

looking up the word "*bird*" in the encyclopedia

so many of them a sky full of eagle hawk pelican
swallow hummingbird and jay like seas full of whales
Raul says the ocean is a sea of whales and the whale is the ocean

so many birds which one?

the whole ocean on the backs of whales who ride the surf to Baja
the bluegreen earth one spinning breath of winds and water currents

so many whales fins and wings
not sheltered refusing extinction
an ocean of whales leaping an sea of songs

the whale that is the beach the whale that is the island
a whole whale of story as Melville's adventure plunders through libraries
and Ryan at five asked "do you know the fragile whale?"

the undercurrent of whales that forge the future
the undergarments that fringe our connection to God and forgiveness
and this time the boy swallows the whale

the earth between trees and beneath birds' wings
as a whale rises towards the sky

fearless

at midnight I'm with three dogs
or just alone on the street some morning
a scary guy with a big jawed dog on a choke chain
I say *howz it goin'?*
and the kids on my street with their little pit
gentle and friendly they say hello

fearless
in any urban redevelopment zone
boarded up buildings broken business and former homestands
people waiting for the bus on a grocery store corner
fuzzy with sleep not looking forward to work
while I'm jogging and surveying the neighborhood
later where I'll find a worthwhile café a light meal
an obscure gallery show

I've been to jail
sat across from rapists murders and drug dealers
guys and gals you wouldn't want to meet
in the isolation between lunch and dinner
or sunset and sunrise
people who can now sit quiet and listen (*continues next page*)

those still sitting and reading
looking up at the ceiling and waiting

and I stand in the room of chairs and chalkboard
without chalk too much heat
and there's not much to do
talk of war and education cuts
when poetry readings seem to make a difference
numbers of people shielding their eyes
from the distance and the efforts of words on a page
and in our hands the worst we can imagine
yet closing in on those meanings
and what makes us
fearless

College Lesson

we counted people in the room
and there were 18 *the only facts* but Stephanie said there were ghosts
others who had been there previous students or the Ohlone people
the cows on the hillsides might have known or the vineyards
where the cows used to be
what were the facts we wondered
what does anyone know from experience or ignorance
then someone noticed a spider crawling on the floor
just fell from the ceiling
the students screamed I should kill the spider but I refused
no reason to kill an animal which eats moths who eat your sweaters
and they're artists too
I bent to catch this intruder and escort it outside onto the grass
where it would likely die anyway
it fell between my fingers a black spider big enough for
the whole classroom to see on the beige tile floor
so I found it again and let it go
let it go
between all the gray areas of certainty
the webs of thinking our heart our minds surely open

untitled

when the days are light and crisp

when the trees sway stormy and ruffled

when talk is glib and quick and muffled

where dense time squeaks by brisk

where the maze of cars people all spin into a whorl

when the lines on faces are drawn dry and taut

when shadows from light burst before darkness well-fought

where doors close and open that uncanny swirl

a garden of overgrown weeds shrubs daisies lilacs

through the green the grey the faces flush

as if the heaven open into where the bodies crush

our thoughts drifts and swell with frequent cracks

no one answers the prayer the horn the recall

a field a needle a shiver in the regret of touching

lipstick for instance the quiver of moonlight blushing

these days of forever laughter or silence or breath that's all