

Seattle City Council

**Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee Meeting**

2 p.m. Wednesday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Words' Worth**

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Sibyl James**

Today's poet is **Carolyn Wright**

**Carolyn Wright's** nine volumes of poetry include *Seasons of Mangoes and Brainfire* (Carnegie Mellon U Press/EWU Books, 2nd ed. 2005), which won the Blue Lynx Prize and American Book Award; *A Change of Maps* (Lost Horse Press, 2006), winner of the 2007 IPPY Bronze Award; and *Mania Klepto: the Book of Eulene* (Turning Point Books, 2011). A Seattle native who studied with Elizabeth Bishop and Richard Hugo, Wright teaches for the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts' Whidbey Writers Workshop MFA Program and for Seattle's Richard Hugo House.

**"This dream the world is having about itself...."** (William Stafford)

by Carolyn Wright

won't let us go. The western sky gathers  
its thunderclouds. It has no urgent need

of us. That summer in our late teens we  
walked all evening through town--let's say Cheyenne--

we were sisters at the prairie's edge: I  
who dreamed between sage-green pages, and you

a girl who feared you'd die in your twenties.  
Both of us barefoot, wearing light summer

dresses from the Thirties, our mother's good  
old days, when she still believed she could live

anywhere, before her generation  
won the War and moved on through the Forties.

As we walked, a riderless tricycle  
rolled out slowly from a carport, fathers

watered lawns along the subdivisions'  
treeless streets. We walked past the last houses

and out of the Fifties, the Oregon  
Trail opened beneath our feet like the dream

of a furrow turned over by plough blades  
and watered by Sacajawea's tears.

What did the fathers think by then, dropping  
their hoses without protest as we girls

disappeared into the Sixties? We walked  
all night, skirting the hurricane-force winds

in our frontier skirts so that the weather  
forecasts for the Seventies could come true,  
**"This dream . . .,"** page 2

the Arapahoe's final treaties for  
the inland ranges could fulfill themselves

ahead of the building sprees. We walked on  
but where was our mother by then? Your lungs

were filling with summer storms, and my eyes  
blurred before unrefracted glacial lakes.

Limousines started out from country inns  
at the center of town, they meant to drive

our grandparents deep into their eighties.  
Our mother in her remodeled kitchen

whispered our names into her cordless phone  
but before the Nineties were over, both

of you were gone. Mother's breath was shadow  
but her heart beat strong all the way in to

the cloud wall. You carried your final thoughts  
almost to the millennium's edge, where

the westward-leaning sky might have told us

our vocation: in open fields, we would

watch the trail deepen in brilliant shadow  
and dream all the decades ahead of us.

*In memory of my sister*

Winner of the Firman Houghton Award, New England Poetry Club, 2007.  
Published in *The Iowa Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2008.

Reprinted in *The Best American Poetry 2009*, ed. David Wagoner. Scribner, 2009.  
Reprinted in *The Pushcart Prize XXXIV: Best of the Small Presses*, 2010.

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