

Welcome to the last session. The illustration brings us back to the beginning when we discussed indigenous cultures before the Europeans set foot in the new world. It shows the Thunderbird with its inner human spirit. We have been trying to understand a little about Canada from its poetry. Trying to sense its inner spirit. Trying to discover the idea of North.


**Joni Mitchell (1943- )**

Born in Fort Macleod, Alberta and brought up in Saskatoon, Mitchell briefly attended the Alberta College of Art before leaving for Toronto, where she busked on the streets and sang in the Yorkville clubs. Several singers (Judy Collins, Buffy Sainte Marie and Tom Rush) covered her songs. Her early recordings *Clouds* (1969), *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970) and *Blue* (1971) brought her fame. She is recognized as one of the great song-writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.



A crucial event in Mitchell's early life was giving up her baby daughter Kelly Dale for adoption. She had become pregnant in her first year at the Alberta College of Art and Design. She had to decide between becoming a single mother or a successful musician. Mitchell met with her daughter later in life but they were never really reconciled.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Mitchell suffered from Morgellon's Disease, a skin disorder of unknown etiology, and this kept her away from the public light. In 2015 she had a stroke from a brain aneurysm and is slowly recuperating.



I've looked at life from both sides now  
From up and down, and still somehow  
It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life at all

The illustrations – painted by Mitchell - are from the album *Both Sides Now* (2000). This traced the history of a relationship using many different modern songs as well as two of Mitchell's hits (*Both Sides Now* and *A Case of You*).

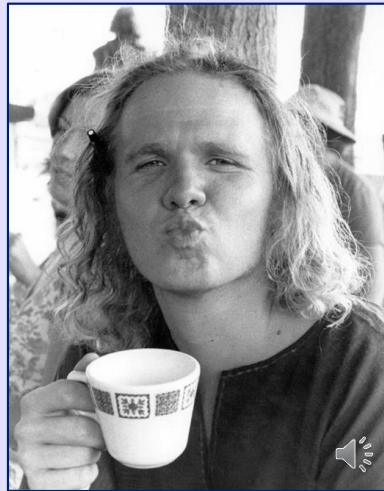


Woodstock was a music festival held from Aug 15-18, 1969, on Max Yasgur's dairy farm in the Catskill Mountains northwest of New York City. Approximately 400,000 young people attended. Artists included Richie Havens, Ravi Shankar, Arlo Guthrie, Joan Baez, the Grateful Dead, Credence Clearwater Revival, Janis Joplin, The Who, Jimi Hendrix, Joe Cocker, Crosby Stills Nash and Young. Despite the rain, the festival became one of the enduring symbols of the 60s generation and their desire for peace and love. Joni Mitchell was not at Woodstock but her song about the festival became an enduring symbol of the search for lost innocence that occurred in the 1960s

I came upon a child of God  
He was walking along the road  
And I asked him, where are you going  
And this he told me  
I'm going on down to Yasgur's farm  
I'm going to join in a rock 'n' roll band  
I'm going to camp out on the land  
I'm going to try an' get my soul free  
We are stardust  
We are golden  
And we've got to get ourselves  
Back to the garden

**bpNichol (1944-1988)**

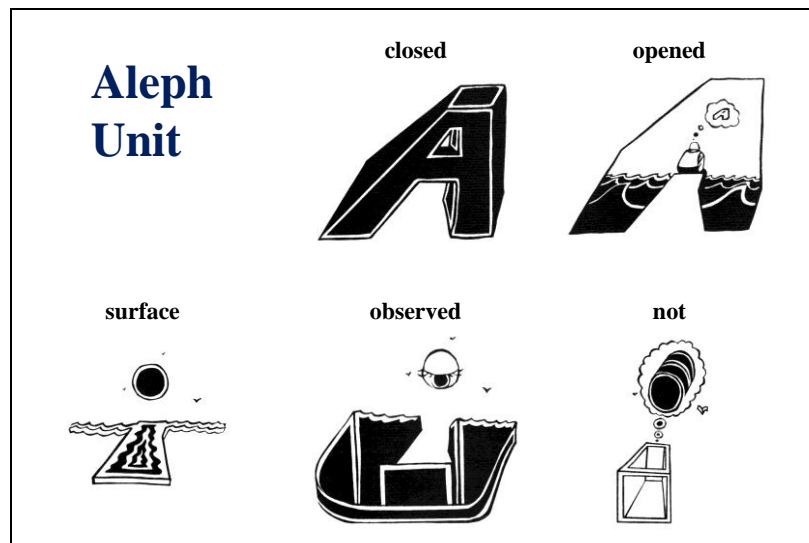
Barrie Phillip Nichol was born in Vancouver and educated at the University of British Columbia. He became famous in the 1960s in Toronto for his “concrete poetry”- poems in the form of visual art – and “sound poetry” recordings (for which he often collaborated with a group known as *The Four Horsemen*). In the 1980s he wrote for the Children’s TV program *Fraggle Rock*. His major work is a huge multi-volume poem called *The Martyrology* (1967-1988). He died during surgery for a tumour.



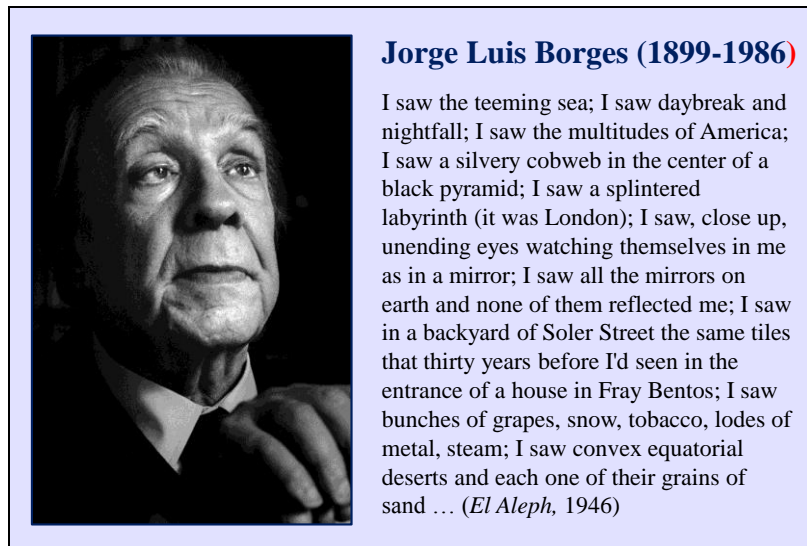
The audio is the beginning of *The Alphabet Game* from the 1972 recording *Ear Rational*. This and many other recordings are available at <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Nichol.php>



bpNichol lane west of and parallel to St George just below Bloor. Site of the Coach House Press.  
 Photograph from Jerrold Litwinenko's blog  
[https://www.blogto.com/arts/2008/11/concrete\\_poetry\\_in\\_bpnichol\\_lane/](https://www.blogto.com/arts/2008/11/concrete_poetry_in_bpnichol_lane/)




As well as sounds, bpNichol was fascinated by the physical format of letters and words. He published several graphic alphabets as well as graphic variations on single letters. In this one he portrays the letter A as seen from different perspectives. This presents the idea of self, the self's perception of the world and of itself, the self's ability to consider the other.




Because of top-down processes, perception can occur without sensation – the imagination. This is the Argentinian writer Borges. Toward the end of his life he became blind. Yet he could always see things in his imagination. The passage is from one of his famous stories, *El Aleph*.

# **from The Martyrology Book 1**



i've looked across the stars to find your eyes  
they aren't there  
where do you hide when the sun goes nova?  
i think it's over  
somewhere a poem dies  
inside i hide my fears            like bits of broken china  
mother brought from earth  
   millenniums ago  
i don't know where the rim ends  
   to look over  
into the great rift  
  
   i only know i drift without you  
into a blue that is not there



bpNichol created a large epic poem entitled *The Martyrology*. This continued until his death, at which time there were 9 books. The beginning sets the scene in an unknown galaxy in the future. The poet speaks to his absent love, standing outside a shrine to the saints/martyrs of the galaxy. The end of the world is near – the sun will go nova before the year's end.

Depending on its size a star dies in different ways. A large star may expand to become a red giant before collapsing into a white dwarf or a black hole. Smaller stars may explode into a nova during their gravitational collapse.



Though bpNichol is describing an imaginary future, the feelings are very similar to the present – a sense of doom, a loss of love, and the failure of religion to provide any answer.

Furuike ya  
kawazu tobikomu  
mizu no oto  
(Matsuo Basho, 1686)

Old pond –  
frog jumped in –  
sound of water  
(Lafcadio Hearn, 1898)

(bpNichol, 1988)

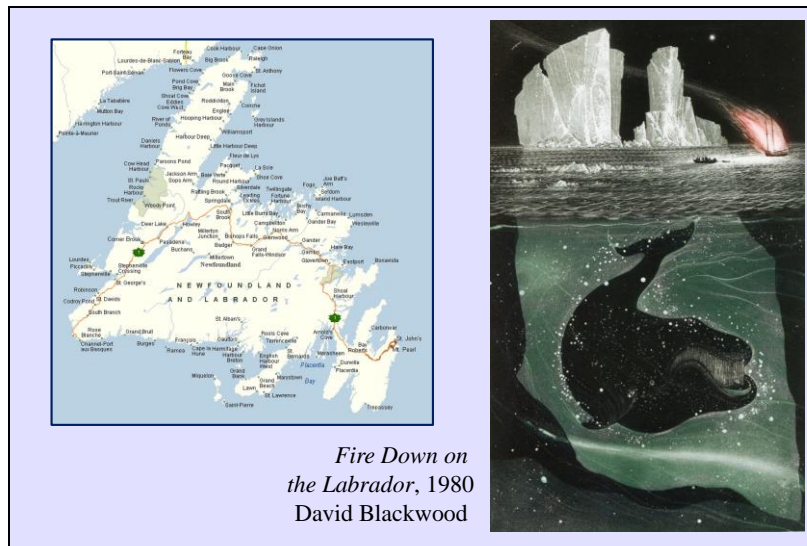
水蛙古  
の飛池  
音込や  
む

The most famous poet of Japan is Matsuo Basho (1644–1694). And his most famous poem is the haiku about a frog jumping into an old pond. A haiku has three lines and a total of seventeen syllables (5, 7 and 5).

Haiku are very difficult to translate. bpNichol provided a visual translation of Basho's poem. The statue of Basho is in Ishiyama Station.

**John Steffler (1947- )**

Born in Toronto, Steffler spent his childhood in Thornhill. After studying at the Universities of Toronto and Guelph, he moved to Newfoundland and became a Professor of English at Memorial University (until 1998). He served as Parliamentary Poet Laureate from 2006-2008. In 1985 he published *The Grey Islands*, a book of prose and poetry, that derived from spending a summer in isolation on an island off the coast of Northern Newfoundland.



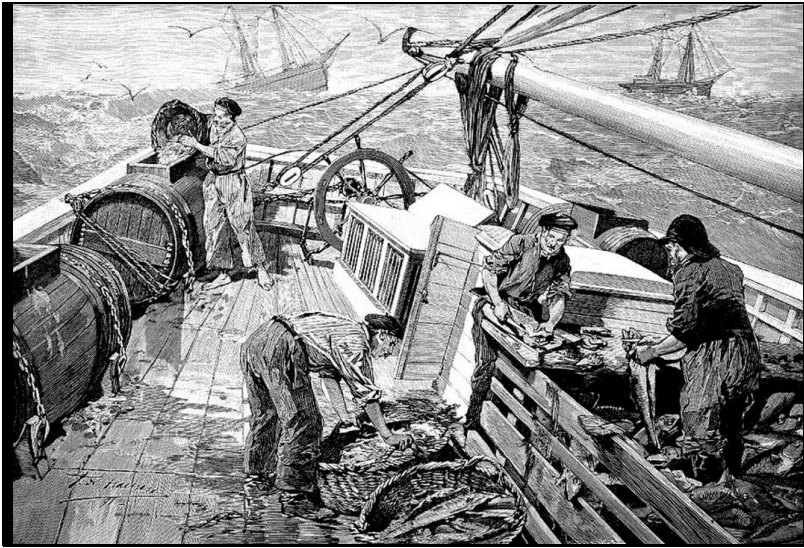
The Grey Islands are off the eastern coast of Newfoundland's northern peninsula. Icebergs flow down from the Labrador Sea. Whales are common in the waters. David Blackwood (1941- ) is a Newfoundland printmaker.



Photograph of rough seas by Corey Arnold. Such were the waves when Steffler was taken out to the Grey Islands:

scoured sky. wind  
and open miles.  
all morning we climb the bright  
hills cresting across our course,  
pitching us up, sledding us sideways  
down, wallowing, walled in water.

quick. near us  
and gone,  
    slim birds flit low, banking,  
twisting, skimming the closing troughs,  
and I feel it,  
    know it a laughing  
fact: the harder your hungry eyes bite  
into the world (the island cliffs pencilled  
in blue haze, and *there*, Nels pointing:  
whale spray!  
    huge flukes kicking at the sun), the more  
you spread your arms to hug it in,  
the less you mind the thought of diving under,  
  
eyes flooded. gulping dark.



This 1891 wood-engraving shows the activities on a codfishing ship. The guts are removed and the head is cut off. Then the fish is filleted and the bones removed. The fillets are put into barrels with salt to preserve them.





the world suddenly seems to be all  
alive, blood running inside  
of us and outside of us, inside  
our hands and over them, with little  
between the two, a cover of skin



Steffler made friends with some of the fishermen and they took him out to harvest the cod from their net.



### **Anne Carson (1950- )**

Born in Toronto, Carson completed her Ph.D. at the University of Toronto in 1981, and did postgraduate work in Greek at the University of St. Andrews. She has taught classics at various universities and is currently an artist in residence at New York University. Carson received a MacArthur Fellowship in 2000. She has written many volumes of poetry and essays and translated several Ancient Greek plays, most recently Sophocles' *Antigone*. She is often introduced as a "Canadian who teaches Greek for a living."

### Short Talks

You can never know enough, never work enough, never use the infinitives and participles oddly enough, never impede the movement harshly enough, never leave the mind quickly enough



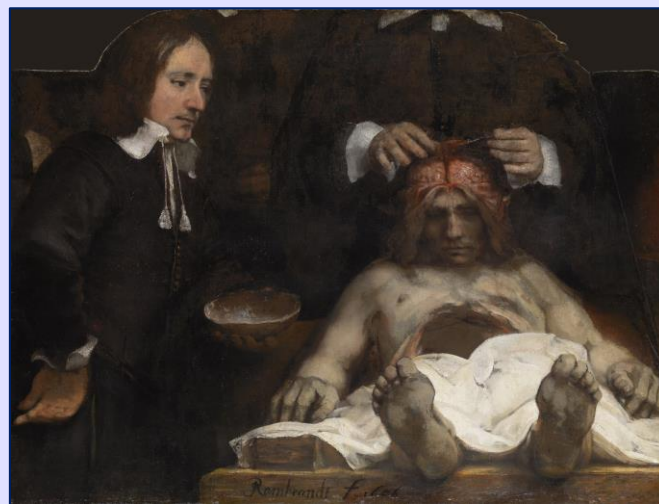
The dead, after all, do not walk backwards but they do walk behind us. They have no lungs and cannot call out but would love for us to turn around. They are victims of love, many of them.



Untitled, 1994  
Betty Goodwin



*The  
Anatomy  
Lesson of  
Doctor  
Deijman*  
Rembrandt  
van Rijn  
1656




The illustration on this slide is *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deijman* (pronunciation: dee-eye-man). It is only a fragment of a larger painting that was severely damaged in a fire. The professor demonstrates the membranes surrounding the brain of the thief Joris Fonteijn, who had been executed by hanging. The original painting showed the professor dissecting the brain and an assembly of students observing his work. The fellow on the left is a simple assistant. He is holding the calvarium – the top of the skull that has been removed

#### Short Talk on the Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deyman

A winter so cold that, walking on the Breestraat and you passed from sun to shadow you could feel the difference run down your skull like water. It was the hunger winter of 1656 when Black Jan took up with a whore named Elsje Ottje and for a time they prospered. But one icy January day Black Jan was observed robbing a cloth merchant's house. He ran, fell, knifed a man and was hanged on the twenty-seventh of January. How he fared then is no doubt known to you: the cold

weather permitted Dr. Deyman to turn the true eye of medicine on Black Jan for three days. One wonders if Elsje ever saw Rembrandt's painting, which shows her love thief in violent frontal foreshortening, so that his pure soles seem almost to touch the chopped open cerebrum. Cut and cut deep to find the source of the problem, Dr. Deyman is saying, as he parts the brain to either side like hair. Sadness comes groping out of it.



### My Religion

I had a vision  
of all the people in the world  
who are searching for God  
  
massed in a room  
on one side  
of a partition  
  
that looks  
from the other side  
(God's side)  
  
transparent  
but we are blind.  
Our gestures are blind.


read by  
Russ Kick

*Indian Church, Emily Carr, 1929*

Russ Kick (1969) is an American writer and activist.

### Antigone

Juliette Binoche in  
*Antigone*, Sophocles  
Barbican, 2015



the unwritten unfailing eternal ordinances of the gods  
that no human being can ever outrun.  
Of course I will die Kreon or no Kreon  
and death is fine. This has no pain  
To leave a mother's son lying out there unburied  
that would be pain

Nielsen as Kreon and  
Mara Lee as Antigone

We may act as we are told or we may follow our own conscience. This is often considered as following our intuitions of a natural law. This is the oldest system of human ethics.

Sophocles' play *Antigone* (441 BCE) considers the issue of the natural law. Antigones' brother Polynices rebelled against his brother Eteocles, the ruler of Thebes. Both brothers died in the battle. Creon became king of Thebes and forbade any funeral rites for the traitor Polynices. Antigone defied this order, claiming that the code of Heaven required her to do so. Creon condemned her to death.

The full interchange between Kreon and Antigone in the Carson translation used at the Barbican (and different from Carson's *Antigonick* (from which the recording comes).

KREON [to Antigone]: Answer me this and no long speeches

you knew this deed to be forbidden by decree

ANTIGONE: of course I did

KREON: and yet you dared to disobey the law

ANTIGONE: well if you call that law

KREON I do

ANTIGONE: Zeus does not

Justice does not

what they call law did not begin today or yesterday

when they say law they do not mean a statute of today or yesterday

they mean the unwritten unfaltering unshakable ordinances of the gods

that no human being can ever outrun

these laws live forever

no one knows how they were born

you thought I would transgress them

for fear of some mere mortal man's decree?

no

Antigone's speech in G. Young translation (1906):

nor did I deem

Your ordinance of so much binding force,

As that a mortal man could overbear

The unchangeable unwritten code of Heaven;

This is not of today and yesterday,

But lives forever, having origin

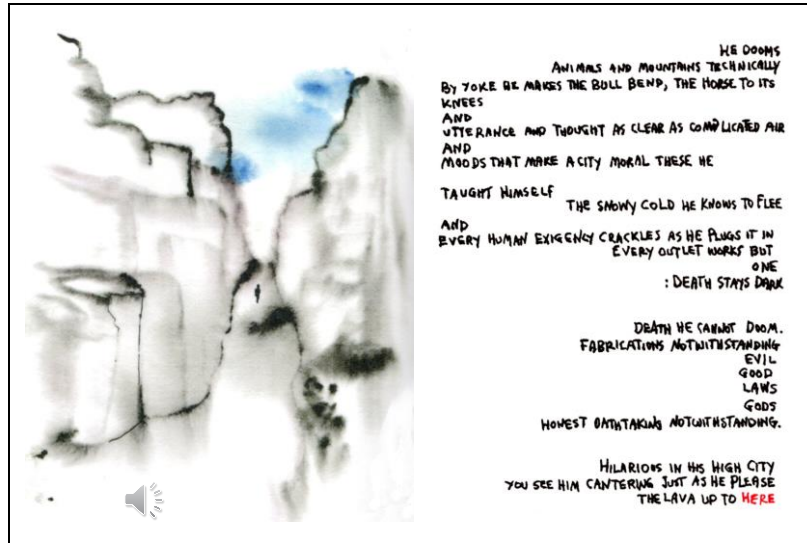
Whence no man knows: whose sanctions I were loath

In Heaven's sight to provoke, fearing the will

Of any man.

Antigone represents the right to civil disobedience, the priority of individual conscience over social obedience.

Modern productions of the play are clearly on the side of Antigone. However, it is possible that the original viewers of the play might have been more sympathetic to Creon who represents the rule of law. There is a second tragedy in Creon's stubborn refusal to compromise or to heed the wishes of the people of Thebes. Jean Anouilh presented a version of the play during the German occupation of France. Though the play supports rebellion, it also makes a case for the need for government, and the occupiers enjoyed the play.



This shows two pages from Carson's translation of *Antigone* – *Antigonick* (2012). Bianca Stone created the illustrations for the book. Many of these were highly surrealistic.

Carson and colleagues presented a read-through of this translation in 2012 at the Louisiana gallery in Denmark.

<http://channel.louisiana.dk/video/anne-carson-performing-antigonick>

The audio recordings for this slide and the previous slide were taken from that performance. Carson reads the Chorus, Mara Lee is Antigone and Nielsen is Kreon.

This recitation is the famous *Ode to Man*. The Chorus reviews the history of humankind, his achievements and his failures. The ode considers how wonderful is the creature called man, who can navigate the sea, cultivate the land, tame the animals, build homes for protection against the elements, and find medicine for his ailments. Carson's version is quite modern and loose. The following translation (Gibbons, 2003) of the beginning of the ode attempts the rhythms of the Greek:

At many things – wonders  
Terrors – we feel awe  
But at nothing more  
Than at man. This  
Being sails the gray-  
White sea running before  
Winter storm-winds, he  
Scuds beneath high  
Waves surging over him  
On each side  
And Gaia, the Earth  
Forever undestroyed and  
Unwearying, highest of  
All the gods, he



Wears away, year  
 After year as his plows  
 Cross ceaselessly  
 Back and forth, turning  
 Her soil with the  
 Offspring of horses.

### Dionne Brand (1953- )

Born in Trinidad, Brand came to Canada at the age of 17 years to study at the University of Toronto. She withdrew from her graduate studies in order to write, becoming a successful poet, novelist and essayist. Her themes are the black and lesbian experiences. She was the Poet Laureate of Toronto from 2009 to 2012. She is currently a professor of English at the University of Guelph. Her recent novel-length poem *Ossuaries* (2010) about the travels and experiences of Yasmine, a young revolutionary, won the Griffin Prize.



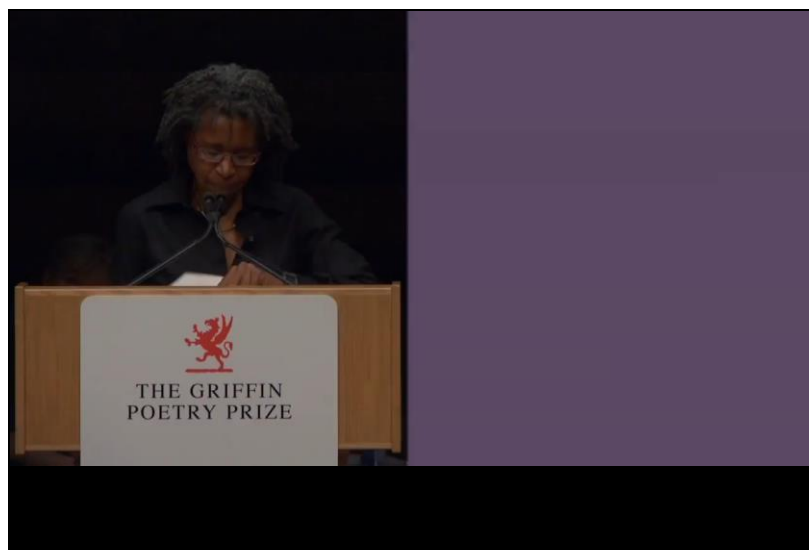
all these roads heading nowhere, all  
 these roads heading their own unknowing way

*Winter Road West of  
 Georges Lake, 2015*  
 Christopher Pratt

This poem gives the immigrant's impression of a cold and indifferent country:

Out here, you can smell indifference driving  
 along, the harsh harsh happiness of winter

roads, all these roads heading nowhere, all  
 these roads heading their own unknowing way,  
 all these roads into smoke, and hoarfrost, friezed  
 and scrambling off in drifts, where is this  
 that they must go anytime, now, soon, immediately  
 and gasping and ending and opening in snow dust.  
 Quiet, quiet, earfuls, brittle, brittle ribs of ice  
 and the road heaving under and the day lighting up,  
 going on any way.



This video can be obtained at the Griffin Poetry Prize website  
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/see-and-hear-poetry/a-g/dionne-brand/>

This section of the poem deals with Yasmine's visit to Havana.

Some notes:

*Tupelov* is a Russian plane. This was a mainstay of Cubana airlines in the 1970s and 1980s.

The *Malecón* is the spectacular road/esplanade along the seawall in Havana. Before the revolution the houses along the Malecón were the most beautiful in Havana. Now many of them are in disrepair. Walking along the Malecón in the evening breeze is one of the great Cuban experiences.

*Jineteras* and *Jineteros* are the male and female prostitutes in Cuba

*Coppelia* is a famous ice-cream store in Havana. The large modernist building was built in 1966.

"*Bird*" refers to Charlie Parker (1920-1955), the great jazz saxophonist. He often played in Havana, which before the revolution (1953-59) was a popular jazz centre (Tropicana, Copacabana). He died a victim of addiction and alcoholism.



### Jan Zwicky (1955- )

Born in Calgary, Zwicky studied at the Universities of Calgary and Toronto. She has taught philosophy at various universities, most recently the University of Victoria where she is now Professor Emerita. Her philosophy is poetic in style, e.g. *Lyric Philosophy* (1999/2014) and *Wisdom and Metaphor* (2003/2014). Her poetry is often concerned with music or philosophy. The 1998 poetry book *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth* won the Governor General's Award.

Photograph by  
Pearl Pirie



That long trill  
is a hand that lifts your hair  
a final time, sunlight, a last kiss  
that knows it is the last.  
And the phrase that follows:  
a small voice talking to itself, how  
some moments are so huge  
you notice only little things:  
nicks in the tabletop, the angle of a fork.  
Drink. It  
is what you will have  
to remember:  
rain's vowelless syntax,  
how mathematics was an elegy,  
the slenderness of trees.



Nils-Erik Sparf

K 219 is the Fifth Violin Concerto ("Turkish") according to the catalogue of Mozart's works made by Ludwig von Köchel in 1862. This concerto was written in 1775 when the 19-year old Mozart (1756-1791) was in Salzburg.

The posthumous Mozart Portrait is by Barbara Krafft (1819)

The recording is by Nils-Erik Sparf and the Uppsala Chamber Orchestra.



*Fuga*, Leonard Brooks, 1961

### Art about Art

One of the features of modernism is that it considers prior art as valid a subject as any object in the real world. Modern poetry refers to previous poetry through allusion and quotation, and considers other forms of art such as painting and music.

**Ekphrasis** – the description of one work of art by another, most commonly the verbal interpretation of a work of visual art:

**notional ekphrasis** deals with an imaginary work of art, and

**actual ekphrasis** deals with a real work of art

Zwicky's poem about Mozart's violin concerto and Carson's Short Talk about Rembrandt's painting are examples of *ecphrasis* (or *ekphrasis*), the formal term for art about art. The word comes from the Greek *ek* (out of) and *phrazo* (describe, interpret). Brooks' painting attempts a visual representation of music.

In the ancient Greek ekphrasis was simply concerned with the verbal representation of anything in the world. Later it came to mean the verbal description of paintings or statues. In recent years the term has been broadened to cover any work of art about another work of art in a different modality. Thus we can have musical representations of paintings (*Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky) or poetic representations of music (*The Weary Blues* by Langston Hughes)



### Diana Brebner (1956-2001)

Born in Kingston, Brebner grew up in Montreal and studied at the University of Ottawa. She published three books of poetry before succumbing to cancer at age 44 years. Her final poems were published posthumously in *The Ishtar Gate* (2005).

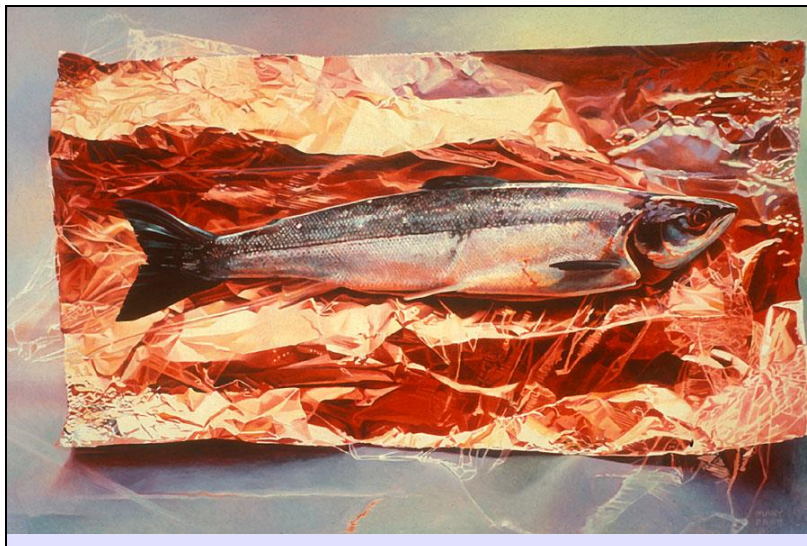
Unfortunately there is very little information available about Diana Brebner. The only photograph on the internet has very low resolution. Most of the information available concerns the Brebner Prize awarded to emerging poet in the National Capital Region.

## Christmas Fire

And, after Christmas,  
the tinsel and paper, the packaging we  
disdain, all the barriers that keep our  
mysteries under wraps, everything goes  
to the fire barrel. Now a second celebration  
can occur: the drum, all rusty, all  
lettered with ancient names, glows in the  
snow, a body that burns with a life  
of its own. How we feed it, all the things we  
would have disappear. And it burns, it burns  
the fierce light of the dying but undeparted.



*Christmas Fire*, 1981, Mary Pratt



This is *Silver Fish on Crimson Foil* (1987) by Mary Pratt.

This is the river of blood, the salmon run;  
so ruthless, in their dark bed, the dusk years

bring to bear, upon anything, or all things  
that we care to call dreams. You want to  
believe it will be easy, clear & fluid; life  
looks you straight in the eye, and you flourish.

You want to believe: if you swim like crazy  
everything turns out right at the end. Now,



I ask myself: What bloody river is this? I set  
my mouth (that wants to gape) stubbornly shut.

I carry on, one silver creature on the heraldic  
field, companion to lions and unicorns, worthy

of shields. I carry on. Up the river I go  
to my crimson foil, the river, and bed,

that I am carried on; and the blue heavens  
will move, reflected in all, and the silver

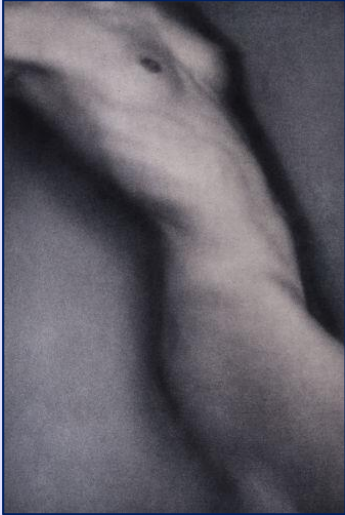
fishflash of my joy will shout, and then  
every good thing will be words in my mouth.

### **Anne Michaels (1958- )**

Born in Toronto, she studied at the University of Toronto, and began her literary career as a poet. She then tried her hand at a novel with *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), which won the Orange Prize. She continues to writes both fiction and poetry. She was appointed poet laureate of Toronto in 2015. She has collaborated with other artists, such as John Berger with whom she wrote *Vanishing Points* (2005), and the artist Berenice Eisenstein with whom she produced the book *Correspondences* (2013).



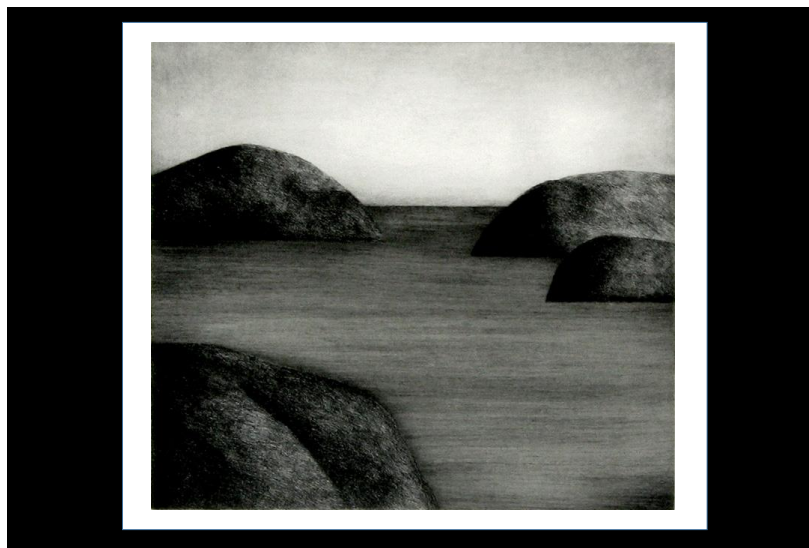
portrait by Marzena Porgorzaly, 2008



### Skin Divers

Again we feel  
how transparent the envelope  
of the body, pushed through the door  
of the world. To read what's inside  
we hold each other  
up to the light.

*Nude*  
Sheila Metzner



This is an aquatint/etching by Mark Strand (1998). Strand (1934-2014) was born in Prince Edward Island but lived most of his life in the United States. He studied painting and became both a poet and an artist. He taught at many different universities, ultimately serving as Professor of English at Columbia University from 2005-2014.

Anne Michaels' poem is in memory of her friend. It describes the framing of an etching, entitled *Black Sea*. Somerset is a special type of paper used for etching. A manifold is a surface without corners.

Mark Strand also wrote a poem entitled *Black Sea* (2008):

## Black Sea

One clear night while the others slept, I climbed  
the stairs to the roof of the house and under a sky  
strewn with stars I gazed at the sea, at the spread of it,  
the rolling crests of it raked by the wind, becoming  
like bits of lace tossed in the air. I stood in the long,  
whispering night, waiting for something, a sign, the approach  
of a distant light, and I imagined you coming closer,  
the dark waves of your hair mingling with the sea,  
and the dark became desire, and desire the arriving light.  
The nearness, the momentary warmth of you as I stood  
on that lonely height watching the slow swells of the sea  
break on the shore and turn briefly into glass and disappear . . .  
Why did I believe you would come out of nowhere? Why with all  
that the world offers would you come only because I was here?

**George Elliott Clarke**  
**(1960- )**

Born in Windsor, Nova Scotia, Clarke studied at Waterloo, Dalhousie and Queen's Universities. He has been interested in the Africadians of Nova Scotia, the Loyalists and slaves who settled there after the American Revolution and the War of 1812. His most famous book of poetry is *Whylah Falls* (1990), which tells the stories of those who lived in a fictional Africadian community. He has served as the Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2016-2017) and is presently Professor of English at the University of Toronto.



### The River Merchant's Wife

While my hair was still cut straight across  
my forehead  
I played about the front gate, pulling  
flowers.  
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing  
horse,  
You walked about my seat, playing with  
blue plums.  
And we went on living in the village of  
Chōkan:  
Two small people, without dislike or  
suspicion.  
At fourteen I married My Lord you.



Read by Jodie Foster



Painting by Mary Wallace

Clarke's poem derives from a famous translation of a poem by Li Po by Ezra Pound. Pound published a translation of Li Po's (8<sup>th</sup> century CE) poem in 1915. At the time, Pound knew no Chinese and his translation was based on notes of Ernest Fenollosa, who had studied Chinese poetry with the Japanese professors Mori and Araga.

#### The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter

After Li Po

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead  
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.  
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,  
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.  
And we went on living in the village of Chōkan:  
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.  
At fourteen I married My Lord you.  
I never laughed, being bashful.  
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.  
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.  
At fifteen I stopped scowling,  
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours  
Forever and forever, and forever.  
Why should I climb the look out?  
At sixteen you departed  
You went into far Ku-tō-en, by the river of swirling eddies,  
And you have been gone five months.  
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.  
You dragged your feet when you went out.  
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,  
Too deep to clear them away!  
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.  
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August  
Over the grass in the West garden;

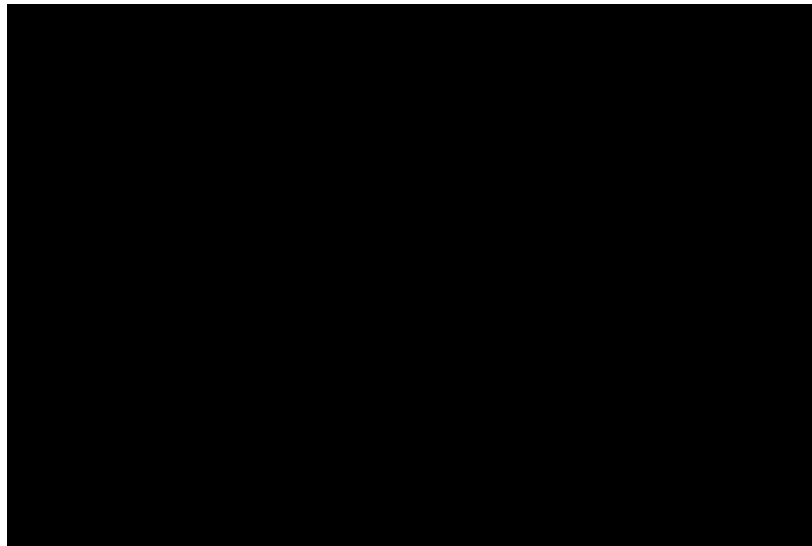
They hurt me.  
I grow older.  
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,  
Please let me know beforehand,  
And I will come out to meet you  
As far as Chō-fū-Sa.

Li Po's letter is from the young wife to her travelling merchant. Clarke's poem is a letter from the traveller X back to his love, the beautiful Shelley Adah Clemence, 18 years old and worried that X will return after his years away studying up river to court her with "words pilfered from literature."

The Sixhiboux River is the Sissiboo River in Southwest Nova Scotia. I am not sure where Beulah Falls might be though there are various falls between Halifax and the Sissiboo River

Clarke tells an anecdote about a woman sitting next to him on a train who asked him to read her one of his poems.

I recited *The River Pilgrim: A Letter* with some gusto – and even joy. But my listeners reply jolted me: "It's very good, but it doesn't sound Canadian"



Clarke's jazz rendition of *Everything is Free* with Ron Davis SymphRONica, and Shelley Hamilton.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4XuKa0OrRE>



**Steven Heighon (1961- )**

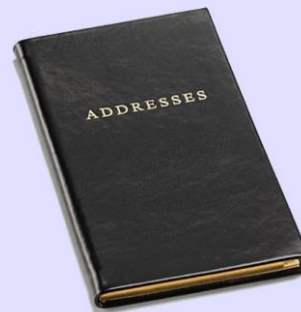
Born in Toronto, Heighon grew up in Red Lake and studied at Queen's University. He spent time in China and Japan before returning to Kingston. He has written poetry, novels and short stories. His most recent book of poetry *The Waking Comes Late* (2016) won the Governor General's Award. He states that "Interest is never enough. If it doesn't haunt you, you'll never write it well. What haunts and obsesses you into writing may, with luck and labour, interest your readers. What merely interests you is sure to bore them."

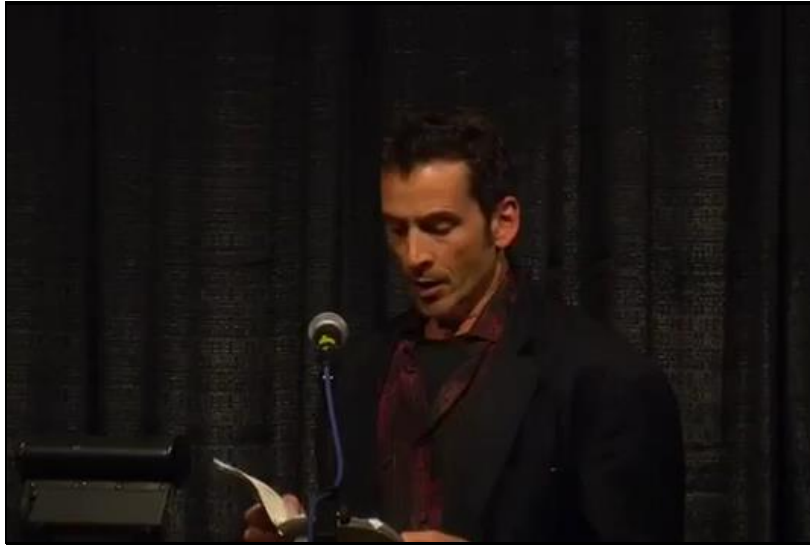
**The Address Book**

Bad luck, it's said, to enter your own name  
and numbers in the new address book.  
All the same, as you slowly comb  
through the old one for things to pick

out and transfer, you are tempted to coin  
yourself a sparkling new address,  
new name, befitting the freshness of this clean-  
slating, this brisk kiss

so long to the heart-renders





There's a final bedtime when the father reads  
to his daughter under the half-moon lamp.  
The wolf-eyed dog sits guard on the snowy  
quilt at their feet—ears pricked, head upright  
like a dragon on its hoard—while the daughter's  
new clock ticks on the dresser. When the father  
shuts the book, neither feels in the cool sigh  
cast from its pages a breath of the end—  
and how can it be that this ritual  
will not recur? True, this latest story  
is over, *Treasure Island*, which held them  
a dozen nights, but "the end" has arrived  
this way often before. Maybe she's tired  
of the rite, or waking to a sense of herself  
revised? Maybe he's temporarily bored,  
or unmoored, reading by duty or rote,  
turning deeper inside his own concerns.



**Michael Crummey  
(1965- )**

Born in Buchans, in central Newfoundland, Crummey studied at Memorial and Queen's Universities. His 1998 book *Hard Light* contained poems recounting tales of Newfoundland and Labrador. His later novels *Galore* (2009) and *Sweetland* (2014) became very successful. His selected poems were published in *Little Dogs* (2016).



The boy watches his father's hands. The faint blue line of veins rivered across the backs, the knuckles like tiny furrowed hills on a plain. A moon rising at the tip of each finger.

Distance. Other worlds.

They have a history the boy knows nothing of, another life they have left behind. Twine knitted to mend the traps, the bodies of codfish opened with a blade, the red tangle of life pulled from their bellies. Motion and rhythms repeated to the point of thoughtlessness, map of a gone world etched into the unconscious life of his hands by daily necessities, the habits of generations.

On Saturday mornings the boy waits at the border of company property, rides figure eights on his bicycle beside the railway tracks, watches the door beneath the deck head for his father coming off night shift.

Late September.

His father emerges from the mill in grey work clothes, a lunch tin cradled in the crook of one arm, his hands closeted in the pockets of a windbreaker. They head home together, past the concrete foundation of the Royal Stores that burned to the ground before the boy was born. Past the hospital, the hockey rink. The air smells of the near forest and sulphur from the ore mill and the early frost. What's left of summer is turning to rust in the leaves of birch and maple on the hills around the town, swathes of orange and coral like embers burning among the darkness of black spruce and fir.

The heat of their voices snagged in nets of white cloud. Their words flickering beneath the surface of what will be remembered, gone from the boy's head before they reach the front door of the house on Jackson Street. The mine will close, the town will col-lapse around them like a building hollowed by flame.

It will be years still before the boy thinks to ask his father about that other life, the world his hands carry with them like a barely discernable tattoo. His body hasn't been touched yet by the sad, particular beauty of things passing, of things about to be lost for good. Time's dark, indelible scar.

### Newfoundland Sealing Disaster

Minds turned by the cold, lured by small  
comforts their stubborn hearts rehearsed,  
men walked off ice floes to the arms  
of phantom children, wives; of fires

laid in imaginary hearths.  
Some surrendered movement and fell,  
moulting warmth flensed from their faces  
as the night and bitter wind doled out

their final, pitiful wages.

*The Mirage*, 1965  
David Blackwood



One of the most searing stories of Newfoundland is that of the Sealing Disaster in 1914.

<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/politics/sealing-disaster-1914.php>

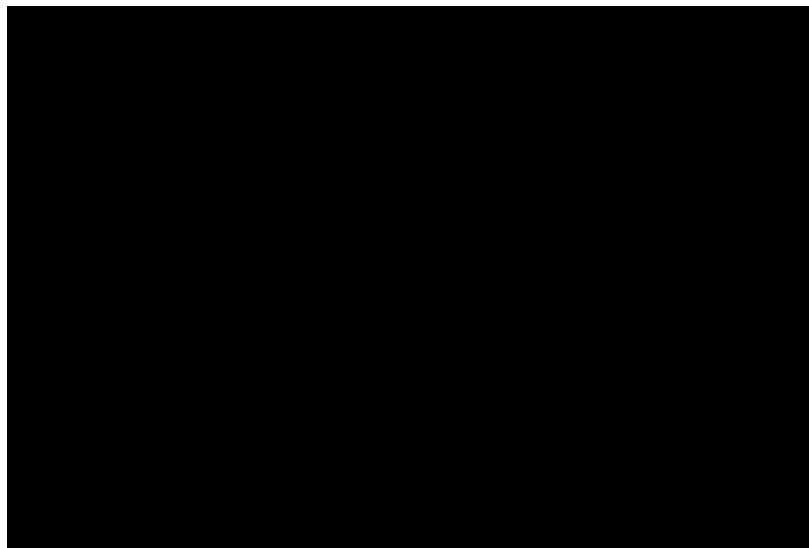
The sealing ships would go out to the ice flows off the coast of northern Newfoundland and Labrador and send the men out on the ice to kill seal pups and harvest their skins. On March 30 of 1914 132 men from the SS Newfoundland were stranded on the floes for two days during a severe blizzard. Two thirds of the men died, many hallucinating and going off into the water after visions of help. At about the same time the SS Southern Cross sank without trace, perhaps because of overloading, when it was returning from the seal hunt. All 173 men on the ship died.

### Christian Bök (1966- )

Born in Toronto and educated at Carleton and York Universities, Bök became an expert in “constrained writing” – wherein what is written is limited in terms of the words or letters. His book *Eunoia* (2001/2008) won the Griffin Poetry Prize. *Eunoia* (“beautiful thinking”) is the shortest word in English to contain all 5 vowels. Bök currently teaches at the University of Calgary.



Bök’s work is related to a group of French writers called Oulipo (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, *Workshop of potential literature*), which began in Paris in 1960. Prominent among these were Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec and François le Lionnais. They wrote using many different sorts of constraints: novels without a single example of the letter ‘e’, writings using only one vowel, palindromes, etc.



This is a reading from Chapter I of *Eunoia*. All the vowels in all the words are “i”. Please excuse the low resolution.

<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/see-and-hear-poetry/a-g/christian-bok/>

The poem *Vowels* is constrained to use only those letters in the title.



loveless vessels  
we vow  
solo love  
we see  
love solve loss  
else we see  
love sow woe  
selves we woo  
we lose  
losses we levee  
we owe  
we sell  
loose vows  
so we love  
less well  
so low  
so level  
wolves evolve

**Stephanie Bolster (1969- )**

Born in Vancouver, Bolster studied at the University of British Columbia. Her first book of poems *White Stone: The Alice Poems* (1998), a book of poems about Alice Liddell and the fictional Alice of Lewis Carroll, won the Governor General's Prize for Poetry. She is presently a Professor of Creative Writing at Concordia University in Montreal.





Alice Liddell as Beggar Maid  
Charles Dodgson, 1858

### Dark Room

We're here, the three of us, lit by one candle.  
Dodgson's wrist dips into solutions;  
he nudges a glass plate to make her be there

sooner. Standing on a box, Alice peers down  
when will she appear in the slow mirror  
that is not a mirror? A flame wavers, kept  
far away

so it won't burn, kept small so it won't  
ruin her  
development. Two faces wait above the vat  
where Alice will loom little, stopped.

Alice Liddell was photographed by Charles Dodgson when he visited her family in Oxford. Dodgson became quite taken with her and she became the inspiration for his books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) published under the name Lewis Carroll. Much has been written about the nature of the relationship between Dodgson and Alice.

### Seawolf inside its own Dorsal Fin (Robert Davidson, 1983)

I sleep in the red of my rising  
arc, curled tight and finned  
within fin, rocked by black  
water I rock. I learn this one part  
of myself, each degree  
of its curve, how the water  
foams against warm skin.  
My fin learns me, the thing  
it is part of but does not  
belong to. We make each other,  
my fin and myself, myself  
and the taut water.

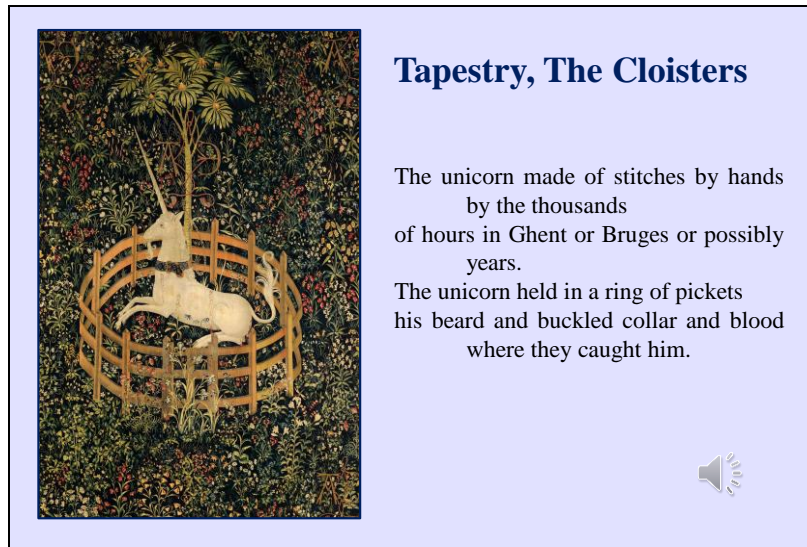


The sea wolf or arctic wolffish is a large and rather ugly fish found in the North Pacific (*Anarhichas orientalis*) and North Atlantic (*Anarhichas lupus*). It has a very large head and its dorsal fin extends the length of its body. In a way it is defined by its dorsal fin.

The graphic art of the indigenous peoples of the Northwest is constrained in many ways. The image must fit within a regular outline – usually rectangular or circular. The different

components of the object depicted and then fit together within the outline. The components are mainly made up of ovoids. Only a few colours are used – usually just red and black.

All art is free expression within the limits of a form. Poetry can be described as speech within the limits that set the lines, rhythms or rhymes. Bök's poetic work sought out very strict constraints. Northwest graphic art shows a similar concern with form and its limitations.



This is one of the tapestries in The Cloisters a museum of medieval art located in Northern Manhattan, and run by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The other tapestries in the series represent the hunt for and capture of the Unicorn, a symbol of spiritual purity. The exact meaning of the series is not known

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-mystery-mets-unicorn-tapestries-remains-unsolved>

from the museum's description:

"The Unicorn in Captivity" may have been created as a single image rather than part of a series. In this instance, the unicorn probably represents the beloved tamed. He is tethered to a tree and constrained by a fence, but the chain is not secure and the fence is low enough to leap over: The unicorn could escape if he wished. Clearly, however, his confinement is a happy one, to which the ripe, seed-laden pomegranates in the tree—a medieval symbol of fertility and marriage—testify. The red stains on his flank do not appear to be blood, as there are no visible wounds like those in the hunting series; rather, they represent juice dripping from bursting pomegranates above. Many of the other plants represented here, such as wild orchid, bistort, and thistle, echo this theme of marriage and procreation: they were acclaimed in the Middle Ages as fertility aids for both men and women. Even the little frog, nestled among the violets at the lower right, was cited by medieval writers for its noisy mating.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/467642>

Bolster's reference to Venetian glass likely links to the *millifiori* style of glass



The waves recur like the verses of a poem. Rhythmically repeating but not completely regular.

What can we say about Canada and its poetry?

The poetry is as diverse as its peoples. The indigenous peoples have been as productive as those who came later though they have not been as well recognized. For a long time we have been blind to their presence and importance. Poetry occurs in both major languages of our country though there is not much in the way of interaction between them and recently not as much translation as could be desired. We are all immigrants to this country and we have yet to become comfortable. Those who have been here the longest – the indigenous peoples have a much deeper understanding and should be listened to.

To repeat a part of Newlove's poem The Pride from the first session:

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

in our desires, our desires,  
 mirages, mirrors, that are theirs, hard-  
 riding desires, and they

become our true forbears, moulded  
by the same wind or rain,  
and in this land we  
are their people, come  
back to life again.

Writers in Canada do not divide themselves categorically into poets, song-writers and novelists. Art wishes not to have boundaries, though talents can be specific. Canadians have produced many narrative poems – stories documenting how we have survived. And many Canadian poets have become novelists. The north is lonely, beautiful and hostile. Landscape is a common a topic for both poetry and painting. Survival is a defining characteristic of Canadian culture. To quote McOrmond's poem that derives from Glenn Gould's 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.