

SAPPHICS FOR CHARLES VICKERY

PAINTING THE CHRISTIAN RADICH

First a lightning sketch of the vessel's outline
Smeared on canvas (minus its own great sheeting)
Bare and white, the tooth of the surface waiting,
Woven threads athirst for the promised ocean.

Square-rigged sails appear on the masts; they billow.
Ships like this reach tall in their quest for breezes.
Clouds collect, exciting the sky, the sailors;
Many recognize the potential weather.

Blues and grays predominate north's horizon.
Next the water covers the foreground deeply.
Light and shadows hurry to take their stations
Fore and aft. The captain completes the picture.

Restless sapphic sea, its devisive rhythm
Twisting out of synchrony, yawing, ceaseless.
See the combers drowning the artist's brushes,
Leading us from shore in a wake of colors.

All on watch have now gone aboard the Radich:
Painter's whim no more but a clipper straining
Every beam, her bowsprit aimed high then dipping
Down to taste the spume in the troughs before her:

Hull a rocking coulter, determined, thrumming,
Riding bias walls with their breaking turrets,
Blue and green and aquamarine with foam-trails
Washing her, and hands at the rails with salt-sting.

Stowaways, we cling to adventure's rigging:
Half an hour vicarious voyagers linger,
Hear the creaking bulkheads and wind-strummed ratlines,
Smell the tar, the sweat of a proud tradition.

Putting down his palette and smiling slightly,
Charles begins to cap all his tubes of pigment,
Signs the work, surrenders it up for auction--
Losers watch it heave out of sight-- a memory.

--Glenna Holloway