Making a Difference
Canadian Multicultural Literature
Edited by Smaro Kamboureli
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The author of seventeen volumes of poetry including *Selected Poems: Loki is Buried at Smoky Creek* (1980), Wah was one of the founding editors of the avant-garde poetry newsletter *Tish* while a student at the University of British Columbia in the 1960s. Since then he has been at the forefront of poetic innovation in Canada, a poet writing out of a profound sense of place and, under the influence of Charles Olson's projective verse theory, of breath and movement.

Wah was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, but grew up in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia. Following his studies in music and English literature at the University of British Columbia, he pursued graduate studies in literature and linguistics at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where he was editor of *Sum* magazine. He received an M.A. (1967) from the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he was co-editor of *The Niagara Frontier Review* and *The Magazine of Further Studies*. He returned to the Kootenays in the late 1960s and from there he edited *Sree*. The founding coordinator of the writing program at David Thompson University Centre, he taught at Selkirk College until moving to Calgary, where he is professor of creative writing and poetics at the University of Calgary.

"Much of the impetus of my writing," Fred Way says, "comes from the hyphen in "half-bred" poetics—Half-bred poetics as a game of reaction from within the egg-yolk of my own cultural ambivalence (white on the outside, yellow on the inside)." The self-reflexiveness and the complex texture of his writing make for demanding reading. As Wah remarks, I've tried to make language operate as a non-aligned and unpredictable material, not so much intentionally difficult as simply needing a little complication—A little complication for me has always been how to create enough camouflage so that the grand intentions of meaning don't get to name me before I do—Before I do any writing I always stop whatever I'm doing—Whatever I'm doing might make a difference—Make a difference.'

Some of his early publications include *Larseau* (1965), *Mountain* (1967), *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (1975) and *Breathin' My Name With a Sigh* (1981), which includes 'waiting for saskatchewan', the first poem in the selection that follows. His book, *Waiting for Saskatchewan* (1985), won the Governor General's Award in 1986, and includes 'Father/Mother Haibun #4.' Wah explains haibun as 'short prose written from a haiku sensibility and, in this case, concluded by an informal haiku line'. More recently, Wah has published *Music at the Heart of Thinking* (1987), selections from which also appear here, *So Far* (1991), which was awarded the Stephan G. Stephanson Prize in 1992, *Alley Alley Home Free* (1992), and *Snap* (1993). Wah is presently working on a collection of essays on ethno-poetics and has finished what he calls a 'biotext', a prose narrative that deals with racial anger and traces, through many detours and elliptical movements, his personal history.

Waiting for saskatchewan
and the origins grandparents countries places converged
europe asia railroads carpenters nailed grain elevators
Swift Current my grandmother in her house
he built on the street
and him his cafés namely the 'Elite' on Centre
looked straight ahead Saskatchewan points to it
Erickson Wah Trimble houses train station tracks
arrowed into downtown fine clay dirt prairies wind waiting
for Saskatchewan to appear for me again over the edge
horses led to the huge sky the weight and colour of it
over the mountains as if the mass owed me such appearance
against the hard edge of it sits on my forehead
as the most political place I know these places these strips
laid beyond horizon for eyesight the city so I won't have to go
near it as origin town flatness appears later in my stomach why
why on earth would they land in such a place
mass of pleistocene
sediment plate wedge
arrow sky beak horizon still waiting for that
I want it back, wait in this snowblown winter night
for that latitude of itself its own largeness
my body to get complete
it still owes me, it does

FATHER/MOTHER HAIBUN #4

Your pen wrote Chinese and your name in a smooth swoop
with flourish and style, I can hardly read my own tight
scrawl, could you write anything else, I know you could
read, nose in the air and lick your finger to turn the large
newspaper page pensively in the last seat of those half-
circle arborite counters in the Diamond Grill, your glass
case bulging your shirt pocket with that expensive pen,
always a favourite thing to handle the way you treated it
like jewellery, actually it was a matched pen and pencil set,
Shaeffer maybe (something to do with Calgary here), heavy,
silver, black, gold nib, the precision I wanted also in things,
that time I conned you into paying for a fountain pen I
had my eye on in Benwell's stationery store four dollars
and twenty cents Mom was mad but you understood such
desires in your cheeks relaxed when you worked signing
checks and doing the books in the back room of the café
late at night or how the pen worked perfectly with your
quick body as you'd flourish off a check during a busy
noon-hour rush the sun and noise of the town and the café
flashing.

High muck-a-muck's gold-toothed clicks ink mark red green
on lottery blotting paper, 8-spot (click, click)
PREACT THE MIND AHEAD OF THE WRITING BUT STOP TO

think notation of the mind ahead of the writing
pretell the ‘hunt’ message doesn’t run like the
wind simile makes it the belief of the wild
imagination or trees or animals too to preface up
the head ahead but notice the body as a drum­
mer preacts the hands to do to do insistent so it
can come out tah dah at every point simply the
mind at work won’t do or the body minding
itself thinking (which is why the drum’s cedar)
get it right or get it wrong just strike from the
body falling back thoughts felt behind to the
notes sometimes gives it shape or thought as
body too my drum tah dum

NOW I GET TO HEAR THE LANGUAGE RATHER THAN

only see it in French over my head fingers want
to touch the sight of the letter oral tactile
fragment hunger in another language the wolf’s
ear to make it up before it happens to hear it
somewhere inside my body before the lips
touch the mouthpiece or fingertip valves as soft
as silk intelligence like that gets carried in the
language by itself the cow simply eats the
whole field I have to practise to get it right and
blow away anyway

Going through the language of time.

I like the water in it. And the footprints.
That movement. As you look for words
‘sans intermission’.

FROM *MUSIC AT THE HEART OF THINKING*
Of course it’s the heart. Pictograph—
pictogram.

The paw again.

Cellular. Un instant. Je vais voir si je la trouve
dans ce livre.
It’s that ‘yelping pack of possibilities’
the hour as the order.

The predication, the pre-form of foot
in snow, log
on truck, finding out it never was lost,
fooling.

51

Everywhere I go here, here I go again.
But even if I worked it out ahead of time
I’d do it.

I know me. This train
crosses all the Chinese rivers in Canada.
Each one the same world water, the same
trestle, same deep gulley.

In Japan Mt Fuji no more
than a quiet, black Shinkansen tunnel,
out of sight, out of mind.

When Dorn said
the stranger in town
is the only one who knows
where he’s been and where he’s going
I could see Pocatello’s tracks.

Your symbol as ‘accent
to the basic drum of consciousness’ lurks.
St Am stutters and stumbles.
These rails are only half continuous.
tongue mist lip boat brown gull hill town bed stone shadow crow tooth rain boat flood hammer star gill shadow skin hammer mouth town mist hill rock brown bed bird tongue snow creek lip crow circle brown lip wave boat shadow city light hill sky mouth talk snow gull hammer fog moon wet grey stone boat bed mist skin gill word flood crow tongue river mouth star brown lip night flood sail wave sky tooth rock red bird shadow stone snow city blue hammer bed hill crow tongue

Map of streets stream of dreams
map of creeks street of cream, fragments and imago imprint, geomance a glyph, a place on earth, under, or from it.

Name's broken letters maybe words your body made.
Idiot bridges to parts of our selves still lost in the palindrome.

A found chain on the coffeetable,
Some Scapes as a bookmark to automobile between 3 and 6; flex, flux, flooding, fl-

(♂ Creekscape: Looking Upstream)


Creek water hits rock with hollow sound.
Making a Difference

Canadian Multicultural Literature

Edited by Smaro Kamboureli

A landmark anthology, *Making a Difference* offers a wide range of writing styles in fiction and poetry, with a focus on Native and immigrant experiences, ethnic ancestry, and the complex spectrum of cultural differences. It begins with the first ethnic authors who wrote ethnic literature in English, and includes established and new voices that have made a difference to our understanding of Canadian identity.

In the past few years, such authors as Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji, Joy Kogawa, and Michael Ondaatje have won some of Canada’s most prestigious literary awards. Jeannette Armstrong, Austin Clarke, Kristjana Gunnars, Claire Harris, Thomas King, Marlene Nourbese Philip, and George Elliott Clarke among others have attracted critical acclaim and media attention. With the diversity of perspectives its seventy-one authors represent, *Making a Difference* invites readers to think of Canadian literature not in terms of ‘centre’ and ‘margins’, but rather as an extraordinary web of cultural exploration.

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