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The Cinnamon Peeler

SELECTED POEMS

MICHAEL ONDAATJE

The Cinnamon Peeler

Selected Poems

Michael Ondaatje

VINTAGE INTERNATIONAL

Vintage Books

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***For* Barrie Nichol**

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**There's a trick
with a knife
I'm learning to do**

'Deep colour and big, shaggy nose. Rather a jumbly, untidy sort of wine, with fruitiness shooting off one way, firmness another, and body pushing about underneath. It will be as comfortable and comforting as the 1961 Nuits St Georges when it has pulled its ends in and settled down.'

MAGAZINE DESCRIPTION OF A WINE

LIGHT

for Doris Gratiaen

midnight storm. Trees walking off across the fields in fury
aked in the spark of lightning.
sit on the white porch on the brown hanging cane chair
offee in my hand midnight storm midsummer night.
he past, friends and family, drift into the rain shower.
hose relatives in my favourite slides
e-shot from old minute photographs so they now stand
omplex ambiguous grainy on my wall.

his is my Uncle who turned up for his marriage
n an elephant. He was a chaplain.
his shy looking man in the light jacket and tie was infamous,
hen he went drinking he took the long blonde beautiful hair
f his wife and put one end in the cupboard and locked it
aving her tethered in an armchair.
e was terrified of her possible adultery
nd this way died peaceful happy to the end.
ly Grandmother, who went to a dance in a muslin dress
ith fireflies captured and embedded in the cloth, shining
nd witty. This calm beautiful face
rganized wild acts in the tropics.
he hid the milkman in her house
fter he had committed murder and at the trial
as thrown out of the court for making jokes at the judge.
er son became a Q.C.
his is my brother at 6. With his cousin and his sister
nd Pam de Voss who fell on a penknife and lost her eye.
ly Aunt Christie. She knew Harold Macmillan was a spy
ommunicating with her through pictures in the newspapers.
very picture she believed asked her to forgive him,
is hound eyes pleading.

her husband, Uncle Fitzroy, a doctor in Ceylon,
and a memory sharp as scalpels into his 80's,
though I never bothered to ask him about anything
interested then more in the latest recordings of Bobby Darin.

and this is my Mother with her brother Noel in fancy dress.
They are 7 and 8 years old, a hand-coloured photograph,
is the earliest picture I have. The one I love most.
picture of my kids at Halloween
as the same contact and laughter.
My Uncle dying at 68, and my Mother a year later dying at 68.
He told me about his death and the day he died
his eyes clearing out of illness as if seeing
light through the room the hospital and she said
he saw something so clear and good his whole body
for a moment became youthful and she remembered
when she sewed badges on his trackshirts.
Her voice joyous in telling me this, her face light and clear.
My firefly Grandmother also dying at 68).

These are the fragments I have of them, tonight
in this storm, the dogs restless on the porch.
They were all laughing, crazy, and vivid in their prime.
At a party my drunk Father
tried to explain a complex operation on chickens
and managed to kill them all in the process, the guests
having dinner an hour later while my Father slept
and the kids watched the servants clean up the litter
of beaks and feathers on the lawn.

These are their fragments, all I remember,
wanting more knowledge of them. In the mirror and in my kids
I see them in my flesh. Wherever we are
they parade in my brain and the expanding stories
connect to the grey grainy pictures on the wall,
as they hold their drinks or 20 years later

old grandchildren, pose with favourite dogs,
coming through the light, the electricity, which the storm
destroyed an hour ago, a tree going down by the highway
so that now inside the kids play dominoes by candlelight
and out here the thick rain static the spark of my match

to a cigarette

and the trees across the fields leaving me, distinct
only in their own knife scars and cow-chewed bark
frozen in the jagged light as if snapped in their run
the branch arms waving to what was a second ago the dark sky
when in truth like me they haven't moved.
haven't moved an inch from me.

EARLY MORNING, KINGSTON TO GANANOQUE

he twenty miles to Gananoque
with tangled dust blue grass
burned, and smelling burned
long the highway
land too harsh for picnics.
deep in the fields
behind stiff dirt fern
nature breeds the unnatural.

scaping cows canter white
then black and white
along the median, forming out of mist.
rows pick at animal accidents,
with swoops lift meals—
listered groundhogs, stripped snakes
to arch behind a shield of sun.

omewhere in those fields
they are shaping new kinds of women.

A HOUSE DIVIDED

his midnight breathing
eaves with no sensible rhythm,
fashioned by no metronome.
our body, eager
or the extra yard of bed,
econnoitres and outflanks;
bend in peculiar angles.

his nightly battle is fought with subtleties:
ou get pregnant, I'm sure,
ist for extra ground
immune from kicks now.

inside you now's another,
rashing like a fish,
winging, fighting
or its inch already.

THE DIVERSE CAUSES

*for than all erbys and treys renewyth a man and woman,
and in lyke wyse lovers callyth to their mynde olde
jantylnes and olde servyse, and many kynde dedes that
was forgotyn by necylgence*

hree clouds and a tree
eflect themselves on a toaster.
he kitchen window hangs scarred,
attered by winter hunters.

/e are in a cell of civilized magic.
travinsky roars at breakfast,
ur milk is powdered.

utside, a May god
oves his paws to alter wind
o scatter shadows of tree and cloud.
he minute birds walk confident
stling the cold grass.
he world not yet of men.

/e clean buckets of their sand
o fetch water in the morning,
ach for winter cobwebs,
weep up moths who have forgotten to waken.
/hen the children sleep, angled
ehind their bottles, you can hear mice prowl.

turn a page
areful not to break the rhythms
f your sleeping head on my hip,
atch the moving under your eyelid
at turns like fire,

nd we have love and the god outside
ntil ice starts to limp
i brown hidden waterfalls,
r my daughter burns the lake
y reflecting her red shoes in it.

SIGNATURE

he car carried him
acing the obvious moon
eating in the trees like a white bird.

ifficult to make words sing
round your appendix.
he obvious upsets me,
everyone has scars which crawl
into the mystery of swimming trunks.

was the first appendix in my family.
ly brother who was given the stigma
f a rare blood type
roved to have ulcers instead,

he rain fell like applause as I approached the hospital.

takes seven seconds she said,
rapped my feet,
ntered my arm.
stretched all senses
n *five*
ie room closed on me like an eyelid.

t night the harmonica plays,
whistler joins in respect.
am a sweating marble saint
ill of demerol and sleeping pills.
man in the armour of shining plaster
alks to my door, then past.
nagine the rain

illing like white bees on the sidewalk
nagine Snyder
igh on poetry and mountains

hree floors down
ly appendix
vims in a jar.

world, I shall be buried all over Ontario

HENRI ROUSSEAU AND FRIENDS

for Bill Muiysson

his clean vegetation
ie parrot, judicious,
oses on a branch.
he narrator of the scene,
ware of the perfect fruits,
ie white and blue flowers,
ie snake with an ear for music;
e presides.

he apes
old their oranges like skulls,
ke chalices.
hey are below the parrot
bove the oranges—
jungle serfdom which
ith this order
eposes.

hey are the ideals of dreams.
mong the exactness,
ie symmetrical petals,
ie efficiently flying angels,
iere is complete liberation.
he parrot is interchangeable;
morrow in its place
waltzing man and tiger,
rash legs of a bird.

reatness achieved
iey loll among textbook flowers
nd in this pose hang
attered like pearls

is just as intense a society.
in Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot's walls,
with Lillie P. Bliss in New York.

and there too
is spangled wrists and elbows
and grand façades of cocktails
are vulgarly beautiful parrots, appalled lions,
are beautiful and the forceful locked in suns,
and the slight, careful stepping birds.

APPLICATION FOR A DRIVING LICENCE

Two birds loved
in a flurry of red feathers
like a burst cottonball,
continuing while I drove over them.

I am a good driver, nothing shocks me.

THE TIME AROUND SCARS

girl whom I've not spoken to
r shared coffee with for several years
rites of an old scar.
n her wrist it sleeps, smooth and white,
ie size of a leech.
gave it to her
randishing a new Italian penknife.
ook, I said turning,
nd blood spat onto her shirt.

ly wife has scars like spread raindrops
n knees and ankles,
ie talks of broken greenhouse panes
nd yet, apart from imagining red feet,
i nymph out of Chagall)
bring little to that scene.
/e remember the time around scars,
iey freeze irrelevant emotions
nd divide us from present friends.
remember this girl's face,
ie widening rise of surprise.

nd would she
oving with lover or husband
onceal or flaunt it,
r keep it at her wrist
mysterious watch.
nd this scar I then remember
medallion of no emotion.

would meet you now
nd I would wish this scar

o have been given with
ll the love
iat never occurred between us.

FOR JOHN, FALLING

len stopped in the heel of sun,
um of engines evaporated;
ie machine displayed itself bellied with mud
nd balanced – immense.

o one ran to where
is tensed muscles curled unusually,
here jaws collected blood,
ie hole in his chest the size of fists,
ands clutched to eyes like a blindness.

rched there he made
diculous requests for air.
nd twelve construction workers
hat should they do but surround
r examine the path of falling.

nd the press in bright shirts,
doctor, the foreman scuffing a mound,
ien. removing helmets,
ie machine above him
ielding out the sun
hile he drowned
i the dark orgasm of his mouth.

THE GOODNIGHT

With the bleak heron Paris
imagine Philoctetes
the powerful fat-thighed man,
the bandaged smelling foot
with rivers of bloodshot veins
clattering like trails into his thighs:
the man who roared on an island for ten years,
whose body grew banal
while he stayed humane
behind the black teeth and withering hair.

imagine in his hands – black
from the dried blood of animals,
a bow of torn silver
that noised arrows loose like a wild heart;

In front of him – Paris
darting and turning, the perfumed stag,
and beyond him the sun
set in the hills, throwing back his shape,
until the running spider of shadow
clapped on the bandaged foot of the standing man
who let shafts of eagles into the ribs
that were moving to mountains.

PHILOCTETES ON THE ISLAND

un moves broken in the trees
rops like a paw
irns sea to red leopard

trap sharks and drown them
uffing gills with sand
at them with coral till
ie blurred grey runs
ed designs.

nd kill to fool myself alive
o leave all pity on the staggering body
i order not to shoot an arrow up
nd let it hurl
own through my petalling skull
r neck vein, and lie
eaving round the wood in my lung.
hat the end of thinking.
hoot either eye of bird instead
nd run and catch it in your hand.

ne day a bird went mad
ew blind along the beach
nashed into a dropping wave
ut again and plummeted.
ater knocked along the shore.

o slow an animal
ou break its foot with a stone
o two run wounded
ael in the bush, flap
odies at each other

ll free of forest
gallops broken in the sand,
ien use a bow
nd pin the tongue back down its throat.

With wind the rain wheels like a circus hoof,
lims at my eyes, rakes up the smell of animals
f stone moss, cleans me.
ranches fall like nightmares in the dark
ll sun breaks up
nd spreads wound fire at my feet

ien they smell me,
ie beautiful animals

ELIZABETH

atch, my Uncle Jack said
nd oh I caught this huge apple
ed as Mrs Kelly's bum.
's red as Mrs Kelly's bum, I said
nd Daddy roared
nd swung me on his stomach with a heave.
hen I hid the apple in my room
ll it shrunk like a face
rowing eyes and teeth ribs.

hen Daddy took me to the zoo
e knew the man there
ney put a snake around my neck
nd it crawled down the front of my dress.
felt its flicking tongue
ripping onto me like a shower.
addy laughed and said Smart Snake
nd Mrs Kelly with us scowled.

n the pond where they kept the goldfish
hilip and I broke the ice with spades
nd tried to spear the fishes;
e killed one and Philip ate it,
en he kissed me
ith raw saltless fish in his mouth.

ly sister Mary's got bad teeth
nd said I was lucky, then she said
had big teeth, but Philip said I was pretty.
e had big hands that smelled.

would speak of Tom, soft laughing,

who danced in the mornings round the sundial
teaching me the steps from France, turning
with the rhythm of the sun on the warped branches,
who'd hold my breast and watch it move like a snail
leaving his quick urgent love in my palm.
and I kept his love in my palm till it blistered.

When they axed his shoulders and neck
the blood moved like a branch into the crowd.
and he staggered with his hanging shoulder
ursing their thrilled cry, wheeling,
waltzing in the French style to his knees
holding his head with the ground,
blood settling on his clothes like a blush;
his way
when they aimed the thud into his back.

and I find cool entertainment now
with white young Essex, and my nimble rhymes.

She said, 'What about Handy? Think I should send it to him?'

'He's supposed to call in a little while. I'll ask him.'

'He retired, didn't he?'

'Yes.'

She waited and then said, 'Say something, Parker. God to get you to gossip, it's like pulling teeth.'

'Handy retired.' Parker said.

'I know he retired! Tell me about it. Tell me why he retired, tell me where he is, how's he doing. Talk to me, Parker, goddamit.'

RICHARD STARK, *The Sour Lemon Score*

DATES

becomes apparent that I miss great occasions.
My birth was heralded by nothing
at the anniversary of Winston Churchill's marriage.
No monuments bled, no instruments
agreed on a specific weather.
This was a seasonal insignificance.

I console myself with my mother's eighth month.
While she sweated out her pregnancy in Ceylon
her servant ambling over the lawn
with a tray of iced drinks,
a few friends visiting her
to placate her shape, and I
tracing the life lines,
Wallace Stevens sat down in Connecticut
with a glass of orange juice at his table
and hot he wore only shorts
and on the back of a letter
he began to write 'The Well Dressed Man with a Beard'.

That night while my mother slept
her significant belly cooled
by the bedroom fan
Stevens put words together
that grew to sentences
and shaved them clean and
raped them, the page suddenly
becoming thought where nothing had been,
his head making his hand
move where he wanted
and he saw his hand was saying
the mind is never finished, no, never

nd I in my mother's stomach was growing
s were the flowers outside the Connecticut windows.

BILLBOARDS

'Even his jokes were exceedingly drastic.'

ly wife's problems with husbands, houses,
er children that I meet
t stations in Kingston, in Toronto, in London Ontario
they come down the grey steps
right as actors after their drugged four hour ride
f spilled orange juice and comics.
eunions for Easter egg hunts.
ite flying. Christmases.
ll this, I was about to say,
ivades my virgin past.

Then she was beginning
his anthology of kids
moved – blind but for senses
missing *faux pas*, terrible humour,
gifted with a sea of persons,
creaking when necessary
into smaller self sufficient bits of mercury.
My mind a carefully empty diary
till I hit the barrier reef
that was my wife—

there
the right bright fish
among the coral.

With her came the locusts of history—
 nuendoes she had missed
 aried attempts at seduction
 ogs who had been bred
 nd killed by taxis or brain disease,
 ere was I trying to live
 ith a neutrality so great

d have nothing to think about.
owadays I get the feeling
m in a complex situation,
ne of several billboard posters
lending in the rain.

am writing this with a pen my wife has used
o write a letter to her first husband.
n it is the smell of her hair.
he must have placed it down between sentences
nd thought, and driven her fingers round her skull
athered the slightest smell of her head
nd brought it back to the pen.

LETTERS & OTHER WORLDS

'for there was no more darkness for him and, no doubt like Adam before the fall, he could see in the dark'

My father's body was a globe of fear
His body was a town we never knew
He hid that he had been where we were going
His letters were a room he seldom lived in
In them the logic of his love could grow

My father's body was a town of fear
He was the only witness to its fear dance
He hid where he had been that we might lose him
His letters were a room his body scared

He came to death with his mind drowning.
In the last day he enclosed himself
In a room with two bottles of gin, later
All the length of his body
That brain blood moved
To new compartments
That never knew the wash of fluid
And he died in minutes of a new equilibrium.

His early life was a terrifying comedy
And my mother divorced him again and again.
He would rush into tunnels magnetized
By the white eye of trains
And once, gaining instant fame,
Managed to stop a Perahara in Ceylon
The whole procession of elephants dancers
Local dignitaries – by falling
Head drunk onto the street.

s a semi-official, and semi-white at that,
the act was seen as a crucial
turning point in the Home Rule Movement
and led to Ceylon's independence in 1948.

My mother had done her share too—
for driving so bad
she was stoned by villagers
(whenever her car was recognized)

For 14 years of marriage
each of them claimed he or she
was the injured party.
Once on the Colombo docks
saying goodbye to a recently married couple
my father, jealous
of my mother's articulate emotion,
dove into the waters of the harbour
and swam after the ship waving farewell.
My mother pretending no affiliation
mingled with the crowd back to the hotel.

Once again he made the papers
though this time my mother
with a note to the editor
corrected the report – saying he was drunk
rather than broken hearted at the parting of friends.
The married couple received both editions
of *The Ceylon Times* when their ship reached Aden.

And then in his last years
he was the silent drinker,
the man who once a week
disappeared into his room with bottles
and stayed there until he was drunk
and until he was sober.

here speeches, head dreams, apologies,
ie gentle letters, were composed.
/ith the clarity of architects
e would write of the row of blue flowers
is new wife had planted,
ie plans for electricity in the house,
ow my half-sister fell near a snake
nd it had awakened and not touched her.
etters in a clear hand of the most complete empathy
is heart widening and widening and widening
o all manner of change in his children and friends
hile he himself edged
ito the terrible acute hatred
f his own privacy
ll he balanced and fell
ie length of his body
ie blood entering
ie empty reservoir of bones
ie blood searching in his head without metaphor.

GRIFFIN OF THE NIGHT

m holding my son in my arms
veating after nightmares
nall me
ngers in his mouth
is other fist clenched in my hair
nall me
veating after nightmares.

BIRTH OF SOUND

t night the most private of a dog's long body groan.
comes with his last stretch
n the dark corridor outside our room.
he children turn.
window tries to split with cold
ne other dog hoofing the carpet for lice.
/e're all alone.

WE'RE AT THE GRAVEYARD

Stuart Sally Kim and I
watching still stars
or now and then sliding stars
like hawk spit to the trees.
Upon there the clear charts,
like systems' intricate branches
which change with hours and solstices,
like bone geometry of moving from there, to there.

And down here – friends
whose minds and bodies
lift like acrobats to each other.
When we leave, they move
to an altitude of silence.

So our minds shape
and lock the transient,
parallel these bats
who organize the air
with thick blinks of travel.
Ally is like grey snow in the grass.
Ally of the beautiful bones
regnant below stars.

NEAR ELGINBURG

a.m. on the floor mattress.
In my pyjamas a moth beats frantic
My heart is breaking loose.

have been dreaming of a man
who places honey on his forehead before sleep
who insects come tempted by liquid
who sip past it into the brain.
In the morning his head contains wings
and the soft skeletons of wasp.

our suicide into nature.
That man's seduction
who he can beat the itch
against the floor and give in
to love among the sad remnants
of those we have destroyed,
the torn code these animals ride to death on.
They fly on windowsill
white fish by the dock
leaved like a slimy bottle into the deep,
who end up as snake
pecked by children and cameras
as he crosses lawns of civilization.

We lie on the floor mattress
as moths walk on us
waterhole of flesh, want
his humiliation under the moon.
Still in the morning we are surrounded
by dark virtuous ships
sent by the kingdom of the loon.

LOOP

ly last dog poem.
leave behind all social animals
including my dog who takes
0 seconds dismounting from a chair.
urn to the one
who appears again on roads
ne eye torn out and chasing.

ie is only a space filled
nd blurred with passing,
ansient as shit – will fade
o reappear somewhere else.

ie survives the porcupine, cars, poison,
nces with their spasms of electricity.
omits up bones, bathes at night
i Holiday Inn swimming pools.

nd magic in his act of loss.
he missing eye travels up
i a bird's mouth, and into the sky.
eparting family. It is loss only of flesh
o more than his hot spurt across a tree.

ie is the one you see at Drive-Ins
earing silent into garbage
hile societies unfold in his sky.
he bird lopes into the rectangle nest of images

nd parts of him move on.

HERON REX

lad kings
lood lines introverted, strained pure
o the brain runs in the wrong direction

hey are proud of their heritage of suicides
not just the ones who went mad
alancing on that goddamn leg, but those

those eyes turned off
ie sun and imagined it
iose who looked north, those who
rked their feathers to grow in
iose who couldn't find the muscles in their arms
who drilled their beaks into the skin
iose who could speak
nd lost themselves in the foul connections
who crashed against black bars in a dream of escape
iose who moved round the dials of imaginary clocks
iose who fell asleep and never woke
who never slept and so dropped dead
iose who attacked the casual eyes of children and were led away
nd those who faced corners for ever
iose who exposed themselves and were led away
iose who pretended broken limbs, epilepsy,
who managed to electrocute themselves on wire
iose who felt their skin was on fire and screamed
and were led away

here are ways of going
hysically mad, physically
iad when you perfect the mind
here you sacrifice yourself for the race

hen you are the representative when you allow
yourself to be paraded in the cages
celebrity a razor in the body

hese small birds so precise
ail as morning neon
ey are royalty melted down
ey are the glass core at the heart of kings
et 15-year-old boys could enter the cage
nd break them in minutes
s easily as a long fingernail

RAT JELLY

ee the rat in the jelly
eaming dirty hair
ozen, bring it out on a glass tray
olit the pie four ways and eat
took great care cooking this treat for you
nd tho it looks good
nd tho it smells of the Westinghouse still
nd tastes of exotic fish or
aybe the expensive arse of a cow
want you to know it's rat
eaming dirty hair and still alive

caught him last Sunday
inking of the fridge, thinking of you.)

KING KONG MEETS WALLACE STEVENS

ake two photographs—
Wallace Stevens and King Kong
s it significant that I eat bananas as I write this?)

tevens is portly, benign, a white brush cut
ripped tie. Businessman but
or the dark thick hands, the naked brain
ie thought in him.

ong is staggering
st in New York streets again
spawn of annoyed cars at his toes.
he mind is nowhere.
ingers are plastic, electric under the skin.
ie's at the call of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

leanwhile W. S. in his suit
thinking chaos is thinking fences.
i his head – the seeds of fresh pain
is exorcising,
ie bellow of locked blood.

he hands drain from his jacket,
ose in the murderer's shadow.

'THE GATE IN HIS HEAD'

for Victor Coleman

Victor, the shy mind
revealing the faint scars
coloured strata of the brain,
not clarity but the sense of shift

few lines, the tracks of thought

landscape of busted trees
the melted tires in the sun
tan's fishbowl
with a book inside
turning its pages
like some sea animal
camouflaging itself
the typeface clarity
being slow blonde in the sun full water

My mind is pouring chaos
it nets onto the page.
A blind lover, don't know
what I love till I write it out.
And then from Gibson's your letter
with a blurred photograph of a gull.
Caught vision. The stunning white bird
in unclear stir.

And that is all this writing should be then.
The beautiful formed things caught at the wrong moment
so they are shapeless, awkward
moving to the clear.

TAKING

is the formal need
to suck blossoms out of the flesh
in those we admire
planting them private in the brain
and cause fruit in lonely gardens.

to learn to pour the exact arc
of steel still soft and crazy
before it hits the page.
have stroked the mood and tone
of hundred year dead men and women
Emily Dickinson's large dog, Conrad's beard
and, for myself,
removed them from historical traffic.
having tasted their brain. Or heard
the wet sound of a death cough.
their idea of the immaculate moment is now.

the rumours pass on
the rumours pass on
re planted
all they become a spine.

BURNING HILLS

for Kris and Fred

o he came to write again
i the burnt hill region
orth of Kingston. A cabin
ith mildew spreading down walls.
ullfrogs on either side of him.

anging his lantern of Shell Vapona Strip
n a hook in the centre of the room
e waited a long time. Opened
ie Hilroy writing pad, yellow Bic pen.
very summer he believed would be his last.
his schizophrenic season change, June to September,
hen he deviously thought out plots
cross the character of his friends.
ometimes barren as fear going nowhere
r in habit meaningless as tapwater.
ne year maybe he would come and sit
or four months and not write a word down
ould sit and investigate colours, the
sects in the room with him.

hat he brought: a typewriter
ns of ginger ale, cigarettes. A copy of *Strangelove*,
f *The Intervals*, a postcard of Rousseau's *The Dream*.
is friends' words were strict as lightning
nclothing the bark of a tree, a shaved hook.
he postcard was a test pattern by the window
rough which he saw growing scenery.

ventually the room was a time machine for him.
e closed the rotting door, sat down
ought pieces of history. The first girl

ho in a park near his school
ut a warm hand into his trousers
nbuttoning and finally catching the spill
cross her wrist, he in the maze of her skirt.
he later played the piano
hen he had tea with the parents.
e remembered that surprised—
e had forgotten for so long.
nder raincoats in the park on hot days.

he summers were layers of civilization in his memory
ey were old photographs he didn't look at anymore
or girls in them were chubby not as perfect as in his mind
nd his ungovernable hair was shaved to the edge of skin.
is friends leaned on bicycles
ere 16 and tried to look 21
ie cigarettes too big for their faces.
ie could read those characters easily
ndisguised as wedding pictures.
ie could hardly remember their names
ough they had talked all day, exchanged styles
nd like dogs on a lawn hung around the houses of girls.

ex a game of targets, of throwing firecrackers
t a couple in a field locked in hand-made orgasms,
nging dramatically in someone's ear along with the record
How do you think I feel / you know our love's not real
he one you're made about / Is just a gad-about
ow do you think I feel'.
ie saw all that complex tension the way his children would.

here is one picture that fuses the five summers.
ight of them are leaning against a wall
rms around each other
ooking into the camera and the sun
ying to smile at the unseen adult photographer

ying against the glare to look 21 and confident.
he summer and friendship will last forever.
xcept one who was eating an apple. That was him
blivious to the significance of the moment.
ow he hungers to have that arm around the next shoulder.
he wretched apple is fresh and white.

ince he began burning hills
ie Shell strip has taken effect.
wasp is crawling on the floor
umbling over, its motor fanatic.
e has smoked 5 cigarettes.
e has written slowly and carefully
ith great love and great coldness.
hen he finishes he will go back
unting for the lies that are obvious.

CHARLES DARWIN PAYS A VISIT,
DECEMBER 1971

iew of the coast of Brazil.
man stood up to shout
t the image of a sailing ship
hich was a vast white bird from over the sea
ow ripping its claws into the ocean.
aded hills of March
ainted during the cold morning.
n board ship Charles Darwin sketched clouds.

ne of these days the Prime Mover will
aint the Prime Mover out of his sky.
want a ... centuries being displaced
.. faith

23rd of June, 1832.

He caught sixty-eight species
of a particularly minute beetle.

he blue thick leaves who greeted him
nimals unconscious of celebration
oved slowly into law.
dam with a watch.
ook past and future, (*I want a ...*),
ase our way out of the structures
his smell of the cogs
nd diamonds we live in.

am waiting for a new ship, so new
e will think the lush machine
n animal of God.
/eary from travelling over the air and the water

will sink to its feet at our door.

THE VAULT

aving to put forward candidates for God
nominate Henri Rousseau and Dr Bucke,
red of the lizard paradise
hose image banks renew off the flesh of others
those stories that hate, which are remnants and insults.
efresh where plants breed to the edge of dream.

have woken to find myself covered in white sheets
alls and doors, food.
here was no food in the world I left
here I ate the rich air. The bodies of small birds
ho died while flying fell into my mouth.
ruit dripped through our thirst to the earth.

ll night the traffic of apes floats across the sky
worm walks through the gaze of a lion
ome birds live all their evenings on one branch.

hey are held by the celebration of God's wife.
i Rousseau's *The Dream* she is the naked lady
ho has been animal and tree
er breast a suckled orange.
he fibres and fluids of their moral nature
ave seeped within her frame.

he hand is outstretched
er fingers move out in
utual transfusion to the place.
ur low speaking last night
as barely audible among the grunt
f mongrel meditation.

he looks to the left
or that is the direction we leave in
then we fall from her room of flowers.

WHITE DWARFS

his is for people who disappear
or those who descend into the code
and make their room a fridge for Superman
who exhaust costume and bones that could perform flight,
who shave their moral so raw
they can tear themselves through the eye of a needle
his is for those people
that hover and hover
and die in the ether peripheries

here is my fear
of no words of
telling without words
over and over of
betraying the silence
/why do I love most
among my heroes those
who sail to that perfect edge
where there is no social fuel
release of sandbags
to understand their altitude—

that silence of the third cross
3rd man hung so high and lonely
we don't hear him say
say his pain, say his unbrotherhood
What has he to do with the smell of ladies,
can they eat off his skeleton of pain?

the Gurkhas in Malaya
at the tongues of mules
to they were silent beasts of burden

in enemy territories
after such cruelty what could they speak of anyway
and Dashiell Hammett in success
offered conversation and moved
to the perfect white between the words

this white that can grow
in the fridge, bed,
in an egg – most beautiful
when unbroken, where
what we cannot see is growing
in all the colours we cannot see

there are those burned out stars
who implode into silence
after parading in the sky
after such choreography what would they wish to speak of anyway

‘Newly arrived and totally ignorant of the Levantine languages, Marco Polo could express himself only with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder and of horror, animal barkings or hootings, or with objects he took from his knapsacks – ostrich plumes, pea-shooters, quartzes – which he arranged in front of him ...’

ITALO CALVINO

**THE AGATHA CHRISTIE BOOKS
BY THE WINDOW**

in the long open Vancouver Island room
tting by the indoor avocados
here indoor spring light
ills on the half covered bulbs

nd down the long room light falling
nto the dwarf orange tree
ines from south america
ie agatha christie books by the window

ameless morning
olution of grain and colour

here is this light,
olourless, which falls on the warm
retching brain of the bulb
iat is dreaming avocado

COUNTRY NIGHT

he bathroom light burns over the mirror

in the blackness of the house
beds groan from the day's exhaustion
and old the tired shoulders bruised
and cut legs the unexpected
a.m. erections. Someone's dream
involves a saw someone's
dream involves a woman.
We have all dreamed of finding the lost dog.

the last light on upstairs
draws a circular pattern
through the decorated iron vent
to become a living room's moon.

the sofa calls the dog, the cat
in perfect blackness walks over the stove.
in the room of permanent light
cockroaches march on enamel.
the spider with jewel coloured thighs the brown moth
with corporal stripes
ascend pipes
and look into mirrors.

all night the truth happens.

MOVING FRED'S outhouse/ GERIATRICS OF PINE

ll afternoon (while the empty drive-in
reen in the distance promises)
e are moving the two-seater
00 yards across his garden

le turn it over on its top
nd over, and as it slowly
lls on its side
e children cheer

0 years old and a change in career—
om these pale yellow flowers emerging
ut of damp wood in the roof
o become a room thorough with flight, noise,
nd pregnant with the morning's eggs,
perch for chickens.

wo of us. The sweat.
ur hands under the bottom
en the top as it goes
ver, through twin holes the
owers, running to move the roller, shove,
nd everybody screaming to keep the dog away.
red the pragmatist – dragging the ancient comic
ut of retirement and into a television series
mong the charging democracy of rhode island reds

ead over heels across the back lawn
ld wood collapsing in our hands

ll afternoon the silent space is turned

BUCK LAKE STORE AUCTION

crub lawn.

A chained
og tense and smelling.
0 cents for a mattress. 50 cents
or doors that allowed privacy.

A rain
vollen copy of Jack London
magazine drawing of a rabbit
ordered with finishing nails.
chickens, bird cage (empty),
uerkraut cutting board

own to the rock
trees

ot bothering to look
ito the old woman's eyes
s we go in, get a number
ave the power to bid
n everything that is exposed.
fter an hour in this sun
expected her to unscrew
er left arm and donate it
o the auctioneer's excitement.
i certain rituals we desire
nly what we cannot have.
hile for her, Mrs Germain,
his is the needle's eye
here maniacs of earth select.
ook, I wanted to say,
10 for the dog

ith faded denim eyes

FARRE OFF

here are the poems of Campion I never saw till now
and Wyatt who loved with the best
and suddenly I want 16th-century women
around me devious politic aware
of step ladders to the king

tonight I am alone with dogs and lightning
aroused by Wyatt's talk of women who step
baked into his bedchamber

moonlight and barnlight constant
lightning every second minute
have on my thin blue parka
and walk behind the asses of the dogs
who slide under the gate
and sense cattle
deep in the fields

look out into the dark pasture
past where even the moonlight stops

my eyes are against the ink of Campion

WALKING TO BELLROCK

Two figures in deep water.

Their frames truncated at the stomach
slide along the surface. Depot Creek.
One hundred years ago lumber being driven down this river
dredged and shovelled and widened the banks into Bellrock
down past bridges to the mill.

The two figures are walking
as if half sunk in a grey road
their feet tentative, stumbling on stone bottom.
Landscapes underwater. What do the feet miss?
Turtle, watersnake, clam. What do the feet ignore
and the brain not look at, as two figures slide
past George Grant's green immaculate fields
past the splashed blood of cardinal flower on the bank.

Rivers are a place for philosophy but all thought
about the mechanics of this river is about
stones that twist your ankles
the hidden rocks you walk your knee into—
set in slow motion and brain and balanced arms
navigating the blind path of foot, underwater sun
suddenly catching the almond coloured legs
the torn old Adidas tennis shoes we wear
to walk the river into Bellrock.

What is the conversation about for three hours
in this winding twisted evasive river to town?
What was the conversation about all summer.
Stan and I laughing joking going summer crazy
as we lived against each other.

o keep warm we submerge. Sometimes
ist our heads decapitated
lide on the dark glass.

here is no metaphor here.
/e are aware of the heat of the water, coldness of the rain,
nell of mud in certain sections that farts
hen you step on it, mud never walked on
o you can't breathe, my god you can't breathe this air
nd you swim fast your feet off the silt of history
iat was there when the logs went
aping down for the Rathburn Timber Company
hen those who stole logs had to leap
ght out of the country if caught.

ut there is no history or philosophy or metaphor with us.
he problem is the toughness of the Adidas shoe
s three stripes gleaming like fish decoration.
he story is Russell's arm waving out of the green of a field.

he plot of the afternoon is to get to Bellrock
rough rapids, falls, stink water
nd reach the island where beer and a towel wait for us.
hat night there is not even pain in our newly used muscles
ot even the puckering of flesh
nd little to tell except you won't
elieve how that river winds and when you
on't see the feet you concentrate on the feet.
nd all the next day trying to think
hat we didn't talk about.
/here was the criminal conversation
roken sentences lost in the splash in wind.

tan, my crazy summer friend,
hy are we both going crazy?
oing down to Bellrock

recognizing home by the colour of barns
which tell us north, south, west,
and otherwise lost in miles and miles of rain
in the middle of this century
following the easy fucking stupid plot to town.

PIG GLASS

onjour. This is pig glass
piece of cloudy sea

osed out of the earth by swine
nd smoothed into pebble
in it across your cheek
will not cut you

nd this is my hand a language
hich was buried for years touch it
gainst your stomach

The pig glass
thought
as the buried eye of Portland Township
ow faded history
aiting to be grunted up
here is no past until you breathe
n such green glass
rub it
ver your stomach and cheek

he Meeks family used this section
ears ago to bury tin
rockery forks dog tags
nd each morning
igs ease up that ocean
eeming it again
ito the possibilities of rust
ne morning I found a whole axle
nother day a hand crank
ut this is pig glass

sted with narrow teeth
nd let lie. The morning's green present.
ortland Township jewellery.

here is the band from the ankle of a pigeon
weathered bill from the Bellrock Cheese Factory
tters in 1925 to a dead mother I
isturbed in the room above the tractor shed.
ournals of family love
ervitude to farm weather
work glove in a cardboard box
ceased flat and hard like a flower.

bottle thrown
y loggers out of a wagon
ast midnight
xplodes against rock.
his green fragment has behind it
ie *booomm* when glass
ars free of its smoothness

ow once more smooth as knuckle
tooth on my tongue.
omfort that bites through skin
ides in the dark afternoon of my pocket.
nake shade.
etermined histories of glass.

THE HOUR OF COWDUST

is the hour we move small
in the last possibilities of light

now the sky opens its blue vault

thought this hour belonged to my children
ringing cows home
ordered by duty swinging a stick,
cut this focus of dusk out of dust
everywhere – here by the Nile
the boats wheeling
like massive half-drowned birds
and I gaze at water that dreams
dust off my tongue,
in this country your mouth
shows the way your shoes look

everything is reducing itself to shape

dark of light cools your shirt
when step from barbershops
their skin alive to the air.
all day
dust covered granite hills
and now
suddenly the Nile is flesh
an arm on a bed

in Indian miniatures
cannot quite remember
that this hour means
people were small,

nimals represented
mply by dust
ey stamped into the air.
ll I recall of commentaries
re abrupt lovely sentences where
ie colour of a bowl
left foot stepping on a lotus
ymbolized separation.
r stories of gods
reating such beautiful women
ey themselves burned in passion
nd were reduced to ash.
omen confided to pet parrots
olitary men dreamed into the conch.
o many
raciously humiliated
y the distance of rivers

he boat turns languid
nder the hunched passenger
ails
eady for the moon
ll like a lung

ere is no longer
epth of perception
is now possible
or the outline of two boats
o collide silently

THE PALACE

a.m. The hour of red daylight

walk through palace grounds
taking the sentries

scarves
round their neck and mouths
speak breath mist
the gibbons stroll
twenty feet high
through turret arches
and on the edge
of brown parapet
I am alone

leaning
into flying air

ancient howls of a king
who released his aviary
like a wave to the city below
celebrating the day of his birth
and they when fed
could return to his hand
like the payment of grain

all over Rajasthan
palaces die young

at this height
a red wind
my shirt and sweater cold

from the white city below
beautiful wail

f a woman's voice rises
00 street transistors
multaneously playing
ie one radio station of Udaipur

USWETAKEIYAWA

swetakeiyawa. The night mile

rough the village of tall
orn leaf fences
idden odours
hich pour through windows of the jeep.

le see nothing, just
ie grey silver of the Dutch canal
here bright coloured boats
p like masks in the night
eir alphabets lost in the dark.

o sight but the imagination's
ory behind each smell
r now and then a white sarong
umping its legs on a bicycle
ke a moth in the headlights

and the dogs
ho lean out of night
rolling the road
ith eyes of sapphire
nd hideous body

so mongrelled
ey seem to have woken
o find themselves tricked
ito outrageous transformations,
ne with the spine of a snake
ne with a creature in its mouth
ar lights rouse them
om the purity of darkness).

his is the dream journey
e travel most nights
eturning from Colombo.
he road hugs the canal
ie canal every mile
uts an arm into the sea.

1 daylight women bathe
raist deep beside the road
tterly still as I drive past
eir diya reddha cloth
ed under their arms.
rief sentences of women
an men with soapy buttocks
eir arms stretching up
pour water over themselves,
r the ancient man in spectacles
rossing the canal
nly his head visible
ulling something we cannot see
1 the water behind him.
he women surface
odies the colour of shadow
et bright cloth
ie skin of a mermaid.

1 the silence of the night drive
ou hear ocean you swallow odours
hich change each minute – dried fish
vamp toddy a variety of curries
nd something we have never been able to recognize.
here is just this thick air
nd the aura of dogs
1 trickster skin.

nce in the night we saw

omething slip into the canal.

here was then the odour we did not recognize.

he smell of a dog losing its shape.

THE WARS

usk in Colombo

ie Bo tree dark all day
athers the last of our light

nd in its green rooms which yawn
ver Pettah stores
its own shadow
hundreds of unseen bats
ining up the auditorium
i archaic Tamil

rincomalee

they whisper
my brother
ource of my exile
ng slow miles to the scrub north
hose blossoms are dirty birds
o bright they are extracts of the sea

wim

into the north's blue eye
ver the milk floor of ocean
at darkens only with depth

he Ray
ies in silence
uttering bubbles to himself
read over his
avenue

he ancient warrior

hose brother
ole his operatic tongue

plunges

pure muscle
owards his neighbours
loodless full
f noon moonlight

nly his twin
nows how to charm
ie waters against him

SWEET LIKE A CROW

for Hetti Corea, 8 years old

'The Sinhalese are beyond a doubt one of the least musical people in the world. It would be quite impossible to have less sense of pitch, line or rhythm' PAUL BOWLES

our voice sounds like a scorpion being pushed
rough a glass tube
ke someone has just trod on a peacock
ke wind howling in a coconut
ke a rusty bible, like someone pulling barbed wire
cross a stone courtyard, like a pig drowning,
vattacka being fried
bone shaking hands
frog singing at Carnegie Hall.

like a crow swimming in milk,
ke a nose being hit by a mango
ke the crowd at the Royal-Thomian match,
womb full of twins, a pariah dog
with a magpie in its mouth
ke the midnight jet from Casablanca
ke Air Pakistan curry,
typewriter on fire, like a hundred
appadans being crunched, like someone
ying to light matches in a dark room,
ie clicking sound of a reef when you put your head into the sea,
dolphin reciting epic poetry to a sleepy audience,
ie sound of a fan when someone throws brinjals at it,
ke pineapples being sliced in the Pettah market
ke betel juice hitting a butterfly in mid-air
ke a whole village running naked onto the street
nd tearing their sarongs, like an angry family
ushing a jeep out of the mud, like dirt on the needle,
ke 8 sharks being carried on the back of a bicycle
ke 3 old ladies locked in the lavatory

ke the sound I heard when having an afternoon sleep
nd someone walked through my room in ankle bracelets.

LATE MOVIES WITH SKYLER

ll week since he's been home
e has watched late movies alone
rrrible one star films and then staggering
rough the dark house to his bed
aking at noon to work on the broken car
e has come home to fix.

1 years old and restless
ack from logging on Vancouver Island
ith men who get rid of crabs with Raid
*2 minutes bending over in agony
and then into the showers!*

ast night I joined him for *The Prisoner of Zenda*
film I saw three times in my youth
nd which no doubt influenced me morally.
ot coffee bananas and cheese
e are ready at 11.30 for adventure.

t each commercial Sky
reaks into midnight guitar practice
ead down playing loud and intensely
ll the movie comes on and the music suddenly stops.
kyler's favourite hours when he's usually alone
ooking huge meals of anything in the frying pan
umbling through *Advanced Guitar* like a bible.
e talk during the film
nd break into privacy during commercials
r get more coffee or push
ie screen door open and urinate under the trees.

aughing at the dilemmas of 1920 heroes

iggestive lines, cutaways to court officials
who raise their eyebrows at least 4 inches
when the lovers kiss ...
nly the anarchy of the evil Rupert of Hentzau
appreciated.

And still somehow
y 1.30 we are moved
s Stewart Granger girl-less and countryless
des into the sunset with his morals and his horse.
he perfect world is over. Banana peels
range peels ashtrays guitar books.
a.m. We stagger through
ito the slow black rooms of the house.

lie in bed fully awake. The darkness
reathes to the pace of a dog's snoring.
he film is replayed to sounds
f an intricate blues guitar.
kyler is Rupert then the hero.
ie will leave in a couple of days
or Montreal or the Maritimes.
i the movies of my childhood the heroes
fter skilled swordplay and moral victories
ave with absolutely nothing
o do for the rest of their lives.

**SALLIE CHISUM/LAST WORDS
ON BILLY THE KID 4 A.M.**

for Nancy Beatty

he moon hard and yellow where Billy's head is.
have been moving in my room
these last 5 minutes. Looking for a cigarette.
that is a sin he taught me.
showed me how to hold it and how to want it.

had been looking and stepped forward
to feel along the windowsill
and there was the tanned moon head.
his body the shadow of the only tree on the property.

am at the table.
Billy's mouth is trying
to remove a splinter out of my foot.
rough skin on the bottom of me.
till. I can feel his teeth
bite precise. And then moving his face back
holding something in his grin, says he's got it.

Where have you been I ask
Where have you been he replies

have been into every room about 300 times
since you were here
have walked about 60 miles in this house
Where have you been I ask

Billy was a fool
he was like those reversible mirrors
you can pivot round and see yourself again
but there is something showing on the other side always.

unlight. The shade beside the cupboard.

he fired two bullets into the dummy
in which I built dresses
where the nipples should have been.
That wasn't too funny, but we laughed a lot.

One morning he was still sleeping
pushed the door and watched him from the hall
he looked like he was having a serious dream.
concentrating. Angry. As if wallpaper
had been ripped off a wall.

Illy's mouth at my foot
removing the splinter.
Did I say that?

was just before lunch one day.

have been alive
7 years since I knew him. He was a fool.
He was like those mirrors I told you about.

I am leaning against the bed rail
have finished my cigarette
now I cannot find the ashtray.
put it out, squash it
against the window
where the moon is.
in his stupid eyes.

PURE MEMORY/CHRIS DEWDNEY

'Listen, it was so savage and brutal and powerful that even though it happened out of the blue I knew there was nothing arbitrary about it'

CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY

1

On a B.C. radio show the man asked me, coffee half way up to his mouth, what are the books you've liked recently? Christopher Dewdney's *A Palaeozoic Geology of London Ontario*. Only I didn't say that, I started stumbling on the word Palaeozoic ... Paleo ... Polio ... and then it happened on Geology too until it seemed a disease. I sounded like an idiot. Meanwhile I was watching the man's silent gulps. The professional silent gulping of coffee an inch or two away from the microphone. Unconcerned with my sinking 'live' all over the province.

2

I can't remember where I first met him. Somewhere I became aware of this giggle. Tan hair, tan face, tan shirt and a giggle-snort as his head staggered back. His arms somewhere.

3

The baby. He shows me the revolving globe in the 4-month-old kid's crib. Only it has been unscrewed and the globe turned upside down and rescrewed in that way so Africa and Asia all swivel upside down. This way he says she'll have to come to terms with the shapes all over again when she grows up.

4

He comes to dinner, steps out of the car and transforms the 10-year-old suburban garden into ancient history. Is on his knees pointing out the age and race and character of rocks and earth. He loves the Norfolk Pine. I give him a piece of wood 120 million years old from the tar sands and he smokes a bit of it.

5

When he was a kid and his parents had guests and he was eventually told to get to bed he liked to embarrass them by running under a table and screaming out Don't hit me Don't hit me.

6

His most embarrassing moment. A poetry reading in Toronto. He was sitting in the front row and he realized that he hated the poetry. He looked around discreetly for the exit but it was a long way away. Then to the right, quite near him, he saw another door. As a poem ended he got up and officially walked to the door quickly opened it went out and closed it behind him. He found himself in a dark cupboard about 2 feet by 3 feet. It contained nothing. He waited there for a while, then he started to laugh and giggle. He giggled for 5 minutes and he thinks the audience could probably hear him. When he had collected himself he opened the door, came out, walked to his seat and sat down again.

7

Coach House Press, December 1974. I haven't seen him for a long time. His face is tough. Something has left his face. It is not that he is thinner but the face has lost something distinct and it seems like flesh. But he is not thinner. He is busy working on his new book *Fovea Centralis* and I watch him as he sits in the empty back room upstairs all alone with a computer typesetting terminal. I can't get over his face. It is 'tight', as if a stocking were over it and he about to perform a robbery. He plucks at the keys and talks down into the machine. I am relieved when he starts giggling at something. I tell him I'm coming down to London in a week and he says he will show me his butterflies, he has bought two mounted butterflies for a very good price. If I don't tell anyone he will let me know where I could get one. A Chinaman in London Ontario sells them. I start to laugh. He doesn't. This is

serious information, important rare information like the history of rocks – these frail wings of almost powder have their genealogies too.

8

His favourite movie is *Earthquake*. He stands in the middle of his apartment very excited telling me all the details. He shows me his beautiful fossils, a small poster of James Dean hitting his brother in *East of Eden*, and the two very impressive mounted butterflies.

9

On the bus going back to Toronto I have a drawing of him by Robert Fones. Wrapped in brown paper it lies above me on the luggage rack. When the bus swerves I put my arm out into the dark aisle ready to catch him if it falls. A strange drawing of him in his cane chair with a plant to the side of him, reading Frank O'Hara with very oriental eyes. It was done in 1973, before the flesh left his face.

10

His wife's brain haemorrhage. I could not cope with that. He is 23 years old. He does. Africa Asia Australia upside down. Earthquake.

BEARHUG

riffin calls to come and kiss him goodnight
yell ok. Finish something I'm doing,
then something else, walk slowly round
the corner to my son's room.
He is standing arms outstretched
waiting for a bearhug. Grinning.

Why do I give my emotion an animal's name,
give it that dark squeeze of death?
This is the hug which collects
all his small bones and his warm neck against me.
The thin tough body under the pyjamas
sticks to me like a magnet of blood.

How long was he standing there
like that, before I came?

Elimination Dance (an intermission)



'Nothing I'd read prepared me for a body this unfair'
JOHN NEWLOVE

'Till we be roten, kan we not be rypen'
GEOFFREY CHAUCER

Those who are allergic to the sea



Those who have resisted depravity



Men who shave off beards in stages, pausing to take photographs



American rock stars who wear Toronto Maple Leaf hockey sweaters



Those who (while visiting a foreign country) have lost the end of a Q tip in their ear and have been unable to explain their problem



Gentlemen who have placed a microphone beside a naked woman's stomach after lunch and later, after slowing down the sound considerably, have sold these noises on the open market as whale songs



All actors and poets who spit into the first row while they perform



Men who fear to use an electric lawn-mower feeling they could drowse off and be dragged by it into a swimming pool



Any dinner guest who has consumed the host's missing contact lens along with the dessert



Any person who has had the following dream. You are in a subway station of a major city. At the far end you see a coffee machine. You put in two coins. The Holy Grail drops down. Then blood pours into the chalice



Any person who has lost a urine sample in the mail



All those belle-lettrists who feel that should have been '*an* urine sample'



Anyone who has had to step into an elevator with all of the Irish Rovers



Those who have filled in a bilingual and confidential pig survey from Statistics Canada. (Une enquête sur les porcs, strictement confidentielle)



Those who have written to the age old brotherhood of Rosicrucians for a free copy of their book 'The Mastery of Life' in order to release the inner consciousness and to experience (in the privacy of the home) momentary flights of the soul



Those who have accidentally stapled themselves



Anyone who has been penetrated by a mountie



Any university professor who has danced with a life-sized cardboard cut-out of Jean Genet



Those who have unintentionally locked themselves within a sleeping bag at a camping goods store



Any woman whose i.u.d. has set off an alarm system at the airport



Those who, after a swim, find the sensation of water dribbling out of their ears erotic



Men who have never touched a whippet



Women who gave up the accordion because of pinched breasts



Those who have pissed out of the back of moving trucks



Those who have woken to find the wet footprints of a peacock across their kitchen floor



Anyone whose knees have been ruined as a result of performing sexual acts in elevators



Those who have so much as contemplated the possibility of creeping up to one's enemy with two Bic lighters, pressing simultaneously the butane switches – one into each nostril – and so gassing him to death



Literary critics who have swum the Hellespont



Anyone who has been hired as a 'professional beater' and frightened grouse in the direction of the Queen Mother



Any lover who has gone into a flower shop on Valentine's Day and asked for clitoris when he meant clematis



Those who have come across their own telephone numbers underneath terse insults or compliments in the washroom of the Bay Street Bus Terminal



Those who have used the following techniques of seduction:

- small talk at a falconry convention
- entering a spa town disguised as Ford Madox Ford
- making erotic rotations of the pelvis, backstage, during the storm scene of *King Lear*
- underlining suggestive phrases in the prefaces of Joseph Conrad



Anyone who has testified as a character witness for a dog in a court of law



Any writer who has been photographed for the jacket of a book in one of the following poses: sitting in the back of a 1956 Dodge with

two roosters; in a tuxedo with the Sydney Opera House in the distance; studying the vanishing point on a jar of Dutch Cleanser; against a gravestone with dramatic back lighting; with a false nose on; in the vicinity of Macchu Pichu; or sitting in a study and looking intensely at one's own book



The person who borrowed my Martin Beck thriller, read it in a sauna which melted the glue off the spine so the pages drifted to the floor, stapled them together and returned the book, thinking I wouldn't notice



Any person who has burst into tears at the Liquor Control Board



Anyone with pain



Secular Love

‘You’re an actor, aren’t you?’

The man nodded silently and averted his eyes.

‘I’ve seen you in films. You always seem embarrassed at the thought of what you have to say next.’

The man laughed and again averted his eyes.

‘Your trouble, I believe, is that you always hold back something of yourself. You’re not shameless enough for an actor. In my opinion you should learn how to run properly and scream properly, with your mouth wide open. I’ve noticed that even when you yawn you’re afraid to open your mouth all the way. In your next film make a sign to show that you’ve understood me. You haven’t even been discovered yet. I’m looking forward to seeing you grow older from film to film.’

PETER HANDKE *The left-handed woman*

Claude Glass

A somewhat convex dark or coloured hand-mirror, used to concentrate the features of the landscape in subdued tones.

'Grey walked about everywhere with that pretty toy, the claude glass, in his hand, making the beautiful forms of the landscape compose in its luscious chiaroscuro.' Gosse (1882)

ie is told about
ie previous evening's behaviour.

tarting with a punchbowl
n the volleyball court.
ancing and falling across coffee tables,
sking his son Are *you* the bastard
ho keeps telling me I'm drunk?
issing the limbs of women
ispicious of his friends serenading
ve pigs by the barn
eaving a wine glass towards garden
nd continually going through gates
ito the dark fields
nd collapsing.
is wife half carrying him home
escuing him from departing cars,
omplains this morning
f a sore shoulder.

And even later
is thirteen-year-old daughter's struggle
o lift him into the back kitchen
fter he has passed out, resting his head on rocks,
ondering what he was looking for in dark fields.

or he has always loved that ancient darkness
here the flat rocks glide like Japanese tables

here he can remove clothes
and lie with moonlight on the day's heat
hardened in stone, drowning
in this star blanket this sky
like a giant trout
unconscious how the heaven
greens over him
as he moves in back fields
missing the limbs of trees
or placing ear on stone which rocks him
and then stands to watch the house
in its oasis of light.
and he knows something is happening there to him
solitary while he spreads his arms
and holds everything that is slipping away together.

he is suddenly in the heat of the party
reaching towards women, revolving
around one unhappy shadow.
That friend who said he would find
the darkest place, and then wave.
He is not a lost drunk
like his father or his friend, can,
he says, stop on a dime, and he can
he could because even now, now in
his brilliant darkness where
grass has lost its colour and it's all
picking Yeats and moonlight, he knows
his colourless grass is making his bare feet green
or it is the hour of magic
which no matter what sadness
leaves him grinning.
At certain hours of the night
pucks are nothing but landscape
lost voices breaking as they nightmare.
The weasel wears their blood

ome like a scarf,
ows drain over the horizon
and the dark
vegetables hum onward underground

ut the mouth
wants plum.

loves from room to room
here brown beer glass
nashed lounges at his feet
pens the long rust stained gate
nd steps towards invisible fields
at he knows from years of daylight.
e snorts in the breeze
hich carries a smell
f cattle on its back.

hat this place does not have
the white paint of bathing cabins
ie leak of eucalyptus.
uring a full moon
utcrops of rock shine
unks spray abstract into the air
ows burp as if practising
ie name of Francis Ponge.
is drunk state wants the mesh of place.
udwig of Bavaria's Roof Garden—
lass plants, iron parrots
enus Grottos, tarpaulins of Himalaya.
y the kitchen sink he tells someone
om now on I will drink only landscapes
here, pour me a cup of Spain.

pens the gate and stumbles
lood like a cassette through the body

way from the lights, unbuttoning,
his desire to be riverman.

tentatively
 he recalls
is drunk invitation to the river.
e has steered the awesome car
ast sugarbush to the blue night water
nd steps out
eaking to branches
nd the gulp of toads.
ubtle applause of animals.
 snake leaves a path
ke temporary fossil.

 He falls
ack onto the intricacies
f gearshift and steering wheel
live as his left arm
hich now departs out of the window
ying to tug passing sumac
ine bush tamarack
ito the car
 to the party.
runkenness opens his arms like a gate
nd over the car invisible insects
scend out of the beams like meteorite
rushed dust of the moon
.. he waits for the magic star called Lorca.

n the front lawn a sheet
icked across a horizontal branch.
 projector starts a parade
f journeys, landscapes, relatives,
iends leaping out within pebbles of water
aught by the machine as if creating rain.

ater when wind frees the sheet
nd it collapses like powder in the grass
ictures fly without target
nd howl their colours over Southern Ontario
.othing burdock
ubarb a floating duck.
andscapes and stories
ung into branches
nd the dog walks under the hover of the swing
eam of the projection bursting in his left eye.

he falling sheet the star of Lorca swoops
omeone gets up and heaves his glass
ito the vegetable patch
owards the slow stupid career of beans.

his is the hour
hen dead men sit
nd write each other.

‘Concerning the words we never said
during morning hours of the party
there was glass under my bare feet
laws of the kitchen were broken
and each word moved
in my mouth like muscle ...’

his is the hour for sudden journeying.

Cervantes accepts
17th Century invitation
om the Chinese Emperor.
hools of Chinese-Spanish Linguistics!
ivers of the world meet!
nd here
ucks dressed in Asia
ivot on foreign waters.

t 4 a.m. he wakes in the sheet
at earlier held tropics in its whiteness.
he invited river flows through the house
to the kitchen up
airs, he awakens and moves within it.
n the dim light
e sees the turkish carpet under water,
w stools, glint
f piano pedals, even a sleeping dog
hose dreams may be of rain.

is a river he has walked elsewhere
ow visiting moving with him at the hip
o kitchen where a friend sleeps in a chair
ead on the table his grip
ill round a glass, legs underwater.

e wants to relax
nd give in to the night
ill horizontal and swim
o the back kitchen where his daughter sleeps.
e wishes to swim
o each of his family and gaze
t their underwater dreaming
is magic chain of bubbles.
ife, son, household guests, all
omfortable in clean river water.

e is aware that for hours
ere has been no conversation,
ngues have slid to stupidity on alcohol
eeping mouths are photographs of yells.

e stands waiting, the sentinel,
rambling back and forth, his anger
nd desire against the dark

which, if he closes his eyes,
will lose them all.

The oven light
shines up through water at him
bathysphere a ghost ship
and in the half drowned room

The crickets like small pins
begin to tack down
the black canvas of this night,
begin to talk their hesitant
warbled epigrams to each other
across the room.

Creak and echo.
Creak and echo. With absolute clarity
he knows where he is.

Tin Roof

She hesitated. 'Are you being romantic now?'

'I'm trying to tell you how I feel without exposing myself. You know what I mean?'

ELMORE LEONARD

*

ou stand still for three days
or a piece of wisdom
and everything falls to the right place

r wrong place

 You speak
 don't know whether
graph or bitch
utters at your heart

nd look through windows
or cue cards
lazing in the sky.

 The solution.
his last year I was sure
was going to die

*

he geography of this room I know so well
night I could rise in the dark
t at the table and write without light.
am here in the country of warm rains.
small cabin – a glass, wood,
n bucket on the Pacific Rim.

Geckoes climb
ie window to peer in,
nd all day the tirade pale blue waves
uch the black shore of volcanic rock

nd fall to pieces here

*

how to arrive at this
rowing
n the edge of sea

(How to drive
ie Hana Road, he said—
ne hand on the beer
ne hand on your thigh
nd one eye for the road)

aves leap to this cliff all day
nd in the evening lose
eir pale blue

e rises from the bed
s wind from three directions
ills, takes his place
n the peninsula of sheets
hich also loses colour

ands in the loose green kimono
y a large window and gazes

rough gecko
ast the deadfall
ito sea,

the unknown magic he loves
rows himself into

the blue heart

*

ell me
ll you know
bout bamboo

rowing wild, green
rowing up into soft arches
i the temple ground

ie traditions

riven through hands
rough the heart
uring torture

nd most of all

this

nall bamboo pipe
ot quite horizontal
iat drips
very ten seconds
o a shallow bowl

love this
eing here
ot a word
ist the faint
ill of liquid
ie boom of an iron buddhist bell
i the heart rapid
s ceremonial bamboo

*

man buying wine
ainier beer at the store
ould he be satisfied with this?
old showers, electric skillet,
ed River on tv
h he could be

Do you want
to be happy and write?)

ie happens to love the stark
luxury of this place
no armchairs, a fridge of beer and mangoes

Precipitation.

To avoid a story The refusal to move
ll our narratives of sleep
mild rumble to those inland

Illicit pockets of
the kimono

heart like a sleeve

*

he cabin
 its tin roof
wind run radio
atches the noise of the world.
e focuses on the gecko
most transparent body
ow he feels now
everything passing through him like light.
n certain mirrors
e cannot see himself at all.
e is joyous and breaking down.
he tug over the cliff.
/hat protects him
 the warmth in the sleeve

nat is all, really

*

le go to the stark places of the earth
nd find moral questions everywhere

ill John Wayne and Montgomery Clift
ike their cattle to Missouri or Kansas?

onight I lean over the Pacific
nd its blue wild silk
nged by creatures
ho

tchick tchick tchick
y sudden movement
ho say nothing else.

here are those who are in
nd there are those who look in

iny leather toes
ug the glass

*

n the porch
in ceramic
times

ride wind
ff the Pacific

ells of the sea

I do not know
ie name of large orange flowers
hich thrive on salt air
an half drunk
gainst the steps

ntidy banana trees
nick moss on the cliff
nd then the plunge
black volcanic shore

is impossible to enter the sea here
xcept in a violent way

How we have moved
om thin ceramic

such destruction

*

ll night
the touch

f wave on volcano.

here was the woman
who clutched my hair
like a shaken child.
the radio whistles
around a lost wave length.

ll night slack-key music
and the bird whistling *duino*
duino, words and music
entangled in pebble
ocean static.
the wild sea and her civilization
the League of the Divine Wind
and traditions of death.

Remember
those women in movies
who wept into the hair
of their dead men?

*

oing up stairs
hang my shirt
n the stiff
ar of an antelope

bove the bed
memory
restless green bamboo
the distant army
sembles wooden spears

er feet braced
n the ceiling
a in the eye

reading the article
n 1825 report *Physiologie du Gout*
n the artificial growing of truffles
eaks
of 'vain efforts
nd deceitful promises,'
ommandments of culinary art

ood
orning to your body
ello nipple
nd appendix scar like a letter
f too much passion
om a mad Mexican doctor

ll this noise at your neck!

heart clapping
like green bamboo

 this earring
 which
as flipped over
 and falls
 into the pool of your ear

he waves against black stone
that was a thousand year old
burning red river
could not reach us

*

Cabin

iana'

 this *flower* of wood
i which we rose
ut of the blue sheets
ou thin as horizon
eaching for lamp or book
y shirt

 hungry
or everything about the other

ere we steal places to stay
s we steal time
 never too proud to beg,
ven if we never
e the other's grin and star again

ere is nothing resigned
i this briefness
e swallow complete

will know everything here

 this cup
 balanced on my chest
my eye witnessing the petal
drop away from its order,
your arm

or ever

recarious in all our fury

*

every place has its own wisdom. Come.
time we talked about the sea,
the long waves

‘trapped around islands’

*

here are maps now whose portraits
ave nothing to do with surface

remember the angels, floating compasses
Portolan atlases so complex
e looked down and never knew
hich was earth which was sea?
he way birds the colour of prairie
onfused by the sky
ew into the earth
Remember those women
ho claimed dead miners
ie colour of the coal they drowned in)

he bathymetric maps startle.
isions of the ocean floor
oughs, naked blue deserts,
anges Cone, the Mascarene Basin

o one is able now
i ideal situations
o plot a stroll
o new continents
loing the Berryman walk'

nd beneath the sea
iere are
iese giant scratches
f pain
ie markings of
ome perfect animal
ho has descended

urying itself
nder the glossy
allroom

r they have to do with ascending,
hat we were, the earth creatures
nging for horizon.
know one thing
ur sure non-sliding
ivilized feet
ur small leather shoes
id not make them

Ah you should be happy and write)

want the passion
hich puts your feet on the ceiling
his fist
o smash forward

ike this silk
 somehow *Ah*
ut of the rooms of poetry

listen, solitude, X wrote,
not an absolute,
is just a resting place)

sten in the end
ie pivot from angel to witch
epends on small things
his animal, the question
re you happy?

o I am not happy

icky though

*

Rainy Night Talk

Here's to
the overlooked
ripples of Spain
brown Madrid aureoles
neecaps of Ohio girls
neeling in the palms of men
waiting to be thrown high
into the clouds
of a football stadium

Here's to
the long legged
roman from Kansas
whispering good morning at 5,
dazed
on balcony moonlight

all that drizzle the night before
walking walking through the rain
at her car door
and wrote my hunger out, the balcony
like an entrance
to a city of suicides.

Here's to the long legs
driving home
in more and more rain
leaving like a one-sided
mely conversation
over the mountains

nd what were you
arrying? in your head
at night Miss
ouri? Miss Kansas?

hile I put my hands
veating
n the cold
indow
n the edge
f the trough of this city?

*

reaking down after logical rules
ouldn't be the hit and run driver
wanted Frank Sinatra
was thinking blue pyjamas
was brought up on movies and song!

could write my suite of poems
or Bogart drunk
x months after the departure at Casablanca.
see him lying under the fan
t the Slavyansky Bazar Hotel
nd soon he will see the truth
ie stupidity of his gesture
e'll see it in the space
etween the whirling metal

Stupid fucker
e says to himself, stupid fucker
nd knocks the bottle
aning against his bare stomach
nto the sheet. Gin stems
ut like a four leaf clover.
used to be lucky he says
had white suits black friends
ho played the piano ...

and that
as a movie I saw just once.

What about Burt Lancaster
mping away at the end of *Trapeze*?
orn in 1943. And I saw that six times.

grew up knowing I could never fly)

hat's me. You. Educated
t the *Bijou*. And don't ask me
bout my interpretation of 'Madame George.'
hat's a nine minute song
two hour story

o how do we discuss
ie education of our children?
each them to be romantics
o veer towards the sentimental?
oss them into the air like Tony Curtis
nd make 'em do the triple somersault
rough all these complexities
nd commandments?

*

h, Rilke, I want to sit down calm like you
r pace the castle, avoiding the path of the cook, Carlo,
ho believes down to his turnip soup
at you speak in the voice of the devil.
want the long lines my friend spoke of
at bamboo which sways muttering
ke wooden teeth in the slim volume I have
ith its childlike drawing of Duino Castle.
have circled your book for years
ke a wave combing
ie green hair of the sea
ept it with me, your name
password in the alley.
always wanted poetry to be that
ut this solitude brings no wisdom
ist two day old food in the fridge,
ertain habits you would not approve of.
'I said all of your name now
would be the movement
f the tide you soared over
o your private angel
ould become part of a map.

am too often busy with things
wish to get away from, and I want
ie line to move slowly now, slowly
ke a careful drunk across the street
o cars in the vicinity
ut in his fearful imagination.
ow can I link your flowing name
o geckoes or a slice of octopus?
hough there are Rainier beer cans,

magically, on the windowsill.

and still your lovely letters
January 1912 near Trieste.
the car you were driven in
at a snail's pace'
through Provence. Wanting
to go into chrysalis ...
'to live by the heart and nothing else.'
for your guilt—

‘I howl at the moon
with all my heart
and put the blame
on the dogs’

can see you sitting down
the suspicious cook asleep
to it is just you
and the machinery of the night
that foul beast that sucks and drains
draping over us sweeping our determination
away with its tail. Us and the coffee,
all the small charms we invade it with.

as at midnight we remember the colour
of the dogwood flower growing
like a woman's sex outside the window.
wanted poetry to be walnuts
in their green cases
but now it is the sea
and we let it drown us,
and we fly to it released
by giant catapults
of pain loneliness deceit and vanity

Rock Bottom

*O lady hear me. I have no
other
voice left.*

ROBERT CREELEY

*

a.m. The moonlight
in the kitchen

Will this be
testamentum porcelli?
unblemished art and truth
whole hog the pig's testament
that I know of passion
having written of it
when my dog shiver
with love and disappear
crazy into trees

I want

the woman whose face
could not believe in the moonlight
her mouth forever as horizon

and both of us
grim with situation

now
suddenly
we reside
near the delicate
heart
of Billie Holiday

*

ou said, this
oesn't happen so quick
must remind you of someone

No,
ough I am seduced
y this light, and
antic arguments
n the porch,
ain't subtle
ou run rings
ound me

but this quietness
hite dress long legs
rguing your body
way from me

nd I with all the hunger
didn't know I had

*

(Inner Tube)

n the warm July river
ead back

pside down river
or a roof

owly paddling
owards an estuary between trees

ere's a dog
arning to swim near me
iends on shore

y head
ips
ack to the eyebrow
m the prow
n an ancient vessel,
his afternoon
m going down to Peru
oul between my teeth

blue heron
ith its awkward
roken backed flap
pside down

ne of us is wrong

e

his blue grey thud
inking he knows
ie blue way
ut of here

r me

*

(‘The space in which we have dissolved – does it taste of us?’)

summer night came out of the water
climbed into my car and drove home
got out of the car still wet towel round me
opened the gate and walked to the house

disintegration of the spirit
no stars
afraid being eaten by moonlight

the small creatures who are blind
who travel with the aid
of petite white horns
like over the world

sound of a moth

the screen door in its suspicion
allows nothing in, as I allow nothing in.
the raspberries my son gave me
cold, cold out of the fridge, a few I put
in my mouth, some in my shirt pocket
and forgot

sit here
in a half dark kitchen
the stain at my heart
caused by this gift

*

(Saturday)

he three trunks
f the walnut

ie ceremonial ducks
ho limbo under the fence
nd creep up the lawn

ppl tree Blue and white house
know this is beautiful

wished to write today
bout small things
at might persuade me
ut of my want

he lines I read
bout 'cowardice' and 'loyalty'
don't know
'this is drowning
r coming up for air

At night
give you my hand
ke a corpse
ut of the water

*

(Insomnia)

ight and its forces
ep through the picket gate
om the blue bush
o the kitchen

verywhere it moves
nd we cannot sleep we cannot sleep
e damn the missionaries
eir morals thin as stars
e find ourselves
ithin the black
rcus of the fly
ll night long
is sandpaper
ibasco leg

he dog sleepwalks
ito the cupboard
ito the garden and heart attacks
ello
ve had a dog dream
ake up and cannot find
y long ears

icotine caffeine
ungry bodies
ould put us to sleep
ut nothing puts us to sleep

*

How many windows have I broken?
And doors and lamps, and last month
tumbler I smashed into a desk

Then stood over the sink
Digging out splinters
With an awkward left hand
Have beaten my head with stones
Pieces of fence
Tried to tear out my eyes
These are not exaggerations
They were acts when words failed
The way surgeons
hammer hearts gone still

Now this
Small parallel pain
In my finger
The invisible thing inside
Grinding

glass
on its voyage out
to the heart

*

(After Che-King, 11th Century BC)

*'you love me and think only of me
ft your robe and ford the river Chen*

atch

‘the floating world’

.52 from Chicago

ft your skirt
rough customs,

iss me in the parking lot

*

(‘La Belle Romance’)

no other deep night
with the National Enquirer

silence
like the unseen
forms of a bat

the book
pages open
to sadness
dead flowers, dead
horses who carried
lovers to a meeting

in my last walk
through the kitchen
see it

I lift
the arms of a cobweb
out of the air
and carry its Y
slowly to the porch
as if alive

as if it was a wounded bird
or some terrible camouflaged insect

that could damage children

*

he distance between us
nd then this small map
f stars

a concentrated
cean of the night

hen lovers worship heavens
ey are worshipping
lack of distance

y brother the moon
ie lofty mattress
f nebula,
ish and spray of love

It is all
s close as my palm
n your body

so you
mong pillows and moonlight
ok up, search
or the jewellery
athing in darkness

atellite hunger, remote control,
he royal we'

and find
our own dark hand

*

That were the names of the towns
we drove into and through

stunned lost

having drunk our way
up vineyards
and then Hot Springs
soiling out the drunkenness

That were the names
I slept through
 my head
on your thigh
hundreds of miles
of blackness entering the car

All this
darkness and stars

but now
under the Napa Valley night
the star arch of dashboard
the ripe grape moon
we are together
and I love this muscle

love this muscle
that tenses

 and joins
the accelerator
to my cheek

*

(The linguistic war between men and women)

nd sometimes
think
omen in novels are too
ntrolled by the adverb.
s they depart
perfume of description

he rose from the table
nd left her shoe
ehind, *casually*'

et's keep our minds
ear, she said drunkenly,'
ie print hardly dry
n words like that

ly problem tonight
this landscape.
ike the Sanskrit lover
ho sees breasts in the high clouds,
sticles on the riverbed
The soldiers left their balls
ehind, crossing into Bangalore
ie said, mournfully')

very leaf bends
can put my hand
ito various hollows, the dogs

ck their way up the ditch
vallow the scent
f whatever they eat

lways wanted to own
movie theatre
alled ‘The Moonlight’

hat’s playing at *The Moonlight*
ie asked
afily

len never trail away.
hey sweat adjective.
he fell into
is unexpected arms.’
e mixes a ‘devious’ drink.
e spills his maddened seed
nto the lettuce—

*

(Real life)

1 real life
men talk about art
women judge men

1 the Queen Street tavern
p.m. the only one busy
the waitress
who reads a book a day

hour of the afternoon soaps

accusations
which hide the trap
door of tomorrow's guilt.
men bursting into bedrooms
out of restaurants.
everyone talks on phones
to the lover's brother
for the husband's mistress

1st second beer
1st fifth cigarette
the only thing more
confusing venomous
than real life
this hour of the soaps
where nobody smokes
and nobody talks about art

ve woken in thick
ouseholds
l my life
ut can nightmare myself
to this future—
st spring I sat here
unday Morning
s bachelor drunks
ame in, eyes
i prayer to the Billy Graham Show

he pastel bar
rey colours of the tv
is is where people come
fter the second failure of redemption

amon Fernandez,
tell me
hat port you
ought that tattoo

*

midnight dinner at the *Vesta Lunch*

here there is nothing
have taken from you
o I begin with memory
s old songs do

in this café
gainst the night

n this villa refrain
here we collect the fragment
o longer near us
o make ourselves whole

your bright eyes
n a greek bar, the way
ou wear your hat

*

have always
een afflicted
y angular
nall breasted
omen
om the mid-west,

new this was true
ie minute I met you

*

petition of midnight
every creature doth sleep
but us

and the fanatics

I want
the roulette of the lightning bolt
to decide all

in this suburban street
the skate-boarder rolls
surrounded by the seeming
loss of electricity

unlit
see him through the trees
poet
wearing a thick sweater
on the late September night

am unable to make anything of this
what are these words for

even the dog
turns away
into himself
the only one to know your name

*

write about you
as if I own you
which I do not.
as you can say of nothing
this is mine.

When we rise
the last hug
no longer belongs,
your fiction
in my story.
fulch for the future.

Whether we pass
through each other
like pure arrows
or fade into rumour
write down now
fiction of your arm

or of that afternoon
in Union Station
when we both were lost
again falling free
the speed of tears
under the Grand Rotunda
as we disappeared
lose from each other

you and your arrow
making just
what you fled through

*

(‘I want to be lifted up by some great white bird unknown to the police...’)

will never let a chicken
into my life
but I have let you
through you squeezed in
through a screen door
the way some chickens do

would never let chickens
influence my character
but like them good sense
batters at your entrance
‘poetic skill,’ ‘duty,’
under the fence

our lean shoulders
studied with greyhounds.
such ball and socket joints
we’ve seen only in diagrams
on the cover of *Scientific American*.
we let greyhounds
into my vicinity
noses, paws, ribcages
against my arm, I admit
weakness
or reluctant modesty.
could spend days lying on the ground
seeing the world with the perspective of snails
tumbling the small territory of obsessions

his leaf and grain of you,
ould attempt the epic
urney over your shoulder.

hen you were a hotel gypsy
elirious by windows
aving your arms
nd singing over the parking lots
learned from the foolish oyster
nd stepped out.

o here I am
aying see this
ok what I found
hen I opened myself up
efore death before the world,
ok at this blue eye
his socket in her waving arm
ese wonders.

n the night busy as snails
n wet chlorophyll apartments
e enter each other's shells
e way humans at such times
ish to enter mouths of lovers,

eeping like the rumour of pearl
n the embrace of oyster.

have never let spectacles into my life
nd now I am walking past
here I could see.
ere,
 where the horizon was

*

(The desire under the Elms Motel)

ow I attempted seduction
ith a select and
areful playing of
he McGarrigle Sisters

ow you seduced me
ereophonically the laugh

ie nose ankle nature

repartee the knee

our sad determination letters

ie earring

that falls

'hey love—

you forgot your glove'

*

peaking to you
his hour
these days when
have lost the feather of poetry
and the rains
of separation
irround us tock
ock like *Go* tablets

everyone has learned
to move carefully

dancing' 'laughing' 'bad taste'
a memory
tableau behind trees of law

in the midst of love for you
my wife's suffering
anger in every direction
and the children wise
as tough shrubs
but they are not tough
so I fear
how anything can grow from this

all the wise blood
poured from little cuts
down into the sink

this hour it is not
our body I want
but your quiet company

*

dentists disguise their own bad teeth
arbers go bald, foolish birds
avel to one particular tree.
hey pride themselves
n focus.
oets cannot spell.
everyone claims abstinence.

reading Neruda to a class
ading his lovely old
ariosity about all things
am told this is the first time
1 months I seem happy.
ealous of his slide
rough complexity.
ll afternoon I keep
epping into his pocket

whispering
instruct and delight me

*

*(These back alleys)
for Daphne*

in '64 you moved
and where was I?
somewhere and married.
(in '64 everybody got married)

Whatever we are now we were then.
Some days those maps collide
falling into future land.
It seems for hours
we have sat in your car,
almost valentine's day,
we've got a plane to meet and I
brought you a rose for you.
His talking
like a slow dance,
we're sharing of earphones.

Since I got separated
I cannot hold
my brain in my arms anymore.
Sitting in the back alley
his new mapping, hello
to the terra nova.
Now we watch each other
in our slow walks towards
and out of everything
we wanted to know in '64

*

nd for George moonlight
ecame her. Curious. After years of wit
e saw it enter her and believed,
nging love songs in the back seat.

hree of us drive downtown
i our confusions

oodbye to the hills of the 30's

inned, torn apart, how do each of us
i are our hearts

nd George still 'hearty,' bad jokes
attering to the group,
oes not converse, but he sings the heartbreakers
adly and precisely in the back seat

o we moon, we tough

*

issing the stomach
issing your scarred
in boat. History
what you've travelled on
nd take with you

ve each had our stomachs
issed by strangers
the other

nd as for me
bless everyone
ho kissed you here

*

(Ends of the Earth)

For you I have slept
like an arrow in the hall
pointing towards your wakefulness
in other time zones

And wary
piece by piece
we put each other together
your past
that of one who has walked
through fifteen strange houses
in order to be here

the charm of Wichita
gunmen in your bones
the 19th century
rolling like a storm
through your long body

that history I read in comic books
and on the flickering screen
when I was thirteen

now we are cats-cradled
in the Pacific
how does one avoid this?
how to the ends of the earth?
the loose moon follows

Wet moonlight
recalls childhood

the long legged daughter
the stars
of Wichita in the distance

midnight and hugging
against her small chest
the favourite book,
Goodnight Moon

under the covers she
reads its courtly order
its list of farewells
to everything

We grow less complex
we reduce ourselves The way lovers
have their small cheap charms
liver lizard,
stone

ancient customs
that grow from dust
swirled out
from prairie into tropic

strange how the odours meet

now, however briefly, bedraggled
history
focuses

Skin Boat

*'A sheet of water near your breasts
where I can sink
like a stone'*

PAUL ELUARD

HER HOUSE

Because she has lived alone, her house is the product of nothing but herself and necessity. The necessity of growing older and raising children. Others drifted into her life, in and out and they have changed her, added things, but I have never been into a home that is a revelation of character and time as much as hers. It contains those she knows and has known and she has distilled all of her journey. When I first met her I saw nothing but her, and now, as she becomes familiar, I recognize the small customs.

The problem for her is leaving. She says, 'Last night I was listening to everything I know so well, and I imagined what if I woke up in a year's time and there were different trees.' Streets, the weight of sea air, certain birds who recognize your shrubbery, that too holds you, allows a freedom of habit, is a house.

Everything here is alien to me but you. And your room like a grey well, your coat hangers above the laundry machine where you hang the semi-damp clothes so you do not have to iron them, the green grey walls of wood, the secret drawer which you opened after you knew me two years to show me the ancient Japanese pens. All this I love. Though I carry my own landscape in me and my three bags. But this has become your skin, and as you leave you recognize this.

On certain evenings, when I have not bothered to put on lights, I hit my knees on low bookcases where they should not be. But you shift your hip easily, habitually, around them as you pass by carrying laundry or books. When you can move through a house blindfolded it belongs to you. You are moving like blood calmly within your

own body. It is only recently that I am able to wake beside you and without looking, almost in a dream, put out my hand and know exactly where your shoulder or your heart will be – you in your specific posture in this bed of yours that we share. And at times this has seemed to be knowledge. As if you were a blueprint of your house.

THE CINNAMON PEELER

'I were a cinnamon peeler
would ride your bed
and leave the yellow bark dust
on your pillow.

our breasts and shoulders would reek
you could never walk through markets
without the profession of my fingers
coating over you. The blind would
humble certain of whom they approached
though you might bathe
under rain gutters, monsoon.

ere on the upper thigh
t this smooth pasture
neighbour to your hair
r the crease
hat cuts your back. This ankle.
ou will be known among strangers
s the cinnamon peeler's wife.

could hardly glance at you
efore marriage
ever touch you
your keen nosed mother, your rough brothers.
buried my hands
n saffron, disguised them
ver smoking tar,
elped the honey gatherers ...

Then we swam once
touched you in water
and our bodies remained free,
you could hold me and be blind of smell.
You climbed the bank and said

 this is how you touch other women
like grass cutter's wife, the lime burner's daughter.
and you searched your arms
for the missing perfume

 and knew

 what good is it
to be the lime burner's daughter
left with no trace
if not spoken to in the act of love
if wounded without the pleasure of a scar.

you touched
your belly to my hands
in the dry air and said
I am the cinnamon
dealer's wife. Smell me.

WOMEN LIKE YOU

the communal poem – Sigiri Graffiti, 5th century

hey do not stir
these ladies of the mountain
do not give us
the twitch of eyelids

The king is dead

hey answer no one
like the hard
rock as lover.
Women like you
make men pour out their hearts

‘Seeing you I want
no other life’

‘The golden skins have
caught my mind’

who came here
out of the bleached land
climbed this fortress
to adore the rock
and with the solitude of the air
behind them

 carved an alphabet
whose motive was perfect desire

wanting these portraits of women

o speak
and caress

hundreds of small verses
by different hands
became one
habit of the unrequited

seeing you
want no other life
and turn around
to the sky
and everywhere below
angle, waves of heat
secular love

holding the new flowers
circle of
first finger and thumb
which is a window

to your breast

pleasure of the skin
wearing earring
girl
of the belly
 and then
one mermaid
one heart
try as a flower
on rock
you long eyed women

the golden
runk swan breasts

ps
ie long long eyes

re stand against the sky

bring you

flute
om the throat
f a loon

o talk to me
f the used heart

THE RIVER NEIGHBOUR

ll these rumours. You lodge in the mountains
f Hang-chou, a cabin in Portland township,
r in Yüeh-chou for sure

ie dust from my marriage
rasted our clear autumn

his month the cactus
nder the rains

hile you lounge with my children
y the creek snakes, the field asparagus

cross the universe
ach room I lit
as a dark garden, I held
othing but the lamp

his letter paints me
ransparent as I am

ne dead bird in the hall
onversation of the water-closets
ompany of the leaf on the stairs

pass her often

loon leaf memory of asparagus
find her earrings
t the foot of curtainless windows

in the kitchen
salt fills the body
of an RCA Victor dog

let us nose our way
next year with the spring waters
and search for each other
somewhere in the east

TO A SAD DAUGHTER

ll night long the hockey pictures
aze down at you
eeping in your tracksuit.
elligerent goalies are your ideal.
hreats of being traded
its and wounds
all this pleases you.
my god! you say at breakfast
eading the sports page over the Alpen
s another player breaks his ankle
r assaults the coach.

hen I thought of daughters
wasn't expecting this
ut I like this more.
like all your faults
ven your purple moods
hen you retreat from everyone
o sit in bed under a quilt.
nd when I say 'like'
mean of course 'love'
ut that embarrasses you.
ou who feel superior to black and white movies
oaxed for hours to see *Casablanca*)
ough you were moved
y *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

ne day I'll come swimming
eside your ship or someone will
nd if you hear the siren

sten to it. For if you close your ears
nly nothing happens. You will never change.

don't care if you risk
our life to angry goalies
eatures with webbed feet.
ou can enter their caves and castles
eir glass laboratories. Just
on't be fooled by anyone but yourself.

his is the first lecture I've given you.
ou're 'sweet sixteen' you said.
d rather be your closest friend
ian your father. I'm not good at advice
ou know that, but ride
ie ceremonies
ntil they grow dark.

ometimes you are so busy
iscovering your friends
ache with a loss
but that is greed.
nd sometimes I've gone
ito *my* purple world
nd lost you.

ne afternoon I stepped
ito your room. You were sitting
t the desk where I now write this.
orsythia outside the window
nd sun spilled over you
ke a thick yellow miracle
s if another planet
as coaxing you out of the house
all those possible worlds! –
nd you, meanwhile, busy with mathematics.

cannot look at forsythia now
without loss, or joy for you.
You step delicately
into the wild world
and your real prize will be
the frantic search.
Want everything. If you break
break going out not in.
How you live your life I don't care
but I'll sell my arms for you,
hold your secrets for ever.

I speak of death
which you fear now, greatly,
which is without answers,
except that each
one we know is
in our blood.
Don't recall graves.
Memory is permanent.
Remember the afternoon's
pale suburban annunciation.
Your goalie
in his frightening mask
dreams perhaps
of gentleness.

ALL ALONG THE MAZINAW

ater the osprey

illing towards
nly what he sees

ie messenger heron
arning of our progress
p Mud Lake

paddle is
ranger
what it heaves out of the way

Wherever you go
Within a silence
witnessed,
touches.

everything aware
f alteration but you.
reatures who veer. The torn leaf
escending into marsh gas
ito an ancient breath.

1 bony rapids
ock gazed up
ith the bright paint
f previous canoes.

ut now, you, *c'est là*,
ith the clear river water heart

ie rock who floats
n her own deep reflection.
emale rock. Limb. Holes of hunger
e climb into and disappear.

ne hour in the arms of the Mazinaw.

hose things we don't know we love
e love harder.

Tanned face
ern rock the rock lolling
emorized by the Algonquin
lohawk lovers. Mineral eye.

y yes I saw your dear sisters too
efore this afternoon's passion
iose depot creek nights when they
npacked their breasts
erious and full of the fever of loon
r whoever stumbled
ung onto the august
untry waters.

PACIFIC LETTER

to Stan of Depot Creek, old friend, pal o'mine

ow I remember that you rebuilt my chicken coop
orth of the farmhouse along the pasture fence
ith fresh pine from Verona.
1 autumn you hid a secret message under floorboards
nowing we would find it in spring.
fanciful message. Carved with care.
s you carved you imagined the laughing.
/e both know the pleasures art and making bring.

nd in summer we lounged for month on month
tting slide the publishers and English Departments
ho sent concerned letters that slept in the red mailbox.
len and women came drifting in
om the sea and from the west border
nd with them there was nothing at cross purpose.
hey made nothing of mountain crossing
o share that fellowship.
he girls danced because
eir long sleeves would not keep still
nd I, drunk, went to sleep among field rocks.
/e spoke out desires without regret.
hen you returned to the west of the province
nd I to the south.

fter separation had come to its worst
e met and travelled the Mazinaw with my sons
rough all the thirty-six folds of that creature river
ito the valley of bright lichen,
reen rice beds, marble rock, and at night

apt under croaking pine.
he spirit so high it was all over the heavens!

nd at Depot Creek we walked
or a last time down river
o a neighbour's southern boundary
ast the tent where you composed verses
ast the land where I once lived
ie water about it clear in my memory as blue jade.
hen you and your wife sang back and forth
i the mosquito filled cabin under the naphtha.
he muskrat, listening at the edge,
eard our sound – guitars and lone violin
hose weavings seduced us with a sadness.

he canoe brushed over open lake
earing the lighted homes
hose laughter eliminated the paddle
nd the loon stumbled
p sudden into the air beside the boat
ocked us awake and disappeared
aving a ripple that slid the moon away.
nd before the last days in August
e scattered like stars and rain.

nd I think now that this
what we are to each other,
iends busy with their own distance
ho reappear now and then alongside.
s once you could not believe
had visited the town of your youth
here you sat in your room
erfecting *Heartbreak Hotel*
iat new place to 'dwell' – that
entle word in the midst of angry song.

ll this comes to an end.
uring summer evenings
miss your company.
hings we clung to
ay on the horizon
nd we become the loon
n his journey
lone tropical taxi
o confused depth and privacy.

t such times – no talking
o conclusion in the heart.

buy postage

seal this

nd send it a thousand miles, thinking.

A DOG IN SAN FRANCISCO

sitting in an empty house
with a dog from the Mexican Circus!
Daisy, embrace is my only pleasure.
holding and hugging my friends. Education.
wave of eucalyptus. Warm granite.
these are the things I have in my heart.
heart and skills, there's nothing else.

usually don't like small dogs but you
like midwestern women take over the air.
you leap into the air and pivot
diver going up! You are known
to open the fridge and eat when you wish
you can roll down car windows and step out
you know when to get off the elevator.

always wanted to be a dog
but I hesitated
or I thought they lacked certain skills.
now I want to be a dog.

TRANSLATIONS OF MY POSTCARDS

ie peacock means order
ie fighting kangaroos mean madness
ie oasis means I have struck water

ositioning of the stamp – the despot's head
orizontal, or 'mounted policemen',
iean political danger

ie false date means I
m not where I should be

hen I speak of the weather
mean business

blank postcard says
am in the wilderness

7 OR 8 THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER– A STOLEN BIOGRAPHY

The Father's Guns

After her father died they found nine guns in the house. Two in his clothing drawers, one under the bed, one in the glove compartment of the car, etc. Her brother took their mother out onto the prairie with a revolver and taught her to shoot.

The Bird

For a while in Topeka parrots were very popular. Her father was given one in lieu of a payment and kept it with him at all times because it was the fashion. It swung above him in the law office and drove back with him in the car at night. At parties friends would bring their parrots and make them perform what they had been taught: the first line from *Twelfth Night*, a bit of Italian opera, cowboy songs, or a surprisingly good rendition of Russ Colombo singing 'Prisoner of Love'. Her father's parrot could only imitate the office typewriter, along with the *ching* at the end of each line. Later it broke its neck crashing into a bookcase.

The Bread

Four miles out of Topeka on the highway – the largest electrical billboard in the State of Kansas. The envy of all Missouri. It advertised bread and the electrical image of a knife cut slice after slice. These curled off endlessly. 'Meet you at the bread,' 'See you at the loaf,' were common phrases. Aroused couples would park there under the stars on the open night prairie. Virtue was lost, 'kissed all over by every boy in Wichita'. Poets, the inevitable visiting writers, were taken to see it, and it hummed over the seductions in cars, over the nightmares of girls in bed. Slice after

slice fell towards the earth. A feeding of the multitude in this parched land on the way to Dorrance, Kansas.

First Criticism

She is two weeks old, her mother takes her for a drive. At the gas station the mechanic is cleaning the windshield and watches them through the glass. Wiping his hands he puts his head in the side window and says, 'Excuse me for saying this but I know what I'm talking about – that child has a heart condition.'

Listening In

Overhear her in the bathroom, talking to a bug: 'I don't want you on me, honey.' 8 a.m.

Self-Criticism

'For a while there was something about me that had a dubious quality. Dogs would not take meat out of my hand. The town bully kept handcuffing me to trees.'

Fantasies

Always one fantasy. To be travelling down the street and a man in a clean white suit (the detail of 'clean' impresses me) leaps into her path holding flowers and sings to her while an invisible orchestra accompanies his solo. All her life she has waited for this and it never happens.

Reprise

In 1956 the electric billboard in Kansas caught fire and smoke plumed into a wild sunset. Bread on fire, broken glass. Birds flew towards it above the cars that circled round to watch. And last night, past midnight, her excited phone call. Her home town is having a marathon to benefit the symphony. She pays \$4 to participate. A tuxedoed gentleman begins the race with a clash of cymbals and she takes off. Along the route at frequent intervals are quartets who play for her. When they stop for water a

violinist performs a solo. So here she comes. And there I go,
stepping forward in my white suit, with a song in my heart.

BESSIE SMITH AT ROY THOMSON HALL

At first she refused to sing.

She had applied for the one concert – that she was allowed each sabbatical – to take place in Havana. Palms! Oh Pink Walls! Cuba! she would hum to herself, dazzling within the clouds.

But here she was. Given the choice of nine Honest Ed restaurants and then hurried to Roy Thomson Hall which certainly should never have been called that.

A long brown dress, with fringes.

Fred Longshaw at the piano.

She opened the first set with ‘Kitchen Man’. Five people left. Al Neil had flown in from Vancouver on a tip. For the next ten minutes, after people realized it really *was* Bessie Smith, the hall was filled with shouted requests. ‘Any Woman’s Blues’, ‘Down in the Dumps’ ... until she said I want to sing what I never was allowed to, because I died. And she brought the rest of the twentieth century under her wing.

She wore wings. They raised themselves with her arms each time she coaxed a phrase. Her wings would float up and fall slow like a hand held out of a car coming down against the wind, the feathers black as the Steinway. You should have been there.

During the intermission the stunned audience just sat in their seats. 'She's looking good' was one of the common remarks.

When she returned she brought out the band. They were glad to have arrived on earth, but they too had hoped for Havana. Abraham Wheat on soprano sax was there. Joe Smith on cornet was there. By midnight her voice was even better. She talked more between songs.

At 2 a.m. the band levitated. She used no microphone. Above us banners waved and danced like a multitude. She took on and caressed the songs of Jerome Kern. She asked what happened to her friend Charlie Green. And then, to her surprise, to apologize for Toronto, Charlie Green was allowed to join her. He had been found frozen in a Harlem tenement but now stepped forward shyly with his trombone. And now he and Joe Smith and Bessie Smith were alone on stage the audience quiet and the banners still and the air conditioning holding its breath. They wheeled away the Steinway. They brought out an old upright decorated with bullet holes. Al Neil was asked to sit in. She sang, 'It won't be You'.

The encore was made up of two songs. 'Weeping Willow Blues' and 'Tar Away Blues'. We stood like sudden wheat. But she could not hear us. She could not see us. Then she died again.

THE CONCESSIONS

i.

/awanosh.

In the corn of night
irrounded by the dusty dark green
ot insects and moon
a star coat.

/e are new and ancient here
lking through midnight's
red arms,
tting go the newness.
am home.
ld farmhouse, a defunct red truck
nder the trees
onversation all evening
nd I have nothing more to say
ut this is a magic night.
ur bodies betray us, long for sleep.
till – talk about the bear, the cause
f theatre, the first time we all met.

yellow light falls onto the sink
nd our arms lean forward
owards Elmira coffee cake.
ello again, after Pacific months,
nd I brought you a seed I never gave you
nd I brought you stories and a peace I want
o give, but it is both of you
ho bring comfort and friendship.

ll night we are at this table.

Tableau of faint light,
agment of Ontario.

le would be plotting revolution in the 1830's.
nd outside the same heat, old coat of stars,
ie released lung of the country, and
reat Ontario night beans growing
owards Goderich.

Lone houses
etrayed by poplar
eached only by long arms
f Wawanosh concessions,
ie crow of night.

Tomorrow
ill be all highway
ll I get home.
o to bed, exhausted and alone.
o to bed with each others' minds.
do not know what to say
bout this kind of love
ut I refuse to lose it.

ii.

y the outhouse and red truck
look up towards a lit window
hich seeps a yellow road into trees.
o end in the warm
love of a maple!

bear.

elcome Shakespeare, Sarah Bernhardt,
someone is starting a new story.
someone is dancing new on this
rrific ancient earth, claiming this
or mute ancestors

nd their language of hands.

The entertainers
who allow themselves long evenings
while others sleep.
the suspicious work of the community.

he town of Molesworth
which once housed a dancing cow
articulated us. As did the director
from Atwood, the fiddler from Listowel,
and the actress from Fergus, the writer from Wingham,
the mystic from Millbank.
these country hearts, a county conspiracy.
their determined self-portraits
where alone one picks
up the pencil, begins with nothing
but these blank pages.
let me tell you, I love them more and more
all their night silences, their ignored dream.

in daylight the car hums. Bluevale Seaforth
every Holmesville.
the deer and flamingos, another mythology,
race every tenth house.
this is not your home
but you are home.

Geraniums
in a tractor tire, horse weathervanes.
loose over the Maitland River ...

and so that yellow light
man or woman working inside
aware of the cricket night
cricket cricket ... cicada? he writes, she says
no one but the page

lack hallways behind him
nd ahead the window screen and then
ie yard of yellow highway into maple
hich his mind can walk out on
nd dream a story
r his friends, the community

s someone once imagined
dancing cow, a giant cheese.
he dream made name.
he gestures of the barroom
ade dictionary.

iii.

hen the four piece band sat stony in the Blyth Hotel
nd played *Maple Sugar*, the bar got up to dance.
ly shoulder banging against the women's room
o avoid flying drunk feet in their boots
at brought the cowshit in. And the bullshit
ame too, through the beer and smoke.

his lady on the electric piano, the two fiddlers
nd guitarist, the actors from across the street
epping up to sing, receive stormy ovations.
he tv green and orange above us
ecording grade B Hollywood, flamingo art.
nd something is happening here.
own and actors exchanging clothes.
he mechanic holds his harmonica
rofessionally against the mike
iercing out 'Have you ever been lonely
ave you ever been blue,'
nd, as the man from Lobo says,
uck the Renaissance
just get me a beer.

iv.

o this midnight choir.

t 2 a.m. everyone is thrown out
nd spreads onto the empty streets.
nseen, as we step into cars,
re the bear and hawk,
ho generate us.
nd from the unseen sky
ie crow watches
affic light up Highway 4
ien turn into unpaved
ellow concession roads.

he car bounces on a grass path
etween tall corn and stops.

ight from the open car
eals the yard.
nd, as if painted onto the night,
the yellow window
here someone, holding a mirror
drawing a picture of herself.

***RED ACCORDION–
AN IMMIGRANT SONG***

How you and I talked!
Casually, and side by side,
Not even cold at 4 a.m.
New Year's morning

At a double outhouse in Blyth.

Break of trees and scrub snow.
Was it dream or true memory
This casualness, this ease of talk
After the long night of the previous year.

Nothing important said
Just as now the poem
Gathers together such frail times.
It steps forward as accident
Like a warm breeze from Brazil.

 This whispering
Is if not to awaken
That hibernates in firewood
Is if not to disturb the blue night
The last memory of the year.

 So we sit
Within loose walls of the poem
You and I, our friends indoors
Drunk on the home-made wine.
All of us searching to discern ourselves,

ie 'gift' we can give each other.
ell this landscape.
r the one we came from.

olkas in a smoky midnight light.

stepped into this new year
ancing with a small child.
achel, so graceful,
e bowed when the dance was over.
'I could paint this I would

and if writing
lowed colour and incident
removed from time
we could be clear.

he bleak view past the door
where we are, not what we
ave made here, or become, or brought
ke wolves bringing food to a lair
om another world. And this
magic.

Ray Bird's seven-year-old wine
transformed! Finally made good.
drank an early version years ago
nd passed out.

Time collapses.
he years, the intricate
nowledge now of each other
akes love.

yard in its scrub snow, stacked wood
rindle in the moonlight, the red truck,
bare tree at the foot of the driveway

aving to heaven.

A full moon the
colour of night kitchen.

en yards away a high bonfire
remembered from summer) lifts
s redness above the farmhouse
nd the lean figures of children circle
o throw in sticks and arms off a Christmas tree
s the woman in long black hair
er left foot on a stump
lays the red accordion.

nd the others dance.

Embracing or flinging
hemselves away from each other.
hey bow and they look up
o full moon and white cold sky
nd they *move*, even in this stilled painting.
hey talk a white breath at each other.
ome appear more than once
ith different partners.
/e are immune to wind.
ur boots pound down the frozen earth
ur children leap from and into our arms.
ll of us poised and inspired by music
riendship self-made heat and the knowledge
ach has chosen to come here driven for hours
ver iced highways, to be here bouncing and leaping

o a reel that carried itself generations ago
orth of the border, through lost towns,
ettled among the strange names,
nd became eventually our own

ll the way from Virginia.

IN A YELLOW ROOM

There was another reason for Fats Waller to record, on May 8th, 1935, 'I'm gonna sit right down and write myself a letter.' It is for this moment, driving from Goderich towards and past Blyth, avoiding Blyth by taking the gravel concessions, four adults and a child, who have just swum in a very cold Lake Huron. His piano drips from the cassette player and we all recognize the piece but are mute. We cannot sing before he does, before he eases himself into the lyrics as if into a chair, this large man who is to die in 1943 sitting in a train in Kansas City, finally still.

He was always moving, grand on the street or the midnight taxi rides with Andy Razaf during which it is rumoured he wrote most of his songs. I have always loved him but I love him most in the company of friends. Because his body was a crowd and we desire to imitate such community. His voice staggers or is gentle behind a whimsical piano, the melody ornamental and cool as vichyssoise in that hot studio in this hot car on a late June Ontario summer day. What else of importance happened on May 8th, 1935?

The only creature I've ever met who disliked him was a nervous foxhound I had for three years. As soon as I put on Mr Waller the dog would dart from the room and hide under a bed. The dog recognized the anarchy, the unfolding of musical order, the growls and muttering, the fact that Fats Waller was talking to someone over your shoulder as well as to you. What my dog did not notice was the serenity he should have learned from. The notes as fresh as creek washed clothes.

The windows are open as we drive under dark maples that sniff up a rumour of Lake Huron. The piano energizes the hay bound into wheels, a white field of turkeys, various tributaries of the Maitland River. Does he, drunk, and carrying his tin of tomatoes – ‘it feeds the body and cuts the hangover’ – does he, in the midnight taxi with Razaf, imagine where the music disappears?

Where it will recur? Music and lyrics they wrote then sold to false composers for ready cash and only later admitting they had written ‘Sunny side of the street’ and ‘I can’t give you anything but love’ and so many of the best songs of their time. The hidden authors on their two hour taxi ride out of Harlem to Brooklyn and back again to Harlem, the night heat and smells yells overheard from the streets they passed through which they incorporated into what they were making every texture entering this large man, a classical organist in his youth, who strode into most experiences, hid from his ex-wife Edith Hatchett, visiting two kinds of women, ‘ladies who had pianos and ladies who did not,’ and died of bronchial pneumonia on the Acheson-Topeka and Santa Fe, a song he did not write.

He and the orchestra of his voice have now entered the car with us. This is his first visit to the country, though he saw it from a train window the day before he died. Saw the heartland where the music could disappear, the diaspora of notes, a rewinding, a backward movement of the formation of the world, the invention of his waltz.

***WHEN YOU DRIVE THE
QUEENSBOROUGH ROADS AT MIDNIGHT***

o not look at a star
r full moon. Look out for frogs.
nd not the venerable ones who recline
n gravel parallel to the highway
ut the foolhardy, bored on a country night
azzled by the adventure of passing beams.

le know their type of course, local heroes
ho take off their bandanas and leap naked,
ight green, seduced
y the whispers of michelin.

o them we are distinct death.
am fond of these foolish things
iore than the moon.
hey welcome me after absence.
ne of them is my youth
ill jumping into rivers
ike care and beware of him.

nowing you love this landscape
ere are few rules.
o not gaze at moons.
uzzle the heat in granite.
wim toward pictographs.
ouch only reflections.

PROUST IN THE WATERS

for Scott and Krystyne

wimming along the bar of moon
ie yellow scattered sleeping
rm of the moon

on Balsam Lake

leasing the air

out of your mouth

ie moon under your arm

ck of the brain

ibmerged. Tick

f the loon's heart

i the wet night thunder

below us

nowing its shore is the air

le love things which disappear

nd are found

eatures who plummet

nd become

n arrow.

o know the syllables

i a loon sentence

intricate

ift of preposition

iat signals meridian

west south west.

he mother tongue

bubble caught in my beak

releasing the air

of a language

seeing no human in this moon storm

being naked in black water

you approach the corridor

rich jewellery! Queen Anne's Lace!

and slide to fathoms.

the mouth swallows river morse

throws a sound

through the loom of liquid

against sky.

Where are you?

on the edge

of the moon bar

ESCARPMENT

He lies in bed, awake, holding her left forearm. It is 4 a.m. He turns, his eyes rough against the night. Through the window he can hear the creek – which has no name. Yesterday at noon he walked along its shallow body overhung with cedar, beside rushes, moss and watercress. A green and grey body whose intricate bones he is learning among which he stumbles and walks through in an old pair of Converse running shoes. She was further upriver investigating for herself and he exploring on his own now crawling under a tree that has uprooted and spilled. Its huge length across a section of the creek. With his left hand he holds onto the massive stump roots and slides beneath it within the white water heaving against him. Shirt wet, he follows the muscle in the water and travels fast under the tree. His dreaming earlier must have involved all this.

In the river he was looking for a wooden bridge which they had crossed the previous day. He walks confidently now, the white shoes stepping casually off logs into deep water, through gravel, and watercress which they eat later in a cheese sandwich. She chews much of it walking back to the cabin. He turns and she freezes, laughing, with watercress in her mouth. There are not many more ways he can tell her he loves her. He shows mock outrage and yells but she cannot hear him over the sound of the stumbling creek.

He loves too, as she knows, the body of rivers. Provide him with a river or a creek and he will walk along it. Will step off and sink to his waist, the sound of water and rock encasing him in solitude. The noise around them insists on silence if they are more than five feet apart. It is only later when they sit in a pool legs against each other

that they can talk, their conversation roaming to include relatives, books, best friends, the history of Lewis and Clark, fragments of the past which they piece together. But otherwise this river's noise encases them and now he walks alone with its spirits, the clack and splash, the twig break, hearing only an individual noise if it occurs less than an arm's length away. He is looking, now, for a name.

It is not a name for a map – he knows the arguments of imperialism. It is a name for them, something temporary for their vocabulary. A code. He slips under the fallen tree holding the cedar root the way he holds her forearm. He hangs a moment, his body being pulled by water going down river. He holds it the same way and for the same reasons. Heart Creek? Arm River? he writes, he mutters to her in the darkness. The body moves from side to side and he hangs with one arm, deliriously out of control, still holding on. Then he plunges down, touches gravel and flakes of wood with his back the water closing over his head like a clap of gloved hands. His eyes are open as the river itself pushes him to his feet and he is already three yards down stream and walking out of the shock and cold stepping into the sun. Sun lays its crossword, litters itself, along the whole turning length of this river so he can step into heat or shadow.

He thinks of where she is, what she is naming. Near her, in the grasses, are Bladder Campion, Devil's Paintbrush, some unknown blue flowers. He stands very still and cold in the shadow of long trees. He has gone far enough to look for a bridge and has not found it. Turns upriver. He holds onto the cedar root the way he holds her forearm.

BIRCH BARK

for George Whalley

n hour after the storm on Birch Lake
ie island bristles. Rock. Leaves still falling.
t this time, in the hour after lightning
e release the canoes.
ilence of water
urer than the silence of rock.
paddle touches itself. We move
ver blind mercury, feel the muscle
ithin the river, the blade
eave in dark water.

ow each casual word is precisely chosen
assed from bow to stern, as if
aning back to pass a canteen.
here are echoes, repercussions of water.
/e are in absolute landscape,
mong names that fold in onto themselves.

o circle the island means witnessing
ie blue grey dust of a heron
leased out of the trees.
o the dialogue slides
othing more than friendship
n old song we break into
ot needing all the words.

/e are past naming the country.
he reflections are never there
ithout us, without the exhaustion

f water and trees after storm.

BREEZE

for BP Nichol

owadays I listen only to duets.
ohnny Hodges and The Bean, a thin slip
f piano behind them
n this page on this stage
raft a breeze in a horn.

ne friend sits back and listens
o the other. Nowadays
want only the wild and tender
hrasing of “NightHawk,”
s air groaned out
ke the breath of a lover.
ashomon by Saxophone.

o brother and sister woke, miles apart,
i those 19th century novels you loved,
ith the same wound or desire.

le sit down to clean and sharpen
ie other’s most personal lines
-a proposal of more, a waving dismissal
f whole stanzas—in Lethbridge in Edmonton
ou stood with the breeze
i an uncomfortable Chinese restaurant
i Camrose, getting a second cup
t The Second Cup near Spadina.

almost called you this morning
or a phone number.

records I haven't yet returned.
apes you were supposed to make for me.

nd across the country
ars about your death.
always thought, someone says,
e was very good for you.
hough I still like, Barrie,
ie friends who are not good for me.

long the highway
nly the duets and wind fill up my car.
saw the scar of the jet that Sunday
ying to get you out of the sky.
en Webster, Coleman Hawkins.
n A and an H, a bean and a breeze.

ll these twin truths

here is bright sumac, once more,
his September, along the Bayview Extension

rom now on
o more solos

tie you to me

A note on the poems

The Cinnamon Peeler contains poems that cover a twenty-five year period. They are poems that were written alongside and between other longer works such as *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, and *In the Skin of a Lion*. They cover the period from 1963, when I first started to write, to 1990.

Elimination Dance, which turns up here as an intermission, is a sort of rogue-troubadour poem that seems continually to change—a few lines get dropped and a few get added every year. It is based on those horrendous dances where a caller decides, seemingly randomly, who should not be allowed to continue dancing. So the piece (I still hesitate to call it a poem) is in the voice of a mad, and totally beyond-the-pale, announcer.

Two poems in *Secular Love*, ‘The River Neighbour’ and ‘Pacific Letter’, are based on the Rihaku-Tu Fu-Ezra Pound poems. They are not so much translations as re-locations into my landscape, with a few lines by the earlier poets making their appearance in my poem.

Most of these poems were written in Canada. A few were written in Sri Lanka. Tin Roof was written in Hawaii.

Trick with a Knife was dedicated to Kim and Quintin and Griffin. And *Secular Love* was dedicated to Linda.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE



Michael Ondaatje

The Cinnamon Peeler

Michael Ondaatje is a novelist and poet who lives in Toronto, Canada. He is the author of *The English Patient*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *Coming Through Slaughter*, and *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*; two other collections of poems, *Secular Love* and *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do*; and a memoir, *Running in the Family*. He received the Booker Prize for *The English Patient*.



INTERNATIONAL

BOOKS BY **Michael Ondaatje**

PROSE

The English Patient
1992

In the Skin of a Lion
1987

Running in the Family (memoir)
1982

Coming Through Slaughter
1976

The Collected Works of Billy the Kid
1970

POETRY

The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poems
1991

Secular Love
1984

There's a Trick with a Knife
I'm Learning to Do: Poems 1963–1978
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