

Self-Portrait as Kindled Rat

Neuroscientist Graham Goddard sent
brief bursts of electrical stimulation
to the rat's amygdala

& the rat did not respond,
the shocks too small to feel.
One more trial, then one more

trial, then six more trials
over eight days, the same level of stimuli
led to facial twitching in the rat

& in further stimulation
facial twitching led to rhythmic
blinking led to chewing motions,

to neck muscle contractions, &
finally to complete convulsion,
the rat rattling like maracas.

When not being tested, the rat acted normal
though months later after a single application
of that first low-level shock,

the rat shook hard, shook fierce
in a radiating seizure. You see,
my psychiatrist tells me

there's a kindling effect in bipolar disorder,
like what we see in epilepsy. If you
have a manic episode, it's more likely you'll

have another, it'll be worse
than the one months or years before it
and it won't need as much stress to induce.

I sit across from him in the plush chair,
the wild randomness of mania,
the not showering, the rosary around my neck,

the getting lost walking to the gas station,
irritable yells, reddened eyes.
Do you hear the screeching voice of God? I said.