

BEYOND THE
Lighthouse



WINONA BAKER



BEYOND THE

Lighthouse

In this new book from Vancouver Island poet Winona Baker, the rainforest landscape is a pervasive presence. Here the individual spirit survives isolation and the darkness that often seems to overwhelm existence by affirming the universal in the common, the wider human condition in the personal. Baker bridges the separation we experience in relationships with a voice that delights in the comic and celebrates the ordinary. Yet her mature vision never allows us to forget the pain suffered by those who are disempowered. *Beyond The Lighthouse* is an eclectic gathering of traditional, modern, feminist, haiku, and humorous poems.



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BEYOND THE
Lighthouse



WINONA BAKER



1992

oolichan books

LANTZVILLE, B.C.

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for Art
and our antecedents & descendents

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The poem "TV War" received the *Writer's Digest* 100 Poets 1991 Award. The haiku "summer's cold" was awarded a *shikishi* at the International Haiku Symposium in 1986.

Some of these poems were published in slightly different form in the author's previous collections, *Not So Scarlet A Woman* and *Clouds Empty Themselves*.

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*We come to these islands as if to dream
come to trees where we ascend to their growing*

*We come to these islands as if to mystery
come to a sea where voice is song.*

RON SMITH

Seasonal

*For though my ryme be ragged
Tattered and jagged
Rudely rayne-beaten
Rusty and moughte eaten
If ye take well therewith
It hath in it some pyth*

JOHN SKELTON 1460-1592

U.B.C.
MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Even before I arrived
I felt this territory haunted

Images
that should only occur in dreams
are in these walls

Survey this land
from the viewpoint of an eagle

These mountains
(think of them
as mountains)
trees march down

Drop
into the wildness
the needle floor darkness
the sea
to the dream succumb

We must ask forgiveness
not only of people
ask it
of trees and water

FOR JOSEPH CAMPBELL

You the transcriber
of rituals

blissful burning

drawn where windows end
there you fall forward

into ancient green
into fabular forests

you are there
where

sounds shape into music
movements curve into dance
words become story

KWAGUILTH

*Kwaguilth (Wild Woman)
of west coast Indian legends
lives in the forest.
She goes by a variety of names.*

This woman is wild: beware, beware,
Of red-rimmed eyes, of tangled hair.
If you walk her trail—oh you, oh you,
Be quiet and quick—and if you do—
You may not feel a stabbing pain,
Limp as one who was womb-born lame.

Remember the one who threw a stone?
He stands catatonic, won't move alone.
He who tried to burn her out
Takes fits and rolls to put flames out;
Tied she screamed as his whip cracked
Now shingles mark his chest and back.

He who poured poison in her well
Choked at his table and dead he fell.
He who pursued her with a knife
Had his throat cut by his loving wife.
This woman is wild: beware, beware
Of red-rimmed eyes, of tangled hair.

THE WORLD DOES NOT LISTEN

*All great trees link heaven and earth
in a single forest of life.*

LAWRENCE BLAIR

The world does not listen
to a trumpeting silence
nor will moon explain
what she and sun have seen

from a ridged roof
raven in a whacking voice
claims tree and earth

ringed in time
the apprehensive tree
hears the stories of the wind

raven does not know what we believe—
even if he can not see
how we slaughter trees
he will squawk to an empty sky

HUNTING DARK

In an old tree
owl waits for night
the scent of blood

stretches a wing
his outer feathers
serrated

a ten year old walks
beneath the moon
her first menses

feeling
what it is
to be woman

the owl's wings
cut the hunting dark
the hunger

gathered in
Is it this
drowning in feathers

raptor rapture
soaring

who watches us
from a thousand eyes

STILL LIFE WITH CHILDREN

I didn't know what to do
children kept slipping out
by twos and threes

they crawled into my lap
snuffled through my hair
searching for nipples

I stood them against the wall
like gingerbread men
after the first half-dozen

I called them my virgin births
there was so little time

children tumbled
over the floors

grew
and strode
away from the house on long legs

I went through rooms
dug out boxes
their photographs

children with faces
like those you see
on MISSING posters

I put them in boxes
and waited

WIRE HANGER WOMAN

for Mildred Tremblay

Wire hanger woman
lives in the closet

can't resist dancing
to certain tunes

have you heard sounds
like discordant wind chimes
as your key
turns in the lock

she's been known
to switch clothes
well you never asked
what she'd like to wear

switch to plastic
give her away
to the Sally Anne

doesn't mean she's gone
reach in back of any closet
there she is cloning herself

you can see
right through her
no internal complaints
admits she's wired
hates Joan Crawford

wire hanger woman
living in my closet

LANDING

Piscean-eager I
swim toward you
needing

earth-rooted
Sagittarian
you are amused

watch my tail flips
skip on water
in the shallows

I head seaward
make a last
spectacular leap

How the shaft stuns!

OLYMPIAD

Under your skin I know are bones

W. MCLEOD

I would like to dive into your eyes
I would like to swim among your bones
Pause and check the structure now and then
Smooth swings the shoulder ball and socket
Korbut like Olga in the hoops of ribs
Then tumble drop land on hip's round rise
Become a mermaid with grottoes to explore
Then race like a champion over lengths of thigh
Ski down to ankle smooth your tarsus bone
Note heel is hard and round foot firm and then
Return to origin's small pointed arc
That starts the columned rise that is your spine

Climb slowly up that concave convex stalk
Digging phalanges in those spacey bones
I think I could sky dive in your eyes
I would like to drift among your bones

TIME FOR ROSES

Like deposed monarchs these roses
bloom in the empty lot
Shards in a gaping hole
show where a house was smashed
They're going to plant a high-rise
Fav Site Mult Zone Reas Phone
those who look at the land
with eyes gentle as rapists'

Women marched with pickets
reading 'Bread and Roses'
Sometimes I need roses

Gay Amanda
filled every vase with jonquils
I'll gather roses roses
for every room in the house

push through frantic vines
and the wily grass
trying to cover scars
(there shall be survivors)

No, can't gather armfuls
close-up the queen of flowers
bitten mildewed decaying
sick as Blake's
roses bringing them inside
would loose an insect army

Find one nice one to pick
Look
why do I feel guilty

I should transplant roses
give them an arch, a setting
feed them spray them groom them
they should be admired tended
I'd have such roses

He brought Sylvia roses
She and my children are gone
Suddenly I feel tired
offer a poem to roses

SWIMMING TOWARD AN ISLAND

We never broke step
when we crossed the bridge

with one useless arm
we swim
toward the island

We tread water
when we can no longer swim
Someone in a coracle
a cedar dug-out canoe
may come along

believe that
believe
there is an island

CHAMBERS PAINTING
SUNDAY MORNING

for Jack Chambers 1931-78

Sunday
I sleep in

listen to
the sleep-drugged morning

hearing
girl-child

boy-child
sounds

sun squares
line the wall

water runs
the cupboard's full

in this country
there is peace

what is it
that flaws the scene

something whispering
"It can't

last."

CONSIDERING YEATS*

Is stumbling love no longer viable
In this our here, and yet imperfect world?
Now forty-plus, I pause, consider Yeats,
Begin preparations for my death.
We born beneath the same old stunning sun
Are made reflective by twin sister moon.
We know no planet having such as us,
No place where seasons follow as ours do;
Here spring relaxes into summer's heat
And painted autumn fades to winter's white.

The almanac of days shows what is real,
But still we try to reach beyond our grasp,
And gasp at the flare appearing on the screen -
A spacecraft explodes, takes seven in space.

**Begin the preparation for your death . . .
from the fortieth winter . . .*

W. B. YEATS

DEATHS OF THE CLOSE FORMATION FLYERS

In cockpits they guided
jets that traced our skies
their daring caused us
to call them heroes

little red planes
flew so close together
time stopped ticking
till sky space showed between them

steeply they climbed the blue
arcing and falling
men on their way
to becoming holy

white scars
across the sky's blue belly

TERRA INCOGNITA

No, we cannot continue as we were
Though skies be just as blue and trees as green.
Should you have dallied as you did with her?
Should I have ventured places I have been?
No, maybe it was better that we did –
Old habits shouldn't be what tie the heart –
Though bringing out and telling what was hid
Has left us, once so close, now far apart.
Winds blew, tides rose, we were tossed and fell,
And now are lonely, but on firmer ground.
Romance it was that made us try so well;
But words I once spoke other mouths must sound.
Our hands could stretch and stretch and never reach,
We stand alone, each on a different beach.

TAMAGAWA GARDENS

I've come alone
to Tamagawa Gardens

where koi fish shelter
beneath outcroppings of rock
placed about this pool

if you would see them
be still as that dragonfly
resting on a lily

a diving swallow
barely disturbs the surface

the koi fish
stir tentatively
you're no danger

bright movements weave the water
oranges greens yellows
one white as death

I almost forgot
how sickness
moves

you know
you can't stay forever

for now watch
where koi fish
circle like happy thoughts

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

She doesn't sleep
after the documentary
She recalls the death race

wonders how far he can run
his antlered head high
his hip slashed

later,
when the camera zooms in
(we can all be there)

two heads on a rock
lovers sharing a pillow
the contented stretch

purring
she pats his face
licks bloody lips

NEWCASTLE ISLAND: GHOST OF KANAKA BAY

In a southern fleet of islands
there's a language of flowers

she says 'this man is taken'
he says 'this woman is taken'
as flowers from vines and trees
are broken from branches
placed in dark hair

lying beneath flowers
petals on naked bodies
flowering deflowering

A wood-panelled office in
colder Vancouver's Island
'We need the labour—
Kanakas—superb canoesmen
quick and smart around boats
bring them here to work'

(they can't bring their women)

Kanaka works with cargo
pulls on tarred ropes
skillfully handles tools
that can turn into weapons

his last night in the Bastion
he stares towards islands

morning vine round his neck
hangs from an angular tree
a flowerless branch
breath broken

flowers die in her hair

WAITING

The couple
married a long time
live in uneasy truce
waiting

neither cares
for the way the house looks

if he were gone
she'd sell his tools
burn bits of lumber

if she goes first
he'll throw out
books and pictures

won't ask
the family if they want them

solicitously inquire
How do you feel today?

LISTEN WILLY

You say nuns fret not, but of course they do
Whether they're in or outside convent walls.
Never was there born a woman yet,
Who sometime in her lifetime did not fret.
About her weight, her legs, her shape, her clothes—
Her hair oily or dry, and oh her nose.
Things awry with sister, boss, or brother;
Something amiss with husband, or with lover.

Oh yes I tell it true, I cannot fib
Not lore nor learning, even woman's lib,
Can change the fact we fret, we women do.
Why would we not? Consider, men do too.

REMAINS

From old bones
paleontologists reconstruct
extinct animals

I fling
my dry bone anger

you don't know
what's the matter

LET'S

Let's lie a little
choose our words with care
ask questions
listen to the answers
let's
find the days too short
for all we have to tell
let's be gentle
buy silly presents
write notes
give homemade valentines
let's
go walking hand in hand
come back and build a fire
brush each other's hair
let's
shut our eyes and memorize
each other's faces
with our fingertips

let's lie a little—
let's say we love each other

WOMAN IN WINTER

You can get hooked
on a drug of dead flowers
feel you're not here
TV talks no one listens
are you asleep no
resting your eyes no

did I die last year again
it's hard to remember
years roll like gimcracks
on assembly lines

mugger death clean as a
TV evangelist tricking words
hand on the back of my neck
tried to shove my face
into his groin

gulls tear at guts
something dead on a rock
where someone spray painted
 'Fear is your friend'

things are set in motion
tilt of head turn of hip
mouths mooning words
eyes flicking promise

stamen spill bursting birth
(we're often unwanted)
then a flight to outrun
the barbed-wire shroud

life's long lectures look
different names on the program
beneath camouflage clothes
all disguised death
come sweet one come
 dance with desire

sometimes we pause
in our race to the coffin
scratch the sand with a stick

time-placed icons
symbol mandala cross . . .
trying to understand

so many visions
budding

HECATE'S HYMN

I listen just to dead men.
Live men tell you lies;
Their tongues are dipped in honey.
Their eyes are sly and wise.

Dead men have lost their passions.
Their crimes have burnt away.
Fingers force no promises,
Mouths are stuffed with clay.

In moonlight hounds are howling.
Crossed roads I travel over.
Men have mounted horses
And galloped to my door.

YOUNG GIRLS DREAM OF LOVE

Sweetly sweetly
I dreamed of love
it seemed Eden
where we dallied once

I thought if we were parted
I'd get back to you
over miles of land
over Pacific seas

as kestrels migrate
winging with light
or as salmon return
scenting the water

Now it's not
that I can't find you
but there is
no reason to

BEYOND THE LIGHTHOUSE

Beyond the lighthouse
gulls circle the outfall

A happy man
red-flushed as the sockeye
spills his catch on the table
calls, 'Lookit this fish!'

She looks at dead eyes
sea lice bloody mucus

In her black skirt
hips heavy with lunar blood
she walks, fearing red tracks
may mark her trail

Invisible hands
tug at her skirt

She is a cave
where winds are resting

She is the sea
that gave her birth

GETTING THE PICTURE

I am taking his picture
He is in the camera

What the photographer sees
will be in the photo
when it develops

I won't see a heart
Perhaps I should cut off
 his arms
 his legs

If he took my picture
he might
cut off my head

It appears
I haven't been using it

ON MONA'S SMILE

I know what brought
that expression to her face
during one of her sittings
Leo said to her, "You know Mona
you're very intelligent
for a woman."

PUB CRAWL

"Well," she said
"he looked innerested
when I tole 'im
I wrote poems."

"Take me home
with you, lemme
read 'em," he pleaded

He spilled poems
on the bed
riffled pages
discarded words

He had his pants off
jewels bulging
and was tugging at his tie
when he asked her

"You're not one
of those crazy
women libbers?"

"Yes," she said

and like
right out of burlesque
film run backwards

he straightened his tie
jumped into pants
zipped up fly
no goodbye

HAPPILY WITH A TREE

*She fell in love with
and lived happily with a tree.*

Earth Witch ANNE CAMERON

The tree in me
talks of moving on
she settled in
when we were young

we're comfortable
go for walks
she's in my handshake
meeting people

what does she want

the radio said
they found a tree
twenty stories tall

I talk of danger
insects grazing mammals
fallers forest fires

she talks of karma

women need trees
to watch something grow
to learn about age
to realize grounding
to turn into and hide

The tree in me
talks of moving on

HIDING JEKYLL

*You have the Jekyll hand,
you have the Hyde hand.*

GWENDOLYN MACEWEN

Mother thought he'd make
a wonderful son-in-law;
she'd heard Dr. Jekyll was single

He came to tea
crushed my ladyfingers
"You're so cute when you scream"

After the unveiling
we came to mother's house
"I like it all -
except that old thing," he said
pointing at mother

and he turned her
and her stories out

He brought his
female patients into the house
said they'd be better if
they went back in time
when a wife stood
while her husband ate and
no rod was spared

"What a lucky wife
Nothing to do"
His face minimized me

In trees behind the garden
I discovered mother

and her band of
superfluous men and women
runaway children

We wove a wicker cage
crocheted ropes
hid them behind our smiles

We tied
Jekyll and Hyde hands
together

From his cage
he watches us garden

NUN IN HEAVEN

A nun arrived in heaven
found no inhabitants there
it seemed the move
happened some time ago

black-robed
she floated up empty streets
yoo-hooed at intersections
found no caretaker

overall it was tidy
the golden stairs were gone
a few feathers and
remnant clouds remained

a scroll with marks
she couldn't decipher

she pondered her life
there were decades
she couldn't remember
anything happening
except

that September afternoon
when burning the bright leaves
she placed her poems on top

LONG BEACH:
VANCOUVER ISLAND

If words can do anything
they should be able to describe
the way the waves
fling themselves on the beach
having come from faraway Japan

The sand, smooth and level,
looks like some giantess sifted it
ready to roll pastry
Did she bleach and scrub the logs
and cast them
up on the bank to dry

A young man rides the curl of a wave;
has someone placed him there
archetype for the good life

THE WAY BIRDS SING*

I would like to write a poem the way

Steve rode his trike
Helen did cartwheels
Doug played piano
Don read books
Marg told jokes
Art kicked the ball

I would like to write a poem the way
Thor's hair grows
Debbie soars over the high bar
Margie Gillis dances
Ferron sings

I would like to write a poem the way
swimmers who've
tied a rope beneath the bridge
swing over the river and
at just the right time
let go

**I would like to paint the way birds sing.*

CLAUDE MONET

WHEN I'M PERFECT

Someday I'll be perfect
rise at five to jog
a cold shower—meditation
I may levitate

I'll become a vegetarian
lose my beer belly
my hair light, straight
worn in a classic knot

cupboards with co-ordinated linens
gleaming wood reflecting
polished silver, I'll join clubs
with royal names, Greek letters

My children
will speak
of their angel mother
who never raises her voice

I'll think things are pre-ordained
instead of being sure some s.o.b.
with free will is getting jollies
by annoying the hell out of me

Someday when I'm perfect

TV WAR

Those who think war is a video game
and clutch body bags full of quarters
don't mind a killing

young boys hugged their sex
during dim matinees and saw
cowboys shoot ride off on horses
blinked out tryin' to walk'n
talk like John Wayne

'power eclipsing Hiroshima'

Is there a family in hiding
with a pubescent daughter
'I want to be more than a housewife'
her writing pen trembling

Is there an artist
painting Guernica

THIS IS NOT THE WAY TO WRITE A POEM

This is not the way to write a poem
A poem should insist
be heard then be written out
easily or with difficulty
a poem whose time has come

This no subject for a poem
nebulous feelings
Poems should have verbs
nouns—caressing or concrete—
Uneasiness is no theme for a poem

This is not the hour to write a poem
filling time at tag end of day

Given one more day to write a poem
what captures our attention
what sacrifices did we make
where did we journey
without a round trip ticket

WRITING ASSIGNMENT: RHYME RICHE

Can you mind the poetic form
then train your mind to write a poem
Emily wrote a lay about a train
another Emily beat the hound who lay
on her white bed then ran hounded and longing
in her long dress through heather
Rosa asked to sketch where they dress animals
by special permit dressed in pants
waded in calf-high blood where great bulls panted
saw before the cut the calf's throat form a bellow
forms lacking imagination should they mind
mean death
does he mean you can mind a form
then train your mind to write a poem

HAIKU FROM RAINFOREST COUNTRY

spring vandals
have toppled the stone angel
from her pedestal

stone angel gone
from the old graveyard
where is she buried?

young children play
pretending to be adults
oh look out - April!

skinny young men
grouped around the car's raised hood
spring

old cemetery
all the sprinklers going
in the pouring rain

in spiked grass
busy dung beetle
rolls up a world

sad tombstones
weathered old short stories
young men killed in mines

husband and son killed
in the same mine explosion
left to mourn . . .

summer's cold
the fireplace brightly burns
next winter's woodpile

Venus of the dump
a sculpted nude female
wears a red hard hat

on the shelter bench
waiting for the next bus
an empty pop can

a fine September
even yellow jackets drunk
on late blackberries

she boards the ferry
turtled with backpack
lugging books for UBC

three such bright moons
sky water
mirror

autumn illness
has harried me to winter
husband aging too

unexpected snow
has chastened fine November
cold chrysanthemums

deciduous trees
upturned egg whips
stored for spring

Indian wood woman
I know what drove you mad
this endless rain

winter gulls rise
into opposing wind
find their beat turn soar

two cats sit
back to back like bookends
inside the frost-trimmed window

sun polished snow
the black crow circles
a shadow moves

driving at night
headlights part the darkness
not the falling snow

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
LIBRARY

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Winona Baker has won many awards for her writing. In 1989, Baker won an international literary prize for the top haiku among entries submitted from around the world. The Foreign Minister's Prize was presented to her in Japan, and her work was featured on Radio Japan's "Haiku Corner." Winona Baker has previously published a collection of humorous poetry, *Not So Scarlet a Woman*, and a haiku collection, *Clouds Empty Themselves*. Her poems have been published in anthologies and journals in Canada, the U.S.A., United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Japan. Born in Saskatchewan, Winona Baker first published at age eleven. She moved to Nanaimo on Vancouver Island with her husband more than forty years ago.

Cover photo: ROD PALM

Author photo: PAMELA EDWARDS



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