

**NEWFOUNDLAND SUITE,
A SONNET SEQUENCE**

FIRST STOP, NORTH SYDNEY

Our Appalachian slopes are also floor
beneath the sea that leads to Labrador,
to Newfoundland and on to Ireland, Norway.
At last, we come to do the Trail in our way.
Now it begins. Soft night will come to mask
these asphalt acres overlooked by neon,
strobing, probing: "*Destination*
it urges, *du navire est Port Aux Basques.*"

Launched from our accustomed contexts, we
quite suddenly are simply who we are,
exalted in still streams of pilgrims by
the joy of embarkation. Spilled on high,
light swims in colors over rain-slick seas
of tar, and bluegrass ripples from a car.

I want to jump our truck and dance around
to celebrate this fair expectancy
illuminating savage desert ground,
a welcome and a welcoming *esprit*.

**CHOICE
a sonnette**

Motoring audibly with a compulsive sway
in the titanic fist of the black unfathomed sea,
committed to our dark uncertainty,
the risk already taken, we have no say
but faith in strangers not to make at our cost
the important mistake. Can arrival never be,
or any new thing, unless control is lost?

THE DEFENSE

On arrive. The ascending road from the boat
is carved like a scar in the sky-high face
of a flat-topped cliff with the port at its base,
crammed at land's end as all the remote
and outposted towns will be, like a float
of boxes scattered aground in the space
between the sea's edge and the rock's embrace.

The sheen on the cliff's face is like a coat –
of *foil*, then the sudden hills come like *bowls*,
cones, tables, set down on a *rug* of peat,
the broad bog *embroidered* with *sequin* pools.
Why this rubbish of household conceit!
O, the Glacier has been here so lately it hurts
my heart, and I am afraid and I run –
to commonplaces, covertured
by kitchen matters, a disturbed
mother armored to avert
confusion with her wooden spoon.

GOD IN GROS MORNE

Then up, up, up the coast toward the top of the world,
to embrace at my age the absolutely new.
The Labrador's flag of white and green and blue
must charm as meant with images unfurled
of snow and trees and water. But here is hurled
the mantle's moony rock. What power threw
these sterile slabs of mountain, what force drew
the fiery shades that frighten, from under the world
the shapes that shock, these emblems unfit for banners,
these mesas with corroding orange slopes
sliced off of Hell by Armageddon's Planner.
The guts should not be seen, stones green as hopes
turned red at touch of air like clotted blood.
"These are my thoughts, which are not your thoughts," says God.

A NAKED TRUTH

Remember how in Oxford the past went on?
Deep and mighty works of Man survive,
an outflow breaking from its time, alive
on its own terms, into a future sun.
Viewed from a distance, the ages of the earth
march stately, masked by strata of man's work.
But here, the life, health, aging of the sphere
untouched, becomes uncomfortably clear,
revealed as a rapid downhill clatter to rubble.
The land is new and changing fast, the troubled
land is born and dies. See how it is born
unclothed, as yet infertile. I'd much rather
plot a book, than know how these my bones
shall turn to stones and flesh to land and water.

GOD AND SIR WILFRED GRENFELL

The famous savior of an obscure people,
preacher, doctor, public leader, made
a Savior in his image, to whose trade
as Blessed Carpenter he raised his steeple.

So, the playing fields of England beat
from somewhat unsuccessful youth, complete
and self-made fin-de-siecle Superman,
adventurer in quest of roomy land
to hold his grand ambitions, New Found Land.

He gave to it a hospital and schools,
an orphanage, a co-op to displace
the Company's oppression, built a base
of volunteers from around the world. No tool
of a Victorian God could turn his hand
to more, his match to this hard place unique.

Always to him the sinful were the silly –
shiftless slackers fuelled by flower power.
He preached a God who in his famous hour
made doors and windows fit without a squeak.
Not for him the Lord who considered lilies.

THE ENDURING UNPOPULARITY OF LADY GRENFELL

I

Was it the Doctor or his wealthy bride
who made the wedding wait upon the mansion
in this plain land of calloused helping hands and
grateful survivors, self-taught and self-made?

A fundraising tour gave rise to the storybook
romance on shipboard. He always told the truth:
without her, the Grenfell Project would have failed.
For her part, when she took the wedding veil,

she put on her husband's ambition like a habit,
labored in his works, served hosts of guests
and wrote his thirty books at his request.
Push a button at the Centre, learn

her housework suffered, the official word
on her achievement, mean and British-ish.

II

At once too strange and too conventional,
her great mistake – lacking his chances to be
one of the boys, with sailors braving the Sea
of Labrador – was to fail to be one of the girls.

His rise to greatness was grounded on the downtrod,
so he lived their lives and swam and fished
and preached their earthy fundamental wish
for betterment, and they floated his vast imago.

But she imported the ante-bellum way
of her father's South and farmed her babies out
for feeding, made servants of her neighbors, flouting
large-hearted customs of those whose liberty
depended upon the sharing of what they had.
It all went to show that they had nothing to add.

GOOD MEN DON'T MAKE FOR GOOD SAGAS (Viking camp, St. Anthony, NF)

Happy the land	Where planting and judgment
Ripen in quiet,	Mind-sown order.
Ever is tragedy,	Death, unintended –
Loss of crops,	Fall of children.
No great name	Tramps the page.
So old Iceland,	Holding all equal,
Cast out its killers.	The outlaw Grettir
Circles his country	From cave to cave,

Forever neither	There nor gone,
Peripheral figure	To shore and water,
Inner, outer,	Self and other.
The banished Erics,	Red with man-blood,
On the edge,	Less map and compass,
Cling to the North	Atlantic rim.

OUTPOST

I

An outpost was built from selves, self-made, not heir
to Roman invaders, despoiling for Fatherland.
The cast-offs of an age, like Rome that bid
self-sacrifice to Empire, just jumped ship
or somehow washed up on their destiny
to live by one law: help one another or die.
For the first time owners, they put on the place they
mastered like a garment, and it became them.
What one could do raised up the self reborn,
the carpenter he who best could tease a home
or stroke a boat from the poverty of the grove.
Fishermen were essential, and a healer.
One might be called to preach or serve as teacher,
or mother of many and founder of her people.

II

For us, the Good Life makes of virtue a past-
time. We are parallel climbers, not a web,
striving to an artificial end
and stranded each alone in a terrible waste.
Those who before were kept in their place, by binding
together made by hand a place for them.
You would stake your life like them for the dream,
all risk and hardship worth it, of your finding
like the wished-for gem in the stony stream –
Your Genius! the resounding village name,
the valued character you were meant to be,
your simple actions future legends, fame
spreading through the woods and over water
and down the generations as forever.

A REAL PLACE

I
(somewhere near Bar Harbor, Maine)

Difficult and uncertain to find True Land:
perhaps that barren, strewn with boulders, can
be saved for a time, or that erratic the size
of a barn's too hard to crush and truck for the price.

These woods are grown-back farmland, the farmers gone
to pre-fabs out on the public highway, past
our Keep Out signs -- now gardeners, cleaners, nans --
displaced like the earth and stones the ice laid down.

And we are the homeless, lost in paradise,
on a loneliness of roads, private, leading
each to a costly prison, sweet, contrived,
architect-designed, and nothing-meaning.

Clowns and jokers all, like Falstaff, lying
in a slum, we'll "babble of green field," dying.

CODA: When we must say goodbye at last,
 no bulldozed and replanted tracts
 will live so lovely in the mind
 as that lost land we strove to leave behind.

II
(NF and Labrador)

This landscape has defended itself;
no former empires worked the land.
It is unworkable, hard strand
between the sea and deep-walled shelf

of vast interior tableland.
At intervals were struck from the ledge,
by a hard life rubbing on the edge,
the tiny outposts that still stand

like lights that guide to the spirit's frontier
where public and private blend without strife
and the place and the people are there as one,
white in the North like the frost rings of stone.
It was an artist who cried out in tears,
"Goodbye to Greenland as if to life!"

IMPLIED WEATHER

The silence of the long way North tells stories,
signs and symbols of life along the road
in cottages hauled on shingle beside their dories.
Drying teepees of stunted spruce encode
the coming winter where no hardwoods grow,
a family's name on each precious tower of fuel.
The imported gravel of the roadbed does dual
service as garden soil in which to sow
food in this barren land, the root crops that keep.
Tall saplings are lashed to useless four foot posts
provided by a far-off State to mark
the road in snow to ten feet, twenty, deep.
But for now, the summer sun along these coasts
shines merrily on each tidy potato park
and pretty pygmy spruce trees pasted down
by an absent wind against the roadcut's crown.

A TENT IN LABRADOR

With just a modicum of help from Bean
and the Province, the tent is up in Labrador.
I had a good night, cozy in a storm,
lulled by thundering surf not far from Green-
land. I rose and washed in it. The undertow
threw me over and rinsed me well, and I shared
with my giggles in its roars of laughter, dared –
this place in eyes and ears and all over – to know
what creatures must learn: what a place will truly require.
And we, the alien race, would rather be
anything but helpless. Alone in the wild,
still searching the globe for our spirits' home, we see
we must be one with the world around us to find
engagement with its meaning and peace of mind.

The Labrador is a spirit world, stripped
of flesh and trappings, polar in its extremes,
a place as it was made. And so it seems

to stand in praise of sacred authorship.
Is its essence visible by our inner light
(as some have held that poetry beats with the pulse),
or is there some racial memory history slights
of a Stone Age disagreeable to monks
and so unpreserved? I have no Roman past,
so putting away society and culture,
I listen with an ancient disused sense for
ancestral voices and drink of iceberg water.
With this communion, I feel on my tongue at last
air breathed back thousands of years, burst free and re-enter.

THE WIND IN WRECKHOUSE

Across the two-lane road drives a special wind
this place makes just for highways, the kind of wind
that happens when opposing forces meet:
steadily pressing ever more, it repeats
“*OUT -- OUT!*” Nowhere to go between
the sea and the moor in Wreckhouse, the only road
a deathtrap as wind tops a hundred fifty. Routine-
ly the station warns: seek shelter, stay off the road,
its voice a modern stand-in for native foresight.
Amundsen learned from the folk what he needed to know:
snow houses warmed by body heat and a forthright
little boat that skipped among the floes.
The others before him had died by battering at
the weather with battalions. Their juggernaut
assaulted -- and fell still in the crushing ice,
where only love would do, the love of place.

END OF NEWFOUNDLAND SUITE