

"Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

Where Comfort Is by Nancy Dahlberg

Five hours on the road to Seattle
three hours of rain and road-splash rise,
cloud up to meet the cloud I'm driving through
and I arrive in the midst of heavy mist,
surprised there's air to breath in this city
under water. I trek up the hill just off the Av
to my daughter's basement flat, my coat
soaked, glasses dripping just getting to the door.
I crave warmth and light, but her carpet's damp,
the rooms, always dark, now cold and sour
from a water leak last week. We drink black tea
from cracked cups, chew on muffins from a day-old sale,
I sit on the only chair trying not to notice
the pile of unpaid bills, our mutual discomfort.
Then she takes me away to the conservatory
where I photograph her, my youngest child,
at home in a practice room at the grand piano.
Through the background window, the space needle's eye
floats on a dripping branch. There is no distance
here, fog flattens everything but the Mendelsohn
concerto she plays. Her fingers, quick on the keys,
release notes bright as birds. This is how
I know music--watching her body bloom
with melody, her fingers fly over arpeggios,
then stretch for chords that rise above bad weather
the way her whole body lifts in harmony;
clear and warm with light.

What To Do With The Hands by Nancy Dahlberg

I may be getting all A's in school,
Mom, but I feel like my body's not.
I want to take this dance class that meets
Tonight. Drive me there? Please?
Modern Jazz for Teens and Young Adults
requiring three weeks ballet
for those who don't know the positions,
How to move, or what to do
with the hands--like my son. A mother
only wants to help so we went in,
I paid the fee and watched the thirtyish dance
instructor eyeing him,
her hair tight back, her leggy body
smoothed into black wet-look tights,
while I swelled into my support hose
and stacked-heel Naturalizers.
Then she walked--no, stalked--up to Steven

giving off some dusky scent
as she moved right past me to confront
my boy. He straightened up
to his whole proud height while that woman
ran the whole back of her spread-
open hand down the whole front of his
long adolescent torso--
my God, she took her time about it--
then smiled up to him with "Oh,
you've got a wonderful body,"
while he smiled back. He smiled back!

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