

Revolution: Religious And Social

By Alan Zaitchik and Chaim Schnur

The question we pose and hopefully answer in this essay is twofold. First, what attitude towards contemporary American society does the *halacha*-conscious individual assume, and, second, does the Orthodox Establishment in its relationship to modern America reflect this *halacha*-conscious perspective or not? We will not attempt to deal in specific *halachic* categories for the purpose of *psak*, a task far beyond our capabilities and authority, but rather we will strive to develop from our own experience of *halacha*-consciousness a general pronouncement on the now-scene.

This pronouncement is not direct nor naive in the sense of prescribing, as a *halachically* determined obligation, a specific course of action, but is rather descriptive to the extent that we claim that anyone who is intensely aware of *halacha* and its presuppositions and values must, of necessity, adopt one general attitude towards an apparently decadent and harmful culture. This course of action is revolution specifically adapted to thwart the anti-*halachic* attempt of homogenization. To quote Steven Schwarzschild in a recent edition of "Tradition" (Spring-Summer, 1967): "The *Halacha*, in order to be completely realized requires a total transformation of human society . . . Thus *Halacha* is religiously the permanent revolution."

We will speak of revolution in two distinct, yet related, senses: intellectual revolution through rebellion of the spirit, and social revolution through rebellion of action. When it comes to the first, revolution is unqualified, as it is the immediate program as well as the goal. With regards to social extensions, we accept a revolutionary attitude with respect to the goals to which we strive. Our aim is radical change. Our means of achieving this turnover are, however, not necessarily those usually connected with "social revolution," although that too is often necessary, pragmatically and morally, depending on the mode and intensity of suppression. These distinctions and qualifications must be kept in mind.

Halacha, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein has said, is the maximization of the conscious confrontation of right and wrong; the *halachic* individual is constantly strung-out, quivering with tension in the awareness of his choice. Modern man is the very antithesis. He is the solution of formula spun out by the machines of Madison Avenue and mythmakers of Hollywood. *V'al Kulom*: the god Felicitas and his son Mammon.

If modern man sins, he has not sinned, for the category is unintelligible to him. . . If he acts ethically, he has not acted ethically, for the "good will" is unknown. What is life? Buying and selling. Modern man buys and sells "everything from toy guns that spark to flesh colored Christs that glow in the dark" (Dylan).

In the all-too-human, petty, pointless pursuit after created needs and falsified demands, the only dimension to the low-level intelligence of an "induced existence," is the heightened awareness of

pleasure and pain. Subway advertisements suggest that lack of mint-flavored Crest is valid grounds for divorce.

The homogenized pop-culture which pervades almost every area of life extends from senseless vacuity to sadistic and perverted excretions, from the childish irrelevance of Doris Day to the stench of the Dirty Dozen. And High-Brow culture? Yes, run to the galleries where the best of the Western zoo is hung and write an essay in 20,000 words (or more, that's the point), giving a critical appraisal to be published in any of a score of sophisticated magazines, read by programmed aesthetes who talk and talk of Bosche but have not his visions, who even at life's aesthetic level exist vicariously and linguistically, not directly and genuinely.

Our entire social, cultural and economic organization is bent on murdering *Halachic*-man, for *Halachic*-man does not cooperate with the digits of pain-pleasure calculus, neither does he respond to the jolts and tugs of the "big bright green pleasure machine." *Halachic*-man is not interested in jetsam-for-sale, vomit-for-rent. Thus, society decides: "He must be destroyed."

What is the response of the *halachic*-conscious Jew to a society bent on his eradication? In the words of Jeremiah, he decides, "To root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to overthrow; to build and to plant." He accepts the challenge; the duel will be fought. Senseless destruc-

roads of the temporal," social community is achieved, "in a movement that rises first to God and then returns from Him to other self" (Tillich). The *halachically* aware individual sees his dual extensions: his shadow cast upon the heavens and his shadow cast upon the ground. The *halachic* revolutionary stands before man in his stance before God.

The revolutionary social dimensions of *halacha* as sketched above grow out of an even more basic radicalization of *halacha*. To set off this radicalization in its sharpest colors, let us first turn to the "Orthodox Establishment" and examine, albeit only in generalizations, its values and world-outlook.

Who is at ease in modern Zion? Those who are content in the marketplace, the turned off, gas-heated, would-be-Jews who live better lives through chemistry, the very Jews who may claim to be, or worse, think of themselves as the faithful proponents of traditional Judaism in its highest level of achievement.

On the Left, Orthodox leaders are pharmacists trying to sell a pill they present as easy to swallow. The *halachic* community, they urge, should throw open its doors, and dilute its message. Kierkegaard once wrote, however, that in a society where all are Christian (or thus think themselves) *eo ipso*, none are Christian. A spineless religion, jellified for easier consumption, cannot substitute for a firm approach to man and God.

"God is man idealized (humanist definition). Religion is the aspiration of man toward an idealized existence. An existence in which the functions of God and man are harmonious, even identical. Art is the movement forward, the understanding progress of man. It is feeling and making. A nation (social order) is made the way people feel it should be made. A face is too. Politics is man's aspiration toward an order. Religion is too. Art is an ordering as well. And all these categories are spiritual, but are also the result of the body, at one point, serving as a container of feeling. The soul is no less sensitive."

LeRoi Jones

tion, utter nihilism, is the work of Satan; creative, goal-oriented destruction of evil, revolutionary reorientation, is often the command of God. Commenting on the verse of *Lech lecho*, the *Zohar* states that the first step in Abraham's personal revolt was to go back to himself, to understand the meaning of his existence, and from there to go ahead and reject his society's and even his family's value system.

This reflects the underlying message of *halacha* in its social dimension: the great dream of social *halacha* is to sanctify the here-and-now with other-worldly values. Declaring war on what is, the *Halachic*-man returns from the *ought* to plan the *to be*. *Halacha* drags saintliness out of its castle into the mud. Aware of the "presence of the external upon the crowded

Our objections to the Orthodox Right are more sweeping and painful, for we are more akin the Right in its face-value acceptance of the centrality of *Halacha*. There are two trends in this community which are stifling and crippling *halachic* vibrancy. The first of these is the near solipsism into which the Right has pushed itself. The rationalization given is that, by clustering its groups into certain neighborhoods, it can henceforth sit back and refuse to confront and feel the challenge of those very issues which are shaking the foundations of the "external" world's ethos. The Right has refused to understand that the irreligious world is also made up of sincere and searching individuals who have some extremely potent claims against today's brand of Orthodoxy

and religion in general. Instead of a head-on and meaningful confrontation, the Orthodox Right has sought refuge in self-created spiritual and intellectual dungeons, living in existential solitary confinement. Instead of breathing fresh life into the *halacha*, they have instead preferred to "bear it in their hands as a sacred relic, as a rescued mummy, and fear to awaken its spirit." (Hirsch) The externalism (almost parallel to Rome in the time of Luther) that permeates the atmosphere through a stereotyped system of speech, thought and dress, has succeeded in turning off those who sincerely seek an alternative to the intense vacuity of American life: *Al eile ani bochia*.

Far more serious is the sense of complacency and even grunting satisfaction expressed in these "best of all possible worlds" circles. The egocentric attitude is also responsible for the near frenzied and inevitable alignment of the hierarchy with any given status-quo including Vietnam, Israel, Black power and other such morally demanding and excruciating issues, (one of the only times that the Orthodox openly bucked the system is when parking rules were not suspended on *yomim-tovim*). The prevalent sense of comfort (primarily material) has led to a spiritual laxity and complacency. Middle-class luxuries have led to foam rubber middle-class mentalities. In certain of these areas, for instance, the gist of Jewish commitment has been made environmental and social rather than inner, as the *Zohar* indicated, and then, contingent and even fluctuating based on the particular mood of that conspicuous consumption community. The herd mentality and the super-inflated social ego have led to a static and neurotic communal fossil.

What is required to stem this bandwagon attitude? Simply, gadflies are warranted to test, question and constantly confront our leaden-weight sluggishness,

to disturb our mental inertia. In a similar situation, Kierkegaard once wrote: "When all combine in every way to make everything easier and easier, there remains only one possible danger, namely that the easiness might become so great that it would be too great; then only one want is left . . . difficulty." Orthodox Judaism has been presented as easily achieved, external and to use a cliché, bourgeois. This has in turn led to complacency and the notion that no honest self-criticism is required, no fundamental introspection necessary; the struggle for the genuine *halachic* Self is deemed suspicious.

A whole new way of viewing and experiencing *halacha* is warranted. True, a *priori* acceptance of the *halachic* system as (Continued on page 2, column 1)

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a whole is obligatory to remain within the *halachic* community. However, our experience and expansion of that mode of life must be qualitatively revamped. Tension and existential confrontation with those around, religious "discomfort in Zion" must be viewed as prerequisites for spiritual meaning. In short, what is warranted is the radicalization of the Torah committed individual through viewing himself as a lonely revolutionary, indeed as a guerilla fighter struggling against the wall of our material-conscious, hypocritically Judeo-Christian society. This attitude would engender a new pioneering fervor, as the *halacha* would not be seen as a mandatory social hand-me-down, but as a right now radical answer and manifesto for individual and social action. This is perhaps what the *Sifre* envisioned on the verse, *asher Anochi metzavcho hayom* — "They shouldn't appear to you as an old royal decree . . . but rather as a new edict to which all run." In another place (Deut. 11; 32), the *Sifre* speaks of doing and accepting *mitzvot* as though they had just been received from Sinai. The implications of this are twofold: a) *Mitzvot* should not be viewed as repetitious rituals, but rather as exciting experiences which are in themselves new and invigorating; b) that *mitzvot* themselves should be seen as revolutionary ideas — *k'ilu kibaltem hayom* — as though these concepts had not existed before, and were not contingent on any authority, be it social, parental, or governmental, except that of the Divine Revelation. In other words, the confrontation in *mitzvot* of old and new must constantly be salient and acknowledged.

Admittedly this radicalization of attitude is not easy to master. A striking passage in *Berachot* 63a enlightens us about its attainment:

R. Judah spoke further in honor of the Torah expounding the text: "Attend and hear, O Israel: this day thou art become a people unto the Lord thy

God." Now was it on that day that the Torah was given to Israel? . . . It is however to teach you that the Torah is as beloved every day to those that study it as on the day when it was given from Mount Sinai.

A clear connection is made between the existential re-acceptance of Torah and its intellectual pursuit. Once again we may make a double inference: a) the excitement of intellectually crystallizing the *halachic* system is in itself an act of religious commitment; b) learning the *halacha* without any "idols" to use Bacon's term is warranted. Our learning must in itself be revolutionary in the sense that its authority is internal and method novel. By its very definition, learning must contain some irreverent elements to make it a sincere and healthy pursuit. This does not imply rejection of any *sugia*, but rather an open-minded and analytic program in the interpretation and elucidation of the primary texts. According to this, the radicalization of our thought is the first step in the radicalization of our actions through *asiyat hamitzvot*.

The dangers implicit in this approach are apparent since a new and sometimes frightening emphasis and responsibility is placed upon each individual, his confrontation and his response. This subjectivism might in turn lead to religious anarchy. However, we must establish that we are working within a given system, *a priori* and demanding. The question with which we are dealing is how we will function and negotiate within that system. Furthermore, the Divine Revelation, with all its communal and national aspects, was nevertheless an individual communication, through which each person heard the Divine Voice being directed specifically and uniquely towards himself. On the first command of the Decalogue, the Ramban comments on the singular use: "He speaks to each individual . . . in order that they shouldn't think (that each will be judged) according to the majority, thus saving the individual." We are enjoined by the first commandment against seeking religious absolution in the lax standards of our society, for through revelation, moral relativity is declared obsolete.

By Stephen Sadowsky

The world is mechanistic; man is machine-like. The cosmos—so cold and impersonal—is no longer compatible with the human element: love, hate, pity, fear have no place in a technological world governed by cause and effect, by switch-on and switch-off. In fact, man can be viewed as a mere machine, while the universe at large is but one large factory, housing millions

of the blood-producing man-machines. Such is the philosophy espoused by Diane Wakoski in the aptly titled, *Inside the Blood Factory*, her latest volume of poems.

Reading Miss Wakoski's poems is a cathartic, almost traumatic experience. Powerful, shocking, impressive—these adjectives all apply to her poetry. And yet, many of the thought patterns and image systems are hidden, masked behind obscure language and syntax. How, then, can one explain Miss Wakoski's triumph of communication? The totality of the experience, the over-all vision impressed on the reader's mind effectively translates Miss Wakoski's abstruse words into meaningful mental images. One "feels" the poem, experiences it, without the aid of intellectual analysis.

Miss Wakoski can perhaps be excused for her contribution to the obscurist tradition in American poetry, for she has some reason, some method to her abstruseness: coherent, logical images were never her interest. Instead, she wished to utilize a method of writing poetry quite analogous to the stream-of-consciousness technique used in prose writing—a style I will term as the "psychoanalytic approach" to poetry. The poet is the patient; the reader is the psychoanalyst. The patient, Miss Wakoski, sits back on her couch and pours out her soul without regard to order or form: her visions of the world and herself, her fears, dreams and hang-ups—all follow glibly. And we amateur psychiatrists read and read. At

Hiding ourselves in groups in order to avoid facing the conflict which surrounds us is a dangerous cop-out, striking at the inner vibrancy of the *halacha* by proclaiming its disinterest and irrelevance. This

view can result only in the further deterioration of the present marshmallow Orthodox community. As Unamuno wrote: "And may God deny you peace but give you glory."

Portrait Of The Artist As A Machine

times, we are moved to moments of passion and, at others, frozen dead like an iceberg. We cannot claim to understand all of the poetry—at least, we cannot verbally explain it in concise terms. However, we are moved. We experience. We live. And we change.

Miss Wakoski's choice of enigmatic, cryptic language takes on more significance when we consider the function of language. T. S. Eliot in his essay, *The Social Function of Poetry*, states that poetry and language are local, meaning that both embody the ethos or culture of a particular people:

"Emotion and feeling, then, are best expressed in the common language of the people—that is, in the language common to all classes: the structure, the rhythm, the sound, the idiom of a language, express the personality of the people which speaks it."

And Walt Whitman in the 1855 "Preface" to his *Leaves of Grass*, tries to describe the English language as being the best fit tool for the most powerful expression of Americanism and the American ideals. English "is the chosen tongue to express growth faith self-esteem freedom

justice equality friendliness amplitude prudence decision and courage," (sic - commas left out by Whitman). Hence, Miss Wakoski's choice of vague, ambiguous language is but a mirror of today's modern technological society, which, according to her opinion operates without principle, is incoherent and illogical and is devoid of meaning and purpose.

This disillusionment with the business-like, materialistic-oriented society is best shown in "Blue Monday," one of Miss Wakoski's most powerful poems. Weekly life, blue Monday life, is dull: work is necessary; money must be made; responsibilities need be fulfilled. This life is characterized by "a blue business suit," a "glass cane, hollow" and "a banker." Love or any other human emotion is relegated to weekends. But Monday always comes, ushering in the workaday world, the week-day life—tedious, repetitive . . . Boredom: "Blue Monday. Monday at 3:00 and Monday at 5. Monday at 7:30 and Monday at 10:00."

On Blue Monday everyone is extremely time-conscious. Time, time, time-schedules must be adhered to; time, time, time-rigid—
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ity governs life; time, time, time-man becomes a perfunctory automaton.

And Monday is always blue. Miss Wakoski chose blue for her basic color pattern because blue is the color of veinous blood, blood depleted of all its life-giving oxygen, and blue is the color of frozen flesh. Hence, blue represents death in life. Her message is simple: by the letter of definition, man is alive; according to the spirit, man is dead.

In revolt against the non-human world, the poet—the blood machine—at least tries to emote, tries to pour out her soul and perhaps communicate with someone else in human, living terms:

"I would sing with my throat torn open,

The blue jugular spouting that black, shadow pulse, and on my lips,

I would balance volcanic rock."

The rebellion, however, fails. The lava and the blood-life forces—are churned into blue lumps by the power of the workaday world. Utilizing repetition effectively, Miss Wakoski powerfully concludes her pessimistic poem, summing up the blue Monday world—tedious and repetitive:

"It is blue.

It is blue.

It is blue."

Continuing her psychoanalytic excursion in "The Night A Sailor Came To Me In a Dream," Miss Wakoski attempts to escape from the real world. No longer able to come to grips with the everyday world, the poet retreats into a dream world:

"the structure of dream like a harness lowered over my head, around me."

The word "harness" implies that the poet is a captive, a prisoner in this dream world, never permitted to grasp life fully: "You haven't swallowed reality yet." Existence, life, is stagnant and people enraptured, caught up, by the phantasmal world of dreams can only peck away at life, never breaching the wall of sterility surrounding daily existence, as if they were

"chickens come out of the living room rug

to peck for corn and the grains like old yellow eyes

roll like marbles across the floor."

One night, however, a sailor comes, bringing some aspect of life, some bit of humanity:

By David Hershkovits

The *Confessions of Nat Turner* by William Styron was on the best-seller list for many weeks, and has been awarded a Pulitzer Prize. The book, chronicling what Styron calls, "the only effective sustained revolt in the annals of American Negro slavery," received nearly unanimous acclaim from white reviewers at the time of its publication.

The absence of black writers responding to a depiction of a great moment in black history prompted John Henrik Clarke, the editor of *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*, to elicit a response from black writers to Styron's conception of black history in general, and Nat Turner's revolt in particular.

The work is an important one, for it allows us to see how easily we may be

"And I cannot remember what you said though the harbor was foggy and your pea coat seemed to drip with moisture."

The sailor is drenched in semen (a sea man himself), he is intercourse—the symbol of life, virility. But what did he say?

"Perhaps you told me

you were not dead."

Life is a "perhaps," a conjecture needing constant affirmation. And the sailor, dripping with moisture, ejaculates a healthy amount of the living, of semen teeming over with thriving spermatozoa, into the sterile environment. But the harbor is "foggy," the sailor but "seems." The sailor comes in a dream: in real life, nothing comes. Miss Wakoski's vision is bleak, black—no longer merely blue.

In "The Father of My Country," Miss Wakoski is most comfortable on her psychoanalytic couch, pouring forth the sources of her hang-ups and the reasons for her alienation from society. The world, she claims, has "military origins," fath-

"Love is anterior to life—
Posterior to death—
Initial of creation, and
The exponent of Earth—"

Emily Dickenson

ered by "rough military men." The military is synonymous in Miss Wakoski's lingo with machinery, for her father, a military man, left the narrator's house when she was under two to be "replaced by other machinery." The "general," the "ruler," the "governor" are the symbolic embodiments of life according to strict discipline and uncompromising order: life is stultified; *rigor mortis* sets in; communication between human beings on a human level is impossible, the human factor is excluded from life:

"My father is coming in a letter
once a month
for a while,
and my father
sometimes came in a telegram
but
mostly

my father came to me
in sleep."

These factors have made the poet "a lonely woman" and society a lonely world.

Miss Wakoski finally brings her case to a reputable psychoanalyst in "The Rescue Poem" only to be disappointed with the prognosis:

"When he diagnosed
my case,
it left me with little
hope."

The diagnosis, quite obvious to the reader—the amateur psychiatrist—is that the poet has "an invisible telephone booth" around her. The poet laments that the glass walls cut her off from some other person, perhaps a lover, who

"would like to put his arms around me
but cannot
reach around the whole invisible
telephone
booth."

She is isolated; everyone is isolated. Communication is impossible because the whole world is locked inside glass telephone booths. And even if people pick up the telephone receivers to make a call, to send out a "help signal," the line will always be "busy," man is so involved in his workaday world, that he has no time for living or for communication.

But there are ways to break through those invisible barriers:

"an apple inside the ear
a bucket of blood
a hammer made out of beetle tongue
a saw made from parts of the cheek
teeth chipped out of the navel."

Thus, by a perfect example of Miss Wakoski's use of obscure imagery that still conveys a powerful feeling, we are told that the complete involvement of the human being, the total harnessing of the human element, is necessary to chop down the glass telephone booth.

Indeed, Miss Wakoski is giving us "an obvious problem." She urges that people should

"Come inside
these invisible walls"

and

"Join me
on the silver
wiry
inside."

Miss Wakoski is insisting that each person join together with another individual on a personal level; remove the shrouds of the business world that cover all of us, and speak of love, of life: communi-

cate as one human to another human. Then life can be affirmed and the mechanized cosmos can be personalized, humanized.

However, such optimism on the part of Miss Wakoski is unconvincing. How can such interpersonal communication exist in the world she has described? Can the glass telephone booth really be chopped down? We never find out. Miss Wakoski's optimism is apparently unfounded.

Miss Wakoski's poetry may also be viewed as being enclosed in a glass telephone booth, enshrouded in obscure imagery. But when we do get inside the booth and pick up the receiver—as Miss Wakoski permits us to do with her "psychoanalytic technique"—we hear voices of gloom, voices of blackness, voices of pessimism. Occasionally, a cheerful note is piped over the line, but it is out of place. Eventually we hang up the receiver, perhaps a bit puzzled and confused, but definitely moved at our inspection, our inside view, of Miss Wakoski's "Blood Factory."

* * *

Confessions, Critics . . . How White Is Nat?

misled into believing that a reconstruction of history is a correct one, when we are not sufficiently familiar with the historical realities. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* collects awards from the white world, while the blacks, familiar with the historical inaccuracies, view the book with scorn, and place it on exhibit as another example of the white man's manipulation of history to suit his own purposes.

The document on which William Styron based his *Confessions*, is a small pamphlet in which are recorded the confessions of Nat Turner, as reported by Thomas R. Gray. In the document, Turner speaks with fondness of his father and mother, who taught him how to read and write. Styron, however, chose to ignore this part and placed in its stead the stereotyped image of the emasculated, fatherless, black man.

In his review, *The Confessions of Nat Turner and The Dilemma of William*

Styron, Alvin Poussaint M.D. expresses what appear to him to be "subtle manifestations of white racist attitudes." The influences on William Styron's *Nat Turner* were white. His character and speech patterns were white. Nat is a black man yearning to be white. Nat is a "house nigger" or an "Uncle Tom." Poussaint, being a psychiatrist, theorizes that perhaps "what really distinguished Nat was the fact that he was not indoctrinated with the psyche of a 'house nigger.'" We are reminded that there is little in the original confession of Nat Turner to suggest that he had ever played the psychological role of the "house nigger."

The reason for this reconstruction lies, Dr. Poussaint believes, in the "stereotyped belief that black people rebel primarily because of an unfulfilled psychological need to be white and not because of a sense of their own inner dignity. This notion, of

course, is the self-flattery of the oppressor who cannot imagine that a black man wants to be anything unless it is an emulation of himself." Dr. Poussaint seems to be on sound psychological footing in presenting this argument.

The question of the competence of a white Southerner (Styron), or of any white writer to enter the psyche of the oppressed black man, is raised by Vincent Harding in his brilliant essay, "You've Taken My Nat and Gone." Mr. Harding claims that Styron did not enter into the mind of Nat, but into his own mind. Witness Styron's creation of Nat's love affair with a white girl. Mr. Harding views with great skepticism the idea of a black commander who thinks exclusively of white women, or of a heroic black leader who destroys the movement because of his lust for white flesh. Since these scenes are Styron's creations, they come from his own mind. Styron has not entered anyone's mind, save his own.

Only a black man could understand Nat. Only a black man could give an honest appraisal of a black experience. Only a black man is able to escape the white
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The Commentator

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Nat's Revolt . . .

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projections that William Styron falls victim to.

Styron comes under further criticism for ignoring history and choosing to create his own, by asserting that Nat's revolt was the only effective slave revolt in the annals of American slavery. All the writers point up the fact that, as one writer stated, "the records are full of black uprisings, plots and rumors of plots, from New York to South Carolina and Georgia, Virginia, Maryland and Mississippi." The refusal to recognize history is viewed as an implication of Styron's attempt to characterize slaves as docile sambos, happy to live like pigs with their enlightened masters.

The collective sentiments regarding the reception of *Confessions of Nat Turner* by the white world is best summarized by John Oliver Killens' essay, *The Confessions of Willie Styron*:

Americans loved this fake illusion of reality because it legitimized all of their myths and prejudices of the American black man, and further, because it cut yet another great American black man to the size of a boy. Nat Turner, in the tradition of most black Americans, was a man of tragedy, a giant, but William Styron has depicted him as a child of pathos.

After studying the assault on Styron, his *Confessions* still stand up as a work of great power, containing many beautiful lyrical passages. His history, however, is inaccurate and he becomes victim to what Dr. Poussaint described as "his own unconscious white racism for which he alone cannot be held fully accountable." One would be wise, therefore, to suspend historical judgment in reading the *Confessions*, until studying the history of the black man in America, or if that seems too great a task, to at least read this fine, important volume of essays.

By Bruce Horwitz

It is fair, I believe, to approach autobiographies with a goodly amount of skepticism. No matter who its author might be, the egocentricity involved in believing that one's life, thought and experience merit exposure to a mass audience pervades the work. I came to understand this unfortunate circumstance while reading the autobiography of Gandhi, a passively powerful man, a model of Hindu humility. Unfortunately, when one describes his own humility at great length, regardless of that description's apparent objectivity, he is diminished in our eyes. This egocentricity is also manifest in the frequent inclusion of minutiae that are neither interesting nor informative.

The latter criticism applies, in part, to Andre Malraux's *Anti-Memoirs*, but the problem that evolves from the writer's fundamental egocentricity takes a different, less offensive form. Malraux, unlike most autobiographers, is not at the center of his work, but only appears here or there in the periphery as an observer who had the good fortune (or in some cases misfortune) to witness the makers of history at critical moments in their creative-destructive work. Most often the only extent to which Malraux injects his own personality into the work is in his rendering or description of conversations at which he was present.

To this extent, *Anti-Memoirs* affords us

Malraux: Existential Anti-Philosophy

a unique insight into some of the "great" men of the Twentieth Century. I use the term "great" advisedly, since there is often disagreement as to what constitutes greatness. In Malraux's account of conversations with men such as Mao Tse Tung and Charles de Gaulle, his definition is apparent. These are men who have shaped the destinies of their respective countries, and in doing so they have altered or created the history that intersects the course of those destinies. These are great men who represent for Malraux the world historical individual described by Hegel in his philosophy of history. The antithesis of a thesis doomed to destruction is embodied in their character.

To the extent to which such men share this characteristic they all partake of what Malraux conceives of as heroic qualities. That is, each is "ready to risk torture simply for the sake of his own conception of himself . . . because the risk of torture alone seems to him to triumph over death." The quality is cryptic in that Malraux clearly holds the hero in great regard, yet the definition itself seems to cast him in an image of self-centered selfishness. Is the hero a man capable of sacrificing a nation to nourish his own image? Do great men conceive of themselves as co-extensive with the people they lead?

Malraux is not clear on these points. While at one moment his words suggest admiration for de Gaulle, at the next turn he provides an incisive glimpse into the man's frailty. Which de Gaulle are we to believe? Admire? Condemn? Malraux does not tell. He suggests.

Past reviews of *Anti Memoirs* have tended to emphasize these conversations as being most central to Malraux's intended purpose in writing his memoirs. Malraux is one of a very few truly artistic and expressive individuals who have been in intimate contact with world leaders. In this unique position he has become an invaluable liaison between the seclusion of the leader as a private man in public office and the loneliness of the people he leads.

But to say that Malraux actually answers the questions he confronts is misleading in the sense that the questions have no answers. Existential problems are formulated into nonsense questions couched in deceptively rational form and are

meant to be indicative and exemplary of the fundamental point about which existentialism concerns itself—absurdity and purposelessness in the guise of reason and direction.

It is, one must realize, the attempt to describe and comprehend that bestows on one the only immortality he can ever enjoy. The victory of knowledge of the existential type is the only victory within human reach. Malraux succeeds beautifully in visualizing for us the full breadth of possibilities in the fusion of meaning and vacuum, sense and nonsense, life and death.

Unfortunately much of the impact is lost in a hopelessly cluttered catalogue of trivia an autobiography inevitably includes. It is on this point that my initial criticism of autobiographies applies to Malraux. Far too many details, facts and incidents are of so highly a specialized and restricted nature as to be of no interest or benefit to the reader. Too much is included suited for Malraux's own knowledge and interests; too much is shallow, inconsequential and undistinguished.

For all this and all that, reading *Anti-Memoirs* is an often difficult if not discouraging task. Malraux, fortunately, has made that which is truly worthwhile distinct from that which is incidental—both in his life and in his writings.

But Malraux's most substantial and meaningful contribution as a creative and sensitive thinker is not repetition of conversation but analysis and description of the confrontation with death he has seen and experienced so often. This is, in fact, Malraux's greatest concern and motivating force. He considers the confrontation as he has witnessed it, in every possible common form—from suicide to that strangest of suicides, death in war.

It is in this area that Malraux shows uncommon insight into the fear that plagues a mortal who senses the immortal within him. Once man has experienced glory, private or public, death can only come as an insult, a tragedy, an absurd negation of what life leads one to believe is true. Malraux reveals that unfolding of the existential psyche with sensitive simplicity. The instant of confrontation that terminates individual evolution is stretched into pages of dialogue between the self one has idealized and the self

one knows at the stark, unadorned moment when the two become one.

It is with reference to this content that Malraux writes: "I have called this book *Anti-Memoirs* because it answers a question which memoirs do not pose and does not answer those which they do."

Indeed, Malraux as the autobiographer is alone in his deeply rooted concern with universal questions, problems which plague the common as well as the great. His investigation of men whom he has seen inextricably involved in the existential web of opposites is autobiographical insofar as the encounters he has witnessed were at once the individual's and his own. Through the rare ability to empathize Malraux has made the experiences of others his own, and through *Anti-Memoirs* he makes them ours.

* * *

THE DAY IT ENDED

The day it ended
We pulled back
Troops and time;
We dismantled the bunkers
And our thoughts - leaving
The muddy air and dead
Jungles of trampled
Trees and sweat-filled
Wounds.
We hurried from the heat
Of shrapnel screams
And leveled huts
In the smoke and dread
Of flashing nights.
We left little
But a child
Confused by the settling
Dust.

Kenneth Hain

By Noah Baer

Religion And Modern Man— Shortage Of Response, Excess Of Need

To say that we live in an irreligious era has become a cliché. Religion has come under attack from all the sciences, both natural and social. It has been accused of being conservative, out of touch with current problems and not addressing itself to modern man. With all these problems, it seems that religion has more than it can handle trying to preserve the status quo let alone project its message to non-believers.

Discussions on religion are with us today as they have been since the eclipse of the Middle Ages. They have, however, taken on different dimensions. Today they seem to center on religious practices and observances, e.g. birth control, celibacy in priests, *Kashruth* and shy away from the core essence of religion—faith and belief. Discussions on commitment are passe and have been designated as underground practices. The question is no longer what or how you believe but whether you conduct yourself according to the rules. Faith is no longer discussed because it no longer motivates people. From a pragmatic viewpoint, it no longer exists.

Aside from making noises in our contemporary journal of theological discussions, *Time Magazine*, the vanguard of organized religion, has taken two divergent steps to regain its territory. It has proposed what has been called the social gospel and a more grass roots approach.

Various clergymen have attempted to live their religious ethic by entering social movements. They have marched for civil rights and against the Vietnam War and have told us how God thinks on every burning issue. This approach may fill the places of worship when the clergy preach what everyone wants to hear, but it is dangerous to reduce religion to nothing more than a man to man formula and relegate God to a source of humanitarian imperatives. Religion must make some statement about man's fundamental relation to God Himself; it must stress his relationships as an individual not only as a social group. It is due to this that this writer feels the grassroots, small unit, intimate service path the more fruitful. Social gospel is important but should only serve an auxiliary role.

Whatever solution is attempted, the causes of the slackening of religious faith must be taken into consideration. This ebb of faith can be traced to the malaise of modern man—his social uprooting and the destruction of his traditional behavior guidelines. Modern man is alienated both from his society and himself. He responds by secularizing his society and denying any absolute standard of reference of looking within himself to create his own *raison d'être*. Either he becomes passive and apathetic or totally committed.

It appears that organized religion has, in modern secularism, finally met an opponent which it cannot successfully combat. Secularism doesn't attack by offering a competing theological system but uses psychological warfare in enervating religionists. In the past religions have fought each other by sword and scripture but presently are unable to combat an idea which refuses to fight. God is monotheistic, polytheistic or pantheistic; He is no longer meaningful or to be taken seriously.

Maurice Lamm in his article "Escalating the Wars of the Lord." (*Tradition*: summer 1967) claimed that:

Before the onslaught of modern secularism, there is no overt combat, no frontal attack against religion. Its victims suffer only a slow withering of faith . . . Faith, in this system is not irrational, it is not an opiate, it is not destructive . . . It is simply a useless appendage.

What seems to be worse is that this

attack is inevitable and inexorable. Harvey Cox described this in the *Secular City*:

What is secularization? It is the loosening of the world from the religious and quasi-religious understanding of itself, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols . . . The forces of secularization have no serious interests in persecuting religion. Secularization simply bypasses and undercuts religion and goes on to attack other things. Secularization has accomplished what fire and chain could not: It has convinced the believer that he *could* be wrong. The gods of traditional religions . . . play no significant role in the public life of the secular metropolis.

This lack of commitment can be traced to the effects of the large city and pluralistic society in which we live. This is not to claim that such social structures elicit wrong responses but that they bring forth a different type of response from that previously encountered. The person caught in the web of a faceless city refuses to become committed anywhere, even in the safety of his neighbors. Mr. Cox finds the metropolitan experience a liberating one which culminates biblical expectations.

The American society, a pluralistic, cosmopolitan one, poses its own problems to committed man. Presenting many cultural models to choose from, the religious person may feel that it is incorrect to commit himself to one model rejecting the experience of the others. Accepting the premise that everyone has a right to his own opinions and that all opinions are equally justifiable, modern man finds himself being multicommited to aspects of many

models rather than to one while disregarding others.

This trend has been helped by the precarious position of Orthodox Jewry in our open society. Since it is impossible to stress uncommitment, Orthodoxy must show how a multicommited person can accept nearly all models in conjunction with Judaism. This creates the organization of Orthodox Jewish Scientists who claim that Judaism is compatible with science, and Yeshiva University which claims that it is compatible with humanistic culture.

Once more it must be stated that this is presented without value judgment and that American culture must be dealt with on its own terms. It is, however, the writer's contention that the religious responses developed in Europe are totally inadequate in our contemporary situations.

Religious commitment is also subjected to a second, different type of attack. It is an attack from thinkers and writers who far from being under-involved with society are very emotionally involved with it and rather than being indifferent to its ultimate meaning, challenge it. It is from these people that we have a fallout of terms like existentialism, angst, crises and men like Camus, Sartre and Nietzsche. The problem raised by these people is not necessarily unique to our period but is aggravated and brought to the fore by the tumultuous upheavals of this century and the nature of modern society. The problem faced is that of the existential crisis, i.e. how to find meaning in a meaningless world, a world stripped of purpose and goal. It is described by Camus in the *Myth of Sisyphus*:

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office of the factory, meal, streetcars, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythms—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises. . . .

Contemporary man is injected into a situation where his past values, systems and beliefs break down. Stepping off the treadmill he turns around and asks "why?" This is the question on which the whole world is balanced, and it is the one traditionally answered by religion. Yet, religion doesn't project itself into man's being to give him the answer and he is left with the question "why believe?" Often he wishes with all his power to believe but cannot. It was not casually said that modern man does not have the ability to pray.

This then is the two-fold attack on religion. From one side it is asked to draw a commitment from people who refuse to involve themselves; and from the other side it is beseeched to give a total answer to those who earnestly seek one yet cannot find it in the established religion.

Three thousand years ago the same questions were raised by Ecclesiastes, "What profit has man from all his labor in which he labors under the sun?" The answer was a suspension of doubt to achieve a faith which overrides questioning. Such an answer requires a leap of faith which modern man is not willing to grant and from which stems both his greatness and his supreme loneliness. The answer is not to be uncovered.

* * *

"It is customary to blame secular and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it was irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message becomes meaningless.

Abraham Heschel

Havurah: Stereophonic Relevance

By Sheldon Schorer

Since the founding of the three great centers of Jewish thought before the turn of the century, there have been few major innovations in Jewish thought. With the exception of *yeshivot* which were transplanted from Europe but followed the basic Orthodox trend, the leaders in Jewish thought have been Yeshiva University for the Orthodox, the Jewish Theological Seminary for the Conservative, and the Hebrew Union College for the Reform. The only other major denomination that has appeared since 1900 has been the Reconstructionist movement which was intended to be a trans-denominational movement within all of American Jewry. But the denominations retained their identity and resisted the unification under Reconstructionism. Thus, when the Reconstructionists established their seminary last year in Philadelphia, it was founded counter to their original principles. Realizing that they could not influence American Jewry from within the present structure, they established their seminary with the intent of influencing Jewry from without.

The Reconstructionists, however, make a point of their basic non-denominational viewpoint. They consider this structure of three brands of Jewish faith outmoded and a fossilized remnant of the faith that was prevalent among Jews over a half century ago. Today, not all Jews feel comfortable in classifying themselves under the strict definition of either of these three modes of Judaism. There is a movement afoot to seek a newer and more compatible understanding of Judaism, not restricted by the ideologies of only these three versions of Judaism. In this respect, the Reconstructionist Seminary is very similar to the other new form of seminary that was established in Cambridge, Massachusetts — the Havurat Shalom Community Seminary.

Dr. Charles Liebman, in his discussion of the new movements in Jewish Seminaries, stated that there are two main trends that permeate and motivate the Havurah: the non-denominationalism that was mentioned, and Hasidism. Perhaps as a direct reaction against the coldly rational, religious existentialist movement that characterized Jewish intellectual thought a decade ago, the Havurah believes in a philosophy that transcends the various restrictive denominations of Judaism and the restrictive rationality of the Self and tries to develop, as its name implies, a Judaism that is based on the communal aspects of Judaism with an emphasis on the spirit and soul. Thus, several of their courses deal with Hasidism and Hasidic thought. This is not to imply that they actually practice Hasidism or even follow *halacha*, but that they feel a kinship with the Hasidic approach which emphasizes emotion and communion with God, rather than the Talmudic analysis of other disciplines.

"Jewish life in America," as their catalogue states, "has failed to attract a great many serious young Jews . . . we find that a disheartening number of religiously sensitive young Jews feel estranged from the institutions and organizations that make up so much of American Jewish life. Because of this alienation from Jewish institutions, Judaism as an avenue of religious self-expression remains closed to them . . . we aim to make Jewish life once again a real and viable option for serious, searching young Jews . . . The Havurat Shalom Community Seminary is dedicated to the belief that a religious renewal of any kind must grow out of the life of a small intentional community — learning from one another and in helping one another in personal and religious growth . . . to cre-

ate for itself a religious awareness of the meaning of life in the presence of one's fellow man.

I visited the Havurat Shalom for a Shabbat towards the end of last March. I will try to describe briefly what I found there, though I want to emphasize that what I saw there was what went on during one particular day. The Havurah is a dynamic and changing institution, and its particular appearance on that one Shabbat is not indicative of its make-up for every day.

The Havurah building is located on a small back street in Cambridge, not far from Harvard Square. On the first floor,

quarters of Rabbi Arthur Green (ordination from J.T.S.) who is the head of the institution.

This year was the first year of operation for the Havurah. As such, the student body is small — only eleven students — the faculty is small, and the course offerings are likewise limited. Courses at the Havurah are on a seminar basis in which the only distinction between a teacher and a student is that the teacher is better equipped to lead discussions. There are no grades. Classes meet whenever those students interested in a course offering decide to meet with the instructor. Great emphasis is also placed

Jews." As such, their philosophy is inchoate since they are still searching for a proper definition of Judaism. There exist varying strains of tradition and anti-tradition, and this contrasting ambivalence is reflected by their service.

Shabbat morning services began at approximately 10:45. Many students from within the Cambridge area and not attending the Havurah attended the service because they could not find a meaningful service in the usual synagogues. The mood was set for the service by playing Gregorian chants through the aforementioned speakers. When a sufficient crowd was at hand, a leader began to chant the service in a traditional manner. The first half of the service (until Torah reading) was entirely traditional as all the prayers were said in Hebrew; nothing important was skipped, etc. But the first half of the service reflected only their traditional pull. This particular Shabbat, they dispensed with the Torah reading and read responsively instead from the Radical Haggadah which is found in the April, 1969, issue of *Ramparts* magazine. The reading was halted twice for a Joan Baez recording of two anti-war songs. This latter half of the service reflected their desire to create a more relevant service. The services were concluded by all standing up and holding hands in a circle while singing *lo yisah goy el goy cherev* and similar songs.

This particular service was performed and could only be performed on that particular Shabbat. On another Shabbat, a different format would be adopted. In fact, they also wanted to incorporate the more "relevant" part of the service with the more traditional part. I do not know what form the service will be next Shabbat. Nor, I suspect, do they. They are trying however, to put into the service the one element that Heschel finds is missing in most services — life. Most prayers are meaningless repetitions in which the beginning and the end are known. The element of unexpectedness, an element so prevalent in life itself, is lacking in most prayers. The Havurah is searching for a way to make the service a worthwhile experience of life rather than merely an exercise in Hebrew pronunciation. They haven't found the best way yet, but as with their interpretation of Judaism itself, they are still searching for a satisfactory answer.

I found the Havurah approach an interesting method which might help many of the boys attending Yeshiva College. I know that I, myself, as well as many friends and acquaintances, am disappointed in what Yeshiva University has done for me. I came here to help evaluate Judaism and myself and help create a viable faith. I had hopes that the Yeshiva approach of *Torah u' mada* would be an excellent method for achieving faith and living in the modern world. Yeshiva, however, disappointed me. It did not help evolve an attitude of synthesis; rather it schizophrenically presents the two disciplines of thought without offering guidance on how to correlate them. Rather than encourage open and honest inquiry, it presented a religiously stifling atmosphere where the emphasis is on learning the methodology of Judaism rather than its true value. One learns the *whats* of Judaism, rather than the *all-important whys*, and thus, unless one comes to Yeshiva with a commitment to the Orthodox approach, one may not be further motivated to make Orthodox Judaism a more relevant part of his life. The Havurah spirit of open inquiry within the framework of the institution is sorely lacking at YU. Unless an attempt is made to help the uncommitted or semi-committed Jew to communicate his feelings and structure a viable faith within the context of the university, more and more religiously sensitive students will be "turned-off" by Yeshiva and Judaism, and this would indeed be a very tragic loss.

the *shul* is located. The *shul* is a small room, about the size of a classroom in Furst Hall, with chairs lined about the extremities of the room and pillows tossed on the rug for sitting during the service. There are also two stereo speakers hanging on the corners of the wall, but more on them later. As you climb the narrow, winding stairs to the top, you notice the kitchen on the second floor. The third floor consists of five rooms which serve as both classrooms and dormitories for several of the students. Parallel and connected to this building is another building which contains more rooms including the living

on the community projects of the Havurah. This year, owing to the newness of the institution, there were few projects, as a few of the students became involved in protesting the draft while others tutored underprivileged Negro children. Next year, they plan to concentrate on more Jewish-oriented projects.

The actual Jewish ideology of the Havurah is as yet undetermined. They describe themselves as "a group of Jews committed to a serious investigation of religious questions and open to a serious interpersonal commitment to the discovery of one another in the context of our lives as

Reflections On The Animal Human

By Abraham Kinslinger

In *Steps*, Jerzy Kosinski creates his own moral universe, which is embodied in the unidentified speaker in whose voice the novel speaks. It is a universe whose driving force is brutal, often senseless violence and unlicensed sexuality. Man is seen as the beast *par excellence* of creation. His imagination interacts with the intellect to create novel forms of torture and revenge. Sex is alienated from its human qualities until it too becomes an extension of the viciousness which seems to be the dominating principle of all other human activities.

The picture may be repulsive, but it never rings false. Kosinski's novel succeeds because his vision, however distorted, has truth nevertheless. It is the same truth which the Surrealists re-created in their art, and it is a mirror of a significant facet of human existence. The tremendous impact of the novel can only be appreciated if its character is seen not as an

individual, but rather as a paradigm of human bestiality—the bestiality which nourishes human inventiveness to develop ever more sophisticated forms of cruelty against itself, and the bestiality which is fundamental to all injustice—the denial of another's humanity. Kosinski's writing is important because it contributes vitally to our understanding of the human condition. In a particularly acute passage, Kosinski explains why concentration camps were seen as "hygienic" institutions, much the same as the extermination of rats is considered as a hygienic measure. The parallel is chilling. "... it's a problem of hygiene. Rats have to be removed. We exterminate them, but this has nothing to do with our attitudes towards cats, dogs or any other animal. Rats aren't murdered—we get rid of them; or, to use a better word, they are eliminated; this act of elimination is empty of all meaning. There's no ritual in it, no symbolism; the right of the executioner is never questioned. That's why in the concentration camps . . . the victims never remained individuals; they became as identical as rats."

Kosinski has written a more extensive (and equally harrowing) description of the *mal du siecle* of our age in *The Painted Bird*. The odyssey of a wandering homeless boy who goes from village to village during World War II is the superstructure which Kosinski fills in with the superstition, ignorance and brutality of the indigenous peoples of Eastern Europe. With hardly a reference to Nazism, Kosinski manages to expose the milieu which allowed Nazism to thrive. Kosinski's vivid description of the horror and hate of everyday life makes the concentration camp look almost like a resort.

And lest we wrongly become disgusted only at the ugly villagers in *The Painted Bird*, Kosinski has amplified the lesson of the first novel in *Steps*. *Steps* universalizes *The Painted Bird*; it is a warning against present-day sanctimonious protestations of "civilization," it is a symbol of the sordidness of man's nature, it is a challenge to any conception of man's creation in the Divine image.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poetic ingenuity and mordant wit stand him in good stead as he lambasts American society, indulges

in sexual fantasies and comments on the role of the artist in *A Coney Island Of The Mind*.

In a few lines he can evoke the counterfeit sterility of the American scene:

" . . . freeways fifty lanes wide
on a concrete continent
spaced with bland billboards
illustrating imbecile illusions of
happiness."

The lines are also a good example of Ferlinghetti's skillful use of alliteration. The alliteration serves as a kind of cement to bind the thought together, to make it an organic whole, to hurl these unconventional thoughts through the conventional defenses of the reader's psyche.

Indeed, he implicitly asserts the poet's duty to make social criticism in the poem beginning "The poet's eye obscenely seeing." Again, Ferlinghetti's lines speak for themselves, decrying America's

"surrealist landscape of
mindless prairies
supermarket suburbs
steamheated cemeteries
cinema holy days

.....
a kissproof world of plastic toiletseats,
tampax and taxis

.....
unroman senators and conscientious
non-objectors."

The poems in *A Coney Island of The Mind* reflect Ferlinghetti in moods of philosophical seriousness and whimsical fancy. From both the cynical satire of his "anti-Establishment" poems and the exuberant immediacy of his erotic poems, Ferlinghetti emerges as a man who is vitally concerned with the sense of frustration and alienation which seems to be the inevitable by-product of our compartmentalized, conformist, superficial society, which deadens the senses ("a kissproof world") and ruthlessly aborts any attempt to achieve meaningful human relationships. His voice is a call for return to the spontaneity of love,

**"Your children are not
your children. They are
the sons and daughters of
life's longing for itself."**

Kahlil Gibran

Come with me, O stranger; come with me to a journey of discovery. Come let us go and find out the truth behind the truth, the secret of the secrets, the essence underlying all, but telling nought to no one. Come let us go and find out What is Man?

Man, man, what is man? Matthew Arnold says that you should "be neither saint nor sophist led, but be a man." Be a man, be a man, how can you be a man if you don't know what is a man? Man is alive, man is movement. Japanese proverb: "One can stand still in a flowing stream, but not in a world of men." Man is change, man is movement. Pascal said that most of the evils of life arose from man's being unable to sit still in a room. Man is movement. Man is striving upwards and foolishly thinking he's arrived. Man is pathetic in his pomposity. "Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave, solemnizing natiivities and deaths with equal lustre, not omitting ceremonies of bravery, in the ignominy of his nature." (Thomas Browne in *Hydriotaphia*.) Man is carpish, man is petty, man

the freshness of nature, the exhilaration of life itself.

"Assassination Raga" is the initial poem in Ferlinghetti's latest collection of poems, *The Secret Meaning of Things*. Though several of the poems herein reflect Ferlinghetti's new-found yen for Zen and other mystical religious philosophies, the above poem utilizes these aspects to best advantage. The poem is loosely an elegy, which the poet first read to a mass gathering in San Francisco on the night of Robert F. Kennedy's funeral. The haunting refrain, *La illaha el lill Allah* (There is no god but Allah is reminiscent of Walt Whitman's recurring lament over the assassination of another great leader: "My Captain lies/Fallen cold and dead." After every repetition of Ferlinghetti's line, the tragedy sinks deeper into the reader's consciousness until, by the last *La illaha el lill Allah*, the reader cannot escape the awesome question, "Where?")

There are many (perhaps too many) poets whose criticism of the system has made the subject trite, almost camp. Ferlinghetti's distinction is that his criticism and satire are written with the freshness and ingenuity of E. E. Cummings. His inventiveness and the skill which he brings to his craft have won him a place among the foremost of contemporary American poets.

* * *

is coarse, man is insensitive. "There are some men formed with feelings so blunt, that they can hardly be said to be awake during the whole course of their lives." —Edmund Burke: *S. A. Allibone*. Man is coarse, man is cruel, man is an animal. Darwin in the *Descent of Man*. "We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities . . . still bears in his bodily frame, the indelible stamp of his lowly origin." And yet, Gabriele d'Annunzio said that "My aim is the re-establishment of the worship of men." Worship what? An ape? Worship what? Man? How can you worship man if you don't know what he is? How can you worship God if you don't know what He is? How can you know God, if you don't know what man is? Only man can know God.

To know, to know, to die, to live without knowing, to die without knowing, to live without believing, to believe without knowing. Such is man, such is man, such is what. What is man? What is . . .

Seance Showcase

is thrown throughout and who is the focal point of the narrative.

Another example of this genre of story is "The Lecture," where despite a surrealist twist involving a journey back in time by an individual considering himself the product of the twentieth century to nineteenth century Poland, the story is told in the first person and it is the narrator with whom the reader empathizes and around whom the action swirls. And once again in "The Letter Writer," Herman Gombiner's mental imageries, experiences and relationships are what makes the story meaningful.

But Singer does not confine himself to focusing upon one particular character, and there are included in *The Seance* stories which exemplify the placing of emphasis by the author upon events rather than upon people. The conflicts that the forces of fate and circumstance cause in the lives of individuals become the focal points of the stories while the individuals themselves remain basically two-dimensional sketches. In "The Plagiarist," the major theme is a description of the emotions experienced by Reb Kasriel Dan when his religiosity and ethical sense are put to the supreme test and how after seeing how close he has come to failing the trial, Reb Dan reaches the ultimate decision to forsake society entirely. Although one might think that such a subject would involve a highly personal treatment of the protagonist, this is not the case. Reb Dan serves as a shell for the conflicting forces that are raging within him.

Similarly, in "The Brooch," when a professional thief discovers that he is not the only member of his family whose dealings are on the "shady side," but that his wife, whom he had previously thought to be a veritable pillar of virtue, had also engaged in thievery, then it is the confrontation and the overlapping of the two worlds, that of the moral and pure with that of the immoral and tainted, that becomes the central theme of the story. And finally, in "The Slaughterer," one of the most powerful stories in the entire collection, the shattering collision that results when a man's sensitivity does not allow him to adapt to his surroundings moves the story along. Yoineh Meir, the man forced into becoming the town slaughterer, does not emerge as a distinct individual, but rather merely provides a framework for the major theme. In "The Plagiarist," "The Brooch" and "The Slaughterer," Singer is reiterating the Shakespearian theme that "all the world's a stage and all the people merely players" (as opposed to individuals).

Besides the skillful display by Singer of two varied approaches in his literary creations, these six stories also are indicative of the author's understanding of the effectiveness of these particular approach-

es. Singer in the past has been known almost exclusively to use the nineteenth-century Jewish scene as a backdrop for his writings. And indeed, in the second group of stories cited above, those in which the theme of conflict transcends the individual characters themselves, the setting is the ghetto or *shtetl*. The reader does not find the alien or, at best, strange setting to be a hindrance to his comprehension of the author's theme, because the sources of fate and circumstances are not and never have been limited to a particular age of society. The theme of conflict, whether it be manifested in a clash between the powers of good and evil, life and death, horror and disgrace, or holiness and apostasy, is not dependent upon the scenario that accompanies it. However, when an author attempts to construct a character to which the individual reader can relate, then the cultural as well as the temporal gap between the ghetto and contemporary life becomes a significant factor, which, if not dealt with properly could hinder the effect of the particular story. Perhaps this is why Singer in the first group of stories departs from his own established convention *vis-a-vis* setting and places the events in modern day Canada and the United States.

All in all, whether you are interested in observing technical virtuosity or merely wish to sit back and immerse yourself in some fine literature, *The Seance* is to be recommended.

* * *

UNCLE'S COMING

*Uncle's coming.
You know Uncle.
Uncle of the fair skies
and rolling plains
and the sea of waving wheat
pregnant with the promise of plenty.
Uncle of the majestic mountains
and the bountiful oceans.
You know Uncle
Uncle of the mammoth cities
that stretch the horizons of prosperity.
Uncle of glad tidings and secure babies
and star-spangled opportunities.
Uncle's coming with his lightning
palette to paint his
fair-skinned nephews
Red with gore.*

Abraham Kinstlinger

By Jack Bieler

A reader of the stories that appear in I.B. Singer's *The Seance*, even if he happens to be very familiar with Singer's previous writings, will not find it difficult to understand why the author has received such consistent praise for his work, and why the appellation of master story-teller is so fitting in his case.

Each of the sixteen stories that comprise the most recent volume of his work is well worth reading for its own merits. However, *The Seance* manages to transcend being a mere showcase of one man's literary talents and becomes significant from the point of view of literature in general. What Singer has done in his major stories is demonstrated and effectively implemented two diverse approaches to the literary presentation of a particular theme by an author. In some of the stories, the reader finds himself making the intimate acquaintance of one or two characters via the exposure of the protagonist's memories, thoughts and dreams for the future. This occurs during a short span of time in which one or two significant events befall him. Such a story is the one giving the collection its name, "The Seance," in which all eyes are focused upon Dr. Zorach Kalisher, a man for whom, we are told, the real world has meant little more than profound hopelessness and frustration. His supreme loneliness and constant search for something in which to place his faith leads him to the illusory world of crystal balls and mediums. The story is brought to a climax when Kalisher's attempt to make contact with the world of the dead leads him to rediscover the world of the living. It is the Doctor upon whom the spotlight

"... but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star."

Henry David Thoreau

*"There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he looked upon and received with
wonder or
Pity or love or dread, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a
certain part of
The day . . . or for many years or stretching cycles of
years."*

Walt Whitman

Cleaver: Youth — Great American Hope

effect on him was marked. The knowledge that a woman cared about him and took an interest in his work energized his moribund spirit.

Finally the youth of America gave Cleaver hope for a better future; "they have reaffirmed my faith in humanity. There is in America today a generation of white youth that is truly worthy of a black man's respect."

Eldridge Cleaver's observations on American society are subtle, incisive and convincing. He is an "Ofay Watcher." Ofays are oppressors, enslavers, colonizers, imperialists and neo-colonialists of the white race. They are the great white heroes of history who have finally been revealed by contemporary events as arch-villains. And it is the white youth who are experiencing the "great psychic pain" of finding their inherited heroes turned into villains.

In his chapter, "The Blood Lust," Cleaver writes that the social Darwinism of survival of the fittest is all pervasive in our American society. It is manifested in "our rat race political system of competing parties, in our dog-eat-dog economic system of profit and loss, and in our adversary system of justice wherein truth is secondary to the skill and connections of

the advocate." Cleaver feels that mass spectator sports are geared to disguise, while affording expression to this survival of the fittest doctrine. Because this theory is exaggerated, it is not altogether convincing, but it nevertheless, contains a great deal of truth.

At times Cleaver's prose is turbid, over-written or painfully sophomoric. In certain chapters—e.g. "The Primeval Mitosis"—his obsession with the coining of names and the playing with words distracts the reader from the textual thesis. At other times, Cleaver's racial expletives and the intensity of his passages are overwrought and detract from, rather than heighten, his power to communicate. But Cleaver's capacity for painfully correct social criticism, his genius for promulgating daring, precocious theories of social behavior and the beautiful almost lyrical passages that are found in *Soul On Ice* make it a major literary achievement.

In *Soul On Ice*, Cleaver writes: "The colored people of the world, Afro-American included, do not seek revenge for their suffering. They seek an end to war and exploitation." Cleaver is now in hiding, a fugitive from American law. He deserves better—far better.

* * *

By Ivan Esterman

"Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man's law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women." This promulgation of rationalized rape marks the nadir of Eldridge Cleaver's philosophy—it is a philosophy, though brutalized and dehumanized. In *Soul On Ice*, Cleaver begins with that hateful, destructive period in his life and traces his gradual development of an ameliorative philosophy.

When he was eighteen years old, Eldridge Cleaver was sent to prison for possession of marijuana: "I was in love with the weed and I did not for one minute think that anything was wrong with getting high. I was convinced that marijuana was superior to lush, yet the rulers of the land seemed all to be lushes." It was natural for Cleaver to feel unjustly imprisoned.

A guard tore down the picture of a bride from *Esquire* magazine that Cleaver had in his cell; "get yourself a colored girl for a pinup—no white women—and I'll let it stay up." Cleaver's initial embarrassment turned to terrible feelings of guilt and despair as he realized that he had chosen the picture of the white girl over available pictures of black girls. He saw that the white American society had indoctrinated him to see the white woman as more beautiful and desirable than the black woman. This realization precipitated a nervous breakdown and after recovery, the period of rationalized rape. Cleaver writes that his state of mind during that period can best be summed up in some lines that he wrote:

TO A WHITE GIRL

I hate you
Because you're white.
Your white meat
Is nightmare food.
White is
The skin of Evil.
You're my Moby Dick,
White Witch,
Symbol of the rope and hanging tree,
Of the burning cross. . . .
After being returned to prison, Cleaver

"If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time.

James Balwin

took a "long look" at himself and for the first time in his life admitted that he was wrong: "I had gone astray—astray not so much from the white man's law as from being human, civilized—for I could not approve the act of rape." Cleaver continues, "I lost my self respect. My pride as a man dissolved and my whole fragile moral structure seemed to collapse." To save himself, Cleaver started to write. He had to seek out the truth and unravel the convolutions of his motivations. *Soul On Ice*, then, is not only a documentation of a developing philosophy but also the instrument of purgation for a morbid psyche.

A key factor in Eldridge Cleaver's spiritual rejuvenation was his lawyer—she is now his wife—Beverly Axelrod. Prison had dehumanized Cleaver: "there was a coldness in my body that eluded me;" it had emasculated him: "the tension of (my) manhood had unwound and relaxed." Cleaver had been in jail eight years when Beverly Axelrod first visited him. The