

NORTHWEST PASSAGE

For centuries explorers dreamed of it: a route
from Europe to the far East, elusive passage

from Atlantic to Pacific. I speak of desire,
a river running through the imagination,

a shortcut over the top of the world.
For these expeditions Victorians invented

the Boat-Cloak: an inflatable dinghy
that doubled as a jacket, moved by

a sail that was also an umbrella.
Sir John Franklin's ships were named

Erebus and Terror and they disappeared
looking for it: 128 men, two thousand books,

five tons of chocolate. Sometimes I imagine
Lewis and Clark searching for that ladder

of myths, Henry Hudson cast adrift
by a mutinous crew. I think of icebergs

as tall as night rising from a violent,
black sea, and the eerie music

they made rubbing against one another,
screams and groans: a Siren song.