

# CLAY MATTHEWS

## Puff

September and so I guess another one starts  
in exposition. Which sounds uncomfortable  
this morning, like some terrible yoga pose  
meant to bring pain, and through pain suffering,  
and through suffering some breakthrough  
to peace or harmony or tranquility on the other  
side of thirty minutes, an hour, however long  
it takes you to get your breathing right.  
I give up. Outside on the road one kid on a BMX,  
though I don't know if that is the brand name  
set to define them all anymore. I don't know  
anymore exactly how metonymy works  
in corporate America. So one kid on a bike,  
and one kid on a scooter, and one kid  
on a skateboard and three-by-three they come  
down the asphalt as dark shadows pushing on  
against the first falling leaves that crack  
under the tread of their tires. Three-by-three  
like angels of darkness down the road. In future  
years they might remember this moment,  
they might relive this moment on big choppers,  
maybe a Wrangler with a soft top left in the garage  
that day, they might take the road to mean  
freedom again, to mean darkness, to mean  
destination without end, end without  
beginning, something smooth on which to fly.  
So Eisenhower built the interstates to save our lives  
in case the bomb ever came. Ye boom, ye bang,  
yr lives out on the move across even and odd numbers,  
north and south, east and west. And maybe a mile  
here and there for airplanes to land, to take off,  
to buzz the sky and the in-between with a feverish  
fury of sound so that if the end is ever near  
we will all at least have one good reason to look up.  
But this was long ago. The real memory of those  
times has died, or is slowly dying one piece at a time.  
Corso has died, who said "that in the hearts of men  
to come more bombs will be born." But it's less  
boom today and more go. The kids take a little

of both—the wheel and the firecracker, smoke  
in all its variations. They sit on a culvert somewhere  
with cigarettes, maybe two between the three,  
passing them around, skinny menthol cigarettes  
stolen from their mother's secret stash in the carport  
shed, just enough smoke to mean something  
in relation to the normal air they breathe, to mean  
something different, something new, something  
they take in deep and then let go to the sky,  
the space before them, as the rolling white movement  
maps out some place to go, some moment  
in the future at which time they might look back, and sigh,  
and feel a heavy heart beating against their lungs,  
thinking of a thousand words of regret, of warning, of hope.  
And they speak them into the wind as it changes  
its direction, amplifying the world as it picks up speed  
and blows, wailing, wild and lost and long.