

The background of the cover is a photograph of a wooden fence made of dark, weathered logs. The fence runs horizontally across the lower half of the image. Behind the fence, there are dense green trees and foliage. In the upper left, there are more trees with bright green leaves. In the distance, a body of water is visible under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bright and natural.

# O Canada

**BY SUSAN  
IOANNOU**

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**O CANADA**  
**THREE POEMS**

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Wordwrights Canada

[www.wordwrights.ca](http://www.wordwrights.ca)

[wordwrights@sympatico.ca](mailto:wordwrights@sympatico.ca)

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## One Wide Sky

(Quebec Referendum, October 30, 1995)

Whose words are so sharp and shiny  
they try to splinter this land

when shore to shore  
we all watch one wide sky

and mountains and plains are alive  
with rustles, our growing?

This restless swinging is nothing new.  
For centuries, autumn shed red and orange.

Evergreen, still our roots hold  
as firm on rock as deep in a lilled field.

Side by side, snow and ice link us. We lean  
away from south's balmier winds.

Our own spring births healthy seedlings  
under one northern sun

and summer fans out ever more ancient rings.  
This land can't be owned, only borrowed

--why, tough as Canadian Shield, we long  
to bury words bent and ill-honed

and sing *Mon Pays* is our heartwood,  
stronger *within* Canada.

## Translation

(for Katherine Morrison, on the Interventions made  
before the Supreme Court of Canada, February 19,  
1998, on a Quebec Unilateral Declaration of Secession)

“*The doctrine of effectivity . . .*”  
contend his dignified tones  
as the portly man in black robes  
stands before the semicircle of nine  
high on their chairs of crimson.

“*Effective control of territory . . .*”  
weighty, measured words  
he reads from section and subsection  
spread across the table before him  
in volumes that scrutinize  
three hundred years of overthrows  
from England’s King Charles the First  
to present-day Uganda.

“*Control . . .*” he emphasizes,  
this *amicus curiae*,  
of land, of law, of a People  
he proclaims he belongs to  
distinct from the Native and “*the Other*”  
tolerated within tight boundaries.

“*My lords, my ladies,*” he beseeches  
the Justices to permit him written replies  
on how to pull apart a country,  
a litany of euphemisms  
--the last, the “*doctrine of necessity*”  
time must give international law  
to staunch the blood and anarchy  
a UDI\* unleashes.

In the highest court in the land,  
cloaked in black and crimsoned  
pomp and legal poetry,  
mutters the simple English of civil war.

\* Unilateral Declaration of Independence

## Night Train Through Matapedia

### *Nation-Dreaming*

1.

Beyond the rocking window, dusk  
deepens from rose to royal blue  
as fading copses, fields race by  
pulling across two solitudes  
while the tracks click-clack  
and sidings veer  
off behind  
leaving a lone inverted V  
where St. Hyacinthe disappears  
behind the dream that rattles and sways  
on into the night.

Mile after mile, the darkness thickens.  
Ding-DING-ding, red flashes by.  
Street lamps bleach an intersection.  
Clustered houses dim and thin  
to village outskirts, moonlit farms.  
The land is heavy with shadows  
except above, a prick of light  
follows, forest by forest, field after field,  
a quiet constant, pinning the night  
over the shivering atmosphere.  
The Evening Star, it must be,  
first of a myriad needling through  
to steady grey metal  
rocking on, faster, nearer.

2.

Slowing, the steel wheels spark and creak,  
turning and grinding around  
Lachine's rushing black water  
toothpicked with shadow bridges over dark foam,  
until whirlpools lengthen and calm  
like oil sliding slow toward shore.  
Far across, out of the darkness  
green glows on a rising horizon,  
Plains of Abraham phosphorescent  
atop great Citadel cliffs  
dropping to tiny glittering houses  
and, blackening at the base,  
the minuscule ovals of boats bobbing  
a midnight city, old and foreign,  
so distant, yet magnificent, alone.  
Separation: dark's oily rippling.  
I wait and watch and wonder  
how long. . . .

3.

Tumble to the brink of the berth,  
roll back into the wall,  
how fast these wheels are thumping and squealing  
upward and upward, straining  
as if to hold on to rusted joints.

A few feet outside the blind,  
dark is a cliff straight up  
bristled steep with black pines  
so high I cannot see their tips,  
I cannot see the stars.  
Yanked between vertical sheets of rock,  
twisting higher and higher  
sleepers rattle onto a trestle  
where hundreds of metres down  
the river is snaking through granite and shale.  
Awakened, we are so small,  
what if this rattling dream plunges off?

Cling to the long shadow  
curving ahead after its own golden beam,  
not to its chimera sliding beside us  
separate under black water.

4.

Greying into first light,  
at last the berth levels out.  
Wheels shudder and spark, slowing.  
If I press my forehead against the glass  
and peer high beyond the blind  
I can see a faint thread  
bluing above the uttermost pine

and gliding into view  
by the matchbox station  
a tiny truck parked up a dirt ribbon.  
A small figure is waiting  
for two men striding away from the train,  
shotgun and fishing rod,  
French, English, becoming with Native  
human specks warming like last stars  
the vast dawn of these Precambrian mountains,  
setting me, like a child, to waving  
for whatever ancient, enduring  
need has united them here.

Sideward, the wheels groan and ride  
gently down and down.  
Faster and faster,  
chitter and chatter,  
yellow flashes off doubling tracks,  
lights up streaks on the dusty glass,  
shines leaves green, rock brown  
as blue pushes cliffs lower and lower  
levelling into summer-long grass,  
the sky an azure mirror  
backing Campbellton's golden bay  
where ridges and deep divides  
fade around the widening curve  
and Canada's dream rattles on  
one more day. . . .

**- FINIS -**