

# GPPReader



Selections From The Poets Of  
**The Guerilla Poetics Project**

Edited By  
**Ed Kauffman**

**Guerilla Poetics Press ★ Worldwide, 2008**

**GPPReader: Selections From The Poets Of The Guerilla Poetics Project**  
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## **Editor's Note**

I've taken the liberty of presenting the work as consistently, page after page, as possible—striving for balance between the "individuality" present in the poems as originally written, and the book's overall formatting needs. This is most evident in the "standardization" of poem titles, presenting them in a consistent "title case," while the bodies of the poems are presented as closely as possible to originally written, creating some significant differences—poet to poet—in punctuation, grammatical liberties, and even format. Beyond that, a very light (hopefully invisible) editorial hand addressed minor, forgivable grammatical concerns: commas, typos, hyphens, misspelled words (of which, despite much recent criticism, "guerilla" is not one—look it up), with extraordinary care given to never change the poet's intent, line breaks, or anything beyond the aforementioned. It is my sincerest hope that these changes will go quietly unnoticed by not only the readers but the writers as well, and please trust I meant no disrespect.

I'd also like to thank the generous efforts and contributions of all the inventive fund-raisers involved, without whom this book could never have been completed. I hear tell of a vintage Vegas poker chip that fetched a right pretty penny on the auction block, the entire proceeds of which were donated to the project and this book specifically. That is the quintessential spirit of the independent press—namely doing any and everything to crack the nut. It's all a simple question of *alchemy*—what you start with and what you do with it. The wealth of this project lies not in its meager ends but rather its near limitless capacity for innovation, owed mainly to the type of personalities it attracts. Creativity is creativity, no matter the medium.

It's been a real honor to be asked to cull what I thought was the strongest work for this ambitious project, and if there is anyone to thank for the strength of the book it's the fine poets presented here. Decades of under-appreciated work among them, I'm proud to help bring just a little bit of what they do to light. If you enjoy the read half as much as I enjoyed putting this beast together, then, you are in for a real treat!

# GPPReader



# **David Barker**



## **The Wheels Of Government**

three of us  
hobbling down the sidewalk  
towards the capitol building.

two bad hips and  
a gimpy ankle.

none too steady on our feet.  
all three spy retirement  
on the horizon.

outside the hearing room,  
a sea of black suits. we shuffle in  
and take seats.

7:30 AM,  
the gavel bangs and  
they start testifying.

I have a file thick with numbers  
just in case of questions.

everyone thought to bring coffee  
but me.

## To The Lady Who Fell Down The Stairs

I didn't witness that accident,  
but I heard about it later, and  
when I saw you on crutches,  
your leg in a cast, you seemed  
embarrassed by your misfortune. That  
was the first time that I saw you  
as a person, and not an adversary. We'd  
had some turf battle years before,  
when you first came to work here. Something  
in your mind, not mine. I think you  
saw me as a threat to your status, not  
realizing that I wasn't after anyone's  
job; I was just doing my own. Things were  
tense for a while, but we got past that,  
and later when you learned that I'm a writer,  
and told me of your own work in journalism, we  
had something in common. You  
even bought my chapbook, the one  
where I talk about all the crap I've  
gone through at work, and you were shocked  
that I was "so bold" as you put it. And I  
explained that I hadn't told  
the half of it in there – that there's  
plenty of other stuff that I've  
kept to myself. I think you saw me  
in a new light after that, and our relationship  
was friendly from then on, asking each other  
"how's it going?" the few times we  
ran into one another in the hallway.

So it came as a hard thing,  
when I got that email from the boss informing us  
that you'd suffered from cardiac arrest  
on Tuesday night and were in the hospital  
in intensive care, lingering in  
a medically induced coma, and that the prospects were  
not good. I'd just seen you that morning  
during the emergency drill, and now  
I'm glad that in the chaos of the moment, I had  
taken a second to say "hi."

They said it was a rare event, but it  
happens: you'd  
fallen asleep on the sofa, and in that  
cramped position, a clot had formed and  
traveled to your heart.

Wave after wave of sadness  
hit me all that day. Not

### **David Barker**

because we were close – we weren’t – but  
because we were coworkers, and I knew it could  
have happened to any one of us in that building. And I  
remembered back to the stairs, and how you would  
really be embarrassed if you could only know what  
had befallen you now.

Well, don’t be. There’s no  
dishonor in falling downstairs, nor in  
falling from life. It happens to the best of us. It  
happens to all of us. And you know what they say about  
how the good die young. There must be truth to that. You  
were only 45, with a husband and a 6 year old daughter.

On Monday the second email arrived, the one I’d been  
dreading. I didn’t have to read it to know  
what it said.

Don’t think me cold because I  
worked the afternoon of your service. It  
wasn’t indifference. It wasn’t because I had too much  
work waiting for me to take off for an hour. And  
it wasn’t because I didn’t care (I did). It  
was for the same reason that I skip all funerals.  
Because they’re too painful.  
The stoic husband ... the  
weeping child. There’s nothing I can say. They  
don’t need my pity, my  
minor grief.

In the days that followed, I took a closer look  
at my coworkers, even those I’d  
battled against, and they all looked  
damned good to me. I have you  
to thank for that. I was wrong when I  
wrote those words. Wrong about everything.

**Just In Case I Become A World Traveler**

my daughter tells me that  
if you go barefoot in India  
these small worms in the soil  
with hooks on them will  
stick to the soles of your feet  
and bore into your skin,  
get inside your body and  
give you diseases.

at first I suspected  
she was passing along one  
of those new urban legends,  
like alligators in the  
sewers of New York City,  
but she assured me she had  
read it in her Science  
textbook.

now I've had to add  
walking barefoot  
in India to my list of  
things to be avoided  
in foreign countries,  
along with drinking  
water in Mexico, and  
taking snapshots in the USSR.

**justin.barrett**  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Alone**

a dying streetlamp  
flickers  
orange light onto  
the road

as an empty  
beer bottle  
sits on the curb

just like  
me

## **Downtown**

smoggy  
gray

guy walks by  
and points  
to a single red  
flower  
growing  
in a crack in  
the sidewalk

“beautiful,”  
he says

and  
it was

### Heredity

my mother used to tell  
me that i could  
be anything i wanted  
to be when i grew up,  
yet here i am  
working a menial job  
for minimum wage,  
thousands of dollars in  
debt with the drink  
as my only escape.

i don't ever recall  
wanting to be  
my Uncle Jimmy.

## A Portrait Of Ourselves Only 30 Years Down The Line

We walk down the halls,  
holding hands,  
like a couple 30 years our senior.

She shuffles as best she  
can, I shorten my  
steps as best I can.

She does well, considering.  
Then we see another couple,  
one of the ones 30  
years our senior, only he's  
the sick one; and *she*'s holding *his*  
hand and encouraging  
*him* along.

When we pass,  
my wife squeezes my  
hand a little tighter,  
bringing it closer to  
her hip,  
and we shuffle  
our way down the  
bleak, sterile hallway.

## Miles J. Bell



### Los Caballos Oscuros

we are already on  
your street  
and we will see you  
and everything you are  
long before you notice us

we are the dark horses

turning vision & visions  
into galloping lines  
that feel like the thunder  
of distant hooves  
steadily moving closer

tonight  
the poets ride

## I Plan Ironies

There isn't a word  
to describe the simple joy  
of finding your wallet  
on bludgeoning mornings  
after apocalyptic nights  
on the beer.

Perhaps I'll invent one.  
I'll become celebrated  
as a man of letters  
and won't have  
to buy a drink  
for myself  
again.

**Past On Fire**

Time's a  
sleek wide river  
after the rain  
rushing out of sight  
around the corner  
and this whole house  
is on fire  
smiles real & forced  
in Polaroids in drawers  
curling into smoke  
like bad dreams in the morning

stand  
in the ashes  
get it on yr hands  
nothing so pure  
& clean as  
starting again

**It's Not Unusual And Neither Am I**

drudgery of work-bound journey  
all that beer I poured into myself  
leaking from multiple forehead pores  
hot asphalt/auto veldt  
sighs as tyres sing  
but  
iron grey clouds hang  
ready to fall  
the crows  
mock behind me somewhere  
this is going to be a long day

## **Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal**



### **Four Crickets**

A great singer  
forges his song  
from behind a  
few blades of grass.

He is small  
in stature, but  
great in depth and  
sound. He is small,

fits in my hand.  
Perhaps two, three,  
four such singers  
would fit as well.

A quartet of  
small, great singers  
would fill this room  
with giant songs.

### **Something Beautiful**

Let something beautiful out,  
a song you can hang the moon on,  
the one-word lovers mean  
when it's not a game.  
Let the suicides die and madness  
mend its own mind. Let the light  
out of the caves and  
bring out the paint to  
color what lacks. Take sadness, grief,  
and sorrow and find it  
a new face: the smile  
you fell in love with.

**The Rust Factory**

Working in the rust factory  
the foreman's on my case  
my job is in danger because  
profit is lower than morale  
my sweat is nothing to them  
it stinks as bad as their  
treatment of the workers  
each affected by the rust  
the blood we cough up each morning  
has colored the walls and  
floor of the factory crimson  
and black when the rust hits it  
I am looking to get out soon  
the asbestos plant is  
willing to pay top dollar to  
any worker with balls and lungs

**Seed**

I want to be buried  
off the side of the highway,  
where green grass grows  
and crows feed and sing.

I don't want to die.  
this is not what I desire.  
What I want is to be a seed  
firmly planted in the earth.

I haven't decided  
what type of seed, but I would  
like to grow defiantly  
in all four seasons.

I want to lie down  
and disappear under roots  
and under the soil and rest,  
living in my dreams.

# JJ Campbell



## You Can Only Watch The Same Movie So Many Times

i see you're rushing  
toward another brush  
with an over the  
counter suicide

and quite frankly i've  
lost all my desire to  
fight with you over it

with that said

may death grant you all  
the wishes life couldn't

we'll meet again  
someday

probably soon

### **Sadness, Through Male Eyes**

i was going through a  
drawer in my desk tonight  
and came across some  
condoms well past  
their expiration date

and here they told me i  
would outgrow all those

high school feelings i had  
of being a loser

### The Unexpected Death Of An Old Friend

i never realized your beauty  
until i saw you in your casket

the soft and gentle features  
of your face were lost  
upon me until then

and perhaps it was that  
or maybe just seeing you  
finally at peace  
that brought these tears

i wiped them with my hand  
and pressed my hand to your lips

who would have thought that  
out of all the juices we  
shared over the years  
the ones that meant the most  
would come after your death

### Making A List, Checking It Twice

i'm wearing my sunglasses in  
a thunderstorm again,

dreaming about the days when  
i wanted to grow up and be the politician  
who refused to kiss the ugly babies

while drinking my body weight  
in southern comfort each day

the grocery store kind though  
life is a marathon, not a sprint

back when i thought that all my  
freckles would join together one day  
and make a glorious permanent tan

that was nothing more than another  
installment in my long history of failure

you would think it would end  
somewhere but no,  
that's what i get for thinking

time to put the brain aside  
and listen to the gut

of course

the gut has been nagging at me for  
years to turn this pen into a gun,  
these words into bullets and this sheet  
of paper into a place for  
collecting names

i still say i'd be  
better off as a poet

but who am i to  
question  
my  
calling

## **Alan Catlin**



### **Hugh Casey And Ernest Hemingway: The Artist And The Ballplayer**

They were two of a kind, the baseball player and the best-selling author, hombres muy simpatico, off-season in The Keys. The middle-aged macho, full white beard and face aglow showing the wild man the riggings, deep-sea fishing and all the rest that goes with it. After, in the taverna, they toast The Revolución with Cuba Libres, the biggest bar joke of the mid-century: the drink was nothing more than a rum and coke with lime and the revolution years away. Later still, Papa and Casey don lightweight boxing gloves in the writer's living room and begin swinging, no holds barred, no knockdown rules or regulations, just two men punching themselves silly toward dawn, a confrontation not even the wife of the moment can stop by saying, "Sure, keep it up, break every stick of furniture in the fucking place, what difference does it make?" Finally, the man who threw the wild pitch in the World Series against the Dodgers arch-rivals, the Yankees, the pitch that made Mickey Owens famous and Casey a dark footnote in history, shared one elemental fact with the man who would win the Nobel Prize for Literature: when all else fails, a shotgun in the mouth, a last image that rips the back of your head off.

## **Working Girl**

Small sips are  
all she can manage  
taken from brown  
bagged Tall Boy  
beer too tired to  
move from this  
spot in the sun  
her eyes permanently  
bagged clothes  
wrinkled dirty  
hair uncombed  
a mess as always  
burned out beyond  
belief well into  
her middle age in  
her twenties yet  
somehow ageless  
this sad eyed  
lady on leave  
from fucking the  
endless armies  
of the night

**No Smoking**

I work at a half way  
place for vets-

that's half way between  
here and nowhere-

old age and death maybe-

The director is one of  
those pressed shirt and tie

gung-ho REMF's

That's a rear echelon mother  
fucker in american

can't wait until  
the no smoking rule  
goes into effect

All those guys have now  
is one room to puff in

I try to tell the director-  
these guys all fought  
in wars

you know what I mean?

Had cigarettes when  
they were nervous  
scared  
relaxed  
relieved  
wounded

They can't drink anymore  
can't chase no women  
or run with no wolves  
so they smoke

They don't have anything left  
that's why they're here

**8-30-06**

Midnight

Hurrying footfalls

4 shots  
then someone yells,

"Go, go, go!"

Some kind of military  
action on Furman Street

Dark car disappearing  
where there are no  
street lights

Then all is  
quiet

for a while

## **Leonard J. Cirino**



### **Logic**

The dog's mouth  
snaps on a leg  
of lamb

A bomb goes off  
in the church  
while a mosque burns

Three children  
hide in the basement  
The attic is full

The soldiers enter  
All hell breaks loose

The dog's mouth  
snaps  
on a leg

### **Modern Times**

At dawn, every face is a nightmare,  
freckled children and heavily-bearded men  
swirl about with garbage cans and school buses,  
all checking the clock and rocking the streets.  
Later, the business suits turn their eyes  
to their watches as their wives gather  
on driveways or porches, wave good-bye  
wishing the absence would last longer,  
or maybe not as long, while they struggle  
with pucker-faced kids dawdling in doorways.  
The laments they could turn into songs  
remain frozen in their modern minds.  
Dreaming of ten thousand Buddhas,  
they go on, hopelessly fruitful.

### **Sorrow And Joy**

*"seeing double in the human soul."*  
—Federico García Lorca

Let me address you Lord, from one who has taken  
the words of Satan to heart, and had his soul eaten  
by the lyrical hawk of sadness and joy, with his beak  
in my eye, talons ripping my tongue, and the crown  
of my sorrow nestled in his cruel and lovely heart.

Let me tell you I've wandered far from the spirit  
of human joy, and into the Ninth Bardo of hell. Somehow  
I returned and am able to consider both the bloody truths  
and the crucible of beauty. I've fired flesh and consumed  
the body, even while all my dreams float in a canoe  
down a peaceful stream, overrunning the banks, lapping  
joys and kissing the slopes with a religious passion  
known only to the most fanatic saints and fervent sinners.

Look at my heart Lord. It is soiled with sweat and the dew  
I glean from midnight and dawn, when I finally settle  
into a foreboding sleep. Still, I navigate these waters  
with the joy of an old man who crosses himself  
and plucks persimmons at the end of a cold autumn.

**The Rich And Famous**

The night is hazy and I dream of monks,  
young kids fighting, hip-hop punks jumping flanks  
of cops armed to the teeth, protecting banks

and the houses of the rich and famous.  
I disdain these shills, their pussy, pompous  
frills, as if they were clowns in a circus,

playing games with the beasts and audience  
when all they really mean is malfeasance  
to the masses. Their cronies look askance

at their filthy deeds and ask no questions.  
I can quote their hateful thoughts verbatim:  
No negroes, queers, or wetbacks, no abortions.

I spit at them and wish them a painful death:  
that or the hope they drink Macbeth's broth.  
Or as the songwriter said, Life's a bitch,  
it's time to go ahead and eat the rich.

# **Glenn W. Cooper**



## **A Room Like This**

There are ways of moving through things  
like this. Just lately I have found myself  
restless to wake up  
in unfamiliar surroundings; to wake, for example,  
in some dirty hotel room, wipe the sleep

from my eyes in the half light, momentarily  
unsure of where I am  
or why. To lay for a moment, observing  
the details of the room, remembering  
the circumstances of my arrival.  
Listening to the light  
rain outside, the traffic moving through it.  
Then to rise naked from bed, draw back  
the curtains and expose the people below.

To light a cigarette. Wonder  
about what it is that propels us onward  
in the face of so many reasons  
not to move onward. It takes a room  
like this, early morning rain, cigarettes  
in the half light, to help a man  
reach certain conclusions. Like

the one about remembering to forget.

There are ways of moving through things.  
This is just one of the ways.

There are others.

#### **4 Year Old Collecting Eggs**

little Katie  
has a new hen  
and the first egg  
is something  
of an event.  
but when she  
tries to gather  
it up the brittle  
shell splinters  
and gooey yolk  
runs between her  
fingers and  
onto the ground.  
without knowing  
it she sees for  
the first time  
the fragility  
of her world.

**A Destroyer Of Men**

Sean O'Grady,  
with over eighty  
professional  
fights to  
his name by  
the age of 23,  
gave new meaning  
to the expression  
“glutton for  
punishment.”  
But heck, he won  
70 of them so  
I guess he  
dished out more  
than he took.  
The kid could  
really punch.  
Now he sells  
real estate  
for a living  
and is learning  
all about  
destroying men  
in other more  
subtle but  
no less brutal  
ways.

**Some Men**

it is said  
that Picasso always  
did three things  
before embarking  
on a new  
creative period.  
first he would return  
home to Spain, then  
he would buy a new house,  
then finally he would  
get himself a brand  
new woman.  
just like that.  
some men have it all  
figured out.

# **Christopher Cunningham**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## **Words Like Terror**

make  
good poems.

words like  
savage  
and  
light.

words like  
grace and  
asphalt  
and guts and  
thunder.

like  
screaming.

like  
the laughter  
of  
dying  
and  
like

sal  
va  
tion.

### **Nothing Is Remembered**

the grave stone tilts  
above the  
plastic flowers.

maybe a lawnmower  
rubbed up against it.

someday the  
damn thing is going  
to fall.

nothing is  
remembered  
forever.

**A Moment Of Something Glittering**

it is late in the day  
and the last bit of sunlight  
cuts its way thru  
the last bit of  
autumn leaves  
left hanging  
on shadowy tree limbs.

it catches the roofs of cars  
and broken glass on the pavement,  
it pushes on the back of an  
old woman struggling up a small hill,  
it lingers in the eyes  
of birds perched above the street.

there are facets cut into the air  
and it is a moment  
of something  
glittering,  
something gem-like,  
before the smoke of night  
and the darkness of time  
conspire  
like thieves  
to bear it away

value  
in the  
impermanence  
of  
everything.

**These Quiet Nights**

after the storm  
there is a hush.

a held breath  
in the moist silences.

after the storm,  
these quiet nights  
are all that remain.

we work hard all our lives  
battling forces  
we cannot defeat,

our voices mingling  
with the roar of passing time.

but after the storm  
there are  
chances to wipe the water  
from our eyes and  
see with  
uncertain clarity,  
to rest our ragged throats,  
to hope.

these quiet nights  
refuel us

as  
                  dark clouds  
gather

in  
threatening  
skies.

# **Soheyil Dahi**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## **No, Not Me**

*After Harold Norse's 'I'm Not a Man'*

I am not a real American  
because I speak English with an accent  
even though I don't think with one.

I am not a real American  
because I don't play or watch baseball,  
I hate apple pie, red meat, pick up trucks  
and sleeveless t-shirts.

I am not a real American  
because I won't die for oil,  
or vote republican or democrat.  
The difference between the two is the same  
difference between Pepsi and Coke.

I am not a real American  
because I will not do the pledge  
and I smile at those who tell me,  
"go back to where you came from."  
As a citizen of the only empire,  
I have a right to be here  
or anywhere.

I am not a real American  
because I don't hate Jews, Arabs, Blacks, or Latinos  
and I won't sell my house if one moved to my street.

I am not a real American  
because I don't care what people do in their private lives.  
Hell, if two men or two women want to get married,  
that's all right with me.

I am not a real American  
because I don't think homelessness is a fact of life.

I am not a real American  
because I will not call a human being illegal.

I am not a real American  
because I like poetry and art  
especially during war time.

I am not a real American  
because I listen to KPFA  
and I have friends who say they are  
communists or anarchists.

I am not a real American  
because I refuse to work 80 hours a week  
for a corporation which will chew me and spit me out  
at its convenience.

I am not a real American  
because, unlike 89% of the population,  
I hold a valid passport.

I am not a real American  
because I cry when people are called  
collateral damage.

I am not a real American  
because I speak English with an accent  
even though I don't love with one.

**You Know**

What matters most  
is what the heart wants  
and the heart wants what it  
can never have

I walk by the hungry  
drop coins in their cups  
my pain so small  
when someone is bleeding  
for my kindness

Through the streets  
men and women  
holding hands  
passing me by  
I admire them  
for not seeing me  
or the hungry

**I'd Give It All Up**

And live alone like the old days  
when I was poor and full of poems  
pushing my old Mustang up the hill  
both of us dying like a minor Sisyphus  
No worries but the next paycheck  
No drinks but the blood of grapes

I'd give it all up for your nod  
or if you let me read your palms  
Your lips quivering with shyness  
I know you've been alone for too long  
But the lines in your palm  
tell me your heart is a wandering gypsy

I'd give it all up for you  
and start anew with what's left of me  
I'd give it all to you  
I'll bleed words for you  
Like a traveling salesman I'll knock on  
all the doors until I reach your home

## Dave Donovan



### A Toast

to lift  
and tip back  
at an angle  
most welcome

the cold wash  
of day's end mercy

curved glass and  
beaded wonder  
singing under the fingertips  
to a song  
our hearts  
learned long ago

open the evening now  
and let it breathe

we have skies to admire.

## In Memory Of Ray Augustine

gentlemen  
reach under the flag  
grab the handle  
and lift

he told the six of us  
three by three  
on either side of you

and we walked forward  
walked as you did  
into our lives

sometime in the past  
into the Abbey  
or the Gallery  
open stages/open mics  
gigs and backyard BBQ's  
any place with music and friends  
and you had plenty of both

we walked forward  
walked as you did  
under the shade of folk tunes

cowboy songs and country blues  
in the footsteps of Woody and Jimmy  
and Hank Sr. too  
who we know you could have drunk  
right under the table  
(or the dashboard as it were  
and who can prove you didn't?)

we walked forward  
walked as you did  
over the grass of history

green and rising  
a sea of memory  
you saved a man's life once  
in the Navy - not in battle  
but heroic nonetheless  
swimming through violent waters  
to retrieve a life nearly lost

(i asked if you earned a medal  
you said no and shrugged it off  
because it turns out  
a letter of commendation

from the Secretary of the Navy  
a meritorious service ribbon  
a newspaper write-up  
and the eternal thanks  
of your fellow sailor  
just don't quite equal a medal  
do they?)

we walked forward  
walked as you did  
into old age gracefully

your red suspenders and  
hair white as ash

your box of harmonicas  
a treasure of train whistles  
wailing and weaving  
the notes of the past  
into songs of the present  
as we arrive  
at that last railyard

a circle of tramps  
fierce and enlightened

gentlemen  
reach under the flag  
grab the handle  
and lift  
he told us

but he never explained  
how to let go.

### **Driving Lesson**

i was riding  
along with my cousin  
to a party  
and we were talking about  
when we were kids

how our family cookouts  
were so much fun  
and our mothers and aunts made the best food  
serving fresh lemonade and sandwiches

how our fathers and uncles told the best jokes  
and drank cold Hamms beer from  
aluminum pop-top cans  
with a baseball game  
crackling out of a transistor radio  
on the picnic table

and I laughed about Uncle so-and-so  
and his chain-smoking Marlboro cigarettes  
when she said  
No - they were Salems and  
the reason I remember that  
she said  
is because one time  
he asked me to run to his car and  
grab another pack for him  
and so I did  
but I couldn't find those cigarettes

and I searched and searched  
and checked the glove compartment  
and under the seat  
but didn't see them anywhere and  
when I gave up looking  
I turned around and there he was

he tried to kiss me

but i slipped away  
and ran off as he was trying to say  
he was sorry and please don't tell

about 30 seconds passed  
as we drove along  
before I could think of anything to say

so i said  
are you SURE they weren't Marlboros ?

# Doug Draime

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## The Earth Is Exploding Where Lawrence Of Arabia Once Slept

where he fought  
and fornicated

where he turned  
his heart to blowing sand

blood lust  
running through

his aristocratic veins

his blue eyes full of  
the murderous

future

## Ivy

Eventually when the  
dark green ivy dies out,  
the sun shrouded  
by the dense smog  
of doom, they will find us  
beneath the dead plants  
living vigorously, our eyes  
full of mysterious light

**Old Homeless Man In St. Francis Hotel Lobby**

I could see  
it was all  
he could do  
to keep  
from crying  
and I  
kept expecting  
his lower lip  
to begin trembling  
and sobs  
to shake  
his bent body.  
But he was dignified,  
holding himself erect  
as he talked to the  
nightly news,  
cursing raving  
at the television  
over the  
war.

**If I Could Paint I Would Paint This**

The sun coming down like iron, while shining  
through huge puffy-white clouds.  
All the buildings glowing like mercury  
The ocean at Long Beach, several miles  
away, is bopping up accepting the sun, in what  
can only be painted as worship

# Nathan Graziano



## A Vampire In The Mall

I sat on a bench in the mall,  
while my wife shopped for jeans.  
A man in a black trench coat  
sat down beside me.  
He had black mascara  
caked around both eyes  
and his face painted white  
to look corpse-like or undead.  
When he noticed me staring,  
he turned and hissed.  
Two long fangs hung down  
from his top row of teeth.

I shook my head, stood up  
and joined my wife in the store.

"Honey," I said, "there's a man  
on the bench outside with fangs  
like a goddamn vampire."

"That's a look these days," she said.  
"People go to dentists and have  
their teeth capped to look like fangs."  
She then turned and left  
for the changing room.

I stood by a rack of women's blouses  
trying to imagine this dentist  
of the dark shadow  
who in a single night turns  
human beings into douche bags.

### **A Frat Guy On A Motorcycle**

Regardless of what I thought  
of his baseball hat turned backwards  
and the eighty-dollar Ray Ban sunglasses,  
or the sleeves of his shirt severed  
and a tribal tattoo on his Mega-man bicep,  
or the girl, Good Lord the beautiful girl,  
tail-up behind him on the Kawasaki  
in cut-off denim shorts, two gulps  
of golden leg straddling a hot engine.

Regardless of my opinions,  
my simple and stubborn stereotyping,  
I have to admit I envied the look  
on this young man's tanned face  
when he stopped at a red light beside me.

It was a look that said, in no uncertain terms,  
"My life is good right now."

### Two Girls In A Tub Together

Maybe you're hoping for a supermodel  
to slip out of a slinky red dress,  
kick off a pair of stiletto pumps  
and step lightly onto a cold tiled floor.  
A few feet away another woman  
waits with parted lips in a Roman tub,  
steam rising from the still water.  
The two beauties then embrace,  
their breasts lathered with bubbles  
and smooth shaved legs entangle  
as their pink tongues flicker like moths.

So it might come as a disappointment to know  
the two girls in the tub I'm talking about  
are my wife and eighteen-month old daughter.  
They're splashing and laughing,  
fun as clean as a yellow rubber duck.  
I'm in the other room listening to them,  
a bit choked up by my love for both.  
I fold my hands over my stomach and smile,  
as astounded as you by my own caprices.

### **My Wife Has The Memory Of An Elephant**

My wife and I lay on the couch  
watching the evening news  
and sipping coffee  
after a dinner of leftover chicken.  
We both groaned  
as the weatherman  
followed a storm up the coast  
with a stiff right arm  
then shook his head  
as if apologizing for the snow.  
I reached around and placed my palm  
on my wife's round belly  
to feel our baby punch and kick.

As beautiful as a butterfly waltz.

Out of nowhere, my wife  
asked me if I remembered  
a night before we were married,  
when she caught me flirting  
with a young blonde at a bar.  
Although I honestly didn't  
remember the night in question  
and blamed it on the beer,  
she proceeded to describe  
the whole evening in intimate detail  
before the weatherman  
could finish his five-day forecast.

## S.A. Griffin



### Everything Is All Right In Time Even Death

100 miles per hour to nowhere  
point blank verse  
pain heaped upon pain  
thru addiction  
or just simply being  
available  
to the process

the march & mulch of war

burgers & fries  
obsessive sex  
the opiates of  
religion

whatever it is  
it will get us all  
in the end

pick your poison well  
live for it

blossom & burn  
inside the sacred unfolding of the  
laughing rose

even the sun will lose  
its hair & go blind

### **This Place Of Love You Make**

built on poems of tempered lyric  
& music boxed in moonlight

ecstatic moment sent to  
school the insensible flesh  
vibrating upon sudden arrows

to prompt the heart's unfolding flower  
tuned to the slightest  
glance & tempest gesture

love, small like time

incurable

**Lady**

we are here  
for the sweet stigmata  
of the poem

**One Night In San Francisco**

I crawled out of bed  
still drunk  
& proceeded to piss  
all over the cold hardwood floors  
of our bedroom

“What are you doing?”

my boozed bladder bursting forth its contents,  
“Taking a piss.”

getting excited she noted,  
“It’s getting all over the floor!”

“Don’t worry, it’ll all run out under the door.”  
I finished pissing & went back to sleep

the Haight was a beautiful place then

she really loved me

# **Christopher Harter**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## **Poem For D.A. Levy**

In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was run off on a  
celestial mimeograph machine,  
and God looked at it and said

"It's a bit crude, but it'll do.  
Here, Adam, go run off about  
500 of these and pass them out  
to the people."

### Poem

—*after Ted Berrigan*

The only time my father  
flew on an airplane, he  
exited the jet way  
white as a sheet &  
visibly shaking.

My father had never  
& would never again  
appear to me in this  
manner, even in the  
last days of his illness.

Myself, I have been  
on planes many times—  
travels both near &  
far.

I am not bothered  
in the least by these  
big mechanical birds,  
but I always think of  
my wife and son  
& smile during take-off,  
just in case.

**Christopher Harter**

**Farmer's Market (6.16.07)**

Today at the market  
we bought:

5 onions  
6 tomatoes  
1 head of broccoli  
2 lbs. of green beans  
1 lb. of sugar snap peas  
1 bunch of kale

I'll enjoy the taste of  
each immensely

When my son asked if  
the old man in the blue overalls  
grew those vegetables  
for us, I said

yes

**Christopher Harter**

**To The Quiet Voice Of Tom Kryss**

My son plays under the maple tree  
with the metal tractors of my childhood  
and the childhoods of my brothers and father

I sit here reading a thinking man's poem

as a nearby sparrow works to crack  
a speck of seed or the shell of a  
struggling insect

Each vaguely aware of the others,  
content to keep to ourselves

## **Richard Krech**



### **Mindfulness To Changed Circumstances**

Out of thin air  
an opportunity  
may arise so quickly  
that you must  
take advantage of it  
right away  
or not at all.

### **After The Storm**

Our warm bed  
central in the dim lit room  
corners in darkness,  
rolling & honking noises  
from Outside scrape across windows.

Our room flying thru space  
commerce bustling around us,  
we lying still  
holding each other after the storm.

Gentle purr of yr breathing  
later lets me know  
I am alone  
w/ my  
self.

**After The Intermission**

A small skiff (at night)  
quickly navigating a body of water,

the time frozen  
like a fine oil  
framed and in its place.

Using objects  
to transcend them,  
to see the core  
we wind ourselves around.

Winding down  
we find ourselves  
after the intermission  
still glued to our seats,  
wondering how it all  
will turn out

and pondering  
our next move.

**That Place Is Always Attainable**

Sunlight  
filtering in thru curtains  
after millions of miles  
in the cold vacuum of space,

Here it looks warm and yellow  
the blue of the sky  
green trees beyond.

Industrial hum  
occasional sounds of humans  
or cars.

The ability  
to find that place of calm  
is essential,

Our rock spiraling rapidly  
around the Sun  
chasing tomorrow.

## Mike Kriesel



### The Great American Novel

Grows up in a trailer park  
in a small Nebraska town.  
Bored as corn, he rides a bike  
on gravel roads where flecks  
of mica flash with sunlight.  
Thinks about joining the navy.  
Writes in spiral notebooks.  
Sometimes holds a page up  
to his face like a mirror.  
Never knew his father.

Lying on a picnic table.  
A meteor blinks past like one  
of God's fallen eyelashes.  
He sees the zodiac of possibility  
hovering above the world  
like a Ferris wheel.  
Feels weightless for a second.  
Things pivot, then settle again.  
Nothing stands between him  
and the stars' roulette wheel.

## **Country Garage**

Working on a Chevy  
with my cousin

underneath the buzz of  
old fluorescent lights

corn outside the  
cloudy windows

scratching at  
the muggy night

swearing at ourselves  
we hammer at neglect

along with any bolts  
that rusted tight

repeating shit we did  
back in the service

lies to grace our lives  
like fireflies tonight

**September's Almost Gone**

Reading a zine	on the steps	our poems connect
on the steps	the pages lift	sometimes like leaves
a thousand people	brief as leaves	spreading watercolors
see these poems	singing to themselves	in the trees

**Watching Boxing**

When dad	After dad	If there's
and I	died I	boxing
watch boxing	quit	on TV
on TV	watching	I leave
the action's	boxing	it on
usually	though	and go
too fast	I kept	do something
for me	his easy	in the
to follow	chair	other room

## **Ellaraine Lockie**



### **Man About Town**

His stride was a study in meter  
And any female looking his way  
from the Leaf and Bean  
as he crossed the street  
would become an immediate student

Black leather blazer  
Body cigar-straight in blue jeans  
tucked into boots  
Dark hair growing out of his halfway  
unbuttoned tan shirt  
Two-day stubble and longhair look  
of a GQ model

Five sips of coffee later I look up  
And he's ransacking  
the four trash cans out front  
Toasting other people's excess  
with paper cups  
In moves as fluid as the lattes  
chai and chocolate milks  
that slide down his throat

He's become a fine wine connoisseur  
Who couldn't be bothered to replace  
hiking boots with soles wallet-thin  
Whose domestic help forgot to hem  
the lining that hangs below black leather  
Or wash the once-white shirt  
that wears the foods he's scavenging

Now he's the city sanitation engineer  
conducting a field study  
Who sets aside samples of pizza  
submarine sandwiches and chicken wing bones  
Scoops it all with bureaucratic certainty  
into a threadbare backpack  
And not one of us watching  
wishes to humble him  
with the truth of a hand-out

## Censured At Starbucks

The book bumps my  
Swiss chocolate bar square  
off the tiny table  
To the freshly wiped wooden floor  
Where the carefully rationed quota  
of daily decadence  
Winks cocoa bean brown eyes  
in clandestine persuasion

I'd pick it up  
and plop it in my mouth  
(Suspecting the life expectancy  
of most germs outside a medium  
is less than sixty seconds)  
If it weren't for the three-year old boy  
watching like a dog-in-waiting  
to see what my next move might be

Role model mindful  
And with maybe meagerly concern  
for castigation from customers  
old enough to consume coffee  
I proceed with the picking up part  
and place the chocolate by my thesaurus

The implied trip  
to the trash can in the corner  
is obscured behind a need to write longer  
than a three-year old's attention span  
and a clientele's turnover  
When I can carefreely complete  
my consummation of the culinary act

**Edge Of Night**

Black with blue swollen veins  
He sits in stained denim  
on the train station bench

Elbows on spread-eagled knees  
Sparrow hands on head hung low  
A plastic produce bag for a hat

pulled over his ears  
Preserving the rising heat  
The fragile lobes from frostbite

As winter eats its way  
into the San Francisco Bay  
with butcher knife teeth

**If You Go To Budapest**

You'd better pack  
hair dye and dark glasses  
Because the mafia breathes heavy at night  
Its halitosis imbuing bars  
that submit \$600 bills for three drinks  
And police turn up their paid-off noses  
at the whiff of tourist protection

So you're required to remit  
Or run in hopes that  
you're smarter and faster  
than the two steroid-fed flunkies  
standing at the front door

You'd better pack  
a wig and make-believe beard  
if you go to Budapest  
Because when you're walking  
down Váci Street after dark  
An oncoming woman wearing store-clerk clothes  
could say you owe her for a hand job in an alley

And the authorities would trust the ten witnesses  
who blink red light retinas and fist folded forints  
And swear her swollen eye  
resulted from your sadistic satisfaction

If you don't race to your hotel  
In hopes that the city will be reconciled  
by swindling the next dupe  
who dares go to Budapest

# Adrian Manning

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## For Tomorrow

maybe there's nourishment  
still left in the bones  
of yesterday

don't discard them thoughtlessly  
pick the choicest ones  
wrap them in rags of the mind

for tomorrow  
may bring fuel for the fire  
feed us well

but tomorrow may be lean  
and empty and those bones  
may make all the difference

## **Your Anger**

let me paint your anger  
if it be your wish.  
watercolours, oils  
no matter which.

vermillion, permanent  
red, ivory black  
I'll paint it thick and brooding  
something to spit at

it will be ugly and terrible  
a vehicle for exorcism  
then when it is finished  
I'll make an incision

I'll pick out some yellow  
or a little orange  
we'll touch it in

I believe  
it needs  
to breathe

**There Must Be A Way**

There must be a way  
of seeing things  
in dream light

a way of  
opening tomorrow  
without cracking  
its shell

there must be more  
to the illusion  
a trick  
a sleight of hand

there must be a way  
that rattles like bones  
shrouded in loose skin  
forming the shape  
of things

**Black Days**

when it makes frantic  
obvious sense  
to leap to the liquor store,  
treading on the pavement cracks  
like I did when I was a kid  
shouting "I WANT to marry a rat!"  
raping the flowers  
and hatefully beheading them,  
punishing them for an eternity  
of beauty,  
hammering on a stranger's door  
asking them "WHAT DO YOU WANT?"  
stamping on their toes,  
singing protest songs to nobody,  
chasing butterflies on fire,  
entering the bear cage  
telling him "you don't frighten me  
you ol' bag o' bones"  
grabbing old ladies by the hand  
and kissing their wrinkly foreheads,  
Scaring young children with  
a natural ugliness  
before hopping and skipping  
back home with wine in the bottle  
to end up lying on the living room floor  
waiting to wake when it is over  
to be totally sane and dull  
again

## Al Markowitz



### Dirt!

*"Pat Buchanan says that by prohibiting Easter services but celebrating Earth Day, public schools are teaching our children to worship dirt instead of God or Jesus."*

Let us worship  
dirt.

Let us revel  
in the richness of soil.

Let us meditate  
on our own composition,  
from dirt we come,  
to dirt we return.

Let us roll  
in rich loam.

Let the compost heap  
be our holy altar.

The world is a dirt ball  
floating in cosmic dust.

The moon is dirt.

The universe is dirt  
and all therein  
the dance of dirt.

Dirt is life  
and life dirt dependent.  
Salt of the earth are we  
and the mountains  
our dirt cathedrals.

Dirt Dirt Dirt Dirt  
Filth dung mud crud dust

Soil laden and excreting  
with dirt under our nails  
and feet of clay  
we acknowledge our oneness  
with Dirt.

Holy Holy Holy Humus  
Basic art thou  
to all that is  
and in your embrace  
is final peace found.  
Who is like unto thee, Dirt  
among the mighty  
providing sustenance and life?

Blessed be  
the Dirt under our feet!  
Blessed be  
the Dirt under our nails!  
Blessed be  
the Dirt that moves  
in intimate complexity!  
Blessed be  
the components of Dirt!  
We of the Dirt extol thee.  
Blessed be Dirt  
for ever and ever,  
Amen!

**Paterfamilias**

My father --  
beatified even  
as his broad brow cooled  
in the dimmed fluorescence  
of the hospital room  
though the dead  
know everything  
the living still  
bound by silence  
can't yet acknowledge  
at least not  
right away.

But sainthood gives way  
to a lesser fate  
when tongues long tied  
begin to speak.

**For The Birds**

Here where night  
has been banished and  
the stars are in exile

Here where silence  
is as much a stranger  
as your neighbor

Here amid the furor  
of false patriotism  
where death is unleashed upon the world

Here in the darkest hour  
among flags and ribbons

Here the birds sing  
oblivious  
in the new budding trees  
knowing  
that even in the heart of darkness  
spring is inevitable

And we  
who stand against the taunting jeers  
at the ragged edge of the abyss  
can only hope  
they are right.

## Hosho McCreeesh



Call It A Battle Cry, Call It Guttural,  
Call It A Harbinger, A Prophecy, A Vision,  
Call It Begging, Pleading, Call It Last Ditch,  
Call It The Knelling Of The Rusted Bells Of Damnation,  
Call It Whatever The Hell You Need To Call It  
To Get Them  
To  
Listen...

I grow tired, hoarse—  
all this screaming  
& still  
nothing.

They march  
onwards,  
insisting on misery,  
denigrated by choice,  
a careful architecture  
to all their  
frustrated sadness,  
it hangs around,  
low & bright like  
children,  
& they continue living lives  
that make you  
flinch,  
make you want to  
turn away,  
they sit behind TVs & locked doors,  
sit atop their pyre,  
waiting,  
curled up & shivering like  
shavings planed from wood,  
a hot wind enough to  
scatter them.  
Thus far, the bulk of it has been  
wasted,  
an earth-sized pile of meat  
so useless it has never even  
flavored our  
greens.  
Tear open their mouths,  
pour molten metal down their throats,  
& it would return a cast

without edge, without definition,  
return a crumpled, unusable foil.  
I have less & less time  
for gaping yaps,  
for hollow maws,  
there's hardly room enough  
for the forgotten &  
the unavenged...

I say: Out with you  
if you sense  
nothing  
miraculous  
in your very  
marrow,  
nothing  
volcanic  
in your center,  
we have centuries & eons & ages of  
ruse & trickery to unknot,  
centuries & eons & ages  
where it has all been  
swindled from us...

What I want  
is  
this:

for all of us  
to do more  
with it,  
to do more  
with  
whatever  
it is  
we've  
got  
left.

Die  
trying.

Hosho McCreesh

Dank, Dark, Ignored Spaces,  
Forgotten, & Unkempt Corners Within  
Buried Somewhere Under My Shoulder Blades,  
& It Feels Like The More I Say,  
The Less It Matters...

...& the world  
simply is  
what it  
is  
& I cannot  
change  
that,  
so I suppose the best  
I can do  
is write, paint—  
because that's what feels right,  
because that's what makes sense inside,  
& then I can leave it all in there,  
in the writing, the painting,  
leave it all behind,  
all the  
struggle  
failure  
dreams  
arrogance  
insolence  
heartache  
madness  
insecurity  
victory  
ideals  
treachery  
worry  
mistakes  
lies  
& the damning, cackling truth

so, maybe, someone else  
isn't consumed by their own demons,  
so, maybe, someone else  
doesn't feel they have to  
go it  
alone.

Yeah,  
I like the  
sound of  
that.

**Hosho McCreesh**

In Every Place The Sun Drags It's Light,  
& In Every Shadow That Aches For It,  
In Every Single Place That Exists,  
& In Every Single Place We Can Imagine...

...the irrefutable, undeniable  
truth  
is that  
despite maybe  
wanting to,  
we  
cannot  
do it all  
alone,  
our humanity  
prevents  
it—

for the  
better  
I think.

# Brian McGettrick



## Alright?

“everything will be alright.”

he nearly spat on me  
forcing this lie out.

and I crack the  
seal on another  
bottle,  
the sound it makes  
is like a thousand  
bones breaking.

then I sit back  
and take a  
good, long drink,

unwilling to believe  
in a clear,  
doubtless existence.

### **From The Shore Out**

the aching  
heart  
betrays  
what is  
here and  
shouldn't  
be and  
what should  
be here and  
can't be

my smile breaks  
like colour torn  
from woven cloth

flee

give  
every  
thing

eliminate  
return.

**Tanning The White Band**

her balled up pink underwear  
plugs a small leak in the shower stall  
meanwhile  
I slide down her lash  
and look her in the eye.

that hot summers still happen  
and quiet mysteries are created by the young  
is no surprise  
and she is so young  
a contradictory cynic  
with more love than her heart can hold.

I used to have a sense of belonging  
in the place where mistakes are made  
but now my lies rest up against her easily  
and there's little left to defeat.

**This Drawn Out Thing We Do**

I used to know a guy  
who would keep his alarm clock set  
through the weekend  
for the time he got up for work.

it was so that he could reach over  
turn it off  
and go back to sleep.

hey,  
take your victories  
where you can get them,  
create  
them  
even.

# Amanda Oaks



## Sirens & Lullabies

wide awake  
at three  
in the am &  
my skin  
is lit

there are only  
a few things  
within reason  
that i  
can do

quietly  
& by candlelight  
so that i  
won't wake you

even though a-  
rousing you  
is the only thing  
i really  
want  
to do

## **Gravity: Iron Hearts You Can't Save Or Kick Start**

you see, she sat there  
& didn't say a fuckin' word  
worth hearing all night,  
sipping on her light beer,  
she was some kind of sadist alright,  
with a silver grin & wine-red nails,  
inhaling & exhaling  
every solitary soul in the place

dead-center at the bar,  
she stole glances of herself in the mirror  
behind liquor bottles half full,  
behind the bartender's petite tits,  
viper tongued & slick lipped  
she easily got lost  
in the process  
of rolling cigarettes,  
she was devoted to the labor of hating,  
laborious, one might say,  
but oh no, she wasn't foolin' me  
or anyone in the place  
because under that hardy masquerade,  
that she paraded around  
every fading day,  
bitterness was dripping  
into a pool of discontent  
drowning future experiences  
before  
their first breath

i studied her  
from across the bar,  
swelling the room with smoke,  
taking part in filling the ashtray  
between me & a slurring,  
alcoholic-eyed pappy,  
wondering why,  
it was so hard for her,  
because even those  
born blind,  
never even seeing  
one ounce  
of this world's beauty,  
know  
how to smile

**Lost Petition For An Endangered Species**  
*Applauding Clarissa Pinkola Estés*

where are you my wild women on  
the brink of brutish but upholding  
a close upkeep of grace & beauty,  
growing taller than those old bones,  
swelling & singing deeper than you  
ever thought possible, does that  
dark man visit your dreams, breathe  
down your neck, sayin' hey lady you'd  
better pay attention, i told him last  
night that i crossed that sacred,  
shallow river seven times, he said  
woman, do it slower next time, you  
gotta be silent to hear the crackle  
of the fire, i said that i've seen too  
many fingers go quick to lips, that my  
flames burn on the inside & they're not  
hard to miss, that our submissiveness  
has been the cement holding together  
our mother's mismanagement & it's  
his mess that bloats all our hearts,  
popping red balloons too heavy to  
float, we have held in our tender  
hands the same hopes & worries  
of our mothers & their mothers &...  
our minds have caged the same bird  
too many times over, so i will not go  
gentle into this night & when i open  
my eyes your ghost will not guide  
me to my death because i run with  
a pack of wolves, we meet our men  
halfway speaking the same language,  
we roll around in our rusty double  
beds, mama & papas of god shouting  
thunder, spitting lightning, so don't  
you tell me that silence is golden,  
our hands have been in our pockets  
cupping loose change & lost buttons  
for far too many years now, so this  
is my call, my plea, my appeal, where  
are you my wild-wild women, let's  
meet our men in the middle & show  
the world what it means to be  
free

### **Insurgency**

i know our love  
is as small as a  
single note played  
on a dusty piano key  
by a passerby  
on their way  
to the kitchen  
to brew their  
sunday morning coffee  
in the grand  
scheme of things but  
just think  
of how that  
lonely note yearns  
to be part  
of a symphony

# **Bob Pajich**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## **Missing You**

Cracked my left wisdom tooth  
the one on the bottom  
and all I can think of is cocaine  
how it numbs your teeth  
and how much I wish I had some  
on this Monday night in October  
this last Monday of October in Las Vegas  
and I bet I could find a bag of cocaine  
to dip into and rub on  
the back of my mouth  
a cabbie could lead me to  
some cocaine for the ache  
that's running from the bottom of the jaw  
all the way into my eye bone  
and I've done nothing wrong recently  
to deserve it, I haven't scaled  
any levels of deceit  
so I know the pain is not  
a payback by a guilty mind;  
it's real. It's dark and I'm tired  
and hurting for cocaine, once again,  
cocaine, always, always cocaine.

## **Beer Without Sugar**

My weakness for bad songs  
is costing me friends.  
They don't understand that  
“I'm still living with your ghost”  
says more to me than any line  
from “Hey Jude,” and  
the three chord riff  
in that college death anthem  
“Santa Monica” makes the hair  
on my arms stand up  
and headbang. “Lonely and  
dreaming of the west coast”  
simply rocks, especially  
if I'm heading to a bar  
to sit in a black vinyl booth,  
drink beer without sugar  
and argue about Bill fucking Collins.  
It's a song about love drowning.  
Collins should be lucky enough  
to have written: “I don't want  
to do your sleep-walk-dance  
anymore.” And the chorus,  
optimistic, somber, as eager  
as a Big Mac, a naked picture,  
it goddamn moves me: “We can  
live beside the ocean,  
leave the fire behind,  
swim out past the breakers,  
watch the world die.”  
I'm there. Elevate me.  
Some days, I play it  
over and over and I don't care:  
“Watch the world die”  
(chicka-chicka) bum bum  
bum bum bum bum  
(chicka-chicka)  
bum bum bum bum bum bum  
“Yeah, watch the world die.”

**Magnolia**

Have you ever walked into a roomful of music  
and scurried for the corner of silence,  
away from the sweating bodies all trying  
to solve their equations for happiness  
that cling to the dark walls of their mouths?  
In New Orleans, it took me two days  
to find Magnolia. For her, I would have let  
everything I value tumble off the shelves  
inside my body and crash into a million pieces  
in my feet. Me and Bobby took turns  
wiggling under her lisp, saying “Christ”  
to each other as if we were marching in a funeral.  
She sang all the words to the J. Cash I called up  
on the jukebox, knew he turned 70 last month,  
which cemented my heart into a smiling gargoyle  
perched over a stone box in the cemetery near  
Louis Armstrong Park. She wouldn’t let us get near  
the black velvet curtains she said  
hung in her bedroom to beat back  
the sunlight during her afternoon naps.  
The next day had her driving to Baton Rouge  
to play a digital keyboard and sing at a T.G.I. Friday’s.  
This is how I know she was real: Dreams do not  
drive 150 miles to perform in a chain restaurant  
that charges \$9 for a cheeseburger.

Right before dawn lifted her head over the Mississippi,  
Magnolia pretended to read my thick palm  
while I worked on a giant steak at an all-night diner.  
She said I would see things, go places, be happy, sad, find ruin,  
guilt, prosperity, sexual gratification, a house  
with many children, a lover, a lover. “Oh.  
And you have a long life-line,” she said,  
“Which means you won’t die until  
you’ve fallen in and out of love 16 times. Even  
by my standards, that’s a lot.” I didn’t tell her  
not really. She held my hand.

### **On Hearing Of The Bankruptcy Of Converse Shoes**

The skin inside the skin  
wants to expand and destroy as a teen  
and these shoes helped me do it. And then there was  
the gym teacher, Mr. Davis, at least  
four years past mandatory retirement  
who lobbed hook-shots over  
our uncomfortable and pimpled heads  
with uncanny accuracy. He once drew blood  
from my nose by faking a shot  
before rifling me a pass, wide open  
and staring at the hoop, braced for the rebound.  
He wore Converse All-Stars  
because he wore Converse All-Stars.  
The canvas supported his varicose-veined ankles  
just enough to school us all. I wore  
All-Stars because I hated my father,  
my mother, my sister, my body,  
my face with white blood cells  
bubbling out of my pores, my smile  
too easy and quick around girls.  
But as the shoe wore on, my face cleared,  
I fought my father in the front yard, I began to  
understand my mother's death in her living,  
my sister became her own self and  
a quiet girl blew me in her basement  
with full-throttled desire. I chopped  
those blue Chuck Taylors into low tops,  
took a pair of scissors, sliced  
right through the red star, wore them  
all summer and most of the fall  
until the gray sole flapped open  
like a panting tongue  
at the top of each step.

# Kathleen Paul-Flanagan



## The Megaphone Man

He stands on the corner  
of Midway Road  
and US Route One,  
a megaphone in one hand  
and a Bible missing the cover  
in the other.

His clothes seem muted,  
it took me a few minutes  
to realize it was dirt  
covering him and  
making him colorless.

He spouts chapter and verse  
and damnation and hellfire,  
pointing at drivers  
and passengers,  
as he twitches with faith.

Once he sang Amazing Grace  
in a raspy quivering voice  
and I almost cried.

People sometimes yell  
back at him  
or give him the finger.  
I just watch and  
open my window  
and listen to him.

Everybody knows him  
or thinks they do.  
Someone told me  
he's homeless.  
Someone else said  
he lives in the trailer park  
right near that corner.

All agree he's crazy.  
I'm not sure.

Whoever he is,  
with his dirty clothes

and his mystery self,  
I see a dancing light  
in his blue eyes.  
And I have to love him  
and respect him.  
I'm almost jealous  
because he believes  
and it shows.

And I don't know  
what I believe  
anymore.

**I'm No Soccer Mom**

I've never had any trouble  
envisioning myself  
as a freaky little flapper  
beaded blue dress swaying  
and tinkling with each step  
holding out a hand for a cup  
of strong bathtub gin  
maybe doing the Charleston  
with a suited slick-haired  
male counterpart

I can see myself  
as a depression-era  
farm wife  
thin cotton dress  
the breeze cutting through  
as I stand in the front doorway  
rubbing my chapped hands together  
sighing as my overall-ed husband  
comes up the front walk all  
dirty and dignified

I know I would have made  
an excellent Rosie the Riveter  
dancing alone  
across the braided rag rug  
in the living room  
to Glenn Miller or Tommy Dorsey  
in loafers and a peasant dress  
tears streaming down my face  
waiting for my Soldier  
to finally come home  
from overseas

I can see  
a clear picture of me  
as a June Cleaver carbon copy  
pearls, apron and  
a holier-than-thou attitude  
baking bread for  
a huge Sunday dinner  
served on Wednesday  
listening politely  
to my Ward  
talk about the office

So I wonder why I cannot see myself  
as a part of my own generation

**Inevitable**

When I stand next to you,  
I feel the same way  
I did the first time  
I saw an Arizona desert sky-

Small and insignificant.

I kept trying then, as I do now  
to make myself taller,  
more meaningful.  
It didn't work in the desert-

And it isn't working now.

I eventually had to leave the heat  
and dust because I just didn't fit.

A person can only be tiny  
and invisible for so long.

# **Michael Phillips**



## **I Don't Understand Birds**

the birds land on the new feeder  
and fight for prime spots  
the smaller, skittish birds  
remain on the ground  
picking through the spillage and waste  
probably laughing to themselves:  
"look at those idiots scrapping up there -  
the more they fight, the more we eat!"

well, birds aren't so smart  
nothing like people  
though there are people  
who survive on leftovers  
waiting hopefully  
for something, anything  
to fall from the sky  
or roll up at their feet

I admit that there have been times  
that I have waited for manna to appear  
times when I did little more than  
check the mailbox daily  
for the million dollar check  
though usually  
I'll do what I have to  
to get by

I don't understand birds that spend their lives  
fighting for dominance  
any more than I understand  
those that follow them around picking up scraps  
I suspect the real trick is just to eat, sleep  
and survive  
no matter how  
you manage to do it

### **The Benefit Of Distance**

in the course of a night  
the moon moves across the sky  
and one hundred people  
write one hundred poems  
about what a beautiful sight it is

I don't see the beauty  
which may or may not  
be a deeply-rooted problem  
all I think about when I see the moon  
is mechanics

and how some crazy bastards  
got the idea to aim rockets at it  
and how some other, even crazier bastards  
raised their hands and said  
"strap me to that bomb, baby!"

anyway, I'll never step on the moon  
though from up there  
I might be able to write a poem  
about how wondrously beautiful  
this city is

**Crawling**

staring out the window  
broke, behind on everything  
watching the Friday afternoon traffic  
Southbound on the 405  
grinding along  
at ten miles an hour

no money I'm used to  
like you get used to a new wrinkle  
or an upstart thatch of grey  
insulting the youthful brown locks  
no money I can accept as inevitable

but without enough  
for even a cheap six pack  
I begin to consider joining the crawl  
and I see myself on that Friday freeway  
pocketful of payday  
plotting the stop for an expensive six pack  
or three  
and a bottle of single malt scotch  
for the weekend  
which Monday looms over menacingly

it's then that I consider  
giving up drinking

for my health

**Michael Phillips**

**The Only Man For The Job**

one day a week the shelter disposes of  
about 50 dogs and cats  
it has to be done  
though it isn't my job anymore

Sammy Benedict does it now  
back there with the big metal chamber  
that creates a vacuum in about six seconds  
but it takes Sammy a long time

you have to work quickly  
to get through 50 in a day  
there are procedures that must be followed  
for proper disposal

Sammy always ends up  
working late into the night  
that one day a week  
sometimes until almost midnight

I was curious why it took so long  
so once I offered to help him  
he declined, claiming  
he was the only man for the job

I asked him why he spent so much time on it  
and he said, "The animals are scared.  
They know what's happening in there,  
and it freaks them out.

So I hold each of them for a few minutes  
before I put them in the chamber.  
It calms them down, and it makes me feel  
like what I'm doing isn't so bad."

all I could do was nod  
step aside and let him walk away  
Sammy was the only man for the job  
and I didn't want to stand in his way

## Sam Pierstorff



### The Grammys Were On

He's already learned it's a blonde world  
full of blue-eyed oceans and white sandy beaches.

In a house of brunettes and olive skin, he's suddenly  
decided "pretty" was on television, one of the *Dixie Chicks*—  
Natalie, if you must know.

His sister is too young to care, half-asleep on Mother's chest.  
My attention, like skis, slaloms down the pages of a novel,  
but he is a wet tongue and the television is a metal pole.

It's his first crush, his first realization of beauty beyond  
the cookies and fire trucks that usually spark his interest.  
This is different. I can hear the dogs of wonder start to bark.

The flame in his throat growls. Butterflies begin to flutter  
toward the light in his heart. He's now singing what he can,  
*Not ready to make nice*, and I look up from my book,

watch a bouncing 4-year-old boy strum air guitar.  
His bare chest is a fret board, his crotch, a humbucker  
that he strums with the speed of hummingbird wings.

At least I *hope* he's playing air guitar.

## The Perks Of Being An Editor

—For Ed Galing

I can really  
only think of one.  
His name is Ed.  
He's 90 and he writes  
long letters to me  
with lines sloping  
heavenward,  
and the pyramid walls  
of each "A" are jagged  
as saw blades.

His wife of 60 years  
recently died.

He tells me this  
in every letter,  
but I haven't forgotten  
either.

It's what I think of most  
when my own wife  
of only 6 years  
shuffles  
into the living room,  
wondering  
if I'd like some  
black tea.

Ed's in an old folks' home now,  
playing harmonica  
and tickling the keyboard  
until it laughs  
or cries.

But I get the feeling  
in every letter  
that Ed's always writing  
to a dear friend.

And that's the way  
it should be  
with poetry,  
too.

**The Changing Station**

In a world of opposites, I tell my wife,  
she'd be stuffing our baby's ass with poop  
instead of wiping it from his scrotum.

We'd have to gag him every two hours  
and funnel milk back into his mother's breasts.  
We would strip him naked before venturing to Safeway,

his uncircumcised penis swelling in the frozen food section.  
And in the cool breeze of Modesto's summer,  
we would cloak him in blankets and wool coats.

Soon he would shrink back to his newborn size,  
then smaller still until the doctor could usher him  
without rubber gloves back into his mother's belly.

Think of the benefits, I tell my wife as we would begin  
to videotape her deflating tummy, month after month,  
until she's a hundred and fifteen pounds again

and we're having dinner at the Macaroni Grill,  
toastng the blue plus sign as I pray for a little boy  
with almond eyes just like his mother's.

### **Coming Home**

Hear the father's old truck rumble and stop,  
its steel doors thud shut, his clumsy set of keys  
jangling like too much silverware in a drawer.

And now his heavy steps—hear them plod  
along the cracked and smeared driveway,  
oil splattered like broken eggs.

Watch the overgrown jasmine scrape his head  
as he kneels to pull a dandelion, remembering  
wishes he made as a child, the rocket-fast bicycle  
that never came, an impossible trip to the moon.

And now, dandelion beneath his sole, sun  
pounding the burgundy door, his key slips  
inside the deadbolt, a quick turn, and then  
the rush of little feet against tile like spilled marbles.

She's halfway to two, still rustling topless  
in a diaper. But she knows who's home, and she  
has just learned to hug and say *Hi, Da-da*.

## C. Allen Rearick



### Death Comes For Us All

I am alone  
the wind has died  
the trees fallen silent

death comes for us all

I see it in the headlights  
of a burning car  
on a rainy day  
in the city

I hear it  
in the cricket's voice  
behind the red barn

I feel it  
as the wind whispers  
past garbage cans  
littered by the dying

they do not understand  
they do not mourn

I wish them  
to teach me  
what it is like

to not

feel.

## The Terror

My grandfather  
used to be  
an alcoholic  
his nick-name was  
the terror

he would  
come home  
from the bar  
drunk every night  
and beat  
his four children  
and wife

now he is  
a sad old man  
with nothing  
to show for it  
but colon cancer

and when  
the devil comes  
to escort  
him home

I'm almost certain  
he will put up  
one hell  
of a fight

handing out  
a good beating  
for once  
in his

life.

### Poem For The Dying

These words  
are fake

I've martyred  
my  
heart  
on paper

this pen  
bleeds  
concrete  
clichés

the world doesn't need  
more poetry

it craves  
violence  
hatred  
self-destruction  
a  
broken  
window  
carved  
with misunderstanding

poet stand  
down

your words  
are lifeless  
in the arms  
of ignorance

go home  
you're  
no longer

welcome.

**These Tired Hands Can Hold No More**

There are sacred days it seems  
when you find yourself alone,  
standing lost in a Pennsylvania cemetery,  
on a late June day, while looking  
for qualities and concrete reflections  
in large stone tablets, carved heavily  
with the names of your ancestors  
by time's immortal touch, as to who  
or what you really are in this life.  
And so you begin to feel something,  
the wind maybe, pressing into your chest  
an innate rapture, like a hot tarred roof  
arresting you where you stand.  
Or a rush of birds, scattering without cause –  
wings beating fiercely, cutting through stillness  
like the dust of dried bones,  
waiting within the earth's memory  
cradled beneath your feet,  
to be carried home by the hands of God.

And so you reach down  
to feel the grass' trimmed warmth  
your thoughts, grazing a distant past,  
try to find something to hold on to –  
a face, a hand's grasp, a soul's timid words,  
anything to still the drumming of your heart.

But there is nothing, and instead  
you find your eyes drawing blank,  
struggling to see beyond  
the horizon's gray border. The distance,  
recoiling like nightmares  
murdered by the sun's hot pulse, awakens  
within you an image of who  
and what you really are.

And you think, what a strange comfort  
to find oneself alone, completely  
engulfed in darkness, silence –  
the dead's voiceless words holding thickly  
to the backs of teeth  
as you feel, finally, what it is to be  
human.

# **Charles P. Ries**



## **Birch Street**

Sitting on the porch outside my walk up with Elaine  
watching the Friday night action on Birch Street.  
Southside's so humid the air weeps.

Me and Elaine are weeping too.  
Silent tears of solidarity.  
She's so full of Prozac she can't sleep and  
I'm so drunk I can't think straight.  
Her depression and my beer free our tears  
from the jail we carry in our hearts.

Neighbors and strangers pass by in the water vapor.  
Walking in twos and fours. Driving by in souped-up  
cars and wrecks. Skinny, greased-up gangbangers  
with pants so big they sweep the street and girlfriends  
in dresses so tight they burn my eyes.

I can smell Miguel's Taco Stand. Hear the cool  
Mexican music he plays. Sometimes I wish Elaine  
were Mexican. Hot, sweet and the ruler of my passion,  
but she's from North Dakota, a silent state where  
you drink to feel and dance and cry.

Sailing, drifting down Birch Street. Misty boats,  
street shufflers and señoritas. Off to their somewhere.  
I contemplate how empty my can of beer is and  
how long can I live with a woman who cries all day.

Mondays are better. I sober up and lay lines for the  
Gas Company. Good clean work. Work that gives me  
time to think about moving to that little town in central  
Mexico I visited twenty years ago, before Birch Street,  
Elaine, and three kids nailed my ass to this porch.

## I Love

Your grilled cheese sandwiches under  
the full March moon, as Jupiter draws  
near and we witness its unblinking eye  
hovering above the horizon at early dusk.

The way your lip is slightly twisted upward  
at one corner making your mouth look like  
an irregular right triangle.

Your explanation for washing your bed  
sheets three times a week, "dust mites."

Your mantric complaint about how hard it is  
to dress well at 20 below zero in the midst of  
a blizzard. Yet refusing to compromise for  
the sake of warmth, instead sludging, steadfast,  
like an Armani foot soldier through road salt,  
snow drifts, and sleet. Saying, "some things  
will not be compromised!"

Your method of slowly moving, methodically  
passing through the house...dusting, resetting  
souvenirs, just so. You, the feng shui master  
of knickknacks and fashion magazines, creating  
a perfect order in the universe of our life.

**Big Woo**

Academic hack turned carpenter,  
blistering nails instead of prose.  
Loved the barber shop and menthols,  
ape man - angel hearted.

Bell rang, third grade poured onto hot asphalt.  
Master of the play ground,  
recess never ending.  
Woo's wonderland - king of kick ball.

Junkie monkey man  
Heroin, methadone, ho hum.  
River rat playing at the sugar shack.  
Dead eyes turned toward heaven.  
Go quietly into the night Big Bad Woo.

### **Communion**

The tavern has closed  
Two lovers pause  
Outside the Catholic Church  
Half moon smiles down.

Ignited like youth  
They find each other.

Pressing her against the cool stone wall  
He wants communion,  
But waits in begrimed respect for her,  
For this place.  
“Why here?” he moans  
“Why not a bed or a field!”

Here is where God choose to light their fire,  
So here it is they will burn.

## Ross Runfola



### **Suburban Killing Fields**

I grew up on the tough side of town.  
I thought it was violent there with all the  
fights, drugs and hustlers.  
but then my parents moved to the suburbs and I met:  
lawyers who pad their bills  
real estate agents who  
don't tell young couples about leaking roofs.  
arrogant professors who  
use the King's English with immigrant parents.  
doctors who perform unnecessary surgery  
so they can put an addition on their house.  
executives from the gas company who turn off  
poor people's heat in the winter.

this suburban shit is so frightening,  
I move back to the city as soon as I can.  
at least the city's danger is more visible  
than the killing fields of the suburbs  
filled as they are with:  
heart attacks  
shopping malls  
soccer moms  
subdivisions  
ulcers  
boredom  
and  
creeping crab grass.

## Nothing To Lose

for no reason other than the closeness of my barstool  
the stranger with a vacant look and deep facial scars  
stares at me as if we were competing gladiators.  
he asks a question that only men who read  
too much Hemingway or do not read at all ask,  
"Do you want to take it outside?"

the stranger with the vacant look and deep facial scars  
has someone's fresh blood  
splashed like small rivers  
on his shirt.  
red paint on the dismal canvas that is his life.  
the fates have not been kind to the stranger  
with a vacant look and deep facial scars.  
the snake eyes that keep coming up  
each morning when he wakes up to no future  
are passed on at night to unsuspecting strangers.

I want to tell him that my life, like his, is filled  
with stale truths, bad fortune and  
hoped-for sunlight come the morning  
but why waste words?  
"when you've got nothing," Bob Dylan sings,  
"you've got nothing to lose."

there have been bigger men who challenged me in bars  
but their eyes were not cold and empty  
like the stranger with a vacant look  
and deep facial scars.  
they had pretty-boy faces, expensive suits,  
or families or jobs waiting for them.  
something to lose--which made them vulnerable.

the stranger's face with a vacant look  
and deep facial scars  
tells me that all that makes him a loser in life  
will make him a winner if we step outside.  
the stranger's daily fight for survival  
and don't give a shit attitude  
makes him invincible tonight.  
Irish Featherweight Champion Barry McGuigan  
explained why he was a ferocious fighter  
who always answered the bell,  
"I can't be a poet. I can't tell stories," said McGuigan,  
"so I carve up others."

I don't want to be the antagonist  
in a story without words the stranger wants to tell tonight,  
or give satisfaction to the crowd at the bar

### **Ross Runfola**

whose keen anticipation of a fight  
turns their faces primitive, grotesque, brutish  
like the painting "Fight Club" by George Bellows.

after the holocaust, the world appears a vacant place  
with deep scars that can never be removed.  
"In your personal struggles with the world,"  
says Kafka, "bet on the world."

"Ladies and Gentlemen, on this barstool  
with a bloody shirt and a don't give a shit attitude,  
representing the world, is the stranger  
with a vacant look and deep facial scars.  
and on this barstool wearing a confused look  
representing poets with a don't give a shit attitude ,  
is a man struggling to find the meaning of life."

I nurse my drink until the stranger is distracted  
by the barmaid with jeans so tight her fleshy stomach  
oozes out like meat pouring out of a sausage casing.  
with what some would call incredible ring savvy  
I beat a hasty retreat from a world  
I no longer understand.

**Orange Juice And Death**

their love turns bitter like a cigarette-stained tongue.  
both husband and wife want freedom  
but are afraid to break the chains of marriage.  
like corpses, they become secure only in daily rituals  
like having orange juice and toast every morning.  
it may be untrue that the wife died of a heart attack  
since she stopped living years ago.  
the night after the wife's funeral,  
the husband takes the money she hid  
in her underwear in the top dresser drawer,  
buys drinks for everyone at a topless bar,  
and almost has the courage to ask the blonde  
at the juke box if she wants to dance to Sinatra.

# William Taylor, Jr.



## Test Subject

My friend is a poet

which is to say  
he is egocentric  
half insane  
and has no money.

He finds me at the bar  
begs a drink and  
sits down at my table.

He sips a bit  
from a glass of whiskey

sets it down  
hard upon the wood  
and says,  
I have decided  
as soon as they finish  
building that  
suicide  
fence on the  
golden gate bridge  
I will be the first  
to try it out.

Either I'll be dead  
or at least they'll know  
the damn thing works.

He laughs  
and quickly finishes  
his drink

before the bartender  
has the chance  
to kick him out

for disturbing  
the paying  
customers.

## In Our Best Moments

Some days  
I dearly want to fall in love  
with us again.

And by us, I mean  
all of us.

I want us,  
in our best moments,

to be as beautiful  
as we are

in photographs  
and in movies,

as we are in books and magazines.

I want us to be as beautiful  
as we are in memories  
and dreams

when we are  
no longer here.

Some days  
I still like to imagine,

for the briefest of moments

we can all be  
as beautiful in life

as we are in death.

### The Heat

It was a strangely hot  
day in San Francisco  
and I stretched out in the cool  
grass of the park with a  
cheap six pack

along with all the others  
who had nothing  
better to do.

The feel of the sun  
the grass  
and the cold  
cold beer

was as good as anything  
the world had to offer.

A shirtless man  
not much older than myself  
sat down beside me.

He said nothing  
and I said nothing  
and we sat that way  
for a while.

I've been sober for ten days,  
he finally said,  
and I don't much see the point.

I smiled a bit  
in reply.

Mind if I have one of those,  
he asked, motioning  
toward the beer.

I nodded and handed him  
a bottle.

He popped the cap and took a long drink.

It's good, he said.

Indeed, I replied.

The heat, he continued,  
makes it hard

**William Taylor, Jr.**

to do anything.

But then I guess  
that's life,  
all you can do  
is relax a bit  
and wait for it  
to pass.

The heat, I asked,  
or life?

Whichever.

## Don Winter



### Buffing

I buffed a floor  
at Wanda's Grill and the buffer hit  
a slick spot, went gazooming like a kid  
spinning to be dizzy and kicked  
my balls. But no, I squealed like a hog,  
oh goddamn but no. All boss did  
was put ice down there real fast  
to get the heat out.  
He said I might be a eunuch  
in at least my right nut  
and don't forget to fill out  
this accident report. After work,

I went to Tintop Tavern  
and said to my girl,  
Here sit in my lap.  
Nothing would go down nor come up.  
She couldn't make it, neither.

Someday right soon, she said,  
there's just gonna be  
a lil' piece of your ass left.  
She was drunk as a hoot owl.  
Pabst on tap.  
Your mouth's runnin'  
Like a whippoorwill's ass  
in chokecherry season.  
I picked a cue  
and leaned. The eight ball wobbled  
like a thrown wheel  
and scratched.

## Lonesome Town

“Andy stole my cherry  
on a toothpick  
& swallowed it whole,”  
she sd. I was out  
of the army a couple weeks,  
madly in lust. “Now Andy’s gone,  
no one can say where,  
otherwise I wouldn’t be dancing  
in this shithole.” She smelled  
like a dogpound in August, but  
she had a wad of bills  
the size of a sandwich. Had a snake  
tattooed around her ankle,  
pierced nipple & that edgy, unreachable  
disinterest I couldn’t  
get enough of.

Two hundred for the night, two bones  
from her dealer later, we jumped  
into a Checker cab.  
Back in my room,  
The dope dropped my head  
Like a tulip.  
She cleaned me out.  
“Ants,” she sd.  
next day at the club,  
“people are ants,”  
lifted her feet & stomped  
them down. Next morning, I started begging  
my way back to my folk’s house  
in Bumfuck, USA.

**At The Tavern**

a man slips  
into his seat  
with a sigh  
like an accordion  
folding into its case

**The Tacoma Tavern**

is drunk with rain.  
And our tables are careless  
with empty bottles, cigarette ash.  
And we run our fevers  
up over a hundred  
arm wrestling our motorcycle buddies,  
drinking pitchers on one breath  
for a dollar. And we try to drink enough  
to lose our names.  
And we make up stories to fit  
the bad things. By turns hero and victim.  
And the waitress acts vaguely in love  
with each man. And the need for touch  
is a razor-toting, cuss-tongued bad ass.  
And the best sex rises from vacancies:  
divorces, failed jobs, incarcerations.  
And the closing time door flings open  
like a warrant.  
And the land tears away from us  
and slides off the horizons.

For more work & information on any of the poets included here, please visit their respective pages at:

**[www.guerillapoetics.org](http://www.guerillapoetics.org)**

## ★ Colophon ★

**GPPReader:** Selections From The Poets Of The Guerilla Poetics Project

### TEXT

*Text presented in SMASH and GARAMOND digital fonts.*