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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Sixth Jefferson Lecture - Saul Bellow

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SCOTT SIMON

From Chicago, the National Public Radio presents the American novelist, Saul Bellow, and the second part of the Sixth Jefferson Lecture of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I'm Scott Simon, in Chicago, the city in which Saul Bellow was raised, in which he resides today, and the city in which he set the scene of most of his work. Mr. Bellow, of course, is three times a National Award Winner for the Adventures of Augie March, The Rain King, and Mr. Sammler's Planet. He has once won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel, Humboldt's Gift. And, of course, late last year he was honored by the Nobel Prize award for literature and he told American reporters from his office on the University of Chicago campus on the southside of this city, "the child in me is delighted." The Jefferson Lectures are described by their sponsor, the National Endowment for the Humanities, as the highest honor that this Nation may pay to an eminent humanist. The first Jefferson Lecture was given by Professor Lionel Trilling, the second by Eric H. Ericson. The third entitled "Democracy and Poetry" by the poet Robert Penn Warren. Paul Freund delivered the fourth lecture, and last

year, Dr. John Hope Franklin of the University of Chicago delivered his 3-part lecture, "Racial Equality in America." Mr. Bellow has entitled his own talk "The Writer and His Country Look Each Other Over."

This is the second part of that talk. We're now in the Gold Coast Room of Chicago's Drake Hotel and Dr. Robert Kingston, who is the Acting Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, will introduce Saul Bellow.

DR. KINGSTON

In one of the passages which make Mr. Bellow's recent autobiographical scrutiny from Jerusalem something very different from a guidebook on that city, he remarked about our American society, "Nothing makes us happier than to talk about ourselves. Our own experience as a people has become a source of ecstasy." And then he notes, "Here am I doing it too." That's what we have asked Mr. Bellow to do tonight. To talk about ourselves. Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Bellow.

SAUL BELLOW

A kind friend, worried about my soul, has sent me a handsomely printed little book called The Bitch Goddess--Success. It was William James who first called the goddess a bitch and identified her as the source of our most serious

American disease, the squalid, cash interpretation of success. She was to blame, William James thought, for the moral flabbiness he saw in so many Americans.

I was glad to receive this anthology, for like a great many Americans I am aware of shameful shortcomings, and I am eager for accurate diagnosis and grateful for correction and cure. The easiest way to get my attention is to approach me from the side of reform. So, I often sit down with this handy little book and read a few frightening, but improving sentences from Thoreau or Walt Whitman. But it occurred to me the other day that these great and lucky men were having it both ways and were doubly successful. For Whitman not only succeeded in writing poems of great beauty, but he saw through success as well, and transcended it. He stands in the American heavens as a twin star, poetic and monitory. We have always been assassinated by admonition as by success. America, please remember, is or used to be the land of the sampler and of "Poor Richard". Grandmothers no longer embroider mottos, but the critical spirit, although changed, is very strong and omnipresent in its new form. Behind the Goddess of Success, there was always a Goddess of Rebukes, who worked in the shadows. Less prominent, she was perhaps more powerful and enduring, and she makes herself felt today in the pervasive uneasiness experienced by all Americans.

When the first Rockefeller declared that he was the trustee of the property of others, committed to his care by God's providence, he was holding his ground against the Goddess of Rebukes -- Rebuka, I suppose we could call her. But is there a banker on Wall Street who could say anything like this today? God can no longer be invoked by the capitalists. When a member of President Eisenhower's cabinet said a few years ago, that what was good for General Motors was good for the country, he caused a scandal. So the prestige of tycoons has gone down, while skepticism of success has increased. Make no mistake about it. The Rebuke Goddess is stronger than the Bitch Goddess. Tame executives who have learned about Mock Zaber at seminars in Aspen may mention the Protestant ethic, but only as a phantom in one of the vanished forces of religion. What is carried over from the days of sin and preaching is a diffuse awareness of moral defectiveness, a sense of undeserved advantages of ingratitude for our good fortune, a feeling that this miraculously successful country has done evil under the Sun, has spoiled and contaminated nature, waged cruel wars, failed in its obligations to its weaker citizens -- the Blacks, the children, the women, the aged, and the poor of the entire world. Are we wrong thus to reproach ourselves? I haven't said that. At the moment I am considering only our extraordinary sensitivity to and our appetite for rebuke. Many of our intellectuals

have found work as priests of the Goddess of Rebuke; nagging, and scolding and infecting a vulnerable people with gnawing anxiety and remorse. In so doing, they often become successful. But they do not serve the Bitch Goddess primarily. They use her to strengthen the power of the Goddess of Rebuke. This was why my considerate friend sent me a handsomely printed little anthology, but really, by now, the Bitch Goddess is as dated as Thomas A. Edison's gramophone.

Anthologists have made Walt Whitman sound like an academic scold, and a mere Levite in the service of rebuke. He was too grand for that. He did not diffuse anxieties; he hit hard. His denunciation of America's literary and moral failures, corruption, hollowness of heart, depravity, the hell under the breast bones are as fresh and true as when I read them forty years ago. Some of the other contributors to the Bitch Goddess volume are less impressive moralists, but I welcome their attacks too, because I believe with H.L. Mencken that being attacked is good for you. Mencken wrote in 1920, "There's always a certain amount of truth in every attack, however dishonest." He tells Theodore Driesser in a letter, "I have learned more from attacks than from praise." In even the most vicious attack, there was a touch of plausibility. There is always something embarrassing about unqualified praise. A man knows down in his heart that he doesn't

deserve it. Thus, even the iconoclastic Mr. Mencken, proves to be a genuine American who feels that we sinners need all the help we can get, and it is more useful to be damned than blessed. And, if the soul is to build more stately mansions, it can't do it without the shaping suggestions that only your adversary can make.

Americans must be the most sententious people in the world. Far too busy to be religious, they felt that they sorely needed guidance. I have a friend who tells me that he thinks the most powerful moral document in America was, for a long time at any rate, the Boy Scout Handbook. He believes that the moral sentiments in this book caused untold harm to several generations of young men pure in heart by preparing them for high principled victimization.

Girls, he argues, were not hampered by such teachings. Their mothers brought them up in the real world. And they saw their advantages clearly and took them up nimbly. But, the young men suffered. And, out of the Boy Scout Handbook comes, according to my friend, the big "Gallahad" disaster. He goes on to draw pictures of sexual misery, mother hatred, alcoholism, and blasted illusions such as, you may find in five hundred American novels written since The Great Gatsby.

But, I must hold to my subject. I was saying that I had taken to reading daily in The Bitch Goddess--Success because I found it full of helpful suggestions -- mantras for meditation. Mr. Charles Ives, for instance, in criticizing prize competitions in the arts says, "A close union between spiritual life and the ordinary business of life is necessary and we must keep the balance between the ordinary life and the spiritual life."

Well this, of course, is the name of the game. But the maddening fact is that after you've said these obviously true things, you're up against it. When Mr. Ives, casting about for an example of the ordinary, says, "A month in the Kansas wheat fields may do more for the a young composer than 3 years in Rome" you ask yourself when he last looked at ordinary life. Again he says, "If for every thousand dollar prize a potato field be substituted, so that these candidates of Cleo can dig a little in real life, art's air might be a little clearer."

Digging potatoes? Kansas wheat fields? The last American artist to go into the wheat fields was Vachel Lindsey, when he went forth to preach the gospel of beauty, in the days before the first World War. The ordinary business of life, United States and its great cities is what it is

because up in Kansas they aren't bringing in the sheaves as they did in 1910.

For further enlightenment, I turn in the same little book to the contribution of famous architect Louis Sullivan who worked for so many years in Chicago. What he has to tell us is this. As you are, so are your buildings and as your buildings are so are you. "You and your architecture are the same. Each is a faithful portrait of the other. To read the one is to read the other. To interpret the one is to interpret the other. If this is true, Mr. Sullivan is accounted in full for the proposition of Mr. Ives. The balance between ordinary life and spiritual life is manifest in what you see before you eyes.

Now, I've spent most of my life in Chicago and have undoubtedly been influenced by its streets, houses, factories, office buildings, fixed flats, and skyscrapers. But I can't agree that Chicago and I completely reflect each other. That is a polemical exaggeration that you expect from prophets. They must exaggerate. Take heed, Sullivan cries when he reaches his prophetic altitude. Did you think architecture is a thing of the books of the past? No never, it was always of its present and its people. It now is of the

present and of you. This architecture was ashamed to be natural but it is not ashamed to lie. So, you as a people, are ashamed to be natural, but not ashamed to lie. And so on.

Well, so people are scolded. And in a Sunday mood they find such scolding refreshing and beneficial. Of course there's a lot in this.

Ruskin's message was not too different, and there were William Morris and even William Blake, if you like, with his Satanic mills and London's chartered streets, though Blake would never have said that as your chartered streets were, so were you. You'd have to be an architect to make precise counterparts of souls and houses. Still, one can easily understand what Chicago at the turn of the century must have done to a man like Sullivan as he looked at huddled slums, bungalows, workrooms, depots, plush hotels, flophouses, rail yards, warehouses, and the mansions and tombs of the rich. Sullivan is easily identified as a man of the single-minded type. Democracy might be saved if we built not for the buck but for the occupant.

So, each of the romantic friends of mankind knew exactly where the remedy was. Assigned in high school to read

Carlyle's famous essay on Robert Burns, I read, "Let me write the songs of a people, and you may write its laws." I wasn't surprised by this having grown up in Chicago. I had heard dozens of similar claims. Vegetarians argued that wars would stop if we stopped butchering animals. And, the bread cranks demanded that we check the decay of society by banning white flour. The temperance lecturers, the enemies of tobacco, saw in booze and smoking dangers of the same dimensions that made Sullivan cry out "Take heed".

Moving into a more respectable intellectual sphere, when I left high school, I learned from more refined theorist a class struggle and the proletarian revolution, and about character neurosis of sexual origin which were destroying civilization, or about the semantic chaos which made opposing interests incomprehensible to each other. One cause of misery, one remedy. I was pleased to read some months ago, What the Austrian writer Carl Krause had said on his death bed, when he heard the news that the Japanese had gone into Manchuria. He said, "None of this would have happened if people had only been more strict about the use of the comma." For the poet, it is the corruption of language and good usage that starts all the trouble. But Krause spoke like a wit and not a monomaniac. The dying Krause seems to me to have remained faithful to his vocation while conceding under

the weight of death, that no conviction can be totally free from absurdities. Bad punctuation no more nails down the case than the class struggle of sexual neurosis, mass-produced bread, nor ugly buildings. That is how I translate Krause's comment.

The artist cannot avoid the disorder of contemporary reality calling on bankers, builders, and the public to redeem democracy by building with honor or by adopting psychological, sexual, or political doctrines. He is bound and bound bitterly, at the best of times to what Nietzsche called the amor fati (the imperative to embrace what is). Such an embrace is not a surrender. It is only the necessary acceptance of a mass of complexities. To limit himself to any one of the single views would result in his segregation, would cut him off from seeing or understanding this great mass of complexities is our great given, the supreme datum. And it is ours. Reading the journal of the Greek poet Seferiades, I come upon a valuable entry. Seferiades is speaking to a friend of his, Zickalyonovs, who is sick. I asked about his health. Yes, I do have high blood pressure, he answered, but it is Zickalyonov's high blood pressure. To this Seferiades adds, it's not he who fits into the world's measurements, the world fits into his measurements. Similar terms may be applied to the American writers relations

to his country. This has always been called an anti-poetic country. Even those who like Tocqueville found so much to admire here, thought it was anti-poetic. The poet Carl Shapiro wrote in a book of essays called, interesting title, To Abolish Children, "it takes a great deal of courage, either that or a powerful inertia to live in America, living in an anti-poetic climate, in fact, is our chief form of poetic stimulation." An anthology of twentieth century United States poetry will bear this out. Thematically, the poems are all of a piece, life in the land of the air conditioned nightmare. That twentieth century poetry has been content to exploit this theme almost exclusively is one of the chief weaknesses of our poetry. It is all related to the horrors of progress, the puritanism of hard work, the failure of success, the betrayal of the social character, and so on. "We are," he says, "a very social-minded bunch of poets, carrying a burden of historical guilt which is way out of proportion to our sins." It is instilled in the American poet at a very early age that something is anti-poetic in the state of America. Some poets pin it on the social system, some on the economic system, some on the failure of spiritual belief, some on the religion of science, but all use the way of life as a target. To the air conditioned nightmare, or the way of life, try to apply the Zickalyonov's Standard. Try it also with Louis Sullivan's, "As You Are,

So Are You're Buildings." I have the same relation with Chicago's buildings as Zickalyonov has to his high blood pressure. The dizzy spells, the fits of faintness are his, the streets of Chicago are mine.

Now against this background, bearing in mind the hints drawn from Sullivan, Shapiro, Zickalyonov, Seferiades, I go about Chicago this winter considering the city as it is and remembering what it was, what it was like more than forty years ago. There are cities where change is slow, a Florentine can dismiss the mere forty years with a shrug, but here, centuries of change can be crammed into a few years and then and now can be as far apart as Stonehenge is from a computer. A bakery I knew in the days of wood burning ovens, when the cursing, good-natured bakers worked over the vats with their fists or brought out the loaves with a long wooden peal is now automated. The workers look like research assistants. Then Petrush the watchman, the one that had lost his finger in a machine, slept drunk on the flour sacks, and the rats hopped over his feet, now there isn't a sack in sight. The hoppers are filled by machine, the rats once unwillingly tolerated are non grata. The streets surrounding the new plant are not greatly changed, the Polish bungalows and the six flats still stand, the Polish population is reluctantly moving out, the Puerto Ricans are taking the neighborhood

over. The Poles were devoted to their property, they kept their bungalows in good repair. The brickwork pointed and covered with wax red, chocolate, or green paint. Employees of the Dole Valve Company, or the casket factory on Carroll Avenue, warehouse and packing plant workers, locksmiths, electricians, pruned the trees, repaired the wooden steps. The housewives wore ribbon dust-caps as they tended flowers growing in old washtubs on the lawn.

I remember dull summer afternoons when whole blocks crackled with the baseball broadcasts and the golden houseflies slept in the privet hedges. I wonder why these hedges became fly dormitories. I am thinking of course, of the twenties and thirties, when Chicago was a city made up of such neighborhoods or villages of industrial workers, when on warm Sundays in the prohibition era, the streets smelled of home-brewed beer and home-made sauerkraut and the player pianos rattled dance tunes like Hotch Maruska Hotch and weddings went on for three days, with stamping and roaring, and fist fights in the alleys. Because you made your own sauerkraut and drank home brewed peavs and swore Polish or Ukranian oaths, you were not necessarily a foreigner. Polish veterans of the First World War gathered on Kratuschco Day with a band playing American tunes and carried banners of the Polish National Alliance when they marched in Humboldt

Park. The marchers spoke either Polish or the English-based lingua-Franco American, for they were Americans. To be American was neither a territorial nor a linguistic phenomenon but a concept, a set of ideas, really. This collective effort seldom conscious to do what was utterly untraditional and historically anonymous, had been accurately been described by Abraham Lincoln in phrases like "conceived in liberty, or dedicated to the proposition that". I call your attention to words like proposition or conceived. The Americanism of immigrants is, to some degree, conceptual and involves mental choices. Those may be called rudimentary, but they are not for that reason unimportant. It cannot be unimportant that a most significant historical development begins in choices among abstractions. At no stage of development can human beings, in the present age avoid abstract choices. Marxism, too, made an offer of concepts to the culturalist, traditionalist, working class, but thinking was not to continue after you have joined the revolutionary party. Now this is dangerous stuff, the necessary, critical intelligence may not be forthcoming in the U.S., but it has not been prescribed by law, only discouraged by the conditions of life. And what are those conditions in big American cities? As soon as I have asked the question, I am filled with regrets. It has always been my opinion, the opinion of an amateur sociologist, that the Immigration Act of 1924 entirely

changed the character of the city. No more carpenters, printers, mechanics, pastry cooks, cobblers, sign painters, street musicians, and small entrepreneurs entered the country from Greece, Serbia, Pomerania, Sicily. Such trades were infradig for the descendents of earlier immigrants. They improved themselves and moved upward. The neighborhoods they left were repopulated by an internal immigration from the South and from Puerto Rico. The country people, Black or white, from Kentucky or Alabama, brought with them mostly skills and customs as the European immigrants. Assembly line, industries had no need for skilled labor. What we have taken to calling ethnic neighborhoods, fell into decay and the slums, as one of my friends once observed, were ruined. He was not joking, the slums, as we still knew them in the twenties, were, when they were still maintained by European immigrants, excellent places, attractive to artists and Bohemians, as well as to Wasps who longed for a touch of Europe. The major consequence of the devastation of these neighborhoods, invariably discussed on occasions like these, the increase in crime the narcotics addiction, the welfare problems, the whole inventory of urban anarchy, I will spare you. I will appease the analytical furies of mentioning only three side effects of the change: First, the disappearance of the genial street life of American cities, then the dank and depressing odors of cultural mildew rising from

the giant suburbs which are still growing, and the shift of Bohemia to the universities, but I shall stop with that. I sometimes think of Sullivan, the prophet, as I go about Chicago looking at its bungalows and six flats. Architects tell me that the three-story six flat extends the bungalow principle to the apartment building. After fifty years one becomes reconciled to these brick shapes. You get the builder's idea; you get some sense of the sort of man he was. You even, sometimes, take his lamentable work to your heart. In the entry of a typical six flat are the brass mail boxes and the bells, three to a side and a short flight of stairs, Indiana limestone, or Vermont marble, pleasingly worn leads to the glass door that opens to the main staircase. There are sometimes more imposing entrances. Some six flats have a pair of Doric or Ionic columns, some have great clumsy square cement planters on the pedestals meant for geraniums or ferns but filled invariably with mud and ancient litter. More pretentious buildings in Chicago had a pair of carved lions in front now diminished by erosion and the beating of the years to lamblike figures. Six open porches at the front, that was what was common in Chicago, the coarse brick laid ornamentally, looking a little out of plumb, the elms have succumbed to the blight, the commonest shade trees now are cottonwoods. Few streets are well paved, but there is plenty of space, land is cheap and the Government

was liberal with it. There are grass plots between the sidewalks and the curbs. Cement passages between the buildings and then there are backyards which face the alley with their line of small garages. Chicago's back porches are wooden and the stairs are open to the weather, crudely built, trussed with planks that are hammered to the beams in long x's. These are what you still see when you ride the elevator trains. I was taken aback on my first trip to New York in the thirties to find the tracks of the Third Avenue el so close to parlor windows of the tenements. There was always plenty of space in Chicago; it was ugly, but it was roomy. There was plenty of opportunity to see masses of things, a large view; a vacancy, never entirely trustworthy, ample grayness, ample brownness, big clouds, the train used to make rickety speed through the violet evenings of summer over the clean veins of steel through the backyards of Chicago with their gray wooden porches, soiled gray stairs, the clumsy lumber of the trusses, the pulley clotheslines. On the southside, you rode straight into the stockyard fumes, these at times infected the Sun itself so that it was reeking as well as shining. But I was speaking of the six flats with the simple symmetry like six pack bungalows, economically built from the simple plans of hack architects, kitchen above kitchen, bathroom above bathroom, sun parlor above sun parlor, the strict regularity making plumbing, heating and

wiring cheaper to install. In this mass production there were nevertheless, trimmings and nifty touches, notes of elegance and of aspiration. In each front room for no one ever called it a drawing room, there was a dummy fireplace with artificial logs, an electric bulb was concealed within and the heat of this bulb fluttered a pleated disk which revolved and threw flickering shadows in an imitation of fire light. At each end of this fireplace were bookcases with art nouveau glass doors, above these at each end of the mantle piece were two small hinged windows, also leaded. The fleur de lis was the commonest ornament, there might be a pane or two of stained glass even in the toilet. The dining room was separated by the front room by china cabinets waist high, on top of these a pair of dummy wooden columns occasionally stood. In the dining room, was a built-in buffet in the same style often with a bevelled mirror. And these fixtures were rapidly turned out by the hundreds of thousands in factories and designed to be quickly and inexpensively installed. An this was how most of Chicago lived. You heard little through the thick slab walls, occasionally a water pipe stuttered in leaden orgasm, noisily. It was through the ceilings that you heard your neighbors play the piano or foxtrotting, you heard the tired and short-tempered bread-winner raging at night or the amiable murmur of kitchen conversations in the winter or on the first floor the janitor

shoveled gritting in the furnace room below. What a commonplace good dullness. It was all uneventful, in the same sense that in the physical universe subatomic particles are uneventful, or the unseen explosion of stars is uneventful. Events too small and too large to be comprehended, through which people sat in their parlors or on their porches. The other day toward the end of a short winter afternoon, I sat with one of my friends in his third floor apartment, one of the usual six looking out at the frost hardened snow and the sunny smoke dragging, slow to rise, when the thermometer stands belows zero. We were having a drink in his dining room which faces the rear of the building, the back stairs and the porches, the work clapped together by literal minded carpenters, the same rails, the same slats, and treads and risers and floorboards, almost as familiar to a Chicagoan as his own body and seconding in his physical existence. Besides all this lumber, a hibernating cottonwood, the big sooty soft, graceless tree in its crocodile bark, just the sort of organism that would thrive in an environment like this, making out somehow, under the sidewalk and transacting its botanical business with the summer murk. In April, it drops its slender sexual catkins and the streets are fragrant for a day or two. In June, it releases its white fluff. By July, the broad spearhead leaves are as glossy as polished leather, and by August they are all fibrous and brown.

In Hyde Park near the University of Chicago, the faculty lived peacefully enough in their six flats, but a few blocks away in either direction are the Black slums. A different sort of life, in Woodlawn and Oakwood, tears apart the six flat and leaves them looking shelled. They are stripped of saleable metals, innards torn out, copper cable chopped to pieces and sold for scrap, glass all smashed and finally fire and emptiness. Sometimes there is no one at all in these devastated streets, a dog, a rat occasionally. The grass plot fences are torn up. True, they were inelegant, shapeless lumber, four by four rails set on an angle with a sharp edge up to discourage lounging. But these have been stolen, burned, and the grass plots themselves have been stamped into solid clay.

If you want to know what happens in this devastated Chicago, you must look into the welfare system, inquire in the grammar schools and high schools, read the sociologist, talk to the cops and the firemen, visit the eviction corps at the youth court, the gun court, the hospitals, the clinics, the house of correction, the county jail.

The first fact that strikes you in a court room is that so large a part of the Black population is armed; men, women, children even, go into the streets with handguns.

When the police make an arrest for illegal possession of guns, they have to justify themselves under the questioning of defense lawyers who throw the fourth amendment at them, stop and frisk, "How did you know the defendant was carrying a weapon?" "His jacket was open I saw it stuck in his belt." Or the prosecution says, observing the clumsy formalities of the courtroom, "directing your attention, officer, to the night of January 4, when you entered these premises on South Lawndale, tell the court why you did it". "Because we received a radio call at 1:15 a.m., and were instructed to investigate a report that unlicensed liquor was being sold at this address. This was a burned out, condemned building where we found sixteen men consuming unlicensed liquor and a pair of guns lying on the plank with a bottle. The defendant said the guns were his, I arrested him." A small business man, a Puerto Rican driving a van, stopped by the police because he is weaving in traffic is carrying a gun, he says, "I was taking my money to the bank, your Honor, twelve hundred bucks. If they rob me, I close my business if they rob me again." His Honor understands this and a great deal more. His Honor, a man in his forties, himself a product of these streets, so altered in the last decades, served in Korea with the Marine Corps, badly wounded, but not crippled by a land mine. He spends his holidays in the west, breaking horses. After Korea he became a cop, went to Law School at

night and with a little political help, I assume, became a magistrate. The political help is indispensable and in Chicago, entirely normal. Chicagoans prefer the machine appointments to the disinfected Civil Service procedures. The politicians know their constituents and they are right to put a man like Judge X on the bench rather than a technician or a trained administrator. We know by now what these highly trained specialists are like. The need is for common sense and sympathy and Judge X has both. Occasionally, he has to defend himself against physical violence in the courtroom. A few months ago a defendant went at him with a knife, was dragged away to a cell and chained to a bench, so freaked out at the Judge, that he tore the bolted bench out of the floor. But these are not unusual occurrences, and I know the Judge himself when he was in night court at 11 to 8 carried his service revolver in his belt because it wasn't safe at 4 in the morning to walk to his parked car within a block of Chicago's police headquarters. None of this unusual. The cases of sexual abuses of children; not unusual, the hookers who hold up their tricks, the pushers who post bonds from huge rolls of fresh bills, the rapist, the security guard at the shopping center who cracked a man's head for stealing a package of Certs, the school girls caught lifting blue jeans, the apparently senseless shootings and stabbings and ridiculous thefts appear inexhaustible before the bench.

It will never end, says the Judge. We take away their guns, they buy more; send them to the House of Corrections, they come back. Among children, you look in vain for resemblances of the past. The public schools are now 76 percent Black and Puerto Rican. Chicago's teachers have the highest salary scale in the country. But they are not paid to keep order, that is for the security guards. What they teach is hard to determine. Whom they teach, is even more mysterious. There are classrooms in which pupils walk about, knocking out rhythms on the walls, listening to their transistor radios, where no one seems to grasp that a room has a center and one focuses on a teacher, in which there is no structure. The ungrasped despair of children seeking to express themselves presses on your heart and viscera for many days afterwards. They are like little Casper Housers, they do not know the meaning of simple words, they live in turbulence convulsively, and in darkness of mind. They are unlike poor innocent Casper Houser, in that they have a demonic kind of knowledge of sexual violence, of drugs, of vices which they don't even see as vices; of intricate and sophisticated relationships of the streets. Look at them as they stand before the Judge's bench and they are incomprehensible. You no more know what they are thinking and feeling than they know what you are feeling and thinking. There are those who struggle to maintain themselves in a disintegrating city and to

protect themselves from guns, rapes, drugs, and street violence, and their children from beatings in school playgrounds and assaults in hallways and toilets. But no one goes out for a breath of air in the streets at night, those who go about freely are those princes, bold and leonine in high costume and probably armed for a gun in your waistband, is what gives you freedom of the streets. If you are one of those dudes for whom it is a necessity to button himself into a long coat of patchwork leather and put on a fancifully swelling peaked cap and clacking platform shoes with Berber Polynesian American Indian ornaments, pard-bearded to be shut in is suffocation and all this ornament demands display. You see costumes of powerful originality in The Loop, where many of the shoppers are junior civil servants who work in the skyscrapers built by the Federal Government. They pour into shops at noon, and in the court rooms and detention cells, men charged with mugging, prostitutes and thieves dress in high style, soiled but elegant, the women in suede and velveteen, hair teased out in puff balls tinged with safranine, men in torn shirts but with coat sleeves that pucker ingeniously at the shoulder, and wearing blunt boots in four colors and red or yellow laces that criss-cross up the leg. They make you think of sociological formulas like that of Leo Lowenthal, who speaks of the idols of consumption which have replaced the idols of production in the popular culture of the country.

This, then, is a portion of the ordinary life which artists feel obliged to reconcile in the manner of Mr. Charles Ives, with the spiritual. But, is this what Charles Ives meant by the ordinary, is this what he meant? No, alas, the ordinary is not what it was in the days of the ordinary, before sparks of consciousness began to fly, not consciousness enough to illuminate fully, only enough of a flash by which to glimpse what it is that we are up against, the beginnings of comprehension, the outlines of what may be, even for the most intensely conscious of it, incomprehensible.

The anti-poetic climate of the United States that inspired most American poets for six decades, never much a theme as Carl Shapiro hinted, has lost what slight interest it once had through the collapse of the hated class that imposed triumphant progress and the puritanism of hard work on us. A city like Chicago no longer has the magnetic power it had in the days when it was denounced and admired as wicked, ugly, bathed in the blood of slaughter houses but vital, charged with energy, the laughing giant that played with railroads and raised the first skyscrapers. It is dimishing, losing industry and population, and with the death of Mayor Dailey detested by right thinking liberals as a reactionary and the author of police riots. Sought after by Democratic presidential candidates. Laughed at for his

malapropisms, it became clear that the last mythic charge had been cut off and that Chicago's realities must now be considered for what they are.

In 1929 the sociologist Harvey Zorbow published a book on The Gold Coast and the Slum in which he contrasted the contiguous contrasting highlife and lowlife of the city on the near north side. The Gold Coast has been in a sense extended in the present day highrises that stand in the vertical fringe along the lake. Some seven or eight miles of fashionable apartment buildings. Behind them westward are the slums. One block west of Sheridan Road with its middle class population of professional people, widows on pensions, small businessmen, police lieutenants, supervisory personnel belonging to the great bureaucracies, run Kenmore Avenue, a street of blacks and Chicanos. The Gold Coast attenuated has spread northward accompanied by the slum. But Zorbow, when he described slum life on North Clark Street in the old days, calling it romantically the realto of the half world, speaks of the prostitutes, the gold diggers looking for generous daddies, the vamps whose profession is blackmail, the crooks, the rouge dandy's of the underworld, Robin Hoods of the boulevard, with their broads, making a night of it. By present standards these vamps and rouge dandys are arcadian. In the slums today

comes a savage fire directed at the middle class groping for security. The crimes are gratuitously sadistic with beatings and often sexual tortures, rapes, and inflicted perversions. Highrise residents in their more-or-less protected buildings as they watch television at night are half aware that the locks of automobiles down in the parking spaces are perhaps being forced even now. And that as they watch the triumphs of actor Kojak over actor criminals in New York there are real criminals outside having things their own way uncaught. A strange isolation is imposed on people. Their evening participation in the life about them partakes of the nature of dreams. On the television screens to which more and more is devoted they see some of their own problems in stylized and untrue fictions alternating with psychological discussion and pictures of the commodities they are urged to buy. They no longer enjoy the modest local life of city dwellers thirty years ago. Their minds and emotions are drawn elsewhere into the nation and the great world itself by the discussion of "problems". By the pressure of international politics, by items about Brezhnev, Idi Amin, the new regime in Viet Nam, Indian elections and so on. This is no longer the anti-poetic climate of American society, the least of our concerns at this moment. What holds the city together for the people I have just been describing is the persistence of certain institutions corporations, banks, stock exchanges,

the great universities, the research institutes, the museums, the famous shops, the political machine, and sadly enough the newspapers. The newspapers make what they can of urban life but devote most of their space to retail advertisements with a few of the bloodiest crimes and political notes thrown in, a smattering of news about weather, energy crises, show biz, sports and that ectoplasmic group, the beautiful people. Item "Thursday's opening of the elegant new Stephano Boutique in Watertower Place drew a large number of Chicago's jet set and big spenders", end quote. The Stephano Boutique is all very well but jewel stores, Domminick's, A&P, Goldlatz & Weebles, lower middle class, working class department stores fill the pages of news sometimes and the Tribune and this, if one is to judge by bulk, is Chicago's real culture. That does not mean that no one is living intensely in Chicago. It only means that intensity is no longer fed by the life of the city. The mind of a Chicagoan, if it is active, is drawn away by stronger interests national, universal, scientific, by problems faced by the entire species. And not even the most ancient cities of the world now have a self-sufficient and absorbing life. London and Rome don't have it, why should Chicago with its shorter history. It is apparently the fact that thoughtful people everywhere have the option of combining local with far off attachments. But there is not enough local, i.e., urban culture available to them. No

outer life which can express the inner life in any satisfactory degree. Life is becoming intensely mental at all levels of society from the bourgeoisie to the liberal and proletariat. This is not intended as a compliment or a sign of progress for when I say it is mental I do not mean that it is clear. I only mean that it is filled with concepts. And this turbulent sea of abstractions as we all know has not exactly increased the stability of the world. The more conceptual life becomes the more the survival of mankind depends upon our capacity for clear thought and when I say clear thought I do not mean abstract cerebration, but the descent of intellectual power from the head to the heart below it and then back again from the heart. Here I'm obliged to exercise a certain restraint for I'm speaking to you not as an academic intellectual but merely as a person who writes novels and stories. If I were speaking as an intellectual I would go through some of the intellectual routines we've all become used to and I've learned to draw comfort from. I would go back to the beginning of history and describe the rise and fall of our civilization with special emphasis on the differences between the new world and the old and many references to the city of man and the effects of German idealism or Romanticism, etc. I have certain sympathy with such routines though I seem to depreciate them. For we need to know the etiology of our disorders. But I am afraid of the long lists we

often find that stretch from Emerson and Thoreau to Charles Reich, Timothy Leary and Father Berrigan are recitations or incantations which put us into a polemical fever and leave us feeling stung and enraged. I have been reading recently a book on the future of the Catholic Church by Malake Martin with its furious catalogs of the errors of our American prophets, poets, our disgraceful intelligencia and mental leaders under such ingenious, angry rubrics as pseudo Romantics, Atomites, destructors elect, and so on. We are all familiar with these lists compiled in indignation and horror. I mention them here to support the assertion that life has become intensely mental. In the Congressional Record the Senate discusses the mental state of the Soviet leaders. Are they mad, are they rational, does their greater success in extending their influence in Asia and Africa mean that they are better political thinkers? Do the wrong answers mean extinction? It is daily more apparent that society has had a battery of examinations set for it by history, to prepare us or to hinder us, there has appeared a crowd of instructors, experts, discussants, exploiters, sloganiers, columnists, commentators, public relations specialists, and skilled attention getters. I have often been called an intellectual novelist. The description is inaccurate. I have simply given up the nostalgic attachment of the realists and post-realists to a simple behavioristic America in which

people felt and acted, but where they thought very little. I have tried to face the new environment of confused ideas in which we are now placed. I begin as any writer does with what I see, feel, and sense and not with highbrow ambitions. Thus as I sit on a freezing Chicago afternoon and watch the salt spattered cars in the somber north side streets I experience the familiar mixture of tedium and excitement which I have always associated with Chicago. A tedium or grimness veined with excitement. Not far from these greyed streets there is bright action. The privation of brightness is experienced in this greyness as something devastating. The narrowness of the lives is made more painful by the proximity of scope. Jets pass over the six flats and everywhere sophisticated electronic machinery is in operation. Scope and stricture are felt in the same soul. A craving for expansion meets a desperate sense of limitation. Essences are hidden in things and for these essences we human beings have a hunger which in the present circumstances expresses itself as this tedium veined with excitement. As simultaneous a simultaneous sense of scope and stricture as at every moment dying and hoping to live. Amid irrelevancies, noises, fakes, brutalities, real thought, false thought, our true beings struggle. During America's brazen past years of pre-eminence and confidence, imitations of the real goods were carelessly accepted. But we have taken hard blows. The

great stars are fading--New York on the verge of bankruptcy, Chicago discussing its own decline, some twenty percent of the population on welfare, the industries moving out, unemployment, inflation, decay, forboding may have at least one beneficial effect. From more than one source I hear of people in Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, turning off their T.V. sets to take night courses in Plato and Shakespeare and of young mothers who bring their children to class. This does not add up to a revolution. There will be much bad teaching, misunderstanding, flounderings, and new forms of confusion but it is at least evident that the absurdities of the mass media are meeting with resistance and that there is a rising demand for art and thought. A feeling of "for God's sake," let's not have any more of this baby-talk, pointless excitement, endless exploitation. Recently I found in an interview given by John Cheever in the "Paris Review," confirmation of my own conclusion that the number of people separating themselves for these substitutes for art, thought, and substance is growing. The interviewer asks, "Who are the people that you imagine or hope read your books?" And Cheever replies, "All sorts of pleasant and intelligent people read the books and write thoughtful letters about them. I don't know who they are but they are marvelous and live quite independently of the prejudices of advertising journalism and the cranky academic world. The room where I

work has a window looking into a wood and I like to think that these earnest, loveable and mysterious readers are in there." This had also been my experience and that of other writers. And these many marvelous people, the readers out there in the woods, must have a similar connection with America and its phenomena, the same hunger for the essences hidden in things, the same unwillingness to fit themselves into America's measurements. We are not, as in Louis Sullivan's simple equation what architecture is and what our cities are. There isn't enough out there to account for everything that we are. Older human environments were more persuasive, more internally formative. Our newer, hastier, utilitarian surroundings in which ideas of profit build structures under our eyes and under our eyes abandon or wipe them out. Do not bind the soul as much. We invest our individual and imaginative powers in what experience, what history sets before us, we become attached to it, it puts its mark on us. But though it imprints itself, though we impart some of our humanity to it the exchange is never total, there is a between space in which we are free. When William James denounced the Bitch Goddess he was after the bad, strong men who wounded and recklessly wasted the country and justified themselves by the cash they made and their material conquest. Fifty years ago they were still dominant. Their power declined during the Depression and under the New Deal. I

can remember Harry Truman's soldiers carrying Sewell Avery bodily out of Montgomery Ward and Company. Fifth years ago Chicago was still the Chicago of raw tycoons, of Upton Sinclair's Jungle, Carl Sandburg's Player With Railroads. It was the Chicago also of Big Bill Thompson and Al Capone and Colonel McCormick and also of physicists and mathematicians and orientalist and other scholars and of famous collections of paintings and books. Barbarism was dominant but science, thought, even sublimity, were not absent and what we have now is a mixture of desolation and vitality. The ability to understand, to imagine, to represent the strange powerful phenomenon unfolding all in flux, all uncertain, as uncertain as the future of the human species itself. Toward the end of The American Dream Henry James devotes some pages to the future of beauty in this country. Why should beauty have a future? James speaks of the ground so clear of preoccupation, the air so clear of prejudice you wonder why some great undaunted adventure of the arts, meeting in its path none of the aged lions of prescription, of proscription, of merely jealous tradition, should not take place in conditions unexampled. He thinks, James does, of the vast American powers of organization the genius for putting things through and asks why these powers of organization and for putting things through should not be esthetically contributive. Those of you who know James will distinguish between his

terms and mine. But then he remembers in time that the great creation - this is James speaking - that the great creations of taste and faith never express themselves primarily in terms of mere convenience and zeal. And that all the waiting money and all the general fury have at the most, the sole value of being good for beauty when it shall appear, they have it in them so little by themselves to make it appear, that your unfinished question arrives easily enough, in that light, at its end. We cannot today pose the matter in such a question for we think neither of beauty nor of money, as James did in nineteen hundred and four. In that pre-revolutionary time when a fine writer could speak in the same breath of great creations of taste and faith. We can still feel as he did the potential advantages of America, the ground clear of preoccupation, the air clear of prejudgment. One America has been made of utilitarian ideas. Why shouldn't other ideas, and ideas greater than convenience, create another America. Money cannot make Beauty appear, nor can enterprise. Their only value is that they are good for art when art is ready to manifest itself, so argues James. We shall never live to see such a transfer of power. Capitalism does not enjoy the same confident strength. The squalid cash interpretation for which William James blamed the Bitch Goddess is still common enough, but I doubt that he would still think it our most characteristic disease. There are

bad, strong men in leading positions but they don't trumpet their success much now. In the Nixon administration one batch of them was swept under in a maelstrom of rebuke. The above mentioned categories: money, success, beauty have lost some of their firmness and their coziness. They touch us nostalgically they amuse us ruefully. We know that we are part civilized and subtle, part barbarous, part triumphant, part ravaged. That is our Chicago condition, our American and universal condition as well. But because we are between the categories, so to speak, because no individual case is quite covered by them, we may enjoy a rich but also painful freedom of spirit. It is painful because the setting is one of ugliness, cruelty, and suffering. It is rich because we are at liberty to go as far as mind and talent permit. To satisfy our hunger for the essences. To make sense of this mystifying mixture. Our individual and historical legacy--our great given.

Thank you.

Scott Simon

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