

## BELOW THOREAU

A SICKENING array of recollections of the Vietnam War—and the time of that war—is presented in a new book, *Unwinding the Vietnam War*, edited by Reese Williams, with thirty contributors. The publisher is the Real Comet Press, in Seattle. The price is \$13.95.

There are memories of the war by veterans, poems by men and women, horrifying statistics, heart-broken cries and angry denunciations. Here is a sample—from the first "essay" by John Ketwig, telling about a time twenty-three days before he was supposed to leave Vietnam and come home.

There was gunfire everywhere. I had to sort it all out, put it in some recognizable form. The M-60 machine guns cracked a snare drum's beat. The M-16s and M-14s rattled the intricate, high-pitched, driving tinkle of thin-ride cymbals. A fifty-caliber thump-thumped a bass beat. I began to get it together. My eyes were clearing. Four or five tiny men in black were moving toward us across the field. They were crouched, firing from the hip. At least a hundred guns were roaring at them, the percussion section of a great symphony orchestra, and they were in plain sight, and they just kept coming closer. Grinning. You could see the white of their teeth. Off to the left one went down, then reappeared. The top of his head was completely blown away, but the crazy bastard got back on his feet, grinned, and just kept coming.

And then I realized it was over. It was quiet. And I was lying on my belly in the mud, tapping my foot to the abstract rhythm my head had found woven into the chaos of twentieth-century warfare. I had never even shouldered my rifle. . . .

Don't act the wrong impression. I'm not John Wayne. I was nineteen when I arrived in The Nam, and scared to death. Six feet and a hundred and twenty-five pounds of skin and bones, glasses, silver fillings in my teeth. Scared to death; never a hero. I hadn't wanted to come to Vietnam. I was in the Central Highlands. If I'd been on the coast I might have tried to swim east till I drowned. The most

heroic thing I'd ever done in my life was to reassure my family before I left. . . .

Harry Wilmer, who became a psychiatrist and wrote *Dreams of Vietnam*, tells about a veteran named Bill who had a nightmare which recurred several times a week for four years. He lost a leg in a mine explosion. He described his nightmare to Wilmer:

We were on a search-and-destroy mission and were going through a friendly village. A baby was crying in a hooch, and no one else was anywhere around. My buddy went into the hooch and the captain shouted, "DON'T PICK IT UP!" But my buddy didn't hear the warning, and reached for the infant. The baby was booby-trapped with a grenade. It exploded. There was nothing recognizable left of the baby and only parts of my buddy. I'll never get that cry and explosion out of my head. Never.

Jim Moore is a teacher. In 1967 he quoted Whitman to his draft board ("Dismiss whatever insults your own soul") and gave them back his draft card. He had a hard time as a working pacifist.

I didn't want to chant slogans. I didn't want to be "right." I didn't want to judge. And yet, there I was, night after night, sitting at the table trying to make a choice: deferment? Canada? (the army was out of the question), draft resistance and/or prison?

These weren't choices. They were entire lives, futures that could never be redeemed—or so it seemed then in the midst of it all—if the wrong choices were made.

He was then teaching in Moline, Illinois, a block from the Mississippi. "It seemed miraculous that someone would actually give me money to talk about what I loved, to have opinions about James Joyce and Thoreau that formerly I couldn't give away. . . .

To the students I was a classy eccentric, and I had them with me from the first, those future postal clerks and nurses, those earnest would-be writers with

their mixed bag of Sartre and letter jackets, pimples and acid, and—finally—of life and death.

Then two of my students quit school and within months were dead in Vietnam. The second student who died had sat in the back of the room, chair tilted against the wall his long hair spread behind him against the blackboard like a scraggly fan. He often brought his guitar to class in a black case. He wrote his poems on cheap yellow paper and he wanted to know about mileage from my bus. Those were the details I remembered when his girlfriend told me he had been killed.

It was winter by then and I was living alone. . . . After that second student's death, I spent the weekend by myself. I was reading Suzuki at the time and wanted to believe in something, even if it was only the pull and release of my own breath as I sat cross-legged, meditating best I knew how. I liked Zen. For someone raised in Anglican it seemed, somehow, the closest thing to those rituals I loved growing up with, but could no longer accept as my own. While I sat meditating, I felt lonely: all my voluble and spontaneous love of poetry that fit itself so nicely into the fifty-minute school hour, my à là mode hiking boots. I thought of that dead boy with his guitar and his questions, and the careful but wasted economy of the cheap yellow paper he used for writing first drafts and I felt sick to my soul, for all my talk of Thoreau and Whitman. I wanted to be a citizen again, to Pledge Allegiance to something with the faith I'd felt in the fourth grade, facing the flag behind Miss Rodger's desk. It was my country, too, not just the John Bircher's downstairs with his saccharine greeting cards and his private gun collection.

These quotations give an idea of what *Unwinding the Vietnam War* is like. They show that its content gives the reader a chance to taste the substance of a recent period of history—how it felt to be in the Vietnam war, what it was like to know people who took part in it, and how it affected the people at home. Only the few, as is always the case, struggled to understand why that war came, why it might have been avoided, and the uselessness and tragedy of it all. The book is by a different sort of people—those who feel the need to comprehend what they are going through. All good books are by such people, and what they write makes you wonder, while you are learning from them, what infects them with the

determination to record how they feel and what they think. For them, the blows of fate require explanation of some sort. In response to this need, writing comes at various levels. It might be said that at the highest levels are found the musings of Henry David Thoreau, in both his essay on *Civil Disobedience* and elsewhere.

Thoreau, it is safe to say, was a fearless man. He knew what he wanted to do with his life, and taking part in a war was not part of what he wanted to do. "It is impossible," he said, "to give the soldier a good education, without making him a deserter. His natural foe is the government that drills him." And in "Civil Disobedience" Thoreau wrote:

"That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the world of a comparatively few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.

Then, in 1863, a year after his death, "Life Without Principle" was published in the *Atlantic*, summing up his outlook, in which he said:

Of what consequence, though our planet explode, if there is no character involved in the explosion? In health we have not the least curiosity about such events. We do not live for idle amusement. I would not run round a corner to see the world blow up.

These passages from Thoreau will bear thinking about. They are the thought of a man who understood the meaning of his life and how it was to be conducted in the world. He had no need to write hooks about the horror of war. For

him war did not exist as a moral reality. It was merely unspeakable—as indeed it is. Yet one is bound to wonder, is *Unwinding Vietnam War* some sort of introduction to Thoreau? "Perhaps" is all that we can reply.

Marilyn B. Young, a history teacher, begins her contribution:

I have been teaching about Vietnam for as long as I have been teaching. I began in 1969 in a basement room at the Residential College, University of Michigan and I continue now in a large-ish lecture hall at New York University. . . .

A significant minority of my students dropped out of school to attempt a more ambitious approach to ending the Vietnam War and bringing social justice not just to the University of Michigan but to the country as a whole. Unless there was a revolution here, in the belly of the beast, they argued, Vietnam would just happen again anywhere, endlessly. By making a revolution in America, they would let freedom ring everywhere. For a very small group this meant armed struggle in the ranks of a Third World vanguard. For a larger group it meant joining Detroit's industrial proletariat for the long hard struggle to raise consciousness—their own as well as their fellow workers.

And then the war was over and, to our surprise, so was the life of the collective protest. Those people we had deemed literally guilty of war crimes—the Bundy brothers, Rostow, MacNamara, Kissinger, and all their underlings—went on to live and be well, which wasn't a surprise exactly but left some of us feeling empty and depressed. Like Gloria Emerson, I found it hard to celebrate in April 1975. I wanted vengeance.

Instead, Carter declared that the United States and Vietnam had suffered about equally and the effort to revise the history of the war began immediately after it was over. If, in Nazi Germany, the universal claim after the war was "I didn't know," in America it was going to be "that's not the way it happened."

The students, some of them, began defining the war as all we could do. Then came a surprise:

One man, who had stubbornly defended the decisions of each succeeding American administration in Vietnam, suddenly raised his hand in the midst of a passionate discussion of the morality of U.S. search-and-destroy tactics. He spoke softly,

as much to himself as the class. Search-and-destroy, he said, was wrong. More, it was wrong not because some other tactic would have been better but because in a war like Vietnam, it was the only *possible* tactic, which meant that the war *itself* was wrong. And if the war was wrong, then so was much of the way he had put America together in his health. . . .

For my students, however, events in Indochina since 1978, combined with having spent their high school years entirely within the Reagan presidency, has made communism and communists totally remote and alien. Like so many of the recent books in the war, these students see the majority of Vietnamese (or Filipinos or Salvadorans or Guatemalans) as passive peasants anxious only to till their fields in peace whoever is in power. They find it extremely difficult to grant either agency or humanity to those who join communist-led or inspired revolutionary movements. This attitude is perfectly reflected in the words of an American mercenary fighting with the contras in Nicaragua who appeared in a recent TV documentary. "We're not down here fighting Nicaraguans," he insisted, "we're fighting the communists." . . . You wouldn't want to be killing Nicaraguans, God knows, but killing communists is something else altogether.

Robert Bly, an American poet, wrote for this book:

We can say then that when the Vietnam veteran arrived home he found a large hole in himself where his values once were. What is the veteran going to do about that? Many veterans I meet say they still cannot find any values to put there. The earlier values were blown out, the way acid blows out the brain. Harry Wilmer moved me tremendously when he talked about the dreams of Vietnam veterans. . . . The dreams of certain veterans, he said, repeated events in exact detail, endlessly, meaninglessly. Only when the veteran is able to find a possibility of meaning—what a wonderful word that is—meaning, meaning, meaning—can his dreams begin to change. Then a veteran can begin to put something into this hole. But most veterans are not receiving help in moving toward meaning, they have not succeeded in finding a man like Harry Wilmer. They live in rage and in a sense of betrayal.

Four men, Brian Willson, Duncan Murphy, Charles Liteky, and George Mizo—all Vietnam veterans—undertook a fast in August, 1986, and addressed a letter to the American people, titled: "When Leaders Act Contrary to Conscience, We

must Act Contrary to Leaders." In their letter they said:

This band of thugs that the President of the United States calls "freedom fighters" has consistently used terrorism to intimidate and control the poor of Nicaragua. The contras' record of crimes against humanity are well documented in reports by Amnesty International and by Americas Watch. . . . We are here because we want to make it absolutely clear that if our government insists on supporting proxy killers, if it insists on violating the sovereignty and right to self-determination of other nations, if it insists on violating our own constitution and international law, they are not going to do it in our name. In our fast for life, we want it known that our government does not speak for us. Nationwide opinion polls taken over the past year have consistently indicated that a majority of the American people oppose aid to the contrast. In the most recent poll, released just before the congressional vote on contra aid, a resounding 62 per cent of the nation's citizens said "No!" to contra aid. It is inconceivable to us that a body of legislators could then so grossly depart from the will of the people who elected them. . . .

We now offer our lives. When the United States entered World War II and Vietnam, we offered ourselves to our country without question. But tragically, the pretext that got us into Vietnam turned out to be a lie. The Gulf of Tonkin incident was fabricated to seduce a reluctant Congress into supporting an immoral war. As veterans, we will not remain silent—we will not sit passively by—while timid politicians lead us into another Vietnam. Invoking the Nuremberg principles, we veterans of two wars choose not to be a party to crimes against humanity in the name of the American people.

Jan Barry, a poet and a founder of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, recalls Mark Twain's "War Prayer":

O Lord, our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells. . . help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst. . . . We ask it, in the spirit of love. . . .

Barry adds this historical note:

The peace movement of the 1980s has grown far beyond the protests of the Vietnam War. It has grown from a few dozen peace groups thinly scattered across the nation in 1967, the year the Vietnam peace movement mobilized its first massive march on Washington, to hundreds of peace groups able to turn out nearly a million marchers for a disarmament demonstration at the United Nations headquarters in 1982, to some six thousand organizations estimated to be working for peace in 1986. It has grown from a focus of working for peace in one place to working for peace in the world. . . .

In the prevailing climate, some of us who came back from Vietnam and tried to talk sense with Congress and the American people began to see that we had much more in common with the hardpressed housewives, lawyers, teachers, religious leaders, and ordinary working people than we would ever have with the celebrated partisans of cultural welfare who commanded the national spotlight—busy trashing each other and tearing Americans apart—as the war raged on. . . . In the 1980s, many Americans began to realize the wisdom of Abraham Lincoln's observation that "the best way to destroy an enemy is make him a friend." . . . Thoughtful peace activists and new media managers have begun to question the limits of protest and harping on the fear of nuclear war, and have begun presenting creative programs on the positive developments of "transforming enemy images into friendly faces". . .

The concluding portion of this book is Martin Luther King's address in 1967, in which he said:

Now it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war. If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam.

This book might be subtitled, "Lessons in reaching toward maturity" It should be some help in this.

## *REVIEW*

### WHO IS OUR EDITOR?

JOURNALISTS who become aware of the social function of their profession are likely to wonder whether it might be better for them to seek another way to make a living. In a book we reviewed some years ago—*Part of a Winter* by George Sibley—there is a passage which tells how this works. For a time Sibley edited a weekly newspaper in the small town of Crested Butte, Colorado. Doing this, he was led to discover things that the experts on large metropolitan sheets have still to recognize. In the section of his book dealing with newspaper experience, he wrote:

Certainly one of the most basic instruments of our civilization is the newspaper: a way of disseminating information about certain kinds of things, with a certain intensity, depth of perception, and pervasive regularity. Whether those kinds of things are worth paying attention to or not.

The function of a modern newspaper (not necessarily its intended function but certainly its effective function) seems to be to tie up the senses and the mind in a consideration of abstractions, conventions, and other mind-born structures which have no reality other than that which we grant them. The Dow-Jones. The Executive, Legislative, Judicial, and the Candle-maker. The Federal Reserve, the Floating Dollar—these abstractions and conventions were, once upon a time, conceived of as means for dealing with certain realities around us. But the newspapers make them realities unto themselves: no longer the means of our prevailing but the ends that insulate us from a more real world. We tune our sensibilities to the printed page, where we learn that the trig board is slipping, or that recent polls indicate that so-and-so has an edge over whosis in California, and our day is ruined.

But what began to bother me a great deal, during my newspapering years in Crested Butte, was the almost "gravitational" inevitability with which I found myself beginning to sound more and more like the standard, run-of-the-mill newspaper. The sum and total of my experience there was the conclusion that I wasn't editing the newspaper; I was being edited by what a newspaper is.

He goes on providing illustrations, and then, at the end of the chapter bids farewell to the subject:

But . . . I ought to heed my own advice. It's like a conditioned response: mention newspapers, and I start sounding like an editorial. Time to get on here—get on with something I hope is a little closer to the organic heart of things.

Well, Sibley did get on to other things—his last chapter tells how he delivered his own baby in a mountain cabin far away from any hospital, and looked at the infant's face—"I'd seen it first, before anyone or anything else in *this* world . . . Buddha-like, cowed with history. "

Getting back to journalism is like going from the sublime to the ridiculous. And yet, some journalism is better than others. We have a book for review, *Breaking Through* (£6.50), by Walter and Dorothy Schwartz, issued by a new English publisher, Green Books, devoted to the "Theory and Practice of Wholistic Living," indeed a book on the right side of very nearly everything.

An early chapter, titled "New Economics," deals with how we all have been "edited" by the culture which surrounds us, and with what some people—now more than a few—are doing in an effort to start living and "editing" their own lives. The chapter begins by contrasting the past mode of thinking about our lives with the conceptions now coming into being.

New economics is a radical revolt from the old, in favor of what Schumacher called—in the subtitle of *Small Is Beautiful*—"a study of economics as if people mattered." It is human-centered and human-scaled—that is, it offers a new perspective. In the foreground are people, not consumers or producers; in the background is an ecologically sound environment. Work is seen as human activity, not as a commodity called labor.

The first premise is that industrial society, which developed at the same time as modern economics, is now itself regulated in large measure according to the precepts of that science. Economic "laws" have become as important as laws enacted in our parliaments; growth, development, monetarism and other notions have an assumed status as high as moral precepts. Industrial society as we know it has begun to falter—at least in part—because economic ideas were flawed from the outset.

Economics counts money-measurable benefits and costs ignoring the human reality behind them. This accords with the tenets of our industrial society,

which has made a marketable commodity not only of work, but of health, home, food, education, leisure and even art. So the revolt against economics is really a revolt against industrial society.

What sort of "editing" of us does the industrial society accomplish?

Instead of satisfying human needs, industrial society creates artificial desires. Since there must be growth, we have to buy more. Surrounded by purchased goods, we become dependent on them; we need to buy still more—and then we need to buy remedies against their ill effects. These effects include urban stress, exhaustion, depression and illness caused by pollution; and these maladies in turn compel us to become consumers of health services and holidays, thereby doing our duty by adding further to the gross national product.

The "Gross National Product" the authors show, is a massive self-deception.

The new economics is radical, not in the left-wing sense but literally, in seeking to pull the old economics up by its roots. These roots have such names as gross national product, growth, economic development, economies of scale, and division of labor. It also redefines demand, supply, production and consumption. Demand is defined as what people need and want as opposed to what they may be induced to buy. Production and supply are defined as the provision of goods and services which people need and want, which makes long-term sense for the community, the bioregion and the world. The gross national product, an unreal measurement whose artificiality is regarded as highly pernicious, is replaced by a more meaningful measurement. The GNP calculation counts pollution and resources-depleting activities, as part of "growth," while ignoring the activities like child-rearing, gardening, house-improvement and voluntary work, that matter most in many peoples' lives. Mere growth for its own sake is replaced in the new economics by sustainable growth in the quality rather than the quantity of goods and services. Human and social development takes the place of economic development and appropriately-sized units of production replace gigantic corporations, factories, farms and power stations.

*Breaking Through* goes on to tell about the new beginnings in sustainable agriculture, in health, in education, and a chapter is devoted to the spirit and future of the Green movement. There is this comment on the Greens:

Green thinking stands midway between the Marxist approach, change through society, and the religious approach, change through the individual. So it earns friends and enemies in both camps.

All these objections miss the crucial point: the have-nots in our society are not only the poor; they are the unhappy, the lonely, the frustrated, the alienated, the unfulfilled. They are the old people who fill our hospital wards, who wait in the doctor's waiting room with nothing wrong with them that a little love, or at least company would not cure. And if people yearn for change and see no way out, they can be shown how, as we have seen in our chapters on new ways of working and living in towns and countryside.

In their conclusion Walter and Dorothy Schwartz say:

Our materialist society shows signs of faltering, having ceased permanently to provide full employment. That fact alone dictates the need for a new one. New forms of society are consequently beginning to break through.

In this book we have sought the outlines of change. Our solution can be read as a blueprint (or greenprint) for a new society. But change begins most productively on the individual level. Can personal transformation lead to collective change? We have argued that the two are linked. Transformation of the individual and transformation of society are opposite sides of the same coin. . . .

We can measure the progress of the new society by looking at people, in the third world and the first who have succeeded in decolonizing themselves. They have become autonomous to a greater or lesser degree. That means using their own resources, respecting their own environment, taking responsibility for their own work, food, leisure, culture, health and education.

It also means that they will have stopped measuring, calculating, feeling the necessity of changing things around. Their minds will be focused on other matters, other ends. Obstacles, such as they are, will have become things to use or go around, not to "attack" or regard as problems. In this respect people will be like healthy children, living in the present. Politics will have long since died away, and government will be like the instinct which guides a flock of birds. People will have learned, without counting, to put first things first.

## COMMENTARY THE GREEN FIRE

ONE thing that MANAS campaigns for is the continual vivification of books that should not be permitted to die. No one but readers can accomplish this. The writer first gives a book its existence, but unless readers recognize its excellence and spread the word, the book will die from within six months of publication and will be forgotten within a year. There is a ruthless justice in this, since most books should never have been born and to die remains the only graceful thing for it to do. Yet there are books that don't deserve to die, but ought to live and be read almost forever. An example is W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation*, which was published in the late 1930s and very nearly died, but after being remaindered and going out of print found readers everywhere and, fortunately for a time, was issued in a paperback edition. We found the book in a used book store and bought ten of them at seventeen cents a copy, and then regretted that we hadn't purchased more, since soon no more could be found until years later, in a Galaxy edition. Today it is virtually out of print again, except for a deluxe edition which costs so much that we will not give the price and have forgotten the publisher's name. Yet it is very likely the best serious book published in this century.

Another book of similar excellence is *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold, fortunately not likely to disappear. It is available as a Ballantine Book in paperback, having found its audience almost immediately among the growing number of people devoted to conservation and the wildlife of America. Leopold did not live to see his book published, since he died fighting a forest fire in 1948, a year before it appeared. The first publisher was the Oxford University Press. The Ballantine edition has in it new material added by Leopold's son, Luna, taken from material by his father, which Luna had prepared for publication under the title *Round River*. The current edition combines eight essays from *Round River* with all

of *Sand County Almanac*. The concluding essay of the *Almanac* is a section on "The Land Ethic" and "Wilderness," the most often quoted of Leopold's work.

Here is a sample of his writing, taken from an early chapter:

There is a peculiar virtue in the music of elusive birds. Songsters that sing from top-most boughs are easily seen and as easily forgotten; they have the mediocrity of the obvious. What one remembers is the invisible hermit thrush pouring silver chords from impenetrable shadows; the soaring crane trumpeting from behind a cloud; the prairie chicken booming from the mists of nowhere; the quail's Ave Maria in the hush of dawn. No naturalist has ever seen the choral act, for the covey is still on its invisible roost in the grass, and the attempt to approach automatically induces silence.

Another passage, this one well known, comes in a section titled "Thinking Like a Mountain," which begins with an account of the penetrating howl of a wolf. Then he writes:

My own conviction on this score dates from the day I saw a wolf die. We were eating lunch on a high rimrock, at the foot of which a turbulent river elbowed its way. We saw what we thought was a doe fording the torrent, her breast awash in white water. When she climbed the bank toward us and shook out her tail, we realized our error: it was a wolf. A half-dozen others, evidently grown pups sprang from the willows and all joined in a welcoming melee of wagging tails and playful maulings. What was literally a pile of wolves writhed and tumbled in the center of an open flat at the foot of our rimrock.

In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to fill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy: how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide-rocks.

We reached the old wolf to catch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But

after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view. . .

I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer. And perhaps with better cause, for while a buck pulled down by wolves can be replaced in two or three years, a range pulled down by too many deer may fail of replacement in as many decades.

This is Aldo Leopold's meaning for thinking like a mountain. In "The Land Ethics," he writes:

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. . . . The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligations to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these "resources," but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots their continued existence in a natural state.

In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.



## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### A SCHOOL IN NEW YORK

TALKING about the girls in her school—the Livingston School in New York for girls, who have been sent there because they couldn't behave as they were supposed to in the city's public schools—Esther Rothman says (in her book, *The Angle Inside Went Sour*):

They live with tragedy—our girls of the Livingston School—tragedy most of us stronger mortals, the professionals, could not transcend. I know one thing, I could not come to school, even now, as principal, much less as a student, if my beloved sister were in the hospital having her arm amputated. Yet Andrea did. She came to school to go to her classes and to see her counselor and to talk and talk and talk.

No tears. They survive, and even laugh. What achievement! What colossal achievement for Pat to concentrate on math when just the night before, the little boy with whom she baby-sat bled to death when a loose glass door unhinged and fell on him, piercing an artery in his neck. Two days later, Pat herself was stabbed in the back by an irate friend who claimed Pat had stolen her boyfriend; in that same week, Shirley's mother died of cancer, Gloria's father was rushed to the hospital with nephritis, Constance's father collapsed on his job, Pauline was hospitalized with asthma Esther's six-month-old brother was rushed to the hospital with acute pneumonia while Esther's mother, refusing to release her baby from her arms, violently attacked her husband and the doctors, accusing them of trying to kill her baby. And except for Pat, who was physically incapable of attending, all the girls came to school.

This was "normal life" in the Livingston School.

Call them what you will—socially maladjusted, or emotionally disturbed, or delinquent, or neurotic, or psychopathic or psychotic, or underprivileged, or troubled, or angry, or spoiled, or victims, or sick or culturally different, or behavior problems—the fact remains that they, cannot be commonly processed or labeled, for they have only three things in common: they are girls, they are adolescents, and they have been in, created, partaken of, and caused trouble in

the public and private schools of New York City. One thing for certain. They are not the quiet type.

They are committed to rebellion against the facts of their lives, and beyond that, they fit no mold. . . . They are inspiring examples of outrageous individualism. They dare to be different. They will not be stifled. This is the main reason they are at Livingston.

What was the school like? Ninety per cent of the girls were black, with the other ten per cent divided between white and Puerto Rican girls. The faculty was half black. Speaking of two girls, Esther Rothman says:

I always thought of Kathy as a neonate—a child unborn. Loretta, on the other hand, was merely ungrown, and not nearly so overtly charming or as seltzery. She had been transferred seven times before she anchored at Livingston.

Each time a new school was tried, it was with the hope that she would like them better and they would like her better than the one before. It never happened that way.

She was pleasant enough. She'd only say to her teacher, "So help me I wanta kick your butt in." She never did.

Loretta was real tough, man. She never talked, man, unless she said "man." But she never really talked. She fenced—she surveyed—she sized up. She never committed herself. She was tentative.

"Why are you coming in late, Loretta?" I would ask.

"Why you wanta know, man?"

"Because this is a school, and I have the right to know why you're late."

"If you got rights, man, then I got rights."

"Oh, come on Loretta, all I'm asking is why you're late."

"And, man, I'm not tellin'."

"So I'll call your mother and find out where you've been."

"Don't call my mother, goddamn it, man, and don't write her either."

Is that a threat, Loretta?"

If you say so."

"I don't say it is. I don't say it's not. I don't know."

"Well, man, if you don't know it, I don't know it. You're the principal, ain't ye?"

And all that, to find out later, via the radio, that there was a serious subway tie-up on all lines.

Berenice was fascinated by the fire alarm box with its glass face. Her teacher thought she would set off the alarm.

"She gets on my nerves," Berenice yelled when the teacher finally got her to come into my office, "always pickin on me, saying I gonna ring that bell. Why I wanta ring that old bell?"

"I don't know why," I answered, "but come on Berenice, your teacher didn't accuse you of anything. It's your guilty conscience speaking. You know you were going to ring that alarm." . . .

"Maybe something inside tells you to do these things."

"No devil inside me," she said.

"An angel inside you?" I tried again.

"Only angel inside went sour."

"Well, we'll have to fix that," I said, "and unsour you."

"Nope." She was negative again.

Livingston is an extraordinary place. Once, when a visiting music teacher had bored the girls by playing Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, Dr. Rothman asked why the teacher played that piece. "Because," she explained, "the chairman of the music department picked it as a good example of nationalism in music."

"Maybe," I said, "for students of the Soviet Union, but our children from the slums of New York City often have trouble differentiating between New York State and New York City, and you give them Russia!"

She shrugged.

"If you want to teach about nationalism expressed through music, what about Woodie Guthrie's music, or Bob Dylan's? What about folk singing and folk rock and Richie Havens and Buffy Saint Marie singing about her people, the American Indians?"

She had never heard of them.

Yet she talked of meeting the needs and interests of her students. How could she, when she didn't know the interests of her students, and she wasn't really ready to learn? . . .

Our girls, however, have been put upon enough. They love rock and roll. We may not, but that's our problem, not theirs. We teach it because it's what the girls want to learn. And every girl who comes to Livingston is taught to play the piano! No other school in the city does this. We are able to do it because we have broken a myth—the myth that learning has to be sequential, that learning progresses from the simple to the complex.

What nonsense! Some children walk without ever crawling. Some children speak in full sentences before one single word is uttered. . . .

At Livingston, a girl bakes an apple pie before she learns the temperature of boiling water. She just may not be interested in how hot boiling water is.

A girl learns how to sew a slack suit before she sews an apron, and she learns to read the words "vampire" or "romance" before she recognizes "and."

And at Livingston a girl learns to play rock and roll before she can identify a single note by name.

This book, *The Angel Inside Went Sour*, was first published in 1971.

## FRONTIERS

### Burrow and Gebser

WE have chosen for attention a rather remarkable group of essays—three approaches to the work of Jean Gebser, a German thinker born in Prussia in 1905, who died in Switzerland in 1973—by reason of what the writers found to be the psychological and moral importance of Gebser's thought. The writers are Elizabeth A. Behnke, Alfreda S. Galt, and George Feuerstein. We were drawn to study of this material by Alfreda Galt's essay, since she was a student of Trigant Burrow, the psychologist and psychiatrist who pioneered group analysis and therapy, and she became an officer and director of the Lyfwynn Foundation, Westport, Conn., devoted to Burrow's studies. Elizabeth Behnke founded the California Center for Jean Gebser Studies. George Feuerstein is an indologist who has written books on different aspects of Indian philosophy and religion, living in California. A passage by Feuerstein in his contribution to this publication, which is titled *Toward Integral Consciousness for an Integral World*, will serve as introduction to its content:

The final wisdom of the rational consciousness, which is no wisdom at all, is either the recognition of universal *ennui*, despair, and disgust, as vividly depicted in the works of Sartre and Camus, or the kind of desperate escape into madness that concluded Nietzsche's life, or its mediocre version in the form of the defeatist psychology of the masses. As philosophical attitudes, neither of the conclusions is viable; both represent a diminution of consciousness, a regrettable and destructive regression into the irrational. As such they spell no hope for humanity. Early on Gebser recognized them as symptoms of the spiritual bankruptcy of our post-modern world. And since his intuitive flash in the winter of 1932/33, in which he saw entirely new possibilities for contemporary humankind, he labored relentlessly, until his death in 1973, to demonstrate that there is a way out of the *cul-de-sac* of the rational consciousness which dominates all our lives and which has pushed us to the brink of global destruction.

The way out of the dead-end of the deficient rational structure of consciousness is the way of

personal participation in, and cooperation with, the emergent mode of consciousness. . . . The fact that the new modality of consciousness is not an automatic happening, but a process that is sustained by individual participation, throws Gebser's contribution into sharp relief. . . . today, in the fullness of the mental structure of consciousness, humanity has the intellectual and informational capacity to understand its own evolution and, with the aid of that understanding, guide its future destiny.

The idea that unites all the contributors is that each human must find his own way in this great transition, and must heal himself. Drawing on Edward T. Hall, Elizabeth Behnke quotes from him:

We in the West are alienated from ourselves and from nature. We labor under a number of delusions, one of which is that . . . we are sane. We persist in this view despite massive evidence to the contrary.

Elizabeth Behnke comments:

But to recognize that our so-called sanity is a delusion implies a radical restructuring of our ideas, including our ideas about treating the individuals we officially identify as being "insane." Are we simply to adjust their private insanity to conform to the unacknowledged insanity of our "normal" life? . . . It is, I believe, one of the major contributions of Burrow's work to have revealed that what we have taken for granted as "normal" is in fact *fundamentally unhealthy*—in short, to have identified what he terms the "social neurosis" and to have described some of its essential structures. It is the social neurosis that functions as the tacit background, the covert "cultural unconscious," of our society; it is the social neurosis that is responsible for the conflict and alienation so prevalent in everyday life; and it is the social neurosis that makes "work on ourselves" imperative.

In her essay Alfreda Galt draws parallels between Gebser and Burrow. Burrow took his degrees from American universities and worked with Adolph Meyer, studied with Jung in Switzerland, and established his psychoanalytic practice in Baltimore. He was, however, dissatisfied with psychoanalytic methods. Then something happened which brought about a great change in Burrow's thinking and his life. A student assistant he was analyzing proposed "that if Burrow really subscribed to his hypothesis

about human nature and the neurosis of society, he'd be willing to change places and let Shields [the student assistant] become the analyst."

Burrow agreed to the proposal. Mrs. Galt relates:

It wasn't long before Burrow found himself with resistances that were quite as strong as those he'd been analyzing in Shields. Far from being negligible, they were intense, and as the months wore on the situation became more and more painful. But gradually the realization came to both men that in becoming the analyst, Shields had simply shifted to the authoritarian vantage-ground; essentially the situation remained the same. . . . they saw that a one-sided critique is the earmark of psychoanalysis. . . . With this realization, the entire direction of the inquiry altered. The analysis became the reciprocal effort of each of them to recognize his own attitude of authoritarianism and autocracy toward the other. This meant relinquishing their self-defensive bias, difficult as that was, and substituting a more inclusive attitude toward the whole question of human consciousness.

Again and again, Alfreda Galt found parallels with Gebser's thinking.

George Feuerstein begins his essay by showing what Gebser meant by the word "spiritual"—briefly, that which moves toward self-transcendence. It is "the native human aptitude for, and actual application to, exploding the 'myth of otherness' created by the self-habit." Feuerstein relates something said by Gebser in a talk given in India in 1961:

. . . the term "spiritual" should be understood to mean that region, which, from the human point of view, is closest to *Atman* on the other hand it is by no means to refer to the psychic-irrational and intellectual-rational possibilities of man."

Feuerstein goes on:

The spirit represents a "higher" order reality, whereas the psyche is more associated with the realm of nature, the "maternal deeps." . . . Nor should spirit be confused with mind. . . . if we look upon the psyche as an opaque glass pane through which we glimpse the spiritual, the spirit is a more transparent pane giving us a clearer view.

Gebser, Feuerstein tells us, "speaks freely of reincarnation. . . pointing out that it was an integral part of early Christianity, until it was suppressed by the Church."

In entertaining this *credo*, Gebser finds himself in the illustrious company of such philosophical geniuses as Plato Plotinus, Nietzsche, Hume, and McTaggart who have all deemed reincarnation a reasonable explanation for whatever evidence there may be.

Copies of this work may be obtained by writing to the California Center for Jean Gebser Studies, P.O. Box 0-2, Felton, Calif. 95018.