

R I C H M U R P H Y

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## No Cheating

“What I’ve tried to do all along here in this endeavor is take the rear view mirrors off the bus—and we have always tried to look forward, and that’s where we are right now as well.”

—General David Petraeus

With the rear-view mirrors off the school bus,  
the current event careens toward the end  
for waiting children at the next pick up.  
The classroom needs no brakes, and  
its wheels whine about mocking  
each generation meeting the road to nowhere.  
The median between bravery  
and fool-hearty wears the uniform tire tracks.  
Bell-curve suspension glues faces  
outside the lines to the ring and to disbelief.  
Screaming tired from rubber, rules  
and one-plus-one-more straight edge bully  
prompt the custodian to the scene.  
Bearing down on the chalk, bored to death

over the poor or less on the blank sheet,  
the gym-grade student-vehicle climbs  
and plunges. The only neighborhood past  
whizzes candy by examinations.  
Old calendars preach many sloppy Xes  
to the promiscuous seeing-is-bereaving  
orange assemblage speeding; where oh here  
did the little dog go. Recessed  
into seats or blurring glass panes, snotty horror  
tells the trail once again to Beau Peeps clutching  
their eyes for roller coaster pride that dupes them  
with lunch money for their tomorrow.

## Pepperoni Peace

When delivering democracy  
from 10,000 feet, purveyors know  
all parties below tip and receive a slice  
straight from the oven  
without a chance to scatter.  
But then, before hell rang the doorbell,  
the men mixing tomato sauce  
in the kitchens on foundations  
had addresses to populations  
and orders also: The pot  
had been simmering  
to a boil a long time.  
Pizzazz thrown in the air  
sits flat with extra cheese  
or the works on top in a box.  
When the lid flies open,  
the smell is unmistakable:  
Nothing sells like the sell in the morning.  
On paper, the meal with map and driver  
could feed the world and may,  
even considering home-made concoctions  
ready to spice up the messengers.  
The average citizen dipping  
his finger in the tomatoes and oregano  
casts a vote and everybody else knows.  
The dough spreads around  
when everyone thinks  
about a pie peace.  
Burnt remnants fade from memory.

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**RICH MURPHY** was born in Lynn, Massachusetts. He graduated from BU's Creative Writing Program and taught writing and literature for 22 years at Bradford College and Emmanuel College before coming to Richmond. He lives in Marblehead Massachusetts and Richmond where he teaches at VCU. Credits include the 2008 Gival Press Poetry Award for *Voyeur*; a second book, *The Apple in the Monkey Tree*; chapbooks, *Great Grandfather*, *Family Secret*, *Hunting and Pecking* and *Phoems for Mobile Vices*; and essays on poetics in *The International Journal of the Humanities*, *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, *Reconfigurations: A Journal for Poetics Poetry / Literature and Culture*, and *Journal of Ecocriticism*.