

Isadora Blue

♦
Fred Wah

of taste and accent for accident, not taut but keen for



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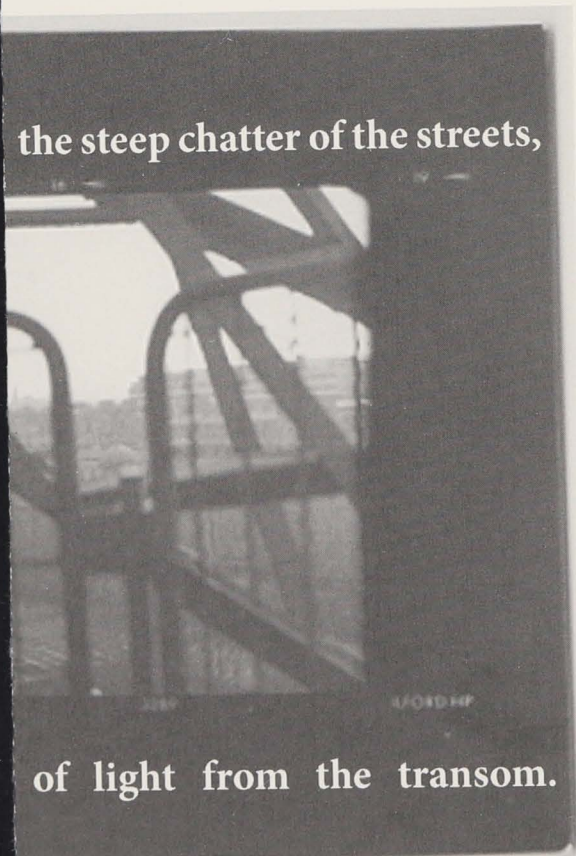
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but sighing says it like the walls of a cage or the coo

live

the steep chatter of the streets,



of light from the transom.

isadora blue

+

isadora blue

*

for my
just be

fred wah

then you : E
just

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ISADORA BLEW and blew the sea the sand the blue
boards sky high waves smashed broke and splintered
shutters white walled water over roof (it's true!) and
filled the floor with beach roar blues but you'd be too
to start the day as blue sky-blue could fool you too now
look at the misery you can see right through poor sad and
lonely one she knows you'll spend your nights alone and
never know how much nobody's missed somebody's blue
yeh! ain't this storm come through my door tellin' you

forwards or
that's old
rocking life
from trike
to chair's got
last night's
ancianos bird
on america's
fraying wire

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

FIVE PEELINGS WAITING

for Richard Baillargeon & Salvador Alanis

1.

After I kicked the wall so hard my leg recovered its
kitchen.

A hinge then a horizontal expression.
Morning just finished what's missing from the
white cafe.

First the agua caliente and then pay up.

2.

He had a touch of Winnipeg.
But just across the park strolled Tinisima's ghost.
And then she longed for the island of untouchable
logging.

Later we'd all get lost.

3.

First fix the word to the thing.
Only the coffee is cold (*dictamen condensare*).
When the plaza is the last still place then.
We'll get back the map of printing.

4.

Next to Gaia is the repair shop.

So we had cerveza, sat back and watched the walls
talk to the city.

The shadows fell behind the shutter.

Between you something's missing—me.

5.

Lost processes of reconnaissance.

Last imagenes.

Lost sentences.

Lost objects 1:30 a.m. the last characteristics.

TRANSLATED ITCHING POEM

Like white silk
Forget the world

White-headed crows

Only dew,
Therefore grass

Moon, the sound of branches, rivers, pines

Dynasty, official, garden, scholar, temple
Meticulous, like ten thousand

The radical
Plums,
In heaven's refrigerator

Late spring
Diving or pissing into the moon
A watchman
And bowl of wine
Silence as music
Ratio of axe to handle
Too far off

WALKING POEM

for Don Gill

You look into the magic ground before each step and feel your grounding cord trailing behind you a tail anchoring you to earth as you shift your gaze to see those parts of the world you were prevented from glimpsing by the laws of sitting still in thought as you circle cinematically in motion these virtual plains of the eyes and your own cellular history there on the pavement or gravel before you maybe grass though not water and the way it flows in comfort not regret the easiest way but this can be difficult the resistance of walking through choice though not always in control of the recording especially the adverb of each step as a past event or even remembering from where you've come needing that and not some other system of positioning your own taste for the global and for this fortress of solitude that ambles an imperfect clock sweeping your music of thinking head down in a pilgrimage of archival thread.

MISTER IN BETWEEN

for Charles Bernstein

Sheet-music – I wanted some of the synoptic
so I stuck out my neck, comma-like
to do attitude was doin' right.

Why did they say eliminate the negative
transparency, don't mess with Mr. In-Between
or scud? 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 downburst blows away, the scene
affirmative by the day. Word's out
what I need to do is mess around
with Mister In-Between.

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 16. An old Chinese proverb says "If one who attains honor 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 who were involved in the business of returning bodies, but our family couldn't afford it so they decided to send my father to Canada to get Mah Lin's bones. My father had to work his way and the first work he got was on a boat going half way 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 1902 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 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 left over from his family but they were still poor so I gave the bones to the Kwan Family Association who were 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 me and our family it's the Mah Lin. We thought of calling it Chinaman's Peak after that mountain in Canmore but people here are still a little prejudiced so we thought it wouldn't be such good luck for business. Besides, seafood in Banff, in the mountains, is a real treat, a

specialty. You gotta do things that are good luck, even if you're not a gambler. Like that umbrella up there on the wall, that's good luck too. My half cousin in Mérida sent that to me; it was her wedding umbrella. She married a Japanese guy and in Japan it's good luck to be married under an umbrella. It's from Japan but the white people here just think we're all the same. Once in awhile, on Fridays, we serve *Marlin à la Marlin*; it's really swordfish but even that's getting hard to find this far north.

DOUBLE DUTCH

I was standing in the doorway
Not doing any harm
When along came the nation
And took me by the
Hinges in my history
The key inside my cock
And gave me a passport
To pass me through their door
Way back in Swift Current
Down by Speedy Creek
Where they gave me a name
And their social numbers
I could never add them up
So it's hard to skip to
Lemon coke soda
Chicken salad lunch
Tell me the name
Of your honey
Bunched up in the middle
Being in between
Caught inside the doorway
Not wanting to be seen
Not in or out
Not on either side
Just a boy scouting for

That big sugar doughnut
Frozen tongue on top
Tell me who's your sweet
Ache at the heart of
Spanish dancer, do the splits
Spanish dancer, kick the door
Along came "stay there"
Part of a little notion to
Keep standing in the doorway
Minding the commotion

JUAN JOSE HE
is valid
he sings
all the way
to Vallodolid.

What's that he said
"polloco"?
Or did he say we saw
the zapalote.

Hey, Man!
he's a buzzard
with his bones
all over his shirt
on the way
to Chemax.

And he speaks fast
the real stuff.
Let's take a taxi
to Tixcacaltuyub.

He says his uncles
are his mother's brothers

saying, singing
with that bottle in his hand
he's ringing.

Wind him up
with movies, books
handsome smile
in his white jipijapa.
Hey, Man!
he's the one
from Mazatlan.

I NEED TO APPLY CANCLINI HERE

I need to apply a soft pedal
for entering and leaving
the dark street of "The Aleph"
lit dim by traditional values
while the valves of Nuevo gringo
capitalize the conversation
languageless in the conversion.

The stem of the familiar local,
that local white shirt there, disappears
as it neons through a door.

I wanted to meet with Mariana
Estrada Castillo. Mestizaje
our own Miss Edge in Nation.
Restore the language of mixed verbs
not the dashboard of codes
designed with intention.

But she wasn't home.
She's reinvested
in the symbolic good.

Hammering
of the jake brakes purr
out on the city limits.
The descent beckons

Coke's winning here.
Come home with the camshaft,
confess to the missing.
Not diet but dying.

LOGGING IN

for Humberto Suaste

We looked for openings along the shoreline or old driftwood rafts where we might get out for a clean cast. Either the alder or small spruce grew right down to the edge or it was a shallow bottom of silt. The only deep pools were under steep, high rocks. But then, at the south end of the lake, just before it emptied into its alpine creek, I found an old deadfall held out of the water by some rocks and relatively steady. It had a few patches of slippery moss here and there but mostly it was dry so I could walk out to the end of it and get a good cast into fairly deep water just above the mouth of the creek. At first I tried a spinner, a "Deadly Dick," but it was a still day and the cutthroat weren't going for it. Then I tried a bobber, six feet of leader, and a fly, a "Coachman." That did it. I pulled about eight or nine out of that spot in less than half an hour. The end of the log was also a good place to clean them, so I did, throwing the offal back into the water so the bears wouldn't start hanging around this log. That log was a partner and I can see its gracious gesture of falling onto the shore as a kind of gift, an imagistic memento of weathered possibility.

ON SECOND THOUGHT

20 Answers for José Teodoro

1.

Yes, as I was driving west on King Ed
through the intersection at Dunbar
in Gladys's Rambler rambled
thought became a "thunk"

2.

I couldn't describe "relaxing"
nor is it sometimes
"stressful" "it"
being an "isness"
a kind of floating referent
just like "there"
and its "arenesses"

3.

If "Memory" really "is a kind of
...renewal" and "change"
is supposed to be at rest,
music at the heart of thinking,
the knock of the name upon the door,

then maybe the liver be a fire
or envy flush, a hand
should be to count on?

4.
The kindling was as wet
as an accomplishment.

5.
Imagine an engine can
take the ra out of "brain"
an instant "bin"

6.
Only beautiful horses
or happy hogs
careful horses
or snappy dogs
ify horses
sniffing for frogs
etcetera

7.

Not so bitter
in a novel
when the protagonist decides
to go on anti-depressants
and goes on to the sudden end
but realizes it's just an ending,
the lyingness of adverbs.

8.

Yes,
my dog isn't so little
but she follows me
just the same as likely
any word would another.

9.

For some reason
I would start at the waist,
though I realize now
that's changed with age;
in my twenties
it would have been
the ankles being

whatever wants to be thin
and held.

10.

You need a nickel
to play the song
so jimmy the lock
to hear Emily sing
carefully an Oh.

11.

To "illuminate" a point
is like turning a planet
into a metaphor,
ineffable into a fable,
just like single and singing
or the lake wood or metal.

12.

I think it was winter
it was raining
perhaps November
(though maybe January
-it depends)
No, I'm unsure

was it in a boat
a rowboat
a wooden one
summer, then
or late summer
just before
returning to school
you know
that time of year
when belief sets in
but an exact time
is what we want of the spirit
or else it's less than more
which makes it spring
a northern spring
hardly there at all.

13.
skeleton Caribbean
full protection suit
first time or first truth
the word coast
looks back.

14.

Same thing:
8-year old logs
stationary
bike.

16.

Counting.
But I have to make up the question.
Yes, you must become a slave
to your own hand over fist.

17.

Not so strange
you should ask.
I was thinking about it
just yesterday, i.e.
where are my father's ashes?
Stone
would be nice.
Words a'scatter.

18.

And greens.

Bok choy

after the Salvation Army.

Family matter.

Remember mouth.

19.

Kootenay Lake.

Creek.

S.

Mouths.

20.

Radio Polanska

doesn't come on

until 4:30

but Deutsche Welle

's ok. Talk

the twin of

Sleep.

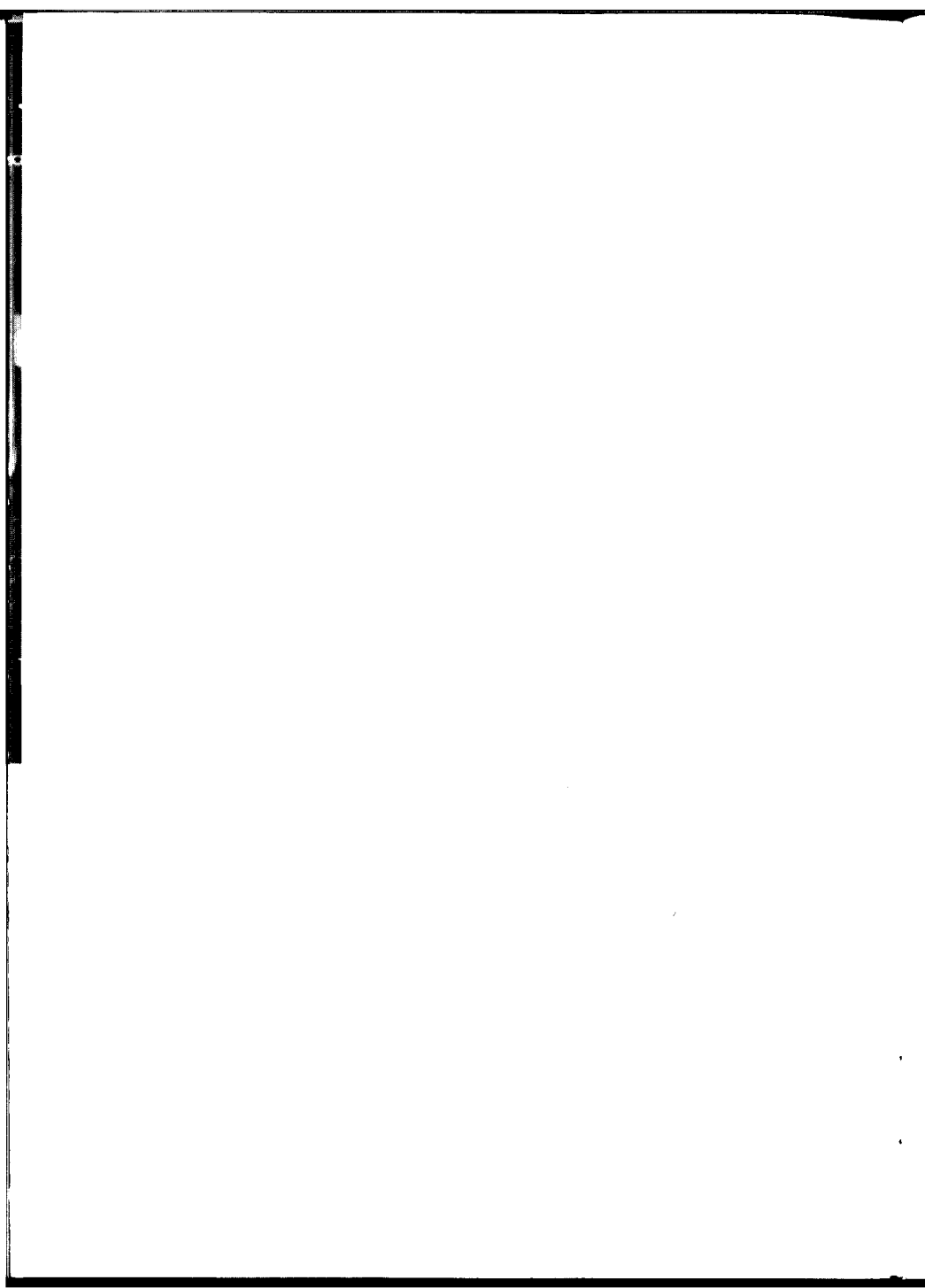
is a door wood
is a door a board
is a door barred
is a door abhorred
is a door locked
is a door shocked
is a door cut
is a door shut
is a door a jar
is a door a lid

is a door nailed
is a door split
is a door fixed
is a door hung
is a door stripped
is a door bolted
is a door supposed
is a door closed
is a door broken
is a door spoken

I WAS WALKING on the beach
after Isadora
at Telchak Puerto
where all the broken doors
are *las puertas rotas*.

Between *puerto* and *puerta*,
The port and the portal
Portage and Main
The Spanglish in anguish
Before and after
The Sass- in disaster
Between the beach and the water

the pandemonium of passage
iterates a constant supercell
of ignition, how to hang on
in a wedge of vortex free from shear
and the siren of echo
how to find the door
to stand in the way
just be there Mr. In-Between



♦

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♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred Wah has published numerous books of poetry. His book of prose-poems, *Waiting For Saskatchewan*, received the Governor-General's Award in 1986 and *So Far* was awarded the Stephanson Award for Poetry in 1992. *Diamond Grill*, a biofiction about hybridity and growing up in a small-town Chinese-Canadian cafe was published in 1996 and won the Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction. His most recent book, *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*, was awarded the Gabrielle Roy Prize for Writing on Canadian literature. He lives in Vancouver and the West Kootenays.

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Wah, Fred.
Isadora blue.

To fall deep into the city, I fell



thick with family wawa, nor

Tsa

first into the advice of the sky, leaning on that tower



racing with skin, or even lipping peeks, since nothing