



is
a
door

F R E D W A H

is a door

FRED WAH



Talonbooks

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Talonbooks

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on america's
fraying wire

's africa
of whose
countenance
as peeled
dis content
signals core
or gated roof
another lust
forever rust

Ordinary Itching Poem in Trans

Just like white gauze
Forget the world

White-headed crows

Only dew,
Therefore grass

Moon meticulous,
The sound of ten thousand branches,
Therefore rivers, pines

The radical
Plums,
In heaven's refrigerator

Late spring, early autumn
Diving or pissing so late at night
A watchman
And bowl of wine
Silence clear as music

Ratio to remember
Axe to handle
Too far off

Sheet Music

for Charles Bernstein

Why did they say eliminate the negative
transparency, don't mess with Mr. In-Between
or pandemony? Sit tight and close low
right down to the maximum, some
latch for an onto, maintaining
a plus from a pulse. Well then
illustrate:

latch onto the nexus while claiming the crux
of the squall. The positive also equals
the page. Ok, I'll take the floor, a
blendable family, double-U-Ay-Aych
aching. Positively, adverb or not
could be more than the accent outside
immigration — who
cares if it does? Doing weather except

why apply for the job if
the hinge isn't broken? I have
stolen the report and now can't find
a door, just when I need one. Even
a sliding door. Side-to-side cloud

thought Noah the dark thought
Jonah what did they do
except wait away and never let
go? My joy's spread, my maximum's
lost interest. Otherwise you'll be other
you know, you'll be background,
and that makes the word
the door with difference:
doored.

The Marlin Seafood Grill

for Laura Barrón

It's called the Marlin for two reasons. First, I had this stuffed marlin of my father's. He got it when he worked in Mexico after leaving China around 1902, before he came to Canada. But I also wanted to call it the Marlin to honour my father's brother, uncle Mah Lin, who was murdered in Calgary in 1900. His death was one of the reasons my father had to leave home in China. Mah Lin was murdered in the spring of 1900 by a young boy, the son of the woman he worked for in Calgary. He was only nineteen years old and my father, that year, was just sixteen. An old Chinese proverb says, "If one who attains honour and wealth never returns to his original place, he is like a finely dressed person walking in the dark." Mah Lin had been buried in Calgary but the family wanted his remains, his bones, to bury him next to his ancestors. At that time there were companies in North America that were involved in the business of returning bodies, but our family couldn't afford to, so they decided to send my father to Canada to get his brother Mah Lin's bones. My father had to work his way across and the first work he got was on a boat going halfway around the world to the Caribbean. But he also liked to gamble too much and he ended up cooking in a restaurant in Mérida in the Yucatán for a couple of years before he earned enough to get passage to Canada. He made it to Canada in 1904 but the Head Tax was so high he ended up without money and had to find work. At first he cooked on the boats around Vancouver. But he also liked to bet on the horses so his gambling habits kept getting in the way of recovering Mah Lin's bones from the graveyard in Calgary. He got involved in a bunch of different Chinese cafes in western Canada and, after he married a white woman, my mother, a cashier in one of his cafes, he never did finish the job he was sent to Canada to do. That was left to me and it wasn't until 1951, a few years after they changed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1947, that I was able to get Mah Lin's bones and take them back to China. I met a few people still living from his family but they were still so poor I gave the bones to the Kwan Family Association, which was happy to bury them in the family graveyard near Canton. But when anyone comes into the Marlin Seafood Grill here in Banff, they think that big fish on the wall is the real name of this restaurant. But for

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Wah, Fred.
Is a door.

is a door

Including poetry projects, a chapbook and incidental poems previously published in magazines and by small presses, *is a door* makes use of the poem's ability for "suddenness" to subvert closure: the sudden question, the sudden turn, the sudden opening — writing that is generated from linguistic mindfulness, improvisation, compositional problem-solving, collaborative events, travel, investigation and documentary — in short, poetry as practice.

Part one, "Isadora Blue," is grounded in the author's encounter with the smashed and broken doors along the hurricane-devastated waterfront of Telchac Puerto, a small village on the north coast of the Yucatán Peninsula. It resonates throughout the other three sections of the book, with its attention to hybridity and "betweenness" — a poetic investigation of racialized otherness — and the composition of "citizen" and "foreigner" through history and language.

Part two of this series of poems, "Ethnogy Journal," written during a trip to Thailand and Laos in 1999, hinges around aspects of "tourist" and "native." Here the poems play in the interstices of spectacle, food and social sightseeing.

Much of this poetry is framed by Wah's acute sense of the marginalized non-urban local "place" and coloured by his attempt to articulate senses of otherness and resistance, or writing the "public self," particularly in the book's third section, "Discount Me In" — a series of sixteen poems from his discursive poetic essay "Count Me In."

The fourth section, "Hinges," is tinted with portraits of the social subject mired in a diasporic mix, a metanarrative trope in Fred Wah's work that began with *Breathin' My Name With a Sigh*.

Characteristically playful and compositionally musical, this is poetry that watches both sides of the doorway: unsettled, unpredictable, closed and open. Sometimes the door swings and can be kicked. Sometimes it's simply missing. Sometimes it's a sliding door.

Wah's poems continually return us to ... the realization of our shared,
not individual, life.

— *Montreal Gazette*

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