

THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS

IN *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster points out the difference between the novel and a historical work. While the novelist and the historian are both concerned with action and human character, the historian is limited to facts which are publicly accessible, while the novelist deals with character in terms of realities which are largely hidden from the historian. Not what is objective, but the subjective, is the unique domain of the novelist. In the work of fiction, therefore, the reader may feel more "reality" than he does in history, for the reason that the writer, by using his imagination, has put reality there. So a novel, one could say, can be at the same time more and less true than factual accounts.

But the writer of a story, while he may tell us a great deal about the inner life of his characters, cannot, or should not pretend to, tell us *all* about them. The superficial reason for this restraint is the preservation of suspense, but more important is fidelity to an essential quality of being human. We don't want to think of the characters in a novel as being *totally* predictable, the product of a complicated machine or a computer program. The presence of a man in a situation is absolutely necessary to dramatic interest, and this is so because human beings are a form of creative intelligence, they are *not* predictable in all that they do. To make them seem so would be to destroy in them what corresponds to the sense of freedom in ourselves. As Joseph Wood Krutch remarks in *More Lives Than One*, questions about the Unknowable bring far more interesting and even more valuable thoughts than positive knowledge about the knowable. So a novelist's representation of what a man thinks, inside himself, how he reaches his decisions, what obstacles he confronts and how he overcomes or is defeated by them, can be made by the reader

into an exercise in self-knowledge. Certainly the great novel is exactly that.

The work of the artist-writer, then, is a study in alternative autobiographies which the reader may consider. Perhaps all art is in some way the movement of a protagonist within and against a background of miscellaneous forces and conditions, some harmonious, some in discord, which he must cope with, relate to, use, and so transcend. He has to make some kind of unity, or meaning, out of it all.

If people were or could be made entirely predictable, then it would be possible to tell *all* about them, thus eliminating originality, imaginative solutions, all creative acts on the part of human beings. Not surprisingly, the social theorists who are convinced that man is entirely the product of his environment are sometimes bold enough to take this view openly. During a visit to Russia to report on the Soviet theater, Krutch had a long talk with Eisenstein, the famous film director who made *Potemkin*. In *More Lives Than One* he summarizes Eisenstein's views:

The legitimate function of art is a purely practical one; its purpose is solely to produce convictions and to lead to actions. During the Revolution, for example, its duty was to provoke revolutionary acts. People went from the theater to the barricades. Now that the Revolution is accomplished it has, of course, other work to do. Religion, for example, has not been completely destroyed and for that reason the thing which he [Eisenstein] likes best in his new film *October* (shown in America as *Ten Days That Shook the World*) is the attack upon religion.

Since the purpose of art is purely practical there is no such thing as a "permanent aesthetic value" and every work must be judged according to its usefulness at a given time in a given place.

Art, then, is no more than instrumentation for the application of Pavlovian or behavioristic

manipulation of people, to obtain correct behavior. When the tool has served its purpose, it will have no further use:

Warming to his theme, Eisenstein developed it to its simple logical conclusion. In the perfect state there will be no art. Bourgeois art is a vicarious fulfillment of unsatisfied desires; Communist art is an instrument for social adjustment. But in the perfect state there will be no unsatisfied desires and no more social adjustments to be made. Art, therefore, will disappear.

This is indeed a grim alternative to the corruptions, coteries, and artificialities of "bourgeois" art, involving, as it does, a social theory and conception of man in which individual creation has no meaning. Yet what other conclusion could be consistently reached by those who are convinced that man is "nothing but" the product of environmental forces? What place for originality could be risked by the managers of a society which is destined to become, through correct conditioning processes, the "perfect state"?

It is appropriate to recall here that pre-revolutionary Russia was the home of two of the very greatest novelists, both in their way great reformers as well—Tolstoy and Dostoevsky; and that two of the most courageous spokesmen for freedom of mind in Russia in the post-revolutionary epoch have also been novelists—Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn.

Fortunately, there are other remedies for the defects of bourgeois art. They are not easy to apply, nor have they much in common with the prevailing ideas of our civilization, but they exist and might bring a restoration of sensibility and refinement to the common life. It is enough, for example, to recall what the Balinese told Miguel Covarrubias—"We know nothing about art—we just do everything as well as possible"; and to remember, also, what Eric Havelock says in his *Preface to Plato*—that "neither 'art' nor 'artist,' as we use the words, is translatable into archaic or high-classical Greek," to which he added, in effect, that when people have no word for

something they do not think of it apart from other things. It is the isolation and the celebration of "art" as a thing in itself that has led to the "cult" of art and to its practice as virtually an elite or even a priestly function. The healthiest thing that could happen to the arts might be for them to lose, not their reality, but their separate identity, by absorption into a simplified way of life.

What would happen to the novelist under such conditions? He might become what he has always essentially been—a practitioner of mythopoeic art, like the saga singers and minstrels of the past. But trying to picture how this could come about puts too great a strain on the imagination. Perhaps we can say that a fine storyteller always performs this function, regardless of external social conditions. It is his calling, and he remains true to it.

What, actually, does the story-teller accomplish for his readers? Unlike the writers of factual accounts of conditions in the world, he deals with a man or woman who has a life to live, no matter what the circumstances or "facts." The novelist, then, works with the raw materials of philosophy. Take for contrast the contents of the current—June—issue of *Harper's*, which are mainly factual, and almost overwhelmingly threatening in implication. Early in this issue is a Department called "Diplomatic Notes," contributed by two men who were both once part of "the national-security bureaucracy" in Washington. They tell in detail how the decisions made by the President of the United States are hedged in, pre-determined, and made ineffectual, even disobeyed, by career diplomats, high-level bureaucrats, and Pentagon and CIA officials. In their conclusion, these writers offer small hope for change other than by the gradual development of courage and integrity and wisdom in both high and not so high places. The lead article by Barry Commoner is concerned with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, scheduled for this month in Stockholm. Dr. Commoner explains why the most urgent

ecological issues could not be expected to receive direct and open treatment, by reason of the various "interests," both political and economic, that would certainly suffer as a result. Actually, he seems to be describing the same sort of compromised, "muddle through" measures which bureaucrats endeavor to force on the man who happens to be President, when, referring to man's already massive "debt to nature," he remarks:

The environmental crisis is a signal that we have run out of ecological credit, that it is time to pay the debt to nature or go into bankruptcy. This much is now well known. What is just beginning to become apparent is that the debt cannot be paid in recycled beer cans or in the penance of walking to work; it will need to be paid in the ancient coin of social justice—within nations and among them.

The next article details what is called "The American Way of Bombing," a study of mechanized killing, with an account of the numerous ingenious devices used to guide bombs to living targets, so that fewer and fewer human beings are needed on the attacking or bombing side. "It's all very impersonal," a Marine captain says. "You don't hear the bombs. It's all very abstract."

A report by Barbara Garson describes how it feels to work on an automotive assembly line—and what the workers say to their wives and friends when they get home. The jobs have nearly all been so simplified that little or no skill is involved and management doesn't worry about quick labor turnover, since people have to work. "The desire to reduce alienation," the writer says at the end, "is hard to express as a union demand, and it's hard to get union leaders to insist upon this demand."

The question of why the International Telephone and Telegraph Company finally got its own way in the merger it wanted, and how professional defenders of the public interest are worn down by work and indirect pressures, is the subject of an article by a Columbia law professor. You could call it a study of the systematic erosion

of honest attempts to limit the further concentration of economic power.

John Holt, a temperate man, contributes a brief article called "The Little Red Prison," in which he, in effect, sides with Ivan Illich on deschooling and gives his common-sense reasons and offers practical suggestions for better education to people who want it.

The featured book review is a long discussion of Alfred Alvarez's recent book on suicide, and the last thing in the magazine is a ruthless attack on all contemporary fiction by Chandler Brossard, who ends his diatribe:

However, this miserable situation is not really surprising. The cheap values and the irresponsible actions of the literary world are very much the creations of a society in which originality, spirit, and radical vision are almost outlawed. We would be fools to forget that this very society thought the atom bomb spelled the dawn of a new civilization and not the death of man.

Hardly unaware of the psychological effect of reading through this issue of *Harper's*, the editors remark that much of the material deals with "gigantic systems of one kind or another," and that while many people's lives are extensively affected by these monolithic institutions, hardly anybody "understands how the systems function, or who controls them, or to what purpose. . . ." The contributors to this issue, the editors say, have some knowledge of these systems and ask "a few of the necessary questions." Then they conclude:

But all the questions, even the smallest ones, will go unanswered unless other people in other places ask further questions, presumably in louder voices. If we neglect to do so, then we will become conspirators in the playing out of an elaborate historical irony. Primitive man established the first magical systems in an attempt to impose coherent order on what he perceived as the blind and terrifying force of nature. But now the systems have themselves become blind, apparently surpassing nature in their sudden tendencies toward vast and inexplicable devastation. Hoping to propitiate his new gods, modern man invents a new magic and calls it statistical analysis.

No doubt many questions are in order, but the most vital one—What does a man do with his life in such circumstances?—is not raised. It is negatively implied in one of the articles—the one about the way the President is frustrated and even deceived by the various bureaucracies—when it is said that highly placed men who disagreed with the administration policy did not speak out, or resign in protest, in the hope of remaining "effective." The writers comment:

No one ever resigned over Vietnam policy. Indeed, there seems to be no evidence that any civilian official has resigned over any foreign-policy matter since World War II.

There is some irony in the fact that only military men have a record of resigning in protest. The three that are named "write books, tour the hustings, and speak out loud." So the President has reason to take military opinion seriously. On the other hand, "If the President remains confident that none of his civilian advisers will resign and take their case to the public, he has little incentive to question his own assumptions."

The question is also suggested in retrospect, in the letter columns, where a correspondent praises an article in the April *Harper's* by Kermit Vandivier, an engineer who lost his job because he would not help to conceal the faults in an airplane braking system his company had designed.

These hints should be enough to show what is basically wrong. Missing is a healthy sense of individual moral responsibility. The functioning of vast systems becomes "mindless" when this loss becomes sufficiently widespread, and then the atmosphere of helplessness and doom takes the place of the *culture* of responsibility to which each one, from top to bottom, must contribute. It was this that Tolstoy wrote about in his essay on *Christianity and Patriotism*, quoted here last week.

No one man can mend the situation of a national leader encapsulated by the habits and narrow self-interest of bureaucrats. It is not even a political problem; it has no *ad hoc* solution.

Neither has the problem of the environment. The inhumanity of the production line, the tyranny of the educational systems, the growing power of money over men's lives—all these are at the same time both real and false problems. They are real in that they represent the places, the foci, where the infection bursts into view. They are false in the sense that they are not the place where the remedies must be applied. These bad situations are but the institutionalized totals of the attitudes and behavior of a vast number of individuals who can no more find outside themselves a guide to a better life than Tolstoy could, or anyone else.

It hardly seems right to return to the idea of the novel after speaking of Brossard's attack on modern fiction, yet the fact remains that the meaning of an individual life, which is the subject-matter of the novel, is still the primary consideration. The great novel has an extraordinary contribution to make to thought about the meaning of life, just as, at root, the distilled wisdom of the human race is somehow present in the myths of antiquity, which represent the classic confrontations of experience. The clues to meaning may be in the recitals of facts—we have pointed to one or two such clues in the June *Harper's*, and more may be found by careful readers—but the insistent question, what shall a man do with his life in situations that cannot soon be changed, is not really asked. A good novel must deal with this question.

While, admittedly, the novel is only an invented parallel, it may afford potent suggestions of the kind of undertaking that lies before every human being who tries to think. The story of a life has in it the elements of drama, it has the possibility of climax and of a kind of completion. The really good stories are about persons who, no matter where or when they are born, find out what they must do with their lives and then engage in action. The objection that few are permitted by fate to reach success has little to do with the matter. Gandhi spoke of his Himalayan failure at the end of his life. And the other decision, for

drifting along, is really worse than personal defeat, since it leads to the common debacle that seems imminent in the composite image of the future pictured by the June *Harper's*.

Our chief difficulty is with the widespread preoccupation with a spurious "success story." This preoccupation has also been responsible, no doubt, for the ruin of the modern novel, making Kafka seem to Mr. Brossard a more important novelist to name for his ideal (among some others) than, say, Dostoevsky. The story of our age may indeed be the story of the displacement of man by his dream of "success," now on the verge of becoming a nightmare.

We are still impressed with what we supposed to be the enormous power for good obtained through social organization. An article in *Harper's* we did not mention—actually, did not really read—concerned with an episode in the Muskie campaign is evidence of the persistent hope on the part of most people that the problems of the country can be solved by political means. Tolstoy took a very different view. He asserted that by giving one's energies to social methods—meaning the organization of people in order to win the power to do good, to right wrongs—those energies are diluted to ineffectuality. What may be read as a notable confirmation of Tolstoy's judgment occurs in a paragraph of Barry Commoner's article:

Perhaps the most obvious evidence that the Stockholm conference, as it is now planned, has turned its back on many real, but enormously difficult, problems brought to light by the environmental crisis, is the case of the missing issue. The gravest threat to the human environment is a well-known, universally feared phenomenon. It is enormously dangerous, it could in a few brief days reduce the wealthiest, most elaborately organized societies into barbaric remnants. It is not a disease, a manifestation of weather, nor any other act of God; the catastrophe is under total human control and completely avoidable. Preventing it would not only cost nothing but would save the world hundreds of billions of dollars. It is an exclusively international problem and therefore peculiarly suited to action by the United Nations; any statesman who solved it

would be assured a glorious page in human history. Yet in 600 pages of conference documentation, distilled from many thousands of pages that summarize twenty-seven months of deliberations, this gravest, most fearsome threat to the human environment—nuclear war—is not named even once.

Dr. Commoner explains that by February, 1971, concern with the basic social and economic *causes* of the environmental crisis had given way to consideration of planning "feasible" action, with focus on "technical details such as the cost of pollution control and tax incentives." It is true that groups less involved in politics than the official delegates to the conference are expected to be active in raising and pressing issues, but the origins of the crisis, Commoner says, are really left out of the official agenda.

What may indeed come out of all this, in time, is recognition that neither the established political means nor a war of attrition against existing authorities, to compel constructive action, is in any way adequate as the basis for change; that what is needed is rather the gradual development of independent, voluntaristic relationships, both social and economic, sometimes within the matrix of the present arrangements, but conceived and carried on in a different spirit by responsible and determined individuals and groups. This was the suggestion quoted in *Frontiers*, last week, from *Community Comments*. Change on this basis will be slow, difficult, and arduous.

But lives which have unforgettable meaning in them are lives lived to such purposes. They will have action and drama, and now and then some minute satisfactions, and perhaps, on the horizon, the faint promise of the dawn of a better day.

REVIEW

BOOKS ON LITERATURE

IN *The Educated Imagination*, a book of lectures given about ten years ago for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Indiana University Press, 1964), Northrop Frye begins by speaking of three uses of language. The first has to do with simple awareness of the facts of life and is made up mostly of nouns and adjectives. This language provides an inventory of what is "out there." Its concern is with what is. Then there is the practical language of what one must do to get along in the world, how to "relate" to the environment, and in its most developed form this is the language of science. Finally, there is the language of what might be—the language of what we are able to imagine *could* be. All forms of language use the power of imagination, but only the third includes the major works of the imagination. In its other uses imagination is more of a practical tool, not the designing architect of the creative intelligence.

Frye's book is concerned with the importance of having an *educated* imagination. By an imagination schooled through conscious practice, the reach of the mind is extended beyond all ordinary limits. What does this mean? Well, the ordinary limits are those given us in nature and by mortality. Frye illustrates this:

E. M. Forster once remarked that if it weren't for wedding bells or funeral bells a novelist would hardly know where to stop: he might have added a third conventional ending, the point of self-knowledge, at which a character finds something out about himself as a result of some crucial experience.

But to show this well requires an educated imagination on the part of the novelist. Some understanding of what self-knowledge is and how it may be gained is required. One has to have found out a little about how people make discoveries through experience—not just how they learn to do something well, but how they learn about themselves in a way that leads to the

reshaping of a life. For that would be the end—or perhaps the beginning—of a story.

In his last chapter the writer calls these modes of the language levels of the mind, emphasizing the importance of the power of the imagination. The levels of mind, naturally enough, produce corresponding levels of life and social reality. There is both what is and what might be. Those who think seriously about such matters arrive at a similar conclusion. Matthew Arnold, Frye recalls, distinguished between the environment and what he termed culture. The environment is what is—call it the status quo, or, from another viewpoint, the establishment. But culture is made of the vision of men—the best that has been thought and said. An environment without a horizon of culture would soon be fatal to human beings. For while we have obvious need to know how to relate to what is, never to imagine going beyond it would dehumanize us. Of the day-to-day level of what is, Frye says:

On this level we use words to say the right thing at the right time, to keep the social machinery running, faces saved, self-respect preserved, and social situations intact. It's not the noblest thing that words can do, but it's essential, and it creates and diffuses a social mythology, which is a structure of words developed by the imagination. For we find that to use words properly even in this way we have to use our imaginations, otherwise they become mechanical clichés, and get further and further removed from any kind of reality. There's something in us all that wants to drift toward a mob, where we can all say the same thing without having to think about it, because everybody is all alike except people that we can hate or persecute. Every time we use words, we're either fighting against this tendency or giving into it. When we fight against it, we're taking the side of genuine and permanent civilization.

The power of the imagination is the means by which resistance to this retrograde tendency is strengthened. If the imagination is not made to flow into disciplined channels—avenues defined by vision—then its uses are degraded to unworthy even if apparently spectacular purposes.

As Frye puts it:

The civilization we live in at present is a gigantic technological structure, a skyscraper almost high enough to reach the moon. It looks like a single worldwide effort, but it's really a deadlock of rivalries; it looks very impressive, except that it has no genuine human dignity. For all its wonderful machinery, we know it's really a crazy ramshackle building, and at any time may crash around our ears. What the myth tells us is that the Tower of Babel is a work of the human imagination, that its main elements are words, and that what will make it collapse is a confusion of tongues. All had originally one language, the myth says. That language is not English or Russian or Chinese or any common ancestor, if there was one. It is the language of human nature, the language that makes both Shakespeare and Pushkin authentic poets, that gives a social vision to both Lincoln and Gandhi. It never speaks unless we take the time to listen in leisure, and it speaks only in a voice too quiet for panic to hear. And then all it has to tell us, when we look over the edge of our leaning tower, is that we are not getting any nearer heaven, and that it is time to return to earth.

In one of his early chapters, Frye says that the framework of all literature is the story of the "loss and regaining of identity." This seems interestingly confirmed in a book we have just started reading. It is *Dostoevsky and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* (Cornell University Press, 1972, \$9.50), by Vasily Rozanov. This book was written in 1891 by a man called "a key figure in Russian intellectual history and literature," but there has been no English translation until the present one, which is by Spencer E. Roberts. In his foreword, Mr. Roberts says that Rozanov's work was the first real attempt by anyone "to look deep inside Dostoevsky." The translator informs us that Rozanov, who died in 1919, married Dostoevsky's former mistress, suggesting that he may have had her help in understanding the novelist. "Rozanov sees Dostoevsky as a man who is without faith but who longs for it deeply, as a man on the side of the godless heroes." Rozanov is said to have exercised strong influence on Merezhkovsky and Berdyaev.

Before considering *The Brothers Karamazov* (in which the Grand Inquisitor appears), Rozanov

gives attention to the general significance of Dostoevsky, and this obliges him to speak of Gogol. He refers to the popular idea that the literature of the late nineteenth century derives from Gogol, but finds it superficial: "It would be more accurate to say that as a whole this literature is a rejection of Gogol, a struggle against him." Rozanov wholly approves of this revolt, feeling that Gogol's famous novel really accomplished a kind of loss of identity:

He [Gogol] called his principal work *Dead Souls* and without any foresight expressed in this title the great secret of his creative work and, of course, of himself. He was a brilliant "painter" of outer forms, and to their depiction (the only thing he was capable of) he gave, through some sort of magic, such vitality, almost a sculpturesque quality, that no one noticed that virtually nothing is concealed behind these forms, that there is no soul, that there is nothing that might carry them. It may very well be that the society he depicted was base and evil; it may very well be that it deserved to be ridiculed: but surely it consisted of people. Is it possible that great moments of birth and death, the feelings of love and hate common to all human beings, had already vanished for him? And, of course, if not, then how could these figures he depicted for us as his heroes have responded to those great moments and experienced those universal passions? What was beneath their clothing—the only thing we can see on them—that could ever rejoice, regret, or hate as human beings do? And the question arises, if they were capable neither of love, of deep hate, of fear, nor of dignity, then why, after all, did they labor and acquire things, travel about, and transfer things from one place to another? Gogol once depicted children, and those children are the same ugly figures as their fathers, figures that also are only ludicrous, and which are ridiculed just as they are. Once or twice he described the awakening of love in a person, and we see with amazement that the only thing that kindles it is a mere physical beauty the beauty of a female body when viewed by a man (Andrii Bulba and the Polish girl); it acts instantaneously, and after the first moment, there is nothing more to say about it. There are none of those feelings and words that we hear in the plaintive songs of our folk, in the Greek anthology, in German legends, and everywhere on the whole earth where people love and suffer instead of merely taking delight in the human body. Is it really possible that this was a dream for all mankind which Gogol had

exposed, after having finally stripped away the reveries and shown reality? Perhaps it would be more correct to think not that mankind had dreamed and that Gogol alone saw the truth, but, on the contrary, that mankind had felt and known the truth, which it had reflected in the poetry of all nations for thousands of years, while Gogol himself had dreamed and told us his morbid dreams as if they were reality?

After devoting some attention to why Gogol seemed so impressive, and how he obtained his dramatic effects, Rozanov concludes: "He told us that the soul does not exist, and in depicting his dead characters he did it with such skill that for several decades we actually believed in a whole generation of walking corpses." Then came a determined reaction, or a restoration, growing, Rozanov believes, out of spontaneous feeling:

After Gogol, all our literature turned to a penetration of human nature. And was this not the result of this counter-force that at no other time and with no other people have all the innermost recesses of the human soul been so thoroughly revealed as they have in the last few decades, before the eyes of us all?

The author is thinking of Turgenev, Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and others. In his stories, Turgenev wrote of the same villages that are familiar from *Dead Souls*, but with the enormous difference that it all is vividly alive in Turgenev. The peasants are no longer merely brutes, but humans who sometimes have some poetry in their lives. He continues:

What a wonderful child's world unfolds before us in the daydreams of Oblimov, in the reminiscences of Netochka Nazvanova in *Childhood and Adolescence*, in scenes of *War and Peace*, in the house of troubled Dolly in *Anna Karenina*! Is it really possible that all this is less a part of reality than are Alcides and Themistoklus, those pitiful dolls of Gogol, that vicious mockery of those whom no one has ever mocked before? And what about Bolkonski's thoughts on the battlefield at Austerlitz, his sister's prayers, Raskolnikov's anxieties, and that whole complex, diverse world of ideas, characters, and situations that recedes into the infinite distance, and which has been revealed to us in the last few decades—what shall we say of it in connection with Gogol? What word can we use to define its historical significance? Should we not say that it is a revelation

of the life that died in Gogol, a restoration in man of the dignity which Gogol had taken from him?

If literature is "man's revelation to man," as Northrop Frye says, and if the task of the critic is to make such expressions known, by teaching and comparison—for the critic is of little importance if he is not a teacher—then Vasily Rozanov is surely a valuable critic. We shall look forward to returning to other parts of his book, perhaps in September.

COMMENTARY VACATION READING

JANE JACOBS' book on cities (see "Children") is extremely valuable in its illustrations of the vital need for human freedom in small decisions of daily life.

Again and again, we see that people must be very careful about planning other people's lives. We think we know what is good for them, but mostly we don't. In *What India Can Teach Us* Max Muller relates that when the British substituted their own court procedures in India, the people no longer felt obliged to tell the truth. "Three fourths of those who do not scruple to lie in the courts would be ashamed to lie before their neighbors, or the elders of their village." Meanwhile, the crime rate in Los Angeles surely has some relation to the fact that, as Mrs. Jacobs shows, and as residents know, it is too much a city of strangers.

All this has a bearing on how children, who are impressionable, are influenced to think of themselves. What is "said" to them is doubtless important, but the life that is lived around and about them will have a much greater effect. Mrs. Jacobs tells, for example, of a woman in Los Angeles who, after living there ten years, confessed that "she has never laid eyes on a Mexican or an item of Mexican culture, much less ever exchanged any words with a Mexican." And she tells, also, of a successful businessman who, wanting to help Los Angeles "culturally" by gaining support for the new museum, spoke of his contacts through businessmen's clubs. When Mrs. Jacobs asked him how Hollywood people might be met, he didn't know. No one *he* knew "socially" knew anyone in the film industry. So, in the broad terms of her comment, Mrs. Jacobs seems quite right: "Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's public wealth of public life may grow."

With this issue, we come to the summer interlude during which MANAS is not published. For those who think they will "miss" the paper during July and August, we suggest obtaining a copy of *The Manas Reader* (Grossman, 1971), which is available in bookstores in paperback at \$4.95. This book has nearly five hundred pages and contains some of the

best material that appeared in MANAS during twenty-four years of publishing. If going to a bookstore is inconvenient, the *Reader* may be ordered by mail from The Cunningham Press, 3036 West Main St., Alhambra, Calif. 91801. Postage is an additional 21 cents, and Californians need to include 25 cents more for sales tax.

The next issue of MANAS will be dated Sept 6.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

SELF-ESTEEM is an ambiguous term, so we read a recent book on the importance of self-esteem in children with a wary eye. The book turned out to offer a lot of sagacity on how parents can help their children to gain self-confidence and self-respect: in fact, it is really a treatise on how parents ought to "relate" to their children. But after reading quite a lot of the book, "self-esteem" still seemed an ambiguous idea. Sometimes it meant the same thing as self-respect, so why not use that word in the title? Perhaps this is a bit "heavy" for busy grown-ups, and not quite popular enough.

So, we began to think about the difference between self-respect and self-esteem in adults. Americans as a people seem pretty mixed up on the question. Until recently, we were quite proud of our "progress" and our "know-how," and our problem-solving efficiencies, and so on. We had plenty of self-esteem. But today thoughtful people don't feel that way any more. A little pamphlet the Quakers have just published—*Indochina 1972—Perpetual War*—leaves little basis for any kind of pride, if you read this sober statement carefully. A self-esteeming but not a self-respecting man might be able to ignore such facts.

Surely self-respect is the only really important form of self-esteem. But what about the children? "Teaching" self-respect does sound heavy, or even practically impossible, if teaching is understood to mean didactic instruction. Probably a child absorbs the attitude of self-respect by being among self-respecting people. These would be people who have a natural concern for other people, and who think about the effect of what they are doing with their lives. How could a person who is just "making a living," not honoring the work he does, generate self-respect? And how could he help his children to have it? Children learn its meaning by osmosis, not from careful management of parent-child relations. This doesn't mean that conscious, constructive intelligence in relations with children is unimportant, but that it

needs the backing of a useful life to have authenticity.

We used to know an artist who didn't make a great deal of money, and who had considerable pain because he couldn't do for his children what many other parents did, such as paying for horseback riding lessons and things like that. This man did have one quality, though—he always said what he thought. He had a basic honesty. Perhaps this is one of the attributes of a real artist. Anyway, this man had this quality, and it had a natural effect on his relations with his children. This was his form of self-respect, and since he was really a humble man, you wouldn't think of self-esteem at all when you thought of him.

But his children acquired self-reliance and their own self-respect. We don't know exactly how this works, or even if we are making assumptions that are fully justified. Not all parents like that have the same good luck with their children. There is probably no one-to-one relation between character in the parent and character in the child—but, all things being equal, a family life in which there is spontaneous self-respect on the part of the parents does have an effect on the young, and it is a good effect. This applies to teachers, too. So we aren't reviewing the book about self-esteem in children, despite its great common sense in many places. The book makes us uncomfortable.

This is an old point we're making, and it could get tiresome and moralistic if pressed too hard. But it has to be made when writers seem to leave it out entirely. It is the same kind of a point Paul Goodman makes when he says that the culture of the community is the real teacher of the child—much more than the teachers in the schools. It is also the point that John Holt is making when he says that the time has come to stop talking about the schools and to try to find out why the schools don't work the way we think they ought to.

There is a tenuous connection between community, considered in this way, and some of the things which Jane Jacobs has to say in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Vintage paperback). Mrs. Jacobs likes cities and lives in

one—New York. Her book is mainly a consideration of the reality of communities within cities, and how some of the things done by city planners weaken the community side of urban life. Too many of the planners, thinking in visual terms instead of studying the daily life of urban communities, eliminate the circumstances through which people get to know each other and learn to accept some responsibility for the general welfare of the community. The streets where there is likely to be crime, for example, are streets which are deserted, where there are no small stores with watchful shopkeepers who are acquainted with the people in the neighborhood and know their children, too. A vital street life is a protection to all. As Mrs. Jacobs says:

Some city streets afford no opportunity to street barbarism. The streets of the North End of Boston are outstanding examples. They are probably as safe as any place on earth in this respect. Although most of the North End's residents are Italian or of Italian descent, the district's streets are also heavily and constantly used by people of every race and background. Some of the strangers from outside work in or close to the district; some come to shop and stroll; many, including members of minority groups who have inherited dangerous districts previously abandoned by others, make a point of cashing their paychecks in North End stores and immediately making their big weekly purchases in streets where they know they will not be parted from their money between the getting and the spending.

Frank Havey, director of the North End Union, the local settlement house, says, "I have been here in the North End twenty-eight years, and in all that time I have never heard of a single case of rape, mugging, molestation of a child or other street crime of that sort in the district. And if there had been any, I would have heard of it even if it did not reach the papers." Half a dozen times or so in the past three decades says Havey, would-be molesters have made an attempt at luring a child or, late at night, attacking a woman. In every such case the try was thwarted by passers-by, by kibbitzers from windows, or shopkeepers.

While Mrs. Jacobs does not go so far as to suggest that the violent crime which is so common on the streets of Los Angeles—much more prevalent than in many other cities—is due to the lack of active street life, she does show that the sprawling West

Coast metropolis is sadly lacking in community spirit. The safety of a street or neighborhood grows out of countless small contacts and friendly interchanges among the people who live there. Mrs. Jacobs believes that planners either lose sight of this, never knew it, or suppose they are better able to arrange those contacts than the people themselves. But the people, virtually all people, want to determine their own degree of privacy and their own kind of social relationships. The web of shared public responsibility and trust needs to grow gradually, informally, until it affords a neighborhood common protection. That sort of trust and commitment to the welfare of others can be made very difficult by housing projects which destroy the organic processes of community life. Mrs. Jacobs quotes a school principal about the effect of a recent housing project near his school:

He mentioned that the project had torn out numerous institutions for socializing. The present atmosphere of the project was in no way similar to the gaiety of the streets before the project was built. He noted that in general there seemed fewer people on the streets because there were fewer places for people to gather. He also contended that before the projects were built the Parents Association had been very strong, and now there were only very few active members.

Mrs. Jacobs points out that this critic was technically in error—there were not fewer places, since the housing project has numerous areas for planned socializing. There were craft, art, and game rooms—but no little candy stores, no *bodegas*, and no small restaurants. They were "pretty," but the people didn't use them. The people preferred to cement their friendships slowly, in casual meetings on the street, as they went about their daily affairs. The "togetherness" of the project was all pre-arranged, left no choices, and they didn't like it.

FRONTIERS

A Distortion of Thought and Criticism

THE relationship of human thought and energy to *power*—which is, one could say, the focus of politics—seems to determine the categories of social and sometimes even moral evaluation. A recent biographical study of a figure in American life uses the spectrum of political and socioeconomic opinion in order to convey an understanding of this man's character. Obviously, he could not be easily fitted into any familiar group or party, and the author ends by calling him an anarchist elitist.

The expression is defensible, since the subject of this study did express himself in ways that might justify either label, but too often descriptions of this sort—which place men according to attitudes which are institutionally identified—are meant to demonstrate contradictions in a man's character, when the contradictions are rather in the oversimplified method of identification. Often, in criticism, there is an unspoken demand that a man be "one thing or the other," when this means a choice between institutionalized or politicalized views—such as "radical" or "conservative"—which in themselves may mean only that a person who can be adequately described in this way is essentially blind to the flaws in the position he has taken. In a time like the present, when actual power threatens to go to the party which embraces extremes, there is an increasing tendency to think that a person must choose one extreme or the other, or remain "ineffectual."

But these extremes have their origin in human beings, where it is at least conceivable that they can be held in balance and made to serve in harness for common ends. The main difficulty with this idea is that such balanced men seldom participate in the struggle for power. And in an age where the identification of human character and worth is typically based on theories of

obtaining power, they are the men who are isolated, ignored, who do not "fit in."

In the world of literature, Ignazio Silone is an example of such a man. His great trilogy, *Fontamara*, *Bread and Wine*, and *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, is a study of the dilemmas of political action. The restoration of human brotherhood as the first necessity is the conclusion of these books; as Irving Howe remarks in *Politics and the Novel*, Silone "has been forced to recognize that vexatious problems of means and ends involve a constant tension between morality and expediency which can be resolved, if resolved at all, only in practice." Howe continues:

Perhaps as a sign of the drift of our age, Silone has gradually become one of the most isolated among Italian writers. In the intellectual world of Italy he is seldom honored or admired. The memory of his refusal to accommodate himself to the fascist regime stirs feelings of bad conscience among literary men who were more flexible. His continued rejection of the traditional elegance of "literary" Italian confounds and disturbs the conventional critics. And his politics—for in some vague but indestructible way he remains a socialist, indifferent to party or dogma, yet utterly committed to the poor and dispossessed—annoys Italian writers who have tied themselves to one of the party machines or the far greater number of them who have remained in the shelters of estheticism.

This last factor may also account for the decline of Silone's reputation in the United States. Those American intellectuals who have settled into social conformism or a featureless liberalism find in Silone's politics little more than sentimental nostalgia—or so they would persuade themselves; those who have turned to religion, whether it be the Catholic Church or the crisis theology of Protestantism, cannot help realizing, with a discomfort proportionate to their sensitiveness, that Silone's struggle for the ethic of primitive Christianity has little in common with the religious institutions and doctrines of the twentieth century.

Yet each man, if he is to remain one, must go his own way; and Silone, in his clumsy uncertainty, his humorous irritability, his effort to speak without rhetoric or cant, has become a kind of moral hero for those of us who have been forced by history to put aside many of the dogmas of social radicalism but

who remain faithful to the rebellious and fraternal impulse behind the dogmas.

Naturally enough, Howe ends this excellent book on *Politics and the Novel* with a discussion of Orwell's *1984*, wondering, in his last chapter, if there is "a constant in human nature which no amount of horror or propaganda can destroy?"

Horror and propaganda—are these the end-products of a civilization which makes the obtaining and maintenance of power the highest good? Are men who show no interest in power merely the ineffectual members of our society? Must literature and the arts be submitted to a critical filter which measures their merit according to their "political" significance?

In *More Lives Than One*, Joseph Wood Krutch recalls the life in Knoxville, Tennessee, where he grew up, before World War I. An essential difference between that time and later years—after the great wars of this century—was that then people didn't think of their lives as a succession of "problems." They weren't pressed by competitive motives and were much more self-sufficient as human beings. He adds, however, that the first ten years of the century seemed dull and unadventurous, both physically and intellectually. That world lacked stimulation and excitement. One could say that it was not yet obsessed by the worship of power, but that the people were vulnerable to infection by reason of the triviality of their lives.

The very meaning of human life is at issue in this question. It is now difficult for us to imagine a society in which power is not the goal, and inherited ideas of power as the servant of good intentions have made morality subordinate to theories of the use of power. So we find ourselves judging men according to standards reflected from political conceptions, without really having intended to allow power to dominate our thinking. But the analysis of men by what is ostensibly their socio-political philosophy may be breaking up their wholeness into conventionalized divisions—a kind of dehumanization. The really

fine men of any age are always bigger than these categories will allow. For growth in understanding of human excellence, then, a strong literature free of domination by these categories will have to emerge.