of view but at a much later time. It is a memory centered around a little swimming hole that she and the boy went skinny dipping in at one point in the picture. “The Man in the Lake” is better because it contains many more physical details; in fact, the entire poem is a big detailed description. I recall being particularly pleased with the poem because it really seems as if though that character wrote it, not me speaking in her voice. That is one of the great perks of writing – being able to slip into someone (or something) else’s skin and, in a figurative yet still real way, feel what they are feeling.



*College
Sophomore Year*

College – Sophomore Year

I wrote very little during this year. If not for a creative writing class that I took, I might only have had one or two poems. I attribute this to two things. First, I pledged and became very involved in Alpha Kappa Psi. As you know from being in it with me for a year, I devote a great deal of time to the fraternity. This expenditure of time, in combination with the fact that I started working and my class load picked up, I had very little time to sit down and take the time to write. For me, poetry is most often a very exhausting process, particularly over the past three years. The older I have gotten the more I seem to invest in each poem. As a result, I believe, I have become a much better writer, although I still have a lot to learn; the other side of it is that much of the time I don't have the energy to write even if I might have a really good idea. To combat this lately I have started making notes to myself on any scrap of paper I can get my hands on in the hopes that I will be able to work on those ideas at some point in time. Many of these little moments of inspiration, though, are lost to me forever. This is a fact of life, I guess, but it can be very disheartening. It is almost like creating the beginnings of a little life and then watching it die because of neglect.

The other reason I did not write as much is because I got involved with a girl named Jenny for about ten months. She was a pledge brother of mine and we just seemed to hit it off right away. Although we had many ups and downs, I only wrote a single poem about her, and that one at the very beginning of our relationship. She felt comfortable to me, and perhaps that is why I never felt the need to write about us. For the most part, she was the one constant in my life for almost a year, and I have a tendency only to write about things (or at least women) who are not constant. As you will see later, I have written more than one poem about you. I broke up with

Jenny in June of 1996. We broke up about two months before that for about a week and I went back to her. Now I know that was probably not the best thing because I did it more for her than I did it for myself. I cared deeply for her and it hurt me to see her hurt, especially since I had caused it. Things were never the same after that, though. We both held back from each other, and that kind of relationship is doomed from the start. I still talk to Jenny occasionally, usually when she calls to talk to my roommate. But that's a long story that I don't care to get into here. Now, two years later, I can appreciate what I gave up that summer. She loved me completely and unconditionally, and I think that's about the best thing you can ask for from life. I wasn't ready for that then, though, so I moved on. I don't regret it, but I do hope to find someone who loves me like that again.

A Second Breath

I've waited so very long
Again to feel this rush
Feared it had quietly gone
Lost my taste and touch
Two years ago it seems
My hope was put to death
My eyes ceased to gleam
No warmth in my breath
Two long years free of feeling
A desperate excuse for living
Perhaps it was a prison steeling
My bitter soul's lack of forgiving
Yet now there is a spark
Of something thought forever snuffed
And my weak, frightened soul
Hopes it might be enough
I'm struggling for a second breath
Another chance at life
Praying there's enough air left
And this whisp of feeling ignites

Commentary on "A Second Breath"

"A Second Breath" is only poem I ever wrote about Jenny. As the poem says, she was a breath of fresh air to me. It had been so long since I had felt anything very strong for a woman. I remember the first AKPsi party I went to. It was at the clubhouse at the apartment complex at which I live now. No one had thought to bring a stereo so I offered to go back to my apartment and get mine. I asked if anyone would like to ride with and Jenny said she would. I didn't think much of it at the moment, but that was the first sign that she liked me. After all, what girl would leave a party complete with beer and liquor to go with some dude she doesn't know to get a stereo? As it so happened, Jenny ended up coming back to my apartment later that night and we stayed up drinking and talking with my roommates until the next morning. Of course, I was a little irritated that one roommate in particular named Matt thought it was a good idea to stay up with us *all* night. Not that we were going to do anything, but that's just bad roommate etiquette. Jenny and I went out to a movie the next night and I ended up spending the night at her place. The kicker, though, is that when I went out to get in my car the next morning, it had been towed because I was parked in someone else's lot. That next week I wrote "A Second Breath" about not just the happiness I experienced at liking Jenny but also about the misgivings I had about those feelings.

Wind-Blown Dreams

Oh, I had those dreams long ago
More precious than you'll ever know

Those times were so clear
The skies had never been freer

Then upon the horizon
I saw the storm clouds glare
They rushed upon me
I had no defenses there

All my dreams were stripped away
My soul left bare to decay

The rains came and the thunder rolled
And my heart grew so cold

And I watched my dreams
As they flew away
And the night quickly grew
Over the day

My hopes as they were to be
I can never again claim to me


The ominous clouds loom overhead
And my spirit will soon be dead

I see those around me
And they are so alive
Without that shelter from wind and rain
I can surely not survive

My wind-blown dreams are gone for good
Life's fickle cruelty can never be understood

Happiness's shelter is blown away
Tomorrow can never be the end of today

I've locked my hopes away
In a sandcastle on the shore
Now the hurricane has come
And it's waged its war



Now I have left the barren beach
Emptiness because of life's bitter breach

I'll build my fortress once again
Emotion's cold fingers will never enter in

My wind-blown dreams will be safe
Locked behind those walls of steel
And no one outside will ever know
That I am real

Commentary on “Wind-Blown Dreams”

This is another poem of which I cannot remember the circumstances surrounding. I know it was written during a time when I felt very unmotivated and stressed. It seemed to me at the time that everyone else was just cruising through life without a care in the world. We all feel like this at times, I'm sure. “Wind-Blown Dreams” has a darkly persevering tone to it. I don't know what it was that hurt me, but whatever it was made me want to just build a wall around myself so that no one and nothing could ever again tear me down again. Of course, I never completely built that wall, but this poem is an accurate description of the way I have, over the years, changed, learned to protect myself by not letting people in quite so easily. I know that sometimes they might think that they are inside, but there many layers to me and I usually control how deep a person is allowed to dig down. Those times you get angry with me because I don't open something up to you, understand that this is why. Believe, though, I have allowed you to peel back more layers than most.

Invisible Inside the Frame

Everyone sees straight through me
Without seeing me at all. They look
At people walking dogs, and children playing
In the backyard, and the sun setting
Over the hills on summer evenings.
They can see everything outside but they

Don't want to think about me.
A window's expected to protect them from cold
And keep out the bugs and the burglars
And all the realness of life that might
Threaten their quiet suburban perfection.
I keep them safe, my seal is strong,

My lock is tight and secure. I do everything
Asked of me, but they don't even notice.
They wipe my sill and oil my latch
To keep me clean and quiet.
But they don't understand that inside my
Sturdy frame of wood and steel and molding

Is a delicate heart of glass. It's invisible
To them, just a way to see beyond their
Monotonous household life to the uncertain world
They don't want to feel. But I feel it. Every
Blast of icy wind and every burning ray of sun
Penetrates my center and stresses the fibers

Of my center. Only when my pane splits
And my useful transparency is shattered
Will the happy family realize the true nature
Of my broken heart. They'll look on me with
Anger, and father will growl that the damned window
Must be defective, that I failed too soon.

Then they'll tear the glassy shards of my soul
From my still-strong body and throw me in the trash.
They'll talk of getting a new and better window
And they'll close the pantry door. Then darkness
Will surround me, and there will be nowhere
To see, and from their memory I will disappear.

Damned to the Ocean

I can hear each night the shapeless hands
Of the ocean searching the rusty hull of the ship,
Wanting to rush in and grab me. The ship creaks
And moans, and the aging traveller shouts at the dark water
To go away, to leave its immigrant stowaway alone.
But the heart of the Atlantic is deaf to the pain
Of my quiet crying and doesn't feel my nightmare shivers.
Something cruel sits in the depths, holding my husband,
Waiting for its chance to strike. It's always known
That I'd come back, that America draws too strongly
On my husband's memory, pulling me with this past across
The marine beast. The fathoms of unreasoning hatred
Sends its frustration hurtling from far below,
Assaulting the few inches of steel protecting me, telling me
That seven years hasn't faded the pleasure of devouring
My husband in the midst of our first attempt at the West.
Now the immortal killer comes to swallow me down
To where the ancient atmospheres of the ageless currents
Can break my body and open my soul to fuel the invisible
Monster's unexplainable need for the death of my desperate
Desire to escape the torment of the years alone with my husband.
In the day the warm sun calms the waves and stills the ship
And allows me to sink into a shallow sleep, but the ocean
Is still there watching. The sapphire slayer sends watery whispers
Into my soul, assuring me that it will find a way. With a vicious patience
During the deadly silence of the day the devil leviathan waits and watches
And talks to my fear with the voice of my husband,
Telling me that I am damned to the ocean,
Doomed to be buried next to him in the same liquid grave.

West Lafayette Woodsman

The heavy smoke of the gas station Swisher Sweet
Rolled off her lips and descended to the table below.
Her eyes slowly scanned the dank off-white interior
Of the 20 dollar a night West Lafayette motel room.
The axe fell diagonally through the air with a slow, dull drag
And split the bark, producing a thud and then a crackle
As the tissue tore down to the hard dark core.
Her gaze stopped on the open navy blue backpack
Sitting on the floor between her suitcase and her left foot.
Muscles taught and aching, the woodsman raised the axe
A second time and plunged the blade deeper
Into the ancient sinews of the towering old pine.
She took her hand off the cold steel revolver on the table
And reached inside the bag, touching the hundred dollar bills.
Sap that had been flowing for thousands of years
Smeared across the head of the rusting axe
As the woodsman withdrew the tool.
She rubbed her fingers across the rough paper
But dared not remove the money just yet, not until the coast.
He paused a moment and wiped his sweaty brow,
Then summoned his strength and gripped the handle
And sent the edge flying a final few inches into the pale interior.
A warmth moved from her hand through her arm
And into her chest, and a small smile crept across her lips.
The crisp smell of three hundred forty thousand dollars
Reminded her of the bite of the Gulf coast air during June.
The pine stood defiantly for a few eternal moments,
Its trunk popping and whining under the pressure,
And then toppled almost silently to the hard clay earth.
Her smile fell away and she pulled her hand back to the revolver.
Her son was waiting to take her away. She wanted to believe that
He would be there this time. She didn't want to feel empty any more.
His small charter boat in Tampa was two thousand miles away.
She couldn't let herself hope for another two thousand miles.

Boiling Water, Calming Water

The pot on the stove screamed as it grew hotter and hotter.
The thief pleaded to me as I shoved his hand into the scalding water.

The dark clouds strolled in from the horizon, booming and sparking,
And the thunderhead sat down on me and immersed me in tears of water.

I stood at the lake's edge, staring deep into the motionless depths.
I leaned slowly forward and the world collapsed into the water.

I turned the cold knob and filled the white porcelain sink
And immersed my hand, the pain erased by a cool curtain of water.

**Commentary on “Invisible Inside the Frame,” “Damned to the Ocean,”
“West Lafayette Woodsman”, and “Boiling Water, Calming Water”**

I wrote these four poems for the creative writing class. “Damned to the Ocean” is a dramatic monologue spoken by an immigrant woman from somewhere in Europe. She is making her second attempt to cross the Atlantic to the United States seven years after her husband was killed when he fell into the ocean on their first try. I turned the ocean into a metaphorical monster trying desperately to claim the woman as well, to steal away her hopes of escaping the memories of her husband’s death by finally reaching America. “West Lafayette Woodsman” is a poetic exercise in which I wrote two unrelated poems, one about a lumberjack cutting down a tree and the other about a woman trying to flee the country with her son and a stash of money, and then combined them into one. The result is a single poem that juxtaposes these two stories and, by a bit of luck and little skill at properly combining the lines, heightens the psychological tension. I also performed more literary gymnastics in “Boiling Water, Calming Water.” The trick here was to choose an object – water – and compose a set of images around that and combine them into one poem. The end product here is the presentation of different perspectives on water in a small space. Finally, “Invisible Inside the Frame” was a poem told from the point of view of an inanimate object, in this case a window pane. In short, the poem is really about loneliness bred from being ignored by the people that the object (or, metaphorically, the person) is shielding from harmful elements. What is important about these works is that they are much more developed than most of what I had previously written. Through that class I was able to gain a better command of language and, in some respects at least, make it my tool instead of being under its control.



*College
Senior Year*

College – Senior Year

Well, what can I say about this year. It is, I'm sure, the one you've been waiting for. You better not have cheated and skipped ahead to it. First a comment on why there is nothing from my junior year. In short, I'm not sure. I think that the time and energy tolls that my promotion at work, being Membership Chair and President in Alpha Kappa Psi, and classes sapped my creative drive. I don't necessarily view that as a negative thing, I just had other areas into which I needed to put myself. It might seem odd to you that I never wrote anything about the problems I had with Milena. I think maybe I was able to deal with that in other ways because she betrayed in such a bold-faced and unapologetic way. But, on to the near past and present. A whole lot has happened in the past year. I surrendered the Presidency, I successfully completed the job search, I'm getting ready for graduation and to move on to another life. Oh yes, and there is you. But you'll have to wait for that one until the very end. You will find that you have been very inspirational to me; you continue to be so. Believe it or not, though, I have written poems about things other than you. All of the poems in this section except for one are from this semester. The first set is from another English class, this one concentrating solely on poetry. Here again, as in my sophomore year, I took another step in improving my writing abilities. I was fortunate enough to be in a class with some very good poets and was able to learn much from them. So now, let's depart on the past year, the Year of Shannon.

Tomato Worm

You lurking little tomato worm,
You vicious specter of the garden
Which my mother and I turn and tend,
You hide and you gorge on the flesh
Of that plump red fruit whose name
You have co-opted for your own.
No, you are no friend of the tomato.
But I know that no vegetative pleasure
Can surpass the warped glee you feel
Upon seeing my fingers curl round
The horizon of the victim fruit
Whom you have mutilated and call home.
For your true terror is not in your demon countenance,
Though surely no benevolent god intended
A worm to expand to the circumference
And weight of a roll of quarters.
No, your evil resides solely in the touch.
Your leather skin betrays your unnatural composition
For no worm is meant to be dry.
And the sheer sensual disbelief
Of the fingertip's push against your fluid insides
Comprised of all the tomato souls you have stolen
Transfers panic from my quivering digits
Directly to the most mortal depths of my soul.
Were there slime on your back
And substance within your shell
You would lose your hellish shock
And return to a pedestrian natural fact.
No, anathema of the tilled earth,
You are truly a devil of gluttony
Which feeds on the crimson pulp of the garden
And thrives on the fears of my dirt-stained fingers.

Commentary on “Tomato Worm”

“Tomato Worm” was the first poem I wrote for the English class and somehow was the one I came to be identified with. The assignment was to write about a single object. The one I chose, thanks to a conversation with Jason, was the infamous tomato worm. In case you are not familiar with the “anathema of the tilled earth,” the tomato worm is actually a caterpillar that feeds on garden tomatoes. When I lived in Indianapolis from birth until I was four years old, my mother had a little garden in the side yard. I would help her with it as much as a toddler can be expected to, which means I probably messed up more stuff than I helped. But she let me dig in the dirt nonetheless. Occasionally while picking the tomatoes I would accidentally grab one of these caterpillars with it. A splendidly icky experience I assure you. So “Tomato Worm” pretty much sums up what I thought about these little creatures. I actually laughed at this poem after I wrote it not because I found it reprehensible but rather it seemed genuinely humorous. Another one of the few poems I have written with a light tone.

Lips Pursed

Lips pursed, pale pink gloss hiding cracked skin
Slightly parted, pouting if in life
Chilly silent whisper now
Strung tight together
Crisscross of thread, refusing nature's gape
Eternal chasm beyond, shackled in embalmed bonds
Reaching out through the cage, holding little boy's eyes
Touch of cool realization, death deferred
Appearance's sewn surrogate
Weaved on my memory
Stitched in time, an image patched
Lips pursed, Grandma whispers goodbye

Commentary on “Lips Pursued”

This poem is much darker than “Tomato Worm” and is written in a form more suited to the experience and the subject matter. When I was nine my grandmother on my father’s side died. During the funeral the family was allowed to go and view the body one last time before they closed the casket. What I saw through the slight part in her lips was the thread they had used to tie her jaw shut. While this should be a scary enough experience for a young child, I was not frightened. Instead it was fascinating and repulsive at the same time. I remember it not as a continuous memory but rather as a series of mental snapshots going by like an old flip card cartoon. Therefore, I wrote the poem as a series of images that, in succession, tell the story. All four of my grandparents died within two years so I went to a lot of funerals and learned to deal at a young age with losing people I care about. Now, so many years later, I deal with death in not so much sorrow as poignant reminiscence. In my family, after the funeral everyone would gather at a church or similar banquet hall and eat a pot-luck dinner and just talk and have a good time. I know this seems strange and even offensive to some people. But believe me, it makes healing so much easier when you focus on the person you lost as they were alive. This is how I want to be remembered. I always tell my friends that when I die, there better be a big party and they better have a good time with the people who are still there for them.

Glenn Hubbard's Dugout Repose

I am a bit player on a stage of superstars,
A scrappy second base utility player
Who can pick the hot shots up the middle
And turn a flawless double play
With razor sharp spikes driving at my shins.
The writers and analysts call me a throwback.
Perhaps they are right.
A man better suited for the days of summer
Spent on sweltering trains steaming from
Philadelphia to New York to rock scrabble fields
Smelling of fresh cut grass baking
In the noon day sun and straight whiskey
And cigars wafting from the stands and the dugouts.
I've arrived fifty years late to a game
No longer suited to a one hundred forty pound
Man-boy with a spectacular glove and an average bat.
The powder blue polyester Atlanta uniforms chafe my skin
And the multi-millionaire marketing icons
Are shells of the hard men who played for dinner money
And the cheer of the few thousand squeezed
Shoulder to shoulder onto creaking wooden bleachers.
I sometimes still hear the whispering footsteps
Of Ty Cobb sprinting from first to second
And the quiet scream of a Big Train fastball
As it burns a path through the rarified air.
When I sit at the end of the bench
In the lull of the middle innings
I can feel their presence around me
And it seems like home. But as their shadows
Fade into fitfully forgotten history,
So too does my place in this changing game
Stream away into the past to which I belong,
A second baseman utility player with the skills of the greats
In a baseball that is losing its memory.

Commentary on “Glenn Hubbard’s Dugout Repose”

This one is another dramatic monologue, told from the perspective of Glenn Hubbard. He was a second baseman for the Atlanta Braves during the 1980’s. When I lived in Atlanta in the early ‘80’s my parents would take me to Braves games and Hubbard was one of my favorite players. He was a scrappy little man who got by on his glove work. He never made the All-Star Team or won any post-season honors, but he could play and he loved it. I played baseball myself for a long time (never in the Majors of course) and there is a lot of me in this poem. While football taught me to focus my aggressions and effort on achieving a goal, baseball showed me a few things as well. It made me appreciate patience and the beauty of loving little things about the game. Although I’ve put on quite a few pounds since my playing days and am no longer the athlete I once was, I would give just about anything to be able to step on a grass infield in one of those big stadiums and smack just one base hit right back up the middle.

One Way Houseplane Flight to Clowntown

The houseplane sits idle on the darkened field,
A small one bedroom white wood siding shack
Wedded to the shiny Learjet tail.
I do all the preflight checks, all windows closed,
All storage bays battened, and the passengers in the tail
All securely belted in.

I can see unfocused beads of sweat
Collecting on the tip of my ten-year-old nose
As I run from one side of the room to the other,
Desperately turning knobs for navigation,
Pulling levers for propulsion,
And spinning wheels for flight control.
I check the blinking lights on the ceiling-to-floor
Control panel on the back wall.
My hands and legs and eyes know this place
From somewhere which is eluding my mind.
But they are doing the job, keeping the houseplane aloft.
Then he walks in from behind me and says,
“We’re there.”

A few hundred feet below Clowntown shimmers
Up into the starless night sky.
The buildings painted in patterns of checkerboards
And stripes and swirls in all the colors
Of the pastel rainbow aren’t skyscrapers,
But they are reaching.
In the streets made of plastic and liquorice
And Lifesavers the people run in jubilation.
They are topped with jester hats,
Wobble awkwardly on stilts,
And shuffle in floppy red shoes.
The one looks up and is merely inches away and says,
“You’re here.”

The celebratory crowds rush past me,
Occasionally shooting strange looks
At my plain attire of a white t-shirt and shorts.
A hall into the red and white checkered building
Stands open to me offering darkness
Past the few feet of light inside.
My feet walk me in and search for the trapdoor
Indistinguishable against the flat red and white
Checkered tile. Then we stop, the door falls open,
And the void beneath climbs upward and swallows me.

Commentary on “One Way Houseplane Flight to Clowntown”

“One Way” is the latest dream poem I have written. It was done to fulfill a class assignment but it actually is about a real recurring dream I had when I was young. The basic story is that I would be in a large field at night and there would be a white one-room house with the tail of a jet attached to its back. In the tail were passengers that I knew where friends but could not identify individually. Then I would be in the house flying it, running frantically back and forth trying to work all the controls. Off in the distance I could see bright lights flashing on the ground and, when I got closer, I saw that it was a city of multi-colored buildings and streets made of candy. Clowns were running all through it so I dubbed it Clowntown. Next I would be on the ground in the middle of street with clowns running all around me. Finally I would walk into a building and fall right through a trapdoor that I somehow knew was there. That’s the dream; it’s a weird one, isn’t it. You can take a shot being Freud and analyze it for me. The only thing I can figure out is that one would think falling through a hole in the floor into an apparently bottomless void would be pretty scary. It never was, though. I know there are lots of theories one dreams involving water, being naked, and falling. I’ve yet to hear an explanation about dreams with clowns and houseplanes and trapdoors.

The Road into the Desert

My whitened knuckles grip the wheel
As I guide the car over the endless pavement.
I steal a quick glance into the mirror
At the places behind grown pale from the sun
And scoured by the ceaseless desert wind.
My sweaty legs stick silently to the seat.

I shift uncomfortably trying to escape the sun
As it reflects into my eyes from the mirror
And rains down on the greasy wheel,
Slick beneath my hands. And the pavement
Stretches into the distance, pulling the seat
Of my fears closer through the sweeping wind.

The open canopy of the car permits the wind
To sting my watering eyes and wheel
Over my shoulders, falling onto the seat,
Spinning in confused zephyrs that mirror
My thoughts driven forward by the screaming sun.
The tires pull the miles from the pavement

And each inch rises up through the seat
As I urge the car onward against the wind.
The horizon grows dim as the passing sun
Falls further with each step of each wheel.
The tar and the oil settle into the pavement.
The places I know stretch away from the mirror

And merge into the unbroken line of pavement
Scraped over by the failing fingers of the sun.
Darkness takes hold of the skies ahead and the wind
Becomes ambivalent and takes its seat
As an unoccupied eddy around the mirror.
My muscles still strain against the cooling wheel

As my eyes stray seldom from the remembering mirror.
My skin shrinks from the slippery seat
In anticipation of what waits at the end of the pavement.
There is a cautious whisper from the wind
As it flows over my hands on the wheel
And strips away the last residue of the faded sun.

I sink in the seat while the wind chills my hands on the wheel
And the pavement leads me away from the setting sun in the mirror.

Commentary on “Road into the Desert”

Writing this was my first experience with composing a sestina. A basic description of this form is that the end words in the each line of the first stanza are repeated as final words in each of the rest of the stanzas (except the last) in different positions. The effect gained is that the repetition of the six end words makes them the central images in the poem. “Road into the Desert” is about a man who is driving through day and into night to somewhere not described, toward something and vaguely frightening. I didn’t have any conscious intent to describe anything in my life when I wrote this poem. I basically was just searching for some kind of topic. When I finished and read through it, though, I realized that it almost hauntingly describes the thoughts and feelings roaming through my head as I prepare to move on in life. Read it closely, Shannon. It will tell you where I am right now.

Vulcanization

Just a little armadillo
Scraping its tail across the asphalt
Clawing chunks of tires
In search of family remains

Commentary on "Vulcanization"

This is a short poem requiring a brief explanation. The assignment was to write a nonsense poem. You can decide for yourself if it makes any sense. It's not supposed to at first. Vulcanization is the method used to fuse old tire rubber into asphalt. Think about all the little armadillo run over by cars and crushed into the pavement down in Texas. Now does it make sense?

The Vibrant One

Standing on the quartzine shore of the shimmering ocean
The vibrant one spins in a glimmering tempest
Of rapture and disgrace and encumbrance
She drifts to the oak door founded in the sand
And leans her sparkling ear to the portal
Listening for a wispy assurance to cross over
Her disintegral hand scratches lightly the ancient wood
Entreating entrance with trepidation and restraint
But she cannot turn the tarnished golden knob
To lift the latch and unleash the invitation beyond
For fear that the hope and doubt will engulf her light
And bend its beams to a different hue of radiance
And harness the freedoms of her wanting shadows
Swirling and swarming the vibrant one glows
Between shades of illusion and elusive acceptance
Her rainbowed fingers grasp for meaning and truth
From the white hot rays of erudition
That burn steadily though from the other side

Commentary on “The Vibrant One”

Now, the moment of truth, the point of no return. The rest of the poems in my collection are about you Shannon. The first of the group is “The Vibrant One.” You have already read it and you told me that you didn’t really understand it. Well, what you thought was an innocuous statement became my motivation to do all of this. Whatever the future holds in store for either of us, I want to give you understanding. My poetry is my most prized possession. It is my creation. Now I give it to you. *You* are the Vibrant One, of course. You have been so since that first night at the Chi Phi house and nothing can change that. Last semester you told me that you just didn’t know what to do after breaking up with your boyfriend. In “The Vibrant One” I express my viewpoint on your situation at that time. You were so afraid to open that big oak door; you were afraid of what was on the other side. Or, more accurately, you were afraid because you didn’t *know* what was on the other side. I won’t tell you what is hiding beyond those hinges. In life, it is ever changing, as it is in this poem. You try so hard not to let anything change you, to bend the beams of your light “to a different hue of radiance.” But change is not only inevitable, it is healthy. You have changed much during the time I have known you even if you don’t realize it. Sometimes the waves of that change have beat against me and battered the edge of my shore. But I am still here, and you are still irrepressibly vibrant.

“The Wilting Rose Upon My Desk Is Bowed”

The wilting rose upon my desk is bowed
In decayed reverence to your image,
One petal's sighing softly ringing proud
Defiance under weight of our love's age.
Its frightened shadow's scurried search in vain
Against the alabaster barrenness
Surveyed under your gaze's frozen plane
And stumbling over drifting emptiness.
My flower drinks the tepid water still
From reservoir which holds your bending face
Beneath the surface tension's concrete will
Where drawn illusions drown with desperate haste.
My straining flower folds and falls to grasp
The draining memories so closely passed.

Commentary on "The Wilted Rose Upon My Desk Is Bowed"

I had more difficulty writing this poem than any other this semester. It is a sonnet and I found it most challenging to fit everything within the confines of rhyme and meter and length. I think, though, this poem speaks volumes about our relationship. Remember the rose and framed picture you gave me for my birthday? Yep, the frame that I broke about five minutes later. I never told you, but you caught me completely off guard with that one. That was the most thoughtful thing you have ever done for me, that anyone has done for me in a long time. I still have that picture on my desk and I look at it several times every day. No woman (other than my mother) has ever given me a picture of her and me. Have no doubt how much that means to me. But, before I sink further into digression, back to the poem. At the time, I still had the rose in a vase on my desk. The vase sat in front of the picture and the water and curvature of the glass bent its image like a bubble; the light in the room fell across the rose and produced a long shadow that ran across the white empty space on my desk. Read the poem and see the flower as my feelings for you; the vase and water as time and memory; the desk as doubt and waning possibilities; and the picture as my image of you. Perhaps with these tools in hand you can beat some sense out of the poem. It would be too easy for me to fully explain its meaning to you. Mysterious tantalizations are good sometimes.

Taking Off My Clothes
By Carolyn Forché

I take off my shirt, I show you
I shaved the hair out under my arms.
I roll up my pants, I scraped off the hair
on my legs with a knife, getting white.

My hair is the color of chopped maples
My eyes as dark as beans cooked in the south.
(Coal fields in the moon on torn-up hills)

Skin polished as a Ming bowl
showing its blood cracks, its age, I have hundreds
of names for the snow, for this, all of them quiet.

In the night I come to you and it seems a shame
to waste my deepest shudders on a wall of a man.

You recognize strangers,
think you lived through destruction.
You can't explain this night, my face, your memory.

You want to know what I know?
You own hands are lying.

Taking Off Your Clothes
Response to Carolyn Forché's "Taking Off My Clothes"

The slip of the silk whispers a warning
That slides into the darkness beyond
Your invisible shoulder. And each shift
Of the midnight breeze is intimate
Only in its quiet isolation. Your every
Sheltered shudder wraps around my fingertips,
Culling justification from a confident grip.

The slants of moonlight slide
Up your back, washing away
Its golden color and stealing
The strength of my embattled resolutions.

It is a shame that we come to each other like this,
Wasting ourselves beneath constructed reproach.

You wrap yourself in strangers,
I create destruction.
I make the wordless promise
Not to explain this night,
To turn emotion to pretense,
And to deny any trace of memory.

I know what you know.
My hands are lying.

Commentary on "Taking Off Your Clothes"

"Taking Off Your Clothes" is a poem in response to Carolyn Forché's poem "Taking Off My Clothes." In it I speak in a way from the viewpoint of the man she is talking about in her poem and I substitute you for her. Of course, Forché's poem does not accurately describe you and us, so as a response my poem twists hers to fit what I am talking about. That's probably a little confusing, but I included her poem so that you can see more clearly what I mean. As far as my work, it is about the night that you spent with me after formal. That was a very strange, wonderful, and perhaps misguided night. Although we didn't reach into certain areas of physical intimacy, we were intimate, and that is what my poem is really about. Put yourself for a moment in the place of one of our mutual friends and look at that night and you will better be able to divine my meaning. What exactly were we during those hours together? You and I seem to take pleasure in testing the boundaries of that narrow area between friendship and love. During that night we both made a running charge at the wall that we have built to keep us from loving each other. "Taking Off Your Clothes" is about that. I woke up about two hours before you did the next morning and I stayed there and looked at you and thought about you, about me, about us. I knew even the night before that we could not burst through that barrier. That is why my hands were lying and why you cuffed, or gained, justification from my confident grip. From your viewpoint outside of our situation can you see the contradictions and enigmas in which we wrap ourselves? You said to me just today that you needed to find a man who is right. You have found the right man who just can't be.

Sympathy

That soulless stare
Across the miles
Of cobblestone feet
And scraping chair legs
Your purpose bent
With each stray beam
Of streaking light
That drowns my eyes
In a withered glare
I feel the weight
Of your eyes on my back
And I hate their gaze
And vilify your name
With a silent denial
So play away
In your stream of manipulation
Because the voices and bodies
Will engulf me
And swallow my heart
With a growl and a bite
And my stony face
Betrays nothing to you
Except my indifference
And a predestination
That this final month
Shall draw away
And pull me peacefully
A forever memory
Into your foolishly wasted past
Burn away through the smoke
And mesmerize yourself now
And my apparition shall sit
In repressed shadows at your back
And smile
When your eyes bleed with salt
And your skin smolders
From the immutable heat
Of your chosen regret

Commentary on "Sympathy"

"Sympathy" is a complete turn from the tone of the other poems I have written about you. As I'm sure you can see, the title contradicts sharply what the poem actually says. Before you take "Sympathy" too hard, I'll explain it to you. It is, of course, about that Thursday night on the patio at O'Charley's when you were or weren't kissing Brian not like a friend while staring at me. What is the absolute truth is no longer important. There is no more time left to be bitter. Recall some of my earlier poems where I struck out at the girl in my life at the time. While they, like this poem, are full of fire and venom, there is something else beneath the dust of their destruction. "Sympathy" was a way for me to deal with that anger, to get it out in a way that I would never forget. But why was I so angry? Anger is sometimes born of love, out of feeling that love is betrayed. So, if you agree to follow me down this twisted psychological path of rationalization, "Sympathy" actually becomes a love poem. Your gaze, wherever it may have been directed, did burn me that night. It always does. I felt its heat even this afternoon when I saw you on my way to an exam. That is the essence of true emotion, the eyes. As your eyes oscillate between blue and green, so do I. When you turn your head, I follow your look without moving, even if I'm not there. I don't know if you will ever regret what is or what is not between us. And I don't want to know. I once told a friend that if I could see into the future and discover if we will ever be together, I would turn away and close my eyes. If we are never drawn nearer than now, I can accept that and enjoy what we have. If we do fall in love, it would be a romance of gold and passion. The time spent in anticipation of either is the true nature of life, and I want to live every gut-wrenching second of disappointment and elation. Life is this process, and in it you and I are alive.

Afterward

Well, there you have it. The stream of my life eight years in the making. It is funny to look back so far on the boy full of passion and doubt and see where I am now. Part of me is still that boy, part has grown up and been reshaped by the intricacies of life. There are pieces of character that we never shed, that we never truly mature beyond. That is a wonderful thing. I hope I never lose that child that tries too hard for things which are sometimes so simple they are impossible. Take what you have learned here, whatever that may be, and remember it. Understanding others is never as difficult as understanding ourselves. If there is one immutable truth in life, that is it. I have peeled back the layers of myself for you; put aside the dictionary and thesaurus and wander through me like a lost child in the night. Lose yourself enough and you will find more than you seek, you will find what you need. This poetry is a physical memory, an unchanging connection to my past and present. They form a chain that joins where I have been to where I am going, to somewhere in an unknown future. Each link is dependent on the others for strength and continuity. Lose one and the entire strand collapses and crumbles to dust. The chain is not just linear. It crosses over itself many times, no time, place, or person being irrevocably relegated to the past. That is the wonder of life and experience. Sometimes the past is the future, and the present is a gateway to both. You are a link in my chain of life. Know well your place in it and understand me. You have effected me greatly in a short time, Shannon. The proof of this is in the little things as much as it is in the grandest of emotions. Parts of you have become one with me. I never leave the slurp on the top of the coke can after I drink from it. Ever. It is one of the times when your memory and motion quietly merge within me.

Divine Hyperbole

Placed in the setting of the heavens
We are binary stars,
Inexorably captured
In each other's gravity,
Rotating around an invisible center,
Burning young and hot.
We duel
In a stellar dance
That we are both masters of and prisoners to.
Yet while we drift far away
In the apogee of our orbits,
The guiding hand of time
Will always pull us back together
Over
And over
Again.
And distant observers marveling
At our power and beauty
Will cap their telescopes and see us
In truth
As a single light,
A point of pure perfection
Reaching out together
Into eternity.

