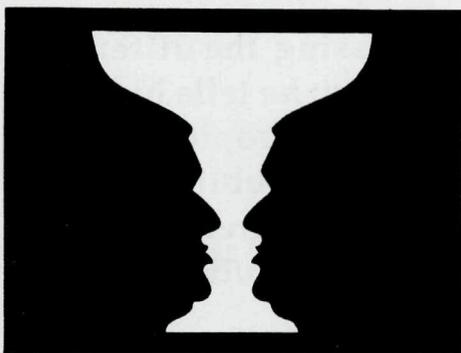


INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

by Paul Abels



It is perhaps prophetic that this issue is dedicated to narratives dealing with the stranger. The stranger is usually an outsider, someone new, not part of our way. Being a stranger, an outsider reflects ideas which camouflage the feelings we have all experienced from time to time, but which are difficult to define without presenting examples from our lives, experiences often shielded in an armor of silence because of the pain the feeling imprinted. Often our first thoughts of "outsider" brings to mind the immigrant, the alien, the isolate. But being an outsider has universal consequences which cover the range of human experience.

The week that this issue went to press was one that potentially illustrates both the clarity and paradoxical nature of the concept "outsider." It was a week in which Princess Diana, Mother Teresa, and Viktor Frankl died. Each in his/her way were outsiders, each reached our insides. Each of them exposed us to important attitudes, actions, and commitments which make the idea of outsider a fiercely creative, but potentially malignant force.

We are patterned to think, and reasonably so, that "insider" is synonymous with power. By that definition, Princess Diana started life as an insider. She was born to a prestigious family, which had both

wealth and influence, a family used to being on the inside. That is, until she entered the "royal" family where she remained an outsider subject to rejections, embarrassments, and a "subject," bound to the rules which favored males and regulated females to traditional positions. The story of her life is now open to all who care to read about her or watch TV. She refused to accept the roles and rules that would have opened the door to her becoming the quintessential insider. She became an outsider, attempting to forge her own way. She used her charm, beauty, and wealth, to help others, and became a reference for many others who were attempting to break free of the cultural rules which put a stranglehold on their lives. Her death revealed the immense power that her "outsidedness" had contributed to countless people, a mere reflection of which was exhibited by the world wide remorse following her death (accompanied by public ridicule of the silence of the "insiders").

Mother Teresa was truly a holy woman. It may be strange to say that made her an outsider, for she certainly wasn't an outsider to the street people in India and the places where she worked to help the poor. But as a Catholic nun in a predominantly Hindu and partly Muslim nation to her credit, and to India's, she overcame being an

outsider, scaling the restrictive borders. She certainly was outside the mainstream. "Saint of the Gutters," awarded a Nobel Prize, and she was honored by the Pope as a "woman who marked the history of the century." She started a new order of nuns, developed helping centers throughout the world, and brought out the best in many of the people who became involved in her work. Her dedication to aid the poorest of the poor made her an extremely creative and welcome "outsider." At Princess Diana's funeral, in her hands was a copy of a bible given to her by Mother Teresa.

Viktor Frankl was an outsider from birth. He was born a Jew. Jews through the centuries have been the outsiders, living in strange lands and worshipping in strange ways. As long as the countries' monarchs offered protection, they could exist, but on the margin. When their usefulness waned they were pushed out, to be strangers, outsiders in another new country. Frankl's ancestors' assimilation into the country of his birth did not make him an insider. It was not enough to save his father, mother, and pregnant wife from death in the Nazi death camps. Even in the camps, inmate 119104 remained an outsider, refusing to give up and working hard to convince hopeless prisoners that there

was a reason to keep living. His mental health contributions grew from his belief in the power of self determination and that it was essential to practice the art of living, even in the camps. His contributions outlived the horror, leading to the development of an approach to helping which he called logotherapy and to the writing of his influential book *Man's Search For Meaning*. It is now in its 73rd edition and translated into 24 languages. He might have believed that it matters not whether you are stranger or an outsider. What is important is how you live your life.

The articles in this issue bring home the intensity of the pain and the feeling of strangeness of those treated as outsiders. Some believe they will always be seen as, or feel like, strangers. We can only reflect on these stories as a sample of what immigrants and aliens feel when they are constantly being singled out as different, as problems, as people not to be trusted, to be denied certain rights, to be held in limbo while others, the insiders, determine their fate.

It would be an honor to the three who died if we could erase the malignant idea of "outsider" (even if just from our own minds) and welcome the stranger. And, it wouldn't be a bad idea either, to eliminate, universally, the idea of "insider" as well. □

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