

Mark Cochrane

# *Dumbhead*

*Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the  
same; leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to  
see that our papers are in order.*

— Michel Foucault

+

## WHATEVER PUMPS HIM, HE PLAYS

on the headphones  
in the gym. billy idol, dumbhead metal, even  
zz top: chainsaw guitars, the musky

mewling & yowl of *Legs*  
soothe the lizard brain as it presses iron.

vertigo of

*who am I without a woman*  
*to be inside?* panicked  
reptile sleeps only here, flexing a heavy bell, or there

when he has entered her. peace

is there, essential blank  
of the organism. there  
is home & feels like  
purpose, elemental.

(never without

a regular girlfriend  
since sixteen: one of the badges  
of cowardice he boasts of —

knees bent to a half-squat

behind her

as she pegs  
her elbows to the sofa: spreads  
her undercurves to watch *himself*  
diminish, vanishing  
into — & the lizard exhales

with the warmth of closing  
folds / lifts  
for a moment

its sticky fingerpads  
from the brainstem, & every choice  
the man has ever made.

what would his life, this island be, without?  
*meaningless*, hisses  
the despot with a tongue flick, *head*  
*full of noises*  
(in the vacuum of space

*& not an outed sound.*

## DUMBHEAD II: IDLE IDOL IDYLL

To the peace that comes of entry

he compares the silence  
of a burial chamber

unsealed in the pyramid, or the  
himalayan hush & foot-scuff

of the Lady chapel at Ely,  
its idols broken & powdered

by frost on a December  
noon; or the draftless chamber

of a tomb among the catacombs  
(you raise a slab of stone & stir

dust that has settled for a thousand years.)  
To the calm a woman gives he compares

the mute & subaquatic  
wad of air in middle ear

that threatens madness in parking  
garages, where pillars & ducts

swaddled in foam  
muffle the soles & breathing

of bandits or *b-boatmen*  
who squat with spring-loaded thighs

in wait.

### DUMBHEAD III: WOMAN AS LIMIT

he makes of each woman a border  
to the livable world. his changeable  
fidelity a shield  
to the unknown, the new, she  
contains the panic in his chest,  
the groin, the aching triceps, if not  
this one then another, mrs  
or mistress, ok  
always keep two women said  
benny williams to  
louis armstrong, ready nurses  
to the overflow, the anxious gush  
of the organism, bullbody's  
binding bull, its specious  
species agenda, a gentle  
pressure on the daily wives  
to squeeze a man inside  
a confined place  
the way a newborn  
sleeps with head wedged  
into the corner of the crib  
because cranial pressure  
from the pelvic cavity  
is uteral memory, because  
a woman is the whole outside world  
turned inward, a draperied room  
of bone, involuted  
surface that carries his myth  
of edges, of small, eventho he knows  
libido is limitless  
by constraint, his whole sexed  
being a water bomb

dissolute, vertiginous  
& a man might easily vanish  
as fluid into other fluids, ether, he needs  
the tight space of a woman  
as a second skin  
to keep his insides in,  
his blood from billowing out

& into

*(Choitla plume)*

the sympathetic blood  
of other men.

+

**YOU USED TO WORRY YOU'D  
NEVER HAVE SEX.  
NOW YOU WORRY WHEN YOU DO.**

— Advertising copy for the  
Home Access Express™  
HIV 1 Test System  
(*Muscle & Fitness*, February 1997)

## DUMBHEAD IV: HIV AS LIMIT

<sup>+</sup>*in which the pronouns shift*

Flirting with guys in the gym  
is a bad idea. Now that he  
believes I am safe, muscle queer,  
bi-tease, or at least  
not a basher, he is  
on me every day, I look up  
from the abs mat  
& he has been watching me  
do crunches

He calls me a *cyborg*  
& is sharper witted  
than awkward I

am: he makes  
nasty cocktail chat  
about contemporary art  
by the upright row

*(All b-boatmen  
are Grace Darlings to me . . .*

says I am too cute  
to be a campus secretary  
& calls me the Aesthete  
though I feel thicker  
than Maurice at Cambridge

*(Wrongtexte, my dear*

— He is a medievalist, parchment  
fetishist, an archivist



for the Library  
scandalized that I stuff  
runny notes for poems  
into my sweatsocks  
between sets

(*not exactly acid-free*  
he protests  
on behalf of my papers)

he is just my height  
but deeper thru the chest /  
*pes stranga guma*  
with a celtic armband  
tattoo, a gold loop  
thru the eyebrow's eyelet  
an orange-stubbled chin &

he has a sore  
or birthmark, like an ink-blot  
at his throat  
that has lasted the whole three  
flushed & gushing weeks I have known him.



## DUMBHEAD IV.II: INTERVAL (BETWEEN THE WALLS)

### *Section 1(a): Excuses, or "Theory"*

*Once sexuality can be read and interpreted  
in the light of homosexuality, all sexuality is subject  
to a hermeneutics of suspicion.*

— Lee Edelman

homosex the rabbit he plucks from every hat:

Or, emblem of eruption  
chasm he can probe forever:  
smoking gun, The Clue, it is always true, a case file  
rising to the moon, like magic it explains  
WHAT IS WRONG WITH HIM, Or: *Inquirer*,  
*some quests are not sexual in nature*  
is a dumb show  
& who reads lips?

Confessional verse  
an exercise in the liar's paradox:  
compulsion is my theme  
he said, four times.

(mind hiding  
inside a Trojan)

(he blows like St. Helen's)

*Just keep telling him, she laughs later,  
you're in love with this beautiful woman.*

## DUMBHEAD V: PLOVERS' EGGHEADS

Once I gave a reading  
in this weight room

& my Archivist  
loves the newsphoto  
of these snarling pit-bulls, lips  
& sleeves peeled back

— reminds him of that scene  
in *Brideshead*: one  
of the vice-regent boys  
delivers with lisp & stutter  
*The Waste Land*  
by megaphone  
*to the sweated and muffled throng*  
of rowers at Oxford

then retreats from the balcony  
for a Cointreau

(but I am his dunce,  
his stenographic hunk, no  
longer scholarly, clerk  
not clerk, I am red-faced,  
he is my Blanche, & whatever oiled  
postures of erudition  
I strike here

— are retroactive.

DUMBHEAD VI: SHAVED HEAD PASSES IN  
CANNON BEACH, OR, OR  
THE PANIC DEFENCE

The innuendo, poetry boy, is slanderous &  
as storytelling,

salacious: ominous  
suggestion, so delicious

to straight culture, the scare  
of gay contagion, it was just

a shaving blemish, a purplish  
brownish, forked, smudging, blade-hickey

& it went away, it went away (&  
even if it didn't / I needed that

imaginary sarcoma there  
to close the question marked

in the curve of a lycraed ass  
— to soothe the split hysteria

prissy & stigmatic  
harbinger of the blood blot

O to keep that ~~svitar~~ out  
of me, out of the dark  
& holographic O. +

+

Last August  
he got his scalp buzzed  
with No. 1 clippers  
& travelled thru the States  
under the changed eyes  
of strangers, hotel clerks, he was obviously  
not a military man  
so with that skull, that bristly  
pencil-sketch of hair, he was obviously

working out in an upscale gym  
with bottled water & a whale mural  
in Cannon Beach,  
hippie town with the tightest lips  
on the whole left coast, he was

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+ O Homo  
-chondria of the closet class  
& I am its  
valedictorian.

sweating up the machines  
after a jog from Haystack Rock  
& looking bony, his granite temples  
shot with veins, his white  
T-shirt in the wall mirror, he was

lifting in a circuit of sets  
& wiping off each seat or grip  
with towels & disinfectant spray  
but still a fellow traveler  
in fitness, a hidebound  
marathoning type  
worked in  
on the leg press,  
the incline bench  
cocked a different spray bottle  
held her breath  
inside a grim face

& positively  
blasted the pads  
again

& again

+:

to kill his every trace.

## Sexing the Page

my derridean dissertation  
on the concrete poem  
as rebus  
for the hermaphrodite body  
was never so real as  
the day my friend the archivist  
with white cotton gloves  
in the climate-  
controlled vault  
jerked me  
(me) (me) (me)  
off  
all over the delicate  
yellowed original  
of bissett's

***am/or***

## Thiefs Journal: Glottal Jack

(Courier-matrix 49 x 14)

Jong je-nez, eyeknows, Ma, death throws on death-  
row. Broom flowers? Fish-you-all-eyes. Vishnu?  
Play that tile or dis tile; distyle. *Disent-ils*.  
Arche text, you're. Mechano. Domino no notions.  
2 E-Z. The fasting nation of watusie cult. Aet.  
*Gl-ahh*. A dill. Doe. A female dear? Arraign,  
Andropov's girlie son. Me? A name I gal myself.  
(The trans ation is exa t. Oh knife, in shining:  
amour? Sheath's log. Vanilla eyes. Aet a moll,  
oh gee! Latin force. Cab bard. Taxi, scabbard.  
Caught aux creases. (G)love. Petalpush pod-ner.  
Hi men. Art, a tack. An T-erection. Anther me,  
eagle, I, rebus, mark. Auf! he bung. Skinraft.  
Stay, men. Style? Sex pistil. Anther me! Bud?



## DUMBHEAD IX: FOUND POEM

So one day Miranda finds this poem

so far, face up on my desk  
& appeals to our face-up  
document rule  
which holds that any exposed manuscript  
around the house is free for reading, but  
paper-shuffling or the opening of journal pages  
is prohibited —

Miranda finds this poem, so far

& although we both know better than to explain  
I start to explain

*Dumbhead I - XIII<sup>TM</sup> is a work of fiction, & any  
resemblance of its characters...*

Dearly tested reader, it is too late  
to complain. You broke the rule, the seal, & the compact.  
You peeled back the sheets, & every page you turn  
hereinafter —

## DUMBHEAD X: SEMINAL TEXT<sup>1</sup>

*Camerado, this is no book,  
Who touches this, touches a man.*  
— Walt Whitman

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1 Originally left blank to accommodate a watermark of authorial ejaculate, this page remains intact to preserve the integrity of the signature, against advice from counsel. Do not attempt to remove this leaf from its binding. Private inscriptions may be elicited from the poet.

Alternatively, taxpayers are invited to fill this space with their own inconsequential drivel. After all, you paid for these resources, & the author is obviously wasting them.

## DUMBHEAD XI: ESSAY ON MARRIAGE

What the Inquirer is trying to do, here, is allegorize  
object exclusion & the loss  
he cannot grieve.

Or: he is confusing the dissemination of text  
with sleeping around. Paper is brave,  
paper is promiscuous, to publish  
is to play the field.  
(He believes you are grasping him now, his

wank scholarship.

— *Truth is you don't need anyone,*  
Miranda writes &

he admires: words that bind  
to their own falsehood

silky as the slipknot  
in a bedpost scarf.

Freedom-giving is an irresistible ruse.

*I release you,*

their little joke.

+

## Advice Column

1) *A tergo poetica*, a slippage or sinking doubt in the mechanics, bar of white chocolate massage oil from Lush™ spread melting across the immaculate confection of gendered pronoun's object, you know it when you squeeze it, leavened loaves of androgyny versus kulchur's kneejerk PIVMO, cf. *The girl's all right* (raow-raow . . . raow . . . raowroawroaow) & the poem as air-guitar workout, *passim*.

2) We each drew a map of the Domain of Personhood. We compared. We accused each other of tracing. We corrected for reflexes. We gave mutual ground.

(The secret is, we are using the same map. It bears the same symbols, the same legend, the same key. It is a map we each have drawn. It traces the Domain of Personhood.)

3) When we say I love you, it does not mean I want to annihilate, erase & rewrite you, though we have been that route, & if it works for people, we wish them every contentment.

4) With Genet, we aver that betrayal is an ethical necessity. But we are lying about it.

+

Tho a husband boast to play libertine  
mark it down to apotrope: needs her

so bloody badly  
advertises his meat  
market readiness  
to muzzle the fearsome jaws of —

*Men's Health* says: buff enough  
to forfend the whelpish  
catastrophe of —

Alone.

*COMME SI*

just any  
body will do.

The poem of betrayal is nothing  
but a preemptive assault  
on getting dumped.

You dumbhead: you dickheart.  
You acolyte of the pectoral cleft.  
You glans of the chest.

+

## DUMBHEAD XII: PLAY RISK

*If we strain thought clear of impulse slowly,  
slowly the day scream subsides to ordered lust.*

— Anne Carson

One lover as limit  
to the utter, able world

*(back off i'm taken)*

Erects his anorexia  
of "life experience"

(that hard venous line  
of phallus & forearm)

The sexual being  
a lipogram, his posture of betrothal  
a martial art:

*+ in short, I was unavailable.*

- To trim to perfection  
with absolute exertion  
a domain so cramped & trivial.

Bodybuilding, like the habit  
of monogamy, is a controlled simulation  
of a wilder aesthetic.

A walled city. Farmed vigour.  
The Weider principles / for a wider back.

*(It's a nice day for a /  
white wedding.)*

Serial fidelities  
protect him  
from choosing to do  
anyone/thing  
new.

*Come for crantinis  
on my roofdeck  
whispers the Archivist.*

The eye's banquet  
of fresh lovers  
as he grinds out his reps  
a substitute for writing.

## A CUTEY DATE

A substitute for faith.

*We'll eat smoked eels  
from Amsterdam*

A substitute for hang-gliding  
cleaning the toilet  
meditation:  
for volunteering at the hospice  
or feeling the full present  
of her singular love.

*& toast the sun's red  
infusion  
with the sea.*

Exchange  
phantasmal desires  
for tasks.

SHAM, EH?



Obscenely methodical.

Not another fuck  
but another book.

*It's a nice day to  
start again.*

+

The political self  
— abdicates —  
& he gets Hard.

Desire is boundless *And*.

*The act a slave to limit  
act a slave to limit  
a slave to limit  
slave to limit  
to limit  
limit.*

+

Adultery as a vocabulary  
for bold action

is pretty lame. Is colloquial. Is bathos. Is prose.

(Flirtation's frippery  
comes easily  
'cause he's  
Always Already Married.

+: As if sleeping with new continents of bodies  
is the same sum gain as

"risk"  
(beyond the viral)

as travel  
(to Irkutsk)

as courage as  
bringing a range of potential selves  
into un-

(*un coup de dés*)

concealedness

global  
openness  
& make-a-mess

## NOPE, HE'LL ERR, A

As if the endlessly renewable  
new lover  
is the true brink of hazard & growth

*poesis*

making new

on the cusp of the moment as if

clear-cutting the wilderness of other green & pulpy flesh

is not  
more or less

## LIZARD

*a nice start*

hisses

Tiresias / despot

with a tongue flick.

## DUMBHEAD XIII: BI

If the image of a man pass  
thru the rims of a black hole & in —  
but it cannot, the module of flesh passes  
while the light that clothes his nameable self  
snags on gravity, the hard pull that the dark takes  
& the snapshot of a last ecstasy on this side, whichever  
this side is, hovers there, blistered to the lip of history, to shine on  
even if the body of the man be far gone (in) or come out  
already, wherever in is, out is, the rays of knowing  
him, or thinking so, hung to fade on choice's  
cusp — & we scorn his flicker, wave fists  
in the air yet cut with no shadows  
a picture of one who is neither

there nor there