Elements of Place in the Choral Works of Malcolm Forsyth

by

Robert Curtis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Music

Department of Music

University of Alberta

Abstract

The full thesis for this degree consists of this document as well as two public juried recitals, which were given on December 2, 2011 and June 9, 2013, at Convocation Hall, Edmonton, Alberta.

The concept of place is complex and has only recently begun to receive serious study, both on its own and in terms of its relationship to music. Ideas of place rely on geography, culture, history, relationships to other places, and relationships between groups of people, and are subjective constructions. The concept of landscape is useful in examining the relationship between people and their biophysical environments; landscapes can be represented in a variety of forms including painting, photography, poetry, prose and music. Elements of place in music take a variety of forms, from obvious surface elements (such as titles and textual references to specific places) to more abstract, subjective elements wherein the composer tries to capture a personal impression or a sense of a place. A variety of approaches to "place" are examined in detail, and instances of manifestations of place in music are explored through the consideration of a number of examples from the choral music of Malcolm Forsyth.

Malcolm Forsyth is a composer for whom elements of place are at the forefront of his compositions. Forsyth was born in South Africa in 1936 and immigrated to Canada in 1968, and his music contains many influences from and unique perspectives on both countries. Four representative choral works are analyzed in detail from the point of view of place in music: *Auyuittuq* (from *Northern Journey*), *The Sea* (from *Three Partsongs*), *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*, and *A Ballad of Canada*. These examples span his entire choral output, including both his first and last published choral works, and include shorter, *a cappella* pieces as well as a major work for choir and orchestra. In each piece, place is a fundamental

element, and it manifests itself in different ways in each piece. *Auyuittuq* demonstrates literal depiction of a soundscape, explicit textual references, referenced landscapes and power relationships. *The Sea* is an example of Forsyth writing within an established tradition of representing place, and serves as a point of entry to a discussion of musical representation of physical environments. *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* is an example of a non-texted piece which must derive its elements of place from musical elements without lyrics to guide the listener. Lastly, the five movements of *A Ballad of Canada* each deal with a different place using different musical techniques, and depict many different conceptions of Canada as a place.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people without whom this essay might not have been written, and to whom I wish to express my deepest gratitude.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Leonard Ratzlaff for his valued advice and mentorship throughout my studies. Working with Dr. Ratzlaff has been both inspiring and formative. Dr. Ratzlaff introduced me to the works of Malcolm Forsyth with *Hesperides* when I sang in the University of Alberta Madrigal Singers under his direction in 2006, and he fostered in me a great appreciation for Dr. Forsyth's challenging and beautiful music. I would also like to thank Dr. Debra Cairns, one of my first conducting teachers and a member of my supervisory committee. It was largely Dr. Cairns's leadership and musicianship when I sang under her direction in the University of Alberta Concert Choir that led me to pursue graduate studies in choral conducting, and she has continued to be a most valued mentor and role model.

I would also like to thank other current and former faculty members at the University of Alberta who have sat on my supervisory committee, candidacy panel, examination committee and recital juries, and who have otherwise contributed their time and energy to help me in the completion of my studies, especially Dr. David Gramit and Dr. Henry Klumpenhouwer. I am very grateful for their advice and feedback as I prepared this essay.

I have been fortunate to work with a number of excellent choral ensembles over the course of my studies, and I am profoundly grateful to the choristers who participated in my doctoral recitals, including singers from the University of Alberta Concert Choir, the University of Alberta Madrigal Singers, the University of Alberta Mixed Chorus, the Richard Eaton Singers, Pro Coro Canada, and i Coristi Chamber Choir. Their time and talent have given me the

opportunity to further explore the choral works of Malcolm Forsyth, among others, in an interpretive context, and have greatly deepened my appreciation of this repertoire.

Lastly, I am particularly thankful for my many wonderful colleagues, friends and family members. I have been immeasurably fortunate to work within an extremely supportive community, and their friendship and encouragement has made this process a joy. I would like to especially thank my wife, Connie McLaws, for her unwavering and ever-present support, and without whom this essay could not have been realized.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Examples

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The concept of place is deceptively complex, and seems so self-apparent that serious work on the subject has only taken place in recent decades.[1] Place can be a physical or imagined location, defined by physical qualities and landscape. It can be defined by way of culture, shared language and experience, and it can defy physical definition entirely. It also incorporates elements of power relationships and institutional legitimacy. The idea of place (and therefore places themselves) is constructed by humans, and also influences our perception of our social and physical surroundings. As such, places are subjective, and individuals' reactions to places can differ widely, not only in their responses to a place but also in their definitions of places and their choices of what means are used to identify place. Lastly, places can serve to represent other places: Andalusia can stand for all of Spain, for example, or the Arctic for all of Canada.

Place can manifest itself in music in a number of ways. Most obvious are literal representations of place, where the sounds of the environment are incorporated into the music itself: quotations of birdsong, sounds of battle, and so on. Composers may also include material that has extra-musical associations with a place, such as folk tunes or particular harmonic and melodic idioms. Representations of place may also take place in a metaphorical way, with tempo and rhythm standing in for qualities of movement or timbre for visible colour—or indeed, any other correspondence a composer or listener may choose. Non-audible qualities of a place, such as physical shape or texture, can be also be described through metaphor: the rise and fall of notes corresponding to the rise and fall of a wave, or the syncopation of a text reflecting the jagged edge of a craggy shore. Still more abstract are wholly subjective representations, in which a

[1] See for example Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language,* translated by

composer attempts to evoke his or her sense of a place; in this case concrete correlations are difficult to convincingly identify, and place is present less in the evocation of physical features than in personal experience—which may still relate to cultural surroundings, relationships with other people and places, or perhaps simply a certain slant of light. It must also be remembered that listeners' reactions to a piece may belie the composer's original intentions, as with Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, which was not written with the Appalachians in mind at all but which is considered by many to be a perfect evocation of the sense of the place.[2] Places can be incorporated into a piece of music by the composer (consciously or not), or they can be inferred from music by a listener, or both; one is not necessarily contingent on the other, nor does the absence of one make the experience of place in the other any less valid.

Malcolm Forsyth is a composer whose works are characterized by a careful attention to text, an idiosyncratic harmonic language and a playful sense of humour, and his works are also very strongly influenced by elements of place. A cursory review of some of the titles of his compositions suggests a strong influence of place, including works for choir (*Northern Journey*, *A Ballad of Canada*, *Three Zulu Songs*), works for orchestra (*Atayoskewin*, *Natal Landscapes*, *Valley of a Thousand Hills*), and other works (*Songs from the Qu'Appelle Valley*, *Strange Spaces*, *Three Métis Songs from Saskatchewan*). Looking more closely at these pieces, elements of place appear throughout, not only in titles but also in texts and musical elements. Forsyth, born in South Africa in 1936, immigrated to Canada in 1968 and settled in Edmonton where he played in the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and taught at the University of Alberta. As an immigrant composer, the combined influences of various places were at the heart of his own

[2] National Public Radio, "The Aaron Copland Centennial: Fred Calland Interview Transcript," November 1980, http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/copland/transcript.html.

experience, and in his composition he had a strong interest in working with elements of place to transport audiences; he once wrote, "everything I've done is with that experience in mind: changing the space that the audience sits in".[3]

First, the concept of place itself will be explored in some detail, in order to establish a solid foundation for its application to Forsyth's music. Anthropologist Margaret C. Rodman noted in 1992 that the serious study of place "was marginalized as a theoretical subject in the 1950s and 1960s", though "geographers now are expressing renewed interest in the theoretical examples of place and region,"[4] and she cites works from 1980 and 1989 as examples of this renewal of interest.[5] The study of place in music traces its roots to a conference at University College London in September 1993, which led to the publication in 1998 of one of the first books dedicated to the subject (*The Place of Music*, edited by Andrew Leyshon, David Matless and George Revill). Since then, the study of place in music has continued to develop, bringing together the disciplines of geography, anthropology and music and influencing a number of studies of regional music[6]. A large portion of the literature to this point has primarily focused on popular music.[7]

In addition to exploring the concept of place, the many ways in which elements of place can be found in music will be discussed with reference to specific examples. Afterward, a brief

---

[3] "Composer Malcolm Forsyth dies at 74," *CBC News*, July 5, 2011, http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/composer-malcolm-forsyth-dies-at-74-1.1109680.
[4] "Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality," *American Anthropologist* 94, no. 3 (1992): 641, http://www.jstor.org/stable/680566.
[5] See Anne Buttimer and David Seamon, eds., *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (London: Croom Helm, 1980) and John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan, eds., *The Power of Place* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).
[6] See for example Fiona Richards, ed., *The Soundscapes of Australia: Music, Place and Spirituality* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
[7] See for example John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* (London: Routledge, 2003); Ola Johansson and Thomas L. Bell, eds., *Sound, Society and the Geography of Popular Music* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

biographical sketch of Malcolm Forsyth will be provided, followed by a discussion of the importance of place to him and its influence on his music. In the second half of this essay, three of Forsyth's shorter choral pieces and one major work will be examined from the point of view of place. These pieces were chosen so as to examine a representative cross-section of his choral output (including his first and last major choral works, as well as pieces from every decade of his career) and to demonstrate the full, rich variety of ways in which he brings elements of place into his choral music. First, *Auyuittuq* (from the set *Northern Journey*, composed in 1997) provides a suitable point of entry into elements of place in Forsyth's choral music through its overt textual references to place and its literal depiction of place; more abstract representations of landscape will also be considered. Next is an earlier work of Forsyth's, *The Sea* (written in 1980 and published as part of the *Three Partsongs* in 1983), which offers the opportunity to explore subjective representations of place and metaphors between musical materials and physical environments. Forsyth's first published choral work, *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* from 1973, then serves as an example of music which contains elements of place without making use of lyrics to explicitly alert the listener to the presence of these elements; the piece will also be the subject of further discussion of referenced landscapes. My analysis concludes with *A Ballad of Canada*, Forsyth's last major work, written to be an iconically Canadian work on the subject of Canada's land and peoples. Each of the five movements incorporates elements of place in a different way: "In the Yukon" does so with its abstract representation of the northern lights and its musical differentiation of background and foreground material; "In Flanders Fields," with its use of contrast to mirror a similar device in the text; and "The Toll of the Bells," through literal depiction of a soundscape. "On the Waverley Road Bridge" then describes a specific, highly personal and emotional experience through abstract

representation, and the final movement, “Newfoundland,” mimics physical characteristics of the landscape in a similar way to the rhythm of the original poem.

Chapter 2 – The concept of place

What is place?

On its surface, the concept of place seems to be very straightforward. Places can simply be locations, such as "my kitchen" or "Edmonton, Alberta" or "North America". Yet the idea of place is commonly extended to more abstract ideas. “Home” is a concept that can include multiple physical locations, such as a person’s residence, a childhood home or a hometown. It can also be tied to no physical location at all: a person might have a sense of “home” linked strongly to the company of a specific person, say a spouse or a parent, without necessarily being tied to a particular location, or may feel a sense of “home” in viewing a particular landscape. “Cyberspace" is another place which does not necessarily need to include a physical location, though we do use the language of place in describing our digital world: *going* online, storing data *in* the cloud, *navigating to* a website. The servers which contain the ones and zeros that make up the Internet certainly do reside in specific places around the world, but when speaking about storing data in the cloud, for example, we are not speaking of a specific server rack in a data centre somewhere in the world, but rather of an abstract place whose physical manifestation is largely inconsequential to the concept. Even the most straightforward seeming of places can have multiple layers of meaning. “Edmonton, Alberta” is a place which would seem easy to define, and it is in fact defined quite clearly in provincial legislation as being circumscribed by particular geographical boundaries. Yet there are elements other than legal boundaries that contribute to a sense of Edmonton as a place: the landscape of the North Saskatchewan River valley, economic

ties to the oil industry and shared support for local sports teams are some basic examples showing that place transcends geography. The concept of "Edmonton" as a place also relies on relationships to other places: the city's rivalry with Calgary, Alberta; as the provincial capital, its ties to Ottawa; and as an important centre of the oil industry, its relationship with the United States. Altering any of these elements would change the concept of "Edmonton"; thus the idea of place transcends geographical definition in this deceptively complex subject. The idea of place is even extended to cultures, philosophies and ideas, such as when we speak of a composer's place within society or how a particular perspective is situated relative to an ideology.

The study of the concept of place has gained more prominence in recent decades among anthropologists and geographers, as they explore the depth behind this seemingly clear-cut idea: "the problem of place arises, paradoxically, because the meaning of place too often seems to go without saying."[8] In extending the idea of "place", however, there is a danger of diluting the concept to the point of eliminating its usefulness. Various writers and scholars have attempted to define "place" in a precise way that nonetheless extends the idea beyond physical place. Foucault describes places as contexts, from which the discourse of speakers derives legitimacy, with a particular focus placed on the power relationships between different institutions and sites.[9] Foucault uses examples of doctors working in different contexts such as hospitals, private practice, laboratories, and as writers. Each of these contexts relates to the central topic (medicine) in a different way: hospitals as places of systematic, quantified observation; private practice as places of less complete observations but with longer-term involvement with patients; laboratories as places of general truths, and writing as a mass of historical information. In a

[8] Rodman, "Empowering Place," 640.
[9] *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 50–52.

musical setting, the doctors become composers and performers, and places of authority can include both physical locations and abstract sites. Physical locations that impart legitimacy to a composer or performer include locations that are specifically referenced in the music itself, such as folk music or programmatic music describing place. Musicians who are seen to have a connection to the location referenced by the musical material may claim a certain legitimacy that others cannot; the connection may be the individual's ethnic background, a period of residency, or scholarly expertise. Consider, for example, a piece purporting to describe the northern lights. At first glance, a Canadian composer would seem to be writing from a stronger position of authority than, for example, an Ecuadorean composer, as the consumer of the music makes the assumption that the Canadian composer has experienced northern lights and has lived in a culture where they are well-known and connected to the identity of the place and its people, while the Ecuadorean composer seems less likely to have experienced them or lived in that culture. More abstract locations from which a composer or performer might derive legitimacy include their place within a cultural or academic milieu; a piece commissioned and premiered by a professional ensemble gains more prestige, and itself a more central cultural place, while otherwise similar pieces may not. Consider the potential difference in prestige and cultural status if a piece were commissioned by a professional choir in Vancouver, versus a school choir in Moose Jaw. Aspects of place in such a piece of music would not be limited to an imaginary landscape under northern lights, but could also include its relationship to other locations and its situation with respect to abstract places, such as the Canadian cultural scene.

Constructing place

Even when the place of music is most closely related to a physical location, the idea of place can be more complex than a set of coordinates or a particular grouping of borders. Notions of physical place are human constructions, "politicized, culturally relative, historically specific."[10] Concepts of physical place are always fluid and subjective; even attempts to unambiguously quantify and delimit place (such as with borders, fences and maps) demonstrate this subjectivity in the very selection of the means of definition of the place: geographical features, cultural similarities between groups of nearby people, identification with particular tribes or factions, political convenience, historical precedent, mathematical equity—the number of possibilities is endless. Languages also serve to define place; the Northwest Territories, as an example, has eleven official languages, and shops bearing signage written in Cree or Inuktitut are a distinctive feature of the territory as a place. The *Office québécois de la langue française*, a provincial board in Quebec dedicated to the normalization and promotion of the French language within the province, is another example of language's deep interconnectedness with culture and place. Examples abound of each of the above criteria being justifiably used to define places, but even the best-defined of places must concede a wide variety of alternate viewpoints.

If every person conceives of a place subjectively and therefore constructs it differently, according to different criteria and from different viewpoints, then communicating one's perception of the nature of a particular place gains an added dimension in that the framework in which the observer is observing the place becomes part of the message. There must be a layer between the observer and the observed, a lens through which a place is seen, an "interface

[10] Rodman, "Empowering Place," 640–41.

between human thoughts and actions and the biophysical environment"[11]—this layer is the idea of landscape. To illustrate this point, consider a specific place: Mount Teide, on the island of Tenerife in the Canary Islands, northwest of the African mainland. Mount Teide is a volcano, the highest point in Spain, and is emblematic of the Canary Islands, appearing on the island chain's coat of arms. James Cook stopped here on his third voyage to find the Northwest Passage. He wrote the following in his journal, describing his departure from Tenerife in 1768:

> "Off this N.E. point lies some rocks high above water. The highest is near the point and very remarkable. By our run from yesterday at noon this end of the Island must lie in the lat. of 28° 27' and S. 7° 45' E .... The Peak of Teneriff (from which I now take my departure) is a very high mountain upon the Island of the same name, one of the Canarie Islands. Its perpendicular hight from actual measurement is said to be 15396 feet .... its situation in this respect is allowed to be pretty well determined."[12]

Cook's approach to describing this specific place is practical and geographical, defining it in terms of its physical coordinates and recognizable features. His concern as a navigator was to provide good documentation for other sailors, and the primary perception of Mount Teide here is as a landmark, enabling sailors to find a convenient stopping-point on the westward journey across the Atlantic.

Compare Cook's journal entry to the following description of the very same mountain, by British artist Darryl Walker:

---

[11] David B. Knight, *Landscapes in Music: Space, Place and Time in the World's Great Music* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 5.
[12] *Journal of H.M.S Endeavour, 1768–1771*, National Library of Australia, MS 1, part 10r, http://nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms1.

Figure 1 – Darryl Walker, "Mount Teide, Tenerife"[13]

Apart from the obvious difference in media—prose versus painting—the two observers exhibit clear differences in their approaches to the same physical location. Walker depicts figures on the mountain which speak to the spirituality, culture and traditions of the people living in the area, and to the mountain's significance to them and to their history. The bright colours and depictions of unusual plant life create a sense of exoticism. At the same time, some features are geographically accurate—Mount Teide is in fact surrounded by a flat plain bordered by ridges, as seen in the background of the painting at the left edge, and the plant life depicted does grow there. Nonetheless, the focus is on the sense of the place as well as its connection to the culture of the Canary Islands rather than on geographical coordinates.

[13] *Mount Teide, Tenerife*, oil on canvas, 2005. http://www.saatchiart.com.

Both descriptions of Mount Teide provide information about the place, and both descriptions reveal different priorities and perspectives on the part of the observers. Each observer chose a medium well-suited to their aims, and while these media are quite different, they both describe a particular landscape. Similarly, musical depictions of place vary widely in their approaches, and they too reveal something about the composer's perception of the depicted place. As in Cook's journal entry, the depiction may be very exact by incorporating elements of a place's soundscape unchanged into the musical material, such as with quotations of birdsong or folk songs. As in Walker's painting, the depiction may be more subjective, using musical elements such as timbre in an abstract way to capture some essence of the place, in the same way that Walker makes use of colour to capture his impression of Mount Teide.

Relationships between places

The relationships that a place bears to other places near or far can be crucial parts of that place's own identity, as previously examined with the example of the concept of the place "Edmonton, Alberta." Places can be related through shared culture (such as a large population that follow and support a sports team based in a particular place), geographical proximity or similarity (such as neighbouring populations that share a border), historical interactions (including conflict or economic ties), and power relationships (political or otherwise). A place can also serve as a metonymic representation of a larger entity.[14] Often, nations see themselves as divided into north and south, with inhabitants of each sub-region deemed to exhibit particular

[14] The term "metonymy" here is used to refer to the case in which something is referred to indirectly by referring to another, related, entity. Often, but not always, relationships between places are an example of "synecdoche", a more specific type of metonymy in which a part of an entity is used to refer to the whole. The term "metonymy" will be used throughout this essay for the sake of clarity.

stereotypical qualities (such as northerners being hardy and southerners being amiable).[15] This has been attributed to "internal migration in response to climatic preferences, resulting in a polarization at limits set by barriers to migration, such as national boundaries."[16] On a continental or global scale, these sub-regions of countries are often taken by outsiders to represent the whole. As an example, James W. Fernandez shows how outsiders' conceptions of Spain are often rooted in its southern part, Andalusia, including typically Andalusian practices such as bull-fighting and Flamenco dancing.[17] He goes on to point out that Spain is a southern country within Europe, and therefore it makes sense to take the southern sub-region (with all the accompanying "southerner" stereotypes) as being more representative of the whole. Canada can be divided between east and west as well as between north and south, though the north-south division is more striking in terms of contrasting landscapes; the Arctic contrasts strongly not only with the southern regions of Canada but also with non-Arctic landscapes around the world. The Arctic is a northern sub-region of a northern nation, calling to mind images of ice plains and polar bears, and this can serve as an invocation of the country as a whole. One must of course be mindful of the "problem of metonymic misrepresentation,"[18] as the Arctic clearly does not fully represent all facets of Canadian culture and place, but the examples identified by Fernandez and others show that sub-regions of Canada are nonetheless often thrust into a position of standing for the whole.

---

[15] U. R. Ehrenfels, "North-South Polarization: A Study in the Typicality of Attitudes," *Centenary Volume, University of Madras* 28 (1957), 85–103, cited in Robert A. Levine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972), 162.
[16] Robert A. Levine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972), 162.
[17] "Andalusia on Our Minds: Two Contrasting Places in Spain as Seen in a Vernacular Poetic Duel of the Late 19th Century," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1988), 22.
[18] Ibid.

It is also important to bear in mind the "mutually generative relations of music and place."[19] Place is not only a component of music, but music is also a component of place and can participate in its construction. To consider the place of music is not only to look for elements of place in the music itself, but also to consider the ways in which music shapes the places in which it is created and performed. Music often exerts "a profound influence on the way we see our world(s) and situate ourselves in relation to others."[20] The composition and performance of new music can lead to thriving ensembles in a community and can help shape audiences' tastes, and this can in turn support further composition and performance. The interaction between music and the places in which it is written and performed is an indispensable part of the context of any piece of music, and is therefore an important facet of any place-based approach to musical analysis. In a 2011 interview, Malcolm Forsyth recalled meeting a married couple after a concert who enjoyed listening to his piece *Atayoskewin* while watching the northern lights:

> "When [*Atayoskewin*] was performed by the Calgary Phil some years ago, I had, which was much to my surprise, after the performance, a number of what I would have to call fans standing around me wanting to talk to me and tell me how this particular piece had affected them, and one couple, a married couple, said, 'We take our ghetto blaster out onto the back lawn in the summertime and we lie on our backs in the grass and play *Atayoskewin*, and watch the northern lights. That first movement *is* the northern lights.' I said, 'Oh. I didn't know that,' but ... I was struck by it and I've identified it as the northern lights since."[21]

Atayoskewin was an integral part of the space in which this couple liked to watch the northern lights, and this changed the composer's own perspective on his piece. In *A Ballad for Canada*, completed in the final year of his life, Forsyth quoted *Atayoskewin* in the first movement, a

---

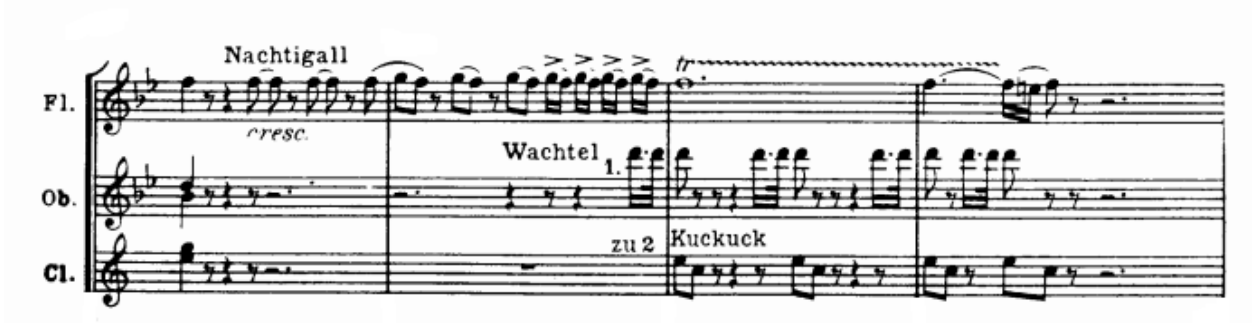
[19] Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill, eds., *The Place of Music* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 4.
[20] John Lovering, "The Global Music Industry: Contradictions in the Commodification of the Sublime," in *The Place of Music*, ed. Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 32.
[21] Trifon Heney, "A Ballad of Canada," interview for *Sound + Noise* (http://soundnnoise.com/2011/04/10/a-ballad-of-canada), April 10, 2011.

musical description of the Yukon. The sense of place that the couple perceived in *Atayoskewin*, though not created consciously as such by the composer, served to generate a sense of place in one aspect of their own lives, which later helped to generate musical material that was consciously evocative of a northern place.

Manifestations of place in music

Several aspects of "place" have been discussed in a general way, and these varying conceptions can be applied to specific musical examples. Place can be described by power relationships, by exact quantities and depiction, and by subjective impression. A place can be invoked metaphorically by metonymous reference to a sub-region. Places also have a mutually generative relationship with the music that is composed and performed there. All of these aspects of place can be found in musical compositions across many eras and styles.

The most straightforward manifestation of place in music is in the literal depiction of elements from its environment. The end of the second movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6*, the Pastoral Symphony, contains a series of birdcalls in the winds (see example 1).



Example 1 – Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony No. 6*, second movement, mm. 129-132[22]

[22] Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony No. 6* (New York: Dover, 1976), 76.

Here Beethoven takes sonic elements found in the landscape he is depicting and inserts them prominently into the music. This effort is underlined by annotations in the score identifying the particular species being imitated: the nightingale, quail and cuckoo. In this case, the literal depiction of a landscape is not confined to the music itself; in addition to the bird species marked in the score, Beethoven also describes place through titles of movements: *Szene am Bach* (Scene by the Brook), *Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute* (Merry Gathering of Country People) and *Gewitter, Sturm* (Tempest, Storm) are among the symphony's five movements. With these titles, Beethoven is referencing a geographical feature, a cultural feature and an environmental feature, describing the place in a variety of ways. This combination of elements is key to evoking a sense of place. The use of the same notes as a nightingale's song, by itself, could be coincidence or poetic allusion, but bringing three birds together and adding elements of landscape, culture and weather creates a new space—a place—that includes all these elements. This kind of descriptive manifestation of place in music can be easily found throughout Western music history: in the footsteps of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*; in the battle scenes of Janequin's *La bataille*; in the postilion's horn of Bach's *Capriccio sopra la lontananza del suo fratello dilettissimo,* BWV 992; or in the buzzing bees of R. Murray Schafer's *Magic Songs*, among others.

Composers may also take a more subjective approach to the depiction of place. Geographer David B. Knight refers to this compositional approach as "referenced landscapes"—music that "refers to landscapes by using human associations."[23] Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9, "From the New World"*, can be viewed as an example of referenced landscape in that it contains

[23] *Landscapes in Music*, 3.

no sonic material from the American physical environment. Dvořák deliberately sought out "spirituals and plantation songs from the South and ... transcriptions of Amerindian melodies"[24] and his works from this period clearly incorporate musical features from these traditions, but he is not seeking to reproduce sounds from the place. Rather, Dvořák uses these musical styles to evoke a particular sense of place, and create a "new, independent art, in short a national style of music."[25] Other examples include Berlioz's *Harold en Italie* (though it contains literal depictions as well), Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and Liszt's *Dante Symphony*.

Places defined by power relationships can be more difficult to identify in musical examples, as a certain amount of cultural or historical context is often required in order to establish the actors and the relationship between them. A well-known example is Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, in which the music establishes two forces—the French, represented by the tune "La Marseillaise", and the Russians, represented by folk tunes—and clearly sets up a power relationship between the two: the French are powerful and advancing on the Russians. The musical narrative describes a shift in the power relationship, as the Russian forces overcome the French: cannon shots (another example of literal depiction of the sounds of a place) halt "La Marseillaise" in favour of the Russian folk tunes. Tchaikovsky thus describes a place, a metaphorical battlefield, in terms of the changing power relationship between its main actors. Haydn's *Symphony no. 45*, the "Farewell" Symphony, is closely related to two places: the summer residence of Haydn's employer at Eszterháza and the regular court at Eisenstadt. Haydn composed the symphony to convince the prince not to extend the court's stay at the summer palace, but to allow the musicians to return home; the first performance concluded with the

[24] *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Dvořák, Antonin," by Klaus Döge, accessed July 24, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.
[25] Letter to Josef Hlávka, 27 November 1892, quoted in Döge, "Dvořák, Antonin."

musicians leaving the stage one by one as their parts ended, leaving only two violinists on stage at the end of the work.[26] This unusual ending makes much more sense when viewed in terms of the place in which the music was composed and first performed, but the summer palace at Eszterháza is not evoked by literal use of sounds from the environment, nor evoked by a sense of place through associations and impressions. Rather, the place is made present by the subversion of the power relationship between composer and patron, and between court orchestra and prince.

Metonymous references in music are easiest to recognize in music associated with national traditions. American music in particular, in attempting to stand for an extremely large country with a wide variety of regional traditions, often focuses on a specific area or musical influence and has it stand for the whole. Copland's *Appalachian Spring* and *Rodeo*, Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Adamo's *Little Women* and Ives's *Three Places in New England* derive some of their American identity through their aim to evoke specific places within the United States. Canadian music can also look to metonymy for some of its "Canadian-ness", as in Harry Somers' *Louis Riel* (focusing on Manitoba) and *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (Newfoundland), John Weinzweig's *Red Ear of Corn* (Quebec), or Stephen Chatman's *Grouse Mountain Lullaby* (British Columbia). The north-south dichotomy mentioned earlier is also evident in works such as Malcolm Forsyth's *Auyuittuq*, discussed in more detail below, as well as in works such as Violet Archer's *Northern Landscape* and Christos Hatzis' *Footprints in New Snow*.

Lastly, mutually generative relationships between music and place are innumerable and deeply connected to local culture and history. A pertinent example is the rise of the choral

---

[26] *The Oxford Companion to Music*, s.v. "'Farewell' Symphony", accessed July 24, 2014, www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

society in nineteenth-century Germany. A variety of factors led to the founding of a number of music societies, often dedicated to the performance of music as a means for the moral improvement of society through their members. Composers such as Brahms and Mendelssohn conducted choirs associated with music societies, and drew on widely-available, high-quality German poetry in writing music for them; the availability of high-quality, contemporary choral music helped these societies thrive, and created a feedback loop that in turn encouraged the creation of more choral works. The German cultural scene also included a number of music-related institutional places from which people spoke authoritatively about values and philosophies, and the influence of these places is apparent in an enormous amount of music. To take one specific example: in 1868, Franz Xaver Witt founded the *Allgemeine Deutsche Cäcilien-Verein*, a society which aimed to reform Catholic church music through the revival of Renaissance music and musical ideals. The *Cäcilien-Verein*, taking inspiration from stylistic elements in Renaissance music that they perceived to be lacking in modern music, coupled with a view that modern music was morally deficient in comparison, sought to shape the production of sacred music by encouraging composers to use Palestrina as a model. The society published the *Vereins-Catalog*, an assessment of pieces of music according to the society's guidelines, with a list of approved music. Bruckner's motet *Os justi* was dedicated to Ignaz Traumihler, who had been heavily involved in the *Vereins-Catalog*. In writing to Traumihler, Bruckner specifically points to the fact that the motet contains no accidentals, no seventh chords, no chords in second inversion and no four- or five-note chords whatsoever.[27] The *Cäcilien-Verein* was shaped by the music of the day and its founders' values, and it in turn shaped many subsequent compositions

[27] James Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 133–213.

which allowed it to create an extensive catalogue supporting its aims. *Os justi* does not refer to a specific geographic place, nor to a landscape, but it does speak to the institutional places of power present in the musical and cultural landscape in which Bruckner was working.

These considerations will provide points of entry into my consideration of choral works by Malcolm Forsyth. As I will demonstrate, place is an important component of Malcolm Forsyth's music, and it manifests itself in a rich variety of ways. *Auyuittuq* refers to a geographical location in its title, includes the Inuktitut language in its text, and makes use of historical and cultural constructions of place in addition to representing the landscape literally (through bird-calls) and subjectively (through musical metaphor). *The Sea* suggests a marine landscape through abstract representation, and *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* also takes an abstract approach, incorporating elements of Swaziland's landscape and culture as well as fragments of Zulu language to construct a new musical space. Forsyth's last major work, *A Ballad of Canada*, uses the Canadian landscape as a framework for a variety of elements of place, including literal and abstract representation, depictions of foreground, background and colour, contrasts between different places and emotional experiences strongly associated with a given place and time.

Chapter 3 – Malcolm Forsyth

Biographical background

Malcolm Forsyth was born on December 8, 1936, in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, about 80 kilometres north-west of the coastal city of Durban. Forsyth had a childhood ambition of becoming a painter, but turned to the study of music after hearing performances of orchestral

repertoire.[28] Forsyth earned a Bachelor of Music from the University of Cape Town in 1963, having switched his major from trombone to conducting and composition. He was co-principal trombone of the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra from 1961 to 1968, and continued his studies, earning his master's degree in 1966 and his doctorate in 1969. In January, 1968, Forsyth and his family immigrated to Canada. They spent the first half of 1968 in Toronto where Forsyth took classes with the Ontario Department of Education in preparation for a job as a public school music teacher in North York to start in the fall. In August, however, Forsyth was offered a faculty position at the University of Alberta in Edmonton; the family relocated that month. He would remain at the University of Alberta until his retirement in 2002, during which time he taught theory, composition, conducting and trombone, served as Composer-in-Residence, and conducted the University Symphony Orchestra. During his time in Edmonton, Forsyth also played bass trombone for the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra from 1968 to 1971 and was principal trombone from 1973 to 1980. Forsyth was a frequent traveller (a fact pertinent to his music's deep relationship with place), with extended trips to South Africa in 1971, England from 1979 to 1980, and Rome in 1987, among others, as well as a term as a visiting professor at Witwatersrand University in 1983 and a fellowship with the Camargo Foundation in France from 1993 to 1994. He received a large number of honours over the course of his career, including three Juno awards (in 1987, 1995 and 1998), was named "Composer of the Year" by the Canadian Music Council in 1988, and was made a Member of the Order of Canada in 2003.

[28] Alister Stott, "Malcolm Forsyth, Artist in Two Climates," unpublished essay, 1989, University of Calgary Special Collections accession no. 724/02.11, file 1.59.

Forsyth was an active composer right up until his death on July 5, 2011, just one month after the premiere of his last major work, *A Ballad of Canada*.[29]

Forsyth's music strongly features "the intricate manipulation of intervallic cells, orchestral textures and rhythmic patterns derived from African and popular musics" as well as "an appreciation of wit and humour revealed in the forms of pastiche and parody and a desire to communicate with a wide audience."[30] Forsyth rejected "radical and iconoclastic vogues" in favour of a style that reflected his "love for the traditional orchestral repertoire and the strongest desire to make a musical statement which was personal, craftsmanlike and above all, passionate."[31] His music has been widely performed and broadcast throughout Canada and abroad, and his oeuvre includes choral, orchestral and solo vocal music as well as a significant amount of music for brass ensemble.

Forsyth and place

The combination of various senses of place and the process of transforming space are central to Forsyth's work. Many of Forsyth's compositions, in all the genres in which he worked, display their relationship to place at a first glance through their titles: *Natal Landscapes*, *A Ballad of Canada*, *Songs from the Qu'appelle Valley*, *Northern Journey*. Forsyth often considered elements of place from the very beginning of the creative process. In the grant

---

[29] For further biographical information, see entries in *Oxford Music Online* and *The Canadian Encyclopedia*; Stott, "Malcolm Forsyth"; "Composer Malcolm Forsyth dies at 74," *CBC News*, July 5, 2011; Michael Brown, "University community mourns loss of iconic Canadian composer," University of Alberta news, July 7, 2011, http://uofa.ualberta.ca/news-and-events/newsarticles/2011/07/malcolmforsyth; Amanda Forsyth, "My Life," unpublished essay, n.d., University of Calgary Special Collections, accession no. 724/02.11, file 1.17; and Carl Hare, "About Malcolm Forsyth," malcolmforsythcomposer.ca.

[30] *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Forsyth, Malcolm (Denis)," by Wesley Berg, accessed August 5, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.

[31] Stott, "Malcolm Forsyth."

application to the Canada Council for the Arts regarding the commission that would result in *Northern Journey*, Forsyth included as one of three audio excerpts his *Three Zulu Songs*, pointing out features in the music ("pentatonic style ... with percussive onomatopoeia") which served to imbue that piece with a particular sense of place.[32] When writing *A Ballad of Canada*, the idea of place was one of the fundamental inspirations for the piece; Forsyth said in an interview that "first of all, Canada is the land ... the history of Canada has been shaped by the land, by the topography. The best art that has come out of Canada probably deals with that aspect of Canada."[33]

One of the most prominent places that finds its way into Forsyth's music is South Africa. This is a place that can be described and subdivided geographically—one could focus on smaller regions such as the land of the SiBaca people, whose influence can be found in *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*. It can also be described in terms of cultural traditions, and Forsyth's music often invokes South Africa through the use of idiomatic rhythms as well as language. After Forsyth's death, his colleague Janet Scott Hoyt remarked that "a lot of his music incorporated the rhythms of the music [in South Africa], and he made it his own; he infused it into something that wasn't African anymore—it was Canadian, but it had that special flavour of something from afar."[34] An example of these rhythms will be considered in the context of *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*, where it is closely linked to the speech rhythms of Zulu languages. In *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*, these rhythms are combined with other elements that are less easily localized to Africa, creating something new.

---

[32] Forsyth to Daniel Swift, Canada Council for the Arts, August 2, 1996 (University of Calgary Special Collections, accession no. 724/02.11, file 1.7).
[33] Heney, "A Ballad of Canada."
[34] Michael Brown, "University community mourns loss of iconic Canadian composer," University of Alberta news, July 7, 2011, http://uofa.ualberta.ca/news-and-events/newsarticles/2011/07/malcolmforsyth.

Whether this new entity is automatically Canadian as the above remark would suggest—simply by virtue of its composer's second nationality, the place of its composition or the place of its first performance and widest dissemination—is questionable. Other elements of place would need to be considered, especially within the musical material itself, and in the specific example of *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*, the other material is not clearly Canadian. Nonetheless, the combination of various elements of place identified in the remark is clearly present, and is a distinguishing feature that reappears throughout Forsyth's works. Canada does appear in Forsyth's music with regularity, sometimes through reference to a location (*Auyuittuq*), sometimes through direct textual reference (*A Ballad of Canada*) and often in much more subtle ways. Composer Allan Gordon Bell points out that Forsyth's piece *Atayoskewin* contains no quotations from First Nations traditional music, but rather is "an attempt to rethink what it's like to view the land, to view the place, through the very profound sensibility that the First Nations people have in the best of their spiritual pursuits."[35] In a 2010 podcast, Forsyth recalled his childhood in South Africa:

> "All day long, there would be black people wandering up and down the street, singing; Zulus playing little home-made guitars, and they'd be playing repetitive ostinato figures and singing, in Zulu ... so I listened to them, I would play out in the front garden, in the flower beds and so on, and I would hear Zulu people singing their music and playing their little ostinato figures and rhythmic figures, from my very earliest recollection, long before my father ever got me to listen to Johann Strauss waltzes. So I heard this music and I knew it, without ever even thinking about it, and it didn't come to the surface until I came to Canada. Suddenly, being removed from all of that, I said, "I know that I'm from Africa. I'm from a different place. I'm not from here."[36]

Responding later in the same podcast to this recollection, CBC producer Eitan Cornfield noted:

> "He discovered his voice, which was partially [a] Zulu voice, only after he came to Canada. And while questioning, while having these kinds of ontological crises that all composers have, especially Canadians

---

[35]Interview by Robert Rival, "Remembering Malcolm Forsyth Part 1," podcast audio, October 27, 2011, http://www.edmontonsymphony.com/eso-blog/519-remembering-malcolm-forsyth-part-1.
[36] National Arts Centre, "The Post War Years: Canadian Composers Come of Age!" from *Eric Friesen Presents the NAC Orchestra*, December 12, 2010, http://radio.nac-cna.ca/podcast/Eric_Friesen_Presents/Eric_Friesen_Presents_07.mp3.

> trying to find their voice and trying to define themselves, he realized that he was an African composer only when he came to Canada. Which is, again, I think, a quintessentially Canadian experience and part of the normative Canadian experience. So he began composing works from snatches of things ... that he heard in his childhood. And he also ultimately drew—I won't say it's a straight line, but a dotted line, between the spiritual component of that music, of the native music of South Africa, [and] the native music of North America. And it was his experience of South African music, and Zulu music in particular, I think, that gave him the sensitivity to write and approach Native spirituality, North American spirituality, and manifest itself in a work like *Atayoskewin* ... there are no Native drum beats in it, there are no throat singers *per se*, there's none of that, true, but there is a real manifestation of that kind of spirituality."

This insight closely parallels modern anthropological ideas of place as constructed and subjective; the music describes the places "South Africa" and "Canada" in terms of the relationship between specific cultural groups and their surroundings. In an interview shortly after Forsyth's death, his colleague and former student, Allan Gilliland, used a metaphor of place to describe the variety of influences present in Forsyth's music: "he really thought wide and far about music."[37]

We have explored various aspects of the complex idea of "place" as well as the ways in which they can manifest themselves in music. Forsyth was deeply influenced by many different places, and as an immigrant Canadian he had a unique perspective on each. Place was a consideration at the very forefront of Forsyth's composing, and can be identified throughout his music, from readily apparent surface features to very subtle, subjective impressions. We now turn to analyses of specific pieces and places, beginning in Auyuittuq, north of the Arctic Circle.

Chapter 4 – The North: *Auyuittuq*

Overview

Auyuittuq is the second piece in a set of three, entitled *Northern Journey*, commissioned by Elektra Women's Choir of Vancouver, BC. The set was commissioned in 1996 with funding

[37] Interview by Robert Rival, "Remembering Malcolm Forsyth Part 3," podcast audio, October 27, 2011, http://www.edmontonsymphony.com/index.php/eso-blog/523-remembering-malcolm-forsyth-part-3.

from the Canada Council for the Arts, and premiered on May 3, 1997. All three pieces (*Auyuittuq, Kluane Glaciers, Winter Sky*) are settings of Arctic-themed poetry, with a number of evocative harmonic and textural effects. In the grant application to the Canada Council, Forsyth provided the jury with a recording of his earlier piece, *Endymion's Dream*, as an example of "word-painting and textural music," noting that Elektra was "'interested in texture' in the new commission."[38] *Auyuittuq*'s texture is quite sparse; it contains extended monophonic lines (set against the backdrop of a repeated cell marked "darkly, as an incantation"), making a transition several times into lush, harmonically complex phrases set for six-part women's chorus. There are a number of surface elements of place to consider, but the piece also describes the landscape in more abstract ways. Forsyth brings a unique perspective of the North, and synthesizes a number of places and musical elements to create a distinctive take on the Arctic.

The text is taken from Inge Israel's poem "Auyuittuq" (an Inuktitut word meaning "the land that never melts") from the collection *Unmarked Doors*, her fifth book of poetry and second in English, published in 1992. Israel was born in Frankfurt and spent her childhood in France and Dublin. She came to Canada in 1958 and lived and worked in Edmonton, later moving to Victoria. The poem's title refers to Auyuittuq National Park, located on Baffin Island in Nunavut, and extending north of the Arctic Circle. Forsyth omits a few lines, setting only the boldface text below:

> **We felt the Ice Age linger**
> **knew it could start again**
> **under weak suns**
>
> **saw the white-lipped horizon**
> **of a world**
> **that had never been young**

[38] Forsyth to Daniel Swift, 1996.

spoke a language
not of sound
but great arcs

then boreal cotton seduced
with fluffy softness
purple saxifrage kindled
ice crystals and **we breathed**
warm guilt into cold air
till the illusion became complete
and self-sustaining

forgetting Goddess Earth
was bedded here by Odin
who still roars mockery
across the glaciers

here, where the narwhal turns
a simple tooth into a sword
and the loon bursts into mad laughter.

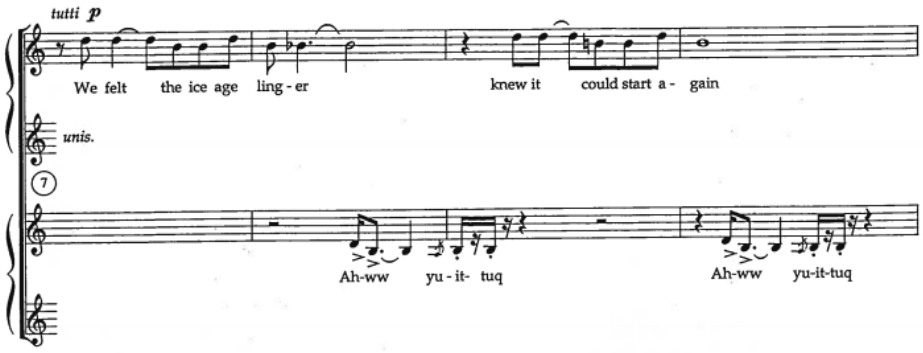
Even the ice groans.[39]

The poem depicts a transformation in perspective on a place. It begins by describing the Arctic landscape in motionless, weak terms: "linger," "weak suns," "white-lipped." There is no sound in the landscape, only "great arcs" (an image of the North that will reappear in the first movement of Forsyth's "A Ballad of Canada", with its "great hangings" and salmon jumping in "silver arcs"). Yet this is only an illusion, gaining permanence because of the speaker's guilt; it ignores the long history of the place. The poem reaches back a thousand years to the Norse colonization of North America, invoking Odin, and transforms the land from weak, white-lipped and soundless to a landscape of roared mockery, swords and mad laughter. The landscape exists in two realities at once: a clichéd view of the Arctic as barren and lifeless, and a view of it as an area full of life and sound. Forsyth truncates the solidifying of the illusion, retaining only one-

[39] Inge Israel, "Auyuittuq", in *Unmarked Doors* (Vancouver: Cacanadadada, 1992), 83.

and-a-half lines of the third stanza, and focuses instead on the two different experiences of place. Devices that give the piece musical unity, such as the recurrence of various motives, especially the "Auyuittuq" ostinato, also serve to unify the two realities of the poem into a single space that incorporates both.

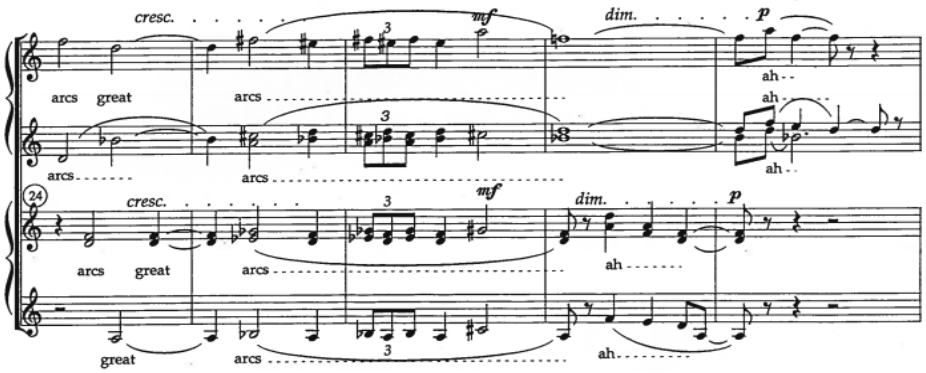
The piece begins with the first altos repeating the word "Auyuittuq" on a short motive that recurs throughout the piece. Forsyth notates the rhythm and articulation of this motive very precisely and gives an exceptionally detailed pronunciation guide at the beginning of the score. This motive may allude to the repeated rhythmic cells of Inuit throat singing (particularly as the "Auyuittuq" motive alternates with the text of the poem just as Inuit throat singers sing in alternation), though Forsyth never explicitly notes this connection. Against this background we first hear bird-calls, then a single melodic line in the first sopranos (see example 2),[40] derived from the altos' ostinato figure.



Example 2 – Forsyth, *Auyuittuq*, mm. 7–10: monophony

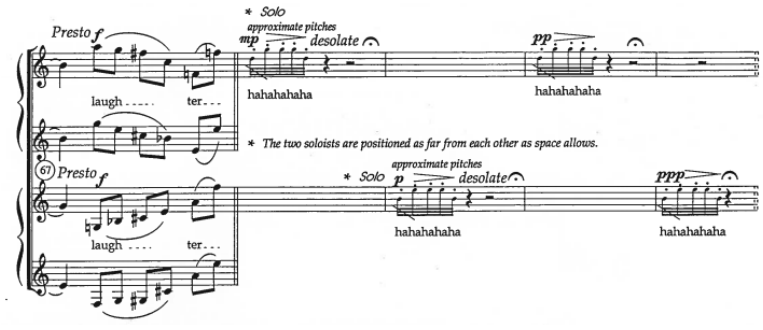
A brief moment of harmony appears in measure 12, then the monophonic soprano line continues; in measures 23 through 28, the next moment of harmony appears with the text "great arcs" (see

[40] Musical examples of *Auyuittuq* excerpted from Markham, ON: Counterpoint Musical Services, 2004.



Example 3 – Forsyth, *Auyuittuq*, mm. 24–28: moment of harmonic colour

example 3). The language here is bitonal, with the sopranos' material centred on B-flat major and the altos' material centred on D minor. The "Auyuittuq" cell occurs twice more before another brief polyphonic section, suggestive of D minor, which leads to the "Auyuittuq" motive (now transposed up a third, also in D minor), echoed in the sopranos a fifth above. The superimposition of B-flat major and D minor continues, building to a climax at "roars his mockery," marked "Impetuoso." The opening melody returns, as does the "Auyuittuq" motive, now presented in parallel minor-major seventh chords in the full choir. The piece builds to a final, dissonant climax at "mad laughter," followed by a return of the opening bird-calls (see example 4). Finally, a sustained D minor triad in the first sopranos and first altos is punctuated by a suggestion of B-flat minor in the rest of the choir.



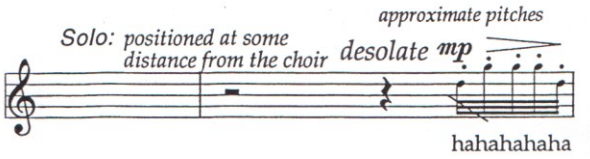
Example 4 – Forsyth, *Auyuittuq*, mm. 67–71: "mad laughter" and birdcalls

Literal depiction and textual references

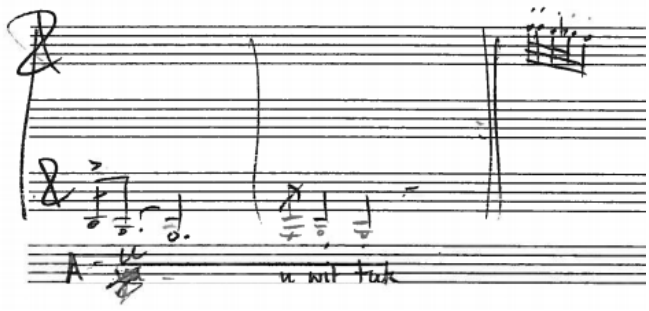
As with many of Forsyth's pieces, the title is a descriptive point of entry into the content of the piece. "Auyuittuq" refers to a remote, northern Canadian national park bearing the same name, located on Baffin Island in Nunavut, accessible only by boat. The name is an Inuktitut word meaning "the land that never melts," or (as given in the score) "entirely without summer" or "pays des grandes glaces" (land of great expanses of ice). A brief description of the park is given in the inside front cover of the score, mentioning its physical location and size, its connection to the Inuit people through the etymology of its name, its significance as Canada's first national park north of the Arctic Circle, and a brief note about early visits by Norse vessels. Other explicit references to place include a subtitle to the poem ("Northwest Territories", though the park is now located in the territory of Nunavut, created two years after the piece's composition), the acknowledgement of The Canada Council for the Arts and the identification of the location of the premiere performance in Victoria. The score identifies the language of the word "Auyuittuq" as "the Inuit language," thus evoking a place by reference to a culture rather than a specific site. The setting of text by a Canadian poet is a further connection to Canada. Though a listener or performer might not be aware of the provenance of the text, the adopted nationality of the poet does bolster the piece's overall connection to Canada, and Forsyth's choice of a fellow immigrant Canadian adds another element of relationships between places. The poetry itself of course refers to physical features of an Arctic landscape ("Ice Age," "cold air," "white-lipped horizon"), and on a cursory glance through the score or a first hearing, the text makes the connection to the North and to northern peoples quite clear.

Birdcalls imitating the loon referenced in the poetry are found near the beginning and end of the piece. The calls are notated as fourths, marked "approximate pitches," sung by a soloist in

the upper register (see example 5). This is very similar to one of the calls of the common loon,[41] and serves to immediately establish an outdoor, natural soundscape at the beginning of the piece. It re-establishes this soundscape immediately after the penultimate line of the text, "the loon bursts into mad laughter," firmly connecting the birdcall to the poem's landscape. Interestingly, the initial sketch for *Auyuittuq* contains a different figure for the bird-call (see example 6)[42]—perhaps a placeholder for what would become the much more specifically-notated loon-call imitation. Forsyth was deeply concerned with notation and felt that the accuracy and visual clarity of a score substantially impacts on the correctness and overall quality of performance,[43] and it is interesting to observe the final notated form that this particular effect took.



Example 5 – Forsyth, *Auyuittuq*, mm. 2–3, soprano solo



Example 6 – Forsyth, sketch for *Auyuittuq*, mm. 1–3

[41] For example, see U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Loons", 0:00–0:05, http://www.fws.gov/video/sounds/44loons.mp3.
[42] Malcolm Forsyth, "SATB Elektra," sketch for *Auyuittuq*, University of Calgary Special Collections accession no. 724/02.11, file 2.1, 1997.
[43] Rival, "Remembering Malcolm Forsyth Part 3."

Referenced landscape

Stripping away text and literal representation of the sounds of a place, music can still refer to place or create a sense of place through metaphor, allusion and abstract representation. Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove define "landscape" as "a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings."[44] This can be represented through painting, photography, poetry and prose. Daniels and Cosgrove's key idea is that landscape is an idea constructed by people in the observation of their environment; it is a perception of one's surroundings which can take on meanings beyond the geographical and physical. Even if a landscape is never painted, photographed or described in words, it still exists primarily in the mind of the observer (as opposed to quantifiable entities such as biomes or ecosystems, which are measurable and exist apart from the observer). David B. Knight describes the same idea in slightly different words: landscape "represents the interface between human thoughts and actions and the biophysical environment."[45] Landscapes can be represented through photography (capturing exact visual detail of an environment) or through somewhat more abstract painting (as in Walker's painting, reproduced above, of Mount Teide), and can be represented in technical prose (as in Cook's aforementioned description of Mount Teide) or poetry (using metaphor and imagery). Similarly, music can represent a landscape through literal mimicry of the sounds of a physical environment, or through more abstract representation, conveying a composer's subjective sense of place. A number of scholars argue that absolute music is by definition non-representational, but Grace Sherrill and Stefan Haag point out that this assertion becomes problematic precisely when considering issues of place in music: "Is it, for example, the national

---

[44] *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.
[45] *Landscapes in Music*, 5.

identity of the man Richard Wagner that leads one to think of his Ring as Germanic, does it have to do with the libretto, or is there something inherent and detectable in the score alone?"[46] Certainly the same question applies to *Auyuittuq*: does the "northern-ness" of the piece reside solely in its text, or in the national identities of composer and librettist, or are there detectable elements elsewhere within the music that contribute to a sense of place?

Describing non-audible aspects of place in sound requires an intermediary through which a conversion from landscape to sound can be achieved; this is the composer, working to evoke a place through allusion, representation and metaphor. Descriptions of landscape can be fairly similar to literal imitation, such as in word-painting: "melodies can rise or fall—and rising or falling melodies can depict anything that rises or falls .... Melodies can be staccato or legato, and so depict anything that is sharp, jagged, abrupt, and anything that is smooth, curved, connected."[47] However, landscapes can also be much more abstractly depicted in music, when composers "call up impressions of the general character of the place"[48] by using musical materials in ways that may be subtle, personal or indeed unconscious and intuitive. In such cases it is clearly impossible to analyze a piece of music to arrive at a definitive one-to-one correspondence between musical features and specific aspects of the described place unless the composer provides an itemized list. Even then, audiences and performers, sometimes guided by clues from direct imitation or explicit textual evocation of a place, can undertake the same process as the composer, in reverse, converting the musical material into a personal, individual experience of a landscape. Susan McClary asserts that "music is always dependant on the

---

[46] "From Landscape to Soundscape: The Northern Arts of Canada," *Mosaic* 31, no. 2 (June 1998): 102.
[47] Theo van Leeuwen, "Some Notes on the Musical Landscape," *Transforming Cultures e-Journal* 4, no. 1 (2009), xi–xii.
[48] Knight, *Landscapes in Music*, 71.

conferring of social meaning—as ethnomusicologists have long recognized, the study of signification in music cannot be undertaken in isolation from the human contexts that create, transmit and respond to it."[49]

A number of features of the Arctic landscape can be linked to musical features of *Auyuittuq*. A similar analysis could be carried out linking the music to another landscape entirely, but in the case of *Auyuittuq* the title, text and written prefatory material in the score guide us (and the listener) to an experience of the piece in an Arctic context. Some descriptors of the Arctic landscape and corresponding musical elements in *Auyuittuq* include:

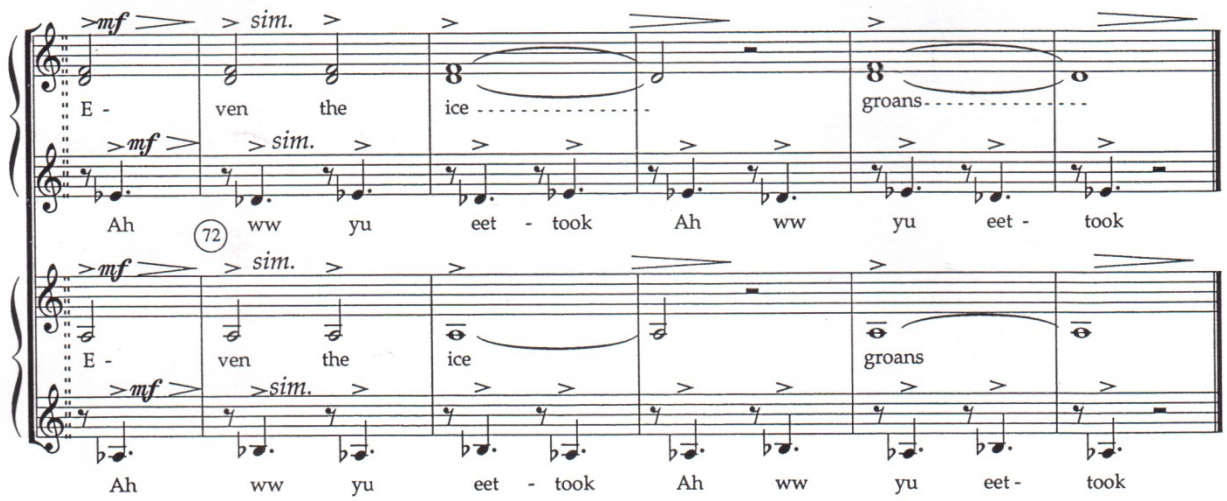
Descriptor	*Musical element*
Sparsely populated	Monophony
Vast, expansive	Use of entire performance space
Small areas of colour	Harmonic moments coincide with life/colour in text
Silent	Frequent rests
Slow-moving, unchanging	Slow tempo, long-held notes

Table 1 – Landscape descriptors and corresponding musical elements in Forsyth, *Auyuittuq*

About three-fifths of the piece is monophonic. A single line sounding in the context of a choral performance, where multiple lines are the norm, creates a sense of solitude, creating a parallel to sparsely populated areas of the North. In a live performance, no more than half the choir would typically be singing during the monophonic sections, such that the audience sees a reduced number of performers actively engaged in producing sound. Forsyth also indicates that the soloists creating the loon calls should be "positioned at some distance from the choir" and that "the two soloists are positioned as far from each other as space allows."[50] By means of this

[49] *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): 21.
[50] Forsyth, *Auyuittuq*, 1, 6.

instruction, attention is called to the size of the performance space itself, and the performance stretches to enclose the entire space. This could potentially be achieved in recorded performances as well through stereo panning or surround sound effects. In addition, moments of harmonic colour in the piece tend to be the moments when life or colour is described in the lyrics: "we .... saw," "great arcs," "breathed warm guilt into cold air," "roars his mockery," and descriptions of the narwhal and loon. Forsyth additionally makes substantial use of silence, with a number of extended silences in between sections and repeated cells. Lastly, Northern landscapes often feature immobile or slow-moving features such as frozen bodies of water and glaciers, and *Auyuittuq* creates an analogy with this feature through its generally slow tempo, with musical elements unfolding at a very measured pace, and with a number of sustained chords and phrase endings. The final six measures, setting the text "even the ice groans," is made up of a sustained D minor chord (the immobile ice) on which is superimposed a series of harmonically unrelated intervals in two of the voices (the groaning of the ice—see example 7).



Example 7 – Forsyth, *Auyuittuq*, mm. 71–76: depiction of groaning ice

Some of these correspondences are subjective, and listeners' and performers' experiences of these details will differ as their experiences of the music are filtered through their own

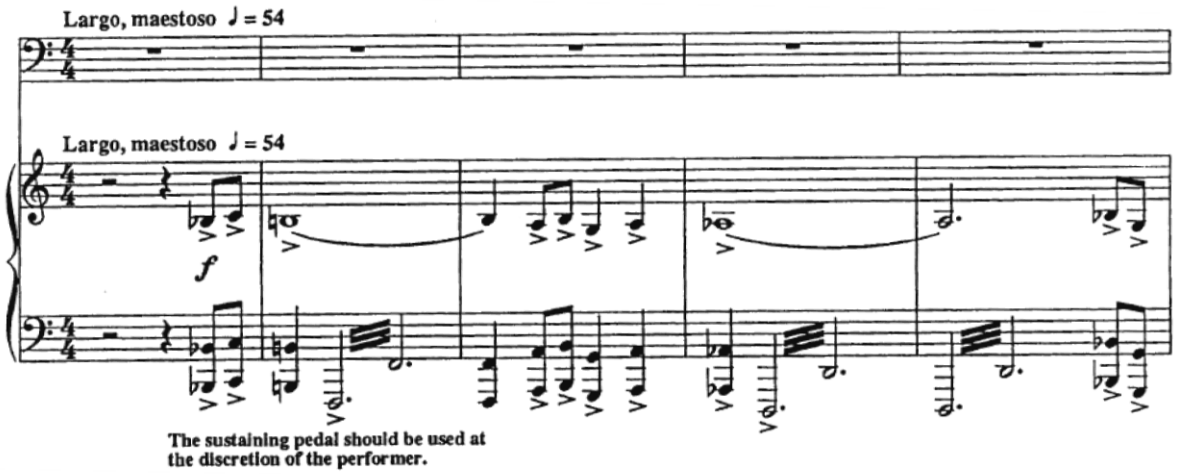
understanding of the Arctic. The appearances of harmony, for example, are not necessarily and definitively related to patches of colour in a grey landscape; for some listeners, this will describe part of their experience of the piece quite well, but others will relate to the musical material in a different way. Nonetheless, for every listener there will be some set of correspondences between the music and its subject on a level that is more abstract than literal pictorialism, if only because the title and text act as an indication from the composer that a particular place is present in the work.

Forsyth's colleague, Violet Archer, also set poems from Inge Israel's "Northern Journey," including "Auyuittuq." Archer taught at the University of Alberta from 1962 (six years before Forsyth joined the faculty) until her retirement in 1978. In 1990, she wrote a setting for solo baritone and piano of four of the five poems from "Northern Journey," including the three poems Forsyth would set several years later. It is unclear whether Forsyth was familiar with Archer's setting when he was composing his own—Archer spent part of 1990 lecturing at the University of Saskatchewan, and Forsyth may or may not have had any direct knowledge of the piece at that time—but it is interesting to note similar correspondences between Archer's musical material and the Arctic landscape. One can find similar musical elements as in the list above.

Descriptor	*Musical element*
Sparsely populated	Monophony; octaves
Vast, expansive	Wide pitch range
Small areas of colour	Harmonic moments coincide with life/colour in text
Slow-moving, unchanging	Slow tempo; long gaps in text

Table 2 – Landscape descriptors and corresponding musical elements in Violet Archer, *Auyuittuq*

While not strictly monophonic as in Forsyth's setting, most of Archer's piano accompaniment (in the sections of text common to both settings) consists of a single melodic line played in octaves, or a single melodic line over a pedal point *tremolo*. The musical material is stark and exposed, devoid of harmony. (see example 8).[51]

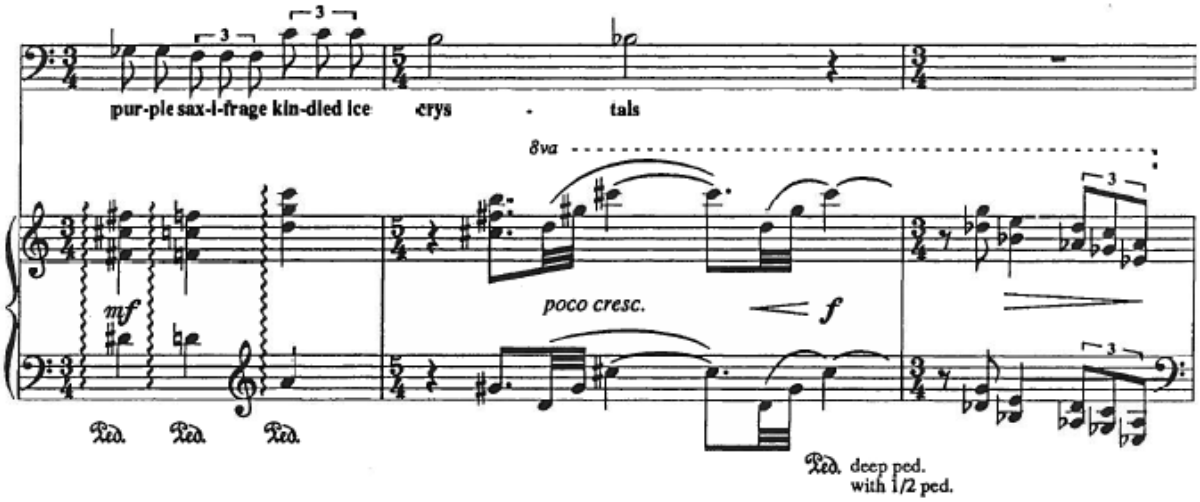


Example 8 – Violet Archer, *Auyuittuq*, mm. 1–5: monophony

The use of the performance space present in Forsyth's setting is not present here. However, a different metaphor can be drawn, that of extended pitch range reflecting the expansiveness of the landscape. The piano allows for a considerably wider pitch range than a women's choir, and in Archer's setting it does in fact span from the lowest note on the piano to the C-sharp an octave above high C (A0 to C#6), while the baritone part encompasses an octave and a tritone from B2 to F4. The central section of Archer's setting is of the text that Forsyth largely omits, with the first word changed from "boreal" to "arctic" ("arctic cotton seduced/with fluffy softness/purple saxifrage kindled/ice crystals,") and here the piano moves from single lines in octaves to full

[51] Musical examples from Violet Archer's *Auyuittuq* excerpted from unpublished copy (Edmonton, 1990), University of Alberta Library.

chords; as in Forsyth's setting, the harmonic language changes dramatically at the mention of colour (see example 9).



Example 9 – Violet Archer, *Auyuittuq*, mm. 23–25: moment of colour

Archer's setting does not incorporate complete silence to the same extent as Forsyth's setting, but the tempo is often quite slow with long-held notes, giving a similar impression of unhurried motion. The poetry is silent for long periods of time, as the solo material is punctuated by relatively long material for piano alone, and thus its overall delivery is slow.

It is interesting to note that many of the same correlations that can be drawn between the musical material of Forsyth's setting and the Arctic can also be observed within Archer's setting. The two settings are quite different in their overall impression, motivic content and so on, and Archer's setting did not necessarily influence Forsyth's directly. However, both pieces describe the same place, and both were composed in close proximity in terms of both location and time; the common threads in their depiction of that shared place are intriguing.

Power relationships and metonymy

The Arctic, as the northern region of a northern country, is used metonymously to represent Canada as a whole. "North is neither synonymous with Canada nor different from it (from southern Canada); it is not either/or but both/and: it is a part of the imagined community called Canada and a defining characteristic, a crucial metonymy, for the whole."[52] Thus a piece for which the Arctic is central must also be connected to Canada as a whole. Its "Canadian-ness" is not only because of the federal government grant support (through The Canada Council for the Arts), the physical location of commissioner and composer, or the adopted homeland of composer and poet, but also because it addresses something unique and essential to Canadian identity. This is not Arctic music, but Canadian music.

Yet *Auyuittuq* does not look at Canada through a stereotyping lens; there are no folk songs or traditional aboriginal musical elements quoted here. The poetry references "Goddess Earth" and "Odin," figures connected with Aboriginal spirituality and Norse religion respectively, two of the earliest peoples to settle in the North. The prefatory material in the score indicates that "about a thousand years ago some Norse vessels made their way [to Auyuittuq]. Very likely it is the Helluland of the Greenlanders' Saga, hence names such as Mount Odin and Thor Peak."[53] The piece approaches the Arctic landscape by invoking the first inhabitants of the region, predating the formation of Canada, and also invoking the first European visitors. As in the original poem, the perspective is of one on the outside looking in, but the first peoples are not reduced to being represented by a stereotypical drum beat or throat singing. The land is viewed, rather, in terms of relationships: the speaker, “breathing warm guilt”; the first peoples, present

---

[52] Sherrill E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 49–50.
[53] Forsyth, *Auyuittuq*, inside front cover.

from the time of Mother Earth and Odin; and the land, turning tooth into sword and bursting into laughter. The speaker is aware of the relationship between the people and the land but guiltily ignores it in favour of the "illusion" of the physical landscape.

The invocation of Odin in the text views the landscape through the eyes of some of its earliest visitors, and through its use of the Inuktitut language, *Auyuittuq* also shares a perspective on the North in terms of its aboriginal residents. The history of relations between Canada's aboriginal peoples, colonists and the state is long and beyond the scope of this discussion, but to say the least, it has been marked by much conflict and imbalances of power, alluded to perhaps in the central lines of the poem, "we breathed warm guilt/into cold air." The potential certainly existed for the piece to continue along those same lines. Consider: an immigrant composer is commissioned by a Canadian choir located south of the Arctic to set the words of an immigrant poet within the context of the Western art music tradition—the piece could very easily have approached its subject without taking into consideration the associated cultural landscape. However, in the same way that *Atayoskewin* approaches the concept of place by re-thinking it in the context of aboriginal spirituality (as pointed out by Bell), *Auyuittuq* incorporates cultural material (language, poetic imagery) in a way that is neither stereotypical of aboriginal folk music nor of Western art music. Instead, Forsyth creates a unique harmonic, textural and melodic language that uses a variety of cultural elements in a new synthesis. *Auyuittuq* is neither solely Canadian, solely Inuit or solely Norse, just as it is clearly not rooted only in the South African heritage of its composer or in the German heritage of its poet. Forsyth brings all of these places together to create a new space, which mediates an interaction between the Arctic landscape (geographical, cultural and historical), the composer's subjective experience of that landscape, and the listener.

Chapter 5 – Water music: *La mer* and *The Sea*

Literal depiction vs. subjective representation

The study of place in music stretches across a continuum from literal representation to abstract impressionism. At the former end of the spectrum lie literal depictions of a real soundscape: birdcalls, sounds of battle, and perhaps in the era of recording and electronics, *musique concrête*. At the other end lie completely subjective representations with no quotations from the environment: entirely absolute music. Literal depictions in music make it quite simple to determine the place conjured by the composer, while entirely abstract representations may be so subjective and open to interpretation that it is difficult to make any useful statements beyond one listener's perspective. The most interesting music to approach from the point of view of place are those pieces that lie somewhere in between the two extremes, pieces that are representational without attempting to faithfully and literally duplicate a place's soundscape.

An example of music falling in this zone between literal depiction and wholly subjective representation is Michael Tippett's *The Rose Lake.* On a trip to Senegal in 1990, Tippett visited Lake Retba, known for its pink waters caused by a population of a particular species of algae. Tippett was struck by the colours of the lake and the way that these colours changed throughout the day, depending on the angle of the sun; these changing colours inspired *The Rose Lake*, a piece built around changing orchestral colours. A listener who is unfamiliar with the story behind the piece's inspiration will likely not leap to the conclusion that the piece depicts Lake Retba specifically, or the changing colours of the lake on a particular day in 1990; if the piece creates a sense of place for the listener, it is quite likely to be an entirely different place, one with which the listener is more familiar, or one which he or she imagines. Prodded by the title of the piece, the listener may be inclined to draw metaphors between the musical material and watery

landscapes; but then, is the place somehow in the music itself, or is it just an illusion imposed on the music by the title? Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* received its title after it was finished, having had the working title *Ballet for Martha*; in a 1980 interview with Fred Calland for National Public Radio, Copland said, "Don't forget I gave voice to that region without knowing that I was giving a voice to it, since I didn't know what it was going to be called, and I was not thinking of the Appalachian mountains when I wrote it."[54] Yet for many people, the piece is quintessentially Appalachia; if the only hint of Appalachia consciously inserted into the piece by Copland was the title, whence comes this association?

One must be wary of the natural inclination to assume that the composer's intentions match one's own experience of the piece. David B. Knight, in describing Tippett's *The Rose Lake*, makes the bold assertion that "the ingenious scoring succeeds in conveying a sense of the color changes Tippett saw that day he was at the lake"[55]—not the colour changes from any other lake at any other time in history, but those as seen through Tippett's own eyes on that specific occasion. Knight was not there, and surely only Tippett experienced Lake Retba through Tippett's eyes. However, Knight connects to the music through a sense of place, so much so that he matter-of-factly declares that Tippett's experience is accurately captured in the musical material. Copland went on to say in his interview with Fred Calland, "[People] like to think that I sat down, knowing what the piece was going to be called. And I was putting the Appalachians in musical terms."[56] Calland's response: "But you have, and no one has done it more beautifully."

---

[54] National Public Radio, "The Aaron Copland Centennial: Fred Calland Interview Transcript," November 1980, http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/copland/transcript.html.
[55] Knight, *Landscapes in Music*, 57.
[56] National Public Radio, "Aaron Copland Centennial."

In contradicting Copland, he is contending that the Appalachians are present in *Appalachian Spring*, whether Copland realizes it or not.

The fallacy here lies in the assumption that music simply functions as a mirror for the composer's experience of a place, that Tippett is communicating his experience of Lake Retba (or Copland his experience of Appalachia) through a musical medium which allows the listener to carefully reverse the process and experience the place in precisely the same way. Rather, music acts as an intermediary, an entity of form and time from which metaphors for experiences of places can be drawn. A composer may represent aspects of a place in sound: visible colour may become timbre, and movement become rhythm, or a composer may choose more abstract metaphors—perhaps the turn of a particular melodic contour or the length of a phrase somehow matching one aspect of his or her impression of a place. Listeners in turn can undertake the same exercise in reverse, perhaps nudged in a particular direction by a title, making connections between the musical materials of a piece and a place they remember or imagine. The resulting place might match the composer's experience or it may vary substantially from it, and it may even surprise the composer as *Appalachian Spring* did for Copland (or *Atayoskewin*'s northern lights did for Forsyth). In the interview, Copland's choice of words is interesting: "I gave voice to that region without knowing," suggesting that the act of representation did in fact take place on his part, albeit unconsciously. Malcolm Forsyth had the same experience with at least two of his pieces: his *Symphony* (discussed in chapter 6) and *Atayoskewin* (as mentioned in chapter 2). Music is less a mirror than a game of "telephone," one in which the end result of the communication can in fact reveal something new to its originator.

Critic Pierre Lalo indirectly remarked on this process in his review of Debussy's *La mer*, writing: "It seems to me that in *La mer* M. Debussy's sensibility is not as spontaneous nor as

intense as it has been until now; it seems to me that he *wanted* to feel rather than actually feeling, truly, deeply and naturally; it seems to me that he *wanted* to express that which he did not feel or only felt halfway ... I have the impression not of standing before nature itself, but before a reproduction of nature ... I do not hear, I do not see, I do not feel the sea."[57] Lalo's experience of the sea (promised to him by the title of the piece) fell short of his expectations, a fact he blames on the composer's inadequately representing the sea in the music in the first place. Howard Isham points out that "this is a specious argument, for all art is artifice, *not* the object to which it alludes."[58] In *La mer*, Debussy did not try to reproduce the sounds of the ocean; indeed, he had a negative opinion of direct imitation, preferring instead to try to synthesize "the natural world and human emotion, harnessed together in such a way as to become indivisible."[59] As such, the metaphors become less precise: rather than a motive representing the shape of a wave, for example, it may be taken to represent graceful movement in general, a quality shared by the movement of the natural world and human experience. As metaphors become less precise, they may still make intuitive sense to some listeners or become part of a completely different mapping for others. Still other listeners, like Pierre Lalo, may understand the metaphor that is being drawn, but feel it to be spurious or ineffective.

Music of water and of the sea is an interesting category to consider in light of this discussion. David B. Knight suggests that "an essential character of most such music is of increasing and decreasing swell," in both rhythm and dynamics and through regularity of patterns and repetitions, though he also cites R. Murray Schafer's String Quartet No. 2

---

[57] Pierre Lalo, *Le Temps*, Paris, October 24, 1905, p.3, translation mine, original available at http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34431794k/date.
[58] *Image of the Sea: Oceanic Consciousness in the Romantic Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 350.
[59] Simon Trezise, *Debussy: La mer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38.

("Waves"), with its mathematical connection to wave patterns, as a counterexample.[60] In his discussion of Debussy's *La mer*, however, Lockspeiser cautions against focusing on pictorial aspects: "We know as yet too little about the psychology of musical expression to attempt a definition of the symbols of music."[61]

Malcolm Forsyth would have been aware of and familiar with the long tradition of musical representations of the sea, and a sense of place is established simply in contributing to that tradition and responding to the music of his predecessors, though a number of musical elements can also be pointed to as creating a sense of place. Malcolm Forsyth's "The Sea" is the first of the "Three Partsongs." "The Sea" and "Sudden Light" were written in 1980 and the latter revised in 1994, and "In the Dying of Anything" was written in 1983; Forsyth later assembled these three pieces into one collection. "Sudden Light" and "In the Dying of Anything" are set for mixed chorus, but "The Sea" is for women's voices, divided at times into 8 parts. The piece requires a very skilled ensemble, partly because of its range but also because of the vocal technique required to navigate the many vocalises that jump across register breaks. Much of the piece is non-texted, the remainder being a setting of twentieth-century American poet Dorothy Parker's poem of the same name:

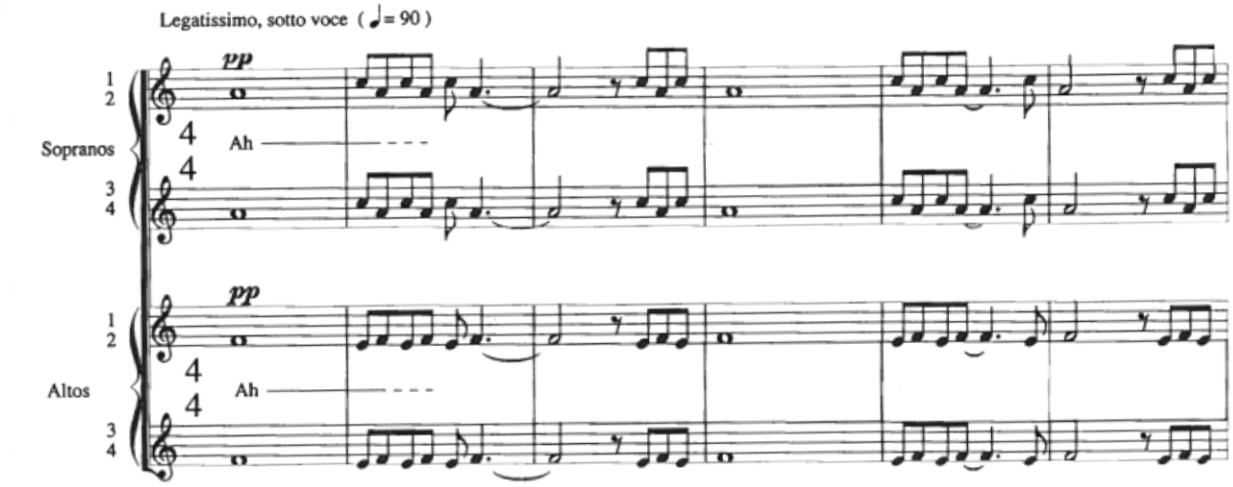
> Who lay against the sea and fled,
> Who lightly loved the wave,
> Shall never know, when he is dead,
> A cool and murmurous grave.

---

[60] *Landscapes in Music*, 58.
[61] Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, volume 2 (London: Cassell, 1965), 29.

But in a shallow pit shall rest
For all eternity,
And bear the earth upon the breast
That once had worn the sea.[62]

The piece begins with a two-voice texture, alternating major thirds and minor sixths in a manner reminiscent of the opening of Debussy's *Nuages*, from the *Nocturnes*, a passage which itself has been interpreted as "a sea-feeling ... [which] suggests a vast ocean"[63] (see example 10).[64]

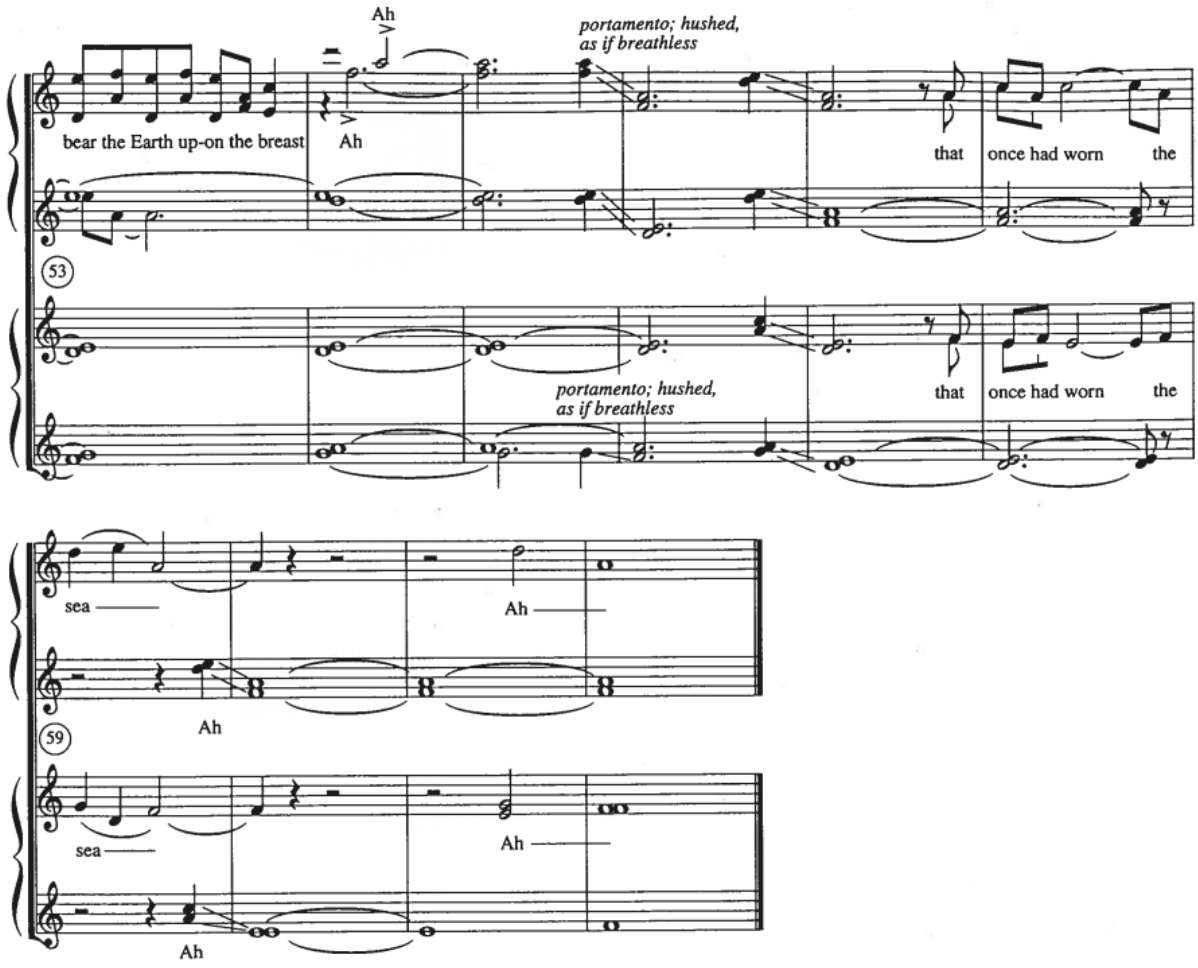


Example 10 – Forsyth, *The Sea*, mm. 1–6

The sixth expands to a ninth and then leads to a dialogue between the first sopranos and first altos above sustained notes in the other voices. The opening material returns with some modification for the setting of the first stanza. There follows a dense, non-texted passage in which the choir moves through a series of chords and tone-clusters, with releases precisely

[62] Dorothy Parker, *Death and Taxes* (New York: The Viking Press, 1931), 41.
[63] Isham, *Image of the Sea*, 348.
[64] Musical examples for *The Sea* taken from *Three Partsongs* (Markham, ON: Counterpoint, 1980).

notated such that notes in a chord are often released one at a time, from bottom to top. The piece, having begun in F major, moves through D minor as the intervallic cells expand, with the most pronounced extension of the tessitura occurring in the non-texted passage following the first stanza, with the carefully-timed releases then creating a return to the F major of the opening. The second stanza is set with similar material to the first, with the addition of several *portamenti* which collapse from a open-voiced chord (spanning a twelfth) to a much more dense voicing (spanning a fifth), and concluding with a return to the first chord of the piece (see example 11).



Example 11– Forsyth, *The Sea*, mm. 53-62

Apart from the title and the text, there are no surface features that immediately suggest the sea: there are no sounds of crashing waves, no birdcalls. In what other ways does the music establish a sense of place? The most obvious feature must be the regular, back-and-forth motion of the first eight measures and beyond, which can be related to the movement of waves or seaweed. The many sustained notes and chords could also be related to the vastness of the sea, or its unchanging nature. The expansion and contraction of the range is another striking feature of the piece, in that the acoustic space that it occupies changes drastically over time. Each phrase starts in a very narrow tessitura, expands to a much wider voicing, and then contracts; the piece as a whole does so as well, moving from two-voice counterpoint spanning a sixth to eight-voice chords spanning a twelfth and ending with two voices a third apart (see table 3). This expansion and contraction brings to mind the back-and-forth motion of a wave or a tide, as the sea cyclically takes up more and less space against the coast.

Section and phrase	***Measures***	***Compass of opening sonority***	***Tessitura at widest point***	***Compass of final interval***
Opening non-texted section*, 1st phrase*	1–6	Major 3rd	Minor 6th	Major 3rd
2nd phrase	6–11	Minor 6th	Major 9th	Major 2nd
3rd phrase	11–18	Perfect 5th	Minor 10th	Perfect octave
4th phrase	19–25	Perfect 4th	Major 9th	Major 3rd
First stanza of text*, 1st phrase*	25–31	Major 3rd	Major 9th	Major 3rd
2nd phrase	31–35	Major 3rd	Major 9th	Major 3rd
Non-texted interlude	36–46	Major 2nd	Perfect 12th	Major 3rd
Second stanza*, 1st phrase*	46–52	Major 3rd	Major 9th	Major 7th
2nd phrase	52–57	Major 7th	Perfect 12th	Perfect 5th
3rd phrase	57–62	Perfect 5th	Major 9th	Major 3rd

Table 3 – Expansion and contraction of tessitura in *The Sea*

Other attempts to identify representations of the sea itself in the music are somehow less convincing: are the *portamenti* relatable to the cries of birds, or the arrival of a tall wave? Or are they related to the state of mind of the poet, the tragedy of resting in a shallow pit rather than a cool and murmurous grave? A more convincing interpretation from the point of view of place is that the musical materials synthesize physical place with human experience: in this case, the poet's perspective on the sea as well as the composer's. The musical material creates a sense of place partly through qualities that can be mapped from aural structures to physical realities, but also partly through the composer's subjective impression. At this point on the continuum between literal depiction and absolute abstraction, the listener's impression becomes more personal and more difficult to define, just as the composer's impression has done. As Lockspeiser cautions, "we may sense [the symbols of music]—and therein lies the poetry of music—but we must remain chary of too literal a definition of them."[65]

Chapter 6 – Place without text: *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*

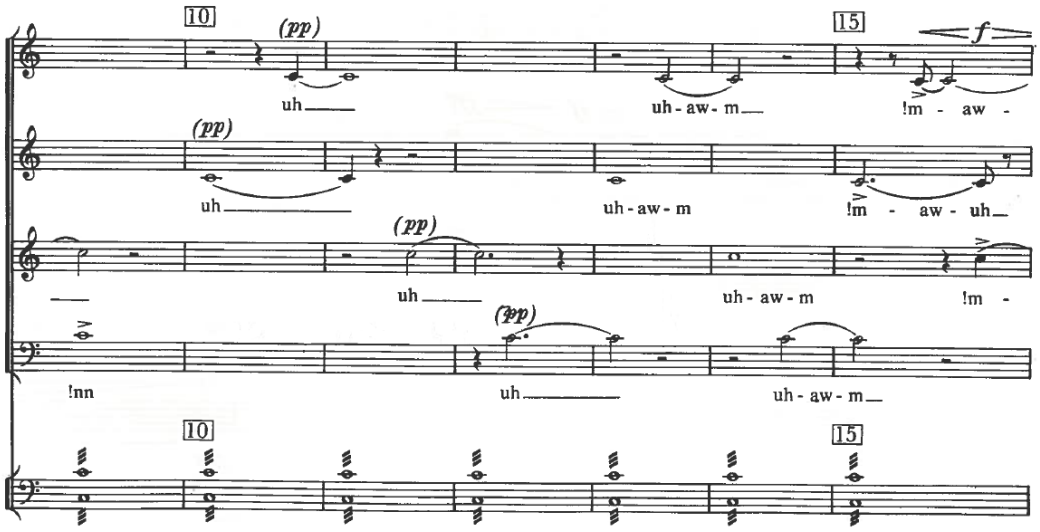
Overview

While it seems sensible that a place-based analysis would be a successful approach to a piece such as *Auyuittuq*, bearing the name of a place in its very title as it does, the question arises whether the same approach can be taken with a piece that does not explicitly mention place. *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* is more absolute in its approach, containing only the implication of particular places in its title (in the references to instruments associated

[65] Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 29.

with specific regions), and making use of syllabic fragments rather than a poetic text. *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* was commissioned by Edmonton's Da Camera Singers and completed in 1973. The piece consists of three movements, titled *Iculenya, Iculabili* and *Iculathathu* ("first song," "second song" and "third song", respectively). The choral material is for mixed chorus and contains a number of extended vocal techniques, including whispers, implosive accents, glissandi, tremolo and clicks. All three movements are accompanied by marimba. The mbira plays a single chord in the second movement and has an extended improvisatory section at the end of the third movement; the roto-toms are also prominently featured in the final movement. The instrumental parts can be performed by a single percussionist, though several quick instrument and roto-tom tuning changes in the final movement make for a very challenging percussion part.

The first movement, *Iculenya*, is almost entirely devoid of any sort of melodic content or harmonic progression. In the first 24 measures, the choir sings only middle C while the marimba rolls on middle C and the C one octave below. The rest of the piece sets two overlapping fifths (G–D and A♭–E♭) against each other in the choir from measures 25 to 49, and in the marimba alone from measure 50 to the end of the piece while the choir resumes singing middle C. One of the primary emphases in this movement is timbre. The choir sings on a variety of single vowels, diphthongs and hums, using different onsets including glottal and plosive, accented and non-accented, and the same pitch is sung in all four sections, each of which provides a slightly



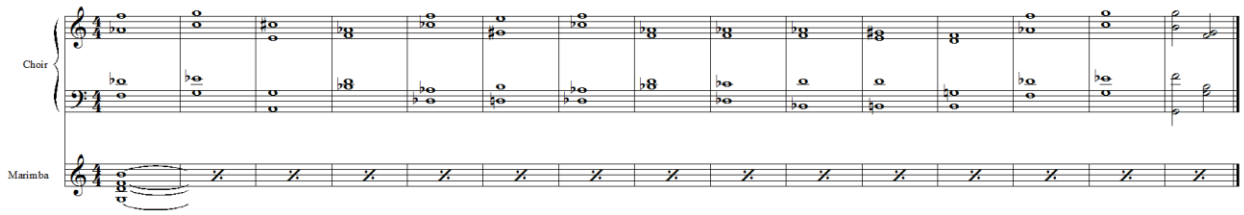
Example 12 – Forsyth, *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*, first movement, mm. 9–15

different timbre in that tessitura (see example 12). [66] The treatment of timbre in the marimba is also highly precise, as the percussionist is instructed in places to shift from the normal playing spot on the bars to the dead spot and back. Rhythm is also a central feature here, as the build to the climax of the movement in measure 49 is accomplished by means of a steady reduction in note durations, culminating in a free, rapid improvisation.

Iculabili, in contrast, is almost entirely preoccupied with harmonic motion. The marimba rolls a G dominant seventh chord through the entire three-minute duration of the movement, stopping only at the end so that the same chord may be sounded on the mbira in the final measure. Above this drone, the choir sings a nearly palindromic series of major-minor seventh chords based mainly on B♭, D♭, and E, moving between the chords via a sustained common tone, and eventually moving to a G7 sonority at measure 44. By measure 49, the choir has arrived at C

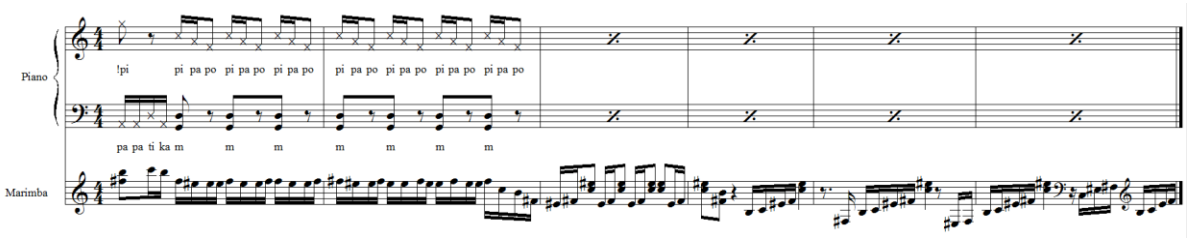
[66] Musical examples of *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* excerpted from Toronto: E.C. Kerby, 1979.

minor—the expected resolution to the ever-present G7 chord in the marimba—and repeats it several times while the marimba continues to sustain its chord, as if trying and failing to arrive at a cadence. Finally, the choir ends on a G7 sonority in concordance with the marimba, and the movement ends (see example 13 for a harmonic reduction of the movement).



Example 13 – Forsyth, *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*, second movement, harmonic reduction

The final movement is the most rhythmically active of the three, and requires a skilled percussionist to execute the challenging roto-toms part, which in several places requires quick pitch changes to be made on specific drums, one-handed, while continuing to play the others. The choir part alternates between voiced and unvoiced material. The unvoiced material tends to be of a strongly rhythmic character, often with imitation between the upper and lower pairs of voices. Often, these sections gradually build up a longer pattern in pieces, as in the opening of the movement where new rhythmic elements are added in measures 5, 7, 9 and 10, building to a *fortississimo* at measure 12. In several places, the unvoiced material serves as rhythmic support to the soloistic percussion part, as in measures 25 to 30 where the choir maintains a one-beat-long rhythmic ostinato supporting solo material in the marimba (see example 14, overleaf). This



Example 14 – Forsyth, *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*, third movement, mm. 25–30

exchanges the expected roles of choir and percussion; rather than the choir providing pitched material and the percussion providing a rhythmic framework, the functions are reversed. Pitched material in the choir is based on interlocking perfect fifths, recalling the first movement, but with movement between different pairs of fifths, and with this fifth-based structure sometimes unfolding into melodic material. The percussionist part throughout this movement is virtuosic, moving frequently from marimba to roto-toms and back. The material here is based on the same perfect fifths as the voiced material in the choir, with the roto-toms mostly tuned to two interlocking fifths, and the marimba's material being based on interlocking perfect fifths as well. The movement concludes with an extended improvisation on the mbira, lasting approximately one minute.

Surface elements of place

For all its abstractness, *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* nonetheless contains a number of surface elements which suggest a strong connection to place. The most obvious is given in the prefatory notes to the score:

> "The abstract vocal sounds employed as text … are derived from the Bantu languages of South Africa and the onomatopoeics used in much African music. At certain points these phonics drift close to real Zulu words expressing violent action, but without any explicit meaning. The musical style, too, is inspired by the musicality of Zulu speech."[67]

[67] *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* (Toronto: E.C. Kerby, 1979), inside front cover.

While the piece does not have a text with specific meaning, the syllables given to the choir were chosen with a specific place in mind. South Africa is given as the particular place, but the Bantu language group extends far north into central Africa as well, across the whole width of the continent, crossing political borders; the place evoked here is thus not only geographical but also cultural. This is an example of incorporating elements of a place's soundscape into a composition, though in this case not through literal depiction. Rather, Forsyth references the landscape of South Africa through his impression of the prosody of its people. Forsyth's recollection of his childhood in South Africa, cited in chapter 3, noted that one of his first languages was Zulu; here perhaps are fragments of childhood memories, a recalling of the sense of a language rather than exact words and syntax. The reference is abstract enough that a listener unfamiliar with the Bantu languages and without access to the explanatory note in the score might not make the connection to a specific place, but the content of the choir's text nonetheless mimics part of the sound environment of South Africa—or, at least, the composer's subjective impression of that aspect of the environment.

Forsyth's note that not only the choral text but the overall musical style is inspired by Zulu speech demonstrates another, still more abstract layer to this representation. The musicality of speech is a subjective impression; languages may differ in pace, vowel placement (forward or back), quality of consonants (liquescent or guttural), amount of elision, importance of tone, inflection and so on. They may also contain prominent percussive aspects, such as the three different clicks of the Zulu language (one of which[68] finds its way into the choir's material in the third movement). Without further explanation from the composer, of course, it is impossible to

[68] [!] in the International Phonetic Alphabet, represented by "q" in the score.

be certain which specific features served as inspiration for the musical style of the piece. Yet since the choir's text at times approaches real words and is inspired by real language, the similarities between the choir's material and the percussion part do suggest some elements of language that may have inspired elements of musical style. In the first movement, the choir parts contain frequent accents, sometimes given for specific notes and sometimes for the plosive onsets of particular syllables. The marimba part is similarly accented, with nearly every attack in the first two sections (apart from the continually-rolled C octave) notated as such. The choir parts also contain a substantial amount of repetition of short syllable patterns, reminiscent of reduplication, a feature of Bantu languages in which a syllable may be repeated to create a new but related meaning.[69] The percussion part as well often imitates short motives, sometimes with minor rhythmic variation, before moving on.

The instruments chosen for the piece also carry an implication of place, particularly the mbira. The mbira, sometimes called the thumb piano, is an iconically African instrument built from a series of thin metal bars fixed at one end over a wooden soundboard, and plucked individually with the thumbs. The marimba, too, has its origins in Africa. The name itself is of Bantu origin, and the instrument was brought to Brazil by Portuguese travellers in the 16th and 17th centuries; it then spread throughout South America and Central America. Together with roto-toms, a North American invention of the 1960s, the instrumentation itself reflects the coming-together of the composer's South African heritage and adopted North American home. The use of the term "mouths" for the choir, though possibly chosen for its alliterative effect, is unusual; normally a piece involving choir will describe the choral instrument as "choir,"

---

[69] See for example Ngessimo Mutaka and Larry M. Hyman, "Syllables and Morpheme Identity in Kinande Reduplication," *Phonology* 7, no. 1 (1990), 73–119.

"voices," "mixed chorus," or something along similar lines. "Mouths" may carry connotations of primitivism or tribalism for some listeners, which can also carry hints of a sense of place, perhaps defined by perceptions of its culture or relationships between peoples and cultures.

Referenced landscape

In 1972, Forsyth travelled to Swaziland on a holiday. While there, he attended the birthday celebrations for the "King of the SiBaca, a people closely related to the Zulu."[70] In a 1975 interview, he recalled: "we watched the dancers … standing there in the little ring of people in the red, choking dust, my wife and I, and we looked at each other with the realization that that was the finale of my *Symphony*. I'd written it knowing, somehow, that I was writing unconsciously *my* version of what I felt, unconsciously, about Zulu music."[71] Immediately after returning to Canada, Forsyth wrote *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms*.

Apart from the references to place inherent in the piece's connection to language and the origin of its instruments, there is a mirroring present between the music and landscape. The influence of the drumming and dancing of the birthday celebration can be inferred quite easily, but what of the "red, choking dust" and other elements of place? The specific mapping of the physical space into musical structures is lost to us with the composer, and in fact may well have been largely intuitive and unconscious, as suggested by Forsyth himself in his recollection above. Yet some connections can be drawn between musical elements and characteristics of the Swaziland landscape. Consider two possible assertions regarding referenced landscapes in the piece: first, that long stretches of unwavering middle C in the opening of first movement reflect

---

[70] Jane Champagne, "Malcolm Forsyth: How to Get High On Your Own Music/Un compositeur par instinct et par la force des choses," *The Canadian Composer* 99 (March 1975): 20.
[71] Ibid.

the flatness of the Middleveld, Swaziland's most populated area, and second, that the changes in tone colour brought about by changing vowels in the first movement mirror the colour of the landscape—clouds of red dust, perhaps, or vegetation, or a sunset. Two levels of metaphor are at work to translate between musical structures and physical landscapes. The concept of pitch as "high" or "low" uses a spatial concept (height) to describe an audible quality (frequency), and the concept of timbre as "tone colour" uses a visual concept (colour) to describe another audible quality (overtone structures). With these metaphors in place, a mapping between music and place becomes possible: the unchanging height of pitch over time mirrors unchanging elevation over distance, and changing colour over time mirrors changing colour in the landscape.

These mappings are highly subjective, particularly in an example such as this where we have moved through several layers of abstraction away from explicit references to place in titles or lyrics. It is important to note that mapping between the landscape and composer's perception of this landscape, conscious or unconscious, is necessarily different from any mapping that can be applied by a different individual. Even a listener intimately familiar with the same place that inspired the music will have a different experience and impression of that place, and for any listener, stronger associations may present themselves with a different place altogether, consciously or not. A recording of the first movement of *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* was played for a graduate Canadian music seminar at the University of Alberta in 2011; the students had not heard the piece previously, and were not given the title or composer's name. When asked afterward if they were conscious of any elements of place as they were listening, the firm consensus was that the subject of the piece was the northern lights. Unscientific as this survey was, it is interesting that the group was so strongly convinced of a landscape that is quite alien to Swaziland. The group was likely biased towards hearing

something Canadian within the music, given the context of the seminar, but still the mapping between the music and their landscape holds: the flatness and stillness of the ice plains beneath the shifting colours of the aurora borealis are reflected in the static pitch and varying timbre of the music. Just as the composer himself brings together different places simply through his South African heritage and immigration to Canada, so too does a piece such as *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* bring together different places. This is accomplished not only through the bringing-together of a variety of musical materials, but through the composer's subjective impression of a landscape, mediated through his music, creating new experiences of landscape in his listeners.

Chapter 7 – A mari usque ad mare: *A Ballad of Canada*

Overview

A Ballad of Canada was jointly commissioned by Ottawa's National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO) and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra in honour of the composer's upcoming 75th birthday on December 8, 2011. An immigrant composer having been asked to write an "iconically Canadian" piece creates an interesting interplay between various ideas of place, and Forsyth was aware of this aspect of the project from its beginning.[72] While working on the piece, Forsyth was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and undertook much of the composition while undergoing medical treatment. The piece was premiered on June 9, 2011 in Ottawa, with Forsyth in attendance despite his failing health, and received its Edmonton premiere on

[72] Malcolm Forsyth, interview by Eric Friesen, unpublished video material directed by Theresa Wynnyk, 2011.

November 11, 2011, four months after the composer's death.[73] The piece was highly anticipated and was well-received by the audience and by critics, and it has since also been performed jointly by the National Arts Centre Orchestra and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Choir in the United Kingdom in October, 2014, as well as in the United States by the Kansas City Symphony and Chorus in May, 2015.

Forsyth's initial idea was to focus on Canada at war, but in a pre-recorded interview with CBC radio host Eric Friesen shown to the audience at the piece's premiere, he said that the piece "proliferated into something much more interesting." The first stage of writing the piece was research into Canadian poetry; Forsyth contacted Ian McLaren, an English professor at the University of Alberta, to ask for a list of lyrical Canadian poems, and he read through them all. He selected one of the poems from the list, "In the Yukon" by Ralph Gustafson, and described it as "a rather catchy comparison of the Yukon with the traditional historical Europe and how this fresh land is untouched."[74] Two poems of E. J. Pratt are also used, "The Toll of the Bells" and "Newfoundland." Forsyth noted how the "beat of the refrain" of the latter poem is used "to describe the tides, then to describe the winds, then to describe the crags of Newfoundland,"[75] an interesting instance of poetic meter evoking a sense of place, in this case through the mimicry of natural rhythms. A fourth poem, "On the Waverley Road Bridge," was written specifically for *A Ballad of Canada* by Carl Hare, a friend of Forsyth's and a former chair of the Department of Drama at the University of Alberta, and a setting of the iconic Canadian poem "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae rounds out the textual content. Forsyth noted in his 2011 interview with

---

[73] Fish Griwkowsky, "Malcolm Forsyth's Ballad of Canada heartfelt tribute to adopted land," *Edmonton Journal*, June 7, 2011; Bill Rankin, "A Ballad of Canada's meditation on mortality," *Globe and Mail*, November 13, 2011.
[74] Heney, "A Ballad of Canada."
[75] Ibid.

Trifon Heney (a doctoral student in composition at the University of Alberta) that the structure of the overall work is related to Canadian geography, in that the outer movements ("In the Yukon" and "Newfoundland") represent "the extreme ends of Canada: the far northwest, and the furthest east," bookending the three poems depicting Canada dealing with war and natural disaster. The inner three poems each deal with a different kind of struggle: "In Flanders Fields" was written on a World War I battlefield, "The Toll of the Bells" deals with the dangers of the sea and the cold, and "On the Waverley Road Bridge" is about current conflicts. The piece thus comprises five movements for choir and orchestra, and is about 25 minutes in duration. The first and final movements are formally titled "The Land," and listed as parts one and three, with part two (the central three movements) titled "Canada in Time of Trial."

In the Yukon

The opening movement is a setting of a poem by Ralph Gustafson. Forsyth excerpts and rearranges the text; the two versions are as follows.

Ralph Gustafson, "In the Yukon"

In Europe, you can't move without going down into history.
Here, all is a beginning. I saw a salmon jump,
Again and again, against the current,
The timbered hills a background, wooded green
Unpushed through; the salmon jumped, silver.
This was news, was commerce, at the end of summer
The leap for dying. Moose came down to the water edge
To drink and the salmon turned silver arcs.
At night, the northern lights played great over country
Without tapestry or coronations, kings crowned
With weights of gold. They were green,
Green hangings and great grandeur, over the north
Going to what no man can hold hard in mind,
The dredge of that gravity, being without experience.[76]

Forsyth's re-arrangement of the text

Here, all is a beginning
At night the northern lights played great over
country without tapestry
They were green
Green hangings
And great grandeur
They were green hangings

I saw a salmon jump again and again
Against the current

Here all is a beginning
The timbered hills a background
Wooded green unpushed through

[76] Gustafson, Ralph, *Rocky Mountain Poems* (Vancouver: Klanak Press, 1960), 36.

(Forsyth's re-arrangement of the text, continued:)

The salmon jumped silver
At the end of the summer the leap for dying
And the salmon turned silver arcs
Moose came down to the water edge to drink
And the salmon turned silver arcs

At night the northern lights played great over country
They were green hangings and great grandeur over
the North

The poem itself is preoccupied with place, not only in the description of a particular landscape, but also in the juxtaposition of two different places, Canada and Europe (as in "In Europe" versus "Here", and "country/Without tapestry or coronations"). In Forsyth's rearrangement of the text, the original poem's juxtaposition of European history with Canada's wilderness is largely gone; only a fragment ("country without tapestry") remains and the focus lies more on a single place—the natural landscape of the Yukon. The landscape bears no human inhabitants, suggesting a colonial view of a new land before its settlement. The northern lights, rivers with jumping salmon and moose at the water's edge, and unspoiled woods are depicted on their own with less attention paid to their relationship to other places. Musically, there is an alternation between two moods, one connected to the background of the landscape and one connected to the foreground.

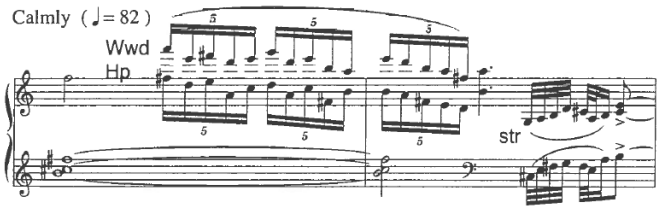
R. Murray Schafer suggests in *The Tuning of the World* that "some terms employed in visual perception may have equivalents in aural perception,"[77] and in particular he identifies the terms "figure," "ground" and "field," which are pertinent to the kind of landscape treatment that Forsyth employs in this music. In visual perception, the "figure" is the foreground object of

[77] *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 151.

focus, the "ground" is the background against which it is perceived, and the "field" is the entire area from which the perception is made. In "In the Yukon," the "figure" is the salmon, the "ground" is the northern lights and forested hills, and the "field" the entire landscape. Schafer points out that more than one category cannot be observed simultaneously, and indeed the musical material representing the foreground of the landscape in "In the Yukon" differs from the background sections in a number of interesting ways. The most apparent feature is a quicker tempo, and here an analogy between tempo and movement is relevant, as the foreground entities listed in the poem do move more quickly than the background entities. The foreground material in the text is in the active voice, with the salmon leaping, jumping and turning. The background material is mostly in the passive voice, and, in places, lacks verbs entirely; only the northern lights "play." The musical material correlates to this. The "salmon" section is quicker, with more rhythmic activity in the orchestra and choir and much more disjunct melodic movement. The "northern lights" section is generally slower, albeit with the only quick-moving background entity receiving the most rapid musical material of the movement, in the northern lights motive.

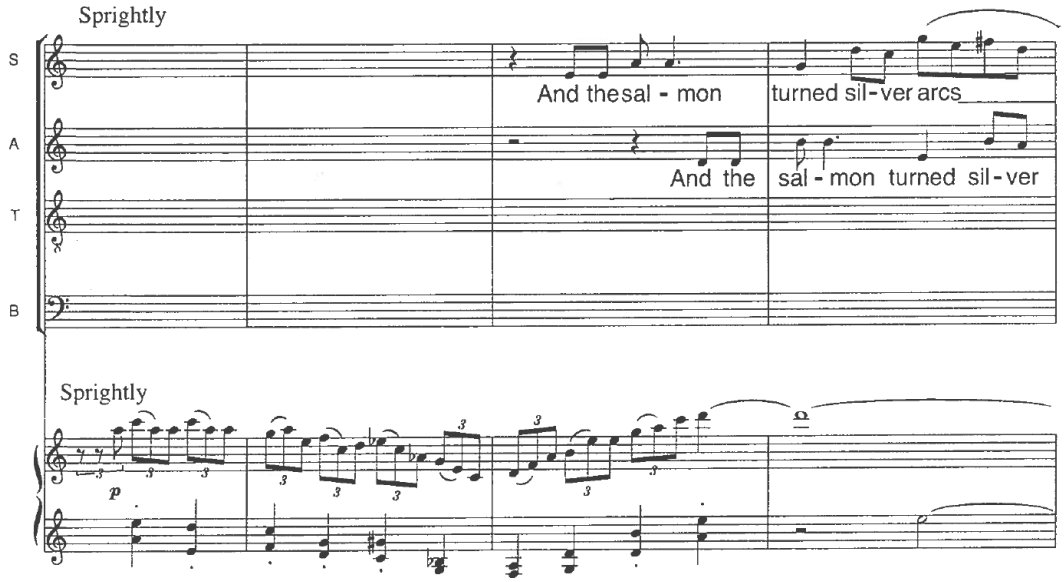
The background elements of the landscape described in the poem are the northern lights and the forested hillside in the distance, and these moments in the poetry coincide with the *Andante calmo* and *Calmly* sections, making use of distinctive quintuplet rhythms in the strings and glockenspiel (echoing the quotation from *Atayoskewin*, discussed below; see example 15, overleaf)[78] as well as a generally homophonic choral texture.

[78] Musical examples of *A Ballad of Canada* are taken from the unpublished score used for the first performance, prepared by Counterpoint Musical Services, 2011.



Example 15 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada,* "In the Yukon," mm. 54-55: "background" material

The river with jumping salmon, on the other hand, is a landscape element that requires physical proximity to be observed and therefore lies in the foreground of the poem's landscape; the corresponding sections of music are set at a faster tempo marked *Sprightly*, with more disjunct and rhythmically regular movement in the orchestra underneath an imitative texture in the choir (see example 16).



Example 16 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada*, "In the Yukon," mm. 95–98: "foreground" material

The appearance of the moose takes place during a background-related section, and serves to unite the background and foreground of the imagined landscape. The imagery in the poem is of

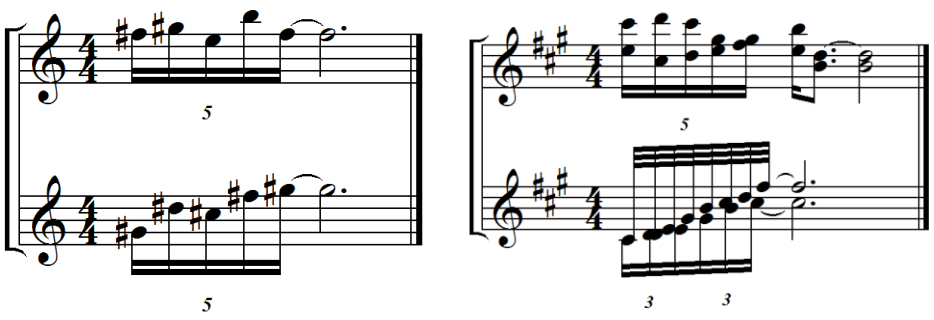
the animals moving from the background to the foreground ("Moose came down to the water's edge"). The section begins with the "background" musical material, already familiar to the listener from earlier sections, but whereas a sustained note occurs at every other transition between sections, here the "background" and "foreground" materials overlap at measure 95 (see table 4).

Introduction	mm. 1–24	*Andante calmo*, instrumental then choir on "ah"
Background 1	mm. 25–41	"Here all is a beginning... northern lights... grandeur"
Foreground 1	mm. 42–53	*Sprightly*, "I saw a salmon jump"
Background 2	mm. 54–62	*Calmly*, "The timbered hills a background"
Foreground 2	mm. 63–85	*Sprightly*, "The salmon jumped silver"
Background→Foreground	mm. 86–95	*Calmly*, "Moose came down to the water edge"
Foreground 3	mm. 95–104	*Sprightly*, "And the salmon turned silver arcs"
Background 3	mm. 105–131	*Calmly*, "At night the northern lights played"
Coda	mm. 132–138	instrumental, concluding with *Atayoskewin* quotation

Table 4 – Form of "In the Yukon" from *A Ballad of Canada*, highlighting background and foreground sections

This movement contains the quotation of material from *Atayoskewin* that Forsyth came to identify as the northern lights, as discussed earlier in this essay. The quotation is not literal, but the similarity in orchestration, rhythm and melodic contour makes the relationship between the two motives clear. Forsyth specifically identified qualities of the motif that are suggestive of the northern lights, describing it as "a perfect little wash of colour suggesting the movement, the colours of the northern lights, the sort of vagueness" (see example 17, overleaf).[79]

[79] Heney, "A Ballad of Canada."



Example 17 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada*, "In the Yukon", m. 138 (left) and Forsyth, *Atayoskewin*, first movement, m. 3 (right): depiction of the northern lights

Forsyth identifies three elements of this musical gesture in particular: movement, colour and vagueness. A musical analogy for movement is rhythm, or tempo—movement refers to the way in which location changes over time, and rhythm is the pattern of durations with which music unfolds over time. In this way, too, a quick movement is suggested by the quintuplet sixteenth notes of the motive, easily relatable by analogy to the quickly-shifting strands of the northern lights. Secondly, timbre is often described in terms of colour, and the orchestration for flutes, harp and glockenspiel of both the original motive and its quotation in *A Ballad of Canada* is an unusual combination of instruments which gives a timbre that is unique within the overall work. The sounds are high-pitched with relatively few overtones, creating a marked contrast from the other more conventional combinations of instruments used in much of the rest of the movement. Lastly, Forsyth's comment about vagueness is interesting, as there is no musical analogy quite as self-evident as those for colour and movement. Perhaps he had in mind the ambiguity of meter, as the second beat is never sounded but rather is tied to the final note of the quintuplet, or perhaps the high pitch of the instruments and the bell-like quality of the glockenspiel suggest a certain ethereal quality. The source of the quotation is the first movement of *Atayoskewin*, titled "The Spirits," which suggests that motive bore qualities of other-

worldliness for the composer. In any case, an interpretation of this motive as a representation of the northern lights is certainly understandable. It is noteworthy that Forsyth pointed out a "wash of colour" and "vagueness" as the musical elements analogous to the northern lights, and the timbre and orchestration are indeed preserved in the quotation while other elements (such as melody and harmony) are slightly altered.

The poem also contrasts the two layers of the landscape by way of colour: the northern lights are green hangings, while the salmon turn silver arcs. In a shift consistent with the analogy drawn earlier between timbre and visible colour, the orchestration changes in this section to include pizzicato strings and muted brass, and the percussionist switches from the glockenspiel to the xylophone. The harmonic content of the music also changes, however, from prominently featuring octaves, fourths and fifths (in the "northern lights" quintuplets) to more prominent thirds and sixths (in the upper strings and choir). This change may not be specifically related to the colour change suggested in the poetry, but it does contribute to the sense that a physically different scene is now being described. When the moose come down to the water's edge, background woods are united with foreground river, and a depiction of the entire landscape, figure and ground, comes together.

In Flanders Fields

On May 3, 1915, Canadian soldier Major John McCrae was sitting in a field near Flanders, Belgium, having just presided over the funeral of a close friend who had been killed in the Second Battle of Ypres. Looking out over the graves of his friend and his other fallen comrades, he wrote "In Flanders Fields," a poem that has become profoundly connected to

Remembrance Day and the First World War in the minds of Canadians, and which in fact may be "English-speaking Canada's most well-known verse."[80] The poem conjures a strong sense of Canada through its cultural status and heavy symbolism, and the composer's response to the text is thus inevitably a response to Canada. This certainly makes it a legitimate inclusion (perhaps event an essential one) in a work that aims to be iconically Canadian, but beyond cultural and historical definitions of place, an interesting question arises from the point of view of physical places. Unlike "The Yukon," the action of "In Flanders Fields" occurs not in Canada but far overseas, in Belgium. What relationship does a poem written in Belgium, concerning itself with a field in Belgium, have with the sense of Canadian place? Does it extend beyond the nationality of the poet and the circumstances of its writing?

The text of the poem is as follows:

> In Flanders fields the poppies blow
> Between the crosses, row on row
> That mark our place; and in the sky
> The larks, still bravely singing, fly
> Scarce heard amid the guns below.
>
> We are the Dead. Short days ago
> We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
> Loved and were loved, and now we lie
> In Flanders fields.
>
> Take up our quarrel with the foe:
> To you from failing hands we throw
> The torch; be yours to hold it high.
> If ye break faith with us who die
> We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
> In Flanders fields.[81]

University of British Columbia professor Nancy Holmes points out that McCrae "efficiently wipes out the environment he finds himself in" through "the adoption of imperial and

---

[80] Nancy Holmes, "'In Flanders Fields'—Canada's Official Poem: Breaking Faith," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 30, no. 1 (2005), http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/SCL/article/view/15269/16346.
[81] John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1919), 3.

European values in desperate opposition to lived experience."[82] This occurs on two occasions. First, McCrae's invocation of the ideals of the Olympic Games (revived just 19 years earlier by the British and the French) in the lines "To you from failing hands we throw/The torch" reframes the battlefield full of "the Dead" and sounds of war in heroic, proper terms: this is no longer Flanders, but classical Greece, and it is no longer a battlefield but a field of sport. A few lines later, McCrae alludes to opium poppies in the lines "We shall not sleep, though poppies grow/In Flanders Fields." Opium poppies are primarily grown in Asia, not in northern Europe, and McCrae's allusion is an orientalist one through which he transforms the place of his poem; as Holmes puts it, "what we thought was a field of cheerful bright Flanders poppies ... is in fact a strange, dreamlike crop of Oriental dope." Thus the poem is not only about Flanders, but about an imaginary, reconstructed and re-imagined place. This occurred too in "In the Yukon," where the first two lines establish a perspective of viewing Canada by comparing it to Europe ("In Europe, you can't move without going down into history./Here, all is a beginning"). This reframing of a place from an imperialist point of view is common in Canadian poetry, and so "In Flanders Fields" creates a sense of Canadian place by conforming to this element of a particular national style.

Forsyth's setting of the poem also serves to create a sense of place through pictorialisms and contrast. The movement opens with 14 measures marked "Aggressive and forceful," with prominent snare drum and brass immediately establishing a military mood. Loud dynamics, short phrases and multiple accents support the "aggressive and forceful" marking and create a suggestion of gunfire. This same section returns before each of the three stanzas of the poem.

---

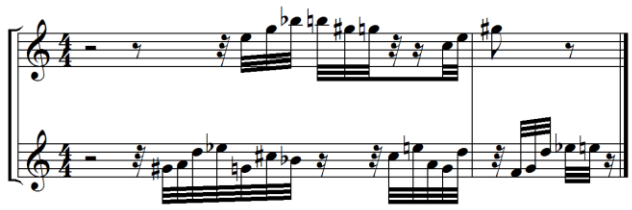
[82] Holmes, "In Flanders Fields".

The poem itself is set to a slower tempo, marked "Serenely, legato," accompanied by harp and sustained strings, with interjections in the flute and clarinet. The harp bears strong connotations of heaven or other-worldly places; Daniel Beller-McKenna identifies a strong association with the divine beginning in nineteenth-century Germany, where the harp's role was "forming a bridge between the worlds of the dead and the living."[83] In Berlioz's *Grand traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* he describes the harp's sound as "delicate, crystalline, of a voluptuous freshness, which makes it proper to the expression of gracious and fairylike ideas".[84] Interestingly, Berlioz also remarks on the particular beauty of harp together with flutes and clarinets, as used by Forsyth in the excerpt under discussion, expressing his surprise that the combination is not more commonly used. In this orchestral texture a clear contrast is established between the two sections ("Aggressive, forceful" versus "Serenely, legato"), and a place-based approach to the music would raise the possibility that two places or two aspects of a place are being contrasted. This could be the field graves and the front lines, as McCrae was familiar with both and invokes them both in the poem. It could also reflect the vertical separation McCrae creates in the text, between the larks above and the guns below. Two textual links suggest that it is the latter.

A distinctive motive reoccurs through the movement in the flutes and clarinets, first heard in measure 15 at the opening of the first B section (see example 18, overleaf). The same motive always marks the beginning of a new B section (in measures 15, 51 and 83) and generally marks the close of a section (measures 66 and 108 to 109).

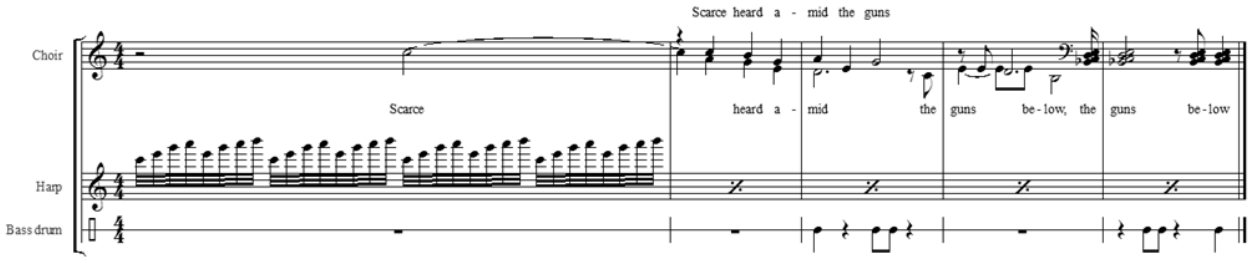
---

[83] Daniel Beller-McKenna, "Distance and Disembodiment: Harps, Horns and the Requiem Idea in Schumann and Brahms," *Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 1 (2005), 60.
[84] Hector Berlioz, *Grande traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes*, translation mine (Paris: Lemoine, n.d.), 80.



Example 18 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada*, "In Flanders Fields", mm. 15–16

The occurrence in measures 98 to 99 marks a false close to the section, since rather than making a transition to the A section, a new, hymn-like texture is heard for the last lines of the poem. In the first B section, however, the motive occurs twice in the middle of the section at measures 22 and 27. At measure 27, it is immediately preceded by the choir singing "The larks, still bravely singing." That line of text is interrupted by the motive, with the choir only moving to the final word of the phrase ("fly") after a measure's rest. The placement of the motive here, and the resulting emphasis on "singing," suggests that this is intended to be a depiction of the larks' song or movement. Further supporting this conclusion is the subsequent disappearance of the lark theme; the choir sings "Scarce heard amid the guns below," and the motive is conspicuously absent until the opening of the next B section. The second instance of word-painting also occurs in this section, specifically in measure 34 where the bass drum sounds quietly, like distant artillery fire, in conjunction with the text "the guns below" (see example 19), recalling the



Example 19 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada*, "In Flanders Fields", mm. 32–36

percussion of the A section. Through these two instances of word-painting, Forsyth creates contrasting musical material for "above" and "below", larks and guns.

The final B section brings together both of these elements, as the section begins with the lark motive shortly before the bass drum reappears in measure 85 ("Take up our quarrel with the foe"). A long crescendo gives the impression of the sounds of battle first heard in the A section drawing nearer; a lark motive in measure 99 suggests the end of the section, but in measure 100 a new section appears, introduced by brass as in section A but involving elements from both sections. A final lark motive in measures 108 and 109 leads into a short, two-measure coda containing material from section A, which stops short of being fully developed into a new section.

McCrae's poem and Forsyth's setting both reveal a perspective on a place through the use of contrast. McCrae reframes the landscape from an imperialist point of view through the use of imagery which denies and reconstructs his physical location: opium poppies versus Belgian poppies, and Greek sporting heroes versus dead soldiers. Forsyth establishes two musical ideas, one representing war and battle (as evidenced by the bass drum's role as a gun), and one representing the larks flying above (in the motive for flutes and clarinets). In doing so, he distances the speakers in the poem, the Dead, who deliver the text from "above," from the realities of the battlefield and the place itself, below.

The Toll of the Bells

The third movement of *A Ballad of Canada* commemorates "a natural disaster all too common off the rocky crags in the frozen Atlantic."[85] Hunting parties from the SS Greenland, a

[85] Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada* (Markham, ON: Counterpoint Musical Services, 2010), prefatory material.

sealing ship, became trapped on the pack ice on March 21, 1898, separated from the ship by a storm. Many sailors died of exposure or, disoriented by the storm, fell into fissures and were lost. In all, forty-eight crewmembers died, and many of the survivors were badly frostbitten. After a difficult voyage back to St. John's, on March 27 the Greenland brought back the twenty-five bodies that they were able to recover. Inquiries were demanded and condolences were received from the Queen; the disaster touched the lives of many Canadians. The text used in this movement is excerpted from a longer poem by E. J. Pratt, which is reproduced in its entirety below, with the text that Forsyth chose to set appearing in boldface.

> We gave them at the harbour every token—
> **The ritual of the guns, and at the mast**
> **The flag half-high, and as the cortège passed,**
> **All that remained by our dumb hearts unspoken.**
> **And what within the band's low requiem,**
> In footfall or in head uncovered fails
> **Of final tribute, shall at altar-rails**
> Around a chancel **soon be offered them.**
>
> And now a throbbing organ-prelude dwells
> On the eternal story of the sea;
> Following in undertone, the Litany
> Ends like a sobbing wave; and now begins
> A tale of life's fore-shortened days; now swells
> The tidal triumph of Corinthians.
>
> **But neither trumpet-blast, nor the hoarse din**
> **Of guns, nor the drooped signals from those mute**
> **Banners, could find a language to salute**
> **The frozen bodies that the ship brought in.**
> Today the vaunt is with the grave. Sorrow
> Has raked up faith and burned it like a pile
> Of driftwood, scattering the ashes while
> Cathedral voices anthemed God's Tomorrow.

> Out from the belfries of the town there swung
> Great notes that held the wind and the pagan roll
> Of open seas within their measured toll,
> Only the bells' slow ocean tones, that rose
> And hushed upon the air, knew how to tongue
> That Iliad of Death upon the floes.[86]

The full poem contrasts the ritual at the harbour when the ship returned bearing the dead crew members with the ensuing funeral ritual at the cathedral. Two places are contrasted: the harbour, with its guns, flags and trumpets, and the cathedral, with its organ, Litany and scripture. The harbour is portrayed as inadequate to the task of saluting the fallen sailors, and in the first stanza hope is expressed that these failings will be compensated for at the altar-rails of the cathedral. The second stanza describes the funeral ritual using exclusively sea-related language; here the sailors' environment meets organ-preludes, Litanies and Corinthians. Yet in the third stanza, "the vaunt is with the grave"—death has won, and faith burned like driftwood. Only the tolling of the bells, united with the ocean and described in language contrasting against the Christian second and third stanzas ("pagan roll", "Iliad of Death") properly salutes the fallen. The original poem is a critique of ritual both secular and sacred; Pratt "[views] as illusionists those who look with hope to God and to a divine, miraculous Christ."[87]

Of the three places described in the poem (the harbour, the cathedral and the sea), Forsyth sets only the text associated with the harbour. This shortens the text and creates an episode occurring in a single location, making it more closely match the preceding movement in the length of its text and the scope of its setting. Gone are most of the religious allusions, with "head uncovered" and "around a chancel" removed from the second sentence, leaving only "at altar-

---

[86] E. J. Pratt, *E. J. Pratt: Complete Poems*, volume 1, edited by Sandra Djwa and R. G. Moyles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 68.
[87] Vincent Sharman, "Illusion and an Atonement: E. J. Pratt and Christianity," *Canadian Literature* 19 (1964): 22.

rails." The text in this form is no longer a critique of ritual, but rather has been consciously altered to be a description of a single place and point in time. Each of the three places is described in the poetry in terms of their sounds. At the harbour there are firing guns and a brass band. The cathedral ritual includes a throbbing organ-prelude, a Litany in undertone and voices singing anthems. The sea hears great sounds of bells in slow ocean tones. Forsyth makes use of a succession of musical suggestions of the sounds of the ritual at the harbour to give a sense of the ritual's soundscape, and of the ritual's unfolding over time. As such, this movement is an example of primarily literal representation of the sounds of a place. The movement opens with the first and the final sounds of the unabridged text: the guns and the bells. The guns are mimicked by the bass drum, as in the previous movement; the drum's metaphorical connection to the guns is reinforced in measure 3, where the bass drum is immediately preceded by the text "The ritual of the guns" in the choir. The appearance of the bell is literal representation, with a tubular bell standing in for the church bells of the poem, and serves to further describe the soundscape of the harbour even with the relevant lines of the poetry itself cut. The second audible element in the poem is the brass band, which appears in measure 13 together with snare drum sounding in combination with the continued tolling of the bell (see example 20, overleaf). The harmonic language of the brass band is idiomatic of a military band and the contrast against the surrounding material is striking. In a sense, the traditional classic symphonic orchestra is momentarily silenced; the brass band at the harbour takes over.

Example 20 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada*, "The Toll of the Bells", mm 1–3 (top) and mm. 13–16 (bottom): guns, bells and the harbour band

This is reinforced by the choir's subsequent entry, "And what within the band's low requiem," which is accompanied throughout by the brass band. After a short interjection by the full orchestra, the brass returns, but its character is again different: the trumpets are now muted, accompanied by timpani rather than snare drum, and the musical language is more consistent with what has come before. Once again, the choir's text clarifies the element that is being represented: "But neither trumpet blast, nor the hoarse din/Of guns." The bass drum's role as the sound of the guns is again confirmed as it reappears immediately after the word "guns" is sung by the choir in measure 26.

An example of subjective representation occurs from measures 32 through 37, to set the text "the frozen bodies that the ship brought in." Most of the literature which examines place in music focuses on the imagery that is triggered in the author's mind by various musical elements; in other words, it proposes specific metaphors between the music and a specific landscape, real or imagined. This is problematic, as these highly personal imaginings are not necessarily applicable to a wider audience; to say, for example, that measures 32 through 37 evoke a static, frozen quality through the shivering dissonances in the strings is evocative but not particularly

informative. In an attempt to improve on this situation, a number of analyses of depictions of coldness in Canadian music were consulted to identify metaphors that were convincing to a variety of authors, recognizing that any individual listener's experience may differ.

Composer François-Hugues Leclair, in an analysis of his own piece *Solstice d'hiver* for six flutes, identifies tessitura as musical element that was consciously chosen to represent the North: "The sonority of the piccolos is truly glacial, transposing the theme into the stratosphere of the audible world, giving it an ethereal quality also characteristic of the enlivening and pure polar air," and later, the dissonance between parts "has in it something of the whistling of the wind in the tundra."[88] This is paralleled in "The Tolling of the Bells" in the high register of the violins and the dissonances they create with the choral parts.

Grace Sherrill and Stefan Haag identify in Harry Freedman's *Tableau for String Orchestra* a "sense of space and isolation ... a tension that is both spare and direct" created by "the sharp contrasts and shifts" in the counterpoint between the violins and low strings.[89] A similar contrast between the violins in their upper register and the singers in their low register is present in the passage from "The Tolling of the Bells," with the violins shifting a semi-tone away from consonant intervals in several places.

Julie Gagné discerns a sense of the North in a theatrical work by Sébastien Harrisson, *Floes*, in its sparseness of punctuation. "On the page, these bits of sentences invite a reading as a written representation of the mist that escapes from the mouth of a person subjected to the cold; they make concrete the difficulty of breathing in low temperatures since, in such conditions,

---

[88] "Composer une musique nordique?" translation mine, *Les cahiers de la Société québecoise de recherche en musique* 14, no. 1 (2013), 60.
[89] "From Landscape to Soundscape," 103.

humans naturally favour shallow breaths."[90] The "frozen bodies" passage, too (indeed, the entire movement) is built of short phrases; the line of poetry specific to measures 32 to 37 is divided into three segments ("the frozen bodies," "that the ship brought in," and the latter phrase repeated). The violins play a one-measure-long phrase, and otherwise the orchestra plays single, sustained notes separated by rests.

A variety of metaphors can clearly be applied to the musical material of measures 32 to 37, some more convincing for some listeners than others, but there is clearly a wealth of possibilities. The close connectedness of the music and text in the movement up to this point suggests, or even imposes, a particular experience of place on the musical material, making an understanding of this passage as descriptive of, for example, an ocean scene somewhat less satisfying. This is reinforced by musical materials that can easily be connected to the subject of the movement through metaphor, in their harmonic language, register and phrasing, among other characteristics.

On the Waverley Road Bridge

When Canadian soldiers are killed on duty abroad, they are often repatriated to the Canadian Forces base in Trenton, Ontario and transported in a funeral convoy to the coroner's office in Toronto. The stretch of Ontario Highway 401 between Trenton and Toronto along which these funeral convoys pass was formally designated the "Highway of Heroes" in 2007.[91]

---

[90] "Entendre le Nord et le froid dans le texte dramatique : Étude du 'paysage audible' dans *Floes* de Sébastien Harrisson et *Roche, papier, couteau* ... de Marilyn Perreault," translation mine, *Les Cahiers de la Société québecoise de recherche en musique* 14, no. 1 (2013): 37.

[91] The specific section of highway was formally designated "Highway of Heroes" on September 7, 2007, after the term appeared in a Toronto Sun article on June 2, 2007 and public support for the renaming steadily grew, supported

When a funeral convoy is scheduled, the overpasses along this highway typically become crowded with people, many waving Canadian flags, gathered to honour the fallen soldier passing by and in support of the soldier's family, who typically travel with the convoy. The Waverley Road Bridge is one of these overpasses along the Highway of Heroes, an entirely non-descript overpass not unlike any other highway overpass in Canada. With ordinary urban sprawl to the north, and a narrow band of hills and scrub separating it from Lake Ontario to the south, the location is not one that would be expected to inspire poetry. Nonetheless, this place is the subject of Carl Hare's *On the Waverley Road Bridge* (written specifically for *A Ballad of Canada*), and it takes an approach to place that is not rooted in physical location:

> In the funeral convoy
> The mother of the fallen soldier
> Waves up to us
> With delicate fingers
> Wrist etched in black
> The hand absent-minded in its grief
> Her son no longer in her arms
> As mine is now
> Gazing up at me with wondering eyes
> How could I bear such loss?
> Stay closer to me

---

by a petition presented to the provincial minister of transportation. See "'Highway of Heroes' Signs Unveiled Along Highway 401," Province of Ontario archived news release, September 7, 2007, http://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2007/09/highway-of-heroes-signs-unveiled-along-highway-401.html; and Pete Fisher, "Highway of Heroes: Let's Make It Official," *Northumberland Today,* August 23, 2007, http://www.northumberlandtoday.com/2007/08/23/highway-of-heroes-lets-make-it-official.

Figure 2 – The Waverley Road Bridge, August 2011. Image credit: Google Maps, accessed May 11, 2015.

The poem captures a single instant in time, from the perspective of one member of the crowd gathered on the bridge. The details observed in the mother's hand act as a freeze-frame, holding time still long enough to observe her fingers, the cut of her sleeve or gloves on her wrists, and the character of her wave. There are multiple shades of emotion present: the mother's grief and absent-mindedness, the child's wonder, the speaker's dread at the thought of losing a child as well as his or her protectiveness, gathering the child closer. The physical landscape itself—trees, concrete, traffic, skies, and so on—is unimportant to the foreground of the poem, but provides an important cultural context. That the convoy is travelling under the Waverley Road Bridge means that the convoy is passing along the Highway of Heroes, which situates the action in Canada in the 2000s or 2010s. The vast majority of combat fatalities among Canadian troops during this period occurred in Afghanistan, and so a relationship between two places is also established: Canada and Afghanistan, home and abroad, funeral convoy and combat zone,

safety and danger. Lastly, while the Waverley Road Bridge could stand for any of the roughly 40 overpasses along the Highway of Heroes, the invocation of a very specific place situates the poem within a single, specific person's experience, giving the impression of a very personal and singular moment, not unlike McCrae in "In Flanders Fields" or E. J. Pratt in "The Toll of the Bells".

Figure 3 – Crowd gathered on the Waverley Road Bridge on March 10, 2015, to greet the motorcade of fallen Canadian soldier Sgt. Andrew Doiron. Photo credit: Jason Liebregts, Metroland Media.

In short, the poem is the expression of a moment in time experienced by one person in a particular place, together with the entire context brought to the moment by that place. It implies a gathered crowd, family, community, solemnity and home. That this ritual occurs on a highway overpass suggests an interruption of the everyday; this is a striking feature of funeral convoys along this highway, as traffic is stopped on one side only of one of the province's busiest highways. Traffic ahead and behind the convoy, and on the other side of the median, continues

as normal, and for only a few minutes is the usual sense of place changed by police cars, hearses and black sedans. The line between the emotional experience of the observer and the context of place is blurred; the change in the sense of place would be different on a side street or in a harbour, and it would be different without the crowds or the traffic.

In this fourth movement, Forsyth explores various shades of the experience of the speaker through a focus on subtleties of timbre. The movement unfolds over a pedal E which is sustained in one instrument or another for nearly the full movement. This is reminiscent of the opening movement of *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* with its sustained C and focus on vowel colours. Forsyth clearly had very specific colours in mind from the outset of this fourth movement of *A Ballad of Canada*, specifying that the violas should play the pedal E on their second string, which gives the sustained note a slightly darker and rounder timbre. The opening instrumentation as a whole provides a unique sound as well, written for violas, claves, piano and marimba. The first phrase in the choir begins on the E below middle C, in the tenor voice; the next phrase (at measure 18) begins on the E an octave higher, and the third phrase (at measure 24) begins on the E one octave higher still. This pattern might suggest assigning the opening material of these three phrases to the tenors, altos and sopranos respectively, as the pitch material moves up through the choir's range, but Forsyth assigns the second occurrence to the tenor section in their upper register, creating a more marked contrast between phrases. The inclusion of a toy piano at measure 28 creates another interesting timbral moment, as well as connotations of childhood coinciding with the moment in the text in which the speaker's child is mentioned ("As mine is now"). The movement concludes with solo material for oboe, soprano and viola, creating another contrast in timbre from the preceding material.

Following the third movement with its literal depiction of place, this fourth movement is now place at its most abstract. There is no musical material that can be convincingly pointed to as representing the overpass, the road, the trees, the wind, or any other physical landscape feature, yet through its title the movement professes to be concerned with a very specific place indeed. It is a very intimate and delicate representation of the sense of a place at a particular moment. The speaker's conception of place is strongly influenced by shades of emotion, by other people nearby and by the significance of the moment; this interaction between the speaker's mind and environment is the landscape of the Waverley Road Bridge at that moment. Landscape is "the interface between human thoughts and actions and the biophysical environment"[92] and in this movement the landscape is represented in music; the speaker's emotions are an essential component of this interface between human and environment, and thus are an essential component of the music. There is clear evidence that Forsyth paid particular attention to specific timbres in this movement, and he stated in interviews that he found the poem to be very moving,[93] and so it is reasonable to conclude that this attention to timbre was indeed a fundamental tool in Forsyth's process of translating his impression of the landscape (through Hare's poem) into music. The abstract quality of place present in this movement, together with the specificity of the place which many listeners may not recognize or have personally experienced, leaves a great deal of latitude for listeners' individual responses to the piece.

Newfoundland

E. J. Pratt's "Newfoundland" uses the physical landscape of Newfoundland as a metaphor for the characters of its people, and the placement of this text as the final movement of *A Ballad*

[92] Knight, *Landscapes in Music*, 5.
[93] Interview with Eric Friesen, video directed by Theresa Wynnyk, 2011; also Trifon Heney, "A Ballad of Canada."

of Canada extends the metaphor to all Canadians. Following three movements which focus on "Canada in Time of Trial," Forsyth's choice to conclude the piece with a setting of "Newfoundland" serves as a unifying device, commenting on the three preceding movements and connecting to the first movement with its focus on a different Canadian landscape. The original poem is reproduced below; Forsyth sets a subset of its text, identified below in boldface. The alternation of italic and roman type is retained from the original poem.

Here the tides flow,
And here they ebb;
Not with that dull, unsinewed tread of waters
Held under bonds to move
Around unpeopled shores—
Moon-driven through a timeless circuit
Of invasion and retreat;
But with a lusty stroke of life
Pounding at [the] stubborn gates,
That they might run
Within the sluices of men's hearts,
Leap under throb of pulse and nerve,
And teach the sea's strong voice
To learn the harmonies of new floods,
The peal of cataract,
And the soft wash of currents
Against resilient banks,
Or the broken rhythms from old chords
Along dark passages
That once were pathways of authentic fires.

Red is the sea-kelp on the beach,
Red as the heart's blood,
Nor is there power in tide or sun
To bleach its stain.
It lies there piled thick
Above the gulch-line.
It is rooted in the joints of rocks,
It is tangled around a spar,
It covers a broken rudder,
It is red as the heart's blood,
And salt as tears.

Here the winds blow,
And here they die,
Not with that wild, exotic rage
That vainly sweeps untrodden shores,
But with familiar breath
Holding a partnership with life,
Resonant with the hopes of spring,
Pungent with the airs of harvest.
They call with the silver fifes of the sea,
They breathe with the lungs of men,
They are one with the tides of the heart,
They blow with the rising octaves of dawn,
They die with the largo of dusk,
Their hands are full to the overflow,
In their right is the bread of life,
In their left are the waters of death.

Scattered on boom
And rudder and weed
Are tangles of shells;
Some with backs of crusted bronze,
And faces of porcelain blue,
Some crushed by the beach stones
To chips of jade;
And some are spiral-cleft
Spreading their tracery on the sand
In the rich veining of an agate's heart;
And others remain unscarred,
To babble of the passing of the winds.

Here the crags
Meet with winds and tides—
Not with that blind interchange
Of blow for blow
That spills the thunder of insentient seas;
But with the mind that reads assault

In crouch and leap and the quick stealth,
Stiffening the muscles of the waves.
Here they flank the harbours,
Keeping watch
On thresholds, altars and the fires of home,
Or, like mastiffs,
Over-zealous,
Guard too well.

Tide and wind and crag,
Sea-weed and sea-shell
And broken rudder—
And the story is told
Of human veins and pulses,
Of dreams that survive the night,
Of doors held ajar in storms.[94]

Physical aspects of the Newfoundland landscape are described in terms of their interaction with humankind; this interaction reveals something about the people's courage and fortitude. The poem is in three sections, one each for tides, winds and crags. In each section, the poet emphasizes that the actions of the physical environment occur with respect to people: the tides are not around unpeopled shores, but run through men's hearts; the winds do not blow on untrodden shores, but hold a partnership with life; and the crags do not meet insentient seas but keep watch on the fires of home. Following this is an italicized stanza describing the beach (the physical meeting-place of sea and habitable land), using it is a metaphor for qualities of the inhabitants. The overall theme is one of endurance and strength: the sea-kelp does not fade in the water or sun (and is compared to blood and tears), and the shells tell stories despite being crushed and scattered. Having examined places of battle, tragedy and death, *A Ballad of Canada* concludes with an examination of a Canadian landscape that represents the Canadian people weathering these and other trials.

The original poem contains a wealth of musical imagery which Forsyth largely excises in his setting. Gone are "the peal," "broken rhythm from old chords," "rising octaves" and "the largo of dusk"; instead, Forsyth keeps the openings of the three major sections of the poem, with their descriptions of the encounter between people and place, as well as six lines of the final

[94] Pratt, *Complete Poems*, 99–101.

stanza which give the general thrust of the poem. In an interview with Trifon Heney, Forsyth said of the poem: "*Newfoundland* is just such a wonderfully evocative thing and it has such structure, and I preserved the structure; not all of it, but the beat of the refrain that he uses first of all to describe the tides, then to describe the winds, then to describe the crags of Newfoundland."[95] The refrain that Forsyth is referring to is the repetition of a particular structure[96] at the beginning of each section of the poem, but his reference to the "beat" of this refrain is interesting. The meter at the beginning of each of the three sections of the poem is largely iambic, but each stanza has one line with contrasting text stress, immediately after the line that begins with "But," and it is perhaps to this feature that Forsyth is referring:

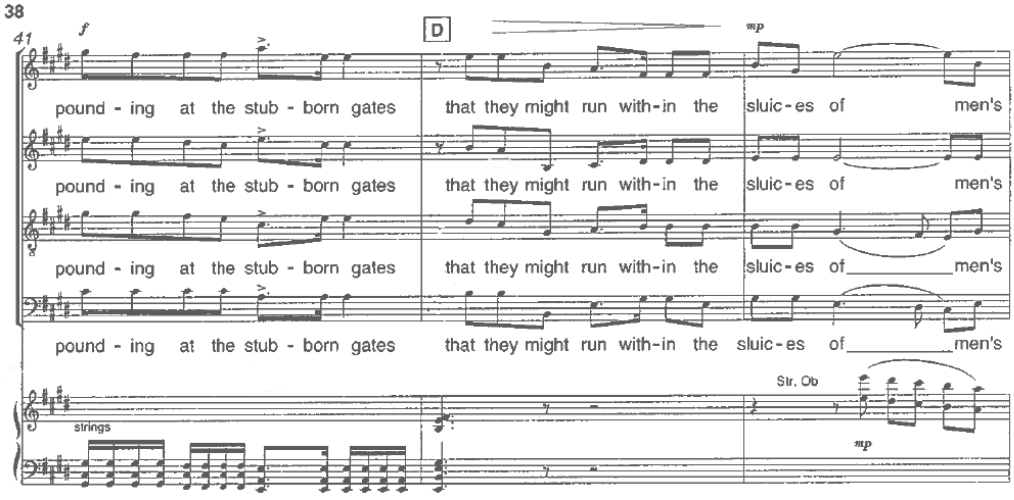
But with a lusty stroke of life	[4 iambic feet]
Pounding at stubborn gates	[1 dactylic foot and 1 cretic foot]
But with familiar breath	[3 iambic feet]
Holding a partnership with life	[1 trochaic foot and 3 iambic feet]
But with the mind that reads assault	[4 iambic feet]
In crouch and leap and the quick stealth	[2 iambic feet and 1 ionic foot]

The change in rhythm gives each physical element a different quality. The pounding of the tides is reflected in the rhythm of "pounding at" and the accents on the initial syllables of "pounding," "stubborn" and "gates." The winds nearly maintain an iambic rhythm, and are portrayed as being "in partnership" rather than in opposition. The crags reverse the accent pattern of the tides, putting text stress on the final syllables in each foot. Furthermore, the division of lines in the final section becomes abrupt, almost jarring—"Here the tides flow" and "Here the winds blow," but "Here the crags/Meet"—with short, three-syllable lines ending the stanza. The

[95] Heney, "A Ballad of Canada."
[96] "Here the tides flow/winds blow/crags meet ... not with that dull/wild/blind ... but with life/breath/mind."

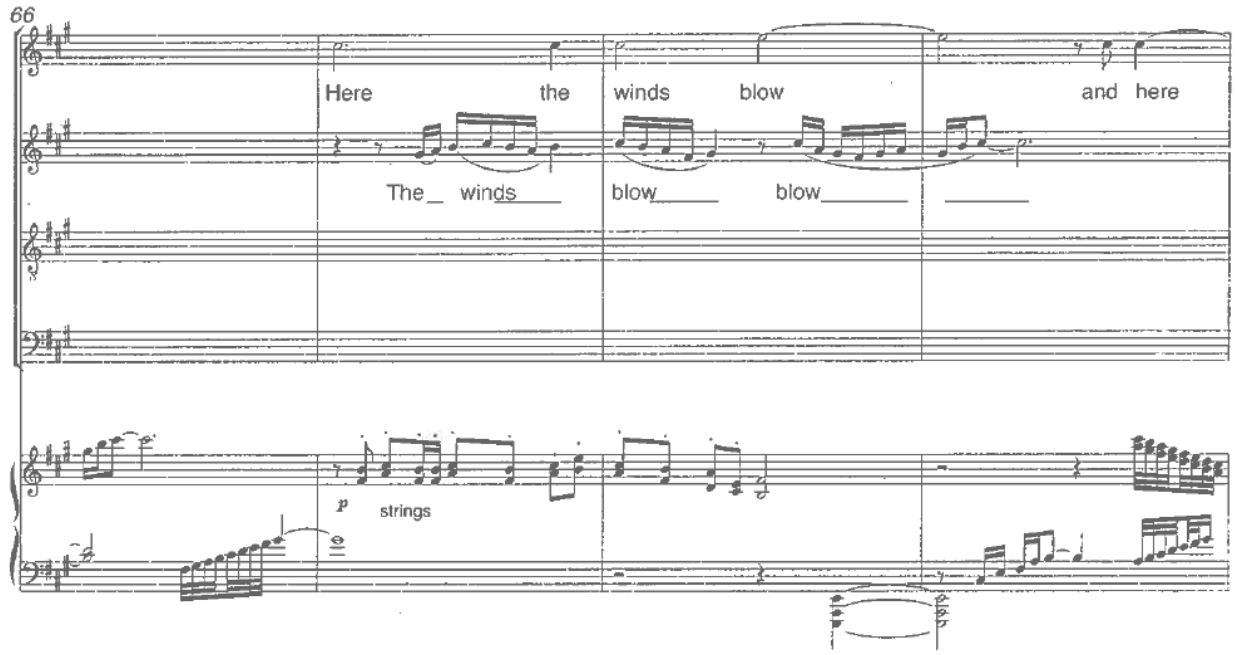
jaggedness of the cliffs is reflected in the jaggedness of the prosody, and is even visually apparent in the silhouette of the stanza on the page.

Forsyth, too, gives each of the three elements a unique treatment. The movement opens and closes with grand, florid sections reminiscent of mid-1900s film music—full orchestra playing dense harmonic material with ornate passagework, accompanied by the choir singing on "ah." After the introduction comes the setting of the "tides" section, marked "Solemnly" and shortly thereafter "with full sonority." The setting of the text is initially characterized by longer note durations, with those durations becoming progressively shorter over the course of the section. Coupled with a slight *accelerando* at the end of the section, the effect is of a gradual speeding up, correlating perhaps to the movement of a tide rushing in or out (see example 21). The harmony is largely triadic and the orchestration is primarily using strings, winds and full choir, with some brass entering towards the end of the section. The "winds" section begins at measure 64, marked "Lightly and slightly faster." A contrast is immediately noticeable in the orchestration, which now consists of solo flute and horns with interjections from the upper strings; the text in this section is also set for women's chorus alone. Rhythmic values in this

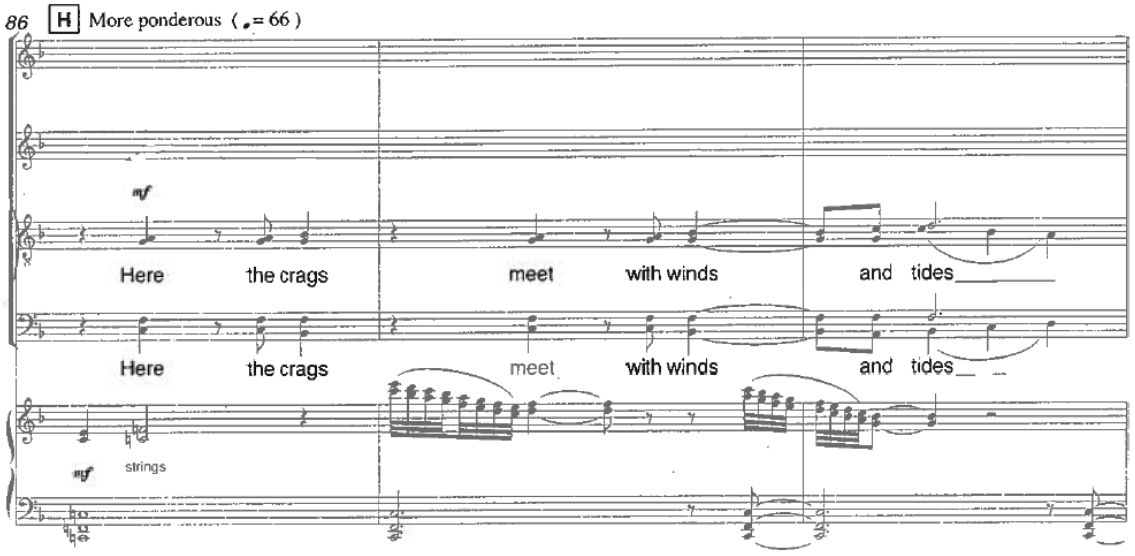


Example 21 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada*, "Newfoundland," mm. 41–43

section are shorter yet, with long passages of sixteenth notes for the solo flute and for the altos, as well as thirty-second note flourishes in the strings. A metaphor can clearly be drawn to the movement of wind, moving faster than the sea but with more lightness. This lightness is reflected in the higher register (both in choir and orchestra), thinner texture and quicker movement (see example 22).



Example 22 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada,* "Newfoundland," mm. 66–69: movement of winds reflected in sixteenth-note motion



Example 23 – Forsyth, *A Ballad of Canada*, "Newfoundland," mm. 86–88: shape of crags reflected in rhythm of text

The "crags" section begins at measure 86, with another immediate contrast as the orchestration moves to strings, brass and men's chorus. The rhythm becomes dotted with more frequent syncopation, in the same way that the prosody of the poem changes and the poetic lines become more jagged (see example 23). This section is marked "more ponderous" and the tempo slows from 92 beats per minute to 66; taking tempo and rhythm as a metaphor for physical movement, the quick movement of the winds is replaced by the motionlessness of the cliffs. At measure 97, the italicized stanza begins and the women's chorus rejoins the men; characteristics of all three sections return, including a mixture of rhythmic patterns and string flourishes. This final texted section builds to a forceful, violent passage at measure 114 pitting *tutti* orchestra against the full choir divided into 12 parts. The passage is dissonant and accented, exploiting the full range of orchestra and choir and producing maximum volume from each. Here the text "Of dreams that survive the night" is set, and the impression of a struggle is present, bringing together the conflicts and hardships of the prior three movements. The choir survives the

struggle, though, with the text continuing for a further three measures accompanied by *pianissimo* winds and strings, before the opening section of the movement returns. The final measure of the piece contains a quotation of the *Atayoskewin* northern lights motive heard in the first movement. "I quoted my little wisp of the northern lights ... and I use it as a kind of leitmotif almost, because it's the very last thing that happens; I bring it back at the very end of *Newfoundland*, and *Newfoundland* ends very softly after a brief pause: just this wash of colour which reminisces about what you've heard in the first setting."[97]

Thus the final movement brings together the three physical elements of place identified in Pratt's poem and colours them with musical elements that can be correlated to particular qualities of those elements: the rushing of tides, the light movement of the wind, and the jaggedness of the crags. In Pratt's poem and Forsyth's setting, interaction with a physical place is taken as a metaphor for the courage and strength of its inhabitants. The Newfoundland of the poem acts metonymously, standing for all Canadians, enduring the trials of war in "In Flanders Fields," natural disaster in "The Toll of the Bells" and the loss of its soldiers in "On the Waverley Road Bridge." The northern lights reappear as they did at the start of the piece, in the Yukon, bringing the piece together as an ode to all of Canada from coast to coast.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

As a South-African-born, immigrant Canadian, Malcolm Forsyth's life itself brought together different places, and his music, too, brings together different places to create new and unique spaces. Forsyth's music is idiosyncratic, deeply concerned with text, "personal,

[97] Heney, "A Ballad of Canada."

craftsmanlike and above all, passionate."[98] Elements of place and transformation of space are central to all of Forsyth's output. His music brings together many different places, but of particular prominence in his compositions are Africa and Canada. The Canadian North is the subject of a number of his works.

Some of Forsyth's works invoke place through literal depiction, as in the loon calls of *Auyuittuq* or the guns and bells of "The Toll of the Bells" in *A Ballad of Canada*. These depictions are always marked with Forsyth's characteristic careful consideration of timbre, orchestration and notation, such as was noted in the discussion of *Auyuittuq*. Explicit references to place are also present in titles and lyrics of pieces. More abstract references to landscapes are also common, wherein musical materials can be related to the physical landscape through metaphor: the sparse population of the Arctic correlates to a sparse musical texture; its vast expanse to the use of far corners of the performance space; small areas of colour to brief moments of harmony surrounded by monophony; silence to rests.

Forsyth's works must also be viewed in the context of the relationships of the places they describe with other places. In works such as *Auyuittuq* or *Atayoskewin*, Forsyth incorporates elements of First Nations language and culture, but he does not use the material in a stereotypical or imperialist way. Allan Gordon Bell's description of *Atayoskewin* applies equally well to *Auyuittuq*: "an attempt to rethink what it's like to view the land, to view the place, through the very profound sensibility that the First Nations people have in the best of their spiritual pursuits."[99] In *A Ballad of Canada*, the Yukon and Newfoundland—two geographical extremes of Canada—are the subjects of movements bookending the central movements concerning

---

[98] Stott, "Malcolm Forsyth."
[99] Robert Rival interview, "Remembering Malcolm Forsyth," October 27, 2011.

Canada in time of trial, and serve to unify the piece as an ode to the entire country. In the "Newfoundland" movement itself, relationships between place and people are the starting-point for a description of Canadians' character.

Forsyth's final major work, *A Ballad of Canada*, brings together a variety of places: the Yukon, a Belgian graveyard, the St. John's harbour, an overpass in Durham, Ontario, and the Newfoundland coastline. Over the course of five movements, the piece explores physical landscapes, contrasts within landscapes, elements of particular soundscapes, colonial and military relationships between Canada and other countries, places generated through mutual experience and companionship and relationships between the land and its inhabitants. More analysis of place would still be possible, including an examination of the text and music within the context of immigration, metonymy and perceptions of Canada by others, as well as an examination of the piece and its relationship to Canadian self-identity. Yet even within this initial analysis of the piece according to the elements of place listed above, it is clear that place is a central organizing feature of *A Ballad of Canada* and a great many of Forsyth's other works; it informs the structure of the piece as a whole as well as musical elements on a more local scale.

CBC News, in its July 5, 2011 obituary for Forsyth, quoted him as follows: "I'm never more happy than when I can be transported by a performer or performance. Everything I've done is with that experience in mind: changing the space that the audience sits in for those brief few moments." Pieces such as *Auyuittuq*; *The Sea*; *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms* and *A Ballad of Canada* not only describe and embody place, they create new perspectives on place, shine a light on our relationships with place, and serve to create and change space for the listener.

Bibliography

Archer, Violet. *Northern Journey*. Unpublished copy. Edmonton, 1990. University of Alberta Library.

Beethoven, Ludwig van. *Symphony No. 6*. New York: Dover, 1976.

Bell, Allan Gordon. Interview by Robert Rival. "Remembering Malcolm Forsyth Part 1." Podcast audio, October 27, 2011. http://www.edmontonsymphony.com/eso-blog/519-remembering-malcolm-forsyth-part-1.

Beller-McKenna, Daniel. "Distance and Disembodiment: Harps, Horns and the Requiem Idea in Schumann and Brahms." *Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 1 (2005): 47–89.

Berlioz, Hector. *Grande traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes.* Paris: Lemoine, n.d.

Champagne, Jane. "Malcolm Forsyth: How to Get High On Your Own Music/Un compositeur par instinct et par la force des choses." *The Canadian Composer* 99 (March 1975). 14–21.

Cook, James. *Journal of H.M.S. Endeavour, 1768–1771*. National Library of Australia, MS 1. http://nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms1.

Daniels, Stephen and Denis Cosgrove. *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Fernandez, James W. "Andalusia on Our Minds: Two Contrasting Places in Spain as Seen in a Vernacular Poetic Duel of the 19th Century." *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1988). 21–35.

Forsyth, Amanda. "My Life." Unpublished essay, University of Calgary Special Collections accession no. 724/02.11, file 1.17. n.d.

Forsyth, Malcolm. *A Ballad of Canada*. Markham, ON: Counterpoint Musical Services, 2010.

———. *Auyuittuq*. Markham, ON: Counterpoint Musical Services, 2004.

———. *Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms.* Toronto: E.C. Kerby, 1979.

———. "SATB Elektra." Sketch for *Auyuittuq*. University of Calgary Special Collections accession no. 724/02.11, file 2.1. 1997.

———. *Three Partsongs.* Markham, ON: Counterpoint Musical Services, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Gagné, Julie. "Entendre le Nord et le froid dans le texte dramatique : Étude du 'paysage audible' dans Floes de Sébastien Harrisson et Roche, papier, couteau ... de Marilyn Perreault". *Les Cahiers de la Société québecoise de recherche en musique* 14, no. 1 (2013): 35–41.

Garratt, James. *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Gilliland, Allan. Interview by Robert Rival. "Remembering Malcolm Forsyth Part 3." Podcast audio, October 27, 2011. http://www.edmontonsymphony.com/index.php/eso-blog/523-remembering-malcolm-forsyth-part-3.

Grace, Sherrill E. *Canada and the Idea of North*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

Gustafson, Ralph. *Rocky Mountain Poems.* Vancouver: Klanak Press, 1960.

Hare, Carl. "About Malcolm Forsyth." Accessed August 5, 2014. http://malcolmforsythcomposer.ca.

Heney, Trifon. "A Ballad of Canada." Interview for *Sound + Noise.* April 10, 2011. http://soundnnoise.com/2011/04/10/a-ballad-of-canada.

Holmes, Nancy. "'In Flanders Fields'—Canada's Official Poem: Breaking Faith." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 30, no. 1 (2005). http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/SCL/article/view/15269/16346.

Isham, Howard. *Image of the Sea: Oceanic Consciousness in the Romantic Century*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004.

Israel, Inge. *Unmarked Doors.* Vancouver: Cacanadadada Press, 1992.

Knight, David B. *Landscapes in Music: Space, Place and Time in the World's Great Music*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Leclair, François-Hugues. “Composer une musique nordique?” *Les cahiers de la Société québecoise de recherche en musique* 14, no. 1 (2013), 55–62.

Levine, Robert A., and Donald T. Campbell. *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972.

Leyshon, Andrew, David Matless, and George Revill, eds. *The Place of Music*. New York: Guilford Press, 1998.

Lockspeiser, Edward. *Debussy: His Life and Mind.* Volume 2: 1902–1918. London: Cassell, 1965.

McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

McCrae, John. *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems.* Toronto: William Briggs, 1919.

National Arts Centre. “The Post War Years: Canadian Composers Come of Age!” From *Eric Friesen Presents the NAC Orchestra.* December 12, 2010. http://radio.nac-cna.ca/podcast/Eric_Friesen_Presents/Eric_Friesen_Presents_07.mp3.

Parker, Dorothy. *Death and Taxes.* New York: The Viking Press, 1931.

Pratt, E. J. *E. J. Pratt: Complete Poems.* Volume 1. Edited by Sandra Djwa and R. G. Moyles. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.

Rodman, Margaret C. "Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality." *American Anthropologist* 94, no. 3 (1992): 640–56. http://www.jstor.org/stable/680566.

Schafer, R. Murray. *The Tuning of the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.

Sharman, Vincent. “Illusion and an Atonement: E. J. Pratt and Christianity.” *Canadian Literature* 19 (1964): 21–32.

Sherrill, Grace and Stefan Haag. “From Landscape to Soundscape: The Northern Arts of Canada.” *Mosaic* 31, no. 2 (June 1998): 101–22.

Stott, Alister. "Malcolm Forsyth, Artist in Two Climates." Unpublished essay, 1989. University of Calgary Special Collections accession no. 724/02.11, file 1.59.

Trezise, Simon. *Debussy: La mer.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

van Leeuwen, Theo. "Some Notes on the Musical Landscape." *Transforming Cultures e-Journal* 4, no. 1 (2009): viii–xiv.

Walker, Darryl. *Mount Teide, Tenerife*. Oil on canvas, 2005. http://www.saatchiart.com.

Appendix – Chronological list of choral music by Malcolm Forsyth

All pieces published by Counterpoint Musical Services unless otherwise noted.

Tollites Portas (1961). For mixed chorus. Text: Psalm 24:7, 3–4a (Gradual for Advent, and Offertory for Christmas Vigil). Unpublished student work.

Diliges Dominum (1962). For mixed chorus. Text: Matthew 22:37. Unpublished student work.

Music for Mouths, Marimba, Mbira and Roto-toms (1973). For mixed chorus and percussion. Non-texted. Published by E.C. Kerby, 1979.

1. *Iculenya*
2. *Iculabili*
3. *Iculathathu*

Three Partsongs (1980–1983). For mixed chorus. Texts by Dorothy Parker, Brian Patten and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Published 2004.

1. *The Sea*
2. *In the Dying of Anything*
3. *Sudden Light*

Music for John Redford's Wit and Science (1983). For unison voices or mixed ensemble and flute, cello and guitar, or recorder, gamba and lute, or piano. Incidental music to John Redford's *Wit and Science*. Published 2008.

Three Zulu Songs (1989). For SSA choir, flute and oboe. Texts by Benedict W. Vilakazi. Published by Gordon V. Thompson, 1989.

1. *We Moya!*
2. *Inyanga*
3. *KwaDedangendlale*

Endymion's Dream (1993). For SSSAAATTTBB chorus. Text by John Keats. Published 1993.

Three Love Poems of John Donne (1994–1995). For mixed chorus. Texts by John Donne. Published 2004.

1. *The sunne rising*
2. *Song*
3. *Holy Sonnet XVII*

Northern Journey (1997). For SSSSAAAA chorus. Texts by Inge Israel. Published 2004.

1. *Auyuittuq*
2. *Kluane Glaciers*
3. *Winter Sky*

Blow! Bugle, Blow! (2000). For mixed chorus and brass ensemble (3.4.4.1). Text by Alfred Lord Tennyson. Published 2004.

Glasnost (2000). For SSATB ensemble and tape. Text by Inge Israel and traditional Russian. Published 2004.

Snug the Joiner as Lion Fell: A Jest for Male Voice Choir (2000). For TTBB chorus. Texts by William Shakespeare and John Frederick Lampe. Published 2000.

Hesperides (2001). For mixed chorus and two harps. Texts by Robert Herrick. Published 2001.

1. *The Argument of his Book*
2. *To his Booke. Another.*
3. *To the Virgins, to make Much of Time*
4. *How roses came red*
5. *The Kisse. A Dialogue*
6. *The shooe-tying*
7. *On Julia's Breath / Cherrie-Ripe / To Anthea / On Julia's Lips*
8. *How violets came blew*
9. *Upon Julia's breasts*
10. *To his Mistresses*
11. *To Silvia to wed*
12. *On himselfe*

Nursery Rhymes (2008–2009). For unison children's chorus (or solo voice) and piano. Texts by Carl Hare. Published 2009.

1. *The bat*
2. *The dragonfly*
3. *The fly*
4. *The butterfly*
5. *The mouse*
6. *The cat*

A Ballad of Canada (2010). For mixed chorus and orchestra. Texts by Ralph Gustafson, John McCrae, E. J. Pratt and Carl Hare. Unpublished (in preparation).

1. *In the Yukon*
2. *In Flanders Fields*
3. *The Toll of the Bells*
4. *On the Waverley Road Bridge*
5. *Newfoundland*