

# recognition/identification test:

crocus

holly

bamboo

magnolia

rhododendron

azalea

cedar

willow

eucalyptus

foxglove

pine

lavender

pansy

hemlock

dill

sage

arbutus

dogwood

blackberry

nike

pepsi

BMW

macdonald's

benetton

safeway

sony

chevron

KFC

pfizer

ipod

lipton

nestle

walmart

shell

esso

adidas

disney

blackberry

# Willow

Catherine Graham

That one rooted in the park  
makes me think *woolly mammoth*—

a tusky presence  
above the mown green lawn,

the strands of willow bough flesh,  
the lost mammalian mass

that moves (a little)  
when you're not looking.

explodes against rock.  
This green fragment had behind it  
The *booomm* when glass  
tears free of its smoothness

now once more smooth as knuckle  
a tooth on my tongue.  
Comfort that bites through skin  
hides in the dark afternoon of my pocket.  
Snake shade.  
Determined histories of glass.

50

[1979]

## The Cinnamon Peeler

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.

10

Here on the upper thigh  
at this smooth pasture  
neighbour to your 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 . . .

20

When we swam once  
I touched you in water  
and our bodies remained free,  
you could hold me and be blind of smell. 30

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. 40

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

[1982]

## To a Sad Daughter

All night long the hockey pictures  
gaze down at you  
sleeping in your tracksuit.  
Belligerent goalies are your ideal.  
Threats of being traded  
cuts and wounds  
—all this pleases you.  
O *my god!* you say at breakfast  
reading the sports page over the Alpen<sup>10</sup>  
as another player breaks his ankle  
or assaults the coach. 10

When I thought of daughters  
I wasn't expecting this  
but I like this more.  
I like all your faults

<sup>10</sup> A type of cereal.



## WATER DRINKER

By Phillip Kevin Paul

The music in trees  
is water. The only way  
of learning that still counts:  
I learned this summer  
how a tree is a reflection  
of a river or a stream.

A tree is like ancient love:  
the love my parents gave me  
came from a long ways away,  
was divided over and over. *The oldest river  
will have the most branches.  
it is the only thing  
that remains uncomplicated,  
grows outward and remains  
uncomplicated.*

*How do you know these things?*

The man, sick of the story and of his life, says:  
*I spent twelve years with the same river  
measuring everything to learn  
measuring is irrelevant.*

*There is only time  
and looking.*

*After twelve years you can finally imagine  
how a river grows old  
and how the trees around it grow old.*

They grow outward and remain uncomplicated.

I sat by a fishless stream for days  
this summer, the place I fished  
when I was small  
as I remember being.  
I felt in the heat the hope in me  
being washed over and diluted.  
I felt this way without knowing  
the fish had all disappeared –

I'd imagined them all summer  
swaying lazily in the dark,  
murky water at the bottom of the stream  
and the flash of their white bellies  
as they twisted into the terrible light,  
fighting at one end  
of a handline.

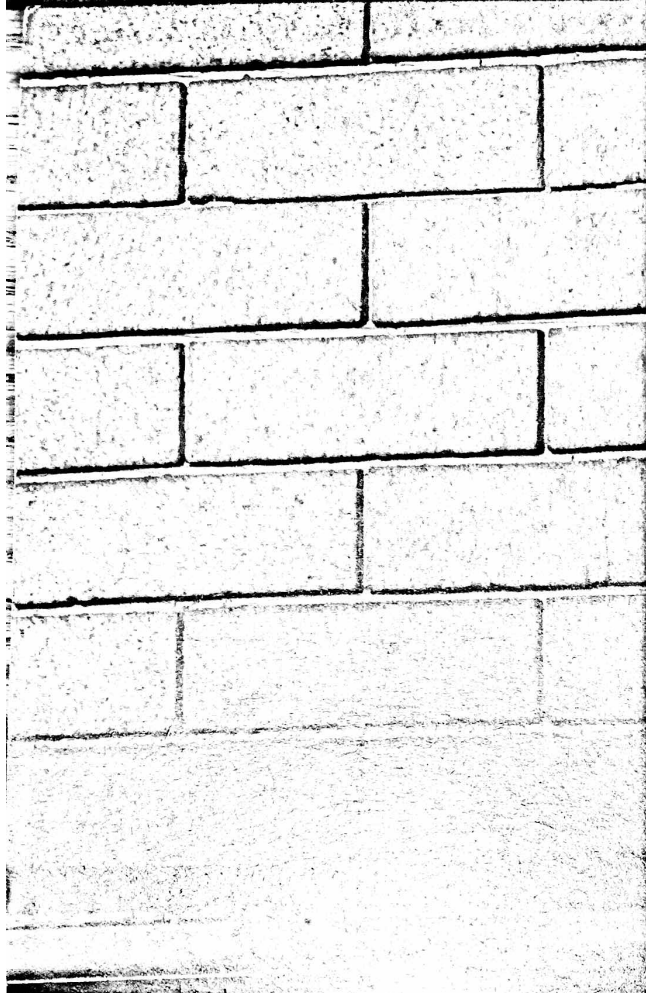
Here - I bring you to the place  
of maples, where on this steep hill  
there is only one arbutus, the way  
the blood from a fish looks  
resting in the stones.

You can feel the stream  
on that hill like a small animal  
shaking in your hand. Its rhythm  
comes up through the ground  
just where the water is  
about to roll over the edge.

Imagine what the Old People thought  
when they saw one small red tree  
growing between the grey-  
white bodies of the maples.  
imagine what their thought  
when they realized  
every stream has its own song  
from the shape made by the trees around it,  
the sound of the water  
turning in the hollow,  
returning to them from the leaves.

How long did they sit here  
on this perfect flat rock beside  
this single arbutus  
to finally see  
the trees around it were dying  
because they weren't as deeply rooted?

When I tell you the word  
is still old, I say that  
because the first time  
a man said *KÓ, KÓ, IɛC,*  
said, *water drinker,*  
it was because the generations  
before him had sat on the rock  
and looked at the tree.  
They sat in name of the tree,  
as in a song too familiar  
to hear, and finally  
recognized it. And when  
I say the word now, *KÓ, KÓ, IɛC,*  
It is the same word,  
but said in an alien light.



## A Baker's Dozen: 13 Vancouver Food (In)Securities

BILLEH NICKERSON

1.

Every summer the fig trees  
look like they just walked home  
from the salon,  
but it's only old Italians  
using mesh nets  
to keep out the birds.

2.

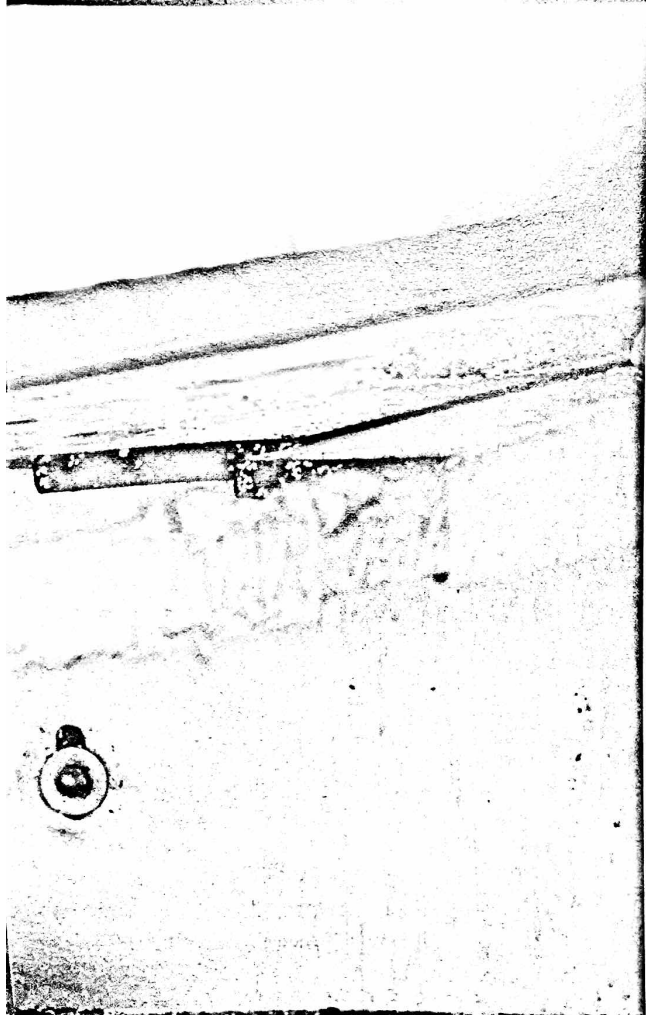
My favourite blackberry bushes  
were torn down  
to stop homeless people  
from living there.  
Now it's a condo complex  
I can't live in either.

3.

At my local café  
a customer explains  
he's never considered  
food security before,  
and now he might need  
to get a lock  
for his refrigerator.  
I continue to sip my coffee,  
burn my tongue.

4.

Sometimes I purchase ginger snaps  
from Uprising Breads Bakery  
where my friend was a manager  
before his untimely passing.  
Each morsel is a small memorial,  
a sweetness against the salt  
in my wounds.



5.  
There's a store in Kitsilano  
with organic jelly beans  
that retail for \$25 a kilogram.  
This makes me think  
of *Jack and the Beanstalk*.  
The beans are not magic though,  
just expensive.  
There are no golden eggs.

6.  
Inside the cheap pizza place  
customers debate  
the merits of pineapple

while outside someone tries  
to scrape enough together  
for a single slice.

7.  
Gelato stores are the cockroaches  
of the hospitality world.  
No matter how much  
or how often rent increases,  
they somehow survive.

8.  
Small bones litter the ground  
under the bald eagles' nest  
in the park  
with the advisory  
to watch out  
for poisoned sausages.

9.  
My friend stipulates  
she wants a birthday party  
where everyone shares  
the restaurant dishes,  
*none of this ordering  
for yourself crap.*

10.  
Crow-proof.  
Rat-proof.  
Raccoon-proof.  
Dog-proof.  
Bear-proof.  
Human-proof.  
The ultimate  
dumpster.

11.  
Minimum wage,  
maximum rage.

12.  
The restaurant offering  
a delicious lentil dish  
with a pay-what-you-can option  
closed down.

13.  
At the First Nations Restaurant  
at the Folklife pavilion  
during Expo 86  
I overheard a tourist  
ask a busser  
*what did your people drink?*

*Um, probably just water,*  
the young man answers,  
which disappoints the tourist,  
and makes me think.

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Billeh Nickerson is the author of five books including the 2014 City of Vancouver Book Award nominated *Artificial Cherry*. He is also a founding member of the performance troupe Haiku Night in Canada, and a silver medalist at the Canadian Gay Curling Championships. He lives—and loves—in Vancouver.

## Inside the Garden: Bees

WENDY MORTON

Outside the garden, the newspaper lands  
on the driveway each morning, bringing terrible words.

Inside the garden,  
we speak another language.

We say esmeralda, brunia, arugula, cylindra;  
we say bordeaux, bolero, fiesta.

We speak in flowers:  
we say alstromeria;  
we say sweet juliet, wildeve.

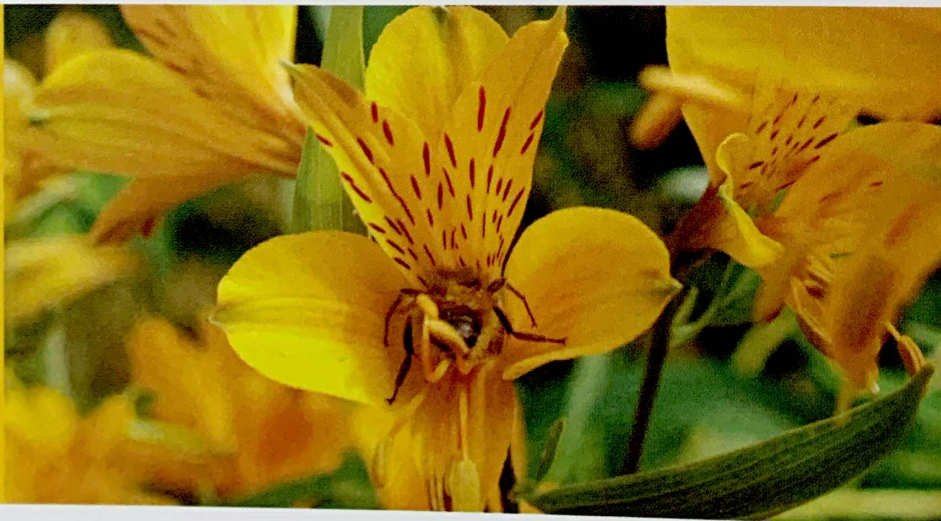
We say tango.

Bees hear us,  
dance.

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Wendy Morton has been a teacher, a printer, an insurance investigator and always a poet. She has seven books in the world. She has grown an organic garden in Otter Point, BC for forty-four years and is well acquainted with bees. She has received many awards, the latest of which is the Meritorious Service Medal from the Governor General of Canada.

Photo Credit: Wendy Morton





# References

- “A Baker’s Dozen: 13 Vancouver Food (In)Securities”, Billeh Nickerson (*Sustenance: Writers from BC and Beyond on the Subject of Food*, ed. Rose, 2017)
- “Inside the Garden: Bees”, Wendy Morton (*Sustenance: Writers from BC and Beyond on the Subject of Food*, ed. Rose, 2017)
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- “recognition/identification test”, Rita Wong (*forage*, 2007)
- “Willow”, Catherine Graham (*Worth More Standing: Poets and Activists Pay Homage to Trees*, ed. Christine Lowther, 2022)
- “Cinnamon Peeler”, Micahel Ondaatje (*Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Contexts*, Volume II, eds Moss and Sugars, 2009)