

MICHAEL PACEY  
**PROVINCIAL**

Backedup backwater  
bumfuck newbrunswick  
backdoor to the front-  
ier (Upper C's  
treasure-chest);  
upside hills and backwash  
waterfalls.  
Nova Scotia's ugly sister.  
And daughter (family  
compacted: isthmus umbilicus).  
Ass backwards ripped  
from her ribs.

But n.b. (note well):  
her emerald body  
    (all pockets and  
        soft peaks).

Once one rose in the house  
and said, Let's call her New  
Ireland, for side by side  
in Pangaea, before the continents  
were torn apart  
(pair packed in peat)  
cheek by cheek.

"No," the call came back.  
We'll honour the German home  
of England's Queen.  
(Not, let's say, *White Pineland*  
for here the great ghosts

gone as masts in her fleet;  
or *Schoonera*, for here the cradle  
that vanquished France.)  
“No,” the call came back.  
Then some wag said,  
“Let’s put a Spanish galleon on  
the flag.”

## SPIRIT LEVELS

are best approached obliquely.  
Like oracles.

To enter that free-floating, evenly-  
suspended state required in fine  
carpentry, pause for a moment ...  
staring blankly at a level  
balanced in your hands.

Peer into its vials of colored alcohol  
(inventor Thevenot  
preferred a good red) until  
its irises, two gulps of air,  
see eye to eye inside,  
resting on tiny horizons.

Squint. Tilt your head. And  
hope  
for the best. Truth  
is like a hammer.  
A level is more like hope.

## READING SHAKESPEARE

We learned to read each scene, set  
on a bare wooden stage, in school;  
at night I'd add inner geography,  
each assigned page would unfold  
in the woods where I used to play.

Even now, gathering fiddleheads,  
walking the dog by the river,  
recognize the spot where Ophelia drowns  
in her stream; witches sit  
in the old graveyard, cooking up stew.  
Turn to the ordinary Saint John, see instead,  
Cleopatra's barge burn on the waters,  
Prospero abandon ship.

Reading Shakespeare, all the scenes filmed  
in deft locations here by the river, as if  
scouted in advance. And watching the action,  
I see superimposed, the ground down here  
from two or three feet in the air, just hovering;  
see the earth and grass and wildflowers,  
close-up, and somehow *lyrically*.

Unaware, I chose this spot, and not  
surprisingly: because of its history,  
this is where the town's founders spent  
their first cruel winter—many lie buried  
on the knoll I use in Hamlet's opening act.  
And because they were Loyalists, loyal  
to England's queen.  
So this is Shakespeare's place, for me:  
a small wild place, set off on its own,  
compact, varied; a place impossibly  
green.