

JOURNEY TO ICELAND

AND THE traveller hopes: let me be far from any
Physician. And the ports have names for the sea,
The citiless, thee corroding, the sorrow.
And North means to all Reject.

And the great plains are forever where the cold fish is hunted,
And everywhere. The light birds flicker and flaunt.
Under a scolding flag the lover
Of islands may see at last,

Faintly, his limited hope; and he nears the glitter
Of glaciers, the sterile immature mountains,
In the abnormal day of this world, and a river's
Fan-like polyp of sand.

Then let the good citizen here find marvels of nature:
The horse-shoe ravine, the issue of steam from a cleft
In the rock, and rocks, and waterfalls brushing the
Rocks, and among the rocks birds.

And the student of prose and conduct places to visit:
The site of the church where a bishop was put in a bog,
The bath of a great historian, the rock where an
Outlaw dreaded the dark.

Remember the doomed man thrown by his horse and crying
"Beautiful is the hill-side; I will not go":
The old woman confessing: "He that I loved the
Best, to him I was worst."

For Europe is absent. This is an island and therefore
Unreal. And the steadfast affections of its dead can be bought
By those whose dreams accuse them of being
Spitefully alive. And the pale

From too much passion of kissing feel pure in its deserts.
Can they? For the world is, and the present, and the lie.

And the narrow bridge over the torrent, and the
Small farm under the Crag
Are the natural setting for the jealousies of a province;
And the weak vow of fidelity is formed by the cairn:
And within the indigenous figure on horseback
On the bridle-path down by the lake

The blood moves also by crooked and furtive inches
Asks all your questions: "Where is the homage? When
Shall justice be done? O who is against me?
Why am I always alone?"

Present then the world to the world with its mendicant
Shadow:

Let the suits be flash, the minister of commerce insane:
Let jazz be bestowed on the huts, and the beauty's
Set cosmopolitan smile.

For our time has no favourite suburb. No local features
Are those of the young for whom all wish to care;
The promise is only a promise, the fabulous
Country impartially far.

Tears fall in all the rivers. Again the driver
Pulls on his gloves and in a blinding snowstorm starts
On his deadly journey, and again the writer
Runs howling to his art.

O who can ever praise enough
The world of his belief?
Harum-scarum childhood plays
In the meadows near his home,
In his woods Love knows no wrong,
Travellers ride their placid ways,
In the cool shade of the tomb
Age's trusting footfalls ring.
O who can paint the vivid tree
And grass of phantasy

But to create it and to guard
Shall be his whole reward.
He shall watch and he shall weep,
All his father's love deny,
To his mother's womb be lost,
Eight nights with a wanton sleep,

But upon the ninth shall be
Bride and victim to a ghost,
And in the pit of terror thrown
Shall bear the wrath alone.

W .H. Auden