

Historied Trees

For Thomas M. Lennon, the Dean of Arts

In *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), Catharine Parr Traill expresses her "disappointment in the forest trees" near Peterborough. "Having pictured . . . giants almost primeval with the country itself," she found "no appearance of venerable antiquity in the Canadian woods. There are no ancient spreading oaks that might be called the patriarchs of the forest. . . . They are uprooted by . . . storm[s], and sink in their first maturity, to give place to a new generation that is ready to fill their places" (112-13). These dismayed comments about the absence of old trees in what is now central Ontario resonate with Traill's view that the young province of Upper Canada -- for so, of course, it seemed to most European emigrants -- lacked "supernatural" inhabitants and "historical associations" (153-55). Just as there were no fairies, ghosts, classical deities, and "legendary tales" in Upper Canada, no poetic stories in the books of Upper Canadian history and nature, there were "no ancient spreading oaks" to conjure up fantasies of Druidic rituals or even village smithies. "[H]ere all is new -- the very soil seems newly formed," complains a friend of Traill's; "there is no hoary grandeur in these woods; no recollections of former deeds connected with the country."

While both Traill and her friend -- perhaps her alter ego -- view trees anthropomorphically, crediting them with some of the physical and the psychological characteristics of humans, what they lament in remarking the absence of "ancient" trees and "hoary grandeur" in the Upper Canadian forests is a quality -- longevity -- that sets trees apart from human beings. "A tree does not have a predetermined life-span like that of mankind," observes Oliver Rackham, who adds that "[a]n age of at least 400 years is quite often reached by oaks" and "[a] few giants go back much further" (24, 27). Precisely because they are transgenerational, long-lived trees such as the oak, the beech, and the yew can provide a living link with the past, particularly when they are associated with specific historical events and personages. In the "Preface" to his *Hamilton; and Other Poems and Lectures* (1871), W.A. Stephens records that in the eighteen forties John Strachan had once contemplated writing a poem centred on "an immense elm tree growing on the commons, near Toronto." His intention had been "to personify this tree, and make it describe what it had seen of change during its long lifetime. First, to tell of the Indians -- their history, manners and customs; next, the arrival and settlement of the French, and what they accomplished; and lastly, to tell of the conquest of the country by the English -- their settlement, enterprise, and progress" (4).

In his *Remarks on Forest Scenery* (1791), the British landscape aesthetician William Gilpin provides a lengthy "catalogue of celebrated trees" -- "trees . . . as have . . . history, and anecdote annexed to them" -- from the plane tree under which Xerxes sat "while the Greeks were taking measures to seize the pass at Thermopyle" to the "Cadenham oak" in England's New Forest, a tree of "no great age" that was renowned for budding "every year in the depth of winter" (1: 120-70). Although he refers in passing to the enormous "trees which Captain Cook found in the Western parts of California" (1: 120), Gilpin assumes that ancient trees are more common in "cultivated countries" like England: "[i]n the forests of America, and other scenes, where boundless woods have filled the plains from the beginning of time, and where they grow so close, and cover the ground with so impervious a shade, that even a weed can scarce rise beneath them, the single tree is lost. Unless it stand on the outskirts of the wood, it is circumscribed; and has not room to expand it's [sic] vast limbs. . . . When we wish therefore to find the most sublime sylvan character -- the oak, the elm, or the ash in perfection, we must not look for it in close, thick woods, but standing single, independent of all connections" (1: 119). It is scarcely surprising that Isaac Weld thought of Gilpin after observing that on the borders of the "open plains" in northern New York trees have "ample room to spread" and, hence, exhibit "all the grandeur and variety which characterizes . . . English timber, particularly the oak" (2: 313). In Upper Canada, as in northern New York, the ubiquity and denseness of the forests precluded the growth of the sort of trees to which rituals and legends were attached in Britain and Europe. As Gilpin says, "[f]aeries, elves and . . . [medieval] people, universally chose the most ancient and venerable trees they could find, to gambol under: and the poet, who should describe them dancing under a saplin[g], would show little acquaintance with his subject" (1: 146).

It is consistent with Gilpin's remarks that one of the first trees in English Canada to acquire historical associations was an old hawthorn, a North American member of a species "used by the ancient Greeks at wedding ceremonies" and "in England . . . consecrated to the pastoral muse and to all lovers of rural life" (Flagg 145). After commenting on the esteem and affection accorded to Sir Isaac Brock in Upper Canada, John Howison observes that the "General . . . was killed close to the road that leads through Queenston Village, and an aged thorn bush¹ now marks the place where he fell, when the fatal ball entered his vitals" (76). "This spot may be called classic ground," Howison continues, "for a view of it must awaken in the minds of all those who duly appreciate the greatness of [Brock's] character, and are acquainted with the nature of his resources and exertions, feelings as warm and enthusiastic as the contemplation of monuments consecrated by antiquity can ever do" (76). Having thus established the associations and precedents of the "aged thorn bush" near Queenston Heights, Howison proceeds to describe the impressions that he has gleaned when sitting under the tree at night "when every light in the village was extinguished": "[t]hen the fire-flies, twinkling among the recesses of the distant forests, would be the only objects that exhibited an appearance of life to the eye; while the Niagara river rolled its sublime tide silently along, and drank, in quiescent luxuriance, the floods of light that were poured upon its bosom by a glorious moon. On one side, the setting stars were struggling with the mists that rose from Lake Ontario; and on the other, clouds of spray, evolved from the mighty cataract, ascended majestically to heaven, -- sometimes shaping themselves into vast pyramids that resembled snow-capt mountains, and sometimes extending their volumes into phantom-like forms, which imagination might figure to be the presiding genii of the water-fall" (76-77). This is little less than a comprehensive catalogue of Upper Canadian icons (fire-flies, the forest, Lake Ontario, the Niagara River and Falls), and its effect is to make Brock's "aged thorn bush" the centre of a rich cluster of appealing and affective sights and scenes. Astutely recognizing that the War of 1812 was a crucial "era in the history of Upper Canada," Howison places the hawthorn tree associated with its beloved "Hero" (77, 76) at the physical and emotional heart of Upper Canadian experience. Indeed, he helped to create what might be called -- borrowing a term from Bakhtin² -- a local "chronotope," a setting rich in natural and historical associations that subsequent writers could employ, modify, and elaborate according to their own circumstances and purposes.³

In Canada, as, no doubt, elsewhere, historied trees like Brock's hawthorn have exercised their appeal primarily on people of a conservative and patriotic disposition. One such was Charles Mair, an associate of the Canada First movement who wrote the closet drama *Tecumseh* (1886) in the aftermath of the Riel Rebellion to "urge by means of literature . . . a recognition of Canada's heroic past and of her potentiality for a magnificent future" (Shrive xvii). The fourth act of the play finds Captain Robinson standing on "[t]he bank of the Detroit River, near the . . . mansion" built in 1794 by James Baby, the scion of a "family . . . renowned for its loyalty to the crown since the conquest" (Mair, *Tecumseh* 89, 265; Clarke 21). Since the Baby mansion was pillaged by Americans in July, 1813, there is some dramatic irony to Robinson's hope that neither "speculation . . . nor progress" will sully the "silvan homes" of "old Sandwich" (Windsor) and to his conviction that "in the distant days, / The strong and generous youths of Canada" will make "pilgrimages" to the mansion to "drink . . . of the past, / And, drinking loyally, enlarge the faith / Which love of country breeds in noble minds" (89-90). In so far as Robinson speaks for the playwright, it is evident that Mair valued the persistence of artifacts from the past into the future, not merely for their "beaut[y]" (89), but also for their power to enhance feelings of loyalty and patriotism, to strengthen the bonds between individuals and their country. When imbibed with the proper attitude, Mair's "drinking" metaphor implies, the precipitates of the past will nurture the soul as well as the body.

The corollary to this is that the body and the soul will cease to grow if deprived of the nurturing spirit of the past. Between his optimistic prognostications about historical continuity and its enhancing effects, Robinson beholds the consequence of being cut off from the past in some historied trees on the Detroit River:

. . . those giant pears
Loom with uplifted and high-ancient heads,
Like forest trees! A hundred years ago,
They, like their owner, had their roots in France --
In fruitful Normandy -- but here refuse,
Unlike, to multiply, as if their spirits
Grieved in their alien home.

In a note to these lines, Mair writes that by the late nineteenth century, "[t]he remarkable old French

pear trees, once plentiful along the Detroit River, are rapidly decaying. The annual rings of one blown down two years ago [in 1884] were found to number one hundred and seventy, so that it must have been planted by the French colonists who founded the settlement of Detroit under de la Mothe Cadillac, in 1701. They are of immense size, and are prodigious bearers; but, strange to say, cannot be propagated, and before many years will become extinct" (265). That the Baby mansion rather than the "giant pears" provides the focus for Robinson's soliloquy stems from the fact that, though "remarkable" historically, the trees do not evoke a tradition of loyalty to Canada and Britain but, on the contrary, associate themselves with the French *régime* and with France itself. Indeed, it is their nostalgia for France which, in Mair's patriotic mind, lies behind their failure to propagate and their imminent extinction. To be fruitful *and* multiply, people, like trees, must give their affection to the land in which they find themselves.⁴

Probably the most celebrated and chronotopic tree in pre- and post-Confederation Canada was the oak under which the Irish poet Thomas Moore was supposed to have written "Ballad Stanzas" -- sometimes called the "Woodpecker poem" -- after arriving from the United States in July, 1804. In ensuing decades, there seems to have been some doubt about the precise location and species of this tree. In the early eighteenth thirties, the narrator of John Galt's *Bogle Corbet* (1831) is on his way by boat from Kingston to Toronto when he is shown a "small tree" under which Moore was supposed by local "tradition" to have composed his poem (3: 4). "Objects of this kind give an indescribable charm to the landscape," Corbet comments, "and especially in America, where the scenery as yet cannot furnish many such talismans to command the geni of memory and fancy."

As the century progressed, however, the tradition apparently attached itself to a large oak on the Niagara peninsula -- a tree whose species and size were mythopoeically appropriate.⁵ As well as being the one British poet of stature to visit Canada in the colonial period, Moore was renowned for his outspoken hostility to the United States. He thus had a twofold appeal for the neoloyalist William Kirby, whose obsessive interest in the past issued in numerous works of imaginative history, most notably an historical poem (*The U.E.* [1864]) and an historical romance (*The Golden Dog* [1877]) in the conservative tradition of Sir Walter Scott. In his collection of historical essays, *Annals of Niagara* (1896), Kirby recalls Moore's disillusionment with American Republicanism and imagines his "great relief and pleasure" at residing for a time among "Canadian Loyalists" (128). He then firmly situates the Irish poet in the pastoral landscape and collective memory of the Niagara area: "[t]here stood in those days and until recent years a majestic spreading oak tree about two miles from the town on the Queenston road. . . . Moore, with a poet's eye for rural beauty, loved to sit and muse under this tree, which acquired the name of 'Moore's Oak.' It was here that he wrote the beautiful ballad, which is one of his most innocent and charming productions. . . . Moore's visit was long remembered at Niagara. The late Thomas Darcy McGee, a year or two before his assassination [in 1868] . . . , visited Niagara . . . , and made a pilgrimage to 'Moore's Oak' while he was here" (128-29). Instead of Galt's "small tree" and local tradition, Kirby has a "majestic spreading oak tree" like those associated with Chaucer and "Hern the hunter" (*Gilpin* 1: 134-35, 145-47) and a national tradition that encompasses a martyr to Republican barbarity. What Kirby says of Moore's "Canadian Boat Song" applies almost equally well to his "Oak" as portrayed in *Annals of Niagara*: it "has become almost national among us" (128).

Nor is "Moore's Oak" the only "majestic . . . tree" celebrated in *Annals of Niagara*. Looking back to the early eighteenth century as did Mair propos the "old French pear trees," Kirby envisages "[t]he country on the Canadian side" of the Niagara River as "a dense, almost impenetrable, wilderness of forest and swamp . . . heavily timbered with oak" and other species of trees. Elsewhere in *Annals of Niagara*, Kirby regards the three principal varieties of oak found in Ontario -- "white, black, and red" -- as analogous to the three main racial groups in the Province (268), but here he focuses on two individual trees, both with Loyalist associations: "[o]ne giant oak stood until a few years ago on the farm of Mr. Peter Servos, Jr. [the descendant of a U.E.L.].⁶ . . . Another stood on the summit of the old burying place of Butler's Rangers, near Niagara town, a grand imposing relic of our primeval woods. This tree was ruthlessly cut down a few years ago for firewood, and its fall smashed a number of the old historical gravestones of the Butlers and others" (35). To Kirby, the felling of the Butler oak was doubly heinous because it not only destroyed a living link with the Loyalist past but in doing so damaged several memorials to individual Loyalists. Kirby was a conservative rather than a conservationist, but his distress at the destruction for firewood of a "grand" and historied tree reveals the affinity between the two philosophies.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, an ecological aspect of old trees provides the basis for a chain of literary influence that runs from Weld's *Travels* to Moore's "Ballad Stanzas" and, thence, to Adam Kidd's *The Huron*

Chief (1830), a long poem that seeks to honour the symbolic practice of certain native peoples by using a tree as a "metaphor" for "peace" (427n.).⁷ When Weld writes of the woods of northern New York that "the most solemn silence reigned . . . , except where a woodpecker was heard now and then tapping with its bill against a hollow tree" (3: 320), his observation depends on the fact that trees whose interior has been partly or wholly rotted away provide a habitat or food source for a variety of creatures such as ants, owls, squirrels, and woodpeckers. It was apparently a combination of natural observation and Weld's Travels (which Moore brought with him when he came to Canada)⁸ that produced the most famous lines in "Ballad Stanzas":

It was noon, and on the flowers that languish'd around
In silence repos'd the voluptuous bee;
Every leaf was at rest, and I heard not a sound
But the woodpecker tapping the hollow beech-tree.

(*Poetical Works* 124)

It is a testament to the potency of this stanza that twenty-five years after its first appearance in Moore's *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems* (1806), William Cattermole quotes a settler in the Guelph area to the effect that the mere sight of a woodpecker often makes him "remember the song of 'The woodpecker tapping the hollow beech-tree'" (203).⁹

Since Kidd dedicated *The Huron Chief, and Other Poems* to Moore, the likelihood is that "the song of 'The woodpecker'" lies in the background of the opening lines of his title poem, which find the narrator "On Huron's banks, one summer-day":

I wandered undisturbed and free,
Nor heard a sound, save wood-doves cooing,
Or birds that tapped the hollow tree,
Where owlets sat, their play-mates wooing. . . .

(5)

The note of foreboding in these lines is soon amplified when, as he passes a "grove of pine," the narrator hears a Huron woman singing a dirge for her lover, a Chief who "Died bravely defending the Indian's shore" from "the white man" (7). But it is not until the destruction of an Indian village and the surrounding forest by treacherous Americans that the hollow tree fully emerges as a "metaphor" for "peace" betrayed and destroyed:

. . . from the hollow, blasted pine,
Where heaven's light'ning played along,
And wild grapes close their tendrils twine,
Comes forth the screech-owl's boding song.

(50)

When the Huron Chief himself is killed in the final American betrayal that these lines forebode, his grave is envisaged "By ERIE's darkling groves of pine, / Where gently now the wild grape creeps" and "future bards" are enjoined to commemorate the "spot" in "songs of grief" (58-59). Almost needless to say, Kidd's literary obscurity has ensured that he was no more successful in inspiring a sequel to *The Huron Chief* than he was in imbuing the pine and the wild grape with what Traill's friend calls "recollections of former deeds." If the groves and vines of Ontario sometimes trigger memories of the "unfeeling" and "dishonourable" "conduct of America towards the Indian tribes" (56n., 58n.), the credit can rarely be assigned to *The Huron Chief*. Yet it is not entirely inconceivable that if Kidd had possessed a modicum of Moore's talent and reputation, these associations would have entered Ontario's collective memory and, like "the song of 'The woodpecker,'" altered peoples' perceptions of the *flora* and *fauna* of the Province. Even a "Kidd's Pine" might have been possible.

There is one Canadian poet, however, whose name was, and, in some minds, still is, ineluctably associated with a particular species of tree. That poet is, of course, the author of "The Grave-Tree" (1898), the opening stanza of which has been committed to memory by countless Canadians:

Let me have a scarlet maple
For the grave-tree at my head,
With the quiet sun behind it,

of Canada. When Max Gordon fells his first tree in the second part of Crawford's poem, he does so as part of a process of destruction and construction in which wood(s) served first as a formidable barrier to settlement and then, in the form of fences and houses, as a major constituent of settlement. By aligning Max's felling of the tree with Hercules' slaying of the Nemean Lion and then having him liken its "vast, prone trunk" to a "toppl'd despot" (10), Crawford makes the act a metaphor for the process of creating an agricultural and egalitarian society in North America.¹¹ In thus recognizing the crucial function of wood(s) for settlers, Crawford was anticipated and probably influenced by Alexander McLachlan, whose chapter on "Cutting the First Tree" in *The Emigrant* (1861) is in turn indebted to Galt's two pioneer novels, *Lawrie Todd* (1830) and *Bogle Corbet* (1831). (As a matter of fact, Galt himself "cut the first tree, where Guelph [Ontario] now stands on the 23rd of April, 1827" [*Report of Tenant Farmers* 119].) "'Twas a kind of sacrament; / Like to laying the foundation, / Of a city or a nation," says McLachlan's narrator of the felling of a "sturdy elm" to initiate the settlement described in *The Emigrant* (33). During and after the ritual, McLachlan's pioneers offer various visions of the human condition, each connected in one way or another with wood: the first, delivered from a "rotten log," is a version of fatalism; the second, expounded from the "stump" of the felled tree, is a hymn to the work ethic; and the third, derived by way of *Bogle Corbet* from Aesop's fable of "The Bundle of Sticks," is a utopian vision of what might be achieved in Canada through collective effort (33-38). McLachlan's recognition of the physical and metaphysical importance of wood is also reflected in the ensuing chapter, where the cadences of Moore's "Ballad Stanzas" are borrowed to describe the architectural equivalent of a "Bundle of Sticks": a "little log cabin . . . far in the woods" beside the shores of Lake Ontario (39-40). Far from being neutral objects, the mindfully felled trees of *Malcolm's Katie*, *The Emigrant*, and Galt's novels are the subject of a complex ceremony of razing and raising that heralds the creation of a new society. It is in their absence that, paradoxically, they most resemble Smith's silent birches. In Canadian society as in Canadian literature, at Guelph or on Lake Memphremagog, the phoenix of the new has risen from the ashes of the past.

Of course, the felling of trees, even ancient and storied ones, was seldom undertaken by Canadian settlers and their descendants with the sense of ceremony or "sacrament" described by Galt, McLachlan, Crawford, and others. Echoing Weld's comments on the "unconquerable aversion to trees" among American settlers, Anna Jameson observed in 1838 that "[a] Canadian settler *hates* a tree, regards it as his natural enemy, eradicated, annihilated by any means" (49). And, perhaps remembering Traill, she adds: "[t]he idea of the useful or ornamental is seldom associated here even with the most magnificent timber trees, such as among the Druids had been consecrated, and among the Greeks would have sheltered oracles and votive temples. The beautiful faith which assigned to every tree of the forest its guardian nymph, to every leafy grove its tutelary divinity, would find no votaries here. Alas! for the Dryads and Hamadryads of Canada!"¹² Wilson Flagg could be addressing twentieth-century Canadians as well as nineteenth-century Americans when he writes in *The Woods and By-Ways of New England* (1872) that an affection for "the historic remnants of a past century" is rare in "the active classes of [North] American society, who are so eager to increase their wealth by new enterprises, that every change is delightful to them if it precedes a commercial venture" (197). After remarking that "[a] wood which we have always frequented may be the only object in our village that wears an ancient look, except the rocks and hills," Flagg writes of seeing "men in raptures over the demolition of some of the most charming scenes of their boyhood, on beholding them laid out into house-lots, and advertised for sale. They are so deeply interested in advancing the price of 'real estate,' that they do not think of the regret with which, at some future day, they may witness the desolation that has followed." To this it need only be added that, to exploit the pastoral longings of their clientele, real-estate developers frequently contrive to have their sprawling subdivisions named after the natural features they have replaced: Oakridge Park, Stoneybrook Meadows, Warbler Woods, Deerfield Estates . . .

In the fall of 1980, in the area of downtown London, Ontario known as Woodfield, a young mother and artist named Skye McDonald discovered that the Public Utilities Commission was planning to remove an "old maple" from the lot across the street from her house. The owner of the lot had complained that the tree was abutting on his driveway and making it difficult to park his second car. "Spare the Axe! Lady Opposes P.U.C. Tree Attack" read the headline of an article in the November 27, 1980 issue of "London's Weekly Community Newspaper," the *Tribune*, which quoted Ms. McDonald as saying "[i]f I don't fight for them who will save those trees for my children to enjoy?" And fight, she did. On January 22, 1981, the *Tribune* ran an article entitled "Skye Triumphant: They're Listening to Her" which reported her success in gaining the ear of the P.U.C. and many Londoners. "[T]he whole issue is bigger than one tree," she had told the *Tribune* reporter; the P.U.C. is "indiscriminately slaughtering London's heritage. . . . Because of the publicity a lot of people who feel the same way about the Forest City have called and offered their support." In the same issue of the newspaper, a London tree surgeon named R.B. Finch expressed sympathy for Ms. McDonald's campaign, but noted that it is more expensive to maintain old maples than to cut them

down. He also "pointed to the widespread vandalism of young saplings planted by the city" as evidence that many "young people have been taught little regard for the beauty and heritage" of London. On January 29, 1981, the headline in the *Tribune* read "Regina Street Maple Falls." "That tree didn't have to come down," said Skye McDonald; "[n]ow look at the mess." "True enough," wrote the reporter, "there [is] a gap in the landscape near the corner of Regina and Colborne that look[s] a little like a front tooth missing."

In the last few years, there have been several such indications that historied trees have become once again a focus of attention in Canada. Perhaps in reaction to the relentless narrowing of consciousness to the present that characterizes the "now" age of the media (McLuhan 335), numbers of Canadians have found in the old trees of their neighbourhoods and yards a means of establishing contact with both the natural world and the human past. "[T]hese bent rusted nails embedded in / the pear tree's trunk: these broken cleats speak / of a processional of school-children / barking their shins while skinning the pear tree / shimmying up into its leafy hideaway," writes Roy Kiyooka in one of his *Pear Tree Pomes* (1987), and in another: "an appall'd lover bends his / ear to the pear tree's trunk to hear a lost rhetorick" (7, 29). Although not entirely free of the fashionable concern with the gap between words and things that has eviscerated much Canadian writing in the media age, Kiyooka's poetic meditation or *utanniki* (Munton 96-98) on a pear tree "as old as the oldest house on / the block" (7) frequently descends from the depleted skies of language theory to generate sympathetic connections between its pained author, the "old pear tree," and the sympathetic reader:

intact

these words cling to each fragile blossom fruit bug and worm
the old pear tree exudes. if you listen closely you'll hear a
creaking branch with `me' clinging to it without a ping of remorse

(7)

The use of scare quotes around "me" (and, earlier, "real") in Kiyooka's opening meditation forebodes further Lindberghian departures, but more promising is the suggestion of words adhering to things and the intimation of communication between fellow human beings. Greatly assisted in these directions by the deliquescent illustrations of David Bolduc, the *Pear Tree Pomes* sequence approaches Michel Serres' vision of a "natural contract" embraced by both "the idealists of language and the realists of things themselves," a peaceful reconciliation which includes "long-term memory, millenary traditions, [and] experiences accumulated by cultures that have just died, or that the . . . powers [of short-term thinking] are killing off" (21, 4). At several points in his poetic meditation, Kiyooka recognizes the longevity which has always made certain trees a living link between the past, the present, and the future. A jauntily apprehensive poem near the end of the meditation makes a fitting *envoi* for the present essay:

who knows if i'll be around
when they come to chop my pear tree down
to build another condominium

magpie! magpie!
swayin' on a high silverbranch!
will you caw me --

if you catch a glimpse of the axe-
man comin' down our alley
cause i've got a petition signed by
all the neighbourhood children
who haven't had a chance to skin their knees
let alone laugh and sneeze
up inside its thatched corridors
and there's a young couple
i know who want to build their first nest
in its forkt-branches

magpie! magpie!
will you be my unpaid informer?

P.S.: the primary epigraph to *Pear Tree Pomes* comes from Gaston Bachelard: "a tree becomes a nest the moment a great dreamer hides in it" (5).

P.P.S.: a poem by another great dreamer, Isabella Valancy Crawford:

The City Tree

I stand within the stony, arid town,
 I gaze for ever on the narrow street;
 I hear for ever passing up and down,
 The ceaseless tramp of feet.

I know no brotherhood with far-lock'd woods,
 Where branches bourgeon from a kindred sap;
 Where o'er moss'd roots, in cool, green solitudes,
 Small silver brooklets lap.

No em'rald vines creep wistfully to me,
 And lay their tender fingers on my bark;
 High may I toss my boughs, yet never see
 Dawn's first most glorious spark.

When to and fro my branches wave and sway,
 Answ'ring the feeble wind that faintly calls,
 They kiss no kindred boughs but touch alway
 The stones of climbing walls.

My heart is never pierc'd with song of bird;
 My leaves know nothing of that glad unrest,
 Which makes a flutter in the still woods heard,
 When wild birds build a nest.

There never glance the eyes of violets up,
 Blue into the deep splendour of my green:
 Nor falls the sunlight to the primrose cup,
 My quivering leaves between.

Not mine, not mine to turn from soft delight
 Of wood-bine breathings, honey sweet, and warm;
 With kin embattl'd rear my glorious height
 To greet the coming storm!

Not mine to watch across the free, broad plains
 The whirl of stormy chorts sweeping fast;
 The level, silver lances of great rains,
 Blown onward by the blast.
 Not mine the clamouring tempest to defy,
 Tossing the proud crest of my dusky leaves:
 Defender of small flowers that trembling lie
 Against my barky greaves.

Not mine to watch the wild swan drift above,
 Balanced on wings that could not choose between
 The wooing sky, blue as the eye of love,
 And my own tender green.

And yet my branches spread, a kingly sight,
 In the close prison of the drooping air:

When sun-vex'd noons are at their fiery height,
My shade is broad, and there

Come city toilers, who their hour of ease
Weave out to precious seconds as they lie
Pillow'd on horny hands, to hear the breeze
Through my great branches die.

I see no flowers, but as the children race
With noise and clamour through the dusty street,
I see the bud of many an angel face --
I hear their merry feet.

No violets look up, but shy and grave,
The children pause and lift their chrystal eyes
To where my emerald branches call and wave --
As to the mystic skies.

Notes

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1. Howison is probably alluding to Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" 115-16: "'Approach and read (for thou can'st read) the lay, / 'Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn'" (138). [\[back\]](#)
2. "Literally, 'time-space.' A unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented. The distinctiveness of the concept . . . lies in the fact that neither category is privileged; they are utterly interdependent. The chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" ("Glossary," Bakhtin 425-27). [\[back\]](#)
3. See Jasen 302-03. Howison was preceded to the site of Brock's death by John Goldie, who notes in his 1819 *Diary of a Journey through Upper Canada* that the spot "is marked by a number of thorn bushes, which form a kind of circle," adding that "[t]hey were not however planted on that account, but have grown here long before" (21). In *A Subaltern's Furlough* (1833), E.T. Coke has "the spot where [Brock] fell . . . near three poplar trees," and provides a detailed description of the battle and "miserable-looking" village of Queenston (2:44); and in his *Pictorial Guide to the Falls of Niagara* (1842), John W. Orr has Brock "standing by a cherry tree" when he was killed, and proceeds to give detailed histories of the Brock monument, Niagara Falls, and various other tourist sights (183-96). [\[back\]](#)
4. See also Heath 128: "Large [pear] trees are rare. . . . Yet there are some remarkable instances. . . . A Pear Tree in the little village of Garmouth, N.B., over a hundred years old, is forty feet high, and forty-two feet in the spread of its branches. . . . Its huge branches had to be supported by means of planks running along the tops of eleven immense wooden pillars. In one year it was said to have produced 28,600 pears." [\[back\]](#)
5. From at least the late eighteenth century onwards, "oaks were claimed to be venerable, patriarchal, stately, guardian and quintessentially English" (Daniels 48). In *The Emigrant's Informant* (1834), "A Canadian Settler" writes that "[t]he visit to [Peterborough] by Captain Basil Hall, in July, 1827, will long be remembered by the settlers. . . . The noble Oak on the domain of Pat. Walsh, which arrested the attention and admiration of the Captain, is held in the highest veneration, and will continue to stand as a memorial" (149). [\[back\]](#)
6. See Kirby's *The United Empire Loyalists*. [\[back\]](#)

7. 7 Kidd is quoting Colden by way of Buchanan 346n. See *The Huron Chief* 74 and 81-82. [\[back\]](#)
8. See Moore's *Letters* 1: 77. [\[back\]](#)
9. See also Murray 373 for the assertion that Moore wrote "Ballad Stanzas" under a "hollow beech tree" in the vicinity of Niagara Falls. [\[back\]](#)
10. See also Bordo on the motif of the solitary tree in paintings by the Group of Seven. [\[back\]](#)
11. See also Talbot 1: 155-56 on the settlers of Upper Canada: "[i]n the uninterrupted enjoyment of liberty, and the enlivening anticipation of independence, these happy lords of the forest spend their lives in toilsome pursuits without a murmur. Every tree that falls by the force of their axe is, in reality, the removal of another obstacle to their increasing prosperity; and never fails to occasion a delightful reflection, which softens toil and sweetens labour." [\[back\]](#)
12. See also Zeller 126 for Lieutenant John Henry Lefroy's observation while en route to Toronto in 1842 that the "stumps, logfences, corduroy roads, and framed houses, [put him] in some danger of acquiring the antipathy to trees which every settler seems to possess." [\[back\]](#)

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