

Praise Poem for the recipients of the 2009 Human Rights Awards – City Of Toronto

In your gifts we are already living in another time,
in your presence we feel the shiver of the axis of the earth,
water has its future taste, mornings have their future lives,
they will say in days to come that your shoulders were massive,
they will say we could only dance because you carried us,
you will make these days antique, these days will be antique

our songs can only be sung in gratitude to you Kimberly Murray,
Nia:wen, Nia:wen, Yakon:Kwe,
you mend bones in the wreckage of courtrooms

John Rae, how would we truly know paths without you, how would they be illuminated,
Birchmount Bluffs how could we know the real meaning of shape, of common space,
and you, Committee for Accessible Aids Treatment,
without your caring arithmetic we would be less, much less, than we are

we cannot think of what these days might be without you Ann Buller,
without you Sonja Greckol, without you both and your shining ancestry
of demonstrations, of burned garments, of women breaking out of history's prisons,
how we strive in your impatience for the next shoreline

John Campey, where did you spring from just as we needed your daring,
what glowing place in our minds

Adrienne, it would have been sufficient, that name Shadd, but not for you,
you took the weight of it and added more, wrote down for us our shattering
archaeology of race

Paul Nguyen, on your slender fibreoptics you pull us to a future this city must have,
fail we can't, not on your youngness, not on your springness,
Scadding Court, we balance, on your communal eyebrow, we make it,
it must be said, on your hope.

In your gifts we are already living in another time,
in your presence we feel the shiver of the axis of the earth,
water has its future taste, mornings have their future lives,
they will say in days to come that your shoulders were massive,
they will say this city could only dance because you carried it in your arms,
you will make these days antique, you have made these day antique,
these days will be antique

City of Toronto Poet Laureate, Dionne Brand. Nov.25th 2009