

Álvaro de Campos

## NAVAL ODE

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Alone, on the deserted quay, this summer morning,  
I look towards the bar, I look towards the Indefinite,  
I look and find pleasure in seeing,  
Little, black and clear, a steamer coming in.  
It is very far yet, distinct and classic after its own fashion.  
It leaves on the distant air behind it the vain curls of its smoke.  
It is coming in, and morn comes in with it, and on the river  
Here, there, naval life awakes,  
Sails arise, tugs advance,  
Small boats jut out from behind the ships in the port.  
There is a vague breeze.  
But my soul is with the things that I see least,  
With the in-coming steamer,  
Because it is with Distance, with Morn,  
With the naval meaning of this Hour,  
With the painful softness that rises in me like a qualm,  
Like a beginning of sea-sickness, but in my soul.

I look from afar at the steamer, with a great independence of mind  
And a whell begins to spin in me, very slowly.

The steamers that enter the bar in the morning,  
Bring to my eyes with their coming  
The glad and sad mystery of all who arrive and depart.  
They bring memories of distant quays, and of other moments  
Of another kind of the same mankind in other ports.  
Every (...), every departure of a ship,  
Is — I feel it in me like my blood —  
Unconsciously symbolic, terribly

Threatening metaphysical meanings  
That startle in me the being I once . . .

Ah, every quay is a regret made of stone!  
And when the ship leaves the quay  
And we note suddenly that a space is widening  
Between the quay and the ship,  
There comes to me, I know not why, a recent anguish,  
A mist of feelings of sadness  
That shines in the sun of my mosy anguishes  
Like the first window the morning strikes on,  
And clings round me like some one else's remembrance  
Which is somehow mysteriously mine.

Ah, who knows, who knows,  
If I did not leave long ago, before Myself,  
A quay; if I did not depart, a ship in  
The oblique sun of morning,  
From another kind of port?  
Who knows if I did not leave, before the hour  
Of the exterior world as I see it  
Dawned for me,  
A large quay full of few people,  
Of a great half-awakened city,  
Of a great city commercial, overgrown, apopletical,  
As much as that can be outside Time and Space?

Ay, from a quay, from a quay somehow material,  
Real, visible as a quay, really a quay,  
The Absolute Quay on whose type, unconsciously imitated,  
Insensibly evoked,

We men have built  
Our quays in our harbours,  
Our quays, of actual stone overlooking true water,  
Which, once built, suddenly show themselves to be  
Real-Things, Things-Spirits, Entities in Stone-Souls,

At certain moments of ours of root-sentiments  
When it seems that a door is opened in the outer world  
And, without anything changing  
Everything reveals itself to be different.

Ah, the Great Quay whence we embarked in Ship-Nations!  
The Great Earlier Quay, eternal and divine!  
Of what port? Over what waters? And why do I think of this?  
A Great Quay like all other quays, but the Only One.  
Full, as they are, of murmurous silences in the fore-dawns  
And budding with the dawns in a noise of cranes  
And arrivals of goods-trains  
And under the black, occasional and light cloud  
Of the smoke of the chimneys of the near factories  
Which clouds its ground, black with small shining coal,  
As if it were the shadow of a cloud passing over dark water.

Ah, what essentiality of mystery and arrested senses  
In a divine revealing ecstasy  
At the hours coloured like silences and anguishes  
Is the bridge between any quay and THE QUAY!

Quay blackly reflected in the still waters,  
Saddle [?] on board the ships,  
Oh wandering and unstable soul of the people who live in ships,  
Of the symbolic people who pass and for whom, nothing lasts  
For when the vessel returns to the port,  
There is always some change on board!

On continual flights, goings, drunkenness of the Different!  
Eternal soul of navigators and navigations!  
Hulls slowly reflected in the waters  
When the ship leaves the port!  
To float as soul of life, to depart as voice,  
To live the moment tremulously on eternal waters!  
To wake to more direct days than the days of Europe,  
To see mysterious ports over the loneliness of the sea,

To double distant capes and see sudden great landscapes  
Of unnumbered astonished alones!

Ah, the distant beaches, the quays seen from afar,  
And then the near beaches and the quays seen from near.  
The mystery of each departure and of each arrival,  
The painful instability and incomprehensibility  
Of this impossible universe  
At each naval hour ever more deeply felt right in my skin.  
The absurd sob that our souls spill  
Over the ever-different tracts of seas with islands afar,  
Over the distant lines of the coasts we merely pass by,  
Over the clear growing-clear of ports, with their houses and their people,  
When the ship nears the land.

Ah, the freshness of morns when we arrive,  
And the paleness of the morns when we depart,  
When our entrails are gripped up  
And a vague sensation resembling a fear  
— The ancestral fear of going away and leaving,  
The mysterious ancestral terror of Arrivals and New Things —  
Grips up our skin and gives us qualms  
And all our anguished body feels,  
As if it were our soul,  
An unexplained desire to feel this in some other way:  
A regret at something,  
A perturbation of tendernesses towards what vague fatherland?  
What coast? what ship? what quay?  
That thought sickens within us  
And only a great vacuum remains in us,  
A hollow satiety of naval minutes,  
And a vague anxiety that would be weariness or pain  
If it knew how to be that. . .

The summer morning is, nevertheless, slightly cool,  
A slight night-dullness lies yet on the shaken air.  
The wheel within me quickens its motion slightly.

And the steamer keeps on coming in, because surely it must coming in,  
And not because I see it moving in its excessive distance.

In my imagination it is already near and visible  
In all the extent of the lines of its portholes,  
And everything trembles in me, all my flesh and all my skin,  
On account of that creature that never arrives in any ship  
And whom I have come to await to-day on this quay, through an oblique  
command.

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