Award (A Gold Watch to the FBI Man Who Has Followed Me for 25 Years)
By Ray Durem

Well, old spy
looks like I
led you down some pretty blind alleys,
took you on several trips to Mexico,
fishing in the high Sierras,
jazz at the Philharmonic.
You've watched me all your life,
I've clothed your wife,
put your two sons through college,
what good has it done?
the sun keeps rising every morning.
ever see me buy an Assistant President?
or close a school?
or lend money to Trujillo?
ever catch me rigging airplane prices?
I bought some after-hours whiskey in L.A.
but the Chief got his pay.
I ain't killed no Koreans
or fourteen-year old boys in Mississippi.
neither did I bomb Guatemala,
or lend guns to shoot Algerians.

I admit I took a Negro child
to a white rest room in Texas,
but she was my daughter, only three,
who had to pee...
and I just didn't know what to do,
Would you?
see, I'm so light, it just don't seem right
to go to the colored rest room;
my daughter's brown and folks frown on that
in Texas,
I just don't know how to go to the bathroom
in the free world!

Now old FBI man,
you've done the best that you can,
you lost me a few jobs,
scared a couple of landlords,
You got me struggling for that bread,
but I ain't dead.
and before it's all through,
I may be following you!

Born in 1915 in Seattle, Washington, Ramon Durem left
home at 14 and joined the Navy. Discharged following an
injury to his leg, Durem worked as a laborer along the West
Coast. He eventually enrolled at the University of California,
Berkeley and joined the Communist party in 1931. Active in
various radical causes on campus, Durem was arrested for
picketing against silk imports from Japan. Durem left for
Europe, aboard the Aquitania, on March 31, 1937. During the
Brunete Offensive, an enemy bullet struck Durem in the same
leg that had been injured in the Navy. While recuperating at the
American base hospital at Villa Paz, Durem met, courted and
married a nurse from Brooklyn, Rebecca Schulman. In the
summer of 1938 when the front lines broke and the hospital
had to be evacuated, Durem returned to the 15th Brigade and
served throughout the remainder of the Retreats and the Ebro
Offensive. Durem was among the Americans who participated
in the farewell parade in Barcelona and returned to the United
States aboard the Ausonia on December 20, 1938. Durem and
Schulman moved to Los Angeles where they had three
daughters. Durem continued to be an active union organizer
and was arrested on a number of occasions. During the 1940s
Durem discovered an African American identity. He separated
from his wife, remarried-- this time to an African American
woman-- and moved his new family to Guadalajara, Mexico in
order to escape government harassment. In 1962 Durem and
his family returned to reside in L.A. In the late 1940s Durem
began writing poetry under the name of "Ray Durem." His
poems were first published in the Crusader, a journal edited by
Robert Williams, the Black Nationalist leader who in the 1960s
was forced into exile in Cuba and China. Other poems were
published in the literary journals Phylon and Venture and in the
Herald Dispatch newspaper. Durem's early poems attracted the
interest of Langston Hughes, and in the mid-1950s Hughes
tried unsuccessfully to help Durem secure a publisher. Hughes
did include one of Durem's poems in the anthology New Negro
Poets: USA. In the early 1960s Durem saw selections of his
poetry published in the Heritage Anthology Sixes and Sevens
and in the magazine Umbra 2. In 1963, at the age of 48, Ray
Durem died of cancer in Los Angeles. A volume of Durem's
poetry entitled Take No Prisoners (1971) was published in
London posthumously.