

Apropos Of Nothing

II

Apropos Of Nothing

When I Was Twelve.

The Noiseless Flash.

All reflection and possible foresight are buried and lost in the crisis of the moment; such are the workings of our world. Do not imagine, however, the event transpired so long ago that it has fallen into the category of rightful forgetting; do not imagine that we would not do such a thing now. There are even more recent events, haunting one's memory, that one has to struggle not to forget.

I was twelve at the time. Just imagine - what would the chances be ordinarily? Yes, our human recorded history recedes dramatically into a crumbling, deteriorating, fragmented handful of souvenirs only thirty-five hundred years ago; and who knows the duration of the preceding evolutionary period? Add to that the amount of time we expect to survive in the very uncertain future. Yes, now just imagine, given the longevity of the average life (at this time it does not matter whether one is a Swede or an Ethiopian), the chance occurs anywhere between one in fifty to one in thousands that a particular person would be born at any particular time (this calculation also discounts the numbers involved in the sperm and ova available to the process). My own offspring came afterward, after the particular momentous occasion that now occupies my interest. However, their lives do coincide with these more recent events, events that are seeking to discover a hole in our memories.

I was twelve at the time. The nation I had been born into had been the one to release its devastating power upon its enemy - and the rest of the world. Only eight days later, the same day as my brother's eleventh birthday, the last Axis enemy had agreed to the unconditional surrender, while the rest of the world would slowly surrender to the oppressive malaise. Neither my brother, nor I, our parents, our President, or even those who developed the bomb had any clear idea of what was really happening. Of course my brother and I were the most ignorant as not too differently were our parents and our President; we were not 'Scientists'. Those who developed and released the force and the weapon, those prized exponents of scientific enlightenment, progress and orthodox patriotism, they knew how devastating the power; and more, they had witnessed and photographed beforehand its annihilating power. But, the lingering aspect; some of them should have been able to predict; however, none knew the full magnitude of the after effects. The expedient claimed the hour.

This is not being written to accuse anyone. If accusations were in order, one would be obliged to begin with Adam and Eve. Do not, however, mistake the intent; one is not automatically excused from

When I Was Twelve

culpability. The enemy and my nation were both party to their joint difficulties; while the enemy was an aggressor (as we were against the Red Man), we displayed arrogant diplomacy, as did our antagonist. Hindsight fills in the gaps in our understanding; we continue to be what we are, even during our finest moments.

The pros and cons have been debated whether or not the President had bound his nation to perdition, through his expeditious calculations - given that the enemy was virtually defeated. At the time The Bomb was released, some 90 cities in Japan had been reduced to ashes, including all the critical Industrial Areas; only four cities remained mostly undamaged; Hiroshima, and Nagasaki amongst them (Was there too much eagerness to do this thing?). Probably it is safe to assume the President's action resulted in saving many lives of the soldiers of his nation through his decision to implement the most awesome and quickest means at his disposal, in order to persuade towards the termination of the conflict. That's the propaganda, anyway. The end was all that mattered: if the total evisceration of every last one of the enemy had fulfilled the requirements of the means, then let it be done. One does not trifle with righteousness, even if Judgment Day did come a day too soon. Besides they were Japs; yellowish with slanted eyes.

Hiroshima was not a military target; it was an amphitheater for the Noiseless Flash. Meanwhile my brother and I could only think of play, of escaping the confinement of school, the rules invented by our parents, teachers and society, that were intended to guide and funnel us into the MOULD. That was our perspective. Surely we had heard of the Japs and the Nazis; they were something to be feared and despised. WOW!, just imagine killing nearly one-hundred thousand in one blow? Efficient (not slow, like Dresden). It has since been documented that the Japanese were human beings, however misguided by their Emperor; they shared in the shame of his defeat; they were neither able to assist him, nor knowledgeable or powerful enough to auger for a better way. My brother and I were also powerless.

Hindsight argues the President (The Buck Stops Here!) could have demonstrated his weapons some other way; many have stated there were channels of communication open to the enemy. Many have stated that avenues had been opened at Yalta to have negotiated an end to the conflict, as many have suggested the conflict could have been avoided in the beginning. Our legacy from Adam and Eve (Our Genesis). Now though; what foresight issues from this memory? If I had been born today instead of during that momentous time, would the event have harbored less significance? There are some who still commemorate the day. However, ought we not detonate twenty kilotons of trinitrotoluene every year on August 6th, recording the event, replaying it over and over again to ourselves - throughout the year, instead of playing tiddly little games on the Fourth of July? Yes!, by all

Apropos Of Nothing

means replay the recorded explosion over Hiroshima as a daily prayer, not as a matter of conscience, but as a prompt to our foresight; as a lesson in vigilance, the vigilance over our forgetful natures; and as a prescribed watchfulness over our inherent aggressive, hostile and destructive natures.

We were the ones; Yes!, theirs was the abominably aggressive act that precipitated that latest of diabolical horrors that marks only too clearly the trail homo sapiens has haphazardly blazed through his thirty-five hundred years of recorded history, wherein only some two-hundred odd have been free from WARS.

Most of the protagonists and antagonists of that day in our illustrious history, during that Good War, are no longer in evidence in order to freshen our view of the horrors. However, a whole new rash of no less diabolical horrors has arisen to replace them; ones which would make those who participated in WW II seem like babes in the woods. Although The Bomb was heralded to be the instrument to end all Wars, with all of its concomitant persuasive force, it possessed no intelligence; it was merely matter. Those who rearranged this matter into its critical configurations possessed the intelligence to design its construction and 'delivery'; many of them. scientist-patriots, who would issue disclaimers to the political implementation of their most fondled creation. The blood would be on other hands. Blood and Matter. Should one ask whether War has been rendered a useless arbiter in the affairs of men?

The hand of any man who strikes a look-a-like is judged to be that of Cain. Cain struck Abel rendering him lifeless. Perhaps the blow expunged Cain of his jealousies of Abel. He had mistakenly believed the Father would now take notice of him. Though we live with the mark of Cain upon us, we presume, still, to believe we have the right to live in Eden. One suspects most of the attempts to end life in others are a momentary consideration, even in the cases of capital punishment. Only the 'righteous' can be certain that ending life is a proper conclusion to another's life. If we could make a man lifeless for a day, a month, one or twenty years, we would do just that, as a form of punishment; mainly because we would not know what else to do, feeling we were expected to do something retaliatory, primarily out of vengeance, and secondly, to teach a lesson pursuant to some pedagogical imperative; or to serve an even more sinister and perhaps unspeakable objective.

The Good Guys and the Bad Guys. My brother and I unleashed some innate program upon each other at times. What was our intent? Was I, some first-born sibling, superior; was I, he, who had 'rightful' inheritance to the throne, brooking no surliness from the resentful? Was he not outraged at being manipulated by the heir apparent? Did my gracelessness not affront him? Was it simply not frustrating to be second, unequal in size, even lesser in the presumed tacit prerogatives? And was I not inclined to play the role of Cain, having felt the patronizing

When I Was Twelve

father? Could a wiser, more indulgent, parent have known or foreseen the potential for physically abusive altercations? Father might conjecture, "They'll work it out; they'll not kill each other", or he might intercede on behalf of his favorite. We did not kill each other; as a matter of fact most of the time we supported each other in our plight against parents, teachers and society. In our later altercations against the larger brotherhood of community and world we seldom struck, never killed, and avoided righteous actions.

Someone eventually probes, "What would it take to get you to kill?" I believe this question to be a *non-sequitur*, a question which attempts at provocation and provides chaff for the Fourth Estate.

Well, then, how many killings are premeditated? In Wars, each assault is premeditated, the number of survivors merely being the result of the adventitious. Premeditated mayhem or slaughter becomes a righteous act during wartime, war being a license to practice savagery, whether in hand to hand combat or through computer to computer Nuclear Atari. These matters belong in another discussion pertaining to our limitations and those imposed upon us by an imperfect Universe which was designed Without Morality.

To return to being Twelve again. The significance of what happened on that day in August escaped me. I feel the great mass of humanity could not conceive of the magnitude of the implications of this singular feat of human achievement. He would learn. There were some who knew; there were some who envisioned certain persuasions, conquerings, even masteries or sovereignties over the peoples of, and of the planet itself. We were to learn more about ourselves as the years passed; not new things, but the repetition of old things; depressing, seemingly predestined things, about ourselves. We, those of my nation, always seek to place the blame on another, as do their counterparts over the horizon.

When I was twelve, there would be an assortment of games we could play as a group to while away the hours; Cowboys and Indians, Cops and Robbers, or War, would often be amongst them. Rules for our competitive amusements would be only generally agreed upon, never invoking the Hague or the Geneva Conventions, much less, a legible copy beyond some scratchings on the surface of the earth. As long as the 'Olympian' spirit existed in our frolics, all would seem to run smoothly, the winners and losers congratulating or consoling each other respectively. But seldom did the Olympian spirit prevail for long, as in real life. Personalities tended to dominate; some would not and could not lose. Loss to them was an unimaginable state, a veritable death to their Egos.

"Bang!..Bang!". "Gotcha!, you're Dead!!"

"Unh.. uahh"; "You never got me .. your aim was bad."

The first thought to protest, but was the smaller. The second invoked a nonexistent rule involving aim; he denied the first, justice siding with

Apropos Of Nothing

the stronger. If play was to continue, the first would always be obliged to yield to the second. The only recourse open to the first was to use live ammunition. Ain't that the way of it though? It is the best of all possible worlds. Question is, do we ever outlive our juvenility?

We needed to humor ourselves in the late Fifties and early Sixties when they were shouting at each other at the top of their lungs, befouling the air with their spittle. I forget now how menacing the snarling sounded, or the decibels; what was it, fifty or one-hundred megatons; and how much Strontium 90 had they found in the cows milk in St. Louis? Are you able to conceive of a Megaton? Of Trinitrotoluene? 1,000,000 tons of **Boom!** Then, what was it, 100 megatons. That's a lotta **BOOM!**

As I've grown older trying to avoid the inevitable, contemplating the precipice, none the less (always contemplating the precipice), I realize my life will not have eclipsed the end of this dreadful concoction or the operatives inherent to its erection and maintenance. The great mass of us are not privy to the discussions involving the latest humane concepts of 'clean bombs' or 'neutron bombs' or 'tactical' or 'smart' or 'who the hell knows bombs'. We are caught in a web of machinations designed to enslave us to a particular ideology - or some rapacious parasite in the form of exploitative economics. And, Alas, we cannot cross some border (to emigrate to another societal arrangement) or disappear behind some curtain in order to escape the deviant and inhuman (?) contemplations of our jailers, Yes, despite the UN's Declaration of Human Rights. It has been proclaimed that "Ignorance is Bliss"; we thus hearken back to Feudal Times, with a fearful ache inside.

Yes, there have been Disarmament Talks; so they intimate. Talk is cheap. Just Posturing. We have agreed upon Mutually Assured Destruction. And have we not remained armed to prevent the excluded ones from overwhelming us (our own exclusive Apartheid)? Has there not been a distinct 'advantage' in remaining 'strong' in order to control and deny, both our own restless peoples and the peoples of the other worlds; those of the great proletarian mass? What am I saying; me; I am one of the restless proletarian mass, no matter who may be my master. Our ideological jailers have colluded to deny everyone - thus Disarmament will never be achieved, NOT UNTIL, genetics alters the beast in another round of evolution, or the fates reconvene...or Hell freezes over. If I would allow my paranoia full rein, I would accuse the 'power structures' of collusion (not that diabolical, you would say). They have assumed prerogatives that reach beyond humanistic (?) dimensions; have usurped and betrayed the support of the masses in some bizarre perpetration, almost infantile in nature, feigning an egocentric cock-of-the-rock, survival-at-any-cost mentality, voiding our common humanity (?). The naive, blinded, yea-saying masses (you and I) have been thrust at each other in constant hypothetical conflict, as so-called

When I Was Twelve

insurmountable and irreconcilable ideological differences parry incessantly, forever threatening to draw blood (yours and mine). If you think I'm paranoid, just read and listen to the parings gleaned from the Fourth Estate, listen to and read the glib rhetoric being espoused by our leaders. Every single moment of every single day. Having a bad guy hanging around keeps our jailers in business.

No, I'm not quite through And have not the munitions makers a vested interest in bloodshed? Are not the 'powerful' nations (who are in the minority) engaged in more than ideological disputes? While it profits them to peddle arms to the burgeoning masses of the other world, do they not also deliberately and callously send forth their missionaries of doom to invent and exacerbate conflict; and finally, is there not some sinister motivation in provoking the other world to destroy itself? Hard Words? YES! (Ours) a Christian Nation? (What in hell is a Christian Nation?) Human Rights? PSHAW!!

There are those amongst us who delve into the study of our behavior, none being able to discover the crucial place or piece of information. However, we do assess vital links, a priori, between our behavior and the 'essence' of survival, so-called 'instinct to survive' ... THEN From our first cell emerges the memory of the thrashing and whirl of the ether bound in a colloid that struggles then and forever against the vacuous and incommensurable Universe. We become stark naked; our fingernails, our toenails are blunt; our teeth, fragile, stubby, square bones, accustomed to chewing morsels; our arms, our legs, but spindly extensions enjoined to complacent tasks Our humanity is thrown over, divested of its vision.

Call it, then, the colliding of essences, or colliding of auras. We attempt to bridge the gulf between our circumscribed entities, our singularities, with salutations, with smiles, bows, handshakes, touchings, embracing and defenseless lovings.

"I'd like you to meet so and so."

"Hello, how are you?" "*Enchanté!*" Grin; handshake.

How many times has the taking and shaking of the hand not been a contest, as much as the greeting that bridges the gulf, and that inadvertently or purposely widens that gulf into a sea? Perhaps I am too shy or timorous to understand or appreciate the greeting of the enthusiast who hails one with the painfully overbearing squeeze of homo steroiderectus. I feel put upon; I feel obliged to raise my knee. Equally bemusing, but without violent overtones is he that offers his hand apathetically as though it was a fresh piece of window putty, as a non-gesture. Am I really doing this? How did we get into this anyway? Shake a Leg. I shake my head. Why bother? There will be no transgression of auras; 'I reserve the right'....'to turn the other cheek'.

When we were twelve, the aura was more shrunken; we tended to collide easily - poking, slapping, punching or wrestling each other;

Apropos Of Nothing

handshaking made us feel awkward. I suppose on August 6, 1945 there were many twelve year olds in Hiroshima, with shrunken auras jostling each other about when the highest achievement in the world of Physics incinerated them. Perhaps they were not worth the life of one soldier. The unbalanced equation. A bit of last-minute genocide?

When the soldier returned it was 'business as usual'. One searches for perspectives to ordinate these experiences, feeling they are beyond his ken. Whereas ultimate truths may be denied to one, I am not ready to be satisfied with conventional wisdom (rhetoric), nor am I willing to substitute a convenient morality.

They wanted to hang the Enola Gay alongside the Spirit Of St Louis in the Smithsonian Institution.

To enter a soldier's life against that of a city of peoples tests any theory of morality; it distorts all perspectives; and whereas it actually happened, it stands as a naked fact, almost a righteous whim, searching for the expiation of a sanguinary passion: REVENGE. We live in the Land of Nod. Surely, those who stand accused are also dead. (The soldier of today is mere fodder in the machinations of the corporations.) so much for nuclear explosions to save soldier's lives.

If the Bomb had not been so utilized, would we have been able to perceive the commendability of such an action? Was it commendable, then, of the French Nation, in 1954, to have refused the offer to utilize the Bomb to subdue the 'Indochinese'? Was it also commendable when the United States did not employ the weapon against the same people at a later date? Perhaps it is unfair to juxtapose the two nations; unfair to the French Nation (who now have their own bomb and still conduct atmospheric testing). Could it be nonetheless true that the French leaders could perceive John Foster D. was a yellowing Xenophobic? The French are slow to admit that someone else pulled their derriere's from the fire. (Twice).

Returning once again to those earlier years, what happened subsequent to the defeat of our enemy, when the salvaged soldier came home, begins a new chapter, no less commendable than the last act of the previous chapter. Even when errors are clearly delineated and one claims not to see them, what hope is there for remedy; are we truly divested of our vision of humanity? Are we still constructing that vision; has it all been too unrealistic?

Perhaps my fellow countrymen are beginning to view me as a jaded malignancy, or a treasonable fellow who does not appreciate the menace of the 'perpetual enemy', as a slanderer of right-thinking humanity...as a fifth columnist. What people have to fear from my kind is not what seems to be treachery, but what cannot be suppressed, whether spoken or 'shoved under the rug' - the Truth. I have no title to the Truth and must answer to it as well as the next. The perpetual enemy, the nation or peoples on the other side of the horizon, it too must answer.

When I Was Twelve

My nation projects some flatulent magnanimity in boasting that its Constitution guarantees one the right of free speech; a self evident Truth becomes the property of our government to be administered by it. Governments fail to administer tolerance; they are more equipped to advise intolerance as a means to their ends... Am I tolerant?

When I was twelve, we began our school day by reciting the "Pledge of Allegiance". I was not wise enough to question this simple yea-saying action. Suppose I had been? Suppose I had not raised my right hand over my heart, and suppose I had remained silent? Eventually one of my 'peers' would have noticed, revealing to everyone else an 'odd' one. What would have been the repercussions?

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"Is there something wrong?"

"No, not really."

"Why have you not been Pledging Allegiance?"

"Because I don't know what any of it means."

At this point an indulgent teacher could have attempted to explain its meaning fully (which might take a while) even without the hope that it would make any difference. But chances are the teacher (one of the ones that taught me) would refer the matter to a higher authority or would have involved the other students (my peers) to bring pressure to bear upon me by asking them, "What do you think of someone who does not wish to Pledge Allegiance?" There were not any counselors in those days; I could have been asked to leave the school by the higher authority, or might have had the matter referred to my parents. Father would have thought it cute; he may or may not have supported me since his views of 'Amerika' did not follow the 'party line'. But he did not particularly like me either; I was not too bright. It would have been a tossup.

Well, it never happened; I did not refuse; father was right, I wasn't too bright. I did not wonder what was going on; enlightened heroes at the age of twelve reign in the realm of idle speculation. Whether they use the pledge or not is immaterial because most people know it isn't worth the air of he that espouses it; besides, why sully the flag with all that obligatory stuff; let everyone's participation be voluntary.

The assumption was made, by all those who pledged, by all those who implicitly benefited, that no one had the right to question. The beloved progeny, the future of the nation is exposed to adult controversies involving prayer in the schools, ideology versus free choice, creationism versus evolution. Will nothing unshackle the young mind from the presumption of the person who commands and prejudices the classroom? "We do our best".

'Our best' embraces the concept that Free Speech allows one to call another a traitor; alas more, the Fourth Estate to broadcast a righteous rebuke for dissenting, protesting, or more innocently, questioning.

Apropos Of Nothing

Treachery to what?. To whom? To a nameless interest? To the rigor mortis of the established orthodoxy, the sacred institutions, to incorporated avarice?

"AH HA" you say. "Words without substance; suppositions; groundless accusations; psychotic ravings!!"

Impotence, or utter faithlessness, is more to the point.

When I was twelve some of us 'played hookey'. We became truants. We would not be away for long; sometimes for an afternoon; at other times for a day; and when real bold, consecutive days, the latter usually when father was out of town. On occasions a whole bunch of us would rush off to the swimming holes, or to fish at the base of the dam, and the more daring would borrow a canoe from Rockingfeller's boathouse. We were liberated from the doses of, and surfeit of, 'caster oil', yet we were fearful; we were doing the unprecedented; we played out our indefensible behavior against the rule, the dogma of our elders, the warp and woof of a presumptive authority. We were recalcitrant puppies having strayed beyond the imaginary influence of the bitch-mother. In that whole lifetime between the ages of five and seventeen, how many times had we escaped the knelling bells? Very few; we did not possess the daring, or were not sufficiently moved by the vital elan of a Huck Finn.

I try to imagine what I felt in those days as I attempt this exhumation of my inner self. Already, at twelve, I had begun to feel things for which I could not find words, for which I still cannot find the words. It meant nothing to me to visualize this, my nation, as a "Christian" nation. From my point of view Jesus Christ was as much a good guy as a bad guy; (Rumor has it that a twelve year old carpenter sprouted a halo) he, or his kith, might forgive me if I assumed the most abject of ingratiating prostrations or humiliations or might see me in hell for my transgressions. Ours was a nation that espoused brotherly love, that championed 'goodness', that had made war upon itself to free slaves and enacted laws to guarantee equality. That was the message, every day reinforced, intoned again and again, branded upon our encephalons like the scourge. One might argue against these mythological projections.

When I wore the same shirt and trousers all week, the same shoes and coat all year, glances came my way; disdainful glances. My name had a foreign ring; it did not rhyme with McEnroe, Murphy, Lynch, Carroll or Thompson, even Holzman or Rothstein; Porter or Lackey. I lived up the dirt road; my father was an eccentric. Somehow I did not seem to fit; maybe nobody really did, but some seemed to. There seemed to be a caste from which I was excluded. What was the significance of this caste that seemed dominant and superior, and excluded some? What was one being excluded from? From the brotherhood; from convivial emanations? From the equality?

Yes, one was chosen amongst the last to be on a team; one was chosen at all because something stuck in their "Christian" craw of sharing

When I Was Twelve

and brotherly love. It did not matter; one sat on the bench; one cheered the 'superior' athlete; one cheered the 'superior' student. One genuflected before the caste (the majority faction).

Damn! Damn! Why should one have sought acceptance from them? Because it was the 'only game in town'? Where else and who else? The others of us who did not fit formed our little 'gangs' outside the confines of the establishment; most of these did not finish school; the sociality of the classroom usurped the purpose of passing the torch. Could it be that the purpose of the school has always been to enforce conformity to the established orthodoxy, the prevailing morality, and 'benign' prejudices?

Imagine!, we all wanted to belong to the 'Caste'. The caste was tacitly approved and reinforced by the teachers who were pressured by local politics. Ours was a small school and a small community where anonymity was impossible. For the love of Flumdum why in hell did we want to belong to something so shallow, narrow and ingrown? And where are they and what are they now? I hope they are all still together in a little knot like a pile of maggots waving their little banners, marching in triumph over their little dung heap. Bitter words.

What did I learn in school? Basically I learned the three 'rs' (Don't ask which three r's). Also, I learned about prejudice, about inequality, about the 'pecking order', about the shabbiness of brotherhood; not in any coherent language, but as unmistakable soul states. I learned about feelings of inadequacy. 'Goodness' was a questionable principle as was the 'Christian' ethos. We learned little of the poetry of life although the poets found their way into the curriculum. Even the brightest students had been duped by patriotism, nationalism, by Christianity and implicit goodness. They accepted the lie of progress, the lie about the American Indian, the lie about property rights and inheritance, about the bad guys who were our perpetual enemies. They received an 'A' when they declared the American Indian a savage. Of course, ironically, the schooling could have revealed many other things (our fantasies even); we would not have questioned their credibility, rather would have recited them as dutifully as the Pledge Allegiance.

Somehow the teacher became the authority; somehow we were obliged to trust in the teacher and somehow we were cheated in the process. What a waste of time; one has had to unlearn it all.

I've learned a lot concerning madness since I was twelve.

I think father was sort of mad. I was spared living with him for three years before I became twelve. I think the Convent was a peculiar place.

Father, in his madness, at least withdrew into the hills where I too could find some solace, if not, some kind of bridge, between myself and my origins. I knew nothing of my origins, i.e. real origins; the genealogical record can only reach back so far. Lying on my back in the hillside pasture with tall uncut hay concealing me from the whole world, without another

Apropos Of Nothing

being aware of my existence, except the occasional bird; and I being aware of little else than a kind of distance and timelessness. I would stare vacantly into the sky above, all blue, where billowing clouds would sail genteely along. I would imagine all kinds of creatures in those noble earth-bound masses of white. A breeze would brush the tasseled tips of the hay creating ever so slight a rushing sound, wafting the scent of warm dry grasses. I would sit up, still concealed, but able to see the undulating hills across the valley behind which would disappear a whole fleet of the dumpling-like ships of the sky. The entire horizon would consist of treed hilltops devoid of the sight or reminder of man.

It was not until many years later that I had imagined how the Indians had integrated themselves into that same environment, what these self-same hills might have meant to them, what wonder or what mystery; until the march of the musket and the cannon in the hands of the paleface, the white pestilence. I have followed in the wake of the white pestilence. When I was twelve, I was told the Indian (The Red Man) was a savage; I was told of the heroic deeds of John Wayne (the mock 'A' student) to rid the earth of the savage... What have we done? (Our father who is not in heaven, who has strayed after some hussy in the nether Universe, please return and deliver us from ourselves; we require your tenderer ministrations. AMEN.).

At twelve, concealed under that open sky, I might have been wealthy, e'en the whelp of nobility, but to look upon my externals you could tell neither had I wealth nor hemophilia. Faded Sears and hand-me-downs and catalog shoes with holey socks, no doubt; an auspicious beginning cast as the lead in The ASSUMPTION of Don Quixote. On top of the world, despite astounding lacks or diminished assets, lying in the open, upon her bare bosom.

Since then some forty years have past. We, as a species have grown more self-conscious and perhaps more polished. We have taken the bags out of our pants, raised our hem lines; we project ourselves, sell ourselves more. We watch the action on the Fast track, trying to become World Class and take on that Globally Cultured look. Forty years between 100,000 and 99,960; what would that have amounted to, given our exponential measure of progress? Talk about baggy loin cloths!

Yet I do not seem to have progressed (grown); I have lost the little something that enlivened me when I was twelve lying upon her bared breast.

I have used machines to best the world; I have made machines; I have been a machine. I have been ill, and have been cured. I have been ill and have been made sicker. I have learned; then had needed to unlearn. I have acquired, only to want to dispose of a millstone. What I have accomplished makes all the past ages seem as one great stillness, stone-like, so much have I done with this one life. Yet to you and to myself I have accomplished nothing. I imitated you in your Protestant ethos, and now,

When I Was Twelve

because this is my world too I take leave of you, under protest, as still another kind of protestant.

After forty years, I yearn to lie upon the open fields in the tall grass and feel what I felt when I was twelve, when I was poor without being aware of its true significance, when my deformities, my incapacities were unknown to me; before I realized I was a failure; before I knew I was white. After forty years I have become aware of my deformities, my incapacities, my failures and my whiteness. You have pointed out to me the secrets of the knowledge of perfection; you remind me of my shortcomings with your disdainful looks and your distance. And I think I know now the significance of whiteness - and meanness.

That twelve year old, upon whom I reflect, whom I was encouraged, goaded and taught to abandon with the switch, the scowl, the platitude, the proverb, the peer, the Laws - the law of righteousness, the law of the big over the little, the law of conformity, the law of the least common denominator, the law of the faceless uniform pledge; where is he now?

I wonder what it was like in 100,000 Before Christ. There's plenty I'll never know; there's plenty I'll never understand. The archaeological expeditions into myself seem so trite. What I am or leave behind will hardly distinguish the species or contribute to its inheritance; a mere repository for some story begun eons ago. Does it pass through me, becoming something because of me? Am I in the mainstream; do I put forth a fruit before atrophying in the darkness? And are not seeds born of the fruit planted in your turf as those of my father were planted in your turf? Father thought I ought to be one thing, and you wanted me to be other things. I thought I wanted to be still other things; father mocked them and he mocked you. I tried some of each. I did the same with my offspring as a father, but succeeded less; you and my father were more persuasive than I.

Father abandoned that part of me that took other directions; although I admired father, I abandoned him too. I do not admire you as much as I admired him; I abandon you as well. I seek something neither you nor he possessed within yourselves. This is not said to condemn you; it is to say the human labyrinth beats diversely - at times.

But now, you do hear me protest. You wooed me with falsity. Part of the burden of blame for my succumbing belongs to me, in my ignorance and shallowness, lack of curiosity; another part of the burden belongs to you in using your great storehouse of knowledge and intelligence to seduce me for your own purposes, and another part; the largest part belongs to our joint abysmal misknowing. The encoder twirls away; hypnotically we all follow into the dimly illuminated passageways.

We live accelerated lives, or are they 'full lives', as some propagandize? I hear some call it the Fast Track!, and World Class! Global Culture! Do you suppose any of it is true?

Apropos Of Nothing

Its difficult to think of ourselves as having ascended from the apes (quite often you hear it claimed we have descended [one descends from the nobility no doubt]). What I mean to say is something I really cannot say; I don't know how the Neanderthal felt in 100,000 Before Christ, when he was twelve lying nestled upon her bosom, peering into the blue yonder. Was he, too, mystified, gladdened, tranquil; or was he fearful in his not knowing; was he fearful of happenings in the sky as we are fearful of thermonuclear heavens?

Perhaps we have descended after all?

How stupid I have been; how victimized as well.

I owe my children apologies for not listening to them, as I resisted their world, the world beyond the doors of our home - my reality. I owe them apologies for having reared them in the urban climate. How could I be so unimpressed by my own childhood experiences? How could I be so forgetful of that freedom to roam her beautiful body unselfconsciously?

Of course I resisted; how could I not resist? Why have I remained so long as homo urbanis? Quite naturally, as a result of my resistance, my children perceive me as chains. I hope they will remember the water; we finally discovered the water; perhaps it was only I who discovered the water. They were most likely in chains upon the water, being in the company of their father. Sometimes it is not the best of all possible worlds; sometimes it is the most agonizing of all possible worlds.

For me, blood is not thicker than water, for the waters of the world run so deep one could hardly distinguish, the dilution is so complete, despite our fear of assimilation. Surely, there is some resemblance, some seemingness to it all, but I am more like my father than they are like me. There are affinities in this life; one is startled occasionally by the wonder of another person. Sometimes it is a narcissistic response; other times its just their uniqueness, their singularity of feeling and vision, their obvious difference; not that one could be like them. In their presence, one realizes that they have been on a journey into many worlds; their minds and spirits are rife with souvenirs and trinkets that leave us trembling with excitement.

I hope my children will change; that they will not always mirror the manufactured and artificial world. I have some hope; their heroes desert them by falling, sometimes astoundingly; their silence reveals their perplexedness. They move on to another, searching still, perhaps more cautiously.

I cannot say it all in one sentence, one paragraph, one page, chapter or multitude of chapters; there are too many nuances, too many shades of pain and discomfort or shame.

Perhaps this is not the place to mention what happened when my daughter first attended your school; how utterly overwhelmed she must have been; how she swooned. In the very first week she came home to

When I Was Twelve

instruct me by proclaiming, "God Said..." I did not share in her enlightenment; neither was I amused. I reacted, "Leave that crap in school", I said. It had begun. She had begun to draw the stereotypically square two-story houses with the criss-cross windows and the peaked roof with the red chimney with the smoke curling out, almost identical to the one's I have seen in almost every scrapbook tenderly secreted in a mother's closet. Although lopsided, the drawing filled the page. "God (had) Said" again. There was rarely a two-storied house, and even more rarely, with crisscross windows and a red chimney, anywhere in our neighborhood or anywhere near the school or on the way to school, and damned few anywhere about (except perhaps, in New England, where it all began, or in [Athens?] with Aristotle). And for the second time I denied 'Him'. "Do your own thing; don't copy those ninnies", I said. I knew I had lost her; they (you) had taken her away from me when she was six years old.

But instead of torching your school, or the hierarchy, or taking her far away, I resisted what she and her brother would drag in the door. I played father; tyrant; besides I had heard it all before and did not believe any of it. I played a lot of things; I could not yield. If I had had any interest in being a parent, in being the bearer of truth, it certainly was not heightened when your world claimed them for its own. Why did you not house them, and feed them, and pay for their hospitalization, and their teeth as well? You only wanted to perpetuate yourself in them; you only wanted to implant your larvae within them. Little wind-up toys. You may be perpetuating yourself; but indeed, what are you perpetuating?

Indeed, what am I perpetuating?

And have you now not abandoned them? Are you so confident of your success?

Rather stark, blunt questions. You will gather something of what I perpetuate as you trace these words. Nothing too apparent, but something does emerge none the less. Those who make it their business to judge and criticize will tell you: 'not a hot item, perhaps on consignment'. We shall all share in oblivion. I will mark my own name in red without anyone's assistance. I will be able to rely on your derogation.

The living of this life, my life (and yours as well) has not been what I had anticipated when I was twelve. Yet I cannot recite to you what it is I had anticipated; for, in truth, what did I know then? May one fairly claim he has been denied a particular soul state? My soul repeatedly asks, "Why cannot man live in peace with his own kind; why must one man lord it over another man? Why is man not content within the boundaries of his natural surroundings; why must he always forcing Mother Nature to bend to his will? OH!, if man had chosen only to excel, to become the fullest and the best of what he was, as a personal matter, but OH!, to sensationalize himself to the embarrassment and discomfort of others." I am twelve no longer, I have no longer the right or the luxury to

Apropos Of Nothing

lie upon her breast imagining things that are not true, and are rarely conditions or states of being to be associated with the likes of mankind.

Yes, you might rightly inquire, "What have you to offer, besides this constant perturbation?"

The fact does remain that WE did it; WE dropped the bomb. I am part of the WE; guilt by association. I thus have the largest burden placed upon me to atone, if I am to escape perdition. At twelve, the Japanese child and I might have wondered what was so frightfully important to cause such a ruckus. What did we know of Empires, Greed, Lust? If we had been given to visions, might we have been given a foretaste of ourselves. Holy Shinto!, Merciful God!, such augury; Spare Us!!

WE ARE WHAT WE ARE (the Excuse for all our failings).

