

POEMS

BY CYNTHIA SCHWARTZBERG EDLOW

The Day Judge Spencer Learned the Power of Metaphors

Picture hangs crooked in jury room: crochet of buff-colored
haze sifts down into a market square. Someplace foreign
and difficult to get by in, with luggage for tables,
with uncaged chickens and strange grains.

Spotches of blue

engage the eye: produce, trinkets, jars
for consideration; the changing
of azure hands.

The judge

wants two things for his day to be bazaar.
Accord, and proper procedure wrapped round it.
The sleepy, overbooked judge
ensconced in a procedural throw. So the proceedings
can step up.

A jury

wants one thing if plucked from the pool. Confetti
and lots of it, with gashes, stitches and strangulating
purse handles. Juries called to civil matters are bummed;
who wants to root five days exposed
to promissory taffy, and its severance
upon the back of a lumbering, recalcitrant beast?
The good civil lawyer makes a robbery
of the process. As if doing you the favor.

In comes the lady

attorney for plaintiff.

Her face is classically round, pointless, yet the courthouse
bathroom's porcelain sink rests enshrined
with unlovely residual vomit. The
disgruntled employee she champions
has his own fears. How did it get this far? What's
not to like about his new job? How many vacation days
had he now for the family, the holidays?

At table opposite, the defense attorney's
own client is absent. Fluke,

and not without consonance. Top
of her lungs, the lady's opening statement
opening line, she shrieks, "F***ing prick moron!"
and she's off, stomping. If you saw her
you might say what an actress, stellar performance,
and she would say she hobbled around

In this, our most "literary" issue of the year, we are pleased to feature the work of a local accomplished poet. Cynthia Schwartzberg Edlow writes on many topics, only one of which is law. We hope you enjoy her work.

Another reason for featuring this form is that April is National Poetry Month (NPM). Established by the Academy of American Poets in 1996, NPM's goal is to celebrate poetry and its place in American culture. Businesses and organizations participate through readings, festivals, book displays, workshops and other events.

More information is available at www.poets.org.

The poetry of **Cynthia Schwartzberg Edlow** has appeared in numerous literary journals, including *The American Poetry Review*, *Full Circle Journal*, *Chelsea*, *Jewish Women's Literary Annual* and *The Emily Dickinson Awards Anthology*. First-place prizewinner of the 2002 Arizona State Poetry Society's 32nd Annual Poetry Competition, her poems have appeared most recently in *Barrow Street*, *The Chiron Review*, *Cimarron Review* and *The Litchfield Review*. New poetry is forthcoming from *Willow Review*, from whom she was awarded the 2004 Willow Review Prize for Poetry. She is completing a book of poetry titled *Interrupted Quenching*.

She will be a featured poet at the City of Tempe Poetry Reading Series in April in honor of National Poetry Month. For more information, call the Tempe Public Library at (480) 350-5287.

MEMS

on bloody stumps, cut off at the knees.

Her star exhibit:

incendiary memo

full of bullying invective,

each handwritten line

rising jagged off the page

flying like bats unstuck, and furious.

The lady pounces, preens

at the box of people—the robbery. Midway

between table and box she stops, small

run at the heel of her dark hose. Her figure

aligns with the judge on his perch,

behind him scalloped eggshell lighting

across the stern cubist walls of the room.

Up above, brown grid of a ceiling.

The light deepens to oyster against the brown.

She lets her insides drift some.

Judge Spencer eyes the emergency

color wheel taped to his desktop. He

pulls up stakes: jury—bailiffed back to its room.

Man in gallery, quit drinking that grape soda. Mind

the dignity of this shop.

O weatherman, hear tell

there's a gale of motions on the air...

The defense attorney flails the three-headed D's,

Dismiss, Dismiss, and Direct your verdict

on this mess for god's sake. The lady attorney

says all she wants is recess, then mispronounces

the defense attorney's name four times

on record on purpose. Judge Spencer sees

trout fishing on the horizon; hooks and lures

packed in his neat tackle box. "Madam, your craziness

becomes you," and because he is backlit

and elevated, and because the jury

has been excused from this exchange, she reaches

into the black bag behind her—

because she's Doll Anonymous,

she should be hammocking in Cozumel, sipping

a peacock-blue cocktail, rich orchid behind her ear,

as something approaches, low-slung, strewing

greetings on the unpaved road—

"No recess, proceed. Bailiff, bring 'em in."

and upon the vacant

plaintiff's table, which should be stacked with legal pads,

deposition transcripts, manicured accordion files, she deposits

a favor, one single regulation baseball,

white with red stitching, unscuffed.

The way it rolls a little and wobbles—

to the bewilderment of the reentered jury—

every time the table is thumped, which is often,

the empty table with nothing

but the ball on it,

the whole episode buzzing, behind her

the thing virtually throbs.

Moment of outmaneuver.

Suited, oiled, the defense attorney queries his first witness

to man up. But get a load of the lady! Sidling right

into mid-court, she's queued, arm's length

from defense at the lectern.

The case way out in the grass sits, atop the memo.

White baseball gleams. Syzygy

of case-winning proportions.

Judge Spencer's eyes narrow

in complot, acres of ink. Yet he breathes pacific. The feeling is soil

but where to put his finger to it? She'd process

explicit directives inside a hair's breadth,

address defense counsel's mound of objections

by the boot of her hip. Time

wasn't earmarked

for the encroachment of men. Impervious,

standing there, as if she'd caught sight

of a beveled mirror and a set of sky-high orbs

like a dream, and still an indisputable radiance

proceeds from outside her, in nature, like so.

And so to Judge Spencer's

vision of a solitary white rowboat at dusk. Gray-blue

backwoods summer lake. Birds flown to the leafy beds

of the treetops. The only stirring, a faint cupping and rocking

of the vessel, as if some great freight

had been pitched from its wooden side. Comes

then the hymnlike pearling down of moonshine—

every single thing is relevant under its misapprehended pull.

Pled

Your client's deposition, and an omission never revealed has jaggedly surfaced. Now the conference room's walls buckle and duck, halving themselves like the taking of sides in a schoolyard fight. The defense attorney is so joyous she frowns bitterly as masquerade. You fume gaseous, the calculated implosion, the knowing toying, another's bonanza. As though you just learned you'd been switched at birth. You see yourself sledding downhill. After hours you school your client – dumpsters in backlots containing company garbage contain company property – yet, he only thinks he's stolen.

Everyone recalls the pageant of your activist wife, her unperfumed huff, delivering your dinner to the office. She spoke to no one, tossed the hot frozen dinner tray atop your desk, other people's problems on paper beneath the dripping gravy, her statement made. The day you know the instant case is all but lost she files her own petition.

When night comes, night itself turning its back at one long confederacy, you roam through thick blue and gray texts, seeking the song of law where it levels, raking out not the answer but the match, every page you turn returns your argument to you as your own countenance weathers like the desert hills, as if you were shepardizing the laws of Moses, where all is sound, the elements menacing and the faintest bereft wail is a chime of enunciation.