

THE HEALER'S LOST ART

ONE thing that the talented members of our society are good at is diagnosis. But perhaps that goes too far. Diagnosis is said to identify a disease or ill and then to establish its causes, but the critics of our time are effective and precise only in the accounts of symptoms. Actual causes seem to come in layers—that is, there are causes behind or beneath causes. How far back in the chain of causation must you go to find the *real* cause of a happening that is accompanied by pain? Did we do something wrong, or can we blame "nature"? The symptoms of our troubles, however, are well known to us. We have figures on the incidence of disease by races and age-groups. The occurrence of crime is broken down in the same way. We know that in some areas the divorce rate equals or exceeds the marriage rate. Alcoholism and drug use have mounted to frightening proportions and increases in addiction seem likely to continue.

We know that most people who once lived and worked on farms have moved to the cities, looking for excitement and work, or both, and that the cities have become overcrowded places of disorder and fear, where children are likely to grow up over-stimulated, unhealthy, and often without hope. We know that fewer and fewer families are now able to purchase their own homes, and that rents and food prices are turning large sections of the middle class into poor people who worry about maintaining even ordinary decencies. We know that people with enough money to buy healthful food don't eat what would be good for them. We know that big business is absorbing little business and placing the distribution of needed goods and services in the indifferent paws of bureaucratic monsters.

The newspapers give us daily reports on the incidence of violence around the world, and on the "progress" of various wars, which seem never to

let up. We have carefully written books on the displacement from the land of peasants in the Far East, and on the inroads of the multinational corporations in South America and elsewhere. Agricultural historians tell us why Greece and some parts of Africa have little top soil left and how much good land is lost year after year, to erosion, exploitive cultivation, and real estate developers in the United States. The rain forests are being destroyed at a furious rate, making native peoples homeless and the baked soil non-productive. We have figures on the pollution of water, air, and earth. The output of fisheries is going down. Mercury and other contaminants are getting into the food fish. Meanwhile the food processors are adulterating what almost all people eat. They put too much sugar in cereal for children, and too much water in the beef cattle on feed lots. We send abroad dangerous medical drugs prohibited by law in the United States. We teach nursing mothers to switch to formulas they don't know how to use.

We are cutting down trees faster than we plant them. We are exhausting fuels that cannot be replaced. We are encouraging a technology that makes us absolutely dependent on imports of scarce materials, supplying excuse to government to protect our "vital interests" around the world. We have the spectacle of women appealing to the Supreme Court in order to get into the army, while the Selective Service System (or a spokesman) predicts that half the young men of draft age may declare themselves conscientious objectors. And so on.

Social and psychological critics try to get behind these symptoms with interpretive essays. One writer shows (with evidence and logic) that Americans are becoming a nation of narcissists. A columnist points out that television is destroying culture in the home. The schools, others say, are

not doing their job. Still others explain why they can't do their job and argue that it is folly to expect much of anything from tinkering with the curriculum and teacher-training programs. The higher learning, we are told, is in the hands of professors interested only in advancing their specialties and their positions on the academic status ladder, while the institutions they serve are in hock to the Department of Defense. We have figures on all this and on practically everything else that is making us uncomfortable.

The reports seem very specific, sometimes with photographs giving visual evidence—air filled with smog, fields washing away, children playing in filthy slums, drunks in the gutter, the bodies of the hanged or the slaughtered by machine-gun fire—that all these terrible things are really happening. Such reports sell papers and magazines. Not in the least attractive, they have attractive power. If there is anything we should be convinced of by now, it is that the people in power are either helpless or doing practically everything wrong. Meanwhile, the authors of analytical think-pieces say that the powerful really can't help what they do; that if they try to do the right thing they'll lose their power. And so on.

There is another activity that critics pursue, but they are not very good at it, and understandably so. This is covered by the terms "prognosis" and "prescription." Prognostication means to anticipate the course of recovery from the usual course of disease. Individual sick people, we know, get well in stages. The organism resumes normal function, step by step. A healing wound may still look awful, but the doctor isn't upset. He knows how a healing wound is supposed to look. He may regard a fever with relief and satisfaction instead of alarm. He explains why to an anxious mother and father, and they stop worrying.

Such simple illustrations do service for a vast range of ills which doctors know about (most of the time) and we trust their reassurances. It is not upsetting to see a young football player going

down the street with the support of a crutch. The cast looks burdensome and his progress is slow, but in a month or so he won't need it. He's getting well. That's the prognosis and we accept it. The doctor has set other broken legs and knows how they heal, how long it takes, and what to do to make the leg good as new, or almost. The important point, however, is that the leg is restored within a controlled situation. The factors are defined and their operation has known timing. Getting well, in a great many cases, is part of the normal process of a closed system, and therefore predictable.

But what about the ills of an entire society? What is the right treatment for a given symptom and ill, and to whom do you apply for the prescription (and the accompanying prognosis, if any)? The economists? The anthropologists? The police department or the FBI? Or do you talk to a moralist, and should it be a tough moralist or a tender one? A few years ago, when New York was on the verge of bankruptcy, various moralists declared that the remedy was quite simple: New York—that is, all New Yorkers one supposes—would just have to shape up and stop spending money the tax rate could not provide. New York is now said to have a surplus of funds, and it would be of minor interest to know what sort of action, or combination of actions, led to this comfortable condition, but the present and doubtless temporary solvency of one city may have little effect, one way or the other, on what is really wrong with the urban areas of the United States. Is the street-crime rate going down? Do people now want to move to the city because of increased educational opportunities for their children? Where do you look to see whether or not somebody's prognosis applies?

Twenty years ago a New York social worker, Julius Horwitz, wrote a novel, *The Inhabitants*, a thinly disguised account of what he encountered from day to day in his work. In one place he described a "symptom" that was common enough in those days. Whether, now, there are more or

fewer such symptoms in New York would be a matter of guess work, but Horwitz's book is still a clue to New York's underlying problems. He tells how, one day, a social worker found waiting at his office a young mother who needed help. In his words:

I saw Miss Fletcher sitting beside the bare-top desk near the window. She held her baby across her knee, burping her. She looked up when she saw me. And I immediately saw that she had come to the Service like everyone else. She had no other place to flee to.

Just as I crossed the middle of the room a Negro girl stood up and screamed. I saw her screaming at the interview desk of Mrs. Nivens. She turned toward the wooden benches to scream. The people on the benches stared dumbly at her wide-open mouth. Mrs. Nivens sat quietly at her desk waiting for the girl to stop screaming. In an instant the girl did stop screaming.

"Why did she scream?" Miss Fletcher asked me.

"Probably because Mrs. Nivens asked her a question that she couldn't give an honest answer to."

"Do people often scream here like that?"

"Some do it loudly, most do it quietly. But everybody screams."

Miss Fletcher took her comfort where she could find it. She sat up her baby and wiped its face with a diaper. The baby smiled. . . .

The Negro girl screamed again. Miss Fletcher dropped the bottle she was holding. The Negro girl broke just as the bottle broke. She stood up screaming, "I'm human! I'm human! I'm human! You dirty son of a bitch, can't you see I'm human!"

The cry of being human was the most commonplace cry in the Service. It's the spatial cry of the beggar. Look the next time you see a beggar. The successful beggar always suggests that he too is human. I don't know why we should have beggars. But beggars beg you to look on their face. And they are vicious when you turn from their face. Almost like the anger of a god. . . .

"What does she want?" Miss Fletcher asked.

"She wants to be human too."

The cry of that girl may not have been the same as a beggar's cry—not planned, that is, or

calculating. But Horwitz's explanation stands. She wanted to be human, or *recognized* as human. A thoughtful comment on this universal human longing occurs in a paper by Anthony Brandt in *Psychology Today* for August. This writer says:

The personal identity we so want to assert is inescapably tied to the world, to the Other, upon whom it depends for acknowledgment and recognition. No one can be a person in a social vacuum. To the degree that we coerce the Other's recognition, however, that recognition loses in value; it becomes insincere, dishonest, worthless: counterfeit goods.

Self-assertion of that kind lacks discrimination, indeed, it resembles Freud's unconscious, all drive and desire, unable to say no; it is like an anonymous natural force that has no real identity of its own. Identity is the product of judgment, of discrimination between what is and is not, what kind of behavior rightly belongs to us and what doesn't. Identity is a moral achievement. It appears, and we acknowledge it, in the quality of the choices we make, the moral acuity with which we say no to ourselves.

Well, that sounds quite accurate. But would you repeat it to the Negro girl who screamed? Or to a persistent beggar? Under what circumstances do people *hear* things like that? A prognosis for the narcissist society of our time is implied by what is said here, at least in terms of subjective stages of recovery. Brandt speaks of attitudes that need to be assumed by all to achieve authentic human identity, and doing this could transform our cities if enough people got to work on themselves. As an act of reason and faith, we say that it *would* change the cities, but we can't possibly tell how. Nor have we any idea of how such a change, at its beginning, would first surface in noticeable behavior. An early prognosis, in short, seems practically impossible, although once some good things started happening they would get attention from people who might then report them in papers like *Self-Reliance* and *Rain*.

We know a little about how individuals find balance in their lives. A. H. Maslow made the study of finding balance his major task, and toward the end of his life turned his attention to

how *societies* find balance, or achieve it. He located what was for him the key to social balance in a paper by Ruth Benedict, on the concept and process of synergy. Dr. Benedict, who was one of Maslow's teachers, had asked:

Is there any sociological condition which correlates with strong aggression and any that correlates with low aggression? All our ground plans achieve the one or the other in proportion as their social forms provide areas of mutual advantage and eliminate acts and goals that are at the expense of others in the group. . . .

I shall speak of cultures with low synergy where the social structure provides for acts which are mutually opposed and counteractive, and cultures with high synergy where it provides for acts which are mutually reinforcing.

Our society, plainly enough, is (in her words) a society "with low social synergy where the advantage of one individual becomes a victory over another, and the majority who are not victorious must shift as they can." How many of our problems result from the methods of "the victorious," and from what the "not victorious" feel compelled to do in shifting as they can?

Curiously, all synergistic or "good" societies seem to be "primitive." When studying the Northern Blackfoot Indians, Maslow was puzzled by the way they measured human distinction:

I remember my confusion as I came into the society and tried to find out who was the richest man, and found that the rich man had nothing. When I asked the white secretary of the reserve who was the richest man, he mentioned a man none of the Indians had mentioned, that is, the man who had on the books the most stock, the most cattle and horses. When I came back to my Indian informants and asked them about Jimmy McHugh, about all his horses, they shrugged with contempt. "He keeps it," they said, and, as a consequence, they hadn't even thought to regard him as wealthy. White-Headed Chief was "wealthy" even though he owned nothing. In what way then did virtue pay? The men who were formally generous in this way were the most admired, most respected, and the most loved men in the tribe. These were the men who benefited the tribe, the men they could be proud of, the men who warmed their hearts.

To say it another way, if White-Headed Chief, this generous man, had discovered a gold mine or stumbled across some pile of wealth, everyone in the tribe would have been happy because of his generosity. If he had been an ungenerous man, as happens so frequently in our society, then the tendency would have been as it is for our friends who have suddenly acquired great wealth; it is apt to set them over against us. Our institutions encourage the development of jealousy, envy, resentment, distance, and finally a real likelihood of enmity, in a situation like this.

Now we seem to be getting somewhere! The culture, through its institutions, controls how people behave. All we have to do, then, is reform our institutions. But this is a vast and all-inclusive task of which we know almost nothing. We have tried very hard, over the past two centuries, to reform the institutions of the American Indians, with practically no success. Instead, we very nearly destroyed the American Indians, as writers like Vine Deloria and Russell Means make clear. Moreover, attempts to change our own institutions, as we know, are likely to evoke the charge, "UnAmerican!", even though the guidelines for the proposed reforms are right out of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln or others of similar fame. One of the Founding Fathers said that what America needs is self-regenerating institutions, an observation of unequalled sagacity, but no one has found out how to design and get them into operation.

This brings us to a (somewhat embellished) fairy tale of unknown origin. It begins with a man wandering through a town, windfall money burning a hole in his pocket. He was ready to *spend!* He saw a store with a sign over the entrance which said, "All that your Heart Desires." He went in and spoke to a clerk—who, it is said, was really an Angel. "You mean that I can buy whatever I want most?" he asked. The Angel said, "Exactly right. Whatever you want, we have, and we'll be glad to know that you want it."

The man pondered. He didn't want to ask for the wrong thing. He thought for a while and then

said "I would like some brotherhood, companionship, generosity, and thoughtful regard for other people. Yes, that's what we need most where I live—and in other places, too. I'll buy some of those good things and spread them around." The Angel went out back and returned a moment later with a small paper bag that seemed very light when the customer took it. "You mean," he said, "it's all in there?"

"Oh yes," the Angel said. "But perhaps you don't understand. Not everyone does. You see, we sell only seeds, and we'd even give them away, except that these days no one expects to get something worth having free. We don't advertise that we just sell seeds, because if we did, then almost nobody would come into the store. But our real business is trying to get people to plant seeds and nourish their growth."

Applying the moral, you could say that where ancestral culture rules, as in tribal societies, there's only one store in town. Whatever you want, that's where you go, and the clerks discriminate: they push some seeds and hold back on others. It's a method that used to get results.

But we, unlike traditional societies, have free enterprise, and aggressively deceptive advertising. We are also in the habit of ordering the seeds of jealousy, envy, resentment, isolation, and even for a real likelihood of enmity. That's what the clerks now expect us to want, and that's what the sales department knows will sell. Changing institutions will involve making very different choices spontaneous and habitual.

So, as we now are, it is no wonder that our diagnosing writers don't know how to provide prognosis. The step-by-step stages of recovery remain almost unknown, and some of the early signs of progress might look like compromises and failures to the moralists who frown on everything short of perfection, even right at the start.

Well, we do have one sort of prognosis, however inexplicit. It is the one Gandhi offered to

his working colleagues in India. He wrote in his magazine *Harijan*, at different times:

The real India lies in the 7,000,000 villages. If India is to make its full contribution to the building up of a stable world order, it is this vast mass of humanity that has to be made to live again. We have to tackle the triple malady which holds our villages fast in its grip: (1) want of corporate sanitation; (2) deficient diet; (3) inertia. . . . The villagers are not interested in their own welfare. They don't appreciate modern sanitary methods. They don't want to exert themselves beyond scratching their farms or doing such labor as they are used to. These difficulties are real and serious. But they must not baffle us.

We must have an unquenchable faith in our mission. We must be patient with the people. We are ourselves novices in village work. We have to deal with a chronic disease. Patience and perseverance, if we have them, overcome mountains of difficulties. We are like nurses who may not leave their patients because they are reported to have an incurable disease. . . .

This was all that Gandhi felt able to say about the prospects for recovery in village societies. He made no glowing promises. And the most that Gandhi himself could do, even in a long lifetime, was to give away some seeds with instructions for their nurture. Some of those seeds have since begun to grow, but a more encouraging prognosis is still beyond the reach of strictly amateur healers. The record needs building up.

REVIEW

A TRANSPARENT PROSE

WENDELL BERRY, a moral man who does not moralize, has put together eleven selections from his published works to make another book, *Recollected Essays 1965-1980*, issued by North Point Press (\$7.50 in paperback). Drawn upon are *The Long-Legged House*, *The Hidden Wound*, *A Continuous Harmony*, *The Unforeseen Wilderness*, and *The Unsettling of America*, all books which have had attention here. One contribution, "The Making of a Marginal Farm," appeared in 1980 in *Smithsonian* and supplies a fitting conclusion to a book that becomes in effect the record of a life. Admirers of Berry, who are many, will want to have this book, either for themselves or as a gift. There is reason enough for admiration. One writer has called Berry "the closest thing we have to a modern Thoreau," and Edward Abbey declares him "the best essayist now working in America." Both estimates seem just.

There are at once literary, cultural, and agricultural reasons for reading Wendell Berry. He came from a farming background, decided to be a writer, and then went back to farming in order to get first things first in his thinking and work.

"I am," he says in *The Long-Legged House*, "a placed person." His farm in Port Royal, Kentucky, is his access to universal meanings. He explores the grain and identifies riches of the world—also its infections and mutilations—in this microcosm of seventy-five acres. He dwells, in, on, and above the land.

For longer than they remember, both sides of my family have lived within five or six miles of this riverbank where the old Camp stood and where I sit writing now. And so my connection with this place comes not only from the intimate familiarity that began in babyhood, but also from the even more profound and mysterious knowledge that is inherited handed down in memories and names and gestures and feelings, and in tones and inflections of voice.

For reasons that could perhaps be explained, I never lost affection for this place, as American writers have almost traditionally lost affection for their rural birthplace. I have loved the country from the beginning, and I believe I was grown before I ever really confronted the possibility that I could live in another place. As a writer, then, I have had this place as my fate. For me, it was never a question of *finding* a subject, but rather of learning what to do with the subject I had had from the beginning and could not escape. Whereas most of this country's young writers seem able to relate to no place at all, or to several, I am related absolutely to one.

The "old Camp" Berry refers to is the long-legged house, put up by his grandmother's brother on the bank of the Kentucky River. As a boy Berry inherited it as a place to play, and later, after some rebuilding, it became the home where he brought his bride. Eventually, the Camp was almost washed away by flood waters, and Berry used the lumber, poplar and walnut, to construct a new house higher on the slope. But it was while he lived in the Camp that Berry "grew up":

In those days I began the long difficult realization of the complexity of the life of this place. Until then—at the level of consciousness, at least I had thoughtlessly accepted the common assumption of my countrymen that the world is merely an inert surface that man lives on and uses. I don't believe that I had yet read anything on the subject of ecology. But I had read Thoreau and Gilbert White and a little of Fabre, and from seeing natural history displays I knew the concept of the habitat group. And that summer, I remember, I began to think of myself living within rather than on the life of the place. I began to think of my life as one among many, and one kind among many kinds. I began to see how little of the beauty and the richness of the world is of human origin, and how superficial and crude and destructive—even self-destructive—is man's conception of himself as the owner of the land and the master of nature and the center of the universe. The Camp with its strip of riverbank woods, like all other places of the earth, stood under its own widening column of sky, in the neighborhood of the stars lighted a little within the darkness. It was more unknown than known. It was populated by creatures whose ancestors were here long before my ancestors, and who had been more faithful to it than I had been, and who would live as well the day after my death as the day before.

These were not random thoughts. It seems clear that they came over Berry because his feelings were antennae of mind which reached out into the small—and the larger—world which surrounded him in that place; that somehow the tendrils of his wondering grasped stems and twigs of the life forms all about; and that an extension of his natural being was the result.

Seen as belonging there with other native things, my own nativeness began a renewal of meaning. The sense of belonging began to turn around. I saw that if I belonged here, which I felt I did, it was not because anything here belonged to me. A man might own a whole country and be a stranger in it. If I belonged in this place it was because I belonged to it. And I began to understand that so long as I did not know the place fully, or even adequately, I belonged to it only partially. That summer I began to see, however dimly, that one of my ambitions, perhaps my governing ambition, was to belong fully to this place, to belong as the thrushes and the herons and the muskrats belonged, to be altogether at home here. That is still my ambition. But now I have come to see that it proposes an enormous labor. It is a spiritual ambition, like goodness. The wild creatures belong to the place by nature, but as a man I can belong to it only by understanding and by virtue. It is an ambition I cannot hope to succeed in wholly, but I have come to believe that it is the most worthy of all.

These meditative interludes come throughout the book, making the reader acquainted with the writer, who reveals himself in this matter of fact way, even as he tells about the birds and animals and plants that people the Kentucky River country. There is some paradox here. Berry says he lives in Port Royal, Kentucky, and provides description of the region in ways that make you want to go there, to see what he sees—if one can—and feel something of what he has felt. Yet the fact is that he lives in his mind. All that he sees and feels and knows is in the organism of his thought—call it the human dimension of nature—created, as he says, by understanding and some shy virtue. It seems just to say that writing of this sort gives objective substance to generative acts of the mind. We sometimes say of such works, "It's just imagination," a comment needing the

reply that all that is authentically human is grown within us by the precise and sustained power of the imagination.

He adds:

At the same time my days here have taught me the futility of living for the future. Men who drudge all their lives in order to retire happily are the victims of a cheap spiritual fashion invented for their enslavement. It is no more possible to imagine "how it will be," and to linger over the task is to prepare a disappointment. The tomorrow I hope for may very well be worse than today. There is great waste and destructiveness in our people's desire to "get somewhere." I myself have traveled several thousand miles to arrive at Lane's Landing, five miles from where I was born, and the knowledge I gained from my travels was mainly that I was born into the same world as everybody else.

Days come to me here when I rest in spirit, and am involuntarily glad. I sense the adequacy of the world, and believe that everything I need is here. I do not strain after ambition or heaven. I feel no dependence on tomorrow. I do not long to travel to Italy or Japan, but only across the river or up the hill into the woods.

Least of all, however, is Berry a recluse. His essays deal with war, pollution, ruin of the landscape, waste of the soil, the ravages of strip mining, and the various bondages into which men enter so eagerly. There is never any echo of another writer in Berry's prose, although his obligations to literature are evident. But his debt to the loam of the earth is greater. Of the north slopes of his farm, now covered with briars, sumac, and young walnut trees, he says:

Tobacco of an extraordinary quality was once grown here, and then the soil wore thin, and these places were given up for the more accessible ridges that were not so steep, where row cropping made better sense anyway. But now, under the thicket growth, a mat of bluegrass has grown to testify to the good nature of this ground. It was fine dirt that lay here once, and I am far from being able to say that I could have resisted the temptation to plow it. My understanding of what is best for it is the tragic understanding of hindsight, the awareness that I have been taught what was here to be lost by the loss of it.

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. .

We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to *know* the world and to learn what is good for it. We must learn to cooperate in its processes, and to yield to its limits. But even more important, we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.

From time to time one comes across a wiry and muscular prose informing the reader that its writer is convinced of what he says, that he is able to say little else; and in such work there is also a transparency which means that the writer has acted on what he believes. Berry's work seems a help in learning to recognize such writing.

COMMENTARY

THE CONCRETE DESTINY OF MAN

MUCH of the quotation from Wendell Berry in this week's Review speaks of his sense of place, his feeling of identity with the country into which he was born; and of how, over the years, he found there the stance on which he relies. There is, it seems, in all of us that center or point of origin which, when found, describes the circle of our being, releasing the radius which reaches out to make our world. Without a firm center, the flowering of an "incarnation" cannot take place.

This is not a new idea, but is often expressed by those who have their being in the field generated by the conscious presence of a self in the world. There are these passages in Ortega's *Meditations on Quixote*:

Man reaches his full capacity when he acquires complete consciousness of his circumstances. Through them he communicates with the universe.

Circumstance! *Circum stantia!* That is, the mute things which are all around us. Very close to us they raise their silent faces with an expression of humility and eagerness as if they needed our acceptance of their offering and at the same time were ashamed of the apparent simplicity of their gift. . . .

We must try to find for our circumstance, such as it is and precisely in its very limitation and peculiarity, its appropriate place in the immense perspective of the world. We must not stop in perpetual ecstasy before hieratic values, but conquer the right place among them for our individual life. In short, the reabsorption of circumstance is the concrete destiny of man.

My natural exit toward the universe is through the mountain passes of the Guadarrama or the plain of Ontigola. This sector of circumstantial reality forms the other half of my person; only through it can I integrate myself and be fully myself. . . . I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I cannot save myself. . . .

Having exercised our eyes in gazing at the world map, let us now concentrate on the Guadarrama. Perhaps we shall find nothing profound, but we may be sure that the defect and the sterility derive from our glance. There is also a *logos* of the Manzanares

River: this very humble stream, this liquid irony which laps the foundations of our capital, undoubtedly bears a drop of spirituality among its few drops of water. For there is nothing on earth through which some divine nerve does not pass: the difficulty lies in reaching this nerve and making it react.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves A MAN TO STUDY

ABOUT the time Joseph Epstein's *Masters: Portraits of Great Teachers* came in for review, we received from a reader a copy of the text of a 1979 television broadcast (produced by Ray Hubbard Associates)—*Lewis Mumford: Toward Human Architecture*. The participants in this program—either in person or by quotation from their writings—were men (and a woman) who know Mumford or have been influenced by his work, and Mumford himself is strongly present in his own words. Lewis Mumford, one might think, ought to have been included among the teachers in Mr. Epstein's book, but may have been omitted because happily he is still alive!

Yet he *is* in the book. In an essay on F. O. Matthiessen, a distinguished professor of English, Kenneth Lynn speaks briefly of the launching of the teacher's career:

When Matthiessen entered Yale in the fall of 1919, *Moby Dick* was shelved under "Cetology" in the university library. "It was hardly an accident," he later recalled, "that when I graduated from college in the early 1920s, I knew very little of our own literature except some contemporary poetry that I had read with my friends." That he started to immerse himself in American literature as a graduate student at Harvard a few years later was decidedly not because he was studying with George Lyman Kittredge, Irving Babbitt, and John Livingston Lowes, but rather because he had read, and been inspired by, a new book of Lewis Mumford's, *The Golden Day* (1926)."

What can explain the catalysis and leaven of a man like Mumford? What will throw light on the capacity of a writer to reach into and fire up other minds—some of the best minds—of his time?

Mumford has written about architecture, cities, civilization, and *ideas*. The television program focused on his discussion of architecture and planning, but the substance of what he says ought not to be classified. This is the point. His

influence has resulted from the way in which he applies basic moral and philosophic conceptions to the grain of life. You feel the power of his ideas because they illuminate the interrelations which shape our everyday experience. As he justly says of himself:

The only thing I have contributed, probably, to our thought on these subjects [architecture and cities] is that from the beginning, I've been a generalist as well as a specialist; and the past and present and future are constantly present in my mind, as I think they should be in every other person's mind if he wants to be fully alive. We have, therefore, to deal with a generation that, by my definition, is not yet fully alive, that thinks that the present is the only thing that counts and the only thing that requires attention, and therefore, they lose the key to what actually should be done.

All his long life Mumford has been a designer and distributor of such keys. What, for example, is art? Tolstoy wrote a book to answer this question, and it is worth reading. Mumford says something else in three paragraphs which open the program. The Buddha would have agreed with Tolstoy. The Greeks would have agreed with Mumford. As a teacher, Mumford starts with an illustration:

The Brooklyn Bridge presents one of the most interesting problems in the complementarity of form and function, because the work itself, conceived by engineers as a practical means of getting people from New York to Brooklyn and back again, was a purely engineering structure, a formidable one. And in the actual planning of it and the working out of it, very difficult problems in engineering were met by the elder Roebling and carried through by his son, Washington.

"Hurrah for engineering," one says. Ah, but it was more than that—engineering, when carried through to the last degree—which involved also the construction of the towers—and to say nothing of the foundation, which was a problem in itself. But the construction of the towers. How were they to relate to this spider-like form of the iron work, this great combination of delicacy and sweeping curves with the solidity and strength, the formidable strength, of the towers? Was that going to be . . . was there any solution for that in the past annals of architecture? None that I know of.

The people who say this was a work of art state something that's true. But it wasn't intended to be a work of art. It was intended to be the best of its kind. That kind happened to be engineering. But art enters—when the spirit enters into a work and seizes hold of the entire problem, what was once a practical matter becomes what we finally see, a real work of art.

The promise, problems, and horrors of the city made a subject to which Mumford devoted much of his life. He didn't believe that cities are hopeless affairs that should be abandoned and razed from the face of the earth. Cities have extraordinary uses, especially for people like Mumford. One of them served the young Mumford well:

The great New York Public Library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue was one of the classic monuments and one of the very best in New York City. And I spent a good part of my younger days in that library, getting part of the education that I couldn't receive in any university or college at the time.

On the subject of cities and city planning, Mumford addresses a characteristic blindness of our time:

The rich experience of a city is the fundamental basis of all intelligent planning. A great many planners have an enormous amount of abstract knowledge. They've studied all the statistics. They've created abstract models of what a city should be and by what efforts it might be changed. But very often I find—this is a basic lack in all our education—the actual experience of a city as a living fact is absent from their lives.

I find that talking to students. Students sometimes—when I was at Leverett House at Harvard, they would come around and consult me about the courses they were taking. And they'd tell me about a study they were making of a particular neighborhood, and the various statistics they had gathered about it. And I would ask, simply, "Have you been there and looked at it?" And again and again—this is true of both planning students and architects—they never thought of going to the place and looking at the site, or finding out what they could through their own eyes, through their own noses, through the effect of the environment on them. They were taking—they were taking statistics, the sort of

thing—abstract knowledge—that you can transmit to a computer. They were forgetting that the most valuable of all computers were discovered and developed long ago, at least 50,000 years ago, in the human brain; and that a computer is a poor, underdimensioned, second-rate instrument, compared to the human brain, which can take in the qualities of the environment, and not merely the quantitative relations.

And this qualitative analysis, which is what is produced by experience, which opens the world of the humanities—it opens the world of feeling and emotion, of art and of love—is absent from our reports. It is absent from the concept of the city. So people think that they have done very well when they've crowded a million more people on a profitable site, or have done something equally stupid, or have multiplied the number of ways in which the city can be destroyed by different means of transportation. But never once have they asked themselves what they're doing to themselves, what they're doing to other human beings, by concentrating on the mechanical means and forgetting that life is the important thing that has to be kept in mind all the time.

Lewis Mumford has a feeling of fitness, a sense of proportion which pervades all that he has done. He has a gift for illustration and animates his language with drama that makes his work memorable. His ethical instincts have given tone to his life. It is this almost unique combination of qualities, we think, that accounts for the continuing power of his influence. The man should be studied in or out of school.

FRONTIERS

Crosswinds in a Society without Values

THE larger America is rapidly becoming a society without clear values, a society that more and more advocates all manner of freedoms without any concrete understanding of what a society is or what freedom is, how freedom works within the limits of specific contexts, and without offering corresponding values like discipline, responsibility, relationship with others and with the planet, and such now casually dismissed values as work, love, willpower and so on. Increasingly, all values are held valid by opposing groups, and one simply takes one's style from the available market.

Few seem to have the slightest idea of what holds a culture together, what a meaningful life is. Lost people in great numbers wander the streets dementedly mumbling or moaning to themselves or others, in search of Lord knows what—life, no doubt, or love, or passion, but never thinking to look into their own hearts for any of what they so adamantly, so sadly and inanely, search for. Everyone seems to think that *they*—the imagined opposition—is to blame for the mess, when practically everyone is contributing to the confusion and violence by indecisiveness and the refusal to make *oneself* the daily offering to the gods, the universe—to put one's life and values on the line. Life anywhere/everywhere won't improve until this happens—and all this applies to me, too, to a certain extent. Such extreme violence and confusion freaks *everyone* out to one extent or another. Hard as it is to grasp in these chaotic times, however, a society, even one as basically gummed-up as ours, still depends on what *every single individual* cog in it does. What you do each minute does matter. This was apparently once much clearer to folks.

In the past many cultures were probably too regimented. We have the legends and poems of star-crossed lovers and runaway apprentices and slaves to tell us this. But these were still coherent cultures, in which people at least functioned, and

seemed to find some measure of joy and contentment, however small. Each person, no matter how lowly, fitted into the general social fabric in a specific way, sometimes without his or her soul's consent, and standards were recognized and mostly adhered to.

But now that we have left the land and/or the village or township, we have no absolute generally recognized standards, and where there are no standards the center, as Yeats so astutely observed, "does not hold." Thus we have absolutely atrocious murders and rapes by the barrel, and radical or terrorist groups shooting down perfectly innocent people instead of the generals and other leaders they would like to kill—often people whose sole "crime" is having been born into a Catholic or Jewish or Ibo or communist family or country. Terrorists are using the same violent means used by those they detest. Freedom, argues Camus, is not the "freedom to kill." Not *at random*, he might have added.

These same groups, sometimes including thoughtless feminists, can be heard on occasion criticizing something as lovely and innocent as the family—or childbirth itself. I keep wondering if any of these people ever loved anyone, man, woman or child (one suspects not). Or ever noticed the love and joy sometimes openly displayed by parent for child, or vice versa. Of course, many radicals themselves are products of bizarre bourgeois homes where the order of the day is likely to be an excess of cleanliness combined with garish tastes, cynicism, corruption, and a distracting sentimentality now underlined daily by TV advertising, with not a speck of love or warmth or spontaneity.

Naturally, one wants to eliminate all that and get down to basics. Hence our occasional veneration for the criminal or outlaw. In this sense the criminal is a hero—in the face of such an incomprehensible and outrageous mess, he at least does *something*, however misguided: A "strong human being made sick" says Nietzsche in Joyce Carol Oates' *The Edge of Impossibility*. An even

more startling passage from Nietzsche is unearthed. There he sees Christian society as emasculating and one in which a human being "necessarily degenerates into a criminal."

This is apparently true for an increasing number of people. But why? Perhaps the criminal is a part of ourselves which cannot restrain violent or anti-social impulses, a part we cannot fathom—the demonic part, let us say. And the criminal personality seems to have no better luck understanding his own demonic nature. So we have before us an unhealthy, almost hopelessly deranged society with stored-up "criminality" expressing itself in absolutely outrageous figures. One more call for more passion and love and warmth and inter-relation is not enough, though one must issue it. What we *really* need to do, however, is to grasp this elemental fact of the criminal as being some neglected part of ourselves—our repressed and distorted sexuality perhaps, our shunned and despised spiritual/artistic yearnings perhaps, or some baffling combination of all these impulses. The fact that pornography is now so widespread is no dismissal of my point. Pornography is just one more copout, a settling on lust as a solution to a most complex knotty issue. No one speaks of love anymore. Love is rather a joke, barely worth camping. People don't take each other seriously either.

A seemingly unrelated remark by Thomas Mann, quoted by Oates, may throw additional light on the matter. Mann is speaking of how the Christian Church, though tame and bourgeois beyond redemption, somehow manages to unleash the very "demonic powers" that so plague us. His conclusion is a real surprise: "To separate Church and religion means to give up separating the religious from madness." (*Edge of Impossibility*.) What can Mann mean by this? One possibility is that there is not enough of the religious retained in our churches, and that is certainly true. His remark mysteriously convinces, yet catches usual thought-mechanisms a bit off-

guard. The amount of sheer madness in the air might be indirect evidence of his insight, but how so? Looking deeper, perhaps Mann refers to our neglected religious "instinct," which, as I see it, is the attempt to comprehend the world man finds himself in, on awakening from the long lost world of sleep. This is not something to be lightly discounted, as all the chaotic interest in gurus and exotic "religions" will amply testify. The mystery, the wonder, the ecstasy, then, must be celebrated, danced out. It is exactly this wonder and awe that moderns seem to have so sadly lost.

Developing oneself into a balanced, coherent, and relatively sane and joyful person in this society—and staying there—is getting to be a horrendous chore. Pretty much a life's work, it is. And from my point of view this is exactly what too many do *not* work at, being too busy floating along with the latest fad or fancy, fact or frill or sensationalistic thrill. Passing over egoistic projections and romantic foppery, when you get right down to it, what are the actual realities of love? Simple relation. Communion. Sharing.

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NORM MOSER