

SYNANON: ON THE SIDE OF LIFE

AFTER you have read *So Fair a House: The Story of Synanon* (Prentice Hall, 1963, \$4.95), by Daniel Casriel, M.D.—the first full-length book about the self-help laboratory for ex-drug addicts located in Santa Monica—it takes some time to absorb the initial impact of what these human beings are doing for themselves and for others. At Synanon, the symptoms of people getting well are so strong, so omnipresent, and so varied that you can hardly recognize the symptoms of the ill they are overcoming. The bad symptoms are there, of course, but at Synanon they manifest in reverse, becoming markers of human progress. And if you should happen to visit Synanon, and stay a while, or spend an hour or two musing on the metabolism of characterological health as described at length by Dr. Casriel, you may say to yourself, "If these people are sick, it might be a good thing for some of the 'normal' communities outside to contract a similar infection." What you have experienced, of course, is not an atmosphere of regeneration unique to former heroin addicts, but the cultural usufruct garnered by men and women for whom the personal incident or accident of using drugs has been turned into the means of making them take a determined look at themselves and do something about what they see.

It is after this conclusion has been reached that the delayed-action mechanisms of the Casriel book begin to work on you. How is a therapeutic community of the sort represented by Synanon put together? Can the dynamics of Synanon be used more widely, in other relationships? Will study of this experiment—now magnificently successful—reveal to social psychology its essential ingredients? How much, in this project, is art and how much is science? What sort of people can start a Synanon House and make it work?

With these questions in mind, you go back and read the book again, or review certain parts of

it. The first block to easy answers is the enigmatic personality of Charles Dederich, founder of Synanon. This is not to suggest that Chuck Dederich somehow makes understanding of Synanon difficult; he does a very good best in explaining how Synanon works; but he happens to be the man who, half sphinx, half gladiator, half P. T. Barnum, and half Florence Nightingale knows what it means to fall down in the gutter, and what it means to pick himself up; who, in the old age of his youth, found there was nothing he wanted to do more than teach other people how to pick themselves up and make a new beginning with their lives; and who, with these talents, this background, and an unbreakable determination, created the Synanon therapeutic community which is so difficult to understand.

But now that Synanon is a reality, someone will say, it ought to be possible to make copies of it for use elsewhere. It ought to be possible, and it is. There are now several Synanon houses besides the parent House in Santa Monica. Synanon "graduates" are operating a House in Reno, Nevada, and running a tier in the Nevada State Penitentiary, as well as an honor farm connected with the prison. There is a House in San Diego, one in Westport, Connecticut, and one about to be in San Francisco. In all cases, they are staffed and run by former drug addicts. *No one else knows how.* This is one of the secrets of Synanon.

To speak of the "secrets" of Synanon is hardly an explanation of how it works. It is explanation by reference to enigma. It is pulling mystic rank on the reader. But a certain amount of this kind of preparation is necessary, to avoid, if possible, superficial conclusions. Synanon happens to be the product of the heroic efforts of people who have all been down in the last ditch of human failure; many of them once longed for

death; all of them felt completely hopeless at one time or another; all of them were absolutely rejected by conventional society; and all of them were pared down and cut back to practically the protoplasmic level of human capacity: they know what it is to be *nothing at all*. At Synanon, the shapeless embryo of a regressed human being builds itself a new, self-conscious form. It is an institution for rebirth. If you can feel what that might be like for yourself, you have a chance to understand how Synanon works.

Do you have to be a mainliner on heroin to grasp the reality of this process? Probably not; but you have to be capable of a parallel emotional experience. It seems unlikely that this can be obtained vicariously, through reading. It takes a trained and willing imagination to put yourself in the place of people who have once been at home at the nadir of human degradation ("nadir" only by conventional standards; "respectable" people occasionally do far worse things than poison themselves with drugs); and it takes the honesty and courage of full maturity to accept such status for oneself, even in theory. Tolstoy succeeded in this sort of identification, in the terms that meant degradation for him, and recorded his feelings throughout the ordeal in *My Confession* (1882). A person who can share in Tolstoy's self-contempt might be able to share the agony of drug addiction and understand the motivations necessary to recovery. Motivation, however, is not all; and for the addict it seems to be mostly a horror—often temporary—of his addicted condition. Synanon is a place which frames the mechanisms that people vulnerable to addiction have found they have to have to get well. Dr. Casriel writes:

It took an ex-member of the addictive group to indicate a way to treat the addictive group. Chuck Dederich, the founder of Synanon, has by intent and flexible modification in trial and error, developed a *therapeutic emotional climate* in which a system of therapy has succeeded in removing, in a voluntary setting, the cloak of acting-out defenses of an addictive personality. In Synanon, once the defenses and all addictive substances are removed, the member is in a position to grow emotionally in a healthy

direction. . . . The missing link in the treatment of addicts—indeed, perhaps in the treatment of all character disorders—has been the *how* of teaching the addict to mature emotionally in an *open* environment. This is the one thing an addictive personality has never learned.

At Synanon, the addict learns first how to live in a mature, paternalistic, family-type environment. It is an honest, tolerant but critical, anti-criminal, anti-addiction society. The techniques (neurotic and psychopathic defenses), attitudes, behavior, and methods of communication the addict previously used in his personal social and anti-social environment are now, at Synanon, unsuited to his functioning. He even feels embarrassed by them. At first, for three to six months, he *acts* as if he understood what was happening, after that he begins to feel it. His character and personality traits begin to change. Within two or three years, the change is so complete that apparently a different personality has emerged. His previous anti-social and addictive defenses seem to have dropped off from disuse and having been "synanized." He may still be neurotic to a greater or lesser degree, but he is no longer an inadequate personality, an anti-social, hostile, or seductive psychopath, or an addictive personality.

There is a section on "statistics" in *So Fair a House*, but the figures, for a number of very good reasons, are not easily summarized. The only statistic that Chuck Dederich feels has true meaning is the following:

Each day of Synanon's existence adds another day free of drugs to the lives of more than 200 ex-addicts. To date, ex-addicts of Synanon's membership currently in good standing have voluntarily tallied up over 100,000 drug-free days. Synanon has saved society \$10 million to date, and 200 [now 300] ex-addicts are developing as emotionally adult, productive human beings.

This measure of the achievement of Synanon is approved and repeated in his book by Dr. Casriel, a practicing psychiatrist, and consultant on drug addiction to the New York State Supreme Court, who, before learning of Synanon, gave as his professional recommendation for the treatment of the drug addict: "Put him away either in hospitals or jails for the rest of his life—or give him all the heroin he wants." He now agrees with Senator Dodd, that "there is indeed a miracle on

the beach at Santa Monica," and he endorses the conclusion of Dr. Lewis Yablonsky, author of *The Violent Gang*, that Synanon is an "anti-criminal society."

For many readers, the most interesting part of *So Fair a House* will be the case histories, the tapes of interviews, and directly quoted illustrations of the therapeutic sessions in which the former addict learns to be honest with others and with himself. Synanon is a place filled up and running over with the lore of self-discovery. The members listen to symphonies now and then, and to their own jazz musicians, who are among the best, but most of all (a common denominator) they listen to tapes which have attempted to capture the psychological mutations that all members of the Synanon family regard as the first business of their lives. There are tense situations in which, when the moment of truth comes, you can practically hear it click, and there are subtler recordings which leave the hearer brooding and wondering what they mean.

Of the basic therapeutic synanon sessions, held by small groups three times a week, Dr. Yablonsky has written:

The group sessions do not have any official leader. They are autonomous; however, leaders emerge in each session in a natural fashion. The emergent leader tells much about himself in his questioning of another. Because he is intensely involved with the subject or the problem in the particular session he begins to direct, he is in a natural fashion the "most qualified" session leader for that time and place. In short, the expert of the moment may be emotionally crippled in many personal areas, but in the session where he is permitted by the group to take therapeutic command, he may be the most qualified therapeutic agent.

Chuck Dederich, in a paper, *Synanon Foundation*, has noted the fact that people who have been addicted are acutely aware of the habitual deviousness and defensiveness of other addicts in relation to the truth about themselves. No addict can con an ex-addict. After a while, they learn not to try. In the synanon—

The temporary leader "leans heavily on his own insight into his own problems of personality in trying to help the members to find themselves, and will use the weapons of ridicule, cross-examination, hostile attack," as he feels inclined. The temporary inquisitor "does not try to convey to the other members that he is himself a stable personality. In fact, it may very well be that the destructive drive of the recovered or recovering addictive personality makes him a good therapeutic tool—fighting fire with fire.

These "synanon sessions seem to provide an emotional catharsis and (appear to) trigger an atmosphere of truth-seeking which is reflected in the social life of the family structure. The sharing of emotional experience in the synanon sessions seems to encourage in the family structure a tolerance and permissiveness within rather loosely defined limits in which the addict who wants to recover feels sufficiently comfortable to stay and buy himself time."

The following fragment from the report of a synanon session—doubtless one of the more "moderate" encounters—is illustrative of the searching mood of them all:

JOE: Hey, wait a minute, Jim. You dig attention. Do you think it's a sickness with you?

JIM: I know it is.

JOE: How does your sickness for attention show itself around here?

JIM: Probably in everything I do. It sounds stupid, but when I go through a motion *not* to get attention, I get very lonely, even with crowds of people around.

HARRY: When did you start laughing like a hyena in heat? Is that laughing physical? We're sitting around in a group now and someone says something funny and everyone starts laughing. *He* starts laughing like a hyena. Everybody stops and looks at Jim. It goes over big. How do you train yourself? It must have taken years to laugh like that; did it? You don't have to laugh like that, Jim. You can laugh a little more normally, like ha-ha-ha, ho-ho-ho.

JOE: If you wanted to, Jim, you could probably do ninety-nine per cent of the things that you do around here, differently. Has any one of us suggested to you to try some constructive way of getting attention?

JIM Joe, I . . .

JOE: No, wait a minute. Keep your mouth shut! The only way you can not manifest your insanity is to keep your mouth shut.

HARRY: He isn't going to keep his mouth shut. Look, do you know the difference between attention and approval?

JIM: Yeah.

HARRY: Which do you prefer?

JIM: I don't know; I never had much approval.

HARRY: Well, you see, you're looking for approval, but you think attention is approval. Look up those two words in the dictionary. You're looking for approval and you get attention. If you want people to laugh at you, fine and dandy. But what you want is approval, not attention.

Dr. Casriel comments:

From the foregoing, it can be seen how, in Synanon, the *constant* assessment required in the member's daily interaction with others fosters the consolidation of self-identity and self-evaluation. The member's self-estimation is under constant observation and attack by his peers, who are sensitive to and concerned about him. In the synanon, each is given a chance to see himself as others see him, and in the eyes of the newcomers he sees how he affects the image of Synanon.

In this therapeutic community, the synanon, it begins to be clear, is Operation Buzz Saw. It cuts away the dead or dying tissue of phoneyess and pretense. By the law of averages operating in some two hundred dedicated amateur sawyers, the cutting edge homes, sooner or later, on everything but the wholesome flesh of unblinking personal honesty. The people bleed some, of course, but not for long. It begins to feel good to be well. And there is no real hostility in the total synanon atmosphere, however much may be discharged by individuals at times. When it shows up then the members switch and go to work on that. Another "secret" of Synanon is the fact that there is no authoritarian status in the place. There is only earned status. Anyone can be a "synanist"—leader of a synanon—if he learns how. Of course, there are lots of jobs bearing temporary

authoritarian status, with some misuse of that status, just as everywhere else in the world. But it doesn't last. It can't last under the synanon law of averages. It isn't part of the system, just part of human nature, which is the raw material with and on which the members of the synanon work. So there are occasional injustices. Why not? People are people. They make mistakes. On this question, Chuck Dederich comments: "So what? Often things in life are unjust, unfair. You have to accept them. Take the punches and grow strong from the experience." Eventually it begins to dawn on the newcomer that these people care about *him*; Not about his "habit," which they regard as irrelevant, except as a symptom; nor about his phoneyess, which they object to; nor about his weaknesses, which they are patient with; but about *him*. That is the biggest, most important of all of Synanon's secrets. Fortunately, they don't talk about it. Instead, this basic regard for human beings gets acted out, as for example in the closing storm of a synanon in which Reid Kimball, an old-timer and administrator, said to some new members:

If you dopes could get it "gut level" that when you run into some criticism or a manipulation of your job it is not abandonment or rejection or hatred; if you could realize where the thought came from, quite clearly and isolated, it would be such a fantastic release for you, you'd be able to sail through life knowing that even if someone shouts and screams right in your face you're not in the slightest danger of being thrown out onto the highway. . . . what a release from bondage that would be! I don't know how the hell I could exist if every time I received some criticism I had to go through the mental anguish you must go through interpreting literally. . . . I'd be on my way out the door. It must be anguish. It's so unrealistic, so abortive. It's so untrue.

Dr. Casriel's book is about Synanon's internal relations—what happens in the synanons, how they work, how the participants get well. Eventually someone will have to write a book about the external relations of this movement—for it is a movement—and study the complex reactions, for and against Synanon, in the public at large. *Against Synanon?* How could anybody be

against the work of people who are making it contagious to overcome one of the most debilitating, most deluding, and most tenacious habits known to man? Look at the record of Synanon—not just its record in helping addicts to regain their health and sanity, but the record of public recognition, public acclaim!

Popular recognition has supported Synanon with money and other gifts, while professional recognition has confirmed its success. A group of business and professional men paid the first month's rent on the present quarters of the Santa Monica Synanon, when the early members first took occupancy in 1959. Synanon became a non-profit corporation under the laws of California in 1960 and was granted a Tax Exemption Certificate by the U.S. Treasury Department. In June of that year, Dr. Donald Cressey, chairman of the department of anthropology in the University of California in Los Angeles, publicly declared that in his opinion Synanon "is the most significant attempt to keep addicts off drugs that has ever been made." In 1961, the Interim Committee of Criminal Procedure of the California State Assembly reported that Synanon "is keeping approximately 100 former addicts off of narcotics." The report added that not only the ex-addicts benefit from Synanon, but also the community at large, since the people at Synanon are no longer committing crimes to finance their addiction, and the taxpayers need not support them in prison or state hospitals. Synanon, the report continued, affords valuable educational service "by sending speakers to any requesting school, church, club or other facility," and it provides "an unparalleled opportunity for research on every aspect of narcotic addiction." In May of the same year, the California legislature passed the Petris Bill, which withdrew implied legal restrictions to the operation of Synanon, and in signing it Governor Brown remarked: "Certainly, we owe Synanon and its founder, Charles Dederich, a chance to show what they can do."

Dr. Lewis Yablonsky, associate professor of sociology and social welfare at U.C.L.A., and a specialist in juvenile delinquency, came to Synanon, studied what was happening there, and added an important chapter to his recent book, *The Violent Gang*, in which he termed Synanon the first major break-through in the long attempt to control and reduce the evil of narcotic addiction. He published a similar analysis of Synanon in the September, 1962, issue of *Federal Probation* and wrote an informing article for the general reader which appeared in the *Saturday Review*. The tide of national publicity and admiration for Synanon rose and spread, bringing stories, some of them long and important, in *Time*, the *Nation*, *Life*, *Downbeat*, *McCall's*, *Ebony*, *Sepia*, *England's Today*, and *Epocha* (published in German and Italian). There have been dozens of radio programs and TV shows on Synanon, and countless newspaper stories, including Arthur Berman's Los Angeles *Mirror* series which won the Award of Merit in the California State Bar's Annual Press Competition. Motion picture stars such as James Mason, Jane Russell, and Steve Allen, writers such as Henry Miller, Rod Serling, Ray Bradbury, Alexander King, and Walker Winslow, and many other notables have visited Synanon, giving their unqualified support. Several excellent documentary films tell the story of Synanon, and a full-length feature based upon Synanon's conquest of addiction is in the making at Columbia Pictures. In 1962, Senator Thomas J. Dodd, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, discovered Synanon. He visited the House at Santa Monica, spent some time asking questions and getting acquainted, then went back to Washington and made a speech on the floor of the Senate in which he called Synanon's achievement "the first hopeful method of curing drug addicts that has ever been devised." It might "lead the way in the future," he said, "to an effective treatment not only for drug addicts, but also criminals and juvenile delinquents guilty of other offenses." One consequence of Sen. Dodd's enthusiasm was an invitation to

Charles Dederich to attend the White House Conference on Narcotics, in September, 1962. Meanwhile, in Nevada, the State Legislature authorized a contract between the Synanon Foundation, Inc., and the Nevada State Prison, making possible the constructive work with the prisoners done by Synanon volunteers. Finally, Dr. Casriel's book, published this month, adds a new peak to the mountain of evidence that Synanon is doing what it set out to do, says it knows how to do, and wants to continue to do even more effectively.

As for the opposition to Synanon, it consists almost entirely of what some Synanon wit has called "the bureaucratic monkey on the addict's back." *Item:* In his address before the California Probation, Parole and Correctional Association in June, 1960, Dr. Cressey spoke of Synanon's need for help. "Where," he asked, "are the official representatives of the correctional agencies, the probation and parole workers? . . . They are either ignoring this significant experiment or else they are revoking the parole or probation of addicts that go to the organization [Synanon] for help. The police and other advocates of harshness are not indifferent to the organization. Why, then, are the official advocates of humanitarianism and rehabilitation so indifferent?" *Item:* The Assembly Interim Committee in its report recommended that the State of California "take a friendly but non-directive interest in Synanon." The official correctional agencies of the State of California have not been responsive. They have done nothing but ignore Synanon, except for attempts to hamper its progress. *Item:* In 1960 Governor Brown asked for a special study of the narcotics problem. A commission made up of six officials undertook the job. During their tour of the state, they stopped at Synanon, asked some questions, and examined ex-addicts in various stages of rehabilitation, but when the report of the Commission was published, it made no *mention* of Synanon. Somehow or other, the one example of success among all the efforts to get addicts off heroin was crowded out of the report's 115 pages.

Item: In his Senate speech, Sen. Dodd invited Mr. Dederich to apply for funds to the National Institute of Mental Health. Mr. Dederich has done so, but no funds have come. Now, more than a year later, the National Institute just barely answers Mr. Dederich's letters. Meanwhile, Synanon needs money. It needs to expand. It is having to turn addicts away from its doors for lack of beds and space. Other parts of the country need Synanon Houses, too.

What is wrong with these people? What will explain this extraordinary failure of communication between public agencies which are supposed to be doing all they can to *find out* how to slow down, stop, eliminate drug addiction, and a couple of hundred men and women in Santa Monica who *have* slowed down, stopped, and eliminated drug addiction in their own lives? All that we can think of is the improbable idea that the bureaucrats and correctional administrators are hearing in the distance the angry hum of Synanon's Operation Buzz Saw, and it worries them: The "healing" part of what the buzz saw does may be okay, but what about this truth-telling and honesty stuff? The whole idea is ridiculous. We know about addicts. We've got them in prisons all over the state and they can't tell the truth. Any addict who tells the truth is a *corrupt* addict, and we can't have that. First thing you know, they'll be wanting us to depend upon the truth, and we can't have that, either. Everybody knows that the social community can't stand the impact of truth. And we're just the people to protect the community. That's what we're paid to do. It's a Sacred Trust.

REVIEW

AN ATHENIAN VIEW OF EDUCATION

FREDERICK MAYER'S *History of Educational Thought* (Charles Merrill, 1960) may be regarded as a companion volume to Robert Ulich's book of similar title (reviewed in *MANAS*, Feb. 3, 1952). A Humanities classicist in relation to education, Dr. Ulich brings to the reader the temper and content of great teachers and thinkers of the past. Dr. Mayer, who teaches the Humanities at the University of Redlands, writes from a similar background, but his approach is reminiscent of Thomas Paine's counsel: "We must go back and think as if we were the first men who ever thought." This is also what the Athenians believed: that the literature, art, mysticism, philosophy, and politics of the present moment could evoke the strongest sense of personal responsibility in the individual.

The Athenians may have been subdivided by population count into free Hellenes, "slaves," and "foreigners," but each citizen believed that he should participate in all phases of civic responsibility. The citizen who voted for war was prepared to hurry home and get his sword, and the man of Athens who voiced an opinion in matters of philosophy expected to implement it by personal action—educationally and politically. For these reasons, we see Dr. Mayer's *History of Educational Thought* as an "Athenian" work advocating immediate personal concern with the root issues of education.

Religion, philosophy, and education are all regarded as natural activities of the individual. Apart from its ceremonials and dogmas, religion represents both personal urgency and commitment, and without these ingredients a vast emptiness afflicts the process of learning. While evidently not a man of any conventional religious persuasion, Dr. Mayer begins his preface with these remarks:

We have learned that without a consideration of goals and purposes education is bound to suffer from a grave limitation of vision. . . .

Basically, education and religion appeal to the same drives.

Both depend upon the inspiration of exceptional leaders. Both are concerned not merely with the present, but with the distant future. Both demand a genuine ethical viewpoint which goes beyond expediency. For we cannot understand the history of educational thought without understanding its religious foundations. I have tried to reveal the impact on education of philosophical ideas not only of Christians, but also of Mohammedans, and of the ancient Chinese Greeks, and Indians. Only as we learn do we progress; only as we overcome prejudice do we become enlightened. The Orient can teach us the virtue of contemplation which we need desperately in our activistic culture.

To characterize the disenchantment of our time and to show why the mechanics of well-advertised and highly-specialized techniques in education do not cure a vast emptiness—Dr. Mayer draws upon the insights of the late Albert Camus:

The dilemma of modern man is perhaps best represented by Albert Camus in *The Stranger*. The main character of the book is a young man who feels no fundamental emotions. He does not love anyone. When his mother dies, he does not mourn; he does not even miss her. He is interested in a girl because he needs a purge for his biological needs. To him she is an object, not someone to be cherished. Then, in a moment of passion he kills an Arab. He is convicted of murder and sentenced to die. At last, when he realizes that his time is limited, he awakens to the value of human existence. But the awakening has come too late.

Man's tragedy is his lack of involvement and concern.

Education has the broadest of goals:

Moral and spiritual values cannot be excluded from the educative process. Yet, moral and spiritual values are often regarded in a rather narrow manner. Teachers are frequently subjected to a multitude of tabus, especially in small towns. They are evaluated by their conformity, rather than by their sense of originality.

A commentator stated recently that he wanted to preserve the spiritual values of our civilization. When I asked him how this would be accomplished, he replied that he wanted to banish writers like Steinbeck and Hemingway from the high school anthologies, for writers such as these present a "perverted view of life."

Genuine spirituality implies quite a different perspective than that represented by the commentator. Genuine spirituality implies a questioning spirit and an identification with the highest symbols of cultures. Like Jesus and Buddha, the truly spiritual teacher will regard all men as equal and he will disregard the barriers of race, religion and nationality.

What has all this to do with the fact that we live in an "age of psychology"? A great deal, for the useful religion-and-psychiatry book cannot be content with a reconciliation of traditional perspectives. The expectation of fruit from this combination might be likened, as Hobart Mowrer has put it, "to that of two aging lovers who have married, each with the illusion that the other has 'resources' which have been implied but, thus far, not concretely exhibited." It is not the revaluation of religion by psychiatry, or vice versa, which is most needed, but stimuli to new valuation in both areas, until the old barriers crumble and the resources of the past all melt into unity in today's existentialist crucible.

COMMENTARY

THE DOMINION OF THE IRRATIONAL

THE assassination of John F. Kennedy—and the murder of his presumed assassin—will be analyzed, argued, and written about in every conceivable way for years to come. The ponderous, often repetitious mountain of words about Lincoln's death may eventually be surpassed, following this most recent reminder that history repeating itself is man demonstrating his small capacity for change. And the quality of these words will probably diminish with time; we have bred no Pericles; not one for governing, nor one for eulogizing. Already there is a ballad about the assassination; and we can look forward in a few years to a movie about the life and death of JFK.

But the firm finality of death mocks such efforts to prolong the drama and mystery of thanatos. Time and vulgarization will place the event in a comfortable historical niche, and we will go on much as before: a strong and good people made weak and afraid by a plethora of "good things," and by a growing fear that all these "good things" will never fill the abyss of meaninglessness at the center of our lives.

Yet there is a difference, now; something has happened to us. For a few days a nation, and much of the world, were witnesses to—and participants in—facts, themes, and symbols of common mortality.

John F. Kennedy does not need eulogies. He had known death intimately during the War; better than most of us, he knew that he would have to die. Socrates, discussing political reforms in the *Republic*, said it well: "Another thing we must banish is the wailing and lamentations of the famous heroes. For this reason: if two friends are both men of high character, neither of them will think that death has any terrors for his comrade; and so he will not mourn for his friend's sake, as if something had befallen him." We would do well to leave John F. Kennedy to history.

Yet for four days, anyone able to temper shock with observation had opportunity to watch the spectacle of millions of people reacting to the inevitable—but carefully denied—fact that man born of woman dies. Something else of significance happened, too. While a new normality was quickly established, one fact grew in the minds of many people for the first time. Not much will be spoken or written about this unwieldy and shocking fact, but in varying degrees we have all seen the dominion of the irrational; and that most of us live under its sovereignty, which determines, overwhelmingly if not totally, the course of history and the details of our lives.

The real murderer of both John F. Kennedy and Lee Oswald was this unacknowledged region of the human mind. Seeing it in the act of murder makes it very difficult to ignore.

We shall want to be given comforting reasons why Oswald and Ruby did what they did. This demand is being supplied with the talk about "temporary insanity"—an easy euphemism at least one abstraction away from the dominion of the irrational. Such "reasons" and the efforts of a host of investigating committees may be able to make people forget what they saw and felt. If they do not forget, and if they choose to try to come to terms and master the irrational, they will be facing a dangerous and painful adventure—to accept the dominion of the irrational in any event leads to the same base of irrationality in oneself. "Know thyself" has never been a popular philosophy, so the prognosis is not hopeful.

But if we are not able to denounce the sovereignty of the irrational, we are able, at least, to grieve. As a result of the assassination, millions of people confronted—some perhaps for the first time—their own death, and the idea and reality of death. Unlike so many deaths—the Labor Day traffic fatalities, the casualties of the Korean War—this one was inescapable; it was too unexpected, too quick. It penetrated before our defenses could come up; and, betrayed by our

electronic wombs, we saw it on every television channel.

The consequences of this confrontation cannot be measured now. It seems unlikely that the dominion of the irrational has been seriously threatened, but in grief we have participated in an appropriate and rational response to a crucial condition: pain, loss, death. The "labor of grief" for John Kennedy and for ourselves was long and elaborate. This measures, perhaps, the depths touched by the experience. It took many hours of ritual and several chapters of tradition to make the world look normal again. Some may have learned that the world is never "normal" or safe, and that it should be this way. "Paying respects to the dead" is, in fact, tacit acknowledgement that grief is a kind of labor; that it takes time to feel and integrate loss and the pain of loss; that business as usual ought to be suspended in favor of this urgent labor. In a way, it is encouraging that so many people were able to feel so much. A really ill person cannot sustain grief; lacking Socratic serenity, our nation is at least healthy enough to grieve.

WILLIAM MATHES

San Francisco, California

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves DEATH AS A TEACHER

AT this time of writing, the children are not in school. They know why, of course: according to age and capacity, they have been caught up in the somber pageantry which brought pause to the activities of an entire nation. The life of a man, a good man, has been sacrificed on the altar of public affairs, and the martyrdom must be recognized as genuine. John F. Kennedy would not have died in this manner unless in high office, and it is certainly conceivable that any man in high office might have suffered the same fate.

But do the children really understand why, and do we? The most ancient impersonal counsels on the subject of death are found in the *Upanishads* of India, wherein Death is given another cloak to wear over that of mourning: Death is regarded as a true teacher. There are reasons for wishing that the instructors in our schools were upanishadic in background, that children could sit down with them today and learn some of the many things that may be learned at such a time. First of all, that which should never be forgotten is the undeniable fact that for a moment, a day, or week, the citizens of the United States have been shocked out of political partisanship. The extent of this inner withdrawal from the factionalisms which, collectively, make earth's wars, depends upon the individual, but the fact of the withdrawal is of great psychological importance. Even momentary transcendence is proof that men are capable of becoming more than partisans.

The shame of Texas and of the United States is one that should be long felt and deeply pondered. For, to the extent that any citizen indulges any hatred, he contributes to the atmosphere from which sick minds can draw sustenance and sick purposes receive encouragement. We have all, in degree, participated in the killing of a man, the

degradation of a symbol, and the lessening of that great and good influence which the United States might exert upon all the world. Whenever a man, woman or child voices denigration of character, opinions, race or religion, he is in some measure a killer. For it is in the cauldron of hate and fear that every violence is born. This the Buddha perceived. As Sir Edwin Arnold gave the Buddha speech in *The Light of Asia*:

So grow the strifes and lusts which make earth's
war,
So grieve poor cheated hearts and flow salt
tears
So wax the passions, envies, angers, hates
So years chase blood-stained years
With wild red feet.

This is a teaching of Death—that every destructive impulse unites hate and fear, bringing a whole progeny of evil deeds. To refuse to submit to this pattern is to establish another hierarchy of thoughts and deeds which strives *without* hate or violence—and suffers losses without fear.

Another reaction to this nearly unthinkable slaying is that of bewildered disbelief. This response may well be an introduction, even if not so recognized, to the great question of the continuance of the "soul" of man beyond the death of the body. If men were only their bodies, they could not ever feel—as in fact they do—that when intensely alive people have gone from their bodies, *they must still exist*. The feeling that the dead are not completely gone is as much a part of human life as the instinct of love or the desire to understand. In all the religions of the world, this one natural belief occurs in some form—the belief that there is much more to man than the body we see, that the inner person is so much more important than the body that he *must* continue to live, somehow, after the body dies.

It may be both sad and unnecessary for the natural questions about death to be left without hope of reasonable answer. Many who talk of science as the only sort of real knowledge say that there is no scientific basis for hope that man may

live another life on earth. But the "science" we know today covers only a very small part of the things which need to be understood. All that a scientist can say is that he has as yet found no way to "prove" that the soul lives on when the body dies. And the man of religion who says "there is only *one* true teaching of what happens to the soul after death" may also be mistaken, for he likewise offers no evidence that his conception of immortality is alone tenable.

We began with some thoughts of the *Upanishads* in mind, for these teachings were intended to "loosen up" man's attachment to mundane preoccupations. Such a loosening can help a politician become a statesman, a partisan parent become a wise and more helpful mother or father. Such a loosening leads out of the creedal forms of religion—which are so often political in their emotional quality—and focuses upon the image of Man as a being of infinite spiritual potency.

There are these verses:

The knower is never born nor dies, nor is it from anywhere, nor did it become anything. Unborn, eternal, immemorial, this ancient is not slain when the body is slain.

If the slayer thinks to slay it, if the slain thinks it is slain, neither of them understand; this slays not nor is slain.

Smaller than small, greater than great, this Self is hidden in the heart of man.

Though seated, it travels far; though at rest, it goes everywhere—this bright one who is joy without rejoicing.

Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address asked his countrymen to consider the sober possibility that the mere fact of physical preservation of the Union after the Civil War could not undo the psychic scars of slavery. A hundred years, even, said Lincoln, might be but a partial time of purgation—the final cleansing to be accomplished only by a truer determination to establish in this land "a new order of ages." Lincoln, in his way, might be said to have been a natural upanishadic teacher of his time. But the

greatest of such teachers is history itself, read in terms of the eternal interplay of the forces within us all, which either elevate or degrade the human spirit.

These things are not easy to teach, nor will these words, certainly, accomplish the teaching. None the less, we could wish that our children were today in school—in a school sensitive to these larger dimensions of a death which is also a world tragedy.

FRONTIERS Toward a Free Press

ONE of the magazines which MANAS receives on an exchange basis is *Liberation*, a monthly which devotes its space to as many of the senses of nonviolent revolution as its editors are able to find. By the logic of the calendar, we should now proceed to an examination of the December issue of *Liberation*, but we have on hand the one for November, and it is so good and so little dated by the passage of thirty days that this offense against timeliness seems unimportant.

Early in the issue is a story on the Quebec-Washington-Guantanamo Walk for Peace and Freedom, an undertaking sponsored by the Committee for Nonviolent Action, involving a team of twenty-one participants, two of them Negro. (Other Negroes join the walk from time to time, as it proceeds through various regions of the South.) The walkers carry signs saying "We Are Walking to Cuba for Peace," "No Invasion of Cuba," "Soviet Troops and U.S. Marines Leave Cuba," and, to show the Walk's identification with the Negro civil rights struggle, "Freedom Now."

"The long-run effects of the walk through the tense and explosive Southland," the *Liberation* story says, "will be intangible, stemming from personal encounters." By Oct. 31, the Walk had reached Atlanta, Georgia, having met the full spectrum of reactions from spectators—all the way from "God bless you's" to eggs, tomatoes, and stones. In Virginia and North and South Carolina, the Walk usually had the assistance of the police. The violence came in Georgia, where the police seemed to care less about their democratic "image." In general, the initial reaction of city officials has been hostile, but after hours of talk with the Walk's leaders, city after city modified its position. (Sometimes a high cost is paid by the Walkers for this gain. According to a later report, in Griffin, Ga., fearing that leafleting would tend to arouse the Negro community, the city police, aided by the sheriff

and members of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, seized the walkers and took them to the city jail. Those who sat down or went limp were given painful electric shocks in vulnerable parts of the body, with a cattle-prodder. This treatment amounted to torture and was applied to men and women, whites and Negroes. After much explanation, the city authorities realized they had misinterpreted the Walk's intentions and, dismayed by the failure of their methods to change its route, allowed the walkers to complete their course. The details of the ordeal suffered by the Walkers during arrest and in the Griffin jail are horrifying, both in pain inflicted and in the brutality of the men who used the cattle-prodder. Police who took no part were emotionally affected by the scene: From Griffin, the Walk proceeded to Macon, where, again, an ordinance against leafleting was arbitrarily invoked. The walkers, holding that its enforcement abridged both human and constitutional rights, gave out leaflets and were dragged to jail. Most of them received sentences of from three to thirteen days of labor at the stockade.)

Another article in the November *Liberation* recounts the recent adventures of Julian Beck and his wife, Judith Malina, co-founders of the Living Theatre and the General Strike for Peace. A note on the Becks' practice of dramatic art:

When critics evaluate the Living Theatre, they write of its dramatic accomplishments, its many prizes won in the United States and on two highly successful European tours, its fine productions of *Many Loves*, *The Connection*, and *The Brig*, among others. But when Julian Beck speaks of the success of the theatre, he stresses "the development of actors who aren't typical actors"—the kind of people who are enthusiastic about being part of a gypsy band that will make theatre available to people who have no idea what a play is.

Last October, with only two remaining performances of *The Brig* scheduled (from which the cast would get its final salaries), agents of the Bureau of Internal Revenue arrived to padlock the theater, their idea being to confiscate the company's practically non-existent assets in behalf

of unpaid federal taxes. When the I.R. Agents refused to let the actors do the last two shows, the company staged a "dramatic" sit-down in the theatre. Finally, the actors gave a bootleg performance of *The Brig* to a delighted and determined audience that had climbed into the theatre by way of the roof. Actors, stage-hands and directors were all arrested and charged with impeding a federal officer's pursuit of duty. However, during the three-day circus of the Living Theatre's resistance to being closed up, so much support and friendly publicity was aroused that the Becks will now have the finances to establish a touring theatre that will give free performances before audiences in parks, schools, churches, and public squares. "One of the finest things that came out of this whole business," said Julian Beck, "was the extension of civil disobedience and the sit-in to new areas other than civil rights and peace. The ordinary person has no idea how much power he has at his disposal if he will only say 'No' to the government instead of allowing it to run his life for him."

The point, here, is not that the Living Theatre pulled a razzle-dazzle on the Bureau of Internal Revenue, but that the tight bureaucratic strait jacket of "legality" which our acquisitive society has developed leaves practically no room at all for the kind of free-wheeling artistic expression that original people are capable of, and that this becomes acutely manifest in the case of the theatre, where at least a minimum of organization, apparatus, and real estate is necessary. Whether or not you think the Living Theatre company behaved properly, it is certain that looser, more libertarian arrangements ought to exist, and this without requiring a lot of elaborate money-raising, getting of non-profit charters, and other legal shenanigans to which no artist should be subjected. This is a *serious* matter; a culture *breathes* by means of its arts. An intelligent, viable society will learn how to avoid penalizing people for being creative, courageous, and eager to enrich the common life in ways that other people have not thought of before. It is really silly

to insist that the legal conventions devised to regulate acquisitive entrepreneurs should be applied without exception to everyone else.

We wanted to take note of at least seven or eight of the articles in this issue of *Liberation*, all of them exceptionally good. But our space has run out. Always, in *Liberation*, there is penetrating commentary on current political affairs by A. J. Muste, a man who has been a peace-oriented observer and leader of pacifist action projects for at least thirty years. And in this issue Thomas Hayden and Richard Flacks conduct a searching discussion of the present "period of changing attitudes, policies and institutions—the test ban being symbolic of the entry into a new period." Theodore Roszak asks those who are horrified at the killing of four Negro children in Birmingham, Alabama, to consider that the men who threw this bomb, "twisted by fear and savage with anger, struck out in what they must have thought was their own defense: the defense of values and institutions in which they believed." If they, feeling threatened, turned to violence, what persuaded them that violence could help? The trust in violence is spawned not alone in Birmingham, but "at every missile base and radiation laboratory and munitions factory and submarine yard in America: wherever child-killing is planned and its weapons perfected."

Liberation is published at \$4 a year at 5 Beekman St., New York 38, N.Y.