

Apropos Of Nothing

X

Apropos Of Nothing

William.

"You're the Poorest Fuck I Ever Had".
A Credible Performance.

I cannot recall whether it was William Shakespeare, or one of his admirers, or analysts, who said, "A strong first statement.....!"

The importance of being earnest.

It was William's father who had made the Statement. Understanding William's father might shed some light upon the personality of William.

It all began awkwardly in the rumble seat when William's mother pleaded "I want a baby". It was William's father who revealed it was his mother who wanted the offspring. The mother must have also wanted a second child, for William kept company with a younger sibling, named Earl. One assumes the parents maintained a rigid rhythm thereafter.

The strong first statement had been uttered when William had reached physical maturity, somewhat towering over the smaller and shorter father. When they had approached heated discussions, that is, when the son attempted to offer an opinion, the father who would not brook contradiction, often would swing wildly (a metaphorical swing); being shorter than William his blows would very often land below the line of ethics. William most likely had muttered some provocation, usually seeking justice of the father for some past wrong, of which the son felt there were many in the ledger. It is indeed an unhappy day when a son speaks to the father of his injustices toward him. It requires that the father listen with a tolerant ear and open mind. William's father was not one of those kinds of fathers; he tended to be defensive; he tended also to believe that one's offspring did not presume to address the authority of the parent with criticism; parental prerogatives reigned (reined) supreme. What are a father's prerogatives anyway?

William was not a fighter. If he had been; well it just wasn't so; an apple is not an orange. Instead, William attempted to abide the declaratory judgments of the father. He desired to please the father, hoping the father would remove the admonition, the 'curse', from him.

In hindsight William might be able to assess the dilemma: as old as Cronus himself; the problem of generations; the selfish desire of father's to fulfill their ambitions through the lives of their offspring.

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When the father could perceive something approaching anger rising in the son he would anticipate an outburst with another defensive statement, "Society frowns on parricide".

In some ways it was clear what the father wanted; in some ways it was clear it was a huge expectation of his sons. In the last analysis it must be said the father emerged as a maze of contradictions; something the sons were hard pressed not to emulate.

The father might be a blend of Gulley Jimson and Fyodor Karamazov, an inspired reprobate. The father claimed his Muse (Mistress) to be none other than ART. "Everything for Art's sake". He could summon to bear upon the argument the great personalities of the past; Leonardo, Michelangelo, Dürer, Titian, El Greco, Bruegel, Rembrandt, Goya, Van Gogh, Rodin, Picasso. 'Look what Art has produced'. The father believed, almost fanatically; a displaced middle-European steeped in the Hapsburg tradition; he felt he had found a solution to his identity problems, and coincidentally a solution to all the world's problems. In addition, he had de facto resolved any difficulties with regard to any issues of morality, having invented the grand excuse; "All was Grist for the Mill". Not unaided in these assessments, he enjoyed, from mid-life onward until death claimed them, a close personal relationship with a Freudian psychoanalyst, who served also as a permissive father-confessor, while perhaps father served as the analyst's own alter ego.

In William one might suspect a dual personality, one part which is poorly formed, perhaps to forever remain so, subsequently one that might be most inclined to seek isolation; also that might seek some carefreeness, away from the judgment of the world; a stunned, maimed and crippled presence, a schizoid personality unfit for human society. The other, a part which attempts to fulfill the urgencies of the splice that had been grafted early in his life, now becoming the dominant flowering of his one earthbound existence, a gross and inescapable chimera or fantasy. Thus it would not be possible to portray William without also portraying to some degree the father. It would not be unreasonable to claim that the father lived within the son as its dominant force, like a huge maggot, the son's own dwarfed self playing the lesser role. Whatever would occur to the son as apropos could never be equal to the professed accomplishments of the father, in what some had characterized as "A Tough Act To Follow!". Therefore, in theory, no argument existed for the further continuance of the personality of the son. While, what is stated here cannot be wholly true, since one is clearly able to draw only his own breath, as he is god-given to do, it must be stated that William became the servant of another, perhaps never to become some other possibility; unknown, and unguessed, not unlike

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the millions trapped in some ghetto or prison of poverty, unable to change their circumstances, engulfed in a self-consumption. Herein doubtlessly we may discover the origin of William's sympathy with the downtrodden, neglected, and disenfranchised. It might be inserted here that no one is unique; we are all subservient to the will of the mass, the will of government, of nationalism, of patriotism, of the bigoted, of the prejudiced, of the apathetic, of the acquiescent, and of look-a-like ism.

The duality of William's personality became most evident when he became despondent at his repeated failures to achieve something which was not in his heart to achieve. He served his master, though the master was many moons away. How on earth is it possible to do anything in this life without heart? Meanwhile life slipped away. The more life slipped away, the further receded the ill-formed and dubious goals of the father; the further receded the incubus of self, leaving standing a somewhat catatonic entity; is it possible, in search of a self that could not exist side by side with the dominant fantasy? How does anyone maintain an appearance of sanity under such a spell?

This is not the place to make excuses for whatever William is; one would be obliged as well to make excuses for all of life. There are always hard realities confronting us, not the least of which is to become something worthwhile in our own eyes. Despite what I tell of William, it must be understood, his very struggle fashioned a person who was compelled to seek meaning beyond the surface of life and things. What one might say 'against' his father by way of assessing fault will reveal only that we have 'taken sides', perhaps in this case, with the living; and heaping 'Judgment Day' upon the dead.

While Rose has symbolized William and Rose together (their love), Rose additionally symbolized some decency and purity in her confessed all-consuming love for William.

William found it difficult to believe that anyone would find him a worthy prospect for their affections. Having failed in more than one relationship had not inspired much confidence in attempting to embark on another. Additionally, William, while having established some kind of negative attachment to others, was unsure of the potentially affirmative nature of personal relationships. Bertrand Russell offers us his sagacity in this matter; *"Many people, when they fall in love, look for a little haven of refuge from the world, where they can be sure of being admired when they are not admirable, and praised when they are not praiseworthy"*. While the Philosopher was inclined to the jocular, and while it is true we are all prey to our weaknesses, William would take exception to this shallow appraisal. Neither he nor Rose used each other falsely; rather would they know only too well, and suffer unto themselves privately, their less admirable and less praiseworthy

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behavior and thoughts. He might however apply such an assessment to his father's liaisons, for his father hungered for admiration. Imbued with a grandiosity of spirit, fueled by his own raptures, basking in the glow of the Muses who inspired the Great Masters, whom he so wished to emulate, and provided with no 'mean talent', as well as a longing for an imaginary world where the Artist reigned as King, William's father envisioned himself alongside the Greats, receiving the plaudits of the multitude, as well as its implicit reward, the favors of the equally enraptured fair sex.

It might be justly stated that, in the matter of the female of the species, the father exhibited a devious propensity; and dubious morality; every female was 'fair' game; some more than others. Initially, the father always proved suavely charming to the 'ladies', paying them indulgent compliments, and further captivating them in meaningful, otherworldly conversation. As soon as some familiarity had been established, the father could not resist stepping over the line (tempting fate). The imaginary demarcation served as a barricade for assuring boredom. If the lady seemed haughty or disdainfully superior, father would welcome this as justifying a series of blatant remarks, one of which might be, "If you stood all the women on their head you couldn't tell them apart." To a lady in distress, perhaps estranged from her husband, he would offer whatever consolation would be acceptable, by fair means or foul. There are those who claimed his flatteries and probings were all a harmless child's play; that when it came down to the real thing, the self-styled Don Juan lacked the follow through (perhaps only that of a guilty rooster after all). While it is doubtless that the innocuous, and sometimes pointed, foreplay would yield an occasional conquest, it transpired as much through happenstance as by method. However, not to dismiss method entirely, and to demonstrate some demoniac dimension to his personality, one must recall his recitations to William's first wife, made in William's absence (the happenstance).

The father maintained very adamant and obtuse notions, suggested to him through his contact with professionals and readings in the science of psychology, regarding mother-son relationships, this in turn stemming from his own lack of first hand knowledge in the area, having lost his own mother when he was but a mere boy. To him all men labored under Oedipal constraints. He elected to believe that his own son, William, desired to commit parricide, literally or figuratively, in order to gain access to his wife, William's mother (alias Jocasta). 'A little knowledge is dangerous', and perhaps obedient to the challenge of Nietzsche, one of his father's mentors, he felt obliged to "Live Dangerously!". A smattering of psychology fortified and aided the father in his machinations, harboring in his own mind both some secret knowledge, and a peculiar license to pursue his own self-indulging, devious propensities. Why else the

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convoluted, in preference to some other, let's say, more honorable, behavior? Why should this father approach the wife of his son with tales of conquest? What kind of confessions had he elicited from William's wife to encourage such malicious intrusion into the son's life? After all, had he not come a long way to visit the son and his family? Was this visit some pilgrimage of curiosity, deceit, and self-titillation, rather than one of familial affection? And was William's wife not party to the whole? Had she expressed her private disenchantment with her husband? Was the father wholly at fault; just merely a salacious opportunist? Who was playing to whom?

It was not until their marital rupture several years later that William learned of his father's conniving familial indulgences. Yes, Dad had proposed marriage to his daughter-in-law. Perhaps the way to a woman's heart, clearly demonstrating one's honorable intentions? Perhaps the father sensed a repeat of an earlier performance; all he needed was to suggest the proper juxtaposition of things? It is unlikely she told him that she would not wish to become pregnant again; 'not another kid'. Perhaps it became necessary for her to feign some loyalty to cool both his ardor and her curiosity; (not another kid!). The father had told his daughter-in-law how he had made a successful conquest of the girl William had failed to as much as kiss. Poor little Willie, couldn't even get to first base, running off like a big crybaby. But Big Daddy hits a home run. Big bad daddy adds a few lines to the Oedipal text. HEADLINE: Oedipus Thwarted By Alert and Resourceful Laius. Laius Marries Son's Wife.

Daddy Juan. No wonder he feared parricide. Too easy. More like a day lying in the hot sun in a bed of ants.

During his father's visit, William had taken a day from work to drive the father to the ocean, a token father-son get-together wherein the father jawed his wisdom incessantly, and wherein he revealed his arduous task of beating off all the suffering women seeking love and salvation, more colorfully phrased as "I seem to be surrounded by bitches in heat.". Heinous monsters!

"ART and WIMEN don't mix. Find 'em, fuck 'em, and forget 'em!".

It should be indicated somewhere in this epistle that William's first wife, like his first serious love (the unkissable one), and an in between girl friend, were all aspiring artists, all painters, having studied FINE ART in that immense dusthole of New York, where both the father and William had also studied. Some, 'friends and enemies alike', had ventured the opinion that William had 'unwittingly' married his father, as a way of escaping the Admonition, "Art and Wimen Don't Mix" (that gleaning from G.B.S.). William might not 'protest too loudly' against such an insinuation, being largely uncertain regarding the truth of such a speculation.

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What a pathetic situation for the innocent female (victim). In some ways, perhaps it was best William did not form a love liaison with the unkissable one. Doubtlessly any such relationship was destined for ruin, as was the first marriage. Wrong woman; wrong reasons; wrong.

William has confessed to me his recognition of the human waste resulting from these bizarre embroilments. Some little attraction; then a whole legion of demons are unleashed, both parties unsuspectingly devastated as two psyches vie for survival. One must not forget the children born of these, and exposed to these, what, in the end, become aggressive, hostile and destructive (in)human relationships. While children are adaptable, and resilient, there is little for them to glean from these wars of attrition but a host of unhappy memories. The babes become scarred; and often we find certain aspects of a learned behavior perpetuated, perhaps best described as an unfeeling lovelessness, doubtlessly something having been severed as the result of some deep wound. Perhaps only the stoic, valiant, altruistic, and those with a given mental acuity, survive these protracted encounters, to become better people (and better examples for the rest of us?).

William's father claimed his father was a martinet. William would in turn accord the same distinction to his father. One wonders what would serve as the common reference. In relation to a modern enlightened Twentieth Century view, wherein the science of psychology 'took on' the admonitions of the Bible, and other such antiquated sources of proverbial guidance, it has been deemed that permissiveness is a better option than 'spare the rod and spoil the child', the latter of which may also entangle meaningfully with the law as child abuse. What happens in violent marriages can only be guessed. We seem to be at the mercy of our extremes.

William had reflected upon his own attitudes, both as a parent in theory, and in practice. He knew from his own role as offspring, something was left to be desired. However he might have construed the lacks, his own preoccupations with himself were bound to erode and affect his normal parental considerations, thus depriving himself and his own progeny of all the benefits of the reflective process. The same must be said with regard to their mother, who, though always defending them against their father, often, as not, would have been unable to offer a defense of her own behavior. We live with our errors; we assess what happens 'as so much water over the dam' as though we were unable to prevent much of the horror that occurs.

William was easily held in check by his domineering father, by his first domineering wife, by most manifestations of loudness and authority. Was it fear? Was it the lack of will to make an issue of oneself, as an entity with certain rights? All he needed to do was bop the old

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man. All he needed to do was tell his wife to 'get off his case' - firmly. The old man was dramatic and noisy. His wife was dramatic and noisy; sometimes she threw things, then became hysterical. She even kicked William in the scrotum. That got a rise out of William; he slapped her upon the face, telling her if she ever resorted to that kind of crap again, he would do more than slap her. She found other ways, telling his friends how he 'treated' the children, or how little his pecker was. Or she would denigrate his relationship with their daughter, saying he was 'fondling' her too much; or she would deliberately interfere with his disciplining of their son, defending him against 'the monster'. She would complain about his coming home late from work, or going back to work on the weekend. She would claim he was always willing to do things for others and nothing for her. She would pick fights with the neighbors, and accuse him of not supporting her. She would complain about his going off to his shop after supper to do art work, or she would say how the house he was remodeling and building was nothing but a shack. She would play up to his male friends, getting them on her side in arguments. Like his father, she hit below the belt, playing on jealousies, emotions, feelings, all with the intent to humiliate, to belittle, to subjugate, to dominate. In living with each of them, his wife and the old man, he felt he had no right to joy or happiness. Yet William endured both the old man and his wife. Yes! until someone came along who didn't function in such a manner, someone who truly found in him an attraction and a worth, in whom he could also find attraction and a worth, an unencumbered affirmation, instead of denial; mutual affirmation instead of mutual denial. ROSE.

In hindsight William assessed his father's attitude as ambivalent and hypocritical. The whole world was too large for anyone to comprehend and control. Controlling the world instead of oneself seemed the easier task, however delusional. One might utter some declamatory statement at the Universe in order to hold it in check, while ignoring or avoiding the simplest moral precept just to satisfy some visceral urge. To William "Art and Wimen don't Mix" served as a subtle form of castration. It would also stir him to wonder whether or not Art was a profession in which one would be ill-advised to engage. How could one sit astride the fence? Surely, Art, as a profession, does not exact such monastic demands. Was not such rigor reserved for the more religious, more fanatical, affectation? William supposed all spiritual endeavors could be classed together. Rigorous Sex??!!

William had already felt somewhat castrated, although not able to objectify it as such at the time, through the residual semi-Victorian morality still prevalent during his youth (during the late forties and the

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fifties - yes! of the Twentieth). While ankles were 'exposed', the knees were not; the clefts were nominally concealed, and one wore baggy clothes. While one was not disgusted with his body, he was not entirely appreciative of it; it was almost as though it did not belong; some kind of ambivalence before birth-control became assured. He thought of Frankie Snotra, as the skinny baggy pants crooner, who became the rounded tight pants swan song. While attempting to avoid pregnancy out-of-wedlock may have augmented the prevailing morality, an ideality was also auguring for survival and preservation: true romance, leading to marriage and a sacred virginal bed, and a lifetime of devotion to a single partner.

On the other hand, William's father was 'merely' passing on what he had learned, and had thought, to be true. While he had taken vows (mixing) in the spirit of permanence, he had learned to modify the arrangement. As William grew older and became more acquainted with the diminished specter of Father, he realized he was the biggest hypocrite that walked on two legs, while others might simply say 'he had become liberated'. William also realized that the prevailing cultural precepts toward the ideality and sanctity of the marriage institution was not a universally accepted practice; to put it rather bluntly, it appeared the species fornicated whenever the opportunity presented itself. He believed his father sought opportunities, despite his vow, both to his wife and his avowed Mistress; to wit, double infidelity.

The father had partaken of and was imbued with literary fantasy, not unlike Don Quixote, but in a less exemplary manner. Being enamored of Goethe's Faust in its simple outline of the Sage who trades his sanctity for a bit of play with the younger set, in real life the father became involved in a sticky love relationship with a young woman, half his age, married to a cripple, also an artist. Befriending both, he proved false to the man, and named the woman after his mother. At some point during the relationship the father confessed his amours to his son, indicating he and the woman had discussed riding off together into the sunset. The father also had become 'artistically' involved in their relationship, depicting in several drawings and one painting the young woman being ravaged by a skeleton; all the while listening to their favorite theme song: Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet. After 'second thoughts' the father bizarrely attempted to involve his son with the woman, either, 1.) hoping to pass her onto the son in relief, 2.) to test her fidelity, 3.) to provide cover for himself, or 4.) to have some fun turning the tables on Goethe, wherein the 'sage' offers his son to the passions of Margaret only to have her decline in favor of his venerable qualities, thereby making unnecessary any bargains with the Devil. Whether to amuse himself, to provide cover for himself, to test the woman to whom

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he had said "When you sleep with another man, take off your earrings", or to rid himself of a problem, he certainly made light both of his own mother and his son, as well as his wife and paramour. A lot of dabbling in psychodemonology. One supposes once you have made it with your mother all else becomes bathos. While some men tattoo 'Mother' upon their rippling muscles, and others name their sailing vessels after them, William's father named his paramour. William was taken with the beauty of the woman, and her softness, and might have fallen into the father's trap had she betrayed any inclination toward involvement with him. Later, it struck William as more than peculiar that the Father could possibly discard his mother upon his son; perhaps an area of psychodemonology yet to be discovered and explored. The whole escapade might be summed up as a demoniac mish-mash of Faustian-Oedipal nonsense; Margaret, mother, Lady Chatterley (Chatterbox), and, finally, a loose fish. The psychoanalyst, friend, confessor-forgiver characterized the whole fustian debacle as 'taking candy from a baby'. While the analyst-friend may have emerged as the good guy in belittling the "Great Love" of his friend's life, he nonetheless fed his proclivities, encouraging some kind of alter ego, or a Mr. Hyde, an animate part, a boldness and luxury that he, the professional pillar of the community, could not entertain, roaming the world, both as a free demoniac soul, and as a study in the errant and aberrant. In the end the analyst also became a beneficiary of works of art, enriching himself, only at nominal cost, and through gratitude and 'love'. (Lave my hands, Lord!). (He was also the head of an AA clinic with flagons full of liquor. Does one need to be one in order to understand?)

While Art and Wimen may not have been miscible, the father would not sever his ties. Perhaps what he feared most was the loss of his brains through his pee-pee. Being influenced, as always, through his readings, primarily by Nietzsche in this regard, he seemed to believe one's brainpower would become enhanced through seminal reabsorption (a philosophical speculation rather than a medical conundrum). Perhaps the father was afraid of being swallowed by the female of the species, by the "Terrible Mother". He was always scandalously brutal to other artists who did not throw over their women for Art, accusing them of having 'their head in the pussy', or of 'seeking a womb with a view'. He tended, most of all, to project onto others his very own 'sins', in that way avoiding the accusing finger; a good offense is the best defense. William felt his father was crude; that he had lost some of it somewhere; that he might even be crazy.

One might conjecture at length on the various aspects of truth, or appearances thereof; one might assert that his own experience is truth, or affirms truth, whereas it may merely exist as an event. One ought

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cautiously 'deduce' from such events, even when multiplied in one's own particular experience.

William might objectively state that his father had not found love, or had not the courage to pursue love; love in this instance involving a fulfilling relationship with the female of the species. That he was vulnerable to the charms (or facade) of the female was readily apparent; that he pursued and persuaded the 'virginal' to become his bride may indicate some attempt to 'play by the rules'. Truly, at least his psyche was involved, and as far as William's mother was concerned there was no hope of conquest without 'playing it by the book'. It wasn't all it was purported to be, for whatever reasons. The poetry did not materialize; soon after, there was disenchantment; in the middle there was rancor, and infidelity, and, in the end, the marriage developed its own peculiar form of dissolution, what one might label, anti-poetry. Anti-poetry was characterized by searching for terrible forces in dark places, and depicting what one discovered as the 'real truth'. His truth could be conceived as the naked, unadorned, unmitigated, primal aspect of nature. If one dare write poetry, it needs be the poetry of ugliness, if he hopes to approach a semblance of Truth. One seizes the Truth as a *peine forte et dure*.

William's mother eventually retired from the relationship after some thirty-five years or so of heartache and mental turmoil. She emerged without much of a self, only shards, remnants of an indomitable will. All of what she was or had been was insufficient to the purpose. The father had put asunder, leaving behind an old spouse with her battered ego, her stoicism and fidelity having earned her naught in the straightforward scheme of things, and hardly any smug self-satisfaction. He had transformed her into some kind of stick, a non-entity with THORNS that made noise in the kitchen. She had determined that what remained belonged to her; she had earned the balance of her time away from the "Old Bastard". She had abandoned the philanderer to his old age and 'balling the chicks' with his withered old thing.

There was no doubt in William's mind that his father was influenced by his readings. He felt that independent judgment was too risky; independent thinking and independent judgment, action, and whatever else, carried with it - Responsibility. In addition, there was always the danger of becoming and appearing ordinary and mundane, if one became what one was, revealing one's true self. One's egocentricity would find plainness intolerable, as he would a Premature Death. Illicit Death was preferable.

Things have changed markedly since William's burgeoning youth. 'Anything Goes' nowadays; experimentation is the name of the game. The whole process is not without ideals of its own. The perfect orgasm,

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... la Jasters and Monster (who recommend sticking your thingie into liquid nitrogen), became an attempt at technical perfection, both within and without the marriage bed. The search for new erotic centers culminating in the Z spot wherein you ziggle zis way and you ziggle zat way in, on, around and between the zilchislating ziggler zone, 'til even hell won't have it; let the pleasures be mine, Oh!, Lucifer. Drugged!! (Drunk and cloyed with Satiety).

Despite the Father's remonstrations regarding ART and WIMEN, William was hard pressed to avoid the programming of the species; or the call to primal purpose. No St. Anthony; instead, imbued with all the sensory deliverance of seeing, hearing, smelling, and alas!, touching; how avoid these 'miraculous' devisings? Blinders? The dulling of the senses? Moses advises the taking of cold showers. An Ice Bath for ART! William could not steer himself around every temptation; collisions were inevitable, even though the voice could be heard from above. Disaster was an accountable result. She had said unto William, "Dost thou not find me attractive; dost thou not desire me?" Oh! Lucifer, the whole immense world of inadequacy loomed before him; not good enough, borderline poverty, undecided about ART and WIMEN, not big enough, don't know how or when. Disaster!! Pity!! What are we? Obviously the Selection Process had faltered. Faint Heart!

William knew what all the parts were, but the mythology confounded him; besides he was in Love, a transcendental Love. She had been placed upon the proverbial pedestal. When he attempted to respond to her question by offering a kiss, she pulled away; never again was he able to regain the momentum. It was she whom the Father eventually 'seduced' and bragged as conquest to William's wife.

William's predicament had not changed markedly when the second aspiring painter had come along, although her interest in William persisted even after he had formed a liaison with the third painter, the eventual mother of his children. Once again the faint heart had failed to pursue what was rightfully pursuable, the specter of the father hovering above. In meeting the third painter, proximity and opportunity, perhaps all too easily flourished, bringing to an end part of the father's grip on his psyche, but unfortunately for all involved, evolved into, and terminated in, what must be adjudged, another of life's pretty messes. Another Sit Com.

Whereas the first had asked "***Doth thou not desire me?***", and the second, by letter, had inquired "Please, will you help me with something: I want to know your thoughts about a girl being a virgin before she marries. Would you want a future wife of yours to be a virgin? What does virginity mean to you? Please think hard and write me a long letter", the third had said, "Take me!".

William

Even with a more indulgent father, the indistinct mores and implicit taboos may have formed an equally awkward barrier to the Imperative.

Of the father, who had become somewhat notable, they had written "...splendid chaos of ideas, a mixture of corn and stabbing truth..."

There are many youngsters who suffer under the subtle suggestions, seductions, persuasions, insistencies and constraints of the parent whose ego becomes extended and insinuated into their offspring. While William's father would scoff at Science as a Twentieth Century religion, and as an unworthy preoccupation of his progeny, some Scientist might scoff at Artistic pursuits as a waste of time, each in their own way are involving their offspring in a test and affirmation of their own ego-life. What am I worth if my own progeny does not carry forth the torch (my torch)? Trading offspring wouldn't wash; one requires blood as the medium of egocentricity.

Wonderfully, William did find, or was found by, Rose. The union displaced, and consigned to purgatory, the selfish venality of the father. A bit sudden and magical perhaps, but not contrived. The hidden forces of nature had usurped the power of the father. An unknown 'tootsie', a 'raging pudenda', had laid waste a lifetime of selfish domination and unethical subjugation. The father placed a long-distance phone call to him only to reach the girl friend of Rose, whom the father had too eagerly construed to be Rose, the unlucky girl being 'read the riot act' concerning home-wrecking.

Eugene O'Neill Jr. and Shane O'Neill committed suicide; Electra O'Neill found other comforts.

William and his brother Edward found other comforts, eventually. With the passage of time the father was removed from his place upon this earth. The tyrant was dead. He left a trail behind him.

In his more objective 'forgive them; for they know not what they do' moods, William tended to think good thoughts about his father. He would write;

"Now that he has been moved over through the offices of the Great Dictator, I am able to afford reflection without fear. Somehow each life is placed along side the human yardstick, the accounting yardstick that is placed there by all the forces that conspire to judge these lives, ours .. of the multiples of increments reflecting the multitude of determinations .. not unlike the length of one's foot, or of one's stride; the stride of one's soul or spirit, or leaps of the same. There, upon the rulings, one imagines he sees some way to size, and to specify 'human' dimensions.. But No!,

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that a pair of eyes see no more, and guide those hands no more; that ears no longer attune to the symphony of sounds, songs of man's forever lamentations; the absence of that encephalon, that skull, that crypt of bone from which the bulk-loading of thought was funneled into trainloads of worded bafflement concerning all those states that we are all about .. are you not baffled? Yes! another pair of ears lost to Beethoven, Bach, Mahler; another pair of eyes lost to Goya, Rembrandt, Michelangelo; another brain lost to peruse Cervantes, Dostoievski, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Freud. Yes!, and a perception of aesthetic trends; a keen observation of artistic achievement, are lost as well. Another peregrinator, delver, fathomer in the vast tomes of our sacred scribblings, and our ideas about this world, is lost".

Earl, William's younger brother, while receiving much the same 'treatment' as William, although in William's eyes, and perhaps in others as well, the father's favorite, perceived the father in a different light. He would be more apt to say "Father felt I was pissing my life away. Oh and Alas, he was right, dead right! I married an opportunist, a floosey, an unfaithful wife. Father had tremendous instinct about people. He called it early - much to my dismay. He saw me as the 'prodigal son'. I will spend the rest of my life repudiating this man. He achieved against great odds. Sure there were terrible limitations about him. I know now there was regret. He tried. He really did. I know toward the end he was a pathetically lonely man - yearning for something, anything, but nothing came. There was I, his son, in a constant state of ennui; who did or could not do anything for him. There were times when I could have reduced my preoccupation with myself to help him; I just didn't. I have come to accept his evaluation of me as the prodigal son.

As far as mother was concerned, their relationship was a highly personal matter that I could not judge, and, in which, I could not take sides. To his questions about mother, I could only give a heartbreaking answer, "Pa, I don't know." "

Earl, like his older brother, suffered through the trauma of divorce, eventually finding another, happier relationship; and still another, after a Second trauma; keep trying.

William and his brother had not been able to maintain a relationship over the years, mostly attributable to the reluctance of Edward. William had seen his brother only once in twenty five years; he had received one letter in that same amount of time; all other correspondence had remained unanswered. Perhaps if William had persisted, he might have at least elicited some more open negative response. The silence could signify many things. Edward also observed a conspicuous silence with regard to the mother, long after the ennui had

William

passed, long after the father had departed. Then, perhaps it was as the brother had indicated during their one meeting,

"I miss the man, Willie, as he said I would. I know that from now on, I am going to be very private and selective about my feelings, whether good or bad, regarding father. I am aware that I am becoming a force even if it is only within, that I have finally graduated into this world. I am no longer afraid of myself or my feelings regarding my own father, and that it doesn't hurt in the least to say 'Father'."

William had speculated that anything to do with 'family' had perhaps, indeed, become a closed private affair. Unhappy memories; unneeded baggage.

William might find other positive things to say regarding the father, but was more easily fueled by the negative, by the hurts. And perhaps that is the only legitimate basis for assessing the value of the father, all rationalizing proving false; thus attributing to the father a culpability he might excuse in another. One must ask the question of himself, and must answer the question as best he can: Am I permitted to cause suffering in others by what I do? Can there be any mitigating circumstances? Do I have the right to put myself first? Does everyone have that right?

His father might have sought to become exemplary in his own fashion, but required more than one lifetime to complete the task, one, to live what one ought, and another, to repair the damage. Father's heroes were those others who came equipped with human failings, who camped along the River Styx. Those failings have been faithfully recorded by the chroniclers, or so they would lead us to believe, all hearsay held in evidence against the dead, having no ennobling significance. It is not difficult to evoke something seemly, especially when we know already our humanity is suspect and far from being an impregnable fortress; besides it titillates our fancy in some smug and macabre way to find in others substance for our own failings, especially amongst the 'exemplary'. In finding record of these failings amongst the biographies, chronicles, allusions, myths, gossipings, and an assortment of likers and dislikers, William's father found support for his own tendency to wander onto the Primrose Path.

However, **INTEGRITY** had been carved by father into the kitchen table; a well-spaced, large-lettered, bold type, spanning two thirds the length of the middle plank of the two-inch thick solid oak table, for which William had, ironically, made the legs. The superscripted letters presented their uprightness to the father's eyes from his accustomed place at the table, whereas the word appeared upside down to William

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from his accustomed place; an inversion. Quite often the word was covered with envelopes, pens, sugar, salt and pepper, a can of evaporated milk, even a miniature sculpture displaying the provocative, gesturing digit; but often enough, one could obtain a full view of the word: **INTEGRITY**.

Such a word, like **EXEMPLARY**, harbors many connotations. With the father, one assumes it referred to a notion of Artistic Integrity. The father was fairly literate; he may have utilized the literal meaning of the word, connoting: complete, whole and sincere. Having been born and nurtured in another country, and having been nurtured in another tongue, in other languages, before having arrived at this

very word or concept, it is possible, though literal in its basis, he tended to romanticize The Word, projecting some far-reaching significance to it. Although he had read more books printed in the English language than most University professors who had been born and nurtured in an English speaking nation, it is possible the literal meaning is more what he intended than a more all-inclusive meaning elicited from his extensive readings in English. How different **CELISVOST**, **NEPORUSENOST** or **BEZUHONNOST** would have appeared carved thereupon. He was not an Artist in those early days when he was still speaking Czech in his native land, where he tells of becoming a horticulturist in order to please his father. Perhaps the meaning of Integrity in the new language grew along side the changed emphasis in his life, from horticulturist to Artist -Painter, Artist - Sculptor; Thinker, Artist, Painter, Scupltor.

What is Artistic Integrity?

Perhaps it was simply being an Artist, first, last and foremost, before everything else. An Artist necessarily views life differently than an outsider views it. He does not see himself as bohemian, eccentric, derelict or pathological. Perhaps one has to be what he is even though he may seem to be something else; therein may lie the basic idea of Integrity. Whether one live in a Red Country, or a Blue and White Country, or a Red White and Blue Country, he may be required to determine for himself what comprises that Integrity, as a person, as an Artist, as an individual, as a life. Aye! Captain of ones' Soul; Master of one's Fate.

Perhaps I should not confuse the two terms, Exemplary and Integrity. The father had notions; he had awarenesses. Being Exemplary somehow escaped him, even though William emulated him to some degree. Perhaps the father sensed it would not be possible to observe artistic Integrity, and become Exemplary simultaneously, there not being enough time or energy to accomplish both.

William's father became disenchanted with his adopted country. Perhaps his dreams of America were founded in some unsuspecting

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fantasy, truly believing that one place could be that much better than another. He could not return to his homeland which had been overrun by Hitler, then by the other Bad Guys, claiming it as theirs and demanding an impossible allegiance. He had become a citizen of his new country; then he became a reactionary critic of the shallowness and lovelessness he felt around him in the human environment. Every American value and virtue, every social pattern, every means of human and social expression, every institution came under fire. The impressionable William was persuaded of the gist of these criticisms, having himself become an object who did not fit, rejected by his peers, rejected or ignored within the implicit surround of a fairness to be associated with a self-acclaimed democratic system. Herein William and his father were most alike, exercising a critical stance with regard to their social milieu, which they had found lacking, the father primarily in regard to the Arts and Humanities, and William with regard to whole spectrum of human values. Each found fault with the nation's order of priorities. While the nation paid lip service to just about any cause you might wish to name, it was only those that advanced the cause of commerce and free enterprise that received attention. Even democratic values would be sacrificed on the pyre of commerce and free enterprise. William and his father did not especially share each other's views; that is, William's insights were not particularly recognized; they might serve, at any point, as stimulus to father, to be interrupted while the father launched into a tirade.

William had written to me:

Father's legacy to me was his life. The rub in such a leaving is that one must go out of his way in order to attempt to understand that life. I believe what one does understand eventually is that those who take paths leading away from the norm, as in father's case, what I have likened to charging through the bush (the underbrush of existence) with their lives, seem to end in loneliness. While the onlooker may say 'WOW!, What a Character!' (maybe as a true gesture of appreciation), the end of the path which one has hacked for himself only amplifies a bewildering isolation. When one approaches this life with some degree of awareness, in the beginning it appears long and plentiful, however elusive. We stumble about in the underbrush, breaking new ground, or so we imagine. Debility of body and mind ensue with the years. One is deeply estranged from community, residing in an lonely place, waiting for what lurks in the shadows as payment in full. No heaven, no hell, no gold watch fob, no pension, no pardon, no reward, with the demons of loneliness for company, guilt and lovelessness, and a loss of certainty. Unless nature intervenes mercifully one lingers on too long.

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What mark does one leave then? He left his mark upon me, which has made my life a strange mixture of torment and guilt, as I have attempted to become, and not become, what he 'challenged', for the lack of a better word, me to become, still indecipherable to me.

I have never let go of this fascination attached to doing 'creative' things, but my fear is that it may be a shallow endeavor attached to my self-image, largely created by that same father. The sad part of it all to me is, that if and when I continue the process, it will not have been much of a choosing of mine, initially or ever. It would be like going into the family business for the lack of anything better to do. What a way to get into the Arts!"

We have labored long with this theme of William and his father. It is William who has the Last Word, as his progeny will have the Last Word. While his brother Edward feels that the father's regrets cover the bases, William feels the regrets were mostly momentary and self-serving, resulting from abject loneliness during his last years. While the father's family's seeming absence of concern may have evolved naturally as a consequence of too much exposure to an abrasive situation, perhaps the imaginary absence of his so-called 'friends' also stemmed from his selfish need, mostly for self-justification, as well as their adulation, denying them a rightful preoccupation with their own lives. That the world did not flock to the 'center' to admire can hardly form a basis for regret. We all have regrets. We are seldom redeemed in our conscience; and one seldom makes an issue of forgiveness.

Could William forgive his father? The question has been asked, "Are there mitigating circumstances to be accorded those who put themselves first, and in so doing cause suffering in others? Does one have the right?" One might also ask, "Is there such a condition as innocence? Does one innocently harm others?" Whether implicitly, as part of the Golden Rule, or explicitly, as part of our social mores, or our system of Laws, we assign a culpability to our actions. All these notions: innocence, regret, forgiveness, culpability, form the lot that is ours. What do we do to enhance concordance and conviviality, not as a matter of convenience to ourselves, but as a genuine expression of belief and will (apart from any deity)? The father might argue, "That is precisely what I am trying to do".

Yes, the indication of regret signifies a recognition of something; perhaps of a futility as much as anything. We have made Laws only with respect to the grosser deeds than men commit upon or against each other. Those who function on the edge of permissiveness because 'there aint no law sayin' I cant do that' generate and Survive in a world of turmoil; herein one speaks of those who are conscious of their deeds.

William

Millions upon millions contrive to live within their psychic needs, which, by their very nature, become self-serving; one's only conscious life may hinge upon rationalizations in support of their psychic needs.

I suppose what we outsiders seek and for which we augur, is a credible performance.

Pursuant to the opening salvo:

Not to omit William's mother entirely when it proposes to invoke questionable affiliations. Whereas William's father might have heeded some dramatic allusion to proper entrances, the mother was not without her admonitions when she angrily and ugly cast upon the son, "If it wasn't for me you wouldn't be here." to which William retorted, "What does that have to do with anything?", incurring a further remark, "You just happened to be standing there." *Ad Infinitum*.

There is not much love lost amongst the principals; when one considers the beginnings, love was not part of the issuance. William was therefore cast upon the world as part of a biological phenomenon, wherein doing the 'inevitable', pursuing one's 'anatomic destiny', or obliging 'reproductive imperatives' nets what love might have otherwise grossly embellished.