

Ours is a century of death. Why is our century so uniquely death-ridden? Couldn't we say this of other centuries as well? Haven't all human histories been a long record of the struggle to survive, to deal with the problems of mortality? Yes, but never before has mankind been confronted by the problem of surviving global death, total death, the extinction of the whole race. And Mahler was not alone in his vision; there have been other great prophets of our struggle. Freud, Einstein, and Marx have also prophesized as have Spengler and Wittgenstein, Malthus, and Rachel Carson --- all latter day Issiahs and Saint Johns, all preaching the same sermon in different terms: mend your ways, the Apocalypse is at hand. Rilke said it too: *"Du musst dein Leben ändern"* (*digging a well by hand*).

The twentieth century has been a badly written drama, from the beginning. Act I: Greed and hypocrisy leading to a genocidal World War; postwar injustice and hysteria; a boom; a crash; totalitarianism. Act II: Greed and hypocrisy leading to a genocidal World War; postwar injustice and hysteria; boom, crash, totalitarianism. Act III: Greed and hypocrisy --- I don't dare continue. And what have been the antidotes? Logical positivism, existentialism, galloping technology, the flight into outer space, the doubting of reality, and overall a well-bred paranoia most recently on display in the high places of Washington, D.C.. And our personal antidotes: Making it, dope, sub-cultures and counter-cultures, turning on, turning off. Marking time and making money. A rash of new religious movements

from Guruism to Billy Grahamism. And a rash of new art movements, from concrete poetry to the silences of John Cage. A thaw here, a purge there. And all under the same aegis, the angel of planetary death.

All of the great works of our century have been born of despair or of protest, or of a refuge. But anguish informs them all. Think of Sartre's *Nausee*, Camus' *Stranger*, Gide's *Counterfeiters*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Magic Mountain* and *Dr. Faustus*, *The Last of the Just*, even *Lolita*. And Picasso's *Guernica*, Chirico, Dali, and Eliot's *Cocktail Party*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Waste Land*, and the *Four Quartets*. Auden's *Age of Anxiety*, and that supreme work of his, *For the Time Being*. And Pasternak and Neruda, and Sylvia Plath. And on the screen, *La Dolce Vita*; and on the stage *Waiting for Godot*. And *Wozzeck*, *Lulu*, *Moses and Aaron*, and Brecht's *Mother Courage*. And yes, also *Eleanor Rigby*, and *A Day in the Life*, and *She's Leaving Home*. These too are great works in the miniature, born of despair, touched with death.

Knowing this how do we manage to survive? Why are we here, struggling to go on? We are now face to face with the Ultimate Ambiguity which is the human spirit. This is the most fascinating ambiguity of all: that as each of us grows up, the mark of our maturity is that we accept our mortality; and yet we persist in our search for immortality. We may believe it's all transient, even that it's all over; yet we believe in a future. We emerge from a cinema after three hours of the most abject degeneracy of in a film such as *La Dolce*

*Vita* and we emerge on wings, from the sheer creativity of it; we can fly on, to a future. The same is true after witnessing the hopelessness of *Godot* in the theater, or after the aggressive violence of *The Rite of Spring* in the concert hall. Or even after listening to the bittersweet young cynicism of an album called "*Revolver*," we have wings to fly on. We have to believe in that kind of creativity. I know I do. If I didn't why would I be bothering to give these lectures? Certainly not to make a gratuitous announcement of the Apocalypse. There must be something in us, and in me, that makes me want to continue; and to teach is to believe in continuing. To share with you the critical feelings about the past, to try and describe and assess the present --- these actions by their very nature imply a firm belief in the future.

*From an earlier lecture*

"These days the search for meaning in beauty and vice-versa becomes more important as each day mediocrity and art mongering increasingly uglify our lives. And the day when this search for John Keats' truth-beauty ideal becomes irrelevant then we can all shut up and go back in our caves."