

JEFFERSONIAN REFLECTIONS

FROM day to day we read in the papers what the President, the Congress, the Federal Reserve Bank, and sometimes the leaders of industry, are doing to restore "the economy" to the ongoing balance which, we are told, existed in good health not long ago and will return with the right political management. The reports are filled with quotations from insiders who comment on what officials are saying, explain what policy-makers are attempting, providing sage asides on problems which must be overcome. The reader—and most of us are *only* readers—feels obliged to hold his breath in anticipation of what the papers will reveal tomorrow. The stories make plain that we have no other hope. The prosperity we long for is made to seem almost entirely a political enterprise. In our role as consumers, we have only to do our manifest duty—save our money and at the same time buy more goods and services (and pay our taxes). The managers, who have access to facts beyond our ken, who carry on research not possible for ordinary people, will do the rest.

We have, in other words, a *political* economy. So used are we to thinking of politics in terms of its economic connections that the idea of separating politics from economics seems unimaginable, even absurd. Almost from the beginning the people of the American Republic have regarded politics as an instrument for the pursuit of self-interest—this being the meaning assigned to the "happiness" referred to in the Declaration of Independence, putting aside or forgetting the other sense that Thomas Jefferson had in mind—the felicity of "public happiness" which results from responsible participation in the affairs of self-government. In his "Reflections on Authority" (*New American Review* No. 8) John Schaar provides this account of our history:

At the time of the founding, the doctrine and sentiment were already widespread that each

individual comes into this world morally complete and self-sufficient, clothed with natural rights which are his by birth, and not in need of fellowship for moral growth and fulfillment. The human material of this new republic consisted of a gathering of men each of whom sought self-sufficiency and satisfaction of his own desires. Wave after wave of immigrants replenished those urges, for to the immigrant, America meant largely freedom from inherited authorities and freedom to get rich. Community and society meant little more than the ground upon which each challenged or used others for his own gain. Others were accepted insofar as they were useful to one in his search for self-sufficiency. But once that goal is reached, the less one has to put up with others, the better. Millions upon millions of Americans strive for that goal, and, what is more important, base their political views upon it. The state is a convenience in a private search; and when that search seems to succeed, it is no wonder that men tend to deny the desirability of political bonds, of acting together with others for the life that is just for all.

We vote for presidents according to what we suppose to be the skills and scores of the candidates in economic management. How well, we ask, will they serve our economic goals? For what Prof. Schaar calls the "postmoral mentality" of the present, the question seems quite natural. Writing in 1969, he said "Compare the Sermon on the Mount with the latest communique from the Office of Economic Opportunity in the War on Poverty; or Lincoln's Second Inaugural with Nixon's first."

Habituated as we are to accept the terms and meanings of our common intellectual environment, it comes as a distinct surprise to learn that for the Greeks of Plato's time, "Political Economy" would have been a contradiction in terms. In those days, economics meant housekeeping and the prudent management of one's personal or private resources. Politics, by contrast, meant concern with the affairs of the *polis*, the social community. This view prevailed

more or less in the Western world until the modern state began to emerge in the sixteenth century. Two hundred years later, in the century of revolutions, what began as a political revolution by an aroused populace intent upon governing themselves was turned into a social revolution which sought economic benefits in the name of justice. Hannah Arendt (in *On Revolution*) shows that in France this change of purpose was accomplished by Robespierre. In his time, schooled by Rousseau in pity for the impoverished and starving masses of France, Robespierre turned the revolution over to "the people," and the people, in a rage accumulated over centuries, demanded in effect the reign of terror. Heads fell by the thousand, but the condition of the masses was hardly improved. Robespierre saw everywhere that corruption existed among the upper classes, and assumed that common folk alone were virtuous. They should have the power; there would be no rulers except as agents to execute their will. Hannah Arendt draws a contrast:

The direction of the American Revolution remained committed to the foundation of freedom and the establishment of lasting institutions, and to those who acted in this direction nothing was permitted that would have been outside the range of civil law. The direction of the French Revolution was deflected almost from its beginning from this course of foundation through the immediacy of suffering, it was determined by the exigencies of liberation not from tyranny but from necessity, and it was actuated by the limitless immensity of both the people's misery and the pity this misery inspired. The lawlessness of the "all is permitted" sprang here from the sentiments of the heart whose very boundlessness helped in the unleashing of a stream of boundless violence. . . .

The superior wisdom of the American founders in theory and practice is conspicuous and impressive enough, and yet has never carried with it sufficient persuasiveness and plausibility to prevail in the tradition of revolution. It is as though the American Revolution was achieved in a kind of ivory tower into which the fearful spectacle of human misery, the haunting voices of abject poverty, never penetrated. . . . Since there were no sufferings around them that could have aroused their passions, no overwhelmingly

urgent needs that would have tempted them to submit to necessity, no pity to lead them astray from reason, the men of the American Revolution remained men of action from beginning to end, from the Declaration of Independence to the framing of the Constitution. Their sound realism was never put to the test of compassion, their common sense was never exposed to the absurd hope that man, whom Christianity had held to be sinful and corrupt in his nature, might still be revealed to be an angel.

Meanwhile, in France—

. . . Robespierre's rule of terror was indeed nothing else but the attempt to organize the whole French people into a single gigantic party machinery—"the great popular Society is the French people"—through which the Jacobin Club would spread a net of party cells all over France; and their tasks were no longer discussion and exchange of opinions, mutual instruction and information on public business, but to spy on one another and to denounce members and nonmembers alike.

These things have become very familiar through the course of the Russian Revolution, where the Bolshevik party emasculated and perverted the revolutionary *soviet* system with exactly the same methods.

The American Revolution, in contrast, was consolidated by the Constitution, although this centralization of authority and power distracted the attention of citizens from the sources of their own experience in self-government, and weakened their political self-reliance. Jefferson alone among the Founders seemed aware of this danger and in his later years wrote (in letters) about the importance of restoring and strengthening local government. He believed that unless the revolutionary spirit—embodied in the will to participate in public affairs and shape to some degree the circumstances of life—could be preserved, the people would eventually lose their freedom. Nor was "prosperity" the goal looked forward to by John Adams. As Hannah Arendt puts it:

When, in America and elsewhere, the poor became wealthy, they did not become men of leisure whose actions were prompted by a desire to excel, but succumbed to the boredom of vacant time, and while they too developed a taste for "consideration and

congratulation," they were content to get these "goods" as cheaply as possible, that is, they eliminated the passion for distinction and excellence that can exert itself only in the broad daylight of the public. The end of government remained for them self-preservation, and John Adams' conviction that "it is a principal end of government to regulate (the passion for distinction)" has not even become a matter of controversy, it is simply forgotten. Instead of entering the market-place, where excellence can shine, they preferred, as it were, to throw open their private houses in "conspicuous consumption," to display their wealth and to show what, by its very nature, is not fit to be seen by all.

Yet the Americans who "became wealthy" did, of course, enter the marketplace—the commercial marketplace, not the agora concerned with public affairs—and their activities there led to the development of the modern corporation, dedicated, not to the common good, but to the interest of its stockholders. In time, as corporations grew more powerful, there have been attempts to control their operations by government regulation, but in the present it seems difficult to tell whether the government is regulating the corporations or the corporations are manipulating the government. Toward the end of his life, Scott Buchanan was led to ask (in a contribution to *The Corporation Take-Over*, Harper & Row, 1964):

How do the political habits formed by members of corporations fit with the habits that republican forms of government have developed in their citizens heretofore? The answers to this question are not definite or final; such as they are, they can best be summarized by a sharp observer of a few years ago, Mark Twain: "It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have these unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either." It may be that the corporation is the school of political prudence in which we learn not to practice what the political republic has always preached.

Corporate interests have indeed come to influence and even to shape the policies of the modern nation-state, reinforcing for critics the conviction that there is no possibility of separating the political from the economic sphere, since the

two have become one. The state, today, is regarded as the creator of the economy. Commenting on the role of the modern state (in the Spring-Summer 1983 *Salmagundi*), Sheldon Wolin sums up:

It [the state] represents not only the greatest concentration of coercive power in history, and it not only demands obedience, but it asks for loyalty, even affection, from its subjects. The conditions which the modern state requires—enormous revenues, a managed economy and labor force, a huge military establishment, ever-more lethal instruments of violence, a vast bureaucracy, and a compliant citizenry that will produce legitimation on demand—make increasingly plain that the "democratic state" has become a contradiction in terms.

This is indeed the lesson of contemporary political and economic events, brought to our attention by social analysts, critical economists, political commentators, and moralists in general. It is the business of the state, they nearly all say or imply, to bring economic justice to the people, to ameliorate the growing misery of the underprivileged and the unemployed, and to put into operation forces that eventually will establish the longed-for ideal of economic democracy throughout the land. The question of *how* this is done is regarded as the only issue worth discussing.

The goal is an acceptable account of the uses of political power to overcome the designs and effects of economic power in behalf of self-interest. Wholly neglected is the question of whether or not this goal is an actual possibility. If something *must* be done, what use is there in casting doubts on its practicability? Hard-headed thinkers from Adam Smith to Garrett Hardin, among them Leon Trotsky as well, point out that self-interest is the only major force in human behavior, and that the task is to devise a scheme of socio-economic government in which that force will be turned to making arrangements that serve the common good. But no one, as yet, has explained how the drive of self-interest can be transformed into concern for the welfare of others. It can be done, it is claimed, by combining

the right sort of politics with the right sort of economics. First you make a revolution, then you make a constitution, and the result should be economic democracy, it is said.

Hannah Arendt regards this claim as the fundamental delusion of the age, saying in *On Revolution*:

Human life has been stricken with poverty since times immemorial, and mankind continues to labor under this curse in all countries outside the Western Hemisphere. No revolution has ever solved the "social question" and liberated men from the predicament of want, but all revolutions, with the exception of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, have followed the example of the French Revolution and used and misused the mighty forces of misery and destitution in their struggle against tyranny or oppression. And although the whole record of past revolutions demonstrates beyond doubt that every attempt to solve the social question with political means leads into terror, and that it is terror which sends revolutions to their doom, it can hardly be denied that to avoid this fatal mistake is almost impossible when a revolution breaks out under conditions of mass poverty. What has always made it so terribly tempting to follow the French Revolution on its foredoomed path is not only the fact that liberation from necessity (personal economic needs) because of its urgency, will always take precedence over the building of freedom, but the even more important and more dangerous fact that the uprising of the poor against the rich carries with it an altogether different and much greater momentum of force than the rebellion of oppressed against their oppressors. . . . It is indeed as though the forces of the earth were allied in benevolent conspiracy with this uprising, whose end is impotence, whose principle is rage, and whose conscious aim is not freedom but life and happiness. . . .

Personal happiness may be regarded as a reasonable and laudable goal—although eminent psychologists have said that happiness is never achieved by pursuing it—but the question is whether political arrangements are the means to achieve so subtle and elusive an ideal. Hannah Arendt goes to her conclusion:

Nothing, we might say today, could be more obsolete than to attempt to liberate mankind from poverty by political means; nothing could be more

fruitful and more dangerous. For the violence which occurs between men who are emancipated from necessity is different from, less terrifying, though often not less cruel, than the primordial violence with which man pits himself against necessity, and which appeared in the full daylight of political, historically recorded events for the first time in the modern age. The result was that necessity invaded the political realm, the only realm where men can be truly free.

Thus the social historian and political theorist, Hannah Arendt, who brought down upon her head charges of indifference to the suffering of the poor, a lack of concern for justice, and an inexcusable preoccupation with the democracy of the Greek *polis* in which slavery freed the citizens for the "happiness" of participation in the affairs of the city state. Condemnation of her would have been much more severe, had not devotion to the common good been so evident in everything she wrote, and had she not proved so manifestly wise in so many of her judgments. Her championship of Jefferson's contention that the maintenance or reanimation of local government would continue at least the spirit of the Revolution was also a point in her favor. The "little republics" of the town meetings, the "wards," as he called them, would "permit the citizens to continue to do what they had been able to do during the years of revolution, namely, to act on their own and thus to participate in public business as it was being transacted from day to day."

Yet what applications can such thinking have today, in the epoch of enormous nation states, organized in hostility to one another, and managed in ways which either discourage or prohibit local initiative and action? Hannah Arendt, despite her brilliance, seems a sentimentalist in arguing for the restoration of Jeffersonian small communities—so the comment goes. Is she unwittingly an apologist for not only the *elites* of the Federalist founders but also for the elites of present-day management, both of whom preferred a manageable sort of "representative" democracy to the populist rule that so easily becomes mobocracy?

There is, however, another approach to this problem. It is found in E.F. Schumacher's paper, "The Critical Question of Size," which appeared in *Resurgence* for May-June 1975. After noting the multiple failures of bureaucratic administration in large organizations, he said:

Excessive size not only produces the dilemma of administration, it also makes many problems virtually insoluble. To illustrate what I mean, imagine an island of 2,000 inhabitants—I have in mind an island of this size which a little while ago demanded total sovereignty and independence. Crime on such an island is a rarity; maybe there is one single full-time policeman, maybe there is none. Assume, however, that some crimes do occur, that some people are sent to jail, and that they return from jail at the rate of one person a year. There is no difficulty in re-integrating this one prisoner into the island's society. Someone, somewhere, will find this person a room to live in and some kind of work. No problem.

Unemployment in small communities would have a similar remedy. Bigness by itself is self-defeating, when it comes to meeting social problems:

An organization may have been set up to render various services to all sorts of helpless, needy people; it grows and grows, and suddenly you find that it does not serve the people any more but simply pushes them around. There may be complaints that the organization has become "too bureaucratic" and there may be denunciations of the bureaucrats. There may be demands that the "incompetent bosses" of the organization should be replaced by better people. But few people seem to realize that bureaucracy is a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of excessive size; that bureaucrats cannot help being bureaucrats; and that the apparent incompetence of the bosses has almost nothing to do with their personal competence.

Schumacher was an advocate of "people's power," but on a scale where it can actually work. Beyond that limit, it becomes a fraud perpetrated by demagogues and manipulated by propagandists. Jefferson understood this well, and feared its result. So did Hannah Arendt, and so does Leopold Kohr. At the root of this issue is an understanding of human nature, as presently constituted. In the small community, self-interest is recognizable and controllable. This becomes

impossible in the modern nation-state, where even the best of humans become unable to distinguish between appearance and reality, and willing, therefore, to become victims of their hopes.

REVIEW

NUANCES AND DRIVES

READERS of Laurens van der Post who turn to his latest book, *Yet Being Someone Other* (William Morrow, 1982, \$15.95), "an autobiographical odyssey," will be pleased to find filled in the blanks in their knowledge of this South African and British writer whose works—fiction and essays—have brought both understanding and hope to what now may seem the worst of all possible centuries. His title taken from an obscure line by T. S. Eliot, is apparently meant to suggest that we do not see ourselves as others see us, but in this case the account of his life admirably completes the picture suggested by such of his books as *The Dark Eye in Africa* and *A Bar of Shadow*, to name the ones we have found unforgettable.

Dark Eye provides at least partial explanation of the twists in the moral mentality of his heroic Boer ancestors, leading in recent months to senselessly cruel reaffirmation of the *apartheid* policy in South Africa, justified by a blindly stubborn reading of the Old Testament. *A Bar of Shadow* is a novel based on the author's experience in a prisoner-of-war camp run by Japanese officers who thought they were honoring the inmates by ruthless treatment. Van der Post is a fine story teller, but most of all a perceptive moral psychologist who puts the reader inside the main characters of his stories. Such a writer opens the way to recognition of the roots of civilization by showing their presence in a maze of often horrifying contradictions. He teaches patience with others and with ourselves.

Born in 1906 in the "backveld" of the South African Interior, van der Post began his career as a writer at the age of seventeen on the *Natal Advertiser* in Durban, covering shipping news, which was plentiful. On the way to the waterfront he would pass through the Indian market where "piles of fruit in pyramids on their stalls, would glow like treasure and never ceased to delight and

excite my eyes." Here were generated feelings and enthusiasms that would last a lifetime.

If my assignment was not pressing I would take a longer route through the market. The variety, brilliance and totally un-African colour of the scene would be reinforced by the saris of the Indian women, the silk trousers and tunics of their Moslem fellow-countrymen, who now pass under the name of Pakistanis. But in those simpler and more naive days they were all one in India under the rule of the British whose politicians called it the brightest jewel in the Crown of the Empire. Indeed for me there was jewellery in the mere colour of their dress, and a totally new idiom of beauty in their physical appearance and bearing. Years of service in the old British Indian Army later in my life, and the extensive knowledge of India that I acquired, have confirmed and enlarged this impression which, at the age of just over seventeen, had an overwhelming impact on me.

Whales were common in the sea off the coast of Natal, and whalers put into port there for supplies. Van der Post became acquainted with Thor Kaspersen, captain of *Larsen II*, with whom he became friends, and after persuading his editor of the value of stories about whaling, went to sea with Kaspersen, starting as a lookout. The captain, as hunter of the largest animal in the sea, longed to hunt elephants, the largest on land, and years later van der Post wrote *The Hunter and the Whale* to celebrate this passion. The young writer was lucky enough to sight the first whale of the voyage, and was thereafter Kaspersen's friend and confidant. The *Larsen II*, a coal-burner, had one stoker, "a tall, magnificently made Zulu." This was their meeting:

He saw me at once and appeared to be as taken aback as I had been by his appearance. For a moment we stared hard at each other, he amazingly steady and balanced on deck. . . . A wide, vivid smile fell from his black, distinguished face. He lifted his hand high above his shoulder and greeted me as one of a people whose sense of manners is, perhaps, the most fastidious in Africa.

The occasion was remarkable for in those days no Zulu ever went to sea. The stoker, named 'Mlangeni, was "detrribalized" as a result. He had ignored one of the greatest ritualistic inhibitions of

his people, who would not even eat fish for fear it would "turn their hearts to water."

Yet, in spite of this, 'Mlangeni, a Zulu of aristocratic origin, had taken to the sea without anger or regret.

Often I would go down, on a calm day, for a brief moment to fetch refreshment for my companion and myself in the crow's nest. I would pause at the entrance to the engine-room and hear 'Mlangeni singing his own poems to music of his own composition. He would sing in a deep voice, audible above the beat of the engines below, for the men with whom he was sailing and, above all, to his captain. But the greatest song was dedicated to fire and proclaimed to his people that fire could be made on water; and that fire and water combined could lead them to greater things. It was perhaps not for nothing that he was called 'Mlangeni. It meant "man of the sun." And how right he was in having the courage of his convictions which took him to the sea, for the Zulus have since become the greatest ocean-going nation in Africa. There is hardly a port in the world that I have visited where I have not seen Zulus manning ships of the commercial navies of southern Africa, and doing so with an efficiency, discipline and ardour that has no equal on the seven seas today.

This inclination and capacity to enter into the lives of people of other races and nations illustrates the underlying spirit of the author. His book makes the reader lean back and wonder what sort of world we would have if, instead of the daily fare of news reports about the military and political gambits, invasions, and civil wars of nations, we had reading matter dealing mainly with the human qualities of other peoples—with, that is, the real world of their feelings and ideas. The political events of this early time in the century have their place in van der Post's book, but they are made to seem little more than background for the less changeable and far more attractive traits of the people themselves.

Invited by the captain of a Japanese ship to visit Japan—in the role of consultant concerning means of overcoming the prejudice against Japanese commercial interests—he noticed an unexplained alteration in the course of the ship on the way to Japan. The captain, Commander

Katsue Mori, explained that "he had ordered the change in deference to the moon, for otherwise we would not be served notice of its coming in the east: nor would we be in a position to see it rise with light unimpeded by any rude interference from the foremast and bows of the *Canada Maru*."

It was then September, and as the moon rose in the east van der Post heard the sound of a Japanese bamboo flute "with clarity and purity as if the notes themselves were made of moonlight."

The purser, who was on my left, whispered that it was addressed to the souls of the newly dead who would be resting there on the rising moon on their way beyond. As he spoke, the moon lifted itself over the rim. Its light began to show fast on the ring of the sea. A second before the sea had been black. Now it glowed and was pierced together with a flash of light that ran all round the flawless horizon, until we were in position at the center of an unblemished equatorial night. The light, indeed the entire moon, was of a rich red-gold, and it rose with the unhurried and even movement that is its measure in the world of the spirit. . . . On my right, Mori sighed, and with a certain deep satisfaction rumbled in his throat before he exhorted us with reverence: "Look! It is Momiji, maple-red."

"Like the Momiji at Arashima," someone hastened to add.

"No. Like those by the Imperial Villa of the Ascetic Doctrine, Shigaku-In, at Kyoto," claimed another.

For a moment there was an excited glamor of counterclaims, until my teacher asked delicately, as a great connoisseur might have done, a question whose answer he wished to share with others: "But the colour of what kind of Momiji would you say?" There were apparently many distinct kinds of maple which coloured the fall, each in its own way.

We have all read about the hard life of sailors in the British Navy but van der Post has other things to report, such as the captain of an East India ship who in 1607 "made his ship's company perform Shakespeare's *Henry IV* while off Sierra Leone and, in the approaches to Table Bay itself, he had staged *Hamlet*, which an entry in his journal calls 'the new and popular play in

London'." In 1941, when van der Post was serving in the British Army, he was sent by sea to Egypt. As an unattached officer he was put in charge of the welfare of the men on the troop ship. The task, he said—

lead at once to a privileged discovery of the composition and character of a truly democratic British army. . . . I talked to them daily about Africa, of our classical beginnings and a complex of related things. The gatherings rapidly grew and were so swelled by officers that I had to make them twice and on occasions thrice-daily events. I found others in the ranks who could add to the theme, and I remember in particular a soldier who had been awarded a double first in Classics at Oxford. He talked about Agamemnon's expeditionary force sailing in its black ships to battle on the great Trojan plain, and about Odysseus, Aeneas, Penelope, Dido and all, so that we were made to feel part of a company of men in and yet out of beyond space and time, and far greater in numbers than those massed in our convoy of ships or for that matter in all the ships sailing to other beachheads beyond our sight and reckoning.

Referring to the content of his book, *The Dark Eye in Africa*, which came out in the 1950s, van der Post spoke of the common failure to discern the recurrence of mythic themes:

I saw this neglect of the mythological pattern, the unrecognized "dominants of history," as I called them, and the irresistible energies at their disposal, at work as hard as ever, sapping the subterranean levels of the human spirit everywhere, because we still deny it the light of our lives and expression in human behaviour. And if I emphasize this it is because it seems to me even more relevant to the contemporary scene in Great Britain and Europe where day by day through a proliferation of a totalitarianism of the left, reason is being invaded by the unreason of negative collective myths, and their pocket Hitlerian loudspeakers are applauded as they peddle, in terms of our day, the same collective little lies, nonsenses and contradictions that Hitler did on his Wagnerian scale.

COMMENTARY
AN INESCAPABLE LIKENESS

THIS week's *Frontiers* recalled a passage from a book of years ago—*Man on a Rock* by Richard Hertz, who wrote:

Karl Buecher collected hundreds of songs echoing the divine animation that springs forth daily under a thousand different skies—songs which people used to sing during the ceremony called work. Chinese peasants, moving into the mountains, every morning to gather tea, sang a hymn in honor of their enterprise, which they compared to a pilgrimage to the Western paradise. The Volga boatmen "accepted the universe," and the women of Madagascar acted, when they cultivated the rice fields, like bayaderes trying to please a god.

Miguel Covarrubias, in his book on Bali, describes the bandjars, or cooperative societies as we would call them in our dry idiom; they watched the magic of work unfold with proper art and majesty in their Indonesian eden, when night fell they sent the arpeggios to their tireless orchestras through fragrant vales. . . .

The medieval fraternities of workers in Flanders and Lyons, toiling in the frozen music of crepuscular cities, rolled the stone from the tomb of their narrow space; their triumph over the refractory materials of the world was not mere routine, but was understood by them in its vast metaphysical connotations. Work interpreted as spiritual discipline gave these people a superhuman patience, detachment from results.

And van der Post's account of the Zulu stoker, singing to a ship's engines (p. 3), brings to mind Wendell Berry's essay in the September/October *Sierra* (*Sierra Club Bulletin*) which speaks of the craft of the mud daubers, wasps which, "as they trowel mud into their nest walls, hum to it, or at it, communicating a vibration that makes it easier to work, thus mastering their material by a kind of song."

Perhaps the hum of the mud dauber only activates that anciently perceived likeness between all creatures and the earth of which they are made. For as common wisdom holds, like *speaks* to like. . . . For humans, harmony is always a human product, an artifact, and if they do not know how to make it, then they do not have it. And so I suggest that, for

humans, the harmony I am talking about may bear an inescapable likeness to what we know as moral law—or that, for humans, moral law is a significant part of the notation of ecological and agricultural harmony.

This essay deserves reading as a whole.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE BOOKS MUST ALL BE GOOD

THE appeal (in "Children" for May 25) of a contributor to last winter's *Dædalus* for the survival of the high quality, general bookstore—fast disappearing from the literary and collegiate scene—brought an articulate response from a college bookstore manager, Jack Finefrock who runs the Kenyon College Book Store in Gambier, Ohio. This rural town has a maximum population during the college term of about two thousand people, much smaller during vacation. But the bookstore does quite well. Mr. Finefrock tells the story of why.

When I worked in a store in Berkeley, the people working in the back room used to talk about what kind of store they would have, if it were possible to have such a store make it. We noticed that whenever we increased the quality of the books we stocked, our sales went up. We mentioned this to the manager, but he thought we were naive. The experience stuck in my mind.

Two years later when I got my first store to manage, I walked into a nearly bankrupt store with no sales and no saleable stock. Since the place was likely to go under, I thought I might as well do as I liked.

So, I only bought books that I thought were good. They sold. Because I didn't want to kid myself (I couldn't believe it), I started a card system so I could tell exactly what book had sold and how quickly. To my real surprise, the best books sold quickest, and the dogs just sat there on the shelf. I decided to intensify my experiment and to try to find out what the really great books were.

My store became great fun for me. I was out to prove something, and my customers became a great cheering section. We were out to prove something.

I got to meet most of the people who read within sixty miles.

My friends who were booksellers and book salesmen (publishers' representatives) either thought I was lying, misguided (self-deceived) or that the community I was in was so unusual that what I was doing would work only there. The booksellers had

tried to sell good books in their stores, the books hadn't sold, and they were mad at their customers for not buying them. I tried to explain that I thought the difficulty was that you couldn't have just a few good books, you needed to have *all* good books. When you mix the good books in with the trash, the good books get lost. And besides, after wading through all the trash, the customers were so depressed that they couldn't tell a good book from a bad one. Then what was the use of their coming to your store, if it was like all the other stores? Customer loyalty is built for stores that stand for something.

We booksellers were vulnerable. They had to buy from us or we wouldn't exist.

Because I was so tired of hearing that my plan would work only in Chautauqua—where I had previously managed a store—and because I was tired of living in a town which had only 400 people, I found my present job in Gambier, to see if my philosophy would work here. It worked even better. So I decided that first I would create the store I wanted regardless of the accepted wisdom of bookselling, and would use whatever business sense I had picked up to make the store work. The idea was to find the things that make the store work in the best possible way, that reinforce the aims of the enterprise, and which do not compromise it.

Of course, we sell things other than books—stationery for example. But we do that to pay the overhead, to insure that we never have to meet our payroll from book sales. Books take up by far the most space, and we plough most of our resources back into books.

We interrupt Jack Finefrock to remark that the manager of one of the most successful general bookstores here on the Pacific Coast has followed this policy for years: the books create store traffic; the stationery makes enough money to keep the store in business.

Our bookish entrepreneur goes on:

We want to be a good book store, and we will become one by hook or crook, even if we have to start selling ice cream to do it.

Because I was stubborn, I decided to use the philosophy I had applied to book buying for buying everything else in the store. So our stationery, card, and even toy sections complement each other—all very good. Now we are able to buy university press

books, stay open 365 days of the year until 11 P.M. and discount as heavily as the chains, and survive.

It would be difficult to say how much of the success of this store is due to being located in a college; students just about have to buy books. But that this sort of success can happen anywhere at all seems encouraging news. The justly proud proprietor of the Kenyon College Book Store concludes:

I doubt that there are many people who have the capital to start a large book store and keep it going, but there are plenty of institutions with tired, badly run stores that do not serve their communities, their faculties, or really anyone. It wouldn't take any additional expense for them to have a good store rather than a bad one. Why shouldn't their stores support the ideas that the institutions that own them stand for? Most institutional stores do not reflect the nature of their institutions. Or is it that they reflect the real nature of their institutions?

Anyway, it can be done.

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What follows is a Sophomore's answer to a final exam question in Harold Goddard's Shakespeare course, at Swarthmore—a long time ago. The question concerned the pertinence of Shakespeare to things other than literature.

In the beginning of the year, when people asked me why I was taking Shakespeare, I couldn't find much to say except that I had to have a year of English for medical school, and I had conflicts with all the more general English courses. As the year has gone on, I have consistently waxed more eloquent on the subject, until now I don't wait for people to ask me why I am taking it—I tell them why they should. This is not because I have become interested in pure literature for its own sake, but because I have found that Shakespeare has a great many things to say to me, which do not depend on what my major is.

One of the great opportunities Shakespeare offers is the chance to know a great many very interesting people much better than you can get to know any but a few people who are real in the ordinary sense. Hamlet, Lear, Desdemona and all the others of this great group of living characters are born again for each one of us. There is nothing out of date about them. The recurrence of similar sorts of people—often in parallel situations—in modern

literature shows that the same sort of people still have the same sort of problems as they did in 1600. Whatever your vocation is going to be, it seems valuable to me to know Shakespeare's characters, through them to catch a shadowy glimpse of Shakespeare himself, and to think about the fundamental problems of life which he presents: blood and judgment, revenge, love, forgiveness, and many others.

Shakespeare's bearing on political science:

The History plays are perhaps the obvious example, for while they are a study of only kings, most of what they say applies equally well to presidents and dictators. *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Coriolanus* are all partly concerned with political problems like imperialism and the common people and the mob. No one can fail to be conscious of the Commodity motive in many politicians today, and *King John* considers this problem. *Henry V* presents a situation of conquest with superficially fine motives which is comparable to Italy's conquest of Ethiopia. . . . If history is valuable for a study of present-day politics and governments, it seems to me that Shakespeare's historical plays certainly are too. They do more than tell you what happened. They go into the basic reasons of *why* it happened—that is, we have Shakespeare's idea of what sort of person would be likely to behave in such a way that the recorded events took place. Whether you agree with him or not doesn't seem very important to me. The valuable thing is that you are going to think about these things yourself, from a rather different point of view. Since fundamentally history is largely what individual men make it, and a government is as good or bad as the men in power, it seems obvious that consideration of the kind of men involved is going to help you decide just what qualities men holding government positions should possess, and what happens when they don't possess them.

FRONTIERS

Where Have All the Folk Songs Gone?

THE first newspapers of this country were rich in the folk lore of the people. They were filled with the same stories and news you'd hear at the old fishing hole, across the neighbor's fence, or from your friend who visited the big city. Word travelled far in those days, and newspapers sprang up as a public exchange for the folk stories, news and opinions.

It is because of this history that editors still have the mistaken idea that newspapers are the voice of the community, but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the media as a whole are killing the voice of the community. The media have become like a huge machine that seeks out and devours the voice of our community, giving us back only entertainment.

The slow death of folk music and folk stories is a warning signal to our modern age. While, it might seem that the folk arts have withered from lack of interest, in fact we should wonder what can destroy these natural impulses of creativity. Stories and songs have always popped up and spread from person to person, making for a unified feeling in our country. They have become a part of our language, and passing from generation to generation they have built the essence of a nation.

But a delicate living thing has been lost since our news, songs and stories are broadcast to the masses. Our relationship with each other has changed. The news now carries with it a sound of authoritative truth that it does not truly possess, and the songs take on an air of the slick and professional. Neither contains the element of sharing; neither comes from the heart.

A deep change is taking place in our modern world as we pass from a world centered around work to a world centered around our leisure. Our country has passed the point where, for the first time in history, leisure claims more time, from the

nation, than work. And there are forces and powers scrambling to see who will set up and control the leisure establishment.

Thus, the rhythmic sounds of the laborer's chants are gone from our midst, and also lost is the art of whistling and singing to one's self. As Paul Twitchell pointed out in *Singing To One's Self Is a Lost Art*:

Self-created music, or the art of singing and whistling when alone, seems to have become a lost ability in these modern times.

Singing while at work whether it is in the house doing domestic chores or driving a car is beneficial. This is the stirring of the ECK within one, or what we know as starting rhythms of the inner being of the individual.

We have lost the art of singing to ourselves or whistling in these times due to the advent of the transient radio. With the radio and TV broadcasting media becoming so prominent in the life of every person we are now somewhat of a brainwashed people.

The sounds that issue from the radio, TV, stereo, public offices, business houses and eating places greets us everywhere. It has gotten to the point where we cannot hide in the mountains or walk along the beach but what someone is nearby with a transistor radio.

This is, in effect, a very subtle war against the human consciousness. We can see that the family, which used to be a unit of work in society, was a breeding ground for the folk arts. Weddings and family reunions would prove this out, as they were rich in homespun music and culture. But now that the family has become a unit of leisure, we find reunions playing music from the radios, and more and more of the family's time spent gathered around the TV.

Threatening our world is the domination of the masses through the leisure establishment. This gives people the appearance of free will while breaking down their spirit and sources of creativity. The human race seems unable to battle this barrage of information being poured over it by the media, and of course with the bomb hanging

over our heads we are forced to keep our eyes glued to the news to know the latest turn of events. It is a form of humiliation, and the absence of the folk arts keeps us from being reminded of our inborn inspiration.

The folk arts thrived in an age when man was forced to accept the existence of a higher authority. Whether he was struggling against the forces of nature, taxation by the powerful, or the restrictions of religion, folk songs and stories were the outpourings of people who shared a common language. Each person knew there were no clothes but what they made, no food but what they raised, and no culture but what they created together. And their protection came from neighbors who looked out for and stood by each other.

But now our protection comes from a police force, our food and clothes from supermarkets or department stores. Our entertainment, also, is served up the same way; with no effort of our own, and by strangers. In fact, it is as if all the bridges toward making a community have been burned, and the common language of the people has been destroyed. This is part of the techniques of alienation and manipulation that the power-hungry use to gain more influence by dividing and swaying the masses.

This is why there are no folk heroes any more, but only the anti-hero, the common man who is defeated by his own weaknesses. And this is why, if we are to believe what we are told, all superior powers are now gone, even what belonged to God, for in their place are the rights of the people.

The individual who follows the beat of his own drum today, is far more an outcast than the hobo of the past, who hopped the freight cars and wandered the back roads. The one who sells his TV for a guitar, to write his own songs about his search for truth, has no voice. In fact, anyone who stands out in originality, or creativity, or intelligence, knows very well the sounds of silence. He knows his talents will never go to the

benefit of his nation, for there is no community left to hear him.

Yet in all this, is there not the sound of a common language? A silent language? Somehow, can it not be heard in the songs the radio does not play, the stories the newspaper does not share, and the opinions that people keep to themselves? Today we face the great struggle of retaining our individuality, dispelling the myths of propaganda, and finding our place in this world. Aren't these the elements of survival we carry silently? And isn't it the voice of silence which lies beneath all folk arts? It is the unspoken, the unsaid, that is common to all, yet no power, no media, can manipulate it, and not even their noise can disturb it.

Have the folk arts truly died, or have they just grown silent while they shape and form a new voice for expression? In a world that has changed so much, so fast, it is not easy to know.

Los Altos, Calif.

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