

Fred Wah



My Horse

I never had
 who carries me
 so secretly
 is dead.

I think
 he bucked
 & threw me
 on a mountain
 at the bottom
 of the path.

O my dead horse
 I never had
 such dreams
 as dreams of you
 not there
 when I ride past.

Acrobat on a Ball

the boy stands
 balanced on a ball
 which does not move

the man
 sits on a blue cloth
 on a blue box
 which does not move

on a hill behind
 the woman
 & two children
 with a dog
 do not move

a horse eats
 on a further hill
 but the eating
 does not move

& the blue sky
 is a blue sky too

behind the last hill
 is not there
 though a man runs
 down a mountain path
 which ends
 when he steps into
 a dark forest

the tall trees hide
 where he runs on to
 & sway in the wind

when the moon begins
 by then

the man is not there

though the moon moves
 behind the last hill
 & the stillness is too

Lardeau / Summer 1964

I said we slept in a shack
 at the bottom of the valley
 watched the sun set after supper
 over an ice field to the north
 an unnamed glacier, then
 the mountains about us
 left white by the moon.

And I said it was a hot day
 where we were I had a headache
 at noon the blue above turned
 to a green blur of moving trees
 the felled log rolled under me
 and we began the afternoon's cruise
 looking at ourselves in the forest.

About the Lardeau?
 There is little to say.
 It is green, it rains
 often, the mountains
 are very beautiful,
 there is a moon at night,
 the unnamed glacier is the shape
 of a bird in flight, with stars
 in its eyes, my logging boots
 make me feel strong
 but too heavy to use strength,
 the rivers and creeks
 flow south to the lake,
 there are mosquitoes, the name
 is Marblehead.

At the end of it
 it was all a dream
 I said from looking up
 up an eighty-foot pole

at lunch and he:
 well, I'll be here all winter
 and the cruising's easy on snowshoes
 though this summer has been a nice one
 gotta get that left shock fixed next time in town

I said
 you must be finishing labour
 at the top of Meadow Mountain
 for she was born at 9:15
 and we neared the top then too
 I had pains in my stomach.

Among

The delight of making inner
 an outer world for me
 is when I tree myself
 and my slight voice screams glee to him
 now preparing his craft for the Bifrost
 Kerykeion he said, the shore
 now a cold March mist moves
 down through the cow pasture
 out of the trees
 among, among

Hermes in the Trees

World word alive
 in the heart circle of the moon
 round and square
 the trees hum and whistle
 the trees bend slightly
 the wind is warm and it moves
 up the valley it moves
 as May 1st has today
 the warm spring advances
 the tops of them crown in the air that moves
 (can their own roots know any of it?)
 O word of the world
 round and square
 give me such graces
 and all accomplishment incline to me
 the blackness and swift flight
 roots held in the dark soil
 bright branches to the sun and air
 in other words the eye of heaven
 consumed by necessity and by its redness
 out through the west wall to my right
 out there in the trees
 as a bird rushes to perch in the moon's limb
 and such a whiteness heard
 that servant and messenger of the inner world
 'the lightning flash that connects heaven and earth'
 out there in the gully the cedar-head that needs
 the cedar-feet out there which wants
 ever to return
 twin-twisted kerykeion
 the warm and dark
 the roots as claws
 under all of this
 moving over
 under

Here

is a dead letter, Mike
 the postal gods there
 are warring
 and the neighbours, they
 spin
 get out in their cars
 rubber
 in our back yards our parking lots our
 garbage cans
 the noises
 are everywhere
 is there a war on
 there is such a storm
 for the cars where will they
 all go to
 our neighbours
 on such a tempestuous night
 a night
 Wait!
 There she is
 see her, on the corner
 thin-wristed twirling her waist
 amulets tinkling, O god
 her earrings
 laughing

The Plan of a Tree

the plan of a tree
 a system, squares
 circles, rectangles
 angles, all round
 spaces, roads, ways
 centres, the plan
 of a tree
 spread out
 the mind of the plant
 growing out of the earth
 becomes a hole
 in the picturehead
 at the boundaries
 it becomes an illuminated hole
 from every direction of the wind
 now it seems larger
 the spread is the gate of earth
 lighted by the luminescence of its plan
 the system of itself
 is larger by the picture of it
 and by the winds of space
 pathways through the branches
 it's only part of the plan
 yet a part
 and looms out
 from the middle of a place
 part of itself
 now part of
 any

On the Earth

On the earth
 namarupa
 and In the world
 arupa
 among the trees among
 the distant lights & stars
 a song
 one endless breath
 each single soul of us
 hearts legs eyes
 flow & shine
 eka
 early one morning
 someone sets forth
 through all of it
 himself, the mountains, creeks
 & many other creatures
 anywhere

Song

My eyes strain against the hillside for a movement,
 a shape, a flash of white-ass fur. I'm on the top
 of the ridge below a grove of poplar. This is
 pretty good. It's clearer here. A view with distance
 and I can see more of the bush, alder gullies and
 old burns. If anywhere, there should be some sign
 here or in the clump of trees above; fresh elk shit
 (steaming still), a warm bed, fresh tracks in the
 snow. I stop for a smoke here, wipe the sleet off
 my glasses and rifle scope, sit on a log.

It begins
 as my own breathing, a rhythm in the chest picked up
 by the blood (pulse), short puffs of white steam
 from my mouth. In this the words come (language
 engraved in the air of a middle silence):

Stand Up

Stand Still

Be With me

Here

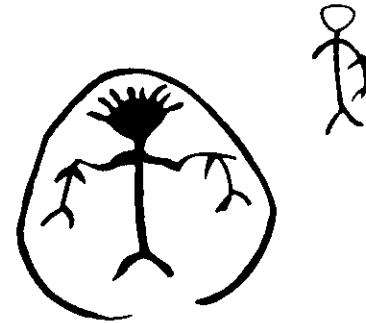
I don't look. Just a blue-white blur of air in front
 of me as I listen hard. Within me, carried by the
 breath, the words speak. They and I warm up to it
 and move now with a song, move nowhere, just sit there,
 now somewhere.

Hey! It Looks like

Hey! It Looks like
 you got a couple ways in there

and a face, me
 no face.

Show me how you do it
 and I'll come too.



nv s ble

nv s ble
tr ck



Not so much

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 it's 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.

Outside It's Snowing

outside it's snowing
 they're skinning the bear
 it's snowing
 a small she black bear
 symmetrical paws
 knife
 slit
 down the inside thigh
 to the crotch
 careening
 single sound
 flies from her
 the snow falls
 from her
 flying from her
 naked now
 bear pig hamstrung, flesh
 a little fat (winter)
 from *her*

We Eat

'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?

Next Spring

next spring
 I'll go out to the garden
 and with a stick
 plant myself
 and eat me in the fall

Bio-Bibliography

Fred Wah was born in Moose Jaw in 1939, moved to the Kootenays as a child, & now lives in South Slokan, B.C. He heads the creative writing programme at David Thompson University Centre in Nelson. Like Lionel Kearns, Wah was trained as a hockey player & a musician. He was a music student at UBC before becoming a founding editor of *Tish*, & he currently plays trumpet with various bands around Nelson. His musical life is important to his poetry – he has often been called the most lyrical of the poets who emerged from the west coast in the early sixties. His verse composition is sustained on ideas associated with jazz, in which the heard figures arrive before the score can be completed. His lines are frugal, even tentative; they remain attentive to the minutiae of process, distrustful of stasis (see his early poem, 'Acrobat on Ball'). He is also resolutely concerned with place, the occurrence of his perception among the trees & snows of the West Kootenays, & the poem's origin in his belly & lungs. He does not want to paint regional scenes, but rather to attend to 'the spiritual and spatial localities of the writer'. He has always been attracted to a Coleridgean exchange of the internal & external; however his focus is not upon sight & mind, but, phenomenologically, on breath. It is perhaps for this reason that he is one of the last of his order to turn to the long poem, which he does with his recent ongoing book, *Breathin' my Name with a Sigh*. It is a sequence of autobiography that takes as its origin not family or place (though they play large parts), but the release of air from the body, & its quick entanglement with primary imagination.

Some of Fred Wah's poetry:

Lardeau, Toronto, Island Press, 1965.

Mountain, Buffalo, Audit, 1967.

Among, Toronto, Coach House Press, 1972.

Pictograms of the Interior of B.C., Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1975.

Loki is Buried at Smokey Creek: Selected Poems, Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1980.

Breathin' My Name with a Sigh, Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1982.

Owner's Manual, Lantzville, B.C., Island Writing Series, 1981.