

Raven's Island
Robin Skelton, 1980s

A mist of rain
upon the shore
of the empty island
and in the sand,
half-buried, ribbed
as an ebbing wave,
white as the moon,
a gaping clam
bubbling sounds
of human voices
Whah! Come out!
A small head
Peers, withdraws.
A gasp of voices
Whah! Come out!
Whah! Come out!
A second head,
A third, a fourth, till
(*Whah! Come out!*)
nine heads, then nine
and nine on nine
come out, and claim
the island; black
wings flap away.

Bear Dance Song
Iroquois, collected 1898

I am moving
along a road
even though
you think
there is none

The Song of the Stars
Passamaquoddy, collected 1882

We are the stars which sing;
We sing with our light;
We are the birds of fire;
We fly over the sky.
Our light is a voice;
We make a road for spirits,
For the spirits to pass over.
Among us are three hunters
Who chase a bear;
There never was a time
When they were not hunting.
We look down on the mountains.
This is the Song of the Stars.

Prayer to the Four Quartets
Blackfoot, collected 1910

Over there are the mountains.
May you see them as long as you live,
For from them you must receive
Your sweet pine as incense.

Strength will come from the North.
May you look for many years
Upon the star that never moves.

Old age will come from below,
From the East
Where lies the light of the sun.

May the warm winds of the South
Bring you success in securing food.

Farewell Words
Chief Crowfoot, Blackfoot, 1890

A little while and I will be gone from among you, whither I cannot tell. From nowhere we came, into nowhere we go. What is life? It is a flash of a fire-fly in the night. It is a breath of a buffalo in the winter time. It is as the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.

Hymn to the Air Spirit
Igpakuhak, collected 1932

Here I stand,
Humble, with outstretched arms,
For the spirit of the air
Lets glorious food sink down to me.

Here I stand
Surrounded with great joy.
For a caribou bull with high antlers
Recklessly exposed his flanks to me.
—Oh, how I had to crouch
In my hide.
But, scarcely had I
Hastily glimpsed his flanks
When my arrow pierced them
From shoulder to shoulder.

And then, when you, lovely caribou,
Let the water go
Out over the ground
As you tumbled down,
Well, then I felt surrounded with great joy.

Here I stand,
Humble, with outstretched arms.
For the spirit of the air
Lets glorious food sink down to me,

Surrounded with great joy.
And this time it was an old dog seal
Starting to blow through his breathing-hole.

I, little man,
Stood upright above it,
And with excitement became
Quite long of body,
Until I drove my harpoon in the beast
And tethered it to
My harpoon line!

Song of the Girl who was Turning into Stone
Ivaluardjuk, collected 1929

Men in kayaks,
come hither to me
and be my husbands;
this stone here
has clung fast to me,
and lo, my feet
are now turning to stone.

Men in kayaks,
come hither to me
and be my husbands;
this stone here
has clung fast to me,
and lo, my feet
are now turning to stone.

(song repeats with thighs,
waist, entrails, lungs ...)

from Brébeuf and his Brethren
E. J. Pratt, 1940

Brébeuf's letter recruiting missionaries:

Herein I show you what you have to suffer.
I shall say nothing of the voyage — that
You know already. If you have the courage
To try it, that is only the beginning,
For when after a month of river travel
You reach our village, we can offer you
The shelter of a cabin lowlier
Than any hovel you have seen in France.
As tired as you may be, only a mat
Laid on the ground will be your bed. Your food
May be for weeks a gruel of crushed corn
That has the look and smell of mortar paste.
This country is the breeding place of vermin.
Sandflies, mosquitoes haunt the summer months.
In France you may have been a theologian,
A scholar, master, preacher, but out here
You must attend a savage school; for months
Will pass before you learn even to lisp
The language. Here barbarians shall be
Your Aristotle and Saint Thomas. Mute
Before those teachers you shall take your lessons.
What of the winter? Half the year is winter.
Inside your cabins will be smoke so thick
You may not read your Breviary for days.
Around your fireplace at mealtime arrive
The uninvited guests with whom you share
Your stint of food. And in the fall and winter,
You tramp unbeaten trails to reach the missions,
Carrying your luggage on your back. Your life
Hangs by a thread. Of all calamities
You are the cause — the scarcity of game,
A fire, famine or an epidemic.
There are no natural reasons for a drought
And for the earth's sterility. You are
The reasons, and at any time a savage

May burn your cabin down or split your head.
I tell you of the enemies that live
Among our Huron friends. I have not told
You of the Iroquois our constant foes.
Only a week ago in open fight
They killed twelve of our men at Contarea,
A day's march from the village where we live.
Treacherous and stealthy in their ambuscades,
They terrorize the country, for the Hurons
Are very slothful in defence, never
On guard and always seeking flight for safety.

'Wherein the gain, you ask, of this acceptance?
There is no gain but this — that what you suffer
Shall be of God: your loneliness in travel
Will be relieved by angels overhead;
Your silence will be sweet for you will learn
How to commune with God; rapids and rocks
Are easier than the steeps of Calvary.
There is a consolation in your hunger
And in abandonment upon the road,
For once there was a greater loneliness
And deeper hunger. As regards the soul
There are no dangers here, with means of grace
At every turn, for if we go outside
Our cabin, is not heaven over us?
No buildings block the clouds. We say our prayers
Freely before a noble oratory.
Here is the place to practise faith and hope
And charity where human art has brought
No comforts, where we strive to bring to God
A race so unlike men that we must live
Daily expecting murder at their hands,
Did we not open up the skies or close
Them at command, giving them sun or rain.
So if despite these trials you are ready
To share our labours, come; for you will find
A consolation in the cross that far outweighs
Its burdens. Though in many an hour your soul
Will echo — "Why hast thou forsaken me?",

Yet evening will descend upon you when,
 Your heart too full of holy exultation,
 You call like Xavier — "Enough, O Lord!"

Huron Carol
Fr. Jean de Brébeuf, 1643

Estennialon de tsonwe Jesous ahathonhia
 Onnawatewa d'oki n'onwandaskwaentak
 Ennonchien skwatrihotat n'onwandilonrachatha
 Jesous ahathonhia ahathonhia
 Jesous ahathonhia
 A,oki onkinnhache eronhia'eronnon
 iontonk ontatiande ndio sen tsatonnharonnion
 Warie onnawakweton ndio sen tsatonnharonnion
 Jesous ahathonhia ahathonhia
 Jesous ahathonhia

French

Chrétiens, prenez courage, Jésus Sauveur est né!
 Du malin les ouvrages à jamais sont ruinés.
 Quand il chante merveille à ces troublants âppats
 Ne prêtez plus l'oreille: Jésus est né.
 Jesous ahathonhia.
 Oyez cette nouvelle, dont un ange est porteur!
 Oyez! Âmes fidèles, et dilatez vos coeurs.
 La Vierge dans l'étable entoure de ses bras
 L'Enfant-Dieu adorable: Jésus est né.
 Jesous ahathonhia.

English Translation (Fr. H. Kierans)

Let Christian men take heart today
 The devil's rule is done;
 Let no man heed the devil more,
 For Jesus Christ has come
 But hear ye all what angels sing:
 How Mary Maid bore Jesus King.
 Jesous ahathonhia. Jesus is born.

Jesous ahatonhia.
 Three chieftains saw before Noël
 A star as bright as day;
 “So fair a sign,” the chieftains said,
 “Shall lead us where it may.”
 For Jesu told the chieftains three:
 “The star will bring you here to me.”
 Jesous ahatonhia. Jesus is born.
 Jesous ahatonhia.

from Brébeuf and his Brethren

E. J. Pratt, 1940

The Passion of Brébeuf

Now three o'clock, and capping the height of the passion,
 Confusing the sacraments under the pines of the forest,
 Under the incense of balsam, under the smoke
 Of the pitch, was offered the rite of the font. On the head,
 The breast, the loins and the legs, the boiling water!
 While the mocking paraphrase of the symbols was hurled
 At their faces like shards of flint from the arrow heads —
 "We baptize thee with water ...

That thou mayest be led

To Heaven ...

To that end we do anoint thee.

We treat thee as a friend: we are the cause
 Of thy happiness; we are thy priests; the more
 Thou sufferest, the more thy God will reward thee,
 So give us thanks for our kind offices."

The fury of taunt was followed by fury of blow.
 Why did not the flesh of Brébeuf cringe to the scourge,
 Respond to the heat, for rarely the Iroquois found

A victim that would not cry out in such pain — yet here
The fire was on the wrong fuel. Whenever he spoke,
It was to rally the soul of his friend whose turn
Was to come through the night while the eyes were uplifted in prayer,
Imploring the Lady of Sorrows, the mother of Christ,
As pain brimmed over the cup and the will was called
To stand the test of the coals. And sometimes the speech
Of Brébeuf struck out, thundering reproof to his foes,
Half-rebuke, half-defiance, giving them roar for roar.
Was it because the chancel became the arena,
Brébeuf a lion at bay, not a lamb on the altar,
As if the might of a Roman were joined to the cause
Of Judaea? Speech they could stop for they girdled his lips,
But never a moan could they get. Where was the source
Of his strength, the home of his courage that topped the best
Of their braves and even out-fabled the lore of their legends?
In the bunch of his shoulders which often had carried a load
Extorting the envy of guides at an Ottawa portage?
The heat of the hatchets was finding a path to that source.
In the thews of his thighs which had mastered the trails of the
Neutrals?
They would gash and beribbon those muscles. Was it the blood?
They would draw it fresh from its fountain. Was it the heart?
They dug for it, fought for the scraps in the way of the wolves.
But not in these was the valour or stamina lodged;
Nor in the symbol of Richelieu's robes or the seals
Of Mazarin's charters, nor in the stir of the lilies
Upon the Imperial folds; nor yet in the words
Loyola wrote on a table of lava-stone
In the cave of Manresa — not in these the source —
But in the sound of invisible trumpets blowing
Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.

Brébeuf and his Brethren

F. R. Scott, written 1941 published 1957

When Lalemant and de Brébeuf, brave souls,
 Were dying by the slow and dreadful coals
 Their brother Jesuits in France and Spain
 Were burning heretics with equal pain.
 For both the human torture made a feast:
 Then is priest savage, or Red Indian priest?

from Abram's Plains (ll 301-331)

Thomas Cary 1789

When up the heights, great Wolfe his vet'rans led,
 Panting, the level lawn they dauntless tread:
 As bold they rise the broad battalion forms,
 The gain'd ascent, for fight, their bosom warms;
 When soon, in view, appears the num'rous foe,
 With arms bright-flashing from the plains below:
 With ardour glowing in his country's cause,
 His hostile sword the chief intrepid draws;
 The troops, to conquest, now inspiring cheers,
 High beat their breasts, strangers to abject fears:
 A chief no more he leads on foot the line,—
 Thus, with his soldiers' fate, his hopes combine.
 The deaf'ning drums the charge loud rattling sound,
 The charge th' opposing cliffs thund'ring rebound.
 The battle rages, bullets, charg'd with fate,
 The hungry soil, with human victims, sate.
 Attending fate, grim death, with hasty stride,
 Triumphs a victor over either side.
 Too sure, alas! the leaden vengeance flies,

And on the chief its force repeated tries.
Heedless of wounds, he hides the purple flood,
His courage kindling with the loss of blood;
'Till spent, at length, nature's oblig'd to yield,
He falls ere fix'd the fortune of the field.
Whilst, o'er his sight, spreads the thick veil of death,
And life suspended stays the struggling breath,
Anxious, he hears the shout — "they fly, they fly,"
"Who fly?" "The foe" — "contented then I die."
Whilst death exulting triumphs o'er his clay,
His name fame echoes through the realms of day.

from The Rising Village(II 441-516)
Oliver Goldsmith, 1834

While time thus rolls his rapid years away,
The Village rises gently into day.
How sweet it is, at first approach of morn,
Before the silvery dew has left the lawn,
When warning winds are sleeping yet on high,
Or breathe as softly as the bosom's sigh,
To gain some easy hill's ascending height,
Where all the landscape brightens with delight,
And boundless prospects stretched on every side,
Proclaim the country's industry and pride.
Here the broad marsh extends its open plain,
Until its limits touch the distant main;
There verdant meads along the uplands spring,
And grateful odours to the breezes fling;
Here crops of grain in rich luxuriance rise,
And wave their golden riches to the skies;
There smiling orchards interrupt the scene,
Or gardens bounded by some fence of green;
The farmer's cottage, bosomed 'mong the trees,

Whose spreading branches shelter from the breeze;
The winding stream that turns the busy mill,
Whose clacking echoes o'er the distant hill;
The neat white church, beside whose walls are spread
The grass-clod hillocks of the sacred dead,
Where rude cut stones or painted tables tell,
In laboured verse, how youth and beauty fell;
How worth and hope were hurried to the grave,
And torn from those who had no power to save.

Or, when the Summer's dry and sultry sun
Adown the West his fiery course had run;
When o'er the vale his parting rays of light
Just linger, ere they vanish into night,
How sweet to wander round the wood-bound lake,
Whose glassy stillness scarce the zephyrs wake;
How sweet to hear the murmuring of the rill,
As down it gurgles from the distant hill;
The note of Whip-poor-Will how sweet to hear,
When sadly slow it breaks upon the ear,
And tells each night, to all the silent vale,
The hopeless sorrows of its mournful tale.
Dear lovely spot! Oh may such charms as these,
Sweet tranquil charms, that cannot fail to please,
Forever reign around thee, and impart
Joy, peace, and comfort to each native heart.

Happy Acadia! though around thy shore
Is heard the stormy wind's terrific roar;
Though round thee Winter binds his icy chain,
And his rude tempests sweep along thy plain,
Still Summer comes, and decorates thy land
Still Autumn's gifts repay the labourer's toil
With richest products from thy fertile soil;
With bounteous store his varied wants supply,
And scarce the plants of other suns deny.
How pleasing, and how glowing with delight
Are now thy budding hopes! How sweetly bright
They rise to view! How full of joy appear
The expectations of each future year!

Not fifty Summers yet have blessed thy clime,
How short a period in the page of time!
Since savage tribes, with terror in their train,
Rushed o'er thy fields, and ravaged all thy plain.
But some few years have rolled in haste away
Since, through thy vales, the fearless beast of prey,
With dismal yell and loud appalling cry,
Proclaimed his midnight reign of terror nigh.
And now how changed the scene! the first, afar,
Have fled to wilds beneath the northern star;
The last has learned to shun man's dreaded eye,
And, in his turn, to distant regions fly.
While the poor peasant, whose laborious care
Scarce from the soil could wring his scanty fare;
Now in the peaceful arts of culture skilled,
Sees his wide barn with ample treasures filled;
Now finds his dwelling, as the year goes round,
Beyond his hopes, with joy and plenty crowned.

Un Canadien Errant

Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, 1842

Translated by John Gibbon , 1927

Un Canadien errant,
Banni de ses foyers,
Parcourait en pleurant
Des pays étrangers.

Once a Canadian lad,
Exiled from hearth and home,
Wandered, alone and sad,
Through alien lands unknown.

Un jour, triste et pensif,
Assis au bord des flots,
Au courant fugitif
Il adressa ces mots:

Down by a rushing stream,
Thoughtful and sad one day,
He watched the water pass
And to it he did say:

"Si tu vois mon pays,
Mon pays malheureux,
Va, dis à mes amis
Que je me souviens d'eux.

"If you should reach my land,
My most unhappy land,
Please speak to all my friends
So they will understand.

"Ô jours si pleins d'appas
Vous êtes disparus,
Et ma patrie, hélas!
Je ne la verrai plus!

Tell them how much I wish
That I could be once more
In my beloved land
That I will see no more.

"Non, mais en expirant,
Ô mon cher Canada!
Mon regard languissant
Vers toi se portera..."

"My own beloved land
I'll not forget till death,
And I will speak of her
With my last dying breath."

from Roughing it in the Bush
Susanna Moodie, 1852

I-1: A Visit to Grosse Isle

Land of vast hills and mighty streams,
The lofty sun that o'er thee beams
On fairer clime sheds not his ray,
When basking in the noon of day
Thy waters dance in silver light,
And o'er them frowning, dark as night,
Thy shadowy forests, soaring high,
Stretch forth beyond the aching eye,
And blend in distance with the sky.

And silence—awful silence broods
Profoundly o'er these solitudes;
Nought but the lapsing of the floods
Breaks the deep stillness of the woods;
A sense of desolation reigns
O'er these unpeopled forest plains.
Where sounds of life ne'er wake a tone
Of cheerful praise round Nature's throne,
Man finds himself with God—alone.

II-1: A Journey to the Woods

'Tis well for us poor denizens of earth
That God conceals the future from our gaze;
Or Hope, the blessed watcher on Life's tower,
Would fold her wings, and on the dreary waste
Close the bright eye that through the murky clouds
Of blank Despair still sees the glorious sun.

from **The Journals of Susanna Moodie**

Margaret Atwood, 1970

Disembarking at Quebec

Is it my clothes, my way of walking,
the things I carry in my hand
—a book, a bag with knitting—
the incongruous pink of my shawl

this space cannot hear

or is it my own lack
of conviction which makes
these vistas of desolation,
long hills, the swamps, the barren sand, the glare
of sun on the bone-white
driftlogs, omens of winter,
the moon alien in day-
time a thin refusal

The others leap, shout

Freedom!

The moving water will not show me
my reflection.

The rocks ignore.

I am a word
in a foreign language.

Paths and Thingscapes

Those who went ahead
of us in the forest
bent the early trees
so that they grew to signals

the trail was not
among the trees but
the trees

and there are some who have dreams
of birds flying in the shapes
of letters; the sky's
codes;
 and dream also
the significance of numbers (count
petals of certain flowers)

In the morning I advance
through the doorway; the sun
on the bark, the inter-
twisted branches, here
a blue movement in the leaves, dispersed
calls/ no trails; rocks
and grey tufts of moss

The petals of the fire-
weed fall where they fall

I am watched like an invader
who knows hostility but
not where

The day shrinks back from me

When will be
that union and each
thing (bits
of surface broken by my foot

step) will without moving move
around me
into its place

The Planters

They moved between the jagged edge
of the forest and the jagged river
on a stumpy patch of cleared land

my husband, a neighbor, another man
weeding the few rows
of string beans and dusty potatoes.

They bend straighten; the sun
lights up their faces and hands candles
flickering in the wind against the

unbright earth. I see them; I know
none of them believe they are here.
They deny the ground they stand on,

pretend this dirt is the future.
And they are right. If they let go
of that illusion solid to them as a shovel,
open their eyes even for a moment
to these trees, to this particular sun
they would be surrounded, stormed, broken

in upon branches, roots tendrils, the dark
side of light
as I am.

Dream 1: The Bush Garden

I stood once more in that garden
sold, deserted and
gone to seed

In the dream I could
see down through the earth, could see

the potatoes curled
like pale grubs in the soil
the radishes thrusting down
their fleshy snouts, the beets
pulsing like slow amphibian hearts

Around my feet
the strawberries were surging, huge
and shining

When I bent
to pick, my hands
came away red and wet

In the dream I said
I should have known
anything planted here
would come up blood

**The Country North of Belleville
Al Purdy, 1965**

Bush land scrub land —
Cashel Township and Wollaston
Elzevir McClure and Dungannon
green lands of Weslemkoon Lake
where a man might have some
opinion of what beauty is

and none deny him
for miles —

Yet this is the country of defeat
where Sisyphus rolls a big stone
year after year up the ancient hills
picnicking glaciers have left strewn
with centuries' rubble

backbreaking days
in the sun and rain
when realization seeps slow in the mind
without grandeur or self-deception
in noble struggle
of being a fool —

A country of quiescence and still distance
a lean land

not like the fat south
with inches of black soil on
earth's round belly —

And where the farms are it's as if a man stuck
both thumbs in the stony earth and pulled

it apart
to make room
enough between the trees
for a wife

and maybe some cows and
room for some
of the more easily kept illusions —
And where the farms have gone back
to forest

are only soft outlines
shadowy differences —

Old fences drift vaguely among the trees
a pile of moss-covered stones
gathered for some ghost purpose
has lost meaning under the meaningless sky
— they are like cities under water

and the undulating green waves of time
are laid on them —

This is the country of our defeat
and yet
during the fall plowing a man
might stop and stand in a brown valley of the furrows
and shade his eyes to watch for the same
red patch mixed with gold
that appears on the same
spot in the hills
year after year
and grow old
plowing and plowing a ten-acre field until
the convolutions run parallel with his own brain —

And this is a country where the young
leave quickly
unwilling to know what their fathers know
or think the words their mothers do not say —

Herschel Monteagle and Faraday
lakeland rockland and hill country
a little adjacent to where the world is
a little north of where the cities are and
sometime
we may go back there
to the country of our defeat
Wollaston Elzevir and Dungannon
and Weslemkoon lake land
where the high townships of Cashel
McClure and Marmora once were —
But it's been a long time since
and we must enquire the way
of strangers —

The Walker of the Snow
Charles Dawson Shanly, 1867

Speed on, speed on, good master!
The camp lies far away;
We must cross the haunted valley
Before the close of day.

How the snow-blight came upon me
I will tell you as we go,—
The blight of the Shadow-hunter,
Who walks the midnight snow.

To the cold December heaven
Came the pale moon and the stars,
As the yellow sun was sinking
Behind the purple bars.

The snow was deeply drifted
Upon the ridges drear,
That lay for miles around me
And the camp for which we steer.

'T was silent on the hillside,
And by the solemn wood
No sound of life or motion
To break the solitude,

Save the wailing of the moose-bird
With a plaintive note and low,
And the skating of the red leaf
Upon the frozen snow.

And said I,—“Though dark is falling,
And far the camp must be,
Yet my heart it would be lightsome,
If I had but company.”

And then I sang and shouted,
Keeping measure, as I sped,
To the harp-twang of the snow-shoe

As it sprang beneath my tread;

Nor far into the valley
Had I dipped upon my way,
When a dusky figure joined me,
In a capuchon of gray,

Bending upon the snow-shoes,
With a long and limber stride;
And I hailed the dusky stranger,
As we travelled side by side.

But no token of communion
Gave he by word or look,
And the fear-chill fell upon me
At the crossing of the brook.

For I saw by the sickly moonlight,
As I followed, bending low,
That the walking of the stranger
Left no footmarks on the snow.

Then the fear-chill gathered o'er me,
Like a shroud around me cast,
As I sank upon the snow-drift
Where the Shadow-hunter passed.

And the otter-trappers found me,
Before the break of day,
With my dark hair blanched and whitened
As the snow in which I lay.

But they spoke not as they raised me;
For they knew that in the night
I had seen the Shadow-hunter,
And had withered in his blight.

Sancta Maria speed us!
The sun is falling low,—
Before us lies the valley
Of the Walker of the Snow!

The Arctic Indian's Faith
Thomas d'Arcy McGee, 1868

I

We worship the Spirit that walks, unseen,
Through our land of ice and snow:
We know not His face, we know not His place,
But his presence and power we know.

II

Does the buffalo need the pale-face' word
To find his pathway far?
What guide has he to the hidden ford,
Or where the green pastures are?
Who teacheth the moose that the hunter's gun
Is peering out of the shade?
Who teacheth the doe and the fawn to run
In the track the moose has made?

III

Him do we follow, Him do we fear —
The spirit of earth and sky;
Who hears with the *Wapiti's* eager ear
His poor red children's cry.
Whose whisper we note in every breeze
That stirs the birch canoe,
Who hangs the reindeer moss on the trees
For the food of the Caribou.

IV

That Spirit we worship who walks, unseen,
Through our land of ice and snow:
We know not His face, we know not His place,
But His presence and power we know.

History Lesson**Jeannette C. Armstrong, 1979 (published 1991)**

Out of the belly of Christopher's ship
a mob bursts
Running in all directions
Pulling furs off animals
Shooting buffalo
Shooting each other
left and right

Father mean well
waves his makeshift wand
forgives saucer-eyed Indians

Red coated knights
gallop across the prairie
to get their men
and to build a new world

Pioneers and traders
bring gifts
Smallpox, Seagrams
and rice krispies

Civilization has reached
the promised land.

Between the snap crackle pop
of smoke stacks
and multi-coloured rivers
swelling with flower powered zee
are farmers sowing skulls and bones
and miners
pulling from gaping holes
green paper faces
of smiling English Lady

The colossi
in which they trust
while burying
breathing forests and fields
beneath concrete and steel
stand shaking fists
waiting to mutilate
whole civilization
ten generations at a blow.

Somewhere among the remains
of skinless animals
is the termination
to a long journey
and unholy search
for the power
glimpsed in a garden
forever closed
forever lost.

from The Pride
John Newlove, 1968

6

Those are all stories;
the pride, the grand poem
of our land, of the earth itself,
will come, welcome, and
sought for, and found,
in a line of running verse,
sweating, our pride;

we seize on
what has happened before,
one line only
will be enough,
a single line
and then the sunlit brilliant image suddenly floods us
with understanding, shocks our
attentions, and all desire
stops, stands alone;

we stand alone,
we are no longer lonely
but have roots,
and the rooted words
recur in the mind, mirror, so that
we dwell on nothing else, in nothing else,
touched, repeating them,
at home freely
at last, in amazement;

'the unyielding phrase
in tune with the epoch,'
the thing made up
of our desires,
not of its words, not only
of them, but of something else
as well, that which we desire
so ardently, that which
will not come when
it is summoned alone,
but grows in us
and idles about and hides
until the moment is due—

the knowledge of
our origins, and where

we are in truth,
whose land this is
and is to be.

7

The unyielding phrase:
when the moment is due, then
it springs upon us
out of our own mouths,
unconsidered, overwhelming
in its knowledge, complete—

not this handful
of fragments, as the indians
are not composed of
the romantic stories
about them, or of the stories
they tell only, but
still ride the soil
in us, dry bones a part
of the dust in our eyes,
needed and troubling
in the glare, in
our breath, in our
ears, in our mouths,
in our bodies entire, in our minds, until
at last
we become them

in our desires, our desires,
mirages, mirrors, that are theirs, hard-
riding desires, and they
become our true forbears, moulded
by the same wind or rain,
and in this land we
are their people, come
back to life again.

**from The Discography of Silence
Steve McOrmond, 2004**

North

Where a winter's night can be measured in years,
and distance between stars. Where breath
turns solid and the mind's never been
more fragile, drifting with the pack ice in a skin boat.
Where bright colours and the shiny
useless things that distract us
are sheared away, flesh from bone,
thought chipped to a spear point.
The economy of gesture, his voice
whispering: follow me.

**Glenn Gould Recording the Goldberg
Variations in New York, 1955**

To coax the bird to fly
in the narrow corridors of its cage
and woo some meaning, however fugitive,
from this nothingness of tones. To bring us closer,
exquisite creatures of logic
and emotion. To reach the end
of all human possibilities, ashes and dust,
and begin again. Repetition
with variation. To find the key
that opens the sky
and demand of the gods
an audience.