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 com-
positions 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 aca-
demic 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 in-
telligence—thus perpetuating a vicious circle.