

Animal Culture

(rules of commitment)



Allison Grayhurst

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*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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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 will 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.**

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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

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

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

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Book 18: **Fire and more**, 2016, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B01BO7P7DM; ISBN-13: 978-1517327279; ISBN-10: 151732727X

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Book 21: **Sight at Zero – selected poems (1988 to 2017)**, 2017, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B075Q7TDJK; ISBN-13: 978-1975894016; ISBN-10: 1975894014

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Book 28: **The Sculptures of Allison Grayhurst**, 2018, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ASIN: B078TJTY37; ISBN-13: 978-1983534270; ISBN-10: 1983534277

Book 29: **Animal Culture (rules of commitment)**, 2018, Edge Unlimited Publishing; ISBN-13: 978-1719094962; ISBN-10: 1719094969

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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.

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