
Angels of Snow

An Anthology of Modern English-Canadian Poetry



• 加拿大现代英语诗歌选集 •

edited by

James Steele, Wei Li, and Huang Zhigang

with an Introduction and Notes

詹姆斯·斯蒂尔 编辑

魏莉 黄志钢 编译



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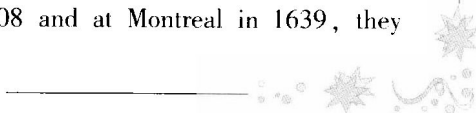
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Introduction

This anthology may be the first translation into Chinese of a collection of English-Canadian poetry. It represents work by some seventeen authors—all of them modern or postmodern. Although their respective visions are remarkably diverse, their poetry forms part of an English-Canadian culture which differs both from the Quebecois culture of French Canada and from the cultures of other Anglophone countries. Canadian poetry has been partly shaped, in fact, by a unique set of historical conditions that have affected in one way or another the structure of its imaginative visions. As Chinese readers may not be familiar with these historical circumstances, it may be helpful to describe them briefly.

The first Europeans to settle permanently in Canada were from France, and they came in the early seventeenth century. (There is some interesting but inconclusive archaeological evidence suggesting that Chinese explorers settled on the east coast of Canada as early as the fifteenth century; this colony, if it existed, did not endure.) Some Europeans came as missionaries seeking to save the souls of the indigenous Indians; others came as explorers to claim territory for their country; still others came as traders hoping to barter trinkets for furs. Founding colonies at Quebec in 1608 and at Montreal in 1639, they





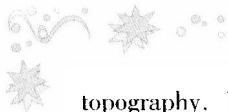
gradually settled along the alluvial basin of the St. Lawrence River between Montreal and the Atlantic coast. Their numbers continually grew through further immigration from France so that the population of New France (as this territory was then called) increased to about 60,000 by the middle of the eighteenth century. This colony was governed by France's "ancien régime." It was thus merchant-capitalist in its commercial organization, feudal-absolutist in its social structure, and Catholic in religion.

As a result of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the rule of France in Canada came abruptly to an end. In this contest between Britain and France for world empire, British forces defeated the French at Quebec in 1759, thereby establishing Britain's dominion over Canada. After British sovereignty had been formally confirmed by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the immigration of British settlers soon followed. The new English-speaking colonists were mindful of the fact that their security and progress depended on British law, British capital, and British naval power. They also believed that their imperial motherland was the world's most advanced nation by virtue of its parliamentary liberty, its commercial supremacy, and its reformed Protestant faith. England was also revered as the homeland of Newtonian science and Shakespearian literature.

Canada was thus founded by colonists from two rival empires—by peoples who differed in language, religion, politics, and culture. Many Canadians therefore regard themselves as belonging to the one or the other of Canada's two founding peoples, and even up to the present time, the relationship between these two "nations" remains problematic.

In the British colonial era between 1763 and 1867, pioneers continued the arduous process of settlement, while mercantilist laws, which remained in effect until 1846, governed the terms of trade. During this period, thousands of acres of forested land were cleared for agriculture in what is now southern Ontario, and millions of white-pine trees were cut, squared, and exported to Britain for use in shipbuilding and other construction. Although the development of manufacturing in Canada occurred more slowly than in either Britain or the United States, industrialization of the economy was promoted by the building of a network of railroads and by the mechanical applications of steam power. The labour force increased rapidly as the result of a series of “great migrations.” These included thousands of “loyalist” planters from post-revolutionary United States, impoverished Scots who had been demobilized from the British army after the Napoleonic wars, and farmers from Ireland fleeing famine in their homeland. Towards the end of this colonial period, many of the inhabitants of the country demanded the right of democratic “responsible government” in matters relating to domestic affairs. This reform, which was a cause for armed rebellion in both French and English Canada in 1837, was granted by Britain in 1848.

During this early period, a few English-Canadian poets, including Oliver Goldsmith (1794–1861), Joseph Howe (1804–1873), Alexander McLachlan (1819–1896) and Charles Sangster (1822–1893), wrote conventionally neo-classical or romantic verse imitative of British models. For the most part, their writing celebrated the social values of a colonial gentry society and the impressive features of Eastern Canada's



topography. It also referred frequently to the invincible power of divine Providence, the romantic qualities in certain landscapes, and the glory of British rule.

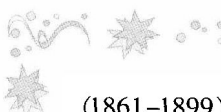
In 1867, the confederation of most of Britain's colonial provinces (three predominantly English-Canadian and one mainly French-Canadian) provided a constitutional basis for the founding and development of a federal Canadian state that allowed the provinces (and their subordinate municipalities) to retain many of their traditional powers. Although this political agreement allowed the francophone province of Quebec only a minority of members in the newly established federal parliament, the union gave constitutional expression to a belief—widely held in English Canada but not in Quebec—that the inhabitants of this country constituted collectively a single “new nationality.” The Confederation of 1867 was also regarded as a powerful instrument for exercising rights of self-government and for fostering economic development.

In the decades immediately following Confederation, the federal government promoted the development of manufacturing in Eastern Canada by establishing, through a system of protective tariffs, an interprovincial home market for products made in Canada. The new federal government also facilitated the construction of a railroad from central Canada to the Pacific and ensured the orderly settlement of millions of acres of mid-continental, wheat-growing prairie land. By 1900, Canada was more than an exporter of raw materials. It had become an expanding, industrial economy with a large merchant navy, two commercial metropolises—Montreal and Toronto—and a system of rail communication that extended more than four and a half thousand

kilometers to link Halifax on the east coast with Vancouver on the west. The flow of immigrants from Britain and the United States continued during this period, but it was greatly augmented by immigration from continental Europe—from such countries as France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Greece, the Ukraine, Russia, Finland, and Poland. Many thousands of these European immigrants settled on farms in Western rural areas. Most of the Canadian population, however, was concentrated in southern parts of Ontario and Quebec, and these areas became increasingly industrial and urban. There was also significant immigration from China both during this period and in recent years so that by 2001 more than a million Canadians—or about 3% of Canada's population—were of Chinese origin. Many of the first Chinese immigrants came in 1858 from southern China, especially from the Pearl River Delta region in Guangdong Province, to participate in the Fraser River Gold Rush. A second wave came in the 1870s and 1880s to work initially, and under appalling conditions, on building the Canadian Pacific Railway through Canada's large western provinces and the Rocky Mountains. By 1981 there were about 300,000 Chinese Canadians living mostly in the cities of Vancouver and Toronto. Over the last 25 years this number has more than tripled, and Canadians of Chinese origin are now well represented in the business community, the professions, and government. In recent years, Canada's nominal head of state or Governor General was a Chinese Canadian.

The pre-modern, English-Canadian poets of this “Confederation” period—notably Charles G. D. Roberts (1860–1943), Archibald Lampman





(1861–1899), Duncan Campbell Scott (1862–1947) and Bliss Carman (1861–1929)—wrote in a romantic mode, inspired in part by the beauty and sublimity of a landscape which they perceived as distinctly Canadian. They also expressed a newly-felt patriotism for the young country and high praise for its founding heroes, both commercial and spiritual.

6 The complete political independence of Canada was not formally achieved until 1931, when the country became an autonomous state within the British Commonwealth. This power of self-determination, however, became increasingly circumscribed as transnational corporations with head offices in the United States gained ownership and control of much of the Canadian economy. When this Americanization of the economy accelerated after World War II, it had an inevitable effect on many aspects of Canadian life, including foreign policy, sports, education, and culture. Canada's book-publishing industry, for example, is mostly foreign-owned; and most of the films, records, and magazines sold within its borders are produced in the United States and distributed here by American-owned agencies. This commercial attenuation of Canada's culture has rendered problematic English Canada's sense of national identity, and made the writing of Canadian poetry a somewhat subversive activity.

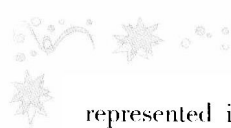
Paradoxical as it may seem, this Americanization of Canada's economy has occurred even while Canadian-based companies have been investing large amounts of capital in other countries. In French Canada, one effect of this economic internationalization has been to strengthen the resolve of many Quebecers to continue their long quest for a relationship

of sovereignty-association with English Canada even while favouring free trade with the U. S. In English Canada, however, the same economic process has generated strongly regionalist attitudes and a desire for reform that would formally institutionalize the equality of regional interests. In recent years, the sense of national identity among Canadians has also been strongly influenced by the arrival of immigrants from many countries of the world. In the 1991 census, 71% of the population identified themselves as having only one nationality in their ethnic background. Of these 21% identified themselves as British in origin, 23% as French and 27.5% as originating in some other country.

Although “free enterprise” and entrepreneurial competition continue to be important features of the Canadian economy in the modern period, the establishment of public systems of social welfare and the growing strength of large semi-monopolistic corporations have reduced the role of small businesses in the economy and the nineteenth-century ideal of heroic individualism. The poets of modern Canada thus inhabit a consumer society in which the prevailing ethos of corporate functionalism is complemented by various kinds of personalist philosophy in private life.

Canada in the twentieth century has been a land of peace, but Canadians have also participated in several wars—the Boer War, World War I, World War II, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and the Korean War. Although several thousand of our soldiers are currently serving among the NATO forces in Afghanistan, many Canadians, if not a majority, are opposed to the American-led occupation there. Given these experiences of war, it is no accident that several of the older poets





represented in this anthology, especially Norman Bethune and Robin Mathews, have a profound distaste for fascism and imperialism. Chinese readers will be familiar with the heroic, anti-imperialist work of Norman Bethune in both Spain and China and with his poetic prose passage entitled "Wounds"; they may not be aware of the fact that he also wrote delightful love poems, some of which are also included in this anthology. Mathews, in his poetry and criticism written over the past thirty-five years, has consistently expressed contempt for various forms of American imperialism in Canada.

S Canada's poets cannot be easily divided into groups or schools. All of them use a variety of verse forms, and each voice, with its own distinctive diction, rhythm, and tone, articulates a unique poetic world. Their respective lyric visions nevertheless include, in varying proportions, a broad range of common topics: questions of philosophy and religion, relations between human beings and nature, interpretations of history, problems relating to social class, feelings of national and ethnic identity, and qualities peculiar to contemporary private life. While these subjects are expressed from diverse points of view, certain ranges of attitudes with respect to particular topics can be discerned. A brief description of these attitudes may thus serve to illuminate several distinctive features of their work.

As noted above, religion in English Canada had its historic roots in Protestantism—a faith which has comprehended the "social gospel" of Methodism, the Calvinist ethic of Presbyterianism and the decorous faith of the Church of England. Nevertheless, the exploration by modern poets

of religious and philosophical questions has not been limited to a consideration of conventional articles of faith. Orientations range from the Christian idealism of Margaret Avison who describes in "Nothing Else For It" the crucifixion of Jesus and would have us "bow, and believe / now, or when glory / leaves all he made / transformed, or stricken" to the militant humanism of Frank Scott, who once wrote that "The world is my country / The human race is my race / The spirit of man is my God / The future of man is my heaven." Between these philosophical antipodes are to be found a wide range of perspectives. These include the Jewish-cum-Buddhist attitudes of Leonard Cohen, the secular Nietzschean élan of Irving Layton, and the personalist naturalism of Margaret Atwood. Humanist perspectives prevail in the poems of Earle Birney, Lorna Crozier, George Johnston, Patrick Lane, Bronwen Wallace, Alfred Purdy, and Tom Wayman.

The relation of human beings to their natural environment—a world that for Canadians consists variously of long coastlines, vast inland plains, the western Rocky Mountains, forests, lakes, and tundra—is another common topic. Central to the Canadian landscape is a primordial, pre-Cambrian, rock formation that covers about half the country. In a poem entitled simply "Laurentian Shield," Frank Scott prophesies that this vast "rock" will be turned into "children" through human labour and culture. Layton, perceiving with a warmly sensuous eye his more southerly environment, sees the "loveliness of incorruptible snow lying bunched on evergreens" as "soft breasts . . . to climb upon." Margaret Atwood compares the non-rational vitality of the natural environment with the insanity of conventional rational society and prefers