

W. M. Thackeray (1811-63)

1 *The Ballad of Bouillabaisse*

A street there is in Paris famous,  
For which no rhyme our language yields,  
Rue Neuve des Petits Champs its name is —  
The New Street of the Little Fields.  
And here's an inn, not rich and splendid, 5  
But still in comfortable case;  
The which in youth I oft attended,  
To eat a bowl of Bouillabaisse.

This Bouillabaisse a noble dish is —  
A sort of soup or broth, or brew, 10  
Or hotchpotch of all sorts of fishes,  
That Greenwich never could outdo:  
Green herbs, red peppers, mussels, saffron,  
Soles, onions, garlic, roach, and dace:  
All these you eat at TERRÉ's tavern 15  
In that one dish of Bouillabaisse.

Indeed, a rich and savoury stew 'tis;  
And true philosophers, methinks,  
Who love all sorts of natural beauties,  
Should love good victuals and good drinks. 20  
And Cordelier or Benedictine  
Might gladly, sure, his lot embrace,  
Nor find a fast-day too afflicting,  
Which served him up a Bouillabaisse.

I wonder if the house still there is? 25  
Yes, here the lamp is, as before;  
The smiling red-cheeked *écaillère* is  
Still opening oysters at the door.  
Is TERRÉ still alive and able?  
I recollect his droll grimace: 30  
He'd come and smile before your table,  
And hope you liked your Bouillabaisse.

We enter — nothing's changed or older.  
 "How's Monsieur TERRÉ, waiter, pray?"  
 The waiter stares, and shrugs his shoulder — 35  
 "Monsieur is dead this many a day."  
 "It is the lot of saint and sinner,  
 So honest TERRÉ's run his race."  
 "What will Monsieur require for dinner?"  
 "Say, do you still cook Bouillabaisse?" 40

"Oh, oui, Monsieur," 's the waiter's answer;  
 "Quel vin Monsieur désire-t-il?"  
 "Tell me a good one." — "That I can, Sir:  
 The Chambertin with yellow seal."  
 "So TERRÉ's gone," I say, and sink in 45  
 My old accustom'd corner-place:  
 "He's done with feasting and with drinking,  
 With Burgundy and Bouillabaisse."

My old accustom'd corner here is,  
 The table still is in the nook; 50  
 Ah! vanished many a busy year is  
 This well-known chair since last I took.  
 When first I saw ye, *cari luoghi*,  
 I'd scarce a beard upon my face,  
 And now a grizzled, grim old fogy, 55  
 I sit and wait for Bouillabaisse.

Where are you, old companions trusty  
 Of early days here met to dine?  
 Come, waiter! quick, a flagon crusty —  
 I'll pledge them in the good old wine. 60  
 The kind old voices and old faces  
 My memory can quick retrace;  
 Around the board they take their places,  
 And share the wine and Bouillabaisse.

There's JACK has made a wondrous marriage; 65  
 There's laughing TOM is laughing yet;  
 There's brave AUGUSTUS drives his carriage;  
 There's poor old FRED in the *Gazette*;

On JAMES's head the grass is growing:  
    Good Lord! the world has wagged apace                   70  
Since here we set the claret flowing,  
    And drank, and ate the Bouillabaisse.

Ah me! how quick the days are flitting!  
    I mind me of a time that's gone,  
When here I'd sit, as now I'm sitting,                   75  
    In this same place — but not alone.  
A fair young form was nestled near me,  
    A dear dear face looked fondly up,  
And sweetly spoke and smiled to cheer me  
    — There's no one now to share my cup.                   80

. . . . .  
I drink it as the Fates ordain it.  
    Come, fill it, and have done with rhymes:  
Fill up the lonely glass, and drain it  
    In memory of dear old times.  
Welcome the wine, whate'er the seal is;                   85  
    And sit you down and say your grace  
With thankful heart, whate'er the meal is.  
    — Here comes the smoking Bouillabaisse!

1849

(From *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*. Vol. 13.  
London: Smith, Elder, & C., 1899)