

The Black Sea Monster

Guyora Binder

1976

There is a monster outside of our window.

The monster roars and shudders; threatens, blusters; blows off steam and rusts. It is a beast of the sea; it is a massive machine; it is dangerous; it is explosive; it has no jaws, but a smaller subtler and more secret weapon... It is crawling with maggots.

It is the battleship Potemkin.

It rests with menace in our harbor, outside our window, pointing its dumb muzzles at us.

We choke on our food.

We pull down our shades; not to hide, but as a samaritan gesture. Lest a head, a mouth, a gaze, gaping go uncovered, we pull the shade, look away. We look over our shoulders (if we have them still). We speak in loud voices. We are upset. As well we should be—we who wake with the sunset, forget; run unthinking to the window to drink in the honeygold; gag on the gulp of blood, instead. We are upset. What is this omen, this symptom, this significant sore? this portentous hulk we see red on the horizon of our picture windows?

It is the battleship Potemkin, burning.

An effigy in flames always calls up visions of oppression, just struggle—thus the vicious strength of art. It is we who feel immolated, though the victim is our enemy. It is we who feel violated by this gift horse—gift of unsought love. It is we who must wonder why our victim is so confident; or, if despairing, from what knowledge that we lack—Or is this a ruse, perhaps?

On board the battleship, too, they talk in loud voices. What are the thoughts of these awesome revolutionaries? How does it feel to know one's tragic fate (worse yet its cause)? On board the battleship, too, they ask these questions. And as they ask, the revolution dies.

It was dead of course, already.

Dead so that the maggots crawled; and in these maggots was the look of life. But the revolution was dead. Even had they asked no questions, nursed no doubts, it was dead, this monstrous carcass—broiled, tempered, melted in the heat of an entirely unmetaphorical fire. It mattered not, in the long run or the long fall or the shortfall of the fourth five year plan, whether these men were heroes or indolents; drunk with freedom or just plain drunk. It mattered not whether these men would have won their first battle or lost; stood their ground or fled like rabbits, maggots, or the smarter class of rat. It mattered only that Kulachikov, three times stupider than a pig, had smoked below decks a cigarette that he had rolled himself; and caught his nightshirt on fire. Now, as they fought the fire, they realized that they fought no revolution, that they made no mutiny; that they would gladly pass a bucket to the mad ship's captain, were he not dead; that the fire was bad luck—nothing more—and more important than anything in their lives. They were not dying for a cause, but just dying. Alone.

They fought and lost (the fire first, the revolution last).

On shore we do not know this. We see nothing but the red sky at dusk and ourselves within the glass. We hear the roar of the monster, the rumble of the future—and for some reason, identify the two.

fifth Estate

Guyora Binder
The Black Sea Monster
1976

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/275-august-1976/the-black-sea-monster>
Fifth Estate #275, August, 1976

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)