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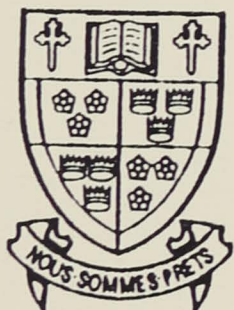
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The New long poem  
anthology.

COACH HOUSE PRESS - TORONTO

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*The other is emerging as the necessary prerequisite for dialogues with the self that clarify the soul's heart and deepen the ability to love. I place myself there, with them, whoever they are, wherever they are, who seek to reach themselves and the other through the poem by as many exits and entrances as possible.*

bpNichol, 1966

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F R E D W A H

T H I S D E N D R I T E

M A P : F A T H E R /

M O T H E R H A I B U N

**Father / Mother Haibun #1**

Finally changed the calendar today to August. Sitting here this morning trying to figure out things (phone rings and she asks "Is this David? I must have the wrong number. I don't know why I keep doing this.") the *ecrit* I'm open for, ungular, now alone in the mornings looking through Jung and Hillman for hints, I mean the simple and solid clarity of my father's father's dying, his dying, and then me living and then dying too is outrageous, bald as geographical Saskatchewan and my Grandfather which made my life "racial" not that he actually came to be there but simply him here/there and her, my Grandmother, her Salvation Army Englishness really solid in the middle of his flux but both of them cutting "geo" out of their world thus Maple Creek Moose Jaw North Battleford Medicine Hat somewhere in England and Canton China places in their lives much more than in their world, you, my father, almost too, thus me, such particles caught in the twig-jam holding the water back impedimenta and this dendrite map I'm finally on now for no reason but time, and then I'll go to the city and look for an S-shaped chair to hold me and this up.

Two weeks late I turn the calendar, crave for ripe tomatoes

## **Father / Mother Haibun #2**

Anger the same thing as you behind my face, eyes, maybe. A larger than usual black bear, eating, high up in the thin wild cherry trees in the gulley this morning, sun just coming up. I peer around the corner of the garage at the bear just like you would, eyes squinted brow lined in suspicion like yours used to, as if you were trying to figure out something serious. I feel your face in me like that sometimes, looking out of me, and now I wonder if my anger is the same as yours flying out of me from him and his, etc. the anger molten back through Chthonic fear. The bear flushed off, finally, by the dog. You hover in the cool August morning air, behind my eyes. The fire, the candle, the pumpkin, the "virtu," inside.

**Crash of broken branch, hungry, pits in the shit**



**Father / Mother Haibun #3**

I try talking to you in this near-September air after I water the dry spots out of the lawn, morning sunny and clear the air coming to this for months ahead, almost, your death-month, turning the flowers, even those huckleberries I picked yesterday had thoughts of the frost ahead high in the mountains, such simple weather but something more primitive here pictures of the kids each year on the first day of school in front of the flowers in their new clothes, ahead, you too and my mind working over the connections, you're laughing, sceptical, like when I told you they used hot water to make the ice at the arena because it steams and you just about believed it because I did, my heart shoots into the memory of that actual mouths-and-eyes-talking dialogue, weather is memory every time I wonder if you ever really listened to the songs on the Wurlitzer in the cafe, particularly on a quiet winter Sunday afternoon, the words anytime your mind roaming ahead and behind like mine the little shots at living each day all the things air carries for thinking like that.

**Music, I try to think of the words to Autumn Leaves, Love  
Letters in the Sand**



#### Father / Mother Haibun #4

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

High muck-a-muck's gold-toothed clicks ink mark red green  
on lottery blotting paper, 8-spot (click, click)

**Father / Mother Haibun #5**

You can't drive through a rainbow I said hills to myself in the mountains  
glory of a late summer early fall thunder storm the Brilliant Bluffs  
brilliant indeed the shine rain and sunshine waves of science breaking  
lickety split school systems memory for the next word after colour from  
the other side no one could see it otherwise nature's path is home to the  
bluebird triangular son/event/father w/ time-space China rainbow over  
your youth vertical like on the prairies that rainbow stood straight up  
into the sky on the horizon you'd think in the winter sun ice crystals  
could form unbelievable

**Radio on, up north an American hunter shoots a rare  
white moose, geese in the sky, nibbling ribbons**

## Father / Mother Haibun #6

I wish you were alive here in my life so we could share the ease of our lives growing older together, now time would catch up with the gap of our ages, 45-72, ethnicity would be gone, just skin and the winding down, the fence Jenefer & I built along the back, hockey games, the sunny fall day, this sentimentalism, songs too, like crazy white American juke box "Mule Train" in your imagination I thought just as those events are in mine, no, but you and the Great Lakes boats desire, absolutely your own, undying care for the single, your own world fact, all this buffer, as down the road in the village from us this so-called community, the ones we care for really spread over the whole earth if possible, padding of the family too, this softness around ourselves so that we want it, so common we could talk about it now, but so alone, so alone.

I'll stain the fence red, a dim border in the snow, might  
last thirty years



### Father / Mother Haibun #7

I was back in Buffalo when you died and when I came out for your funeral at the end of September there was snow on Elephant Mountain as far down as Pulpit Rock from Ernie's house the lake quiet my mother alone suddenly, months unused, unusual, I knew you best in the winter when there was curling and hockey or in the summer when we fished, dark mornings on the way to work or wet leaves in the gutter, driving at this time of year from Cranbrook to Nelson for the Lion's dance, car heater toasty warm upholstery, outside the air wet and cool mist hackles in the mountains your life simply closing down in the quiet month on the Hume Hotel ballroom floor wobble of the planet's sun seasons shortened golden flower's corny harvest elixir completed.

Road's nearly empty, only a few pickups with firewood



## Father / Mother Haibun #8

The pulse. So. When I take it now the microsystem wild card is almost cellular in its transport of the image imprint forward or I think back pictures. Some Saturday afternoons I'd have to take off work at the Diamond to play soccer down at the Civic, or you'd feed me a steak before a midget hockey bus trip to Trail, after the game Frenchie's french fries outside the Cominco, my earth my world which grosses more sensation, you knew more than I did, now my daughter has grown up into her stomach too, large encryptic sublease a full-grown symptom of I'm just curious about this body. You read it all, playing games is really not such a big deal but I always thought I had to pad it a bit to get off work, the world and out the door down the street, you knew it and me, outside the sun and the chemicals it's either numbers or that large front swinging wooden door.

Felled tree in the fall, I look at the stump for sap, zero

## Father / Mother Haibun #9

"Why do you think of your father so much?"

"He's dead. Every once in a while I think I see him, or someone I see reminds me of him, or I'm writing this book and he's in it."

"That's not the truth. There's more to it than that."

"What we'll try for is a paradigm in this."

"You can think of a fishing cause. For him environment is connected with the earth."

"Dante phoned last night. From Salmo. And the day before, Mike Zoll showed up and told me 'The subtle quality of things transcends all formal boundaries.' I don't know, I'm not sure, maybe."

"Do women think a circle is a labyrinth?"

"Kore, no one wears purple like you. I half expect you to come with a hat."

"I feel I'm lucky I'm part Chinese when I see a river."

"So. What about your father?"

"Look, it's an old problem. When Smaro says 'Alley Alley Home Free' I know exactly what's going on. Her eyes twinkle. Here, it's snowing today. Sounds are deadened, like waking up in a room with the windows closed. Why do you ask?"

"'Autumn in New York,' 'Moonlight in Vermont,' they're all haiku. And that's just one of the tricks Lionel knows. You know that poem about his dad and the echo of the axe on the other side of the valley? That was in the fall, there was frost. Or Victor's poem, 'Kenkyusha: Day Nine,' his daughter's birth, my father's death, zooming in on the phoneme of time, accurate, and asks me 'what time.'"

"You'd better ask Peter about Jack Clarke's Hegel's 'discipline of service and obedience' and 'the lake Fred Wah said it all ends up in' in case McNaughton and the hidden 'd' can help."

"Maybe tomorrow. I've been carrying it around all week. It's the epitaph to my Aunt Hannah's grave in Swift Current. It's like a song. Whenever I think of it I can hear my Granny Wah singing, front row, in the Salvation Army hall, and I can see her grey-blue eyes softened with a bit of surprise."

Hannah Elizabeth  
fell asleep in Jesus Arms  
1918-1936



## Father / Mother Haibun #10

Working with my back to the window for more natural light, dog chasing cows in the field, the words stubble today, embedded there in the bracken at the edge of the field, Chinese philosophy and numbers, the cloud-filled night, "and they swam and they swam, right over the dam," etc., all this, and sugar too, holding the hook, time, the bag, the book, the shape, you also carried on your back yin and embraced yang with your arms and shoulders, the mind as a polished mirror, there, back into my hand.

**I can't stop looking at the field of brown grass and weed  
and feeling the grey sky**

Father / Mother Haibun #11

Mother somewhere you flying over me with love and close careless caress  
from Sweden your soft smooth creme skin only thoughts from your  
mother without comparison the lightness of your life/blood womanness  
which is mine despite language across foetalness what gods of northern  
europe bring out of this sentence we say and live in outside of the wife  
of the storm god's frictive battle with the "story" our names

Rain washes first snow, old words here on the notepad,  
"Where did Odysseus go?"



## Father / Mother Haibun #12

Mom you'll know this as a wordgame, strategy to get truth's attention, your name, Corrine, for example, core, cortex, heart, blood, islands of the liver, a tension to incite the present, your friend Woody written into the texture, coloured uphill under their apple tree beautiful also, we were about fifteen when Wayne Waters said to me "Your mother's a good looking woman" and I blushed, tissue of skin, shades of other people's hair, touch.

The landscape is red, "pudeur," an air of sanctity and respect, etc.

**Father / Mother Haibun #13**

The issue is to divide into two, duplicate, derive language which is a filter for the blood, and then to replenish thought in a precise flow to converge again on life, how much a copy of you I am also a material for my own initials (F.J.) Karen Marie Erickson when your mother died all the undoubling condensed memory added up to a single snowy winter month like January.

**I get up and look, no sky today, just the fog. How one can one be?**

## Father / Mother Haibun #14

When my hands, arms, and head grew larger there was at one point a very comforting sensation which I thought might relate to my birth and you're constantly rubbing your wrist joints this spherical map of "influence" as in Dad's anger, maybe, or your clearing your throat. I wait for simply old age and a mental space serrated description narrative the same refrain female song a flair for the fictive or theory that there is invocation in the inheritance of the blue-print.

**In winter ravens look more majestic, weaving over the highway, tree to tree, tree to tree**

## Father / Mother Haibun #15

All this imaging is only the subliminal daily cache because of your first real house and the "Just Mary" show *time* with you in the radio air of the room carpet *Journeys Through Bookland* "Tom and the Waterbabies" with story every morning and on Sunday afternoons got "serial" eyes with "Jake and the Kid" or John Draine's story hour quiet spring evenings Sgt. Drake on the Vancouver waterfront breathing radio world innuendo a mother with secrets when the snow blows in circles over the farms final connections to the ancient world.

Someday I'll grow them, prairie hollyhocks again, on a stucco wall



**Father / Mother Haibun #16**

I know the language just turns you into metaphor, rock of ages like  
Granny Wah, the truth. Traces of the other mothers, cliff-dwellers in the  
golden city, your windows nothingnesses to the world's something,  
bisons on the walls at Lascaux. So there. How to defend you and I from  
a language edited by Christians I stand facing west with my father and  
speak words which are new names for the sea.

**Old month's countenance, deer swim the rock-wall river,  
mean anything to you?**

**Father / Mother Haibun #17**

Oh Mother, the brightness of the birch tree's bark in this November mid-afternoon sunset, fringes, the datum which is permanent, the external events of all that stuff actual energy is created from, you on a different planar syntax Jenefer discovers in turning the yin/yang key, a cyclic thing going on there, ontologic principle, all the daughters want it, one pot, this morning I watered your Christmas cactus bursting brilliant pink and purple on schedule for your birthday again, and you should see Helen's, what'd those philosophers say, he beats the drum, he stops, he sobs, he sings, they had mothers.

**You flew over me, outside there was a moist loss, now I  
remember**

## Father / Mother Haibun #18

I'd say that's a "proud" or swollen wound on my finger, body's pride reminding itself of itself, something genitive about the blue sloped roof of the '51 Pontiac, lives broken into car eras both of you (thus us) the heat on the edge of healing skin red something eucharistical and my own two daughters even this spring, fall leeches ground and then outside the flowers see how hard it is for me to make sense of a hunch, looking around myself, looking for the simple "of" connection might be, and why my friend Albert set out his amaryllis this spring.

No more snow to shovel this winter, back to the ground,  
flowers

**Father / Mother Haibun #19**

I'm here alone for the weekend, get fires going and burn all that junk, mind keeps that there to clean up. I get some rice on and the cabin's warm. Now I sit here sip a beer and dwell on my aloneness, the solitary singleness and being older now. That is a prediction I gave myself when I watched some of the old men around town, isolation. Night falling. Cold over the lake, fingers of clouds in the western sky above Woodbury Creek. I told Peter that's the process I'm interested in as long as I can keep getting the language out. Now I'm as old as you were. The fire outside in the dark comes from your eyes. The words of our name settle down with everything else on this shore.

**Smoke sits on the lake, frost tonight, eyes thinking**



## Father / Mother Haibun #20

I still don't know how to use the chopsticks as right or as natural, bamboo fingers hands arms mind stomach, food steaming off the dishes, rain or wet snow, windows, night lights, small meals you'd grab between rushes (unlike me), that's what you did, isn't it, went back to the cafe later, on the nights we didn't have rice at home, me too, when I first went to university in Vancouver I couldn't stand it, I'd need rice, catch the Hastings bus to Chinatown, what is it, this food business, this hovering over ourselves?

A little ginger, a little garlic, black beans, lo bok, Aunty Ethel, the kitchen

**Father / Mother Haibun #21**

Speedy dancing and the leaves of Germany meet me at the elevator,  
words mean everything, I try to phone you on mother's day, everyone  
does, more Swedish than Chinese, you didn't want me to be a boy scout  
all my life, did you (the leaves cling to this writing), sometimes to be  
battle-ready Norbert Ruebsaat, genetics and geographies, he can tell you  
too, exactly like mother alphabet the new lyric feet, McKinnon's South  
America eyesight I tell myself my self-perception, palace/place/police,  
spring leafless trees on Ontario's horizon, did Pindar catch us dead in  
our tracks?

Japanese plum blossoms, my finger joints swollen, your  
kind of love sweetest, get that, sweetest

## Fred Wah

Length in poetry seems useful as a means by which to investigate the possibilities of a content, formally and, further, to extend the inquiry into contiguous aspects of the content. Such a process of composition offers generative resources that extend the dynamics of the poem (rhythm, repetition, shape, etc.) that not so much avoid cadence as configure it in different ways (cadence as shapely settling, not closure).

As well, the "long poem" offers more of that democratic dialogic currently in favour in writing. That is, the insistence of sub-, supra-, or alter-texts is much more likely given size.

"This Dendrite Map," for example, attempts to engage, in each separate piece, the reaction and resonance of the "haiku" that settles out at the bottom. These were interesting pieces to write because, while writing the prose, I was conscious of the word-rumble further down the line. Other than that, the relationship in this poem seems to be serial.

Six or seven years later I'm still spurred by the same content. For me the advantage of the long poem is the continuing biotext it affords – long poem, long life.

## Biography

Fred Wah was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, in 1939, but grew up in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia. He studied music and English literature at the University of British Columbia in the early 1960s, where he was one of the founding editors of the poetry newsletter *TISH*. He did graduate work in literature and linguistics at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where he edited *Sum* magazine. In 1967 he graduated with a master's degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo where he co-edited the *Niagara Frontier Review* and *The Magazine of Further Studies*. He returned to the Kootenays in the late 1960s and from there he edited *Scree*. He is currently a contributing editor of *Open Letter*. He has taught at Selkirk College and was the founding coordinator of the writing program at David Thompson University Centre. He now teaches at the University of Calgary. *Waiting for Saskatchewan* was awarded the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1986. He has also written critiques of contemporary Canadian and American literature and is presently working on a verse-novel.

## By Fred Wah

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T H E N E W  
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'SINCE 1979 WHEN COACH HOUSE PRESS PUBLISHED THE FIRST CANADIAN *Long Poem Anthology*... the form has become so well-established that to include even a sample of the best long poems written in the last decade would require many more volumes.' – SHARON THESEN, from the Introduction to *The New Long Poem Anthology*.

This essential reference and guide contains sixteen long, book-length or serial poems displaying the diverse range of subject and method that contemporary Canadian poets have brought to this form, and continues the work of *The Long Poem Anthology*, edited by Michael Ondaatje: 'Long poems crawl out of cupboards, archives, gardens, long bus journeys, out of every segment of Canadian writing... it seems to me that the most interesting writing being done by poets today can be found within the structure of the long poem.'

ROBIN BLASER  
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DIONNE BRAND  
CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY  
LOUIS DUDEK  
DIANA HARTOG  
ROY KIYOOKA  
ROBERT KROETSCH  
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