

Dear Goth

by

Jay Newman

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Dear Goth

Jay Newman

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Signature:

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*Jay Newman*, Student

Date

Approvals:

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*Mary Biddinger*, Thesis Advisor

Date

---

*Catherine Wing*, Committee Member

Date

---

*Steven Reese*, Committee Member

Date

---

Dr. Salvatore A. Sanders, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies

Date

## ABSTRACT

*Dear Goth* is a collection of poems that chronicles the tumultuous life of a modern-day “goth kid” in small-town USA, how his musical heroes have influenced him, his relationships, and his ultimate conclusion that perhaps life isn’t all about doom and gloom all the time.

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For **Momo**,  
my **pale muse**.

For **Mary**,  
my **fairy gothmother**.

It was suffering and incapacity that created all  
afterworlds—this and that brief madness  
of bliss which is experienced only by those  
who suffer most deeply.  
Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
Yeats, “The Second Coming”

If you hate life, truly hate the sun, and need to smoke  
and drink coffee, you are Goth.  
If, however,  
you like dressing in black ‘cause it’s fun, enjoy putting sparkles  
on your cheeks and following the occult  
while avoiding things that are bad for your health,  
then you are most likely a douche bag vampire-wannabe boner  
because anybody who thinks they are actually a vampire  
is freaking retarded.  
Pete, *South Park*

## Every Day Should Be Halloween

My music is broken radios high and dry. Goth is dead, and only I care. Pop culture is just a cult without a leader. My makeup runs. I am lying to everyone.

The chronic union: Goth and entertainment re-smoked  
is unlike awaking. I live like cats in others' lives. Bittersweet as pumpkin ale.

I look in the mirror, droopy-faced, a lick, a scar-line on the cheek, an eye,  
a mask. A sky both black and white fuses my face.

I adjust my glasses sliding down my nose and lust for nothing. My contact lenses are  
black,  
but not prescription. Maybe if I sleep in them, they will become a part of me.



*Bildungsroman*

Under the bed,  
inside the closet,  
chasing shadows  
beneath the mirror.

Waiting.

Between the buried  
before the living,  
outside the window  
above the trees,  
against the edge  
of the cliff,  
among the deep  
behind the stairs,  
down the well  
within the cellar.

Whispering.

Underneath the stone  
of my father,  
beyond the walls  
of children's dreams,  
in this empty  
bottle of storms,  
beside broken eyelids.

Ripping  
    through the seams.

Life Is Pain (in the Shower)

When I am alone in a cloud  
of shower vapor, I remember my mother  
and how she used to dress  
me like a doll, make me up  
in powders, rouge, pleated suit,  
parted hair, and those ugly shoes  
that somehow echoed Mary Janes.

When I was nine, she sat me down  
in the living room for tea,  
and when I spilled one drop on her silk  
tablecloth, she dragged me by my ankles,  
threw me in her bedroom closet,  
and locked the door.

In the shower, my pruned fingers  
are the ones that clawed that closet door  
until they were bloody. Despite the warm water  
running down my back, I cannot stop  
thinking about how the knob wouldn't turn,  
how it kept me away from her touches.

I look down at my penis, and it is  
the warming, brass head on the door.  
I jerk the knob, turn it until I spill like my tea.  
The water stops, but I am still unclean.  
The shower cannot wash  
the doll away.

## Oedipus Complex

A young boy ripples  
toward a hole in the wall  
He peels a moth from it

He holds two others in his hand  
He reaches  
He brings it to his mouth

on all fours  
outlined in mold.  
plucks paper wings from its middle.

encloses them in his love grip.  
into the bleeding wall. Removes his sticky fist.  
bites his mother's half-eaten heart.

## Halloween Drag Queen

This cigarette tastes like moldy pumpkin strands,  
but that won't stop me from holding it  
between my fingers and inhaling  
what's left of Samhain.

Dressing myself up in these  
rollers and pear colored nails  
has nothing to do with it. These perfectly carved  
brows don't mean anything either.  
Makeup is security. Not vandalism.

I can't decide what shade  
to wear. Licorice Jackson  
or Strawberry Gash? Maybe even Grape  
Gilbert? No...I stick with black.  
If good is dead,  
I look like death in black.  
Mirrors never lie.

People often stare at my flesh  
when I stroll the sidewalks  
wearing what most women never could.  
But I am more divine than Divine,  
and I will continue to blow  
smoke into the glass until it stops  
saying *You're not me.*

Dear Robert Smith—

I wish you could be incensed  
again. When you clenched the teeth  
of your eyes and vomited ink  
from the vast well in your chest,

that was when you could see  
the pale flesh stretched across the antimatter  
of yourself. Your entire being was black  
as my pre-grafted skin and you didn't care

if everyone else died  
with you. I wanted to die too.  
NOW your mask does not scowl  
anymore, and you've painted your black car  
mint. All your Fridays are pink.

And I still look  
like a burnt Dali portrait with eyes  
hanging from my cheeks and missing ears  
when I look in the mirror,  
and nothing

has changed. But your ink is gone.  
A heart cannot start  
writhing in a dead man. You cannot be cured  
by rainbow-laced lyrics and major chords.  
You won't ever be able to look  
in the mirror again.

Last Call  
at the Voodoo Lounge

My palms are breaking  
bones. I do nothing  
but pound this tumbler

on the twinkling bar. Watch  
in black charm  
with frosted grins  
and slim jaws.

I am out.  
About to drink someone's sequined stares  
my sober self is too afraid to touch.

About to sleep  
with her skin  
in his silk-sheeted bed.

About to burn  
another room in his chest  
with a fifth of Jack Daniels  
and a soft, pallid body.

I should not take her  
from the corner stool.  
Tie her up.

Make her want to die  
and come back again.

I should just go home and sleep.  
Let him have the night  
in the morning.

## Oedipus Not So Complex

Here is a man trapped  
in white sheets, waiting  
for the wind to blow him free.

But here, interwoven  
in the leaves, no wind  
can so much as cough,

and no man will fall  
with the rains. Here is where  
man becomes the night.

## Laughing in the Dark

If you've got red on you,  
the haunted house isn't yours.

Stitches are not the answer.  
Neither is cutting your thighs in the tub.

Bath salts are apparently deadlier  
than jagged glass and rusty knives  
when ingested.

The messier it is, the more colorful  
it will be  
in long mirrors.

Funhouse glass is known  
to highlight facial features  
when shattered.

Youth is circling the drain  
while others watch you  
apply makeup with the lights off.



Dear Martin Gore and Dave Gahan—

Every time I hear the red pulse  
of your songs, I am violated  
by guitars, microphones and the velvet  
breath of rhythmic synths.

And while most men would be bothered  
by such a confession, I am savvy  
to the sway of hips and the waves  
of pain that crawl out of them.

But pain and pleasure are just  
about the same as God's sick sense of humor.

In "Personal Jesus." I thought  
you were saying *Reach out and touch  
Jay* because that's how the song  
penetrates me. It's the closest to ecstasy  
anyone can get without protection.

It also makes more sense to touch someone.  
You can't touch  
faith, and why would you want it  
instead of girls...or boys...or both?

It isn't about finding a private martyr.  
It's about pure, adulterated fucking.

You both know  
masters beat their servants  
with wooden splinters,  
and the servants let them.  
So I will be neither.

While you reach for the sex  
you cannot begin to fathom  
with ball gags in your mouths,  
I will continue to mishear your lyrics  
and blow smoke rings in the background.

## Insomnia

My pillow reeks  
of sour sweat and venom.  
Shadow serpents wrestle  
on the ceiling. A woman  
behind the wall whines of Jesus.  
Her song rattles  
my bedpost like trash can lids.  
Clang. Bang. Clang. Bang.

A red-eyed raccoon hisses  
from a void  
in the corner. I look  
away. The crick  
in my leg reverberates, a shrieking  
tuning fork.

Not even pleasure  
can make this body  
relax. The red numbers of the alarm  
clock climb slow. Minutes lose  
to eternity as my brain somersaults  
and screeches in my skull.

Ears bleed black  
in the moonlight. The bag of sand  
empty at the bedside. Morpheus left  
it last night and did not promise  
to return. I long for ceiling glitter,  
something to sing me to sleep.  
I close my eyes and pray  
my dreams won't wilt  
from lack of sleep.

## Coffee Etiquette

One's coffee can never  
be too bitter to bite the tongue.  
The darker, the better.

Darker coffee means bolder  
buds, like boulders crunching the lungs.  
One's coffee can never

be too cold either.  
Cold coffee is better than none,  
and the darker, the better.

The heart can always beat faster  
especially if young.  
One's coffee can never

explode a heart, however,  
unless he drinks a ton.  
The darker, the better.

If black blood spews out the drinker's  
mouth, then I am wrong.  
One's coffee can be darker,  
darker and always better.

Life Is Pain (in the Mall)

If the woman in line wearing the slop  
stained, pink camisole, knew  
that in this moment, my world revolved  
around my wanting to tear the skin  
and yellow fat from her body  
so that she could smother  
her whining kids with her filth, I wouldn't mind.

Here, I am only a number in a person  
mask someone bought at Wal Mart. Here, I have  
no discerning characteristics but the blackness  
of my uniform, but I do own my arthritis.  
Tonight, my muscles pull themselves  
further and further away from their joints  
as easy as this woman's swollen digits pull apart  
string cheese.

I am not a person. I am string-fucking cheese,  
and here she comes to help my hips along  
the way, which I decide is okay,  
since the management has made the font  
of my nametag the same as everyone else's—  
too small to read.

Slop-stain woman hands me a twenty  
from her cleavage for her entertainment. I give her  
change, bag her entertainment, smile, and say *Thank you.*  
*Have a great day.* She says nothing. Snatches her  
bagged entertainment from my outstretched hand.

My arm is flushed because she pulled it  
like string cheese and looked at me like I was dinner.  
My wrist does not exist  
as a joint connected to the hand bones. It is pulled apart  
string cheese too.

The woman drags her children out the door and feeds them  
the part of me she took with her. I excuse myself  
to the lavatory and shit diarrhea. I am lactose intolerant,  
allergic to myself.

Dear Siouxsie Sioux—

Would it be weird  
if I said you were still  
the one I want to beat me  
with a studded and spiked bondage belt  
after all these years? What would get me  
in the door of your happy house with zebra  
upholstered furniture and rugs  
made from the skins of hyenas?

Is it strange that I want to reach  
into your doorways and twirl around  
wearing a Stevie Nicks shawl while eating  
the nightshade you've grown in your Hong Kong garden?

I am drunk from your juju—  
the slips of your lips, the spells in your eyes  
framed in sharp, black-lined designs—so I will  
have to let you drive.

I've lost my glasses and I don't believe  
in contacts. I'm sure my eye makeup is smeared  
after all this whining. I'm dying to be  
your whipping boy. I would do anything to be  
tied up.

Please, just don't take me home.

*La Petite Mort*

1.  
Laura was Korean,  
bespectacled, and too young  
to know Nintendo.  
But she was ripe enough  
to let me. I was fast but not fast  
enough. She stayed  
colder than yellow moons. Didn't  
reciprocate. Left me limp.

2.  
Ally was a waitress way out  
of my league: voluptuous and,  
regrettably, blond. Her eyes  
were too blue, breasts too  
small for the rest of her, but I  
was confused drunk. She said  
I was hairy; I was primal,  
premature.

3.  
Marley was a suicidal rail  
who loved black coffee, her wrist  
scars, and her insulin.  
She wanted me; she wanted  
death. She didn't want to talk  
about Satan over cigarettes  
in bed. At four a.m. we drove  
to Denny's. I got diarrhea  
and turned off.

4.  
Jay was a failure  
with himself in bed.  
The wrist joints were stiff  
and much too sore to come  
into the darkness. And porn  
just wasn't working anymore.  
When porn broke  
and his penis didn't,  
he decided it was time  
for something more permanent.

## Dead Soul

Raven bleached  
his feathers yesterday because  
he was bored with begetting  
death and sick  
of taxiing souls to dead lands.

He ordered blue contacts,  
changed his name to "Cockatoo,"  
applied for a job serving  
nectar and seed  
cakes at his local Skybucks.

Maybe other birds would take  
him seriously if they  
saw him fight  
his own cliché. If only  
he could coin  
a better catchphrase  
than *Nevermore*.

## The Poser's Lament

Here's a man in a smiling bag  
hanging on the wall.  
He can no longer breathe  
but days ago he was  
just like me: black lines  
under his eyes.

Then he wasn't.  
The record screeched  
and stopped. He clutched his chest,  
pulled out his heart  
with his own fingers.

He didn't leave  
a note. He disappeared  
without returning  
my last call. I hung up  
without recording  
a message.

I remember  
the last memory, when I knew  
something he didn't: Clan of Xymox.  
I played *Medusa*. He claimed to know them,  
Then I saw we had withered  
into carved, half-eaten pumpkins.

He molted and left  
a transparent, smoky shell  
in place of his body.  
I kept it.  
He always said he would  
haunt me, and now he's on  
my wall.

Wrapped in plastic.  
Perfectly preserved. Stuffed  
with frankincense, fresh patchouli,  
dried eucalyptus, and blue opium.  
Hands and feet bound with barbed wire.  
Eyes dead coals. Shriveled lips.  
An industrial Jesus Christ.

Here's a man in a smiling bag  
hanging on the wall. I plug him in  
and wait for him to pop into light.  
Black streaks fall from his coals.  
He is alive. Alive and like me  
until the smile is gone.



Dear Nick Cave—

I must request you play  
my next birthday party because I feel  
you're the only person who understands  
that birthdays are not about cake.

Birthday parties are about grime,  
and birthdays are like the plucking  
of bass lines felt deep down  
in the pelvis.

Birthday parties are about blowing  
ink out of water. No matter how hard  
you try, it cannot be done. The ink swirls  
like blood circling down a toilet,  
but it never mixes, never blends  
into new substance.

You are the King of Ink,  
and your red right hand has tattooed mine  
with the taint of alone despite the body  
of a warm woman in my bed who does not speak  
our language.

I listen to your *Murder Ballads* and want to be  
the bad motherfucker called Stagger Lee  
so that I can tell her I don't love her  
like she loves me, so that I can find  
my zoo music girl to pound me with broken knuckles  
until I am bruised with love's blue brush.

Sir Nick, birthday parties are about fucking  
the world with a dick pierced by the bones  
of bats, but mine is limp  
without your baritone vocal chords  
wrapped around my ears.

*Vagina Dentata*

Spotted, like a cow's  
cleft, this hole—aureoled by string  
rings—is a velveteen planet.

I want to  
reach into  
its wet-felted fissure,  
scrape the discharged silken gauze  
lining its walls.

A woolen strand lingers,  
whispers *reach in*. Fingers  
split, brush alchemy,  
then pain—sharp—knuckles  
gone.

## Walnut Beach

A heart-shaped gull curls on the sand, at peace with surging winds blowing in, sucking out from the lake. I walk with my lover along the beach. Sand teeth nip our heels. We tiptoe

on browning sea grass and fish skeletons with hollow eye sockets. One by the jetty is ripe, oozing from a bite in its side. Its one wide eye sympathizes with the sun-

bleached driftwood spelling *Help*. She picks up a freshwater crab claw, pinches her pinky. Something is amiss. Even clouds know no color

will be on the water today. We peer at them, behold a pile of clothes and empty pair of shoes stacked neatly on the shore. The owner backstrokes between the rocks and buoys. We turn,

make our way up the hillside to a leafless tree, twisted on the overhang with blood-poison vines. I see how she wants to touch them, let them sting her blind, but she resists, holds my hand

as the air breathes down our gullets. We look at the buoys in the distance, swaying shadows below the clouds. The swimmer is gone, vanished. Nothing disturbs the water now

except the ringing buoys and dead air. The speck of clothing washes away with the tide; pale silver lights reflect the surface of the lake and scald the fish beneath nervous breakers.

The lights are happenstance. The clouds have made a mistake, and the breeze flicks her hair so brisk it burns the freckles from her cheeks. Thunder claps from the edge

of the world chase us back to the car below. Sea glass whips our windshield. Leviathan's earth-shattering shower makes us shiver with the blinkers on—waiting, waiting.

Close Encounter: Liberty Park

Shooting up. Stars fall. Car dips  
in the road. Clock on the dash reads  
1:17 a.m. then stops.

Analog parts make digital circuits.  
Inverted pulses cross the sky.  
Our wireworked cortexes must

malfunction. Glitter balls zip  
into the void. Between  
Vega and Polaris, we see them. People  
call us godless, but we believe in truth

and lights in the sky. We believe  
in the hairs on our backhands.  
We believe our eyes are quick enough.

Dear Peter Murphy—

When I heard the news  
that you suddenly compromised  
everything you had built—  
the red-velvet-lined, black  
box, the bats in the bell tower,  
the translucent black capes—  
for faith, I began to question  
my faith in you.

I saw you  
as a martyr who abandoned  
the girls with wild, veiled hair in black  
waves of dresses, dresses that spin  
in fog forever—around and around—  
to the genre you created. You feared  
the black-lined gazes staring you down.

When I heard there was no news—  
that Goth was never your faith,  
that you pretended to be a “vampire”  
in *The Twilight Saga*, that you had abandoned  
thirty years of Bauhaus and strobe lights  
to be popular—  
my faith was never coming back.

When I hear the news  
that one day you are bleeding  
to death from the very stigmata you made  
holy in the flat field,  
I will ask this question:  
Who will save the man who sold Goth  
for thirty pieces of silver?

To Jeffrey's Pipe,

I've seen you once or twice before, in Jeffrey's mouth.  
Long and coiling outward toward pompous conversation,  
you breathed from mahogany wood grains the smoke  
of a thousand wise men before—Vincent Price, Arthur  
Conan Doyle, Tolkien—and made me wonder why I don't  
grow a wizard's beard, finger the sticky tobacco, and scrape  
a match against my cheek. For puffing a pipe while wearing  
a smoking jacket translates as intellectual gentleman,  
and blowing smoke in the mist of a rainstorm on a cool,  
June morning is even further indication of such an esquire.

Then again, dear pipe, upon closer inspection, you look  
rather cheap. Perhaps you aren't real mahogany at all  
but some kind of varnish, and maybe the fancy curves  
you're so proud of, all the way up to your mouthpiece,  
are merely plastic. The rotten bananas on the counter  
smell better than you. You make lungs turn darker  
than clouds, first in splotches, then in patches,  
then in whole chunks. Rotten bananas and stormy lungs  
wearing velvet smoking jackets in pine green lawn chairs.

But what do the government and doctors really know?  
The *surgeon-general's-warning* malarkey is theoretical.  
Sophistication can't kill me. I take you off the shelf, turn you  
over in my hands. You may not be handmade, but you don't say  
*Made in China*. I pour myself a glass of Ezra Brooks on the rocks,  
put on my dark jacket, make a vow not to shave for a while.  
I fill you with sticky shreds, scrape a match against my stubble.  
I snap a selfie with you hanging from my mouth, whiskey glass  
in hand, and upload it to my profile with a caption: *words  
come easier with the slow burn of learned men.*

## Hotbox

There's nothing left to do  
but crawl through blankets  
and clothes to crease our flesh.

Your breath comes closer  
to the precipice before a void opens  
in the center of my chest.

Reaching past the ribs is not enough  
to scrape the back of my throat.  
Nothing works to still the flow.

Burning streams in and out  
every tangled strand and tendon.  
Your hands smell of smoke

and pumpkins. Your body is white  
and mine is pink. You are smooth.  
I am coarse. We do not belong.

But our lungs are the same sick shade  
of purple. When there is no more face  
to shatter your eyes, I will eat your ether  
until I'm a paler shade of you.

## Snakeplants

Reach for the nightlamp.  
Shut off the blue glow.  
Make a dream out of hair.  
Put the hairdream under  
your pillow. It's yours to keep.

Take the dream and bury it  
in your pillowgarden. Enrich it  
with nightsand and ghost stone water.  
Watch it sprout. Tend it wisely  
until it blooms violet.

Make more dreams  
from fingernails, sweat, lost  
teeth. Plant these in the corners  
of your pillowgarden. Watch them

grow, sway, like your milk snake did.  
They eat rodents, tail ends first,  
swallow them whole.

The only difference:  
your dreamflowers in your pillowgarden  
do not slither away. They continue  
to sway in your warmth.



Oh, My Goth!

If it is too bright outside,  
then bring an umbrella  
because sunshine murders the pale.

Sunshine makes us sweat, and sweat  
makes makeup smear and run, so bring  
along skull powder, lipstick, and shadow.

The color of shadow is Midnight Mass,  
the color of clothes, a reminder  
of insistent death. Death is not a state of being,

but a philosophy to make us see the brilliance  
of what we are: drifters, musicians, poets.  
But we are *not* vampires, *not* posers.

This is not a style. We reflect the pain  
and futility of life and the comfort of death.  
Death makes us hang out in cemeteries,

smoke clove cigarettes, and drink coffee  
with nothing in it. Nothing encircles us.  
Others, conformists, they think they are living,

but really they're slowly dying. Dying is nihilism  
in a trenchcoat. Like nothing matters  
if we all die, like empty glasses, empty songs

on vinyl records covered in cobwebs.  
The tracks snap, crackle, and pop like spiders  
on fire. Move the webs, weave the webs.

Twirl and spin in the webs. Wear the webs.  
Eat the webs. Backmask. Listen to the whisper:  
*we are all spiders on fire.*

*Jeffrey Dahmer Files after Midnight*

The credits roll. My hangnail bleeds. I don't know  
what to do. Stomach cramps. More whiskey  
to melt through the stomach and bite  
the skin. I'm no zombie though,

not a biter. My Calico is, though. Turned my finger  
into a sexless nub, but he left  
the hangnail. Always comes back,  
that one. Snipped it last week. Cats aren't into hanging,

I guess. Jeffrey Dahmer is back  
from Hell. At first, my finger, then my head.  
My girlfriend's safe since Dahmer only likes  
boys. And that simple preference means

I'm about to die. They say brains die  
after fingers, but I find that my grey matter baked  
slow on YouTube. So maybe I am undead  
like the brains onscreen. Perhaps I should fight Dahmer

for finger food, eat myself  
on the carpet. One last meal. I crawl  
across the brackish rug, try sneaking,  
all corpse, and grope for my succulent

finger, but Dahmer is savvy, knows  
my plan. He runs away with dinner. I snarl,  
and—*Wake up, you drunk!* my girlfriend screams,  
*You're bleeding all over my rug!*

## Skinny Jeans

cannot exist apart  
surface lesions.  
to deny that these sores  
But there's no other option

in such a coarse fur coat.  
from ingrown hairs  
These pants are too tight  
instead of one button

are nothing more  
for the hips and legs.  
the waistband

I've tried everything.  
being torn  
And that was just  
waxing genitals

Nair smells  
dipped in vomit.  
of cum, and spending  
just can't be good.

when the skin  
does not cover  
either. So I'm stuck  
and band aids.

repeat until healed.  
only cover up so much.  
more hairs. More grow in

Plucking hairs out  
make the dots go away.  
my girlfriend only makes  
rip. More pustules

I am hideous  
want me anymore  
covered in band aids.  
in anything. It's not

from covering up  
I want  
define my pubic skin.  
when covered

Purple abscesses form  
shaved over and hidden.  
in the crotch. Three buttons  
and a zipper. These pants

than a black straightjacket  
I take them off, roll down  
of my boxer briefs.

Waxing feels like my skin  
with every single hair.  
my back. I can't imagine  
feels any better.

like cucumbers  
The texture reminds me  
too long with *that* on the skin  
Besides, Nair only works

is not broken. Insurance  
laser removal or electrolysis  
with rubbing alcohol  
Clean, apply bandage,

Here's the thing: Band aids  
Replacing them only pulls out  
underneath the skin.

with tweezers doesn't always  
Fucking and rubbing against  
the skin redder as more hairs  
come to their heads.

in this mirror. She will not  
with these splotches all over  
They don't really aid  
their fault though. It's the *pants*.

Life Is Pain (Waiting for the Mail)

I am a roast slab of stay-puffed bats.  
There are no shadows on the curb.

She sits next to me and paints her nails  
a blooming shade of pink. I seethe and wonder why

she wants to be brighter than me. I am on fire.  
My white skin glows red. Pink is no longer

possible. She looks away from her fingers,  
her eyes full of stones. Laughs at the sweat

on my nose. *Go into the dark before you burn*  
she says. But my package will surely be stolen.

Others wouldn't like what they'd find inside  
the box. They'd run when they saw my melted head.

Dear Andrew Eldritch—

Stop—just stop pretending  
your sperm worms did not birth  
thousands of pale, pockmarked children  
with clove-clouded lungs.

Stop denying Doktor Avalanche  
and his drum beats never delivered them,  
still connected to their soiled placentas with pine  
needles and earth dust trickling  
from their mouths.

Your smoke is their breath,  
your sunglasses their shields, your leather  
their skins. Their heartbeats your drum machines, cries  
your cocksure baritone.

Without your children,  
you will be the father of nothing  
but this corrosion of gears and pistons,  
steamless and congealed  
with hardened grease.

Where is Marian? Lucretia? The ideals  
you created to save you from the grave  
have drowned in colors and denial. They never existed  
because you did not follow

The First Rule of Goth: you do not deny  
that you believe in nothing. The Second Rule of Goth:  
you do not deny that you are the figurehead  
of nothing. If you continue to reject the rules, you should kill us  
before we eat you for our last meal.

The sun is rising  
on this planet you once called black. Your smoke  
is no longer thick enough to eclipse its teeth. When your ozone  
finally goes, we will all melt into nothing  
but piles of black clothes  
because you made us enemies.

So either let us eat you or die  
with your children as we all meet the sun  
together. This is the way  
your world ends, not with the flood  
but with your screams in the grand floodlight.

## Oedipus Complex in Front of an Oak

Acorns scatter away  
from the veins  
of the red middle and strike  
my combat boots.

On tiptoe, I grip  
the knothole at the core  
of the trunk. I want  
to know the color

of oak blood,  
stroke her rings,  
but she drones,  
and a skull-

backed, lemon-vested  
carpenter bee  
anoints my forehead  
with holy honey.

## A-Maized

Lost among grey corn stalks, I wander with my lover under a scarlet moon: a bloody, smirking face. We twist in the labyrinth under the red glow, turn around at dead ends, can't find the way.

Breaths leave her mouth in wisps and build webs with mine. Our hands are cracked and numb; we left our gloves behind. We shiver at human-owl screeches.

I squeeze her hand and remember a story she told of a white-haired creature with an abysmal stare. It looked up at her from the creek bed as she stepped over it and ran.

Another inhuman cry resonates through the stalks; we turn at the next junction, quicken our pace. We slip and squelch in something we hope is only smashed pumpkins.

A corn stem crunches at the corner; it is only her, looking beyond the stalks into blackness. My hand brushes a jutting shuck, a brittle washboard skin. She crushes a weakened kernel.

Heavy footsteps rustle behind. We begin to run, turn again, but the footsteps increase in tempo. We find our way into a clearing, and next to an overturned metal barrel. A grey coyote pecks

flesh from pale bones. The canine squawks, takes flight. She kneels down, says the ribs look human. The footsteps start again.

I touch her shoulder. She spins around, blinds me with her flashlight. I back away. A towering silhouette approaches. Her eyes are silver diodes; her hands shake. She doesn't move.

My lamp is shattered. The shadow hulks closer. I raise the broken lantern. The shadow grunts My love closes her eyes. I lunge, swing down upon the shadow's head until it grunts no more.

Its hands extend in protest, then collapse. My love recoils, shines her beam, shrieks. The abysmal stare isn't there, just a bludgeoned man. I look away to the bloody, smirking moon.

Dear Rozz Williams—

If the hangman is a fool,  
then you must be the noose  
of the neo-Goth tarot deck.  
Except in this deck, your card  
is upside down, and you are the metaphor  
for naiveté, unrefined  
like dirty sugar covered in ants  
taking away crystal after crystal.

Hope recedes  
with the leaves on trees and the men  
hanging from their stoic limbs.  
Their faces are covered in wet shades  
of scarlet, ochre, and burnt sienna.

Their feet  
dangle, like yours, pointed  
at the floor, wanting to be level, wanting  
to be kissed like you wanted your hand  
to be kissed after dark.

But the Dark is dead,  
and the sky cannot go out  
when the sun is always on. The crosses  
burn within you, without you. Your distress  
will always be  
because you never wanted to be.



## Portrait of Satan Sitting on a Bench

Satan wishes that he was the one who wrote “Hip to Be Square.”

Satan’s jealousy falls somewhere between Freud (who was square) and Nietzsche (who was hip).

Satan is neither hip nor square because Satan says he’s a natural born individual.

Satan dances in front of a mirror to 80s synth pop.

Satan puts cocoa butter on the skin after bathing in scented oils.

Satan shaves his head and his goatee and rubs more cocoa butter on the skin.

Satan puts on white setting powder, mascara, and Pink Lady lipstick.

Satan puts on a long brunette wig and styles the hair with Living Proof Flex Shaping Hairspray he ordered from Sephora.

Satan drinks Constant Comment in the middle of the afternoon while feeding the pigeons because people scare him. At home,

Satan hides behind his cat that he named Satan because Satan the cat understands that men with small penises drive diesel pick-up trucks. Satan does not drive a truck, obviously.

Satan drives a black Beetle with a leather interior because he thinks it’s sexy.

Satan is sexy in the women’s underwear from Victoria’s Secret and the red dress he bought at Express.

Satan finds New Order sexy also, although Joy Division is sexier because they are more depressing.

Satan is not depressed, even though the Kentucky bourbon he drinks on a nightly basis is a depressant.

Satan finds bourbon to be a hearty immune booster. Garlic and cayenne are also immune boosters.

Satan is not a carnivore (carnivorism is a myth). Satan prefers vegetarian (this is not a myth); in fact,

Satan’s favorite dish is hummus with extra garlic and Frank’s Red Hot (hot sauce is an expected immune booster). True enough,

Satan never gets sick, although Robert Palmer’s “Simply Irresistible” makes him sick.

Satan prefers something with a little more soul, like David Bowie’s “Five Years.”

Satan is a poet who likes to write poems about how angry it makes him to sit through *Rosemary’s Baby*. Satan is sterile and not really such a bad guy. After all, it’s manly to cross dress in public.

Satan is vulnerable and often questions his sexuality because of how he feels about John Cusack.

Satan is vulnerable and often questions his sexuality because of his fixation with water.

Satan is vulnerable and often questions his sexuality when he looks at passing women and feels nothing.

Satan would dance to “Pump Up the Volume” in angel wings (wearing nothing but hot pants) at the Limelight if he could, but the Limelight is closed, so Satan is sad and alone on this bench, doped up on Percocet and Sylvia Plath.

Satan masturbates when he is sad and alone, even though he mounts his girlfriend regularly and performs cunnilingus with his forked tongue. Of course, it isn’t really forked, Satan’s tongue.

Satan has no horns, but he is horny.

Satan is not a demon unless people are demons. If people are demons, then

Satan is just a man, a cross-dressed man, who right now bears a striking resemblance to a dark-haired Jayne Mansfield, staring off into the distance beyond the park.

## Cat Sonnet

He sits on the windowsill  
like some kind of martyr  
watching the water drip and spill  
and drip and tap and pitter-patter  
all morning long. He trills  
and asks it to fall faster.  
It does. Then he's silent, still,  
possessed by something far greater  
than a god behind a curtain until  
he comes back down a little smarter.  
He rests his head on Blanket Hill  
because his eyes have seen the water  
outside raining thicker than oil.  
He does not uncurl from his coil.

Life is Pain (Doctor's Waiting Room)

An ample metal shiv  
feels like it's being sucked  
from my pelvis by a mammoth  
horseshoe magnet. And I see you  
across the room, holding the magnet  
in your chest like breath  
and sucking me to you. I can barely

walk, let alone sit  
on this purple ass. Yesterday, the anvil  
you dropped  
on my lower back did not make  
the pain go away in other places. I hate

my swollen wrists,  
my molasses lungs,  
my bent, aching, straw fingers. I am  
the floor of the city bus in this  
mute-palette cartoon life.

I sit on a lopsided couch,  
and watch you shake silently  
without laughing out loud. The boulder  
you pushed down the hillside this morning  
grows on my shoulders  
like a calcified hump. The drugs help

less and less, and you give me  
no more. To move  
is pain, to not move  
is pain, to look at you  
is pain. Every breath  
lets in more sharp presents  
wrapped in smoke.

Have You Stood atop an Abandoned Fire Tower Today?

He contemplates  
down and sees  
hundred feet above  
what it'd be like  
below a puddle  
with the smoke  
Fear is one  
the drop more  
is more silver  
breakable than her

his death  
how insignificant  
the bleeding tree line  
to become jelly  
of bone yeast  
of a thousand  
with his heart  
than his girlfriend  
than her skin  
Yet he wants her skin

when he looks  
he is eleven  
He wonders  
in the rock garden  
that will rise  
dying campfires  
He might want  
The cold wet quarry  
He wants to be more  
to eclipse his own

## Oedipus Cannot Abort His Complex

He cannot stroke  
this silver breast,  
nippleless, or remove it  
from its cradle,

cannot breach  
its mother,  
foldless, shelled  
in peach skin.

He cannot savor  
its insides, the blackest  
bundle of celluloid  
hair.

He cannot see  
it sparkle  
in darkness, a prism-  
addled membrane.

All he can do  
is beat himself  
helpless until his hands  
crack and bleed yolk.

No good  
will come from this  
if he still can't have  
what's inside her.

## Smoking Cloves on the Dock

This wetlands, in winter, is a graveyard,  
everything frozen and dead.

The lines in the ice are pensive cords  
that link like chains of dread.

Everything is frozen, dead,  
and brittle: silver whispers  
that link like chains of dread  
in cold shadows and grey winds.

Brittle, silver whispers  
break the ends of cat tails  
in cold shadows. Grey winds  
chaps our exposed skin

and break like the ends of cat tails  
in the spaces of black water.  
It chaps our exposed skin  
that stands rigid in fear

of the spaces of black water.  
We exhale broken rings of smoke  
and stand rigid in fear  
of drowning in the silent dark.

We exhale broken rings of smoke.  
In this wetland winter graveyard  
with the drowning silent dark,  
ice lines are pensive cords.

.

## Thrill Kill Show

A girl in a heroin black dress and combat boots  
smokes herbal cigarettes on the deck. She stumbles  
into me. Words blur under the beats. I have to piss.

There is no door to the bathroom stall  
covered in black graffiti. I've never seen  
so many *fucks* given away in one place.

I buy a Pabst Blue Ribbon at the bar,  
a tallboy, and return to the smoking deck.  
My buddy Jon leans on the brick wall.

He smokes another Marlboro and another  
until he forgets that he is not Ryan Gosling.  
Heroin girl is gone, but she left the box

of her Ecstasies in the ashtray. I take it,  
turn it around in my hand, brush the butterfly  
on the front, slip the box in my back pocket.

I don't tell Jon I have Ecstasy in my pants.  
I tell him to snub his smoke  
and come inside to watch the show.

Life Is Pain (Holding a Cat)

but it shouldn't be. I should not be pretending  
that a ten-pound ball of cotton with claws  
makes me want to slowly saw off my arms  
with a plastic butter knife.

But I am not pretending. The cat is an overfed  
American fatass who eats more Meow Mix  
than I eat actual people food. He is too much  
for my swollen, knotted limbs.

This current prescription is not enough to stop me  
from hating the creeping winter tightening my muscles  
like shrinkwrap. The drugs are not even enough to let me  
hold a cat without wincing. And the worst part is

that I am constantly reminded  
that I deserve all of this. His white fur sticks  
to every part of my black hoodie, my pants,  
my socks. Like the cat, pain always comes back.



Dear Ian Curtis—

I wonder if I could do it  
better than you. See, I am having thoughts  
I might act on—about a girl—  
which wouldn't be a problem  
if I were single. But like you, I have  
a devoted woman, and she is my shadow  
in the moonlight.

But I am losing control, losing  
myself, and even though I'm older  
than twenty-three, I feel  
backed into the catch-22 of love. I keep looking  
through your simple, bleak melodies  
for answers, but I find none. The prospect  
of giving in

to a woman with a blacker soul  
sounds like God but feels like splinters  
in my eyes. I'd rather not think  
about that, but this is a killing joke. I get it,  
why you did it, why I might do it too,  
the loss of control that perversely mirrors  
the pressure of choice.

Glass shards in the nether regions  
are treatable. Loss of libido is manageable.  
But the mind is the cruelest muscle  
to have eaten away. To lose  
all recollection of having done so,  
while the world watches, is worse.

And to wake with that other woman  
in mind instead of my own, and to think  
that she might be some fucked form  
of salvation would drive me to it. But a noose  
just isn't my style. I wouldn't be able to stand  
the grip of the washing line, strangling away  
my seconds of remaining breath. I won't do it  
in the kitchen. Every time my girl would make dinner,  
she would think of me, hanging,  
an everlasting lull, my tongue sticking out.

## Last Night I Vanished Twice

and woke on the kitchen floor.  
I didn't check the time, but I was wet  
from the leaking sink overhead.

The rainbow letters from the fridge  
scattered on the floor. The remaining few  
still stuck to the door spelled *sex bomb*.

The cat did not even see me. I could have  
slammed six shots of Crown  
and flicked him on the nose.

I am not familiar  
with my disappeared self, either. He has  
no reflection. I can't see his hands.

His nails might not be painted  
with Inkwell polish. He probably  
doesn't wear skulls on his fingers.

My disappeared self could be a hermit  
who watches the neighbors sleep  
because he has nothing better to do.

He might even be an emasculated  
cuckold when he's not pretending to be me.  
Christ. He might not even wear eyeliner.

## Have You Stood Inside a Dead Tree Today?

Up the path, we hear the *buzz*  
between the halls of rock at the end of day.  
Coats of melting ice wax  
the walls. Low-end frequencies, zero point  
six decibels louder than yoga, pierce  
our eardrums like the sharp sticks  
poking our ankles. She glides  
on a narrow ice sheet.

Bliss is blowing clouds from open  
mouths. Air just isn't enough. So she exhales  
cumulus gloom, monochrome-shaded,  
without lightning or rain. She is afraid  
I will fall from a high  
black rock quilted with moss. I hop  
down. We continue reaching  
for the *buzz*, for nothing, for us. I sense

we are nearing death. The tree  
before us is an egg, lifeless  
and open. She stands inside, deaf, vain,  
and brooding. Somehow we wanted  
this all along: to pretend Xenon  
is breathable. Pale bulb, she has been  
the *buzzing* all along.

## Love Cat

I must be delirious  
when I hear the crunching  
over by the cat's food dish.

There is nothing there.  
My cat is gone.

I cannot possibly see  
his shadow touched by the sun  
behind the curtain.

I don't believe it.  
My cat is gone.

I do not see him  
scurry behind the window blinds  
out of the corner of my eye.

I couldn't have.  
My cat is gone.

Then again, I see the blinds swaying  
too. I close my eyes. Feel his whiskers  
against my face.

Dear Morrissey—

I have walked through the gates  
of the cemetery behind my house.  
Not everyone can say they have a graveyard  
as a backyard, not even you.

You once said that you were happy  
around cemeteries, so by your logic  
I should be the happiest son-of-a-bitch  
in town. But I am not.

I come to this place  
to think. No one talks  
but my inner monologue. And it keeps telling me  
to deal with my girlfriend.

She won't go away. She does not see  
that we are not the same. I am the sine wave.  
She is the cosine. But I can't bring myself  
to tell her we do not share the same dreams  
anymore. I might as well kill her.

I search the pages of your *Autobiography*  
for some kind of answer, but all I find  
is how much of a bitch you think Siouxsie is.  
What does that tell me about my life?  
I am not Siouxsie Sioux.

I listened to *Louder Than Bombs*  
five fucking times, and with every listen,  
I bawled my eyes out when "Asleep" came on.  
I am tired too. I want to go to bed.

Soon has become now.  
and now I will be silent. She cannot know  
I have betrayed her like your brothers  
betrayed you. I am a Pharisee  
because I'm burying parts of myself and telling  
no one but you. The earth pours over my head  
and crunches between my teeth. I taste  
my rusted blood on it.

I wanted to die with her,  
but not today. You have to receive  
my confession. Please, forgive me, Father Moz  
so that my ringing ears will stop,  
so that I may sleep tonight.

O-U-I-J-A

Whiskey, full of grit, bites May's tongue  
like snuffbox tidewater  
at high noon. My black star planchette  
tells me so. It glides like ointment  
over the slippery elm board, distrusts my broken  
bottle hand.

I am just trying to reach  
myself, but the thief  
candle I lit is no more than a coffin  
nail in a pile of dust. There is no me,  
only May,  
and she smells of sulphur.

She says she's paddling up  
the Styx in a canoe. She sucks on a sliver  
of snakeroot because she likes  
the bite. She cannot

remember the way home, somewhere  
past the Brass Ring, she thinks. I wish I knew  
how to help, so she'll go away, but she doesn't leave  
directions, just my black star  
pointed at *Goodbye*.

Death,

For seventeen seconds of never  
I want to be a raven  
bound in rope and dangled  
from a building if it means

I can pretend I'm drunken  
stupid on the blink.  
But we're all pretending  
in suits and dresses

and uniforms to be all we  
never wanted. Before we know  
there are no words to this song,  
cats will shed their fur, grow

wings and eat me. Then I will hear  
you whisper in my ear  
that my heart  
never had any keys.

## Ritual for Binding the Shadow Self

The beak of this rook shall sever the hold.

This string will strain  
the stream of blood  
once cut, wilted, put inside  
the mouth. Mix  
with myrrh and sage  
and swallow with winter wine.

Once finished filling  
the filthy void,  
concentrate.

Concern yourself with chords.  
Bind the beak  
with black cords.

Take the bundled beak quick.  
Bury it under a corner stone.  
Wait one week.

Dig up the beak, burn the cords, and boil  
the beak.

Bite the beak, hard.  
Break teeth.  
Bleed.

Kiss the beak.  
Trick your eyes, and stick it  
somewhere warm.

Wait for it to forget you.  
Fear the folds of alone.



Life Is Pain (in the Bathroom Mirror)

The lines are always there  
underneath my eyes, the dark streaks  
that make me a cliché.  
Lines enclose me in a skin  
that doesn't want anyone  
to come in. When it peels,  
I am nothing  
but flesh in a trashbag uniform.

The uniform makes me  
paler than the sun allows.  
I ache from vitamin D deficiency.  
Water cannot wash it away. I am always tired  
during the day. Being out in the sun  
is no different to me  
than sitting inside a microwave  
for five minutes, on high.

The only reason I am standing here  
at the height of noon  
is because I drank more Folgers  
and smoked more Camels  
than a human should. Otherwise, I'd be dead  
by three. And that won't work  
if there are other lines to cross,  
other loves to push me out  
to touch the breeze.

Sitting here  
contemplating the future of Goth

I wonder if  
in a tattered La-Z-Boy  
I have hit the bottom  
There's no coming back  
She is pissed  
She is not Patricia Morrison  
immersing myself  
smoking a pipe  
finding meaning  
I enjoy because  
to Cocteau Twins  
good, old-fashioned

Robert Smith once said  
the incessant longing  
forever. This means  
I just flipped  
Lana Del Rey is not Goth  
just like I reach  
Maybe it's just hiding

my kind is dead  
with blue balls  
This is the end  
from the floor  
She is so fucking dreamy  
She does not dress  
in Alien Sex Fiend  
underneath  
in the words and music  
somehow  
mixed with Kate Bush  
American

the whole point of  
of what has been  
Goth is a paradox  
the record  
though she reaches back  
for the exact enigma  
between the cracks

But then here I am  
moping to Lana Del Rey  
my big comedown  
because Lana is sad  
She is not Siouxsie  
in black. I should be  
but here I am  
a string of twinkle lights  
of a pop star  
she's a throwback  
and she seems to understand  
hyperbole

The Cure was  
knowing it was gone  
and so am I because  
it's only on side 2 of 4  
to what has been  
Maybe Goth isn't dead  
in the vinyl.

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