
HAWAII / Donald M. Hassler

O strong soul, by what shore
Tarriest thou now?

Matthew Arnold, "Rugby Chapel," 1857

A strong resemblance links the faces
In my family. So though my father's death
Fell three falls ago, I saw him in the lobby
Of the Honolulu airport in his twin my uncle.

Uncle Dave tells the story of when they cleaned
Their father's church as kids, he drew a clever line
To separate the work in half. Now my father has
Finished his work first and the other brother waits.

In fact, my uncle also claims the family lost
My dad when he got married. My mother
Dominated. So it seemed proper to find
This uncle after many years and many deaths.

Also, it was he who mentioned Rugby Chapel
That I'd avoided reading since college.
Arnold isn't exactly what we pack these days,
And Waikiki and Pennsylvania Dutch are miles apart.

No one speaks today as Arnold spoke,
At least, and sells a poem. So half the time
My wife and I were cool and hung out
Around the beach. The other half is what I'd write:
Gothic chapels haunting enlightened shores.

He gave me Chapman's Homer in his Pacific
Paradise and talked of when his dad,
The preacher, had come up to Yale
Proudly to see his son's Gothic graduation,
And all the stories a twin will tell on his brother.

But more than Homer, it was Vergil
On my mind this trip—the part where three times
Aeneas tries to touch the shadow of his father.
My students always laugh at how much Vergil

Has him weep too, those old Arnoldian classics.

We moderns don't believe in shadows anymore,
Certainly not on the sun-draped islands.
But shadows drove this modern jet
Voyage of ours, and if sentimental means
Reaching out beyond the possible, we touched

Shadows this trip. My uncle with his eyes
Lit up spoke of his father. I spoke of mine.
Finally, perhaps, the islands are not so isolate
And enlightened because my uncle said it rained.
It always rains when someone leaves, he said.