

Riel's Second Dream
From Prophet of the New World
Dorothy Livesay, 1945

I dreamed we wrestled in a wood—my Lord
with flaming tomahawk, his mind afire
and I slow animal with limbs of man
battling the light. I, crying to be known
by him, delivering fierce blows for truth
to shake my chains in helplessness—
I, pitted small against his towering
saw his blood spurt and bruises burst like flowers:
downfallen to the earth his armour lay.

Then cried out in my pity: "Lord, forgive."
And as I stooped, he was a-sudden over me
his feathers fire, his body like a blade
and I it was who bruised and streaming lay
and woke up knocking at my breast and bone...
a lonely man, but truth unfettering me!
Here on this earth to fight for freedom's light,
here in this flowered land to end the hate.

Canadian Railroad Trilogy Gordon Lightfoot, 1967

There was a time in this fair land when the railroad did not run
When the wild majestic mountains stood alone against the sun
Long before the white man and long before the wheel
When the green dark forest was too silent to be real

But time has no beginnings and hist'ry has no bounds
As to this verdant country they came from all around
They sailed upon her waterways and they walked the forests tall
Built the mines the mills and the factories for the good of us all

And when the young man's fancy was turnin' to the spring
The railroad men grew restless for to hear the hammers ring
Their minds were overflowing with the visions of their day
And many a fortune lost and won and many a debt to pay

For they looked in the future and what did they see
They saw an iron road runnin' from sea to the sea
Bringin' the goods to a young growin' land
All up through the seaports and into their hands

Look away said they across this mighty land
From the eastern shore to the western strand
Bring in the workers and bring up the rails
We gotta lay down the tracks and tear up the trails
Open 'er heart let the life blood flow
Gotta get on our way 'cause we're movin' too slow

Bring in the workers and bring up the rails
We're gonna lay down the tracks and tear up the trails
Open 'er heart let the life blood flow
Gotta get on our way 'cause we're movin' too slow
Get on our way 'cause we're movin' too slow

Behind the blue Rockies the sun is declinin'
The stars, they come stealin' at the close of the day
Across the wide prairie our loved ones lie sleeping
Beyond the dark oceans in a place far away

We are the navvies who work upon the railway
Swingin' our hammers in the bright blazin' sun
Livin' on stew and drinkin' bad whiskey
Bendin' our old backs 'til the long days are done

We are the navvies who work upon the railway
Swingin' our hammers in the bright blazin' sun
Layin' down track and buildin' the bridges
Bendin' our old backs 'til the railroad is done

So over the mountains and over the plains
Into the muskeg and into the rain
Up the St. Lawrence all the way to Gaspé
Swingin' our hammers and drawin' our pay
Drivin' 'em in and tyin' 'em down
Away to the bunkhouse and into the town
A dollar a day and a place for my head
A drink to the livin' and a toast to the dead

Oh the song of the future has been sung
All the battles have been won
O'er the mountain tops we stand
All the world at our command
We have opened up the soil
With our teardrops and our toil

For there was a time in this fair land when the railroad did not run
When the wild majestic mountains stood alone against the sun
Long before the white man and long before the wheel
When the green dark forest was too silent to be real
When the green dark forest was too silent to be real
And many are the dead men too silent to be real

from Malcom's Katie (part VI)
Isabella Valency Crawford, 1884

The Land had put his ruddy gauntlet on,
Of harvest gold, to dash in Famine's face.
And like a vintage wain, deep dy'd with juice,
The great moon falter'd up the ripe, blue sky,
Drawn by silver stars — like oxen white
And horn'd with rays of light. Down the rich land
Malcolm's small valleys, fill'd with grain, lip-high,
Lay round a lonely hill that fac'd the moon,
And caught the wine-kiss of its ruddy light.
A cusp'd, dark wood caught in its black embrace
The valleys and the hill, and from its wilds,
Spic'd with dark cedars, cried the Whip-poor-will.
A crane, belated, sail'd across the moon.
On the bright, small, close-link'd lakes green islets lay,
Dusk knots of tangl'd vines, or maple boughs,
Or tuft'd cedars, boss'd upon the waves.
The gay, enamell'd children of the swamp
Roll'd a low bass to treble, tinkling notes
Of little streamlets leaping from the woods.
Close to old Malcolm's mills, two wooden jaws
Bit up the water on a sloping floor;
And here, in season, rush'd the great logs down,
To seek the river winding on its way.
In a green sheen, smooth as a Naiad's locks,
The water roll'd between the shudd'ring jaws —
Then on the river-level roar'd and reed —
In ivory-arm'd conflict with itself.

Indian Summer
William Wilfred Campbell, 1888

Along the line of smoky hills
The crimson forest stands,
And all the day the blue-jay calls
Throughout the autumn lands.

Now by the brook the maple leans
With all his glory spread,
And all the sumachs on the hills
Have turned their green to red.

Now by great marshes wrapt in mist,
Or past some river's mouth,
Throughout the long, still autumn day
Wild birds are flying south.

How One Winter Came in the Lake Region
Wilfred Campbell, 1897

For weeks and weeks the autumn world stood still,
Clothed in the shadow of a smoky haze;
The fields were dead, the wind had lost its will,
And all the lands were hushed by wood and hill,
In those grey, withered days.

Behind a mist the bleary sun rose and set,
At night the moon would nestle in a cloud;
The fisherman, a ghost, did cast his net;
The lake its shores forgot to chafe and fret,
And hushed its caverns loud.

Far in the smoky woods the birds were mute,
Save that from blackened tree a jay would scream,
Or far in swamps the lizard's lonesome lute

Would pipe in thirst, or by some gnarlèd root
The tree-toad trilled his dream.

From day to day still hushed the season's mood,
The streams stayed in their runnels shrunk and dry;
Suns rose aghast by wave and shore and wood,
And all the world, with ominous silence, stood
In weird expectancy:

When one strange night the sun like blood went down,
Flooding the heavens in a ruddy hue;
Red grew the lake, the sere fields parched and brown,
Red grew the marshes where the creeks stole down,
But never a wind-breath blew.

That night I felt the winter in my veins,
A joyous tremor of the icy glow;
And woke to hear the north's wild vibrant strains,
While far and wide, by withered woods and plains,
Fast fell the driving snow.

The Winter Lakes **William Wilfred Campbell, 1889**

Out in a world of death far to the northward lying,
Under the sun and the moon, under the dusk and the day;
Under the glimmer of stars and the purple of sunsets dying,
Wan and waste and white, stretch the great lakes away.

Never a bud of spring, never a laugh of summer,
Never a dream of love, never a song of bird;
But only the silence and white, the shores that grow chiller and dumber,
Wherever the ice winds sob, and the griefs of winter are heard.

Crags that are black and wet out of the grey lake looming,
Under the sunset's flush and the pallid, faint glimmer of dawn;
Shadowy, ghost-like shores, where midnight surfs are booming
Thunders of wintry woe over the spaces wan.

Lands that loom like spectres, whited regions of winter,
Wastes of desolate woods, deserts of water and shore
A world of winter and death, within these regions who enter,
Lost to summer and life, go to return no more.

Moons that glimmer above, waters that lie white under,
Miles and miles of lake far out under the night;
Foaming crests of waves, surfs that shoreward thunder,
Shadowy shapes that flee, haunting the spaces white.

Lonely hidden bays, moon-lit, ice-rimmed, winding,
Fringed by forests and crags, haunted by shadowy shores;
Hushed from the outward strife, where the mighty surf is grinding
Death and hate on the rocks, as sandward and landward it roars.

Low Tide on Grand Pré
Bliss Carman, 1887

The sun goes down, and over all
These barren reaches by the tide
Such unelusive glories fall,
I almost dream they yet will bide
Until the coming of the tide.

And yet I know that not for us,
By any ecstasy of dream,
He lingers to keep luminous
A little while the grievous stream,
Which frets, uncomforted of dream –

A grievous stream, that to and fro
Athrough the fields of Acadie
Goes wandering, as if to know
Why one beloved face should be
So long from home and Acadie.

Was it a year or lives ago
We took the grasses in our hands,
And caught the summer flying low
Over the waving meadow lands,
And held it there between our hands?

The while the river at our feet –
A drowsy inland meadow stream –
At set of sun the after-heat
Made running gold, and in the gleam
We freed our birch upon the stream.

There down along the elms at dusk
We lifted dripping blade to drift,
Through twilight scented fine like musk,
Where night and gloom awhile uplift,
Nor sunder soul and soul adrift.

And that we took into our hands
Spirit of life or subtler thing –
Breathed on us there, and loosed the bands
Of death, and taught us, whispering,
The secret of some wonder-thing.

Then all your face grew light, and seemed
To hold the shadow of the sun;
The evening faltered, and I deemed
That time was ripe, and years had done
Their wheeling underneath the sun.

So all desire and all regret,
And fear and memory, were naught;
One to remember or forget
The keen delight our hands had caught;
Morrow and yesterday were naught.

The night has fallen, and the tide . . .
Now and again comes drifting home,
Across these aching barrens wide,
A sigh like driven wind or foam:
In grief the flood is bursting home.

A Dawn on the Lièvre
Archibald Lampman (1888)

Up the dark-valleyed river stroke by stroke
We drove the water from the rustling blade;
And when the night was almost gone we made
The Oxbow bend; and there the dawn awoke;
Full on the shrouded night-charged river broke
The sun, down the long mountain valley rolled,
A sudden swinging avalanche of gold,
Through mists that sprang and reeled aside like smoke.
And lo! before us, toward the east upborne,
Packed with curled forest, bunched and topped with pine,
Brow beyond brow, drawn deep with shade and shine,
The mount; upon whose golden sunward side,
Still threaded with the melting mist, the morn
Sat like some glowing conqueror satisfied.

After Mist
Archibald Lampman (1892)

Last night there was a mist. Pallid and chill
The yellow moon-blue clove the thickening sky,
And all night long a gradual wind crept by,
And froze the fog, and with minutest skill
Fringed it and forked it, adding bead to bead,
In spears, and feathery tufts, and delicate hems
Round windward trunks, and all the topmost stems,
And every bush, and every golden weed;
And now upon the meadows silvered through
And forests frosted to their farthest pines -
A last faint gleam upon the misty blue -
The magic of the morning falls and shines,
A creamy splendour on a dim white world,
Brodered with violet, crystallized and imperaled.

Morning On The Lièvre
Archibald Lampman (1888)

Far above us where a jay
Screams his matins to the day,
Capped with gold and amethyst,
Like a vapor from the forge
Of a giant somewhere hid,
Out of hearing of the clang
Of his hammer, skirts of mist
Slowly up the woody gorge
Lift and hang.

Softly as a cloud we go,
Sky above and sky below,
Down the river; and the dip
Of the paddles scarcely breaks,
With the little silvery drip
Of the water as it shakes
From the blades, the crystal deep
Of the silence of the morn,
Of the forest yet asleep;
And the river reaches borne
In a mirror, purple gray,
Sheer away
To the misty line of light,
Where the forest and the stream
In the shadow meet and plight,
Like a dream.

From amid a stretch of reeds,
Where the lazy river sucks
All the water as it bleeds
From a little curling creek,
And the muskrats peer and sneak
In around the sunken wrecks
Of a tree that swept the skies
Long ago,
On a sudden seven ducks
With a splashy rustle rise,

Stretching out their seven necks,
One before, and two behind,
And the others all arow,
And as steady as the wind
With a swivelling whistle go,
Through the purple shadow led,
Till we only hear their whir
In behind a rocky spur,
Just ahead.

In November
Archibald Lampman, 1888

The leafless forests slowly yield
 To the thick-driving snow. A little while
 And night shall darken down. In shouting file
The woodmen's carts go by me homeward-wheeled,
Past the thin fading stubbles, half concealed,
 Now golden-gray, sowed softly through with snow,
 Where the last ploughman follows still his row,
Turning black furrows through the whitening field.
Far off the village lamps begin to gleam,
 Fast drives the snow, and no man comes this way;
 The hills grow wintry white, and bleak winds moan
 About the naked uplands. I alone
Am neither sad, nor shelterless, nor gray,
Wrapped round with thought, content to watch and dream.

Snow
Archibald Lampman (1895)

White are the far-off plains, and white
The fading forests grow;
The wind dies out along the height,
And denser still the snow,
A gathering weight on roof and tree,
Falls down scarce audibly.

The road before me smoothes and fills
Apace, and all about
The fences dwindle, and the hills
Are blotted slowly out;
The naked trees loom spectrally
Into the dim white sky.

The meadows and far-sheeted streams
Lie still without a sound;
Like some soft minister of dreams
The snow-fall hoods me round;
In wood and water, earth and air,
A silence everywhere.

Save when at lonely intervals
Some farmer's sleigh urged on,
With rustling runners and sharp bells,
Swings by me and is gone;
Or from the empty waste I hear
A sound remote and clear;

The barking of a dog, or call
To cattle, sharply pealed,
Borne echoing from some wayside stall
Or barnyard far afield;
Then all is silent, and the snow
Falls, settling soft and slow.

The evening deepens, and the gray
Folds closer earth and sky;
The world seems shrouded far away;
Its noises sleep, and I,
As secret as yon buried stream,
Plod dumbly on, and dream.

To an Ultra Protestant
Archibald Lampman (1889)

Why rage and fret thee; only let them be:
The monkish rod, the sacerdotal pall,
Council and convent, Pope and Cardinal,
The black priest and his holy wizardry.
Nay dread them not, for thought and liberty
Spread ever faster than the foe can smite,
And these shall vanish as the starless night
Before a morning mightier than the sea.
But what of thee and thine? That battle cry?
Those forms and dogmas that thou rear'st so high?
Those blasts of doctrine and those vials of wrath?
Thy hell for most and heaven for the few?
That narrow, joyless and ungenerous path?
What then of these? Ah, they shall vanish too!

In an Old Barn
Charles G. D. Roberts, 1893

Tons upon tons the brown-green fragrant hay
O'erbrims the mows beyond the time-warped eaves,
Up to the rafters where the spider weaves,
Though few flies wander his secluded way.
Through a high chink one lonely golden ray,
Wherein the dust is dancing, slants unstirred.
In the dry hush some rustlings light are heard,
Of winter-hidden mice at furtive play.
Far down, the cattle in their shadowed stalls,
Nose-deep in clover fodder's meadowy scent,
Forget the snows that whelm their pasture streams,
The frost that bites the world beyond their walls.
Warm housed, they dream of summer, well content
In day-long contemplation of their dreams.

A Potato Harvest
Charles G. D. Roberts, 1893

A high bare field, brown from the plough, and borne
Aslant from sunset; amber wastes of sky
Washing the ridge; a clamour of crows that fly
In from the wide flats where the spent tides mourn
To yon their rocking roosts in pines wind-torn;
A line of grey snake-fence, that zigzags by
A pond, and cattle; from the homestead nigh
The long deep summonings of the supper horn.
Black on the ridge, against that lonely flush,
A cart, and stoop-necked oxen; ranged beside
Some barrels, and the day-worn harvest-folk,
Here emptying their baskets, jar the hush
With hollow thunders. Down the dusk hillside
Lumbers the wain; and day fades out like smoke.

At Even

**John Pensive Bangs, 1893
(William Wilfred Campbell)**

I sit me moanless in the sombre fields,
The cows come with large udders down the dusk,
One cudless, the other chewing of a husk,
Her eye askance, for that athwart her heels,
Flee-haunted and rib-cavernous, there steals
The yelping farmer-dog. An old hen sits
And blinks her eyes. (Now I must rack my wits
To find a rhyme, while all this landscape reels.)
Yes! I forgot the sky. The stars are out,
There being no clouds; and then the pensive maid!
Of course she comes with tin-pail up the lane.
Mosquitoes hum and June bugs are about.
(That line hath "quality" of loftiest grade.)
And I have eased my soul of its sweet pain.

The Unnamed Lake

F. G. Scott, 1897

It sleeps among the thousand hills
Where no man ever trod,
And only nature's music fills
The silences of God.

Great mountains tower above its shore,
Green rushes fringe its brim,
And o'er its breast for evermore
The wanton breezes skim.

Dark clouds that intercept the sun
Go there in Spring to weep,
And there, when Autumn days are done,
White mists lie down to sleep.

Sunrise and sunset crown with gold
The peaks of ageless stone,
Where winds have thundered from of old
And storms have set their throne.

No echoes of the world afar
Disturb it night or day,
But sun and shadow, moon and star,
Pass and repass for aye.

'Twas in the grey of early dawn,
When first the lake we spied,
And fragments of a cloud were drawn
Half down the mountain side.

Along the shore a heron flew,
And from a speck on high,
That hovered in the deepening blue,
We heard the fish-hawk's cry.

Among the cloud-capt solitudes,
No sound the silence broke,
Save when, in whispers down the woods,
The guardian mountains spoke.

Through tangled brush and dewy brake,
Returning whence we came,
We passed in silence, and the lake
We left without a name.

The Shooting of Dan McGrew
Robert W. Service, 1907

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon;
The kid that handles the music-box was hitting a jag-time tune;
Back of the bar, in a solo game, sat Dangerous Dan McGrew,
And watching his luck was his light-o'-love, the lady that's known as Lou.

When out of the night, which was fifty below, and into the din and the glare,
There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog-dirty, and loaded for bear.
He looked like a man with a foot in the grave and scarcely the strength of a louse,
Yet he tilted a poke of dust on the bar, and he called for drinks for the house.
There was none could place the stranger's face, though we searched ourselves
for a clue;
But we drank his health, and the last to drink was Dangerous Dan McGrew.

There's men that somehow just grip your eyes, and hold them hard like a spell;
And such was he, and he looked to me like a man who had lived in hell;
With a face most hair, and the dreary stare of a dog whose day is done,
As he watered the green stuff in his glass, and the drops fell one by one.
Then I got to figgering who he was, and wondering what he'd do,
And I turned my head — and there watching him was the lady that's known as
Lou.

His eyes went rubbering round the room, and he seemed in a kind of daze,
Till at last that old piano fell in the way of his wandering gaze.
The rag-time kid was having a drink; there was no one else on the stool,
So the stranger stumbles across the room, and flops down there like a fool.
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and I saw him sway;
Then he clutched the keys with his talon hands — my God! but that man could play.

Were you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon was awful clear,
And the icy mountains hemmed you in with a silence you most could *hear*;
With only the howl of a timber wolf, and you camped there in the cold,
A half-dead thing in a stark, dead world, clean mad for the muck called gold;
While high overhead, green, yellow and red, the North Lights swept in bars? —
Then you've a hunch what the music meant. . . hunger and night and the stars.

And hunger not of the belly kind, that's banished with bacon and beans,
But the gnawing hunger of lonely men for a home and all that it means;
For a fireside far from the cares that are, four walls and a roof above;
But oh! so cramful of cosy joy, and crowned with a woman's love —
A woman dearer than all the world, and true as Heaven is true —
(God! how ghastly she looks through her rouge, — the lady that's known as Lou.)

Then on a sudden the music changed, so soft that you scarce could hear;
But you felt that your life had been looted clean of all that it once held dear;
That someone had stolen the woman you loved; that her love was a devil's lie;
That your guts were gone, and the best for you was to crawl away and die.
'Twas the crowning cry of a heart's despair, and it thrilled you through and through—
"I guess I'll make it a spread misere", said Dangerous Dan McGrew.

The music almost died away ... then it burst like a pent-up flood;
And it seemed to say, "Repay, repay," and my eyes were blind with blood.
The thought came back of an ancient wrong, and it stung like a frozen lash,
And the lust awoke to kill, to kill ... then the music stopped with a crash,
And the stranger turned, and his eyes they burned in a most peculiar way;
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and I saw him sway;
Then his lips went in in a kind of grin, and he spoke, and his voice was calm,
And "Boys," says he, "you don't know me, and none of you care a damn;
But I want to state, and my words are straight, and I'll bet my poke they're true,
That one of you is a hound of hell. . .and that one is Dan McGrew."

Then I ducked my head, and the lights went out, and two guns blazed in the dark,
And a woman screamed, and the lights went up, and two men lay stiff and stark.
Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was Dangerous Dan McGrew,
While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the breast of the lady that's
known as Lou.

These are the simple facts of the case, and I guess I ought to know.
They say that the stranger was crazed with "hooch," and I'm not denying it's so.
I'm not so wise as the lawyer guys, but strictly between us two —
The woman that kissed him and — pinched his poke — was the lady that's
known as Lou.

The Cremation of Sam McGee
Robert W. Service, 1907

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun
 By the men who toil for gold;
 The Arctic trails have their secret tales
 That would make your blood run cold;
 The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
 But the queerest they ever did see
 Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
 I cremated Sam McGee.*

Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee, where the cotton blooms and blows.
 Why he left his home in the South to roam 'round the Pole, God only knows.
 He was always cold, but the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell;
 Though he'd often say in his homely way that "he'd sooner live in hell."

On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way over the Dawson trail.
 Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold it stabbed like a driven nail.
 If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze till sometimes we couldn't see;
 It wasn't much fun, but the only one to whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night, as we lay packed tight in our robes beneath the snow,
 And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead were dancing heel and toe,
 He turned to me, and "Cap," says he, "I'll cash in this trip, I guess;
 And if I do, I'm asking that you won't refuse my last request."

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no; then he says with a sort of moan:
 "It's the cursèd cold, and it's got right hold till I'm chilled clean through to the bone.
 Yet 'tain't being dead—it's my awful dread of the icy grave that pains;
 So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll cremate my last remains."

A pal's last need is a thing to heed, so I swore I would not fail;
 And we started on at the streak of dawn; but God! he looked ghastly pale.
 He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day of his home in Tennessee;
 And before nightfall a corpse was all that was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death, and I hurried, horror-driven,
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid, because of a promise given;
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say: "You may tax your brawn and brains,
But you promised true, and it's up to you to cremate those last remains."

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid, and the trail has its own stern code.
In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load.
In the long, long night, by the lone firelight, while the huskies, round in a ring,
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows— O God! how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay seemed to heavy and heavier grow;
And on I went, though the dogs were spent and the grub was getting low;
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad, but I swore I would not give in;
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing, and it hearkened with a grin.

Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge, and a derelict there lay;
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice it was called the "Alice May."
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit, and I looked at my frozen chum;
Then "Here," said I, with a sudden cry, "is my cre-ma-tor-eum."

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor, and I lit the boiler fire;
Some coal I found that was lying around, and I heaped the fuel higher;
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared—such a blaze you seldom see;
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal, and I stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn't like to hear him sizzle so;
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled, and the wind began to blow.
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled down my cheeks, and I don't know why;
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak went streaking down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow I wrestled with grisly fear;
But the stars came out and they danced about ere again I ventured near;
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said: "I'll just take a peep inside.
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked"; ... then the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm, in the heart of the furnace roar;
And he wore a smile you could see a mile, and he said: "Please close that door.
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear you'll let in the cold and storm—
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee, it's the first time I've been warm."

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From The Titanic

E. J. Pratt, 1935

The Iceberg

Calved from a glacier near Godhaven coast,
 It left the fiord for the sea—a host
 Of white flotillas gathering in its wake,
 And joined by fragments from a Behring floe,
 Had circumnavigated it to make
 It centre of an archipelago.
 Its lateral motion on the Davis Strait
 Was casual and indeterminate,
 And each advance to southward was as blind
 As each recession to the north. No smoke
 Of steamships nor the hoist of mainsails broke
 The polar wastes—no sounds except the grind
 Of ice, the cry of curlews and the lore
 Of winds from mesas of eternal snow;
 Until caught by the western undertow,
 It struck the current of the Labrador
 Which swung it to its definite southern stride.
 Pressure and glacial time had stratified
 The berg to the consistency of flint,
 And kept inviolate, through clash of tide
 And gale, façade and columns with their hint
 Of inward altars and of steeped bells
 Ringing the passage of the parallels.

The Final Moments

Out on the water was the same display
Of fear and self-control as on the deck—
Challenge and hesitation and delay,
The quick return, the will to save, the race
Of snapping oars to put the realm of space
Between the half-filled lifeboats and the wreck.

The swimmers whom the waters did not take
With their instant death-chill struck out for the wake
Of the nearer boats, gained on them, hailed
The steersmen and were saved: the weaker failed
And fagged and sank. A man clutched at the rim
Of a gunwale, and a woman's jewelled fist
Struck at his face: two others seized his wrist,
As he released his hold, and gathering him
Over the side, they staunched the cut from the ring.
And there were many deeds envisaging
Volitions where self-preservation fought
Its red primordial struggle with the "ought",
In those high moments when the gambler tossed
Upon the chance and uncomplaining lost.

Aboard the ship, whatever hope of dawn
Gleamed from the *Carpathia's* riding lights was gone,
For every knot was matched by each degree
Of list. The stern was lifted bodily
When the bow had sunk three hundred feet, and set
Against the horizon stars in silhouette
Were the blade curves of the screws, hump of the rudder.
The downward pull and after buoyancy
Held her a minute poised but for a shudder
That caught her frame as with the upward stroke
Of the sea a boiler or a bulkhead broke.

Climbing the ladders, gripping shroud and stay,
Storm-rail, ringbolt or fairlead, every place
That might befriend the clutch of hand or brace
Of foot, the fourteen hundred made their way
To the heights of the aft decks, crowding the inches

Around the docking bridge and cargo winches.
And now that last salt tonic which had kept
The valour of the heart alive — the bows
Of the immortal seven that had swept
The strings to outplay, outdie their orders, ceased.
Five minutes more, the angle had increased
From eighty on to ninety when the rows
Of deck and port-hole lights went out, flashed back
A brilliant second and again went black.
Another bulkhead crashed, then following
The passage of the engines as they tore
From their foundations, taking everything
Clean through the bows from 'midships with a roar
Which drowned all cries upon the deck and shook
The watchers in the boats, the liner took
Her thousand fathoms journey to her grave.

And out there in the starlight, with no trace
Upon it of its deed but the last wave
From the *Titanic* fretting at its base,
Silent, composed, ringed by its icy broods,
The grey shape with the palaeolithic face
Was still the master of the longitudes.

In Flanders Fields
John McCrae, 1915

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

The Avenging Angel
William Wilfred Campbell, 1917

When the last faint red of the day is dead,
And the dim, far heaven is lit
 With the silvern cars
 Of the orient stars,
And the winged winds whimper and flit;

Then I rise through the dome of my aerodrome,
Like a giant eagle in flight;
 And I take my place
 In the vengeful race
With the sinister fleets of night.

As I rise and rise in the cloudy skies,
No sound in the silence is heard,
 Save the lonesome whirr
 Of my engine's purr,
Like the wings of a monster bird.

And naught is seen save the vault, serene,
Of the vasty realms of night,
 That vanish, aloof,

To eternity's roof,
As I mount in my ominous flight.

And I float and pause in the fleecy gauze,
Like a bird in a nest of down;
While 'neath me in deeps
Of blackness, sleeps
The far, vast London town.

But I am not here, like a silvern sphere,
To glory the deeps of space,
But a sentinel, I,
In this tower of the sky,
Scanning the dim deep's face.

For, sudden, afar, like a luminous star,
Or a golden horn of the moon,
Or a yellow leaf
Of the forest's grief,
When the autumn winds are atune;

There is borne on my sight, down the spaces of night,
By the engines of evilment sped,
That wonderful, rare,
Vast ship of the air,
Beautiful, ominous, dread.

One instant she floats, most magic of boats,
Illusive, implacable, there;
Throned angel of ill,
On her crystal-built hill,
O'er a people's defenceless despair.

Then sudden, I rise, like a bolt through the skies,
To the very dim roofs of the world;
Till down in the grey,
I see my grim prey,
Like a pallid gold leaf, uncurled.

I hover and swing, until swiftly I spring,
And drop like a falling star;
And again and again,
My death-dealing rain,
Hurl to the deeps afar.

Then I hover and listen, till I see the far glisten
Of a flame-flash blanching the night;
And I know that my hate,
That has lain in wait,
Has won in the grim air-fight.

Then I curve and slant, while my engines pant,
And the wings of my great bird tame;
While the sinister Hun,
In his ill, undone,
Goes out in a blinding flame.

The Dying of Albert Ball.
From Billy Bishop Goes to War
John Gray and Eric Peterson, 1978

He was only eighteen
When he downed his first machine,
And any chance of living through this war was small;
He was nineteen when I met him,
And I never will forget him,
The pilot by the name of Albert Ball.

No matter what the odds,
He left his fate up to the gods,
Laughing as the bullets brushed his skin.
Like a medieval knight,
He would charge into the fight
And trust that one more time his pluck would let him win.

So he courted the reaper,
Like the woman of his dreams,
And the reaper smiled each time he came to call;
But the British like their heroes
Cold and dead, or so it seems,
And their hero in the sky was Albert Ball.

But long after the fight,
Way into the night,
Cold thoughts, as dark as night, would fill his brain,
For bloodstains never fade,
And there are debts to be repaid
For the souls of all those men who died in vain.

So when the night was dark and deep,
And the men lay fast asleep,
An eerie sound would filter through the night.
It was a violin,
A sound as soft as skin.
Someone was playing in the dim moonlight.

There he stood, dark and thin,
And on his violin
Played a song that spoke of loneliness and pain.
It mourned his victories;
It mourned dead enemies
And friends that he would never see again.

Yes, he courted the reaper,
Like the woman of his dreams,
And the reaper smiled each time he came to call;
But the British like their heroes Cold and dead, or so it seems,
And their hero in the sky was Albert Ball.

It's an ironic twist of fate
That brings a hero to the gate,
And Ball was no exception to that rule;
Fate puts out the spark In a way as if to mark
The fine line between a hero and a fool.

Each time he crossed the line,
Albert Ball would check the time
By an old church clock reminding him of home.
The Huns came to know
The man who flew so low
On his way back to the aerodrome.

It was the sixth of May,
He'd done bloody well that day;
For the forty-fourth time, he'd won the game.
As he flew low to check the hour,
A hail of bullets from the tower—
And Albert Ball lay dying in the flames.

But through his clouded eyes,
Maybe he realized,
This was the moment he'd been waiting for.
For the moment that he died,
He was a hero, bonafide.
There are to be no living heroes in this war.

For when a country goes insane,
Obsessed with blood and pain,
Just to be alive is something of a sin.
A war's not satisfied
Until all the best have died,
And the devil take the man who saves his skin.

But sometimes late at night,
When the moon is cold and bright,
I sometimes think I hear that violin.
Death is waiting just outside,
And my eyes are open wide,
As I lie and wait for morning to begin.

Now I am courting the reaper,
Like the woman of my dreams,
And the reaper smiles each time I come to call;
But the British like their heroes
Cold and dead, or so it seems,
And my name will take the place of Albert Ball.

Look at the names on the statues
Everywhere you go.
Someone was killed
A long time ago.
I remember the faces;
I remember the time.
Those were the names of friends of mine.

The statues are old now
And they're fading fast.
Something big must have happened
Way in the past.
The names are so faded
You can hardly see,
But the faces are always young to me.

Friends ain't s'posed to die
'Til they're old.
And friends ain't s'posed to die
In pain.
No one should die alone
When he is twenty-one,
And living shouldn't make you feel ashamed.

I can't believe
How young we were back then.
One thing's for sure,
We'll never be that young again.
We were daring young men,
With hearts of gold,
And most of us never got old.