

# five poems by brian bartlett

## LORD OF TOOLS

Chrome-Dome our stunted shop-teacher  
Was rumored to have  
Polished his head with floor-wax  
Strutting in a white bib  
And sawdust-colored whiskers  
Keyholder and Lord of Machines

Halfway into a prong  
Of my friend's sa.ad-fork  
The bandsaw blade snapped  
But any fire-and-brimstone  
Was simmering for me

My hand slipped--the wood  
Thrashed on the drill-press  
Until I killed the switch  
Alas my bird-house hole  
Shaggy and egg-shapped  
Chrome-Dome's brow grew red:  
The first time in my life  
Called an idiot  
Without a trace that it  
Wasn't meant literally

On days our lunches almost  
Froze before reaching school  
Light glanced off snow  
And glass hitting his skull  
Maybe the polishing story was  
True: Looking at him  
As he ordered when  
Spoken to you squinted  
As at a jewel  
In the forehead of an avatar

## LESSONS OF THE GROTESQUE

They aren't funnies (he cries,  
chin swinging up)  
they're comicks, I don't  
read funnies any more,  
funnies are punkstuff, you  
goober, you grannie

*Snagglepuss and Bullwinkle are funnies  
Sergeant Storm and Aquaman are comicks  
Funnies are hoofs as hands  
Comicks are hands sparking lightning  
Funnies use pig-pink flesh  
Comicks use coin-gray flesh  
Funnies abolish wounds  
Comicks abolish blood in wounds  
Funnies like sleek lawns  
Comicks like quicksand*

Listen, punk (I cry) you  
haven't grown older by  
switching to comicks--twitc  
your tail to a circus and  
see tartaned and tassled poodles  
minuetting on hindfeet  
and bleating, and the man  
clothed in sweat, pestering a lion  
with a stool. Both  
shows are in the same ring.

Brian Bartlett is an eighteen year old  
Fredericton resident, this year in his first  
year at UNB. In introducing these five poems  
he says, "Last Poem and Loved Burden are  
from my collection, Finches For The Wake,  
published by Fiddlehead Poetry Books and to  
be released in the near future. The other three  
poems are more recent efforts."

## LOVED BURDEN BECOMES PARCEL

Brain & embryo cradled in water  
when you run into walls  
or have your chair  
pulled away from under you

What if brains & embryos  
were carried under-arm  
in packets of water?

Fetus & idea would leave  
when we travel, substituted  
by tickets, duplicates  
on their handles

...being told your luggage  
is lost, waiting  
with cramps & blank eyes

What should be within & shielded  
& moving sometimes--will it  
move into daylight elsewhere?

I search for unborn orphans

Wandering into grocery-stores  
I begin wondering if  
there are brains or embryos  
in plastic-bags of milk  
which boys push pins in  
when clerks backs are turned

## BIKING IN A PICKPOCKET WIND

I.

Bear down on the pedals  
down the falling road,  
a funnel of poems  
shoved in my pocket. Am  
a blur in the intersection when  
pages are grabbed out  
by wind, snapping at my back until

scattering. Turn, see poems  
shifting, cartwheeling, cupped  
around poles. My secrets  
& promises out, under  
startled faces at steering-wheels.

II.

Emptyarmed girl, smoothly as if  
changing grip on a kite-string,  
catches one between two fingers  
& brings it to me, between

two fingers. Say, 'Thanks for  
rescuing my poem.' 'Oh,' she says,  
'That's what it was.'  
Say, 'A dalmation's pawed one  
on the grass, a driver's pointed to  
his grill. You're the best yet.'  
'I've,' she says, 'always  
thought of writing poems.'  
Say, 'Glad it didn't rain  
today.' She laughs. Feel good  
as you do after loosing  
a beautiful girl's laughter, even  
if what you said was  
funny as murder &  
she was actually  
acting or  
anxious to get on  
to wherever she was going.

III.

Wonder if the lost poem was  
pierced by a litter-stick  
& cast among cans & wrappers  
& carted off to a furnace. Or  
if the girl knelt, brushed it  
& deciphered something. Or if  
an oriole carried it aloft  
& cut it into strips  
to weave into its intricate nest.

## LAST POEM

what looks as tragic  
as wings cut from egrets?

those wings  
somehow worse than  
the wingless egret

the bird has felt  
bone snap and flesh tear  
but the wounds are soon  
covered with buff

while no jaws come  
down around his legs  
he stalks in swamps,  
no longer having to  
drag his legs across the sky

ah, i blink--there was  
something saying  
new wings could grow

yes, the wingless egret  
needs our grief:  
crouched, blue with cold,  
seeing other egrets  
take flight

but let us observe the wings  
lying in the reeds  
where the deed was done:

how they fan out until  
they are translucent, how  
they creak, how they  
are very dead

the wingless egret lives  
for now at least  
but the wings have  
lost all pulse

*find a pair of egret wings  
already removed,  
put them with my body*

for me, dear lawyers,  
it will relieve  
the pain of winglessness

it will also be good  
for the wings  
that would have been  
buried bodyless

do not polish the wings

if there be ceremony  
do not have it selfish

let other birds and men  
see the box if they wish

do not discourage wrens  
who alight on the edges  
and create thin songs

let buzzards circle above

let there be finches for the wake

