

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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Editors' 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

Miles J. Bell

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

Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal

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

JJ Campbell

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

Alan Catlin

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

Alan Catlin

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.

Leonard J. Cirino

Sorrow And Joy

"seeing double in the human soul."

—Federico Garcia 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.

Leonard J. Cirino

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.

Christopher Cunningham

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.

Christopher Cunningham

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.

Soheyl 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.

Sohey1 Dahi

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

Sohey1 Dahi

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

Dave Donovan

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 Draine



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

Doug Draine

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.

Doug Draine

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.

Nathan Graziano

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

S.A. Griffin

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 peeing & 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.

Richard Krech

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.

Richard Krech

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

Mike Kriesel

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

Mike Kriesel

Watching Boxing

When dad
and I
watch boxing
on TV
the action's
usually
too fast
for me
to follow

After dad
died I
quit
watching
boxing
though
I kept
his easy
chair

If there's
boxing
on TV
I leave
it on
and go
do something
in the
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

Ellaraine Lockie

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

Ellaraine Lockie

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

Adrian Manning

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

Adrian Manning

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 bearcage
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!

Al Markowitz

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.

Al Markowitz

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 McCreesh



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.

Brian McGettrick

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.

Brian McGettrick

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."

Bob Pajich

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.

Bob Pajich

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.

Kathleen Paul-Flanagan

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

Kathleen Paul-Flanagan

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

Michael Phillips

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.

Sam Pierstorff

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,
toasting the blue plus sign as I pray for a little boy
with almond eyes just like his mother's.

Sam Pierstorff

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.

C. Allen Rearick

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.

Charles P. Ries

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.

Charles P. Ries

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 begrudged 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.

Ross Runfola

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.

William Taylor, Jr.

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.

Don Winter

At The Tavern

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

Don Winter

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

★ Colophon ★

GPPReader: Selections From The Poets Of The Guerilla Poetics Project

TEXT

Text presented in SMASH and GARAMOND digital fonts.