

Seattle City Council

**Public Safety, Government Relations, and Arts Committee Meeting**

Tuesday, 2:00 PM, June 5, 2007

**Words' Worth**

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Brian McGuigan**

Today's poet is **Arne Pihl**

**Arne Pihl** is a carpenter and a poet. He believes that the impulse to create is most fundamental and vital human characteristic, even though he doesn't always do right by it. When he wakes up in the morning, he feels like his body is new, the world is new, the only things old at all are memory and the ways he responds to interaction. He is sure there is a psychological term for this phenomenon, but he hasn't looked it up. He's not that kind of poet. He has published three books: "GirlsGirlsGirls," "Deck Hand Arm," and "Montana." His newest manuscript, "The New Biology," recently received its first rejection letter.

THE NEW BIOLOGY

It was almost completely ignorable at first:

A new variety of sand worm  
On a distant beach in Argentina,  
A type of cricket  
Never seen before  
In a far corner  
Of Ethiopia.  
Only a handful of biologists  
Noticed

Then,  
On an isolated rock  
In the Hawaiian Archipelago  
There appeared hermit crabs  
With strange golden claws  
That wore the bodies of sea anemones,  
Whole rainbows  
Of new seaweeds,  
Twelve finned minnows,  
Undocumented squid.  
People began to pay attention  
But

It was too late

New species began popping up everywhere—  
Under rocks,  
On the no-man  
Division lands  
Between directions  
On freeways,  
In the backs of cupboards  
In old cereal boxes

Now,  
Every locker room  
Has fungi  
That defy classification.  
The evening choir of frogs  
Has all kinds of new voices,  
Bird's songs  
Can hardly be recognized  
And twitter  
At unfamiliar hours

Vines like ribbons, shoe strings, serpents  
With berries like agates, salt water taffy, blue glass  
And flowers like bells, humming birds, and perfect  
Genitalia  
Crowd walkways,  
Consume backyards,  
Bus shelters,  
Neglected bicycles

Carpets have been lost  
To moss  
Thick as carpets.  
Trees eat up concrete  
With roots  
Like green teeth

There's a salamander  
On my window sill  
With orange eyes  
And purple feet  
Who whispers  
"Saturday" "Saturday"  
For impenetrable reasons  
When I'm trying to sleep

The word "Genesis"  
Is an over-used  
Media buzz word—  
It's lost all religious connotation:  
"There's some heavy Genesis  
East of the bridges this morning  
They're backed up across the water.  
Find another route."  
"Hey man, did you see that Genesis last night?"  
"Yeah...  
...Dude"

People are mystified.  
It's not what they signed up for.  
All that talk of extinctions—  
They feel kind of cheated.  
They laugh maniacally and weep.  
They drink too much.  
They lock themselves in and rarely leave.  
They babble nonsensically.  
Sway silently  
In circles  
On sofas—  
Their eyes as wide  
As a new species  
Of wide eyed bug  
In the glow  
Of the screen.

And worst of all  
Is the talk—  
All the nervous chatter,  
Stupid questions,  
And wild  
Speculation.

God,  
What I wouldn't give  
For a normal  
Conversation

-- end --