

DON
WINTER

***SATURDAY
NIGHT
DESPERATE***

A RETROSPECTIVE
1999-2009

By Don Winter

Things About to Disappear (2005)

On The Line (2006)

Beware The Madmen (2007)
(co-author Robert L. Penick)

No Way Out But In (2008)

To Get It Cold (2009)
(co-author David J. Thompson)

*Saturday Night Desperate: A
Retrospective* (2009)

**NON
WINNER**

**SATURDAY-NIGHT
OPERATE**

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Press of the Real: Poetry of the Working Class

Working class *is*. It is the vast majority of us in America “who must live by the sale of [our] labor power, and [who] have no other life sustaining forces” (*Line Break* 12). It is those of us who perform jobs that seem boring, routine, banal, trivial, pointless, who as sociologist George Ritzer points out, “do the same thing every day. It is boring, it is bad, it is dehumanizing, but the green stuff seems to alleviate the boredom, at least once a week” (47). It is the man who worked at the power plant in Jack London’s *John Barleycorn*. It is those who labored in Charles Bukowski’s *Post Office*, “people who were caught in traps...They felt their lives were being wasted. And they were right” (142). It is the man and woman in James Scully’s “Enough.” It is those who suffer jobs destructive to human existence, jobs underscored by the ideology of Frederick Taylor’s *Scientific Management*, which has gained force in recent years, driving the expansion of the post-industrial service and information economy: jobs in consumer services, adjuncting, wholesale, and retail. It is those displaced industrial workers who must endure forced entry into the lowest levels of that service economy: jobs in domestic, food service, clerical, and telemarketing (Coles & Oresick xvii).

In Niles, Michigan, the working class town where I grew up, you were educated (euphemism for “socially managed”) for docility: conformity to the rules, obedience to authority, and receptivity to rote learning. Spontaneity and creativity were not rewarded. Niles High School produced submissive, malleable adults who were eager for jobs that would set the schedule. A good job meant Clark Equipment Company, or Simplicity Pattern, or National Standard. Work became the fabric of life, providing for a family the work ethic. That work ethic, the working class ethic, prized the functional and the practical. Conversation was direct, sometimes blunt, purposeful, but not reflective, and truthful, but you kept that truth in the family. You learned to laugh to survive; you passed on stories of family and town history, you passed on your values. Often you felt rage, bitterness and denial at being exploited by those you could not even name. You had difficulty in seeing multiple perspectives, but you felt others should be treated fairly, so you stood up for the “little guy.” And at home you made do, you sacrificed, you supported each other. Patriarchy ruled home, ruled the

workplace. Often violence exploded in both. Education was fine, as long as you didn't get too much of it, as long as you didn't forget "where you came from."

No, that's not quite. Resistance to willed amnesia is a myth. You wanted to rise, through the accumulation of money and its power, above who you are and where you began, and then to marginalize, obscure, silence that beginning. But without intergenerational money, upon which middle class society rests, most settled for upwardly mobile versions of themselves predicated upon a pyramid of consumption, formulated not so much on the need for a particular object as the desire to own it to distinguish themselves socially: the idea that a Mercedes is a status symbol that places you above the one who owns a Volkswagen, even though you may be a paycheck or two away from homelessness. As Linda McCarriston notes:

"Analysis of class in America is approached by different thinkers with different standards of measure, but it's safe to say that status—objects, jobs, reputations—is not the same as class. Take Thomas McGrath dying in a single room in Minnesota with a black mitten on the hand that could never get warm after the VA surgery on it, a handful of books around him. He NEVER was middle class. But he was educated, brilliant, and famous. The academy threw him out and McCarthy—which should concern us all today—finished him off. People are called, and call themselves, middle class when they have no safety net beyond the next paycheck, no leisure in which to learn and reflect upon their fate, no job security, no secure medical (and dental, of course). What they have is an education and enculturation in which they've learned to look down their noses at themselves 'before,' in their past notions of a life."

The first lines I wrote, at age 40, evidenced some of the rage, bitterness, and denial I felt in my working class poor life: "For years the land worked us, planned/ our cities like shotgun blasts." Plain spoken, private lines I wrote sitting on a bar stool in Niles. Here in my first attempt, in many ways brute, "snake brain" writing (I had no critical terminology to describe what I wrote), there is inner will, inner power, and social vision—also that rage—of a worker who realizes he is of a larger group that is, by-and-large- exploited, and who refuses to be silenced, to be extinguished. In the books I'd begun to read, such as *The Branch Will Not Break*; *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*; *Not this Pig*;

Chicago Poems; Ariel; American Primitive; What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American; I discerned a reticence about the working life. I mean, there were a few Levine work poems, and several of Frost's. And of course Sandburg's, but as Williams observed in a letter to Moore, Sandburg's "work" poems are a "drift of people, a nameless drift for the most part." Why was it that poems from the position of the working class poor, from that life and that labor being economically exploited, seemed to not be a powerful strand in American Poetry? Why was the voice of a defined social class—whose condition has long been the subject of study by sociologists and political scientists—as absent or misrepresented in American "academic" poetry, as that of African-Americans had been until recently?

There is, and has been, the resistance of the "academic" literary canon to "those below," certainly those of the working class. I believe this resistance arises out of a failure to appreciate, or react against, the class content of the poetry. That there isn't a clearer concept of the "working class" is a big issue. Why can't I justify my working class poems in the "academic" environment? Largely because the working class environment and real voice lack the political, social, and economic naming that might make them dynamic. Rarely gathered together as a locus of critique, the elements of a sociological poetics uncover the terms and uses of most "literary theories" as taxonomies of taste and/or group identity, joustings for a higher rung on the status ladder. And there simply is no cogent "working class" theory. The project of trying to place the importance of poetry in my life as a writer of poems becomes problematic as I realize how antipathetic to my poetic the "norm" is, and how few, scattered, and out of print are the theoretical materials I need to defend and articulate it. There is in American "academic" poetry a poetry of the "working class" that is all costume and no content. Most "working class" work that is acceptable to the digestion of the American "academic" poetry norm is not politically conscious. It's nostalgic, romantic, soft focus. Anybody can sling dialect and dress his or her speaker in denim or leather or rags. Much of what American "academic" poetry loves as "working class" and "poor" is voyeuristic. So to situate the importance of poetry in my life as a writer of poems is to point to this dominant academic tradition (normalizing discourse) AND the (my) dissident tradition, both ever present and in dialogue, though the "dominant" tradition avails itself of the false prerogative of refusing to talk with its other as equal.

Dominant tradition be damned, I knew when I began to write I wanted to embrace, not exclude, the working class poor in my hometown. I wanted to express and claim my belonging, my sameness to them. I felt that in traveling to the deepest parts of myself, and my experiences in the localisms of Niles, in other words the particulars of my working class experience, I might touch the deepest parts of the working poor in Niles, and elsewhere. My exemplars, McGrath, Scully, Boland, and McCarriston, as well as Charles Bukowski, Phillip Levine, and Gerald Locklin, are radically awake in their writing, something any poet should aspire to, quaky-kneed beginner or experienced connoisseur, with a consciousness fiercely engaged by the particularity of this world, peddling hard as it can to attend to and honor each moment in that relentless flood of disparate sensations, experiences (and memories about sensations and experiences), and ideas which is contemporary life; and they write with an authority of voice rarely achieved by either man or woman. They have begun, along with writers like Jim Daniels and Fred Voss, to clear a space in American poetics where “forbidden voices” such as mine can exist and persist as an urgent place for utterance of consciousness, to speak for my class as well as myself, a poem of self “made valid for all” (des Pres 164). They have not forgotten their class, in fact have become bards for it, and they have been taken seriously.

Don Winter
Anchorage, Alaska
January, 2006

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Table of Contents

Things About to Disappear (2005)

Batting Rocks.....	18
Things About to Disappear.....	19
Song for Someone Going Away.....	20
Fishing Near Dark.....	21
Dressing Burgers at Wanda's Grill.....	22
The Dream Home.....	23
Boarded Up.....	25
Silent in America.....	26

On the Line (2006)

The Wooden Indian Motel Blues.....	29
Roofing.....	30
Cleaning Up at the Hamtramck Burger Chef.....	31
The Grill Cook's Dream.....	32
The Cashier at Hinky Dinky's Discovers Jesus.....	33
Eugene Walks Off the Job.....	34
Saturday Night Desperate.....	35
Working Late.....	36
At the Tavern.....	37
The Tacoma Tavern.....	38

Beware the Madmen (2007)

One Night Stanzas.....	41
Two Theories.....	42
Marcella's Fantasy House.....	43

Table of Contents

No Way Out But In (2008)

Buffing.....	46
Raw.....	47
Mon:1968.....	48
Lonesome Town.....	49
Going On.....	50
Late Shift Waitress.....	52
haiku.....	54
At Taylor's Pawn.....	55
Outlaw.....	56
The Hamtramck Hotel.....	57

To Get It Cold (2009)

Boast.....	60
Breaking Down.....	61
Southside Janet.....	62
Cab Ride.....	63
Lighthouse.....	64
Refuge.....	65

I

Things
About to
Disappear

Batting Rocks

If you were laid off in Hamtramck, Michigan,
and had done time
for beating your son, and for fighting
at the Tin Top Lounge, you might,
as he did, nail halves
of a junked bat together, and walk back
of the mill to the dump's edge.
You might toss rocks into the air
and swing for all you're worth,
make the hurt wood cry out.
You name the willow
growing up from the thrown
tires Willy the Kid, pounding his glove
under pop flies. You line one off
the crowd's roar—six homers in a row.
But the feeling stirs anyway,
like dust kicked up. Nothing to do
with the willow, the feeling rises with your breath,
a smell almost remembered—
the must of an attic, or a room
closed off. Whatever
it is you've lost is hidden there.
Your hand and eye are brother
to the willow, but your body is
this whole field: the dust settling
ignorant over the brambles and trash, over
your shoes, over the wild
and precise branches of the willow.
It is the thrown tires, the dented
rusting bedposts, sprung mattress, the washed
colors of grass whispering in their sleep.
Yours to call home. Yours to keep.

Things About to Disappear

For years the land worked us, planned
our cities like shotgun blasts.
Now it gives up, sinks
between hills. Boarded up factories
litter our rivers. It will do no good
to knit your brow. There's not enough left
in those hills to buy a meal.
What's left are wallets
of lost years, lapels tugged wide
by advice. We're old enough to be
our own fathers. We need a place
to be what we have become.

Song For Someone Gone Away

There are those who've begun
to ghost their lives.
You see them hunched
in grocery lines or on the bus.
They have grins lost somewhere
in the folds of their faces,
with fences of old teeth
broken and leaning.
They have no pocket charms
against oblivion
and they're not going to cry
about it. Maybe they have invited
sadness as a shield
against despair. Like old dogs
they hobble home, push
and pull the sheets, knead and scrape
until they have them right,
then drop down and breath out deeply.

Fishing Near Dark

The wind stiffens between my teeth.
I watch old men lean
into it, cast their lines
out of the shadows. All afternoon
we fished, caught nothing.
I should turn back
to the cabin. But he breathes
below the surface.
I change bait and I cast.
If I could I'd pull
the water over my head.
Beneath the choking air
I'd wait, know everything that falls
becomes my food at last.

Dressing Burgers at Wanda's Grill

During his 23 years here,
on each one
he curls ketchup
into a mouth,
places two pickles
for eyes, two lines
of mustard for eyebrows.
The onion bits,
he says,
are pimples.

We watch him
leave alone after
work, come in the same
time each morning,
take his break
by himself, always the same
station blaring.

We watch him
finish off
each face with a *top hat*, mash
the condiments together,
bury each one
in a thin, wax box,
All those little white caskets
on the greasy steel rack.

The Dream Home

Traveling north to hunt deer
you take a wrong turn
and stop for directions
at a house you've never seen.
A woman, fat and wholesome,
awaits you on the porch.
She smells like freshly baked bread
and when you ask her
for directions she leads you inside
to a clean, white table,
a cup of black tea.

This is more than you ever imagined before.
A plate, a knife, and a fork are already laid out.
You pretend you're not starving,
take a sip of the hot tea,
place the napkin in your lap.
Three girls, each under 5,
hold their skirts
as they walk down the long stairway
into the room. They smile at you,
and you smile back.

After supper the woman asks
if you might tuck the girls in
before you leave. As you tuck each one in
you hum nursery songs
under your chest.

After they're asleep
the woman invites you
to the back porch

to watch the sun go. You do not refuse her
when she opens your red flannel shirt.
You need love like all of us.
This is no dream, you think,
No dream. In the wet grass
you try to match your breathing
to hers.

Boarded Up

The end has been
happening for years.

The warped boards
are diaries of rain.

Termites comb
years out of wood.

Sparrows, a concert of them,
suspend in the rafters.

Absence remains,
grown tall in a doorway.

Chipped plates fill up
with the moon.

Silent in America

If you were fifty-five
and your speech had been crushed
by factories and divorce
to a single vowel, you might drift,
as he did, transient as a dream,
beneath the random lettering
of a broken marquee, beyond
all bittersweet efforts to connect,
to make sense, to endure.
You might stumble at dusk
to the Shelter Workshop,
listen to a revivalist
swollen like a tent, in trade
for a few hours of cold
comfort. It's taken years to forget
what's missing in your life:
the woman who bore you
eight children, the beaten Dodge,
the engines hung from the rafter
like hams. Here, a pale blob
of cold light gasps
you awake. The heat takes care
of itself. You mechanically eat
a doughnut, drink a cup of coffee.
The door closes, final
as a slap. You wander neighborhoods wrapped
in sleep, past dogs barking
who are you and cars and the ear
of a basketball hoop that listens
for its one song.
What can anyone do for you now?

I

II

On the Line

The Wooden Indian Motel Blues #8

2 A.M.

On the tube

the actress says,

“How do you want my tears,

halfway down my cheeks

or all the way down?”

I say,

“How do you want my poem,

halfway down the page

or all the way down?”

Roofing

Mornings we ripped
shingles. When air temp topped
body temp we got buzzed.
We sat and smoked.

“I’d get monkeys
to do your jobs
if I could teach them not to shit
on the roof,” boss yelled.

We laughed like struck
match sticks. Down in the street
sheets just hung there on the line
like movie screens.

Cleaning Up at the Hamtramck Burger Chef

Nights at this place
boss lines spray bottles up
across the counter. He says the red's
for shelves, the blue's for toilets,
and the white's only for stainless steel.
His eyebrows frown, but when
that bastard disappears into his office
I spray what I want
onto what I want.

Some nights his wife lifts
her ass onto the counter. She points
out turnover skins I missed.
Looks like she's been slept in
for years. Those nights I time
his trip to the bank so I can chase
her with the white bottle.
And I catch her and squeeze
the little Chef faces stitched
over breasts. Some nights,

that is. But most nights the boss
looks right through me. His wife cleans
the salad bar, and yells
at the bits of mustard and dressing.
As if they were to blame
for all this. Most nights I turn up
the radio and sing my own words.
Something about being in this business to stay
alive. Something like that.

The Grill Cook's Dream

Since she came to Burger Chef
Vera is all he thinks about.
She calls back,
Two double cheese, hold the onions,
and he slides down
that voice onto a sofa
where they sit frenching, blowing
in each other's ears.
She makes change,
and he makes it under
her sweater, her nipples lilac
in the space heater's flames.
You fucked up, or what? Boss yells
one night when he's already boosted
the radio in his head
to 10, Vera's throat wild with words:
Yeah baby, oh baby, yeah,
her butt wriggling,
her skinny legs jittering
like rubber bands.
I'm fine, he swears,
sweeping buns into a dustpan
and secretly hoping
he and Vera have the whole night ahead.

The Cashier at Hinky Dinky's Discovers Jesus

You tell me when she found him.
It came sudden like a slammed door. A tent
of blond hair and two eyes of alien
blue, and a mouth that gossiped
us and the customers. She drove us
to church flapping her jaws
about forgiveness. She sized Jesus talk
to fit our sins. Jesus this.
The disciples of Jesus that.
And prophecy. Frogs and snakes
and blood letting blahblahblah.
We sang songs about
hallelujah, and shooing our past
sins like flies,
and one where you jumped
up and down for Jesus.
She left scraps of scripture
in every nook and cranny of Hinky Dinky's,
in cash drawers and cookie jars and cupboards,
even in a Bible
we swore would explode,
until one day
geewhillikers her heart did.
The good in us ran downhill.
We all stood around at Tintop Tavern,
drinking beer, pushing one another
and cussing.
Us back to good for nothings, wrong
since Genesis.

Eugene Walks Off the Job

Working the lot,
he unweaves the hose,
spreads the soap. He scrubs until
an oil stain lightens to a dull grey.

Hosing down the foam
he thinks of the cuts
in pay, in hours, of all the times
he's wanted to leave,
weighs these against
his brother laid off in Wyandotte,
his uncle in Coker, factories everywhere
slamming shut like empty cash drawers.

He puts down the hose,
walks past the other parking spots
with names of people he'll never meet.
The guard's seen it
before. He smiles and nods.
Eugene walks out of the lot,
past rows of clipped hedges, past
sprinklers repeating a slow, broken sound.
Yard after yard
dogs bark behind fences.
He won't admit
his greatest fear:
that he'll fling his life
into the distant, grey highway,
past the signals blinking "don't walk."

Saturday Night Desperate

We talked about it at the time clock
while we waited to punch in,
how it must have been the moon
and the radiator whiskey
brought us to her those Saturday nights,
and how the dog with the bowling ball
head barked from her front porch, back legs braced
to charge, front legs braced to turn
and retreat, and how she came hard
out that door hung from one low
hinge and was on you, smelling
of possum, with slick hair and a cunt
with whiskers stiff enough to grate cheese,
and how she pitched her head back, buttoned
those green eyes and shook out punk

birdcalls under her shower cap, and how
we took turns with her in the outhouse,
the door swung half open, the lime scented life
of the toilet seeping through
the half-moon cut in one wall, and we nodded
each other daft, winked and said she's all that
and a bag of chips, or something like,
and what we left out was the only
thing true: how she laid back when she finished
with us, yawned like some cat
curled in the pocket of a threadbare afternoon.

Working Late

Squared in his spot on line six,
he chalks a number
on the board, locks the chuck.
Fronds curl against his hands
and arms. He keeps nodding off,
even though the roof kicks with rain
and wind turns
on itself in the empty truck docks.

Each piece he lifts
is heavier than the last.
He cleans the finished ones
in the oil soup.
He turns the heat off, sips black coffee,
remembers the guy on graveyard
fell asleep for a moment and woke
to his finger lying on the cement.

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 most try to drink enough
to lose their 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.

III

Beware
the
Madmen

One Night Stanzas

He's not pretty,
really. Porcupine hair. Knuckles
for eyeballs. But he slays them
with that voice,
a slow bear climbing
a honey tree,

those kisses a barn full
of electric swallows,
that cock
a shot of bourbon
smoothing them out.
Women full of a fool.
Afterwards they roll around
with their wedded husbands
like dogs gone wild
with fleas.

Two Theories

There's a light at the end of the tunnel,
he said.

It's us going up in flames,
she said.

Marcella's Fantasy House

Nights at this place
he drank beer after beer.
His gut rolled
like a melon on the felt.
He said he could beat any of us
and mostly he was right. He played us
for quarters so he could feed
his thing for Hank and Willie
on the one juke box.

Paydays he wanted his winnings
in shots, so he could get drunk enough
to visit this redhead dancer
at the stage. He put nearly all
his pay between her breasts, then he kissed
the bruised air, because he knew,
like we did, that was all of her

he was going to have. Then he sat
by himself on a stool
and punched the air, a round against
the guy who stole
his old lady in Tuscaloosa, one against
the foreman we hated at the plant.
Against the no new love
and the no new luck
and every night nothing
he hadn't seen before.

IV

NO WAY
OUT
BUT IN

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.

Raw

Playing hooky again,
we carry eggs across French fries
& broken glass frozen on the pavement.
We count three & fire:
one falls short,
three smack the fat chef's face
on the roof.

 We tear for the truck.
Mark turns doughnuts, I hang out
the window, hit a guy
wearing a football uniform,
splatter the handicap sign.
We feel tough
 as older brothers
learning to say fuck you to authority.

The manager pounds out
after us, punching air
& screaming, but he snaps back
when my egg hits his chest.
Mark fishtails the street.
"One fuck of an arm,
fuck of an arm,"
he spits, turns up the unhinged
music. Pretty soon, someone will kick
our asses for doing shit like this.
I stick my head out
the window again, raw
air rushing into
my eyes and mouth.

Mom: 1968

As the supper on the stove
is nearing completion
her fork tests a potato,
breaks a bit of meat.

She salts a green vegetable.

Before the set but unsurrounded table
she stands in an empty house.

She listens for the sound of a car.

Whoever you are
if you come at this time
she will feed you.

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.

Going On

You drink Pabst and trade
low belches with a woman with platinum
hair and rhinestone earrings. Something or other
is on the tube, either the one
about the soldier dealing cards
to the dead, or the one closer
to home, about suicide and steel mills.
You talk the smallest talk possible,
all the while thinking
how does one face it down, go on
after another bad marriage. 46.

Days you wrestle big sacks
of fertilizer from co-op storage bins
to the beds of pickups.
Nights you watch bad television.
You had hoped to feel better
about paying the support,
but most nights you just feel your sore back,
wonder how long your life
will be in parentheses.
The woman throws her change
onto the bar to see if she'll fuck you
or not, but you're thinking

of your son singing under the brick arch
of the home you lost,
his voice griefless, the sky endless
blue without credit cards
or betrayal. You tell the woman you have to
be up at 5 for work.
You stand in the frozen rutted mud

of the parking lot, close your eyes.
2 A.M. The birds are chirping.
Already? You think.

Late Shift Waitress at Wanda's Grill

Nights at this place
I yell orders to a short order
cook five feet away, to his beefy
tattoo blurred by the years to maybe
some woman's name, or maybe the name of a ship
which went down. I learn to appreciate
the customers who answer *What are you having?*
with *Another one of those nights.*
I mechanically recite the list of everything I'm out of
and feel it's not much
compared with the litany of going and gone
I sing softly back
to the radio. The local color here
is blue: blue plate special, an entire row
of songs on the jukebox, my blue-streak
chatter on the phone,
fingering the dark blue bruise on my neck.
No matter how many times I rehearse,
I'll never be able to say,
No more. Don't wait up. Won't be back, ever.
Words like the thunk
of a car meeting something alive in the road.
At break, I look down at the plate of bacon and eggs
made up like a face,
growing colder by the minute.
Guess I'm not very hungry after all.
Whatever hunger brought me here
in the first place, whatever I wanted
so badly I could taste it,
somehow became the cockeyed wisdom
in those Have-a-hank handkerchiefs
behind the counter, in the measured

outline of a woman with all the fizz
knocked out of her. All here for the sadness
and the burning
and the neon promise spelled out: WE NEVER CLOSE.

(note: this “found poem” cost me blood)

she had a body
that had been a few places—
back from only some

At Taylor's Pawn

the price tags dangle—
morgue tickets
on dead men's toes

Outlaw

Maybe you've known a guy
half crazy, plain stupid, or just itching to be free,
who tapes *don't try to find me*
to the refrigerator door, and is never
heard from again, not even a phone call
or a post card. He changes from work clothes
into black scuffy boots, blue jeans, dark
t-shirt and a motorcycle jacket, hides his face
under a cowboy hat. He hails loneliness
like a cab, breaks every promise
he ever made to himself.

What balls, the men
at the factory say. *Braver than a suicide*.
But they hope they don't catch
what he has. And he winds up
drifting transient as a dream
not in some Kerouac utopia, but beneath
the random lettering of a broken marquee.
And he stumbles at dusk
to listen to a revivalist swollen
like a tent in trade for a few hours
in a warm bed. He forgets
what's missing in his life,
stops telling himself the lies
we need to make sense, to survive,
and he believes nothing
is always what's left
after awhile, and nothing he does or has done
needs to be explained.

The Hamtramck Hotel

shrinks in a desert of parking meters.
And WE NEVER CLOSE pops and blinks like a wounded
eye.
And the buckled sidewalk a blood and beer stained belt
of accordion keys. And the prostitutes whistle their one
note,
lips thick donuts strawberry glazed.
And the cars lay for years like stunned animals.
And the manager's voice tumbles like dice.
And all the rooms are dark, candle stubs
gasping on the tables. And the walls are stripping
down their paint. And the plumbing has hot flashes.
And Joe's biceps are two pigs wrestling
in a sack. And he belts the punching bag,
fists backfiring like pistons, an engine running down.
And thin walls separate lives.
And you hold back air, clutch your own fists
and wait to hear it—whatever woman moaning
low, the dull thud of the beating.
And you are glad your friends have stopped visiting.
And you turn up the radio
and hold onto the notes, a man diving
from a burning tenement holding to a mattress.
And you sleep between the station breaks.
And a rolling curtain of freight cars blocks out the river.
And the moon climbs
as the stars drip steadily into the streets.

V

TO
GET
IT
COLD

Boast

I can talk without
moving my poems.

Breaking Down

I bought that car for \$50.

To open the door
you had to pound
just below the handle.

When you turned a corner
the dash lights flickered
like a busted marquee.

The rolling noise
that charmed Vera
was a can of Budweiser
under her seat.

Night we split up,
she held my erection
& looked out the window
like someone
with a hand on a doorknob
stopping to say one last thing
before goodbye.

Southside Janet

her scars precede
the wounds
that cause them

Cab Ride

I should have walked,
she says.

I should have been a doctor,
he says.

Lighthouse

one match struck
in the dark
and blown out.
then another.

Refuge

(for gia)

Cool spring night.
Car window down.
A light snow falling.

And your head on my shoulder.

You smell of ginger root
and cedar and a child's
crayola crayons.

You look up at me and smile.

Your hands are ten
tiger's-eye butterflies.

There is nothing
I would not do for you.



**“Entrepreneur” Don Winter in
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 1997**



**“Poet” Don Winter in
South Bend, Indiana 2007**

From 1999-2009, Don Winter's poems appeared in most small press (and many "academic" press) journals. He is off to discover a new path.

One of the small press' finest poets.
——Chiron Review

Don Winter is one of the best poets in small press.
——Small Press Review

***I will miss your work, and in your future I hope
that you find the same peace and happiness
in life—in whatever you do—as you brought
into my world as an editor and writer and reader...
and that I mean with all of my heart.***

——Raymond Hammond
Editor, New York Quarterly