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# **SEVEN DEER DANCING**

by

**Rolland Nadjiwon**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research  
English Language, Literature and Creative Writing  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada**

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wahjeh

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## **oscillations**

you must sleep

you must dream

your dreaming

must dream me

or i cannot dream you

into my dream

breathing--

in and out

motionless

under archaic lapis

in and out

like a bronze man breathing

his azury breath

at the azury centre of time

released from all destructions—



## **the old ones**

they are gone now--physically  
most of the old faces  
from the reservations  
letting go of our language  
too foreign for our colonizers

they are not really gone  
the old ones

seattle i think it was said  
"death, there is no death  
just a changing of worlds"  
or something like that

that is where old ones they go to  
changing world  
where it is always

anyone cannot just go there  
the old ones tell us

you must come from there first  
where all your relatives are relative  
for always

some still rememberers  
ride otter far beyond bounded horizons  
far beyond where science  
renamed the grandmother earth  
renamed all our generations  
renamed the northern lights  
shimmering and dancing  
where turtle whispers  
in small butterfly voices  
into our shaking tent  
renamed a still beyond  
to an event beyond that event  
where binaries cannot go  
where time itself bends itself  
into the curved roof  
of a sweat lodge  
spirits enter and sing  
in small butterfly voices

if we ask those who still can  
they will tell us about this journey  
a journey of not going anywhere  
a journey of changing

if we bring them tobacco  
and ask them  
they will still tell  
of jihjahkonce  
and spirit that has no ending

the gone ones still laughing tell us  
uncertainties are not problems  
they laugh and say  
an indian's favorite word is maybe  
so they say  
maybe i will go to town tomorrow  
maybe not

and drift off to important matters

they can be sure of

like those dogs over there--he keeps eating grass

maybe it will rain today

maybe not

**beforenow**

before the now

before people

earth

sky

there was only medicine

medicine stood alone

at the centre of nothing

reaching out his hand

she touched a mystery

nothing was there

only an illusion

grasping illusion

he began to drum

an unfinished song

an unfinished earth

sound of heartbeat

upon watersound

of rattle upon water

where they touched  
the earth  
the water  
the darkness  
against each other  
was the sound of soft  
of dancing  
of wind

medicine took  
a small soft of the sound  
made a cradle board  
made a song wind could not blow away

gave tobacco  
made smoke to the wind

thunder flashed lightning

in unfinished light  
illusion took shadow  
once

twice

three times took shadow

wind song flashed lightning

fourth illusion took shadow

took shadow into nahba

this one medicine said

is thunder and son of thunder

she danced there where

the earth

the water

the darkness

they touch softly each other

a medicine song

with thunder

with lightning

with dancing

and

wind in tikinagan

**the songs they sing**

this at the centre

is my song

at the centre

is where i am from

when the water is calm

and the fog is just drifting

that's when i show up

now and then

water is flowing

its sound

toward my house

when i show up

the waters cast up men

i am a spirit

yes, i am a spirit

see me becoming visible



in the middle of the sea  
long long room of the sea  
in which i am sitting

at the centre  
is where i am from

**from the center of medicine**

from the way over there

out of illusion

he sings medicine

to the fire

from the way over there

out of illusion

she sings medicine

to the fire

drum

singing out of a blue wilderness

rattle

singing out of a blue wilderness

out of medicine

out of illusion

blue earth singing

a red dawn song

at the center of fire

it is i who sing

at the centre of fire

at the center of song

it is i singing out of illusion

## **crystal thoughts**

stilled

or in motion

the limits of our own

mechanical thought rolling

across the laboratory

newton's flat table

or a flat earth

abstracting us from our emotional content

to prove our logical analysis

prototypes of causal propagation

enclosed in crystalline sphere

of lightdreaming that we

this prototype

is everything

breathing in and out

our new possibilities

of a multiverse in which

i/we move--at once

in every possible directions  
in every possible times  
where i/we can not even hope  
to tear back the  
universe's curtained stage  
and reveal its pretty scenery

our selves  
the rulers of our measurements  
extending yet beyond  
another of our own measured horizons  
another curtained stage  
in crystalline sphere  
of lightdreaming that we  
this prototype  
is everything  
breathing in and out  
our own causal propagations  
of yet other crystalline spheres  
rolling across a flat earth

no, god does not play at dice  
with the universe--he plays pool  
and we--this new blue earth  
we only dream ourselves to be the 8 ball

**first woman**

on cotton thread

first woman

softly

like feather

touches

like warm

passing

through me

like lightning

like thunder

i shudder

feeble as an old warrior

trembling

at the centre

of her dream shirt

**they dance alone**

they dance alone

for a long time now

it was not always

this way

turning

turning

turning

turning the empty

embracing the empty

where once

standing

smiling

touching

were all his

our small breaths

wiped sleep

from our lastnight eyes

into an oleander morning

into a vision



into a dreaming  
into a remembering that  
this was the today  
the soldiers came

for a long time now  
only nightmares dance me awake  
with tears that try to  
wash his memory  
from my morning eyes

each day  
not one tear drop less  
and still  
i cannot weep away death

yes we are old  
yes we dance alone  
yes we are tired  
yes our arms  
our hearts  
are filled with shadows

shadows the soldiers left

we dance alone now

always with tears

and for a long time now

**before**

before the world was  
before the children of the four hundred  
who were one and four hundred  
before the seven macaw  
who were one and seven macaw  
before the two twins  
who were one and two twin  
there was nothing  
calm and silence were the great  
nothing existed  
nothing had been drawn together  
the face of earth was unseen  
the song of earth was unheard  
softly the nothing began to hum  
slowly the nothing began to dance  
faster and faster  
round and round with arms spinning  
like dervish the nothing  
broke into small swirling dreams  
into a shirt of woven dreams

first woman put on the dreamshirt  
emerging at the  
centre  
swirling and dancing  
until  
the children of the four hundred  
who were one and four hundred  
became the milky way  
swirling and dancing  
until  
the seven macaw  
who were one and seven macaw  
became the big sky dipper  
swirling and dancing  
until  
the two twins  
who were one twin  
became the sun and the moon  
until  
on cotton thread from her dreamshirt  
first woman lowered herself  
into the dreaming

emerging at the  
centre  
of our ancient song

## **blue moon**

many circles we walk

but tonight

ahhh...the dream magic

of this full moon walking

## **the birthing**

blood red and wet  
across a morning sky  
into a dark wilderness  
of light dancing  
dreamed stories of stars  
in a blue wilderness  
dropping dropping dropping  
head first feet first into  
what is already known  
about fire in sky  
where the pistis sophia  
on the thirteenth day  
winging on thirteen angels  
raided the ciborium of eden  
escaped with adam's white soul  
and pointed accusing finger  
and eye of death through adam's soul  
onto the twelve aeons  
who broke the thirteenth sphere  
to release the whore

who birthed the son of god  
blood red and wet  
across a morning sky  
smiling twice toward bethlehem



## **white christmas**

o holy night

the stars were brightly shining

with neon lights

and people

rushing down

slippery streets

sloppy floor mats

at k-mart

check out counters

laughter of children

with christmas trees

plastic bulbs

little flashing lights

paper and ribbon

and endless

mechanical ingenuity

bionic man

star wars

wonder woman

happy hearts  
for the moment  
going from door to door  
midnight mass  
christmas hymns  
a piece of bread  
this is his body  
a shot of wine  
this is his blood  
amen  
outside  
greetings and handshakes  
christmas kisses  
and  
a mickey of cc  
in the hip pocket  
to add a little  
kick to christmas spirit  
it is the night  
of our dear saviour's birth

**amber phantasy**

wanted you so much

to be real

thought i needed that

to touch

the way we did

that time

so long ago in Eden

you did not come

i looked for you

in coffee shops

smoky bar rooms

bus stations

small dried up towns

with dried up roads

dried up people

waiting from cigarette to cigarette

every place too familiar

every moment

a tired reincarnation

you did not come

i don't need you now

reflecting into my stale beer

and second hand smoke

we are only amber phantasies

i dreamed forever

## **deer dancing**

when i sleep

i dream a deer

when i walk

a flower

when i walk

a flower

when i touch

a flower

when i touch

a flower

when i dream

i sleep a deer

deer with flowers

in horns

walking with flowers

in his horns

## **desert thoughts**

talk of deserts

desert smell

of rain fresh

miles away

ancient

desert

rain

many miles away    woman

you stand

born

a moisture wind

rattling palm trees

like dried bones

darkness

desertness

memories

of there

coming ancient

to life

i would like to be there

now

again

beneath

the moonlight rincon mountains

I think

## **fast horses**

we rode fast horses in them days  
told stories in the silent sharing of power  
in firelight dancing eye of  
our women - old people - children  
of counting coup and stealing horses

recounting the time  
of young men raiding  
the untended night time  
moving like smoke of fires  
into morning grey dawn  
edge of camp  
edge of horse corral

on stolen horses  
riding thunder  
through enemy village  
through enemy sleeping  
shaking dreams awake  
into the magic



of our medicine dream

of our medicine ride

women - old people - children

wide eye

gawking

their morning dreaming

the dancing beauty

of our morning power riding

through their village

invisible

in their circles

in their half sleep morning dreaming

many coup - five horses

out from that day's morning mist

and  
riding  
riding from horse  
to horse  
to horse  
until nightfall  
silent in the sharing power  
of that day when we rode fast horses

## **fasting**

catcher of dreams

walking so far

here

where there is

no water

i hear your

dream catch songs

catcher of dreams

where do you make

your dream catch songs

over here in the centre

of this enchanted wilderness

catcher of dreams

walking so far

over here in the centre

of this enchanted wilderness

where do you make

your dream catch songs

catcher of dreams

walking so far

a flower covered centre

now where there is

no water

**i live alone now**

wasn't always this way

all my forever lovers

long gone words

faded into neon vacancies

wind blown nothings between forevers

as far as the eye can remember

i no longer feel

soft rustlings in the darkness

or the not long gone whisperings

that once lingered in my room

how dark

how long

one single night can be

the endless sound of silence

too long i think it has been

i stand here dark without you  
and feel the first frost  
of a new winter  
touching oh so cold

**two year old news twelve years later**

( Ernest Ottetail was killed in an accident  
the same day his son was born)

still--after all these years  
and you're even dead now  
you reach back to the day  
when I gave you hell in class  
for some now forgotten reason  
injuring the patience of trusts  
and friendships  
"kinomahgay ininih--you hurt me  
when you yell at me" you said  
in such a soft voice

you were not too young to know  
teachers screw-up

looking into your eyes  
tear filled eyes  
staining down your so young face  
i felt a same kind of pain

my conditioning wouldn't

allow me to express

to tell you i was sorry

the rememberings of each tear

reflects again and again

the last day i saw you as a child

you were playing at going to town

"lets play irwin hotel"

you shouted to the other kids

drinking heavily from a can of coke

and imitating your father's stagger

years later and last time i saw you

you weren't pretending

"kino mah ga ininih" you smiled "umbeh neemin"

you took my hand and we danced

like time had not cooled the remembering

of our lac la croix weekend at the school pow-wows

picked you up early next morning

you were walking back into fort francis



i think you had been partying all night

"kino mah ga ininih" you smiled

"lend me \$5"

i gave you what i had in my pockets

"kino mah ga ininih" you smiled

"i don't need all that...just \$5"

dropped you off at the irwin hotel

there is no word in indian

for lending and borrowing

that was the last time i ever saw you

and you weren't pretending

heard the other day

you and your woman had a little boy

heard you didn't have time to name him

heard you smashed your truck

and your life

heading for the irwin hotel

to celebrate his

that last day of school so long ago

the last day i saw you as a child

when you played irwin hotel

at the school picnic i felt

the shadow pass

so close beside us

crucifying itself into me

your son two years old now and you

ernest are two year old news

i wonder what his

mother named him

**jeeske inini asked to strike**

shaking tent man

spirit rider

night traveller

we who choose vengeance

you cannot refuse our

of black cloth and tobacco

you cannot refuse us this

drum singing

soul catching

song dance

ho! ho! ho! ho!

enter your tent shaking

spirit rider

tell them we will pay with life

perhaps our children

the blood color of our tomorrows

if you are struck  
from the back of otter  
light dancer  
you cannot return  
from your spirit tent  
mikinak - turtle  
will not find you  
and wahbun - morning  
will close the small hole  
back to your village

## **jungle thoughts**

imagine

the magic of jungle hum

trees from which

like bat dung

we fell to earth

almost upright

to search for souls

in forbidden fruit

centred

at the centre

of forbidden gardens

where snakes imagined gods

throwing thunder voices

from jungle canopies

onto offenders

cast into tomorrow

into factories of penitents

built on obliterating

the garden of origins

obliterating

the path of returning

but not

the dreamtime memory

of having been there

**last nite**

the rain last night

soft

gentle

touching

spring

to woman

to giving

to sharing

thunder

flashed

lightning

eyes

smiling

i thought about you

in a blue dress

and gave tobacco

**leaving**

standing in the warm

the wind singing

watching as you crossed the street

the way you walked

the way you looked back over your shoulder

with a wave and a smile

i tried so hard to memorize you for that last time

knowing it would be important

often that time of your going would return to me

on sun grey days

odaemene keezis maage penaque keezis

it would be the same

i would hear singing in the wind

and that day's sing would come back

for years to come



i live alone now  
but not without the kind of thoughts  
that let me sleep without your memory  
or erase the excitement of your hands

i am not sure what it means to lie in darkness  
listening to the heart beat  
listening to the warm  
and remembering

**loon — he is singing thunder**

i put beads on the lake to ask his song

i put beads on the lake to ask his song

i put tobacco on the lake to ask his song

i put tobacco on the lake to ask his song

he placed the beads upon my back

he placed the beads upon my back

he brought me to a thunder dream

he brought me to a thunder dream

he smoked with me a thunder pipe

he smoked with me a thunder pipe

and sang for me a thunder song

and sang for me a thunder song

**may-may-quay-zho inninwug(butterfly people)**

may-may-quay-zho innini

landed on my morning shoulder

touching me

singing me a wabeno song

from his people his mourning thoughts

on a sunshine superior morning

four thunderloons calling

for thunder

for thunder

four thunder

## **memories**

i remember you

each time a little less

each sunrise morning

or greying dawn

tidelike

over the remembering

of another so quiet

so still last night

without you

each dreaming

awakens

trembling the thin veil

we have imagined

between our realities

of absences that are not

each dreaming

tracing in detail

your features

your being

until morning

i see your photograph

realizing i have redrawn you

and i am not remembering you

but forgetting

**mishi-bijou sleeping**

great serpent

awakening into our dreams

into our visions

a chimera of power

tempting our ancient greed

grandfather

your beauty magic songs of creation

your sacred arrow songs

silently holding the seventh arrow

into his seventh coil

until we sing your song again

to keep his sleeping

or it is forgotten

and the arrow falls

empty

each morning

each desert sunrise

four times

i remember

sand

mesquite

palo verde

cactus shadow

i am a desert stranger

my grandfather

is buried

in rich dark earth

under trees

maple

oak

elm

hickory

soft fern

near limestone sweet springs

too far from here

i am so far from grandfather

from his earth spirit

the songs are silent

the drum is cracked

his tracks dusted under

sometimes

at night

he speaks to me in the thunder

or weeps tears of acid rain

mishi-bijou moves

the sacred song arrow trembles



**moon**

fire night-time

out on the lake

a crackling loon

good-night grandmother

**noise**

i speak for you  
the silence between worlds  
thought in bush camps  
traplines  
guiding fat tourists  
scratching and yawning  
into the lake rippling of morning  
painting us across  
a nightblack horizon  
only owls and wolves can hear  
and a loon  
laughing its critical loonsong  
leaving me trembling  
in thundersilence  
where i have peered  
out at you occasionally  
through this vague and noisy language

**pale orchids**

mandeo

stranger

i dream you

you exist

pale rider

one night at a time

you who are

out of reach

drifting

one thought away from touching

you speak my name

i feel universes between us

so softly whispering

shaking me like thunders

leaving me trembling

again and again

so lonely without you

i awake

**penetangushene-east side**

wandering night time  
reflections of an  
across the bay yesterday  
remembering aimlessly  
y/our memory  
of that one time singing song ago  
along the penetangushene

that one time ancient drum ago  
out of sunseting fires  
to touch across  
the water of your now  
unforming shadow memory  
of your ancient chanting  
waveskipping  
in  
to me  
from the bay

sometimes blue shirted

ancient boatman

you are there

waiting

i feel your up and down

against the spiles

just over there in the shadows

where one can feel on sometimes nights

braids of sweetgrass growing

**rain stick**

rain stick

flower stick

lying here

in this enchanted water

talking

who is this

lying in

the enchanted water

talking to me

over here from

the flower covered dawn

it is i who is talking

it is i who is walking

out of an enchanted

light blue earth

i am a person

rain stick

flower stick

lying in

enchanted water

talking

walking

singing

humming enchantments

out of an enchanted

light blue earth



**rain**

desert rain

desert thunders

trembling

trembling

trembling

trembling

the memories

of your touch

## **rock paintings**

in dreamtime

a whisper wind

like butterfly wings

not violent yet

blowing softly

through me

a whisper voice

soft

familiar as the wind

tells me to remember

remember what

i shout

my shout forming

into a spiral vortex

stretching me beyond

my own horizon

compressing me

into its own event

at last  
encased in clear amber  
i float on someone else's dreamtime  
until it is too familiar

i am tiredness  
i wish only to flex  
my petrified joints

the butterfly vortex  
spiralling  
will not end  
and there is no  
friendly voice  
in this dark wilderness

unseeing  
mindless science  
pulls in every direction  
until i am spread and pinned  
like luna moth specimen  
hot sticky blood

drips through my fingers

slivers of dogwood

pierce me

my butterfly eyes

lose to the opacity

of all deaths

that last forever

in a single moment

when small familiar voices

of butterfly people

whisper in crescendo

at the eye of our storms

fathers forgive them

where i die

with my butterfly eyes

opened wide

because no one remembers

how to close them

my last blood falls  
ochre red  
in random drops  
onto precambrian rock  
telling dreamtime stories  
of a far off  
amber dreamtime

**small spotted fawn**

small

spotted

crying

in the centre of enchanted forest

why are you here where coyote lives

where you walk

red dawn humming

blue earth humming

ribbons

flowers

of enchanted forest where coyote

uses you up like flowers in blue wilderness

i am going into this light blue wilderness

dancing

ribbons

flowers

into a red dawn humming blue earth

out of a light blue wilderness

over there in the middle

where i am going

coyote will use me up

in the wilderness where i went

## **solitudes 2**

in the oneness of oneness

i sit through

sunrise

sunset

sweetgrass

days gone by

time

between the circles

morning

passing to evening

to stillness

to night

to morning

to day

with fear sometimes

i conjure--with sweetgrass

old tobacco

old photographs

old memories

old magics



dancing rhythm  
to stillnesses  
of  
drifting  
on sweet scented  
wisps of smoke  
through  
restless  
dreams  
through  
restless  
time  
wisps of smoke  
sweet  
into morning

## **talking trees**

sometime long ago  
when a blue earth  
was forming  
out of the thoughts  
of a red dawn humming  
all the trees  
and plants  
and animals  
talked

when the new world  
was becoming  
here  
out of thought songs  
of the red dawn humming  
there were ones  
who could hear  
the sounds  
of the trees  
and the plants

and the animals

these ones

who could hear them

told about it

because

they were old

and from so long ago

they knew how to listen

they were the ones

who could hear

that time of talking

when this earth

was becoming new

to here

when the buh-gwudg-innini-sug

the little people

when they lived here

that is when

the trees talked

and the plants

and the animals  
and when they talked  
it was a song  
now on this blue earth  
only the one  
is standing  
singing  
    singing  
        singing  
of a blue earth  
out of a red dawn humming

**buh-gwudg-innini-sug**

"the little people,"

they said

"came to the fire last night"

they sounded like

maybe

maybe they almost

believe in them

born again indians

**thunders**

in the wind

today

i thought i heard a voice

did you

my brother

hear thunder

and welcome him

with your thunder pipe

in the wind

today

i thought i heard a voice

**on sometimes nights**

on sometimes nights

in an enchanted

light blue outside

you hear the spirits move

like a soft

they move

like a warm

they touch

from that side

into blue forest

the spirit will walk to you

look out

look out into the light blue

he is walking to us

on sometimes nights

from that side

you feel the spirits move

**the pronoun of the second person singular or plural in any grammatical relation except  
that of a possessive**

you

always so familiar

again and again

maybe i feel you

touching this madness

a touching feeling

always recreating new form

out of me feeling you

why will you

not let me name you

speaking you disappears

always no echo

always no reflection

always no tracing

i write you desperately



i want to see you

to give you form

you on this page

this very page

i locate you

a place for the tears

of my privation to fall

to be absorbed into you

we cannot

we must not remain

breathless circuitous pronouns

reenacting the possessive

and forever violence

of an anonymous dying

and yet you disappear

even as i speak you

**wahbun — first light**

you who choose to fractionate  
to understand everything  
your way

we are  
what is ours

you understand  
you say

you cannot understand  
without us

we are of this earth  
we are life  
we are death

we are all the legends

this you must understand

or there is no "more"

moving from shadow to shadow

you will not have to stand

in the light of our sun

the light of our generations

see darkness

in your shadow

walking on this earth

you are not earth keepers

from shadows

you watch us moving

—moving

in the light of ancestors

for a moment

maybe

    a quick moment

you feel good

you imagine knowing

quickly

it moves one way

drum

dance

chant

heart beat

ancient

we fade

fade

back

back

into light of sondance

our generations

life

unsacred

turning into shadow

shadows of almost knowing

we who are deemed powerless

cannot be

or

be otherwise

we who are powerless

cannot command

shadows

**meneseno (old warrior)**

old warrior

turtle

fire keeper

anishinabek

a new thought

spoken from a new dawn

touching onto a blue earth

circle circle circle

our village is circle

blue earth is circle

who is standing in this circle

meneseno--old warrior

it is i am the stander

it is i am the centre

breathing in and out

when this one dies

old warrior will slide

silent as a spoken word  
down a new dawn  
touching onto a blue earth

at the centre of the time  
he will be old  
he will be young  
grandson—grandfather

one will say  
who is humming a song  
i almost remember

ah yes—it is the old warrior—one will say  
it is he who hums the ancient blue earth song  
again he must be standing at the centre

**when the film breaks**

to be indian

any kind of indian

is like to wake every day

a little more dead

not less alive

just a little more dead

culture

someone said

is a weapon

that does not rust

why would we want it to be

rust—simple erosion

culture erodes

like weapons

like books

like films



it will be lost

not used

not read

not watched

my grandmother/grandfather

each day

each morning

faced east

with thoughts

not of hollywood

the sun of frost

drawing moisture/essence

from the small bits of

tobacco prayers

all their/our stories

left for some tomorrow

in snow

earth

grass

water

rocks

i was there

indian

aboriginal

indigenous

first nation

native american

which politically correct

word will we utter

as our film breaks

as our page tears

with our last breath

what uptown/downtown

library/theatre

will i be curled up in

drawing my knees closer

to the memory of my

grandmother/grandfather

telling/laughing

until the tobacco

was all gone

while

in my too late useless

tears kevin costner

and pocahontas

dance with wolves

across an empty screen

and the broken film

slaps uselessly

around

and around

and around

an untended wheel

as the curtain drops

## **Damn The Storm!**

Froth spitting waves crashing, melting into shadows  
of cedar darkness on the distant shoreline across the harbor.

In the half light of almost, nothing is separate from  
the monochrome howling of this storm.

Water, earth, sky melt.

Dressed in useless black oilskins mom and dad  
struggle to get their boat across the foaming breakers  
into an even darker wave beyond. Waves, wind throwing them  
violently backward again and again out of white capped waves.  
Their boat does not break up into storm tossed tomorrow kindling  
lying weathered and smooth on the rough rocks.

The shoreline of our village is littered with remains  
of boats that didn't make it. Many times, cupping our hands  
to shadow our gaze through the crystal clear wind swept first ice of winter,  
we kids played at counting remains of boats on harbor bottom.  
Boats that did not make it back to shore or were ripped loose from  
their moorings and swept out to founder alone in the dark spinning eye of storm.  
I found the rusted drive shaft of my grandfather's forty footer  
one long summer time ago. Skipping stones and suddenly it was

lying there, right in front of me on the white sandstones—

a few broken ribs naked like an old carp skeleton.

I heard the stories about that one a few times.

How my grandfather built himself into the hand hewed timbers

Two Model T engines hooked up in series an old stick shift transmission

with no clutch jamming and grinding into gear. She was a beauty

everyone at the store agreed over a coke and a cigarette after

the fish were put on ice and time was visiting for the evening.

Yep, she must have been a beauty.

Outsiders would say, “Oh, look at all the nice driftwood. Maybe

we can have a bonfire tonight on the shore.” That always kinda bothered us.

We could see small patches of green, or red, or white paint that

told us it was our uncle’s boat, or our cousin’s, or our grandfather’s.

Nothing in our community was a disconnected something.

Everything had a name and a belonging.

Standing on that grey, wet shoreline so long ago, watching

my parents bobbing up and down on those black and stormy waters

fighting for our life and our nets. Tears melting into rain

filling my eyes and blurring vision. So hard to see—so hard to see them.

I keep moving, moving, moving, jumping up and down trying

to hold onto a small glimpse of them disappearing again  
and again below the white capped crest of another dark wave.  
I am afraid—afraid their boat will not ride the trough or crest of the next wave.  
Afraid I will be left staring into the howling empty wave after wave of no boat.

“No! No...(more softly)you can’t come with us. Its too dangerous,”  
Seemed like that is all I ever hear. I follow down to the water.  
I need to be there with them—close by where I can hold their hands and keep them safe.  
There, alone on the shore, where the distance, they tell me, is no danger  
I feel their warm softness through cold darkness of storm. I cannot let go.  
Nothing can ever be so fearful as being without them.

Defly my dad jumps into the boat, my mother pushes steadying  
it into the waves until my dad can lock in the oars and get  
a bite into that damned storm. I am so afraid. I yell again and again  
pushing my words back into the face of the shrieking wind, “Mom, dad!  
Come back. Come back. We don’t need to eat.”  
Sometimes, like on this day, all we have is the fish.

I hear my dad clearly as if those fifty years that slipped by so quickly  
are still, somehow, yet to happen. “East wind today, mom,” he’d say  
with a little shake twist of his head to the sound of window panes rattling.

“Guess we gotta get the nets out.”

“It’s too dangerous out there today...”

“Fish ain’t gonna wait for a good day.”

And I’d slip out the door behind them into a terrifying nightmare.

Jubilation—their boat scraping and grinding across the flat rocks

coming to rest tilted at strange angles. Dark cheated waves

rolling and crashing, rolling and crashing against time.

The silvered floor inside the boat alive with the moving harvest.

Gulls dipping and bobbing on the wind crying for the fish,

crying for their share. Excitement—the red smell of life and death eddying,

spinning dizzily like gulls on the wind around us. Silence spilling from the mouths of fish

opening and closing, opening and closing—sucking in more and more of their own death.

Rain washing popped air bladders off wet rocks back into the life and death harbor.

A too swift fifty years later today I write for you

this quick snapping of a memory, knowing only too well

my mom and dad never did get off that boat that day, or any other day.

They are on it, now, across the dark waves and back out into the harbor,

together. Every time, every wave a bit rougher. Greying shapeless pulling

at them, pulling them into its own eternal shapeless. Slowly, for they are older now,

they sew and string a new net—a spirit net to a calm on another side of the storm.

I am sad. I cannot mend the tears in the webs of their lives that come with age,  
with living. I cannot lift their net or scull their boat around toward the safety of my shore.  
They are not coming back with a boat load of breakfast. Not this time.  
Damn the storm!  
And again they are not letting me go with them.  
“No...you can’t come with us. Its too dangerous...” they still say so gently.  
I want so much to take their time, their worn old fishing hands in mine and  
hold in the warmth—only for another too swift fifty years...  
Damn!  
Damn the storm....



**tuhgwahgun**

tuhgwahgun—autumn

how long we have known

one another

each time—each autumn

and still i cannot stop your

cyclical grounding

or stay you

for one moment longer

into the beauty

the incredible beauty

of your earth changing

ah nokomisas—little grandmother

i will miss you

until seegwun—until spring

when your waters break

and you are reborn again

kisheh minido—old spirit

laughing and giggling

into the rivers that flow

beside where i live  
and into our lake below the hills

you and i tuhgwahgun  
child parent grandparent  
until the time of some  
still and spirit moon  
when my now breath  
is the same color of your passing  
into peboon—the long winter  
of our going home sleeping  
where together we will fall  
each fall into the memory  
of our having been  
together for a summer

## **VITA AUCTORIS**

Rolland Nadjiwon, a member of the Potowatomi Tribe and a member of the Turtle Clan, was born in 1945 on the Cape Croker Indian Reservation on the Bruce Peninsula. After graduating from High School, he worked for many years for Native Organizations before attending Algoma University College in Sault Ste. Marie where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts in English and Political Science. He is presently a candidate for a Master's Degree in English and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor where he will graduate in the Spring of 2000.