

Ontario

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Calesius C.B.

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I

So tell us why a dapper man of silver hair
Bronze tongue was required to mediate and repair
Long after his red flame had cooled in Ontario
And few picked him as a guide to tomorrow.
Well, he was available for public function,
Long eased by private wealth, had no compunction
About lending his good name to conflict resolution:
And he knew of Solomon confronted with two sides' positions.
Indeed, his first words on the problem, despite flung abuse
And assertions of those involved (the most obtuse),
Were not mad. That is, the only course for clashing claimants
White and aboriginal was to don new raiment
And to each other talk, negotiate,
Within each camp to self-interrogate
About the justice of competing cries
So as to find some satisfaction for both tribes,
At least a decent chunk thereof.
For no absolute solution would float from above.
Different, to be sure, was the reigning perspective
Among certain Caledonians made restive

By Iroquois' burning tires and blockades;
Nor did compromise seem central to the tirades
Of Mohawk fundamentalists and fighters
Long fed up with Euro-hypocrites and liars.
This plot of land around the Grand is ours,
All simply said. Across the cop-staffed line they'd glower,
One side citing papers signed, commercial law,
The right of common sense, the other noting history's maw
Is full of ruptured promises and thrusts
Cloaked in legalities and entreaties to trust
A people apt to grab and kill and steal.
"This was Native before Plank Road ever felt a wheel."
"Look," said the hunkered Mohawks begun a dig,
"We've discovered longhouse fragments (not fuel for a rig)
Proving this is truly our Grandmothers' realm,
Earth from which we harvested the strong-backed elm
To cover our canoes and follow liquid trails
Over what is now a bedlam sprouting towers and jails."
Some simply said the land was from the British given
In perpetuity, later slyly taken
Sans vrai consentement, while voices seemingly more radical

Insisted British had no right to grant a parcel
They had purchased from some Mississauga lacking claim;
These latter Indians who'd placed their name
On Captain-General Haldimand's old deed
Were interlopers who'd never in Ontario's deep spear sunk seed.
In other words, a past receding in dense mist
Was proof of rights, not signatures or understandings missed.

Our thesis: only love and history truly answer shouts today
And grant the leading premise of what that dapper man did say
(If not some solution that he might next month unveil
Or starchy recipe for peace destined to later, sooner fail).
But history not as flabby tales of dubious significance;
Rather scenes of our investigation and our glance
That unveil joys and skeletons of old Ontario
As it lived in fact, even if we borrow
Fancifully to fill in times quite full of holes:
White vacuums marring the history writer's goals.
This is a pragmatic method; the past in reality's intact
In the sense of no emptiness between each fact
But our record is of course a ripped-up cloth

Chewed and enjoyed by Time's ravenous moth.
Our best? Stitch in our most plausible yarn
And hope the result does not veracity disarm
(So that our try is an approximation,
And granted, not the truth in its full incarnation).

II

Thus it is that not far from Caledonia
(Or on its very spot) houses echoing Iroquoia
Puffed smoke and shaped a yard
While in gold-blue space, cornstalks filled Aronhiaie's regard.
She stared, set her pestle on the ground
Stopped turning maize-flesh into snowy down.
An old man, trunk against a longhouse wall
And chiseling a raccoon pipe, averted her grey pall
For Aronhiaie wasn't who she had been in her joy
When Teonogan heaved his sticks and toys.
In her now ruled gaunt shapes and howls
And sudden jabs running up the bowels
Though she tried to keep the rhythms of the day.

It had been a glowing morn in what others named bright May
When they had wandered, riverside, with several children,
Mothers, aunts in search of tubers for the cauldron
And bursting berry fruits plus whichever rabbit thought to lunge
From underneath the brambles so to plunge
To safety in the deeper green. Work, tranquillity,
No fear of raids from north or east to break neutrality
(Though Fire People from the west could always come;
There was no guarantee their warriors would not succumb
To temptations to hit back for outrages done
To them in other years, but there had been a quiet run
Of late, and dread was not the mood for the Attawandaron,
As neighbours called these People of the Deer.)
Soft-spring pressing underfoot, gurgles of light cheer,
Adult women digging, fruit-hefty bushes emptying,
Squirrel-hunt, friend-chasing legs of youngsters scattering
Into trees' embrace that made boys disappear from there
And further still, so mothers knew nothing of the bear
Until the screams *she* knew to come from Teonogan.
The crowd of juice-smear'd girls and matrons ran
Through saplings and their fathers' shade into a sunlit scene

Hysterical, fur-blotted space of death's black dream.
The cubs the boys had found were up a tree
But mother's jaws were clamped to child-life wiggling to be free,
Then spasmodically, at last relaxed – after whirring rocks and sticks
Then crow-tailed arrows flew, making deadlier the group's
projectile mix
And the sow mixed dark and chestnut perished too.

Can the pieces of our earth great gravity eschew?
Are they doing that when up they flash
To smother even as our spirits crash?
That's how she felt, what she sensed, in her swoon
As the shredded boy was laid out 'mongst the shoots.
In fact, a fold of earth full-covered her
And then drew back in a fast blur
Announcing end, she thought, to all being
That now or once had in her body lived, knowing
Her own spirit choked after the tended one expired.
Aronhia collapsed, riven, in Earth-Hell's mire.

In such a space she'd lengthily dwelt,
Been a most-time resident, her anguish quelled
In instants and only for instants forgetting,
Brief skips and spots of the old life shining
Like lit islands on infinity's gloom-lake,
Spots that in her paddling she might overtake:
Tormentors' aids more than breaks of consolation.
Or open spots in a Carolinian forest constituting stations
Bathed in brightness but briefer than three strides
(Deer people more apt to walk than over water glide),
Useless to refounding joy's old town.
Her own mother tempted her with foods of wide renown,
Concerned about the shrivelling of her form;
After decent mourning from her flesh had shorn
The weight that one can bear
She continued suffering in a fashion rare,
Or at least discouraged amongst a people
For whom life was prized and bountiful
Though struck by thunderous blows with frequency
Such that the reigning mood was battered glee.

In fact the breezes kept their honey smell
And the glorious roof o'er trees, spread well,
And even infinite, was gloriously blue
Most days, holding ecstatic cries that flew
From arrow beaks then through arms darted
And to most persons happiness imparted,
Stroking rich tones in the atmosphere
As if dipped in colour-blends never known a peer
Outside their pigment-aural group.
While she remained, *apparently*, captive of her agonizing loop,
Locked in that temporal point when great jaws clamped,
Though Nature went on bursting gorgeously stamped.
And there resides the notion that's essential:
While Now is filled with all that's potential
And can't but have the past within it,
Difference is the quality of each rolling minute;
That is, staticity's a myth, quite false
So that a wet Spring night at last brought cries then calls
To friends and God when there emerged a glowing face
New and old, one of many, not to erase
Thoughts of the delight who'd been

But to remind that after 'ends' we can begin
So that Aronhiaie sensed that in some fashion
The vanished boy was present in her renovated passion.
In the gurgles and the smiles and shrieks,
The frustrations and all of tiny anger's piques.
Then once more she took an interest in the communal pulse,
Exuded glee when Deer warriors were not repulsed
By wounded and embittered foes out west
Or blocked a raid by those same fighters in a bloody test.
Life back, if never gone, if incomplete,
Life's air, at times free even of its tinge, was sweet
To a woman near a broad lake's shores
Whose night-laps mixed with the long-tail's roars.

III

Ochatagain slipped off in the holy night
Beyond the baby maize and into trees
To take deep breaths and dampen quivering fright
And free his bowels of grips that seized
His feared and vaunted person prior to departure
In gore's direction, following the sun to death.

Only here did he expose, release that factor
Of dreaded struggle warriors are loathe to confess;
In the world still dead, before God was reborn
Ochatagain wasn't shy to shake, to press his forehead
Hard against the smooth skin of a trunk, to mourn
What wasn't glorious about the enterprise ahead
(Provided there were no souls around to see,
Friends and rivals who had known his face to war's endeavour
Always chisel-hard or dressed in smiles so cruelly
Splayed in painted instants, glory covered).
Last night there'd been a gathering to kiss the braves' departure:
A time for public presentation.
Under the Sun-Child's gaze, rapture
Made the mood, fed confidence that one more examination
Of the great Deer tribes would justify control
Of their domain's so rich, elastic spread,
String of villages that ripening boys and girls were told
Had first been placed in a radiant corner of the arrowhead –
Blessed, sprouting land the envy of less fortunate men
Like whining Wendat at the other edge
Condemned in their cheap vanity to stony ground and cold when

The gods unveiled to all the peoples their initial pledge
To make available green regions on the Turtle's back
In accordance with each nation's virtue, power, elegance.
The youth were told there'd been a pact
To place Deer people in a realm liable to entrance
Even the reddest monster dwelling in Lake Nipissing.
And here they'd stay forever, while virtue didn't slide
And esteem for fathers and grandmothers gone but dwelling
In their midst was shown in all minds' eye.

Other peoples, heaved by war and pestilence, had moved forgetfully,
Like certain Wendat 'cross the arrowhead from lake to lake
Toward the southern Bear and old Tionontate towns, so recently
Away from villages around the Carrying Place. To take
Up life anew, provoking war with those under the mountain painted
blue

(Though further from the raging, raiding Seneca).

“These harried women and their men untrue

To any homeland in its veritable sense; lacuna

In the place of living, rooted history,”

Prideful, condescending warriors of the Deer might smirk.

Though in this case too truth partly checked vainglory
For though proud Neutrals (as the French would call them) might
assert

That ground above the sea named for the Cat
Was theirs since memory began, unto Time's furthest reach,
They should (as others did) have cited their own stumble back
That followed, dramatically, a council on a western beach
When warriors had heard the women old and young entreat
The chiefs to move their furthest villages
Away from cunning Fire People seeking their defeat
And pressing on with raids and pillages,
To send those western towns days closer to the Ongniaahra falls
Until 'Neutralia' condensed into a heartland safer than before.
In other words, boasters and the fact of walls
Retracting 'round the realm were mutually acquainted. But truth
implores,
Can never impose a readjusted gaze,
A turning of the mind imbued with honesty.
Most told themselves that this retreat was just a phase,
A gathering-in before a sweet and utter victory.
Later on. Sometime. In any case, bravado's certainty

Was the public song Ochatagain offered
Once hard war was opted for definitively
While conscious too that such a posture needed to be watered,
Tended by fear's tears and the shivering of desperation
Which he now shed and suffered
By himself, unspied, with just hard oak and elm in consultation.
Certainly, it wasn't just or mainly death he dreaded
But agony beginning in his tortured skin and joints
Signalling unravelling of a world that seemed imbedded
In reality but did, he knew, have numerous points
Quite vulnerable. Could his very flesh of these be one?
His right hand squished black ground beneath a fern
Until it gave no more. Above a gently fashioned run
For voles a Grand Duc sated sat and turned
Its head of yellow orbs. Silence. And then the warrior was done,
Walking back from trees into the new-born light
Revealing contours of the common
That abutted corn and ran right to the tight
Formation of those round and pointed palisades.
The others, whip-cord, wiry men, were close-lipped gathering.
For the custom, at the commencement of all raids,

Was to journey quietly and seriously, not fearing
Discovery on one's own territory, obviously,
But to set an ambiance appropriate to running
Men's great test. It would be unseemly
And an insult to the dead to joke and gambol
In the shadow of the realm into which they soon could pass.

Yet as their day stretched through their travel
Ochatagain failed, despite the coming maelstrom,
To resist the pleasures of a laughing sense inside;
For here it was again and still, the world, his world,
His belonging to the world.
Straight westerly on trails through glistening boughs
At first they walked to meet up with a group of others
Armed and from two neighbouring towns,
Ounontisaston and Teotongniaton,
Capitals of those who penned White-tails.
And then they swung again toward the water of the Cat,
Its sparkling crests to follow to their quest
That was, somewhere, beyond its rivery end
And past a smaller lake shaped like a head-dressed man

Inhabiting the thick-haunched body of some beast.
A quest of screams and groaning expiration shifting spatially
According to the village choices of the Fire foe.
But now a kind of love Ochatagain felt,
Kindled by that tingle, hot and cool
Of bright sun-splash on the aqua spread way out.
What glory, even Victory's, could match this kind?
The question jabbed him over and again.
The trail would break and there, to the left,
Was spread that second sky that shared the sun
With the one above,
That received its awful, lovely force, absorbed it and diffused
Across the crested plain that ancient, golden flash.
Most lovely certainly when these men's pebbled path snaked
Up to higher ground and the spread of liquid light
Could be imbibed that way,
From midway 'tween the skies,
Pouring through some pine boughs spread their fingers
Somewhat in the way.

Chattering tails of grey and red burst on Deer's route;
Striped squirrel cousins arrowed under logs.
Above on sturdy branches curled in daytime sleep
The masked and tactile pilferer
(One of whom was dropped impaled to roast,
Consumed with cakes of corn meal and a soup of white
In which dried fish were bubbled almost back to life).
New petal faces purple, red, came poking out of shoots;
The Broad-winged raptor crouched upon his branch
Seeking tiny rustling meat, having given up
The currents of high sky until the babes were grown
And it was time to soar back past the Aztecs' home.
Ochatagain's eyes fell on a shallow pool with lily pads
By a trail curve on their way
So that he saw not green but greens
Pulsating and exchanging places on those plants
Such that their surfaces lost epidermal quality
And turned to, rather, openings in multi-layered
Selves (until at last he thought he saw their beating hearts).
Where he was headed, or rather unto what,
Buried itself deep in Ochatagain's dark head,

Like the Snapping hardback into winter mud.
The singing oak-town lives above
Instead took up this thoughts,
The canopy's brown Marten mates
Themselves pausing to watch the passing file beneath,
Perhaps reflect upon disparity between priorities
That marked the lives assorted coinciding in the forest on that day.
(Or not. Their similarities could also be a theme.)
Or so ideas like these winged in and out of the
Decorated Deer's strong brain as his feet followed feet
Above the water named after the long-tailed cat
And those men south of it
Adoptive of her name so smooth
 And imitative of her slink.

One of his favourite places
On this trek to prisoners and gore
Or captivity and death slowly administered
Or quick demise in liquid battle's flow
Was a spot beyond a marsh and right before small cliffs
That loomed just over sandy strands

Of beach that made a ribbon
‘Long the lake. Loveliest
About this little stretch on the Cat Lake’s side of marsh
Was the way soft grasses claimed dominion
From their taller, tougher kin for thirty strides
Before the edges of the cliff, presenting
Passing travellers with the opportunity
Of sweet lawn rest. But the men just paused, looked carefully
And tactically, not slipping out too far grass-ways
(For things were well along and who knew
If Deer mightn’t meet a Fire party planning blows
They intended to administer rather than absorb)?

IV

Quietly men went, smoother, shadowy,
Over land abandoned as a living space
(Though used of course by hustling painted parties
Of various persuasions, in their race
To deeds and misdeeds up-land and down,
All trying to be furtive snakes
Neither slinking spotted

Nor tromped on under old leaves rotted).

Now at dinner time hearths were cool
Since leaping tongues of heat were signs
That after rendering plain fare beautiful
Could for the hunted their pursuers define
In black's covering of western lands
Or even at grey's dusk or the bright mauve flickering
When the party paused from their night walk
To chew, then curl up under trees, avoiding talk.

Then appeared a morning's indication of a group,
A fishing camp quite small just on the move
That raiding Deer decided they would scoop
Next evening's fall, after Ochatagain felt bound to reprove
Young hotheads eager for a launch in day's fresh light.
So tense, men passed the resting, dwindling hours
Until the brackish liquid of the sky
Washed over blood-shot eyes.

Delicately, cat-like, along a small lake's bay
Braves' forms pressed ground and broken things.
Why this carelessness on Fire fishers' part?
The lovely spring of course.
Across a clear stretch, mostly women, older men:
Whirrrrrr..... Puchchchch
Deer arrows shocked, crow feathers wagged from out a bloodied
neck,
Then panic wailed its lonely howl
As a pair of skulls were split by rocks held in a club's curved grasp
And roughly arms were bound behind bent backs.
Before the captives roped joined marauders in a line
Deer warriors feasted on the thick-flanked Whitefish hung
While spitting threats and promises
Toward the damned, mixed in with bones.

Then on. Boys watched the prisoners
Who would not say just where the nearest village was
Though thorns were run red-welling through their tongues
And sharpened sticks in lower parts slow thrust.
It's harder, after all, to find Fire People's towns

Than to locate population centres in Neutralia's heart,
As raiders knew quite well and scoffed
At their more mobile foes who full of fear
(Deer say) refused to plant and stay
For years and years as a village of the Deer would do,
Only moving when the earth grew tired
Of bright maize, bulbed squash, tobacco and sweet beans.

Studious of glances, shimmers on the captives' faces,
Warriors figured when a direction chosen was likely to be right
But they were briefly tricked in this as well,
For Fire prisoners they feigned distress
Just when the army's walk aimed further from their town.
And then, in daylight hours, one broke a bond
And ran, bounding mink-like into trees
Chased wildly by ten Deer.
But after all, these were the edges of Mascouten territory
And the runner, older though he was,
Knew the crevices and routes just like the Lynx
Who traced and dropped on rabbits in the shade;
The pursued one melted in the light-splashed world.

V

Fierce Deer at last directions squeezed
With taunts about a people's cowardice from one long cut and
drained,
So that their violent train found spools of smoke,
Fires that defenders didn't choke
But rather chose to stoke before the foreheads of an enemy
For whom they'd had a chance to ready
Having warning from that fleeing brave.
Proudly repelled by the prospect of a life as slaves
The Mascouten had extended invitation to wild fight
To show these Iroquoian dogs some western might
And make them reconsider following the sun
To war when their blood heated with the rivers' melting run.
Indeed, when Attawandaron men, thick slew of them,
Unfurled their sprinting wave they saw they'd not be exempt
From anguish in the clearing where brown wigwams crouched
(No palisade for these tough people vouched);
For a fat contingent of Fire braves had rallied,
Rushing from another village too, allied

By kinship, love, and hatred of the Deer tribe foe,
Outnumbered still, determined to enormous courage show
Even if the Earth Beast hinted prospects dim
Looming over this green battlefield burning his sardonic grin.
So both sides raged, their fury fuelled
By fear, each by vows to never crumble ruled.
Ochatagain, after crouching down to let sharp arrows fly
Into several chests ranged on Mascouten's side
Rushed headlong to the fray, swinging
His balled club stone-cold, spraying
Life-juice at the ground an hour ago
Consecrated to the games of babes and old
Men padding to the trees for shade.
Next, Ochatagain lunged aside, made
Feint then ducked to evade the swinging thrust
Of a mesh-maned giant daubed yellow and rust,
Mascouten fighter whom he'd seen on other days –
Once in fact deep in Neutralia's heart on a wild raid
Hot Fire-threaded at their foe the Deer
When this great timber-muscled man with dripping sneer
Had, they knew, split the face of Sundakwa,

A handsome youngster who'd proudly worn a necklace of bear claw
And once had aided Ochatagain with a Wapiti he'd slain.
Helped carry slabs of organs, meat in fact, then gifted with the brain
(That delicate slab of sweet so smooth when bubbled
With slim leeks grown rampant here, untroubled
By the absence of a cultivating hand that paid its heed
To squash and maize of course, and to the seed
That sprang out as the smoking plant.)
Now Ochatagain slipped aside but a great blow on him glanced,
Shooting pain that rattled shoulder-down –
Stymieing quite suddenly his fight so he felt bound,
Momentarily at least. Then after cautionary flight
He whirled and shifted fast a stone-blade weapon from left hand to
right,
Rushed in so that the other man was fooled sufficiently
To give an opening, and into heat the blade struck rudely.
Then Deer's warrior crouched, one knee down
In the thick of battle's storm, swinging injured limb around
In the pattern of a hunting hawk's wide loop
Tilted on its side, and felt a saving tingling, and saw re-group
Mascouten who were being pushed by numbers greater

But discovering that dread and slipping hope are generators
Of great thrusts: thus stifled at close range, defenders
Took back steps and loosed a wave of arrows at attackers'
Surging ranks, dropping several, shattering a tide
Temporarily at least, so that Ochatagain saw a scalper stand astride
Soneiachasenni, his life seeping from a slender pole
Well-staked into his chest, sinuous young man placed in a role
He never would have chosen back around a distant bay,
Soft home, lolling in the summer's moon and feeling liquid cradle's
 sway
As he, perhaps, speared fish.

A cut, two tugs and wild air's swish
And the young man's hair was brandished
In the maelstrom's midst. But a diversion then tarnished
The scalper's moment, for as he shouted
A rage-fuelled axe, hurtling true, clouded
His broad forehead brown then scarlet
In a brilliant stain that flowered, painted
Hard demise on our sap-dripping earth.
Two Attawandarons next identified a rival with a dearth

Of shafts and swarmed him, two on one,
Also convinced by his discarded club they'd won
Since the fighter now had just a knife
Of sharp-edged chert, thin blade between his life
And the intentions of this growling, charging pair
Who sought his rushed commitment in despair
Which would free the untargeted man
To sink a blow or a blade slam
Into unprotected belly, flank
Of the Fire Nation foe. But the pair couldn't thank
This brave whom calm did not abandon while he crouched,
Waiting, determined, ready and self-vouched
Not to die in error at least. Meanwhile,

The father-star was high, a flaming pile
Of middle-morning heat, though not cruel enough
To dissuade two tail-daubed birds of prey in ovals rough
Sketching on the sky above. At length these hawks moved off
Replaced by other avian guests anticipating an organic trough
In which to plunge their bald red heads to feed
While less interested, the clans of chickadees followed the lead

Of brothers first to zip from branch to branch.
Above but hardly distant from the fight sat a crow in trance,
Apparently, voice still, gazing into blue beyond
Or perhaps at the glimmer of a somewhat distant pond
Where he, more than infrequently, dipped to drink
And upon the lives of fishes think
Before racing off in quest of tasty nestlings to impale
Or pleasant berries set to burst or carrion in some stage of stale.
Of course at times he glanced the battle's way.
Human themes weren't entirely uninteresting to this cousin of the
 jay
Insightful and night-black (if no negation he), curious about wide
 Being
And all its beings too, but declining
To bestow unusual importance on what was turning into carnage
On the field below, even if a certain tarnish
To his life an arrow wildly stray might add.
Slim chance. The action now, again, was clubs and jabs.
Perched in his Crownness, he dismissed the chickadees,
As rolling crests and dips and sheaths
Of leaves and slim appendages shimmered in spring's slightest

breath;

Up down in silent trips on trunks transporting wealth
Went ants, night-garbed just like the studying bird
But unlike him, engrossed by micro-cosmic words
And messages that didn't prime a hefty avian brain.
Small clouds of bugs resembling rain
That resisted falling earthward added to the atmosphere,
Helped speck this instant of reality, this here
And now of poorly grasped but sheer totality
Not rent, not stitched, Substance 'spread' inseparably.
This was so, though fighting men and the insect haze
And birds devoted to their sudden snacks and ways
Air's rivulets can be plied on run or escapade
Into the blue that sweats white sunlit streaks
And covers all the happy or disastrous weeks
That constitute a feathered life –
This was so though all lives present, in their way, thought of the
world as rife
With discreet parts, developments and sections,
And who could blame them for this evaluation?

In the distance crouched blue-wooded hills
And there a sow, two cubs, took of shoots and roots their fill
Not an eighth-day's walk away
From the human killing beginning only now to stay
After outnumbered, drubbed Mascouten men still standing
Fled after their families in amongst the trunks and saplings
In the rear. The Deer, victorious perhaps, had failed to close
A noose around their foes, wiler by far than white-tailed does
So easily penned at home. Such that while no one could say
The eastern party had been vanquished on this crimson day,
A bitter taste, variously derived, settled in the tonsils
Of the Neutral fighters as they torched the brittle walls of broken
lodges
That yesterday were children's shelter and sites of friendly smoke
Rising up 'mongst mates, men who jokes
And a roasted loin of venison had shared
Some thousand times. But whose flesh was now bared
To springtime elements, not wintry cruel
But without the insect-chasing hearth that wouldn't fool
The rankled enemy in the manner cool and silent darkness could,
Thus saving hurt Mascouten in their vast wood

Until they made their way unto a greater village,
Secure from Attawandarons' grim pillage.

VI

Indeed, it was the truth Deer tastes were bitter;
Theirs was anger crackling like hot logs collapsed
After flames lie low but before wood withers
Into ash. For when the battle had elapsed
It was clear that Neutral losses had in quantity
Occurred, that bodies who life-sparked
Had journeyed from corn-bordered villages, freely
(They considered) now flopped limp, cruel-marked
By dour, final realizations on their faces –
Mere matter spread on grass and dusty molecules.
The souls of 14 braves had been erased:
On the invading side an onerous fee that could only fuel
Resentment and frustration for a force that saw success
In either resounding victory or blood *just* shed
From foreign veins. Let others' duress
Be the bad side of war, while we on glory's bed
Rest after battle – safely home with those we love,

Protect and cherish. There are no people so deserving, after all:
Such was the view of most who dwelt above
And to the west of the great vertical cascade whose squall
Can soak a visitor a decent run away
From where the foaming stream of white spills hard.
So revenge, of all ideas, was in play
In Attawandaron minds as their war party's bard
Began to work a song about this sour success
And they commenced the slip-through-shadows march, sans torch
Back to their sun-blessed towns 'tween lakes, less rest,
Evading once, on the way, a fierce ambush's flinty scorch.
The Deer braves vowed that someday soon, not long,
They'd return to Fire regions with a massive force
And administer great woes to right all wrong
Ever dished their way by a blazing source.

VII

Infinite or dating from a cosmic birth
Our universal current ran so that
Ochatagain's strong town, from being
One place robed in brown and gold and green, became

The same but semi-buried under drifts of crunching, powder-white.
Winters, winters, more of them,
Enough to re-confirm old views of Earth (this piece)
And Neutralia as co-eternal, practically, unlikely to confront a sun
Unable or unwilling to enact rebirth.
A boy of ten stepped through a longhouse door
One late afternoon as the glow began to dissipate
Making sharper still the contrast marking
Season's glimmering sheen, knee high
From the air in shadows hung. Out he went
Furs and skins pulled on but parents unaware
That he'd grown stiff with boredom in the longhouse
Drag of pranks and dice and coloured bones
Tossed back and forth, around,
Plus all the else that's done when corn is stored
And Whitefish smoked aplenty but the snow is deep
So that time seems to merely ask that humans rest.

The truth is that great piles of snow
Were not the normal features of this milder land
And wide-spread shoes of netted hide and sinew

Not so necessary here. Most years.
The boy, enraptured by the brightness and the dark,
Stepped in crispy powder through the palisade,
Across the field toward full forest
Green and gently weighted white.

But now, oblivious to cold, he sensed things differently,
Drawn into, out of ambiance,
Mind alternatively focused on the scene spread out
Then on a tale he'd heard some days ago
Beside his longhouse fire and the sleeping racks.
A story from a warrior who traded chert
And didn't wait for bands desirous of that good
To send their buyers to Neutralia
But bore its useful preciousness to everywhere himself
In part, no doubt, because he loved to know
The world spread wide. In fact, he'd said,
He'd journeyed so far past
The watery and tree-filled territory of the Fire-men,
So many times, that he was comfortable
In lands where forest almost ended

But for patches here and there,
And the sky sloped hugely to a distant crust
That in the distance could be seen:
Blue curve infused with sun and puff shapes
Here and there, and flat grass running to the end.
Here lived great brown beasts heavier and furrer than deer
With curving blades sprung from their heads
That didn't spread like White-tail's racks
Or the palming weapons of the moose
But to a belly did a good knife's work
(Before the trampling in a crushing rush).
For in wide lake-sized tides they move, these beasts,
Far more of them than sharpened wits can measure reasonably –
These things the man had told. Some had heard the details
Many times; for the boy this was a fresh recounting.
But a description of this land had only been
The man's first step; he told the tale
Of how these massive animals had reached a pact
With the people of this flat, liquid-dissected land
Where rivers brought small sudden clumps of trees
That then gave way to ground and painted air.

For generations they had scratched
Subsistence from the edges of this plain, these men,
Pushed from the fuller forest and from warmer lands
Where corn and squashes could be grown by
War-like rivals stronger and more numerous.
Poor and pained they'd barely lived
But then one band, this traveller said,
Had made a deal with the captain of the Bison tribe
Enamoured of a human girl sweet radiant and smooth.
They agreed, the men they did, that she
Would be the bison's wife and in exchange
The herds' invincibility would be relinquished
And a certain number of the giant animals
Be vulnerable to puny humans'
Hunting styles, their arms, techniques.
And so the wedding sealed this new arrangement
(Though the story didn't detail girlish views
On this development unprecedented)
And the bison wife next morning trundled
From her village garbed in wolf's white skin,
A robe that, possibly without wearer's intent,

Caused great offence among the in-laws of the bovine bent,
A turn that in its turn provoked no deal retraction
But a small adjustment of the pact
Such that the bison tribe decided
While a certain number of their hordes indeed would fall
Just as the wedding contract held,
Easily they'd never go – and try
To take as many hungry braves as possible
In the process of the hunt.
The marriage, for its part, never cultivated joy,
Said the teller, but the deal
Meant too much to the human tribe to cancel from their end
And so (this aspect prompting fascination
On the youthful listener's part)
The bison-wife took to drifting off alone
Into the woods at night, the forest where
Her mothers lived before, steering clear of the sad plains
Until her husband searched and called her back.
Around she went in white, the wolf skin draped
About her shoulders that one day grew into wings:
So desperately did she want to soar away

That gods relented and extended her this little prize
To compensate for her great sacrifice and grief.
So here and there she flew in solitude.

VIII

Then stepping into trees still airily spaced
The boy perceived it had begun to snow
(Or resumed, the elements having slyly paced
Themselves in exercise, refreshed, ready to go
Again and layer their bright blanket still). In and out of reverie
He stared up into night behind a powdery screen
(As though the sky had spawned a great albino insect swarm,
Bugs alone among their kingdom in no need of warmth).

Stepped, crunched, heard the howling wolf-wind run,
Dropped a leg deep in a thinly covered hole.
Pulled himself out, the boy was by his brown eye spun:
A snowy shape with parts for flight fast-rolled
Through the focus of his sharpened sight
And he was sure, wanted to be so,
Felt sudden heat well up with hope and confidence,

Was enchanted by her kindly countenance.

Uncles found him easily hours on
Propped at a soaring pine's gnarled feet –
It fortunately hadn't taken them till dawn
To recognize that he had slipped from their retreat
Warm and smoking into cold. 'Why'
Was harder than 'to where' to handle
And the boy wouldn't answer satisfactorily
Though back home he smiled, perhaps gratefully.

Then mothers three rubbed his frozen body with the oil
Of autumn's chestnuts mashed. They eased him to the fireside,
Just close enough to save his frosted skin, pressed softened soil
On his cheeks, kissed his little breast and eyes,
Then helped him sip infusions drawn from conifer spines.
At last around him wrapped a Red Wolf bitch's pelt
Until throughout his form returned a ruddiness
While on his face danced flicks of dreams' caress.

Only after cure seemed sure
Was the Oqui (who'd been sleeping) called.
Across the white-blown clearing, the contrast of demure,
He burst into the families' long hall
Accompanied in minutes by his rhythmic hags.
Firestones, old eggs, he avidly flung
While aunts and mothers scrambled to secure their goods;
The Oqui liked to grab and even drag things to the woods.

But oh what action in that flickering, fetid house!
The priest wild dashing, his women tapping out a dance
And then the former pouncing like a fox upon a mouse
Before he blew his breath onto the boy in trance.
The rattle-crack, the even chant shriek-punctuated,
The flame-flecked, costumed heads of moving bear:
All these painted one under-worldly scene
That fortunately, in the constitution of a child, failed to intervene.

The Oqui even sprinted to the snow
Then back to flop in sleep
While the dancing and the singing carried on. Blow!

Screamed winter winds when the door went “sweep”
Inviting things that dwelt in warmth-drained black right in.
At last, to finish raucous treatment, feasts were ordered;
Next day relaxed enjoyment followed
While the Oqui, maize and Whitefish fed, in his dubious credit
wallowed.

IX

But then, do all firestorms copy the sun’s direction?

There were:

 Calm spring silence sounds,
Dripping and songs,
All the whistle tunes a wind through looping branches makes
Puck-puck-tsh-tsh-tshsh-shshsh
Then stopped by a word
A warning of some fiery wave
Hotter than yesterday’s burns
Threatening catastrophe, perhaps?
A razing of the garden
One had come to think on-blooming.
Words prove true.

Storms visited on neighbours farther on
In short years past
Now showed up in the shape of thousands painted rouge
And yellow, all equipped with booming sticks,
Foes once handled, peace imposed, now
Magnified to devilhood, complete with scalding tongues.
Wave of slashing cuts to a body weakened first
 By stinking fever-shrouds –
Silent smothering through air delivered
Since (approximately) Jesus babblers
 First showed up
 And Kingdom-Judgement talk became the toxic curse.
Rush. A scrambling fight-back,
Grieving silence after splintering crash.
Uncles crumpled, shoves so roughly done.
Sweat-stunk arms and growling mouths
Emitting orders in our language
Though not quite the same,
That accent other-slanted, stained.
Then stumble stumble shoved,
The ash-dry throat,

At last,

 The final look at how one elm beloved
Embraces shorter oaken babes beside?
Triangle of the mounting blue just visible.
A train too terrible to sing.
Human stock dragged east
To replenish the confederacy of pain:
 Grim tide.

X

And then ran years,
Eye blinks, nothings in the scheme
When the chickadees' song and the stretched-out caw
And a pilgrim bear's short grumble-cough
Didn't fall on fin-like, fur-less ears.
Fitting, right, that land called Neutral
By the Frenchmen then was so in fact?
Bereft of that particular member of the world
Who grants things names.
Brooks, not cited, splashed and winds shed fluff-seeds in a swirl
But never on the tops of running girls.

The ground, turned out, refused to bleed;
White-tails and lynx long-legged tended to relax.
Ghosts there may have been, but sans extension or design.
Le maïs? Un nuage de poussière.

XI

But the being tough and shrewd who fills most vacuums
Couldn't stay away for long. Snakes that spume
And wash twist down from Evergreen-full north
As they have since rocks and trees thrust forth
And these long lanes brought families
Back to their Second Stopping Place, as legend's melodies
Told them this had been, safely down after Ojibway-Mississauga
Earned defining victory in southern lands over the Iroquois.
This realm then knew the Sapiens' return as wooden blades
Again sliced sheen, not driving raids
But propelling clans through their exquisite morning,
As fresh as on the first time's roll, re-discovering
Earth blessed, then damned and blessed again,
Enjoying tree-top songs that nicely danced to bend
Green grasses much more densely sprung than from the grounds

Above the giant lake of home, where water pounds
Against a rocky, smirking shore and cold makes cultivation
Fools' endeavour. Better there to deal thick pelts for morning's
ration

Of white meal ground up in gentle, southern realms
(Precisely those these Mississauga now sought not to overwhelm
But enter in and be absorbed by, warm-enfolded,
So that they might continue lives emboldened
With an option to raise golden corn and beans
So as to boost their families' means
And thus push off the threat of gnawing famine
Which could rot bellies in the absence of sweet manna
And of herds disposed to give up roasts
To hungry hunter-gatherers who did in fairness boast
Of long survival on the Shield, but often by a thread, just).
Thus is explained the laughing, jostling thrust
Into the fertile arrow whistling in between the lakes.
Blessed lands passed on to nation of another face.

So shouts and giggles rang explosively again;
Black Bear, who heard – freshly from his winter den –

Wasn't sure if dread, caution or nonchalance was the emotion
Demanded by this novel situation.
For he'd been born after copper-coloured women and their men
Had been driven from Neutralia; nor was he then
Chased by hunting Seneca distant from their home
(Though indeed for meat these keepers of the gate had roamed
Above Ontario, and even planted short-lived villages on the north
shore).

His mother had instructed him to flee the coughing roar
Of the long-tailed cat when he was small
And the wolf that slashed in groups as well
But now these stirred in him just bear contempt,
His strength and mass rendering him exempt
From what were perils back those months and years;
Nor did these chattering stick-things *seem* stokers of grim fears.
But counting from essentially what Frenchmen called the 1680s
This realm embraced by gods was effectively assumed by
Mississauga,
As bears to their chagrin would learn
Just like the pumas and the rusty, howling snouts in turn.

XII

In contrast to previous human inhabitants

They were:

Mottled shadows slipping here and there

Silently, in little groups

Sometimes settle-pegged to stalks

But also here then gone

Then gone

Wandering between the lakes where

Mist God booms. Bodies

Gently bearing bodies ill and old

Along the lovely fingers

Thrusting in Ontario's grey waves

There forming gentle shallow bays

Where one can float and bathe and dream

Sharing mud with hard-backed turtle boys

And toads born weeks before

Just weeks.

And speaking of the Mist God's boom.

That was a place

Still carrying the Deer men's name
That told the Mississauga beautifully
About our flimsiness, our meagreness
Even as we fit into the glorious.
A gorge all dressed in green
Slashing through the earth
Even as the god grew loud
And soft refreshment soaked the air around
Up to the ghostly cloak of spray
Slung over that death-plunging, nowhere-matched ga-boom!

Speaking of bays. Sometimes
In between the thundering spray
And the delicate fingers cradling kind cures
 Part-way in between
They'd walk or paddle through bright sun
And hymns played through exquisitely wrought beaks
And open eyes on that cool spread of blue
Where Iroquois' historic rout at Mississauga's hands had been –
To seek a line of dusky, clay-caked crevices
 And cavern dens

Where spirits long had liked to hover, dwell and
Even offer consultations when taken by the mood.
Spirits who had filled these caves
Long before Neutralia, ghosts bequeathed to
Questing others now.
Along the smooth-stoned edges of a bay.

And best they were consulted after fiery tests
Like those Makade-waagosh Wag prepared to undergo
Before a raid on Sauk far to the south
A test he waited for some minutes after
Night's smooth coat had dropped over the world.

The lick of fire, burning eyes
Trying to convince this Mississauga brave
War's promised and potential gains
Were hardly worth hard clash
Not unlikely to unravel in the arms
Of an imagination-ending ghoul.

The night ablaze ten countings from the caves
Warriors sat on the ground or stood
 Preparing in their way;
Makade-waagosh Wag's visage his only part like stone.

They waited, warriors
While the daubed and dancing man
(A special type with tastes to his calling given)
Jerked with deep-earth energy
Appropriate to the task –
His forehead smeared the yellow of ubiquitous spring growths
His cheeks red red of doe's warm belly slit.

And these, these cheeks, shook shivered as he
Whipped his middle-ageing head from right to left
While prancing, two feet down then up.
And his tongue, outstandingly,
Flapped loose like an eel scooped from a stream,
Outgrowing any human tongue Makade-waagosh Wag had seen
 before.

The tongue, he thought, of a beast more aptly

Painted on a rock, or dwelling near-invisible
In the close-trunked forest's deepest shade.
But there it was, on glimmering air
Comical and fear-inspiring (the former just a trace).
And he felt prickly tides course up his rivers,
Then a fist knead in his bowels
Till he nearly ran off into woods
To flush his tremulous young self.
For who could know about this test
That for him would be a first?
They said a magic paste would smoothly dull the pain
But some had testified it failed at times
Faced with the glowing, fiery eye.
Who knew till it was done, accomplished?
Just then the dancing man approached
An older warrior one-kneed kneeling in the grass
Beside young Makade-waagosh-Wag
And thrust two fingers in between his teeth still-white
And strong from cracking chestnuts' shiny shells
In order to extract a tip and trunk of tongue.
Then out he pulled the creature pink and wriggly

(Much briefer than his own, of course)
And with a brush made soft with muskrat hair
Slapped a goo of white upon the organ
Then in a movement, blur, that really
Makade-waagosh didn't see
Deposited upon that tongue a blazing coal,
Red-orange death it seemed, the sort that enemies
Would hold against one's cock or thrust
Into a rectal place, ingredient in a nasty stew of suffering
Cooked up to lead to final, cooling death –
A cool that would in likelihood exceed all properties
Men know about the pleasant state we give the general name.
Interesting, he thought, how heats of raging pain would lead to cool
As he himself had felt a corpse to be,
Its airy spirit finally drained, released
Life's lovely, moderate warmth.
So this older brave's strong face
Maintained rigidity, declared its impassivity,
And a blade scored Makade-waagosh Wag's young gut, inside,
As he wondered on himself and the powers
Of a thick, pale paste.

The truth? Some said
The only benefit conferred by what the shaman slathered on
Was protection from a lashing burn, scorched skin,
Blacked then flaked then peeled;
In other words, that the instant's anguish
Was just as savage as could be
Then went, but for its memory, leaving
Not a physical trace of horrid incident.
Knives scored Makade-waagosh Wag's young gut...
And then the ghoul-man leaping, lunging,
Was in front of him,
Less a human than a flame of features hominid,
Or so perceived the rattled youth,
Who steeled himself to bravery,
The virtue he'd embrace even as he felt the shaman's grab
And knew the crumbling fire's
Crackly kiss on surface pink and trembling...

XIII

It was silver, blue and bright,
The stream that countered Sun in a winding way

From out a sheltered spot where light
Couldn't penetrate thick trees and rocky interplay;
Then showed a tendency to change its mind
Part-way down the trek from dead Huronia.
At which point it began to birth
Tributary babies who drew branches on the Earth.

In the itchy reeds, on the banks of one of these
As a day's hot sun ceased to sweat but splashed
Along the surface green and murky, decorating trees'
Own image in the wash, a gnarled old man tasked
With bringing home red meat coiled in a crouch,
Ignoring dull pain running through his thighs,
Trained to know that giving in to minor anguish
Destroys one's chances later on to feast or vanquish.

Silently, as motionless as a breeze-swept human thing can be
He was, because he sensed the great-palmed water beast
Would either stomp or paddle past his point quite fearlessly
Unless it sensed a motion, caught his smell at least
In which case outstanding caution on its part

Or bursting, charging rage could make schemes go awry –
Leaving hunger, injury or tromped-on death of one slim hominid
As potential outcomes of this larder-driven bid.

In fact, it was a bit unusual for the great-palmed deer
To stray to this leaf-falling, softer land
But the Mississauga, hearts and souls sprung clear
From northern rocks and spruce, knew the Grand
Prince of waterways and foliage in an intimate way
And thus were thankful rather than surprised
When familiar prints in muck and grunts in happy shade
Revealed themselves to human ears and eyes in this deciduous
glade.

Then the brittle, vegetable break of bodies sheathed in bark,
A flattening of plant forms by the shore
And a crash in waters, muscular life's wet spark
Playing on that fading gold was heard. Just before the roar
Of rage and agony as a hawk-dressed shaft slammed home
Into a mighty, chestnut flank.
Then another arrow whizzed through pollen-dusted air

To tunnel hard through lungs and blot out Moosely care.

XIV

And this green pungent land, as old as any,
With its nooks and spaces thickened by bug clouds,
Wasn't through bestowing novel jolts on many.
Such as an officer's wife quite well-endowed
With landscape skills and a diarist's pen.
For whom was built, over then a Shimmering Don,
A rough-hewn cabin that perched atop the Seine
Would have failed to impress, but here with hints of Athens shone –
Concretely (sans marbre, that is) due to pillars
Born of four strong, local trees re-staked on a veranda floor.
“Castle”-christened, north, removed from York's traders, tillers,
It was also named for young son Francis, toddling, who would
 implore
His gifted mother to let him in the edging forest ramble –
An activity/request that was never conceded.
Though convinced that Mississaugas' friendliness erased all gamble
On that safety score, she knew that had she ceded
Cinnamon boars might have posed a threat, interrupted in their berry

patch.

For he was just a tiny thing! What a place it was for her, Elizabeth!

To bloom (as well as bear) as she splashed

All stains of the Carolinian palette, a smith

Whose metal was the visual stuff of this fresh place.

Where God, she saw, had let men live quite differently:

Light, silent shadows, swift and few who without trace

Could materialize, appearing gaudily

But evanescent, so unlike

Those agglomerations of smelly human stuff that characterized

The Europes, Isles and even Indias that life

And reading's light had helped her know. Apprised

Of Mississauga's spare and slipping ways, rife

Became her notes and canvases with impressions

Of these lovely fitted, copper shapes and eyes

Carried, so it seemed, by light and in the sun's recession

Gone like visions after beige lids snap and rise.

She wondered at smooth Nature's undiminished rule

And at, inside Her hardness, all the softer parts

Like afternoons brown-late, when the lake was gold and silver

jewel.

Far out where promontory fingers of treed green held arts
And even forms of medical science
(For there the Mississauga, old and ill, she'd seen,
Came to bathe and test their calm reliance
On the herbs and roots that in some quantity were gleaned
By old-maned women, sometimes with their men, hopeful
That famed potions could prolong the pictures and the lies).
She hoped and marvelled, re-read her pages full;
Ignoring power politics, felt herself in paradise.

And that was one side of it,
The beauty of the snow-drenched boughs and floors,
Reflections on the state of men before the state.
Toboggan joys atop the frozen Don to town.
But worries, worries, played her too –
What did this world present to boys and girls,
This world, its whole and all its parts
(Not one corner tucked away in wilderness)
 To which she was, through husband
In poor health, illustrious as well,
 Irrevocably pegged and roped?

Honour, service, empire, war:
Wouldn't words like these (and more)
End by calling in their due?
Reminding God to suck more happy souls
Into that gut where room was always plentiful?
And then she'd check herself at this blasphemous thought,
Remember all her privilege and boon that class had brought
 To her, to her,
Her offspring too. Praise Him. Son and Holy Spirit too.
Still, they had acquired one huge tract of land right here;
Couldn't their sweet boy, at least, melt in,
Embraced and hidden in these cheerful trees?

Not long before the Simcoes built
One Sunday when the pleasure and the snow
Were deep, a brave on great webbed feet
Named incidentally for the hands that clap with rain
Observed a lodge's future site through trunks, unseen.
He was thinking of the coming melt,
 Of a campaign too
Already underway,

One boasting splendid victories so far
By Blue Jacket's spreading family.
War would resume when warm winds soothed that very year.
Americans, brown pestilence, would be routed and repulsed,
That was the plan.

For this young man the question was:
To travel south and west to join,
Now that he had attained a fighting age
So that... triumph could on his contribution feed?

Triumph? For Indians who'd keep a certain spread of earth?
For those who'd crushed good friends the French
And then been shamed by upstart whites?
Here, there was a town of sorts spreading by the lake,
Not distant from that salmon stream below.
What if the problem were more general?
A straighter, red-or-white theme, that's to say,
Rather than a fiddling of alliances.
For there had been a day
When no sheds sprouted down there by the shore at all.
He imagined gazing through those shapes,

That other white invention they called window panes:
Distorted, narrow view,
No clear perspective on the one true way ahead.

Indeed, the snow did melt
And a great campaign bloomed again
So that a brave who'd imagined views through glass
Found himself with warriors of multi-nations
Bulked along a line of fallen trees –
South and west, quite south and west of old Neutralia.
Ojibway brothers (even of the Mississauga bands),
Wendats long ago expelled from Wendake,
Pottawatomis as well and Ottawas, and from the local lands
Shawnee who did indeed assume a leading role
In this great Indian push to deal
A stretching, spreading beast a blow
Before it knew itself invincible.
Down here, in lands he didn't know,
Days' stride from cool blue waters that had been named
For those men of the long-tailed cat.
But not just red men brought into the rising's circle

But white types named militia men
Who came, would you believe
From that sharp arrowhead in between the lakes –
 Just that land from whence the Mississauga hailed.
One even dwelt in that small spread
Of buildings that the British called their York.
Who could imagine that?
Turf that this brave knew so well!
Trekking here fistfuls of English-speaking whites
Prepared to die at Indian sides,
 Official soldiers none,
Because they so despised
The serpent gone republican. And since, they said,
The Indians must have lands and not be squeezed
Beyond Ohio's churning river tracts,
Americans must be instructed in the art of how to live
Within the space they had
(Like rats blocked in their hole).
 Alliances, alliances,
Who could sort through this?

But what was wrong with making pacts?
Two points this Mississauga brave weighed up
As U.S. columns came his way:
The men, “red men” as white boys called them,
They had never, as best as he recalled or knew,
Been free of bleeding, hacking strife.
French-speaking men had helped his fathers
Against the hated Iroquois
(Though peace now thankfully prevailed with them);
The French they’d been good friends.
And here were these militia men, cheerful, ready, strong,
A vigorous hate to share.
But it was obvious, they were unlike the Indians;
Different sorts whose ways and actions changed all things.
Where would it end?
His father oh the Iroquois he’d hated,
Would not allow a Seneca’s right to be
But he had pointed out,
 Back when,
That at least they’d dwelt down there,
Beneath the lakes and east,

Never spreading like a blanket of black ants

That can't be turned away.

(War they'd made, cruel war

And had been richly dealt it too.)

But there they'd stayed for a great time.

Not upturning any world

Until the white-scum-needing-fur-by-bushel-load had come.

But then too late to reflect more;

The surging tide of immediate war

Was on them, fire and shattering death

Whipping the Maumee with his scorching breath.

General Wayne he was, on horseback with a massive force;

The brave understood Blue Jacket's course

Had turned over the falls

When he saw comrades, including his Ojibwas,

Break and run for English Fort Miami

Where shelter from a killing spree

Could be, even as lead balls and arrows both directions flew

And azure-cloaked Americans gasped and tumbled too.

Ungunned, he let arrows fly, then seeing

How the enemy was quickly flanking
His confederates' line, he scrambled too in fort's direction;
Soon others running back revealed with anger, stupefaction
That to Indians Miami's doors were firmly shut.
The British had not sanctioned thrusts at the young American gut,
Heard he, before the universe went softly damp and black.
Last of all he felt a root-thrust in his back.

XV

Next, a narrative jump
From prior to a lodge
Named for a boy
On turf that would at last be Slicktown
With a mushroom growing through the sky
(Its stem exceeding cap by much) –
A jump from prior to a later
All the way across the sea

Do you know Extremadura
Prairie of Iberia's wild west?
Roll, sense of Romanesco green

Reiterating, yes, again;
Lush you wouldn't say
But green with smoky blue infused on certain morns
Nose down: not merely salad but a roast

Walls and turrets crumble here and there
Avian carpets warble as they wave
Plunge up and down and then re-roof a stretch of sky
Their music's miel and Candelabrum S.

Walking there, there is no way
But to seek anomaly
Upon our Mother curved and smooth
A bushy stand, a sudden rise
 A centuries-in-the-ground fast fighter's fort
Where cavities are nurseries for Vulpes
 (Near ground)
And fliers graced with leather wings (above)

Leave Badajoz and quiet can be yours
 For days

White boy for whom the 'castle' had been named
And destined as his mother knew
For uniformed devotion
Became acquainted with a wholly different version
Of the place

He forced his mind to flowers as the pressure built
Well-watered meadows of Britannia

 The violet-grapefruit heath of Devon in the East
Fields where he had rolled
And munched on berries Straw and Goose
Learned to ride and fallen hard
Had for picnic: pies of venison and partridge stewed
Gulps of iced champagne and milk
At Honiton, sweet Honiton
The chapel where dear Daddy lay
And balls were swatted off the turf at goals
 Approached by gallop over green
Sisters wiping back his July hair
Barn owls through dusk at rats

Thus blessed
Young Francis found himself
As though detached in two
Able to digest and pass instructions
Funnelled down from Wellington
With a crystal brook's cold clarity
While another section of his mind
Enjoyed a life's review

Then he led the charge
Into an oily, blistering hail
The French he'd studied was to no avail

XVI

But more than New World-born to Europe
Europe headed here
In swarming numbers such that Upper Canada's
Old peoples couldn't help but lose their breath
(Those who still had lungs to draw).
For soon enough the draw was not a measly drain
Of that new striped republic underneath,

Loyalists enamoured of a perk or love-bound to the Crown
But hungry Europe her old self,
Her children driven by their quest to eat,
Hankering for more than hand-to-mouth,
Attracted, sensibly, by tracts described as endless
(Even if the fact was that the new Aristocrats
Plus one established pew got so much of the best).
But swarming like black bugs they were,
Not lovers of the land, the earth –
And all its lovely emanations
But possessors jealous of a parcel –
Like men toward their wives.

They were not eviler than other men,
At least not on their own
But came convinced that land their government had bought
(A notion Mississauga still could not quite comprehend)
For them should be filled up,
Not shared, nor kept accessible.
It was not ‘ownership’ itself that overwhelmed these local brains;
They could see that this coat counts to him

Or such and such a wigwam is that woman's property,
Boy's bow, girl's garb.
But turf and streams on which we tail the wind?
What sense in that?
True, it's true, they'd never made their country
Available to hunters who had harried them,
To Iroquois they'd hated back in days of old
But here the matters shouldn't be confused:
Harming or not helping enemies *ain't*
To lay invisible and measured lines of iron across the Mother's
back,
That's clear.

Whites came armed with their hard faith,
Their metal tricks that shaped the world,
The latter easing life so much
While making Mississauga worthless in all minds.
The former, it was hard to grasp,
So full of words of love but hardness too,
So often angular and sharp, constricting
People's chests who'd just been told

That all they'd ever held about the world
Was rife with "falsehoods, superstitious fable-tales."
What did that even mean, falsehood?
A lie? That someone said to once have clubbed
An enemy had just been boasting, cultivating name?
But no, they seemed to mean much more,
Unfathomable emptying more, these
Words of Christian-soldier farming men.
Indian brains, they battled hard this tide of bafflement.

And on they came, the whites, establishing that thing they called a
state
Which grew from London but set up right here as well;
It seemed related to, some way, their Lord
But higher than Himself at times.
For some told Mississauga that the Church's chieftainship
Resided with the King across the sea,
That Father Great,
Others said its only holder was the Christ
Who'd died but in a dewy dawn
Returned to life and those he loved, us all.

All this the Mississauga well had heard in centuries past
But now proximity and density of those skinned light
Increased the overall intensity. Invasion
Yes it was, without inflicted, violent death
From subtle foes who friends themselves
 They called.

And waves they came.
And towers gained,
Bricks piling to the sky:
A realm brand new.
Plus ghosts called companies that owned and
Unveiled newly painted signs
But possibly were only real in minds
And in the metal boxes where the state filed things.
Overall, the white men flourished,
 First men sunk in drink,
Forgot to fish, to hunt, to make
Canoes that didn't sink.

XVII

But the story runs ahead.

Some, just some, who'd entered sweet Ontario back when
Were not white seedlings in the '30s Christened Pat and Joe;
First trickles of the tide
Included Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga and Seneca
Who'd shown the King their love against America
When revolution broke, way back;
Post-war they're here, back in Ontario, on land
Distributed by one Rex George's generous hand;
We say "returned" to underline that Iroquois
Had been here once before, recall, as plunderers of Neutralia.
Such was the point of all these words.

And so the reader is equipped to ethically beware
When about this place sly claims are set with verbal snares,
This space where love has ruled only sporadically,
Sometimes with strength but fitfully.
Or rather, never *seemed* to count for very much
To those determined in their study just to touch
Surface appearances and give weight metaphysical

To wars between vain men for whom cruel strife is ontological
And who unhappily knew how to seize the day
Aided by conjunctures of long history, some would say,
That presented them a chance.

Yet

Neither despair nor lies will feed advance
Toward a resolution of our impasse
Of which this poem's but incidents and flash.

Start again. Not as though nothing came before
But precisely since it did,
In its shame and grime and gore.

There was no land abandoned,
Left loveless just by chance.
Title can't be won by genocide
But au contraire, contraire.
So when an innocent third party
Drifted to this 'empty' realm
Whose possessors had been slaughtered, driven off
And years and years confirmed their incapacity to come and claim

The turf above Lake Erie's shore
(Above all since they'd ceased to be,
Absorbed into the raging Seneca
Who bore the burden of the crime)...

Then then

Homesteaders Mississauga over months and years
Became the masters rightly and in fact
Of territory stretching from Ontario's north shore
(Leftward wing, for sure, no concession all the way past Kingston,
this)

To west of that Great Lake

Around the Credit, all that turf

That Haldimand indeed believed was theirs.

As for the Valley of the Ouse, also called the Grand,

And requests/demands by Oneidas, Mohawks, Onondagas –

In that case the answer is the gift

And the reference traditional.

For:

As wet May bloomed and her gifts poured

In their yearly gush

(1784)

The Mississauga made their proclamation of a present

– Even as the Brits threw £1180 their way –

To their Six Nation “brethren” in the hope that harmony

And happiness would spring

From this sweet seed, subduing memories of gore

That had so reigned so cruelly in the past.

Next, certain chiefs, including one known by the name of Brant,

Took the view that far from indivisible

This slab of turtle’s back could be chipped off

By leaders wise and peddled, here and there,

For nations’ nurture, wealth and sustenance;

Speculator-sold to satisfy the settler rush to come.

But was that quite the deal?

It was not then how Mississauga thought of land;

Nor in their minds had they conceded British ownership

As indispensable and the key step

In this smooth act, although the money might have helped.

They just relinquished space within the arrowhead

Where sinners harried, hit and ravaged by hot war

(Not only dishers-out of death were Iroquois)

Could have a spread of maize-full Earth
On which to rest, regroup, recover –
Even if removed from their beloved realm
Below the lake known as Ontario.
No titles passed to parcel-minded
Household heads to market as they chose.

Nor were a group of chiefs, some absent, some around
Sanctioned to sketch Xs on a page
More than half a century on,
Peddling off a people's patrimony
(Graceful grant from their forgiving foes)
When many Iroquois, or most,
Were well convinced they had agreed to merely lease
Out land on which to plank a road.
The Six, our drivers call it now.
A stretch across the plunging head
Acquired by a state grown fat
On flesh seized craftily or violently beyond its shores.
For absent justice what's a kingdom under any name
But robbery done grand...

Then water underneath a bridge?

Anyway, today we are urged on
By generosity to greenly go again.
2000s mean a sense of property a trifle more distinct
In our melange of attitudes,
White melted into red and even back and forth,
Cultures with their boundaries quite blurred
And modernity no more just mystery for most.
Recipients of that old act of faith
Must all decide what will be common or partitioned up in deeds,
The latter, if the owners choose,
Now vendible to companies desirous of condominiums
Or cabbage fields or golf.
The former too if *everyone* agrees.
As for that turf already crowded with determined settlers
Or steel projectiles hurtling over hard:
Conversation about compensation is what's radical,
The only route to lucre not so stained.
Accord and mutual gain to ease that ample pain
(Though pay for one side bound to be the sort

That's not stored up in safes).

Perhaps the silver-haired wise man will say

Amen to this. Amen.