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THE RENAISSANCE: ACT II

THE inspiration of the European Renaissance was philosophical and moral. It was other things besides, but first it was philosophical and moral. It constituted, as is so often said, the Rediscovery of Man. While the Renaissance had many spokesmen, those who recorded its conscious intentions with the greatest clarity were the Humanists, and the Humanists of Florence, where the Renaissance began, were Platonic philosophers. It fell to Pico della Mirandola, the youthful genius of the court of Lorenzo, to give expression to the spirit of awakening.

Pico's oration on the Dignity of Man is a fundamental document of the Renaissance. In it, Pico sets man off from the rest of creation as the being who makes his own destiny:

> Thou [Man], constrained by no limits, . . . shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. . . . As maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul and judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.

This is the claim and assertion of the Renaissance. Man's is the power and the responsibility—and the glory, if he chooses to achieve it. Wherever these ideas appear, there is a flowering of the Renaissance. Pico is man speaking to man. He is man speaking, not to bad men or good men, not to Italian men or German men, but to men everywhere, without qualification—to the spirit of self-conscious intelligence. For Pico, there is nothing else to invoke through human discourse.

Thus the Renaissance was the championship and the challenge of the human spirit. It appeals to nothing less and it can find nothing greater to appeal to. It finds within man himself the entire leverage for change in human action; it recognizes no other locus of power in human affairs.

Today, nearly five hundred years from the time of Pico, men are finding reasons to speak as Pico did. This, we may say, is the second act of the Renaissance. It is another chapter in the drama of man's discovery of his own responsibility. It is a renewal of the Renaissance challenge to man to find in himself the power to transform his life.

The voices of this discovery are very few, yet not so few, perhaps, as we suppose. Nor are "numbers," in this case, quite so important as they are assumed to be. Numbers were not important, to begin with, for M. K. Gandhi. What Gandhi accomplished for the world began with the accomplishment of a single man. Numbers are important only for those who believe more in the anti-human or subhuman forces than they do in the human forces. It is, moreover, the privilege and right of those who declare for the power of the human spirit—repeating Pico—to display high confidence in that power, as springing from self-generating resources. It is, as Shelley said—

> To love and bear, to hope till hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.

It happens that the voices we now desire to repeat are the voices of Americans, addressed to Americans. Yet here there is no mistake. Their cry is to Americans as *men.* They say, as Stringfellow Barr said some years ago, "Let's Join the Human Race!" and as he repeated in a recent *Nation* (Jan. 25) article. The fact that they address Americans is mere incident, or accident of birth; the call is to human beings.

First, we go back twelve years to recall the words of Lewis Mumford in the *Saturday Review* of March 2, 1946. Nothing has changed since he wrote this article, "Gentlemen: You Are Mad!"

If anything, matters have become worse. Mr. Mumford began:

> We in America are living among madmen. Madmen govern our affairs in the name of order and security. The chief madmen claim the titles of general, admiral, senator, scientist, administrator, Secretary of State, even President. And the fatal symptom of their madness is this: they have been carrying through a series of acts which will lead eventually to the destruction of mankind, under the solemn conviction that they are normal responsible people, living sane lives, and working for reasonable ends.
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> Soberly, day after day, the madmen continue to go through the undeviating motions of madness: motions so stereotyped, so commonplace, that they seem the normal motions of normal men, not the mass compulsions of people bent on total death. Without a public mandate of any kind, the madmen have taken it upon themselves to lead us by gradual stages to that final act of madness which will corrupt the face of the earth and blot out the nations of men, possibly put an end to all life on the planet itself. . . .
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> Why do we let the madmen go on with their game without raising our voices? Why do we keep our glassy calm in the face of this danger? There is a reason: we are madmen, too. We view the madness of our leaders as if it expressed a traditional wisdom and a common sense: we view them placidly, as a doped policeman might view with a blank, tolerant leer the robbery of a bank or the barehanded killing of a child or the setting of an infernal machine in a railroad station. Our failure to act is the measure of our madness. We look at the madmen and pass by.

Those other madmen, not ourselves, who are our leaders: do we suppose they *like* what they are doing? Only the super-madmen among them can possibly like what they are doing. But what else are they to do? They have a mandate from the people to do what they are doing. That is, they have been given no dramatic reason by the people to change what they are doing, and where, in history, have governments changed what they were doing without a dramatic reason from the people?

The contemporary theory of government is not of a government of supermen or demigods. The contemporary theory of government makes the governors servants of the people and their will. What is the will of the people? Godknows! The people have no particular will, these days. The people want to be relieved of responsibility. *Everybody* would like to be relieved of responsibility. The madmen in power have the habit, but not the capacity, of relieving the people of responsibility, so the dreadful present creeps sluggishly on, from one nightmare scene to another.

Mumford sees the issues clearly, and in the following paragraphs his reference to an event of twelve years ago happens also to fit the immediate future (the nuclear tests scheduled for Eniwetok next April):

> The power that the madmen hold is power of an order that the sane alone know that they are not sane enough to use. But the madmen do not want us to know that this power is too absolute, too godlike, to be placed in any human hands: for madmen dandle the infernal machine jauntily in their laps and their hands eagerly tremble to push the button. They smile at us, these madmen: they pose for fresh photographs, still smiling: they say, being madmen, "We are as optimistic as ever," and their insane grin is prophetic of the catastrophe that awaits us.
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> Lying to us about the secret that is no secret, the madmen also lie to themselves, to give their lie the further appearance of truth, and their madness the outward garb of sanity. Not knowing any other use for their machine but destruction, they multiply our capacities for destruction. Their every act is an act of madness; even now, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, they plan further madness, with a monkey-like curiosity to discover a new secret that is no secret. One mad act has led to a second mad act, the second to a third: and the end will be a morbid compulsion to achieve the last irretrievable act of world-madness—in the interests of security, peace, and truth.

Thus Lewis Mumford. What more can he say? What more can anyone say, when there is nothing else important enough to say before or instead of saying this?

There are "practical" problems, of course. But the practical problems of life are all twisted out of shape by the problem of remaining human.

What is the use of talking about social systems and politics, about money and welfare and economic progress, so long as the great question of what it means to be human is still undecided. We cannot let other men decide this question for us. We have to decide this for ourselves, no matter what the cost. If we do not have the power to make this decision, we have *no* power worth talking about. If we can't or don't make this decision, we are no longer human. All that will remain to be decided is the precise means by which we shall be made to discover that we are no longer human—that the high judgment of Pico no longer applies to the humanoid creatures inhabiting the earth.

Then, again in the *Saturday Review,* this time by Norman Cousins—who as editor of the *SR* must have decided to print what Lewis Mumford wrote twelve years ago—is an article on "The Casual Approach to Violence" (*SR,* Aug. 31, 1957).

Starting out on this subject, Mr. Cousins stipulates that we—"we" in the U.S. and the "we" in the U.S.S.R.—know all about how to destroy the world. There is no disagreement on the fact that "the instruments are now available for pulverizing man's cities, poisoning his farmlands and his water, and downgrading the genes of his survivors, if any." We have genuine "certainty" about these things.

It is Cousins' point that "we" have no background—or very little background—for any other kind of certainty. Learning to take seriously the need to look beyond violence, he says, "may well be the most difficult undertaking in our history." His analysis lays bare the uglier aspects of Western culture:

> . . . our conditioning has made violence a seemingly normal part of our lives and we have a casual approach to it. Almost from the moment a child is old enough to observe or talk, violence is glamorized for him and made part of his emotional diet. His earliest games have to do with violence or the instruments of violence. Year in and year out, the biggest sellers in toys are guns or make-believe weapons. Even religion has been made to glorify violence. Sunday school in too many cases has become less an adventure in the higher reaches of the human spirit than a grandstand seat in an arena of interminable warfare. There is little compassion for slain people when they happen to be on the other side. Not much is said about the tragedy of human conflict; the battle is the thing. Even the Deity is vested with certain violent moods; He is not above stoning people when they displease Him, and innocent children are punished for the sins of remote ancestors. There is a hard wall of separation between the sublime and non-violent ethics of the Sermon on the Mount and their application in everyday life. It is as though it is more important not to believe than it is to believe.
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> Wherever we turn we find reflections of this casual approach to violence. It is one thing to kill animals for food or protection of crops. It is another thing to kill them for the fun of it. And numberless persons take part in this exercise out of sheer enjoyment....
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> The fact that public issues are not made of these things is significant in itself. For the casualness with which violence is treated and accepted may make it difficult for us to think today in totally different terms, even though our lives may now depend upon our ability to do so. But it is not enough to itemize the unthinkables in order to produce sanity and safety. It becomes important to replace the unthinkables with the workables.

How do you go about doing this? How do you change public apathy into public awareness? How do you reverse habitual reactions and typical conditionings in the home, in school, and in the community? How do you arouse men to want the responsibility of personal decision, instead of wanting to avoid it?

The best answer we have seen recently to questions of this sort was given in David McReynolds' analysis of the death of the Communist Party in the United States (MANAS, Jan. 29). McReynolds is talking about the means by which men are caused to break with old ways of thinking and acting:

> Everyone exists in a certain framework of events, friends, physical and psychic influences. Such a framework shapes our course of action and living. You do not (or should not) blame a man for

doing that which, considering his existential situation, he *must* do. Only some tremendous explosion *within* this individual framework makes possible change. That "explosion" may be physical or it may be spiritual. A Christian might call this "explosion" the gift of God's grace, lifting one out of the situation.

Let me illustrate it in this way. Many a white Southerner really in his heart believes the Negro *wants* segregation. He has lived out his whole life in a situation (or "framework") where segregation of the races was accepted by *both* black and white. How can he be expected to consider the Negro his equal, when the Negro himself silently accepts a subordinate position? You and I, damnyankees that we are, can talk till doomsday and not change the mind of such a man. For we are not central to his framework. But let some tremendous event like Montgomery literally blow things to bits and the white Southerner *must* change his mind because his environment, his framework or situation, has changed. He may become violent in an attempt to hold on to the past, or he may break suddenly and completely reverse his position. But he must make some basic changes.

Now while we may recognize that the "change" or "changes" here considered may have origins considerably more diverse than the ones described by David McReynolds, it remains clear that he has set up a useful *type* of the problem involved. The problem varies from individual situations to social situations. In the case of individuals, external causes may be quite obscure. Some inner awakening, provoked by causes unknown, may lead a man to change his values and his way of life. Intimations of how these causes work may be gained from the study of biography—of the lives of men like Keir Hardie, Abraham Lincoln, Eugene Debs, Gandhi, and Schweitzer. Historical factors can usually be discerned in social change, but these may also be traced to the inner awakenings of individuals. In other words, a point is reached in the analysis of social change where the determinism dissolves into the mystery of private human vision and decision.

Individuals exercise influence for change in various ways. Often this brings martyrdom to the individuals. The greatest movements of history seem to have been launched, or perhaps simply marked, by crucifixions. Buddha, the story goes, was poisoned. Pythagoras was burned to death. Socrates was executed by the state, and Jesus was crucified. Bruno was burned at the stake, Lincoln was assassinated and Gandhi was murdered. Whether this sort of fate is an essential part of the pattern may be arguable, but the violent death of men who exercise great moral force is almost a constant element in revolutionary change. The man who challenges the status quo becomes a scapegoat for the outraged feelings of those who are bound by habit to the past. Such men "create" the events which precipitate the change, and pay the price exacted from them by society for being a disturbing influence.

Thus the pattern in the past has been largely created by great leaders.

But if the Renaissance is to continue in the spirit declared by Pico—if there is to be a second act of this great drama of awakening—there must be a change in the pattern of change, as well as the change itself. There will still be leaders, no doubt, but they will act as individuals who speak for themselves, instead of organizers of mass deliverance. Men can no longer be saved as "followers" or as those who "belong." For a human being, to be "saved" by somebody else is increasingly a contradiction in terms. For this kind of "saving" is only a repetition of the delusion from which we already suffer—the delusion that *we* are not responsible, that all the great decisions may be safely left to our leaders or the men in power.

The prophet of the second act of the Renaissance was surely Leo Tolstoy, who in *Christianity and Patriotism* stated its principle:

One free man says truthfully what he thinks and feels in the midst of thousands of men who by their words and actions are maintaining the exact opposite. It might be supposed that the man who has spoken out his thoughts sincerely would remain a solitary figure, and yet what more often happens is that all the others, or a large proportion of them, have for a long past been thinking and feeling exactly the same, only

they do not say so freely. And what was yesterday the new opinion of one man, becomes today the public opinion of the majority. And as soon as this opinion becomes established, at once, gradually, imperceptibly, but irresistibly, men begin to alter their conduct.

But the free man often says to himself: "What can I do against this whole sea of wickedness and deception which engulfs us? What use is it to express my opinion? What use is it even to formulate it? Better not to think of these obscure and tangled questions. Perhaps these contradictions are the inevitable condition of all the phenomena of life. And what is the use of my struggling alone with all the evil of the world? If anything can be done, it is not by one alone, but only in association with other men." And abandoning the mighty weapon of thought and the expression of it, which moves the world, every man takes up the weapon of social activity, regardless of the fact that every form of social activity is based upon those very principles with which it is laid upon him to struggle; regardless of the fact that when he enters on the social activities existing in the midst of our world, every man is bound at least to some extent to depart from the truth, and to make concessions by which he destroys the whole force of the mighty weapon which has been given him. It is as though a man, in whose hands a sword of extraordinarily keen edge which will cut through anything has been put, should use the blade to knock in nails....

If only free men would not rely on that which has not strength and is never free—on external power, but would believe in what is always powerful and free—in truth and the expression of it. If only men would boldly and clearly speak out the truth that has already been revealed to them of the brotherhood of all nations and the criminality of exclusive devotion to one's own nation, the dead false public opinion upon which all the power of Governments and all the evil produced by them rests would drop off of itself like dried skin, and make way for the new living public opinion which only waits that dropping off of the old husk that has confined it in order to assert its claims openly and with authority, and to establish new forms of life that are in harmony with the consciences of men.

Tolstoy spoke to and for the man of the future—which is our present. The human situation has not changed. What Mumford saw in 1946 is what Tolstoy saw in 1894, and what we see in 1958. Our sole advantage is in being able to perceive more clearly the necessity of the decision which Tolstoy described.

REVIEW
IN DEFENSE OF POETRY

A READER who is on friendly terms with Henry David Thoreau and Rabindranath Tagore writes to MANAS in reproach for the wish—expressed in a Dec. 18 editorial—that modern poets "would write a little prose along with their poems, so that we could more easily discover what they care about and what they mean." Our reader feels that this expression was snippy, if not unjust, and argues that the poets are not so uniformly obscure as all that. "Who," he asks, "having read the song offerings of Tagore, would beg for a typed explanation?"

He suggests, further, that "much of the prose written these days has no quality to make reading a pleasure. It is mostly dull, well formed upon an accepted design of the twins of logic and reason, but seldom embodies the common sense that speaks a different note in the scale of vibration. One might say, perhaps, that the better prose verges almost to verse."

When a reader champions Walt Whitman, as this one does, we have absolutely nothing to say except in agreement. In fact, wondering a little about poets since Whitman, we asked some questions, which happily stirred "W.W." to contribute "Letter from the Night" on William Butler Yeats (MANAS, Jan. 8). More such nocturnal reflections concerned with poets since Whitman may be forthcoming from "W.W."

Meanwhile, an article by Lawrence Lipton on "The Uses of Poetry" which appeared in the (Winter, 1957-58) *Literary Review*, a new quarterly published by Fairleigh Dickinson University, is the best brief discussion of the subject that we know of. Mr. Lipton's article makes ideal reading, we think, for those who would like to return to the reading of poetry with a fresh view of what poetry may be "about."

After all, no one ever comes to the reading of poetry for the first time. You can't even get through kindergarten without having some experience of it, and by the time you get out of high school or college, you have been exposed to a fair variety of verse. Further, the instinct for making songs is an endowment of every child. Children are continually inventing rhymes and chanting rhythms. What this means, from a psychological point of view, we leave to another discussion; here we offer Lawrence Lipton as a guide for the return to verse in one's maturity. In quoting his first two paragraphs for evidence of what one may expect from Mr. Lipton, it may be noted that his prose is the opposite of dull (he writes poetry, too), and his coverage of the subject remarkably broad for so compact a review. He writes:

> Poetry has always had many uses. It has cast ritual spells, enchanted and disenchanted princesses, riddled and unriddled mysteries. Laws have been couched in verse, official reports and even fiscal budgets, and one poet-enchanter is recounted in the *Kalevala* as having sung his opponent right down into a bog up to his mouth in a sorcery contest until he cried uncle, a use that has been revived in our time in the versified singing commercials. It has been used, and is still used, as religious liturgy, as sexual seduction, as a form of entertainment, and a snap course for college credits.
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> Today, when the new sonic media of mass communication radio, television, phonograph recordings, and public poetry readings, offer at least an opportunity of making poetry once more a flourishing social art, it might be pertinent to recall some of its more serious uses. These are definable, I think, in four main categories: poetry as a private, psychological therapy; a psycho-social therapy; a political philosophy, *i.e.* a theory of history; and a *mythos, i.e.* a theory of man's origin and destiny and his place in the universe, which can be either religious or scientific or an attempted synthesis of both.

To look at the first category, "private, psychological therapy" here indicates considerably more than therapy is commonly understood to mean. Lipton quotes Dylan Thomas for explication: "Poetry is useful to me," wrote Thomas, "for one reason: it is the record of my individual struggle from darkness toward some

measure of light," and "is, or should be, useful to others for its individual recording of that same struggle with which they are necessarily acquainted."

The passage we liked best in Lipton's article is his analysis of the second category—poetry as psycho-social therapy. On this subject, he writes:

> What makes the psycho-social function so difficult for poets in our time is the fact that it cannot be combined, as it was before the Renaissance, with any ready-made system of social sanctions. A community that rests on no psychologically effective rite of initiation is not a community. It is only a quantitative, a statistical collective. All the ready-made church-administered social rites fail the poet today because they are based on an outmoded God-Father-King *mythos* which no longer commands more than lip service, even among its religious and political priests. (The present attempt in the United States to resurrect it as a God-Father-President *mythos* is as artificial as it is reactionary.)

Here, we think, are offered the basic materials and tools for understanding of the confusion of all the modern arts. The arts give coherent expression to a unified world-view—"ready-made" is Lipton's term. That, at any rate, is what we have been led to expect of the arts. We expect them, that is, to have a "familiar" content, to add an emotional dimension to ideas that we partly understand, and thus, from the sensuous impact of an art-form, come to understand still more.

But we have no unified world-view, these days. The modern artist cannot celebrate and interpret and embellish the "wheel of life" as the Buddhist artist of two thousand years ago did. He has no moral-metaphysical structure to work within. And the splendid "rediscovery of man" which we say was characteristic of the Renaissance is a largely exhausted enthusiasm. We have gone from tired theological abstractions to tired material reality and come to the great Jumping-Off Place. In fact, we have jumped. The people who would like to be told what modern art is "about" are really asking where we have jumped.

Lipton has a sprightly paragraph on where some of the modern poets jumped to. Concerning the poet's function as a psycho-social therapist, he says:

> When we look for it in the modern poetry of England and the United States we are forced to speak of the *early* Eliot, the *early* Yeats, the *early* Lawrence, etc. All of them pursued psycho-social solutions only just so long, so far. Yeats settled for a mystique of history instead, trying, in his own words, "to substitute for Biblical or mythological figures, historical movements of actual men and women." (Pound later erected a rambling jerry-built structure on the same foundation.) Eliot settled for a Thirteenth (some say Eleventh) Century version of Christian theology dressed up with some mystical trimmings from John of the Cross which bear as much relation to *ex cathedra* doctrine as Sufi mysticism bears to the Aga Khan or the once Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Just the same it has sparked some church-joining among intellectual playboys (and girls) and a few conversions among young poets fresh from English Lit and the New Criticism. Most of the younger poets of England and the United States have been content to learn something of their craft from Eliot and leave his mythos alone. As for Lawrence, he became so enraptured with "primitive" rite that he never found his way back into the Twentieth Century.

For poetry to supply the kind of feeling most people long for in it, some kind of "organic" society is needed for the poet to sing about. But the only "organic" societies we know anything about are the mechanized imitations of ancient organic societies found in the totalitarian State. In a chapter of his essay, "The Responsibility of Peoples," Dwight Macdonald has paid the respects of contemporary, civilized man to the "Organic State." It is the State in which "no individual citizen or group of citizens may think or act otherwise than in accordance with the policies laid down by those in control of the State apparatus. When cells in a biological organism cut loose from their organic function, the result is cancer. Similar behavior by the citizen-cells of the Organic State is political cancer." Question: Is it possible to imagine an organic society which is not an organic State? Answer: It may be possible, but it is certainly not easy. Mechanical conceptions,

quantitative values, the politics of propaganda and distrust—these are the absolute enemies of organicism in human relations. The poet, if he is to find the quality of life that constitutes the material of his art, is reduced to fragments, ends and bits of the shattered world-views of our time; or, perhaps, he reaches into the depths of his own subjective life for the flow of being which has not yet been warped into some mechanical mold. And this must be true, also, of other artists, painters, and musicians.

The form of organic life is hierarchical. But hierarchy, in terms of modern political forms, is a synonym of infamy and corruption. How, then, could there be, in our age, "a community that rests on [a] psychologically effective rite of initiation"? The thing is impossible. It is impossible, at least, in any familiar terms. Such rites, in any event, would have to be wholly extracurricular to the political forms of modern society, and entirely separate from the economic and technological mechanisms of the time.

Further, the very intellectuality of Western culture is opposed to any traditional type of organicism. The rite of initiation belongs to the *cultus* form of human association. In ancient times, societies were theocratic, the civil and the religious hierarchies being either closely related or identical. But the very genius of modern culture, its unique and probably its sole contribution to human development, is the emergence of individuality. As Hegel put it (quoted by Macdonald):

> In the ancient States, the subjective purpose was absolutely one with the will of the State. In modern times, on the contrary, we demand an individual opinion, an individual will and conscience. The ancients had none of these in the modern sense; the final thing for them was the will of the State. While in Asiatic despotisms, the individual had no inner self and no self-justification, in the modern world man demands to be honored for the sake of his subjective individuality. (*The Philosophy of Law.*)

How, then, shall the organicism of the inner life, the free and uncalculating vision of the poet, the climactic experience of initiation, be restored to human beings?

This is the sort of problem with which the artist wrestles, which produces his agonies and often the strange anomalies in what the rest of the world is invited to regard as "works of art." To do as an individual, almost wholly as an individual, what was once done by the artist as a member of a cultural "chorus" in an institutionally based society—this is what we require of the artist in our own times. Is it any wonder that some confusion, some triviality, and even some "obscenity," result?

One more paragraph from Lipton:

> Of the four categories I have suggested, the mythopoetic is perhaps the most fundamental. It attempts to answer the questions, What am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Identity, purpose, destiny. These elements are present in myth from the beginning. And from the start they took a three-fold form, the Quest: a setting out, a confrontation of perils, and a destination. Perhaps they were danced and/or painted before they were spoken, that question may never be settled; but when they did take the form of language it was a language of symbols, based in the first place, I suspect, on the sacred icons and the ritual animal masks. Hence it was a language of metaphor, which is by definition that which is like to or stands in place of. . . . Nothing will do but to cut back to the very root of mythopoiesis, a personally experienced sense of the numinous. We must ask all the old questions again, freshly, with an almost primitive naivete, as Walt Whitman asked them: "What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?" and see ourselves as he saw himself, "no less than the journey-work of the stars."

If poetry will undertake this "charge and succession," it may indeed regain its place as, in Lipton's phrase, "a flourishing social art" and help to supply, in individual terms, the rites of initiation appropriate to our time.

COMMENTARY
NO PAST, NO FUTURE

IN a classical culture, an organic society, or a traditional civilization, there is little likelihood of there being a "lost" generation. A past illuminated by high achievements, filled with the memory of heroic enterprise and fulfillment, directs the young through the present into the future, and a balance of personal, civic, and religious objectives defines the role of the young individual. From childhood, he is made to learn what is expected of him. He is informed of the obstacles which lie ahead and instructed in moral principles which will help him to triumph over them.

This is the kind of society we don't have at all. Neither the children nor the adults have any idea where they or their society is going. Our moral traditions have been left somewhere behind. Heavy-handed, authoritarian religion, it is true, still exercises a measure of restraint on the young who are born to these influences, but the price of this small gain in integration is a narrowly anachronistic outlook in other respects. People who are able to believe in the creeds and sanctions of anthropomorphic religion don't seem to be living in the twentieth century nor to be touched by its real issues. Their protection comes from living in a region of circumscribed awareness.

Our point, here, is that the "conformity" practiced by the "weird" or "beat" generation (see "Children . . . and Ourselves") is an invention of the children themselves—it is the best that they can do—since their culture gives them nothing, or almost nothing, to go by. Little children, studies have shown, when given no fantasy—fairy tales, stories of wonder and imagination—create their own. So adolescents, supplied by their elders with no intelligible scale of values, create their own. They don't have much to work with, so they make do with what they have.

They see nothing in the adult world that seems worth relating themselves to. Why should they, in a society which can be reasonably addressed by one of its best social critics with the words, "Gentlemen: You Are Mad!"?

The older generation can't do much about all this. The older generation has first to command some respect before it can do much of anything about much of anything. The "beat generation" isn't something that is happening to the young. Whatever it is, it is happening to us all.

What can the older generation do for itself? Any generation which finds itself in a traditionless condition, with old ideals, norms, and external goals disappearing, must learn to replace what it has lost with more inward modes of regulation. Until this happens, the older ones can do little more than wistfully watch the younger ones work things out in their own way.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

DISCUSSION OF A GENERATION: II

REGARDLESS of the extreme toward which today's youth tends, the result is literally "weird." For, in *Webster's* we find that *weird* means "mysteriously strange or fantastic."

One direction chosen by the members of the "weird" generation seems to be "nowhere"—amounting to deliberate avoidance of whatever distinctive personality or individuality might otherwise be sought. The psychic responses to "rock and roll" sessions indicate no pretense, no rebellion, but rather the elimination of thought, and the obligations of individuality which thought implies. An article by Gertrude Samuels, a New York *Times* staff writer, "Why They Rock 'n' Roll—And Should They?", sums up the frightening depths of conformity to which the Rock 'n' Rollers descend:

> Their clothes and manners bespeak a kind of conformism: so many of the girls wear a sort of uniform—tight, revealing sweaters with colorful kerchiefs, skin-tight toreador pants, white woolen socks and loafers; so many of the boys conform to a pattern—leather or sports jackets, blue jeans, loafers and cigarettes.
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> Physically, it would seem as though the children feared to look different from one another, or lacked confidence in individuality. Indeed, many admit to this cheerfully: "All the kids have this jacket," said one boy, "and I don't want to be different."
>
> Inside the theatre, the emotional conformism is even more obvious. A scream of approval or delight starts—mostly a girl's scream—and everyone starts screaming. An arm shoots up fifth row center, and instantly all arms appear to be flung up and bodies leap up or start swaying crazily. Anyone can touch off the stampede of screaming youngsters who always rush the stage after a show is over.

Nor is submergence in unthinking conformity confined to the restless teenagers who have no prospect of going to a university. An editorial in the *Progressive* for November describes another dimension of the same condition, suggesting that while some of the members of this generation may be searching for something in which to believe, many of them have no present intention of even defending their *right* to believe what they choose:

> The current crop of college students, we are told, is a conservative lot, bent more on acquiring the security of a corporation berth and the respectability of suburbia than on breaking new ground with the radical thinking and progressive action that characterized the undergraduates of a generation ago. The evidence to confirm this judgment is weightier than we like to consider, and only recently a fresh batch of proof turned up to add to our dismay.
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> The Bill of Rights, America's charter of individual freedom, is certainly no radical document. But a scientific survey of undergraduate opinion has disclosed that less than one per cent of the students agree with, or accept even with reservations, all of the historic liberties, enumerated in the Constitution's first ten amendments by the conservative founding fathers of our Republic.
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> Professor Raymond W. Mack of Northwestern University and Professor Robert McGinnis of the University of Wisconsin, both sociologists, polled a cross-section of student opinion on the individual safeguards in the Bill of Rights and came up with the shocking conclusion that "even the most highly educated segments of our population cannot be counted on to defend the principles of human rights set forth in the first ten amendments to the Constitution."
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> The response among students at private, conservative Northwestern was not greatly different from that among the students at the state-supported, more progressive University of Wisconsin. And there were no significant differences between those who classified themselves as Democrats or Republicans.
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> Both surveys showed that more than 70 per cent of the students would deny an accused person the right to confront his accuser, that more than 40 per cent believe there are situations where star chamber proceedings are preferable to a public trial, that 40 per cent believe there are groups to whom the right of peaceful assembly should be denied. . . .

It is not that the youth exhibiting these discouraging tendencies are deficient in intellectual capacity or in ability to be articulate. They just don't seem to want to articulate anything

which connects them with the values, good or bad, of the adult world. A letter to the *New Republic* of Jan. 6, by Burling Lowrey, a university instructor, begins by explaining "the despair which most teachers of college freshman feel when being confronted year in and year out, with the intellectual vacuums that come off our high school assembly lines." Mr. Lowrey continues:

> Semi-literacy is now common in more than 25 per cent of composition students, and history instructors tell me that they have reached the point where they now consider the students' frame of reference as zero. . . . Over the past ten years I have conferred with hundreds of freshmen; and, while I have not recorded any data, I think I have a fairly clear idea of what Johnny *does* know, which, in my opinion, merely substantiates the indictment by Sawin and Norman. *(New Republic*, Dec. 23.)

> Nearly all freshmen are highly informed on the subject of *automobiles.* In this area many of them even have an encyclopedic knowledge, displaying an ability to discourse brilliantly on the functioning of the motor, body style, new gadgets, whether or not fins are aesthetically pleasing, and the burning issue of foreign cars versus American cars. Another intellectual challenge seems to be sports car racing. Many freshmen even go so far as to read all the available literature on this subject, and I would be willing to bet that they know the specialized vocabulary cold, even to the point of spelling all the words correctly.

And what is the relationship between these depressing revelations and ourselves? Cartoonist-philosopher Robert Osborn sums the matter up with a few brief lines:

> Some of us *do* stand up for our beliefs—we try it "outside" for awhile but are soon frightened by solitude, contention, thought . . . so we crawl back into the tranquilized crowd—glad to be blurred into the massive herd.

These indices of conformity represent one of the extremes of which we originally spoke; the other is of necessity more complicated, and considerably more hopeful. This second "extreme" is articulately represented by young artists and writers who feel that their only "salvation" is to "dig" everything (which often means simply to see through the pretentiousness of most human attitudes), and to achieve a peculiar sort of alternation between detachment and oblivion in sensation. A consideration of Jack Kerouac's surprising "hipster" novel, *On the Road*, and of the numerous speculations about its meaning, will afford opportunity for extending the entire area of discussion.

FRONTIER

Political Ferment

SINCE our optimistic survey (Jan. 8) 0f reports of a growing "freedom" in Communist countries, we have encountered a number of less optimistic views, one example of which is Richard Hughes' "China as it Is," which appeared in the *New Republic* for Nov. 18. A correspondent for the *Financial Times* of London, Mr. Hughes last summer completed a two-month, 10,000-mile tour of China. He feels compelled to report that the "let all flowers bloom together" policy of Communist leader Mao has not and cannot be fully implemented under any present Communist regime—*i.e.*, that conformity and obedience are still the imperatives. While Mr. Hughes does not suggest that Mao's invitation to intellectual dissent, which brought so much hopeful comment in the West, was a deliberate snare for optimists, he indicates that it has had this effect. "There is no doubt," he writes, "that most of the Party leaders were surprised, as well as embarrassed, by the depth and vigor of the criticism and the uncovering of deep-rooted heresies in intellectual circles. Most of the offending intellectuals have admitted their crimes in nauseating self-abasement and sought forgiveness and a second chance. They are pathetically anxious to dissemble; the Chinese are very good at dissembling. Anyway, what can they *do?"*

Mr. Hughes does not, however, relinquish the hope that some ground may be held by the advocates of free opinion:

> If, by the time this is published, the Party has begun to hand out prison terms to "rightist" intellectuals, it will be a reasonable deduction that Chou's school has prevailed and that the Party line has shifted from patient persuasion ("brute reason" and the carrot) back to physical compulsion ("brute force" and the stick). One should never predict Communist Chinese events, but, on form, the odds are against any such retreat—on a widespread scale, at any rate.

It remains difficult, these days, still, to write encouragingly of developments in communist countries without overemphasizing the "good things" that often seem to be happening, and we might have expected our Jan. 8 piece, "The Bright Side of the Sputnik," to call forth some criticism from at least a few readers. Our only defense would have to be that while we lay no claim to being politically "informed," it seems extremely important to find what favorable facts we can concerning our opponents, and at the same time be fully aware of our own shortcomings.

Howard Fast's final rupture with the Communist Party is certainly to be welcomed, especially since it may now be possible for many who have been prejudiced against Fast to appreciate his unusual capacities as a writer. Fast, however, in relating his personal trials as an American Communist (in his recent book, *The Naked God),* insists that we should not judge men simply by their political affiliations and that human dignity and sincerity of purpose should not be denied many of those who have served what we call Communist causes. As he said in the *Saturday Review* (Nov. 16), "If one denies the nobility of some Communists, one can make no sense or reason out of the ignoble horror that the Communist structure begets. Life is just not that simple. The American boy from the slums of New York or Chicago who joined the Communist Party, volunteered to fight in Spain against the darkness of Fascism, and walked with his still-to-be-fired Springfield into the hell of Jarma Valley—where, as it was said, he learned to die before he learned to fight—was no monster, he was one of the bravest and truest human products of our time." Mr. Fast states his own credo in the same article:

> Whatever the Communist Party once was, today it is a prison for man's best and boldest dreams. Tomorrow belongs to those who break down the prison walls that enclose the minds of men, not to those who support such walls. For mankind, the promise of tomorrow always has been and always will be the widening of intellect and horizon—in ever greater vistas of individual freedom.
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> I do not believe that a Communist Party can be destroyed by force. A Communist Party is an idea—and ideas cannot be dealt with in terms of force. It is time we learned this. An idea must be bent over the anvil of truth to see if it can survive some strong blows. I do not believe that this particular idea can so survive.

This is an unqualified stand on matters political, but it is also an unqualified stand on the platform of brotherhood for all those who labor for *any* cause with sincerity. It is for this reason that we find ourselves out of sympathy with a number of reviews of *The Naked God.* As an example of "damning with faint praise," there is Arthur M. Schlesinger's comment in the Dec. 14 *Saturday Review.* Mr. Schlesinger, we think, misses the point of Fast's story when he writes condescendingly:

> Howard Fast's *The Naked God* turns out to be a better and more interesting book than one would have expected. Mr. Fast succeeded in remaining in the Communist Party long after it had ceased to attract people of decency or intelligence, at least in the West; this would argue a certain fatuity or blandness in his politics. Moreover, as a novelist, Mr. Fast has always been possessed by a sentimental vision of "the people"—a vision whose essentially patronizing quality has been emphasized by effusions of spuriously poetic rhetoric; and this too would argue against his ability to see himself any more clearly than he has seen politics. Nor is *The Naked God* by any means free of fatuity, blandness, or sentimentality. It has all these things in abundance. Yet it manages to convey, in the end, the impression of a man who has undergone genuine torment; and also, for all its random and repetitious quality, it gives a vivid and terrifying picture of what commitment to the Communist movement means to a writer.

It is not Mr. Fast's torment which is significant, nor the sloppy writing in this book, but the drive and integrity of a man who will give his utmost for any side in which he believes—a quality shared by very few.

One would hardly expect to find *Esquire* speaking out in favor of the latent "goodness" in any sort of Communist, but a somewhat autobiographical article by Burt Silverman in *Esquire* for January provides excellent background for better understanding of both Mr. Fast and the Communist sympathizers with whom he was once associated. For three years Mr. Silverman used a studio adjoining one occupied by a Russian spy. Silverman had no intimation whatsoever of Colonel Abel's sinister calling. He knew him only as "Emil," a good neighbor and good friend. When the F.B.I. finally caught this kindly, unpretentious man, Silverman was astounded. He protested: "Colonel Rudolph Ivanovich Abel of the Soviet intelligence service is the name of a stranger and a foreigner, someone I have never known. I knew a warmly human, generous guy named Emil. That may be the greatest portrait he ever painted."

The following sketches the natural man who underlay the political man in Emil:

> Emil constantly exhibited modesty and kindness. He would lend me things—a slide projector, paints or brushes—without the slightest suggestion of when he expected them back. At this time he was making good progress in his painting, but I guess I was doing a little better for I was getting some good reviews in The New York *Times*, and ultimately had my first one-man show at the Davis Galleries in Manhattan. Emil was often discouraged about his own work, but he always admired mine and encouraged me. He came to the opening at the Davis Galleries in the same old tweed suit he always wore, and afterward escorted my mother to the subway in what struck me as an act of old-world courtliness.
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> There was always an old-world dignity and a salting of seasoned wisdom in what he said. And there was one thing that I liked very much: despite the difference in our ages Emil never showed the condescension which a much older man so often displays to a younger. We talked as equals.

As we see it, the basic problem is to learn how to find the natural man underneath the political man in Russia, in China and in our own country. Politics, we suspect, will become statesmanship only when we make progress in this direction. It is not necessary to be contemptuous of those whom we oppose. Howard Fast deserved respect quite as much three years ago as he does today. A sincere change in ideological opinion does not necessarily change the man, even if he changes in what we consider to be the wrong direction. The fact that Fast changed in the "right" direction is pretty much beside the point, since the new direction was "right" only when he discovered it to be so for himself.