

poems &
antipoems

— also by —
TODD FABOZZI

Poems & Antipoems
vol. III

Poems & Antipoems, vols. 1 & 2
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poems & antipoems

vols. I & II

TODD FABOZZI

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Volume I

Selections from
Umbrageous Embers (2008)

the last wave for my city

it's the last wave for my dying city
and I'm crying

running out of time
to turn the tide
to make the dry rot subside
or watch it take over

the tipping walls and caving roofs
with sliding shingles
that leave black eyes open to blue skies
like empty cups to drink pouring rain

and I can hear the slate slip and slap down
and see the shards splinter to the ground
returning to earth

and the plywood pounded over windows no more
and the phantom factories with workers no more
and for each fallen porch
and broken stairway to nowhere
you see nature taking over
engulfing
reclaiming what was hers

the crunch of broken bricks
like red crumbs beneath my feet
reminds me that time waits
patient and relentless

to have lived a life here
is to hear the whisper of bygone voices
echo through these empty streets

and as I walk alone among old ghost homes
I hear warped wood creak and groan
in the clutch of rusty nails
pulling and popping
giving up
and letting go

and the mist of memory fades
like a brittle picture slowly vanishing

and every day
is a history less remembered
today, less than yesterday
when there was
but now
there isn't.

the levee of indifference

it was a category five
pointed right at the Big Easy

a knockout punch of wind and water
but the worst was still waiting

miscalculations
shortchanged shortcuts
that cut waterfalls
through malfeasant cracks

a torrent into the ninth ward
the poor ward
the better-them-than-us ward

they climbed into attics
with water to their necks

they climbed onto rooftops
and waved frantic arms at no one

they floated like bloated rafts
like garbage in the gutter
the refuse of our inaction

they were herded like cattle
the ones without cars
packed into a football stadium
to wait out their fate

so they prayed
and cried
and some died
while others died
a different kind of death
wallowing in their own excrement

they died of indifference
of racism
of poverty

they died of a broken heart
seeing reality unadorned
here in America
knowing that
to be black and poor
means
you don't matter to them

you are a one-way ticket to
wherever

you are a poison trailer

you are lost in the bureaucracy of
the Other America
that can't see you
or sees you as something
they can't feel
or sees you as an opportunity
to whitewash or privatize

but there are others, not many
though their spirit is strong—
stronger than all the others put together

and they have dug up from the wreckage
a cache of magic instruments:
rusty trumpets
bent trombones
cracked cymbals
dancing shoes
with holes to let the souls in

and they have begun to play
these battered instruments

and they have begun to dance

and their notes drift higher than the clouds
to the drumbeat of ancestral rhythms

and like mist from the bayou
a song of hope rises up
waiting to be heard.

wake up

it will take waves lapping at doors

it will take wild winds
whipping trees through windows

it will take basements filled like swimming pools

it will take whole houses crushed like toothpicks

it will take hurricanes and plagues
heat waves and starvation
it will take total deprivation

before people wake up and ask
what happened?

and even then
they won't ask

unless it happens
specifically
to them.

bankrupt

welcome to the land of more
where we never have enough

it's a place of enchanted images
dangled from a screen
insatiable needs manufactured to entice
youth, fame and fortune
sweet beauty for a price

there's a dream house
that should be yours
and a fancy car to envy

there's a trophy wife
with big fake boobs
and sugar daddy spending

there's the nosey neighbors talking
and you hope they wish they were you
all trying to top each other
in the race for something new

and if you can't afford it
you can borrow and pay tomorrow

and if the debt is crushing
and the repo man is calling

and if the power has been shut off
and you just feel like bawling

don't you worry you're not alone
in the land of not enough
where all the best consumers of my generation
have gone bankrupt.

just like that

he spends most of his life flying
from one place to another
like a bird without feathers

this is his life, his job, always flying
taking care of business

he's a lonely one with no friends
and no one to miss him when he's gone

he's like lots of people who spend their lives in
the hopeless pursuit we call making a living

flying from town to town
waiting in airports
waiting in line
getting searched and scanned
in their sox
bored and tired
dreaming of excitement
and meaning
wondering in weak moments
if today is the day when
it all goes down in a fiery wreck

sometimes it happens just like that

one minute you're reading the paper
or dreaming of sunshine
or just minding your own business
and the next moment
you're begging the god you've neglected
to spare your sorry soul

but the lonely flier never had such thoughts
never contemplated loneliness
or mortality
or the cruel hand of fate

he just went about his business
until that fateful day
when his life was cut short
in a horrific crash

it happened just like that

and there was only
one mourner at the funeral
only one person in this wide world
who noted his absence
and that was me...
the one who saw him explode
in a blast of green and yellow mucus
here today and gone tomorrow
in a splat across my windshield.

Volume II

Selections from
Crossroads (2009)

rat race

it's a mad dash
gunning it, breaking
shifting, swearing
stopping, stalling
trying to get ahead
not getting ahead
changing futile lanes
feeling insane

in a rushed rampage
to get to work on time
or home by five
to the daycare closing
or the store for more
or wherever in your wound-up world
you need to go

the grimace
in your rearview mirror
or the cut in line
the bump and grind
your blood pressure flying
dying
to the pulse of the rat race

to get nowhere fast
in a flash of nervous frenzy
with no time for peace
can't get no relief

always late and rushing
something nut crushing
stuck in traffic
beepers beeping
alarm bells cheeping
you wake up worrying
nerve-wracked hurrying
always scurrying
as you grasp at the fleeting pieces
of your runaway
American dream.

welcome to Wal-Mart

only in America
where the crowds congregate
before the rising sun
nervous for goods
anxious to shop till they drop
with itchy palms
sweaty for merchandise
in long lines champing at the foamy bit
ready to swipe and save a few nickels
on a black Friday day

they elbowed and edged
crunched and punched
the mad pulse of the crushing crowd
pushing and shoving
ramming and thrusting
the doors bulged and groaned
straining to hold
the clerk yelled “no!”
as the framing let go
and the frenzied crowd flowed
in a mad desperate dash
to save a little cash
screaming and yelling
and over and over they stomped—
thousands of ravenous feet
boot prints on his belly
stiletto heels to puncture his legs

steel tips to crush his desperate fingers
as he gasped for air not there
lying there
like a sacrificial lamb
offered to the gods of commerce
to the angels of cheap labor
to the spirits of over-consumption
who ravaged his battered body
and left him crushed dead
with hundreds of footprints
stamped on his head
and there imprinted
Made in China it said.

progress

for birds
four decades of
decline

one third endangered
threatened
dying

many poison reasons:
bad neighbors
exotic invaders
tree top removal tends to be
detrimental
heat margins become
incompatible

avoid nesting near parking lots
watch out for whirling turbines

good news—
only 4.1 billion pounds released last year
toxic discharges down 5%

of that only 1.3 billion pounds airborne
7% reduction

and only 232 million pounds
washed into waterways
5% reduction

making progress

although data shows
more mercury
lead
polychlorinated biphenyls
indelibly accumulated

they say
things are slowly improving

the die off happening

a little more

slowly.

horror flick

surely the time has come?

with so much to fix
so many blind alleys
and burned bridges

do we have the will to pull it off?

have our eyes finally focused
or has the chain completely disengaged?

maybe we'll learn to fly just in time
as we're knocked from the nest with no net?

or maybe we'll just drown, slowly
in our own quicksand
seeing the tragedy unfold in real time
as if we're watching a homemade movie.

dignity

who is that person behind the mask?

who is that woman
who makes me change
with her older eyes
and weary smile
and her sadness barely hidden?

who is that man
who says, "can I help you?"
surely several someones
before it came to this?

is there dignity?

are they able to accept circumstances
as they are
not as they wish
and summon the power to overcome
an unresponsive god
and still smile?

maybe they just keep from
stepping too far outside themselves
so they don't have to look?

but what about those with wings?

what do they do?

there's a wall

in the middle of my downtown
and I want to knock it down

there's a wall in the middle of my downtown
and someone, once
thought it was a good idea to put it there

there's a wall in the middle of my downtown
and some people think it was put there
to keep the Puerto Ricans in their place

there's a wall in the middle of my downtown
that used to be a mall
when those things were in fashion

there's a mall wall in the middle of my downtown
lying on top of one hundred historic buildings

obscuring the memories of people
walking talking
out and about
picking up a few things
maybe shopping for a shirt
sitting at the lunch counter
catching up on the gossip
catching a movie at the Rialto
or a catching a few cold ones
with the boys at the bar

but now there's a mall wall
rotting in the middle of my dead downtown
like a dumb brute
choking the neck of the city

yes, there's a big blank wall
in the middle of my downtown
and it's blocking Main Street
and it was put there on purpose
through urban renewal

yet ultimately nothing was renewed
just removed

swept away
to welcome in these sad desolate days

as we wait and wait
and dream of the day
when urban renewal
is finally undone

and that wall blocking our future
is knocked to the ground
and downtown is put back like it was.



Todd Fabozzi is an urbanist, writer, teacher and drummer.

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