



The Underground GRAMMARIAN



VOLUME FIVE, NUMBER TWO

FEBRUARY, 1981

Voucher, Schmoucher

THERE is very little to be gained and much to be lost in assuring, through education voucher schemes or tuition tax credits, that the public school system will become entirely what it is now only partly—the last, futile hope of the permanently dispossessed and disabled. We say this with testy reluctance, and certainly *not*, as regular readers will know, because we can see any hope that the jargon-besotted and uneducated tribes of educationists and teacher-trainers will ever provide the land with literate and thoughtful citizens, but because there is no chance at all that credits or vouchers would destroy or even mitigate the government schools, which have proven again and again that they can easily digest and transform into nourishment any complaint brought against them. As the better and luckier students—and teachers—escape, our cunning educationists will have no trouble persuading the same old agencies and legislatures that they now need even *more* money. But the voucher and credit schemes probably *will* destroy the worth of the private schools.

To see why, we must consider some popular, widely preached misunderstandings:

“The public schools could provide better education if we gave them more money.” This is false. We give them far too much money. They spend it on gimmicks and gadgets and programs and proposals and whole legions of apparatchiks and uneducated busybodies and Ladies Bountiful manquées. The private schools just don’t have

that kind of money. That’s why they’re often so much better. If we were to enrich the private schools, most of them would hire the recently unemployed values clarification facilitators and start offering courses in environmental awareness enhancement and creative expression of self-as-individual-self through collage. In a few years, we would have thousands of private schools just as bad as the public schools are now. Furthermore, bad private schools, **unlike bad public schools**, can do as they damn well please just as long as they can find buyers for what they choose to sell, and they will care no more for our opinions, or yours, than the mongers of obscene T-shirts care about our quaint canons of taste. The people who run the government schools can at least be ridiculed and humiliated in public.

All of that must be seen in the darkness cast by another popular misunderstanding: “Parents should be free to choose for their children whatever kind of education they think best.” This is *not* false, for it asserts only a special case of that right to the pursuit of happiness to which we are supposed to be committed. It is, however, irrelevant and (perhaps) unintentionally cynical, for it presumes the possibility of “free choice” in countless millions of innocent citizens **who** have themselves been “educated” by the life-adjustment slogan-mongers, and who have come to “think” that a good education in an indoctrination in *their* pet notions and beliefs rather than someone else’s. Their choices of schools for their children will be no more the fruit of informed and thoughtful discretion than their choices of deodorants and designer jeans. The support they might withdraw, through vouchers or credits, from one pack of fools and charlatans they would fork over to another of the same, which, furthermore, will usually be an *ad hoc* reconstitution of the first pack, now happily embarked on what is for them just one more obviously profitable, bold, innovative thrust. (Continued on page 4.)

Strangers in Paradigms or, The Hegemony Connection

WE are not guilty of omitting capital letters in the title of the passage reprinted below. Nor is that omission to be accounted, strictly speaking, an "error," except, of course, in taste. It is merely an example of what is known to printers as "cockroach typography," an affectation once thought more appropriate in ads for emporia devoted to the swift removal of unsightly hair than to the announcement of scholarly colloquia on the "richness—past, present, *and* future—of our collective humanistic treasury."

Cockroach typography is named after archy, that courageous cummings of cockroaches, who had to write his poetry by diving headfirst onto the typewriter keys, but could not manage the shift. And had the describer of "the paradigm exchange" been required to compose his piece in the same way, Earth would be more fair.

the paradigm exchange took place not, as you might well imagine, at Checkpoint Charlie in a murky fog, but at the University of Minnesota in a murky fog. It might not have been, however, quite the innocent romp it seems. Indeed, our staff cryptanalyst has concluded that the colloquium was nothing less than a "cover" for a covert operation laid on by a band of royalty-rich humanities professors in collusion with the international banking and fund-laundering cartel. In support of his hypothesis, he contends that the cited passage is obviously in code, which he unravels thus: "Taking stock. Capitalize currency exchanges [and/or] brokerages. Coin bank deposits richness treasury."

Well, while we do admit that an international conspiracy of professors and bankers is certainly more plausible than a brokerage characterized by exchanges of tools and explorations of modes, and than the examination of forms (*and* the paradigms themselves) through the appli-

cation of modes; and while it is true that the supposedly decoded message makes a bit more sense than the original text, we're just not buying it. Those folk are *intellectuals*, dammit! They aren't even a pack of educationists, never mind international conspirators. We're going to give them the benefit of the doubt and assure you that there is probably nothing more sinister in that passage than a muddled and inappropriate metaphor, some vain-glorious but routine jargon, and perhaps a pervasive malaise compounded of pretentiousness and the perfectly justifiable fear of academicians that no one out in the world is taking them seriously.

But the cryptanalyst remains unconvinced. He smugly points out that this so-called paradigm exchange provides a morning session called "*Accounting for the Disciplines*" (*his italics*), and then an afternoon session, "*More Accounting for the Disciplines*" (ditto). We reply that disciplines do indeed seem to require lots of accounting for, especially those that might be brokered through papers about "Modes of Space and Interiority: Ontology or Sociology," "Proust's Paradigm: A Production, a Figure, an Object of

Reading," to say nothing of "'Sociality' and 'Historicity' as Categories in Literary Reception" and the "Hegemony of Interpretation."

That was the point that convinced our stubborn decoder. He finally had to admit that no self-respecting gang of hard-eyed money manipulators and bagmen would take the risk of doing business with bozos who run so easily off at the mouth. Only a public institution of higher learning can take a chance like that.

So, thank goodness, the paradigm exchange was probably just a harmless frolic of porseffors. And why not? If the poets are to be the unacknowledged legislators of the world, they will surely need some help, some bureaucrats and appliers of analytical models, some paperpushers and methodologists of analysis and interpretation. Those artist types are clever enough in their own little specialties, but you can't expect them to handle the hard stuff. For that you need porseffors.

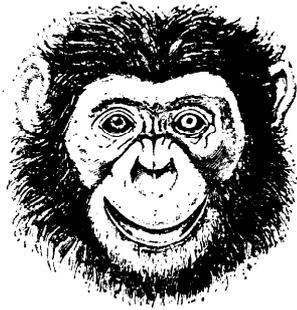
It happened once that archy's boss, Don Marquis, invited the insect to visit him at home, provided only that he come without any friends or kinfolk. To that, the Villon of vermin replied:

boss
you should have learned
by this time
that literature
makes strange
bedfellows

So where is that cockroach, now that we need him?

the paradigm exchange

Taking stock of the state of critical inquiry in the humanities and arts, this colloquium capitalizes on the diversity among the disciplines, and the currency of creative theories and methodologies of textual analysis and interpretation that bring changing perspectives to scholars and students. Exchanges of texts and tools and explorations of new modes of humanistic thinking characterize the brokerage of the colloquium. Through application of numerous analytical models, a variety of art forms will be examined. This will be followed by an examination of the paradigms themselves, coined in realms that bank deposits from anthropology, physics, history, and linguistics, to literature, philosophy, sociology, and psychology. The Colloquium aims to inventory the richness—past, present, and future—of our collective humanistic treasury.



Yes, we have Some Bananas

HERE at Glassboro State College we are blessed with some of America's most outstanding campus humor publications. And they're *free*, too! The citizens of New Jersey cheerfully bear the expense, because they understand (we've told them and told them) that the worst thing that can happen to a school is that it might become *less* fun than a barrel of monkeys.

Never fear. It can't happen here, certainly not so long as we continue to enjoy the services of scores of people like those funny folk in Co-operative Education, for instance. Their latest brochure starts *right off* with this absolutely socko bit of dialog: "What is cooperative education? In it's simplist definition, it is learning by doing." How about *that*? You're not going to find that class of humor in the *Harvard Lampoon*, you know.

And whatever we may lack in class, we make up for in comedy. Other schools will have a top banana and a few seconds, maybe, but we have middle bananas, bottom bananas, and even a platoon of assistant vice-bananas.

We may even have some adjunct bananas, for some of our ribticklingest copy appears regularly in those little catalogs of cute courses sent out by the Office of Adult Continuing Education. (Even the title gets a snicker, implying the risible existence of that from which it is so laboriously distinguished—Juvenile Instantaneous Education.) Notice, for instance, how the possibly forbidding academic solemnity of a course called "Betting to Win" (wittily listed in the "Finance" section) is entertainingly alleviated when would-be students are exhorted: "Gain a solid and workable understanding of the intricacies surrounding most thoroughbred race tracks." If you've never driven through the traffic circles of southern New Jersey, you might not get that clever joke, but that is *your* failing, and certainly not the humorist's.

Then there's the Psychologists' Conference, open not to just anyone, of course, however adult and continuing, but only to "School Psychologists with intermediate to advanced level experience in personality assessment." What could be drearier? But a Glassboro gag writer can

always find exactly the right, deft touch with which to lighten even so dismal an occasion as a convocation of personality assessors with one level experience or another:

The program is designed to enhance interaction between the participants and guest speakers. All participants and guest speakers are encouraged to stay overnight.

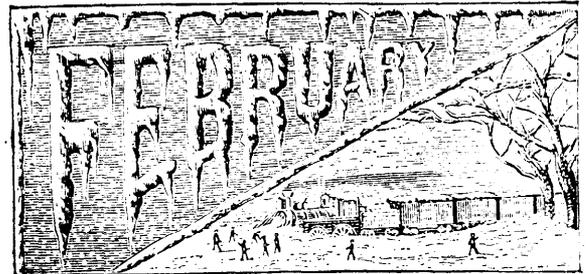
(On the other hand, we could be wrong. Maybe it isn't intended to be funny at all, but simply to suggest, if only to the cognoscenti of interaction enhancement, that adult education is to education as adult books are to books.)

Sometimes, of course, the humor of the Adult Continuing Education catalog is tinged with melancholy. Consider, for example, "Job Options for Educators":

This workshop is specifically designed for educators who wish to explore alternative careers. Participants will have the opportunity to explore various career options consistent with their interests, values, skills and special abilities.

That *is* funny, we admit. Very funny. But it's kind of sad too, don't you think? After all, there just aren't that many openings for people whose interests, values, skills, and special abilities are so accurately portrayed in their contributions to our journals of campus humor.

Well, let's not let that unhappy thought spoil the fun all those wonderful people bring us. Besides, they can always stay on as "educators," laughing all the way.



The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Published monthly, September to May
R. Mitchell, Assistant Circulation Manager
Post Office Box 203, Glassboro, New Jersey 08028
Annual subscription: US & Canada, \$10; others, \$14

*Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune, whose words do jarre;
nor his reason in frame, whose sentence is preposterous.*



A Certain Trumpet

WE'VE recently had a terrible fright. Some rascally reader sent us a copy of an essay from a sheet called "Journal of Developmental & Remedial Education." Very promising. Even better, the author, a certain Paul Rice, was identified as Director of Developmental Studies at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Heh heh. What could be better?

As it turned out, a poke in the eye with a sharp stick could have been better. Just imagine our chagrin as we read Rice's very first paragraph:

Amid the recent national fervor in developmental education, I noticed a disturbing tendency: we are having trouble thinking and we are having trouble talking.

When the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? *We* will, and gladly too. But

this Rice seemed to be tooting in tune. And, sure enough, the obstinate fellow kept hitting right notes:

There is talk of intervention strategies, diagnosticians, prescriptionists; of clinics and postures and modalities. We are being medical when we have no business doing so; we are attempting to elevate mundane ideas to academic respectability by giving them proud but meaningless names, and we are attempting to appear in control of situations we don't understand.

So what are we supposed to do with a man like that? He not only refuses to write the standard educationistic gobbledegook, but he actually *encourages* the same elitist dereliction in others. Should his friends flock to follow his feisty fanfare, it would mean the end of **THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN** as we know and love it.

We are not, however, without hope. This Paul Rice, if there really *is* such a person, has probably played his last trump. In the coda, he sticks his neck out thus:

Last week a young man came seeking a job in our developmental studies program. He left his resume. It spoke of 'transhumanistic learning experiences,' of 'self-sufficiency experiences,' of 'holistic learning strategies.' No doubt he will find a job somewhere. But I sent him packing.

When that young transhumanistic experimenter reports to the teacher training academy where he learned all that neat stuff, the whole **confraternity** of educationists will rise in wrath against Rice and bash in his embouchure.

Voucher, Schmoucher...

We can understand the angry desperation out of which even thoughtful citizens can propose, as remedy for the ills caused by one governmental contraption, yet another governmental contraption. And any system for credits will be exactly that, a wholly owned subsidiary of the state and a bureaucratic agency for the propagation of ideology and the enforcement of "standards." And the standards will be devised not by the enthusiasts of vouchers, who don't really know exactly what they want anyway, but by the same old coalition of educationists and unionists and politicians and social engineers and manufacturers of gimmicks and publishers of pseudobooks, who *do* know exactly what they want, and exactly how to get it.

It is simply naive to imagine that our government, or any government anywhere, will construe tax credits or vouchers as a way of letting its citizens keep, and spend as they please, some of their own money. Such devices will be thought of as "subsidies," and loftily denounced,

especially by those whose livelihoods depend entirely on perpetual subsidization of the public schools, their pandemic problems, and their Byzantine and costly governance, as "handouts" of "public" money. Should credits or vouchers be provided by law, the same law would have to provide, as *quid pro quo* to a tremendous and noisy lobby of government employees, that most of the policies and practices that make the private schools what they are would suddenly become illegal. When private schools are required to hire certified graduates of state teacher academies, and to offer all the mandated mickeymoussery of social adjustment disguised as "studies," and to make sure that the ninth grade textbook for Appreciation of Alternative Life Styles doesn't use any tenth grade vocabulary words, then the erstwhile voucherites will long for the good old days, when you could at least get what you paid for, and when the private schools actually *were* an alternative to government education.

Those voucher and credit schemes were probably *not* cooked up by a conspiracy of educationists. Those people aren't that smart. But you just can't beat them for luck.