

## Barbara Helfgott Hyett – Featured Poet

### Five Poems



#### **Boston, Mid Winter**

Even if fear makes the kiss  
tremble. Even if scent spits

its relentless *I am*, love  
may turn you to stone, or glass

if you're not careful. Even  
glass seeks its other. Snow beats

on the window. Even snow.  
Any one thing is also

any other: stone, glass, love  
smoothed without our intention.

Come to it open armed then,  
so as not to be burned. Stars

are unafflicted by  
awareness. And the North star

gazes toward nostalgia all  
day. Winter sun is a poor

ghost of itself. And the sky,  
cold all the time. The sewers

happen to gleam, though  
snow slants too brightly

and we must look away,  
into drifts.

## Seventy-Two Hours After The Arrest

I stare at the face of my son  
his eyes wildly innocent  
as he drags by—chains—  
ankle to ankle, wrist to wrist, shoulders  
pulled so far up his back, there must be blue bruises

bearing down. Because his lawyer said such  
things could move a judge to leniency, I took in  
a homeless cat who, from the start, lacked  
the genetic gift of movement. but I'd  
misjudged cat we called *Amerika*.

She'd fly across the room to bite  
my ankle, fly across the room while  
I was reading—to bite my wrist, a kind  
of play, I thought, only too aggressive.  
I never heard her purr.

But this is real, The Federal courthouse  
I'd never imagined, sitting so close behind  
the trouble of my son. Now and then  
the cat would let me touch the top  
of her head. But mostly she'd walk away.

Or cry out, or call me maddeningly  
from the bowl. To make her happy I'd open  
the front door, or plug pheromones  
like a nightlight into the wall.  
I began to wonder if she'd do well

on a farm somewhere, began to take  
the feral fact of her to heart. Helpless  
in my row, I suffer with my son who must  
answer the curt D.A.—  
*and didn't you tell the detective....*

my breath is a wail inside my chest,  
wall to wall. What was it made me keep  
the cat who bit me bloody? The vet advised  
me to surrender her to the shelter.  
*This animal cannot live with people, she said.*

## Near Trinity Bay, Newfoundland

*for Deb Vandermolen*

Because my friend said, *Let me  
show you*, we drove for miles  
of unpaved road until shale  
and stones stopped us. The sea  
was grey and spackled. Summer

buttoned my sweater red. We had  
come to the green end of the world.  
Earth was a pillow and there were  
wildflowers, and crazy blossoms  
spun from a single stalk. Juniper!

We lay on the grass to watch  
for whales— *I lay here naked once  
with my shy husband*. I grew still  
in respect for her sorrow. A foghorn  
flooded the oceanic roar. Horizon

was an imagined island rising. Ice  
battered the coastline of the invisible  
tide. Nothing beyond. Only out— out  
and far were all. How long can the sun  
keep hiding its own impossible stars?

## **In The Dark**

My blanket slides to the floor  
from under my taffeta bed  
spread. Is that fear on my teddy  
bear's face? Which should I choose  
to suffer: roaches hiding  
in the wall or letting my blanket  
stay so far away from me? Who  
shall I call, and when may I  
cry? I stay in my bed and count  
the waves coming in and  
count the coming, in the sea  
outside the window.  
But it is hard to know  
when one wave stops  
and the next wave begins.  
I ask my teddy what to do,  
knowing full well the dark  
could scare me if I'd let it.  
I must talk to my bear.  
I must count. Sing until  
I believe sleep is safe.

## Moth In Three Voices

1.

I held all  
night to her  
window screen.

Just a moth  
watching. Street-

light showed me  
up. She turned  
off her lamp

to see. Her  
face was rain.

When she woke  
it was dawn,  
I was gone

but sound still  
came through.

2.

*Mother, is  
that you, I  
cried out in*

dream. And she  
came and turned

on my lamp.  
I was half  
awake, She

said *Go to  
sleep my sweet*

*lullaby-  
my lovely  
night light child.*

3.

I turned off  
her light as  
it ripened

into dusk.  
Moth wings splayed

against her  
window. *Is  
that you?* I

watched the moth  
hold itself

still by it's  
feet. Feathered  
eyes on each

unseeing  
wing. Huge it

was, a flick-  
erring come  
to show her

what there is  
to believe.

**Barbara Helfgott Hyett** is a poet, teacher, and scholar who has published five collections of poetry: *In Evidence: Poems of the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps*, (Univ. of Pittsburgh Press); *Natural Law*, (Northland of Winona) *The Double Reckoning of Christopher Columbus*, (Univ. of Illinois), *The Tracks We Leave: Poems on Endangered Wildlife of North America.*, (Univ. of Illinois) and *Rift*, (Univ. of Arkansas.) Her poems have appeared in small literary and major national magazines in America, and abroad. She has won the Boston Foundation's Artist Fellowship Award, two Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowships, and many other awards prizes, and residencies, including the Sproat Award for teaching English at Boston University. She has also taught writing and literature at MIT, Harvard, and Holy Cross, and directs the program, PoemWorks: The Workshop for Publishing Poets, in Newton, MA (<http://www.poemworks.com>)