

33. On Getting Personal

It was while taking these honours courses that the thought first struck me that I could have been a father to many of my fellow students.

Notwithstanding this source of both minor amazement and discomfort, I was still very much at an age (but will I ever be past this age?) that I would have liked to have had sex with a few of them.

– This certainly doesn't sound like someone who's left behind masculinism. On the contrary, he seems to be giving reason to those who've long denounced men for viewing women as sex objects.

As it so happened, one of the young ladies to whom I was attracted was both an ardent feminist and a lesbian. She and the young woman who was her lover often took umbrage at my comments (though our exchanges thankfully fell short of nastiness) in a course on American literature that was focussed on opening up the canon to Hispanic, Afro-American, and women writers. Of course I never made any advances towards her but rather argued with her and her friend in class while secretly admiring her. My sexual love was this show of mastery that from time to time dismayed me because it seemed as sterile as some might have judged the love between these young women.

– And what about the love between men? Why hasn't he dealt with that if his purpose is to confront his subject from all angles?

Of course I now take comfort in the thought that both sterility and fruitfulness can take many forms. Sterility – as much as anything can be called sterile in human affairs – may very well be the seedbed of diverse spiritual children. If I look into my own heart, I see that I was always more interested in being a progenitor of these. No doubt the course of my life and many of my actions have been influenced by this preference. All the heartache notwithstanding, I was at bottom someone who could stand alone and, with a combination of sporadic sexual encounters and erotic fantasies, carve out of my solitude an idealized love and destiny.

– It's still not clear why he treats heterosexuality with less degree of, if I may say so, heterogeneity than other subjects.

Which of course could also be called an unabashed and unrelenting self-love.

– Do you think he could deal with it as you might wish, that is, politically and not be counterfeiting? Especially when you see me here looking as I am which is not exactly dowdy.

– *You're voluptuous.*

– *If you had a man who looked exactly like me, if his voice were like mine and if he acted pretty much like I do, do you know what you'd have? You'd have all my hero's homosexuality coming out of the closet.*

My wife-daughter fantasy effectively ruled out any desire for a so-called normal relationship with women. And my preoccupation with my past self did the same for begetting children. Of course all of this must be taken in the light of never having met the right woman when I was young. But, then again, who would have fit the bill except some flesh and blood goddess who, Athena-like, would have been forever behind me?

– *Is it part of our task to get personal? To lay bare our souls? Aren't we here simply to flesh out the subjective and objective poles of truth-telling? You on one side, me on the other? You the temptation, make-believe, passion, and high feeling that go with it. Me the nastiness, swordplay, criticism, and so on.*

– *I'm not jealous or upset by what he said beyond a certain point. I'm not scandalized either by erotic elements that have a lot to do with what I'm all about. Instead I take it as the greatest compliment that I, Alice, a simple undergraduate student, am the flesh and flood realization of what was only fantasy in him before. After all, it's me who can say she's the princess who's finally come into his life and not only declared herself to be passionately in love with him but actively behind him.*

I have had to live with the sterility of being an onanist and a narcissist all my life. I have had to bear it as much as any person has to put up with being a soul tethered to an asshole.

– *That's a fine line!*

It is not so easy to call oneself an asshole when others may very well be tempted to.

– *It's from one of Irving Layton's poems.*

When I look back on all my passions and rages . . .

– *I said it was a fine line.*

. . . I know that, as much they issued forth not in private but in public, I always viewed them as well-grounded, as reasonable, as justified, as the mark of my solid, straightforward, and even heroic character. It was always others who, in offensive, treacherous, or thoughtless ways, set a light to the explosive charge that was in me and who received, as a consequence, their due. On the other hand, how many times have I gone in for self-laceration, for calling myself an asshole, for ranting and raving over my foolishness and ineptness in the quiet of a room? What a gap there is between a public and a private persona, between maintaining a good opinion of oneself for others to pick up on and scrapping it entirely in order to be the sternest of judges.

– I must say, I’m warming to his candour. So much in us is divided and hidden away that, if it weren’t for efforts of this sort, we’d take it for granted that formality in our lives was the highest achievement.

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