

THE CAPILANO REVIEW



sometimes feel
like a motherless tongue
berthed
tied
as noosed as Judas
sold down the river of time.

— Wayde Compton

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THE CAPILANO REVIEW

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24" x 18" wood, acrylic paint,
scrabble pieces, and various
multi-media objects called
"miracles" by the artist.

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George Bowering / TWO GLASSES OF REMY

I like to think of myself as an impulsive character. It seems more interesting, is what I mean to say. But I didn't usually do things like that, not actually do them.

We were in the left hand lane, waiting for a green light, and the taxi was in the right lane. I could see her plain as day, or really it was eleven at night, and she was sitting over on the other side of the back seat, weeping her eyes out. It was the light on Cambie, so there was a long wait, usually hate getting caught at Cambie.

The cab driver wasn't paying any attention, just looking at the red, and there she was, this old lady, didn't even have a hankie, just bawling, not really bawling, just crying with her bony mouth open in the back of a Yellow Cab. I didn't even say anything to Willy, just opened my door and took two steps and opened the cab door and got in, just when the light went green. The cab driver didn't have time to react till he was moving. I didn't even look at Willy. He had to make his move before the people behind him got murderous. I don't know whether he drove along beside us or not.

Before I knew anything I had put my right arm around her shoulders, and she just put her grey head on my chest, half on my chest and half on my shoulder. Now the cabbie looked in his mirror and said, "What's happening?"

I said, "It's okay."

She was slowing down on the sobs.

"Ma'am?" said the cabbie.

"It's all right," she said. Her voice was a little weak, and there was crying in it. But the cabbie must have figured we knew each other.

"You still going the same place?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, no sob.

It was warm in the cab. Now I noticed her scent. I don't have any idea what I expected. I guess I usually think that old ladies either smell funny, or they wear too much perfume, the kind your grandmother always left all over you after she gave you a little hold. But this old lady smelled terrific, with one of those slight aromas that remind you of herbs or trees. I started worrying about whether *I* smelled all right.

She was sort of thin and seemed pretty tall, and as far as I could tell, she was wearing an expensive fur wrap and some kind of suit thing or dress that might as well have been a suit, dark, made by a tailor. I could see the bottom halves of her legs in the faint light coming in off the streetlamps. She was wearing black stockings you could see through, and she had those great legs you sometimes see on old ladies when they're rich. She was letting all the weight of her upper body lean on me, her arms tucked in front of her and her head on my chest.

The taxi had been turning right and left. Now it turned left off Blanca, I guess, and into Belmont. These were all million dollar houses when a million dollar house was still something. The taxi turned into a circular drive in front of a big white mansion, I guess you'd say. Now what, I thought. She took her time sitting up straight. I got out my wallet, but she was already handing the driver a bill and waving away the change. Was I going to ride away with the cab? The lady got out her side and left the door open and walked away toward the house. I slid across and got out, clumsy, and closed the door. The cab crunched away on the circle.

There were no lights on in the house. What was I supposed to do? This wasn't a pick-up. She never asked me into the cab, and I didn't know what I was doing. She was crying, that's all, and I didn't know old ladies cried, I had to put my arm around her. I'm in my late thirties, well, forty. I don't jump into taxis.

But here we were at her house, or at least *a* house, a rich person's house. I'm not a gold-digger, I'm not a gigolo, I'm a recently separated man with a taste for beer parlours and movies. Willy had been driving me home from the soccer game and a meatball sandwich on the Drive. Well, here I was, a short climb from the Fourth Avenue bus.

She was digging into her purse, and the fur wrap was hanging off one of her shoulders. I put it back right, and she smiled a tiny bit at me, tears in her eyes still, but no smudge. The driveway lights showed me a face that had once been very beautiful. Still was, in another way. I decided to walk her to her door, make sure she got in. I'll never tell this story to anybody, I decided.

But she had no intention of going to the enormous white door with the pillars in front of it. She aimed a little gizmo to the left, and one of the three garage doors went up. A lot of strange possibilities went almost through my head: was I supposed to stay in the garage overnight? Was she giving me a car for being so nice? Was she a weird murderess with a garage full of ominous tools? She put a key chain into my hand, and walked on her straight legs into the garage. I followed her, of course — why deviate from my behaviour so far?

She was standing on the passenger side of a dark green Cadillac convertible with the top up. The garage lights were on. Beside the Caddy was a tan Rolls Royce, and beside the Rolls was a black four-by-four of some sort. I couldn't leave a woman like her standing beside a Caddy door for long. There were about ten keys on the key ring. I had no idea what a Cadillac key looks like. While I tried four keys in her door she stood beside me. I was a hod-carrier in the presence of superior breeding. But I managed to close the door for her with enough sophistication, I thought. And I got the driver's door open on the first try — no question of her leaning across to pop the handle.

I'd never driven a Cadillac before, and I'd never driven any kind of car during the year it was first bought. I was nervous about crunching something while backing out onto a circular driveway, but she just sat with her back and neck straight, looking straight ahead. I backed out, and before I found a forward gear, the garage light was out and the door was coming down. I could smell trees.

"Where to?" I asked, trying to sound casual or cheerful. She nodded. She probably had a gold tissue dispenser in the car or her purse, but she never dabbed at her eyes. I drove.

She didn't say anything while I took two rights and headed out the drive to the university. I could not hear the engine, only a wisp of tires on the wet pavement. We went past the Japanese garden and

south along the ring road, the ocean to our right, beyond some trees that were made to look like a forest in a book for kids back on the prairies. That's how I think, even in situations where it's hard to think.

The rain clouds of the earlier evening were gone inland, and now the moon was up there, three-quarters full or a quarter empty. I reached for the radio, but she put her fingers on mine and left them there till I moved my hand back to the steering wheel. Then she had a cigarette in her hand. I reached for the Caddy's lighter, but this time she didn't touch me. Flame came out of something gold in her other hand, and I could smell French tobacco.

I cleared my throat and told her my name, sort of. From her silence with her cigarette, I knew she wasn't likely to give me hers. Instead, she motioned toward the lookout. This is a little parking space for about four cars. You can point the nose of your Toyota or Cadillac toward the edge of the cliff overlooking the Strait, and catch a glimpse of the logbooms below. If you're in a Cadillac, your back bumper isn't all that far off the road. Down in the water there is supposed to be a famous sunken wreck.

She leaned toward me and I wondered what now, but she was after some gadget that retracted the roof. It went straight up and then back, and just disappeared. I was gawking. I'd never been in a Cadillac before. Maybe I was trying to persuade myself that the Cadillac convertible was the strange part of this event. She turned off the ignition and took the key out before a man's reassuring voice from the dashboard could finish telling her to. I decided that if we were going to talk, she was going to go first. It was not a warm night. There was a wind coming off the Strait, but she was wearing a fur stole. I turned my lapels out.

And we sat there, looking out to sea. There were a few lights on the water. A propeller plane descended toward the airport. I didn't turn my head, but I snuck a sideways look at her. The moonlight made her face look really nice. Not young or anything, but she had a long straight nose and straight hair that was tied loosely somehow at the back of her neck. The women her age that I know all have short hair done in curls. They don't go around crying in taxis.

Now she was opening the glove compartment, which in a

Cadillac should be called an overcoat compartment. For the third time I saw moonlight moving in a big diamond ring, at least I thought it had to be a diamond, and now I could see what I thought I'd seen, that there was no gold band next to it. But now there were two heavy-looking whiskey glasses and a bottle of Remy something, and she poured as if she were the barman at the Ritz, not a wasted motion, no hesitation, no clink.

For a while after my separation I had downed a few, but not one Remy anything. Lately I had stayed pretty well away from alcohol, but what would you do? I even took a French cigarette, though I had quit smoking again a month before. So we sat in a Caddy with the top down, smoking Gitanes and sipping extremely old brandy. Now that we had trees around us, I couldn't smell them anymore.

If you are sitting in the only automobile at a lookout around midnight, you are eventually going to pay attention to the woman sitting on the leather seat beside you, it doesn't matter what kind of woman. With a little warm brandy in my stomach, I gradually turned and looked at her. She was still facing toward the gleam on the sea, even while she jabbed her cigarette into the big ashtray. Maybe I should be ashamed of myself for looking her up and down, as they say, but I don't see why I should be. Her long grey hair was pulled back loosely, as I said, and except for a little strand that fell by her ear and moved in the wind, it looked as if it had been brushed with a silver-backed brush just a few minutes ago. The eye I could see was clear now. There were creases rather than wrinkles under her eye and near her mouth. She had not ruined her human beauty with a face lift, at least not recently. She held her chin high, as if she always did, and there was a little turkey in her neck, but not much, the amount you'd like to see in your mother or a politician. Her dress, because now I knew it was not a suit, was dark, and darker under the midnight moon, but I could see that she was not scrawny or boardlike, pardon me for using such words. She had medium-size breasts still. Now her legs were crossed, and I could see her right leg from the knee down. I have hardly ever seen a nicer leg. I was not turned on, as people say, but I was surely impressed. I've been married once, and I've been with a few people of the female persuasion before and after. Well, during, too. But I have never sat

in a car or anywhere else with such a beautiful woman. Lady, some people might say. If that sounds peculiar, I can't help it. I like to think of myself as an experienced character, but this woman who was now pouring a second Remy for us made me feel like a boy in a bedtime story or something. I don't mean anything by bedtime, let's say a fairy tale. Or let's just drop that altogether.

This time there were no cigarettes, and I was glad about that. When your first cigarette after a month is one of those thick French ones with no filter, you get a little woozy. The brandy eased my throat and made me look at the moon. It was everywhere, in the clear sky, on the otherwise invisible water and on the smooth hood of the quiet car. It was in my head. If that sounds romantic, why don't you try it sometime?

She put her glass with some brandy in it down on the open door of the big glove compartment, and turned at last to look at me. She took my glass and put it beside hers. For the first time I could see her teeth, the ones in front. They were not movie teeth, but they were very good. The tooth part of her face was a little further forward than it is with the average person, something I've always liked, especially in women. And now she smiled for about a second. I felt as if she was not smiling at me, and not because she was happy. That second's smile reminded me of the thing I'd seen in the taxi.

For the first time that I had noticed, she looked right into my eyes, and she did this for a while. In the moonlight she had a white face and deep black eyes, and then they were coming closer to me. She put her gentle bony fingers on the sides of my head, leaned way over on me, and kissed me on the mouth. Her mouth was open, and so was mine, in surprise. Electricity went through my body in a big car. She did something with her tongue for only one second, but she held the kiss. I could feel her breast against me, and as God is my witness, I considered touching it with my hand.

Then she was back where she had started, sitting upright, looking at the blessed ocean, her drink lifted to her lips. My heart was pounding, of all things, and I just couldn't reach for my glass. For a length of time I couldn't tell you, I looked straight in front of me, too. I tried to concentrate on visualizing the gears there on the cliff, where D was, where R was. I wanted to say something, but I

couldn't, until she put her glass down empty, and made the smallest sigh you can imagine. Maybe it was the kind of sigh you make when you finish a very old brandy.

"Can I ask you a question?" I said.

"May I," she corrected me, her voice closer than I would have expected.

"May I ask you a question?"

"One."

"Why were you crying in the taxi?"

I had to wait for her answer. Maybe she did, too.

"Because of you," she said at last.

"What?"

"That's two questions," she said.

She handed me my drink, and I finished it. I passed the glass back, but she did not take it from my hand. I put it on the glove compartment door, and then she put it away and closed the door. She picked the keys up and gave them to me. I turned on the ignition and concentrated on R. While I drove with the top down, slowly back along the road between the trees, she took a little telephone from her purse and called Yellow Taxi. She asked for a cab at Belmont Drive and Blanca. *I will* get home tonight, I thought, or maybe I said it.

Renee Rodin / TWO STORIES

GLASS

In anticipation of the upcoming holiday, everyone's in an exceptionally good mood. The boss is relieved because this is the make or break season and the business has done well. The staff is up-beat because tomorrow is a paid holiday. Customers are making a concerted effort to maintain an air of joviality, whether it is heartfelt or not.

At fifteen minutes to closing time this unusually harmonious atmosphere is abruptly broken by an insistent hammering on the door. I peer out to see an elderly person in a wheelchair frantically gesturing me for help. As I begin to walk over, my boss, from across the room, shouts, "don't answer it, don't let him in." But even if it weren't Christmas Eve, it'd be impossible for me to not respond.

I've seen this man at the city-run residence for senior vets next door. He's usually outside with others in chairs or sitting on benches, crutches propped beside them. They're smoking and staring at the parade passing them by with expressions ranging from boredom to bewilderment. If they weren't shell-shocked before they got here, they're shocked now at how in hell they're spending the rest of their lives on this defiled patch of concrete in the city's core.

Except for slow variations I've seen the same group of vets for years and some have taken to smiling when I walk by. But not this wizened old man, with his cadaverously thin face, who would give me such strange stares I'd have to avert my eyes.

Now I'm having trouble manoeuvring his chair to let him in. I can tell from his boozy breath he's driving drunk and end up with him halfway through, blocking the entrance. He demands, "I want *Mein Kampf* in German."

Stunned, I think maybe it's for "research." Again he is icily

inspecting me, again I lower my eyes. Scornfully he asks why I seem so upset and I lie, tell him it's how he's got his chair, I can't close the door.

He mutters something to me in a language I remember my grandparents speaking when they didn't want the kids to know what they were talking about. But my honest "I don't understand Yiddish" is met with a mock of disbelieving laughter.

I can't even begin to find my voice. All I want is to crawl out of here into the cloister of my home, holed up with books and videos to block out the world. I have a hard enough time this time of year dealing with the endless mindless wishes for me to have a "Merry Christmas."

Meanwhile, my boss, who'd been bristling with irritation, decided to view the vexsome vet as a potential customer and has been delving into the bowels of her extensive operation. She reappears behind the barricade that is her desk, her pudgy cheeks flushed from the exertion of having dug through precariously piled books, as she triumphantly flags me over to fetch an old edition of *Mein Kampf*, in German.

I place the book into hands as gnarly as the branches of a ravished tree but his fingers become delicate feathers as they lovingly trace the embossed letters on the cover. Nearby I fiddle agitated, waiting till eventually he checks out the price, deliberates and declares, "It's too expensive." With reluctance he returns the book to me, awkwardly weaves his way out, backwards. This time without my help.

"See, I told you," my boss crows, smug with vindication and I'm not sure whether this means, "see, I knew he'd be trouble," or "see I knew he wouldn't buy anything." This is a bookstore after all.

Before I have a chance to gather myself, because now I've begun to unravel, a real colossus, in his early twenties strides over. He's carrying a huge pack on his massive back and I wouldn't be the least surprised to hear "Val-de-ree Val-de-rah" come flying out of his mouth. But he is in no singing mood. His eyes are bulging with accusation as he shouts, "How can you carry such odious book? In my country, in Germany, it is illegal."

All I hear is rank Aryan anger, perverse national pride and I hate

him. How dare he put me in a position where I have to defend the reading of *Mein Kampf*? How dare he boast to me about the moral superiority of his country's "law"?

Until I regain control and realize this young man is no freer of history than I am. He is probably only an innocent taking on the task of re-working the world. "Know thy enemy" I quote and elucidate the temptations of forbidden fruit. But my statements do not placate him, my theorizing is gibberish.

Though I know full well to offer any balm is inane, still I can't resist patting him on the arm and murmuring soothingly "don't be upset." He's been struggling to be polite but at my touch his revulsion spills over and he recoils. His face is creased with confusion, shrivelled with fury as he stalks out. The words that should have been directed at the vet are clanging with loud impotence inside my throat, my chest is seething with shame.

On Boxing Day, I'm once more in the store filling the spaces created by books sold out of the window display. It is early, the area is quiet. The only activity is the vet who is in a frenzy wheeling up the street. Straddled across the arms of his chair is an ornately carved walking stick. Not only is this guy a Nazi, I think, but a faker to boot.

He moves at breakneck speed, I'm hoping in a rush to get to his residence. But no such luck, as soon as he's exactly opposite me on the sidewalk, he jerks to an abrupt halt, almost topples out of his chair. We are separated by only a curtain of clear glass yet he pretends to be oblivious to my presence.

As I watch him pick up the stick, a collective memory surfaces and the shards of *Kristallnacht* lacerate my brain. I am transfixed, a silent, shuddering witness.

He brandishes it high above his head, twirls it once, twice before bringing it down hard and fast. Down, down it comes until at the last possible nanosecond before contact, he slows its descent to tap it ever so gently on the huge plateglass.

Now he looks at me. His chin juts out at an ugly angle, a jeer slashes his face. At last something deeper than memory wells up. Angry and defiant I finally look directly back at him. He lowers his eyes. It is my small victory against the darkness.

PREDATION

Constance was sitting on a bus in Seattle bound for Vancouver saying goodbye to a young man. She waved, blew a kiss, mouthed an endearment and tried to drink in every last drop of his face. Slightly embarrassed by this prolonged farewell, he was attempting to act nonchalant, though it was obvious he cared too. Just as the bus pulled away the woman noticed she was being watched by a boy, sitting quite close to her, at the very back. "Mothers," she quipped and they exchanged smiles. He was perhaps in his mid teens, a few years younger than her son.

She began to contemplate the weekend trip in which she'd gone down to help Jeremy pack for his upcoming move to Montreal. When she'd arrived he told her he was being harassed by his ex-lover Trish, who he'd lived with in San Francisco and who he'd accidentally bumped into in Seattle.

Trish had come to see her mother who'd recently reconnected with the man with whom she'd had a baby which she'd given up for adoption. The child, now thirty years old, had found her parents, who hadn't seen each other either in all that time, and they'd had a reunion. The parents had fallen in love again, married and settled in Seattle.

Now here was Jeremy, living, without knowing it, just a couple of blocks away from Trish's new blended family and Trish wanted him to spend an evening with them at a club. He told her he was too busy but Trish kept phoning and when she wasn't herself calling, she enlisted her mother, her mother's new husband, even her newly found half-sister to call. Trish's persistence was odd since she'd precipitated their breakup, she had just become engaged and knew Jeremy was happily with somebody else too.

The barrage of phone calls created a lot of tension. Because Jeremy was expecting important calls he put the answering machine on and insisted that he and his mother spend time away from the house. The situation unnerved Constance since Jeremy had only a few days left in which to prepare for his move, but by late Sunday Trish had returned to San Francisco and Jeremy's packing had proceeded hastily but uninterrupted.

Tuesday, Constance was on the bus thinking about the machinations of the weekend and also how she would miss her son. She started to read a collection of fiction by Grace Paley with language so astonishing and accurate, she had to stop after each piece to fully absorb it. She did this by gazing out the window at the pale green spring farmland fringed by dark receding forests.

During one of these pastoral interludes she became anxious about returning home since that meant dealing with a multitude of moths which had invaded her kitchen about a week before she'd left for Seattle. They'd entered with the oats she'd bought at a bulk grains store and had rapidly embedded themselves in other food, all of which she had to throw into the compost. But still they lived on. Trapping each individually and ushering it out of the house proved to be pointless, since, for every one she removed, a dozen more took its place. Even the cedar balls with the strong scent that were supposed to repel the moths seemed instead to act as a fertility drug.

Constance was wondering what to do with them next when the young man who'd watched her saying goodbye to her son was suddenly by her side. He was lanky, handsome, in a brooding way, wearing fashionably cool baggy cutoffs which were creeping down his hips and hovering at his knees. He asked if he could sit with her and the moment she agreed he began to weep noisily.

She eventually managed to calm him down enough for him to tell her he was only 17, that was how he said it "only 17" and very scared. He was coming back from Seattle where he'd met the girl he'd been corresponding with for months on the Internet and she had been driving him back to catch the ferry to Victoria, where he lived, when her car broke down and so he had to take a bus to Vancouver instead.

He was afraid they'd come in too late to catch a bus to Victoria and that he'd have to spend the night alone in Vancouver where he had no friends or family. He said "the worst is that my mother will be very upset because she knows I can't take care of myself."

Just when Constance thought he was going to hit her up for money, he pulled out a thick wad of cash which she cautioned him to put away. She suggested he phone his mother and when he told her he didn't know how to call long distance, she promised that she would help him when they arrived in Vancouver.

He had an air of discomfort about him but said, "This look I have, so sweet and sensitive, is just to get across the border, I'm a musician and when I perform I pattern myself after Sid Vicious."

He told her Johnny Rotten named him that because he'd had a hamster without teeth who couldn't chew his way out of a paperbag and that Sid was like that too, very unaggressive except on stage. "My new girlfriend is Nancy, the groupie, and I'm Sid Vicious but I don't do drugs," he said. Again he broke into long sobs until Constance held him and he gradually fell asleep with his head on her breast.

The bus had been quiet enough for their conversation and his crying to be quite audible and every few minutes someone would turn to gawk at them. The driver didn't hide his relief that he wasn't having to cope with the boy.

When the bus pulled into the once elegant, now garishly lit station at Main and Terminal in Vancouver, Constance and the boy dashed around looking for a bus going to Victoria but all the wickets were closed and the buses sat empty as husks.

At the payphone the boy asked Constance to talk to his mother because he was too distraught but just as the operator placed the collect call, a man in his early thirties showed up. He was dressed in a casual yet conservative way wearing a sports shirt, cotton pants and a baseball cap. It was unlikely that he was the boy's father since he was too young, of a different race and his tone was very formal when he asked, "Are you ready?" The boy nodded, picked up his guitar case, which was the only luggage he had and started to walk away with him. Constance hung up the phone and chased after them.

"Do you know this man?" she asked the boy, alarmed that he might be going off with a total stranger. He nodded and they

continued walking, with her alongside, hoping for some explanation but there was utter silence and no eye contact. When they reached the man's late model compact car, the boy and the man got in, still without acknowledging her presence and drove off. Constance stood there burning with betrayal that the boy had sucked her into the vortex of his crisis and then had abandoned her.

Overwhelmed she told the story to her cab driver, who launched into a theory that, "it's the Internet that makes people crazy, people meet too soon and too intimately in unnatural circumstances." They had a bit of a discussion over this but when he asked her if she thought the *X-File* stories were true Constance stopped talking to him and he spent the rest of the trip chortling to himself.

She was too tired to be very concerned. Aside from all the emotional events, she'd spent the weekend on a thin foamy on a hardwood floor and was longing for the comfort of her own bed. She was also ravenously hungry.

Once she got home, Constance dropped her bags and headed for the kitchen where the only quick to prepare and impossible to infest food, the canned soup, was. She envisioned a scene from *The Silence of the Lambs* as she braced herself to be swarmed by hundreds of moths. When she finally opened the cupboard door, there was not an insect in sight.

Liz Waldner / TWELVE POEMS

YEW-BERRY

A mouth of round red flesh around it
The private green seed a tongue inside it

The house holds the finger of its yew
Before its eye.

There's a shade for night
And a taken-away for the light of the day.

This is the lived in prayer.

Each morning, dutiful, the taken-away.
Every evening, blind.

The house mashes me to its mouth.
Between its fingers seed comes out.

SUNDAY, NO PEIGNOIR

Much that is hidden shall be revealed — Matthew 10.26

A word, to put a word on the tongue of the morning
that will become my body and blood
in its blue mouth, in its green veins
to run a clear sap between earth and sky . . .

Wanting that much
with address of flesh, of bone, to be remodeled
that much to address any world without sin
to wear it well, the mantle of self,

much, that — well . . .

ANOTHER PRAYER AND WHERE IT CAME FROM

The trees cathedral.
Locust chant.
Rain articulates its prayer.

I am here
in a damp chair.
There, what do you do?

Lie on your back, your eyes closed.
Feel the moving air.
Yes, I am composing you.

I move my chair so I can see
the big white dead tree
I need in this green
vault of heaven
to bring it to bear
on my composition.

Yes, this is prayer.
Hear, O Israel, and not:
All grass is green
and flesh is grass
and bones and words
are white and turn
to green. Yes,
and turn to air.

PRO(VERB) (RE)CREATION IN THE TIME OF AIDS

A dog is barking behind me and I
think of its open mouth.
A wind lifts the leaves and they
shift like their shadows.
A spider disturbed swings on its silk.

My new hat is full of dust.
It is dangerous
but I believe above me
I hear the tree making its leaves.
My heart burrs briefly.

The wasp measures the door and leaves.
Soon you'll come and open it.
When you do, some dogs will shut their mouths
thinking sometimes it is better
not to have had their day.

EXHIBITS A

Doubt is spun, a strand, it drifts, faint and catches
A line is drawn across the field of vision
Crosswalk, double cross, valor, honor
Cross hairs in the gunsight, cheap talk
A fat cross man, a hot cross bun, a double lock

The sky a diagram, the eye a pentagon, milk fortified
On the exit ramp from the interstate, a shoe in the margin
The empty room, its door latch, catch in the throat
Gethsemene, the fool on the hill, the catch at Galilee
A shifting of the loaves, a floury light among the leaves

The way through the trees of his life blocked by a lion
The pendulum in his pants marks ample reasons
Dante's progress clocked by seasons
After the Fall the spider bobs the littlest bit
Silk stretches from star to pit

DARK TIMES

The flickering shadows of leaves.
The prayer of a fly with red eyes.

The star chart made of a leaf by a worm.
With a mandate from heaven in its heart.

The archaic song *Continuo*.
Percolates through the throats of birds.

The plant spines curved in arcs like sun's.
The sun swung leaves by stems.

The glimmer of water in candle basin.
Registering presence with sky and eye.

Deduce.

Let the syrx song.
The star shadow.

PERSIAN STANZAS

How to advise those who, for a long time, believe stones are faithful? Love, grace saved from the censure of Great Day, do not deny me the names. I am a narrow vessel, a star asleep on its daybed. I have been such a long time in the night, your arc of tenderness a ploy, keeping me against the day when the inflection of the body should be entirely the late shrug of your shoulder, an accent too grave to alter the meaning of my sleep.

The good death is a package wrapped in somebody else's name. Give me your word you will send back all the stones to their places, all the stories, estuaries of water lilies, hyacinth all along the stairs' descent to terrible childhood. A dead yellow dog and a bicycle pedal — wrap them back up. I have them already.

Tonight the night itself is a cross across which crosses are drawn. Yesterday I saw long the shadow of a young tree kept in the trunk of an older. What have I done? If only *every shadow entailed a sun* . . . Foregone; let the avenger pass over.

Rest in what menaces, heart. Call out the names. Let the traces of tears be the trees of salt that root the night sky. Call each root Star. Call each star Forgiveness. Call Forgiveness the diurnal fruit of Great Day.

FEAR AND SUCKLING AND THE MIRRORING UNTO DEATH

. . . which alters when it alteration finds

Two calcium clouds have appeared in the sky
of my fourth finger's nail.
The fourth finger of my left hand means to me
the sound of the letter 'L'.

As I write this 'L', a big wind blows
and leaves leave the trees sideways.
Trying to stay, I adjust my glasses.
I pour linden (the lost love's name for me)
honey and a Chinese herb into my tea and see
in its dark mirror the red-orange teeth
of the tiger-lily dying in its day.
The mirror moves when my hand moves
and so do the teeth and the day.

I move when you move.
Take my hand and see.
Put my clouds in your mouth.
Still me.

Tell me this way
Love is not a talent.
Suck. Correct my vision.
Still me.

OF UNKNOWING, THE CLOUD

In the morning would the white
cat nose the tall grass
along the driveway.

Careful not to touch, knowing
at a distance. Smell the synapse
as is the green thing springing
forth from the earth
also good to smell.

In the morning would the white
cat carefully
go its nose naming along
in the morning. It would, yes,
it did go. And in the morning watching
she thought this: it is important to remember
there is really no certain way
to be. What she wanted
to think is: I'm allowed.

ENCODE, *ENFILADE*

And you who sleep in the vast rooms of dreams,
will you allow us one evening to read
those letters affixed to the walls
of one room? A crucifix

with its beautiful feet
might be an I, its text the object
of suffering's sliver: to work itself
out. Like the candle at your bedside now.

MÄRCHEN, TRUCKIN'

We are sitting in our truck in Tivoli next to the laundromat where a load of whites hasn't made it to rinse yet and it occurs to us that this is the moment hoped for, referred to, suggested by, so many moments before when, reaching into the ashtray for turnpike change, my fingers were pricked like poor Rapunzel's lover by the thorns of a thousand upturned tacks. Well, a dozen. Diabolical, if someone thought it up, a spurned lover maybe, but I did it myself (goodbye, "we," contamination from *The New Yorker* pulled out of a recycling bin while waiting for other laundry to dry back in Boston); last things out of the apartment in Corrales, they've been riding around in the ashtray almost two years now. Once, hot and thirsty through Utah and Nevada all summer, I stuffed a rented car's ashtray so full of pits from the box of dates on which I'd spent the last of my food stamps, I couldn't get them out or close it when I returned it. They gave me my \$300-no-credit-card-deposit back: they were either kind or had no eye for detail at the airport in Albuquerque. I guess I get to decide.

So it is the moment to pick out the tacks, practicing thereby the manual dexterity an aptitude test picked up twenty years ago in Atlanta but instead, as you can see, I've picked up my pen because all morning I've been hearing a voice saying something about *I, your own personal vision of loveliness . . .* and it was going to do something and say so but I forget what, so here I am in my truck on a Saturday morning in July, a sparrow yelling in

the passenger side window, me writing on a 1950s notebook from a drugstore in 1970s Mississippi that features helpful, if obscure, tables on its pale yellow back cover (4 gills make 1 pint, 10 dollars make 1 eagle, 20 grains make 1 scruple), slipped under the steering wheel and balanced on my thigh, again with no or any where to go. I guess I get to decide.

I suppose it should have been Snow White with her finger pricked by a spindle and not Rapunzel with her lover lying with his eyes poked out in the briars below. But Snow White sickens, she's so sweet or Disneyfied, and the tower is one big prick, besides; these brambly blue words all look prickly, too, because last night, my true love was not true, and I'm afraid no other will blind my eyes.

THE LAUNDRESS MAUNDERS II

Laundromat, laundrymat, here we are again. Agayne. Imagine spelling your name Jayne. Imagine a small disaster with a red wagon is now taking place on a sidewalk near you. The boy, he says she made him break his back. Stand up and arch your back like this, is what she says to him for him to see if it is broken. He does. A cat sits on the sidewalk, watching. One ear swivels. The injured party does not cry. He bleeds from one knee. A mother is fetched, observes the bleeds. This party of three departs for the laundry, accompanied by a giant noise: wagon wheels on concrete.

A man on a motorcycle carries a green bucket. A man in a golfing hat walks with three women. Two are fat. His shirt is green. As long as I am busy telling, I can hope to be allowed to be. He told me his dream of minefields to prove being around me is like being in one. My heart and my stomach sank. One of three beer bottles on a slanty window sill falls by itself. A t-shirt tag sticks up like a tongue on the neck of a man who appears on roller blades to inspect. He puts it back up on the slanty sill. A black dog and a woman come out his door quick.

The black dog is happiest to be. Expensive white cars go by, three. Two white butterflies dance the dance of DNA. After he said I was neurotic and gave his convincing evidence, I put a deck chair in the driveway and looked at late evening clouds above the trees. A whole parakeet with its eyes closed was one feather of the wing of another. I see what this means. A cloudy tabby stretched out in mid-pounce arched above me. Better I live in the middle of nowhere and hang my laundry to dry on trees.

Margaret Hollingsworth / BEYOND CLOSURE

A girl is sitting on the edge of a bath. She has something in her hand. It might be a knife or it might be a nail file or it might be a comb. She is fully dressed. She wears a white coat-thing that's probably a dress. She has slender legs and no shoes on her long, bony feet. Her hair's straight, shoulder length, the colour of Shreddies. I can't see her face, she's at an angle to the camera and her hair covers her profile, but I know she's beautiful, probably one of those models, very thin with tiny schoolgirl tits that peep up and catch you with your eyes down. You can't actually see her ribs but you can see a sort of shadow like an underdeveloped x-ray where the bones should be. None of what's underneath is in the picture of course.

The room where she's sitting is stark white tile, floor, ceiling, walls. The light seems to be harsh, or maybe it's the lighting. The bath isn't a normal bath — to begin with it's not long enough to sit in, you'd have to pull your knees up under your chin. Then it's tall — the sides would reach up to my armpits, she'd have to hoist herself up to perch on it. It's more a trough than a bathtub. Maybe it's used for sheep dipping or washing off potatoes or something scientific. I know it's a bath because I can make out a tap.

And that's all there is. I keep looking at the magazine, wondering if the photographer put the girl there or if she got there by herself. She doesn't look posed, she's too concentrated. I wonder what she's going to do with the object in her hand. Is she going to fall back into the bathtub and drown? If so, why did the photographer take the picture at that moment, why didn't he rescue her? Women don't

take mysterious photographs of other women, so it must have been a man behind the camera. If I look at it long enough it's more than a picture.

I look at it long enough.

So how much is manipulated, that's what I want to know?

What am I looking at, now, this moment? What lies beyond the frame — there's a shadow in one corner — if it's a door, what lies beyond it? What lives are being lived on the edge of the picture? Would I feel the way I do now, if I knew? The photographer won't let me in. He's a tease. He's selected his moment, and shut me out. I can take it or leave it, but I can't change it by turning the page, or by waiting for the next frame, the moment after "and then" in the story.

I don't care. I don't want in. I'm horny.

Is this all there is?

I want to smash his lens. I want to kill him.

They try to tell you that photography tells it like it is. That's bull. It tells it like the guy who presses the shutter wants it to be, and he never comes out from behind the camera to take the heat. It's a massive fraud. I'm mad because I'm probably the last one to realize that! Grow up Newman, haven't you read your John Berger, your Susan Sontag? Well, no, actually, I couldn't get past page five; (what the hell do they know anyway?).

I pick up the magazine and go to the kitchen to make a ham sandwich. It's white tiled, with a deep sink. There's a knife lying on the counter. Nothing else, just a knife. I rip the picture diagonally, right through her body.

I go out and buy another copy. It's minus five but I don't bother to put my socks on.

I'm in love.

•

We're in the middle of a power outage and it's still cold. TV cameras roam the streets capturing personal tragedies and triumphs.

Newman says snap snap, crackle crackle, bug off. Newman hears the ice. Ice is forming a thick rind round his liver. He won't leave the house. There is only now, and now is only cold, a long piercing note of cold, no "and thens," no "to-be-continueds," no themes, no reiterations, no narrative. Only now.

He thinks what it would be like to be his goldfish.

They've been promising electricity for so many days I've lost count, not that I count normally, I just take note of darkness and light and when the food comes. Now I take note of the cold. I don't mind cold. An ancestor of mine survived right through the winter in a pond. As long as there's mud on the bottom there's no misery. Now there's a crust of ice on the top of my bowl and it's spreading down. I hear someone say it could crack the glass. That's worrying. Where would that leave me? Flapping round on the floor, gasping for air, feeling my flesh freeze. Newman wraps a pillow round my bowl. I'm in the dark. I can just see a square of spackled ceiling and the dead light fixture through the ice.

Newman gets the bright idea to put me in the oven. I've never been in an oven before. It's a dark box. He puts me on the top shelf and he puts two candles on the bottom, lights them up and closes the door. It's great — I swim round and round listening to the ice tearing apart above my head. The temperature of the water is rising. And rising. Someone had better come quick or there'll be fish soup for supper. At the last minute when I've got myself into a sort of C shape, Newman grabs the bowl. The light outside the oven is blinding, it must be day. He keeps apologizing to me. He wraps the pillow round the bowl to keep the heat in and the light disappears.

After that he repeats the treatment every day until two voices come and tell him he can't stay in the apartment with no heat. He protests, and the two voices insist, they are cops so he has no choice, I can hear him banging around the apartment, then he bangs out, leaving me where I am as there are no provisions for fish in the temporary shelters. I'm relieved. I settle down on the gravel.

The ice climbs down and down until it cramps my head. Then it's all around me. I lie perfectly still. My gills are not plugged so I can keep breathing very slowly. I imagine myself swimming down a long tunnel with a light at the end. I'm on the ceiling looking down. I can see me swimming. My eyes are filmed over and an angel fish touches my shoulder. I hear the call of an elephant seal.

The problem with people like Newman is that they think animals have imaginations. They think tame birds feel regret when they shit on your head, and cats have a guilty conscience for all the damage they do with their claws. People like Newman remember talking fish from their electronic baby sitters, the cartoons they were made to watch on rented videos. He feeds on stories, he cannot live without "and then" . . . For a fish there is only now and THE END.

If you know nothing there can be no unknown.

Newman and his kind play with us so we'll fit into their frame. They pull us out of the water, let us die slowly on the dock or the deck, yank the hooks out of our mouths and throw us back in as if they were doing us a favour. A fish knows hurt, hurt lives in the single cell of its collective memory, it's a given. Humans must be missing that cell; for humans, pain may manifest in the moment but it's instantly forgotten when it's over, otherwise why do they inflict it on others? People like Newman think that every object, every animal, every plant views the world the way they do. They think the big blank eye on the television is sad. They believe that objects and animals and plants respond to love, as if love weren't something they invented. They believe that time can be broken down and counted and they

think it's possible to capture a moment with a camera as if one moment could be separated from the rest.

When Newman comes back from the shelter the water in my bowl has changed form and I have disappeared. Newman tries to rattle the bowl, snivels once or twice then throws it in the garbage chute, bowl, pillow, ice, the whole shebang, and there, amidst the warm gases given off by decay, the ice thaws while Newman sits and stares at the images on the TV screen. They are showing the horrific aftermath of the big ice storm. Twenty years on, people will look at the pictures and think of this as the time they came together in a real community. A time of love, of forging new links. The fights and the stinks, the broken trees and the fear will be pushed outside the frame; human collective memory works this way — it protects them, allows them to live with pain instead of halting it, it prevents them from progressing.

•

Sometimes when Newman listens to the radio he tries to decide how closely the voices match what they are saying. What is behind the information which is directed at him? Who is giving the real message?

Today, Newman is studying the picture of the girl. He has pinned it up over his bed, and he has bought five more copies of the magazine, to be on the safe side. The power is back on. Magic. The voice on the radio is coming from Buenos Aires. It tells him that a few years ago people were being disappeared in Argentina. He senses distrust behind the words, so he turns it off, but the voice continues in his head.

He wonders how you can be disappeared. To disappear. That's active, a matter of personal choice, but to be disappeared puts a wobble in the word, takes away the active, changes it into something scary, someone else's choice. Does a wobbly word carry any freight?

The goldfish was not disappeared, if one were to search in the garbage chute one would find a body, or at least a skeleton. Newman has created a symmetry for the fish, its life has meaning, narrative, a beginning, a middle, above all, an end. It can be safely forgotten. The voice of the man on the radio continues in the silence. It is devious, it invites acts of sabotage or imagination, invites the audience to test their powers of magnification and elimination by simply turning a dial, but whatever the listener does, somewhere in Buenos Aires the man behind the voice continues his premise, propelling through sentences to some kind of conclusion. And the girl? The girl will always be perched on the side of the bath. She has not left and gone to the hairdresser, she is not meeting a friend for a drink, she is not visiting a psychic who will foretell her death.

She is not walking into my arms.

No. There's no moment before or after the one when she sat on the bath. There is no story. The photographer will never come forward; unlike the broadcaster or the writer he won't take responsibility for his work, he's more interested in what's not there than what is. Negative space. What if he airbrushed her out of the picture? He holds the only copy of the negative. But there are prints. I try to stop shivering. Montreal is in the grip of the worst ice storm in recorded history but even ice storms end. The prints must be preserved. She cannot be disappeared. I'll buy up every existing copy of the magazine, I'll demand them from the publisher. I'm in love.

I switch on the radio. It's a different voice now, the voice is talking about a recipe for *poutin*. Curds and gravy and . . . It's all right. I taped the first voice. But what if the first voice was a recording, too? I've taped a recording. What's live? How far back is the real thing? Is it in Argentina?

What does it mean then, to appear? To come into view. To be suddenly there like the angel fish in the goldfish's near death experience? If no one saw the angel fish, if it was all in Newman's imagination did it exist? They say that near-death experiences can

be physiologically explained, something to do with neurons. Everything can be explained except the one remaining question. What is the end of the story? The photographer makes the woman appear. Who makes the *aparacidos* appear in Argentina, (you must have appeared if you disappear)? The mothers? Los Madres de Plaza de Mayo who grieve for their lost children? They are the ones who gave birth, who reared them on ranches, on city side-streets, on beaches in Puerto Madryn where the elephant seals rear up much larger than life and penguins perform, indistinguishable one from one even to another penguin. They are the mothers who took these sons to Teatro Colon for their first glimpse of opera. They are the mothers, who, having gone through the unbearable pain of childbirth forget it, and have more children, for pain has no memory unless it is attached to unexplained absence; pain is dispelled with closure which is why stories must have an end. Without this the hurt from the loss of a child cannot be forgotten. It rears up, like the elephant seals, so large, beyond imagination. Sometimes a photograph will trap this pain, for in a photograph there is no time.

The pictures of the *desaparacidos* sit on the mantles in the homes of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Who can confirm to a grieving woman that her child has been disappeared? If he has been disappeared there is someone behind it, someone who can be blamed. But the someone cannot be identified, the spirits have been airbrushed out and the hurt pricks and burns. The absence is a red hot poker.

I am making a once-only plea to the girl in the picture. Step forward won't you? Step forward, please.

What happens to the tens of thousands, to the millions of fish whose disappearance is never recorded? Where do they go? Why are their bodies not littering the sea, the sewers, the canals, the ponds? The sky over the city is thick with crows but how often do you see a dead bird? They are disappeared — when a crow is shot do the other crows feel the bullet?

The mother looks at the picture on the mantle. It is in a silver frame and the frame sits on a hand crocheted doily. The mother wonders if he was indeed her son — could he be a changeling, is it possible that her real son is alive and well and living the good life in Buenos Aires, or Rio, or Quito? This disappeared one is not her flesh. The picture is of a smiling young man in a soccer jersey. She tries to think what was going on outside the frame. What day was it? What did they have for lunch? Were there any phone calls? She can't think. What was the moment immediately after the picture was taken? Was he about to play a match or had the match been completed, or was it merely a costume? The jersey isn't muddy — what does that mean? Why did the camera capture this moment and not another? A smile and not a frown. Did he ever frown? Who took the picture? Her daughter, her mother, her uncle (note that she thinks of them as *her* relatives, they are already detached from the disappeared one).

Newman follows the trail. He buys a ticket from Montreal to Buenos Aires.

In La Recoleta he wanders up and down the streets of monuments; this is a city for the dead, entered through a Doric portico; unknown to him the body of Evita Peron is resting here, having been discovered, according to the story, embalmed, in the projection room of a small town cinema years after it disappeared. Some citizens of La Recoleta are content with mere headstones, others have large and architecturally elaborate palaces filled with *memento mori*, the last resting places of the rich. The door to one of these structures has been left open. Newman goes inside. It smells of rose water and tomcats. He stares at the casket and feels absence (the casket is lined with lead so the energy of the departed is sealed inside); pictures of the family are displayed on the wall and there is a pair of ballet slippers in a glass case on a shelf; vases of dried flowers contain papery memories of blues and purples and orange. He has a sudden, unspeakable urge to fart, to break open the sarcophagus and feast on the flesh. Take. Eat. For this is my body. Soup.

Outside, each headstone displays the obligatory photograph of the lease holder. Were the subjects aware that this particular moment in their past life would be exposed in perpetuity? Did they give their permission? It doesn't matter. There is no speck of recognition in the pictures' eyes. Nothing invites Newman in.

It has been a long trip to Argentina and while he is there, I remember Rome.

I visited a cemetery in Rome two years ago. No ordinary cemetery this, it consists of four chapels, the last resting place for 4000 Cappucin monks. They must have had a sense of humour, those monks. The chapels are decorated with their bones, great water lilies bloom, their petals made out of scapulars, chandeliers are delicately fashioned from vertebrae, the walls and niches are made of thighs and skulls. The skeleton of a child is glued on one ceiling and there's an inscription *what you are now we used to be what we are now you will be*. The more recent arrivals are posed in their cells, as if caught in some quotidian activity or a shard of religious ritual, their bones peeping though their robes, skulls shrouded with hoods.

The word *macabre* didn't apply, it all looked too ordinary, like some greedily over-decorated parlour. The word *overkill* came to mind and made me laugh. Who thought of this? Who planned it? How did he persuade his confreres to share his wicked commentary on the absence of spirit? These monks were not disappeared, they died natural deaths, in some cases their infirmities are etched on their bones, laid open to the prying eyes of anyone who can afford the price of admission. Gazing at the piles of fingers and ankles was not an affront, I had no sense of sadness or of being a voyeur, merely a sense of pattern, of lack of variety — in death we are like penguins. The planner is daring us to feel affronted, terrified, transfixed. There are new bones among the old, shined to a pearly sheen. They mock us. Mock the notion of the sanctity of the body after the spirit has departed. Something essential has disappeared. There is no piercing moment of intimacy such as the voyeur must feel, locked

outside, yet, by his very presence, transforming the everyday into a core experience.

Each bone spoke to me of the comfort of a single inauspicious moment, the moment of departure — taken out of time, and expanded beyond time. It was so much more eloquent in its utter finality than La Recoleta. It went beyond closure. Unlike the girl on the bath, or the sons of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the Cappucins' moment is unimportant, their departure is of no relevance. They have gone beyond closure.

Until this moment I'd completely forgotten the Cappucins, I had to go to the library to make sure that my recollections were accurate; but I still retained all the details of the Rafaels and the Veroneses in the Vatican, paintings by bold men, artists who left their signatures behind, left self portraits or imprints hidden in painted crowds always in motion, always wanting to yield up new discoveries, shouting "this is me, mine, I am here, take, eat, come back and revisit." Cameras are forbidden in the Vatican. The paintings spill over their frames, they will live on and on.

•

Grief. Newman has been working on grief. No longer able to face the ridged and blackened mounds of snow in Montreal he moves three thousand miles to Victoria where the sea never freezes. It's not possible to go any further west without drowning.

I am still in love. Where is the end?

He wonders why we are expected to feel something after someone dies? A high school student is murdered by her classmates in Victoria and immediately the grief counsellors descend, telling everyone what they are supposed to feel, then shielding them from it. Everyone grieves, from grade one up. Kids who've never heard her name, kids she's tormented, kids she's loved, kids who feel guilty for not liking her, friends of friends of friends. TV cameras station

themselves outside the gates of the school to record the grief, to question whoever agrees to be questioned on their views about teenage violence; even people who have never set eyes on her answer the call to come and record her passing with flowers and teddy bears, packs of cards, comic books, video games, and poems.

People come every day. The tributes are piled up to make a cairn. Some onlookers have their pictures taken beside the spot. The day after the murder Newman buys a camera and stands on the opposite side of the street to the school. It's warm, even though it's winter. It's warm compared to Montreal though if he had no recent comparison he'd say it was cold. He records all the comings and goings. No moment will be differentiated from the last. An endless procession of moments as similar as penguins. He records everything around the growing cairn, the schoolyard, the street, the cherry trees, the number ten bus, the yellow school bus, the mothers who comb their offspring off the sidewalk into waiting cars — the safety of metal.

Newman hears everyone talking about violence, but he doubts that anyone knows what it means. Even those who've felt it, or perpetrated it have forgotten the pain. Everyone knows it's wrong. "This is something we'll have to live with for the rest of our lives," her parents tell the TV camera. They tie her photo to the railings above the flowers. They splice all their interviews onto one tape and put it on a shelf next to the videos of her first steps, her tenth birthday party, her piano solo. They tell the press what they have done and Newman reads it in the *Times Colonist* in a break before changing his film. He'll be snapping when the flowers have dried and the teddy bears and games given away to the needy and the photo taken down. He'll stay here and continue to capture the scene until he comes to the end. Maybe he'll inadvertently snap another crime like in that movie *Blow Up*.

He has used up one hundred and two rolls of film when he discovers the timing device on the camera. He crouches down and takes a shot of himself. He continues to pose after the shutter has clicked, feeling the back of his Nikes bite into his heels. Then they move in

on him. When they ask him what he's doing he says "I'm marking time." And when they ask him who he is he invites them to develop the picture. They expect an explanation so he tells them he's protesting. They're bored with protests, they barely suppress a yawn as they ask him what the hell he's against. He says "cruelty to goldfish. Tyranny of trees by ice. *Desaparacidos* who may or may not have been dropped into the sea from government planes. *Evanescence*. All distortions of truth. The impossibility of containing negative space."

Another nut. They ask him to move on, stay away from the school, there have been complaints.

He sits down.

They take him to a cell, take a head shot, give him a number, confiscate his belongings, and file him away in the system. Someone will decide he is not worth their attention, there's no place for people like him, so they'll return his camera and let him back on the street after a night inside to cool his heels; fortunately he has an address, even though it's in Quebec. To be on the safe side they call Montreal and get them to go over his apartment. These young Quebecers, they all come to winter on the Coast, get away from the snow, live on the street, create problems for shop owners. The power is still on in Montreal, the apartment hasn't been looted; inside the searchers find ten stacks of yellowing copies of a magazine. It seems pretty innocuous, one of those colour supplements they stick inside newspapers, nothing unusual. The paper hasn't fared well in the damp and the cold, the pages are stuck together, the ink is beginning to run. There's mildew.

Meanwhile Newman develops his last roll of film. The only picture is of a small, dark man crouching on his heels. He has no socks and his blue padded jacket looks black. Behind him is a girl with long hair the colour of Shreddies. She's not wearing the white coat-thing, but she has the same legs, the same stance. Her arms are open, someone must be running towards her. She occupies the negative space. *There*

is a story after all. He settles down in the doorway of a patisserie on Government Street and sleeps soundly for the first time in weeks.

The next day I eat a hearty breakfast, buy a pack of cigarettes, read the paper, and, finally, since I can't put it off any longer, I check the photograph. The girl is still a presence, but she's aged twenty years, she's put on weight and her hair's short and curly. I know this can't be right, but I'm holding the evidence.

Melinda Mollineaux / CADBORO BAY PHOTOGRAPHS

Examining the colonial histories of Canada's West Coast black settlers, I discovered that from the time of their 1858 arrival from California, these early immigrants held Emancipation Day picnics every August 1 at Cadboro Bay in remembrance of the West Indian abolition of slavery.

The Cadboro Bay picnics represent, for me, a diasporic social space that challenges established narratives of Victoria's British colonial history. I use pinhole photography to say, like the picnics, that despite our apparent invisibility, our experience of a life in migration occurs within a sense of place.

















Wayde Compton / THREE POEMS

PILLAR

"The Negro's tale is a poignant one and it will never be told in full. Most of the first people who immigrated to Salt Spring wished to forget their past. Here they found the freedom they had never known in their own land. Their descendants, who live on Salt Spring Island today, concur in their forebear's preference. They wisely do not want to look back."

— Bea Hamilton, *Salt Spring Island* (1969)

up the I, suckers, reach
for the sky. cause this is a hold
up, and I
've finally come
for what's mine:

"The first settlers of Salt Spring Island were Negroes and came as early as 1857 (9?), seeking liberty and freedom from discrimination. Family names of these earliest settlers were

[Buckner Robinson
Curtis Isaac
Davis Wall
Whims
Levi Jones
Shore Lester
Robertson Thompson]."

— Richard Mouat Toynbee, *Snapshots of Early Salt Spring* (1969)

Howard Estes (bought himself with \$ from California gold
prospectin), and his wife
Hannah Estes, and their son
Jackson Estes, and their daughter . . .

Sylvia Estes
+ Louis Stark
Sylvia Stark

Sylvia Stark
X Louis Stark
Willis Stark

“Panthers and wolves in those days swarmed on the island and prevented any attempt at keeping cattle or sheep. One man [Willis] relates how he and his father [Louis] shot nine panthers between them within a few weeks one autumn, and the howling of wolves was a constant source of disturbance at nights.”

— Reverend E.F. Wilson, *Salt Spring Island* (1895)

now.
don't be looking fo no black folks there
now.
ain't even *one* there, at press.
all moved to Victoria. Vancouver. the States. wherever. what you expect from people
got names like “Whims”?

RED LIGHT BLUES

it's the colour
they tell you *no* in, in

voking blood perhaps or
fire to keep you, a pack,
at bay. English don't

exist in the cross
walk. here we speak
in pictographs, glyphs, i
cons. X

for tracks that cut you
off from other
sides.

the hand offends me.
the white man eternally gives the go a
head. the hand
that clasps
your sullen undoing
is read.

you could wait a thousand years,
a glacier's day,
for the dotted lines
to sign your right
of way. the right passage
of entrance in
to the right terrain.

when your destination
is the crossing,
how do you know
when you've made it? we,

the strays of the race, the wild
goose chasers, after

rainbows and caul
drons of response
and arrival,

allegedly
shelved
on the beams
of the aurora
borealis.

SPORT OF THE KING OF KINGS

how to read the program:

—horse colour
——sex
——age
——place foaled
——name of sire
——name of dam
——name of sire of dam

abbrev. & symbols:

race information:

be—broken equipment
acc—accident
p—placed by judges
I—intersected
©—boxed in
†—hopped
bl—bled
ch—choked
χ—broke stride

race distance:

m—one mile
n—9/16 mile
s—1 1/16 mile
h—1/2 mile dash
f—5/8 mile dashed
hy—1/2 mile hyphenated
q—1/4 mile quadronated
- —back to Africa
+—to the crossroads

horse exegesis:

B—bay	c—colt
Blk—black	f—filly
C—chestnut	g—gelding
Hy—high yellow	h—horse
R—roan	m—mare
W—white	r—ridgling
X—negro	s—spayed
Ω—pale	t—crossed

who got the copyright
on the King James thing?

alphabetized mind,
omega nigga.
alphabetized, mined
down to a chiastic claim.

X

marks the stain
of Cain of Cain of Cain
but who got the copyright
on the King James thang?

rhyme me up a river
or a name. me? a lame-
horse better, at the wicket
staking claims.

ripping up washed up
tickets to easy street. tripping
steps on brassy sand. picking
through the pro
gram for a hint
like an ibis
on the hunt
for in
sects, for
another day.

beak
in the banks.
beak
in the beach breaks.
skanking on
the moon's off
beats. like Bob

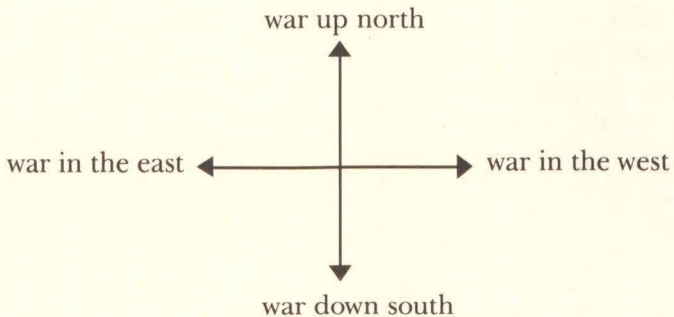
Marley with the mic
in his palm like

the sword of the righteous, swingin, ““until
the
phil

osophy which holds one race superior and another
inferior is finally and permanently discredited

and
aband
oned,
every
where
is
war

...



war
war
rumours of
war.””

(who got the copy-
right?) Marley fights

them down

down with the sword of his mouth
mouth
and his tongue of fire. fire
of eye. eye
of dread. dread
of tendril. on
high. high
on. bliss
of brass. fire
come. tongue
fire. earth
of kiln. lap
of sky. I
and
I

sometimes feel
like a motherless tongue

berthed
tied
as noosed as Judas
sold down the river of time.

still

I sharpen my spear like a cue
and break, tidal. blacks
(they say)
are good at pool:
something to do
with ancient Egyptian
or Islamic geometry?
the divinity of math, the afro
centric, concentric like
360°
like a clock
like a track
like a poem?

or maybe just something to do

with rolling and gathering
no moss
rolling and gathering
no Moses
rolling along

collecting no lichen
rolling along
like Hendrix covering Dylan
likening —

“ “how does it *feel*
to be on your own

[home

land]?” ”

someday my ship will come in
someday our shining black prince will come
numbers running
to the end, and up
ending diadems, in
a black beret, blasting off,
offing cops, bucking rounds,
bucking down contending clowns
on the march like Mao, cool like Mo
manifesting, ‘how ya like me now?’
all on the long long shot to pay off, down
to back
the exact
mount.

sages of the race
track
leaf through pages of the pro
gram
like selectors in a dancehall.
stylin like Solomon.
“I like such-and-such,” and
“so-and-so looks good in the seventh.”
one of the wisest of the wise
looking comely
scrutinizes
the racing form.
his fighting chances
these choices.

THE SUN DOWNS
December 31, 1999

7TH RACE

Warm-up Cloth—blue Purse—you

Blue BLANK EPOCHS

1 W g 6 (East) Pox Vopuli—HBC Rainbow—Blanket Statement

Blue KNIGHTVISION

2 C c 2 (West) Infrared—Pale Rider—Clint Westwood

Blue GRAVE FORECAST

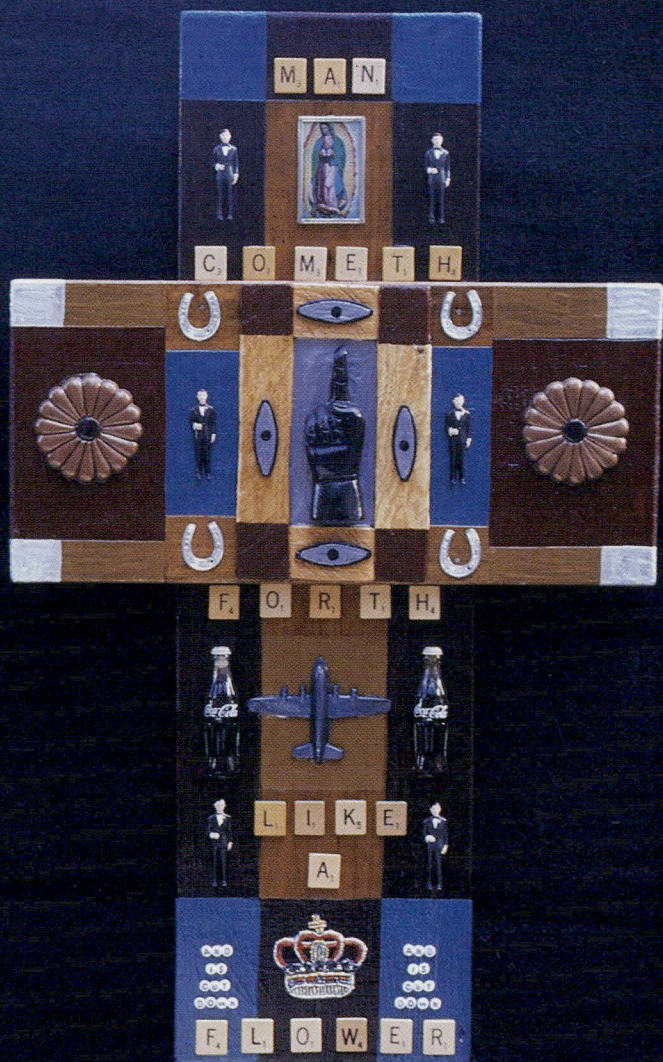
3 Blk h 4 (North) Caste O' Thousands—Flash Flood—100%
Chance Of Rein

Blue STONE HARVEST

4 (Ω 6 (South) Baron Samedi—Grim Reaper—Conqueror

(All others scratched in the final race.)

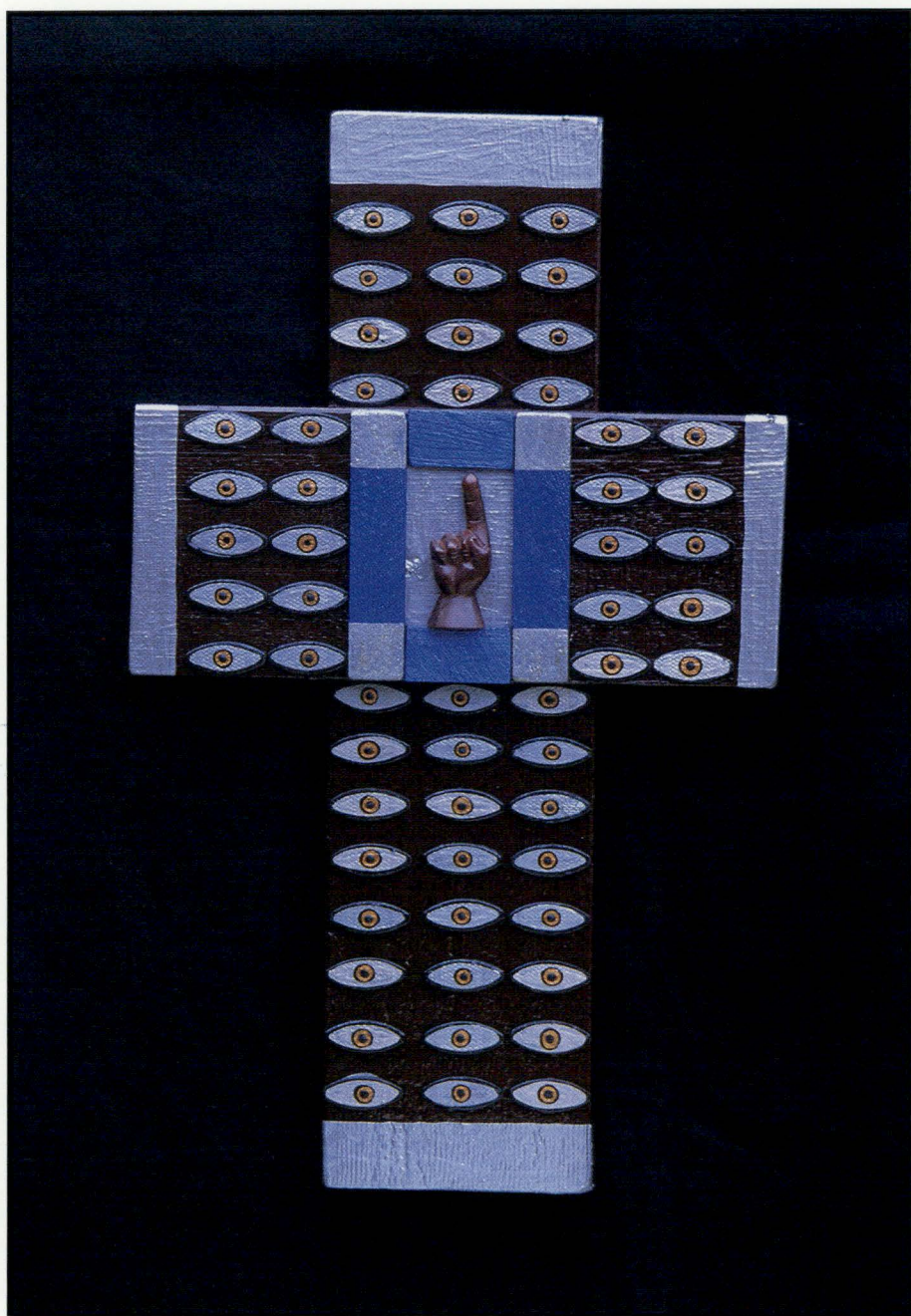
Jan Wade / WORSHIP

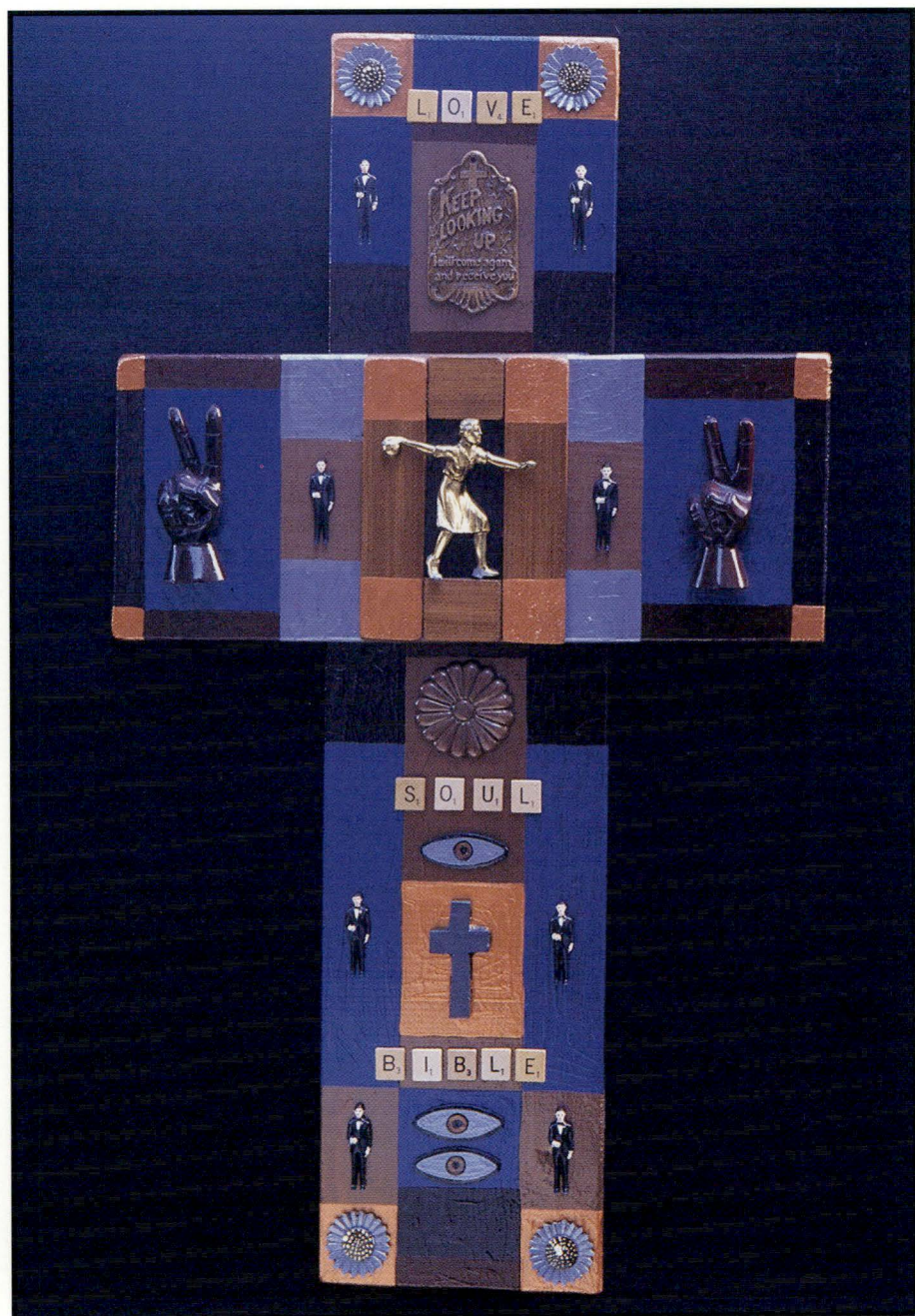




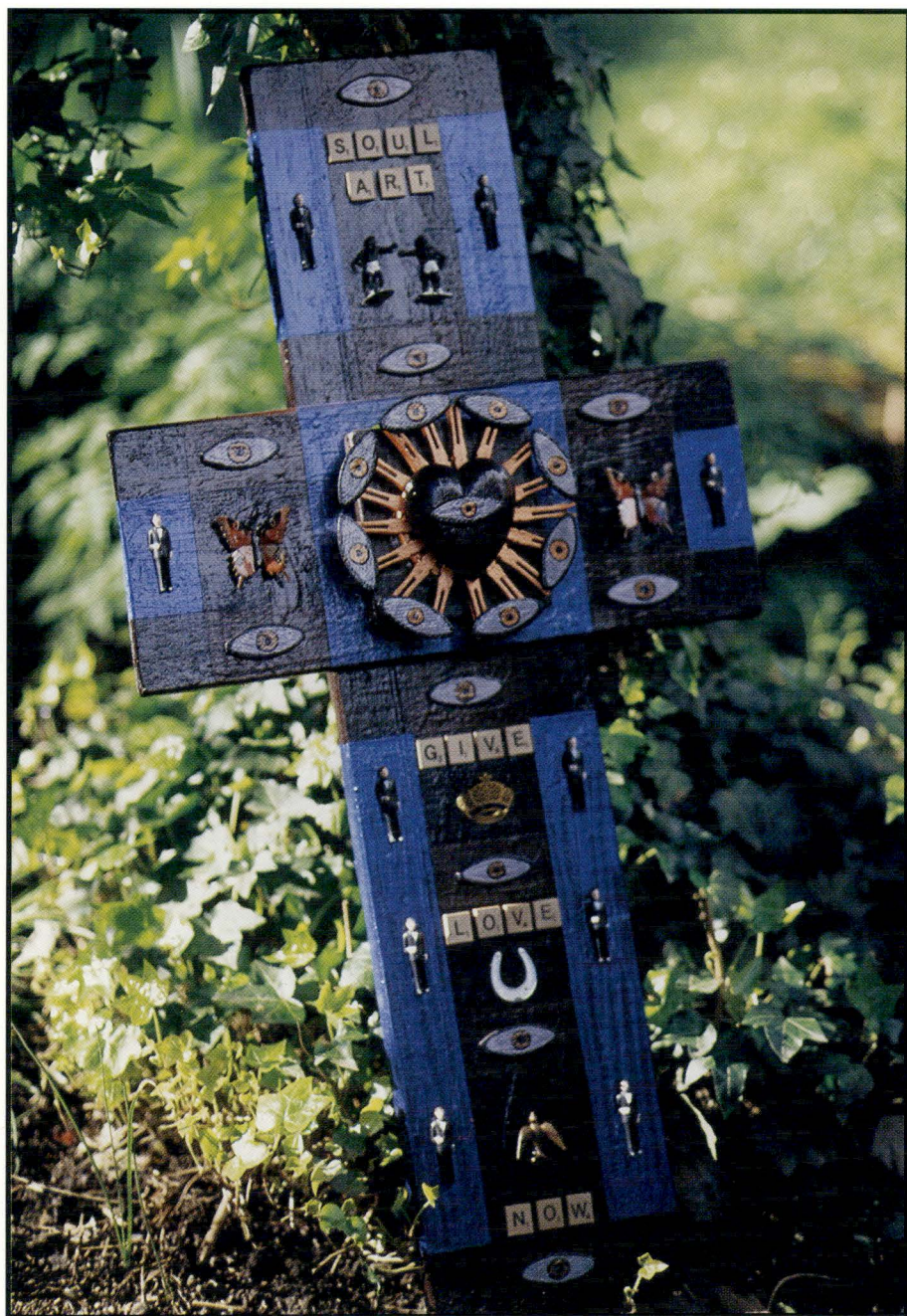


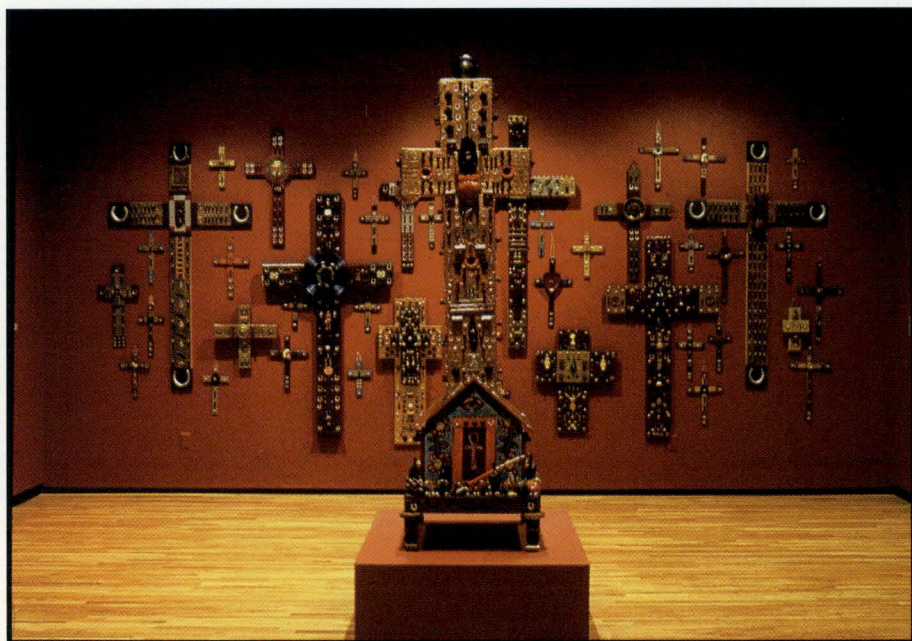
PRAYER
CHANGES THINGS
When ye pray Believe











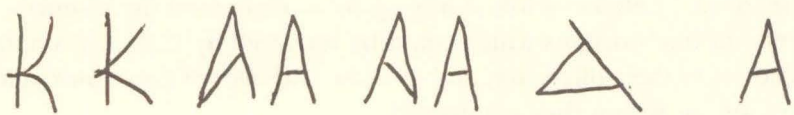
Betsy Warland / EXCERPTS FROM *BREATHING THE PAGE—THE MATERIALS OF WRITING*

ALPHABET

Alphabet: alph, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, the first of anything + beta, the second letter of the Greek alphabet, the second item in a series or system.

Once there are two there are more.

The origins of our alphabetic letters trace back to the Phoenicians and Semites of Syria and Palestine around 1,000 B.C.



Phoenicians

Greek

Roman

Medieval

Modern

Many of these precursory letters were symbols for the basics of everyday life: *A*, *alph*, 'ox'; *B*, *beth*, 'house'; *C* and *G*, *gimel*, 'camel'; *D*, *daleth*, 'door'; *I* and *J*, *yod*, 'hand'; *K*, *kaph*, 'hollow of the hand'; *M*, *mem*, 'water'; *N*, *nun*, and *X*, *smekh*, 'fish'; *O*, *cayin*, 'eye'; *P*, *pe*, 'mouth'; *Q*, *qoph*, 'monkey'; *R*, *resh*, 'head'; *S*, *shin*, 'tooth'; and *T*, *taw*, 'mark'.

Shapes of the natural world also appear in some letters: the *M* of mountain peaks; the slithering *S* of snake; the *O* of sun, moon, and our mouth's "O" of comprehension.

Written alphabetic letters connote absence. Unlike footprints, inevitably left behind in the natural world, alphabetic letters involve

choice — choice more akin to a mammal intentionally leaving its scent. Scents are left to warn, to excite and invite, to inform others of one's species, or to assist one's own memory. For us Homo sapiens, various configurations of letters forming a word function in much the same way.

Conceptually and instinctively, the alphabet's lineage is pictograms, ideograms, hieroglyphs, and petroglyphs.

Like these other systems, the act of inscribing letters of the alphabet disembodies its users. Yet these very letters springboard us into transcending the specificity and time-based constraints of our lives — enabling us to enter others' lives and time, and enabling others to enter ours.

With the advancement of civilization, the alphabet was a strategy for not getting lost: a map. Small-scale, basic survival nomadism was gradually replaced by large-scale economic, religious, and cultural “nomadism.” Letters — like storage pots — contained the essences (scents) of one's origins which could be retrieved by their users and passed on to their offspring, and to those with whom they co-existed or traded, or whom they conquered.

The existence of the alphabet confirms that with expansion came an increased recognition of our limitations. With our experience of bridging greater complexities came our realization that our human voice was no longer sufficient. The spoken voice's range required proximity.

Breath is life. Civilization awakened another sense of breath. When reciting the alphabet out loud the *vowels' free passage of breath* opens outward — then crests periodically — between the accumulating waves of *consonants' partial or complete obstruction of the air stream*. It is as if the alphabet replicates our lungs' movements. It is as if the alphabet is breathing itself. Where lungs animate voice now alphabet animates words.

Breath is believed to be a manifestation of the deities. Vowels may evidence this as vestiges of Divine speech. An infant's early word-sounds are nearly all vowel. Our final dying word is often vowel. It is with vowel we come into this life from elsewhere. It is with vowel we leave this life for elsewhere.

But, while we are fully here, *Latin, vowel, vox, voice* persistency seeks *consonant, Latin, consonare, to harmonize*. This is the Yin & Yang of our alphabet.

A WORD

Written word is our declarative mark left for others.

Just as a dog exhales its warm breath onto a blade of grass to reactivate a scent-message left by a previous dog, a reader's eyes focus on a written word to reactivate what the writer has expressed.

A word — comprised of inscribed alphabetic letters — is a locus of visual symbols which represent speech, thought, and emotion.

Sometimes words mimic the exact sound they represent: cuckoo; snap. This is known as onomatopoeia.

A word is a thought-stream we drink from. Some of the thought-streams are: personal streams, in which a word like "house" contains the specific houses each writer and reader has known; collective streams, in which the word "earth" contains the meanings of how the earth has been recalled, experienced, and understood in one's lifetime; and linguistic streams, which reveal the etymological lineage of a word and its word relatives.

Word, wer-, to speak, Latin, verbum, verb, verve, proverb, irony.

Word is morphosis. A gathering of one or more *morpheme, mer-gwh, to gleam, sparkle*. These linguistic, cellular units attract and transform one another into meaning. Over time and territories, words themselves change and adapt as any organism must to survive.

Word: verb.

A word traces the very activity of beingness and simultaneously creates it: synapses of syllables arching endlessly; axon & dendrite.

Word is reincarnation. As new words are created, old words fall into disuse and die. "Dead" words return in other decades, lifetimes, centuries, with altered or new meanings.

It is interesting to note that contemporary definitions as well as the etymological lineage of "word" denote only verbal, spoken references: there is no specific word that indicates the phenomenon of the written word. Our inscribed units of alphabetic sound, thought, and emotion essentially remain nameless. The implications of this are worth pondering.

In contrast, the definitions of "alphabet" are entirely writing-based. This suggests that the alphabet doesn't exist in our experience of oral communication, only words. Conversely, in our experience of written communication, only alphabetic letters exist. When we write we must physically construct each word, letter-by-space-letter every time. The "same word" we speak and write is, in fact, not experientially the same at all.

Word is enigma.

FORM — POETRY

With the iambs of our infant breathing, rhythmic cycles of our bodily functions, patterns of sound and motion within our domestic surroundings, repetitive song of our distinctive crying and comforting melodies of our parents' voices, poetry embraces us into our being here.

The structure or nature of the poem is before, after, inside, and outside of words. We call it rhythm, rhyme, pattern, meter, cadence, intonation. We call it the poem's musicality and form.

•

Because the very form and spatiality of a poem is based on what can never be fully said or known — more than on what can be said and known — poetry may be as close as we come through language to the sacred.

It is no happenstance that the sacred texts of most cultures (religious or mystical) are essentially lyric in form. This is the lineage of the poem.

There are many different kinds of poetics. The poems which prick our imagination, pulse within us (from generation to generation), are those composed with an awareness of poetry's lineage.

•

Like music, poetry is intrinsically an airborne art form. Although contemporary poetry has become more a visual art form, the poem must still navigate the page like the voice in space.

The body breathes the poem and the poem breathes the page.

When the orality of a poem and the poet's body share a profound intimacy, the inscribed poem and page become lovers — nose to nose — inhaling & exhaling one another's breath.

The poem's scored spaces inhale.

The poem's scored lines exhale.

•

All systems we have devised to represent meaning — written language, sheet music, math, and visual art — rely on a related progression of scored lines and spaces. In poetry, these systems of inscribed representation converge.

Language (scored lines and spaces) evidences our separateness.

Silence (scored space) evidences what we share.

•

Concurrent silences may mean different things to different people; nevertheless, their meanings do not have to be articulated. This is what we share. Silence and the uninscribed space of the page are

powerful forms of communication which are often mistaken for nothingness, blankness, meaninglessness.

Silence and space hold all language, all meaning.

Language acknowledges our separateness by telling us something specific. The inscription of language is generated from our desire to communicate, to bridge a sensed gap in memory, perception, or feeling.

Poetry is a riptide where language and silence negotiate one another's powerful currents. Ultimately, sound (language) and silence (scored space) are the same thing: emphasis and meaning.

•

The poem is a wave.

At its base is the depth of our unknowing. At its crest is our knowing. Within the movement between is the poem's gathering momentum.

•

Accurate scoring of the poem is critical. The inscribed poem must remain faithful to the intonation, pausing, emphasis, rhythm, and acoustic spatiality of its oral roots and sensibilities otherwise its meaning is compromised. Confused. Like a piece of music, the intricate scoring of a poem enables a reader to breathe and sound it as its poet has done.

The integrity of a poem is rooted within a set of specific circumstances — just as a composer writes a piece of choral music to move through the time and space of a cathedral in a particular way

for particular occasions, or a lullaby to move through domestic time and space in another way — so the poet composes each poem.

•

The poem merely gestures toward, hints at. It is a sketch. A note. A Chinese brush painting. Poetry and the sacred move us through their purity of articulated sensation not their proof of explanation.

The poem is porous.

Its scored pauses create pores for inhales of anticipation, exchanged glances, sighs of recognition, and exclamation.

Its scored stanza breaks allow time for the reader's recognition of her or his own associations, thoughts.

•

The poem is a field of molecular word activity. The poet senses what is *already there* and navigates accordingly. If we navigate accurately, faithfully, we return years later and are startled by the poem's wisdom, insight, beauty, which we were not fully cognizant of when we composed it.

Poetry is change in its very motion. Like beauty, its fluidity surprises and transforms us. As with species' survival, the poem's words organize themselves with resilient inventiveness. Intention.

•

The poem enters your heart like an idea enters your mind.

Although poetry often has narrative elements, its creative and formal instincts are not to be confused with prose narrative's creative and formal instincts.

Poetry and prose can be hybridized into prose-poems, poetic prose, and lyrical theory yet poetry and prose inherently resist merging.

Narrative takes us on a journey.

Poetry is the journey.

Phil Hall / FIVE POEMS

as of old

a ghost haunts
a house you've lost

buy the house back
feed the ghost

a pillow & a snore
outbid the going rates

a living ear
is what a ghost eats

asleep & listening
weave a nursery

to a child tucked in
tell a ghost story

*the blood on the stairs
would not fade*

*'til the bones in the cellar
were reburied*

& the story told

the day Celan saw Antschel in the Seine
& slipped into the ripples of the bookstalls

he entered *the Zion of the water bead*
(as Dylan Thomas said we must do)

into his mother's wide eye he vanished
(struck-shine fading incredulous against dirt)

her last moist blink *spills*
of mire he sank through the curdled sheen of

trying to smuggle labyrinthine green
back inside grey *Kampf* comfortable tongues

his life-guard psalms sinking
in us scrap iron parsings of despair

the same bookstalls today
along the Seine shimmering

temple gardens
shattered by his repair

fingers rowed
into their own shadows

into shadowed earth
into shadirt

April 1970

grubbing (suckling)
into our furrows

exhume
die blessing-fossil

those men who do
seem devoted
to the ice-rim-lit
muck-filled hoof-holes
bodies are

fly over helpmeats
right into couvade pretense
become epigrammarians

horrified lest tongues of Babel
go-go above bowed heads to loosen
nooses of exactitude

they idolize & minimalize
the rhyme of the brooch-pikes
in the old king's eyes
(gore is what Tradition likes)

MAN DIES CRUSHED BY HIS OWN ADDRESS

or the blindman in the park
beseeching his dog *Anus! Anus!*

I am my own ex-wife he says

smear

caul

aside

with

one

hand

blow

snot from

nostril

support

little

*I am the little pyramids
of paper caught under the staple
when legal pages are torn away*

a glider's chewed off paw

yet here comes that horizon
he had made for himself special

plate tectonics ahem

how a man loves a pact that stunts!

neck

with other

hand

uncherish

fallow

spearing pineapple rings from a can with a stick

piqued by the moment's tenacity — its appropriation of
the wrecking yard around the epiphany

I have unfolded the road map of the axhead
& found even in its wagon ruts & foot paths
the same devotion to flung balance — the same hierophany
a tree displays in its cold twigs & seed tips &

unfullblown asymmetrical ornament-hammered gasket-crumbled

(Father a serial killer of pets
Mother a falsy shielding a prone *tick*)

born joined at the head with myself — *monstre sacré*

hurt into balladeering (take it away boys) — been verified

squat in song beneath the slide-rule bridge
— darkness yellow grass a blip gristle

si! rue!
this day my fathers ye animal gods

how charred hemp binds a spearhead & feathers
to a pray-mole carved from antler

(there is no magic here)

how a red curl of sandstone
is a mother shore bird

& in the valley of her waves
a lake-smoothed oblong limestone
papoose

(there is no magic here)

so try flying dreams
an inner tube of tripe charvoyant

(there is no magic here)

so the fetish maker in desperation
tools a fetish of self & sings

*though our land be filled with enemies
make me precious*

(there is no magic here)

si! rue!
this day my fathers ye animal gods

Sharon H. Nelson

JERUSALEM THE GOLDEN:¹ TEXT,² ANNOTATIONS,³ SUBTEXTS⁴

¹ *The Zohar* [V:221a], quoting Psalm 147, tells us: "'The Lord buildeth Jerusalem' — He and no other. It is for this building that we are waiting, not a human structure which cannot endure." A later reference to the same quotation is "This work . . . has been deferred to the end of days in the last deliverance." See *The Zohar*, tr. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (Hertford: Soncino, 1934, rpt 1970), Vol.V, pp. 330 and 331. Not only in *The Zohar* or in Judaism's mystical traditions but at many levels of Jewish discourse, Jerusalem is not only or even essentially a physical place. More even than a sacred centre, Jerusalem is a symbol. In scripture, and especially in the books of the prophets, both the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem often are represented as a woman, and in the case of the city of Jerusalem, as a woman's body. See, for instance, Jeremiah 31:3-4 "I have loved you with an everlasting love; . . . /Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel." Jerusalem is not always envisioned or portrayed as virginal. See, for instance, Ezekiel 16:1 "Make known to Jerusalem her abominations" and 16:15 "But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot. You lavished your favours on every passerby"; and Jeremiah 30:14 "All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you."

² The poem was printed first as the opening poem in my first book, *A Broken Vessel* (Montreal: Delta Canada, 1972), pp. 7-9.

³ References to Biblical passages are based on annotations made when the poem was constructed during 1967-68.

⁴ Subtexts accreted during discussions with anthology editors, critics, readers, and especially out of the need to introduce/frame the poem for a listening audience.

the body is a myth
my sculpted form
passes for body or dumb flesh

In Judaic and Christian cultures, in general, a dichotomy is posited that separates "body and soul" or "flesh and spirit." The visible body is perceived as "real" while the spiritual component is posited as mythic[al]. The poem contradicts.

My mother phones to say that N called, arrives Friday and expects me at the airport. He has left no number, gives me no chance to decline or respond, expects me to be at the airport when he arrives. N, a man I don't know, met briefly in New York while travelling. [In which fairy tale am I a princess waiting for his touch?] I work full-time in a crazy and demanding job, carry a course overload at university, am involved in theatre and scholarship and with a lover. I have no time.

I don't know what N wants, why he is arriving, why at this time. He has not contacted me since we met socially in New York where politely, as one does, I gave him a phone number in Montreal when he expressed interest in visiting the city. It is my mother's phone number; I move around a lot.

"Passes" as "blacks" or Jews have used the term. In Judaic and Christian myth-making, which, in its literary versions has been male-centred and male-voiced, it is the female form that "passes for body or dumb flesh". "Dumb" as "incapable of speech" and in reference to an incapacity for intelligent speech attributed by men to women. It is easy to forget during an era of negotiation of women's [human] rights how recently theologians discussed whether woman had a soul/was human.

and you don't understand why I write like this
that it is not a matter of will
or that my mouth is small

The woman Israel addresses the Hebrew god. The woman Jerusalem addresses Israel in its male-identified persona. The female writer addresses the male intellectual/tradition of intellect as male. A woman addresses her male lover. Just as in some traditions the poet speaks for the community and the male poet speaks for and on behalf of everyman, so in "Jerusalem The Golden" the female voice represents female experience and speaks for womankind but speaks also for all humankind, most of which is not in a position of "dominance".

This stanza may be paraphrased: "Why can't this woman sound more like a man?" Why not "pass" — for white, for not-Jewish, ungendered and unsexed. In general, culturally, now as when the poem was written 30 years ago, the default value is male; one/everything is presumed male unless specified/demonstrated "other" wise. The persona is self-admittedly constitutionally incapable of adopting masculin[ist] disguise, of clothing the female body in the conventions of male rhetoric.

I have no time to think about N, but I respond to the alarm clock, drive dangerously fast to Dorval airport. N, looking splendid, unruffled despite the August heat and humidity, the discomforts of air travel, steps towards me with complete certitude as if we had long been lovers. What is he doing here?

you want to take me
to the subway
where your electric mind trains
a supple gymnast
so that the noise will hurt me

and you don't understand why I am like this
laying down my last ticket for a nowhere subway
branching like a dead-end city
or why the building with no architect is a myth

Met through a mutual friend with whose brother I'd had a brief relationship. Surely not on such a basis? [Hearsay, inadmissible in court, "the stuff of which we make our lives".]

Now here is N, full of myths and expectations. The products of his lust/ imagination [pornographic images? tenderness? poems he claims to write?] are palimpsested over my image, overlaid my presence so that "I" cannot be present. He reaches for "me", an object of his imagination, subject of his imagining he enfolds in his arms. N: Narcissus expanded to encompass all. In theory, an end of objectification, but there remains an object, though it/she is not me, certainly not I.

The electric mind of the sophist is sharp, probing, volatile, heavily charged, a supple gymnast descending to the depths and creating noise that is painful to hear. Such sophistication/electric minds create [senseless] noise and spread confusion and pain. Also, sub/way: in London, "The Underground", sub/terrain, the depths; and thus, as in a number of creation myths, chaos, which the sophist courts.

and you are bored and tired of beauty
Beauty, trees or even cities
myth-song or body
the whine of time is like electric wheels
scissors churning in the stems like heathens

Which genres/disciplines/personae/mythologies intersect?
Which "me" writes to an inquiring critic that there are several "voices" in the poem and several kinds and levels of address. The voices flow/blend into each other, and the images and what they symbolize are conflated. Israel often is represented in the Old Testament as the bride of the Hebrew god. In the Judaic tradition, the people Israel is represented as a female body yet the voice of Israel is always male. In "Jerusalem The Golden", Israel speaks out of a female body to the Hebrew god who is supposed to be her husband, lover, protector. Similarly, the city of Jerusalem, represented as a woman and as an embodiment of Israel, has something to say. And then there is an impatient young woman complaining to her lover, or complaining about her lovers, or complaining about men and their propensity for myth-making.

Now, 30 years later, I remember a previous experience, as a woman even younger, barely a woman, on whom these experiences were/are [super]imposed. L was staying with relatives at a cottage in the Laurentians, a colony of pious Jews. I was surprised he spoke to me, even in public, at the beach, exposed as I was in a swimsuit. I was 12, L 16? On the basis of his letters over several years, I thought him naive, unworldly, over-protected. He imagined me not on the basis of the letters I wrote to him but as a future wife, virginal, pious, shaven-headed, suitable.

you are dead
a stoned Goliath⁵
blighting the land with rot
and the pestilence of pharaoh⁶ to count yearly the generations
or the sons of sons of sons of sons repeating: plagues
locusts serpents babies⁷
and a waterless well⁸ that has no depth but salt⁹

⁵ Goliath, like the golem, symbolizes brute force without a spiritual component.

⁶ See Exodus 10:1-3 "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh; . . . that I may show these signs of mine. . . and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your sons' son . . . what signs I have done.'"

⁷ See Exodus 10 and also Exodus 11:5: "and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die." The list of plagues is repeated annually during the commemoration of the Passover.

⁸ See Proverbs 10:11 "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." Throughout the Old Testament, the well and its water are symbols of prosperity, fruitfulness, fertility, and god's "steadfast love". Both the well and water often are associated with a woman, as in Genesis 24 with Rebeckah, or in Genesis 16, where the pregnant Hagar, at "a spring of water", is told by the angel of the Lord: "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude." Water was central to the existence of pastoral peoples, as innumerable references in Genesis show. A well is a blessing [Gen 25:11] and comes to symbolize oaths and covenants [Gen 21:25-30 and 26:18-31]. In Genesis 29, Jacob meets Rachel at a well. Moses is so named "Because I drew him out of the water." [Ex 2:10] and in Exodus 2:15, "Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well." There he met and aided Zipporah, who later became his wife. The importance of water to the Israelites is clear from Numbers 21:16-20, where "the Lord said to Moses, 'Gather the people together and I will give them water.'" The line in Isaiah 12:3, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation", is echoed in the New Testament in John 4, and especially in 4:13-14 "Jesus said to her, 'Every one who drinks this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

you want to know what is this structure,
why that fool, David,¹⁰ mad with fear,
outgrew even his senile harp and found a stone
lodged always in the cup of Israel's crown;
why a divided kingdom¹¹ yielded
to a forked twig¹² bent in the shape of a man¹³

Perhaps the questions themselves are less important than wanting to know, which is the mark of humankind and the hallmark of science, philosophy, and mathematics, which offer solutions different from those of most theologies, which propound the necessity of denying the "want to know". The body of pronouncements of privileged, literate, dominant males is not necessarily much less alienating for most "ordinary" men than it is for many women.

⁹ In the Old Testament, salt is symbolically the opposite of water and is associated with blight, sterility, violence, alienation, and betrayal. See, for instance, Jeremiah 17:5-8 "Thus says the Lord: 'Cursed is the man . . . whose heart turns away from the Lord . . . He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.'" But "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord . . . He is like a tree planted by water"; and in Deuteronomy 29:23-28 "the whole land brimstone and salt, and a burnt-out waste, unsown and growing nothing, where no grass can sprout, . . . because they forsook the covenant of the Lord".

¹⁰ David, psalmist and king of Israel, who slew Goliath

¹¹ Israel and Judea/Israel and Judah; Israel was divided politically and by religious differences.

¹² David's slingshot

¹³ David, representing Israel and Yahweh, is himself made "in the Image" and carries a weapon in the shape of what has been shaped "in the Image". Also, in a later period, Christ "bent in the shape of a man", on the cross, represented as "a forked twig"; and later still, the "yielding" of Judaism and of Jerusalem, its signifier and symbol, to Christianity; the "yielding" of Jerusalem to a host of conquerors.

I feel your fingers slip
from the knot of my hair
to the stems of perfect flowers, trees,
or dig in the grass for beetles, vipers,
stalking an unborn crop or lashing out
at hostile unplucked twigs

The "knot of hair" is part of a series of "natural" objects with which the female is associated in many mythologies. The [male] [divine] fingers move from a caress to digging to lashing out. Israel as a woman is consistently accused by the Hebrew god through the Hebrew prophets of unfaithfulness and harlotry. The love promised and poetically expressed in the Old Testament often turns to accusation, threats, and punishments. Israel must pay for her purported harlotry, and the price is to suffer verbal abuse and to make burnt [flesh] offerings.

Hair. The knot of [my] hair. Jewish hair. African hair. Hair as a knot, conundrum, braid. Dreadlocks.

hair/always pinned up/tight///my secret/weapon///who knew/
how long/how strong/it was///who undressed me/in public
places///eyes full of images or/saw me naked/without a
shred/of clothing/completely open/welcoming///my hair/com-
pletely/dressed///
rapunzel saw her hairdresser/three times a week/kept her
stowed/in a back room of the tower/resisted every effort
to be shorn///fashions come and go/you never know/who
might need/a strong foothold [from "To Embrace Is To Con-
fess", *Room of One's Own* 17:2, June 1994]

and I am barren
as a building set for demolition
as a scarecrow hung on a dead man's cross or binding¹⁴
like an empty shirt that still remembers scenting
or a mongrel bitch with torn belly out of season

Hairdressers are constant, omnipresent in the lives of women. So much hair, symbol of female sexuality the Jews cut off, the Muslims cover. So much hair, hidden. Woman's hair/woman's sexuality/woman's shame.

The Old Testament pattern is of betrothal, love, accusation of betrayal/failure to abide by the terms of the covenant. The accusations and promised punishments are presented as signs of love and of the intention to forgive and to resume the love relationship, of which Israel, despite his or her transgressions, {Israel in the Old Testament is at once both a woman [physically] and a man [communally/ritually/spiritually]} is worthy.

¹⁴ The scarecrow, who is Christ, is made mad by the desertion of the divine presence, by having been forsaken by the Hebrew god-the-father, and thus the image of a straw man or a straw body bereft of a spiritual presence. The body without the spirit is a bag of straw, whether the body is female or male, human or divine. The urban building, the agricultural scarecrow, the cross are linked to destruction, death, and barrenness, the curse worse than death. Despite this barrenness, the persona remains sexual, like the shirt reminiscent of a lover's scent. On this image is superimposed that of an injured bitch presumed mistakenly to be in heat, introducing the imagery of mistaken readings of the female body and of female signals [as sexual]. The blood from damage and injury are seen in masculinist culture as sexual signals; what issues from the torn belly is mistaken for oestrus. It is important to distinguish "masculinist" from masculine or male, a crucial distinction in any discussion of gendered beliefs or behaviours.

you pause to hobble
fine flesh with green twigs
bent lashes, pebbles;¹⁵
the cold stone of the craftsman's hand hammers
straight nails in a salty rock,
and salt is blood or myth or tears
of a bent twig where a scarecrow madman
bites at the knot of his strings and seamless garment¹⁶

I dreamt I walked in a walled city
where there was no milk for the orphaned children¹⁷
and the dry breast of the rock¹⁸ formed only salt

I think of a *chignon*, a "French knot" that I wore for decades, that my fingers still
can form in seconds, a few pins, a swirl of hair; a tuck, *voilà*: the knot of my hair.

However important in the formulation of a poem, do these
personal details impinge on its reading? Is the physiology
of an author the destiny of her writing? Shape of
body/shape of mouth/shape of text?

¹⁵ The body of woman, of Jerusalem, or of Christ, is hobbled, bound,
lashed, stoned.

¹⁶ Christ on the cross gnaws at the strings of the garment prescribed for
Jewish males.

¹⁷ See notes below. Rachel's children, who here, by transposition, have
become motherless; all children who are orphaned due to death by violence.

¹⁸ See Deuteronomy 32, where god is "the rock of salvation"; 1 Samuel 2:2,
"neither is any rock like our god"; 2 Samuel 22:47, "and exalted be my god, the
rock of my salvation"; and Psalms, where "god is my only rock". In the Old
Testament, rock is a symbol of god's strength and sometimes of the holy counte-
nance and often is related to water, as in Exodus 17:6 "I will stand before you
there on the rock . . . and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it,
that the people may drink." And in Numbers 20:8 "So you shall bring water out of
the rock for them; so you shall give drink to the congregation and their cattle."

Rachel,¹⁹ wailing,²⁰ devoured²¹ a soldier
to replenish her womb
though the skeletal clank of his dry bones²²
clatters to fill a rented tomb²³
there is no comfort in walls or armour
and the sick smell of flesh rotting
is the plague they do not tell²⁴

all the ceremonies finally end:
the scarecrow pulls his garment tight about him
unharried by wind,²⁵
steps down

¹⁹ Rachel is called "mother of Israel."

²⁰ See Jeremiah 31:15 "A voice is heard in Ra'mah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children; because they are not." This verse appears also in Matthew 2:8.

²¹ See Ezekiel 16:20 "And you took your sons and your daughters whom you had borne to me, and there you sacrificed them to be devoured [as food for idols]." Compare Jeremiah 7:31 and 19:5.

²² See Matthew 23, and especially 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." Compare Proverbs 17:22 "A broken spirit drieth the bones."

²³ See note 22 above; also, in Christianity, the body is a temporary and temporal abode; also, Christ's sepulchre, and by extension, Jerusalem.

²⁴ The results of armed conflicts are the plagues they do not tell.

²⁵ *Ruach Adonai*, the breath of life [which inspirits/inspires], often is symbolized as a wind, and in the case of Christ on the cross, the lack of wind symbolizes the lack of paternal/divine/spiritual intervention.

the voices that one night awoke a city²⁶
are stilled in a night that admits no miracles
while no structure can be perfect, no form complete²⁷
and a promise binds²⁸ the newborn in the flesh²⁹

I am the Rose of Sharon
the lily of the valley³⁰
the Shekinah,³¹ a broken vessel . . .³²

²⁶ The voices of the watchmen within the gates of the city raising an alarm [See *Song of Songs*]; the voices of the Hebrew prophets, especially Hosea; also, the voices that announced the exodus from Egypt or the coming of the messiah.

²⁷ Until the messiah will have come, perfection and completion cannot occur.

²⁸ See Deuteronomy 11:18 "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes."

²⁹ Judaism prescribes male circumcision as a symbol of the binding of Israel by the covenant. See Genesis 17:9-10 "And God said to Abraham, . . . 'This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.'" And also, Genesis 17:13 "So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant."

³⁰ Compare *Song of Songs* 2:1 "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys." The difference in texts is intentional.

³¹ Like Jerusalem, the Shekinah, a manifestation of the divine presence in the world, is associated with or represented as female. See Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd. rev. ed. [New York: Schocken, 1961]. See also *The Zohar*.

³² See Jeremiah 19:10 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended.'" See also Jeremiah 18:4-6 and especially "like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

Yerushaliam is a Magdalena³³
a soldier's whore . . .³⁴

Adàm, in the Image . . .³⁵

you are all³⁶
my lovers

³³ In Christian iconography, Mary Magdalene is the opposite of Mary the virgin mother. Virginity and motherhood are the two roles prescribed for woman, outside of which all is harlotry. This is not only a religious but a political construct; woman as virgin/maiden was the chattel of her father and as wife/mother the chattel of her husband. Women without male protection were outside the social order. By extension, any woman of independent action, which implies independent thought, such as Mary Magdalene, flouts the social order and aligns herself with outcasts, in the case of Magdalene, with Christ. Women who step outside the normative definitions are traditionally accused of harlotry. Compare also the Old Testament images of Jerusalem as virgin bride and as faithless woman and harlot.

³⁴ who yields of necessity to force of arms

³⁵ The name "Adam" usually is said to be derived from the word "*adamah*", which is translated as "clay" or "earth". See also Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), note 79, p.73, where he quotes the "Hasidic master Simhah Bunem of Przysucha (1765-1827) on the verse 'God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' (Gen. 1:26): '[The word] "*adam*" (man) is derived from "*adam'h*" [i.e., I will imagine].'" Wolfson relates "image" to imaging and imagining and human creativity to the divine creative principle.

³⁶ All who are made in the image, all conquering armies, all the religions for which Jerusalem is or has been a holy centre or a sacred city.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

GEORGE BOWERING has published books in almost every mode and genre but has never been nominated for a BC Book Prize. His newest book is a popular history, *Egoists and Autocrats*. About the Canadian prime ministers, it is published by Viking, and will be published in paperback by Penguin.

WAYDE COMPTON is a Vancouver writer. *49th Parallel Psalm* (Advance Editions, 1999) is his first book, a documentary long poem chronicling the African Canadian presence in British Columbia from the arrival of the first black settlers in 1858 to the present.

PHIL HALL's long poem, *Hearthedral: A Folk-Hermetic*, was published by Brick Books in 1996. He lives in Toronto, where he edits Flat Singles Press. A memoir with poems, called *Trouble Sleeping*, will appear next spring as part of Brick Books' 25th Anniversary.

MARGARET HOLLINGSWORTH has written widely for radio, stage, TV, and film and has contributed essays, articles, and stories to periodicals and collections. A collection of her stories *Smiling Under Water* was published in 1989. Published collections of plays include *Endangered Species* and *Willful Acts*. She is now working on a novel. Two of her stage plays have been produced this year in Berlin and London, England. She teaches Creative Writing at the University of Victoria.

MELINDA MOLLINEAUX is a visual artist who has exhibited her work in group and solo shows across Canada and her artist pages have appeared in *Diaspora*, *FUSE*, *West Coast Line*, *Front Magazine*, and *MIX Magazine*.

SHARON NELSON is author of eight books and two chapbooks of poems and of essays, feminist analyses, and literary reviews. She co-authored a book about problem-solving and computer programming and has edited computer science texts, taught writing, and lectured about arts and feminist issues across Canada.

See <www3.sympatico.ca/sharon.nelson>.

RENEE RODIN lives in Vancouver and is the author of *Bread and Salt* (Talonbooks). She is currently working on a new collection of writing and is delighted to be in the first issue with Ryan Knighton as editor and wishes him lots of luck.

JAN WADE is an artist/woman of mixed racial heritage, born and raised within a black community in Hamilton, Ontario. Her formative years were greatly influenced by the southern black perspective of her great grandmother, and through the stories, songs and dances of the African Methodist Church. She currently lives in East Vancouver.

Several of the poems published here are from LIZ WALDNER's forthcoming book, *A Point Is That Which Has No Part* (University of Iowa Press), which has won the 1999 Iowa Prize for Poetry. Her first book, *Homing Devices*, was published by O Books in 1998.

BETSY WARLAND's most recent book of poetry, *What Holds Us Here*, was published in 1998. Her prose manuscript, *Bloodroot*, will be published by Second Story Press, Spring 1999. She is currently working on *Breathing the Page* — a series of meditations on the materials of writing.

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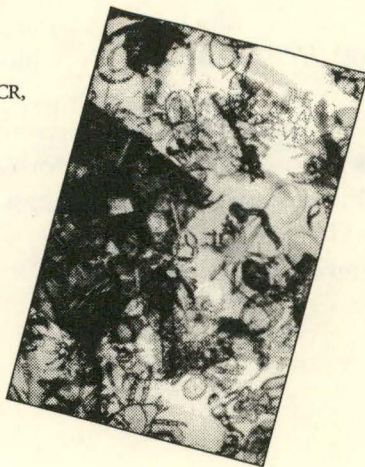
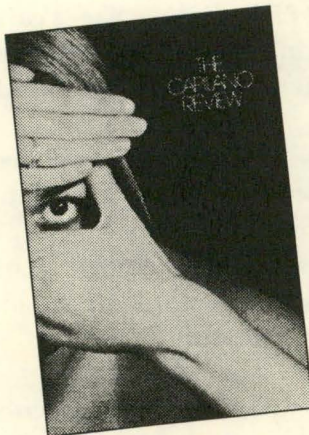
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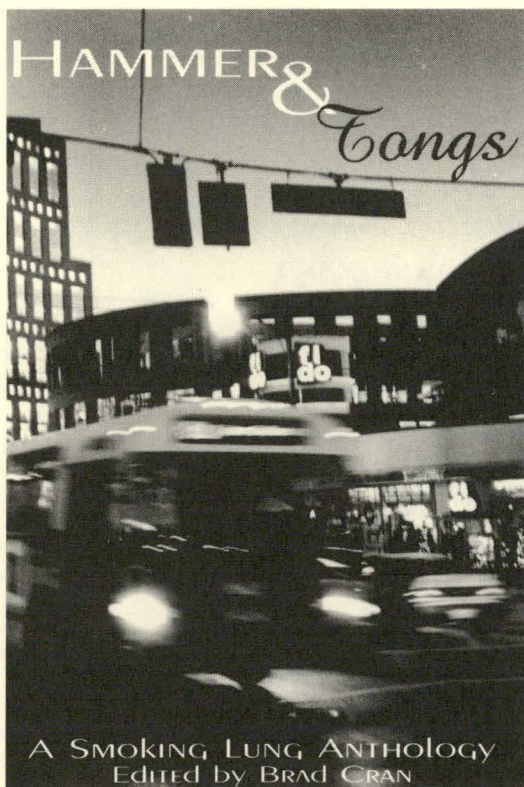
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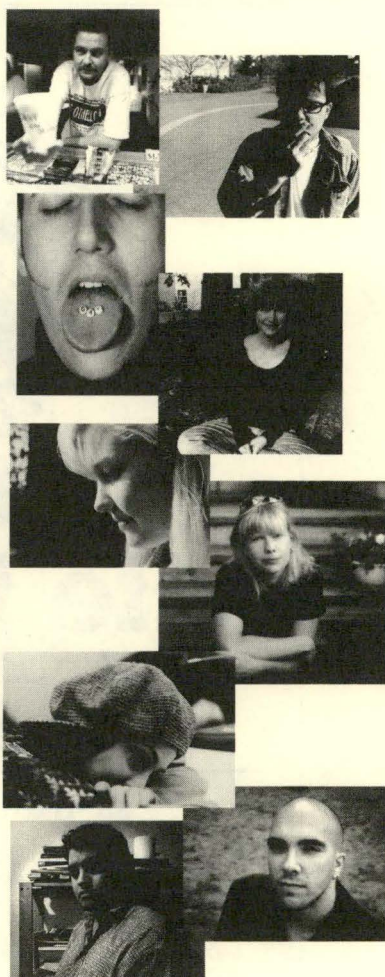
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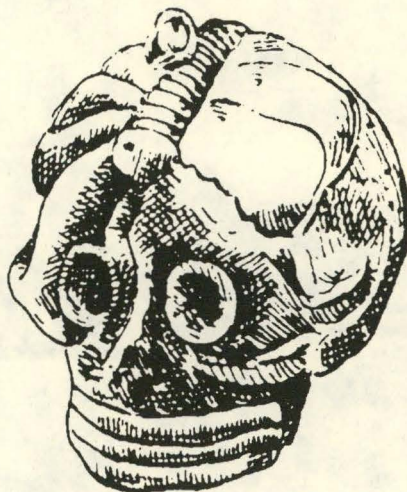


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