

**Travelling Against  
by Karen Houle**

Give me the common or the rare, as they roll

We are mistaken in what we survive,  
in what we must eliminate.

The ladies at the plate glass persist,  
reviving their brutal martyrdoms,  
worn thin by the abuse of soap,  
the contour of teacups in unison

against smallpox, cosmetic agriculture,  
and wartime rape. And a woman

they believe unrecognizable  
as such.

She is given to volatility around faith.  
Faith in where the unlivable gathers

like thistle,  
like wild yeast's affinity for chance

where sexual impatience bursts from the sudden rise  
like malady. And it is knee-deep

in mustard, in scattered hybrids  
of deliberate imperfection.

Slice through against chronicle. Slip your thumb  
under the seam where the signal tugs  
forward. Pain,

where you grasp it,  
is not what you don't want  
any more

than an uncontaminated vat remains sterile,  
and cannot

Be treated better,  
Or promoted across palate.

Be perverse in your indifference to recommend  
a local history. Keep the virus for study,  
keep this loss of mime. I know

so little,

my arts are often mistaken  
in their assemblies, their lambic filiations  
among grain and tool. But

it is such hands  
as mutate all along the breed,

And travelling against,  
And loud.

(c. Ballast. House of Anansi Press, 2000.)