

BREATHIN' MY NAME WITH A SIGH

Fred Wah

First Draft January 1978





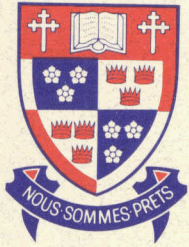
Coach House Press Manuscript Editions are computer line-printer copies of works in progress -- long poems, poetry collections, etc. They are run off and bound up as orders are received at the Press. The compositional date and number of the particular draft is clearly marked and as the manuscript is revised by the author these revisions are fed into the computer and the compositional date and draft number altered accordingly. It is our hope with these editions to allow readers and writers more access to each other during the compositional process.

The Coach House Press, 401 (rear) Huron Street,  
Toronto, Canada M5S 2G5

BREATHIN' MY NAME WITH A SIGH

Fred Wah

First Draft January 1978



**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY**

**THIS BOOK IS A GIFT  
TO THE STUDENTS OF SFU  
FROM  
DAPHNE MARLATT**

I like the purity of all things seen  
through the accumulation of thrust  
forward especially the vehicle  
container maybe / or 'thing' called body  
because time seems to be only it appears  
to look into the green mountain valleys  
or through them to the rivers & nutrient creeks  
where was never the problem animal is  
I still have my own name its what they call me  
'breathin' my name with a sigh'

Story. Father, when you died you left me  
with my own death. Until then I thought  
nothing of it. Now I know its clear cut  
both genetic 'bag' as well as choice.  
I know now I'd better find that double  
edge between you and your father  
so that the synchronous axe keeps splitting  
whatever this is the weight of I'm left holding.

I thought where I came from we grow up  
also only to reach heaven  
and / or what our bodies dictate to us.

Sometimes I remember the 'hinge' too late  
or what we call the 'fence'  
having crossed over it side to side.

Such 'things' and their ideas are 'walls'  
and demand me return into my life  
as the dogs scratch at the door for the warmth there.

I wonder if I can ever pay attention like that  
to my own life and the simple or bare particulars  
of what is it's 'number' without making up  
some other cruel paradigm to swim around in.

I feel the spring in me and the water running.  
But I don't know how it does that or where.

Are origins magnetic lines across an ocean  
migrations of genetic spume or holes, dark  
mysteries within which I carry further into the World  
through blond and blue-eyed progeny father's fathers  
clan-name Wah from Canton moving east across the bridges  
still or could it all be lateral craving hinted  
in the bioplasmic cloud of simple other organism  
as close as out under the apple tree?

I lie here and wait for life again

no one told me this happens

not death but a consequence of it

the physical isn't a world

at least it wasn't

when I ran up the road this morning

out of breath

yet that is what I most desire

Its only information

I mean what leads up to death is.



What's it like to hold yourself in for awhile

settle for that a whole lifetime?

If I don't pass the impasse what'll happen?

Maybe I can just stay here

until thought

settles like dust through the sunshine

giving it all back to me

so I could

just pack up each day, maybe

no one does anyway, at least look like

what they're doing.

What else was there out there in the dark but  
night which has always been and is an answer  
trick presence to the daylight you've seen every day you'd think, heh?  
and not simply everything all over again forever & ever, right?

No foolin I thought I was gonna die  
just about every day so much the mountains  
air clear blue sky & hum broke up  
as pieces each of themselves I was separate from  
larger than life the thought my face all action  
bigger my picture of head arms finders sens  
ation at first something from mother my eyes  
at sleep birth  
swelld up just like the stung finger head  
and that was the first time in McNaughton's  
January 1974 to know its true even  
the enlargement now remember more  
things

Now know why you missed dreaming  
for so long how could you sleep  
in the darkness without the sphere. I believe  
I'd better get back there myself pretty soon  
or shift off the surface each of us lives upon  
for ourselves day to day. Can't get it  
or at least its hard to hold on  
until I think of her and her return  
or look up into the field full of cows  
take the whole thing and run out with it  
from the night into the day with promise  
of at least an echo.

Not so much all of us dying  
or nobody else living or even one  
one shining master of light  
but a procession forth  
into I like the movement  
in our syntax goes  
something like a river Daphne  
so its still 'how' we do what  
and give a punch we hope  
words to take off on us  
will still be the line all of us  
dying to do it the best way we can.

Breathe dust like you breathe wind so strong in your face  
little grains of dirt which pock around the cheeks peddling  
against a dust storm coming down a street in Swift Current  
Saskatchewan or the air walking out into the fields at the  
edge of town with a few pails of water to catch gophers over  
by the glue factory downwind of all the horses corralled  
their shit and hay smell whipped over the grass and the smell  
of prairie water is that it is unmoving water doesn't move  
is stale or even rancid but the air along a prairie road first  
thing on a clear summer sunday morning and in winter how the  
snow smelled like coal when I (must be later in Trail B.C. up  
the alley behind our place my mother needed water to melt on  
top of the wood cook stove so she sent me out with my sleigh  
and a washtub to collect the snow so dirty in the city I always  
scraped off the top few inches before I put my shovel in and  
then packed it into the tub and back to the house and stove air  
hot and steamy rosy pink over the stove my mother what did she  
need that water for I don't know but where somewhere the snow  
smelled like coal or is it back in Swift Current the cold so  
cold it smelled of cold I don't remember maybe we had oil  
there we did later in Nelson and I had to go out into the shed  
and get buckets of oil from a 45-gallon drum for the stove in  
the living room but the shed had a coal bin too coal for the  
stove in the kitchen coal dust even later filling Pearson's  
furnace hopper every two-three days moving it shovel full across  
the basement the dust even later in the summer playing anywhere  
someone's coal bin settled into my nose and the oilyness of it  
on the skin riding down the hill outside the house on Victoria  
on a coal shovel I hit a rock and had the wind knocked out of

me I was dying and couldn't even tell anyone but stood and  
waved my arms and flailed the message without air

Brother then brothers

numbers / age

^a matter

of penetration'

the three of us

someday take that on

each one of us

older

than father

brothers



the first bridge was in Trail  
and it crossed over the first river  
full of fish and it moved with weight  
not speed the first mountain  
a hill of sand and scrub brush  
Ernie's dog Mickey died  
its where Donnie was born  
the Trail Smoke Eaters  
were the World Champions

mother  
somewhere  
remember  
whoever  
forever  
to fly over  
love her  
pleases her  
caress  
close  
careless  
loss  
most  
moist  
remove her  
mutter  
mummer  
mummy  
maybe  
moreover  
habit  
made-up  
puddled  
mud  
cleaver  
pie  
calamity  
dust  
wax  
because of her

house

window

saskatchewan

radio

air

breath

quiet

just

mary

baby

lady

cream

swede

more-to-me

names

remember

corrine

kar en

clean

heart

mother somewhere I remember you flying over me

remembering me in your tummy mummy out side a moist loss

caress & float

## COMING THRU

Jack's Gloucester right beside Dante breaks  
it all up wholly conceived little devils  
evil little critters no two occasions can  
not only identical actual worlds also Gladys  
McLeod says its as goddam scary as saying genetic  
memory genetic apple or remember Carrol's dream  
struck by how clear the stars can be thus words  
the colour of ashwood I'm starting to get it  
out of it Glover says how exciting Lawrence is right  
every worlds / mind

## THE WIND

death stick's tool

each of us the implement

extension arms legs mind

think it out fingers not killing

but planning I've meant to do that

all my life

next spring

I'll go out to the garden

and with a stick

plant myself

and eat me in the fall

outside its snowing  
they're skinning the bear  
its snowing  
a small she black bear  
symmetrical paws

knife

slit  
down the inside thigh  
to the crotch

careening

single sound  
flys from her  
from her  
the snow falls  
from her

flying from her

naked now

bear pig hamstrung, flesh

a little fat (winter)

from her

Flesh, as if  
to eat it up

fresh surface  
hair on my arm

a chunk from yr cheek  
teeth

yr song  
shattered on its own words

words in the mouth  
chew, chew

words which mean  
is are here

taste, broken  
bones

dead fingernails  
hair, screams

he said he wiped his mouth  
on his sleeve.



^We eat

Everything stares back at us.

All this hunger

is what we call the World.'

Words fly from our mouths as leaves

fall to the ground from the trees in fall

wind and rain

(no pain

just a storm at the cave-mouth howling

leaves rasping the pavement

and water

a river of also falling to the mouth

(the Yangtse, the Columbia

Ocean

Ocean Ocean

lick

the shore.

the Shore?

Where does it come from

voice voice mouth tongue creek

move into picture of perfection pan ridge of colorful clothes

sine

not tight sin a little color too

but clear and right / clear and light

especially water, creek, tongue, mouth, voice

voice

Its not enough. I think it should be.

To be able to. That's all I need.

To do anything. Complete.

How does it go? Did it?

I want to know I'd better

what's going on. Or it.

I shovelled gravel today. I hoped

that would be enough and then afraid

I wouldn't be there right then but

somewhere else far away in the mountains alone

I thought working hard in the hot sun

I know how that goes I would just breathe

but away from myself. Give it all back.

this is a gash  
this one's also about breath  
the last five hundred miles  
up a mountain for example  
I have this warning, six toes  
and a mouth three arms  
and a head with hair  
called power  
I wait for the dance to start  
but I know it will  
and end up all turned round  
again slice across  
the size of my head  
much larger up there  
mind doesn't tell me  
how to do anything for myself  
until now it starts, 'time'  
and again, here  
I'll own up to it  
image-works  
spewing out and falling up  
through the sky like houses

the build-up

how I listen to myself try to make it

'hold on'

so that the day remains in the light

the next collision open

and I catch up to the breath

breathing somewhere

the air

as it comes out

ahead of me

'waahh, waahhh'

ok I get a sense of it now  
breath can reach my toes  
I can take there the thought  
and breath goes with it  
simple exercise mechanics  
image disconnected out  
beyond the foot  
remember hw hw  
question and answer remember  
the only bird of poetry  
the night  
Sanskrit 'to breathe'  
out only empties the container  
a handful of dead toenails  
hw hw

as he leaves her  
as he moves  
as he leaves for the whalehunt  
he blows his breath  
into a kelp bubble  
shaped like a small balloon  
ties it and gives it to her  
to hold for him  
until he returns  
or so that she knows he wont  
when it deflates

around her neck

she wears his breath  
or over her bedpost at night  
his breath

(horizon of ocean swells and tides  
something like old sealskin  
strip of seaweed necklace  
box of cedar  
air  
you hold for me  
til I get back)

sounds of o and ree

tryi-, try to make breath

sounds that make (sky)

mine (me) to breathe

(see breath

out in front of you

as a white mist in the cold air

or some school teacher reading us a story

about the arctic and how cold it can get

it was so cold someone's words were frozen in the air

and centuries later when it warmed up

language popped out right in front of them

right out of the air

breath

which makes sound from my body

air which flys out of me

through o and ree

oooooory      oooooory

breaking open as spittle would crackle in the frozen air

(crystal



mmmmmmmm

hm

mmmmmmmm

hm

yuhh Yeh Yeh

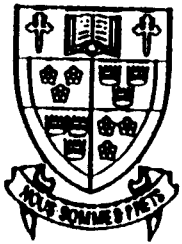
thuh moon

huh wu wu

nguh nguh nguh

w\_\_\_\_\_h

w\_\_\_\_\_h



CLC

**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**  
**LIBRARY**

**SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**

PR 9336 A37 B7 1978

Wah, Fred

Breathin' my name  
with a sigh

