

V I N T A G E

eBooks



The Cinnamon Peeler

SELECTED POEMS

MICHAEL ONDAATJE

The Cinnamon Peeler

Selected Poems

Michael Ondaatje

VINTAGE INTERNATIONAL

Vintage Books

A Division of Random House, Inc. New York



FIRST VINTAGE INTERNATIONAL EDITION, JANUARY 1997

Copyright © 1989, 1991 by Michael Ondaatje

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York. Originally published in slightly different form in Great Britain by Pan Books Ltd., London, in hardcover in 1989 and subsequently in the United States by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, in hardcover in 1991, and in paperback in 1992. Published simultaneously in Canada by McClelland and Stewart, Inc., Toronto.

Most of the poems in this collection were originally published in *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do* (1979) and *Secular Love* (1984), published by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Copyright © 1979 by Michael Ondaatje

Copyright © 1984 by Michael Ondaatje

The Library of Congress has cataloged the Knopf edition(s) as follows:

Ondaatje, Michael, 1943–

The cinnamon peeler: poems/Michael Ondaatje.—1st ed.

p. cm.

I. Title.

PR9199.3.O5C5 1991

811'.54—dc20 90-53557

Vintage eISBN: 978-0-307-94896-0

Author photograph © Dominic Sansoni

v.3.1

For Barrie Nichol

Contents

Cover

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to do

Light

Early Morning, Kingston to Gananoque

A House Divided

The Diverse Causes

Signature

Henri Rousseau and Friends

Application for a driving licence

The Time Around Scars

For John, Falling

The Goodnight

Philoctetes on the Island

Elizabeth

Dates

Billboards

Letters and Other Worlds

Griffin of the Night

Birth of Sound

We're at the Graveyard

Near Elginburg

Loop

Heron Rex

Rat Jelly

King Kong Meets Wallace Stevens
'The Gate in his Head'
Taking
Burning Hills
Charles Darwin Pays a Visit, December 1971
The Vault
White Dwarfs
The Agatha Christie Books by the Window
Country Night
Moving Fred's Outhouse/Geriatrics of Pine
Buck Lake Store Auction
Farre Off
Walking to Bellrock
Pig Glass
The Hour of Cowdust
The Palace
Uswetakeiyawa
The Wars
Sweet Like a Crow
Late Movies with Skyler
Sallie Chisum/Last Words on Billy the Kid. 4 a.m
Pure Memory/Chris Dewdney
Bearhug

Elimination Dance (An Intermission)

Secular Love

Claude Glass
Tin Roof
Rock Bottom
Skin Boat
Her House
The Cinnamon Peeler
Women Like You
The River Neighbour

To a Sad Daughter
All Along the Mazinaw
Pacific Letter
A Dog in San Francisco
Translations of My Postcards
7 or 8 Things I Know About Her
Bessie Smith at Roy Thomson Hall
The Concessions
Red Accordion—an immigrant song
In a Yellow Room
When You Drive the Queensborough Roads at Midnight
Proust in the Waters
Escarpment
Birch Bark

Breeze

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

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

MAGAZINE DESCRIPTION OF A WINE

LIGHT

for Doris Gratiaen

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

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

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

and this is my Mother with her brother Noel in fancy dress.
They are 7 and 8 years old, a hand-coloured photograph,
is the earliest picture I have. The one I love most.

picture of my kids at Halloween
as the same contact and laughter.

My Uncle dying at 68, and my Mother a year later dying at 68.
He told me about his death and the day he died
his eyes clearing out of illness as if seeing
light through the room the hospital and she said
she saw something so clear and good his whole body
for a moment became youthful and she remembered
when she sewed badges on his trackshirts.
Her voice joyous in telling me this, her face light and clear.
(My firefly Grandmother also dying at 68).

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

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