



The Gift of Fire

Richard Mitchell

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The Gift of Fire Richard Mitchell

Twenty-odd years ago, Richard Mitchell, a professor at New Jersey's Glassboro State College, set out on a quixotic pursuit: the rescue of the English language and the minds of those attached to the world by it. Donning cape and mask as "The Underground Grammarian," Mitchell sallied forth upon his newsletter against the nonsense being spoken, written, and, indeed, encouraged by the educational establishment. ("One thing led to another," as he tells it, "a front page piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, a profile in *Time*, and other such. Before it was over, *The Underground Grammarian* came to be, in the world of desktop printing, the first publication to have subscribers on every continent except Antarctica.") What began as a vivid catalog of ignorance and inanity in the written work of professional educators and their hapless students soon became an enterprise of most noble moment: an investigation, via mordant wit and perceptive intelligence, of "what we might usefully decide to mean by 'education.'" The results of Mitchell's inquiries are as stimulating today as they were when first articulated. His project remains a telling explication of how, through writing, we discover thought and make knowledge. It is certainly the most drolly entertaining.

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