1999

Making company of darkness

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Making company of darkness

by

Joshua Evan Borgmann

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Creative Writing)
Major Professor: Neal Bowers

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of
Joshua Evan Borgmann
has met the requirements of Iowa State University

Major Professor

For the Major Program

For the Graduate College
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I. INSALURBRIOUS BIFURCATIONS
Family Portrait at 23

I was born on November One, Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Four, born into the city of Kearney, in the state of Nebraska, born under the sign of Scorpio, on the chart of the Zodiac. In that land of barren waste, I was named Joshua Evan, the son of Richard, the son of Connie, of the family Selvage. I lived among my parents past the birth of my sister, Sean Marie, but following our fine family tradition, Mommy was forced to flee the law. I did not know my brothers Christian and Jason or my sister Stephanie, born and lost in the state of Virginia; we could never meet. Abandoned by my father, I was taken by Great Aunt Betty, wife of Ernest of the family Borgmann, from the town of Shelton. The law stripped me of my name, proclaimed me Joshua Evan Borgmann, son of Betty and Ernest, yet I never lived under their roof. I was given into the care of Viola, mother of Betty and grandmother of Connie. Growing up, I never questioned family legitimacy, I never understood the questions of others, the looks of confusion. Mother, father, child, I had no such concepts. A mother was a distant thing. She was a paranoid creature who gave orders and spoke of shooting people. Father meant a drunken man who worked from two to ten everyday then fearfully signed away his check to Mother, expecting only beer in return. Love meant the old woman I called Grandma, nothing more; she supported me, read to me, helped me with homework, tucked me in at night.

Now at 23, I have found two mothers from two generations, but still it’s that old woman, now approaching 90, I go home to, she’s the one I call when I want to hear a familiar voice.
Family

I remember my family.
They were many:
my great grandmother, who grew old as I watched,
those who forced her out of her home at 87,
the son who served in the Navy, later displaying his moral depravity,
stealing away his mother’s savings and home
and the daughter who wallowed in poverty,
unable to produce a family of her own.
and my grandmother, a woman too concerned with herself for anyone else.
I remember another generation,
the generation of my mother and her sisters:
the one who spent so many years of her life in prison,
theft and fraud, against her own family,
the one who taught me to tie my shoes, only to die in '85,
ilness of the blood or domestic abuse,
the one who married and divorced Felix Cervantes and Myron Brown,
now with the one they call Johnny Coins,
and my mother, the oldest, so much like me with imagination and dreams,
a potential never realized, a family torn asunder.
Then there was my generation:
there was Terry, the blonde haired cousin of my youth,
taken from his mother after so much abuse,
Casey and Miles, I never really knew, I don’t know what happened to them,
do they know their mother is dead?
Five cousins I knew:
the one who suffered brain damage at 17,
flung from the car,
the one who ate a live toad for a dollar,
now stalking the streets in Crip blue,
the one they said was a little slow,
ear infection, brick to the head,
the one who spent years in counseling and foster homes,
and the youngest so disrespectful of his elders,
so opposed to his white heritage, so accepting of his Hispanic roots,
knowing nothing of either.
Of the three youngest of brothers and sisters I know so little,
one died, hours old.
The others I know nothing of, somewhere in Virginia I guess.
My brother Christian I know only from a single photo.
They say a banker adopted him,
the sister growing up 19 miles away yet seemingly a world apart,
three children by age 20
and then there was me,
the first of my grandmother’s line to graduate high school,
the first to go to college, first to commit this to paper.
Family Spirit

November 1 and my mother didn’t call me. Instead, she called the Psychic Friends Hotline, Dionne Warwick and her supernatural spies. She didn’t even have a credit card but it was my birthday and she didn’t call me.

She had been speaking of ghosts, not just Marie and her phantom cat but another, a child-like specter in black glaring from the couch. It was November and my mother was speaking of ghosts.

She said spirits were part of our family. They visited in the night, her grandfather, her uncle Porky (killed on the railroad), and after the cancer took her—Marie and her ever faithful cat. My mother said they were her family.

My aunt visited me once in a dream, at least I think it was her; with time, memory goes blind but I recall she told me I was healing, my heart was not broken, I would not die from the pain, but she only came in my dreams.

Awake, I’ve tried but I’ve never seen a ghost. Many late nights as my mom drove my dad home from work, I saw UFOs in the sky and once I thought I saw Bigfoot snooping through my bedroom window, but I’ve never seen a ghost.

In December, my mother called speaking of psychic wars, reading Psalms with a glass of water on the nightstand to collect the demon child that hid beyond the bathroom light. It was December when my mother finally called.
Insalubrious Bifurcation of the Post-Nuclear Family Schema

We exchange vows
through a limited lexicon,
stretch phrases out of amputated
vocabularies with poorly constructed
syntax. The morphemes of our
discourse are anything but
sublime equations of metaphysical
philosophy that link us
in linguistic intercourse;
they are abstract geometries,
Non-Euclidean, multi-dimensional
divisions which bifurcate
my existence along lines of maternal
duality. What sense we make
literally we forsake figuratively
in favor of bland conformity
to the American mythology
of family singularity. Son, mother,
grandmother, father. For simplicity's
sake say "You are my son"
not "She is your mother as
am I." Biology and legality
provided definitions of my maternal
situations -- separated by more than
semantic mileage-- chasms linguistic
tricks cannot transcend.
It is physical
law not theory or hypothesis.
We can never coalesce.
Christmas Eves

Christmas Eves long ago, as bells and Santas drifted through my eyes, I waited for Mom and Dad to pull into Grandma Viola's drive, spending hours searching for the first sign of headlights down the alley. A boy couldn't swell much more than me as I imagined their arms loaded down with my Christmas joy. Each year something new and different, a new variation of my wish list letter to Santa. One year, it was Star Wars-- complete with Hoth gear Luke Skywalker, Jabba the Hutt play-set and the true rare gem, a Droid Detention Center. Another year, Transformers -- robots in disguise, a full array of Autobots and Decepticons, with the massive aerial wizard Jetfire at the center.

This year, Mother Betty placed me in front of a video rack at Target and demanded I pick from it. I pointed out my favorites-- Beavis and Butthead, Scream, Star Trek: First Contact and Men in Black. She threw Scream in the cart muttering about how stupid it looked. Later, we walked into Hastings Books and Music hoping to find a musical component for my gift. A casual shopper, I went to the used rack first trying for something rare, cheap, or old. “Welcome to Hastings. We will be closing in one minute.” Came over the p.a. hatching one minute of rushing as Betty ranted, “Do you like country? Do you like....” Finally, I grabbed an Ozzy Osbourne and a Metallica both of which I already had -- on tape.
I try to peel dried food
from my supposedly clean dish,
while Grandmother Viola and Mother Betty
look on, Grandmother waiting
for turkey, as Betty cuts
the bird, complaining that the knife
isn’t right. I catch her eye.
“I hope to tell you
I washed those plates.” Awaiting
her explosion I say,
“I’m sure you did
but something dried on it.” Grandmother
chuckles, “I’m not the only one.”
Reminding me of dried Cocoa-
Pebbles on the inside
of the cereal bowl. “Everyone does,”
I say. Strangely Betty remains
calm, no screaming, no glares.
An absence robbing the meal
of tradition, its long history.

As a child, I’d watch the family
come together. Grandmother Viola,
Betty and her husband Ernie, legally
my parents, Betty’s sister Shirley
biologically my grandmother, Shirley’s
husband Jim (no relation) and my Aunt
Cheryl gathered while I sat behind a card table
with my cousins Juanita, Lucan,
Yolanda, Felis, and John.
Jim was always quick
to fire the first shots toward Betty,
their knives slicing the turkey
cleaner than any from the kitchen.
For additional amusement
Felis was sure to ram his head through
a window or two. Some years later,
as Shirley took Grandmother Viola
for the day, Betty had to save
me from her “bitch sister.”
The afternoon would drag
into dusk and no food would touch
the table let alone anyone lips and Ernie grew
restless, a few “bitches” and “dirty son
of a bitches” were sure to be exchanged.
With true holiday cheer a plate
would crash down to the table, shattering,
as Ernie drifted out the door. Another year,
I would find myself shipped off
with Shirley and Grandmother Viola. There Jim would announce that he found me too fat, while he slammed down a case of Old Milwaukee and finished off his Salems. My sister Sean would join me in harassing Juanita for preferring Rod Stewart to Megadeth. And just two years ago, I remember walking to Gas and More with Ernie to buy a case of Pepsi only to return to hateful screams as Betty accused him of "causing trouble." Once again, he was cast out leaving the ever present aura that clung to such holidays.

Yesterday, he told me he wouldn’t be here, he was cooking for himself, having a beef roast and baked potato. The only thing left for me is to say no to pie when there’s gravy on my plate.
Food, Football, Family

Home for the holidays
what’s the excitement anyway.
Friends can’t wait,
A Christmas Carol, A Wonderful Life,
television sentimentality, just gotta have that feeling.
Me...
Nothing but dark foreboding...

The beckoning promise,
Food,
Football,
Family,
the sacred trinity of F,
masking the dark fourth brother,
Not talking about Fun,
nor Fucking,
just good ol' white-trash Fighting.

My Mommy and Daddy teach
lessons in mutual hatred.
Forget Married with Children,
the Bundy’s dysfunctional?
BULLSHIT!
Combined Al and Peggy,
shoe salesman and Bon-Bon Queen
couldn’t hold a fart to my Mommy Cat-Shit Queen.

You want dysfunctional,
then shut up and listen:
Grandma’s older sister’s name is Mommy,
Mother’s either Aunt or Cousin—
can’t really remember,
but her sisters are Aunts
and Grandma is Aunt
or that bitch,
depending on Mommy’s color of the day.

Now, Great Grandmother’s Grandma
but she deserves Mother.
Mommy’s husband is Dad,
or that dirty-son-of-a-bitch,
depending on Mommy’s color of the day.
Father, he’s just a bastard.

Let’s recap,
two mothers,
two dads,
two grandmas,
too many aunts.
I can’t fucking keep it straight.
I don’t want a Mommy—I want my Mother,  
I want a family  
not some fucked up soap opera cast.

Bitch, Bitch, Bitch  
Oh Damn it,  
Everyone Shut Up!  
Eat your damn Butterball,  
drink your Old Milwaukee,  
and leave me here beside Great Grandmother  
her television never fails to soothe.  
I’ll just watch New Year’s Bowl Games,  
stuff myself with Stove Top,  
and bake my brain dreaming.
Wal-Mart Christian

Oh, The voice of Jesus cries out,
"My flock's gone astray
and Sam Walton's taken
my birthday." Oh, where
will the just find truth
when the blood of Christ runs
through the aisles of the Wal-Mart
Supercenter. You bottle it up--
holiday cheer and resurrection candy.
Then, for good measure you throw
old St. Nick from the rooftop
and swallow the holy doughnut.
Television airwaves tell us
"Jesus is the reason for the season"
and flash the newest Christmas sale--
a one-time holiday special-- Jesus wouldn't
want you to miss.

Oh, this must be Christianity,
flocks of seasonal zealots with
Jesus on the lips,
Wal-Mart on the Visa.
Oh, all you poor lost sheep,
missing since at least the last
symbolic crucifixion and resurrection,
returning to your savior, your messiah,
your God for the Wal-Mart pilgrimage
and the assurance of a place in the rapture.
"You know, you've gotta give Jesus
his day or it'll be the horrors of
Armageddon." If you're saying that to me,
I'll say, "Wasn't Armageddon just a bad
Bruce Willis movie?" You'll be looking at me
saying, "I thought fat people
were supposed to be jolly like Santa Claus."
Well, I'm no damn Santa Claus
and I'm not about to play
the good little Christian boy, saved
four weeks a year and wallowing
in sin the other forty-eight.
My dear Wal-Mart Christian,
I'll make it simple.
I'm a sinner, infidel, heretic, pagan
and you'd love to burn me at the stake.
Sure, you remember that Jesus said,
"Love everyone," but you know
he'd understand that you really need
to feed someone to the lions. Oh Hell,
I didn't even know Jesus shopped at Wal-Mart
but it really doesn't matter.
See, I'm an American boy for a new
generation, never satisfied with nothingness
but unwilling to have a dead religion
Force-fed to me through seasonal blinders,
tubes down my throat, needles in my veins.
Devil's Advocate

The black pope brings
misanthropic ideals to a world without aesthetic sense,
a world of pretentious sheep
who revel in stupidity.
Sheep always assume that others are the same as them,
conforming to the will of the herd,
a lack of perspective flowing into seas of self-deceit.
Drowning, they are weighed down by the anvil of their pride.
Oh, let them drown
it can only fill our cup to the brim.
Oh, let them wallow in their putrid self-righteousness;
just keep them out of our way.
When will they see, the nature of the beast is indulgence.
When will they see, your diabolical heart is cradled in the rib cage of truth.
Religions in Ice

In the sub-zero cathedral of winter,
I am baptized in ice.
Here I serve witness to a January wind's sermon
and paths like frozen hallways,
born in the dark before dawn,
greet me.

Among the lovers of artificial heat, you will not find me.
In the winter,
I embrace the coldest hours before dawn,
when the world is trapped under ice.
In these desolate hallways,
I hear the winter preach its frigid sermon.

On these frigid mornings, I remember a very different sermon,
the first and the last for me.
I still remember those unforgiving hallways,
the smug God-fearing people, cold as a Russian winter,
the words from the pulpit sharp as shards of ice,
forcing upon me some long forgotten dawn.

They do not see, for me there is no dawn.
I hear no sermon.
I see nothing, my eyes crusted in ice.
Yet, they keep calling out to me.
"What will you do in your winter?"
"Where will you find the final hallways?"

I tell them there will be no hallways,
there shall be no dawn.
There shall be eternal winter,
winter without sermon,
a winter suited for a cold serpent, suited for me.
A diet of snow and ice.

I am a sculpture in ice,
my veins crimson hallways,
nothing can harm me.
I will not melt at dawn.
I will not hear the sermon.
I am one with the winter.

Let me die in winter, bury me in ice.
Let the wind be my sermon, glaciers my hallways.
Take away eternal dawn, I will die for me.
Deicide

Oh, fly on the wall,
may I ask
why life has spread you so thin
when you soared so high
that the ants worshipped you,
their many eyed
thin winged God?

Oh fly on the wall,
may I ask
what has left you so dead
crucified side by side with my Pushead Metallicas
and my Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Calendar
with the wings of those who came before
to this miniature Golgotha?

Oh fly on the wall,
may I ask
how the gods kill?
If only you could move
your splattered legs,
your exploded thorax,
perhaps you could show me your divinity,
your holiest of holiness,
whatever it is that ants worship.

Oh fly on the wall,
may I ask
if I do not see you with the eyes of an ant,
do not see in you the image of my God,
when I swat down your brethren
is it still deicide?
Suicide Poem # 23

I asked for poppies; they sent me roses, the same as I saw lovers exchange on Valentine's Day. They sent me tulips, the same as the ones that grew outside my bedroom window. Daises, daffodils, perhaps lilies. But I asked for poppies; clearly I recall placing it in my note. Somewhere, after the reasons, the pain, and my emphatic declaration that this had nothing to do with subliminal messages on my Judas Priest albums, I wrote it plainly, "Poppies-- give me poppies to ease the transition." But they sent me roses with which to wither.
Suicide Poem # 24

I remember Ozzy Osbourne singing, 
"Happiness I cannot feel 
and love to me is so unreal."
In such words, I took comfort, 
my heavy metal Prozac. Give me 
depression for my sadness, 
feed me a sad groove, 
if you desire a smile 
to cross these lips. I cannot 
take those happy songs. 
"Don’t worry be happy,"
must beam suicidal tendencies 
to my brain and I clearly choke 
at the thought of love songs.
Hey little boy,
What ya thinkin?
What ya hidin
behind those little blue eyes?
Are those little eyes happy?
Well, let me tell you,
it won't last. You'll see.
Are ya feelin loved?
feelin special? feelin needed?
just plain feelin?
Is your little body healthy?
Is your little mind free?
Well, let me tell you,
it won't last. You'll see.
Little boy, ya gonna learn
to hide things deep,
to keep those baby blues
cold and cracked with red
to only speak with your heart
on paper and then only
in measured bursts.
Sadistic Auto-Masochistic Persecution

Love is a gun and I’m everything a gun is not. Immune to happiness, I have no fire, am as unliving as if dead, something always forgot, the solitary memory of an honest liar.

My mind wasted, a cold heart suicide for hire shooting heavy metal Prozac, inside, my war is fought, something everlasting, but my heart can only tire, and I know my gun is love, but I’m everything love is not.

Oh, divergent genetic highway on which I’m caught, crashed at the major intersection of my wetwire, stranded soul stopped short of all I’ve sought, happiness immune, I have to know fire.

Yeah, know the painful creatures sharp depression can sire, these lost star children, men of pain, and the supernatural astronaut, I am he, the sufferer, the traveler, the pain buyer, am living as if undead, as something always forgot.

My heart pulsates, contracting, composing a line of knots tied by the twisted crippled hands of a Satanic friar, the imposing hands that play the symphony of Lot, with the honest memory of a solitary liar.

Some things are everlasting but my heart can only tire, and look for sleep in a field of poppies, I never forgot, and be lulled away on the song of a solitary lyre, which plays an eerie refrain for this newborn necronaut.
Random Self Indulgent Shit

*Killing winds blow my way bringing everlasting pain.*

*Living is Hell.*

*In this wasteland,
no longer do I wish to live.*

*Death becomes my friend
and I embrace her eternally.*

Oh, Sorry.

Did you want me
to write a different poem,
a happy poem?
I could maybe
write you a lie.
Would you like a lie?

*Hey (insert random name here)
why don't you send me all your love?*

*Yeah, you heard me, I'm asking,
I'm begging for your loving.*

*Oh won't you (insert random cliché here)*

That's my happy cliché poem.
Does it speak for itself?
Did you look at my first poem closely?
Do it now!
Did you see it?
Yes, there is something there
to find. I hope
I don't have to spell it out.
Perhaps it's enough to say,
I call it "Memory in a Name."

*I feel like shit.
I want to die.*

*Life has little meaning
when no one cares.*

*My life has reached a stage
from which I must choose a path.*

*No one guides me any longer
I'm on my own.*

*I ask you why
do I have to die?*

*Is everything really the way I see it?*

What do you think?
Call it 9th grade, call it today.
I call it "The Way I See It."
Did you figure out that first poem?
if so,
Do you wonder who she is?
A cheerleader.
Yes, I did say a cheerleader
but this is all before that.

The sixth grade, fat geek stalker
scribbling down lines
of praise and perversion,
my twisted love letter,
a look of glee spreading
as I write, "You're so sexy."
So with sixty Os.
A voice on the phone issuing
countless rejections,
laughter,
looks of hatred,
and threats of violence.
My hopes easy prey
to notes signed in her name.
Easy for me to buy the line,
"I love you but I'm embarrassed"
or "Prove yourself in a series of tests
first, escape from this pit,
then (insert random act),
then
then
then I will love you."
My two and a half year delusion.

Does that answer your questions?
Sure I was fat and ugly
but I didn't know
that should cost me a cheerleader's hand.
I needed to learn
cute will follow cute
and so will everyone else.
I learned to avoid and to hide,
vowed never again to ask a girl out,
a vow I've broken only once
in ten years.

I couldn't find one
damn pitcher of Bud
that could wash away my memories
of her, the one I can't
forget and can't afford.
I need this beer
to numb this poverty pain
this foolish desire,
this return to failure.

Oh, I'm sorry
am I being self-indulgent?
Is this being too explicit?
Well, guess what.
I don’t give a fuck.
I don’t care what you think poetry
is supposed to be.
(work on imagery and metaphor.
be subtle.) Huh!!
This is my space.
This is my poem.
And I’ll say what I want
how I want.

Rip it up,
throw me out,
never meet my needs.
I didn’t ask,
but you said,
and never delivered.

Did you ask me why
I’m so bitter?
Well, just think about it.
If your believed you were doomed
to die young and unloved -- wanting
to believe in something beyond-- knowing
with 99.9% certainty
that there is only darkness,
eternal utter nothingness,
just like life but without consciousness
and even if there were something
knowing your sinner’s soul
could only know damnation
pain and suffering eternal
much like life,
wouldn’t you be bitter?

Damn,
I’m trying here
but nothing is working.
How about we all get together and sing
that Jefferson Airplane song?
You know the one I mean:
“Everybody needs somebody to love.”
Come on,
“Don’t you need somebody to love.”

Peace.
High School High Via the Lost Highway

I MAYBE A LITTLE DAZED AND CONFUSED
BUT I'VE NEVER BEEN CLUELESS,
NEVER HAD ANY FAST TIMES,
AND I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ANY RISKY BUSINESS
SEE, I'D BEEN LIVIN' IN THE DOLLHOUSE,
BEFORE, I WENT TRAVELING ON THE LOST HIGHWAY
TOOK A WRONG TURN SOMEWHERE AROUND DUNE,
RAN OUT OF GAS JUST OUTSIDE OF TWIN PEAKS,
MET A MAN, SAID HIS NAME WAS ERASERHEAD,
SAID HE COULD SELL ME A LITTLE BLUE VELVET.
MAN WAS A REAL GENIUS,
SHOWED ME THE WAY HOME WITH A LITTLE WEIRD SCIENCE,
DID HIS OLD HOCUS POCUS
AND I WAS HOME WATCHING RETURN OF THE KILLER TOMATOES,
Feeling I MIGHT BE SMITTEN LIKE I MIGHT BE ONCE BITTEN,
SO I WENT LOOKING FOR TRUE LOVE, FOUND ME DR. NO.
NOW, WHEN I HEAR DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER,
I PROVIDE A VIEW TO A KILL,
SO BEWARE, MY TOMORROW NEVER DIES,
AND I'LL NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN.
SEE, LATELY I'VE BEEN FEELING LIKE I'M ROSEMARY'S BABY,
BUT I WON'T BE NEEDING AN EXORCIST
I'M GOING DOWN WITH THE FRIGHTENERS,
GONNA TRY TO MAKE EVERY DAY HALLOWEEN,
MAKE MY LIFE A REAL SCREAM.
OH, I WANT EVERYONE SCREAMING, OH GOD, YOU DEVIL,
NEED TO BE LIKE SLATER IN HEATHERS,
A MAN WITH A LIFE A LITTLE LESS ORDINARY.
I MEAN, IN THIS STONED AGE,
EVERY CLASS NEEDS ITS PSEUDO-SATANIC WANNA-BE AXE-MURDERER.
Forgetting '87

I can’t recall just how many,
I love yous, I scrawled
at the top of the tornado slide,
inside the baseball dug out,
and, of course, upon my bedroom wall.

I’ve almost forgotten,
how I climbed the steps, each one
taking me to heights I’d never
before ascended. To the top, where
my black ink would defile
the blue metal, “Josh + Kelinda,”
a lie amongst this nest
of pure teen love.

I only faintly recall
approaching little Shawn Rice,
and teaching him
all about art in the park,
and I never expected him
to scribble “Kelinda loves Josh”
in sprawling black paint across
the sign which once read City Park,
but I laughed all the same,
when his Grandma made him wash it off.

Lately, it’s truly been a struggle
to resurrect those late nights
alone with a phone and KSYZ FM,
Grand Island, every night
between midnight and one,
I would dial in on the 800
or perhaps the long distance,
dedicate a song, Bon Jovi’s
“Living on a Prayer,” “You Give Love a Bad Name,”
or Poison’s “Talk Dirty to Me,” taking my pleasure
from a stranger saying, “From Josh
to Kelinda,” knowing that somewhere
all was right with love.
Thirteen

Thirteen,
a flamboyant killer strikes
the heart
of childhood's waxing
usurping the supple flesh,
slowly
shaping,
recreating
body and mind.
The victim suffers
the throat of gravel,
the aroma of the most natural and unique
personal perfume.
Endures
burns, abrasions,
a multitude of open wounds
holding off
the advancing wolf's mane
and a certain beast
that leaves
a dampness on the sheets.

Thirteen,
a lover of desolation
this dark usurper,
this Satanic knight
brings
hellspawned despair
taking childhood's innocent gluttony,
its dull unawareness,
its meaningless joy
leaving the young
victim caged
in a body no longer his own,
in a world robbed
of things known,
mourning
over the grave of his twelve-year-self-apprenticeship,
praying
for escape
from this coffin-world.
In the Absence of Light

I sit in the dark dreading
what's lurking outside my window.
The crackle of shoes through
leaves, the hiss of slightly masked
whispers. Oh, the bastards.
It's all fun and games,
or so they say, just tormenting
the dork.

"It's only fair,
he's barely human, anyway.
We'll just keep him awake
flashlights in windows,
rocks into his kitchen,
a smoke bomb in the door."

I curl up, listen
to the dull thud of egg
on wood and the aerosol hiss
of paint from the can.
As they retreat,
through the hedge, I struggle
for sleep to a chorus of their giggles,
knowing the morning will bring,
"Fuck You," scrawled in red
outside my bedroom window.
Windows

The windows are always closed now
never to open again.
No cool summer breeze blows through.

For fifty years or more,
these windows have watched lives unfold,
seen three generations of children playing, growing, leaving,
becoming: soldiers, welfare mothers, college students.
Now they are alone forever.
Yet these windows refuse their solitude
making company of darkness.

A broken cane, long forgotten, reminds them of the old woman,
Strong and dignified, she raised children into her eighties,
only for them to turn on her, forcing her away.
These windows remember her with love.

Now these windows barely hang;
time extracts its toll.
An old nemesis crumbles them, building a complex network of tunnels.
Their flesh is eaten away, devoured internally,
Cancer.

Once, these windows had eyes in the back of their heads,
a two-way affair.
Nothing escaped them, inside or out.
Now panes cracked, vision extinguished,
Blindness reigns.

Silently these windows wait;
surely they are not forgotten.
They cannot see the yellow beast, Caterpillar, which grinds its teeth.
They do not know, do not understand,
Nothingness.
The House

One story, not large at all,
white paint only, once maintained,
portrait of the American working class dream.
No longer.
White paint crumbles,
wood shows brown, rotting, and damp.
Boards hang loose, nails protrude, brown mush of rot,
termite tunnels navigate,
this dead house waits,
clinging fearfully to failing doors.
Nothing kept in, nothing kept out.

Whitetail deer entangled
with the ever changing hands of time,
farm scenes painted, splendid, dangle, cliche', Midwestern.
Tape covering slits in plastic seats
giving it all a sense of home.
Mildew and gas linger in the air,
the scent of something timeless.
On the carpet, countless stains serve witness,
yet what does it matter with
nothing kept in, nothing kept out.

Buckled concrete, collapsed ground,
foundation screams
as its innards fall away.
Mouth of twisted concrete, something unimaginable,
a house digesting internally.
Nothing kept in, nothing kept out.
Old Woman

Looking at a picture of her
one-hundred year old neighbor
sitting in the "new" Town Hall with
some papers--
a ballot--
in front of her, my great-grandmother
tells me how she watched
two women, each in their eighties, roll
this woman's wheelchair three blocks through
a chilly Nebraska November so she could cast
one more vote, have one more picture
on the front-page of the *Clipper*.
"I've never voted," my great-grandmother,
now nearly 90, tells me. "Why?"
I ask. In silence, she sits for a while before
saying, "My Dad was a Democrat but
Hugh, my first husband, he was a Republican."
In the Night

Sometimes the noises almost
sound like voices lurking
outside the window—junior
high phantoms resurrected
to bifurcate—my fear.
(What's that pain I feel?)
Sleep—a desired state
of equilibrium—afraid—
possibility of infinite embrace—
afraid—clanging of furnace,
invocation of the spirit
whispered with a falling calendar,
the wail of a refrigerated banshee,
ghosts float in pie
bowls and howl at neighbor's coughs.
I wait for death or daylight.
Alone, my life becomes a Black Sabbath song. Sitting at bars, I often notice women some of whom are single and some of whom might be interested in me.

Lately, I've been thinking about getting a tattoo but not of a dragon, devil, or jaguar. I'd have a goat worked into my right shoulder. If I were a bit drunk, I would have Goathorns written underneath it in cheesy b-movie letters. No doubt, it would happen as quickly as my online names and passwords become "goatboy," "goathorns," or "goatlord."

I wear a Black Sabbath shirt, my favorite, featuring a being half man half goat with mystical glowing rays shooting from its eyes. It is the goat behind Goathorns, the goat of Greek mythology, e.e. Cummings, Anton LeVay, and Venom lps.

I am waiting for my goatgod flute in hand to spur me on but I have found only a ceramic goat head which stares back at me with hollow eyes and pictures from rare days on my parent's rented farm. I see myself leaning beside my dad's yellow 1968 Ford pick-up truck my hands held out cupping grain for two small goats or holding a single goat by the horns. Then there is my mother, her leg broken by icy ground and wild hooves, and my dad sitting at the kitchen table pushing aside butter dishes and molding bread mumbling, "Those damn goats."

I remember that when my mother moved, our town cursed by Jack Kerouac in On the Road would suffer no goats. Though my mother screamed of communists and bullets for board members, my dad brought out the hunting rifle. I stood in the doorway, my mother screaming, "Don't you dare shoot my kid."

The last goat, (legs tied hung from a tree, my dad removing organs from the smiling abdomen- my mother naming each: stomach, liver, pancreas, spleen) stared at me with vacant eyes. I never broke contact until the neck gave a final crack.

I wait. I hope. I continue to sit.
II. BLACK IS THE ONLY COLOR IN THE WORLD
The Day I Saw the Ocean

I boiled my dreams,  
the day I saw the ocean.  
Sucking down Kentucky Fried Children,  
I remembered to live,  
trading bones for a pocket full of shells —  
the shark in the sand.

In my name, I erect this pillar of sand  
charged with plutonium dreams,  
a brain of shotgun shells.  
The day I saw the ocean,  
I knew I would live  
forever among Neptune's children.

Trapped, I am my own children  
amooned in my own sand,  
swallowed by my own dreams,  
cannibalized in my own desire to live.  
My bones, ground shells,  
the day I saw the ocean.

The day I saw the ocean,  
I spat up my children,  
repented over an altar of shells  
on the cathedral of sand  
repented forgetting how to live  
for letting the pressure peak in my chamber of dreams.

I bade sweat dreams,  
the day I saw the ocean,  
sweet dreams to vomited children  
given a new chance to live  
sculpted and reborn in sand  
with eyes of polished shells.
This is Not a Poem

Months have passed since
last my pen could touch paper and twist
a line or even a word
out of this thick haze.
Writer's block, burn out, a dead muse,
things under which I could hide,
yet I decide to stand in the open
wordless.

My muse is not dead,
simply irrelevant--feeding me
images of sorrow, despair, sadness, and emptiness,
all as meaningless as meaninglessness itself.
But happiness, success, or joy
are the same frail blank cliches.
I want to write the one thing worthy of words,
one thing I cannot understand
or wrench to the page,
one thing beyond all known words--
pure and simple
nothingness.
The Voice of a Hated Enemy Arises:  
The Author Attempts to Deal with an Overwhelming Inability to Forget the Summer of '95

Every Friday, bringing home videos, your baboon grin would open and “Roger Ebert says its one of the greatest films of all time,” would come out. All I could think was shit, black and white with white subtitles. I would have preferred *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or *Plan Nine from Outer Space.* I got *8 1/2* or *Roma,* which I might have enjoyed if it weren’t for you rambling on about how a work of fiction could be a documentary. I felt like screaming. “I don’t care how brilliant it is or what Roger Ebert says, if it’s not real, it’s not a documentary.” You’d just say, “Roger Ebert...” Roger Ebert, not even Gene Siskel, just Roger fucking Ebert. I’d sit there and say, “Man, can’t you form your own opinions.” Your ape visage would issue its brilliant retort, “I don’t have opinions.” I’d be left wondering why the fuck you were always sharing them.

*On 8 1/2,*
do not question
Roger Ebert.
This is gray men
white words.
There will be no *Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* no *Plan Nine from Outer Space,*
no *DS9* or *WCW.*

Such exquisite suffering
just brings a smile to my face.
Oh, was that a cliche?
Do I suffer from an absence
of original opinion?
At least I don’t fashion myself a poet,
Mr. “I’ll take an F
and change my major
so I don’t have to wake
up at 5.” Do I?

Every day that Summer, I'd find you in the living-room sitting in sweat drenched Fruit of the Looms, leafing through *Gallery* magazine. You were so detached as you said, “You know, marriage, porn, and prostitution are essentially the same thing. It’s all in the economics: the model trades her image, the prostitute trades sexual favors, the prospective wife trades promises of sex, cold hard cash or financial security, it’s all the same really.” I wonder if you’ve ever told your mother this or if you’ll ever make it to the twentieth century.

*Romantic ideals*
aside
*economic sensibilities*
say you want a prostitute
wife. *Synonymous-
the two, as are economics*
and life, put plainly
there is no love.
Yes, I spent the summer wringing
sweat from my Fruit of the Looms
as I leafed through your
Gallery magazines. What bothers you?
You introduced me to porn,
so was it that I opened
your mail, that your slimy bratwurst
fingers weren't first to leaf
through the cologne drenched
pages, dripping fat
on those air-brushed porn babes
or was it that I wouldn't turn on the a.c.
so you could write your shitty poems.

I can't forget how many times I had to listen to you talk about your poverty filled childhood
complete with thousands of dollars in the bank. You say you grew up like me, you can understand where I'm coming from. But I know you're not like me. See, I know white trash, I am white trash, and boy, you're not white trash. I don't care if your uncle's dog lost its leg in a moonshine mishap or how many times you caught your grandpa masturbating the night away. You'll never be white trash. I mean, motherfucker, white trash boys don't grow up to be libertarians or actuaries.

On poverty,
don't you dare
question me.
I'm your communist
libertarian actuary,
that's right -- wealth
redistribution
libertarian checks
and balances, utopia
evermore.

Anyway, motherfucker,
you owe me $120, don't bother
giving me the I forfeited
my right when I threw out your toilet
paper and Beavis and Butthead calendar
line. I think maybe just maybe
you should stop writing
your shitty poems cause we know
poetry doesn't pay
until after you're dead -- like
Emily Dickinson-- and just go
write more stories about cannibalism,
necrophilia or vampiric horses.
Maybe try some porn since you love
it so. Whatever! Just make it
marketable.
Composition

you can't help but admire a visionary you know Ed Wood Jr. was a visionary not a visionary like David Lynch or John Waters but visionary all the same Ed thought big planned big spent small paper plates on strings made sublime starships but where would the Spielbergs and Devlins be without Plan 9 from Outer Space some the short-sighted might say Devlin makes big budget Ed Wood flicks but beautiful lizard aside you gotta give Ed more credit looking for big budget Ed Wood try Tim Burton's Ed Wood you've gotta believe that's the movie Ed would've made given a few mil and modern tech can you draw a line between art and trash can you define the limits of social or educational value is it in a name David Lynch John Waters what separates David Letterman and Jerry Springier is it pornography isn't it just possible that Brad Armstrong's scenes with Missy and Stephanie Swift in Pornogothic might improve your sex life or provide one for you so you don't become a predatory sexual sociopath have you considered the political ramifications of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre it simply must be viewed as an investigation of the plight of the working class as automation takes over the workplace this much is clear from the opening scene where the hitchhiker discusses the making of head cheese his family has been working on the slaughterhouse floor for generations as the air gun replaces the sledge they lose not only their economic means but their connection with the food on their table driven by such forces the cannibalistic acts carried out against the teenage representatives of the social order display a clear case of the lower classes rising up in revolt against the upper class what about Scream can you believe it's been shown in college composition classes an example of satire or a masterful metafictional examination of the cliches that dominate modern film can you imagine the politically incorrect composition classroom where any opinion any text is allowed where students condemn their instructor to Hell and write detailed personal essays describing their fondness of anal sex where ability to determine author's purpose and technique is more important than taste where bizarremag.com a website filled with graphic photos dismembered corpses and nude women with linguine and instructions on bug eating becomes the topic of serious classroom discussion where South Park becomes the key to rhetorical analysis what do you say has it gone too far has a line been crossed could you be this instructor or the student who says it just shows where our society is headed
The Author Attempts to Convince You He's NOT Crazy
(After Reading Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho)

I.

My apartment:

II.

The British band Cradle of Filth is perhaps the world's best known "black" metal band; however, their reliance on over the top theatrics and dark romanticism has alienated many fans of the Norwegian scene who prefer fascism and either LeVayian Satanism or political Odinism. Furthermore, COF displays a much greater reliance on the original speed metal blueprints of Venom and Slayer than their Norwegian counterparts in Mayhem, Burzum, and Emperor. In fact, much of their 1993 debut album, *The Principle of Evil Made Flesh*, is essentially Slayeresque guitar work strung together by Dani Filth's high pitched chants and short neo-gothic keyboard passages, reaching its height on the gloomy "The Forest Whispers My Name." While *Principle of Evil* featured numerous references to Hecate, Persephone, and dark desire, the follow up *Vempire* was a chaotic platter of vampiric beauty highlighted by the introduction of angelic female vocalist Sara Jezebel Diva, who added a touch of ethereal beauty to the surrounding brutality.

III.

Atenolol, garlic, Co-enzyme Q10, Echinacea, zinc, vitamin C, caffeine, Double Whopper with cheese no pickle (I do not like pickle) no tomato (fast food tomatoes are often poor in quality), French fries, Rodeo cheeseburger, Dr. Pepper, addiction, fear, heart attack, aneurysm, death soon. NOTE: Burger King was $5.29 including taxes. Letter from Visa company, university bill, hospital bill, *Penthouse* magazine, Deicide cd, on-line: telnet, e-mail, Netscape. Write poetry. Avoid cannibalism and necrophilia, longing for dead lovers may be ideal, dead lovers are not. Write of flowers, poppies perhaps. Save. Strawberry yogurt with M&M topping ($2.95), Bus pass ($99), Nintendo 64 ($129), South Park ($59.99), Goldeneye ($39.99), BattleTanx ($59.99), Rumble Pack ($19.99), SuperPad ($19.99). Return Videos. Dinner? Where? Pizza Hut, Dominoes, Godfathers, Perkins, Country Kitchen, Fazolies, Peking Palace, Subway, Burger King? Tonight—Perkins (I like the muffins).

IV.

Cradle of Filth's dark romanticism didn't fully come together until their third album, *Dusk and Her Embrace*, which featured the introduction of Arthurian legend and the infamous blood countess Elizabeth Bathory. The album's centerpiece, "A Gothic Romance (Red Roses for the Devil's Whore)," is perhaps the perfect Cradle of Filth song, maintaining sublime balance between Sara's vampiric spoken word and Dani's Yosemite Sam on crack shrieks. At
this point, it seemed the band couldn't possibly top its excellent third album; however, the members had at least one more bloody ace up their sleeves which they revealed with the release of Cruelty and the Beast, a brilliant concept album detailing Elizabeth's bloody saga and highlighted by the swarming masterpiece "Cruelty Brought Thy Orchids" with its constant time changes and bold declaration that "all crimes should be treasured if they bring thy pleasure somehow."

V.


VI.

I am only 24.
Obscenity Divine

No egotistical zealot's God
nor crucified revolutionary
lays claim to my soul
or provides me solace
in this pathetic wasteland,

Life.

I live by one rule,
"As it harms no one,
do as thou will."
interpreted as I will, deferring
to moral libertarianism.

I live.

Innocent too long,
the good girls taught me
that a bad girl's arms
are always more inviting.
Among those dubbed sluts and whores,
where I wore the shame
of innocence, the cursed V,
I found humanity, learned

I was alive.

I found my God
in the slow groove
of a Black Sabbath song,
my goddesses between the pages
of High Society and Gallery
or in the arcade booth
at the Blue Nude or the Pleasure Pit.
I found

a reason to live.

There are those among you,
who would block my path
screaming, "Can't you accept Jesus?"
My Jesus would slip me a twenty
smirking as he turned on you and sighed,
"You know not what you do,

let the man live."

My sermon is dressed
in high heels, a most divine communion.
Whenever, I want religion given form,
I find her temple on Highway 69.
I need only negotiate Iowa winters
with a few Franklins or a hefty roll of Jacksons
to buy my paradise,
my alternate form of salvation.

Life is sin. Sin is life.
Nightlife of the Absurd

Early morning t.v.,
the insomniac's religion, companion of the graveyard shift,
cascades through small-town gas stations and college residence halls,
burns in the hearts of motels and hotels, suburbs and inner-cities.

Des Moines, IA:
Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock speak to a young man behind the counter at 7-11.
Alone, he shares his dreams with those 23rd century heroes,
debating Spock on the logic of his desire
to write the great American gothic horror novel,
speaking of his admiration of Poe, Lovecraft, King, Barker,
falling to his knees to worship Poppy Z. Brite, goddess of gothic splatterpunk.

Across town:
*Tales from the Crypt* plays out a macabre tale of a rock-n-roll promoter gone bad,
as another maker of horrors plans his masterpiece,
a masterpiece to be painted in blood at the 7-11.
Mimicking the Crypt Keeper's demonic laughter,
he caresses his blades—his brushes.
Tonight, Tonight, Tonight,
he'll paint himself Van Gogh.

Tonight, *MST3K*’s tin-can/kitchen appliance robot, Krooow and Tom Serbo,
own't be the only ones to lampoon *Godzilla vs. Megalon*.
In a 7-11, two artists, makers of horrors, collide.
One writes a masterpiece from a shotgun blast
that makes a Van Gogh of a painter.
The writer is a painter, the painter the painting.
All the while, early morning t.v. plays on,
the sedative of the artist who makes art from the remains of artists.
The Devil's Villanelle

My Villanelle, oh how I mourn you, my Villanelle. 
Oh, your sweet verse has fallen into such deep despair. 
Could it be the Prince of Lies cast some evil spell?

Blood, tears, and White Zinfandel 
mark this badge of sorrow I wear. 
Oh how I mourn you, my Villanelle.

Of my sweet Lady Villanelle, 
poets bragged that none could compare, 
but oh the Prince of Darkness can cast a potent spell.

It is sad; I cannot wish you well 
my lady dark and fair, 
but oh how I'll mourn you, my Villanelle.

Oh we were such a scandal 
and who could ever forget all the souls we shared. 
Yet, the Lord of the Pit must cast his spell.

Still beyond the kingdom of Hell 
none can compare with you, my lady dark and fair, 
yet, I must mourn you, my Villanelle 
for I have cast my evil spell.
Black is the Only Color in the World

The music pumps, a technological hallucinogenic,
three eyes meet my gaze across the pulsing jungle of humanity,
Hindu goddess Kali greets me.
Can it be?
No only an illusion in neon.
The glowing red reads, "Kali's Paradise."
Loneliness and sorrow permeate the air.
We all dance a macabre ritual,
transforming the smoky air into a temple
for our dark goddess.
We are all servants of twilight,
in our lonely hearts,
Black is the only color in the world.
I order another vodka,
wash away my sorrows.
It is bland.
Everything is bland.
In the periphery of my vision,
I notice her,
freshly cut daisies woven in her long black hair,
She says her name is Poppy.
She is alone, like we all are.
I buy her a drink to wash away her thoughts.
She asks me to dance,
reluctantly I follow her into the hallucinogenic vortex.
Through the smoky veil, her face shines like the midnight moon,
her soft breath blows upon me, autumn breeze.
I feel her touch,
cold as a January wind.
She wraps herself in smoke,
moving in rhythm with it.
Her eyes look inside me,
burning with November's fire.
She smiles and whispers softly,
"You know, Love's a devil's plaything."
Her words soothe, I'm not quite as lonely, as ten minutes ago.
Perhaps she is all I've been looking for.
Nosferatu's delight, My Halloween treat.
Her arms outstretched await me,
I step into their cold embrace
her hands are cutting loose the vine that holds me.
Colors coming back to me
Blue, Red, and Orange
Each Color a taste,
Blue- the sweet nectar,
Red- the tangy delicacy,
Orange- the billowing spice.
I taste them all in her soft kiss.
Poppy

I crave this dark place,
this out of the way dive,
masked behind neon emblazoned
with the name of Kali,
a paradise for a girl like me.
You men are such easy prey,
sulking at the bar,
draped in black with your hair so bleak,
your skin artificially pale
to highlight the black in your eyes.
You like to say that black is your color,
that black is the only color in the world.
You're oh so funeraleseque,
playing all dead and beautiful,
all the while, pouring down the vodka,
shot after shot,
bland as the eternal darkness beating inside you.

My thrill is in watching,
tracing the pattern
of the frown across you lips,
mapping each
quickly averted gaze of your eyes,
waiting for them to fall upon me.
Never making the first move,
I like you to feel that I'm your discovery
that your dark goddess wove
the daisies into my hair
and left me in the temple
you've created in her honor.

As our eyes meet
across the smoky veil,
I move for you.
Your eyes pull me closer,
the seduction is oh so easy.
I reach out and take your hand,
drink the vodka you offer,
flatter you with my eyes.

As I drink your pale liquor, you drink from me,
soaking up my words, my motions,
captured in the tonations and minute gestures.
I tell you my name is Poppy, ask you to dance,
pull you out into the smoky vortex.

The strobes bathe us;
the music fills us.
Slowly we sink
into the crowd
my cold hands moving
across your body,
moving us toward oneness.
Oh, you’re sure to think
I'm all you've been looking for,
Nosferatu's delight,
a sweet sweet Halloween treat.
If only you knew,
I'm October rust,
November fire,
I cut like a January wind.

I feel your need,
a need to escape the blandness,
a need I crave to quench
I fill your blackness with color,
each color brings a flavor:
Blue, the sweet nectar
Orange, the billowing spice
Red, my tangy delicacy.
You taste it all in my frozen kiss
and belong to me forever.

As I fade into the crowd,
I almost feel the blackness
rushing back to you,
your scream almost moves me,
but I have no sorrow.
I am content, you will come to me
for my gift of creation and destruction
until finally black
is the only color left in your world.
Never Love, Forever Lust

"I am like dusk come to ravish the light
Steal me from their stares and mute christ into night
I will answer thy prayers
if thou Wouldst drink of my life."
— Cradle of Filth
from "Malice through the Looking Glass"

Living absurd day time dreams
filled with vodka induced ecstasy,
and somber longings for things forgotten,
he waits in grim repose
upon his self-made throne of black
for the lady who feeds him the colors,
his vampire slut, his darling Poppy.
He sees her filtered
through some supernatural opium daze,
an image from some dark album cover:
"Bloody Kisses" or "Dusk...
And Her Embrace."
From the first time he saw
the daises woven in her hair
and felt her cold touch,
he knew she was wrong,
something not for his time,
more suited to Byron, Shelly, or Poe,
but he'd wanted a devil's plaything,
an eternal whore of Satanic beauty
and in that first frozen
kiss he was imprisoned in joy,
in pleasure, in the rapture of colors.
Oh, the price seemed so little:
a little pain, a little emptiness, a little
death; he'd never thought
it was cumulative. But lightheaded
and empty he awaits her evening caress
yet again.
Sweet Love

Sweet love,
Dear sweet dying love,
you are so sweet,
more angel than man.

What brought you into my arms?
Why weren't you sorry to come?
Yes, I will kiss you
for you shine of innocence.

I will drink your warmth
and leave you safe and cold
with the kiss of dark eternity
so don't be afraid.

Remember those dead men
who sleep eternity away in cold dark boxes
dreaming (if it is possible) of wakeful life,
of wild hunts with the moon and stars above.

Close your little eyes
and I'll give you those dreams made flesh
every night shall have its romance
and there won't be a place for death or fear

and once you're properly trained
you'll stand in macabre temples for fools to covet
and how they'll scream
but you'll be so very proud,

a newborn god, and taking my hand
we'll look down upon our beautiful children
and we'll dance and sing
hymns to the night.
The Breakfast Meeting

In the first hours of the morning,
I find myself leafing through a menu of bacon and eggs,
of biscuits and dried beef gravy, of homemade pancakes.
There seem to be hundreds of homemade pancakes.
Perhaps I'm at the Village Inn.
I sit for a moment tempted by the hazy gloom
that cradles the world before sunrise,
dreaming that darkness can love me,
before dropping the menu and calling for the waitress.
Not until I see her eyes staring at me,
like the enhanced lenses of a hunter's scope,
do I recognize that she is inside the body of the woman I once loved.