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POPULAR CULTURE
IN THE
ENGLISH CURRICULUM

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What is English? That question has long been debated, often heatedly. I would hope that the debate would continue and that this issue of the Minnesota English Journal would help heat the fires of the debate since we need to be constantly defining our subject which is, as all of us know, so comprehensive that no definition can ever hope to encompass it.

The subject matter of English, always broad, seems to be getting even broader as this issue, which focuses on a relatively new aspect--popular culture-- makes clear. The authors attempt to define popular culture as an integral part of the humanities and to show how it can be taught in the classroom, mostly in the high school, although much of what is suggested is also applicable in the elementary school and in college. The final article in this issue, while it does not deal directly with popular culture, does show how adolescent novels can be used, just as popular culture can, to force students to reexamine their values and thereby to become a little more human.

I would hope, as I'm sure that the authors of these articles would, that they might provoke some disagreement, particularly from those who feel that popular culture is not a liberating, mind expanding subject with a place in the English curriculum where we ought to concentrate on the literature that has stood the test of time and that many students will have no other opportunity to explore.

Your journal, therefore, would welcome response to these articles, short or long, just as it would welcome articles, poems, short stories on any topic. The more articles the editor has to choose from the more lively and provocative the journal will be. Speaking of a lively journal, contributors should keep in mind that a little levity now and then would not be out of place, even in these pages. Sometimes we take ourselves too seriously. But serious or humorous all articles will be read with interest and considered for subsequent issues.

Writing Themes About Popular Literature: Definitions, Classifications, and Applications

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At first glance, popular culture seems to be easily defined, but hardly worth the effort. It is commercial, trivial, transient and disposable, and most certainly appears to be irrelevant to the classroom, where our concerns are with permanent values. But when we begin to realize that our students live in an environment-- in some cases a total environment--of popular culture, a second glance seems appropriate. It is, after all, many years now since teachers have presumed that there is no existence for students outside the school, and so, for example, we recognize the importance of understanding the culture of the ghetto children, at least so that we can be more sure of what we have to work with. When such examination has been made, though, teachers may feel dismayed at the separation of the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students.

There are common denominators, though. One is the school, of which more later. The other is popular culture, for it is a fact that the urban ghetto, the suburban split-level, the reservation shanty, or the prairie farm-house alike share Dentyne, 7-up, Maud, Reader's Digest and Superman. It is a chaotic world of material goods, this popular environment, and it may be necessary to define and classify it just for the sake of control. The field of popular culture per se is now some seven or eight years old, and definitions abound and sometimes may seem to conflict, but after some years at the task, I have settled upon the definition implied in the diagram below, which I call a "culture-wheel." In terminology it differs from some other definitions of the different cultural traditions, but overall it is congruent with such definitions as Russel Nye's in his excellent The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (Dial: New York, 1970).

POPULAR

MASS PRODUCTION
MASS AUDIENCE
COMMERCIAL
Coca-Cola
"Knock Three Times"

Rock-opera
Pop Art

Hand-made local souvenir
Country western music

SOCIAL VALUES
INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION
MYTH
FORM
TECHNIQUE

FOLK

TRADITIONAL
LOCAL
FUNCTIONAL
An Eskimo mukluk
A Yoruba work-song

CULTIVATED

CONSCIOUS
PROFESSIONAL
EXPRESSIVE
Cellini salt-cellar
A Bartok quartet

Mexican retables
Romantic-national symphonic works

In reading the "wheel" try to think of producer, object and consumer in each of the three traditions: folk, popular and cultivated (or "high" or "elite"). That is, for example, think of Beethoven, his symphony, and his audience; or of the Yoruba potter, the vessel, and the user of the vessel. Aside from that, the "wheel" is self-explanatory. The borrowings among the three traditions are illustrated in the examples given between the "pure" labels, and actually these in-between areas are where "the action" is in the arts: pure "cultivation" is sterile academicism; pure "folk" is static; pure popular is dismally stereotyped. I exaggerate, of course, but only to emphasize the stimulation that comes to any arts from borrowings of content and techniques. Only think of what the discovery of African folk arts contributed to burnt-out traditions of cultivated Europe,

or of what the discovery of popular rock music did for Broadway, or of what the discovery of art nouveau did for popular decor, and you may begin to understand why a "serious" scholar can become interested in this complicated subject.

But probably the most complicating force affecting these different traditions is that of universal public education. The schools repress folk tradition, expunge popular traditions and institutionalize cultivated traditions. The child enters the school, comic book in hand and dialect in mouth, and after twelve years he leaves, his comic book hidden in his zipper case notebook, his dialect mitigated into grammatical, if crudely ennunciated speech, and his hand holding the paperback works of Shakespeare and Vonnegut, "both dead."

The effect of education on the cultural traditions may help to delineate the audiences. Strictly speaking, folk culture is a non-literate, oral tradition. Clearly, for most people, some experiences are folk generated, such as childhood rhymes and games, how to cook an egg, how to call a dog, but with each year of formal schooling, more and more experiences are institutionalized, mass-disseminated, or mediated through print and the electronic media. They cease to be local and direct person-to-person folk experiences. At the other end of the scale, higher education tends to increase consciousness of ones own actions and tastes, and it tends to extend the cultural environment at least to a national scope, but probably more likely to an international, inter-cultural scope with a wide range of historical experience. Finally, higher education is marked by a tendency toward analysis and definition. To put all this in simpler terms, the cultivated consumer (or patron, if this is more flattering) of cultural products has been aided by formal education to ask: What—precisely—is this? Where does it fit into history? What are its components? What is its message or appeal to me? In short, conscious definition, classification, analysis and response are traits of the cultivated audience. This self-awareness and analysis is foreign to the folk and popular audience. Foreign, but not inapplicable.

Traditionally, the schools and teacher outlaw

popular works, and yet, it would seem to be far more useful to help young people to apply the tools of cultivation to their dominant environment of mass products rather than to outlaw them. In the rather broad field of "English", this means that the schools might very well look seriously into popular literature. In the remainder of this article, I will be suggesting some methods from the cultivated tradition that may help both teachers and students to understand, discriminate and more fully enjoy popular literature.

As art, popular literature has few substantial differences from cultivated or "high" literature, although the differences in degree can be considerable. Popular literature and cultivated literature alike employ formula plots, but in cultivated literature the formula is so obscured by the subtlety and range of characterization and of language, by the multiplication of plots, and by the sophistication of philosophical ideas and artistic techniques, that it often becomes ridiculous to comment upon the plot formulas at all--for example to dwell upon the fact that Moby Dick is a sea adventure story. On the other hand, contrasting Moby Dick to popular sea stories may help the readers to understand the nature of Melville's art and philosophy. Formula narrative and its concomitant, stock characters (good guy, bad guy, Augusto, Pantalone, Miles Gloriosus, etc.), consequently, are common to both literary traditions, but they are more salient in popular literature.

Similarly, while both literary traditions share the three common elements of audience, author, and art work, in popular literature the audience far outweighs the the other elements in importance. The popularity of In His Steps, or Superman comics, or How to Win Friends and Influence People communicates social-psychological information about the audience in its time and place, but in none of these instances is a biographical study of the author (or authors, in the case of Superman) especially rewarding. In cultivated literature, where individual authors' lives help to illuminate their works, audience studies are next to worthless. The examination of the readership of Mann's The Magic Mountain or Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury does not help us to understand the works themselves, for they are artistic entities and personal expressions and are better approached through examination of technique, imagery, history and philosophical-aesthetic biography of the author.

The grey area between the traditions is where most literary works are located, and so no easy definitions and panaceas are available. Each literary work demands careful thought. All Quiet on the Western Front, for example, may be examined as a best-seller Book-of-the Month selection of 1929, as a war novel, or as the personal expression of the artist Remarque. The popular audience approach may be extremely useful for some fine art works. A high school class that does not respond to Catcher in the Rye may find it profitable to examine it as a popular work that spoke intensely to the audience of 1951; indeed, so intensely, that we of that audience have institutionalized it, under the reasonably safe assumption that Holden Caulfield's concerns were of his age, not of The Age, and thus would speak to those of Holden's age a quarter-century after. Such, I suppose, is the test of great literature. In their original format and style, the novels of Charles Dickens are no longer popular; we do not favor long printed stories in weekly installments; but for any who will make the effort to read the collected installments (or novel), the largeness, the universality, the abundance of life, and the clarity of the Dickensian eye, ear, nose, throat and mind will reveal some reasons for the long-haul popularity of great literature.

All this is prefatory, for the general fact remains that popular literature has few substantial differences from cultivated literature, and that therefore, the approaches to the study of popular literature can be similar to those approaches that help us to understand cultivated literature. For these, a useful codification was developed by Edgar V. Roberts for his composition textbook, Writing Themes About Literature, now in its third edition (Prentice-Hall: New York, 1973). This handy book contains eighteen chapters, each showing a valid approach to literary criticism, with full explanations and sample themes. I will list his chapter-headings here, and provide a brief comment on possible applications to popular literature in hopes that many

more ideas will occur to teachers and students for literature which could include everything from Nancy Drew mysteries, to Luke Short western, to Rod McKuen poetry, and, by judicious extension, to magazine advertising copy, television drama and comic strips.

1. The Summary Theme. Especially valuable for laying bare the bones of formula plots.
2. The Report. This genre includes some analysis and personal response from the writer, and will provide the freedom a student needs in his first experience with a popular literary form, say, a Horatio Alger story.
3. Theme of Character Analysis. Rarely applies in the usual sense, because popular fiction characters are two-dimensional and do not change within a given work. But as stock characters, archetypes and symbols there may be much to be said.
4. The Theme About Point of View. Much detective fiction is first-person narrative; all mysteries must carefully control point-of-view; earlier popular fiction is outrageously omniscient and given to the vocative: "Ah! Gentle reader, if only our hero could see what lay ahead!"
5. The Theme About Setting. In much popular romance and spy fiction, the setting contains an image of elegance and sophistication for the popular mind; landscape is a fascinating variable in westerns. In popular literature, why is there no Milwaukee?
6. The Theme Discussing Ideas. Roberts means "message" or "meaning" by ideas. Orphan Annie is blatant about ideas, and so is Doonesbury. How about Blondie and Rex Morgan? Popular fiction is rarely obscure or ambivalent: Good will triumph, but it isn't easy.
7. The Theme on a Close Reading. Close reading implies a carefully wrought text, which is not often the case with popular literature. Close reading can be useful as a device for extracting formulae, tag phrases, cliches, Tom Swifties: "I ate too much," said Tom heavily.
8. The Theme on a Specific Problem. That is, a problem assigned by the teacher. Quite applicable to popular literature.
9. The Theme of Comparison-Contrast. My own favorite because it illuminates characteristics of both

individuals: Perry Mason and Donald Lamm; As the World Turns and The Forsythe Sage: True Grit in film and fiction; the Hardy boys and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
10. The Theme Analyzing Structure. The study of structure in both narrative formulae and mythic constructs are current advanced problems for serious researchers in popular culture. Folk and myth studies a la Levi-Strauss may be useful. This is not kid stuff.
11. The Theme on Imagery. The sociological nature of popular literature is apparent here. Popular literature images are heavy-handed and conventional. Look at the metaphorical characteristics of pornographic novels, "tough-guy" detective fiction, and popular song lyrics.
12. The Theme Analyzing Tone. Tone is an elusive topic, but in popular literature, examine approval and disapproval of movements in popular opinion. Is the tone of James Bond novels approving of CIA? Are westerns "environmental" or exploitive?
13. The Theme Analyzing Prosody. The technical knowledge required for analysis of popular poetry is no less than that required for cultivated poetry, yet the analysis tends to confirm the conventional design of popular verse. The lyrics to modern popular songs have more complicated prosody.
14. The Theme Analyzing Prose Style. Dialect and diction are especially valid topics in prose, as are the balance between dialogue and description. In novels chapter openings and endings are worth examining in the light of structure. Popular prose styles also seem to tend either toward extremely spare styles or toward florid, purple prose.
15. The Theme Analyzing Historical Period. Particularly valuable approach for popular works, which often describe what people in a historical period thought of themselves. The literary styles of any historical period are simplified and magnified in popular letters.
16. The Theme of Evaluation. A great temptation in popular literature criticism is to judge the work absolutely. This results in books-of-the-month (for all time) on the one hand and much light literature that doesn't seem to measure up to King Lear on the other. Evaluation of popular literature should always consider relative standards: relative

to audience, historical period, popular form, etc.

17. The Review. Edgar Roberts describes this as a free
evaluation report. I think it could be valuable for
new current magazines, comic books and television
programs. "This Year's Horror Stories; A review of
new trends," etc.

18. The Theme on Film. This theme Roberts has added
since his first 1964 edition, and quite rightly so.
Yet it implies somewhat too strongly that film is
a literary art form. Insofar as film is dramatic
and narrative it is indeed a literary form. At
best, however, film is a visual or an audio-visual
medium, (which may or may not include dialogue and
narrative). Audio-visual art calls into play many
skills, techniques, conventions and perceptions
that are not included in the literary budget of
critical and creative tools. For some reasons,
literary scholars have made playscripts part of
their field, and, by implication, the theatrical
production as well. So Shakespeare is literature;
yet, strangely, Verdi is not. Rightly or wrongly,
the literary authority feels that music-drama is a
multi-media pageant, and for him to extrapolate the
verbal portion would be presumptious. (This doesn't
bother the musical authority on opera, however: the
verbal and visual and mimetic elements are often
but silly trappings festooning the real opera).
The question is open. Are Eisenstein, Fellini and
Bergman producers of literature?

Please understand, I am not setting up precincts
of jurisdiction. I am only pointing out that some
kinds of films require--or are open to--studies of
all the seventeen preceding types exclusive of verbal
context: camera point-of-view, visual imagery, the
tone established by musical score, montage style,
and so on. The same thing is true of many of the
popular literary art forms I have mentioned above:
comics vary all the way from highly literary (like
Orphan Annie or Doonesbury) to highly pictorial
(like Henry or Flash Gordon) sometimes with a total
separation, as with Prince Valiant, other times with
inseparable integration, as with Pogo. Television
drama, plays and musicals are likewise multi-arts,
as advertisements, but all of these may be profitably
studied for their literary (verbal) content and style.

As to film and popular literature, the distinction
I like to make is that between films and movies.
Bergman does films, John Wayne stars in movies.
The popular movie, with its heavy reliance on plot,
is very close to literature.

Earlier I stated that as art, popular literature has
few substantial differences from cultivated literature,
and it was on this basis that I recommended Roberts'
Writing Themes About Literature as a guide for students,
teachers and researchers, for his theme classifications
all show usable means toward understanding the art and
ideas of popular literature.

But there are substantial differences between popular
literature and "high" literature, because popular
literature is a business more than it is an art. In
popular literature, author, art work, and audience tend
to become producer, commodity, and market, and this
necessitates some additional ways of studying and writing
about popular literature (for, after all, only unpublished
authors write for art's sake exclusively, and proofsheets
and royalties involve all writers in the business of
literature), but because the art works of cultivated
literature are highly individual, for them, Roberts' list
of approaches may be more appropriate. Faulkner's novels
are unique and deserve individual study; one can pick an
Erle Stanley Gardner novel at random for study.

So let us proceed to add to the list of approaches
to "Writing Themes About (Popular) Literature."

19. The Theme about Conventional Consistency. Popular
literature conforms to conventions and formulae.
What is the conventional structure for a Perry Mason
mystery? How well does this conform? (This theme
type is familiar to us all: "Does Death of a
Salesman conform to the conventions of tragedy in
Aristotle's Poetics?" "Are George Meredith's Sonnets
good sonnets?" and so on). Consider the teen-age
girls' novel, the inspirational biography, the
Readers' Digest anecdote, the Sports Afield hunting
narrative, the True Romances confession. To identify
conventions, study the parodies of Leacock, Beerbohm,
Benchly, Mad and National Lampoon, and look into

Writer's Digest and The Writer for prescriptions for writers.

20. The Theme about Production and Process. Much popular literature must conform to production requirements: number of pages, type of binding, size of columns, price of plates, printing deadlines, and so on. At least from Dickens' day on, this has greatly affected art style.

21. The Theme about Economics. Related to the above, but consider Alexandre Dumas' staccato dialogue after his publisher shifted the pay scale from by-the-word to by-the-page. Most importantly, literary economics is a matter of finding what the market wants, and then grinding it out fast, imitating other best sellers. Statistical examination of sales figures, market breakdowns and the like is essential to the study of popular literature.

22. The Theme about History and Development. Because of market competition, because of changing events, popular literary forms change rapidly. Relaxed obscenity legislation produced a whole new area of popular mass literature which in form, language and content has "advanced" annually. How about the development of the character of Snoopy in Peanuts? What is the development of the western hero? The international spy? The paperback original? (Once more, the approach should be familiar to English teachers: "What is the history of the sonnet?" "Trace the development of the novel.") This is also related to the two foregoing approaches. How does the development of moveable type, of wood engraving, of lithography, of steam printing presses, of photography of paperback books, of public education affect the development of a popular literary form and the literary audience?

23. The Social-psychological Theme. The popularity of any literary work tells us something about the audience, which is the society that has either selected that work out of many available and elevated it to popularity, or that the producers understand well enough to write a work that will be popular. Why is a given formula or convention continuously popular? What changes in the publid mind throughout history have created, transmuted or destroyed popular art forms? Great literature tends to respond to major changes in the mass mind and world view, as in changing from medieval world view to renaissance world view. Popular literature tends to respond to events that capture public interest: Robinson Crusoe and Selkirk, Natty Bumppo and Daniel Boone, Tarzan and jungle exploration, new wars, heroes, crimes, inventions, etc.

24. The Classification. Because of the bulk of popular output of a given author or in a given genre, a classification (of Tom Swift plots, or of Gothic novel heroines and villains, or of condiments in popular cookbooks) can be extremely useful in evaluating other individual works.

It might be added that the article you have been reading is a classification, and, like all classifications of cultural phenomena, it over-simplifies and overdelineates, but like most classifications, it suggests a basic pattern of order that should be helpful to people who are overwhelmed by the chaotic boundlessness of a new area of interest and investigation.

If this article has achieved these goals, even in small part, it is probably the place and time, here and now, to point out that the literary aspect of popular culture studies is only one part of a cultural world of pictures, packages, circus acts, dances, automobiles, souvenirs, phonograph records, cookstoves, clothing, garden decorations, houses, Social Security forms, catalogs, games, sports, and hot dogs: the study of popular culture is the study of human lives and loves and duties and joys as they are contained and reflected in the physical and social environment, and such, I think, is a study worthy of anyone who respects humanity.

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[1]A more complete treatment of this subject may be found in Fred E. H. Schroeder, Joining the Human Race: How to Teach the Humanities (Everett/Edwards, Deland, Florida, 1972). $10. Chapter VIII is particularly useful.

Popular Culture
and the Humanities Curriculum

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The humanities are rooted in an all-encompassing concept of personal and social perfection which the ancient Greeks called paideia. So all-encompassing was that concept as it relates to man that the Romans chose to translate the concept with the most generic word at their disposal--<u>humanitas</u>. In essence the notion relates to the perfection of human nature and to man's infinite potential to live creatively. The concept is elitist in its implicit optimism in the potential of an individual man and in its hope for a better world. In no sense, however, is the notion elitist with respect to the realities that affect man. Everything from cosmic to finite forces, from spiritual to physical existences, from the realities of war to those of art that influence or could possibly influence the destiny of man was considered a worthy object of study. As a matter of fact, the liberal education of paideia was thought to free man by encouraging the individual to pursue all knowledge, sacred and profane, noble and mundane, within man's physical and cognitive grasp. Nothing was thought unworthy of man's attention if, indeed, it shaped his existence.

While effective educators have always related traditional subjects to contemporary student experiences without any pedagogical prostitution, there are, nevertheless, two trends developing in contemporary education. On the one hand educators who have lost sight of the all-encompassing nature of a liberal education, accept the elitist premise with respect to man, but arbitrarily define which realities truly help man realize perfection. This selective censorship of curricular material is a gross distortion of the original theory of a liberal education. In the humanities,curricular censorship occurs in those areas of the arts that are considered mundane, vernacular, or popular. They are judged unworthy of formal academic study. Hence, many administrators discourage popular innovations because they conflict with the community's "philosophy of education;" many parents object to such programs because they want the best possible education for their children; and, finally, many taxpayers want only that their dollars be spent "judiciously."

The other polarized attitude is revealed in those educators who are blinded either by an illusion of relevance or by the pressure of fulfilling immediate goals. From standpoint of revelance, the use of the popular arts becomes an end in itself. It need go nowhere beyond fulfilling the student's expectation of relevance. From standpoint of pressures, teachers report to using the so-called mundane or popular as a means of fulfilling the "higher" expectations of educational systems. Hence, they fulfill the demands of a syllabi, or measurements and evaluations by making the popular means of teaching the formal aspects of learning.

In recent years, another movement within the humanities to study the popular as part of the total humanities curriculum has responded to the polarized attitudes on both extremes. To the traditionalists who want no popular materials in the curriculum, they enunciate a broad philosophical definition of the humanities. To the innovators who use the popular as an effective method of instruction, they argue that "use" for whatever reason is really placing "the cart before the horse."

These last educators contend that study of popular humanities or culture has a definite place in the humanities curriculum by nature of the fact that the popular contains, either directly or indirectly, cultural forms and values which should be learned on their own terms. In fine, they propose that the humanities curriculum contain formal courses in popular culture. Such units, they assert: (1) Would provide a broader curriculum base for the entire body of humanities knowledge; (2) would serve as a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of traditional art and literature; (3) would place under academic scrutiny the popular contemporary art forms and icons, mores and life styles, as well as the social, economic, political, and religious systems of the contemporary world; (4) would study the colloquial manifestations of language as a basis upon which formal oral and written styles develop;

(5) and finally, would reveal the hidden pressures and manipulative elements of modern life as they manifest themselves in the popular media of the late twentieth century.

Innovation with Justification

Without sound philosophical justification, the implementation of popular culture in the secondary curriculum can result in "play time" chaos. Curriculum planners who are considering the teaching of popular contemporary forms and values must (a) be convinced of pedagogical relevance; (b) understand that the innovations are part of the humanities subject matter; and (c) clearly see the relationship of popular culture to the life needs of the individual student.

Educators and laymen seeking a justification for popular culture will find that justification, then, most easily within the philosophical ideals of humanities itself. Since humanities programs attempt either to pass on an historical cultural heritage or to humanize the student to a higher degree of personal freedom, the popular culture course should be designed to fulfill either or both of these goals. In the first instance, popular culture provides the forms out of which the art of all ages rises. It is, therefore, important to teach the formulae, conventions, and genres of popular art to appreciate the artistic conversions of sophisticated cultural forms. In the second instance, art, literature, history, philosophy and music can cultivate the student only to the degree that the student is prepared to assimilate the artistic experience. The study of packaged, dollar-producing, mass circulated materials which mirror middle class values can be one of the most effective ways to awaken the sensitivities of students to the artistic possibilities of form and to the controlling forces of life. Effectively taught, the study of popular culture can enlarge the value alternatives inherent in culture and, theoretically, can make a student freer to choose his own life style.

A Practical Problem

Beyond the theoretical controversies that surround the teaching of popular humanities, a pragmatic problem exists that could well influence the ultimate success or failure of a broad humanities program. The problem concerns personnel, selection of a teaching staff for such programs. My personal experience planning and supervising a four-year course in two large metropolitan high schools convinced me of the unique value of the individual teacher. Twenty enthusiastic teachers were involved in the experiment . When the program was evaluated at the end of the first year by students, staff and outside consultants, evaluators concluded that the weakest part of the program lay in the teaching. Enthusiasm was simply not enough. A few teachers were uncomfortably lost in foreign materials; others were unable to synthesize the art forms with the values of contemporary culture; and some were unwilling to devote to planning the extraordinary amount of time required. The few successful teachers in the program were those with the most extensive academic experience in the cultural arts and humanities.

Following this poor evaluation after the first year, the project was cancelled. The experiment had failed, but the insights gained were invaluable. Perhaps the most significant insight was this: popular humanities can be effective only when taught by faculty with strong academic backgrounds in the humanities. It was further discovered that such teachers not only understood the purposes and goals of the program, but possessed as well the ability to integrate the popular into the total picture of culture. Their courses were neither an end in themselves, nor excuses to entertain, but claimed a significant pedagogical relationship with the entire humanities curriculum. While specialized training in popular culture certainly helps, it is not essential. Given one's willingness to prepare his materials and to learn from his students, a teacher who is knowledgeable and conversant in traditional humanities should be competent in the teaching of popular humanities.

Scope of an Innovative Humanities Program

The popular culture course has the potential of meeting the needs of an extremely large percentage of the school population. Both college and non-college bound students can benefit from well planned programs.

The college preparatory course broadens the traditional humanities program and establishes a basis for appreciating fine art and literature. This course places the popular in a context of academic objectivity so that it can be understood in terms of both its positive and negative cultural contributions.

The popular culture course for the non-college bound student, while different in content and scope, is, nevertheless, a most rewarding course. It realizes the goals of the humanities curriculum without burdening the student with materials beyond his understanding. Such goals are frequently unattainable for the slow or tactically oriented learner in a traditional program.

A positive side effect of the non-college bound program is that learning suddenly becomes a pleasure for students who have suffered through traditional humanities courses from primary grades. In a pop culture program students identify with the course material. Perennially dormant students very often unfold creatively when they become involved in classroom presentations, discussions, and projects. Perhaps the most ennobling quality to reveal itself in the non-college bound student is his attainment of a cultural sensitivity which emerges as his humanistic awareness increases. This sensitivity, in turn, provides a basis for forming value judgements. Formal humanities programs which emphasize artistic classics and human heritage do not provide this learning opportunity.

Resource Materials

Given the fact that most published materials are already outdated at the time of publication, teachers of popular culture are often challenged to find and develop their own materials. Even the best teachers can become academically sterile without a good source of viable materials. To my knowledge the best resource at the present moment is the Center for the Study of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. The Center publishes quarterly journals in film, music and culture, along with a number of newsletters and pamphlets. POPULAR CULTURE METHODS is one pamphlet that I recommend highly for the novice popular humanities teacher. Not only does this publication offer valuable cross-references of studies and events in popular humanities but very often it also contains syllabi units that are ready for classrroom implementation.

Unit Possibilities for Popular Culture Courses

Popular Culture is currently taught to meet the needs of diverse educational philosophies. At least five distinctly different approaches are successfully practiced today.

I. Genre Approach

The most successful and widely used approach examines various fictional genres from the viewpoing of formula and structure. In this approach formulized conventions of plot and character are identified and traced through four or five work of the same genre. Such a unit prepares the student to think in terms of structural formulae. Uncomplicated conventions of popular fiction often reveal the simplified value alternatives of the marketplace and provide a touchstone for comparing popular literature with works of art. Units of study could include examination of these genres:

1. western
2. detective mystery
3. domestic romance and soap opera
4. science fiction
5. comics
6. comedy
7. advertisements
8. occult fiction

9. pop poetry, pop lyrics and greeting cards
10. icons and symbols of popular culture

II.   Media-Genre Approach

Communication media is a vehicle of culture. It is not itself a popular art. The relationship between media and popular art is, however, more than an interesting phenomenon. The popular arts have consistently and necessarily adjusted to the limitations of media. This approach emphasizes formula variations of popular fiction both within a single medium and among competitive media. The popular romance or western genres, for example, have distinct convention patterns in pulp fiction. Stories and characters change but the essential structural and thematic elements vary only according to the dictates of a specific medium. The same genres traced through radio, television, movies, music and theater reveal the interesting formula variations as the limitations change. Value articulations which are always central to art when mass communicated are distilled to conform to the broadest possible audiences.

Media	Genre
1. print	Any popular genre can be
2. radio	traced through a number of
3. theater	media: western, mystery,
4. movies	romance, science fiction,
5. pulp paperbacks	comedy, occult fiction,
6. television	popular poetry, advertise-
7. music	ment, etc.

III.   Issue Approach

The issue approach is the easiest to organize and present. It is an approach which is especially valuable for the flexible teacher who wishes to address curricular materials to crises situations. A unit or course in Indian or Black literature, in the literature of Women's Liberation, or the abuse of political power are prime examples of issue-oriented curricula units. Success in such courses, however, often depends upon timeliness and student interest. Language or rhetoric, for example, is one workable emphasis in this approach. The rhetoric of

power in all its manifestation, for example, affords provocative material for discussion in any of the following issues:

1. race--Indian, Black, Chicano
2. women's liberation--pros and cons
3. community--social pressures to follow patterns, mores
4. social drop-outs--prisons, communes, sub-cultures (hippie, drugs, occult, religious, etc.)
5. politics and political images
6. language of advertisements--status, nostalgia, sports, etc.
7. role playing--personal and social pressures to conform
8. stereotypes, myth and hero figures
9. youth versus age, generation gaps, etc.

IV.   Comparative Literary Approach

In this approach a comparative study is made of both fine and popular literatures with emphasis upon form, enigmatic themes, characterization, and assumed and expressed values. The professional challenge of the approach is to sustain academic objectivity by accepting each work on its own terms, not by "putting down" the inadequacies of the popular. With objectivity such a comparative study can increase the student's appreciation for the subtleties and complexities of art. Units of study could include:

1. John Donne's love sonnets and Rod McKuen's popular verses
2. Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and West Side Story
3. The Song of Roland and The Umbrellas of Cherbourg

V.   Historical Approach

The historical approach is usually done within a history unit but may be used in a literature course. This approach views world events of the past in the context of the popular culture. The Great Depression or World Wars could be studied, for example, in terms of the popular music of the periods. Shakespeare could be studied in terms of clothing styles, social customs, sanitation facilities, or penal practices of the period. This approach has the capacity to bring remote events and

and personalities alive. It helps the student understand
realistically and with a social and human perspective not
attainable in courses that study art and history in a
cultural vacuum. Historical units could isolate
phenomena as:

1. changing hero figures and types
2. changing social values
3. changing life styles and institutions
4. the relationship of art to distribution markets or
    new technological inventions

April Sneaked In

April sneaked in when I wasn't looking.
She is shaking the trees
With a hint of warm breeze;
Returning the finches, the robins, and such
And is giving the willows a pale yellow touch;
There's proof of her coming in each sound, in each sight
From earlier dawn to longer twilight.
April sneaked in when I wasn't looking!

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Creative Teaching in Interdisciplinary Humanities: The Human Values in Pop Music

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Man and Modern Media

The mid-twentieth century has thundered through
time in motion, light, sound, and symbol. Each
generation finds itself maturing within new and changing
experiences. Stability is no longer understood in
terms of firmness, permanence, and fixation. The
sound of the times is communication, in ever more
instantaneous communication media. One interesting
aspect of modern media is a sub-culture called 'pop."

While many adults reject the "pop cult" phenomenon
as a passing and distasteful fad, creative teachers
find themselves with the awesome task of searching for
value and justifying its use in previously staid,
esoteric, and antiquated educational environments.
Their search involves understanding, interpreting, and
judging the artistic refinements of media. A student's
personal growth may very well depend upon the teacher's
grasp and proper use of contemporary media. Today's
youth are exposed to newspapers and magazines, tele-
phone and radio, television and films almost as a way
of life. While the visual images and sounds of media
continually change, and contribute to the change of
western culture itself, creative teachers have often
found that the message does not change.

Pop lyrics is but one good example of the abiding
message. The inherent values bouncing in rhythm and
rock, they find, generally fall within the mainstream
of the Judeo-Christian value system. In addition
to the literary value of a given genre, and, indeed
many songs have real literary value, of predominant
importance is the civilizing value. This civilizing
and humanizing value not only removes the genre of
pop lyrics from the area of gimickry to justify its

use in an English class, but makes its use pivotal to the very existence of educational institutions.

Characteristics

Values contained in the medium of pop music are generally characterized by an honesty in admitting real human problems, a questioning of those values that do little to improve the human situation, open revolt against empty, specious, and oppressive values, and finally, an offering of values as tanguble solutions for the problems of our human encounters. It is this last characteristic that is so appealing. Most solutions are really "old stuff," no more than the enduring values of our civilization.

Pop lyrics reveal numerous themes; here we shall consider five: (1) personal flaws, (2) communication and inter-personal relationships, (3) the ideals and dreams of man's destiny, (4) the vision of the artist in society, and (5) here and now sociological problems. The lyrics of the more poetic composers, such as Paul Simon, James Taylor, or John Lennon, are among the richest resources for the teacher of popular culture.

Personal Flaws

Man's personal blindness and selfishness is one variation of the personal flaw theme. Not long ago Paul Simon reworded one of Edward Arlington Robinson's poems, "Richard Cory," by giving the narrator the character of a selfish, ignorant factory worker, blind to the suffering of another who happened to be rich. In a later poem, "Mrs. Robinson," Simon exposes adult "double standards" of living as a deception to be both scorned and pitied. Burt Bacharach and Hal David's "Alfie" describes an unfeeling man who selfishly uses others. Such popular lyrics as "Take a Letter, Maria," or "Mr. Emery Won't Be Home Till Late Tonight," in this instance describing the unfaithful husband who vacillates between his wife and his secretary, are frequently subtle and ironic revelations of double-standard living.

George Harrison of the Beatles takes the same general theme of blind selfishness in "Within You,

Without You," and advocates getting out of self to find "peace of mind." Another Beatle, John Lennon, takes the same selfish individual in "Nowhere Man" and leaves him in his "nowhere land making all his plans for nobody," because "he's as blind as he can be, just sees what he wants to see, doesn't have a point of view, knows not where he's going to." Then he asks, "Isn't he a bit like you and me?"

The apathy theme is self explanatory in Paul Simon's "A Still Life Water Color." Simon's indebtedness to T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" provides a provocative comparative study.

> It's a still-life water color
> On a now late afternoon
> As the sun shines through the curtain lace
> As the shadows wash the room
> And we sit and drink our coffee
> Couched in our indifference
> Like shells upon the shore
> You can hear the ocean roar
> In the dangling conversation
> And the superficial sighs
> The borders of our lives.

Hiding from reality in a world of illusion and isolation, another aspect of the personal flaw theme, rings out in two Simon poems, "Flowers Never Bend" and "I am a Rock." "Flowers Never Bend" reads in part:

> The mirror on my wall
> Captures an image dark and small
> But I'm not sure at all it's my reflection
> I'm blinded by the light of God and Truth and Right
> And I wander in the night without direction
> So I'll continue to continue to pretent
> My life will never end
> And flowers never bend with the rainfall.

Ironically, the poet knows that his life will end and flowers do bend. Isolation and pretension are not answers. "I am a Rock," rich in metaphors and imagery, says on a literal level that isolation is a viable human solution; but on the level of imagery, it means coldness

and death. Neil Diamond's "Be" is perhaps a timely, positive response to "I Am a Rock":

> While the sand would become the stone
> Which begot the spark turned to living bone
> Holy, Holy, Sanctus, Sanctus.
> Be as a page that aches for a word
> Which speaks on a theme that is timeless
> While the sun God will make for your day,
> Sing as a song in search of a voice that is silent
> And the one God will make for your way.

Communication and Inter-Personal Relationships

Two recently popular ballads performed by Helen Reddy, "Delta Dawn" and "Leave Me Along" (Ruby Red Dress) present women reminiscent of such southern gothic maidens as Faulkner's Miss Emily, and poignantly depict individuals isolated from the human community.

In "Eleanore Rigby" John Lennon contrasts two different types of loneliness: the loneliness of Eleanore who actually lives to love but is never loved in return; and the loneliness of Father McKenzie, a self satisfied bachelor, whose vocation is to love but who is so wrapped in himself that he does not know his love is directed inwardly. Father McKenzie buries Eleanore at the end of the poem and wipes his hands as he walks away from her grave, as if to say, "another job well done."

James Taylor, himself a former inmate of a mental institution, sings again and again of his loneliness and of the problems related to imposed human isolation: "Knocking 'Round the Zoo" and "Carolina in My Mind," are two such Taylor lyrics. Contrasted to the sufferings described in these original songs, students appreciate Taylor's disarmed warmth when he performs Carole King's "You've Got a Friend":

> You just call out my name
> And you know wherever I am
> I'll come running. . . .

Bob Dylan, the prophet of the pop generation, asks

the older generation to change with a changing world in "The Times They Are A 'Changing'."

> The present now
> Will later be past
> The order is rapidly fading
> The first one now
> Will later be last
> For the times are a changin'.

Life is filled with sad experiences. One of these is the breakdown of a personal relationship. In "Red Rubber Ball" Paul Simon creates a cycle of life imagery in a red rubber ball, the sun, and a roller coaster to awaken and prepare his listeners for these eventualities. He says in effect, "be like that red rubber ball--that's life."

The generation gap is expressed in terms of parental failure in Lennon's "She Is Leaving Home." To escape the "lovelessness" of home, a girl runs away to take a trip on drugs. The reaction of her parents is, ironically, indignation. Selfishness is at the root of their non-communication.

> She (We gave her most of our lives)
> Is leaving (Sacrificed most of our lives)
> Home (We gave her everything money could buy)
> She (We never thought of ourselves)
> Is leaving (Never a thought for ourselves)
> Home (We struggled hard all our lives to get by)
> She's leaving home after living alone
> for so many years. Bye, bye.

"The Sounds of Silence" by Simon, romantic in form, rich in imagery and literary allusions, develops the theme of loneliness amidst crowds of people. The poet pleads prophetically to "hear my words that I might teach you/ Take my arm that I might reach you." Later, in 1970, Simon is less desperate when he describes himself as a "Bridge over Troubled Water:"

> If you need a friend
> I'm sailing right behind
> Like a bridge over troubled water
> I will ease your mind.

A Trent-Tony Hatch song, "Don't Sleep in the Subway," recommends reason and compromise as a solution for exaggerated personal problems, problems founded in pride and self delusion. Merrill and Styne's "People," then, capsules what may be a simplistic solution to the more complex problem of communication and inter-personal relating.

Ideals and Dreams of Man's Destiny

Contemporary musical drama is replete with scores of this theme: Godspell, Hair, Jesus Christ Superstar. Simon's "Hazy Shade of Winter" and "Leaves That Are Green" speculate on time:

> Time hurryes on
> And the leaves that are green turn to brown
> And they wither with the wind
> And they crumble in your hand
> Hello, hello, hello, hello
> Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye
> That's all there is
> And the leaves that are faded touched the ground.

In the "Beatitudes" Simon finds a contradiction in words without acts. Specifically, he points to the hypocrisy and emptiness of religious dictums. Religion and life cannot be isolated.

> Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit. . .
> Blessed is the lamb whose blood flows. . .
> Blessed are the sat upon, spat upon, ratted on.

These are the real events and sufferings of mankind that needblessing, that deserve an application of noble principles.

Leonard Cohen's lovely ballad "Suzanne" suggests that the problem of loneliness is solved for man by contact with simple things. The real hero is one who is attentive to the ordinary events of life, especially suffering. Contact with Suzanne gives the narrator of the ballad insight and brings him into communion with all men. In Suzanne he finds life.

> And she feeds you tea and oranges
> That come all the way from China
> . . . .
> And you want to travel with her
> And you want to travel blind
> For you've touched her perfect body
> With your mind.

By reaching him as a person, Suzanne brings the narrator to cosmic transcendence and becomes his alter Christus redeemer:

> And Jesus was a sailor
> And when he knew for certain
> Only drowning men could see him
> He said all men will be sailors.

The Vision of the Artist in Society

The lives, contributions, and ideals of artists frequently become the subject of song. Paul Simon ("Rhymin' Simon") alludes to his art in such compositions as "Sounds of Silence" and "Homeward Bound." His craft is the exclusive subject of "Song for the Asking." The relationship of the renowned architect to Simon's lyric "So Long, Frank Lloyd Wright" could spark interesting student speculation.

In "American Pie," a remarkable verbal collage of an entire decade, Don McLean recalls "the day the music died" in his eulogy of composer-performer Buddy Holly. The mood of McLean's "Vincent" is far more plaintive than the almost flippant "Bye, bye, Miss American Pie" when he speaks to the Dutch master of nearly a century ago, "How you suffered for your sanity/ How you tried to set them [men] free." Describing Van Gogh's painting of a starry night and recalling that suffering humanity was "soothed beneath the artist's loving hand," McLean laments that Van Gogh's vision is as misunderstood in the present as it was in his own time:

> And when no hope was left in sight
> On that starry, starry night
> You took your life as lovers often do.
> But I could have told you, Vincent,

This world was never meant
For one as beautiful as you.

Social Problems

The most important of the social problems is that
of the struggle for civil and human rights. In songs
like "He was my Brother," we hear of a freedom rider
killed in the streets for riding a bus. "Sparrow,"
another Paul Simon song, is a story about Blacks told
in imagery of a starving sparrow who is rejected by
the wealthy, by white racists, by all of society.
His destiny is corruption and death; the song ends
fatalistically: "From dust were ye made, and dust
ye shall be."

The social theme of the horrors of war is developed
in the contrasting imagery of peace and annihilation in
"The Sun is Burning in the Sky." "Last Night I Had
the Strangest Dream" is a song expressing hope that war
will end and men will live in peace.

The structure of social institutions and, in
many cases, the subsequent suppression of the individual
by the institution, is a common theme in pop lyrics.
Simon's "Patterns" illustrates this theme:

From the moment of my birth till the instant
    of my death
There are patterns I must follow just as I
    must breathe each breath
Like a rat in a maze, the path before me lies
And the patterns never alter until the rat dies.
My life is made of patterns that can scarcely
    be controlled.

Lyrics dealing with particular social issues
are myriad: Marvin Gaye's "Mercy, Mercy Me (the Ecology)"
obviously addresses itself to the contemporary concern
for preserving natural life; "Wooden Indian" and "Half
Breed" expose the crisis of the American Indian; "Candy
Man" and "Rocky Mountain High," on one level at least,
are songs about drugs; sexism is confronted in Helen
Reddy's "I am a Woman;" James Brown's Motown recordings,

unpoetic but forcefully communicative in their ver-
nacular, are deliberate, message-oriented comments on
problems ghetto youth enocunter in society.

Conclusion

Many of the more appealing aspects of pop music
are beyond the scope of this writing: electronic sound,
psychedellic music translations, and audience response,
to mention but a few. Lyrics are stripped of their
spirit when given in one dimension. The total power
of pop music can only be gained through the experience
of its performance.

Pop lyrics in the English class is not the last
word in the teaching of English, nor should it replace
traditional literature. However, this music should
take its rightful place as a continuation and develop-
ment of the humanistic themes that are found in the
literature of every age. Formerly, popular lyrics
were not taken seriously because until fifteen or twenty
years ago they said very little about life, and what
they said was often a form of romantic escapism.
Today's pop lyrics say something real and meaningful,
and millions of listeners hear these messages each day.

Music shows youth what has motivated men through
crises and calm, through joy and suffering, through hate
and love, through life and death in their own age. It
is a record of contemporary values: of folly and nobility,
of crime and retribution, of generosity and avarice, of
harm and stupidity, of weakness and heroic strength.
Pop music can help young people to interpret the world
they live in, to establish an emotional, psychological
stability, and to commit themselves to those values
most enriching for their own lives. Viewed in this
way, pop poetry truly is one of the humanities.

Confronting Adolescent Problems Through Fiction

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Adolescents probably choose, read, and respond to fiction primarily on the basis of what is uppermost in their minds: themselves. They seek out--and project their own personal life-styles into--characters with similar problems, needs, and perceptions. This adolescent experimentation may be safer when done vicariously through fiction than when young people actually try out different roles in "real life," but it need not be any less disturbing--thinking about oneself has never been easy.

That is why I wince at all of the talk about making literature enjoyable. While enjoyment of literature should certainly be a primary objective of literature instruction, I would like to assert the need for teachers to be open also to the ways in which fiction can be a disorienting experience which confronts students with values different than their own: creating doubts, tension, anxiety, and self-analysis.

Such experiences are not necessarily negative. Adolescents always need self-examination. However, I believe that our current cultural situation makes it difficult for many adolescents to begin this introspective process. They need relatively stable cultural norms by which to define themselves or to rebel against, but presently many perceive only a confused society which lacks models whose example might encourage young people to develop a sense of self.

The result may be an aimless drift through life without the felt need for self-examination. This current cultural situation is best summed up by Anne Riophe writing about the Loud family whose lives were (apparently) rendered on the television documentary, "An American Family."

She noted:

> If there is such a thing as negative culture or culture minus, the Louds have it. The blaring sound of rock is the high point of creativity in the family...There is no avenging sensibility, no moral right or wrong, no sense of judgement of good or bad weighing over the family... I think the Louds have escaped the small town mores of an earlier America. They have been educated and led into a large vacuum, and like the rest of us are cast out without the structures of work and religion that used to shape our days.[1]

Despite the cultural drift, there are signs that people are more concerned with notions of "self-understanding" and "humanistic values" than, say, twenty years ago in the era of "the organization man." However, much of this is co-opted through superficial and romanticized treatment in the mass media. This only increases the need for students to think carefully about themselves, to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and to define a sense of purpose for their lives. The option is to enter an alienated life of crass consumerism, striving for the hollow goals of meritocracy. The "compulsive comsumer," who becomes dependent upon external objects and entertainment, and the achievement-oriented "compulsive winner," who views life as a game of barriers to be defeated through high grades and impressing the boss, are, in the words of Michael Maccoby, "centerless people."[2] As one of his young patients put it, "I experience a gaping hole where my self should be."[3]

It is often easy to allow externals to define oneself --the playboy image remains a powerful one for adolescents, as does the image of the "free spirit" bedecked in the phony trappings of the counterculture. In contrast, reading and thinking about oneself can be a difficult, risky experiment in vicariously living out alternative roles. For example, when adolescents identify with contemporary protagonists as these protagonists confront their own problems, the readers may ask themselves if they would behave in a similar manner or choose according to the values of the protagonists. They are thereby experiencing the fact that self-analysis is important to

these characters, that when, in <u>A Separate Peace</u>, Gene looks back on his experiences with Phineas, he realizes that Phineas was a challenge to him from which he learned about himself.

Now all of this, of course, is vicarious experience. Some educators argue that with the information explosion and the accessibility of information through the mass media, students are constantly being confronted with challenges to their world.views. Articles on women's liberation, TV reports on the ghetto, paperbacks on the environment, or TV documentaries on various crises certainly present much information which is disturbing and essential for self-examination.

However, this information may not be all that students need in order to grapple with themselves. Our TV-bred adolescents are saturated with information; they also need experience, either real or vicarious. For example, adolescent girls may have read articles about establishing an equal status with males but may have witnessed few if any such male-female relationships in their own experience. Literature could provide the vicarious experience which may be lacking in informative articles.

Moreover, the type or process of response to journalism information differs from that of response to literature in terms of the kind or quality of experience. I would contend that the literary experience allows for a greater degree of imaginative participation and self-reflection than does the experience of taking in large amounts of information. Faced with a daily flow of information, audiences develop various kinds of avoidance strategies. Some seek out and take in only what they want to believe, thus their beliefs are rarely challenged. Others try to "keep up" with everything in order to be "with it" but without perceiving any general patterns or meaning for themselves. Some assume that while everything is going on in the "outside world," none of it affects their lives out in the suburbs. Others view information cynically as entertainment, a form of instant stimulation.

Because the literary work demands so much more imaginative participation by the reader than does

journalism information, the reader engages more of his total personality in reading literature than in receiving information. Some of the research on response to literature suggests that the writer is not always in control. Subjects often project their own interpretation or, as one study found, impute values to characters that are not in the work.

Given the need in today's world for students to develop a strong sense of self, literature can be an important stimulus to critical self-examination. It seems to me useful, then, to consider some of the ways in which literary works do confront students with anxiety-- anxiety defined for the purpose of this article as a sense of existential worry, a more positive use of the word than the negative sense of anxiety as self-defeating fear. Secondly, I would like to suggest some ways we as teachers of literature can encourage students to expand their experience with a work, developing more than superficial, stock responses; and finally, how teachers can help find works which will provoke self-analysis.

In what ways does literature bother readers?

The research indicates that many adolescents are affected by their reading, even to the point of changing their attitudes and beliefs. The effect of a work depends to a large extent on the attitude of the reader toward the work, whether the reader assumes the role of an impersonal spectator, an analytic critic, or an emotional participator.

In one study on effects of literature, Fehl Shirley found that adolescent readers fall into four categories: (1) the indifferent, who exhibits a general apathy toward reading; (2) the observer, whose attitude is based on external judgment rather than emotional identification; (3) the participator, who identifies closely with the characters or action; and (4) the synthesizer, who develops a new or reinforced perception or self-image as a result of being disturbed by his reading.[4] Synthesizers were the largest group reported, indicating that many students were bothered by their reading, even to the extent of altering their perceptions. Another

interesting finding was that subjects were influenced
more by their voluntary reading than by specifically
assigned reading, which suggests that the student may
expect more from a work he chooses himself in terms
of its effect on him. Thus, the way in which an adoles-
cent is bothered often depends on the kind of stance
he assumes toward the work and his expectations of the
work.

It is difficult to predict any cause and effect
relationship between a work and reader because of the
strange ways in which literature affects readers.
Readers project their unique personalities and needs
into the work. Thus some readers may be disturbed by a
light romantic lyric because it dramatizes a certain
lack in their own lives, while the grotesque scenes of
wartime Rome in Catch 22 leave them unmoved. The effect
of literature can vary with changes in the reader's
mood, attitude, or motives for reading. The preconcep-
tion that one is reading for escape or recreation can
affect one's perception of a work.

The effect of a work may have less to do with the
content (for example, hard-hitting "social realism"
versus light romance) and more to do with the work's
challenging of the reader's own value system. The
reader can experience "worlds more frightening, painful,
and precarious than our own, worlds in which men find
it very difficult to cope successfully with either their
fellows or their natural environment and in which
suffering is one of the most common occupations."[5] The
student who perceives the world from a dogmatic, "closed"
orientation may perceive a novel as a threat or challenge
to his own value system; the student who has an inflexible
cognitive style may have difficulty coping with a char-
acter whose attitudes or goals are ambigous.

Some of the developmental research on moral beliefs
by Kohlberg suggests that many adolescents remain on an
immature level or reliance on adult authority for moral
guidance, a "good boy morality" or doing what your
elders say. When these adolescents read novels in which
elders provide little moral guidance, this experience
runs contrary to their habitual perception, perhaps gen-
erating some anxiety.

Likewise, some of the popular "absurd" writers can
bother students who are accustomed to straightforward
narratives or logical explanations for events. They
therefore have difficulty explaining the character in
Brautigan's The Abortion who sits in the "library" and
presides over a collection of works which nobody reads.
Readers are also often disturbed by writers who don't
resolve things at the end, who leave things hanging, thus
frustrating the reader's expectations for happy endings.
They may have difficulty in their retrospective patterning
of such a work, trying to put all the pieces back
together again.

Adolescents can be bothered by a sense of the
inauthentic. One place to begin discussing the ways in
which novels do bother people may not be with realistic,
well-written novels but with sentimental or stereotyped
novels. One outcome may be discovering the lack of
complexity in these novels, which, in turn, poses the
question of why complexity or ambiguity is or is not
inherently perplexing.

Readers are also bothered in a subconscious manner.
They can repress these troublesome ideas or translate them
into fantasies which are not threatening to their egos.
For example, an adolescent can be reminded of his traumatic
relationship with a parent on a subconscious level,
translating this memory into a conscious sense of being
disturbed.

These are some of the many ways literature can bother
readers. It is obviously impossible to make accurate
predictions that given book X, reader Y will be bothered
in manner Z, or that given reader Y's concerns, book X
will necessarily deal with those concerns. The literary
experience is too complex for such predictions.

On the other hand, the manner in which literature is
often taught can reduce the potential for this complexity
by limiting students' responses while reading the work
to, for example, answering questions which deal solely
with identifying facts and themes. Ironically, such
literature teaching generates negative anxiety, a self-
defeating fear of giving the "wrong answer," getting a
poor grade, etc.

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As literature teachers we should be helping students develop their literary experience to its fullest potential. As Walter Slatoff argues in his book, With Respect to Readers,[6] instead of dealing with the problem of "inappropriate responses," we should be dealing with the problem of "insufficient responses" -- the failure to fully experience the work and its effects on the reader. For example, if a reader's covert response strategy is limited to merely describing and interpreting a work, then he may not be expressing any emotional relationship with the work or evaluating the quality of the work. Likewise, if his responses are limited solely to affective experience, he may not be understanding the work. I believe that the wider the range of response, the more likely it is that a reader will be bothered because the work is providing just that much more of an experience.

Slatoff defines the "full response" as one in which the reader both experiences the work and also experiences himself going through that experience: He both "loses himself" and is simultaneously aware that he is so absorbed. Similarly, when we talk about having "an experience," we mean that we were detached enough from an event to be aware of the fact that something unusual was going on and aware of how we were experiencing it. All this implies a tension between involvement in a work and self-awareness.

As teachers we can't go around telling our students to "have a full response" when they read. That's like telling them to be open, free, and spontaneous. What we can do is not preprogram their experiences so as to undermine the potential of a work to bother them. We can ask them about the ways in which they did experience a work so they do become aware of how they were both involved and detached.

None of this is easy, given some of the ways students have learned that they ought to experience a work. For example, students often assume that if they fail to understand a work, the teacher will be able to explain it for them. This often involves more than the expectation that the teacher will clarify the students' failure to comprehend literal meaning and extends to their reliance on the teacher's pat explanations of ambiguity or central questions in the work.

For example, a student is reading Invisible Man and reaches the ending in which Invisible Man goes back down into his room surrounded by light bulbs. Now a student might be bothered by this ending: Is Invisible Man renouncing the world and going underground permanently or is he preparing to go out again to perform some revolutionary actions? The student isn't sure. He is also thinking about himself and his own ambiguous attitudes toward the world, attitudes which range from total apathy to a desire for radical action.

The next day he goes into class and the teacher explains that what Invisible Man was really doing was renouncing the world, and the student thinks, "Yes, that must be it." Instead of letting the novel linger on in his mind in a bothersome way, he forgets it. If he learns to depend on the teacher's explanation, then the next time he reads, he may not think through something else that bothers him. Teachers need to resist the temptation to explain. An alternative is to openly explore the conflicting responses without any preconception that they may be resolved, leaving the students to resolve the ambiguities in their own minds.

In addition to assuming that ambiguities will be cleared up by the teachers, a second assumption students make is that the literary experience involves a perception of organization and completed form. Thus students assume that it is their job in reading to somehow find order and describe a work's completed form. Much of reading literature involves a constant disruption of form, a continuous violation of expectations. In our concern with teaching a sense of order, which is obviously necessary, we rarely deal with the disordering effects of literature, thus leaving out much of what contributes to the "full response."

For example, take a sentence from a work: "She reached up and put her hand on his cheek." Next sentence ....well, what were you predicting? Whatever it was could then be compared with what actually followed, let's say, "He smiled at her." This involves a continuous guessing game in which the reader's imagination fills in

the gaps between sentences. The same holds true for larger units: paragraphs, scenes, or chapters. When our predictions turn out to be continuously wrong, when we hope that the guy will realize something about the girl's actions and he never does, then a tension develops between the reader and the work. The reader may begin to examine his own perceptions, to question whether he is right, for example, in wanting that guy to see through the girl's behavior. Then perhaps the reader may ask himself, "Why is it that I always want that; what does my reaction reveal about my attitude?"

The critic, Morse Peckham, who has written much about the disordering effects of art, notes that "order... is not something imminent in a perceptual field; it is something contributed by the perceiver. It is fully oriented perception, a condition in which disparities are ignored, in which one has a conviction that one's predictions will be confirmed."[7] When this sense of order is violated, the reader may be bothered or baffled and then may begin to examine the reasons for this discontinuity of experience.

Let's apply this theory to the teaching of poetry. Instead of asking students to read a poem only once, I would suggest asking them to read it several times, perhaps keeping a written or taped journal for each re-reading. Then, in class, students could discuss how the poem may have continually resisted any of their hypotheses. Readers often search for closure after one reading, some retrospective patterning which will put it all together. However, after several further readings, they may realize that their initial hypothesis was superficial, that the poem continues to defy any imposed closure, leading to further thinking about the poem.

Too often classroom discussions assume the same need for quick and easy closure or "theme hunting," what I call "instant interpretation." "Let's finish this poem off in a hurry . . . Sally, what do you think it is saying?" As a result, interpretations are out of place or won't earn favor with the teacher.

In contrast, I would occasionally assume that the class does not need to achieve synthesis but would try to encourage deviant responses and expressions of ambiguity

or leave a class hanging between opposite interpretations and then the next day discuss whether the students were bothered by this. This would be particularly appropriate in the middle of longer novels when everything is unresolved. Again, students could discuss openly how the work frustrates their need for closure, how their stock responses are violated. Role play or creative dramatics sessions could deal with the anxiety or conflict situations in the work. Students could extend these conflicts and then discuss whether other students would have extended them in the same manner.

I'm not saying that students will always be bothered or affected by these activities; however, I wouldn't panic if students are confused or frustrated. One of the myths teachers operate under is that confusion and frustration are not conducive to learning. In order for students to want to understand something, an important prerequisite is that some lack of understanding exists. When students are bothered or frustrated, they may then perceive their own sense of incompleteness, their own lack of understanding, and want to further seek understanding--maybe, about themselves.

In addition to helping students develop "full responses" to their reading, let me suggest some ways in which teachers can help students find works which will be related to their concerns or provoke self-analysis.

As literature teaching moves toward more individualized or free-reading programs, teachers need to be able to develop "tie lines" between work and reader, to suggest books to students based on a careful perception of each student's own ability, interests and needs. This includes ascertaining those things that are bothering a student, or, if the student cannot define what is bothering him, being able to suggest works which may help him define what is bothering him. This could be accomplished in an informal conference or an inventory asking which books may have had some effect on students and how they were so affected. In talking with the students, the teacher could express some of his own concerns and mention books related to those concerns or the ways in which specific titles familiar to the student may have bothered him. This can relax a student

or provide an example.

The teacher might also try to ascertain the manner in which a student thinks about his concerns--his conceptual framework or level of moral reasoning. This information could then serve as a basis for further conversation about specific books the student has read. For example, because of his identification with a character who conceives of his problems in more ambiguous, or more discriminating terms, the student may have changed his manner of thinking about his own problems. Of course, the teacher must be open to the possibility that the student may not want to talk about the book at all or, if he does respond to the book, that he may respond in only cursory evaluative terms.

Moreover, the student may have expressed no previous problems or may have begun the book without any particular problems foremost in his mind. However, while he read the book, something in it may have bothered him. Again, he may or may not wish to discuss this effect with anyone; if he does, the teacher should serve as a sympathetic audience and perhaps help the student understand why he was so affected.

The attitude of the teacher toward the student is important. The teacher should not assume in some heavy-handed manner that he is trying to rid the student of some of his psychological problems, unless, of course, he is involved in a bibliotheraphy program acting as a trained counselor. Nor should he give the impression that he is providing some instant cure or easy answer in suggesting titles.

Too many students have been turned off by a teacher's didactic missionary zeal in telling students they ought to read something because it is good for them. This often masks an elitist assumption that they ought to be reading better stuff. Furthermore, it is important that the students be given as much leeway as possible in making choices. If students learn to make their own choices from a number of titles and they perceive that the particular title selected was a book they enjoyed, they gain a confidence which can carry over to later years, a confidence that they can select books which

are meaningful. Moreover, to recall the Shirley study, when students self-select, they may have a greater incentive to want to read the book and to want to be affected by it.

As an option to suggesting just one book, the teacher could suggest a cluster of books which revolve around a particular concern, and which vary in readability and sophistication so that if a student got into one which was too difficult, he could switch to another. The books suggested should contain relatively familiar material. Most of the research on reading interests finds that adolescents become more involved with subject matter with which they are more familiar--works about things that are close to their own experience -- than they do when reading about people or subjects foreign to them.

There are also a lot of new anthologies which group selections around adolescent concerns. I would avoid those that contain moralizing introductory essays and questions at the end of each selection, because all this interferes with the student's formulation of his own unique responses. I also contend that paperback novels, which are longer and potentially more involving, are a better bet, particularly when the student is choosing them himself.

It is no news to literature teachers that within the last five to ten years the adolescent novel has developed a more realistic social and psychological orientation than its predecessors. Not only is this the case with content-- frank treatment of parental relationships, sex, drugs, school politics, prejudice, etc. -- but also some of these novels differ in form or structure from their predecessors. The older "junior novel" tended to conclude with a formulaic happy ending, whereas some of the more contemporary novels end without resolution, leaving the future uncertain or ambiguous. A case in point is A Slipping-Down Life by Anne Tyler. After a long and, at times, humorous relationship between a high school girl and a rock singer culminates in marriage, their relationship disintegrates and the marriage ends. The novel then simply ends at that point without any extensive moralizing, and the girl is left facing an uncertain future.

"Realism" does not necessarily mean staging the novel in a 1973 commune. Historically, it suggests a careful

rendering of authentic human relationships; Dickens and Balzac come to mind. As Jean Karl has noted:

> Realism--facing today's problems in books--is not simply presenting in books what the reader already knows to be true, or wishes were true. It is not creating a facade that looks like something the reader knows to be true and modern, when closer examination reveals the facade to be a stage set that simply gives a new look at an old idea. Realism must have its roots in the actual emotions, the real concerns, the gut truths of what is--a far different thing from using today's scene as a backdrop for an old idea.[8]

I believe that many current authors of adolescent fiction are sensitive to authentic characterization because they are not tied down to some of the stereotyped, formulaic demands of the stock "junior novel" and the publishers who had to sell books to restrictive school boards. It is certainly easy for writers to treat sex, drugs, politics, or the counterculture in a sensationalistic manner in order to attract attention and sell books. However, once adolescent readers develop an interest in the better written adolescent novels, they themselves are likely to reject the stereotyped treatments. As research indicates, they are reading more adolescent novels than traditional literature selections, exposure which provides a wider range of choice between the well-written and the hackneyed.

Let me suggest an example of a cluster of realistic novels based on something which can bother adolescents, the concept of marriage. They know a lot of facts about divorce and illegitimate children, but many obviously lack exposure to a variety of marital problems and the ways people might deal with them. Many are bothered by how well they get along with others and are concerned with how they might function with just one person. Some are questioning the basic validity of marriage; others are bedazzled by the romanticized version of marriage on television ads. For such students, one cluster could include: Head, Mr. and Mrs. Bo Bo Jones; Zindel, My Darling, My Hamburger; Crane, Wedding Song; Tyler, A Slipping-Down Life; and Laing, Ask Me If I Love You Now.

The following are a number of other "clusters" based on recent adolescent novels, most of which are in print and in paperback. Obviously each novel listed does not deal exclusively with one problem. However, I have tried to group the novels under headings which reflect the primary thematic focus of each work.

Relationships with Parents

Wersba, Run Softly, Go Fast
Ellis, Celebrate the Morning
Walden, Walk in a Tall Shadow
Barrett, Midway
Brown, The Other Side of the Street
Sherburne, Stranger in the House
Naylor, No Easy Circle
Mazer, I, Trissy
Ney, Ox: The Story of a Kid at the Top
Wolff, The Space Between

Race, Prejudice

Westheimer, My Sweet Charlie
Kata, A Patch of Blue
Neufeld, Edgar Allen
Raymond, Up From Appalacia
Hill, Time to Quit Running
Arnow, The Dollmaker
Demby, Bettlecreek
Gregory, Hey, White Girl!
Crary, Mexican Whirlwind
McKay, Dave's Song

Drugs

Eyerly, Escape from Nowhere
Kingman, Peter Pan Bag
Anonymous, Go Ask Alice
Wojciechowsak, Tuned Out
Mathis, Teacup Full of Roses
Hinton, That Was Then, This Is Now
Chaber, The Acid Nightmare

School and Institutional Injustice

McKay, The Troublemaker
Hentoff, In the Country of Ourselves
Huntsberry, The Big Hang-Up
Koob, The Deep Search
Hinton, The Outsiders
Weston, Hail, Hero
Friedman, Rage
Weaver, Nice Guy, Go Home
Davis, Anything for a Friend

Sex

Stuling, You Would If You Loved Me
Weston, Jolly
Zindel, I Never Loved Your Mind
Mills, A Long Way From Troy

Homosexuality

Hall, Sticks and Stones
Donovan, I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip
Holland, The Man Without a Face
Kirkwood, Good Times/Bad Times

Pregnancy, Abortion

Dizenzo, Pheobe
Head, Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones
Eyerly, A Girl Like Me
Eyerly, Bonnie Jo, Go Home
Thompson, The House of Tomorrow
Hale, Nothing But a Stranger
Sherburne, Too Bad about the Haines Girl
Wilson, To Find a Man

Mental Illness

Neufield, Lisa, Bright and Dark
Green, I Never Promised You a Rose Garden
Eyerly, The Girl Inside

Loneliness, Insecurity

Platt, The Boy Who Could Make Himself Disappear
Gallico, The Abandoned
Warwick, Learn to Say Goodbye
Hill, Lonesome Traveler
L'Engle, Prelude
Ball, Johnny Get Your Gun
Rinkoff, Name: Johnny Pierce
Ruhen, Corcoran's the Name

Girl's Maturing

Drexler, I Am the Beautiful Stranger
McShane, The Passing of Evil
Colman, Claudia, Where Are You?
Baker, Here By the Sea
Butler, Captive Thunder
Raymond, The Trouble with Gus

Boy's Maturing

Barrett, Midway
Jordan, His Own Where
Balducci, Is There Life After Graduation, Henry Bernbaum?
Bowen, Wipeout
Hentoff, I'm Really Dragged but Nothing Gets Me Down
Bradford, Red Sky at Morning
Lee, The Skating Rink
Johnson, Count Me Gone

Let me conclude by asserting that the literary experience is more than simplistic sentimental enjoyment. It can be disturbing in a positive existential manner of confronting self. While we don't often understand how this works, we have a sense of it in the words of two readers: Kafka said, "I read sentences of Goethe as though my whole body were running down the stresses"; and C. S. Lewis said, "In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do."

Footnotes

1. Anne Riophe, "American Family; Things are Keen but Could Be Keener," The New York Times Magazine, February 18, 1973.

2. Michael Maccoby, "A Psychoanalytic View of Learning," Change, Winter 1971-1972, p. 34.

3. Ibid.

4. Fehl Shirley, "Influence of Reading on Concepts, Attitudes, and Behavior," Journal of Reading,. February, 1969, pp. 369-372.

5. Walter J. Slatoff, With Respect to Readers, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 144.

6. Ibid., p. 38.

7. Morse Peckham, Man's Rage for Chaos, (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 139.

8. Jean Karl, "Contemporary Children's Literature," in Reaching Children and Young People Through Literature, ed., Helen W. Painter, (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1971), p. 2.