

that the rapee was ordained a sacrifice for society's own communal sinning. Yet even a devotee of this still chic aberration might concede that the range of choice available to the criminal for his next sacral stroke ought somehow to be restricted. One way, Buckley feels, again narrowly, almost wistfully, would be trial procedures shaped more explicitly to the criterion, "*Did He Do It?*"

All in all, it is a patient and persuasively argued book, notably concerned for poor people, poor states, impoverished schools, and that updated version of Sumner's Forgotten Man—the *victim* of violent crime; and proposing only the quiet easements of procedure for substantive problems which, if perhaps still in theory soluble, have survived twenty-three centuries of trying by the brightest and best—and worst.

Reviewed by C. P. IVES

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### *Voice in a Wilderness*

**Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922-1972**, by Lewis Mumford, *New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973. 522 pp. \$12.95.*

DESPITE WHAT liberal academicians write so superlatively for and about each other, in the learned journals as well as in the overlord press, our literary and cultural situation remains barren. Where, today, are our great teachers and critics, our great statesmen, philosophers, and religious thinkers, our great poets and novelists, our great men of letters? Any attempt to answer this question must end in a discouraging brevity of response. *Malaise* is a word that immediately presents itself here; and one thinks, too, of the frightening truth of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's assertion that a universal spiritual death touches us all. Standards of judgment and value, let alone

of example and conduct; seriousness of the general critical intelligence and conscience; intellectual honesty and moral concern and commitment: everywhere these criteria of perspective are, along with excellence and discipline, in eclipse. Our liberal pundits, to be sure, dismiss such a protestation as the dying remnant of nonprogressive and unenlightened metaphysics. By now we are all too aware of this responding tactic and, worse, of the harm it brings relentlessly and irretrievably. The contemporary absolutism of liberalism, as is everywhere evident, exerts a thought control alarming in its power; and a reductionist technologico-Benthamite conformity prevails. But, in desperation and dismay, we must continue to believe and to insist, with Dr. F. R. Leavis, that discrimination is life, indiscrimination is death.

Obviously, the "we" of the previous sentence signifies not a horde but a minority whose voice, even if it is a voice out of the whirlwind, steadily weakens as the insanities and irreverences of the horde increase. At any rate, it suffices to say that the serious critic—who, as Irving Babbitt once observed by way of indicting H. L. Mencken, is "more concerned with achieving a correct scale of values and so seeing things proportionately than with self-expression,"—is fast disappearing from the cultural map. And when, and if, he dares raise his voice, he is quickly silenced or ostracized. (One thinks here of what generally happens to a Jacques Barzun or a Lionel Trilling when speaking out about the state of the American soul and its twisted sense of liberal "progress.") Clearly, the generating mood and climate around us are not favorable to the critical spirit, that is to say, the discriminating mind and the judgments it renders. The result is lamentable and nowhere better underlined than in the decline of, even the absence from, the American (and European) scene of the man of letters. A man of letters belongs to a great tradition of responsibility, as not only Babbitt but also T. S. Eliot reveals. He is concerned, quintessentially, with standards as

these affect the prospect of man and the condition of civilization. "He must," as Allen Tate reminds us in a superb essay, "The Man of Letters in the Modern World" (1952), "recreate for his age the image of man, and he must propagate standards by which other men may test that image, and distinguish the false from the true." Indeed, as Tate further observes, "There would be no hell for modern man if our men of letters were not calling attention to it."

Lewis Mumford (b. 1895) is our most distinguished surviving man of letters, whose warnings regarding the hell of modern life receive confirmation steadily. Mumford has devoted a whole lifetime, as a man of letters, to battling for the idea of a humane society against an onrushing specialist spirit, with its loss of proportion, its overemphasis, and ultimately its technic dehumanization of human existence, resulting finally in what Tate terms "the secularism of the swarm." In challenging this life-negating spirit Mumford has disclosed a constant and consistent dignity and sincerity of effort. What he calls the "miscarriages of 'civilization'" and the "transformations of man" are in the end his two most central preoccupations; and in the fearless exposure of these miscarriages and transformations, which he sees ultimately crystallizing into a new barbarism, he brings into view a prophetic energy of concern and response. In speaking out and speaking forth the felt truths of what he sees, and discriminates, Mumford further discloses that moral dimension of thought, of judgment above all, that characterizes the mission of the man of letters. Prognosis and diagnosis, in light of "the condition of man," become in this respect the major task of the man of letters, as this representative collection of Mumford's writings of over the last half century proves. In the pursuit of these tasks, he also discloses that creative, life-saving constituent that girds the prophetic critical spirit in all its offshoots: Vision. For the man of letters is also a man of vision who understands, on the deepest levels of

sensibility, that "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Of course, Mumford retains just enough of his optimist faith so that he does not yet pronounce man's total collapse. But that modern man has come more and more to the outermost edge of civilizational dissolution and now approaches that zero-zone of total nullification: against this hell of man's fate Mumford recreates the full force of his message. This is by no means a happy task; the prophet's responsibility is, from the earliest of times, always a troubling one, both for himself and his audience. Which again returns us to the essence of the main task of the man of letters: the refining maintenance of standards that distinguish human society, and humane civilization as a whole, from the kind of society in which spiritual servitude becomes the ultimate dehumanizing law. Even the roughest analysis of the evolving significance of Mumford's writings since 1922, whether in his choice of great figures, or of historical movements, trends, directions, or of major themes and theses, will show a steady, undeviating line of concern with human possibility in a world of growing impossibility. Mumford is uncompromising not only in expressing his vision of life but also, and even more importantly, in affirming the meaning of life—the meaning of man. He shows this affirmation in the highest humanistic terms, seeing the value of a spiritualizing love as an ultimate value in transcending the modern spirit of desacralization that impedes "the flowering of plants and men." "We need," writes Mumford, "such a redeeming and all-embracing love at this moment to rescue the earth itself and all the creatures that inhabit it from the insensate forces of hate, violence, and destruction."

Yet, the possibility of a spiritualizing love remains a stubbornly remote one in the modern world. Everywhere the forces of anti-life are ascendant, as what Mumford calls the "megamachine" and "megatechnics" become the new religion of our culture. Duty to humanity is replaced by duty to scientific truth, and this obscene process of

transvaluation leads to the debasement of life that Mumford summarizes cogently in one sentence:

For the fact is that standardization, organization, automatism, which are the real and special triumphs of modern technics, tend with their very perfection to produce routiners: people whose vital interests and activities lie outside the system to which they have committed themselves.

The imposed dogmas of this new religion of technics contain a frightening absolutism based on quantity and quantification, on bureaucracy, regimentation, mediocrity, external (cybernetic) control. These are precisely those depersonalizing elements of both life and governance that, as we see to our horror, destroy the humanistic hierarchies that, Mumford notes, "give authority to knowledge over ignorance, to goodness over malice and evil, to the rational over the irrational, to the universal and enduring over the time-serving and particular." In the end nothing is more triumphant in the midst of the rise of the new religion than the specialist spirit that Mumford views as the most formidable enemy: the ultimate desecrator whose empire of might is almost impregnable. No field of human activity remains unchallenged or untouched by this presiding specialist spirit, as its "new" metaphysicians of disorder—our new reformers, scientists, educators, psychologists, artists, theologians, philosophers—remorselessly lead us to Armageddon.

There is another, even absolute, quality that the man of letters must possess and reveal with a kind of irradiating grace. This is the quality of wisdom, or better than just mere quality, the unexcelled capacity to communicate meaning and value as an interdependent entity. Intelligence of itself, we know, can convey meaning in its various interpretive levels of signification; and it is no doubt an important and respectable facet of the critical function. But beyond definition of meaning one needs, above all, also to discover the life-essences of value.

A critic, even a very good critic, can achieve the first of these qualities, or criteria, of perception. A man of letters achieves both. In some ways, these greater, or higher, critical qualities that the man of letters has and discloses endow his vision with a special, innate religious quality, consummated in a communicated form of wisdom. Such wisdom has a generalist dimension, as it were, for it embraces the whole of existence. It speaks of and to the total human condition, in all of its immediacy and history, and the voice that is heard has a universal echo or tone. It contains and is contained by, in a word, "the idea of the holy." The view of life that is delineated is reverential; the counsel proffered, whether as pronouncement or announcement, prophecy, protest, precept, reflection, or warning, is sapiential. A wise man has acutely seen and discovered and said things ordinary mortals neglect or refuse to see. His revelation, thus, becomes his testament, his conveyed wisdom, the kind of wisdom that our modern civilization has too often, and often disastrously, rejected. Particularly in his style, in the manner of his writing that dictates the relation between form and moral content, the man of letters is very much an ancient teacher of wisdom in modern dress.

Of this ancient legacy of wisdom Mumford is both teacher and exemplar, eloquently synthesizing and unifying as he also does, and as any true man of letters must, the Hebraic element of conscience and the Hellenic element of consciousness. His portrayal and scrutiny of actual human existence and his way of addressing himself to his listeners underline the style of the wisdom writer. Exhortation and prophecy are conveyed in a vigorous language and style in which even the habit of repetitiveness intensifies the heavy burden of Mumford's teachings:

To save technics itself we shall have to place limits on its heretofore unqualified expansion.

We discarded the universal insights

of Confucius and Buddha, of Mo Ti and St. Paul, at the very moment they were needed most to make technics a true agent of civilization.

The test of maturity, for nations as for individuals, is not the increase of power, but the increase of self-understanding, self-control, self-direction, and self-transcendence. For in a mature society, man himself, not his machines or his organizations, is the chief work of art.

Throughout Mumford speaks as a wise man who, in his universalizing awareness and indictment of the decay of civilization, affirms ethical and moral precepts of life. One outstanding essay that especially corroborates this paradigmatic quality is Mumford's "Post-Historic Man," which in its terrifying truth of insight captures the very essence of a wise man's observation and consideration of a world in which the post-historic is also the post-human. The following passage from this essay gives a characteristic hint of what one encounters in the whole of Mumford's *Wisdom* books:

During the present era . . . man's nature has begun to undergo a decisive final change. With the invention of the scientific method and the depersonalized procedures of modern technics, cold intelligence, which has succeeded as never before in commanding the energies of nature, already dominates every human activity. To survive in this world, man must adapt himself completely to the machine. Nonadaptable types, like the artist and the poet, the saint and the peasant, will either be made over or be eliminated by social selection. All the creativities associated with Old World religion and culture will disappear. To become more human, to explore further into the depth of man's nature, to pursue the divine, are no longer proper goals for machine-made man.

At no other time in history have we more urgent need for the man of letters who is also a man of wisdom; for the wise man,

that is, who is in accord with both priest and prophet, with the former speaking for reverence and with the latter warning against the transgressions of titans. If the twin tyrants of our modern world, Blasphemy and Barbarism, are ever to be resisted and contained, the sage pleas and admonitions of a Lewis Mumford can only be ignored or dismissed at one's peril. "They [who] sow the wind . . . shall reap the whirlwind."

Reviewed by GEORGE A. PANICHAS

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### *A Thesaurus of Wisdom*

**The Wisdom of Conservatism**, edited by Peter Witonski, *New Rochelle, N. Y.*: Arlington House, 1971. 4 volumes, 2,396 pp. \$40.00.

"THE STUPID PARTY" was John Stuart Mill's contemptuous appraisal of conservatives. And for much of this century most American intellectuals shared Mill's belief. However, it appears that now—some two decades after the publication of Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*—it finally has become intellectually respectable for one to consider himself a conservative. Manifestations of this growing respectability can be witnessed in the United States, where increasing numbers of scholars have been gravitating toward the Right on many key issues. We find an acknowledgment of conservative insights regarding, for example, the nature of man, the need for order, authority, and roots, and the proper role of government. For many years conservatives have warned that cultural, economic, and especially political power must be diffused, balanced, and limited. When too much power is concentrated in the hands of government, contends the conservative,