

The Island

VI

The Island

Further Meditations and Reflections.

The literary fellow upon the Island had regarded me as some kind of social conscience; as a knat in the ear. He had styled himself sardonically as the sleezy, pusillanimous taxi driver; thus acting out some kind of apology and excuse for a behavior that disregarded social convention and propriety, and flaunted social seemliness. He had tried to find some accommodation with this knat, this foreigner, but abandoned him as of little consequence, rating him on some imaginary form sheet as though betting on the horses, or grading neophytes in the classroom, who simply had not got the message. While it is true I departed the Island, I had not died. And, Yes!, I was some kind of kink in the works; if things were to run along smoothly, one had to account the kinks.

We are assured we can not have the one without the other. I have given it some thought. I have become the prospective citizen of another country - on another planet, perhaps. He had had difficulty identifying with 'them'; too old perhaps, and too late. We were not unlike in this regard, even though antagonistic in most others.

I have found myself at odds with the counterculture contingent, although I am more sympathetic to their reason-to-be than their opposite, the upholders and yea-sayers. I had had this same lack of rapport with the 'beats' with whom I had been identified (a hole without a pigeon destroys the symmetry). By the time the hippies arrived, with whom I was also sympathetic, I was raising a family (doing it the traditional way). Communes and Dope seemed a reasonable way to go, if you were being asked to put your life on the line 'over there'. But just try to create a country within a country. While I was confident the counterculturists were motivated toward saving their own skins, I was uncertain as to what they were saving them for. Yes!, it should be sufficient for anyone to simply declare him(her)self a non-participant, as an inalienable right, without having to justify him(her)self. Perhaps the counterculture people are the advanced guard of the future wherein no one will participate in anything.

What Ho! If I persist in this vein, I will be engaging in speculations with regard to the First Amendment or the Tenth Amendment, or the First Sacrament. In seeking this place to die, since we all must go, I would marginally feel better if I could choose the place, if not the time. A certain mobility would enhance one's chances in finding the right place; a mobile island, let's say. I know this all sounds grim, almost as grim as passing along in an urban hospital, plugged into the I.C.U. life-support. This order of support, in its most succinct and cruel reality is simply

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support for Hippocrates, and Hippocrates Estate. Death-support needs some attention. To that end I seek to escape the urban hospital to the land of the sirens, who will bathe me in mysterious oils, ply my senses with secret elixirs, and fondle what remains of my life with utmost delicacy. In lieu of the latter I would seek my own elixirs or potions to administer when I had located the place of my choice in order to partake of a grand sendoff! Away! Harmony Heaven!

You imagine I parody a good honest passing. After years of faithful service one ought be done up in ribbons with a good deal of sacredness and sanctimony; embalmed, dolled, rouged, satined, baubled, ceremonied and lowered. An awkward business, getting old, then falling down; very undignified. I am rankling in this oldest of traditions. Jump from the highest promontory into the blue below, descending forever. Down with Mortuaries and Morticians! Forever!

I recall other moments while upon the Island:

"A strong wind arose. One could hear the russshhh through the trees. HE expelled even fiercer blasts; some of the trees lost their balance, then their hold, falling to the hard wet earth. I would be one of them.

No one would know. I would lie amongst all the others in the forest.

I imagined, perhaps before I returned to the immortal dust, A seed would fall into decaying remains, where another would obtain a foothold.

Failing that fantasy, where then would be the glory or the purpose? What glory is to be found in a simple decomposition; and being passed through the vermin that forage aimlessly along? Ah!, to become a seedbed!

She does not like to hear me speak this way; it reminds her of the long empty hours ahead. She knows I shall topple before her; then, the waiting will seem interminable.

I tell her that I have grown tired of maintaining my balance when the winds materialize; they always come, sometimes unexpectedly.

She frowns; she feels me slipping away in my thoughts. She feels she has lost her allure. She tries to cheer me with her smiles, then by gently touching me, then by brushing against me. She bares her breast, then her thighs, smiling, humming and caressing me.

Of course I do not turn away; I abandon those bleak thoughts; I speak not those chilling words. The wind blows; I maintain my balance. Dare I enter into a union with another; will I not become giddy?

Now I shall sleep for a while, the torment having subsided. Yes!, she is alluring, and indeed I am fortunate; and surely she does sway and swoon.

Then I awake with myself again, having forgotten. She is happy, Yes!; there is a lingering presence about her; surely that cheers me. I must not forget.

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But he that would reside in me, that composite being made of several puzzles mixed together, all cut from the same mould; though, when guided together, interlocked, form some crazy mosaic or crazy quilt, instead of a coherent and meaningful design; I am a crazy quilt. But is that not better than lying about in pieces that are apt to become lost altogether?

I am the composite tree. She stands beside me wanting only that for herself; and that I would notice her.

If you happen to be passing, you will be able to recognize me; I stand almost solitary, not really towering, but tall nonetheless, with a maze of short thick limbs above and heavy limbs below; I do not bend easily in the rush, but lean, flexing some. Not too distantly stands another, not quite so tall, being very slender in appearance, with shorter, sparser bows above and long elegant, drooping limbs below. It is she who sways and swoons, supplely arching in the rushes to touch the other".

I cannot recall the first imagery that came to my mind upon hearing or reading of the word: Island.

In another writing (Apropos of Nothing) I have described, in a chapter titled "When I Was Twelve" what it was like to be an island locked within a body from which there was no escape.

Iceland became the first real Island upon which I resided for any period of time. I had chosen to go there to escape the proximity of Korea aboard an aircraft carrier. Given my later propensity for the sea, perhaps it was an unwise choice. However, in attempting to estimate one's appreciation of the sea while aboard a floating steel city hardly conjures what I have since learned as the more intimate relationship with the water, and what romantic notions I have consistently entertained regarding the deep blue/gray/green. While I might have regrettably imagined Iceland from aboard a carrier, my purpose in being in Iceland, while disguised as a military one, was surely a lot of my own doing as much as anything else I have done. It was a matter of chance and opportunity, within a given framework, as have been all my other island experiences.

The opportunity may be said to have grown out of Hitler and the Japanese, the Lend-Lease and the Manhattan Project, and Yalta. Perhaps one is forced to delve deeper into the historical record, reaching back in time to he whom struck the first blow. Anyway the Ruskies got pretty strong and tough with our help. We helped them beat the piss out of Hitler because he was such a menace, then: anyway Korea came along, as a symbol of you know what. I hadn't reached my maturity (I was old enough all-right, but did not know what the hell was going on, and I didn't believe what they were telling me was going on {you have heard it all from me elsewhere, so I'll spare you the beration upon this

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occasion)}) when they had begun to chase me down, anxious to get me involved. I wish I could say some positive things about my experience with the military, but I was damned terrified of the power these fellow countrymen held over me in order to get me to do their bidding.

What has preceded constitutes only an aside. Iceland is more to the point, but, like Australia, it might as well have been a continent for all one felt of the intimacy of the sea on the restricted air base, located too distantly from the sea. A liberty trip to Reykjavik and an emergency aircraft landing on the island of Vestmannaeyjar, long summer days, 'northern lights' in the winter, and colorful skies become what is memorable from the experience. Vestmannaeyjar became the first real Island experience; although I did not walk upon a beach, I did walk the cinder fields and bluffs, the docks and quays. The city of Reykjavik and the settlement upon the Island presented a kind of plain prosperity embellished in a tidiness, and cleanliness, the tiled roofs and stone and stucco construction lending a feeling of permanence to the whole. I found this quite a contrast to the many shanties and cabins, and less substantial homes I have found along subsequent seashores in my own country, and upon the Island. Our structures, by comparison, almost seem temporary with their composition roofing and wooden exteriors, both subject to a rapid deterioration, and invasion by the elements and pests.

The impact of the sea in this Northland, while mindfully surrounding the small Island, was not allowed to penetrate much beyond my other preoccupations of the moment, doubtlessly having taken fancies to the skirted entities walking thereupon; sirens of Scandinavian extraction.

What had served as a symbol of rectitude in this long flight across the mystic oceans; as well, a dream designed to frustrate the conscious life; finally had become a tangible reality; a place where an awkward featherless pair of ceaselessly beating and droning wings would flail no more. The fear of drowning in the murky bloody sea of homo erectus had driven one thus; where one could stand alone on the unspoiled, unstained, pristine shore; no longer feeling those unholy compulsions to survive; able now to indulge and revel in the other less obvious persuasions of the Great Mother. We would now station ourselves above the sea, upon our bridge deck constructed of granite, beyond time and illusion, unassailable, invulnerable to all but Omega. There, beneath us, breathed the timeless element, overwhelming us with something we could neither identify, nor quantify.

With precious hours squandered; auguring, dredging and unearthing this Beforedeath repose, for which they had demanded that artless, indifferent medium of exchange; our signatures attested to our

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before-rapture three-dimensionality, our gross validity; spirits bounded in an ugly and mortal flesh.

We had requested an injunction against mankind. We had demanded that he not be allowed into the Temple ever again; the place, perhaps permanently, reeking of some foul smelling and obdurate animal.

Aye, we resideth in our ivory towers playing endless rounds of solitaire, when we could be preparing for the afterlife, or writing the long overdue treatise on the Rise and Fall of Bullshit.

On the mystical horizon one believed he could see a fleet of ships without flags.

In the silent wood, the Pestilence stirred; sharp little piranha-like, steel teeth, driven with motorized vengeance into the defenseless trunks. No anesthetic. Shots echo throughout the forest. Death walks everywhere; the price and admonition of Survival; somehow an inelegant, undainty, unfrivolous thrust. Another refrain omitted from Mother Goose and Beatrix Potter. Spare them in their innocence.

There is little wisdom in poetry. They live in wooden houses.

"Useless as tits on a boar", as one of the Islanders would paraphrase the elegant, refined sensibilities. Plato might echo the sentiment

That symbol of rectitude, lofted upon the metaphysics of escape, of longing, yearning, for the security for that innerness, that had discovered mostly malicious thorns, always diverting, and directing one's attention, morbidly, toward the inevitable escarpment. Yes!, this ship of an Island, does it too fail to fulfill its scantlings as the successful repository of buoyant dreams?

The decision having taken its final form in this concrete three dimensionality, acquires the epitaph of "Reality". Now what? Confinement? Confinement; another leap that has found one landing hard upon the planetary integument.

"Tis all too true, a patch of dream, of Paradise, had become something else, a still-life, a fait accompli.

What Rub doth lie therein?

Funnygin might utter, "What feels these muddles be!"

The EPITAPH: I dreamt, therefore I was.

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