

THE MOUNTAIN IN THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

THE MOUNTAIN IN THE CITY

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"The Mountain In The City" consists of a collection of poems centering on Montreal as a setting for individual and collective experience. The poems explore and examine states of mind exemplified and produced by the city and the individual's response to it. Psychological/emotional, social, political, and spiritual elements are interwoven to document the urban experience. The poems are essentially explorative and observational, re-creating facets of city life from children at play to people at work to the individual in solitude. Particular and collective experiences are explored with realistic and imagistic language. The manuscript attempts to give a poetic rendering of the city in terms of its being both the backdrop to its citizens' dramas as well as its having a character and personality of its own.

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MONTREAL CIRCLES THE SUN

Montreal has always circled the sun
 in foot-stomping dance and song celebration,
 the freshness of new bagels,
 the feisty placards of embroidered liberation.

Montreal flies over herself in balloons.
 The skies are seas swarming with manned ships.
 Place Ville Marie, Les Terraces, The Bay
 sail their gleaming windows,
 allowing employees to levitate over themselves
 and the swarms in which they move en ville.

Montreal has always parachuted from her airships
 to let them find their own windpaths,
 making haste to rescue her people
 and guide them home on crazy weekend nights
 to rest for work
 and new affaires de coeurs.

Montreal visits herself from time to time,
 erects monuments, celebrates centenaries,
 polishes rusty heroes, new and old conquerors.
 Keeps a filing system for reference, and deference.
 She opens her streets to tourists
 who let themselves free in Old Montreal.

She kisses the hem of her own skirts,
 yet banishes them. Praises folk art,
 yet worships glass and steel.
 Montreal whirls in her warmth, stolidly.
 Keeps her promise wedded to winter skies, throbbing humidity.
 Montreal bribes, sews, struts,
 in future and historical chic.

She
 turns her cheek when pressed too hard,
 offers the other
 when her lover withdraws.

She calls her people to her bosom,
 yet wrenches them free,
 calmly and sweetly standing on the planet Earth,
 coolly and seasonally
 circling the sun.

2

THE CITY AS HOME

The streets themselves are dispassionate,
exist for no one. They watch life
wend its way and create its play
full of hope and hoped-for meaning.

The buildings stand aloof.
Shelters for the human drama,
supremely glassed and windowed,
they give a setting to the cabaret.

It is endless,
the circle, cycle spinaround.
The city stands,
the people move,
creating warmth in a transparent cage.
We are windswept
and rooted
in the city we call home.

OLD MAN

The old man drags his legs along the street,
sends up the dust and dirt to soil his clothes,
scraping the soles of his old, brown shoes.

He turns his head to see if anyone is coming
and crosses left.

He comes to rest at Atwater, facing McDonald's,
crushing an old newspaper
over several hot, dead worms.

He sits down.

There is a young waitress
who gives him free coffee.

He says he is in love with her.

Usually he stays there all afternoon,
but when it rains,
he walks around the shopping plaza,
looking for lucky coins.

LE PRAG POEM BLUES A LA CARTE

Entrée!

- daily soup
- 8 oz apple
the juice glass juiced
saxophone blare
in the light of the blue night
lights
downtown

inside homefries flambé goulash
omelet your choice
music blares a raunchy laugh
and ho-ho, I love you, audience
love this salami and selected cold cuts
eggs cordon bleu, oui wee
the viennoise dixieland sweet band playing
a strange Czech language and passion
any minute eruption de choix non plus
deux langues, Montreal, une montaigne - ville
hot 'choliflower' soup in this late fall
soup air beige, with good Czech fat
break a chunk, further
peruse the menu to the bottom, soup finishes fast
oh, wawa,
lost in the dream of the black forest cake
Canadian wilderness
now three course delight
for the folks -
poor boy's
happy person
wealthy man's delight
this humble Tony's reading
and feeling his sensuality
choufleurs! choufleurs!
at the bottom of the soup bowl
hot no more, whole no more
choufleurs, choufleurs,
love 'em and eat 'em and let 'em go
not to be without
bratwurst
sauerkraut
'cottache' cheese.
ah, to earn a living
in this mad, mad world,
one must charge
more for coffee
after 9:00 p.m.

oh to be lost in the black forest cake
fouetté

PASSIONATELY ALTERNATIVE

French and English memories
line the streets, and litter the boulevards,
the corpses of earnest ideas
passionately fought in livingrooms,
committee rooms, editorial rooms,
each human a cell in the body
of the people's soul,
and every one
running down an alternative road
to new Quebec.

SEASONS FOUR

I.

Mountain leaves fritter
as I walk the fusty, fall air.
They are frail on the copse
of the dawn-kissed hill.

II.

Down the whooshing winter mountain
come children playing at being children,
knocking themselves out being children,
climbing and sliding with their parents who are children.

III.

Stamping on the mountain in the warm, spring slush,
teenagers make mud splat with their feet
on calves of passersby and yell ecstatically.
They love the havoc of growing up messily.

IV.

It is summer. Young women and men
have returned from the Appalachia, Himalayas, Sinai.
The sky sparkles a bland, infinite blue
as they walk the city into thought.

SPRING

When new birds roost
on my neighbour's tree,
small leaves unfold
up and down the sensual limbs,
warming my muscles
beneath their bark
to release their scents
and tap the universal skies
for wonder.

THE CITY'S REACTION TO POLITICS

The intransigent city's layaway plan
encircles the mountain in crusty snow.
The payments, debts, and promissory notes
lie upon one another forming hardened
black-tinged ridges. The mountain rises
white in the middle,
nipples at the cross.
The trees are hair to suck
in ardent love-making,
but the past and future
are held in escrow.
English businessmen
creep out of the province,
carrying crates of invoices
to lay on flat, western land,
love's statements exchanged elsewhere.
Montreal sighs, her breast caressed by the sky
and shudders as her men leave
to assault her from afar.

RE-SHAPING THE PRESENT

Men in pinstripe suits and red flannel shirts
are pacing the floor of new Quebec
in new and old shoes.
They build and tear bridges
in irritated excitement,
cherishing their plans of the imminent.

Women are passionate with ideas.
All day they argue in the cafés, universités,
dress shops. All day they walk the streets
of new Quebec, re-paving them with concepts.

The children of this province are held
under the light of history,
torn between
inheritance and redemption.
They play seesaw in the parks
and build cities in the sand,
while their parents watch them
through a funnelled mirror
and argue furiously.

PLAYING IN WESTMOUNT PARK

When children
crawl inside pipes
they know they are home

They play house and play pretend,
hurl moonbeams
down the length
and spaghetti round the bends

They hurtle through space
accompanied by robots and angels
identifying galaxies and
manned spaceships that alter
form and colour

They grow their bodies long
and shrink them,
eat gunk food and mud capsules,
enter time warps,
see shapes of space.
They fall asleep
and wake up terrified
when night comes,
and Mommy picks them up,
and carries them home
quietly sobbing.

THE RAINBOW PUDDLE

Ring around, skip around
the pebble in the puddle.
Skip it, skip it, fast and hard.
Run it, oh, fast, Sarah, go!
Oh, Sarah! You ran it,
you did'it, the puddle's clear!

Sarah, before I became
a baby in my mommy's tummy,
I flew in water like that.
Swam in it, breathing.
Flapped my wings
till it became clear,
and then all the colours of
the rainbow stepped out
dressed like a beautiful lady.
She sang like an angel
and smelled like rose blossoms,
and told me about life on earth,
and about me, and my life to come.
She wouldn't let me in her puddle.

And, oh, Sarah, you did it.
Maybe
it will rain
and she will come.

Sarah, don't go in.
It's going to rain now.

SKATEBOARDERS

Lithe children fly
on city streets,
balletomaniacs.
Their limbs and bodies,
viscera of the city.
They explode with joy
and burn themselves alive,
leaving a trail of mercury
that dances in the streets.

CALECHE

The golden shod horses
clop calèches
through the streets of Montreal.
The shock of their survival
touches my skin like mercury
fissuring the pores.

Clouds spiral the sky and rain the earth.
Vortexes spin star to star.
When I was drawn by the big, brown mare
I was Lady Eglinton, femme du seigneur, Nephertite,
rolling back the centuries
with the creaking slowness
of slender legs plodding
one at a time.

HOT ROCKS

The stud struts blue-eyed,
white glazes his pupils.
Pierrot swings a tight ass
down staid and lovely Wilson Street.
There is no room for hot rocks here.
The streets are big and calm,
the homes, lived-in and gracious.
It is time for him to love his rocks,
make love with his rocks,
drench them,
baptize them
with sacred rites and sperm.

BLUE EYES

in the old days
when she stuck her head in ovens
and ran around Montreal
in gypsy garb, enlisting man
with fucked-up sensuality
and softness to enter her

we laughed more -
today we looked
straight, two sets of
blue eyes meeting
so still and large
not even they spoke

MONTREAL CATS

Montreal cats are sphinxes
that sit between the worlds,
metronomes pacing
the tides of the river
that circles the city
like a prophet's moat of unseen miracles.

They swim in the rank and dust
of the city,
howling in imperturbable cycles
like men and women in the
moon of their vulnerability.

Slowly they ease their instinctive bodies
in repose,
and die
when they seem to sleep,
and the tides change.

WHEN MEN EMBRACE

There are apple blossoms in Montreal
with grave scents
of full-bodied spring.

No gold dust, fish-sparkling rivers.
There are deals and counter deals
in cabins grown to glass and steel.

Cartier, Sanguinet, St. Denis
stand on guard from their tombs
in freshly painted streetsigns.

Strong, masculine names
in a city where men embrace
and warm in friendship
in the odd ways
they trade for love and softness
among themselves.

NIGHT

I

night time:
sleep.
eyes close.
mouths at peace.
brains alter their waves.
stars light the sky
of our luminous imagination.
night enfolds us
darker than blindness.
we are sand, we are marrow.
the animals hoot and moan.

we are children now.
heads on pillows,
hair askew.
dreams call us in reverie.

sleepytime,
bye bye,
day is done.

II

Late night riverlets
run their streams
down the neon streets
of Montreal's twilight scene.
The chicks, fags,
lonelies, crazies,
sip late night brews
while eccentrics in big hats
escalate their studdes
into the mountain.

III

Montreal is a whore
with pigeon feathers in her hair
and rat traps in her neon teeth

She rattles her children's foetal sleep,
twisting them in dreams of darkness
to tight red-lipped poems

To remember her in momentary silence
when the big bang does not suffice,
or Darwin,
for the creation of the universe.

MONTREAL POETS, 1977

When burgeoning kings of winter storms
burst forth in spring to publish volumes
they meet and party
with those they shred in private,
craft, words and themes,
moles on asses and concrete images,
lyrics and odes bitterly archaic,
biographies, narratives, witticisms
curiously out of place,
ditties, satires and evocations ironically passé
Ah, when poets meet
they roar into ears
of compatriot fighters
loving some style and pick
of parcel over another's
run of prejudice,
though they would call it criticism.
A loving family
fighting the only war they know.

WRITER'S WRITE

in the early morning
 when the city sleeps,
 writers wake in private spaces
 phone off the hook,
 a waning moon,
 common sense newly wrought
 from anxiety's plate:

what traumas yet to find us
 in life's gargantuan journey,
 what sorrow breathing
 pace upon pace,
 what light flickers, now bright,
 now void, this breath

flowers bloom in tight-petalled livery.
 the roads are caverned crevices in the earth.
 mitchell worries about buses,
 cedric, metros.

jean-claude quits his job,
 evelyn looks for one.
 morgana sits sideways laughing,
 carole is intense, impatient.

the moon's apace,
 waning now,
 the traumas fade
 into sensitivity,
 stars flicker and die.

the needle pricks its pattern
 in the tapestry.
 we share these poems
 aloud.

A PERSONAL GEOGRAPHY

I.
 Leaning gently on a farmyard gate,
 I listen for the breath
 of wind or change
 to sweep across the land.
 Those who dared to speak the truth
 invited controls
 that tortured the body
 of America
 under McCarthy

We didn't know
 in Canada,
 unless Japanese
 or Newfie in Toranna,
 Eskie in the Territories,
 Chinese in Drapeau's
 modern building spree

And all over the continent,
 each Yakamoto changed his name
 to Jackson and Nillson to Nelson,
 unless he flexed his loins
 and overturned with sinewy strength
 the bland progress of common epigrams
 and platitudes died like day lilies
 a seeming death at night
 a shield against the moving shadows
 of darkness across the land.

II.
 A sunnyasin utters platitudes too
 in his search to bring
 his vision of the truth
 to ears of man.
 He walks, brown-eyed and orange-robed,
 swathed in the folds of perception,
 his brown feet bare on city pavement,
 ancient India visiting Quebec
 in thickly saffroned scents.

III.

The robes that shone
in Athens
and Jerusalem
are lost
and our embattled minds allude
to grace and revelation
that only may have been.
The buried continents
entomb traces
of lives, societies, forgotten.
Seas and dust seal the past,
the stars are codes of the future.

When ancient finds are brought to light
it will be known if seers
like Cayce revealed
the sister pull of continents
in trances and visions..

There is nothing now
but an awesome quirk
of light
that separates
truth from darkness.

IV.

Leaning gently against the gate,
I swing sideways, back and forth.
All Lees, Cohens
and Rising Eagles
lie on their beds,
embraced by Christ and us
this Christmas night.
There are no lights as I turn
full circle.
I am alone with this history
as are my neighbours.

THE TEMPLE

The film has disintegrated.
The last illusions
have left the theatre.
They mill like pale straws,
no arms to hold,
no hearts to clutch.

In the midst of the crowd
I see him wandering
between the people
parting them lightly like beaded curtains.

He sees me
and asks to take my hand.
We walk down the busy street.
So this is how love begins.
Unexpectedly.
With no pit of trembling knees,
ads, and placards.
We walk, not looking at each other,
knowing beyond logic
we are concrete blocks
to start the building of the temple.
The sky deepens.
Water laps at sidewalk's edge.
It is the Mediterranean.
We are walking from Acco
to Jerusalem
to lay the foundation.
It is precisely noon.
The sun will never be so hot again.
We hold each other's hand
tightly in the blazing sun.
We leave the sea to turn inland
consumed by our love,
die in a phoenix splendour
of whirling sands
that ripple through the air.
We are breathless, invisible.
The fire engulfs us,
We promise to cherish each other eternally.
The fire distills,
radiant with fine sprays
that shine in the cooling sun
like opals, amethysts, and crystals.
We embrace.
All is still.
The air glistens with the dew of dawn.

We are as strong
as the temple
we are about to build.
I feel our tenderness and strength
issue forth and meet
whirlpool dancing
that makes us drunk with laughter.

Now we are back in Montreal,
running down the street.
The temple is within us.
The phoenix lives,
burns, rises
with every step.
Our hearts are joined,
our breath is one,
our knowing is complete.

We stop and stare,
touch each other shyly,
this awkward, stubborn,
perfection-driven partner,
there, before us, in the new hot summer.
Montreal. May the 12th.
So this is how it begins.

SAFES

My man's safes
lie atop
prison memoirs.
We are safe from childbirth now
with one rubber or another.

Safes
and prison memoirs.
No fancy jimmying /"
can bust the bad times,
call forth the bank's safes
to a one-in-a-million jackpot
and escape free from the scene
into dreamland.

No, opening the pages leads to
the nether world.
And how those men yearn
for our safes.
Each night
they bang themselves
with reveries
of girls unseen
but dreamed of.

The safes lie sealed,
as our silence now
carries us back
to some sense of wholeness.
Child inside,
we recapture in rest
the moving world
of our inner beings
the men in prison
seek to shut away.

What good is the roaming mind
in cells of steel and concrete?
Their soft skins and lips
will wait. Even in masturbation
they do not feel their bodies,
soft as a woman touching them,
surprised to see how sensitive the killer is,
and how tender near the heart.

They sleep fitfully
amidst their larger instincts,
lying on cots that represent them,
while my man and I, tired,
fall asleep after one, soft kiss.


The presence of our bodies
cradles each other's universe
with trust.
No need for us to make love
tonight.

4



LOVE SUITE

I



Eskimo calls late in the night
your name, silent in the trees
Indian steps in the forest by the creek
night hush, full and dark
Chinese eyes see and are still
your heart folded inside you

quiet as the sudden dawn
that knows all,
our meeting
in the universe

II

The suddenness of our loving
known in a fancy
of eyes meeting
full as new spring

The passion of our touch
with such tenderness
as a child
closes its small hands

The secret knowing of some solemn past
and awakening future
stills us to pure passion

Your hand burning in mine
loses its skin, we merge
and atoms secret from the womb of life
marry us
before we are one day old

III

Laugh in the face of death,
you bring me to it
with your open heart
and eyes

Laughing at the brink,
when all else falls away
and we stand
in the wind
and the air
and a thousand responses

The petals of our fire
shoot, Go!
we orbiting the Earth
and our follies,
hand-in-hand we find
roses and tulips
litter the paths to the stars

THE CITY IN MY HEART

The city sleeps in the veil of my heart.
The city sleeps in my bosom.

The veil that covers my heart
protects it from
disappointment.
I run the city into distension,
let its blood pump in arteries
away from the core
of my being.

My beloved lives near the mountain.
He climbs it in his sleep,
jogs it in the morning,
eats it with his toast and eggs
before the next flight.
I never see him go.
He disappears,
and sorrow cuts my veil
and sears my heart.

That lucky mountain.
He returns to her.

WELL-WORN LOVE ALONG CITY PAVEMENT

I stopped to brush the tears away,
my brimming eyes
staggered icicles,
fortressing the city's winter.
I turned and heaved, the
mock castle glittered,
my pain arrayed,
a public cave.
I hurled myself against them
with a sword of polished crystal.
Thick with meaning they crumbled,
each a mountain of decadence
interpreting old wants.
I wandered desolately.
Montreal: dead
or respectful?
One woman's mourning for a well-worn love
appreciated.
The city was still
and knowing
in its calm acceptance of suffering.

EULOGY

I remember him.
He had lumber in his heart,
horsewhip in his legs,
bullocks in his testes.

I remember where he stood in my heart.
Full regalia, thunder crashing the sky.
Stars set in light years, equally burning.

The sun's rays shine differently now.
The rain runs ellipses around my house.
The pavement is hot and made of tin.
Black leaves throb.
I circle the earth
in discarnate miasma.

It's no use.
There was no other love,
there was no other man
like him.

GRIEF AT THE DEATH OF LOVE

I
Past, present.
The city rests at night
Dead.
Its soul flies to other places
Future.
I am embraced by that memory,
awaken in the new day,
Continuing.

II
The city was locked in my love's body
his blood was the streets,
his flesh, the buildings.
Now I search darkened roads
for glimpses of his presence.
My face is veiled,
my heart is veiled,
my heart wracks in mourning.
He is here, or elsewhere,
with a new lover, or alone.
No one sees me chase my tears away,
or disperse the ashes
like dust in the wind.

THE SUN OF EXPERIENCE

He is gone.
The streets
call their jibes.
Corners' collar me darkly.

I live' in the sun of experience.

No deflection
will stop my heart
from pumping
liquid gold
into the relentless sky.

THE PROMISED LAND

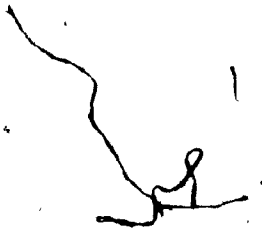
She dries the wail of tears
 on the pores of the wall of her skin
 and leaves her house
 in slow, small steps.
 Inside her pounding heart,
 choices bait and stalk.
 Her eyes are drawn.
 She searches the autumn pavement
 for light. There is none.

She remembers gold,
 a filter of dreams
 streaming in rays of the sun,
 once in a vision
 when the ark of the vault
 materialized,
 and the voice of an angel
 reminded her
 of a law, a contract,
 a covenant.

She trembles in the autumn flames.
 Her blood is the blood of the leaves,
 the green of breathing humanity.
 Her choices melt and fuse.
 Eye meets eye in new understanding.
 Barriers break,
 circle like children in serious play.

The limbs of the trees are streaming with milk,
 the streets are flowing with honey.
 The mountain in the centre of the city is Sinai,
 the houses are temples.
 The street lights are guideposts,
 each square of pavement,
 another rock and pebble
 of the desert and the promised land.

She is gripped by the passion of living,
 her young breasts,
 this new flight,
 the sacred forest.
 She remembers the fallen temple,
 once a holy spirit charged within,
 a home of wisdom, love, and power.



As she walks,
the angel reminds her
that the covenant once made
is never lost,
and the redemption of truth she knew,
when the temple was built upon the land,
awaits her.
She is not doomed to be
the broken reminder
of a former glory.
She may transform.
The hands of the angel
reach out to her
in the midst of a teeming street.
Tears illumine.
She stops,
and whirls.
The tablets sing within her.
She has known the commandments
all her life.
The desert blooms.
Her circle of mysteries is complete.
There is no need for the
wailing wall.
It crumbles
in an ecstasy
of released grief.
The promised land is within,
before her.
She is the covenant replete.

She returns to her house
on a tree-lined street
and enters a state of knowing.
In the morning she remembers
the promise of dawn,
in the evening,
transformation.
The mount of ascension
is within her breast,
as the mountain in the centre of the city.
She climbs it daily
as the leaves fall
and turn to dust.
In the spring
they will return
and her laughter
will ring around the mountain,
creating pathways
to the ark.

THE MEMORIES OF CERTAIN COLOURS

In the days
when Solomon ruled
there were dresses
the colour of sand,
houses and marts
the colour of sand,
and rock, skin, and leather
like millet and rice,
bread and leaven,
the colour of sand.
There was a walk
to men and women
like that of trees,
sway the spine,
the stem, the stalk,
sway the branches,
the arms, the leaves.

There was a blossom in the eyes of soul
like petal-leaves on the olive trees,
expanse of smiles and anger
as wide as sea and land,
and flowers of amber, rust, and ochre
embroidering robes
like the movement of the sea.

I am the temple,
a quiet gold of
rocks, sand, and stone
fitted close
like the pores of the skin.
I walk in Montreal,
the robes flowing
and sandals brushing
the floor of the sacred land,
like a particle of sand
brushed by the wind
in a certain direction.

I
The tablets.
The issuing
of the Presence
manifested in stone.
Sinai.

Orange-saffroned sadhus,
Rite of initiation.
Ganges in the Himalayas.
Dawn in the Indian soul.

Wailing birds of sun
in the morning.
Yucatan medicine man.

Shaman of the Great One.
Celebrant of the spirit world.
Family dies, the Great One guides
the visions that heal.
Navajo in Arizona.

Scientists conquer mountains they measure.
Everest, Katmandu bridge the soul
of their aspiration.

Ascension,
perfection,
transfiguration.
Power
at the peak of knowledge.
Each ledge is a step, a boulder to rest.
Mountains open paths
to the initiate.

II

How does a wave live
in the sea?

It knows as plain as mountain ants
and desert insects
how to filter heat and cold
and dip and rise with antennae
that are strong to one so small.

III

It is true that sun and sea
do not produce idyllic dreamlike states
automatically. Something of the dreamer
must be called to play
gamin, lover, heretic,
swimming in the sea
that bears the dream to life.

IV

Mountains have coded writings
men cannot decipher.

Teachers, saints and healers have walked them,
silently infusing them with the blood
of their wisdom drenched to earth.

Mountains raise herbs and chickens,
goats and wild flowers,
farms.

Mountains perch for years and suddenly slide,
they stretch like tigers and suddenly rumble.

Mountains are as still as the wing of a bird in flight.

V

There is a statue of Brother André
on the mountain in the middle of Montreal
that smiles with interested softness
on parishoners as they climb
the tiny stairs to his house.

Oh the blessed sweetness of our Christian brother,
who healed the sick and blessed all who sought him,
lighting candles for souls
in need of spiritual comfort.
Crutches are silent testimony.
Agnostics laugh when passing the hundreds
of wooden sticks silently leaning
and candles continually burning.

VI

Death comes in the middle of mountains
and passage to new worlds
is imminent.

ICY PASSAGE

Crumble down
the iron block.
Laughing giddy,
travail a mixup.
Hairy legs,
lonesome breasts,
marriage, separation.
The sword of death.

Still,
committees meet,
vote on issues.
Former strains erupt
the pain.
I mind-block all,
close off refrains.
But when'

the chairman of the icy chill
calls the vote,
all speeches are in vain.
The mettle's cast,
removed from mold.

The hand of death
passes over.

"PROMISE OF GOOD IN THE FUTURE"

starring ISABEL PERON AND RONALD REAGAN

Little children bang bang
playing with their wang wangs
in the midst of traffic,
busy city streets.
Little children frolic
shooting off their crackers
pretending they're cowboys,
one'll be bionic.

But projecting into consciousness
are streams of veins and muscle tension,
rising through the time spans
like the changing of the guard.
Each dawn and dusk
a cleavage worse than the desert
between their mother's breasts,
an adolescent cloning to
ravage their live-or-bust fervour.

The world is falling in, the world is falling
down by the paddy in McGillicuty's stream.
I am a mother
watching history at play.
The phone rings.
It's Isabel Peron,
accompanied by her aide and confidant,
José Lopez Rega.
Together they mismanaged public finance
in the Peronist crusade.
She used to lay on the window-topped casket
of her dead husband's dead wife, Eva,
trying to absorb her characteristics
and communicate with her spirit.
Isabel Peron was dictator of Argentina,
and the seances with Eva and Juan
did not keep her in power.

Oh, the paddy near McGillicuty's farm
roars a drowning spirit
as spring waters flood.
What do I tell my son now?

Of course, Isabel knew handsome
Ronald Reagan, third cousin once removed
from the 3Ks (not to be confused

with any business group or prophetic vision
which might arise in sets of three).

The phone rings. It is Ronald Reagan.
He says, "Elect me republican candidate
or your son will be bussed
to a presently all-black school."
"This is crazy," I reply, "I am Canadian."
"Not as crazy
as you think."
Jimmy Carter does not worry me,
though he runs the horse race, the
circus train, the circle round
the pit.

Bang! The curtains go up,
red velvet and gold.
A nine-year-old stands before
the glittering crowd. I look closer:
yes, it is my son and he is giving out
Oscars. But first the candidates
in each category must survive
Kronsky's knife-throwing act.
The winners have already been selected
for merit, but they must also survive.
Who can meet this conferring of success?
Who will lay down their life for the anti-god,
sometimes first cousin, not removed,
from the real thing.
Reagan survives, Trudeau survives, Clark survives,
Drapeau wins the polished statue.
There are bright new lights,
but the old neon, individually tailored
and refitted annually, glitters.
The audience applauds.
The pit has entertained them well:
Some future life they will pay,
as old Romans mauling Christians
pay in McGillicutty's remembrance of things past.

Isabel Peron finishes her call.
She shouts: "I am Peron!"
She was a superstitious chorus girl
involved in a myth.
A president.
She shouts: "Don't let them treat me this way!"

"Eva! Juan!"

Montreal's pop president, Juan Rodriguez,
is compassionate and his charm stirs her.

"Juan," she shouts and attempts to embrace him.

"I am not to be imprisoned, Juan.

I am Peron!" He sees her suddenly
and leaves. She sobs, falling to her feet
and is lifted away by the military guard.

She has a third nervous breakdown
and loses ten more pounds.

Rodriguez picks up the phone,

"Who is it?"

"Carole."

"You should be ashamed of your son,
participating in such a corrupt event."

"I did not know.

Don't condemn me in your column!

You're softer now, but still so opinionated."

He smiles, it is true. "But watch your son,
you don't want to be ashamed of him."

Juan runs for city councillor and wins.

He has a large following.

I want Ronald Reagan to take care of
Isabel Peron. He was in the movies.

Perhaps she could break in.

The casket calls from the pit.

The sister part of self cries
for her soul.

My son leaves the Oscar ceremony.

"Mommy," he says. "One of the
knives almost got me."

"I know, I know," rocking him.

"Is that why you left?"

"The knives were real, Mommy,
they were real."

"Outside of the neon,

we are shot with knives, too, son,
but they are smaller and sometimes fake."

"You mean that real life's larger than life?"

"I mean that Ronald Reagan knows how to survive,

and you will have to choose, too,

where the fights in your life will be staged,
and how, if you can."

"I don't want to live this way, Mommy."

"Then find another way, see if you can.

Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed

all had human blood. Here,
 give me the gun you were playing with.
 Don't play on city roads.
 Play fair, do unto others..."

Off in the distance, Isabel Peron and Ronald Reagan
 stand on a knoll and chat in pastels.
 Jimmy Carter flies by, Joe Clark after him.
 Trudeau's teeth lie a distance from them
 far behind Nixon's scrunched up shoulders and Meir's brows.

All is quiet and then, my son,
 a little child returned from golden ceremony,
 dances round them
 in flaming colours to enfold them.
 Their bodies remain through the rite
 but the fire transforms them.
 A golden aura rises over the mountain.
 My son continues to chant,
 he speaks in tongues.
 Isabel and Ronnie embrace and hold hands,
 Isabel and Ronnie stand in wonder.
 Then my son gives Isabel the telephone.
 She calls to me: "The final - the real - solution
 has been effected. I remember the name
 given to me by my parents. It is
 Maria Estela Martínez Cartas.
 Ronnie's real name is what he says it is.
 We are on a starship
 ready to enter new worlds.
 This is true."
 My son sits cross-legged and listens.
 "You will know McGillicutty's magic
 if you will come to terms with Oscars."
 She hands over the phone. Reagan says,
 "Jimmy Carter will be your next President.
 It will be Jimmy and Joe, of Canada.
 They will be great backgammon players
 and will lead our nations into the New Age.
 There will be no bussing, no autocratic directives,
 but wise guidance of cloning
 and other scientific acts of terrorism.
 The pit will no longer exist
 and why should it?
 The pit is ruthless.
 Life's tests will come from
 the powers we have
 so far tapped in reverse."
 Reagan dances the circle and chants
 with Isabel who trips over her heels
 and ghosts of times past.

Her former confidant comes by
and showers the millions
he releases from the vaults of miscast wealth.
The birds sing, my son rejoices,
and I walk to the hill
making slow circles
around them.

When I come close,
they reach out to touch me.
Still reacting against their more
familiar selves, I recoil in disgust:
let no time ever unite me
with Peron and Reagan!

But my son
steps up
and takes my hand,
leading me to them.
Clark and Carter come by
to join in the circle,
losing lines on their faces
and shedding years
of burdens unwisely shouldered.
It is the future
and in the timescape
we can hear
the bang bang
of the kids' wang wangs,
and the passing traffic
as the hurly burly world turmoils on.
Transcendence has its place.

I begin to laugh,
and soon, it travels round the circle.
We are all doubled over
and smacking our fists with joy.
Peron is free, Reagan is free.
Clark and Carter embrace and cry.
I turn around and see
the ghosts of Eva and Juan Peron
beckoning.

I leave them
and stay with my child,
this son of woman and man,
this issuing carefully nourished,
projection of our beings.

We stand together,
all of us.
We leave Eva and Juan to die.

We leave them.
They are gone: let their spirits
cleave to other worlds.
Oh Earth, we are free!

DAWN AWAITED

From the eons,
trapped within the cycles,
twilight,
a carving away from light:
man's belligerence.

The sun's long arms
lift up the ethers
but allow darkness
to rule the days.

The prince of peace
awaits the dawn
to sit upon the throne,
long promised.

MOUNTAIN REVERIE

I lay on the side
of the mountain
embracing the sky.
Clouds rolled over me
and I played each shape,
growling low in the feather brush,
writhing in the green
of the tickling grass,
following the quaver of a wisp of vapour,
till, clutching the handbook
1950 gave me,
I saw my life -
prisoner in a glass cage.
Creative obedience
had made me seem free
but the glass glittered neon reflections
and I ran from the mirror.

Now, in the grass,
the clouds touched me
all over.
The glass inflamed and burst,
sending memories and thought patterns
into the air.
The clouds wove a net
of golden support.

A rhythm emerged,
unfolding me
like a grain of wheat,
my leaves, arms
reaching for a place
already known.

I got up,
barefoot,
began to run,
began to fall,
slowly stones
overturnd
wildflowers, ferns,
falling over
scents
and caress of moss and herbs,
faster,
hundreds of metres
till there was no bottom,

though scientists
 before Sputnik and since
 would calculate
 the distance and the probabilities,
 but I, a human avalanche,
 breast over face over hair,
 hips over stomach over ass and cunt,
 calves and thighs,
 beetles and caterpillars,
 clover and daisies and burrs,
 down,
 till everything stopped
 and
 I remembered

1950

a steel platter
 stretched out to turnpike
 glass ribbed
 a see-through body
 racing in chintz
 boogie alley across the land in 4:4 time
 and zigzag to a quarry
 for diamond rings and razmatazz,
 thou shalt not be fulfilled
 for guilt is thy sustenance
 and clothes the presentation of self

1950

uncontrollable re-shaping
 to straight lines
 after the war,
 even Montreal began
 to grow steel then
 though only one building
 rose in the 50s,
 crossing the villages of the city,
 a giant lean-to
 sheltering business in cages
 though later
 the gun-runner
 lost millions
 and the glass city rose in earnest

I watched the old buildings fall,
 a new war of shelling.
 We were Japan
 and each monolith
 reconstructed life:
 sofa by the door
 plant by the elevator
 muzak in the fatigue

of return from the mines,
though it was us
who were mined
and diseased,
and we laughed and beatled,
shells
by the elevator
praying we wouldn't crack or plunge
but be taken
non-stop
to our homes
glass-ribbed in a steel casing

Reverie on a mountain.
Disembowel that seed
or die in sequins
of it.

I lay in the present
till quiet
and all my parts
fell out.
Each organ, vein, and tissue
rose in four dimensions,
vibrated off each other,
live in the air,
stretched in the cleansing.

I lifted to sky,
alive in the sun,
and slow over the valley,
travelling through the clouds,
returned to ground.

Spirit touched the parts
and water from dew ran thin.
Forms of grass and trees
infused my breath.
My face and I
rolled over and waited
as my body took form
anew.

SHELLS

Crack the nut
 and lift the pen,
 I move to eat
 and write.
 The shells are cups,
 each nut, a heart,
 a brain,
 a map and mural of my being.
 I cup them
 in the pen flow.
 My hand writes,
 the ink is blood,
 a liquid mirror
 of existence.

There I see we burrow
 like squirrels
 without the wise of winter
 under train tracks, subway lines,
 duplexes, street lamps,
 under high rise art galleries,
 syndicated skies
 of Sydney J. Omarr
 under all the subject matter
 issued in texts and speeches
 all the beings
 we have raised
 and gilt
 and torn
 under and within
 the porous natures
 falling streams
 window light
 moon sprays
 every thistle down
 duck down, bed down
 every fuck and love groan
 every martial art
 and french class
 every language, every comma
 every stage
 of play and canopy
 every path
 a soul follows.

Each nut
each time of year
each hope
 and change of season
each stick
each step
each kick
each breath.

This nut I crack
and pieces lying on the table
like gassed and
herded bodies
I chew to liquid
and could move as galaxies within.
My nostrils,
my being-filled,
spirits
of every living entity.

No, not these shells
on my clean table!
half lives
on backs
on bellies
ghettos
half-blossomed forth.

But I cup each shell
in pen flow,
drink their mirror down,
and each hollow
paints a map and mural
of my being.

I accept.

When the rising
of the moon
is near,
the spray will
raise the corners
clean
and all the shells
will fall
away.

SOLITAIRE

In the moon,
of the moon,
as the goddess of the moon,
my friend, the queen, blessed is she,
comes forth in solitaire
as I turn the first card,
and all along the row
are filled with diamonds
sparkling as the night
when the moon shines,
her majesty of radiating riches,
and only one ace up her sleeve,
hearts.

I neatly place this ace above
the rest and begin my silent game.
The heater burns behind me
as I stalk the nocturnal round.
She does not find her king
to rest against.
I fold the cards back into the deck.
The moon is full
in my kitchen window
over my belly of blood.
Aches of every kind
curse and praise
my sister, my friend,
the moon.

Blood does not sear my belly alone.
The mysterious one reigns
in the ideal of ideals,
queen of stars to the sun,
a kingship.

I replace the deck of cards,
go to sleep.
The stars close their eyes,
diamonds twinkling light years away,
the vast sky
empty, invisible, breathing.

STAR OF INDIA

From Himalayan hands,
rossoula sweet
made of milk
cupped in bowl
succulent after the driving meal
of spice and heat.
A large berry
swims in the juice.

BAGELS

There are two
bodies of power
the one I call freedom
the other death

Would Polonius have called
bagels and cheese a meal,
or pointed to the hole
as the difference between
two realities?

XMAS, 1999

See the jolly fatman
begging stones in red apparel.
He dips and slides
along his well-worn path,
his matted suit flat
in bitter cold.
Air is 'tight
and hard to breathe
these days.
The streets are pocked,
his feet are cold,
his shoes have holes.
In front of Ogilvie's,
he stops.
The doors to Westmount's buying chic
have closed.
Money is dust
in the cradle of the holocaust.
Sheet music plays in
tartan on a music stand.
The man who played the bagpipes
daily at the closing of the store
has died.
Bells jingle.
The streets are crumbling.
The fatman trips on drainpipes,
stumbles on downtown.

Emptiness in the city's orifices
where all the children played.
Wind sweeps.
There is no snow.

TV SONATA

Snow job
mow job
TV does a
good job
titillates
exacerbates
composes a
bionic sonata
fugue in ditch
sitcom concerto
police story rhapsody
variations on cacaphony

In the news
the requiem
lightened by a lullaby
ho-hum
guffaws and snores
close the door
what a bore

DIVORCE PASSAGE

When I came to ask him
why his wife had come to hate him,
he answered: I didn't listen,
and when her shouting
began,
I walked away,
the noise too loud,
her fragile self
too breaking,
my structured ears
too formed for hearing.

When I learned to listen
it was winter
and the ice formed in drops
long and hard
as once I'd loved her
when we were young and beautiful.

By then, she'd formed
a picture
of what we were supposed to be
and seeing my withdrawal as weakness,
prodded a new fever of burning nerve endings,
the lever, our children,
the first dreams,
the broken slipper, and glue.
No, I left. I would not be
bribed, but she
turned the children into piranhas,
snapping, whirling, mad dogs
lonely, frightened, little people.
Gradually she
released me,
not before
she'd paraded
at least
three lovers,
emblazoned their cocks
and compared them with mine.
To survive, I conquered
cunts
though it was a heart
I yearned for,
and arms and hands
to sew me, stitch me, mend me.

There was no healer
in this loose-boned,
splayed organ manipulation.
I died so many times
when birth came
I misunderstood the pain
and cried all the same.

And when I asked him
how the journey into himself
started with his running away,
he answered:

First there was the pattern of not listening,
then came the need for bleakness.
I hid the sun with clouds I stroked to fullness
I mashed blades of grass to shreds,
kicked my shoes and sandals
till the threads showed,
tore knolls of newspapers into thin tapes
that rustled over the floor of my new apartment.
I wished for aggression, war, and bombs.
I would slit her throat
and slice her cunt.
I would bake her thin body
and toast her,
eat her for breakfast.

The nights wore long and hard
and the seasons blended in their cycles.
I consumed myself in pyres of paperwork.
I visited sites, signed documents,
drank toasts in leathery bars
on misty, smoke-filled streets.
Gradually I forayed into shared beds,
legs spread, easy entry, fast escape.
I lurched and huddled, searched and muddled,
returned for crumbs
with emotions flayed
in deep, dark countries.
I grieved.

And when I asked him
 what had led him
 into his own creation,
 he replied:

It was the touch of a feather,
 the dawn of a kiss,
 the brush of the wind on a butterfly's wing.
 It was a morning in May,
 a blueberry muffin:
 some small, beautiful thing
 that crawled inside me faster
 than I could defend myself.

It was at Murray's on Queen Mary,
 a Saturday morning in May,
 after a sombre walk on the mountain,
 slush and melting snow,
 new birds, buds on treetops,
 clouds for rain, approaching growth,
 and a certain form of peace.
 I had driven to eat, but at Murray's
 I cried.
 And paid quickly, lunged to my car,
 throwing myself down on the seat in the back,
 held myself sobbing,
 shaking the car with my groans.
 My feet dangled and body twisted
 with moans, lay and convulsed
 in long, dark tones.
 And first anger, then sorrow died.

And when I asked him
 how re-birth took hold
 and built him anew,
 he answered:

First my need for pain and tears
 drowned by fluttering dreams.
 Habits long formed
 pressed me into darkness.
 I languished for months
 in ellipses of shortened breath.

Then I dreamed one night I saw her
on the way to a ball
dressed in sequined finery,
blond hair chignonned,
reeking of perfumes, slim lines,
and old, old dreams.
Her shoes became golden
and blazing,
the gown drowned me in
matchsticks and razed me,
the earrings swinging caught me
and spun me,
the circles of my loving her,
hating her, leaving her,
wrapped me tight,
and flying in this glittering fire,
loosened around me their burning wires,
began to encircle
large and larger till we flowed
in a sea of waving memories,
now strong, now soft,
reflecting me self to self in every detail.
And languidly enlarging
circle upon circle,
freedom emerged in a series of mists.
I saw myself move
in relation to them,
and partnering the waves,
danced in rippling gestures
of protean hope re-born.
Her figure now stood barely etched
in a fading haze.
I felt drawn to reach for her
wanting her all the same,
oh, that dream, dying at last!
But a hand came and fell between us,
letting her return to dust
and enter another man's vision.

The fire transformed into a suit of gold
and infused me with strength and courage.
It glowed quietly but constantly
as arcs of rainbows and sky lights played
like larks in a moving twilight.
Hummingbirds skittered and twittered in rapture
over a meadow that opened before me.

I beheld wildflowers, herbs, and lush grasses.
The sun was as golden as the aura around me.
I walked, unafraid,
running, laughing, flying, crying,
as waves of freedom raised me
and birds flew over me
dancing on the wind,
my memory sea now invisible,
permitting me liberty.
That dream never died.

I looked at him.
He said:

For either a being is loving,
or is not.
How is love a gift meant for one
and none other?
The purity of love burns a well
in one's heart,
an ecstasy encompassing pleasure and pain,
yet neither.
It is all, is in all,
without prejudice.

We sat for some time
in calm silence where
our souls embraced,
and after a time of quiet communion,
we continued our talk
walking hand-in-hand
in the city of our birth.

THE SOUND OF WIND

I hear the sound
of wind which bends
the trees tied with rope
and howls and yells of men,
this life we lead
separate from the stars.

Ah, the stillness of the city night.
Sarcastic.
Three crickets play.
I watch the leaves of trees
turn brown and shrivel.
The midnight bus roars by,
these passengers
muted alive as wires
strung across the city

And transient songs
stir my bones.
Sways of trees and lilts of scents
rush a high so fine I reel,
drunk with memories
and pain,
a silent ecstasy.

Demolition and construction
break the city's spinal cord.
What is familiar
disappears
into the new century.
Earthquakes will bury the old,
enfold the trusting to its core.

There is no song so ancient as the dawn,
Those who witness it
on mountaintops
wait
for time's breathless promise
to feed our understanding
for the re-making of the city.
The trees are tied with ropes
as they listen to the wind.

THE MOUNTAIN

The gold, low moon
hangs over the cold
tough mountain
cadences
and inclines
rock ledges
and parapets
notched on her face

She looms
a cool tower
a granite bed
a summer force
whirling invisible atoms

She waits
in the equinox.
There are few travellers,
so much the better.

The seeker climbs,
cries as he falls.
In the middle of the mountain
he must find
the lake of all rhythms,
all seasons, all knowledge.
Fish of love and wisdom live there;
golden carp, silver trout,
flaming salmon.
They are clothed in gossamer
so resplendent
his breath dies
on seeing them.
His intellect discounts
their possibility.
Faith leads his ascension.

The mountain watches him
climb her. She is a sphinx
that knows each man
is the pioneer
of his own wilderness.
She waits
as he grasps her,
notch by notch,
under the gold, low moon.