VOLUME XLI, NO. 13
MARCH 30, 1988

LIKE CRUSOE

LOREN EISELEY, anthropologist and writer, was born in 1907 near Lincoln, Nebraska, and died seventy years later in Pennsylvania, close to the University of Pennsylvania where, for many years, he had taught. In his younger days he dug for bones in the Western states; he was also a hobo in his youth, riding the rails. He wrote poetry all his life, but his lasting work was as a man of imagination. The best minds of the century sought him out and became his friends.

The reason for speaking of him now *is* the appearance of a book, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley,* edited, with a long introduction, by Kenneth Heuer, who was his editor at Scribner's. The publisher is Little Brown, the price $22.95, This book is filled with seed ideas, many of them related to anthropology, yet the fruit of a mind that ranged high above his calling—a mind guided by vision, yet vision regulated by intuitive responsibility. This is the reason we give attention to this book.

Here is an entry made in 1957 about his profession:

> The follies of the anthropologist and/or science.
>
> 1. Emphasis on the past to the exclusion of man's transcending powers in the present.
>
> 2. Because man was a social animal long before he was a man, there is a tendency to forget society, in man, is to a marked degree, a conscious act and that as Bruner has remarked, "if one is concerned for society he must above all be concerned for this social consciousness."

Speaking of a conference he attended at Cambridge (in 1956), he wrote:

> Some lecturers, such as Harcourt Brown, regarded the humanities, in contrast to science, as primarily involved with the discovery and exploration of the individual, the unique. Considerable discussion arose as to whether any scientific theory which becomes widely popular does not really do so because it is supporting or offers the possibility of support to [laissez faire capitalism in the case of Darwinism] some popular ideology. In this sense one might speak of ideological science, as one can also note the respect for gadgets on the part of the layman as really belief in scientific magic.

Among those in whom Eiseley found inspiration were Emerson and Thoreau. Of Thoreau he wrote:

> Reading in Thoreau's journals today, it strikes me that Thoreau's writing is like his own landscape—a vast expanse of weeds, brush, thickets, and just occasionally a singing bird with a soft note hidden in some unexceptionable underbrush. Thoreau, in other words, is as chaotic as the real world of nature and just as full of trivia, with here and there some remarkable observational nugget.

His wisdom comes out in the parallels he continually discovers:

> One may write, for example, a nature essay in the purely literary tradition, expressing some feeling for the marvelous, or the wonder of life—things perfectly acceptable when perused in such old classics as Thoreau or Hudson, and then awake to discover that a certain element in the "union" regards one's activities in this totally separate field as "mystical" and "alien to the spirit of science." It was not so among the great Renaissance thinkers, but the growing compartmentalization of thought has contributed to a trade feeling that the shoemaker should stick to his last. The feeling is more evident in some sciences than in others; in fact, some of the older sciences, whose members, perhaps, are more secure and with a longer tradition behind them, are manifestly less nervous in this regard than younger ones.

He often returns to Emerson and Thoreau:

> In the old days of the New England transcendentalists, it used to be stated that the cosmos was a reflection of man, that his shadow ran a long way out through nature. Though the idea may be, in some sense, out of fashion, I would venture to remark that men like Emerson and Thoreau, whose interior thoughts contained a place for muskrats, bean fields, and uninhabited peaks, were closer to an analysis of

> man's original nature, his soul, if you will, than much that has gone on in laboratories since. A wilderness exists in man which refuses to be studied. "There has been but the sun and the eye since the beginning," Thoreau once wrote, and some of us prefer to have that eye round, open, and as undomesticated as an owl's in a primeval forest—a forest which invisibly surrounds us still.

Loren Eiseley had a quality of gentleness that pervades all his work. In one place in these notes it is outspoken:

> No, it is not because I am filled with obscure guilt that I step gently over, and not upon, an autumn cricket. It is not because of guilt that I refuse to shoot the last osprey from her nest in the tide marsh. I possess empathy; I have grown with man in his mind's growing. I share that sympathy and compassion which extends beyond the barriers of class and race and form until it partakes of the universal whole. I am not ashamed to profess this emotion, nor will I call it a pathology. Only through this experience many times repeated and enhanced does man become truly human. Only then will his gun arm be forever lowered. I pray that it may sometime be so.

Most scientists, when they enter a field and undertake research of one sort or another, allow their minds to undergo confinement. In the case of Eiseley, while he pursued his investigations within broad parameters of assumption, he never sacrificed his freedom to imagine. Preparing material for a book with the title "How Man Came," he spoke of the extraordinary latitude the evolutionary process used to put the human being together.

> His living organs, his eyes, backbone, his hands and feet—even his remarkable brain—have originated in far places and in different eras of time. He is a mosaic of odd parts drawn together as one might rifle a cosmic junkyard to make a more than usually complicated tin woodman or a scarecrow. Some of the parts have been bent to other than their original purposes, some are obsolescent.
>
> None of these facts make man unique. All living creatures, because of the changing nature of life, are constricted of similar wandering bits of material strung together by a peculiar little alphabet or set of instructions, a kind of "do-it-yourself" kit which all plants and animals carry in their bodies and pass from one generation to another.
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> Man can give names to these processes, lengthy scientific names like DNA, but their wonder remains. In short, we are stardust that somehow assembled itself first into life and finally into consciousness. This implies strange forces in the universe that no amount of naming by man can make ordinary. Man can use terms like evolution and try to position himself in time, but when, behind all these processes, he asks why they are, or come to be, he has reached the borders of science and has entered a realm of thought which can never be tested in a laboratory. This is the realm of what used to be called final questions, the questions asked by the philosopher. We can reason about such questions in a division of thought called metaphysics. Or we may explain them in terms of religious faith. But unlike the domain of science, with its palpable causes and effects which we have come to take as given and to be studied either in the experimental world of the laboratory or the wider, more confusing world of nature, we can only think what we are informed of by our senses. By the nature of things we are denied a scientific answer to the question Why? We can only accept the universe as given and proceed to examine how it seems to operate. . . .
>
> Change and becoming is the law of the universe, but why this should be, or why there should be a universe subjected to the laws we know, or indeed why there should be a universe at all—these questions science cannot answer. . . .

Like Plato, when the resources of science are exhausted, Eiseley resorts to allegory or myth.

> The Plains Indians had a favorite story motif and an opening line that began, "Once there was a poor orphan." This was once a true statement of man's condition, and although man has since attained to material riches he is a poor orphan still—an orphan armed with dangerous weapons he has picked up by the wayside that threaten to destroy not the fearsome creatures that once threatened him but himself. He needs, in other words, another little kit of instructions not carried in his body. That strange little kit that is studied by genetics instructs his body how to shape itself. What the orphan now needs in the freedom given him by nature is a new kit of instructions upon how to live. Man himself must write this book. He has been trying for many ages all over the earth, but he has found the task difficult, and even more difficult the task of observing the rules he has devised for himself. This is part of the problem

> of being human and an orphan in a world where other creatures go about with another little set of instructions known as instinct, which tell them to be what they are, as for example an otter, a beaver, or a serpent. By contrast man has gotten lost in a desert of terrible freedoms. He does not know clearly what he is and he frequently falls into violent argument as to how to behave. At such times the wise among his kind know that he is still an orphan and that he needs a new instruction. . . . Long ago but not unwisely it was said in a sacred book that the foxes have their holes but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. In those words is expressed the epitome of the human condition down to this day.

What of Loren Eiseley the man? Beginning with *The Immense Journey* (1957), a collection of essays like the others, he wrote ten books in prose and four in poetry. The editor of *Lost Notebooks,* Kenneth Heuer, was not only the editor whom Eiseley came to trust and seek the counsel of, but he was also a devoted friend. Of the book he put together, with much labor, Heuer says:

> The notebook permits the reader to see the genesis of Loren's work, what Henry James called "the seed work of art. Here we are in the laboratory, observing the author openly—a fascinating experience in which there is often a sudden burst of poetic power. With Loren, notebook keeping was not drudgery. He made an entry when he saw something or was thinking, and, like all writers of original genius, he glimpsed wonderful things in the commonplace in life which make the ordinary reader look about him and wonder what he is missing. The notebook is a prying questioning work, not only observing. He had a sympathetic understanding of nature, or birds and insects; what he was apprehensive of was man.

Loren was born on a Nebraska farm to a family which had come there years before with the wagons of people who settled in Nebraska Territory. His mother was stone deaf, of unsettled mind, yet a talented prairie artist. His father was a hardworking man with an eloquent voice who exposed his son to the magic of Shakespeare and of poetry in general. He wrote his first book at the age of six—*Animal Aventures* (*sic*) and the boy could read before he attended grade school. He loved to read and haunted the library. In 1921, while in the eighth grade, he announced that Nature Writing would be his vocation. He had some rare teachers who helped him to develop. He attended the University of Nebraska (in Lincoln) starting in 1925, planning to become a scientist, since writing poetry was not a way to make a living. In 1930 he went to Colorado because he was threatened by tuberculosis after an attack of influenza.

Loren's enforced sojourn in the Mohave Desert had left him restless, at odds with his environment, and for a time he drifted westward again, riding freight and passenger trains with the jobless men of the depression, living in hobo camps. Later, through contacts at the museum, he found work in the summer with university parties seeking fossils. After finally graduating from college he went to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania where he concentrated on anthropology and met influential professors. After obtaining his doctorate, he began teaching at the University of Kansas. Meanwhile he was writing and publishing in scientific and other magazines, gradually becoming known and appreciated.

In 1947, when he was teaching at Oberlin, he received a call to return to the University of Pennsylvania to succeed his former teacher, who had become ill, as chairman of the department of anthropology. Soon after he became curator of Early Man in the university museum. By then he was being widely published, his articles appearing in the *New York Times Magazine,* the *Saturday Evening Post, Saturday Review, Holiday, Gentry, Horizon, Harper's,* and *The American Scholar.* He also wrote for the *Scientific American.* His first book, *The Immense Journey,* was an immediate success, appearing in various editions around the world.

> Not only did it find a receptive audience with the general public, but it won many ardent admirers among distinguished authors, including the poet and Librarian of Congress, Archibald MacLeski, who, like other fans, expressed his appreciation in a letter. Over the years prominent writers of both prose and

poetry came into his life through his writings: Theodore H. White, Phyllis McGinley, Howard Nemerov, W.H. Auden, Ray Bradbury, Hal Borland, to name but a few. The interesting fact is that almost without exception *they* sought *him* out.

Eiseley was a born revisionist, always on the lookout for ways to question established opinion. For example—

> Critics of Malthus have pointed out that he created a false situation in that he claimed population was increasing faster than the food supply, when what was really happening was that population was increasing faster than a given type of economic system could make use of people. In other words, there was no shortage of food in a natural sense there was only an ecological failure. Perhaps an analogy to human society exists here in the animal world. Cities allow more niches in which diverse talents can be manifest. Similarly, a biota which has arranged itself in ecological communities has reduced the struggle for existence so that more types can take advantage of a given region (law of divergence). Thus diverse adaptive mutation is important, more important for life in general than straight-line evolution. Man's mental variability, which is not wholly cultural, has in his cities, replaced physical evolution.

Here are some of his musings about the word "nature.'

> No word bears a heavier, more ancient, or more diverse array of meanings. Of all words none is more important, none more elusive, for the term implies not alone all that is or may come to be. Behind it lurk the irregularities and the chaos of the world. And behind that further mystery, the shadow substance that only the mind of man has had the peculiar power to summon up from the beginning, the form beyond all matter, the shape of divinity itself. Man as atheist may turn upon and rend his own mind and say that this shadow is an illusion that is specifically his own, or as a scientific agnostic, he can draw an imaginary line beyond which he forces himself not to pass. He will adhere to the tangible, but he will still be forced to speak of the "unknowable," of "final causes," even if he proclaims such phrases as barren and of no concern to science. But in his mind he will still be forced to acknowledge a line he has drawn, a definition of nature he has arbitrarily proclaimed, a human limit that may or may not coincide with reality. . . .
>
> The word ramifies and runs through the centuries assuming different shapes. Sometimes it appears as ghostly as the unnamed shadow behind it; sometimes it appears harsh, prescriptive, and solid. Then again it takes on a more tenuous character. Matter becomes interchangeable with energy. Fact becomes shadow, law becomes probability. . . . We grow introspective or we fear and wait for dawn. "Nature" is a word that must have arisen with man. It walks with him as changeable and intangible as his shadow. It is in fact the shadow of the unnamed shadow that has so frequently divided men in murderous contention, but it is part also of man's humanity Other beasts than man live within nature. Only man has carelessly turned the abstraction round and round his tongue and found fault with every definition, found himself in the end looking endlessly outside of nature toward something invisible to any eye but his own and indeed not surely to be glimpsed by him—only to be glimpsed or guessed or pondered upon.

So, rather than speak of Loren Eiseley as a scientist or an anthropologist, let us call him simply a man of imagination. Few men or writers in this century have made so clear the riches of the mind—the mind in action rather than by accumulation of its works. We are indebted to Kenneth Heuer for providing us with this gift. The truth is not an accumulation, it is rather a fire. And from this reality we learn the secret content of all real education. It is learning to fire the mind. All the rest is but luggage, skills and luggage, and most of the luggage to be got rid of sooner or later. Here is the credo of a man who found this out:

> What persists in my mind is an utter distrust of the longevity of civilization. It is clear that I move daily amidst debris that would entice a castaway. Mentally I am engaged in dismantling the remains of an offshore wreck. I am relying on my own sharpened ingenuity for survival. It is obvious that I unconsciously regard the rejected fragments so wastefully strewn about me as the *dismembra* of a civilization already perished and in the midst of whose solitude I linger like Crusoe upon his isle.

REVIEW
VEDIC VISION

FOR a layman acquainted neither with the Vedas, Vedic exegesis, nor Sanskrit, to attempt to review Jeanine Miller's *The Vision of Cosmic Order in the Vedas* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985) may seem presumptuous. This self-imposed task was nevertheless begun enthusiastically in the hope of helping to awake more general interest in the author and the timeliness of her volume. For although a scholarly treatise on ancient India's religious lore that includes lengthy characterizations of the various gods that made up the Vedic pantheon, it also provides the kind of spiritual wisdom that helps us to understand more fully the religious and moral perturbations of our own troubled times. Those who have had the opportunity to hear Jeanine Miller lecture will not forget her engaging manner and vivid, forceful presentations. Nor will the reader of this book be disappointed. Sometimes her beautifully expressed thoughts seem to leap off the pages to replace one's own inept articulations; at other times they challenge and incite to further reflection. Either way, *The Vision of Cosmic Order in the Vedas* points to the essential problems of human existence.

Contemporary humanity is truly served by this book. First, it emphasizes that evolving man's ability to transcend himself does not depend upon the unaided human mind, as western secularists believe, but has instead a divine source. Second, it emphasizes that man's attempt to anthropomorphize deity to make it "more accessible to average human intelligence . . . is no sign of advance in or development of understanding." In rightly disputing the religious notion, also prevalent in the West, that an impersonal Power is a less fit object of worship than a personal deity, the book focusses upon the human/divine relationship that is possible when men pay universal homage to cosmic law and order.

Such ideas are extremely ancient. The Rigveda, which forms the main subject of the treatise, is the oldest of the four Vedic hymns to the gods and is believed to have been composed between 3000 and 3500 years ago. Far from merely expressing man's primitive wonder in confronting his deities and his natural environment, as early western scholars assumed, the Rigveda consists of profound religious insights of Indian sages into the origin, nature, and destiny of the whole manifested cosmos. The hymn's deep spiritual intent is particularly revealed by the concept of an unmanifest, absolute Oneness or Supreme Power as the central point and common source of all cosmic manifestation and which is ever imposing divine order and harmony upon it.

To account for the dynamics of manifestation during the creation and evolution of the cosmos, Jeanine Miller painstakingly explores the concept of rite in the Rigveda. This, according to the sages, was the first emanation from the Absolute and thus the primary manifestation of the original act of creation. Rita is characterized as the eternal Law or blueprint of cosmic order, and the author explains that the Vedic mind conceived this transcendent law "as the only fit expression of the Absolute which itself stood beyond human speculation." As the most perfect symbol of deity in manifestation, rite, the supreme law of harmony, demanded homage and compliance from gods and men. While it is revered and obeyed by the gods, who, we are told, must be true to their own nature, man, who seems uncertain of his, chooses again and again to thwart rite with inharmonious acts that disrupt the divine equilibrium. Thus inherent in the human condition is man's need to seek divine assistance to restore the order that he is continually disrupting. In this sense, religious ethics become an inseparable part of the ancient world view of India. And it is here, in the sphere of man's understanding of good, evil, and ethical choice, that the book is most helpful and most challenging.

During the past three millennia, how much have we learned about understanding and resolving moral issues? That we are sadly uncertain in this sphere is demonstrated by the 1987 controversy in the United States over the testimonies in the Iran-Contra congressional hearings. Some believe that to be able to circumvent the enemies that threaten their country, patriots are morally justified—if not obligated—to engage in secret operations that require them to withhold, even from their own government, vital information and to lie and deceive in order to attain their desired ends. At the other extreme is the purist view that even when the preservation of democratic governments, the elimination of terrorism, and the lives of citizens are at stake, such ends do not justify the use of dishonourable means and are, indeed, tarnished by them. Since it is extremely difficult for anyone to have to decide whether or not personal integrity should be sacrificed for the attainment of goals believed to be higher than self, let us, in fairness, recognize that the ethical choices that actually were made to express the conscience of patriots who, in fighting evil, had to struggle with moral issues whose resolution may have lain at the very limits of their spiritual wisdom.

The Vision of Cosmic Order in the Vedas deals essentially with ancient spiritual wisdom. This is not to imply that in it will be found detailed resolutions of the specific ethical problems now occupying the conscience of America. But it does contain ideas about human conduct which, because they are placed in the cosmic perspective, help us to see more clearly what the moral obligations of the good man should be.

Jeanine Miller talks about the inseparability of ethics from cosmic harmony and quotes in support of her view from *The Vedic Experience* by Raimundo Panikkar:

> The dichotomy between an ethical and a cosmic order is foreign to Vedic thinking, not because the ethical order is ignored but because the really existential order is anthropocosmic and thus includes both the ethical and the cosmic one.

She then goes on to elaborate:

> . . . the ethical order pertains to humanity and humanity is part of the cosmic order, hence the use of the adjective "anthropocosmic."

Yet she stresses again and again that cosmic harmony embraces far more than morality since truth, righteousness, and justice are only human value judgments that reflect our vision of the universal Law but not the whole of it:

> That whole could be more appropriately summed up, not as "the objective law of goodness," but simply as the "law of harmony". . . . That which is consonant with the overall harmony will, in the human sphere of activity, be considered moral or good, hence the norms of social as well as personal ethics that form the basis of all civilizations.

Again:

> To think in terms of a cosmic moral order is to bring in a purely human dimension at a level where the purely human is bypassed. The objective moral order of the universe exists solely in man's mind. Its counterpart in the universe is harmony, equilibrium.

The idea that morality, goodness, conscience, and ethical choice belong exclusively to the human sphere is not shared by all. Those who conceive the Unmanifest One to be the Absolute Good tend to envisage the entire cosmos, both material and spiritual, as being pervaded and sustained by moral law. How such a Law could apply to all non-human manifestation seems quite beyond our ken; nevertheless the thought of Supreme Goodness in the cosmos persists as an appropriate expression of the truth just as does the supremacy of Cosmic Harmony. Both exist as ideas in the human mind. Either could, I think, have objective existence apart from man.

But, as Jeanine Miller clearly recognizes, from the strictly human point of view, it is scarcely possible to distinguish between them. Harmony is the "right" relationship of parts; and what is "right" can only be good. When human conduct is most right, it is just, honourable,

courageous, loyal, kind, generous, and compassionate. If the ultimate source of these qualities transcends the human, then to use them in character designation may involve more than human value judgments. And civilized men everywhere have intuitively grasped that they are noble traits representing the realization of man's highest potentials—which may be divine. With or without religious significance, they have always been regarded as good attributes, while deviations from them are less good and sometimes evil.

In this way we can return to the moral issues raised by the Iran-Contra affair. The harmonious relationship of peaceful men, which we all seek, is built upon trust and confidence in one another's integrity. To oppose evil forces with dishonourable practices may, in the short term, accomplish patriotic, political, and even humanitarian ends. Those who participated in such actions were motivated by idealism and a sense of obligation: they were fighting the enemies of their country in the most efficient way they knew, even at the cost of personal integrity. But better men would have realized that dishonourable means never establish the "right" relations, and in disrupting the divine harmony of the cosmic order are, in the long run, a disservice to mankind. Nor is patriotic concern for country, democracy, and political freedom, however commendable, the highest duty. Nations and governments come and go as the human race struggles to evolve; man's prime obligation is to facilitate its spiritual ascent.

Jeanine Miller addresses the basic problems of human nature and its place in the universe. Let us recognize that despite all our human frailties, our evolutionary potentials are indeed divine and that our earthly trials and tribulations are necessary to become more god-like in thought and action. *The Vision of Cosmic Order in the Vedas* is replete with the spiritual beauty and promise of moral obligation.

CATHERINE ROBERTS

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TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

As a conventional account of the Buddhist religion, *Buddhism—The Path to Nirvana*, by Robert C. Lester, just published by Harper & Row (in paperback, $7.95), is a useful, scholarly book. It tells the story of Gautama, the wandering monk who achieved enlightenment and of his efforts to communicate his wisdom to the peoples of the East. These organizational activities resulted, through the years, in a variety of Buddhist sects which are now the religions of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Tibet, Bhutan, and Japan. Yet there are fundamental ideas which are common to all. As Lester says:

> Its message begins with the recognition of the fact of suffering in human existence. It characterizes the human person—subject to constant change, pain, and ultimately—death—as fundamentally ill-at-ease, full of anxiety, endlessly striving, and never satisfied. According to the Buddha, the cause of suffering is not the natural environment, human society, or the actions of a super-natural force, but humans themselves. More specifically, the cause of suffering is karma—the force of a person's thoughts, words, and deeds. Indeed, karma is the cause of life itself. People are self-creating; their physical form is the expression of a mental disposition, shaped and driven by desire—the desire for life, for pleasure, for power, for possessions, and for freedom. Within certain limits, whatever a person wills, that is what he or she becomes.

By the reduction and elimination of desire, peace is achieved—amounting to the realization of Nirvana. Lester's book is mostly the story of the various forms and beliefs which have grown up over the twenty-five hundred years since the Buddha lived.

The book is informative on what may be called the sociology of Buddhism around the world, and on the distinctive differences between Mahayana Buddism and Theravada Buddhism, sometimes called the esoteric and the exoteric aspects of the Buddha's teaching. It is, in short, a thorough instruction in what various Buddhists believe and practice. However, for those who are interested in the Buddha's philosophy, other books

are needed. One we strongly recommend is *The Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, edited by Kenneth Rexroth and published in 1977 by Ross-Erikson in Santa Barbara, Calif. Hearn gives the reader opportunity to absorb the essential ideas of Buddhist teachings as a way of life, and in particular how it shaped the feeling and thinking of the people of Japan. No one has written so illuminatingly of Nirvana and of the more recondite aspects of Buddhist philosophy. Then, in a little volume, *Appearances*, by G. Lowes Dickinson, published by Doubleday in 1914, the author speaks of the "sculptured gospel" found in the magnificent *stupa* of Borobudur in Java, which "seems to bring home to one, better than the volumes of the learned, what Buddhism really meant to the masses of its followers."

> It meant not the hope or desire for extinction, but the charming dream of thousands of lives, past and to come, in many forms, many conditions, many diverse fates. The pessimism of the master is as little likely as his high philosophy to have reached the mind or the heart of the people. . . . What touched them in him was the saint and lover of animals and men. And this love it was that flowed in streams all over the world, leaving wherever it passed, in literature and art, in pictures of flowers or mountains, in fables and poems and tales, the trace of its warm and humanizing flood.

COMMENTARY
CAN WRITING BE TAUGHT?

WRITERS and especially poets are more likely to have things worth saying than other people. A good example is the contribution of Denise Levertov to *Writers as Teachers—Teachers as Writers,* which is quoted in this week's "Children." She gains an intensity seldom achieved by present-day writers.

There were other valuable contributors to this book, one of them Wendell Berry, who at that time was teaching at the University of Kentucky, where he is now again teaching two days a week. His title, for his contribution then, was, "Some Thoughts I Have in Mind When I Teach," and the concluding part of his essay is his answer to the question, "Can one *teach* writing?" What he says has great appeal to those who wonder about the dozens and scores of volumes which assume that such teaching is possible. This is his reply

> I don't think so. And I suspect, moreover, that most things worth knowing cannot be taught. I am depressed and repelled by the thought of all the books and articles that have been written to tell people how to write—all that stuff about how to get "the reader" interested in writing that (presumably) does not deserve his interest, as if the art of writing were merely counterfeiting. What gets my interest is the sense that a writer is speaking honestly and fully of what he knows well, and it is stupid to think that he could have received this power from a book or a teacher. It is a power that he has made in his life by the practice of his art and attentiveness to his experience. No good book was ever written according to a recipe. Every good book is to a considerable extent a unique discovery. And so one can say with plenty of justification that nobody knows "how to write." Certainly nobody knows how other people ought to. For myself, though I think I know how to write the books I have already written—and though I guess, wrongly no doubt, that I could now write them better than I did—I am discomforted by the knowledge that I don't know how to write the books I have not yet written. But that discomfort has an excitement about it, and it is the necessary antecedent of one of the best kinds of happiness. . . .
>
> I think there is a good chance that the best result of a writer's teaching may be wholly inadvertent. His greatest service to his students may not be anything he *intends* to do for them, but in his chance revelations of himself.

This is a very good book. But the years pass and one seldom hears of it again.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
WRITERS AS TEACHERS

IN *Writers as Teachers—Teachers as Writers* (Holt, 1970), Denise Levertov, in the longest contribution to this book, tells about the nearly *six* months she spent teaching literature and the craft of poetry at the University of California in Berkeley during the first half of 1969. "My Berkeley students," she said, "demanded and gave more than any others I had known, and by their attitudes made me much more deeply and genuinely non-authoritarian." This was the time of the student strike. Relating what happened, she said that while she had questions about "its timing and tactics," she immediately declared her support of the strike and announced that all her classes would be conducted "off campus as long as it continued." They finally found a suitable room for meeting. Meanwhile she picketed after every class and took part in the People's Park demonstrations.

> And now I come to the experience from which I learned most at Berkeley, for which much of what I have just been telling is only the background, though necessary, I feel, to understanding its impact:
>
> The People's Park had, during the first part of the second quarter, been coming steadily into more and more manifest existence—created by students and "street people"—two blocks away from our coffee house classroom. Many of us had spent some pleasant time there; a few were actively involved in its construction. I suggested that those from the class who wished (plus some from the poetry workshop) meet in the Park one afternoon to work at digging or planting or whatever was going on. In fact, we ended up taking a truckload of garbage out to the city dump. . . . This occurred on what turned out to be the last day before the Battle of Berkeley. . . .
>
> For almost three weeks thereafter there were daily rallies and protest marches, with attempts (some at least temporarily successful) to start new Parks on other empty lots; there were many tear-gassings, police billyclub charges, the naked bayonets of the National Guard. And always the threat of a repetition of the first day's buckshot fire when the police killed one young man, blinded another (an artist) and wounded three hundred more . . . Under these circumstances, what happened to my classes?
>
> Miraculously, beautifully, even though we found it impossible to continue our planned reading and discussion of the books on my list and of students' resulting papers (which sometimes were poems), yet the larger class (as well as the poetry workshop) continued to meet every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 11 A.M., usually with full attendance, and often with the addition of some members of the workshop also. . . .
>
> What is it that made this experience so important to me even aside from its immediate qualities of drama and emotion? What made it a learning experience for me *as a teacher?*. . . . It was only a gleam—a glimpse—but things were said in those last meetings, perceptions were exchanged, not only verbally, but by tone and gesture, that attained, or at the least gave promise of, levels of shared learning far beyond the average.

For Denise Levertov the idea of what a school should be like began to evolve.

> I am not suggesting that we can only teach and learn on the barricades. Indeed, there was very real disruption and distraction of the attention from material we would have liked to explore, no doubt of that. But if some degree of the commonest social intimacy—the exchange of some biographical information, meeting in settings less formal than the classroom, getting to see one another's bookshelves—if even this can make mutual criticism and appreciation and the exchange of insights at once more candid and more sensitive, then the sharing not only of—as in this case—danger, trauma, and the experience of community under provocation—but of all kinds of other realities would surely make shared learning in any field—of the humanities especially—more profound. To have lived through the Berkeley siege means to me, then not only a new vision of what life might be like in a world of gentle and life-loving people. It means not only the knowledge that there is no such thing as a generation gap when people are engaged in a common task in which they believe.

Her dream expands:

> It means not these things alone, though they are much, very much; but also the conviction that a meaningful education in the future—if there is a future worth the name—will be broken down into the smallest viable units (classes averaging between ten and fifteen) and that these units will do many more

> things together than study specific subjects: they will cook together (something that would restore meaning to eating together), and grow vegetables and flowers together, and mend each other's clothes—and study not only one subject as a group, but several related and unrelated ones, while each individual would also be sharing some study and other activities with other semi-autonomous groups. In such educational interweavings each teacher would also be, part of the time, a student along with the rest; and all teachers would share, at least to the extent consonant with his or her age and family situation, in the life of the commune—for such educational units would certainly be communes, to a far greater degree even than such forerunners as Black Mountain seems to have been.
>
> A pipe dream? I don't believe it is merely that, remote and hard to effectuate as such a scheme may sound at a time when colleges everywhere are *expanding*.. I can't see it as a mere pipe dream because I believe it is a necessity. (If Paul Goodman's proposal for storefront elementary and high schools had been taken seriously several years ago, it would have been one of the greatest advances ever made in the history of education.)

There would of course be some difficulties for small schools, which lack elaborate science equipment. But the schools would have no boards of directors and parents would be free of anxieties if schools were places where "people were free to teach and learn in an atmosphere of mutual aid."

> "And the degrees?" someone asks. "Accreditation?" All I can answer to that is that the most intelligent students I have known care less and less for the degree (here again I am speaking only of the humanities, I admit) and many quit school before getting it. The basic—perhaps the only—criterion for admission to such a commune/school would have to be that the applicants were interested in sharing their living and learning and that they did not care about ending up with a stamp of approval. . . .
>
> It seems clear that if teachers and students want (and I know there are many, many, who do) the kind of new college I have sketched, there is little hope of persuading existing institutions to change radically in that direction. People are going to have to get together and do it themselves—without big preliminary (and exhausting) fundraising campaigns, without expectations of each experiment enduring for years and becoming institutionalized (better they should not), and without wasting time and energy in setting up a lot of rules and regulations and boards of trustees. Let a thousand "hedge schools" bloom.

FRONTIERS

"Super Destructive Illness"

WE have before given attention to the work of Hannes Alfven, the Swedish Nobel Laureate physicist who calls for the cleansing of our language, but the strength of his appeal and its importance justifies further quotation. Parts of this essay appeared years ago in *Development Dialogue*, issued by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation. It is now available again as the pamphlet, *Honest Language—Semantics of the Nuclear Debate*, issued by the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, 1187 Coast Village Road, Suite 123, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93108.

Prof. Alfven begins with a quotation from Confucius: What would he do, the Chinese philosopher was asked, if he became Emperor of China? He answered: "The most important thing would be 'the rectification of words'." Alfven continues:

> This principle is applicable to the nuclear debate. . . . An important euphemism is "nuclear arms." It gives the impression that these arms are similar to old-fashioned arms. In the back of their minds, people may associate nuclear arms with brave knights fighting in shining armor. But the criminal pressing the button which will annihilate millions if not billions of civilians, including women and children or rather, torture them all to death—is doing nothing heroic. Annihilators would be a more precise term for such arms.

He adopts from John Somerville the term "omnicide" to describe the result of the use of nuclear weapons. Science, he says, used to mean simply "the unbiased investigation of nature." But now other meanings have been added.

> Years ago some scientists discovered nuclear fission and later others enthusiastically worked at making nuclear fission increasingly more terrifying. At present more than half the scientists in the world are paid directly or indirectly by the military or political establishments. On the other hand, there are a great number of scientists who, since the Manhattan Project, have protested as strongly as possible against the development of annihilators.

He speaks of "a general madness" sweeping the world, with "humanity girding its loins for omnicide, the killing of all of us."

> What role can scientists play? It is our profession to clarify the truth to ourselves and to our colleagues. It is also our duty to tell everyone the truth and nothing but the truth: to educate people about the real state of the world.
>
> It has been thought that this should be done by whispering advice into the ears of the world's political leaders. Decades of sad experience in the nuclear debate have taught us that this does not work. Politicians are under pressure from many groups more powerful than scientists and, according to the rules of the political game, they listen—they must—to those who can exert the most pressure. Of course they would be concerned if their actions led to world destruction, but clearly they are more concerned about winning the next election or, in dictatorial states, about retaining their power.
>
> Hence, the only effective remedy for the nuclear threat would be that popular movements become strong enough to exert decisive pressure on the politicians. As I see it, this is the only way to save our culture, our society, and the scientific and technical knowledge on which our civilization is based. I find it very satisfying to see such grassroots movements now developing.

Hannes Alfven does not exaggerate the danger. The only difficulty is in finding ways to arouse common folk to action. He asks:

> Is the situation really so dangerous? Yes! It is not necessary for me to repeat all the arguments—they are well known—but I believe that the more you study the present situation, the more terrifying it looks. There are an increasing number of scientists warning against the present buildup of nuclear arms. Still, it is surprising that more scientists do not speak out. Why do they not? One reason is that scientists are specialists. To them the most important thing is their latest discovery or latest technical innovation. Whether this is to the benefit or the detriment of humankind is often of secondary interest. They are happy to pass that responsibility to the businessmen, the military men and the politicians, who pay their research grants and salaries. Since destructive results are usually rewarded more generously than others, scientists are often under pressure to accelerate the *rare to oblivion.*

> But there is a second, deeper reason that scientists do not protest more strongly. Scientists are often—but not always—very "intelligent" people. However, in this context there seem to be two different types of intelligence. One kind is what we may call "nuclear intelligence." The people who possess this count their achievements by how many people their devices can kill: how large a figure they can enter in the *megadeath* column. (One megadeath means the death of one million people.) Their aim is to make this figure as large as possible for the "enemy" and as small as possible for their own masters. What *megadeath* means in human terms is something they either do not understand or refuse to think about. In particular, they never mention that killing people by nuclear means is not comparable to killing the same number of people by conventional weapons because radioactive death is not a "heroic" death in the old sense; very often it is a slow torturing to death, as we know very well from Hiroshima.
>
> The other kind of intelligence we may call a "humane intelligence." Those who possess it cannot avoid seeing the meaning of megadeath in human terms. Their intelligence is combined with empathy in such a way that they are compelled to identify themselves with those who would be killed. In their imagination they themselves constitute one millionth of what the people with nuclear intelligence call a megadeath.

While the construction of annihilators and delivery systems is complicated, which only experts can discuss, the claims and slogans made in behalf of these weapons are within the grasp of everyone.

> Anyone who can read and think is competent to discuss and analyze the problems. In fact, the "experts" are perhaps less competent than ordinary people to discuss them because of their professional bias. And many experts possess more nuclear than humane intelligence. Decisive in these discussions is that *honest language* be used. . . .
>
> Until someone demonstrates that it is possible to accept some nuclear technology and remain safe, there is only one conclusion: the sole means of avoiding the increasing threat of nuclear omnicide is to consider *all nuclear activity as a crime against humanity.*

What does Hannes Alfven think about Star Wars or SDI? He calls it the "Super Destructive Illness."