

FROM THE TRENCHES

Costume-Based Schooling

by *Edward G. Rozycki*

It was six men of Indostan
 To learning much inclined,
 Who went to see the Elephant
 (Though all of them were blind),
 That each by observation
 Might satisfy his mind.

—John Godfrey Saxe (1816–1887)¹

In Days of Yore

In olden days, back in the Oldcountry, it was much easier to choose. Back then the Club Manager told you what costume to wear. Even the Ax-wielders recognized the advantages of the Costume: it reduced resistance to their ministrations. Ordinary people came to recognize the advent of the Costumed Ax-wielder as a sign of their own shortcomings. If, when asked to adopt the Costume, you hemmed and hawed, you were visited by one of the Ax-wielders and made an offer you couldn't refuse: *be convinced or be minced*.

And most people fell in line wearing the prescribed costume: surprisingly, not all too reluctantly. Rather, to make peace with Conscience, they talked themselves into believing that they accepted the Costume, not from fear of the Ax, but for Good Reason's sake. (And besides, you had to show your costume off only on the rare occasion when a Manager or an Ax-wielder insisted.)

educational HORIZONS® (ISSN 0013-175X) is published quarterly by Pi Lambda Theta, Inc., 4101 East Third Street, P.O. Box 6626, Bloomington, IN 47407-6626. Membership in Pi Lambda Theta, which includes a subscription to educational HORIZONS®, is \$35 per year. Nonmember subscriptions are available for \$18 per year; U.S.; \$25 per year; Canada and international. Periodicals postage paid at Bloomington, Indiana, and other mailing offices. Single copies: U.S. \$5, Canada \$6.50, and international \$8, plus \$1.50 postage. POSTMASTER: Address changes should be mailed to: Pi Lambda Theta, P.O. Box 6626, Bloomington, IN 47407-6626. All claims must be made within four months of publication. Back volumes available on microfilm from ProQuest Information and Learning, 300 Zeeb Rd., P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346; (313) 761-4700; (800) 521-0600; www.proquest.com. Indexed in Current Index to Journals in Education (ERIC). Selected back issues available online at www.pilambda.org. Copyright 2004, all rights reserved, by Pi Lambda Theta. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of Pi Lambda Theta. educational HORIZONS® is a trademark of Pi Lambda Theta.

But there were always some scoundrels who resisted—who wore no costume or the wrong costume or added or subtracted something from the prescribed costume! Happily they provided us, the correctly costumed, some distraction from, and recompense for, the disciplined life imposed by the Costume: these scoundrels could be minced, diced, and even sliced, to the edification and amusement of all. As one of our sages put it, “It will be the reward of the Correctly Costumed to contemplate the eternal embarrassment of the Unfashionable!”

But mistakes were made. Some Wonderful People were mistaken for scoundrels. (Or, as some club managers explained later, Wonderful People whose correct costume was ignored or unrecognized by scoundrels posing as club managers.) Belated recognition of their wonderfulness did not undo the fact that they had been minced, sliced, and diced. These martyrs to Fashionable Costumery were eventually acknowledged, however, and even some expiation for the mistake offered in that club functionalities—Ax-wielders of the Costume, even—could sport a Wonderful Remnant, a mincing, a slicing, or a dicing, to adorn their renovated costumes.

But scoundrels abounded. And even wielded axes. The Costume Wars commenced. After great struggle, a most unappetizing truce was concluded: scoundrels were to be permitted to go about their scoundreling, their restyling of the Costume, without interference. It was time to go elsewhere.

The New World and the Proposal

We came to Newland seeking to establish a Realm of the Costume. Unfortunately, scoundrels abounded here, too. Something in the air or water, it seemed, turned even the most fervent among us, our own children, even, into scoundrels. We had been sure our epaulets and shoulder braids would hold, indeed draw, people away from the false charms of tucks and darts and appliqués: but not only did tucks and darts and the lot continue to mar the Costume, some also added spats. Spats! And the Law permitted it! Worse yet, the Law allowed real scoundrels to pretend to True Costumery and even defame us as the scoundrels! Hard to bear; but at least these scoundrels, who outnumbered us substantially, were not permitted to wield the Ax in their own behalf.

Many a Wise Person, throughout the history of this Newland, has warned us that without the Costume, Schooling can never be Education. Public schooling we found particularly disturbing for its disregard of costumery. Over the years in this Newland, intense feelings about costumery have waned and some rapprochement has occurred among aficionados whose costumes vary minorly. Many of us now understand that the Costume, like the proverbial Elephant, has many facets, only

some of which we, with our limited understanding, can comprehend. It is now a time when we—and our (ex-scoundrel) associates—recognize that minor variations in costume are not so important, so long as everyone wears a costume. (Spats are still anathema—but there are jails, now, as well as axes.) It is our most recent undertaking to promote the public funding of costume-based schools.

Here is our proposal: Let all and only those presenting themselves as costumed club managers (mere members are so fickle and membership, itself, so changeable) have access to public funds to establish schools, each based on their own Costume. Let the funds be proportioned to the needs of the membership served.

We believe that schools based on costumery will ennoble those attending them, strengthening their characters and providing a firm basis for their citizenship. History proves this: one need only look at the Ax-wielders to see how costumery has softened their manners, their hearts, and their mercies.

The Risks

But doesn't our proposal run a real risk that scoundrels, real honest-to-goodness Scoundrels, will pass themselves off as costumed club managers just to get their hands in the pot? Couldn't every person in Newland fashion a costume and claim to be a club manager?

There are two answers to this concern: the first is that History again shows how in the long run the Power of Costumery brings the fraudulent, the real Scoundrels, to ruin. Our Costume abides with us and the Scoundrels are relegated to a place where only secondhand clothing and hand-me-downs are available.

The second answer is this: even as we speak, most of our members—no matter how evanescent their membership—express fatigue at the many choices offered them and the many decisions that take time away from their casinos, their video games, their World Federation Wrestling, and their Monday night football. They implore us to create a League of Certified Costumery to ward off the scoundrels—perhaps, even, with the help of properly costumed legislators, to recostume the Ax-wielders for the enforcement of Good Fashion.

Note

1. <<http://www.wordfocus.com/word-act-blindmen.html>>.

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