

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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## Goodbye with words

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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.