

Chapter 3

Who am I? And what am I?

There are about 123 years between two important poetic works that I believe describe the ultimate nature of human beings. For this Memoir, wanting to pin point Who am I?, I have therefore consulted these two works.

The most recent one is Johnny Mercer's Blues in the Night, published in 1941. There's a man's version and a woman's version. It's the woman's version that sent me into the crying binge in the bathroom in Miami Beach, Florida. I was married to Dorothy, and Mercer's female vocalist unmistakably warned Dorothy: Marvin is a worrisome thing; Marvin is a two-face; you, Dorothy, are in for the blues. Here's what the vocalist says:

My mama done tol' me, when I was in pigtails,
My mama done tol' me, "Hon, a man'll sweet talk
And give ya the big eye, but when the sweet talkin's done
A man is a two-face, a worrisome thing who'll leave ya to sing
the blues in the night."

My mama was right, there's blues in the night.
From Natchez to Mobile, from Memphis to St. Joe, wherever the
four winds blow,
I've been in some big towns and I heard me some big talk, but
there is one thing I know:
A man is a two-face, a worrisome thing who'll leave ya to sing
the blues in the night.

Actually Dorothy's mama and her father, both of whom had good judgment, liked Marvin, but they were fooled as well. Meaning that Marvin went into the Miami Beach bathroom and cried for them, too.

The other poet is Lord Byron.

Byron has a different approach, because he was writing not about persons like Marvin but about mankind. Even so, he explains the phenomenon of the person Adolf Hitler. How come Hitler had such a captivating impact on the German people? What Byron did was introduce his concept of mankind's "hereditary rage." Thereby he was able to warn in 1818 – predict might be a more accurate word – that Hitler's Germany would suffer over 5,000,000 military deaths during the six years of WWII, 1939 - 1945, and that about 3.5% of the whole world's total population would be killed during that short span.

Speaking of the vulnerability of mankind, here's what Byron said in 1818 about the German people who would be under Hitler's rule in WWII:

And thus they plod in sluggish misery,
Rotting from sire to son, and age to age,
Proud of their trampled nature, and so die,
Bequeathing their hereditary rage
To the new race of inborn slaves, who wage
War for their chains, and rather than be free,
Bleed gladiator-like, and still engage
Within the same arena where they see
Their fellows fall before, like leaves of the same tree.

I agree with Byron's hereditary rage formulation, but I don't think hereditary rage tells who Marvin is or what Marvin is. Whereas gladiators are performers, soldiers are dutiful citizens. Marvin was a dutiful citizen. I deplored – in fact, I feared – what Germany (Hitler), Italy (Mussolini) and Japan

(Tojo) did and were doing, and that's really why, as soon as I became of age, I volunteered to become a dutiful USA citizen soldier. True, there were "hereditary" components to my doing so (I had many Hungarian endangered relatives), but I was not enraged. I was confident that the USA's collective citizenry could and would stop the deplorable things that the phenomenally persuasive leaders were persuading their countrymen to do. Though I didn't want to plod anywhere in sluggish misery, I was simply a quasi-military person who would go anywhere my leaders wanted me to go, but, even so, it would be only with the greatest reluctance that I would go to fight on mainland Japan. I didn't join the army to die in battle.

So I'm concluding that Byron's hereditary rage doctrine doesn't apply to me, but I'm also acknowledging that Johnny Mercer's female vocalist said a true thing about me: No question about it; I'm a male human being, which is what I think her mama really done said.

This piece is a Memoir, and since Memoirs are supposed to be true, I am now declaring something about Marvin that has bothered me all of my life. I have an incredibly awful singing voice that I try to cover up by dismissing it as a mere biological foible. That is, I explain to people that I have "a defective gene for music." I learned to do that when my fellow soldiers were bothered and embarrassed for me when they and I were marching

along and singing things like, "Let's remember Pearl Harbor as we go to meet the foe. Let's remember Pearl Harbor as we did the Alamo." I liked that song. It was a good song, and I'm glad we were ordered to sing it. That's all. I could never hear my own voice. The truth is the truth.

So I accept what Johnny Mercer's vocalist said about who I am - yes, I'm a two-face, a worrisome thing who absolutely left Dorothy to sing the blues in the night.

It remains for me in this Memoir to tell what the Poet Byron actually said about what I am. Hence I'll be delving further into Lord Byron, because he knows first hand whereof he speaks.