

## paskwāwi mostos iskwēw (Buffalo Woman)

Nicole Louise Harrison

This poem is based on: Artwork: #A15.05/001 – "Kayas – A Long Time Ago" by Cardinal, M.

This poem won second place in the Journal of Integrated Studies 2018 Ekphrastic Poetry Competition.

**NOTE:** The artist of this piece of artwork is Plains Cree and from Alberta, Canada. In Plains Cree, the lower case is used for all words to signify that one person, place, and/or thing is not more important than the other. All are equal.



*Painted by Cardinal M. (1986). Medium: Serigraph*

foggy, distant dreams  
of drums dancing unified  
behind a distant half-gaze  
clothed in the red sun.



culture shock waves  
shake your sparkling blood  
hidden beneath the thick cloak  
of another culture's clothing.

days when paskwāwi mostos ēkwa mistatimwāk  
roamed free on Canadian plains  
mikisiwāk calls heard for miles  
lands once void of gravel, pavement, cement tiles

grass weaving free, forests young  
animals obeyed the nēhiyawēwin tongue  
danced with the drums, sang ancient songs  
people, animals, plants, streams, even rocks were one.

respect for all creation  
love and obedience prevailed  
until the veil was dropped  
between the nations.

"dīvide et īpera!" napoléon said.

mothers from fathers  
to fight world war for peace.  
parents from children  
in the guise of education and protection services.



a tear streams down  
your war torn visage  
paskwāwi mostos iskwēw  
memories too painful to bear.

paskwāwimostos iskwēw  
so calm amidst the storm  
blessed by the gliding mikisiw o'erhead  
protected by paskwāwimostos abroad.

nōcokwēsiw surrounded by  
a culture not your own  
yet feet firmly dance, drum, sing  
for peace, unity, love all the more.

revitalization, restoration, revival  
not yet lost, not yet forgotten  
visions of times no more  
yet still to be.

rest assured, some day  
even the animals will hear and obey  
nēhiyaw  
as earth's last hope for survival.



lessons taught and forgotten  
so long ago, so far away  
some day nōcokwēsiw  
seven generations

from ink spilling on rolls of parchment  
before iron clad personages robed in black, in red  
adorned with rings of gold and silver  
brought the nations to their knees.

nēhiŷaw-iskwēw. nōcokwēsiw.  
paskwāwi mostos iskwēw.

we sing, fast, smudge, sweat, dance for you  
to remind us why we're here  
what we need yet do  
please, don't leave us behind when you go

where paskwāwi mostosak still roam free  
and mikisiwāk warning cries still heard  
upon that distant shore  
where pain can touch you no more.

---

**Cree Words:**

Paskwāwi mostos: buffalo (literally: prairie/plains cow)

ēkwa: and

mistatim: horse (mistatimwāk – plural; literally: big dog)

mikisiw: bald eagle (mikisiwāk – plural; aka: kihēw, eagle)



nēhiyawēw-: Plains Cree or indigenous to the land of North America (variations in ending can denote the language, the people, the traditional ways)

nōcokwēsiw: a Cree elder (female)

iskwēw: woman

“dīvide et īmpera!”: Latin for “divide and conquer!”

---

*Nicole is an Administrative Support Coordinator for FHSS Graduate Programs and a Master's of Education student.*

---