ONE

Introduction: Split in Two

IT HAPPENED AGAIN TODAY: I was bluffing my way through some material in my Property class about which I knew no more than what the teaching manual told me, it being the extent of my researches on the topic. On such occasions I present the subject in the pompous style in which professorial banalities are often uttered, meaning thereby to prevent student questions by elevating myself to the regions of the unquestionable. God forbid one of them should start thinking deeply about the stuff and expose the limits of my knowledge.

Then it hits: all of a sudden my voice transforms itself into a parody of my father's voice, an imitation of the voice he used when he was doing his best to assert pompous authority. How does this happen? My voice seems to have acquired a will of its own as it seeks to lower itself into the resonant ranges his had as a gift of nature. My sisters and I would often burst into giggles when our father assumed this style of dominion. The students at least won't giggle, having been beaten down by myriad professors into resigned acceptance of – nay, into slavish respect for – pompous authority. And even if I were to revert to my natural voice I wouldn't succeed in getting it back to normal. Compared with the phony version of my father's it would sound like a whine, and I would find myself correcting it into something utterly alien. Better stick with Dad's until the class ends.

Twenty minutes left to fill, and I have said everything I have to say. Still there is this me standing outside me watching me talk in someone else's voice. Do not look at the beautiful babe sitting over on the right; you will lose all authority if you do that; meet only the eyes of the guys. Is she really that much of a bombshell, or is it that at my age I have lost all discernment, mistaking youth for beauty? Kill

that kid over there who is nodding off again. Don't turn to write on the blackboard because Ms. Simmons, the bombshell, will observe the thinning of your hair in back, the beginnings of your tonsure.

While all these thoughts are going on, the me standing outside the me going through the motions of lecturing gets a metathought of wonderment: how remarkable human consciousness is that it can have all these distracting thoughts while split in two and still let me speak coherently on easements. How do I know the lecture is coherent? Because as soon as I split in two the students dive for their pens and the keyboard clacks increase to frenetic rates. They inevitably think I am delivering the goods when they hear my father's voice.[1] When I actually know what I am talking about they occupy themselves playing solitaire on their laptops, or they ostentatiously look back at the clock on the wall behind them (spiting their wristwatches) to make sure I know how impatient they are for me to have done with it.

Funny how easy it is to do *mental* tasks with all the voices inside your head critiquing you while you continue the performance, but how hard it is to act convincingly when you become self-conscious of your *physical* movements, such as whether you are walking naturally, or blinking too much, or looking like a law-abiding driver when the cop pulls up next to you at the stoplight. So though I feel that I am faking it and fear the roof might come caving in on me at any moment, since the physical demands are minimal and there is a barricade-like lectern to provide cover for most of my body, the roof (almost always) stays put. Within seconds the me standing outside me remerges with the me putting on the show, and time is up and I am safe for another day, unless, that is, I should overhear a student grumble to another about what an awful class it was. But you never hear complaints after a day of bluffing. You know you get your highest approval ratings from the students when you keep it easy and falsely authoritative; as long as they can take good notes, most of them feel they got their money's worth.

Is it the case that my experience of seeing myself as if outside myself was generated by guilt over faking it? Is that me outside me, in other words, my conscience? Or is it the form my conscience takes when it really means business? That hardly seems right. For often that me

outside me simply looks on in contemptuous bemusement. Unlike the conscience, it seems to take the performing me less seriously than a truly moral policeman would. It cares less that I am a moral failure than that I may be a social failure. It will suffer my being a knave but will not suffer my being a fool. It shares much with Adam Smith's impartial spectator, whom we shall meet again, except the me outside me is not really impartial; he is too hard on me most of the time, determined to unnerve me. In truth, sometimes that me outside me appears when I teach Bloodfeuds, where I know my stuff, and there it is elicited not by anxieties of fakery but rather by my being so much into the subject, so excited by the material, that the students, I fear, must think I am a total nerd. That me outside me wants to make sure I am maintaining a certain level of dignity, and it doesn't seem to matter whether I am about to lose respect by being exposed as a fraud or simply by not having properly modulated my sincerest enthusiasm. Besides, why think that that me on the outside isn't faking also, or playing a false role by playing me as an ever so self-tortured being?

As I am sure you know, the anxious feeling of faking it can arise in almost any setting. It can harass you in routine polite conversations; it can disrupt what you thought had been an authentic emotional moment in matters of mourning or love. You see yourself suddenly as a phony, a hypocrite, when until that intrusive moment you were blithely at one with your role, with words, deeds, and thoughts all united in service to the cause at hand.

I have often felt myself to be a hypocrite for paying lip service to pious views I do not quite believe, some of which I downright don't hold at all. I have feigned sorrow at the departure of guests, faked joy at their arrival, simulated delight at a colleague winning a MacArthur so-called genius award, shammed grief at the passing of the neighborhood self-appointed policer of leash laws, assumed a façade of concern for a student's bad grade or interest in stories of other people's children. And I fear others will repay my shamming by exposing me as a fake, a fraud in the roles life has assigned me: as dad, son, spouse, friend, law professor, writer, Old Norse scholar, Jew, citizen, decent human being. Why is it that I cannot help feeling foolish at times going through the motions of playing the roles I have

to play to pass for a properly socialized and sane person? And why, when I happen to immerse myself joyously into a role, do I later – not always, mind you, but often enough – wonder if I haven't made a fool of myself by overdoing it? And how do I manage to escape being exposed as a fake as often as I do, unless it is all a setup?

To be a proper person behaving properly we must engage in a certain amount of self-monitoring. Most of such monitoring is routine and hardly the stuff to generate great anxiety. I thus automatically modulate the volume of my voice to the level appropriate to the occasion (though my teenage girls are constantly shushing me in restaurants); without an anxious thought, I engage in minor gestures of grooming to make sure my nose isn't about to humiliate me, my nails are clean, my zippers zipped and buttons buttoned. More anxiety-provoking are the demands to display proper emotions at the right time and place. Tears are a problem, often failing to appear when they should and showing up when they shouldn't. Just trying to display interest when it is polite to do so, or to suppress signs of it when it is impolite to show it, can make us uneasy about how poorly we are playing it. It does not help, for instance, to let the fact that I cannot take my eyes off the big zit on the chin of my interlocutor serve as a substitute for my not being able to maintain the faintest modicum of interest in his conversation.

But I must confess, and I would bet you could confess it too, that I have found myself feeling quite pleased or relieved in the midst of some emotional turmoil – a lover's quarrel, a funeral, a moving moment – that tears actually showed up. I cannot quite repress the "Thank God" of relief, or the "Way to go, Miller" of self-congratulation. And who is saying that "Way to go"? Me? Or a fake "me" that I pretend to be when I am trying to please? Or is it the voice of a stranger, a father, a conscience, an intruder? Or all of the above? Those internal conversations that make up much of what we think of as thinking – are they monologues, dialogues, or sessions of the Israeli Knesset?

This book is unified by the intrusive fear that we may not be what we appear to be or, worse, that we may be only what we appear to be and nothing more. It is about the worry of being exposed as frauds in

our profession, as cads in our loves, as less than virtuously motivated actors when we are being agreeable, charitable, or decent. Why do we so often mistrust the motives of our own good deeds, thinking them fake good deeds, even when the beneficiary of them gives us full credit? And why do we feel that even our bad deeds might be fake? Remember how as a teenager you tried pathetically to show how tough and fearless you were by shoplifting, drinking yourself senseless, and other things still unconfessable?

And related to all this is the question, who is this you that is being so hard on you? Is it just plain you? Or is it you in a specific role and, if so, what role? You as a fairly hostile observer of guys like you, you the hanging judge? Or is it nothing more than you the ironist with regard to roles you must play? We know that many roles are supposed to be nothing more than fakery of a sort, playable with one hand tied behind one's back; we know that virtue itself cuts all kinds of deals with a benign form of hypocrisy that keeps us polite, kind, and acting properly. Yet we still feel a bit tainted by what we think are our own half-hearted commitments and our uncertain or unverifiable motives, about our less than full-hearted performances in the various roles we must play. Or perhaps it is not so much a unified self that feels thus tainted; maybe it is something foisted on the part of us that remains behind by the part of us that stands outside ourselves.

Much of the book deals with self-consciousness – not self-consciousness in the sedate sense of being aware of ourselves as thinking beings with a past, present, or future but rather self-consciousness in the sense of that unpleasant emotion that interrupts our blithe and unself-conscious "naturalness," which, however, may be no more than "*acting* naturally" and not knowing we are. It deals with being watched and judged by ourselves and by others as we posture and pose. It treats of praise and flattery, of vanity, esteem, and self-esteem, false modesty, seeming virtue and virtuous seeming, deception, and self-deception. It is about roles and identity and our engagement in the roles we play, our doubts about our identities amidst the flux of roles, and thus about anxieties of authenticity.

These topics are as old as the hills, having been treated many times by poets, novelists, moralists, philosophers, and theologians. God

Himself seems to worry about these kinds of disorienting moments, long before He ever felt it necessary to split into Father and Son and watch Himself perform. When Moses asks God what name he (Moses) should give the people as his warrant for a claim to lead them, God tells him to say to them that "I am who I am" sent him (Exod. 3.14). God is playing games with His name, giving it as a kind of riddle, a riddle that suggests that He, not He mind you, has absolutely no anxieties about His unity of being, of being fully immersed in Who He Is. No anxieties of faking it for Him. He, by fiat, is One unified self. But the fiat shows Him protesting too much, for the refusal to fix His name may be because He cannot get a fix on it either. He is posturing when He answers Moses, playing it up, for He is deeply embattled in an only middlingly successful struggle for the hearts and souls of a stiff-necked people who frequently disobey His commandments and who prefer statues of calves to Him when the going gets rough.

Though most English translations of the Bible prefer the present tense, the Hebrew of God's answer supports equally the future tense – "I will be who I will be" – which results in a dramatic shift in meaning as to the kind of character God is claiming to be. "I will be who I will be" presents us with a God who takes His mightiness to be manifested most in arbitrariness, and moreover in a particular type of arbitrariness about His own identity and continuity of character, claiming for Himself an infinite right and power to be a shape-shifter, that He Is Never What He Appears To Be, all signs and wonders, masks and veils. The future tense seems better to accord also with the riddling way of naming Himself.

Shape-shifting and name changes: deeply anxious about his identity and role, Saul becomes Paul; and Augustine claims for himself a wholesale change from false to true, but he is so vain of his anxiety as not to be anxious at all. For recognizable proto-modern anxiety – I skip over many a fearful epic warrior who covered his fear with bravado and, for the moment, ignore Jesus, wondering about his own full immersion into his role in Gethsemane – there is Hamlet, the grandest of poster boys for feeling that he is faking it. I am drawn to Hamlet too because his worries about roles and feelings of falsity

or inadequacy take place in the context of revenge, my scholarly fixation.[2] It might be the case that the avenger is the most dramatic of all roles,[3] the lead role, a role God is eager to reserve to Himself – vengeance is mine – and what is drama but Faking It, putting on shows, enacting reality, so that the word for the doer of a deed and the word for a theatrical performer mimicking a deed merge and are the same: actor.

This book is possibly best seen as a quasi-novel, "quasi" because it has no conventional plot other than the one every book has of "how many more pages to go" and only the vaguest sense of characterization except for the narrator's voice with its stream of self-consciousness. Don't think me paranoid either; most of my life is spent in sluglike unity of soul, pleased to be drinking a beer, lost in a hockey game on TV (liquid bread and virtual circuses). I honestly believe myself to be a fairly reasonable example of *l'homme moyen sensual*, forgetting for the moment that no American l'homme moyen would use that phrase to claim he is Joe Average or the man on the street.[4]

This is a book about moments that spike out of the much-to-be-admired ho-humness of daily life. These moments invite Comedy to attend, though Tragedy sometimes crashes the party. Fakery and comedy go hand in hand, says Emerson: "The essence . . . of all comedy, seems to be . . . a non-performance of what is pretended to be performed, at the same time that one is giving loud pledges of performance."[5] Sounds good, but it is not true of all comedy. The comic does just fine with brute miserable unadorned reality, with stripping veils and masks as well as donning them; in fact, if we substituted the word "tragedy," or *Hamlet*, for "comedy" in Emerson's quote it would work about as well. No genre escapes posing, masking and veiling, and anxieties about authenticity. Ask Hamlet, Othello, or Odysseus. In short, the risk of my faking it is considerably less likely in the lighter moments that follow than in heavier discussions maintaining the dignities and forms of academic disputation.

THE TERRAIN OF FAKING IT is vast. Virtually all social interaction and much psychic life lie within its bounds. The path I follow is

not linear, for the goal is not a particular end point of an argument or a thesis but a descriptive travelogue that intends to give the traveler a feel for, an expansive familiarity with, the custom of the country. Some of the views are scenic, others will make us lament the lot of the natives, but the pictures are all identifiably about some aspect borne by the notion of "faking it," as we employ that term colloquially.

At the beginning of William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Will, the narrator, has a vision of a fair field full of folk going about their chicanery and hypocritical fourteenth-century existences; the William who narrates *Faking It* offers a twenty-first-century revisitation of that vision: a world of posing and shams, anxieties of exposure, and a fear that the genuine may be just another sham whose cover is too tough to be blown. The first stop is a logical one: the vice of hypocrisy. The next three chapters show how falseness and fakery lie at the heart of many of the nice things we say and do, and how inextricably vice and virtue are bound together in their eternal pas de deux and not necessarily in a bad way.

TWO

Hypocrisy and Jesus

FAKING IT IS A DOMAIN not completely congruent with the vice of hypocrisy, though there is so much overlap that we must face hypocrisy at the outset. Not all hypocrites experience the anxieties at the core of the faking it syndrome. And not all types of faking it raise a serious issue of hypocrisy. I am not a hypocrite, unless most teachers are, for pretending to find interesting what is dull, or for engaging in the various falsenesses that constitute cajolery. Nor am I a hypocrite for putting on a somber face at the news of the untimely death of a person I didn't especially care for. Says Trollope: "Will anyone dare to call this hypocrisy? If it be so called, who in the world is not a hypocrite? Where is the man or woman who has not a special face for sorrow before company? The man or woman who has no such face would at once be accused of heartless impropriety."[1] Were we to blame the mere donning of a role that our hearts weren't totally into as hypocrisy, we would be hypocrites all the time, except perhaps when asleep.

Even in sleep there is a trace of role-playing, of self-monitoring so as to maintain certain proprieties and a sense of responsibility, though not enough to give rise to hypocrisies.[2] Thus I do not wet the bed, nor roll over and smother the toddlers who are sleeping there too, nor fall out of it, nor face toward the door, where I still expect to see those dead twin girls from *The Shining* come waltzing in. Contrast the care that you take to sleep inoffensively with that of the man (they are always men) next to you on the airplane whose head lolls over onto your shoulder as he snores, snorts, drools, who awakens as the plane lands with no awareness of offenses given nor received, as when you finally overcame reticence and delivered jabs and shoves in

desperate disgust to no avail. I never cease to be amazed that people are either so cavalier about their dignity, or else wrongly confident of their ability to self-monitor while sleeping, that they could be so daring as to let themselves fall asleep in public spaces.

The feeling of faking it forces upon us a recognition of a split between something that we flatter ourselves is our "true" self and the role we are playing. More modestly, it is the feeling of our incomplete immersion in the role, with impious thoughts intruding about the role. Sometimes, it is merely a vague sense of dislocation that takes the form of worrying where we are amidst all the roles we must play: I worry about who I am; therefore, I guess, I am. Anxieties about faking it seem a necessary and mostly unpleasant byproduct of the fact that we must play roles, some of which come easier than others and do not necessarily involve us in any kind of moral failure; yet even these manage to give rise to social and psychological discomfort and disorientation.

In contrast, hypocrisy, at least by one account, though often infecting certain roles, is less about role than the propriety of motives you bring to the role. The fear that you may be a hypocrite may not even mean that your motive is bad, only that it is not the perfect one; or that you are unsure of your motives and fear they are a mix of good and not so good; or that you simply cannot get at what your motives are but suspect the worst. And when are you to make your most informed judgment about what your motives are, anyway? In the heat of the moment? Upon reflection that night? By observing what others think your motives to have been and then adopting their views as your own? Or by reexaminations and reconstructions done years later via memory?

We can be hypocrites and know that we are. Judith Shklar describes such a one as a "naïve hypocrite" who "hides acts and beliefs he knows to be wrong" and may even suffer a guilty conscience.[3] Or we can be what she calls the "new hypocrite," who thinks himself a paragon of virtue. The new hypocrite does not feel himself to be faking anything; he may be blithely or smugly delighted with the role he has assumed, experiencing himself as sincerely what he is purporting to be, but be culpably deluded as to the sincerity of his sincerity.[4]