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Jacques Servin

MIDDLESIZED SEA OCCURRENCE (Distress and civilization)

There was a big whipping-up over there in the sea, some of us noticed, a great big nastiness hovering over (among others) a spot which, upon squintier peering by us, contained a boy waving his arms so fast he seemed just a spot full of arms, if you can picture that image, and some of us scribbled it down in our notebooks and others made sketches while still others poured this into that and still others opened tomes and glared over their tops at the spot full of arms. “Whew,” we said, angry, because a whole shitload of activity on the part of your group is bound to make your group angry, let me tell you, what with: (a) civilization, (b) traffic, (c) lack of drugs for the soothing of states, and all like that; we thought it okay we were angry like this, though angrier surely would be way too angry, we figured—just okay angering-of was going down here, figuring just by results (anger quantity), this was believed—and oh, one tires of group dynamics and description of same and conveying to you said description, and besides, you’ve got other what-all to do, go do it.

Anyhow! We decided to go rescue the boy because after all you can’t just go drown a boy by disuse of your limbs, by refusal to act, anomie, non-plussedness, miasma of shucking obligedness, boohoo eczema, whatever you call it, so we concocted up a big odyssey starting with the camp stove and finishing with the boat paint and then we put all the items into the boat and pushed off.

We began the actual movement-charged part of the odyssey from the third rock to the left of the lighthouse when you’re facing the side of the harbor with the enormous laterally-syncoated charnel house whose surface and that surface’s incredible albedo are a darned good point of reference for describing the point of departure of us on a trip, both reference point and trip pretty big, let me tell you, trip especially, a darned odyssey if you start from the start and continue on through through all the effects of the trip on each soul of us thereafter. No one does, truth told, but describing the thing with precision is balm, there’s that to be said, there’s that.

We had brought several books, because an odyssey is a big thing and if you don't read you get stupider and stupider until first you're catching flies with your tongue out on the savannah, then rooting in peat, finally whipping at the chiggers with your big floppy tail and getting smacked upside heaven by cowboys, cowboys wanting *there* from *here*, go figure, which doesn't rest well . . . so we'd brought several books including, of all things, a tome on the disappearance of Egypt from westerns, and *Young Törless*, an excellent effort, and some other bits of good and nearly-good writing that all of them had something pretty instructive to leave on our minds and souls which, like most souls, were in need of some major instruction. And at this point in our odyssey, with the pushing-off from the rock (*cf. supra*), some of us fell to reading these books, and feeling a warm brush of air over us that could easily be mistaken for the Supreme Being's breath, and that was reported by the readers to everyone else as a positive thing about reading, so reading multiplied in extent to a certain extent, not to say much, but in each of us to a different one; in any case by the time we got to the boy there was reading in great multiplicities of extent, that's the important thing where this story's concerned.

The boy, to our surprise, was confused, this was his most obvious characteristic next to wetness. So we proceeded, first, to remove his confusion, because most of us were of a methodical turn of mind and considered that if one thing is clear, that thing must be acted upon rather than shelving it in favor of things below it in clarity.

The steps in our removing confusion were three, broadly classed as sanctity-avowal, distress-matching, and shipshapeness-lauding. In the first, we declaimed to the boy upon the sanctity of all life, the terrible things that can happen to the universe when that sanctity is obscured, etc. In the second we proved beyond doubt that the force of distress in each one of his now interlocutors, us, was equal, at least, to that he was going through there in the water, evidence of which, of course, was far clearer than ours, and could be felt even unto the droplets careening into our clothes from the water his arms were uplifting by dint of abovesaid distress. Finally, third, we exclaimed in the various formats we'd mastered the virtues of being "the way that is needed," of holding the "shimmering cadenza" appearance, etc.

We are not unfair, we are eminently fair, we consider ourselves the

apotheosis, collectively, of evenness in its ladled-out form, the kind that comes to be Justice. Thus we gave him his turn to express things, although it must be said that this, this behavior on our part, the expected behavior on his part, and so on, was less than obvious, less clear in import, usefulness, need, etc. than our previous action, in which we removed the boy's big-eyed confusion.

"What is your sentiment, boy," we said, "about all of these things? these things that you find yourself hearing? which we hope are the things that we, your rescuers, have been saying? though if not, if there are other things you are hearing, we are interested, then, in those things though, it must be admitted, purely in a science-led way, in a clear uncovering of the paths of this thing and that through to that thing and this, rather than in the humanitarian way we have so far been interested in the things that have so far occurred, here, between you and ourselves, including our speech and, projected, what we see as your clear-thought response? Yes?"

At this point, problem. We are not deaf to the needs of structure, we are not blind to the troubles of those who need structure, we are the clearest of thought when it comes to the hankering after symmetry so characteristic of those contending with civilization, civilization's wants, etc. Yet here we must fail you, Reader. As it happens, there are truths and behaviors we cannot describe, for that would be amending them, for they have not happened, and description would be emendation *nec sine virtute*, but without clear excuse. So here we will not be able to appose a response to our question, the question will go unanswered, and the fabrications of a poet among us will stand in the stead of the reasoned response we might long for, on behalf of yourself, understanding your needs, which—still, let us count blessings—will not, thanks to the poet among us, be wholly unmet.

The sentiment of the boy, were it expressed, then, would be this (though, it must be repeated, it was not):

"Catchment reservoir.

"The term calls forth countless memories. Jumping into the catchment reservoir, climbing out of the catchment reservoir, running my finger along the edge of the catchment reservoir between the alder and the first creosote to its left, etc.

“I liked it mainly because it was round, not square like a lot of other containers of water I’d seen. Also, its water came from the sky, not a faucet. Moreover, people would come and jump in, and yell at each other, and discuss harsh truths with each other—there was something about it that made people angry, and anger was something I was never allowed to envision at home, so I was awfully curious. (When I say ‘envision,’ of course I don’t mean ‘see’—I was allowed to see my parents and sister fighting all day and all night if I wanted—I mean, really, think about, notice, consider. In actual fact, the truth is, simply: if anyone caught me considering anger, *whop!* So the catchment reservoir was something for anger.)

“The day they destroyed the catchment reservoir was a sad one. It started early in the morning, when I awoke; it ended at night, when I went to sleep, finally, after that terrible day. During that day, destruction of place, health, life. But then it was over.

“Now I read about catchment reservoirs whenever I can. But there’s something about the one I grew up in, still, when I bring it to mind, that does something odd in my head. Go figure.

“In conclusion, and in greater, more thorough expatiation, complete with decocting of event as recounted to portray your expoundings” (note here the skill of our poet, who can both portray the lack of mastery in the speaking of thought characteristic of most boys today, though he himself, poet, is not lacking in same, and can at the same time append a conclusion worthy of the best of us) “I’d like to say that the difficulties I felt with the reservoir’s disappearance illustrate your sanctity obscuration precepts, first; and the simplicity of the circumstances surrounding these difficulties speaks for the commonness thereof, their equivalence in your lives, all of yours, second; and the keel, even, I held during the day of the catchment reservoir’s destruction displays the ‘shimmering cadenza’ precept absorbed and enjoyed by the listener, me, even before its expression, yours, third.

“Thanks.”

Again, this did not happen.

Instead, the boy, to the disappointment of all present, said nothing at all to any of us but quite simply vanished, which, if we’d bothered to study some articles published of late on the characteristics of the

boys of today, would not have surprised nor upset us. We might simply have returned with less pride than otherwise. Instead, we dove into the angry blue water one after the other until only the boat remained in the air, then examined some fish, then lay on the sand next to the boy for a good many years, done for the nonce with our odyssey, waiting, waiting for that token of notice by truth, resurrection.