Saint Harmony, many years I have stript
naked in your service under the lash. Yes,
I believe the first I heard (living, there
aloud in the hall) was Sergei Rachmaninoff
set at the keys like a great dwarf, a barrel
on three spindles, megalcephalus, hands
with fourteen fingers, ugly as Merlin, with whom
I was in love, a boy and an old man; a boy nodding
and an old man sorrowing under the bushfire of the
people’s heart, until he coolly knocked out the

Prelude in C# Minor. Second was Coleman Hawkins

in about 1934 perhaps, I, stript and bleeding,
leapt to the new touch, up and over the diminished
in a full-voiced authority of blue-gold blues. I
would do nothing, locked in discipline, sworn to
Freedom and Discipline

freedom. The years shrieked
and smothered, like billboards

beside a road at night.
I learnt how Catlett
drove the beat without
harming it, how Young

sped between the notes,
how Monk reconstructed

a broken chord to make
my knuckles rattle, and much

from oblivion: Newton,
Fasola, Berigan, my

inconsolable Papa Yancey.
Why I went to verse-making

is unknowable, this
grubbing art. Trying,

Harmony, to fix your beat
in things that have none

and want none – absurdity!
Let that be the answer

to any hope of statecraft.
As Yeats said, *Fol de rol.*

Freedom and discipline concur
only in ecstasy, all else

is shoveling out the muck.
Give me my old hot horn.