

asphalt rabbiters

Winner 2002 New England Review Poetry Award

i wore the sleeveless quicksilver
the one that shows my renovator scars
said *you and me* *both battlers mate*

warned him

you and your boy *what is he no* *more than*
nine
your ferret
sussed *days ago*

shook him loose a smoke
tipped him *we know*

our leadlight windows
are on your mind

no jump from him
when the hoons in hotties
mad max the block

his eyes steady as my spirit bubble

transparent that he's checking out
his apshalt traps
measuring the width of the boy
against our federation gaps

wake up
street's mined
next door's spun a web of hooks
across her sandstone wall

we are waiting in our burrows
with gentrified claws.

Notes on asphalt rabbiters

'I lived in a house on the corner once. There was lot going on outside if you cared to look for it.' *Trader Horn*

I lived in Hordern Street, Newton before and during its early gentrification. First day in my new house I walked past The 12 Night Tavern -a notorious bloodhouse - and strolled down to the post office to make a call. Left at about 12 noon. Next day I read in the paper that two guys had jumped out with iron bars and bashed someone to death outside the post office. Some sort of hired thug and the muscles had chosen the wrong man! Newtown aint Newtown any more

An old guy used to shuffle down the lane behind my house while I was renovating like every second place in the street. He had a 9-10 year old snowy haired kid in tow. They didn't make eye contact but watched carefully when no-one was looking. I worried about them. They looked so vulnerable. Every day you could almost see their place being pulled from under their feet. They were being dispossessed like old farm hounds as industrialization came through.

Several of the lines came to me at the time. I imagined the narrator as a kindly but pompous come up in the world but slightly awkward with it type who fancied he could speak this old lag's lingo. 'Let him strip his sleeves and show his scars' from Henry V kept sneaking into the speech. I

The poem didn't really gel until I hit upon 'I wore my sleeveless quicksilver'. Then I pared back the lines, concentrating on keeping a conversational rhythm. Capitalizations and punctuation were eliminated to emphasize this rhythm. I hoped the reader would work harder at finding the sounds that were on the page.