

Journal of Salvator R. Tarnmoor

Selected Excerpts

Introduction

Discovered near Banks Cove, this moldering journal is wrapped in oilcloth and contains a faux bookplate identifying its owner as “Salvator R. Tarnmoor.” A surprisingly literate harpooneer, Tarnmoor spends much of the journal recording fanciful descriptions of the Galápagos Islands and spinning tall tales. The following excerpts illuminate his stay on Albemarle Island. (A more “authentic” handwritten version follows these typed excerpts.)

1841

From the Acushnet to Albemarle; or dare I say hell. But ‘tis my hell, to paraphrase Lucifer, & better reign on a clinker than serve a floating tyrant!

[A long poem about the hellish landscape of the Galápagos, written in a deliberately antiquated style with archaic spellings.]

Today I repair the boat.

This island is perfect. A home for my scavenged flotsam & jetsam! The soil is wretched; I suspect many journeys in my future, transporting sacks from the interior. Surely something will grow here? If the Florianos can tend this wretched earth, so can this son of the Hudson Valley!

A most unusual visitor today, a British surgeon named Nigel Vox. A deserter for sure—the *Hyperion* left the anchorage this morning. There was something about his manner that troubled me; a nervous stutter & a look in his eye, like a beaten cur. He claimed to be following dreams; but given the contents of his medico’s bag, I fear these dreams are of the Celestial variety. After trading sweet potatoes for a phial of camphorated medicine, I bid him farewell. I have a notion that once his laudanum has run its course, he’ll rejoin his trade on the next departing whaler.

1842

And lo! A small iron trypot, traded for knowledge of the nearest freshwater spring, a bushel of mangoes, & my spare copy of Milton. From a boiler of whales to a potter of terrapins.

I acquired a pair of freshwater kegs, a tolerable skillet, & a cask of hardtack. It seems these sailors have a near superstitious regard for terrapin oil! I have become Tarnmoor the mountebank, peddler of potions, Excellency of Elixirs, Padishah of Patents. Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!

The wild dog I have been feeding has finally agreed to enter my boat. I shall call him Pilot; it's an excellent name, auspicious & good-omened. Pilot, my fellow hermit.

[Fanciful notes on previous Galápagos hermits, including a mutinous figure named Oberlus.]

I saw them again, near the ridgeline of the northern volcano. Two figures! Yet no ships lie at anchor. My suspicions were correct; this island is not my hermitage alone. I cannot shake the suspicion that one of them was the surgeon I wrote about some months previous, the opium-eater with the nervous disposition.

I feel their eyes, the secret watchers.

1843

Today I returned to discover my garden plundered! And yet, there are no ships in the anchorage. Plundered! Despoiled! All my labours lost! I must start again.

Imps of Darkness! They watch me, they hiss at me with their reptilian vileness. I say, if the terrapins carry the souls of wicked captains, these fuligin abominations are burdened with those whose crimes far exceed teetotaling and flogging—mutineers, murderers, scofflaws & blackguards of all stripe, from the cruelest overseer to the most wretched pimp. I look into their eyes and I see a rogue's gallery! And they gather on the rocks and hiss! What do they want from me?

[A story about "The Creole Dog King," a fictionalized version of General de Villamil that transforms his prison colony into a pirate republic.]

Such wild storms! Yet again, the northern heavens were aflame with lightning, the very atmosphere a Leyden jar charged with electrickal particles. St. Elmo paid my humble castle a visit, leaping from my harping iron to terrify poor Pilot. I am reminded of that gothic romance by Wollstonecraft's daughter, what was it called? And what dead stand to be resurrected upon these Tartarean shores?

Today my mansion has grown another wing! Oh terrapin oil, oh vegetables, oh fresh water; you are the currency of my exile, the sulphur and souls to my Lucifer!

The garden plunderers have struck again. I need more dogs!

1844

It was worth the expenditure of powder & shot. Now they know I am armed, and ready to defend my singular nation! But who are these men? In all my wanderings, I have seen no sign of others.

Was this ball worth my magickal oil? Still, it's good to have another "friend." I painted his face with Wilson's mad eyes! How he made me laugh. I miss his company.

[Whimsical notes on a detailed excursion to Redondo Rock and the “Pisgah” sights of the islands afforded from the view.]

Muttering in Spanish, all night long. By some acoustickal trick of the lagoon, the voice sounded at first here; then there. For whatever reason, I do not believe this mutterer an associate of my thieves. There was something broken, abject, about the soliloquy. Maybe one of the creole’s castaways?

1845

Again! A nocturnal muttering, a distant stream of broken Spanish syllables. When I called out, the infernal whispering stopped, and by the moonlight I saw a figure loping up the side of the crater. Pilot and I examined the location and found nothing, nothing but spiders & clinkers & endless ash.

A new visitor has arrived upon these shores, a plump negro woman. She must have arrived on the most recent whaler, but the captain never mentioned a hen upon his frigate. She has made camp north of Banks Cove, and possesses a confidence remarkable for her sex. I shall extend the hand of amity tomorrow.

She is gone! I dare say, my island hermitage has been growing decidedly less hermitous. Perhaps my mystery matron was a chola from one of the Spanish colonies? But why come to Albemarle?

[A long story about a “chola” woman and her retinue of pet dogs.]

Blasted thieves! Blackguards! Ruffians and criminals! My powder horn is missing! I was absent but a few short hours, and I carried the paddle with me—the scoundrels must have swam to my island, bribing faithful Pilot with a leg of goat! They also stole my most recent batch of oil. Fortunately, they had no intelligence about my secret caches. Oh, Pilot! Your thirty pieces of silver were minted in meat & marrow!

Traded oil for gunpowder with one Mount Sinai Butterfield, a rather dashing—if somewhat eccentric—captain from the Theresa, currently at anchor. The captain shewed me a most unusual firearm. He was accompanied by a Mowri harpooneer, a handsome fellow covered with tatus. I must say, while the captain put a rather high stock in my terrapin oil, the Mowri was more interested in my necklace of booby claws, and offered to trade his harpoon for it! Of course I sensibly declined.

Today I leave to explore the northern volcano as thoroughly as possible. Cap’n Butterfield claimed a wild isolato was discovered there in the ‘30s, inhabiting some sort of “philosophical cave” in the caldera. It would be interesting to shine some light on this tale, perhaps discover this Platonic eyrie for myself. Moreover, I have reason to believe the region is occupied—perhaps the home of these wandering souls, these pirates of my island garden? After all, if they are men and not phantoms, they must have a home, a place to sleep & eat & worship as men. I have looked everywhere else—why not this caldera? In any event, I shall take my trusty espingole, & my faithful Pilot shall be at my side.

1841

From the Acushnet to Albemarle; or dare I say hell. But 'tis my hell, to paraphrase Lucifer, & better reign on a clunker than serve a floating tyrant!

Today I repair the boat.

This island is perfect. A home for my scavenged flotsam & jetsam! The soil is wretched; I suspect many journeys in my future, transporting sacks from the interior. Surely something will grow here? If the Florianos can tend this wretched earth, so can this son of the Hudson Valley!

A most unusual visitor today, a British surgeon named Nigel Vox. A deserter for sure—the Hyperion left the anchorage this morning. There was something about his manner that troubled me; a nervous stutter & a look in his eye, like a beaten cur. He claimed to be following dreams; but given the contents of his medic's bag, I fear these dreams are of the Celestial variety. After trading sweet potatoes for a phial of camphorated medicine, I bid him farewell. I have a notion that once his laudanum has run its course, he'll rejoin his trade on the next departing whaler.

1842

And lo! A small iron trippot, traded for knowledge of the nearest freshwater spring, a bushel of mangoes, & my spare copy of Milton. From a boiler of whales to a potter of terrapins.

I acquired a pair of freshwater kegs, a tolerable skillet, & a cask ofhardtack. It seems these sailors have a near superstitious regard for terrapin oil! I have become Tarnmoor the mountebank, peddler of potions, Excellency of Elixirs, Padishah of Patents. Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!

The wild dog I have been feeding has finally agreed to enter my boat. I shall call him Pilot; it's an excellent name, auspicious & good-omened. Pilot, my fellow hermit.

I saw them again, near the ridgeline of the northern volcano. Two figures! Yet no ships lie at anchor. My suspicions were correct; this island is not my hermitage alone. I cannot shake the suspicion that one of them was the surgeon I wrote about some months previous, the opium-eater with the nervous disposition.

I feel their eyes, the secret watchers.

1843

Today I returned to discover my garden plundered! And yet, there are no ships in the anchorage. Plundered! Despoiled! All my labours lost! I must start again.

Imps of Darkness! They watch me, they hiss at me with their reptilian vileness. I say, if the terrapins carry the souls of wicked captains, these fuligin abominations are burdened with those whose crimes far exceed teetotaling and flogging—mutineers, murderers, scofflaws & blackguards of all stripe, from the cruellest overseer to the most wretched pimp. I look into their eyes and I see a rogue's gallery! And they gather on the rocks and hiss! What do they want from me?

Such wild storms! Yet again, the northern heavens were aflame with lightning, the very atmosphere a Leyden jar charged with electrical particles. St. Elmo paid my humble castle a visit, leaping from my harping iron to terrify poor Pilot. I am reminded of that gothic romance by Wollstonecraft's daughter, what was it called? And what dead stand to be resurrected upon these Tartarean shores?

Today my mansion has grown another wing! Oh terrapin oil, oh vegetables, oh fresh water; you are the currency of my exile, the sulphur and souls to my Lucifer!

The garden plunderers have struck again. I need more dogs!

1844

It was worth the expenditure of powder & shot. Now they know I am armed, and ready to defend my singular nation! But who are these men? In all my wanderings, I have seen no sign of others.

Was this ball worth my magickal oil? Still, it's good to have another "friend." I painted his face with Wilson's mad eyes! How he made me laugh. I miss his company.

Muttering in Spanish, all night long. By some acoustical trick of the lagoon, the voice sounded at first here; then there. For whatever reason, I do not believe this mutterer an associate of my thieves. There was something broken, abject, about the soliloquy. Maybe one of the creole's castaways?

1845

Again! A nocturnal muttering, a distant stream of broken Spanish syllables. When I called out, the infernal whispering stopped, and by the moonlight I saw a figure loping up the side of the crater. Pilot and I examined the location and found nothing, nothing but spiders & clinkers & endless ash.

A new visitor has arrived upon these shores, a plump negro woman. She must have arrived on the most recent whaler, but the captain never mentioned a hen upon his frigate. She has made camp north of Banks Cove, and possesses a confidence remarkable for her sex. I shall extend the hand of amity tomorrow.

She is gone! I dare say, my island hermitage has been growing decidedly less hermitous. Perhaps my mystery matron was a chola from one of the Spanish colonies? But why come to Albemarle?

Blasted thieves! Blackguards! Ruffians and criminals! My powder horn is missing! I was gone but a few short hours, and I carried the paddle with me—the scoundrels must have swam to my island, bribing faithful Pilot with a leg of goat! They also stole my most recent batch of oil. Fortunately, they had no intelligence about my secret caches. Oh, Pilot! Your thirty pieces of silver were minted in meat & marrow!

Traded oil for gunpowder with one Mount Sinai Butterfield, a rather dashing—if somewhat eccentric—captain from the Theresa, currently at anchor. The captain shewed me a most unusual firearm. He was accompanied by a Mowri harpooneer, a handsome fellow covered with tattoos. I must say, while the captain put a rather high stock in my terrapin oil, the Mowri was more interested in my necklace of booby claws, and offered to trade his harpoon for it! Of course I sensibly declined.

Today I leave to explore the northern volcano as thoroughly as possible. Cap'n Butterfield claimed a wild isolato was discovered there in the '30s, inhabiting some sort of "philosophical cave" in the caldera. It would be interesting to shine some light on this tale, perhaps discover this Platonic cynic for myself. Moreover, I have reason to believe the region is occupied—perhaps the home of these wandering souls, these pirates of my island garden? After all, if they are men and not phantoms, they must have a home, a place to sleep & eat & worship as men. I have looked everywhere else—why not this caldera? In any event, I shall take my trusty espingole, & my faithful Pilot shall be at my side.