

LOST AND FOUND MEANINGS

THE ancient cypress trees on Point Lobos, in Carmel, California, grow out of cracks in rocks. Perhaps a lichen first lodged in the crack, its acids widening the fissure, and a little debris found resting place there. Then came the seed of the cypress, and with the swell of the seed's roots the crack became a crevice, making secure foundation for a tree that would live for hundreds of years. The cypress trees on Point Lobos are exotically beautiful, entwining the stony coast with the dynamic symmetries of life—a life which makes capital out of what seem life-denying conditions. The weary entropy of surf-eroded stone is overtaken by a form-making persistence we can hardly understand. There seems an infinity of meaning in these finite splendors—a wonder the mind does not penetrate but which nonetheless gives delight. This patient conquest of an alien environment fills us with delight.

No right-minded human environment-maker would choose the coast of Carmel to make a cypress orchard. Yet no man-made grove of trees would come close to the splendor of the random plantings by nature on that desolate shore. But was it indeed random planting? We have no way of knowing; the plan—if there was a plan—remains obscure. The plan, perhaps, is hidden in the extraordinary adaptive power of living things, in the unlikely yet amazingly sure ways devised for seeds to find pockets of stability and nourishment.

By odd association this resourcefulness of nature recalls the report, years ago, of a Scandinavian who lived for a whole year on nothing but potatoes, and was quite healthy at the end of the year. We study the science of nutrition conscientiously, publishing scores of books every year on the subject. Our progress ought to be impressive, but consider a finding about the Icelanders, repeated by McColium and Simmonds (*The Newer Knowledge of Nutrition*, 1929):

This island was settled in the ninth century by colonists from Ireland and Scandinavia, who took with them cattle, sheep, and horses. Their diet was practically carnivorous for several hundred years. Martin Behaim (quoted by Burton) writing of Iceland about A.D. 1500, stated: "In Iceland are found men of eighty years who have never tasted bread. In this country no corn is grown, and in lieu fish is eaten." Burton, quoting Pierce, states that rickets and caries of the teeth were almost unknown in Iceland in earlier times. . . . The health conditions were good and dental caries was unknown until after 1850.

Inevitably, our anxious attempts at environment-making will go on. We shall continue to compose solidly statistical treatises concerning the inequities of our practice, and devise challenging programs for feeding the world in a manner to which it is accustomed—or unaccustomed, which might be better—and no one will propose putting a stop to such well-intentioned proceedings. Yet the cypress in their glory are still there for our instruction, and the skulls of Icelanders (ninety-six of them), all with sound teeth, can be examined at Harvard University, where they repose as a gift from Stefansson, who dug them out of a cemetery.

Suggested here is no Dadaist attack on honest knowledge about good food, but only a certain skepticism toward the frantic utopianism which declares that nothing will be right with the world until the correct program for environment-building has been determined by tireless research, and until the diverse peoples of all continents are persuaded by hook or by crook to conform to properly defined necessities. The system-designing utopians will not of course succeed; they never do; but they are responsible for enormous expenditures of energy by a great many hopeful people, and so, in part, for the discouragements which inevitably result. We need a holistic system of checks and balances to contain these enthusiasms; or rather, we have the checks, which

are amply supplied by the lethargies of human nature—it is the balances which are lacking. Where are balances found, and what is their substance?

We are thrown by this, as by many other puzzling situations, back to the old philosophic question of the meaning of our lives, of the reason for our placement in a scheme of nature filled with mysterious paradoxes, and most of all concerning the source of the hopes and longings which keep us going, as persistently as cypress trees and other living things.

Are there common denominators of purpose in all this diversity, all this adaptability, all the endless production of something out of almost nothing by the magic of life? Brooding about this matter, D. H. Lawrence, considering the virtues of the novel as a form which gives some working order to uncountable relativities, reached this conclusion:

We should ask for no absolutes. All things flow and change. In all this change I maintain a certain integrity. If I say of myself, I am this, I am that!—then, if I stick to it, I turn into a stupid fixed thing like a lamp post. I shall never know wherein lies my integrity, my individuality, my me. I can never know it. It is useless to talk about my ego. That only means I have made up an *idea* of myself.

Examining Lawrence's pursuit of identity in the Winter 1975/76 *American Scholar*, Robert Langbaum notes that this quest for the elusive self seems the animating principle of most distinguished writers. As with William Blake and Wordsworth, the problem of being human begins for Lawrence with the loss of innocence that is the price of self-consciousness. Mr. Langbaum quotes Lawrence as saying that when a man—

becomes too much aware of objective reality, and of his own isolation in the face of a universe of objective reality, the core of his identity splits, his nucleus collapses, his innocence or his naivete perishes, and he becomes only a subjective-objective reality, a divided thing hinged together but not strictly individual. While a man remains a man, before he falls and becomes a social individual, he innocently

feels himself altogether within the great continuum of the universe.

We had the know-how of the cypress before the fall. Can it be recovered? "You can't go home again," said Thomas Wolfe, yet that is what everybody wants to do, however scientifically we define our longings, and in whatever dreamy misconceptions of the order of the "great continuum" we place our faith. Where is the chart for a successful voyage home? Is it necessary to know the reason for the expedition into the world before the way back can be recognized and mapped? Did the Prodigal Son gain anything from his sinful excursions? Was the conquest of Troy only a false and unnecessary errand for Ulysses?

Once upon a time these matters seemed to have adequate if not clear explanation. The age of unambiguous meaning, of epic certainty, was also the age of faith. The epic of revealed religion declared the path for humans, catalogued good and evil, and listed the rewards of virtue and the punishments for sin. The epic saturates culture with its unities. Ethics, customs, skills have inseparable relation, hardly distinguishable from each other. In heroic ages the verity in the epic suffices, and people feel that they are part of a natural flow in the "great continuum." But when, in time, the heroes become only legendary, their courage and nobility reduced to memories, then the rule of custom replaces epic inspiration. And it is then, for both society and the individual, that the rigid "I am this, I am that" becomes "a stupid fixed thing," as Lawrence says. For a certain number in the society—call them philosophers; of late they have often been artists—the confinement in stereotyped identity becomes unbearable. This is the sense of being "split" which Lawrence speaks of. "I am not, indeed, what custom and tradition say I am," the philosopher declares. He feels in himself the thrust of lonely self-determination and declares his dissent. Then from the dissent society, too, begins to split; and sometimes, when dissent is multiple, society is not only split but fragmented.

This is the cultural sundering of the One, and it is plainly necessary or inevitable. Whatever the losses that accompanied the breakup of the rigid traditional society, independent individuality had to emerge. The condition of man before the emergence is well described by Eric Havelock in *Preface to Plato*, in his account of the psychological shaping of the traditional Homeric Greek:

He is required as a civilized being to become acquainted with the history, the social organization, the technical competence and the moral imperatives of his group. . . . This over-all body of experience (we shall avoid the word "knowledge") is incorporated in a rhythmic narrative or set of narratives which he memorizes and which is subject to recall in his memory. Such is the poetic tradition, essentially something he accepts uncritically, or else it fails to survive in his living memory. Its acceptance and retention are made psychologically possible by a mechanism of self-surrender to the poetic performance, and of self-identification with the situations and the stories related in the performance. Only when the spell is fully effective can his mnemonic powers be fully mobilized. His receptivity to tradition has thus, from the standpoint of inner psychology, a degree of automatism which however is counterbalanced by a direct and unfettered capacity for action, in accordance with the paradigms he has absorbed. "His not to reason why."

Looking back on the epic age of tradition, it is comparatively easy for us now to understand the necessity for breaking out of the primitive unity of Homeric culture—it was only a majestic fabrication, an ingenious multi-dimensional reflection of the "great continuum." By Plato's time the correspondences had been lost, the intuitive verifications were worn thin. Men had to learn *to reason why*, and for reasoning why they needed the contrast between subject and object, even though this meant suffering all the Pandora's box of evils and frustrations that come with the division.

Thus Modernism, as we call it, or the break with tradition, began as a Platonic enterprise. Prof. Havelock describes the prior condition to

introduce his explanation of Plato's rejection of the mimetic poets:

We are now in a position more clearly to understand one reason for Plato's opposition to the poetic experience. It was his self-imposed task, building to be sure on the work of predecessors, to establish two main postulates: that of the personality which thinks and knows, and that of a body of knowledge which is thought about and known. To do this he had to destroy the immemorial habit of self-identification with the oral tradition. For this had merged the personality with the tradition, and made a self-conscious separation from it impossible. This means that his polemics against the poets are not a side issue, nor an eccentric piece of Puritanism, nor a response to some temporary fashion in Greek educational practice. They are central to the establishment of his own system.

Half of Plato's goal was "affirmation of the psychology of the autonomous individual"—in short, modernism, the contention that we must seek to know for ourselves. But the other half was concerned with the course of autonomous individuals back to the unity of the One, without loss of their autonomy—a much more difficult undertaking.

Compared to the later, post-Reformation champions of autonomy, Plato was the gentlest of iconoclasts. He broke with tradition as autocratic authority, but he still sought its riches the way a miner gathers ore. He believed or knew that behind the inheritance from Pythagoras and certain other sages there was a structured matrix of truth, some parts of which were to be found in the myths of the gods, with more, perhaps, in the dramas of the Mysteries, but he was convinced that no one who knew this truth would ever corrupt its essence by trying to write it down. So, at least, he said, in his seventh epistle.

But the modern West had had enough of "mysteries." It wanted everything plain and visible—and computable, as Galileo declared. No more secrets. If you can't write it down, it isn't worth knowing, declared more recent champions of definable public truth. "If what you say doesn't have a concrete, objective referent, it's *blah!*"—as

one intellectual sanitation squad put it, earlier in this century.

The seventeenth century saw the birth of mechanism in the doctrines of Galileo and Newton. The eighteenth century, rich in the promises of fresh discoveries by science, with many of its eminent thinkers themselves backyard experimenters, denuded the world of any meaning but the working of a vast machine—not a continuum of life, but a machine. They meant to protect their own and any future world against crimes perpetrated in the name of mystery. Being totally absorbed in the wonders of objective nature, they could hardly realize that in closing out all mystery they were indeed shutting out themselves. Those busy men had little time for thinking about themselves, and the world of today is the bewildered heir of their doctrinaire emptiness.

Socially, the result of all this externalization has been the complete preoccupation of reformers and revolutionists with environmental arrangements, to the neglect of inner resources. If there is nothing much of importance inside the human being, then everything outside takes on decisive significance. Nothing can be left to individual ingenuity; all must be planned in behalf of the little human machines who are multiplying at an incredible rate. Society is conceived as a *machine!* raged Carlyle contemptuously, a hundred and forty years ago, predicting the enslavement of man by rigid, machine requirements. Roderick Seidenberg's *Post-Historic Man* came a century later as confirmation and reinforcement of Carlyle's prophecy.

The artists—artists in the Blakean sense—were the first to object. They were the ones who, moving around in the freedom of the autonomy born of the Renaissance, realized that the mystery of the self, of human identity, was *meant* to be a mystery and would remain so. The self has implications, not explanations. The self can explain everything but itself. *It* is the first principle—the motion, as Plato said, which moves

itself. But the self as we experience it is far from footloose and free. The self has a *sense* of freedom, but in life is subject to dense confinements. The modern world, so variously split, no longer affords to anyone "a direct and unfettered capacity for action" for the reason that this world is known or declared to be an aimless place, fulfilling no cosmic vision, ruled over by blind forces as senseless as the rock which vanquished Sisyphus throughout eternity.

Was this the price of being an autonomous individual, and was it worth it? How could an individual survive in a continuum where, to paraphrase Bertrand Russell—all man's hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the accidental collocations of atoms; where no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; where all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and where the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins?

What, with such a prospect, was the artist expected to do? There was not much he could do except express his disgust, his pain, and contemptuous rejection of the modern world. Yet the *forms* of epic expression and the myths of the classical past were often chosen by modern artists to embody their despairing feelings about the world in which they had been born. James Joyce used the *Odyssey* in this way. Gilbert Highet says this of Joyce's *Ulysses*:

It contrasts the strong, noble, statuesque past with the nasty, poor, brutish present, in which everything is dirt and humiliation. . . . It has been called an explosion in a sewer. The commonest criticism of it is that its filth is exaggerated; but few of those who offer this criticism have spent the first twenty years of their lives in a large industrial city.

Then, of Eliot, Highet says:

Less filthily, more beautifully, but no less despairingly, T. S. Eliot has used Greek legend to cast a pure but revealing light on the meanness of modern

life. The poets of the Renaissance used Greco-Roman myth and history as a noble background to dignify the heroic deeds they described. Eliot does the opposite. When the Renaissance poet compared his hero to Hector or his heroine to Helen, he made them more brave and more beautiful. By comparing Sweeney leaving a pick-up girl to Theseus deserting his mistress Ariadne, Eliot shows the modern infidelity to be vile—because the world which tolerates it is ignoble, coarse, repetitious and complacent, and because even the actors lack that style which, in a heroic era, elevates crime into a tragedy.

Yet, between the lines we are able to read, however faintly or inverted, the higher longing of the poet or novelist, when he writes so well or even beautifully of hateful things. Bursts of longing come out in strange guises in all the really good writers. Lawrence and Norman O. Brown are examples. The weight of a world without a higher counterpart is too much for them to lift. The isolation won by objectivity has become a prison of unmeaning routine and they want to go home again; but the ancient pathways have all been marked "No Thoroughfare" by the Western liberators of mankind.

It is an extremely difficult time. Already the sweep of mass emotional rejection of the age has far outrun the academic thinkers—most of whom remain cautious and undecided—but in the barbarism of uncontrolled feeling there may be obscure clues to the natural hungers which vaguely anticipate the future development of the human race. These youngsters who go about chanting—as though the splendors of ancient community could be conjured into existence by a mechanical repetition of sacramental phrases—at least announce a turn in the temper of the times. But they will not construct a homeward-bound causeway by ritual utterance, for this can only reanimate briefly the static unities of societies which had never allowed confrontation with the Socratic questions. A knight must win his spurs before he can seek the Holy Grail. Individuality must have its testings, defeats, and trials to reach the maturity which begins the lonely return. We were not born in the world *simply* to get out of it,

and there is only deceptive salvation for those who devote their ingenuity to flight.

But surely there is meaning in all the encounters in our time. There must, for example, be a lesson in the minor warfare between Sartre and Levi-Strauss concerning autonomy and social structure. Each, surely, is right in his way, and what is missing in both is some subtle sense of transcendental unity enabling individual freedom and evolving cultural patterns to meet in synthesis, if still in necessary tension. Finally, there is the new-old conception of the self proposed by Joyce Carol Oates—another idea that is in the air, these days:

Long-cherished, sacred myths are now being explored the collective mind of our world is making a supreme effort to transcend itself. One of the holiest of our myths always has been the unique, proud, isolated entity of a "self": perhaps it is through an exploration of this phenomenon that our other myths will be exposed, devaluated or given a new value, absorbed in the consciousness of a new world. . . .

In surrendering one's isolation, one does not surrender his own uniqueness, he only surrenders his isolation. . . . As long as the myth of separate and competitive "selves" endures, we will have a society obsessed with adolescent ideas of being superior, of conquering, of destroying. . . . Many myths must be exposed and relegated to the past, but the myth of the "isolated self" will be the most difficult to destroy.

This is an idea with great potentiality for transforming the environments we have now, for then they would become the vehicles for other sorts of relationships, and consciously graded unities would begin to come into being. But, unlike the cypress trees on Point Lobos, we must be deliberate about this change in order for the laws of nature to work on our side.

REVIEW BETWEEN EPOCHS

THE labors of scholars, it now becomes evident, may eventually render the classics of American literature inaccessible to general readers. In the *American Scholar* for the Winter of 1975/76, Peter Shaw describes the work of the Center for Editions of American Authors, begun in 1964. Among books published or to be issued are works by Stephen Crane, John Dewey, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Dean Howells, Washington Irving, Herman Melville, William Gilmore Simrns, Henry David Thoreau, and Mark Twain. The idea has been to provide "definitive texts" which embody in each case the author's intention. Apart from the question of whether the books now appearing are indeed "definitive"—an arguable matter, as Mr. Shaw shows—there is also the question of whether they are needed. He says:

. . . most of the important errors in nineteenth-century American books were discovered by the 1940s, so the Center editors have been able to add but a few footnotes to the history of bibliographical discovery. As for their regularizing, modernizing, and mistaken readings, as well as their typographical errors—the truth is that these have proven disastrous only in terms of failed expectations. For in most cases the texts, though accompanied by introductions, appendixes, and notes, remain essentially the same as in the earlier editions. . . . Having bibliographically established the basic reliability of our old editions of American books, the editors need not have reported this discovery in the form of editions priced between fifteen and thirty-five dollars a volume and issued at a collective cost in excess of six million dollars.

The interpretation of the author's intent, as Mr. Shaw describes it, sounds perilously like an editor's idea of what the author *ought* to have intended:

The editors of Melville's *Typee* decided to reject many of Melville's own revisions made when he went over the first English edition of his novel to prepare it for publication in America. They concluded that "original intentions may often be more valid than final intentions." In their judgment Melville's publisher may have pressured him to alter certain expressions that the publisher feared unacceptable to American readers. Along with these changes, they rejected Melville's apparent attempts to counter

criticisms of his narrator by reviewers of the English edition. The reviewers had found the speech too literary for an ordinary seaman, and in response Melville apparently tried at several points to make him sound more salty. The editors judged these changes out of keeping with the novel's original texture. In all, the editors developed six categories of changes by Melville that they could reject for violating his original intentions, or his "true" intentions, or his "concept of the book as an artistic whole." The last and least category, fittingly, contains the flaw in their logic.

According to the concept of an artistic whole, revisions of *any* type made by Melville could be rejected when these revealed the influence of later developments in his style. This was to introduce, in the name of scholarly objectivity an essentially subjective basis for editorial revisions. Far from being technocrats icily determining accurate texts with the help of machines, the editors were awash in a sea of speculation.

Meanwhile, because of the great pains taken with these expensive books, they are appearing very slowly. This is notably true of the historical series of the American Editions: "The net result of the Adams papers, and of the other historical and literary projects comes down to this: the guardians of our tradition have succeeded in keeping it out of print. Fewer of the writings of our eighteenth-century statesmen and nineteenth-century writers are in print today than at the turn of the century. It is possible that more were in print at the centennial than will be at the bicentennial."

Mr. Shaw has some kind words for G. P. Putnam's, a publisher that (without subsidy) by around the turn of the century had put into print the writings of Samuel Adams, Franklin, Jay, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Paine, and Washington. Meanwhile, Riverside made available Hawthorne, Cooper, Emerson, Poe, Mark Twain, and Whitman, in a faithfulness, according to one critic, equal to that of the paperback versions of the present American Editions. Mr. Shaw gloomily concludes:

Very possibly our traditions may be of direct use only to professionals and students, the rest of the population subsisting on historical novels, television dramatizations and a few images of the past recalled from school days. On the other hand, if editors and

publishers begin with this assumption, or something like it, no wider dissemination or deeper understanding of the tradition can be possible. There is no telling who will make use of sets of the American classics if they are made available inexpensively and in readable form. But if they are made only partially available, and if issued for the most part in unwieldy volumes and at great expense, they most certainly will have no general use.

We are able to think of only mournful comments on such a situation. Much elaboration of means has quite obviously displaced ends in the practice of scholarship. The "unbridled lucidity" of attention to detail, which Michael Polanyi speaks of as a weakness in science, has spread to become a common ill among the learned. Reports like Mr. Shaw's excite the suspicion that scholars no longer find delight in the reading of fine books, and have forgotten that their primary task is to awaken the capacity for that delight in others.

Some years ago a teacher in one of California's state colleges (now all become "universities") said that he was offering a survey course in Western civilization, not because he particularly admired survey courses, but because he found this to be the only way he could get great books into the curriculum. He also said that another member of the faculty was eager to take part, since this approach would enable her to do the "essay" sort of study of Sartre to which she was strongly attracted. Teachers must now devise ingenious means to free themselves of the conventional demand that they produce only "research" papers loaded with footnotes.

Scholars, in short, do not write for the public, but for one another.

Fortunately, change is already well on the way. A new kind of publishing has become noticeable during the past five years. Once the paperback was a low-priced replica of the hardback edition, but now paperbacks are coming out on their own, with independent excellence of graphic design, and they have grown in dimensions, many of them 8½" x 11" in format, some 9" x 12" or even larger. A lot of these volumes are either "how to" or "self-help" books, yet the time will come when they launch a whole new literature. But since full-bodied literature

is the fruit of painfully and devotedly acquired cultural maturity, we shall have to wait for such fulfillments.

Meanwhile, there is a sense in which the back-to-the-soil, organic-gardening-and-health-food-nutrition, and build-it-yourself movements represent the gradual emergence of a new "folk" society, so far existing only in pioneer terms, but getting larger and stronger every day. And the popularity of the new books is ample evidence of a far-reaching change in the direction of people's lives. A great many, even if they are not yet living in new ways, are thinking more and more in these ways, and will some day begin to act. Then will come exuberant publication of declarations and manifestoes—this has already begun—and thoughtful distillations of the wisdom of the past as foundation for the new vision of the future; and then the leisurely, mellow expressions of great literature will follow after—but perhaps long after. It takes time and ripeness for an Emerson, a Thoreau, a Melville, or a Whitman to emerge.

The present is a time for breaking out of old forms. Wherever there are options, changes are in evidence. Replacing old institutions with new ones is not something to rush into, but young scholars of promise are not likely to stay in the universities very much longer. Some of them have already left, going to work in places like the New Alchemy Institute. Four years ago William Irwin Thompson called the turn:

The universities are no longer on the frontiers of knowledge. A lot of students are leaving, professors are leaving. The universities won't die or disappear, but they'll lose their charisma and their imaginative capacity to innovate, which means that they will become the kind of places where you learn the past, where you consolidate, and then, when you're ready to really get into things, then you'll say, "O.K. I'm gonna go and work with Soleri, or I'm gonna work with Piaget . . ."

For links with the illustrious past, there are still copies around of those turn-of-the-century editions of the American classics, put into print by Putnam and Riverside, and even if they are out of print the used book stores are sure to have some of them for a while.

COMMENTARY RECOVERY OF HUMANITY

THE idea of finding our way "home," spoken of in this week's lead article, has something of an echo in Review, which speaks of a future in which cultural vision will gain fresh embodiment in a literary renaissance. We see its primitive beginnings, perhaps, in the eager grass-roots expressions of writers now involved in establishing healthy relationships with the earth.

Convergences of high philosophy may soon become possible in terms of the associations natural to these deliberate renewals of healthful everyday life. Already we have psychiatrists who declare that the individual's feeling of *relatedness to his nonhuman environment* is "one of the transcendentally important facts of human living"; and we have physicists who say that the search for "fundamental elementary particles must give way to the Platonic quest for fundamental symmetries." Is there, an astronomer asks, "a fundamental ethic in our existence in the universe?"

An intimation of how all these skeins of meaning may come together in new works of literature may be found in an almost forgotten modern classic, *The Outermost House*. Henry Beston said in his preface to the 1949 edition of this book:

As I read over these chapters, the book seems to me fairly what I ventured to call it, "a year of life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod." Bird migrations, the rising of the winter stars out of the breakers and the east, night and storm, the solitude of a January day, the glisten of dune grass in midsummer, all this is to be found between the covers even as today it is still to be seen. Now that there is a perspective of time, however, something else is emerging from the pages which equally arrests my attention. It is the meditative perception of the relation of "Nature" (and I include the whole cosmic picture in this term) to the human spirit. Once again, I set down the core of what I believe. Nature is a part of our humanity, and without some awareness and experience of that divine mystery man ceases to be man. When the Pleiades and the wind are no longer a part of the human spirit, a part of very flesh and bone, man becomes, as it

were, a kind of cosmic outlaw, having neither the completeness and integrity of the animal nor the birthright of a true humanity.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

SEEDS OF MATURITY

NOT quite as an experiment—but for a reason—it is of interest, when three or four adults are gathered together, to ask one of them whether he ever killed anything when he was little. The ones who didn't may be hard to find. And the ones who fail to remember their shock and self-disgust, looking at that little dead thing lying there, may be even harder to find. People don't like to kill; wanton killing is worst of all; and since the killing children do is mostly thoughtless, it is remembered years afterward with some shame and regret.

Why does a child kill a bird? Because he can, because he has the power to. By killing the bird the child makes his power known to himself. And then, in time, he makes his guilt known to himself. It would have been better not to have killed the bird. But if a child learns from killing a bird that human powers need restraint and control, something very important may have been gained. In retrospect, then, the bird becomes a sacrifice to self-discovery. It would be better if humans could reach maturity without sacrificing a life to drive this lesson home, but it seldom happens. When it does, an act of imagination has taken place. The child—or adult—has learned the wrong of killing without having to kill.

A full act of the imagination in relation to these things has a double potency. It intensifies the shame of the act of killing, but it also generates the strength of not needing to be ashamed, because one has withheld his powers from random acts. This is an aspect of human dignity, fostered by musing recognition. A poem by Wendell Berry, "The Fearfulness of Hands That Have Learned Killing,"* reveals this sort of recognition:

The fearfulness of hands that have learned killing
I inherit from my own life. With my hands from boyhood
I formed the small perfect movements of death,
killing for pleasure or wantonness, casually.
Manhood taught me the formal deadliness
of hunter and farmer, the shedding
of predestined blood that lives for death.
Only marrying and fathering lives
has taught me the depth of ruin,
and made me feel quick in my hands the subtlety
and warmth of what they have destroyed.
And still I have killed for pity, and felt open
in my mind the beautiful silence, the sudden
ridding of a hurt thing's pain. I
am dumbfounded at the works I have accomplished
at the bounds of mystery, seeing it flow out
red and mute, matting the hair of my hands.
The skill that is prepared in me is careful
and terrible. There is no life I can think of
without sensing in my hands the answering power.
I shall not go free of the art of death.

An act of the imagination takes us beyond innocence and beyond guilt. There is no secure maturity without reaching beyond these poles of the human condition, since innocence is forever vulnerable and guilt diminishes the capacity to choose without fear. So one who remains guilty will continue to offend. He can't help it. He has absorbed guiltiness into his identity. Children verging on adolescence can sense these things, and some would be able to take this poem to heart. A phrase or an image might become a lifelong resource, reviving the rich meaning of the poem from time to time.

Yet it seems a minor sin to make something didactic out of these lovely lines. That might be a reason for reading it casually, on some occasion when the mood is right. The magic of the casual often makes a better engagement than ceremonial preparation—the introduction of an idea sedately on a pedestal—although ceremony has its uses, too.

Much of teaching is accomplished by alternation between the casual and the ceremonial, and by relying on the latent momentum of moods. This was perhaps why Jonathan Kozol chose "The

* The poems by Wendell Berry are reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. from his volume, *Openings*, ©1967, 1968, by Wendell Berry.

"Ballad of the Landlord" to read to his fourth-graders (a decision which, unbelievably, got him fired from the Boston public school system, as he explains in *Death at an Early Age*). Some poems can become life-companions for children, nurturing countless little complementary acts of the imagination. As Kozol tells it:

Of all the poems of Langston Hughes that I read to my Fourth Graders, the one that the children liked most was a poem that has the title "Ballad of the Landlord." The poem is printed along with some other material in the back part of this book. This poem may not satisfy the taste of every critic, and I am not making any claims to immortality for a poem just because I happen to like it a great deal. But the reason this poem did have so much value and meaning for me and, I believe, for many of my students, is that it not only seems moving in an obvious and immediate human way but that it *finds* its emotion in something ordinary. It is a poem which really does allow both heroism and pathos to poor people, sees strength in awkwardness and attributes to a poor person standing on the stoop of his slum house every bit as much significance as William Wordsworth saw in daffodils, waterfalls and clouds. At the request of the children later on I mimeographed that poem and, although nobody in the classroom was asked to do this, several of the children took it home and memorized it on their own. I did not assign it for memory, because I do not think that memorizing a poem has any special value. Some of the children just came in and asked if they could recite it. Before long, almost every child in the room asked to have a turn.

Well, the children knew that memorizing a poem they loved had a special value! That it would stay with them always as a result. While memorizing sometimes deadens meaning, the joy of knowing something "by heart" can also give its meaning free release.

When children grow to manhood, or as they approach it, the nation may demand that they learn how to kill, that they train for it. Mr. Berry might have written "Do Not Be Ashamed" with such impending requirements in mind. This is the last half of the poem:

Though you have done nothing shameful,
they will want you to be ashamed.

They will want you to kneel and weep
and say you should have been like them.
And once you say you are ashamed,
reading the page they hold out to you,
then such light as you have made
in your history will leave you.
They will no longer need to pursue you.
You will pursue them, begging forgiveness.
They will not forgive you.
There is no power against them.
It is only candor that is aloof from them,
only an inward clarity, unashamed
that they cannot reach. Be ready.
When their light has picked you out
and their questions are asked, say to them:
"I am not ashamed." A sure horizon
will come around you. The heron will begin
his evening flight from the hilltop.

It is a mournful and terrible thing that the world has become incomparably skilled in killing. Now children can do it easily with the machines we give them, after a little instruction and some physical and psychological preparation that is supposed to toughen them up. We draft them, train them, and then send them to do far-away chores of killing long before they reach maturity—before they have had time to think about such things and decide for themselves whether they want to give up their innocence altogether—put their motives and morality in someone else's charge.

So, to protect the children—and everybody else a peace movement is required. The children have to be warned. They have to be told the lessons of maturity long before they are mature. But slogans can't be relied upon to spread the meaning of the maturity a peaceful mankind will require. The poetry and drama of individual experience, the fragile wonder of individual discovery, the mysterious resolve of those willing and able to stand alone—all this has to be continually renewed, or even born for the first time, in the young.

FRONTIERS

Energy, Food, Agriculture—Abroad

FROM *Sunshine Project*, a publication of the Japan External Trade Association (2, Akasaka, Aoi-cho, Minatoku, Tokyo, Japan), we learn that nearly 80 per cent of the energy consumed by Japan is petroleum energy—all of it imported—and that the Japanese are now undertaking research into other sources—particularly solar and subterranean heat—with a view to "a low-growth economy in the future." While admitting "a national aversion to anything nuclear," this report also declares nuclear energy to be the most promising alternative to petroleum as a source of energy. At present eight nuclear power stations—developed over the past eighteen years—generate 4.2 per cent of Japan's total output of electricity, but the report adds that as of last January six of the eight stations were shut down "for regular inspection or because of equipment breakdowns."

Since Japan is poor in energy resources and has a population density eight times that of the United States, "there is a particular need," the report states, "for a simultaneous solution to energy and environmental problems." It is said that with appropriate installations "solar energy could provide all the energy needed by Japan in fiscal year 1985." While this sounds more than a little optimistic, even as a dream such anticipations have an encouraging aspect.

The extraordinary achievement of Verghese Kurien, whose efforts are bringing thousands of gallons of milk to the children of Bombay and other Indian cities, is described by Graham Rose in the *London Times* of Jan. 4. Mr. Kurien graduated from the University of Michigan in 1947 as a qualified dairy engineer. In 1965, the then premier of India, Lal Shastri, saw what he had accomplished with a dairy cooperative at Anand, near Bombay—collecting, processing, and retailing the milk produced by 215,000 farmers located over 2,500 square miles. The milk comes

from the buffaloes and cows of small peasant farmers. The *Times* writer relates:

The logistics were bewildering: 170,000 gallons of perishable milk were collected (and paid for in cash) twice daily at 800 village collection centers. Of this 44,000 gallons were railed daily for distribution to milk-starved Bombay and the rest was processed into butter, cheese, milk powder and baby food.

Kurien's Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union was successful because it beat corruption with sound commercial principles. He took on the gangsters who controlled milk distribution in Bombay by opening a chain of easily accessible dairy booths where higher quality was offered at lower prices. Demand rocketed and the profits were used to increase production by providing co-op farmers with cheaper feeding stuffs from their own mills and veterinary services and advice which enabled them to obtain more milk from their buffaloes by employing better breeding, feeding and animal hygiene.

Premier Shastri urged Kurien to establish similar producers' co-ops elsewhere. The dairyman agreed, but with the proviso that the headquarters of the organizing group—the National Dairy Development Board—be in his home-town of Anand, far from Delhi politicians, and that it be entirely free of government control. Capital for Kurien's ventures has come out of profits or as help from international bodies like Unicef and Oxfam—"without a rupee of government money." Graham Rose describes the program of the Dairy Development Board:

By 1970 Kurien had laid his plans for Operation Flood. Due to be completed by 1977, it is the largest dairying or agricultural project ever attempted. It involves organizing more than two million separate farm units into 20 integrated, large-scale co-ops supplying the 30 million people living in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Madras. Before Operation Flood was launched these cities consumed about a million litres of milk a day. Operation Flood could practically triple that. . . .

By the end of this month [which was January of this year], when he opens his ninth factory in Jalgoan in Maharashtra State, Kurien will have transformed the lives of more than 4.5 million people.

The competition the co-op is giving to international companies such as Lever Bros. and Nestlé recalls the similar success of the Swedish co-ops years ago in breaking monopolies and lowering the prices of electric light bulbs and galoshes. Having reason to think that the internationals were reaping exorbitant profits on baby foods, Kurien's co-op entered this field and gained 74 per cent of the sales by offering quality products at 17 per cent less in price. He is now opening a co-op chocolate factory to bring Cadbury's dividends down to normal.

The funding is still independent of government:

Kurien is financing Operation Flood entirely out of the £63 million which the cooperatives made over five years by transforming 42,000 tons of butter oil and 126,000 tons of milk powder obtained free from the EEC butter mountain (as Europe's contribution to the world food programme) into saleable dairy products.

According to Eliot Coleman, of the Small Farm Research Association, Harborside, Maine 04642, European agricultural reformers use the word "biological" to describe what is presently called "organic" by Americans, feeling that "Biological Agriculture" stresses life both in and on the soil and is free of semantic confusions. Mr. Coleman begins a pamphlet, *Biological Agriculture in Europe*:

Biological agriculture came of age in Paris during November 1974. The occasion was the 10th International Congress sponsored by Nature et Progrés, the European Association for Biological Agriculture and Health. Just as the doors closed on the F.A.O. World Food Conference in Rome, those of this Paris Congress opened. The two events were not unrelated. The point was made that the first posed problems and the second proposed solutions.

The three-day sessions of the Congress were attended by 10,000 participants from twenty countries who overflowed the largest convention center in Paris. Its purpose was to increase acceptance of biological agriculture since "even the industrialized nations obviously cannot continue to support the present high level of

agricultural energy consumption, much less export these high energy techniques to the rest of the world." Eliot Coleman highlights the agricultural side of the proceedings—which also included health, food, nutrition, forestry, alternative land use, recycling, ecology, and diversified medicine. He was especially impressed by the quality of the speakers:

Not only in the realm of open-mindedness did the European agriculturalists seem to be ahead of the U.S. status quo but also in getting out and doing the necessary research and making comparisons. One example: A preliminary report of a study by the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture puts Earl Butz's unfounded statement about "which 50 million would starve" in its biased place. This document, "Alternative Agriculture," contains 160 pages with a bibliography listing 365 publications and comes to the general conclusion that biological agriculture offers a viable alternative.

Eliot Coleman's pamphlet on what the Europeans are doing in this area is available from the Small Farm Research Association for 35 cents.