

MY FATHER DRIVES ME TO AMHERST

by Bill Tremblay

He knew the poet recited a verse
at the inauguration, but wants to know
how much he got paid. Or was it,
like every time a working stiff gets screwed,
pour l'honneur? This from a man who dreamed
of getting rich betting on horses. I try to
explain what I think my job is: to listen for
the names of the living who pass time and put
them with the families to whom they belong.
You think you can live on what you imagine?
he asks as he navigates the winding road
between West Brookfield and Ware. I sit
beside him like a one-legged sparrow.
Beyond the next hill I imagine a secret place
where he can never die. At last we enter
the campus. I slip into the back row
and hear the poet brush off his critics
like snow clumps fallen on his shoulder.
A death wish, he chuckles. He doesn't count
the years of ice, the bitten prayers, candles
snuffed at dawn, the sudden blood of wayward
saw-blades, blizzards of crumpled paper filling
his kitchen waste-basket. Another day is
dawning, so dazzling our red eyes will sing.
My father stands outside smoking Pall Malls,
reading horses' names in *The Racing Form*.
I listen to an old man sing about a strange

brook with rocks that fling white water
back to the source of everything.