

LAW 46

NEVER APPEAR TOO PERFECT

JUDGMENT

Appearing better than others is always dangerous, but most dangerous of all is to appear to have no faults or weaknesses. Envy creates silent enemies. It is smart to occasionally display defects, and admit to harmless vices, in order to deflect envy and appear more human and approachable. Only gods and the dead can seem perfect with impunity.

TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW

Joe Orton met Kenneth Halliwell at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London, in 1953, where both had enrolled as acting students. They soon became lovers and moved in together. Halliwell, twenty-five at the time, was seven years older than Orton, and seemed the more confident of the two; but neither had much talent as actors, and after graduating, having settled down together in a dank London apartment, they decided to give up acting and collaborate as writers instead. Halliwell's inheritance was enough to keep them from having to find work for a few years, and in the beginning, he was also the driving force behind the stories and novels they wrote; he would dictate to Orton, who would type the manuscripts, occasionally interjecting his own lines and ideas. Their first efforts attracted some interest from literary agents, but it sputtered. The promise they had shown was leading nowhere.

Eventually the inheritance money ran out, and the pair had to look for work. Their collaborations were less enthusiastic and less frequent. The future looked bleak.

In 1957 Orton began to write on his own, but it wasn't until five years later, when the lovers were jailed for six months for defacing dozens of library books, that he began to find his voice (perhaps not by chance: This was the first time he and Halliwell had been separated in nine years). He came out of prison determined to express his contempt for English society in the form of theatrical farces. He and Halliwell moved back in together, but now the roles were reversed: Orton did the writing while Halliwell put in comments and ideas.

In 1964 Joe Orton completed his first full-length play, *Entertaining Mr.Sloane* . The play made it to London's West End, where it received brilliant reviews: A great new writer had emerged from nowhere. Now success followed success, at a dizzying pace. In 1966 Orton had a hit with his play *Loot*, and his popularity soared. Soon commissions came in from all sides, including from the Beatles, who paid Orton handsomely to write them a film script.

Everything was pointing upwards, everything except Orton's relationship with Kenneth Halliwell. The pair still lived together, but as Orton grew successful, Halliwell began to deteriorate. Watching his lover become the center of attention, he suffered the humiliation of becoming a kind of personal assistant to the playwright, his role in what had once been a collaboration growing smaller and smaller. In the 1950s he had supported Orton with his inheritance; now Orton supported him. At a party or among friends, people would naturally gravitate towards Orton—he was charming, and his mood was almost always buoyant. Unlike the handsome Orton, Halliwell was bald and awkward; his defensiveness made people want to avoid him.

THE PARABLE OF THE GREEDY MAN AND THE ENVIOUS MAN

A greedy man and an envious man met a king. The king said to them, "One of you may ask something of me and I will give it to him, provided I give twice as much to the other." The envious person did not want to ask first for he was envious of his companion who would receive twice as much, and the greedy man did not want to ask first since he wanted everything that was to be had. Finally the greedy one pressed the envious one to be the first to make the request. So the envious person asked the king to pluck out one of his eyes.

JEWISH PARABLE, THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS, SOLOMON SCHIMMEL, 1992

An admirer who feels that he cannot be happy by surrendering himself elects to become envious of that which he admires. So he speaks another language—the thing which he really admires is called a stupid, insipid and queer sort of thing. Admiration is happy self-surrender; envy is unhappy self-assertion.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD, 1813-1855

With Orton's success the couple's problems only worsened. Halliwell's moods made their life together impossible. Orton claimed to want to leave him, and had numerous affairs, but would always end up returning to his old friend and lover. He tried to help Halliwell launch a career as an artist, even arranging for a gallery to show his work, but the show was a flop, and this

only heightened Halliwell's sense of inferiority. In May of 1967, the pair went on a brief holiday together in Tangier, Morocco. During the trip, Orton wrote in his diary, "We sat talking of how happy we felt. And how it couldn't, surely, last. We'd have to pay for it. Or we'd be struck down from afar by disaster because we were, perhaps, too happy. To be young, good-looking, healthy, famous, comparatively rich *and* happy is surely going against nature."

Halliwell outwardly seemed as happy as Orton. Inwardly, though, he was seething. And two months later, in the early morning of August 10, 1967, just days after helping Orton put the finishing touches to the wicked farce *What the Butler Saw* (undoubtedly his masterpiece), Kenneth Halliwell bludgeoned Joe Orton to death with repeated blows of a hammer to the head. He then took twenty-one sleeping pills and died himself, leaving behind a note that read, "If you read Orton's diary all will be explained."

Interpretation

Kenneth Halliwell had tried to cast his deterioration as mental illness, but what Joe Orton's diaries revealed to him was the truth: It was envy, pure and simple, that lay at the heart of his sickness. The diaries, which Halliwell read on the sly, recounted the couple's days as equals and their struggle for recognition. After Orton found success, the diaries began to describe Halliwell's brooding, his rude comments at parties, his growing sense of inferiority. All of this Orton narrated with a distance that bordered on contempt.

The diaries made clear Halliwell's bitterness over Orton's success. Eventually the only thing that would have satisfied him would have been for Orton to have a failure of his own, an unsuccessful play perhaps, so that they could have commiserated in their failure, as they had done years before. When the opposite happened—as Orton grew only more successful and popular—Halliwell did the only thing that would make them equals again: He made them equals in death. With Orton's murder, he became almost as famous as his friend—posthumously.

Joe Orton only partly understood his lover's deterioration. His attempt to help Halliwell launch a career in art registered for what it was: charity and guilt. Orton basically had two possible solutions to the problem. He could have downplayed his own success, displaying some faults, deflecting Halliwell's envy; or, once he realized the nature of the problem, he could have fled as if Halliwell were a viper, as in fact he was—a viper of envy. Once envy eats away at someone, everything you do only makes it grow, and day by day it festers inside him. Eventually he will attack.

It takes great talent and skill to conceal one's talent and skill

LA ROCHEFOUCAULD, 1613-1680

ENVY TORMENTS AGLAUROS

The goddess Minerva made her way to the house of Envy, a house filthy with dark and noisome slime. It is hidden away in the depths of the valleys,

where the sun never penetrates, where no wind blows through; a gloomy dwelling, permeated by numbing chill, ever fireless, ever shrouded in thick darkness. When Minerva reached this spot she stopped in front of the house ... and struck the doors with the tip of her spear, and at the blow they flew open and revealed Envy within, busy at a meal of snake's flesh, the food on which she nourished her wickedness. At the sight, Minerva turned her eyes away. But the other rose heavily from the ground, leaving the half-eaten corpses, and came out with dragging steps. When she saw the goddess in all the brilliance of her beauty, in her flashing armor, she groaned.... Envy's face was sickly pale, her whole body lean and wasted, and she squinted horribly; her teeth were discolored and decayed, her poisonous breast of a greenish hue, and her tongue dripped venom. Only the sight of suffering could bring a smile to her lips. She never knew the comfort of sleep, but was kept constantly awake by care and anxiety, looked with dismay on men's good fortune, and grew thin at the sight. Gnawing at others, and being gnawed, she was herself her own torment. Minerva, in spite of her loathing, yet addressed her briefly: "Instill your poison into one of Cecrop's daughters—her name is Aglauros. This is what I require of you. " Without another word she pushed against the ground with her spear, left the earth, and soared upwards.

From the corner of her eye the other watched the goddess out of sight, muttering and angry that Minerva's plan should be successful. Then she took her staff, all encircled with thorny briars, wrapped herself in dark clouds, and set forth. Wherever she went she trampled down the flowery fields, withered up the grass, seared the treetops, and with her breath tainted the peoples, their cities and their homes, until at length she came to Athens, the home of wit and wealth, peaceful and prosperous. She could scarcely refrain from weeping when she saw no cause for tears. Then entering the chamber of Cecrop's daughter, she carried out Minerva's orders. She touched the girl's breast with a hand dipped in malice, filled her heart with spiky thorns, and breathing in a black and evil poison dispersed it through her very bones, instilling the venom deep in her heart. That the reason for her distress might not be far to seek, she set before Aglauros' eyes a vision of her sister, of that sister's fortunate marriage [with the god Mercury], and of the god in all his handsomeness; and she exaggerated the glory of it all. So Aglauros was tormented by such thoughts, and the jealous anger she concealed ate into her heart. Day and night she sighed,

unceasingly wretched, and in her utter misery wasted away in a slow decline, as when ice is melted by the fitful sun. The fire that was kindled within her at the thought of her sister's luck and good fortune was like the burning of weeds which do not burst into flames, but are none the less consumed by smoldering fire.

METAMORPHOSES, OVID, 43 B.C.-C. A.D. 18

Only a minority can succeed at the game of life, and that minority inevitably arouses the envy of those around them. Once success happens your way, however, the people to fear the most are those in your own circle, the friends and acquaintances you have left behind. Feelings of inferiority gnaw at them; the thought of your success only heightens their feelings of stagnation. Envy, which the philosopher Kierkegaard calls “unhappy admiration,” takes hold. You may not see it but you will feel it someday—unless, that is, you learn strategies of deflection, little sacrifices to the gods of success. Either dampen your brilliance occasionally, purposefully revealing a defect, weakness, or anxiety, or attributing your success to luck; or simply find yourself new friends. Never underestimate the power of envy.

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

The merchant class and the craft guilds to which medieval Florence owed its prosperity had created a republic that protected them from oppression by the nobility. Since high office could only be held for a few months, no one could gain lasting dominance, and although this meant that the political factions struggled constantly for control, the system kept out tyrants and petty dictators. The Medici family lived for several centuries under this system without making much of a mark. They had modest origins as apothecaries, and were typical middle-class citizens. Not until the late fourteenth century, when Giovanni de' Medici made a modest fortune in banking, did they emerge as a force to be reckoned with.

Upon Giovanni's death, his son Cosimo took over the family business, and quickly demonstrated his talent for it. The business prospered under his control and the Medicis emerged as one of the preeminent banking families of Europe. But they had a rival in Florence: Despite the city's republican system, one family, the Albizzis, had managed over the years to monopolize control of the government, forging alliances that allowed them to constantly fill important offices with their own men. Cosimo did not fight this, and in fact gave the Albizzis his tacit support. At the same time, while the Albizzis were beginning to flaunt their power, Cosimo made a point of staying in the background.

Eventually, however, the Medici wealth could not be ignored, and in 1433, feeling threatened by the family, the Albizzis used their government muscle to have Cosimo arrested on charges of conspiring to overthrow the republic. Some in the Albizzi faction wanted Cosimo executed, others feared this would spark a civil war. In the end they exiled him from Florence. Cosimo did not fight the sentence; he left quietly. Sometimes, he knew, it is wiser to bide one's time and keep a low profile.

Over the next year, the Albizzis began to stir up fears that they were setting up a dictatorship. Meanwhile, Cosimo, using his wealth to advantage, continued to exert influence on Florentine affairs, even from exile. A civil war broke out in the city, and in September of 1434 the Albizzis were toppled from power and sent into exile. Cosimo immediately

returned to Florence, his position restored. But he saw that he now faced a delicate situation: If he seemed ambitious, as the Albizzis had, he would stir up opposition and envy that would ultimately threaten his business. If he stayed on the sidelines, on the other hand, he would leave an opening for another faction to rise up as the Albizzis had, and to punish the Medicis for their success.

Cosimo solved the problem in two ways: He secretly used his wealth to buy influence among key citizens, and he placed his own allies, all cleverly enlisted from the middle classes to disguise their allegiance to him, in top government positions. Those who complained of his growing political clout were taxed into submission, or their properties were bought out from under them by Cosimo's banker allies. The republic survived in name only. Cosimo held the strings.

While he worked behind the scenes to gain control, however, publicly Cosimo presented another picture. When he walked through the streets of Florence, he dressed modestly, was attended by no more than one servant, and bowed deferentially to magistrates and elder citizens. He rode a mule instead of a horse. He never spoke out on matters of public import, even though he controlled Florence's foreign affairs for over thirty years. He gave money to charities and maintained his ties to Florence's merchant class. He financed all kinds of public buildings that fed the Florentines' pride in their city. When he built a palace for himself and his family in nearby Fiesole, he turned down the ornate designs that Brunelleschi had drawn up for him and instead chose a modest structure designed by Michelozzo, a man of humble Florentine origins. The palace was a symbol of Cosimo's strategy—all simplicity on the outside, all elegance and opulence within.

Cosimo finally died in 1464, after ruling for thirty years. The citizens of Florence wanted to build him a great tomb, and to celebrate his memory with elaborate funeral ceremonies, but on his deathbed he had asked to be buried without "any pomp or demonstration." Some sixty years later, Machiavelli hailed Cosimo as the wisest of all princes, "for he knew how extraordinary things that are seen and appear every hour make men much more envied than those that are done in deed and are covered over with decency."

Interpretation

A close friend of Cosimo's, the bookseller Vespasiano da Bisticci, once wrote of him, "And whenever he wished to achieve something, he saw to it, in order to escape envy as much as possible, that the initiative appeared to come from others, and not from him." One of Cosimo's favorite expressions was, "Envy is a weed that should not be watered." Understanding the power envy has in a democratic environment, Cosimo avoided the appearance of greatness. This does not mean that greatness should be suffocated, or that only the mediocre should survive; only that a game of appearances must be played. The insidious envy of the masses can actually be deflected quite easily: Appear as one of them in style and values. Make alliances with those below you, and elevate them to positions of power to secure their support in times of need. Never flaunt your wealth, and carefully conceal the degree to which it has bought influence. Make a display of deferring to others, as if they were more powerful than you. Cosimo de' Medici perfected this game; he was a consummate con artist of appearances. No one could gauge the extent of his power—his modest exterior hid the truth.

Never be so foolish as to believe that you are stirring up admiration by flaunting the qualities that raise you above others. By making others aware of their inferior position, you are only stirring up "unhappy admiration," or envy, which will gnaw away at them until they undermine you in ways you cannot foresee. The fool dares the gods of envy by flaunting his victories. The master of power understands that the appearance of superiority over others is inconsequential next to the reality of it.

*Of all the disorders of the soul, envy is the only one no one confesses to.
Plutarch, c. A.D 46-120*

The envious hides as carefully as the secret, lustful sinner and becomes the endless inventor of tricks and stratagems to hide and mask himself. Thus he is able to pretend to ignore the superiority of others which eats up his heart, as if he did not see them, nor hear them, nor were aware of them, nor had ever heard of them. He is a master simulator. On the other hand he tries with all his power to connive and thus prevent any form of superiority from appearing in any situation. And if they do, he casts on them obscurity,

hypercriticism, sarcasm and calumny like the toad that spits poison from its hole. On the other hand he will raise endlessly insignificant men, mediocre people, and even the inferior in the same type of activities.

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER, 1788-1860

For not many men, the proverb says, can love a friend who fortune prospers without feeling envy; and about the envious brain, cold poison clings and doubles all the pain life brings him. His own woundings he must nurse, and feels another's gladness like a curse.

AESCHYLUS, c. 525-456 B.C.

KEYS TO POWER

The human animal has a hard time dealing with feelings of inferiority. In the face of superior skill, talent, or power, we are often disturbed and ill at ease; this is because most of us have an inflated sense of ourselves, and when we meet people who surpass us they make it clear to us that we are in fact mediocre, or at least not as brilliant as we had thought. This disturbance in our self-image cannot last long without stirring up ugly emotions. At first we feel envy: If only we had the quality or skill of the superior person, we would be happy. But envy brings us neither comfort nor any closer to equality. Nor can we admit to feeling it, for it is frowned upon socially—to show envy is to admit to feeling inferior. To close friends, we may confess our secret unrealized desires, but we will never confess to feeling envy. So it goes underground. We disguise it in many ways, like finding grounds to criticize the person who makes us feel it: He may be smarter than I am, we say, but he has no morals or conscience. Or he may have more power, but that's because he cheats. If we do not slander him, perhaps we praise him excessively—another of envy's disguises.

There are several strategies for dealing with the insidious, destructive emotion of envy. First, accept the fact that there will be people who will surpass you in some way, and also the fact that you may envy them. But make that feeling a way of pushing yourself to equal or surpass *them* someday. Let envy turn inward and it poisons the soul; expel it outward and it can move you to greater heights.

Second, understand that as you gain power, those below you will feel envious of *you*. They may not show it but it is inevitable. Do not naively accept the facade they show you—read between the lines of their criticisms, their little sarcastic remarks, the signs of backstabbing, the excessive praise that is preparing you for a fall, the resentful look in the eye. Half the problem with envy comes when we do not recognize it until it is too late.

Finally, expect that when people envy you they will work against you insidiously. They will put obstacles in your path that you will not foresee, or that you cannot trace to their source. It is hard to defend yourself against this kind of attack. And by the time you realize that envy is at the root of a

person's feelings about you, it is often too late: Your excuses, your false humility, your defensive actions, only exacerbate the problem. Since it is far easier to avoid creating envy in the first place than to get rid of it once it is there, you should strategize to forestall it before it grows. It is often your own actions that stir up envy, your own unawareness. By becoming conscious of those actions and qualities that create envy, you can take the teeth out of it before it nibbles you to death.

Kierkegaard believed that there are types of people who create envy, and are as guilty when it arises as those who feel it. The most obvious type we all know: The moment something good happens to them, whether by luck or design, they crow about it. In fact they get pleasure out of making people feel inferior. This type is obvious and beyond hope. There are others, however, who stir up envy in more subtle and unconscious ways, and are partly to blame for their troubles. Envy is often a problem, for example, for people with great natural talent.

Sir Walter Raleigh was one of the most brilliant men at the court of Queen Elizabeth of England. He had skills as a scientist, wrote poetry still recognized as among the most beautiful writing of the time, was a proven leader of men, an enterprising entrepreneur, a great sea captain, and on top of all this was a handsome, dashing courtier who charmed his way into becoming one of the queen's favorites. Wherever he went, however, people blocked his path. Eventually he suffered a terrific fall from grace, leading even to prison and finally the executioner's axe.

Raleigh could not understand the stubborn opposition he faced from the other courtiers. He did not see that he had not only made no attempt to disguise the degree of his skills and qualities, he had imposed them on one and all, making a show of his versatility, thinking it impressed people and won him friends. In fact it made him silent enemies, people who felt inferior to him and did all they could to ruin him the moment he tripped up or made the slightest mistake. In the end, the reason he was executed was treason, but envy will use any cover it finds to mask its destructiveness.

The envy elicited by Sir Walter Raleigh is the worst kind: It was inspired by his natural talent and grace, which he felt was best displayed in its full flower. Money others can attain; power as well. But superior intelligence, good looks, charm—these are qualities no one can acquire. The naturally perfect have to work the most to disguise their brilliance, displaying a defect or two to deflect envy before it takes root. It is a common and naive

mistake to think you are charming people with your natural talents when in fact they are coming to hate you.

JOSEPH AND HIS COAT

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colors.... And his brothers envied him.... And when they saw him afar off, they conspired against him to slay him. And now they said to one another, "Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we shall say, some evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams"

OLD TESTAMENT, GENESIS 37:3—20

THE TRAGEDY OF THE TOMB

[When Pope Julius first saw Michelangelo's design for his tomb] it pleased him so much that he at once sent him to Carrara to quarry the necessary marbles, instructing Alamanno Salviati, of Florence, to pay him a thousand ducats for this purpose. Michelangelo stayed in these mountains more than eight months with two workmen and his horse, and without any other provision except food.... Enough marbles quarried and chosen, he took them to the sea-coast, and left one of his men to have them embarked. He himself returned to Rome.

... The quantity of marbles was immense, so that, spread over the piazza, they were the admiration of all and a joy to the pope, who heaped immeasurable favors upon Michelangelo: and when he began to work upon them again and again went to see him at his house, and talked to him about the tomb and other things as with his own brother. And in order that he might more easily go to him, the pope ordered that a drawbridge should be thrown across from the Corridore to the rooms of Michelangelo, by which he might visit him in private.

These many and frequent favors were the cause (as often is the case at court) of much envy, and, after the envy, of endless persecution, since Bramante, the architect, who was loved by the pope, made him change his mind as to the monument by telling him, as is said by the vulgar, that it is

unlucky to build one's tomb in one's lifetime, and other tales. Fear as well as envy stimulated Bramante, for the judgment of Michelangelo had exposed many of his errors.... Now because he had no doubt that Michelangelo knew these errors of his, he always sought to remove him from Rome, or, at least, to deprive him of the favor of the pope, and of the glory and usefulness that he might have acquired by his industry. He succeeded in the matter of the tomb. There is no doubt that if Michelangelo had been allowed to finish it, according to his first design, having so large a field in which to show his worth, no other artist, however celebrated (be it said without envy) could have wrested from him the high place he would have held.

VITA DI MICHELANGELO, ASCANIO CONDIVI, 1553

A great danger in the realm of power is the sudden improvement in fortune—an unexpected promotion, a victory or success that seems to come out of nowhere. This is sure to stir up envy among your former peers.

When Archbishop de Retz was promoted to the rank of cardinal, in 1651, he knew full well that many of his former colleagues envied him. Understanding the foolishness of alienating those below him, de Retz did everything he could to downplay his merit and emphasize the role of luck in his success. To put people at ease, he acted humbly and deferentially, as if nothing had changed. (In reality, of course, he now had much more power than before.) He wrote that these wise policies “produced a good effect, by lessening the envy which was conceived against me, which is the greatest of all secrets.” Follow de Retz’s example. Subtly emphasize how lucky you have been, to make your happiness seem more attainable to other people, and the need for envy less acute. But be careful not to affect a false modesty that people can easily see through. This will only make them more envious. The act has to be good; your humility, and your openness to those you have left behind, have to seem genuine. Any hint of insincerity will only make your new status more oppressive. Remember: Despite your elevated position, it will do you no good to alienate your former peers. Power requires a wide and solid support base, which envy can silently destroy.

Political power of any kind creates envy, and one of the best ways to deflect it before it takes root is to seem unambitious. When Ivan the Terrible died, Boris Godunov knew he was the only one on the scene who could lead

Russia. But if he sought the position eagerly, he would stir up envy and suspicion among the boyars, so he refused the crown, not once but several times. He made people insist that he take the throne. George Washington used the same strategy to great effect, first in refusing to keep the position of Commander in Chief of the American army, second in resisting the presidency. In both cases he made himself more popular than ever. People cannot envy the power that they themselves have given a person who does not seem to desire it.

According to the Elizabethan statesman and writer Sir Francis Bacon, the wisest policy of the powerful is to create a kind of pity for themselves, as if their responsibilities were a burden and a sacrifice. How can one envy a man who has taken on a heavy load for the public interest? Disguise your power as a kind of self-sacrifice rather than a source of happiness and you make it seem less enviable. Emphasize your troubles and you turn a potential danger (envy) into a source of moral support (pity). A similar ploy is to hint that your good fortune will benefit those around you. To do this you may need to open your purse strings, like Cimon, a wealthy general in ancient Athens who gave lavishly in all kinds of ways to prevent people from resenting the influence he had bought in Athenian politics. He paid a high price to deflect their envy, but in the end it saved him from ostracism and banishment from the city.

The painter J. M. W. Turner devised another way of giving to deflect the envy of his fellow artists, which he recognized as his greatest obstacle to his success. Noticing that his incomparable color skills made them afraid to hang their paintings next to his in exhibitions, he realized that their fear would turn to envy, and would eventually make it harder for him to find galleries to show in. On occasion, then, Turner is known to have temporarily dampened the colors in his paintings with soot to earn him the goodwill of his colleagues.

To deflect envy, Gracián recommends that the powerful display a weakness, a minor social indiscretion, a harmless vice. Give those who envy you something to feed on, distracting them from your more important sins. Remember: It is the reality that matters. You may have to play games with appearances, but in the end you will have what counts: true power. In some Arab countries, a man will avoid arousing envy by doing as Cosimo de Medici did by showing his wealth only on the inside of his house. Apply this wisdom to your own character.

Beware of some of envy's disguises. Excessive praise is an almost sure sign that the person praising you envies you; they are either setting you up for a fall—it will be impossible for you to live up to their praise—or they are sharpening their blades behind your back. At the same time, those who are hypercritical of you, or who slander you publicly, probably envy you as well. Recognize their behavior as disguised envy and you keep out of the trap of mutual mud-slinging, or of taking their criticisms to heart. Win your revenge by ignoring their measly presence.

Do not try to help or do favors for those who envy you; they will think you are condescending to them. Joe Orton's attempt to help Halliwell find a gallery for his work only intensified his lover's feelings of inferiority and envy. Once envy reveals itself for what it is, the only solution is often to flee the presence of the enviers, leaving them to stew in a hell of their own creation.

Finally, be aware that some environments are more conducive to envy than others. The effects of envy are more serious among colleagues and peers, where there is a veneer of equality. Envy is also destructive in democratic environments where overt displays of power are looked down upon. Be extrasensitive in such environments. The filmmaker Ingmar Bergman was hounded by Swedish tax authorities because he stood out in a country where standing out from the crowd is frowned on. It is almost impossible to avoid envy in such cases, and there is little you can do but accept it graciously and take none of it personally. As Thoreau once said, "Envy is the tax which all distinction must pay."

Did ever anybody seriously confess to envy? Something there is in it universally felt to be more shameful than even felonious crime. And not only does everybody disown it, but the better sort are inclined to incredulity when it is in earnest imputed to an intelligent man. But since lodgment is in the heart not the brain, no degree of intellect supplies a guarantee against it.

BILLY BUDD, HERMAN MELVILLE, 1819-1891

Image: A Garden of Weeds. You may not feed them but they spread as you water the garden. You may not see how, but they take over, tall and ugly, preventing anything beautiful from

flourishing. Before it is too late,
do not water indiscrimi-
nately. Destroy the weeds
of envy by giving them
nothing to feed on.

Authority: Upon occasion, reveal a harmless defect in your character. For the envious accuse the most perfect of sinning by having no sins. They become an Argus, all eyes for finding fault with excellence—it is their only consolation. Do not let envy burst with its own venom—affect some lapse in valor or intellect, so as to disarm it beforehand. You thus wave your red cape before the Horns of Envy, in order to save your immortality. (Baltasar Gracián, 1601-1658)

Know how to triumph over envy and malice. Here contempt, although prudent, counts, indeed, for little; magnanimity is better. A good word concerning one who speaks evil of you cannot be praised too highly: there is no revenge more heroic than that brought about by those merits and attainments which frustrate and torment the envious. Every stroke of good fortune is a further twist of the rope round the neck of the ill-disposed and the heaven of the envied is hell for the envious. To convert your good fortune into poison for your enemies is held to be the most severe punishment you can inflict on them. The envious man dies not only once but as many times as the person he envies lives to hear the voice of praise; the eternity of the latter's fame is the measure of the former's punishment: the one is immortal in his glory, the latter in his misery. The trumpet of fame which sounds immortality for the one heralds death for the other, who is sentenced to be choked to death on his own envy.

BALTASAR GRACIÁN, 1601-1658

REVERSAL

The reason for being careful with the envious is that they are so indirect, and will find innumerable ways to undermine you. But treading carefully around them will often only make their envy worse. They sense that you are being cautious, and it registers as yet another sign of your superiority. That is why you must act before envy takes root.

Once envy is there, however, whether through your fault or not, it is sometimes best to affect the opposite approach: Display the utmost disdain for those who envy you. Instead of hiding your perfection, make it obvious. Make every new triumph an opportunity to make the envious squirm. Your good fortune and power become their living hell. If you attain a position of unimpeachable power, their envy will have no effect on you, and you will have the best revenge of all: They are trapped in envy while you are free in your power.

This is how Michelangelo triumphed over the venomous architect Bramante, who turned Pope Julius against Michelangelo's design for his tomb. Bramante envied Michelangelo's godlike skills, and to this one triumph—the aborted tomb project—he thought to add another, by pushing the pope to commission Michelangelo to paint the murals in the Sistine Chapel. The project would take years, during which Michelangelo would accomplish no more of his brilliant sculptures. Furthermore, Bramante considered Michelangelo not nearly as skilled in painting as in sculpture. The chapel would spoil his image as the perfect artist.

Michelangelo saw the trap and wanted to turn down the commission, but he could not refuse the pope, so he accepted it without complaint. Then, however, he used Bramante's envy to spur him to greater heights, making the Sistine Chapel his most perfect work of all. Every time Bramante heard of it or saw it, he felt more oppressed by his own envy—the sweetest and most lasting revenge you can exact on the envious.