

The Old Salt

VII *T*_{HE} *O*_{LD} *S*_{ALT} or *T*_{HE} *S*_{UBTERFUGE}.

This brief digression purports to convey some thoughts concerning writing and other pertinent matters.

A house may be designed and constructed in any number of ways; so it is with this convoluted scribbling; perhaps there are too many ways; how arrive at the correct way; is there an archetypal writing?

I am so full..... of..... clauses, parenthetical statements, appendages and digressions, I imagine myself as anything but archetypal. If longwindedness answers any part of the holier notion of writing archetypes, then surely, I may have found my niche, after all.

And while my sea-going adventures are so scant as not to fill a single volume, lest it be that of a pamphlet; being needful, then, of concocting unending arpeggios, trillings, mordants, and appoggiaturas to enliven my shanties, I shall continue to implicate all manner of perfunctory issuances, newspaper fashion, to fill the conspicuous void. Surely you may be rightfully inclined to inquire, "Where's the Substance?"

One's health is always at issue whether engaged in sailing, or in standing idly by on the dockside. Discussion bearing upon the maintenance of a healthful existence seems to find many participants and adherents. Everyone, eventually, seems to feel that life is worth living, and even when in ill-health will make some effort to expunge himself of all his bad habits towards that ephermeral elan.

In the interest of better health, I had ceased my affair with tobacco, much to the detriment of my salty image and to the horror of The Industry. Why my health, per se, should have become important to me, I know not; I suppose the thought of needing some kind of machine to assist my breathing evoked a most unappealing image.

Perhaps my health has benefited. Not having been a heavy smoker, and not needing, therefore, to fumble in the dark early in the morning for a fag, I was content to wait until mid-day before succumbing to this oral fixation. Regardless of the time of day, my fate was sealed for the remainder of that day until bedtime. Just because I was a late-bloomer didn't signify that I was in control of my habit.

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Without hypnosis, Slick, or other abetted discontinuance, 'cold turkey' sufficed to persuade me aboard the ferry to a better health.

Actually I had begun experimenting with smoking when around age sixteen or so. I am able to remember the first time; a bunch of us boys were 'playing hookey'. Part of our truant excursions usually involved a visit to the Charcoal Pits, as they were known to us. These hollow constructions were conical in shape some twenty feet in height and some twenty feet at the base, with a two-foot opening at the top and a larger, broader head-height opening at the base; they were constructed of unmortared stone. Reflecting upon those pyramidal erections causes me to marvel at them, wondering if they still exist. They certainly were not displayed as are the burial mounds of the Pharaohs, and are not considered one of the wonders of the world. Perhaps this is so because they were hidden in the bush and scrub like the Mayan ruins. In Egypt there are not too many trees; things therefore tend to appear more prominently. Doubtlessly, those pits have fallen to the usual store of vandalism that suffices as the proving grounds for the up and coming generation; one seems ambivalent about one's past.

All this conjecturing aside, I do recall dimly wondering how the builders of those pits managed to place all those stones at an incline without the forces of gravity defeating them in their endeavors. Actually, while we sat inside the pits, I remember a feeling of apprehension that the whole might cave in upon us; Hah!, in order to secret our truant selves, we risked all. The pits did provide some shelter from the elements, as well as screen us from curious and observant eyes. How odd though; we walked by these structures, as perhaps children do each day by the Sphinx in Egypt on their way to school, none the wiser they pass a marvel of the world; at least as a testament to slave labor.

I wonder how many teenage Egyptians smoke their first Turkish Delight in one of the Pharaoh's Tombs. Actually, one of my school, and in this case, vagabond chums, was considered a regular smoker. In other words, he smoked. "Joey smokes!". One day whilst we sat upon a log placed at the entrance to the 'Pharaoh's' pit, it befell me to lose my virginity to one of Joey's Phillip Morris. I yielded amidst hackings, coughings, belchings and gaggings; indeed a task for a *droit de seigneur*, and in the end I felt very dizzy and truly nauseated. [HOLY SMOKES!!, this is living!! ?](#).

I could lengthen this digression to speculate on the seduction of tobacco and the resultant deleterious effects. Whereas losing one's virginity, in some respects, might lead to pleasanter things, I

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could not envision where smoking was anything but a test of one's endurance.

As I had begun to speculate in the beginning of this discourse, I cannot determine the precipitous cause for any sudden onset of concern for my health. The Cancer Alarm had been sounded, but hadn't precipitated a headlong rush towards expiation amongst the errant masses (Oh!, the power of evil). Emphysema was another matter. A neighbor of mine couldn't walk one block up the hill without needing some kind of resuscitation; he had been a true inhaler who died of a stroke shortly thereafter. Another neighbor, a middle-aged lady, whose personality was intricately laced and linked to a series of gestures involving those little white cylinders, sort of like certain sultry movie actresses, perished of lung cancer. I remember the nearly daily delivery of oxygen towards her end. She had collected antiques; some had conjectured she shouldn't have been smoking while refinishing furniture. Solvents, sawdust, cigarette tars, and radon: in the light of what we (and the Surgeon General) seem to know, can you imagine what a lethal glop such a combination of ingredients would make?

I know I've lost you completely. I really wanted to impress upon you the magnitude of trying to solve one's health problems even when one isn't apparently all that concerned, and when it is apparent one ought to be; and even before I digress to the evil habit of writing. To be brief then, I had managed to cease the filthy habit; none too happily, I might add.

Just to illustrate: You all possess an image of the Salty Sea Captain, in his turtle-neck and tuque sauntering down the quay, with his Meerschaum amply stoked, cutting a distinguished and picturesque figure, a true emblem of his calling. Well now, its not all pose, and indeed, many a long hour standing watch upon the bridge gazing into an eternity of sea and sky, leaves one with little to do but meditate. What finer assistant to one's deeper cogitations than a bowlfull of an aromatic blend?

What more natural thing for an American Skipper then, to bestride the quarter deck of his bark, puffing, like some pacing steamer, upon his tobacco?

'Even the least contribute', some might say. In the end their Subterfuge was discovered. 'The Surgeon General has determined that Cigarette Smoking is Dangerous to Your Health'. Doth one thus impute the same dreary aspect to his aromatic blend?

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More than thirty-five hundred years, since the Phoenicians first plied the Seas, have Captains sailed unaided in their perils; a recent occurrence then; is it so, hardly do we qualify as Old Salts? None the less envision if you will, the puffing Captain upon the bridge, anticipating the Age of Steam.

How then came we by this perversity? Cristoforo Columbo, Cristobal Colon, Christopher Columbus; converso; weaver, sugar buyer, dreamer-mariner, explorer. CONQUISTODOR? We applaud him, as we applaud Adam. Adam abandoned Paradise and Columbus discovered the New World.

The emissaries to the New World were hardly the choicest of Adam's descendents. Amongst other things, it is a reasonable assumption, though the inhabitants of the New World were 'savages' and 'heathens', those conquering Spanish Bastards conducted very brusque courtships in defiling their womenfolk (propriety was not a consideration). Whereof doth these Conquistadors ply their vascular tissue? Ah!, *Princesse lointain*, Romance in a far away place; and the glories of our brutal naivete and rotten callousness. Perhaps they were trying to make Gold. Anyway let them brag their exploits that we may cheer them. They now lie applauded in their tombs deafened to this appraisal. And what of the 'natives'? Still mestizos, compesinos, peasants; some distinct order of chaff; just ask anybody.

Surely I put ye on notice, despite Spinoza's admonition, "Do not Weep, Do not wax Indignant; Understand". Ah! then; to the Riches, Gold, Women and Tobacco!

As I was saying; the Subterfuge: **Tobacco!**

Herba Panacea, herba santa, sans sancta Indorum; our holy nicotian, 'divine tobacco'. Is it any wonder that one would be lost without such close connection with the powers that might be?

Alas, a poisonous alkaloid; an insecticide - found therein.

Surely, some propitious intersection of the effulgent heavenly bodies is responsible for our sensibilities. Bring on the Astrologers; let us reorder this chaos.

Man; thou art a monstrous perplexity.

As you doubtlessly observe, adventure easily becomes a hazardous undertaking; one risks the perils of the sea, the treachery and savagery of natives, the rebuke of historians, the invocation of the metaphysician, the admonition of the Surgeon General and the devious soundings of the author, and tobacco companies.

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Take Heed then, before dire phantoms rouse you to action; peradventure some abstinence, a flogging, or a siege in the brig, would stand thee in better stead.

Perhaps some other substance could fire the boiler on the quarterdeck to aid the Chief in his deliberations and enhance his image.

Well, I'm not a sea captain, nor have I stood those long hours gazing into eternity; nevertheless, I have undertaken the semblance of such goodly works and have found it enjoyable to puff away in my cockpit pondering, as one is wont to do, the pondering wont abetted signally thereby, as though one were inhaling, filtering and distilling the Universe through this elementary oral connection. Who is it that may specify our source of wisdom?

'Twas so, at the peak of my Captaincy, after I had abandoned the habit, even while daily intrusions were made by some very sexy ladies from Madison Avenue, into my psyche, attempting to seduce me or convince me I would gain some semblance of their favors if I would but jeopardize my health ([faint heart ne'r won fair lady](#)), Yes!, at the peak, once again confronted with those long hours passaging from anchorage to anchorage, I yielded to the impulse (after seven years abstinence). It was not unlike my very first experience as a teenager in the 'pit'. Verily undone, I was needing much cradling and reassurance that life would go on; that old alkaloid feeling. Foolishly I continued for nearly another whole year before a health-consciousness reawakened the cold-turkey within me once again. To this day I am able to imagine the virtues of smoking without having to be seduced by a pair of thighs whose false promise confuses the issue. Not being able to maintain a vital contact with the Universe has been the most significant sacrifice, and as I accrue the years my perception of the Universe diminishes, clouding in proportion to the years; in searching for the Truths of this Man-dominated life, I feel an ever and ever greater need for my old assistant.

Perhaps, as Captain of my little store of health, it is better that I concentrate upon the matters at hand than seek out some great truth.

'Even if one only lives once, truth lives forever', so sayeth the Old Salt.

I had set out to say something concerning writing; instead all I have done is blow smoke.