

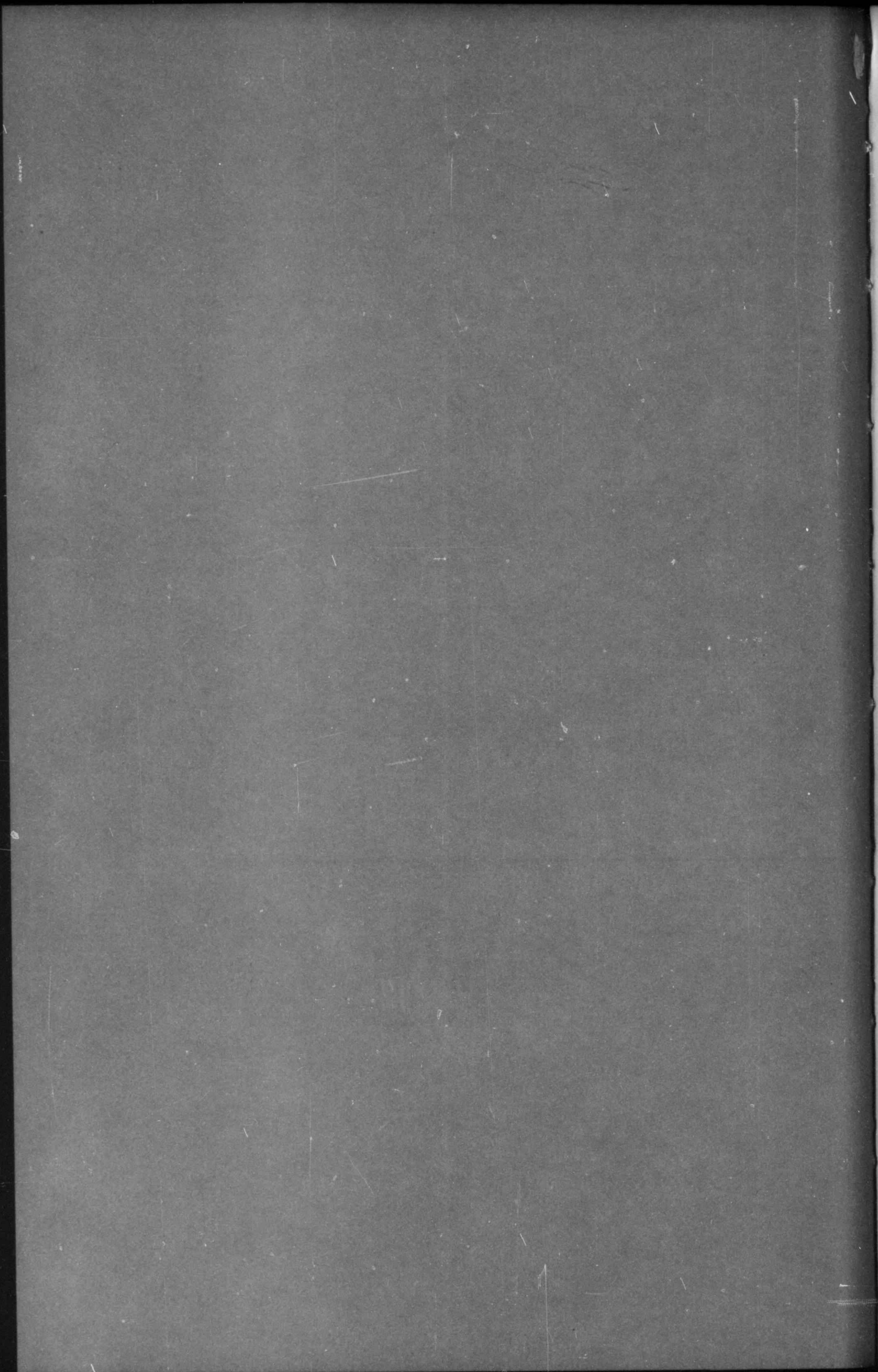
# PARABOLA

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THE MAGAZINE OF MYTH AND TRADITION



THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS



## PARABOLA

MYTH AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING

NOV 18 1985

PHILOSOPHY RELIGION  
& EDUCATION

## THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

- 
- 4 **The Vicious Inherencies:** Essays by Thomas Buckley, Frederick Franck, Christopher Bamford, Roger Lipsey, Martha Heyneman. Paintings by Gloria C. Ortíz.
- 19 **Experiments in Truth** by John Loudon  
*Towards an excellent life.*
- 24 **The Garment** by P.L. Travers  
*A story.*
- 28 **The Human Place:** An interview with Pauline de Dampierre
- 34 **Seven (and more) Deadly Sins** by Paul Jordan-Smith  
*The elaboration of insights.*
- 46 **ARCS: Savage Stocks**
- 52 **Fire Proveth Iron** by D.M. Dooling  
*The mystery of good.*
- 60 **From Talks of Instruction:** Meister Eckhart
- 62 **The Lion and the Unicorn** by Helen M. Luke  
*Purging the ego.*
- 70 **The Nut from Nowhere** by Janwillem van de Wetering  
*A story.*
- EPICYCLES
- 74 **The Evil Tempter/Scandinavian**
- 79 **Pandora/Greek**
- 81 **Gluskabe and the Four Wishes/Abenaki**
- 84 **The Bullfrog and the Bull/Aesop**
- 85 **CURRENTS & COMMENTS**
- 2 **FOCUS**
- 87 **TANGENTS**
- Forces of Becoming: Peter Brook's Mahabharata** by Richard Temple  
*A review essay of the epic play's premiere at Avignon.*
- 94 **BOOK REVIEWS**
- 127 **PROFILES**

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*Cover: Pride. Gloria C. Ortíz, 1985. Mixed media. Photograph by David Heald.*

## FOCUS

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The names of the Seven Deadly Sins bring our immediate interest and attention: pride, envy, avarice, anger, lust, gluttony, sloth. We know them all, all of us, in one degree or another. They are lodging in the human heart today as certainly as when the early church fathers espied them in their own hearts, as securely as when the first Buddhist monks wrestled them within theirs. Somehow or another, they seem to belong to the human condition. They cling to us, and we to them.

Perhaps they interest us because they are names for suffering, for the psychic pain of our isolation, frustration, and fear. In a time when the word seems an embarrassing anachronism, each of our contributors has had to face the question of what sin means to us today. Is sin an action, an external deed? What is a "state" of sin? In our interview with her in this issue, Pauline de Dampierre says that sin is "an undercurrent of tendencies always acting" in human beings. Do these tendencies have a purpose? Are we responsible for these impulses—inevitable and "natural" to us as they are? They have a vigorous life

within us—are they in any sense needed?

“Envy,” Roger Lipsey says in his essay, “drives us, raving, to ourselves.” Each of these sins drives us, raving, to ourselves; and there, within ourselves, they bring us to an end or a beginning.

From many points of view, in many different ways, and to a surprising extent, the contributors to this issue share a fundamental approach to the question of sin. “Virtue,” says P.L. Travers, “is always equivocal.” Vice seems to offer a sure thing, the appearance of certainty. It is, in fact, a point of arrested movement, a place where process has stopped, where growth ends, where change crystallizes into a distortion. “Change breaks down our boundaries,” Thomas Buckley writes in this issue, “links us to all else, providing the grounds of our interconnectedness, our interdependency . . . we seem to fear both impermanence and interdependence.” These sins, our contributors are saying, can block our realization of this impermanence, can appear to offer us a way out of fear, and give us an assurance of control. And lead us into temptation.

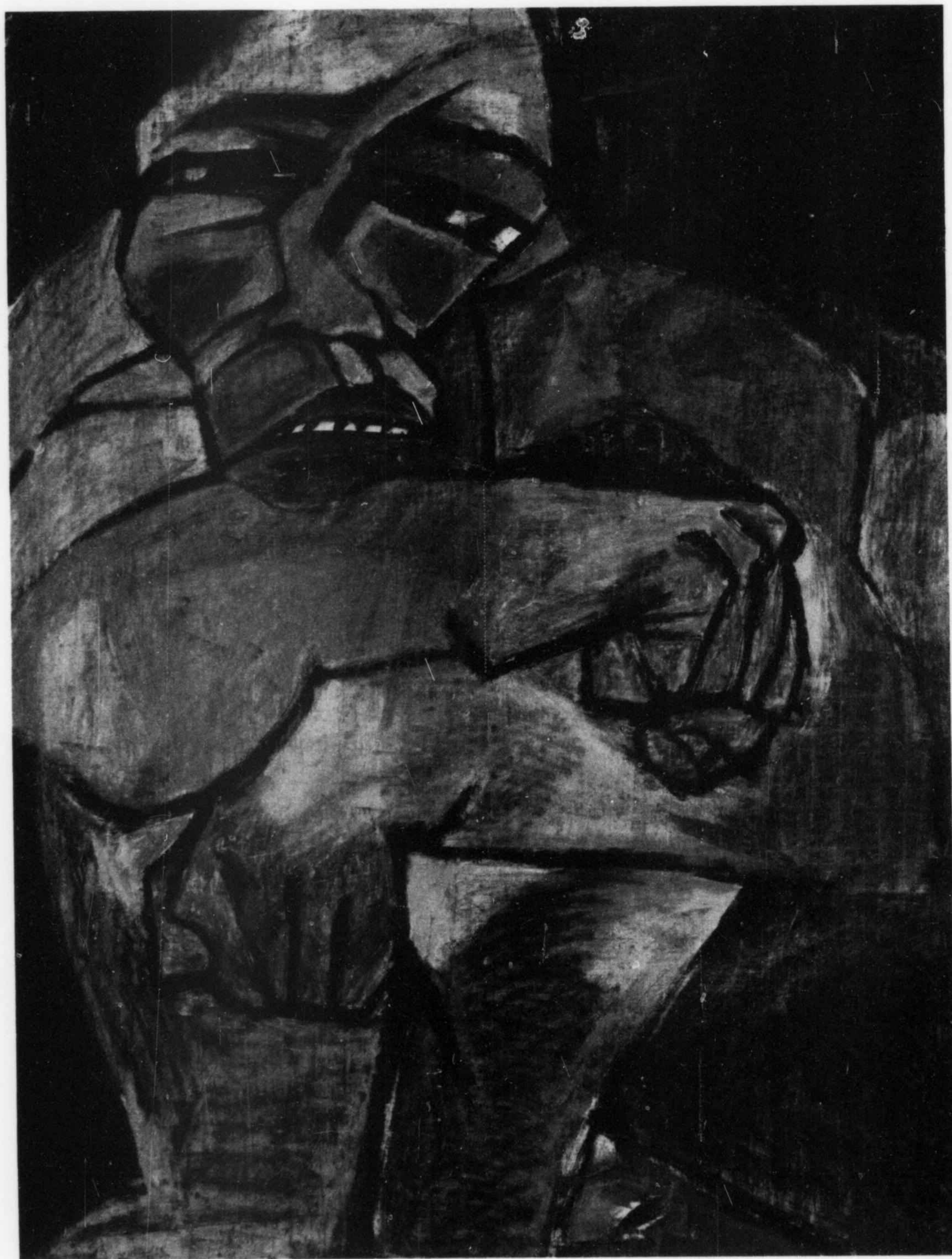


That we can be led into temptation, that we have a capacity for fearsome excesses is at the same time a testimony to our freedom and our will. No animal is gifted with the choice to move toward growth or toward decay—a choice present at every moment. “The moment I begin to act,” de Dampierre says, “these impulses are there and must be taken into account.”

What is it within us that can take them into account, that can bring them into the light? For these deadly sins can flourish only in the darkness of the ego and its partial and limited desires. Denied and unseen, they are all the beasts of creation exercising certain dominion over our humanity. Only virtue is uncertain, and always threatened, demanding a conscious awakening to a deeper reality. Perhaps these sins, with their sting of death, can bring us to the exercise of that capacity, and to life.

—Lorraine Kisly

# The Vicious Inherencies



# Anger

*After he had been thinking about it for a long time he began . . . talking against fighting and said people should live like close relatives together. . . . He wasn't any kind of war chief no more. . . .*

—Anonymous Washoe Indian

As liberation and feminist theologians tell us, there is much to suspect in the Church father's condemnation of anger as a sin against grace. But what was their wisdom? In seeking this wisdom it is useful to distinguish between a momentary burst of simple anger and deep, abiding anger, ire, the thirst for vengeance; useful, too, to place all anger in a developmental context that includes fear, sadness, and real freedom.

The anger of a young child, flashing like lightning and leaving as quickly, seems a human reflex, bound up with survival. As—often—a form of honesty, it may be creative or at least a mechanism of healthy autonomy. But the levels of anger arise on a continuum, and few of us remain capable of such simple, honest anger for long. In the grown heart, anger becomes entrenched, chronic, deep, and we get stuck in it as it gets stuck in us. We usually construe the negativity of such deep anger, at least in another person, in terms of the harm it does others. But what does anger do to us, when it is in us, as a form of suffering?

Deep anger isolates us. Through it we create the illusion that the world has stopped in its tracks and come to focus entirely upon ourselves, our desire. We create this illusion by the strength of our desire to control the movement and variety of reality in terms of our own limited needs, interests, and understanding. It is an illusion that rests, finally, on fear

of losing control, both over others and over the self. Anger protects the *status quo* of the ego. In it (paradoxically!) we regain a sense of control, protect our identity, and so master fear—or overwhelm it. But it is a move that leaves us utterly alone, out of connection with everything. Reality loses its integrity, reduced to an exclusive reflection in the narrow mirror of our desire for control in the form of vengeance; all else is meaningless.

Anger, fear, and sadness are related in a kind of scissors-paper-stone emotional game. At a high price, anger “takes” fear. We keep playing: the isolation of deep anger, the loss of control in it, creates more fear, taken in turn by greater anger, creating greater isolation or alienation. Yet, in this game, sadness, as in grief and as utterly distinct from depression, will finally take anger, if we let it through.

At bottom, sadness entails realization of transience; of the ultimate futility of our efforts to control reality, and of fear as well, in a world in which we can neither win nor lose but only change. Change breaks down our boundaries, links us to all else, providing the grounds of our interconnectedness, our interdependency. Anger effectively blocks realization of this movement, by isolating us. Perhaps we cling to our anger *because* of this? We seem to fear both impermanence and interdependence, and to fear their realization in sadness more deeply than we fear anger and isolation. Anger storms in the hard passage between fear and grief. Many of us choose it over grief, like those Philippine head-hunters who continued the round of vengeance lest grief for their own dead overwhelm them. Yet the route to freedom, out of the scissors-paper game, leads through the very heart of grief.

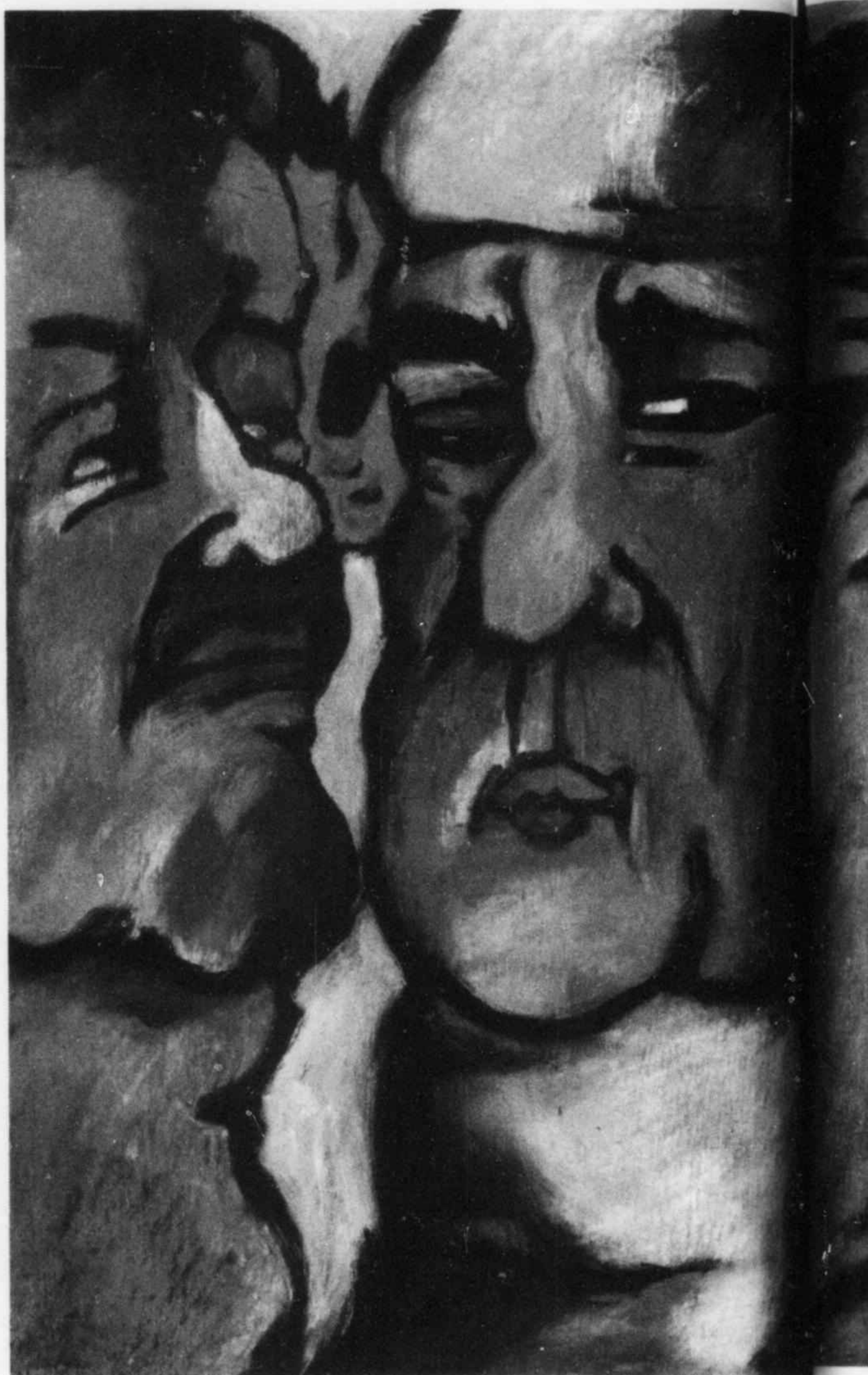
Anger blocks this route, but without it the road itself may disappear from view. Our anger points us toward the limitations of control and fear alike. It highlights their futility. The pain of angry isolation spurs us to accept what may seem even greater pain in recognition of impermanence and interdependence, through sadness. Anger, if its source be realized, gives the strength needed to take the risk of facing greater pain. Deep anger may be a necessary element in a developmental process.

The "sinfulness" of anger may not lie in anger itself but in prolonged attachment to it; in the refusal, out of fear, to let ourselves back into the impermanent world of interrelationship, across the bridge of sadness. Its negativity may center in its refusal of grief, and thus of the possibility of going through and beyond both anger and sorrow. Anger may be part of a developmental process, but it also has the capacity to stop that process—a kind of "grace"—altogether; deep anger/deep death.

Some peoples have culturally orchestrated this process, doing their best to insure themselves a clear path through. Various North American Indians, for example, virtually demanded that their young men become participants in blood feuds, building confidence and fearlessness through unbridled ferocity in vengeance. Later in life they were expected to move on, to become peace speakers, spiritual leaders, and diplomats. Such men had an influential voice in part through the reputations they had built as warriors, but also were held to understand the way things connected better than young fighters could. Nowadays most of us must find our ways through alone, sink or swim.

*The epigraph is from Warren L. d'Azevedo, Straight with the Medicine (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1985). My thanks to Jeff Broadbent for his help.*

—Thomas Buckley



## Envy

*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house,  
thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor  
his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his  
ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy  
neighbor's.*

It wasn't just the man, it was his shoes. And not so much the shoes as their flawless shine. Week after week, he returned unruffled, pink, with shoes. I changed, one day placid, the next raw. But those shoes, and their man with them, seemed to live in a preserve. The assaults suffered by my shoes in the



course of a day somehow passed his by, deflected by a shield of self-assurance that descended from the man and enveloped his feet. My eyes were drawn to his shoes as the tongue is helplessly attracted by a lodged particle of food. I tried to ignore them, to be happy with my own shoes, to find goodness in the man himself. But gleaming like the parquets of Versailles, they remained the sign of a superiority that I could only admire, cross-eyed, an urban peasant in clogs. To shine my own shoes meant nothing. They would gleam—and remind me of his shoes.

And his handkerchief. Not the

working handkerchief, discreetly hidden, that makes all men one, but the breast-pocket handkerchief folded like a flower, insolently waving its multipetalled head. I considered wearing one like it; nothing prevents a man from adopting a fashion, from appearing at the office one day *changed*. But when I approached my dresser to select a suitable combed-cotton square, perhaps a silk, my heart sank. I had no idea how to fold it; it kept coming out like the other handkerchief, the one you use. How many little tips is right? Hadn't I read somewhere about a symbolism of tips? Would I be inadvertently telling the world I was

gay? I withdrew, sobered. But somewhere in the dead zones of my imagination the offending image of his handkerchief lingered on, as white as a ghost, a grandeur that had escaped.

I ask only to know the way to freedom. Perhaps I shall not go that way, perhaps I will stay behind in the world where eyes, instead of seeing each thing and person as they are, see a provocation. But I ask to know the past. Each day, in late afternoon or early evening when the sun moves to the horizon, a time comes when the day's passions thin and disappear, and the night's have not yet taken hold. One's thoughts become unaccountably clear, feelings closer to home. The light itself, golden and gentle, is the author of this state for which one is not, by any stretch of presumption, personally responsible. At such times, if not others, one sees through illusion.

One feels the beauty of being and accepts again the challenge of being *this* creature, not another. One takes joy in oneself walking, thinking, feeling, sensing both the day and the man in it. To be a separate life that can open to others but is not others seems an ingenious pattern for accomplishing the work of the world, whatever that work really is. One stands a better chance of participating than if one were somehow entangled in a larger, perhaps clumsier whole. Such a whole might never reach decisions in time to accomplish much.

We open secretly to one another, like night flowers. We send our scent in spite of everything, and receive others. Envy turns us, raving, to ourselves. But that is where we belong. Self knows nothing of shoes or handkerchiefs. It can await patiently for us to know nothing of them, either.

**Roger Lipsey**

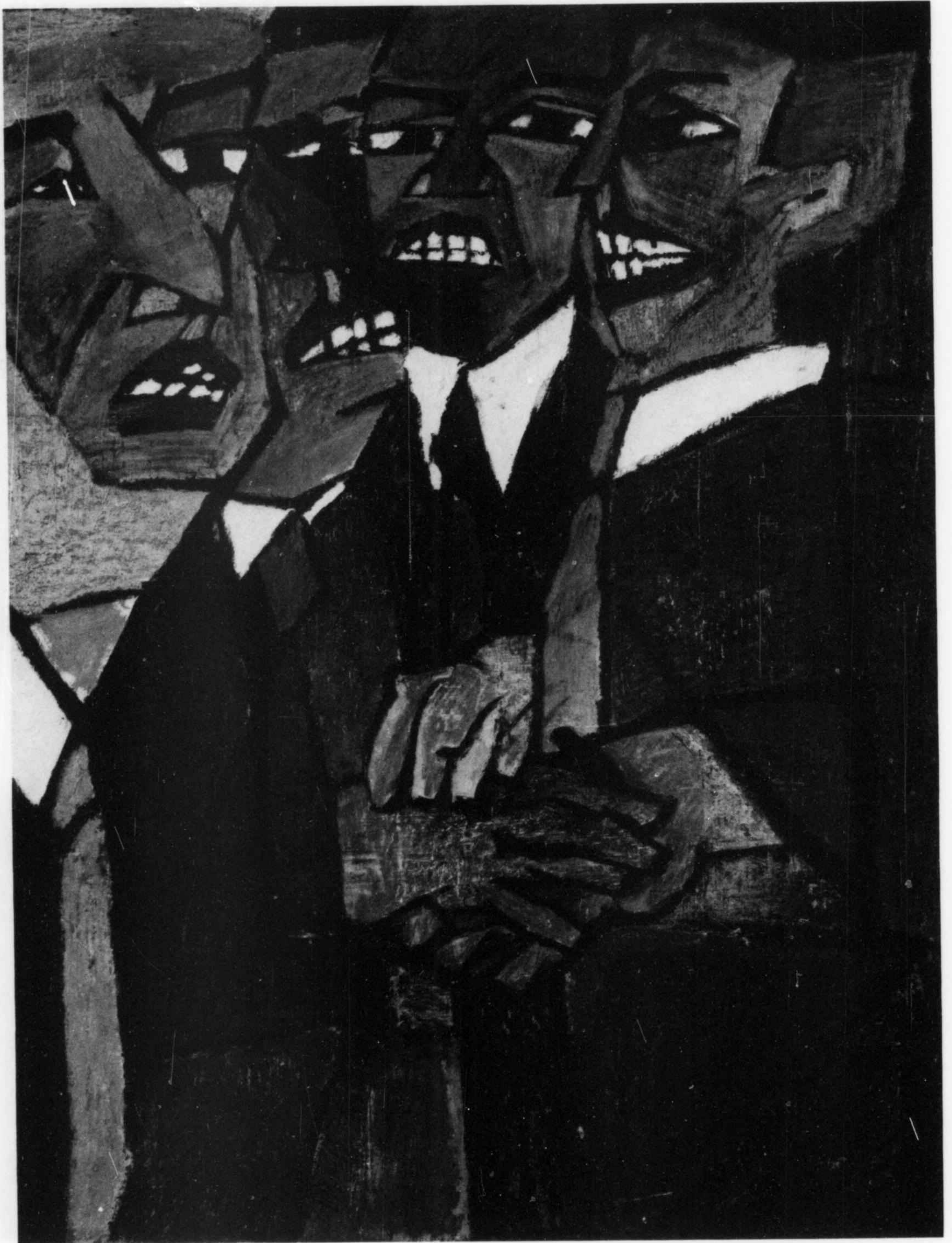
## Lust

This strange magma which preachers define by the not ill-chosen name of lust (since it would seem to be a matter of the luxuriance of the flesh expending its force) defies examination because of the variety of substances which compose it, and which in their turn break down into other components, themselves complex. Love is one part of the mixture, though less often, perhaps, than is admitted; but the concept of love is itself far from simple. This so-called lower world connects with what is most subtle in human nature. Just as even the most vulgar ambition is still an effort of the mind striving to bring order to things or to improve them, the flesh in its audacity takes upon itself the mind's capacity for curiosity, and indulges in fantasies, as the mind likes to do; the wine of lust derives its strength from the soul's sap, as well as from that of the flesh.

**—Marguerite Yourcenar**

*From The Abyss, by Marguerite Yourcenar, translated from the French by Grace Frick in collaboration with the author. Translation copyright © 1976 by Marguerite Yourcenar. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.*





# Avarice

The besetting sin pervading our culture is *cupiditas*, the one of which the wages are literally death, not only of the human in us, but ultimately of the planet itself. For while sloth, gluttony, and envy tend to affect our individual lives negatively, unbridled *cupiditas*, in combination with the pride and anger with which it is almost invariably allied, wreaks havoc also on the social plane. It erodes the ground on which human communality is possible, antithetical as it is to the teachings of those exalted beings who have lived to attain, indeed to embody, the completion of the human process: the Christ and the Buddha. They are the lodestars by which we may set our course to the destination of life's pilgrimage, and be led to the humble awareness of the immense distance that still separates us from its end-point.

To love one's neighbor as oneself, to love God with all one's mind and all one's heart, is surely incompatible with *cupiditas*, the "setting of one's heart on appropriating something for oneself."

Whereas Christianity classifies greed among the seven crucial flaws that stand in the way of this fulfillment, Buddhism singles it out as one of the three main hurdles of ego-inflation to be taken on the way to liberation before arriving at our specifically human destination. It is what makes us stray from what is ultimately sane. The "wisdom that is compassion"—the root of Buddhist spirituality—is utterly irreconcilable with greed; it is its very opposite. Buddhism classifies living beings in six categories; those on the lowest, most evil path are the "fighting demons," *pretas*, and denizens of hell. The *pretas*, or "hungry ghosts," are plagued by insatiable greed, which could swallow the universe and still be hungry and thirsty. A Buddhist prayer implores that these

unfortunates may be able to abandon their greed and awaken to the desire for enlightenment.

The Church Fathers not only called "mine" and "thine" pernicious words, they condemned the holding of private property as theft and usurpation. Thomas Merton tells of the monk Serapion who sold his New Testament and gave the money to the hungry, saying, "I sold the book that told me to sell all I had to give to the poor...."

What else than greed could ruthlessly riddle our food with carcinogens until and unless stopped by law; to desecrate the earth, to waste within a few decades its riches built up over millions of years; to destroy the autochthonic cultures and the economies of what we call the Third and Fourth World and thereby to condemn entire populations to the status of a permanently alienated subproletariat; to subject untold animal lives to entirely avoidable "research"; to ravage our own countryside, to despoil it with speculative building projects; to make our cities uninhabitable for all but the affluent, and to paralyze the inner life of adults and little children by an uninterrupted bombardment with trivia and political and commercial propaganda. We are all unavoidably infected with this virus of greed. We covet what we see advertised, we invest in what promises the highest yield, we are incessantly urged to participate in sweepstakes and lotteries. Greed is what we breathe in and out. *Cupiditas* pollutes our air.

Is there an antidote before the self-combustion is consummated? The Buddhist verse of repentance says: "All the evil karma wrought by me from long ago, stems from greed, anger, and folly without beginning. It is all born from my body, mouth, and mind. I now repent it." It is echoed by: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us, sinners."

—Frederick Franck



## Pride

*Holy Reason is a most delicate mechanism. Introduce as much pride as a grain of sand into the mind of a Saint Francis, and you will obtain Hamlet-Faust-Manfred and their grandchildren of today, anguished and foolishly jeering.*

—O. V. de L. Milosz

Pride is the oldest simplest story, the bedrock of our infirmity. It is the cause of the most damaging fall for the soul. Anger and sadness follow on the heels of this demon, who is the prince of this world, the leader of its demonic pack. Not to mince words, we may call him/it *Lucifer*, whose name means “light bearer,” which makes his paradoxical nature clear. We are he, who was the first to deny God and to regard himself as the cause of his own actions, the source of his own wisdom—the first to think that he was God. He it was

who said, blinded by the immensity of his creative power (he had just made the angels), "It is I who am God; there is none apart from me." But of course there was (and is); and Lucifer soon perceived the One greater than himself. Thereby his act of negation became one of opposition, and of this magical science our poor world was born, full of strife and envy, and heavy with the sense of God's transcendence. Lucifer wished to be independent of God, the One who made him and was Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. He wished to assert himself the master of his own destiny, the captain of his karma. That is why he is called "self-will." "Self-will was the beginning of pride," writes Boehme, adding that Lucifer would still be an angel if he had not wished to dominate and control all things. "He should have been wholly resigned in the holy power of God; and hear what the Lord would speak and play by his own Spirit in him. This self-will will not do; and therefore he must now play in the dark." Called to deification by grace, Lucifer wished to be God by himself. Nor was Adam any different, nor are we: we are one. Hatred of grace and the thirst for self-deification are the root of our ills. Thereby we play in the dark, amid hostile objects, and fall again and again. "Nine monks fell away after many labors and were obsessed with spiritual pride, for they put their trust in their own works," says one of the Desert Fathers. "Of what use is love where there is pride?" asks another.

Gregory Bateson tells the story this way. In the beginning, there was a garden, containing many hundreds of species and two anthropoids more intelligent than the rest. One day, to reach some fruit hanging too high for them, these two began to "think," to think

*purposively*. Selecting one part of themselves out of the totality which they were, they then selected on this basis out of the totality which they were in—these two "selections" being simultaneous and one and the same—a certain partial (linear) sequence which (so they thought), if followed faithfully, would lead to the desired end. The trick worked. They successfully sliced up the world according to their limited, short-term purposes. They then became almost drunk with excitement (the phrase is Bateson's). "This was the way to do things. Make a plan, ABC, and you get D." What this meant was that they began to *specialize* in doing things in a *planned* way. The actuality, however, was something else again. "In effect, they cast out of the Garden the concept of their own total systemic nature and of its total systemic nature." They cut themselves off from the wisdom of the whole. Thereby wisdom was darkened for them and they came to live in the darkness of ignorance and unconsciousness. They set up a part to rule over the whole—an impossible proposition—and when things went wrong—which they increasingly did—they blamed God. They cast Him out. The One who had been their ground, ever-present and speaking, became alien, distant, and finally absent. Then things became really dark.

We too have played in the dark; we have thrown ourselves into enterprises that came to nothing, or came out quite other than anticipated. We "failed," and are hurt. But what hurts is what has to be let go of: pride. "I"—the everyday doer—am not in control, in charge, but playing in the dark like Lucifer.

—Christopher Bamford



## Gluttony

O cursed gluttony, our first distress!  
Cause of our first confusion, first temptation,  
The very origin of our damnation,  
Till Christ redeemed us with his blood again!  
O infamous indulgence! Cursed stain  
So dearly bought! And what has it been worth?  
Gluttony has corrupted all the earth.  
Adam, our father, and his wife as well,  
From Paradise to labour and to Hell  
Were driven for that vice, they were indeed.

While she and Adam fasted, so I read,  
They were in Paradise; when he and she  
Ate of the fruit of that forbidden tree  
They were at once cast forth in pain and woe.  
O gluttony, it is to thee we owe  
Our griefs! O if we knew the maladies  
That follow on excess and gluttonies,  
Sure we would diet, we would temper pleasure  
In sitting down at table, show some measure!  
Alas the narrow throat, the tender mouth!  
Men labour east and west and north and south  
In earth, in air, in water—Why, d’you think?  
To get a glutton dainty meat and drink!  
How well of this St Paul’s Epistle treats!  
‘Meats for the belly, belly for the meats,  
But God shall yet destroy both it and them.’  
Alas, the filth of it! If we contemn  
The name, how far more tilthy is the act!  
A man who swills down vintages in fact  
Makes a mere privy of his throat, a sink  
For cursed superfluties of drink!  
So the Apostle said, whom tears could soften:  
‘Many there are, as I have told you often,  
And weep to tell, whose gluttony sufficed  
To make them enemies of the cross of Christ,  
Whose ending is destruction and whose God  
Their belly!’ O thou belly! stinking pod  
Of dung and foul corruption, that canst send  
Thy filthy music forth at either end,  
What labour and expense it is to find  
Thy sustenance! These cooks that strain and grind  
And bray in mortars, transubstantiate  
God’s gifts into a flavour on a plate,  
To please a lecherous palate. How they batter  
Hard bones to put some marrow on your platter,  
Spicery, root, bark, leaf—they search and cull it  
In the sweet hope of flattering a gullet!  
Nothing is thrown away that could delight  
Or whet anew lascivious appetite.  
Be sure a man whom such a fare entices  
Is dead indeed, though living in his vices.

—*Geoffrey Chaucer*

*From "The Pardoner's Tale" of The Canterbury Tales.  
Translated into modern English by Nevill Coghill.  
(Penguin Books, 1951.) Reprinted by permission.*

# Sloth

It was not the delicious sheets of childhood, over whose smoothness you slid your bare legs again and again as the church bell called and the fronds of the palm tree lashed and writhed; it was not the blanket house under the card table, floored with pillows, where you burrowed and waited for the fumes of tight-lipped, grown-up anxiety to blow away; it was not the worn-out Oriental rug on the living room floor, where you lay on your stomach on Sunday afternoons, elbows on the funny papers, chin propped up on hands; or the silken sands of adolescent beaches, where an oiled shoulder flashed as you turned yourself over, and the sea sighed, and sighed again. Delicious sloth was only one of the many daughters of the medieval sin of acedia. As for sullenness—black looks congealing over unwashed dishes—Dante rightly placed that in hell, in the closed circle of wrath.

Acedia, the “noontday demon,” was first discerned by monks in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century A.D. Having been reminded by the fall of the Roman world that all the things of time eventually come to nothing, they were trying to keep their attention on timelessness. Around noon, a monk might notice that something had insinuated itself into his stifling cell. Something was making him impatient, restless, cynical, bored. Something was making the sun stand still in

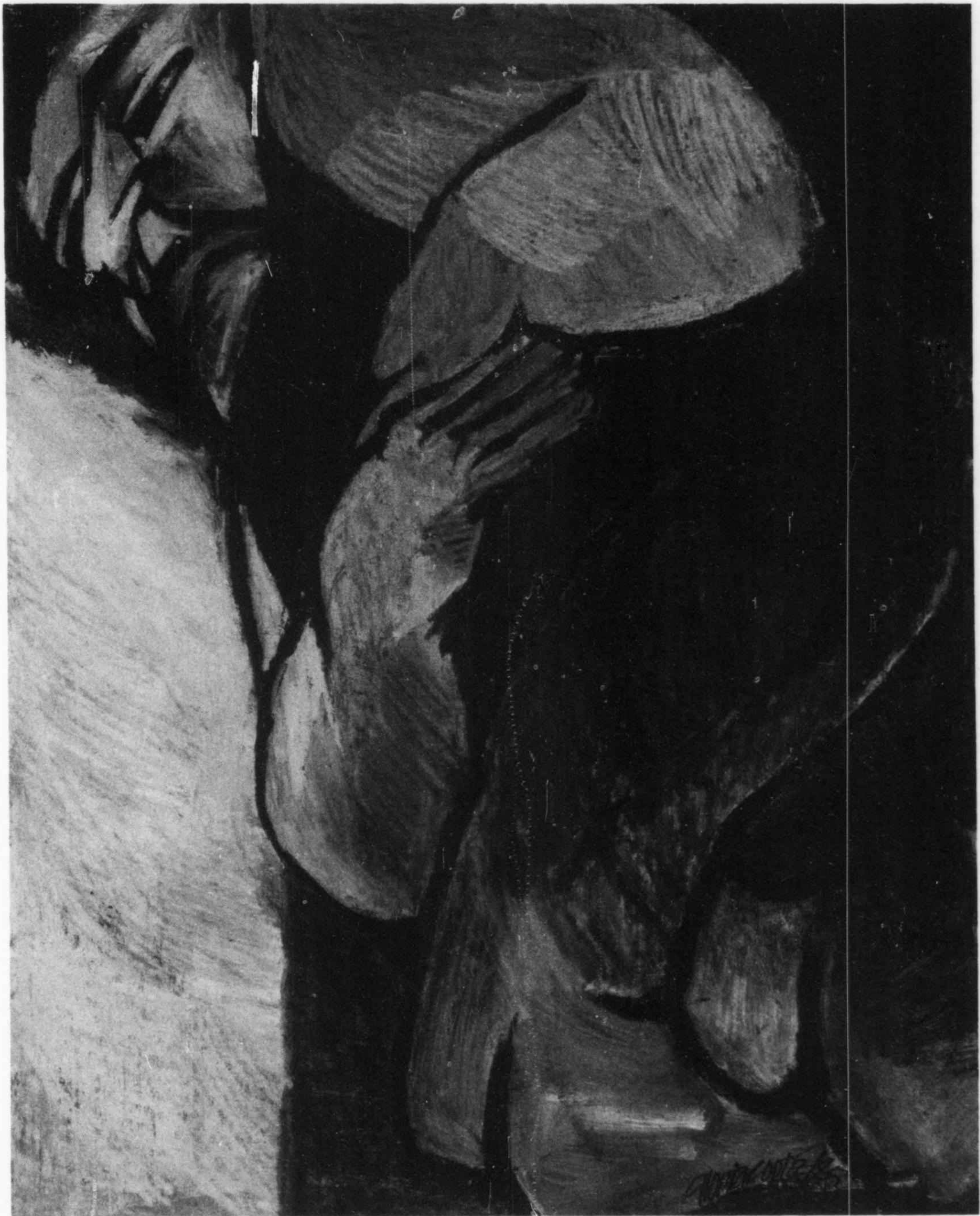
the middle of the sky. The day seemed intolerably long. Life seemed intolerably long. Something had opened a hole in the bottom of his heart. Enthusiasm for his own undertaking was draining away. He began to wonder if there was any point in it—if there was any point in human life at all.

This is acedia. Dante places it precisely in the middle of the *Divine Comedy*, halfway up the mountain of purgation. It is the middle sin, the motionless fulcrum between the sins of the spirit and the sins of the flesh. When neither ambition nor appetite any longer moves me, I come to a halt.

Acedia also lies midway between gravity and grace, as if a spaceship had flown beyond the power of attraction of its planet of departure, but could not yet feel the pull of its goal. When Dante and Virgil reach this place, they come to a halt.

It is night on the mountain. One can go on circling on the level where one is; or one can slide all the way back down to the bottom. No one can move upward a single step without the sun.

It used to be fashionable to talk about acedia at cocktail parties. Aldous Huxley wrote that, what with failed revolutions and war after war, we had a right to our acedia. T.S. Eliot embodied it in his great, tired poem, *The Waste-land*, composed of the floating fragments



of a fallen world. Compared with how we are inside today, *The Wasteland* seems like a romantic poem, full of emotion. We have gone beyond the end of a world, into nowhere.

Numb. Blank. Nothing.  
I run every morning, cook, work,  
smile, make money.  
Inside there is nothing.  
Bankrupt.

Jacob Needleman remarks in a recent book, "It has been this way for a long time, well before this present era. But now we see it without any possibility of error. We can do nothing and we can be nothing. It has all vanished, every trace, as we stare blankly at the possible future that our mistakes have painted for us . . ."

"But," he says, "we can search."

No. It has gone even further than that. I can't move.

Acedia (*a* = not + *kedos* = care) is the absence of charity, a mortal sin, says St. Thomas Aquinas; for the soul without charity is dead already. But I cannot care on command, I can only fake it; and the false leaves no room for the true. I can try to live as if I could love, but don't want to lie to myself. Charity is the gift of *charis*, grace.

When I have come to the end of the satisfactions of the things of time, and charity has not yet dawned in me, I can slide through the zero of acedia into despair, *désespoir*, which is the negation of hope, as acedia is the negation of charity. Despair is a black hole, a dead end. Acedia, as Eliot went on to show us in *Four Quartets*, can be an end and a beginning.

When I can't move, I can sit still:  
empty, open, attentive, waiting:

*With the drawing of this Love and the  
voice of this Calling.*

**Martha Heyneman**

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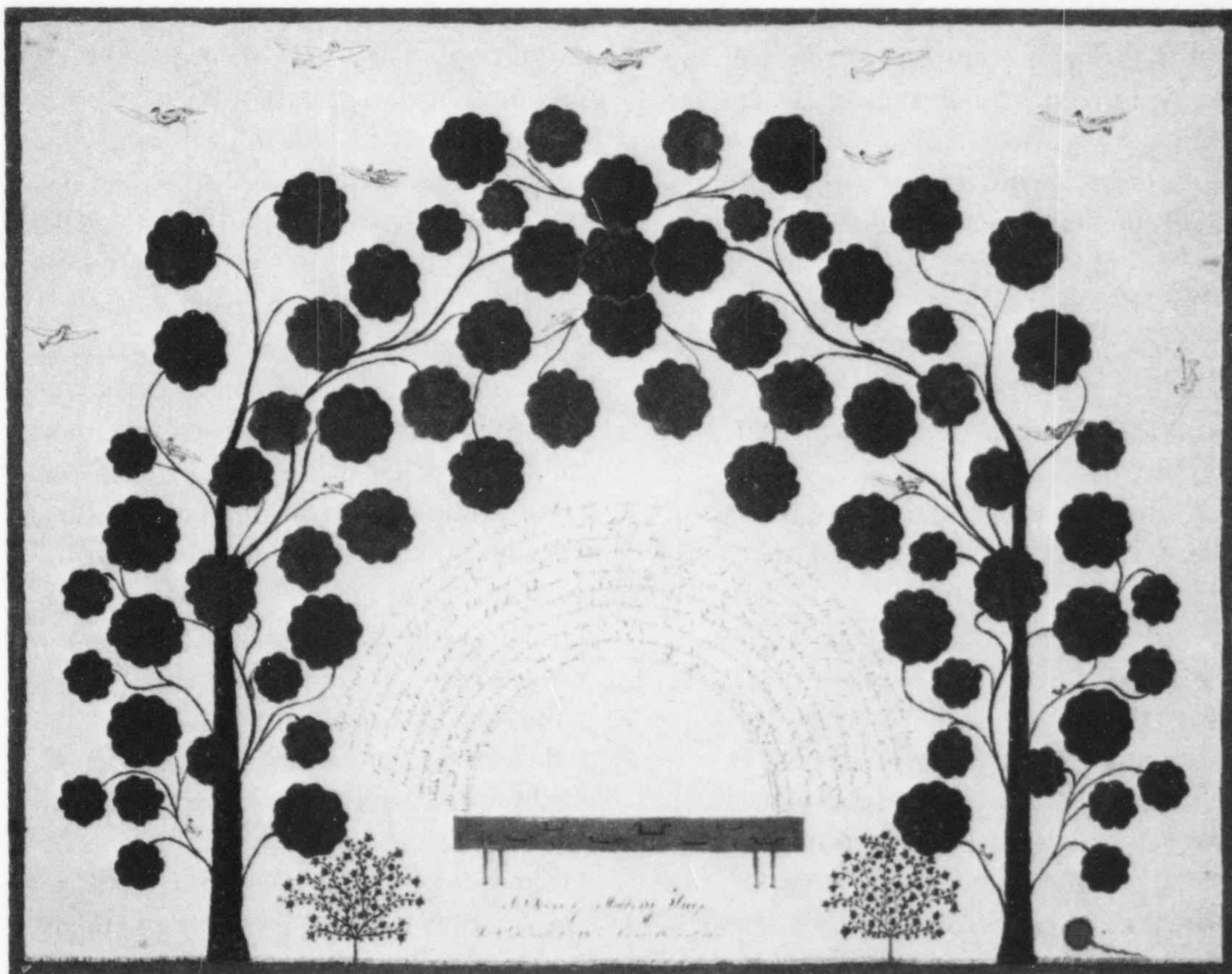
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# Experiments in Truth

JOHN LOUDON

At first blush, the seven deadly sins seem little more than relics from our religious past. The very notion evokes musty medieval treatises, a life-denying asceticism, a vengeful God who tempts us with forbidden fruit and damns us for taking it. The quaint list appears to hold more promise for marketing a new line of perfumes than for guiding lives.

In fact, as a rock album proclaimed years ago, what were once vices are now virtues. Far from being the root of evil, pride is the glory of the robust psyche. Greed, the desire for what we don't have, fuels our consumer society. Lust, as Jimmy Carter found out, is just a benighted word for sexual freedom. While gluttony is hardly in vogue (since



it is at odds with the narcissistic pursuit of the perfect body), the privileged many passionately pursue the gourmet life. The only thing wrong with anger is suppressing it. Envy wears many masks (flattery, ambition, admiration), but being sad or mad about not having what someone else has, has become chronic and dangerous. And if laziness seems contemptible in a vestigially puritanical country, our lives are still shot through with the assumption that ease is better than effort, that leisure is the goal of life. Even sin, if taken seriously at all, appears more alluring than repelling. Our contemporary ethos is a quest for self-gratification that has refined the seven deadly sins into a way of life.

However, such traditional religious ideas as the deadly sins often work as signs of contradiction. The parables and paradoxes of great teachers prick the balloons of prevailing paradigms, and challenge us to move from the level of the sleepwalking ego—its drives, needs, immediate gratifications—to that of our true self. So a principal function of myth and tradition is countering trends of the day and inertial tendencies of the human spirit.

Certainly, our recent unshackling from pinched ecclesiastical moral codes has brought one sort of liberation to many. But real moral freedom involves advancing beyond adolescent rebellion to a mature evaluation of the truth in such old-fashioned teachings as the virtues and vices.

The words themselves are instructive. Virtue derives from the Latin word *virtus*, which means manliness (from *vir*), strength, excellence, and this original sense survives in such expressions as “by virtue of,” “virtually,” “virtuosity.” Vice comes from *vitium*, meaning lack, deficiency. The biblical Hebrew and Greek words translated by our word sin literally denote “missing the mark,” and more generally convey being out of order, going astray, running amuck.

Hence, at root virtuous living does not mean living an antiseptic, all work no play, goody-two-shoes existence—with the unspoken ideal a cloistered nun who never raises her voice above a whisper—but living that is vibrant, full-bodied, excellent. The virtuous life is full life. Whereas sin entails living in ways noxious to the human spirit.

From this perspective, the cataloging of deadly sins becomes vital, since it reveals those attitudes and patterns of behavior that are spiritually carcinogenic. The wages of sin is death. The deadly sins kill our spirits.

Still, you might well say, that's a noble sentiment, but how do you find out if it is true? How to determine if the seven deadly sins are indeed deadly, and not just a misanthropic code that keeps us from enjoying ourselves?

One response, of course, is the orthodox Christian stance of taking the teaching on faith, specifically on the authority of the Church. But acquiescent morality always seems an imposition to anyone who has experienced freedom in any other part of life. It feels heteronomous (an alien law), someone else's idea of what you should do. The challenge is to make this teaching our own, or to find another path for the heart.

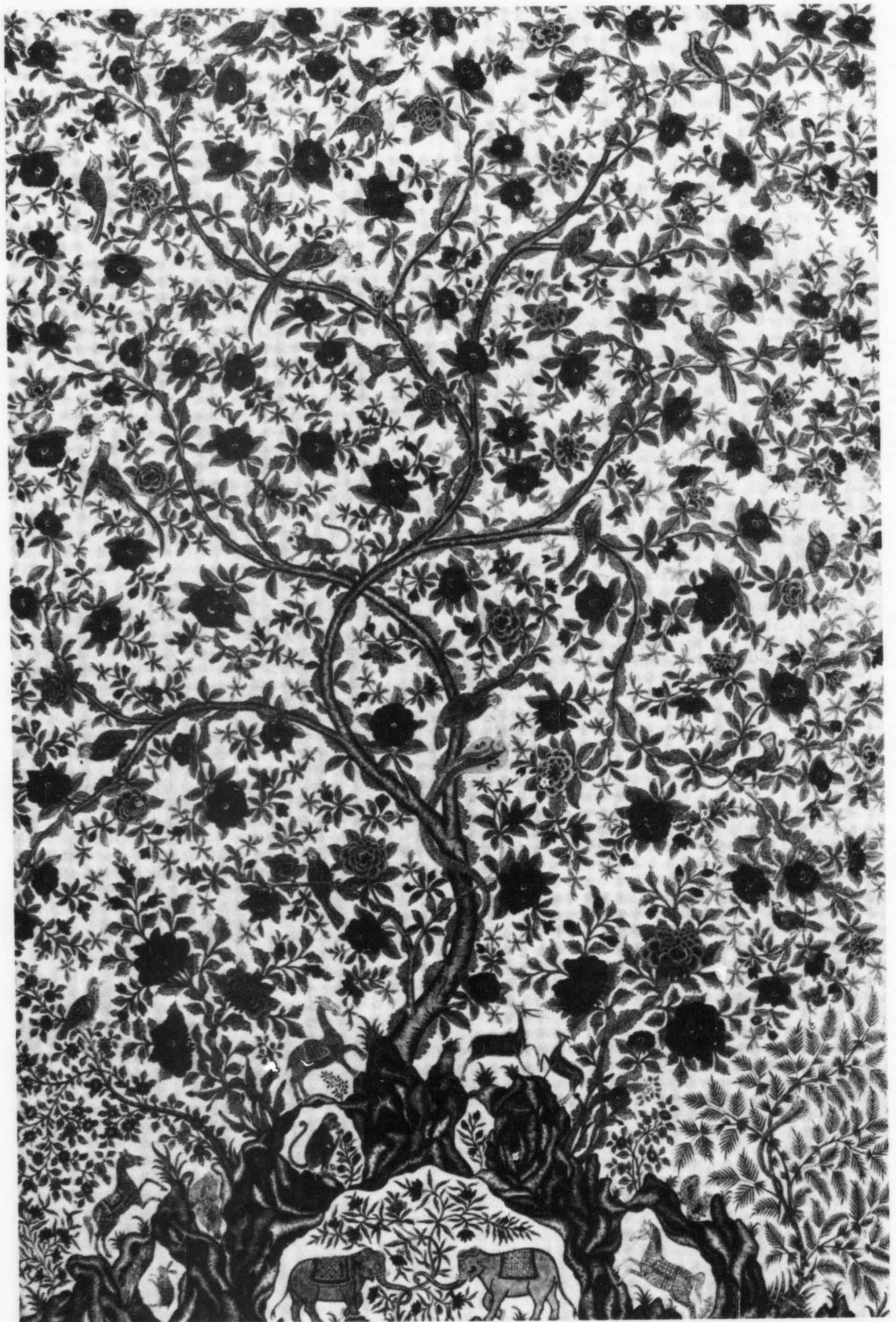
Ultimately, the only validity religious ideas and symbols have is the degree to which they make a difference in our lives. What other reality could they have? Religious traditions deserve respect because they enshrine hard-won wisdom (albeit along with lots of nonsense and cultural baggage). Just because some teaching is traditional doesn't make it valid in any vital sense, but it makes it worth hearing. The test is in the living. If sloth, for instance, is really a deadly sin, then we should be able to discover how it kills the human spirit.

All that I can propose, then, regarding the deadly sins, is to make this

teaching what Gandhi called an experiment in truth. That is, try living as if the teaching is true, and see what sort of person you become, what quality your life takes on.

In the present case, the life experiment—which, in fact, we are all daily conducting, consciously or not—is to discover which habits of the heart are truly virtuous (life-enhancing, conducive to excellence) and which are vicious (corrupting, deadly). The working as-





sumption is that virtue is its own reward: that human beings—just like plants or animals or, for that matter, human bodies—are so constituted that they thrive if they live in certain ways and wither if they live other ways. Taking the deadly sins seriously would mean testing the ways of feeling, thinking, acting that lead to full living.

Each of the deadly sins, then, is a hypothesis to be evaluated over time. Take, for instance, gluttony. Even if Henry VIII's eating style is not the current ideal, eating disorders are epidemic. We are urged to gratify every craving, experience every taste sensation, but never to get fat. Food has become a reward, a consolation, a weapon, an obsession. And what is gluttony if not an obsession with food? This disorder, in which food's place in life gets distorted and blown out of all proportion, may derive from a deep-seated fear that you will never get enough to satisfy you, or a feeling that food is the only compensation in an otherwise bleak existence. On the other hand, there is a way of eating that comes from a feeling of abundance, of gratitude for life's gifts, of strength and well-being, that is free and nonobsessive. Naturally fit people eat with attention and appreciation exactly what they want and as much as is truly satisfying, and don't worry about food until they're hungry again. And so the experiment would involve determining to eat in the most satisfactory way, closely observing how and why we eat and with what results, and gradually making conscious eating a liberating habit. So too with other enslaving, and ultimately lethal, addictions.

Greed also stems from a diminished sense of self. We need to get things to make us whole, worthy of admiration, etc. But the demands of the impoverished ego are insatiable.

Each of the deadly sins involves an impoverished sense of self, a feeling of personal inadequacy. We try to fill the

lack in us with something external, but the craving self is a bottomless pit. Just as Buddhism finds desire the root of suffering, the deadly sins identify the everyday forms desire takes (just think about what goes through your mind on any given day, and you'll discover the complete repertoire in full swing). Escaping the vicious cycle of sinful living amounts to freeing ourselves from the suffering that insatiable desire causes. For the deadly sins, interestingly, are not evil acts we might commit (murder, rape, theft, libel, etc.). They are the roots of evil deeds, the life patterns that make us the sort of people who do such things.

Living with pride, lust, anger, and so on, means being relentlessly driven by outside forces (appetites, Aquinas called them), not directing your life from within but lurching back and forth between incessant needs and stopgap gratifications. Effectively, the sinful life means not living in the real world, but in a blinding maelstrom of impersonal drives.

Pride is the pre-eminent sin, because it is selfishness—perverted self-interest—that is the vortex of this storm of desire. The selfish person—and we all are to some degree—is desperate, craving praise, admiration, gratification to fill the void inside. And the ultimate experiment is discovering how excellence and fulfillment come only in freedom from the drives of selfishness.

Performing such experiments in truth requires commitment, attention, and patience. We have to decide to settle for nothing less than the best life; we have to be awake to how and why we do things and what sort of people we are becoming; and we have to realize that living virtuously is a lifelong work of trial and error, forgiveness and rededication. Finally, it doesn't matter whether there are three or seven or twelve deadly sins. The crucial thing is to discover the habits that kill our souls, and those that nurture them. ■

# The Garment

P.L. TRAVERS

The bell rang in the outer court, a peremptory, musical summons. And with much jangling of keys, St. Peter unlocked the double doors, opened them a little way, and put out his head through the crack.

"Well?" he demanded. "What do you want?"

A man in a long white robe stepped forward.

"I want to come in," he said.

"What? Dressed up like an apprentice angel? Isn't that rather premature?"

"My garment represents myself," said the man. "You can read it as though it were a book. There is no stain on it anywhere."

"So I see. That makes the book difficult to read. Nothing to declare, as it were. I'm afraid you have come to the wrong place. We only cater for sinners."

"But surely I have a right to be here! I have led a blameless life."

"We do not deal in rights," said St. Peter. "Though there is grace abounding. Perhaps it would be more to the point if you told me about the wrongs."

"There are none. Guilt has passed me by. I have never practised avarice, keeping only enough for my simple needs, giving alms to the beggar at the corner and tipping waiters generously. Moreover, I have envied no man nor been a source of envy. I eat sparsely, once a day only, a meager dinner of herbs. And as for lechery, I deplore it. When I see a woman, even the passing swing of a skirt, I quickly turn my back on the scene or look in the other direc-

tion. Pride, too, I likewise abhor, bowing both to king and peasant, not setting myself above another nor boasting of my possessions. And I fill my days profitably, never an idle moment. Compared with myself, the ant is a sluggard; sloth finds no place within me. Last of all, I have never lost my temper."

"Alas, poor ant!" St. Peter grinned. "I feel for you, my good sir. You have told me a tale that is all perfection. But perfection is a heavy burden. I have not known one who could carry it."

"But, surely," the man was clearly dismayed. "You must take account of virtue!"

"Ah, virtue. That is a different matter. Virtue is always equivocal, a field of opposing forces. It is not merely lack of shortcomings and certainly not an unstained garment. It belongs to a man's totality, the bad along with the good. Did you think to approach the courts of Heaven without passing through—yes, and revelling there—the hostelries of earth? If you take my advice, you'll ring the bell at the Other Place. They would certainly teach you a thing or two, not least the meaning of virtue." He pointed downwards with his thumb.

"Down there? Never!" the man shuddered. "There must be some alternative."

"There are always alternatives," said St. Peter. "For instance, you could return whence you came and begin again at the beginning. The garment which you call yourself might then have something to tell me."

The man drew his robe about him, with a fond possessive gesture.

"After all my self-denial!" he said, and sighed as he turned away. "I never thought it was possible that this could happen to me."

"You never thought—leave it at that."



St. Peter's face disappeared from the crack. The doors swung together again and a key turned in the lock.

And the sun rose and the sun set and the work of Heaven went steadily on, systole and diastole, the heartbeat of the universe.

And after a time, a lifetime, perhaps, the man who had gone dejected away came once more to the door.

"What—you again?" St. Peter exclaimed. "But what have you done with that vestal garment, yourself immaculate?"

For the man was clad in a threadbare robe, spattered with patches of brassy color all shades of the spectrum.

"I am wearing it," he replied, turning about like a spinning top in order to display himself.

"Are you, indeed?" St. Peter chuck-

led. "Well, this vestment has clearly done some living. Come closer so I can read it."

He pored over the splashes of insolent color as though they were a map. "Ha! Yellow—bright as a wasp's wing! This is avarice, if ever I saw it! I would guess that the beggar at the corner no longer gets his lucky penny, nor the waiter his generous tip. And this strip of green must surely be envy. Covetousness seems to have burned in you for the chattels and qualities other men have. Warp and woof almost worn away.

"Now, what have we here in this patch of blue—greed, would you say, yes, greed indeed! No more dinners of herbs, eh, but gluttony at all levels, mind and stomach always a-clamor, calling, even when full, for more. And this—this broad explicit expanse of scarlet? Does the man who so deplored lechery still turn his back when he sees a woman, let alone the swing of a skirt? Who would have thought that virgin robe would have had such a tale to tell!

"And you are proud of its disclosures. See, the sin of pride declares itself here where the violet borders the red. Do you bow, now, both to king and peasant? I am inclined to doubt it. And what about the sluggard ant that you so far outdistanced? This splash of black where the thread shows through assures me that he who was never idle has lain in the very lap of sloth. And this torn flap of brilliant orange—what could it be but the sin of wrath? What tempers! What tantrums! What fits of rage! Well, well! Now let me see. Is there not something else?"

"What could that be? You have seen the lot. The sins speak for themselves."

"I am looking," said St. Peter, gravely, "for some small unstained segment—white, perhaps as the swan's wing—that would give them all their meaning."

"What could that be?" the man in-

quired. "I thought the list was complete."

"That which completes is repentance and I do not find it here."

"But these——?" The man gestured widely at the colors. "Aren't they enough? And what about *you*? Have you repented?"

St. Peter gave him a long deep look.

"I have wept," he replied, quietly.

"At the crowing of the cock."

At that the man turned his head away and was silent for a moment.

"I thought to cast down a golden crown around the glassy sea. But that is not to be, it seems. I have never shed a



single tear, nor learned aught of repentance."

"It cannot be taught," said St. Peter, gently. "It arises, of itself, in a man, when the time in him is ripe. Hitherto, as your robe tells me, you have let your life simply happen. You yourself have played no part in it. I have said there are always alternatives. Why not go and sit in the cave of your heart and confront whatever you find there—a caracole, maybe, of angels and devils. If so, you could join them in the dance, hand to one of them, hand to another, and so learn much that you now do not know. That garment will be your teacher."

The man drew his robe about him, and strode away shaking his head, clearly misliking the proposition.

And the sun rose and the sun set and the work of Heaven went steadily on, systole and diastole, the pulse of the Universe.

And after a time, a lifetime, perhaps, St. Peter, humming like a bee at his daily tasks—polishing the knobs of the doors, whitewashing the front step, shaking out the mat—looked up and saw a curious sight.

A man, naked but for some tatters of cloth, was sitting hunched up beside the entrance, head bowed, deep in thought.

St. Peter tapped him on the shoulder. "What's all this?" he demanded sternly. "Keep away from that fresh white step. I don't want footprints on it. Why, it's *you!*" he exclaimed, as the man turned, revealing a face that was now familiar.

The man assented wordlessly.

"But what are you doing sitting here with not a stitch of clothing on you but a handful of faded rags? What has happened to that famous garment?"

"It has gone," said the man, "except for these scraps. You told me to

repair to the cave of my heart. This I did, but unwillingly. And as I sat there pondering, telling over the beads of my life, seeing what I had dared not see and dancing with the opposites, my robe disappeared thread by thread, worn out by the strain of that confrontation and above all by the grieving: grieving for my sins, yes, in the measure that was needful—all men, in some degree, wear my many-colored gown—but mostly for that which had no color, the white and stainless garment I was pleased to call my virtue. I had fashioned it, I saw clearly, to hide myself, my pretentiousness, from my own eyes, let alone Another's. And I wept for shame who had never wept. That I could presume to come to this place, assuming the rights of one called and chosen. Alas, the pity of it!"

"The pity of it, indeed," said St. Peter.

"Yet, for all that, do not pity me. With my garment in shreds I am emptied out of all that I was, and am content to be so. Who am I? I ask myself and do not know the answer—no more than the worm on the leaf knows or bread cast upon the waters. And what, I also ask, is my purpose, without my protecting garment? That I do not know either but whatever it is I must try to serve it. If I have meaning it is there."

He hid his face in his hands again, lost in his own thoughts.

St. Peter regarded him silently for a long and brooding moment.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit. You must come in," he said.

The man raised his head, startled.

"But I am naked," he protested.

"And of all men unworthy."

"Your nakedness shall be your passport. And none are worthy here."

St. Peter flung the doors wide.

"Step over the whitewash carefully and make your way to the inner court. They will give you a garment there." ■

# The Human Place

## AN INTERVIEW WITH PAULINE DE DAMPIERRE

PARABOLA's first opportunity to speak with Pauline de Dampierre about the teaching brought by G.I. Gurdjieff came a year or so ago. The theme then under discussion was "Wholeness," and we were particularly struck by one idea. We asked her about the words of Gurdjieff: "He can be called a remarkable man who. . . knows how to be restrained in the manifestations which proceed from his nature, at the same time conducting himself justly and tolerantly towards the weaknesses of others."

Her comments about this description intrigued us and led us to explore the question further in relation to our present theme of "The Seven Deadly Sins." We find her insights on this question remarkable in themselves—original, subtle, and clear.

**PARABOLA** The last time we talked, we spoke of the whole man. How do you feel the whole man relates to the idea of sin?

**Pauline de Dampierre** What interests me is what is at the source of what we call sin. Usually we see sin as a manifestation of a certain intensity, or as an action which is exaggerated, bad, harmful. But what is at the source of that action? Compared to the source, the ac-



Photograph by Aymeric de Dampierre

tion is only an excrescence—something that bursts through from an undercurrent which is always acting in human beings.

The undercurrent of tendencies from which these impulses arise is a part of the whole man.

**P.** These are motivating forces?

**P. de D.** Usually these tendencies have a much greater influence on our behav-

ior than we imagine. They are always moving, and they are at the root of what has been called our automatism. If a person were to stop all his outer and inner movements at a given moment in order to see what is acting in him, he would nearly always feel a tendency which has about it something narrow, something heavy, something with a negative aspect that tends to be against, to be egoistic. All that is usually going on unseen. But if he tries to awaken to what is going on in himself, to be sincere, he will be able to witness, in addition to what could be called the "coarse" life in him, another life of another quality—much subtler, much higher, lighter—that is also a part of himself. The contact with this other quality of life helps him to have a quieter presence, a deeper vision. And he feels an urge at that moment to be open to a quality of this sort that would have a force, that would be a center of grav-

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*...every time we let ourselves go strongly into one of these tendencies, the tendency is strengthened.*

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ity. He begins to search for a way to serve what he feels would be his real being.

Then he begins to really know that if he lets his attention, his interest, be taken by his automatic tendencies, it deprives him of contact with that other source of life he is searching for. It could be said that there is a continual tendency to sin, in that sense. When these sins are spoken of as deadly, it means that these tendencies—if they are allowed to rule—

at every moment deprive the human being of the possibility of turning towards this real life.

**P.** When you speak of this undercurrent, do you mean the passive?

**P. de D.** Passive....To let oneself be continuously led by these automatic nonconscious tendencies is indeed to be passive. And when a person is passive, the automatic begins to take the initiative, to direct him. When he turns towards something else....

**P.** When he makes a contact between the two?

**P. de D.** Yes, then the undercurrent is able to play its normal role—its very necessary role.

**P.** Without a search, is there any sin? Is there responsibility without an aim?

**P. de D.** It is often said that man in his state of illusion about himself is not responsible, and perhaps in that sense it could be said that there is no sin. But to what extent is he absolutely not responsible?

**P.** Is he held responsible at some level?

**P. de D.** What we know is that every time we let ourselves go strongly into one of these tendencies, the tendency is strengthened. After a time it becomes very difficult to be free of it. It is in that way I see that one pays for his actions. And what about the harm that has been done to others through us? It is a very serious question....

**P.** I'm interested in what you say about

*...each one of these tendencies is there to sustain my life at a certain level; they are necessary and healthy.*

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these tendencies being natural. If they are natural tendencies, always there as an undercurrent, what are they there for? And what is the difference when they are there as an undercurrent and when they are acted out? Do they become sins only when they are expressed?

**P. de D.** One can feel these tendencies as inescapable parts of one's nature which to a certain extent bring data about oneself and the external world. I have to sustain my life. Many demands come to me from external life and I must sustain my outer life with the ego—as I am, I have nothing else. So it is through these tendencies that the ego is informed.

Take anger, for example. With a little vigilance, it is possible at the beginning of a movement of anger to surprise in oneself the sudden, sharp upsurge of an instinctive impulse that tends to immediately reject whatever is irritating us, making us suffer. This impulse is necessary—how could we get along without it? We would be inert: we could let our hand stay in a fire without reacting.

Take envy. There exists a law according to which when two masses of unequal size are near one another, the larger provokes a tension in the smaller. I should add that I know nothing about physics and do not know if this law prevails in that domain. But it is indubitably among the psychic influences that act on us, whether we like it or not.

Very probably it is thanks to this law that the child instinctively educates itself, seeking to imitate an older person. He admires him, wants to be like him, wants to draw his attention, and if he doesn't succeed in doing so, he is frightened. For adults, it is exactly the same.

And pride—don't we teach a child to be proud of his successes, of his strength? Lacking this pride, he wouldn't respect himself and wouldn't make himself respected by others.

In a way each one of these tendencies is there to sustain my life at a certain level; they are necessary and healthy. But if I live with them alone, I am an animal. A human being has to stand in-between and not allow himself to be taken by these things; not to let them raise opposition and justification. For this he must not let himself identify with them, and this means he must not let them make him forget the one and only thing important for him.

**P.** These sins, then, are engines of the ego? They drive the ego?

**P. de D.** I would even say that they are engines of our nature, because we can always find these tendencies acting in us. But if one can see them, one can be informed by them instead of being blindly taken.

You were speaking of the ego.... On the portals of certain cathedrals, one can see sculptures representing the vices and, above them, sculptures of the virtues. But between the vices and the virtues, there is something intermediary. And this is not shown. In fact, what remains hidden in the middle is man's wish to be sincere, to try to understand the meaning of his life. But for this, the underlying current must be perceived, and respected. Then the virtues take on form

on their own. It isn't necessary to seek them directly. They appear.

The rest of the time, it is ego speaking. There is no other alternative.

These virtues do not judge, do not reject, have no violence. They emanate; they radiate. Certain exceptional human beings prove that this is so, and even in someone who is very far from that, the existence of such a possibility can make itself felt.

**P.** In a way, it is like saying that only a person who knows fear can be courageous. There is no need of virtue if you don't have vices!

**P. de D.** What is vice? There are many ways to look at the subject—psychologically, analytically, theologically. I have no intention of adding to what has already been said along these lines. I simply want to emphasize one aspect that is rarely brought to light: the role of an inner search in relation to these underlying tendencies. Then the "vices" become simpler. You don't so much think of them as bad, but you feel strongly, painfully, that they are harmful to what you are searching for. They are there and you don't allow them to take too much place. You don't reject them, but you don't let yourself be engulfed by them, either. Through this process, something can be developed in us.

**P.** That brings a note of hope—and it bears on our earlier question about *why* the undercurrent is there.

**P. de D.** What is important is to begin to be able to hold oneself at the source. I heard during my Catholic upbringing that even a saint sinned seven times a day. But I would say that the tendency

*The power to act is in the body. The wish for evolved being comes from another source.*

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to sin is at every second.

**P.** And it is not one's fault that it is there?

**P. de D.** It is my human place. The power to act is in the body. The wish for evolved being comes from another source. And the two parts must meet. They do not often meet by accident; they meet only when something is acknowledged and held in respect.

**P.** These impulses, then, if held at the source, can actually contribute to a continued sense of presence?

**P. de D.** My sense of presence will only be real if I take these impulses into account. I may try to open only to something higher—perhaps it is possible in a posture of meditation, but even then not so easy. But the moment I begin to act these impulses are necessarily there, and must be taken into account.

**P.** Unquestionably, they have enormous force. It seems that something else of an equal force needs to be there. One can be aware of one of these impulses for a moment, and suddenly be swallowed by it. And then it is the only thing there.

**P. de D.** I would say that what is needed is not an equal force but another kind of force, more subtle, more active. As in chemistry, one can take a stone and introduce a very active substance and the

stone will dissolve. Well, the wish to be can be very active.

In fact it is not possible to experience an opening towards more freedom without obedience toward something higher. A human being has no other possibility. He may think he can be free, but he is either obedient and submitting to this higher, or a slave. But when he submits willingly, he may receive something of such a high quality that he will no longer be attracted to what enslaves him. Every time we are attracted, we think we find life in that attraction. We think we affirm ourselves. But at the moment of submitting to this finer force, we feel life of such another kind that we are no longer tempted.

There is a very strong relation between the action of these tendencies and a certain automatism of the body. Of course, we all know how easily tempted we are by physical satisfactions—resting, moving about, food, sexual attraction. But what I'm speaking of is much more hidden, insidious, almost beyond uprooting by ordinary means. It's a question of a certain "coarseness" inscribed in the body by everything that we have experienced, by the way in which we have allowed ourselves to be led along by these impulses. The body is accustomed to this heavy functioning even if outwardly it seems extremely light and free. The very texture of the body favors these impulses and is reinforced by them. It's a vicious circle. When there is an opening to something higher, the body quietens, and begins to be impregnated with something more subtle. It finds a kind of inner behavior much more in accordance with this opening. And in that way these tendencies begin not to have such a strong action on the person.

**P.** What is the place of feeling, here? Does feeling have no action at all? Is this a struggle only between the head and body?

**P. de D.** It is said that we have almost no contact with real feeling. Our emotions are very egoistic. There is no love in them. They always turn me to something other than what is there. When we feel emotions, there is a vibration so quick and tempting that it is difficult to resist. We always think it is our feeling, but it is not our feeling—it is our emotionality. If you observe yourself at that moment, you will recognize that that emotion is not yourself. You have no liberty; you are absolutely engulfed. Yet there is this mysterious power in the human being—to turn also towards something else in himself that may be very weak, nearly inaudible, but of another quality that he respects more. One could say that real feeling appears at those rare moments when what is happening in the individual is of such quality that his only wish is to be able to remain there, and to serve it as best he can. It is only then that he has a positive feeling of the moment, with no wish to be somewhere else.

**P.** There seems to be a sense in which the impulses of envy, avarice, and so on seem to have to do with the future or the past—with images of something that I want, and fear that I will not be able to have. I am taken out of the present moment by wanting to insure something for the future. Do you think that these impulses are based on fear?

**P. de D.** In our usual state, we have nothing real in us to rely on, so it is necessary for us to create projections and

ideas, to have desires of all kinds. We have no aim that would feed our presence. Every real search is about that—to find a place in oneself we could serve, where being could grow and play its role. Then it gives sense to life. When it appears, true relationship begins among the parts of the individual. He sees better, he is clearer at that moment, he is

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*Every time we are attracted, we think we find life in that attraction. We think we affirm ourselves.*

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no longer afraid of living. Even outwardly, something is more balanced. Without that, there is never an aim which brings me in contact with the sense of my destiny. But at that moment, no matter how briefly, I see that I am in contact with the aim that I've sought. I know what to place my confidence in.

**P.** We are almost forced, then, to imagine some kind of reality for ourselves, because we are not in touch with a true reality. We have to create some sort of world to live in.

**P. de D.** I would say that we haven't been taught that we could be open to the growth of a reality in us. It is a great discovery to touch something real and tangible in us—it is the goal of all the traditions, to help the individual toward what is real in him.

**P.** There is very little in our society that lends support to a search of this kind. Why should anyone believe you when you say that something more is possible for human beings?

**P. de D.** These ideas seem quite alien, it's true. Today, however, several great currents of spiritual search are trying to give them new reality.

For my part, I would say that one of the most remarkable aspects of Gurdjieff's thought is that it allows us to start from what we are—from our mortal sins, one might say, or more simply from our predominant faults. It casts a vigorous, surprising, light of truth on our multiple weaknesses, our prison. And it shows us how to listen to another voice, enter into contact with another reality.

How to be touched? One can be deeply touched by contact with someone who has begun to develop this in himself. Or special events can happen in life—a great happiness, a great sorrow, an impression of nature, of sacred art of the past—that can give an extraordinary feeling of much more life in us, much finer, much broader, as if the horizon were opening.

It gives us a taste that life should always be like that. It doesn't happen often and it comes through events outside of us. But the longing for it is always there. For we are speaking of a human need—the need that makes us alive.

To feel it, is to feel that it is true and must be searched for.

A real search is a preparation for an opening to the taste of that life. Gaining knowledge of everything that opposes it is the first step on the path. And it is a great adventure....

# Seven (and more) Deadly Sins

PAUL JORDAN-SMITH

A joke recently going the rounds says that humankind is divided into two groups: those that divide humankind into two groups, and those that don't. One might extend this witticism philosophically and say that there are those who create formal expressions of order and those who do not, perhaps because they do not perceive order, or maybe because they pay it no mind. Many such formal expressions have entered our thought without our knowing quite how they got there. Early and medieval Christianity expressed the sevenfold division of vicious human inherencies as the Seven Deadly Sins, or the Seven Capital (or Cardinal, or Principal) Vices. How did the formulation come about? Why, and in what sense, were these seven sins (or vices) considered "deadly"? How are they regarded today, their formulation having become an artifact of a bygone day?

The earliest formal expression in the Western traditions of the sinful nature of man is the Decalogue (cf. *Exodus* 20:1-17; *Deuteronomy* 5:6-21), which delineates areas in which human beings are prone to weakness. The number *seven* makes its appearance briefly in *Proverbs* 6:16-19: "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he

that soweth discord among brethren." The sacred number seven makes an early appearance here; however, these aren't the seven we are looking for, although three of these—lasciviousness (Lust), wrath (Anger), and Envy—appear in *Galatians*, 5:19-21.

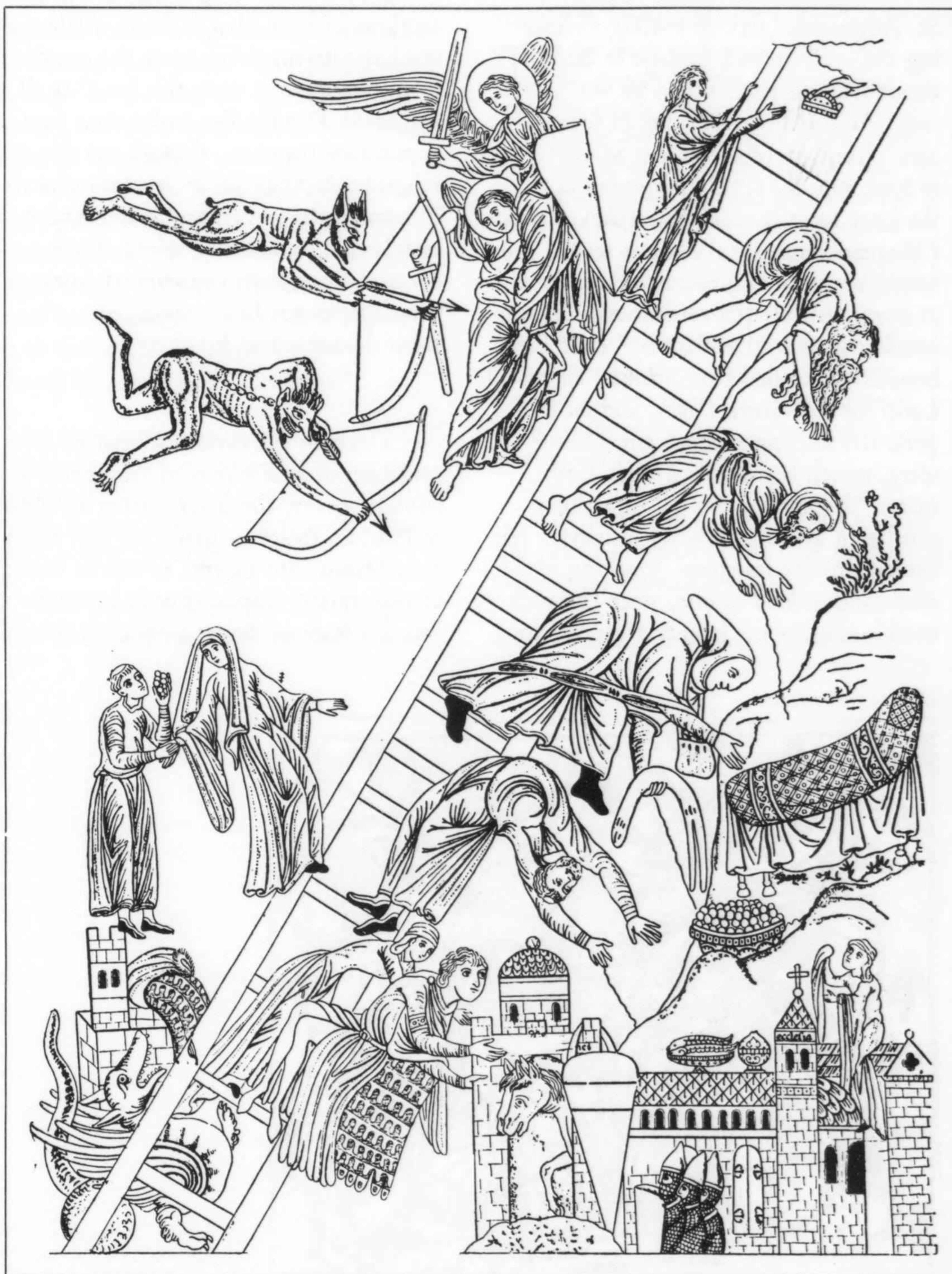
The next listing we come across is in one of the most interesting of early Christian pseudo-revelatory writings, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, composed around 148 A.D. The third section of the book contains several parables; of interest is the ninth, in which is described the building of a tower by twelve maidens in white raiment. Hermas is represented in the work as a particularly dense specimen with whom his various angelic guides become repeatedly exasperated, all but stamping their etheric feet at his persistent thickheadedness. In the fifteenth section of the parable, he asks about the tower, which is built on a rock rising in the middle of a plain surrounded by twelve mountains. The tower is the Church, it is explained to him, and the rock is the Son of God (not Peter, curiously). The twelve maidens in white raiment stand for various virtues, as explained by Hermas's angelic guide. There were also twelve maidens in black, whose office had been to cause various building stones of the tower to be rejected:

"Hear also," said [the angel], "the names of the women who have black raiment. Of

these also four are more powerful. The first is Unbelief, the second Impurity, the third Disobedience, and the fourth Deceit; and those who follow them are called Grief, Wickedness, Licentiousness, Bitterness, Lying, Foolishness, Evil-speaking, Hate."

This is one of the earliest attempts to delineate vicious inherencies in any

formal or orderly fashion. Of the twelve vices enumerated (any of which, the angel tells Hermas, is sufficient to prevent the Beatific Vision), none of the traditional seven is specifically given, although *Licentiousness* is akin to Lust. The inclusion of *Grief*, however, demands some explanation. This word in



the Greek of Hermas is *Lype*, which in classical Greek means *grief, distress, or painful sadness*. Among the early desert fathers, however, the word is taken to include *envy*, and as such it indicates not the pain of spiritual suffering but an exaggerated indulgence in wishing that things were other than the way they are.

We next come to the *Confessions* of St. Augustine (A.D. 354–430). Following the well-known passage in Book II about stealing pears when he was sixteen, Augustine gives a list of fifteen sins, citing six of the classic Seven Deadly Sins: *superbia* (Pride), *ignavia* (Sloth; the later term is *acedia* or *accidie*), *luxuria* (“Expensiveness” in Watts’s seventeenth-century English; later translated as Lust), *avaritia* (Covetousness, Greed), *invidia* (Watt’s “Emulation,” later Envy, here distinguished from *tristitia*, the usual Latin for the Greek *Lype*), and *ira* (Anger); the missing seventh sin is Gluttony, which is subsumed with Lust under “Expensiveness.” Augustine is not being systematic here, however. His fifteen sins (or fourteen, counting *ignorantia* and *stultitia* as one, since the verb used is singular) is largely a literary for-

mulation, not part of systematic theology.

In the first epistle of the Augustan writer Horace, dated around 20 B.C., there appears a list of vices which must be guarded against: *avaritia* (covetousness), *laudis amor* (love of praise, vainglory), *invidus* (envy), *iracundus* (wrath), *iners* (sloth), *vinosus* (literally, love of wine, by extension, gluttony), and *amator* (love of love, that is, lust). Although the Latin terms differ from the standard formulation, it is with this list that all of the Seven Deadly Sins make their first appearance together, though outside a religious doctrine *per se*. Horace was an Epicurean, however, and if one understands that philosophy aright, these excesses detract from the serenity (*ataraxia*) which Epicurus had established as the most desirable end for man.

Perhaps the earliest Christian formulation of sins is that of Augustine’s contemporary, the desert father Evagrius of Pontus. Evagrius made his way from Asia Minor into Egypt, where to the dismay of the Coptic church he established a Rule of desert asceticism. He



was a follower of Origen, so his theology was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (A.D. 553) along with Origenism in general, but as that council was patently manipulated by the emperor Justinian to exclude most Western theologians, it seems to have had little effect on Evagrius's reputation. Indeed, his *Praktikos* and other writings influenced St. Benedict in establishing his monastic Rule. Evagrius was famous for his dictum that women and bishops constituted the greatest temptations to monks, and that both should be avoided as much as possible.

The *Praktikos* is a collection of very brief, pithy chapters on aspects of the ascetic life. It was conceived as part of a larger work, but was also written to stand as an independent treatise. Early on in the work, Evagrius lists the "Eight Kinds of Evil Thoughts":

There are eight general and basic categories of thoughts in which are included every thought. First is that of gluttony, then impurity, avarice, sadness, anger, *acedia*, vainglory, and last of all pride.

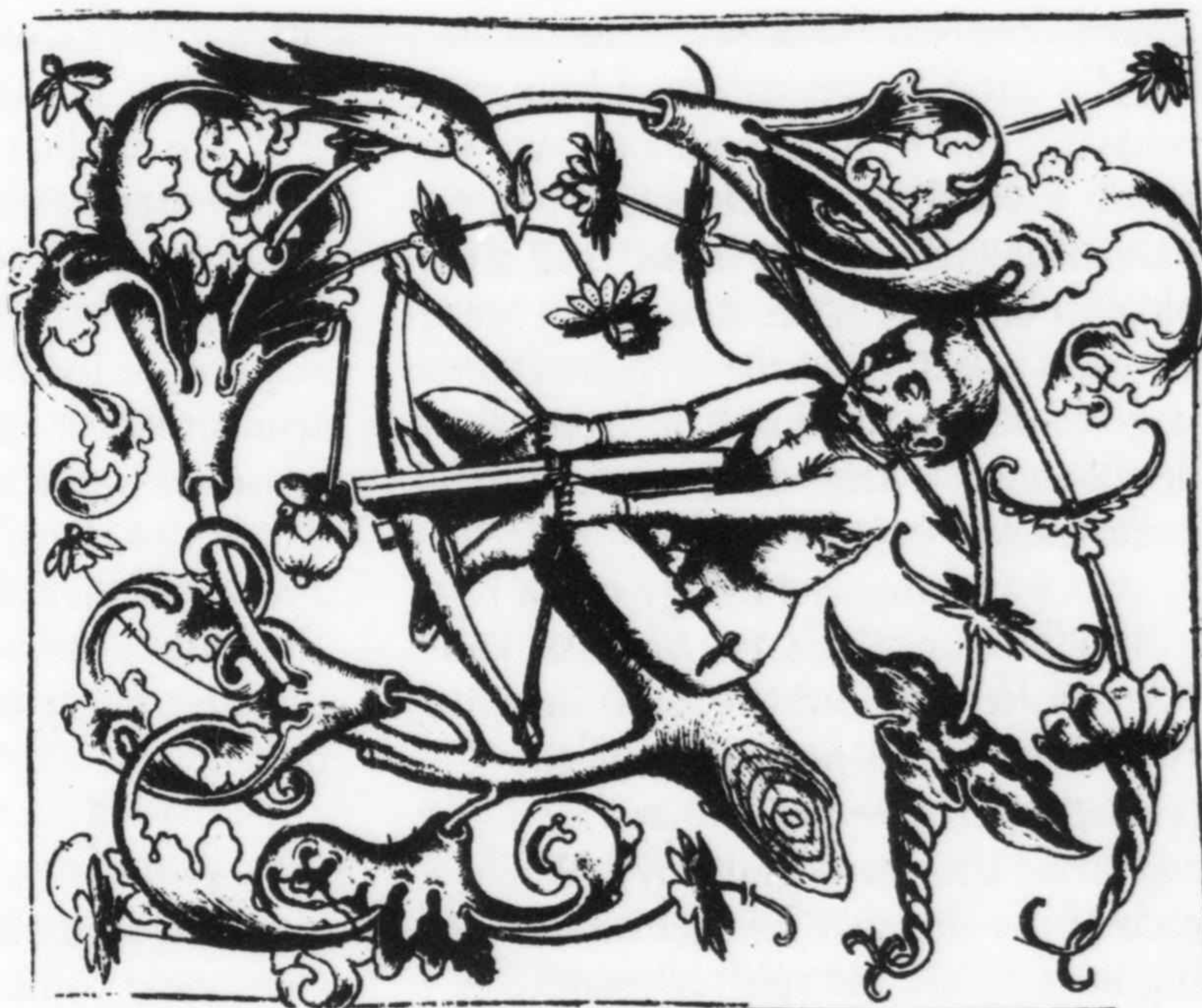
It is with St. Gregory the Great (A.D. 540–604) that we first find the sev-

enfold division in Christian literature. In his *Morals on the Book of Job* (xxxii, 87) we find the first formulation of the seven *principia vitia* (principle vices) or *peccata capitalia* (capital sins):

For the tempting vices, which fight against us in invisible contest in behalf of pride which reigns over them, some of them go first, like captains, others follow, after the manner of an army. For all faults do not occupy the heart with equal access. But while the greater and the few surprise a neglected mind, the smaller and the numberless pour themselves upon it in a whole body. For when pride, the queen of sins, has fully possessed a conquered heart, she surrenders it immediately to seven principal sins, as if to some of her generals, to lay it waste. . . . For pride is the root of all evil, of which it is said, as Scripture bears witness; *Pride is the beginning of all sin*. But seven principal vices, as its first progeny, spring doubtless from this poisonous root, namely vain glory, envy, anger, melancholy, avarice, gluttony, lust.

Gregory goes on (xxxii, 88) to give the names of some of the foot soldiers of the vicious captaincies:

From vainglory there arise disobedience,



boasting, hypocrisy, contentions, obstinacies, discords, and the presumption of novelties. From envy there spring hatred, whispering, detraction, exultation at the misfortunes of a neighbor, and affliction at his prosperity. From anger are produced strifes, swelling of mind, insults, clamor, indignation, blasphemies. From melancholy there arise malice, rancor, cowardice, despair, slothfulness in fulfilling the commands, and a wandering of the mind on unlawful objects. From avarice there spring treachery, fraud, deceit, perjury, restlessness, violence, and hardness of heart against compassion. From gluttony are propagated foolish mirth, scurrility, uncleanness, babbling, dullness of sense in understanding. From lust are generated blindness of mind, inconsiderateness, inconstancy, precipitation, self-love, hatred of God, affection for this present world, but dread or despair of that which is to come.

For any systematic treatment after Gregory it is necessary to leap over the next seven centuries to St. Thomas Aquinas, and examine his treatment of the various sins from several points of view (see the *Summa Theologica*, Qq. 72-73). By this time, the formulation of Seven Deadly Sins had become an established expression in Christian theology. Distinctions such as those between *mortal* and *venial* sins took pre-eminence in any discourse on the nature of human behavior, and from this time on, we see a shift towards the development of a pastoral doctrine of sin rather than a theological one. From the next seven centuries, the teachings of the Angelic Doctor were to dictate the limits of doctrinal development within the Roman communion.

As a systematic theology of sin began to develop, Gregory, Aquinas, and other writers divided the seven sins into two categories, namely *spiritual* sins (pride, anger, envy, covetousness, sloth) and *carnal* sins (lust, gluttony). While each of the sins may be regarded as having both carnal and spiritual manifesta-

tions, their centers of gravity, as it were, are determined by this twofold distinction. Eventually, they came to be given in a specific order and denoted by the acronym *saligia*, which is composed of the initial letters of each of the sins in their Latin denomination: *Superbia* (Pride), *Avaritia* (Greed, Covetousness), *Luxuria* (Lust), *Invidia* (Envy), *Gula* (Gluttony), *Ira* (Anger), and *Acedia* or *Accidie* (Sloth).

The principal use of the word *saligia* is to remember the sins, not only by name and number, but also by the *order* in which they are given. They are seen to constitute a progression, from the least to the most deadly. Thus *Pride*, in the theology of Gregory and Aquinas, is the "queen of all sins," but while both consider it distinct from *vainglory*, Aquinas holds *vainglory* to be a daughter of pride, derived from it but not itself among the seven. Although it heads the list, Pride is considered the most escapable, since humility, its contrary, can be brought about by human action. The state of pride, then, is a vulnerable state (one even speaks of "wounded pride"), one in which the penetration of suffering can still save the soul. The soul in its descent becomes less and less vulnerable as it approaches the utter passivity of sloth at the bottom-most place in the order. As Aquinas has it: "We might say that all the sins which are due to ignorance can be reduced to sloth, to which pertains the negligence by which a man refuses to acquire spiritual goods because of the attendant labor; for the ignorance that can cause sin is due to negligence. . . ." (Q. 84, Art. 4, Rep. Obj. 5). Perhaps one should say that the progression is from the least toward the most *deathly*, the utter inactivity of sloth being most like death.

The formulations of a time we have commonly come to regard as "re-

pressed" and steeped in ignorance seem unlikely today to touch our sensibilities. In 1912, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* presented a theology of sin which to a very great extent reflected the predominantly Thomistic thinking of the Church through the preceding eighteen centuries. The current edition treats the subject in psychological terms, almost as if sins were little more than quirks of the personality, to be treated by the modern

It is not in our power to determine whether we are disturbed by these thoughts, but it is up to us to decide if they are to linger within us or not and whether or not they are to stir up our passions.

Today, of course, the stirring up of passions gets mixed reviews. It is a virtue to feel passionate about some things—provided that they are the right things. But what are the right things? It



Pride riding on. 11th century.

pastor by psychotherapeutic methods. A more prevalent attitude regards the topic as outmoded, possibly dangerous, as if it were a sin to talk about sin. . . .

Are we not subject to sin in our enlightened days? Or have the Seven Deadly Sins no longer the force or significance they had in former times? Perhaps the fact that they all have various human inherencies as their centers of gravity has led to the notion that since sin is an inevitable aspect of human behavior, it ought to be treated much more tolerantly. To this, Evagrius replies:

was never a sin to be passionate about God, for example; yet religious passion today raises suspicions of mental illness. Doubtless much of what passes for religious fervor is just exactly that, but perhaps the baby goes out with the bath water rather often. A passion for the acquisition of material goods, on the other hand, is one widespread contemporary form of covetousness. While not universally considered praiseworthy, it often leads one to indulging in excesses which would have raised the eyebrows of the most liberal Epicurean. A case could be made that each of the Seven

Deadly Sins has come to be looked on almost as a virtue largely because in our mistrust of systematic religion we have lost the knowledge of distinctions. We can no longer discriminate when one of our appetites, carnal or spiritual, has become an end in itself, has passed from the disturbance of our thoughts to the stirring up of our passions. Still, each of the old catechetical sins is well known to us, only now we pay the inherent dangers little heed; since each sin has its virtuous counterpart, we are apt to mistake one for the other.

By *Proverbs* 16:18 we are informed that "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." The "haughty spirit" in the King James (and the Jerusalem) Bible is rendered as "arrogance" in the New English Bible. The *Septuagint* has it as *kakaphrosyne*, which means "evil thinking," but the generally accepted meaning is similar to the common understanding of *vainglory*. The distinction may be purely literary, arising out of the kind of parallel construction that characterizes *Proverbs*. In any case, it was taken as a distinction of kind by later scholars, resulting in theological discrimination.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* defines Pride as "the excessive love of one's own excellence," noting that in Aquinas, "vainglory, ambition, and presumption are commonly enumerated as the offspring vices of pride, because they are well adapted to serve its inordinate aims." Evagrius says that "it induces the monk to deny that God is his helper and to consider that he himself is the cause of virtuous actions. Further, he gets a big head in regard to the brethren, considering them stupid because they do not all have this same opinion of him." Of vainglory, he writes:

It leads them to desire to make their struggles known publicly, to hunt after the praise

of men. This in turn leads to their illusory healing of women, or to their hearing fancied sounds as the cries of demons—crowds of people who touch their clothes. This demon predicts besides that they will attain to the priesthood. . . . It is only with considerable difficulty that one can escape the thought of vainglory. For what you do to destroy it becomes the principle of some other form of vainglory. . . . I have observed the demon of vainglory being chased by nearly all the other demons, and when his pursuers fell, shamelessly he drew near and unfolded a long list of his virtues.

Among the virtues of the demon of pride, as Aquinas pointed out, is ambition, highly praised in our day in self-help books on how to get on in the business world; "Looking out for Number One" is the operative phrase. But there are other demonic virtues as well, some of them attributable to the ethics of the so-called "me generation," but they apply in less obvious form to the rest of us as well. Self-esteem and self-respect masquerade as virtues, and advertising appeals to these aspects of pride by presenting beautiful egoists who praise products because "I'm worth it," or "'cause I believe in me." We buttress our insecurity in the face of a society that threatens extinction of individuality by affirming "black pride" and "gay pride." These we hold to be unassailable by all but the most oppressive and repressive elements, considering such people "stupid because they do not all have this same opinion." Pride here asserts its true name, complete with its list of virtues, and we fear to face it critically because we no longer know how to distinguish the true from the false among the forces that move us.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says that covetousness "differs from concupiscence only in the implied notion of nonpossession, and thus may cover all things which are sought after inordinately." By 1912, covetousness was regarded as an

“inclination to sin,” and like several of the other sins, forms of it were regarded as “positively commendable” by the clergy under Pius X. This innocent phrase appears in a number of articles, the general tenor of which seems to indicate that *sin*, at least considered in the pastoral sense, was already not such a burning issue as it once had been.

The various words used to translate *avaritia*—covetousness, greed, avarice—appear to connote a hunger after things which one does not possess, and this is the sense in which it is understood above. Evagrius however sheds some interesting light on the subject by examining not the sin’s most superficial and obvious forms, but what in the contemplative life were its insidious temptations:

Avarice suggests to the mind a lengthy old age, inability to perform manual labor (at some future date), famines that are sure to come, sickness that will visit us, the pinch

of poverty, the great shame that comes from accepting the necessities of life from others.

Evagrius goes right to the heart of the matter: avarice is not defined by pure material greed, but by the principle of *thinking about what does not yet exist*, a kind of preoccupation with imaginary or future things such as hopes and fears. That one could be greedy about what one fears is a subtlety that escapes our ordinary thinking. The distinctive feature here is that the future enters into the sin. This differentiates it from *sadness* (*tristitia*, often related with envy and sloth), in which the future is replaced by the past and present, and which has to do with more immediate deprivations.

Covetousness appears, of course, in the Decalogue, specifically in the Tenth Commandment. It is like Lust, in that there is a craving to possess, but things rather than people. Greed is also similar to Envy, from which it is separated in the *saligia* order by Lust. One might say



An angel and a devil standing behind a layman and his confessor. 16th century.

that greed is envy without the personal dimension: "I want . . ." without regard to the fact that "you have."

So much has been written about contemporary materialism that it would hardly seem necessary to say anything further about our modern view of greed. As with the other sins, the obvious becomes a cloak for the subtler manifestations. Our daydreams, beloved to us for their therapeutic resolution of our hopes and fears, are also a splendid field of action for this demon. Since our indulgence in daydreaming has such a positive value, we often hear it praised as "creative." In this we are probably not far wrong, and the scholastics would be shocked by the arrogance of our attempts to imitate the Creator by spinning dreams in which our enemies are dispatched and our ambitions fulfilled to the nth degree.

Lust is "the inordinate craving for, or indulgence of, the carnal pleasure which is experienced in the human organs of generation" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*). Aquinas, in his chapter on concupiscence (*Summa Theologica*, II-I, Q. 30), makes the distinction between taking pleasure in things that are suitable to the nature of the animal and in things that are only apprehended as suitable—in other words "beyond that which nature requires." He is not speaking here of lust *per se*, but of desire, which manifests itself in a number of sins, lust being one of them.

In a time of sexual "liberation," we find it difficult to regard lust as a sin, as well perhaps as the other six. Like greed, the essence of the sin is imagination, which we take to be creative when it is not overtly destructive. Lust adds the personal element lacking in greed, but it does so in an impersonal way, treating the person lusted after as a thing, the "object of desire." It seems only too obvious to point out how ad-

vertising exploits our weakness in this area. It has been found, for instance, that men's pupils dilate when they are given a glimpse of female flesh, and that with careful timing an image of the product can replace the "object of desire" in a television commercial. Thus we are led from Lust to Greed, both sins upon which the advertising industry thrives.

Inasmuch as the ancient writers such as Evagrius used the word "sadness" to denote what the Latin doctors called envy, it seems appropriate that Aquinas should lead off his discussion of envy (*Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 36) by explaining why envy is a kind of sorrow: "Now the object both of charity and of envy is our neighbor's good, but by contrary movements, since charity rejoices in our neighbor's good, while envy grieves over it. . . ." It is also a capital vice because, "just as acedia is grief for a Divine spiritual good, so envy is grief for our neighbor's good." There is also a kind of envy which is accounted as a sin against the Holy Ghost (and therefore unforgivable), "namely envy of another's spiritual good, which envy is a sorrow for the increase of God's grace, and not merely for our neighbor's good."

Evagrius gives a more subtle definition of envy, focusing not so much on the sorrow for another's good (which does not seem very much different from covetousness) as upon the chimeras of present and past times, or of places other than here. In this regard, envy is similar to gluttony and lust, in being built on imagination. Another critical feature for Evagrius is *attachment*:

For sadness is a deprivation of sensible pleasure, whether actually present or only hoped for. And so if we continue to cherish some affection for anything in this world it is impossible to repel this enemy, for he lays his snares and produces sadness precisely

where he sees we are particularly inclined.

Envy can also be seen as a marriage of Greed and Lust, which immediately precede it in the *saligian* order. Whereas satiety appeases momentarily, though does not completely assuage those two, insatiability is the very essence of Envy. Satiety is anathema to its operation, and in this respect it paves the way for Gluttony. Advertising, a rich field for examples of the appeal to our baser nature, again and again exploits our inclinations to envy, usually through the dynamic of *comparison*. When we compare ourselves to our neighbors, we indulge in a mo-

ment of envy or of pride, for either we are better off than they or they than we. When it is the former, it is pride, and when the latter, envy. But since this gives rise to such virtues as ambition and avarice (and sometimes lust), we are assured that all is well with our troubled souls.

In the thought of Aquinas, the center of gravity of gluttony is the word "too": "too soon, too expensively, too much, too eagerly, too daintily." The world "self-concern" is germinal also.

The cure, in Evagrios's Rule, was a



The Virtues Slaying Discord.  
12th century.

bread-and-water diet, since "satiety desires a variety of dishes but hunger thinks itself happy to get its fill of nothing more than bread." In other words, he prescribes a return to a normal definition of the necessity of food.

The word "gluttony" has a strong visual imagery: we see an inordinately fat man or woman stuffing food down until he or she bursts. But is quantity the whole issue? C.S. Lewis provides the following from *The Screwtape Letters*:

But what do quantities matter, provided we can use a human belly and palate to produce querulousness, impatience, uncharitableness and self-concern? Glucose has this old woman well in hand. She is a positive terror to hostesses and servants. She is always turning from what has been offered her to say with a demure little sigh and a smile, "Oh please, please . . . all I want is a cup of tea, weak but not too weak, and the teeniest weeni-est bit of really crisp toast." You see? Because what she wants is smaller and less costly than what has been set before her, she never recognizes as gluttony her determination to get what she wants, however troublesome it may be to others. At the very moment of indulging her appetite she believes that she is practicing temperance.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* defines anger as "the desire of vengeance" and goes on to say that the sinfulness depends on "the quality of the vengeance and the quantity of the passion. When these are in conformity with the prescriptions of balanced reason, anger is not a sin." It can, according to the article's author, even be "positively commendable," under certain circumstances. It depends on the circumstances, of course.

Evagrius appears somewhat less flexible, taking anger in the sense of "a boiling and stirring up of wrath against one who has given injury—or is thought to have done so." He links it

with indignation, which he sees as its long-lasting effect, giving rise to "alarming experiences by night," followed by other evils, including a form of paranoia.

Aquinas holds that:

the movement of anger has a twofold tendency: namely, to vengeance itself, which it desires and hopes for as being a good, and in which consequently it takes pleasure; and to the person on whom it seeks vengeance, as to something contrary and hurtful, which bears the character of evil.

In this argument, he is following the thought of his principle guide, Aristotle, in stating that men do not seek evil *as evil*, but always seek what they apprehend as good and avoid what they apprehend as evil. He goes on (quoting from the *Ethics*):

" . . . anger listens somewhat to reason" in so far as reason denounces the injury inflicted, "but listens not perfectly," because it does not observe the rule of reason as to the measure of vengeance. Anger, therefore, requires an act of reason, and yet proves a hindrance to reason.

In a similar vein, but addressing himself more to the practical aspects of the contemplative life, Evagrius notes that:

Anger is given to us so that we might fight against the demons and strive against every pleasure. Now it happens that the angels suggest spiritual pleasure to us and the beatitude that is consequent upon it so as to encourage us to turn our anger against the demons. But these, for their part, draw our anger to wordly desires and constrain us—contrary to our nature—to fight against our fellow men to the end that, blinded in mind and falling away from knowledge, our spirit should become a traitor to virtue.

This note of Evagrius's indicates that the propensities which lead us into temptation have a positive aspect as

well, and may become virtues if we allow ourselves to be delivered from evil. It is in this sense that any propensity can be regarded as "commendable." The problem of righteous anger lies not in the anger *per se* but in the contamination of the self, so that it becomes *self-righteous*, and it is seldom that we see a truly righteous anger.

The critical words of Aquinas regarding sloth as spiritual negligence have been quoted already. Its manifestations in the contemplative life, as documented by Evagrius, bring other aspects into consideration most vividly. He speaks of *acedia* as "the noonday demon" (the main meal was at 3:00 P.M., during the monastic ninth hour):

The demon of *acedia*—also called the noonday demon—is the one that causes the most serious trouble of all. He presses his attack upon the monk about the fourth hour and besieges the soul until the eighth hour. First of all he makes it seem that the sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is fifty hours long. Then he constrains the monk to look constantly out the windows, to walk outside the cell, to gaze carefully at the sun to determine how far it stands from the ninth hour, to look now this way and now that to see if perhaps. . . . Then too he instills in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life itself, a hatred for manual labor. He leads him to reflect that charity has departed from among the brethren, that there is no one to give encouragement. Should there be someone at this period who happens to offend him in some way or other, this too the demon uses to contribute further to his hatred. This demon drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities, more readily find work and make a real success of himself. He goes on to suggest that, after all, it is not the place that is the basis of pleasing the Lord. God is to be adored everywhere. He joins to these reflections the memory of his dear ones and of his former way of life. He depicts life stretching out for a long period of time, and brings

before the mind's eye the toil of the ascetic struggle and, as the saying has it, leaves no leaf unturned to induce the monk to forsake his cell and drop out of the fight.

Simple "laziness," which contemporary usage attributes to sloth, does not fully characterize this sin, which has borne several names, from Horace's *iners* ("inertia") to Evagrius's *acedia* to the *tristitia* of Augustine and Gregory. A term like *self-pity*, on the other hand, conveys both utter self-centeredness and the sadness spoken of by earlier writers ("sorrow" is misleading, as one can feel righteous sorrow, i.e., remorse, for one's sins). One can be deceived by appearances here as well. Someone who spends leisure time dozing in a hammock or on a beach may seem lazy, but such a form of inertia probably would have been thought trivial by the scholastics, whereas the mindless industry of the "workaholic" might be seen as true spiritual negligence.

What purpose did such formulations serve in their day? Are they of any use now? By regarding these products of a systematic, if dated, theology as archeological specimens of a bygone day, and by resorting to stereotypical imagery (most of it carnal and material) instead of pondering the elements of the formulation, we trivialize these ancestral ideas and dismiss them from our consideration. If once they served as a form by which one might examine one's personal motivations and the movements of the soul, they now are little more than artifacts. Shy of religion, we discard the forms and the knowledge which they contain along with the enfeebled institutions which engendered them. We take the form to *be* the knowledge, rather than the container of a wisdom to be released to our understanding through active contemplation.

Which delighteth the devil no end. ■

## Savage Stocks

The boa constrictor, when he has had an adequate meal, goes to sleep, and does not wake until he needs another meal. Human beings, for the most part, are not like this.<sup>1</sup>

—*Bertrand Russell*

Every man is under that complicated disease, and that riddling distemper, not to be content with the most, and yet to be proud of the least thing he hath; that when he looks upon men, he despises them, because he is some kind of officer, and when he looks upon God, he murmurs at Him, because He made him not a king.<sup>2</sup>

—*John Donne*

I do not admire the excess of a virtue like courage unless I see at the same time an excess of the opposite virtue, as in Epaminondas, who possessed extreme courage and extreme kindness. We show greatness not by being at one extreme, but by touching both at once and occupying all the space in between.<sup>3</sup>

—*Blaise Pascal*

Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment.<sup>4</sup>

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

There are very few of those virtues which are not capable of being imitated, and even outdone in many of their most striking effects, by the worst of vices.<sup>5</sup>

—*Edmund Burke*



The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.  
The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.  
The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.  
The nakedness of woman is the work of God.<sup>6</sup>

—William Blake

And what then are the defilements of the heart? Greed and covetousness, malevolence, anger, malice, hypocrisy, spite, envy, stinginess, deceit, treachery, obstinacy, empty-headed excitement, arrogance, pride, conceit, indolence. If a man thinks and knows that these are defilements of the heart, and strives to get rid of them, he becomes confident in the Buddha.

—*Majjhima Nikāya, I. 36, Pāli Canon*

The demons told me that there is a hell for sentimentalists and pedants. There they are abandoned in an interminable palace, more than half-empty, and without windows. The damned wander through it as if they were looking for something and, quite predictably, soon begin to lament that the greatest torment consists of being unable to share in the vision of God, that moral suffering is much more acute than physical suffering, and so forth. At that point the demons seize them and throw them into the sea of fire, where they burn eternally.<sup>7</sup>

—*The False Swedenborg*

The human mind feels such an exquisite pleasure in the exercise of power; even those who are lovers of virtue are so excessively fond of themselves that there is no man so happy as not still to have reason to mistrust his honest intentions; and, indeed, our actions depend on so many things that it is infinitely easier to do good, than to do it well.<sup>8</sup>

—*Charles-Louis Montesquieu*



As fruits ungrateful to the planter's care  
On savage stocks inserted learn to bear;  
The surest Virtues thus from Passions shoot,  
Wild Nature's vigor working at the root.  
What crops of wit and honesty appear  
From spleen, from obstinacy, hate, or fear!  
See anger, zeal and fortitude supply;  
Ev'n av'rice, prudence; sloth, philosophy;  
Lust, thro' some certain strainers well refin'd,  
Is gentle love, and charms all womankind:  
Envy, to which th'ignoble mind's a slave,  
Is emulation in the learn'd or brave:  
Nor Virtue, male or female, can we name,  
But what will grow on Pride, or grow on Shame.º

—Alexander Pope

Any sin we have committed,  
consciously or unconsciously,  
deliver us from it,  
O Gods one and all!

From whatever sin  
I, a sinner, committed  
awake or asleep,  
may both past and future  
set me free,  
as if from a stake  
to which I was fastened!

May I be set free  
as if loosed from a pillar  
or loosed from the dirt  
after taking a bath!  
May all the Gods  
cleans me from sin,  
as butter is pure  
after passing through the strainer!

—Atharva Veda VI, 115

All that we ought to have thought and have not thought,  
All that we ought to have said, and have not said,  
All that we ought to have done, and have not done;

All that we ought not to have thought, and yet have thought,  
All that we ought not to have spoken, and yet have spoken,  
All that we ought not to have done, and yet have done;  
For thoughts, words and works, pray we, O God, for forgiveness.

—Ancient Persian prayer

. . . Nor do we delight in blessedness because we restrain our lusts; but, on the contrary, because we delight in it, therefore are we able to restrain them. "

—Baruch Spinoza

*Iago*. Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions; but we have reason to cool



our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts; whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.

—William Shakespeare, *Othello*, I, iii, 322.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. "

—Charles Dickens



Man will only become better when you make him see what he is like.

—Anton Chekov, *Notebooks*, 1892–1904

Bulstrode shrank from a direct lie with an intensity disproportionate to the number of his more indirect misdeeds. But many of these misdeeds were like the subtle muscular movements which are not taken account of in the consciousness, though they bring about the end that we fix our mind on and desire.<sup>12</sup>

—George Eliot

*Father Zossima*: If you sin and grieve even unto death for your sins or for your sudden sin, then rejoice for others, rejoice for the righteous man. Rejoice that if you have sinned, he is righteous and has not sinned.

If the evil doings of men move you to indignation and overwhelming distress, even to a desire for vengeance on the evildoers, shun above all things that feeling. Go at once and seek suffering for yourself, as though you were yourself guilty of that wrong. Accept that suffering and bear it and your heart will find comfort, and you will understand that you too are guilty, for you might have been a light to the evildoers and were not a light to them. If you had been a light, you would have lightened the path for others too, and the evildoer might perhaps have been saved by your light....

You are working for the whole, you are acting for the future. Seek no reward, for great is your reward on this earth: the spiritual joy which is only vouchsafed to the righteous man. Fear not the great nor the mighty, but be wise and ever serene. Know the measure, know the times, study that. When you are left alone, pray. Love to throw yourself on the earth and kiss it. Kiss the earth and love it with an unceasing, consuming love. Love all men, love everything. Seek that rapture and ecstasy. Water the earth with the tears of your joy and love those tears. Don't be ashamed of that ecstasy, prize it, for it is a gift of God and a great one; it is not given to many but only to the elect.<sup>13</sup>

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky

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# Fire Proveth Iron

D.M. DOOLING

*I have set before thee this day life and good,  
and death and evil...therefore choose life, that  
both thou and thy seed may live.*

—Deuteronomy 30:15,19

The problem of evil has baffled mankind since Eden; perhaps because it can only be approached through facing the mystery of good, and we do not like to acknowledge that good is a mystery. In our times especially, people dislike the thought of what is nevertheless inescapably true: the existence of scale; the idea of relativity in any more humanly personal sense than Einstein's; the reality of levels of "worlds" in which the human being is called to live in more than one at a time, and moreover to participate—as no other living being is called to do—in an exchange between them. Without a sense of this process, the understanding of good and evil, except in the most limited and subjective way, remains forever beyond our possibility even to approach.

We feel uneasily that we are surrounded by evil, that our world is indeed "sinful," although our therapists are constantly telling us for the sake of our "positive self-image" that we are good people—even if we don't often stop to ask ourselves what this means. We deplore violence, certainly; in or out of church or temple, we wish to be forgiven for our own occasional sins; we mean well. Something in us knows—vaguely, because it is mostly unrealized—that we have value; but *goodness*? "Why callest thou me good?" asked

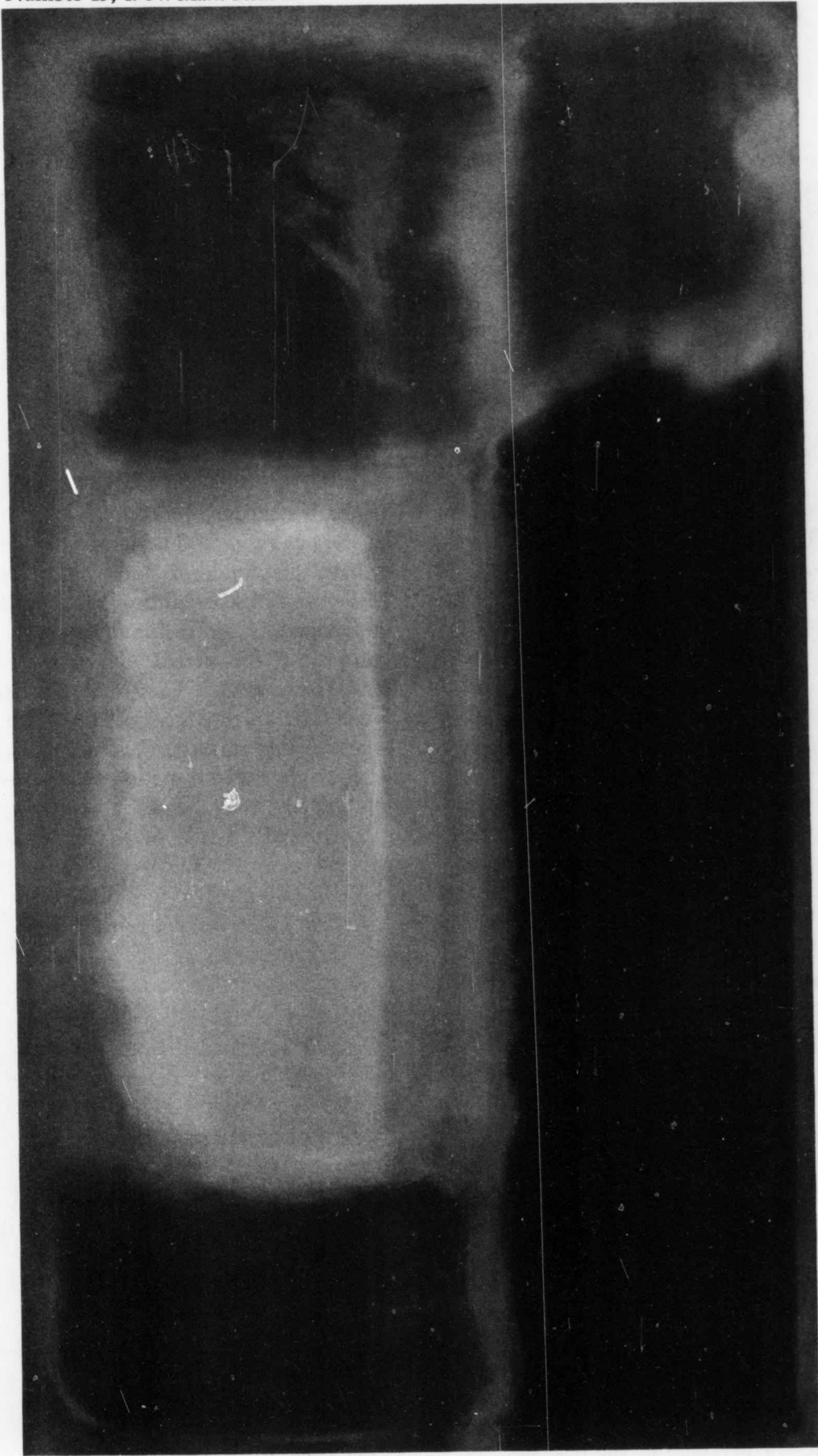
Jesus of Nazareth. "There is none good but one, that is, God."\* Even on the human level, can I say that I am wise and compassionate, as the Buddha taught, or that I love my enemies, as Christ commanded? Goodness and love: the two seem inseparable, a state of being and the action which is its manifestation; but who can say what that state of goodness is, or define the action of love? Is it really love we speak of when we say "I love my parents but I don't want to be around them," or "I love my children so much I can't help spoiling them"? These formulas leave one with a question, and lead to the confession that love, seen as action, is indeed a mystery; it is unknowable, for it is not of the nature of our plane of existence, and so it is incommensurable with the creatures and events of our level.

Nevertheless it manifests somehow on this level; I have some relation with it. Something in me strongly affirms that I can, I even must, approach it. What then could be the way toward this mysterious "good" that is forever above and beyond me, and how does it show itself, how does it relate with my human life?

Perhaps the greatest of all formulations of the human situation, as it is and in its possibility of transformation, is what we call the Lord's Prayer—the Pater Noster, so often repeated by those

\*Matthew 19:17

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who profess and call themselves Christians that it has given rise to the word "patter," which defines a mechanical recitation by rote. Yet the depth of meaning and possible understanding in those same words, if one listens to them, is unfathomable. Thousands have pondered them and hundreds, perhaps, have written down and shared their ponderings; and each time, there is more to be said, more to be understood.

The triple structure of the prayer has often been recognized; it is a triad of triads, of which the first and third are sometimes thought of as salutations, a ritual approach and withdrawal, and the middle one as the heart of the matter, that which has to do with man. But in my view, the whole prayer, from the first word to the last, is an examination of the process of exchange between levels in which the human person lives and moves and has his actual as well as his potential being. In the first two words, the relationship is established: Our Father; and in the next four, the distance—the necessary condition for the relationship to be valid. The first plea of the prayer is that we may remember that distance, that we may not lose the dimension of the sacred. "Hallowed be Thy name": it is the first necessity for us "to remember to keep it holy," not to forget the relationship nor the distance—to preserve the mystery. Otherwise we are imprisoned for a brief and meaningless moment on this earth, in this body, and our days indeed are as grass; our participation in the cosmic exchange is reduced to our bodies' nourishment of the earth itself.

"Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done—in earth, as it is in heaven"; the exchange again, the necessity of the resonance of

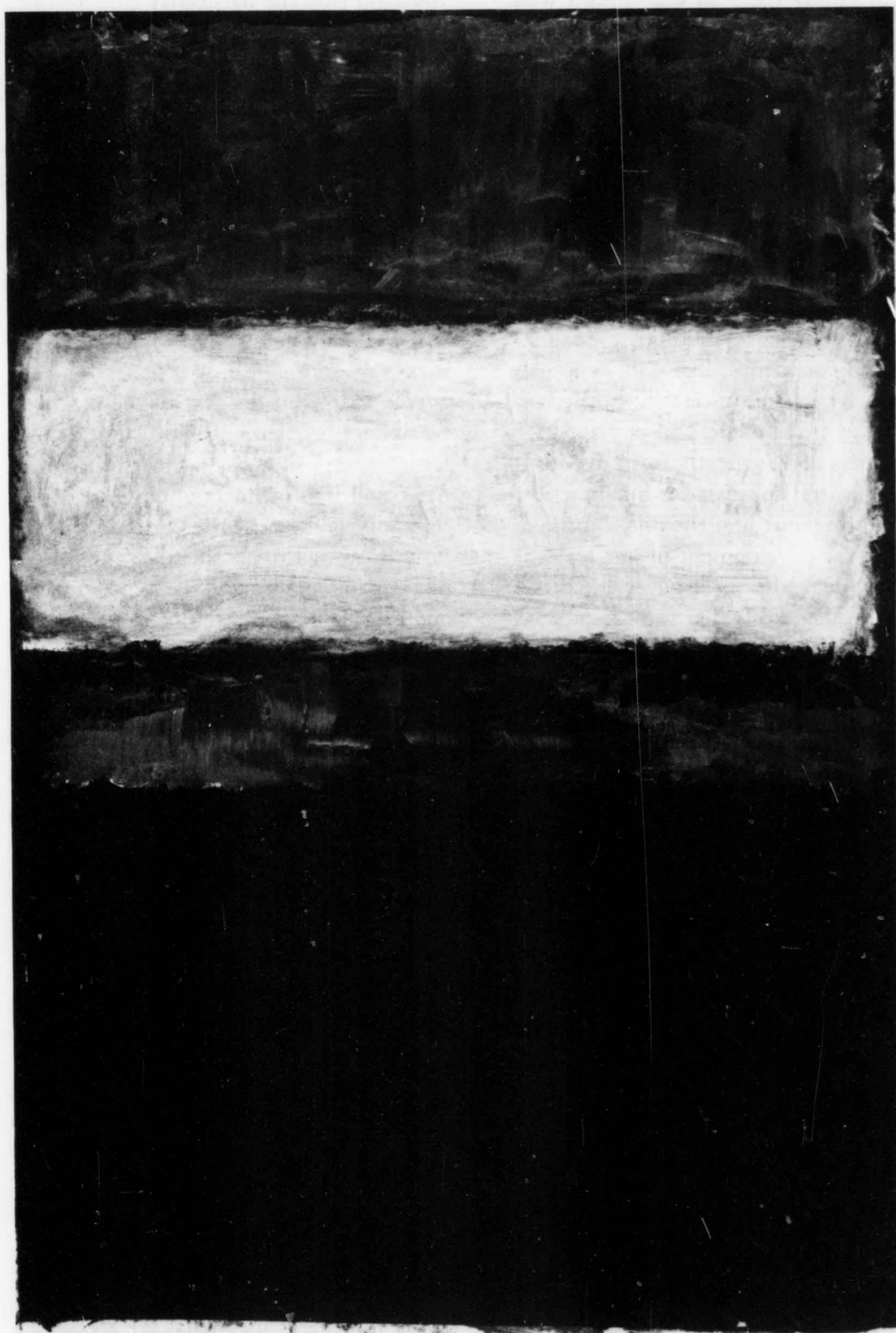
the higher within the lower. It is not enough that the Most High should be praised from afar; it must be "resurrected," incorporated, incarnated in fallible mortal clay; and in the process of striving to reflect the "good," somehow we are fed. We are fed even by our mistakes, by our sins. Sin is implicit in human being: in our lack of completion, the partiality of our nature; it is "imperfection," that which is unfinished, and it is the way we were made—intentionally, if we believe in a conscious Creator or creative process. The words *sin* and *to be* have the same root, and incompleteness—unrealized relationships, gaps of understanding and communication, blind spots, within and without—is the law of our being. "The strength of sin is the law," wrote St. Paul; but his message was that through the challenge and the discipline of temptation and resistance, sin and repentance, trial and error and trial again, man's possibility is to go beyond the law of his natural being, beyond death and its sting of unfinished business to the completeness of union with the source of life itself.

So we are told that there is a reason for sin; it might be said that there is nothing wrong with sin, if it takes its right place in a positive process. "Be-times," says Meister Eckhart, "it is the will of God that I commit sin";\* and one of his Talks of Instruction is entitled "How the inclination to sin is always beneficial" \*\* to the just man, the man

\* *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, by Raymond Bernard Blakney, page 50. (Harper & Bros., 1941.)

\*\* *Ibid*, page 12.

Untitled, 1968. Mark Rothko.



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of *good will*—which does not, I think, mean simply the man who means well.

For man was given will, but not much wisdom; he must choose, without knowing how; so it is inevitable that he make mistakes, but possible that he learn from them. He was also given a conscience, which is the heart of his possible consciousness; but like the rest of his being, will and conscience are also unfinished, rudimentary. Potentially the infallible knower of good and evil (is this, perhaps, our legacy from that tree in Eden?), conscience, like will, is actually small, weak, and uncertain; but it is a very fine instrument, and perhaps its weakness comes mostly from disuse. It is the central compass for our functioning throughout life, the one thing on which the development of our real humanity depends; yet it never enters into our considerations that the use of this instrument is a skill that has to be educated. As children, we are given vast amounts of information and of the most varied impressions (especially with the help of television), but not the slightest guidance, at least not in our schools, in learning how to appreciate or discriminate between the differences of levels in all this wealth of material. We don't learn that there is an "up" and a "down," a life and death, a good and evil, on a scale beyond ourselves and our concerns but between which we have inevitably to choose. And it is only conscience that discriminates truly and makes a correct choice possible.

Without conscience, will is our greatest danger; our choosing is fatally liable to self-indulgence, which "errs" from the direction of the higher. Sin is the error of a wrong choice which often is injurious to ourselves and others; we do a great deal of harm unintentionally.

But we are forgivable—by which I understand that the harm may turn to inner profit: food for conscience, new knowledge, finer valuations—to the extent that we acknowledge our kinship with other makers of mistakes, other committers of injury. Forgive us our sins, our debts, our trespasses, as we forgive others; yes, that depends on us. But only You can deliver us from evil!

Here where the "problem of evil" makes its appearance, it is generally agreed that even the text of the prayer becomes a problem. "Lead us not into temptation." Some say: How can goodness itself lead us into temptation? My difficulty is the opposite; I do not see how it can fail to do so, since choice is our destiny and our privilege as humans, and every choice is a temptation; so it would seem to me an unbelievable weakness, in this strongest of all declarations of an aim, to ask to be excused from the means of going toward it. But the phrase can be understood differently: not cut off from the words which follow it but taking them together, as seems to me logical and as the threefold structure of the prayer seems to demand. Lead us not into temptation except You deliver us from the "unforgivable," from total destruction. Lead us into temptation if You must—and it seems You must, since we can learn only through challenge, and the very movement of our life depends on this process of choosing; but allow us to profit by the mistakes we make that we recognize, the sins we fall into and repent of, as well as by the strength we acquire when we resist them. "Fire proveth iron, and temptation a just man. We know not oftentimes what we are able

to do, but temptation showeth us what we are," wrote Thomas à Kempis.\* We need the battle, we even need to be defeated sometimes, but not to lose our lives; deliver us, therefore, from evil.

The difference between sin and evil is not, it seems, just one of degree, although the degree of distance is certainly an element in the process. We cannot go too far, too deep into our errors, take on too long their shape and coloration, without the risk of losing sight of the indubitable if mysterious existence of the good. "By becoming unlike, thou hast gone far away," said St. Augustine; "by becoming like, thou drawest near."\*\*

We are alive, and so we are in a continual movement, going now in one direction and now in the other, in a constant choosing, a constant "temptation," which, if we were aware of it, could also be our daily bread. But in the comatose state of our consciences, we don't notice this continuing inner situation, nor do we open the eyes of our mind to it; we imagine that our changes of direction are imposed on us by something outside, and are oblivious to the fact that everything takes place within ourselves. We are taken over by the habit of the self-indulgent impulse into what seems like another life-movement but which is in fact inertia, and can lead only to a running down.

In this process there is a point of no return, a moment when the starved conscience finally disappears; all sight and even memory of the original direction vanishes. One is entirely lost to it and

\* *The Imitation of Christ*, I-13.

\*\* *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, translated by E.B. Pusey, page 134, footnote 2. (Everymans Library.)

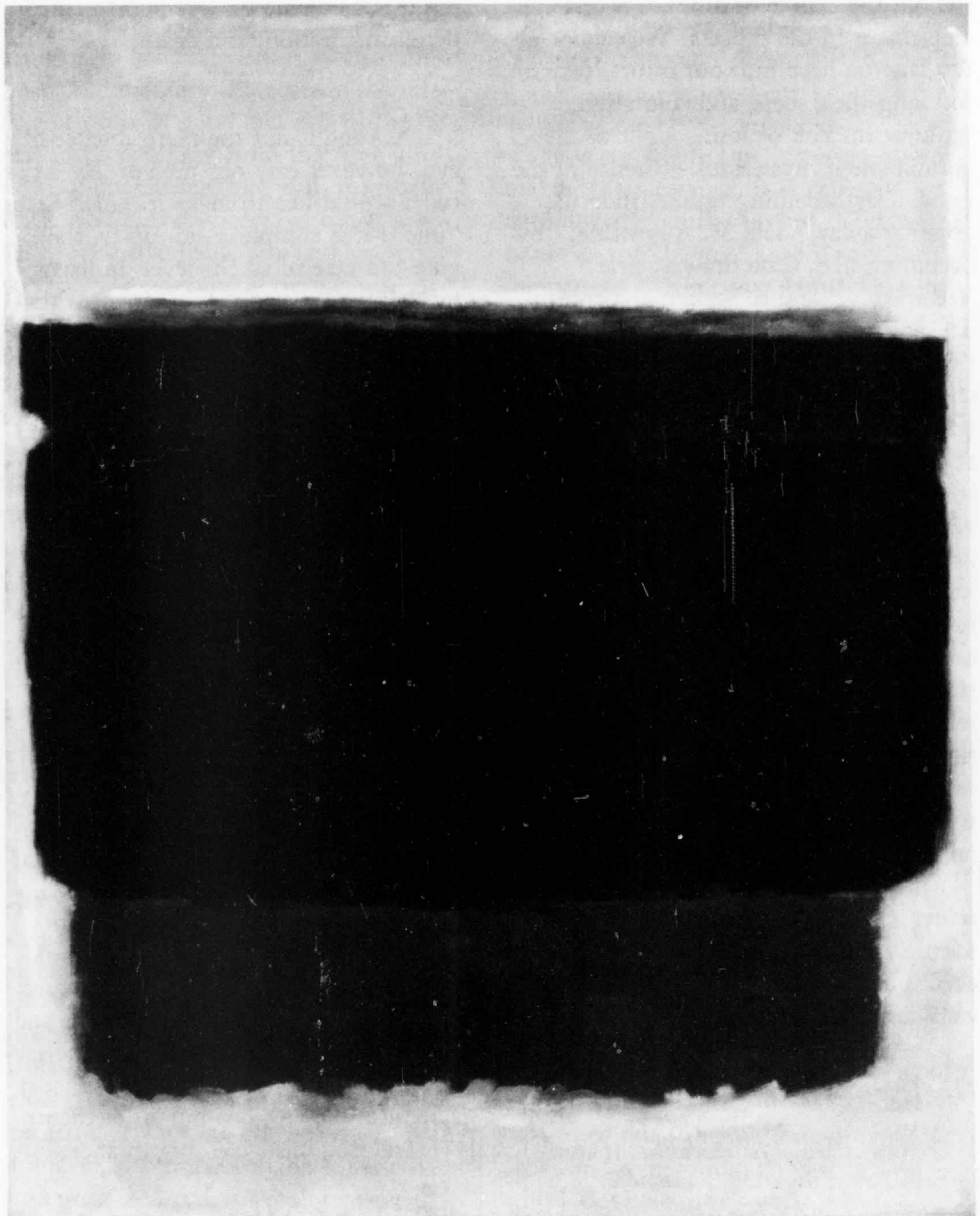
captured by the attraction of another magnetic pole. There the ego, always an eager candidate for power, has no rival in sight; and then indeed sins become "deadly," for they have entered the domain of evil, in which good, by being forgotten, is denied existence and nothing is left but the gravity pull to entropy, disintegration, and death.

Good is not the mere absence of evil, however easy our present-day attitudes would like to make it. Good is the "one"; it is completeness, unity, the give and take of all the levels in harmony. It is evil that is partial, for it is the banishment of good, the dismissal of the possibility of a process leading to wholeness. Evil is incompleteness by choice, a willed, because consented-to, disintegration; it is vice "embraced," as Pope puts it. And joined with the human will, it becomes a force, although in itself it is really nothing. "I enquired what iniquity was," wrote St. Augustine, "and found it to be no substance, but the perversion of the will, turned aside from Thee, O God, the Supreme, towards these lower things."\* It is man's will, his consent, that gives it its power, and its power is great and its presence everywhere: on every street corner, on every page of the newspaper. And behind that consent, without which it would be impotent, there is also nothing real, not even a devil—only the absence of something: a forgetting, a not-seeing. I used to wonder why stupidity—my own and others—was not counted among the seven deadly sins; but I now believe that it is because it is not one but all of them.

The Buddhists call it ignorance,

\* *Ibid.*, Book 7, XVI.

Untitled, 1949. *Mark Rothko.*



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which we tend to condone: it is not our fault if we don't know something! No one told us, no one taught us that! And that is dangerous, like all half-truths; but what is more dangerous is that we don't know that we are ignorant, we don't see that we don't see. We believe in our one-dimensional, evil world with its strange ego-god, and if someone tries to tell us of a different truth, we refuse to listen or—worse—say yes, that is exactly what I think too.

The fact is that we don't ever really see good or evil; we see "good things" and "bad things," or what we judge to be so, but we don't see their source or their goal. With more attention to our weak consciences (thereby strengthening and educating them) we could see at least the direction from which impulses and events come and toward which they tend, and draw from that knowledge some conclusion on which could be based a more intelligent choice. For choose between them we must. The will we were given by whatever force created us destines us to choose. But our will is not free; it is bound by our conditioning, by fear, by imagination, by habits of all sorts. Perhaps we are here just to free that will and take the blindfold off of conscience; perhaps the reason for human existence is that we should come to be responsible for the gifts that make us different from the animals, and whose full use could give us a different destiny from theirs.

In the words of one of the Upanishads:

Man is a creature of will. According to what his will is in this world, so will he be when he has departed this life. Let him therefore have this will and belief:

The intelligent, whose body is spirit, whose

form is light,...who never speaks, and is never surprised,

He is my self within the heart,...smaller than a canary seed or the kernel of a canary seed,...greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than all these worlds...

He, my self within the heart, is that Brahman. When I shall have departed from hence, I shall obtain him.\*

"Let him have this will and belief"—again, it is our choice. It is possible to begin to value the fact that "man is a creature of will" and appreciate ourselves for our real potential worth, our possibility of becoming instead of a taken-for-granted, imaginary "goodness." The human will could be free—we have examples of it; free to coincide with a higher will ("Thy will be done") instead of the self-will of the ego. There could be a will to obey the law and to stop our offenses against nature; a will on the side of life and the completion of its relationships, inner and outer—a movement toward wholeness. For will is action, a movement toward; it is close to being the equivalent of love. Certainly real love is not possible without it. "The seat of love is the will alone," Meister Eckhart wrote. "Love depends altogether on the will; to have more will is to have more love."\*\* For this kind of free will would be open to the light of conscience and the sense of responsibility for one's choice. ■

\*Khandogya Upanishad, III, 14. *Sacred Books of the East*, translated by Max Müller. (Krishna Press.)

\*\**Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, by Raymond Bernard Blakney, page 14. (Harper & Bros., 1941.)



## From *Talks of Instruction*

MEISTER ECKHART

### *How the inclination to sin is always beneficial*

Know that the impulse to wrong is never without use and benefit to the just person. Let us notice that there are two sorts of people involved. One is so constituted that he has little or no impulse to do wrong, whereas the other is often strongly tempted. His outward self is easily swayed by whatever is at hand—swayed to anger, pride, sensuality or whatever, but his better nature, his higher self, remains unmoved and will not do wrong, or be angry, or sin in any way. He therefore fights hard against whichever vice is most natural to him, as people must who are by nature choleric, proud, or otherwise weak and who will not commit the sin to which they are liable. These people are more to be praised than the first kind. Their reward is also greater and their virtue of much higher rank. For the perfection of virtue comes of struggle, or, as St. Paul says, "Virtue is made perfect in weakness."

The impulse to sin is not sin but to consent to sin, to give way to anger, is indeed sin. Surely, if a just person could wish such a thing, he would not wish to be rid of the impulse to sin, for without it he would be uncertain of everything he did, doubtful about what to do, and he would miss the honor and reward of struggle and victory. Because of the impulse to evil and the excitement of it, both virtue and its rewards are in travail born. The impulse to wrong makes us the more diligent in the exercise of virtue, driving us to it with a strong hand, like a hard taskmaster, forcing us to take shelter in doing well. The weaker one is, the more he is warned to strength and self-conquest; for virtue, like vice, is a matter of the will.



The light shines in the darkness and there man becomes aware of it. What is the good of light or learning except it is used? It is when people are in the dark, or suffering, that they are to see the light.

The truth is that the more ourselves we are, the less self is in us. That man who has denied himself will never lose track of God whatever his activity. If he makes mistakes, says bad things or does wrong, if God was at the bottom of it, he will take the blame and therefore these things should never distract us from our work. Illustrations of this are to be found in St. Bernard and many other holy ones. We shall never be free from such episodes in this life and we do not throw away the good grain just because the rats often get into it. To the just man who is well acquainted with God, pains and untoward episodes are quite fruitful, for all things work together for good, as St. Paul and St. Augustine both tell us—and this includes sin too.



Even if your sins were as great in number as all mankind's put together, still he would not count them against you and he would still have as much confidence in you as he ever had in any creature. If only he finds you ready, he will pay no attention to what you were before. God is God of the present; as he finds a man, so he takes him and accepts him, not for what he has been but for what he is now. All the evil and outrage done to God in sin, he will gladly suffer and suffer for many years to come, if only he may bring man to a better knowledge of his love, and make man's affection and thankfulness warmer, his struggle more passionate—as so often it is, after one has sinned.



The more grievous a man's sins seem to him, the readier God is to forgive them, to enter the soul and drive them out; for everyone is most diligent in getting rid of what is most disagreeable to him. The more in number a man's sins are, the greater they are, the more immeasurably glad God is to forgive them. The more they irk him, the quicker he is about it. The sooner divine repentance reaches up to God, the sooner the sins are swallowed up in the abyss of God—as quickly as I can shut my eyes. They are annihilated as if they had never happened, if only the repentance be whole.



*Excerpted from Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation, by Raymond Bernard Blakney. (Harper & Bros. 1941.) Reprinted by permission.*

# The Lion and the Unicorn

HELEN LUKE

Pride in the Christian tradition has always been regarded as the first and most deadly of the seven deadly sins. In the myth it was the awakening of pride in Eve and in Adam when they heard the serpent say, "Ye shall be as gods knowing good and evil" that led to their eating of the apple from the forbidden tree of knowledge. The Greek word *hubris* better conveys the full meaning of this sin—it carried the specific meaning of a pride so overweening that it arrogated to itself the power of the immortal gods, and those who were possessed by it inevitably suffered a fall which destroyed them utterly, as in the story of Icarus and his attempt to fly to the sun.

Psychologically these myths are entirely accurate. This kind of pride, once it invades and possesses the ego in a man or woman, becomes the root of all the other six, the root of our envy, anger, sloth, covetousness, gluttony, and lust. We can have no hope of redeeming these evils while the arrogant pride of the ego remains. All these six are distortions of instinctual drives for power or perversions of love; but *hubris* is an identification of the ego with the divine totality itself. *My* skill, *my* opinion, *my* comfort, *my* need, *my* safety, etc., are to be served as the essentials of life. I want something and I must have it because it is obviously my "right."

I have listed the seven sins in the order given to them in Dante's *Purgatorio*, which is symbolically the place, or the condition of soul, in which the ego slowly purges itself and is freed from each of them. The proud are met by Dante and Virgil on the lowest cornice, where they walk around the holy moun-

tain weighed down by enormous stones carried on their backs, unable to look up, to look anywhere but down at the ground—the *humus*, the earth of humility.

Dante's symbolism of the sufferings each sin engenders speaks with wonderful clarity to our understanding of the unconscious today. Always the suffering is precisely the sin itself known in the perception of its true effect on the individual (or collective) psyche. The envious, for example, sit with sealed eyes unable to see anything, for envy kills all true discrimination of values; the wrathful are choked and blinded by the smoke from their burning fires of resentment; the slothful never stop running—and this is particularly obvious in the driven busyness which is the bane of our society and which is, fundamentally, a slothful escape from the hard work of the journey within. Once a man or woman has said "yes" to the inner process of purgation these things are experienced willingly and gladly as the essential conflicts on the way to wholeness, to the marriage of the opposites. He or she has set foot on the spiral way of Dante's Mount Purgatory. If we do not so choose, however, we remain in the infernal state in which we shall suffer the opposite aspect of our hidden sin neurotically and unconsciously, until the day when the neurosis itself may drive us to the journey and be known as a blessing.

The image of the proud bent over under the weight of huge stones is especially powerful, for the stone has been from primitive times in all religions and cultures a symbol of divinity and immortality here on earth—a symbol of



Dante and Virgil As-  
cending the Moun-  
tain of Purgatory.  
*William Blake.*

the Self, to use C.G. Jung's term. For Moslems the black stone in Mecca is the center; for the alchemists for centuries the "lapis" was the image of the goal of their quest for the transcendent unity of the Self. In some versions of the Grail legend the Holy Grail itself is called the stone; for Christians Christ is the "stone which the builders rejected," "the headstone of the corner," and in the Apocalypse the true name of a man or woman which "no man knoweth but he that receiveth it" is written on a white stone.

We can perceive in those figures bearing the weight of the stones what it is that pride does to us. The *hubris* of the ego identifying with the Self, usurping

the divine power and wisdom, demanding always to be first and right, looking down on others from above with a contempt well hidden, perhaps, but nevertheless "deadly"—this soaring pride will inevitably constellate in the unconscious a growing weight—a weight often felt in the atmosphere which such an ego spreads in the environment, and which inevitably at last pulls down, crushes, and destroys that ego itself. An inferiority complex is as dangerous a manifestation of pride as is its opposite.

Moreover, pride is the first and most sinister of all the seven because, unless it has been faced and purified in the ground of our psyche, successful efforts towards purging of the other sins will

only lead to the worst and most poisonous threat of all—the hidden pride of spirit which rejoices in its own “goodness,” its own wonderful insights, its own martyrdom even, its own saintliness, even its own imagined humility.

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” So it has been since Lucifer fell from heaven. The proud reject and refuse to carry the weight of the stone consciously; the other kind of suffering is so much easier because the ego can still feel proud of its nobility or can project its cause onto someone or something outside itself. Lucifer, nevertheless, is also the light bringer. There is no one who does not seek to become a god, for that is the original sin. But having fallen, we may begin to see the light, to be aware of objective good and evil in the ego with its shadow, no longer as the center but as the servant of the Self. We then begin to understand the words of Julian of Norwich, “O happy fault that wert the occasion of so great a redemption. For when Adam fell Christ fell into Mary’s womb.” The original sin is also the original opportunity whereby we may come to conscious oneness with God. Dante shows us that the redemptive process for the individual is the lifting and the carrying with joy the weight of the Stone—the weight of the human condition exactly as it is in the pattern of the totality in each one’s particular life. This chosen carrying will force us to keep our eyes on the earth at our feet, on every smallest happening, the little things of every day, the often disregarded images that come to us.

There is no doubt at all about the initial “weight” of the Self when we consent to lift and carry our suffering and the agonies of fact. We are exposed to the constant temptation of self-pity and complaint about the nature of our particular weight of suffering. But the

moment in which we consent to it without any conditions on every level of our being, the miracle happens and the weight disappears. Most wonderful of all, we realize that the neurotic suffering which had for so long oppressed us has become a valid carrying of the burden and that it now reveals meaning in our lives and has finally forced us to abandon the ego as the center and glimpse the circle whose “center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.” In Dante’s imagery, as the poet with Virgil comes to the stair by which he will emerge from the state of pride, the angel of humility brushes his forehead with his wing; he hears joyful voices singing “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” and as he climbs he asks in wonder:

Master, what heavy load  
Has slipped from me,  
So that I walk with ease  
And scarcely feel fatigue upon the road?\*

He has begun to experience the meaning of Christ’s words, “My yoke is easy, my burden is light.”

In a lifetime’s journey such moments may come and recede again many times, but even once truly experienced they are known forever as truth, however emotionally remote they may usually seem. Dante has still a long and arduous climb ahead of him and a purging of all his lesser distortions of love. All those efforts to gain the heights are a lie unless we have recognized the lurking shadow of pride as it serves the ego and begin to be aware of the true nature of humility.

Like all the “sins,” pride is not in itself a sin or an evil. Nothing in the instinctual nature of human beings is a sin unless it is used by the ego with some kind of profit motive—even if that

\**Purgatory*, translated by Dorothy L. Sayers, page 161. (The Penguin Classics, 1974.)

profit motive is seemingly justified, respectable, "good" in a collective sense. As so often, the dictionary may open our eyes startlingly to the root meaning of words we so frequently use without discrimination. The root of the word "proud" is the Latin "*prodesse*," which means "to be beneficial," and "prod" is a variant of *pro* (for) and *esse* (to be). The old French root is *prod*, *prud*, meaning "good," "gallant," "brave." The first meanings of the English word given in the *American Heritage Dictionary* are all concerned with self-respect. Only meaning number 4 is equivalent to the sin of pride, synonymous with arrogance—the arrogating to oneself, to the ego, of that which belongs to the Self. It is easy to recognize in the root "to be for" the paramount importance of the first and most fundamental of the sins. To be for—what? Or whom?

It is therefore as vital for the inner journey in each of us to look as deeply into the meaning of the positive nature of pride as to recognize the deadly nature of its distortion. I once heard a dream in which there was an image of a man who had lived fully and deeply through much suffering and had come to a turning point in his life. A voice spoke in the dream and said of him, "He has learned the pride of the lion; he must now learn the pride of the unicorn." This dream led me to a long reflection on these two images of pride and their meaning.

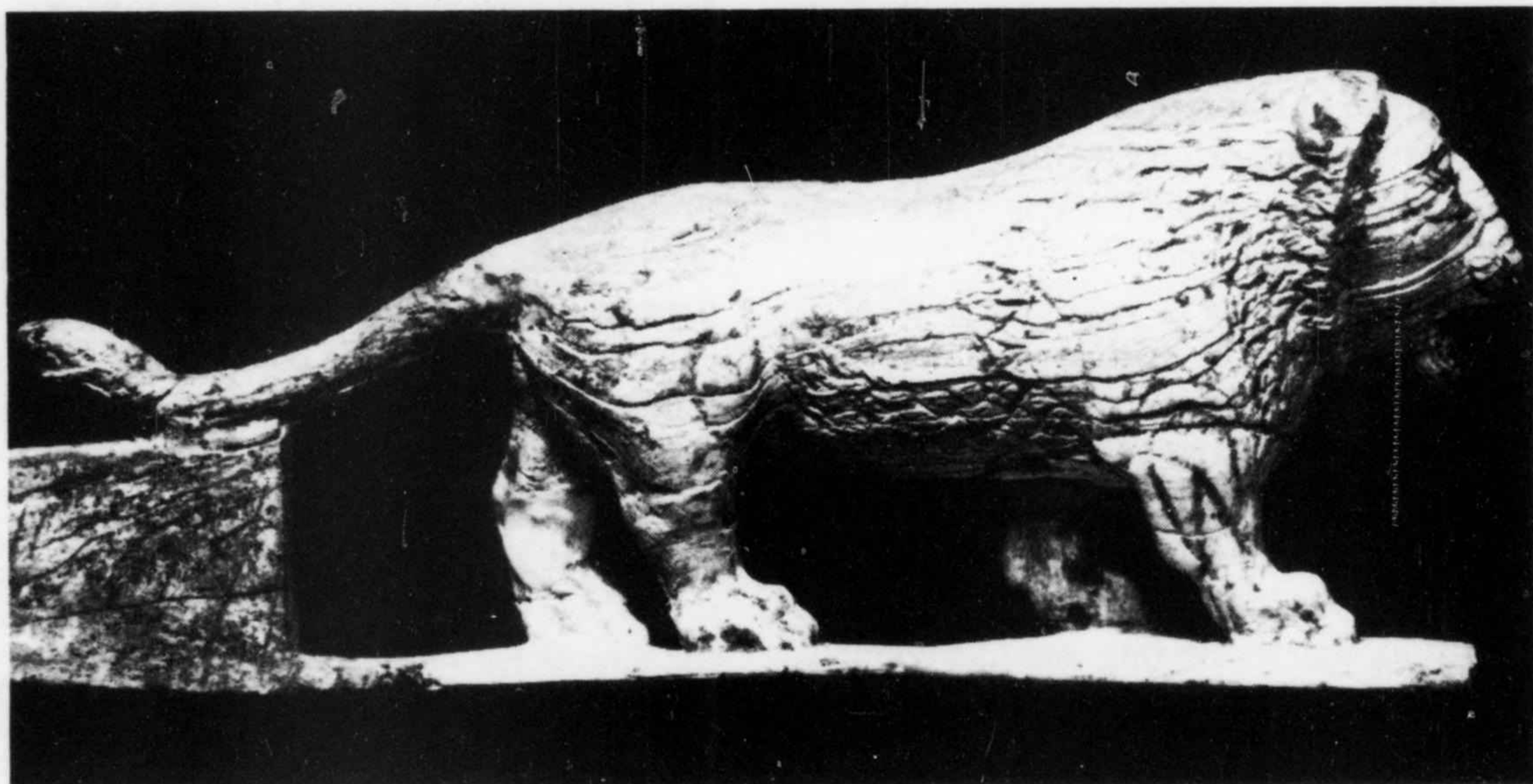
It is not by chance that we speak of a "pride of lions," for those old collective words often expressed a salient quality in the beasts or birds they described. The lion is felt by man to be a king among beasts. His pride is very different from the human sin of usurping a merit not his own; it is a natural pride which is the quality of being absolutely true to oneself. A lion who turns man-eating when unable through injury to catch his

natural prey becomes a pariah, cast out of his pride, for he is untrue to his lion nature, no longer a proud king among beasts. It is interesting to remember how Laurens van der Post writes in *The Heart of the Hunter* of the Bushman's feeling for the lion, and of his own observations. He says the lion is by far the most individual of the wild animals in Africa. Every lion you encounter will act in a different way and you can never predict his behavior as you can with almost all the other species. This is reflected in the beautiful Bushman story of how the lion singled out a man and forced him finally into coming out from behind the protection of his tribe, into taking responsibility for his own decisions.

This, then, is how a man learns the pride of the lion. He must emerge from the protection of convention and from dependence on collective authority and enter into life with the courage both to kill and be killed, as it were, a thousand times, as a lion must kill to eat and risk the guns of the hunters. For, once we have experienced the Fall and innocence is lost, we are plunged into the battle of the opposites, and we can never be involved in this battle as anything but unconscious pawns until we have learned that we must, symbolically speaking, kill in order to eat, and be killed that others may eat. "The pride of the lion" in this context is that which comes to the man who consciously accepts this symbolic truth, and the suffering it brings. Thus he emerges from the meaningless state of tearing others to pieces and being torn in the *unconscious*, which is so often the condition of those who preach universal good will and a bloodless kind of psychic pacifism. We have only to think of what would happen if all fighting and killing were to be expunged from the great myths of the world to realize that life would be meaningless without fighting. The long journey towards consciousness involves

constant and ruthless fighting and killing; primitive man would have starved without it, and a man in any age who tries to evade it on all levels is still sucking milk from his mother's breast in a state of arrested development. Any kind of pacifism, as opposed to the true understanding of peace, is not only doomed to failure, since it denies validity to one of the basic facts of the unconscious, but it actually breeds more and more violence, violence of an unconscious kind which kills in order to feed those hideous distortions of human nature, the pride of the ego, its power and

destruction through the unconscious into the lives of their neighbors. Man's urge to stir up war has increasingly through the centuries been generated by his boredom. He has an absolute need to fight obstacles, to "kill the dragon," to know in himself the heroic devotion which proves him a man—and, the fewer the natural obstacles in life, the greater his need for either an outer or an inner battlefield. That is the choice. Until there are enough individuals who find and fight their inner battles, wars must continue and the horrible thing is that war today, even without the atomic



its greed. To be released from this kind of violence, we have to accept the necessity of fighting with every ounce of our strength, but *on an inner not an outer battlefield.*

I believe that, as long as men are unable to fight and to kill and to expose themselves to be killed in their inner world, then it is a great deal better that they find the meaning of courage and self-sacrifice on an outer battlefield than that they live out their lives in a simulation of peace under which they spread

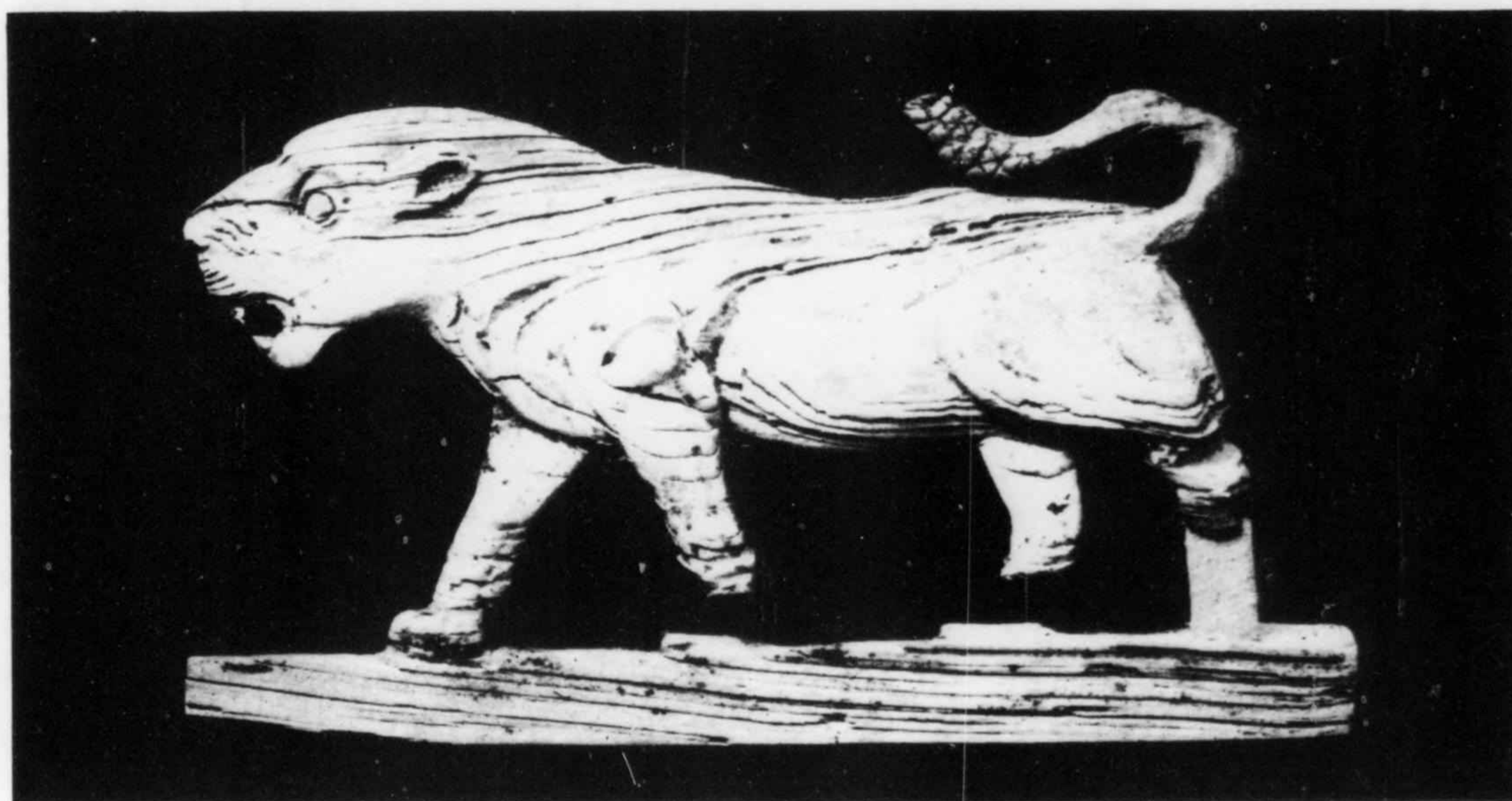
bomb, has become largely a matter of long distance destruction of targets, stripped of all individuality. It is the coldness of hell itself.

So it becomes more and more imperative that we dare to fight in our own personal lives; and it is a great deal better that we fight openly and outwardly the people around us when it is a matter of standing by our *essential* values, however immature these values may be, than that we hide behind a pacifistic pseudoharmony and then go about spreading hostility and bad feeling in an indirect manner. As long as we are split

and the opposites hold sway we will do as much harm to others in our lives as good. We may, however, think of the immense debt we owe to those who have dealt us mortal blows in the course of our lives, thus revealing to us our own truth, and while it does not relieve us of our guilt for our own unconscious killing, we still may know that perhaps our darkness has brought light to others.

Some pacifists hold that a man is almost as guilty for killing another man in war as he is if he kills for some personal end. But the practically universal

shocking, ugly thing. We are not animals, and for us to live out the animal side of our nature without conscious choice and ethical judgment is equally an offense against the nature of man. Jung repeated many times that a man—if he is to be true to his humanity—must live by an ethic which every person who seeks individuation must find for him or herself. When we have accepted both these things, the animal and the ethical, and we are willing to kill and be killed, if necessary, in the service of our deeply held values, then we have learned “the pride of the lion.” “I am come not to



judgment of mankind on this issue does not err, and the distinction is valid in the personal world. If a man fights out of his devotion to something—a value, a feeling beyond his ego's pride and desire—if he kills out of *need*, whether it be the killing of animals for food, or of men when an essential value is threatened, he is not guilty as he is guilty if he kills out of greed and hatred. It is here that the natural “kill and be killed” of the animal world brings us a basic lesson. In an Indian story the lion brought up with goats and refusing to eat meat is shown as an offense against nature—a

bring peace but a sword.”

The pride of the lion, however, is far from being the end. There comes a time when this pride must in its turn be abandoned, transmuted into the pride of the unicorn; and if a man refuses this sacrifice and the quest of the “unicorn” when the time is ripe, he will surely fall back again into a worse and more deadly state of personal pride.

When the pride of the unicorn is born in a man he has no more need to fight, for he has begun to find his nour-

ishment through that love which is beyond the love-hate opposites. The unicorn does not kill; he harms nothing. His horn is uplifted in a remote and lovely pride as we glimpse him now and then on his swift course. Yet like all true pride it is humble. The power of his horn comes to rest, in the myth, on the lap of the virgin (the ancient meaning of the word virgin was "she who is one-in-

Shire after the defeat of the Dark Lord, the Hobbits had to fight to clear the land of the evil that had crept in in their absence. For Merry and Pippin and Sam this was an inevitable duty, "lions" as they were, in spite of the killing it involved. But Frodo had become a "unicorn." He could never draw sword again, though he accepted with sorrow that it must be so for others. No hurt



herself"), and here he gives himself willingly to the knife of the hunter. The sage, the holy one, the Bodhisattva, who *chooses* to remain in this world, as it is said in the East, has reached the stage where no hurt of any kind goes out from him or her. Nevertheless, being here in the world of opposites he is not freed from their effects. Consciously, willingly, he exposes himself to the hatred of the world, not in a weak and watery pacifism but having fought the bitter and bloody battle entirely within himself through repeated sacrifice.

Frodo, at the end of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*, is an image of this. At their return to the

went out from him, though, for the brief time that remained before he "went into the West," he suffered still from the wounds that he had taken in the days of his fight with the dark powers.

Surely we glimpse and faintly experience this "pride of the unicorn" every time we succeed in detaching for a moment from the battle of the opposites, repressing neither the one side nor the other, accepting both—a thing which can be done through the intense imaginative experience of a uniting symbol. When our feelings are hurt, or we are angry or depressed, if we make the effort to objectify the emotion, not rationally but through imagination in some

form or other, and so give it validity as separate from the ego, we are able to accept conscious responsibility for it as part of the suffering of all humanity. Thus a little bit of our ego's pride is laid at the feet of the "virgin," and for that instant no harm goes out from us into the world as we touch the final innocence.

Finally, here is an incident from Helen Waddell's beautiful novel, *Peter Abelard*.<sup>\*</sup> Abelard had been indeed a lion. He had been true to the love of his heart; true to the immense power of his mind in the teeth of all the violence of collective morality and of the dogmatic narrowness of the church. His reward had been the horrible suffering of physical castration, and the public burning of the book into which he had poured his deepest faith. He was another Job, refusing to pretend to a guilt he did not feel, crying out upon the injustice of God. Helen Waddell describes how he came to the end of that which I have called the pride of the lion, and to the birth of the unicorn within.

On the feast of All Saints Abelard came alone to the porch of a little country church. He felt shut out, abandoned by God and man. The words of the liturgy floated out to him. "The souls of the just are in the hands of God and the torment of malice hath not touched them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; but they are in *peace*." To him it seemed that the torment of malice had touched him and the hand of God had rejected him. He stood face to face with God, asking no pity, asking only for human justice.

"And standing there, braced against Heaven, that wind that had blown upon him once and been forgotten breathed upon him again. It came without observation, for the Kingdom of God is within. . . .

<sup>\*</sup>(London: Constable and Co., 1948.)

"He saw no heavens opened: he saw no Son of Man. . . he felt the grey breath of dissolution, the falling asunder of soul and body. For a moment: then his spirit leapt toward heaven in naked adoration. Stripped of all human emotion, with no warmth of contrition, with no passion of devotion, but with every power of his mind, with every pulse of his body, he worshipped God."

Now Abelard walked mile after mile through the November day, and as he walked his past life returned to him and he saw himself as never before. "Every sentence that he had written stood out before him, that glorious array of embattled spears. . . fighting for the conquest of the spirit's Palestine, for the worship of the Father in spirit and in truth. But for whom was the glory of that warfare? He had fought against ignorance, against spiritual sloth, against an easy faith that was the faith of gulls and not of men: he had written for his young men, challenging them to doubt, arming them against the deadlier sin of dullness: but did dullness keep a man more insensitive to God than pride?" He had written beautifully about humility but his heart had swelled as he had written it.

". . . Through what sore discipline of body and soul, through what crucifixion of his pride must he still go before he saw the Kingdom of God? For a moment his flesh and his heart failed. Then he raised his head and began walking steadily towards home. He was chanting as he walked the words that had held for him the torment of all longing and now were forever his. 'The souls of the just are in the hands of God and the torment of malice hath not touched them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: but they are in *peace*.' "

*Adapted by permission of the publisher from The Voice Within, by Helen M. Luke. (The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1984).*

# The Nut From Nowhere

JANWILLEM VAN DE WETERING

The sheriff's long cruiser nudged its nose under the archway of apple trees that protect my driveway. I immediately felt guilty. The sheriff is a prototype of avenging rough power—even his bulging belly is clichéd, so are his smart eyes, partly hidden by porcine protective slabs of fat, and his shiny boots ready to stamp out the protesting human worm.

"Looking for me?" I asked anxiously.

It wasn't me, the sheriff growled gently, but my disreputable mate, the Nut from Nowhere, he might care to chastise within reason.

My grounds lie between the towns of Sorry and Rotworth, in down-under Maine, and between these centers of advanced civilization ramble untidy woods. In one of the glades the Nut inhabits a transparent structure. An uneven number of ill-assorted poles support plastic sheets that sag down to the ground in heavy rain. When Nut rises under extended arms a thousand gallons of water cascade down the sides of what he calls Home, and Nut is ready for another day of beer. My friend is bald and toothless, obese with arms of avarice that reach out for liquid that slithers down his gut. Proud of his sinfulness Nut lolls about the alleys of our towns, leering enviously at what he cares to call "a bit of skirt." His low level fascinates me and we've been buddies since the

day, years ago, that fate made us hug. He often visits, to deride my efforts, and sneers when I tend to rise late and overnap later, grins at my attempts toward physical fitness, hoots at my uphill scrambling interrupted by uncontrolled downward slides. Nut represents some of my shadow side and my wife frowns when I buy him another crate of beer.

"What has Nut done now, Sheriff?" I asked tremulously.

"Ah," the sheriff said thoughtfully. "Ah."

The sheriff's shiny star of righteousness dazzled my weak eyes.

"What didn't he do?" the sheriff rumbled.

We were told what Nut did in the sheriff's choice of abbreviated wordage.

Our twin towns, to amuse and attract the summer tourists, stage a yearly festival. While pretty girls whirl batons and handsome boys dance break, the county's rich history is brought to life again. A schooner nuzzles up the river bringing a load of white people in black clothes. A majestic pine is cut down to make a mast for a King's vessel of war. A package of tea is sprinkled on the marina's oil-topped waves. The first factory belches smoke and an Indian girl, clad in strips of birch, tries to escape in a birch canoe. Everyone trots out to embrace the out-of-staters.

"Where were *you*?" the sheriff grunted.

My guilt surged again. We could easily have gone, done up in checkered shirts and loggers' jeans, to smile our welcome to dollar-shedding tourists.

My wife blushed. "We forgot."

"Yeh." Ham hands slid toward the overcharged Magnums. "Next time better. Your presence is required to restrain your friend. Nut was there all right, wishing everyone a good day."

"Nice Nut," my wife and I chorused.

Not so nice, as our overlord explained. Nut had waved a human skull attached to a stick. "Enjoy, enjoy," Nut had been shrieking, spoiling sales while his horrid symbol bobbed. Not nice at all.

"Go talk to him," the sheriff rumbled. "You'll do that for me?"

"A real skull?" my wife asked.

"No, an imitation, put together from a hobby-box."

"Is that illegal?" I asked.

"It's a free country," the sheriff snarled, "even so, even so. Talk to him, Van, we don't want to lose our patience."



I set out at once. The path to my friend's abode is paved with good intentions. A man approached me on the path. "Hi," I said, "how're you doing, Nut?"

No one else lives in the rambling woods between Sorry and Rotworth. "Is it you?" I asked, for I like to be sure. Nut looked lean and dapper and his smiling mouth displayed a complete set of sparkling dentures. He wore an immaculate combination of bib overalls and off-shade denim shirt that is advertised in our garden catalogue, under the type of hat featured in Steve Spielberg movies. Nut's shoes glowed under a healthy layer of waterproof paste. A Swiss army knife peeked from a brand new holder attached to his polished belt.

"How are you?" Nut asked kindly. "How's your writing? Keeping up the Good Work?"

I squirmed, remembering that, in an unaware moment, I had, yes, called my work good. Nut sneered evilly at me then, while breaking into another six-pack. I gave him a six-pack now.

"No, no," Nut's hands were raised in complete refusal.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "This is good beer. Remember? 'Out of beer, out of luck'? Don't you always tell me that?"

"Nah," Nut said casually, leading the way to his glade.

"But what happened?" I asked on arrival, stammering as I looked at his neat cabin fitted together out of smooth cedar logs, finished with a trim of gleaming pine; stuttering as I admired the neat balcony on the recessed upper floor, and the sloping roofline, artfully built up out of hand-hewn shingles.

"Who did that for you?"

"Me," Nut said. "Care for a cup of tea?" He waved at artistically sculptured

garden furniture set on a mown lawn.

Nut made the tea, humming contentedly behind the open kitchen window. I looked about, something wasn't there.

"Nut?" I screamed. "Where are the million beer cans?" Right where I was sitting there had been the biggest and most splendid collection of empties within the Western Hemisphere.

"Sold," Nut said. "It paid for what I'll be needing now. Out of the ruin of the past the present is born."

We sipped the tea and I tried not to be disappointed. The tea was excellent, but I like to have the psychological buildup of others well defined.

"Cheer up," Nut said. "It may all come back."

"Your sins?" I asked.

"What sins?" Nut asked kindly, crossing neat legs, frowning a little at my cigarette smoking up a clear sky. "You can't give that up?"

"No," I said. "Aren't you envious anymore of the cartons stacked all over my desk?" Nut shook his head. "That wouldn't suit me now." He lectured, from behind a wagging finger. "There's too much negativity in envy and I changed my direction." The finger wagged upward. "I'm off to the top of the next hill from where I'll watch the view again." He patted my arm. "How about some home-baked pie?"

"Don't overdo it now," I said. "You detest sharing."

The Nut cut a generous slice. He wasn't having any himself. I tasted the pie. My wife would like the recipe. "You always hogged all your food down, Nut."

"What's 'always'?" Nut asked.

"You must be proud of your progress," I said peevishly. "Never thought you had it in you."

"I have everything in me," Nut said, "and it'll come out in good time."

"Nut," I said, "you can invite girlfriends here and engage in all the pastimes you used to slobber about before." I leered meaningfully. "Eh? Dallying in your very own dwelling?"

The finger wagged again. "It would interfere with my present direction."

That's right, how could I forget? Nut was climbing Mount Spiritual, to enjoy the view.

"Got tired of the smelly swamp, eh, Nut?"

"What's 'tired'?" Nut asked. "You do this for a while, then that."



He showed me his bedroom, with fresh sheets and puffed-up pillows. "Still sleep a lot?" I asked, for many a time that I tried to visit, Nut would wave me away from the heap of garbage that made up his lair.

"Just enough," Nut said, "to rest between going on."

I tried to provoke his anger, which was easy enough in the past. "Nutty-Nut," I said, "you'll never make it. Bliss is not for the likes of you."

"What's 'bliss'?" Nut asked. "If there's just bliss at the next end I would

consider the journey a waste."

"So what are you after, Nut?"

"To find out," Nut murmured, "as ever."

"That's good?"

"What's 'good'?" Nut asked.

"What's 'bad'? Who cares?"



I remembered the sheriff's errand and asked Nut about the caper with the make-believe skull. He didn't answer straight off but rummaged about. "This?" he asked, waving the adorned stick in my face.

I looked away. There was hair glued to the skull, luminous paint glowed in its sockets and some pinkish slime dribbled from between its broken teeth.

"Put it away, Nut," I begged. He did, sat down, and stared at me in wonder.

"And you're a writer," Nut mused aloud. "Your drivel gets printed, bound, and bandied about."

"Are you jealous again?" I sneered. He kept shaking his head.

"Why do you have to interrupt the flow of tourists this area needs for a living?" It was my turn to wag a finger. "What's so cheerful about death?"

"What's 'death'?" Nut asked, putting his hand affectionately on mine.

"It comes to all of us, Nut. We hate to be reminded."

"Who's 'we'?" Nut asked. "Are you really no more than a skeleton

dressed up in meat? It all goes on. Never an end to it." He kept staring at me.

"You should know that by now."

"The tourists shouldn't," I said crossly.

"That's why I was shaking my stick at them," Nut said. "It's nice work, waking up fools. It was nice before, when I was trying to get you to pop your dream, you in your palace on your estate, with your damned word processor, thinking *you* were doing good."

"You're doing better now, Nut," I said, studying his quiet comforts.

"You're getting there."

"Where's 'there'?" Nut asked, tipping my chair over with his foot. He helped me up and walked me halfway home.

"You're saved now, Nut," I said, intending the remark to be my parting shot. "You're out of sin."

"What's 'sin'?" Nut asked.

"Stop asking the meaning of every damned word I use," I yelled, shaking my fists under his clean-shaven chin.

"*You* tell me what's Sin."

His bright eyes shone. "There isn't any."

"Not too deep," I begged. "You're not the wise upstart from the comic strip. A straight answer to a straight question if you please."

"Select your direction," Nut said, "pick any of many and take it to its end. While you're at it don't wander, if you do you wander in sin."

He turned and left. I wandered on homeward. I heard his mocking voice chanting down the path. "In sin. In siiiin. In siiiin." ■

## EPICYCLES

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### The Evil Tempter/Scandinavian



The Evil Tempter wished to play a trick of mockery and derision on a wise monk. He dressed himself in a wide cloak with a huge slouch hat so that no one would recognize him and made his way to the old man who sat in the confessional waiting for his parishioners.

“Reverend Father,” said the Tempter, “I am a farmer and a farmer’s son. I get up with the sun and never forget to say my morning prayers. I work all day in the fields. My food is bread and milk, and when I wish to have a good time with my friends I give them milk and honey. I am the only support of my old parents. I have no wife, nor do I long for women. I go to church frequently and I give a tithe of all I own. Reverend Father, you have heard my confession. Will you please absolve me?”

“My son,” said the monk, “you are the most pious man I have ever seen! I will be happy to absolve you. But first let me tell you something that has happened recently in this town. You will be glad to know about it since you will learn many commendable deeds and yet you will be able to say to yourself that, in comparison to you, those who achieved them were poor sinners.”

“Father, you are tempting me with pride,” said the Evil One.

“May God preserve me from such a great sin,” answered the monk. “When you have heard my story you will think otherwise.”

And he began:

The proud knight who owns the big mountain castle on the other side of the river decided one day to give his daughter in marriage to a rich and powerful man who held her very dear. But the maiden was against this, because she had already pledged her troth to another.

“The maiden wrote a letter to her beloved and told him how she was being forced by her father to marry another man. ‘Therefore I bid you a thousand farewells,’ she wrote to him, ‘and beg that you will not harm yourself for my sake because in my

heart I am faithful to you.'

"But her father, the knight, took the letter from the messenger and destroyed it in secret.

"So the wedding day arrived and she greeted it with many tears. But in church she did not weep, rather the sorrow took hold of her features and petrified them. And all the people in the church wept for her sake.

"Her father also saw how the sorrow had petrified her face. He was stricken with terror for what he had done. When they returned home from church he called his daughter into his sacred chamber and said, 'Dear one, I have behaved unjustly towards you.' And although he was a very proud man he knelt in front of her and confessed that he had done a shameful deed and stolen her letter, fearing that had her beloved known about the wedding he would ride up with his squires and take the bride away by force.

"She said to him, 'It may be your excuse, Father, that you do not know what misery you have caused.' And she went out on the parapet.

"There the bridegroom went to her and said, 'Dearest, why is such sorrow written on your face?'

"The bride answered, 'Because I have a dearly beloved whom I have sworn never to abandon.'

"But he said, 'Do not be sad that you have become my wife. I have such a great love for you that I believe no one could make you happier than I will make you.'

" 'So think all who love,' she said.

" 'Just tell me what I can do to drive the sorrow from your face,' he said, 'and I will show you that I speak the truth.'

"Then the bride took courage and thought, 'I will say it. Perhaps God will touch his heart.' And she told him that she and her beloved had sworn an oath that the one who was betrayed by the other would kill himself on the other's wedding day. 'So today my beloved will kill himself,' said the bride. And she collapsed in her misery and lay at her bridegroom's feet, begging. 'Let me go to him before he can carry this out.'

"There was such power in the woman's sorrow that, although her husband thought, 'If I let her go to the one who loves her I will never see her again,' he conquered himself and said, 'You may do what seems right to you.'

"She stood up and thanked him through her tears. Then she went into the hall where the wedding guests were standing at the tables set for the wedding feast as they



were very hungry after the long ride and the long mass.

“‘Dear guests,’ said the bride to them, ‘I must tell you that, with the permission of my husband, I am going this evening to see my beloved. Otherwise he intends to kill himself this day because I have been untrue to him. Now I am going to tell him that I have been forced. Do not be surprised that I am going myself, because for such an errand one cannot send a letter or find a messenger who is sufficiently safe. But I beg you: eat, drink, and be merry while I am gone! Because I will return when I have saved the life of my beloved.’

“But all the guests wept when she told them about the sorrow that threatened her, and answered, ‘In no way will we eat and drink when you are so sorrowful. Go, and when you return we will begin the feast.’ And they left the tables.

“When the bride crossed the courtyard, a great din was coming out of the kitchen. A young serving boy had run to the head cook and called to him that the meal would not take place for several hours. And the head cook became grieved at the thought of his roasts and other dishes which now would be spoiled. He threw a pound of butter into the fire and smashed a basket of eggs on the stone floor. He flung the serving boy over the threshold and stood above him with a big broom raised to strike.

“But when the bride came out in the courtyard, she begged him to let the boy go. Moved by her request, he stopped beating him at once and cried, ‘Praise God who has made you so lovely. I will not cause you any further distress.’ Whereupon he kept the food for many hours without speaking a word of anger to anyone.

“**T**he bride walked alone through the great forest, as she wished to come to her beloved on foot and without attendants, just as one comes in great need to the chapel of the Mother of God.

“But in the forest there dwelt an outlaw who was a robber. From where he lay in his hiding place he saw the bride come walking along the road. She had rings on her fingers, a gold crown on her head, a heavy silver belt around her waist, and pearls around her neck. Then the robber said to himself, ‘This is just a weak woman. I will take her treasures. With them I will have enough riches to move on to another country, abandon this miserable life in the forest, and become a respectable and honest man.’



“But when the bride came nearer and he saw her face he became powerless; for God had made her very lovely. He thought, ‘I cannot harm her. She is a bride, and I cannot let this fair maiden come plundered to her own wedding.’ And he feared God who had made the woman thus and let her go.

“In the same forest there dwelt an old hermit who tormented his body by staying awake for six days and nights, only sleeping the seventh. He had made a rule that if he

did not have the peace to sleep during the seventh day, he had to stay awake for another six days. And this was because he believed that it was according to God's wish. Now his seventh day was almost over without having been able to sleep, as many sick and miserable people had sought him out. But when he had turned them all away and was about to lie down to sleep, he saw the bride come walking through the dense forest. And he thought to himself, 'How will this wanderer be able to cross the raging river which swelled in the night and tore away the bridge?' Whereupon he abandoned his cave and accompanied her to the river and carried her across the water on his shoulders. But when he returned to his cave his time had passed and he had to keep watch for another six days for the sake of this unknown woman. But he did not regret it, because there was such a loveliness about her that all who saw her were happy to deny themselves for her sake.

"So the bride arrived at the house of her beloved. But her betrothed had gone into his chamber and closed the door with heavy locks. And when she knocked on the door he refused to open it, because he had pulled out his sword and was about to kill himself.



"The maiden could neither call out nor pray, because the anguish took her voice away. But her tears flooded the stone floor and through the oak doors he heard how she sobbed. He could not kill himself listening to this, and he opened the door for her.

"He said to her, 'You must go now, because you belong to another.' And she answered, 'How can I?'

"But the knight who loved her tore himself from her arms and said, 'I will not wrong the one who allowed you to come to me.' Whereupon he had two horses saddled and accompanied her to her father's house."

All this the monk told the Tempter, and still he did not know with whom he spoke. Then he asked him which one of these seemed to have made the greatest sacrifice. For the monk was a wise man; he knew well that no man is without sin as this stranger claimed to be. And through this story he meant to find out which of the seven deadly sins was his cardinal sin. For as he answered that the father or the bridegroom or the wedding guests or the head cook or the robber or the lover had sacrificed the most, the monk would know whether pride or envy, gluttony, anger, avarice, sloth, or lust was the sin that ruled over his soul. The pious man knew that the virtue the stranger most admired in another would reveal the sin with the deepest hold on his own soul.

But the Evil One was so occupied with his own game that he did not notice the cunning of the monk.

"In truth," said he, "it will not be easy for me to answer your question. It seems to me that the bridegroom did not sacrifice less than the lover and that the wedding

guests did not make a greater sacrifice than the robber. They all deserve the greatest praise." And he felt satisfied that he had answered in the way the monk desired.

"For the mercy of God," cried the pious monk, in horror, "say that you prefer one deed above the others, or say that you consider none of them of much value."

"Not at all, Reverend Father," said the Tempter. "Nothing that these men have done do I consider to be easy; nor can I put one above the other."

But the monk put his lips to his ear and said in a breathless voice, "I implore you to say that someone is the best!"

But the Tempter refused and asked to be absolved. "Then you are guilty of all seven deadly sins," cried the monk, "and you cannot be a human. You must be the devil himself!"

No sooner had he said this than he rushed out of the confessional and fled to the altar where he began reading the exorcism:

*"Vade retro, Satanas...."*

When the Tempter saw that he had betrayed himself he spread his cloak out like a pair of wings and flew, like a big black bat, up between the dim vaults of the church.

Not only did his evil intention fail, but by the grace of God it came about that all of this led to a blessing! The tale of the monk has been used for a long time to discover the content of the heart of man. If one makes good use of it, it is like a net in the hands of a fisherman. As this is thrown into the sea and catches fish, so this is made to be thrown into the heart of man to pull the sins up into the light where they may be fought and overcome.

-Selma Lagerlöf

Translated by Kristina Leeb-Lundberg

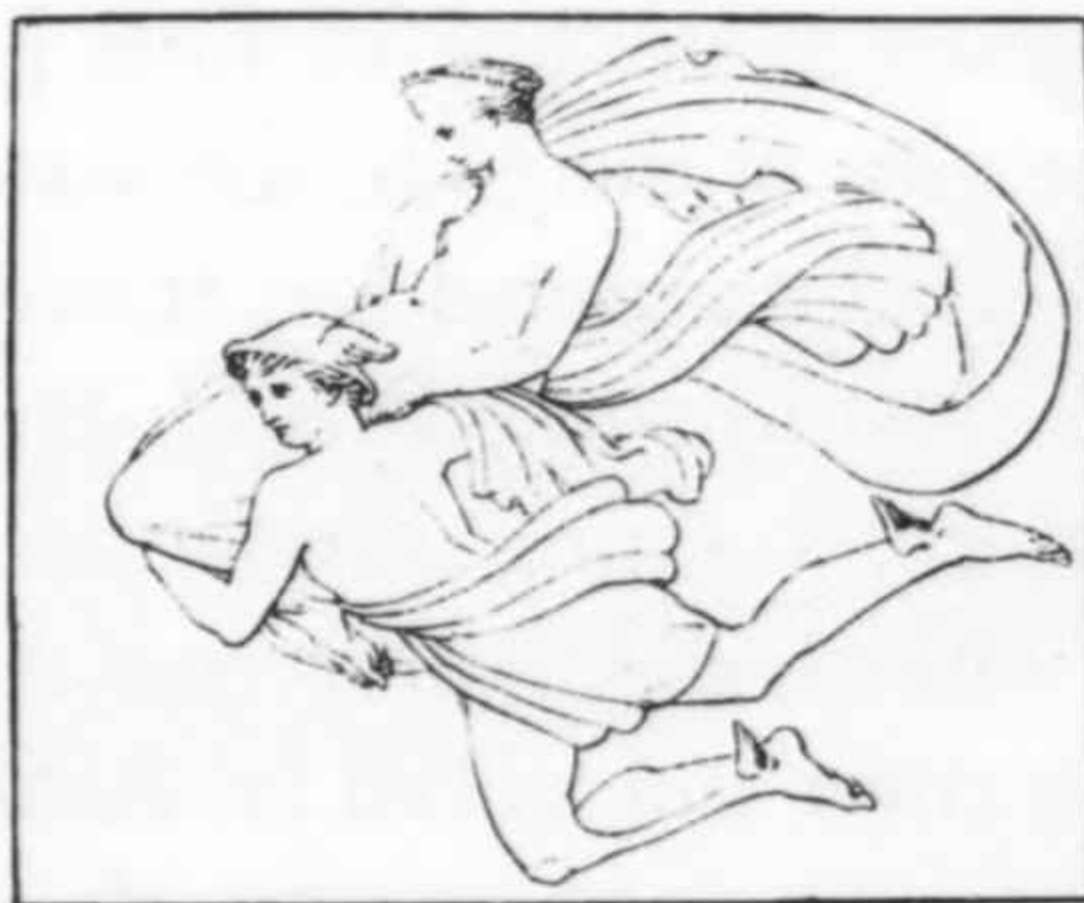


# Pandora/Greek

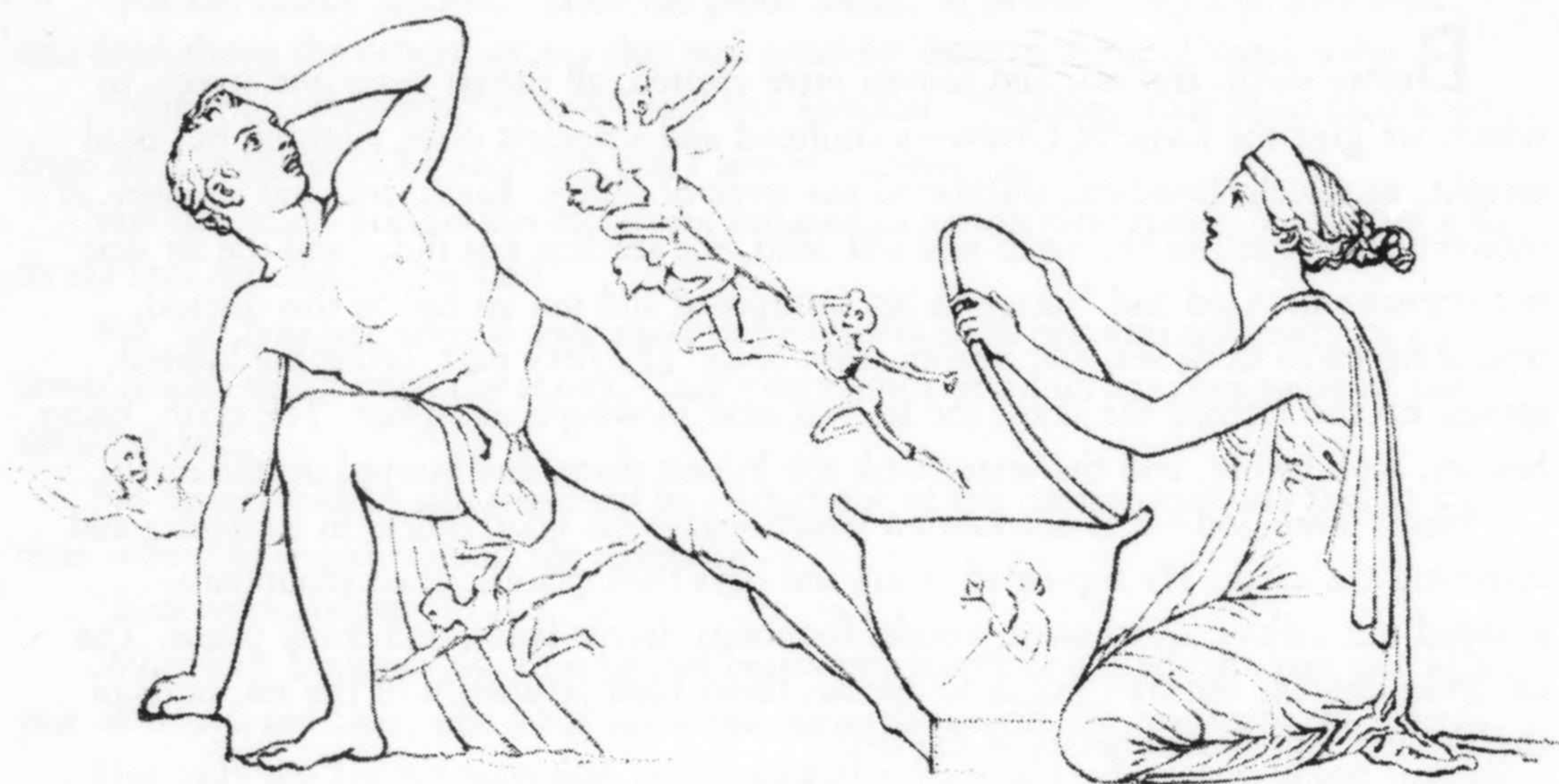
Before earth, and sea, and heaven were created, all things wore one aspect, to which we give the name of Chaos—a confused and shapeless mass, nothing but dead weight, in which, however, slumbered the seeds of things. Earth, sea, and air were all mixed up together; so the earth was not solid, the sea was not fluid, and the air was not transparent. God and Nature at last interposed and put an end to this discord, separating earth from sea, and heaven from both. The fiery part, being the lightest, sprang up and formed the skies; the air was next in weight and place. The earth, being heavier, sank below, and the water took the lowest place, and buoyed up the earth.

Here, some god—it is not known which—gave his good offices in arranging and disposing the earth. He appointed rivers and bays their places, raised mountains, scooped out valleys, distributed woods, fountains, fertile fields, and stony plains. The air being cleared, the stars began to appear, fishes took possession of the sea, birds of the air, and four-footed beasts of the land.

But a nobler animal was wanted, and Man was made. It is not known whether the Creator made him of divine materials, or whether in the earth, so lately separated from heaven, there lurked still some heavenly seeds. Prometheus took some of this earth, and kneading it up with water, made man in the image of the gods. He gave him an upright stature, so that while all other animals turn their faces downward and look to the earth, he raises his to heaven and gazes on the stars.



Prometheus was one of the Titans, a gigantic race who inhabited the earth before the creation of man. To him and his brother Epimetheus was committed the office of making man, and providing him and all other animals with the faculties necessary for their preservation. Epimetheus undertook to do this, and Prometheus was to overlook his work, when it was done. Epimetheus accordingly proceeded to bestow upon the different animals the various gifts of courage, strength, swiftness, sagacity; wings to one, claws to another, a shelly covering to a third, etc. But when man came to be provided for, who was to be superior to all other animals, Epimetheus had been so prodigal of his resources that he had nothing left to bestow upon him. In his perplexity he resorted to his brother Prometheus, who, with the aid of Minerva, went up to heaven, and lighted his torch at the chariot of the sun, and brought down fire to man. With this gift man was more than a match for all other animals. It enabled him to make weapons wherewith to subdue them; tools with which to cultivate the earth; to warm his dwelling, so as to be comparatively independent of climate; and finally to introduce the arts and to coin money, the means of trade and commerce.



The first woman was named Pandora. She was made in heaven, every god contributing something to perfect her. Venus gave her beauty, Mercury persuasion, Apollo music. The story is that Jupiter sent her to Prometheus and his brother, to punish them for their presumption in stealing fire from heaven; and man, for accepting the gift. Endowed with all the gifts of the gods, she was conveyed to earth and presented to Epimetheus, who gladly accepted her, though cautioned by his brother to beware of Jupiter and his gifts. Epimetheus had in his house a jar, in which were kept certain noxious articles, for which, in fitting man for his new abode, he had had no occasion. Pandora was seized with an eager curiosity to know what this jar contained; and one day she slipped off the cover and looked in. Forthwith there escaped a multitude of plagues for hapless man—such as gout, rheumatism, and colic for his body, and envy, spite, and revenge for his mind—and scattered themselves far and wide. Pandora hastened to replace the lid; but, alas! the whole contents of the jar had escaped, one thing only excepted, which lay at the bottom, and that was *hope*. So we see at this day, whatever evils are abroad, hope never entirely leaves us; and while we have *that*, no amount of other ills can make us completely wretched.

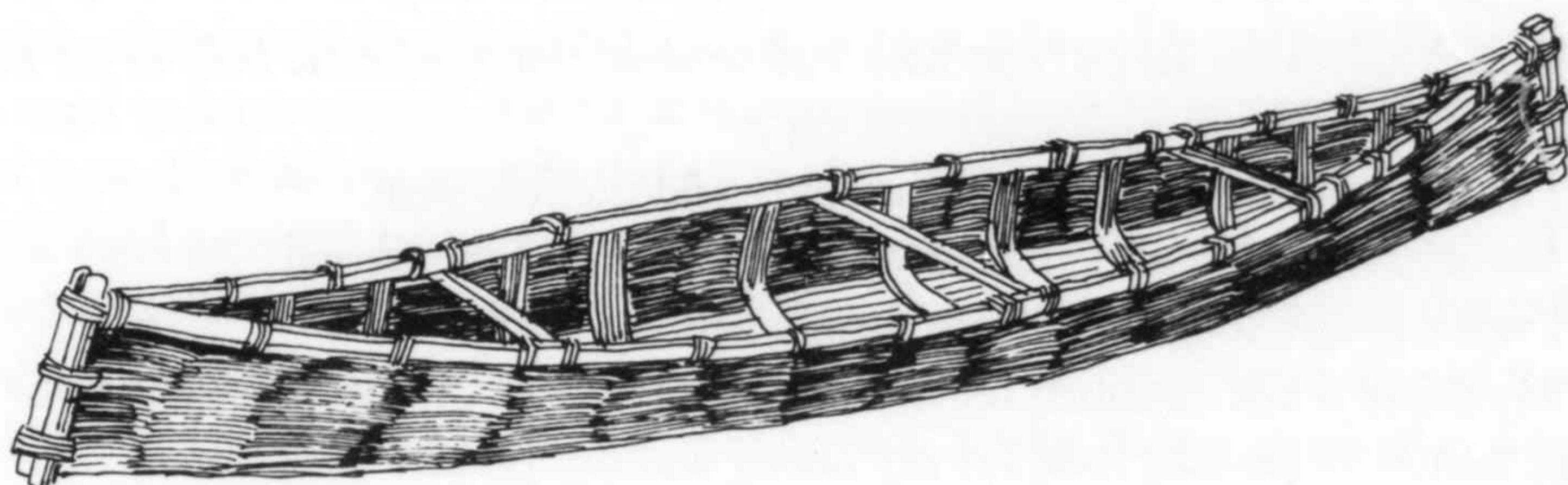
From *Mythology*, by Thomas Bullfinch. (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1937.)

# Gluskabe and the Four Wishes/

## Abenaki

Now that Gluskabe had done so many things to make the world a better place for his children and his children's children, he decided it was time for him to rest. He and Grandmother Woodchuck went down to the big water. Gluskabe and his Grandmother climbed into his stone canoe and sailed away to an island. Some say that island is in the great lake the people call Petonbowk, others say that Gluskabe went far to the east, beyond the coast of Maine. They say that the fog which rises out there is actually the smoke from Gluskabe's pipe. But wherever it is that Gluskabe and Grandmother Woodchuck went to, it is said that for a time Gluskabe let it be known to the world that anyone who came to him would be granted one wish.

Once there were four Abenaki men who decided to make the journey to visit Gluskabe. One of them was a man who had almost no possessions. His wish was that Gluskabe would make it so that he owned many fine things. The second man was a man who was very vain. He was already quite tall, but he wore his hair piled up high on his head and stuffed moss in his moccasins so that he would be even greater in height. His wish was to be taller than all men. A third man was very afraid of dying.



His wish was that he would live longer than any man. The fourth man was a man who spent much time hunting to provide food for his family and his village. But he was not a very good hunter, even though he tried very hard. His wish was that he would become a good enough hunter to always give his people enough to eat.

The four of them set out in a canoe to find the island of Gluskabe. Their trip was not an easy one. The currents were strong and they had to paddle hard against them. The man who owned nothing knew a song to calm the waters and when he sang it the currents ceased and they were able to go on their way. Now a wind began to blow very hard, pushing them back towards shore. But the second man took out some tobacco and offered it to the wind and it became calm enough for them to continue on their way. Soon great whales began to come up near the boat and it seemed as if they would tip the boat over. But the man who was afraid of dying had brought with him a

small stone figure shaped like a whale. He dropped it into the water as an offering and the whales dove beneath the surface and were gone. Now the island of Gluskabe was very close, but they could not see it because a fog came up over the ocean and covered everything. The fourth man, who wanted to be a good hunter, took out his pipe and began to smoke it, making an offering of his smoke so that Gluskabe would stop smoking his own pipe and let the fog lift. Soon the fog rolled away and they saw the Island of Gluskabe was there before them.



They left their boat on the shore and made their way to the place where Gluskabe sat.

“Kuai!” Gluskabe said. “You have had to work hard to come here to see me. You have earned the right to each make one wish.”

“I wish to own many fine possessions,” said the first man.

“My wish is to be taller than any other man,” said the second.

“I want to live longer than any man,” said the third.

“My desire is not so much for myself,” said the fourth man. “I want to be a good enough hunter to provide food for my family and my people.”

Gluskabe looked at the fourth man and smiled. Then he took out four pouches and gave one to each of the men. “In these you will find what you want. But do not open them before you get home and in your own lodge.”

The men all agreed and went back to their canoe. They crossed the waters and reached the land. Then each of them started on his own way home. The first man, who wanted many possessions, took the canoe which had belonged to the one who wanted to live longer than any man.

“Take this to go home in,” said the man who wanted to live long, “I am going to live forever, so it will be easy for me to get another canoe.”

As the man who wanted many possessions paddled along he thought about all that he would have. He would have fine clothing of buckskin, he would have ornaments made of shells and bright stones, he would have stone axes and finely made weapons, he would have a beautiful lodge to live in. As he thought of all the things he would have he grew more and more anxious to see them. Finally, he could wait no longer.

“It will not hurt anything if I just peek inside this pouch,” he said. Then he opened it just a crack to look inside. As soon as he did so all kinds of things began to

pour out of the pouch. Moccasins and shirts, necklaces and wampum belts, axes and spears and bows and arrows. The man tried to close the pouch but he could not do so. The things came pouring out and filled the canoe, covering the man. They were so heavy that the canoe sank and the man, tangled in all his possessions, sank with them and drowned.

The second man, who wanted to be taller than all others, had walked along for only a short time before he, too, became curious. He stopped on top of a high ridge and took out the pouch. "How can this make me taller?" he said. "Perhaps there is some kind of magic ointment in here that I can rub on myself to make me grow. There would be nothing wrong with trying out just a little of it before I get home." Then he opened the pouch. As soon as he did so he was transformed into a pine, the tallest of the trees. To this day the pines stand taller than all others, growing on the high ridges, and in the wind you may hear them whispering, bragging about their height, taller than all men.

The third man, too, did not go far before he became curious. "If I am going to live forever," he said, "then nothing will be able to hurt me. Thus there is no reason why I should not open this pouch". He opened it up. As soon as he did so he turned into a great boulder, one which would stand unchanged for thousands of seasons, longer than the life of any man.

The fourth man, though, did not think of himself as he travelled home. He had further to go than the others, but he did not stop. "Soon," he said to himself, "I will be able to feed my people." He went straight to his lodge and when he got inside he opened the pouch. But there was nothing inside it. Yet as he sat there, holding the open pouch, there came into his mind a great understanding. He realized the ways he must proceed to hunt animals. He began to understand how to prepare himself for a hunt and how to show the animals respect so that they would always allow him to hunt. It seemed he could hear someone speaking to him, more than one person. Then he realized what he was hearing. He was hearing the voices of the animals themselves, telling him about their ways. From that day on he was the best hunter among the people. He never took more game than was needed, yet he always provided enough to feed his people. His was truly the best of the gifts given by Gluskabe.

—Retold by Joseph Bruchac



## The Bullfrog and the Bull/Aesop

"F  
ather," a goggle-eyed junior Bullfrog croaked  
From among the marshes where a bigger Bullfrog soaked:

"I've seen the hugest, most enormous thing  
Standing in the meadows with brackets on its head,  
A tail like a tassel and through its nose a ring.  
Is it a rhinoceros or a giant toad?"

"Tut tut, my son!" the senior Bullfrog said:

"It's only a Bull, and as to its giant size  
I think your calf-frog fancy's overflowed.

It's taller than me perhaps, but as to spread,  
Great Bullrush no! I more than equalize."

Saying which, this Bullfrog breathed and blew  
His carcass up: outwards from within.

"Why, I'll make myself as big as two."

"Perhaps, but still, compared to him you're thin,"  
The small frog said and watched him as he grew.

"As big as this?" "Oh, bigger, bigger." "Wait."

He drew a breath that forced him to inflate  
To such a size his skin was a balloon.

"Not as big as—?" Bang! He spoke too soon. . .

They never found the places he was strewn.

*(Self-conceit can lead to self-destruction)*

From *New Tales from Aesop (for reading aloud)*, by Paul Roche. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982.) Reprinted by permission.

## CURRENTS & COMMENTS

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### FILM

"I almost expect to be remembered as a chair or a table."—Sister Mildred Barker, Sabbathday Lake, Maine. This whimsical plaint by one of the twelve remaining Shakers pinpoints the irony: while the market value of the furniture and buildings of this oldest of home-grown American religious sects soars, the spiritual energy and discipline which inspired the production of near-perfect handicrafts and products has been devalued to a curiosity by the general public. In a luminous sixty-minute film, **The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God**, documentarists Ken and Amy Burns remind us forcefully of the core of the Shaker message and brilliantly depict the special rhythms and textures of Shaker life.

A pioneering group of Christians who gave up family and personal fortune to create "heaven on earth," the Shakers, or Shaking Quakers, grew to over 6,000 strong in nineteen villages across America in the mid-1800s. By weaving together still photographs, home movies, haunting Shaker music, readings from diaries and letters, and live interviews—including several with Shakers, and one with Jacob Needleman—the Burnses recreate a compelling and compassionate portrait of a people



dedicated to a life of holiness in the world, a celibate people doomed to extinction in this sensual century. Not to be missed, *The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God*, winner of a CINE Golden Eagle and a Blue Ribbon at the American Film Festival, may be shown in the near future on PBS; copies of the movie, on both film and videotape, are available from Direct Cinema, Ltd., P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey (201) 891-8240.



### MUSEUMS

Chinese figure painting differs from Western in its emphasis on line, rather than shading or color, to define form.

Characterized primarily by controlled lines of uniform thickness—known as “iron-wire” lines—the figural art of China dates back to the sixth century B.C. and reached its pinnacle in representations of varied Bodhisattvas and sages painted during the Sung and Yuän dynasties. In **The Iron-wire Line: The Art of Chinese Figure Painting**, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is presenting from now through December 21st fifty-five of the finest Chinese figure paintings produced from the eighth through the seventeenth century. Of special interest are Li Kung-lin’s (ca. 1049–1106) illustrations to the *Classic of Filial Piety*, the most ancient of Chinese figure paintings of import to survive into our era. For further information, please telephone (212) 879–5500.

The ways in which a people’s handicrafts accommodate new and alien markets while maintaining cultural integrity is the fascinating focus of the Newark Museum’s **Navajo Textiles: A Century of Change**, on view from now through September 1986. The exhibit features twenty-two rugs and blankets, beginning with several fine wearing

blankets from the 1860s—marked by a restrained use of color and woven for the weavers’ own use. There are also some “eye dazzlers”—optically dizzying textiles created for a white clientele after the Navajo’s five years in captivity as part of a U.S. Army pacification program—and contemporary pictorials depicting jets, trucks, and Santa Claus. The exhibit concludes with examples of a recent return to classic and muted geometric style. For further information, telephone (201) 733–6600.



The art of the Native Americans of the Woodlands, a region extending from the Mississippi to the Atlantic and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, dates back five thousand years. From now until March 9th, visitors to Houston’s Museum of Fine Arts have the opportunity to view in **Ancient Art of the American Woodland Indians** the first historical overview of Woodlands art. Beads, pipes, bottles, and masks, dating from 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1500, are among the 120 artifacts on display at the museum. For further information, telephone (713) 526–1361. ■

## TANGENTS

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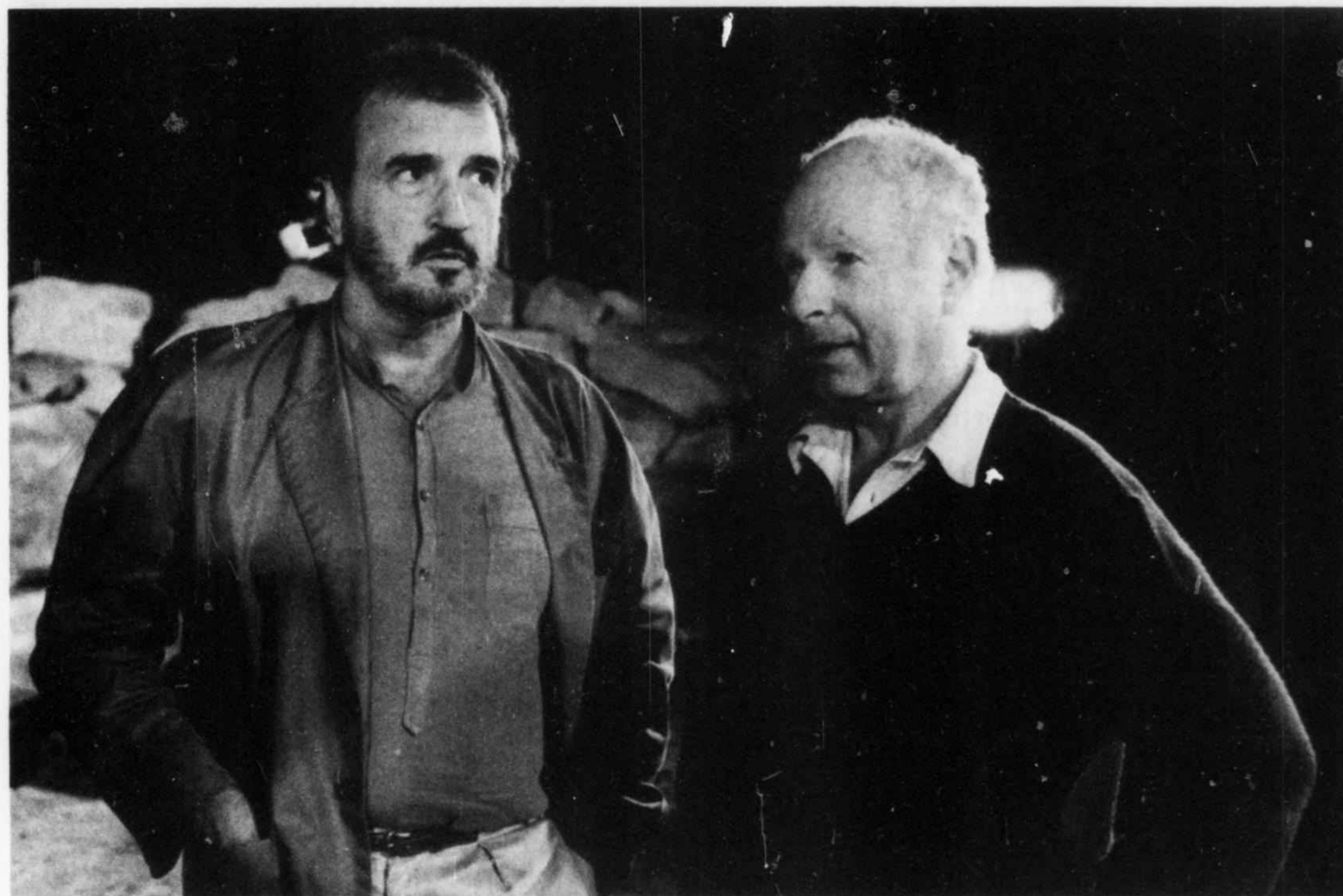
# Forces of Becoming:

PETER BROOK'S *MAHABHARATA*

RICHARD TEMPLE

Somewhere beyond this visible material world of our sense perception, we are sometimes aware of an invisible world waiting to be discovered. It is a world of spiritual reality which we don't know how to reach; but something within us responds to it, and recognizes the possibility that the physical

world can open to this higher influence. If the response becomes also a listening in which we hear the voices from this other world calling to us, an inner journey may begin, which is the journey towards our own selves. Sometimes in a work of art, a poem, a piece of theater, such a voice can be heard; and the theat-



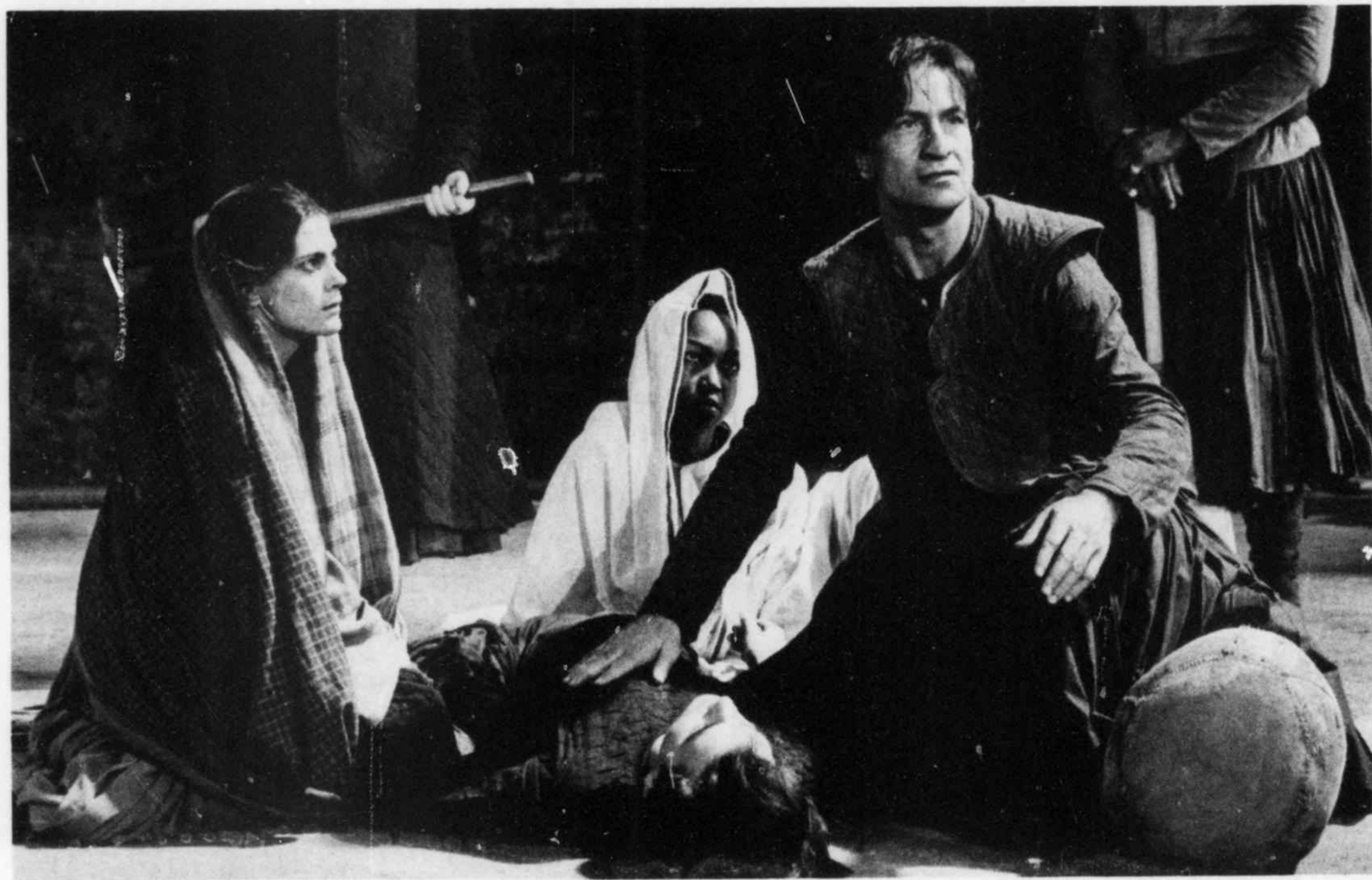
*Jean-Claude Carrière (left) and Peter Brook*

rical adaptation of the *Mahabharata* that Peter Brook is currently presenting brings us to the threshold of this new world.

The dramatized version of this ancient Hindu classic was the high point of the 1985 Avignon Theater Festival. The production was spread across three plays which could be seen either on three con-

loved and revered as a classic of Indian wisdom.

The *Mahabharata*, which developed through oral tradition over a thousand years, is not so much a uniform poem as a miscellaneous collection of poetry, consisting of different masses of legendary and didactic material, worked around a central heroic narrative. Divine, semi-di-



secutive nights or, twice a month, in a continuous event that started in the evening and ended at dawn. The French version will go to Spain, Greece, and Denmark and then will play in Paris during the coming months. An English version is being prepared and there are plans to bring the production both to England and to the U.S.A. in 1987.

The *Mahabharata*, together with the *Ramayana*, is one of India's two great national epic poems. Its origins date from the fifth or sixth century B.C. and it consists of more than 100,000 couplets, making it about fifteen times the length of the Bible. But it is scarcely known in the West except for one short book, of which there have been several English translations: the *Bhagavad-Gita*,

vine, human, and animal personages are present in the story, which recounts the struggles, alliances, wars, and various adventures that befall several generations of the royal line of the noble family of Hastinapura. It is a vast pageant in which strange and powerful events are enacted. We are admitted to a fantastic world of dreams, myth, and legend where impossible and wonderful things happen. Yet it is a curiously familiar world, echoing the fairy tales of our childhood, one to which part of us seems to belong.

To help us enter this world, Peter Brook and the script writer Jean-Claude Carrière, together with the actors of the International Centre of Theatre Research, offer themselves collectively as

interpreters of the *Mahabharata* and become our guides on a path that most of us would not be able to find for ourselves.

Carrière has produced a text which conveys the action and the narrative comprehensively. The words of the purely didactic and philosophical passages, which would hinder the dramatic continuity, have been dropped or, as in the case of the *Gita*, condensed to a fraction of their length; but their meaning is brought through theatrical imagery and dramatic allegory. In the introduction to the text Carrière tells us that, "We had to drop most of the secondary stories, some (of which) can go on for more than fifty pages . . . to transform an immense epic poem into one piece of theater (or into three pieces), it was necessary, while respecting the sense at the heart of the text, to imagine new scenes, to create confrontations between characters who, in the poem, never meet.... without intervening (as far as possible) with our own conceptions, the authority of our own judgment, our own twentieth-century analysis." The text has great clarity and simplicity and well serves the aim of presenting the *Mahabharata* theatrically to a Western audience.

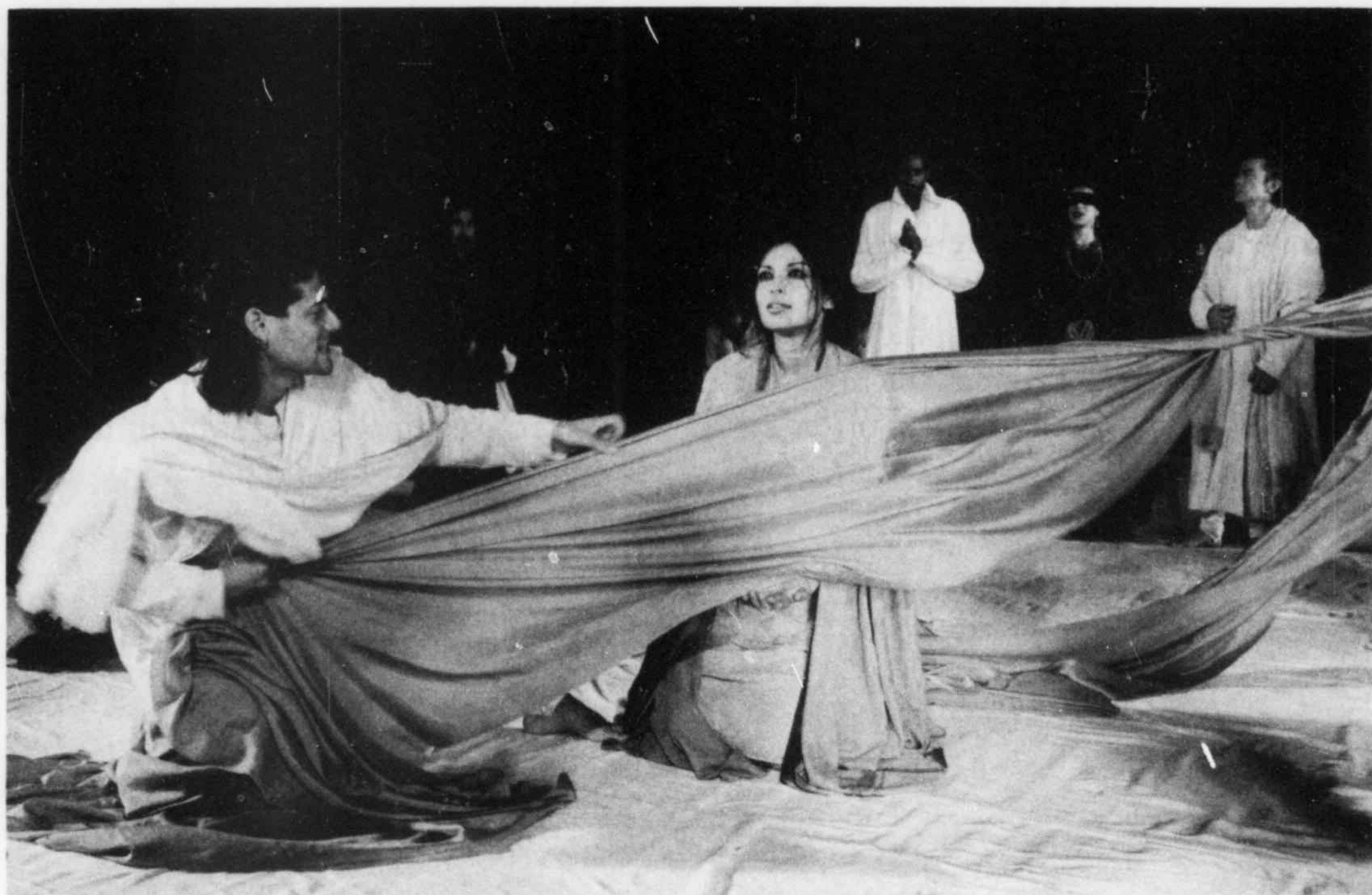
To what extent do actors and director succeed in conveying the unfathomable wonders of this ancient poem? This is a question which each must answer for himself, because the *Mahabharata* is an invitation to an encounter with truth and, as such, is, for every individual, uniquely subjective. But I would strongly recommend to anyone who values such an invitation that he or she make whatever efforts or sacrifices may be necessary in order to get to where the *Mahabharata* is playing.

The epic story unfolds, through the three plays, scene after scene, sometimes joyful and tender, often funny, oc-

asionally hilarious and farcical, sometimes terrifying, into depths of immense grandeur and volume. As Vyasa, the "author" and narrator, says to the unknown young child, it is "the great poem of the world....it recounts the history of your race, how your ancestors were born, how they grew, what happened in a very great war."

Man contains within himself his cosmic as well as his biological origins, and these cosmic origins are presented in the *Mahabharata* cloaked in a series of mythological events. There are curious marriages and strange matings between humans and gods and between humans and animals. There are monstrous pregnancies and terrifying births. At one moment in the first play (*The Game of Dice*), the music erupts with maniacal shrieks, squeaks, whistles, and hooting. A flapping red blanket cartwheels onto the stage at high speed, and sticking out of it are naked, hairy arms and legs. It is the birth of Duryodhana, and an example of the way Brook symbolizes cosmogonies on which are founded many later gnostic mysteries—a symbolism based on the idea that man's origin is associated with cosmic error. Thus also, at the beginning of the story, King Santanu breaks his vow not to question the actions of his beloved and, as it turns out, divine wife, Ganga. His interference sets off a chain of actions that create rivalry, distrust, and polarization between two groups of descendants: the Pandavas and their cousins the Kauravas.

The second play, *Exile in the Forest*, depicts the consequences of the fall and the inevitable result in man's new nature as a duality. The lost kingdom, which was gambled away in the *Game of Dice*, means the lost self. It is a familiar idea in Western culture through Shakespeare, where there are identical metaphors of lost, or usurped, kingdoms and exile in forests. Such ideas as the fall from grace, banishment, former greatness, and so on, exist in the folklore and mythology



of all races and cultures. They are central to a proper understanding of our human nature, of who and what we are.

But there are powerful forces against us and man is, apparently, almost helpless. Special efforts and special means have to be employed; trickery and disguise are traditionally often necessary, so it is no surprise to find Arjuna disguised as a woman, while his brothers and Draupadi pass themselves off as servants. The play has episodes of great charm here, including knockabout farce, a concert, and an oriental puppet show. Then, by contrast, in a scene of theatrical splendor reminiscent of the imagery of Akira Kurosawa, we see five of the Kauravas, standing high on the cliffs, black-robed and holding long lances. Tall and menacing, they are looking down and discussing the identity of the figure below. Suddenly Arjuna throws off his disguise and, to our intense satisfaction and joy, reassumes his true identity.

It is at precisely this moment that the opposing forces gather themselves

for an ultimate confrontation, determined to rid themselves of Arjuna and his brothers forever. And the war, inevitable since the beginning, brings the Pandavas out of exile and back to their true splendor, and becomes the title of the third play.

Symbolism can always be taken in a number of different ways. In one sense, the eternal truths of sacred literature are merely borrowing human passions and human situations in order to convey something to us in forms that we can recognize, but which actually belong to a level so high in the universe that, next to it, the moral aspects of human passions and events scarcely exist. And yet this high level exists also in us, though not at all at a level of consciousness that we are in touch with. Perhaps Arjuna, the immaculate warrior, personifies that noble aspect in us that aspires to truth in eternity, that cannot compromise, that willingly makes any sacrifice. Duryodhana, on the other hand, may represent that in us that is weak, masked by the noise and bluster of the senses,

and blind to subtle influences grasping only the obvious. The origins of these strengths and weaknesses, and the struggle between them, are deeply within ourselves, but they are the echoes of a struggle taking place at a level beyond time and space—a struggle, even a war. This is the central theme of the *Mahabharata*: cosmic war, spiritual war, human war, coming to a climax in the last of the three plays, *The War*.

Theatrically, the war is rendered in several ways. There are stylized Chinese acrobatics taken from oriental martial arts tradition where swords, or sometimes rippling flags, one in each hand, are whirled around, unleashing a force that throws actors into backward flips and somersaults all over the stage. At other times the action is almost purely abstract: Arjuna's faultless archery is conveyed by a musician tapping a stretched coil of metal wire, at whose eerie echo we sense the space vibrating and charged with power. Another style is employed where, in one long, drawn-out scene, the shocking realism of one of the twentieth century's ghastliest collective nightmares is displayed to the audience: death in mud, blood, and slime, shameful and inglorious. And it would be difficult not to see another twentieth-century obsession in the references to *Pashupata*, a weapon too dangerous to use because it is capable of destroying the earth and all humanity.

Although the central theme of the *Mahabharata* is war, there appear to be no such moral implications as we find in the subject today. The ideas of sin and guilt are absent. How are we to understand this? At one point Krishna tells Arjuna that he has no choice between war and peace, that he can only choose between war and war. There are moments when the warring parties, sometimes jointly, consult the noncombatants, Krishna, Vyasa, or Dritarashtra.

And the role and responsibility of these characters, in regard to the war, is strangely objective. They make no attempt to stop it and often, especially in the case of Krishna, connive at what appears to be foul play. Krishna's replies to the questions are always an invitation to us to think more deeply: "Death kills no one, the creator kills, even gods die."

All this points to the idea that the narrative's true meaning only appears when the events are sensed and felt in terms that transcend our ordinary responses, our ordinary thoughts and feelings. It is only in this context that the theme of *dharma* can be understood. We are told, in a conversation between Bhishma and Krishna, that *dharma* is more important than all else, because it is the "right action" by which the order of the universe will be maintained. This exchange takes place just before the terrible events of the game of dice where Yudishthira, the eldest of the five Pandava brothers, the king of kings, loses his inheritance and vast wealth to the rival Kaurava family. In order to preserve *dharma*, Bhishma has agreed not to intervene, no matter what happens—to sacrifice his race if necessary, so that each man, as Krishna insists, "goes to the very depths of himself."

When the young child asks Vyasa why he is writing the *Mahabharata*, Vyasa replies: "To write the *dharma* in the hearts of men." It is therefore more than a moral precept for human behavior; it is a necessity, a spiritual obligation that man should help God and protect the world from destruction.

Theater, like art, is sacred in origin. This means that it was originally intended as a vehicle for conveying higher truths than we can ordinarily perceive—the actors have to create in the audience a state of mind where ordinary belief is suspended so that the logic of the senses can give place to the logic of the psyche. No one understands this better than Peter Brook, who seems to have an

inexhaustible supply of dazzling, show-biz trickery with which to disarm us and bring us, childlike and unresisting, into the world of wonders. Alterations of theatrical mood through changes of color, lighting, sound, tempo, and so on, play with a magical lightness of

chological archetypes. The heroes of the *Mahabharata* epic are evolving under an extraordinary destiny, the sense of which lies outside our Renaissance-Jungian viewpoint. Their words and actions are often strangely incongruous, and in the mysterious sequence of subtle and com-



touch on the susceptibilities of the mind and of the feelings, so that we become open to a completely new kind of influence. In the *Mahabharata*, the theatricality, the sheer entertainment, are constantly maintained at brilliant levels. Our mind and feelings are continuously engaged by audacious, dramatic wizardry so that each new effect wraps us deeper and deeper in enchantment. Brook's theater is a hallucinatory drug, stupefying our ordinary perceptions of time and space so that we become capable of glimpsing an otherwise inaccessible world.

For obvious reasons, Carrière has reduced the number of principal personages to about twenty. I have come to feel that we should avoid the temptation of seeing these characters merely as psy-

plex contradictions, the feeling arises that we are being called from beyond the frontiers of our Western understanding. The central figures of the *Mahabharata* are not fixed archetypes, such as we find in Shakespeare. Rather they are to be seen as forces in a world of continuous becoming: a world of real values and universal truth where no energies are at rest.

**W**e can confront the incomprehensible only with our own questions. For example, is it possible that Arjuna and Karna, while seeming to be forces in opposition, are, at the time, aspects of the same man? Could it be that the five Pandava brothers, in their mysterious

communal marriage to Draupadi, are united parts of the same whole? And what of Yudishthira and Duryodhana—are they not much more than “good” and “bad”? If Yudishthira’s apparent weakness for gambling had not lost him his kingdom, would not the twelve years of exile still have been a necessary phase in the search for right action? And it cannot be denied that Duryodhana is a good ruler and a great king whose subjects live in peace and prosperity.

There is another group of characters who observe and occasionally intervene in the action but who are somehow not full participants at the human level.

Among these are Dritarashtra, the sightless king and ancestor whose blindness inhibits his influence, and Gandhari, his wife, who voluntarily blindfolds herself in order to gain inner sight. There is also Vyasa, the narrator and creator of the poem whose role is impartial yet who is compelled to intervene in his own story. And how should we understand the actions of Krishna who, cosmically impartial, continuously intervenes? Is this perhaps the “Way of Action”?

The international cast, consisting of Polish, African, Lebanese, French, German, Balinese, Greek, and Italian actors has created, with amazing success, human types whose essential characteristics and tendencies we may painfully recognize from the depth of our own experience, and it is a tribute to it and the director that we grow to feel these characters as members of our own families. For that is indeed what they are. The *Mahabharata* is not only a group of legends symbolizing man’s divine origin and his cosmic fall: it is, at the same time, a series of images revealing the true nature of human psychology. It is the story of our own lives. It also shows that man’s behavior is determined by his place in the universe and that, at that level, there is nothing he can do to alter the course of events in which he is

bound up.

We are shown too that, as men, we are not only destined to live at the level of conflict, but that higher levels of the universe simultaneously exist in us. All these characters of the *Mahabharata*, and the events that befall them, are reflections of our inner lives; that is why the horrors, joys, tendernesses, comedies, tragedies, and wonders of the *Mahabharata* are capable of such an extraordinary hold on our attention.

It is a convention that myths and fairy tales are not expected to conform to the rigidity and narrowness of everyday logic. We are lucky to have retained this tradition, considering how much of the past we have destroyed, because the absence of human logic in the world of legends is the doorway to a realm where our other consciousness can enter.

This is why theater once was sacred and with this production perhaps it becomes so again. Actors and director work on that area of the psyche at which the fall of man occurs. Man’s fall can be said to be his descent from transcendental unity with God, or with truth, into carnality and the blindness of sense perceptions and rationalistic thought. Tradition tells us that what we think is reality is an illusion foisted on us by the senses: *maya*. Theater, paradoxically, can disillusion us from such false perceptions by creating illusions that in fact correspond to reality. These actors have opened up a corridor by which we can look back to the higher worlds from which we fell. We must be very grateful for the appearance of the *Mahabharata* in a form so available. We need such reminders to encourage us in the long and difficult return journey to another reality which it is up to us to begin ourselves.

*Richard Temple is currently writing a book about icons and the philosophical origins of Christian art. He is the author of Icons: A Search for Inner Meanings.*

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### **Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi**

*Edited by David Godman.* Boston: Arkana (an imprint of Routledge & Kegan Paul, Inc.), 1985. Pp. vii + 251. Paper. \$8.95.

I first heard of the Maharshi, whose words are recorded in this remarkable little book, in the early 1940s when a knowledgeable friend identified him as the inspiration for Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*. Shri Ganesha, the modern Hindu holy man who converts the young American hero, Larry Darrel, to the life of the spirit, had a model, still living in the hills of southern India. This man, I was told, had made an indelible impression on the worldly British author in a face to face encounter some years before.

Maugham had Larry describe the Maharshi to the novel's narrator as follows:

"He wasn't tall, neither thin nor fat, palish brown in colour and clean-shaven, with close-cropped white hair. He never wore anything but a loin cloth, and yet he managed to look as trim and neat and well-

dressed as a young man in one of Brooks Brothers' advertisements."

"And what had he got that particularly attracted you?"

"Saintliness. We've all read about the saints, St. Francis, St. John of the Cross, but that was hundreds of years ago. I never thought it possible to meet one who as alive now. From the first time I saw him I never doubted that he was a saint. It was a wonderful experience."

"And what did you gain from it?"

"Peace."

Maugham's own meeting, although it did not bring him peace—if anything it haunted him throughout the remainder of his long life—must have been even more striking than his hero's. Upon arriving at the ashram, the dapper little Englishman, who had been everywhere and seen everything, had lost consciousness. When he came to in one of the huts, he was confronted by the naked, open-faced, gently smiling Indian.

Maugham never forgot his encounter—mostly silent—with this man who had never been out of his native province of Tamil Nadu yet who obviously had seen and experienced much more than the famous world traveler could ever hope to. At one time he thought of

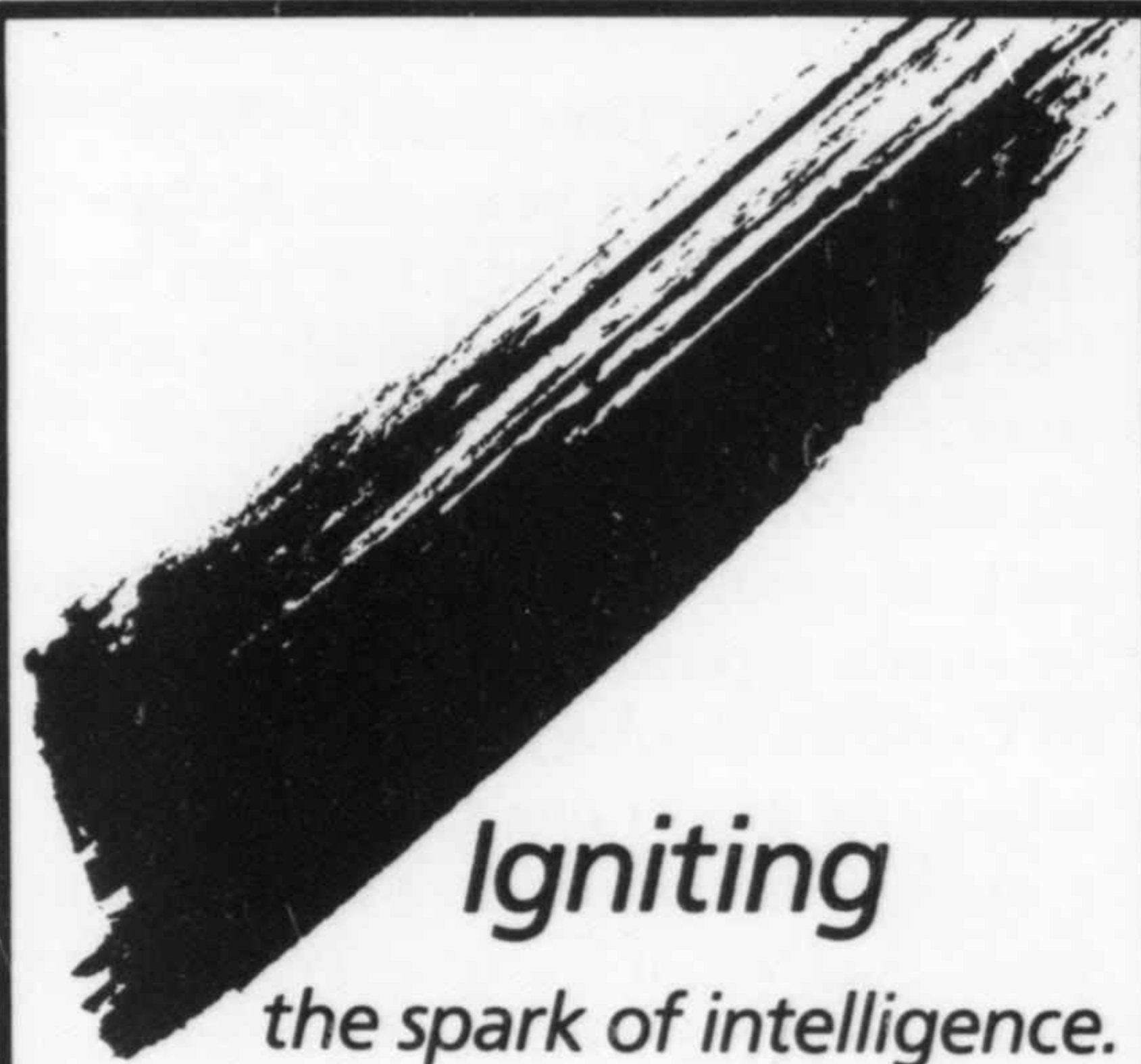
calling the book in which he memorialized this meeting "Of Human Liberation" (in answer to his earlier classic "Of Human Bondage"). The book he did write, with the Maharshi embedded at its heart, turned out to be his most lucrative, with a hardcover sale of 1,400,000, a movie version starring Tyrone Power, translation into a dozen foreign languages. As an old man he made the Maharshi the subject of one of his final pieces, an essay called "The Saint" in which he tries, with middling success, without the protective screen of fiction, to come to terms with the life and teachings of such a man.

There were others who had tried to catch the Maharshi's unique quality. In the early 30s the indefatigable salvation-shopper, Paul Brunton, had made the same pilgrimage to the ashram at the base of the holy mountain of Arunachala. He declared after a fortnight's residence that the Maharshi was "the one man who has impressed me more than any other person I have ever met whether in the East or the West." He signed on as a disciple and several books followed.

But among Westerners, the Maharshi's message was most clearly and significantly interpreted by a middle-aged French monk, Henri Le Saux, who travelled from his abbey in Brittany to Tamil Nadu in the years immediately following World War II.

What Maugham saw with the dim vision of a world-weary agnostic, and Brunton conveyed in the florid hyperbole of a journalist of the occult, the Benedictine grasped with the troubled and searching vision of a devout Catholic on a no-nonsense spiritual quest.

"Even before my mind was able to recognize the fact," he wrote of the meeting, "and still less to express it, the invisible halo of this Sage had been perceived by something in me deeper than any words. Unknown harmonies awoke in my heart. . . . In the Sage of Aruna-



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chala of our time I discerned the Unique Sage of the eternal India, the unbroken succession of her sages, her ascetics, her seers; it was as if the very soul of India penetrated to the very depths of my own soul and held mysterious communion with it. It was a call which pierced through everything, rent it in pieces and opened a mighty abyss. . . ."

Le Saux never left India. He took the name of Swami Abhishiktananda and stayed on to pursue his spiritual quest and become what a Catholic colleague has called "One of the greatest contemplative theologians since St. Bonaventure." With Jules Monchanin, another French Christian who had preceded him to Arunachala, he established an ashram dedicated to the reconciliation of Christianity with the religions of the East. The ashram still exists at Trichy under the direction of the distinguished Eng-

lish Benedictine Dom Bede Griffiths.

Nearly twenty years after Maharshi's death in 1950 and a few years before his own in 1974, Abhishiktananda wrote: "I remain 'greek'; my understanding moulded by Scholasticism is really in agony before the problem posed by Hindu experience and Zen experience to Christian theology, a problem in which one gropes one's way and which sometimes brings one to a complete impasse. And yet, if Christianity is ever to pass beyond the world of Mediterranean culture, if it claims to be universal, it will have to face up to the irrefutable spiritual experience of Hinduism and Buddhism . . . and to integrate it. . . . If the Christian mystery is true, it will reappear intact on the other side of the nondualistic experience."

In his diary he noted: "The ashram of Ramana helps me to understand the Gospel; there is in the Gospel much more than Christian Piety has so far discovered."

When Thomas Merton arrived on his last fateful trip to Asia he had a note to look up Abhishiktananda at his tiny hermitage on the banks of the Ganges, where he still devoutly sang the Catholic mass. The meeting never took place—but on the shelf of his own hermitage back at Gethsemane in Kentucky was a copy of Le Saux and Monchanin's *Ermites du Saccidananda*.

So the chain goes on, soul by soul.

It is in the light of this linkage that the appearance of this compact, accessible volume, *The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, is particularly important. Acknowledging that the Maharshi always insisted that his most effective teaching was silent (a fact witnessed to by Maugham, Le Saux, and Brunton, all three) one still feels the simplicity and strength of the message of this man who for the last three decades of his life was revered by millions of Indians as their holiest man.

From what did this unmistakable authenticity arise?

The book's brief introduction gives the bare facts:

In 1896 a sixteen-year-old schoolboy walked out on his family and, driven by an inner compulsion, slowly made his way to Arunachala, a holy mountain and pilgrimage centre in South India. On his arrival he threw away all his money and possessions and abandoned himself to a newly-discovered awareness that his real nature was formless, immanent consciousness. His absorption in this awareness was so intense that he was completely oblivious of his body and the world; insects chewed away portions of his legs, his body wasted away because he was rarely conscious enough to eat, and his hair and fingernails grew to unmanageable lengths. After two or three years in this state he began a slow return to physical normality, a process that was not finally completed for several years. His awareness of himself as consciousness was unaffected by his physical transition and it remained continuous and undimmed for the rest of his life. In Hindu parlance he had "realized the Self"; that is to say, he had realized by direct experience that nothing existed apart from an indivisible and universal consciousness which was experienced in its unmanifest form as beingness or awareness and in its manifest form as the appearance of the universe.

The teachings are based on this indelible experience of nonduality, which closely resembles that of saints in other traditions. They have been expertly codified by editor David Godman and presented in question and answer form. The twenty-one chapters progress from "The Nature of the Self" to "Karma, destiny and free will" and include interchanges on The Jnani, Surrender, The Guru, Mantras and Japa, Samadhi, The Nature of God, etc. These are given in a stripped down, homely diction which is rare in modern Hindu spiritual writings. Although in one place or another the Maharshi may cite the Upanishads, the

Gita, the Bible, or acknowledge the names of teachers from Sankara to Aurobindo and Krishnamurti, he sees no necessity to justify his answers by reference to either scripture or other men's teachings. He dismisses no one, he leans on no one, he merely insists, with unmediated consistency, that all valid teachings, all worthwhile spiritual practices must lead to the same consummation.

The book's final paragraph epitomizes the inclusiveness of the Maharshi's message:

There are only two ways to conquer destiny or be independent of it. One is to enquire for whom is this destiny and discover that only the ego is bound by destiny and not the self, and that the ego is non-existent. The other way is to kill the ego by completely surrendering to the Lord, by realising one's helplessness and saying all the time "Not I, but Thou, O Lord," giving up all sense of "I" and "mine" and leaving it to the Lord to do what he likes with you. Surrender can never be regarded as complete so long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. True surrender is love of God for the sake of love and nothing else, not even for the sake of liberation. In other words, complete effacement of the ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through self-enquiry or through *bhakti marga*.

To go back to Larry, Maugham's surrogate in *The Razor's Edge*:

"But it wasn't his teaching that was so remarkable; it was the man himself. . . .

"It's a mistake to think that those holy men of India lead useless lives. They are a shining light in the darkness. They represent an ideal that is a refreshment to their fellows; the common run may never attain it, but they respect it and it affects their lives for good. When a man becomes pure and perfect the influence of his character spreads so that they who seek truth are naturally drawn to him . . . the effect may be no greater than the ripple caused by a stone thrown in a pond, but one ripple causes

another, and that one a third. . . ."

That sense of presence, of the direct communication of the truth so far as it can be put into words, is there on every page of this valuable little book.

—Marvin Barrett

*Marvin Barrett, until recently a member of the faculty at the Columbia School of Journalism, is completing a book on sickness as a spiritual search.*

### **The Noble Traveller: The Life and Writings of O.V. de L. Milosz**

*Edited by Christopher Bamford. Introduction by Czeslaw Milosz. West Stockbridge: Lindisfarne Press/Inner Traditions, 1985. Pp. 483. \$24.95. Paper. \$14.95.*

"For this is what it is to love, this is what it is to love: to seek love with love." Christopher Bamford's beautifully designed and produced introduction to the life, thought, and poetry of O.V. de L. Milosz is faithful to the spirit of one whose life was such a search. Oscar Milosz's influence and importance has until now been known to Americans mainly through the work of his distant Polish cousin, Czeslaw Milosz, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980. Many will now welcome the op-

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portunity to encounter this "French Goethe" directly, and to learn wisdom from a man who could speak with the birds.

The book is rich enough to provide many ways of approaching its subject. A detailed biochronology, with extracts from his notebooks and letters, complements the two introductory essays by C. Milosz and Bamford and the appendices on poetry and symbolism, which together provide a context for understanding O. Milosz's own writings. A selection of his poetry from 1899 to 1936 is given in the French with facing translations, mostly quite literal, generally vivid and moving. But the heart of the book, to which the title itself and the introductory essays direct attention, lies in the two metaphysical poems that form a distinct section: "Ars Magna"

(1924) and "The Arcana" (1927), both of which refer to a certain moment in 1914—14 December at 11 P.M. to be precise—when Milosz became an explorer of heaven and hell, a "priest of the order of Melchisedek." Milosz writes: "Noble traveller is the secret name of initiates of antiquity." No one who reads this book can avoid confronting Milosz's claim to be the latest in a line of great initiates that includes Paracelsus, Dante, Boehme, and Swedenborg.

"My mission here-below is among the most secret," he writes. The "annunciation of future Christianity" involved a reintegration of modern science with the perennial philosophy. Einstein's theory of relativity, which he read as an echo of his own vision, seemed to Milosz to promise a great awakening from (what Blake had called) "Newton's sleep." Milosz announced a new cosmology, a new alchemy, in which the discoveries of science would again become part of "God's language," the language of symbolic correspondences. He warned of an approaching crisis, linked to industrialism, and an "immense catastrophe" before 1944 (Milosz did not live to see the Second World War). He dreamed of a more distant future, a "United States of the World," a universal Christendom ruled by a congregation of Initiates under a spiritual Monarchy.

To many readers, much stranger than his visions will be Milosz's Roman Catholicism. Henri Corbin expresses the belief of many when he says that the dogmatic Magisterium of the Church leaves no room for "prophetic hermeneutics" or esoteric interpretations. In particular, he points to the official theological position that God created the world from nothing: "ex nihilo." This seems to him a metaphysical absurdity, a denial of the reality of the archetypes and a degradation of the "ontologically creative Imagination." But for Milosz, this same doctrine represents "the key to

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the world of light." Milosz describes "The Arcana" as "a new light thrown upon the intangible book of Catholic orthodoxy."

What his vision of 1914 taught Milosz was "the Holy Notion of the Nothing," the code word of the Noble Travellers . . . the entrance and the exit of the labyrinth." "Our limitless universe," he writes, "is God's incorporeal light projected by a pure act of love on the idea-archetype of an *exterior*." This idea of an exterior is the *nihilo* from which God draws creation. It is the an-

swer to Milosz's question of questions: "Where is space?" The Scholastic theologians had long ago recognized the complementarity of Potency and Act. Potentiality was like a mirror to receive the light of Being. But Milosz fleshes out their dry abstractions with the substance of vision. He *sees* the reality of which they had merely drawn diagrams.

Turning this golden key in the lock, Milosz uncovers the answer to pantheism: "the Judeo-Christian conjugal principle." Manifestation is feminine; creation is Beauty, the "Bride of Glory," the

spouse of God—the image in the mirror. In his development of this doctrine, Milosz explains the birth of Eve from Adam as an echo of the birth of creation from God, and the Fall as Adam's proud denial of the Nothing which separates him from his maker. The whole universe runs on a mystical aesthetics of love. Milosz writes, "The Father creates the universe so that the law of necessity which he is should be transmuted into love, so that holy beauty should call him from outside."

But to identify God with the Father alone is to forget the Trinity, and to be led into the mistake of thinking that "God could not but create the world." If I am right to suspect Milosz's orthodoxy at this point, there is reason to believe that Milosz himself would have been open to revising his position. For all his claims that "my knowledge surpasses that of a Dante," humility or "genuflection" was for him "the touchstone of all doctrine and any life." On this basis he even came to question the value of "the science of Guénon and the others," which had once influenced him greatly. Metaphysicians, especially, must beware of the intellectual pride of Lucifer, the enemy of all true gnosis.

"Holy Reason," he writes, "is a most delicate mechanism. Introduce as much pride as a grain of sand into the mind of a Saint Francis of Assisi, and you will obtain Hamlet-Faust-Manfred and their grandchildren of today, anguished and foolishly jeering." "The only thing of importance in this world—in this total Universe—is prayer." Prayer precedes even faith. "Ask and it will be given you" (Luke 11.9)—this is "the core of all philosophy and of the entire art of life."

—Stratford Caldecott

*Stratford Caldecott is Editorial Director for Routledge & Kegan Paul in Boston.*

### **Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish**

*Translated by Seamus Heaney.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1984. Pp. 85. \$13.95. Paper \$7.95.

### **Overnight in the Guest House of the Mystic**

*By Dick Allen.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984. Pp. 51. \$13.95. Paper \$5.95.

Seamus Heaney, the contemporary Irish poet, rose to prominence as "the bard of the bogs," a writer whose literary turf was his literal turf: the soil of his native Northern Ireland—the many deaths that have fed it, and the earthy lives it feeds. Heaney became known particularly for his poems about the ancient Norsemen whose corpses were preserved in the great peat bogs. To his readers, those exhumations and resurrections in verse seemed emblematic of the poet's art. And now Heaney, in his *Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish*, has turned his necromantic gift to the task of reviving yet another ancient body from the North Atlantic isles: the Gaelic narrative, *Buile Suibhne*.

The original text, in alternating prose and poetry, is believed to have been written in the late Middle Ages, but the legends it incorporates likely date back almost to 637 A.D., the year of the historical Battle of Moira, which figures in the tale's beginning. When the narrative opens, Sweeney, the intemperate (and, so far as we know, fictional) warrior-king of Dal-Arie, takes violent offense at the pious and peaceable activities of "a certain Ronan Finn..., a holy

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and distinguished cleric." Once the Battle of Moira commences, Sweeney is further enraged by Ronan's efforts to keep the peace and to impose limitations on the fighting. The pagan ruler deliberately violates all truces, slays one of Ronan's psalmists with a spear, and finally hurls a spear at Ronan himself, whose sacred bell stops the weapon just short of its mark.

Outraged, Ronan unleashes a fateful curse at the riotous king: Sweeney will be crackbrained as Ronan's bell is now cracked, will fly off as crazily as Sweeney's broken spear-shaft has, and in the end will himself "die at spear-point." At the cleric's words, Sweeney convulses, and is soon transformed into a mad bird-creature who flees fearfully into the wilds. The book then gives us the stories and songs of Sweeney's harrowed wanderings, as he flies from place to

place, severed for life from his wife and fellows, his kingship and sanity. Suffering from madness, flayed by the elements, Sweeney is reduced to "the thing itself; unaccommodated man...a poor, bare, forked animal." Ultimately, though, Sweeney's "houseless" soul is redeemed through his terrible suffering.

*Sweeney Astray* has a bleak and compelling beauty, in which Sweeney's emotional desolation is tempered by his moving intimacy with the trees and beasts and grasses of his land:

From lonely cliff-tops, the stag  
bells and makes the whole glen shake  
and re-echo. I am ravished.  
Unearthly sweetness shakes my breast.

One could hardly have found a poet fitter than Seamus Heaney for the task of rendering Sweeney's tale into Eng-

lish. Heaney's heart is also tied to Sweeney's haunts, among which Heaney grew up, and Heaney's lyric instrument plays just the kind of heavily stressed, consonantal music needed for Sweeney's anguished plaints:

Without bed or board  
I face dark days  
in frozen lairs  
and wind-driven snow.

Certainly no gift is more important for a translator than a talent for rhythm and aural textures. The original can provide description, metaphor, plot and ideas, but the translator's voice must give breath to Pygmalion, a heartbeat to the Golem. Mr. Heaney, whose principal genius lies precisely in composing the sound of his verse, has used that genius well to bring a resonant new life to the mad bird-king of Dal-Arie.

Another remarkable redemption, although quite different from Sweeney's, is evidenced by *Overnight in the Guest House of the Mystic*, a recent book of poetry by Dick Allen. One could not have predicted the achievement of this book from a reading of Allen's two earlier collections. In *Anon and Various Time Machine Poems* and *Regions with No Proper Names*, Allen engaged all too often in the adolescent pastime of building bonfires from the straw men readiest to hand. Those books were riddled with banal imagery and thought, a hipper-than-thou pedantry, and an annoying penchant for soft-core pornography.

But somehow, in the nine years between his second book and his new one, Allen shed his old poetic skin. Certain elements like Allen's interest in outer space and science fiction, and his disapproval of American materialism, are still present in *Overnight*, but the tone, pro-

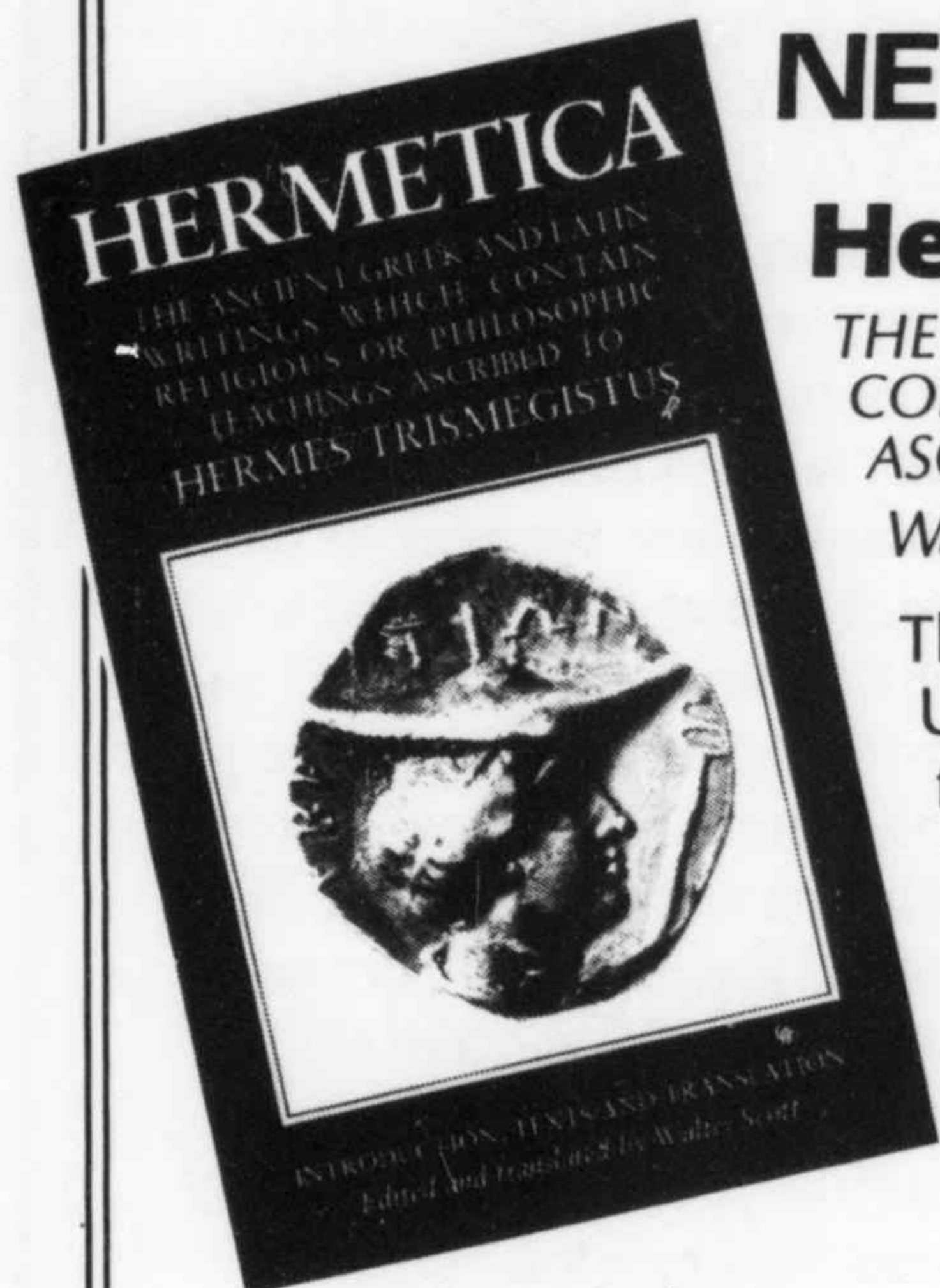
sody, and perceptions in the new work are worlds beyond those of the old.

One of the primary agents of Allen's transformation appears to have been the growing sense of morality that informs many of his newer poems. Yet the poems suggest that this does not suffice to explain his happy metamorphosis:

*Our knowledge that we shall not pass this way again—  
almost unbearable—although it makes  
each moment precious in itself,  
strikes even deeper if we come to feel  
the signs and patterns of the mystical  
on every tree and bush and turning wheel.*

The subjects that gently fire Allen's book are mortality, love, and above all else, the intimations of and yearnings toward that deeper sense of life which we call the mystical. The book's first poem, "Janes Avenue," provides an appropriate keynote: in it, the poet tells us how he and his fellow schoolchildren believed that a mummy was kept in the upper reaches of their school, and that only after school-hours would their mentors unlock the treasure for their own amazement: "they entered and they gazed and they were shaken./As we wished to be." *Overnight* is fueled by the conviction and knowledge that our world is made of marvels, many of them waiting just beyond our sight—or our willingness to see them.

You shut the television off. A blanket  
wrapped around  
your shoulders, you stand by me. All out  
there  
is fading into white. The hills, the lake, the  
house,  
the wood lot—all are gone. The moon has  
disappeared  
inside a bank of clouds. Just swirling snow  
I shine a flashlight into meets our eyes.



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"But how beautiful," you say, "a tunnel,  
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And we peer into it, along the flashlight's  
beam,  
at crystals spiraling. It's as if we poked  
a hole right through a swirling galaxy  
of dense stars. At the tunnel's end  
a living tree stands branched out like a man.

Rainer Maria Rilke wrote that the most important thing for the poet is to praise. Dick Allen, both directly and implicitly, has done that difficult thing in his splendid new book. His poetry, like a Japanese flute concert in words, has

the sweet-sad music of mortality and mystery, an atmosphere of tenderness and wonder toward existence. He carries the reader with him into the spirit of praise.

—Lawrence Russ

Lawrence Russ has published poems in numerous magazines, including *the Nation*, *the New York Quarterly*, and *the Iowa Review*. His poem "Prayers at the Broken Gate," which appeared in *PARABOLA Vol. VIII, No.3*, has been selected for the 1985 edition of the *Anthology of Magazine Verse*.

### **The Way of the Physician**

By Jacob Needleman. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. Pp. xiv + 187. \$15.95.

"With purity and holiness will I watch closely my life and my art."

These words from the Hippocratic Oath, sworn for the past 2500 years to "all gods and goddesses" by most doctors upon graduation from medical school, affirm the physician's role as keeper of a sacred obligation: to nurture and sustain human life. But today this oath is uttered by men and women who for the most part have lost contact with a sense of higher duty. Swamped by the flood of new medical findings and technologies, straitjacketed by supervisory boards, panels, and committees, and ever fearful of the specter of malpractice, the contemporary physician is as likely to watch his back and his bank balance as his life and art. In a remarkable new book, *The Way of the Physician*, Jacob Needleman calls upon doctors to make a radical movement: to return to the original aim of their practice, to once again become men and women whose "passion to save lives echo[es] of something beyond death itself."

Needleman, Professor of philosophy at San Francisco State University, constructs his book as a series of letters to his boyhood physician, Dr. Kaufman, whom he remembers as a prototype of "the great physician." This epistolary method works well, suffusing the author's words with an unusual warmth and intimacy. And although Needleman occasionally slips into sentimentality when writing of Dr. Kaufman, and of his own decision to forego a medical

career in favor of philosophy (a decision confirmed as he watches Dr. Kaufman begin to succumb to the ennui prevalent among other physicians), his prose achieves a rigor and persuasiveness in the section entitled "You Physicians," where he describes his struggles to introduce to an audience of doctors at a series of seminars on medical ethics "new universal ideas that would call those who heard them to a search for Truth."

This "search for Truth" is for Needleman the prescription needed to heal the malaise of alienation and boredom which ails modern medicine—and modern life. Once at the apex of humanity, embodying "a harmonic balance of thought, feeling, and instinct," and serving as a channel for healing energies descending from a higher source, today's physician, argues Needleman, has, like the rest of us, flattened and narrowed under the pressures of modern life. He has lost the thread which once connected him to "the active forces in the universe, forces to which the terms *conscious*, *intentional*, and *purposive* can truly be applied," and from which the power to heal, rather than simply to repair, derives—and only an inner search will allow him to rediscover that thread. But how to begin to approach, even conceptually, this search? Needleman indirectly points a way in some highly provocative reflections on what he calls "the riddle of Freud":

How could a man whose theoretical constructs about the human psyche were so complicated and artificial be such a good physician? . . . To put it briefly, I came to the conclusion that the greatness of Freud was due mainly to the fact that he was looking at the mind and at the suffering of his patients with an intensity that arises only when all one's deeply rooted opinions are destroyed . . . This combination of being a decently moral man and being committed to solve a problem for which there were absolutely no ready-made answers to be found anywhere produced in him a power of mind

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that enabled him to see and act with revolutionary effectiveness, objectivity, and compassion.

This power of mind, Needleman goes on to explain, is *attention*: "the healing factor" itself. It is a power which contemporary humanity has lost, as knowledge—rational scientific knowledge—has developed at the expense of "being": "The authentic physician is both a healer and a man of knowledge. That is, he has within himself a balance of two kinds of power: a strong life-energy and a well-developed intellect." It is this life-energy, focused through attention, which allows the true physician to practice *caring*, and which is sorely lacking in contemporary humanity.

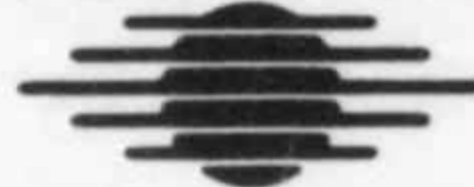
To rekindle this life-energy, it is necessary, Needleman posits, to restore the sense of "moral wonder," which in every moment permits us to see the world—and the physician each patient—*anew*. In one highly charged passage, the author makes a gift to us of his own sense of wonder as he describes his first-hand observation of open heart surgery:

And now suddenly there was the beating human heart less than eighteen inches away from me . . . I could feel my eyes bulging as I bent forward to watch the heart in action. I wanted to touch it. I thought of ancient civilizations and the meaning of the heart as the center of life, the seat of the soul, the ultimate mystery and wonder. Seeing it now, a muscle the size of a fist, throbbing under its own mysterious source of power—actually seeing the heart in front of me.

Most of us will never share this opportunity, of course. But death surrounds us, and it is in the fact of *death*, both others' and our own, that can awaken us to the wonder of *life*, as Needleman forcefully makes clear in describing a death he witnessed as a young orderly:

He died on the fourth day just as I was

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propping up his head in order to try to give him some oatmeal . . . The oatmeal was dribbling down his chin and he was looking at me — as usual uttering some curses at me. The light simply and suddenly went out of his eyes . . . the world of real reality was announcing its existence on the ward and people behaved as if this world did not exist, as though this world were not constantly pressing in upon us, insisting, demanding that we acknowledge it. I don't want to use the word *God*, but if I had to speak in religious language, I would say that every day God was thrusting his hands and legs into the ward and everyone was simply walking around them, taking no notice.

But is all this really relevant to today's harried, overworked physician? About his observation of Mr. Patterson's death Needleman writes, "Such experiences are no mere metaphysical luxury. No mere philosophical indulgence. They are necessary for the activation of medical intelligence, the power to see the truth about the individual human body itself, about patients, their needs, their actual diagnoses and treatment . . . Physicians are also scientists — that is, they need to drink from the sense of wonder; but, their calling demands also the confrontation with death. Only these two truly peak experiences . . . can bring him the intelligence and compassion he craves, but which he has nowadays all but given up hope of finding."

Needleman writes in his introduction that "the aim of this book is to demonstrate that the meaning of being a physician can only be recovered through a rediscovery of the question of human life itself." Through his passion, good humor, and compelling clarity of thought he makes an effective demonstration, one which hopefully will be noticed by as many physicians and laypeople as possible.

—Jeff Zaleski

*Jeff Zaleski is Executive Editor of PARABOLA.*

**Echoes from the Bottomless Well**  
By Frederick Franck. New York: Vintage Books (a division of Random House, Inc.), 1985. Pp. xiv + 145. Paper. \$8.95.

For years Frederick Franck had thought of collecting essential sayings and texts from Buddhist and Christian traditions to form a kind of breviary. He pictured a small book, compact enough to carry to prison, "or any place one could take at most one small book as a companion on the way." He could not have predicted how it would come to be. It began with a letter from a correspondent of half a century: she was dying.

Later, he would feel that the detonation which followed had been sparked by the grace of a single line in which the old woman distilled for him the truth of the "reality within." Dr. Franck remembers that he was "shaken, much more than I would have believed possible"—shaken enough to pick up an unaccustomed tool, a Japanese brush, and begin to draw. Through the next forty-eight hours, with only a few hours for sleep, he sat and watched as verses, koans, insights from Buddhist sages and Christian saints welled up and assembled themselves like pearls on a string. His hand moved automatically, following no familiar style or conscious concern, dashing out images that completed each quote. After two days the flow abated and a sequence appeared for the 144 illustrated sheets, "as inexplicable, as inexorably as did the twins of word and image themselves."

These hand-lettered sheets, bound in large-format trade paperback, comprise *Echoes From The Bottomless Well*. For the reader the collection is a progression of luminous quotes on the nature of being by Basho, St. John, Rinzai, and many others, illustrated by rough, exuberant sketches. For Dr. Franck it is a "Book of Hours, of Forty-Eight Hours," in which gems of sacred knowledge rose

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up as though from the unfathomable depth of collective human memory. It seemed to him that he simply recorded what—through a lifetime and yet, suddenly—had become his own. *Echoes* became for Dr. Franck a requiem for the friend who died an hour after mailing her letter: an answer to the monk Rin-zai's demand that he "Speak! Speak!" This is Dr. Franck's breviary, but it is a collection shot through and resounding with the dying woman's quiet reminder of "That Which Matters." This is not a collection of still moments, but an ar-

row in flight.

Dr. Franck is well known as a student of Zen and a teacher of drawing. Gone here is the careful exposition and draftsmanship of *The Zen of Seeing* and *The Awakened Eye*. In those books he guided one to an inner quiet that permitted apprehension. What are we to make of these intentionless drawings, this "unstoppable stream?" "He who knows speaks not," Dr. Franck quotes of Lao Tze, and on the same page Haru-rakuten answers, "If he knew...then why did he write those 5000 words?"

One senses that Dr. Franck is not really breaking the rules of silence and simplicity in *Echoes from the Bottomless Well*—for this is not authorship, but an offering. The last page quotes Hakuin: “The bright one will see at a glance where the arrow flies...” In *Echoes from the Bottomless Well*, a moment of grief becomes the springboard for the wisdom of a generous heart.

—Tracy Cochran

*Tracy Cochran is a freelance writer.*

### **The Mythology of North America**

By John Bierhorst. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985. Pp. viii + 259. \$13.00.

It is fortunate that John Bierhorst initiate the projected series of books on the mythologies of the New World (William Morrow and Co.); his *Four Masterworks of American Indian Literature* and *The Red Swan* are familiar and continually useful to serious readers of Native American history. His new volume, *The Mythology Of North America* is, as its generic title suggests, an introduction. (The jacket calls it the first “systematic guide to this lore since H.B. Alexander’s *North American Mythology*.”) Bierhorst offers an idiosyncratic and accessible approach. Simply put, he creates a *map* of North America, indicating “proposed mythological regions”; these, too, are chapter headings—Northwest Coast, Far North, Southwest, West Central, Coast Plateau, Plains, East, Midwest. This constitutes much more than an ethnographic field guide; it allows geographies to animate themselves. For example, we catch glimpses of myriad Trickster-cousins—Raven,

Coyote, human-like beings—who invent, prestidigitate, troublemake their way all over the continent. Cartographer-scholar Bierhorst makes his map a forum in which history as expressed in folklore is discussed. Like all the most intrepid, generous books of this kind, *The Mythology Of North America* infuses a reader with enthusiasm for its subject, and provides an impetus for more detailed investigation into particular oral literatures.

The advantages (when paced and handled properly) and disadvantages of our travelling Bierhorst’s narrative regions—without, that is, stopping at any one for very long—can be clearly illustrated by the section “The Far North.” Here, we are provided with an insert map of the Arctic and Subarctic, and an accompanying motif index: Animal Mother, Dog Husband, Thunder Girls, Raven Cycle, Sun Sister and Moon Brother, Transformer, and the tribes in which these motifs are common: Koyukon, Kutchin, Slavey, Dogrib, Tsetsaut, Beaver; and farther north, Koniak, Netsilik, Iglulik, etc. The map is our main archive of names, the individual *sound* of each language. In our brief visit we learn, among other things:

...storytelling was widely used as a soporific. During the long night, while telling stories, Netsilik grandmothers cultivated a monotonous voice so that children would fall asleep more quickly.

Bierhorst has given us a detail which draws us into a particular cultural circumstance. The phrase “cultivated a monotonous voice” allows us to hear a story being told, if not to understand its words.

Yet taking this section as an example, two things decidedly troubled this reader.

Myth is born of, indeed remains symbiotic with, language. A place is given a name (Place-Eotik-Saw-An-Otter-Fly), the name can evolve into a

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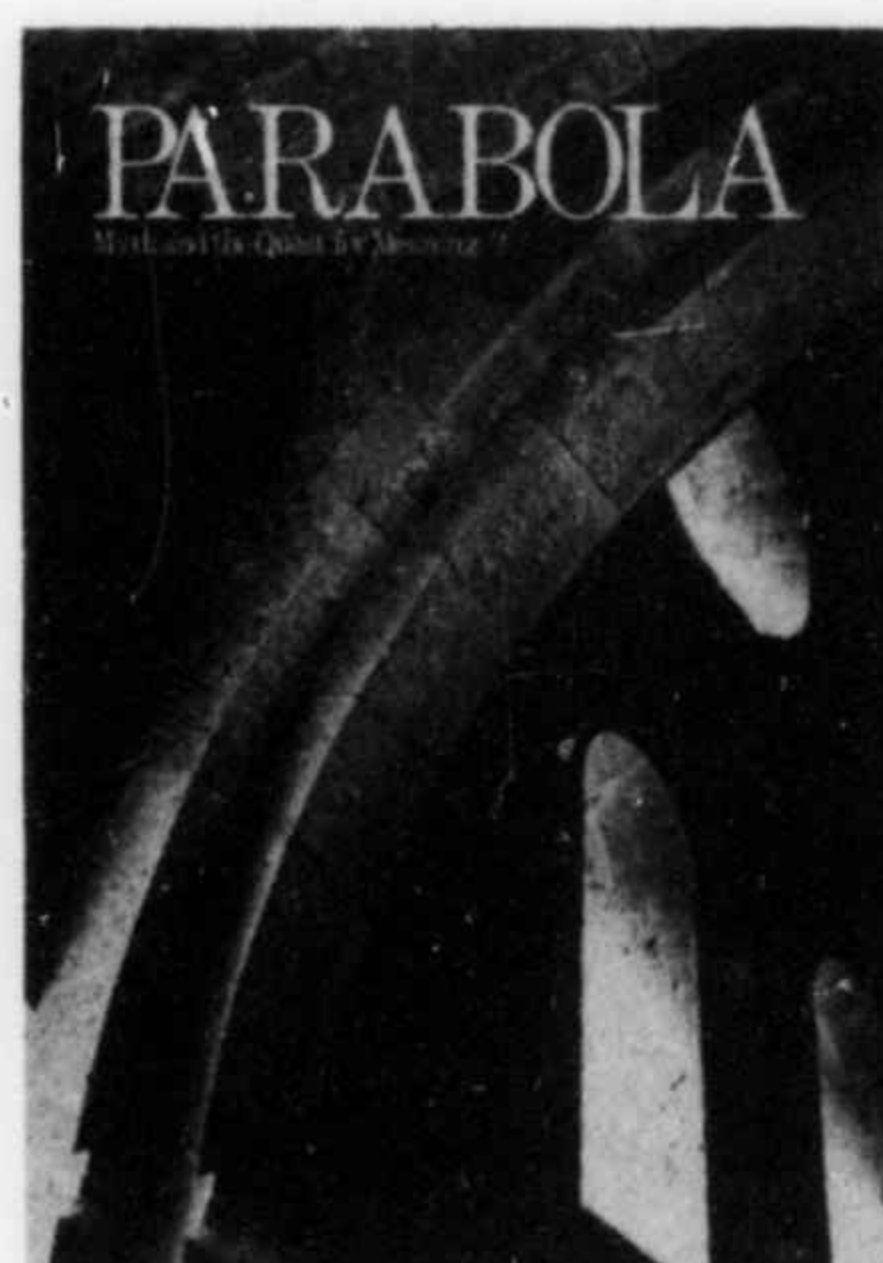
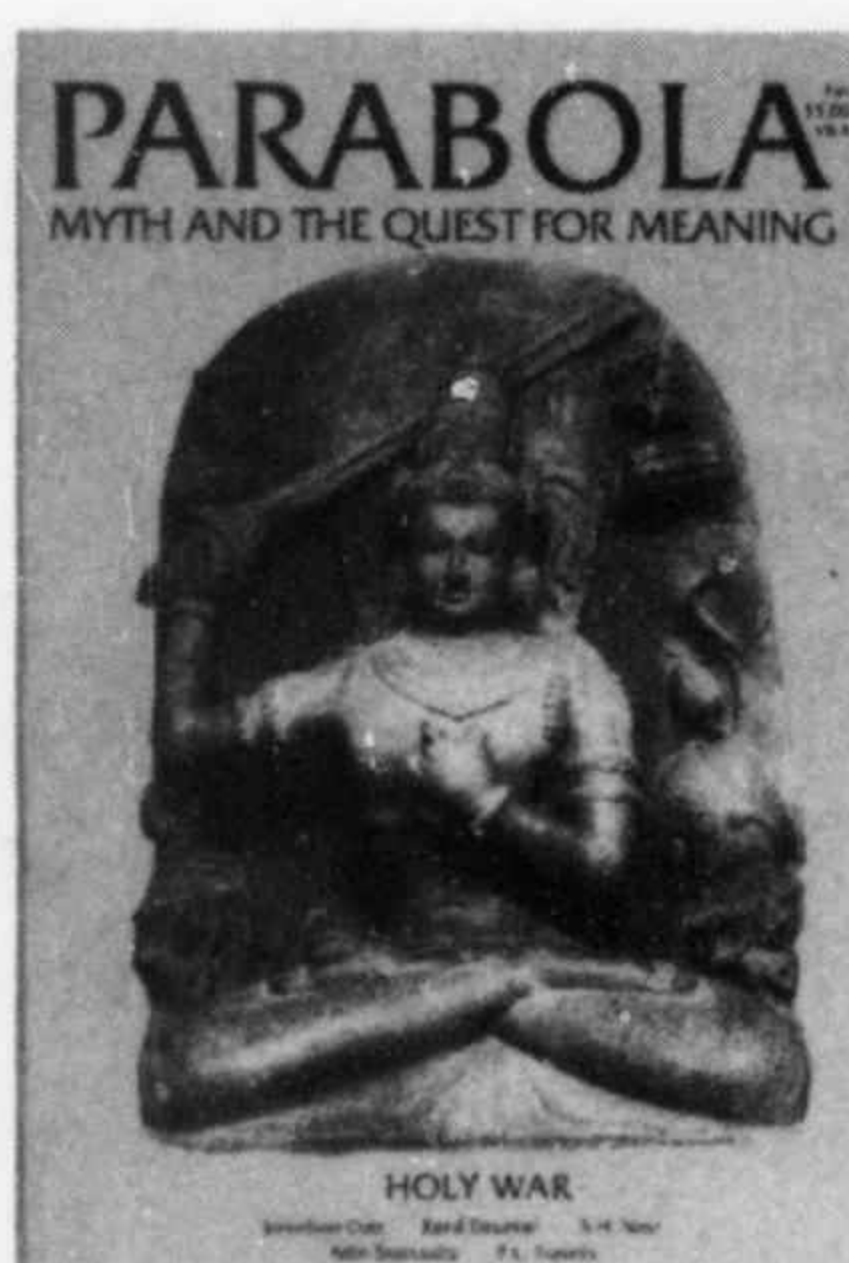
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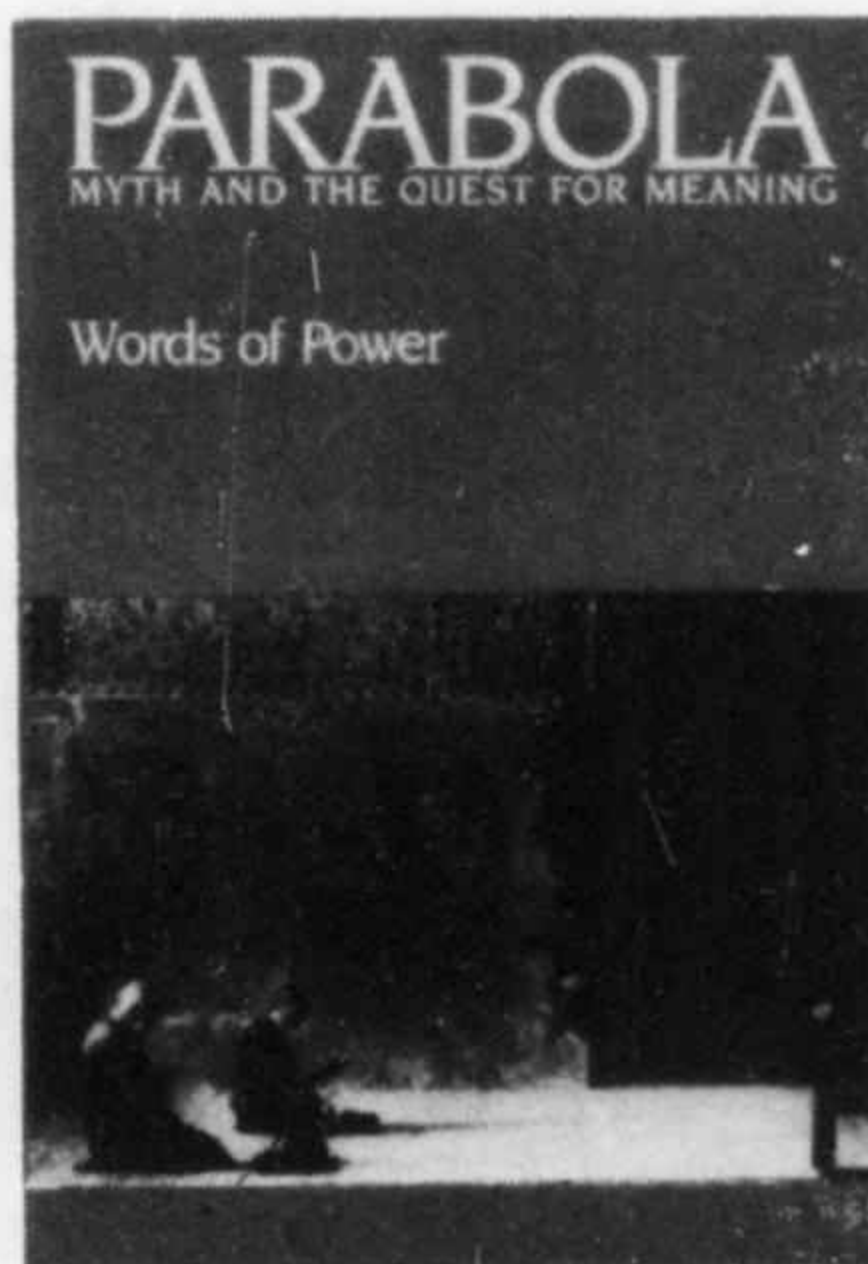
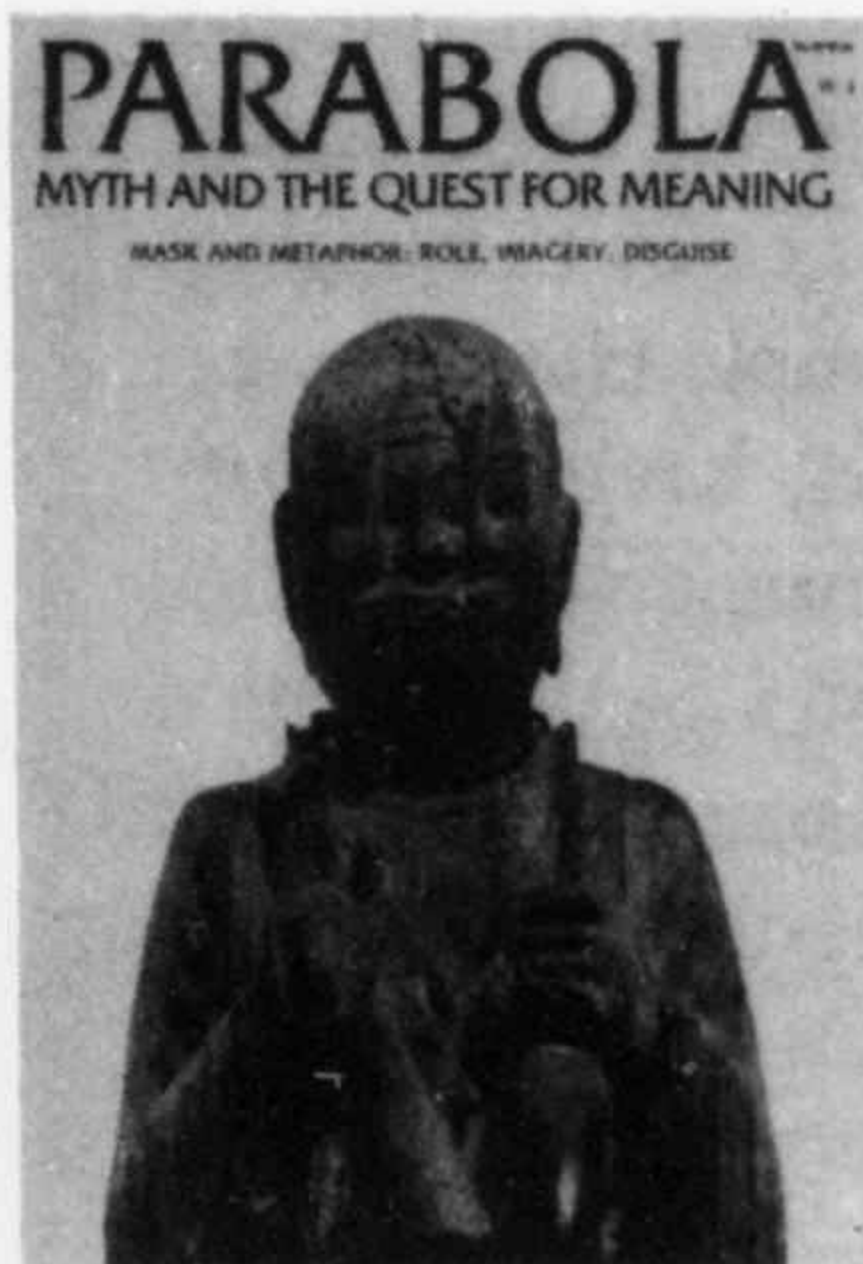


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more elaborate anecdote, the anecdote into a narrative, the narrative into a cycle or sequence. The world is thus explained. A myth, then, being a vessel of Time, contains human linguistic history. In *The Mythology Of North America*, the discussion of the role of language was conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps in the book's introduction, along with other subheadings—"Myth and Culture," "Gods and Heroes," "The Trickster," "Mythological Regions," and the rest—language might have claimed equal prefatory importance.

Secondly, while *The Mythology Of North America* was never intended as an anthology, it would have been an asset to include at least one full tale per "mythological region" to supplement the occasional synopsis of particular motifs. However, Bierhorst is by no means ne-

glectful of showing tales as living presences. In the section 'West Central' he asks:

How did these stories sound in performance? In the circular earth lodges of the Eastern Miwok they were sometimes chanted, usually by a professional myth teller, or *untentbe*, who made the rounds of the villages, taking payment in baskets and other valuables.

The myths were told at night, the only acceptable time for reciting stories, and as smoke from the fire rose to the hole in the center of the heavy-beamed roof, the *untentbe* might begin by explaining how the animal people got ready for the world flood:

"Prairie Falcon told his people to prepare. He said, 'Get ready, Eagle. Get ready, Flicker. Get ready, Dove. Get ready, Woodpecker. Get ready, Quail. Get ready, Kingbird. Get ready, Hummingbird. We are going. We are going. We are going, going toward the north. Hurry, prepare, for we must go at once, must go at once, must go at once.' So he said, when he told his people, to prepare. 'We shall take the people. We shall take the people to the place where my father always goes.'

"Prairie Falcon said to Eagle, 'Tell everyone, Eagle. Tell everyone, Eagle. Tell everyone, Eagle. Have your people prepare. Tell California Jay to come. Tell Coyote to come. Tell Hummingbird to come. We will go to the top of the great mountain.' "

At such a leisurely pace, it is understandable that sessions with the *untentbe* often lasted the night. This was customary throughout the region. Among the Pomo, as the night wore on, each story ended with the obligatory prayer, "From the east and from the west may the mallard girls hurry and bring the morning."

In working with myth, the translator must confront the difficult question of how *in writing* to evoke the original *telling*, and the ambience of the telling. Bierhorst, in the example cited above, faces another dilemma, having to condense centuries of Miwok performance. His is the reductionist's paradox: on each page Bierhorst shouts, "Pay careful attention!" and in the next breath, "But

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remember this is only the surface!"

*The Mythology Of North America*, keep in mind, is a book of comparative mythology; chapters are panels of cultures, whose similarities and differences are seen through their juxtaposition with one another. Fortunately for his readers, the structure Bierhorst has designed carries a tremendous amount of vivid information.

—Howard Norman

Howard Norman's most recent book is *Where the Chill Came From: Cree Windigo Tales and Journeys* (North Point Press). His novel, *The Northern Lights*, is due next year from Summit. He is the editor of *Folktales of the North* (Pantheon) and is on the faculty of The Center For Northern Studies, Wolcott, Vermont.

### Art and Human Consciousness

By Gottfried Richter. Translated by Burley Channer and Margaret Frohlich. Preface by Konrad Oberhuber. Spring Valley, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1985. Pp. xvi + 271. \$30.00.

Before Gottfried Richter became ordained as a priest in 1927 in the Christian Community—a religious movement based on the ideas of Rudolf Steiner—he had studied art history at the universities of Heidelberg and Jena. His *Ideen zur Kunstgeschichte* (Reflections on Art History) was published in 1937 and has now been translated into English and published by the Anthroposophic Press under the title *Art and Human Consciousness*. The English title is more informative than the original German, but the

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book could have been subtitled "An Interpretation of the History of Art According to the Anthroposophic Ideas of Rudolf Steiner."

Not only the history of art, but cultural history in general, is interpreted by Richter according to Steiner's thoughts on the history of human consciousness, with special emphasis—as pointed out in the preface by Professor Konrad Oberhuber of Harvard University—on "the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ," which (according to Anthroposophic theory) is seen as the "central event in the history of the world."

*Art and Human Consciousness* is written with the urgency and conviction of a spiritual message. Towards the end of the book Richter points out that "More than ever before, what is artistic is not only an *esthetic* question, but a *moral* one

as well. Not 'moral' in the sense of middle-class morality, but in the sense of such questions as these: What sort of will is at work in you? Who within you is saying 'I' to you? "

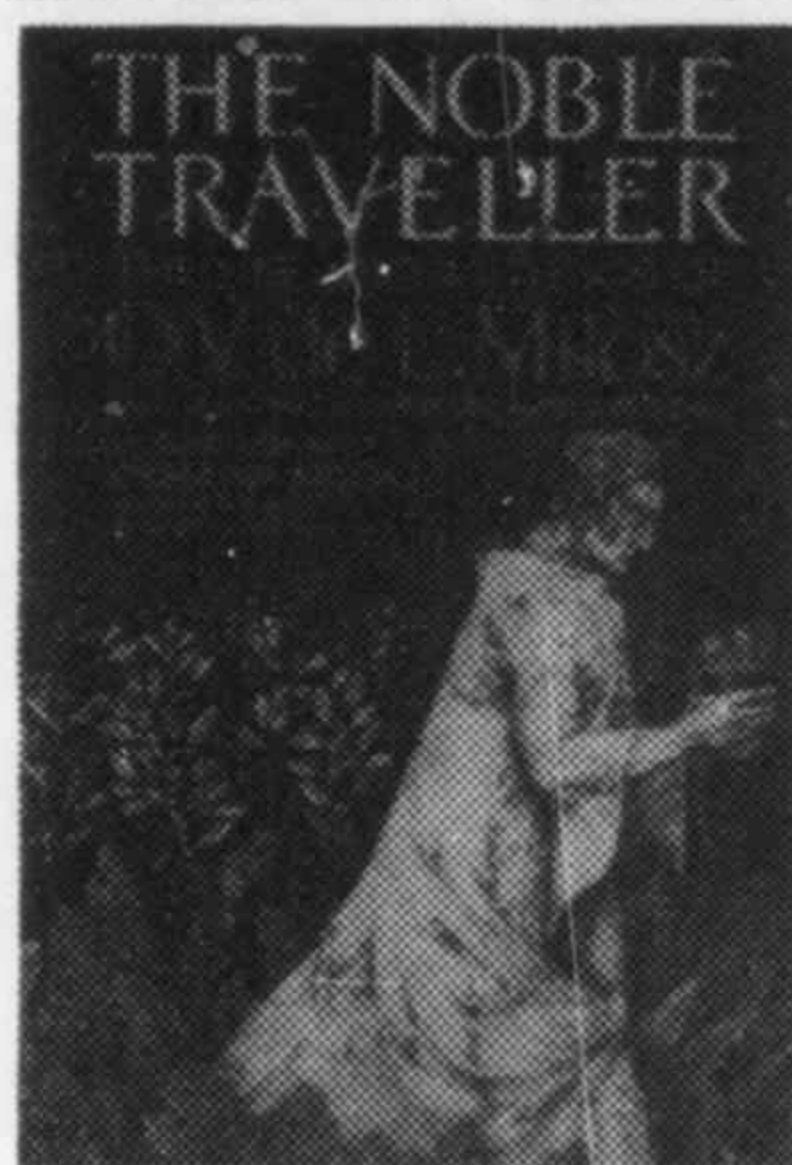
Konrad Oberhuber notes in his foreword that "the highly poetic language and the depth of Christian feeling" expressed in the book might "create a barrier." This is not the real problem, however. It suffers more from being divorced from the Anthroposophic ideas which underlie it, and which are largely presumed known to the reader. Indeed, when Richter occasionally allows himself to set out on a literary interpretation of the unique qualities found in a specific work of art, the writing rings true as direct experience.

The weakness of *Art and Human Consciousness* lies in the large sweeping

generalizations, with their obvious historical omissions. Richter fails to do justice to the works and the periods in question by entering into criticism whose objective is to define and interpret whole periods according to a pre-existing set of ideas. Today, no art historian would claim that he has approached individual works of art or the development and the changes within different periods without a pre-existing set of values and concepts. He would, however, attempt to define these sets of determinants and make them, as far as possible, a simultaneous object of study. A crucial—and unresolved—element of any art historical investigation is how to view history itself. In its infancy, art history attempted, almost feverishly, to create a “philosophy of history,” and although we study these attempts today with great interest, and even use their methods and ideas as tools, we have lost faith in their universal application.

In the introductory chapter, “On the Meaning of History,” Richter has attempted to outline the concepts structuring his approach. He declares that “the world—including both mankind and human destiny—is a densification of something higher, the expression or the becoming visible of something invisible,” and that “the real meaning and intention of every work of art is to exhibit this more complete densification in physical form.” To this he adds, first, that in “a work of art truly worthy of the name, this ‘experience’ always originates in the spiritual world; it is the artist’s sense of being looked at by a divine being,” and then, “mankind as a whole is involved in this same type of growth, awakening again and again to new stages of inner experience. Each great civilization is a new beginning at ever new stages along the pathway that all mankind is traveling towards the self and its realization.” Richter sees these ideas of a linear progression and of an awakening to new collective stages of

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inner experience, both as an “infinite gain” and an “infinite loss.” This allows him to proceed with a generally positive approach to the periods he selects, though it clearly does not sustain him once he enters into a discussion of the art of the twentieth century.

Richter's rather simplistic structure of spiritual progress cannot, however, form the basis of any direct investigation of the history of art, but only serve as a tool for literary generalizations. The book therefore proceeds by interweaving groups of partially introduced Anthroposophic ideas with generally well-known art historical readings.

In the last chapter, Richter arrives at an almost total condemnation of twentieth-century art, and is, finally, only able to point to one positive example (art produced by artists connected



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with the Waldorf School). Richter proceeds with a strong condemnation of abstract art, to the point of declaring that it "breathes an icy indifference." One of the abstract artists he mentions by name is Piet Mondrian. Richter knew well, of course, that Mondrian was a Theosophist, and a member of the Theosophical Society all his life, but avoids any discussion of his work, and of his attempt at visually establishing or rediscovering a universal language. That the other great master of abstract art, Vassily Kandinsky, is not mentioned at all, although he was both directly and indirectly influenced by Steiner's ideas, is equally unfortunate. But it points to Richter's selective reading of Steiner's ideas, and also the generally nostalgic flavor of all of *Art and Human Consciousness*.

—Lasse Antonsen

*Lasse Antonsen is curator of the Danforth Museum of Art in Framingham, Massachusetts. He is currently organizing the exhibition, "Picturesque India: India as Seen by British Artists 1780-1860. A Selection of Watercolors and Aquatints from the Allen Collection."*

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By Percy Bullchild. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. Pp. viii + 384. \$22.95.

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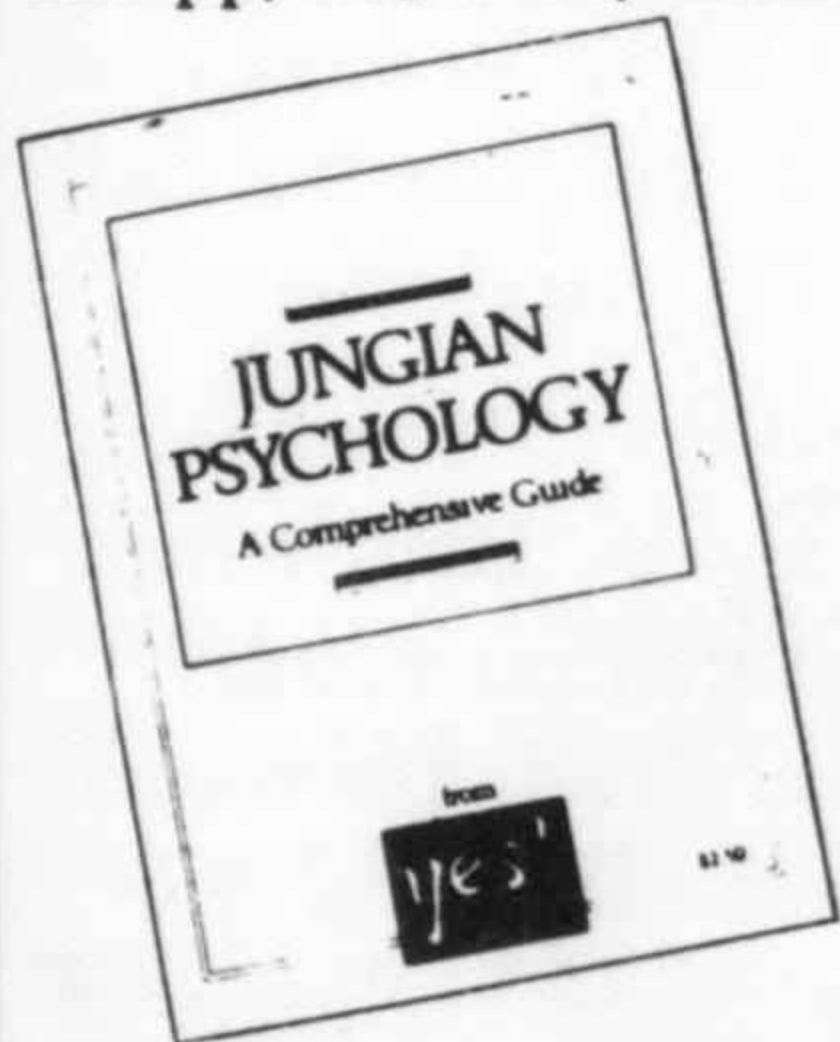
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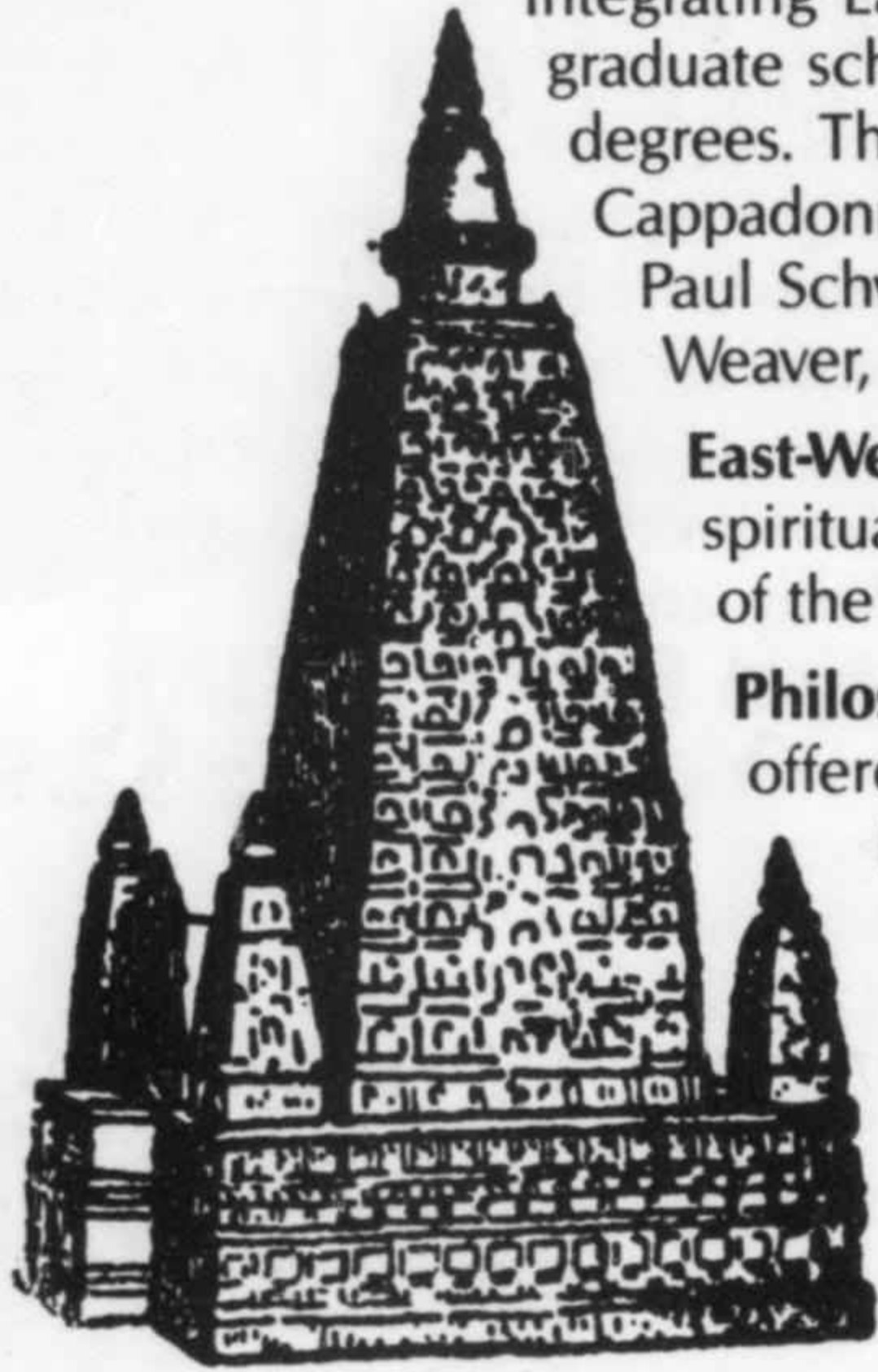
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narrates nearly fifty traditional accounts of Blackfeet religious belief as well as "our historic past and our legends." The author illustrates his narrative with thirty-eight of his own exciting works of art, all of which are personal and dramatic elaborations, in black and white, of traditional pictograph styles. He notes that "all of this story is true, because we Natives preserved our history in our minds and handed it down from generation to generation, from time unknown, orally . . . ."

This is an important book, the impact and merit of which is not diminished by the fact that there are, of course, many other American Indian and even other *Blackfeet* points of view. Only on occasion does the author overstate his case: for example, in describing the Blackfeet prior to contact with the

whites, Bullchild portrays them as living nobly in a North American Eden which did not know war. More importantly, however, Bullchild has clearly communicated that the Blackfeet religion is relevant and alive—not a "dead" religion of the past. The book is a significant contribution to an understanding of Blackfeet religion as it has survived and has been affected by various contacts with other Indian nations and other Indian religious beliefs, as well as with various white nations and white religions.

For Bullchild, what is true is more than knowledge based on historical or scientific fact. The most profound truths are mysteries, powers expressed by the Creator Sun in the past and/or present which explain the origins of the present world and universe. Equally true are the myths which explain specific events in

creation on earth, including the tales of "Napi" or "Oldman," whom Bullchild describes as "the disciple of Creator Sun" who was "put here on Mother Earth to teach the children of Creator Sun and Mother Earth. . . ."

Blackfeet religion (in common with many other American Indian religions) maintains that all aspects of creation are alive, and although all beings have different functions and powers, all are interdependent and worthy of respect. It follows therefore that all life forms also have common life experiences—love affairs, frustrations, and other challenges. Bullchild relates a Blackfeet belief of how the universe begins with Creator Sun, the source of spiritual power and creation who nevertheless faced numerous challenges. That Blackfeet religion is alive today is demonstrated by Bullchild's account of Creator Sun's adulterous wife, who became the Moon: "She was left completely bare of clothing. No growth on her of any kind to cover her, and no bearing any offspring. So today, the astronauts find the moon completely bare, even of air or wind." Thus in Blackfeet religion the present serves to confirm the past. Through this and similar glimpses of the lives of spiritual forces in Blackfeet religion, the reader is shown that those forces are understandable from a human point of view, yet they are nonetheless awesome and deserving of reverence. The integration and interdependence of all life forms is further demonstrated by the Creator Sun's one "commandment that was to be used by all, especially the human beings. The commandment was just a plain, 'Be honest to life and to all life.'"

Some readers might quarrel with Bullchild's use of English words such as "commandment," "sin," or "Tabernacles," which Bullchild uses to describe Blackfeet attitudes, objects, and actions. But this reviewer feels that these English words are Bullchild's careful attempts at analogies, reflecting the problem of Bullchild's translating Blackfeet into his sec-

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete, Joseph Kulin, Associate Publisher, October 1, 1985.

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ond language, English. He has taken an admirable risk in an attempt to be understood, and readers would do well to concentrate on the spirit of the English words he uses rather than center upon debating the precise literal meanings.

This book represents major aspects of the accumulated wisdom of all Blackfeet people. But it is also a very personal account. Because it includes Bullchild's asides, admonitions, interpretations, and opinions, each page becomes his personal vehicle to communicate oral history. Just as if one was listening in person, the reader can "hear" Bullchild explain the serious issues of spirituality—often with humor, humility, self-deprecation, or stern anger. The latter is especially important. Bullchild's anger at what white governments did and are still doing to

Indian people is only occasionally expressed, as are his frustrations at seeing Blackfeet and all Indians frequently misunderstood and even cruelly treated by non-Indians in general, but when this anger appears in his text, it provides a jarring counterpoint and supplement to the spiritual narrative. Such a counterpoint is very necessary, because Indian religions and arts are too often viewed by non-Indians as aspects of Native American life which can be separated and appreciated apart from history and politics. Indians themselves have occasionally deliberately pandered to this desire of non-Indians to study only those aspects of American Indian culture which will not make non-Indians uneasy or uncomfortable. Bullchild obviously feels he has an important spiritual message to convey, but he is also determined to challenge the reader to react politically. He invites the reader to understand Blackfeet culture and religion, but this understanding demands coping with challenges like the one he chooses to express as the very last lines of his book: "Today we are struggling to survive the onslaught of the whiteman . . . to fully conquer the continents. The Native can only pray to our Creator Sun for deliverance from this wicked onslaught and robbery of our lands and now the waters."

—Robert W. Venables

*Robert W. Venables is Director of Special Projects, American Indian Community House, New York City.*

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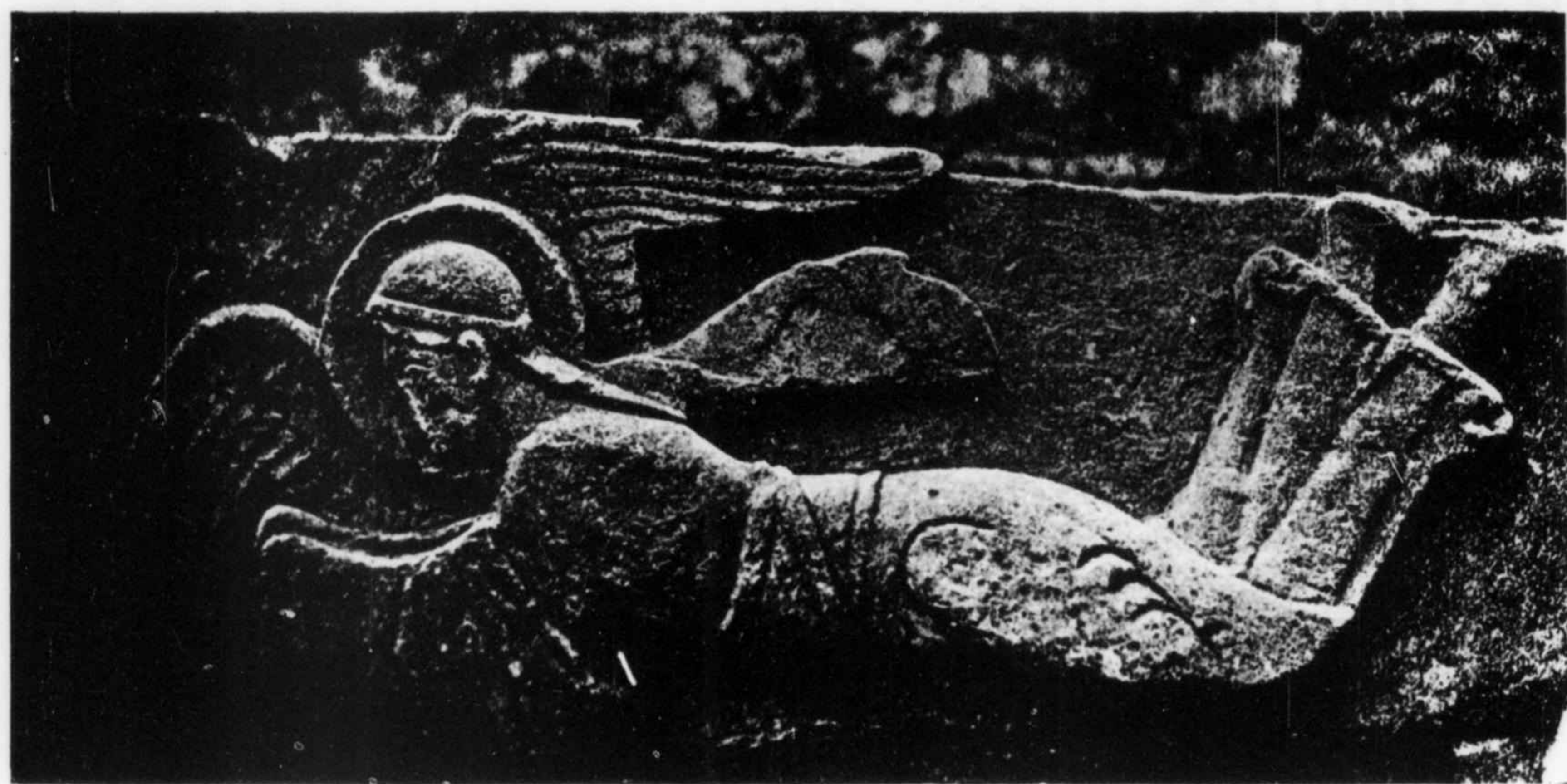
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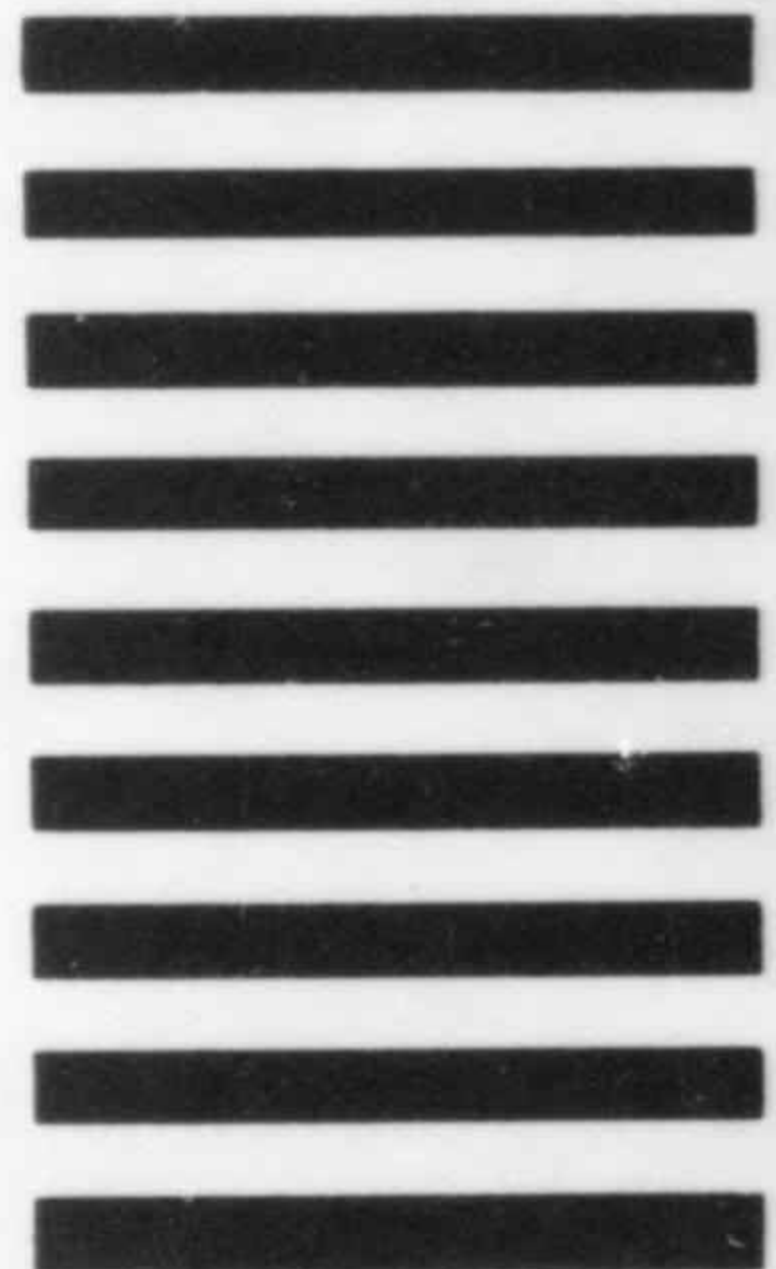
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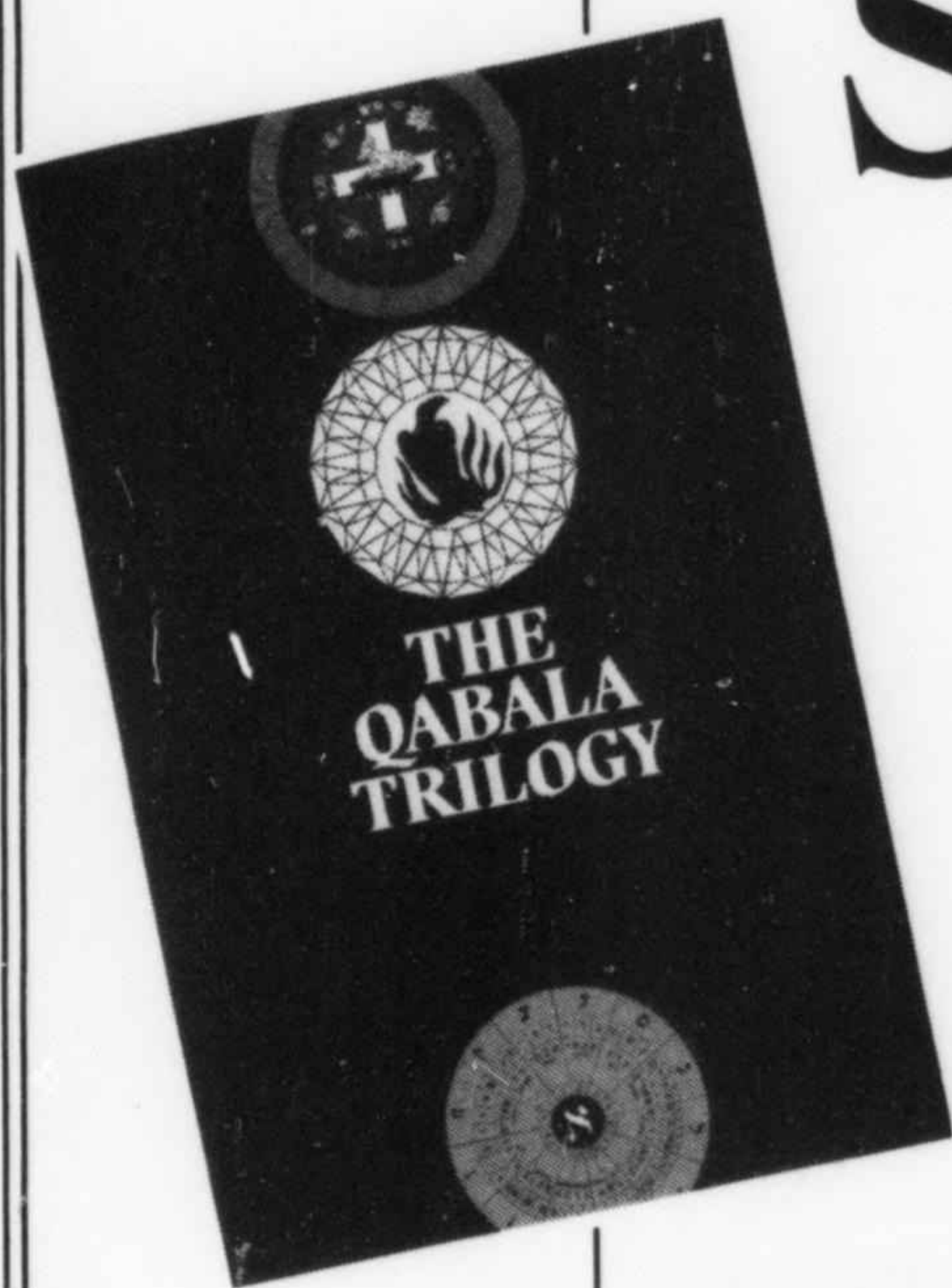
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