

little-known documents

Letters to the Editor,
1963–69

LARRY EIGNER

INTRODUCTION BY GEORGE HART

Introduction

LARRY EIGNER (1927–96) WROTE OVER THREE THOUSAND POEMS, NOW AVAILABLE IN THE FOUR-VOLUME *COLLECTED POEMS OF LARRY EIGNER*, edited by Curtis Faville and Robert Grenier. Although not as widely known as many of his fellow poets, Eigner was included in Donald Allen's seminal *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960*. His early work appeared in Cid Corman's *Origin* and in the *Black Mountain Review*, among other prominent journals that promoted postmodern poetry, and his first book, a small collection of poems titled *From the Sustaining Air*, was published by Robert Creeley's Divers Press in 1953. Early advocates of his work included William Carlos Williams, Denise Levertov, and Robert Duncan, and he was embraced as a literary forebear by language poets such as Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, and Ron Silliman, who dedicated the first anthology of language poetry, *In the American Tree*, to Eigner. These associations—Black Mountain poetics and language poetry—indicate Eigner's commitment to radical experimentation with poetic form, and they place him directly in one of the significant lines of postmodern American poetry.

Eigner's adaptation of Charles Olson's projective verse has also attracted interest from the field of disability studies (Davidson; Hart; Luck). A forceps injury Eigner sustained during his birth left him with cerebral palsy, which affected his speech, mobility, and coordination. As a result, he typed his poems, stories, and letters on a manual typewriter (given to him as a bar mitzvah gift) with the thumb and index finger of his right hand. The combination of his projectivist poetics and his disability makes the typewriter central to his work. Eigner's poems usually move down the page from the far left margin to the far right, creating a fluid, sinuous shape, in part because it was difficult for him to return the carriage to the left margin consistently but also because projectivist poetics uses the page as a spatial field for composition. Most of his letters are densely typed and single-spaced, and Eigner often filled the margins with additional comments and afterthoughts, and he sometimes inserted poems into any blank space available. *The Collected Poems of Larry Eigner* includes a selection of facsimiles of Eigner's typescripts so that readers may see what Curtis Faville, in his appendix to the collection, calls "the text as an

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image of itself.” The typewriter, Faville explains, was “the key ‘prosthetic’ link between Larry’s disabled body and the universe of print media, facilitating his participation in it, while gratifying his hunger for contact and intellectual discourse” (xxxii).

Although disability partially determines Eigner’s compositional practice and is therefore present in every text he created, it is not overtly featured in the subject matter of his poetry. As Michael Davidson observes, “Because Eigner himself seldom mentioned his disability during his lifetime, he poses a test case for thinking about impairment when it is not represented” (xx). For Davidson the material condition of Eigner’s embodiment produces a “poetics of disability” that supplements the “politics of disability,” which requires representations of the experience of disability. However, Eigner was explicit about his opinions on various other political and social concerns in his poetry. Since he was largely housebound, he spent a lot of time listening to the radio, watching television, and reading newspapers and magazines, responding in his poems and letters to what he heard, watched, and read. The topics of his poems range from weather and family life, art and music, and American history and literature to specific contemporary issues such as the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam. One of his enduring concerns was the environment, not only conservation and pollution but also hunger, resource extraction, and global warming. As Benjamin Friedlander wrote in a note appended to a letter from Eigner to Ina Forster, “His goal was always to strike the right balance—Larry’s poetics in a nutshell, and politics too. (His deeply felt response to the ecology movement is a rarely noted key to the work.)” The four letters presented here document Eigner’s deep engagement with environmental issues during the 1960s, the decade that saw the birth of the modern environmental movement.

The earliest letter, to the editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, responds to a column by John Rock called “Speaking Out,” which appeared in the *Post* on 20 April 1963. Rock, a fertility specialist, wrote as both a physician and a Catholic in support of the newly developed oral contraceptive pill:

I have personally hoped that the recently developed oral pill, the first effective *physiologic* means of fertility control, would be accepted by the Catholic Church as a fully permissible method. The pill, a synthetic steroid, was developed by Drs. Gregory Pincus and M. C. Chang at the Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, before I became associated with the clinical aspects of this investigation. (14)

The same year this column appeared, Rock published *The Time Has Come: A Catholic Doctor’s Proposal to End the Battle over Birth Control*. Whereas Rock concentrates on Catholic doctrine and the various positions held by clergy and theologians, situating the need for acceptable contraception in the context of Catholic family life and the expanding population, Eigner, instead of drawing on the Jewish tradition that he would have been familiar with, responds ecologically, linking birth control and population growth to hunger, waste, pollution, and animal rights.

The next letter, written to the editors of *Harper’s* in June 1963, is a remarkable document of Eigner’s ecological thinking. Responding to Carl Dreher’s article “Martyrs on the Moon?,” from the March 1963 issue of *Harper’s*, Eigner not only comments on technology, population, and consumption but also integrates these ecological issues with ideas about the role of the imagination and with quotations from Wordsworth, Frost, and Williams. Eigner reacts in particular to Dreher’s statement that

[t]he universe is man’s business. Especially the solar system, which is probably as far as man in the flesh can ever go. Kipling’s lines, “For to admire an’ for to see / For to be’old this world so wide,” are outdated. The world is no longer wide. If he has the money a man can traverse it in a matter of weeks or days, with no effort on his part and with airline stewardesses of various pigmentations, but all ravishing, ministering to his wants all the way. But in the solar system, airless and impersonally hostile, with death beating on the walls of the capsule every second, there is still room for adventure. For the vast majority of us the adventure will be vicarious, but we are willing to settle for that and to pay for it. (37)

A fitting summation of Eigner's sense of ecology, as Friedlander noted, is "Better than to know is to balance, often enough, or be healthy, while the balancing does take considerable knowledge." In giving his letter a title, "The Cigaret Trees"—an allusion to the fantasyland of the folk song "Big Rock Candy Mountain"—Eigner is perhaps indicating that this is more essay or manifesto than letter to the editor.¹

The letter titled "Recent Concerns" is a response to something that James William Fulbright, a senator, wrote or said. I have been unable to locate any contemporary periodical publications by Fulbright that Eigner might have seen—but the poet may have been reacting to something Fulbright said during the televised congressional hearings sponsored by the senator in February 1966. In writing about the Vietnam War, Eigner offers his ideas about the balance between action and contemplation that leaders need to strike in making decisions about national concerns. The letter, which contains an unpublished poem, provides context for a cluster of works from March and April 1966 that appear in *The Collected Poems*, including "CALCUTTA," "Whitman's cry at starvation," and "Thoreau's 2 or 3."

"Recent Concerns" demonstrates Eigner's associative, paratactic, and metonymic approach to his poetry, letters, reading, and social concerns. For example, Eigner writes, "Whitman had this idea millions of men could be company rather than just 'crowds upon the pavement.' Not so Thoreau, who said: 'Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! . . . let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand . . . and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail.'" The poem "CALCUTTA" appears to have been prompted by something Eigner read or heard about food shortages in India:

. . . how much
food
is brought in
what to do with
heaps of it . . . (2: 708)

"Whitman's cry at starvation" begins by linking Whitman's concern for American citizens in the mass to Vietnam, the civil rights movement, and the factors that contribute to food shortages:

Whitman's cry at starvation
in a land of plenty
prison camps the mean
South
six ways
of saying it
the big problem is
consumption and conservation and population
population consumption conservation
conservation population consumption
population conservation consumption
or what about
bringing others in
conservation consumption population
consumption population conservation (2: 709)

The remainder of this poem, which takes up a whole page in the oversize *Collected Poems*, is a series of unattributed quotations from *Specimen Days*, Whitman's collage of fragments detailing his time tending to the Civil War wounded. In this way Eigner integrates Whitman into his own environmentalist concerns and uses Whitman's lament over the numerous dead to inform his own commentary on population. Eigner then invokes Thoreau to counterbalance Whitman's celebration of the multitudinous with a celebration of the minimal. About two weeks after beginning "Whitman's cry at starvation," Eigner writes this short poem:

Thoreau's 2 or 3
affairs but the air-pressure
from birds, wow, or snow, or they
rest on the branches
and weigh them down
while cloud motion
may light time (2: 711)

The juxtaposition of Whitman and Thoreau in "Recent Concerns" provides the ground for linking the issues addressed in the letter to "Whitman's cry at

starvation” and “Thoreau’s 2 or 3.” Whereas Whitman is a metonym for multitude, population, and the potential of Americans as a mass, Thoreau stands for the individual, the few, and simplicity. Most important, this binary is not static: just as Eigner cannot determine a fixed ratio between thought and action in the letter, neither do Whitman or Thoreau provide singular solutions for the problems Eigner contemplates. Even if we reduce our affairs to light and small things, like individual birds or snowflakes, they can still weigh down the branches. Or, even if we reduce the number of our concerns to as few as three—population, conservation, consumption—the “big problem” is that the ways of expressing them multiply when they are combined. And thinking in terms of numbers, as Whitman does in *Specimen Days* when he tallies the wounded he visited and assisted, does not guarantee an arrival at the meaning of collective action. Quoting from the section of *Specimen Days* in which Whitman counts the dead, “The Real War Will Never Get in the Books,” Eigner ends the poem about Whitman with these lines:

how much of importance is
buried in the grave
in eternal darkness (2: 709)

The last letter, to the editors of *Scientific American*, was prompted by an item in the magazine’s column “Science and the Citizen” in its March 1969 issue. The article, which cites Barry Commoner’s report to the American Association for the Advancement of Science on the environmental damage caused by nitrogen fertilizers, concludes that “[t]o impose limitations on the use of fertilizers would be to reduce food supplies at a time of mounting worldwide needs, as well as to engender fierce opposition from farmers and the chemical industry” (“Science” 48). In his letter Eigner proposes a solution to this “painful dilemma” that became a central part of his environmentalism—a national, weekly day of fasting that would save food resources and reduce the need for fertilizer.

It is likely that Eigner sent these letters to their intended recipients, but no acknowledgment of receipt from the editors has been found in Eigner’s pa-

pers held at the University of Kansas, and a search through the publications Eigner addressed his letters to has not located any published excerpts. The 18 May 1963 *Saturday Evening Post* did include two letters responding to Rock’s column (one pro, one con), but neither was Eigner’s. In a letter to Denise Levertov, dated 15 October 1963, Eigner reports that he did indeed send letters to *Harper’s* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. After copying a paragraph from Dreher’s article, Eigner writes, “This has seemed much like poetry to me, most of the time, however it is. Fleurs des Mal in the silence of Spring, and all. I sent *Harper’s* an awful 2100-word letter art[icle] on it.. O well. In same issue was an attack on a Congressman trying to encroach on conservation. So it goes.” Later in the letter, he writes:

I sent the 2 pp. seconding Dr Rock w idea Joe might send it to Dr Rock, might like to and be able to. Wife suggested i send it to Post as article rather than a letter, with a photograph. I did, and wrote a letter to editor saying I recognized it was harsh and so forth, sorta iconoclastic, but I’m not war-like way down, i recognizes it wd be harder for him to print than it was for me to write ahem .. still It came back with a reject slip and where it says the Post isnt in a position to accept unsolicited ideas (or the word may’ve bn original) underlined in editorial red. Wow! (?)²

One would assume that Eigner’s digressive and paratactic style would have made his letters hard to follow by the editors of mainstream publications such as *Harper’s* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Nonetheless, these valuable letters document Eigner’s emerging interest in contemporary environmental issues during one of his most productive decades.

NOTES

1. The title of Eigner’s letter comes from the song’s refrain:

O the buzzing of the bees in the cigarette trees
By the soda water fountain
Near the lemonade springs where the bluebird sings
On the Big Rock Candy Mountain.
(“Big Rock Candy Mountain”)

2. “Joe” is Larry Eigner’s brother Joseph, a biochemist, and “Wife” is Eigner’s sister-in-law, Janet.

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Letters to the Editor, 1963–69

∞∞ 850 words ∞∞

April 25 ∅ - May 2nd ∅ 1963

Originally a note beginning On reading
“Speaking Out” of April 20th
∅ *Saturday Evening Post* ∅ . . .
this by Dr John Rock

Dear Sirs

On learning something more, recently, of the population raises and of the Shrewsbury pill it struck me that the Catholic Church is being pretty hard on humans, and the world—notwithstanding that in most, or all, fields, control and sport is as fine a thing as any, stopping at a red light is, and considerably necessary, also that I like tradition insofar, at least, as I believe in going slow (even as it appears I can’t really tell when it comes to traveling light / how much to reflect on?); since on one hand Catholicism frowns on contraceptives, at the same time that hetero- is the only type of sensuality it has deemed

valid, natural or whatever. Yet mankind is quite various in some ways from person to person, and society to society (it’s now recognized)—it’s kind of feasible to lay down laws of grammar and Aristotelian laws about what best befits bovines, or the ant, or ape, or to interpret modulate them, but perhaps impossible when you get to billions of men, even the cannibal. Their lives are very different

At first I thought other contraceptives might not be called less natural or unphysiologic than what Dr. Rock has been working with, but anyway physiologic is one level or degree or course or something, biochemical another which has been distinguished—exemplified right here I think—and what abortion is to infanticide, and contraception to abortion, so may the new drug be to older contraceptives, and malnourished babies, and grown-ups. It would scarcely be all to the good, of course, for it’s true that it’s like hiding all the light-switches behind the wall, or a lot of them, there is everywhere the ques-

tion of What is happiness, what is a painless life; and yet in many parts of the world there might very well be an extremity of pain, and a very small modicum of enjoying life—the latter, entertainment facilities and the like, on the decline, too.

Although, evidently, I can't be religious and can't see very final or special causes, Onan's action was in Biblical times a rather grave social crime, as for one thing you wanted the children to outpopulate the wolves, if not the sheep—and the smaller a population the more likely and of high proportion is a shortage of women or, especially, men (dream of the androgyne)—and clear on up through the¹ 19th century this was an issue, in quite a few places. Now, hardly so, the world is really drawn up close—and flying apart. If purposes are real, they do not scorn facts, and are ready to be changed by them, clearly and openly. But when facts, and things, are very numerous purposes are, and they go very fast, and for example it's conceivable we might regret birth control, in some years, by a shortage of nurses, or physicians, or physicists during those hours we think about keeping the bears away (having still the old problem of security among peers at any rate, rest of our lives, how much we need, and could enjoy, and where it lies, or we think it does).

It might also be brought in that the more or less immanent, impending waste-disposal problem, in however limited area-ways at present, as well as that of food and the drain on natural and supplemented capacity of earth in general (reasonably pure water, tourism—in callous form, quantities—the plunting of souls, eyes and ears, and so on, even beasticide in that to grow more plants you must allow fewer animals so—Brinksmanship!), has a basic relationship to size of population. The admirable Greeks and/or others committed not only infanticide and abandonment but also colonization too (early form of colonialism, they would beat, harness the natives if any, if they could, and it suited them). For

healthful reasons, and when in medieval days a city, town came to have too many people, be unwieldy it, also, split up, in an intentional way, and afterwards there was Columbus, New England and so forth, migrations of the Irish. Where as yet there is little likelihood of one potato in the moon, or space, or anything within reason, or distance, or poi. WE CAN ASSESS, and calculate the risk. Let not man be a locust, and drive out his fellows.

Nor, barring holocaust, inferno, disaster, overkill, critical mass, or till then, coming to happen in some particular detailed way perhaps, does it look as if various smogs or fallouts will redress the death rate (as regards the near future), in time to lower and stabilize the birth rate, that is, precisely enough to stay on a plateau. Despite all the bloodshed of the ages, man has kept growing.

thick.

(While state-wide planning of babies, with or without government agency, seems drastic, and nation-wide about as drastic as anything could be, perhaps equal to or even more than infanticide, and hemispheric more so, murderous, and global accordingly.)

—Larry Eigner

Swampscott, Mass.

¶ 23 Bates Road ¶

*

The fewer billion people have to
do things the better, and this
includes contraception . . .

¶ 143 & 9 lines 1720 words ¶

¶¶ The Cigaret Trees ¶¶ ¶¶ June 11 63 ¶¶

¶ or:

¶¶ To the Editors ¶¶

Although his stand against race² ¶ Harper's, March ¶ is a millimeter or more in the right direction, Carl Dreher among others displays an infatuation with self (anthropos—"The universe is man's business" ! !) and the treasure-hunt for experience per se, sensation, that is more and more brutal and appalling—

the ultra Picaresque, a lust for life and adventure which is increasingly untempered by gentleness or love, hence any experience at all, blind therefore, self-destroying. Kipling can be taken perhaps as nicely as in his day, but he never was a Bible, he is outdated, as to a lesser extent Columbus is, he traveled for adventure and other, likely more cogent reasons as well; while the journeys there are traces of in myths resulted in benefit to the tribe, the heroes at any rate would rather have stayed home than go abroad, so the stories say—they didn't go to kill any more buffalo than necessary. If life on the airlines has reached the point of heavy dullness, that can only mean that the stewardesses should go back to their villages and towns, and the "man with . . . money"—or any man—might go back to one too, take a walk in the country, help learn how to fish more, be moderate and see to the preservation of fresh air, relatively pure food and drinking supplies, which among other things involves keeping the human population and traffic of a size low enough to allow other fauna to exist, which has to be not only in his stomach and eye, but his imagination too, that is, independently, at a distance; and for men themselves to exist, have room for their own middens, in their most congenial place. The imagination should not be snuffed out by too much furniture, though it often is. The bored airplane-rider should be aware of the birds far below him, who, for reason or not, are dying out on the branches. Because he traverses the earth, he has no right to be callous of it, or lord it. Rather, he should treat it the better, and do what he can for it, as he has drawn on it. And as long as anything dies, or is alive, how is the earth uninteresting? ~~Anyway, outside of the earth worms are far more possible than birds.~~ But he is more likely to find ants anywhere else in the solar system than birds, anyway. He should imagine the 60-foot trees and others, five times daily. He should take it on himself to imagine the dead of World War II, as they were living, and those of the India-Pakistan

Civil War. He cannot sufficiently imagine the transactions of a thousand cities, and their roofs, or even the angles of all the buses, or the children (he should not overlook them, certainly) playing on the steps. Too much. Or even if he succeeded just as to imagination, and there was nothing that needed repairing and upkeep, there would be more than too much, too many things would be actual,—serious, business. But a matter of degree of course. Quite true, life wouldn't be so pleasant if Faraday and Edison had only day-dreamed. But some things, ultimately, and according to the day, should not be puffed up in and beyond the imagination. The imagined and the real, the present state of things, should always be held in roughly the same boat.

Better than to know is to balance, often enough, or be healthy, while the balancing does take considerable knowledge. And a chance discovery in one field has often made another fruitful, which has just been impossible before, or rather invisible to men's eyes, but just the same "Science," or scientists, being earthbound, must stop going off in all directions at once, must get into some human order, things have been tightened up so much that, unfortunately, there is very little room for free play, science is much less a game nowadays (for one thing it is by now compounded with technology, and so, of the same piece, speculation, and research—any research—or the lack of it, has very immediate impact on the physical environment) than it is very serious business. (From the human point of view, incidentally, or rather, for survival of a greater or lesser number of people, the oldest science of the spectrum, astronomy, is the least vital, and anyway is now practically a branch of the next science, physics.) Science as a whole must be centered on the earth, and ecology for instance should be more in men's minds than astronomy. Astronomy is more spectacular (not more intricate), so this brings me to the point that the more men there are the more they all have to be spartan philosophers, or scientists,

¶¶ As, for one thing,
I'd better admit,
in fairness, one man's
asphodel may be
another man's lotus, et al ¶¶

—L Eigner
Swampscott, Mass.

*Manpower, technical power,
or whatever How many cities in how many
lands might someday really be able to have an
atomic power plant? Oil burners? Such ques-
tions from being metaphysical have become
historical, no less.

L Eigner

¶¶ Recent concerns ¶¶ Apr 16 66 ¶¶ Senator Full-
bright I think basically right in saying it's not
Communism the U.S. has to fear but aggres-
sion. And it's not too significant if the Chinese
dream of Africa and/or La .. America or the
world, or if the Russians and others are repelled
by them. There are graver matters than ideolo-
gies (always are in quite a number of senses—
for instance Roger Williams had it religion
should not be enforced aboard ship), such that
the Maoists can be taken as not more insane
than Hitler and without dreams of firestorm-
ing the earth. If Chou-En-Lai could somehow
be brought to take over from Mrs Gandhi of
India, say, where reportedly 1,000,000 slowly
starving people bed down in the streets of Cal-
cutta at night, and fight for places on the inad-
equate public transportation system in order to
get "home" (to give one example)—then China
wd become a different type of problem. Can-
adian wheat would become insufficient, and
besides foodstuffs we could export some TVA
systems to China as well as Vietnam and India
(for one thing a good back-up in the event we
miss the moon). As things are, though, I wish
somewhere was some computer that could tell
us when and how to un-dock from Vietnam
and stop destroying crops and killing people.

Even Newport, diminished as may be, is
still a live town, let alone Harlem and Watts;

and thinking of rich/poor nations, I won-
der if Keynes cd do as well as Gemini with a
computer. Or Bertrand Russell or someone.
Plato opted for ph-kings. Do we need ph-cits
[citizens?] or poets? Whitman had this idea
millions of men could be company rather
than just "crowds upon the pavement". Not
so Thoreau, who said: "Simplicity, simplic-
ity, simplicity! . . . let your affairs be as two
or three, and not a hundred or a thousand . . .
and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail .
In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized
life . . . a man . . . must be a great calcula-
tor indeed who succeeds. . . . Instead of . . . a
hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things
in proportion. Our life is like a German Con-
federacy, made up of petty states, . . ."

There are times for living, or let's say
purposeful action according to a more or
less home-grown, tribe-grown or else eclectic
code (Thoreau, Dante, Don Quixote)—and
times for contemplation of the world, which
includes the self. A passage in Ginsberg's Kad-
dish,—where after mourning or remembering
his mother, "gone without corsets and eyes,"
he says, "Nameless, One Faced, Forever, be-
yond me, beginningless, endless, Father in
death .." (New American Poetry, p. 198, Ever-
green)—brings to mind again degrees of the
personal/impersonal%,³ projections of self, in
the 3 or 4 monotheistic anthropomorphic #
sects: Buddhism might be as much polytheist
as otherwise, for all I know. Ikons,.. idols (Gk
image, phantom, from idein, to see, which is
the root word of idea also—this etymology
being 1 indication that vision is the predomi-
nant sense in mankind, besides the fact that
the visual area of the cortex is the largest at
least of the sensory areas, hand going with eye
(and to no other region are "impulses deliv-
ered with so little delay or pass so few senti-
nels", states G.A.Dorsey in Why We Behave
Like Human Beings, a bk published in 1925),
and the tendency, even slight compulsion, to
visualize, as people heard on phone or radio,

] cigaret trees]

-3-

quaintly any better, to speak of, and keep them valuable. I can't tell what might, being ~~as~~ anyway a man who can't become competent in anything, except ^{possibly a} few outlines. But socialism for instance--or a ~~seepressive nature~~ ~~the~~ on the whole a cooperative rather than a competitive way of reaping and constructing things,--such as the Navahoes, say, ^{have, or had--if} ~~behave~~ carried out some ways or others, might, conceivably, not turn people into sloths or dinosaurs, while not developing the harsher drives.)

It does in fact seem as though we had better try to gather ourselves, that we are going downhill with our belongings. Maybe we can't even afford to give much attention to the chances Russia might

get a masser onto the moon,--or Venus, or Mars, if we get there first--or bounce an m-beam off it, for however ^{lethal} indiscriminately/or subtle strategic purposes; as little as we can afford one or two more high-stake fail-safe quiz programs and emcess followed by psychiatric lore, mescaline exploration, etc.. A crazy world, despite the fact that I guess it always was.

" Every drill
driven into the earth
for oil enters my side
also "

" Look at
what passes for the new.

||both quotes Y You will not find it there but in
from William Carlos Williams: despised poems.
Carlos Williams: It is difficult
"Asphodel, that to get the news from poems
Greeny Flower"|| yet men die miserably every day
for lack

|| As, for one thing, of what is found there. "
I'd better admit,
in fairness, one man's
asphodel may be
another man's lotus, et al ||

-- L Eigner
Swampscott, Mass.

* Manpower, technical power,
or whatever How many cities in how many lands might someday really
be able to have an atomic power plant ? Oil burners ? Such questions from
being metaphysical have become historical, no less.

while we're less inclined to imagine voices of people seen in phone-booths or what records seen in a store might play); and without imagery, Wallace Stevens thought, the center could not hold, which was a thesis of B Berenson too, I guess. ¶ All this writing, and talk ¶ But we have to live not only in the

the past, present, future
to live
eternity perhaps
another thought
way of life
sleep, the plain thing,
and the death ¶ lost
to come in it
I say, a moving wood to
lie quiet

present (in enough of it, which is impossible if we're too personal or anyway introvert or perhaps selfish, egotistical or hard-up), but also the past and (least of all, it had better be, probably—or how fast does life go?) future, and different times come together in memory, all sorts of times. And it could be that any time is for thought, if we can manage it—while nostalgia and thinking in narrow circles isn't much compared to action or physical work. Or the circle might get too broad, and “the balloon of the mind” too big for the earth.

¶¶ In the introductory ch. to *Character and Opinion in the United States*, “The Moral Background,” which I've come across just after writing this, Santayana remarks that the Hebrews pursued material comfort,—milk and honey, yes, and this is what may have led them to stress the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, at that—whereas “Socrates and his disciples admired

this world, but they did not particularly covet it, or wish to live long in it, or expect to improve it; what they cared for was an idea or a good . . . expressed in it, something outside it and timeless, in which the contemplative intellect might be literally absorbed. . . . Plato . . . assures us . . . the intestines are long . . . that we may have leisure between meals to study philosophy. Curiously enough, the very enemies of final cause sometimes catch this infection and attach absolute values to facts in an opposite sense and in an human interest; and you often hear in America that whatever is right. . . . and thus we oscillate between egotism and idolatry. . . . Without suggesting for a moment that the proper study of mankind is man only—for it may be landscape or math ..—we may safely say that their proper study is what lies within their range and is interesting to them. . . . subjectivity is not in all respects an evil; it is a warm purple dye. . . .”

And earlier: “Eloquence is a republican art, as conversation is an aristocratic one. . . . In the form of oratory reflection, rising out of the problems of action, could be tuned to guide or to sanction action, and sometimes could attain, in so doing, a notable elevation of thought. Although Americans, and many other people, usually say that thought is for the sake of action, it has evidently been in these high moments, when action became incandescent in thought, that they have been most truly alive, intensely most active, and although *doing* nothing, have found at last that their existence was worthwhile. Reflection is itself a turn, and the top turn, given to life. . . . Every animal has his festive and ceremonious moments . . .”

¶¶¶ Copyright Charles Scribner's Sons ¶¶¶

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¶¶ And Mark Twain suggested importing American Missionaries from China to bring

out the anti-lynch spirit from the people. “The Chinese are universally conceded to be excellent people, honest, industrious, trustworthy, kind-hearted and all that—leave them alone, they are plenty good enough just as they are, and besides, almost every convert runs the risk of catching our civilization. . . once civilized, China can never be uncivilized again . . .”



% Entity, unity—functional act of mind (let alone personality). A whole may be functional, as, whole field of view,—or concrete, actual; or abstract and more imaginary, extrapolated, extended, projected, as panorama, universe, a sum of parts or units. You feel yourself a part of your surroundings, sometimes more so, sometimes less (whichever may be a matter of impingement, which of abstraction (a moving forward?) or consolidation of experience in the mind); or you feel yourself one man or remember you’ve been various people, by imaginative projection or otherwise, however it is. Moving tribes inclined to monotheism, or the opposite? (King of the gods, family of the gods) Divine (a . . . garish ?) forces at first, apparently, then totem animals and/or goddess(es), gradually, then god(s). † Apr 27–My 2

Wonder if any monotheism has ever been anything but anthropomorphic.

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The Editors

Scientific American

Sirs:

With regard to the theoretical possibility of reducing fertilizer use and “high” agricultural yield, that seems even more remote, indeed, than the possibility of lessening municipal and industrial waste (SCIENCE AND THE CITIZEN, March—“Pollution by Fertilizer”), but not quite inconceivable. Barry Commoner’s “painful dilemma” between insufficient food production and pollution reminds me of an idea that came to me last Fall, of a Weekly Fast—to include Thanksgiving in the U.S.—as a frequent reminder to ourselves of the likelihood, whatever it is (and crop failures have not been unknown), of inadequate harvests, and of how great food

is, as well as in memory of the starved (in Biafra for instance) and the hungry, in connection with which there could well be a Drive like the March Of Dimes, on the day of the fast, to have money saved from food budgets go towards getting enough or ample supplies to those with a low or below-par living standard, as long as foodstuffs for example are available above ground, and perhaps to recompense grocers and restaurant owners, offer them a subsidy.

Community and participatory democracy in general of course. That day devoted with much heart to public living. If the thing didn’t broaden to this it would in some little time be a routine fad instead of an earth- and life-oriented religious element.

One or more fast days a week, if the idea caught on, might allow a deliberate lessening of crops somewhat, though how be frugal one day and bountiful the next? Very concerned versatility would have to become widespread, serious and involved, with swift and accurate, and keen, awareness, on-going, of what activities (and industries!) to diminish, and at any time, which ones to increase. No doubt there would, in any event, be little time for studying war, and a few other things. And some dilemmas would always get overlooked and neglected, still.

Frugal days come to think of it used to alternate, or be relieved by (rather), plentiful ones, which they outnumbered. Fasts and feasts—the two words have the same source—were closely associated.

Hitherto, one dilemma has always made a fine gordian knot with another. At present for instance it seems the tourist trade in some parts is inhibiting the recognition of hunger, indecent housing and so on, as in the past, and more money is being devoted to soil banks than to food-stamp programs. And it might be relatively feasible for the Federal Government to make payments for non-manufacture and/or non-use of chemical fertilizers—to industry, farmers,—and at

the same time cut soil-bank programs thus putting now fallow acres back under the plow.

Larry Eigner
Swampscott, Mass.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Eigner uses a variety of idiosyncratic punctuation marks and abbreviations in his letters, and I have retained as many of these as possible in transcribing the original typescripts. To avoid excessive keystrokes, he often underlines only the first and last letters of book titles. He brackets text that supplements the letters' main text with

marks made by overstriking an opening parenthesis on a closing parenthesis. Text that Eigner deletes by typing an *x* over each letter has been omitted since it is illegible; words that he crosses out with a pencil have been struck through by hyphens. Eigner occasionally strikes the wrong key on his typewriter, and I have silently corrected obvious mistakes.

1. The first page of the letter ends here, and Eigner inserts “*¶* - May 2nd 1963 *¶*” at the top of the next page.

2. Dreher's article concerns the “space race” of the 1960s, in which the USSR and the US competed to be the first to land a person on the moon. Dreher supported the attempt to reach the moon but argued against rushing the expedition just to be first.

3. The percentage symbol here and the pound sign that follows are Eigner's idiosyncratic footnote indicators.