

MENDING THE AGENDA

"but i need you," i said.

her look told me that
it was not my needs but hers
we were discussing.

OGRE ROOSTING

in the seminar someone asks,
"does anyone know what happened
to the children of
ted hughes and sylvia plath?"

and i blurt out,

"he ate them."

SLAMMING THE OL' SIZE 13 BACK BETWEEN THE DENTURES

i ask her, "do you ever see geraldine?"

"not very often. why?"

"because i think she left her umbrella
in class the night of the final. at least
the guy who brought it up to me thought
it was hers."

"is it red?" she asks.

and all i really have to reply is that, yes,
it's red, one could say that it's red,

but instead for some reason i find it
necessary to say, "actually it's more of a
disgusting pink. i was humiliated carrying
it back to my office. why? did geraldine
tell you she'd lost a red umbrella?"

"no," she says, "but i loaned her one."

AND THE GRAY MATTER PER CAPITA OF THE JUDGES?

florida courts have refused to declare brain-dead
an infant born without a brain.

AN IMMORTAL IN THE FLESH

i come out of my lower-division
poetry writing class with two of
the more talented students

and we are near the hot-dog cart
when i spy an almost young man,
frail and slightly bent, but possessed
of a bright-eyed depth and virility,
making his way across the campus
with an armload of spanish books.

"you see that guy?" i say,
"you are looking at a sure-fire future
winner of the nobel prize."

they look at me as if, once again,
i'm making some kind of inexplicable
joke.

but this is no joke:

"that's raul zurita," i say,
"the finest living poet in chile
... make that in latin america."

the living part is significant.
because he as easily could not be,
having been tortured on a torture ship
off the coast of his country
in the days of the replacement
of allende by pinochet.

one of them says, "gerry, you're shitting
us again."

so i tell them how raul is here because
my colleague in spanish-portuguese. jack
schmitt, is now his translator for university
of california press, and how raul has just
returned from a reading tour of russia
and the continent and how he will soon
be touring america.

i explain that he speaks little english
and i no spanish
and he writes big oblique poems
and i write short direct ones.

and yet there somehow from the first
has been a warmth of camaraderie between us.

they say, "we just watched a world-class poet
hunch incognito past the hot-dog cart?"

i say, "the greatest poet in spanish
since neruda, is what they tell me,