

Aboard the *Redoubt*, October, 179_

Thirteen bells of this fog and still no end to it,
Though the evening air is upon us.
We can but guess our position;
Accuracy lies only in the imagination.
Things fail, humans err, all ships sink,
Or lie forgotten in obscure anchorages,
Rotting timbers broken by tides and time.

“Say gull, what news?”

If the crew could have known the possibilities
Would they have signed on?
Their passage is difficult enough,
A Master cannot express doubt, must maintain
A certainty his crew’s labour suffers some gain.
Mist condenses everywhere, damp tiller, beards
Carry beads of the sea – some order is necessary

“Heave Her to, Mr. MacKenzie.”

In the doldrums: clear horizon,
Bare steerage, the men pulling Her by oar,
Blisters, faintness, some talk
Of madness then. But, when the wind came up
From the West, the cry they gave!
Extra tots all round that night, no thought
Of land, or the hope of land, that night.

“Oh, for some breeze to clear this air..”

The need is for movement, forwardness;
Some illusion of gain provides all recompense.
Aye, some shore is there, to starboard, somewhere,
And men of wisdom or demon's lairs?
The Mate reports yestereve the bos'un swears
He heard a voice: "Twas Charon's shout,
From the far side of Styx, no doubt."
I instructed him to belay such talk,
We've no need of such superstitions here.
Yet, it's always there, nagging.

Since the *Griffin* went down
We ourselves have become ghostly,
Lack corroboration of our existence on this sea;
We could be Dutchmen for the silence.
I swear the young Skipper aboard the *Griffin*
Lacked inspiration; royally trained and appointed,
He had no suspicions, and twenty-three men
In all and all . . .

"By Christ some air –
Harden the sheets, helm alee!"

This ship has purpose, now.
We'll bring Her downwind to a destination.
No matter the position cannot be fixed with certainty,
It is the limits of intelligibility
I seek.