

BARRY ROBERT BARNES (1960 -)

Barnes draws on the poetic tradition and enlivens it each time he performs. At a recent performance, I heard Barnes recite from memory a number of poems by Langston Hughes, Robert Burns, and Shakespeare. This writer also appears on spoken word recordings that improvise on Hughes's poetry. He writes about very contemporary themes, like Hughes, yet at the same time and on the same stage, he reaches back to previous centuries.



"Kicked to the Curb" is a rarity in American English verse: a successful social protest poem. The straightforward dialect is made powerful by parallel yet varied comments. This is not a simple anti-war poem—the poet lists some plausible reasons for the conflict in the second stanza. The costs of war, nonetheless, are clear. A political poem shares qualities with narrative poetry: embedded within these images is a storyline. Finally, this is a moral comment that protests the treatment of returning veterans, especially those with war wounds. The title has shock-effect, or hyperbole (exaggeration) to move readers to action.

KICKED TO THE CURB

**An army of amputees
return from overseas.
Traumatic brain injuries:
can't hear, can't think, can't speak, can't see.
post traumatic stress syndrome
can't concentrate, can't eat, can't sleep.
Unexplained disorders and diseases
and what for?
What is the reason for this war?**

**Revenge for 9-11.
To free Iraqis.
War on terror.
Cheap oil.**

**When all our soldiers finally come home
will they be forgotten and kicked to the curb?**

Education: Barry Barnes is a life-long resident of Lawrence, where he attended public schools.
Career: This poet's book of poetry, *We Sleep in a Burning House*, is from Mammoth Publications (2008, www.mammothpublications.com). He adapted poetry of Langston Hughes to musical form for *Plain and Simple Truth* (Chameleon Productions 2007). He appears with the Bopaphonics on these Chameleon spoken-word productions: *Let America Be America Again* (2006), *Channeling Langston* (2005), *P-Bop* (2004). *Super Cow* is another ensemble CD. His poems appear in the compilation *Kaw! Kaw! Kaw!* (Gonk Monster and Chameleon Productions 2000). Barnes produced CDs: *Blue in a Red State* (with Stacey Fox 2003) and *Straight Out of Kansas* (2005). He works for Hallmark in Lawrence. See <http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=186910480>.