

# **Animal Culture**

*(rules of commitment)*



**Allison Grayhurst**

# *Animal Culture (rules of commitment)*



*Do animals have culture?  
Yes! The great wisdom  
of Earth spoke.*

*And She spoke –  
Having faith in God  
is trusting God's faithfulness.*

\*

*Allison Grayhurst*

*Edge Unlimited Publishing*

**Animal Culture (rules of commitment)  
The Poetry of Allison Grayhurst  
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**Cover Art (sculpture):  
“Baby Elephant” © 1990 by Allison Grayhurst  
Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Grayhurst, Allison, 1966-  
Animal Culture (rules of commitment)**

**“Edge Unlimited Publishing”  
Poems.  
ISBN-13: 978-1719094962  
ISBN-10: 1719094969**

**Animal Culture (rules of commitment)  
The Poetry of Allison Grayhurst  
Title ID: 8334711**

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# *Cardinal*

## **Now That I Swept**

**I swept the veranda  
I swept the hall  
I swept in corners I turned  
a blind-eye at before.  
The encasing cracked. The bride's dress  
was lifted out of the attic into sunlight.  
There was paint on the windows. I scraped  
it off, exposing galleries of creepy-crawlers  
and prayers half-prayed  
still writhing on the floor, struggling  
for breath and completion.  
I showed courage, even killed my longest ties,  
bought bread at a new store and accepted the storm.**

**This home-swept sterility has outlasted fears,  
sermons of aestheticism dug deep to remove  
the pus from my wounds.  
I count - one - two - each heartache  
quietly. I turn the gas on and wait for heat.**

**I am not comfortable without clutter.  
I cannot soar in this crate,  
with manicured belongings and my attention given over  
to such ruthless unending details. The old has died.  
This new is not my home, but my desires will layer up  
again, roll in the wind again, collect  
broken robin shells, leaf stems, and shed animal fur.**

**\*\*\***

**It will feel like home sometime after  
I am sure my fears have been defeated,  
when I can trust myself not to pillage,  
loiter or take for granted.  
Blessings, hair-ties, a time of ginger tea.**

**I swept and now everything is clean.  
I swept, and slowly I will let life back in,  
but not before inspecting the truth of its charm  
and the smell of its comfort.  
Where it twitches and cramps, I will bear witness  
to its intricacies, suffer the host as a hymn**

**hymn, hymn, to hold over the flame, in spite  
of the other voices I hear, despite the echoing screams,  
strip it, swept clear of shame  
and these stultifying drift banks  
I have swept  
of a coward's hidden-away rot and rubble.**

## **Identity (as self to self before God)**

**Identity as explorer,  
as an eagle with a powerful spread,  
or as a sparrow, budding delicate, stirring  
tenderness in others.**

**Identity as a mother, as a single flame monk  
in the 4 a.m. quiet, under a dome, encased  
in creativity and loneliness. Identity  
as drink, poverty, excessive cash flow or beauty  
beside the grave of the visibly mediocre.**

**Identity in discipline or free-spirit strength  
that enriches the landscape with humour and charm.  
Identity as a man whose skin has become core,  
and the burden of time has passed through his sky  
like a setting moon.**

**Stoic or gregarious, just the shape of a cloud,  
changing, merging with other clouds  
than dissipating. Speaking - backwards, forwards -  
when the bearer of that identity dares to skip over the madness  
of self-loathing, self-congratulating, skip  
the moan in summer, the ovation indoors**

**and be in love,  
like when first in love, ever swallowing  
the joy into the fear, then the fear into joy,  
the how-can-this-be? the will-I-ever-be-pure-enough?  
struggling to keep up with such a devouring-bliss. Devour me,**

**more, more, let it be, be what never rests,  
what is always too much, always  
electrified, perfect. Heal me of identities,  
allow me to step longing for divinity with every step,  
engulfed in a splintering ecstasy while longing -  
this beat, this beat - folding over, under and  
everywhere, mastering the dance,**

**where my identity is just like a child with a toy,  
there to enact a deed of great imagination.**

## **Healed**

**Bone and sleeve, blessed  
a thousand times over -  
first it enters through the back, a wave  
of rare wind flooding the pores, then through the front,  
a deeper rush that separates the skin  
like rock into sand, making granules, softness  
to cup loosely in hands.**

**You never viewed me dressed in my own hues. You tried  
with your guilt and pity, clinging to the ruthless rules  
of worldly absolutisms, rules void of miracles,  
void of the greatness of God. It is not your fault.**

**You were born in a poverty den, surrounded  
by uproar and mouths of many hungry siblings.  
Violence and servitude, and so many trapped ghosts  
filling the stairways, settling  
in the corridors, peering through paintings. A home  
where spirits latched on to doorknobs, the nails in floorboards,  
bred like bugs under pillows, in closed-door closets.  
I cannot blame you, later  
you earned and kept your independence,  
but still the one thing remained your master  
like a severe hand coming down, dominating,  
throwing cutlery across the room, thrashing  
your childlike joy to pieces.**

**My lungs can't function in that haunted landscape.  
I am rising new born, rising with no sense of  
separation. I move beyond my temporal bloodlines.  
I will not own your wounds as truth. Even still, I love you.  
I bless the bell. I bless how far we both have come - new homes,  
clean of bad breath and the tormented  
tightening-grip of others.**

**Miracles are fish that somehow know  
their way through the oceans.  
Miracles are stones, glorious as stars,**

**or a rat in winter guided  
to a dumpster feast.**

## **Make a Bridge**

**Make a bridge,  
follow its framework,  
fall fall  
off that bridge into  
an ice-cold pond  
where the underbelly is  
readying for hibernation.**

**Be cold under that bridge,  
remember who you are -  
the maker and the one who fell.**

**It is good to paint  
delirium and devotion  
as one and the same.  
It is good to arrive secret in your niche, never  
letting anyone know you are there,  
if you want to stay and not be up-seated.**

**Make a monster  
to keep in your pocket  
that you can caress or make squeal at will.  
No one will hold you accountable as long  
as it remains unspoken of, vaguely secret.  
No one will ask you to make  
another bridge – one will be enough.**

**In time, falling and freezing  
miles below the surface  
will be the milestone, the lasting legacy.**

## **Acceptance as Recovery (the blinds are drawn)**

**The light wind,  
the heavy wind  
belongs beyond the flesh  
and gravity's consent.  
We are stopped at the threshold -  
a pomegranate in the water, floating,  
soon to be devoured.**

**When the child grew up,  
apparitions of abandonment remained,  
blistering the eyes now and then with salt.  
Hot fear, unease in the gap between  
the mind and doing.  
What is this? A waterfall to stand under,  
to try to master the onrushing force, and climb?**

**I think you never belonged here  
that is why you don't eat or own your own skin like origin.  
I think you were a jellyfish on another world,  
a fluorescent swimmer without a skeleton,  
barely feeling the torrent ebb and flow around you.  
I think you glow like something brighter  
in an already bright sky,  
You reject the stone, anything that burns  
permanently into your flesh,  
demanding you to be human.**

**You came a long way and went a long way to the other side.  
You are one-of-a-kind, a creation who is always  
in the process of equally praising and escaping.  
You gather your light like gunpowder.**

**It is hard maneuvering on this primitive plane  
of terrifying unpredictability.  
It is hard to be so bright, so see-through,  
and not to be part shielded, and where not shielded,  
long lines of jagged division,  
fractured roots and core, damaged.**

## **Broken Window**

**Flip, flop and pound  
on the other side of night,  
like in pre-teen summers,  
peeling paint off the rafters,  
hanging around at a nearby park and pool,  
climbing the old tree to catch a glimpse, an ear-full  
of your boy-focus and his conversations,  
moving forward with solvable cares.**

**Days were burning fingertips on ice,  
tucked in pockets after the fact, when being alone  
meant you could soar (all senses alert) into the sun,  
onto a past-life planet, more vibrant than  
even your infant awakening, here.  
Flavours slid down rooftops, made their way down  
brick walls, painting  
front yard gardens in watercolour tones.**

**I needed you to blow the whistle, remove the veil of the dull  
horror of living without hope, of swaying back  
and forth on the high line. I needed your devotion, not  
your powdered nose appearance, lies of gainful tapestry  
adventures - cut clean from commitment or attachment.**

**Loyalty, on the dinner plate, in the bathtub, honesty  
in the eye-to-eye, I needed  
to trust your words, that what was between us  
would always be clean.  
But so it stands, a muddy thick brew up to our throat lines.**

**I stand on stilts on a ship on stillwaters looking  
all around. Nothing to see but endless sea - dreams  
liquefied as illusions - love, impossible,  
because I see, and all I see  
is that I am alone.**

## **Flaw Mended in the System-Sphere**

**The ground is a pond  
widening into a lake.  
Before and around me,  
tiny turtles, thriving  
in the early morning calm.**

**A spinning globe expanding,  
a blessing that saturates even backwards  
into the folds of yesteryears' jaundice.  
Where will it take me? Out of the vice-lock gripping my gut,  
out of days and decades of useless but obligatory activity,  
out of the prison cell with thick walls of searing flames  
and no sink or stream to gather water.**

**I want a life to own loudly on all fronts,  
a life where every part of every day is glorious, even  
the hard parts, the grief, the quivering breath of a vision  
temporarily lost and the sand beds swelling  
with capsized bodies.  
Where I could say that is mine, a flavour in my quest  
for purification, a motion of love and delectable intensity.**

**The land is stretching its fingers, gathering space,  
claiming territory. I want the rising ripple.  
I cannot live much longer bonded to the wall,  
chained at the throat and joints. I cannot keep  
making up stories of how this is acceptable or anything  
other than a secret punishment to justify  
love gathered and love received. I dissolve that belief  
and nod to the oncoming wave.**

**Drown these brick-wall flames,  
drown my boots and my gloves, gather me naked  
into your ride, over this barrier, into a deeper maturity,  
where I will know fulfillment on all fronts  
- field, home, city streets -  
aligned, nourished, in service.**

## **Oasis?**

**Cold wave, mother blue  
as the dead and empty sky,  
orphan sun sitting when  
pity has passed, love  
has left too for alliances with  
the party goers, party-givers  
and the run-of-the-mill wealthy mongrels  
of deception and worldly favour.**

**Eyes to the pavement with  
the strength and perseverance to find and pluck  
the secret egg hidden among the stones,  
pluck away shame, guilt and unhealthy obligations,  
boil them in the boiler room, send  
them into the crematorium  
never to again inflict a living hold.**

**Once plucked what is left hurts like a severed attachment -  
lost from warmth and the glowing light  
of benevolence.**

**Devastating, this violation of nature,  
this thrust-alone on the high ridge.  
Flowers here in pretty colours  
are confined to gardens, to gravity  
like the rest of us. I walk away from flowers  
into a desert where high winds and sand  
scratch my face, then  
the corneas of my eyes.**

**Can love be revolutionary here, a miracle here  
of abundance, soft affection? Can it be priceless,  
a happy licking tongue, settling  
for nothing that isn't endlessly overflowing,  
a waterfall, a child embracing  
in fearless abandon?**

## **The Faintest Breath of Love is Enough to Save Me**

**Inside the box the lid  
was pushed up, lifted, pulling out  
the weight of darkness, filling  
the space with air – fresh as a  
blooming sunflower, gathering the  
bumble bee and Eastern Grey squirrel.**

**Without warning the stem snapped,  
an essential survival line severed from its source.  
The bee and squirrel moved on,  
as I must move on, clean up dead stems, petals and seeds,  
rest on the front steps, put the debris in the box and bury it  
in the same place where  
the sunflower once stretched half way to the roof.**

**I must be brave without beauty to strengthen me,  
free of myth and poetic attachments, mingle with  
the nest-makers, the earth-foragers, satiate in the present  
and tremble with glory, breathing better in spite of decay,  
disease and the loss of sustenance.**

**Light the box on fire before I bury it.  
Bury it while it is burning. Bury it, burning...  
holy is this, holy is that,  
dream it now  
and it will be over, it will be mine.**

## **Hard Landing**

**A scattering of force  
lapping up voices from street corners,  
subway cars, seagull songs, using them as your own.  
The flowerheads drop, dried in a jar.**

**You abandoned me,  
once my shell had cracked and  
my doom became inevitable.  
You could have offered glue,  
as there was a tiny tube on hand, in your hand, enough  
to repair and prevent further damage.  
But you turned your back, flaunted fake superiority,  
based upon the good fortune of your stars and privilege.  
Not the love of unconditional calm,  
joining with joy and determination my plight with your own.**

**Your darkness reigns silent,  
no space for whistling or pleading or singing.  
Wave upon relentless wave caught the fish  
and shoved it ashore. The tide receded,  
the skin scales became brittle  
with the rising light of the sun.  
Cat paws over lidless eyes, teeth digging  
deep into fishy fleshy sinews.**

**Broken, it is broken, my body, our bond  
of guilt, shaming and shame. Love  
I have felt as a beautiful pressure within  
– a mother's strength of overcoming, and when  
unable to overcome, kneeling until the miracle unfolds.**

**Your darkness latches itself to the upside-down illusion,  
takes its breath and being from inversion, a lie  
deep as your self-righteousness. Never come here again.  
I seal my skin. I have this last straw, lack-of-pulse nothingness,  
phone calls of perpetual chatter,  
deliberately avoiding the wound and methods of healing.  
I deserve healing, debts forgiven, a future worth  
upholding. I will not give up to the titling of the tree, but  
pitch high, bypass your acts of conditional charity.**

**I love you, but the link that bonded me, broken  
under your power, bonds me no longer. I love you,  
and the honey flows, my windows are clean,  
my heart has evolved, this way, orphaned.**

## Body of the Whale

Burnt, engraved  
slipped for weeks walking on  
a shallow incline. I could not choose  
my steps or wear anything but out-worn shoes.  
I could only be this one way and pray  
I was not being deceived.

After many falls and aching ankles,  
thumb-joints, landing-joints,  
and my tears in constant flow, I decided not to move,  
stay as a sunken root, let the mud flood  
around me, driving me deeper into the stench.

Fears like a cord tied to my feet, tugging me down where even  
undulation ceased and it was cold and simple, without cause  
or mercy or chance of escape.

I am at the bottom, somehow still myself.  
There are strange translucent reptiles brushing  
at my extremities. No way to eat and no breath left to be had,  
under here in this lightless territory, not much different  
than the depths of space, than the place I was first born.

But there, I was one with the darkness, and the stillness of void  
was tender, womb-like, all I knew. I will find that again here,

stop resisting, diffuse, painfully, but with the least amount  
of rebellion or horror - dissolve like candy floss in a child's  
mouth until I join the blank weight digestive track,  
welcome the bottom feeders and the algae pocket swirls  
as my own flesh, until there is nothing left of me  
but this indent bed,

**the space inside this bed that keeps my body. And soon  
even that will fold over, coalesce, as though it never was.**

**I was a daughter. I am not anymore. I was waiting  
on a personal love, rescue like a clean wave coming to  
liquidate my mind. I am not waiting anymore.**

**I have no strength for hope, no heart  
to withstand the hurt.**

**I break a part and I gather, honouring  
the end of my pulse and its reign.**

# Cardinal

We walked beside the wall  
on a grim February afternoon.  
Our lips parted wanting to speak,  
but words grazed the soundwaves like  
ghosts and our hearts sank.  
We walked together, over logs of rotted wood,  
through slush puddles, avoiding snowbanks  
and icicles dangling from high trees, beside the wall.

This is love, you told me, and I knew it to be true.  
I grew tired and you linked our arms. You grew despondent  
and I looked into your eyes like looking at a flower.  
The winds turned on us. Family dug ditches of judgment  
around us, expecting our downfall.

The cardinal arrived, leading the way, navigating  
us through – stopped on a wire while we rested, called at us  
to turn a corner. Around that corner, holding hands,  
the wall disappeared.

Our hair damp with snow, our gloves ripped  
at the fingertips, we sat on a neighbourhood rock, in a yard  
where nobody was home. The cardinal left when a stranger  
appeared. You helped me up and we continue on

houses all around us, children going to school, and us together  
inseparable, strong in love, stronger than the hard hard world.

## **Love is our master**

**The tone resonated the red heat  
of a sea of lava burning away the dead cells,  
activating a living substance. We held  
hands, walking in the deserted late-December streets.  
Ours is nobody's but ours - broken train tracks carried,  
dropped, put back together. The lapping wind of the spirit  
like a bell in the far distance, calling us here, there  
and always home.**

**Your pockets are full of roots, ones  
you chopped from the ground, left there with no tree  
or shrub to source its life out to. But those roots still thirst,  
so you place them in a high jar in our bedroom, tend to them,  
give them the attention of your brilliant mind, hurting  
for their inadequacies. I love you deep in the hole and in  
the twilight of an open summoning space or when locked  
in desire, the two of us, giants without chains - the illusion of  
isolation shed, heroes to each other's loneliness, and the rising  
of our blood that has no ancestry, no pastlives  
or this life before.**

**We are the keepers of this conversation.  
You are the place where all my ships land,  
in the infinity of your eyes, a strong arrow spark  
of awe-striking connection, where  
underground tunnels are excavated.  
We are a perfect rub and flow, and we flow, fingers  
over the tender inner thigh, mouths  
braving more than kisses. We built a bridge and we crossed it,  
holding hands, watching each other's back.  
We take off our shoes, a field is before us.**

**All animals are gorgeous, each with a full and necessary soul.  
Animals peer out from behind the curtain of high trees  
lining the field, waiting for us to run. We run  
and twirl and lay down in laughter, like we once did long ago.  
We are good just as we are. We are one  
at the knees and at the core.  
Hell and the moaning of withheld mercy is far behind us,  
we have been devoured and we dissolve -  
our shells and our centers, seasoned, spring-woven,  
what is ours, what is God's, combined, surrendered.**

## **Stream of Dark Nectar**

**It does not end today, in the morning, in  
these sapling hours of blissful solitude.  
It could end and be a bone, dried and crushed  
by the pressure of circumstance – but the  
veil has lifted. Jesus speaks his anarchy  
and raises the grass strands, blooms the flowers, swiftly,  
miraculously with perfect sense before my eyes. King  
of time and gravity – the weather listens to him, the water,  
coins and food all bend to his majesty and authority.  
I watch this like I would a landscape sunseting sky,  
vast across forever and wide as the sea.**

**Cards are in my hands,  
they have living pictures, moving in sacred gestures,  
gathering force, corresponding with bird conversations,  
rising in crescendo, defending in their equal chaos  
and innate harmony. One tree opens its branches.  
One child remains.**

**This morning I see upright, shed  
what was never mine to own.  
Jesus is near like the beauty of eternity, sitting  
across from me, touching my knees then holding my hands.  
Power that is peaceful and velvety soft as it is  
a black hole of mystery, infinity contained.  
This morning God is strongest,  
cutting the threads of mortal memories, leaving  
only the imperishable wind.**

## **Bountiful**

**The vanishing sequence,  
removed like a ghost from  
the body whole, now whole  
and no longer leaking out  
toxic bile of directed hatred  
or the spirit-force leaking,  
weakening the core, extending  
to the appendages. Contained,  
aura sealed as it was in the beginning even before  
this body, this birth, dreaming in temporal form.**

**There are no enemies and no significance in battle zones  
or winners – it is just a shedding of skin, dead cells  
turning into dust, whisked away by a sweep and a soft blow,  
a light breeze from a window open, opened,  
all parts collected into a singularity. Faith in  
the sidewalk turn, in the emptying.**

**The conquering darkness is placed in a storybook,  
a tale of long ago that holds to personal sorrow –  
raw chafing bonds of bitterness and regret.  
Fears become detached, become a horse  
in an open field, unclipped from his halter and lead.**

**It is stronger than charity because  
there is no giving, no division  
between what is given, what exists and what is received.**

**It is a dried curled leaf, opened -  
the colour cracks and crumbles, its flesh like confetti,  
gazed at in awe, dropped and lost, vanishing in luscious folds,  
beneath high grassy ground.**

## **Commitment**

**Take the end of the root and  
squeeze. Air is not wind or  
a wave. Gazing into the darkest of eyes,  
needs forgotten in the tale  
of becoming something more than shape,  
someone more than someone who rocks  
in despair or madness.**

**I held you with my  
mind and in my arms, held you broken and stoic  
as all dangerous dreams. I was afraid to tell you  
but I told you anyway and the song grew into a sunset.**

**Eaten by gravity, blurring in potency as it traveled  
past the horizon. I saw  
you were the willow tree, the pine tree and the birch  
that scattered leaves and seeds throughout  
the large acreage yard.  
I was a raccoon, a beetle bug and a tiny bird.  
I moved through you, across you,  
made my home inside of you. Can you see  
how much of what was mine depended on yours?  
When the yard caught on fire,  
the fire seeped into my joints, extending into my aura  
and all your seeds around me of brown and green.**

**Not a single day when I did not fight  
to keep your will and commands,  
not a day without struggle to keep afloat,  
keep at bay the urge to sink**

or draw the ravenous sharks near and nearer until  
they touched - fin against my flesh and then something  
sharper.

You love me you say, but it is a love  
I cannot understand. I know it is a love, colossal, ruthless  
in its perfection but it hurts like withholding, hurts  
as I try to adore you and be absolved by a mutual tenderness.  
You are final and in this I have no say.  
I love you, but we are not  
dancing. I trust you, but we are not  
sharing with ease. I am left aching, in sharp  
icicle-tip-pounding-lack, struggling  
to make sense and find “the law”  
if there is no mercy to be seen.

I should be lucky to know you even as I do, as most  
walk the Earth without discovering a trace of your existence.  
But is there something new for us?  
Is there a bouquet around the corner?  
A line we can cross and keep  
on the other side? I give you my wings, my prints  
and all of my sacred stones. Take me  
into your softness or leave me here  
on these barren sharp ridges. Between us,  
there are no secrets, even my children  
are freely yours.

## Hooked

Lips pulsing, forehead  
enduring – pound, pound  
in the nightmare night –  
high winds, blazing storm  
and thinking “all alone!”  
Centre of a circle, surrounded by loved ones  
who have turned their backs –  
poverty shame, fed-up with helping.  
And there it is, the rabbit screaming  
in a leg-hold trap, compressed, bones snapped.  
There is this place of Earth called home, survival  
and self-preservation paramount. Nearing now  
the rotted root, my hands are slashed,  
fingers twisted “Do not land!” the voice says,  
pulsing as I sleep, denying all pleas for mercy.

My father would have saved me, but he is dead,  
died long ago, too young of too big and too broken  
a heart. My father would have helped me with love  
in his eyes, growing old would not have blocked his kindness.

The streets all go south to the lake and drown  
in freezing polluted waters. I go south with them,  
passing beach houses, cafes I once sat at.  
I am done here, let me be done, I can  
not carry this inheritance.  
I cannot lift my foot another step.  
I have one true-heart companion and we have  
been shunned together – our home, our children  
taken from us to feed the snapping jaw.  
Dreams made of thin glass, roses plucked to the core.  
Take me like a log and feed me to the campfire, let me  
turn to ash so I can start again.

## **Illusion is our imagined separation from God**

**Bend down and savour  
the shallow water,  
stroking out praise like  
the wind strokes the skin on a gentle day.**

**I was in the pit,  
closed across the journey,  
forming lines, lining up eagle eggs, pine cones  
and leashes. Breaking though  
irregular dreams that break the edges  
and expand in an un-uniformed spill.  
My love was lost when I footed the bridge.  
My love fell over the rail like a stone.  
Its sinking was mandatory as only heavy things can  
make a storm or hiding places for surface-crawlers.  
My love was my body - left side wracked with aching joints,  
stealing the sunlight air, sleep and my swift directed walk.  
Goodbye old love that trembled in  
survival's ruthless prison pit, fed on dread and fireants -  
skin stretched like a belly that bore countless stillborn babies.  
Without choice in the pit, calling a block-square-of-sky heaven  
and the starlings that would occasionally stop  
to land and peer below.  
All that love is gone, old, though because  
once worthy and living, it is honored for its gifts.  
The ground rises beneath me, the pit shortens  
into a short-climb out. My limbs awaken and harness  
the edges where direct light pours in.**

**The first thing to go will be my heritage,  
from this life and lifetimes before –**

bonds of steely anger, irredeemable deficiencies,  
those bonds like throat chains that became like laws  
that I pulled at, tried to cut or at least fray, now  
I blow them away like down-fluff feathers.  
How soft they have become,  
their hardness swelled like shells breached  
to reveal tender interiors.  
I swallowed, and they are gone.

Love, I am learning a freer way of your expression,  
entering a top layer, climbing.  
I am almost out, on a flat plane, almost  
I can see the treeline, the fullness  
of a full skyline of sunrise on one side and sunset on the other,  
surrounding plane in a circular scope.

I see dimensions pierced and I know  
it has always been this way,  
no pit, not ever, only this love,  
now shed of illusion, away from its hell.  
I can speak again, sing again, bathe upstream.

## Fuller Octave Frequency

Quick, the altered parable,  
which once was wise words, has become  
a chapel to rest in, to find a fire whistling  
and dust crevices full of infant images  
just starting to talk.

Quick, death is dying, the division  
between houses has dissolved.  
Mother is a shell, busted.  
Mother is morning crashing against a bell –  
chime and resound – the streets are tempered  
with your protection. Quick, the graves  
have turned into sundisks, have turned again  
into a vastness that is infinity that is personal  
and kisses my forehead first, then my lips, and then  
knows how to purge me of my sleep.

Quick, my bones are sucked of their water,  
my wealth is in my organs, pouring off my skin  
like flakes of glitter. Blow the hair from  
my eyes, see me for who I am – daughter of the egg  
and animal speaker. The weight inside of me is sheared.

I will not carry that crude responsibility anymore. Quick,  
see me off this cloud plateau, bring me down so I can dig  
with both hands into earth, my head raised, listening  
to the squirrels laugh, experiencing the joy of a sunny day  
as they twirl around a tree, three dizzy with exuberance.

**I topple over, and I am made.  
You are pressed against my back and I am holding  
your hand. Quick**

**take my hayride, my daily routines,  
dunk me in your ocean, hearing  
the lyrics that arrive in a melody of plumbing intimacy.  
Walking close to the sidewalk curb – death is nothing.  
You are showing me this – death is temporary, love  
is the eternal bloodflow. We are all  
(even the stones even the weeds)  
whispering, combined.**

## **Rodents and Wings**

**Days of holding up the second wall,  
sustaining with syringe feedings and lifting  
the broken Venetian blinds.**

**Days of extremes, straining to stay afloat  
in a flood of despair and then given a  
miracle season of joy until misfortune overtook again.**

**You told me to walk, and I did. You told me  
in order to heal the wound, I must first see the wound.  
You told to keep the water moving,  
make waves with my hands and never stop  
stroking the surface.**

**I loved without complaint- washed tiny toes in the sink,  
kissed a forehead, made medicine in the kitchen.  
My efforts worked, for a while  
until they stopped working and death had its claim.**

**At the exact moment of death as I watched a body  
struggle to sustain breath then stop struggling,  
you gave me sight to see a spirit rising,  
speaking of thanks and love and vows,  
showed me the ropes of attachment, strings of light  
that need release before a soul can give way to illumination,  
dissolve intact, no vigor or sorrow, but merging with the whole,  
into the light that is blackness, that is not void  
but the absorption of all colour, holy.**

**You showed me and still I grew angry and embittered,  
at a loss for comfort, destroyed of trust.  
Two days I lingered enveloped in this terrible flame,  
weeping, separated from the dance. On the third day,  
you came again, pointing out**

**a passage of perfect meaning, allowing the sun  
to glow and others to be stronger than me.**

**Crystal patterns converging. A crack muted,  
a rift mended and filled, memories  
and the harshness of a permanent end.  
Two islands to surrender to,  
two secrets painted on the beach,  
on the backyard shed, in the inside,  
giving in fully to emptiness overtaking,  
as the calm begins to carve out a niche  
where it can revive, return pure, all parts  
tethered faithfully to the wind.**

## **No ecstasy without surrender**

**There is only one way forward,  
to surrender into the tar-pit,  
the O-no! void-pit, stop resisting  
God's will, start proclaiming light in uncertainty,  
in personal dreams defeated where that defeat  
gnaws, builds, insurmountable.  
Lifting the stubborn rusted lock of what-must-be  
to allow what will-be, is meant for me  
to own and witness.**

**If death must arrive  
then let it be guided and enveloped in  
tenderness, without tortuous sorrow,  
give me the strength to receive it,  
relax into its force, welcoming  
with trust and even anticipation.**

**Then maybe gratitude will balloon out, covering wide  
in unexamined corners, peace will come in places  
where dread claimed victory, an infant's peace,  
an in-the-now glow glory to bask in, released of exception,  
uncovering flawless layers- some dwindling, some expanding -  
layers like laments spoken, when spoke  
removed like scar-marks from the skin,**

**pausing to hear flute whistles, pausing to rejoice  
in the broken down alignment with karmic bonds -  
diffused like fragrances dispersing, going, cleared.**

## **It is a strange dream**

**to be a woman, this woman,  
ripped out of an other-worldly childhood  
into monthly nightmare extremes, and  
the mess - the demanding insects crawling  
under coat sleeves, pant cuffs, arm cuffs  
onto belly and breasts, swollen, aching.**

**To grow curves and be looked at but not seen:  
to be told to smile.**

**Then to bear the weight of another living being  
cuckooing, blooming inside - shifting joints, altering  
established gaits, and the hunger.**

**Being with those you bore and birthed  
in every stair climbed, in every sleep, each minute,  
never without their beings not beside yours, living  
the greatest of all imaginings –  
heaven in a hug, tangible in eyes  
that are not yours but are threaded tightly to your nerves,  
riveting through you - their breaths  
more significant to your survival than your own, riveting  
like fireworks and famine,  
in their sorrow and brightness.**

**Almost grown, then grown and swinging from  
bell-towers without safety nets, changing houses,  
destroying rooms, forgetting, sometimes remembering, God.  
The love, resonating into cracks in plaster, deeper  
than the sound of a million singing bowls, singing, salting  
your howl, and the chant of your joy.**

**They are mostly good, and you learn the lesson hard  
that the greatest gift you can give them is knowing when  
to hold on and when to let go, and you must let go.**

**The day comes near fifty when your body begins its final  
chapter - starts slow, builds unacceptable,  
steals sleep, sanity, your strong and capable shoulders.  
No one knows, has to know, but you  
refuse to keep it secret, refuse  
the nagging misogynistic whispering shame.**

**Your home is blessed, your husband and you,  
still mad, making love, in love, vibrating true to your visions,  
a home haloed in struggle and uncompromised ideals.  
You meditate, make a routine and stick to it, as this  
transformation**

**lasts for years. Sweaters on, sweaters off, heat  
first on the face then infiltrating your spine, down, down,  
spreading like hot poison, flooding every pore.  
When it has gone far beyond the tolerable threshold,  
then it lets up,  
only to return and begin again.**

**What a strange dream I have never dreamt before –  
to receive the climb, lie down with babes, nurse other beings  
into their own, to release the cycle, enduring  
the havoc of becoming yet anew.**

**I should not cry but be praising, grateful  
to finally spin a journey in this form.  
It is a high road, can be  
a life-long sermon, and such a strange dream,**

**weaving me a pair of wings to flaunt, maybe  
never flight-bound but always love-bound and  
rich, rich as death, a backdrop  
to the pale but pounding pulse of dreams,  
the nut-meat, nectar  
of eternal pilgrimage.**

## **If it is what you want . . .**

**Bleed out  
in the dirt and dung of relationship,  
leap like a lemming off the cliff  
soothe your cracked hands in olive oil,  
then take another's hands and allow them  
to join you in this private matter.**

**It is in this truth, ourselves with another, that  
we test the mettle of our discoveries, the cleanliness  
of the mansions we live in.**

**I see stillness in the saga, retreat  
when necessary and triumphant vows  
in spite of chaos and the blood-drenched ground.**

**I will never be fully born,  
whole enough to join the stars in their whistling.  
Each time it will be a sunflower plucked,  
and the bee along with it,  
each time torn awake –  
on the threshold of death, only to master  
the small stream before it widens into a river.**

**Each time,  
love is a miracle - the movement forward, past  
jagged huge stones, decaying corpses.**

**Let your bare feet make contact, even lie flat,  
naked, face down, take in  
the sharp edges, the smell, the sight, then  
answer back by rising and walking and  
acknowledging the sky.  
Say, love, my love,  
you are more than habit,  
you are the most treasured thing ever pulled from the void,**

**the only summer worth remembering, a seed  
that turned into a thousand-year-old tree and yet still  
just a seed, easily crushed, demanding nutrients and care.**

**Clear cutting, mud-thrashing,  
faint smiles that unfold a cityscape of fears.  
Barely making it, sure of decline, then suddenly, soaring –  
one nod, the same need, mutual reviving genesis.  
It is soft sometimes, but mostly impossible,  
always impossible, alone.**

**Make up your mind.  
Make a shell and break it completely.  
Pick an apple, and chew.**

*A Great Wind  
Came Rushing*

# **Foothold**

**I think midnight  
is a future swelling  
ready for wreckage  
then prayer, then sun  
I think the animals  
have voices,  
many, too motionless to hear  
A backbone, crushed  
a starfish, exploding  
good emotion squandered  
out of fear of failure –  
all of this exist  
in union with the empty eye**

**Old people understand  
the brave business of life  
some, they have conquered competition  
cold, ceasing to cry  
some, they feel like fugitives  
nearing the boundaries of death  
shaking like a season  
that has lost its beginning  
a harvest  
ill, unused**

**I dream of footholds  
I dream deliberate  
draining meaning  
out of every moment  
I dream of souls patterned  
like constellations**

**In the snow  
a flame was born  
Darkness is pointless  
lacking the owl's eyes**

**I used to house the harrowing hooligans  
This way, I have restored my temple  
burying my body below sand,  
joining the desert  
devoted.**

## **Joshua's Shoulder**

**The herd was on a hill  
Soldiers were marching  
Young people were below, learning  
how to grow up correctly.  
I touch a cloud with my tongue,  
cried on Joshua's shoulder**

**Will they every be resurrected?  
Will the horn blow,  
beat heaven into every heart?  
I had a dream Joshua,  
we were on a clear river  
sailing on a gigantic leaf  
we were more than happy  
never once striving for shore.**

**Joshua stretched out an arm  
a finger**

**drew a circle encasing us**

**My love,  
I would break in a minute  
if not for your soul  
pressed so close to mine  
Choose your smiles well  
not everyone understands laughter  
like we do.**

**The rocks dislodged from mountains  
covering graveyards.**

**An old woman was reciting her name  
in front of a mirror, a child  
she once knew, remembered  
herself to be**

**Dead fish lay on the beach,  
their eyes, like marbles**

glowed, all suffering  
traceless  
as if locked inside  
a wisdom  
no human could unmask.  
I lifted my hands  
to give thanks to the birds,  
leaned on Joshua's shoulder  
and whispered  
    Joshua  
        The flowers are stones  
        and the stones are stars  
Joshua nodded  
took my hand  
and changed direction, tears  
leaving his strong eyes.

## **Selina**

**What were you seeking  
as you walked  
year past year  
through the talking crowd?**

**When he'd ask  
of the cold terror  
that would sweep through your heart  
moving like freezing rain  
towards his eyes  
all you could remember  
was summer  
a week of silence in the heat  
when you endured his visits  
like a weight  
you longed to unleash.**

**Beggars battled their hunger  
near your home  
you could smell the decay  
reeking of bad alcohol  
and heavy insanity**

**He would climb  
like an old man  
onto your body  
inject his virility  
fade into a dreamless snore**

and you would listen to that awkward rhythm  
thinking of your mother  
childhood  
waves never reaching shore.

All fled from your fire  
sleep was short  
waking was difficult  
occasionally a star  
would shake inside of you  
spread its silver shoots  
and separate the surrounding night.

You must have known from the beginning  
how meagre his love could be  
You must have tried hard  
to inherit some joy  
from the faces  
you kept etched on your windowsill

Out of all of them,  
his was the thinnest  
but still some gesture of affection  
fated to overpower you  
when he held out his boorish hand  
waiting to be love.

In the lonely air of age  
grief watched on  
as you laughed  
fast and forceful  
concealing the wound  
behind charm and habit.

**Selina, you died  
like a country woman  
barred by the pine trees  
Selina, you wore clothes  
scented with velvet flowers  
and spring after a storm . . .**

**pretending the dance went on  
despite your exhaustion.**

## **The Jester and the Monk**

**The jester and the monk went walking  
The winter moon  
hung like a skull above their heads  
Two before midnight  
prayed by the river  
laughed in the apple orchards  
holding hands  
they circled a forest of dreams**

**The jester poked a tongue at the sky  
the monk dripped tears on the earth  
nailed to absurdity  
locked in serious sainthood  
campfire burned  
children linked arms  
close to their love**

**If not for the living thirst  
If not for the agonized fascination  
and the ignited chill  
no blue bird would they have betrayed  
no house would they have entered  
like wings  
flapping in an undecided wind.**

**A thousand hours  
counting many dawns,  
nights of humour and holiness**

**Anyone could feel the connection  
resting in their smiles  
Anyone would have swam an Artic sea  
to soothe the burn  
blistering the strength of their hold.**

**What they wanted  
neither dared to understand  
only a bridge  
mouthfuls of truth  
handfuls of lies  
drove them together  
inseparable.**

## Walls

I prefer the window  
gardens made of stone  
a sleep-filled afternoon  
where the whole of a frozen pond  
is cupped in my palm.  
When I was younger  
I skipped stones on the river  
lived, lurked  
dazed, dazzled  
with an honest imagination  
and cool peace  
Now, my socks are filthy  
lovers have belittled intimacy  
and the sun is sullen  
painted as a shadow.

The planet is yawning  
over worn with rot  
moral inconsistencies  
litter the sidewalks  
nobody wears  
the wind on the backs  
anymore

Walls are mine  
to devour  
spit up  
then build again.

# **Immortal Burn**

**The evening falls  
I crawl on my belly through sewers  
old passions, fatal hopes  
bellow, discharge  
into my mind**

**Your smile is like a sickness  
I can't shake off  
Your body  
a beating obsession  
infesting my pores**

**The last hour  
the last kiss  
burns immortal  
like thunderstorm  
fastened to my existence.**

## Lost Your Clown

An applauding audience  
rat dung on the carpet  
yes, remember  
the perfumed summer  
cold pennies  
we would lay on the railroad tracks  
and my necklace  
with one jewelled eye  
your clothing of cinnamon colour  
mornings of breathing  
with the lights left on  
surviving the shrilling gull's song  
breathing  
wax, humidity, hand-prints on the wall.  
From you a hot glow  
swelled in your snare  
tiny tedious nights  
in your asylum of approvals  
and secret judgements  
I would squirm  
dry  
thirsty  
when you'd come home  
pockets full of food and false friendship  
I would rock and weep  
near the tape recorder  
stabbing sorrow  
in my isolated aquarium  
tossing pebbles to the ceiling  
watch them hit  
and laugh out loud

**I want you to know  
your theatre is bare  
nobody lingers for you  
gifted pretender  
of deliverance.**

**Take flight  
take your guru condescending cold  
it's getting easier to be alive.**

## **A Great Wind Came Rushing**

**A great wind came rushing  
and I said to the wind  
“Bitter wind, stop before you carry me off.”  
A great wind came rushing  
and pulled me into the sky,  
I travelled past wheat-fields  
sailed under its furious reign.  
I was broken into many pieces,  
hit what the wind could not pass through  
half-crazed with resistance  
I fell to the ground  
into worm-holes and the open mouths of laughing children.  
I sunk into soil and dreamt of sprouting.  
And the wind said to me,  
“Do not perish with fright in these strange places,  
close your eyes and wait for spring.”**

**Spring came,  
I cracked and grew flesh  
then like a vine I crawled out of that dark ground  
and found the sun  
soothed by heat and rain  
I praised the earth with untainted joy  
And I said to the earth,  
“Sweet earth, allow me to walk.”**

**Gradually my limbs found movement  
lips formed, eyes appeared, blue and wide  
and I ran from land to land  
celebrating life with each step.**

I wore no clothes, carried no yard stick  
found equal peace, equal rapture  
with every new encounter.

A great wind came rushing  
and I said to the wind  
“Powerful wind, come carry me off  
for I am still young and can bear the storm.”  
Weightless with excitement  
I joined its intense ride  
gathered at the centre  
halfdead with stillness  
I gave myself up  
lost the beating of my pulse, lost momentum  
sunk low into my depths, immune to singing  
And the voice said to me  
“Do not despair with sorrow in this vacant hollow,  
open your eyes and wait for love.”

Love came,  
I expanded and felt communion  
Like a clam I crept out of my isolation  
and shone my pearl

Like a clam I closed back my shell  
and hid in the safety of darkness.

And I said to my love,  
“I am as incapable of loving as much as  
everyone else is.” And my lover said back to me,  
“So am I.”

**A great wind came rushing  
And I said to the wind,  
“Great wind, be still  
It is time now to learn.”**

**The great wind ceased.**

**My love and I walk hand in hand  
on an unknown mission, swept away,  
carried by each other, alone.**

## **Into the Fire**

**My egg  
sticks to my womb  
wanting something  
like a thunderbolt**

**My love  
makes havoc in my breast  
like a sinister struggle.  
I am expecting him  
his lost satisfaction  
stretched out to annihilate my own**

**I am expecting him like  
a flickering tongue, a goodnight kiss  
in the twisted cry of his need,  
folding up inside of me  
expecting  
a terrible after effect**

**My love hovers in a madman's purgatory,  
where eternity gets stuck in a single moment,  
no claimed victory, no wingspread  
to express his freedom**

**I continue in silence  
expecting him...**

**I will never sleep again.**

# Devotion

What links  
and where?

Was I always flushing with need  
there are your feet  
with a terrible tenderness  
or tenderness unborn?

I have watched you walk  
certain you will never run,  
mystified by your suffering.  
Was there ever a miracle great enough to touch you?

The world is madness, unsafe,  
and you are captive to that tragedy  
trying for an impossible life

I have imagined brighter days  
I have imagined to be eternally in love  
enslaved by nothing  
delivered from everything

I have imagined a life unabstract.

More than flesh,  
but never more.

## **Colour of Earth**

**Should I be  
an aqueduct of faith  
flowing and falling  
onto the paralyzed streets?**

**I know flowers  
are infinite. I know the way is  
risk. But I cannot climb  
that blistered mountain  
or hope for a gentle wind to save.**

**My mirror-ghost rises whole  
with tangible flesh, too visible to bear.**

**And clouds obsess me.**

**Green forever. Green is  
the ego waning and love  
that grows in wild orchards.**

**Red is our age and our wait  
for greatness inside the owl call.**

**Turn here, turn there – kill  
the wheel and the virgin flight.**

**So much unanswered. So much  
we must inevitably lose.**

## Swan's Neck

The afternoon is here. You are lost,  
limited, sick with inadequacies  
and innumerable attempts  
to forget the unknown.

The wolf that communed with your bones,  
did you place the swan's neck  
next to his teeth? You did.  
You were scared but in love  
with red blood on white feathers.  
You wish you had the courage to forgive  
yourself - days, weeks  
on the edge of a sinister conspiracy darkness.

You are the last of my history.  
I can't go on in this vacuum  
of thorny hedges, trying to kill boredom  
with these grandiose unsubstantial schemes.  
I think you are lonely.

I do miss you, sometimes  
I would like to have your wax figure in my hands,  
hold it over a candle, to see how fast heat can melt  
your virgin body.

Everything is hard. Hard hats, hard watches –  
everything, even your striking eyes.  
And the Italian couple who gave us cookies,  
the are hard and hurting  
for revenge  
And it's no good,  
it is just damn awful

**to carry this sea full of creatures  
in my stomach  
to hurt like a worm  
in the mid-day sun  
attempting to mend this insanity  
backhoe digging trenches  
into my karma.**

**Please let me in on the secret,  
can our gypsy dream really be over?**

**I want to throw the arsenic in the garbage.  
I want to triumph.**

## Lost in a Garden

Subjugated, they seduced your ego,  
abducted your history  
until nothing remained but a gap,  
a secret left too long untold.  
You have a face, a bed to lay  
your death mask and examine  
the tears that slip  
from that counterfeit depth.  
Morning is vivid, it attacks you  
with its beauty, but you are stitched  
together by pale craftsmen who know their trade  
is narrow.

If only the years would end with a final blow,  
then you could rid yourself of  
that blunt nameless ache,  
too rare to resurrect  
into symbolic meaning.

On the back of the moon,  
you let the vision go  
for a prize that had no gain.  
They came to you with soft sighs that belittled freedom.  
You believed: A fool  
who knew the souls of each and every star  
then stooped to touch the Earth  
in all its pointless fury.

All is private. Your confessional  
hands will disappear.  
They need you now to smile  
in spite of your personal storm.

Do not despair. Heal.  
You know whose side you're on.

# The Tongue

Through the back door  
he took the baseball bat  
and hammered the rattlesnake to death.  
Feasting on decadence, he escaped the burning sunrise  
and ate the last petal of the last rose.  
No one could persuade him of unity,  
not even her with her undulating promises of love.  
He was saddled in the seat of pride,  
turning eastward to raise a glass  
to Armageddon.  
She broke his removed look  
with a touch of her tongue to his lips.  
She tuned her hair to flames, and called out to follow.  
As he lifted his hand to touch her skin,  
she took him in a dream to a land where  
people wandered intoxicated with sorrow,  
on account of their ill-formed hearts,  
where children were weary,  
baptized by the grotesque art  
of selfishness.  
He called – adultery.  
She called back - It is your accomplishment.  
He watched her tongue turn to water then  
drip on the grass, tuning the whole scene  
into stone.  
We must go she said. She said,  
there is no belonging,  
only intimacy achieved, fought for.  
Without protest, he curled into her arms  
hiding in peace, safe beneath her golden sails.

## **Paper Man**

**Those were the distances,  
the attachment of your soul to mine,  
where we slept in the windy valley  
with that imbecile comedian  
who would play the flute  
and try to emulate your profound nature.**

**The day you opened the door and I walked in,  
stared at your multi-coloured paintings,  
grateful to eat your wonderous gifts,  
I needed you like a bandage. I needed  
my cigarettes, the nights outside in alleyways  
fantasying formidable adventures  
to express our courage.**

**Thank you for your arms  
that veiled me from the eclipse  
and the strangers you brought to my side  
with God brewing strong in their stomachs**

**I never did get my housecoat  
or the dance in the traffic I so wanted.  
They tell me you are going far,  
to great planets that have no names.**

**On my bare belly,  
our hands once joined.**

**You are on stage, singing,  
drenched in a beautiful darkness.**

**You were my companion, lover  
in the January frost.**

## **When He Rides**

**Unearthly dreams  
illuminate him  
where gardens  
lay their petals to rest.  
They creep now, his eyes,  
into sad and forbidden  
realms  
of insanity's broken weight.**

**Loose threads  
dangling from his mind.  
Loose thoughts  
that have no ending.  
Lost on his lips, something  
unleashed like music, something  
like my love.**

**Find me alone  
inside bedroom walls,  
take these useless hands,  
allow them to touch  
the impossible**

**He makes the bell ring  
He turns the lights off  
He takes the bareback horse  
and gallops  
into the cutting dark.**

**The stars, they say,  
lose all balance  
when he rides.**

## **The Man and The Snake**

**Fused, in flight**

**he dove with haste into the sand pit. So little now to feel,  
but hummingbird fear, crushed pebbles and bitter pride.**

**He danced in the yellowish crevice, swinging  
religious aging arms;**

**as if invisible like the silent atmosphere  
of stopped clock hands and snowflakes falling.**

**The cobra cocked its head. Suspended in the shadows,  
its boneless beauty shone with lust.**

**He touched its tail first, then tongue; rolled  
like thunder down its fleshy throat,**

**kicking his heels against  
the interior shell of the snake being.**

**Breathless, he begged for poison,  
or relief. The snake hissed -**

**Tonight, you return to the womb. Close your eyes  
    your sanctuary is complete.**

**His eyelids folded over like petals in a frost.**

**He kissed the dream, then followed his fate  
home.**

## Sister

With your random intimacy, you gather  
like a fresh season  
in my unchanging days.  
The letters I write you  
turn blue with sorrow, yellow  
with self-lies.  
I am a woman  
bearing this seed of false explanations.  
Am I meagre? Have I calculated  
truth and love, inch by inch  
as severable, solitary desires?  
I am sinning beneath a half-moon, wanting  
to shape my thighs perfectly,  
but I have only two hands to mend this wound,  
and even their double skill and devotion  
is inefficient for such a task. It is better left  
to trust, to fate,  
to an open-hearted ruin.  
I believe in your perfect happiness,  
your nunnery in a Montreal duplex, your discipline.  
I will join you someday, look into your priestly eyes  
and feel once and for all  
upright.  
My mind is whitewashed.  
Your smile is surfacing  
like a cleaned glass swan.  
On the shore or in the sandpit  
we will arrive,  
whether it take over night  
or lifetimes.

## **Kaita**

**It is sort of colourless,  
the Earth. Though  
I can hear the voice of spring,  
I cannot help being disappointed at the slow  
blooming flowers, that grow up  
pursing the sun  
to no avail.**

**Then I see the long boneless bodies  
of angels  
ascending like arrows  
into the depths of a starless sky,  
and I think to myself that he  
who has gone into  
shadows, hissing a private song  
is much better off with his visible scars than  
their invisible wings.**

**And I wonder, will he come home  
or pass like water between unwebbed feet, to the ocean  
where all that is written  
is washed away with the sand?**

## Nocturnal Souls

Those pure, breathable love-notes  
written on Japanese paper.  
Our house, rain-cold  
with dawn dying in every corner.

When you sleep  
I believe I am made of ice. I travel  
in my frozen figure, spiralling,  
drilling up  
into God's domain. While you, flat  
amongst the covers, breathe slow like  
roots, touchable, sacred  
as the shadows of my mortality are born  
then perish in the wind's mute philosophy.  
Loneliness infects us all. You have told me,  
there will never be a simpler tomorrow.

Cut flowers lean their bloom on pale walls.  
I drop my mouth like wine dripped  
on your shoulder.  
You wake and find me,  
hauntingly yours.

## Walk on Fear

It appears in the grip  
of ecstasy, in the  
idiot abstract of failure,  
and sometimes, love.

Illusions coating  
the sides of eternity  
with shrieks, illusions  
crawling out of the mouths of

of gods and myths. Trains  
pass all night through offices,  
apartments, trains packed

tight with a cargo of dreams.  
No one is strong enough to say goodbye  
to the world, shave their heads  
without feeling. No one is here

to shout spontaneous, to endure  
the striving tongue and bone. Electrical  
flies on the wall. Cockroaches scanning  
the fridge - oxygen, dancing couples,

standing naked  
before a window, skyscrapers  
stretched towards  
a crippled sky, and then

**long ago, a child  
sitting in a forest,  
singing  
to each tree.**

**Lately, it is has been hard  
to hide - undressed,  
divorced from direction.**

**Lately, I've been watching  
the furniture, screaming  
aloud when there's a knock  
on the door.**

**But my house is forever.  
And the urgency and hunger  
that overpower my pulse  
has never cried for peace.**

## **Forgive the Night**

**Let the heart peel  
its iron crust.**

**Let the rainbow ribbon of this  
spiritual dream  
coil around my neck.**

**I walk the fished-fumed streets,  
with mask in one hand and thoughts  
of resurrection in the other,  
balanced between mercy and reality's  
ruthless blade.**

**Who will let me in, let me  
name my thorn, give wing  
to my smallest vision?**

**Alone, through May's  
ripened night, through the dusk light above.  
Grief shifts understanding  
to a higher octave, anchors it in soft ground.  
My hood, my sting, alone  
waiting a certain tomorrow  
when all will dig like a diamond  
into my chest, leave no  
forgiveness unappeased, no love  
denied a brilliant wave.**

**I long for my enemy's hand  
to bless it like we all  
bless the stars. I long to shut  
out hate caused  
by hurt, by love incapable.**

**A walk through a cemetery.  
Death invading an injured bird's  
eyes. This I can bear.  
This lockjaw, heavy drum of death.  
But the dying - harsh struggle, grasping  
claws, alcoholics in the streets,  
violent children, worthless anguish...**

**Who will drain this venom from my  
blood, blow my armour down?**

## Wide In His Chains

Under the cliff of  
    winter clouds  
his hands  
    were born,  
drunk on abstractions and  
    a feeling muse.  
Battleships soared through his  
    ransacked-mind.  
Impossible loneliness attacked like  
    a vulture,  
painting his jealous seasons  
    morphine blue.  
His was a tender style, loving equally  
    the hideous and the brave.  
He was punished for his ruthless poetry, exiled  
    for his ecstasy-grip  
Those hands were tendrils, latching on  
    to what others feared.  
His music drove on through  
    bombshell screams  
toward a prophetic morning,  
    desired.

## **On Mortal Ground**

**Nothing, take nothing  
only my starving hopes.  
Save my brow from the devil's comb,  
the false religious cry.**

**I am low on the ground  
watching ants and spiders play.  
I have been hit  
by a barnacle onslaught storm.  
My fingers are strands of straw,  
beating back in time with the breeze.  
I am alive, guarded by grief  
and rib and brain.  
My house is an egg,  
a shooting simple firework.**

**Nothing, take nothing  
the children are my shelter,  
and their gifts of inspiration -  
my wound, my blade.**

## **But the Waves of Savage Light Kindle Me**

**I do not trust  
your ruse-dance, your guillotine  
cutting mind.**

**I listen through the backdoor,  
with both eyes  
locked on the table.**

**Lies shut beneath  
your playacting smile.  
Sweet**

**encouragement with  
a twist, like towels can  
twist,**

**and limbs and laughter.  
Metre by metre your muse is  
measured,**

**scaled-down  
to a keyhole  
muted howl.**

**The streets are bleached monotone  
by your analytical trumpet  
pour.**

**The buildings outside  
turn bloodless blue,  
sold**

**to your calculated vision.**

## **Tearing Roots**

**Guilt that shatters  
the skull of megalomaniacs.**

**Guilt that motivates early morning  
extremes, pacts and dubious proposals.**

**He was paralyzed in the playground,  
taking years to say a single  
no – A childhood  
filled furies and thieves.  
A child that carried sharpened pencils  
in his pockets.**

**A child in bed, in a lucid dream  
of horrid hands rising from the floor,  
tugging his dangling foot, pulling  
his hair and leaching  
his pores of their juice.**

**Now he rides beyond the blasphemy  
of his youth, beyond his  
innocence murdered by a careless  
tyrant's siege.**

**Out of his husk, his form  
swims, pursuing a small but majestic  
harbour  
glow.**

## **The Leap**

**His body  
has fallen  
onto the pyramid's point.**

**Pyramid  
of passion's climb, edge of  
water of sunstroke-sea.**

**Thunder  
in his bones, contagious,  
moves through his nails and  
hairstrands.**

**Has one dedication – to seek  
and scream. Has no**

**mother  
no rite of passage to  
soak him in strength.**

**Thunder  
of hard fought-for joy.  
He tosses and turns at  
the tip,  
on his heels.**

**He lies flat, feet and arms  
spread  
like some great animal,  
fossilized, once  
in flight.**

# Hawk

Paradise bound  
by doubt's heavy claw.

Our promises were  
fracturing. The hour  
melted into sleep  
then confusion.

In the bed where our stones  
were gathered like oracles  
of deliverance came the touch  
of communion, your hands  
crossing my boundary flesh.

Splitting the atmosphere,  
and your eyes, feverish with love's  
great skill.

You circled me,  
sliding down  
through the stronghold space  
between, entered  
and gave what in tomorrow  
I may never find.

## **To Mourn the Dusk**

**Measure of rain,  
echoing through his  
protected slumber.**

**Authenticity locked beneath  
his belly, amidst swarming  
bullets of base destruction.**

**Rage grinding, titling his  
equilibrium, shrinking  
an ivory sun.**

**People play with him, give response  
to his repeating voice, won't abort  
his fatal ebb and flow.**

**He sits with arrows under his seat,  
trusts nothing but the iron isolation  
of betrayal.**

**Will not speak to children or enjoy  
a paint-by-number. Loves only  
chewed wounds, impossible needs,**

**the drowned swimmer  
of  
his mind.**

## **Working with Glory**

**In the rich thick salt  
of a sea,  
gulls gather creating  
havoc with their stammering wings.**

**A dog brushes my knees.  
Small pebble shells cover my toes.**

**I walk to the pavement where  
an insect crawls,  
seeing purpose there as great  
as any mountain climber's weight and cause.**

**I follow a madman off the pavement  
into the bush, hearing the waking  
of an oncoming downpour.**

**In a raven's beak descending  
a chant echoes into the open:**

**It brings in rays of maximum heat,  
sets my name  
on fire.**

## **As Your Sky Opens**

**I touch your eyelids  
not to keep closed  
nor to help lift,  
just to understand  
how such secrets form.**

**The night's creatures  
rise like needles from the earth,  
into the trees, into the throbbing river's arms.**

**You have so many days ahead,  
so many visions unnamed, ready to be spoken.**

**Your tears drop like swallows.**

**Your smile changes the shape of each cloud.**

## **Step Through Summer**

**Dying for my thoughts to fade  
into an amnesiac slur, not judge my  
convalescent love.**

**Waiting for sleep to  
move to a higher  
octave, away from guilt, blame and  
artful blindness.**

**The light that falls forever  
into the gullies  
of souls and skulls - comforts  
but cannot heal. The wind too cannot  
give like a compass burn.**

**I pace the floors, longing  
to surrender what I have  
to the summer flowers,  
remaining.**

## **No Wedding Day**

**Held up by the strings  
and the ragged chains  
of expectation.**

**This is the  
last vein to burst,  
the last root  
to dry.**

**Keep your milk  
and music for  
the moon – mother  
of dreams, mother  
of personal metaphor.**

**The marriage ring has taken  
its final curve.  
From now on, only  
a gypsy smile,  
only a trumpet blow  
for the wanderer's freedom.**

**Clouds cave over the sun  
like a fist. Children play on  
the green-pink hills  
as all disappointments line up  
on the wave of their laughter  
to be killed or  
pardoned.**

## Missed the Mark

I felt I could almost run  
the passage.

But the mist and  
the naked days  
of winter's burning  
snows  
made my head heavy and  
a purpose too slender to follow.

A twisted brightness came crashing  
through the ghosts surrounding.

Nothing but a comforting  
numb held my feet to the ground.

I thought my blood was more  
than words. I thought to claim  
my flesh anew.

But love shifts like coastal waters  
and only the drumming tides  
of error and time  
can guide me now –

away.

## **Feline Dream**

**Winter comes like a blank page  
dropping over the city.**

**Houses glow in  
T.V. light,  
dulled and eerier.**

**Somewhere my mind has lost itself,  
trekking through this burning time.**

**I see the eyes of animals in every place.  
I see a kestrel cribbed in the sky, beating  
against clouds and taunting crows.**

**I do not know what I am:**

**I live the nights through like a cat,  
soothed by poetry  
and the moon-white  
fury  
of solitude**

**under stones.**

# Helen

She rises from the flower-pot soil,  
sad as a caged Queen.

Her hands, fixed behind,  
pushing her head towards  
the moon.

Her lips as still as  
trees after a storm, lying flat  
and bloodless. She does not  
let her hair down, or her  
firm skin flex.

She has seen what lies underneath  
where worms and millipedes crawl.

Half of her still there –  
the other half, awakening  
struggling up, away from the tar-sand  
ruins.

## **Birth**

**I hear the tumbleweed bounce  
and the jewelled breath of the  
antelope. Pebbles under my  
tongue. His aura is heavenbound.  
His mind is breaking up  
in his landscape beyond my reach.  
I turn to him – his leg stretched  
out, tilting clockwise.**

**Where power is shapeless  
and some shrilling sorrow  
is sealed in fishbowl eyes,  
ruling from behind glass worlds -  
I see him born, towering between  
flesh. His head is a miracle, a  
signing bonfire.**

**I turn to him. I run to him.  
His belly makes me weep. Pulsing  
up and down, warm with life.**

**He is coming out from the  
quicksand wound. His beauty,  
quenchless. His is innocence is  
revived.**

## Nomad and Wife

Her dying bones  
which still have the strength  
of moon and fight are held  
up on his altar-hut.

Watching over – a small  
figure with the once milking  
flow of feminine  
curve and charm.

He will not be undone  
by the pain or  
winter's fast approach.  
(He places a carved bird at her feet.)

He has killed for her dignity  
marred and she for the power of his  
wide-set eyes. They touch  
hand to weatherworn hand  
and know the sensation  
singular like the sun  
is singular in its power  
to bless or deprive.

They do not smile, their union  
is too rich for such  
a soft space between.  
(They remember their children)

Watching as her life departs,  
his anguish echoes the high plains  
undefended, heard only  
by the gods. And the trees  
so placid, absorb each cry,  
accepting.

## **You walk**

**the branches.**

**You put Sunday in your  
pocket. Unlike you, I am not  
destined for immeasurable acts.**

**I speak to the stones, to someone like you,  
looking up your stairway, into your hallway  
of a holy place.**

**You move to the rooftop,  
eyeing the crowd with a distant tear.**

**I would hold my hands out to you but  
your love is criminal, is metal slowly  
burning through the streets, congesting  
the autumn air.**

**Why do you devour me  
into your sweet, immaculate hell?**

**You circle me and circle my door with your  
smiles and waves  
of irresponsible feigned devotion.**

**I am too soft for such deception.  
I am no rock, no easy rider.**

**Your lies like your beauty  
live in me, aimlessly**

**cutting.**

## The Way of Separation

If today I cry for you  
would you weep  
with me, though  
your paradise is found  
and my life is strange to your eyes?

Blue shade in my  
palm. Midnight in  
my shoe. I give up  
hope, give up the covers  
to shield me from ruin.

If you could love me differently,  
with a love not so dead to deeds,  
so proud in its moral conviction,  
would the moon appear different too,  
and its bone-white light, could I bear it  
whole?

I learn to will my famine numb  
I learn our intimacy was hollow,  
nothing is sure but God  
I learn the way starfish see –  
slow, slow change, that none  
but the intent can observe.

*(Mortal heart  
that hears the  
resonating thunder,  
feels the owl's burning  
eyes. Modern heart  
of secret logic, robed*

*in the gales of a coming  
age.)*

**Do you remember the heat  
of our stride, our anxious days  
of youth, christened by our friendship?**

**You go into airy ideals.  
I break with your walking.**

**You go into arms that praise your every gesture.  
I look to the river.**

**You ask my forgiveness.  
I am stronger now, enough**

**to bless (*and I bless*)  
without taking.**

## **Ambush Your Rage**

**Savour the shock  
that makes a weak person perish.**

**Savour the shape  
of abandonment in an old man's eyes,  
the grit of bitterness that taints the forgotten,  
the pinpoint range of hurt  
which lasts beyond  
all means of distraction or comfort.**

**Savour the fruit of your  
awareness, its fierce caress and symbolism.**

**Live long along the roadside's edge. Let  
the ants weave your shroud.**

**Give nothing to the canyons, to the diving  
bottom-feeders while winter freezes overhead.**

**Give nothing to this minnow town, these  
streets of helter-skelter code.**

**Let the heron guide the way as you  
kneel before your destined trials  
and seize the tide  
to follow.**

## **Anonymous**

**The man on the corner curb,  
knees bandaged and bloodstained,  
mocks  
each passer-by  
with a wink from his drunken  
eyes.**

**Long hair like seaweed  
glued around his neck and shoulders.**

**Child  
of a tortured past, says he sees miracles  
looking into storefront windows.**

**Lovers  
ignore him, only children notice,  
tugging on pant legs with defiance and  
trepidation.**

**Says he plays cards with leprechauns,  
has lived through an avalanche which fractured his  
soul**

**into two. Unravels his bandages and shows  
his wound: can't remember how it happened.**

**Rain  
floods his open hands.  
His mouth, catching drops like  
diamonds.**

## Treading Water

I hear hummingbird's wings  
figure-eight beneath my skin.  
Too many bitten sandwiches, people  
walking by, containing  
their anguish.

The wordless hymn  
is a waterfall, pouring  
through the smoke: not a dry ocean,  
but, rejoicing. But this mind  
is like an axe, slaughtering my joy  
with world-worn concerns.

Who craves the contradictory high? Do I?  
Do I love for nothing but death and bramble?

To be blinded by ecstasy,  
to hunt again for the colossal Self.

I walk through the dust-ridden morn.  
The wind splits my shell like a labouring woman:  
It enters. It expels. It knows  
everything.

*The Field  
is Open*

## **The Field is Open**

**Going on, unable to order  
a plot of land that is not a prison pen.  
Monotony spreading, reflected in  
nerve endings frantic with anxiety.  
Repetitive motion, futility rises, and also that voice  
that wants to turn even this into a ceremony,  
but can't, can't stomach the steps, the one-by-one steps  
of petty materialism that must be endured, focused  
on, taken so seriously. Going on, like a torturous  
continuance, swelling the mind with mealworm madness.  
Going on, with no way out, a lifetime sentence,  
a sorrow that has metastasised into despair.**

**Dig out, dig me out, let the miracle rise and cover  
my home. Multiplying buds - at the entrance, entering,  
side-stepping this sinister fate, slicing  
the circle, cleared of the heavy shadows, cleared  
to name a new street and walk down it.**

**Receiving like birds receive  
music, breaking the ethereal framework,  
dissolving the rut grime delusion,  
peeking over the top, peace  
taken into the mouth, peace  
that is grace, that is receiving,  
fastened freely to the flow.**

## **The Last Say**

**Call it an infestation of worms  
floor-mapping your innards.  
Call it an impossible current  
directing you over the crater-fall  
or a whispered breath ricocheting  
inside your skull that whispers “Loser!  
Fool! You have never belonged!”**

**But you must belong, you must let it burn you out,  
possess you with its electrical charge. Turn on  
the microphone and scream its ownership  
over you. Call it debris - plastic bags in the belly  
of a dolphin. Call it hot liquid iron rising  
to seal your throat, lock it so you cannot swallow.**

**Imagine yourself a greenhouse and store  
your treasure there, place your orphaned lizards  
in vegetable beds and tell them they are safe,  
give them a home to thrive in.  
Don't crash or perish, but open, stay open  
even as your nerves are poltergeist-haunted  
and the flower you grew, counted on to keep growing  
is snapped at the stem, ground-level.**

**How can you change it? You can't. It is summer.  
The last day of school. You wanted to harness your heart,  
give it a safety net far from the rocks,  
but it is all a choice - autonomous.  
This is your nest, put in it what you will.  
Trust in the green juice inside your branches,  
don't let the ice-melting platform at your feet prevail.**

**God is tender so you must be too,  
keep your tenderness afloat,  
even when soaked in frigid water.  
Let the pressure threaten  
to kill you. It won't kill you.**

**Loosen the knot and climb under  
the jettison cliff's edge.  
Hang upside down. It is a long way to fall,  
but your arms are strong and something stronger still  
is holding you in its sustaining embrace.**

## Thread Count

Tumble down  
the ocean stairs,  
mounting the whales' trail,  
maneuvering depths and distances  
unfathomed.

Dream in the city at 5 a.m., accustomed  
to the speech that comes just before the birds  
awake and take away all formation of song.

This doorway, like a driving marked nightmare  
cursing your already blooming cloud. Tomorrow  
is the same leg-chain to drag behind, the same  
shrinking dome to be lived under.

But tonight, I have you like a burning death,  
one spot burning, one place in the house, fast  
and immediate, wielding shapes  
out of tall-far-away trees, from mind spaces,  
fresh as newborn fish navigating  
coral reefs and seeing which caves to hide in  
or seeing what is hiding in -  
patient predators.

Tonight, the bath water is ready, rooting  
my body to its sensations.  
The spell is dissolved, and clarity  
becomes gold, a hailstorm of ecstasy, reaping  
many more than one plateau, gliding gigantic above  
these graves, loud, rudimentary, I have you,  
nailing the flame  
to both of our sinking thighs.

# Fingerprint

Call it in,  
into the palm,  
into the spoon,  
the upsidedown shell.  
Hold its liquid grace  
and walk slowly over hunchback hills,  
tall weeds and cracked pavement.  
Do not spill a drop.

Shield it from the sun  
so it will not evaporate.  
Shield it from the stars  
so it does not recognize its kin  
and claim its home back amongst them.  
Shield it from the children  
who naturally harness such vitality.  
And also, from the animals,  
they will gather it in their mouths  
and feed it to their early-summer offspring,  
knowing its worth.

Instead, call it in  
because this small measure is only yours,  
as long as you call it in and let all other things go,  
go to serve your house and others.  
As long as you know, possession here is paramount,  
protection is integrity, is the way  
to keep the sponge saturated, your jaw firm  
in prayer.

**Call it in,  
into the brown jar on your sacred shelf,  
anoint it secret, pay the wages  
to ensure its safety. Sip from it,  
sometimes a little, sometimes more than a little,  
like rejoicing, like uncoiling, caught  
pure, naked, in a space fully lit with  
no off-switch or walls.**

# Lumin

One of the greatest souls I ever met  
was in the body of a rat.  
She was pure and noble, dissolved  
in gentle love, a smooth essence, easy  
to dive into.

Her name was Lumin - named by my son  
after the Shaolin clan virtue Focus.  
In truth, it may sound crazy, something many  
would smirk at or mock - but here she was -  
holding an infinity of tenderness in her rat eyes,  
every day, every night with her rat toes, her Dumbo ears  
and her rat tail.

She had a brain tumour and lived a year with it -  
recovering five times from the brink of death, holding space  
in the chair, giving up her seat on the throne to stay with us.  
Every night for hours we stayed together, often  
just looking into each other's eyes.

No one could know. I could have never guessed  
that I would love a rat this much,  
that such an untroubled expansive heart  
could dwell in one so small, so shunned and disrespected.

She loved and was able to receive love  
like a child with her mother.  
She saved my son during two years of teenage despair.  
That was her music. There was nothing hard in her, nothing  
that did not soften into joy - even when she was ill.  
When she died

**five minutes she struggled, panicked, lunging for breath.  
My hands went on her. I prayed for God  
to intervene with mercy.**

**For five more minutes she stopped lunging, was at ease,  
gasping slightly, then stopped gasping  
and the light radiated through and around her body,  
and her breath and the beating of her chest stopped. Now  
she is at rest, delighting fully in the wave.**

**One of the greatest friends I have ever had was a rat.  
And I have and have lost many friends in many body forms -  
she was a shrine of layered clarity and kindness. She  
was a great being, a resting point in God's creation.**

**One of the greatest souls I have ever met  
was in the body of a rat.**

**Please listen. please understand. Holy. Holy. Holy halleluiah.  
We are all joined.**

## **She said**

**there is a man who walks around town  
who thinks he is Elvis.**

**It is a cliché, I know, the crazy man who thinks he is Elvis.  
But this guy is for real, she says.**

**He wears a white low-cut button suit, chest hairs showing,  
and those 70's flared pants.**

**Sometimes, he even flaunts a red cape.**

**He wears a black wig that each week  
the barber pretends to cut.**

**(That kind of compassion is rare!)**

**Everyone shows him kindness.**

**He gets free day-old muffins at the doughnut shop,  
and when Joyce is working, she throws in a coffee.**

**How cool it would be to walk around in white,  
feeling like a king, never paying for breakfast,  
everyone smiling at you, treating you as a rarity.**

**People take pictures, videos, come up to him  
and ask him to sing. He never does,  
just lifts the one side of his lip  
and dramatically flips his red velvety cape**

**purchased years ago  
at the local used-clothing store.**

## **Promised Land**

**Past the burnt-down barn,  
past the tracks of a narrow road  
far into wilderness chaos, the clearing is found,  
shelves are emptied, floors are once again seen.  
The house is open like lips learning  
how to talk instead of scream. There is peace  
in the soundwaves, animals are  
five-times-miracle-recovering  
from the verge of death, upright, energy restored.**

**It was a long walk to the podium to finally have your say,  
but the effort has paid off, the love given was not wasted  
or disfigured permanently, was not solidified into  
a lost-forever horrorshow as we thought it would.**

**Gold has returned to our pockets, water faucets are running,  
laughter is common, coming from under doors.  
Love is like it once was when we had our Rooms of Joy –  
when we had each other, explorers of unending light.**

**Around the tree I dance my praise.  
Gratitude I never expected,  
years of trying to pet the violent horse's mane,  
touch its forehead with a kiss –  
now she is still, soft and free.**

**We made it past the dumpyards and the  
foreign countries full of war and pillage.  
We stayed the course, singing when we could, letting go  
of hope in steady increments of necessity,  
unravelling the last thread of our faith  
until hell overtook. And in those relentless flames  
we still believed and asked for mercy.  
Mercy has come.**

**My home is happy once again. My children have returned,  
married and bearing the seeds of deep maturity and there,  
there, sprouting back after years of dormancy,  
those glorious, sacred child-like smiles.**

## Wayside

I have fallen by the wayside,  
scrapped divinity for a taste  
of the overflow.

Everytime speaking, I was  
silenced like a nailed board  
sealed above my head.

### Summer

came in ruthless heat pulses  
depleting the oxygen, terrorizing  
nesting sparrows.  
The lap pool was chemically soiled.  
All manner of fungi bloomed,  
as dark bonds visibly materialized.

Geometric interlocking  
dimensional coveralls - covering all -  
left side of my body decaying, chomped at  
by an unswerving force, asking for my devotion,  
demanding unquestioned servitude  
regardless of devotion.

Blindly I fell into the river's fold,  
no strength left in my upper arms  
so I drifted to the wayside, into  
muddy misquote egg-beds  
and the hiding nooks of snakes

left there to breathe in fish-corpse fumes,  
play footsie  
with the washed ashore water-logged frogs,  
dreaming amphibian dreams.

# Homecoming

Time and the matrix point  
of nerves that sound off like  
a dinner bell, riveting through  
the body, vibrating the bones and all  
that stands between.

You speak of shifting plateaus,  
but the paint hasn't even left the brush,  
the walls are cracked, veined and under  
the watchful eyes of those who walk the halls.

The rules you treasure are intricate masterpieces  
of divine tapestry but they are not the mud-sling  
upheaval, unpredictable holy heartache,  
muscle aches that mark us as we grow old, and touch  
each other in the day-to-day of waking up,  
sharing the bathroom, the kitchen, animals  
who belong with us, depend on us, and sickness.

Here is my watering can. It is sufficient. It too has wisdom.  
One eye only that blends and interprets all perceptions.  
Here is my tale, my acts of shade, shelter and sun.  
The seraphim drive home dreams in vows on fire,  
born from nebulas and the hands  
of the bricklayer and secretary.

Yours is one way, powerful, yes, but so are the trees,  
a toddler's temper tantrum, the Lord's Prayer more so –  
clasped hands, no separation, helpless, wordless,  
at the beginning, saved.

## **Breaking**

**Bitter patience, counting moonlight beams  
on fledging grass stems.**

**Endure for the law that presses heavy and cold  
against your chest.**

**Endure because there is no leaving  
only traveling on.**

**Weapons put away, dressing  
strictly for good form.**

**The planets rock back and forth,  
bump against each other, but like us, are bonded,  
unalterably glued to their personal constellations.**

**Irrational hope is the shadow I have,  
the silent zone of my cortex that defeats reality, yet below  
the storm gathers and changes course for no one.**

**What used to be roots are now tossed away, ripped  
on the ridges of sidewalks like bubble gum wrappers.  
Storm that has no subliminal meaning, is only storm,  
gun shots in the wind. Patience.**

**Wait for the unwanted guest to go. Wait for your life  
to mature finally into what you wish it would be.**

## **Lighthouse gone under**

**At the end of a dream, after the burning down,  
is a sorrow, there and fixed  
like a blockage to ensure failure of the flow  
like a broken pipe,  
letting flood the lighthouse tower.**

**It will drown the lighthouse,  
even the tip and the ancient bricks below.  
And in sinking and dispersing its form  
under the water's pressure it will make a coral bed  
for otherwise homeless creatures.**

**It will make an underwater greenhouse, a place for  
tiny beings to hide, find shelter and explore.  
It will go on longer down there, below the surface,  
go on past decades, generations and nuclear explosions.**

**It will not be recognised for the tower and steady guiding light  
it once held, but it will morph into a thriving community.  
Its concrete flesh will grow breathing skin –  
slippery green living follicles. It will endure  
the winters above and the blank-eyed predators  
maneuvering through its make-shift corridors.**

**This sorrow will take and it will be final.  
And then it will give,  
infusing a richer purpose, nurturing beating life  
into the landscape of its shattered,  
now restructured, bones.**

## **Because it is a Stone**

**Because it is a stone  
the fire hits it, moves around,  
changing shape like a wave.**

**Because grief is not a word  
that counts footsteps or encapsulates  
the butcher's madness, just builds like  
a deep stagnant pool of a pond – one drop,  
one drop, rising.**

**Because all the vegetables have not been picked through,  
and more people hold compassion than they do hate,  
the tree can grow, the fountain can flow up and make  
a statement of solidarity, a sound  
peaceful to those who are near.**

**Because the robin keeps coming back  
to sit on my lawn, stares at me and waits  
for my greeting before moving on.**

**Because hope is red eyes stinging,  
but sight unimpaired,  
and the darkening shadows darkening  
the day-to-day landscape drift -  
sometimes far away.**

**Because there is early morning, peppermint tea,  
and love abides in everything living,  
I can walk another step, another day,  
bury the corpse of a treasured friend,  
and place something beautiful  
(a stone, a whisper) beside the grave.**

## **I tilt back and see above**

**a tiered canopy  
that rises great heights, separating pockets of sky  
- some blue, some with clouds -  
layers, textures swaying in gentle phrases,  
opening the hilltop-cap of grief  
more like pouring in  
the truth of helplessness,  
setting free depths unspoken,  
domed in such beauty.**

**Perfection that cannot be matched  
or misplaced as mediocre or somewhat flawed,  
but is flawed, not one straight line  
or obedience to symmetry,  
all space taken up with its fecund flesh.**

**No cell or stem rotted without reason, rotted  
because of regret or the weight of culture  
or the ridged mind-set of past tradition, but all the past  
contained within it.**

**The ancient trunk expanded equally in the roots  
and the leaf currents, intertwined with other currents  
to build a blanket, thick enough to feel protected,  
mesmerized by the soft motion overgrowth bloom,  
a place to anchor a home, release all weapons, comforted.**

## **I walked the Circle**

**I walked in a strange place  
where light was named darkness  
and darkness named light  
and knew it was my new home.**

**How can this be? I asked myself,  
inspecting each inversion  
of authenticity. Gravity, I answered,  
wiping off dust, pulling down the thick clouds.**

**Sorrow crept into my sleep, confusion  
hijacked my taste buds.  
Beauty was seen only  
in the plastic, unnaturally perfect.  
And the mortal gift, betrayed.**

**Among the ants and rodents I felt safe,  
pretended I was their kin, and they welcomed me.  
We crept through weeds, jumped  
branches and collected.**

**I gave myself a name,  
refusing the strength of my true identity,  
refusing the insight  
I first had upon arrival.  
The rivers looked blue that were really red,  
the petal of the rose lost its bright juniper green.  
Love lost the nipple flow of eternity and I didn't know  
anyone I could lean my head upon.**

**Memory is rounded, has no starting point, is the point of time.  
These are the consequences, linear trepidation and  
the quenching of fear and the felt-superiority of every nation.  
Because the bread crumbs became the feast and the feast  
was swept under the rug, willfully ignored.**

**I love my chains, I admit it. I love the deep ache and bother  
because it is familiar, inertia, mine. But here  
I announce  
I will trade it for connection, for inexperience, the courage  
of extreme risk.  
I will forge in unknown territory, set things right  
at least here in my world.**

**I have no king in gravity. I have no sound  
forbidden to me.  
The war cry is a split tongue and it deceives.  
My war cry is the path Jesus takes me on  
- walk, run, sit down - that is the way.**

**There are better places.  
I love the red tree. I love the folding cold fires, insects  
on my arms. Take care. Descend. Pick up speed.  
I had a father. I have a father no more.  
I had a brother. He never was.  
I have children, now they are grown.  
Shame on torment. Shame for not not  
letting go. Shame on shame.**

**Judgement is set aside, hidden behind the bench.  
The bird feeder is up, the bird bath too.  
Let them come, the birds, all manner of beast and fowl.  
Let them find sanctuary here.**

**All seasons, I am learning,  
are holy places, and all colours  
are sacred, unnameable, the same.**

# HolyGrail

Let it spill,  
let it move in me,  
churn my intestines  
realigning my matrix,  
releasing the gnawing dead thing  
tethered to my spine –

A butterfly sailing  
Two cardinal mates nest-building  
A golden pup leaning against my thigh  
A squirrel, staring, close, deliberately eye-to-eye

God is my master  
God is my loving parent  
The scar will remain  
but the wound is sealed  
and the penicillin taken.  
For I know love –  
the fairytale soulmate dream.  
I have held it and kissed it  
now for 30 years.  
It has born offspring, children  
who are no longer children  
who dream one day of children  
of their own.

He calls me a master.  
I call him the most wonderful being  
I have ever known.  
And we have walked together  
through such horrors that when they did not destroy,  
did irrevocably demean,

through the rocky edge of decline and crash, and  
the kidnapped stride of so many happy moods,  
learning that joy is not always a rising above  
but is more often a plain-bread steady receiving,  
is love that speaks and speaks  
and never overstates or loses a word,  
learning that we are rich and have never been forsaken,  
honouring this purple flower amongst the weeds,  
dedicated to this legendary love in the day to day,  
in the tragedies of death, infant illnesses  
and precious dreams deformed, collapsed.

Let it spill. I am already overflowing.  
Let it clean what has not yet  
been cleaned. I see the gift given,  
this greatest of all visions manifested that  
has braved itself to fruition over many lifetimes.  
I see and now I am free

seeing we are already, and have been for so long,  
*(since the day our eyes locked electrified eternal and our bodies  
were swept into that pure bliss oblivion Shangri-La vortex),*  
still dancing in the meadow, ripe with music  
when we knew with certainty all our prayers were answered,  
felt the quenching of our unbearable mutual loneliness,  
as we twirled and we danced, divinely infused  
with an ongoing source of strength, restoration  
and river blaze.

## Choosing

to trade these hands  
for a house in the forest, landed  
on a hill above any risk of flood, but near  
a flowing stream

to tear off the shingles  
for an open view, converse with hawks,  
whisk out the stale air and leave  
the smell of rain

to untie myself from this ball-bearing spinning  
spider's lair, empty that middle drawer and fill it  
with the crust of shattered seeds, still green enough  
to keep, keep  
to help me make sense  
of the seasons and explain the age of the moon,  
keep them as momentums of gratitude, candy wrappers  
or the dropped feather from a favourite pet - proof  
of something once solid, soft and natural

to set the barn on fire  
after everyone has moved out, and not  
a swallow or mouse remains, gamble everything  
on the gospel pages. This

is what  
I am going to do, sooner than it takes a tide to  
rise. I am going out the window, out on the street,  
my face remade like when in the womb.

**At first my loved ones will say Who?  
Not before long, they join me.  
There on the street we will gather, cloistered as one.  
There we will count to three, set out to race,  
nothing at our heels, wide, in all directions.**

## Publication Acknowledgments

*All of these poems have been published and have appeared in:* New Ink Review; GloMag; Setu; PPP Ezine; On Possibility: Poems and Poetry; Outlaw Poetry; The 13 Alphabet – Magazine; 1947, a literary journal; Apache Poetry; Academy of the Heart and Mind; The Blue Nib; Chicago Record Magazine; Synchronized Chaos; Your One Phone Call; Elephant Journal; Moongate Motherbird; The Peregrine Muse; Medusa’s Kitchen; The Plowman: A Journal of International Poetry; New Mystics; Ygdrasil – A Journal of the Poetic Arts; Our Poetry Archive; The Dope Fiend Daily; Madness Muse Press LLC; The Pangolin Review; Scryptic; Night Forest Cell of Radical Poets; Electronic Pamphlet

All poems in *Animal Culture (rules of commitment)* are all written and copyrighted by © Allison Grayhurst. Some of the early poems in the section “A Great Wind Came Rushing” are from the chapbook *Before the Dawn*, published in 1989 by The Plowman, written by Allison Grayhurst under the pseudonym of Jocelyn Kain; the chapbook *Joshua’s Shoulder*, published in 1989 by The Plowman, written by Allison Grayhurst under the pseudonym of Jocelyn Kain; the paperback book *Common Dream*, published in 1991 by Edge Unlimited; the paperback book *Somewhere Falling*, published in 1995 by Beach Holme Publishers, a Porcepic Book.

# About the Author



Allison Grayhurst is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. Four of her poems were nominated for “Best of the Net” in 2015/2018, and one eight-part story-poem was nominated for “Best of the Net” in 2017. She has over 1,200 poems published in more than 475 international journals and anthologies. Her book *Somewhere Falling* was published by Beach Holme Publishers, a Porcupine Book, in Vancouver in 1995. Since then she has published fifteen other books of poetry and six collections with Edge Unlimited Publishing. Prior to the publication of *Somewhere Falling* she had a poetry book published, *Common Dream*, and four chapbooks published by *The Plowman*. Her poetry chapbook *The River is Blind* was published by Ottawa publisher above/ground press December 2012. In 2014 her chapbook *Surrogate Dharma* was published by *Kind of a Hurricane Press*, *Barometric Pressures Author Series*. In 2015, her book *No Raft – No Ocean* was published by *Scars Publications*. More recently, her book *Make the Wind* was published in 2016 by *Scars Publications*. As well, her book *Trial and Witness – selected poems*, was published in 2016 by *Creative Talents Unleashed (CTU Publishing Group)*.

In 2018, her book *Sight at Zero*, was listed #34 on CBC's "Your Ultimate Canadian Poetry List".

Collaborating with Allison Grayhurst on the lyrics, Vancouver-based singer/songwriter/musician Diane Barbarash has transformed eight of Allison Grayhurst's poems into songs, creating a full album. "River – Songs from the poetry of Allison Grayhurst" released October 2017.

Allison Grayhurst is a vegan for the animals. She lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay.

Some of the places her work has appeared in include Parabola (Alone & Together print issue summer 2012); SUFI Journal (Featured Poet in Issue #95, Sacred Space); Elephant Journal; Literary Orphans; Blue Fifth Review; The American Aesthetic; The Brooklyn Voice; Five2One; Agave Magazine; JuxtaProse Literary Magazine, Drunk Monkeys; Now Then Manchester; South Florida Arts Journal; Gris-Gris; The Muse – An International Journal of Poetry, Storm Cellar, morphrog (sister publication of Frogmore Papers); New Binary Press Anthology; Straylight Literary Magazine (print); Chicago Record Magazine, The Milo Review; Foliate Oak Literary Magazine; The Antigonish Review; Dalhousie Review; The New Quarterly; Wascana Review; Poetry Nottingham International; The Cape Rock; Ayris; Journal of Contemporary Anglo-Scandinavian Poetry; The Toronto Quarterly; Fogged Clarity, Existere; Boston Poetry Magazine; Decanto; White Wall Review.

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## Quotes

**“Allison Grayhurst’s poetry combines the depth and dark intensity of Sylvia Plath, the layered complex imagery of Dylan Thomas and the philosophical insights of Soren Kierkegaard, taking the reader on a fearless journey through the human condition, delving with honesty into death, grief, loss, faith, commitment, motherhood, and erotic love. Grayhurst intertwines a potent spirituality throughout her work so that each poem is not simply a statement or observation, but a revelation that demands the reader’s personal involvement. Grayhurst’s poetic genius is profound and evident. Her voice is uniquely authentic, undeniable in its dignified vulnerability as it is in its significance,” *Kyp Harness*, legendary singer/songwriter, cartoonist, author of ‘Wigford Rememberies’ and ‘The Abandoned’, Nightwood Editons; [www.kypharness.net](http://www.kypharness.net)**

**“Allison Grayhurst is the Queen of Catharsis. Her poems are like cathedrals witnessing and articulating in unflinching graphic detail the gritty angst and grief of life, while taking it to rare clarity, calm and comfort in an otherwise confusing world of deception, mediocrity and degradation. Allison Grayhurst takes the sludge of life, and with fearless sharpness of eye and heart she spins it free of maggots with the depth of honour and passion. Allison Grayhurst's work is haunting, majestic and cleansing, often leaving one breathless in the wake of its intelligence, hope, faith and love amidst the muck of life. Many of Allison Grayhurst's poems are simply masterpieces booming with thunderous insight begging to be in Bartlett's Quotations, lines such as "I drink necessity's authority." Nothing is wishy-washy in the realm of Allison Grayhurst. Allison Grayhurst's work is sustaining, enriching, and deepening for the soul to read... a light of sanity in the world. As a poet, Allison Grayhurst is a lighthouse of intelligent honour... indeed, intelligence rips through her work like white water,” *Taylor Jane Green, BA*,**

**RIHR, CHT, Registered Spiritual Psychotherapist and author of *Swan Wheeler: A North American Mythology* and *The Rise of Eros*.**

**“Grayhurst’s rapturous outpouring of imagery makes her poems easily enjoyable ... Like a sear the poet seeks to fathom sensual and spiritual experience through the images of a dream,” *Canadian Literature*.**

**“Her poems read like the journal entries of a mystic – perhaps that what they are. They are abstract and vivid, like a dreamy manifestation of soul. This is the best way, in prose, one can describe the music which is ... the poetry of Allison Grayhurst,” *Blaise Wigglesworth, Oh! Magazine: Ryerson's Arts and Culture Voice*.**

**“Grayhurst’s poetry is a translucent, ethereal dream in which words push through the fog, always searching, struggling, and reaching for the powerful soul at its heart. Her work is vibrant and shockingly original,” *Beach Holme Publishers*.**

**"Allison Grayhurst's poetry appears visceral, not for the faint of heart, and moves forward with a dynamism, with a frenetic pulse. If you seek the truth, the physical blood and bones, then, by all means, open the world into which we were all born," *Anne Burke*, poet, regional representative for Alberta on the League of Canadian Poets' Council, and chair of the Feminist Caucus.**

**"Read at your peril. You will never look at this world in quite the same way again. Your eye will instinctively search the sky for eagles and scan the dark earth for the slightest movement of smallest ant, your heart will reach for tall mountains, bathe in the most intimate of passions and in the grain and grit of our earth. Such is Allison Grayhurst. Such is her poetry," *Eric M. Vogt*, poet and author.**

**"Grayhurst is a great Canadian poet. All of Allison Grayhurst's poetry is original, sometimes startling, and more often than not, powerful. Anyone who loves modern poetry that does not follow the common path will find Grayhurst complex, insightful, and as good a poet as anyone writing in the world today. Grayhurst's poetry volumes are highly, highly recommended," *Tom Davis*, poet, novelist and educator.**

**"Biting into the clouds and bones of desire and devotion, love and grief, Allison Grayhurst basks the reader, with breathtaking eloquence, in an elixir of words. Like lace, the elegance is revealed by what isn't said. This is stunning poetry," *Angela Hryniuk*, author of 'no visual scars'.**

**"Allison Grayhurst is a poet whose work is characterized by startling imagery and uncompromising emotion, whose pieces have appeared in prestigious magazines. Lights, darks, colors, and passions intertwine throughout the pages of her work," *Louise E. Allin*, *Literature and Language*.**

**"When I read Allison Grayhurst's poetry, I am compelled by the intensity and strength of her spirituality. Her personal experience of God drives her poetry. With honesty and vulnerability, she fleshes out the profound mystery of knowing at once both the beauty and terror of God's love, both freedom and obedience, deep joy and sorrow, both being deeply rooted in but also apart from the world, and lastly, both life and death. Her poems undulate through these paradoxes with much feeling and often leave me breathless, shaken. Allison Grayhurst's poems are both beautiful and difficult to behold," *Anna Mark*, poet and teacher.**

**"Allison Grayhurst's poetry has a tribal and timeless feeling, reminiscent of the Biblical commentary in Ecclesiastes," *Cristina Deptula*, editor of *Synchronized Chaos*.**

# Books by Allison Grayhurst

## Paperbacks

**Common Dream**, 1991, Edge Unlimited; ISBN-10: 0969542313  
ISBN-13: 978-0969542315

**Somewhere Falling**, 1995, Beach Holme Publishers, a Porcepic Book; ISBN-10: 0888783655; ISBN-13: 978-0888783653

Book 1: **Journey of the Awakening**, 1997, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CH6WO5Y; ISBN-10: 1478189339; ISBN-13: 978-1478189336

Book 2: **The Longing to Be**, 1998, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CH94ZNK; ISBN-10: 1478197684; ISBN-13: 978-1478197683

Book 3: **Death and Other Possibilities**, 2000, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CHB8M0K; ISBN-10: 1478208163; ISBN-13: 978-1478208167

Book 4: **Outliving the Inevitable**, 2002, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CHBYD1W; ISBN-10: 1478220295; ISBN-13: 978-1478220299

Book 5: **Into My Mortal**, 2004, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B00CHFGOB0; ISBN-10: 147822858X; ISBN-13: 978-1478228585

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**The River is Blind**, 2012, above/ground press; ISBN-10: 1-897224-99-0; ISBN-13: 978-1-897224-99-1

Four chapbooks published under the pseudonym of Jocelyn Kain:

**Jumana**, 1989, The Plowman; ISBN: 0-929002-36-9

**Perfect Love**, 1989, The Plowman; ISBN: 0-929002-66-0

**Before the Dawn**, 1989, The Plowman; ISBN: 0-929002-11-3

**Joshua's Shoulder**, 1989, The Plowman; ISBN: 1-55072-025-2

"Allison Grayhurst's poetry has a tribal and timeless feeling, reminiscent of the Biblical commentary in Ecclesiastes," Cristina Deptula, editor of Synchronized Chaos.

"Grayhurst's poetry is a translucent, ethereal dream in which words push through the fog, always searching, struggling, and reaching for the powerful soul at its heart. Her work is vibrant and shockingly original," Beach Holme Publishers.

Allison Grayhurst is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. Five times nominated for "Best of the Net", 2015/2017/2018, she has over 1200 poems published in over 475 international journals and anthologies. She has 21 published books of poetry, six collections and six chapbooks. She lives in Toronto with her family. She is a vegan. She also sculpts, working with clay; [www.allisongrayhurst.com](http://www.allisongrayhurst.com)

