

VINLAND DISTILLATIONS



Gary David

**VINLAND
DISTILLATIONS**

Gary David

"Vinland Distillations" is from Northern Lights,
a series in progress.

Sources:

The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America,
translated with an introduction by Magnus Magnusson
and Hermann Palsson, Penguin Books, 1965.

Williams, William Carlos, *In the American Grain*,
New Directions Books, 1956.

Cover map drawn by Sigurdur Stefansson, c. 1590.

GARY DAVID
382 WILLIAMS ST. #4
DEADWOOD, SD 57732

~~D' VINE PRESS
5338 Meteor St.
Rapid City, S.D.
57701~~



COPYRIGHT © by GARY DAVID

1980

*...in the yeast of
William Carlos Williams'
American Grain*

Grapes not known to grow wild north
of Passamaquoddy Bay along the East coast.
Salmon not known to run south
of Hudson R.

Both were found in abundance
& big, by Leif Eiriksson & his men
one year after the land of his birth
Iceland officially adopted Christianity, 1000 A.D.
at best reckoning.

Upon coming ashore, they were welcomed
with dew cooling the thick grass, wild wheat & maples.
The first thing they did was kiss
this manna, the sweetest ever tasted.

On the return voyage, Leif received
his new name for the deed of saving
Thorir & his crew shipwrecked on a reef off Greenland.
Leif the Lucky "... was tall and strong and very impressive
in appearance. He was a shrewd man
and always moderate in his behavior."

Luck was something
Leif inherited from his father
Eirik the Red & was commonly held
to be the workings of the favorable winds
of fate. It had nothing to do as it does
at present with random fortunes
or future. Leif began to preach the Catholic faith

in the land his father first had found—who never made it
by the way, to Vinland, due to an ill omen: the steed
he was riding down to the ship

threw him, so
he stayed behind. The winter following
his son's return, Eirik along with Thorir & others
died of some mysterious disease, weird & untimely.

Eirik the Red, outcast from Norway, & again from Iceland
to Greenland, rejected

by his pious wife Thojhild
from his own bed, passed on:
outlaw, killer, heathen.

Thorvald the brother of Leif made as well
the voyage to Vinland the Good, found the place
at the mouth of two fjords—heavily
wooded & beautiful beyond belief—he would've made
his homestead, had he & his men not noticed
instead along the beach three skin-boats, each
with three Skraelings apiece under them.
They captured & killed eight. One escaped.

Overcome by all the slaughter, the whole crew dropped
into a death-drugged slumber upon the shore. But the ghost
of Thorvald's blood-luck woke them in time
with piercing warning to return to ship & defend
against Skraeling attack. One of the gunwale breastworks failed &
Thorvald pulled his fate-arrow out
with these last words: "This is rich country
we've found—there's plenty of fat
around my entrails." They buried him
at the headland of his would-be settlement, staked a cross
at each end of his grave & christened the place

Krossaness.

Thorstein the brother of Leif as well
would follow the fate of his father: never to shore
far Vinland across the bitter waves. And Thorvald to stay
buried there still, his woe-begotten ghost wandering
the New World forever. The new faith
was still but a babe when Thorstein died
in Lysufjord on the West coast of Greenland in the arms
of his good wife Gudrid. That night his corpse rose & spoke
to her of his happy repose, & of the long & hale life
ahead of her—how she would quietly expire, a sister
& servant of the Lord. He was layed to rest in Eiriksford

by his father's side. Eirik the Red, whose blood
has never settled: his sons, traitors to the old ways.
The ways of his fathers

shall be avenged

one way or another.

Thorhall the hunter “. . . a huge man,
swarthy and uncouth; he was
getting old now, bad
-tempered and cunning, taciturn
as a rule but abusive
when he spoke, and always
a trouble-maker. He didn't have much to do

with Christianity since it'd come to
Greenland. He wasn't particularly popular, but
Eirik and he had always been close friends.”

An asset to Karlsefni's expedition west
“. . . because he had considerable experience
of wild regions.” Somewhere around Straumfjord
he suddenly disappeared. Three days they searched
& on the fourth they found him top of a cliff
staring up at the sky, chanting
an unknown tongue, ice-blue eyes agape
& nostrils flaring, scratching
at his skin, & tearing his hair out.

He told them he was old enough
to take care of himself, & what he was doing
was none of their affair.

Not long after a whale washed ashore but
Karlsefni, an expert on whales, was unable
to figure out what kind—tho they cut it up & boiled it
just the same. The whole crew grew ill on the bad
meat they'd eaten, as Thorhall the Hunter remarked:
"It seems Redbeard has beaten out your Christ.
This is the reward for the poem I made
to honor my patron, Thor, who rarely fails me."

But soon grown sick of the water, the lack of wine
souring the tales of grapes in great abundance, Thorhall
set sail north with nine others to find the true
Vinland the Good. They hit strong headwinds &
were blown offcourse all the way to Ireland, where
they were captured, brutally beaten, & enslaved.

Here Thorhall the Hunter lived out his last days:
friend to no one, but faithful
to the old ways
to the end.

"...they caught sight of nine skin-boats; the men in them were waving sticks which made a noise like flails, and the motion was sunwise."

Karlsefni & his men went out to greet them bearing their common token of peace: a white shield.

"The newcomers rowed toward them and stared in amazement as they came ashore. They were small, dark-colored, and evil-looking, and their hair was coarse; they had large eyes and broad cheekbones. They stayed there awhile, marveling, then rowed away south around the headland."

When it came to that, the trade with the Skraelings:

1 pack of fur
per bellyful of cow's milk. Or

1 sable pelt
per span of red cloth, sometimes short
as a finger's breadth. Under Karlsefni's orders,
arms of any kind were never bartered.

"The *Skraelings* of Vinland have been tentatively identified with the Mimac or extinct Beothuk red Indian tribes."

Derivation of this term is uncertain, but it has come to mean
'shriekers' or 'wretches'.

Karlsefni had married the widow Gudrid
who bore his first son, Snorri, in Vinland.

One day she was sitting in the doorway by the cradle
when a shadow fell across the door & a pale woman
wearing a black, tight-fitting tunic entered.
She had a band around her chestnut-colored hair &
". . . the largest eyes that have ever been seen
in any human head." She walked up to Gudrid & said:
"My name is Gudrid. What is yours?"

Stunned, she motioned her to sit—but with a crash
the other vanished
just as a Skraeling was being put to death
outside by one of Karlsefni's men
for trying to steal weapons.

No one had seen this dark Gudrid
come or go
but Gudrid herself.

Karlsefni & his wife later settled
on a farm in Iceland. Among their descendants
three famed bishops came to power.

The summer before his conversion
by King Olaf the Saint of Norway,
while stranded in the Hebrides
awaiting favorable winds, Leif's heart
fell under the spell
of the noble woman & worker
of magic, Thorgunna. Just
as he was about to set sail, she wished
to go along as his lover &
when he told her there was no way,
she informed him of his future

son she would bear.

Before he finally left, Leif gave her a gold ring
along with a belt of walrus ivory & a mantle homespun in Greenland.
The boy who she named Thorgils later came to Iceland
the summer before the Frodriver Marvels, a weird time
of ghosts, tragic omens, & untimely death.
From there Thorgils journeyed to Greenland, where
Leif acknowledged him his son, tho
". . . there seemed to be something uncanny
about him all his life."

**Freydis, the bastard daughter of Eirik
is most noted for her cold-blooded treachery.**
How she duped her husband, Thorvard
during their business venture in Vinland
into believing their partners, Helgi & Finnbogi
had raped her, since she'd come home early one morning
her feet cold & full of dew. Enraged Thorvard
& his party put an end to them & all their men
but five women remained no man would kill.
Freydis picked up an axe

& the deed was as good as dead.

Upon their return Leif learned of these murders, & tortured
three of the men into telling their stories. All of them
tallied, but he did not have the heart to
punish his half sister outright. He did prophesize, however,
her descendants would never prosper in any country.

A final parting scene: Freydis, pregnant & pursued
by Skraelings, suddenly whirled around to face them off, pulled
a massive breast out of her bodice &
with a sword snatched from a dead warrior's hand
slapped it broadside.

This brought on immediate
& terrified retreat.

Heathen against heathen
again & again
fails to provide
the unique context
of bread & wine needed
to transubstantiate
the Conquest:
of fluid boundaries
fixed, frozen
by the snipe shot
of Divine Overview.

For the Christian: the Last Supper.
The heathen: the First

Hunt.

The blood of Eirik's brood
in the New World, looking inward
just after leaving the ways of the old
beliefs behind, only to find the Beast
-With-Two-Backs, inland. The bodies

of the Skraelings looked so good, a truth
too hard to endure. The old blood quickening
an uprooted lust, convoluted & twisted, transplanted
on harsh strands a new realm
of the brain, strange (as once the heart was
thought to be the seat of thought) ". . . the *convolutions*
of the brain, of the intestines, of a vine."
Reaching toward the sun, concocting
darkness underneath, coming up, in the world, with
a new

Divine mandate: extirpate
all traces
of the ways native blood & races
have risen
off the face of the earth
:the inroads
of our filthy beginnings.
Offer up as sacrificial bread
their flesh, mortal as ours—flood
of the stigmata to
evaporate
officially
past sins. Let the countenance of the Savior flash
upon the world. Let the New Age begin.

By the 14th century, the passage
from Snaefellsness (Iceland) to Angmagssalik (Greenland)
a few degrees south of the Arctic Circle had to be abandoned
due to the increased & precarious presence
down from the north
of polar floes.

Greenland, so named by Eirik the Red
"...for he said people would be much more tempted
to go there if it had an attractive name."

It is highly unlikely anyone on this Norse outpost survived
into the 16th century the most recent onslaught
of the New Ice Age.

"It is said Greenland is an island near the edge of the world
and its inhabitants have neither bread, wine, nor oils
and live on dried fish and milk. Because of the ice surrounding
the island sailings there are rare, for land can only be reached
in August when the ice has receded. For this reason it is thought
no ship has sailed there for the last 80 years, and no bishop
nor priest has been there during that period. As a consequence,

most of the inhabitants have abandoned their Christian faith
and the only remembrance they still preserve of it
is that once a year they exhibit the corporal cloth used
by their last bishop about 100 years ago."

:from a Papal letter, 1492)

*

"But now he saw before him the illusive bright future
of a great empire founded, coupled with a fabulous conquest
of heathendom by the only true church."

Hail Don Cristóbal! . . .

"With its archaic smile, America found Columbus
its first victim."

. . .the Eucharist of the New World

is your blood to conquer:
our bread to consume.