

From TRAVELLIT

1

think about a frozen outpost,
people with burdensome exile,
entrenched hierarchy, petty
pecking order

an office-seeker
inadequate for more
than commentary,

trade route, impatience for gold,
for annihilating control

not a cordial Somewhere
to express (dare I say it?)
one's intellectual gifts

anchor-buttons
officers wear,
envy of all

never thought to ask
distance to be covered:
well up from outer regions,
blood-enriched gods

tribute given
tribute taken

no puzzle about
meaning:
round stone
flat stone

trouble under tongue
accidental sounds
 (extra stuff,
rest . . .)
amongst destinations,
destiny
 stint
no babble
for diplomat,
 but compilation

standard weights and
measures

one nation, central;
other, a minor phrase
near sea serpents
which corner the map

“ . . . It is strange, too, that he most strongly enlisted my feelings in behalf of the life of a seaman, when he depicted his more terrible moments of suffering and despair. For the bright side of the painting I had a limited sympathy. My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires—for they amounted to desires—are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men—at the time of which I speak I regarded them only as prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfill.”

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, Edgar Allan Poe

literacy driving an expedition,
graduated details of coastline
and passage
—found frozen a century
and a half later

Terror

messages left
in stone cairns
for search parties

captain's log:
ponderous prose,
euphemistic observations,
desirous:
reception as serious, aristocratic,
scientific, flat

travel literature:
things there?
or provincial Self?

travel, as leisure and
pleasure, comes after
exploratory work,
after literacy,
after adventure,
after itinerancy,
after food-gathering

kept a close watch
a journal
the change

bits of seahorse

sea legs and weightlessness

point of origin (theorized
segment)
summer fruit or land
crossing
bundle or baggage
of amniotic water

a naming
to cease
investigation

they will decide

no going back
on broken shell,
cinder afloat
over roof
notoriety,
note struck
hammered steel

filling out the map,
book of records

a monopoly on samples
programmed for unity
(or trinity)

botanical sketches
and of “natives”

select most typical
beautiful
sizeable

fragments of shell
do not an egg make?

unduly

could come home
in a blaze of glory

first sailed into Admiralty Bay
on a wind-swept day
in late November 1819 (or 1989)
and made a landing
deep in the interior . . .

time to measure
glacial movement

from a shoal
of conventional prompts

lower boat from anchorage,
wend way to
 tie it off

level transit
on fixed plane:
an impossible
academic frame

based on this story,
decisions are made

measure extinct volcano

national interest
in polar “research”

“Polar exploration is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has been devised . . .”

Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World*

skeleton in stern of dory
men and dogs pull sleds

barely held together
with language

charged with uncovering
the disaster, construe

boatmen haul the vessel
by rope, often working
all day in wet clothes
at near freezing
temperatures
(barefoot)

use of Royal Society instruments
to float progress

“ . . . a conspicuous *lop-stick*, a kind of landmark . . . its use in pointing out the frequented routes. It is a pine-tree divested of its lower branches, and having only a small tuft at the top remaining. This operation is usually performed at the instance of some individual emulous of fame. He treats his companions with rum, and they in return, strip the tree of its branches, and ever after designate it by his name.”

The Adventures of Sir John Franklin by Sir John Franklin,
1859

century and a half later:
ice-strengthened hull
painted red to distinguish it
from ice floes

whistles and bells
to mark each watch
replaced by telephones

bronze to copper again.

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