



WHEN THE EVENING GETS DOWN TO CIGARS

by Sam Hazo
Pennsylvania State Poet, 1993-2003

WHEN THE EVENING GETS DOWN TO CIGARS

Let's now be frank.
The subject is cigars.
We first should thank
Sir Walter Raleigh
and those other harvesters
from Cuba or the south
for rolling leaves
of ripe tobacco into shapes
adapted to the human mouth.
Some thanks are also due
to bars and pubs
and sundry bachelors' clubs
whereby the custom grew
to strike and flare an after-
dinner match to a cigar,
then puff and blow blue
smoke in layers
to the ceiling ...

So much
for history.

Let's now
be franker and admit
that cheap cigars
or those left over
and re-lit smell ranker
than the smell of bear,
and that, lest we forget,
is just about as rank
as you can get.

One's
obligation to cigars
is not complex.

Some projects,
once begun, like Mass
or surgery or sex,
cannot be interrupted
under pain of loss.
What's true of such
is truer of cigars.

Initially, make sure the oils
in the wrap and filler
are exactly up to scratch,
then crimp the tip
by mechanism or incisor,
touch a match-flame
to the waiting end
until it glows, and lo!
you are a smoker.

So ...

Imagine that your debts
are paid, your enemies
at bay, your gas-tank
full, your peace with God
and man assured,
your mind at play
with folderol or whimsy
and your appetites replete.
Now let cigar-smoke
lasso you in rings
of blue, creating something
like the hue of smoke-filled
rooms where presidents
are often picked, huge
fortunes made or thrown
away and poker played
from midnight to the light
of day and after.

So much
for atmosphere.

Just puff
and aim a beam
of smoke at nothing
but the fact of satisfaction ...
What seems a treasure
in this world is not
for us to measure.
Sometimes it's quite
enough to marvel
at a dream that turned
mere leaves into a pleasure.

As hard as it is to imagine, cigars have not always been part of the life of the Rascals, Rogues, and Rascalions. The first time we lit up at an RR&R meeting was December 4, 1993. I was answering a Rascal Challenge to find something interesting that had happened on December 4. As it turns out, that was the day, in 1871, that Moses F. Gale of Brooklyn patented a cigar lighter. So we had a program about cigar lighters. Which meant we needed some cigars. And that seemed to call for cigar songs – this was the first time “My Last Cigar” was sung at an RR&R meeting. And, to gild the lily, I asked Sam Hazo, the State Poet of Pennsylvania at the time, to grace us with his company and declaim a few lines in honor of the humble stogie. Which he did with tremendous style. Here, in print for the first time, is “When the Evening Gets Down to Cigars,” a poem Sam modestly insisted was not a poem, but just a few lines of occasional verse. And the poet’s fee for his work? One box of Macanudo Maduros. A bargain at twice the price.

Daniel Paul Morrison
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