

Seattle City Council

Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee Meeting

2 p.m. Wednesday, September 12th, 2012

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Sibyl James**

Today's poet is **Edward Harkness**

Edward Harkness is the author of two poetry collections, *Saying the Necessary* and, most recently, *Beautiful Passing Lives* (Pleasure Boat Studio, 2010). His poems have been widely published in both print and online journals. He lives in Shoreline and teaches writing at Shoreline Community College.

Great Apes at the Zoo

by Edward Harkness

Behind the glass barrier and the laughter
of children and parents, the mother is eating
something the keepers have given her.
She holds a rind—avocado or papaya—
as if it were a small Chinese bowl,
lifting morsels of whatever it is to her mouth,
then delicately licks her slender fingers.
Squatting in straw, she seems Buddha-calm,
unaware of the gawking world, unaware,
apparently, of her tussling boys,
one no bigger than the toddler beside me,
his nose to the glass, squealing in recognition,
as if he would too would like to wrestle and box.
The straw flies. Dust rises in misty puffs.
The little ape slaps his big brother,
does a back flip, bumps his head on a log,
runs to mama, and crawls on her back
to catch his breath. Mama doesn't budge.
She drops the rind and surveys the leafless
climbing trees the keepers have installed,
a webbing of ropes, an artificial stream,
and across it the dark pocket of a concrete cave.
Her eyes are bland, resigned—

the eyes of any prisoner or refugee.
The kids and parents have strolled away.
The older brother shits in the straw,
knuckle-walks to the stream where he stirs
the slack water and cups his hands to drink.
The mother gazes off as if at some other life.
She reaches back and lifts her little fellow
over her head, rolls sideways onto the straw
and grooms him till he falls asleep.

-- *End* --