Orphaned Words:
Forgotten Poems From A Haphazard Life
by R.D. Armstrong http://lummoxpress.com

By Doug Holder

I have known R.D. Armstrong, the founder of the scrappy California-based small press—LUMMOX for a number of years. I have contributed to a number of his publications, including an anthology of Bukowski-inspired verse, and a huge—poet filled anthology that included many Boston poets. In his latest collection "Orphaned Words," he uses poems of his that didn't make it into his other collections, either because they were not ready for prime time, they were lost, etc...

Armstrong has lived a hardscrabble life in Long Beach, California, and many of his poems speak to his dark, ontology of the streets. They also tell you in no uncertain terms about the failing state of his health—and his diminished horizons.

Armstrong is respected for his honesty, and his refusal to paint a pretty picture—where this none. The poetry at times can feel like a quick, kick in the groin. Sometimes— dear reader— you may recognize yourself and quickly turn the page. In "Benediction 11" the poet chews and spits the angry words and memories of a dead end life,

> *" I want to fill my mouth*
> *With your angry words,*
> *That hover like stale smoke-*
> *Laden air, chewing on them,*
> *Mixing the broken syllables and*
> *Violent vowels with my own saliva....*
>
> *From them I spit the*
> *Dead bones of this absurd*
> *Hatred to the ground*
> *To shatter and turn*
> *To dust and blow away...."*

I share Armstrong's love of the late, jazz vocalist and musician Chet Baker. I love how Baker's horn coolly moves you on that metaphorical cloud, and lets you drift in the ether. In his poem, "Chet Baker," Armstrong captures Baker's sensibility, "horn and it's sadness,...weaving a tale of wistful melancholy... you were my Mother Theresa/touching me there// in my hour of depravity/giving me back my dignity..."

Some of these poems don't make the cut—and Armstrong is not shy about saying that. But when they do— they cut you, and you are wide awake.