

Uvavnuk's Dream

The great sea frees me, moves me,
 as a strong river carries a weed.
 Earth and her strong winds move me,
 take me away,
 and my soul is swept up in joy.

Lament for the Dorsets

(Eskimos extinct in the 14th century AD)

Al Purdy, 1968

Animal bones and some mossy tent rings
 scrapers and spearheads carved ivory swans
 all that remains of the Dorset giants
 who drove the Vikings back to their long ships
 talked to spirits of earth and water
 — a picture of terrifying old men
 so large they broke the backs of bears
 so small they lurk behind bone rafters
 in the brain of modern hunters
 among good thoughts and warm things
 and come out at night
 to spit on the stars

The big men with clever fingers
 who had no dogs and hauled their sleds
 over the frozen northern oceans
 awkward giants
 killers of seal
 they couldn't compete with little men
 who came from the west with dogs
 Or else in a warm climatic cycle
 the seals went back to cold waters
 and the puzzled Dorsets scratched their heads
 with hairy thumbs around 1350 A.D.
 — couldn't figure it out
 went around saying to each other

plaintively

"What's wrong? What happened?
Where are the seals gone?"

And died

Twentieth-century people
apartment dwellers
executives of neon death
warmakers with things that explode
— they have never imagined us in their future
how could we imagine them in the past
squatting among the moving glaciers
six hundred years ago
with glowing lamps?
As remote or nearly
as the trilobites and swamps
when coal became
or the last great reptile
hissed at a mammal the size of a mouse
that squeaked and fled

Did they ever realize at all
what was happening to them?
Some old hunter with one lame leg
a bear had chewed
sitting in a caribou-skin tent
— the last Dorset?
Let's say his name was Kudluk
and watch him sitting there
carving 2-inch ivory swans
for a dead grand-daughter
taking them out of his mind
the places in his mind
where pictures are
He selects a sharp stone tool
to gouge a parallel pattern of lines
on both sides of the swan
holding it with his left hand
bearing down and transmitting
his body's weight

from brain to arm and right hand
and one of his thoughts
turns to ivory
The carving is laid aside
in beginning darkness
at the end of hunger
and after a while wind
blows down the tent and snow
begins to cover him

After 600 years
the ivory thought
is still warm

Ellesmereland I
Earle Birney, 1952

Explorers say that harebells rise
from the cracks of Ellesmereland
and cod swim fat beneath the ice
that grinds its meagre sands
No man is settled on that coast
The harebells are alone
Nor is there talk of making man
from ice cod bell or stone

Ellesmereland II
Earle Birney, 1965

And now in Ellesmereland there sits
a town of twenty men
They guard the floes that reach to the Pole
a hundred leagues and ten
The warders watch the sky watch them
the stricken hills eye both
A Mountie visits twice a year
And there is talk of growth

The Horseman of Agawa

(Indian rock-painting under the cliffs of Lake Superior)

Al Purdy, 1973

It's spring and the steel platforms tourists usually stand on
are not installed yet so we take our chances
but I have to abandon my beer and use both hands for safety
We clamber down rocks unsteady as children
reach slanting stone ledges under the hundred-foot walls
my wife skipping ahead so nimbly I'm jealous of her
and say "Wait for me, dammit" but she won't
then take my shoes off and go barefoot

She sees the painting first and calls "Here!"
her face flattens and dissolves into no expression
I balance myself beside her on the tilted ledge
that slides off into deep water and the rock hurts my feet
but I feel the same way she does as the rock horseman canters
by two feet from my nose forever or nearly
The painted horseman rides over four moons (or suns) on his trail
whose meaning must be a four-day journey somewhere
the red iron oxide faded from Lake Superior storms
and maybe two hundred years since the Ojibway artist
stood there
balanced above water like us
and drew with his fingers on the stone canvas
with fish eggs or bear grease to make the painting permanent
pitting fish eggs and bear grease against eternity
which is kind of ludicrous or kind of beautiful I guess

I have too many thoughts about the horseman I
might select one and say this is a signpost this painting
(in fact I've just done that)
a human-as-having-babies signpost
but also dammit part of the spirit
a thought taken out from inside the head and carefully left here
like saying I love you to stone
I think that after the Ojibway are all dead
and all the bombs in the white world have fizzed into harmlessness
the ghost of one inept hunter who always got lost

and separated from his friends because he had a lousy sense
of direction
that man can come here to get his bearings calling out
to his horse his dog or himself because he's alone
in the fog in the night in the rain in his mind and say
"My friends where are you?"
and the rock walls will seize his voice
and break it into a million amplified pieces of echoes
that will find the ghosts of his friends in the tombs of their dust

But I mistrust the mind-quality that tempts me
to embroider and exaggerate things

I just watch my wife's face
she is quiet as she generally is because I do most of the talking
it is forty years old and has felt the pain of children
the pettiness of day-to-day living and getting thousands of meals
but standing on the rock face of Lake Superior
it is not lessened in any way
with a stillness of depth that reaches where I can't follow
all other thoughts laid aside in her brain
on her face I see the Ojibway horseman painting the rock
with red fingers
and he speaks to her as I could not
in pictures without handles of words
into feeling into being here by direct transmission
from the stranded Ojibway horseman
And I change it all back into words again or that's the best I can do
but they only point the way we came from for who knows where
we are
under the tall stone cliffs with water dripping down on us
or returned from a long journey and calling out to our friends

But the rock blazes into light when we leave the place
or else the sun shines somewhere else and I didn't notice it
and my secret knowing is knowing what she knows
and can't say and I can only indicate
reclaim my half-empty beer and drink it and tie my shoes
follow her up the tangled rocks past the warning sign for strangers
and wait till she turns around

**from Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.
Fred Wah, 1975**

Under and over
I see myself rocking
boat/cradle
cave to swim into
over and over again
home again
home
again and again



**The Song My Paddle Sings
Pauline Johnson, 1895**

West wind, blow from your prairie nest
Blow from the mountains, blow from the west.
The sail is idle, the sailor too;
O! wind of the west, we wait for you.
Blow, blow!
I have wooed you so,
But never a favour you bestow.
You rock your cradle the hills between,
But scorn to notice my white lateen.

I stow the sail, unship the mast:
I wooed you long but my wooing's past;
My paddle will lull you into rest.
O! drowsy wind of the drowsy west,
Sleep, sleep,
By your mountain steep,
Or down where the prairie grasses sweep!
Now fold in slumber your laggard wings,
For soft is the song my paddle sings.

August is laughing across the sky,
Laughing while paddle, canoe and I,

Drift, drift,
Where the hills uplift
On either side of the current swift.

The river rolls in its rocky bed;
My paddle is plying its way ahead;
Dip, dip,
While the waters flip
In foam as over their breast we slip.

And oh, the river runs swifter now;
The eddies circle about my bow.
Swirl, swirl!
How the ripples curl
In many a dangerous pool awhirl!

And forward far the rapids roar,
Fretting their margin for evermore.
Dash, dash,
With a mighty crash,
They seethe, and boil, and bound, and splash.

Be strong, O paddle! be brave, canoe!
The reckless waves you must plunge into.
Reel, reel.
On your trembling keel,
But never a fear my craft will feel.

We've raced the rapid, we're far ahead!
The river slips through its silent bed.
Sway, sway,
As the bubbles spray
And fall in tinkling tunes away.

And up on the hills against the sky,
A fir tree rocking its lullaby,
Swings, swings,
Its emerald wings,
Swelling the song that my paddle sings.

Marshlands
Pauline Johnson, 1895

A thin wet sky, that yellows at the rim,
And meets with sun-lost lip the marsh's brim.
The pools low lying, dank with moss and mould,
Glint through their mildews like large cups of gold
Among the wild rice in the still lagoon,
In monotone the lizard shrills his tune.
The wild goose, homing, seeks sheltering,
Where rushes grow, and oozing lichens cling.
Late cranes with heavy wing, and lazy flight,
Sail up the silence with the nearing night.
And like a spirit, swathed in some soft veil,
Steals twilight and its shadows o'er the swale.
Hushed lie the sedges, and the vapours creep,
Thick, grey and humid, while the marshes sleep.

The Lost Lagoon
Pauline Johnson, 1912

It is dusk on the Lost Lagoon,
And we two dreaming the dusk away,
Beneath the drift of a twilight grey,
Beneath the drowse of an ending day,
And the curve of a golden moon.
It is dark in the Lost Lagoon,
And gone are the depths of haunting blue,
The grouping gulls, and the old canoe,
The singing firs, and the dusk and—you,
And gone is the golden moon.
O! lure of the Lost Lagoon,—
I dream to-night that my paddle blurs
The purple shade where the seaweed stirs,

I hear the call of the singing firs
In the hush of the golden moon.

**from Pale as Real Ladies:
Poems for Pauline Johnson
Joan Crate, 1991**

See this necklace? It is made from the claws
of a cinnamon bear that went mad
when her young were slaughtered.
These are my poems.
The words have been scraped clean
of death and anger,
and will shine in your mouth
like a string of white pearls.

Story Teller

Your voice
scrapes the bones of time.
At night by the fire, it is only you,
Chief Joe, who feels
a lost spring flood thirsty cells.
In the dark heat you find legends
once buried, now
damp on your dry lips.
Whisper to me and I will write you down.
I will run ink through your long wounds,
make your past flash like fish scales
under a sharp knife.
I will give names to the tricks of seasons,
tie your stories of beginnings to weighted ends
with my careful fisher's fingers,
lock your chants, spirits,
dances, your paint, your potlatches
into a language you can't speak.
I will frame your history
on a white page.

**from Grey Owl:
The Mystery of Archie Belaney
Armand Garnet Ruffo, 1996**

Mirror

In the end there
is no escape.
 (Did I say there was?)
It is always me.
No matter what I do
to change
the way I look.
What is inside is inside looking out.

I see it all (home, family, friends, wives...).

Is this the reason
I'm happiest
making miles
in my canoe —
going to beat hell
over the surface of some lake?

I dip my paddle,
pull hard,
the water ripples
and swirls,
for a moment
the mirror
I'm riding
smashed to a million pieces.

The Forsaken
Duncan Campbell Scott, 1905

I

Once in the winter
Out on a lake
In the heart of the north-land,
Far from the Fort
And far from the hunters,
A Chippewa woman
With her sick baby,
Crouched in the last hours
Of a great storm.
Frozen and hungry,
She fished through the ice
With a line of the twisted
Bark of the cedar,
And a rabbit-bone hook
Polished and barbed;
Fished with the bare hook
All through the wild day,
Fished and caught nothing;
While the young chieftain
Tugged at her breasts,
Or slept in the lacings
Of the warm tikanagan.
All the lake-surface
Streamed with the hissing
Of millions of iceflakes
Hurled by the wind;
Behind her the round
Of a lonely island
Roared like a fire
With the voice of the storm
In the deeps of the cedars.
Valiant, unshaken,
She took of her own flesh,
Baited the fish-hook,
Drew in a gray-trout,

Drew in his fellows,
Heaped them beside her,
Dead in the snow.
Valiant, unshaken,
She faced the long distance,
Wolf-haunted and lonely,
Sure of her goal
And the life of her dear one:
Tramped for two days,
On the third in the morning,
Saw the strong bulk
Of the Fort by the river,
Saw the wood-smoke
Hand soft in the spruces,
Heard the keen yelp
Of the ravenous huskies
Fighting for whitefish:
Then she had rest.

II

Years and years after,
When she was old and withered,
When her son was an old man
And his children filled with vigour,
They came in their northern tour on the verge of winter,
To an island in a lonely lake.
There one night they camped, and on the morrow
Gathered their kettles and birch-bark
Their rabbit-skin robes and their mink-traps,
Launched their canoes and slunk away through the islands,
Left her alone forever,
Without a word of farewell,
Because she was old and useless,
Like a paddle broken and warped,
Or a pole that was splintered.
Then, without a sigh,
Valiant, unshaken,
She smoothed her dark locks under her kerchief,
Composed her shawl in state,

Then folded her hands ridged with sinews and corded with veins,
Folded them across her breasts spent with the nourishment of children,
Gazed at the sky past the tops of the cedars,
Saw two spangled nights arise out of the twilight,
Saw two days go by filled with the tranquil sunshine,
Saw, without pain, or dread, or even a moment of longing:
Then on the third great night there came thronging and thronging
Millions of snowflakes out of a windless cloud;
They covered her close with a beautiful crystal shroud,
Covered her deep and silent.
But in the frost of the dawn,
Up from the life below,
Rose a column of breath
Through a tiny cleft in the snow,
Fragile, delicately drawn,
Wavering with its own weakness,
In the wilderness a sign of the spirit,
Persisting still in the sight of the sun
Till day was done.
Then all light was gathered up by the hand of God and hid in His breast,
Then there was born a silence deeper than silence,
Then she had rest.

On the Way to the Mission
Duncan Campbell Scott, 1905

They dogged him all one afternoon,
Through the bright snow,
Two whitemen servants of greed;
He knew that they were there,
But he turned not his head;
He was an Indian trapper;
He planted his snow-shoes firmly,
He dragged the long toboggan
Without rest.

The three figures drifted
Like shadows in the mind of a seer;
The snow-shoes were whisperers
On the threshold of awe;
The toboggan made the sound of wings,
A wood-pigeon sloping to her nest.

The Indian's face was calm.
He strode with the sorrow of fore-knowledge,
But his eyes were jewels of content
Set in circles of peace.

They would have shot him;
But momentarily in the deep forest,
They saw something flit by his side:
Their hearts stopped with fear.
Then the moon rose.
They would have left him to the spirit,
But they saw the long toboggan
Rounded well with furs,
With many a silver fox-skin,
With the pelts of mink and of otter.
They were the servants of greed;
When the moon grew brighter
And the spruces were dark with sleep,
They shot him.
When he fell on a shield of moonlight
One of his arms clung to his burden;

The snow had not melted:
The spirit passed away.
Then the servants of greed
Tore off the cover to count their gains;
They shuddered away into the shadows,
Hearing each the loud heart of the other.
Silence was born.

There in the tender moonlight,
As sweet as they were in life,
Glimmered the ivory features,
Of the Indian's wife.

In the manner of Montagnais women
Her hair was rolled with braid;
Under her waxen fingers
A crucifix was laid.

He was drawing her down to the Mission,
To bury her there in spring,
When the bloodroot comes and the windflower
To silver everything

But as a gift of plunder
Side by side were they laid,
The moon went on to her setting
And covered them with shade.

Indian Place-Names **Duncan Campbell Scott, 1926**

The race has waned and left but tales of ghosts,
That hover in the world like fading smoke
About the lodges: gone are the dusky folk
That once were cunning with the thong and snare
And mighty with the paddle and the bow;

They lured the silver salmon from his lair,
They drove the buffalo in trampling hosts,
And gambled in the tepees until dawn,
But now their vaunted prowess all is gone,
Gone like a moose-track in the April snow.

But all the land is murmurous with the call
 Of their wild names that haunt the lovely glens
 Where lonely water falls, or where the street
 Sounds all day with the tramp of myriad feet;
 Toronto triumphs; Winnipeg flows free,

And clangs the iron height where gaunt Quebec
 Lies like a lion in a lily bed,
 And Restigouche takes the whelmed sound of sea,
 Meductic falls, and flutes the Mirimichi;
 Kiskisink where the shy mallard breeds

Breaks into pearls beneath his whirling wings,
 And Manitowapah sings;
 They flow like water, or like wind they flow,
 Waymoucheeching, loon-haunted Manowan,
 Far Mistassini by her frozen wells,

Gold-hued Wayagamac brimming her wooded dells:
 Lone Kamouraska, Metapedia,
 And Metlakahtla ring a round of bells.

Poem for Duncan Campbell Scott

(Canadian poet who “had a long and distinguished career in the Department of Indian Affairs, retiring in 1932.”The Penguin Book of Canadian Verse)

Armand Garnet Ruffo, 1994

Who is this black coat and tie?
 Christian severity etched in the lines
 he draws from his mouth. Clearly a noble man
 who believes in work and mission. See
 how he rises from the red velvet chair,
 rises out of the boat with the two Union Jacks
 fluttering like birds of prey
 and makes his way towards our tents.

This man looks as if he could walk on water
and for our benefit probably would,
if he could.

He says he comes from Ottawa way, Odawa country,
comes to talk treaty and annuity and destiny,
to make the inevitable less painful,
bearing gifts that must be had.

Notice how he speaks aloud and forthright:

 This or Nothing.

 Beware! Without title to the land
 under the Crown you have no legal right
 to be here.

Speaks as though what has been long decided wasn't.
As though he wasn't merely carrying out his duty
To God and King. But sincerely felt.

Some whisper this man lives in a house of many rooms,
has a cook and a maid and even a gardener
to cut his grass and water his flowers.
Some don't care, they don't like the look of him.
They say he asks many questions but
doesn't wait to listen. Asks
much about yesterday, little about today
and acts as if he knows tomorrow.
Others don't like the way he's always busy writing
stuff in the notebook he carries. Him,
he calls it poetry
and says it will make us who are doomed
live forever.

Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga **A. M. Klein, 1945**

Where are the braves, the faces like autumn fruit,
who stared at the child from the colored frontispiece?
And the monosyllabic chief who spoke with his throat?

Where are the tribes, the feathered bestiaris?—
Rank Aesop's animals erect and red,
with fur on their names to make all live things kin!—
Chief Running Deer, Black Bear, Old Buffalo Head?

Childhood, that wished me Indian, hoped that
one afterschool I'd leave the classroom chalk,
the varnish smell, the watered dust of the street,
to join the clean outdoors and the Iroquois track.
Childhood; but always, as on a calendar,
there stood that chief, with arms akimbo, waiting
the runaway mascot paddling to his shore.

With what strange moccasin stealth that scene is changed!
With French names, without paint, in overalls,
their bronze, like their nobility expunged,—
the men. Beneath their alimentary shawls
sit like black tents their squaws; while for the tourist's
brown pennies scattered at the old church door,
the ragged papooses jump, and bite the dust.

Their past is sold in a shop; the beaded shoes,
the sweetgrass basket, the curio Indian,
burnt wood, and gaudy cloth, and inch-canoes—
trophies and scalpings for a traveler's den.
Sometimes, it's true. they dance, but for a bribe;
after a deal don the bedraggled feather
and welcome a white mayor to the tribe.

This is a grassy ghetto, and no home.
And these are fauna in a museum kept.
The better hunters have prevailed. The game,
losing its blood, now makes these grounds its crypt.
The animals pale, the shine of the fur is lost,
bleached are their living bones. About them watch
as through a mist, the pious prosperous ghosts.

Searching for Eagles
Peter Blue Cloud, 1992

A pair of great blue herons should
be feast enough for anyone's sunset.
Still, I chant an inner prayer
to glimpse but once, a circling,
soaring eagle close to
this river at my doorstep.

This bit of Mohawk territory, encircled
by cities, towns, freeway and seaway,
cannot be what my ancestors dreamed.
They, who intimately knew eagles,
how would they reconcile today
without the loon's evening cry?

I pretend this river at my doorstep,
for it is a backwash of the seaway,
not flowing, but pulled back and forth
by passing ships. No more the taste
of fresh fish, what swim here are
sickly, polluted, and dying creatures.

Secret Path
Gord Downie, 2016

Freezing rain
And Ice pellets
Walking home I'm covered in it
Walking home
Along the tracks
Secret Path
Did you say "Secret Path"?

Pale blue
Doesn't do what they said it'd do
It's just a jacket
It's a windbreaker
It's not a jean jacket
They call it a windbreaker

Walking home
Along the tracks
Secret Path
He said, "Secret Path"
I am soaked
To the skin
There's never been
A colder rain than this one I'm in

Pale blue
Doesn't do what they said it'd do
It's not my jacket
It's a windbreaker
It's not my jean jacket
It's just a windbreaker
And the fuck-off rocks
Along the tracks Secret Path
There's no "Secret Path"

And the freezing rain
And the ice pellets
Coat the rail
So I can't even tightrope it.

Angry Thunderbird, 1960
Armand Garnet Ruffo, 2015

Of the old stories. The belief in wings of thunder
and eyes of lightning.

You wrapped comfortably in the style of the moment.
Secure in the civilization of your apartment.

This flat image of what seems a bird with a small sack of something.
Electric eyes. Divided circles.

This is your mind on the mid-day road when the sky turns
black and you are suddenly no longer secure or certain.

Because for all your education you still tuck fear
under your pillow and rest your head on it every night.

And for a moment its scream lifts you high above your knowing
into the claws of something huge, immense.

Indian Canoe
Armand Garnet Ruffo, 2014

Behind the blink of a dream
the shaman paints himself
into voyage
and travels
with the people
who have been padding all their lives
for centuries
back to the source
of religion

Misshipesheu
water Manitou, spirit guide
swims the underworld
spiraling out of a whirlpool
Sign of medicine power
and presence
a prayer
for calm water

Loon shapes the canoe
in an elegant song
of loyalty
and beauty
head held high
to the distant horizon
vigilant for the people

Sturgeon supports
the fragile vessel
master of deep water
strength
and sweet flesh
given in self-sacrifice
beloved totems

And the four aboard
Man, Woman, Child
Shaman (paddle or brush in hand)
painted in red ochre on stone
and bound together
transformed
innumerable times
by innumerable artists
so that the people might continue.

The Indians Speak at Expo67
F. R. Scott, 1967

When the White Man came
We welcomed him
With love

We sheltered him
Fed him
Led him through the forest

The great explorers of Canada
Travelled in Indian canoes
Wore Indian snow-shoes
Ate Indian food
Lived in Indian houses

They could not have lived
Or moved
Without Indian friends

The early missionaries thought us Pagans
They imposed upon us their own stories
Of God
Of heaven and hell
Of sin and salvation

The White Men fought each other for our land
We were embroiled in the White Man's wars

The wars ended in treaties
And our lands
Passed into the White Man's hands

Lament for Confederation **Chief Dan George, 1967**

How long have I known you, Oh Canada? A hundred years? Yes, a hundred years. And many, many seelanum more. And today, when you celebrate your hundred years, Oh Canada, I am sad for all the Indian people throughout the land.

For I have known you when your forests were mine; when they gave me my meat and my clothing. I have known you in your streams and rivers where your fish flashed and danced in the sun, where the waters said ‘come, come and eat of my abundance.’ I have known you in the freedom of the winds. And my spirit, like the winds, once roamed your good lands.

But in the long hundred years since the white man came, I have seen my freedom disappear like the salmon going mysteriously out to sea. The white man’s strange customs, which I could not understand, pressed down upon me until I could no longer breathe.

When I fought to protect my land and my home, I was called a savage. When I neither understood nor welcomed his way of life, I was called lazy. When I tried to rule my people, I was stripped of my authority.

My nation was ignored in your history textbooks — they were little more important in the history of Canada than the buffalo that ranged the plains. I was ridiculed in your plays and motion pictures, and when I drank your fire-water, I got drunk — very, very drunk. And I forgot.

Oh Canada, how can I celebrate with you this centenary, this hundred years? Shall I thank you for the reserves that are left to me of my beautiful forests? For the canned fish of my rivers? For the loss of my pride and authority, even among my own people? For the lack of my will to fight back? No! I must forget what’s past and gone.

Oh God in heaven! Give me back the courage of the olden chiefs. Let me wrestle with my surroundings. Let me again, as in the days of old, dominate my environment. Let me humbly accept this new culture and through it rise up and go on.

Oh God! Like the thunderbird of old I shall rise again out of the sea; I shall grab the instruments of the white man’s success — his education, his skills, and with these new tools I shall build my race into the proudest segment of your society. Before I follow the great chiefs who have gone before us, Oh Canada, I shall see these things come to pass.

I shall see our young braves and our chiefs sitting in the houses of law and government, ruling and being ruled by the knowledge and freedoms of our great land. So shall we shatter the barriers of our isolation. So shall the next hundred years be the greatest in the proud history of our tribes and nations.

The Universal Soldier **Buffy Sainte-Marie**

He's five feet two and he's six feet four
He fights with missiles and with spears
He's all of 31 and he's only 17
He's been a soldier for a thousand years

He's a Catholic, a Hindu, an athiest, a Jain,
a Buddhist and a Baptist and a Jew
and he knows he shouldn't kill
and he knows he always will
kill you for me my friend and me for you

And he's fighting for Canada,
he's fighting for France,
he's fighting for the USA,
and he's fighting for the Russians
and he's fighting for Japan,
and he thinks we'll put an end to war this way

And he's fighting for Democracy
and fighting for the Reds
He says it's for the peace of all
He's the one who must decide
who's to live and who's to die
and he never sees the writing on the walls

But without him how would Hitler have
condemned him at Dachau
Without him Caesar would have stood alone
He's the one who gives his body

as a weapon to a war
and without him all this killing can't go on

He's the universal soldier and he
really is to blame
His orders come from far away no more
They come from him, and you, and me
and brothers can't you see
this is not the way we put an end to war

**from There Is My People Sleeping
Sarain Stump, 1970**

Like little hands
the flowers
break from the ground
to steal
little drops of sun

It's with terror, sometimes
that I hear them calling me
but it's the light skip of a cougar
detaching me from the ground
to leave me alone
with my crazy power
till I reach the sun makers
and find myself again
in a new place

Death Mummer
Jeannette Armstrong, 1976

Yesterday I walked
by Thunderbird Park.
Tonight
With blood-stained fingers
I remove my mask
I think
walk past garish totem-painted storefronts
down avenues that echo

There are no Indians here
None
even in the million dollar museum
that so carefully preserves
their clothing, their cooking utensils
their food
for taxpayers
from all over
to rush their children by

There are some good Indians
hanging around Kings Hotel
and they are dead
preserved in alcohol
it would be neater though
to kill us all at once
Whole clans and tribes
could be dressed and stuffed
Add a fifth floor to the museum
to accommodate them

Better yet
pile us up like cordwood
in those longhouses
we would be home at last
and it would be good value
I walk slowly and think back

I stagger under
the raw
hide pack
that I carry
and the clever mask that I have fashioned
for myself
from the bones and skin
of my dead tribe
all dipped in the fresh blood
of my brothers and sisters
scooped from old battle streets
near hotels

Moon of the Windfallen
Daniel David Moses, 2012

The moon, so ripe on its stem,
He wants to be a kid and
Clamber through the branches of

The tree of night again, needs
To look out through the topmost limbs
At the illuminated

Farm, a harvest of many
Moons, as the saying goes, safe
In a six-quart basket hung

From his arm. How long did
He think that harvest would last?
How much did it profit him

Once he'd been taxed off the land,
Once he'd landed with his boots
Here on the pavement? How long,

He's wondering, has it been
That I've been here? So long
He can no longer see the lights

Of the city, flickering
To fullness after sunset,
As anything other than

Counterfeit. The real moon's
Light, in his experience,
Never tarnished anything.

These shadows thrown around him
Are branches no boy ever
Will climb. The old moon, this time

Round, rises to the zenith.
The man enters the corner
Store, hungry for pale apples.