

Welcome. This and the following sessions will consider the poetry and songs of Canada. Our purpose will be to experience some of the poems written in or about Canada and to perhaps gain therefrom some idea of what it means to be Canadian. Wherever possible the poems will be read (or sung) by their authors. The poems will be placed in the context of our history, and visually illustrated with works by Canadian painters and sculptors.

This particular painting is by Paterson Ewen (1925–2002). He was born and educated in Montreal and taught at the University of Western Ontario. The painting shows various amorphous parts trying to fit together. The colours are cold. There is no title. These characteristics seem appropriate to our purposes.

Our approach will be roughly historical. The presentations will begin today with the songs of the country before the arrival of the Europeans and follow up to the time of Confederation. In the following weeks we shall follow the development of Canadian poetry to the present day. Certain aspects of this development will require particular attention – the poetry by and about Canada's indigenous peoples (session 5), and the poems of French Canada (session 6).

<p>Northern Voices</p> <p>Terry Picton</p> <p>email:</p> <p>terry.picton@gmail.com</p> <p>website:</p> <p>http://creatureandcreator.ca/</p> <p>http://creatureandcreator.ca/?page_id=1787</p>	 <p><i>Forest, Kazuo Nakamura, 1974</i></p>
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Some brief information about your moderator:

I am not Canadian born. I immigrated to Canada with my family in 1956.

I am a physician and scientist by training. My knowledge of literature comes from reading.

I have a hearing loss and so I might need help with questions.

I will respond to emails. However, since I have time constraints do not expect an immediate reply.

The texts and the notes for the course are available at

http://creatureandcreator.ca/?page_id=1787

The notes are pretty complete and so we need not slavishly follow to script. If I skip slides, you can find out about them in the notes.

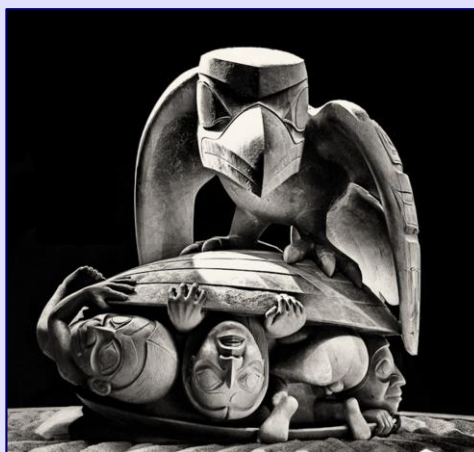
Kazuo Nakamura (1926-2002) was a Japanese-Canadian painter. He was interned during World War II. He was one of Painters Eleven, a group of abstract painters centered in Toronto in the 1950s.

Raven's Island

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!



Robin Skelton, 1980s



Bill Reid The Raven and the First Men (1980)
photographed by Ed Parker

We begin with some ideas about our origins.

Robin Skelton (1925-1997) was born in Yorkshire, educated in Cambridge, immigrated to Canada in 1963, and taught literature at the University of Victoria. He was also a practising Wiccan, who believed in the magical power of Nature. In this poem he retells a Haida myth about their origin. This was likely triggered by a large wooden sculpture of Bill Reid (1920-1998) that was installed in the new Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia.

The people from Haida Gwaii (once known as the Queen Charlotte Islands) off the coast of British Columbia tell a story of their origins:

The great flood which had covered the earth for so long had at last receded, and even the thin strip of sand now called Rose Spit, stretching north from Naikun village, lay dry. The Raven had flown there to gorge himself on the delicacies left by the receding water, so for once he wasn't hungry. But his other appetites — lust, curiosity and the un-quenchable itch to meddle and provoke things, to play tricks on the world and its creatures — these remained unsatisfied.

He had recently stolen the light from the old man who kept it hidden in a box in his house in the middle of the darkness, and had scattered it throughout the sky. The new light spattered the night with stars and waxed and waned in the shape of the moon. And it dazzled the day with a single bright shining which lit up the long beach that curved from the spit beneath the Raven's feet westward as far as Tao Hill. Pretty as it was, it looked lifeless and so to the Raven quite boring. He gave a great sigh, crossed his wings behind his back and walked along the sand, his shiny head cocked, his sharp eyes and ears alert for any unusual sight or sound. Then taking to the air, he called petulantly out to the empty sky. To his delight, he heard an answering cry — or to describe it more closely, a muffled squeak.



At first he saw nothing, but as he scanned the beach again, a white flash caught his eye, and when he landed he found at his feet, half buried in the sand, a gigantic clamshell. When he

looked more closely still, he saw that the shell was full of little creatures cowering in terror of his enormous shadow.

Well, here was something to break the monotony of his day. But nothing was going to happen as long as the tiny things stayed in the shell, and they certainly weren't coming out in their present terrified state. So the Raven leaned his great head close to the shell, and with the smooth trickster's tongue that had got him into and out of so many misadventures during his troubled and troublesome existence, he coaxed and cajoled and coerced the little creatures to come out and play in his wonderful, shiny new world. As you know, the Raven speaks in two voices, one harsh and strident, and the other, which he used now, a seductive bell-like croon which seems to come from the depth of the sea, or out of the cave where the winds are born. It is an irresistible sound, one of the loveliest sounds in the world. So it wasn't long before one and then another of the little shell-dwellers timidly emerged. Some of them immediately scurried back when they saw the immensity of the sea and the sky, and the overwhelming blackness of the Raven. But eventually curiosity overcame caution and all of them had crept or scrambled out. Very strange creatures they were: two-legged like the Raven, but there the resemblance ended. They had no glossy feathers, no thrusting beak. Their skin was pale, and they were naked except for the long black hair on their round, flat-featured heads. Instead of strong wings, they had thin stick-like appendages that waved and fluttered constantly. They were the original Haidas, the first humans.

This is from

Reid, B., & Bringham, R. (1984). *The raven steals the light*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.

	<p>Bear Dance Song (Iroquois, collected 1898)</p> <p>I am moving along a road even though you think there is none</p> <p> <i>Shaman's Call</i> R. Carlos Nakai</p> <p><i>The Bear Medicine Man</i> Norval Morrisseau, 1966</p>
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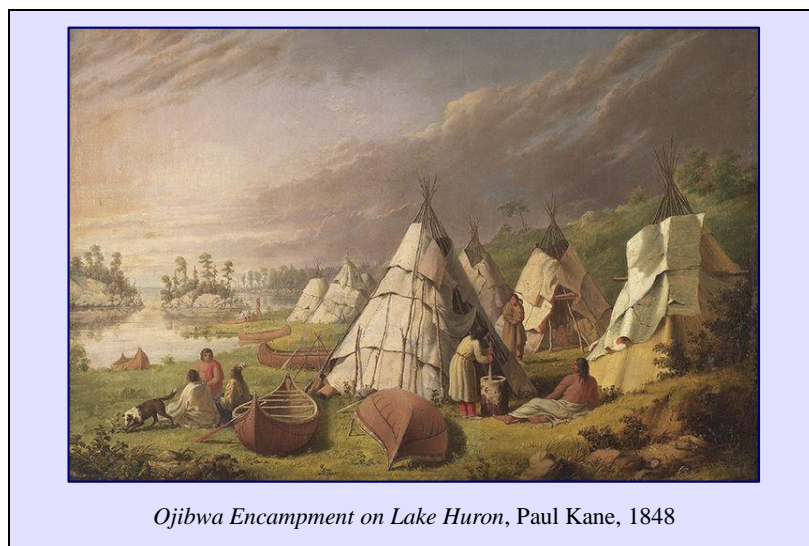
This and the following poems are from

Colombo, J. R. (1983). *Songs of the Indians*. Ottawa: Oberon (2 volumes).

The flute music is by R. Carlos Nakai, a Navaho from Arizona. He has numerous recordings produced by Canyon Records.

The painting is by Norval Morrisseau (1932-2007). This Ojibwe artist founded the “Woodland School” of Native Art. He was often referred to as the “Picasso of the North.” The painting depicts a medicine man or shaman.

A shaman is someone who can act as an intermediary between the real world and a spiritual world. The term derives from the indigenous people of Siberia. In order to experience the spirit world the shaman will often enter into a trance state. This can be assisted by drugs or by asceticism. In modern European cultures, the role of the shaman can be taken by the priest, the medium, or the mystic.




Paul Kane (1810-1871) was born in Ireland but grew up in Toronto (then known as York). He travelled extensively in the north and west of Canada, painting the landscape and the indigenous peoples.

Though his original field sketches were often embellished when converted to oil paintings, Kane’s work provides a clear portrayal of native life before the land was overcome by Europeans. His style may be European and romantic, but his experience was real.

How should one have depicted the indigenous peoples? The style of Norval Morrisseau would have been more fitting, but any such artist as might have lived then left no works behind.

The paintings do give a sense of the way in which indigenous people live as part of nature rather than in opposition to it. Environmentalism has only recently become part of our country’s thinking. However, this idea was here all along in the culture of our indigenous peoples.



The Song of the Stars

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.

Ojibwa Star Map by Annette S. Lee,
William P. Wilson, and Carl Gawboy

The indigenous people of North America looked at the night sky in the same way as those of Europe. They grouped stars together into constellations, but these were different from the Europeans. The little dipper (or little bear), which contains the north star, was the loon. The constellation viewed as Pegasus was the moose. Scorpio was seen as naniboujou – the Ojibwe trickster.

source for star maps according to native traditions:

<http://web.stcloudstate.edu/aslee/OJIBWEMAP/home.html>


Prayer

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.



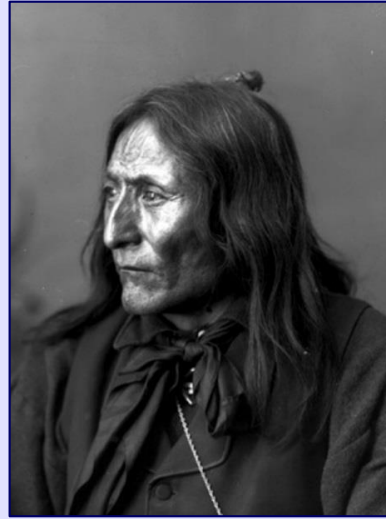
Man changing into Thunderbird
 Norval Morisseau, 1977

The song is Earth Spirit, performed on an eagle-bone whistle by R Carlos Nakai.

The prayer typifies how the indigenous peoples live within the world's four corners. West is not mentioned by name – it is over there in the mountains.

**Chief Crowfoot
(1830-1890)**

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.



Crowfoot was a Siksika Indian chief, who negotiated Treaty 7 (1877) with the Canadian government on behalf of the Blackfoot confederacy. Desirous of peace, he refrained from participating in the North West Rebellion of 1885. Disillusioned with the process whereby native rights were subsequently taken away, he died at Blackfoot Crossing in Alberta.

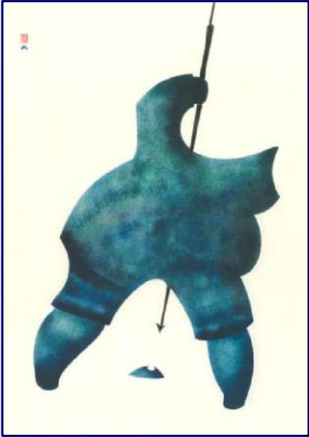
His final words describe the transience of life. They recall the words of Herrick

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

and presage words of Dowson

They are not long, the days of wine and roses:
Out of a misty dream
Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream.

Crowfoot's images are more suited to this continent and to his people. They gather intensity by not being so well known.



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!

Man Hunting at a Seal Hole
Niviaksiak, 1959

Igpakuhak, collected 1932

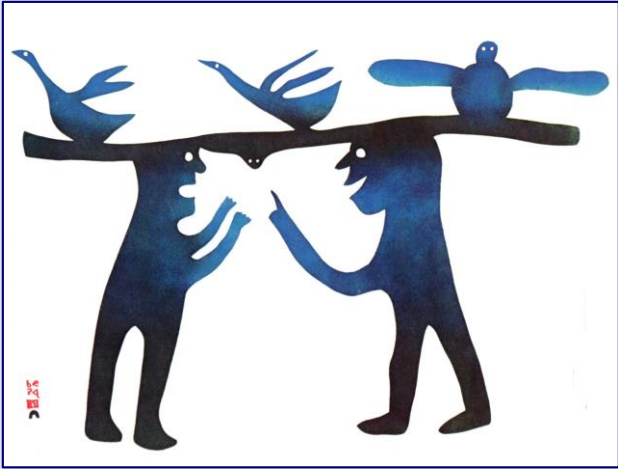
This song is from


Colombo, J. R. (1981). *Poems of the Inuit*. Ottawa: Oberon Press.

It tells of a hunter's success – first in killing a caribou and then in catching a seal.

In 1949, James Houston (1921-2005) travelled to the Canadian arctic and obtained carvings from the Inuit for sale in the south. After carving became successful, Houston obtained a grant from the Canadian government in 1957 to create a graphic-arts workshop in Cape Dorset on the Southern shore of Baffin Island. He taught the Inuit how to produce stone-block prints. These Cape Dorset prints became much sought after. The illustration shows one of the prints from the first series produced. It depicts a hunter at a seal hole. He patiently waits until the seal comes to breathe and then thrusts his harpoon into the seal.

*Two Men
Discussing
Upcoming
Hunt*
Kavavook
1961





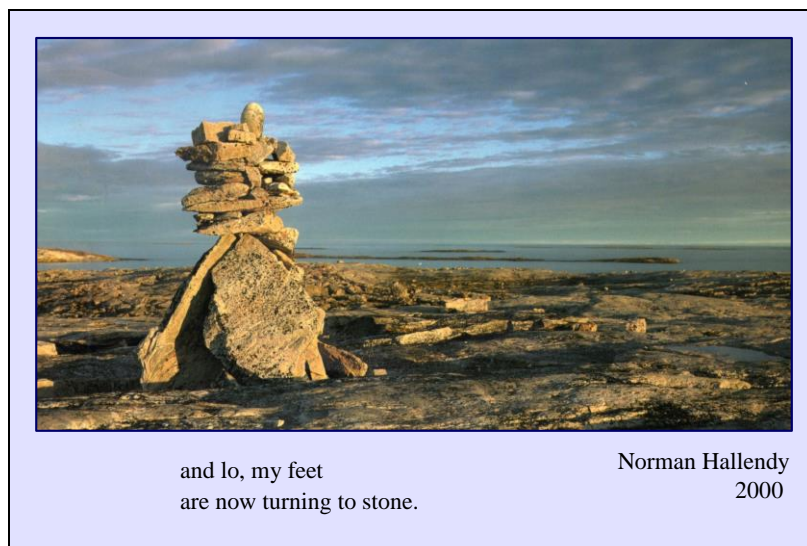
Inuit Hunting Song, Derek Healey, Musica Intima

This early Cape Dorset print shows men discussing a hunt.

An Inuit hunting song (in Inuit) was set by Derek Healey (1936-) who was born in England but spent many years in Canada. The short clip is from the their album *Into Light* (2008). The words in translation are

First they shot a female caribou
Then two buck caribou came along
Their horns were just beginning to appear
All velvet in the spring.

Healey adds to the song a shimmering choral background




Photograph is from the cover of
Hallendy, N. (2000). *Inuksuit: Silent messengers of the Arctic*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.


The inuksuit are used as navigational landmarks, as markers for food caches or spiritually important places, and as means for herding caribou during hunting.

This picture is used to illustrate the words of an Inuit song
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.

The song continues through feet thighs waist - until the singer is a complete inuksuk

Bird Dream Forewarning Blizzards
Tudlik and Kananginak, 1959


Anuri (The Wind)
Katajjacoustic (Nunavut)
Kiah Hachey and Karen Flaherty




This is another early print from Cape Dorset. Of note is the right hand of the dreamer which reaches outside the edge of the picture to maintain some tenuous hold on the real world.


The song is a throat song about the wind. It is taken from a video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPI2dXcn8Vw>

Inuit throat singing is traditionally performed by women. It is a duet wherein one singer provides a rhythmic pattern which the other singer adds to. The sounds can be either voiced tones or simple breathing sounds. The singing is often in the form of a contest to see which singer can outlast the other.

from Brébeuf and His Brethren

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.

 recitation by Jean Cavall



from 1991 film *Black Robe*
starring Lothaire Bluteau


We now move on from the indigenous people to their interactions with the European settlers. One of our country's foundational stories is that of the martyrdom of the Jesuit Jean Brébeuf in

1649. Having set up missions in Huron territory, Brébeuf and his colleagues were captured during a raid by the Iroquois. They were then tortured and killed. Brébeuf was canonized as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church in 1930.


in 1940, E. J. Pratt published a long epic poem about Brébeuf. This was recorded for the CBC Radio in 1943. Choral interludes were composed by Healey Willan. The recitation by Jean Cavall is from that recording. This part of the poem derives from Brébeuf's letter back to France requesting help in his missionary work. He describes how the life in Canada is hard, the accommodation poor, and the mosquitoes terrible. Yet this will make the sacrifice all the greater. He promises them that they will find "a consolation in the cross that far outweighs its burdens."

Huron Carol

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 ahathonhia.



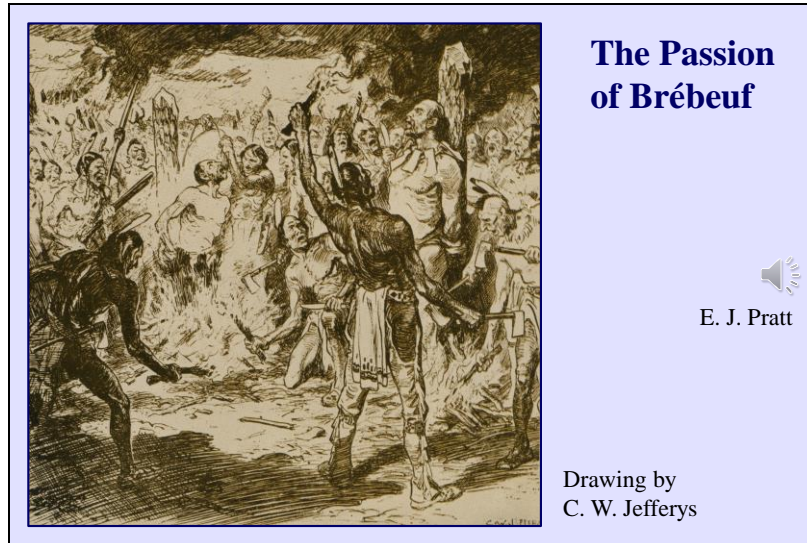
Heather Dale



Brébeuf learned the Huron language and compiled a dictionary. In 1643 he composed the Huron Carol in both Huron and French, using the tune of a traditional French folk song.

The following slide presents Pratt's own recitation of the part of his epic dealing with the death of Brébeuf. The Iroquois delight in torturing the priest, who accepts his fate as an imitation of Christ. The Iroquois cannot find the source of his phenomenal courage.

Manresa is a city in Spain. St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), wrote his *Spiritual Exercises* in a cave nearby.



Pratt's poem glorifies the martyrdom and the faith that inspired the martyr.
An ironic comment is in a poem by F. R. Scott

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?



Illustrated is the famous painting by Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1769. The painting is in the National Gallery of Canada.

The Battle of the Plains of Abraham was fought in 1759 just outside Quebec City. As part of the Seven years War between France and England, the British had laid siege to the city. Rather than attack directly they decided to go upstream, climb the cliffs and attack the city from the west. Some have suggested that the outcome of the battle largely depended on the experience of the troops. The British were veteran soldiers. Montcalm, the French general, was an experienced military leader, but his soldiers were new recruits without battle experience.

The death of Wolfe is described in Cary's poem:

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.

Before the battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759, James Wolfe supposedly read *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* written by Thomas Gray in 1750 and remarked "I would rather have written those lines than take Quebec tomorrow." The beginning and ending verses follow:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

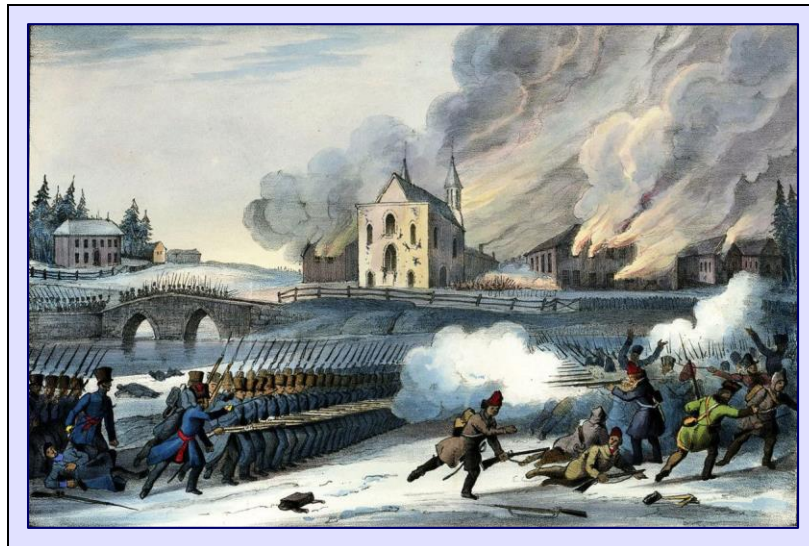
Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such, as wand'ring near her secret bow'r,
Molest her ancient solitary reign

...

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.

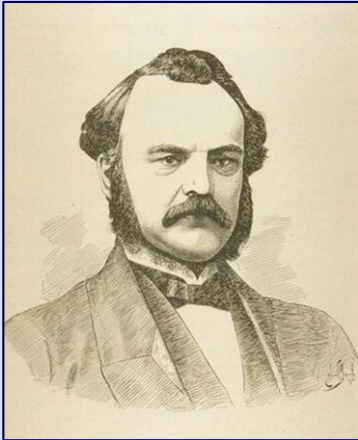
Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,
He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)
The bosom of his Father and his God.



After the British victory at Quebec City, French Canada became a part of British North America. However this did not sit well with the French-speaking settlers.

In addition, in the early years of the 19th century there was much thought of Canadian independence from Britain. In 1837 outright rebellions broke out in both Upper and Lower Canada. In the illustrated battle of Ste. Eustache (1837), British troops defeated the *patriotes* of Lower Canada. (Ste. Eustache is now a suburb just to the west of Montreal.) After the resurrection was put down, Lord Durham recommended that Upper and Lower Canada be united and that French settlers be assimilated into the British colony. Many of the rebels were condemned to death or forced into exile.



Un Canadien Errant

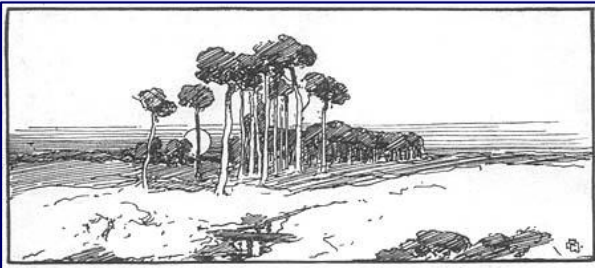
Un Canadien errant,
Banni de ses foyers,
Parcourait en pleurant
Des pays étrangers.

Estelle Caron and
Claude Corbeil, 1971

Antoine Gérin-Lajoie (1824-1882)

Antoine Gérin-Lajoie wrote the song in the context of the Patriot Rebellions of 1837. However, the song was also used (often with the first line changed to *Un Acadien errant*) to commemorate the Great Upheaval of the British campaign against New France (part of the Seven Year War of 1756-63). French-speaking inhabitants were expelled from the maritime provinces Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island – together known as Acadia (not to be confused with the Arcadia described in classical poetry as a long-ago place of innocence and peace).

The song is sung by Estelle Caron and Claude Corbeil on the Radio Canada program *Les Joyeux Troubadours*.



Deserted Village
Woodcut by
W. Lee Hankey

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), the famous Anglo English writer, published a long poem, *The Deserted Village* (1770), lamenting the decline of English village life. Many villages were taken over by large landowners and villagers often emigrated to the colonies.

Oliver Goldsmith (1794-1861) was his namesake's grand-nephew. He lived in Nova Scotia and wrote a poem, *The Rising Village* (1825), describing the village life in Canada.

biography:

http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/goldsmith_oliver_9E.html

full text:

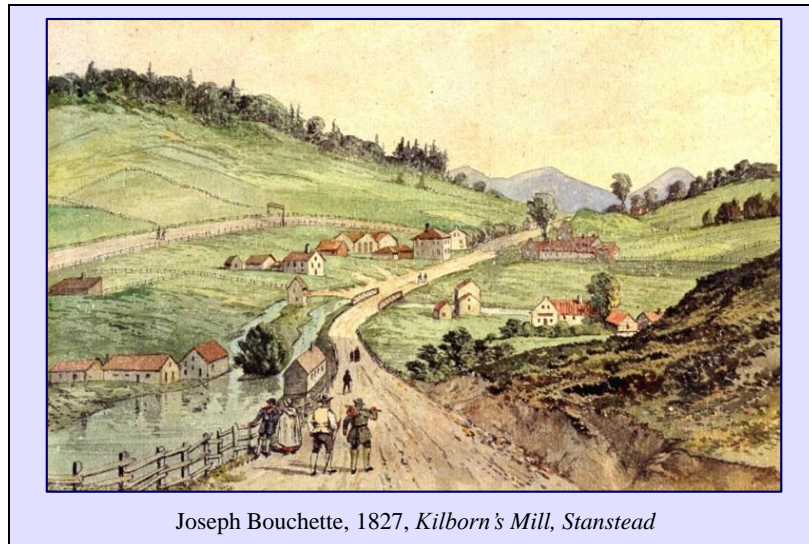
http://www.canadianpoetry.ca/longpoems/Rising_Village/index.htm

criticism:

<http://www.uwo.ca/english/canadianpoetry/cpjrn/vol01/hughes.htm>

The Deserted Village:

<http://journeytoforever.org/rllib/gsmith.html>



Canadian Goldsmith finds that the New World is where one can return to the joyful country life that had been lost in the Britain of his great uncle. The beginnings were hard – the savages and the wild animals had to be driven away, but then the land was cleared and prosperity began:

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.

The water-colour painting is by Joseph Bouchette (1774–1841) who was the Surveyor General for British North America. It shows an idyllic country scene in the Eastern Townships.

Early paintings of British North America often show how much the new country was like the old. Neither the wildness of the continent nor the nature of its indigenous peoples are portrayed.



**Susanna Moodie
(1803-1885)**

Born in Suffolk, England, she emigrated with her new husband to Canada in 1832. They were not farmers and had great difficulty surviving in the inhospitable country just north of Peterborough. She wrote *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings* (1853) about her experiences. The chapters are often prefaced by brief and sometimes pessimistic poems.

Susanna Moodie is probably Canada's most famous immigrant. She and her family came to Canada totally unprepared for survival in the "Bush."

Her poetry catches some of the fearfulness of the immigrant in a land that pays them scant attention:

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.

A sense of desolation reigns
O'er these unpeopled forest plains.



Northern River
Tom Thomson, 1915

Moodie's poems are imbued with a pessimism that may have been helpful – she never thought life would be easy. Survival often comes to those that expect the worst.

'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.

Tom Thomson (1877-1917) captured some of this darkness in his 1915 painting. However, Thomson was an optimist and the light cannot help but break through.

Photograph 1970
by Shelly Grimson



In 1970 Margaret Atwood wrote a set of poems *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* to present in Twentieth-Century terms what it must have felt like to be Susanna Moodie. These poems were illustrated by Charles Pachter.

Margaret Atwood (1939-) began her literary career as a poet in the 1960s before becoming much more successful as a novelist, beginning with *The Edible Woman* (1968). In this she established a precedent in Canada where many of our poets have become more famous for their novels than their poems – Michael Ondaatje, Anne Michaels, Michael Crummey, Anne Hébert, as examples. In 1972 she published an influential review of Canadian Literature entitled *Survival*. In this she pointed to various recurrent themes in our literature – one of which was man (or woman) against a hostile nature.

She became intrigued by the experiences of Susanna Moodie, and in 1970 wrote a series of poems that attempted to depict these in modern language. In 1980 these poems were illustrated by Charles Pachter (1942) who became famous for his painting *Noblesse Oblige* (1972) showing the Queen on mooseback.

The photograph shows Margaret Atwood (1939-) in the days of her youth. In 1970, Shelly Grimson took a series of photographs of Canadian poets. These were finally published in *The Walrus*:


<https://thewalrus.ca/2004-10-poetry/>


Disembarking at Quebec

The moving water will not show me
my reflection.

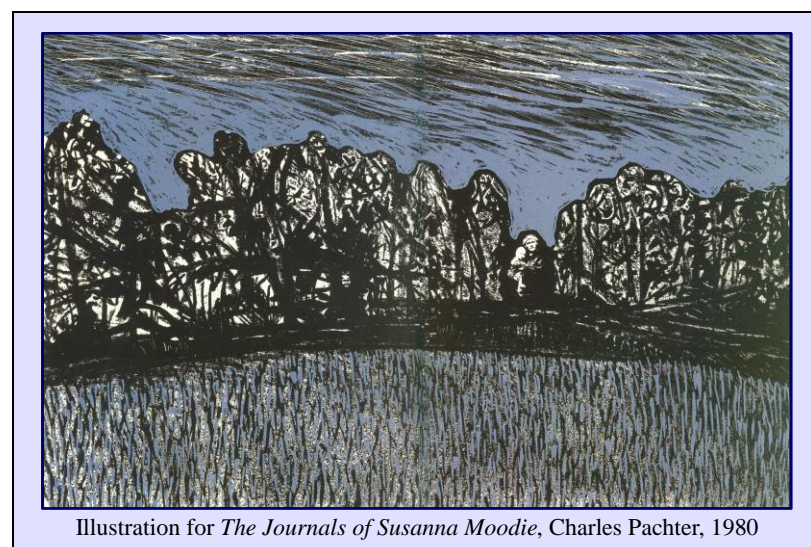
The rocks ignore.

I am a word
in a foreign language.

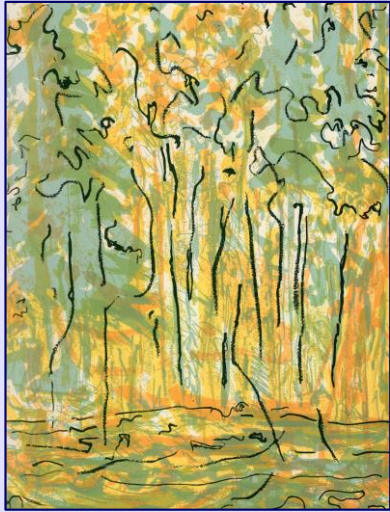
 Margaret Atwood



In this first poem of the series we get a sense of the total disorientation of the immigrant in a land which has no precedent in her previous experience.



This Pachter print illustrates the feeling of being lost in a woods of Canada.



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

This poem portrays Moodie's attempts to fit the landscape to her mind.

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

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



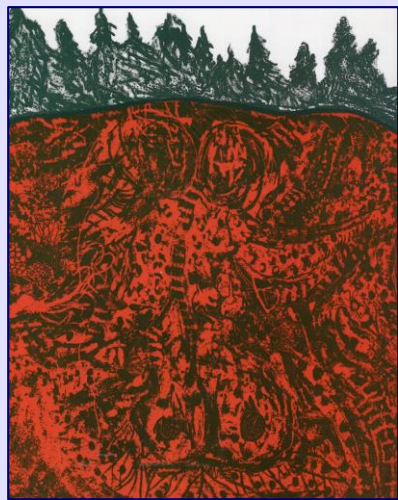
The Planters



The poem continues

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.



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

The poem continues

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

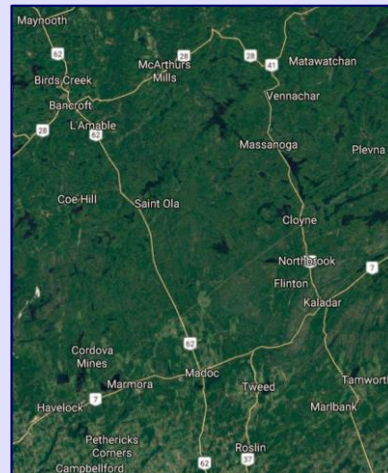
The Country North of Belleville

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

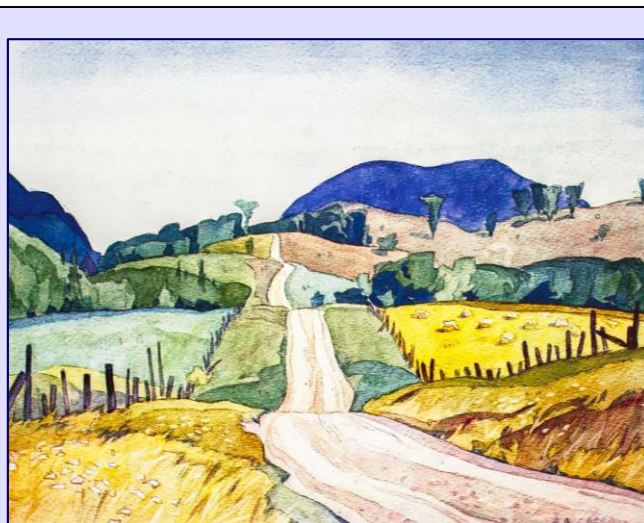
for miles —

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



Al Purdy's grandfather settled in the region of Ontario north of Belleville. This is some 60 km northeast of Susanna Moodie's homestead. It is difficult land to farm. Purdy wrote several poems about his grandfather and the life he led. The most famous of these is *The Country North of Belleville* (1965).

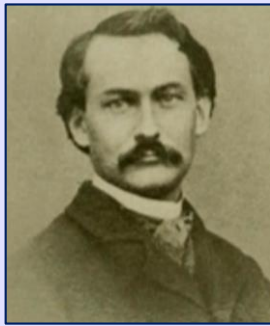
The map shows Hasting County in Ontario. Wollaston township is around Coe Hill; Cashel Township is just east of this. Weslemkoon Lake is the large lake in the upper right of the map. Many years ago people tried to farm the country but it was never successfully cultivated. The glaciers had long ago scraped most of the soil away. There are now numerous ghost towns and abandoned farms. The area is now mainly used for fishing and recreation.



Country Road
A. J. Casson
1959/1991

A. J. Casson (1898-1992) was the youngest member of The Group of Seven. He painted the forests and farmland of Southern Ontario. This landscape is of a country road near Bancroft. Casson later made a serigraph reproduction of the painting.

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 —



**Charles Dawson Shanly
(1811-1875)**

Born in Dublin, Shanly was educated at Trinity College. In 1836 he emigrated with his family to Upper Canada settling in Fanshawe near London. He served in the army and then worked for the Board of Public Works of Lower Canada in Montreal. He also edited the satirical magazine *Punch in Canada*. In 1857 he moved to New York where he wrote poetry and satirical sketches and co-founded the first version of the magazine *Vanity Fair*. His poem *The Walker of the Snow* was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1859.



William Blair Bruce (1859-1906) was a Canadian painter. Though he lived most of his life in France and Sweden, his most famous painting is probably *The Phantom of the Snow* (Hamilton Art Gallery) which was inspired by the poem *The Walker of the Snow* by Charles Dawson Shanly. The painting shows a trapper, with one of his traps on his back, being blighted by the Snow Walker.

Shanly's poem was set to music by Sean Tyrrell, an Irish folk-singer. A video is available <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ka5x60vOwE>

The poem tells the tale of man who was "blighted" by the Snow Walker. At the beginning it seems a simple story of an encounter with a supernatural being. But once we know that the speaker was blighted, we are not sure exactly who is telling the story.

The following are some comments from Sherrill Grace in her book *Canada and the Idea of North* (2007).

At this point in the narrative (the penultimate verse) the story becomes confusing and the sense of mystery, even dread, doubles because the speaker tells us that the men who found him did not say anything to him, "For they knew that ... [he] had seen the Shadow Hunter, / And had withered in his blight." What, precisely, we must wonder, happened to the poor man whose tale we have been hearing? Was he injured? Did he recover? Is he – and this is the question – dead? What, in short, does "withered in his blight" mean? If he died on that terrible trek through the Shadow Hunter's valley, he could not now be speaking to a "good Master" or to us. Or could he? The closing verse suggests that he survived his ordeal and has lived to tell his tale and, dread prospect, pass once more through this valley of the shadow of death. But another possibility hovers over the poem and is unresolved at the end: either the two men in the poem (master and companion, guide, or servant) face the valley together, and this tale simply adds excitement and a frisson of the supernatural to their otherwise tedious, lonely night, or the speaker of the poem is not what he seems. He might be a ghost himself, an avatar of the Shadow Hunter (though he seems much more garrulous than that ghostly presence is described as being - "no token of communion /

Gave he by word or look"), or he might be addressing us all from the depth of our inner fears about being alone and tired on a cold, moonlit night, surrounded by nothing but snow-filled space in the middle of the northern wilderness, in which case he is a hallucination and we are in greater trouble than we thought.

In February, 2018, in the Yukon Arctic Ultra Race, the Italian competitor, Roberto Zanda, suffering from extreme fatigue and cold, was visited by a hallucination who told him to leave his sled (which had a tent and supplies) and go into the woods to a cabin where someone would help him. Zanda did so, ultimately falling unconscious in the snow. He was found almost dead the next morning. His severely frost-bitten hands and feet had to be amputated.

<http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/yukon-arctic-ultra-race-under-fire-as-italian-competitor-awaits-amputation-of-hands-and-feet>


The Windigo

The Windigo or wendigo is a monster in the tradition of the Algonquian-speaking Native Americans. The monster devours human beings, praying mainly on those that live alone or are temporarily stranded away from home. The monster has numerous supernatural powers, among which are the ability to walk on the surface of deep snow. Metaphorically, the windigo has been used to refer to the forces that act to annihilate indigenous peoples and their culture.

Windigo, 1963
Norval Morrisseau



The Snow Walker of Shanly's poem is likely the Windigo.



**Thomas D'Arcy McGee
(1825-1868)**

McGee was born in Ireland. At the age of 17 years he emigrated to the United States. He later moved to Montreal, finding Canada more hospitable to the plight of the Irish. He was one of the founding fathers of Canada at the Charlottetown Conference in 1864. He became the Member of Parliament for Montreal West in the first Canadian parliament. He was a prolific poet.

The poem selected for McGee concerns the spirituality of the indigenous people of Canada, which McGee says is just as valid as the Christianity of Europe.

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.

The wapiti is an indigenous word for elk. It comes from a Cree word meaning “white rump.”



Battle of Ridgeway, 1866

The Irish were a significant force in North America. They had emigrated from the old country due to the potato famine and hated the British. The Fenians (a group desirous of liberating Ireland from the British by armed revolution) promoted numerous raids from the United States

into Canada as well as one doomed uprising in Ireland in 1867. The battle of Ridgeway occurred near Fort Erie. Although the Fenians, many of them experienced veterans from the US Civil War, initially had the upper hand, reinforcements later gave the victory to the British.

McGee opposed the Fenian Brotherhood which advocated the forcible takeover of Canada by the United States. On April 7, 1868, he was murdered by Patrick Whelan as he returned from parliament to his boarding house in Ottawa.

William Kurelek
1976



Thomas d'Arcy McGee is most famous for his assassination, which occurred while he was serving as a member of the first Parliament of the Dominion of Canada. Exactly what led to the assassination is not clear, but it is generally believed to have been inspired by the Fenians.


William Kurelek (1927-1977) was a Canadian artist with Ukrainian roots. He converted to Roman Catholicism, and a militant Christianity shows in many of his works. This particular picture is unusual in his work.

Jeanette Armstrong (1948 -)

Born and raised in the Penticton Indian Reserve in British Columbia, Armstrong studied at the University of Victoria. She is a major force behind the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, which promotes native culture and education. She has published a novel *Slash* (1985), and a book of poetry *Breath Tracks* (1991). Together with Lally Grauer, she edited an anthology of *Native Poetry in Canada* (2001).



*The disembarkation
of Christopher
Columbus in 1492*
José Garnelo y Alda
1890



History Lesson

Justine Gieni

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

This poem by Jeanette Armstrong gives a view of North American history from the perspective of those that were here before the coming of the European settlers. This was a clash between a civilization which lived mainly by hunting, gathering and small farming and one that had been industrialized and mercantitized. Farms were set up to make more food than the farmer needed so that the farmers could trade their food for money and other goods.

The settlers worshipped money and went to great lengths to obtain it – blasting holes in the earth, polluting the rivers, destroying the forest.

The Father referred to in the second verse is the great spirit – for some reason he lets Columbus happen to North America and neither warns nor helps the innocent natives.

The red-coated knights are the RCMP.

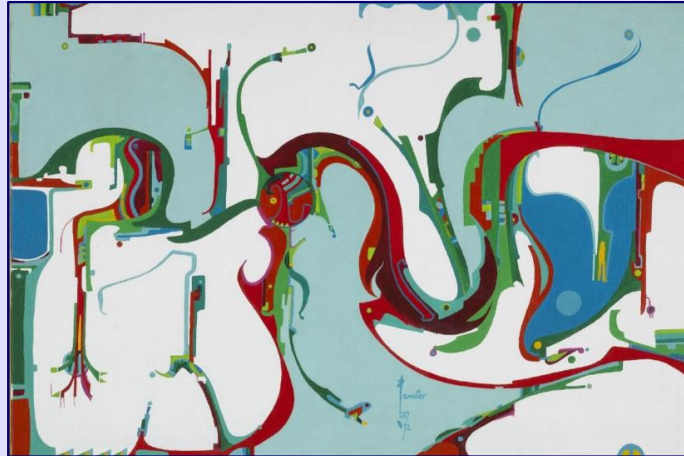
Flower powered zee is some unknown chemical pollutant from the mines and paper mills.

The faces of the smiling English Lady (the Queen) are on dollar bills.

It is not clear who are meant by the colossi. A colossus is a giant statue – such as the Colossi of Memnon in Egypt or the Colossus of Rhodes in Greece. Armstrong is probably indicating the overwhelming forces of greed and exploitation.

A video by Justine Gieni (a professor at University of Saskatchewan) discussing this poem is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBRw_I3Ec2I

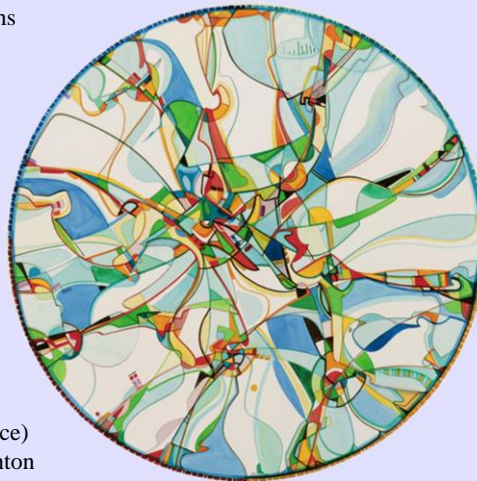
The recitation is taken from this video.



Alex Janvier, *Coming of the Opposite*, 1972

Alex Janvier (1935-) was born in the Cold Lake First Nations reserve in Alberta. This particular painting is his take on the clash between Native American and European civilizations.

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.



Alex Janvier, 2016
Tsa Tsa Ke K'e (Iron Foot Place)
Mosaic, Rogers Place, Edmonton

The ending of Armstrong's poem indicates how we have lost paradise. By trying to be Gods we have lost all that we were given in the beginning. The loss of paradise is a recurrent theme – we shall read it again in Joni Mitchell's song *Woodstock*.

John Newlove (1938-2003)

Born in Regina, Newlove attended the University of Saskatchewan briefly and then decided to become a poet. After publishing several books of poetry, he worked as an editor for McClelland and Stewart in Toronto. After teaching at several universities in Canada he settled in Ottawa where he worked as an editor for government publications.

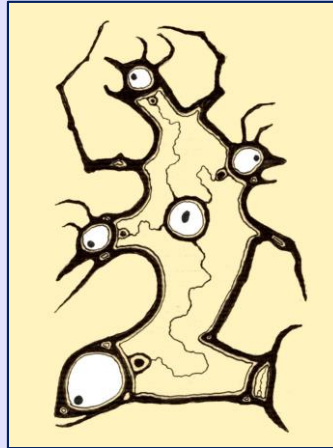


Photograph 1970
by Shelly Grimson

Newlove also recounts the history of the Europeans in North America in his long poem *The Pride*. In the first sections of this poem he recounts many of the interactions between the natives and the settlers. He tells of the end of a hunt, the hunters tired and sweating on their horses and then derives his lesson:

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;




Mankind – Part of the Sacred Circle
James Simon Mishibinijima, 2017

And the main lesson is that the only way we can become comfortable in this continent is to learn from the indigenous peoples how the land should be treated, to become one with them

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.

The Idea of North



When trying to understand what Canada means, one must somehow come to grips with its northerliness. The North is both untouched and inhospitable. Margaret Atwood tried to understand Canadian literature from the point of view of our *Survival* (1972) in this cold country. Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas as Bob and Doug McKenzie parodied our culture in the TV program *Great White North* (1980-82). However, the most striking representation of the North was in Glenn Gould's play for voices *The Idea of North*, initially put together for radio in 1967 and made into a short film in 1970.

The idea of North has a long history. In medieval Europe one postulated the country Thule in the uttermost North.

One often contrasts the philosophy and culture of the north – ascetic, romantic – with that of the south – epicurean, classical. Robert Rosenblum wrote an influential book about *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* (1975) in Europe. An exhibition *The Mystic North* (1984) placed Canadian painting, particularly that of the Group of Seven, in this Northern tradition.

The creature brought to life by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* finally escaped toward the north:

I shall quit your vessel on the ice raft which brought me thither and shall seek the most northern extremity of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch who would create such another as I have been. I shall die. I shall no longer feel the agonies which now consume me or be the prey of feelings unsatisfied, yet unquenched. He is dead who called me into being; and when I shall be no more, the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish. I shall no longer see the sun or stars or feel the winds play on my cheeks. Light, feeling, and sense will pass away; and in this condition must I find my

happiness. Some years ago, when the images which this world affords first opened upon me, when I felt the cheering warmth of summer and heard the rustling of the leaves and the warbling of the birds, and these were all to me, I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation. Polluted by crimes and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?

Sherrill Grace prefaces her book about *Canada and the Idea of North* (2001) with a brief quotation from Frankenstein's creature.



Gould's *The Idea of the North* involves various people talking. Toward the end of the play we follow a young man as he takes the Muskeg Express north from Winnipeg to Churchill. On the train he meets with Wally McLean, a philosophic northerner, and asks him what the life will be like. Wally tries to tell him what the North means. The background music is from Sibelius' Fifth Symphony. The full film is on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA4B9Iem83s>

In a suite of poems about Glenn Gould, Steve McOrmond (1957-) wrote about the Idea of 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.

Steve McOrmond was born in Nova Scotia and grew up in Prince Edward Island. He presently lives in Toronto.

Glenn Gould (1932-1982)

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.



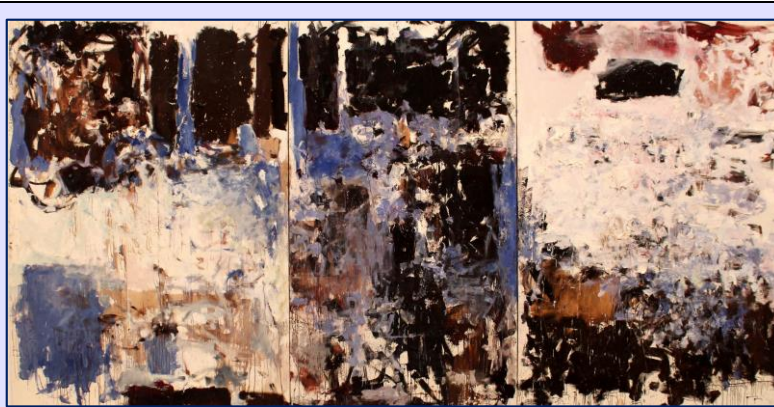
McOrmond also wrote about Gould's famous 1955 recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Gould recorded this piece again in 1981 just before he died.



There is no video available of Gould playing the Goldberg variations. Gould made his name playing this until-then obscure work by Bach. In his first US concerts he also played even earlier and even more obscure works by the English contrapuntalists.

This video of Gould playing Orlando Gibbons' *Lord of Salisbury Pavan* (1612) is from *The Alchemist*, a 1974 documentary on Gould by Bruno Monsaingeon. A pavan(e) is a slow

processional dance originally from Padua, the most famous example of which is probably Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899). Gould shows his austere ecstasy.



Joan Mitchell, *Canada I Triptych*, 1975

Some of that austere ecstasy is represented in this large triptych painted by Joan Mitchell (1925-1992). Like *Canada* the painting is difficult to comprehend, dark as well as light, balanced. Joan Mitchell (1925-1992) was an American painter and long-time companion of the Canadian painter Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923-2002). This painting is in the AGO exhibition *Mitchell/Riopelle: Nothing in Moderation* – open until May 6, 2018.



Northern Voices

Beginning

Eagle, 1979
Robert Davidson

We could have concluded with Mitchell's view of Canada, but we shall add a print by the Haida artist Robert Davidson (1946-) representing *Eagle*. The print actually shows Davidson's family heritage. On the outside mainly in black is the Eagle; inside is Frog. Both require each other – the eagle's beak is in the frog's legs and the frog's mouth is in the eagle's tail. Difficult to comprehend, dark as well as light, balanced. Northern Voices.