

A STORM

Y

Published in *The Knickerbocker*
November, 1850 (36:5)

Edited and Annotated by Morgan Panknin
University of Arizona Antebellum Magazine Edition Project
April 13, 2015

Where from columnar cliffs the clamoring sea-gulls

Dive to the ocean's ever tumbling foam;
Where above golden vapors golden eagles
Wheel in swift orbits under Jove's blue dome;
Where royal lion-hounds¹ and yelping beagles
Range through the ancient forests of Illome,
There amid Plutonic² mountains dully
Fortress-girdled, lies the land of THULE³

A grisly juggler⁴ and his black banditti
Held in old time this pleasant territory;
But knights now buried sacked his silver city,
Flinging from the rocks this wizard hoary⁵:

1. A breed of dog known as a Rodesian Ridgeback originally bred for the purpose of hunting in South Africa—were known to actually keep lions at bay (Fox 35)

2. Likely used for its geological meaning, but it does also carry the definition of relating to the god Pluto (Oxford English Dictionary)

3. An Ancient Greek or Latin term for the most northerly region in the world (Oxford English Dictionary)

4. Potentially from a Native American legend about a white man who gained the ability to send his eyes from his head, but did this too often and his eyes ceased to return. So he stole one from a mouse and asked for one from a bison; but the one was too small and the other too big (“The Eye Juggler”).

He became a whale (a spermaceti)
And has been seen by Northmen in their barks⁶,
Baited through all the Arctic seas by sharks.

Now it was night. A fierce and roaring storm
Marched up the glimmering sky his black brigades,
Clouds and pale fire begirt his awful form;
Vaporous cavaliers and giant shades
Crowded th' horizon, while the ponderous ordnance⁷
Rumbled through darkness with a deep discordance.

Now the wild lightning was let slip, and tore
The hollow clouds. The thunder like a dragon,
Sprang to the ground, and with an awful roar,
Burst through the cracking caves of old Mount Zagon⁸:
Then, burrowing down through its foundations four,
Roved growling through those halls of gold and granite,
Where dwell the goblin-kings of this brave planet.⁹

The winds then blew, and the swift rains descending,
Filled to the brim with foam the mountain lochs:
Through the thick darkness shot bright rockets, rending
From Zagon's pinnacles the topmost blocks.
The woods resounded; with the tumult blending,

5. Old and trite, or grayish white (Oxford English Dictionary).

6. A sailing ship with three masts (Oxford English Dictionary).

7. Artillery or a branch of the armed forces in charge of weapon storage (Oxford English Dictionary)

8. This is an actual mountain in Croatia (Geographic.org)

9. Potentially from a Romanian legend about a man named Agheran who descends to the land of the ogres and meets the daughters of four kings, one of which is named Goldine (Fairy Tales and Legends from Romania).

Arose old Ocean's uproar by the rocks.
On a scarped¹⁰ mist stood ranged a line of gunners
From Hell's grim garrison, and fired loud thunders.

Each flash revealed that diabolic corps
Pounding their cartridges with iron rammers,
Wrought in huge furnaces from Tophet's¹¹ ore.
Louder and wilder rose th' infernal clamors:
Swift through the tempest frightful thunders tore,
And towers fell as struck by brazen hammers.
Beneath this battery strange tall war-ships quivered,
Their bulwarks¹² being stove and topmasts shivered.

In truth it was a most rebellious night:
The awakened monsters in their dens lay growling,
To their feet starting as each sharp light
Kindled the caves. The swamp-dogs covered howling,
And even spectres kept their graves from fright:
Demons alone around the land went prowling,
Sent on secret, black, and midnight missions,
By the Oriental College of Magicians.

That night a curséd and malignant Moor,
Of morals loose and principles oblique,
Abetted by a hairy Tartar¹³ Sheikh¹⁴,

10. Something cut away to a steep slope (Oxford English Dictionary).

11. Biblical location near Jerusalem that was a place known to have "constant fire" that was used to sacrifice children to Moloch and Baal (*The New International Version* 2 Kings 23:10), later to become synonymous with "hell on earth" (Oxford English Dictionary).

12. The raised woodwork along the sides of a ship—above the deck level (Oxford English Dictionary).

And by a certain chemist of Darfour¹⁵,
Who often caused the sheeted dead to squeak,
Desiring slumbering Christendom to harass¹⁶,
To Thulé came and stole the royal heiress.

The morning came: the Storm's decamping forces
Stood out to sea: we saw their sun-streaked backs
Dip in the west; along the river-courses
White fogs and vapors rolled in mighty stacks:
The Knights of Thulé fiercely spurred their horses
Through the wet gorges on the Tartar's tracks;
But the old gray monarch beat his forehead,
And heedless of his counselors, thus he sorrowed:

'O! for a crack of old Olympic thunder!
O! for the batteries of Saturnian Zeus!
O! for a word to break the earth asunder,
Ev'n to that gulf where through the Stygian sluice,
Phlegethon¹⁷ rolls the world's deep arches under:
O! for that champion who with mind unshaken,
Harpooned, on Norway's coast, the scaly Kraken!

Y

13. Referring to a native of Central Asia to the Caspian Sea (Oxford English Dictionary). Also used as a shortened version of Tartarus—the deepest part of the Greek underworld—such as in Shakespeare's *The Twelfth Night* (35).

14. An Eastern governor, prince, or king (Oxford English Dictionary).

15. Potentially a misspelling of Darfur which is a region in Sudan (Geographic.org)

16. Likely referencing the land of Thule in this case.

17. Stygian refers to the river Styx, this and Phlegethon are two of the five rivers in the Greek underworld. The Styx was the boundary between Earth and the underworld, and the Phlegethon was a river of fire that stretched down to Tartarus (Smith, 112).



EDITOR'S NOTE

Perhaps the aspect of this poem that is most connected to its historical context is the two conflicting forms of nature presented in the poem. It is both the storm that ravages the country and provides a distraction for the Moor to take the heiress, and also the initial description of the country as well as the thing that allows the fleeing Moor to leave tracks that the Knights may follow. At the time that this poem was published, other works were beginning to emerge that seemed to be investigating humanity's relationship with nature. Such as *Spearing* by Street, that seems to be regarding the natural world as something to be conquered through the knowledge of man through his inventions (368). Versus the view in *The Bee-Hunt* where nature and man are combined (Oakleaf 368). What can be inferred by this difference is that there is a struggle between humanity and nature going on—after all, Thule, being “the most northern region” means that anything further on is wholly non-human nature; Thule is the border between these worlds. This may also account for the king's desire for the old gods. The older gods were all associated with natural phenomena, and the fact that nature is both for and against the humans of Thule might be in some way connected to their changing whims.

Even to modern times the question of how humanity is to relate to nature has been called into question. Now it is more a matter of pursuing the protection of the “natural world” and how far that protection is meant to extend—at what point should humans stop interfering. In most cases humans have been completely separated from what has become to be regarded as the natural world—quite the opposite of the Oakleaf piece, and closer to *A Storm* and *Spearing* in its “us” and “them” ideology. One example where this distinction reaches its greatest struggle is in the consumption of bush meat in Africa. The eating of the meat is causing some species to go extinct—however, as meat from wild animals doesn't have to be paid for, many underprivileged to starving people in these areas use it as their main source of protein. Many activist attentions have been directed to the species on the decline as a result of this, and have started efforts to try to stop the practice of eating these species (Donovan). What they ignore is the question of where the people currently eating these animals will get food to replace them—making it seem like it is humanity's job to protect the “natural world” even at the cost of itself. Apart or not?

Morgan Panknin



WORKS CITED

- Donovan, Travis Walter. "7 Animals Being Eaten to Extinction." *The Huffington Post*. 2010. Web. 13 Apr. 2015
- "The Eye Juggler." *First People of America*. 2015. Web. 12 Apr. 2015
- Fairy Tales and Legends from Romania*. New York: Ardent Media, 1993. Web. 12 Apr. 2015
- Fox, Sue. *Rhodesian Ridgeback: Everything About Purchase, Care, Nutrition, Behavior*. New York: Barron's Educational Series, 2003. Web. 4 Apr. 2015
- Geographic.org*. Information Technology Associates. 2010. Web. 4 Apr. 2015
- The New International Version*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. Print.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford United Press. 2015. Web. 4 Apr. 2015
- Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth night*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005. Print
- Smith, William. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*. London: Taylor and Walton, 1844. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.
- Street, Alfred B. "Spearing." *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine (1833-1862)* 01 1840: 16. Web. 13 Apr. 2015 .