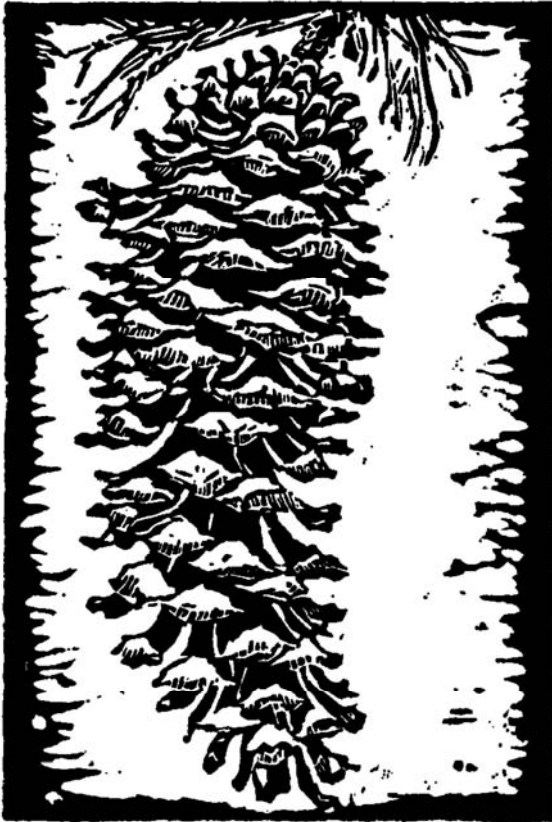


# Elegance of Instinct

By Zahhar



*Journeys Into Poetic Forms*

*Volume II, Series II: Free Verse*

July 2006 – revision 3

***The Unusual Path***

*by Alan Polson*

*Strange this long tortuous path  
Through dark valleys damp with dew  
By twisted trees on high ridge tops  
This unusual path traveled by few*

***At Dusk***

*by Dan Barth*

*At dusk five deer in meadow next to pond  
Looking north I watch them as they graze  
Soaring swallows light the evening haze  
Eyes heart mind and intuition all respond*

**Front Cover**

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Starscape

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## Expanding My Paradigm

**Overview:** It's been four years since I put together my previous free verse chapbook, Volume I of this series. Though I've done a lot of writing during this time, not much of it has been free verse. In fact, excepting three or four poems, this chapbook contains every free verse poem I've written since the middle of 2002. Not having a large selection to draw from, organizing these poems into sections was not easy. So I've ended up organizing them by "feel" more than anything else, though the first section, "Flashbacks", is the most cohesive in that each poem depicts on some level a memory flashback to an earlier period of my life.

Since writing Volume I, I've become more willing to experiment with indentation, enjambment, and imagery. I've always been reluctant to just do what I'm told, and as I got back into writing poetry after eight years spent away from it, a lot of the people I encountered—some of whom were well published and widely respected—told me I needed to format my lines funny, enjamb them, and use concrete imagery. None of these people could convincingly tell me *why*, so I considered their urgings under the fanaticism of *fad*. I intended to explore these things, but as part of my overall exploration rather than as the essential components of "good poetry".

**Indentation:** I think it was the Symbolists who began to use line indentation, or indentational schemes, to create various effects in poetry. The same folks also experimented with extra spaces and tabulations. So far I have only taken an interest in exploring indentation, though not in the dramatic way the Symbolists used it.

I like the effect that indentational schemes can have on the feel of a poem, the way its content is experienced. Indentation of course has been used for a very long time in traditional verse forms to help clarify rhyme schemes and semantic relationships. One such poem that comes to mind is Thomas Campbell's "The Last Man", which uses an elaborate scheme of indentation to help highlight the rhyme pattern. But in free verse it wouldn't be used in this manner at all. As I explored the use of line indentation in my poetry, I found myself attempting to use it to develop visual impressions, create mood, affect flow, and highlight relationships between expressions and ideas.

Content has a lot to do with how I've used indentation. For instance, in "Father" I've used it to escalate the tension in the thoughts and imagery of each stanza, mediating the one-line stanzas between them as a clarifying moment of reflection. In "timelines" I've used it to move through time, the left-most justified lines representing *nowness* of mind, so that what moves above it reflects on the past, and below on the future—the idea was to create a sort of temporal mirroring effect through both indentation and imagery.

In some poems the indentation is arbitrary, the result of playing around with variations until one somehow seemed to fit the poem just right. "Hush" and "The Intertext" are both examples of this.

**Enjambment:** With enjambment I've experimented with ways to juxtapose words and ideas without compromising the complete unit of expression I feel a line should represent. The most solid example of this would be in the penultimate stanza of "Ambivalence", where I juxtapose the visual adjective "white" with the concrete noun "ceiling" between a line break.

For the most part I'm not happy with the effect enjambment has on poetry. It is very difficult to use effectively, in a way that actually conveys meaning and information. I feel this device is often used simply for the purpose of being and feeling in vogue, perhaps because some university professors have overstressed its applicability as a poetic device. I'll continue to explore this device, but not to the detriment of expression, meaning, and structure, and certainly not just to be in vogue.

**Imagery:** The way I use imagery has changed quite a bit over the past four years. In my older poems I felt a strong need to explain my imagery right there in the poem through some correlative device. If I used the image "rolling sea", I wouldn't be able to help myself in defining it in the next line as "human kind". Today I find I'm more satisfied to just use an image and let it stand, allowing the process of interpretation to fall on the reader. This isn't to say that I never relate a metaphoric image to its counterpart, I just do so less often than before, and less obviously.

I've also become more willing to replace expository statements with depictive imagery. For instance, in "Sacrifice" instead of saying, "My lip split from the cold as I played my flute," I tease the matter with imagery: "a cold spring breeze / splits my lower lip / quietly so as not to disturb / the wind in the wood." In the context of the poem, this allows both "wind" and "wood" to represent more than just my breath in a flute.

Although I've come to accept the usefulness of imagery in poetry, I'm still not an Imagist, Surrealist, or any other modern or postmodern "-ist". Imagery is a tool that can be used to create impact, inspire mood, direct mental focus, vivify relationships, and bring readers into the interpretive process. It's a good tool, but a tool nonetheless. It's not the holy grail of poetry.

What's interesting is that the way I would or wouldn't use imagery in the past has not been abandoned, but merged into a broader variety of styles and techniques. The more I learn through study and experimentation, the more ways I have to present ideas and experiences, and the more naturalized these methods become. In a sense all the poems in this collection can be considered experiments of imaginary expression, depiction, and conveyance—of poetic communication.

## Flashbacks

My free verse poems tend toward spontaneous jaunts of reflection. This of course would include reflections on the past. My past has given me much to reflect on, so there's no shortage of material to draw from:

**Father:** What I remember most about my father is his rage, that I was entirely terrified of him. Even when he wasn't exploding like an angry gorilla, everything about him was filled with tension. His neck and jaw muscles always seemed strained to the point of snapping, his eyes full of dark lightning clouds. When I was ten, living with my mother then, his rage collapsed in on itself, and he committed suicide. This poem was written the day after I had a dream about him in May of 2005.

**A Christmas Poem:** Written on Christmas Eve of 2004. I spent that evening alone with my thoughts. Two months earlier I had moved in with my wife, then girlfriend. She was separated and going through a divorce with the father of her two small children. But that came to an end the day after Thanksgiving when she received a call and learned that her husband had committed suicide. I was lying next to her in bed as she took that call. This is also how my mother learned of my father's suicide, and I happened to be lying on her bed as she took that call. Strange parallels, yet not the only ones.

**timelines:** Both parents were abusive in their own ways, one mostly physical, the other mental and emotional. This poem reflects on the injury of the past as what is past, as nothing more than phantoms which—though they still may strike in memory—are powerless to cause further injury.

**Hush:** From age twelve to nearly sixteen I was bounced between psychiatric installations and residential homes as a ward of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court system. Psychotropic "care" began when I was eight, however. There were many staff members in these places, including the hallowed psychiatrists, who told me that I would spend my entire life in the system, forever dependent on psychotropic medication. I ran away about two months before turning sixteen. And I stayed away, period. I remain psychotropic free to this day.

**Protoculture:** As a fourteen year old I got to live with my mother for a short while. During this time the Robotech series aired, and I watched what I could of it. The story fascinated me, even if I couldn't understand it entirely. And somehow I got something from it—impossible to describe—which has stayed with me throughout my life, which I think helped seed in me the strength to eventually escape the life-long institutionalization set in store for me to an alternate future. In the series, "protoculture" was a powerful substance that made everything from "robo-technology" to genetic manipulation possible. It was the prize the humans ("micronians") and the three alien races (a race of giants, a race of clones, and an insect race) fought to possess.

**Dispossession:** As a runaway teenager I hitchhiked all over the Western and much of the Midwestern US. One night in northeastern Missouri I passed the night in an old tool shed. As I began to drift off to sleep I had the strangest, most terrifying experience with some kind of phantom. I've thought of it ever since as "the inkblot demon", because it looked a lot like an amorphous inkblot with thin red eyes and spindly tentacles. I wonder if anyone else has ever encountered one of these?

**The Mother:** I was sitting in a Starbucks Coffee House in the Portland area working on a poem when a mother came in with her infant and began knitting. Usually the presence of infants irritates me instantly, especially when they're noisy—so I was acutely aware of their presence as she sat in a lounge chair a table away from me. But as I watched them interact, and saw the intense love and compassion she had for her child, it dawned on me that she was not like most American mothers, and that this child may not grow up to be like most Americans. Suddenly I found myself writing this poem as I reflected on the disparities between this infant's luck, and my distant misfortune.

**Dreamscape:** This piece could just as easily have gone in the next section since it's a contemplation on the nature of samsara and transmigration. But, as I wrote it I was actually reflecting on my own transmigratory experience, which—from what I've come to understand—is not separable from any other.

**Silhouette:** As a runaway teen I developed the habit of talking to the stars, or praying. My understanding of "god" is a long unfinished process, far from over. I suspect this is the case for most people. This piece reflects on an experience I had while praying in the mountains when I lived in San Jose.

## Father

last night I saw your eyes drip fear  
your jaw set against the coming change  
skin stretched taut across your face

just a memory

though i would one day stand six feet tall  
you towered over me six foot two  
tension rippling beneath your shell

a rumbling sorrow

i scrambled from your massive shadow  
but it stretched in stillness like a sundial  
and i never found the edge

trapped in silence

one day you collapsed sobbing colossal rage  
an explosive end that sent deadly debris  
like pyroclastic flows throughout my life

## A Christmas Poem

I want you to know that I heard your cry  
That night before you passed away  
Into darkness

It was much like a cry I heard before  
Long ago in the corridors of memory  
The night my father died

I want you to know that I somehow knew  
When the phone rang  
And her quiet voice answered beside me

The wind was blowing outside  
I felt it press against the windows  
It presses even now

I want you to know that I hear your sobs  
A sound like a leaking roof  
Collecting in plastic buckets

The buckets are long overflowed  
The roof still leaks after all this time  
A door sways lightly on a creaking hinge

I want you to know that I would have done anything  
If I knew  
Your silence is like that wind outside

I can hear the house settling in the dark  
Weighed with the cold gray weight  
Of your swinging clay

## **timelines**

when you reach today

the back of your hand  
will have no sting

your thin leather belt  
will leave no welts

the rip of your bellows  
will strike no terror

your whetted tongue  
will draw no blood

your scabbard silence  
will pierce no organs

and your chainsaw glare  
will tear no flesh

there will just be a pond  
surrounded by grass

a masked pair of swans  
gliding through their wake

a row of alders  
reflected in ripples

bright white clouds  
mirrored in darkness

## Hush

i remember silence  
walls made of glass  
mattresses of chain-linked steel  
even dreams were impenetrable  
cemented in concrete

you dared tell me  
this is all i would ever know  
poison in my veins  
mold across my eyes  
brittle cracked nostrils

one day strapped to a bed-frame  
i saw when i closed my eyes  
that you weren't so formidable  
your skin fell off in ribbons  
and you choked bubbling blood

years passed  
but i learned to quell your violence  
to relish the scent of tea leaves  
as i sit with the world  
your silence only half remembered

## Protoculture

mysterious and eternal  
    you shot me among the stars  
    folded my mind across the unknown  
    and for the first time  
        i felt the stainless grip  
        of chains and shackles

and i began to tear my flesh  
    bruise my bones  
    crazed with a wordless desire  
    snapping chains against their mounts  
        pain now only a reminder  
        freedom or death

imagination was reborn  
    behind my glaze  
    my soul transformed over and over  
    a veritech dodging heavy fire  
        a guardian swooping the foe  
        a battloid launching wild salvos

somehow i sensed a resonant power  
    a massive generator of hope  
    giant invaders sought to capture or destroy  
    deep in my battle-scarred fortress  
        and ripping free of my blood-caked bonds  
    i reeled and stood my ground

## Dispossession

yes...

i have seen your claws  
razor black talons  
aimed at my mind

i have seen your eyes  
dark red slits in the depths  
of ink blot shadows

and...

i have felt your touch  
siphon warmth from my blood till shards  
cracked from my spirit

yet...

i will never forget  
how you shriveled in terror  
when i called to the stars

## The Mother

I am nowhere to be found  
in those coal-black orbs

Your surprised face fills itself  
with the elegance of instinct

She is absorbed by you  
attentive as the moon

You see no imperfections  
just beauty deeper than sound

I can't remember such a thing  
your heart is filled with wings

She echoes your croons  
you watch her silence

You grip open air  
holding a moment of joy

She bends her boughs for you  
so there is no need

I remember only an avalanche  
an ice-ravaged destiny

You will remember feathers  
a warm bosom like an eaves

She cradles you like a jewel  
as you ponder a thumb

Your world is a steady sea  
and you sway to sleep in peace

Her world is flash and thunder  
but she holds you still as crystal

My world is an unlit cavern  
littered with broken stalactites

## Dreamscape

splinters of lightning split the dark  
a billion thundering flashes  
lifetimes come and gone

death has swallowed  
how many times  
with its gaping fine-toothed maw

a suck of water  
a rush of loss  
oblivion

don't question me  
i have no answers  
but i sense a certain permanence

the shape of lost lives  
enters into me  
splitting my sleep

silhouettes flash in moments  
five shiny black claws tear past my ribs  
and i wake bleeding anguish

did i know that loss  
those claws have taken something essential  
why can't i name the sobs

tissues harden around the tear  
even the wound is blurred with doubt  
by midday

though the memory is lost  
the feeling remains  
swirling in blood-mist

i know i am dead  
i know i am living  
i sense they are inseparable

## Silhouette

a new road  
  like so many before  
an unstriped snake  
  convulsing across the mountains

each bend a heave  
  each rise a toss  
where starless overcast crushes  
  asphalt into shadows

stopped in a dusty turnout  
  boot-steps scuffle and pace  
hidden hands claw the hidden sky  
  driven far from the city  
    deep among shapeless trees  
    grasping and gasping for solace

here prayers cannot be hidden  
  they are pulled from the throat  
ripped from the lungs  
  torn from the belly  
    swallowed whole  
    by subtle unseen sounds

dry leaves crunch  
  twigs pop and snap  
movement scuttles and skitters  
  stirred by a torment  
    sucked from human lips  
    by the wind

in the double-darkness  
  a prayer halts  
buried in beats of blood  
  as a presence nears  
    yet makes no noise  
    rustling only the senses

the prayer turns  
  throws a cone of light  
searching through the oaks  
  and steps away reveals  
    in the outline of a wolf  
    two hollow orbs of light

## Contemplation

What is a poem if not a contemplation of some sort? To me these poems have the most contemplative feel out of those selected:

**Halflight:** I'm probably happier with this poem than I am with any other free verse poem I've written, and there's not much to it. This poem arose from contemplation on the nature of the psyche as I read *The Psychology of C. G. Jung* by Jolande Jacobi. The imagery came from a picnic area I visited one night off an obscure road in Northern California.

**Sacrifice:** There is an oak tree in Gresham, Oregon I like to practice my flute by. It tends to work out that my visits to this tree are at night. This poem reflects on an experience I had just after the oak had opened its leaves for spring.

**sheer:** Lately I've found myself using poetry to explore what I think of as the "interpretive field". This is one such poem. Although I had something specific in mind when I tapped it out, its meaning and significance is for the reader to decide for him or her self.

**house of mirrors:** As I finished reading *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan* by Zenkei Shibayama, I found myself tapping out this little poem.

**sunflower splendor:** *Sunflower Splendor*, edited by Wu-Chi Liu and Irving Yucheng Lo, is a book of English translations of Chinese poetry I read awhile back. It was an enjoyable read, and I felt like I gained something from taking the time to read it carefully over the course of a year. I was compelled to write this poem as I finished the book.

**Condensation:** *The Psychology of C. G. Jung* had my thought processes doing strange things as I read it. One strange thing was this thought that the individuals of a complex cohesive society are actually the result of a sort of psychic condensation effect that takes place through the course of biological and spiritual evolution over long periods, and that we still possess our entire collective past somewhere within us. Suppose this fits well with the concepts of transmigration, too.

**irruption:** Another poem inspired as I read *The Psychology of C. G. Jung*. I was fascinated by the explanation of consciousness as a sort of self-contained sphere that a surrounding personal or collective unconscious could actually irrupt into. Pondering the notion lead me to scratch out this poem.

## Halflight

who can escape  
the sound of water  
a crooked stream  
rumpling in the darkness

oak leaves catch a breeze  
cicadas call amongst themselves  
moths flutter invisibly  
against the skin

but there is ever the water  
absorbing every sound  
reflecting every motion of thought  
from a warbling void

## Sacrifice

a cold spring breeze  
splits my lower lip  
quietly so as not to disturb  
the wind in the wood

this song is past memory  
it fills an asphalt space  
between tall cracked walls  
calling out the leaves

my body begins to tremble  
against the broad high trunk  
which holds up the night  
the wind falls hush

in the halogen light  
tiny oak leaves quiver  
and i notice now the blood  
smeared on my hollow reed

## **sheer**

the dreamer falls  
crashing through patterns of ice  
submerged in crystal black waters

a flash of cold  
sears through the senses  
and life begins

## **house of mirrors**

in the house of mirrors  
vigorously wipe the dust  
from each reflection

then close your eyes  
a hundred crystal images  
echo within the void

## **sunflower splendor**

one by one  
petals plucked and scanned  
the center cracking bare before the sun

broken leaves  
covers pale and worn  
nothing left to shield the falling seeds

names and words  
read with utmost care  
float away from mind like passing clouds

## Condensation

vapors ooze from a black unknown  
shifting places changing form  
currents swirl beyond sensation  
and dreams are set adrift  
wafting like scents through the void

poured from starless reaches  
impulses consolidate in pools  
growing creeping crawling flying  
their primal manifestations  
sprung in tandem from the abyss

color falls from the earth  
moisture grows from the sky  
soils sweep across the sea  
waters erupt into mountains  
fires spurred to consciousness

flashes clear a shapeless dust  
and pink hued lumps of clay  
soak the stormy reign of thought  
stand and stumble struck with awe  
blinded by visions of time and space

## irruption

all in a moment  
reality peels back and reveals  
the unknown...

snowflakes fall to the sky  
boulders drift through a canopy  
rustling leaves as puffy white clouds  
leave craters where they fall to earth

snap to  
eyes open  
reach for balance...

walls breathe in darkness  
linens screech at silence  
ceramic tiles gnaw the legs  
of your trembling bed

grip the sandpaper blankets  
fingernails splintering  
shut tight your eyes...

cold coils around your wrist  
fibers burrow into the skin  
as something parts the covers  
by your recoiling feet

spring from bed  
stumble to light  
shatter the darkness...

nothing but familiarity  
the rumpled sheets  
an unvacuumed carpet  
a flickering heartbeat

## Connections

These poems connect abstracts in some way that has to do with language, the psyche, and/or condition, which can also be referred to as samsara or karma:

**The Terrible Truth:** Over the past six years most of my work with poetry has been in structured forms. This has won me some annoying stigmatizations. I am merely exploring poetry in ways I know will cause me to develop as a poet and writer. Just because I write a few villanelles doesn't make me a formalist. Just because I emulate a few classical forms doesn't make me a classicist. Just because I've spent a good deal of time exploring some of the more structuralist aspects of language doesn't make me a structuralist. I'm just an explorer pushing his way through the vast jungles of poetry.

**Entry:** Where most personal discovery and progress is concerned, I think that we are ourselves the door. I spent a lot of time and energy looking outside myself for the door to some essential personal sense of meaning in life, then one day it dawned on me that I was going about it all wrong.

**The Intertext:** This poem is one of the side effects of reading about language theories, going through the Hubble Telescope Heritage image archive and reading the papers associated with them, and contemplating the nature of the human psyche all at the same time.

**Starscape:** Further side effects of going through the Hubble Telescope Heritage image archive while pondering other things. This time I was pondering the nature of samsara in general. It occurred to me that we humans and other earth entities aren't necessarily the only beings thrashed in the sea of condition.

**Stardust:** Another outcome of my visits to the Hubble Telescope Heritage archive. Here I explored the interconnectedness of all things. The matter from which we're formed once burned in the heart of ancient stars, and one day it will again in future stars. In a sense, we *are* the stars. Kind of a comforting thought to me for some reason.

**Dis-integration:** Somehow I found the spider web a neat metaphor for thought and reason, the fabric of mind. Another obscure connection.

**Reflection:** I found Plato's dialogue *Phaedo* really moving for some reason. For the past several years I've been alternating my reading between Eastern and Western thought because I'm interested in understanding both as best I may. This poem tries to connect Socrates' view of death, which is very much a Western view, to the transmigratory process, which is more Eastern.

**To the Postmodernist:** Though some of the poems in this collection have a postmodern feel to them, this has not become my overall focus in poetry. I like to explore various ways of approaching and conveying content in my poems. And though this has led me to experiment with some postmodern ideas, I don't see how anything fruitful could come of making a postmodern movement one's entire focus in poetry. It's becomes just so much noise after awhile.

## The Terrible Truth

Try not to confuse me  
with the Formalist  
the Classicist  
the Structuralist  
the Neo-something

I am merely an explorer  
a piece of yourself left  
beneath the rain-soaked coals  
of a distant childhood  
campfire

## Entry

For eons I looked for the door  
Searching in deserts and on plains  
Scouring oceans and forests  
From every end of the earth  
To every end of the earth...

Utterly defeated, I gave up hope  
Beat my breast and wailed up to the sky  
Howled, hollered and cried until exhausted  
And on collapsing, realized  
I was in the doorway all along...

## The Intertext

between the lines  
space expands  
and meaning  
collapses in a well  
of spinning density

between the words  
time contracts  
and meaning  
explodes from a point  
of translucent light

signs aggregate  
from the void  
and meaning  
glows in the vacuum  
of inspiration

imagination  
flares like a beacon  
and meaning  
erupts from the silence  
of unknown origins

## Starscape

silence gleams compressed by gravity  
collapsing from the void until  
explosions fan out  
shattering massive veils

clusters burn and swirl in dance  
waltzing throughout the cosmos  
passing merging colliding  
rolled in the stream of being

nebulae ripple twist and stretch  
shaped by raging birth and death  
blue yellow red and black  
colossal comings and goings

half-conscious half-aware  
i remember storms of light  
bursts of life  
scattered across the darkness

## **Stardust**

what particle  
what measure of gravity  
never brillianced the heart  
of suns long since extinguished  
or punched through the hyper-cores  
of ancient faded black holes

what searing pains  
what morbid fetters of flesh  
will remember the cries  
that bore them into the light  
or recall in terror  
malignant growths and broken bones

sometimes i feel my life  
sucked out across the void  
and as i clutch at my breath  
shudder at the looming loss  
starscapes burn through the lids  
when i shut my eyes

## Dis-integration

i touch the fabric of reason  
it stretches stuck to my fingertips  
rips suddenly free  
and recoils to half its shape  
folded and torn

though i long to repair it  
each attempt sends  
filaments spiraling back  
across disintegrating nodes  
which ripple and twist

it was a tapestry of thought  
reluctant imagination  
spun from an emptiness  
that refracted light into color  
shape into meaning

was it meant to end this way?  
now it flails in the wind  
an artifact of memory  
long ago abandoned  
by the grandmother spider

## Reflection

You told the story well Phaedo  
But I fear your dear friend  
Confused the mind for the soul  
Does the woodfire's smoke  
Think of leaves in the wind  
Do the dissipating clouds  
Ponder breathless spectacles  
Surely your dear friend persists  
But who could understand how  
And who could fault your tears  
When a breeze plays in your hair

## To the Postmodernist

your hands wave  
    in a sea of waving hands  
    through dark cold waters  
    amid the swaying kelp  
lost in formation

your voice howls out  
    against rocky cliffs  
    drowned in the crashing parade  
    of white-noise waves  
lost in the drone

your words flash  
    briefly into view  
    on the tops of curling waves  
    a moments notice  
lost in the tide

## Reflections

These are reflections on current or recent experiences, at least at the time the poem was written:

**Unfenced:** Del Livingston was a poet friend of mine who lived in Tucson, Arizona. We met at an online poetry forum in 2003, and developed a friendship from there. One thing I really enjoyed about our friendship is that he took me seriously as a poet, and wanted to learn from me. This made me feel like I may actually have something to offer one day. In the spring of 2005 I visited him in Arizona for a week, which is a good thing since he passed away on September 13<sup>th</sup> the same year. This is one of two poems I wrote in memory of Del. He spent most of his life as a horse trainer, and he felt he had a spiritual relationship with them.

**Braille:** This was inspired as I mused on the nature of communication between two people who are very unlike one another, especially from an intimate standpoint. Sometimes it's not easy to find ways to explore this, hence the scattered nature of the poem's imagery and focus.

**Ambivalence:** Written the day after I had a dream about my step-daughter, Gwenyth. Her father committed suicide in the winter of 2004, and now that I'm married to her mother, I have found myself struggling with an ambivalence concerning my role as step-father. This dream, and hence the poem, is one manifestation of this struggle.

**Disparity:** Leonard Cohen is one of the few modern poets whose more recent work I've come to enjoy. His poems are inseparable from his songs, some of which have found their way to the sound systems of Starbucks Coffee Houses. I'm not much of a singer. I wish I were since I love to sing. So I must content myself with the limited domain of words, leaving the realm of song for another time and place, if I'm lucky.

**Lost:** Written as I pondered human "progress" from what seemed to me the point of view of the Australian Aborigines, or at least from the point of view of that part of my own nature which identifies with what I know of the Aboriginal culture.

**Forward:** I've begun to see a difference between the domain of ideals and the realm of actualities. Ideals are doomed to be shattered like so much broken clay; actualities will remain to be faced and dealt with no matter how much we may romanticize what seem like essential ideals.

**Whitewater:** Further reflections on the realm of actualities. This one is a self-reminder of sorts. Watch the stream, look for the safest way through, stay afloat. It's not easy, but perhaps there's a place in the future where clarity begins to form, and the treading comes easier.

## Unfenced

*In Memory of Del Livingston*

close your eyes my friend and listen  
hear the sound of beating hooves  
your spirit-brothers come to take you home

they have heard the call of your stallion heart  
wild neighs that pawed against your chest  
and now they come to see you home

yes they have heard you realms away  
known you as their own throughout the years  
lifting their heads at the sound of your distant soul

your stallion blood has pounded long  
confined within a human cage  
at last you have broken free

do you feel the wind flash across your mane  
can you sense the creased mountains in your nostrils  
the power that ripples beneath your hide

close your eyes and dream my friend  
no longer can the old pains trouble you  
go now and join the waiting herd

graze where waters wind through wooded vales  
gallop where the grasses stretch and gleam  
nicker in morning mists among your kind

fill your lungs with fenceless air and leap  
when you open your eyes and blink away the sleep  
you will be home again at last...and free

## Braille

run your fingertips  
along my scattered thoughts  
can you feel some meaning  
    some point  
brush against your skin

textures manifest like  
    emotions  
smooth or rough  
    unforgiving  
cracked in the sun  
    wasting with age

it feels like water  
    i suppose  
a million little nibbles  
    of sensation  
striving for notice  
    awareness

i've watched you listening  
    touching sound  
and you've heard me watching  
    grasping at  
colors curves and hues  
    in darkness

if you've ever stumbled  
i've never noticed  
yet wicker weaves have often  
    sent me flying  
in a scuffle for balance

do you make such connections  
    a broken wrist  
but in some foreign way  
    a fractured arm  
through tactile membranes  
    a ruptured disk

here are the particles  
    moments of sand  
sifting shifting drifting away  
    recalibrated  
questions like rivers filled with  
    momentum

here my collected memes  
    whirl through time  
little vortices of ...  
    pulling nylon wires  
until my flesh begins to tear  
    from resistance

brush your wrinkled touch  
across my life  
and tell me if you see  
    some fragment of sense  
in these morbid depths

## Ambivalence

I woke to daylight  
your frail little form strewn across my chest  
crying

What's wrong I asked  
you don't want to be my daddy you said  
through tears

Who told you that  
mommy did but I already knew  
you gripped me harder

Something in my chest tore  
like an old blue tarp weighed with rain  
till it burst regret

I'm sorry I said  
I've never wanted to be a daddy  
our daddies are dead

I know you said quietly  
and pressed your cheek to mine  
my ears warmed with loss

Moments passed through muffled sobs  
and I placed my hand on your back  
across your shoulder blades

Do you know what ambivalence is  
I asked  
knowing the answer

No you said drawing back  
to search my hazel gaze through sniffs  
what is it

It's when you feel two things at the same time  
that aren't themselves the same  
do you understand

You turned to shadow against the white  
ceiling as you pondered  
beyond my focus

Then slowly you smiled  
stark blue eyes glinting in the wake of tears  
I think I do

## Disparity

i've never seen such a cross  
between whisk and wood  
rod and rood

your words portray such  
longing for the very thing  
in your arms

what drove you to spatter  
prolific patterns of thought  
into sylleptic song

was it really the tenderness  
you found beneath blue skirts  
or was it g-ds

no i have a feeling it was just  
the same old question  
that manifests us all

stranger we both wear black  
yours stylish and dapper  
mine rotting and threadbare

and stranger we both bear songs  
yours in starbucks cafes  
mine hushed dead in my throat

## Lost

the sacred markers are gone  
rusted rocks moved aside  
magnificent beech and myrtle cut down  
even once immovable markers defiled  
that cliff face on the east of the valley  
cut for quarry  
that granite outcrop once there on the hilltop  
bulldozed for a mall  
the songlines are lost  
scarred by countless hands  
yellow machines billowing black smoke  
there is no way back to the dreaming

rivers shifted off course  
plains cleared and plowed  
canyons gutted for ore  
fences barb borderless boundaries  
even the clouds are dirty

i once walked the songlines  
heart that i was  
i knew the markers and respected them  
soul that i was  
there in the dreaming before all this  
but i have lost my way  
i cannot find the markers  
how shall i return to the dreaming

everything has been sacrificed  
the way is lost  
all is forgotten  
lessons of the ancients  
guidance of our ancestors  
spurned and rejected  
they weep for us even now  
they walk among us watching  
even they cannot find the markers  
ripped from the earth  
songlines erased for the next ten thousand years  
even they are lost from the dreaming  
wandering among us  
crowding the rooms of our angular homes and towers  
flowing in limpid flood throughout our lanes  
moaning and wailing soundlessly like drizzle  
sharing our torment

the way is lost  
the dreaming lost

## Forward

You've shattered the image,  
marble glass and clay  
scattered like broken dreams.

There's no repair,  
no reconstruction  
for these lost ideals,

Grecian models fragmented  
into rubble,  
jigsaw disappointment.

What is there to save?  
These jagged shards will only  
tear the skin.

Yet there's still the garden,  
paulownia trees in bloom,  
a little brown path.

Please, take my hand;  
let's walk, find a casual pace,  
and leave this waste behind.

## Whitewater

we're caught in a turbid flow  
    you and i  
    and we must learn to swim  
both or die

the banks are high and torn  
    rip-rap roots  
    churn the heaving surge which  
leaves no bar

ahead a canyon booms and  
    we are bound  
    to shoot its foamy rocks and  
shoreless pools

snags menace every feeble stroke  
    trunks and boughs  
    broken into maenad nests of  
tooth and claw

no raft will lift us safely through  
    arms and legs  
    are all we have to navigate this  
wrathful flood

gather up your will and swim  
    peel your eyes  
    watch the movements of the stream and  
tread the wake

beyond this tangled weave of bends  
    we may find  
    a white sand beach of clarity where  
moments rest

## Finalization

Thank you for taking the time to read through these poems. For the most part they're not as coherent as the poems of Volume I, but I think they do represent some growth in other areas. Down the road maybe I'll be able to merge this growth with a greater coherency of thought in my free verse poems, or not. Only time will tell.

Over the past several months I've begun to add free verse poems to my writing cycle. This slows my process down in other respects, but balances out in that I end up generating more material overall. This hopefully means it will take less than four years for me to put together another chapbook of free verse, and that I'll have a larger selection to draw from when I do.

A friend of mine, Alan Polson, suggested the title after reading through a draft of this chapbook; "Elegance of Instinct" is a phrase from "The Mother" on page 13. I have also included a small poem by Alan, "The Unusual Path", inside the front cover.

## Thoughts

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## Thoughts

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## **Contact**

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