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# The Bearded Man

Scott Lutz

*Eastern Illinois University*

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THE BEARDED MAN

LUTZ

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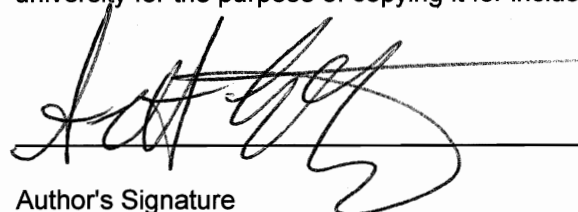
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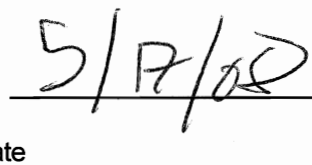
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The Bearded Man

(TITLE)

BY

Scott Lutz

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2008

YEAR

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The Bearded Man

Poems

Scott Lutz  
Eastern Illinois University  
2008

## Abstract

*The Bearded Man* is a collection of poems conceived around the theme of mythmaking. Mythmaking in these poems manifests itself as a means of translating or filtering the outside world through a fantasist lens that creates an alternate interpretation of the natural world. However, the project quickly grew beyond myth and evolved into tall-tale-like poems. My purpose in writing or constructing these modern-day tall-tales or fabricated takes on reality, is to enable the reader to reacquaint themselves with the impossible, and to remind the reader that not everything needs to be explained through logic or science. But I suppose ultimately the purpose of these poems is to delight and entertain the reader in their unique approach to illustrating the world.

## Dedications

This project is dedicated to the memories of three dead friends:

William Graves  
Barrett Graves  
&  
Martin Scott

Three fine men indeed.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Nonaka for all the time, energy, and guidance you have given to me these last two years. I hope it has been mutually wonderful and strange.

Thank you Dr. Martone and Dr. Abella for your support as readers for the project.



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## Preface

*The Bearded Man* is a collection of poems conceived around the theme of mythmaking. Mythmaking in these poems manifests itself as a means of translating or filtering the outside world through a fantasist lens that creates an alternate interpretation of the natural world. However, the project quickly grew beyond myth and evolved into tall tale like poems. My purpose in writing or constructing these modern day tall tales or fabricated takes on reality, is to enable the reader to become reacquainted with the impossible, and to remind the reader that not everything needs to be explained through logic or science. But I suppose ultimately the purpose of these poems is to delight and entertain the reader in their unique approach to illustrating the world.

The collection was intended as an extension of a previous work called *Mythmakers*, which was a series of myths told by children of various ages. While the intention was to continue with this theme while moving the point of view to adults, writing has a funny way of following its own will. While composing the poems, they started becoming less concerned with contemplating and ordering the world through myth, and evolved into the telling of tall tales. These poems embody the spirit of an American tall taleness that has from the outset focused on exaggeration beyond natural laws. Carolyn Brown explains it this way:

Although it was neither invented in nor restricted to North America, the tall tale has held a place of special significance in American life. From almost the beginning, the incomprehensible vastness of the continent, the

extraordinary fertility of the land, and the variety of natural peculiarities  
inspired a humor of extravagance and exaggeration. [Brown 2]

Interestingly, the tall tale poems embrace this old idea of coping with the vastness of the continent and the peculiarities within it, and according to Brown, exaggerative story telling was a way of coping with that vast unknown. It was a way of assigning meaning or identity to the ungraspable space. In this way the tall tale resembles mythmaking, however the tall tale embodies a uniquely American tradition that first and foremost reveals itself as fiction. So in my poems, the focus is turned to the extraordinary, the oddity, the exceptions and exaggerations that contradict accepted belief, things like Carnival scenes contained in a man's mouth or the heavenly origins of basketball shoes.

Ultimately, I locate this collection in the middle of a transition from one mode of storytelling to another—from mythmaking to tall telling. The shift was subtle during the writing process, and it is pleasing to have captured this creative growth in one collection. Thematically, there are roughly three types or groups of poems in *The Bearded Man*. The first type is the myth poem. These poems formulate meaning from some idea or phenomenon in magical terms to create an alternate interpretation for the reader. One example of a myth poem is "Crank." This piece provides an alternate explanation of the how's and why's of summertime cicada cries. The poem intimates that cicadas are really automatons, windup toys, powered by a combination of steam and ant power, and that the sound produced is like that of a teakettle warming up and cooling down. In the poem "Eurydice," the theme of myth is explored in a different way. Instead of provoking an exploration of something, this piece reworks an old myth into a modern setting. The poem is a meeting between Eurydice and Orpheus in a nightclub in Odessa, Ukraine.

“Eurydice” is a mixture of modern content and ancient mythos: “he starts singing and I pass out because I drank five vodka redbull’s/ and only ate a hand full of crackers before going out.” This retelling is centered around a marginalized character from the original story, which addresses a modern need for alternate perspective, a need filled by putting the story in Eurydice’s point of view. Also because the Orpheus character in the poem is based off the traditional mythic character does not mean that the Eurydice of the poem has those same roots. The fact that Orpheus attempts a sort of reconciliation of memories with Eurydice, and that she has only a spark of recollection, shows the truly doomed fate of these two characters, both in and out of the traditional confines of myth. In some ways this poem was the turning point during the writing process because it shows the death of the mythical, or that myth is no match for the modern condition and as the poem shows at the end, the death of an old god is only worth a headline in the local newspaper.

The second thematic group in the collection is the tall tale. The tall tale pieces establish exaggerated fictional worlds that compliment our own. These poems are not explaining or ordering anything, but rather they explore the possibilities of imagination as a compliment to reality. These poems look more like allegories, or at times fables, but the ultimate purpose is to tell a story. Take “The Gravity of Aging” as an example: it is a story about an old woman who died with enormous feet. The poem begins:

When grandma was in her twenties she was 5’5” tall  
And 3’ square when she died 60 years on.  
*Every year I get a little shorter she would say,  
And all those inches must go somewhere.*

The reader quickly learns that every inch of the top ends up going to her feet. This piece shows the nature of the shift from myth to tall tale by not offering any discussion of why

or how the fantastic occurs, but rather focusing on the details of the tale. The tall tale poems create worlds in which something like an old woman shrinking in height while her feet grow is a real possibility, although everything else in that world may be the same as our reality. In this sense, the tall tale poems resemble Magical Realism in that the magical elements are accepted as logical and don't require explanation, even if the rest of the fiction is subject to the standard rules of nature.

The last type of poem fits neither of these categories thematically or formally. I call them the "Hush" poems, because they provide a break for the reader from the descriptive and narrative poems that dominate the work. These little poems are like neutral space in a busy painting that gives the viewer a place to look to relax their eyes. For these pieces, I used a more internal approach to imagine the world. They are introspective poems that use quiet language to express an idea or image. For example, in "like a peasant's death," the narrator is poisoned, and upon dying contemplates the meaning of love, asking,

is it  
stunning  
like a peasant's  
death  
deep  
in a valley  
digging  
turnips  
in new  
holeless  
boots

The lines are very short, at times only made up of a single word, which provides a hushed tone, however the content is very personal and reflective of my own inner thought processes. This type of poem seems inevitable after writing so many pieces that deal with

the creation of fiction and that use so many words. These poems instead take a break from the narrative impulse, and instead approach poetry like a painter where the words become colors and lines on the page.

In *The Beaded Man*, the narratives are established by finding some absurdity or unexpected detail to liven up the otherwise dull moments and characters of reality. Russell Edson has been an influence on how I approach this type story telling in my poems. His works create individual worlds and characters that are self-contained on the page, and a prose approach to poetry relies on the ability to present the illogical or magical in plain language. Edson's poetry attempts to channel the unconscious mind through the construct of language. He explains in an interview on writing that "In gross terms the two basic forms of creative writing are fiction and poetry. Language is consciousness, and this is where fiction is made. Poetry springs from the dream mind, the unconscious" (Tursi ¶ 12). For Edson, the unconscious produces the ideas and the conscious needs to create language to translate those ideas to the page. He goes on to say, "I would guess in the history of literature fiction came first and taught poetry how to speak" (¶ 12).

Edson's poems often infuse the mundane domestic scenes of everyday life, with unexpected twists of logic and imagery, thus presenting a new view of the everyday reality of existence. For example, his poem "The Reason Why the Closet-Man is Never Sad," says,

This is the house of the closet-man. There are no rooms,  
just hallways and closets.  
Things happen in rooms. He does not like things to  
happen...Closets, you take things out of closets,  
you put things into closets, and nothing happens...

Why do you have such a strange house?

I am the closet-man, I am either going or coming, and I  
am never sad.

But why do you have such a strange house?

I am never sad... [192]

First, the poem begins with a domestic notion, a house, then he shifts the reader's notion of the house by creating a hyper-symbolic character, the 'Closet-Man.' Then comes the next narrative turn—the house is nothing more than a collection of closets, but now that an internal set of rules govern this poem, the rest makes perfect sense in relation. The closet-man is never sad because nothing happens, and nothing happens because there are no rooms for anything to happen in. Edson is much like Calvino in this formula of altering reader perceptions and then proceeds with newly established logic in tact. In my own work I have taken to this style of introduction. In the poem "Cycle of a Voice," the opening lines are,

Gregor ran his voice  
through a meat grinder  
after his lover told him  
it had no character  
what stayed clumped  
and bunched to the  
roof and sides of  
his mouth like salt  
water taffy bought  
from boardwalk shops

In this poem's introduction, the new rules are established immediately to allow the reader to adjust to them, so that the rest of the poem makes sense within the designated logical parameters. This type of logic re-defining, deadpan introduction is extremely common in Edson's work and has found its way into my own.

Italo Calvino has also played a big role in shaping my work for this project. Although he is primarily a fiction writer and essayist, his ideas and approach to writing have influenced the content of the poems. Calvino's earliest short stories were written at a time of great political chaos in Italy, and his littlest stories, or fables, are simple allegories charged with much larger social questions. For example, a story called "Making Do," begins, "There was a town where everything was forbidden" (Calvino 11). This story begins with a popular theme for Calvino's stories, oppression. The tale goes on to say that the townspeople had one legal pastime, a game called tip-cat, and when the government made everything legal, all they wanted to do was continue playing the game. So the government outlawed the game, and then the people rebelled, killed the government, and went back to playing their game. This is a good example of Calvino's cause and effect pattern in his works. In *The Bearded Man*, the poem "Reservoir" was written using the cause/effect style of Calvino's. In the poem a town is faced with typical aches, pains, and illnesses. The town doctor prescribes medication for the townspeople to take and people begin to feel better. But, in Calvino fashion, there is a turn. The medications are being urinated out and make their way back into the town's water supply. Then the effect is that the mixing of medications causes dramatic side effects and the town is essentially destroyed. Like in Calvino's politically charged fables, the allegorical significance of the poem is pulled from a real problem some communities are facing in the country, that their water really is being contaminated by pharmaceuticals.

A further facet of these Calvino and Edson influenced story poems, and a factor that differentiates them from the myth and hush poems, is the use of more traditional stanza formats. These poems take a practical and straight-forward long-lined stanza



approach to storytelling. In a poem like “The Gravity of Aging,” each idea is broken up into stanzas, much like a story would break up in paragraphs. The intended effect of this is to provide a sense of logical progression for the reader, even if the poem’s content lacks the same logical plot or outcome, and not over stimulate the reader with the addition of typographical or formal oddities.

In the past I have been very attracted to sprawling typography, intruding parentheses, and smashing words together. This type of formal experimentation was influenced mainly by E.E. Cummings’ work. Like a painter, Cummings takes advantage of a page’s space, not so much to fill it ‘up’ with words, but to display the words on the page. He forms shapes and allows his lines to sprawl to add a visual emphasis for the reader of a poem. His formal influence can be seen in *The Bearded Man* in the poems “Crank,” and “Honeymoon Tuxedo.” In “Crank,” lines are broken up and slanted outward to increase the speed of the words to mirror the building up of steam in the cicadas of the poem. And in ‘Honeymoon Tuxedo,’ on Cummings-like play is the formation of the words to create the shape of an object important to the theme of the poem: a champagne glass.

This project as a whole shows a significant progression of both my thoughts on what a poem is, as well as what a poem can do. I began thinking about and writing poems that attempted to create a modern mythos to find life by intimating order in a largely defined modern age. But I quickly grew away from this notion opting instead for less explanation and more exposition. Most of the poems in *The Bearded Man* tell stories that are closely linked to the absurdity or extraordinary circumstances of the modern world. For example, the poem “Subdivision” shows the closed-off nature of a suburban

subdivision through the eye of a sandcastle builder. “Jesus Christ Vs. George Washington on the One Dollar Bill” shows the conflict between religion and hyper-capitalism. While I do think a poem should have a reason or purpose behind its creation, it need not have larger societal implications. For example, the poem “Honeymoon Tuxedo” is little more than a portrait of a man on the verge of a transition into an unknown future. That little moment captured in the poem is enough of a purpose for a poem to exist.

Finally, in addition to this collection being a work caught in subtle transition thematically and structurally, it is also a work in progress the same way that all writing is in a state of progression. Where does one project end and the next begin? I can’t say for sure that the next one hasn’t begun already. I suppose it is much easier in prose writing to define beginnings and ends, but trying to define these things in poetry is much more difficult, especially when dealing with a series. With that said, I will continue with this project beyond the binding of these pages regardless of defined beginnings and ends. I may write ten more poems, look back and realize they are all based on urban legends or sea shanties, because although I compose the words, I have learned that writing has a way of shaping itself.

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**THE BEARDED MAN**  
**POEMS**  
**BY**  
**SCOTT LUTZ**

## Myth

The impossibility of olieollieoxenfree. The innocence of the child yelling  
cheatercheatepumpkineater waving a stick in one hand and a snowcone dripping blue red  
green down Sunday best blazer. The readyornot here I come all children are born with  
and don't need words to describe a bruise they have the bruise and don't need words to  
say I'm hungry they eat a mulberry and don't need words to say what one might say if  
one had something to say and don't need language to scream in the street when dad  
whistles timeforbed and when it rains we swim.

## Seesaw

Two children teetertotter talking science, but they don't know it.  
Fat Jack moves closer to center, tells skinny Jill to move back  
And now they seesaw up and down on a plank balanced on a pivot

Fat Jack's feet touch ground and he stops leaving Skinny Jill in air  
*I could send you into outer-space if we do it just right*, says he  
*Maybe tomorrow so I can pack a lunch*, says she

And he jumps so Jill's feet touch ground and she stops leaving Jack in air  
*What is there to do in outer-space?* asks she  
*There is nothing to do but think*, says he

And the teeter totters back and Fat Jack takes the ground  
*I would go too if you asked me*, says he  
*I'm sure you would, but that's because you are in love*, says she

And back around Skinny Jill's feet meet ground  
*Love is oxytocin plus norepinephrine plus dopamine*, says she  
*But surely that's not all, what about the heart*, says he

But Jill doesn't move and Jack stays afloat in air  
*No, love is simply chemicals in the brain*, says she  
*If you feel that way, I have nothing more to say*, says he

So Fat Jack and Skinny Jill seesaw in silence

## Catfish

Wish well. Only a penny wish, huh. Save them nickels and dimes for astronauts and presidents. This wish clash cold hard smack dive into that wishin' pond. Ole Abe boy tied by lil bitty hole in his head to fishin line. Gonna land a shark on this one copper head coin. Abe's the only bate for catching purse sharks in this pond. At night, real quiet like, ching swoosh ching swoosh—hear change janglin' in jingle shark guts. Now pullout a cigarette butt tied tight to kite string now loopy loop round that thumbby toe like so and chuck—black lung blue gill be bitin' hard on that bait. Beer can bass catches itself. And the last fish in this pond is a danger. Them stingskers will shock you to tomorrow. A catfish 's electric. A catfish can swallow a car. Catfish can stare down a grizzly. You wanna try? Hot dogs cut to hockey pucks, no catsup, yellow mustard, be real quiet.

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And if you're lucky the catfish won't nibble on that dog. Yep, 's how my cousin lost his arm.

## Reservoir

In the town was a woman who cried every day  
So the doctor gave her something to make her happy

A young boy couldn't focus when he was in school  
So he got a pill to make him sit still

A very old man couldn't move a joint in morning or night  
So he was given a little medicine to ease his plight

A middle-aged man couldn't get his little friend up  
So the doctor prescribed a pill for that too

A mother had headaches and an aunt had ticks  
A son had ear infections and a grandmother itched

One by one the doctor helped with tonics and elixers  
Until the town's sick got better

No one was moody  
Or had achy joints

Men walked around with bulgy trousers  
And headaches were forgotten

No more infections or ticks  
And not a soul in town was sick

Little did they know every time they went pee  
That some of the drugs went with back to stream

Once the bad water made it back to the well  
The whole town unknowingly drank and fell ill

Men writhed in agony from all-day erections  
And blood pressures' shot up and dropped down

Everyone's eyes became bloodshot and dry  
And throats became swollen and mouths parched

Appetites were lost so nobody ate  
And the water was bad so nobody drank

Until one day they became so dry  
The a wind pickup up and blew them away



like a peasant's death

The tea  
was poisoned  
so I  
died  
pondering  
the nature of  
love:

is it  
stunning  
like a peasant's  
death  
deep  
in a valley  
digging  
turnips  
in new  
holeless  
boots

## The Bearded Man

The bearded man didn't always have a beard.  
He grew tired of his old life, tragedy,  
and moved to a new town with a new beard.  
He made many new friends who called him by his new  
beard name. Two years passed with the beard.

The bearded man forgot his old face, the one without  
the beard, and one day he shaved it off.  
Most bearded men forget about a weak chin,  
hockey scar, or acne pocks.  
The bearded man forgot about  
the carnival scene inside.

Unlike normal skin  
his was a transparent sort forming two globes over  
his cheeks. Inside a tiny circus of cogs and  
wheels turned on cranks powered by dingy brown  
clowns with cigars half-lit. Teeth could be seen  
through his cheeks and on each was a little door  
and sign that read *Mirror Maze, House of horrors,*  
*Fire! Freaks! Fun!* and the like.

A river of tiny teeth people wandered in and out.  
A strongman hoisted anvils above his head  
And the bearded man remembered why he grew his beard.

He turned his other cheek  
Where elephants walked trunk in tail by and a Ferris wheel  
spun with full lights blazing. The bearded man reached for  
the magnifying mirror. Just then he saw a mustached  
man jump in a basket and take off.  
The bearded man opened his mouth wide and out came  
the mustachioed man in his marble sized hot air balloon.  
The bearded man marveled at the balloon slowly rising  
in front of him and thought, *That is the bravest man*  
*I have ever seen.*

Then the unbearded man brushed his teeth.

### Jesus Christ-ler Le Baron

Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ, invented the automobile in 1563, it's true, I looked it up, because his dad, God—that God—told him to, and when God was giving Adam and Eve rule over the fowl of the air and fish in the sea, he also gave them all the sweet crude oil in the ground—it's in Genesis, I looked it up—but when Adam and Eve fell out of the apple tree God kicked them out of Eden, he took the oil back and didn't let them have cars because this was Old Testament God and everyone knows he was a jerk, but then New Testament God, dad God, reconsidered and in 1563 Jesus invented the car. I had to look up the model, but then felt dumb because it was the Chrysler Le Baron—Jesus was French, it's true, and it was the first internal combustion engine and ran on refined crude oil—petroleum, gas—and it was good, and Jesus broke the land speed record, 210 mph, but then Rudolph Diesel invented a new engine—a better, cleaner, more efficient engine, the devil's work, and it ran on rapeseed oil and God smote Rudolph Diesel Down to Hell because of this pagan engine that ran on plant oil and challenged His divine will and now only hippies drive vegetable-oil cars and nobody trusts hippies—it's true—and then Shakespeare invented the bicycle, which never caught on because no one trusts poets.

## Mulligan Stew

I was at the gym running  
On the treadmill  
The other morning  
Before work  
And I recalled the time  
I was an old hobo in Chicago

In '31 just a trampin around  
Happy as a bull in spring  
Cuz we would set up convention  
Down a tad from the stockyards  
Just off the river, see, and  
I sure miss them old days,

We had it all figured out,  
While all them working bidlestiff bums  
Was trying to get work and starving  
Their families, we were high on the hog, see,

Those stockyards was a dirty smelly bunch  
And back then they'd dump the bloody leavins from  
Cows, pigs, sheep, horses, what not right into the river,  
So me and the boys would walk to the river bank and  
Plop in our neckerchiefs and use em like fishin nets,

Every time we bring them up straining out the bloody  
Entrail water and looky what is left:  
Ears and snouts, jowl bacon and hooves,  
Leavins and leftovers, fatty sacks and stomachs.

Throw it in a pot with a spud or two; there was a feast  
And if there was three or four tramps at dinner  
Each got a heap of mulligan stew and the winner  
Was the one with a pig ear in his bowl;  
Meant he could relax whilst the others  
Told him the kind of stories that start:  
*The strongest cuppa mud I ever drank was...*  
And end: *So that's how I lost my big toe.*

Yeah, I was in better shape then,  
Didn't need the treadmill anyhow.

## The Gravity of Aging

When grandma was in her twenties she was 5'5" tall  
And 3' square when she died 60 years on.  
*Every year I get a little shorter* she would say,  
*And all those inches must go somewhere.*

Those old pictures show her long blonde hair  
Pulled back tight like the flowered dresses  
Against her solid Polish stock body  
Birthing hips and all—before the five children.

She rode horses and played field hockey  
When she summered in Rocky Nook  
With her aging grandmother and cousins,  
All bleached and salted out from the sea air.

As she aged her body loosened,  
Back slumped, shortened a bit  
Like the earth wanted her back,  
And she shrunk a little every year.

*It must go somewhere,* she would say,  
And it did. Every inch off the top  
Moved south—to her feet,  
Until her feet doubled, tripled in size,

Like the oozing of molasses  
Down the side of a mixing bowl  
That gathers on the flat bottom,  
This is how her feet grew.

She could no longer wear  
The heels or saddle loafers of her youth,  
And instead clogged and clopped around town  
In men's basketball shoes.

When she died her coffin was  
A child's coffin, white and petite,  
But at the end a hole was cut from the lid  
And a wine crate was nailed down,

Like a slapdash soapbox car,  
So her mammoth feet could steer.

## Honeymoon Tuxedo

dashing to be sure  
as he ordered  
the champagne  
and dropped  
the lime from his  
WaterGlass  
in the bubbly flute  
(without a thought)  
to the  
future  
that waits  
with solid gold open arms

## Jesus Christ Vs. George Washington on the One Dollar Bill

G.W. I am the carrot on the stick. I dangle like ice from a rain gutter to the masses.

J.C. My hands are edible. My feet are sandwiches. My lungs breath cappuccino foam in winter air.

G.W. I am save. I can sink ships in the calm. I control the empire.

J.C. I can sift sinners like the blue whale krill. I am the tractor beam to salvation.

G.W. I make your job worth doing.. I'm a giant robot terrorizing.

J.C. I command bread and fish to multiply. I can make money from nail shavings.

G.W. If that were true, you'd be where I am. You have no innovation. I thrive on new.

J.C. I am the star of the show. They read The Book to see ME. You had the cherry tree. I had the Roman Empire shaking in their sandals. I was Crucified!

G.W. You were a stool pigeon. I blind with my judo chop. I am a regular David and Goliath.

J.C. The blind are pigs without wings. I am the slingshot of love. I transformed mankind.

G.W. I am mankind. I cause traffic. I am in bed with the board and your time has passed.

J.C. I am polymorphous, black jubilee, Mexican hope, White prosperity.

G.W. You are corrupt. I am suppressor of Blacks. I am Mexican hate. I am White Envy.

J.C. My blood is wine. They live by my teachings.

G.W. I buy 100 proof. They live on pornography and gasoline.

J.C. My words are pure. I am GOD.

G.W. Who buys and sells your words? I do.

## The Ad-Man Apocalypse

the corduroyed man  
stands in the room  
sweating suffocating nerve-sick.

*Our newest product  
should do well in  
the Midwest market*

walls begin to bleed  
close in like a trash compactor  
fellow execs transform

into rabid mongoose  
hissing at a cobra  
with maggots

*research shows  
that it's the fattest  
demographic*

drooling down from  
bloody razor fangs  
and the big boss

is a snarling  
wolverine with claws  
tearing at the table

sulfur orange stinking stalactites  
and stalagmites jut solid  
from the floor and ceiling

*it'll be ready  
by black Friday  
and I call it*

an iron coal furnace in  
the corner sizzles  
with smoke and steam



*Cookie Dough Perfume  
smells like chocolate chip  
only \$10.99 a bottle*

and with that  
the room  
turns back

but the boss  
still snarls  
and lunges for

the corduroyed man  
who fights for his life  
with briefcase and shoe

Sermon by Chuck Taylor®, May 4, 1942

The Converse All-Star High-Top Sneaker sticks feet way out front  
Beyond the realm of rational space to a place unknown by naked feet.  
It's that rubber white uni-toe that defies science and feet just jut  
From this world to another celestial heaven found up and out.

Each black and white canvass rubber sole is forged in the womb  
Of The Mother Defender of the Basket of Truth and All-Knowledge,  
And the creator was God himself, master of the Three Point Conversion  
Of heathens, and each is anointed with a single tear from the eye of Christ.

Once on feet they feel light as a feather and quick like lightening bolts  
And as any child knows a new pair makes feet run faster and jump higher.  
Those sneakers are on a journey home to the heavens in which they were born  
And they want the wearer to come too, back to the court of eternal salvation.

So remember, brothers and sisters, next time your feet slide into high-tops  
That those feet are one leap away from that pickup game in the stars.  
And when you look down and your feet look silly, fat, and far away,  
It brings you even closer to everlasting life in paradise. Amen.

## Subdivision

I heard this beautiful thing:  
There are a million times more stars  
As grains of sand on the entire planet,  
So I grabbed my pail and shovel  
And went to the beach for the day.  
I had never seen a castle so I built  
A sand house with siding and a two-car garage  
And I built another like it three inches away,  
And another and another, and 100 more just alike.  
On one edge I gently sculpted a sand Shell Station, pumps and all,  
Using a real sea shore shell for the sign,  
And on the other a Costco with 500 parking spaces.  
I patted together a Chile's and a Blockbuster,  
Then an office park with chain link fence and warehouses, too.  
I was building with stars and I wanted to make a universe, or a galaxy anyway.  
I watched my little sand-star people leave their sand-star houses  
Get into their sand-star cars, drive to their sand-star jobs  
Shop at the sand-star stores and watch TV on their sand-star couches.  
Sand-star dogs ran around fenced in yards  
And sand-star children rode bikes down sand-star cul-de-sacs.  
What more could my sand-star solar system need?  
And just then two mean looking ten year olds came running at me,  
Two bare-foot shirtless bully kids, and stomped my sand Subdivision back into beach.  
So I moved closer to the water and built a sand skyscraper instead.

## The Common Orange

I can peel an orange  
In one piece  
With my hands  
So it looks like a  
Cross laid out  
Without breaking it

But sometimes I don't

Sometimes I peel  
It one layer  
At a time  
And pretend it is clothes

First the top layer  
Like a shirt and bra  
Then the bottom like a skirt or pants

The stem part I do last  
Like removing  
Underwear

I slide my middle finger  
Into the small hole  
And wiggle it a little  
Until it opens up

It is moist inside  
And I slide my finger  
Between each slice  
A few times

And when I am alone  
I hold the orange to my face  
And rub my nose  
In the wet crevasses  
Before I eat it

But usually I peel it  
In one piece.

## Cycle of a Voice

Gregor ran his voice  
through a meat grinder  
after his lover told him  
it had no character—  
what stayed clumped  
and bunched to the  
roof and sides of  
his mouth like salt  
water taffy bought  
from boardwalk shops—  
words stuck to fillings  
syllables needed  
to be scraped with tongue  
and spat out like  
rancid hot dogs—  
sometimes a stray vowel  
would tumble out  
while jogging  
or worse bad words were  
swallowed while eating  
a turkey sandwich  
causing dreadful  
indigestion—  
Gregor grew tired of his  
Ground-voice burden—  
the grinder solution  
failed to impress his lover—  
so he formed patties with  
the remains  
placed them on  
a smoking charcoal grill  
until medium-rare  
and ate the voice patties  
with Heinz yellow mustard  
and sweet pickle relish—  
for a few hours he  
burped old voice  
until stomach acid broke  
it down and passed it  
along to intestines  
and later it was gone—  
flushed away—  
somewhere down stream  
a billion microscopic bacteria  
sound just like Gregor before  
the meat grinder

## Dervish

Kathy asks where she knows that word from.

One of the words we are born with.

See: Whirling Dervish.

Any kid knows the phrase and can use it smartly.

I knew the word the first time I swung a jump rope over my head.

First time I spun so hard I fell down.

First time I got in a fight.

First time I saw the roller derby.

One of the words a child invents.

Re-invents.

Adopts.

Owens.

But what does it mean to a child?

Children don't have definitions, no, they have examples and pictures.

Say—It means a Muslim who takes a vow of poverty, generally using dance in ritual.

They pause—

No, it's like this...

(and spinning and jumping and gyrating and grunting).

## Eurydice

So I am in this disco in Odessa when all of a sudden this Grecian type with gold chains and tight pants to show bulge says "Didn't I know you in a past life?" And I think *nice* line but I might get a drink out of this loser so I say "maybe you did. Maybe you left me for someone younger." And he gets all huffy and says "It isn't true. I don't go that way." Then he says "I have given up drinking. I only need the sun." So he's crazy but seems harmless and besides I have mace in my purse so I ask him where he is from and he says "Originally from Greece" and I say "I knew it!" and he says "But I have a place on the water in Bulgaria, Tatul is the place" And I have never been to Bulgaria so I ask what he does there and he says "I'm a singer songwriter" So now I'm sure he's queer but I like his face, it reminds me of someone, so I ask "What kind of songs" and he says "Songs that make the nightingale envious. Would you like to hear one?" And I think it's so loud in the disco that I wouldn't hear him anyway but "Sure" and he starts singing and I pass out because I drank five vodka redbull's and only ate a hand-full of crackers before going out and when I wake up I'm outside the bar on a park bench in his arms and I reach for my mace but I remember he is fruity, so I stop and notice a scar on his neck and ask him about it and he answers "It's a long story. But I can tell you about it if you want" and I say "what the fuck" and he says "Okay, but not here. I know a really nice grassy hill nearby where we can watch the sun come up and I'll tell you all about it" and I think whoa, I'm drunk and this sounds like trouble so no thanks and he says "maybe some other time then" and gives me his cell phone number and I go back into the bar and hear him singing down the street and I drink two more vodka bulls and wake up the next morning next to some sleezy river rat and stumble out of his place to get a cup a' coffee and see a newspaper on the table in the café and read an article about a foreigner killed by a messed up girl gang on a hill just outside of Odessa. A strange coincidence. I called his cell phone and left a message but he never did call back. So yeah, that's why I don't go to the Ukraine anymore.

## Crank

stretch yer ears to  
hear two marching bands  
at once for the notesontopofnotes

two marching bands-listen at the  
same time for the notesontopofnotes

come hearer  
to heapy peel birch  
trees on back face up  
eyes closed  
stuff yer visual

and stretch...  
cicadas like  
cicatrix on the bark  
screaming sirens  
automatons wound  
works on a crank  
(manned by ants)  
and listen

them whirling noise bugs wind  
and build up that steam  
and let loose and--our letters don't have the letters to combine letters to spell the sound--  
till the  
steam  
loses  
steam

and---our letters don't have the letters...  
like the key driven kids toy  
they slow and sink and let  
go  
that last moan of a moan



## M

A heap of nickels could buy the gummy kingdom (when I was a boy) in that little alley popcorn shop. Blue sharks and rainbow worms. I knew nature but these could live in my pockets passed the ticket taker for the dollar matinee. I don't miss it like they say they miss it but I will miss it when I am they and memory is my burden. Memory has a way of making. Memor makes because it has no order, no master, no key. Mem works like a cobbler—a cobbler fixes the shoes without regard for the foot—that is why the cobbler lacks a saint. The cordwain sees the foot and makes the shoe—the cordwainer has St. Hugo and his bones. M is full of saints but they don't have names only impressions of faces. I forgive M for the lies and half-truths that I wouldn't forgive a friend or lover for. M is strong but has one fear—the word. M is silent relying on the image. M cannot create like the word can create—like god speaking the world into being—and M is afraid and tries to create but can only interpret leaving distortions of truth. I watch these things that M makes. Have you ever opened an accordion? Looked inside a typewriter? These things are not to be understood, like a map of Moscow in Russian is not to be understood. M too does not understand like a grandfather clock who doesn't understand that every time around the dial is brand new, it can never be twelve again like it was twelve yesterday because that twelve now belongs to M and that is why M is the only real keeper of time.