

Been Awhile Ghazal

It's a few dollars' cab ride from hell's half-acre
Traffic can be murder along Spring Garden Road

Walk a brisk thirty minutes from North Street to Work
You can save yourself ten via Spring Garden Road

They cut through the dark and the fog from the harbour
Debris of all kinds washes up Spring Garden Road

Jay plays Westerberg tunes on acoustic guitar
He'll get lunch with the coins around Spring Garden Road

You can shoplift from Taz Records all afternoon
Play that vinyl when you get home from Spring Garden Road

Chase down your new worst-friend for a gram of trouble
Mike makes his living crisscrossing Spring Garden Road

Some high school kids swarmed that guy and nearly killed him
He had trouble walking after Spring Garden Road

Katie will work the late shift at Tim's, eight 'til five
Meet her in the wee morning on Spring Garden Road

You're keyed up at the Marquee and nervy in Hell
For fresh air and a stretch go down Spring Garden Road

You never knew her name, it wasn't yours to learn
Ghosts yearn to rub shoulders across Spring Garden Road

Jill and Jesse hooked up at Reflections last week
First steps are tentative beyond Spring Garden Road

Precise details elude me, the older I get
My memories unravel through Spring Garden Road

Those kids from New Brunswick, I knew them all too well
They lived eight to a flop above Spring Garden Road

Two springs spent idling between bookstores, bars and schools
Years later Stranach still dreams of Spring Garden Road

A Week in Montreal Ghazal

They were two days hitching, Halifax to Montreal
Got to Fougères Electriques just in time for the show

“I’ve got something to tell you before we get married,”
He yelled in her ear while she ignored the metal show

She replied *en Français* that he’d never understand
He went to get drinks and she disappeared from the show

Jimmy lost his virginity behind a warehouse
And to think he hadn't planned on going to that show

Flipping through the channels, alone in the apartment
Falling asleep before you can find one worthwhile show

They gobbled mushrooms and went to Cinema Du Parc
“Cannibal Holocaust” was that Friday's midnight show

They left the call centre early that Tuesday morning
The towers fell repeatedly on every news show

“Are you guys from New Brunswick?” she asks, looking appalled.
Who do you expect to see at a Tav Falco show?

They slipped into Super Sexe coming home from Bar Fly
But were too drunk, broke and sodden to lap up the show

Called her around dinner time to see if she wants breakfast
Her roommate took down the message, wonder if she'll show

Slouching into your thirties, you're bored out of your tree
You can't stand the thought of going to one more rock show

They barely got back to the Maritimes in one piece
Matt sifts through these images for the right ones to show

Devolution Ghazal

When my wife went away I began to devolve.
Before your very eyes this Ghazal will devolve.

One night at O'Malley's led to three days at hers'.
I smoked while she worked until we had to devolve.

On patrol in Kabul, he wonders why he came.
It takes just one wrong moment for shit to devolve.

Marty didn't make very much of a corpse
Bones and ash mingle with dirt to quickly devolve

Janie and Lanie and Beth schlepped to O'Malley's.
They dawdled and waited for the night to devolve.

Half of Grade Nine blew the Language Arts assessment.
It took but two hours for their morale to devolve.

Jess went flying from her bike and into the air.
Leaves met her back and she felt her terror devolve.

Sam casts a virtual shadow across the net.
Sun-down 'til sun-up he lets his free time devolve.

It feels as if we've always been talking this way,
Winter to winter, hour by hour, seasons devolve

You find this man without his wife stark raving bored
Talking mindlessly, our conversations devolve.

We could walk up and down Spring Garden Road for hours.
It's the evening's prerogative if to devolve.

The crows and the voles and the carrion know it.
Our days and words and thoughts have only to devolve.

There were so many nights where so little happened.
Walking home alone you felt your mind might devolve.

Every hand reaching out and every cry knows it.
We can only be counted upon to devolve.

Yet finally you find you have to sleep it off.
Matt's middling dreams seem to whisper "devolve, devolve".

New Year's Ghazal

They scrambled, and raged, and gasped, and thrust out the old year
They sucked, and hollered, and spilled, and grasped in the New Year

Katie gave herself license, Dave was simply that drunk
They slipped off together into the howling, new year

Marty fell asleep with a fresh drink and a lit smoke
His house burned to the ground within hours of the New Year

It was more than a sympathy fuck, he'd later say
Then why hasn't she called you, three weeks into the New Year?

It snowed, rained, then snowed again as cars slipped and skidded
RCMP were busy well into the New Year

His hometown looks strange since the roto in Kandahar
At first, he hadn't expected to live through the New Year

Forget getting plastered and throwing up all evening
We're going to bed early to sleep through the New Year

It was the closest to hell the detective had seen
The whole house reeked of death; first Sunday of the New Year

They set up their gear in the apartment's living room
Played covers for four, five dozen rocking in the New Year

She puts on some make-up then takes a taxi to work
Coffee and customers greet her hung-over New Year

They skidded, and yowled, and screwed, and yawned out the old year
They blazed, and huddled, and stabbed, and jumped in the New Year

A time for ebullience; another night on the piss
Matt jots down a half-remembered, half-made-up New Year

Going, Gone to Seoul Ghazal

You've thought of leaving town to go teach in Seoul.
There's nothing to keep us from speaking of Seoul.

You thought we had something there in Vancouver.
I was merely waiting to meet you in Seoul.

Time seems to run backwards here in Halifax.
His wife long departed, he contemplates Seoul.

It was all I could do to leave Montreal.
We'll take the blue line until we're downtown Seoul.

Jay didn't date for three years while in Saint John.
Girls shiver in skirts in the winter in Seoul.

We lasted a few days in Victoria.
I made for the mainland, you headed for Seoul.

They drove hours to see Fugazi in Boston.
He got dropped off at Logan en route to Seoul.

Stacey had a job all lined up in Fort Mac.
Then she got word how easy life is in Seoul.

U2 will play London, Bon Jovi Moncton.
I would pass up the Stones to see you in Seoul.

Your voice glides on wires across the Pacific.
The waves whisper your name between here and Seoul.

The dust and the heat can drive you from Doha.
Listen for the rain striking rooftops in Seoul.

Some cities I know very well from TV.
New York and Toronto have nothing on Seoul.

His old city drifts in and out of focus.
Fumblingly, Matt hashes his reveries of Seoul.

Lashed by the Desert Winds Ghazal

The muezzin's voice echoes across the grit and the silts
The sun has laid waste to all but the grit and the silts

In the inky afterlife he sees himself buried
He reaches without hands to stop the grit and the silts

That homebrew that Mike made put us all on our asses
We downed bottles of skunk juice to the grit and the silts

Glanton had the kid sprung from a Chihuahua cárcel
Killers hunted Apaches through the grit and the silts

We returned home to the villa after the summer
Our furnishings were begrimed with the grit and the silts

A low pressure system buffets the peninsula
Sheet lightning races over the grit and the silts

The intractable wastes extend past the horizon
What djinee or dervish wanders the grit and the silts?

He's a stark waking nightmare after weeks of no sleep
Wraiths and apparitions slip from the grit and the silts

Judge Holden caught the kid at a bar in Fort Griffin
He's dancing somewhere still beyond the grit and the silts

The road into town was mined before morning's first light
Metal, flesh and fire rain upon the grit and the silts

Dust storms mark the transition from winter to summer
After work Matt goes dashing through the grit and the silts