

# Platypus

Poems – Prose – Performance Texts

by

Joel Allegretti

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## THE WALT WHITMAN COMPLEX

Go and find a lawn that is as green as “lawn” implies.

Stand at its edge and pluck a blade of grass, only one.

Hold the blade close to your face. Study it. Touch it. Smell it. Experience the meaning of “grass.”

When you are sure you know the piece of grass as no one else ever could, put it in your mouth and eat it and, in eating, become the grass.

Walk to the middle of the lawn. Lie down with your arms extended from your side and rest in the knowledge that you are surrounded by family.



# I COMFORT CROW JANE

Dear Jane,

No one  
set the wheat fields ablaze. Look  
toward night for the culprits. See  
the pockmarks on the black-tar sky?

The stars,  
numb from the silence of heaven  
and tired of being so removed from us,  
dislodged themselves and descended  
to learn what all the fuss was here.  
It was their curiosity ignited the fires  
that scorched a path to the sea.

The burden  
of days blows through our lives  
like breath through a harmonica.  
In the heart of every tree is a guitar  
waiting for its craftsman.

The waters  
part at our approach. Come. Walk.  
Each new era cries for its own Moses.



## THE BOWERY (NOT)SONNET

Tell me everything you know about a green door on Bleecker Street;  
Not about the diligent carpenter who planed it into being,  
But the door itself and its need to separate us from someone else.  
Tell me when the Bowerie dropped its UIE and gave up its CBGB.

Then I will tell you I want to spend a night—or maybe two—  
In a seaman's home on 4<sup>th</sup> Street and imagine a concertina  
Wheezing me to sleep with choruses of "Sail Away, Ladies."  
But right now, I'm distracted by the man on the fire escape

Who is facing lower Manhattan. He is, I suppose, thinking  
About the Twin Towers and how loss makes us who we are.

7 OUT OF EVERY 10 9/11 FIRST RESPONDERS SUFFER FROM RESPIRATORY DISTRESS.\*  
He's smoking a cigar; even minor acts show we're engaged in life.

Meanwhile, over on East 7<sup>th</sup> Christ looks down  
On McSorley's Old Ale House and smiles at the goodness of it all.

\* From a placard posted along the Bowery in May 2007

## THE 1950s B-MOVIE MORALITY PLAY, OR CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON, GRANT US PEACE

Life was too luxurious in the suburbs.  
Streets swept virgin-immaculate,  
Lawns the envy of the Irish.  
Samba rhythms percolated on the stereo.  
We were the middle-class Eloi  
In split-level tract homes.  
We needed those Saturday mornings  
With a tarantula the size of Ecuador  
To remind us of our good fortune.  
Burnt supper? D in arithmetic?  
Inconsequential weighed against  
An intergalactic raspberry gelatin  
Consuming a roadside diner.

In every driveway, a waxed Impala  
Or Oldsmobile beamed  
Under the Sunday-dinner sun.  
Fireworks sequined heaven on the 4<sup>th</sup>.  
Melting ice cream gloved our fingers.  
No trace of a radioactive brontosaurus.

Yes, we knew late-night awakenings,  
But at least they had nothing to do  
With Martian reconnaissance setting up shop  
In the field behind the house.  
Had we ever noticed how doors slammed  
At two a.m. resemble gunshots—  
Or something approaching Tokyo from the sea?  
The sleepless hours and the rage in the next room  
Were only minor inconveniences.  
Think of the Incredible Shrinking Man.  
Nobody had it worse.