

## *Gallery 1: Looking Around*



“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 highschool 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

KRISTIN PREVALLET

## *Practicing Slow Poetry*

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 its 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.

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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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 fireworks 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:  
laundry tender stash &

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

ear-link candle-lit i-pod  
economize & signi-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, *oiu?* 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)fellas/h/at(molded)us a  
slinger s'lute sir(forearmerly) 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 (idéā 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)  
warped dust lips asset(s')go(informd)-to-hell  
(free-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!



## STACY SZYMASZEK

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

RANDY PRUS

*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.

## STACY BLINT

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  
dear 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

(bad math)

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

## TOM CLARK

### *The New World*

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*,

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  
Duqu, 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.



## *Toribio*

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 beautiful *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  
*Migrantes*, 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.