Rule, Britannia

James Thomson

When Britain first, at heaven's command,
Arose from out the azure main,
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sung this strain—
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves."

The nations, not so blest as thee,
Must in their turns to tyrants fall;
While thou shalt flourish great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves."

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
More dreadful from each foreign stroke;
As the loud blast that tears the skies
Serves but to root thy native oak.
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves."

Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame;
All their attempts to bend thee down,
Will but arouse thy generous flame,
But work their woe and thy renown.
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves."

To thee belongs the rural reign;
Thy cities shall with commerce shine;
All thine shall be the subject main,
And every shore it circles thine.
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves."

The Muses, still with freedom found,
Shall to thy happy coast repair:
Blest isle! with matchless beauty crowned,
And manly hearts to guard the fair.
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves."

from www.poetryfoundation.org
Source: The Longman Anthology of Poetry (2006)

Matthew Arnold

Dover Beach

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

from www.poetryfoundation.org

William Whiting

The Sailor's Hymn

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bid'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea.

O Christ, Whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at Thy word,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,
And calm amidst its rage didst sleep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea.

Most Holy Spirit, Who didst brood
Upon the chaos dark and rude,
And bid its angry tumult cease,
And give, for wild confusion, peace;
O hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

O Trinity of love and power,
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them wheresoe'er they go;
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

Amen.

from wikipedia

John Masefield

Sea Fever

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

From Salt-Water Poems And Ballads. New York: the Maxmillan Company, 1913, p. 55.
the poem was first published in Salt-Water Ballads, 1902.

Robert Frost

Neither Out Far Nor In Deep

The people along the sand
All turn and look one way.
They turn their back on the land.
They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass
A ship keeps raising its hull;
The wetter ground like glass
Reflects a standing gull.

Some say the land has more;
But wherever the truth may be —
The water comes ashore,
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?

from yalereview.org

Wallace Stevens

The Idea of Order at Key West

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
The water never formed to mind or voice,
Like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
The song and water were not medleyed sound
Even if what she sang was what she heard,
Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
It may be that in all her phrases stirred
The grinding water and the gasping wind;
But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone. But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
Of sky and sea.

[stanza break]

It was her voice that made
The sky acutest at its vanishing.
She measured to the hour its solitude.
She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
Why, when the singing ended and we turned
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

from www.poetryfoundation.org
from Collected Poems. New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
a division of Random House, Inc., 1990.

Stevie Smith

Not Waving But Drowning

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.

from www.poetryfoundation.org

Tony Hoagland

Voyage

I feel as if we opened a book about great ocean voyages
and found ourselves on a great ocean voyage:
sailing through December, around the horn of Christmas
and into the January Sea, and sailing on and on

in a novel without a moral but one in which
all the characters who died in the middle chapters
make the sunsets near the book's end more beautiful.

—And someone is spreading a map upon a table,
and someone is hanging a lantern from the stern,
and someone else says, "I'm only sorry
that I forgot my blue parka; It's turning cold."

Sunset like a burning wagon train
Sunrise like a dish of cantaloupe
Clouds like two armies clashing in the sky.
Icebergs and tropical storms.
That's the kind of thing that happens on our ocean voyage—

And in one of the chapters I was blinded by love
and in another, anger made us sick like swallowed glass
and I lay in my bunk and slept for so long,

I forgot about the ocean,
which all the while was going by, right there, outside my cabin window.

And the sides of the ship were green as money,
and the water made a sound like memory when we sailed.

Then it was summer. Under the constellation of the swan,
under the constellation of the horse.

At night we consoled ourselves
by discussing the meaning of homesickness.
But there was no home to go home to.
There was no getting around the ocean.
We had to go on finding out the story
by pushing into it—

The sea was no longer a metaphor.
The book was no longer a book.
That was the plot.
That was our marvelous punishment.

from Unincorporated Persons In the Late Honda Dynasty. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2010.

Mary Oliver

The Poet Compares Human Nature To The Ocean From Which We Came

The sea can do craziness, it can do smooth,
it can lie down like silk breathing
or toss havoc shoreward; it can give

gifts or withhold all; it can rise, ebb, froth
like an incoming frenzy of fountains, or it can
sweet-talk entirely. As I can too,

and so, no doubt, can you, and you.

from A Thousand Mornings. New York: The Penguin Press, 2012.