Grim Goes Fishing: from a New Lay of Havelok the Dane[1]



The Grimsby Town Seal

'...it will not be amisse, to say something concerning y^e^ Common tradition of her first founder *Grime*, as y^e^ inhabitants name him. The tradition is thus. *Grime*, a poore Fisherman, as he was launching into y^e^ Riuer for fish in his little boate vpon *Humber*, espyed not far from him another boate, empty (as he might conceaue) which by y^e^ fauour of y^e^ wynde & tyde still approached nearer & nearer vnto him. He meetes itt, wherein he founde onely a Childe wrapt in swathing clothes, purposely exposed (as it should seeme) to y^e^ pittylesse rage of y^e^ wilde & wide Ocean. He, moued with pitty, takes itt home, & like a good foster-father carefully nourisht itt in his owne occupation: but y^e^ childe contrarily was wholy deuoted to exercises of martiall sports, & at length by his signall valour obteyned such renowne, that he marryed y^e^ King of England's daughter, & last of all founde who was his true Father, & that he was Sonne to y^e^ King of *Denmarke*; & that *Haueloke* (for such was his name) exceedingly aduanced & enriched his foster-father *Grime*, who thus enriched, builded a fayre Towne neare the place where *Haueloke* was founde, & named it *Grimesby*. That *Haueloke* did sometymes reside in *Grimesby*, may be gathered from a great blew Boundry-stone, lying at y^e^ East ende of *Briggowgate*, which retaines y^e^ name of *Haueloke's-Stone* to this day. Agayne y^e^ great priuiledges & immunityes, that this Towne hath in *Denmarke* above any other in England (as freedome from Toll, & y^e^ rest) may fairely induce a Beleife, that some preceding fauour, or good turne called on this remuneration...'

—Gervase Holles, MP, Mayor of Grimsby 1636 &c., MS. Harl. 6829.

Blind night-abyss. Black tides rising
wash and welter. Wind-tang a smart
reek raw with brack. Rumour of surf-
upheavals' eddy in-draws its moan.
Saltbillows seethe. The sands whisper.
Work of waters.
The waves cresting
dive downsunken. Deep wellings climb.
Groundswell's regurge grinds trawled shingle.
Its sway an aura, Sea wields the shock
of its brunt being; and its bulk that mass
endlessly other, forever moving
astir unstanched. The streaming flux
writhes restlessly; the rough element's
throes thrive to warp throngs of changeling
forms phantomlike: floodwaters spawn
bodies born flotsamed; their blurred guises

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merge manyshapen, then melt drowning
in the void vortex— as their voices call
to a brink brimming. Brine-gush lathers,
chafes chesil-pebbles, churns to breakers'
spindrifted spume; the spray-drizzle
stings staiths ashore.
Storm is gathering.

From Ægir's eelbilge to Ymir's crown,
heavenroads of hawks: in the helm of the sky
—Blue-One's brainpan that burdens dwarves—
murk is mounting; Moon's bridlepath
is gloom-shrouded. Gust-flurries awhirl,
housed high above seas in hidden eyries,
the weavers of winds waft nightshadow's
veils of vapour. It devours twilight;
swirls swoop over and swallow the stars,
glide grimplumaged; groping wingspans
fan out the fume: a frown of darkness.
Pitchblack it prowls; a pall thrumming
with glowers and growls; glints that smoulder.
Thunders throne him: Thor's juggernaut
rolls full-career; he is riding the winds,
steers the tempest in his storm-chariot,
pilots cyclones. He plies the swinge:
the goat-goader giddies-up fiercely;
spoked axle-spins spurn floors of cloud
—whiplash whistles— his whickering pair,
Toothgrinder, Toothgnasher, his team of goats,
bite their bridles, their bleats snorting.
Drum dinning hooves; he drives them hard;
the rims rumble on the roof of the sky.
Black bands like smoke boil in spirals,
writhe around him, as he rallies his hosts,
the weathers enthralled to the thunder-weapon:
brow-moons ablaze, the bane of ogres,
the wagon-driver who wields Mjœlnir
the oak-striker, with his iron gauntlets
clasps its handle that crackles with zigzags,
heaves high and aims the hammer of the lightning.

The cloud-arrows, cruelly volleyed
rainbodkins rake the rearing flanks
of the brine-whelmings, on the blast of a gale
from the icy East with an edge like a chisel.
Rumpus mutters; rock-slidelike snarls
stammer, are stifled: then with stutters and cracks
the bang throbbing from the thunder-burst
shakes main and shore with a shuddering boom.
Launched lightningbolts lash the ocean,
forked flicker-barbs. As fleet glimpses
dreampictures dazzle in the darts of levin:

walls of water; waves surge in peaks,
horns honed by wind, heaving ridges
flash, ravenflint; floodwaters swell;
Spearman's expanse: spate churning froth.
The whistling squall whips the currents up;
streams strive aloft: storm beats downward,
tall tides rampant entangle with clouds,
rollers roiling; horizons drowned
obscure borders of Sky and Earth
—the ocean-walled urn of tempests;
the gale-enwreathed garth of mortals.
  Whalemere howling with hungry growls,
the waters teem with worm-kindreds;
the mere-monsters' mood is whetted:
seldcouth seadragons, scenting carnage,
floodpower-fathomed, flounder dredging
wide wavebedrock and wade to shore;
garfish gambol in their greed for prey;
knuckerholes gnawing.
  North musters sleet,
hard hailshowers' harvestless grain;
kernels coldest.
  Then those keel-riding
harbour-horses on the whales' acre
—fish feeding-grounds— must fear for their lives,
when tempest towers at the tossing prow;
spume-sprayed the hull spins steerboardless,
the bulwarks swamped by brack-welter,
the mare of the mere's mast-yards topple,
clinkered lapstrakes crack and splinter:
brineguests must bathe— abandon ship
and fail to breathe the fishes' air
—jump jetsamed in giant's-woundthawing;
beersmith's-yeastsurf; abyss of eels;
the gannets' larder: the engulfing chasms'
ill-eddying swirl. That ale they quaff
bitter bloatswillage brewed by Ægir:
dark frothy dregs; their drowned bodies
trapped entangled in the trawling nets
Rán reels under, roaring Ægir's
brinecold bedmate.
  Bloodshot the foam
at rock-skerries rife with lobsters;
water weaponful: wide-gaping jaws
bare battletushes; a broil of spines,
fangteeth and fins. Flood bloodied scuds.
Rich pickings rise in ruddled slurry.
They flock to the feast: fulmar and tern,
for orts and offal; the ernes stooping
with whetted beaks, white-tailed eagles
delve deep their talons, dewy-pinioned;

swart-sallowbrown, the swan of wounds,
hazy-plumaged; the horn-nebbed one.
Scream of scavengers. Scolding jargons
chide, rame and chirm as they choose morsels;
the squabbling skua, the skirl of whaup,
grey herring-gulls' gabble and yammer:
mews' glee at meat.
Morrow-tide weakly
leavens the darkness, and lulls the storm.
High heavencandle is huddled in cloud.
Then come up to the reefs Rán and Ægir's
ninefold nestlings, knotter of meshes'
billows-daughters, to bleach their hair.
Spools shrugged into spume in spilling hanks
of rippling ringlets reach through the waves:
flax flosses out fronds and tendrils,
the curls coiling to cove and wharf;
tress-tentacles tickle all the coasts
and dishevel ashore.
A shifting firth;
an arm of the sea.
East wind dropping,
the heaving surges hush to stillness;
the surf-struggle sinks abating.
The walls of land that weathered tempests,
staiths stormbeaten, stayed the onslaught.
Meretowers melt.
Mews are wailing.
In wide heavens winds veer and yawn.
Sweeping breakers swirl back foaming.
Shoals grind the shelves of a shingle bay
where a grey river greets the ocean.

Amid the frost-phantoms of a foggy dawn
Grim goes to work, at the gloomy hour
of livid twilight: leaves his homestead,
threads through the dunes' thigh-high tussocks,
saltmarsh, siltdyke; in silence till
the fisherman flushes the fowl nesting
from rush-reedbeds, redshank and snipe;
lagoon-grottoes' gluts of lamprey,
samphire-dingles— a salt presence
gropes goosepimpling with a gruesome allure—
winds wide mudflats; wades down to the shore's
kingdom of kelp. Cold grey as flint
the horizon rims a rink of slate.
A withering wind; wolf-tooth-bitter.
Marine redolence of rancid weed.
Breakers' thunder. Brute threat of sky
and with a loom, the sea.
The long combers
wash the beaches; waves arch their necks;

race rolling back, and rear again;
prance pawing hooves, their pluming manes
froth faxwaxen; fetlocked with spume,
nostrils neezing, with noise of onrush,
lapping, lathered, the leaping steeds,
ply over ply, are pool-folded.
Above the white horses wheel mews shrieking;
alderman eyes augury-birds'
gliding gaggles; they graze in mobs;
their skeins pucker, then scatter aside,
spin spiralling, and speed away.
All eddymingled, the eagre-streams;
Barbwielder's bath blends its settlings.
Strewn over the strand, storm has broadcast
Ocean's harvest, the after-math
of wrack and wreckage, careened in ooze:
dulse-hung driftwood; in dimpled ruts
bladderwrack blackens. Barnacled spars
lulled lopsided in lakes of slime;
oak earls have taught the art of swimming
surf tumbles and sifts, and salt scorches;
goods for salvage, the gear of the drowned;
ribs wrenched from hulks; rags of sailcloth,
lanyard-belayed amid the lobster-creels:
idle awnings.
Their eyes on stalks,
crabs creep sideways, clacking pincers.
Lugworms uplift little sandcastles.

Yet there at the sandbar is the sound-plying
tidegoer tamed by tether-cables:
his ocean-otter, anchorbond-fast,
stays for her steersman, her stem bridling;
rocked at roadstead by the rising swell.
Gulfcunning Grim at the grey margin
hauls out of hithe, and heaves to launch
the clinkered coble— the currents grinding
shell on shingle; shore-defying
brawn shoves abeam— the beast of the slipway
runs her keelstrake into rushing surf.
The prow plunges; planks are bucking;
he climbs aboard, casts off moorings
to ride the rollers.
As he rows he sees
fleet-floating ones on furrowed ripples
bathe breastfeathers in the brown gullies
of the swans' sailroad: the swimming fowl,
preening pinions with piping cries.
Above the floods' darkness the frowning sky
lours leadenclouded, a ledge of grey
in piled layers, its pending roof
stretched stonemantled upon steely waters;

ironhued to the eye, edged with lustre
at the wan weathergleam, windowed eastward:
bleak beams glaring, bleared and sallow.
  Then once the masttree's mere-arraying
sail's cinctured tight, sea-stays are braced
—cordage creaking— and clews are trimmed,
the bunt bellies in a breeze astern:
the prow perking, pilot thirsty
for Ægir's ale. Underway the craft
drives deep water. Drenched with spindrift
rein-rigging hums. He rides his steed
of the track of gulls: the tarred wader's
keel is cutting, the cold fathoms
burst brine-surges on braided strakes,
well-clinkered wands of the wake-carver.
Mind on mereflood —mews reel aside—
the coxswain cuddles the kicking tiller.
  She wafts then on wavehome at winds' urging,
floats foamybosomed, flying birdlike,
the tide-treader; timbers dinning,
the surfwood soars the sound-channels,
crest-glider's cruise; until her keel pierces
open Ocean: Ymir's bloodstream
fosters foison of folk with scales,
haddock and hakes' harvest-acres,
redfishes' realm, ruled by mackerel,
saithes' seafastness.
  With song-magic
Ránlover's runes enrapture air
to raise the wraiths of roke-vapour
and foam-frettings, as frosted puffs
blow burred by cold to blooms of steam;
spun out of space, spider-gauzes
are fused fuscous, furring æther;
tissues toughen, teaselled to sheer
thistledown threads, the thatched weftage
clammy clusters of cloud-smother:
this hedge of hazes is the haar of that sea.
Its blankness blinds the bear-warrior;
fogbound in fume the fishing-boat
—waylaid by walls of wisps of smoke—
drifts in doldrums.
  In the dewy hush,
with currents becalmed, chorus voices;
mist-muffled howls. The moan from the Odd
of Raven's-Ayre narrates to Grim
—whelps of whelmfloods whoop and gibber—
brother of Byleist and Bifrost-guard's
single combat for that sea-kidney
—amber amulet owed to Freyja,
the dwarves' trinket— a duel on the reefs,

gnomecorpse-Náinn's canoeshed-doors:
jewel-jousting amid the giant's blood,
guised as selkies.
A gleam twinkles;
a shadow that shimmers shows through the fogs:
swart silhouette, swathed in dimness
yet the prow's profile plays glowing through,
as lighted taper the lantern-horn;
amid skeins scudding the skeleton hulls,
the mast falters, mainsail drooping;
she swings nearer on the sullen wallow.
Whorl-necked she hoves: a white, dazzling,
leeward-listing, longship of war.
He climbs the keel of that kings' galley.

None stands stationed at stern or beak.
Craft captainless. Uncrewed the thofts;
no hand to halyard; hulk gybes and yaws.
A dragon-dromond adrift on the tides.

Bulwark-bucklers, bright lindenshields
—preybird-painted— pegged still on racks;
grey gear in heaps. A ghost-vessel;
and this ship's shining in a shell of ice.

Lookouts won't ladder the lensed pinnacles.
The cold clenches, clustered on spars;
its freezing feathers fleece the stanchions:
mossed with moonbarbs; mirror-splinter grist.

As if tackled with ice. Timbered with ice.
Antlered with ice, this elk of the flood.
Ice on oarports. Ice-stark sailcloth
chimes on yardarms. Chill droplets have

eked icicles, the ooze frozen
to sparkling spikes spiral-twisted
like narwhal-horns; the knotting beasts,
carved in keelposts, crystal-lacquered.

Frostbitten filigrees. Fossilized in glaze,
its rind renders the rig's cordage,
shrouds encrusted, and sheets to bony
wires of silver: winter cobwebs.

Iron ice shackles her oak planking;
hoary harness to helmet ships.
The frost-fetters flicker gemstones
rainbowed with rime. A rapt silence.

Foot-falls' clangour —frore mists of breath—
keel-climbing Grim is crossing thwarts.
The eastern airt opened with glades
of culver-colour and coral blushes,

mists are moving. Murk is fading.
Beneath the awning a nestled bundle
cries out and kicks the clouts aside:
a baby boy in the bosom of a longship.
Grim views in gold, on the gold swaddlings,
serpent-symbols; silken vestments;
rune-written torque wrapped in sendal;
the waif is wound in a war-banner,
gonfanon-garbed in the gold samite,
ancient oriflamme of Ingvi's Folk:
a royal heirloom to robe a babe in
from some tribe's treasury, travel beside him,
into the floodtides' might —far departing
cradle rocking on the cold waters—
a boon from whoever embarqued this infant
from a forlorn seashore, launched him drifting
across the currents —castaway child—
with that banner to bless him.
The boarder sees
his fair features; fiercely piercing
ice-bright his eyes, of eagle keenness;
on Grim's finger his grip is strong.
It is then that the sunlight sears through the fogs.
Heatwending high the heaven-candle
climbs clear of wrack and cloud-tatters:
the sea-farer's circling promise;
enemy of ice. Egg-field dwellers,
mews, mount the air: the massed seafowls'
whiteplumaged hosts whirl and cackle,
the gulls gathering to greet with clamour
the bright beacon. Her burning rays
melt mist and fume. Murk is vanquished,
the welkin-wanness, by the weather-jewel.
Lightwonder laughs as lurking dusk,
narrow shades of night, the numb wintry
dark's downfallen, and dawn rises
—Old Ægir smiles endless dimples—
on a Yule morning with the youthful sun.
At their topmost tower, two messengers
in wide-pinioned wind-riding flight,
hover high aloft: they hail with trills,
glide down and gaze with golden eyes,
and soar circling; then sweep away
—errand-eagles— to the elf-roundel.

Thus as west Wáda voyaged, the pilot of Wingelote,
cleaving the cold waters, giant king of the Helsings
—nor was it neap on the whaleroad, but a depth of nine ells when
he bore from the brine Wéland, a child on brawny shoulders—
as Sheave on his shield-cradle washed ashore on Angeln;
as from Finn Folkwalding's hall, avenging feud with slaughter,
the hero Hengest was driven to Kent and hungered for land;

from the east as Ingvi the Lord crossed in his ocean-chariot
from Fródi's fruitful kingdom —where drudging frost-giant girls
heaved at Hamlet's millstone, turned the harsh axle-tree;
the tides from their turning changed to the briny taste of weeping:
fettered there the frost-maidens turned that Fródi throneless—
so to Humber's haven Havelok the Dane,
a freight salvaged by Father Grim,
was wafted to Lindsey, on wings of storm,
to our folk-founder, to this fisher-town,
our anchorage, from over the waves,
the swans' sealanes, seeking England:
thrower of menhirs; the throne-claimer.