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ANNUAL WRITING CONTEST

Again the ALEMBIC will award cash prizes for the best contributions during the current year:

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THIS CONTEST IS OPEN TO PROVIDENCE COLLEGE STUDENTS ONLY.
Proliferation of Matter in the Comic and the Absurd

By Paul Ferguson '65

During the past summer there was a program on television, a rerun, concerning famous comics of the motion picture world. I cannot be sure, but I believe the title was “The Golden Age of Comedy.” On this program was shown an old one-reel silent film called “Cops,” starring Buster Keaton, a young man at the time the film was made.

Keaton played the hero, a picaresque type, the little man who managed quite innocently to alienate himself from those around him. His face was deadpan, the characteristic Keaton expression, with a slight hint of sadness and unawareness of the world around him; his entire body assumed this facial expression. A pair of baggy pants hung from his hips and billowed out over his worn-out oversized shoes so that the cuffs dragged along on the ground. Suspenders attached themselves to the pants in a futile attempt to keep them up. His unironed shirt, unbuttoned at the neck, sporting one or two holes, fit as loosely and as carelessly as the pants. To allow unencumbered movement of the arms, two ragged arm bands held up the sleeves. And sitting squarely atop his head like Puck, as if it had sprouted there of its own accord, was a straw hat, torn slightly at the edge, but still relatively clean.

The plot of the film, if it can be properly termed a plot, was a simple one. The opening scene showed Keaton, driving an early model truck with an open cab and spoke wheels, being stopped by a cop at an intersection. Although the cargo on the truck could not be determined, Keaton was apparently delivering something. When the intersection had been cleared, the traffic cop signalled him to move, but the truck would...
not move, for it had stalled. Consequently, all traffic was brought to a halt.

Keaton climbed down from the truck while the cop, hands on his hips and a look of agitation on his face, stood and watched. A few passers-by cast glances over their shoulders. Some even stopped to see what would happen next. Keaton began to crank the engine, and when the truck commenced to vibrate with signs of life, he returned to his seat, only to discover that the engine had stopped.

The cop remained immobile and noncomittal.

Keaton repeated his effort several times, each time meeting with failure, each time drawing the attention of a few more onlookers and the wrath of irate drivers.

Finally the cop came to life and withdrew from his pocket a pad and pencil. A heated conversation ensued. Keaton still retaining his look of sadness, the cop becoming more infuriated as the tragi-comic figure pestered him with pleas. In a moment of comic wrath, Keaton struck out with a roundhouse blow at the cop that brought to his face a look of open-mouthed indignation. As soon as the blow landed, Keaton turned and ran down the street, pursued by the cop. Subsequent scenes showed Keaton pursued by more and more cops until finally there were a few hundred cops chasing one little man in baggy pants and straw hat, one little man not worth chasing, who continued to confound his multitudinous adversaries.

The major irony, however, came at the end of the film. Keaton was running down a long street pursued by an abundance of cops, so many that the street could not be seen. Suddenly before him appeared a building with a huge double door above which was a sign reading "Police." He ran in and closed the door behind him, and a few seconds later, the pursuant cops

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followed. An impossible number passed into the building until the street was completely empty.

For about ten seconds no action occurred. But finally the door opened and a sad face peered quizzically out. When he was certain there was no one around, Keaton stepped out confidently, dressed in a police uniform, locked the door through which he had just emerged, and strutted off twirling a billy club as the circle signalling the end of the film closed in around him.

For some inexplicable reason, this brief film stayed in my mind. I seemed to recall seeing or reading something very similar to this film previously. But precisely what this something was, I could not remember.

Shortly I retired to my room and picked up a paperback volume by Eugene Ionesco. For the third time I started to read “The Chairs,” a one-act play which I considered to be one of Ionesco’s best. The play concerned two people, an old man and an old woman, who were awaiting the arrival of several imaginary guests and an orator. The orator, whom we find to be deaf and dumb at the end of the play, was supposed to deliver to the world a message which had been conceived by the old man, but which the old man himself was unable to express. To accommodate all these imaginary guests who were to hear the message, the old man and woman gathered chairs and arranged them on stage until it overflowed and the two characters were hopelessly separated from each other.

At this point I suddenly realized why “Cops” had seemed so familiar: it had used an element similar to the major ingredient of Ionesco’s works, the proliferation of matter. Cops came from nowhere, filling the streets, surrounding and overwhelming Buster Keaton; chairs came from nowhere, filling the stage, separating the old man from the old woman, causing them to commit

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suicide. Ionesco had used a comic, vaudevillian convention to carry a tragic meaning, a highly significant use of irony.

"The Chairs," however, is not the best example of the proliferation of matter motif. There are other plays by Ionesco which show the use of this convention much more extensively, "The New Tenant," for instance.

It might be well to note here before investigating "The New Tenant" that Ionesco uses this particular motif to carry his theme of alienation, a theme drawn partially from the out-of-place characters of the old silent comedies and some of the later comic films. This alienation theme, which recurs in literature under different forms throughout history, is more apparent and more absurd in the area of comedy. Today it is an outgrowth of the existentialist philosophy as propounded by Jean-Paul Sartre and other philosophers of his ilk, who see the world as an absurdity and man as a "useless passion." Ionesco, in his own way, is a disciple of this philosophy, although despair is not as firmly entrenched in his works as in the plays of Sartre. For him, the world is an absurdity, but man is not necessarily a useless passion. Ionesco hints in some of his works that perhaps man himself causes the world to be absurd. And whereas Sartre pictures his characters as hopeless, Ionesco leaves the question of hope unanswered: there may be an absence of hope in his plays, yet there is also an absence of despair.

With these thoughts in mind, let us look at the play "The New Tenant."

The scene is a sixth floor apartment somewhere in London. The room, with a huge double door at each end of the stage, and an open window in the back wall which apparently overlooks the street, is completely empty. The walls are a light color, possibly cream.

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As the play begins, a considerable amount of noise can be heard off-stage: sounds of voices talking and laughing, children shouting and playing their favorite games, hammers rapping violently against planks of wood, the clatter of feet rushing up and down stairs, and a barrel-organ playing a circus type song. The off-stage cacophony is sharply interrupted as the caretaker, a boisterous Cockney woman in her mid-fifties, comes crashing through the door on the right, carrying a large ring of keys, and singing loudly so that, for all practical purposes, she drowns out the other sounds.

The caretaker is a standard caricature of the typical Cockney landlady. She is dumpy, with greying hair which she never combs, and wears a sweater over her faded print dress. She is loud, at times too loud, a more or less British version of Marjorie Main, and her chief occupation in life is spreading gossip, recent or otherwise. Full of contradictions, aspiring to be the wise woman she is not, the caretaker is probably the most lively and the most fully developed character in the play, although she disappears before it is half over.

As she leans out the window, back toward the audience, in an attempt to attract the attention of someone below, a gentleman, the new tenant, silently enters and positions himself beside her. Sitting squarely atop his head, in the Stan Laurel fashion, is a black bowler which matches the rest of his dark clothing. He wears a black jacket and striped trousers, black patent leather shoes, carries grey gloves, a black overcoat, and a black leather attaché case. His impeccable manner of dressing suggests that he could conceivably be a funeral director, and as the play progresses, it seems that he is not only the director, but also the one to be buried.

His rather slim middle-aged bodily structure is set off by a Charlie Chaplin mustache on his
upper lip, and his facial expression is somewhat cold and inscrutable. His personality is phlegmatic, bordering on the diabolical as he directs the action on stage with callous precision. He pays no mind to those around him, to the caretaker who ineptly attempts to communicate with him, to the sound issuing from the street below. In fact, he orders the caretaker to close the window so that the din of life cannot filter into his world. His character is that of the alienated man, alienated from the world, alienated from the individuals around him, but alienated from these things by his own will. The only individuals to whom he speaks at any great length during the play are the two movers, but only because they are needed as instruments of his ultimate alienation.

The caretaker, quite surprised at the gentleman’s unannounced appearance, speaks to him of trivialities. Throughout this entire discourse, the gentleman ignores her, except to bid her close the window, or to make some other comment irrelevant to what she is saying. All this time he is examining the walls, or measuring the floor and calculating exactly how he will arrange his furniture, as if the furniture were something of great value. He rejects every attempt at communication and eventually drives the caretaker away by his disinterested attitude.

The movers finally arrive and begin to bring in the gentleman’s furniture, starting with small objects such as vases, and progressing towards larger items such as chairs and wardrobes. It is at this point that the proliferation of matter motif begins. The proliferation of matter, as I noted previously, expresses Ionesco’s theme of alienation. Yet the proliferation is brought about by the gentleman, the funeral director who is preparing his own interment. It is under his personal direction that the various articles of furniture are brought on stage: vases, stools, suitcases, pedestal tables of assorted designs and colors, until finally

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the objects proceed to move in of their own accord. Ironically the articles brought in are not only superfluous, they are also grotesque and non-functional. They are used in this comic instance to symbolize man's absurd relationship to the material world.

But his mere direction is not the only thing that shows that the alienation is self-induced. The gentleman draws a circle in the center of the stage, a circle which is to be the place where he shall remain at the end of the play, a circle which represents his own enclosure, his own alienation. Through his wishes, the solitary window is blocked, cutting him off completely from society, and he only accepts the radio when he discovers it will not function.

The excess of furniture is exaggerated to a point where even the river Thames is so full that it has ceased flowing. His alienation is now irrevocable, and his fate is sealed when his circle is completely surrounded by screens and slats, his only possessions within the circle being a radio which is useless, a lonely chair, and a chamber pot. His burial is complete, the movers cast flowers at him in much the same manner as someone would strew flowers on a grave, and the lights are extinguished, leaving him in blackness. He has reached a state of "perfect" alienation.

The comics of the silent era were also "alienated" from the world, although in a manner completely different from the heroes of Ionesco. There was Charlie Chaplin, the vagrant who antagonized people by splashing soup in their faces, or by lifting ladies' skirts with the handle of his cane; Buster Keaton, the lethargic baggy pants clown who raised tempers by his bungling; the Marx Brothers, who wrought havoc by disrupting normal activities with their zany, purposeless antics. Even today movie comedians, such as Jerry Lewis in his famous character of "The Kid" whose mental capacity is below average, and Red Skelton...
in the role of one of his famous bunglers, depict characters who are alienated from the rest of society. This alienation, however, is purely for the sake of comic effect.

Qualities of such characters can be seen in many of Ionesco's creations. Berenger, the central figure in both "Rhinoceros" and "The Killer," calls to mind the lethargy of Buster Keaton as well as some of the mannerisms of Charlie Chaplin. Amedee Buccinioni of "Amedee" also bears Keaton-like qualities, and in the final scene, when Amedee is carried away by the gigantic corpse which has been transformed into a sort of balloon, one is reminded of Jerry Lewis hanging desperately to Dean Martin as the two fall to the earth in a parachute. The old man in "The Chairs," in order to imitate the month of February, scratches his head like Stan Laurel.

Yet the characters, as I noted previously, are not the only elements in Ionesco's works. There is also the proliferation of matter motif which is the cause of the alienation depicted. The growth of the corpse in "Amedee" reminds one of the scene in a Red Skelton movie, "The Fuller Brush Man," wherein a large number of rubber life rafts are inflated until the room is completely filled. The famous scene in "A Night at the Opera" with the Marx Brothers shows an impossible number of people being jammed into a tiny cabin, while "The New Tenant" re-echoes this scene with an infinite amount of furniture arranged in the gentleman's cramped room until furniture pours out the door and down the street, stopping traffic, causing the Thames to cease flowing.

The similarities existing between Ionesco's theater and the burlesque antics of the silent films are clear, yet their end products differ drastically. The first of the differences is purpose. In the old silent films, the comic elements are used solely for the purpose of entertainment. The multitude of
cops in the Keaton film is for purely comic reasons. But the excess of furniture in "The New Tenant," while it is a comic convention, is also significant thematically to carry the thesis of alienation.

The second difference is the manner in which the dramatic conflict is resolved. For Buster Keaton, whose uniformed adversaries are from without, there is a final triumph. But for the new tenant, whose inanimate adversaries are directed by his own will, although they are outside of him, there is defeat. The irony of Ionesco in the play mentioned here is that the main character is not the least bit concerned about his fate. He neither hopes nor despairs. He constructs his own tomb and lies in it with passive acceptance of his fate.

Thus we can see very clearly how Ionesco's theater is based on the burlesque antics of his silent comedy predecessors. But through a unique twist of this playwright's hand, a relatively low form of entertainment has been turned into one of artistic significance. And although we may not agree with many of the theses in Ionesco's plays, we certainly cannot ignore them.

1 Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, P. 92.
2 Sartre equates man's nature with his acts, saying that man is the sum of his acts. He further states that man's one great passion (desire) is to become God through his own activity; but since there is no God, says Sartre, it is impossible for man to become that which is not. Thus man is a useless passion.
The Hidden Laughter

By Gregory Prior

Sleepytown, he thought, just ahead. That's what they had said when they were kids, he and his four brothers, riding down this road in their family's huge, coffee-colored, three-seated, 1948 DeSoto in the early days of summer toward the beach. He wondered if he should tell the girl who sat next to him now, cradled in the small leather seat of the red MG, her knees drawn close together. But no, she would probably not understand. He had only been out with her three times and each time she had been nice and happy and smiling, but he did not really know her yet. How could she understand what it was like then? She was leaning back in the seat, her head resting on the pillow which her long yellow hair formed, staring blankly with half opened eyes at the road. The road meant nothing to her.

He knew the road well. He had travelled it every summer until he was fifteen. It had not changed much since he had seen it, since his parents had sold the beach-house. There were still the corn fields and the old farm houses and the shabby motels with names like Sea-Vu and Sailor's Rest. When he and his brothers were young, almost every mile of the long trip to the beach-house had something that was important, like the farm with the pigs in the front yard or the house that had paintings set up outside. Sleepytown was the most important because it meant the trip was almost over.

When they rounded the curve, he remembered, and saw the tops of the trees in the distance, Charlie, his oldest brother would holler, "Sleepytown, just ahead," and you would get ready. It
was still about a quarter of a mile away and you waited until you could see the long colonnade of huge oak trees. When the car slipped into the dark shadows of the tunnel the trees formed, you closed your eyes, pretending you were asleep. You tried to keep your eyes closed until you were sure you were out of Sleepytown. It was a game. Like cemeteries. You held your breath going past cemeteries and you did not die.

It was not until he was fourteen and he and his brothers played the game with a kind of mock childishness that he learned the trick of Sleepytown—to keep your eyes closed until you felt the pink fuzziness of the sun shining on your eyelids again. Before that he was never very good at the game. He was not very good at holding his breath going past cemeteries either. His brother Matt, who was two years older and had probably learned the tricks of the game earlier, was better at the games. He was better at everything. He could swim better and play ball better and think up games that everybody wanted to play. Matt. He was best and he knew it. He would sit on the left next to the window, with Charlie sitting on the right and him in the middle and the two little kids in the small third seat behind, fighting. Why were they always fighting? In the long room in the beach-house where they all slept, the two little ones kept it up late into the night and it would be Matt who would shut them up, telling them they could not play with him if they didn't. Or in the boat. The five of them in that small boat, slipping over the dark water of the salt pond, with Matt and Charlie each manning an oar. Matt would give the orders and decide where they were going to go and tell the little ones who were sitting in the back to be good or he would throw them into the water. And they did what he said.

For it seemed that you had to do what he said. Like that time they were down by the spring. He and Matt had come with heavy glass jugs to fill them with water from the spring. The spring was
about a mile from the beach-house and it was surrounded by wild rose bushes which were covered with small, hard, orange fruit. He had tasted the fruit once but it was sour and had tiny, grainy seeds inside. It was good for throwing or squashing in your hand but you couldn’t eat it. The water from the spring tasted good, cool and sweet. It flowed up between the smooth, moss-covered rocks and into the pond so cold that when you put your hand into it, it got stiff like a stone or a fish frozen in a pond in the winter. The spring water was clean and white but the water in the pond was dark and covered with a slick green slime and where the spring flowed into it, it pushed back the slime, wrinkling it like a dirty cloth.

Matt had filled his jug with water and was sitting next to the spring, splashing his feet in the water.

“C’mon. Hurry up and fill your jug,” Matt said.

“O.K. Don’t worry,” he said. He knelt down and felt the wetness of the moist grass on his bare knees. Lowering the jug into the spring, he watched the bubbles rise slowly to the surface as it drank in the water. Matt was standing behind him now.

“If you don’t hurry up and fill that, I’ll push you in headfirst.”

“I can’t make the water go in any faster than its going in.” Matt would want him to, though.

“Here, I’ll do it.” Matt knelt down and shot his hand into the water, grabbing the jug from him. He got up and walked over to a rock next to the pond and sat down. It would be dark soon. You could see it turning orange next to the sun. Pretty soon the sun would disappear and the sky would turn purple. Then the fireflies would come out and the lights on the ferris wheel in the amusement park on the other side of the pond would come on and begin circling. It would not

(Continued on Page 25)
A profusion of BoreDom FLOWERS—drawings and poems by Stephen Vincent Grillo
BOREDOM FLOWERS —
MYRIAD COLORS OF THE
PHANTASMAGORIA NIGHT —
camelian red,
soiled white.

BOREDOM FLOWERS —
FEASTING AND REVELRY
WITHOUT LENT,
A KALEIDOSCOPIC CARNIVAL
WITH MERRY-GO-ROUND
SPINNING
SPINNING
SPINNING
' TILL THE MACHINE DOES TILT.

A PROFUSION
OF BOREDOM FLOWERS —
Wilted.

"FLESH, FAREWELL!"
BILLBOARD CONSCIENCE
ASPHALT HEAD (!)?
CRISS-CROSSED VEINS
OCTANE ENERGY! (?)
POWER. POWER. POWER.
THOSE WHO THINK YOUNG
(VOTE MEDICARE (?)
RUN. RUN. RUN.
15¢ HAMBURGERS AND-
A PROFUSION OF BOREDOM FLOWERS

EXPRESSING-
THE MULTI-COLORED NOTHINGNESS
OF AN INDIFFERENCE
THAT DISREGARDS (WITH IMPIOUSNESS)
ANYTHING "SAVE" NOW;
AND (STAY THE CHARNEL ROAD)
DENIES THE ANSWER TO —
HOW?
Alembic
YESTERDAY—
I SAW MR. DITTO!
IN HIS TEE WHEE BIRD,
BRANDY NEW,
SHINED—BLACK,
AND TWO TEENIE–WEENIE
 Dittoes in the rear window
OF THE DITTO ON THE DITTO;
And guess who else was there?
Why it was Mrs. Ditto.
In cognizzzo.
A SHORT FUNNY

ROUND SHORT
ROUND SHORT STUFF - ROUND SHORT STUFF FUNNY MAN,
CAME UPON THE PERIMETER OF A SAD DOOMSDAY SCENE. SADDENED BY THE SIGHT
OF SAD DOOMSDAY SCENES SMOKE -
HELL! SMOKE. HE WEEPED.
HE CRIED WITH INDIGNATION -
HELL! SMOKE! DOOMSDAY!

(VOICE) HEY! YOU!
SHORT FUNNY ROUND MAN!
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
WHAT DO YOU EXPECT OF OUR SCENE?
LEAVE OUR PERIMETER! YOU LACK THE MEANS!
YOU'RE SHORT OF THE MARK!
UGLY! YOU'RE UGLY!

THEY WALKED IN SPLENDOR BRANDISHING DAZZLING-
JEWELS. HE CRINGED, CRIED, BROODED,
AND LEARNED OF THEIR INNER WEAKNESSES RUNNING HIS WORDS TOGETHER AS DID JOYCE -
CRINGECRY, SHORTROUND UGLY MAN.
CRINGECRY . . . SPY.
get cold, though. It only got cold in the night at the end of the summer. It would stay warm and they would stay up late because it was too hot to sleep.

"Look who's being slow now," he yelled to Matt. "It's getting late. Mommy's going to want us home."

"I'm not in any hurry," Matt said. "If you have to get home, you can leave anytime."

"She sent us together and we're supposed to stay together."

"Well then don't keep nagging about you want to get home. I don't feel like going home yet."

Matt got up and set the full jug down next to the other. "C'mon," he said. "I'm gonna go explore old man Hopson's place. You can come if you want to." That was not right. The spring belonged to old mister Hopson and he didn't mind if you took water from it. But you were not supposed to go wandering around his land any farther than the spring. He used the land for hunting and he didn't like to have people disturbing it. Maybe he'd shoot you if he found you, they said.

"Hey, Matt," he said, "we're not supposed to poke around here. It's going to be dark soon."

"What, are you afraid of the dark, sissy? Afraid Hopson's going to come after you with his great big shotgun?"

"No, but it's late and the water will get warm if we leave it there."

"Well you can go home any time you want to," Matt said. Matt turned away and walked toward the trees. He followed Matt away from the clearing where the spring was and into the thick woods even though he knew it was not right. It was a lot darker there and the air seemed heavier. It was warmer, too, because the trees held the air

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in close. There were briars which snagged his feet as if they had teeth and were biting him, so he had trouble catching up to Matt. “Matt, wait up,” he shouted and Matt stopped and leaned against the white leathery trunk of a birch tree. “What’s there to do here?” he asked when he reached Matt. “It’s just a bunch of trees.”

“I’ve never been here before,” Matt said. “I just want to see what it’s like.” Matt slid slowly down the trunk of the tree and sat at the bottom, tearing up dry, dead grass from the ground and throwing it into the still air. “Look,” Matt shouted suddenly. “There’s a snake. Catch it. There.” He looked at Matt, hesitated and then reached down to grab the small snake which was twisting through the grass at his feet. He could feel the cold moistness of its smooth skin when he picked it up.

“It’s just a grass snake,” he said to Matt.

“Give it to me,” Matt said. “I saw it first.” He held the snake out and let it slip slowly into Matt’s hand.

“You know,” Matt said, “if you cut a snake in half, it’ll live and you’ll have two snakes.”

“Don’t,” he said, as he saw Matt take his jackknife out of his pocket and open it with his teeth. “That’s just with worms. You’ll kill the snake if you do.”

“No it won’t. It won’t even hurt.”

“Yes it will. It’ll kill it.” He could almost feel. The sharp knife squeaked through the smooth skin and dug into the soft insides. Slowly, a moist, thick fluid oozed out of the split halves. The two halves shook with a brief spasm and then, suddenly, became still.

“I guess maybe you’re right,” Matt said as he dropped the two sticky pieces on the ground and

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began kicking them. "Move, snake, move. Yeah, it's dead. He picked up the dead halves and threw them into the bushes.

"Well, it was only a snake," Matt said.

"You shouldn't of done it," he said. "Let's get home. It's getting really dark."

"Wait," Matt said. "I want to find that snake. If I dry it out, maybe I can use it for something." Matt walked off into the bushes, slashing them with his hands, to find the snake. He would not be able to find that snake. The sky was practically black and anyway he wouldn't be able to use it. There wouldn't be anything left of it when the sun had dried it up. Mommy wouldn't let him use it either.

"Hey, come here. I've found something," Matt shouted. His voice sounded far away and it was too late to be fooling around. It was so dark it was as if he were blind.

"Where are you, Matt?" he yelled. "I can't see you."

"I'm over here. Hurry up."

He walked off in the direction of Matt's voice, pushing his way through the thick bushes. The branches of the bushes scratched and stabbed him and, though he could not see anything, he felt that people hidden somewhere were staring at him.

"Where are you, Matt?"

"Right here, see. Look, I found a cave here."

"Where is it. I can't see anything. It's too dark."

"Come here," Matt said. "It's a pretty big cave."
“I can’t see it. Show it to me.” He walked over to where Matt’s voice was coming from and grabbed him by the arm.

“Look, here it is.” Matt said as he placed his hand on a large rock which circled a gaping hole. “It’s a pretty big hole, isn’t it?” Matt said.

He pulled his hand out of Matt’s grasp and slid it slowly down the side of the rock. The rock was smooth and damp like a rock under water. The hole it formed was wide, big enough to crawl through.

“C’mon, let’s explore it,” Matt said.

“It’s too dark now. Let’s come back tomorrow when we can see it. There may be something in there.”

“No. We’ve gotta explore it now. We might not be able to find it tomorrow.” Matt knelt down and began crawling on his hands and knees through the hole. Creeping slowly, he followed Matt into the cave. He could not see anything but he could feel the softness of the spongy moss on the floor of the cave. It was warm there and the air hung heavy and close around him. He was breathing heavily and his knees made a soft hushing sound as he moved. He raised his head and swept his eyes around the cave trying to see. Then he saw it, the huge whiteness like an eye staring at him about five feet away.

“Matt,” he shouted. There’s something in here. Get out.” He turned and with a frenzied quickness scrambled back to the entrance of the cave, scraping his arms on the rocks. Matt was behind him when he reached the entrance of the cave and climbed out.

“I knew you’d be a chicken.” Matt said. “I knew you’d get scared and run away.”

“But there was something in there.”

*Alembic*
"There’s nothing in there. I’ve been up here before. That’s just a piece of white rock. But I knew when I brought you up here, you’d be a little chicken and run out. You’re nothing but a little sissy, a baby.” Matt began to laugh.

“You did it to trick me. I hate you,” he screamed. “I hate you. Matt.” He turned and ran as fast and as hard as he could through the darkness toward home.

The car was moving quickly now and the landscape in front of him was blurred, but he could see the water off to the left. He turned to the girl. She was sleeping, her head rocking as the small car swayed along the road.

“We’re almost there,” he said.

She raised her head and looked around slowly. “What?”

“I said we’re practically there.”

“Are we? Good. I must have fallen asleep.”

“You know, I used to live around here during the summer when I was a kid.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Gee we really had some good times here then, my brothers and I.”

“That’s nice,” she said.
BOOK REVIEWS

THE PEOPLE OF GOD
By Herbert McCabe, O.P.
Sheed. 172 p. $3.95

*The People of God* is a product of the "new theology." The newness of this "new" theology is not in its dogmatic content, but in the fresh emphasis it places upon the content of traditional dogma.

This is a book about the sacraments, but it has its own approach. Fr. McCabe says:

This book is a study of the sacraments as mysteries of human unity, as the ways in which men are able to break down the barriers between them and form a real community. It is a study, therefore, of the sacraments as constituting the Church, for the Church is nothing but the community which sacramentally foreshadows the life for which God has destined man.

The full significance of these remarks is seen in a later chapter in which Fr. McCabe says that the Church is not a "... quasi-political entity constituted by a hierarchic structure of jurisdiction... The Church is first of all the sacramental presence of Christ in the world."

The deepest meaning of these words is important to an age that unfortunately looks on the Catholic Church as nothing more than a group of elderly Italian cardinals making hopeless demands on their followers. As fresh as Fr. McCabe's words are, they are actually as old as the Pauline epistles. For it is St. Paul's gospel that Christ and His Church are not two separate entities; the Church, rather, is the completion of

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Christ's salvific mission; the Church is Christ's bride. His partner in the redemption of mankind.

Fr. McCabe's book is an explanation of the sacraments in this Pauline context. Interestingly, it shows how these sacraments are foreshadowed in the Old Testament and the community in and with God which Israel enjoyed. It is also a book that can be read as the theological backdrop of the new liturgy, which stresses the role of the laity in the communal, public worship of the Church.

As Fr. McCabe says, it is a book about the sacraments as mysteries of human unity, unity that is achieved in the sacramental essence of the Church. If the meaning of the new theology, the new liturgy, and Fr. McCabe's book can be contained in a single phrase, that phrase is St. Augustine's; he says that the Church is "one Christ loving Himself."

Terrence Doody '65

THE CATHOLIC AS CITIZEN
By John F. Cronin
Helicon. 176 p. $2.95

American Catholics who have been struggling from their cultural and social ghettos in such great numbers during the past twenty years have stood in need of practical guides to the effective assimilation of their Catholicism into the mainstream of American life. This problem has been honestly examined in a recent study by John F. Cronin, S.S. In The Catholic as Citizen, Fr. Cronin advocates a wider participation on the part of Catholics in public affairs. The Catholic's role, as the author suggests, should be positive rather than negative.

A former director of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Fr. Cronin was awarded the Papal Benemerenti Medal in 1957 for his contribution to Christian social progress. By injecting the principles
of Catholic action into modern society, he tells us, much can, and has been done to eliminate impediments, political and religious, to the progress of society.

Commending the positive approach to society and its ills, the author imparts a feeling of optimism to the reader regarding the solution of social problems by Catholic citizens acting in concert with interreligious and interracial groups.

Treating separately such timely topics as ecumenism, race relations, politics and poverty, Father Cronin proposes a sound program of Christian action, based upon a realistic appraisal of the problems affecting modern society, and augmented by years of practical experience in the field of social action.

Of especial interest, perhaps, are Fr. Cronin’s insights into the matter of race relations and specifically how racial prejudice ought to be eliminated by Catholic initiative and social cooperation. The author suggests that the need for religious conviction is paramount in countering prejudice, first in one’s own heart, and then in society as a whole. Action undertaken in the name of true Christian charity, with a view to the common dignity of man, whether on an individual or on a collective basis, cannot but succeed to a considerable extent.

Admittedly, Fr. Cronin offers precious little in the way of suggesting specific remedies to specific instances of discrimination in schools, for example, or in housing; he does, however, offer a supplementary means of eliminating such prejudicial practices by reminding all Catholics, indeed all Christians, to “... stand on Calvary and there realize that Christ is dying for all mankind.” He goes on to say that “... if our hearts can absorb something of this love, our minds can take up the question of methods and techniques.”

Summarily, then, Fr. Cronin laments the loss of zeal in the lay apostolate, but recommends a

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rededication to Christ as a means of restoring dignity to all men as sons of God and heirs in common to the treasure of heaven.

Walter F. Pickford, Jr. '66

A NEW GENERATION
By Michael Novak
Herder. 250 p. $4.50

In A New Generation, which he subtites American and Catholic, Michael Novak has gathered together and correlated several of his essays which appeared in The Commonweal, The New Republic and magazines of like persuasion. Although the author has re-written most of his chapter conclusions in order to integrate each essay into book form, a certain unevenness sometimes appears in transition from chapter to chapter.

To quibble on such a minor point, however, would be more than picayune if one considers Novak's remarkable insights into the problems of modern American Catholicism. Mr. Novak divides his book into three sections. In the first, he discusses the problems peculiar to his "new generation." Many modern Catholics despair over the variance between the call to the reconstruction of the social order voiced by the last several popes and the rather perfunctory answer to that call evidenced in the American Church. Many of them feel alienated from their priests by a wall of mutual suspicion and fear. Most of these Catholics are exhilarated by the vision of their call to the witness of Christ in the world. The new theology and the restored liturgy proclaim their dignity and equality in the whole community of the people of God. However, the cold reality of their "second-class" citizenship in the concrete forms of the Church's 20th century life is only too evident.

Mr. Novak treats the problems of the education of the "new generation" in an extremely ar-
ticulate second section. The problems that Michael Novak examines so honestly in these eight chapters touch the core of the arguments currently raging in academic Catholic circles as to the worth of the parochial school system. In Chapter 7 he insists that "... the most urgent problem faced by the new generation is the split between the general Catholic culture of America and the secular intellectual culture." The American Catholic community, he notes, has tended toward political conservatism and has displayed a surprising anti-intellectualism. His thoughts in this chapter echo those of Msgr. John Tracy Ellis' celebrated monograph, *American Catholics and the Intellectual Life*.

The separation of Christianity from the concerns of the modern world, he adds, is a divorce with disastrous results for both. The problem of the new generation "... is to create a fuller, American humanism—lest the spiritual life of secular America and of Catholic America wither and die..."

Novak then concerns himself with the proper role of education. Education, he insists, is to help us understand. But one cannot understand if he is exposed to a single set of values and aspirations. One can only understand if he realizes the value of dissent and learns to weigh conflicting values. Novak despairs of finding the idea of dissent in the American public school system which, for fear of offense, has rejected religious, ethical and social controversy.

But Novak does not find this idea of dissent, this freedom to discuss, to argue, to disagree in the parochial schools either. Much of our religious mentality has been conditioned by the apologetic defensiveness of the post-Tridentine era. We stand in such awe of our clergy, he insists, that no effective dialogue is possible. "The main tragedy of American Catholic education," says

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Novak, “is that it is excruciatingly difficult to be perfectly honest with nuns, priests, or overprotected students.” It is only when an educated laity insist that their skills be employed in the establishment and policy-making of the parochial schools that we can approach any true concept of Catholic education.

Chapter 11 is a crucial one in the development of Novak’s thought. Insisting that fear of controversy is the great cancer in American life, he suggests that religion might be most effectively taught within the public school system. If the public schools could overcome their fear of controversy, an impartial presentation of the range of religious belief coupled with the religious program available to each group on campus would produce Catholics better educated in their religion than either public or Church-affiliated schools now produce.

Novak here echoes much of the sentiment of Mary Perkins Ryan who argued in Are Parochial Schools the Answer? (Holt, Reinhart, $4.00) that religious should not have to teach school subjects a layman is perfectly capable of teaching. Both Mrs. Ryan and Mr. Novak call for an integration, or at least an association of public and parochial school systems.

The logic of such a position is not too difficult to understand. Catholic educators have long despaired of the wish, “every Catholic child in a Catholic school.” More than half the Catholic children of elementary school age are now being educated in the public schools because the facilities of the Catholic school system just cannot accommodate them. Five-eighths of our young men and women are educated on the secular college campuses. A recent report in America (9/19/64: “Catholics in Higher Education”) indicates that this disparity will become much more pronounced in the next twenty years. Vocations to the teaching orders in the Church show no great promise of corresponding increase. The Catholic school

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system faces an impasse if present procedures remain unchanged.

Novak further argues that the traditional argument against secular education as detrimental to the faith of the weak is unsound. He cites the 1961 America survey which indicated that there is no more danger of losing one’s faith on the secular campus than there is, for example, downtown in an office or elsewhere in our secular world. Furthermore, the percentage of Catholic-college students who lose their faith is equal to that of Catholic students educated on the secular campus.

Mr. Novak, however, is not arguing against the idea of the Catholic school system. His argument is against the woefully dissatisfying results that system has produced. He further laments the lack of freedom and the lack of intelligent contact with conflicting ideologies one meets on the Catholic college campus. He insists that the “secular campus is the most exciting home for the human spirit in our time.”

Novak’s tough-minded realism is almost discouraging. The Catholic school system, although it has strived mightily and has achieved mightily, just cannot fulfill the task it has set for itself. Sixty-five percent of our Catholic students study on secular campuses. By 1985 that figure will have surpassed eighty percent. Catholic clubs, according to estimates put forth by Novak, can only reach twenty percent of the Catholics on a campus. Each campus is in dire need of Newman Club chaplains, and that need will increase two-and-one-half fold by 1985, as the America survey indicates.

Why, Novak argues, do we educate nuns, priests and brothers to teach the sciences and the humanities instead of training them in counseling, liturgy, ecumenics and social action? Such a move, of course, would demand the complete revision and rethinking of the apostolate of Catholic education by the Church’s teaching orders. Provision, too, would have to be made for those
religious who have a vocation to study and teach certain of the arts and sciences. A movement toward such a rethinking is evident in the reports of the 1960 Presidents' Conference of the Jesuit Educational Association, which has recently appeared in book form: *Christian Wisdom and Christian Formation* (Barry McGannon, S.J., ed; Sheed).

Novak suggests that Catholic colleges affiliate with their local counterparts, much as in the successful experiment undertaken by St. Michael's College in Toronto and several neighboring colleges. An alternate plan could be the cross registration system whereby Catholic-college students could take credit courses at nearby secular universities while they studied philosophy and theology at their own schools. A third suggestion was recently offered in the pages of *America* (Lawrence Shaw, “Georgeham: 1984,” 8/29/64). Shaw envisions the day when Catholic schools will be staffed by laymen in all departments but the Theology and Philosophy Departments, which will employ trained priests. The recently established University of the Sacred Heart in Bridgeport, Conn. has been set up on just such lines. The numbers of priests, brothers and nuns that each plan releases from the duties of teaching can be used most effectively in a widely expanded Newman Club apostolate on the secular campuses and in much more direct social action.

The world that Michael Novak envisions in the last section of *A New Generation* is one bristling with opportunities and challenges for this “new generation.” The stakes are incalculable, the risks are great and will involve many painful misunderstandings. The promise, however, of a revitalized Church, alive to the needs of its age and ever anxious to best fulfill its mission on this earth, is too great to forsake with half-hearted action.

*William E. Coleman, ’65*
Candle-Song for an Anniversary

By Terrence Doody, '65

One year since we first came together, love;
So this, our anniversary, in a way,
And time, I think, for us to stand aside
And take account of our love's progress to this day.
A year we've passed together by the sun,
But not together, really; for in that year,
Long absences have made our time together weeks
And prevent evaluation now from being clear.
For our love has been a candle caught
In sudden-dying drafts that flap the flame too much—
Distort the light: too bright and then too dark—
To judge or fairly test what such
A candle can provide of constant warmth.
We've only known, and have to judge, extremes;
And too little can be learned from these
To now predict or ascertain the beams.
The struts that could support a future love.
We cannot hope to spend our coming time
As we have spent our past: A brightness too intense,