“Practicing Slow Poetry” by Kristin Prevallet

“Clay Nation” by Alicia Askenase

Poems by Stacy Szymaszek

“Retinal Discontent” by Randy Prus

“the alibi was my bar,” “I know you when the floorboards creak,” “my high school art teacher,” “dirty death poem,” “flash flood of nectarine,” “Dear Mr. Ghost,” “a midwestern water park in winter,” and “(bad math)” by Stacy Blint

“New World,” “A Meditation Outside the Fertile Grounds Café,” and “Toribio” by Tom Clark
Laura Elrick's essay "Poetry, Ecology, and the Production of Lived Space" provides the conceptual framework for a poetic consciousness I am slowly embracing as a means of confronting the radical shift in ecological, social, political, personal, and ideological grounds.

She writes:

- Perhaps Charles Olson meant to suggest just such a shift when he wrote that "what we [poets] have suffered from, is manuscript, press, the removal of verse from its producer and it's reproducer, the voice." But by this I don't mean to propose a return to speech or a poetics of breath per se, but rather to suggest a possible grounding of poetics in spatial practices that challenge the "nature" of capitalist space, a practice that rejects the separation of our bodies from the spaces we inhabit.

As an artist / writer I can't stop producing (images, words, ideas). Producing is what keeps me alive, connected to other people, and present in the world. Yet, as I join the ecological and political movements to restore the planet and save humanity from the doomsday forces of capital, I feel the conscious need to question my habits of production and consumption.

But how do I begin? How can my poems work to illuminate the shift?

Dale Smith has theorized "slow poetry" as the momentum guiding poetic production as we face what Rick Doblin calls "the tipping point."

Smith writes:

- Production is not limited to texts, but is viewed as a socio-spiritual practice that helps prepare audiences for ways of looking at poetry and the context of the world(s) in which texts may eventually arrive. SP also stresses the necessity of slower consumer practices, preferring close readings to quantitative ones. SP values individuals as key motivating forces of poetic agency. That is, while systems or networks may influence how power is distributed, at each point, poets make rhetorical decisions about their work, determining the context and means of engagement.
I take this to mean the necessity for me to "show up" as a writer. In other words, I respond to Smith’s call not out of the urge to join in some “movement” (because that “just speeds things up,” as Henry Gould said in a comment to Smith) but rather to take some time to reflect on what I am doing. For whom am I writing? And why? Do I need, out of psychological necessity, to sit at a computer and hammer out words as fast as they come? Am I so enamored by my language that I have to display it like a peacock, flaunting the surface of language to fill up pages and pages of notebook-thoughts? And then publish them? Is my thinking really so magnificent that I need to churn it out, not missing a single thought bubble? How, ultimately, is self-expression really so different from globs of plastic shaped into cheap toys? As John Tipton writes, “Time to stop and think for a minute before we pick up our pencils.”

This stopping to reflect is, I think, what Ethan Nichtern of the Interdependence Project calls "the psychology of ecology." There are the "outside" things we think we can do to save the world: recycle, eat raw food, build solar houses, renew energy, etc. But there is an internal shift that must happen as well:

- But what about the internal landscape of consumption—the subtleties of our state of mind as we attempt to change our patterns? ...

Interdependence invites us to expand our awareness and to bear witness to the complex network of conditioning that produces each of our habitual actions, as well as the larger context of outcomes produced by our lifestyle choices. As ignorant participants in complicated processes of global production and consumption, we have had precisely this contextual awareness stripped from us.

In taking that internal shift seriously, I return to Smith’s blog where I find a rich discussion involving one theoretical position after another. But does all that thinking really manifest what he’s trying to say? To respond, I’d like to perform slow poetry as a thought experiment. This involves laying bare my thought; making present my associative leaps; reusing poetry as opposed to creating new poetry; and establishing a conversation with an audience that, as Smith writes, “makes context real.”

This is what I think Elrick and Smith are on to: questioning the extent to which poets are exempt from changing our patterns, and seeing how the work we do is dependent on cycles of consumption and production. Isn’t the work we produce and produce, publish and publish, linked to the same treadmills of production that are ruining the planet? Can we lay bare the subtleties of our state of mind? Show up in contextual awareness of what we're doing, and why?

For my thought-experiment I decided that the poetry reading is a good place to
start because it is a site where active engagement with an audience has the potential to build much more than my ego. What might happen if instead of reading one poem after another, I try and spatially inhabit the poems I read out loud? This means opening the space of the poetry reading to an experience that takes language off the page, into the body, and beyond the breath. To slow things down by fundamentally changing the tone of my poetic offering.

Naropa University, July 1, 2008:

Essay Press recently published my book *I, Afterlife: Essay in Mourning Time*, which is an elegiac essay about my father. I’m tired of reading from this book, but I am going to resist my inclination to write new poems just because I am bored with reading from my book. Instead, I’m going to try and shift the audience’s reception of the book by fundamentally changing my presentation of it. I’m going to try and shift the context of the poems in the book away from the language of personal suffering. Shift poetic language into an action. What I hope is that shifting gears from language into action disrupts the passivity of an audience’s expectations of a "poetry reading." Instead of writing about my grief, can I create a space for public mourning?
At a July 4th protest reading a few days later, I extended an invitation for anyone from the audience to join me in a procession that would involve slowly walking with the flag, the compost, and the blocks of numbers around the periphery of the hundreds of people gathered to watch fireworks on the great lawn that bordered Naropa’s campus. About 20 people joined me in this slow procession. We picked up a few people who decided to take a moment from their firewords festivities to join us. We then found a spot to set up the memorial so that it was clearly visible to people as they left the fireworks display.

caption: 500,000 = the estimated number dead from depleted uranium (which they stopped counting in 2002); 93,067 = the Iraqi death count, July 1 2008; 4,650 = U.S. soldiers dead in Iraq and Afghanistan, July 1, 2008.
Even in Boulder, CO, the most liberal town in America, this didn’t last long. About 15 minutes later the police informed me that there were complaints about my use of the flag as “antiwar protest” and that they would confiscate it if I didn’t remove it immediately. So, another slow procession to collect the memorial and place it under a sycamore tree on the Naropa grounds.

The following week I was informed that Naropa confiscated my flag because it had been desecrated. They turned it over to the local veteran of foreign wars post, who sent it off for ceremonial disposition. (If I do this again, I will ceremonially dispose of it myself.) Naropa asked me to write an artist statement, which offended me for a moment only because I hadn’t thought of the memorial as a work of art. So I wrote:

This is a memorial created by a citizen. It is a memorial to the dead, and a memorial to the flag which has been desecrated not by me, but by the war in Iraq. The flag is being buried along with the dead because I want the symbol of the flag to hold mourning as fiercely as it does patriotism.

So, as an exercise in slow poetry, was this a successful thought experiment? Did I, as Smith writes, “disrupt systems of thought, bring reflection to habitual patterns of action, and extend capacities in audiences to help show other modal perceptions of the world where ideological conflicts erupt?” It’s bold to imagine that poetry can be integrated into system of cause and effect at this level. But certainly I can change the interface through which my poetry is received. I found this to be a good exercise in putting theory into practice – not for the long term effects, but as preparation for the gradual mental shift we’re all confronting in different ways.
ALICIA ASKENASE

clay nation

- edgy mantra angst
  non-experimental not/es

  to midlife-coach:
  launder tender stash &

denavigate what clinging static disrupts, white-knuckle-it,

ear-link candle-lit i-pod
economize & signi-hi-fi

it

should lines channel right to
jolly global flow, cut demo out,
in-surgents at per gallon slick
prism spectacle boards
bogus grand stirring vat
solo h to the o ho hog
encore!

quatre Seasons, oi? O’planet picante erupts weather of a nature gradually painted order by the numbers you stop at no Sovereign cross urinal suspect or that museums slug garden nudists eclipse martyrs & styrofoam cathedral ceiling cups sistine Ambiguity chants all button stalagmites

Weep
January 20, 2009

ex-claymation to the former (the last) dragged out
8 years, today the citizens (formally) cheer loudly!
lone-star(uniform)state chopper never gone(secede, re-form!)
wheeling(true to form)chair thug(deformed)live-in vice
dybuks & boy devils(from a mold)cuntra'(farmerly)
genel’men! in(die Gestalt)fellast/h/at(molded)us a
slinger s’lute sir(foamerly) wide brimmed(formidable)
wadded up(unformed) to not have
to stand up(dis/deformed)
in dark(boogie-man) Presence would-be push’em!(bad form)
(bad back)busted bunker (phantom)bid(morphing)riddance…
in London(formal)(at least one personal cook) (formal) wretch!
(blowgrits!)not even ONE(formless) poison then...(formerly)
now a(form of)government)avant sundance(newly-formed) inaugurate
(informal) of (idēā s) s l o w m o polka pokes(formica
politicos) at real M A N kind (reforms) plenty for
Other/s(conformed) whoop up ciao (formality)
w warped dust lips asset(s’go(informd)-to-hell
(form(-form)cluster-fuck (perform)bombing-lust
(run to form)suit insider rapes(job-performance) piece
aesthetic hawks above banks(formulaically foam at)tender swine
prize hooks in eyes (formulate)sequel (form,
fitting) fly SWAT team drive-by it’s SO
BYE the BYE!
after-tax capture of my body

know which animals have special offerings

earrings on crocodiles can be misleading cats don’t hatch

more prudent to ooze post-maturation of abscess it’s all loose change

in the surveillance of births carrion equals

worship-intensifier

rot in a cell or this derivative headdress

roundabout stare takes effect asked to play a diplomat they scuffed my face

“there bona fided”

but my speeches have never made anyone sick
I have omitted punctuation
to reduce brain fever

there are still pushy vocal folds
when deprived of a personality

the motion of an
annual flower
consonant with his evening
breath

another name overwritten

another pact
to make different
public statements

still a reliquary
the distress call of the crocodile on my back

alerted me to my own submersion in murk  my physiological mouth

was elongated and birds flew in to clean me

this animal armorial  a poorly chosen amulet  for one who has never taught

a child to speak

maternal  she got bored

and fell asleep
Retinal Discontent

A painting of a painting
in front of a window, looking outward.
It’s the Human Condition, *pace* Magritte,
to view the world through art, to return
ourselves to the familiar, to the comfort
of being inside, in a room, somewhere,
to see the *not-here*, the there
so clearly we do not see the art
or the artifice involved, so clearly
we do not see the Human Condition
of making art, an *imago mundi*.
We name the world until the world
dissolves itself into image.

The Catholics had gotten it right, for once,
in making icons sacred. It kept the mind
focused on the mysteries of the everyday
and reserved materiality for the rituals,
preserving the aura, the sense of being,
weighted down by the forces of the world itself.

Henry Adams, from his view of the Potomac,
saw it all. How the exceptionalism
of American Protestantism could conquer
a continent as well as sex. Transforming it
to machinery, trapping the forces of nature.
He, too, saw history as a rearrangement
of the symbolic order, and how the act of naming
disappears as the thing is named. He, too,
felt the world itself, a dynamo.

From the edges of the sacred to the surreal
the world is too much with us, with its
law of retinal discontent, but we keep on
naming it, imposing images upon it, anyway.
the Alibi was my bar
the light
such sharp relief
real
chiaroscuro chianti

it was here the German printmaker told me
whenever he was around me
he felt like he was in a Steve Martin film
according to him it was my red lipstick
that correlated

one night he got really drunk
and asked me to go home with him
his favorite word was undulating
but when he said it he sounded like
he was having a stroke

he brought pink yak’s milk
to school he said he would take me
on a picnic where I would have a lollipop

it’s not like I’m going to chain you to the bed
or lock you in the closet says the German
when I get to this part I start to think of
violets
sunlight
being outside
rolling downhill
pity I couldn’t tell him that my first
sexual fantasy involved
Wonder Woman
swimming pools
Nazis
and pee
I know you when the floorboards creak
beneath a weight that’s shifting
behind your eyes
a falling shade brings us back to the first position
of what must be
a square step

kaleidoscope of earthen oak
beneath a weight that’s shifting
my cheek against yours
there is a burl to you
familiar

how to stop my heart from boiling over
please blow on me
my highschool art teacher
said he didn’t believe in meaning
or signs from the universe

mostly I feel humbled
by telephone poles
and the lines they make
parallel to the road

my desire is
saying something truthful
in this rainy caterwaul
of budding branches

drawing beautiful
swirling sounds
of breath
as the hands of a baby
discovering water

more miraculous
than even the best
of our fucking
is this
dirty death poem

cover me with mud
fresh earth
so there are worms in my hair
and rocks in my mouth
don’t worry what the neighbors will think

then turn the garden hose on me
spray until I shiver
until I shake and am unable to stand
then wrap me in a towel
embrace me
like someone who’d been found
buried alive
flash flood of nectarine
deer plums are also sweet
strawberries made
taste now red
crazy a two way street

as wind will scumble water
warm breeze lay down to die
tall grass embraces silence
Roy Orbison wafting by

still as much a beating heart
my most beautiful hell
even better than I thought
formerly having idolized
(what would come to dictate
a necessity of
this (un)balancing act
of descent
dissent
)un(mitigated

my golden fallen statue
having killed the queen
broken open now bleeding honey
this mournful hive
and I with welts split open
satiated

oh but now dandelion seed promise
rides the wind softly lofted
just beyond grasp
reaching this wish of oblivion
embracing everything
entropy

mud puddle mud puddle
barefoot mud puddle
crinoline splash
Dear Mr. Ghost,

in the best burlesque
of half seconds
as Tinkerbell through a smoke ring
I follow your eye

this shop smells like old people
and books longing to be opened
should I caramelize the sugar

Dear Mr. Ghost,

a rhinoceros
what if I become
a reflection in the glass
a china shop actuary
confessor of passersby
mirror

if I lay sprawled out naked
a shadow on the floor
falling under footsteps

or should I
take up residence
in the ceiling fan
a midwestern water park in winter

i’m imagining her IN the sundae
covered in gravy and mashed potatoes
but i have problems
i also have some stubborn earwax
that is really sticky
yet compelling
i got some on my nose
after digging in my ear
and trying to smell it
when i was in the bathroom i wondered
who will be here to keep the toilets running

a midwestern water park in winter
makes me feel farty and obsolete
beside myself without language
sometimes I read letters i’ve written
and think to myself
this person sounds insane
wait
this person is me
question mark
pause
question mark
really
I sound insane
earlier today the sun haloed my daughter
leaves crunched, the dog peed
i waited while
    she disappeared
    ahead of me

sweet daughter silhouette

sun allowed

10 years ago i stood outside the church
wearing my wedding gown, smoking carefully

(un)hallow(ed)

there was a park nearby noisy with kids this
little boy comes up asking ‘got any candy’
    i don’t say no
    i say
    go away

(( hollo(w))ed)

golden cords cut to eye
merry go beside herself
round
the bend ahead of
knowing
dispersing last breaths
promised to safe keeping
Eruptions of starlight, joy and gladness
As, at 10:30 p.m. on Shattuck, the New
World dawns with shouts of "Yes we can!"
From young persons thronging the clogged street.
The street people, however, are just trying
To get some sleep. I infer this from the body-
Bundles I see huddled in every alcove. But why,
In the rapture of intoxicated victory
I glimpse around me, do I insist on this
Dissonant note? "A complete curmudgeon,"
Gentle Dorothy once called me, in
Exasperation, accurately,
I cannot deny. Aye, O Friend! I fear there are
What are lately called Depression Issues
At work here. How tiresome, really.
By Depression do I mean the mental kind
And am I signalling I "need help"? Some,
I'm told, might well secretly think so.
"And maybe they're right, William," tenders
Gentle Dorothy from across the hearthside.
The nights are growing sharp, November
In the Cumberlands, ancient aching joints,
Getting up in the dark and seeing your breath,
Bad patches of thatch to fix before frost
Closes in and fingers, too numb for labors,
Withdrawn into religious half-mittens.

There were street people in William's village
Too. But in knowable communities
That which is often seen soon becomes known,
Thus accepted and not stepped over
As if inhuman, insignificant
Or nonexistent. Naturally William,
Who saw the poetry in everything,
Perceived the poetic aspect of this--
Particularly after coming back from
London, where the bewildering urban
Alienation and estrangement
Had already long since taken hold.
_Awed have I been by strolling Bedlamites,
He writes in Book XII of _The Prelude,_

**Tom Clark**

_The New World_
Referring to the road-wandering not-
Quite-normals of that not-so-remote epoch,
*From many other uncouth Vagrants pass'd*
*In fear, have walk'd with quicker step; but why*
*Take note of this? When I began to inquire,*
*To watch and question those I met, and held*
*Familiar talk with them, the lonely roads*
*Were school to me in which I daily read*
*With most delight the passions of mankind,*
*There saw into the depth of human souls,*
*Souls that appear to have no depth at all*
*To vulgar eyes. I like that. To me it feels*
More considerate toward the Bedlamites
Than the shrieking street partygoers
To the street people trying to sleep this night
Of victory through, unnoticing. It's
Their right, one might almost say, acknowledging
In the same breath that they have no rights.
Who needs a loud victory party
When all you want to do is lay your body
Down in a shop doorway, wrap your thin fleece sack
Around you, and chase a few winks. Morning
Wake-up on the street comes at five--with the light,
Now that Standard Time's back, and the clatter
And roar of garbage trucks and street cleaners.

"I have to get out of my negative
Comfort zone," Angelica's wise cousin
Peter Heinegg, Ph. D., joked
Ahead of the election, anticipating
A liberal landslide that would leave
Him little content for further volumes
Of social criticism. His *That Does It: Desperate Reflections on American Culture* comes with the dedication
"For Angelica--I had to dash off a
Few more jeremiads before Obama
Comes and drags me out of my negative Comfort zone." This reminded me of a work
Whose title has always strangely intrigued
Me: Granville Hicks' *I Like America.*
My tattered paperback copy cost
Fifty cents in 1938. "A native
Sees his country as it is and as
It might be," the subtitle goes. And it's not
Just a rose-colored-spectacle gloss
Of a book: *Nobody Starves--Much--*perhaps
The chapter most pertinent to the scenes
I see on the streets as each night I pass
By--discusses such uncomfortable
Subjects as that phenomenon thought
Of, as recently as the Eighties,
As pure anachronism: the American
Street beggar.  *Enough for Everybody*
Is another chapter.  And *The Freeing Of America*.  And *Can We Work Together?*
But even with bread lines still fresh
And vivid in his mind, Hicks remains
Able to build his vision upon an America
Of known and knowable communities
That no longer exists in the world of lies
The no less honest or idealistic
Peter Heinegg must needs begin from.

Her other cousin Paul sent us a picture of
His wife Rita, a black woman, and himself,
Embracing Barack Obama, smiles all
Around.  Paul had signed up fifteen hundred
Voters for the cause.  Gentle line of second
Generation Americans, the Heineggs.
Paul like Peter with his brood of bright kids: So
That now, as another cousin puts it, this clan
Of transplanted Austrians has a new branch:
The Black Heineggs, citizens of the New
World that this morning has its dawn.  What
I mean, O Friend! is, please don't take my lines
To mean I'm tempted to sell the New World short.

On campus the night is again cool, dark, and
Almost empty under the dripping canopy of tall
Eucalypti by the Genetics labs.  *Junior*,
In which a character portrayed by
The present governor of California
Is seen to become "with child", somewhat
Like Mary toward Bethlehem to wend--
Only it's not immaculate conception
But expert science by brainy Emma
Thompson that works the supra-natural
Magic--had these labs as its fictional
Location.  Well do I recall the ten long
Widebody movie production trucks
Lined up like supersized camels of
Hollywood Magi, as far as the parking Kiosk. Not even UCLA Boosters, When Bears host Bruins, boast that big A bus fleet. A world is going on and constantly Changing, changing. The Election Night Sea of celebrants has ebbed. Away From the crowds of tooting screaming white People on Shattuck, five young blacks loiter In the shadow of the labs. Four males and a Girl. Smoking and quietly larking. The biggest dude--athletic, in a STRIKE FORCE windbreaker--talks quietly on cell. The girl reels between them, singing softly "He loves you," and "he loves you," and "he loves You" as she goes. Each of her friends accepts This news in turn, without any expression I can detect. As I skulk past, not wishing To spoil what appears the lowest-key And best victory party of the night, The girl, whirling, floats up to ancient me. "And he loves you," she sings with eyes and smile That say, I guess, You may be surprised by What's coming. And I go on my way.
A Meditation Outside the Fertile Grounds Cafe

Ayman just came back from his family Home in the West Bank. How's the spirit there? I asked. "Good. Nobody's giving up."
Ayman paused, wiping down the spotless glass top Of the pastry case one more careful time Without looking up. Thinking to himself. "After all, all they want's a little justice."
On the map of the West Bank, that blank space Just to the left of the town of Bhiddu Is the village where Ayman's father, one Of twenty children, was born and raised.
The name of the village means House of Stones "Because there's a quarry there," but still It's too small to rate a spot on the map in The Economist, alongside this story
On the fresh welling up of blood and anger In my friend's home land, that blank space Filled with blood and stones. Ayman loves His trade; in six years he's built from nothing The coolest little coffee shop on the street; People like him, he likes them; he makes Great coffee, his sandwiches are famed, justly;
It's the old American Horatio Alger Dream, and America's his country. Every day he gets hundreds of calls On his cell phone. "But know how many Calls from people here I take when I'm back Home?" he smiles. "None. I talk to people There." And when he goes back home to Beit Duqqu, America feels far away.
That's the way it feels to me too, but I have No other home. The photo of the olive tree, Its roots exposed from the bulldozer cut, That was up on Ayman's wall last autumn--
Is that a photo of a broken home Or is it that one's home's always intact In one's mind as long as one's heart is Full? I wouldn't begin to know. Tacked On a phone pole out front of Fertile Grounds In drifting night mist, a tattered poster With a picture of a cat's face on it, lost Near Delaware and Shattuck. It's Momo. And what's become of poor Momo, now a week Gone? Tonight, caning into the fog,
I hallucinated a Momo
Sighting downtown. No, just another feral.
Over ferals few sentimental
Tears are shed. A shelter's not a home.
A sanctuary's what everybody needs
These days--the ferals, the street and doorway
People, the drifters in the mist, the bums.
On my way back, as I passed, I saw that
A young Arab girl in headscarf sat weeping
At a table outside Fertile Grounds. Ayman
In his counterman's apron, spick and span,
And Mohamed stood huddled in conference,
Mo holding a cell phone. "She's just lost
Her family, everything," Mo said softly.
"She doesn't have people here. I am
Going to help her." Ayman was talking
To the girl in Arabic, serious, hushed.
Then too Mo, in Arabic, reassuring.
"Don't worry, it will be okay," said Mo--
Switching back to Shattuck Avenue English
For me, the infidel. God is great. May
God bring Momo home if it is His will,
And everybody else along with him,
Whomever that may include--we, living--
And we'll abide in that, and till then hope
That Momo too, pilfering out of the trash
Bins behind the Shattuck eateries,
Will abide likewise. He'll not lack competition.
Christmas Eve of the New Depression year
And as usual Toribio's at his station
In the doorway of the French Hotel cafe
Philosophical, diffident, unhurried
Among his compadres, exchanging words
Now and then with tonight's counter man
Jesus, the joven whose brother-in-law
Cecilio even now tends counter three
Blocks south at Fertile Grounds--the useful
Underground railroad of coffee servers
Floor moppers and sink and basin scrubbers,
Without whom no necessary caffeine jolt
Of temporary cognitive enhancement
To keep anxious Christmas shoppers bent
To last minute buying rounds--the street's high end
Food markets overrun now by busy crowds
Of cautiously intent-on-consuming
Festive season celebrants; Toribio
However half skeptical looks upon
It all and comments bargain sales are good
Business this year, this is good for
Everybody. Is Toribio
Serious? I can't make this out, then later
Chastise myself for doubting, and tell
Toribio so. He nods understanding
It's my fate accorded me by my name
That of the doubting Saint who insisted
On sticking a dubious finger in the wound
In the side of Jesus--the earlier one
I mean, the one born in Bethlehem,
So long ago. Toribio is thirty
Three, same age at which the original
Jesus died, as I once suggested
While he stood on a Saturday night watching
The fancy muchachas prance up Shattuck past
The French--slouched against the bricks, checking
Out the beauteous piernas largas
And sipping an Anchor Steam from a brown
Paper bag. When Toribio washes
Dishes across the street some nights a week
The money he makes he sets aside,
Eats lightly, rides a bike, lets time go by
And on the weekend buys two twenty-
Fours of Anchor and goes through one per
Night, his humor minimally improved,
His philosophy deepened, his mood made
More serene yet his nocturnal routine
Unaltered, and on one such night I
Bring up his age conjunction with Jesus
And ask him, doubting, Toribio do you
Think Jesus had a good time? Of course he did
Says Toribio, he had life didn't he?
And if there were Anchor Steam, Toribio,
In Jesus' time, would that have made his life good?
Somber Toribio nods, por supuesto.

Toribio has no family here yet does,
Toribio will spend Christmas with friends
Toribio's Christmas present to himself
--He's already told me, and when he did
I made a pretend fist, chucked his wind
Breakered shoulder and said Que hombre,
Muy fuerte, with sincerity--will be ten
Twenty-fours, which he will make grace with joy
The ten days of his migrant's Christmas.

In Toribio there is some Vasquez
Family blood from back in Jalisco
And some Gonzalez, and the Gonzalez
Blood connects Toribio with his namesake
Santo Toribio Romo Gonzalez
The Santo Pollero or Holy Illegal
Alien Smuggler--a Saint, canonized
In Dos Mil by Papa Paulo Dos. All this
I learned one cold full moon night in November,
It was a Saturday night, the pretty young
Woman who cleans the rooms was dancing
And singing--a good feeling in the air--
She insisted the moon was not quite full,
Toribio's bantamweight-sized hermano
Lucho the Antonio Margarito
Fan insisted good natured la luna esta
Llena: when I tilted my head I could see both
Points of view and said so, and at that moment

Toribio said Santo Toribio
Is here. Quien I said? Santo Toribio,
He said, he is alive, he is here. I looked around.
Traffic was rolling up the street. The moon
Sat upon the tops of a few scant bare branches
Above the post office. He is everywhere,
Said Toribio. He comes when you need him.
I now know he spoke then of his ancestor
And namesake, the patron saint of the needy
*Migratores*, who appears in the night
To help them get across the river, provides
Food and water at the other side, soothes
Fevered brows in the desert crossing, heals
Snake bite. I felt a chill in my spine
As Toribio first explained all this that
Full moon night, a ghost story about a Scarlet
Pimpernel priest dead these eighty years,
Killed by *federales* in his sleep, in
Santa Ana, near Jalostotitlan,
Jalisco. If you need him he will come.
He is here, he is there, he is everywhere.

As the nights went by and times got harder
And nights got colder, I more than once quizzed
Toribio as to when the Saint
Might be expected to show up, given
The evident ambient state of need
On this street of illegals and bodies
Huddled in doorways more numerous
Each night. Toribio sneered
As though I had no idea of the true meaning
Of need. *Que, no lo necesitamos?*
Toribio shook his head. If saints
Had to come every time you need them
There would have to be many saints, *muchos*
*Santos* not just one, Toribio said.