Puppets and strings  
By Charles Conklin  

Custodians mop tear-filled floors  
in the halls of Wal-Mart.  
Crystal auras rip apart  
like innards and gore on tile floor.  

Screams of a child echo,  
rebounding off the cardboard boxes  
of Pepsi, Sony, Lays…  
Their scaled claws seep into  

The mother’s meated eyes.  
She stands as the sand-filled doll scans and dimples  
from its sewn-threaded lips.  

They leave in their steel-barred mobile car that heaves  
at the blood-red light.  
These shiny metal cells  

locked behind thick glass  
where trenches of asphalt  
and fumes of carbon smoke  
parch their rusted bars.
In one steel cell,
a teenage couple laugh.

Behind another fat glass,
porcelain mother, cheeks cracked.