

Seattle City Council

Public Safety, Civil Rights, and Arts Committee Meeting

Tuesday, 2PM, March 15th, 2005

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Anna Maria Hong & Grant Cogswell**

Today's Curator is Grant Cogswell and his poet is **Johnny Horton**

Johnny Horton is a graduate of the UW's MFA program in creative writing. He has published poems in Willow Springs, The Laurel Review, Seattle Review, Cranky, Crab Creek Review, and Pontoon #'s 6 and 7. Horton teaches English at Seattle Central Community College and will be a featured reader at the Seattle Poetry Festival on Sunday, May 1st of this year.

At Emerald Downs an Old Man Rips Apart his Betting Slip and Lets the Pieces Flutter in the Breeze

Johnny Horton

He must have come from central casting
in his green plaid jacket and his chartreuse trousers.
He must have left a wife and family for that Macanudo
and a racket sure to pay his daughter's mortgage.
She must be waiting
in a motel by the airport. She must be watching
Animal Planet, considering reservations
to a place like Venezuela. She must not know
her father backed a long shot. His nag ate dust
behind those seven other horses. She must know nothing
of this. He lost the money he made
snaking hair from other people's plumbing. On television
she watches a monkey ride a Doberman
across the fast track of its owner's yard. She wonders who changes
the monkey's diaper, this hairy creature so unlike her father,
so unlike a tiny plumber. When the monkey grips the dog's collar with his ankles
she must think she would enjoy a pet like that. But no one ever asked her
what she might enjoy. Though stranger things have happened. Stranger
than her father losing paychecks
on the ponies. Stranger than her dreams of watermelon
margaritas, of making love

with Robert Redford (as Waldo Pepper) on a Sopwith Camel's paper wing.
In the morning he will ask her how she best enjoys her omelet.
With his finger in a silk scarf he will trace
her cheekbones. He will call her lovely and propose
she consider the flapper's role
in his upcoming feature. Stranger things have happened.
Stranger things have happened in a motel by the airport, watching
Animal Planet. If she was at the racetrack she could see her father
tearing up these slips of paper.
But the old man is alone here, and he tramples
his cigar butt on the blacktop. He must be thinking
about his daughter, about the caliber of his pistol, or the willingness
of his crooked fingers. He must be calculating
the value of his Buick as he saunters to the window
to put his final dollar on a long shot,
as the bugler takes his place, as the horses line up in the post.

- end -