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## INTRODUCTION

The voice heard in these poems and stories -- that of fragmented contemporary woman -- is a universal one, but it is also the voice of a particular woman, the "I" who fears the dark and loneliness and reaches towards nature in quest of a "saviour." Her condition mirrors that of women in much of Canadian literature: women in environments that isolate, both geographically and psychologically; the unflowering female psyche, caught in the tangled undergrass of family and social pressure, suffering the deeply imbedded psychic splinters of Calvinism or another creed; the condition of women who wait.

Passivity has traditionally been assigned to the female as a central virtue. Her self-realization has come mainly through home and children, and her identification with the accomplishments of the men she loved. As Hagar said, in Margaret Laurence's Stone Angel:

I've waited like this, for things to get better or worse, many and many a time. I should be used to it .... I didn't know what I was waiting for, except I felt something else must happen -- this couldn't be all.<sup>1</sup>

She must at last confront the question: "Is there nothing more?" When the answer is a resounding negative, she is forced to withdraw into herself, into her immediate

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968, p. 87.

environment, urban or rural, and search for other means of survival.

In the section "Ice Women vs. Earth Mothers", in Survival, Margaret Atwood asks, "Are there any real women?" and outlines the Rapunzel Syndrome, one she believes fits the identity of the fictional Canadian woman. In this sequence, Rapunzel is imprisoned by a wicked witch, usually the protagonist's mother, husband or father, and her imprisoning tower is the attitude of the society in which she lives. The Canadian version of the fairy tale does not supply a rescuer. The Handsome Prince is a figure of fantasy and Rapunzel is left to languish in her tower.<sup>2</sup>

Withdrawal from her prescribed rôle has engendered in the "I" of Shattered Glass and Other Fragments, a forced association with the elements. Blood ties with the soil and with nature are formed. Through these strengthening ties, a capacity for "innerness" and the ability to survive isolation develops and the search into self is begun. A stronger and more aware self will emerge, it is suggested -- one with less fragmentation of the psyche. Solitude imposes constraints but offers, as well, the opportunity for the odyssey into the heart of light and darkness.

Psychic fragmentation in polarity with wholeness and self-individuation are suggested, in Jungian terms, by the

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<sup>2</sup>Margaret Atwood, Survival, Toronto: Anansi, 1972, p. 209.

tree imagery, frequent in the poems. Although in "Dry Rot" the possibility of new growth remains uncertain, other poems point to regeneration. Nature's cyclical pattern may, at last, imbue this woman with sufficient vitality to overcome the psychic barriers that have prevented communication and relatedness.

In this collection, the rhythm of the poems is based on the traditional formal rhythms but is free of its conventions. It attempts to move towards musical cadence and some of the poems are set out in a manner suggestive of a musical score. Yet the visual quality is of equal importance in many of the poems and their appearance on the page is an integral part of the poem. The mode of these poems approaches visual art, though in their concreteness content is not abandoned.

The typographical patterning of "Land Claim" emphasizes the separateness, in time and life styles, of two claims to the same property. "Ballerina" attempts to suggest the skeletal structure of a winter tree, stressing the presence of space and "whiteness". "Silent Seasons III" also attempts to give the feeling of loneliness and space in its visual structure.

The sequence in this collection is not chronological for all of the thoughts, events and emotions are operative within the psyche simultaneously, creating the alienating fragmentation. The isolation, the quest in fantasy for a

"saviour", the journey into self, are also experienced in each moment. It is the vitality, flowing from nature, that will unite the psychic fragments, and allow the tree, symbolic of wholeness, and the "I" of the poems, to flourish.

I will give you nothing  
their silence screeched  
each splintered surface  
that are not stanchd  
a question without  
a prayer for words

but unplucked words  
from shattered instruments  
revealing wounds  
each sound  
answer  
to heal

SILENT SEASONS

I

I will yet  
find words  
for all  
the seasons  
some new legend  
can be explored  
beneath  
the silences  
I will metamorphose  
glaciers  
into warm liquids  
where we  
can dip our hands

SILENT SEASONS

II

I know about  
Heavenly seasons  
God and I  
are on intimate terms  
we come together  
when the ice goes out  
and when the birds  
leave for the south.  
Sometimes when  
the first snow falls.  
We are pleased  
by the same events  
preludes  
to our divine  
communion.

SILENT SEASONS

III

Frozen phone  
casting off  
iron bars  
of silence  
subduing me  
with promises  
of wasteland  
subjects  
an ice pick  
to penetrate  
the frozen tundra  
wrong season  
for the midnight sun  
Perhaps you have left  
the climate of telephones  
and only a smoke signal  
can reach you

This is a season

of funerals

of dreams

drowned in shallow waters

intentions in collision

with powered destructors

aspirations

poisoned by ambiguity

and hopes let fall

into an endless grave

LOVER

You gave me seas shells  
and a song your hand to hold  
sweet wine and kissed my heart  
I rushed you into your other roles  
mad Hamlet scorning Ophelia  
at her prayers  
grappling with Laertes  
in the grave  
Mad Hamlet, longing for melted flesh.  
You said I laughed at your performance.  
You missed the point.  
You didn't know  
that I'd rejected  
death by drowning.

HANDMAIDEN

holy Mary	mother of God
pray for me	in my adversity
I sought freedom	from the shackles
you know I embraced	the new morality
chose freedom	for my soul
cast off	the fetters
of the dishpan	and submission
to the lusts	of men
Mary you were hip	in your day
we were a long time	catching up
and now standing there	gazing down upon us
I must remark	upon the fact
your hands	are gone
Vandals or faulty	granite I guess
well I wanted	to tell you
we don't really seem	to have got
the hang of it yet	you know
people fulfillment	universal equality
total emancipation	et cetera
Mary mother of God with no hands	
help us now in our affliction	

BALLERINA

White-sequined

limbs

swung high

resting

against

the practise sky

arms move

in gentle rhythmic

patterns

in the wind

their

unfleshed bones

dresden-delicate

herculean-strong

In my winter prison

celled by snow

I see you

standing

cloud-tall

you pirouette

and pivot

bend and swirl

feet hidden

in soft crystals

O winter ballerina

gay and strong

I wait

to learn

from you

your rooted

freedom

WHAT IF

What if I should love you

what then?

would you bring me

scent of clover

in a cup?

bring me

bird songs

on a golden plate?

and wild sweet red berries

on soft moss?

would you

let me put my heart

into your hand?

let me keep your love

within my care?

and sink your roots

deep downward

in my soil?

Branches eiderdowned,  
undressed for sleep. Lovers stilled:  
regenerating.

YELLOW BARN

Feathered trees

walk the frozen sky

Grey-soft fences

protest

their isolation

stoically suffering

the twanging wire

that clings

above the snow

A yellow barn

painted against the ridge

An after-thought

on black and white

Shaggy dun-colored cows

Shelter on its leeward side

Partridge tracks in snow

Still life waits for grass

and cowslips

Breezes to warm its colors

Animate it so it will become

a landscape.

LAND CLAIM

M. Delisle  
is on  
my swimming pool  
where your orchard  
your well  
I found  
you used  
when the 'dozers  
The meadow  
where you  
the trees  
the stumps  
the stones  
I have  
to till

my house  
your property  
is planted  
stood  
is dry  
the spade  
to dig it  
came  
to the west  
chopped down  
dragged out  
and picked  
lies fallow now  
not learned  
the soil

M. Delisle  
you were  
I recog  
cutting brush  
I found  
emerald green  
you built  
when you  
in seventeen

I must apologize  
the first one here  
nize you  
up on the ridge  
a bitters bottle  
just where  
your house  
came here  
eighty-seven

I'm sorry  
taken over  
the land

to have  
I didn't know  
was occupied

Flower child  
standing  
alone  
on the battle field

you kneel  
and hold  
the hand  
of someone  
who has  
just one

your smile blinds  
the gunner  
you place  
the rose  
in the barrel  
it blasts

O flower lady,  
you should have found  
an open door  
to hide behind  
till they had counted

guns blasting  
earth gutted  
volcanic tanks erupt  
and then fall silent

you walk  
towards a gun  
holding  
a white rose

he thought  
you were  
a fantasy  
he conjured up  
he did not know  
that you were real

DROP OUT

Entangled  
 in mustardseed and bindweed  
 Sui  
 Cide  
 will come  
 to me soon  
 wearing a tasselled cap  
 of velvet fur  
 emptying me of all  
 my contradictions

I'll dream  
 of midsummer's night  
 and sweet Bottom's bottom

Starveling will be  
 the ninth part of a man  
 Sewing pinked moonbeams  
 on Puck's impud gauzy wings  
 (Starveling will  
 not be  
 a starving people  
 wiped out  
 by famine and diseased  
 administrations)

A poem or a piece of bread?  
 Reign Oberon! I cannot choose

Give me a leaf  
 a feather  
 and a dream unward

COLUMBIA MAN

You whom I love

are embalmed  
with steel bars  
driving their spikes  
into your manness.

You are permitted

if you are very fast  
to make: shoes  
and boxes  
and egg  
cartons

You are permitted to recycle  
bottle caps  
for your neighbors  
to the north

You are permitted

to make  
forty-five cents a day.

Once  
a rich man  
they

I prayed  
to set

She must

you robbed  
and when  
took you  
to the Virgin  
your bail  
have forgotten

so many things to do  
Now you wait  
and I still pray  
and feel your warm  
and gentle love  
inside my mind  
Tender lover they will not  
let you go.

You can make boxes  
make shoes  
make coffins  
make bombs

My lover,

you have become a forty-five cent man.

CONVERSATION WITH DR. FREUD

Flaming

purple suns dissolve

my eyeballs

The minotaur's cord is round my neck

amniotic fluid clots my hair

blood of the Lamb flows from my private parts

My body, diffused, on slanted crosses

hangs head down

drowned in a high sea of liquid stool.

Old man, get me my soul

out of the garbage can.

Lick off the stench

dream me the triangle dream

that sets it straight

Turn the wild beast

(resting inside my head)

into God

with tears of semen on his face.

HERO..

laughing hair  
and lips  
we took each other  
us  
and flashing golden arms  
sprayed by the sea  
rising together  
in celebration

again I seek you  
you have become  
upon a monument  
with medals

enchanted purple eyes  
deep as hot pools  
and gave us

two trees  
our saps mingling

and find

a name

a KIA

you can't know )

you can't feel )"

in a box ) Choose one

on your chest )

in a drawer )

CYCLE

My wombness

                  blasted in consuming flames  
falls in bleached ashes  
                  down the castle wall

I see you

                  from my window  
                  suddenly appear  
                  your white charger  
                  parked somewhere

My castle gates spring open

                  we race down  
                  stone stairs  
                  to the moat

and when I drown

you draw me out

                  and I emerge  
                  my womanness restored  
                  regenerated

to be consumed again

                  by fires you set

## DEATH IS A BUS THAT CAN'T SLOW DOWN

In the beginning was the bus and the bus was with God and the bus was God. The bus was life because it moved and it was death because it could never stop. When you ride on the bus it takes on speed, it accelerates, it goes faster and faster, and nothing can stop it. You can't get off and the city streets and the country-side slide by like a coloured movie and fear has shape and feel and odor and the colour of fear is deep, dark red. The bus is death and death is never-ending and eternal and for all of time.

Sometimes I forgot I was on the bus. Sometimes for a little while I could forget. Once I saw a child with a copper-coloured puppy and the child gave me the puppy to hold. I felt its life in its fat, round belly and its squirming to be free and to race like the swift east wind in the wake of the bus. But the bus came back and caught the small dog beneath its wheels and rushed on with the speed of a high, shrill cry. The child saw the stillness and stiffness of the dog and drew back and the odor of fear clung to the child. She felt on the snow with her finger where the blood lay, fresh and bright, and she knew that life is death and death is life, and the bus is God moving quickly over the land.

Once I forgot I was on the bus because of a man. I believed, you see, that man is a mind and that the mind of a man is equal to God. The mind of a man can stand still and at the same time travel to the farthest corners of the earth. With his mind a man can fathom the depths of the ocean and conquer the vastness of space and know the strength and beauty and meaning of the learning and actions of other men throughout the ages. The mind of a man is timeless and ageless and with it he creates meaning and sanity out of chaos. I knew that the mind of a man was stronger than a bus hurtling to destruction or the wrath of God. But some things I did not know.

I did not know that the mind of a man is also a man and that there cannot be one without the other. I drank martinis with a man and I learned that a man is mind and a man, and the two are separate and yet they dwell together within one person. I learned, too, that there is something between a man and a woman that leaps up like a flame, springing into life, that cannot be extinguished, that warms and strengthens and the bus that never stops becomes a distant rumble.

He said, "I'll warm your hand," and the life in him flowed into me like sweet, red wine, and I forgot the bus was going too fast. He talked of the artists who have created beauty and meaning out of words and I knew that when all those who ride fast buses are carried to destruction,

truth will still live in the mind of a man.

A man is a mind but a man is strength and desire, too. A man is a strong, hot body that holds you and you cannot deny or resist. You can only worship but when you worship, you worship the mind that will not die. You rejoice that because the mind will not die, the body is saved from death, for it stands apart and does not ride on a speeding bus.

He said, "Room 1205. I like that room. It's my favorite."

The room was pleasant and newly-furnished and a tired artist had painted a picture for it. The safety and warmth of the room was an amniotic sac, protecting, cushioning, and in the closeness of the man, I sought the nourishing placenta. The stench of fear was changed and fear was a thing shapeless and odorless and its color was pale, soft pink.

He said, "I worship you. I will love you forever. I will always remember you," and I sighed at the sound of the words. Words are easy to say and when a man becomes a flaming, living force, they have no meaning. But a woman is glad to hear the words and she pretends when she hears them they are true. And the words, and her worship of the man, kindle hope and promise joy and ecstasy that waken the memories of all the pleasures she has known. The gates of Heaven open and the celestial glories are close enough to reach out and touch.

He said, at last, "I must go. My mother will be waiting. She worries about me." Then I heard the swoosh of the bus and the screech of the brakes that wouldn't hold and I knew I was riding a fast bus through the night.

"I'll phone you," he said, and I knew it wasn't true. A man is a mind and only for a short while he becomes a man and when his urgency is spent, he forgets. But I was glad he said it because for a moment the bus slowed down.

In the night the bus travelled very fast, for the room was dark and lonely and there was no warmth anywhere. I knew that a high stone wall could stop the bus and that somewhere a high stone wall was waiting. The bus was speeding toward it and the high stone wall was waiting, unknowing and innocent. I knew that the wall was close and soon violence and destruction would crush me, and it would be as though I had never lived. The bus picked up speed and tore through the slumbering towns and villages, and called out barking dogs and roused the dozing night people. I thought

of all I had meant to do and had not done, and I wept for the wasted days and nights, and I wept for the hopelessness of my despair.

Morning was pale thrusts of light through the venetian blind.

"Thank God," I murmured. "I thought the night would never end." The muted ringing of the phone was far away, something remembered from a dream.

"I feel dreadful," he said. "And my mother is angry. She doesn't understand." I knew then that even a man could stop thinking and board a fast bus, and a lady who is old and tired could get on without questioning.

"I'm sorry," I said, and he thought it was because he felt tired I was sorry. But I wanted to scream to him not to get on the bus because the bus is death, and death is a terrible and wasteful thing. I wanted to make him know that the bus is God but the mind of a man who will not ride a speeding bus, is equal to God, and gods are what people create them to be, for gods exist only in our dreams and fantasies.

I tried to sleep again but I remembered his hands caressing, his lips, his maleness, strong and needing, and that I had nourished myself against his warmth. I thought of his seed falling wasted on the clean, white sheet, and I felt a sadness so profound it seemed I mourned the suffering of all mankind. When my sorrow was spent, the flame of passion leapt up, and I knew that I was a woman and that woman is the temple of man. Man thrusts himself into the temple, in urgency and despair, ashamed of his need, for a man knows there are no gods. Yet he must humble himself and worship so he may flourish and bring forth fruit. He must sow his seed in the fertile soil of a woman and she must spread herself and receive the seed. And when the seed is well sown, a man walks erect, like a tree whose roots grow deep. But those who ride on a speeding bus, cannot sow deep or bring forth fruit, for they travel too fast and fear robs them of their fertility, and a bus is life, but life is death, and a stone wall is destruction.

The phone rang and this time it was real.

"I'm coming back," he said. "Don't go away. I'll be there soon."

A gold-colored chain holds the door, a slender gold chain between two people. A short, strong chair can separate

by a thousand miles, but a chain falls before the passion of a man and a woman.

He said, "I worship you," and I knew it was not I but Woman he worshipped, because woman is the soil in which he must nourish himself. Woman is the temple in which he must worship and a woman must not think to nourish herself, but she must hide the man from his shame and give herself to his act of worship, and save him and save herself.

This time his seed did not fall on the clean, white linen. It sowed itself deep in the warmth and safety of the woman, and her womb enclosed it and nourished it. And the seed grew.

I said, "I must see your mother. We must tell her. She mustn't get on the bus." I knew now that a woman lives through her children and her children's children and a man whose roots grow deep will never die. I knew, too, that a woman who dies in her passion, and becomes the soil for the seed of man, will regenerate herself and increase forever.

The humming of the tires of the bus was gone and the stone wall had crumbled, for God is reverence for life and whosoever reveres life, has God within him. All gods are God and God is all gods and those who fear ride a fast bus and have no roots. The fearful cries of the riders fill the night, but those who worship, worship in silence. For in silence the seed grows that becomes a child.

## DON'T STOP THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

One day you wake up and the sun is spilling into your room like gold nuggets and you can hear a kingfisher in the willows on the river bank. And you think, "My God, I'm married! I married that guy! It can't be." But it is just the same. You feel as though there's a funeral some place you have to go to, but you don't know how to find it because the funeral is your own.

You wonder how it could have happened. Your mind just went away and got lost when it was happening because it wouldn't be part of such a sordid thing. Maybe it was what he said that did it.

"We'd better get married," he said. "You've got those sexual hangups. It's one thing or the other, kid. We'd better get married."

And you said, "Marriage is for the birds. Marriage is for idiots and morons and women who can't earn a living."

"Your parents hate each other or something?" he said. When you looked at him you knew he was nice to look at. He had dark hair that waved like a girl's and features that looked right and eyes that were blank.

You said, "Maybe. I don't know. My father was hardly ever home. My mother was a Strong-Minded Woman. A nag. A bitch. Maybe he couldn't stand it. My mother had a thing about men. She loved them till she got them wild for her then she got rid of them. Conquering heroine, or something. But my Dad! Lord, what a man! Do you know he could read pages of poetry and then close the book and recite the whole thing. He could say all the poems he ever read in his life. It was fantastic! He lived on one meal a day for four years so he could get a university education. I guess my mother hated him. He was a cripple."

"A cripple?"

"Polio. She said she'd given up her life when she married him. You see he couldn't dance. A man who could recite poetry, and she cared that he couldn't dance! You know, I never said anything when he was home. I just listened so damned hard so I wouldn't miss one word he said. I stored it all up and I brought it out little by little and remembered it when he was gone."

"What'd your mother do?"

"She could do anything. She made things and sewed things and repaired everything. She could fix toaster cords and blocked sinks and she took in boarders and hung up wall-paper. Once she nagged my father into putting up a shelf. A little, narrow shelf in the bathroom. Do you know what? The damn shelf fell down. The first time my mother set something on it, it fell down. My father was a wonderful man."

"I mean what did she do about sex when your old man was away. You should have learned a few things."

"She hated sex. She was afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Afraid she'd want things she couldn't have, I suppose."

"Are you afraid you'll want things you can't have?"

"Maybe."

"You can have me."

"Thanks."

"There's something wrong with you. We've been going out for three months now."

"Going out?"

"I've been driving you around. Out to the lake. Up in the hills."

"You didn't have to. I could have gone just as well in my kid brother's jalopy. I thought you wanted me to."

"Sure, but it's supposed to lead to something."

"I know what it's supposed to lead to. I just forgot. I was thinking about the lake. That water's so damned cold when you dive in, it drives everything out of your mind. You feel as though you're part of the water, that you belong there, like a fish. You're part of everything that's real and all the things that people think are real, dissolve and everything's clean and perfect and beautiful. You should learn to swim."

"Water scares the hell out of me."

"It wouldn't when you got used to it."

"Look, kid, all girls want a man. Even those lesbians. They got turned off because they got turned down. A man. That's what counts for a woman. Maybe you should see a doctor."

"Maybe you should drop dead."

So you wake up married and you think, "This is it!" You never really thought how it would be. You never imagined it would be this bad.

Marriage begins and ends in bed. There seems to be nothing else. Oh yes, there is too. There is not ever spending any money for anything. There is putting every cent into a bank account for a rainy day, some distant disaster, or for when you're dead.

"Don't buy curtains, kid, they just keep out the sun. It's unhealthy. Look here! With your cheque and half of mine, we can boost the old bank account way up every month."

"What's the sense of going out? All we'll do is spend a lot of money. Liquor is the root of all evil. All those people you know drink too much. Come on to bed."

"Shut that book and come to bed. Who is this guy Hemingway, anyway?"

"He was a shy, and sensitive man. He had a sister who said he was a problem to his parents. He didn't want to go to school and he didn't want to work. He seemed very passive but there was great violence in him, too. He liked the bull fights. He had an Indian girl friend in his adolescence whom he probably seduced. Or maybe she seduced him. Anyway she contributed greatly to his basic education. He also wrote a few books."

"Why do you read these books all the time?"

"Because when I'm reading I forget everything."

"You forget you're my wife."

"I forget I am considered sexually inadequate by my husband."

"You could improve."

"You could go to hell."

Everything changes when you have a child. Even before it's born, everything changes. Every day used to be the same. You get up, you go to work, you come home, you cook dinner, you read, you go to bed. You wonderd what was the point. Why were you living? And you knew you weren't really alive. Then it happened, and there was a reason to begin to live. My God, you had to live!

Look what you'd done! Some kid who didn't want to be born was going to be born and it was your fault. You had to care. Somebody had to care. It was a very, very important thing that someone should care about this kid.

He said, "Hell, how could you let such a thing happen? Couldn't you be careful? You could have an abortion. But it would cost a lot. Just when we were beginning to save some money. Now you won't be able to work. Lord, I married a stupid woman. A real stupid woman."

But now it doesn't matter what he says. If you listen, he'll make you think this thing that is happening is wrong and you know it's the only reason for living, and you build a screen around your mind and block him out. Nothing matters but the child who is trying to be born. 'For unto you a child is born, Unto you a son is given.' You think about God and you know there are no gods. All religions are invented by frightened people who want to feel safe. But you want there to be a God. You want God to be real so this child will be safe and guarded and taken care of and never have to die. And you defy your mind and grow a new part, a part that is kind to people and believes in God.

Babies get born in hospitals and those are sad and lonely places to be born in. In hospitals people suffer and give up hope and confront their insignificance, and wither away and die. But the grandmothers and maiden aunts and cousins and midwives have vanished and babies are born in sterile delivery rooms. They should be born in the seclusion of the conjugal bedroom instead of encountering life in the penetrating glare of an operating light on the narrow confines of a surgical table.

The doctor isn't there and you can't have an anaesthetic, but it doesn't matter. Suffering is part of everything and you don't think about the pain, you only think of what is happening. You wonder how anyone could be afraid of this because it's the most real thing there has ever been. You know you can never feel more joyful.

You can't believe that this child is yours. You are awestricken by this miracle of creation, this integrated, functioning lump of humanity. It is little and grumpy-looking and it has fat cheeks that droop down and its nose has been levelled off with a scalpel. It never thinks that maybe nobody wants it. It thinks it's the only thing in the world. And it isn't a son, it's a she, and that's your fault, too. He says he could have accepted a son. He had decided that. But it was just like you to have a girl.

"Don't expect me to get involved with it," he says. "You know I can't stand kids."

You don't say anything. You don't hate him. Now you know what he can do. He can make this miracle happen. You can't hate him when he can do that. It doesn't matter what he says or what he does, you can never hate him. You are bound to him with bands of steel and rivets of iron. You blot him out of your mind, because he will not be the child's father, but the realness of him is always there, an urgent potency, screaming with life. A strong, new life is kindled in you too, so vital and powerful that what you were before seems a shell, a husk cast off before the fires that rage. And you know you will never again be free. You know you are a slave to the woman in you and your mind goes away and only through the child can you be free.

The sun lies like gold bullion on your window sill and the kingfisher sings by the river and the air is scented with fire-colored petunias. You know this is so because once you sensed them, in that other life, but now you can't reach them because your mind has gone away and the pleasures of the senses are for the free born and you are a bondswoman. The part of you that is kind to people and believes in God cries out in anguish but you know this part is worthless and you let the flames consume it. And there is nothing but the fire and the ashes.

Terror

you play me  
like a mad guitar  
picking

my bones  
in an endless season.

winds whirl me  
high updownupdown  
downupdowning

Rhythm

beats  
naked  
in hiding

upoverupover  
naked

beat  
rhythming

winds up up up uprising  
picked bones bones ones ns ns ns  
winds  
updowning updowning updowning

I stand  
in the center of the universe  
blood flows  
from my heart  
in great rivers  
to the far  
corners  
of the world  
impulses  
from my brain  
synapse  
on long grey highways  
to distant parts  
skeletal structures  
glistening with my protoplasm  
span the oceans  
my hair  
covers your face  
you are annihilated.  
You cover my body  
with caresses.  
I lose my universe.  
I have entered another galaxy.

DISTANCED

Space

surrounds

the memory

of your voice

gives it added attraction

though even

in the beginning

it had a quality

hard to define

a subtle urgency

that held my mind

without coming

too close

a quick tide-sound

coming

and going

that penetrated  
my camouflaged  
defenses

Impassioned phone calls

in the night

coming

from remote addresses

giving me a flash

of tide-magnet

through liquid wires

Quickly

hanging up

There is no space

now

Oceans

have been drained

for useful purposes

Magnets  
pull me  
in anonymous directions  
Rooms are filled  
with jostling  
voices  
I am trying

not to confuse you  
with someone else

It was better before

I liked  
the space  
between us

It gave us room  
to reach  
each other

LOVE CAME TO ME

Love came to me, a leper  
caging me in its despair  
laughing its dry scaly sound  
at my cries of fury  
holding out for pity  
its unfleshed limbs

Stench of disease  
mocks my condition  
I am known  
by my inaccessability  
Love locks me  
in its embrace  
My body, curled on itself, waits passively  
and freedom's a door I still must learn

OBLIVION

Gold lips

and golden arms

Yellow ladies

on yellow streets

chiding the old man

at the gate

for letting in mad dogs

and ruined mornings

Iron honeysuckles

laced with

vacant sockets

Promises let fall

to aromatic oblivion.

And dawn is thin

grey blankets

stretched over

tarnished limbs.

UNCLAD

You were never satisfied

with my looks, were you

you always said: why don't you

put on your glasses

Perhaps if your hair

were longer

Perhaps if you used more make-up.

I was too naked for you

wasn't I?

There was too much of me

clad in a facade

that was too thin

Next time I'll wear more:

a helmet and a breast-plate

for a start.

I have been caught in many cages  
held firm in many kinds of traps  
legs steel-banded  
arms restrained  
in straightjackets  
of subtle silence  
Deep hidden pits  
have caught me unawares  
I have languished  
in forgotten dungeons  
carving my name  
with blades of grass remembered  
from meadows bright with freedom  
And I have been set free  
by handsome princes  
in tattered jeans  
and jaunty helmets  
who weave a magic melting spell  
with one warm hand

You trap me

with sly syntax

and crafty rhythms

Your labyrinth

is mined

with ambiguities

I feel my way

through new declensions

you've just made up.

Your punctuation

is mostly obelisks

and I had counted on some question marks

POEM

Your flaming  
rapier  
entices

Prepares me  
for a mortal  
wounding

Diseased by loneliness.  
my mind calls up the days  
discarding each  
and searching  
for one  
not yet named  
called for  
a more recent god  
who sends down  
sunbursts  
of golden stars  
to hurl me up  
and light my mind  
letting it blaze  
out of control  
Then they'll send  
fire fighters  
and other  
worthy personnel  
to talk me down  
and let me know  
which day has happened

DWELLING

Flower pots in the sink  
a cobweb on the Virgin's glassed-in face  
Prometheus cross-legged upon the table  
his chains hung from the ceiling  
Proteus flowing from the frozen taps  
Books climb the stairs  
mice proliferate among the manuscripts  
a broken chair  
where once Diana sat  
goldfish stranded  
in a desert bowl  
Phoenix shrouded  
with unkept promises  
the bathroom's filled with news  
tied neatly into rolls  
cease-fire refugees of Vietnam  
coil round

Rex Morgan, M.D.  
transplanting Pogo

The bathtub's filled  
with currant wine  
and I'm submerged  
waiting for someone  
to plug me in

This day is spent  
and I'm left wondering  
if other unframed days  
will fill my gallery  
each watercolor  
grey on grey  
formless things  
made of the evanescence  
of cobweb dreams  
ravaged by winds.  
Winds take my message  
written in the lightmoment  
of cautious hope: "I need I need I need"  
and waft it to warm-colored landscapes.  
Illuding the hot géométric deserts  
my other message blows wild  
on sullen seascapes:  
I could exchange each picture for a touch  
fourteen charcoals for a feather bed  
and framing arms to hold my needs

I sleep -

on the left side

of the bed

always

never getting

too close to the middle

I don't want to discover

you're not there

A FITTING ROLE

If I could only  
get out of this role

(it's become monotonous

after all these centuries)

I think I would

pack the tapestry bag

(the one your mother gave us

for hospital emergencies)

and perhaps perhaps perhaps

I would sit in Dominion Square at first

and watch what people do

and feed the pigeons for a while

then I would walk around and view the city

a new self seeing everything for the first time

I'd skip the Bay and Ogilvie's

and try the Sailor's Church Maison del Vecchio

Auberge Ste-Gabrielle

perhaps I might meet the ghosts of de Maisonneuve

or Marguerite Bourgeois

Sieur de Montclam the Sulpicians tending their gardens

in God's name.

This role I'm in sticks like tar and feathers

and even if I could get out

who would tell me where to go?

Everyone seems to be hurrying to get there.

I fling lies

like dandelion

fluff

and hope

the truth

will reach you

DRY ROT

Rigor Mortis

sits on the cherry tree

Dry Rot captured it

late last year

Said "Hands up"

and there they stay

Suppliants

gesturing mockingly.

Thumbing its nose

at the thing it's got

Upping the wretch

that did it in

Hopping for nothing

but shining rain

Its bones have become

their own monument.

Arms held high

and flesh turned black

The trees beside it

stand away

Who's to bury it.

decently

Who's to find out

if its heart still beats?

Fear stalks me  
a tiger seeks its prey  
I crouch where jungle grass

grows rank

Above,

the fragrant plants

spread wide their leaves

grow berries, to be tasted by the brave

A silent animal slinks near

and though I crush myself

against the steaming earth

fear finds me

by the beating of my heart

devours its prey

and makes us one and one

and I no longer yearn

to feel

the blood-red juice of berries

on my tongue

J. F. K.

roses are red  
and violets are  
blue Jack i really did for-  
give my pre-  
sumption  
Jackie too  
of course  
it didn't seem  
as though well  
children didn't  
seem real you  
know i couldn't  
believe.  
i was your child  
erwombed  
i guess so  
when they gave you  
that address in  
arlington well i  
automatically  
moved in too  
forgive please so  
nervy of me there must  
have been a billion  
others  
whd

A book I lent you  
and my heart.  
The book you kept.

My heart you hung upon a tree.

CONFESSION

We are consumed  
on the sands:

Moses' bush burns  
out of God's sight  
fire and darkness

mingle  
in the Red Sea  
prevent  
our crossing-over

The tabernacle of our  
covenant  
is desecrated  
by the stench  
of unbound wounds

We bleed venom into each other's  
mouths  
have escaped  
the chastening  
of Aaron's rod

We are stranded  
beyond judgment  
beyond the Ark

We are become pillars of salt  
and only a rainbow  
can save us

Tide turns

and leaves  
us stranded

two tree sculptures  
drifted in sand

two watchers

waiting  
for rescuing signals

Beached

our bones  
quiver  
in the sun

Sand

crusts you  
who were known  
as a snappy dresser.

There would need to be  
more of me  
to reach you

If I could bring rain  
sucked from  
a rock crevice  
I would uncover you  
wash your wounds  
and we would grow hands  
on our branches  
grow mouths  
grow tongues  
grow hungers  
and baptize them  
in the sun

I was taken in

by your savoir faire

I didn't know

you were just acting

Playing king

to my lady-in-waiting

It was only

when I looked into

the mirror.

and saw

your face

(that I had only

seen before

when both our masks

were on)

wearing my eyes

that I understood:

neither of us

has a shadow

BARRIER

Blue lights

glow  
on your hedge  
leading me on  
casting soft shadows  
on pine needles

and meadow grass  
hurling back light  
giving me room

Gleam from your

many blue eyes  
magnets  
that draw me  
into unknown territory  
my fences left  
untended  
land  
unguarded

I enter your

pine hedge  
tear hands and feet  
on barbed wire  
Entangled  
caught in the mesh  
I cannot cross

Shadows fall

blue lights  
on soft pine needles  
we cannot touch

Fence holds

You  
staring from eyes  
that cannot see  
hurling back light  
giving me space  
to surrender

April 19/77

HIGH HOUSE

It's a high house  
and the wind blows through  
windows  
that wait  
for rains  
to come  
Houses must  
be cleansed  
of spirits  
of those who dwelt  
before

High house leaning into  
the wind  
making room  
for cleansing  
agents  
Your squared stone  
foundation  
shudders  
as wind rises  
sighs and shudders  
Stones cannot forget  
so quickly  
are known for  
their stubbornness  
cannot accept  
events  
unquestioningly.

O, porch, screened against insects  
and hidden wounding  
where I was safe  
from instruments  
that outrage  
torturing devices

O, cellar  
where the crocks for vinegar  
were shelved  
and lidded  
and where the apple barrels  
gave off the fragrance  
of spring orchards

O, kitchen, green spring pump  
baptising  
daily

O, doors, O windows  
O, boards and lathe and plaster  
O, house, high house  
Wind blows through you  
Blows free the spirits  
of those you held  
Leaves you there  
waiting

High house, high house  
drop down one window  
keep one door on latch  
keep in one spirit  
let it be womb-bound  
taken  
kept

Close fast one door for me, high house  
high house

July/77

Spears are a necessity  
for this time and place  
the importance  
of competition  
cannot be forgotten  
Though you have all the advantages  
You know how to operate the sharpener  
More attention  
to practicing  
your thrusts  
I am easily tempted  
to sit in the hammock  
catching aromatic breezes  
in my apron  
pretending I can't see you  
in the shadows  
resting your spear  
in the pear tree  
sitting cross-legged  
beside the place where  
the moon lifts up  
the earth's lid  
to show its fire  
We are not adept  
at the game  
Our points are blunted  
They lie between us  
melded in our flame

MOONSHINE

I walk

in your shadow

going backwards

there is light

only from your

gleaming eyes

there is darkness

beyond the circles

that search out

my future transgressions

Your beaming

headlights

cast a pall

upon the moon

It hides

its faces

behind the man

Soon my shadow

will merge

with yours

and I'll be hidden.

Another moon

without darkness

for shining

PARCHMENT

I have oozed

into

the parched soil

of your desert

Arid lands

have

sucked my juices

I am become

a weathered fruit

dried in the sun

that kissed me once

and filled my skin

with fruit

You have absorbed my moisture

dry winds

have caused

evaporation

Sand blows

between us

We cannot touch

We see us only

in each other's eyes

WOMEN'S WEEK

There is  
     a coffin  
     in her mind  
 where roses  
     and white lilies lie  
 and like a weighty  
     metal cell  
 it has displaced what was her mind  
     and whence it came  
     she cannot tell

Meningeal layers  
     ripped and torn  
 a putrid mass  
     of ganglia  
 berated dreams  
     that came to rest  
 the whole locked up  
     within that cell

Once there was light  
     and airy joy  
 and thoughts revolved  
     with pleasant ease  
 and all the tenderness  
     she knew  
 circled her mind  
     like warm womb dew

Did you stride in  
     through her locked door  
 holster and spurs  
     your brandished badge?  
 and did your dirk gleam crimson bright  
     replacing tenderness with fear?  
 and when you made your angry thrust  
     was there a coffin left behind?

She can remember larks that sang  
 and meadows greening in the sun  
 herons that waited by the lakes  
 breeze that moved softly in the elms

But in her mind a coffin waits  
     and terror  
     is its carrier  
     that insulates  
     and keeps  
     it bright

There in her mind  
a coffin  
waits  
a souvenir  
you left  
behind

WINTER ROAD

Sloping pines

Norman roofs transplanted  
dark angels  
treading virgin snow

Whited apple orchards

their upthrust branches  
radiant candelabra  
lighted in celebration

The pines cluster

in communion  
nodding affirmation  
swaying in genteel rhythm  
protecting the young

Far back

barns sag  
settled in comfortable positions  
satisfied with age  
guarding their crops  
knowing their worth

A squirrel scampers through the rails

letting fall  
its stilled mate  
already melding with the road:  
snowmobile victim

Branches extend

in the ritual of extreme unction  
whisper a muted mass  
offer comfort

Grey sky

painted over the mountains  
at the border

Obscuring divisions

Blue coyote shelters into banked snow

lovers entwine  
believing themselves  
alone

The trees sway

sigh softly  
feel the comfort  
of warm roots  
beneath their pristine eiderdown

Pieces of paper

dusty in bank vaults  
lay claim  
to the landscape

They are forgeries:

the land is inhabited  
by those  
who pass this way

ODYSSEY

I walk down Eccles Street  
My cyclop's eye, filled with a silent jet  
Of hayjuice, dimly sees  
Ruby's generous white arms  
Hung in the butcher shop,  
A melon in each hand.  
The tolling of St. George's, a celebration  
Of Paddy Dignam's  
Metempsychosis into a fat, grey rat.  
The rattling of powdery bones in Megapenthes' bag.  
Usurpers all. Parnell brought low  
By Helen. Zoe, the whore, dwelling in  
The navel of the sea: wearing a veil  
And tickling Atlas behind the knees.  
Proteus answering, "Signatures of all things.  
Wombing tomb."  
The fox buries his mother  
In the cellars of Misericordiae.  
Coffined in the earth-closet,  
A candle to light my agony,  
I give birth to the new womanly man:  
All dimpled cheeks and curls;  
Dehydrated matter, weighing seven pounds.  
A smell of burn.  
Is it a dog that's dead, or God?  
Omphalus, the deserted tower,  
Filled with brisket  
Rotted by the sun.  
Proteus escapes me with his slippery arts  
And Mulligan's got the key.  
I cannot swim.  
Flower of the mountain, Say yes! Say yes!  
The door of death is open  
And I am changing  
Into a mad tree.

THE CASANOUS

I could love you  
in some small café

Amazed  
to find the sweetness  
of your tongue  
inside my mouth..

Amazed.  
Our legs drawn together  
magnets  
holding each other  
and we  
surprised

Hands touch  
both reaching  
for sugar  
and are caught  
in the current  
that is grounded  
in our unpreparedness:

Human lips are softer  
and more urgent  
than I had known

They say more  
when they're  
not talking

Our eyes cannot meet.  
What can they tell?  
of fear?  
hope?  
or ask a question?  
a mad request  
for womb-love  
An urgent cry  
for umbilical  
life-lines  
stifled?

Our tissues  
had to articulate  
everything

And later  
when I passed  
the painted orange café  
fly-blown windows  
Sign with two letters missing  
I knew my mind  
had skipped  
We'd been together  
in a verdant meadow  
sipping mead

from buttercups  
dew-dipped  
sheep pastured  
on the hill  
soft music of harpists  
was wafted  
on a scented breeze

If I saw you  
I would ask you  
where you were then

Perhaps -  
you were  
listening  
to last year's songs  
on the juke-box

Perhaps you were  
sitting at a table  
formica-topped  
for convenience

Sometimes I think  
I see you  
driving by  
but I'm not sure  
Only my fingertips  
could tell

We are separated  
incalculable  
to be entered  
Icicles drip  
as we behold  
littered with  
that divides us  
We have become  
confronting  
in isolation  
Perhaps  
that perches  
upper lip  
a message  
Perhaps  
will melt  
and I  
a soft  
to walk across  
and touch  
Melt it  
and remorse

by a no man's land  
misunderstood  
at one's peril  
from our lips  
the charred expanse  
obsolete weapons  
two monuments  
the carnage  
the sparrow  
on my rigid  
will take to you  
I cannot  
a warm answer  
my hands  
will plant  
green carpet  
this wasteland  
your frozen mouth  
with forgiveness

THE CHATEAUGUAY I

The river spirit floods its banks  
soaks us  
in its fecundity

Roaring a savage call  
to rouse our shades  
quicken our vital juices  
on his boulder tongue

Deluging us with potent anger  
cascading monumental  
granite  
forgotten  
by an age

Screeching its history  
to vitalize our sap-gone-torpid-

Sitting on your glacial rocks

you banshee me  
with taunts  
then try seduction:  
sweet murmured rhythms  
hummed softly  
on a breeze

But I am on to you  
old god

I will not be seduced  
for you have told me  
your story:

coureurs-de-bois and Mohawk fearful  
of your treachery  
unprotected

in your careless rapids  
and when the battle came  
the whistling signals  
winged through trees  
each tree a hundred men

You traitored then

You took a side

You should have been always  
in the middle

THE CHATEAUGUAY II

River

you give me  
a standing ovation  
give me the sounds  
of the stars and  
the sun  
You raise  
your great hands  
in a beneficent gesture  
lay them upon me  
that I'll be raised up

River

you call up  
forgotten emotion  
memories  
deep-hid  
in the stream  
of my mind  
You have unlayered them  
let them rise to the surface  
shone in the rush  
of your cleansing cascade

River

you've gentled  
and soothed  
all my terrors  
given me power  
to immerse  
in your depths

And you have given me  
joy of creation  
self that is free  
of dark soil-rooted  
doubts  
Drawn me  
from quick-sands  
metamorphosed to silver  
cut stars from  
this gleaming  
sent them soaring  
above

River

my lover  
ever leaving  
yet staying  
stay me a longer day  
Keep out the dark