

C. Day Lewis

The Voyage

Translated from Baudelaire

Children, in love with maps and gravings, know
A universe the size of all they lack.
How big the world is by their lamps' clear glow!
But ah, how small to memory looking back!

One morning we set out, our heads on fire,
Our yearning hearts sulky with sour unease,
Following the waves' rhythm, nursing our desire
For the unbounded on those earth-bound seas.

Some glad to leave an infamous birthplace: some
To escape the cradle's nightmare; and a few—
Star-gazers drowned in a woman's eyes—it's from
The scent and power of Circe that they flew.

Not to be changed to beasts, they drug their minds
With space and the large light and burning sky:
The ice that bites them and the suns that bronze
Efface the scar of kisses gradually.

But the true travellers are those who go
For going's sake: hearts light as a balloon,
They never slip their fate: why it is so
They cannot tell, but the word is "Fare on!"

With longings shaped like naked girls, they dream—
As a recruit of gunfire—there impend
Huge pleasures, changeful and untried, whose fame
Is past the wit of man to comprehend.

II

God, that we should behave like top and ball
Bouncing and twirling! Even in our sleep
The Unknown we seek gives us no rest at all,
Like suns tormented by an Angel's whip.

Strange game, whose goal is always on the move
And being nowhere, may be any place;
And Man, whose hope no setbacks will disprove,
Keeps running madly just to catch repose.

The soul is a three-master, Ithaka-bound.
"Keep your eyes skinned!" a sea voice will implore;
From the maintop a keen, mad voice resound
"Love . . . glory . . . luck!" Oh hell, we've run ashore!

The Voyage

9

Each little isle hailed by the look-out man
Is the Promised Land, golden beyond belief:
Such revels he imagines, but he'll scan
By the cold light of dawn only a reef.

Fairytales lands—that they should craze him so!
Clap him in irons? Pitch him overboard?—
This bold Columbus, drunken matelot,
Whose mirage makes our sea more hard to abide.

So the old tramp goes pounding through the shit
And, nose in air, dreams up a paradise;
The meanest shanties where a candle's lit
Are Pleasure-Domes to his enchanted eyes.

III

Amazing voyagers, what splendid tales
Your sea-deep eyes have printed on them. Rare
The jewel caskets of your chronicles:
Show us those gems, fashioned from stars and air.

We'd voyage, but we have no sail or screw.
Liven our souls, that would be canvas-taut.
Breathe your horizon memories, view on view,
Over the boredom of our prisoned thought.

Tell us, what have you seen?

IV

We've seen some stars,
Some waves; and we have met with sand-banks too:
For all the uncharted hazards and the jars
We suffered, we were often bored, like you.

Splendour of sunlight on a violet sea,
Splendour of townships in the setting sun
Kindled in us a burning wish to be
Deep in a sky whose mirror lured us on.

Rich towns and landscapes lovely to the gaze
Had never the mysterious appeal
Of those that chance created out of haze
And our impassioned wanting made so real.

Enjoying gives desire more potency—
Desire that feeds on pleasure: the bark grows
Thicker and tougher on the ageing tree,
But its boughs strain to see the sun more close.

Will you be growing still, great tree, who soared
Higher than cypress? . . . Well, since you rejoice
To swallow anything far-fetched, we've worked hard
And brought these sketches for your album, boys.

There we have greeted trumpeting effigies,
Thrones of star-clustered gems dazzling to view,
Palaces wrought by fairy artifice—
Dreams that would bankrupt millionaires like you;

Dresses which stagger you like drunkenness,
 Women with nails and teeth vermilion-stained,
 Magicians conjuring a snake's caress.

V

Yes, yes! Go on! And then?

VI

You baby-brained!

Lest we should miss the great, the unique thing,
 Ubiquitous and unconcealed we've seen
 On the predestined ladder's every rung
 The tedious sight of Man's inveterate sin:

Woman, bitch slave, stupid and overweening,
 Vain without humour, and without disgust
 Self-loving; man, slave to a slave, a stream in
 A sewer, all grab and foulness, greed, power, lust:

The thug who loves his work, the sobbing martyr,
 The feast that seasons and perfumes the blood;
 The prince whom power corrupts into self-murder,
 The mob who kiss the brutalising rod:

Several religions, just like our own following,
 Bulldoze their path to heaven; the austere,
 While dissolute types on feather beds are wallowing,
 Gratify their own taste with nails and hair:

Gabbling mankind, drunk on its own nature
 And mad today as in all previous years,
 Raving with agony bawls to its Maker
 "My lord, oh my twin-brother, it's you I curse!"

And the least mad, tough lovers of Alienation,
 Fleeing the herd whom fate has corralled in,
 Take refuge with a limitless Illusion . . .
 Such is our globe's unchanging bulletin.

VII

Acid the knowledge travellers draw. The world,
 Little and dull, today, tomorrow and
 Tomorrow makes you see yourself—an appalled
 Oasis in a tedium of sand.

Should we then go, or stay? If you can, stay:
 Go, if you must. One races: one shams death
 To cheat the watchful enemy of his prey.
 Some runners Time allows no pause for breath—

The wandering Jew, the apostles, who can neither
 Escape this gladiator and his net
 By ship nor car nor any means: another
 Can kill Time without stirring from his cot.

And when He sets his foot upon our spine
 At last, we shall cry hopefully "Let's be going!"
 Just as in old days when we left for China,
 Eyes fixed on distances and our hair blowing,

We shall embark upon the sea of Shade,
Light-hearted as a young enthusiast.
Now do you hear those voices, sweet and sad,
Singing, "This way, all you who want to taste

The fragrant lotus! Here we shall let you savour
Those miracle fruits, for which your souls were famished:
Come and transport yourselves with the strange flavour
Of a long afternoon that's never finished"?

What's turned unreal, we know from its hackneyed tone.
Dear friends stretch out their arms; and "Swim this way,
Take new life from my loyal heart," cries one
Whose knees we kissed—but that was yesterday.

VIII

Old Captain Death, it's time to go. We're sick
Of this place. Weigh anchor! Set the course, and steer!
Maybe the sky and sea are inky black,
But in our hearts—you know them—all is clear.

Pour us the cordial that kills and cheers.
We wish, for our whole beings burn and burn,
To sound the abyss—heaven or hell, who cares?—
And find the secret wombed in the Unknown.

Richard G. Stern

Teeth

"In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a phrenzied desire."
POE, *Berenice*

AH, MISS WILMOTT, how did you come to think what you did? Is all your interpreting so askew, so deformed by self-interest? And is your self-interest so unbroken a pup that any street whistle seems its master's voice? To think that you were misled as wisdom itself was being certified in your aching jaws? Those third molars, so long held back, and then so painfully emergent, fangs and cusps clinging savagely to the gum flesh. "Impacted," said Dr. Hobbie, and despite the kind, soft-beaked, confident face behind the metal glasses, you shuddered. You remembered the last one, also impacted, eight months before, also in the Bank Building, though two flights up on the ninth floor in a large office afloat in the strawberry light off the lake. Dr. Grant, the extractionist, Miss Blade's recommendation, a strong fellow with white moustache and a post on the Executive Council of the American Dental Association, just back from a downtown committee meeting to have a go at your trouble. A lovely May day, the creamy air swimming over the IC tracks, enough to make you forget the pain, until Dr. Grant, eyes asweat under his speckled horn rims, leaned over your open mouth and blocked out the view. And then, the tugging, the hammering, the cracking, chiselling, wrestling, blood squirting into the cotton gagging your mouth, blood dripping past it down your throat, your heart pumping, your great

brow streaming, your wet palm grabbed tight by the fierce little nurse, Miss Romeyne. Afterwards, on the couch, another blow, Dr. Grant sitting beside you, your long legs dripping feet over the edge, hand to your swelling jaw. "How does a hundred dollars sound, Miss Wilmott? Pretty fair? Including post-operant care, anæsthesia, the works. I know you're a teacher."

The pain lasted twelve days, unabated by Miss Blade's late revelation that she had been charged a hundred and twenty-five dollars. For this omission, Miss Blade would not get to know about Dr. Hobbie. Not that she'd appreciate him anyway. Miss Blade favoured all the weak sisters in the department, the students with the loudest line of gab and the worst minds who took so long with their dissertations that they completed them and their scholarly life simultaneously.

Miss Wilmott learned of Dr. Hobbie through her once-a-week cleaning woman, Mrs. Spiders, whom she passed in the lobby of the Bank as she was on her way to request it to honour Dr. Grant's hundred dollars, although her balance was zero until the first of June. Mrs. Spiders was on her way to Dr. Hobbie. "Yeah, Miss Wilma, mah Hobbie's a grand tooth man." Mrs. Spiders' syntax obscured identification, but she spoke of him now and then throughout the year, so that when Miss Wilmott's second tooth began cracking her head open the night after Epiphany, the vision of the great dental surgeon soothed it till morning, when she phoned him up and got a noon appointment. Dr. Hobbie was seldom too busy to squeeze