

**A Dream of Hanlan's**  
*(Southern England, 1945)*  
**Raymond Souster, 1945/64/84**

It's not homesickness, it's the thought of the morning sun  
strong on the beach, warming the sand for the feet  
of the young girl and boy I can almost see running  
out the cottage door, down the walk, then free of the house  
and anything holding them from the lake's tingling-cool  
water....

And it isn't loneliness, it's just me imagining  
the utter peace of mind, the quiet of those mornings,  
when no aircraft roared off to bomb or to destroy,  
no machine-guns, no cannon, shaking out sprays of death,  
but with only the shouts of swimmers in the water,  
the cries of children as the waves break on their impractical  
castles of sand.

It's nothing but desire to live again,  
fresh from the beginning like a child.

**Flight of the Roller-Coaster**  
*(Old Sunnyside Beach, Toronto)*  
**Raymond Souster, 1955**

Once more around should do it, the man confided ...

and sure enough, when the roller-coaster reached the peak  
of the giant curve above me, shrill screech of its wheels  
almost drowned out by the shriller cries of its riders –

instead of the dip, then the plunge with its landslide of screams,  
it rose in the air like a movieland magic carpet, some wonderful bird,

and without fuss or fanfare swooped slowly above the amusement-park,  
over Spook's Castle, ice-cream booths, shooting-gallery;  
then losing no height made the last yards across the beach,

where its brakeman cucumber-cool in the last seat solemnly saluted  
a lady about to change to her bathing suit:

ending up, as many witnesses reported later,  
heading leisurely out above the blue lake water,  
to disappear all too soon behind a low-flying flight of clouds.

**Girl at the Corner of  
Dundas & Elizabeth  
Raymond Souster, 1955**

You want it  
or you don't

I'm twenty-one  
I ain't  
got any time  
to waste

You want it  
or you don't

Mister  
make up your mind

**Bridge over the Don  
Raymond Souster, 1956**

Why does your loneliness surge up, why does that ugliness, despair,  
Hit you between the eyes because you stand  
On a bridge late at night, because you look down.  
Down, at the dark water, because your eyes  
Move out into the darkness?



**Death by Streetcar**  
**Raymond Souster, 1964**

The old lady crushed to death by the Bathurst streetcar  
had one cent left in her purse.

Which could mean only  
one of two things: either she was wary of purse-snatchers  
or all her money was gone.

If the latter,  
she must have known that her luck must very soon change  
for better or for worse:  
which this day had decided.

**Chet Baker at the Colonial**  
**Raymond Souster, 1964**

Play your horn to the floor, boy, keep the sound  
close to the bandstand, keep it there  
with you and the others beside you making, living this music.  
Don't ask those at the tables, drunk, talking too loudly,  
laughing too crazily, to share it, possess it.  
See what they've done with their lives, see  
what they'd like to do to the lives of others. Go on  
playing with your horn down, blowing the perfect notes  
to the goddess at your feet, that swooning silent  
angel of perfection.

**Queen Anne's Lace**  
**Raymond Souster, 1974**

It's a kind of flower  
that if you didn't know it  
you'd pass by the rest of your life.

But once it's been pointed out  
you'll look for it always,  
even in places  
where you know it can't possibly be.

You'll never tire  
of bending over to examine,  
of marvelling at this  
shyest filigree of wonder  
born among grasses.

You'll imagine poems  
as brief, as spare,  
so natural with themselves  
as to take your breath away.

**Misty Morning, Ashbridge's Bay**  
**Raymond Souster, 1984**

The shoulders of the fog  
take their last shrug,  
begin to steal away.

Day will soon burn through.

It's a last chance  
for birds and boats  
to feel that strange  
sweet-and-sour joy  
that aloneness brings,

a final moment  
hidden from the all-seeing  
meddling eye of man.

**Four Strong Winds**  
**Ian Tyson, 1963**

Four strong winds that blow lonely  
Seven seas that run high  
All those things that don't change come what may  
But our good times are all gone  
And I'm bound for moving on  
I'll look for you if I'm ever back this way

Think I'll go out to Alberta  
Weather's good there in the fall  
I got some friends that I can go to working for  
Still I wish you'd change your mind  
If I asked you one more time  
But we've been through that a hundred times or more

Four strong winds that blow lonely  
Seven seas that run high  
All those things that don't change come what may  
But our good times are all gone  
And I'm bound for moving on  
I'll look for you if I'm ever back this way

If I get there before the snow flies  
And if things are goin' good  
You could meet me if I sent you down the fare  
But by then it would be winter  
There ain't too much for you to do  
And those winds sure can blow cold way out there

Four strong winds that blow lonely  
Seven seas that run high  
All those things that don't change come what may  
But our good times are all gone  
And I'm bound for moving on  
I'll look for you if I'm ever back this way

**Perishing Bird**  
**D. G. Jones, 1967**

The mind is not  
 Its own place  
 Except in Hell.

It must adjust, even  
 When the place is known.

Only time  
 Will tell the mind  
 What to think,

What birds to place  
 On what boughs:

The catbird crying,  
 'Me, me'  
 In a dry, hot bush,

At night the owl  
 Crying, 'Who?'  
 In a distant wood.

All else  
 Is an infernal shade

Where the family trees  
 Gather their antique  
 Nightingales

And the ill will  
 Flowers in the leaves.

For Hell's the Lord's  
 Bijouterie,  
 A Byzantine world

Where the clock-work birds  
 And the golden bees  
 Eternally repeat

What the heart once felt  
 The mind conceived.

For the mind in time  
 Is a perishing bird,  
 It sings and is still.

It comes and goes like the butterflies  
 Who visit the hill.

The cries of the children come on the  
 wind  
 And are gone. The wild bees come,  
 And the clouds.

And the mind is not  
 A place at all,  
 But a harmony of now,

The necessary angel, slapping  
 Flies in its own sweat.

Cocking its head to the wind  
 It cries,  
 'Who me? Who me?'

And whatever the answer,  
 It forgets.

It is radiant night  
 Where time begets  
 The sun, the flowers, Nanabozho's gift –

Mosquitoes,  
 Who disturb my sleep –  
 And everything else.

**You Have the Lovers**  
**Leonard Cohen, 1961**

You have the lovers,  
they are nameless, their histories only for each other,  
and you have the room, the bed and the windows.  
Pretend it is a ritual.  
Unfurl the bed, bury the lovers, blacken the windows,  
let them live in that house for a generation or two.  
No one dares disturb them.  
Visitors in the corridor tip-toe past the long closed door,  
they listen for sounds, for a moan, for a song :  
nothing is heard, not even breathing.  
You know they are not dead,  
you can feel the presence of their intense love.  
Your children grow up, they leave you,  
they have become soldiers and riders.  
Your mate dies after a life of service.  
Who knows you? Who remembers you?  
But in your house a ritual is in progress :  
is it not finished : it needs more people.  
One day the door is opened to the lover's chamber.  
The room has become a dense garden,  
full of colours, smells, sounds you have never known.  
The bed is smooth as a wafer of sunlight,  
in the midst of the garden it stands alone.  
In the bed the lovers, slowly and deliberately and silently,  
perform the act of love.  
Their eyes are closed,  
as tightly as if heavy coins of flesh lay on them.  
Their lips are bruised with new and old bruises.  
Her hair and his beard are hopelessly tangled.  
When he puts his mouth against her shoulder  
she is uncertain whether her shoulder  
has given or received the kiss.

All her flesh is like a mouth.  
He carries his fingers along her waist  
and feels his own waist caressed.  
She holds him closer and his own arms tighten around her.

It is his hand or her hand, it hardly matters,  
there are so many more kisses.  
You stand beside the bed, weeping with happiness,  
you carefully peel away the sheets  
from the slow-moving bodies.  
Your eyes are filled with tears, you barely make out the lovers.  
As you undress you sing out, and your voice is magnificent  
because now you believe it is the first human voice  
heard in that room.  
The garments you let fall grow into vines.  
You climb into bed and recover the flesh.  
You close your eyes and allow them to be sewn shut.  
You create an embrace and fall into it.  
There is only one moment of pain or doubt  
as you wonder how many multitudes are lying beside your body,  
but a mouth kisses and a hand soothes the moment away.

**A Kite Is a Victim**  
**Leonard Cohen, 1961**

A kite is a victim you are sure of.  
You love it because it pulls  
gentle enough to call you master,  
strong enough to call you fool;  
because it lives  
like a desperate trained falcon  
in the high sweet air,  
and you can always haul it down  
to tame it in your drawer.

A kite is a fish you have already caught  
in a pool where no fish come,  
so you play him carefully and long,  
and hope he won't give up,  
or the wind die down.

A kite is the last poem you've written,  
so you give it to the wind,  
but you don't let it go  
until someone finds you  
something else to do.

A kite is a contract of glory  
that must be made with the sun,  
so make friends with the field  
the river and the wind,  
then you pray the whole cold night before,  
under the travelling cordless moon,  
to make you worthy and lyric and pure.

**Suzanne**  
**Leonard Cohen, 1966**

Suzanne takes you down to her place near the river  
You can hear the boats go by, you can spend the night forever  
And you know that she's half-crazy but that's why you want to be there  
And she feeds you tea and oranges that come all the way from China  
And just when you mean to tell her that you have no love to give her  
Then he gets you on her wavelength  
And she lets the river answer that you've always been her lover

*And you want to travel with her, and you want to travel blind*  
*And you know that she will trust you*  
*For you've touched her perfect body with your mind*

And Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water  
And he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower  
And when he knew for certain only drowning men could see him  
He said all men will be sailors then until the sea shall free them  
But he himself was broken, long before the sky would open  
Forsaken, almost human, he sank beneath your wisdom like a stone

Now, Suzanne takes your hand and she leads you to the river  
She's wearing rags and feathers from Salvation Army counters  
And the sun pours down like honey on our lady of the harbor  
And she shows you where to look among the garbage and the flowers  
There are heroes in the seaweed, there are children in the morning  
They are leaning out for love and they will lean that way forever  
While Suzanne holds her mirror

**Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye**  
**Leonard Cohen, 1967**

I loved you in the morning, our kisses deep and warm  
Your hair upon the pillow like a sleepy golden storm  
Yes, many loved before us, I know that we are not new  
In city and in forest, they smiled like me and you  
But now it's come to distances and both of us must try

*Your eyes are soft with sorrow*  
*Hey, that's no way to say goodbye*

I'm not looking for another as I wander in my time  
Walk me to the corner, our steps will always rhyme  
You know my love goes with you as your love stays with me  
It's just the way it changes like the shoreline and the sea  
But let's not talk of love or chains and things we can't untie

*Your eyes are soft with sorrow*  
*Hey, that's no way to say goodbye*

I loved you in the morning, our kisses deep and warm  
Your hair upon the pillow like a sleepy golden storm  
Yes, many loved before us, I know that we are not new  
In city and in forest they smiled like me and you  
But let's not talk of love or chains and things we can't untie

*Your eyes are soft with sorrow*  
*Hey, that's no way to say goodbye*

**Avalanche**  
**Leonard Cohen, 1971**

Well I stepped into an avalanche,  
it covered up my soul;  
when I am not this hunchback that you see,  
I sleep beneath the golden hill.  
You who wish to conquer pain,  
you must learn, learn to serve me well.

You strike my side by accident  
as you go down for your gold.  
The cripple here that you clothe and feed  
is neither starved nor cold;  
he does not ask for your company,  
not at the centre, the centre of the world.

When I am on a pedestal,  
you did not raise me there.  
Your laws do not compel me  
to kneel grotesque and bare.  
I myself am the pedestal  
for this ugly hump at which you stare.

You who wish to conquer pain,  
you must learn what makes me kind;  
the crumbs of love that you offer me,  
they're the crumbs I've left behind.  
Your pain is no credential here,  
it's just the shadow, shadow of my wound.

I have begun to long for you,  
I who have no greed;  
I have begun to ask for you,  
I who have no need.  
You say you've gone away from me,  
but I can feel you when you breathe.

Do not dress in those rags for me,  
I know you are not poor;  
you don't love me quite so fiercely now  
when you know that you are not sure,  
it is your turn, beloved,  
it is your flesh that I wear.

**You Want It Darker**  
**Leonard Cohen, 2016**

If you are the dealer, I'm out of the game  
If you are the healer, it means I'm broken and lame  
If thine is the glory then mine must be the shame  
You want it darker  
We kill the flame

Magnified, sanctified, be thy holy name  
Vilified, crucified, in the human frame  
A million candles burning for the help that never came  
You want it darker

Hineni, hineni  
I'm ready, my lord

There's a lover in the story  
But the story's still the same  
There's a lullaby for suffering  
And a paradox to blame  
But it's written in the scriptures  
And it's not some idle claim  
You want it darker  
We kill the flame

They're lining up the prisoners  
And the guards are taking aim  
I struggled with some demons

They were middle class and tame  
I didn't know I had permission to murder and to maim  
You want it darker

Hineni, hineni  
I'm ready, my lord

Magnified, sanctified, be thy holy name  
Vilified, crucified, in the human frame  
A million candles burning for the love that never came  
You want it darker  
We kill the flame

If you are the dealer, let me out of the game  
If you are the healer, I'm broken and lame  
If thine is the glory, mine must be the shame  
You want it darker  
Hineni, hineni  
Hineni, hineni  
I'm ready, my lord

### **Bluebeard's Wife** **Daryl Hine, 1965**

Impatiently she tampered with the locks,  
One by one she opened all the doors;  
The music boxes and the cuckoo clocks  
Stopped in alarm; dust settled on the floors  
Like apprehensive footsteps. Then the stores  
Of silence were exposed to her soft touch:  
Mute diamonds and still exquisite ores.  
She had not thought the squalid world had such  
Treasure to proffer, nor so easy, nor so much.

She did not listen to the hinges' groans,  
Complaints in metal, warnings in the wood,  
But room by room progressed from precious stones  
To tears, and at each secret understood,  
Exclaimed, amused, 'How simple!' or 'How good!'  
As she took up some fragile, painted jar.  
Throughout the palace doors and windows stood  
Whether in dread or sympathy ajar  
Upon a pale horizon seeming very far.

The open doors of summer afternoons,  
The scented air that passes in and out  
Ferrying insects, humming with the tunes  
That nature sings unheard! She could not doubt  
She was unseen, no one was about,  
The servants all had gone—she wondered where:  
The calm within was dead as that without,  
And all about her breathed the stealthy air.  
She knew she was alone, that no one else was there.

Now she attained the room of artifice.  
Not a thing that grew there but was made:  
Venetian glass that counterfeited ice  
So close it seemed to melt, and green brocade,  
The wind's most subtle movements in a glade.  
Nothing was modern, everything was old,  
And yet it was not true that they should fade  
Though time and fashion dim the emerald.  
Each was at once an image and a deathless mould.

Dazzled, she shut the door, but through the next  
Saw greater good than any she had seen:  
A window open on the sacred text  
Of natural things, whose number had not been  
Created or conceived, nor did they mean  
Other than what they were, splendid and strange.  
One leaf is like another, and between  
Them all the worlds of difference range;  
The world is not destroyed and does not cease to change.

The final door resisted all her strength,  
 No key would fit, the bars and bolts stuck fast.  
 But there she pried and worried, till at length  
 She opened it, knowing it was the last.  
 They hung on hooks, their finery surpassed  
 Each her predecessor's, in their lives  
 Less fortunate than she. There hung the past,  
 Putrid and crowned. And thinking, 'Love survives  
 The grave,' she stepped inside to join the other wives.

**Patroclus Putting on The Armour of Achilles**  
**Daryl Hine, 1965**

How clumsy he is putting on the armour of another,  
 His friend's, perhaps remembering how they used to arm each other,  
 Fitting the metal tunics to one another's breast  
 And setting on each other's head the helmet's bristling crest.  
 Now for himself illicitly he foolishly performs  
 Secret ceremonial with that other's arms,  
 Borrowed, I say stolen, for they are not his own,  
 On the afternoon of battle, late, trembling, and alone.

Night terminal to fighting falls on the playing field  
 As to his arm he fastens the giant daedal shield.  
 A while the game continues, a little while the host  
 Lost on the obscure litoral, scattered and almost  
 Invisible pursue the endless war with words  
 Jarring in the darkening air impassable to swords.

But when he steps forth from the tent where Achilles broods  
 Patroclus finds no foe at hand, surrounded by no gods,  
 Only the chill of evening strikes him to the bone  
 Like an arrow piercing where the armour fails to join,  
 And weakens his knees under the highly polished greaves.  
 Evening gentle elsewhere is loud on the shore, it grieves  
 It would seem for the deaths of heroes, their disobedient graves.

**The Trout**  
**Daryl Hine, 1968**

The water my prison shatters in a prism  
As I leap alone the dying falls,  
Cruel gasps of air, the musical chasm  
Intrigue me with their broken intervals.

Deep in the noon of motionless canals  
I dreamt away my pale reality  
Till stirred by her immortal voice who calls  
To the heights of the mountains and the depths of the sea.

I lean on air as prisoners on time  
Not to let them down, my impetus  
Only to the second hand sublime,  
From every point of view ridiculous,

To climb the stair of stone where I was spawned,  
Where ponds are oceans and the rapids give  
Foretaste of the unbreathable beyond.  
I try, I fall, I wriggle loose, I live

Drop by drop against the stream I am,  
And in death's little cataract belong  
Like Tristan to the torrent and the dam,  
Liquid chamber music and still current song,

As I was laid upon the deep sea floor,  
Part of the faded pattern of the carpet,  
Or spilt like the sperm the kissing fish ignore  
Held in each others' scales as in a net.

Yes, I exist, a memory in man  
And beast and bird, a universal wish  
For the watery world where life began,  
And your angelic avatar, the fish:

Ambitious, ghastly, with protuberant eyes,  
Or suspended like a living bathysphere,  
I negotiate the steps of paradise  
Leaping to measures that I cannot hear.

**Variations on the Word *Sleep***  
**Margaret Atwood, 1981**

I would like to watch you sleeping,  
which may not happen.  
I would like to watch you,  
sleeping. I would like to sleep  
with you, to enter  
your sleep as its smooth dark wave  
slides over my head

and walk with you through the lucent  
wavering forest of bluegreen leaves  
with its watery sun & three moons  
towards the cave where you must descend,  
towards your worst fear

I would like to give you the silver  
branch, the small white flower, the one  
word that will protect you  
from the grief at the center  
of your dream, from the grief  
at the center. I would like to follow  
you up the long stairway  
again & become  
the boat that would row you back  
carefully, a flame  
in two cupped hands  
to where your body lies  
beside me, and you enter  
it as easily as breathing in

I would like to be the air  
that inhabits you for a moment  
only. I would like to be that unnoticed  
& that necessary.

**Morning in the Burned House**  
**Margaret Atwood, 1995**

In the burned house I am eating breakfast.  
You understand: there is no house, there is no breakfast,  
yet here I am.

The spoon which was melted scrapes against  
the bowl which was melted also.  
No one else is around.

Where have they gone to, brother and sister,  
mother and father? Off along the shore,  
perhaps. Their clothes are still on the hangers,

their dishes piled beside the sink,  
which is beside the woodstove  
with its grate and sooty kettle,

every detail clear,  
tin cup and rippled mirror.  
The day is bright and songless,

the lake is blue, the forest watchful.  
In the east a bank of cloud  
rises up silently like dark bread.

I can see the swirls in the oilcloth,  
I can see the flaws in the glass,  
those flares where the sun hits them.

I can't see my own arms and legs  
or know if this is a trap or blessing,  
finding myself back here, where everything

in this house has long been over,  
kettle and mirror, spoon and bowl,  
including my own body,



and can we, can we slake the gaping eye of our desires?  
 we will sit around our hewn wood table  
 until our hair is long and our eyes are feeble,  
 eating, my people, O my insatiates,  
 eating until we are no more able  
 to jack up the jaws any longer —

to no more complain of the soul's vulgar cavities,  
 to gaze at each other over the rust-heap of cutlery,  
 drinking a coffee that takes an eternity —  
 till, bursting, bleary,  
 we laugh, barbarians, and rock the universe —  
 and exclaim to each other over the table  
 over the table of bones and scrap metal  
 over the gigantic junk-heaped table:

by God that was a meal

**The Name of the Place**  
**Gwendolyn MacEwen, 1972**

We each have a message to give to the other,  
 The size of the place, the colour of the place,  
 How to get in and out of it,  
 How long it is safe to remain,  
 But first of all its name.  
 I know the name of the place so well  
 That it's just now slipped my tongue,  
 But it doesn't matter as long as you  
 Tell me I have not been there alone.

All things are plotting to make us whole,  
 All things conspire to make us one.

**The Shadow-Maker**  
**Gwendolyn MacEwen, 1972**

I have come to possess your darkness, only this.

My legs surround your black, wrestle it  
As the flames of day wrestle night  
And everywhere you paint the necessary shadows  
On my flesh and darken the fibres of my nerve;  
Without these shadows I would be  
In air one wave of ruinous light  
And night with many mouths would close  
Around my infinite and sterile curve.

Shadow-maker create me everywhere  
Dark spaces (your face is my chosen abyss),  
For I said I have come to possess your darkness,  
Only this.

**Dark Pines Under Water**  
**Gwendolyn MacEwen, 1972**

This land like a mirror turns you inward  
And you become a forest in a furtive lake;  
The dark pines of your mind reach downward,  
You dream in the green of your time,  
Your memory is a row of sinking pines.

Explorer, you tell yourself, this is not what you came for  
Although it is good here, and green;  
You had meant to move with a kind of largeness,  
You had planned a heavy grace, an anguished dream.

But the dark pines of your mind dip deeper  
And you are sinking, sinking, sleeper  
In an elementary world;  
There is something down there and you want it told.

**Moon Landing**  
**Gwendolyn MacEwen, 1969**

Once his eye raised the cool towers of space  
 Over the roves of his youth, and he lay  
 Growing in the red shifting days beneath  
 Orbiting castles and giants and starbeasts.

Now he descends the steep mountain of the night  
 To the breathless valley of the moon; earthlight  
 Floods the lunar pools and craters accommodate  
 The visitation of his step, his alien weight.

Earthrise is an eye beyond the blinding brim;  
 Past sighing miles of silence the finite children  
 Watch him become the satellite of his own dream  
 And orbit the white world of his youth for them.

Computers map the territories of nether suns  
 Where galaxies are graphic castles giants own;  
 Now up the weightless slopes of time he climbs  
 Through vacuous doorways to the gasping dark beyond.

**from The T. E. Lawrence Poems**  
**Gwendolyn MacEwen, 1982**

**Water**

When you think of it, water is everything. Or rather,  
 Water ventures into everything and becomes everything.

It has

All tastes and moods imaginable; water is history  
 And the end of the world is water also.

I have tasted water

From London to Miranshah. In France it tasted  
 Of Crusaders' breastplates, swords, and tunnels of rings  
 On ladies' fingers.



Camels lean into the desert, lost in some thought  
   so profound it can only be guessed. When  
 Will God invent man? When  
   will the great dream end?  
 My skin crawls with a horrible beauty in this  
   Nothingness, this Everything —

I fall to my knees in the deep white sand, and my head  
   implodes into pure light.

### **Notes from the Dead Land**

I have died at last, Feisal. I have been lying  
 On this hospital bed for five days, and I know  
   that I am dead. I was going back home  
   on my big bike, and I wasn't doing more  
   than sixty when this black van, death camel,  
 Slid back from the left side of my head, and ahead,  
 Two boys on little bikes were biking along, and  
   something in my head, some brutal music  
   played on and on. I was going too fast,  
   I was always going too fast for the world,  
 So I swerved and fell on my stupid head, right  
 In the middle of the road. I addressed myself  
   to the dark hearts of the tall trees  
   and nothing answered.

The Arabs say that when you pray, two angels stand  
 On either side of you, recording good and bad deeds,  
   and you should acknowledge them.  
   Lying here, I decide that now  
   the world can have me any way it pleases.  
 I will celebrate my perfect death here. *Maktub*:  
 It is written. I salute both of the angels.

**Grandfather**  
**George Bowering, 1962**

Grandfather

Jabez Harry Bowering  
strode across the Canadian prairie  
hacking down trees  
and building churches  
delivering personal baptist sermons in them  
leading Holy holy holy lord god almighty songs in them  
red haired man squared off in the pulpit  
reading Saul on the road to Damascus at them

Left home

big walled Bristol town  
at age eight  
to make a living  
buried his stubby fingers in root snarled earth  
for a suit of clothes and seven hundred gruelly meals a year  
taking an anabaptist cane across the back every day  
for four years till he was whipped out of England

Twelve years old

and across the ocean alone  
to apocalyptic Canada  
Ontario of bone bending child labour  
six years on the road to Damascus till his eyes were blinded  
with the blast of Christ and he wandered west  
to Brandon among wheat kings and heathen Saturday nights  
young red haired Bristol boy shoveling coal  
in the basement of Brandon college five in the morning

Then built his first wooden church and married  
a sick girl who bore two live children and died  
leaving several pitiful letters and the Manitoba night



**from Tree**  
**Fred Wah, 1972**

Cedar perfume forest  
 sunlight sweet  
 so silent, paths  
 ahead our eyes  
 reach out behind  
 to pull it all  
 and move it in  
 let it  
 see itself happen  
 quiet sweet  
 a sunlight forest  
 cedar noses perfume  
 burns into the closeness

**Race, to go**  
**Fred Wah, 2009**

What's yr race  
                   and she said  
 what's yr hurry  
 how 'bout it cock  
   asian man  
 I'm just going for curry.

You ever been to ethni-city?  
 How 'bout multi-culti?

You ever lay out skin  
 for the white gaze?

What are you, banana  
 or egg? Coconut  
 maybe?

Something wrong Charlie  
 Chim-chong-say-wong-leung-chung?  
 You got a slant to yr marginal eyes?

You want a little rice with that garlic?  
 Is this too hot for you?

Or slimy or bitter or smelly or tangy or raw or sour

— a little too dirty

on the edge hiding underneath crawling up yr leg stuck

between the fingernails?

Is that a black hair in yr soup?

Well how you wanna handle this?  
 You wanna maintain a bit of différ-ence?  
 Keep or mother's other?  
 Use the father for the fodder?

What side of John A. Macdonald's tracks you on anyway?

How fast you think this train is going

to go?

**Alligator Pie**  
**Dennis Lee, 1974**

Alligator pie, alligator pie,  
 If I don't get some I think I'm gonna die.  
 Give away the green grass, give away the sky,  
 But don't give away my alligator pie.

Alligator stew, alligator stew,  
If I don't get some I don't know what I'll do.  
Give away my furry hat, give away my shoe,  
But don't give away my alligator stew.

Alligator soup, alligator soup,  
If I don't get some I think I'm gonna droop.  
Give away my hockey stick, give away my hoop,  
But don't give away my alligator soup.

### **The Secret Place**

**Dennis Lee, 1991**

There's a place I go, inside myself,  
    Where nobody else can be,  
And none of my friends can tell it's there—  
    Nobody knows but me.

It's hard to explain the way it feels,  
    Or even where I go.  
It isn't a place in time or space,  
    But once I'm there, I *know*.

It's tiny, it's shiny, it can't be seen,  
    But it's big as the sky at night . . .  
I try to explain and it hurts my brain,  
    But once I'm there, it's *right*.

There's a place I know inside myself,  
    And it's neither big nor small,  
And whenever I go, it feels as though  
    I never left at all.

**Riff 1**  
**Dennis Lee, 1982**

When I lurched like a rumour of want through the networks of plenty,  
a me-shaped pang on the lam,  
when I ghosted through lives like a headline, a scrap in the updraft,  
and my mid-life wreckage was close & for keeps —

when I watched the  
birches misting, pale spring  
voltage and not mine, nor mine, nor mine —

then: a  
lady laid her touch among  
me, gentle thing, for which I stand still  
startled, gentle thing and feel the  
ache begin again,  
the onus of joy.

**The Cinnamon Peeler**  
**Michael Ondaatje, 1989**

If I were a cinnamon peeler  
I would ride your bed  
And leave the yellow bark dust  
On your pillow.

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

Here on the upper thigh

at this smooth pasture  
neighbour to you hair  
or the crease  
that cuts your back. This ankle.  
You will be known among strangers  
as the cinnamon peeler's wife.

I could hardly glance at you  
before marriage  
never touch you  
--your keen nosed mother, your rough brothers.  
I buried my hands  
in saffron, disguised them  
over smoking tar,  
helped the honey gatherers...

When we swam once  
I touched you in the 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  
the 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  
as if not spoken to in the act of love  
as 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  
Peeler's wife. Smell me.