

Writer's Bloc

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Writer's Bloc Staff

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PG 6 INTERROGATING THE GLASS BY LUCAS WHALEY

PG 7 IF EVER BY CHRISTOPHER SHAPARD

PG 8 MIRRORS DON'T LIE, BUT MEN DO BY ABDUSH SHAHEED

PG 10 MODERN DAY ADAM IN EDEN BY JAMES MORAN

PG 11 TO MY FUTURE YOU BY JASON FARRELL

PG 12 LOVING FATHER BY LEROY TAYLOR

PG 13 A YOUNG JEWEL BY DAVID BENDEZU

PG 14 FROM THE HEART BY JAMES M. SQUIRES

PG 15 FORBIDDEN LOVE BY JONATHAN A. VANANTWERP

PG 16 FINAL HOUR BY E. PARIS WHITFIELD

PG 18 10, 9, 8, -- BY MICHAEL SHANE HALE

PG 20 QUESTIONING MYSELF BY JACOB RUSSELL

PG 21 SELFISH BY SHAWN GREEN

Letter from the Editor

Sitting down to write this final editor's letter has been a complete struggle, ridden with tears and put off until the last moment. For me, walking away from Cornell in May means walking away from *Writer's Bloc*, Auburn, and CPEP...the organization that started it all for me within my first week of living in Ithaca. I cannot thank enough the friend who put me in touch with Jim Schechter, the previous CPEP director. He quickly became my fantastic mentor and welcomed me so warmly into a world that I had honestly spent little to no time previously exploring or even thinking about. My time with the program—from the intimate conversations on long car rides back and forth from Auburn, to the fun times working or having girl-talk with Marge in the office, and obviously the magic that crept into my life each night I entered a classroom with CPEP students—has been nothing short of transformative, and has served as the true well of passion from which I draw and use to pour into everything else that I have done in the past four years.

To the students of the CPEP program: Thank you.

Thank you for allowing me to enter into your world, come and go, and always leave as a better person. Your passion, intelligence, creativity, wit, and intellectualism all served as the spark that kept my torch here at Cornell lit as strongly as it was. Anyone who knows me well on campus knows that you guys have a special hold on my thoughts—and more importantly, my actions—and that is because of the immense strength you have given me to look at life differently and question everything, finding answers and friendship in places I never would have searched before.

Thank you for lending me your senses, giving me the sights and sounds of your life and offering me a new way to see and hear those in my own.

Thank you for letting me into your minds through your writing and class discussions: I felt more intelligent every time I left a lesson with you, and I would return to campus and feel more engaged, excited, and stimulated by everything in my environment. Really, thank you for making me perpetually on my game. Though you are at Auburn, you all introduced me to my own campus in Ithaca by directing me to engage in my courses and *actually* love them, to be open-minded and approach every person without judgment, and to set my mind to something and truly follow it through to the end. I entered your walls for the first time as a child, and you have seen and helped my evolution into an adult. In fact, you all have charted my growth probably better than all of my peers and professors here on campus. I would not be the student or the person I am now if I had not been so moved by each person I came into contact with throughout my time as your teaching assistant and as your editor.

You leave me with one final question:

How does one repay another for bestowing upon them an entirely new perspective?

I could put no price to what I have learned from you all, but I think some of my tuition dollars should go directly to you as *my* teachers over the past four years.

My experiences with the wonderful staff of CPEP and this journal have also contributed to my life in a profound way. *Writer's Bloc* has introduced me to some of my favorite people on campus, whom I truly can say I feel comfortable letting my freak liberal flag fly with. I have looked to you Jack, Emily, Kierra, Caitlin, Willie, and Eleni as beacons of hope on this campus—people I can always rely on to have interesting opinions and outlooks, and who perpetually astound me with their brilliance each time I speak to them. I swore for a while that I would never find even one partner on this journal who could rival Esther's spirit and loveliness, but you each have proved me wrong and have stepped up for me and this project on so many countless occasions. Your motivation and determination as team players has often blown me away, and your hard work all this time has created something uniquely beautiful—you should be so proud of yourselves. The trajectory of this journal would be nothing without you, so thank you for helping to keep this alive. And to the incoming editors-in-chief, Landon and Shane, I know—not think, but *know*—that you will not only keep *Writer's Bloc* going, but you will make it even better. Though my anxiety about finding successors was even greater than my fear of not gathering the incredible staff we have now, I am so lucky to get to put this journal (my baby) into such capable hands. However, I'm not sure you will find a staff even half as cool as we are...

but hey—what can you do?

Finally, to our readership, thank you for picking us up. This issue was originally meant to publish pieces from students on campus and at the facilities, but we were honestly so impressed by those submitted by CPEP students that we decided to go a separate direction. In this issue, we asked contributing writers to show us what they would say to or ask of their future selves. In return, we received beautifully introspective poetry and prose about life, happiness, family, self-improvement, and catharsis. At a low point in this semester after attending the funeral of a close family friend, I was feeling very overwhelmed about the meaning of life, making it count, and getting caught up in the little things. Reading these submissions gave me a huge sense of internal calm, as they revealed to me the true essence of life—which is the ability to connect to others and incorporate them into who you are.

As always, happy reading! And may you continue to seek whatever you are looking for whether you find it within the pages of this journal (as I did) or not,

Adina Rubin-Budick

6

Interrogating the Glass

by Lucas Whaley

Are we still skipping to a punk tune?

Are we still battling the Nothing?

Is the world still orbiting the star of our heart?

Do we still shape the contour of valleys?

Do we still guide the current of rivers?

Is there still a mountain rising in our soul?

Are we still leaning into the wind?

Are we still standing in the prow?

Is there still thunder rumbling in our eyes?

Do we still taste the moonlight?

Do we still grasp the rain?

Is there still an unfinished canvas in our mind?

Are we loving?

Are we dreaming?

Are we living?

Are we free?

If Ever

by Christopher Shapard

7

If ever in the future

I look at this poem and say,

What could I have been thinking

on that cold and wintry day?

Know this myself

in unknown futurity

I push and strive for our realization

Heidegger's fullest potentiality

I defy the labels and endless boundaries

We'll be 100% authentic

True onto our core

Never will we surrender

Forever learning more

I am forever optimistic

As I'll affirm for me

I yearn for a freedom

Beyond this reality.

And if I in my future

Question my position of the past

It's only to quantify my progress

Out beyond the stars.



Mirrors Don't Lie, But Men Do

by Abdush Shaheed

Before I could utter even a word late at night, cold or heat
to tell my future self about the current me, amongst the creeps, fools, and freaks
the older I said, fully aware that I'm in too deep
"Forget about what you've been instructed won't face my peeps
to do and listen up,
I'll tell you how you're going to proceed. I feel so ashamed
Rather than go on and on talking about lost in this game, with no one to blame
the man I now see, I want you to act as if and I can't take the way my
you're looking at the old us in a mirror mans an' 'em look at me strange
and speak truthfully about like they know it's me but I'm not the same
the man we used to be. and it might be perceived that
Keep in mind that I know us well, I'm too wild to tame
think carefully about but it's the anguish I feel that flows
what you're going to say, through my veins
know for a fact that based upon and goes to my brain
the tale you tell exposing my pain
I will know the truth about all I am is a link in a chain
the man you are today and I'm in love with Maryjane
because mirrors don't lie, but men do" everyday is the same
so I said
and I'm losing patience
I don't sleep hating the woman that sits adjacent
I'm in the streets I built her up and broke her down

etched in her eyes is all that we've been through Many times I want to cry
I shaped and molded who she is right now instead I laugh and I joke
and can't stand her for being so trying to cope
what I turned her into feels like attempting to grab a hold of smoke

I'm without connection and lack direction and on with life I go,
and trapped in a triangle of self-deception though my soul is sick
still, here I am and diseased and got the nerve
adamantly propagating that I'm doing all to have a following
that I can to implement and ensure
the success of my so-called master plan man
and teaching my little boy them fools are even sicker than me
what it is to be a man
a concept that I refuse to admit so I continue to play the role
that I don't even understand acting as if all the pressure is easy to handle
oblivious to the fact that
and my knees are beginning to buckle my life is literally in shambles
under this weight that I'm bearing and that far from being a leader,
as I freely dispense this misery I'm just a follower of a very bad example
that I feel no way about sharing

I'm beginning to wonder, The future I simply cracked a smile,
"Is anybody really being fooled turned on his heels,
by this mask that I'm wearing?" and went on his way...

Modern Day Adam in Eden

by James Moran

One bite—regurgitate for life

I used to live in a tangible dream,
then out of my loneliness I was divided into two,

The most beautiful creation, man's helper,

out of the tree she fell into

a world of knowledge,

In her new found existence she

chose to share her pain!

But

As the wine has always been mine upside-down and backwards,

If you could see through the pages then you would understand,

In the concept of reality

I am subjected to this matrix-like nightmare,

However, through the discipline of obedience I can be spared the

pain of regret by not listening

to this requiem we are dancing to, but as for my dreams,

they have now turned into a requiescat for the walking dead.

To My Future You

by Jason Farrell

11

Salute...

Today is our little brother's birthday, you're feeling the pain. Said you'd do it big for him when he was slain, so you're trying to celebrate it the best you could in that cage, doing the college thing, and trying to find a better way so when you hit the streets you'll see better days. Stay focused, work hard at it, you gon' catch your wave. Used to pace the cell, impatient to get back in the game, plotting our next move. Get back in your lane. Hold down who holds you down, keep it loyal, never change. Yeah, yeah...you know, but I'm trying to keep your aim on target, I'll paint you a picture, you better keep it framed...

Remember how it felt when you didn't get mail-- all your "friends" disappeared, couldn't get you bail. At times feeling like you were next to hell. The empty locker, waiting on the chow-bell, the pictures on the wall, pictures of the things you're missing, and wishing on a star that we did things different-- only way to escape was when our shawty came to visit? You've gotta do better cause this ain't living, this is prison...

So now, what are you gonna do with your freedom? Remember going through each day like a re-run. Couldn't count days, but the years through seasons. And those bright days you couldn't see suns? Now ride out, cause that was only a speedbump. No one believed us, so you've gotta make it happen whatever you do, you do it in fashion. Don't wait, just do it—it's action. Never stand still, make every second count. Keep up the good fight, you're only in the second round. Your mind is your best weapon now never doubt, be about it, let no problems get you down cause we've got a second chance, so let's let it count.

12

Loving Father

by Leroy Taylor

February 18th, 2013

Dear Me,

If I am reading this it means I have made it another five years, because the envelope this letter was in told me, "Do not open until 2018." This letter is to remind me of the person I was five years ago.

To describe myself in two words for 2013—Loving Father.

February 2013: Teetee is in her Spring semester—freshman year of college. Today, I am able to kick ideas back and forth with her about most of her college courses with intimate details. For example, she is currently taking a Western Civilization course, the same course I took last semester at CPEP. She is very interested to read the essays I wrote on the French Revolution, Napoleon, and Georges Seurat's painting, "A Sunday Afternoon in the Park." She is taking Calculus, so I have begun reviewing a Calculus know-it-all book a friend gave me. Teetee is impressed and driven because I am digging in the trenches with her, so we can go over derivatives and limits problems together or just discuss the principles.

Tasia is a junior now and has set a goal to make the National Dean's List this semester. One class, Advertising and Management, poses a threat to her success of achieving that perfect 4.0. We discuss her assignment for that course over the phone and I mail her brainstorms for her to sort through and possibly incorporate into her research...not much different than two classmates studying together. It's gratifying, to say the least, when she tells me my ideas were helpful.

Both of my daughters have less room for excuses, not that they are looking for them, because if Dad can learn Calculus without Youtube or computer courseware, they certainly can do it with these added tools. I am here to show them that where there is a will there is a way because I'm a Loving Father today.

Sincerely,

Me

P.S. Now that it's 2018, my son should be close to beginning his college experience, so let this letter remind me how I can inspire him.

A Young Jewel

by David Bendezu

13

I remember the moment like it was yesterday. I remember every word and how every word sounded.

The words were just, simple...

“Hey, hey you...Yeah you, with the nice shoes! Look fool I’m you. First of all, stop whining about how messed up the world appears to be. So what no one told you was that life wouldn’t be easy.

Be grateful you’re even alive.

Stop being selfish, nothing in this world belongs to you. Nothing! And stop making excuses, you sound pathetic. And stop lusting, love doesn’t respect that. And stop going through life, why don’t you try growing through life? Stop acting and stop fronting, I can see the real you. And stop thinking about the “what ifs?” and start thinking about the “what nows?”.

Who do you think you are? The world doesn’t revolve around you. You really think someone cares about your “nice shoes”? Your expensive, look-what-I’m-wearing, in-your-face shoes? No loser! Did you ever stop to think that someone in a sweatshop in China made your nice shoes? You probably don’t care. Well start!

Listen to me. Let your hair down. Grow and love. Don’t let any one or anything stop your vision.

Fight! Don’t let what is fake appear to be real. Don’t lose! And it’s ok to cry. Forget that gender stuff. You’re human! Don’t let the past become your future. You’re beautiful. Act like it.

Believe!

You’re lucky I have to go home. My mom is calling me. By the way, those two hundred dollar shoes, the one’s you have on, you could make em, just a thought. See ya later.”

I remember that kid. I missed the train that day, and I’m glad that I did. It forced me to walk home in my nice shoes.

14

From the Heart

by James M. Squires

Dear James,

It has been a long time since we've last spoken, my friend. It wasn't want of better conversation that silenced me, but more of a lack of respect for another's wants and desires. I was only trying to help you, but I now see that my advice is at times biased and not always decisive. Still, the bond which we share can not so easily be broken no matter how cold you wish to become. I know for a long time now you have been attempting to wall yourself off from the warmth I wish to give you, and I know exactly why. As one so close to you, it is my responsibility to dissuade you from your current path. You must not allow the pain of the past to poison your future. Embrace and grant me the opportunity to help guide you on your journey, for you are not alone. I only wish for your happiness and joy, and the agony you feel is shared by me regardless of if you accept me or not.

Must you be so stubborn? Does the fire of anger and hatred sear through your veins so strongly that you can no longer feel the anguish you cause me? Can you not see that the armor you wear against the world can only stifle and suffocate the goodness within? I entreat you, please, stop the madness before it forever engulfs your being and destroys what remains of your humility. No other can sense better the torture that looms within and causes you only to betray yourself. You are only afforded what you give yourself, and if choosing darkness over light is what you want, I will still be here to do my best in assuaging the quaking beast that menaces and embitters.

This is a war of attrition, and the deciding battle will be a Pyrrhic victory if you place your forces against me. The love I emanate can and will purge you of your sorrow, guilt, and hatred. Trust in me and I will be your shield and sword to wield mightily against the adversities of this world. So, if you seek peace then prepare for war because there can only be one outcome in this fight. And, my blood is yours.

Truly and anatomically,

Your Kardia

Forbidden Love

by Jonathan A. VanAntwerp

15

As the days turned into years,
and the years into burning, yearning, wet tears...
I think back on those times, remembering...
How we fought what we felt were losing battles.
Running with all our strength, up icy hills—against ceaseless winds...
Our love tested. No longer being held
by the fickle fingers, on the hands of time.
Pushing, pulling, playing—sad songs of fate,
doubts dancing in and out, of our minds...
Endlessly,
battling, those unseen things.
“Forbidden Love,” they’d loudly say, with their eyes.
Our minds, matching their shouts, saying, “NO WAY, NO HOW...!”
Faith, on our side, whispering, “They will see in time.”
With a well trained ear...
There is a sweet sound of revelation, I, now, seem to hear...
Church bells singing, so clear...
Hand in hand...
Our steps, in sync...
We’ve come to fruition.
Despite their ominous whispers of, “Forbidden love.”
Neither of us dared to consider their foul admission!
Instead we,
Believed. Achieved. Succeeded.

FINAL HOUR

BY E. PARIS WHITFIELD

It's eleven fifty-nine, one minute until—it's to be 12am.

A new year is being ushered in...

Nothing will, ever, be the same.

New hopes, new dreams,

mixed with old fears... mixed with older cares...

I've waited eleven, of those.

One hardly would believe 60 seconds is much to be concerned...

but I'd vehemently argue,

not one year day hour

or minute, that's already been spent—

will I ever get back.

Has anyone, ever, taken just a moment, to consider that?

It's eleven-fifty-nine, and 30 seconds in counting...

Involuntarily, a single tear has managed to break free,

from that invisible "thing" which has always constrained me.

It resolves to make its way down my cheek. Its familiar trek.

I don't even attempt to wipe it away.

For even it, deserves to celebrate its accomplishment.

I'm exhausted, joyous. This I've patiently awaited...

But more importantly, I've been vindicated...

It's eleven-fifty-nine, and 10 seconds, in counting...

With my head held high, I silently give thanks

My eyes are closed. And I reminiscence, just how long this journey has been.

It's, now, twelve a.m., and I finally lament.

There to meet my open eyes are a pair just like mine.

Our smiles embrace. And we walk with new life, coursing through our minds

to the sweet rhythm of freedom.

Then, I awaken to realize, although I am close, my final hour has yet to materialize...

Yet, the intuition, from that dream, still burns inside.

18

10, 9, 8, --

by Michael Shane Hale

10, 9, 8, --

Stop struggling. Just go with it. Follow the breath.

You've conditioned yourself to face life and death.

7, 6, 5, --

You could never figure out a way to make it right.

Could never undo the mistakes, only learn from them.

4, 3, 2, --

Come into your rest, lay your burden down.

Like veins and airplanes, miles of confusion

Cross-crissing carrying distance and worn out DNA

1, --

To live, to die, to believe, to ignore.

Marginalized early on.

To see the look of disappointment for being gay

crushed my confidence like tomatoes being canned to stew later on.

ZERO -

"I can't figure this out on my own. Society, help me to own the death I caused; to bring meaning to life, to expose the roots, to learn from history so as not to repeat it, in the name of all that is holy." So you say.

You immersed your life in atonement: proof of remorse.

Craving renewal in a second chance.

You pour yourself into shot glass after shot glass.

Vengeance shouts to the crowd, "All drinks on the house!"

Throats constrict, round after round.

Quenchless, they throw another one back.

LESS THAN ZERO --

Now in your final moments, death's breath promises freedom.

While alive you lay buried underneath political socioeconomics.

Let go! Lay down the tools wielded for transformative spaces.

Tools, institutional alms, bequeathed from Ivy League largesse.

Tools mentored by volunteers' hands.

Passed over their heads kneading my clay,

taking shape in the kiln of their passion.

You connect, you matter, you made a difference,

fingerprints, unique, identify a community overcoming

the pain that comes with being human.

Buoyed by idea your final breath reveals the gift they gave.

Clarity floods in wearing out the final link.

The crowd had its own issues.

Finally, achieving peace, they tag you, zip your body up in a

bag, and discard you in Potter's Field.

Questioning Myself

by Jacob Russell

Despite recognizing the aged-disguised face across from me as my own, even if it wasn't yet, it still took considerable convincing for me to accept the claim.

"Sooo, you're me in twenty years...yet you're here now. O-kaaay," I replied, drawing out the last syllable with undisguised skepticism. I got a nod and a shrug as a response.

"Okay, why now? Why not 18 years ago, you know, before this?" I motioned about the prison visiting room with both hands before folding my arms across my chest and leaning back in my chair.

"Because without this, uh, character-building experience, we never would've become us."

Then I asked why now, why today? "Because you're dangerously close to doing something we've never done." When no explanation immediately followed, I splayed out both arms with palms up and shrugged impatiently – the universal gesture for "well, are you gonna tell me or not?"

"Giving up, quitting on our self, and most importantly, on all of those who believe in us because we believed in them." My own aged voice states with a heavy matter-of-factness what I had never confided in anyone else. The involuntary jerk that forced me to sit straight up caused an all-too familiar smug grin of triumph on the face of my older self. Clearly I was pleased with myself, forgetting my own attention.

"Dude, stop gloating. It ain't all that impressive to read your own thoughts...especially after you've already had them." Smug grin subtly morphed into cocky smirk, causing me to wonder when exactly over the next twenty years I would become that annoying, since surely I wasn't like that now... was I?

"So what's the point here?"

"Well, you're questioning yourself and your purpose, so who better to ask such questions of than yourself—that being me, the you you've yet to become." Despite silently conceding that I had made a

damn good argument to my current self, I didn't tell my older self for fear of it going to my own eventual head.

"And before you ask" my older self began, "no, we don't become a porn star, Ironman, Batman, a Jedi, and/or any combination of them." Damn, older me was good!

"Oh, well," I sighed, shrugging with affected disappointment, "we never did care about stuff like that... not much, anyway." Mirrored grins reflected between my present and future face. After a long and contemplative pause I finally asked myself, "Is it all worth it? Are we a good human being, and do people finally see us as more than just a prisoner?"

"Haven't we always been a good human being, mistakes and all, and when did we ever not care about others? And when did we ever care about what others thought about us, huh?"

"That's not what I mean, and you damn-well know it."

"Hey, I only know what you know and learn for us, remember?" I reasoned to my current self with logic so irrefutable it was irritating.

"Does the time come when people quit professing to treat us 'like' a human being the same way parents claim to treat their children 'like adults' when they consider their kids anything but? Are we ever seen as a human rather than 'like' one?"

"Does the answer really matter? Would you stop being us by the time you become me if the world still saw us as a prisoner first and a person second, if at all? Is our humanity determined by our own actions and the heart controlling our actions, or is our humanity contingent upon the opinions and behaviors of others?" I heard the familiar passionate rationale in my own older voice and recognized the indisputable logic of my own future words to myself and felt foolish for needing myself to remind me of what I already knew.

“Dude, you still haven’t actually answered a single question. All you’re doing is asking me questions in response to my questions,” I pointed out to my eventual self.

“Hey, aren’t you questioning yourself here,” I was reminded by way of question, “and am I not you? Therefore, since you were me and I will be you—making you and me past, present, and future us – am I, too not questioning my past self as you are questioning your future self?” The roguish gleam in my older eyes and the amused grin upon my aged lips, combined with the obnoxiously philosophical context to my own argument against myself – in question format, no less! – reminded me of my innate knack for frustrating the hell out of people at times, myself included.

I needed to know one final thing though, so I asked myself, “Do we ever find, you know....” My words evaporated into silence, unable to voice the question even to myself. But I saw in my elder eyes that I already knew my own question.

“Tell me, dammit!” Still, the me I was to become remained silent, regarding the me I had already been with eyes flooded by commiserative understanding.

“Please,” I implored to myself in a violent whisper.

“I can’t tell you. Wait--” I stared into my own future palm held out in front of my present face signaling my own silence, “Because if I do, then you might do things differently, like not try as hard as you always do to show people how much you care and to always follow your heart.”

“Then just give me a hint, a clue to let me know if I, we, finally...” Again, my voice faltered as I watched who I was to become slowly shake his head with sorrow.

“Why not, dammit? You know, now I think I finally grasp why people get so frustrated trying to talk to you, me, at times! Where’s your damn loyalty to our self—why not even a hint?”

“ Because she told me not to tell you, jackass!”

“But you of all—” The delayed impact of my words slammed me into momentary silence as humorous benevolence over my own present density reflected into my future eyes. “Oh. Hmmm, uh, well...” I struggled for words as my tongue flopped around in my mouth like a salmon upon shore while I strained to regain my composure.

Finally, with a gargantuan grin, I asked the me I couldn’t wait to become, “Dude, you get told what to do by her?” The words had barely breached my lips before my present grin was dwarfed by the grin of my future self.

“No, YOU, do!”

24

Selfish

by Shawn Green

[Wise Self]

Hey me, what it be?

I see you've been up to your usual things.

Trying to balance positive with contrary activities

to learn the outcome of what freedom brings.

However, your reasoning is not the type of flavor that is in this seasoning.

Being that you're not combining all the right ingredients,

your effects are meaningless.

I suggest you become a little bit less tedious

with what's to come.

[Naïve Self]

Listen to this: I don't know who you are or where you're coming from,

but in time I'll overcome whatever the hell you are talking about, son.

Because the life I lived from the shit I did,

the average person could only imagine

that which I'm attempting to convey to you in a pleasant fashion,

since you're asking about self.

[Wise self]

From patience and understanding came a substantial amount of wealth.

Also please be mindful of your health

In all aspects and just a little of it goes a long way;

A word called respect will protect you

from the concealed as well as unhidden threats.

They say it was written, however beware
you're the chief editor of what's in store.

Take heed to the fact, although you're the beginning, I'm the finisher.

[Naïve self]

Oh so you're the end, therefore I make no sense.

Whatever man! I'm still sticking to my plan.

Assuming the position of one who likes to grandstand

Mister one person band, I am

So please, miss me with your buts, ifs, including ands

This is directed to you as well as your entire clan

Cause I's does what I's wants and not what I cans

Since no one is going to change me

[Wise self]

No doubt, of course, I understand to a degree

Being the improved self, I finally realize it's much more challenging

for a reflex angle to interact with an acute one;

When trying to master one's cipher

You're so caught up in defense, you ain't even got an offense

The situation is best perceived as a dance, cause it takes two to entangle
and I believe that's only how we'll ever have a chance.

Although, I was hoping we'd just mingle, since it's gonna be a while
before I'm able to iron out all these wrinkles.

