

we are now assuming that there already exists the situation favorable to the student's spontaneous and personal response to literature. What does it "feel like," from within, to be this kind of person or that?

To be angelic, cruel, dominating, passive? What are the satisfactions, what are the elements, of the many roles that may be played? He is no longer satisfied with a childlike acceptance of the mere external gestures and trappings as of silhouettes against a screen. He wishes to experience these things

from within. It is often to literature--and principally fiction--that he turns. Here he finds not only emotional release for the impulses already strong within him, but denied satisfaction in his life as a minor; he finds also through vicarious experience the insight he craves into the possibilities that life offers, the possible roles open to him, the possible situations in which he may find himself. Being still in

the dependent childhood relation to the family, yet feeling himself practically an adult, the youth often

begins to question the authority of the family. Even in a stable well-integrated society, such as pre-industrial, agricultural America, the period of adolescence brings with it a heightened tension within the family group. The youth seeks ways of asserting his existence as an individual apart from it. He sets up the goal of psychological as well as economic independence. These attitudes frequently come into conflict with the desire of the family to continue its dominance, and with the psychic need on the part of

the parents to feel themselves still an essential force in the life of their offspring. These strains and stresses make the whole subject of family relationships a field of particular interest to the adolescent. We should at least help him to understand the function that our culture assigns to the family in the life of the individual.

He needs also to become more aware than ever before of his parents as personalities with emotional needs of their own. He will profit also from a clear understanding of the nature of both dependence and independence. Yet in the education and training that are given the adolescent in America there is little to enlighten him along these lines.(R) He will sense these needs and curiosities, and here

again, it will be often only from the reflection of life offered by literature that he will acquire these insights. These conflicts and difficulties are tremendously complicated for the present-day adolescent, of course, by the fact that he is living at a moment when our society is singularly lacking in consistency, when changes in our economic and social attitudes are going on with unprecedented speed, when few

of the traditional ideas remain unquestioned. The young boy and girl who have grown up within the

relatively stable pattern set by the family are suddenly catapulted into a world of innumerable alternative patterns; the burden of many choices is placed upon them. They often find the ways of life,

the ideas, and the activities that have been valued within the family, ill adapted to the conditions of a changing world. More than probably any other generation, they have the opportunity to formulate their

own ideal life patterns. It is no longer assumed that the families they create will be organized on one

pattern; an extraordinary range of possible relationships with their mates and with their children can be

envisioned. Similarly, in their choice of work the settled values need no longer hold. The prestige of the

successful business man has somewhat dwindled; the social value of the artist, the scientist, or the

artisan is increasingly recognized. Similar breadth of choice and challenge to personal creation meet

the adolescent as he seeks to develop a social philosophy and a set of values. In ironic contrast to the

bewilderingly generous choice of goals that presents itself are the heartbreaking obstacles toward their

attainment created by our present economic disorganization. This too has enormously heightened all of

the characteristic problems of adolescence. Economic independence seems often an impossible goal, or if it is attained at all, it is in such limited form that a full adult life including marriage and a family is impossible. Formerly, in the years of prosperity and expansion, political questions or concern with possible alternative organizations of society often seemed remote and academic to the adolescent involved in plans for his own personal life. Today, even the least socially conscious individual is forced into some recognition of the influence of the surrounding society upon him. Here again, the teacher or professor will fail to convey a living sense of literature if he goes blithely on his academic way without

recognizing that the student turns to literature out of this welter of shifting and uncertain social conditions. Probably because of the jolt that our habitual attitudes have received, we have become somewhat more aware of the automatic and indirect ways in which we acquire our ideas of the roles open to us in life. In a stable society, we should absorb from our childhood experience in the family and from the community about us the image of the behavior, the appropriate attitudes, the rights and the responsibilities of, for example, the various family roles. The young man probably would automatically assume in his turn the roles of husband and parent, without even consciously defining their attributes.

He would need only to follow unquestioningly the well-channelled paths of social behavior. Although more of these aspects of behavior have been forced into consciousness in our age of transition, it is still

in the same automatic and indirect way that much of our behavior is patterned. We have absorbed ready-made standards and attitudes from the family background, from the lives of neighbors, from the images of accepted patterns of behavior with which we are surrounded. The very emotions with which

we most spontaneously meet a situation have, after all, been learned through the force of cultural suggestion. If a woman is indignant and jealous at the thought of her husband taking a second mate, it is because from childhood on she has constantly observed that situation coupled with that reaction. For the

same reason, the native African woman will automatically express pleasure and gratitude when her husband proposes to take a second wife. Our sense of the culturally approved emotional reactions, our notions of right and wrong, our sense of the appropriate types of behavior, are in largest measure the result of such unconscious assimilation. Thus it is that the adolescent will already possess a wealth of culturally absorbed attitudes and ideas of human behavior. And it will be principally through this same process of unconscious cultural absorption that he will build up his images of the possible future roles

that life offers. Innumerable influences in his environment will have given him a definite image, for instance, of the possible ways of behavior and feeling, even of the kind of temperament, appropriate or

possible for a man or a woman. His parents and his family, through their own example and through explicit statement of the accepted attitudes, will have done much at an early point to set this mold. These will have been reenforced not only by the men and women about him but also by the images presented in newspapers, books, and magazines, and in that exceedingly potent influence, the moving picture.

The image of the man as dominant, masterful, superior, the woman, emotional, dependent, clinging, in need of help and guidance, is, for instance, the one most often and most forcibly presented to us even in this supposed age of woman's emancipation. We are constantly bombarded with these images: in the actions and attitudes of the conventional members of the older and younger generations about us; in the distinctions, both subtle and crude, between the things proper for men and for women repeated

endlessly in the newspapers and popular magazines; in the types presented with monotonous similarity on the screen. And we must recall, literature is another of these image-forming media. The human complications that are recognized as important and valid enough to be given explicit attention in fiction, in the newspapers, or in motion pictures reflect overwhelmingly the stereotyped notions of masculine and feminine nature and behavior. In the great majority of cases, these images will condition the actions, feelings, and choices of the individual. Even in the case of the post-war generation that seems in such large measure to have broken away from these conceptions, the pressure of these older more deeply rooted images is still felt. The redefinitions of possible roles for man and woman and of the possible relationships between them has gone on constantly in terms of revolt or readjustment to the older attitudes which still permeate our environment. The present generation of adolescents particularly is subjected to the conflicting pressures of contradictory images. On the one hand, the traditional notions of the behavior of man and woman are being constantly reiterated; on the other hand, the adolescent meets with increasing frequency images of men and women behaving in ways alien to the traditional ideas. Women enter into activities thought appropriate only for men; children are given freedom that would formerly have been considered dangerous; grandmothers behave in ways formerly thought scandalous. The adolescent's own assumption of adult roles cannot therefore be as automatic as in the case of the youth in a more stable society. His choices, nevertheless, will probably in large part be made on an emotional basis. Against the weight and pressure of the traditionally accepted image, there will be exerted the dramatic appeal of the new and perhaps more practical image. In many cases, the assumption of the new type of role will be made only under the compulsion of new economic and social conditions. The old attitudes and habits of response will be constantly intruding themselves, complicating the individual's life, creating insecurity and confusion. It is with such attitudes and preoccupations that the adolescent comes to his experience of literature. Anything that his reading may contribute must take its place in the complex web of influences acting upon him. His attention will be diverted to those phases of any work that apply most clearly to his own emotional tensions and perplexities. He may often conceal with seeming indifference the reactions dictated by his particular obsessions, yet a teaching situation such as we have outlined in the preceding chapter would encourage him to give articulate expression to his emotional responses. Moreover, we must face the fact that if a work, no matter how intense and stirring the teacher may think it, does not meet any of the adolescent's needs, he will remain indifferent to it. The teacher should be aware of still another conditioning factor which will affect the student's sensitivity to literature. The individualistic emphasis of our society builds up a frequent reluctance to see the implications for others of our own actions, or to understand the validity of the needs and drives that motivate other people's actions. The fact that the success of the individual must so often be at the expense of others places a premium upon this kind of blindness to the needs and feelings of others. We teachers of literature must take this cultural pressure into account, since it is so directly opposed to the attitude of mind we are attempting to foster. For the very nature of the literary experience is a living into the experiences of others and a comprehension of the goals and aspirations of personalities different from our own. Furthermore, much of what the student reads and sees will tend to coarsen his sensibilities and to make him less able to respond fully to

the complex and subtle nature of good literature. We cannot afford to ignore the crude pictures of human behavior and motivation offered to their millions of readers by the newspapers, or the oversimplified and false images of life presented by the pulp magazines. Not even the school as a whole, let alone the teacher of literature with his much more limited scope, can hope fully to counterbalance the great weight of the influences met in the surrounding society and in such institutions as the newspaper or the moving picture. The mere reading of a play by Shakespeare, or a novel by George Eliot or Henry James, cannot in itself be expected to wipe out the effect of all the desensitizing influences met outside the school or college. Yet this is not a reason for assuming a defeatist attitude that would limit our hope of influence to the gifted student or the one with unusually favorable background. On the contrary, we must broaden our understanding of our function. We must do more than merely expose the student to great art. Although the reading of a novel will not in itself counteract all the unfavorable pressures, it may be made a means for helping the student to develop some resistance to those influences. And we can accomplish this only if we remain constantly aware of the nature of the social forces acting upon the student. When an individual student reads a particular work, there will come into play one of the innumerable possible variations upon our general picture of adolescent concerns. The particular community background of the student will be a factor; whether he comes from the North or the South, from city or country, will affect the nature of the understanding and the prejudices that he brings to the book. Stribling's *The Forge* or Green's *This Body the Earth* will elicit a very different response from students of northern and southern background. *Main Street* and *Manhattan Transfer* will not mean the same thing to the city boy and the country boy. The daughters of a railway magnate or mill owner and of a factory worker will probably react differently to Norris' *The Octopus* or Anderson's *Poor White*. And when we turn to the literature of the past and of England, these same differences hold. The fact that our American population is becoming increasingly urban may explain the growing difficulty of keeping alive the love of English poetry, so permeated by country imagery. The STUDENT WILL BRING to his reading the moral and religious code and social philosophy assimilated from his family and community background. His parents may stem from a *Main Street* setting, or they may have turned from a life such as F. Scott Fitzgerald pictured to assume the duties of parenthood. The adolescents who will be coming to our schools and colleges in the next few years especially will reflect this diversity of moral atmosphere. The religious background of the student also often plays an important part. In a class studying Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the girl who was a devout Catholic presented a very different response from the one who had been brought up in an agnostic milieu. Similarly, a discussion of *Romeo and Juliet* was given a rather unusual turn by one student's insistence that there was no tragedy since the lovers would be reunited after death. Similar problems will arise in connection with social and economic views. The child of well-to-do, middle-class parents who, after reading Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, insists that "some people like to be dirty and ragged and just won't work" will have rather a special approach to Dickens' *Hard Times* or Hugo's *Les Misérables*. It is extremely valuable for the teacher of literature to recognize the nature of some of these possible "stock responses." We have seen that in large part they represent the dogmatic platitudinous ideas about people and life that one meets on all sides: in the newspapers and the moving pictures, or on the lips of the man on the street. Similarly, they show

themselves in ways of feeling that have become so conventional as to have lost all individual quality or fine shades. Our popular songs are repositories of such sentiments. Such responses are aroused with great ease as we see in the commercialized appeal to stock sentiments represented by Mother's Day

and Father's Day, or by much of our advertising. Yet the very essence of literature is a rejection of such stereotyped, superficial, and unshaded reactions to the mere outlines of situations or to the appeal of vague and generalized concepts. A poem or a novel grows out of some fresh insight into the quality of these things.

The reader, therefore, must possess a certain flexibility of mind, a freedom from rigid emotional habits, if he is ever to enter into the esthetic experiences the artist has made possible. This is

not to argue that our object should be to create in the student such a state of flexibility and such a passivity to new kinds of experience that he will lose all the advantages of an integrated personality or a

settled structure of ideas of his own. Keats, who possessed this quality of sensitivity to fresh

experience to a supreme degree, speaks in one of his letters of the poet as one who possessed no character of his own because he could identify himself so completely with other forms of being and could

adopt so readily new and untried forms of response. Precious as that capacity may be for the poet, in such an extreme form it is not a practical asset for the conduct of everyday affairs. A stock response

may often, as Richards says, be a convenience. Just as it would be disastrous if at every occasion for walking we had to reason out the best way of putting one foot before the other, so in our intellectual and

social life ready-made attitudes and ideas are also useful. By automatically taking care of the major part of our life, they leave us energy for meeting the new and unprepared-for situations. What is needed

is sufficient flexibility to free one's self from the stock response when it prevents a response more appropriate to the situation. This is as true of the problems encountered in our daily practical lives, as it is of our encounters with literature. Much of the mismanagement of our lives, particularly in our personal relationships, is the result of our following a stereotyped and automatic reaction to the general outlines

of a situation instead of responding flexibly to the special characteristics and changing qualities of that situation. The mother, accustomed to her children's dependence upon her for the management of their lives, continues to expect the same kind of dependence long after the children have grown beyond the need for it. During the years of America's economic expansion, the idea develops that the man without a

job is shiftless and unenterprising; when the Depression makes it impossible for many of even the most enterprising to have jobs, this same attitude toward the unemployed persists in many quarters. The young man who has been accustomed to his mother's housewifely attention to his physical well-

being becomes irritated when his wife, employed in business, overlooks these things. In the experience of literature, where we are liberated from the demands that practical life makes on us for speedy and economical response and action, this capacity for flexibility should surely be exercised and enlarged. Fundamentally, what we are seeing[^] is the development of individuals who will function less as automatic bundles of habits and more as flexible discriminating personalities. Our great heritage of literary experiences can be enjoyed and understood only by such personalities. Our remarks concerning

"stock responses" can be translated into terms of the breadth or adequacy of the individual life experience. In a motion-picture theatre recently, a ten-year-old boy was heard to exclaim, just as the hero and heroine fell into the traditional closing embrace, "This is the part that I always hate!" That

feeling is evidently not shared by the millions of adults who view such pictures weekly. This quite obvious point concerning readability is one that is often forgotten when literature treating more complex situations and insights is involved. The teacher, particularly, needs to remember that in the molding of any specific literary experience what the student brings to literature is as important as the literary work itself. Part of our equipment for helping the adolescent to fuller literary experience will therefore be an understanding of adolescent concerns and an awareness of some of the possible personal factors that may limit or enhance his response. Every opportunity for coming to understand the individual student will therefore be valuable. Under the usual teaching conditions, these opportunities are unfortunately only too rare. All the more reason, therefore, for the teacher to work out some general understanding of the possible experiences and preoccupations typical of the particular group of students with which he is dealing. Since in this book our attention is centered particularly on the high-school and early college years, it will be useful to suggest some answers to the question: What does the adolescent bring to literature? Our discussion will not attempt to be inclusive. We shall merely try to suggest some of the awarenesses of adolescent concerns that will be helpful to the teacher in his attempt to understand the student's spontaneous response to literature. A knowledge of typical adolescent preoccupations will also influence the teacher in the choice of literary materials. The ADOLESCENT READER to whom we offer the experience of literature comes to it out of a mass of absorbing and conflicting influences. It has become a cliché to describe as a time of storm and stress this period when the child is coming into possession of the physical and nervous endowments with which he will function as an adult. The marked physical changes that occur at this time probably have been excessively blamed for the difficulties that beset the adolescent years. Anthropologists have pointed out to us societies such as Samoa where these physical changes occur without emotional upheaval. In other cultures, the period of personal turmoil may fall at an entirely different age and without reference to physiological changes. Nevertheless, without making these changes the sole reason for all the problems of adolescence, we are justified in believing that in our society they do have certain emotional repercussions. The girl or boy is made more or less aware of these physical readjustments and recognizes certain transformations in his emotional drives and personality traits. A heightened self-consciousness and curiosity about the self usually follows. It is obvious that this will affect his attitude toward the essentially human art of literature. The self-consciousness of the adolescent seems often to center about a concern with normality. (R) He is worried by what seems to be any deviation from the "normal." This may not often take so decided a form as in the case of the student who confessed that she had hated almost every story or play she had read in high school because they ended on the note "they lived happily ever after," so contradictory to the image of her own parents' unhappy disagreements. Authors, she felt, must be in some vast conspiracy of untruth. Here, certainly, is an instance in which acquaintance with some of the contemporary novels dealing with marital maladjustments might have led the student to realize that the writer attempts to illuminate the whole range of human experience and that, therefore, his images of possible happiness might also be given some credence. The student's own relations with his parents will also be a conditioning factor in his approach to literature. His identification with a domineering father, for instance, may make him get greater emotional satisfaction

tion from images of successfully imposed authority than from images of an individual independently working out his own fate. Anything, of course, that has entered into and shaped the development of the student's personality will be significant also for his literary development. We cannot attempt here even to enumerate the major factors that have been recognized as typical in our society. Nor can the teacher in dealing with the student hope to glimpse many of them, of whose import the student himself will be most

of all unaware. Yet such general social attitudes ultimately will condition the whole texture of the student's experience of life as well as of literature. We should at least be conscious of the presence of these

elements in the interplay between the book and the personality. Failures in sensitivity, lack of understanding, and seemingly distorted reactions often have their roots in these factors in personality. By helping the student to understand and evaluate his personal emphases, we shall help him to arrive at a more balanced and more lucid sense of literature. There is very little systematic information available concerning the specific ways in which the individual personality colors the response to literature. The

book by Professor Richards which we have cited (R) offers some valuable illustrations of individual reactions to poetry. His elaborate and subtle analyses of his students' comments on poetry reveal

some of the typical patterns of response, and his discussion of "Irrelevant Associations and Stock Responses" is especially pertinent to our present consideration. The teacher who is sensitive to such personal and temperamental concerns will see how intimately involved he must become in the attempt to help his students to handle social, psychological, and ethical concepts such as we outlined at the very opening of our discussion. "Anything in the reader's past experience, any of his present preoccupations,

his needs and frustrations--even his present physical state--may enter actively into the nature of his primary spontaneous response. In some cases, these things will conduce to a richer and more balanced reaction to the work. In other cases, they will limit or distort the reader's image of it. It is important that the teacher of literature be aware of some of the personal factors that will inevitably affect the equation

represented by book plus reader. The experienced teacher will undoubtedly be able to recall many illustrations of responses to literature colored by some personal factor. Some personal preoccupation

or some automatic response to a minor phrase or to the general subject of the work will lead the student to a violent reaction that has very little to do with the work itself. A word such as home or mother or a phrase such as my country, with their many conventional sentimental associations, may often set off an automatic reaction that tends to blind the reader to the context in which the poet had presented these words. The same thing happens on perhaps an even larger scale in connection with fiction and drama. A young college graduate recently expressed herself most forcibly concerning Anna Karenina. She had no sympathy, she said, for Anna, who was so preoccupied with her own affairs and who probably did not

appreciate her husband. He was undoubtedly the kind of man who loves deeply but is unable to communicate his feelings to others. When the young woman was informed of the more usual

interpretation of Anna's husband and was asked to point out in the work itself the basis for her interpretation, she replied, "But there are people like that, with very warm hearts and intense affections, who are unable to let others know it. Why, my own father is like that!" The personal sources of this reader's blindness to the author's intention were revealed here in clearer terms than is usually possible in a classroom or a school situation. The young girl's reaction to the love element in "The Eve of St.

"Agnes" is another illustration. Our discussion of some of the conditions affecting the adolescent today has already suggested various other factors that would tend to implant in the student's mind limited or stereotyped preconceptions. We have spoken, for example, of the influence of a rural or urban background or of sectional provincialism in building up stock responses. The same thing would apply to the student whose response to White's Fire in the Flint was that Kenneth Harper deserved his fate since he did not know his place as a Negro. The fixed ideas and emotional associations that cluster about family and sex relations may also lead to frequent irrelevant responses. An example of this is a Cambridge student's condemnation of D. H. Lawrence's poem "Piano" on the ground that no sensible person would want to give up his adult independence and return to the limitations of childhood. Again we are confronted with the need of building up, as a preliminary, basis for literary appreciation, a richer, more refined, and more flexible sense of life.