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AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE*

WHEN was the last time you picked up a journal and read about practical procedures for teaching literature? In our professional magazines, the numerous articles dealing with the teaching of foreign language and culture have familiarized all of us with such terms as "audio-lingual method," "cognitive code," "individualization," "generative grammar," and "cultural capsules." But the truth is that our profession has neglected the art of teaching literature. If, from time to time, an article on literature appears in one of our journals, it generally deals with when to begin teaching literature and to whom (for example, should we begin reading simple excerpts from literary works at the intermediate level, or should we include in our syllabi more culture—which seems to turn students on—and wait until the third year of college language to give the students a survey course?).

Another type of article on literature, among the few that may be found in our journals, clearly reveals how this aspect of foreign language instruction has taken a back seat in our profession. These articles take for granted that the teaching of language and culture is our primary concern, and so they attempt to show us how to use literature as a vehicle for enhancing language acquisition or for illustrating cross-cultural differences. In other words, a poem, short story, play, essay, or novel is not studied in the classroom as literature per se, but rather as a tool to supplement vocabulary and to demonstrate certain grammatical principles that were previously covered in class or in the grammar texts. The standard literary texts that we are encouraged to use in our college classes are full of vocabulary exercises and carefully selected questions aimed at determining if a student understood the content. But the questions are always of the "who, what, how, when, where" variety. Literature becomes a tool, a support, for teaching language and culture. To use the line from the *Mary Poppins* song, literature is the "spoonful of sugar [that] makes the medicine go down." Unfortunately, this does not always produce the desired results, and all too often the mixture of literature, language, and culture only succeeds in confusing or overwhelming the student.

There is another, more serious problem: when it is not being used as a support system, literature is generally taught as a science, rather than as a humanistic expression or art. We are all familiar with the professor who enters the classroom and, from the very first day of the semester, narrows his vision and focuses on the work of literature. In the classes that follow, he dissects the literary work by analyzing the

Donald T. Dietz

author's life, psychoanalyzing the author, and neatly categorizing the work into its genre and period. Then he proceeds to study microscopically the work's various vital components, its anatomical structure—metaphors, similes, and symbols.

But what about the human element in the work, that aspect of a literary piece which makes it an expression of human concerns, transcending time and linking today's student with a classical or medieval author? When do we study this humanistic element? For it is the human component that makes a work live through the ages.

Edward Joseph Shoben, in a stimulating article entitled "Texts and Values: The Irrelevance of Literary Education," calls attention to the difference between approaching literature as a science and as a humanistic art:

In the direct literary experience, a reader confronts a portrayal of life that commands both his recognition of self and his enlarged understanding of life-styles foreign to his own. The educative potential in this tension is achieved when he has worked out a personally acceptable accommodation to these novel identifications. Literary scholarship, on the other hand, following the rules of the disciplines derived from literature, tends to focus either on the origins and history of the work or on its internal structure and the meanings given by its textual constraints.¹

He says, in this same article, "Literature must be taught as part of liberal education, not as a series of exercises in the literary scholarship" (p. 244). Shoben further suggests that

humanistic scholarship has grown less humanizing as it has become more scholarly, that the interests of faculty members and the interests of students in literary documents are likely to be so different as to imperil educative communication, and that an intrusive devotion to literary research can inhibit students from discovering the humane relevance of literature for their own development. (p. 250)

*The present article is based upon a presentation given at ADFL Seminar West, 1977, in San Antonio, Texas, 27-30 June. The author is chairman of the Department of Classical and Romance Languages at Texas Tech University.

These two views of literature—as a science and as a humanistic art—have dictated two distinct approaches to teaching literature. The traditional approach, one that most of us have experienced, treats literature as a science. The traditional methodology centers attention on the literary work. Much as the laboratory scientist draws his conclusions and hypotheses from direct observation and empirical evidence, the student acquires knowledge of the work through literary analysis, which follows closely the structured route of one of the five traditional modes.² In this approach, the teacher is the key, the imparter of knowledge. It is expected that the student will come to know literature through the teacher's well-organized lectures, carefully selected bibliographies, and years of experience in the field. This methodology seldom allows any true communication between instructor and student, or between student and student. Occasionally instructors do abandon their notes, carefully collected from their own college classroom experience, and venture to talk with the student. This type of student-teacher dialogue usually ends up taking the form of a "tell-me-what-I'm-thinking" game, which teachers train students to play and which, interestingly enough, students usually succeed in mastering with varying degrees of rapidity and success. All of this is performed under the guise of free classroom discussion and student participation.

The second view of literature uses a different approach. If literature is conceived of as a humanistic expression and treated as such in the classroom, then the focus must switch. The literary work is read, but instruction in the classroom begins with and centers around the humans involved in the learning process, namely, the student, his fellow students, and the instructor. Knowledge of the literary work, therefore, is not so much cognitive as it is experiential.

Shoben comments on these two basic ways of knowing and urges us not to forget in our teaching of literature the second approach to knowledge, which is based more on participation than on controlled observation. He says:

In our most intimate experience, including our relationships with others, we discover the meaning of fear, the qualities of desire, and the value of friendship by entering directly into life's impingements on people. By identifying with others, we enlarge our knowledge of ourselves as human beings; by reflecting on the various degrees of our identifications, we learn something about what we individually are—highly socialized isolates, intensely dependent on our interpersonalized environment and inextricably involved with it, yet unique and alone as unduplicable personalities. This route is the route to self-knowledge and to that continuously criticized and revised body of value commitments which define a large and significant segment of the examined life. (p. 247)

Shoben ends his fascinating article by saying: "It

seems probable that, although such disciplines as literary history and linguistics can be taught, literature can only be participated in" (p. 251).

The role of the teacher in such a methodology should be carefully noted. He or she becomes a facilitator whose ultimate goal in the classroom is to help the students affectively experience, in their own lives, what they are only reading about in the work of fiction. Given that experience is one of the two basic modes of knowledge and a valid tool in the classroom, a teacher's greatest assets, aside from his or her own life experiences, are the students themselves, their values, and their human encounters. But what, then, is the role of vicarious experience?

Once when I was lecturing on my ideas on teaching literature, and I had just finished what was, I thought, one of my best demonstrations on the affective methodology, a kind colleague, who was obviously skeptical and ready to label the whole technique as so much "bull," asked me why it was necessary to have students in the classroom interrelate and express the feelings they had experienced when they lost a close friend or relative through death. (I had used the theme of death as a basis for illustrating a point in discussion.) Why couldn't the students vicariously experience the feelings of loneliness and the sense of loss through their reading of a literary work: let us say a novel in which the main character tragically dies and every fictitious character severely suffers the consequences of his passing? Before I had a chance to tackle this first inquiry, the colleague produced a second rapid-fire question. "Suppose," she said, "none of the students in class had ever experienced the death of a friend or close relative? How could they talk about it and share this experience in the classroom?" Now, this may sound like an extraordinary and almost impossible situation, but I have had classes in literature, at the college level, in which all but two of the students admitted that they had never experienced the tragedy of death. They had never even been to a wake or funeral.

The answers to these questions seem quite simple and obvious. Yes, the student who reads a work of literature in which death and grieving are the main themes, and who follows the characters of the novel, will vicariously add a new dimension to his human experience of death. And a student who has not yet experienced the difficulties of accepting death will undoubtedly experience death's anguish in some form through the author's creative art. This sharing of feeling between author and reader is a real, valid, vicarious human experience that comes to the reader through the written word and his own imagination. Through the filter of fantasy, which is informed to some extent by the events in a person's life, the reader experiences the reality of death as it is witnessed and expressed by a fellow human being, the author. If, on the other hand, this reader-student were given an opportunity in the

classroom to share in the human experiences of his teacher and his fellow students, who sit right beside him, would he not have a more meaningful and vicarious educational experience? In other words, there are levels of vicarious educational experience.

I do not believe that the teacher of literature who relies solely on the traditional methodology can have any substantial effect on the vicarious experience of a student who reads an assigned work. By using the five traditional approaches and their various subdivisions, the teacher can lead students to cognitive knowledge and familiarize them with the literary tools needed to appreciate the work scientifically. But appreciation of the human, lasting values of the literary art must come from the range of human experiences, firsthand or vicarious, that the reader-student brings to the work. The teacher's function is to facilitate the expansion of students' human experiences so that they can approach the literary work with greater capacity for sharing the humanness of the author.

To summarize thus far: I have attempted to describe the two fundamental ways of approaching literature: the one treats literature as a science; the other treats literature as a humanistic art. These two approaches have given rise to two distinct methodologies in the classroom. The scientific approach strives to analyze a piece of literature through one or all of the traditional modes. The humanistic approach emphasizes the individuals involved in the classroom, namely, the teacher and the students, and treats the literary work as an artistic expression of the author's human concerns. The scientific approach, which relies almost entirely on the lecture method and literary analysis, is intellectual and lies within the cognitive domain; the humanistic approach, which depends mainly on student participation and classroom interaction, is experiential, intuitive, and lies within the affective domain. However, it is important to note that neither methodology is complete because each excludes the other. The second methodology I have described, which is the affective mode and which Shoben calls humanistic, I also have called humanistic, but this is a misnomer. A truly humanistic methodology must instruct the total mind.

Recently I read a review of a book written by Julian Jaynes, called *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*.³ Apparently, as this book indicates, scientists have been making startling discoveries concerning the dual nature of the human mind. The human brain is divided into right and left halves. It has been known for a long time that the right half controls the left side of the body and that the left half controls the right side. But it has just recently been discovered that the two halves of the brain perceive differently. Research suggests that the left side perceives analytically, linearly, and logically, while the right perceives holistically, intuitively, and imaginatively.

The left half of the brain codifies; the right half synthesizes and intuits. In other words, the left is the scientist; the right is the poet.⁴

These recent scientific findings have important implications for educational techniques. One aspect of Jaynes' work, in particular, may be of significance in our search for a more meaningful methodology: his concept of the primitive human being. Jaynes theorizes that primitive men and women possessed a highly developed right half of the brain. Their intuitive powers were so refined that they could communicate easily and effectively with nature (trees, animals, etc.) and the supernatural. As the culture of the occidental world evolved, with its premium on the rational (and therefore on the left half of the brain), the right half was gradually neglected and became repressed to a point of retardation.

This theory will certainly prove to be one of Jaynes' most controversial; but if it turns out that he is correct and intuitive knowledge comes to us more naturally and easily than cognitive knowledge, perhaps we have a strong clue to the best starting point for any classroom methodology, namely, the student's creative nature.

The question of how to teach literature is not an either/or proposition. The solution to the problem should be a synthesis, of the traditional methodology and the so-called humanistic one, that would result in an integrated system, a total alternative methodology. What form will this integrated methodology take? It is at this point that I would like to venture some ideas for an alternative approach to teaching literature, an approach that embraces both the cognitive and affective aspects of the learning process. I will briefly lay down some general principles and then suggest a five-step procedure for putting them into effect.

The following general principles are fundamental to the proposed alternative methodology:

(1) The starting point of instruction should not be the literary work, or the author's life, or the social ambience in which the author lived and wrote; the starting point must be the student in the classroom. The student should be brought to the literary work, not the literary work to the student.

(2) More emphasis must be placed on the student's experience as a vehicle of learning. It should be recognized that each student brings to the classroom human experiences distinct from those of other individuals in the class, and that these experiences may be used as tools to arrive at a greater appreciation of human and literary values.

(3) There must be fewer lectures and much more dialogue in an interchange of cognitive as well as intuitive knowledge.

(4) In the classroom, much more attention should be given to ideas and values and much less time should be devoted to the historical, sociological, and biographical dates and facts. These can easily be made available to

the student through well-written histories of literature and other historical and sociological books.

(5) Expression of the student's aesthetic appreciation of literature should not be cognitive only; it should involve his creative and intuitive nature. The term paper, a highly intellectual endeavor, should give way to involvement in the artistic process. In other words, the student reflects what he has learned by creating for himself. What is asked of the student is an effort that is both intellectual and creative.

The following five steps for teaching literature are based on the general principles just described:

(1) *Identification of a major theme or human concern.* The teacher identifies a main theme or some human concern that is central to the comprehension of the literary work assigned and that is likely to be at work in the student's life. It is certainly true that any literary work may contain numerous themes and that its one dominant message may vary according to what critic one reads; nevertheless, the instructor may rightly select, on the basis of his or her own research and understanding, a focal theme to use as point of departure (for example, death, love, fantasy versus reality, the individual versus society, etc.).

(2) *Exploration and internalization of the theme in the student's life.* In this second step, the instructor must move the students to reflect upon the major theme and how it is present in their own lives. Not only must the students be asked to think about the major theme; they must also be helped to feel or experience it. They will have already begun to do this when they participate actively in a discussion, relating experiences from their own lives to the major theme. It is also at this point that the type of vicarious experience discussed above comes into play.

It is this second step in the instructional process that is the key to the entire methodology. Once the student internalizes the human concern of the author through reflection and personal experience, he will be able to spot the human problem in the literature, more easily understand the artistry of the author who depicts the problem, and finally reproduce the problem in his own aesthetic and artistic creation. Obviously, this stage is the most crucial, and a great deal of classroom time must be spent on it. Note that, at this point in the teaching process, the students are assigned the reading of the literature and are expected to complete the assignment, but there is no discussion in the class on the work per se. The entire time in class is devoted to exploration and comprehension of the philosophical, sociological, and psychological aspects of the human issues so that the students feel the literary theme actively in their own lives.

(3) *Bridging of theme.* This third step in the methodology is perhaps the simplest of all. Having actively analyzed all of the sides of a philosophical question in the classroom while reading the literary

work outside the classroom, a student will be prepared to pass from his own real world to the fictionalized world of the author. However, it is important for the teacher to ensure that the student successfully relates the major perceptions from his life to the literary work. Note that, unlike the traditional methodology, the alternative methodology emphasizes the student's passage from the real world to the fictionalized world and not vice versa.

(4) *Recognition and appreciation of the author's artistic expression of theme.* This fourth and next-to-last step in the alternative methodology is precisely where the traditional methodology usually begins in the classroom. It has been my experience that, once a student understands and internalizes the human concern, he or she is ready to appreciate the artistry of the author. To attempt literary analysis before the student comprehends the significance of the theme is a wasteful expenditure of energy and time. The only difference between the student and the author is that the author is an artist while the student has not yet demonstrated his artistic capabilities. An analysis of the literature becomes easier for the student after he has been taught to feel what the author felt upon writing his work.

(5) *Reproduction of the author's theme and artistry in the student's creative expression.* The final step in the alternative methodology is the creative expression of the student. The teacher asks the student to produce his own work of art based on what he has learned from reflection and internalization. The student must be encouraged and freed to experience what the author experienced in creating his work. Instead of the traditional term paper, which usually depends to a large extent on what others have thought and written, the student may wish to write a short story, play, or poem. Or the student may choose another artistic medium—such as painting, sculpture, collage, or even dance—in which to demonstrate his understanding and internalization of a literary theme. How well the student has thought through and experienced the class and the literature will be reflected in this personal creative product.

NOTES

¹Edward Joseph Shoben, "Texts and Values: The Irrelevance of Literary Education," *Liberal Education*, 53 (1967), 248.

²The five modes of literary analysis referred to are the moral, the psychological, the sociological, the formalistic, and the archetypal. See Wilbur Scott, *Five Approaches to Literary Criticism*, (New York: MacMillan, 1974). Also helpful is Wilfred L. Guerin et al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

³Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).

⁴G. Lynn Nelson, "Toward a New English Teacher," *English Education*, 8 (Spring 1977), 132.

Survey of Humanities Classes in Community Colleges

The Center for the Study of Community Colleges, a non-profit corporation based in Los Angeles, has released a report on enrollment, classroom activity, use of media, student assignments, grading procedures, examinations, etc., in humanities classes at community colleges. The following text is extracted from the survey, which forms a major portion of the study being prepared by the Center under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Principal investigator for the study is Arthur M. Cohen.

Under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges asked the faculty in 178 community and junior colleges about their instructional practices in all areas of the humanities. Sampling was undertaken by pulling every tenth class section from the colleges' fall 1977 schedules of day and evening classes, a total of 1,110 sections. Of these, 92 class sections were not offered, most due to lack of enrollment. Of the 1,018 survey forms delivered, 860 (84%) were completed by the instructors and returned by our on-campus facilitators.

The average enrollment per class in all humanities courses was 28. By discipline, the average enrollment breaks down as follows: anthropology, 31; art history, 31; foreign languages, 19; history, 33; literature, 23; music history and appreciation, 30; philosophy, 27; religious studies, 28; political science, 31; and interdisciplinary humanities, 37.

Only 12 of the 860 class sections had 100 or more students enrolled; 54 of them had fewer than 10 students enrolled, and most of these were in foreign languages. The larger class sections tend to be taught by the faculty members with the most experience. The average class section for the faculty member with less than three years' experience was 21 students, whereas 32 was the average class size for the faculty member with 11 or more years' experience. Similarly, the part-timers tended to teach smaller classes than the full-timers.

We asked about the amount of class time that the instructors spend on various activities. Overall, they lecture 45% of the time. The foreign language teachers lecture least; the history instructors most. Class discussion occupies 21% of the class time—least in music appreciation classes, most in literature classes. Instructional media are used 10% of the time; the range is from 5% in philosophy classes to 26% in art and 32% in music appreciation. On the average, student verbal presentations take up 8% of the class time, but the foreign languages, with 23%, dominate here; remove them and the average would drop markedly. Quizzes and examinations also take up 8% of class time; they are balanced across disciplines. The other choices—guest lecturers, simulation and gaming, and field

trips—are rarely seen, although a few political science instructors utilize guest lecturers; simulation and gaming is found in a few foreign language classes; a few of the art history and music appreciation classes spend some time on field trips.

We asked about the type of materials used. Nearly all instructors, of course, use texts and other assigned books. Around 70% of them rely also on syllabi and handout materials. From one-fifth to one-third of them require lab materials and workbooks, collections of readings, reference books, journal and magazine articles, and/or newspapers. The lab materials and workbooks are most frequently seen in the foreign language classes. History and philosophy instructors tend toward collections of readings. The political science instructors rely heavily on newspapers. The interdisciplinary humanities instructors are more likely to have prepared syllabi and handout materials for their students. The faculty members with the most experience tend toward the use of collections of readings and reference books; those with least experience tend to rely more on syllabi and handout materials.

We were concerned also with the number of pages that instructors require students to read. There has been much talk about the decline in required reading in college courses and we wanted to assess these contentions. The literature and religious studies classes required the most reading. The foreign languages are well below average in the number of pages that they require their students to read. The average number of pages required in textbooks is 345. About two-thirds of the instructors are well satisfied with the texts; many of the others would like to change them. Around 5% of the teachers wrote the texts for their class. Half of them had total say in the selection of texts. The small colleges seem more inclined to allow instructors to select their own texts, and thus small-college instructors are more likely to be satisfied with such materials.

We also wanted to know about the emphasis given to various student activities, such as regular class attendance, papers written outside of class, participation in class discussions, etc. We asked whether these types of activities were used and how they were used to determine the student's grade. Grading is determined primarily by essay exams and quick-score or objective tests, with 28% of the instructors relying heavily on papers written outside of class. Other activities are less likely to be emphasized: class discussions, 14%; papers written in class, 12%; oral recitation, 10%; regular class attendance, 10%. Field reports, workbook completion, and individual discussions with instructors are rarely utilized.

There are many differences by discipline. The literature instructors are most likely to be concerned with papers written outside class, but in anthropology, art history, and political science, class papers are not

often seen. The essay examination is most frequently utilized by instructors in religious studies, history, and literature. The quick-score or objective test is most frequently seen in the anthropology, political science, and music appreciation classes. The instructors in small colleges tend to rely more on the traditional measures, papers and exams, for student grading. Just about the only instructors to require field reports are those in anthropology and art history. The oral recitations, of course, are most frequently seen in the foreign language classes. The phenomenon of requiring regular class attendance as an important determinant of the student's grade is seen overwhelmingly in the music appreciation classes. The art history and foreign language classes also tend to rely more on student attendance, but this seems to be a matter of practically no concern to the instructors in anthropology and religious studies. Participation in class discussions is heavily emphasized by literature and foreign language instructors. It is of considerably less importance in anthropology, philosophy, art history, religion, and humanities interdisciplinary courses.

We wanted to know about grading practices and found that 76% of the class sections are on the ABCDF scale, 16% on ABCD/No Credit. Pass/Fail is seen in very few classes, and Pass/No Credit or ABC/No Credit in hardly any. The grading options other than ABCDF are practically never seen in the small institutions; any innovations in grading show up in the

medium size and larger colleges.

We asked about what it would take to make the class a better class and allowed instructors to check as many of the choices as applied. The overwhelming first choice was "Availability of more media or instructional materials," with "Instructor release time to develop course and/or materials" and "Professional development opportunities for instructors" running a close second and third. (More than one-third of the instructors chose these options.) Practically none of the instructors opted for "Fewer or no prerequisites for admission to class," but 22% of them wanted "Stricter Prerequisites." Although 13% of the instructors wanted larger classes, 27% saw the desirability of smaller classes. And while 21% (more among part-timers) would enjoy more interaction with colleagues or administrators, only 5% thought that less interference from colleagues or administrators would make the class better. A few wanted more clerical assistance (19%) and more readers or paraprofessional aids (12%); 10% wanted more freedom to choose materials.

Our prediction about the percent of instructors with doctoral degrees going up seems to be holding. In 1975 we found 14% with the doctorate and predicted a rapid rate of increase, reaching to 20% or 22% by 1980. These data drawn from instructors in fall 1977 showed nearly 19% of them with the doctorate.

Program in International Trade

Laredo State University (Laredo, Texas) has announced a new M.B.A. program in International Trade. The course of study, which can be completed in one year, includes offerings in business communication (Spanish/English), International Economic Geog-

raphy, International Management, and Customs Brokerage. Graduates of the program will understand the principles of international trade operations and be able to process import/export shipments through the appropriate federal agencies.

Additional information may be obtained from the Dept. of International Trade, Laredo State University, Laredo, TX 78040 (telephone: 512-722-8001).

Since literature is a reading-centered task, teaching literature cannot work without considering highly the skill of reading. Efficient literary reading however remains a hindrance in the way of teachers and learners because of the absence of consistent techniques and strategies that could facilitate the task. Regarding this view, the teaching of literature in our universities has become mainly lecture-based with teacher-centred approach. As a consequence, the student becomes a parrot-like capable of simply repeating and vomiting what has been presented in class. Mililani (2003:2) states that: "Thus, the course (of literature) becomes a simple transposition of the teacher's impressions and feelings to the learner towards a literary work, - 35 Using the literature-based approach to teaching reading has many benefits. One of the advantages of literature is that it helps students understand that many words have multiple meanings. Though ... When it comes to the advantages of literature in education, it seems like every teacher and education researcher has an opinion. Some believe that the literature-based approach is the most effective way to teaching reading skills. In the literature-based approach, students are exposed to words in their natural contexts. Some experts think this is the best way to learn and retain new vocabulary. Others believe that the importance of literature should be downplayed in favor of using more of a building-block approach, also known as the basal-approach, which incorporates rules and phonetics.