

On the **art** of Being Canadian



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ON THE
art OF BEING
CANADIAN

Sherrill Grace



UBC Press · Vancouver · Toronto

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20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 5 4 3 2 1

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Grace, Sherrill E.

On the art of being Canadian / Sherrill Grace.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7748-1578-9

1. National characteristics, Canadian, in art. 2. Nationalism and the arts — Canada.
3. Arts, Canadian — 20th century. 4. Arts, Canadian — 21st century. I. Title.

FC95.5.G72 2009

700.971

C2009-904155-3

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP), and of the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and with the help of the K.D. Srivastava Fund.

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Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens
Set in Electra by Artegraphica Design Co. Ltd.
Text design: Irma Rodriguez
Copy editor: Deborah Kerr

UBC Press
The University of British Columbia
2029 West Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2
www.ubcpress.ca

for

Gabriele Helms
(1966 to 2004)

and for

David Vella Grace
(2004-)

Contents

Illustrations / ix

Acknowledgments / xi

Introduction:
On Being Canadian / 3

1

Creating a Northern Nation / 15

2

Theatres of War: Battle Fronts and Home Fronts / 55

3

Inventing Iconic Figures / 106

Epilogue:
Listening for the Heartbeat of a Country / 154

Notes / 160

Bibliography / 175

Index / 188

Illustrations

- 1 Frederick Varley, *Portrait of Vincent Massey* (1920) / 6
- 2 Andrew Danson Danushevsky, “Jean Chrétien, 1985, Self-Portrait” (1985) / 9
- 3 Charles Pachter, *The Mistook North* (1984) / AFTER 16
- 4 Don Proch, *Magnetic North Mask* (2000) / AFTER 16
- 5 Gerardus Mercator’s map of the Arctic (1589) / 21
- 6 Rudy Wiebe’s map *Inuit View to the South* / 22
- 7 Nordicity map, *Where Is the North?* / 23
- 8 Map of Canada showing Nunavut / 24
- 9 William Blair Bruce, *The Phantom Hunter* (c. 1888) / AFTER 26
- 10 Lawren Harris, *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate Zone* (c. 1935) / AFTER 26
- 11 Benoit Aquin, “Le verglas #16, Boucherville” (1998) / 27
- 12 Owen Beattie’s photograph of John Torrington / AFTER 38
- 13 Dominique Gaucher, *Abstractionist Rescued from Certain Depth 2* (2006) / AFTER 38
- 14 John Palmer, photographs of Mother Canada and the Vimy Memorial / AFTER 56
- 15 Frederick Horsman Varley, *For What?* (1918) / AFTER 56
- 16 Map of the western front, 1917 / 61
- 17 Maps of Second World War theatres of war / 62
- 18 Alex Colville, *Infantry, near Nijmegen, Holland* (1946) / AFTER 66
- 19 Charles Comfort, *Via Dolorosa, Ortona* (c. 1944) / AFTER 66

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 20 Charles Comfort, *Route 6 at Cassino, Italy* (1944) / 71
- 21 Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770) / 73
- 22 C.R.W. Nevinson, *War in the Air* (1918) / 83
- 23 Eric Peterson as Billy Bishop in *Billy Bishop Goes to War* / 84
- 24 “Remember Hong Kong!” a Second World War recruiting poster / 86
- 25 Photograph of Louis Riel in 1885 / 113
- 26 Chester Brown, page from *Louis Riel* (2003) / 115
- 27 Marcien Lemay, *Louis Riel* (1968) / 122
- 28 John Boyle, *Batoche—Louis David* (1975) / AFTER 122
- 29 Jane Ash Poitras, *Riel Reality* (2000) / AFTER 122
- 30 Joe Fafard, *Emily Carr and Friends* (2005) / AFTER 126
- 31 Emily Carr, *Self-Portrait* (1938-39) / AFTER 126
- 32 Joy Coghill in *Song of This Place* / 130
- 33 Tom Thomson, *Self-Portrait after a Day in Tacoma* (1902) / AFTER 134
- 34 Tom Thomson, *The Jack Pine* (c. 1916-17) / AFTER 134
- 35 Brenda Wainman-Goulet, *Tom Thomson* (2005) / 139
- 36 Panya Clark Espinal, *First Snow* (1998) / 141
- 37 Mina Benson Hubbard on her Labrador trail (1905 and the 2005 centenary) / 146
- 38 Mina in *Mina et Leonidas Hubbard: L’amour qui fait voyager* (2007) / 149

Acknowledgments

From 2003 to 2005, it was my privilege to hold the Brenda and David McLean Chair in Canadian Studies at the University of British Columbia. The duties of the chair are to teach two senior seminars in the Canadian Studies Program and to deliver three public lectures. I gave my lectures in March 2005 and have revised them for this monograph. Chair holders before me have included some of the most distinguished scholars of Canada from my generation, and each one of them is, and was, an inspiring lecturer, but it is Brenda and David McLean who had the vision and generosity to grasp the significance of Canadian studies for future generations and who have given us, and posterity, an invaluable gift through these lectures and monographs.

Although a published book provides tangible and lasting form for the lectures and for my research over those years, it cannot capture all the lived joys and challenges, all the face-to-face interaction, and all the lively debate that made holding the McLean Chair such a delight for me. Thus, though I begin with my thanks to the McLeans, I must also thank my students in both seminars for their enthusiasm, insights, and lively discussions. I will not name each of them, but I hope they will read this little book and keep in touch with me as they continue to carry their dedication to this country into their future careers.

It is especially important to thank the many artists, from young poets to veteran painters and filmmakers, for their permission to quote from or reproduce their works, and it is a particular pleasure to thank Kate Braid

and Karen Connelly for allowing me to quote so extensively from their work. If these artists did not do what they do so well, there would be no “art of being Canadian.” One of my long-standing debts is to Canadian geographer Louis-Édmond Hamelin, and it is once more a pleasure to thank him for his knowledge about the North and for his inspiration. Among the many others I wish to thank is John O’Brian, who, as chair of the Canadian Studies Program at UBC, advised and assisted me at every turn and whose vast knowledge of the Canadian cultural scene has guided me on many occasions. Working with you, John, has always been fun. Other colleagues have also provided support, ideas, and suggestions for music or poems or paintings: Richard Cavell, Stephen Chatman, Donna Coates, Michelle La Flamme, Bill New, Doug Udell (and the staff of the Douglas Udell Gallery), Jerry Wasserman, Dominique Yupangco, and still others who have listened patiently while I struggled to articulate and clarify ideas. To all I owe my appreciation because thinking in solitude is thinking that is limited; it is only in the exchange of ideas that we learn.

This book is dedicated to two wonderful people — one for the past and one for the future. The colleague and friend whom I remember with special feeling and to whom this book is dedicated is Dr. Gabriele Helms. Gabi and I had discussed many of the ideas I would develop for this book, and we were planning to work together on the Canadian representation of war. My only regret about this volume is that she died before I could benefit further from her reflections on what it means, in Gabi’s case for an immigrant as well as a scholar, to become and be Canadian. My grandson, David, was born in 2004 and still has much to learn about being Canadian; I dedicate this book to him with the hope that his future and the future of his country will be full of promise.

Finally, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the support over many years of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and of individuals such as Margery Fee, Laura Moss, Jean Wilson, and the editors

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

at UBC Press, Darcy Cullen and Holly Keller, for their support of this project at various stages. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to Geneviève Gagné-Hawes for her amazing help with illustrations and permissions. And, as so often in the past, it is a joy to thank my family: John, who shares my passion for the North and for Canadian painting; Elizabeth, who has also gone north and succumbed to the temptations of Canadian art, theatre, and literature; and Malcolm, with whom I can always discuss the history and exigencies of war.

On the **art** of Being Canadian

To be creative is, in fact, Canadian.

— *Margaret Atwood*

The identity of a nation has no fixed essence and supplements this lack with the labour of continuous self-representation. Nationhood is formed by telling stories, manufacturing fictions, and inventing traditions in a ceaseless and selective process of inclusion and exclusion, remembering and forgetting.

— *Sue Malvern*

If this is your land, where are your stories?

— *Edward J. Chamberlin*

INTRODUCTION

On Being Canadian

Oh Canada.

I try so hard with you
but nothing explains
your terrible polite immensity,
your merciless wind, your deaths,
which are my own.

Not to suggest that a country is a family

but stating it unequivocally
a country *is* a family
and this is mine,
my country
my family.

I come back to them now
as water always comes back.

It is the dead
who teach us how to live,
well or badly, it is the dead
who teach us how to swim,
well or badly, it is the dead
who walk among us
but cannot spell our names.

— *Karen Connelly, "OH, CANADA"*

I began my 2005 McLean Lectures, and now begin this book, with Karen Connelly's poem "OH, CANADA" because it is by a young Canadian woman writing in this century, and because it responds, in so many ways, to Vincent Massey's questions in his 1948 book *On Being Canadian*: "What sort of person do we wish our young Canadian to be?" Massey asked. "What will he be like if he embodies the best in the Canada around him?" (184). Massey's book has given me part of my title, but Connelly's poem, written in 2003 and first published in 2004, demonstrates the contemporary relevance of my title, as well as confirming my belief that *the art of Canada* continues to tell us what "being Canadian" means.

When he was writing in 1948, Massey was not thinking about the arts in quite the interdisciplinary way I am or even as he would come to do over the next decade of his life. He was concerned about education — a liberal arts education in schools and universities — because he believed that such an education would produce good Canadian citizens. From today's perspective, it is easy to describe Massey's ideas as elitist and conventional, and it is easy to criticize his personal love of pomp and ceremony, his loyalty to the British Empire, his wealth, his centralized view of power, and his rhetorical flourishes. It is easy but not altogether wise, if for no other reason than because a liberal arts education is still the foundation of contemporary Canadian life in ways that technical training or scientific education alone can never be. But there are other reasons for taking the man and his ideas on the arts seriously. Vincent Massey (1887-1967), Canada's first native-born governor general (from 1952 to 1959), had a vision of Canada to which he was prepared to devote his time and energy. He placed great emphasis on the role of culture (by which he meant theatre, classical music, architecture, history, and painting) in defining the nation, and eighteen years before writing *On Being Canadian*, he had articulated his reasons for believing that art and nationality must go together. In "Art and Nationality in Canada," a speech he gave to the

Royal Society of Canada in 1930, he explained why the arts were so important to the country, and he called on artists “to arouse us from our lethargy” (67) concerning our own history and landscape while at the same time warning his audience that “a national art cannot flourish without a public which is both honest and loyal” (71).

Early in my planning for the McLean Lectures, I knew I wanted to begin with Massey because, for better or worse (and much of it *is* better), he has had a profound and lasting influence on the state of the arts in this country.¹ It was the report of the Massey-Lévesque Commission (chaired by Massey with Georges-Henri Lévesque as a key committee member), formally called *Report: Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1949-1951*, that warned against “a national independence which would be nothing but an empty shell without a vigorous and distinctive cultural life” (18), and it was this Royal Commission that described Canadian independence in terms of the North, the arts, and a strong military for national defence. Moreover, it was the Massey-Lévesque Commission that called for the creation of the Canada Council, which came into existence in 1957 with Lévesque at the helm. The commission’s report also paved the way for numerous future studies and commissions that would follow, such as the much criticized Appelbaum-Hébert Report of 1982, the Fraticelli Report on gender inequity in Canadian theatre professions (1982), and the Canadian Arts Consumer Profile (1993-94) — all funded by the federal government.² By the 1990s Canadians had come a long way from Massey’s vision, and the very term “Arts Consumer Profile” must have sent him whirling in his grave.

By invoking him here in these pages, I am, as it were, *calling him up* (see Figure 1), but if he does put in a spectral appearance, I hope he will approve my linking of the arts with his “being Canadian” because I too believe in the value of the liberal arts in education, in the importance of national independence, and in the need for a loyal and informed public.



FIGURE 1 Frederick Varley, *Portrait of Vincent Massey* (1920), oil on canvas, 120.6 x 141.0 cm. Charles Vincent Massey (1887-1967) was a life-long patron of the arts and the first Canadian-born governor general of Canada (1952-59). Frederick Horsman Varley (1881-1969), a First World War war artist and founding member of the Group of Seven, painted a number of powerful portraits of which this is a striking example. Permanent collection of Hart House, University of Toronto; reproduced with the permission of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery.

Like Massey, albeit without his attachment to the British monarchy, I am a cultural nationalist. Nevertheless, I hope that, as one of Karen Connelly's "dead / who teach us how to live," he will hold his tongue as I set about pushing the boundaries on *the art of being* Canadian beyond what he would have accepted, simply by virtue of being a female academic and

by foregrounding female artists. As Canadians now know so well, Earle Birney was quite wrong when he said we had no ghosts, but I prefer Massey's to be quiet.

Although my thinking for the lectures and for this book has been influenced by Vincent Massey's work and life, and by recent studies of him, his phrase and my expansion of it raise several questions: How does one *be* Canadian? What qualifies as "being Canadian"? Who, then, is Canadian (and who is not)? What do the arts and our artists show or tell us about being Canadian or about being ourselves? How do they do this work of cultural and national identification, assuming they do? And to what degree do our many cultural institutions and policies determine, control, and shape the arts, artists, and aspects of cultural production (dissemination, accessibility, visibility, canonization) that instruct us in the art of being Canadian? These are sweeping, ultimately political, questions for which I have no tidy answers, but I raise them because they trouble and fascinate me, because I believe they are important — at least as important as any answers — and because these questions will surface time and again in the following pages. But if I do not have answers, I do have, or make, assumptions, two of which are fundamental. I take for granted that the arts matter and that they exert considerable power in, as well as bringing great pleasure to, our lives. Moreover, I assume that, collectively, they have and continue to represent, illustrate, narrate, shape, and inform identity, our personal identities and the identities of any number of social groups or physical places to which we might belong — a city, a province, a region, and the country. Here are two brief examples as preliminary illustrations of what I assume: one is rather arcane — not easily accessible and thus little known — the other is more visible; one is very serious and the other rather less so; both work overtly with ideas of identity through autobiography/biography and familiar Canadian imagery; both also manage to gesture toward the three defining subjects I

have chosen for these lectures: the North, the two world wars, and a set of iconic figures.

My first example is Joyce Wieland's 1976 film *The Far Shore*, her only feature film and one that creates a story about Tom Thomson in a portrait of the artist as moral arbiter for Canadian identity. Setting her story against the background of a post—First World War Canadian heartland (Toronto and the “north country” just beyond the city), Wieland pits her Tom character and his lover Eulalie — a beautiful French Canadian pianist who is unhappily married to a crass anglophone entrepreneur and Toronto developer — against the violent and corrupting forces of mining speculation, resource exploitation, greed, and cultural commodification. The villains in this film are also racist and sexist; Wieland has loaded her dice. However, in her national allegory of Canadian identity, Wieland's good artists seem to lose out to the crass developers because she is stuck with the Tom Thomson story, and in that story the artist must die. When Tom and Eulalie flee north in the service of art, love, country, and freedom, they are killed by the sniper shots of the returned soldier turned developer.

My second example is Andrew Danson Danushevsky's richly ambiguous portrait photograph of Jean Chrétien (see Figure 2). This cleverly staged portrait of Chrétien, created in 1985 while the future Canadian prime minister (1993-2003) was waiting on the political sidelines, might not be visible today were it not for its prominence in an article from the March 2004 *National Post* in which Julia Dault describes a McMichael gallery exhibition called *Identities: Canadian Portraits*. Dault's headline is “How We See Ourselves,” and she privileges the Chrétien piece for contemporary political reasons because, in 2003, Chrétien had just left office with the sponsorship scandal about to erupt. In the 1980s, when this photograph was created, he was known for his interest in the Canadian North through his ministerial appointments with Indian Affairs and

FIGURE 2 Andrew Danson Danushevsky, “Jean Chrétien, 1985, Self-Portrait” (1985), black-and-white photograph, 55.9 x 57.1 cm. Danushevsky’s provocative photograph of the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, Liberal prime minister of Canada from 1993 to 2003, was featured in a 2004 exhibition of Canadian portraiture at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Collection of the artist; reproduced with permission.



Northern Development (1968-74) and with Energy, Mines, and Resources (1982-84). This ironic, humorous image has a lot to say about being Canadian and about *the art and artfulness* of being Canadian: right on cue, we have our nordicity represented by that polar bear and our military endeavours signalled through a salute. But wait! The whole scene is a clever pose: the bear is just a rug (could it be a souvenir from Chrétien’s work with Northern Development?), the salute is Chrétien’s familiar Boy Scout salute (given while seated, which is scarcely respectful, and directed *at* the viewer/voter), and he is posed holding the camera’s shutter release cable in a scene staged for the viewer’s consumption and bewilderment. Can it be that the politician returning our gaze intends to insult or mock us? Whether or not the man in the photograph will become an icon, only time will tell, and whether or not Canadians endorse his script for being Canadian — after all, we did buy it in 1993 and for quite a while following that — he appears to know the precise Canadian props with which to stage his performance. And the arts reporter *seems* to be going along with the show. Dault’s subtitle reads “Portraiture Communicates the Personal as Well as the Collective Sense of Identity.”³

At first glance, perhaps, these images and media seem totally different and without connection. As works of art, however, they suggest a great deal about both the *art of* being Canadian and about *being Canadian* between the early 1970s, when Wieland was making her film, and the mid-1980s of the Chrétien photograph. Each work, moreover, evokes or refers directly to all three of my subjects in this study — the North, war, and the process of creating national icons — and by doing so, each underscores the complex interconnections among these subjects, which in turn locate a significant aspect of their cultural power. In addition, there is a mixture of romance and irony, an undercurrent of self-conscious comic nostalgia in both works that I often detect, to varying degrees, in many examples of Canadian art. Both works rely on documentation of geographical and historical facts and people to create an aura of documentary authenticity. The film creates a portrait of the artist in a familiar landscape that is *real* for Canadians who live in Ontario (or for visiting tourists) but is recognizable, indeed iconic, for the rest of the country due to its frequent representation by painters, from the Group of Seven to the present, and the commodification of such landscape images on everything from tea towels to coffee mugs. The photograph stages self-portraiture, another genre of apparent authenticity, reinforced by artifacts (or identity props), from polar bear rug and Inuit sculpture to a shutter release cable.⁴ Both works enlist cultural memory and require participatory acts of recognition and remembering on the part of viewers to produce artistic meaning; both invite Canadians to relate to, or identify with, something about *where* they are and have been in order to better see *who* they are.

I will return to these common features and, I hope, be able to clarify and expand upon them in the chapters to come, but here, at my outset, I want to reflect on why I have selected my three subjects, instead of many others, and on what this selection inevitably excludes. Most obviously, of

course, the McLean three-lecture series dictates a certain structure, and the limits of time and space further constrain what can be considered. I have come to this challenge after a considerable amount of work on two of the topics — the North and the creation of national icons — and there are numerous overlaps between them. But why war, and how does this difficult subject *fit* with the others? Although the importance of both world wars to this country is well documented by historians such as Pierre Berton, Jack Granatstein, Desmond Morton, and Jonathan Vance (to name just a few), and Canadians have been taught that the country came of age in 1917 on Vimy Ridge, general public education about the country's war-time activities has been neglected, the wars reduced to little more than traces, subtexts, and brief Remembrance Day commemorative ceremonies on 11 November — until the early 1990s, that is. For a variety of reasons that I shall return to, the subject of Canadian participation in wars past and present, rather than peacekeeping in war zones, has acquired urgent importance. Today there is ample evidence of a heightened attention to war — in current international affairs, in future concerns over climate change, and in a spate of recent books (fiction and non-fiction), films, television documentaries, plays, and, of course, in painting.⁵ The exhibition *Canvas of War*, which toured between 2000 and 2004, the May 2005 opening of the new Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, the deployment of Canadian troops in Afghanistan (with the inevitable casualties), and the military exercises currently under way in the Canadian Arctic are a few of the most public and impressive examples of the renewed attention to war and its meaning for Canadians. Canada is by no means the only country revisiting its activities in past wars in the context of current conflicts, and the self-reflexive nature of much of this representation is connected, in complex ways, with debates about history, memory, trauma, and testimony. For Canadians, these debates influence how we understand or construct the nation.

In the final analysis, however, I have chosen my three subjects — or domains of inquiry — because they provide crucial sites of memory and cultural representation, and as such they are central to the process of inventing Canadian identity. All three have an active history, by which I mean that their creative lives extend over significant periods of time and are very much alive today. The fascinating, informative interconnections that exist within and across these subjects mean that an exploration of representations in one area opens windows on another. But most important for my purpose in this study is the fact that Canadian artists, working in different genres or media, continue to explore and exploit these subjects. By doing so, they create a cumulative commemorative process, and my task is to map that process, to locate key markers of identity, and, a little like the researcher in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, to make sense of what I find. These three subjects help me organize a wealth of artistic materials, to illustrate persistent yet changing concerns with Canadian identity, and to understand more about Canada's position in the larger world.

Although I have included voices and perspectives that were not part of Vincent Massey's Canada (First Nations, for example), a number of subjects and perspectives have inevitably been left out. I wish there were more women artists telling me how to be Canadian, but I have singled out a few for close attention such as Emily Carr, who plays a prominent iconographic role in our collective story, or Mina Benson Hubbard, who is well on her way toward gaining significance as part of our northern story. Although I wish I could include more *Quebécois* artists, my use of this term indicates my reluctance to force Quebec into the Canadian framework. That said, in *Canada and the Idea of North*, I traced some of the ways in which concepts of nordicity/*nordicité* and *le grand nord* contribute to both a Quebec and a Canadian definition of place and self. And there can be no question but that both world wars played a critical role in

the history of federal-provincial relations — as some Quebecois novelists and poets remind us.⁶ But how can anyone discuss Canadian icons and Quebec icons in the same breath? Who lays claim to Talbot Papineau, Brother André, Maurice Richard, Céline Dion, or Leonard Cohen, who was born in Quebec but has spent long periods living elsewhere and is now an international cultural icon? Finally, what about other Canadians who are beginning to represent themselves and look for themselves in the art around them, those Canadians who have recently arrived, those who have only recently gained visibility, and those who have always been here? This Canada is officially multicultural, a fairly late evolution in the ongoing process of being and becoming Canadian, and for this Canada I would need a fourth or fifth chapter as well as more time for research and for the cumulative process of representation to gather force.⁷ There is much to do, and other students of Canada will continue the journey.

Before I begin, let me suggest a few of the artists and artistic events that I think of when I think of Canada, mental images that conjure this country for me: Molly Parker's face on the big screen in *Perfect Pie* (her intelligent, mobile, non-Hollywood beauty is mesmerizing); Colm Feore performing Glenn Gould or Pierre Elliott Trudeau; watching the CBC television production of George Elliott Clarke's opera *Beatrice Chancy* (absolutely breathtaking and unforgettable) or the equally moving and informative broadcast of the April 2007 rededication of Walter Allward's Vimy Memorial; listening to John Estacio and John Murrell's 2003 opera *Filumena* on CBC radio after travelling to Calgary for the premiere; listening to my colleague Gu Xiong, a painter and photographer, describe his visits to Banff or listening to Joy Coghill describe her struggle with Emily Carr while holed up in a writer's cabin at the Banff Centre; and Coghill herself, just her presence on so many of our stages, or Frances Hyland (who died in 2003), Martha Henry, Brent Carver (as Robert Ross in the film adaptation of Findley's *The Wars*), and Gordon Pinsent, who starred in

the 2006 film *Away from Her* (based on a story by Alice Munro). Or Nicholas Campbell as Shorty McAdoo in the 2008 CBC film adaptation of Guy Vanderhaeghe's novel *The Englishman's Boy*. I will return to Campbell. Watching R. Murray Schafer spectacles — in train stations. Listening to Ben Heppner sing! Or hearing the iconic theme song (discontinued in 2008) that has introduced CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada* since I was a child. The inimitable Mavor Moore (1919-2006), a one-man archive of Canadian art (with his bald pate and bespectacled, shrewd face), who was a passionate, terrifyingly energetic, talented visionary. Or Pierre Berton, or Farley Mowat. Rick Mercer barging in on the Barenaked Ladies — *bare-naked*; Stan Rogers, k.d. lang, Joni Mitchell, Susan Aglukark, and so many more. I grew up with Wayne and Shuster (two faces now forgotten by many and completely unknown to younger generations) and will never forget that inimitable comedy team, the Royal Canadian Air Farce, which gave its final CBC television show on 31 December 2008. And I have not mentioned my favourite filmmakers or playwrights: Anne Wheeler, Denys Arcand, and Atom Egoyan; Tomson Highway, Marie Clements, Sharon Pollock, and Michel Tremblay. If I were marooned on King William Island and able to take a selection of Canadian artists' works with me, I could survive, imaginatively at least, and remember how to *be Canadian*, by reading Rudy Wiebe's *Playing Dead*, with Harry Somers' *North Country* or Christos Hatzis' *Footprints in New Snow* playing in the background.

Creating a Northern Nation

À partir du moment où le Nord fera vraiment partie des
preoccupations du pays, les affaires pan-canadiennes ne pourront plus
être décidées seulement par les seuls citoyens du Canada de base.

— *Louis-Édmond Hamelin*

Until we grasp imaginatively and realize imaginatively
in word, song, image and consciousness that North
is both the true nature of our world and also our graspable destiny
we will always go whoring after the mocking palm trees and beaches
of the Caribbean and Florida and Hawaii.

— *Rudy Wiebe, PLAYING DEAD*

I IMAGINING NORTH

To judge from his painting *The Mistook North* (1984), Charlie Pachter's *take* on Canada and the true North strong and free is somewhat ironic (see Figure 3), but I begin with this image because Pachter's irony and humour also have a serious message, one that addresses some of the questions I have raised about the *art* of being Canadian. If I believe Pachter, what Canadians perceive as North is shaped by a Group of Seven Ontario landscape painting (or a canvas by Tom Thomson), and I am the Canuck

in his painting (mouth open in surprise — or is it recognition?) who mistakes the image for the real thing. But the comic irony of the piece, captured by its title, is integral to the joke. Pachter calls the work *The Mistook North*, thereby evoking a famous formulation of the subject by artists themselves, such as Lawren Harris, and by art historians and curators: the “mystic North.”²¹ But just how much of a mistake is represented by Pachter’s painting? And how mistaken are we to turn to our artists for an understanding of the country? Perhaps the joke is more complex than we might at first glance think, and our artists have a greater influence on how we see ourselves than we realize. Pachter’s placing of a familiar landscape picture against a larger backdrop of a *real*, equally familiar, landscape is a deliciously rich act of citation — a painterly *mise en abyme* — that throws our perceived distinctions between art and reality into doubt. At the same time, the painting reminds me that people tend to understand themselves, not only in relation to the actual world around them, but also (and perhaps more profoundly) through the artfully constructed world of an imagined national iconography.

Geographically, Canada stretches into the northernmost reaches of North America, and a great majority of the physical country lies north of 60°; geopolitically, we are one of the circumpolar nations of the world; meteorologically — with the exception of the tiny southwestern corner of the nation — we must live with ice, snow, very cold temperatures, and the flora and fauna of such a climate for at least six months of the year. Historically, economically, and culturally, as Harold Innis told us in 1930, we have been shaped by our nordicity, which is an inescapable fact of life for both indigenous and settler populations. Challenges to our sovereignty have not been restricted to our longest undefended border. They have often occurred well out of sight for the majority of Canadians — over the Northwest Passage, on Baffin Island, in the Yukon — and such challenges



FIGURE 3 Charles Pachter, *The Mistook North* (1984), acrylic on canvas, 91 x 182 cm. Toronto painter Charlie Pachter is famous for his portraits of Canadian artists and for his unique perspective on Canadian myths and icons, from Queen Elizabeth to Group of Seven landscapes. This painting suggests how profoundly the images of the Group have influenced what people see as a Canadian landscape. Collection of Denise and James Rex Inglis; reproduced with the permission of the artist.



FIGURE 4 Don Proch, *Magnetic North Mask* (2000), 50.8 x 38.1 x 40.6 cm, mixed media (silver point, graphite pencil, coloured pencil on fiberglass-backed white ceramic surface; the top arc is black and blue fiberglass inlaid with crosscut animal bone and studded with chrome-plated brass pins, and the area behind the canoe is nickel- and chrome-plated copper). The materials of this piece and its images of human face, landscape, and canoe represent familiar natural and cultural aspects of Canada's northern identity. Collection of John and Sherrill Grace; reproduced with the permission of the artist. © "A Sessippi" Don Proch.

are not going away. Indeed, sightings of submarines in the Arctic Ocean, recent Canadian military exercises on Baffin Island, and the looming threat of climate change suggest that a national presence is still required in the North if we wish to retain control over this vast territory. But my focus is not on any of these issues, or on global warming, which of course intensifies our need to pay attention to the North. My focus is on our arts and on how some of our artists have represented the many aspects of our “nordicity” (a term I borrow from Louis-Édmond Hamelin, one of our pre-eminent geographers). This is not to say that I think questions of sovereignty, global warming, and meteorology are unimportant. But I have long believed that it is the artists who have told Canadians the most about why the North matters and that it is the arts that have the power to persuade voters and consumers to appreciate North by recognizing how profoundly it shapes the country, even when some Canadians cannot wait to flee south to warmer climes or when others mistake a painting for the real thing.

Don Proch captures the complex and profound interdependency of North and human identity with exceptional clarity in his striking *Magnetic North Mask* (see Figure 4), and I want to explore the following four indices of North, all of which are represented in this mask, as they have been articulated, reinforced, and created by generations of artists:

- that North is as much an idea, and a present force right here in southern Canada, as it is a physical place *out there* — *somewhere* and far away;
- that what Canadians understand as the North has moved, over time, from its earlier location in the southeast of the country, where Vincent Massey located it, to areas farther west and much farther north, as Adrienne Clarkson reminds us;

- that these ideas have changed over time to include more perspectives than before and that they are still a changing, vibrant part of our culture;
- and lastly, that these changing ideas of North are fundamental to an understanding of the Canadian nation and to our sense of *being Canadian*.

Proch captures all these ideas in his powerful work, but most importantly of all, he reminds us that we create and are created by ideas of North because his work of art is a mask, and as a mask it shows us an image of our northern landscape by using those familiar signs of the North — magnetism, rock face, water, and canoe — *as a human face*.

Over the past century and a half of Canadian cultural history, many writers, artists, and historians have described their sense of national and personal identity through images of North, although their characterizations of the North have differed dramatically. I have already discussed a wide range of these comments, from Confederation to the turn of the twenty-first century, in *Canada and the Idea of North*, so I will simply recall a few especially interesting ones that illustrate the persistence of ideas about North in our culture, as well as the passionate, even mythic, attraction the North exerts on Canadians' imaginations and cultural life. In a 1936 essay called "I'll Stay in Canada," Stephen Leacock, an author and humourist whose sense of irony matches Charlie Pachter's, insisted that "to all of us here" (Leacock's *here* was his armchair in Montreal), "the vast unknown country of the North, reaching away to the polar seas, supplies a peculiar mental background" (284). Lawren Harris, who, along with A.Y. Jackson, painted various northern landscapes and visited the High Arctic more than other members of the Group of Seven, is famous for his highly nationalistic and spiritual descriptions of the North; for Harris, the North was "mystic," visionary, and the source of what he understood as

“the pervading and replenishing spirit” of artistic expression *and* Canadian identity (39). Speaking years later on the occasion of Canada’s centenary, Glenn Gould was a bit more realistic, if no less romantically inspired than Harris, in his description of the North and its influence on his life and work. He had been commissioned to write a special piece in celebration of Canada’s birthday for which he created the first of his remarkable sound documentaries *The Idea of North*. Gould has been a strong influence on my own imagination, and I shall need to return to him, but a brief quotation from his liner notes for this composition demonstrates why I single him out as representative of our continuing attitudes about the “northern third of our country”:

I’ve been intrigued for quite a long time ... by the incredible tapestry of tundra and taiga country ... I’ve read about it, written about it occasionally, and even pulled up my parka once and gone there. But like all but a very few Canadians, I guess, I’ve had no direct confrontation with the northern third of our country. I’ve remained of necessity an outsider, and the north has remained for me a convenient place to dream about, spin tall tales about sometimes, and, in the end, avoid.

Never to be outdone in the emphatic tone of his pronouncements, composer R. Murray Schafer is categorical and portentous in his statements about the North. “The idea of North is a Canadian myth,” he insists in the liner notes to his 1980 composition *North/White*, before warning that “without a myth a nation dies.” To which I might add that, in this century, Schafer’s North may itself be dying and that as it melts, Canadian sovereignty may be dying with it.

My last quotation, from Wendy Lill’s play *The Occupation of Heather Rose*, rings quite another note. It comes from a play that challenges many

of southern Canada's mistaken notions about both North and Native northerners, but Lill is not joking, not even seriously, as is Pachter in his painting. The play is a monologue in which Heather Rose directly addresses her audience:

Who me? What brings me here? Oh, I've always been attracted to the North ... like a firefly to light. No ... never this far before. Mainly the Barrie area, but it's a lot like this. One-sided trees, fiery sunsets, loons ... You've heard of Camp Cocano? (300)

Heather Rose is a naive, well-meaning young nurse who has flown into a northern Indian reserve bringing with her all her southern illusions about northern adventure and a Florence Nightingale concept of the white woman's burden. She is addressing us as she waits in a southern office for a meeting with her boss, but by the end of the play (the boss, like Godot, never shows up), her traumatic memories of her experiences up north, and her reconstruction of the story of her initiation into the realities of her own ignorance, will have transformed her into a different person. She will be angry, aware of the arrogant mistakes made in the North by cynical southerners, and she will take responsibility for her failures. Heather Rose is a type of Ancient Mariner or Marlow figure, seizing us by the arm, forcing us to see her heart of darkness, so that we too will understand just how dangerous romantic fantasies and irresponsible actions in the North can be.

II *IMAGE-ING* NORTH

Maps are among the most powerful of the many visual images that have fascinated and influenced me. They bear eloquent testimony to ideas of North that have circulated for centuries; they teach us how these ideas



FIGURE 5 Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator (1512-94) is remembered today for developing the Mercator projection map. His beautiful map of the North Pole blends medieval information and myths about undiscovered areas and open waters at the pole with information from sixteenth-century explorations in Arctic regions. Derived from Mercator's 1569 map of the world, it has been reproduced in many books and atlases over the centuries.

have changed, and they show us how we shape and are shaped by such images. Gerardus Mercator's sixteenth-century *Map of the Arctic* (see Figure 5) is a colourful reminder of how the European mind once saw the North — as an intriguing mix of partial fact and pure fiction, with pygmies living near the pole and an imaginary island called Frisland — of just how old some ideas of the North are, and of how far we have come in

INUIT VIEW TO THE SOUTH



FIGURE 6 (FACING PAGE) *Inuit View to the South*, from Rudy Wiebe’s *Playing Dead: A Contemplation concerning the Arctic* (1989). Wiebe is one of the earliest and most important writers (along with Pierre Berton and Farley Mowat) to urge southern Canadians to understand the North from a northern perspective. In the twenty-first century, the impact of climate change on the Arctic, with its attendant spectres of military conflict over resources and environmental devastation from global warming, makes Wiebe’s northern message all the more prescient and urgent. Reproduced with the author’s permission.

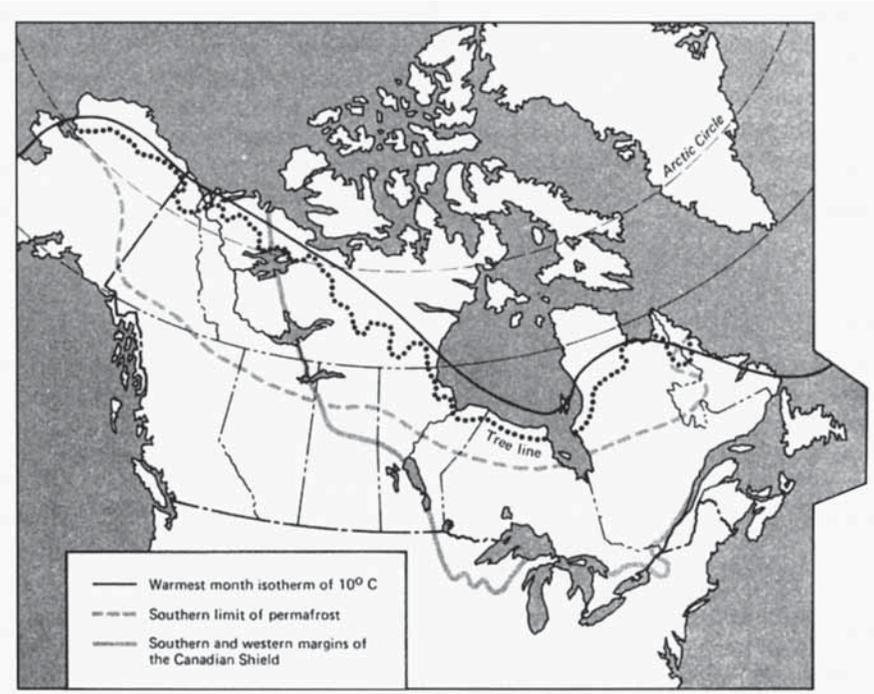


FIGURE 7 *Where Is the North?* illustrates some of the main indices of Canadian nordicity. Reproduced, courtesy of Bruce Hodgins, from *The Canadian North* (1977).



FIGURE 8 This map shows the new internal boundaries of the Canadian North as of 1999. When Nunavut became an official territory on 1 April 1999, the map of Canada changed significantly, and the North gained new prominence. The former NWT was divided to create Nunavut (Our Land) to the northeast, leaving the smaller NWT to the southwest. The population of Nunavut is primarily Inuit, and the capital is Iqaluit on Baffin Island. Reproduced from John Hamilton's *Arctic Revolution* with the permission of The Dundurn Group © 1994.

our cartographic authority.² Almost four hundred years later, Rudy Wiebe gives us his equally fanciful imagining of the North but from a post-modern perspective in which he turns the tables on the South by turning our country upside down (see Figure 6). But in case Wiebe's perspective is as disorienting as Mercator's, two contemporary Canadian cartographic

representations of our physical shape (although not as artistic) show us clearly where nordicity is located by scientists and how the internal boundaries of the country changed after 1 April 1999, when Nunavut was created from the former Northwest Territories (see Figures 7 and 8). But now I want to put such *facts* aside and invite you to venture forth with me on a short historical and artistic expedition.

If you were to visit the Art Gallery of Hamilton tomorrow, chances are you would be able to see a famous Canadian painting prominently displayed on its walls. The canvas is not especially large (151.1 by 191.4 centimetres), but its power is not a function of size. In the foreground, a hooded figure, with snowshoes strapped to his back, kneels in the snow. All around him, and receding into distant drifts, lies moonlit snow. The sky is dark, but if you look closely there are a few stars; however, it is not the stars, the night sky, the pale snow, or even the fallen trapper that holds your attention. Ahead of this man, just beyond his outstretched arm, and clearly discernible against the snow, is a figure walking away into the picture plane and out of the painting. Who or what is this? Another trapper? A ghost? Or, given the resemblance of the fallen trapper to the ghostly presence, is this figure the trapper's doppelgänger, his very soul, and thus the image of his death? The painting I have just described is Blair Bruce's *The Phantom Hunter* (recently renamed *The Phantom of the Snow*), a critical success at the 1888 Paris salon (see Figure 9).³ Today it is Bruce's most famous painting, enjoying a privileged place in the iconography of Canada's image of itself as a northern nation.

Bruce's inspiration for the painting came from "The Walker of the Snow," an 1859 poem by Charles Shanly. This is a deceptively simple narrative poem based on legends or folktales about the Shadow Hunter, a figure who bears some resemblance to the Windigo of Ojibwa and Cree mythology. The speaker in the poem tells his listener about an encounter he has had — and survived? — with the Shadow Hunter, "who walks the

midnight snow” (Shanly, in Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* 108) and kills men who pass through the valley alone on cold winter nights. The hunter wears a grey hood and appears suddenly beside you just as you are about to enter the valley; more importantly, he leaves “no foot-marks on the snow” (108). The climax of the tale comes just as the speaker and his companion are about to enter “the valley / Of the Walker of the Snow”:

Then the fear-chill gathered o’er me
 Like a shroud around me cast,
 As I sank upon the snow-drift
 Where the Shadow Hunter passed.
 And the otter-trappers found me,
 Before the break of day,
 With my dark hair blanched and whitened
 As the snow in which I lay.
 But they spoke not as they raised me;
 For they knew that in the night
 I had seen the Shadow Hunter,
 And had withered in his blight.
 (109)

Even today in a postmodern Canada, where we can build towns like Inuvik on the permafrost, take oil from the Beaufort Sea, escape from wind chill temperatures of minus 30 into the West Edmonton Mall, and transport the Canadian Shield to downtown Toronto, it is difficult to shrug off this poem. It is difficult because the poem reminds contemporary readers, just as it did Blair Bruce at the end of the nineteenth century, that a northern world is a dangerous one. The poem, like the painting it inspired, reminds Canadians forcibly of things they might prefer to forget,



FIGURE 9 William Blair Bruce, *The Phantom Hunter* (c. 1888), oil on canvas, 151.1 x 191.4 cm. This powerful nineteenth-century painting is now an iconic image of Canada-as-North. I discuss its imagery and sources in further detail in *Canada and the Idea of North* (104-22). Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, Bruce Memorial, 1914, and reproduced with permission of the gallery.



FIGURE 10 Lawren Harris, *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate Zone* (c. 1935), oil on canvas, 74.1 x 91.2 cm. Perhaps best known for his austere paintings of northern Ontario landscapes, Harris also painted the Rocky Mountains and the Arctic. This dramatic image captures the extent of nordicity in Canada and represents the country as symbolically informed and united by its northern climate. Collection of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, purchase 1994 (1994.13) and reproduced with permission.



FIGURE 11 Benoit Aquin, “Le verglas #16, Boucherville” (1998). This stunning photograph of a collapsed power line, caused by the ice-storm that struck areas of south-central Canada during the winter of 1998, was part of the photo-essay “Lethal Beauty,” by Montreal photographer Benoit Aquin. It provides a striking reminder of Canadian nordicity and of the vulnerability of our technologically sophisticated society. Reproduced with the artist’s permission. © Benoit Aquin.

such as the terrible ice-storm that crippled Montreal in January of 1998 and was captured by Quebec photographer Benoit Aquin in his stunning series of photographs titled “Lethal Beauty” (see Figure 11).

By the turn of the twentieth century, cameras were going to the Far North with explorers and ethnographers because they were becoming

small enough to carry, and they used film that could survive cold temperatures. One early example of published Kodak images is Mina Benson Hubbard's 1908 classic *A Woman's Way through Unknown Labrador*, but Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Diamond Jenness, and many others also published their photographs as visual proof of their northern exploits.⁴ However, the first southerner to take a film camera into the North with the intention of making a movie was Robert Flaherty. *Nanook of the North* was released in 1922, but it was filmed earlier largely around the Revillon-Frères fur-trading post at Port Harrison (now Inukjuak), Ungava. The film made Flaherty famous and popularized the image of the "Eskimos" as childlike, fur-clad, smiling people. Contemporary videos of it are easily available today and still used in university film studies and anthropology classes.⁵ In the opening sequence of the film, Canada is equated with the North of Hudson Bay and Ungava, and the "Eskimo" subjects of the film are constructed as representative of all Inuit; the actors are not identified by name as *actors*. Instead, we come to know them as "Nanook," the "great hunter," and his family. Compared with the deadly, haunting North of Shanly and Bruce, Flaherty's North is liveable, and its cheerful inhabitants are quite at home. Of all the shifting ideas and images of North, the ones presented in films are the most striking for the transformations charted by their changing representations over time. True, technological advances are immense in this art form, but attitudes and perceptions have changed as well. Contemporary films about the North differ from past films because of the ideological distance artists (and audiences) have travelled, as a comparison of Robert Flaherty's *Nanook* with Zacharias Kunuk's *Atanarjuat* demonstrates.

Eight years after *Nanook* began entertaining the world (and after the hero of the film had died, unnoticed and uncelebrated, of starvation), the southern Ontario playwright Herman Voaden published *Six Canadian Plays* (1930), the volume in which he announced his new northern vision

for a Canadian theatre. Voaden, who was deeply influenced by the Group of Seven (especially by Lawren Harris), believed that a truly Canadian drama must use Canadian subjects and northern settings. The six plays he edited for the volume employed these subjects and settings, and Voaden illustrated the book with production photographs, drawings of northern scenes by Lowrie Warrener, and paintings by members of the Group. Voaden's introduction was, in fact, a manifesto linking Canadian nationalism, nordicity, and the arts. For his own plays, such as *Northern Storm*, *Northern Song*, and *Rocks* (1932), Voaden used silver-grey-blue lighting on the simplest abstract sets to evoke a northern atmosphere that would make the "North," as he put it, "a participant in the action, an unseen actor" (quoted in Grace, "Re-introducing Canadian 'Art of the Theatre'" 128). But, as with the film *Nanook of the North*, I mention Voaden's work here to provide a time frame and a marker of the distance travelled by contemporary playwrights such as Wendy Lill, Patti Flather and Leonard Linklater, Sally Clark, and Marie Clements, whose play *Burning Vision* I will consider shortly.⁶

But no consideration of images and ideas of the Canadian North is complete without acknowledging the influence of three popular champions of all matters northern: Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879-1962), Pierre Berton (1920-2004), and Farley Mowat (1921-). Stefansson, arguably Canada's greatest Arctic explorer, the subject of a major biography (see Hunt) and a National Film Board documentary film called *Arctic Dreamer: The Lonely Quest of Vilhjalmur Stefansson* (2003), organized three expeditions to the Arctic and wrote several important, and very popular, non-fiction books about his explorations, the Inuit, and Arctic history and legend. He was a controversial explorer, an anthropologist, an ardent advocate of the North, and an extremely interesting writer who argued for the friendliness of the Arctic and attempted to dispel a series of what he believed were ill-founded prejudices, errors of fact, and negative assumptions

about the North. In *The Friendly Arctic* (1922), he set out to convince his readers (and the governments who might fund his research) that the North is a friendly place, rich in resources and high in potential for development and settlement. “It is the mental attitude of the southerner,” Stefansson insists, “that makes the North hostile. It is chiefly our unwillingness to change our minds which prevents the North from changing into a country to be used and lived in just like the rest of the world” (687).

Canada’s recent loss of national icon Pierre Berton, who died in 2004, is important for many reasons, but one of the most compelling of them is his articulate vision of the North. Whether he was writing about Arctic exploration or the romance of the Klondike in books for adults or children, Berton always saw Canada-as-North, Canadians as northerners, and the country’s national responsibilities as northern and circumpolar. In his last book (his fiftieth), *Prisoners of the North* (2004), Berton returned eloquently to what he called his “Northern heritage,” and he confessed that, like his father, “and like the five remarkable characters that follow, I, too, in my own way am a prisoner of the North” (3). The “remarkable characters” he refers to are the heroes and heroines of his book — Klondike Joe Boyle, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Lady Jane Franklin, John Hornby, and Robert Service — but their life stories are inextricably woven with Berton’s insofar as they share with him (as he with them) a northern destiny that includes understanding the complex history and realities of a Canada defined by the North. Among his many reasons for prefacing his final story about the nation’s collective identity with a quotation from Robert Service’s poem “Men of the High North,” the key one may be responsibility. Berton’s final message, along with that of Service, is to “Honour the High North” and “learn to obey” her laws.

Although Farley Mowat may not write with the same *gravitas* as Berton (and Mowat, thankfully, is still with us and still writing), he too has staked his claim to personal and national identity on the North in his many

books, for adults and children, about the Keewatin (*People of the Deer*, *Never Cry Wolf*, *The Snow Walker*, to name just a few) and the Arctic (*The Polar Passion* and *Ordeal by Ice*), and he too has returned to his private North in two of his recent books, *High Latitudes* (2002) and *No Man's River* (2004), and in his 2008 memoir *Otherwise*. Some scholars and scientists choose to scoff at the notion of a serious interest in Mowat, but I reject that attitude. I enjoy reading Mowat on the North and believe Canadians (indeed, all people) need to be reading him in this era of climate change, more than ever before. Margaret Atwood put the matter succinctly in her introduction to *High Latitudes* when she reminded us that, “as Farley Mowat has always known, and as more and more people have come to agree, it’s a race against time, and time — not just for the north, but for the planet — is running out” (xi). By reading Mowat on the North, we are able to enter and share in his deeply personal, hands-on sense of place; he writes, passionately, in the first person, often mixing fact and fiction in his inimitable manner, and always bringing the people, the life (animal and vegetable), weather, and land- and waterscapes close enough, in vivid sensuous detail, for us to smell and touch. It is difficult to ignore a reality that comes so close to our lives. Mowat first went north when he returned from the battlefields of Italy after the Second World War. He wanted to escape memories of that horror, but instead of escaping, he found himself entrapped, imprisoned (like Berton) by a world that, he tells us in *No Man's River*, “was to become a determining influence in my life” (3). His escape became a mission, and through his books and two feature films, Farley Mowat’s North has touched more people living in the south of Canada (and around the world) than anyone else’s.

Without doubt, Stefansson did convince some of this country’s politicians, from Prime Minister Robert Borden to Lester Pearson and John Diefenbaker, of the potential of the North.⁷ But today, it is even more important that current politicians listen to Berton and Mowat, or to the

advice of former governor general Adrienne Clarkson, whose belief in the cultural and strategic importance of the North is unequivocal. In a 2004 interview titled “On Being a Northern Country,” she explained that, “as Governor General, my going to the North draws attention to the fact that: it exists [and that] it is extremely important for Canadians to realize that they are a Northern country. Otherwise you pretend that the greater part of your country is not there and you live in denial about your real identity. *We are a northern people*. I want us to think of how we relate to the countries that share the same latitudes” (6). I suspect that Clarkson takes Berton and Mowat very seriously, and I suggest that current and future politicians should do the same.

But let me return to the painters. Lawren Harris always insisted that his “work was founded on a long and growing love and understanding of the North, of being permeated with its spirit” (7), and over his career his North expanded to include areas far north and west of Algoma and Lake Superior. More than any other member of the Group, Harris wrote about the North in comments that have been printed, quoted, and reprinted until it has become a critical commonplace to associate him with the “mystic north,” the “replenishing” North, the “spiritual clarity” and “flow” of the North, and with a national ideal of northernness.⁸

Of all the Harris paintings I might have chosen to contemplate here, *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate Zone* (c. 1935) captures many of the ideas of North that are circulating in my examples thus far (see Figure 10). The first striking aspect of this canvas is the limited palette: the pure, shimmering blue mountain- or glacier-like shape rising in the background is balanced, but not displaced, by the creamy-white, snow-clad shapes of tree and shoreline in the foreground. These two massive vertical forms mirror each other across the smaller horizontal deeper blue form of an island. On the dominant vertical axis of the painting, the eye moves from the distinct cold blue tips of mountain or glacier down to

the tree top and down again to the frozen shapes in the foreground, until, at the very bottom of the picture, it rests on spots of yellow, the only warm touches in the entire composition. From there, the gaze travels back up the painting and off the top of the canvas toward an imagined Pole. What Harris has done in *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate Zone* is to connect the temperate zone of boreal forest with the barren, ice-surrounded sub-Arctic and the High Arctic of glaciers; he has linked the more southerly North of Shanly and Bruce with the Far North of Stefansson. By joining them visually, by imaging their symmetry and mirroring duplication, he creates an allegory of Canada-as-North.⁹

For Canadians such as Voaden and Harris, *the North* was indeed God's country. However, the idea of "God's Country" had other roots, which have spread deeply in the fertile commercial ground of popular art over the last hundred years. Putting aside the movies explicitly using this term, such as *Back to God's Country* (1919) starring Nell Shipman, I want to consider a popular image that is inextricably bound up with ideas of North that many Canadians born in the 1940s will remember from childhood: *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*. In the first half of the twentieth century, images of the Mounties were proliferated through radio serials or movies about Canada. Pierre Berton claimed that, of the 575 Hollywood films made about Canada between 1907 and 1956, the overwhelming majority represented the country as vaguely northern or arctic, and 256 featured the Mounties (*Hollywood's Canada* 111). Of these movies, *Rose-Marie* was the most popular; the 1936 sound version, starring Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, remains famous. Although Preston owes much to the earlier Canadian Mountie radio serial *Men in Scarlet* and to movies, this northern hero probably reached more Canadians than any of his predecessors because he was aired serially on CBC radio during the late forties and early fifties, and he starred in seventy-eight episodes on CBC television between 1955 and 1958. The incorruptible Preston, often

in dress uniform, always gets his man, despite fierce blizzards, numbing cold, and the dramatic sound-effects of blowing wind, barking dogs, and cries of “Mush!”

The forties and fifties were, in fact, rich in popular images of the Canadian North, and one of the youngsters watching *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon* on CBC television in the fifties was Paul Haggis, who created today’s most famous TV Mountie, Constable Benton Fraser, the dashing, pure-minded hero of the award-winning series *Due South*. The program aired in 1994 and ended in 1996, but it lives on in many ways. Constable Fraser, played by a handsome, clean-cut, young Paul Gross, has kept the iconic image of the Canadian Mountie alive along with the satiric wit and comic exploitation of cultural stereotypes (of how Canadians see themselves and their southern neighbours) fundamental to the program’s stories and characters.¹⁰ He always gets his man, of course, along with the help of his trusty dog — a husky-wolf cross named Diefenbaker after the former prime minister — a canine side-kick that recalls the famous dog King (perhaps named for another PM), who worked alongside Sergeant Preston. Since 1996, when the series ended, it has enjoyed a successful afterlife on BBC2 in the United Kingdom, on video and DVD, through books such as Geoff Tibballs’ *Due South: The Official Companion* (1998) or paperback treatments of episodes by Tom McGregor, and on-line, where one can buy “official” *Due South* trinkets, see photographs of Gross as Fraser, or read about “Dief.” The generation of voters who brought Diefenbaker, the politician, his stunning majority in the 1958 election was brought up on *Men in Scarlet* and *Sergeant Preston* and, during the Second World War, on such explicitly northern comic-book heroes as Dixon of the Mounted, Fleur de Lys, and Nelvana of the Northern Lights, otherwise known as Alana North, secret agent. Nelvana, the brainchild of Adrian Dingle and Franz Johnston, was a white goddess

figure, daughter of the King of the Northern Lights, and very loosely based on Inuit mythology. Unlike Preston or Fraser, she was a wartime propaganda heroine; she could travel at the speed of light on the aurora borealis, make herself invisible, transform others, and, most importantly, control communications. Although less famous than her male counterparts, Nelvana has lived on through a commemorative stamp and comic-book folklore (see Plate 4 in Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North*).

When I turn to the world of Canadian music, it is by no means only in the realm of popular culture that I find representations of northern identity or iconic figures. Many Canadians know Stan Rogers' ballad "The Northwest Passage" or the Tragically Hip's song about Tom Thomson or the music of Susan Aglukark (just one of several northern singers or groups I might name), but they are less familiar with classical compositions inspired by their composers' experiences of northern landscapes and peoples. Harry Somers' *North Country* is one of the earliest of these and still, to my ear, one of the most moving. Somers composed this work in 1948, three years after the period he spent (1943-45) with the RCAF during the war and after some restorative camping trips in Algonquin Park. This short orchestral suite (just over fourteen minutes on my recording) in four movements evokes the four seasons in that part of Canada, and I also detect in it a haunted quality, as if Somers' memories of the war lie just beneath the surface of this music. Although insisting on representation in non-programmatic music is problematic, it seems to me that Somers' vision of his north country is perfectly captured in the language of contrapuntal organization, extended crescendo, dynamic contrast, and what Brian Cherney calls his "tension-producing appearances ... of tonal elements within a non-tonal context."

The title of this piece — *North Country* — provides my key representational coordinate, but I am on firmer ground with my next musical

example, by Glenn Gould. It is tempting to imagine Gould, who was born in 1932, listening to *Men in Scarlet* and *Sergeant Preston* on the radio or reading *Dixon of the Mounted* and *Nelvana of the Northern Lights*; he was, after all, an inveterate radio listener and quite comfortable with popular culture. It is tempting, but I have no evidence for it. Gould claimed that his inspiration for *The Idea of North* came from school maps of the Northwest Territories, reproductions of Group of Seven paintings on schoolroom walls, aerial photographs, and Geological Survey maps.¹¹ Gould's unusual composition was commissioned as a centennial project for CBC *Ideas* and first broadcast on 28 December 1967; three months later, it aired on CBC's Northern Service *Tuesday Night*. Gould's introductions for the two broadcasts differ in interesting ways and demonstrate his awareness of the gap between southern and northern Canadians' perceptions of the North.¹² In 1970 he adapted it, adding visuals and actors to the libretto and score, to create the CBC television version of the work, and he was photographed bundled up against the cold and standing beside the Muskeg Express, the train that would take Gould, who refused to fly, as far north as he would ever get. Since then, *The Idea of North* has been recorded on vinyl (in 1971) and on compact disk (1992), as one of three sound documentaries in his *Solitude Trilogy*. In his 1993 feature film *Thirty-Two Short Films about Glenn Gould*, François Girard combined ideas of solitude and nordicity (cold, snow, empty distances) to create his image of Gould the man: in the long opening and closing shots of the film, a black figure materializes from the expanse of white as he approaches the camera and then moves away from it to disappear into that same empty white landscape. All we hear is the crunching, at first faint and then louder, of the man's boots on the snow. In between these framing shots, we see Gould (played by Colm Feore) living, performing, and recording in a studio, but he has been established for us from the start as a spectral figure

(reminiscent of Blair Bruce's phantom), one with the winter landscape, and as quintessentially Canadian because of that identity. Girard has made the North a governing metaphor for Gould himself.

But just as Gould's *Idea of North* has had several incarnations, which, by the 1990s had recuperated Gould himself, making him over as (or into) North, so the composition itself does not inscribe a fixed, single *idea of North*. Gould's North is, in fact, contrapuntal and multiple: it presents the "interaction of [the voices of] five characters" who were carefully chosen by Gould to represent five different responses to the North; they include an "enthusiast," a "cynic," a "governmental budget-watcher," someone who "represents that limitless expectation and limitless capacity for disillusionment" (a position filled by an anthropologist and geographer), and lastly, the philosopher/narrator Wally Maclean (Gould, "The Idea of North" 392). Inevitably, each "character" turns to the question of the relationship between the North and the rest of Canada, to the idea of nation, and to the way the North shapes the southern individual who goes there. These reflections flow smoothly into observations about some of the harsh realities of the North — poverty, alcoholism, starvation, racism, and sexism. And so the polylogue continues, swaying back and forth, like the train, from one voice to another, from romance and myth to harsh facts, from dreams of Eldorado or Utopia to the challenges of the future. An extremely important theme, introduced late in the composition, concerns the future of the North: one man sees it as similar to that of the rest of Canada, another sees it as full of dramatic developments, such as drilling for oil in the Beaufort Sea, and another believes that the North will become the place of creation, recreation, re-creation, the place to go for universals and knowledge "on a global scale." Just audible, underneath these voices, is what Gould called the "basso continuo" of the train carrying us all further and further north.

III FROM GOULD TO *ATANARJUAT* AND BEYOND

Since the 1967 premier of Gould's *The Idea of North*, artistic representations of the North have continued to circulate within our culture. Between 1967 and the present, the North has become more important to the entire country and a more significant — albeit problematic and challenging — subject. Although, unlike Hamelin's, my nordicity indices are not scientific, I have my own way of calculating what I see as the increasing profile of the North over the past thirty-five years. For example, the rising importance of the North is demonstrated by the sheer quantity of published work on or about it. This work ranges from scientific papers and scholarly monographs in history, geography, art history, and so forth to popular books, often lavishly illustrated, children's books, serious fiction, plays, films, biography, and autobiography, and to work by northerners such as *It's Like the Legend: Innu Women's Voices*, edited by Nympha Byrne and Camille Fouillard, or novels by Northwest Territories writer Robert Alexei. A number of important events have kept the North in the public eye, from the obsessive interest in Franklin that was renewed when Owen Beattie opened the graves on Beechey Island and published photographs of the remains, which he found to be astonishingly well preserved by the permafrost (see Figure 12), to ongoing negotiation for a pipeline in the western Arctic, new agreements in Quebec for hydro-electric development around James Bay, the creation in 1999 of Nunavut, the 2005 centenary of Mina Benson Hubbard's successful expedition across Labrador, and the intense media attention to Canadian research being conducted in the High Arctic — I am thinking of CBC's national news anchor Peter Mansbridge's trip on the *Louis St. Laurent* in the summer of 2006 but also of the constant coverage of climate change and issues of sovereignty in our newspapers and magazines.

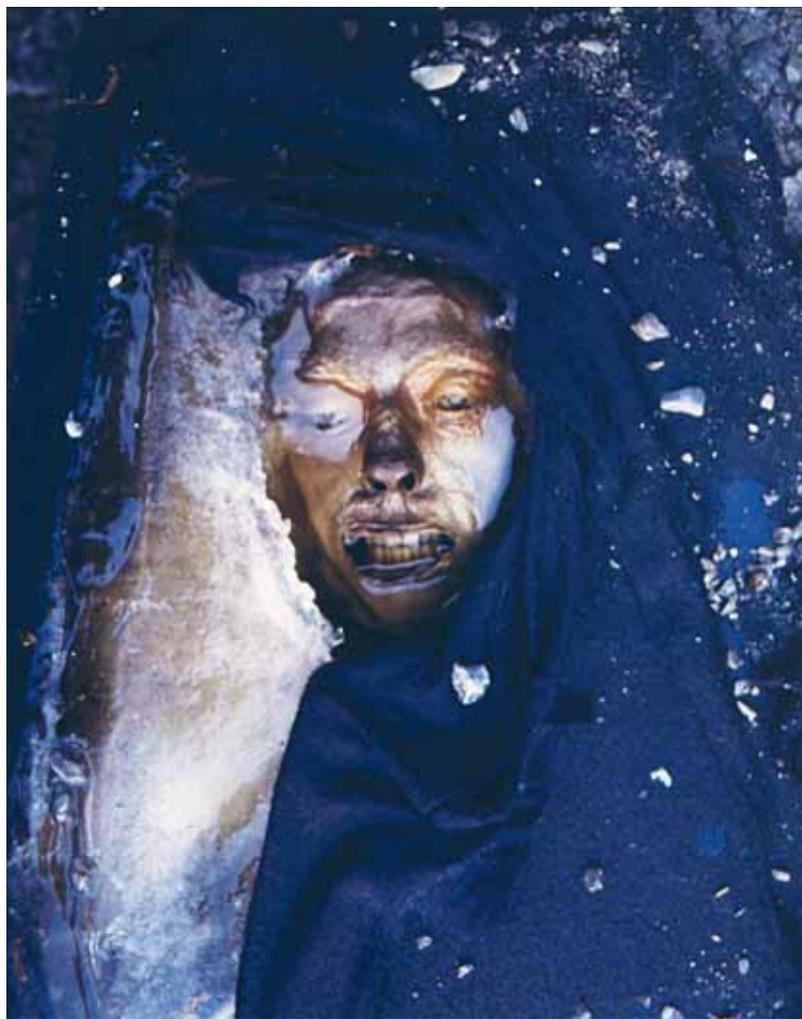


FIGURE 12 Few images from the Canadian Arctic have had quite the impact and wide circulation as this haunting photograph of John Torrington in his coffin on Beechey Island; it was taken when the blue wool shroud covering him was pulled back to reveal his well-preserved face 140 years after his death on the fatal Franklin expedition. The photograph was first published in *Frozen in Time: Unlocking the Secrets of the Doomed 1845 Arctic Expedition* (1987) by Owen Beattie and John Geiger. Dr. Beattie, a professor of anthropology at the University of Alberta and principal investigator of this research into the fate of Franklin and his crew, took this photograph, which is reproduced with his permission.



FIGURE 13 Dominique Gaucher, *Abstractionist Rescued from Certain Depth 2* (2006), oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm. This powerful painting is part of a diptych in which the artist explores the boundaries between abstraction and figuration, illusion and (apparent) reality, and surfaces and depths. A viewer may find many other meanings in this complex, evocative work, but I see a prophetic irony in this scene of sophisticated red-suited Arctic explorers/scientists scrambling to safety as the ice melts beneath them *in a Montreal studio*. This painting was first shown in the 2006 exhibition *On the Surface of Things*, at the Douglas Udell Gallery; it was printed in Gaucher, *On the Surface of Things*. Reproduced with permission of the artist. © Dominique Gaucher.

This social, political, and cultural activity provides the necessary context for understanding the impact of the arts and their crucial role in informing Canadians about their nordicity. In 1995-96 the retrospective exhibition celebrating the Group of Seven called *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation/Le group des sept: L'émergence d'un art national* (see Hill) toured from Ottawa's National Gallery of Canada to Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Musée des beaux arts in Montreal. A splendidly illustrated catalogue was published simultaneously, and the event was a massive and, I would argue, *strategic* success. I call this exhibition strategic because of its political timing, its cross-country itinerary and major venues, and its ideological underpinnings. Prominently displayed on the book's dust jacket above a full-colour reproduction of Arthur Lismer's *Pine Tree and Rocks* (1921) is this quotation from a controversial 1919 exhibition: "The great purpose of landscape art is to make us at home in our own country." One obvious purpose for this bilingual exhibition was to reinforce Canadian faith in "our own country" at a point in our history, post-Meech Lake (1987) and the second Quebec referendum (1995), when the country seemed to be coming apart. The idea of North, like the story of the Great War, has periodically served as a flag around which to rally in a shared, unified identity and common national purpose. This synergy is once more gathering momentum as the ice melts and the Northwest Passage opens. However, *Art for a Nation* is only one of a number of significant arts and cultural events of recent years to be specifically associated with the North. The latest are the newly created Magnetic North Theatre Festival and the 2002-03 Tom Thomson retrospective and catalogue. For many years, the Great Northern Arts Festival has been held in Inuvik; in 1998 Canada hosted the first Northern Encounters Festival, which brings the artists and arts of *all* the circum-polar countries together; from 1996 to 1998, the country celebrated the

hundredth anniversary of the Klondike Gold Rush, which precipitated the publication of many books and CD-ROMs, extensive television coverage, and an increase in tourism to the Yukon; and in January 2008, Quebec City began its four-hundred-year anniversary celebrations with, among other winter sports, the “Red Bull *Crashed Ice*” event on a massive ice slide constructed through the heart of the old city for extreme skaters, skiers, and snowboarders to descend with dizzying (bone-breaking) speed — this was a classic example of le grand nord coming due south to remind everyone of where they were.

My favourite Klondike centenary event was the publication of Robert Kroetsch’s novel *The Man from the Creeks* (1998), its title and characters drawn, as many Canadians will recognize, from Robert Service’s famous poem “The Shooting of Dan McGrew”:

Then I ducked my head, and the lights went out,
 and two guns blazed in the dark,
 And a woman screamed, and the lights went up,
 and two men lay stiff and stark.
 Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead,
 was Dangerous Dan McGrew,
 While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the
 Breast of the lady that’s known as Lou.

The Man from the Creeks is both a historical fiction about the Klondike and a highly self-conscious intertextual narrative about the processes of myth-making, historiography, and storytelling that provides, in the form of an entertaining novel, a *serious* rewriting back into Canadian history and contemporary consciousness of an event of major significance for Canada (see Grace, “Afterword”). The great Gold Rush of the late 1890s

brought thousands of prospectors and others into an inaccessible and undeveloped northwestern corner of Canada. In a few short years, it transformed tiny Dawson City into a bustling metropolis, and it challenged Canadian sovereignty and law because most of the miners were American.

Kroetsch, of course, is not the only one to have written about the Klondike. Apart from Robert Service, Pierre Berton has immortalized the time and the place in several books, including his last one, *Prisoners of the North* (2004), but Kroetsch has done several things in his rewriting that add to and expand upon the story. He makes his hero a woman: despite the novel's title, the central character of his Klondike is "the lady that's known as Lou." He revises the received version of the story about who discovered the gold in August 1896 that would spark the stampede north, and he makes his discoverer the First Nations woman Shaaw Tláa (see Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* 232-33). What's more, he creates a symbolic journey under the ground and into the permafrost in a search for the mother lode, and he brings back to the surface the ghosts from the past, giving them voices in our shared present. In short, he has used his novel to celebrate the Gold Rush as a living testimonial to our current history and geography, thereby confirming its place in the creation of nation. He has, through the power of imagination and story, written Lou, Shaaw Tláa, and a host of other ghostly presences into an understanding of our contemporary shared nordicity.

Sally Clark's play *Wanted* (2004) is also set in the Klondike during the height of the Gold Rush. Like Kroetsch, Clark makes a woman her central character, which in itself is unusual because most northern adventures feature men, and the Gold Rush has always been portrayed as a male story. Clark researched and wrote the play during a period she spent as writer-in-residence at Dawson City's Pierre Berton House in 2002, and the

play premiered with the Nakai Theatre in Whitehorse before moving up to Dawson City's historic Palace Grand Theatre. In other words, although Clark herself is from British Columbia, *Wanted* was written in the North about a northern event and then had to pass muster with northern theatre audiences. It is in many ways her most Canadian play to date.¹³ But Kroetsch and Clark, for all their love of the North, are southern writers and know it. What the specifically northern arts continue to give us is enormous and different. From their small beginnings under James Houston in the 1950s, Inuit sculpture, graphics, and wall hangings have blossomed into a successful national and international art that brings the North to the South and returns benefits to the North. And northerners are now actively representing themselves to the rest of the country in other media as well, from fiction and non-fiction to music, theatre, and film.

Although it is premature to say what the film *Atanarjuat* will do for our sense of being Canadian, it is now important in any discussion of North. *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* won its director Zacharias Kunuk the Camera d'Or at the 2001 Cannes festival for the best first feature film, and it has gone on to win more awards and much attention. This film is often thought of as bringing an Inuit perspective and story to a non-Inuit world, but I am certain that it is doing much more. First, it is a spectacularly beautiful film that quotes and *revises* a host of earlier so-called Eskimo or God's Country movies, from *Nanook* to the present. I see *Atanarjuat* as a cinematic "writing-back" to that earlier non-Inuit tradition. Second, it marks a fascinating conjunction of ancient narrative (of myth) with the latest technology, and by making such a link, it celebrates human creativity. Third, it represents the Igloodik Inuit to themselves *as a people living in time*, something Kunuk values above all else: his toughest screening test was not at Cannes but in Igloodik, his home, where Igloodik Isuma Productions is based, and where his community judges his achievement.¹⁴

IV GOING *NORTH* RIGHT HERE

As I hope is clear by now, the North is *not only* a geological or meteorological matter of treelines, eskers, permafrost, ice, snow, and temperatures that can drop as low as minus 81 Celsius. Although it has certainly been naturalized as essential to Québec in the *pays d'en haut* concept and to Canada as “the true North strong and free,” North is a human construct, like the Québec City ice slide, like Canada itself; it is full of meaning because of its multiple artistic representations. It has become part of what the French scholar Pierre Bourdieu calls our “habitus,” and we have learned to accept it as a given, even perhaps to *mistake* it — as Charles Pachter suggests — for a Group of Seven landscape painting. Images and ideas of North have done, and continue to do, a great deal of ideological and practical work for this country because they demonstrate the degree to which the North permeates all aspects of our culture, from painting to comic strips, and from politics to classical music and epic fictions, such as Rudy Wiebe’s *A Discovery of Strangers*, Mordecai Richler’s *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1990), Gabrielle Roy’s classic novel *La Montagne secrète* (1961), or long poems such as *Cantos North* (1982) by Henry Beissel. North surrounds us in tourist trinkets and in advertisements for everything from mutual funds and beer to bottled water and diamonds. But there are also images of North circulating in our immediately contemporary culture that urge us to look beyond the North as a playground or as a commodity, and I want to conclude my thinking about North by considering a few of these works that remind me of more serious issues while contributing to our expanding concept of a northern nation.

My first examples are from films, feature and documentary, one of the most entertaining of which is *The Snow Walker* (2004), based on Farley Mowat’s stories from the 1975 collection with that title. This is not the

first Mowat text to be made into a film; in 1983 his first autobiographical narrative — or what he called his “subjective non-fiction” — *Never Cry Wolf* (1963) became a popular family film delivering a conservation message.¹⁵ With *The Snow Walker*, however, Mowat and the film’s director, Charles Martin Smith, have exchanged the romantic adventure story and humour of the earlier film for a sobering illustration of the North’s power to teach, to kill, and to sustain life and for a celebration of the Inuit, who know how to live (and die) with their environment instead of fighting and exploiting it. The white man in *The Snow Walker*, a bush pilot who flew bombers during the Second World War, is an arrogant, dangerous fool, and the consequences of his greed and stupidity are fatal. He will survive his crash in the Arctic, as he survived the war, but the juxtaposition of his memories of war trauma with scenes of his Arctic ordeal suggest that he has learned much from the North and the Inuit that he did not learn from war: most importantly, how to be a better human being. Through its sumptuous cinematography of vast landscapes, thundering caribou herds, and exquisite sunsets, this film, like the earlier one, also brings the beauty and majesty of the North to southern Canadian audiences and suggests that we can survive in this harsh landscape only if we respect it and adapt to it.

The National Film Board has been making films about the North and its indigenous peoples almost since its beginnings, but its most recent northern documentaries focus on climate change and on educating Canadians — and others interested in Canada — about the impact of global warming on Canada and on the world. As the advertising for the series called *Arctic Mission* indicates, the Arctic is on the frontline (an apt military metaphor) of climate change, the permafrost is melting, whole islands and communities, as well as wildlife such as polar bears, are under threat. “The impact of global warming on Canada’s North,” the blurb reminds us, is of urgent concern and we are part of a global ecosystem; we

will all lose if we do not change our ways.¹⁶ The 2004 NFB documentary *Through These Eyes* is another example of the film board's constantly evolving representation of northern peoples, in this case of the Netsilik of Pelly Bay. In this film, as in Part 5 of *Arctic Mission* (titled *People of the Ice*), the Inuit describe their history and culture and warn the rest of us about the degradation of their habitat in their own words and from their own perspective.

The White Planet (2006), a France-Canada co-production directed by Thierry Piantanida and Thierry Ragobert provides a fascinating counter-discourse to *March of the Penguins*, the popular nature film about Antarctica. The white planet of the title is the circumpolar North, although many scenes are shot in Canada, and whereas *March of the Penguins* anthropomorphizes the life cycle of the birds in terms of a dramatic pilgrimage of epic proportions, *The White Planet* quietly represents the Arctic as the birthplace, the true mother lode, if you will, of all life on earth. Through remarkable wildlife documentary footage, we are allowed to watch birds and animals migrate north in spring and summer to food-rich oceans and tundra, where they can bear and raise their young. The narrator of the film, who remains relatively unobtrusive and is never didactic, refuses to draw a moral from these scenes; he allows the viewer to reach her own conclusions about the so-called empty and barren wastes of the Far North. Only once, and almost en passant, does he acknowledge that climate change could destroy this fragile life-sustaining ecosystem.

But in these brief reflections on cinematic contributions to our increasing awareness of the Canadian North, I cannot forget Igloolik Isuma Productions' major film *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (2006). Although I found this film much less compelling than *Atanarjuat*, its subject and message are, if anything, more timely. Kunuk and co-director Norman Cohn have returned to a critical moment of cultural encounter in the 1920s, when Danish ethnographer Knud Rasmussen met the people of

Igloodik and recorded in his journals the catastrophic impact of Christianity on their traditional culture. In an interview at the premiere of the film, held in Igloodik before his own community, Kunuk explained that Christian missionaries had robbed the Inuit of their beliefs: “They killed our spirit,” he said, so it is no surprise that today the Inuit “are killing themselves” (quoted in MacDonald R1). *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* reminds Inuit and non-Inuit, northerners and southerners alike, about the lasting evils of colonialism while at the same time trying, in Kunuk’s words, to “answer two questions that have haunted me all my life: Who were we? And what happened to us?” (quoted in MacDonald R5). By providing answers through exploring the historical context, he believes he can give some hope to younger generations of Inuit. Kunuk’s art may well be more efficacious than the Canadian government’s formal apology on 10 June 2008 for such past wrongs as residential school abuse.

My theatre example of an artist’s creation of new aspects of the North and of being Canadian is *Burning Vision* (2003) by Marie Clements. Like the films, it insists that southern Canadians recognize the North as integral to the rest of the country (and the world) and that, in doing so, they also acknowledge responsibility for the way in which the North and its people have been used by southern governments and interests. In this play, the North in question is Dene land around Port Radium on Great Bear Lake, but the play’s setting reaches far beyond this remote area. The story Clements tells unfolds on several levels and through juxtapositions of different historical moments and physical places. On one level, it enacts the discovery, in 1930, of high-grade pitchblende for producing uranium. This led the American government, with the full cooperation of Ottawa, to order sixty tonnes of ore needed for the Manhattan Project, which would develop the bombs the world now knows as Little Boy and Fat Man after they were dropped on Japan in August 1945. This ore was mined and handled by Dene men who needed jobs, but they were not

provided with protective clothing for a kind of work known to be extremely hazardous.

The play opens in “intense darkness” and with a countdown to the massive explosion that, at the April 2002 premiere in Vancouver’s Firehall Theatre, was one of the most impressive theatre moments I have ever experienced. The lights that came up after this blast were flashlights and the dying embers of a fire, and the audience only gradually realized that it was underground with the Labine brothers, who are credited with the 1930 discovery of the ore. These two white men dismiss local Dene prophecies warning against the power of the pitchblende — it is only money they are after — but at a corner of the playing area, before the low fire, a Slavey woman is mourning the death of her husband.¹⁷ What we see as the play develops is, in a sense, what she calls up from the embers of her fire: scenes depicting the violence of war, the destruction of Japanese civilians, and the ruthless exploitation of Canada’s North and its people in the interest of what Clements calls “Western civilization building a country” (75). By the play’s end, the audience has borne witness to a burning vision of radium, war, and cancer but also of reparation when the survivors among the Dene and the Japanese meet. And we listen to the voice of the “Dene See-er” reminding us, “I wondered if this would happen on our land, or if it would harm our people. The people they dropped this burning on ... looked like us, like Dene” (119). The Canadian North and what happens there affects the Dene, whose ancestral lands are there, as well as the rest of the world because Canada’s North is a shared home and a shared responsibility that people can embrace only if they know all sides of the story.¹⁸

Whether I think of our constant retelling of northern stories as myth or as revisionist history, there is no denying the perennial appeal of past northern adventures and tragedies for the contemporary Canadian imagination: Kroetsch and Clark turned to the Klondike and to the poetry of

Robert Service; in *A Discovery of Strangers*, Rudy Wiebe chose to retell the first Franklin expedition from multiple perspectives, including those of the Indians; Lawrence Jeffery reimagined the death of John Hornby in *Who Look in Stove* (1993), and Elizabeth Hay showed what a persistent ghost Hornby has proven to be in her 2007 Giller Prize—winning novel *Late Nights on Air*; Sharon Pollock tackled the seemingly intransigent subject of two Inuit found guilty of murdering Catholic missionaries in 1914; in January 2007 John Estacio and John Murrell used the re-creation of Martin Frobisher as the subject of *Frobisher*, the first full-scale Canadian opera written about the North; and in 2008 John Walker released his award-winning documentary film *Passage* in which he provided a thoughtful, innovative investigation of Dr. John Rae's search for the lost Franklin expedition. All these re-creations of North take the Arctic or the territorial norths as their settings, but the provincial norths of Ontario and British Columbia also continue to inspire our writers in surprisingly new ways. For example, northern Ontario, in Mary Lawson's novel *The Other Side of the Bridge* (2006), is a fragile refuge, not only from the noisy corruption of southern cities, but more significantly from the catastrophes of war, and Michael Poole's mysterious northern British Columbia coast provides draft dodgers a temporary sanctuary from the military police during the First World War in *Rain before Morning* (2006). This very contemporary representation of North as a refuge from both world wars strikes a new note in the imagining of this country, a note that is pushed to painful intensity in Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*. But Boyden's North in this novel is so inextricably bound up with the horror of the Great War that I want to delay my discussion of it until my next chapter and conclude this chapter with a brief consideration of artistic inventions and celebrations of three northern expeditions: Mina Benson Hubbard's 1905 crossing of Labrador, the 1914 murders of Fathers Rouvière and Le

Roux while they were on a mission to the Inuit, and the late sixteenth-century search for the Northwest Passage by Frobisher.

Hubbard is a fascinating example of the degree to which writers, filmmakers, and others have used the woman herself, her book, her journey, and her relationship with her guides and her husband to reinvent a figure from the past and invest her with a range of romantic, idealistic, even mythic qualities. When the actual Mina Benson Hubbard (1870-1956) crossed Labrador, from tiny North West River on Grand Lake to Ungava Bay in the summer of 1905, she was accompanied by four male guides. She was attempting to complete the work of her first husband, an American named Leonidas Hubbard Jr., who had starved to death in October 1903 toward the end of his failed attempt to lead his expedition west and north from North West River to the great interior Lake Michikamau and, from there, north with the George River to Ungava. He made a number of serious errors in planning for and conducting his expedition, but he was also misled by the incomplete Geological Survey maps of the Labrador interior, which were all he had to rely on at the time. When his lovely young widow took it upon herself to mount the second Hubbard expedition, she caused a scandal: her husband's family was furious about what it saw as her public spectacle; the paparazzi had a field day impugning her motives and casting doubt on her female abilities in such a masculine endeavour as a northern expedition; and public opinion was against her because it was felt that no respectable, educated, middle-class, white woman would vanish into the wilderness in the company of four men, especially four Native or "half-breed" men. But vanish she did, for five weeks, the length of time it took her to cross so-called unknown Labrador, take the measurements necessary to redraw the maps, photograph the Innu people in their camps, and keep a detailed journal that would become the basis for her book *A Woman's Way through Unknown Labrador*

(1908), published by John Murray in England and by William Briggs in Canada.¹⁹

Mina was a success. After her return from the North, she gave public lectures with lantern slides, published articles on her expedition, and travelled to England where she was eventually recognized by the Royal Geographical Society. She often returned to Canada but never to stay; she married a British man (John Edward Ellis Jr.) with whom she had children and, after subsequently divorcing him, remained in England to raise them. When her book went out of print with the Second World War, Mina Benson Hubbard was largely forgotten until renewed interest in Labrador and in her husband's expedition led to her rediscovery during the 1980s. Since then, artistic attempts to imagine Mina and to retrace her "way" across Labrador have escalated until it is fair to say that she has come to represent that rare northern phenomenon — a female explorer, who may or may not have had an affair with her chief guide, George Elson, who may or may not have mourned her lost, beloved first husband as she completed his work, but who indisputably succeeded where a man had failed, lived to tell her story, changed the map of Labrador forever, and discovered a new, powerful sense of herself, of her independence, and of pride in her accomplishments. And it was this self-discovery, as much as what she did or wrote, that was celebrated in June 2005 on the beach in front of the old Hudson's Bay trading post in North West River, where the community staged a re-enactment ceremony to remember the woman it continues to see as *its* hero, as a part of *its* history and place. A film crew was there to capture the event; a play about Mina, by a local writer, was performed; books were launched, paintings and photographs displayed, special Mina T-shirts sold, and everyone from North West River and from *away* had his or her opinions to voice. At this centenary, the real person called Mina Benson (Hubbard/Ellis) passed from history into

legend, and her story — rewritten, reinterpreted, re-enacted, and elaborated upon almost beyond recognition — became the stuff of northern myth. I consider her an iconic figure and discuss her status as icon in Chapter 3.

The story about what happened to Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux is by no means so uplifting. The two Oblate priests were sent by the Roman Catholic Church into the vast barren lands of the central Far North (now Nunavut, but in 1914 part of the Northwest Territories) to convert the “Copper Eskimos,” as the Inuit of the area were called. But the priests failed to return, and it was not until many months later that rumours about a possible disaster filtered south to the ears of the church and the police. A search into this remote area of taiga, tundra, rivers, and lakes was led by Inspector Lanauze of the RCMP, and by the summer of 1917, two Inuit, Sinnisiak and Uluksuk, had been charged with murder and brought south to Edmonton for trial. Perhaps the most sensational aspect of the case was their confession that they had eaten a piece of liver from each of the dead priests. The deaths of Rouvière and Le Roux, so far from the scrutiny of white, Christian eyes, attracted international press coverage during the trial, and the events have continued to be recounted, studied, and explored for their significance for almost one hundred years. For francophone Catholics in the 1930s, the priests were martyrs, and students were taught that their deaths were sacrifices in the struggle to save pagan souls. For popular culture aficionados, the more grisly aspects of the case qualify it for inclusion in the annals of murders committed in the Canadian North. Perhaps not surprisingly, scholars such as R.G. Moyles and a recent writer McKay Jenkins read this story of violent murder on the barrens as a cultural confrontation between two incompatible views of the world and as an example of southern colonization of northern spaces, peoples, and resources.

However, it is what Sharon Pollock has done with the story in *Kabloona Talk* (2008) that I find most interesting. Pollock has resisted the temptation to reinvent Inuit characters or Catholic missionaries and thus to put words into the mouths of men she could not possibly know. Instead, she has chosen to focus exclusively on the August 1917 Edmonton trial in which Sinnisiak was acquitted of murder by the jury, and she explores the response to this verdict by the lawyer for the prosecution, the defence, and the presiding judge. In other words, she exposes *southern* attitudes and southern manipulation of the justice system, which colluded behind the scenes (and over the protestations of the lawyer for the defence) to conduct a second trial, with a new jury, in Calgary (where a guilty verdict was reached), and the extreme self-interest of southern politicians and developers in maintaining unchallenged authority over the North and its future exploitation. What was interpreted in the 1930s as a violent, barbarous outrage committed by savages against innocent priests, who had every right to impose their faith on pagans, and later viewed as a saga of police detective work under extraordinarily harsh conditions, has been turned upside down. Instead of staging the murders or the trials and inventing characters called Sinnisiak and Uluksuk, Pollock puts southern prejudice and ignorance on trial to reveal a host of hidden agendas for and narratives about a northern reality that few southern Canadians appreciate or accept, even today. Pollock's North in *Kabloona Talk* is one about which white men talk endlessly from the comfort of their southern city offices.

Frobisher (2007) could hardly be more different, even allowing for the fact that grand opera cannot be easily compared with a stage play. In this opera, playwright John Murrell imagines a deadly, mysterious North of everlasting cold and ice, not only for his imagined sixteenth-century Martin Frobisher character, but also for his two young twenty-first-century filmmakers who are trying to create a film about *their* Frobisher. Murrell

has said that he sees “the Far North of Canada” as “unknowable, yesterday and today; a magnificent riddle ... an alluring phantom” (“Frobisher: Program Notes” 25). For him, Frobisher represents “the attraction and the dread of the North ... which frightens and compels us, and always will” (25), and that is why his filmmakers are also drawn to the North and to what Murrell depicts as Frobisher’s dream of a polar paradise. In opera, of course, we must have tragic deaths, usually inflicted on the soprano/heroine, but in *Frobisher*, the people who die are Frobisher and his contemporary avatar Michael the filmmaker. It is left to Anna, Michael’s wife and co-director/scriptwriter, to complete the film after Michael disappears into the deadly, alluring North. Without doubt, the staging, music, and performances in *Frobisher* were stunning. At the premiere, I knew I was witnessing a tour de force of operatic spectacle, and a rare spectacle at that, because the North was a major character in the drama, and it was imagined and brought to life before my eyes and ears as I have never before experienced it. However, in 2007 this highly romanticized southern idea of North struck me as somewhat anachronistic.²⁰ We know that the North is not a realm of everlasting ice; we know that it is not an empty *terra incognita* but a home to many Canadian citizens; and we know that we must take responsibility for our southern exploitation and destruction of northern ecosystems and cultures. Impressed as I was with the collaborative artistry of *Frobisher* in performance, I am more moved to critical self-reflection by a modest work such as *Kabloona Talk* and more intrigued with our mythologizing of northern heroes by our continuing inventions of Mina Benson Hubbard.

Rather than close this chapter on an uneasy note of operatic romance, I want to stress my sense that our interest in the North as place, story, history, northern home, and southern destiny demonstrates the abiding relevance of nordicity and the North for the imagined community of the

entire country. Other writers, in addition to Clements, link the North with war, a phenomenon I examine in my next chapter, and new voices are coming south from the North in novels such as *Porcupines and China Dolls* (2002) by Robert Alexei and *The Lesser Blessed* (1996) by Richard Van Camp. Southern urbanites are bringing their experiences of North south in music such as *Footprints in New Snow* (2002) by Toronto-based composer Christos Hatzis and in exhibitions such as *On the Surface of Things* by Montreal-based painter Dominique Gaucher. *Footprints in New Snow* recalls Gould's *The Idea of North* in its experimental electronic soundscapes, but unlike Gould, Hatzis went north and was inspired by Inuit throat-singing, which he combines with his contemporary classical vocabulary in acoustically dramatic and innovative ways. Gaucher's works have a similar contemporary appeal, but in this case the canvases, especially those in which red-suited explorers (or are they scientists conducting experiments, or soldiers on military exercises?) appear to scramble free of yawning crevasses of ice and water on his studio floor, speak to me of imminent danger (see Figure 13). These men are not searching for some distant, mysterious North Pole or some inaccessible, deadly Northwest Passage, and they look incapable of defending Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. They are struggling to escape from an Arctic world that is melting right here under our feet, in our cities, now, today, beneath our safe, complacent, imagined surfaces.