

Seattle City Council

Public Safety, Government Relations, and Arts Committee Meeting

Tuesday, 2:00 PM, April 4, 2006

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Jeannette Allée**

Today's poet is **Elizabeth Austen**

Elizabeth Austen's author interviews and commentaries on Pacific Northwest literary readings can be heard on "The Beat" every Monday on KUOW, 94.9, public radio. She has performed her poems at the Skagit River Poetry Festival, Bumbershoot, Seattle Poetry Festival and in Austin's Artspark Festival. Her poems have appeared in journals as far a field as Cape Town, South Africa and Middlebury, Vermont, as well as in the Seattle Review.

Her, At Two

by Elizabeth Austen

Sometimes a bone
sticks at the tender back
of the throat, requires a wracking
indelicate cough
to survive it.

Sometimes a bone is plucked—
still fully fleshed—from the platter
and brandished like a baton,
a magician's wand. She transfixes every guest,
gluttonous tyrant in miniature.

Is this how we all began, thrilled
to hold the meat in our tiny fists
sure the feast was laid for us alone?
Before long she will want what she

cannot reach, will be told
it's not for her
that's not lady-like

wipe your fingers
put down the bone.

Oh, let her be lucky and rare,
let it be years before her gender
is learned as limitation, a fence
to circumscribe her life. Before that verdict
is delivered, let her travel

so far into her own skin
she'll shrug off that suit
of expectations, clothe her mind
according to her own desires, bite
the flesh from the bone.

I want to be her
and I want to have birthed
her, and I want her
to survive. That girl—

who reaches and takes, erupts
in glee as she shakes her fistful
of bone and meat.

Deciduous

by Elizabeth Austen

Days like today
I could let it all go.

Release ambition
like a balloon floating

into someone else's
yard. Let the radio

keep its death toll
and speeches. I will give

myself to what will answer
with blossom and fruit.

Could I die back?
Could I be mere twigs,

waiting? Give me
light, rain, a piece of ground.

Here I might remember
the prayer of silence, practice

one thing until done well,
heal what lies

within reach.

-- *end* --