



An English Canadian Poetics: Vol. 1 The Confederation Poets

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This collection of 37 essays by Canada's Confederation Poets is the first in a series of volumes intended to collect all the significant essays on poetic theory written in English by Canadian poets from the late nineteenth century to the first decades of the twenty-first. These essays follow a long tradition among poets of the West to articulate in prose what their poetry is about, why they write in a particular form, how they regard language, and whom they consider mentors, equals or inferiors in the practice of their craft. Above all, the essays concern the specific social, cultural and political circumstances under which poetry is created.

The Confederation Poets reflects their Romantic preoccupation with Nature and the ideals of Beauty and Truth, placing great value on imperial (Victorian) notions of formal structures in art and poetry. All born in Canada in the early 1860s, these poets came to maturity after Confederation, and all were men, members of the sex most qualified (according to the gender assumptions of the time) to celebrate in poetry the nation-building enterprise of the immense and young Dominion of Canada. Not all of them shared an explicit desire to see Canada become a republic, but all of them believed in the importance of poetry to the creation and expression of a distinctive nationality, an assumption rooted in the defining characteristic of their age—nineteenth century European nationalism of which Young Ireland was an offshoot, as were Young England, Young Italy and Young Germany.

As the First World War was drawing to a close, they knew an era had ended. Bliss Carman wrote on April 5, 1917: I doubt if any of the men who came to maturity before the great war will be able to find the new key, the new mode, the new tune.

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