2-18-2013

Viking Death: The Dragon Sleeps

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Recommended Citation
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LAKE MICHIGAN BEACH IN AUTUMN

A girl, not yet a woman, walks along the beach of this inland sea of life: her brown hair is streaming in the wind, like the water-tossed seaweed.

She walks on the sand while the life-sea caresses her ankles with its million year-old-man waters.

Empty of the gypsy hordes of summer sea worshipers, the inland sea lies alone and forgotten: there is only the walking girl.

William Henry Gringhuis

VIKING DEATH: THE DRAGON SLEEPS

(And all those who felt the over mastering ambition for absolute command knew the same thing....nothing. Not one of them could say with certainty what lay beyond the visible horizon, nor whether the ship was drifting.)

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Dawn breaks with uncertainty across the calm blue salt water. Night is a fog slowly fading, absorbed in soft pinks and yellows of a yawning, sleepy-eyed sun. On the horizon, almost beyond view is an empty ship with one torn sail, red striped, flapping in the early morning breeze. With the patience of old age it slowly creeps its way across wave after tiny crested wave toward the brown sandy beach at the feet of the shoreline. The dragon head carved on the bow, angular, proud, almost haughty, stares woodenly toward the inlet like an old man looking at a gravestone. Gently the bow scrapes bottom in the shallows just off shore as timid hermit-crabs scurry from its path. War shields laced with salt rotted leather to the sides of the ship fall like over ripe fruit, plunking one at a time into the shallow water. A hand and partial forearm swing freely from a gaping hole in the side of the ship. A horned helmet rolls loosely as the boat shivers in the slight breeze.
Like a spoke in a turning wheel
the sun rotates through the pale sky
and with the confidence
of half a day's travel
it lashes out with burning heat
at the parched wooden dragon.
Large white sea gulls
oblivious to the dragon's great dignity,
swoop and dive under his very nose
and perch on his great forehead
and white wash his broad neck.

When the shadows begin to creep
like beggars into twilight
the ship is discovered
by a wandering party of hunters
dressed in great shaggy sheep coats
and helmets with horns.
Their grim faces and silent voices
give evidence of their thoughts.
One of them wades into the cold water
and peers into the hull's grey shadow.
He bends and lifts the dangling hand
then drops it against the ragged hole.
He turns to the others and sighs.
In the twilight stillness
his breath is like a sudden gale.

They build a small fire on the beach
from gathered driftwood
and carried tender.
Hunched in a circle around the flame
their faces resemble ritual masks
and the spitted animal dripping fat
into the sputtering fire
makes the light dance around them
in grotesque motions
like a man with many broken bones.
They eat in silence
 tossing ravished bones
 into the dark shadows.

Then two of them wade
up to their knees into the ink-black water
and turn the ship around.
As the dragon is again headed seaward
the remaining men fling torches
into its bowels.

On the horizon the flame burnt brightly
reds, yellows, oranges
against a velvet night
and the steel grey sea.
On the shore the man watched
humming a song of grief.
At last the dragon, tired and beaten
lay down and slept,
with the sea for a bed
and the night for a blanket.

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