Cultural Transpositions
of Creativity

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Nowadays we regard creativity as a routine matter. It has almost become an inalienable right. So-and-so is awfully creative, we say, and that is positive, and so-and-so is not very creative — and that's not so good. We are easy on creative artists: remarkable splashes of color can sometimes satisfy us, and I can just imagine a Leonardo da Vinci or a Botticelli looking at the words of Picasso or Nicholas de Staël or some of the more recent flights of creative fancy, Cristo, for instance, who drapes those miles of white cloth along the landscape. Presumably it forces us to look with new eyes at that old routine landscape we have driven by so often. Fake art, Donatello or Cellini would have cried, forgetting that what is fake and what is not is not always so crystal clear.

We are much more open, tolerant of individualities, preferences, lifestyles, people doing their thing, maintaining motorcycles and Zen. That is good, and is the result of long struggles to establish the right of individuals, shall we say, to “do-their-thing.” Let us not forget (for it is only too easily forgotten) what a precious item this matter of individual freedom is.

I will not attempt to define “creativity.” Jerome Bruner, also writing on this subject in a Symposium on Creativity, falls back on saying that creativity is anything that provokes an “effective surprise.” Such an opinion is surprising since it seems to brush aside all forms of traditional art, but Bruner does add that creativity is the result of “combinatorial activity”, of placing things in “new perspective” and that may serve as a point of departure.

Individual freedom and individual creativity are associated at least sufficiently to allow new combinations, unexpected and unsuspected new arrangements to be attempted, and not be snuffed out by a hostile community or oppressive regime. Cultural creativity, on the other hand, is a much more elusive matter. Cultures such as ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Aztec, Maya, and many others well known to us were brilliantly creative on any scale, but they were also innocent of any ideas that we would recognize as individual liberty. The very idea of individual liberty and creativity appears fairly late in history. Athens 5th century B.C. is as good a place as any to locate the brilliant emer-
gence of such thoughts, though there are echoes in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in India as well, and perhaps in Persia.

For most of history, however, creativity is not really a human attribute at all. Creativity is the work of the gods. They are the true creators. It is they who create and populate the world. Then they make a gift of it to the humans.

The gods create the parameters of the world for the members of a particular culture. The major plans of the society — the value-systems, the direction of family and individual lives, the purpose of existence, the reasons why certain things are worth preserving, why institutions must be maintained, why effort must be directed towards achieving certain goals — are provided by the gods. Sometimes if the gods are looking elsewhere it can be provided by super-humans who are in-the-know: the Buddha, Mahavira, Confucius, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and some others who, fairly obviously, have some special characteristics which set them apart from their fellows. In all these fascinating cases, which can be regarded as monuments in the exercise of creative power, it is deemed that the general framework is highly special, that it must be respected (for a variety of reasons), and that the duty of the citizen is to maintain the framework which has been established.

In fact, there is a certain amount of engaging self consciousness about the Hindu ideas regarding the relations between gods and men. It is often said that men need to perform the rites and make the offerings of food or flowers (or, among lower castes, of sacrifice) so that the gods will maintain the well-being of everyone, but it is equally said that the gods are in need of all these offerings. For if men did not remember the gods with offerings and sacrifice, then the gods would be forgotten. Who is to say whether they would actually cease to exist, but for practical purposes, they would not be there when you needed them. So just as men need their gods, the gods, too, need to be remembered and celebrated. Indeed, in India and Ceylon they are often well pampered: bathed in oils, fanned, entertained by dancing girls, with music and candles, and well fed and taken to bed. It is indeed royal treatment for deities. These celebrations maintain a totality, a social, ethical and symbolic framework, and a general paradigm for orienting the life of ordinary people. What is true about society in general is even more true about the forms of expression used in a culture. Art, literature, music, philosophy, and even history are couched in their paradigms from the beginning by the creators. In traditional cultures such as India, the inspiration of the gods in forming these realms of creative activity in the arts and literature is well recognized. They are recalled before and after creative performances.

The reason I mention the creators as gods for ancient society is to draw attention to two matters. First, the very special regard in which
these super-creators are held, the divine aspect and the dangerousness of creativity, and second, the great preoccupation with the problem of social order, structure, tradition, continuity, stability, conservatism even in the field of "creative" arts. It is no doubt true that all societies we know about have internal tensions, disaffections, factions with particular interests which they would want to further. It is, however, also true that in an ecological niche where the human control over nature, over disease and the stability of food supplies was always a source of justified anxiety, any uncertainty and instability in social and political institutions would have also had and often did have calamitous results. Hence the interest in tradition and continuity that one cannot overlook in writing about ancient or primitive societies. Hence the emphasis on the fact that the ancestors or creators had gifted the paradigm of social life to their children, which the children were to maintain unaltered.

Given these interests in continuity, stability, custom, tradition, and well-established social structures, it should be clear that any great emphasis on individual creativity would have appeared as a treacherous and even treasonous idea to many historical societies.

An emphasis on individual creativity — unless such creativity could be organized and harnessed to the going paradigm in the hands of the establishment (the priesthood, the patrons, and others in high places) — would have been too close to the idea of individual freedom which both in ancient empires and in primitive society would have been regarded as an element of instability in the social fabric. The question as to why certain social systems — such as nomadism or slash and burn type (swidden) cultivation — might be marginally more tolerant of individual freedom and why certain others, for instance, the Hindu caste system, could not countenance much margin by way of liberty, cannot be answered in this context. The answers are not often farfetched but it is depressing to think that even in 1978, most of the societies of the world were placing the significance of civil order, structure, continuity, and social control at a much higher level than individual creativity, so that the freedom of action and thought of individuals is severely curtailed by the state or by the community in innumerable political units.

All this makes the Athens of the 5th century B.C. still more of a surprise. The combination of a free citizenry so clearly indicated by Pericles, together with the example of Socrates, the astonishing playwrights, the brilliant and highly individual artists (no longer anonymous, but individually named) and the poetry, is certainly arresting. When the extraordinary sense of free inquiry is added to the picture through the development of philosophy, Plato and Aristotle, as well as the various other schools, the comparative anthropologist must remain properly astonished. The most remarkable fact about the sense
of free inquiry in Athens (and some other Greek cities) is that so much was accomplished in so many fields by small if not tiny communities. One cannot help wondering why the nobility of ancient Greece in terms of free philosophical inquiry was not matched in many other much more extensive civilizations.

Claude Lévi-Strauss seems to think that just as a major step in a new direction was taken by mankind when orderly agriculture was commenced, similarly a “dramatic change took place along the frontiers of Greek thought, when mythology gave way to philosophy and the latter emerged as the necessary pre-condition of scientific thought.” There is, of course, the contrast between the bondage of the slaves and the freedom of the Athenians, but even that does not detract from the remarkable accomplishment in the development of an almost positivistic Comteian rationality and away from fetishism.

The picture, of course, fits our own prejudices. We live in a rationalistic age where faith and belief are questioned and sometimes severely. The Here and Now has priority over the Hereafter and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Rationalism appears to be related to a sense of the emphasis between the world of men and the world of gods. Some cultures emphasized the other-worldly values; others, like ancient Greece, were very concerned with this-worldly problems. It is tempting to think that the more autocratic regimes found it useful to turn the attention of the population to a coming and better world, whereas those in which the citizenry was more in command of their own fate and their own political direction were more oriented towards a rational and this-worldly direction.

Were there no other attempts made in the direction of the freedom of rational inquiry without fetishism and dogma in other civilizations? The examples are not very numerous. In India, the Buddha may perhaps be regarded as a figure who challenged well-established social formations and questioned well-accepted and apparently self-evident truths. His immediate teachings have not survived, but even second or third-hand, one can tell that here was a searching mind quite comparable to Plato in a philosophical vein. But rational inquiry is soon overcome and submerged by established dogma even in this most promising case. Thereupon the Sangha (monks of the Buddhist order) maintain the “teaching”, which is rational in many ways, but still contains a hard core dogma which must be taken on trust. Even so remarkable and rational a work as the Questions of King Milinda, which is justly celebrated as a key work in Buddhist inquiry, leads inexorably in the direction of dogmatic certainties.

The availability of Platonic writings to philosophers of the 9th and 10th centuries had also engendered an inquisitive spirit in Islam for a while. Here, too, are the great examples — al Farabi, writing in a highly
philosophical Platonic style, Avicenna, Averroes; but these promising developments, too, are soon overcome by the tidal wave of dogmatic teaching. A great and fascinating mind such as Ghazali (d. 1111) after many years of free thought, himself chooses the path of security and stability, the path to assured traditions and in his own words “closes the door of rational inquiry” (bab-i-ijtihad).

It is not until much later that non-dogmatic philosophy directed towards the enhancement of the individual and his freedom, free inquiry into the nature of social systems, the role of men and their thoughts in such systems again engages great minds.

The reason I raise these difficult and controversial questions is because they are highly contemporary. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in his *Critique de la raison dialectique* that the East and primitive peoples have no self-consciousness and therefore their history is really no history. Therefore, in fact, they have no individual creativity apart from that laid down by the traditions of their society. When Sartre wrote this, he was in fact repeating what Hegel had written earlier. His view, too, is that what he called the Orient was asleep (not even dreaming?) and therefore unaware of the historical condition in which it found itself. Hegel claimed that historical self-consciousness is a special attribute of Christianity and so is the sense of individualism and that self-awareness comes to a climax in Europe in the 18th century.

Even with the numerous volumes of Asian and African history which are now available to us, it is indeed still true that socio-political and free philosophical inquiries directed towards a greater understanding of individual and society are surprisingly rare. There is Ibn Khaldun on universal history, and al-Biruni on India, but evidently no major tradition that one could turn to. (There may be more self-conscious inquiry in this skeptical vein in China and Japan, but the social order is not effectively questioned until much later.)

Be that as it may, Sartre certainly received a devastating reply from Claude Lévi-Strauss, who defended the dignity of savage thought by comparing the results of the marvelous creativity of Australian aborigines with the mental gymnastics of those venerable teachers at the Ecole Normale Supérieure and indicating in elegant terms that the French professors were really no better.

From the perspective of eternity, Lévi-Strauss was surely right. The really stunning mental effort was probably demanded when men moved from the Paleolithic to Neolithic cultures and started manufacturing tools and domesticating plants and animals. The fruits of this revolution which developed a mastery of men over much of nature and opened up major distances with almost all other creatures is still around us for all to see.

Lévi-Strauss also maintained from a fairly distant perspective again
(i.e. about 100,000 years) that the differences which are so evident in terms of the Industrial Revolution, between Western Europe and other parts of the world, are really an illusion. What is 200 years in the history of man? Soon, Seoul and Singapore, Osaka and Yokohama, even Calcutta and Cairo will become like Manchester and Pittsburgh. The process is on its way and the writing is on the wall. The industrial revolution which transformed the West is now a worldwide phenomenon.

The radical position of Lévi-Strauss derives from a healthy and thorough sense of the relativity among cultures. We are often pleased with ourselves, our astonishing machines, airplanes, radios, telephones, skyscrapers and other similar aspects of our temporary superiority over nature. Lévi-Strauss wants to draw attention to the most remarkable creation of all: that is, human culture. He has written to say that even the remotest, tiny little hamlet hidden deep in the jungles of the Amazon is as capable of expressing the nobility, subtlety, beauty and tragedy of human destiny as any of the great metropolises of our world.

What can he mean by this? Can this be true? Is there really no difference in terms of creativity between one culture and the next? We may be able to accept the fact that, in Lévi-Strauss's words, "man has always been thinking well" and still maintain that some cultures have clearly been more "creative" in a more successful way than others. This means that the cognitive powers available to their members have been more efficiently cultivated, their thought better organized, their results more satisfactory and effective than some other cultures to be seen in many parts of the world which have not been so creative.

So, then, there is a difference between the categorical mentality of the savage mind, so brilliantly explored by Lévi-Strauss, and those other minds which can not only apply a categorical scheme to the world around them, but also cultivate their own thought in such a way as to get new results and new products like the ancient Greeks.

It is, then, not true that man has always been equally creative everywhere, if not in making missiles, MIRV's and ICBM's, then at least in Garden Magic and Canoe-making.

Auguste Comte was not wrong when he saw progress as essentially a progress of the human mind from the shackles of primitive fetishism, through the ties of tradition towards an increasingly free and open rationality. Perhaps this is the difference between thought that depends for its framework on a traditional system of categories, which exercises its creativity through a kaleidoscope of mythology and cultivated, orderly, systematic, but searching and open-ended scientific thought? But these questions, once raised, become extremely disturbing and difficult to handle.
There is first an existential issue: Sartre notes that all human action is purposive action. Human beings act with intention. Their thought and life is directed towards certain goals. Life is oriented towards the fulfillment of certain intentions and values. But the manner of decision-making is individual and never completely predictable. Between the intention and the act, between the resolution and the execution, falls the shadow, as T.S. Eliot so brilliantly detected. At any particular moment human creativity is engaged. The past is available, but the future is always newly created.

If this is so, and if such a creative faculty is a human existential condition — and I do agree that it is — then why are certain cultures more creative than others and why are cultures sometimes creative in one phase of their history, but burn themselves out in another phase?

The question is not easy to ignore. Great minds have worried about it. Enormous tomes have been written — Spengler, Toynbee, and Kroeber for instance, — and the matter remains tantalizingly unresolved.

In approaching this question, we must recognize the degree to which our very recognition of creativity is socially determined. There are some sobering examples. It would not be disputed if I mentioned that Darwin and Freud were among the most important figures in setting the cultural parameters of this century. Yet it is certainly notable that what with hindsight seems so clearly innovative and creative may not have appeared so to their contemporaries.

Arthur Koestler writes that the controversies around the idea of evolution were simmering for a long time before Darwin appeared. In 1830 there was already a major debate on evolution in the French Academy of Sciences between Geoffroy and Cuvier.

The general impression on the public may be gathered, for instance, from the manner the heroine of Disraeli’s Tancred sings the praises of a book by Robert Chambers entitled The Vestiges of Creation, published in 1844, 15 years before the Origin of Species:

You know, all is development. The principle is perpetually going on. First, there was nothing, then there was something; then — I forget the next — I think there were shells, then fishes; then we came — let me see — did we come next? Never mind that; we came at last. And at the next change there will be something very superior to us — something with wings. Ah! that’s it: we were fishes, and I believe we shall be crows. But you must read it... it is all proved... You understand, it is all science; it is not like those books in which one says one thing and another the contrary, and both may be wrong. Everything is proved...
Tancred’s rejoinder to the enthusiastic lady, was: “I do not believe I ever was a fish.” Koestler concludes: “Thus Darwin originated neither the idea nor the controversy about evolution, and in his early years was fully aware of this.”

There is much evidence to show that the key ideas on which Darwin’s fame was established were in fact in general use during his lifetime. T.H. Huxley, when he read about natural selection and the survival of the fittest, is said to have remarked, “How stupid not to have thought of that.”

With Freud, too, the “unconscious” was no sparkling discovery out of the dark recesses of the mind. On the contrary, the idea of an “unconscious” appears to have been fairly generally recognized. Again, Arthur Koestler, who discusses the matter with brilliance, gives remarkable examples, many drawn from a book by L.L. Whyte, *The Unconscious Before Freud.*

Goethe: “Man cannot persist long in a conscious state, he must throw himself back into the Unconscious, for his root lives there . . . Take for example a talented musician, composing an important score: consciousness and unconsciousness will be life warp and weft.”

Jean Paul Richter, the outstanding novelist: “The unconscious is really the largest realm in our minds, and just on account of this unconsciousness it is an inner Africa, whose unknown boundaries may extend far away.”

The famous Fichte: “Beneath active consciousness there must lie consciousness in a merely potential state, that is a middle condition of the mind, which though not yet conscious, nonetheless positively carries the specific character of Intelligence.”

The psychologist Wundt: “Our mind is so fortunately equipped, that it brings us the most important bases for our thoughts without our having the least knowledge of this work of elaboration. Only the results of it become conscious. This unconscious mind is for us like an unknown being who creates and produces for us, and finally throws the ripe fruits in our lap.”

Koestler also notes that about 1868 Erich von Hartmann published his *Philosophy of the Unconscious* which became a best-seller. Apparently around 1870, two main topics of conversation in the intellectual salons of Berlin were Wagner and the Unconscious. Within ten years of Hartmann’s book’s being published, there were no less than six philosophical works which carried the word “unconscious” in
their titles. Even Nietzsche is involved here. He apparently took over the unconscious Id from Lichtenberg, professor of Physics at Göttingen, which according to Whyte, Groddeck then took over from Nietzsche and Freud from Groddeck.

Nietzsche writes: "Consciousness is the last and latest development of the organic... Every extension of knowledge arises from making conscious the unconsciousness. The great basic activity is unconscious. For it is narrow, this room of human consciousness."12

So it appears that the idea of the "unconscious" was commonplace and had been vigorously discussed for several decades before Freud. So in these very dramatic cases, it is the recognition and the hindsight of society which has marked, recognized and celebrated certain "concepts" as "new discoveries."

A similar but reverse effect of society acting upon science is again provided by Greece and Rome. We tend to assume that science must progress "forward," as it were, but it seems to be able to go "backward" as well.

It is not true that "once the neutron is discovered, it remains discovered." Do things remain discovered?

"In the fifth century B.C. the educated classes knew that the earth was a spherical body floating in space and spinning round its axis; a thousand years later they thought that it was a flat disc, or a rectangle perhaps."13

Plutarch, for instance, who was very interested in astronomy, wrote that the moon was of solid stuff, like the earth, and the reason it did not fall down on the earth, despite its weight is as follows:

... The moon has a security against falling in her very motion and the swing of her revolutions, just as objects put in slings are prevented from falling by the circular whirl; for everything is carried along by the motion natural to it if it is not deflected by anything else. Thus the moon is not carried down by her weight because her natural tendency is frustrated by her revolution.

This is practically Newton's first Law of Motion.

If the recognition of creativity is so susceptible to the social atmosphere of the times, so that even remarkable advances in knowledge can be lost, or important discoveries may not be recognized (consider the sad fate of Mendel's work on genetics), then the recognition of creativity across cultures becomes even more of a mystery. We now appreciate Chinese porcelain, and collectors at Sotheby's will pay large sums for ancient Chinese bronzes. But how many can appreciate Chinese opera or Chinese music? And what about other
kinds of music from Tibet, Vietnam, Thailand, and Afghanistan? How many are musically open-minded (open-eared?) to appreciate the music of other peoples? For some reason the mental block which prevents many of us from being able to participate in the musical expressions of the Orient does not appear to stand in our way for African music. In many ways, African music appears to have a closer cultural distance to Western music than the traditions of the Orient. The conclusion that we appreciate the products of another culture entirely in our own way seems inescapable.

Even though communication across cultures has all the earmarks of total failure — like poetry in prose translation which can only hint at the delights of the original — there appears to be general agreement about a certain periodicity in cultural creation.

Stuart Welch, the art historian, once said that both artists and art periods in history reminded him of the Mandala. This was a kind of circle with Mind or Spirituality represented in the upper semi-circle, and Body or Sensuality, even Carnality, represented in the lower semi-circle. If you regarded the Mandala as representing different creative periods, you would move to the right and down, that is, from spirituality towards more and more sensuality, until you reached the maximum possible and you would then again move back towards greater spirituality. Welch was ready to include not only art periods, but also artists in this paradigmatic representation: thus there were periods of greater vigour and libidinous energy in the work of artists, especially when young. They were then dominated by body impulses, and later the mind and a calmer approach to art would come to predominate.

It is intriguing that such a dual paradigm of rationality vs. affectivity, of mind and body, of order and energy, is very widely recognized if not always accepted. So Nietzsche writes of Apollonian and Dionysian: the Apollonian mode is measured, limited, tangible, timeless, structured, organized and detailed, whereas the Dionysian mode is restlessly striving, concerned with infinity, with energy and struggle, tension, dynamism. It will not accept limitations and bounds, but is attuned toward ultimate reaches.

Sometimes similar ideas are represented in literature and art as “classicism” — a preoccupation with order and symmetry — in opposition to “romanticism,” which represents a release of the imagination from fetters, the pouring out of impulses and emotions.

A.L. Kroeber, the eminent anthropologist from Berkeley, has many examples of this way of thinking in his two works The Configurations of Culture Growth and Style and Civilization. He writes of ethos vs. pathos (Curt Sacks), Apollonian vs. Faustian (Goethe), ideational vs. sensate, and similar ideas associated with writers such as Spengler, Toynbee, Biggon, Collingwood, Sorokin, Chamless, Ligeti, Flinders Petrie and others.
Kroeber tries to convince us that there is a periodicity in culture in 1000 pages, which is parallel to Spengler’s *Decline of the West* in 1000 pages, which is eclipsed by Toynbee in 21 volumes. The Kroeber thesis is, of course, that cultures go through an archaic and vigorous stage to establish their forms and style, then they reach a stage when they are comfortable with the forms and elaborate them in a classical way, and then the desire for more emphasis sets in and the forms are over-elaborated, smothered in details and finally the edifice totters and shakes and comes tumbling down, as it is overtaken by another more vigorous and archaic culture.

Toynbee, too, has a similar paradigm embellished by the question of moral and spiritual fiber. The argument here is that the stages of cultures, or civilizations, are transcended by the consciousness of the historical actors of being challenged and by their recognition of the need for a vigorous response to such challenges.

Who can deny that the works of individual men, but also institutions, entire cultures, even civilizations, seem to exhibit such a periodicity when looked at from certain points of view? But who can deny also that these are troubled waters where the intense difficulties of comparing cultures make navigation particularly hazardous. Toynbee’s 21 volumes indicate the magnitude of the effort needed to make a dent in the serried ranks of specialists who do not take to enormous cycles—like geophysical trends—which go beyond their areas of expertise, in any friendly ways.

One of the latest attempts at establishing some sense of creative evolution in culture is by Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Critique de la raison dialectique* to which we have referred earlier. In his major philosophical statement since *Being and Nothingness*, he explores a series parallel to the Apollonian-Dionysian made Nietzsche and Goethe. It is, however, unique, as we would expect, and provocatively contemporary. Sartre writes of the continuum between the individual and the group. He puts it as follows. Consider, he says, a group of people waiting for a bus at St. Germain-des-Prés. They wait in line, each involved in his or her cogitations. Their thoughts are separated from one another. They wait in order of arrival, not urgency of errand, or importance of mission. They wait alone. This represents a closing in of the individual upon himself, an alienation. He calls it *seriality*.

At the other end of the continuum, there is the opposite situation. Consider the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. Such individuals were imbued with a sense of mission. Their goals were one, their thoughts transparent to one another. Their excitement made them live in close communication with each other. They were no longer separate in their thoughts and in actually storming the dungeon, they were fused with one another as a group. This point, furthest from alienation, he calls *group-in-fusion*. 
In between is a third stage, in which individuals are not alienated, are doing what they are supposed to do, but they are doing it out of habit, in a traditional way, so that they are not particularly conscious of the situation in which they exist. This he names with a curious and clumsy term, the *practico-inert*.

Behind this threefold classification of alienation which is still consciousness, *practico-inert* habitual activity, and the group-in-fusion, excited and elevated crowd behavior in fusion, it is difficult not to see the alternative paradigm of conscious rationality, structured behavior, and affective (charismatic) action of much modern social science. There is little doubt that the contours of Sartre's thought run very close to those of the German existentialists, and in particular, to Max Weber. He had been writing about the reverse series, from charisma through routine tradition to rationality (and alienation, *Entzauberung*) all his life.

How does this view of creative periodicity in history (culture) stand up against a view that “man has always been thinking well” advanced by Lévi-Strauss?

It seems clear now that Lévi-Strauss' brilliant structural formations are essentially a contribution to the study of traditional and stable cultures. He has recognized this himself in writing of them as “cold cultures” as opposed to “hot cultures,” which try to incorporate change into their view of their history. It also seems clear that the problem of cultural creativity is engaged at every point of the scale.

In those calmer times when men can think well and put their thoughts and their lives into order, their creativity may have a serene quality which derives from an assurance and dependence on conventions which are generally understood and appreciated.

But there is little doubt that such serene times in the lives of men and societies are fairly rare. More often there is evidence of the alienation or mere habits or of crowd psychology that Sartre is warning about.

Creative minds can create at any point in the cycle, but depending on where the rest of the culture happens to be, their art is likely to exhibit those qualities of vigor and archaicism or classicism, or the dynamic, restless romanticism in different proportions.

Koestler notes: You can take an X-ray of a face, but you cannot create a face from an X-ray. One can write about structure and forms, but creativity remains an unexpected gift sometimes recognized if in tune with its times, often not recognized, or recognized at a different time when conditions are ripe.

Recognition of creativity is hardly automatic. Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, describes how much some of the Oxford dons disliked one of his predecessors in the Regius Chair. After having been carefully chosen as a “loyal fellow of St. John’s College” he had made a grave mistake: his colleagues remem-
bered him for having disgracefully allowed "one Handel, a foreigner, who they say was born in Hanover" to bring his "lousy crew" of "fiddlers" to play in the Sheldonian.15

Consider Tolstoy's assessment of the French Symbolists:

The productions of another celebrity, Verlaine, are not less affected and unintelligible, ... I must pause to note the amazing celebrity of these two versifiers, Baudelaire and Verlaine ... How the French ... could attribute such importance to these versifiers who were far from skilful in form and most contemptible in subject-matter is to me incomprehensible.16

Tolstoy's judgment must stand as a warning to adventurers on this dangerous ground.

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