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Moral Standards

draw in the chorus of howls
long fought for release
hiding beneath black robes
and in solemn sermons
caching documents
in god's confession boxes

when the consecrated men were exposed
moral bankruptcy was no longer
in question — delusional
claims of justification
and faith tucked in the dark wedges
between sweaty legs
imagining the neat corners of beds
in school dorms
making the sign of the cross
completing the trip to dorms
because god equipped them
with superior moral standards
that allowed them
to be free of sin

and those who cruise
skid row in Mercedes
don't know why
the destitute child seeks
salvation in the piss-riven streets
a needle dangling from their palm
a fist coiled in sloppy war
crossed-over feet spiked
down with decades of holy sins
while the selection of popes
follows Darwin's theory of evolution

nor do the salvation seekers
know those queens and survivors
carry the weight of the Vatican
in their wombs and rectums
even believing
rape was legitimized by god

it is hard to imagine, even accept
that the purple cocks of priests
were the toys they played with
their Jesus-like entrapment
nailed to their skins
and they smell, not of droplets of blood
dripping from the heart
but the stink of their predators' sperm
crusted in private places

Indian country is full of witnesses
while the city folk spout racist rhetoric
smothering the healing songs
and losing the hope
they can't even imagine

Digestion

sometimes enemies
eat their own fanciful words
to keep wars alive

Vancouver Snapshots

Vancouver parks
busy with pimps pushing
raw deals and bows
ready to sling a needle-full of pleasure
that take down hunter and game clomping
420 speed along piss trails
fronting east-side soup lines
on a bellyful of Chinatown cures

time is meaningless
the day is meaningless
crack-house refugees
sleep away the fix
dream of drag-queen runways
handyman shooting
galleries and decaying
Pickton slaughter houses

the line space between East Hastings
and Robson Street dazzles the glamour kings
riding high on Banana Republic taste buds
but it will never be home
to sidewalk Indians, twisted cowboys and broken women
fixated on billboard pictures and Gucci pretty boys
window shopping as a cruel sidewalk dance
as the beat goes on and on

it is easy to lose one's stride here
just as it is easy to offend high fashion
terrorize it, in fact, with scar-stitched eyes
and knives protruding from hearts barely beating
all it takes is a walk to the other side
betrayal lives on the line
between skid-row
and consumer enchantment

where sushi maidens stare saucer-eyed
at Indians who escaped museums
where cowboys were hung up
on bulls too hard to ride
and where broken women crumbled in their skins
people turn away
ignore that things are real
for fear is a mania of its own

yet there's got to be hope
somewhere in the windy sky
tunnelled between the skyscraper glass
with love-palaces jetting into the sky
blocking heaven's view
canyons of isolation
stifling a society surviving
on feather-light optimism

Vancouver's new-ageism and dirty secrets
are targets for writers like me
the Pacific's knife edge
offers both the exquisite and the hideous
it brims with covert snapshots
in photo albums tucked amid Stanley Park totem poles
the relocated bones of Indigenous populations
and the Chinatown sojourners

the decades of reconstruction
the digging and re-building
hide only the prominent
meant to bury the ugly
and rebuild an attractive mosaic
worthy to sell to the world
and it does
at world-class rates

the influx of Asians is no longer
the slaves who worked the railway
when the colonies dropped
New Westminster as its rose
now they are the ones
who enslave
the Canadian psyche
demanding their place in Canada

the wealth, the symbol, the prestige of freedom
gladiator football stadiums
shining blades of hockey enforcers
Canada Place — the polished jade, the pride of Vancouver
thumps in the hearts of jaw-locking believers
driving them to drunkenness
to madness
driving them driving them

this city full of snapshots . . . snap shots

Guns and Words

these shadow words
blackness between the spaces of teeth
bold and raw barnacles sticking to gums
that make the Canadian stutter
since truth is hidden behind lips
and across this mosaic land
a crop of lies — Canada's
bequest to the world

and I have given my life
I am the mixed blood of contempt
the reminder of the white man's survival in the fur trade
the curse of my original ancestors
yet my mother's people put me on a mountain
so that my own salvation would drip
from the sweat and tears I offered as prayer
to build a future for my Secwepemc grandchildren

no vision was offered
but the words of my ancestors
streamed from my mouth
using the weapon of the white man
to speak the sounds of my blood
into an English-speaking world
because what is believed
is the ink that splatters on paper

even though I am nothing
and have nothing
only volcanic poetry
will you still point a gun at me?

Fear Traps

i

across this land the wanderer
stops or begins at the coast
piecing together a computer-based image
of Manhattan — the city of Picasso buildings
skyscraper mountains raining
yellow piss on Wall Street
on the streets leading to the ocean
where in time past, troops of Native warriors opened
their loving arms, their loving legs to immigrants
where the golden sky of morning
pours hope on the bald heads of white men
who sought western love but found slavery instead

the booby traps of political policy
founded nations for the KKK in the south
and here in the north, white supremacy runs wild
from rattlesnake mouths hissing
at women and Indigenous folk who laboured to
protect those starving and disease-stricken men
when they arrived to give birth
to another imposter European nation
so easily they forgot about their hunger
led astray from the true
meaning of the Two-Row Wampum
stitching a border for Canada and the US

now here in Vancouver —
a jewel for the immigrant eye
the sun goes down on the Pacific
fog paints the city silky grey
shadows of madmen dart in and out
of streets bogged down with
the needles of the homeless
screaming racist vulgarity
because of the displacement of Native warriors
because of the Asian influx
because of the foreign policy
because multiculturalism is rhetoric

this land, this holy land
has implanted cataracts in blameless visitors
given them permission to be bigoted
because no one is good enough
nothing is good enough
except computers
the digital chips forcing
worldwide websites to sizzle
in a brogue of love letters to fill files
of computer-based love alerts
from east to west, and west to east
in a never-ending heartbreak

the fear traps of an ever-distant utopia
at the forefront of every lonely person's thought
of lunatics clinging to fraught hope
as they reach for their lifelines
punching digits in desperation
just in case a warm body is willing to travel
over mountains and prairies and badlands
over swamps and rivers and lakes
doing anything it takes to reach heaven
and when heaven cannot be reached
there is always another warm body
to search for on the rain-slicked streets

or else along gravel roads
leading to mountains of desolation
in the winter's hard grasp
where the wanderer's dream dies hard
where reality is the razor blade
splitting the spirit in two
it is neither spiritual nor significant
it is the mundane business of life
it is the scent of summer death
it is the colour of red leaves in fall
waiting for the white of winter
to end it all