
rillas in the mountains. This was impossible. Nevertheless, Wyden believes, the operation was not completely hopeless. It was a "wild gamble," but not "mad," and with all its defects the plan might have been carried out successfully.

President Kennedy wrecked any chances of success by blandly ignoring the requirement—which the CIA seems to have made reasonably clear—for the destruction of Castro's air force. The Pentagon had warned at one point that if even one enemy plane survived it could sink most of the invasion ships. The CIA had planned two air strikes, one two days before D-day and one at the last minute. In the naive hope of concealing the size and origin of the operation, the president cut the first attack from sixteen planes to six, and canceled the second strike entirely. Castro's surviving aircraft played a decisive role, sinking critical supplies and shooting down the Cuban exile bombers. The Cuban exiles fought well and valiantly; they were simply isolated and outnumbered. It is perhaps characteristic of the Bay of Pigs that President Kennedy was even more enthusiastic about the dishonest aspects of the operation than the CIA—and it was the fraud involved which finally wrecked the whole affair.

The planning and failure of the Bay of Pigs, and the CIA's vaguely related attempts to murder Castro are well told by Wyden, who managed to secure a good deal of new information from both American and Cuban sources. His conclusions are well argued, and his criticisms of President Kennedy and Richard Bissell, the prime decision-makers, are particularly impressive, given his obvious respect for both men. His book is far from an anti-CIA diatribe, and he appreciates the way the world looked to those in charge in 1961, which is more than can be said of many recent historians.

In one case, however, Wyden does indulge in some unfortunate sensationalism. American destroyers trying to rescue survivors after the defeat were

shot at; Wyden suggests that had the Cubans or Americans on the spot been more reckless, "World War III" might have been started. Since incidents between American and Soviet forces have occurred several times without serious consequences, it is hard to believe that an American-Cuban clash would have had such horrible results.

A more important defect is Wyden's failure to discuss the issue of the morality of the operation in a serious manner. He merely offers, as an aside, the comment that the American leaders' "urge to eliminate Castro, while ethically indefensible, is easy to understand." Not coincidentally, he also fails to discuss the consequences of the Castro regime's survival. A brief account of what Castro has done to his own country, his interference in other Latin American countries and Africa, and the 1962 missile crisis, might suggest a different conclusion about the morality—though surely not the effectiveness—of the Bay

of Pigs. While intervention in other countries, whether overt or covert, is hardly an ideal solution for problems, it is sometimes necessary. Castro, after all, was already quietly intervening to aid communists in other Latin American nations. The Bay of Pigs was just an attempt to do to Castro, wholesale, what Castro was already doing to his neighbors, retail. In terms of global strategy his regime was a Soviet salient inside the United States' innermost defense perimeter. To declare any American intervention wrong, as Wyden seems to imply, really means to allow the other side a free hand to continue its interventions as it pleases. It is unfortunate that our government could not find a more effective and open means of dealing with Castro. But if its actions were immoral, they were only because of the futile dishonesty—as opposed to normal and natural military secrecy—that the Kennedy administration insisted on, and the carelessness with which it treated the fate of the Cuban exiles. □

Has the Prodigal Returned?

Neil Postman: *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*; Delacorte Press; New York.

by Edward A. Wynne

Neil Postman is the author or co-author of several popular, engagingly written books on education. The perspective of his works—up to this point—is suggested by the title of his most prominent book, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. His books engaged some readers because they presented simple solutions to complex problems, and because his solutions often invited educators to enlist their students in covert aggression (against society) or treat novelty as synonymous with cre-

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ativity. In short, his work epitomized many of the educational fads of the 60's.

As the title implies, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* reveals that Postman has undergone a partial conversion. In assessing the significance of that change, we should first interpret its implications for many people who have not converted—those who always thought much of the 60's was a big mistake.

The parable of the prodigal son has always troubled me; but one of the purposes of profound religion is to disturb believers. Remember that one son stayed home, while the prodigal roamed. When the prodigal had wasted all of his money and returned home, the father directed that the fatted calf be killed to provide a welcome feast. The continuously dutiful son then asked, "Why is all this show put on for an irresponsible one who has

finally seen the light, while I've never erred and still receive no dramatic recognition?" As best I understand, the parable signifies the high value communities should put on *wholesomeness*, and the demands that valuation places on responsible citizens. A similar theme is iterated in the parable of the lost sheep, and the duty of the good shepherd to reconstitute his flock.

Obviously, there is good precedent for treating Postman's potential for conversion with sympathy and interest. If my preceding remarks were directly related to Christian tradition, I have no doubt that many other important religious traditions mirror similar themes. However, for persons of a more secular temper, let me offer a more empirical proposal: "We should never underestimate the potential of human beings for learning and changing." Often this potential is unfulfilled, and often it reveals itself slowly, but other humans are not strict images—unless we refuse to allow them to grow.

An interesting theme in the Postman book is the idea that formal education, to some extent, must maintain a degree of tension in its relationship with the popular values of society. Education should not simply prepare its students to be mirror images of the norms of the surrounding society. Instead, it should try to identify deficiencies in the society, and conduct itself so that its students, when they mature, are not crippled by these deficiencies or can even (in adulthood) help to try to correct them. In a way, this theme is consistent with *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. Ten years ago, Postman thought poorly of conventional society. He thus wrote a book recommending that schools and teachers act as subverters. Now he believes society is too enmeshed in pursuing immediate gratification. As a result, he recommends that schools act to support traditional values (through measures such as requiring rigorous homework and by maintaining dress codes). Some of his

recommendations make sense, but . . .

The difficulty is that Postman has not lived and learned enough. The in-temperate, all-or-nothing approach which pervaded *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* still persists. Only this time Postman has found a new superordinate villain—not traditionalism, but television. And, just as in his earlier work, there is some merit to his suspicions, but his conclusions are severely overdrawn. This overdrawn gravely undermines his diagnosis and proposed treatment. It is notoriously true that modern children spend a great deal of time watching television, and that much of the programming is at best trivial, and at worst destructive. Still, it is simplistic to attribute all—or most—of the deficiencies identified in the conduct of our young to television. Similarly, it is unsound to almost totally relate prescriptions for improving schools to the need to correct the harmful effects of television.

Television is not the only important change that has occurred in our youths' environment during our lives. It is simply the one that is most evident to uninformed people without much perspective. There is a great variety of other changes which many social scientists have concluded are extremely deleterious. Divorce has increased; the proportion of families living in suburban and urban areas has increased (while the rural proportion has declined); real family income has increased; school size has increased; the level of bureaucracy in schools and colleges has increased;

the amount of time young people spend enrolled in school and college has increased; the fragmentation of school programs and student groupings in schools has increased; the number of children in individual families has declined, and their age grouping has become more clustered; the variety and number of household chores allocated to children has declined; the quality of paid work available for young people has deteriorated; and the quality of school discipline codes and grading standards have declined.

Most of these changes are not as immediately evident as some kids watching television. They can only be identified through reflection, adopting a long-range perspective, and reading some tedious studies. Estimating the cumulative harmful effects of these changes, and their relative importance to each other, is a topic for an ongoing debate. But most persons concerned with such issues would conclude—as I do—that the harmful effect of these changes on our young is far greater than the wrongs wrought by television. And, if one's thinking tends to such a direction, it is evident that the medley of education-related remedies needed are far more complex than simple worries about how to cure televisionitis.

In sum, let us rejoice. A prodigal son is trying to return. Let us also hope he can come along further, and finally rid himself of his temptation to pursue the facile, whether it's done in defense of either good or bad causes. □

Books in the Mail

Dialogues on American Politics by Irving Louis Horowitz and Seymour Martin Lipset; Oxford University Press; New York. Scholarly reflections on the state of America in the late 1970's.

Paradoxes of Education in a Republic by Eva T. H. Brann; University of Chicago Press; Chicago. An inquiry into the root dilemmas of American education.

Dorothy L. Sayers: A Literary Biography by Ralph E. Hone; Kent State University Press; Kent, Ohio. A look at the work of Dorothy L. Sayers and the life which inspired it.

As Her Whimsey Took Her: Critical Essays on the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers edited by Margaret P. Hanney; Kent State University Press; Kent, Ohio. A collection of literary criticism covering the varied writings of Dorothy L. Sayers.

Outdated Gomorrahs

James Baldwin: *Just Above My Head*; Dial Press; New York.

by Allan C. Brownfeld

In an essay written in *Partisan Review* in 1949, when he was twenty-four, Baldwin declared his determination to reject the path of protest which a black writer in America was expected to pursue. Rather than depict the black man as "merely a member of a Society or Group" who has been condemned by whites to poverty and ignorance, Baldwin expressed his desire to understand black men as "something resolutely undefinable, unpredictable." He decided, in effect, to write about men, not about racial symbols. He went so far as to criticize such novels as Richard Wright's *Native Son* which, he argued, was crippled by hatred and fear. Its failure, he wrote, came from "its rejection of life, the human being . . . in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended." All of which indicates that James Baldwin has, for many years, been struggling to find a proper literary identity.

Slowly, however, James Baldwin changed his view. He was, it is reported, stricken by Eldridge Cleaver's criticism in *Soul on Ice*, when Cleaver denounced the characters in Baldwin's novels for engaging in various sexual activities "in a vacuum," without a proper awareness of race, of politics, of economics. Other black nationalists and black radicals joined in the attack.

Apparently, James Baldwin could not remain indifferent to such intellectually refined charges, and he reacted. In *No Name in the Streets*, written in 1972, he rejected the creed of nonviolence and wrote favorably of the guerrilla tactics

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of the Black Panthers. He came to view Cleaver's attack as a "necessary warning." Finally, in *Just Above My Head*, Baldwin portrays the black communal life and culture which he had found absent from the "protest" novels of the past. It is clearly a "black" book, in which whites exist only as remote demons; it is a love song—as Hall Montana, its narrator, says to his brother,

"He suddenly seems a much more universal writer . . . There is incest, prostitution, rape, endless horror and an equal dose of fervent passion."

—Playboy

"It must be said that Mr. Baldwin writes about homosexual love with something like genius."

—John Leonard
New York Times

Arthur. Dead in his 39th year, Arthur was a gospel singer and a homosexual.

The novel pictures the lives of the Montana and Miller families, from Harlem of the 1940's and 1950's to the present time. Julia, a precocious nine-year-old preacher, is exploited by her greedy, weak father and feared by her weak, timid brother. Jimmy, her resentful seven-year-old brother, is largely ignored. Julia and Hall will eventually fall in love, as will Jimmy and Arthur. The events are less a story than a recitation of happenings: the Trumpets of Zion quartet must tour the South; Julia must leave the ministry and endure abuse from her father; the Korean War, the Black Muslims and the civil-rights movement appear. Throughout, Hall insists that Arthur remains "the apple of my eye. I worried about cops and billy clubs and pushers, jails, rooftops, basements, the river, the morgue: I moved like an advance scout in wicked and hostile territory, my whole life was a strategy and a prayer; I knew I could not live without my brother."

Many of James Baldwin's critics have charged that he has squandered his talent on his obsession with sex. In *Just*

Above My Head, there are many pages routinely devoted to explicit accounts of both homosexual and heterosexual encounters. This time, however, the sexual monotony has an equal partner in Baldwin's humdrum, cliché attacks on whites and America, that citadel of hostile and pale-faced enemies. Mixed in, nevertheless, is the complex feeling which any human being feels for his

native land. "I don't think anybody can really hate his country, I don't think that's possible," Baldwin writes, "but you can certainly despise the road your country travels, and the people they elect to lead them on that road. If I had been a white man, I would have been ashamed, really, to send a black man anywhere to fight for me. But shame is individual, not collective, and collectively speaking, white people have no shame. They have the shortest memories of any people in the world—which explains, no doubt, why they have no shame." And, at some points, he seems to understand that racism—fear of those who are different—is not simply an affliction of whites, but a dilemma facing all men: "They believed that they hated white people, and that's no wonder. They were far from the hard apprehension that they simply could not endure being despised, far from the knowledge that almost everybody is, could not conceive that the world, or at least the world we know, could be so tremendously populated by people who despise each other because each despises himself . . . Thus, they imagined that they hated white people be-