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In the Time of the Willies A Hard Case Brings Tidings of Comfort and Joy

The final speaker at the conference was sociologist Charles Willie, professor of education at Harvard University, who boldly drew for the participants a picture of the multi-cultural university. Prof. Willie began by saying that calls for increased excellence in American colleges and universities discriminate against minorities, since the criterion of excellence works to exclude minorities from the university. Standardized tests, he said, do likewise, and should be abolished. No matter whether these tests are biased or not, he argued, they should still be eliminated because they “terrorize” minority students. The university, he said, should not terrorize, but rather “rescue” such people.

WHAT you see above is from “Onward to Adequacy,” an academic report, or maybe an academic question, by Glynn Custred in *Academic Questions*, Summer 1990.

Custred, an anthropologist at the Hayward station of California State University, went to one of those conferences. This one was called “From the Eurocentric University to the Multicultural University: The Faculty’s Challenge for the Twenty-First Century.” (They always have a colon.) There he heard much that was droll.

He heard one Ronald Takaki, a professor of ethnic studies, (well, of *certain* ethnic studies), elucidating the plight of women and other minorities groaning under the oppressive weight of Eurocentric Culture and male dominance in literature and other arts. Takaki made quite a good case, too. Vivid and convincing. And why not? He stood, as any thoughtful teacher should and would, on the shoulders of giants. As parables and

paradigms of the baleful effects of male Eurocentrism, he climbed on *Moby Dick* and Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. So that’ll show ‘em a thing or two.

Among those listening, and possibly enthralled, to Takaki’s ethnic *tour de force*, was one Ann Reynolds, chancellor of the California University system. She had recently spoken her own piece. It was called, with the obligatory colon, “A New Look at an Old Model: Getting Higher Education out of the Fourteenth Century, and into the Twenty-First.” Well, Takaki did manage get out of the *Fourteenth Century*.

There were many other such diversions, of course, but the star of the confab was surely the Charles Willie named above. He was brave and bold, A plain speaker. It takes a mighty tough-minded man these days to say that “excellence” is just another way of naming elitism, and that “adequacy” is quite good enough for black students, (and for black faculty, too), who could never in any case be expected to match the academic achievements of white or Asian students. Just you try going around talking like that and see what happens to you. Willie, of course, had a bit of an edge in that he was, as Custred puts it, “not white,” but he still took a terrible risk in that some day some one not knowing that might read his words and think him a rabid racist. Now that’s courage.

Custred’s coverage continues: “With this in mind, Willie went on to claim that there are many kinds of ‘intelligences’, ‘communication and calculation’ constituting only two of them. The other types, he continued, should be taken into account when considering students for admission. One kind of ‘intelligence,’ said Willie (and these are his own words) is ‘singing,’ and another is ‘dancing,’ both of which, he asserted, black people do well. {Oh how hard, how hard it is to refrain from the obvious and sadly facetious! Provide it for yourself, if you must.} Since the job of higher education is to ‘strengthen what the students already know and to teach them what they don’t know,’ Willie argued that we should teach black students ‘the King’s English’ and (again in his own words) we should teach white students to ‘sing and dance.’”

One more paragraph from Custred: “Even more startling was Prof. Willie’s statement that ‘excellence’ should not be the business of the

university, since excellence is a matter of personal choice requiring sacrifice. The university should instead be concerned with what Willie defined as ‘adequacy,’: that which is ‘sufficient to meet the requirements of the situation.’ The university should aim to certify that all those passing through its portals are ‘good enough to help but not bad enough to harm.’ Any talk of a master university, he said, smacks of a master race, and remember what Hitler had done with that idea.”

Ah, Hitler. Where would we be without him? By what would we conjure without the power of his name? Thank God he didn’t do his dirty deeds way back there in the Fourteenth Century where only some poet had thought them worthy of comment, so that he might have been blotted out by social progress.

Well, Willie is surely a juicy fish in the barrel, and we would have a good time with his busted invisible syllogisms and in exploring the entertaining implications of his dizzy definition of “the job of higher education,” but we don’t want to do that. Practiced readers can do all of that for themselves. But even out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, wisdom is ordained, and there are two startling flashes of pure light in all that nonsense. They shine so brightly that we must look at them.

Plato, in his old age, seems to have despaired. *The Laws* is, all by itself, a melancholy meditation on the vanity of our wishes for the good life that might be brought about by the work of the mind, and a sad admission that our best hope is that we might yet be *made* good by some greater force. But even earlier there are hints, Sophocles notwithstanding, that maybe the wisdom philosophy brings isn’t the parent of happiness, which is not that gloomy a suspicion; after all, if only the wise can be happy, the rest of us are in a bad way indeed.

The best of such hints is right in the first book of *The Republic*, where Cephalos (an old man, it is interesting to note) welcomes Socrates warmly, saying how much he has missed the wonderful chats they used to have. As soon as the talk turns to philosophy, however, he excuses himself, explaining the he has to go and make a sacrifice.

Socrates, left with only the young folks, manages from their answers to sketch the good and simple life of hard-working and plain-living people who rise early and go to bed when

darkness falls, having dined on lentils and sung the evening hymn of “praise to the god.” Right here, the whole discussion of *The Republic* could have ended, and perhaps would have, had there not been a progressive activist in the crowd.

“That’s all very nice, Socrates,” says the nimble-minded young Glaucon, “but what about couches?”

“Ah,” Socrates answers, “if you want couches, the picture of the good life in the good society will have to be a little bit more complicated.” Thus, all the long rest of *The Republic*. We want couches.

Somewhere else—somebody please find it—he seems to suspect that philosophy is just not going to do the job, and that we might all do better to spend more time in singing and dancing and “praising the god.” So, notwithstanding Willie’s silly (and surely racist) assertion that white children are just as much in need of remediation in dancing and singing as black children in communication and calculation, we can not disagree with him or reject what he possibly does not know that he means. There is little joyful refreshment of any kind to be found in any of our systems of schooling. In the nearby state mental institution best known to us, Pooh-Bah rules: “That youth, of course, must have its fling, is hard on us, is hard on us, so pardon us, so pardon us, if we decline to dance and sing.” In English departments, poetry is cerebrated, not celebrated, and dancing and singing are no more to be countenanced than the fighting in the war-room in *Doctor Strangelove*. A student who is alert to allusion and assonance, to say nothing of synecdoche and cæsura, will do very well indeed, and the student who has been properly sensitized to the baleful elitism in alertness to all such things will do even better, but no credit is given for being surprised by joy. This is a strange truth: The very *raison d’être* of all art is the awakening of such things as joy and wonder, and other transcendental glimmerings, all of which are exactly what must be neglected in school.

We remember, distantly and dimly, when the day in school began with song and dance, and when there seemed to be no teacher who could not play the shabby and ill-tuned piano in the corner of every classroom. We welcomed sweet springtime in song, to the tune of Rubenstein with the words of Damrosch, and, even in the darkest winter, she stepped lightly among us. And not

even knowing what a muffin was or where Drury Lane might be found, we celebrated the excellent muffin-man who lived there and gave good things to children.

In those days, there were no teachers sufficiently enlightened to tell us that we could not possibly relate to such a person in such a place, so we just sang the song, and we danced the dance, and we felt pretty good. How bad was that? What did it do to us? Did it, perhaps, move us toward that unexciting but surely decent condition that Willie calls “good enough to help but not bad enough to harm”? Was it so meant, or was that just some natural consequence of singing and dancing together?

Here is Alyosha, saying farewell to the little boys in the last chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov*, a passage that every teacher should read at least once every term and brood on in the still watches of the night:

“My dear children, perhaps you won’t understand what I am saying to you, because I often speak very unintelligibly, but you’ll remember it all the same and will agree with my words sometime. You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. If a man carries many such memories with him into life, he is safe to the end of his days, and if one has only one good memory left in one’s heart, even that may sometime be the means of saving us. Perhaps we may even grow wicked later on, may be unable to refrain from a bad action, may laugh at men’s tears and at those people who say as Kolya did just now, ‘I want to suffer for all men,’ and may even spitefully jeer at such people. But however bad we may become—which God forbid—yet, when we recall how we buried Ilusha, how we loved him in his last days, and how we have been talking like friends all together, at this stone, the cruelest and most mocking of us—if we do become so—will not dare to laugh inwardly at having been kind and good at this moment.”

It is because we do brood on this passage around here that we were brought to unexpected attention by Willie’s word—“rescue.” Yes. That is

the right word. They need to be rescued. Every one of us is born in captivity, utterly surrounded and outnumbered by the beliefs and influences, usually either poisonous or mindless, or both, of the only world in which we can live and grow. They are the chains of Rousseau, perhaps, or the “nurture” of the psycho-prattlers. We swim in this world, and, unhelped, we are as likely to discover the fact of our captivity as the fish are to notice water. The very air had to be discovered. The shapers and counselors who make us what we are neither know nor care that we exist, for they are neither knowers nor carers. They are the invisible influences, the waves that roll as they please and the wind that bloweth where it listeth.

(Here is yet another suggestion in the Prometheus myth. The blindly floundering creatures that once we were, were awakened into the knowledge that they had been blind flounderers. Every individual human life, unless it is to remain mindless forever, which is not at all impossible, must be a private and internal recapitulation of the coming of fire, the awakening of self-knowledge.)

And the wretched children of the wretched poor, surely the ones that Willie has most in mind, need exactly what he says—rescue. And that, after all, is the first meaning of *education*—a leading forth out of captivity. And he is right in saying that terror will not save them. The frightened learn nothing.

But—oh, what a big but!— shall we wait until they reach the university before throwing out the lifeline? If we choose to “strengthen what they already know,” or, far more likely, what they (or we) suppose that they “know,” will we be rescuing them, or teaching them how cleverly and profitably to wear their chains? Why doesn’t Willie preach to those better placed for the rescue, to their parents, who have cast them adrift, to their day-carers, who make livings because their charges have been cast adrift and whose jobs would disappear if there were no castaways?

And what will he say to the teachers who see them first, long before they come to the university to be confirmed and cemented in “what they already know,” most of which they would probably do much better without, and re-aroused for the umpteenth time over “issues,” bringing them a never-ending succession of visions which will make them more forlorn? Will he counsel

them to bring tidings of comfort and joy to the lost and wretched? Does he even *want* them to be comforted and joyful, or would he prefer that they have not one good memory at all, lest they fall away from political correctness and neglect the spiteful jeering which the socially awakened are bound to visit on the goodness, truth, and beauty which happen to have been revealed by the wrong people in the wrong place and time?

Well, no matter. Our time has given us these Willies. Until their time is past, they can not be turned aside. But there is nothing from which we can not learn. To us, this Willie brings tidings of comfort and joy. He and his pals, of course, will prevail. They have already made of schooling a political reeducation camp, and of their calling, a lobby. But the same has happened, after all, in every other age. The Willies are correct in their belief that all schooling is the servant of a political agenda. And they share with all the aggrieved the thirst not for freedom but for the power to aggrieve. They are learning how to do that. In the next age, it will be from them that children will need to be rescued. And—what a lovely irony—the next Willies will have learned that from these Willies.

So be of good cheer, Schooling is just a contraption of convention; education is the natural destiny of human beings. Its very enemies open the gate. It cannot be turned aside, not even by the schools.

The Killer Bees

As felicitous an instance of futile classicism as can well be found, outside of the Far East, is the conventional spelling of the English language. A breach of the proprieties in spelling is extremely annoying and will discredit any writer in the eyes of all persons who are possessed of a developed sense of the true and the beautiful. English orthography satisfies all of the canons of reputability under the law of conspicuous waste. It is archaic, cumbersome, and ineffective; its acquisition consumes much time and effort; failure to acquire it is easy of detection. Therefore it is the first and readiest test of reputability in learning, and conformity to its ritual is indispensable to a blameless academic life.

IT was Thorstein Veblen who left that scrap of prose lying around where we might read it. Indeed, most of us probably have read it, but also forgotten it, long ago. Now, thanks to one of our distant readers, it has come back to mind, and brought, as is usually the case with wisdom, yet more bad news.

We found it in a strange, wonderful little book, *A Teacher's Perplexicon*, in part written and in part assembled by Peter Wexler, of the Department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex. It is a magnificent compendium of vexing thoughts from great (and occasionally not great) minds, all loosely organized under such heading as Credulity, Obituary, and Zombie.

The unattributed entries, which easily hold their own in the company of Locke and Voltaire, must be Wexler's own. Under Dictionary, we read: "Every time you look up a word in a dictionary you consult an interpreter, and one who has persuaded most people that he isn't there. Every time you open a book you place in some editor or printer more trust than is good for him." Hearing that, you immediately find yourself somehow better equipped.

The passage from Veblen made us think of Jeopardy, the television game show. Successful contestants, we have heard, spent weeks and weeks boning up and amassing tiny fragments of unrelated information, useful only for the answering of questions that might appear on the show. Every child in school does, or could do, exactly the same for the Regents Exams or the SAT's. For the children, however, the reward is but meager. The best they can hope for is the chance to move forward into more of the same. The Jeopardists have at least the chance of picking up some real dough, and we salute them for their industry.

One of the great traditions of American educationism is the annual orgy of spelling, in which little children all over the land bring tears to the eyes of the faithful and astound the judges and the audience by spelling *onomatopoeia* and *syzygy*, both of which we just now had to look up, and only one of which was recognized by this computer's expensive spelling checker. Wow, those kids are smart! They could probably soak up and spit out whole pages of telephone directories

and bus schedules too. They are put forth every year as great credits to their teachers and their schools. They are living arguments for new programs and increased funding, by virtue of which more children could spit out telephone directories and bus schedules.

(Interesting question: Exactly what has the teacher taught when the student has memorized the price list in the seed catalog, or for that matter, the spelling of *onomatopoeia* and *syzygy*? And another: Exactly what, other than the obvious, has been learned by the student?)

For some reason, probably sloth of mind, we have ignored or forgotten all that we once thought we had learned from Veblen in all of these years of consideration of the follies of our American schooling. Now we are rightly rebuked. Conspicuous waste, and its sister, the better known but no more remembered idea of conspicuous consumption, are powerful helps to our understanding. How interesting it would be to make a list of other “skills” and “learnings” to which our schooling must devote millions of hours in every year. The multiplication of four digit numbers by three digit numbers comes at once to mind, for that is an exercise utterly different from the absorption of principles which might come, and in a very short time at that, from some study of geometry. How many times have you done that since you left school? And then there is, of course—and we are delighted to say it—Grammar.

We have, of course, worried more than a little bit about grammar. We do know that the handbooks are full of it, lists and tables and even conjugations beyond counting, rules and exceptions, caveats and paradigms. We know that in every school year, every school child is set to it all of it yet once again, and that, much to the chagrin, but even more to the job-security, of every English teacher, hardly anybody ever learns anything. But, somehow, the students just keep talking anyway. What does it all mean?

Here is Wexler on the subject: “It is no accident, as Stalin might have said, that the shibboleths of grammatical purity (or other tribal qualification) should *regularly* be trivia like split infinitives or the agreement of past participles—within the capacity of the tiniest-minded pontificator—and also, historically speaking, perfectly arbitrary.”

We wish that you could all have copies of Peter Wexler’s *Perplexicon*, especially the teachers among you. Ours was sent to us by the author, and it is clearly published at and by his university. No price appears on it, however, and no address for the publisher. We do have Wexler’s address: 18 Church Road, Elmstead Market, Colchester, Essex, C07 7AT, England. British addresses are incomprehensible, but try it anyway.

In any case, we intend to keep returning to the marvelous and usually disquieting insights to be found in his work. We will go a step further. Wexler like all the English, presumes in all of us a knowledge of French, so he has left entries in that tongue untranslated. Alas. We will translate them.

Dry Bones in a Dry Season **Psyche Papers—Number One**

LUCIUS APULEIUS was born in 125AD. It was his misfortune to live in interesting times, in which he managed, however, to live an unusually varied and productive life. He was born in Carthage, then a Roman province, and educated mostly in Athens, where he picked up a leaning toward what is now called neo-Platonism, and also, apparently, some knowledge of those old Mysteries into which Socrates and his friends had been initiated.

He lived in the best of times, and also in the worst of times. His life began in the reign of Hadrian, one of a brief series of four “good” emperors. After Hadrian came one Antoninus, almost unremembered by us, but good enough to have been called “Pius” by his own people. After the Pius, came Marcus Aurelius, surely the only Roman emperor whose writings are still read. Marcus Aurelius died in 180, in which year Lucius Apuleius would have been only fifty-five. No one knows the death-date of Apuleius, but he may well have had the misfortune to live on for some time in the reign of the next emperor, Commodus. He was not one of the good emperors.

Hadrian and Trajan both have, to this day, walls named after them. The Empire in those days was hard-pressed everywhere by what the Romans would surely have called “lesser breeds without the law.” The walls were last ditches. Marcus

Aurelius, whom I usually picture meditating to the splash of fountains, tablet and stylus ready to hand, actually may have spent most of his time reading dispatches from the front. In his reign, the barbarians attacked Rome for the first time and did considerable damage to what we now call the infrastructure before they were defeated and driven off by the scholar Marcus Aurelius.

And then there was pestilence. Roman legionaries returning from the East brought with them the smallpox, and many thousands died. They brought with them also another sort of contagion, of which our knowledge is severely limited by the fact that only its enemies survived to tell us about it. It was the strange worship of a god called Mithras, the divine son of a divine mother.

The most interesting and momentous current flowing through the lifetime of Apuleius was surely religious turmoil. Because we trace our descent from the winners, we think of it as the time in which Christianity was growing into its strength and beginning the march that would end in its official establishment under Constantine. (He himself was not himself willing to convert to that creed, but he saw some good use to which that powerful organization might be put.) Others, including Marcus Aurelius, who did what he could to stamp it out, and probably Apuleius as well, thought it just a plebeian and antisocial conspiracy against all orderly government. But that was only the beginning of the more or less standard Roman distaste for the new belief that was growing so alarmingly quickly. There was also a truly religious objection. It must have been that Christianity, in some deep and not entirely explicable way, just didn't *feel* right to an educated Roman of the upper class.

The official religion of the Roman Empire was little more than a convenient fiction, much larger in consequence, of course, but theologically of no greater strength than our cult of Santa Claus. In its practice, no one was required, or expected, to believe that the Emperor was a god, and except, perhaps, for idiots and very young children, I think it unlikely that anyone did. And thus one of the lesser but perpetual complaints against the Christians: Just what is *wrong* with these babies that they won't perform a tiny symbolic act which no one takes seriously anyway? It probably had no more meaning than we intend by sticking a Love

stamp on the envelope we send to AT&T. The competition between Christianity and the cult of the emperor may have been religious from the point of view of the Christians, but for the Romans it was social and political.

But Christianity also had truly religious opponents beyond counting. My ancient Britannica says that Lucius Apuleius lived in an age of "reaction against a period of scepticism." Scepticism, or, more accurately, I think, a materialistic cynicism, a condition not unlike our own, might well have been an unintended product of the official cult itself, which offered "neither joy, not love, not light, not certitude, not peace, not help for pain." It was no golden branch, but a dry bone in a dry season. But there were some golden branches to be gathered in his time, and at least one of them had long been understood both to offer and provide those very things, all the way from joy to help for pain.

They were what we now call by what I think a deliberately wrong name, and one so chosen to mislead us. What Socrates and his friends referred to simply as mysteries, we have come to call Mystery Religions, in order to make a distinction that was truly not the case. It allows us to say, and to think, that Christianity is *one* religion and that a Mystery Religion is *another*, and, therefore, that one might be chosen in place of the other, but this does not usefully describe the difference.

The Greeks may have had religion, but, as we understand the term, they did not have a religion. They had no churches, but only temples, which served many purposes, more of them social and civic than religious. They had no scriptures, no written roots of doctrinal authority invested with holiness in themselves, but only the poets, truthful and beautiful no doubt, but poets all the same, often obscure and ambiguous, suggestive but tantalizing. And, most important of all, they had no clerical class with a vested interest in orthodoxy; their priests and priestesses, all very narrowly specialized in their functions, became such, and often only briefly, sometimes because of family, sometimes by vote, and sometimes by tradition or even by accident. Greek religion had no Creed, no Articles of Religion, no Commandments, no rituals of admission to the role of the faithful, no way at all of testing who was a member and who was an unbeliever or, even worse, a mistaken believer. It was not, like

the Church of Rome, or even so amorphous a thing as Protestantism, for instance, a system.

But it was also unlike the Roman Catholic Church, or Protestantism, for that matter, in another way; it was not in some special and dearly bounded compartment separately established and set aside from the rest of life. The Greeks did not go to church; they were always in religion. Some of them were doubtless hypocrites and deceivers for useful purposes best known and kept to themselves, some doubtless serious and credulous, and some suspicious but puzzled by doubt. Of the poets they might well have said, as even Aquinas said of the scriptures, that they are truly the revealed Word, but that, all the same, their meaning was far from clear, and best pursued hesitantly, tentatively, and very slowly, through thought and contemplation, through art at one end of a grand spectrum and rational discourse at the other and even through just plain living and the continual examination of living.

Of all such undertakings we see many examples in the conversations of Socrates and his companions. Even when they are talking about triangles and negative numbers, they are cheerfully engaged in an enterprise which they would have understood as “pious.” To us, that seems an inappropriate word, for we want to hear it in terms of a religion, and we are little likely to put it into the company of the word “cheerfully.” Our notion of piety wears a straight face, with the eyes turned somewhat upward.

Entry into the mysteries was not like joining a church. It called not so much for the believing of something, but for the learning of something. And that learning was apparently not the sort of mental act that we regularly, and to our disadvantage, call learning. By that, we ordinarily mean the acquisition of information. We say that we “learn” the days of the week and the capitals of the states, and in like manner other “facts” beyond counting. And then, we “know” them.

But such particles of information are not usefully to be called facts, not at all what Wittgenstein must have meant by “that which is the case.” That a certain portion of the face of Earth is Arizona, is not the case. Just now, we happen to call it Arizona, and when that day comes when no one calls it Arizona, it will not “be” Arizona. And so it is with almost everything that we suppose that we have learned. But our

“knowledge” of such things is strangely misty, and, like the zip codes of our friends and the principal exports of Japan, always subject to change without notice.

The learning of the mysteries seems to have been of a different sort. Socrates often refers to them in metaphor, saying what seems to be the case, that is, that one who would learn the greater would first have to pass through the lesser. This suggests at least one useful way in which we might distinguish between various sorts of learnings. Whether we learn the names of the states before or after we learn the days of the week matters not at all, but with such things as algebra and calculus, that is not so. But Socrates seems not to have meant, although also not necessarily to have excluded, such a pedagogically practical notion. He had in mind, I suspect, the sort of thing that we mean when we say, sometimes contrary to all evidence, that we learn by living and by experience, or, more accurately, as we are reminded when the evidence is contrary, not simply by living and experience but by *reflecting* on living and experience. Whatever it was that the Greeks “learned” in those mysteries, it must have grown out of reflection.

In the time of Lucius Apuleius, the ancient mysteries of the mother goddess were still being taught and celebrated in the little city of Eleusis not far from Athens. It would be very interesting to know what was done there, but we don’t. The initiates were sworn to secrecy, and they seem to have kept the secrets. There are hints dropped here and there, but none of them are useful. How those rites and learnings brought so many, as many did indeed claim, into joy and light and help for pain, we do not know. Furthermore, since we ourselves gnaw on dry bones in a dry season, it seems most likely to us that those who had passed through the Eleusinian Mysteries were either lying or deluded, either deceivers or deceived.

Lucius Apuleius may not have passed through those mysteries. His time was in some ways like one through which we have recently passed. It was an age of enthusiasms, of appetite for wonders, and all through the Empire people of all classes were “into” fads and notions, like hippies meditating with incense and chanting mantras. Mithraism had taken hold among the legions, and for a while ran neck and neck with Christianity, itself an exotic Eastern import. Religious

curiosities from the East, although not exactly new, were drawing new crowds. The cult of the Great Mother of the Gods had been established in Rome since 204BC, in obedience to a prophecy in the Sybilline books. It held its own until 394AD. But it was to yet another version of the mysteries that Apuleius was drawn, probably in those years that he spent, after his schooling in Athens, wandering and studying in the Eastern provinces. It was the cult of Isis that he chose, and he became not only an initiate of it but even something of an apostle.

All of those Mysteries of the Mother cults were probably much the same. The ancient Mother had countless names, and her history is very long and widely spread about the face of Earth. Stories of her nature and doings are told everywhere and naturally subject to all possible variations in its particulars of time and place. It seems very unlikely that the mysteries could have been in serious competition with one another. They did not, as would seem only natural to us in the case of churches or denominations, generate what we would call “congregations,” regulars who could be counted on to put something in the plate every week.

(Nor did the mysteries compete with other religions. Apuleius spent the latter part of his life as an honorable and prosperous citizen in Carthage, where he was elected to priesthood in the imperial cult and found, obviously, no conflict of interest or belief in performing his “sacred” duties. He kept the accounts of the temple funds and superintended the decent and proper management of the games in the amphitheatre.)

Most of those who came to be initiated at Eleusis came from very far away, and there was no duty laid on them ever to return. They were done with that. If they were expected to grow in what they had learned, which seems very probable, then it was obviously up to them to see to it on their own and for themselves, but they were not under orders to return. In fact, they were not permitted to return, for no one could repeat the process. It was obviously seen as a “passage,” something like birth or maturation, a complete change through which a person could pass only once, and in only one direction. It was not, as we think in religious terms, a “conversion.” It is better named a metamorphosis.

Lucius Apuleius was a philosopher, a rhetorician, a bureaucrat, and an advocate at law, but he is best remembered, where he is remembered at all, as a novelist. He wrote only the one novel, but it is a wonder. Like ever so many other writers until relatively recently times, he simply stole most of his best material. He would not have been annoyed in the least could he have known that others, Boccaccio and Cervantes, for examples, would re-steal from him in their time. Until some time well past Shakespeare, originality and novelty were not thought virtues in art and a good story was always thought well worth another telling. So it is that Apuleius’ novel bristles with entertaining little tales gathered here and there, but mostly from an earlier work, *The Metamorphoses* of one Lucius of Patrae, which no one reads anymore. So unashamed of his plagiarism was Apuleius that he did not even look for a new title. His novel is also called *Metamorphoses*. The name under which we now know it is *The Golden Ass*, but that name was given it later because of its popularity. It is about an ass, to be sure, but the “golden” is not a description of the ass but a judgment of the book. “Golden” was something like “super,” maybe, in the sense that put it into titles, like that of St John Chrysostom, of the golden mouth.

The Golden Ass is a rollicking tale of a young man’s misadventures following his richly deserved transformation into an ass. It is, by turns, funny, fantastical, frightening, raunchy, and lyrical. One can easily see in it how this and that story seem to be tied together only by the hero’s presence, and how such stories might be just as well told with different sets of particulars. But there is one story, truly the heart of the book, which stands out as somehow not like any of the others. For one thing, it is not something that happens to the ass, whose name also happens to be Lucius. It is a story that he hears, and also a story that he is not supposed to hear. It is a secret.

But it is more than a secret; it is a secret of women. It is told in a darkened cave by a wrinkled crone to a crying virgin. The crone is stirring a kettle, probably, as we would understand it, making a comforting potion of chicken soup. She tells the story for the girl’s comfort. The men, the band of robbers who have abducted the girl right out of her wedding, are all away. The women do not know that a man is listening, a man in the

form of an ass, to be sure, but still a man, and a man who will one day tell us the tale that he was not meant to hear.

The story within the novel is variously named. The worst name is *Cupid and Psyche*. A cute Cupid won't do. *Psyche and Eros* is better, since even among us Eros has some power and dignity left, in spite of his diminution into the uniquely sexual. In my own mind, I think of the story simply as *Psyche*. It is her story.

Such is the quality of that story that we have come to suppose it a myth, one more myth in the great collection known as the Greek Myths, which just happens to have been dropped into the novel along with other diverting tales. But that seems to me not right. Although it uses a few well-known characters out of the Greek myths, it places them, especially Eros, in very uncharacteristic roles; it has no readily identifiable family of versions, and no known source.

I would like to believe, and I intend to behave as though I did believe, that the little story of Psyche is the most audacious and valuable of the many plagiarisms of Lucius Apuleius. Of the story of Psyche, I will say that it either is, or might as well be, one of the secrets that initiates of a mystery cult was supposed to keep. It has all of the necessary attributes.

It is dramatic and engaging, and tells a story at once magical and exotic and also perfectly familiar to all human beings, a story of love, love's dreams, love's losses, love's search, and love's triumph. It has reversals and recognitions, violence and death, treachery and deception, terror and suspense. It would make a great movie. It tells the one great and seemingly perpetual story of the quest, its wanderings, trials, and discoveries, its coming out of the darkness and into the light. It is in one way perfectly clear, in another, it is a puzzle calling for solution. It stays in the mind and impels reflection. And it is just much too good, too well-wrought, to have been thought up even by the learned and sophisticated Lucius Apuleius.

But it is not for the sake of converting myself, or anyone else, to the cult of Isis that I would study this tale. This is not to say that I would turn down the chance to learn of those mysteries, for I am certain that they revealed something not so much about what we now call "a religion," but

about something that we might think of as true education, the kind that ought to be capitalized.

As far as I can make out from reading around in Plato and other old works, just as there was no equivalent among the Greeks of churches, there was also no equivalent of what we call "religious education," no Sunday School, a process among us which would often seem to provide the opposite of the liberation implied in the word "education." It was probably from the poets, most particularly from the dramas, that the Greeks learned their "piety," and not from the preachings of licensed pietists.

Furthermore, while Socrates often refers to this or that person as "educated," he clearly means nothing like what we mean, that is, schooled or trained in this or that skill or calling. He does, however, always seem to mean something moral, some practice and power in the task of distinguishing the better from the worse. He seems to be thinking of an education not related to or dependent on any time or place or any set of particulars. It was some inward condition in which a Martian might well be found, and from which Aristotle would not be excluded by his ignorance of the capitals of the states. He was, of course, not unfamiliar with the fact that people could learn to be carpenters or pilots of ships, but he obviously did not think of that as education, or even as a part of it. As a matter of fact, he seems not to have imagined, as we do, that such an inward condition had any parts, but rather that it was one thing.

In our age, we find it very hard not only to understand that ancient idea of education, but even to want to understand it. About one thing, Socrates was perfectly clear: Education is not a condition of the mind, but of the soul. We can, apparently, accept the idea of winning hearts and minds, by which we seem to mean really sentiments and notions, but "soul" is a word that embarrasses us. "Psyche" does not embarrass us, even though it is the word for "soul," because it has been sanitized by the psychological "scientists," who were embarrassed by Freud's habitual use of "*die Seele*" and wanted to sound more up-to-date and technical. But the story of Psyche is quite simply the story of the soul, its birth, its growth, its trials, and its destiny. And that is to say, the story of an education, plain and simple, and without any admixture of the various things we now take for education, the amorphous

collection of skills, information, social graces, and indoctrination that we have to mean by the word.

Furthermore, we find the story of the soul enfolded in another story of education, the story of a man who is turned into an ass. This is a familiar tale; we can all tell it, having lived it. But it is also the story of a man who knows that he is an ass, and who doesn't like it, and who would like to work his way back into being a man. This is a less familiar tale, but a far more important one.

Both tales are the stories of all of us. If they can reveal some secrets of education, it must be of a truly universal education that they reach, an education not of any time or place, but of wherever it is that is permanent and universal in persons. So it must be, alas, that an inquiry into such an education must be called "religious," but not in the usual sense of the word. "Religion," by its stems, means a tying together, a reuniting of what was - or seems - sundered, the recognition of relationship, perhaps, best of all in these times, a vast and mighty ecological revelation of the kinship of all that is and all that lives. Religion is to "the religions" what education is to the curricular devisings and schemes of the schools. It is too important to be left to the religionists.

Brief Notes and Things to Come

The seven days of the week will not suffice, no, nor seven months either. Best not too soon make plain how much mortal time must pass over his head while he sits spun round in his spell. Heaven forbid it should be seven years!

WITH this issue, we begin our fifteenth year of publication, or, as we think of it, our third spell of seven years. We must now give you notice that we do not expect that there will come a twenty-second year of publication. Three sevens is quite enough. Indeed, we always find it hard to believe that there will be a *next* issue.

The third seven will see changes. Our Associate Circulation Manager will now become Full Circulation Manager. And with tenure. There is nothing we can do about that: it's in the constitution. It is also in the constitution that he will write us a book every seven years. In his first

term he did *Less Than Words Can Say*, the simplest and least useful of his books, but also the only one that remains in print for some strange reason. His second term brought *The Graves of Academe*. We do not give him credit for *The Leaning Tower of Babel*, for it was not truly a book, but a collection of our own pieces bound in the shape of a book.

He is not a fluent writer. He writes very slowly. He hates writing. He says that he would rather re-tile a bathroom than complete a paragraph, but alas, he has never actually done that. He has chosen to write a new book slowly, and have it appear, piece by piece in issues of THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN. In this issue you have already found the first installment of *The Psyche Papers*. To read it most comfortably and usefully, you may have to do a little homework in the course of the next seven years.

The assigned reading is *The Golden Ass* of Lucius Apuleius as translated by Robert Graves. It can be had in a cheap paperback edition. *The Psyche Papers* will be given mostly to a consideration of the tale of Psyche and Eros which appears within the novel, but it will not be enough to read only that passage. There are connections and echoes.

We seem to have spent our first seven years trying to figure out why so few of those who call themselves "educators" can make sense, and our second looking at the institutional and individual calamities brought on by senseless people who operate our schooling. It looks as though our third seven years ought to be given to a question that readers have often, and often very urgently, asked: Well, then, if that's the way it is, what can we do? Let us try to discover or devise some answers.

This is not, however, to say that we want to suggest some hitherto unimagined "reform." Our "education" is not sick; it is dead. There is no undertaker skillful enough to bring its putrid corpse to life. No matter. It was never truly an education anyway, only another thing using the name. It was never intended as a release from the captivity in which we are all born. We would like to rediscover, if that can be done, the real thing.

ALSO, as you do or should know, permission to quote or to reprint any part or even all of any issue of THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN is

invariably granted to anyone for any purpose. One reader write recently to apologize for plagiarism, since he had woven some of our stuff into a speech he had given and made no attribution. Since then we have also had word of a man who wrote, to the editor of some newspaper, a letter that was, in fact, made entirely of our words. The paper caught him, chastised him, and barred him from their letters column forever. Somehow, we feel that something only sort of like justice has been served here. So now we have to add a new rule. Plagiarism is also permitted. Go ahead. Make our day.”

THIS issue has been set in an old new typeface. It is Richard Beatty’s resurrection of Jenson’s Eusibius, the first true Roman letters. It made its first appearance in 1470, and it still looks great. This faithful electronic version is named Mitchell. And we like it. See below for another note of typographical interest.

*Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune,
whose words do jarre; nor his reason in frame,
whose sentence is preposterous.*

Fanny Mitchell’s Fell Hand

Fanny Mitchell is known to our subscribers as Central Control, *i.e.*, She Who Must Be Obeyed. It is she who writes those utterly illegible postcards and those tiny, and less legible, post-it notes that so many of you, after a few weeks of courteous pondering, send back for translation, only to fall into her fell hand yet again. Be of good cheer. There is remedy in view. Well, maybe.

One of America’s most talented designers of typefaces for the computer happens also to be a friend and admirer of Fanny Mitchell—well, that’s surely a part of his reason—he has designed Fanny Mitchell, this charming penletter face that you are reading. We are delighted. There are many more Nobel Laureates in this world than there are those for whom type faces have been named. And we do hope, of course, that she may want to use it in her correspondence with you, although we are not counting on it. We, at least, will be using it from time to time in *The Underground Grammarian*.

We happen to know that some of our readers publish journals and newsletters of their own from their Macintosh computers. There may even be some for whom this sheet is of strictly typographical interest. So, to all readers who use Macintosh computers, we offer the free use of this typeface. Just send us a legible postcard, and we’ll send you a disk containing not only Fanny Mitchell but also another old typeface that we made right here for our own use. And if you happen to be looking for someone who can design typefaces, be aware of Richard Beatty, at 110 Carter Avenue, Middle Hope, NY 12550-1223, and of our own typographical subsidiary that sells many of his elegant types and borders.



The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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The Stories People Tell

The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to keep alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves. One day you will be good storytellers. Never forget these obligations.

CROW AND WEASEL came in as we were all sitting around brooding about Psyche and Eros. It is a little book, well, short but not really little, and probably the first book, by one Barry Lopez, published at the North Point Press in San Francisco. It has luscious illustrations by Tom Pohrt. It is pricier than it ought to be, but what book isn’t these days? Nor is it exactly a great book, although it certainly isn’t a bad one. Nevertheless, we think you ought to read it. There is a strange and wonderful promise in it.

The little passage quoted above is so obviously important to this book that the writer of the jacket copy quoted it, or most of it, before we did. Those are the words of Badger, a wise old woman who gives shelter to Crow and Weasel on the difficult journey home, and we found them astonishing. You'll see why when you read this issue's Psyche paper, which happens to be given to a consideration of stories and storytelling.

The author seems to be a man who knows much about American Indian lore and ways of living and thinking. If you could have of him some inside information, this is what we would like to know: Did he create Badger's speech himself, or is it a version or paraphrase of what somebody else said? If the former, then we have high hopes for the future works of Barry Lopez, and if the latter, then we mingle with those hopes a deep regret for the sad diminution of the culture out of which they came.

Crow and Weasel is the story of two young men, hardly more than boys, who make a long and perilous journey to the North, where no member of their tribe has gone before. They remind us of Gilgamesh and Enkidu journeying to the Cedar Mountain to wrest lumber from Humbaba, who guards the forest.

But they are better than Gilgamesh and Enkidu, because their journey is more moral, neither for gain nor battle, but for the intriguing purpose, as Mountain Lion tells them, of "carrying our way of life with you, for everyone to see."

Their way of life can be described with only one word, used in a very old sense—piety. Sophocles or Plato would have called them exactly that—pious.

Theirs is a piety that has nothing to do with the public displays of religiosity and the strident claims of righteousness that have brought the word "pious" into disfavor among us. It is something like that condition in the Greeks which Demerartus tried, in vain, to explain to Xerxes, when that potent emperor said that the Greeks were leaderless and thus easy to beat. No, said Demerartus, they do have a leader. Their leader is the Law. (The capital L is important.)

Crow and Weasel do live, although with occasional lapses, especially in the case of Weasel, by the Law. Lost in the forest, they ask the trees for guidance. (In their case, the trees

answer; we would probably not be so fortunate, but who can say that we would not be better for the asking?) They thank the bird who leads them. They thank and revere the very animals that they must kill to live. The Law is obviously a law of connections, an idea about something like the family of all that is. It is a precept of the Law that nothing is meaningless, nothing is insignificant, no deed disappears without consequence. It is a very large form of the idea that We Are All in This Together, including, as it does, not only all that lives, but all that is, the clouds and the rocks and whatever. It is not a contemptible notion, and to live by it might well be called a way of Religion with a capital R, and without the demerits that seem to come with a religion and its articles, rules, and organizational devices.

Now here is what we wonder: How would *Crow and Weasel* fare in school?

It would be perfect for children. Its English is clear and simple and often lovely. Its story is intriguing, and its characters are few and sympathetic. Its heroes are young. It promotes, or at least gives a teacher a chance to promote, certain now popular "awarenesses," like environmentalism and intercultural appreciation. (Crow and Weasel go far enough north to meet a hunting party of Inuits with whom, most improbably for us but not for little children, they turn out to share the same language.) A teacher could even call this "minority literature." But we suspect that none of these merits will win it a place in school.

Crow and Weasel are not in any way oppressed, not victims, except, occasionally, of themselves. Even the hunger that almost kills them is, they know, their own fault. And they are thoughtful enough to learn, young as they are, that self-esteem is a dangerous illusion. This makes them politically useless.

The book is simply too—well, the only word is "spiritual." Its spirituality is decent and restrained, there is nothing of New Age gaga about it, and that makes it even less acceptable. School people love gaga. Crow and Weasel do think about, and even call upon, the Ones Above, but the Ones Above seem not to have promulgated any dogma or ordained any clergy. They haven't even boasted about themselves and their stupendous powers. The young heroes seem to think of them more as family, although far away. (Mountain Lion did tell

them, “When you are tempted to give up, think of your relatives.”) Their concern for the land, the animals, the people they meet, and for each other, seems to be as natural to them as eating and sleeping, and the result neither of obedience to some supposed commandment nor of social programming.

In short, they live in the good life utterly without the aid of any of those programs and devices by which the schoolers promise us that they will teach our children how to live in the good life. Worst of all, the goodness of life in them arises from something which, while it has nothing to do with any of the professional goodness businesses we can name, simply has to be called religion, some apprehension of the truth that all things are “tied together,” just as the word says.

Strangely enough, all the same qualities should make it impossible for Crow and Weasel to win acceptance in the other schools, the ones that *call* themselves religious. For them, religion is *their* religion, and not about tying together but about separating, thank you.

Too bad. *Crow and Weasel* is a story that would take good care of children.

Political Correctness One Last Time

As to the disorder of political correctness in curriculum, we will have nothing more to say. We have read, and urge you all to read, a piece called “Illiberalisms” in the *New Yorker* of May 20 1991. It is a review by Louis Menard of *Illiberal Education*, by Dinesh D’Souza. This is the book that brought the great political correctness flap out of Academe and into the popular press and its op-ed page.

Louis Menard, whoever he is, and we wish we knew, is exactly what he should be—a card-carrying member of neither warring faction. He discerns and understands the nonsense on both sides of No Man’s Land. His book review has the remarkable effect, therefore, of hitting D’Souza right where he should be hit, and hurt, but without giving aid and comfort to the sillies in whose ludicrous *sottises* D’Souza has found such easy and entertaining targets.

But what we like best about Menard is his superb grasp of grammar. Here he is on the truly

important concern hidden by the political correctness mess:

“Having sensibly decided that we were wrong in believing that a person’s race and sex are the least important things about him or her, we have now apparently concluded that they must be the only important things. Words that ought to be adjectives—black, white, female, male, homosexual, heterosexual—have been made into substantives.” Now there you can see the truest practice of good grammar, pure and undefiled.

The Grammar Buff’s Corner

There used to be a useful little definition of “grammar.” It said simply that a language’s grammar was a collection of all those little changes through which its words can go. The ‘s’ on the end of plural nouns, and that other ‘s’ on the end of verbs in the third person singular were grammar. And ditto for the change of *man* into *men*. Grammar is not hard at all; there is no one who doesn’t use it.

English has very little grammar. Its verbs, which really have only two tenses, are easy to conjugate, and it lacks one of the things that makes so many other languages at once harder to learn and easier to construe—the agreement between modifiers and what they modify. It’s unfortunate. With just a few little changes in our grammar, we could make thoughtfulness and understanding easier to come by, and life easier to live.

We have recently discovered, quite by accident, an amazing fact of Russian grammar. Russian, like many other languages, awards its nouns the remarkable distinction of gender along with the more comprehensible and excusable distinctions of case and number. But it goes even further. In some cases, the endings of nouns, and therefore of the adjectives that would modify them, depend upon whether or not the nouns name inanimate objects or animate creatures. That seems to us astounding and provocative. It is a clear case of true grammar, and we could use more such.

Consider this dilemma, on whose horns some of our fellow citizens are just now uncomfortably impaled.

The desert war is now sort of over, but some of the issues it raised still stand. In the days before

the war, there was biting of nails and wringing of hands. It was a grand time for professional ethicists and clergy, countless of whom enjoyed brief days in the sun of talk-shows and op-ed pages debating the question of The Just War. And why not? Where else can the professional newsgatherers and informers of the public go in times of moral uncertainty but to those who are experts on goodness and God?

Unfortunately, however, the desert war broke out before the moral experts could reach agreement, or even define their terms. Worse yet, the whole thing came to an end without having provided enough deaths and dismemberments to produce a verdict as to its justice. The goodness professionals, like all the other social scientists, prefer large databases.

Well, no matter. Luckily, the moral sensibilities of the nation may yet be informed and edified. The goodness pros have in fact discovered a large data base in the hapless Iraqis. Let's be grateful.

Controversy continues. Here is the word from one Michael Walzer, who is "a political philosopher," whatever that means at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Studies, whatever *that* means:

"We still don't know the full extent of either civilian or military casualties, and there could be a cholera epidemic, plus the deaths to come in the civil war."

Ah yes, the deaths to come. Now that is a data base. *Omnēs exeunt*. Walzer, his dire forebodings notwithstanding, is one of the moderates on the justice of the war. He pronounces the war "just but dangerous" and approves the "discrimination" made possible by smart bombing; but he warns that we must now become much more critical of "nondiscrimination" in bombing, lest a just war suddenly become unjust (and thus more dangerous?) when the destruction of parked aircraft takes place on visitor's day, no doubt. Accidents will happen.

He is joined in moderation by a pair of Roman Catholic justice experts, one Father Langen, who pronounces it "an imperfectly just war," and a certain Father Hehit, who deems it "just but unwise." What remarkable ideas. Wisdom and justice in discord. The astonishing thought of the imperfectly just, which must be very much like the partially pregnant. Well, there is one great

reward to him who utters the meaningless; he can never be proved wrong.

Still, even those moderates sound just a teeny bit uncomfortable, as though they would have been much happier with more destruction. And there are, it appears, some who will not give even a qualified certificate of justice. They are waiting for the final count. In the *New York Times* of March 17, where we found all this neat stuff, there are two subheads. One reads: "Many of the moralists' apocalyptic scenarios did not come to pass." Pity. Well, it's nothing new. Jonah suffered a like disappointment. For moralists now sharing his chagrin, there is still hope. Nineveh *will* be destroyed, if not today, then maybe tomorrow.

The other subhead reads: "Moral equations are hard to balance when the number of dead Iraqis is unknown." Now that's the one we like. It appears not to be a direct quotation from any one of the cited moralists, but rather an editorial summation of some last remaining hope in them all. So far they have, for all their searchings of hearts other than their own, not come up with the definitive answer. After all, what do we pay these people for? If they're going to be goodness experts, let them put up or shut up. When you ask the fishmonger, Is this fish fresh? you don't want qualifications and quibbles. And when we ask our moral experts whether a war is just or not, we have the right, considering the Authority which so many of them claim, to expect that they will be mindful of the Apostle's command: Let thy Yea be Yea, and thy Nay, Nay; for the double-minded man is uncertain in *all* his ways.

But, before we fire the whole lot of them, or, even better, decide to stop asking them, let's give them a chance to do a little math. After all, what sort of decision can they make while the number of dead Iraqis remains unknown? What do you say? Let's give them exactly twenty-four hours from that moment, the moment in which the count is concluded. All they need, apparently, is the magic number. And wouldn't it be interesting to discover that. Just imagine! There is some number of dead Iraqis, x , which will show the war just. What a relief! And there is some other number, $x + 1$, which will show the war unjust. Wow. Now that's the sort of ethicism that we would be delighted to pay for. It would prove that our professionals of goodness and God areas good as our fishmongers.

If you are wondering what all this has to do with Russian adjectives, you're just not thinking. When counsel is darkened by words without meaning, flee to the comfort of grammar. Let us make a few simple changes in our language. And, taking our clue from the admirable distinction that Russian makes between the animate and the inanimate, let us consider the importance of an even more admirable distinction, to wit, between the person and the non-person.

What a pity we don't have the endings. Wouldn't it be a remarkable and useful grammar that provided us with continual reminders that roses don't love sunshine, but they we only pretend that they do for the sake of the song. Nor does that last rose of summer grieve, although we take pleasure in saying that it does, or perhaps, more accurately, in *playing* that it does.

There are certain acts that only a person can commit, certain conditions that only a person can achieve. The stars can neither rejoice nor repent. The Chrysler corporation can't lie; Lee Iacoca would have to do that. Earth herself can not be wise, but you might. You, or you, or even *you*, can be just or unjust, but a volcanic eruption can't. Neither can a war. Where justice and injustice are assigned, always be sure to ask for names.

All we need to keep our minds in order in matters of ethics and morality is some little grammatical convention, an ending, perhaps, attached to any word that is person-specific, something whose absence would make a nasty clunk in whomsoever hears it, as a split infinitive is said to do, or a double negative.

Now that would be an *important* grammar, a grammar with import, quite unlike the grammar with which we vex ourselves in schools. When a little boy says, "I ain't seen no dog," it's not important. He is neither a liar nor a charlatan. Nor is he unjust. But when the professionals of goodness blab on about the "justice" of war, the case is otherwise.

Reading the Real Truth Psyche Papers—Number Two

PHAEDRUS: Tell me, Socrates, isn't it somewhere about here that they say Boreas seized Orithyia from the river?

SOCRATES: Yes, that is the story.

PHAEDRUS: Was this the actual spot? Certainly the water looks charmingly pure and clear: it's just the place for girls to be playing beside the stream.

SOCRATES: No, it was about a quarter of a mile lower down, where you cross to the sanctuary of Agra; there is, I believe, an altar dedicated to Boreas close by.

PHAEDRUS: I have never really noticed it, but pray tell me, Socrates, do you believe that story to be true?

SOCRATES: I should be quite in fashion if I disbelieved it, as the men of science do. I might proceed to give a scientific account of how the maiden, while at play with Pharmacia, was blown by a gust of Boreas down from the rocks hard by, and having thus met her death was said to have been seized by Boreas, though it may have happened on the Areopagus, according to another version of the occurrence. For my part, Phaedrus, I regard such theories as no doubt attractive, but as the invention of clever, industrious people who are not exactly to be envied, for the simple reason that they must then go on and tell us the real truth about the appearance of centaurs and the Chimera, not to mention a whole host of other such creatures, Gorgons and Pegasuses and countless other remarkable monsters of legend flocking in on them. If our skeptic, with his somewhat crude science, means to reduce every one of them to the standard of probability, he'll need a deal of time for it. I myself have no time for the business, and I'll tell you why, my friend. I can't as yet "know myself," as the inscription at Delphi enjoins, and so long as that ignorance remains it seems to me ridiculous to enquire into extraneous matters. Consequently I don't bother about such things, but accept the current beliefs about them, and direct my inquiries, as I have just said, rather to myself, to discover whether I really am a more complex creature and more puffed up with pride than Typhon, or a simpler, gentler being whom heaven has blessed with a quiet, un-Typhonic nature.

Somewhere far away and long ago, we may have gone wrong. Our most ancient ancestors were, they had to be, and in the truest sense of the word, educated. They made art. They must have known how to consider and search out meaning, and how to make sense, how to gather from reaction the

fruits of reflection, and how at least to pursue the distinction between the better and the worse. In other words, and also in what should be the truest sense of this word, they did know how to “read.” We seem not to know.

Their reading, of course, would not have been what is so easy now to so many of us, the receiving of what is on the page, but rather the reading that has now become so hard for us, the reading of one who looks up from the page in wondering and reflection. Like us, they had no end of “reading material,” but, unlike us, they had not convinced themselves that the receiving was also the knowing. Their library, just like ours, was a literature, that which was written; but, unlike ours, it was a literature in which no one could be sure of holding an advanced degree.

When we survey our past, we see a continuous upward climb. Those old ones long gone had, by our standards, almost nothing. And, in that sense of the word now most common, we must account them entirely without education. We presume an absolutely essential relationship between education and literature. Education’s history begins, for us, with the coming of writing. Before that, there was nothing but such sub-literary forms as myth, and legend, and fairy-tale, all of them naive, confused, and inconsistent, however colorful and charming. When we do find worth in such primitive forms, we deem it a worth that only we, but not the hearers of the tales, could have found, and that, only by virtue of our reading in psychology or sociology or some such discipline. Thus we conclude that the wisdom and insight which we enlightened ones may sometimes take from the ancient story was not in fact available to those who told and heard it. We will allow that Sophocles, of course, was literate and subtle, and thus could seek out the “deeper meanings” of the tale of the miserable king, but of those who told and contemplated the tale long, long before Sophocles, what can we suppose, except that their understanding, if any, must have been childish and primitive, and that their indubitable interest in the tale must have been due only to what was in them but utterly invisible to them, since they had not the advantage of the explications which the more literate of their descendants have by now provided. But for them, alas, too late. We must leave them behind in darkness, and without hope of the light, like the useful idiots who bring in and

die for the revolution whose fruit will never ripen in their time.

Thus we see our mind’s history. First there was darkness and confusion, the ignorance out which grows what we call, as though it were the work of the mouth alone, the “oral tradition.” Then comes the faintest glimmer of dawn, the coming of writing and the reading of writing. Now there can be Literature, ever growing and improving, moving always from the worse to the better. And we too, can always be moving upward with it, always measuring the powers of our understanding by the number of books we have read, and thinking ourselves “educated” in proportion with the number of “facts” that we remember and cite. And Literature itself we now know to be only the great messenger sent before the face of the greater to come, Criticism. Books of course are good, but they are only the beginning of the understanding that comes from books about books. As some poor chap asks in Acts, “How can I learn, except there be a teacher?” And “How indeed?” replies the teacher, and the teacher of the teacher. And so it is that schooling is practiced mostly by teachers carefully positioning themselves directly between their students and the light.

Plato’s *Phaedrus* is a remarkably iconoclastic little piece. Besides the dismissal of literary criticism cited above, it contains also that story in which the Egyptian god Thoth devises for humanity the gift of literacy and proudly presents it to the king of Egypt. The king is not pleased. This invention, he says, is not a path to understanding but to remembering. It will bring us not into considering but into reciting. It will bring knowledge and understanding, but only information, the illusion of knowledge and understanding, and, with that, to the endless discomfort of all humanity, a pack of pests who, having read much, imagine that they are wise.

To the king’s misgivings, Socrates adds others. He reminds Phaedrus that books, like statues and paintings, are beautiful but dumb. If you ask them questions, they do not answer. They are like speechless infants, who can neither defend nor explain themselves, who can say only what they have said, and can give no further account of it without their parent standing by. They are also, he says, and to our tastes most shockingly, indiscriminate as to their victims. They can be

read by anyone who picks them up, young or old, wise or foolish, and with potentially disastrous consequences. They always speak as though they knew they were right, and never consider, as a wise person would, what is the right thing to say at this time to this listener. In effect, they always do exactly what Socrates says elsewhere what no thoughtful person seeking the good would ever do—they speak at random.

It is interesting but maddening to speculate as to how things might have turned out had the king been able spare us forever the gift of literacy. We would surely now lack much that we think necessary, but we might also not ever have come to think them necessary. We would lack a great collection that we now have, but we might also not need it. It is easy to speculate, of course, as to what we might have lost; the harder task, but also the more important one, is to discover what we might have kept.

Joseph Campbell, somewhere in the middle of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, makes a provocative assertion, that a great light came into the world with Galileo, but that, at the same time, another great light went out of it. It may be that Campbell sets the date far too late. Socrates would have chosen an earlier one. But the date is not as important as the question: Is this worth worrying about at all? Does Campbell, out of some sentimental archaism of the sort that always thinks the old days were better, assert what is simply preposterous?

Socrates would like to consider that question, I think. In a way, he has considered it in the passage cited above, when he says that in thinking about a story he would rather not think about the story but about himself. Leaving aside for now the probable modern reaction to this idea as selfish and anti-social, it will still be disapproved as a rejection of two of our most popular and powerful generators of what we call light—science and literary criticism. Where myth is concerned, those two have become the closest of collaborators.

Myth is most often understood among us as the feeble attempt of the primitive mind to answer the sort of question that we have learned to answer through science. That is also to say that myth, while it may be entertaining, is a failure which we have replaced with a success. We tell schoolchildren, if we do still tell them anything about myth, that Persephone's half-year stay in

the Underworld is meant to account for the perpetual return of the cold weather when nothing grows. It is the same kind of "explanation" that Socrates finds useless in the case—and a very common case it is—of the maiden spirited away by a lecherous wind. There is no story which cannot be subjected to like treatment, so that it is possible, out of nothing more than sufficient cleverness, to account in equal fashion for the fact that it was a swineherd and not a cowherd who was the only witness to Persephone's abduction. And all the same is possible, of course, in the case of our heroine. Psyche, too, is spirited away (and here the word "spirited" is used in its best sense) by a wind. There are, in fact, many such stories from countless cultures, so many, indeed, that we have to conclude, if we want to be perfectly scientific, that the early death of some pretty girl because of wind was far more common in preliterate times than it is now.

But the story of Persephone was never intended to "explain" the cycle of the seasons. It may even have been meant the other way around, suggesting that the meaning of our condition is the shadow of something greater. The sheer brute facts of life do not call for explanation until *after* the coming of science. If science wants to answer the question What is the world? which may be not entirely a falsification of science, then the making of myth can perhaps be understood as the attempt not exactly to answer but at least to contemplate a very different question: What does it *mean* that the world is what it is?

When Socrates tells of his studies in physics, he pronounces them fascinating but of little use. They taught him, for instance, what the moon does, but gave him no clue at all about the question that interested him: Why is it *right* that the moon does what it does? And, about the story of the moon as told by physics, he would probably have found another question to ask, one similar to the question he asks about the story of the wind that it named Typhon: Can I learn to be like the moon, always in my place, always doing what I should do? Obviously, where there are such questions, it is not some imaginable *better* physics that would serve. Something else entirely is needed.

The "answers" to such questions, furthermore, are not at all what science means by answers. They do not relate to the questions as solutions

relate to problems. They are not, as Socrates makes clear to Phaedrus, questions about the world out there, but questions about the world in here, in the self. This is the tremendous difference between our sort of “education” and the education that I am ready to think possible not only in the most ancient of our forbears but also in the least schooled and lettered of any human being anywhere and at any time. It is an education in and about the self, and, a leading forth out of self, ignorance. In our time, when all of our devices and desires, all of our social, political, and technological endeavors, are aimed at the world out there, when all our fondest dreams of the good life drive us mightily to labor for the improvement of other people, the idea of an education devoted to the nurture of self-knowledge seems not only preposterous but even a little bit wicked.

Consider this passage from *The Book of Thomas*, a gospel that was rejected by the Christian establishment. In it, Jesus speaks thus to Thomas:

“Since it is said that you are my twin and my true friend, examine yourself and understand who you are, how you live, and what will become of you. Since you are called my brother, you should not be ignorant about yourself...While you are walking with me, though you are ignorant of other things, already you have obtained knowledge, and you will be described as one who knows self. For whoever does not know self does not know anything, but whoever knows self already has acquired knowledge about the depth of the universe. So, my brother, you have seen what is hidden from other people, what they stumble over in their ignorance.”*

* You can find the rest of this in *The Secret Teachings of Jesus*, Random House, 1984, translated by Marvin W. Meyer. The short-lived relationship between early Christianity and the dying mystery religions is chronicled and weighed by Rudolf Steiner in *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, a strange but intriguing book, first published in 1912 and now available in the second English edition of 1972 from the Rudolf Steiner Press, London. Steiner was something of a crank, no doubt, but one whose time may yet come. He was, among other things, the founder of the Waldorf School movement, which just now is enjoying a renaissance.

The importance of Steiner’s book for us lies especially in this: He understands and documents the elitism of the mystery religions, and goes on to assert,

This Jesus sounds like Socrates, although Socrates, moderate, of course, in all things, would never have been quite so assertive. He may well have believed, but surely would never have said, that who knows self knows “about the *depth* of the universe,” and that who is ignorant of self knows nothing, nothing at all. But it was exactly about the depth of the universe, and not merely about the universe itself, that Socrates wanted to know when he studied physics.

The Golden Ass, which frames our story of Psyche, and which may be not much more than a pretext for telling that story, is nevertheless also a story about self-knowledge. Lucius, when we first meet him, has no self-knowledge and no interest in self-knowledge. This is true of almost any young person, and, although it isn’t, it ought to be the first truth on which any school is built. His interest is in the world out there, and, most especially in whatever is bizarre and titillating in the world out there. He is hypnotized by sex and magic. The lure of sex is easy to understand, but his fascination with magic should be thought about. It is not myth, but magic, that is the true pre-scientific counterpart of science. Magic is about the physical world, the universe itself as opposed to the depth of the universe that Socrates wanted to understand. Lucius, just like any budding young scientist, wants to make things happen out there in the world. He will learn at the last to make things happen within himself.

But he resists any learning that points inward. In his cousin’s house he beholds the sculptured group of Diana and her hounds, in which even the face of Acteon is seen peeking out between the leaves. The hunter is already beginning to turn into a beast. He examines the group “with delighted curiosity.”

“Delighted curiosity” is exactly the phrase with which to describe the very best of scientific enterprises. It is, if I remember correctly, the most captivating and perhaps even the happiest of all the conditions of childhood. The world out there is full of wonders and marvels, each containing its

partially through a remarkably compelling interpretation of the story of the raising of Lazarus, that the intended work of Jesus was to bring the awakening to a new life, the light and consolation of the mysteries, to all people, not just to the cultured and intelligent (and rich), like our hero Lucius, for instance.

own neverending regressions of more wonders and marvels. Scientists play exciting games.

Lucius' cousin Byrrhaena finds him admiring the statuery and says a strange thing: "Cousin, this is all for you." But Lucius can not "read" what she says, any more than he can read the sculpture with the reading that Socrates commends to Phaedrus.

The sculpture is a story, and a very famous one. Lucius, of course, "knows" the story, as we would say, making no important distinction between knowledge and information, but he can not read it, he can not look up from the page and wonder. If he could, he would, to be sure, wonder what of Acteon he might have hidden in himself, but he might go even further. He might wonder about his own houndness, that animal nature in him that might well turn and tear its master to pieces. And he might ask, too, whether there is in him something of Diana herself, or, as the Greeks told the tale, of Artemis, the strangely ambivalent protector of the beasts as well as their hunter. And he might consider her famous and unshakeable virginity, asking what is chastity, after all. Can it perhaps be understood in some terms larger than those of creaturely sexuality. Is there in him some purity, violated and outraged even now by his own Acteon?

But no. He is bewitched already, and held in the spell of "delighted curiosity." Which is to say, he is not free. And that is to say that he is not educated, not yet led forth out of captivity.

This is one of the most striking facts about all of us. We are born in captivity and poverty. We have nothing. We must obey every order of our bodies, and we must absorb entirely and only those influences and ideas into whose midst we are delivered. And yet, sometimes, some of us can have glimpses of the bars of the cage. And these glimpses always arise from stories, either the stories that we tell silently in the mind, and that we call our "life," or the stories that are told for us to hear. An entire education, of the sort that leads out of captivity as distinct from a training, which by itself leads only into another captivity, can come from the contemplation of stories. But it does take contemplation and attention to the nature of the self, for which Lucius is not ready. His metamorphosis into an ass is an elegant literary device, and an important part of the pleasure we take in the story, but inwardly he is already a perfect ass, a serviceable beast who has

been loaded with burdens by others. When his transformation comes, he does not truly become a man again; he becomes a man at last, now *educatus*, set free.

And it is, of course, as an ass that Lucius hears—really *overhears*—the story of Psyche and Eros.

"I stood close by the girl prisoner listening to this beautiful story, and though it was told by a drunken and half-demented old woman, I regretted that I had no means of committing it to writing."

Well, perhaps he is not entirely an ass. He can see that the story is beautiful. And, just like a man, he wants to write it down, that is, he wants to make of it literature. He is not content, as the girl prisoner probably is, with a ritual telling, a secret, as it were, passed on from a drunken and half-demented old woman to a weeping maiden. Well, how can he be? He, the ass, hasn't been given any of the sacramental chicken soup the old lady is brewing.

That may be a large part of the trouble we have in finding what there is to be found in myth. We receive it as literature, and apply to it automatically all that we have soaked up from our reading or movie-going or television-watching about canons of literature. We have certain expectations, even the most naive of us, about such things as plot development and the relationship of character to action. We expect some logical progression of events, and some reasonable probability that there will be some order in what happens. Much of what we read as myth does provide these things, but that is because it has been turned into literature. The plays of Sophocles will surely hang together much better than the ancient stories that lie behind them. And, could we hear those ancient stories, we would certainly, I think, prefer Sophocles. We would say, of course, that he has done them better, but by that we would mean that he has made them into our kind of thing, into literature, and "rescued" them from their crude and primitive prototypes, which, we assume, and probably correctly, were far less coherent and logical.

This should have been a problem for Lucius Apuleius. He has to put this story into the mouth of a "drunken and half-demented old woman," who can not be supposed literate in any sense of the word. But she sounds as though she is. Her

telling of the story has nothing at all in common with, for instance, anthropologists' transcriptions of stories told the shamans of the Lapps or the curanderos of South America. We have here, really, nothing but literature.

We will have to read it, therefore, with the reading of Socrates, and not as we are inclined to read a novel of Dreiser or of Dickens, pretending, perhaps, that it is a story we have *heard*, not read, and that we could, in our own way and in our own words, tell to others. We have to read and tell it in pure selfishness. It is not about the world out there; it is about the world in here. You must read and hear it as though it is about you.

Indeed, this is true of all stories, for there is nothing else for them to be about but what is general and continual in human persons. The raw material out there in the world is the set on which the drama of every human life is played, and the general and continual conditions of persons are the theme. It is only from us and because of us that we can make meaning, just as it is only out of you and you alone that your dreams can be "written" and played out on the set suggested by the world as mysteriously altered by you.

We must go a bit farther than Socrates goes. He, in brief and casual conversation, mentions only Typhon, and concludes that he has been granted a less tempestuous character. But the maiden Orithyia is also "about" him. Had we been able to hear him talk about that, he might have given us some interesting hints as to how to understand Psyche and the wind that blew *her* away. Winds do blow in us, in all of us.

Looking for yourself is a good way to read all stories, not just myths and fairy tales. It is also the way to "read" all art, which is the name for all those creations that tie together the outer and inner worlds. The painting on the wall of the cave, just as much as a song of Schubert, tells us all about what is human in us all. While such a reading provides nourishment to self-knowledge, however, it provides also strange difficulties.

Consider that you are Psyche, a soul in the world. If her story is truthful, it will tell you much about yourself. But our gentle and beautiful heroine is also the murderer of her sisters. It is true that Eros says that he will "very soon be avenged upon them," but it is the forlorn Psyche who visits them in turn and sends them to their deaths by enticing them into leaping off the cliff

when "another wind altogether was blowing." In our literatures, of course, such an event might come to pass, but certainly not in the case of a heroine who is ultimately to be redeemed and rewarded.

We have certain ideas about "morality"—which Socrates and Plato had as well—which lead us to decide that some things are not suitable to be shown to children. While our practice is not in keeping with these ideas, we hold and propound them nevertheless, and often conclude, especially in the schools, that impressionable children should not hear a story in which Jack kills a giant, lest they go forth and kill. Myth is especially rich in the objectionable: violence, rape, murder, dismemberment, infanticide, treachery—the list is probably complete, but the harm that it does to children (or to us?) is at least debatable.*

But it needs no debating if you read as Socrates reads. You are the sisters. If a Psyche must kill them, what must you kill that is also you? This is why murder and death are so common in myths and all sorts of stories left over to us from an earlier time. Our ancestors apparently believed that there might be some things in us that we ought not to put up with. The slaying of monsters and dragons, which we tend to applaud, becomes somewhat more a threat—although truly no less a triumph—if we are mindful of the monsters into which all of us are capable of turning, and have in fact turned, more than once. And if we are especially fond of our monsters, as fond as we might be of sisters, are they any less monsters to be destroyed?†

* Years and years ago we ran a piece about some schoolish revision of "Jack and the Beanstalk." It was concocted by a lady educationist who changed the ending and had Jack and the giant sitting at the conference table working out their differences by rapping and relating to each other. She expected that this would stop war and other forms of violence. Just now, no one around here can remember the name of the piece, but if you still have it this would be a good time to reread it.

† C. S. Lewis, in his wonderful version of this story, does not allow Psyche to murder her sisters. What he does instead is interesting and beautiful, but it still may be true that he has given in to "morality." But that is nor to disparage his book. It is called *Till We Have Faces*, and if you haven't read it you should go and do

The concrete worldly elements of myth and fairy-tale, which look to us like mountains or monsters or cruel mothers, are in fact a kind of poetry, metaphor treated as though it were fact. We imagine, because we are “advanced,” that preliterate people told so many stories about the change of one kind of creature into some other because they must have believed that such things could happen. Of such an event, the transformation of a girl into a bird, for instance, how much experience could they have had? Did it happen often, or only occasionally? Obviously, it did not happen at all, and even our most primitive forbears could not possibly have believed that it did. They were not fools or madmen. They lived what they would surely call “well,” and they made art.

If the stories they have handed on to us are rich in metamorphoses, it must be that they could “read” human behavior in a way that is not customary among us. And some of us, perhaps, can still read as they read. Any little child among us knows that he is neither mistaken nor lying when he tells himself, at night, that his father turned into a monster.

Such a statement is the real truth, not the “real truth” which must of necessity be continuously concocted by the clever and industrious explicators to whom Socrates refers, and to whom the real truth needs the support of some fact, even if we have to imagine that fact, but simply the real truth. Fathers do turn into monsters. And men, not a few of them, turn into asses. Every day.

An inability to read the metaphoric poetry of the real truth causes great trouble in the world. Believers and nonbelievers will fight forever—but not to the finish, alas—because they can not read that poetry. For the theist, the poetry of metaphor must be fact; for the slightly more sophisticated atheist, the poetry of metaphor may be lovely indeed, but it is still a lie.

Northrop Frye, in *The Great Code*, describes, although not intending to, just what the reading of Socrates means. Of truth and lie, of correctness and incorrectness, he says nothing. He speaks rather of two modes of narrative: the one intends to tell you what you would have seen had you been there; the other tells you what you should

so. To compare it, point by point with “Psyche and Eros” brings both delight and light.

have seen had you been there. The forms of myth are intended to help us to fulfill the obligation implied by that word—*should*.

Second Great Picnic Looms

THE Second Great Grammarian Picnic will be held on Saturday, August 3, starting at 9AM and going on until whenever. All are invited, along with family, friends, or cahoots of any sort. Dogs are especially welcome, both by the park people and our staff (we may bring one or two big ones), but they do have to wear their collars and leashes.

The park’s rules are unchanged: four bucks for car and driver, fifty cents per passenger, dogs free.

This year, we have taken the Pavilion, which has tables, benches, and grills. Also a roof. It will be useful in case of rain, but it sits between meadow and woodland, so there will be plenty of open space in which to lie down and contemplate.

If you get lost, you can call the park office at 302-571-3545. If you just know that you *are* going to get lost, you can call us at 609-589-6477. We will advise you to cultivate that moderate and cheerful demeanor without which no one can hope to be happy, young or old, rich or poor.

Last year we had a problem with name tags. There weren’t any. And that seemed to all of us entirely appropriate for such an odd bunch. But we did keep forgetting who was who. Awkward. There must be some solution. Think.

The area shown by the map probably has America’s highest concentration of lovely countryside and beauties to visit, gardens, parks, and museums. If you just happen to be touring about anyway, you might do well to spend a few days hereabouts. Just don’t price the real estate.

Please come if you can. We’d love to see you, and you’ll meet lots of very interesting people.

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The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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Jam Today at Last!

Consider the experiment published this month in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* by Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia and University of Pittsburgh researcher Jonathan Schooler. The two chose five brands of strawberry jam that varied widely in quality. In a *Consumer Reports* taste test, jam experts had ranked the five 1st, 11th, 24th, 32nd, and 44th.

In the experiment, one group tasted each of the jams and ranked them immediately. Its ratings corresponded quite closely to those of the experts. The thinking group, however, was another story. Forced to write down their reasons for liking and disliking each brand, their preferences bore no resemblance to those of the experts or their peers in the control group.

In other words, it is not simply that thinking leads to decisions we may later regret. It also appears that thinking too much can lead to choices that by an objective standard can be called bad or wrong.

Malcolm Gladwell, *Washington Post*

TOTALLY awesome. Oh, how we would just love to sit down and chat with some of those jam experts. How we would love to attend a trial where one jam expert was testifying against another. What profound satisfaction we will feel when the Democrat's National Committee comes up with a canny consultant broccoli expert, and when the internecine warfare between Tastes Better and Less Filling is put to rest at last according to perfectly objective standards.

All of that comes from an article in a publication whose name we can not give you. All we have is a photocopy. It was accompanied by another photo-copy, a column in *The Daily Record* of Wooster, Ohio, by one David Lewellen,

who is, alas, something of a thinker, and who gave some thought to the findings displayed above. He may well have read the same stirring report that we read, and he pulled out of it the most revealing "conclusion of the expert experimenters: it appears that thinking impairs only people who are not experts." Yeah.

In another "experiment" conducted by Wilson and Schooler (it really does need those quotation marks), students were shown five posters and asked to choose the one they would like to take home. The posters showed either animals or impressionist paintings, although we are not told whether any of the impressionist paintings showed any animals, or whether any of the pictures of animals conveyed, all inadvertently perhaps, any impressions.

Half of the "large group" just picked a poster and went home. The other half were required to write down the reasons for their choices. The poor suckers of the second half turned out to be more likely to choose animals. That tells you something, eh? And there's worse to come.

Three weeks later the students came back to report how things were going with their posters, and what do you think modern science discovered? "The thinkers were far less happy with their posters than those who chose without articulating their reasons. They wished they had chosen differently."

This one little event seems to show that nothing of any importance has been changed in American educationism at least since 1976 when we first started to consider it, and probably not since 1913 when a committee of teachers union members met to cook up *The Cardinal Principles of Education*, a manifesto of armed ignorance which brought the schools out of a quaint and stodgy traditionalism which unaccountably had some good effects, and into the cuckoo land of the good old Affective Domain.

First, be not misled, The "findings" of Schooler & Wilson are in no sense at all "scientific." Imagine, for instance, the sad plight of the poster choosers.

Here they stand, poor kids, dragged in to play one of those silly games that the sosh-psych people use for padding out the vitas. A free poster. Big deal. Not one rock star. Impressionists, for God's sake, and animals. Well, what the hell, pick one and go home. Don't forget, this guy gives out

grades. But wait, what now? I have to explain *why* I want one of these dumb posters? I have to *write it* out? What the hell, let's scribble something down we're out of here.

Teachers rarely know what they really want, but students almost always know what their teachers want. And the rabbits know a lot about the snakes.

Wilson & Schooler will bring no consequences in the practice of science. The meteorologists and chemists will not be crippled in their labors by the fear that they may someday be made "less happy" for having figured something out. Nor, for that matter, will auto mechanics or Maytag repairmen.

But those who will find comfort and joy in this sort of "research" are the manipulators not of devices but of persons, the politicians, the preachers, the sellers and persuaders, in all of which groups can be included the educationists.

All such folk will think to learn from Wilson & Schooler what they already imagine that they know: that reaction is more to be prized than reflection. And, now confirmed yet again in that belief by the "science" in the "experiments" of posters and jam, and confronted by recent revelations that schools are even worse than the most gloomy of us had thought, they will know exactly what to do. New programs? And, of course, more money. And, at last, (sigh), back to the good old Affective Domain* of gut reaction and sentiment, and out of the trap they had unwittingly devised for themselves in all that "critical thinking" stuff that we paid them for in another of their big reformations.

The term "critical thinking" was itself the result of a failure of thinking. It is not easy to define "thinking," and even the school people were uncomfortably aware of that. When the educationist says: I think we ought to teach the children to think, even a dull-witted teacher, if

* The making of *Cardinal Principles* and the coming of the Affective Domain are among the disasters described in *The Graves of Academe*, a book by our FCM. For some reason, we have recently had more requests than usual from people who want help in finding a copy of that book, which has been out of print for some time. It was published first by Little, Brown, and thereafter re-printed as a fancy paperback by Simon & Schuster, and that's all the help we can give to people who want to read it, aside, of course from suggesting that they do business with one of those old-book search outfits.

given a little help, can see that those two *thinks* may have very different meanings. For all we know, the first may be exactly the same as the *think* in: I think I'd like to have that cute panda poster. It might also be something like *believe*, or *suppose*, or even *feel*. If the second were the *same* as the first, then even educationists could come to see after a while that children needed no instruction whatsoever in such inward actions, and that, indeed, such supposed ways of thinking were perfectly natural to children. To some, it may even have occurred that believing, supposing, and feeling might be, if not exactly the *opposites* of thinking, at the very least not the *same* as thinking, and, at the worst, perhaps even *contrary* to thinking.

(They needed Aristotle, of course, but he is not admitted into their company; the teacher-trainees never read him, lest they fall into irrelevance. It was he who gave us a shocking but wonderfully useful definition of "children," with the help of which we might make productive new discoveries in education, which is, after all, the bringing of children out of childhood. Thus Aristotle: Children—and madman, too, alas—are those who are governed by appetite. What would happen, do you suppose, believe, or think, if we were to design education as a liberation from appetite?)

So at last they came up with *critical* thinking, distinguished from mere thinking in that it was, well, critical, you know. They didn't put it this way, because they're not too good at figuring out what they mean, but they obviously did sense (aha! another substitute for thinking) that *critical* thinking ended up with something that was not in the "thinker" until *after* the thinking had been done, and the *mere* thinking was a way of declaring what was already in the thinker. And thus it was that they ended up, for awhile, trying to teach logic as though *that* were thinking. They did know, after all, that logic reached conclusions, which made it seem comfortably similar to Dewey's notion of thinking as "problem-solving activity."

It did not occur to them, apparently that logic was also *uncomfortably* like problem-solving in that it could reach only those conclusions already implicit in its givens, and the teaching of it was, in any case, no fun at all. As far as we know, logic is no part of the standard curriculum in any of the public schools.

The term “critical thinking” made the school people feel pretty good for awhile; it suggested a technical proficiency not unlike that of the sciences, and implied, in those who said they could teach it, an expertise for which schoolteachers have in general not been celebrated. But there was a problem; it was that word, critical, which the school people in the Affective Domain construe as meaning something very like *hostile*. You can hardly blame them; any truly critical consideration of what they do in the schools must end by being, at the least, not flattering. There is worse. If school children were brought into the habit of critical thinking, might they not become critical? Might they not, by logic alone, notice incoherence and inconsistencies in their schooling? Might they not begin to question some of the supposed social truths and goods which are preached to them as worthy and feelings? There is, after all, nothing more galling in any teacher’s class than the smartass who makes sense.

For whatever reasons, the school people have obviously repented their passion for critical thinking. We hear no more of it. And Wilson & Schooler are preparing the ground for those educationists who may someday have to defend, against the inexpert multitudes of the laymen who never *have* been able to understand what the schools are doing, the abandonment of thinking in the schools. Aha, they will say, that’s where you’re wrong! We now know, as our studies have shown, what thinking really is, and how niftily and correctly most children can do it, if only they leave their minds alone and go with the flow. Trust us, We are the experts, the ones who can think without damage, and we don’t intend to injure these innocent children.

It’s never a good idea to say of any thing that “it all boils down to this,” but in these pages we once had occasion to quote a line from Georges Bernanos that tempts us to say that it all boils down to this: The modern world can be best understood as a vast, unwitting conspiracy against the inner life.*

* There are no quotation marks because this is not a quotation, but a paraphrase as best we can remember it. Nor do we know its source in Bernanos. We wish we did. There are probably no more widely-read readers than our readers, and we are hoping that one of them

Well, we’re not so sure about the “unwitting” part. We wonder this: Do these Wilsons and Schoolers truly *know* what they are doing? Have they figured out why, for instance, they have come up with such grotesque parodies of science as the jam and poster experiments? We know that they have an agenda, but do they know that they have an agenda?

The lesson of these “experiments” is unambiguous: Unless you are an expert, a jam expert, for instance, or a thinking expert, like us, you will do best just to go with the flow. Hey, whatever turns you on, turns you on, right? An inexpert attempt to distinguish between the better and the worse is worse than useless; it is all too likely to make you unhappy. And, presumably, if you do want to eat the “best” jam, just listen to the experts.

The only jam expert we can quote is the loony queen in one of those Alice books. “Jam yesterday,” she explained, “and jam tomorrow, but never jam today.” Wilson & Schooler have shown us a mournful new meaning in her words. We have promoted her, and we join her now in literary matrimony with that broody intellectual academic in some novel of Sartre, the one who looks out of a window and muses that “nothing ever happens while we live.”

We do not truly have our lives; they happen in an instant, in a tiny moment in which there is time for nothing but reaction. It is only when the moment is gone, and gone forever, that we can have it in some strange way that is not exactly the real having. We can hold it in the mind, but not it exactly, only an interpretation of it, a consideration, a remembrance of things past. Our lives are actually a form of literature, tales that are told, and that may be told either well or badly, instructively or destructively, told by an idiot full of sound and fury and signifying nothing, or told by a controlling and considering consciousness. And if yesterday’s jam is bitter on the tongue, we may be able to understand why that had to be so,

can give us the source. We would like to read the rest of the piece.

Bernanos’s best known work, and around here his only known work, is *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1937), in which the quotation is not to be found. This little book is well worth reading; it’s not what you think.

and even to take thought for the jam of tomorrow. Today, in this moment, all we can do is gobble it down, like children, and react. Aristotle was right; the children are those who want their jam right now, and imagine, too, that they can have it. Which is to say that they think, and who can blame them, that *this* is life, this moment, this reaction, this thrill, this experience. It's all that counts, Yesterday's jam has lost its savor; it is as though it had never been. And tomorrow's jam is a dream.

The life that we *can* have is an inner life, the life that we can discover, and even design in reflection; reflection is a brooding on the strange and troubling hints of meaning in what ought to be meaningless, the random and mechanical flow of moments; meaning is pursued through attention to language.

There is much to be wondered about the shenanigans of the Wilsons and Schoolers, and much about the fact that there are such folk among us. What are they up to? What can they gain by trying to "prove" by "science" that "thinking," except in the case of "experts," will put us in peril of being "less happy" than we would have been without it?

Bernanos, of course, can not be right. All conspiracy theories are bunk, no? So we'll find some other way to explain Wilson & Schooler. Just be patient, OK?

What a Very Singularly Deep Young Man Department

WE have just gotten around to opening some of the mail from last January. In it we find an announcement, passed on by an old friend, from one (looks like) Joe Beuler, at the Art Momentum Studios in Gainesville, Georgia, where the sheriff probably used to worry about this sort of thing, but doesn't any more.

Joe, apparently with some other likeminded (that word will seem strange) individuals (come to think of it, that word will *also* seem strange), is working with combinational theories of art processed as a state of being, thus creating art that coordinates the process of molecular awareness with the concept of reason and scale perception. And this he refers to as an imprintsial pattern. And why not? Here's clarification:

"Each imprintsial pattern is accompanied with its conceptional mode of thought idea that is bordered with patterns that help set the photographed process for further referral by the individual that has chosen to work with it in order to mobilize his state of Beingness. Much of this work will also move in the form of books....The harmonics of life that focus its momentum from the before of its intent can move into place the harmony of events that create the exactness of want and desire without the forceptual requirement of change without recognition of monumental flow."

Joe's collaborators "are a team of professionals who have skills in art, biology, teaching, writing, medicine, psychology, color, and sound," and if you're having trouble with all of that it's probably because you assume that "forceptual" must mean "having the nature, shape, or quality of a pair of forceps." That's wrong.

Well, we were about to award Joe the What a Very Singularly Deep Young Man Prize for 1991 without even considering other candidates, A natural, no? But behold! Now comes word of a promising new contender, probably not quite as young a young man, but still a young man, and that's for sure.

We have just had news of him from Thomas W. Hazlett, who teaches economics at the University of California in Davis, and who writes a regular column for *Reason*, and who has quite a mouth on him. We do enjoy him.

"By the time you read this, you will have already missed the opening lecture of Professor Thomas Hayden's new course offering at Santa Monica (junior) College, 'The Environment and Spirituality.' The idea sprang from the cosmic experience Mr. Hayden gained while jetting to and from the Amazon Rain Forest, whereupon he racked up a New Consciousness of shrubbery and beaucoup frequent flier miles. His plan, according to *The New York Times*, is to teach a 'new earth-oriented religion.' He will begin with the Bible. 'We need to see nature as having a sacred quality,' solemnly intones Professor of Spirituality Hayden, 'so we revere it and are in awe of it. That forms the barrier to greed and exploitation and overuse.'"

If "Professor of Spirituality Hayden" has not yet rung your bell, here's a clue from Hazlett: "Let us not be so grotesque as to point out that the globe-

floating Tom's ex-wife consumed most of the free world's known silicon deposits." There. Now you recognize him.

So, obviously, we're going to have to wait on that VSDYM Prize. We have a lot of pals out around Santa Monica, and, sooner or later, one of them will get hold of an interesting document, even some lecture notes, maybe. After all, Santa Monica (junior) College is a public institution.

(That (junior) is just the sort of thing that makes us love Hazlett. Now there's a man who knows how to write.)

And Norman Lear, come to think of, lives somewhere out there, and he and the Professor of Spirituality clearly have interests in common as to what "we need to see," *we*, presumably, not including such as Tom Hayden, who must already see. So, hey, there may even be a video.

And furthermore...

IN a strangely related matter, we read of the rescue by one Elizabeth Sackler, a rich lady, of three ceremonial masks put up for sale at auction by Sotheby's. Two of the masks are Hopi, and the third may or may not be Navaho.

But perhaps "rescue" is not the right word. Some Hopi objected to the auction as a "source of pain and outrage," saying that it would be a sacrilege to "place monetary value on them," which deed, of course, must be done by one who would sell them, *i.e.*, take money for them. A fascinating moral dilemma, If one who sells, sins, what can we say of one who buys? Ms Sackler "returned" them, if that is the right word, since it is very unlikely that she handed them over to those from whom they were taken, but in order to do that, she did have to "place monetary value on them," thirty-nine grand, in fact. It's like the old problem of selling of your stock in South Africa; you get to be virtuous by inveigling some poor sucker into the vice of buying the tainted goods. But, aha, you say, I did it for a good cause, and so too did Elizabeth Sackler! Sure. And there's a good old-fashioned name for that argument.

Somehow, such things seemed much clearer in the old days, when bounders and scoundrels of the East India Company used to pinch the rubies out of the idol's eyes, only to be troubled later by the rumours of mysterious dark-skinned strangers

seen lurking on the heath or asking questions at the pub. Dacoits, no doubt of it, dacoits! Now those guys knew what they meant by "sacrilege." They were not about to solicit some rich lady—not even the bounder's charming young fiancée, however much that might improve the plot—to restore the sacred jewelry to its "rightful owners," of whose exact identity they were also perfectly sure. Furthermore, they knew exactly what to do with those rubies once they got them back.

All of that is to say that the murderous but pious Dacoits knew what they meant by their words. They knew what they meant by "sacred." Whether they were "correct" in the meaning they gave the word is not to the point; there is no thing in the world by which to test. And their condition was certainly not the condition that might conceivably arise in those who would say, with the Professor of Spirituality, that "we need to see the idol's eye as having sacred quality."

That expression, *to see something as*, is remarkably common in the screeds of educationists and sociologists. It is a way not exactly of lying, but of leaving the impression of having spoken the truth without actually having to do so. He who says that the childhood years can be seen as formative (one of their favorite words), does not have to commit himself to the proposition that they are formative. It is a gutless way of talking. He who talks that way can never be shown wrong—all he said was that they *can* be seen as,—and has the further luxury, by the same logic, of excusing himself from having to say what is right.

There is a sad and ironical cowardice in Hayden's words. Had he returned from the spooky rain forests of Brazil to proclaim that nature is sacred, that he *did* stand in awe of it, and that he *did* revere it, we would have been given to some thoughtful brooding at least, and would have waited with interest to see whether his subsequent behavior might testify as to the meaning of those terms.

But he comes back instead with a tired educationistic platitude: *We* need to see nature as sacred, and I will give *them* instruction in that trick. Such instruction can be really nothing other than a program of preachments, which is all the more transparent since the preacher himself admits that the piety he intends to inculcate is for the sake not of the virtue of pious, who see the

earth as sacred, but for the castigation of evildoers, the sinners of greed and exploitation and overuse. Not only in myth and fable, but even in many documented cases, we hear of one who saw a great light and who saw in its glow how wrong he had been, and who went forth to live otherwise; now, in this post-modern age, the work of the great light is wonderfully changed, and those who see it realize how right they have been, and go forth to make sure that everyone else will live as they do.

Please store up these ruminations in memory, for they will serve as a preface to an essay in the next issue. We will introduce you (very probably for the first time, for he is little known) to the work and thought of a strange genius, a man who “identified defective use of language with a defective moral and metaphysical outlook,” and for whom “linguistic obtuseness was equated with intellectual or ethical obtuseness.” And we’ll tell you who said that about him.

Intimations of Possibility Psyche Papers— Number Three

The point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business. Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn’t in the slightest influence me.

Suppose, for instance, we knew people who foresaw the future; make forecasts for years and years ahead; and they described some sort of a Judgment Day. Queerly enough, even if there were such a thing, and even if it were more convincing than I have described, belief in this happening wouldn’t be at all a religious belief.

Suppose that I would have to forego all pleasures because of such a forecast. If I do so and so, someone will put me in fires in a thousand years, etc. I wouldn’t budge. The best scientific evidence is just nothing.

A religious belief might fly in the face of such a forecast, and say “No. There it will break down.”

As it were, the belief as formulated on the evidence can only be the last result—in which a number of ways of thinking and acting crystallize and come together.

A man would fight for his life not to be dragged into the fire. No induction. Terror. That is, as it were, part of the substance of the belief.

That is partly why you don’t get in religious controversies, the form of controversy where one person is sure of the thing, and the other says: “Well, possibly.”

You might be surprised that there haven’t been opposed to those who believe in the Resurrection those who say “Well, possibly.”

SINCE the beginning of these Psyche Papers, I have had numerous letters from our readers, and one (why only one?) cancellation of subscription from the library of a college operated by a religious organization. All of them, including the cancellation, have been fruitful, and anyone who had read them all would notice, here and there in this work, points and considerations that would never have been made without the contributions of many other minds.

There is some interesting lesson in this fact. It is not exactly that we learn from each other, for no one can really learn anything except in and by himself; it seems better to say that we learn *because* of each other, and, indeed, that if there were no others, there could be no learning at all. In this there is a mystery, for we know not how to account for the first beginning of all learning, and it is one of the mysteries shown forth in the story of Psyche and Eros. After a long journey, we will return to it.

The readers’ letters often recommend certain readings, and I always do them. The passage above comes from one of them, and its occasional incoherencies are not to be attributed to Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose work it is, sort of. Somewhere around 1938 Wittgenstein gave a series of lectures “on religious belief,” and some of his students took notes. A compilation of notes by three of the students can be found in a little paperback called *Wittgenstein: Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. They have done, I am sure, the best they could, but the book still stands as a warning to teachers that only those words that they now wish they hadn’t spoken will be remembered accurately.

Nevertheless, the book is very valuable, rich in provocative hints.* There are several of them in the quoted passage. One of them arises from the useful and all too unusual observation that belief ought not to be understood as one thing. We should know that better than we do, for it is not only religionists, but also scientists who say, and have no choice but to say, that they “believe” this or that rather than that they “know” this or that. The scientists tend to be a little more careful than the religionists in making that distinction, and the pseudo-scientists, the sociologists, educationists, psychologists, economists, and all the various tribes of -ists, a lot less careful. Plato, however, seems to have made it most rigidly, when he divided all the ways of trying to understand into the progressively more valuable families of dream, belief, knowledge, and dialectic, calling science a way of belief. (Hume seems to have done so as well, when he argued that a million black crows do not licence us to know that the next one will be black, or something like that. I have much forgotten Hume.)

The most intriguing hint of the passage is found in the last question. The quarrels between the believers of A and the believers of notA are well-known to us, and so too the quarrels between believers and non-believers, and, if we think about it for a while, it does seem to us surprising that there has not arisen in the context of any belief system whatever some third party, those who say “Well, possibly.”

I suspect, of course, that they are out there, crouching in muddy shell-holes in No-man’s Land between the ignorant armies, keeping their heads down. Some of them, I suspect, are reading this sheet.

Later in the notes we find this: “If you ask me whether or not I believe in a Judgment Day, in the

* Wittgenstein is always provocative. Read anything by him. I am still waiting for a copy of his commentary on Frazier’s *Golden Bough*, another reader’s suggestion, but I know that it will cause something interesting in this project. I do wish that we had also some consideration from him of such things as political and pedagogical belief. The little volume at issue here does include comments on Freud which are, in effect, an examination of psychological belief. Those of you who have the time would find it fascinating to compare this section with Hanna Arendt’s comments on the idea of the unconscious in *The Life of the Mind*.

sense in which religious people have belief in it, I wouldn’t say: ‘No. I don’t believe there will be such a thing.’ It would seem to me utterly crazy to say this.... I can’t say. I can’t contradict that person.” And this: “If you say ‘Do you believe the opposite?’—you can call it believing the opposite, but it is entirely different from what we would normally call believing the opposite.”

Perhaps Wittgenstein was being tactful; perhaps the note taker left something out, who knows, but if Wittgenstein thinks that he would have to be utterly crazy to say No, I don’t believe, then he must also find him utterly crazy who says Yes, I do believe.

I wouldn’t object to the characterization. Certainly, in our time, the most noticeable effect of religious belief in our time is bitter conflict between religionists who suppose that they “believe the opposite” of what other religionists believe. The conflict, although so far somewhat less violent, is no less bitter between the religionists and the anti-religionists, another pairing of believers of the opposite. If it seems to you too strong to think of all such combatants as utterly crazy, imagine yourself standing in the street between the Pro- and Anti- abortion demonstrators and saying “Well, possibly” when asked if abortion is murder. You might perhaps be a bit safer than you would be in saying “Well, possibly” as to God’s disposition of the real estate between the Israelis and the Palestinians, but maybe not. Better not to do either.

We have forgotten, and forgotten long, long ago, what “religion” means, and why it has been everywhere and always an element of human culture and a preoccupation of human persons. It is best thought of, it seems to me, as a kind of suspicion, and worst thought of as a kind of knowledge.

It is a suspicion about invisible connections, the ties and links referred to in the stem of the word that we use, the *lig* in religion, and in ligature as well, and even in relic in a slightly different form. In the scrutiny of language, as Voltaire pointed out, the consonants count for very little, and the vowels for nothing at all; “relic” and “religious” are the same word, and the relic itself, even a plastic swizzle suck, can be construed as the knot in the tie that binds, which is why you still have that swizzle stick.

When one of our ancient mothers began to suspect that the motions of the sun had something to do with the barley, and then to wonder whether there might be something else that, in the same mysterious fashion, had to do with the motions of the sun itself, she was thinking religiously. But, and a very big but it is, she was also thinking scientifically. This is one dear way to understand what we mean by science; it is a uniquely and universal human enterprise that begins with suspicions of invisible connections and remarkably often seems to find them, so that we are brought to that condition in which we can have newer suspicions.

And when it occurs to the hunter, as seems always and everywhere to be the case, that there is some just price to be paid for the killing of the deer, he is suspecting a connection. Was he a better or a worse man, a smarter or a stupider man, than our hunters, because he thought it meet and right to ask forgiveness and seek reconciliation with his prey? In this case, the suspicion is not exactly of the same sort, not a suspicion like the one that makes science.

The suspicion of the link between the sun and the barley will lead to what can be seen; it is “invisible” only for a while. It will be seen. But the suspicion of kinship with the earth and the beasts and all life will never be confirmed as the heat of the sun will be shown to bring forth the green plants.

The same is true of other suspicions that all peoples seem to have had. Such little things (are they little?) as the utterly unaccountable fact that there seems to be something wrong about lying and something right about truthfulness have always given pause, provoked wonder and suspicion.* We, of course, have been taught that

* Here is an intriguing new book: *The Death of the Soul: from Descartes to the Computer*, by William Barrett, from Doubleday Anchor Books. Starting on page 93 you will find a provocative consideration of Kant’s argument that what troubles us about lying is really nothing but the inherent logical contradiction of the deed: I say A while meaning, and knowing that I mean, not A. It is my reason that grumbles.

This is a book well worth your time and attention. It is, although Barrett doesn’t use this word, about suspicions. It provides also interesting discussions of that new academic frenzy that has bewildered so many of us—deconstructionism. In the Epilogue Barrett

all such notions of right and wrong come from social conditioning, and have mightily labored, as you know, to provide such conditioning as a form of “education.” This teaching permits us to see moral issues as political issues, and the “values” of the people as, at least potentially, something that we can shape and control. We seem not to be doing it very well, but we will, of course, try harder, and seek funding for new programs. We have to conclude, out of our superior knowledge, that the superstitious ancients tried to behave well only out of their fear of the gods, which we do not intend to invoke. It never occurs to us that it might well have been the other way around, that the unenlightened savages were led to thinking about the fear of the gods by the simple fact that they had it in them to want to do the right thing, and that they seemed to know what it was.

Some of you will remember the issue in which we awarded Norman Lear, a well-known television producer, a prize for his suspicions, the First Faltering Footsteps Award. It was because of an address he had given, in which he boasted of the great and indubitable achievements of the liberal movements of our age, but lamented that that same movement seemed to have had the effect of destroying what he called some “spiritual” component of our lives and, most especially, of the rearing of our young, the whole enterprise that we call “education.” What he really wanted, although he didn’t put it this way, was that the children would come to look upon the forests, the whales, the wretched of the earth, the starving, all folk of other colors, *etc.* and *etc.*, as sacred; but he found himself living in a world that he had helped to bring about in which the word “sacred” could no longer be used without raising cries of outrage and constitutional jitters from millions of other Norman Lears, not yet reconstituted. And all he could think of as remedy was to encourage the representatives of various churches and sects to come up with some way of bringing the spiritual into respectability without offending either the liberal establishment, a hard

announces that he is coming “to a halt, not a termination—for the questions involved here will occupy us in a later work.” That makes me nervous. I’m pretty sure that I first read Barrett in the early fifties, and I do hope that he is in good health. Do I pray for that? Well, possibly.

job, or each other, an impossible job. His message was not warmly received by the religion functionaries to whom he spoke.*

Here is Lear's problem. He wants to say this, and he wants to be believed: Let us care for the Earth, and for each other, and for all that lives. Let us come to see that all these things are, uh, well, *special*, hmm, *valuable*, you know. (He can't really say "sacred." He sort of thinks he knows what it might mean, but it's, well, let's admit it, it's controversial.) So he imagines, what else, poor man, that what's needed is persuasion, and maybe role-modeling, so that children, and many others, would come to believe (realize? know?) that the whales and the trees and the poor are what another age might have called sacred. He imagines that the manipulation of sentiments combined with sweet preachments will bring about in the young exactly what Socrates would have called "piety," another word that Lear can not use, for it is now tainted both with sectarian implications and with, let's be honest, suggestions of the mechanical ritualism of traditionalists or of the unseemly public protestations of the fundamentalist faithful. We have seen more than enough of electrical evangelists raising their misty eyes to heaven, and of weirdos holding up slogans at football games. It wouldn't be so bad if we could be sure that all such were cunning charlatans, but some of them really seem to be just jerks.

Nor can Lear make his appeal to piety in the sense of the word to be found not in the practices of some sect but in *Antigone*, for instance. It's too bad, for he would find some useful strength in the idea there, but the young people he has in mind seem no more able to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest such works than their teachers are.

The preaching and persuasion, of course, are not without effect. We do see frequent displays of cute little children holding up for the camera crayoned posters on behalf of the whales and the earth. But if Lear does not consider this sufficient

* Lear called me up. He was talkative and enthusiastic. He wanted to read the piece and other stuff from this sheet. He was going to go and speak likewise to some annual convention of the NEA, or maybe the AFT. I forget which. I suggested that he might think again about that. He hinted that he had a new TV series coming along, and that it would renovate the spiritual. I sent him some stuff, warning that it probably wouldn't be what he wanted. And it wasn't.

effect, he is right. It is rather a case of what Socrates called Right Belief, a condition both praised and condemned by its name.

Right belief is a very interesting idea. The Greeks were aware, as we are, that there is, perhaps in almost everyone, a push toward goodness. Without some special reason to be otherwise, we will treat each other with decency and kindness, if the price is not too high. In general, if not always in particulars, we prefer and intend to tell the truth rather than a lie. And so forth. There are many examples in every daily life. In other words, although we may often discover some reason to do otherwise, we are inclined to do the right thing, and we have some pretty good idea what that is. Whence this Right Belief arises, we do not know. Surely, in the individual, it comes in part from social example and the suggestions of lore, but the origin of the impulse out of which flow those examples and suggestions is misty, and the cause of the ground in which they so readily take root is unclear.

Nevertheless, in many cultures the mere existence and prevalence of Right Belief seems to have been enough to engender a satisfactory ethic which seems not to have required curricula and special preachments to children about the sanctity of the earth, but only stories. But Socrates thought to see a perilous weakness in Right Belief; he thought it weak not because it was wrong—far from it, but because it was belief, only belief.

All belief stands on shaky ground. In the time of Socrates, as in ours, there were skilled practitioners of that art by which those who believed A could be cleverly brought to believe B instead, and thereafter, if necessary, C. And life itself will often have the same effect. In the most ardent believer in such things as the sanctity of the earth, and particularly in one for whom the sanctity of the earth is a very fuzzy notion, one new appetite, one new fear, one new glimmer of self-interest, will put a possibly fatal crack in the edifice of Right Belief. Thus it was that Socrates tried again and again to put Right Belief to the test of Reason, not at all to prove it wrong, but to transform it from belief into Knowledge, so that we might "know" that truth is better than the lie as surely as we know the equality of the angles where the line intersect.

In this, I would say, Socrates failed. Read the little dialog called Euthyphro. It is precisely about

the quality that Lear wants in us all. Piety. Euthyphro is a self-proclaimed expert in piety, and he offers to instruct Socrates. What follows is both funny and sad. We are left where we probably should be left after all such considerations, however expert and thorough—in uncertainty, a condition from which two paths lead, one into cynicism, and the other into suspicion. And both paths run both ways.

Consider now what is suggested by the story of Psyche and Eros, and by the religious context of which it is so much a part. It is surely no sermon on certainty; it is an awakening unto suspicion.

Where the education of the educationists, even as it might be mitigated by Lear, says: Look at us and listen to us, the education of Psyche and Eros says: Look into yourself; consider and consider again all your suspicions; see for what it is the path that you are walking; think of the palace where you live, the invisible powers that serve you, the darkness that hides the better meaning of your pleasures and joy. Consider the fruit that you must bear, and the destiny that may be rightly yours.

And as to the world, that Earth that gave you life and nourished you, behold and regard the life that shares her with you. Be mindful of the ants, and all the tiny, mighty powers; listen to the reeds, who know, as well as their cousins the oaks, that all life must ride on the tides and the currents that flow through all the world. When the eagle falls out the sky and offers you help, take it: when the contriver by Nature's example of all human devising, mind itself, shows you the path, walk it, even to Hell.

All that, which would arouse, even in the very young, deep and nagging suspicions of connections, will not provide a curriculum, of course, and it isn't democratic.* It serves neither this nor that social agenda, unless we can understand, as perhaps we ought to understand,

* Thinking of those ants that helped Psyche, about whom there will be more later, puts me in mind, strangely, of the first essay in *The Lives of A Cell*, Lewis Thomas' first book, which most of you have probably read. It was about the mitochondria. It was simply astonishing. It revealed vast new worlds, and connecting paths beyond counting. Go and read it again. I am trying to imagine some sort of curriculum in which children would look back and forth awhile from Thomas' mitochondria to Psyche's ants.

that there is only one social agenda for children of the same mother, all of one blood, and that all our lives and destinies are tied together in one great pattern. That does sound like a conclusion (conviction? realization? belief?) that would bring about just what Lear would like to see, but it can be reached only by one who is free of sectarian ideologies, free to say, Well, possibly.

Among those who heard him, there were probably no sayers of "Well, possibly." Their responses showed them just what you would expect—protectors of dogma and doctrine, and conservators of the system. And the same would have been true at the educationist convention. All such folk have their suspicions, of course, but they are suspicions of threats to their own practices and beliefs, suspicions of possible offense to their own sensibilities. The religionists and the anti-religionists, the ones who believe the opposite, surely are different from each other, but not in any important way.

It is a sadness of our time that we can not easily imagine how to live without joining one or the other of these gangs. The story of Psyche and Eros comes from a time when there were no such gangs, when Herodotus, for instance, could say of the Parthians or the Egyptians, or any other group he mentioned, not that they were unbelievers or heretics, or that they were wrong and stood in need of correction, but that they worshipped the same divinities as the Greeks under different names, and that their practices, however remarkable to a respectable Greek gentleman, had dearly the same laudable intentions as those of the Greeks—to acknowledge and honor some invisible connection.

Even Herodotus, fussy, pedestrian, and skeptical, could see that the gods and goddesses were metaphors, and it was for seeing just that that Socrates was hauled into court. But the invisible can not become visible, and metaphor is all that we can see of what can not be seen.

Brief Notes

☞ THE old Greeks apparently understood "chaos" as the unimaginable opposite of cosmos, order—not just a mess, but even worse. In a mess things are surely either bigger or smaller than other things, to the right or to the left of them, older or newer, and so forth forever. In chaos,

those very attributes are not to be found. We know all about it.

On the first day of June, we began extensive enlargement, renovation and refurbishment of the Underground Grammarian Megacomplex. Workmen were everywhere, engaged mostly in the distribution of sawdust, plaster dust, and work dust in general. The office was inaccessible for almost six weeks. When we got back into it, it turned out that, in spite of shrouds of garbage bags and drop cloths, both computers were disabled in one way or another by some form of dust. Our decrepit old typesetter, who hasn't done a lick of work since 1985, but who still hangs around muttering like *Bartleby*, mentioned the fact that the printing press was still just as effective as the day it was born in 1934, but nobody listens to him anymore.

Well, we didn't much worry. We sent them out for repairs and got busy with painting the barn and filling it up with stuff, constructing fences, gates and paths, digging countless holes in the new beds and filling *them* up with stuff, and so on and on. We suspect you know how it is. And Fall itself had fallen before we even made a start on the Fall issue. And that's why *this* issue is late. For the next one, there will be some different reasons.

☞ THE Full Circulation Manager has taken early retirement from the nearby state mental institution in which he has been one of the keepers for what seems a very long time. They made him an offer he couldn't refuse. For now, he continues to supervise a few encounters, but only those of the sort that none of his colleagues has ever practiced. that is to say that he can not yet be accounted a recovering academic, but he is tapering off. He had thought that this would give him more time for other things, but that has not yet been shown. Maybe later.

☞ YOU will find it instructive to read Erich Neumann's *Amor and Psyche*, from Pantheon. It has been around for a long time, but few seem to know it. It is subtitled "The Psychic Development of the Feminine," and it is, we think, wrong in some very interesting ways. Of course, Neumann was a psychoanalyst, and he applies very limited (we say) meanings to the terms psyche and psychic, but he was a brilliant chap and worth reading even if you disagree. And he certainly knew where to go looking for some light. Some of his thought will be at issue in the next installment

of the Psyche Papers, which will be about "Psyche in the Darkness," or something like that.

*Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune,
whose words do jarre; nor his reason in frame,
whose sentence is preposterous.*



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Running on Empty

The unfortunate thing is that the verbal art works with a material that the rabble handles every day. That is why literature is beyond help. The farther it moves itself from comprehensibility, the more importunately do the people claim their material. The best thing would be to keep literature secret from the people until there is a law that prohibits them from using language, permitting them only to use sign language in urgent cases....Sign language would be entirely sufficient for the ideas which they have to communicate to one another. Karl Kraus

Kraus identified defective use of language with a defective moral and metaphysical outlook; for him linguistic obtuseness was invariably equated with intellectual or ethical obtuseness. In *Nachts*, he wrote; "This is something that I can not get over—that a whole line could be written by half a man. That a work could be built on the quicksand of a character."

Harry Zohn, in *Karl Kraus*, p. 59

WHILE doing the brooding that I blithely call "research" for this little essay, I fell into idle chitchat with a student friend, a very nice young man. I asked him to make an inventory of an ordinary day in his life and discover some portion

of it through which he could not successfully get with nothing more than some sign language. He brooded for a bit. “Well,” he said at last, “suppose I have to buy gas?”

He was not joking. He had thought it out. But, from very far away, I thought I could hear someone laughing, so I did not ask him to elaborate, to explain just what it was about buying gas that would call for the use of language.

That Karl Kraus who is named above is the subject of a fine and thoughtful critical biography by Harry Zohn, who was, in 1979, chairman of the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages at Brandeis University. He may still be. I hope he is. It was in 1979 that he sent me a copy of his book, for which, now having opened it, I am very grateful. (I hope he will not be offended, but it could be worse. Heinrich Zimmer’s *The King and the Corpse* rested unopened and in plain sight for thirty years, waiting patiently for me to be ready.)

Karl Kraus lived in Vienna in the great age, from 1874 to 1936, from the first performance of *Die Fledermaus* to the Proclamation of the Rome-Berlin Axis. He was a prodigious writer, poet, dramatist, journalist, critic, essayist. He published, and also wrote, *Die Fackel*, a periodic journal that ran to thirty-seven volumes, all out a writing preparatory to the writing of books. Of Hitler, the writer of millions and millions of words was unable to speak—“*Mir fällt zu Hitler nicht ein.*” In his last poem he summed it up thus: *Und Stille gibt es, da die Erde krachte.*” And now there is silence, since the earth cracked. Brecht said of him, “When the age died by its own hand, he was that hand.” One Frank Field, in *The Last Days of Mankind: Karl Kraus and His Vienna*, put it so:

“In the twelve years that followed the accession of Hitler to power, things were to happen that surpassed the most pessimistic insights of the satirist: the building of the concentration camp at Buchenwald around Goethe’s beech tree, and the processions that took place into the extermination chambers of Auschwitz while elsewhere in the camp the orchestra played selections from Viennese light music—all this only becomes a little more explicable after reading the work of Karl Kraus.”

In the worst of times, satire does seem to dry up. It is the business of satire, after all, to reveal the generally unsuspected silliness of things, and when silliness itself is driven out by something far

worse, the satirist doesn’t find much to say. I can’t be sure—is Kraus being satirical when he suggests that almost everybody, that is, the rabble, could conduct whatever business it needs to conduct by sign language? Swift played around with an idea like that in the Academy of Legado, where the philological scholars were trying to replace language entirely with the display of objects. They projected a system in which a man leaving home in the morning would haul along a great bag full of all the things he might have to refer to, and then drag them out and show as need arose. It’s funny. But Kraus’s proposed law to forbid language and to let a system of signs serve—but only in urgent cases—is not funny. Maybe that’s because the Legado plan just couldn’t be brought off, while the Kraus plan could.

We have already accomplished the suggested prelude to such a plan. If you don’t believe that literature has been kept secret from the people, then you are deep in ignorance about our schools, colleges, and universities. Oh yes, there are some people there who are reading literature, but they are not “the people.” Mostly they are either the secret-keepers or those who would like to join the secret-keepers, who are, they gladly admit, classy.

Not too long ago, the secret-keepers were in big trouble. The stuff they were using was coming to be thought irrelevant. Since they could think of no convincing argument for its relevance, they started fattening their curricula with the stuff that the complainers would call relevant. That it was literature, who can say, but that it was polemic anyone can say. Indeed, those who pronounced it relevant did so because it was perfectly clear to them that it *was* polemical. Suddenly remembering all the relevantizing of curriculum, I think I can almost understand what Kraus meant with the half a man and the whole line. A writer with a social agenda can not be whole; “part” is in the heart of “partisan.”

That manoeuvre did bring in some new bodies to sit in the chairs in English department courses, for a while, and they were occasionally, to be sure, the bodies of those who might well be called “the people,” but if you can train the people into the belief that polemic *is* literature, you have simply found a cunning but socially acceptable way of keeping literature secret from them. Exactly such a system worked to the same end for a long time

in the old Soviet Union, where the literature of Boy Loves Collective and Makes Quota easily drove out the stuff that can not be read at all with sign language.

Then along came Cultural Literacy. Wow. The mother-lode. What, these kids have never even heard of Polonius or little whatsername scampering across the ice flows? You say they can't tell the best of times from the worst of times, or figure the value of four-score and seven? Whew. Well, we can fix that. We'll run off these big lists and give tests, And that is to say, of course, that you can "read" a culture without its literature, without the bother of gathering and holding its ideas, considering their genesis and evolution, and weighing them in the balance with each other. When you have memorized enough bits of information, a great light will glow in your mind and you will be culturally literate and able—well, perhaps not to *compete* with the Japanese, but at least to drop a reference to T. S. Eliot at the cocktail party in celebration of your company's takeover.

(One of the Great Themes of American Educationism is hidden in all the Cultural Literacy nonsense. It seems to be based on the assumption that if one man can invent the light bulb in a thousand days of work, then a thousand men can do the same in a day. Thus, if there is some decision that a wise man ought to be able to make, we can find it without any wise man at all simply by assembling a big enough collection of fools and calling them a committee. Or a congress, come to think of it. Hmm. Could be this is a Great Theme of something even bigger than American Educationism? Scary.)

All of that dodging and finagling wasn't really necessary. The Big Secret of keeping literature secret from the people had actually been well-known and hard at work for a long time. It's easy when you know how. All you have to do to keep them from reading literature is to keep them from reading. First of all, you say that literature is just a way of communicating, and therefore a nice and pleasant thing indeed, but a lesser thing than the Big Thing, COMMUNICATION itself. And let's face it, sure they need to read, but don't worry, they will pick that up, as well as many cheerful facts about this and that, as we teach them Communication! *Voilà*.

And so a book is communication. It is, really, just like the face of a clock, although sometimes longer. As the clock tells you what time it is, *War and Peace* will tell you, should you for some reason of your own end up reading it, all about Borodino, and then you'll know. Pretty neat, eh? And you might even, if you're that sort of person, find it kind of fun. Of course, if all you want to read is Stephen King, well, that's OK; you'll find out stuff in that too. And it's even more fun. And that is the real business of communication—finding out stuff. And it certainly can happen in reading too, but there is this difference: in communication that's all that happens; in reading it is the barest beginning.

We do not need to require the people by law to restrict themselves to sign language. With just a little help from the schools, they have already been trained into sign language. Sign language has the same attributes as communication. It has, and it *must* have if it is to "work," no use for metaphor or ambiguity. In the instructions for assembling either a bicycle or a bomber, there is no place for irony. A thought-provoking turn of speech or a description of a room that somehow reminds us of a certain way of living would be an arrogant impertinence in the fat booklet of instructions put out by the tax people.

Communication is, and should be, all up front, when we have given it our attention, when we have looked at and received it, it is over. Its language and its images will not come back in future years to haunt us in the still watches of the night or waken us with unexpected light.

Literature is not communication. As we look upon its face, it points over its shoulder and beyond. How far? We can never know. At what? We have now some inkling and now another. When we have read it, we are only beginning, we have only set a foot on its path, a path that leads...well, we don't know where. Literature changes us, so that we can not throw it away once we have taken it in, as we can, and should, throw away the instructions for the Mister Coffee machine. And it changes us continually. We can, no, we must, for we can not help it, read it again and again, even when we lend it to a friend who never returns it.

Well, it's unfashionable but it must be said: Literature is Art. And we don't really know what

it means, although we do know that it is, it's there, it exists.

There is another way to make this distinction, using some of Kraus's words, or Zohn's maybe, where he connects a defective use of language with a defective moral and metaphysical outlook.

Where communication is, and had better be, phenomenal, tied in logical correspondence to what is out there, literature is metaphysical, whispering to what is in here. Where communication is practical and to be judged only by the correctness of its correspondences, literature is moral, hinting at meaning in lives and deeds, and to be judged by its truth, if only we knew the truth.

A sign language will serve well as one of those devices, and you really *could* get your gas tank filled with it if you had to.

Words, Words, Words

My own head is capable of only a few clear thoughts about a human condition that drives those in whom it resides to kill a neighbor or to attack a child for the color of his skin.

There is justifiable hatred as there is justifiable war. For the respect of God and for the sake of human sanity: there is difference, a chasm, between the emotion instilled by intolerable oppression — the slave for the owner in earlier centuries, the victim of religious, racial or political pogrom in our own—and the hatred taught for the purpose of creating victims or achieving power.

Perhaps it would help if we used different words to distinguish between them—using detestation for the former and saving hatred for the latter. Because they hate, we detest them.

WE KNEW A MAN who was hating Rohm and Haas. He was not at all reluctant to say so, and with bitter conviction. It all had something to do with chemicals.

We also knew him well enough to refrain from asking him how well he knew those chaps. After all, one could conceivably hate Abbott and

Costello, or even Kukla, Fran, and Ollie, without ever having met them, but he didn't seem to mean the same kind of thing by his hatred of Rohm and Haas, who probably died long ago in any case. People who hate Abbott and Costello can just turn them off; they feel no need to rail against the miscreants and probably do not lie awake seething in the still watches of the night. But our friend seemed quite unable to turn off those two probably dead tycoons. He was really mad as hell.

His variety of hatred, of course, is well known and actually very popular. It is taught in the schools and preached in many a pulpit. It is the kind we are expected to feel for all the Bad People, the polluters, the war mongers, the too rich, the killers of Bambi, the heedless of dolphins, the depleters of ozone, the driers of wet lands, and for all we know, the wetters of dry lands. The list is very, very long. Indeed, the only people we are not supposed to hate are all those right-minded haters.

The writer who is quoted above would probably say that he has yet another sort of hating in mind. He is A. M. Rosenthal, whose column often appears in the *New York Times*. In this case, he was brooding, as one should, on some questions that Elie Weisel had asked, and left unanswered, in talking to a colloquium of some sort in Moscow. Rosenthal summarizes and paraphrases Weisel's questions thus:

“What is hatred and how is one to define its parameters? Where does it begin and how does one know it before the knife is raised—what are its symptoms? Are they envy, or ambition or thirst for power, lust for domination or religious blindness? Was King Solomon right to declare in Ecclesiastes that there is a time for love and a time to hate? When?”

Well, those are interesting questions, interesting but tough, as Huck Finn said of *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Rosenthal knows better than to try to answer them. He does, however, go on to reveal, and probably quite inadvertently, exactly why it is so hard not only to answer but even to think about questions of that sort. It is because nobody knows what they mean. And he also reveals, and this time surely inadvertently, why there will be no end to the evil that he laments along with Elie Wiesel. It is because anyone who feels like it can choose for himself his own meaning of hatred and call it by some other name.

The same is not true of fish. Even among us, driven to the very edge of idiocy by the pseudoscience of social science, laughter alone would sufficiently answer all questions about the parameters of fish and the definition of those parameters. And a shrug would be the most astute response we could possibly make to a man who wanted to call a fish something else.

Maybe that is what Gertrude Stein had in mind with that “rose” business. A fish just plain *is* a fish, We may fight over who gets the fish, but no one will go the barricades to make us admit that it’s a mushroom,

It may be that Wittgenstein was right, if this, as we sometimes suspect, was what he meant: that all of our confusions, all of our disorder, (would he have said also, all of our badness?), is rooted in our failure to examine our language and to take account of *its* failures.

We can usefully say of “hatred” and of “love” and countless other intangibles as well, exactly what Augustine said of Time: We know exactly what they are, except when someone asks us to explain what they are. This is not a defect in our language any more than the failure to indicate relative humidity is a failure in a clock. Countless such words stand as markers at the boundaries of vast mysteries pointing back over their shoulders and saying no more.

Beyond them lies something that is not susceptible to language. If we are confused about this, supposing that they must point to things analogous to fish, although even more complex, we will talk nonsense, and will imagine that if as many of us as possible will talk as long as possible we will eventually be clear as to *what the thing is*. This is why the ruminations of the social sciences are so verbose and jargon-laden, and also, of necessity, interminable. There may indeed be no such thing as *the last* word where fish are concerned, but we can come as close as we need to, and there most certainly is a last word about such things as the *ohm* and the *kilogram*, but of hatred and love there is really no word beyond the first word.

Rosenthal seems to be sorry that the meeting in Moscow failed even to try to answer Wiesel’s questions. We suspect that he would be much sorrier if they *had* tried, and if he were required to read the complete transcript of their ruminations. It would be the sort of document that many of our

readers send us for examination, provided, of course that they are rich enough to pay that much postage. And the end of the matter there would be...what? Do you suppose it would satisfy Rosenthal, and you, so that we could now go forth proclaiming Eureka? Here’s what we must do about this long, long record of human crimes and infamies. Fat chance.

The whole record of myth and legend show us that Elie Wiesel is not the first to brood on the mystery of hatred. That record also shows us that Rosenthal is not the first to say, Well, of course, some hatred, my kind, is OK. After all, what I hate is bad, and it should be hated. Can he suppose that those on the other side say anything different, that they intended to be bad and chose to hate what they knew to be good?

Orestes did not devise an alternate vocabulary in which to convince himself that matricide was “justified” by his mother’s misdeeds, He knew he had to kill her, but he knew just as well that it was an evil act for which he would, and should, be punished.

What he did not know, and what Rosenthal does not seem to know, is that the mythic record also shows the only way out of the cycle of crime and retribution. Orestes didn’t know it because he wasn’t able to read his own story, and Rosenthal doesn’t know it, or, knowing it, can’t accept it, probably because of membership in some ideological faction. And, among us, there is no hope of finding a truly disinterested agent who will stand, like Theseus, between the hostile partners who are everywhere and always the indispensable components of any cycle of retribution. That’s why Theseus *is* a myth, and why he will *not* appear on the border, saying, O Jews, O Arabs, you have suffered enough and more than enough; forget, each and everyone of you, forget forever all your transgressions against one another and forgive in your hearts all that is passed.

And anyone who would like to try that will quickly discover that the Jews and the Arabs are not opponents in *everything*.

So what, in these days, shall we say of the myths? What shall we say of the apotheosis of Œdipus at Colonus, of the ultimate release and redemption of Prometheus? Shall we say that these are nursery tales for children, whom no one ever believed anyway, or that they are the foolish

imaginings of ignorant primitives who had not the advantage of our understanding of modern psychology?

And shall we, having indeed said all that and more such, go further and say of ourselves: Ah, but *we*, we *know* something. If we hold some meetings, organize a few encounter groups, and, of course, get the help of the real *professionals* as moderators and facilitators, well, the first thing you know, Earth will be fair, and all men glad and wise.

That is, of course, exactly what we do keep saying. And exactly what we keep doing in all mysterious matters—crime, war, poverty, marriage, parent hood . . . another long list. And what we have to show for it is exactly what we deserve. Darkened counsel. Words, words, words. Billions and billions of words.

Psyche in Darkness **Psyche Papers—Number Four**

For the first time in my life, I began to look inward for solutions as well as outward.

Gloria Steinem

In this frank and personal book you'll meet a new Gloria Steinem who forges a crucial link between the internal world of self-discovery and the external world of social justice. Gloria explains how to find self-esteem that leads to personal, political, and social change, and why the struggle for self-esteem will become this decade's revolution.

*New York Times ad blurb for
Gloria Steinem's new book.*

GLORIA STEINEM, like all the prominent public people, is well-known. That is what it means to be prominent and public. At the same time, however, she is, except perhaps to very few, utterly unknown. She was pointed out to me once in one of those restaurants where editors take authors and where all the bills are paid by someone who doesn't get to eat any of the food. Oh, I said, so that's Gloria Steinem. But, of course, it wasn't, it was only a projection, a shadow on the wall of the cave. And had I in fact met her, and chatted a bit, I would surely later have been asked, So what is Gloria Steinem really

like. I would, of course, have been quite unable to say.

In our time, people like Gloria Steinem are too numerous to count. They are out there, visibly out there, getting things done, saying things, explaining things on talk shows, representing their particular views on panels, providing print-bites on current events and pending legislation for reporters. Busy, busy, busy. They are the opinion-moulders, the consciousness-raisers, the unelected movers and shakers of the elected movers and shakers. And, while those on this side of an issue will always see them as the peskiest of partisans on the other side, we owe them all gratitude. In public, they do indeed, however shrilly and intemperately sometimes, wrestle out for us questions that we should have wrestled out for ourselves, but didn't.

The life that they lead is tempting. What fun it is to be recognized on airplanes and in restaurants. How good it feels to fly first-class and be met by a liveried chauffeur who whisks you away to the studio where everybody is very, very courteous. It makes you feel very good.

But there is an even greater charm in that life, to which even well-known mafioso and congressmen are warmly admitted. The life of a Gloria Steinem is clothed in virtue. She is doing good, making the world a better place.

It is no wonder that such a life is preached and promoted in our schools and other government institutions. It is, after all, exactly the sort of life that suggests, even in a dissident, the moral worth of government. Those who will busily and publicly promote causes, even unpopular ones, are either living and visible witnesses to the much prized responsiveness of liberal democracy, or, in the case of the dissidents, testimony to its tolerance. Thus it is that even very little children are continuously urged, if not exactly to seek the life of a Gloria Steinem, at least to be worried about the whales and the poor, and to produce posters in favor of the earth. If all such preachings and similar elements in what we call education were seen together, as from a great distance, we would readily notice that one great theme unites them all. They are all about the world out there, and the moral strength imputed to them is so great as to suggest that there is something downright selfish and immoral in paying too much attention to the world within. And so it is that Gloria

Steinem, long, long after having done with school, has suddenly discovered the inner life.

Even now, however, the newly wakened inkling can find in itself nothing more than yet another mechanism by which to “solve problems,” and no greater agenda than the establishment of “self-esteem.” School does hang on; it will never let us go. A long-buried yearning for the wealth of the inner life reveals itself at last and is immediately assigned the role of adjunct agent in the service of the agenda of the world out there. It is as though Gloria Steinem had said, Now that I like myself even better, I can do even more good. Which is again the theme of school.

Psyche, too, had her time of public prominence. It was to see her that “people made long pilgrimages over land and sea to witness the greatest wonder of the age.” And all those pilgrims were, we can be sure, very, very courteous. When it was all over, and her death was at hand, her parents bitterly bemoaning her fate, she spoke thus of her time as a celebrity: “When the people all over the world celebrated me as the New Venus and offered me sacrifices, then was the time for you to grieve and weep as though I were already dead.”

We, too, are not inclined to weep when we behold those who have lost themselves, and the sight of themselves, in the sparkling cascade of current events. We will, of course, if they are able partisans of factions other than ours, gnash our teeth, but we will not lament them as lost.

The story of Psyche is a story about self-knowledge. It is also, in some part, a story about the greatest inhibitor of self-knowledge—self-esteem, in which Psyche might well have been rich indeed in those days when people came from afar merely to behold her, to eat, perhaps, in restaurants where she might be pointed out. We see but little of her life as a celebrity, but what we do see is a kind of blithe self-assurance. When feasts were spread for her, she must have eaten them, and on the flowers scattered in her path she must have walked. And it was in beauty and goodness that she walked; her very presence made the world a better place. And had she not ever come to the attention of the Goddess herself, what then? Would she have lived such a life permanently, saying to herself, this is the life! This is the life that I *want* to live, and that I *should* live. And had she lived it, what would we say of

her now, what would we discover in recounting her life?

In the time of Apuleius there were no talk-shows, and what we see now as the life of celebrity would have passed all understanding in that world. The important resemblance between the early life of Psyche and the modern life of celebrity lies only in this: it is a life in which the world out there is the world, the only world, and the only reality. One need not be a Psyche to live in such a world. Indeed, it is the common lot of persons to be born into that world, to be born, as it were, in captivity, and to dwell exclusively in it for a season. So rich and various is that world, so profoundly convincing, that we can all come, in time, to take it for *the* world, and far from looking for escape, can come also to suppose that separation from the world is death. In the case of Psyche, it is.

The word “education” means an act of leading forth, bringing out. Psyche alone can see her own sentence of death as education. Our own notion of education would probably seem to Apuleius curiously misguided. It consists almost entirely of walls and bars, as though we feared very much the kind of “death” that we would surely suffer should we come to discover that all our thinking and all our believing have been laid upon us from without. Emerson says it somewhere: if you do not make your own self, someone else will certainly make it for you. What a task it is, how immeasurably great a struggle, to put away all influence, to discover and understand the self not as what the world sees and says that is.

Here is another way to look at the story of Psyche, indeed, a useful way in which to consider any story. A story is a story. It is not life. It is not the world. It is an imaginative construction. It is a portrait not simply of persons but of the idea of *person* itself.* Read the story as though it were all

* Nicholas Berdyaev devotes an entire book, *Slavery and Freedom*, to a rumination about the meaning of the concept person. It is not consistently enlightening, but it is well worth reading, and sometimes rather weird. Nevertheless, he seems to me quite right in saying that his cat, as a living center of consciousness, is real and that the Holy Roman Empire is not. I guess I stole that idea in another book, where I held that the difference between person and anything else was the same as the difference between the sun and the moon, the one burning from within, and the other shining only by

a portrait of one person, and everything in it an element of that person. This is not all that hard to do. What is one of your dreams but exactly that? It is made entirely of your own stuff. Indeed, you haven't any other stuff than that. Thus you can see that the jealousy of Venus, and the sentence of death as well, are in the person. No injustice is done to Psyche by Venus. It is a dream death, an inner death; it is the "death" of anyone who says, I must change my life, and then changes it.

Something there is in us all that does not like the way we are living, and wonders, especially in the evening, just why it is that we do live this way. It might as well be called a goddess. It is as though it were the aim of the world out there, of politics and money and social expectation, of all that is local and temporary, to put the goddess to sleep. When she sleeps, all seems well, and we are actually pleased to be getting and spending, and displaying our right-mindedness and virtue by joining the right idea clubs and getting out the vote.

It seems not only right but visibly respectable that we have pitched camp and settled down beside the road that probably doesn't go anywhere anyway. When the goddess stirs in her sleep, we have a bad moment, a little doubt, and we look down the road with puzzlement and vexation, but a good political scandal, or even an increase in the price of car insurance, will bring us back to what we call our "senses." But should that lady awake, and tell us what she really thinks, we are called to nothing less than a death, a real and permanent end to this life. We prefer not to go.

It is one of the important differences between life and stories that what happens in life is what happens, while what happens in a story, or more precisely in a true story, is what *should* happen.

In life, ten thousand Psyches today will easily put Venus back to sleep. In our story, all is arranged so that that is not possible, because the

reflected light. I have lost the book and can not check it now, but I do remember one of his thoughts that would be interesting to consider in reading *Psyche and Eros*, to wit, that by person we must mean something that is capable of sorrow and of joy, and other such. Because a man can be expected to die for his country while his country can never be expected to die for him, we know which one is a person.

story is true, not factual, not historical, but true.* In a true story, the Psyche who walks in darkness sees a great light, whether she wants to or not.

She will, of course, walk in darkness yet again, when her mysterious, glorious husband visits her by night and forbids her the sight of him. From that darkness, too, she must be released, but the agents of her release will be powers very different from the goddess. In his lovely retelling of this story, C. S. Lewis comes to a hard patch here.

The Lewis version, for those of you who have not yet read it, is called *Till We Have Faces*, and it is a wonderful, wise book. It has the great virtue of being—well, non-sectarian seems not good enough a word, perhaps "nonpartisan" would be better. This is an especially valuable virtue in the case of so rigorous a Christian apologist. It is as though Lewis had, toward the end of his life, found that "religion is even more important than one of "the religions," which might more usefully be called "persuasions," since it is entirely through the process of persuasion that they can establish and support themselves as "religions." Had they evidence to show, this world would be different. But in the case of Psyche's release from the dark intoxication of the flesh, it is probably out of simple, Christian reluctance that he finds himself utterly unable to do what must be done. He can't kill the sisters, which would be quite bad enough, but, even worse, he can not let Psyche kill them.

Our culture wrestles in vain with what it is our custom to call the "problem" of capital

* This understanding I have also stolen, in this case from Northrop Frye. In *The Great Code*, he considers various modes of discourse, and differentiates some of them this way: In one manner of speaking, the intention is to convey what you would have seen had you been there; in another, the intention is to reveal what you should have seen had you been there. This idea makes for interesting wrangles in literature classes, where students always come equipped with the notion that "true" and "factual" are synonyms, and are thereafter strangely bemused to discover that they would have to call something like the story of *Psyche and Eros* a "lie." Remarkably enough, or maybe not, the makers of literature are sometimes themselves led into this dilemma. Anthony Trollope once testified in court, but the force of his testimony was destroyed by the opposing attorney, who drove him to admit that he made money by concocting his stories, and therefore as a professional liar.

punishment. That we wrestle in vain, does us credit, but that we call this a “problem,” takes some of that credit away. Our wrestling comes from the collision of two suspicions that we can not, and should not, ignore. On the one hand, we suspect that any human life holds measureless possibilities; on the other, that there are some deeds, and some doers, that we simply must not tolerate if we are to be a sane and decent society. There is a mystery here, and not a problem. If we call it a problem we imagine that there is some path of logic that leads to what we will call a solution. A person who solves this problem does so only by putting away utterly one or the other of the two suspicions. That can be done, and is done, of course, but only out of the remarkable hardness of heart that disguises itself as nothing more than being “realistic.” It is our inability to abandon either one that demonstrates the worth and power of such suspicions. Suspicions of mystery like these—or like that of the disapproving goddess—can surely be stamped out, but in the society that has stamped them out, we would not want to live.

The same suspicion of mystery vexes all our considerations of killing. How clearly we can see, sometimes and for a while, that now we must kill. And how bemusedly we wonder about it later. The Christian persuasion of Lewis purports to be clear in this matter—No killing. But then it also says “except...” And thereupon arises a great cloud of vain argumentation. Let us ask it in another way, asking not Should there be killing? but, Should Jack kill the giant? This is, in fact, exactly analogous to the question, Should Psyche kill her sisters?

I do not mean to suggest that there is a something wrong in Lewis’s version. Far from it. If anything, it makes *Till We Have Faces* an even more powerful myth than the version given to us by Apuleius. But that is not to say that he has set right something that was wrong in our version. They are different stories. Ours is the story of Psyche, his of Orual, the eldest sister. And he has not changed the most important understanding: This is a story; the sisters *are* Psyche. There are some elements of the self—and this must be true of any self—that just have to go. It is just here that self-esteem always blocks the path of self-knowledge.

Of course, Lewis would properly have Psyche forgive that element in herself whose role is

played by her sisters. (And he may have the better case here; perhaps some nastier personae of the self may flee away or even be transformed once they are forgiven.) It is the sisters, most certainly, who are the agents of her escape from the second darkness, but it would be not only as some recompense for service that forgiveness is due. In the not entirely common Christianity of Lewis, forgiveness is due not because someone has earned it but because it is right. The sisters are surely whiners and deceivers, but that doesn’t mitigate their forgivability. However, if one had to choose between the lessons of Lewis and of Apuleius, the former might be the better choice, but harder. The rehabilitation of vices is not an easy job.*

* Here is a supplemental reading on considerations both of capital punishment and of what so often looks like “just death” in literature and in dream. It comes from *Gorgias* 511-12, where Socrates is musing on Callicles’ assertion that the saving of life is the highest both of motives and of callings, by which he means to demonstrate the worth of rhetoric, by which a man in peril of death in a trial may bring those jurors who believe one thing into believing something else. He points to an art even greater in life-saving than that of the lawyer, the art of the pilot, the helmsman, the very one who appears as “the helmsman of life” in Phi Beta Kappa’s motto.

“He asks but two obols if he brings you here safely from Ægina, and if from Egypt or the Black Sea, for this mighty service of bringing home safely all that I mentioned just now, oneself and children and goods and women folk, and disembarking them in the harbor, he asks but two drachmas at the most. And the man who possesses these arts and achieves these results goes ashore and walks alongside his ship with modest bearing. For I suppose he is capable of reflecting that it is uncertain which of his passengers he has benefited and which he has harmed by not suffering them to be drowned, Knowing as he does that those he has landed are in no way better than when they embarked, either in body or in soul. He knows that if anyone afflicted in the body with serious and incurable diseases has escaped drowning, the man is wretched for not having died and has received no benefit from him; he therefore reckons that if any man suffers many incurable diseases in the soul, which is so much more precious than the body, for such a man life is not worthwhile and it will be no benefit to him if he, the pilot, saves him from the sea or from the law court or from any other risk. For he knows it is not better for an evil man to live, for he must needs live ill.”

In the Greek way, however, the soul in our story chooses to put an end to what is in her and in us all, and to what has undone her and destroyed her happiness—Envy. In life, envy also destroys happiness, but those in whom this has happened attribute their misery not at all to their envy but to the “injustice” which deprives them of that which they envy. The sisters are even more Envy; they are Envy’s sisters, too. Theirs are the voices not of skepticism but of its own wicked sister, cynicism, whose counsel is to put away all suspicions of mystery. Her voice is always whispering to us that nothing good and beautiful can be trusted, that goodness and beauty are simply quirks of perception and opinion, emotions, nothing more. Nobody truly *knows* that, but many say it, and even feel better for having said it. It shows them modern, tough-minded and realistic, like the cocky child who knows that life’s a bitch and then you die.

So it is that the sisters say, This can not be true. He must be a monster. Why else the darkness? But they are not truly modern skeptics, however, for they do fear, and later indeed come to believe, that what Psyche tells them may be true. It is the thought of her possible joy in bearing a divine child, and of the splendor in which she lives that brings them to concoct their scheme.* And, not as they mean it, but in some sense of which they do not dream, the sum, the final worth of their ill-intended counsel is for the good. That’s the sort of thing that happens in true stories, and may, for all we know, and in spite of what we think of our conditions, happen in life, too.

This is one of the regular devices of myth and fairy-tale. What looks like the best often turns out

There are many people do not share with Socrates a suspicion of soul; they are also the ones who sometimes put up a big fuss about “the sanctity of life.” Puzzling.

* It is probably more than literary sophistication out of which Lewis sends only one sister to visit Psyche. Even in Apuleius one sister would have been enough, but the story must have existed for him as we see it, and it does give us to think about the recurrent theme of the three sisters, the youngest of whom is the chosen one. Lewis goes even further—and does better—by showing us an Orual who truly means her counsel to Psyche, and then showing us the meaning of her meaning when we discover that she can not see the palace and all its splendor.

to be the worst, and what falls upon our heads as the unbearable worst proves to be the path, and the only path, to the very best. Dante can go to the light only by passing through Hell, and Odysseus who looks for the short cut—Dante’s Odysseus, that is, not Homer’s—is swallowed up in the dark sea. Even *Candide* concurs with Pangloss at the end of things that all was for the best. The experience of life and the testimony of many who live do not always provide support for this notion. Of it, what can we say? It is either a vast, a universal, artistic conspiracy for the telling of comforting lies to unhappy children, or it is not.

And Psyche has the best, it seems. Her life in the palace is the realization of all the common human wishes. There is soft music there, and the murmuring of many fountains. She is waited upon by invisible hands, and all that she is given is of the best. She can load her sisters with gold and precious stones, for she already has more than any girl could want.

At night she is visited by her loving husband. She lives in the ecstasy of new young love, the headiest wine of all. But—for this is the subtle power of that drink—she does not “see” what she loves any more than she sees the servants who bring her everything.

The life is idle, an idyll. The soft music—Tennyson’s words, in fact—is the lullaby of the lotus-eaters. She must wake up, but—and the god-husband and the wicked sisters work together as though conspirators—she must do the awakening herself. She must light the lamp and take the knife in her own hands.

The love to which she has flown in the arms of Zephyr, the warm western wind, is really a kind of madness.† She is *beside* herself, not within herself.

† Another supplementary reading, this one from a letter of Rilke to a friend. (*Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke*, 1892-1910, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York.)

“I learned over and over again that there is scarcely anything more difficult than to love one another. That is work, day labor, Friedrich, day labor; God knows there is no other word for it. And look, added to this is the fact that young people are not prepared for such difficult loving; for convention has tried to make the complicated and ultimate relationship into something easy and frivolous, has given it the appearance of everyone’s being able to do it. It is not so. Love is something difficult and it is more difficult than other

And to be beside oneself in love is different only in particular but not in principle from being beside oneself in preoccupation with the world out there and its neverending succession of burning issues about which something must be done right now.

This allows Pan to give Psyche some ironic advice. “Stop crying, try to be cheerful, and open your heart to Cupid, the greatest of us gods,” he tells her, and we, thinking in our own meaning of love, have to suppose that his advice is ill-informed and vain. After all, we say, has she not already done exactly that?

No, she hasn’t. She has not done the work of love, but has given herself, opened her heart, just as it is, utterly untended, to the play of love. What Pan recommends is hard labor, and labor in the true service of the beloved only if it is first in the

things because in other conflicts Nature herself enjoins men to collect themselves, to take themselves firmly in hand with all their strength, while in the heightening of love the impulse is to give oneself wholly away. But just think, can that be anything beautiful, to give oneself away, not as something whole and ordered but haphazard rather, bit by bit, as it comes? Can such giving away, that looks so like a throwing away and dismemberment, be anything good, can it be happiness, joy, progress? No, it cannot... When you give someone flowers, you arrange them beforehand, don’t you? But young people who love each other fling themselves to each other in the impatience and haste of their passion, and they don’t notice at all what a lack of mutual esteem lies in this disordered giving of themselves...

“To take love seriously and to learn it like a task, this it is, Friedrich, what young people need. Like so much else, people have also misunderstood the place of love in life; they have made it into play and pleasure because they thought that play and pleasure were more blissful than work. But there is nothing happier than work, and love, just because it is the extreme happiness, can be nothing else but work.”

It almost makes you suspect that there is such a thing as wisdom and that people can actually learn it by themselves if they just pay attention to themselves, and then talk with themselves.

To consider further this understanding, and beyond the context of romantic love, read also the chapter called “A Lady of Little Faith” in *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which the Elder Zossima says to Madame Kholohov, who just loves “the people” but can’t bear their ingratitude, and doesn’t like anyone she actually knows, “Strive to love your neighbor actively and indefatigably.”

true service of love itself, the care of the garden that is to be given.

Here is a strange emptiness in our various educations, both the formal that we find in the schools and the informal that we in everything from journals of learned opinion to situation comedies on television. We are assiduous in preaching to the children, and to each other the great importance of what we very carefully call “caring.” (To call it “loving” would apparently frighten us.) To be sure, we are selective as to what is worthy of our caring; we should care about the baby seals, but not about the rats that infest our cities, which accords ill with many of our slogans about the worth of all life and also with our concern for the disappearance of species. But no matter. The appeal we make is mostly emotional; and tinted with logical also selectively, as in the case of the supposed, but also questioned, logic of global warming.

We urge on the young the thought of life as service, and the young generally attest to wanting such a life. Miss America is always glad to have been crowned, for now she intends to get out there and make the world a better place in her own little way, and the class valedictorian announces that she will now study law not to make a bundle but in order to help the poor and downtrodden. Even Olympic athletes—and highly paid professionals of sport as well—talk much of the “sacrifices” they have made in preparing themselves to do the only thing they want to do anyway, as though they had somehow endowed us all, whether we deserve them or not, with good things at great expense to themselves.

Our preaching has been successful, but it is not exactly virtue that we preach. When the school children do their “voluntary” service, as some schools do require, and distributed the right number of free meals to shut-ins, we pronounce them virtuous and are content. That some of them, perhaps many of them, may have hated it and done it only because it was required is not to the point. The work has been done, hasn’t it? The “caring” has been done; the gift of the self has been made.

And we refuse entirely to consider the nature of the self that has been given. When the school child shrugs and does his duty, and when a Mother Teresa feeds a bowl of soup to a dying old

lady, are we willing to judge that exactly the same thing has happened in both cases?

Yes. We take no thought at all for the obvious fact that many of the children, like many of the rest of us, are in no condition to be fit and worthy gifts to others. This is doubtless because the deadly combination of our intoxication with self-esteem and our fearful suspicion of self-knowledge. And thus it is that we have to accept the seeming of virtue rather than virtue itself.

Pan, although in his typically gentle way with girls, nevertheless commands her to work at becoming a better person. It is, after all, exactly that enterprise that she sought to escape through suicide. His prescription is typically Classical: Be cheerful, and get on with your work.

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