

THE POEM AS AN ACT OF RESCUE

THIS subject gives welcome opportunity to come to closer grips with *the* problem, call it the leading obsession, of the poet at work. Though this problem may be always and everywhere the same, in our time it presses upon us with peculiar urgency. It nips at our minutes, gnaws our hours, colors our solitude, and gets into our poems—or keeps our poems from happening. Let me state it the way the poet is likely to feel it first and have to face it at last, as a question in the first person singular. *How can I find (or make) a conception of the poem which will fit but not submit to the conditions of living here and now?*

Stated in this large, unwieldy way, the problem, of course, can't be solved. But notice that the need I feel, any way I state it, is for a conception of the *poem*: the unique, unparaphrasable work of words I'm trying to make. It's not a need for another definition of poetry. What the poet least of all men needs is a definition of poetry. From him such definitions abound. To his eye they litter the landscape like heaps of twisted forceps bleeding rust; and if he could, he would have them all swept or hauled away to prepare for the dawn of the poem.

So, then, we have the problem. It is in part, but only in part, a problem of communication. The poet usually "communicates" to those who are ready for him. Mainly, though, it's a problem in *integration*—in reaching and working from a responsive center, a "frame of reference" if you will, and letting the resources of the poet's art derive and develop from that center. Without that center, without that core of derivation and development, the poet is merely what Emerson once called Poe: the Jingle Man. And who, with only jingles to sell, could fail to see that the big supermarket for them today is not the highest paying "little magazine"—no, nor the Groves of Academe, either—but the opulent anonymity of

Madison Avenue? *That* ought to be the Purgatory where all poets go to when they die—as poets.

Let's look again at that statement of the problem I sent up as a trial balloon, for you to shoot down, follow, or ride. Notice that "conditions of living here and now" implies a wide range of experiences. It includes conditions of *writing*. It implies that from this felt need for a working and workable conception of the poem, certain other needs follow. These include questions of technique, of the accessibility of experience for the poem, of the usability (or irrelevance) of tradition, and of something called "tone"—which, for the poet, usually means his attitude toward not only his audience, but also his occasion for writing, his true (rather than apparent) subject of concern.

Now, when we grasp the extent of these needs, we begin to see how they run together as one great underground river continually exerting pressure upon the poet. We see, too, how the fact that this pressure may be largely self-imposed makes it not less but more impelling. The poet may not choose what he is, true; but given the conditions of living here and now, he must constantly choose to survive or perish as what he is. His choices come in poems. For him these aren't primarily products, "marketable commodities" (though he may market them), or bits of transferable property (though as a writer he must try to transfer them). They are phases of a process forming under his hands. They don't stay in one place, of course. They have a life beyond him, yet within him; they go on happening as acts. That is the wonder of them, the wonder and the terror. So, in the crisis of our culture, we will perhaps appreciate our poems best when we come to take them as what in truth they always were: acts of rescue.

At this point let me refer not to a private experience but to a public fact. Early in 1963 we lost two of the best poets this country has produced so far. About one, Robert Frost, much has been written and much more will be. For as an American "character" with all the "straight crookedness of a good walking stick," as a pungent homespun humorist who was at the same time a serious poet, Frost endeared himself easily to many of us. Long before his death his work had even earned, beyond the public popularity, a kind of adulation it surely never needed; it glowed with the patina of academic respectability. How Frost himself managed to be Horace, Hardy, and Jefferson together, we never knew. No doubt, though, the critics in coming years will labor to show us how. Whether any critic ever succeeds completely in "explaining" Frost (and whether, if he does, we'll accept the explanation) won't matter as long as he can once again get us to see, hear, and acknowledge what is *there*, undeniable as Everest, in the writing: more than "the voice of a man speaking," but also *what is spoken of* and what, even if left unspoken, is kept intact.

About the other, William Carlos Williams, much less has been written. Yet it is easy to see (though apparently difficult for many to say outright) that Williams, by the influence of his personal example as well as the achievement of his work, has been a greater force than Frost in advancing the development of American poetry. Certainly his encouragement of young poets, his disclosure and partial remedy of blind-spots among established critics and their followers, and his many gadfly services performed upon some deeply entrenched American attitudes stand unmatched by any American poet in our time. Williams' work never found, or sought, academic respectability. But its power as a body of disturbing revelation, generous empathy, and responsible craftsmanship will more and more be felt in years to come. As for Williams himself, I know of no American poet in this century who so clearly took the place of Whitman for us and who fulfilled for us so many of Whitman's functions.

And yet Williams, despite resemblances, was all his own man. He succeeded in being original without being eccentric.

Now, those of you who kept up with Williams (and that took some striding!) will probably sense a kinship between his conception of the poem as "a field of action" and my conception of the poem as an act of rescue. Williams had much to say on the problem underlying both conceptions. "Think," he once asked us, "of a work of art—a poem—as a structure":

A form is a structure consciously adopted for an effect. How then can a man seriously speak of order when the most that he is doing is to impose a structural character taken over from the habits of the past upon his content? This is sheer bastardy. Where in that is the work, the creation which gives the artist his status as a man? And what is a man saying of moment as an artist when he neglects his major opportunity to build his living, complex day into the body of his poem?

Then he threw us the challenge: "Unless he discovers and builds anew he is betraying his contemporaries in all other fields of intellectual realization and achievement and must bring their contempt upon himself and his fellow artists."

But the challenge always boomeranged for Williams. Always the standards he pressed upon others he took first as the benchmarks for his own work. "It may be said that I wish to destroy the past," he once admitted. "It is precisely a service to tradition, honoring it and serving it[,] that is envisioned and intended by my attack, and not disfigurement—confirming and *enlarging* its application":

Set the overall proposal of an enlarged technical means—in order to liberate the possibilities of depicting reality in a modern world that has seen more if not felt more than in the past—in order to be *able* to feel more (for we know we feel less, or surmise that we do. Vocabulary opens the mind to feeling). But modern in that by psychology and all its dependencies we *know*, for we have learned that to feel more we have to have, in our day, the means to feel with—the tokens, the apparatus. We are lacking

in the means—the appropriate paraphernalia, just as modern use of the products of chemistry for *refinement* must have means which the past lacked. Our poems are not subtly enough made, the structure, the staid manner of the poem cannot let our feelings through.

But what does this process of "refinement" in the poem aim at? Why take the trouble to overcome so much resistance and distraction in order to build into the body of your work your "living, complex day"? Williams answers:

A man writes as he does because he doesn't know any better way to do it, to represent exactly what he has to say CLEAN of the destroying, falsifying, besmutching agencies with which he is surrounded. Everything he does is an explanation. He is always trying his very best to refine his work until it is nothing else but "useful knowledge." I say everything, every minutest thing that is part of a work of art is good only when it is useful and that any other explanation of the "work" would be less useful than the work itself.

How, then, is the artist's "refinement" of his work to "useful knowledge" related to the present crisis of our culture? The more closely we consider this question, the more readily we can see that the relationship is direct, interactive, and not confined in its effects and implications to any so-called "art world." Once we see this, we begin to grasp some of the existential issues involved in the artist's role today. For every artist today is engaged, whether quietly or dramatically, in a struggle to rescue human goods—nothing less than that. In this struggle he is tested by, as well as testing, the survival-value of every conceivable aspect of life. His own achievement as an artist, then, must stand or fall as much by what he rejects as by what he rescues. There is no easier way—as Williams makes clear:

In the structure of their works will stand revealed that [which] they, as artists, conceived of their material. In the structure the artist speaks as an artist purely. There he cannot lie. The artist as a man of action perpetuates his deed and records himself as a reality in the structure of his work—for which the content is merely useful.

The artist addresses himself to life as a whole. By reason of this he is constantly questioned and attacked. He is attacked by the closed lobbies of thought, those who have made special solutions—those who wish to halt the mutations of truth under a single ægis, fixing it to a complexion of their own private manufacture in search of a way through to order as against the modern lostness and distress.

But the general reason for our distress seems to be that we are stopped in our tracks by the dead masquerading as life. We are stopped by the archaic lingering in our laboring forms of procedure—which interested parties, parts, having or getting the power will defend with explosives—seeking to prevent the new life from generating in the decay of the old. Those who see it one way call it the defense of tradition. Others see tradition belied in that tradition once was new—now only a wall.

Fairly understood, this statement is as much a manifesto as a diagnosis. It's a nonpolitical manifesto, though—*essentially* nonpolitical. Perhaps that's why it and similar statements by Williams have not always been fairly understood. Any manifesto, since it is a call for change, seems to require at least a provisional sympathy to be understood. Williams, through a long life and more than forty published works, constantly fed, drew upon, and shaped such sympathies. Like any artist, he was a revolutionist in his concern for *structure*, for more ample and sensitive forms of perception, feeling, and reflection. This concern kept him from being neatly tagged and identified with a particular school. But it also caused him to be regarded, in some quarters, as an æsthetic anarchist. You see how it was with him? Always the dead letter killeth; only the informed and reformed spirit giveth life. But against that spirit, that sense of profound involvement with "life as a whole," that abundant human "content" which (just because it was constant with him) he could call "merely useful"—against *that*, Williams neither called for nor made a revolution.

Earlier I spoke of how the problem of finding or making a workable conception of the poem in our time gets into the poems themselves. Now, let's consider three such poems in terms of the special light each casts on the larger general

problem. As a first specimen, here is Robert Frost's "For Once, Then, Something":

Others taunt me with having knelt at well-curbs
 Always wrong to the light, so never seeing
 Deeper down in the well than where the water
 Gives me back in a shining surface picture
 Me myself in the summer heaven godlike
 Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs.
Once, when trying with chin against a well-curb,
 I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,
 Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,
 Something more of the depths—and then I lost it.
 Water came to rebuke the too clear water.
 One drop fell from a fern, and lo, a ripple
 Shook whatever it was lay there at bottom
 Blurred it, blotted it out. What was that whiteness?
 Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then,
 something.

What Frost gives us here is a playful, punning treatment of the old proverb that *Truth lies at the bottom of a well*. Surely we need no learned exegesis of the poem to discover what it tells us of the poet's role in our time. It begins by presenting a situation. We find the poet (specifically Frost, but by extension any poet) kneeling at a well-curb in search of truth. The poet has often been taunted for doing just this. Others have said to him: "Why don't your poems come up with something definite, something concrete? Why must you always let your feelings get in the way of what you're seeing and showing to us?" The poet gets in the way of what he's looking for, then. In this sense he's "always wrong to the light."

Frost then lets us suppose that the taunt has finally stung him into the search for a more impartial "objective" truth. For once he discerns, or thinks he discerns, something "beyond the picture." Yet since *he* is the one discerning it, that something (which is "white," "uncertain," and "of the depths") also shows "through the picture." But does it exist *apart* from his discernment? Before he can make sure it does, his clear insight becomes shaken, disturbed "rebuke[d]" by a small outside distraction: a drop of water. So he never does make sure. He never really knows whether

what he saw, or thought he saw, was the whiteness of truth (the complete spectrum that absorbs all colors) or only a quartz pebble. Why quartz? Perhaps because quartz gleams just as brightly with a vein of fool's gold as with real gold. In any case, all the poet *knows* and can report to his taunters is that once, in his search for truth, he thought he saw something. If that tentativeness exasperates us and makes every poet seem what Yvor Winters once called Frost, a "spiritual drifter," then perhaps the poet can do no better, we think, than to find his bearings in the drift—as all of us must—and to report his latest findings.

If we read Frost's poem in this way, we might consider it as his response to that refrain *No ideas but in things!* that rolls like the ocean through William Carlos Williams' long poem *Paterson*. Let me say at once that *Paterson* is the one long poem written so far in our century about America, by an American, and for *all* Americans to which I believe the term *epic* may be fittingly applied. Actually, it is amazing how many of the classical criteria for an epic Williams' poem fulfills—and how well, though in unexpected ways, it fulfills them. In saying this, I don't mean that *Paterson* lacks defects. It has them all right, and several (like the structural confusions in Books III and IV) loom large. But then almost everything about this poem is large—large in conception, execution, sympathy, and sheer truth-telling.

As my second specimen, then, here is a short section, a complete poem in itself, from Book II of *Paterson*:

Without invention nothing is well spaced
 unless the mind change, unless
 the stars are new measured, according
 to their relative positions, the
 line will not change, the necessity
 will not matriculate: unless there is
 a new mind there cannot be a new
 line, the old will go on
 repeating itself with recurring
 deadliness: without invention
 nothing lies under the witch-hazel
 bush, the alder does not grow from among

the hummocks margining the all
 but spent channel of the old swale
 the small foot-prints
 of the mice under the overhanging
 tufts of the bunch-grass will not
 appear: without invention the line
 will never again take on its ancient
 divisions when the word, a supple word,
 lived in it, crumbled now to chalk.

This poem takes us into the heart of our problem. It exemplifies much that I've already quoted from Williams' prose; yet, being a poem, it adds, refines, and ramifies. We notice how the poet alludes to what at first seems farthest from his theme. He begins with the astronomical fact that the constellations gradually drift out of shape; hence the stars need to be "new measured." This allusion suggests to us that the notion of relativity in the New Physics can have implications for "invention" in modern poetry.

The same allusion also sponsors the introduction of the key word "line." Does Williams mean here the *line of verse*, an *ancestral line*, a *melodic line*, or a *painter's line*? All of these meanings are relevant; none is actually ruled out by the word as it occurs in the poem. Poetry as an art, for example, shows strong affinities with both music and painting. Yet Williams' identification of *line of verse* with *ancestral line*, the new poem as offspring of "a new mind," is basic to the overall theme of regeneration as he develops it. He reinforces this identification with a great deal of concrete imagery, all representing natural growth, and a preciseness of observation that would do credit to Burroughs or Thoreau. Within this imagery the "the small footprints/of the mice" become curiously exciting.

The last four lines give us a swift summation of the strengths and weaknesses of poetic tradition as Williams understands it. His last phrase, with the line "crumbled now to chalk," carries another of those scientific allusions he can make so effectively yet unpretentiously. Chalk, he encourages us to recall, is composed mostly of the

shells of tiny marine creatures. Chalk was once alive.

As a third specimen I offer a poem of my own—without apology for the good company it enjoys with Frost's and Williams' poems. Here, then, is "Take This Hat":

This morning in the middle of coffee,
 Remembering the stitch in time, I saw
 How the Great Wheel, turning, brings back trial.

I thrust away for a far holiday
 Neruda, Ortega, Unamuno,
 Santayana, Lorca—all that Latin magic,

And set myself to study plainer shapes
 Not yet shoreworn . . . Perhaps this battered hat,
 Gray yellow felt, here on a reach of beach,

Will give the world of my new wearing form.
 Take this hat. It smells of brilliantine. Tar.
 Something else not easily identified.

It is modish. Water-logged. Six and seven-
 Eighths. With a broad polka-dotted band and
 Curly feather, now almost gone. It shows

A shape of hope. An American dream
 Of Mediterranean somnolence.
 A beauty loose, jaunty in the suburbs.

A grin on Main Street. A grip on the thin
 Red stripe, now almost gone, fading behind
 Mounting graphs of tedious résumé . . .

Perhaps this hat will relegate the world,
 Set obsolescence in true proportion
 To ripeness. O if it can breach debris,

Can skim brimwide over regular waves
 And find its owner, its only wearer:
 One of a singing and dismembered head.

This poem also begins with a situation. The poet, absorbed in the banal activity of early morning coffee, suddenly has the not-so-banal experience of a vision. He sees, as if hovering in the air, the Great Wheel of Existence, a symbol which is common alike to Hindu, Buddhist, and Tibetan Lamaistic systems of faith. Chastened by the vision, he tries to thrust from his mind an inordinate delight in the works of certain Spanish and South American writers. These, by virtue of their native genius and almost incantatory skill as stylists, represent for him "Latin magic." From

these he turns to the materials of his own experience—admittedly "plainer shapes." Later, while walking along the beach, he finds a man's hat washed up by the tide. He examines the hat. He muses upon what it may have represented to its owner. He finally takes it as a symbol for certain threatened values in modern America. For him the hat becomes a prototype for all the "plainer shapes." With these "shapes" rescued and made manifest in poems, he thinks, what is dead or dying in American life may be seen in truer proportion to what is alive or yet to be born. All that lives or may live he takes as "ripeness," then, and ripeness is all. So he would have the hat restored to its rightful owner, Orpheus, god of poets, whose head torn from his body floated down the river to the sea, still singing.

And so I would still have it. In speaking to you on the problem of a workable conception of the poem for our time, I've stressed the poem as an act of rescue. There are other conceptions, of course. But in considering what *can* be done and a little of what *should* be done in the poems of our time, I've assumed (as I hope you have) that the poet can still do for us what is well worth doing. He can, with an eye, an ear, and an informed conscience for the life around him, give us a memorable sense of what really matters. He can give us ways of coming to terms with our experience. He can give us the presence of the spirit's deep music and make it one with the freedom of speech, the truth of personality, and the gaiety of wit. He can even give us, despite the anger and cruelty and waste of our days, an insight into what man's rightful destiny may be. For Browning, in his essay on Shelley, said it for our time as well as his: "the misapprehensiveness of his age is exactly what a poet is sent to remedy."

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REVIEW

THE GANDHIAN GROUND

IN the January 1964 issue of *Gandhi Marg*—a quarterly (published in New Delhi, India) entirely devoted to Gandhian thought—are reprinted some letters written by Gandhi to his son, Manilal, in the spring of 1914. What impresses the Western reader of these austere communications, among other things, is Gandhi's complete confidence in the wisdom he is conveying to his son. The overarching metaphysic of Indian religious philosophy is simply there, like the sun and the stars, and Gandhi reads off its lessons to Manilal with all the assurance of a T. H. Huxley lecturing on a piece of chalk.

How could he do this? Of various tentative answers to this question, one is found in a comparison of Eastern with Western religion. The religion of India, whatever its faults, has never violated the rational intelligence of human beings to the point where aggressive Materialism became preferable to the "spiritual" conceptions of the religious establishment. Gandhi's early psychological environment, therefore, never alienated him from ancestral Indian philosophy. A second possibility—growing out of the fact that Gandhi was an extraordinary man—is that he had turned his inherited religious traditions into personal conviction and so could speak of them without haunting doubts.

None the less, for Westerners, who have learned from bitter experience to cherish the spiritual tundras of the secular state, these seem slender reeds on which to base Gandhi's wholehearted gnostic faith. And whatever even its pragmatic justification, the itch to question this faith remains. Can't we, the Westerner asks himself, do with a bit more modest assumptions?

Yet an anxious father may feel some envy of Gandhi. *That*, he may say to himself, was a good thing to tell the boy. It is not so much the wisdom, but its ground, that makes you wonder. Take for example this counsel:

You must learn to think independently for yourself and stick to your judgment. It will not matter if, in doing so, you sometimes go wrong. You are even entitled to oppose my views after you have honestly thought over a matter, in cases in which it seems right to oppose me, opposition becomes your duty. It is my earnest desire that you should understand the idea of Moksha and aspire for it. This will never come about, however, till you develop a capacity for independent thinking and firmness of mind. At present, you are in the condition of a creeper. It assumes the shape of the tree over which it spreads. That is not what the Atman does. The Atman is free and, in its essence, omnipotent.

Now this is good, educational, common sense, but what about the metaphysical trimmings? Why bring in "Moksha"? And this abstraction of the Self—"Atman"; do we need it?

Here are certain of the most far-reaching concepts of Gandhi's philosophy. *Atman* is the essential spiritual self, identical with the One Self, or Deity. Gandhi, you might say, made extreme demands upon himself because he believed in the godlike potentialities of the *Atman*. Every man, he held, is an expression of this Deific essence and is therefore capable of what might be termed "divine" behavior. In a *Hindi* work, Gandhi made this criticism of the Marxists:

These people have concentrated their study on the depths of degradation to which human nature can descend. What use have they for the study of the heights to which human nature could rise? That study is being made by me. (Translated by Raghavan Iyer, *MANAS*, Aug. 29, 1962, p. 6.)

Moksha is that state of unqualified spirituality to which the soul may attain, once it is free of the tendency to identify itself with any material form or be moved to action by a less than universal desire. This "other-worldliness" of Gandhi's view enabled him to be completely uncompromising in his struggle for what he believed. He did not expect "perfection" in this world; the attainment of perfection, by men, would dissolve the world into Nirvana. Only by striving after the unattainable on earth, Gandhi felt, could the actually tolerable be achieved.

It will hardly do Westerners any good to borrow Gandhi's philosophical vocabulary without adopting his philosophy. What does seem important, however, is to recognize the role in his life of the ideas represented by these terms. The impressive thing about Gandhi is the power he had to affect history, and this power seems to have arisen, in large part, from his absolute determination, once he had decided what he thought was right. The point to be made, here, is that this conviction flowed from a philosophy of the spirit. Gandhi's calm in the face of overwhelming opposition had the same source as the serenity of Socrates before the wrath of his Athenian judges. For Gandhi, as for Socrates, the real universe is the moral or spiritual universe. Gandhi tried to convey this sense of reality to his son.

But what is of peculiar interest—in the extract chosen, at least—is the way in which Gandhi's extraordinary philosophical certainty made him at the same time insist that Manilal "think independently." Apparently, with this sort of philosophy, the more deeply you become convinced of its truth, the less willing you are to make decisions for others. This is not what we ordinarily expect of "extremists" in spiritual or metaphysical belief.

Actually, Gandhi amounts to a historical mystery not because we fail to learn about his philosophical beliefs, but because of what remains unexplained about him after we have learned all we can. It is the tremendous intensity of Gandhi's resolve that theories of "conditioning" or "cultural influence" leave unaccounted for. Yet, on the other hand, knowing how Gandhi himself explained his convictions provides a clue. There is, he says in effect, in every man a capacity for private decision, for purely individual comprehension or understanding, and this capacity must have strenuous exercise if the man is to become fully human. No moral code, however elaborate, supplies the field for this exercise or gives the rules for such decision. Here, in this

secret place of his spiritual life, the man must *create* his own identity. It is here, in the individual's holy of holies, that the Atman is made free on earth, as it is in heaven, by always acting from immediate perception of what ought to be done, and never from habit or reflex—not even from conscious memory.

Studying what Gandhi thought, we at least learn of this principle of absolute self-reliance in his life, and of the transcendent importance he assigned to it. If we overlook this, we are likely to suppose that he got his strength from the Hindu religion, from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or from the Sermon on the Mount. This would be a great mistake. These scriptures—any or all of them—did not give Gandhi his strength, although they undoubtedly framed his quest for strength. But the strength he found in himself—which is the only place any man ever gets strength. Atman is the name given by Indian religion to the Self which is a reservoir of strength.

Gandhi did not frown on the conventional virtues. Instead, he practiced them with such incredible ardor that the average Westerner—who is easily upset by displays of virtue—begins to wonder if the game can possibly be worth the candle. To understand Gandhi, the Westerner has somehow to get past this barrier to the heart of his thought. Gandhi, after all, is an Indian, and the Indians have been great on virtue for thousands of years. And since Gandhi wanted to get through to the Indians, practicing the traditional virtues for all they were worth was a small price to pay. Then, there is the further consideration that the virtues didn't do him any harm, since he knew he had to get beyond them.

We know that Gandhi transcended the virtues because he was not a self-righteous man. That is why Gandhi's writings are so superior to the dutiful compositions on "spiritual matters" which the spiritual types in India are always putting out, and which are so weighted with self-conscious virtue that you can hardly start, much less finish reading them. Here, quite likely, is a fundamental

difference between East and West, to which Gandhi supplies a kind of key. Both Easterners and Westerners hang up on the problem of the virtues, but in different ways. Westerners are in revolt against the saccharine flavor of traditional Christian piety. They are ostentatiously proud of their anti-virtues, which have come to stand for "freedom," individuality, and having a hell of a time. On the other hand, a lot of Easterners seem to be entranced by the moralistic euphoria they get from being virtuous. Apparently, intelligent dialogue between East and West about the virtues will be resumed only when the West discovers the reactionary side of the anti-virtues, and the East discovers that moral euphoria puts a stop to growth. The spirit is not saintly. Saintliness is the imitation of spirit that matter is capable of, and it is very tiresome to a man of true spirit. Gandhi tried to make this distinction clear to Manilal.

COMMENTARY BEYOND THE QUALITIES

WE cannot resist adding to the quotation from Gandhi in this week's Review. In the same letter Gandhi also said:

Here is the meaning of the sentences which you could not understand. "They who act in a purely legalistic spirit (in accordance with the literal meaning) are, indeed, cursed for such action. Even so, it is stated that those who do not keep doing the things as indicated by the letter of the law are all lost." The point is that the mere bookish souls can never attain Moksha. The *Gita* has a verse to the same effect, which you may ponder over. "The Vedas keep on the plane of the three Gunas; be thou, Arjuna, beyond those Gunas." This is what Krishna said to Arjuna. This does not mean that one need not do the duties prescribed in the Shastras. It means rather that doing them is not quite enough, that one must understand their hidden significance, their aim, and go beyond the actions themselves. . . .

This is a repetition of Gandhi's insistence on freedom of thought. He seems to be saying that what can be put into a code of morals is never the final truth. The duties enjoined by religion ought to be done, but "their hidden significance"—which the scriptures cannot reveal—is even more important.

The expression, *Gunas*, may puzzle Western readers. The Gunas are the three qualities which "spring from nature"—*Tamas*, or sluggishness, darkness and indifference; *Rajas*, the aggressive energy of passion or unslaked desire; and *Sattva*, or harmony, peace, and truth. These are the universal qualifications of nature and of external human experience. The sage is aware of the rule of the Gunas in the world about him, but does not submit his choices to their influence. Therefore he is unattached, even in the midst of apparent "involvements"; though indefatigable in action, he remains free.

Lack of space made it impossible to place Ralph Pomeroy's bibliographic notes at the end of

the lead article. The following paragraph gives the essentials.

Suggested readings on Frost and Williams include: Mildred Hartsock in the *Personalist* for April, 1964 (pp.157-175) Allen Tate in *Modern Verse in English: 1900-1950* (Cecil and Tate) Macmillan, 1958 (p.48); Linda Wagner in *College English* for March, 1964 (pp. 425-430); Yvor Winters in *The Function of Criticism*, Alan Swallow, 1957 (pp.159-187). Material by Williams about the poetic craft is taken from *Selected Essays*, Random House, 1954 (pp.36-37, 217, 223, and 284). The poem by Frost is from *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, Henry Holt, 1949 (p. 276); the passage by Williams, from *Paterson*, New Directions, 1951 (p.65); the poem by Ralph Pomeroy, from *A Prey of Diverse Colors*, Cunningham Press, 1962 (pp.26-27).

CHILDREN **. . . and Ourselves** **BE UNPREPARED!**

[William Mathes, who two weeks ago wrote on "Creative Playthings and the Prepared Environment," here contributes further thoughts on the latter phrase.]

THE "prepared environment" would seem to be indistinguishable from similar manipulations of children by people driven by fear and guilt to rigidly structure and bleach the world, no matter how many comments are made to the contrary by ads attempting to generate guilt in order to sell ways of relieving that guilt. There is not much difference between telling a child to sit quietly and be seen but not heard and telling him to go into his "prepared environment" and have some "experiences" to improve his "imagery."

We too easily forget that what does not contribute to the growth of children does not contribute to the growth of what is human: they cannot be separated. Even if the "prepared environment" were essentially benign, it would still be stultifying. The world must have its confusion, variety, and mystery. Of course, the deprived child grown into adulthood will only in rare persons—those exhibiting extraordinary effort and possessing unlikely external support—transform himself within the dimensions of his adulthood: design his own maturity. This is as rare as real love. But what is not rare is the frequency of maturity—and the high quality of that maturity—produced by a childhood nourished in terms of the specific needs of human growth.

The key question is what is human and what is not? This is complicated and risky: complicated because the answers lie inside each of us, and risky because it is always dangerous to look inside—we have no adequate tradition for introspection, and fear, perhaps, that there might not be anything "inside" to discover. Further complications arise because existing political, social, and educational institutions carry on their

face an assumption of correctness merely because they exist. The fact that a way, thought, product, politics, or society exists is not reason enough to assume that it contributes to human growth and development.

There is general confusion about what is human and what is not, and about what can be done about what is not. If the city as we know it (not to mention the suburban ghettos) truncates human life, change it. If the damage by a curious child of a five-hundred-dollar Danish-modern table would be an economic and psychological loss, then buy a cheaper table: the choice is between a home which includes the growing child, or a home from which the child is excluded in favor of a current status display. The child whose needs are not met while growing will probably become an adult who will place great value on having a five-hundred-dollar table—or hate all tables indiscriminately. Such adults will be likely to marry other adults of similar orientation; they will raise children who will be deprived, who will be in an inferior relationship to tables and other things. This cycle could be broken through only with great difficulty at any point in its turning. The trouble is that all points are interdependent. The deprived adult will himself have to sustain radical personal transformations if he would raise undeprived children.

At some juncture we will all have to decide if we want to change the world into a place of emotional, physical, and spiritual nourishment for the growing child (a place for human beings, including young human beings)—or continue to try to change the children (fortunately, this will never be totally successful) to fit into the world as it is now.

Take your own presumably emotionally well child to the children's ward of a mental hospital and make comparisons there (one possible future); follow this with a reading of A. S. Neill's *Summerhill* and compare those children (another kind of future) with your own. To make an extreme parallel: In a significant psychological

sense, we are all guilty of Eichmann's crimes, and to "hang" Creative Playthings would be as stupid and as magical as was the execution of Eichmann. The origins of our world, from mass murder to mass manipulation by advertising, are in ourselves. If ever we decide to base our world on something other than murder and manipulation, it would take nothing less than a revolution. As one of your lead articles has said:

We need a revolution. . . . a bloodless, warless revolution fought with weapons stranger than the most exotic bomb or death-ray. There will be no barricades to defend, no Molotov-cocktails to hurl, no defense plants or war bonds, no ritual trials and executions, no fun at all. It will be a lonely revolution. Its harbingers are old; it has been a sustaining dream for centuries; it is where we have to go, what we will have to do what we will have to become if we would survive now. The old dream has become a reality waiting, with no alternatives, if we want to live at all. Millions of people will have to confront themselves and each other, their mortality, their joy, their pain, their Life, the relentless novelty of their future, the finality of the loss of their past, and the pervasive, terrible fears about these confrontations. We will have to exchange magic for the possible. We will have to give up the caricature for the real thing. We will have to come to love the Now of our lives more than all the dreams of the future built on the losses of the past. We will have to go as far as we can in knowing and accepting wonder, the apocalypse of the everyday, and in finding the courage to love the origins of this wonder and improbability in existence and in ourselves. (MANAS, May 22, 1963.)

FRONTIERS

Forms of Social Schizophrenia

ONE need not be a poet to state the precious truths, but in doing so, social tact and diplomatic elusiveness are preferable to a brutal honesty which might precipitate trauma. Perhaps every age is a bit tight-lipped for this reason.

But to live is to speak and to speak is to live. Remove the significance of the subjective and you remove the basic means by which we live. I see an essentially modern condition where emotions are merely positive or negative, causing a split for personal reality and with it social irresponsibility, unenlightened self-interest and unhappiness. There is no communication because we feel there is nothing worth communicating. This condition has caused some foreigners to describe American life as full of hatred and competition rather than love.

The stress of modern psycho-sociological concepts on personal adjustments easily implies that social surroundings should satisfy individual needs as scientifically established by the New Sciences. The individual all too often concludes that struggle is irrelevant, that it is useless to be responsible or desire to understand the other point of view when it is a simple matter of adjusting well established "needs" so glibly discussed by experts who can be consulted.

From adolescence to senior citizen, one is classified neatly into stages. Just as a modern chicken can be grown to maturity in incubators and cages, its feet never touching the ground, our feet never really touch the ground of personal reality. The child of today has less struggle with physical reality and is urged to see his counselor should anything go wrong. Your personal problem and its painless solution by specialists replaces any "pioneer" struggle.

The social scheme is rigid and there seems little chance for an individual to influence the monolithic social institutions. Not the great dream, but how can I get a slice of the social pie. Technology on every side stands ready to serve me. The gains are there,

now enjoy them. As a consequence there is nothing to do but grow fat.

The resulting boredom has been portrayed in modern literature in the form of meaningless escape into sex, or a turning from a hopeless society into "family life" and "fun." The greater reality which the New Sciences presumably lead us into actually results in a split from reality (our inner self). The dynamic society is much activity signifying nothing, forcing the individual into a rigid mold.

It is almost amusing, if not pathetic, how the psychological orientation enables one to gossip scientifically and hate objectively. If we carry psychology with us everywhere, every little statement of our friend across the table is interpreted in this psychological frame of reference. This "objectification" of purely personal feelings often places a statement in a narrow rigid context, such as "middle class projection." While we can believe in the devil and still react freely to each other, the new orientation usually demands a cold explanation of the slightest nuance of behavior. This strait-jacket on personal thought is far more oppressive than belief in tribal ritual. We no longer stick to what a person actually does but psychoanalyze his behavior into anything we wish it to mean. I do not have to damn my enemy. I merely refer to his personal problems.

Mass education, mass culture, and greater uniformity through exposure to the same experience (radio, TV, press and college) add to the pressure toward belittling the inner man. For are not students awed by the intellectual giants they must memorize for the next class? They exercise their improved reading speed on the latest paperback, without which they would feel lost. In response to the ever-increasing, ready-made intellectual and cultural experiences (children don't have to improvise as many games as they once did) the inner self diminishes in value. One reasons that his own thoughts are worthless and that external cultural symbols and modes of reaction are real. It leads to sensation-seeking in the form of brilliant verbal interchange, cleverness for its own sake and entertainment with words rather than simple enjoyment or creative interchange of ideas. This leads to intellectual "culture vultures" and pseudo-

intellectualism. It leads to a fear of the creative nature in us all because we might not measure up to the great models so easily accessible.

I just have to turn a knob and I hear great music. Who am I to struggle?

One can see this basic alienation at "Art" theatres where insensitive people seek stimulation through "Brilliant Art" and laugh at what is intended as serious emotion. Perhaps our huge tranquilizer bill can be traced to an attempt to kill the fear of death resulting from the killing of the capacity for a simple heart-felt response.

As an illustration of these ideas, consider a current trend in thought which says that women in America tend to play the masculine role because of their resentment of the subordinate feminine role. If these same people would only look to other societies where women have played more active roles (such as in matriarchal societies) they would not necessarily find a destruction of relations between men and women. Is it because that in American life the very inner core of being has been castrated and replaced by a prefabricated set of responses that don't belong to the Human, but are products of Madison Avenue and the Ph.D.'s of Social Science? There is no necessary reason why we cannot live in a complex urban society and still realize that men and women should supplement each other. The notion of independence becomes absurd when we realize that the air we breathe makes us extremely dependent. Do we rebel and refuse to breathe air? Obviously not. Then we must look to other causes.

Hugh Hefner has pointed out the lack of a strong role played by either sex in this society. But his approach to its solution points out the cause of the problem. The females parading in his Playboy Club are mannequins. Can one love a mannequin with the right proportions? Is real "love play" between a couple in love the kind one would get from the "Play Girl" of the month? Hefner has attempted to solve the problem of "femininity" by stressing the glittering external features of a situation, ignoring the inner reality of life. He reflects the current social situation where the individual's relation to the rest of society is

mechanized (just as sex is) in terms of "objective features." This robs us of the very substance life demands: personal love. The individual has been Freudianized into a meaningless pattern of responses and we no longer talk of the Good Life or happiness. Can women (or men for that matter) live such a monstrous code and not rebel? Women may think it is their feminine role they rebel against, but is it not the opposite, that they are robbed of playing the feminine role simply because our society makes a mockery of either role (while advertising sex)? To love is to be childlike. Our society erroneously thinks that this means immaturity and equates maturity with the degree to which one can approximate the apparently masculine features of the well rehearsed commercial announcer. How well one appears to play the game becomes of paramount importance. The image becomes far more important than what lies behind it. We then come to the point where we manipulate one another through skillful imagery. This leads to a schizophrenic situation where we do not address ourselves to what we really think nor to a real person before us. We tell lies to fictitious beings so often that truth and falsehood are as meaningless as our neighbor. The very sciences whose approach underlies this schizophrenia offer no solution since they claim to be morally neutral.

There is no real communication because you must believe to speak. Observe the school boy attempting to express himself on some topic he loves. He speaks from the heart and therefore he speaks well.

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