

## Voyage

*At night I wake up with my sheets soaking wet.*

—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

The banditos of the inner region would take not only your money but, with little provocation, your throat—their dogs were said to love that tender delicacy especially. Other menaces that Darwin met with equal calm were from the land itself: volcano; earthquake; and the jaguar's swipe will tear a man open as easily as an envelope. Those dicey moments shrivel up and blow away in the gale force of his zeals: "I am today red-hot with spiders, they are so interesting!" A loveliness is everywhere: "The haze became a most beautiful pale French gray." And the Earth, of course, was just beginning to open herself for him: *here*, like a lover, *here*, and he could look inside, down geologic forces unimaginable. And so we're always a little surprised, remembering that the background for these five years of adventure was—this, from a letter—"one continual puke." His correspondence home provides us with a face for his heroics that the published versions turn aside: "I hate every wave of the ocean with a fervour, which you who have only seen the green waters of the beach can never understand. I loathe, I abhor the sea and all ships which sail it"—then upgorged, for a vivid proof, all over the brass and mahogany. This display from someone who could stomach "the disgusting black bugs of the Pampas, about an inch long, crawling over my skin, and in the act of sucking they changed from as flat as a wafer to globular." "So curious," he called the experience. Something in his ocean-going frailty, then, is heartening as I picture him

with my friends in their various sleeplessness:  
Serena, my student, zero insurance, the lover-father  
long absconded and Donnie, nine, "a call from his school,"  
in a corner with one arm's belly slit like a fish,  
"he'd used *my* razor he stole," his hug around her leaving  
a high-tide line of his own red misery on her skirt,  
or Ron from one block up, "was just an annual physical" and  
so what, please, was this tiny squid-thing doing inside  
his X-ray with its tentacles squirming greedily around  
the gray-tone shoals, "and now we're waiting to hear," and now  
let these two stand for every one of us awake  
all night in a private hell on Her Majesty's Ship *Insomnia*  
until we simply surrender and let the sickness  
at the pit of us be the entirety of us. All night

—a voyage. And when the bed has reached  
the shore of another morning, that's when I often see him  
holding to the rail, somewhat weak—a little  
porridgey in the face, if you want to know the truth—  
but already deeply inhaling something amazing  
from the horizon. He says: Get up, go out.  
Go out and see what's new today with the species.