

# Strange Comforts: bricolage for a young Malcolm Lowry

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*David Large*

The 'monstrous' spectre of undue influence on the creative act can easily overshadow the appeal of working from a model, or re-presenting aspects of an older text in a new light. Malcolm Lowry admitted in a letter to Nordahl Grieg that much of his first novel *Ultramarine* was "paraphrase, plagiarism or pastiche" from Grieg's *Skibet Gaar Videre* [*The Ship Sails On*]. The tendency to rely on his "pelagarist pen" haunted Lowry, who seemed nonetheless to consider the act of reading a text equivalent to being granted permission to create a free translation of its contents.

This bricolage is compiled from snippets of various donor texts, including Conrad Aiken's *Blue Voyage*, Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" as read by Herman Melville, Lowry's letters, poetry and novels, as well as newspaper articles about his schoolboy voyage on board the S.S. Pyrrhus. Beyond fitting the phrases to (irregular) pentameter, I have changed very little from their original presentation. Enacting a similar series of appropriations to Lowry's apparent mode of creation provokes, I feel, an accompanying sense of unease.

Roll on, you witless dark-brown ocean, roll,  
As Malcolm, chipping at the red lead, sighs.  
Another drink to soothe the Aiken soul  
and set to calm the sullen roiling skies.

A pair of ragged clauses scuttling, fade  
between two silent dark parentheses.

Father, I take no joy from being Ley'd –  
There can be no silk-cushion life for me.

The blackening sea tips a weary wave,  
unroots autochthony, but I digress.  
There is no safe port for young poets save  
the mortuary of the *TLS*.

Sleepless Caligula, troubled by dreams

For ten years has been writing a novel, which no one has seen.

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