

Loss Sonnets

O Patronage! patronage! It is that which constitutes the whole power of the Executive Government of this Province; and when the future historian of New Brunswick records the history of these times, he may sum up the whole duties of the Executive in these words. – Lemuel A. Wilmot, 1847

Commands From The Prodigal

1. Abandoned in the homeland, crouch under the scythe.
2. Refuse office. 3. Rise each morning in fear of not rising again. 4. Live half-empty cups and half-connected kicks. 5. Resound the soaked earth.
6. Swallow your head. 7. Step and stride as seed-dispersal. 7. Play Hide & Seek or Rise & Decide: once I was, once I am. 8. *Run*. 9. Don't stay down, you'll get beaten worse. 10. Come up strategic with pain's plan and thrum. Lavish blood on mistakes—else succumb. 11. Resolve to move like the sun on an axis that perfects the praxis of farms: 12. Seasons elide.
13. You don't know why. 14. You'll never know why.

Coat of Arms

You don't know why; you'll never know why.
At a shipyard on Lethe, Woman stows away
on the Lymphad. Saint John River, herald
of drowning in February air– why do your oars drag

despite the furling sail? I wanted safety, her hand
in mine. Is love worse to survive outrageous oxygen
everywhere, gills flapping in the surplus? The picture
names our ordinary dead and dying. Yet forward we

sail, crazed by names. In our dreams, water sings
oar and oar sings air. Sun sings Ecclesiastes: *I am come
to the great estate*. In the basket, the maid's breath plumes
as a banner of gold. This province, full of the sick and old,
sends our dead back to the world in a galleon. All ghost
ships sail backward, back to us –



Under the Ice

Ships sail backward, back to us.
Ghosts finish each day like soldiers
lowering flags. Nowlan prays under
the ice to tomorrow, for tomorrow.
Loyalist men whisper about poor omens
in this bitter winter as their wives
whisper about disloyal men. Though the
Provincial Archives are full of lies,
lies sail backward, too. Only later can
we learn we are wrong. We all work
according to a weird religion where
Irving Convenience calls the backship

forth –

Rivers Alluvial

Forth:

go to the ends of the earth, you children of lesser worth. A capillary is as one river alluding another, the body's cricks as local Styxes serviced by hick Charons. We want love and there's never enough air, so draw in sweetness and never let go. Your chest will burst in half-death but the end comes when a ghost ship, doomed to return, hoists you to the basket. *Return* is the first commandment of our religion. Two: *Go Forth*. Three: *Choke Mourning's Throat*. Does elegy preserve our good name? Cut another name from the world and see: living names writhe in cellular flames. Madness is to want comfort, for our need to be kept desperate and oxygen-indebted. The umbilical link unto star and ghost provides finite blood and infinite death. Remembrance is always the name in the picture. Image becomes spirit when said: I say your name and I do grieve. All names dredge the deep.

Head Pressed to Stone at St. Vincent de Paul Cemetery

I say your name and I do grieve. All names
dredge the deep, but they fail to take heed
and sprout. Hereabouts, mustard seed got choked
by conglomerate needs rendered too economic.
Scrub grass debriefs our fields. Old Dutch
farmers sing about crop yield and claim
to have never yielded, but wrote wills to sons
who refuse to break the back of the land
open for cheques. The future left as adherents
to our religion rocket down untolled highways
that irrigate rural graveyards. But look –
in the field, see wounds the mortgage
might heal. Land remains, awaiting the farmer
of future nostalgias. Mom, I miss you.
This differgreen is slow, wild, beautiful assertion.

Nov. 9, 2014

This differgreen is slow, wild, beautiful assertion.
To stay where home stays away *is* home. Air thins.
I want to run back and beat the backship to the goal,
though she sailed long before I learned to stand. As
precious freight in the Lymphad, coffins are draped
with a sad flag. They died for what, our daughters
and sons? I learn vital statistics in the white-knuckling
province. In those numbers is the ice I pray under.

I clasp dead names, names that release.
I go home to see your stone. May it stand as sundial
long after I fall, time's not-home for distraught
mortal thoughts men fall in love to abate. I go not-home
to be not-alone, to relearn it's always too late.

My mother rose every morning in fear

To go not-home, to relearn it's always too late,
do this: complain. *The God of New Brunswick
is a vengeful God. He taketh away the farms, fish,
and trees. Sending friends afar like scattered seeds,
he giveth governments that hoard according
to election.* Then take a break. Reflect:
*We bleed on the earth and there is only one
religion to flee, the one of bloodshed.*
Children of lesser worth, repeat: *Fear tightens
the noose they fitted for us. All these years,
pain singed our brains at their beginnings.
Did we ever agree that it's hard? Long ago!*
The secret to evict pain is to breathe deep and forgive.
Loosen the mooring. Mouth holy words.

100% Oxygen

Loosen the mooring. Mouth
holy words. Pump them through
breathing tubes. Percent-alive
equals how much we don't want
to die—voiceless, with a tube
in her throat, my mother wrote out:
Will I live? The answer's not meant
to be written. Percent want: forgiveness
of sins or forgiveness of sinners?
In each cell, mitochondria
are the smithys of our unknowns.
Wheeze makes an onomatopoeia
of witness. *We*. My answer a plural plea
of unwritten *No*. Forgiveness
of sins or forgiveness of sinners?
Sinners: *yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.*

Sail

Sinners: *yes, yes, yes, yes, yes*

tatters of mind stitched into sail

drape love's cloth

see the breath

once, half-emptied cups were prayer enough

we know parable well: the good

is glass that breaks

air is partial compared to need

we bleed to keep breathing as

the turned cheek burns.

A sail

woman is covalency

man steals air to prevent names from breathing

other names for love: *be, remember, tatter*

Witness sings name

facts pass like people pass epitaphs

who stays the same when the myth expires?

Netherworld wind is inexhaustible desire.

The sail curves into sun as symbol consumed, a saturation of less,
 lesser, least – sound the number into the air rushing out of the leak—
 we run, we dance, we have little time—the zero-vow is a bet against
 the sun rising to fail _____

Goodbye with words

Seventy four years ago, this bedtime story:
your pillow was once stitched based on a dream
of you. Your hand was on your head and your head
was dreaming. Dad could pull down whole temples
around your head, he knew where all the temples were.
And you climbed – what did you say that night?
That hundredth night of looking in the mirror?
Of telling yourself a story about how to go to sleep?
Did you listen to yourself? *Could* you listen?
Whole fields of dreamed crosses are made of a salt
that comes from eyes. A gift from god for those
who need answers, who need their dreams terrified.
Mother, you are there, looking further back,
erecting dreams for more ghosts yet to dream.

After Metaphor

For more ghosts yet to dream, this advice:
I have to remind myself all the time I am in love.
It's strange. I wake every day with the sun.
My mom taught me that victory is to be sick
and yet stand, to face those who hate the kid
who can't help his asking *why*, the child that hides
from hurt until pain rises to become his name.
Yes – I'm fine. The noose loves necks
but won't rest on mine. Remember,
New Brunswick? What do you remember?
A mother, a son, bayonets, *Evangeline*,
the Tantramar marsh? That time the man
and woman fell in love? When a boy cursed
his father and the father regretted his boy?

Are your myths my myths?
Do you sing of my body?
Are you an altar?
Am I alone?

New Brunswick Answers

You are alone.

You *were* and *were*.

I am an altar.

I sing low of your body.

Our myths are compatible.

How could they not be?

Yes, I remember time, families, literature and land.

I remember ghosts and their dreams.

That there was pain means that you can hear this answer, which is their answer.

Listen and understand.

You ask questions as commands, but I'm a silent refrain.

Hear the sail snap the headwind.

I am enough.