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ABSTRACT

The seminar summarized in this report was held at the University of Wisconsin (Milwaukee) in July 1970 as part of the summer program of the Center for Twentieth Century Studies. Moderator for the seminar, for which the general topic was the appreciation of literature as one of the arts, was Robert F. Roeming, director of the Center. Each of the four participants presented a different approach to the discussion: Herbert Kubly discussed ways in which the aspects of creativity can contribute to literature appreciation; Haskell M. Block stressed the importance of actively relating literature to the student's experience; Julius Weinberg dealt with the relevance of the study of literature; and Leslie F. Cross commented on maintaining a clientele for contemporary authors. A question and answer session, with remarks from the audience, conclude the report. (JM)

Report I

Generating Literary Appreciation

(among High-School and College Students)

Edited by
Robert F. Roeming, Director
Center for Twentieth Century Studies

The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee
College of Letters and Science
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201

This report summarizes a seminar, open to the public, which was held at The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee on July 14, 1970 as part of the summer program of the Center for Twentieth Century Studies.

JULIUS R. WEINBERG
1908-1971

Since the sessions reported in this brochure, held in the summer of 1970, Julius R. Weinberg suffered a serious illness from which he did not recover. He died on January 17, 1971. Those of us who shared these discussions with him last year will retain vivid memories not only of the depth and breadth of his learning, but more especially of his capacity as a man to express totally the humane spirit. Julius R. Weinberg was certain at every moment of his life of what he believed while at the same time equally aware of the fallible limitations which belief entails. Thus he was never autocratic in his convictions nor zealous in gaining adherents to his views. The persuasion of reason was the weapon with which he confronted issues and men with limitless optimism.

Those of us who knew him as a colleague during his tenure at The University of Wisconsin have had an unusual opportunity. Any conversation with Julius R. Weinberg would soon evolve into a broad consideration of the legacy of the human spirit and one of his seemingly casual observations or a quotation from literature would illuminate a vexing problem which until then seemed only to generate illusive answers. As a professor and as a man, he was indeed unique.

In gratitude for a life that was shared liberally with many this report is dedicated to Julius R. Weinberg.

A Public Seminar

GENERATING LITERARY APPRECIATION
among High-School and College Students

Center for Twentieth Century Studies

July 14, 1970

Kenwood Conference Center
The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee

Participants

HASKELL M. BLOCK, Professor of Comparative Literature,
Brooklyn College, The City University of New York

LESLIE F. CROSS, Book Editor,
The Milwaukee Journal

HERBERT KUBLY, Professor of English,
The University of Wisconsin—Parkside

ROBERT F. ROEMING, Director, Center for Twentieth Century Studies, Professor of French and Italian,
The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee (MODERATOR)

JULIUS R. WEINBERG, Late Vilas Professor of Philosophy,
The University of Wisconsin—Madison

The Guest Participants

HASKELL M. BLOCK is Professor of Comparative Literature at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. He received his doctorate from the University of Paris. He has also taught at Queens College and The University of Wisconsin. In addition to holding visiting professorships at several American universities, he has been a Fulbright research scholar at the University of Cologne from 1956-1957 and the University of Paris from 1968-1969. He is the author of a number of books of literary criticism, including *Naturalistic Triptych: the Fictive and the Real in Zola, Mann, and Dreiser.* He has also served as consulting editor for Random House.

LESLIE F. CROSS, a journalist in Milwaukee for several years has served as reporter, columnist, and editor for various Milwaukee newspapers prior to coming to the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1941. He has been Book Editor and columnist for the *Milwaukee Journal* since 1951. He was the recipient in 1966 of the First Bookfellow of the Year award from the Bookfellows of Milwaukee, and the Decennial award of the Wisconsin Committee for National Library Week in 1967. In 1969 he received the Distinguished Service Award from the Society of Midland Authors. In adddition to his editorial work, he has contributed verse and prose to national periodicals.

HERBERT KUBLY is Professor of English and writer-in-residence at the University of Wisconsin—Parkside. He has taught at San Francisco State College, the University of Illinois, been a visiting lecturer at Columbia University and The New School for Social Research. He has also been Fulbright lecturer at the University of Milan, Italy. In 1956 he received the National Book Award for non-fiction for his travel memoir, *American in Italy.* He has published novels, essays and short stories and his plays have been produced both in the United States and England. He has contributed short stories and articles to national periodicals and has served as music critic for *Time Magazine.* He has been a reporter and writer for several newspapers. In 1962 he received a citation for distinguished service in education and literature from The University of Wisconsin.

JULIUS WEINBERG received his A.B. and M.A. degrees from The Ohio State University and his Ph.D. from Cornell University. He taught at Cornell University and the University of Cincinnati before joining the faculty of the University of Wisconsin in 1947. In 1962, he was appointed Vilas Research Professor of Philosophy in the Institute for Research in the Humanities of the University of Wisconsin—Madison, a position he held until his death in 1971. His primary academic field of specialization was the history of philosophy, particularly medieval and early modern. His books include *Abstraction, Relation and Induction*, published in 1965, *Ideals and Concepts*, 1970.

ROEMING: Our concern is for literature as one of the arts. Our concern is also for a personal appreciation of literature as one of the arts. Our concern is intensified by the fact that our educational system is developing a staggering number of non-readers of literature and a disproportionately large number of functional illiterates of all ages. The census of 1960 revealed that there were three million totally illiterate adults in the United States. If we, however, consider persons who have a fifth grade education or less and persons who cannot complete the forms for a driver's license, for social security benefits, for the census, and the like, then it is estimated that the total of functional illiterates in the United States is close to twenty-three and a half million adults. In addition, we must consider the fact that fifty-eight percent of all persons over age twenty-five in Illinois and the Midwestern states are not high-school graduates and that this percentage is approximately the national average.

That such a large group within the United States can be left strangers to reading and to literature must at least cause high-school teachers and university professors to reflect that their professional status as specialists in literature is in jeopardy. With growing emphasis on the *right* of all to higher education, with growing insistence that barriers to higher education be eliminated, the teachers of literature find themselves by circumstance espousing a counter-movement toward elitism. To be sure, literature can be appreciated intuitively through the ear. And it often is! But it is more than natural in a civilization such as ours to identify literature with books

and with the printed word. In fact, except for the oral reading of stories and poems to the very young, there is no recognition in the educational system of courses and of class activities that literature exists without reading. Thus common practice can justify the assumption that appreciation of literature presupposes skill in reading, which in itself has innumerable gradations of proficiency.

Though the highly intangible qualification of individual appreciation of literature cannot be defined as a direct ratio of reading proficiency, common practice leads to the assumption that those who are most attracted to literature are avid readers. Thus in a discussion of how appreciation of literature can be generated among students, consideration must be given to the question of what constitutes appreciation, and more precisely appreciation of literature, which, unlike appreciation of music, appreciation of the visual arts, appreciation of the performing arts, is predicated upon the skill of reading. The problem under discussion is further complicated by consideration of the degree to which appreciation of literature depends upon the fusion of reading proficiency with knowledge of history, cultural and individual taste, social and individual values, which are brought to bear in varying degrees upon the reading of a text, because appreciation of literature is a highly individualized experience which allows for pause and reflection at the will of the participant.

The first approach to this discussion will be through the experience of creative writing. Professor Kubly is asked to comment, as a creative writer and also as a teacher of creative writing, how the aspects of creativity can contribute to an appreciation of literature.

KUBLY: I am one of that curious species in America that teaches creative writing. I have been doing it off and on for about twenty years. There are a lot of writers on campuses these days who are very prolific as far as teaching is concerned. This is a rather noticeable trend which has been developing over the last fifteen or twenty years, one that is completely misunderstood in foreign countries, I might add. My English publisher, Sir Victor Gollancz, now dead, once said, "What a curious idea! How can you teach creative writing?" This is a question which of course one is constantly expected to answer also in America. People want to know why it is taught and if it is possible to teach it. On a very specific basis the answer is: "No, you cannot teach creative writing."

What you can do in teaching is develop an intuition, if it does exist. You can do a great deal in that direction toward developing writers. If the instinct and intuition do exist, you can develop creative writing through encouragement, criticism, general prodding and stimulation. How many students are really worthy of this attention? In other words, how many of them have the possibility of being a writer?

In answering this question, let me reflect with you upon the group of some forty students that I had a year ago at The University of Wisconsin—Parkside. Of these forty I would say that at the most two or three have a chance of becoming writers. One of them, I am almost certain, will make it. Incidentally he is a garage mechanic in Racine who has talent and who is determined to be a writer. He was the hardest worker I had. Another student has the talent for writing; he does not have much discipline and he may drop by the wayside. The third is a girl who has talent and no discipline at all. I am almost certain that she will drop by the wayside.

What about all the others? Why bother to teach them? This is where I think the real answer lies, this is why I and others teach creative writing. On this point I feel almost like a crusader because I think, and I am zealously convinced of this, that whether they become writers or not, their course in creative writing will remain for all my students for the rest of their lives one of the most valuable courses they will have taken. First of all, I try to teach them — to make them aware of — the relationship of life to literature. They are encouraged to write about their own experiences. They get a much greater awareness and appreciation of literature, if they are able in a sense to relate to the life of the author who wrote the particular work under consideration and, in so doing, relate it in a sense to their own lives as an illumination of some of their own problems of being young in this very cataclysmic age for the young.

The world is moving very swiftly and it is very hard for a teacher to maintain a certain firm position in contemporary literature at any point. Teachers moving with the trends learn as much from their students as students learn from them. The students who are learning to read more sensitively in a creative writing course will read and discuss literature with a new measure of criticism which comes from their growing awareness of the individual as a writer, and their own functioning as a writer. All of them are functioning as writers whether they will be writers or not. And this does open powers of criticism in relation to the reading they are doing. They become more comprehending readers. They will for the rest of their lives read with greater awareness and greater pleasure. I know that this is true because students whom I taught some years ago have told me this and have written me letters to this effect.

In a larger humanistic sense creative writing opens all kinds of doors and extends horizons of awareness and perception. When students function in this way, in this sort of self-expression, they find within themselves a breaking through of inhibitions, of fears, of apprehensions and of blocks. These are psychological forces which prevented them from expressing themselves before they entered a writing course. As we know, certainly from the political activism of students, there is a great unrealized hostility and resentment, and shall we say, frustration in students today.

I had this experience in San Francisco State College, where I taught up to the time of the strike. I had students, very active politically, become so involved in creative writing, in the discovery that they could effectively express their frustrations in literary composition, that they completely dropped out of the protest activity. They were protesting in their writing.

This was a very constructive phase of their education. Unfortunately there is only a small minority of students studying creative writing at The University of Wisconsin—Parkside, approximately forty out of four thousand or one percent. I cannot offer this as a panacea for all education problems in universities, but within my limited framework it has worked extremely well and I report it with a sense of satisfaction and pride.

ROEMING: I am going to pass to Professor Block because he made some comments earlier which would carry forward this [redacted] of active participation in the learning process. We were then talking [redacted] the great amount of effort involved in learning, that passivity and lea[redacted] were not compatible and that appreciation probably is a matter of in[redacted]ulcation through example rather than something that would be taught.

BLOCK: I used to believe when I first began to teach that it was most important to provide the student with certain skills which he would then proceed to apply. I still think that there is some value in this and that, within certain limits, literary appreciation or tools of literary und[redacted]standing and enjoyment can be taught. But I also have come to appreci[redacted] more fully the importance of the immediate experience which the stu[redacted]nt has in the artistic or aesthetic transaction itself while in the very contact with a work of literary art, be it through reading or through some type of performance; and that this is a highly personal experience, not simply a preparation for something else, that the reading of a poem is not done in order to learn how to read poems in the future, but that this reading is now and has to be meaningful in the instant of time, in the very moment of performance.

The value of any kind of artistic experience seems to me to depend in large measure on what is brought to it in terms of the quality of mind or spirit or vision, in the totality of experience, not alone in its literary, intellectual or academic aspects. It is not sufficient to consider what the work is, but also who the reader is, or what the reader brings by way of life experience to this transaction. At a time such as this when we are getting students who are semi-literate, who have very little sense of cultural tradition and very little respect for the past as past — I am reminded of Carl Sandburg's line: "The past is a bucket of ashes" — the past as a past seems to matter less and less to them. This attitude has been translated into student classroom experience as an impatience with history, as an assault on the predigested and packaged presentation of chronology, of information as names, facts, dates, events as such. This is not altogether a bad thing, because for most students, this conception of history is point-

less; namely, history as inert facts, as empty experience, devoid of any context, of any promise or relation. At the same time, the pulverization of history probably stems from an awareness on the part of the student of the acceleration of the rate of change, and of the sense of change in his own personal life.

I would not go so far as to say that we can study literature or enhance its appreciation only by using material which is absolutely contemporary, which has just been written, which is drawn from what is happening right now. Professor Weinberg will discuss the question of relevance, what is immediately relevant and how relevance is most usefully defined. But there is something to be said in proceeding from the student's own immediate experience. I do not look askance at beginning the study of lyric poetry with a collection of rock lyrics, as some new textbooks suggest.

Why not, as long as the experience does not stop there? Certainly there is everything to be said for having students see the plays they read and talk about a dramatic experience, to show that the literary work, though part of a "dead" past, can take on flesh and blood and can come alive if allowed or willed to do so.

In other words, the enlargement of the range of experience is extremely important, even while the appeal to immediate experience can provide a useful starting point. More important, it seems to me, is a conception of the totality of literature or art, or culture, past and present, in which these planes intersect, in which there is a deep commitment on the part of the teacher to the material at hand and to the literary or artistic transaction. If the literature does not matter for the teacher, it can hardly be expected to matter to the student. Concern with the student's experience is fundamental.

It is commonplace that this is an era of punch press education, particularly in the large depersonalized public institutions in which human relations of all kinds are growing more and more perfunctory. In contrast, it should be the renewed purpose of the humanities to take a stand against this depersonalization and devitalization, to assert the rights of creativity, of individuality, and of freedom, which go together. The instructor can do this by his concern for the individual, personal experience, immediate and ultimate, of the student. Not very many do this.

We certainly can all look back on our education and ask, how many of our instructors were themselves concerned about our responses, about what we brought to the experience, or what we took away? There is a constant transformation in the ways in which literature is viewed as part of an accretion of cultural values. There was a time, I suspect it still may linger with us, when teachers of literature were regarded as keepers of monuments, like the older view of the curator in the museum; and appreciation was generated through the imposition of awe and admiration on beholding the great works of the past. Today this view would not augur well for the survival of literature. If literary works matter, they matter to us in the here and now; they matter because they enable us to live fully, more intensively, more richly and more uniquely, or at least to understand ourselves and the world about us in a way which would be impossible except through this experience.

There are a great many other things we can do with our time besides read books. Why do we read books at all? Because reading books is a way of enlarging and enhancing personal experience. Without it we are completely limited by what we ourselves have done or said, or what someone else has done with us or said to us. Through reading we become projected beyond this realm of immediate, local, personal experience and we join hands with a collective group, we become part of the cultural tradition itself, which we in turn transform by the sense we give to it and the use we make of it. Either literature is enlivened by this sense of dynamic transformation or it ceases to matter.

The same questions are being asked of the university. Consequently, at this time every conscientious professor, whether of literature or of any other discipline, is questioning seriously the reason for his existence. What is this all about anyway? What is our function and what is our calling? This carries us far, but not, it seems to me, too far from the subject at hand when a good deal of our discussion deals as much with the crisis in the university as with the problem which is forced upon us by the invasion of the semi-literate.

ROEMING: Since the teaching of literature is a function of the university, and the whole education system as well, then indeed these questions are germane. At the same time they focus our attention on the consideration of "relevance" as a potential measure of all things. As philosopher, teacher, and certainly active citizen, Professor Weinberg can very competently speak to this point.

WEINBERG: I think I should explain at the outset that I am not a man of letters at all but that I used to be a philosopher. Then when I was made the secular equivalent of an archbishop at my own branch of the University of Wisconsin, it was because I had become an historian of philosophy. So now I am an historian of philosophy, rather than a philosopher, but in no sense a man of letters. I might more properly be regarded as a guinea pig in the experiment of responding to the question: what does knowledge of letters do for a person who is not professionally engaged in teaching appreciation of fine letters, or, as in the case of Professor Kubly, in instruction in the art of creative writing? The first thing I think I would like to address my attention to is the constant demand on the part of students, both graduate and undergraduate, for a revision of the university curriculum for what they call relevant education. I daresay this demand will eventually find its way, if it has not already found its way, down to the high school.

There are two values to education in general and to a literary education in particular. One is a wholly instrumental value, a fringe benefit one might say, and that is the formation of what the French of the seventeenth century called "jugement" — judgment. I would define judgment, or rather *good* judgment, as the art of being right more than fifty percent of the time, in a theoretical or practical decision, where the evidence on the basis of which you formed your decision is inevitably and permanently incomplete. This art of forming good judgment is not best developed or fostered by the exclusive, or almost exclusive concern, with what the students are pleased to call the "relevant," the "immediate." This is so for two reasons.

In the first place, what is relevant in a given month, week, or year will not, alas, be relevant two or three or four years hence. That is one reason why the exclusive, intensive concentration on what the students are pleased to call "relevance" is misguided, because the "relevance" in their sense does not remain "relevant" very long.

The second reason is this. Most people, as we all would be willing to admit, and this applies to ourselves as well, are usually too hot to think clearly with any degree of impartiality on what is the meaning of the immediate concern in the realm either of letters, of politics, or of international affairs, because we are too much, as the French say, "engagés," we are too much ourselves involved to think with any degree of objectivity or clarity on the immediate. How then do we learn to form good judgments?

One way is to study what in the undergraduate student sense of the term is quite irrelevant, whether it be a period of history such as that of Athens in the fifth century B.C. or a period of letters such as the period in which Chaucer or Dante wrote, or a period in the development of the fine arts, all of which are so far removed from our times that we have to make an especial effort to place ourselves in an entirely different climate of opinion and an entirely different emotional attitude and adopt that attitude which Coleridge describes as "a willing suspension of disbelief" in order to grasp either the philosophy or the science, or the letters, or the painting, or the music of an entirely different age. There we are not involved. We can say, "What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba, that he should rend the air in this way?" because not being involved we can have a certain measure, or develop a certain measure, of sympathy with an idea, with a form of style, which is far removed from our own. But we can do it in an atmosphere in which we are not, as I said before, too hot to think. The repeated experience of that kind of activity, whether it be in letters or philosophy, or in the study of art or music, or of the politics of a past age, enables us to think more cooly and to form on all of these matters, both theoretical and practical, good judgment. But, as I said before, that study of the seemingly irrelevant is only a fringe benefit.

The second and true value of the study of letters, both of the present and the past, is quite a different one which offers special benefits. It is one that needs no apology, but one for which a defense is constantly asked. There is a sense in which the enlargement of the soul, in which the cleaning of the windows of one's soul, is a perfectly defensible end in itself. As Aristotle long ago observed, you cannot justify every activity in which you

are engaged by pointing out that it is something which as an instrument will lead to the accomplishment of something else. Sooner or later, the romantic notwithstanding, you have to have some ultimate goal, there has to be some ultimate consummatory experience which makes your life worth living and whatever that is it will be self-justified and no apology be needed for it.

If this is right, and I firmly believe it could be, whether a person is studying letters or music, or politics, or philosophy, or science, the ultimate justification is that it is a delight in itself and it enlarges one's personality. If this is the case, the intensely pragmatic in the bad sense of that term, because the term does have a good sense, the intensely pragmatic character of our age and the demand for justifications of one's activity for some ulterior purpose or motive must be stoutly resisted.

There is only one way, I think, in which people can be brought to take that firm stand and that is, first of all, to be able to enjoy the consummatory experience of understanding or of enjoying, whether it be a matter of knowing a new, or at least new to oneself, philosophical idea, or a new kind of emotion, or the enhancement of one's everyday experience by seeing the world "par l'oeil de l'artiste" — with the eye of the artist.

Since we can't all be artists, and very few of us can be good artists, the next best thing is to be able to see the world in a different way — not only the world of the commonest experience, but the world in which our experience is occasionally extraordinary. I have in mind such ordinary things as the fact that when I am out driving in the evening just at dusk, almost invariably the opening lines of the *Divina Commedia* occur to me, in which it is just at that hour of the evening that Dante's great poem begins. Or sometimes the opening lines of Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, in which with a consummate art and with a great economy, he recaptures that elusive nuance of the evening air. I would not limit this enlargement of everyday experiences only to inspiration one receives from reading poetry or some very good examples of prose. It can come also from an acquaintance with other forms of art.

I remember when I was a child out in the forest in late autumn I was always terribly disappointed because the flamboyant and even banal coloration of the early fall was gone and only the subtler tones on the leaves were still visible. But after having seen a great deal of Cézanne's paintings I now realize that the later softer, minor color harmonies of autumn have a beauty all their own which I would have completely lost had I not been able to see the countryside through the enlightenment I received from looking at Cézanne.

Therefore, enjoyment itself needs no apology. It enhances the experience of common day, and as I said before, it makes life more tolerable.

I think we ought to begin in the world in which we live at least. Now that is past, that glorious period of the first World War, in which at least the members of the middle classes could say it was very heaven to be young. We are engulfed instead in the higgledy-piggledy, mad job-lot of a world we live in now. It is something to be able to find any consolation,

any beauty, any understanding anywhere. It seems to me that far more than the study of philosophy, the study of letters does to a very great extent serve this aspect.

I agree with Professor Block that in introducing people to the study of letters you have to do something which will encourage them to go on, and which will give them a sense of accomplishment. Now in a good many cases in the United States, the students in high schools and particularly in colleges are burdened with a tremendous number of courses. In literature courses they are asked to read a great many books in a single term. This is a very serious and a very great mistake. At the end of four years they end up with accumulated confusion instead of some personal sense that they have learned a few things in some variety and that they have learned these things well. This can be accomplished by asking the students at the beginning to read something which can be comprehended totally within a small amount of time. A lyric poem would serve this purpose well whether from the antique world, or from modern English or modern French, one which can be read in a very few minutes. Such a poem can be mastered by careful re-examination, or at least understood in greater depth in a matter of a few hours. Through such intensive reading the students will gain a sense that they had made something which once belonged to somebody else, the poem, a part of themselves; that they had acquired a certain right to consider that a part of their own beings or their whole personalities because of the contribution which they have made. The sense of accomplishment they will get from doing one small thing well will be, I think, the greatest impetus to their going on to attempt something more pretentious.

Most teachers in whatever field, whether it is science or philosophy, or poetry or novels, again seem to me to try to do too much. Unfortunately in most language and literature departments, with the notable exception of comparative literature, teachers are confined to one literary tradition. Now Goethe once said, "He who knows one language, knows none." I think this can be applied to letters. It would be far better for the student if he gained a broad acquaintance with the range of different literary traditions and genres, from various national cultures and various epochs in the history of civilization. It would be better if he read some of the best things that have been produced by these cultures, than to have him acquire a very thorough knowledge of the whole history of English letters from Chaucer to the present and have no acquaintance whatsoever with the great products of German, Italian and French, and for that matter, American letters.

ROEMING: If we have inspired an interest through an appeal such as we have been considering, can that interest, more optimistically devotion, be maintained? Mr. Cross, as editor of the *Milwaukee Journal* review of books, has over the years been in contact with a great number of authors

through their books and through personal contact. Do you find, Mr. Cross, that we are in a position as university professors to maintain the kind of clientele that is going to read the books you tell us about?

CROSS: In this discussion I am more or less on the periphery because my approach as a journalist is quite different. The primary concern of a journalist is to tell what is news, to try to give a sense of what may be significant, not necessarily to the highly educated, but to the rather intelligent reader though not necessarily well-informed one. The problem of relevance is something to which too much concern is attached at present. I remember that only a few years ago, for example in literary criticism, at least the criticism of poetry in the period of I. A. Richards and The Chicago School, relevance was completely irrelevant. I have been a book review editor for about twenty years and in the course of those twenty years I have noticed these great fluctuations of what Malcolm Cowley calls the literary stock exchange. A writer's stock may go down this year, and he may come back to prominence in ten years.

Such a situation does not encourage a substantial clientele of readers for contemporary authors. The British demonstrate a certain loyalty to their established writers and their artists in literature who are trying to create a body of expression. British readers are much more loyal than ours are. For us the situation does not augur well.

Though Dr. Weinberg argues that readers are better prepared to understand modern literature if they have some knowledge of a great number of cultures, I think that can be overdone too. It is well to know English literature quite thoroughly, to know Jane Austen and George Eliot, to know what such authors do and what they think rather than to satisfy oneself with a smattering of a large number of literary cultures.

ROEMING: No doubt there are among us teachers who represent the classroom firing line, especially in the high schools. A matter of considerable concern is the extent to which the high schools are able to lay the groundwork that the colleges necesarily have to build on. In the past we very often thought of college education not only as a new start, but a projection as well of a considerable orientation toward literary appreciation achieved through courses in English and foreign languages. But now with the variety of preparation that students bring to college, the kind of preparation which has been taken for granted exists no longer in many cases, especially in the commitment to read for pleasure.

Questions and Comments from the Audience

Question: It seems to me that the problem, as I found it, is not so much that the students in my classes did not know how to read but that they did not read at all. They get their pleasure from television, from movies, and from rock music and its lyrics. As teachers we are perhaps trying to teach them a slightly out-of-date art which they do not accept, since they are not inclined to read for pleasure, I think that part of the problem in discussing literary appreciation is: How do we get students to read for pleasure?

BLOCK: I think that you are certainly right. We are getting students who simply do not read and have no interest in reading. We are also getting those into colleges who go through high school very often without acquiring either the skills or knowledge. They are just passed along — and then they gain admission to the colleges. It seems to me that the reading which they do in the classroom can be made a pleasurable experience. In other words, even if there is no preparation at all, nor any skilled training, a gifted, stimulating, concerned teacher can make a tremendous difference.

WEINBERG: May I respond to one phrase that the gentleman was pleased to use. He said with respect to reading, that it was a "slightly out-of-date art" because of the extensive television viewing and movie attendance. You are quite right in characterizing reading as a "slightly out-of-date art." One of the things that a person could do in starting to go back to the intellectual equivalent of the maxi skirt, which is not going over too well right now for understandable reasons, is to point out to the people who are so given to this spectator's sport of seeing it in the movies, or seeing it on television, the extent to which those who control the world in which we live have been manipulating us, and what is more — the extent to which they are providing us with a visual or oral form of garbage when we could dine on venison or guinea-under-glass if we only would just make a few moves in a different direction. The reason why the students are so given to this passivity produced by television, as one of my colleagues remarked, is that television was the baby-sitter of the generation that has now come to either high-school or to college age. The student who is of college age should have it suggested to him that he has been manipulated, used, exploited by people whose tastes are worse, far worse, than his could be and that he could have experiences of a far greater and deeper and more enjoyable character if he would give himself the opportunity not only to read books, but to listen to something other than the deafening and polluting quality of rock and roll. It would be better if he went back to jazz, rather than spend his time at the rock festivals, just to preserve his hearing.

KUBLY: The generation gap is again making itself apparent. But there is something involved here besides an expansion of energy. The gap is manifested by the many influences on the present generation of students which have brought them to the point where everything is made awfully easy for them, brought to them, and given to them. Their stimulus from television, the movies, and rock music comes to them; they don't have to do a thing to receive it, to respond to it. Reading requires a certain selection, certain concentration and certain expending of effort and energy which some simply have not been taught to use. I think this is the big problem and, if I may say so, it is a problem of laziness.

WEINBERG: Would you be willing to say that encouraging people to go back to reading would be the intellectual counterpart of encouraging more intramural and less professional sports? Because in the case of intramural sports everybody has a chance to engage in it and to think of himself as having contributed something; whereas the spectator's participation in the professional sports makes him completely passive, whether he watches a football game on television or whether he attends the game at a stadium. It does seem to me there is a sense of happiness, which almost unconsciously attends accomplishment, whether it is intellectual or physical.

Comment: I find that it is not television as much as work which deters students from reading. Because they know that their future attendance at college will present a financial burden, a considerable number of students have jobs which occupy their time from four o'clock in the afternoon often until eleven o'clock or midnight. I wonder how many of us, for example, as teachers are reading for pleasure. We spend most of our reading time on professional material or in teaching a class. I don't know how we can expect our students to read for pleasure when we don't ourselves and when their own time is preempted by school attendance and work.

BLOCK: Of course, much of the reading you would do as a teacher would give you pleasure, particularly if it is reading of sufficient range and complexity so that each time you go back to it, it yields more.

Comment: Indeed; but I am concerned with not just reading the required works but with the enthusiasm for going beyond that.

BLOCK: We may be expecting too much. You can certainly put things in the way of the students and hope that those in whom the spark takes hold will go ahead. I don't know that the inculcation of the enjoyment of literature can be carried much beyond that, once the initial contact is made in the classroom.

CROSS: I wonder too if we aren't starting much too late in the process of inculcating reading; I think a good point can be made that a love of reading must be generated at a very early age. If I might digress here, the point I am making involves a common truism; namely, that the resources of literature are much greater than the resources of cinema, for example, or television. All the other media are much more shallow than literature considered as a body. Thus it is important that students be made aware that literature offers something for everybody. Books are generally published in relatively small editions, but there is such a vast variety of sub-

ject that they will enrich the life and increase the enjoyment of almost any person who is encouraged to read.

Comment: The mother and father in a family set the example by watching television for their own enjoyment and pass this habit on to their children. High value is not placed on reading and it is too often assumed that once a child gets to college all the gaps will be filled in. But ultimately reading is not even in this context considered a form of relaxation, another form of pleasure and contentment.

WEINBERG: I agree entirely that you have described the situation quite accurately. However, I want, just for a moment, to dream out loud. Suppose we do not, God willing, get into a confrontation in the Near East with the Soviet Union. Suppose we do get out of Vietnam eventually. Suppose we do succeed in dealing with problems of poverty, pollution, population, and all the woes that beset us, or at least get on with the job and make some visible progress. We might be successful. Of course if we are not, we are doomed and we know that.

One thing seems to me to be inevitable. Even if we succeed in checking the rate of population growth to a reasonable degree, we are going to have many more people in this country and in every other country of the world. Eventually in order to see to it that they have something to do we are going to have to reduce radically the amount of time anybody will be able to work in the course of a day. At least this, too, seems to me to be inevitable. What are people going to do with all the time they have at their disposal after they eventually tire of the garbage they get through the ears and through the eyes? What is the individual going to do with his time? It may not merely be a question of whether it would be nice to increase the reading habits of the literary public, it might become an absolute necessity. You describe the matter as it is now but I doubt very much that it will stay that way.

Interruption: The people who watch garbage on television will read garbage; there certainly is a lot of it published.

KUBLY: That's entirely true. We'll talk about books here for a moment. What books are the best sellers? The television mentality has created in our reading public a receptivity for authors like Harold Robbins, Irving Wallace, and Jacqueline Susann, whose books are such fabulous successes. Not really written books, manufactured books. Ideas that are sold to Hollywood for a million dollars before they are written and then are converted to a script. This is exactly what has happened as far as reading is concerned. Obviously these books are read. They go on selling millions of copies. But nothing is done at all for the cultivation of any literary taste. The whole corroding influence of television is being sustained and supported by the literary tastes which television develops.

Comment: I wonder if there are any comparisons of how well people, youngsters as well as adults, read before the advent of television, or how well children now read in families where there is no telvision, or where television viewing is limited because of parental restriction or because of work and other demands on time. Only if we had such information would

we be justified in putting all the blame on the "boob-tube" or whatever you call it.

I have come to know students who had watched a movie on television and then read the book. Or they reversed the process and felt that their understanding and comprehension of the book and their appreciation of it was much greater than if they had only read the book. Reading is an art; it has to be taught. Somebody has to teach it and if the parents are not willing to teach it then I'm afraid the responsibility rests upon the teachers. If the children are not reading I do not think putting the blame on television is going to solve any of our problems.

Question: The growing enrollments in the technical high schools and colleges raises unique problems. Students at the college level are interested in technical or performance aspects of literature. There is also evidence that a substantial number of performers and stage personnel of the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre have been trained in technical colleges. They deal with literature as the substance of their participation in theatre or in television production. Is technology of this type a means of stimulating appreciation of literature? Does television viewing of what can be called "good" programs, such as Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, stimulate "good" reading?

BLOCK: May I comment on *The Forsyte Saga?* We were trying among ourselves to account for its popularity on the air. One of our colleagues thought this was perhaps the grandest spectacle of a soap opera which one could find on television today. There is a fair amount of sex and violence; and if you want to get students interested in literature, sex and violence sometimes gets them started. This is the sort of reading they are going to do anyway, in paperback and to the extent that they read. There is plenty of violence in the classical repertoire of the great literature of the world. Violence is not an invention of the twentieth century. There is also, however, in Galsworthy, a sense of continuity with the past, even the vanished past, a sense of stability of institutions at a time when institutions seem to lack any kind of stability. Perhaps the viewer is experiencing some kind of unconscious wish fulfillment coupled with a quaint documentary value, the value of recapturing of the past, simply as part of an ancient and now vanished time. There are probably several reasons, not just one reason for the appeal which this program makes, but if the best that comes out of it is that some people are going to read Galsworthy's novels, this might not really be good enough. I hope we could do better in the classroom and encourage reading beyond Galsworthy. We ought to be able to. We have material which is rich enough. Certainly there are less interesting books, but there are also much better books.

Perhaps television could be used more effectively than it is being used, particularly in working with the semi-literate. I think that the

students we used to enroll say twenty years ago, could express themselves better in the English language than students can today. It seems they came with somewhat more literary baggage than students bring now. Although I do not have statistics relating reading to television viewing, we should consider the fact that there were approximately a million and a half college students in 1947, while today we must have over seven million college students, with the prospect that we are going to have more and more people being educated at the college level, while at the same time the colleges by necessity of circumstances must attend more and more to deficiency work which in the past was done in the high schools. This is radically changing the demands that are being made on teachers of literature. It has to.

Question: In the high schools, how do you teach literature to students who in fact cannot read? I am not speaking of seniors who read at the ninth grade level but about juniors and sophomores in high school who literally cannot read. How do you teach reading and appreciation of literature to somebody who is illiterate?

BLOCK: I think that for motivational purposes some use can be made of the visual arts. Some experimental work is being done with music and painting as a way of interesting students in reading and inculcating reading skills. Obviously what we have to do is establish instructional, rather than remedial, basic skill centers at most of our colleges. We have to find the money for this and we have to find professionally prepared people. If we do not move on this and move fast we are going to be in deep trouble. We have a problem I would say of crisis proportions right now in New York City where an open enrollment policy has been adopted. Students will be admitted to college level study who will not have the ghost of a chance of remaining in college unless remedial programs are set up for them in a hurry. It seems to me a cruel fraud to admit these students to both high school and college work unless at the same time we are prepared to give them the tools needed to do the job.

ROEMING: Two teachers of English classes in the seventh and eighth grades of the school system of Washington, D. C., informed me that they had finally gained attention by reading out loud to the students constantly and that they had chosen their own materials. It appeared to be the same technique that one would use with a little child. They had chosen materials which in content would intrigue these students. The basic motivation of these children was surprising; it was twofold. These two young teachers were very anxious to help their own people but it had been a matter of first necessity to keep order and quiet in the classroom without being dictatorial about it. They therefore got the students interested in listening to them read. They were reading practically everything to the children — mathematics, social studies, fiction or whatever the curriculum prescribed. Oral reading was being done by other teachers in the same way. So in

spite of the system, they had modified it to achieve some improvement, if not success.

At this University we have become involved in this matter in another way. We have been training teachers to teach English to speakers of other than standard English. Here too we found that we have to adopt some kind of continuing oral presentation of material in order to awaken enough interest so that students would go back to books and materials not previously mastered. In this manner the realization of what was achieved in the first contact may at least prompt deficient students to read simple material. This is related to another problem that concerned me when I was thinking about this seminar some months ago. Some of our high schools which years ago were called academic high schools in the city of Milwaukee are now reporting that as many as fifteen percent of the enrolled students are completely unable to read. In a mixed high school this is one of the basic causes of revolt in the classroom where the non-readers are constantly creating a turmoil to distract and disturb the class in order to gain some attention.

WEINBERG: May I ask a question of the members of the audience? This has come to my attention at the University a number of times. It has been alleged in the first place that among speakers of non-standard English — which does not mean only blacks, but includes such ethnic groups as Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Jamaicans, and perhaps in Milwaukee instances of other ethnic communities and sub-cultures — standard English is never heard at home; secondly, that the introduction of standard English from the schools into the homes by the children would perhaps cause difficulties; and thirdly — and this is the most extravagant claim and was made not by a member of the ethnic minority, but by a member of the ethnic majority — that we have no right to ask the members of an ethnic group who speak non-standard English for the most part, to speak standard English, because such a demand is a fundamental encroachment on their natural rights.

The question I want to ask is, to what extent do you find this kind of resistance in such groups as I described, and to what extent do you think that the last and most extravagant claim is justified? Because if it is, there is no possible way of overcoming this claim that each individual has a right to speak his own "patois" and that his rights are being violated if he is forced to speak — the "Umgangssprache" that most of us are obliged to speak with varying degrees of proficiency.

Comment I: In the past, the tendency was to have all immigrants adjust as rapidly as possible to the Anglo-Saxon tradition and to the use of English. This has reenforced monolingualism in the United States. The difficulties experienced by immigrants from Europe in the midst of an entirely new situation must be comparable to those now faced by various ethnic groups who come from other areas of the United States or North

America in which language and mores are decidedly different from those of the large Northern cities. Instead of an abrupt immersion into this culture, attention must be paid to the language skills with which each individual is equipped so that a transition can be made with minimum hardship. In the contemporary cases this hardship is intensified by the inability to read. In this respect, one is justified in saying that a member of a minority group ought to be at least able to understand fully that language which is being spoken so that he may maintain confidence and thus lose the feeling of inferiority which is tremendous stumbling block to his adjustment. The students can be supported psychologically if they are encouraged to realize that dialects are a much more living force in any language, but any language, to be totally useful to the individual, to satisfy *all* his needs, must have the widest possible currency.

Comment II: In order to avoid value judgments associated with terms like "standard" and "non-standard," "right" and "wrong," "good" and "bad" in characterizing English, those of us who teach in high school speak more freely and objectively of "formal" and "non-formal" English. The use of one or the other is then determined by the appropriateness of the situation and its requirements. Certainly in a very complicated society there are times when an individual of a minority group is forced to use formal English. In applying for a job it is essential that one demonstrate proficiency in using formal English. For other purposes of communication informal English may be more expressive and meaningful. The dualism of the society is reflected in the varieties of language. An effort should be made to use one variation to foster the other in a manner that obliterates distinctions of "right" or "wrong."

Comment III: I have through teaching learned the language of the ghetto. It must be emphasized that formal English may in these circumstances be too elaborate and less expressive for the social environment of the individual. The social entity in which the individual functions will for some time continue to reinforce the type of English he speaks.

Question: Previously the comments touched upon increasing the student's sensitivity to literature. Perhaps an analogy to photography will be meaningful in this context. I had a teacher of photography who analyzed the same photographs again and again, but each time emphasized a different aspect, such as light, focus, shading, structure and so on, and each analysis intensified one's understanding and interest. Would such emphasis on close observation in order to increase sensitivity be a means of gaining greater appreciation of literature?

KUBLY: I assume we are talking of students who are writing. When I get a new group, as I did last fall when I came to a new place, I had students who had never written more than high-school compositions. I do not quite know why they were in the class. Some had been advised to

register for it. Some had heard that I was going to be a colorful character, that perhaps the classes would be a lot of fun without any discipline, that they would not have to work very hard. So there they were. After the first meeting or two some began to be intimidated by the fact they were going to have to write. How do you get them to do it?

There were many ways. If I were doing it right now I might talk about one of my favorite writers, D. H. Lawrence, for whom I predict a mild renaissance because of two rather well made, rather sensational recent films that are going to be seen by the high-school and college generation, if for no other reason than that there is nudity in them. We would talk a little about Lawrence, his life of poverty in a mining community, his strict Calvinist mother, his alcoholic father, etc. and how these factors came into his books and how the inherent attitudes reflected in his writings were really part of his life's blood, how he could not be someone other than he was, as a writer and a person. We would determine how these particular books, which they would be reading now because they had seen the movie, or will have seen it, are related to Lawrence, to his own life and the people who moved in it. Then I would hope these students would begin to write, relating themselves to their writing as they have seen Lawrence relate himself to his work.

How do you tell students who have not written, "Now you go out and write a short story?" They know what a short story is. But the process of constructing and writing a short story is new to them. So usually their first effort is an autobiographical record. I tell them to free-flow, write about themselves and their experiences as a child and youth. There is a great deal of deception at first and mistrust. It is never easy. But the class is slowly beginning to function in terms of group therapy. I have had fantastic demonstrations in a class of personalities developing, of opening up slowly. As students become involved they lose their inhibitions, they begin to see — in this particular case as Lawrence saw — they begin to feel as Lawrence felt. They begin to use materials from their own backgrounds. I ask them to keep, like patients under analysis, a pad at their bedside, upon which to write out their dreams when they are fresh, to record their nocturnal thoughts. Fantastic material comes out of this process. The students begin to relate to everything that happens around them. Where their lives had been closed before, there is now an opening of experience which they are sharing with each other. There may be twenty students in a class, all individuals different from one another. One cannot generalize about them as we are doing in this meeting today. I am generalizing from my own experience just as you are — and this is the way to go wrong because we do not understand that every single individual is different. I cannot superimpose my own attitudes on this person but I can share them and the interplay of personalities becomes a marvelous chemistry, an organic thing that just grows.

I don't know what more I can say. I am working in this fashion, I have no syllabus, no text. I just have lots of books of short stories. There are many good collections of short stories at very low prices which students can afford. We read them. I do not mean that we read them in class. The students read them at home and we discuss them. The stories we read and

criticize in class are the student's own. At Parkside every story written by students is reproduced by offset process. This gives the students a sense of publication. They have twenty or thirty copies of their stories to distribute and give to friends. At the end of the semester every student has a complete collection of every story written in the class. When these stories are discussed in detail, it becomes a gratifying experience for myself and for the students. Students find themselves emotionally, or should I say, organically, involved in the process. We may speak of literature as history as a "bucket of ashes" but this is not true — it becomes a very vivid living thing.

Question: Would the members of the panel comment on the tools they use to stimulate literary appreciation, especially at the college level?

BLOCK: One tool has not been mentioned which is certainly available to all of us, even where the schools have a modest equipment budget. That tool is recordings. Some poets do not read well, but many of them read very well, and students are sometimes intrigued by recordings of poets or prose writers presenting their own work. Also, taking students to performances of plays would certainly enhance the study of drama in the classrooms. It would give a kind of immediacy to the study. If there is a strong theatrical center either in the community or in the university, this procedure can work very well.

Question: What can you use at the college level in classrooms besides this that will prove effective?

BLOCK: Projecting oneself into a consideration of the work at hand, sometimes through an anecdote, something related to one's own personal experience, something one has done, some encounter one has had, can have motivating effects. When I was teaching at The University of Wisconsin, some years ago, I spent one summer on a project of the Wisconsin Idea Theater, driving around the state with a tape recorder and a good deal of other equipment in a station wagon, recording scenes and interviews with members of summer theatrical troupes. In Mineral Point I happened to encounter a retired journalist, who had edited a Swedish language newspaper in Chicago. He had been a promising playwright in his youth, and at the age of nineteen or twenty had met August Strindberg. When I heard this I could not wait to draw him out. I wanted to know his impression of Strindberg. He remembered it very well, because this was a great event in his experience. He made it in a small way a part of my experience too, and when I had occasion to teach the modern drama and talk about Strindberg's late work, his iconoclasm, the blue tower in which he secluded himself, his walks at six in the morning through the empty streets of Stockholm, followed by absolute seclusion for work the rest of the day, with the aid of this retired Swedish editor I was able to tell the students certain things which perhaps helped to provide a more intimate

context for the study of the work. I say perhaps because one cannot be sure.

WEINBERG: May I add some examples? The music of Mozart must be listened to very, very carefully to note the subtle differences in which he presents the various parts of the Mass. The same thing is true of a secular piece such as *Don Giovanni*. Now if one just listens to the music without understanding the words, one can achieve one form of appreciation, but if one has a score of *Don Giovanni* with the words written in and one can read Italian, these nuances of the music become far more understandable. Now the same thing is true I think of Dylan Thomas' recitation of his own poetry; or of James Joyce's recitation of that part of *Finnegans Wake* known as the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" episode. There is something that could not possibly replace Joyce's peculiar Irish intonation as he reads the "Anna Livia Plurabelle." Or to take another example, available to all, or almost everybody, if the high school can afford some recordings. When students in high school read a play of Shakespeare and listen to a good recording by a superb English Company while they are reading the play for the first time, the dual experience offers a tremendous augmentation of their understanding. They won't understand the whole play, they won't be able to gloss every line; that comes later. But going through it first in the way it was first presented to the public by the living voice, certainly enhances their appreciation. I think the same thing could be said for somebody who can recite lyric poetry well. "Emlyn Williams as Dickens" is an example of a recorded reading of certain parts of Dickens which can vastly increase the appreciation of the texts. Mark Twain is as funny as any author can be at times. But the humor is accentuated by the interpretation of the tone of Mark Twain's voice in Hal Holbrook's recording "Mark Twain Tonight." This use of two media of reception, of the eye and of the ear simultaneously, ought to be extremely useful.

BLOCK: May I just mention one more tool which seems to me useful and which is suggested by some recent French and German publications. These are copiously illustrated editions of classics which include reproductions of manuscripts, photographs of places and persons associated with the writer and of the writer himself. Passing these around the classroom can sometimes get students interested in an author and his works and make him more than just a name; there is a context, there is a physical presence here they can get at.

ROEMING: In summation it appears that the orientation of students toward seeing and hearing makes it imperative that motivation toward appreciation of literature can best be established by using the tools of audio and visual education for this purpose. But at the same time, it seems that appreciation of literature, because of its great variety, can be offered young persons as a reflection of their own interests by means of which their own personalities will develop and their own knowledge of themselves be expressed creatively in imitation. At any rate, appreciation of literature can

no longer be generated through passive acceptance of standards which the student does not find fully in accord with his own. It is the development of standards of taste and judgment which literature should support in the education of our youth. Skill in reading and appreciation of literature must support each other in order to develop persistent readers.

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An Available Resource

Copies of the Final Report of the Institutes in Adult Basic Education held at The University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee in July and August 1969 are available on request from the Center for Twentieth Century Studies. This was a TESOL project, consisting of two three-week institutes for training experienced teachers to teach standard English to adults with an educational equivalency of eighth grade or less. The primary purpose of the institutes was to train experienced teachers in those aspects of linquistics which would increase their potential to remove the barriers of language which deter a formidable number of adults from full participation in the life of their communities. The Institutes were funded by a grant from the United States Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Dr. Robert F. Roeming was Executive Director of the project and co-editor of this report.

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