

my back on Fenstermacher's forever. Perhaps the unshaded light bulbs, hung starkly from their ceiling cords, had glared at me once too often. Perhaps the water cooler was empty one time too many. It may be that the filthy linoleum was uncommonly unbearable. Whatever my reasons were, I found that my decision to leave brought great relief. I ascended that night into a smoke-blackened city whose streets were swept with rain; but my heart was filled with sunshine.

"English As She's Not Taught"

Bill Duff

IN APPROACHING the problem of deriving clear meaning in English, Barzun states that the principle of mental discipline should be made clear to every beginner, child or adult. However, he adds, the schools make writing an irrational chore approached in the mood of rebellion by requiring length and concentrating on correctness.

How right he is! I could not agree more.

In the primary grades the student realizes, with a rude shock, that he not only has to learn to read reading, but also to read writing and write reading. The extent of this disciplined education stops, however, with the firm differentiation between making neat circles on lined white paper and informing the world that "Herman is a rat" on the rest-room wall.

Other attempts of self-expression are sterilized by bringing to his attention mistakes of grammar, punctuation and spelling in a confiscated love letter written in secret code.

This conflict between teacher and student develops into a struggle to get all of the requirements of an assignment fulfilled without the student's invoking the Fifth Amendment. The student tries to avoid this because invoking the Fifth Amendment requires the use of only nineteen words, and he knows that it is best, when you do not know much, to say a lot.

What view could the student develop other than that compositions are like a bolt of cloth: to be reeled off in the required length? The fact that the cloth contains no pattern or originality is to be expected. This eliminates the need of any effort on the part of the teacher to judge the material with any but the accepted academic scale.

The ability to rapidly throw up a wall of words to hide ignorance stands the student in good stead in later life.

In college he observes that the objective test is apparently graded by the difference in weight between a new blue book and one to which lead has been applied. If you do not comprehend what the professor wants, give him enough wordage, and he can find his own answer.

Outside in the jungle, the graduate advocates the proposition that a prolific use of words is supposed to indicate a degree of intelligence—thus perpetuating a vicious circle.