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“TO CANADA”: MICHAEL GOWDA'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERARY HISTORY OF ALBERTA

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Michael Gowda (1874–1953) was a trailblazing pioneer who played a key role in the early history of Ukrainians in Alberta. The second of ten children born to a tailor and seamstress in the village of Vetlyn in Austro-Hungarian Galicia,¹ he immigrated to Canada as a twenty-three-year-old in June 1897 to avoid having to complete his military service in the Imperial Army. By the time he reached Strathcona Station on May 18, 1898, Gowda had picked up enough English to find work as a sales interpreter with the Bellamy Agricultural Implement Company on Jasper Avenue. In the process, he became the first permanent Ukrainian resident of Edmonton, since the settlers who preceded him had simply passed through town on their way to homesteads in the surrounding countryside.

A former schoolteacher, Gowda was fluent in Ukrainian, Polish, and German and could communicate in several other Slavic languages. As part of his job, he would assist both in-coming colonists as well as farmers in Edmonton on business, becoming a familiar figure to thousands of newcomers.

These activities soon brought him to the attention of local merchants and civic leaders, who began turning to Michael Gowda not only for his services as an interpreter but also for his firsthand knowledge about the customs and ways of the exotic-looking foreigners in sheepskin coats. Thanks to his linguistic abilities Gowda quickly got to know such prominent individuals as *Edmonton Bulletin* editor Frank Oliver (subsequently a federal Minister of the Interior in the government of Wilfred Laurier), and the future city mayor, William Griesbach.

Given his high profile, it is not surprising that Michael Gowda was at the centre of many landmark events in the formation of the Ukrainian community in Alberta. In March 1899, he began submitting occasional reports from Edmonton to the Pennsylvania-based newspaper, *Svoboda* [Liberty], both describing and commenting on how his countrymen were faring in their efforts to make new homes in the Canadian West. His accounts, which were followed with great interest by *Svoboda* subscribers across North America and in Western Ukraine, remain an invaluable source on the evolution of Ukrainian life in Alberta at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1901, Michael Gowda became one of the initiators of the Taras Shevchenko *Chytalnia*, or Reading Society, the first Ukrainian organization to be established in Edmonton. Named after Ukraine's greatest poet, the association's small library of Ukrainian-language books and periodicals was located at the home of John Kilar on 101A Avenue east of 96 Street. Although short-lived, the reading room served as an important early gathering place for farmers visiting town as well as for the Ukrainians who were starting to find jobs in the city.

Inevitably, Michael Gowda also became embroiled in the religious controversies that erupted in the Ukrainian community as soon as missionaries began competing for the confessional allegiances of the immigrants. Despite being raised in a devout Greek Catholic family and having an older brother who was a priest, Gowda was fiercely critical of both the Ukrainian Catholic clergy and their Latin Rite counterparts, often airing his grievances in the press. Gradually acquiring a reputation as a "troublemaker," his uneasy relationship with Catholic authorities deteriorated even further with his 1903 marriage in an Orthodox Church to the daughter of Bukovynian settlers who had homesteaded near Willingdon. After briefly joining the Protestant-backed Independent Church and for a time assisting the Russian Orthodox Mission in its work – setting aside his strong opposition to the latter's imperialistic, often chauvinistic character – he eventually became a

member of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada organized by *narodovtsi*, or national populists, like himself.

In 1907, Michael Gowda directed the first Ukrainian-language play staged in Edmonton – the popular classic, *Natalka Poltavka*. Fittingly, it was written by Ivan Kotliarevsky (1769–1838), the celebrated founder of modern Ukrainian literature. In 1908, Gowda got a job as an interpreter with the city’s Dominion Lands Office, where he helped many homesteaders to register title to their farms. The following year, he spearheaded an ambitious campaign to form a “Ruthenian Regiment” in the Canadian Army in the belief that it was the best means by which his fellow immigrants could demonstrate their loyalty to their new land.² To support his initiative Gowda circulated through the Ukrainian press a sample petition to the “Ministry of War in Ottawa,” which he urged everyone who wanted to join such a regiment to sign. The petition explained the motivation behind the drive to create a Ruthenian corps along the lines of the Scots, Irish, and French-Canadian units already in existence:

The signatories’ desire to take part as a nation in the defence of the administration of this empire primarily because all of the signatories as foreigners and former citizens of foreign countries essentially desire the status of loyal citizens of this land, and at the same time the British Empire, of which Canada is a part. (qtd. in Marunchak 337)

Even though Gowda won the backing of cavalry Captain William A. Griesbach and the *Edmonton Journal*, as well as several influential Ukrainian leaders in Alberta, his proposal was vigorously opposed by Ukrainian socialists and failed to win the approval of Canadian military officials in Ottawa.³ In retrospect, one can only wonder if the unhappy fate experienced by the Ukrainian Canadians who were interned as “enemy aliens” during the Great War might have been avoided if such a regiment had been in existence before the outbreak of hostilities in Europe.

In early 1910, Michael Gowda was enlisted as one of the Alberta shareholders and directors of the Ukrainian Publishing Company in Winnipeg, set up by the emerging Ukrainian Canadian intelligentsia to publish a weekly newspaper, *Ukrains’kyi holos* [Ukrainian Voice].⁴ Although initially billing itself as the organ of the Federation of Ukrainian Social Democrats and Anarchists, *Holos* quickly dropped its left-wing identification to become the chief vehicle of the pioneer era Ukrainian nationalist movement.

Around the same time, Michael Gowda joined the Federation of Ukrainian Social Democrats of Canada (FUSD) at its inaugural convention held in Edmonton in August 1910. However, Gowda's membership in the socialist camp was short-lived, as he was first and foremost a Ukrainian patriot in the populist tradition and his politics were always closer to those of the Liberal Party of Canada. Often employed as an interpreter by politicians when they were campaigning among Ukrainians, in the 1913 provincial elections Michael Gowda finally became a candidate himself in the heavily Ukrainian Victoria constituency northeast of Edmonton. Along with three other community activists, Gowda ran as an Independent when the provincial Liberals failed to support Ukrainian demands for bilingual Ukrainian-English schools or to have riding boundaries redrawn in a way that would improve the chances of an immigrant getting elected to the legislature. Lacking the financial and administrative resources of an established political party, all four Independents were roundly defeated. Meanwhile a Russophile, Andrew Shandro, nominated under the Liberal banner, became the first Ukrainian elected to provincial office, much to the chagrin of national populist community leaders.

Upset by what he regarded to be a betrayal by the Ukrainians who had voted against him, Gowda wrote a stinging rebuke that he had printed and put up in post offices throughout the Victoria district. The language of his diatribe, titled "Thanks to All the Real Turncoats," not only showed how bitterly disappointed Gowda was by his defeat, but at the same time revealed his poetic gift for invective:

For all the swines with long piggish snouts = sell-outs = traitors, abject wretches and scoundrels, reptiles, honeyed serpents, scorpions, moneygrubbers, Judases, and those who allegedly speak the word of God, but who sold themselves like that Judas Iscariot – I wish them many, many, many long years, may they not fall ill but languish in poverty and never die, and may they wallow about this world like stinking fetters and look upon their vile work every step of the way, so that the black spectre of betrayal always stands before their eyes, and may their conscience be so heavy and gnaw at them the way it gnawed at Judas, who nevertheless stood higher than they did because he understood his treachery, understood that he conducted himself dishonourably and he finished his miserable life at the end of piece of rope on a withered aspen-tree.

And as for the betrayers of the national cause like those who essentially behaved like swine in the Victoria district and are not ashamed of their baseness, but even pray to a righteous God, may He prolong their abominable lives. This is unbridled baseness. (Michael Gowda Papers, PAA)⁵

This unhappy episode brought to an end Gowda’s only attempt to win elected office. Afterwards, he established a successful farm implements dealership in Mundare and still later worked as a Dominion Lands administrator and a representative of the Canada Pacific Steamships Company, for a time relocating to Saskatchewan while his family stayed behind in Edmonton. However, by the 1920s it was becoming increasingly difficult for Gowda to find a steady job, since many of his former patrons and employers were no longer able to help him and his multilingual skills were not as necessary as they once had been. As the 1920s wore on Gowda also experienced marital difficulties that compelled him to move from the family home. In his later years, he became dependent on the support of his adult children, one of whom, Faust, graduated in 1928 with a degree in dentistry from the University of Alberta. By the time that Gowda wrote a letter to the editor of the *Edmonton Bulletin* identifying himself as the city’s “First Ukrainian Citizen” – published in the paper’s “Mail Bag” on November 17, 1933 under the heading “Money-Mad Maladministration” – he was already a somewhat marginalized figure whose groundbreaking achievements were mostly remembered by other “old-timers” like himself. Always a passionate Ukrainian-Canadian who was equally comfortable in both of his identities – the Ukrainian one he was born with, and the Canadian one that he chose as an immigrant – Michael Gowda died in 1953 at the age of 79, and was buried at Edmonton Cemetery.

In many respects, Michael Gowda was an atypical member of the first major wave of Ukrainians to immigrate to Canada. Much better educated than most and endowed with a self-confident nature, he possessed a degree of charisma and drive that made him a natural leader among his fellow Ukrainian pioneers. Furthermore, like many *hromadski diachi*, or community activists of his generation, Gowda was inspired by the example set by such revered Ukrainian writers as Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko. Gifted authors as well as visionaries, they were at the forefront of mobilizing the Ukrainian people against their economic, political, and national oppression. Thus, it is not surprising that in addition to being a grassroots organizer Gowda also entertained literary aspirations, or that he turned to poetry to goad and cajole his Galician and Bukovynian kinsmen into action.

Because of Ukraine's long and painful history as a battleground of rival empires, in the nineteenth century poets were the heroes of the Ukrainian nation, keeping alive the memories of Ukraine's storied past while inciting resistance to foreign domination. As a stateless people, Ukrainians looked to their literary champions as their "unacknowledged legislators" and torchbearers for the cause of Ukrainian self-determination. Indeed, simply writing poetry in the Ukrainian language was in itself a political act – a tradition that continued through the defeat of the Ukrainian national movement in the early twentieth century, through the persecutions of the communist era to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Viewed in this context, Michael Gowda's poetic and literary efforts during his heyday in pioneer era Alberta can best be understood as an extension of his work as a community activist. How both were inextricably intertwined is evident in the very first article that Michael Gowda contributed to the newspaper *Svoboda*, which dealt with the growing religious discord among Ukrainian immigrants. Published on March 16, 1899, under the heading "News from Canada," the article concluded with the following three stanzas of didactic verse urging Ukrainians to stay united:

Best of luck to you, brethren of good will,
 May God grant you strength!
 Take up harmony in your free life
 Because that is what the Supreme Being demands.

Clasp your hands together,
 And love each other like brothers,
 Let us pay no heed to those who sow discord,
 And let us not follow after them.

Stand, brethren, together in one line,
 Always try to look ahead,
 And be sure to pay heed
 As to what kind of traces you leave after yourself!

This untitled twelve-line composition earned Gowda the distinction of becoming the third Ukrainian-Canadian immigrant to have an original work of poetry appear in print. Just one month earlier, an 111-line poem by a Star-area farmer named Ivan Zbura had been published in the same newspaper under the title "*Kanadiis'ki emigranty*" [Canadian Emigrants], and it

may well have been responsible for prodding Michael Gowda to try his own hand at composing verses.⁶

Gowda’s next submission to *Svoboda* on August 31 of the same year was a twenty-four line poem titled “*Rus’komu narodu!*” [To the Ruthenian People!]. Like Ivan Zbura’s piece, it lamented the plight of the *muzhiks* languishing in Europe, the opening lines painting an especially bleak picture of the harsh conditions in the old country:

They are writing from the homeland: We’re being tormented so cruelly,
That we don’t have the strength to breathe.
Everywhere you turn it has now become so corrupt,
That even food isn’t appetizing anymore.⁷

The poem went on to complain about police harassment as well as electoral treachery and deception by local authorities. However, it concluded with an optimistic prediction about Ukraine’s coming liberation through the efforts of its “slender young fighters.” What is perhaps most striking about Gowda’s composition is its strongly nationalistic sense of a *Ukrainian* identity (notwithstanding its title), since most immigrants at the turn of the century still primarily thought of themselves as Ruthenians, Austro-Hungarians, Galicians, or Bukovynians.

Gowda again included some original verse in his third submission to *Svoboda*, which appeared on September 27, 1900, under the heading, “Several words to the Ruthenians in Canada.” In it, Gowda pointed out that the 30,000 Ukrainians in Canada – almost 12,000 of whom had reportedly settled in Alberta – represented “real strength,” and he therefore offered the following advice to his countrymen: “As quickly as possible we ... have to familiarize ourselves with the workings of the country that we are living in, love our faith and language, but above all else learn the local language.” He then summoned his Ruthenian brethren to overcome their legacy of abuse and oppression at the hands of old country lords, with these words of exhortation:

For the might and the glory of the Ruthenian people
I sing you this song,
Awake from your deep slumber to the great task
I implore you today.
Arise, get ready, the star is now shining,
The eagle of freedom has already awakened
The fields overgrown with forests await you,

It is time for you to seize upon the opportunity,
 In the name of the Father put a cross on yourself,
 Jesus His Son will help you,
 Ask for enlightenment from the Holy Spirit
 Because with faith your strength will multiply.

Paraphrasing the famous New Testament passage that begins, “Ask and it shall be given you,” Gowda consciously tried to stir national pride among his kinsmen, describing them as “brothers and sons of our glorious Mother Rus’-Ukraine.”

Gowda continued to be an occasional contributor to *Svoboda* in the following years, holding forth on various issues and using the paper to educate and to rally his fellow immigrants behind causes that he was either leading or working to promote. However, with the founding of three newspapers in Winnipeg in short succession in 1904–1905, *Svoboda* lost its journalistic monopoly among readers in Ukrainian settlements across Canada. Competition came in the form of the Liberal Party-backed *Kanadiis’kyi farmer* (Canadian Farmer), the Conservative-subsidized *Slovo* [The Word], and the Presbyterian-sponsored *Ranok* [The Dawn], all of which were issued from Winnipeg. Together, they provided for a range of perspectives on how organized Ukrainian life was beginning to develop in Canada. Besides serving as platforms for lively debate and discussion, the new periodicals also offered immigrant authors a choice of outlets for expressing their ideas and feelings. Michael Gowda was quick to take advantage of these opportunities, and on November 2, 1905, he had a lengthy poem published in *Kanadiis’kyi farmer*. Titled “In Memory of Our Emigrants,” the poem began on the following dramatic note:

Like prisoners from captivity
 Their faces damp, oppressed, sickly
 Creatures enveloped in grief
 For some reason their eyes redden
 Is it from anger or from crying?
 If you ask or don’t ask
 They won’t tell you anything
 And seemingly lost they look for the road
 As if they were waiting for someone or something

Signed "M. Gowda, Edmonton, 10 October 1905," the 149-line poem was steeped in a mixture of anger and pathos. In it, Gowda railed against everyone he regarded as being responsible for the unhappy plight of the Galician immigrants, including "Those age-old bloodsuckers / Depraved nobles and lords," Austrian authorities and Ruthenian leaders. Reflecting attitudes that were widespread in those days throughout much of Europe as well as North America, Gowda at the same time singled out Jews for condemnation, accusing them of profiting from the misery of the peasantry and describing them as having been responsible for Christ's crucifixion. While lacking technical polish, "In Memory of Our Emigrants" is forcefully expressive and filled with a heartfelt sense of grievance that still makes a powerful impression upon the reader, notwithstanding some of its dubious content.

In October 1905, Michael Gowda achieved yet another "first" when one of his poems became the earliest work by a Ukrainian immigrant writer to be translated and published in English. Produced and disseminated with the help of the renowned author, poet, and journalist, E. W. Thomson, "To Canada" initially appeared in the *Manitoba Free Press* and the *Boston Evening Transcript*, before being reprinted in the *Edmonton Bulletin*. In the *Boston Transcript* the poem served as the conclusion to the first instalment of a fascinating report that Thomson wrote about his late September visit to the Ukrainian colony east of Fort Saskatchewan. Entitled "Five Days in Galicia," the two-part story appeared on October 17 and 24, 1905, while the *Bulletin* only ran the small portion of the report that dealt with Michael Gowda on October 18 under the heading "Galician Poetry." In introducing Gowda to Canadian and American readers, Thomson offered the following observations about him:

How the Galicians, whether they be German, Polish or Russian, feel toward their new country may best be told by their own poet. Edmonton and the surrounding region know him only as Michael Gowda, interpreter to the Bellamy Agricultural Implement Company, and a very keen, clever stump-speaker at election times. He was a school teacher in Galicia, and has been out here, after escaping from the Austrian army, some eight years.

Thomson goes on to mention that Gowda had translated "into Russian verse" [sic] "Snowbound" and twenty other poems by the American Quaker and abolitionist, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892). However, these do not seem to have ever been published and are not preserved among Gowda's

papers at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. Thomson's biographical introduction concluded with the explanation that "... he is, unless I mistake, a genuine poet himself. Here is a rough versification, made by myself, from his prose English translation of his poem to Canada:"

TO CANADA

O free and fresh-homed Canada, can we,
 Born far o'erseas, call thee our country dear?
 I know not whence nor how that right may be
 Attained through sharing blessings year by year.

We were not reared within thy broad domains,
 Our fathers' graves and corpses lie afar.
 They did not fall for freedom on thy plains,
 Nor we pour out our blood beneath thy star.

Yet we have Liberty from sea to sea,
 Frankly and true you gave us manhood's share.
 We who, like wandering birds, flew hopefully
 To gather grain upon thy acres fair.

From ancient worlds by wrong opprest we swarmed
 Many as ants, to scatter on thy land.
 Each to the place you gave, aided, unharmed,
 And here we fear not kings nor nobles grand.

And are you not, O Canada, our own?
 Nay, we are still but holders of thy soil.
 We have not bought by sacrifice and groan
 The right to boast the country where we toil.

But, Canada, in Liberty we work till Death,
 Our children shall be free to call thee theirs,
 Their own dear land, where, gladly drawing breath,
 Their parents found safe graves, and left strong heirs.

To Homes, and native freedom, and the heart
 To live, and strive, and die if need there be,
 In standing manfully by Honor's part
 To save the country that has made us free.

They shall be as brothers to all the rest,
Unshamed to own the blood from whence they sprang,
True to their Fathers' Church, and His behest
For whom the bells of yester Christmas rang.⁸

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian original of this eight-stanza poem never made it into print and has not survived, so it is impossible to determine how faithful the English rendering is to the primary text. It seems fairly certain that "To Canada" was less a translation than an inspired collaboration, and that the metre, style, as well as much of the phrasing of the poem, owed more to Thomson than to Gowda. Nonetheless, knowing Gowda's feelings for his adopted land one can be confident that "To Canada" accurately captured his sentiments as well as his thoughts about how Ukrainian immigrants would ultimately need to earn their full citizenship through sacrifice on a battlefield. This may seem rather contradictory given the fact that Gowda had emigrated from Austria-Hungary partly to evade military service, but it is actually consistent with what is known about his political views and allegiances. Although Gowda felt no great love or loyalty to the Austro-Hungarian crown, he fully believed in many of the British ideals and institutions that formed the pillars of Canadian society in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, as demonstrated by his efforts to organize a Ruthenian infantry unit in the Canadian Army, he clearly was not a pacifist. Indeed, in 1907–1908 he enlisted in the 101st Regiment of the Canadian Home Guard, proudly serving it for four years around the same time that he was urging Ukrainian Canadians to support the creation of a Ruthenian detachment.

What is therefore perhaps most striking about "To Canada" is that it was composed just six years after Gowda landed in Halifax, as indicated in the *Bulletin* version, which carried the credit line, "Michael Gowda, Edmonton, 1903." It is evidence as to how quickly Gowda adapted to his new homeland, and how whole-heartedly he embraced mainstream Canadian values. Equally telling, however, is the last stanza, which unequivocally reaffirmed Gowda's sense of ancestral pride and commitment to preserving his Ukrainian heritage. Obviously, the notion of being a "hyphenated" Canadian was not problematic for the author of the poem, who wanted to keep the best of his old world identity while becoming a full-fledged citizen of Canada.

"To Canada" was the first and for a long time, the only Ukrainian-language literary work by an immigrant author accessible in English. Because of its uniqueness, it was reprinted in whole or part on several occasions over the span of many years. It was included in a book entitled *Our Fellow Slavic*

Citizens, published in New York in 1910, and a slightly revised portion of it was cited in an untitled and unattributed January 29, 1913 article on Gowda that appeared in the *Vegreville Observer*.⁹ According to a news story that ran in the *Edmonton Journal* under the heading “Work for the Foreign-Born” on July 9, 1920 and reproduced five of its eight stanzas, the well-travelled poem was next reprinted in the 1920 *Handbook for New Canadians*, compiled by Alfred Kirkpatrick for The Frontier College. And it has been published in several Ukrainian-Canadian sources in recognition of Michael Gowda’s singular contribution to Ukrainian-Canadian literature, which serves as an early benchmark of Ukrainian integration into Canadian society and culture.¹⁰

Michael Gowda and E. W. Thomson first became acquainted in the fall of 1905, when Thomson was touring the rapidly changing Northwest writing a series of articles prompted by the founding of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Being the “point man” for the Ukrainian community in Alberta at that time, Gowda was undoubtedly introduced to Thomson soon after he arrived in Edmonton from Los Angeles with his wife. Gowda was henceforth to remain a trusted journalistic contact for Thomson on matters pertaining to Ukrainian immigrants in the Canadian West, their friendship being a reflection of the out-going characters of both men and the bond that they forged while travelling together through the burgeoning Slavic colony northeast of the city.¹¹

Edward William Thomson (1849–1924) was a multi-talented individual who led a remarkable and adventure-filled life. Born and educated in southern Ontario, as a teenager he saw action with the Union Army in the American Civil War and afterwards fought with the Queen’s Own Rifles against the Fenians. Subsequently employed for several years as a surveyor on the Prairies, he eventually pursued a successful career as a journalist, and from 1878 to 1891 was a member of the editorial staff of the Toronto newspaper, *The Globe*. In the following decade, he edited the Boston magazine *Youth’s Companion*, where he published many adventure stories that were included in his 1897 book, *Between Earth and Sky and Other Strange Stories of Deliverance*. After briefly working for the *Montreal Star*, in 1902 he was named Canadian correspondent for the *Boston Transcript*, a position that he held until two years before his death (Bourinot).

Thomson’s wide circle of friends included such celebrated political figures as Joseph Howe, Wilfred Laurier, and Henri Bourassa, and the Canadian poets Duncan Campbell Scott, Archibald Lampman, and W. H. Drummond. Besides being a poet and fiction writer of some distinction

himself, he also produced a number of translations from French and German, including works by Victor Hugo, Sir George Etienne Cartier, and Heinrich Heine.¹² Thus, "To Canada" was not the only time that he tried his hand at literary translation, though unlike French and German, he undoubtedly did not know a word of Ukrainian before coming to Alberta.

Whereas E. W. Thomson obviously developed feelings of both sympathy and respect for Ukrainians during his brief encounters with them in the Canadian West, the same could not be said for some other important opinion-makers, most notably the well-known Winnipeg writer and Presbyterian minister, Ralph Connor – the pen name of the Rev. Charles W. Gordon (1860–1937). In his 1909 novel, *The Foreigner, A Tale of Saskatchewan*, Connor provided a largely unflattering and utterly confused depiction of the Galician immigrants in Canada, provoking howls of protest from the Ukrainian community. Among those to condemn his book was Michael Gowda, who gamely, if not altogether successfully, tried to express his criticisms in English in "An Open Letter to Ralph Connor" that was published in the *Edmonton Journal* on April 12, 1910. Struggling to control his anger after reading the book, Gowda lashed out at the author in a lengthy rant, part of which reads as follows:

In my opinion and also in the opinion of over 100,000 people in Canada there is doubt whether you were conscious at the time you wrote the "Tale of Saskatchewan" or whether you were delirious in some hidden disease which is known only to people suffering by the prejudice of foreigners.

In this respect I must tell you that you have done a great injustice to our nationality by bringing false facts before the people of the English speaking world....

The history will tell in the future that you are wrong in this case; the history will mark you as the one who had strained the situation and the relation between the foreign class of people, especially the Ruthenian nationality and the Canadians and English class of people. Your name will rank in the memory of the future history of the people as one who had done great wrong to the national name of the people, as one who insulted the people at the very time that they should have been petted and learnt how to do better.

The injustice you have done by writing the “Tale of Saskatchewan” is injustice that will never be forgotten, and I will not be responsible if the day will come that you will be called upon to explain yourself before the public.

Demanding that Gordon suspend publication of his book and to stop publicly describing it as a work of fact rather than “pure fiction,” Gowda concluded his tirade by “kindly” requesting a reply to his letter in the near future and politely signing his complaint, “Your friend.”¹³

It is worth noting that in Michael Gowda’s extant papers there are a number of clippings on literary themes, many of them nondescript poems submitted to newspapers by would-be poets. Some of these homespun verses were included in a special page of the literary section of the *Boston Evening Transcript* for May 5, 1917, which was undoubtedly mailed to him by E. W. Thomson. The same issue contained an article about “The Literary World of Today,” though Gowda was probably more interested in the feature story about Joseph Conrad and reviews of two recent books, *The Russians and Their Language* and *Something about the Revolution and Other Affairs*. Other clippings saved by Gowda were of obituaries for the Polish novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916) and for Ralph Connor (d. 31 October 1937), who appears to have never responded to Gowda’s angry letter in the *Journal*. Equally noteworthy is the first page of the *Reader’s Digest* version of Henry Kreisel’s 1948 novel *The Rich Man*, as it reveals that Gowda continued to follow contemporary literature long after he abandoned his own creative ambitions.

Other materials of literary interest in the Gowda papers are two poems in typescript: one written about a return visit that he made to his native village in 1912, and another composed on the tenth anniversary of the 1898 death of his father. Handwritten documents include a poem called “To Mother” – penned on Dominion Lands Office stationery and dated May 10, 1912 – as well as a few poetic fragments and short texts that are difficult to decipher but appear to have some literary content. In 1912, Gowda also produced a 169-page draft manuscript of a scrawled autobiography in a notebook that similarly remains to be decoded.

Although this evidence points to the fact that Gowda never lost his enthusiasm for literature and poetry, his own authorial attempts seem to have ended sometime during his second decade in Canada. Notwithstanding E. W. Thomson’s generous praise of him, Gowda was not really blessed with great natural talent and he lacked the discipline and determination required

to hone his poetic style and technique. His handling of rhythm and phrasing were sometimes awkward, and it is clear that his emotions and prejudices occasionally got the better of him. Still, he was capable of giving vigorous and colourful expression to his ideas and passions, as is evident in his memorable condemnation of the Ukrainians who did not support him in the 1913 provincial elections. He also distinguished himself from other immigrant poets of his era by choosing to compose in free verse instead of the naïve and folkloric style that was typical of the earliest "songs" produced in Canada by Ukrainian pioneers. (Slavutych 12–13; Marunchak 299–300, 307, 310)

Michael Gowda may have only left a handful of modest poems to posterity, but he will always be remembered as the creator of "To Canada," which is his most significant literary achievement. That and being recognized as the "First Ukrainian Citizen in Edmonton" and the activist who broke ground for organized Ukrainian life in Alberta are worthy accomplishments for an immigrant who so quickly became an ardent Canadian while always staying true to his ancestral roots. Indeed, he can be said to have lived up to Taras Shevchenko's invocation in his famed "Friendly Epistle," whose words would have made an appropriate epitaph on Gowda's tombstone:

Educate yourself, my brothers!
Think, and read,
And learn about others,
But do not renounce your own.... (Shevchenko 193)

NOTES

1. Vetlyn is now in southeast Poland.
2. Gowda's original appeal to the "Ruthenians in Alberta and all of Canada" appeared in *Kanadiis'kyi farmer* in April 1910: "We are recruiting our own regiment in the army and we are turning to you, the youth of our nationality who are here in a foreign land, with these words: Anyone who has a sense of honour for his own nation, for whom it is pleasing to recall our glorious ancestors from Zaporozhian times, for whom it is important that other nations here give us more respect, who wants to leave some glory to the good residents of this, our new country, and renown to their children, should join our new regiment." (qtd. in Marunchak 337)
3. To help build support for the creation of the Ruthenian military unit, a public meeting was held to discuss the proposed regiment on 1 May 1910. One of the speakers at the gathering was Iwan Letawsky, who had been a co-founder of the Taras Shevchenko *Chytnia* and along with Michael Gowda had previously joined the 101st infantry regiment. Among those who supported Gowda in his effort to establish a Ruthenian corps were such well-known figures as Peter Svarich, Paul Rudyk, and Gregory Krakiwsky (also spelled Kraikivsky, Krakiwsky, and Krikevsky).
4. Other Albertans who were part of the company's board of directors or shareholders were Gowda's friends and frequent collaborators, Svarich, Rudyk, and Krakiwsky.
5. Translated from a broadsheet dated 1 May 1913, which is now found with the rest of the Gowda papers at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. All translations from Ukrainian sources used in this article are my own, and materials from the Gowda papers that were utilized in writing this article are from my personal collection, obtained from the Gowda family prior to their deposition in the PAA.
6. The first published poem by a Ukrainian-Canadian author was "Do bratov halychan" [To Brother Galicians], by Yuri Syrotiuk, printed in *Svoboda* on 27 May 1897. The second was the poem "Kanadiis'ki emigranty" [Canadian Emigrants] by Ivan Zbura of "Beaver Creek," Alberta, which appeared in the same paper on 2 Feb. 1899.
7. The poem was reprinted in Slavutych, Yar, comp. & ed. *Antolohiia ukrains'koi poezii v Kanadi, 1898–1973* [An Anthology of Ukrainian Poetry in Canada, 1898–1973]. Edmonton: *Ob'iednannia Ukrain's'kykh pys'mennykiv u Kanadi*, 1975: 8; and Hay-Holowko, Oleksa. *Ukrains'ki pys'mennyky v*

Kanadi. Literaturno-krytychni narysy. Tom Pershyi [Ukrainian Writers in Canada: Literary-Critical Sketches. Volume One]. Winnipeg: Tovarystva “Volyn,” 1980: 21–23.

8. The version of the poem that appeared in the *Transcript* had a couple of minor differences, such as “... free and fresh-home Canada!” in the first line, and “wrong” written with a capital in stanza four – the first likely being a typographic error and the second a stylistic preference on the part of Thomson’s Boston editor.
9. The latter featured several revisions that do not improve on the original, such as “But Canada, our hearts are thine till death” in the sixth stanza, and “True to their Father’s creed and His behest,” in the penultimate line of the last stanza.
10. The version of the poem in the Balch anthology was reproduced in abridged form in Mandryka, Mykyta. *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada*. Winnipeg-Ottawa: Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, 1968: 41–43. A complete Balch text then appeared in *Forum: A Ukrainian Review* 16 (Spring 1971): 29.
11. Thomson’s *Boston Transcript* articles on his trip through the Ukrainian bloc settlement northeast of Fort Saskatchewan are datelined 23 and 28 September. Eight years later Thomson included a quote from Gowda in an article that he wrote in defence of Ukrainian efforts to get provincial recognition for bilingual schools, describing him as a former “... schoolteacher, an excellent poet in his own language, long an enthusiast for spreading English amongst and Canadianizing his own people....” See “Persecution of the Ruthenians” in Thomson’s article, “Old King of Ottawa Vale,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, 8 Oct. 1913.
12. In his biography of Thomson, Arthur S. Bourinot (13–14) judged him to be “...a competent but not an inspired translator.”
13. Gowda’s name was then misconstrued as “M. CJOWDA.”

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