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THE IMPERFECT CREATOR

SOONER or later, anyone who writes makes the discovery that a line of description is never accurate—that is, it cannot be complete—least of all when it applies to some other human being. The account you give of someone is in that sense always deceiving. It is better, then, not to describe, but to tell about an action, or a series of actions, which the reader can turn into the characterization of the man or woman you are writing about. Even then, the portrait is likely to be imperfect, since the action in another situation may produce an entirely different effect. But less deception seems to be involved.

In his essay, *The Dehumanization of Art*, Ortega y Gasset turns his discovery into a critical principle which he uses to explain modern art. The modern artist, he maintains, is determined to avoid appealing to the human element, which is spontaneous in its response. He says:

> This is clearly discernible in music and poetry. From Beethoven to Wagner music was primarily concerned with expressing personal feelings. The composer erected great structures of sound in which to accommodate his autobiography Art was, more or less, confession. There existed no way of aesthetic enjoyment except by contagion. "In music," Nietzsche declared, "the passions enjoyed themselves." Wagner poured into *Tristan and Isolde* his adultery with Mathilde Wesondonck, and if we want to enjoy this work we must for a few hours, turn vaguely adulterous ourselves. That darkly stirring music makes us weep and tremble and melt away voluptuously. From Beethoven to Wagner all music is melodrama. . . . Romanticism hunts with a decoy, it tampers with the bird's fervor in order to riddle him with the pellets of sounds. Art must not proceed by psychic contagion, for psychic contagion is an unconscious phenomenon, and art ought to be full clarity, high noon of the intellect. Tears and laughter are frauds. The gesture of beauty never passes beyond smiles, melancholy or delight. If it can do without them, better still. . . .
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> There is to my mind, a good deal of truth in the young artist's verdict. Aesthetic pleasure must be a seeing pleasure. For pleasures may be blind or seeing. The drunken man's happiness is blind. Like everything in the world it has a cause, the alcohol; but it has no motive. A man who has won at sweepstakes is happy too, but in a different manner; he is happy "about" something. The drunken man's merriment is hermetically enclosed in itself, he does not know why he is happy. Whereas the joy of the winner consists in his being conscious of a definite fact that motivates and justifies his contentment. He is glad because he is aware of an object that is in itself gladdening. His is a happiness with eyes which feeds on its motive, flowing, as it were from the object to the subject.

Ortega continues his argument:

> What has the beauty of music—something obviously located without and beyond myself in the realm of sound—what has the beauty of music to do with that melting mood it may produce in me? Is not this a thorough confusion? Instead of delighting in the artistic object people delight in their own emotions, the work being only the cause and the alcohol of their pleasure. . . .
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> Madame Tussaud's comes to mind and the peculiar uneasiness aroused by dummies. The origin of this uneasiness lies in the provoking ambiguity with which wax figures defeat any attempt at adopting a clear and consistent attitude toward them. Treat them as living beings, and they will sniggeringly reveal their waxen secret. Take them for dolls, and they seem to breathe in irritated protest. They will not be reduced to mere object. Looking at them we suddenly feel a misgiving: should it not be they who are looking at us? Till in the end we are sick and tired of those hired corpses. Wax figures are melodrama at its purest. . . .
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> Debussy dehumanized music, that is why he marks a new era in the art of music. The same thing happened in poetry. Poetry had to be disencumbered. Laden with human matter it was dragging along, skirting the ground and bumping into trees and housetops like a deflated balloon. Here Mallarmé was the liberator who restored to the lyrical poem its ethereal quality and ascending power. . . . Mallarmé was the first poet in the nineteenth century who wanted to be nothing but a poet. He "eschewed"—as he said himself—"the materials offered by nature"

and composed small lyrical objects distinct from the human fauna and flora.

Ortega remarks:

> A good deal of what I have called dehumanization and disgust for living forms is inspired by . . . an aversion against the traditional interpretation of realities. The vigor of the assault stands in inverse proportion to the distance. Keenest contempt is felt for nineteenth century procedures although they contain a noticeable dose of opposition to older styles. On the other hand, the new sensibility exhibits a somewhat suspicious enthusiasm for art that is most remote in time and space, for prehistoric or savage primitivism. In point of fact, what attracts the modern artist in those primordial works is not so much their artistic quality as their candor; that is, the absence of tradition. . . .
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> When we discovered that the new style taken in its most general aspect is characterized by a tendency to eliminate all that is human and to preserve only the artistic elements, this seemed to betray a great enthusiasm for art. But when we then walked around the phenomenon and looked at it from another angle, we came upon an unexpected grimace of surfeit or disdain. The contradiction is obvious and must be strongly stressed. It definitely indicates that modern art is of an ambiguous nature which, as a matter of fact, does not surprise us; for ambiguous have been all important issues of these current years. . . .
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> For a real understanding of what is happening let us compare the role art is playing today with the role it used to play . . . throughout the last century. Poetry and music then were activities of an enormous caliber. In view of the downfall of religion and the inevitable relativism of science, art was expected to take upon itself nothing less than the salvation of mankind. . . . It was a remarkable sight, the solemn air with which the great poet or the musical genius appeared before the masses—the air of a prophet and founder of religion, the majestic pose of a statesman responsible for the state of the world.
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> A present-day artist would be thunderstruck, I suspect, if he were trusted with so enormous a mission and, in consequence, compelled to deal in his work with matters of such scope. . . . All peculiarities of modern art can be summed up in this one feature of its renouncing its importance—a feature which, in its turn, signifies nothing less than that art has changed its position in the hierarchy of human activities and interests.

The honesty of the artist leaves him no choice. His discovery that, almost without knowing it, he has been a manipulator, compels the modesty of his new position, of its initial rebellion and the justification of what may seem the light-weight novelties of his new expressions. Ask no profundities of me, he seems to say. I refuse to try to move your heart with tricks. And so the artist, if he is a real artist, seeks the blessed anonymity of a craftsman, the maker of folk rhymes and tunes, the artist who has freed himself of the shackles of tradition.

So it was that among the archaic Greeks, there was no word for "art," no sanctified meaning which we have given the term, but only for skill in representation. According to Eric Havelock in his *Preface to Plato*, such mistranslations—

> are held in defiance of the fact that neither "art" nor "artist," *as we use the words*, is translatable into archaic or high-classical Greek (cf. Collingwood [*The Principles of Art*], p. 6: "If people have no word for a certain kind of thing it is because they are not aware of it as a distinct kind"). The possibility of a notion of aesthetic, as a distinct discipline, first dawned with Aristotle. . . . The words "art" and "artist" can be used to translate the metaphorical use in Plato of words like *techne* and *demiourgos* ("the art of living," "the art of government," "the artist of the universe". . .), and what is said in these metaphorical contexts is then interpreted as part of Plato's "theory of art" in the professional sense. Hence even the Platonic philosopher can by this device be turned into an "artist," and Plato's text be reduced to a glutinous paste capable of adhering to any mental object in the critic's mind.

Thus Plato, in his youth a poet, was on guard against the fascinations of the poet's "art" and his capacity to enslave in belief young minds. It is this capacity of the descriptive line to mislead that arrests the writer, compelling him to reflect upon the deception implicit in his art, and to draw back, seeking, if he can find it, a more universal medium.

We go now to another of Ortega's essays, included in the volume, *The Dehumanization of Art*, which we have been quoting (published by Princeton University Press, 1968), this one titled

"The Self and the Other." He begins with a comparison of humans with apes, noting that, unlike humans, apes or animals are totally involved in their environment. In the case of the animal—

> It does not rule its own life, it does not rule from *itself,* but is always alert to what is going on outside it to what is *other* than itself. Our Spanish word *otro* (other) is nothing but the Latin *alter.* To say, then, that the animal lives not from *itself* but from what is *other,* is equivalent to saying that the animal always lives in estrangement, is beside itself, that its life is essential *alteración.* . . .
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> But, you will ask, does man perchance not find himself in the same situation as the animal—a prisoner of the world, surrounded by things that enchant him, and obliged all his life, inexorably, whether he will or no, to concern himself with them? There is no doubt of it. But with this essential difference—that man can, from time to time, suspend his direct concern with things, detach himself from his surroundings, ignore them, and subjecting his faculty of attention to a radical shift—incomprehensible zoologically—turn so to speak, his back on the world and take his stand inside himself, attend to his own inwardness or, what is the same thing, concern himself with himself and not with that which is *other,* with things. . . .
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> Observe that this marvelous faculty which man possesses of temporarily freeing himself from his slavery to things implies two very different powers: one, his ability to ignore the world for a greater or lesser time without fatal risk, the other, his having somewhere to take his stand, to be, when he has virtually left the world. Baudelaire expressed this latter difficulty with romantic and mannered dandyism when, asked where he would choose to live, he answered: "Anywhere, so it were out of the world!" But the world is the whole of exteriority, the absolute *without,* which can have no other without beyond itself. The only possible without to this *without* is, precisely, a *within,* an *intus,* the inwardness of man, his *self,* which is principally made up of ideas. . . .

Now Ortega. says that to take refuge in himself, man must *learn* to make this withdrawal. "He has to do it all for himself."

> Hence, if man enjoys this privilege of temporarily freeing himself from things and the power to enter into himself and there rest, it is because by his effort, his toil, and his ideas he has succeeded in retrieving something from things, in transforming them and creating around himself a margin of security which is always limited but always or almost always increasing. . . .
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> From this inner world he emerged and returns to the outer, but he returns as protagonist, he returns with a *self* which he did not possess before—he returns with his plan of campaign: not to let himself be dominated by things, but to govern them himself, to impose his will and his design upon them, to realize his ideas in that outer world, to shape the planet after the preferences of his innermost being.

Now Ortega rises to heights of inspiration. There is no deception in his prose, but a lifting, a reaching, the most profound exercise of the writer's art. He says:

> Far from losing his own self in this return to the world, he on the contrary carries his self to the *other,* projects it energetically and masterfully upon things, in other words, he forces the *other*—the world—little by little to become himself. Man humanizes the world, injects it, impregnates it with his own ideal substance and is finally entitled to imagine that one day or another, in the far depths of time, this terrible outer world will become so saturated with man that our descendants will be able to travel through it as today we mentally travel through our inmost selves—he finally imagines that the world, without ceasing to be the world, will one day be changed into something like a materialized soul, and, as in Shakespeare's *Tempest,* the winds will blow at the bidding of Ariel, the spirit of ideas.
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> I do not say that this is certain—such certainty is the exclusive possession of the *progressivist,* and I am no progressivist, as you will see. But I do say that it is possible.

Ortega now entertains the doubts that are inevitable. It is our business to think, but we think very imperfectly.

> Because if for a moment, so that we may understand one another here and now, we admit the traditional idea that thought is the charactertistic of man—remember *man, a rational animal*—so that to be a man would be, as our inspired forefather Descartes, claimed, the same as to be *a thinking thing,* we should find ourselves holding that man, by being endowed once and for all with *thought,* by possessing it with the certainty with which a constitutive and inalienable quality is possessed, would be sure of being a man as the fish is in fact sure of being a fish. Now this is a formidable and

fatal error. Man is never sure that he will be able to carry out his thought—that is, in an adequate manner; and only if it is adequate is it thought. Or, in more popular terms: man is never sure that he will be right, that he will hit the mark. Which means nothing less than the tremendous fact that, unlike all other beings in the universe, man can never be sure that he is, in fact, a man, as the tiger is sure of being a tiger and a fish of being a fish.

And now he draws his momentous conclusion:

Far from thought having been bestowed upon man, the truth is . . . that he has continually been creating thought, making it little by little, by dint of a discipline, a culture or cultivation, a millennial effort over many millennia, without having yet succeeded—far from it—in finishing his work. Not only was thought not given to man from the first, but even at this point in history he has only succeeded in forming the small portion and a crude form of what in the simple and ordinary sense of the word we call thought. And even the small portion gained being an acquired and not a constitutive quality, is always in danger of being lost, many times in fact, in the past, and today we are on the point of losing it again. To this extent, unlike all other beings in the universe, man is never surely *man;* on the contrary, *being man* signifies precisely being always on the point of not being man, being a living problem, an absolute and hazardous adventure, or, as I am wont to say: being, in essence, drama! Because there is drama only when we do not know what is going to happen, so that every instant is pure peril and shuddering risk. While the tiger cannot cease being a tiger, cannot be detigered, man lives in the perpetual risk of being dehumanized. With him, not only is it problematic and continent, whether this or that will happen to him, as it is with the other animals but at times what happens to man is nothing less than *ceasing to be man.* And this is true not only abstractly and generically but it holds for our own individuality. Each one of us is always in peril of not being the unique and untransferable *self* which he is. The majority of men perpetually betray this *self* which is waiting to be; and to tell the whole truth our personal individuality is a personage which is never completely realized, a stimulating Utopia, a secret legend, which each of us guards in the bottom of his heart.

We should here leave some space in the text and say that it is meant for taking time off to think about what Ortega has said. But we won't do this because playing with typography is only a little boy's trick, as we. all know, and those who are ready to think will do so when they feel like it, along the way. So we skip some pages and return to Ortega:

Without a strategic retreat into the self, without vigilant thought, human life is impossible. Call to mind all that mankind owes to certain great withdrawals into the self! It is no chance that all the great founders of religions preceded their apostolates by famous retreats. Buddha withdrew to the forest; Mohammed withdrew to his tent, and even there he withdrew from his tent by wrapping his head in his cloak; above all, Jesus went apart in the desert for forty days. What do we not owe to Newton! Well, when someone, amazed that he had succeeded in reducing the innumerable phenomena of the physical world to such a precise and simple system, asked him how he had succeeded in doing so, he replied ingenuously: *"Nocte dieque incubando,"* "turning them over day and night"—words behind which we glimpse vast and profound withdrawals into the self.

For his conclusion to this essay, Ortega recalls Goethe's lines—

I, I confess, am of the race of those
Who from the dark aspire to clarity.

. . . Because clear ideas have ceased to exist, the European now feels lost and demoralized.

Machiavelli—not to be confused with "Machiavellianism"—tells us neatly that when an army is demoralized and scatters, losing its formations, there is only one salvation: *"Ritornare al segno," "to return to the banner,"* gather beneath its folds, and regroup the scattered hosts beneath that sign. Europe and America must also *ritornare al segno* of clear ideas. The new generations, who delight in clean bodies and pure acts, must integrate themselves in the clear idea, in the strictly constructed idea, which is not redundant, which is not flabby, which is necessary to life. Let us return—I repeat—from myths to clear and distinct ideas, as, three centuries ago, they were called, with programmatic solemnity, by the keenest mind which the West has known: René Descartes, "that French cavalier who set out at such a good pace," as Peguy put it. I know very well that Descartes and his rationalism are outdated, but man is nothing positive if he is not continuity. To excel the past we must not allow ourselves to lose contact with it; on the contrary, we must feel it under our feet because we have raised ourselves upon it.

REVIEW
TWO STORIES

THE story is the thing.

There was once a Hasid, a disciple of the holy rabbi of Koznitz, who was unable to father any children. From time to time he visited the Maggid, the preacher, of Koznitz, to ask for help, so that God would bless him with children, but the rabbi remained silent. Years passed and the Hasid's wife grew bitter because of her lot. Finally, she cried out to her husband, "Go, now, to the holy rabbi, and don't leave his doorstep until he replies to you, for my life is no life at all without children." The Hasid asked, "What if he tells me to divorce you?" And she replied, "We shall do whatever he says."

So the man went to the rabbi once again, who this time said: "If you are willing to make a great sacrifice, to go on a long journey that will leave you impoverished, you may yet succeed in having a child." The Hasid said he must first consult his wife. He did, and she said that "Wealth means nothing if I cannot leave a memory after me."

So the man returned to the rabbi and was told: "Go home, sell all of your possessions, and take the gold with you. Keep nothing, or your journey will be in vain. Go to Rabbi Yakov Yitzhak of Lublin, and tell him I have sent you, and follow his advice."

So in Lublin the Hasid waited a week to see Rabbi Yakov Yitzhak, the Seer of Lublin, and then another week, living at an inn. Then, at the end of the third week the rabbi saw him. After a very long silence the rabbi said:

> "In your youth you were betrothed to a young woman Miriam Shifra, but when you came of age you broke this engagement on your own, without even informing her or her parents of your decision. She waited and waited until the news reached her that you had already been wed to another. This caused her great grief. Her father could find no one else for her to wed. You are to blame for her pain. Find her and ask her forgiveness. Only if she forgives will a soul from on high be set free to become your child."

The Hasid was staggered. How did the rabbi know these things? "Now," he said to the Maggid, "I will do exactly as you say." And the Maggid said: "In two months time there will be a Bazaar in the town of Balta. She will be there. Go there, and speak with her."

So the Hasid went to Balta, wandered about asking for Miriam Shifra. And in the evening he returned to his room in the inn, spending the night studying the Torah and in prayer that he might fulfill his quest. But no one knew anything at all of Miriam Shifra. He stayed and kept looking only because the Maggid had told him not to leave until he had found her.

Then the bazaar came to an end, the merchants all packed their goods and left, and soon the streets were all empty and it began to rain. On the outskirts of town, the Hasid saw two women taking refuge under the eaves of a house. And he heard one of them, very beautiful and finely dressed, say to her servant, "Do you see that man standing there? That man betrayed me when I was young, and now he's trying to escape from me again."

Hasid overheard these words. Meekly, he approached the woman and said: "What do you mean? Is it true that I was once engaged to you?" The woman replied, "Are you still pretending that it is not so? That is how you have acted all these years, leaving me forgotten like one of the dead. Tell me, do you at least recall my name?" And the Hasid spoke in a whisper, "Are you Miriam Shifra?" And when the woman nodded, the Hasid broke into sobs. Finally, regaining control, he said, "I have come here to seek you out. You have every right to despise me, and it is too late for me to right the matter, but I hope it is not too late for you to forgive me. For I have come seeking your forgiveness, so that my wife and I may have children of our own. The Seer of Lublin told me that until you do, we will never know the blessing of a child. Now I beg you to forgive my sin, if you can, and I would do anything to repay you."

The woman stared hard at him and saw that his repentance was true. And she said, "There is nothing I need that you could give me. But I have a very poor brother, a scholar of the Torah, who lives in the town of Sublack. His daughter is of the age to be wed, but my brother does not have enough to pay for the dowry and the wedding. Therefore go to him and give him three hundred silver coins. And tell him that you are giving it in my honor and at my request. When the deed is done I will forgive you with all my heart. Then I am certain God will bless you with children and grandchildren, all of whom will have a love of the Torah."

The Hasid was enormously relieved. The woman said she had to go and she went around the corner. He followed her to thank her, but she had disappeared. So, in the morning, he set out for Sublack and located her brother, who was in distracted condition. The Hasid asked what was wrong and the man explained that the parents of the young man had sent him a letter saying that if they did not have the dowry of three hundred pieces of silver within three days they would cancel the wedding. So my daughter, he said, is crying and cannot be comforted.

Now the Hasid had exactly three hundred pieces of silver left of the money he had brought with him. He took his pouch and handed it to the sad father, saying, "Here, take this, and may the wedding be a great joy to everyone." The man was overwhelmed. "Why are you helping me like this?" he asked.

Then the Hasid said: "I am a messenger from your sister, Miriam Shifra. She directed me to give these coins to you for your daughter's dowry." A very strange look came over the man's face, and he said, "Where did you see my sister? When did she tell you that?" The Hasid replied, "I saw her in the marketplace in Balta about three weeks ago." Then the man shouted, "My sister has been dead for ten years! Come with me and I will show you her grave!" And when the Hasid heard this a chill ran down his spine, for he realized that the woman he had met in Balta was not one of the living.

So he told the whole story to the father of the restored bride. And when the man heard this, he realized that his sister must indeed have come back from the beyond to help him, and he too turned pale. The two of them sat in silence for a long time. . . .

The Hasid then heard a whispering voice, "All is forgiven." So he attended the wedding and then returned to Lublin to tell the Maggid all that had happened. . . . The Maggid gave him a great blessing, that his lineage would have a great love of the Torah. And that is exactly what came to pass. . . .

We said at the beginning that the Story is the thing, so for review of *Lilith's Cave—Jewish Tales of the Supernatural,* retold by Howard Schwartz, illustrated by Uri Shulevitz, and published this year by Harper & Row ($22.50), we repeated one of the stories. There are fifty such stories in the book, some of them longer, some of them shorter.

We have space to tell one more story—this one about a young woman of Frankfurt who was about to be married. But she and her mother had a dispute about her gown. The girt refused to wear her mother's wedding dress, she wanted one of her own. But her mother insisted and then became so angry that she said, "Go to the Devil!" and walked from the room and slammed the door.

Then the girl went to the store where she had seen a wedding dress she longed for and there saw that dress about to be purchased by a wealthy woman along with a great many other dresses. So she went up to the woman and in a trembling voice said: "Please, Madam, do not be angry with me, but I was hoping to purchase that one dress for my wedding." She pointed to the dress and the woman pulled it out of the pile. The woman said, "What a beautiful girl you are. I am certain that you would indeed look magnificent in that dress. Perhaps I can give it to you as a wedding

present." The girl said that she only wished to purchase the dress herself, but the fine lady asked the girl to come home with her and show her how well she looked in the dress.

So the two women went to what turned out to be a veritable palace and the girl put on the dress in a room filled with mirrors. She put on the dress and then wished that she could always be as she was at that moment, dressed as a bride and surrounded by mirrors. Then she found herself locked in that room.

When the girl did not return home in time for dinner, her parents searched for her and the next day they consulted Rabbi Naphtali Cohen, who told them to continue preparations for the wedding as if she were there. That night she learned in a dream what had happened. When the bridegroom arrived the rabbi asked him if he were willing to risk his soul for her. Assured that he would, the rabbi took him out in the country to a field where the rabbi drew a large circle around him, and then told him: "Your bride has been kidnapped by Lilith, Oueen of Demons. Asmodeus will come here. You must look him in the eye and say 'Why did you take my bride?'" And it all happened as the rabbi predicted. The young groom, a man of strong will, put his question and faced the King of the Demons down, saying "She is mine, not yours. She will come with me." Then the rabbi came, bringing the bride, whom he had rescued, and had given a clean garment. The demons all disappeared. Returning to Frankfurt, the rabbi told the bridegroom: "You have done well indeed, for had you turned your eyes away from those of Asmodeus for even an instant, the girl would have been lost for good. But because you did not, she was set free."

So the wedding was celebrated with great joy, the girl wearing her mother's wedding gown, and she was beautiful indeed.

COMMENTARY
A HIDDEN LANGUAGE

THE arts are halfway houses between truth and illusion. They produce joy because of what they are reaching toward, yet also all the deceptions and frustrations of which Ortega speaks, as quoted in the lead article. What is beyond art? The silence of the philosopher. The philosopher has had intimations of truth, and therefore he keeps silent, since he has discovered that words are the fabric of illusion. Yet words, coming from the mind of a great man, sometimes outwit the illusory tendencies of speech and then, once in a thousand years or so, we have a Shakespeare whose lines reverberate through the ages, turning beauty into what it was intended to be, both fascinating and bewildering the reader. The artist begins by copying the past, but if he is a real artist, and not just an imitator, the impulse to break with the past becomes stronger and stronger.

Then he is overtaken by pain. He leaves behind the audience which nourishes him, or from which he thinks his nourishment comes. He begins to do strange raucous things. We do not understand the lines he draws, which seem an effort to portray a figure which is not there. And yet, sometimes, he seems to succeed and incites wonder in the viewer. What is he doing? People write long monographs to explain, but the world becomes little wiser from them. Was this how, over many centuries, the conventions of Egyptian wall paintings evolved? Did a theory of meaning finally become more important than objective appearance? Is this something that artists can teach us? We hardly know.

Yet the power in ancient symbolism has a strange effect on our feelings: we sense that a meaning is intended by these forms, but who can give it voice? The circle, the triangle, the swastika, the egg-form and the spiral—these forms occur and recur throughout ages in many cultures. They speak to some part of us, as though they stood for a language of the gods. Is a speech possible in this tongue?

There are thinkers who are convinced that such a speech is an underlying reality of our lives—as for example, Alan McGlashan, whose *Savage and Beautiful Country* was recently reprinted. Listen, he says, to the still, small voices that can be vaguely heard from within.

Do we actually have an inner life, an immortal life with a language whose accents are sometimes heard from afar, whose symbols are written in both the stars and in the earth? Are the arts but imperfect imitations of these things, given to us by a parentage we know of only from legend? We may be thankful that it is also given to us to wonder about these things.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THREE UNUSUAL MEN

IN tints book, *The Servant as Leader*, which he published in 1973, Robert K. Greenleaf described three men who were great persuaders. One was John Woolman, the American Quaker "who almost singlehandedly rid the Society of Friends (Quakers) of slaves." Thirty of his adult years—he lived to 52—were devoted to this mission. "By 1770, nearly 100 years before the Civil War, no Quakers held slaves."

Greenleaf tells how he did it:

> Although John Woolman was not a strong man physically, he accomplished his mission by journeys up and down the East Coast by foot or horseback visiting slaveholders—over a period of many years. The approach was not to censure the slaveholders in a way that drew their animosity. Rather the burden of his approach was to raise questions: What does the owning of slaves do to you as a moral person? What kind of an institution are you binding over to your children? Man by man, inch by inch, by persistently returning and revisiting and pressing his gentle argument over a period of thirty years, the scourge of slavery was eliminated from this Society, the first religious group in America formally to denounce and forbid slavery among its members. One wonders what would have been the result if there had been fifty John Woolmans, or even five, traveling the length and breadth of the Colonies in the eighteenth century *persuading* people one by one with gentle non-judgmental argument that a wrong should be righted by individual voluntary action. Perhaps we would not have had the war with its 600,000 casualties and the impoverishment of the South, and with the resultant vexing social problem that is at fever heat 100 years later with no end in sight. We know now, in the perspective of history, that just a slight alleviation of the tension in the 1850's might have avoided the war. A few John Woolmans, just a *few*, might have made the difference. . . .
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> John Woolman exerted his leadership in an age that must have looked as dark to him as ours does to us today. We may easily write off his effort as a suggestion for today on the assumption that the Quakers were ethically conditioned for this approach. All men are so conditioned, to some extent—enough to gamble on.

It seems a pity, at any rate, that John Woolman is now practically unknown except among the Quakers—a kind of private hero. His achievement merits wider recognition.

Next Greenleaf gives attention to an aspect of the life of Thomas Jefferson. It was the way in which he chose his calling.

> Perhaps the most significant aspect of Jefferson, more important in history than the Declaration of Independence or his later term as President, was what he did during the war. With the publication of the Declaration the war was on and Jefferson was famous. He was importuned on all sides to take important roles in the war. But he turned them all down. *He knew who he was* and he resolved to be his own man. He chose his own role. He went back to Virginia and didn't leave the state for the duration of the war. Jefferson believed the war would be won by the Colonies, that there would be a new nation, and that that nation would need a new system of law to set it on the course that he had dreamed for it in the Declaration of Independence. So he went back to Monticello, got himself elected to the Virginia legislature, and proceeded to write new statutes embodying the new principles of law for the new nation. He set out, against the determined opposition of his conservative colleagues, to get these enacted into Virginia law. It was an uphill fight. He would go to Williamsburg and wrestle with his colleagues until he was slowed to a halt. Then he would get on his horse and ride back to Monticello to rekindle his spirit and write some more statutes. Armed with these he would return to Williamsburg and take another run at it. He wrote 150 statutes in that period and got 50 of them enacted into law, the most notable being separation of church and state. For many years Virginia legislators were digging into the remaining 100 as new urgent problems made their consideration advisable.
>
> When the Constitution was drafted some years later Jefferson wasn't even around; he was in France as our Ambassador. He didn't have to be around. He had done his work and made his contribution in the statutes already operating in Virginia.

Now Greenleaf turns to a great Danish leader.

> Nikolai Frederik Severin Gruntvig, whose adult life was the first three-quarters of the nineteenth

century, is known as the Father of the Danish Folk High Schools. To understand the significance of the Folk High School one needs to know a little of the unique history of Denmark. Since it is a tiny country, not many outside it know this history and consequently Gruntvig and his seminal contribution are little known. A great church dedicated to his memory in Copenhagen attests the Danish awareness of what he did for them.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Denmark was a feudal and absolute monarchy. It was predominantly agricultural, with a large peasant population of serfs who were attached to manors. Early in the century reforms began which gave the land to the peasants as individual holdings. Later the first steps toward representative government were taken.

A chronicler of those times reports, "The Danish peasantry at the beginning of the nineteenth century was an underclass. In sullen resignation it spent its life in dependence on estate owners and government officials. It was without culture and technical skill, and it was seldom able to rise above the level of bare existence. The agricultural reforms of that time were carried through without the support of the peasants, who did not even understand the meaning of them. . . . All the reforms were made *for the sake of the peasant*, but not *by* him. In the course of the century this underclass has been changed into a well-to-do middle class which, politically and socially, now takes the lead among the Danish people."

Freedom—to own land and to vote—was not enough to bring about these changes. A new form of education was designed by Gruntvig explicitly to achieve this transformation. Gruntvig was a theologian, poet, and student of history. Although he himself was a scholar, he believed in the active practical life and he conceptualized a school, the Folk High School, as a short intensive residence course for young adults dealing with the history, mythology, and poetry of the Danish people. He addressed himself to the masses rather than to the cultured. The "cultured" at the time thought him to be a confused visionary and contemptuously turned their backs on him. But the peasants heard him, and their natural leaders responded to his call to start the Folk High Schools—with their own resources.

"The spirit (not knowledge) is power." "The living word in the mother tongue." "Real life is the final test," as contrasted with the German and Danish tendency to theorize. These were some of the maxims that guided the new schools of the people. For fifty years of his long life Gruntvig vigorously and passionately advocated these new schools as the means whereby the peasants could raise themselves into *the* Danish national culture. And, stimulated by the Folk High School experience, the peasant youth began to attend agricultural schools and to build cooperatives on the model borrowed from England.

Two events provided the challenge that matured the new peasant movement and brought it into political and social dominance by the end of the century. There was a disastrous war with Prussla in 1864, which resulted in a substantial loss of territory and a crushing blow to national aspiration. And then, a little later, there was the loss of world markets for corn, their major exportable crop, as a result of the agricultural abundance of the new world.

The Danish peasants rose to the challenge.

Peasant initiative, growing out of the spiritual dynamic generated by the Folk High Schools, recovered the nation from both of these shocks by transforming their exportable surplus from corn to "butter and bacon," by rebuilding the national spirit, and by nourishing the Danish tradition in the territory lost to Germany during the long years until it was returned after World War I.

All of this, a truly remarkable social, political, and economic transformation, stemmed from one man's conceptual leadership. Gruntvig himself did not found or operate a Folk High School, although he lectured widely in them. What he gave was his love for the peasants, his clear vision of what they must do for themselves, his long, articulate dedication—some of it through very barren years, and his passionately communicated faith in the worth of these people and their strength to raise themselves—*if only their spirit could be aroused.* It is a great story of the supremacy of the spirit.

We should, Greenleaf says, study these three men, Woolman, Jefferson and Gruntvig, "not to copy the details of their methods but as examples of highly creative men, each of whom invented a role that was uniquely appropriate for himself as an individual, that drew heavily on his strengths and demanded little that was unnatural for him, and that was very right for the time and place he happened to be."

FRONTIERS

Bountiful Yields from the Garden

WE have at hand the 1988 catalog of Ecology Action, the enterprise begun by John Jeavons in 1972. He studied with Alan Chadwick, the famous English gardener, and thereafter devoted himself to developing methods for a "mini-farm" that will sustainably maintain a family in full health. He also designed larger plots for market gardens to supply a community. He began these projects in Palo Alto, Calif., but later acquired land in Willits—5798 Ridgewood Road, Willits, Calif. 95490—where the experimental gardens of Ecology Action are now located. There is also a store in Palo Alto. The catalog offers 220 untreated, open-pollinated seeds, green manure and cover crops, and a list of books, along with supplies for organic gardeners.

A summary of the work of Ecology Action is provided in the catalog:

> Indications are that a gardener may be able to grow his or her own 322 pounds of vegetables and soft fruits in a six-month growing season on as little as one hundred square feet—half the size of an average kitchen. Using "the method," one needs to spend only a few minutes in the garden each day, water and weed one-fourth as much, and spend far less effort. All of this is possible while your soil's fertility is greatly improved on a sustainable basis. With good market conditions, it should even be possible for mini-farmers to make a living on as little as one-eighth of an acre.
>
> Our educational program presents classes both in Willits and at our *urban center* in Palo Alto. We have become a key garden publisher, producing four major books and over a dozen working pamphlets on such subjects as: raising your own fertilizers, growing your own seed, and bio-intensive apprenticeship possibilities.

As for what goes on at Willits:

> The heart of Ecology Action's work is the Research Garden/Mini-Farm run by John Jeavons. Our development work comes from one of the oldest, long-range research projects in the country. We are currently researching the answers to two major questions: What is the smallest amount of land for growing a complete diet and how much additional land is needed to produce enough organic material to maintain soil fertility?
>
> *Time is running out for much of the world*, and we will not be exempt from the results of massive world starvation and malnutrition. . . . The Third World needs agricultural methods that enable people with poor soil, little water, few fertilizers, and simple hand tools to grow their own food.
>
> We do not have all the answers, but we do have some key solutions to enable people to begin. More and better funded research is needed, and soon. . . . If you feel as we do, that it is important to be able to provide people with the know-how by which everyone can become more responsible for their own food/nutritional needs in an ecologically sound and resource-conserving way, help us in our work by making a tax-deductible contribution of $30.00. . .
>
> We continue to have an impact on work in over 100 countries. *How To Grow More Vegetables* has now been translated into Spanish, French, German, and Hindi. A Danish edition is in preparation, and Russian may be next. Our teaching materials are now being used by the Peace Corps, UNICEF, and others. The pilot project in Tula has had a positive effect on Mexico's interest in big-intensive mini-farming as an alternative way to begin to provide for nutritional needs.

This catalog has 56 pages with lots of "extras." There is for example a brief summary of the steps in mini-gardening, using Jeavons' book, *How To Grow More Vegetables* as a guide.

> *Start Small*—50 square feet of garden can yield 75-150 pounds of vegetables using big-intensive techniques.
>
> *Go To Beds*—eliminate unproductive path space and create growing areas that stay untrampled for healthiest plant growth.
>
> *Compost*—leaves, weeds, grass dippings, kitchen waste assure lasting fertility. The rules are simple: keep it moist, allow for air circulation, and cover "juicy" layers with soil to keep flies out. Compost in an old garbage can if space is limited.
>
> *Careful Soil Preparation*—is the single most important key. To make the job easy, water deeply several days before digging, then let the soil dry just to the point where it does not stick to the spade. Take your time. Rototillers destroy the soil structure in the

top six inches, and within a month or two the soil settles down tighter around tender plant roots.

Keep Soil Moist—before, during and after preparation and planting. Plants that get to the "wilting" stage will recover but never be quite as healthy.

Close Spacing—why grow weeds? Prepare 1/4 the area well and plant closer. The mini-greenhouse effect of close planking shades the soil, reduces evaporation and weed growth.

Start with Salad Vegetables—for the highest yields. In one square foot you can grow 40 carrots, 20 garlic, 170 scallions or 40 radishes.

Use Seedlings—for instant growth. Lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, and cauliflower will do better when set out as young starts.

Easiest Crops for Beginners—are green beans, squash (especially zucchini), lettuce, chard, tomatoes, sunflowers, kale and radishes.

Beautify With Flowers—nasturtiums surround a salad bed prettily and the flowers are quite tasty. Sprinkle cosmos in the spring/summer garden, stocks and calendulas in the fall/winter garden.

Among the books listed are five published by Ecology Action and a series of research papers in the form of pamphlets. A number of other valuable books are listed, including works by Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson, Masanobu Fukuoka, and Eve Balfour.

John Jeavons says toward the end:

It is clear that the deterioration of the world's natural resources is becoming increasingly critical as the world population rises. Ecology Action strongly believes that bio-intensive farming, with its emphasis on small growing area, low resource consumption, and sustainability with higher yields than commercial agriculture, can be a solution to the problem discussed here. It is a personalized approach to food-raising, a living system which works to give the plants an optimum environment in which to grow and prosper. Approaching farming as a living system of relationships (of which each of us is an integral part) is a nurturing experience rewarded through bountiful yields. Ecology Action does not purport that mini-farming will provide "instant" results. Experience is necessary for good results—experience, knowledge, and understanding.