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DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA
SECCIÓ D'ANGLÈS

THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE THROUGH POETRY

VOLUM I



TESI DOCTORAL DIRIGIDA PER LA DOCTORA SUSAN BALLYN.
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N E L A B U R E U i R A M O S

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Around the second bridge, over the top
Of the air-shafts, backed, resurged and whirled
Into the stockhold through the fiddley grating.

Under the final strain the two wire guys
Of the forward funnel tugged and broke at the eyes:
With buckled plates the stack leaned, fell and smashed 970
The starboard wing of the flying bridge, went through
The lower, then tilting at the davits crashed
Over, driving a wave aboard that drew
Back to the sea some fifty sailors and
The captain with the last of the bridge command.

Out on the water was the same display
Of fear and self-control as on the deck-
Challenge and hesitation and delay,
The quick return, the will to save, the race 980
Of snapping oars to put the realm of space
Between the half-filled lifeboats and the wreck.
The swimmers whom the waters did not take
With their instant death-chill struck out for the wake
Of the nearer boats, gained on them, hailed
The steersmen and were saved: the weaker failed
And fagged and sank. A man clutched at the rim
Of a gunwale, and a woman's jewelled fist
Struck at his face: two others seized his wrist,
As he released his hold, and gathering him 990
Over the side, they staunched the cut from the ring.
And there were many deeds envisaging
Volitions where self-preservation fought
Its red primordial struggle with the 'ought,'
In those high moments when the gambler tossed
Upon the chance and uncomplaining lost.

Aboard the ship, whatever hope of dawn
Gleamed from the *Carpathia's* riding lights was gone,
For every knot was matched by each degree
Of list. The stern was lifted bodily 1000
When the bow had sunk three hundred feet, and set
Against the horizon stars in silhouette
Were the blade curves of the screws, hump of the rudder.
The downward pull and after buoyancy
Held her a minute poised but for a shudder
That caught her frame as with the upward stroke
Of the sea a boiler or a bulkhead broke.

Climbing the ladders, gripping shroud and stay,
Storm-rail, ringbolt or fairlead, every place
That might befriend the clutch of hand or brace
Of foot, the fourteen hundred made their way 1010
To the heights of the aft decks, crowding the inches
Around the docking bridge and cargo winches.
And now that last salt tonic which had kept
The valour of the heart alive- the bows
Of the immortal seven that had swept
The strings to outplay, outdied their orders, ceased.
Five minutes more, the angle had increased
From eighty on to ninety when the rows
Of deck and port-hole lights went out, flashed back
A brilliant second and again went black. 1020
Another bulkhead crashed, then following
The passage of the engines as they tore
From their foundations, taking everything
Clean through the bows from 'midships with a roar
Which drowned all cries upon the deck and shook
The watchers in the boats, the liner took
Her thousand fathoms journey to her grave.

.....

And out there in the starlight, with no trace
Upon it of its deed but the last wave
From the *Titanic* fretting at its base, 1030
Silent, composed, ringed by its icy broods,
The grey shape with the palaeolithic face
Was still the master of the longitudes.

TOWARDS THE LAST SPIKE

It was the same world then as now- the same,
 Except for little differences of speed
 And power, and means to treat myopia
 To show the axe-blade infinitely sharp
 Splitting things infinitely small, or else
 Provide the telescopic sight to roam
 Through curved dominions never found in fables.
 The same, but for new particles of speech-
 Those algebraic substitutes for nouns
 That sky cartographers would hang like signboard 10
 Along the trespass of our thoughts to stop
 The stutters of our tongues with their equations.

As now, so then, blood kept its ancient colour,
 And smoothly, roughly, paced its banks; in calm
 Preserving them, in riot rupturing them.
 Wounds needed bandages and stomachs food:
 The hands outstretched had joined the lips in prayer-
 'Give us our daily bread, give us our pay.'
 The past flushed in the present and tomorrow 20
 Would dawn upon today: only the rate
 To sensitize or numb a nerve would change;
 Only the quickening of a measuring skill
 To gauge the onset of a birth or death
 With the precision of micrometers.
 Men spoke of acres then and miles and masses,
 Velocity and steam, cables that moored
 Not ships but continents, world granaries,
 The east-west cousinship, a nation's rise,
 Hail of identity, a world expanding,
 If not the universe: the feel of it 30
 Was in the air- '*Union required the Line.*'
 The theme was current at the banquet tables,
 And arguments profane and sacred rent
 God-fearing families into partisans.
 Pulpit, platform, and floor were sounding-boards;
 Cushions beneath the pounding fists assumed
 The hues of western sunsets; nostrils sniffed
 The prairie tang; the tongue rolled over texts:
 Even St Paul was being invoked to wring
 The neck of Thomas in this war of faith 40
 With unbelief. Was ever an adventure
 Without its cost? Analogies were found
 On every page of history or science.
 A nation, like the world, could not stand still.
 What was the use of records but to break them?

The tougher armour followed the new shell;
 The newer shell the armour; lighthouse rockets
 Sprinkled their stars over the wake of wrecks.
 Were not the engineers at work to close
 The lag between the pressures and the valves? 50
 The same world then as now thirsting for power
 To crack those records open, extra pounds
 Upon the inches, extra miles per hour.
 The mildewed static schedules which before
 Had like asbestos been immune to wood
 Now curled and blackened in the furnace coal.
 This power lay in the custody of men
 From down-and-outers needing roofs, whose hands
 Were moulded by their fists, whose skins could feel
 At home incorporate with dolomite, 60
 To men who with the marshal instincts in them,
 Deriving their authority from wallets,
 Directed their battalions from the trestles.

THE GATHERING

*('Oats- a grain which in England is generally given to horses,
 but in Scotland supports the people.'- Dr Samuel Johnson.*

*'True, but where will you find such horses, where such men?'-
 Lord Elibank's reply as recorded by Sir Walter Scott.)*

Oatmeal was in their blood and in their names.
 Thrift was the title of their catechism.
 It governed all things but their mess of porridge
 Which, when it struck the hydrochloric acid
 With treacle and skim-milk, became a mash.
 Entering the duodenum, it broke up
 Into amino acids: then the liver 70
 Took on its natural job as carpenter:
 Foreheads grew into cliffs, jaws into juts.
 The meal, so changed, engaged the follicles:
 Eyebrows came out as gorse, the beards as thistles,
 And the chest-hair the fell of Grampian rams.
 It stretched and vulcanized the human span:
 Nonagenarians worked and thrived upon it.
 Out of such chemistry run through by genes,
 The food released its fearsome racial products:-
 The power to strike a bargain like a foe, 80
 To win an argument upon a burr,
 Invest the language with a Bannockburn,
 Culloden or the warnings of Lochiel,
 Weave loyalties and rivalries in tartans,

Present for the amazement of the world
 Kilts and the civilized and barbaric Fling,
 And pipes which, when they acted on the mash,
 Fermented lullabies to *Scots wha hae*.

Their names were like a battle-muster- Angus
 (He of the Shops) and Fleming (of the Transit), 90
 Hector (of the *Kicking Horse*), Dawson,
 'Cromarty' Ross, and Beatty (Ulster Scot),
 Bruce, Allan, Galt and Douglas, and the 'twa'-
 Stephen (Craigellachie) and Smith (Strathcona)-
 Who would one day climb from their Gaelic hide-outs,
 Take off their plaids and wrap them round the mountains.
 And then the everlasting tread of the Macs,
 Vanguard, centre and rear, their roving eyes
 On summits, rivers, contracts, beaver, ledgers;
 Their ears cocked to the skirl of Sir John A., 100
 The general of the patronymic march.

*(Sir John revolving round the Terms of Union with British Columbia.
 Time, late at night.)*

Insomnia had ripped the bed-sheets from him
 Night after night. How long was this to last?
 Confederation had not played this kind
 Of trickery on him. That was rough indeed,
 So gravelled, that a man might call for rest
 And take it for a life accomplishment.
 It was his laurel though some of the leaves
 Had dried. But this would be a longer tug 110
 Of war which needed for his team thick wrists
 And calloused fingers, heavy heels to dig
 Into the earth and hold- men with bull's beef
 Upon their ribs. Had he himself the wind,
 The anchor-waist to peg at the rope's end?
 'Twas bad enough to have these questions hit
 The waking mind: 'twas much worse when he dozed;
 For goblins had a way of pinching him,
 Slapping a nightmare on to dwindling snoozes.
 They put him and his team into a tug
 More real than life. He heard a judge call out- 120
 'Teams settle on the rope and take the strain!'
 And with the coaches 'heave, the running welts
 Reddened his palms, and then the gruelling *backlock*
 Inscribed its indentations on his shoulders.
 This kind of burn he knew he had to stand;
 It was the game's routine; the other fire
 What was he feared the most for it could bake him-

That white dividing rag tied to the rope
 Above the centre pole had with each heave
 Wavered with chances equal. With the backlock, 130
 Despite the legs of Tupper and Cartier,
 The western anchor dragged; the other side
 Remorselessly was gaining, holding, gaining.
 No sleep could stand this strain and, with the nightmare
 Delivered of its colt, Macdonald woke.

Tired with the midnight toss, lock-jawed with yawns,
 He left the bed and, shuffling to the window,
 He opened it. The air would cool him off
 And soothe his shoulder burns. He felt his ribs:
 Strange, nothing broken- how those crazy drowzes 140
 Had made the fictions tangle with the facts!
 He must unscramble them with steady hands.
 Those Ranges pirouetting in his dreams
 Had their own knack of standing still in light,
 Revealing peaks whose known triangulation
 Had to be read in prose severity.

Seizing a telescope, he swept the skies,
 The north-south drift, a self-illuminated chart.
 Under Polaris was the Arctic Sea
 And the sub-Arctic gates well stocked with names: 150
 Hudson, Davis, Baffin, Frobisher;
 And in his own day Franklin, Ross and Parry
 Of the Canadian Archipelago;
 Kellett, McClure, McClintock, of *The Search*.
 Those straits and bays had long been kicked by keels,
 And flags had fluttered on the Capes that fired
 His youth, making familiar the unknown.

What though the odds were nine to one against,
 And the Dead March was undertoning trumpets,
 There was enough of strychnine in the names 160
 To make him flip a penny for the risk,
 Though he had palmed the coin reflectively
 Before he threw and watched it come down *heads*.

That stellar path looked too much like a road map
 Upon his wall- the roads all led to market-
 The north-south route. He lit a candle, held
 It to a second map full of blank spaces
 And arrows pointing west. Disturbed, he turned
 The lens up to the zenith, followed the course
 Tracked by a cloud of stars that would not keep 170
 Their posts- Capella, Perseus, were reeling:
 Low in the north-west, Cassiopeia
 Was qualmish, leaning on her starboard arm-rest,
 And Aries was chasing, butting Cygnus,
 Just diving. Doubts and hopes struck at each other.

Why did those constellations look so much
Like blizzards? And what lay beyond the blizzards?

'Twas chilly at the window. He returned
To bed and savoured soporific terms:
Superior, the Red River, Selkirk, Prairie, 180
Port Moody and Pacific. Chewing them,
He spat out *Rocky* grit before he swallowed.
Selkirk! This had the sweetest taste. Ten years
Before, the Highland crofters had subscribed
Their names in a memorial for the Rails.
Sir John reviewed the story of the struggle,
That four months' journey from their native land-
The Atlantic through the Straits to Hudson Bay,
Then the Hayes River to Lake Winnipeg
Up to the Forks of the Assiniboine. 190
He could make use of that- just what he needed,
A Western version of the Arctic daring,
Romance and realism, double dose.
How long ago? Why? this is '71.
Those fellows came the time Napoleon
Was on the steppes. For sixty years they fought
The seasons, 'hoppers, drought, hail, wind and snow;
Survived the massacre at Seven Oaks,
The 'Pemmican War' and the Red River floods. 200
They wanted now the Road- Those pioneers
Who lived by spades instead of beaver traps.
Most excellent word that, pioneers! Sir John
Snuggled himself into his sheets, rolling
The word around his tongue, a theme for song,
Or for a peroration to a speech.

THE HANGOVER AT DAWN

He knew the points that had their own appeal.
These did not bother him: the patriot touch,
The Flag, the magnetism of explorers,
The national unity. These could burn up
The phlegm in most of the provincial throats. 210
But there was one tale central to his plan
(The focus of his headache at this moment),
Which would demand the limit of his art-
The ballad of his courtship in the West:
Better reveal it soon without reserve.

THE LADY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Port Moody and Pacific! He had pledged
 His word the Line should run from sea to sea.
 'From sea to sea', a hallowed phrase. Music
 Was in that text if the right key were struck,
 And he must strike it first, for, as he fingered 220
 The clauses of the pledge, rough notes were rasping-
 'No Road, No Union', and the converse true.
 East-west against the north-south run of trade,
 For California like a sailor-lover
 Was wooing over-time. He knew the ports.
 His speech was a persuasive as his arms,
 As sinuous as Spanish arias-
 Tamales, Cazadero, Mendecino,
 Curling their baritones around the lady.
 Then Santa Rosa, Santa Monica, 230
 Held absolution in their syllables.
 But when he saw her stock of British temper
 Starch at ironic sainthood in the whispers-
 'Rio de nuestra señora de buena guia,'
 He had the tact to gutturalize the liquids,
 Steeping the tunes to drinking songs, then take
 Her on a holiday where she could watch
 A roving sea-born Californian pound
 A downy chest and swear by San Diego.

Sir John, wise to the tricks, was studying hard, 240
 A fresh proposal for a marriage contract.
 He knew a game was in the ceremony.
 That southern fellow had a healthy bronze
 Complexion, had a vast estate, was slick
 Of manner. In his ardour he could tether
 Sea-roses to the blossoms of his orchards,
 And for his confidence he had the prime
 Advantage of his rival- *he was there.*

THE LONG-DISTANCE PROPOSAL

A game it was, and the Pacific lass
 Had poker wisdom on her face. Her name 250
 Was rich in values- *British*; this alone
 Could raise Macdonald's temperature: so could
Columbia with a different kind of fever,
 And in between the two, *Victoria*.
 So the *Pacific* with its wash of letters
 Could push the Fahrenheit another notch.
 She watched for bluff on those Disraeli features,

Impassive but for arrowy chipmunk eyes,
 Engaged in fathoming a contract time.
 With such a dowry she could well afford 260
 To take the risk of tightening the terms-
 'Begin the Road in two years, end in ten'-
 Sir John, a moment letting down his guard,
 Frowned at the Rocky skyline, but agreed.

(The terms ratified by Parliament, British Columbia enters Confederation July, 1871, Sandford Fleming being appointed engineer-in-chief of the proposed Railway, Walter Moberly to cooperate with him in the location of routes. 'Of course, I don't know how many millions you have but it is going to cost you money to get through those canyons.'- Moberly to Macdonald.)

THE PACIFIC SCANDAL

(Huntingdon's charges of political corruption based on correspondence and telegrams rifled from the offices of the solicitor of Sir Hugh Allan, Head of the Canada Pacific Company; Sir John's defence; and the appearance of the Honourable Edward Blake who rises to reply to Sir John at 2 a,m)

BLAKE IN MOOD

Of all the subjects for debate here was
 His element. His soul as clean as surf,
 No one could equal him in probing cupboards
 Or sweeping floors and dusting shelves, finding
 A skeleton inside an overcoat;
 Or shaking golden eagles from a pocket 270
 To show the copper plugs within the coins.
 Rumours he heard had gangrened into facts-
 Gifts nuzzling at two-hundred-thousand dollars,
 Elections on, and with a contract pending.
 The odour of the bills had blown his gorge.
 His appetite, edged by a moral hone,
 Could surfeit only on the Verities.

November 3, 1873

A Fury rode him to the House. He took
 His seat, and with a stoic gloom he heard
 The Chieftain's great defence and noted well 280
 The punctuation of the cheers. He needed all
 The balance of his mind to counterpoise
 The movements of Macdonald as he flung

Himself upon the House, upon the Country,
 Upon posterity, upon his conscience.
 That plunging played the devil with Blake's tiller,
 Threatened the set of his sail. To save the course,
 To save himself, in that five hours of gale,
 He had to jettison his meditation,
 His brooding on the follies of mankind, 290
 Clean out the wadding from his tortured ears:
 That roaring mob before him could be quelled
 Only by action; so when the last round
 Of the applause following the peroration
 Was over, slowly, weightily, Blake rose.

A statesman-chancellor now held the Floor.
 He told the sniffing Commons that a sense
 Keener than smell or taste must be invoked
 To get the odour. Leading them from facts 300
 Like telegrams and stolen private letters,
 He soared into the realm of principles
 To find his scourge; and then the men involved,
 Robed like the Knights of Malta, Blake undressed,
 Their cloaks inverted to reveal the shoddy,
 The tattered lining and bare-threaded seams.
 He ripped the last stitch from them- by the time
 Recess was called, he had them in the dock
 As brigands in the Ministry of Smells,
 Naked before the majesty of Heaven.

For Blake recesses were but sandwiches 310
 Provided merely for cerebral luncheons-
 No time to spread the legs under the table,
 To chat and chaff a while, to let the mind
 Roam, like a goblet up before the light
 To bask in natural colour, or by whim
 Of its own choice to sway luxuriously
 In tantalizing arcs before the nostrils.
 A meal was meant by Nature for nutrition-

A sorry farinaceous business scaled 320
 Exactly to caloric grains and grams
 Designed for intellectual combustion.
 For energy directed into words
 Towards proof. Abuse was overweight. He saw
 No need for it; no need for caricature,
 And if a villainous word had to be used,
 'Twas for a villain- keen upon the target.
 Irrelevance was like a moral lesion
 No less within a speech than in a statute.
 What mattered it who opened up the files,

Sold for a bid the damning correspondence- 330
 That Montreal-Chicago understanding?
 A dirty dodge, so let it be conceded.
 But *here* the method was irrelevant.
 Whether by legal process or by theft,
 The evidence was there unalterable.
 So with the House assembled, he resumed
 Imperial indictment of the bandits.
 The logic left no loopholes in the facts.
 Figures that ran into the hundred-thousands
 Were counted up in pennies, each one shown 340
 To bear the superscription of debasement.

Again recess, again the sandwiches,
 Again the invocation of the gods:
 Each word, each phrase, each clause went to position,
 Each sentence regimented like a lockstep.
 The only thing that would not pace was time;
 The hours dragged by until the thrushes woke-
 Two days, two nights- someone opened a window,
 And members of the House who still were conscious
 Uncreacked their necks to note that even Sir John 350
 Himself had put his fingers to his nose.

*(The appeal to the country: Macdonald defeated: Mackenzie
 assumes power, 1874.)*

A change of air, a drop in temperature!
 The House had rarely known sobriety
 Like this. No longer clanged the '*Westward Ho!*'
 And quiet were the horns upon the hills.
 Hard times ahead. The years were rendering up
 Their fat. Measured and rationed was the language
 Directed to the stringency of pockets.
 The eye must be convinced before the *vision*.
 '*But one step at a time,*' exclaimed the feet. 360
 It was the story of the hen or egg;
 Which came before the other? '*'Twas the hen,*'
 Cried one; '*undoubtedly the hen must lay*
The egg, hatch it and mother it.' '*Not so,*'
 Another shouted, '*'Twas the egg or whence*
The hen?' For every one who cleared his throat
 And called across the House with Scriptural passion-
 '*The Line is meant to bring the loaves and fishes,*'
 A voting three had countered with the question-
 '*Where are the multitudes that thirst and hunger?*' 370
 Passion became displaced by argument.
 Till now the axles justified their grease,
 Taught coal a lesson in economy.

All doubts here could be blanketed with facts,
With phrases smooth as actuarial velvet.

For forty years in towns and cities men
Had watched the Lines baptized with charters, seen
Them grown, marry and bring forth children.
Parades and powder had their uses then
For gala days; and bands announced arrivals, 380
Betrothals, weddings and again arrivals.
Champagne brimmed in the font as they were named
With titles drawn from the explorers' routes,
From Saints and Governors, from space and seas
And compass-points- Saints Andrew, Lawrence, Thomas,
Louis and John; Champlain, Simcoe; Grand Trunk,
Intercolonial, the Canadian Southern,
Dominion-Atlantic, the Great Western- names
That caught a continental note and tried
To answer it. Half-gambles though they were, 390
Directors built those Roads and heard them run
To the sweet silver jingle in their minds.

The airs had long been mastered like old songs
The feet could tap to in the galleries.
But would they tap to a new rhapsody,
A harder one to learn and left unfinished?
What ear could be assured of absolute pitch
To catch this kind of music in the West?
The far West? Men had used this flattering name
For East or but encroachment on the West. 400

And was not Lake Superior still the East,
A natural highway which ice-ages left,
An unappropriated legacy?
There was no discord in the piston-throbs
Along this Road. This was old music too.
That northern spine of rock, those western mountains,
Were barriers built of God and cursed of Blake.
Mild in his oaths, Mackenzie would avoid them.
He would let contracts for the south and west,
Push out from settlement to settlement. 410
This was economy, just plain horse-sense.
The Western Lines were there- American.
He would link up with them, could reach the Coast.
The Eagle and the Lion were good friends:
At least the two could meet on sovereign terms
Without a sign of fur and feathers flying.
As yet, but who could tell? So far, so good.
Spikes had been driven at the boundary line,
From Emerson across the red to Selkirk,

And then to Thunder Bay- to Lake Superior; 420
 Across the prairies in God's own good time,
 His plodding, patient, planetary time.

Five years' delay: surveys without construction;
 Short lines suspended, discord in the Party.
 The West defrauded of its glittering peaks,
 The public blood was stirring and protesting
 At his continuous dusk upon the mountains.
 The old conductor off the podium,
 The orchestra disbanded at the time
 The daring symphony was on the score, 430

The audience cupped their ears to catch a strain:
 They heard a plaintive thinning oboe-A
 That kept on thinning while slow feeble steps
 Approached the stand. Was this the substitute
 For what the auditorium once knew-
 The maestro who with tread of stallion hoofs
 Came forward shaking platforms and the rafters,
 And followed up the concert pitch with sound
 Of drums and trumpets and the organ blasts
 That had the power to toll out apathy 440

And make snow peaks ring like Cathedral steeples?
 Besides, accompanying those bars of music,
 There was an image men had not forgotten,
 The shaggy chieftain standing at his desk,
 The last-ditch fight when he was overthrown,
 That desperate five hours. At least they knew
 His personal pockets were not lined with pelf,
 Whatever loot the others grabbed. The words
 British, the West instead of South, the Nation,
 The all-Canadian route- these terms were singing 450
 Fresher than ever while the grating tones
 Under the stress of argument had faded
 Within the shroud of their monotony.

*(Sir John returns to power in 1878 with a National Policy of
 Protective Tariff and the Transcontinental.)*

Two years of tuning up: it needed that
 To counterpoint Blake's eloquence or lift
 Mackenzie's non-adventurous common sense
 To the ignition of an enterprise.
 The pace had to be slow at first, a tempo
 Cautious, simple to follow. Sections strewn
 Like amputated limbs along the route 460
 Were sutured. This appealed to sanity.
 No argument could work itself to sweat
 Against a prudent case, for the terrain

Looked easy from the Lake to the Red River.
 To stop with those suspensions was a waste
 Of cash and time. But the huge task announced
 The moulding of men's minds was harder far
 That moulding of the steel and prior to it.
 It was the battle of ideas and words 470
 And kindred images called by the same name,
 Like brothers who with temperamental blood
 Went to it with their fists. Canyons and cliffs
 Were precipices down which men were hurled,
 Or something to be bridged and sheared and scaled.
 Likewise the Pass had its ambiguous meaning.
 The leaders of the factions in the House
 And through the country spelled the word the same:
 The way they got their tongue around the word
 Was different, for some could make it hiss 480
 With sound of blizzards screaming over ramparts:
 The Pass- the Yellowhead, the Kicking Horse-
 Or jam it with *coureur-de-bois* romance,
 Or join it to the empyrean. Eagles,
 In flight banking their wings above a fish-stream,
 Had guided the explorers to a route
 And given the Pass the title of their wings.

The stories lured men's minds up to the mountains
 And down along the sandbars of the rivers.
 Rivalling the '*brown and barren*' on the maps, 490
 Officially '*not fit for human life*',
 Were vivid yellows flashing in the news-
 '*Gold in the Cariboo,*' '*Gold in the Fraser*'.
 The swish of gravel in the placer-cradles
 Would soon be followed by the spluttering fuses,
 By thunder echoing thunder; for one month
 After Blake's Ottawa roar would Onderdonk
 Roar back from Yale by ripping canyon walls
 To crash the tones by millions in the gorges.

The farther off, as by a paradox 500
 Of magnets, was the golden lure the stronger:
 Two thousand miles away, imagined peaks
 Had the vacation pull of mountaineering,
 But with the closer vision would the legs
 Follow the mind? 'Twas Blake who raised the question
 And answered it. Though with his natural eyes
 Up to this time he had not sighted mountains,
 He was an expert with the telescope.

THE ATTACK

Sir John was worried. The first hour of Blake
 Was dangerous, granted the theme. Eight years 510
 Before, he had the theme combined with language.
Impeachment- word with an historic ring,
 Reserved for the High Courts of Parliament,
 Uttered only when men were breathing hard
 And when the vertebrae were musket-stiff:
 High ground was that for his artillery,
 And *there*, despite the hours the salvos lasted.

But *here* this was a theme less vulnerable
 To fire, Macdonald thought, to Blake's gunfire,
 And yet he wondered what the orator 520
 Might spring in that first hour, what strategy
 Was on the Bench. He did not mind the close
 Mosaic of the words- too intricate,
 Too massive in design. Men might admire
 The speech and talk about it, then forget it.
 But few possessed the patience or the mind
 To tread the mazes of the labyrinth.

Once in a while, however, would Blake's logic
 Strumble upon stray figures that would leap
 Over the walls of other folds and catch 530
 The herdsmen in their growing somnolence.
 This waking sound was not- '*It can't be done*';
 That was a dogma, anyone might say it.
 It was the following burning corollary:
 '*To build a Road over that sea of mountains.*'
 This carried more than argument. It was
 A flash of fire which might with proper kindling
 Consume its way into the public mind.
 The House clicked to the ready and Sir John,
 Burying his finger-nails into his palms, 540
 Muttered- '*God send us no more metaphors*
Like that- except from Tory factories.'

Had Blake the lift of Chatham as he had
 Burke's wind and almost that sierra span
 Of mind, he might have carried the whole House
 With him and posted it upon that sea
 Of mountains with sub-zeros on their scalps,
 Their glacial ribs waiting for warmth of season
 To spring an avalanche. Such similes
 Might easily glue the members to their seats 550
 With frost in preparation for their ride.
 Sir John's '*from sea to sea*' was Biblical;

It had the stamp of reverent approval;
 But Blake's was pagan, frightening, congealing.
 The chieftain's lips continued as in prayer,
 A fiercely secular and torrid prayer-
*'May Heaven intervene to stop the flow
 Of such unnatural images and send
 The rhetorician back to decimals,
 Back to his tessellated subtleties.'* 560

The prayer was answered for High Heaven did it.
 The second hour entered and passed by,
 A third, a fourth. Sir John looked round the House,
 The agony of legs, the yawn's contagion.
 Was that a snore? Who was it that went out?
 He glanced at the Press Gallery. The pens
 Were scratching through the languor of the ink
 To match the words with shorthand and were failing.
 He hoped the speech would last another hour, 570
 And still another. Well within the law,
 This homicidal master of the opiates
 Loosened the hinges of the Opposition:
 The minds went first; the bodies sagged; the necks
 Curved on the benches and the legs sprawled out.
 And when the Fundy Tide had ebbed, Sir John,
 Smiling, watched the debris upon the banks,
 For what were yesterday grey human brains
 Had with decomposition taken on
 The texture and complexion of red clay. 580

*(In 1880 Tupper lets contract to Onderdonk for survey and
 construction through the Pacific Section of the mountains. Sir John,
 Tupper, Pope, and McIntyre go to London to interest capital but
 return without a penny.)*

Failing to make a dent in London dams,
 Sir John set out to plumb a reservoir
 Closer in reach. He knew its area,
 Its ownership, the thickness of its banks,
 Its conduits- if he could get his hands
 Upon the local stopcocks, could he return them?
 The reservoir was deep. Two centuries
 Ago it started filling when a king
 Had in a furry moment scratched a quill
 Across the bottom of His Royal Charter- 590
*'Granting the Governor and His Company
 Of Gentlemen Adventures the right
 Exclusive to one-third a continent.*
 Was it so easy then? A scratch, a seal,

A pinch of snuff tickling the sacred nostrils,
 A puff of powder and the ink was dry.
 Sir John twisted his lips: he thought of London.
 Empire and wealth were in that signature
 For royal, princely, ducal absentees,
 For courtiers to whom the parallels 600
 Were nothing but chalk scratches on a slate.
 For them wild animals were held in game
 Preserves, foxes as quarry in a chase,
 And hills where hedges, river banks were fences,
 And cataracts but fountains in a garden
 Tumbling their bubbles into marble basins.
 Where was this place called Hudson Bay? Some place
 In the Antipodes? Explorers, traders,
 Would bring their revenues over that signet.
 Two centuries- the new empire advanced, 610
 Was broken, reunited, torn again.
 The *fleur-de-lis* went to half-mast, the *Jack*
 To the mast-head, but fresher rivalries
 Broke out- Nor'-Westers at the Hudson's throat
 Over the pelts, over the pemmican;
 No matter what- the dividends flowed in
 As rum flowed out like the Saskatchewan.

The twist left Sir John's lips and he was smiling.
 Through English in ambition and design,
 This reservoir, he saw there in control 620
 Upon the floodgates not a Londoner
 In riding breeches but, red-flannel-shirted,
 Trousered in homespun, streaked and blobbed with sea-oil,
 A Scot with smoke of peat fire on his breath-
 Smith? Yes: but christened Donald Alexander
 And loined through issue from the Grants and Stuarts.

To smite the rock and bring forth living water,
 Take lead or tin and transmute both to silver,
 Copper to gold, betray a piece of glass
 To diamonds, fabulize a continent, 630
 Were wonders once believed, scrapped and revived;
 For Moses, Marco Polo, Paracelsus,
 Fell in the same retort and came out *Smith*.
 A miracle on legs, the lad had left
 Forres and Aberdeen, gone to Lachine-
 'Tell Mr Smith to count and sort the rat-skins.'
 Thence Tadoussac and Posts off Anticosti;
 From there to Rigolet in Labrador,
 A thousand miles by foot, snowshoe and dog-sled.
 He fought the climate like a weathered yak, 640
 And conquered it, ripping the stalactites

And valleys, brooded on the rocks and quarries.
 Using slate fragments, he became a draughtsman,
 Bringing to life a landscape or a cloud,
 Turning a tree into a beard, a cliff
 Into a jaw, a creek into a mouth
 With banks for lips. He loved to work on shadows.
 Just now the man was forcing the boy's stature,
 The while the youth tickled the man within.
 Companioned by the shade of Agassiz,
 He would come home, his pockets stuffed with fossils- 690
 Crinoids and fish-teeth- and his tongue jabbering
 Of the earth's crust before the birth of life,
 Prophetic of the days when he would dig
 Into Laurentian rock. The morse-key tick
 And tape were things mesmeric- space and time
 Had found a junction. Electricity
 And rock, one novel to the coiling hand,
 The other frozen in the lap of age,
 Were playthings for the boy, work for the man.
 As man he was the State's first operator, 700
 As boy he played a trick upon his boss
 Who, cramped with current, fired him on the instant;
 As man at school, escaping Latin grammar,
 He tore the fly-leaf from the text to draw
 The contour of a hill; as boy he sketched
 The principal, gave him flapdoodle ears,
 Bristled his hair, turned eyebrows into quills,
 His whiskers into flying buttresses,
 His eye-tusks into rusted railroad spikes, 710
 And made a truss between his nose and chin.
 Expelled again, he went back to the keys,
 To bush and rock and found companionship
 With quarry-men, stokers and station-masters,
 Switchmen and locomotive engineers.

Now he was transferred to Winnipeg.
 Of all the places in an unknown land
 Chosen by Stephen for Van Horne, this was
 The pivot on which he could turn his mind.
 Here he could clap the future on the shoulder
 And order Fate about as his lieutenant, 720
 For he would take no nonsense from a thing
 Called Destiny- the stars had to be with him.
 He spent the first night in soliloquy,
 Like Sir John A. but with a difference.
 Sir John wanted to sleep but couldn't do it:
 Van Horne could sleep but never wanted to.
 It was a waste of time, his bed a place
 Only to think or dream with eyes awake.

Opening a jack-knife, he went to the window,
 Scrapped off the frost. Great treks ran trough his mind, 730
 East-west. Two centuries and a half gone by,
 One trek had started from the Zuyder Zee
 To the new Amsterdam. 'Twas smooth by now,
 Too smooth. His line of grandsires and their cousins
 Had built a city from Manhattan dirt.

Another trek to Illinois; it too
 Was smooth, but this new one it was his job
 To lead, then build a highway which men claimed
 Could not be built. Statesmen and engineers 740
 Had blown their faces blue with their denials:
 The men who thought so were asylum cases

Whose monomanias harmless up to now
 Had not swept into cells. His bearded chin
 Pressed to the pane, his eyes roved through the west.
 He saw the illusion at its worst- the frost,
 The steel precision of the studded heavens,
 Relentless mirror of a covered earth.

His breath froze on the scrape: he cut again
 And glanced at the direction west-by-south. 750

That westward trek was the American,
 Union-Pacific- easy so he thought,
 Their forty million stacked against his four.
 Lonely and desolate this. He stocked his mind
 With items of his task: the simplest first,
 Though hard enough, the Prairies, then the Shore
 North of the Lake- a quantity half-guessed.

Mackenzie like a balky horse had shied
 And stopped at this. Van Horne knew well the reason,
 But it was vital for the all-land route.
 He peered through at the South. Down there Jim Hill 760
 Was whipping up his horses on a road
 Already paved. The stations offered rest
 With food and warmth, and their well-rounded names
 Were tossed like apples to the public taste.

He made a mental note of his three items.

He underlined the Prairies, double-lined
 The Shore and triple-lined *Beyond the Prairies*,
 Began counting the Ranges- first the Rockies;
 The Kicking Horse ran through them, this he knew;
 The Selkirks? Not so sure. Some years before 770
 Had Moberly and Perry tagged a route

Across the lariat loop of the Columbia.
 Now Rogers was traversing it on foot,
 Reading an aneroid and compass, chewing
 Sea-biscuit and tobacco. Would the steel
 Follow this trail? Van Horne looked farther west.



There was the Gold Range, there the Coastal Mountains.
 He stopped, putting a period to the note,
 As rivers troubled nocturnes in his ears.
 His plans must not seep into introspection- 780
 Call it a night, for morning was at hand,
 And every hour of daylight was for work.

(Van Horne goes to Montreal to meet the Directors.)

He had agenda staggering enough
 To bring the sweat even from Stephen's face.
 As daring as his plans, so daring were
 His promises. To build five hundred miles
 Upon the prairies in one season: this
 Was but a cushion for the jars ahead.
 The Shore- he had to argue, stamp and fight
 For this. The watercourses had been favoured, 790
 The nation schooled to that economy.
 He saw that Stephen, after wiping beads
 From face and forehead, had put both his hands
 Deep in his pockets- just a habit merely
 Of fingering change- but still Van Horne went on
 To clinch his case: the north shore could avoid
 The over-border route- a national point
 If ever there was one. He promised this
 As soon as he was through with buffalo-grass.
 And then the little matter of the Rockies: 800
 This must be swallowed without argument,
 As obvious as space, clear as a charter.
 But why the change in Fleming's survey? Why
 The national point again. The Kicking Horse
 Was shorter, closer to the boundary line;
 No rival road would build between the two.
 He did not dwell upon the other Passes.
 He promised all with surety of schedule,
 And with a self-imposed serenity 810
 That dried the sweat upon the Board Room faces.

NUMBER ONE

Oak Lake to Calgary. Van Horne took off
 His coat. The North must wait, for that would mean
 His shirt as well. First and immediate
 This prairie pledge- five hundred miles, and it
 Was winter. Failure of this trial promise
 Would mean- no, it must not be there for meaning.
 An order from him carried no repeal:
 At was as final as an execution.

A cable started rolling mills in Europe: 820
 A tap of Morse sent hundreds to the bush,
 Where axes swung on spruce and the saws sang,
 Changing the timber into pyramids
 Of poles and sleepers. Clicks, despatches, words,
 Like lanterns in a night conductor's hands,
 Signalled the wheels: a nod put Shaughnessy
 In Montreal: supplies moved on the minute.
 Thousands of men and mules and horses slipped
 Into their togs and harness night and day.
 The grass that fed the buffalo was turned over, 830
 The black alluvial mould laid bare, the bed
 Levelled and scraped. As individuals
 The men lost their identity; as groups,
 As gangs, they massed, divided, subdivided,
 Like numerals only- sub-contractors, gangs
 Of engineers, and shovel gangs for bridges,
 Culverts, gangs of mechanics stringing wires,
 Loading, unloading and reloading gangs,
 Gangs for the fish-plates and the spiking gangs,
 Putting a silver polish on the nails. 840
 But neither men nor horses ganged like mules:
 Wiser than both they learned to unionize.
 Some instinct in their racial nether regions
 Had taught them how to sniff the five-hour stretch
 Down to the fine arithmetic of seconds.
 They tired out their rivals and they knew it.
 They'd stand for overwork, not overtime.
 Faster than workmen could fling down their shovels,
 They could unhinge their joints, unhitch their tendons;
 Jumping the foreman's call, they brayed 'Unhook' 850
 With a defiant, corporate instancy.
 The promise which looked first without redemption
 Was being redeemed. From three to seven miles
 A day the parallels were being laid,
 Though Eastern throats were hoarse with the old question-
 Where are the settlements? And whence the gift
 Of tongues which could pronounce place-names that purred
 Like cats in relaxation after kittens?
 Was it a part of the same pledge to turn
 A shack into a bank for notes renewed; 860

To call a site a city when men saw
 Only a water-tank? This was an act
 Of faith indeed- substance of things unseen-
 Which would convert preachers to miracles,
 Lure teachers into lean-to's for their classes.
 And yet it happened that while labourers
 Were swearing at their blisters in the evening

And straightening out their spinal kinks at dawn,
The tracks joined up Oak Lake to Calgary.

NUMBER TWO

On the North Shore a reptile lay asleep- 870
A hybrid that the myths might have conceived,
But not delivered, as progenitor
Of crawling, gliding things upon the earth.
She lay snug in the folds of a huge boa
Whose tail had covered Labrador and swished
Atlantic tides, whose body coiled itself
Around the Hudson Bay, then curled up north
Through Manitoba and Saskatchewan
To great Slave Lake. In continental reach
The neck went past the Great Bear Lake until 880
Its head was hidden in the Arctic Seas.
This folded reptile was asleep or dead:
So motionless, she seemed stone dead- just seemed:
She was too old for death, too old for life,
For as if jealous of all living forms
She had lain there before bivalves began
To catacomb their shells on western mountains.
Somewhere within this life-death zone she sprawled,
Torpid upon a rock-and-mineral mattress.
Ice-ages had passed by and over her, 890
But these, for all their motion, had but sheared
Her ridges stand out like the spikes of molochs.
Her back grown stronger every million years,
She had shed water by the longer rivers
To Hudson Bay and by the shorter streams
To the great basins to the south, had filled
Them up, would keep them filled until the end
Of time.

Was this the thing Van Horne set out
To conquer? When Superior lay there 900
With its inviting levels? Blake, Mackenzie,
Offered this water like a postulate.
*'Why those twelve thousand men sent to the North?
Nonsense and waste with utter bankruptcy.'*
And the Laurentian monster at the first
Was undisturbed, presenting but her bulk
To the invasion. All she had to do
Was lie there neither yielding nor resisting.
Top-heavy with accumulated power
And overgrown survival without function, 910
She changed her spots as though brute rudiments

Of feeling foreign to her native hour
 Surprised her with a sense of violation
 From an existence other than her own-
 Or why take notice of this unknown breed,
 This horde of bipeds that could toil like ants,
 Could wake her up and keep her irritated?
 They tickled her with shovels, dug pickaxes,
 Into her scales and got under her skin,
 And potted holes in her with drills and filled 920
 Them up with what looked like fine grains of sand,
 Black sand. It wasn't noise that bothered her,
 For thunder she was used to from her cradle-
 The head-push and nose-blowing of the ice,
 The height and pressure of its body: these
 Like winds native to clime and habitat
 Had served only to lull her drowsing coils.
 It was not size or numbers that concerned her.
 It was their foreign build, their gait of movement.
 They did not crawl- nor were they born with wings. 930
 They stood upright and walked, shouted and sang;
 They needed air- that much was true- their mouths
 Were open but the tongue was alien.
 The sounds were not the voice of winds and waters,
 Nor that of any beasts upon the earth.
 She took them first with lethargy, suffered
 The rubbing of her back- those little jabs
 Of steel were like the burrowing of ticks
 In an elk's hide needing an antler point,
 Or else left in a numb monotony. 940
 These she could stand but when the breed
 Advanced west on her higher vertebrae,
 Kicking most insolently at her ribs,
 Pouring black powder in her cavities,
 And making not the clouds but her insides
 The home of fire and thunder, then she gave
 Them trial of her strength: the trestles tottered;
 Abutments, bridges broke; her rivers flooded:
 She summoned snow and ice, and then fell back
 On the last weapon in her armoury- 950
 The first and last- her passive corporal bulk,
 To stay or wreck the schedule of Van Horne.

NUMBER THREE

The big one was the mountains- seas indeed!
 With crests wither than foam: they poured like seas,
 Fluting the green banks of the pines and spruces.
 An eagle-flight above they hid themselves

In clouds. They carried space upon their ledges.
 Could these be overridden frontally,
 Or like typhoons outsmarted on the flanks?
 And what were on the flanks? The troughs and canyons, 960
 Passes more dangerous to the navigator
 Than to Magellan when he tried to read
 The barbarous language of his Strait by calling
 For echoes from the rocky hieroglyphs
 Playing their pranks of hide-and-seek in fog:
 As stubborn too as the old North-West Passage,
 More difficult, for ice-packs could break up;
 And as for bergs, what polar architect
 Could stretch his compass points to draught such peaks
 As kept on rising there beyond the foothills? 970
 And should the bastions of the Rockies yield
 To this new human and unnatural foe,
 Would not the Selkirks stand? This was a range
 That looked like some strange dread outside a door
 Which gave its name but would not show its features,
 Leaving them to the mind to guess at. This
 Meant tunnels- would there be no end to boring?
 There must be some day. Fleming and his men
 Had nosed their paths like hounds; but paths and trails,
 Measured in every inch by chain and transit, 980
 Looked easy and seductive on a chart.
 The rivers out there did not flow: they tumbled.
 The cataracts were fed by glaciers;
 Eddies were thought as whirlpools in the Gorges,
 And gradients had paws that tore up tracks.

Terror and beauty like twin signal flags
 Flew on the peaks for men to keep their distance.
 The two combined as in a storm at sea-
 '*Stay on the shore and take your fill of breathing,*
But come not to the decks and climb the rigging.' 990
 The Ranges could put cramps in hands and feet
 Merely by the suggestion of the venture.
 They needed miles to render up their beauty,
 As if the gods in high aesthetic moments,
 Resenting the profanity of touch,
 Chiselled this sculpture for the eye alone.

(Van Horne in momentary meditation at the Foothills.)

His name was now a legend. The North Shore,
 Though not yet conquered, yet had proved that he
 Could straighten crooked roads by pulling at them,
 Shear down a hill and drain a bog or fill 1000
 A valley overnight. Fast as a bobcat,

He'd climb and run across the shakiest trestle
 Or, with a locomotive short of coal,
 He could supply the head of steam himself.
 He breakfasted on bridges, lunched on ties;
 Drinking from gallon pails, he dined on moose.
 He could tire out the lumberjacks; beat hell
 From workers but no more than from himself.
 Only the devil or Paul Bunyan shared
 With him the secret of perpetual motion, 1010
 And when he moved among his men they looked
 For shoulder sprouts upon the Flying Dutchman.

But would his legend crack upon the mountains?
 There must be no retreat: his bugles knew
 Only one call- the summons to advance
 Against two fortresses: the mind, the rock.
 To prove the first defence was vulnerable,
 To tap the treasury at home and then
 Untie the purse-strings of the Londoners,
 As hard to loosen as salt-water knots- 1020
 That job was Stephen's, Smith's, Tupper's, Macdonald's.

He knew its weight: had heard, as well as they,
 Blake pumping at his pulmonary bellows,
 And if the speeches made the House shock-proof
 Before they ended, they could still peal forth
 From print more durable than spoken tones.
 Blake had returned to the attack and given
 Sir John the argue with another phrase
 As round and as melodious as the first:
 '*The Country's wealth, its millions after millions* 1030
Squandered- LOST IN THE GORGES OF THE FRASER.

A beautiful but ruinous piece of music
 That could only be drowned with drums and fifes.
 Tupper, fighting with fists and nails and toes,
 Had taken the word *scandal* which had cut
 His master's ballots, and had turned the edge
 With his word *slander*, but Blake's *sea*, how turn
 That edge? Now this last devastating phrase!
 But let Sir John and Stephen answer this
 Their way. Van Horne must answer it in his. 1040

INTERNECINE STRIFE

The men were fighting foes which had themselves
 Waged elemental civil wars and still
 Were hammering one another at this moment.
 The peaks and ranges flung from ocean beds
 Had wakened up one geologic morning

To find their scalps raked off, their lips punched in,
 The colour of their skins charged with new dyes.
 Some of them did noy wake or but half-woke;
 Prone or recumbent with the eerie shapes
 Of creatures that would follow them. Weather 1050
 Had acted on their spines and frozen them
 To stegosaurus or, taking longer cycles,
 Dividing human features, had blown back
 Their hair and, pressing on their cheeks and temples,
 Bestowed on them the gravity of mummies.
 But there was life and power which belied
 The tombs. Guerrilla evergreens were climbing
 In military order: at the base
 The *ponderosa* pine; the fir backed up
 The spruce; and it the Stoney Indian lodge-poles; 1060
 And these the white-barks; then, deciduous,
 The outpost suicidal Lyell larches
 Aiming at summits, digging scraggy roots
 Around the boulders in the thinning soil,
 Till they were stopped dead at the timber limit-
 Rock *versus* forest with the rock prevailing.
 Or with the summer warmth it was the ice,
 In treaty with the rock to hold a line
 As stubborn as a Balkan boundary,
 That left its caves to score the Douglasses, 1070
 And smother them with half a mile of dirt,
 And making snow-sheds, covering the camps,
 Futile as parasols in polar storms.
 One enemy alone had battled rock
 And triumphed: searching levels like lost broods,
 Keen on their ocean scent, the rivers cut
 The quartzite, licked the slate and softened it,
 Till mud solidified was mud again,
 And then, digesting it like earthworms, squirmed
 Along the furrows with one steering urge- 1080
 To navigate the mountains in due time
 Back to their home in worm-casts on the tides.

Into this scrimmage came the flighting men,
 And all but river were their enemies.
 Whether alive or dead the bush resisted:
 Alive, it must be slain with axe and saw,
 If dead, it was in tangle at their feet.
 The ice could hit men as hit the spruces.
 Even the rivers had betraying tricks,
 Watched like professed allies across a border. 1090
 They smiled from fertile plains and easy runs
 Of valley gradients: their eyes got narrow,
 Full of suspicion at the gorges where

They leaped and put the rickets in the trestles.
 Though natively in conflict with the rock,
 Both leagued against invasion. At Hell's Gate
 A mountain laboured and brought forth a bull
 Which, stranded in mid-stream, was fighting back
 The river, and the fight turned on the men,
 Demanding from this route their bread and steel. 1100
 And there below the Gate was the Black Canyon
 With twenty-miles-an-hour burst of speed.

(ONDERDONK BUILDS THE 'SKUZZY' TO FORCE THE PASSAGE)

'Twas more than navigation: only eagles
 Might follow up this run; the spawning salmon
 Gulled by the mill-race had returned to rot
 Their upturned bellies in the canyon eddies.
 Two engines at the stern, a forrard winch
 Steam-powered, failed to stem the cataract.
 The last resource was shoulders, arms and hands.
 Fifteen men at the capstan, creaking hawsers, 1110
 Two hundred Chinese tugging at shore ropes
 To keep her bow-on from the broadside drift,
 The *Skuzzy* undre steam and muscle took
 The shoals and rapids, and warped through the Gate,
 Until she reached the navigable water-
 The adventure was not sailing: it was climbing.

As hard a challenge were the precipices
 Worn water-smooth and sheer a thousand feet.
 Surveyors from the edges looked for footholds,
 But, finding none, they tried marine manoeuvres. 1120
 Out of a hundred men they drafted sailors
 Whose toes as supple as their fingers knew
 The wash of reeling decks, whose knees were hardened
 Through tying gaskets at the royal yards:
 They lowered them with knotted ropes and drew them
 Along the face until the lines were strung
 Between the juts. Barefooted, dynamite
 Strapped to their waists, the sappers followed, treading
 The spider films and chipping holes for blasts,
 Until the cliffs delivered up their features 1130
 Under the civil discipline of roads.

RING, RING THE BELLS

*Ring, ring the bells, but not the engine bells:
 Today only the ritual of the steeple*

Chanted to the dull tempo of the toll.
 Sorrow in stalking through the camps, speaking
 A common mother-tongue. 'Twill leave tomorrow
 To turn that language on a Blackfoot tepee,
 Then take its leisurely Pacific time
 To tap its fingers on a coolie's door.
 Ring, ring the bells but not the engine bells: 1140
 Today only that universal toll,
 For granite, mixing dust with human lime,
 Had so compounded bodies into boulders
 As to untype the blood, and, then, the Fraser,
 Catching the fragments from the dynamite,
 Had bleached all birthmarks from her swirling dead.

Tomorrow and the engine bells again!

THE LAKE OF MONEY

(The appeal to the Government for a loan of twenty-two-and-a-half million, 1883.)

Sir John began to muse on his excuses.
 Was there no bottom to this lake? One mile
 Along the northern strip had cost- how much? 1150
 Eleven dollars to the inch. The Road
 In all would measure up to ninety millions,
 And diverse hands were plucking at his elbow.
 The Irish and the Dutch he could outface,
 Outquip. He knew Van Horne and Shaughnessy
 Had little time for speeches- one was busy
 In grinding out two thousand miles; the other
 Was working wizardry on creditors,
 Pulling rabbits from hats, gold coins from sleeves
 In Montreal. As for his foes like Blake, 1160
 He thanked his household gods the Irishman
 Could claim only viscous brand of humour,
 Heavy, impenetrable till the hour
 To laugh had taken on a chestnut colour.
 But Stephen was his friend, hard to resist.
 And there was Smith. He knew that both had pledged
 Their private fortunes as security
 For the construction of the Road. But that
 Was not enough. Sir John had yet to dip
 And scrape farther into the public pocket, 1170
 Explore its linings: his, the greater task;
 His, to commit a nation to the risk.
 How could he face the House with pauper hands?

He had to deal with Stephen first- a man
 Laconic, nailing points and clinching them.
 Oratory, the weapon of the massed assemblies
 Was not the weapon here- Scot meeting Scot.
 The burr was hard to take; and Stephen had
 A Banffshire-cradled r. Drilling the ear,
 It paralysed the nerves, hit the red cells. 1180
 The logic in the sound, escaping print,
 Would seep through channels and befog the cortex.

Sir John counted the exits of discretion:
 Disguise himself? A tailor might do much;
 A barber might trim down his name, brush back
 The forelock, but no artist of massage,
 Kneading that face from brow to nasal tip,
 Could change a chunk of granite into talc.
 His rheumatism? Yet he still could walk.
 Neuralgia did not interfere with speech. 1190
 The bronchial tubing needed softer air?
 Vacations could not cancel all appointments.
 Men saw him in the flesh at Ottawa.
 He had to speak this week, wheedling committees,
 Much easier than to face a draper's clerk,
 Tongue-trained on Aberdonian bargain-counters.
 He raised his closed left hand to straighten out
 His fingers one by one- four million people.
 He had to pull a trifle on that fourth,
 Not so resilient as the other three. 1200
 Only a wrench could stir the little finger
 Which answered with a vicious backward jerk.

The dollar fringes of one hundred million
 Were smirching up the blackboard of his mind.
 But curving round and through them was the thought
 He could not sponge away. He had not fathered
 The Union? Prodigy indeed it was
 From Coast to Coast. Was not the Line essential?
 What was this fungus sprouting from his rind
 That left him at the root less clear a growth 1210
 Than this Dutch immigrant, William Van Horne?
 The name suggested artificial land
 Rescued from swamp by bulging dikes and ditches;
 And added now to that were bogs and sloughs
 And that most cursed diabase which God
 Had left from the explosions of his wrath.
 And yet this man was challenging his pride.
 North-Sea ancestral moisture on his beard,
 Van Horne was now the spokesman for the West,
 The champion of an all-Canadian route, 1220

The Yankee who had come straight over, linked
 His name and life with the Canadian nation.
 Besides, he had infected the whole camp.
 Whether acquired or natural, the stamp
 Of faith had never left his face. Was it
 The artist's instinct which had made the Rockies
 And thence the Selkirks, scenes of tourist lure,
 As easy for the passage of the engine
 As for the flight of eagles? Miracles
 Became his thought: the others took their cue 1230
 From him. They read the lines upon his lips.
 But miracles did not spring out of air.
 Under the driving will and sweltering flesh
 They came from pay-cars loaded with the cash.
 So that was why Stephen had called so often-
 Money- that lake of money, bonds, more bonds.

(The Bill authorizing the loan stubbornly carries the House.)

DYNAMITE ON THE NORTH SHORE

The lizzard was in sanguinary mood.
 She had been waked again: she felt her sleep
 Had lasted a few seconds of her time.
 The insects had come back- the ants, if ants 1240
 They were- dragging *those* trees, *those* logs athwart
 Her levels, driving in *those* spikes; and low
 The long grey snakes unknown within the region
 Wormed from the east, unstriped, sunning themselves
 Uncoiled upon the logs and then moved on,
 Growing each day, ever keeping abreast!
 She watched them, waiting for a bloody moment,
 Until the borers halted at a spot,
 The most invulnerable of her whole column,
 Drove in that iron. wrenched it in the holes, 1250
 Hitting, digging, twisting. Why that spot?
 Not this the former itch. That sharp proboscis
 Was out for more than self-sufficing blood
 About the cuticle: 'twas out for business
 In the deep layers and the arteries.
 And this consistent punching at her belly
 With fire and thunder slapped her like an insult,
 As with the blasts the caches of her broods
 Broke- nickel, copper, silver and fool's gold,
 Burst from their immemorial dormitories 1260

To sprawl indecent in the light of day.
 Another warning- this time different.

Westward above her webs she had a trap-
 A thing called muskeg, easy on the eyes
 Stung with the dust of gravel. Cotton grass,
 Its white spires blending with the orchids,
 Peeked through green table-cloths of sphagnum moss.
 Carnivorous bladder-wort studded the acres,
 Passing the water-fleas through their digestion.
 Sweet-gale and sundew edged the dwarf black spruce; 1270
 And herds of cariboo had left their hoof-marks,
 Betraying visual solidity,
 But like the thousands of the pitcher plants,
 Their downward-pointing hairs alluring insects,
 Deceptive- and the men were moving west!
 Now was her time. She took three engines, sank them
 With seven tracks down through the hidden lake
 To the rock bed, then over them she spread
 A counterpane of leather-leaf and slime.
 A warning, that was all for now. 'Twas sleep 1280
 She wanted, sleep, for drowsing was her pastime
 And waiting through eternities of seasons.
 As for intruders bred for skeletons-
 Some day perhaps when ice began to move,
 Or some convulsion ran fires through her tombs,
 She might stir in her sleep and far below
 The reach of steel and blast of dynamite,
 She'd claim their bones as her possessive right
 And wrap them cold in her pre-Cambrian folds.

THREATS OF SECESSION

The lady's face was flushed. Thirteen years now 1290
 Since that engagement ring adorned her finger!
 Adorned? Betrayed. She often took it off
 And flung it angrily upon the dresser,
 Then took excursions with her sailor-lover.
 Had that man with a throat like Ottawa,
 That tailored suitor in a cut-away,
 Presumed compliance on her part? High time
 To snub him for delay- for was not time
 The marrow of agreement? At the mirror
 She tried to cream a wrinkle from her forehead, 1300
 Toyed with the ring, replaced it and removed it.
 Harder, she thought, to get it on and off-
 This like the wrinkle meant but one thing, age.
 So not too fast; play safe. Perhaps the man

Was not the master of his choice. Someone
 Within the family group might well contest
 Exotic marriage. Still, her plumes were ruffled
 By Blake's two-nights address before the Commons:
 Three lines inside the twenty thousand words
 Had maddened her. She searched for hidden meanings- 1310
'Should she insist on those preposterous terms
And threaten to secede, then let her go,
Better than ruin the country.' *'Let her go,'*
 And *'ruin'*- language this to shake her bodice.
 Was this indictment of her character,
 Or worse, her charm? Or was it just plain dowry?
 For this last one at least she had an answer.
 Pay now or separation- this the threat.
 Dipping the ring into a soapy lather,
 She pushed it to the second knuckle, twirled 1320
 It past. Although the diamond was off-colour,
 She would await its partner ring of gold-
 The finest carat; yes, by San Francisco!

BACK TO THE MOUNTAINS

As grim an enemy as rock was time.
 The little men from five-to-six feet high,
 From three-to-four score years in lease of breath,
 Were flung in double-front against them both
 In years a billion strong; so long was it
 Since brachiopods in mollusc habitats
 Were clamping shells on weed in ocean mud. 1330
 Now only yesterday had Fleming's men,
 Searching for toeholds on the sides of cliffs,
 Five thousand feet above sea-level, set
 A tripod's leg upon a trilobite.
 And age meant pressure, density. Sullen
 With aeons, mountains would not stand aside:
 Just block the path- morose but without anger,
 Not feeling in the menace of their frowns,
 Immobile for they had no need of motion;
 Their veins possessed no blood- they carried quartzite. 1340
 Frontal assault! To go through them direct
 Seemed just an inconceivable as ride
 Over their peaks. But go through them the men
 Were ordered and their weapons were their hands
 And backs, pickaxes, shovels, hammers, drills
 And dynamite- against the rock and time;
 For here the labour must be counted up
 In months subject to clauses of a contract
 Distinguished from the mortgage-run an age

Conceded to the trickle of the rain 1350
 In building river-homes. The men bored in,
 The mesozoic rock arguing the inches.

This was a kind of surgery unknown
 To mountains or the mothers of the myths.
 These had a chloroform in leisured time,
 Squeezing a swollen handful of light-seconds,
 When water like a wriggling casuist
 Had probed and found the areas for incision.
 Now time was rushing labour- inches grew
 To feet, to yards: the drills- the single jacks, 1360
 The double jacks- drove in and down; the holes
 Gave way to excavations, these to tunnels,
 Till men sodden with mud and roof-drip steamed
 From sunlight through the tar-black to the sunlight.

HOLLOW ECHOES FROM THE TREASURY VAULT

Sir John was tired as to the point of death.
 His chin was anchored to his chest. Was Blake
 Right after all? And was Mackenzie right?
Superior could be travelled on. Besides,
 It had a bottom, but those northern bogs
 Like quicksands could go down to the earth's core. 1370
 Compared with them, quagmires of ancient legend
 Were backyard puddles for old ducks. To sink
 Those added millions down that wallowing hole!
 He thought now through his feet. Many a time
 When argument cemented opposition,
 And hopeless seemed his case, he could think up
 A tale to laugh the benches to accord.
 No one knew better, when a point had failed
 The brain, how to divert it through the ribs.
 But now his stock of stories had run out. 1380
 This was exhaustion at its coma level.
 Or was he sick? Never had spots like this
 Assailed his eyes. He could not rub them out-
 Those shifting images- was it the sunset
 Refracted through the bevelled window edges?
 He shambled over and drew down the blind;
 Returned and slumped; it was no use; the spots
 Were there. No light could ever shoot this kind
 Of orange through a prism, or this blue,
 And what a green! The spectrum was ruled out; 1390
 Its bands were too inviolate. He rubbed
 The lids again- a brilliant gold appeared
 Upon a silken backdrop of pure white,

And in the centre, red- a scarlet red,
 A dancing, rampant and rebellious red
 That like a stain spread outward covering
 The vision field. He closed his eyes and listened:
 Why, what was that? 'Twas bad enough that light
 Should play such pranks upon him, but most sound
 Crash the Satanic game, reverberate 1400
 A shot fifteen years after it was fired,
 And culminate its echoes with the thud
 Of marching choruses outside his window:

*'We'll hang Riel up the Red River,
 And he'll roast in hell forever,
 We'll hang him up the River
 With a yah-yah-yah.'*

The noose was for the shot: 'Twas blood for blood;
 The death of Riel for the death of Scott.
 What could not Blake do with that on the Floor, 1410
 Or that young, tall, bilingual advocate
 Who with the carriage of his syllables
 Could bid an audience like an orchestra
 Answer his body swayong like a reed?
 Colours and sounds made riot of his mind-
 With horses in July processional prance,
 The blackrobe's swish, the Métis' sullen tread,
 And out there in the rear the treaty-wise
 Full-breeds with buffalo wallows on their foreheads.

This he could stand no longer, sick indeed: 1420
 Send for his doctor, the first thought, then No;
 The doctor would advise an oculist,
 The oculist return him to the doctor,
 The doctor would see-saw him to another-
 A specialist on tumors of the brain,
 And he might recommend close-guarded rest
 In some asylum- Devil take them all,
 He had his work to do. He glanced about
 And spied his medicine upon the sideboard;
 Amber it was, distilled from Highland springs, 1430
 That often had translated age to youth
 And boiled his blood on a victorious rostrum.
 Conviction seized him as he stood, for here
 At least he was not cut from compromise,
 Nor curried to his nickname Old Tomorrow.
 Deliberation in his open stance,
 He trenched a deep one, gurgled and sat down.
 What were those paltry millions after all?
 They stood between completion of the Road

And bankruptcy of both Road and Nation. 1440
 Those north-shore gaps must be closed in by steel.
 It did not need exhilarated judgment
 To see the sense of that. To send the men
 Hop-skip-and-jump upon lake ice to board
 The flatcars was a revelry for imps.
 And all that cutting through the mountain rock,
 Four years of it and more, and all for nothing,
 Unless those gaps were spanned, bedded and railed.
 To quit the Road, to have the Union broken
 Was irredeemable. He rose, this time 1450
 Invincibility carved on his features,
 Hoisted a second, then drew up the blind.
 He never saw a sunset just like this.
 He lingered in the posture of devotion:
 That sun for sure was in the west, or was it?
 Soon it would be upholstering the clouds
 Upon the Prairies, Rockies and the Coast:
 He turned and sailed back under double-reef,
 Cabined himself inside an armchair, stretched
 His legs to their full length under the table. 1460
 Something miraculous had changed the air-
 A chemistry that knew how to extract
 The iron from the will: the spots had vanished
 And in their place an unterrestrial nimbus
 Circled his hair: the jerks had left his nerves:
 The millions kept on shrinking or were running
 From right to left: the fourth arthritic digit
 Was straight, and yes, by heaven, the little fifth
 Which up to now was just a calcium hook
 Was suppling in the Hebridean warmth. 1470
 A blessed peace fell like a dew upon him,
 And soon, in trance, drenched in conciliation,
 He hiccuped gently- 'Now let S-S-Stephen come!'

(The Government grants the Directors the right to issue \$35,000,000, guarantees \$20,000,000, the rest to be issued by the Railway Directors. Stephen goes to London, and Lord Revelstoke, speaking for the House of Baring, takes over the issue.)

SUSPENSE IN THE MONTREAL BOARD ROOM

Evening had settled hours before its time
 Within the Room and on the face of Angus.
 Dejection overlaid this social fur,
 Rumpled his side-burns, left moustache untrimmed.
 The vision of his Bank, his future Shops,

Was like his outlook for the London visit.
 Van Horne was fronting him with a like visage 1480
 Except for two spots glowing on his cheeks-
 Dismay and anger at those empty pay-cars.
 His mutterings were indistinct but final
 As though he were reciting to himself
 The Athanasian damnatory clauses.
 He felt the Receiver's breath upon his neck:
 To come so near the end, and then this hurdle!

Only one thing could penetrate that murk-
 A cable pledge from London, would it come?
 Till now refusal or indifference 1490
 Had met the overtures. Would Stephen turn
 The trick?

A door-knock and a telegram
 With Stephen's signature! Van Horne ripped it
 Apart. Articulation failed his tongue,
 But Angus got the meaning from his face
 And from a noisy sequence of deductions:-
 An inkstand coasted through the office window,
 Followed by shredded maps and blotting-pads,
 Fluttering like shad-flies in a summer gale;
 A bookshelf smitten by a fist collapsed; 1500
 Two chairs flew to the ceiling- one retired,
 The other roosted on the chandelier.
 Some thirty years erased like blackboard chalk,
 Van Horne was in a school at Illinois.
 Triumphant over his two-hundred weight,
 He leaped and turned a cartwheel on the table,
 Driving heel sparables into the oak,
 Came down to teach his partner a Dutch dance;
 And in the presence of the messenger,
 Who stared immobilized at what he thought 1510
 New colours in the managerial picture,
 Van Horne took hold of Angus bodily,
 Tore off his tie and collar, mauled his shirt,
 And stuffed a Grand Trunk folder down his breeches.

*(The last gap in the mountains- between the Selkirks and Savona's
 Ferry- is closed.)*

The Road itself was like a stream that men
 Had coaxed and teased or bullied out of Nature.
 As if watching for weak spots in her codes,
 It sought for levels like the watercourses.
 It sinuously took the bends, rejoiced
 In plains and easy grades, found gaps, poured through them, 1520
 But hating steep descends avoided them.

Unlike the rivers which in full rebellion
Against the canyons' hydrophobic slaver
Went to the limit of their argument:
Unlike again, the stream of steel had found
A way to climb, became a mountaineer.
From the Alberta plains it reached the Summit,
And where it could not climb, it cut and curved,
Till from the Rockies to the Coastal Range
It had accomplished what the Rivers had, 1530
Making a hundred clean Caesarian cuts,
And bringing to delivery in their time
Their smoky, lusty-screaming locomotives.

THE SPIKE

Silver or gold? Van Horne had rumbled '*Iron*'.
No flags or bands announced this ceremony,
No Morse in circulation through the world,
And though the vital words like Eagle Pass,
Craigellachie, were trembling in their belfries,
No hands were at the ropes. The air was taut
With silences as rigid as the spruces 1540
Forming the background in November mist.
More casual than camera-wise, the men
Could have been properties upon a stage,
Except for road maps furrowing their faces.
Rogers, his both feet planted on a tie,
Stood motionless as ballast. In the rear,
Covering the scene with spirit-level eyes,
Predestination on his chin, was Fleming.
The only one groomed for the ritual
From smooth silk hat and well-cut square-rig beard 1550
Down through his Caledonian longitude,
He was outstaturing others by a foot,
And upright as the mainmast of a brig.
Beside him, barely reaching to his waist,
A water-boy had wormed his way in front
To touch this last rail with his foot, his face
Upturned to see the cheek-bone crags of Rogers.
The other side of Fleming, hands in pockets,
Eyes leaden-lidded under square-crowned hat,
And puncheon-bellied under overcoat, 1560
Unsmiling at the focused lens- Van Horne
Whatever ecstasy played round that rail
Did not leap to his face. Five years had passed,
Less than five years- so well within the pledge.

The job was done. Was this the slouch of rest?
 Not to the men he drove through walls of granite.
 The embers from the past were in his soul,
 Banked for the moment at the rail and smoking,
 Just waiting for the future to be blown.
 At last the spike and Donald with the hammer! 1570
 His hair like frozen moss from Labrador
 Poked out under his hat, ran down his face
 To merge with streaks of rust in a white cloud.
 What made him fumble the first stroke? Not age:
 The snow belied his middle sixties. Was
 It lapse of caution or his sense of thrift,
 That elemental stuff which through his life
 Never pockmarked his daring but had made
 The man the canniest trader of his time,
 Who never missed a rat-count, never failed 1580
 To gauge the size and texture of a pelt?
 Now there he was caught by the camera,
 Back bent, head bowed, and staring at a sledge,
 Outwitted by an idiotic nail.
 Though from the crowd no laughter, yet the spike
 With its slewed neck was grinning up at Smith.
 Wrenched out, it was replaced. This time the hammer
 Gave a first tap as with apology,
 Another one, another, till the spike
 Was safely stationed in the tie and then 1590
 The Scot, invoking his ancestral clan,
 Using the hammer like a battle-axe,
 His eyes bloodshot with memories of Flodden,
 Descended on it, rammed it to its home.

The stroke released a trigger for a burst
 Of sound that stretched the gamut of the air.
 The shouts of engineers and dynamiters,
 Of locomotive-workers and explorers,
 Flanking the rails, were but a tuning-up
 For a massed continental chorus. Led 1600
 By Moberly (of the Eagles and *this* Pass)
 And Rogers (of *his own*), followed by Wilson,
 And Ross (charged with the Rocky Mountain Section),
 By Egan (general of the Western Lines),
 Cambie and Marcus Smith, Harris of Boston,
 The roar was deepened by the bass of Fleming,
 And heightened by the laryngeal fifes
 Of Dug Mackenzie and John H. McTavish.
 It ended when Van Horne spat out some phlegm
 To ratify the tumult with '*Well Done*' 1610
 Tied in a knot of monosyllables.

Merely the tuning-up! For on the morrow
The last blow on the spike would stir the mould
Under the drumming of the prairie wheels,
And make the whistles from the steam out-crow
The Fraser. Like a gavel it would close
Debate, making Macdonald's '*sea to sea*'
Pour through two oceanic megaphones-
Three thousand miles of *Hail* from port to port;
And somewhere in the middle of the line
Of steel, even the lizard heard the stroke.
The breed had triumphed after all. To drown
The traffic chorus, she must blend the sound
With those inaugural, narcotic notes
Of storm and thunder which would send her back
Deeper than ever in Laurentian sleep.

1620

ALFRED PURDY

ARCTIC RHODODENDRONS

They are small purple surprises
in the river's white racket
and after you've seen them
a number of times
in water-places
where their silence seems
related to river-thunder
you think of them as "noisy flowers"
Years ago
it may have been
that lovers came this way
stopped in the outdoor hotel
to watch the water floorshow
and lying prone together
where the purged green
boils to a white heart
and the shore trembles
like a stone song
with bodies touching
flowers were their conversation
and love the sound of a colour
that lasts two weeks in August
and then dies
except for the three or four
I pressed in this letter
and send whispering to you

Pangnirtung

THE COUNTRY NORTH OF BELLEVILLE

Bush land and scrub land-
Cashel Township and Wollaston
Elzevir McClure and Dungannon

green lands of Weslemkoon Lake
where a man might have some
 opinion of what beauty
is and none deny him
 for miles-

Yet this is the country of defeat
where Sisyphus rolls a big stone
year after year up the ancient hills
picnicking glaciers have left strewn
with centuries' rubble
 backbreaking days
 in the sun and rain
when realization seeps slow in the mind
without grandeur or self-deception in
 noble struggle
of being a fool-

A country of quiescence and still distance
a lean land
 not like the fat south
with inches of black soil on
 earth's round belly-
And where the farms are
 it's as if a man stuck
both thumbs in the stony earth and pulled

 it apart
 to make room
enough between the trees
for a wife
 and maybe some cows and
 room for some
of the more easily kept illusions-
And where the farms have gone back
to forest
 are only soft outlines
 shadowy differences-

Old fences drift vaguely among the trees
 a pile of moss-covered stones
gathered for some ghost purpose
has lost meaning under the meaningless sky
 - they are like cities under water
and the undulating green waves of time
 are laid on them-

This is the country of our defeat
 and yet