

Seattle City Council

Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee Meeting

2 p.m. Wednesday, April 28th 2010

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Priya Keefe**

Today's poet is **Ellen Welcker**

Ellen Welcker has poems and critical writing at *Shampoo*, *Tinfish*, *Mudlark*, *Gently Read Literature*, and *Quarterly Conversation*. Her first book, *The Botanical Garden*, will be published this summer with Astrophil Press. Today she is reading an excerpt from a long poem entitled, "Rice"; the rest of the poem can be found at Mudlark's website, www.unf.edu/mudlark.

Rice

by Ellen Welcker

*What is the word for centuries of human thinking about time, seasons, sea creatures, reindeer, edible flowers, mathematics, landscapes, myths, music, the unknown, and the everyday?**

in a beginning
a god was in love
with earth
who gave birth
to rice

in a beginning
a goddess was killed
and a rice plant
the first rice plant

sprang up from her body

in a beginning

a goddess saw

the people were hungry

she pressed milk from her breasts onto earth

until she was sore; she kept pressing

and the milk turned bloody

her milk became white rice, her blood

became red rice

in a beginning

maroons hid grains of seed rice

in their hair

smuggled them off slave ships

into a new world

//\V/\V/\V

In a beginning

paddy was navel, softly scooping holding,

cupping water in folds of lap,

offering a steaming fertility.

One likes to press tongue to this wet place, taste earth and a humbling.

And knew what it was to be terraced; was learning

what it meant to be

swamped and seeded,

waded and weeded,

sickled and scythed.

The deafening chirrup of cricket in ear, blinking underwater.

Perhaps, already there were

Crow tit, Long-tailed
tit, Roufous-necked turtle dove. Azure-
winged magpie, Great tit, Brown-eared
Bulbul, Jay.
Yellow
breasted bunting.

There were gerrids, veliids, mesoveliids, hydrometrids, pleids, and saldids.

Damselfly dragonfly preying planthopper leafhopper.

Hydrophilids. Scavengers. Predators. Prey. Detritovores.

Egret stalking. channels.

Rakes and rails, a home, a nest. A wader, a tree sparrow.

Tree sparrow, Roufous-necked turtle dove,
House swallow.
Spot-billed duck, magpie.

The fox—Inari—at the edge,

among the rice and the sedge and people and the mud and the water and the birds and
bugs and the breeze.

-- end --

* <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20070918/endangered-languages/>