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## Neanderthal Dig

Don McKay

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from *Larix*  
by  
Don McKay



## Neanderthal Dig

1.

When we dug up the grave  
we found a child's bones  
laid on a great swan's wing.  
They had never been, we thought,  
the sharpest flints in the cave,  
with thick skulls evolving toward NFL  
helmets. We'd applied their name  
(from Neander Vale, site  
of the first remains we found)  
to racists, sexists, and dull  
bureaucrats.

Now we stood abashed  
trespassers on grief, thoroughly *sapiens*  
with artful implements and wit.  
What would it be like to be so stricken,  
with few words to call on heaven, hell,  
hope, grief? And what  
sharp words might we, the clever cousins  
muster for the child who one  
day watched a Mute Swan (wingspan:  
five feet) lift from the river in two white  
swipes of Paleolithic air?

2.

What manner of wreath  
might honour this death?  
Some wing of language  
entering earth?

Wherever you're gone  
may your spirit wander  
wild as a swan  
in the Vale of Neander.

**DON MCKAY** has published numerous books of poetry and several books of essays. The poetry has been recognized with a number of awards, including two Governor General's Awards and the Griffin Poetry Prize. His most recent books of essays, *The Shell of the Tortoise*, received the BMO Winterset Award for Excellence in Newfoundland and Labrador Writing for 2011. *Paradoxides* is his most recent publication. His collected poems, *Angular Uniformity*, appeared in 2014. He lives in St. John's, Newfoundland. "Neanderthal Dig" is from *Lexis*, Vallum Chapbook Series No. 18, Montreal, Quebec, 2015.

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