

KNOTTED TWINE

XIX

DOTH AN ISLAND EXIST

As we have navigated from anchorage to anchorage, and have begun to feel more attuned to these surroundings, these splendors, these solitaries and quietudes, we have become afflicted with an inevitable malady that quite distorts the prevailing realities, causing us to yearn for a permanent residence in these environs.

Aye, 'tis then one muses, "On which distant horizon does this Universe of ours glow most resplendently, in an untroubled welcoming warmth?"

Whose claim will one transgress? Should these seas upon which one might act out his symbolic destiny belong; should any part of the planet belong - to anyone? Should not the oceans be reserved for the dreamers and wanderers?

If, in his reckonings, one had anticipated a tussle with the elements and accounted the occasional surprise as part of the fare meted out by the Omnipresent Mother, he could not have anticipated and accounted the tussles his look-a-likes might spontaneously and arbitrarily interject into his wanderings; or his 'game plan'. While one might account shoals and currents and even outwit the storm, how plan against marauders, opportunists, port officials and landowners?

While Magellan and Captain Cook survived the shoals and currents, storms, and perils of the unknown, they were unable to survive the treachery of their look-a-likes. Oh, 'tis true enough, we recognize their encounters with death resulted from presumptuous intrusions; regardless of their condescending peaceableness, they had hoped to persuade or conquer.

The depictions of Gauguin and the 'romances' of Melville establish still other kinds of images or realities. All one need is the desire; all one need be is a wanderer, all one need, in addition, is some small store of carefreeness and courage; he will venture o'er the distant horizon to the fabled island paradises, and endless supine pleasures.

Do we not so fantasize, still; do we not imagine these extraterrestrial flights of Elysian fancy? Ah!, such is our indecipherable whimsicality and innocence. Surely some purpose must be served through this 'ornamental' behavior; perhaps it represents the intervention of some higher order that urges one to broadcast his seed; each harboring the glorious future in his loins - Where, Oh, Where ought one? Alas, beyond the pickets, a lass, in one's neighbor's house, doth reside and smile a beckoning.

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Some have remained; Gauguin finally, and Stevenson. Melville reminisced from afar; London gainsaid the familiar shore, and Selkirk opted for home".

Thus 'tis I sound a brief refrain, and raise the query propounded in that earlier writing, titled, Knotted Twine:

Doth an Island exist for thee?

Islands abound, but sadly, not one for each. Many, doubtlessly the choicest, are placed out of bounds to aught but the few, a state of affairs we might collectively challenge - given the sparsely numbered hours allotted to each life. What islands remain are numerous and large enough to accommodate those whose wanderlust and need for remoteness would propel them yonder (regardless of their status as Real Estate). Elbow to elbow, like gulls, wing to wing, we might embrace the sea.

Tahiti is a symbol most bandied about, but she is the most sullied as well; for each dreamer, or seafarer who gained her shore bore some resemblance to the rest of us; and what have we been? Have we not presumptuously transported the edifice of civilization to these nakedly vulnerable and exploitable shores? Have we not ravished, converted and disposed and judged, denying rights to their inhabitants, (be cautioned, he without might has no rights - conceal your weaknesses and brandish your strengths - ALAS - and OH - 'twere not so.) Whatever be his intrinsic worth, whether he be Polynesian, Indian, African or Eskimo, he is more picturesque than viable, in our manner of thinking; he shall mirror his benevolent conqueror; he shall yield his home; he shall abide - lest he be enslaved more harshly, annihilated, or shipped to a forgotten wasteland. Thus it is, we might not find what it is we had imagined we had sought. Should we make a landfall upon that distant o'erfabled isle, might we not be obliged to avert our head in shame?.

It is not unwarranted to say, and indeed to advise, that some part of life's experience will be precluded from ours, and in the case of the Tahiti, the illusion would be the better part preserved.

And what of this illusion?

Tahiti, now a commercial enterprise; mankind, a resource, to be lured thereto. Oh, 'tis not so much a luring, as wanting to be lured. The brown-skinned loveliness of the Polynesian, his blood so diluted, perhaps unique in some bastardly sort of way, is offered as bait to those unavoidably cast upon the world as dreamers. Dreams exploited then, somehow a willing exploitee, wanting to

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believe, and believing, as he does - in Paradise; in Heaven. Yes! a little foretaste. Paradise is paved over - Oh! 'tis so, yet 'tis all surrounded in azure blue, set in so temperate a clime. One need merely devise some minor adjustments to his fantasizings.

And Typee - a truer fantasy the world chose not to believe. What is it that a writer may write and a reader may read that will accord the sensibilities of both?

What of the real ruin of Melville's Typee, to be discovered only sixty-five years hence, its native population decimated - extinguished - through its exposure to the civilized world's tuberculosis?

Oh, (heck!), why mention an embarrassingly awkward truth? C'est la vie! The Islander, sadly, was found unfit to survive.

Civilization has squandered, in lusting, in ignorance, in prejudice; it has defiled, profaned, and has abandoned, to flail away, some incarnation and contingency it had the power to overwhelm, to exploit, to ravish; having extracted the good, satisfied its appetites, and passed on its kiss of death, it has displayed the additional boldness and crassness, in passing judgment upon 'savages'. Aye! Herman, how your words echo throughout all of these musings "Is civilization a thing distinct, or merely an advanced stage of barbarism?" We have not been



concerned with the morality of our actions. By relegating a man to the diminutive station of 'savage', we have invented some prerogative for our own assumptions to superiority, and have, at the same time, conveniently relieved ourselves of moral responsibility.

Though we are but followers, and though these eternally recurring dreams are but colored realities; and realities, confoundings of dreams, as followers and dreamers, aware of these awkward truths, we are not precluded from the enjoyment of the remote shore, or the South Sea isle. If it had been by-passed through some miracle or mercy, or higher morality, or for the 'love of man', and should it have been I who had landed first,

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would I have abandoned what I had found for the next? Yes, it is true, some things have passed into the void forever; 'tis but a lamentation over spilt milk. Yes!, now all is possessed and 'Christianized', or anointed with civilization, nary a ghost of its former intrinsicity to be found. Mother Earth has been transformed into Real Estate and picturesque postcards.

And we would now find the place quarantined to protect the protectors of the protectorate - we have learned; let us read from the Decameron; now, what is it that plagues us?

Lest ye carry as cargo the 'root-of-all-evil', ye will not be allowed to step ashore.

Be prepared to 'sail on, sail on, sail on and on'.

If only the earth had been square instead of round, one might suddenly fall o'er its edge, freely away, to other times and climes, of which we have yet to dream.

Then, let us not take lightly this lesson. Aye, one cannot but ship some moralizing as he plows the seas of life. While one would be 'Captain of his own soul, and Master of his own Fate, the stage reserved for his solo performance is a circumscribed place wedged amongst all the other Captains.

E'en so, in our journeyings about, we spied many an empty shore where we could alight, perhaps not long to bask in the sun, or to glean breadfruit, coconut, or extract taro root, or carry off bronzed maidens, but instead to join, share, and do battle with the bear. Should we decide to disembark for a lengthy stay we must dispense with the dreamier stuff, being prepared to adopt a frontier existence; alas, to adapt to these grimmer coconutless realities. We need approach these colder, beachless, o'ertreed, and underbrushed isles with a good deal more resolve than we would a South Sea Isle. Should we decide to disembark for a lengthy stay, we must prepare for a less dreamy existence, to be sure; with an aged and infirm carcass, to be considered a more dreary, than dreamy, prospect; for we would be confronted as much with labor as basking. An airy grass hut constructed on these northern isles would expose one to the vicissitudes of a dankness destined to transform one into a living mould.

So, 'tis true then, one must set to his labors or strike a truce with his extravagance. Aye, one must to the task; a substantial shelter, firewood piled high and dry, the larder full, and one's little ship secure against the o'erfabled 'ragings' associated with the prevalent Pacific Lows familiar to these Bear Latitudes.

Then it is you might be qualified to feel as Captain and Master of your various capacities. And most likely a happy reward would be in store for you; it could be fairly stated that this faraway

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remoteness would be yours, within the normal range of expectancy, being unable to prevent all intrusions.

Perhaps you feel I make sport of you in suggesting this Godforsaken aphelion. While the suggestion may seem odious for its unvarnished depiction of what obtains in the realm of cheese parings, What Ho!; the experience of adjusting to these realities would not create an untoward imposition upon our only seemingly recumbent frames, whose genesis and resourcefulness has always met the challenge, throughout the millennia.

We might engage in some discussion concerning the style, but not improve significantly upon the gesture and basic accouterments of the experience. Should we be foolish enough to import the advantageous world-class by-products of the materioconsumereconomical civilization we had abandoned, we would but add to our labors, squandering the precious hours required to Captain the very Forces of Nature (nowadays, commonly referred as the Second Law) that conspired to reduce these importations to their former state.

While mother nature proves a formidable foe to our world-class presumptions, she is nonetheless provident in other ways; we could not have become what we are had she been any less provident. We may besmirch ourselves with, but cannot eat, gold. But most likely some stipend would be required to meet the needs of perfect health. Alas! a pragmatic stowaway climbs topside to play upon our sentiments; perhaps he could be sustained upon nature's stores, and our supplements. Verily, we most likely could do with less, for less becomes the criterion for salvaging the mission of our 'voyage thither'.

Advisedly, it may be thought best not to dispense entirely with our interdependency - indeed, though we remain, as ever, our own keeper.

Whereof, at this juncture, I should recall, deeming it not necessary to be specific in name, although I will swear to the reality, we have sojourned to that distant shore, venturing thereupon, only to learn we were not the first, and lately to learn, not the last. Indeed, having disembarked our "Escape to Reality", we found civilization secreted within its reposeful boundaries. In fact, without the aforementioned incursion (civilization) we may have been precluded from penetrating her armor of salal, thimble berry, blackberry, fern, alder, douglas fir, cedar and arbutus, flourishing lushly in every declivity and o'erhanging of rock; yes, even if we persisted with 'might and main'. Albeit, the incursion of the 'industrious flea' had provided a road, no less, for us to explore the environs, and 'Lo!', its inhabitants,

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proffered insistently, we accept humble transport to wherever it was they had occasion to go (via horseless carriage, needless to say), whereupon, through one gesture or another we attempted to decline, communicating 'we had merely disembarked to stretch our enboated limbs, though indeed we are apparently headed your way (there being only one way, in any case)'. 'Oh well, what the hell!'. Thusly we received our introduction to a fabled distant shore, wherein the 'natives' proved hospitable; and we had not greeted them with strings of beads.

Until this very landing we had considered ourselves intrinsically itinerant, having our roots in yet another place. Our previous shore leaves tended to serve a variety of utilitarian purposes associated with the 'cruising ' boater's life: water the dogs, stretch the legs, harvest berries or some other edibles, and only when absolutely necessary, to purchase groceries and fuel, launder our clothing, blissfully bathe, and partake of other 'civilizational amenities'.

In our cruising we had always admired, and even coveted, many of the visible, lofty, waterside perches so enchantingly erected by our fellow man upon these Shangri-Las. We had not particularly envisioned the same for ourselves, having reckoned our financial resources, finding them wanting as would accord such titillating deliberations. We had also observed the proximity of the one perch to another, deeming such closeness anathema to both privacy and conviviality, creating in our minds what seemed an incompatible intrusion, or unwarranted invasion, into the sacred marriage between man and the sea.

Nevertheless, upon occasion, we had considered divesting ourselves of our cargo, alias material wealth, somehow converting this burdensome baggage into some larger vessel upon which we could live, anchored somewhere in this other world of Shangri-La. Being of a pragmatic nature, rather than 'take the plunge', we continued in our o'ertrodden path, comfortable in our corporeal selves, crippled in our spirits (a dichotomous arrangement, to be sure).

But what followed from this hallowed, aforementioned, shore leave, set the stage for further yearnings and deliberations, thus encouraging in us a disease which grows progressively worse, from which there is no cure. A-men(RCWD).

Although not entirely unacquainted with the permutations of human nature, or the kinds of individuals one is apt to encounter upon islands, or in isolated places, having, in the past, lived upon an island for a short while, upon which dwelled some peculiar, yet enduring specimens, we had now encountered some more distinguished personages. While they would object to being

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perceived as specimens, one could not avoid noticing their casual self-contained notoriety, somewhat projected as a badge of honor.

While in ordinary society the 'ostensible' male sports a cowboy hat and some other projections of rugged outdoorsy wear or a three-piece Brooks Brothers, attesting to one's role or imagined status, depending upon his milieu, we come abreast of fads and stereotypes, all some artificiality generated by the manipulators of the materioconsumereconomical orthodoxy; and the ladies, whether ostensible or not, never knowing which Brooks will dominate the sexist world we live in, exist in mortal dread, lest fashion strand them high and dry in some hand-me-downs, casting them adrift as sexless nonentities.

'Tis not so amongst these islanders, who seldom dress to a congruous model, even of their own devising, often leaving one confused as to where they came from, and to what they belong, contravening the dire principle 'you can judge a man by appearances alone'. Oh!, 'tis unmistakable, many have frequented the Surplus Stores and the Salvation Army, and recycling works wherever chanced upon; and it is apparent that others insist upon constructing their own habiliment to more suitably house their personalities and their moods. 'Tis not that all are imbued with their difference; some, though naturally different, feel a more comfortable blending, less markedly attired in the ordinary. Quite often, when leaving the island to conduct affairs in the greater outer world, requiring a mingling with one's look-a-likes, they will armor-up in conventional garb; its all a matter of efficiency; still most wear themselves well, though attired in some straight-jacketed disguise.

While upon the island itself, the whole objective is to appear nonchalant in some unique form. 'There goes He', instead of, 'There, but for the Grace of God, go I'. At times an artful habiliment is displayed at social functions, and though you will search the world high and low, and enter all its crevices, you'd not find its duplicate anywhere. It would seem an affront to hold a casual conversation in such dignified 'get-ups'; even though one be an individual with aristocratic bearing, he must eventually fall heir to the mundane, lest he refrain from all idle conscionable intercourse (gossip).

I make some jest, but no sport, in these eulogizings. It is not often you would find, there, those who would regale the world in deceptive fineries, embarrassed in their individuality. Still it is sadly true, that in all walks of life 'tis not an easy matter to walk about nakedly nonchalant.

I might now elaborate upon the absence of conformity, conformity to a model. I might now elaborate on individuality as a

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mark of some truer personage. I might remark that individuality does not preclude a conformity to principles, certain principles, without which, men could not live together; for there is nothing inherent in individuality that assures for peaceful coexistence.

And further, I believe it is amongst these, if one discovers acts of free will that border on anarchy, while better understood in this human climate, they would suffer disapprobation, as they would elsewhere. Yet here, it is no crime or affront to the community to be an individual. All, without exception, yea-say individuality as the highest priority and highest premium in their lives.

While still not o'erpaved, civilization is a welcome guest. Survival is the name of the game, and because it is, the evils of the world have taken up residence as well. Like all men, we profess only good intentions, yet possibly harbor and eventually become the expression of evil.

All the same, we were well enough received.

We have returned again and again.

We are convinced that an island does exist within us, for we are afflicted with all the symptoms of that mysterious malady. Amen.

