

[Travels With the Right]



RAFFERTY

by Peter Collier

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Illustration by Colin Patrick

“**N**OW YOU WATCH, when things start to get hot in this campaign, Cranston will try to make me look like some sort of cross between Hitler and Attila the Hun.” Leaning back at his desk and tossing off bons mots with studied carelessness, Dr. Max Rafferty, California’s state superintendent of public instruction and Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate, discusses what he affably calls “The Pat Brown Syndrome,” so christened in honor of his old enemy, the ex-governor. “Pat used to do it every time an election rolled around, you know. It amounts to this:

call your opponent a Dangerous Paranoiac, and let it go at that. I don’t doubt that The Syndrome will be used against me this time around.”

Projecting vaguely rapacious innocence, Max Rafferty is the sort of fellow who drives his many enemies—in the schools, in politics and in day-to-day life—wild with frustration. He is a law unto himself, with his own strange rules of logic and procedure. One of these rules is that the game must always be played on a field of his own choosing. When asked recently about the hardening position of Alan Cranston, former state controller and Birch-baiter-in-residence for the Brown Administration, on the use of police force, Rafferty noted dryly, “It is commendable. I welcome him as a disciple in my crusade for law and order.”

The superintendent of public instruction is more a happening than anything else, the sort of zany political occurrence that has become commonplace in California over the last ten years. Inheriting an Irish gift for gab from his father and the right to membership in a group known as Children of the American Revolution from his mother’s side of the family, the fifty-one-year-old Rafferty has parlayed a ready wit and quicksilver tongue, as well as a bizarre theory of education, into rapid prominence in statewide and now national politics. Since his first appearance as a public figure just seven years ago, he has become a sort of house intellectual for California’s right wing, swinging out on practically every issue that comes into view, writing books (*Suffer, Little Children* and *What They Are Doing to Your Children*) and syndicated newspaper columns, and making an untold number of image-building appearances up and down the state under the pretense of ministering to the multiplying ills that afflict the schools. In the process, he has captured a committed following and refined the expansive, voluble style which titillates admirers and causes enemies to scour their imaginations for scornful epithets. He has been called “one of the finest minds of the 12th century,” and “the Mickey Spillane of education.”

On the surface, the superintendent would seem to be a good target for The Pat Brown Syndrome. Paranoia hangs about his politics like cheap perfume, and taken as a whole, his comments do seem dangerous enough. He is a loudly self-proclaimed patriot whose last, best refuge has always been the Gold Coast of Orange County; he has indicated that he favors strict censorship of books and films, and he lighthearted-

ly volunteers to undertake the defense of any number of near-threshold positions—from unleashing the military in Viet-Nam to unleashing law and order on the dissenters at home whom he pleasantly calls “creeps and commies.”

But Dr. Rafferty is far from being either stupid or a Manchurian Candidate under the control of sinister forces. Put simply, he has seen which way the truth is blowing. “The current state of American chaos,” he says gleefully, “is the result of 36 years of liberal sovereignty.” In education, in morals, in matters of state, Rafferty is able to communicate vividly the failures of the recent past, while holding out a vision of a new order whose simplicity is perfect in all dimensions. He is that thing he claims to despise most—a pragmatist. He knows where the action is and has managed to get a corner of it for himself, as is evident from his insight into his defeat of incumbent Senator Thomas Kuchel in the June primary, an upset which surprised practically everyone except the superintendent himself. “What happened to Kuchel,” he says in his best offhand manner, “was simply that he outgrew his usefulness and became invisible. He was a protégé of Earl Warren’s, you know, when Warren was governor of this state, and he grew up in the era of cross-filing, when a politician could have a foot in each camp. This is what determined that neuter political character, and what accounts for the fact that he wound up looking like a half-Democrat. But California had been changing while Kuchel was away for all those years in Washington. The politics polarized, and the status quo wasn’t good enough any more. Kuchel never seemed to realize it, though. Throughout the primary, he relied on his incumbency, on his 17 years seniority in the Senate, on his position as minority whip. It was an invisible campaign, the sort he has always gotten away with, only this time it didn’t work.”

Whatever Thomas Kuchel’s sins of omission, Max Rafferty understands polarization, having courted it as early as 1962, when he was first elected superintendent of public instruction. From the beginning of his career, he has flamboyantly pitted himself against the status quo which by now has alienated practically everyone. Instinctively, if not consciously, he understands how deeply the American dream has failed for the great WASP middle class: its social position has eroded, despite money and property; it has become dispossessed despite its affluence. Rafferty has always spoken directly to the phenomenon of suburban power, with its longing for the old

virtues of Americanism which it knows by nostalgia rather than experience, with its desire for the certitude of straightforward, uncomplicated solutions and for a return to the individual rather than the group as the primary unit of social emphasis.

Max Rafferty is the witty, authoritative voice laying down the ground rules to these people for their reentrance into the American Eden. The message is simple, but no less soothing for being so. It is: We're Not Guilty. For starvation in Asia: "There has always been mass starvation in Asia, long before there was a United States of America, largely because most Asiatics insist upon breeding like rabbits. . . ." For civilian deaths in Viet-Nam: "I blame the sinister Ho Chi Minh and his blood-drenched Viet Cong and that murderous mandarin Mao Tse-tung who conspired to start the slaughter over there in the first place. If you yell for my help against some burglar who has smashed his way into your home, and if one of your kids happens to get stepped on as I battle the intruder in your living room, I'm going to get pretty steamed if you hold *me* responsible."

Max Rafferty would take everyone back to a simpler time, when standards were absolute and a man was not hedged in by so many moral conditions. This is the work of a magician, not of a charlatan, as some have called him. "Look," the superintendent says brightly, as if explaining that he's only trying to make a buck, "I'm just an individualist, and I've never claimed to be anything else."

[I. THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE MAX]

DR. RAFFERTY LUXURIATES IN HIS ROLE as a rugged individualist. It is one of the few things that has stayed with him over the years. But it is a posture nonetheless—one woven of words rather than deeds. Max Rafferty is a word-merchant. One's abiding impression of this clear-eyed, square-jawed man, with his head settled precociously on a body that seems too small for it, is that there are unruly mobs of words milling about behind his perpetual smile, anxious to get free and chase each other like school children off into open space. The superintendent's sentences come fast and thick without pause for reflection, as it is said Joe McCarthy's did. Words, not any special zeal or conviction, have always been Rafferty's most attractive feature.

He was not made by a warmed-over charm salvaged from grade-C movies, or even by hard work within the party organization, but by words, specifically by a speech. Among the acolytes surrounding the superintendent, it is spoken of in hushed tones as *The Speech*. It occurred in 1961, after Rafferty had done time as a teacher and administrator in a variety of small California schools, and it rescued him from certain anonymity.

Rafferty was talking prior to *The Speech*, but not very many people were listening. His is not an especially distinguished background, but it has always been more or less concerned with education, a preoccupation that has served him well. After graduating from UCLA in 1938—he is remembered there mainly for having been an ardent member of anticommunist organizations at a time when most of the student body was worried about fascism—Rafferty got a teaching credential and a job in Trona, a small, arid town at the gateway to the Mojave Desert. He doubled as coach of the football team and

got a reputation for being a good man not to cross. He stayed at Trona High School through World War II, barely managing to avoid military service. After his occupational deferment ran out, he was classified 1A and passed his physical examination. He appealed, insisting that he had flat and deformed feet, but was denied. In a recent interview, his first wife, Virginia, recalled his aversion to the military. "He had been in the ROTC at UCLA and said that he hadn't liked it at all," she said. "He told me he hoped his flat feet would keep him out of the service, and he said if that didn't work, it would be easy to have an accident and shoot a toe off." As it worked out, Rafferty didn't have to take such a violent course. When he reported for induction, he insisted on a re-examination and finally got his 4F deferment.

Today, perhaps victimized by the generation gap, Rafferty says that he tried hard to get into the Army and was, at that time, "Wishing like the devil that they would take me. . . ." Draft resisters are very low in his estimation. They are the "creeps" spawned by a permissive education and a society out of joint.

After the war, Rafferty taught for a while in Big Bear, a resort town in the San Bernardino mountains, where he is remembered for being a good principal and an excellent public address announcer at the football games. A few years later, he became a doctor of education and a superintendent of schools. By 1961, he had made it to La Canada, a Los Angeles suburb, and he might have stayed there if it hadn't been for *The Speech*.

Rafferty had been giving *The Speech*, whose official title is "The Passing of the Patriot," in one form or another to Rotary Clubs and the like in small desert communities for some time, but it had never caused much of a stir. In 1961, however, he delivered *The Speech* to a gathering of 200 in La Canada and it resulted in an immediate furor. The audience was divided almost equally between loud praise and damnation of the speaker, a reaction which he still inspires today. Thinking back on this momentous event in his personal history, the superintendent says, "The rise of the John Birch Society—which I had never heard of till I came to the Los Angeles area—and other pro-American groups had created a tinderbox and I unwittingly dropped a lightning bolt in the middle of it." For a man who had never heard of the Birch Society, however, Rafferty showed what can only be called a remarkable instinct in *The Speech*. "The worst of our youngsters," he said, "are growing up to become booted, ducktailed, unwashed, leather-jacketed Slobs, whose favorite sport is ravaging little girls and stomping polio victims to death; the best of our youth are coming into maturity for all the world like young people fresh from a dizzying roller coaster ride, with everything blurred, with nothing clear, with no positive standards, with everything in doubt. No wonder so many of them welsh out and squeal and turn traitor when confronted with the grim reality of Red military force and the crafty cunning of Red psychological warfare."

The Speech caused many a ripple in the normally stagnant waters of California education. Portions of it were inserted into the Congressional Record; it was reprinted in dozens of papers over the country and in *The Reader's Digest*. Thus Rafferty's career as a force to be reckoned with was launched, and he began to popularize the message contained in *The Speech*, which is important less for its content than for its tone—What

Are They Doing to Your Children?

Shortly after giving *The Speech*, Rafferty was approached by what he remembers as a "concerned citizens' group" to run for state superintendent of public instruction, a post which was shortly to become vacant. He did so, after being assured of adequate financial backing from Henry Salvatori, Walter Knott and other financiers of the right, who are now hoping that he will join George Murphy and Governor Reagan in a right-wing trinity. The 1962 election was hard fought, with several candidates on the primary ballot. Rafferty finished second to Dr. Ralph Richardson, a professor at UCLA. He later handily won the runoff in the general election. Like most nominally nonpartisan contests, this one split clearly down party lines: Richardson, the liberal Democrat, urbane and unexciting, backed by the professional teachers' groups and somehow identified with the status quo; Rafferty, the maverick, appealing to a grass roots concerned with the fact that their kids seemed to be growing up absurd.

Since arriving in Sacramento, Rafferty has, as one state legislator puts it, "been doing practically nothing but running for higher office." If he didn't know before, he has known since he gave *The Speech* where the action is, and during his years as superintendent he has largely ignored education and cultivated the action. California's educational system has responded by going downhill. Tests, in which he places more faith than most educators, show that the state is now 25th nationally in the accomplishments of graduating high school seniors. Neil Sullivan, superintendent of the Berkeley schools, says, "I've been in this state for four years now, and that guy has never called a meeting of all the superintendents of schools. Who the hell is he supposed to be leading anyway? I've only seen the man once in person, and that was when he called me to Sacramento to discuss the fact that the Berkeley schools had Langston Hughes' poetry on its library shelves. The conference involved my saying that the books would stay, and him saying OK."

If he hasn't done much about education, the superintendent has nonetheless been an enthusiastic gadfly on the back of practically any issue that has political potential. He has been the hardest of hard-liners among the University of California regents and has loudly attacked dissenters of all varieties. On a more parochial level, he has sided with women in Orange County who quibbled over the way that evolution was taught to their children; he has conducted a public pogrom against such pornographic classics as *The Dictionary of American Slang*; he has spoken out against strikes and homosexuality in the teaching profession. He proposed hundreds of niggling amendments to *Land of the Free*, the controversial eighth grade history text which became a minor cause célèbre throughout the state because of its attempt to present American history in a "scholarly" light and to portray, at least fleetingly, the accomplishments of minority groups. Objectionable to the superintendent were inferences that the U.S. became a colonial power when it took over the Philippines; that white supremacy was an integral part of the restoration of the Union after the Civil War; that the Japanese were thinking of surrender at the time that the atomic bomb was dropped; that Joe McCarthy might possibly have abused his powers as a senator. On the whole, Rafferty's objections didn't carry much weight with the State Curriculum Commission. But this wasn't important; his points had been made for all to hear.

What exactly has Dr. Max Rafferty done in six years as superintendent? Nothing much, nothing very harmful certainly, although his abrasive presence has been extraordinarily unaesthetic, especially for the liberals he has always driven up against the wall. He can legitimately claim, as he does on the list he has prepared of his ten top accomplishments, "the adoption of music textbooks containing such patriotic songs as 'Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean,' 'You're a Grand Old Flag,' and 'Yankee Doodle Boy.'" He can take credit for producing "a recommended list of children's classics to be sent to all elementary and junior high schools." And most important, of course, he has kept his constituency up-to-date on the day-to-day progress of his thinking on issues that are vital to the Republic. All this wins him the order of merit he most wants—the Red, White and Blue Max.

[II. DING DONG DEWEY]

IF ONE WERE TO RELY ON HIS DEEDS as a public official, defining Rafferty would be like trying to carve a statue of Venus out of silly putty. But his writing and what passes for his official thoughts are something else altogether. Here, with sledgehammer arrogance, the world of Max Rafferty becomes clear.

In his promotional literature, the superintendent calls himself "one of the few major educational reformers in American history." This is the kind of solipsism permitted only to egomaniacs and political candidates. It is a claim that rests on two factors: a relentless attack on John Dewey, whom he doesn't understand in the least, and the way that Dewey's progressive education has corrupted modern children; and Rafferty's own counter-program, which he calls "Education in Depth."

What Dr. Rafferty endlessly belabors as "the gospel according to St. John Dewey" has never been implemented in this country's official educational philosophy, except for a pop translation which has managed to filter into professional educators' jargon. Certainly progressive education had ceased to be a vital issue for some time before Rafferty made it his number one priority in that first campaign of 1962. But to hear the superintendent tell it, Deweyism had reigned as long and autocratically as Louis XIV. And he has made a career for himself out of giving it life as a bona fide straw man which he is willing to knock the hell out of at a moment's notice.

This progressive education—what is it to Dr. Rafferty? It is a virus that silently infiltrates educational philosophy and condemns the young to a perdition of ignorance; it is a force that makes "the mastery of basic skills . . . erode, knowledge of the great cultures and contributions of past civilizations slip and slide, reverence for the heroics of our nation's past fade and wither." Deweyism is to Rafferty what the Supreme Court is to some of his adherents—a metaphor through which he can communicate his sense of the nation's all-out failure. "We have found out," he wrote in 1962, "that our morals are rotten, our world position degenerating so abysmally that a race of lash-driven atheistic peasants can challenge us successfully in our own chosen field of science, and our rate of juvenile murder, torture, rape and perversion so much the highest in the world that it has become an object of shuddering horror to the rest of the human race." John Dewey and the liberal pragmatic tradition out of which he worked are as much as

anything else responsible for the end of the American empire. "I submit," says the superintendent, "that our national school curriculum, particularly in the elementary and junior high schools, has had little or no relation to the only really basic issue of the past decade and a half—national survival."

Dr. Rafferty's use of Dewey and progressive education is not especially noteworthy as intellectual activity. What this critique—which is actually a sort of smear campaign conducted in the guise of educational theorizing—does do, however, is give him a convenient peg on which to hang his ideas about the necessity for reviving all the antique virtues of American life. It does all that any kind of reductionism can for the reducer.

The superintendent's panacea for education's large production of Slobs is not only euthanasia for Deweyism, but also a plan of his own. What the term "education in depth" really means has eluded most who seek to understand it, although its outlines are fairly clear. It maintains that the "main purpose of education is to seek out lasting truths . . . and explore them to the greater benefit of the individual and the nation." It regards the individual as "the be-all and the end-all of the educative process." It wants a curriculum to "provide for the individual the tools and skills he needs to be a cultured, productive, patriotic American citizen." It believes that the "very survival of our country and the success of the individual . . . depends upon how well he is taught to hold his own in a highly competitive world." It always impresses upon the student that "our economic system has made us the envy and the wonder of the whole world." Over and above this, Rafferty is very strong on tracking students, forced feedings of facts, memorization and drill in the multiplication tables.

It is no accident that Max Rafferty has hedged on the topic of corporal punishment for children, since his whole educational theory amounts to a subtle infliction of punishment on pupils. "Once in a while," he writes, "a schoolman will come across a child who has been taught at home to equate punishment for a misdeed with a switching or a paddling, and who does not realize that he has done anything wrong unless discipline is administered in this manner." And ultimately, his "education in depth" is little more than a sort of sensory deprivation experiment for the child, a brutalization of soul, if not body. It is also a form of educational counterinsurgency to make sure that children don't develop any sort of discrimination about the ideas to which they are exposed; it is a way of ensuring that they are not free from authoritarian classroom regimens and don't develop in directions undreamt of in the dictionary of standard Americanisms. The superintendent's "educational philosophy" is motivated by an inquisitorial contempt for children as creatures whose wills need to be broken as early as possible; whose judgments need to be stifled with respect for authority before they have a chance to become dangerous; and finally, who must at all times be subjected to patriotism as if it were a mutilation ritual to ward off demons.

All of this is partially hidden beneath high-sounding clichés, of course. As with most who propagandize in prose, Rafferty's writing tells more about him than anything else. His is a style of writing that vulgarizes the language and ultimately makes it as inhuman and meaningless as the classroom would be for any child luckless enough to live in his utopia. Words for Rafferty do not exist to inform or even convince, but to over-

power, to hammerlock a reader into submissive assent. They crowd about his awesomely simplistic ideas like a pack of male dogs all simultaneously trying to mount a bitch in heat.

The metaphors are overripe, and a rancid smell comes off them: "The educator should approach his class not as the chemist appraises his retorts nor the astronomer his nebulae, but rather as the conductor confronts his symphony orchestra. From the breathless whispering of the strings, from the clarion peals of the brass, from the muted thunder of the percussion, the conductor will weave the very fabric of great music, threaded throughout with the polychromatic strands of his own genius. Even so will the teacher evoke from the myriad experiences and abilities of his pupils the chords which, laced and interwoven with something of himself, will ring grandly in the harmony of life." What is important here is the fact that the most mundane of ideas is treated as an apocalyptic insight, and the reader is commanded by the language to pay homage to it. And throughout Rafferty's writing, there is an unbelievably heavy leaven of sentimentality, a counterfeit sentiment for those who have none: "From beneath our countless classroom desks have passed, in time gone by, the feet that plodded through the mud of the Argonne and waded ashore in the bloody hell of Iwo Jima. From the gymnasiums of American schools have come the lithe young bodies that fought and won at San Juan Hill and Tarawa, Seoul and Belleau Wood."

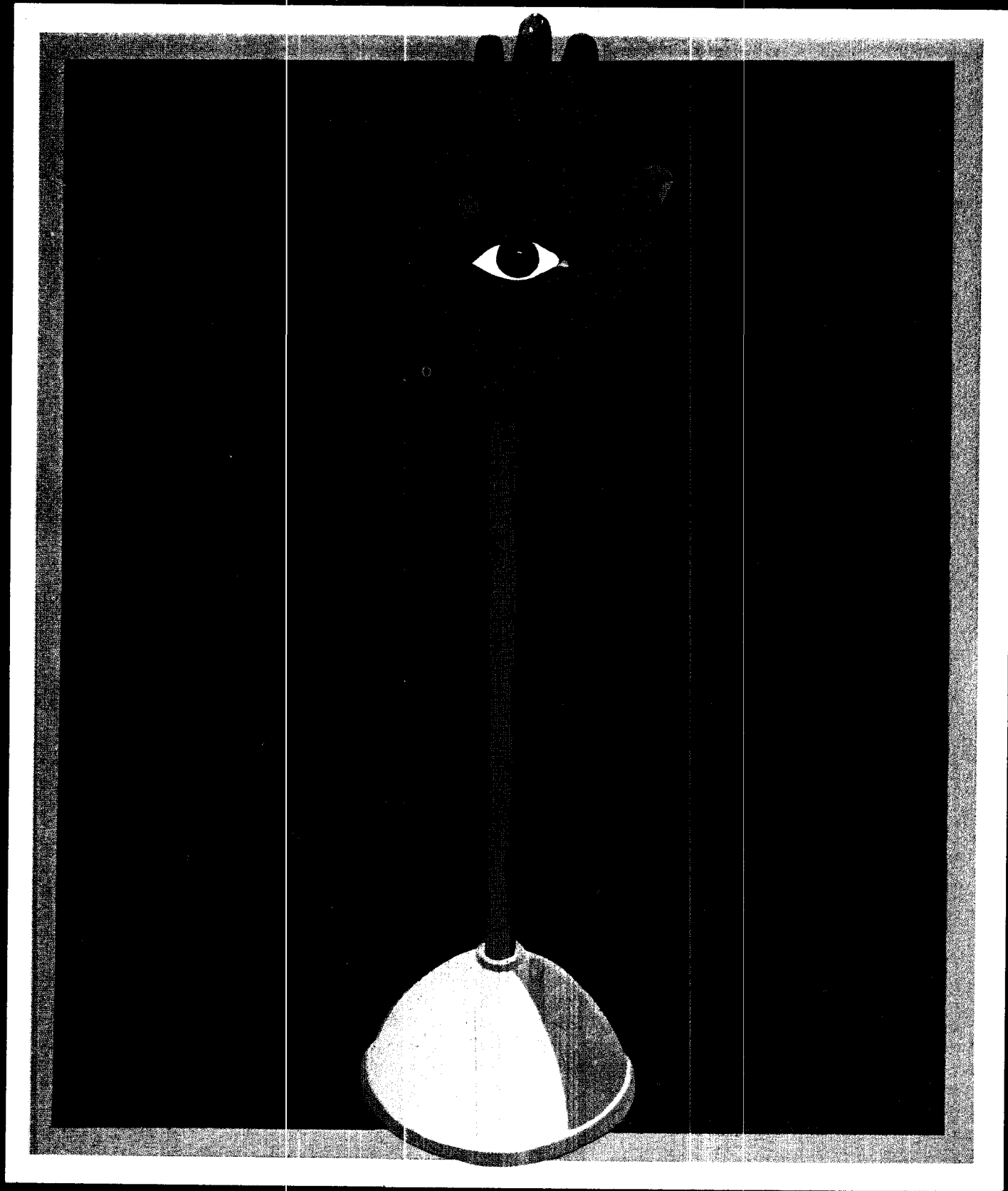
Through this maudlin, curdled stew, the reality of the world of Max Rafferty is rarely visible. But when it is, one realizes that the superintendent possesses little more in the way of logical argument than the non sequiturs Pat Paulsen has popularized as a stage device. "It seems to me," the superintendent writes, "that one of the first duties of a nation's educational system is to preserve that nation. After all, if the nation goes under, so do the schools."

Dr. Rafferty's books are whole concentration camps of literary and logical abuse. Perhaps his politics can be regarded as impelled by a pragmatic desire to be elected, but what he writes about and how he writes about it is wholly voluntary.

[III. YEAR OF THE BEAST]

IN MANY WAYS, MAX RAFFERTY IS A COMICAL, Chaplinesque figure, pummeling his straw men and casually pulling the wings off the ideas he has captured in a lifetime of watching, waiting and talking. But as he goes blithely on his way, dividing the universe into children of light and children of darkness, it is hard to forget that only in a period of social collapse and confusion could such a Rafferty-happening exist.

He is genuine American Gothic, and somehow the assertion that he is the offspring of a failed liberalism isn't powerful enough to explain a happening of his magnitude. Perhaps the Raffertys have always been there, waiting in the shadows for liberalism to run its course, so they could make their own wordy, confusing appearance at stage center. But now, as they claim what they regard as their rightful place as leaders of men, it is necessary to conceive the inconceivable—they will govern, for a time, this country and therefore the world. It will be a grotesque experience, but it may also sharpen our moral focus and allow us to see something which has become obscured over the years: the evil of banality.



SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE
OR
THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

A DUTY-DANCE WITH DEATH

BY

KURT VONNEGUT JR.

A FOURTH-GENERATION GERMAN-AMERICAN
NOW LIVING IN EASY CIRCUMSTANCES
ON CAPE COD

[AND SMOKING TOO MUCH],
WHO, AS AN AMERICAN INFANTRY SCOUT
[HORS DE COMBAT],

AND A PRISONER OF WAR,
WITNESSED THE FIRE-BOMBING
OF DRESDEN, GERMANY,
"THE FLORENCE OF THE ELBE,"
A LONG TIME AGO,
AND SURVIVED TO TELL THE TALE.

THIS IS A NOVEL
SOMEWHAT IN THE TELEGRAPHIC, SCHIZOPHRENIC
MANNER OF TALES
OF THE PLANET TRALFAMADORE,
WHERE THE FLYING SAUCERS
COME FROM.
PEACE.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., a Seymour Lawrence/Delacourt Press book, will be published on March 10, 1969. The following are the first two chapters of that book.

Illustration by Dugald Stermer

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