

The Old Streetwalker

Roaming pointlessly down concrete roads,
The old street walker
Tossed like a dirty paper scrap,
Facing pizza-eating lovers
Through rain-dropped window walls,
Thinks of other days.
Muttering unheard curses
To the air
Form the impotent filth
Of his existence,
Thinking
He may have already died.

Paul McNeil

The following article entitled, *The Effects of Sputnik On American Education*, does not reflect the feelings of the staff of the *Alembic*. We feel however, that the *Alembic* should be a forum for opposing viewpoints. In this spirit, then, we publish this article, along with a rebuttal written by a member of the *Alembic* staff, which asks some questions which we feel the former author has left unasked or has clouded.

Editor

A LOOK AT VIETNAM IN '69

or

THE EFFECTS OF SPUTNIK ON AMERICAN EDUCATION

Americans have always taken pride in their industrial and technological advancements, and rightly so, for theirs is the mightiest country in the world. Like at the peak of the Roman Empire, the United States in 1957 was at a standstill — the people were satisfied, fun-loving, and altogether happy. Unfortunately, unlike the bitter decline that was Rome's, America had a rude awakening which sparked the impetus towards a better education, particularly in the field of science. Sputnik I brought the proud Americans something to gasp for, and turned eagles into chickens.

No doubt this was a great psychological shock — to think that a nation which dominated the earth for three quarters of a century was being surpassed by a country seemingly filled with illiterates, peasants, and barbarians. "But America will not be overtaken!" so shouted the politicians. Surely this great land would rebound and produce another savior, another Einstein. What was there to worry about?

And so the upper class, ignoring the lower class, explored the middle class to seek out the cause for this great humiliation. "Painstakingly," so they said, "we have examined every aspect of our society which could have created this unimaginable situation where we are placed second in the field of technology and science where we have been at the apex for an unprecedented number of years." Painstakingly they examined the government, the attitude of the public, the job training, the industries, and the research facilities. And, painstakingly, after a record scrutiny of four days and ten hours, they concluded that the American system of education was at fault.

In panic-stricken times, the people are disunited, frenzied; but there is nothing like a common butt to get everybody rolling again, and the educational system *really* got things rolling.

Since their founding, the majority of colleges in America gave a sound cultural education — a liberal education. Tribute should be given for the wisdom of these universities because democracy itself demands a well-rounded educated populace; a liberal arts course produced the order. And so college graduates went out into the world knowing a little bit about everything and a lot about one thing. They were prepared; they carried this lowly colony to a respected nation.

"But where are our scientists?" they asked. "We do not need twentieth-century Shakespeares, but physicists, atomic specialists, chemists, computer experts, and mathematical geni." In order to produce these machines, they introduced advanced science and math courses into the school system, eliminating some "out-dated" courses such as music, art, and language, finally committing the ultimate sin by phasing out Bible study. They even tried to replace English with psyconucleophysics, but the mothers, who wanted to understand their children when they arrived home from school, wouldn't hear of it.

Twelve years later, Americans are still proud, contented, and altogether happy. There's Telstar floating around somewhere, along with Saturn, Apollo, Mercury, Ajax, and Aphrodite. Thousands of mathematicians, computer analysts, physicists, and rocket experts are roaming the streets.

"America is first in astronautics!"

We give them thanks.

Twelve years later, Americans refuse to fight for their freedom, for their birthright, for their country. They are undisciplined, licentious,

and uncultured. Every post-Sputnik college graduate can state and outline Einstein's theory of relativity and nasa's code of ethics. The average freshman can perform the most intricate calculus problem Descartes had never seen. But this generation has never heard of Dante and Rousseau, Wordsworth and Dostoyevsky, Socrates and Kierkegaard.

Consequently the youth of America can solve complicated scientific problems, but not the problem of life itself. They are making a farce of democracy with constant demonstrations and outright indifference towards authority. They have Telstar accompanying Sputnik, but they lack the backbone which a liberal education gives.

by Paul J. Richards

A LOOK AT INTELLECTUAL SNOBBERY IN '71

and/or

THE EFFECTS OF AMERICAN EDUCATION ON THE AMERICAN EDUCATED

It has been implied that the fact of the United States falling behind the Soviet Union in the space race back in 1957 led this great nation's government to emphasize scientific study in its educational system, which created a crop of uncultured college students, who refuse to fight in Vietnam.

A few questions: Is it really true that the people of the 'greatest nation in the world' were 'satisfied, fun-loving, and altogether happy' before Sputnik? If so, which people?

Is the Soviet Union really a 'country seemingly filled with illiterates, peasants, and barbarians'? If so, how can Dostoyevsky be listed as a prerequisite for the so-called cultural jet set?

Can Einstein be classified as a 'saviour' of the greatest country in the world when the people he saved were the poor of another race?

Why ignore the lower class? Are they too low?

What's a 'well-rounded, educated populace'?

Did any members of the well-rounded set go out into the real world and find out that all that knowledge they had didn't mean anything?

A few answers: I refuse to go to war. I cannot outline Einstein's theory of relativity. I got a D in Calculus. I have heard of Dante and Rousseau, Wordsworth and Dostoyevsky, Socrates and Kierkegaard. I can't solve scientific problems. I can't solve the problem of life. I am indifferent towards all authority which thinks it knows what God wants us all to do. I never think of Telstar and Sputnik. I possess a backbone, and also a typically dull, irrelevant college attendance-record-contest diploma (otherwise known as a college education).

Two questions: Am I cultured? What's Telstar?

Paul McNeil

return of judas viator

feet pressed to the earth:
the pain of wood,
of stone,
and of church glass
worries the cracked, marble feet
on the italian valleys.
now ritual has belied
its own myth with a kiss:
only rain washes where tears cleansed;
grasses clutch where hair once held.
the crosiers
have become a balustrade in ruin,
not even the celestial cathedral
remains.

skyles rhys

spanish soliloquy

yes, now is the time.
for it is now, in the pre-twilight,
that seventeen flies
pursue another seventeen.
and yes, it is in the meantime
that each blade
of night sharpens
itself again
against the hills
and now, before the beaten faces
of the condemned,
that each fly
is caught and digested
and the day vomits forth
its past wickedness.

skyles rhys

Day.
Whistling a half-dead Irish ditty,
The stumbling whiskey-wiskered bum
Fumbles his hand inside the right pocket
Of the long-ragged coat that covers him;
Grabbing there, for a crumpled cigarette
He finds later in the left.

No matches.
"No I haven't!"
The blonde lady yells
For him to stay away,
To leave her be.
She flees,
To the M.T.A.,
To Kenmore,
To Simmon's College for Women.

The bum gets his match finally,
And sits on the straight-green-board park benches,
To smoke his crumpled daydreams,
To watch the pigeons
Bicker and peck at one another,
Fighting for a lonesome peanut
That lies beside the bum's untied,
Tattered-black leather shoe.

Dusk.
It starts to shower,
Falling like tear-droplets
To the green-board benches,
But the bum stays sitting through it.
His weary eyes pan the dismal park,
Noticing the fat lady who collects for the needy
(Somewhere far away) waddle to a nearby phone booth.
A business man moves through the drizzle,
Holding the Boston *Globe* over his head for protection.
Career women with short skirts and made-up faces
Scurry to their tree-houses like nervous squirrels.

From the bum's soaked head
A bead of rain slips and rolls
To the tip of his nose,
Where it hangs momentarily,
Then falls to the black tar, shiny with wetness.

Night.
Flickering, car lights shimmer and glare
Into the damp drops, searching to see.
Flashing, neon signs silently stare open and closed,
Like great multicolored eyes begging to be seen.

The park lamps look faded-yellow down
From the puddled walks and soggy-brown peanut bags
To the bum,
Now lying asleep or dead with the echoey drone
Of cars in motion . . .

by Charles J. O'Neil Jr.

jews, circa 1940

. . . bodies like wax,
and when they
melted, john donne, there was nothing metaphysical
about them . . .

skyles rhys

How Awesome is this Place

I watched from a window to a street below
How the wind wavered and quivered the black wires
Strung from stick to stick, stuck in the road.
Stray cats hideously screamed,
From garbage-gutted ghetto alleys, Pain:
All men's fear forced dead by frustration.

Dank Evening. The lonely groaning church toll's sour,
Leaking unevenly, telling the hour.

Hellish Night. Reeking of need and a lying desire,
Thanatos, silver scorpion, against the sacred cows
his seed fires for the calves' growth:
Sick and deformed and wierd of soul.
Morning?

by Charles J. O'Neil Jr.

Boochikoochicoo, baby, bye, see the stars in the sky, and please,
Don't pick your nose, Robert.
. . . But, it itched, father, and I forgot,
Excuses, , really, just don't let it happen again, aghast, simply
ahoy there, it seems the ship of the heavens is gone astray. If God
had as many angels as there are stars in the sky, could they
all fit on the head of . . . but the stars can't all be seen.
So, rockabye baby, in the tree top, if the
cradle stops, you'll probably wake up and then I won't be
able to sit here and look at the stars.

As Robert Hennegan Sr. thought on it, he realized that things
weren't very different. Twenty years ago, he had to mind his little
brother,
Billy, and now here he was walking his own two sons, Robert Jr.,
and James J. still kept from looking completely undistractedly at the
stars. It wasn't that he didn't like his sons- any man
in Dublin would be risking his life, or at least, a black eye,
to say there were two finer lads, anywhere. It was just the sky had so
much to show him. He saw a woman's plaintive movement. She was a
prisoner, and he would free her. Chains bound her, bound her
eternally,
no matter how hard he struggled with them, he couldn't even
give her an inch of freedom more- in fact it was as if she
didn't even know he was trying to rescue her. The look of sadness,
of eternal sadness, was all he saw. Didn't she know- he was her
hero, Achilles, Hector, Hennegan. Andromeda,
nose picking, Robert will you stop that, will stop, be saved,
tuckledo, tuckledee, cat, the mouse, and me makes three.

For a time as he walked Robert, could only see the stars, his sons,
their noises, their yells of joy and of annoyance, became
mingled and finally obliterated by the harmony which he could feel
the
sphere of her heavens producing. It was so . . . puurfect, so
symmetrical, his sons circling around him, just like the
satellites circling around Jupiter. In the pitch blackness, he could see
only the stars, he could feel akin . . .
the throb of their motion, was the pulse in his veins, he was
one with the heavens, and he knew them.
Blood of his blood, which planet has fostered him? Just as
he had fostered James J. which quasar's explosion marked the
orgasm which had resulted in the creation of Robert Hennegan. The
continuity he felt. The star of little town of Bethlehem, how
sweetly . . .
Three wise men, the star was the connection-man always felt
connected.
Connected or totally alone. He was either in the stars, or
he was alone. There were really only two places. Two. The thing
that scared him was sometimes, when he was alone, when it was
black
night, and when the stars stood out there shining so brilliantly, it
seemed
to him that their brilliance mocked the very
dullness of his existence. Robert, stop that. At least use your
handkerchief. It was then, that he wondered, and it must be
admitted,
doubted, whether he could be one with the stars. Alone, with the
stars
and the brilliance, he saw in himself no complementary brilliance,
only a soul devoid of any sparkle, a soul almost completely
extinguished of the fire which united him with the stars.
Andromeda was still in chains . . .

Michael A. Rybarski

as Mother beams

stretching galoshes and splitting seams
the packaged tot woozily ambles
out the kitchen door, as Mother beams;
blinded at first by wint'ry glare, he gambols
'midst the new-fallen snow — how nice it seems
to smell the peculiar freshness in the air
and to feel the sting of a sprouting blush —
but soon the undefiled drifts (lying where
any child might mindlessly rush)
beckon him: thus the enraptured tot races there
with an unsteady step (and runny nose),
all the while eyeing a certain majestic peak.
clambering up the mound he chose,
he pauses on its powd'ry summit, weak
and dizzy from this strenuous conquest; clothes
betraying the slushy route he took,
wearing a flushed and baleful look,
he wonders why, after a quest so bold,
both the mountain's top and his bottom grow cold.

Thomas Gray
'73

In his book *The Courage To Be*, Paul Tillich speaks about the meaning of meaninglessness. The world is meaningless when there is no good reason for a person to be, to exist. The meaning of meaninglessness lies in the rejection of this meaninglessness, or, as Tillich would say: "being must be thought as the negation of the negation of being." Concerning God: "The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God (the God of theism) has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt."

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. has faced us with the challenge 'to be' in the form of a 191-page, 127-chapter (paperback edition) book entitled very meaninglessly, *Cat's Cradle*. A man named John tells the story of how he had set out ("two wives ago, 250,000 cigarettes ago, 3,000 quarts of booze ago") to write a factual account of "what important Americans had done on the day when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan." The book was to be entitled *The Day The World Ended*. Instead, he has written a book called *Cat's Cradle*. The 'reason' for this turn of events is the same reason his name is John and not Jonah: "... not because I have been unlucky for others, but because somebody or something has compelled me to be certain places at certain times, without fail. Conveyances and motives, both conventional and bizarre have been provided. And, according to plan, at each appointed second, at each appointed place this Jonah was there." So what began as a factual, possibly meaningful endeavour in the field of history, ended as *Cat's Cradle*. The meaning of the cat's cradle, which is made by looping string through your fingers, is revealed by little Newt Hoennicker, midget son of the inventor of the atom bomb: "No damn cat and no damn cradle".

An accidental book with a meaningless title certainly provides the reader of *Cat's Cradle* with firm roots in meaninglessness. The meaning of this meaninglessness lies in John's discovery during the directionless course of the story, of a religion called *Bokononism*. John is telling the story of *Cat's Cradle* as a Bokononist who used to be a Christian. Only a Bokononist could write a story as meaningless as this, because Bokononism is the religion whose members embrace the meaninglessness of life with the courage to be.

The basic unit of the Bokononist religion is the *karass*: "... teams that do God's will without ever discovering what they are doing". A further elaboration of the *karass* is: "If you find your life tangled up with somebody else's life for no very logical reasons", writes Bokonon, "that person may be a member of your *karass*". Bokononism possesses many such meaningless terms, all defined with appropriate meaninglessness, and all included in the *Books of Bokonon*. Bokonon is the San Lorenzan pronunciation of the name 'Johnson', Lionel Boyd Johnson, a Negro Episcopalian who began Bokononism on the island in the Caribbean Sea called the Republic of San Lorenzo. It is on this island that fate ultimately placed John in his search for the facts "for the book I never finished, the book to be called *The Day The World Ended*".

Before anyone gets the idea that this review is a tract on Bokononism, it might be wise to quote what John writes on this point: "I do not intend that this book be a tract on behalf of Bokononism. I should like to offer a Bokononist warning about it, however. The first sentence in *The Books of Bokonon* is this: 'All of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies.'

With this, John begins to recount the story of his search for the facts about the day the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. He wants to find out what took place at the home of Dr. Felix Hoennicker on that fateful day. Dr. Hoennicker is the father of the bomb, and the father of Newt Hoennicker, Angela Hoennicker, and Franklin Hoennicker. John feels that the three Hoennicker children are members of his *karass* and from them he should be able to get the facts for the book. This creates a kind of wild-goose-chase of meaning and meaninglessness only Vonnegut could imagine. The trip involves as much as anything, John's abandonment of everything he had previously believed held meaning (e.g. God, America, government, science) and the simultaneous embracing of the truth in the lies of *Bokononism*. Bokonon writes: "... a fool ... is anyone who thinks he sees what God is Doing". As soon as anyone in the story expresses what they think is meaningful, or God's will, John counters with a true lie from Bokonon. He, John, doesn't concern himself with what should happen or what will happen, only with what has happened. And what has happened, as Bokonon simply states: "was meant to be". *Bokononism* defies anybody to find indestructable meaning in such a meaningless world. *The Fourteenth Book of Bokonon* is entitled: "What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?". This chapter contains one word and a period: "Nothing."

What can a man do? He can pursue his own individual concept of beauty and laugh occasionally at himself and the world and most of all God, the God of theism, Who disappears when the God of the courage to be, Bokonon, replaces him. *Bokononism* was outlawed on San Lorenzo and in 1929 Bokonon had filled out a police identification form, later used as part of a wanted poster of Bokonon. John writes: "But what interested me were some of the words Bokonon had chosen to put into the blanks in 1929. Wherever possible, he had taken the cosmic view, had taken into consideration, for instance, such things as the shortness of life and the longness of eternity. He reported his avocation as: 'Being alive'. He reported his principal occupation as: 'Being dead'."

Paul McNeil

"I don't want to hear any more of this big time blue suede shoes talk I know already your mother told me Brewster Street is full of them and I don't mind telling you that I got my clothes on Livery Street all my life and just because you're a musician it don't mean a thing, I won't allow it and I suspect a good many of these Brewster Streeters are going to end up on the Bowery I bin watching the crime in the newspaper I know."

And at this point of disbelief he ripped the Elvis Presley records from his hands and threw them down so as not to damage them (because they were bought with Pete's allowance, his *earned* money) but hard enough to make his point clear. I sure wanted to jump on them because being a younger brother it's tough to take seeing all those pretty girls he knows and goes to drive-ins with, but held myself and ran to the kitchen before I was brung into it. Soon there was no noticeable signs of the Brewster Street vs. Livery Street bout left and I emerged safe, clutching some pop. It was another day I would remember to be sure and I did especially when Pete was nice to me and only those times he did. There was moisture on my mouth when I said real grown up!

"Ten years from now you'll be glad he said those very words."

I knew my father was listening in the next room so later I went in bucking for an advance on my allowance, and I got it. He said not all too few words to me though:

"You'll be just like him kids are all alike you know but I'm hoping and trying hard not to let it bother me while the T.V. is working I know I can make through another week, two maybe if she don't come busting in bothering me about her bridge night and you know there's one thing I can't stand and that's a predictable woman and she is you know your mother is predictable like the 6 o'clock news and there ain't no cause for an advance but you haven't bothered me too much I have you and the T.V. is working and as long as you keep out of my hair I won't let you down there's all this talk about rock and roll and Nat King Cole well I don't like it and you know you'll be just like him kids are all alike you know."

His steam ran out and I knew I'd better leave and I did off to the pool parlor but don't pay no mind to him. He likes to have his say and I can't blame him. If I was him I would have jumped on those Elvis Presley records and make him mow the lawn.

Michael James Paul

Romantic comedies have had a bad name in American film, perhaps justifiably, since Doris Day and Rock Hudson appeared in things such as "Pillow Talk". They had been reduced to the level of high class TV situation comedies until "The Owl and The Pussycat" came along. You may retch at the idea of seeing a Barbra Streisand picture, but you will enjoy it despite yourself.

The story uses two basically stock characters; an intellectual writer who is trying to "find himself" and all that, and a down-to-earth, straightforward girl who happens to be a prostitute. They fight for a while, begin to see their own faults, and finally find that they are miserable without each other. At the end, they admit their faults to each other, kiss and make up, and presumably live happily ever after. If you think that sounds a little hackneyed, you're right. The situation itself is not much more than a reversal of the roles that Rock and Doris played. What makes this such a good film are the superb performances of George Segal and Barbara Streisand.

The great danger in using characters like these is that they tend to become little better than caricatures. But instead of trying to carry the whole film on a one-joke theme, Streisand and Segal play their characters in depth. They use the admittedly common plot as a frame for their almost burlesque comedy. Even more than the visual humor, which is good, the dialogue shows the talents of the two. Barbra Streisand can talk like a hooker so well I begin to suspect the accounts I have heard of her previous occupations. Segal is a foil to her in this area, and he is a great straight man.

What "The Owl and The Pussycat" does is act as a showcase for Streisand and Segal. As was seen, the plot itself is no masterpiece, but rather a taking-off place for the two. The same is true of the photography. It serves the function of showing the two actors, and lets them take it from there. It is not bad, just unremarkable.

Being a romantic comedy, the film has some faults inherent to that genre, that is, it is sometimes oversentimental. Even Barbra Streisand and George Segal cannot prevent it from getting a little sticky at points. The scene at the end, when the two finally reach an agreement, is similar to the work of another popular Segal. In fact, without Streisand and Segal, the film would have been nothing more than a piece of sentimental drivel.

"The Owl and The Pussycat" is no milestone in the history of film art, and it makes no great comment on the social problems of our time. It is just a very funny demonstration of the talent of two good actors. After seeing films such as "Joe" and "The Strawberry Statement" it was a very welcome change.

—Jim Greer

tears
the night before
with friends on sofas
of laughter
stories
of former people
in happy times

remember when?

hazy
midnights with shapeless
acquaintances

tears
the morning after
with strangers in beds
of laughter

Gene Gousie

Plaintive Recourse

The heart is a throbbing beast
melting in a potpourri of
filth, truth, fear
that constantly annoys
and forever you try to distort that message
from the garbage collector
disturb the message by
looking in mirrors;
building a house;
stepping on insects
stepping on litter
stepping on those that bring
the message to you ever
so
clear

But you are satisfied not to know;
you know you must be satisfied to know is not to satisfy
but to be satisfied

and here we all become the child
T.V. cooks the mind to digestable medium well,
and the water is cooling us to 33 degrees F

MODERATIONS MITIGATE MIMES

we have no immediate wants — we have no immediate wants
for we want and want to be able to want; to crave; to covet
only to satisfy that which we only ignore

for we all have a kindling point
which is known only to us — sometimes
that we never reveal exactly

We have only to feel through scars
of countless repercussions of the original act
and fill the never changing heart once again.

John Bucknavage

Read Me

Tell me a story,
any child enjoys
a fantasy.
tell me you love
me,
and decorate it
with castles and
dragons
and give it an
ending,
happily ever after-
or tear each page
to shreds
and give me back
my catechism.

John Popoli
'71

dawn
the solitary pond
lies sullenly beyond
the natural road.
channeled insurrectingly
between a freshly
colored hollow,

i, resurrectingly,
follow.

skyles rhys

for C.

I did find you
lurking behind
somewhere not
perhaps lurking

innocently
maybe troubled
whispering steps
I did not hear

and you claimed
it was only
a dance of some
sorts you knew well

Michael Paul

I, Pygmalion

IF as a person for a purpose
I be pushed and dragged naked
Over dirt or sharp stone;
IF alone I must will
To fill no wooden horse
To creep from to kill;
IF in the end I spill and breathe and pray
Life into the living
So that the living live for me;

Then I, Pygmalion, might sooth to death
Suicide's festering soreness
With beauty-life's new feel.

by Charles J. O'Neil Jr.

Cotton clouds
flirting with the blue
reflect on the trampled snow
below
ushering in those wintery blues
that hold my soul
watching you float
in the boundless sea of blue
seemingly you are so free
but those tradewinds unmercifully
drag you to nowhere
we are not the kingpins we think
we are but the footprints
we leave in the snow
we come and go
leaving only our marks
thoughtlessly created masterpieces
impressed in the crusted snow
If they gave me another chance
I too would be floating
in the sea of blue
at least the clouds
are creative.

Tom Magner

My Life is Living

The emerald grass that
is the blanket of my
bed lies beneath the
bough of a rustic maple
tree.
In the evening I sit
beneath this bough and
feel all
and rain filtered
through its branches
and sun curling its
leaves
and moon boring its trunk
hollow
and wind trimming its
bark.
The bough is curled and
mottled grey
and is the lumber of my life.

Philip A. Tetreault

Drinking thinking they got it made

There're all out there
making plans for tomorrow
next week
next year
me, I know better
just living today
forgetting yesterday
not worrying about tomorrow
they'll probably drop the bomb
by then anyway.

Tom Magner