



The Wisdom of the Heart (Story), Henry Miller

## The Wisdom of the Heart

EVERY BOOK by an analyst gives us, in addition to the philosophy underlying his therapeutic, a glimpse into the nature of the analyst's own problem vis-à-vis life.

The very fact of writing a book, indeed, is a recognition on the part of the analyst of the falsity of the patient-versus-analyst situation.

In attempting, through the educative method, to enlarge his field of influence, the analyst is tacitly informing us of his desire to relinquish the unnecessary role of healer which has been thrust upon him.

Though in fact he repeats every day to his patients the truth that they must heal themselves, actually what happens is that the list of patients grows with terrifying rapidity, so that sometimes the healer is obliged to seek another healer himself.

Some analysts are just as pitiful and harassed specimens of humanity as the patients who come to them for relief. Many of them have confused the legitimate acceptance of a role with immolation, or vain sacrifice.

Instead of exposing the secret of health and balance by example, they elect to adopt the lazier course, usually a disastrous one, of transmitting the secret to their patients. Instead of remaining human, they seek to cure and convert, to become life-giving saviors, only to find in the end that they have crucified themselves.

If Christ died on the cross to inculcate the notion of sacrifice, it was to give significance to this inherent law of life, and not to have men follow his example. "Crucifixion is the law of life," says Howe, and it is true, but it must be understood symbolically, not literally.

Throughout his books\* it is the indirect or Oriental way of life which he stresses, and this attitude, it may also be said, is that of art. The art of

living is based on rhythm, on give and take, ebb and flow, light and dark, life and death.

By acceptance of all the aspects of life, good and bad, right and wrong, yours and mine, the static, defensive life, which is what most people are cursed with, is converted into a dance, “the dance of life,” as Havelock Ellis called it. The real function of the dance is—metamorphosis.

One can dance to sorrow or to joy; one can even dance abstractly, as Helba Huara proved to the world. But the point is that, by the mere act of dancing, the elements which compose it are transformed; the dance is an end in itself, just like life.

The acceptance of the situation, any situation, brings about a flow, a rhythmic impulse towards self-expression. To relax is, of course, the first thing a dancer has to learn. It is also the first thing a patient has to learn when he confronts the analyst. It is the first thing any one has to learn in order to live.

It is extremely difficult, because it means surrender, full surrender. Howe’s whole point of view is based on this simple, yet revolutionary idea of full and unequivocal surrender. It is the religious view of life: the positive acceptance of pain, suffering, defeat, misfortune, and so on. It is the long way round, which has always proved to be the shortest way after all.

It means the assimilation of experience, fulfillment through obedience and discipline: the curved span of time through natural growth rather than the speedy, disastrous short-cut. This is the path of wisdom, and the one that must be taken eventually, because all the others only lead to it.

Few books dealing with wisdom—or shall I say, the art of living?—are so studded with profundities as these three books. The professional thinker is apt to look at them askance because of the utter simplicity of

the author's statements. Unlike the analyst, the professional thinker seldom enjoys the opportunity of seeing his theories put to the test.

With the analyst thinking is always vital, as well as an every-day affair. He is being put to the test every moment of his life. In the present case we are dealing with a man for whom writing is a stolen luxury, a fact which could be highly instructive to many writers who spend hours trying to squeeze out a thought.

Howe looks at the world as it is now, this moment. He sees it very much as he would a patient coming to him for treatment. "The truth is, we are sick," he says, and not only that, but—"we are sick of being sick." If there is something wrong, he infers, it is not a something which can be driven out with a stick, or a bayonet.

The remedy is metaphysically achieved, not therapeutically: the cure does not lie in finding a cause and rooting it out. "It is as if we change the map of life itself by changing our attitude towards it," says Howe. This is an eternal sort of gymnastics, known to all wise men, which lies at the very root of metaphysics.

Life, as we all know, is conflict, and man, being part of life, is himself an expression of conflict. If he recognizes the fact and accepts it, he is apt, despite the conflict, to know peace and to enjoy it. But to arrive at this end, which is only a beginning (for we haven't begun to live yet!), man has got to learn the doctrine of acceptance, that is, of unconditional surrender, which is love.

And here I must say that I think the author goes beyond any theory of life yet enunciated by the analysts; here he reveals himself as something more than a healer, reveals himself as an artist of life, a man capable of choosing the most perilous course in the certitude of faith. Faith in life, let me quickly add—a faith free and flexible, equal to any emergency and broad enough to include death, as well as other so-called evils.

For in this broad and balanced view of life death appears neither as “the last enemy” nor the “end”; if the healer has a role, as he points out, it is “to play the part of gynaecologist to death.” (For further delectation the reader might see the Tibetan Book of the Dead.)

The whole fourth-dimensional view of reality, which is Howe’s metaphysic, hinges on this understanding of acceptance. The fourth element is Time, which is another way, as Goethe so well knew, of saying—growth.

As a seed grows in the natural course of time, so the world grows, and so it dies, and so it is reborn again. This is the very antithesis of the current notion of “progress,” in which are bound up the evil dragons of will, purpose, goal and struggle—or rather, they are not bound up, but unleashed.

Progress, according to the Westerner, means a straight line through impenetrable barriers, creating difficulties and obstacles all along the line, and thus defeating itself. Howe’s idea is the Oriental one, made familiar to us through the art of jujitsu, wherein the obstacle itself is made into an aid.

The method is as applicable to what we call disease, or death or evil, as it is to a bullying adversary. The secret of it lies in the recognition that force can be directed as well as feared—more, that everything can be converted to good or evil, profit or loss, according to one’s attitude. In his present fearsome state man seems to have but one attitude, escape, wherein he is fixed as in a nightmare.

Not only does he refuse to accept his fears, but worse, he fears his fears. Everything seems infinitely worse than it is, says Howe, “just because we are trying to escape.” This is the very Paradise of Neurosis, a glue of fear and anxiety in which, unless we are willing to rescue ourselves, we may stick forever.

To imagine that we are going to be saved by outside intervention, whether in the shape of an analyst, a dictator, a savior, or even God, is

sheer folly. There are not enough lifeboats to go around, and anyway, as the author points out, what is needed more than lifeboats is lighthouses. A fuller, clearer vision—not more safety appliances!

Many influences, of astounding variety, have contributed to shape this philosophy of life which, unlike most philosophies, takes its stance in life, and not in a system of thought. His view embraces conflicting world-views; there is room in it to include all of Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, as well as Taoism, Zen Buddhism, astrology, occultism, and so forth.

It is a thoroughly religious view of life, in that it recognizes “the supremacy of the unseen.” Emphasis is laid on the dark side of life, on all that which is considered negative, passive, evil, feminine, mysterious, unknowable.

War Dance closes on this note—“there is nothing that it is not better to accept, even though it be the expression of our enemy’s ill-will. There is no progress other than what is, if we could let it be. . . .” This idea of let be, of non-interference, of living now in the moment, fully, with complete faith in the processes of life, which must remain ever largely unknown to us, is the cardinal aspect of his philosophy. It means evolution versus revolution, and involution as well as evolution.

It takes cognizance of insanity as well as sleep, dream and death. It does not seek to eliminate fear and anxiety, but to incorporate them in the whole plexus of man’s emotional being. It does not offer a panacea for our ills, nor a paradise beyond: it recognizes that life’s problems are fundamentally insoluble and accepts the fact graciously. It is in this full recognition and acceptance of conflict and paradox that Howe reconciles wisdom with common sense.

At the heart of it is humor, gaiety, the sense of play—not morality, but reality. It is a lenitive, purgative, healing doctrine, based on the open palm rather than the closed fist; on surrender, sacrifice, renunciation, rather than struggle, conquest, idealism.

It favors the slow, rhythmic movement of growth rather than the direct method which would attain an imaginary end through speed and force. (Is not the end always bound up with the means?) It seeks to eliminate the doctor as well as the patient, by accepting the disease itself rather than the medicine or the mediator; it puts the seed above the bomb, conversion before solution, and counsels uniqueness rather than normality.

It seems to be generally admitted by intelligent people, and even by the unintelligent, that we are passing through one of the darkest moments in history. (What is not so clearly recognized, however, is that man has passed through many such periods before, and survived!) There are those who content themselves with putting the blame for our condition on the "enemy," call it church, education, government, Fascism, Communism, poverty, circumstance, or what not. 'They waste their forces proving that they are "right" and the other follow "wrong." For them society is largely composed of those who are against their ideas.

But society is composed of the insane and the criminals, as well as the righteous and the unrighteous. Society represents all of us, "what we are and how we feel about life," as Howe puts it.

Society is sick, scarcely anybody will deny that, and in the midst of this sick world are the doctors who, "knowing little of the reason why they prescribe for us, have little faith in anything but heroic surgery and in the patient's quite unreasonable ability to recover." The medical men are not interested in health, but in combating sickness and disease.

Like the other members of society, they function negatively. Similarly, no statesmen arise who appear capable of dealing with the blundering dictators, for the quite probable reason that they are themselves dictators at heart. . . . Here is the picture of our so-called "normal" world, obeying, as Howe calls it, the law of "infinite regress":

"Science carefully measures the seen, but it despises the unseen. Religion subdivides itself, protesting and nonconforming in one

negative schism after another, pursuing the path of infinite regress while aggressively attaching itself to the altars of efficient organization.

Art exploits a multiplication of accurate imitations; its greatest novelty is 'Surrealism,' which prides itself upon its ability to escape all the limitations imposed upon sanity by reality. Education is more or less free for all, but the originality of individualism suffers mechanization by mass productive methods, and top marks are awarded for aggressive excellence.

The limits of law aggressively insist that the aggressive should be aggressively eliminated, thus establishing the right by means of out-wronging the wrong-doer. Our amusements are catered for by mechanized methods, for we cannot amuse ourselves.

Those who cannot play football themselves enthusiastically shout and boo the gallant but well-paid efforts of others in ardent partisanship. Those who can neither run nor take a risk, back horses.

Those who cannot take the trouble to tolerate silence have sound brought to their ears without effort, or go to picture palaces to enjoy the vicarious advantages of a synthetic cinema version of the culture of our age.

This system we call normality, and it is to live in this disordered world that we bring up our children so expensively. The system is threatened with disaster, but we have no thought but to hold it up, while we clamour for peace in which to enjoy it.

Because we live in it, it seems to be as sacred as ourselves. This way of living as refugees from realism, this vaunted palace of progress and culture, it must never suffer change. It is normal to be so! Who said so? And what does this word normal mean?"

"Normality," says Howe, "is the paradise of escapeologists, for it is a fixation concept, pure and simple." "It is better, if we can," he asserts, "to stand alone and to feel quite normal about our abnormality, doing



nothing whatever about it, except what needs to be done in order to be oneself.”

It is just this ability to stand alone, and not feel guilty or harassed about it, of which the average person is incapable. The desire for a lasting external security is uppermost, revealing itself in the endless pursuit of health, happiness, possessions and so on, defense of what has been acquired being the obsessive idea, and yet no real defense being possible, because one cannot defend what is undefendable.

All that can be defended are imaginary, illusory, protective devices. Who, for example, could feel sorry for St. Francis because he threw away his clothes and took the vow of poverty? He was the first man on record, I imagine, who asked for stones instead of bread.

Living on the refuse which others threw away he acquired the strength to accomplish miracles, to inspire a joy such as few men have given the world, and, by no means the least of his powers, to write the most sublime and simple, the most eloquent hymn of thanksgiving that we have in all literature: The Canticle to the Sun. Let go and let be! How he urges. Being is burning, in the truest sense, and if there is to be any peace it will come about through being, not having.

We are all familiar with the phrase—“life begins at forty.” For the majority of men it is so, for it is only in middle age that the continuity of life, which death promises, begins to make itself felt and understood. The significance of renunciation, as the author explains it, lies in the fact that it is not a mere passive acquiescence, an ignominious surrender to the inevitable forces of death, but, on the contrary, a re-counting, a re-valuing.

It is at this crucial point in the individual’s life that the masculine element gives way to the feminine. This is the usual course, which Nature herself seems to take care of. For the awakened individual, however, life begins now, at any and every moment; it begins at the moment when he realizes that he is part of a great whole, and in the realization becomes himself whole.

In the knowledge of limits and relationships he discovers the eternal self, thenceforth to move with obedience and discipline in full freedom. Balance, discipline, illumination—these are the key words in Howe's doctrine of wholeness, or holiness, for the words mean the same thing. It is not essentially new, but it needs to be rediscovered by each and every one individually.

As I said before, one meets it in such poets and thinkers as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, to take a few recent examples. It is a philosophy of life which nourished the Chinese for thousands of years, a philosophy which, unfortunately, they have abandoned under Western influence.

That this ancient wisdom of life should be reaffirmed by a practicing analyst, by a "healer," seems to me altogether logical and just. What greater temptation is there for the healer than to play the role of God—and who knows better than he the nature and the wisdom of God? E. Graham Howe is a man in his prime, healthy, normal in the abnormal sense, successful, as the word goes, and desirous more than anything else of leading his own life. He knows that the healer is primarily an artist, and not a magician or a god.

He seeks, by expressing his views publicly, to wean the public of a dependency which is itself an expression of disease. He is not interested in healing, but in being. He does not seek to cure, but to enjoy a life more abundant.

He is not struggling to eliminate disease, but to accept it, and by devouring it, incorporate it in the body of light and health which is man's true heritage. He is not overburdened, because his philosophy of health would not permit him to assume tasks beyond his powers. He takes everything in his stride, with measure and balance, consuming only what he can digest and assimilate of experience.

If he is a very capable analyst, as is generally admitted, even by his detractors, it is not because of what he knows, but because of what he is. He is constantly unloading himself of excess baggage, be it in the

form of patients, friends, admirers or possessions. His mind is, as the Chinese well say, “alive-and-empty.” He is anchored in the flux, neither drowned in it nor vainly trying to dam it. He is a very wise man who is at peace with himself and the world. One knows that instantly, merely by shaking hands with him.

“There is no need,” he says, in concluding *War Dance*, “to be morbid about the difficulty in which we find ourselves, for there is no undue difficulty about it, if we will but realise that we bring the difficulty upon ourselves by trying to alter the inevitable.

The Little Man is so afraid of being overwhelmed, but the Larger Man hopes for it; the Little Man refuses to swallow so much of his experience, regarding it as evil, but the Larger Man takes it as his everyday diet, keeping open pipe and open house for every enemy to pass through; the Little Man is terrified lest he should dip from light into darkness, from seen into unseen, but the Larger Man realises that it is but sleep or death and either is the very practice of his recreation; the Little Man depends upon ‘goods’ or golf for his well-being, seeking for doctors or other saviours, but the Larger Man knows by the deeper process of his inward conviction that truth is paradox and that he is safest when he is least defended. . . . The war of life is one thing; man’s war is another, being war about war, war against war, in infinite regress of offensive and defensive argument.”

It may seem, from the citations, that I favor *War Dance* above the other two books, but such is not the case. Perhaps because of the daily threat of war I was led instinctively to make reference to this book, which is really about Peace.

The three books are equally valuable and represent different facets of this same homely philosophy, which is not, let me repeat, a system of thought expounded and defended in brilliant fashion, but a wisdom of life that increments life. It has no other purpose than to make life more life-like, strange as this may sound.

Whoever has dipped into the esoteric lore of the East must recognize that the attitude towards life set forth in these books is but a rediscovery of the Doctrine of the Heart. The element of Time, so fundamental in Howe's philosophy, is a restatement, in scientific language, of the esoteric view that one cannot travel on the Path before one has become that Path himself. Never, perhaps, in historic times, has man been further off the Path than at this moment.

An age of darkness, it has been called—a transitional period, involving disaster and enlightenment. Howe is not alone in thus summarizing our epoch: it is the opinion of earnest men everywhere. It might be regarded as an equinoctial solstice of the soul, the furthest outward reach that can be made without complete disintegration. It is the moment when the earth, to use another analogy, before making the swing back, seems to stand stock still.

There is an illusion of "end," a stasis seemingly like death. But it is only an illusion. Everything, at this crucial point, lies in the attitude which we assume towards the moment. If we accept it as a death we may be re-born and continue on our cyclical journey. If we regard it as an "end" we are doomed. It is no accident that the various death philosophies with which we are familiar should arise at this time.

We are at the parting of the ways, able to look forwards and backwards with infinite hope or despair. Nor is it strange either that so many varied expressions of a fourth-dimensional view of life should now make their appearance.

The negative view of life, which is really the death-like view of things, summed up by Howe in the phrase "infinite regress," is gradually giving way to a positive view, which is multi-dimensional. (Whenever the fourth-dimensional view is grasped multiple dimensions open up. The fourth is the symbolic dimension which opens the horizon in infinite "egress." With it time-space takes on a wholly new character: every aspect of life is henceforth transmuted.)

In dying the seed re-experiences the miracle of life, but in a fashion far beyond the comprehension of the individual organism. The tenor of death is more than compensated for by the unknown joys of birth.

It is precisely the difference, in my opinion, between the Eye and the Heart doctrines. For, as we all know, in expanding the field of knowledge we but increase the horizon of ignorance. "Life is not in the form, but in the flame," says Howe.

For two thousand years, despite the real wisdom of Christ's teachings, we have been trying to live in the mold, trying to wrest wisdom from knowledge, instead of wooing it, trying to conquer over Nature instead of accepting and living by her laws.

It is not at all strange, therefore, that the analyst, into whose hands the sick and weary are now giving themselves like sheep to the slaughter, finds it necessary to reinstate the metaphysical view of life. (Since Thomas Aquinas there has been no metaphysics.) The cure lies with the patient, not with the analyst. We are chained to one another by invisible links, and it is the weakest in whom our strength is revealed, or registered. "Poetry must be made by all," said Lautréamont, and so too must all real progress.

We must grow wise together, else all is vain and illusory. If we are in a dilemma, it is better that we stand still and face the issue, rather than resort to hasty and heroic action. "To live in truth, which is suspense," says Howe, "is adventure, growth, uncertainty, risk and danger. Yet there is little opportunity in life today for experiencing that adventure, unless we go to war."

Meaning thereby that by evading our real problems from day to day we have produced a schism, on the one side of which is the illusory life of comfortable security and painlessness, and on the other disease, catastrophe, war, and so forth. We are going through Hell now, but it would be excellent if it really were hell, and if we really go through with it. We cannot possibly hope, unless we are thoroughly neurotic, to escape the consequences of our foolish behavior in the past.

Those who are trying to put the onus of responsibility for the dangers which threaten on the shoulders of the “dictators” might well examine their own hearts and see whether their allegiance is really “free” or a mere attachment to some other form of authority, possibly unrecognized. “Attachment to any system, whether psychological or otherwise,” says Howe, “is suggestive of anxious escape from life.” Those who are preaching revolution are also defenders of the status quo—their status quo.

Any solution for the world’s ills must embrace all mankind. We have got to relinquish our precious theories, our buttresses and supports, to say nothing of our defenses and possessions. We have got to become more inclusive, not more exclusive.

What is not acknowledged and assimilated through experience, piles up in the form of guilt and creates a real Hell, the literal meaning of which is—where the unburnt must be burnt! The doctrine of reincarnation includes this vital truth; we in the West scoff at the idea, but we are none the less victims of the law.

Indeed, if one were to try to give a graphic description of this place-condition, what more accurate illustration could be summoned than the picture of the world we now “have on our hands”? The realism of the West, is it not negated by reality?

The word has gone over into its opposite, which is the case with so many of our words. We are trying to live only in the light, with the result that we are enveloped in darkness. We are constantly fighting for the right and the good, but everywhere we see evil and injustice.

As Howe rightly says, “if we must have our ideals achieved and gratified, they are not ideals at all, but phantasies.” We need to open up, to relax, to give way, to obey the deeper laws of our being, in order to find a true discipline.

Discipline Howe defines as “the art of the acceptance of the negative.” It is based on the recognition of the duality of life, of the relative rather than the absolute. Discipline permits a free flow of energy; it gives absolute freedom within relative limits.

One develops despite circumstances, not because of them. This was a life wisdom known to Eastern peoples, handed down to us in many guises, not least of which is the significant study of symbols, known as astrology.

Here time and growth are vital elements to the understanding of reality. Properly understood, there are no good or bad horoscopes, nor good or bad “aspects”; there is no moral or ethical examination of men or things, only a desire to get at the significance of the forces within and without, and their relationship.

An attempt, in short, to arrive at a total grasp of the universe, and thus keep man anchored in the moving stream of life, which embraces known and unknown.

Any and every moment, from this viewpoint, is therefore good or right, the best for whoever it be, for on how one orients himself to the moment depends the failure or fruitfulness of it.

In a very real sense we can see today how man has really dislocated himself from the movement of life; he is somewhere on the periphery, whirling like a whirligig, going faster and faster and blinder and blinder.

Unless he can make the gesture of surrender, unless he can let go the iron will which is merely an expression of his negation of life, he will never get back to the center and find his true being.

It is not only the “dictators” who are possessed, but the whole world of men everywhere; we are in the grip of demonic forces created by our own fear and ignorance. We say No to everything, instinctively.

Our very instincts are perverted, so that the word itself has come to lose all sense. The whole man acts not instinctively, but intuitively, because “his wishes are as much at one with the law as he is himself.”

But to act intuitively one must obey the deeper law of love, which is based on absolute tolerance, the law which suffers or permits things to be as they are. Real love is never perplexed, never qualifies, never rejects, never demands. It replenishes, by grace of restoring unlimited circulation. It burns, because it knows the true meaning of sacrifice. It is life illumined.

The idea of “unlimited circulation,” not only of the necessities of life, but of everything, is, if there be such a thing, the magic behind Howe’s philosophy. It is the most practical way of life, though seemingly impractical. Whether it be admitted or not, there are hierarchies of being, as well as of role.

The highest types of men have always been those in favor of “unlimited circulation.” They were comparatively fearless and sought neither riches nor security, except in themselves. By abandoning all that they most cherished they found the way to a larger life.

Their example still inspires us, though we follow them more with the eye than with the heart, if we follow at all. They never attempted to lead, but only to guide. The real leader has no need to lead—he is content to point the way. Unless we become our own leaders, content to be what we are in process of becoming, we shall always be servitors and idolaters. We have only what we merit; we would have infinitely more if we wanted less.

The whole secret of salvation hinges on the conversion of word to deed, with and through the whole being. It is this turning in wholeness and faith, conversion, in the spiritual sense, which is the mystical dynamic of the fourth-dimensional view.

I used the word salvation a moment ago, but salvation, like fear or death, when it is accepted and experienced, is no longer “salvation.”



There is no salvation, really, only infinite realms of experience providing more and more tests, demanding more and more faith.

Willy-nilly we are moving towards the Unknown, and the sooner and readier we give ourselves up to the experience, the better it will be for us. This very word which is so frequently on our lips today—transition—indicates increasing awareness, as well as apprehension. To become more aware is to sleep more soundly, to cease twitching and tossing.

It is only when we get beyond phantasy, beyond wishing and dreaming, that the real conversion takes place and we awake re-born, the dream re-becomes reality.

For reality is the goal, deny it how we will. And we can approach it only by an ever-expanding consciousness, by burning more and more brightly, until even memory itself vanishes.

\*I and Me; Time and the Child; War Dance, By E. Graham Howe.

The end