Lord Nelson's Brandy

Nelson's corpse was casked in brandy, myrrh
And camphor for the seven days the *Victory*
Struggled lamely on towards Gibraltar.

Once there and stowed in spirits of wine,
In a lead-lined coffin for the journey home,
Sailors sampled brandy from that cask,

From that malarial and scurvie spa,
Their idolatry a devotion sparked
With devilry. I think of them, those tars

Who had survived the pulverising blood
And wood strewn seas off Cape Trafalgar.
Though they've long ago gone down with their ships

A health to each and every man, and two
To those whose bold show of perversity
Brings tartly back an old world rude as paint.