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Utilizing pupils' reading interests in popular fiction to better attain ends of literature teaching.

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Boston University

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Thesis

Utilizing Pupils' Reading Interests in Popular Fiction to Better Attain Ends of Literature Teaching

Submitted by

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CONTENTS

"All science," says Will Durant, in his preface to the "Story of Philosophy", "begins as philosophy, and ends as art." This statement can be as readily applied to progress in fields educational as to any other field. We who are interested in education flatter ourselves that we have emerged from the philosophic stage and pride ourselves on being in the scientific stage. And, I think, we all hope that one day education will be an art.

Meanwhile, the value of any subject in the program of studies, and the value of any technique devised for putting that subject across, must be measured by a scientific yardstick. The whole vast subject of English, traditionally enthroned as a key course in any program of studies, has not been unchallenged. In the crucibles of innumerable classrooms, in the retorts of myriad committees of sundry variety, its worth has been tested. And not found wanting.

We have defined, in no uncertain terms, the aims and objectives of English teaching. We have refined, time and again, our definitions, until today every good teacher of English knows, theoretically, just where he is headed in his subject. Actually, very few teachers ever see their goal reached, their task reasonably well done, Why?

This study will attempt to show that we may better attain our major objectives by incorporating into our courses of study in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade of our public high schools literature that has a natural appeal to

adolescents.

The method used will be as follows:

(1) To trace historically and set up as our goal the best statement of ends of English literature teaching.

(2) To indicate that we fail to attain them because of uninteresting subject-matter.

(3) To find out what subject matter is interesting to high school students. Data will be drawn from:

(a) Psychology--which will tell us why adolescents like certain types of literature.

(b) Various studies--which will tell us what adolescents read.

(c) A study by the writer of certain authors to see if what the psychologists recommend is really the type of thing the adolescent reads.

(4) To suggest how these interests may be utilized to attain the objectives of literature teaching, and the broader ends of secondary education.

Prior to the report of the Committee of Ten, the study of English was not divided into various fields such as composition, literature, grammar, but was held to have certain very definite practical objectives, such as the "ability to speak effectively in public."(1) Moreover, the general

(1) Quoted in "The High School"; Monroe-Weber, Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1928; P.238

acceptance of faculty psycholgy and the doctrine of formal discipline resulted in emphasis upon trained "faculties" as objectives to be attained by the teaching of English. Two examples of this type of objective are given by Stout[1]. They say that

"A systematic analysis of the English sentence should hold a prominent rank, merely as a means of mental development."

And again, another quotation from Reed and Kellogg whose text was very widely used from 1885 to 1900,[2] states three aims for the study of a sentence:

(1) To give a knowledge of the laws of discourse.

(2) To aid in giving ability to translate foreign language.

(3) To provide mental discipline.

The study of composition, as such, was neglected, according to Monroe and Weber, and in the study of literature the principal objective was the memorization of a large number of facts relative to its history, supplemented by biographical data about authors.

About 1885 the influence of college entrance requirements began to make itself felt in high school literature, and

(1) Ibid -- P. 240
(2) Ibid -- P. 241

there was a decided shift to the study of the "classics". The theoretical objective was to acquaint pupils with "standard productions" and "to implant in their minds a love for choice literature."(1)

The Conference on English of the Committee of Ten stated the aims of literature sutdy as follows:(2) "to cultivate a taste for reading, to give the pupil some acquaintance with good literature, and to furnish him with the means of extending that acquaintance." Now this wasn't a bad statement of aims but the Committee itself frowned upon it. It was too presumptuos. "The intelligent reader of the report of this Conference," says the Committee, "will find described in it the means by which the study of English in secondary schools is to be made the equal of any other study in disciplinary or developing power. The Conference claims for English as much time as the Latin Conference claims for Latin in secondary schools; and it is clear that they intend the study shall be in all respects as serious and informing as the study of Latin."

This report, however, was an entering wedge for "literature", as such, and was the beginning of a period of formalization of English that was not definitely challenged until the National Council of English Teachers, in 1912, started a stir that

(1) Ibid--P. 243
(2) Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Subjects. American Book Co:1894; P. 86

culminated in the famous report on "Reorganization of English in the Secondary Schools," published in 1917, as Bulletin No. 2 of the Bureau of Education.

Says Koos,[1] "For a long period of years the chief influence operative in the selection of literature studied in the high school was the needs of college entrance." We have not, as yet, really broken away from that tradition as we shall see when we examine present day courses of study and reading lists.

This brings us to a consideration of present day aims and objectives in literature teaching. Douglass says,[2] "Ends of literature teaching have always been the appreciation of good books, and the cultivation of habits of good reading. Specifically, it is believed that the particular results to be sought in the work in English literature include:

"Ability to find pleasure in reading books by the better authors, both standard and contemporary, with an increasing knowledge of such books and increasing ability to distinguish what is really good from what is trivial and weak.

"Knowledge of a few of the greatest authors, their lives, their chief works, and the reasons for their importance in their own age and in ours.

"Understanding of the leading features in the structure

(1) The American Secondary School; Leonard V. Koos, Ginn and Co. 1927; P. 396

(2) Douglass, A.A. "Secondary Education," Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1927; P. 510

and style of the main literary types, such as novels, dramas, essays, lyric poems.

"The power to enter imaginatively into the thought of an author, interpreting his meaning in the light of one's own experience and to show, perhaps by selecting passages and reading them aloud, that the book is a source of intellectual enjoyment."

While we may question Douglass' "always," we can accept his statement of ends, although it falls far short of the masterly and comprehensive definition of aims set forth by the National Joint Committee on English in its "Reorganization of English in the Secondary Schools. These aims are as follows:(1)

1. "The literature lesson should broaden, deepen, and enrich the imaginative and emotional life of the student. Literature is primarily a revelation and an interpretation of life; it pictures from century to century the growth of the human spirit. It should be the constant aim of the English teacher to lead pupils so to read that they find their own lives imaged in this larger life, and attain slowly, from a clearer appreciation of human nature, a deeper and truer understanding of themselves."

2. "The study of literature should arouse in the minds of pupils an admiration for great personalities, both of authors

(1)Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools; Bulletin No. 2, 1917, Bureau of Education

and characters in literature. No man is higher than his ideals. Human beings grow unconsciously in the direction of that which they admire. Teachers of English must, then, consciously work to raise the pupil's standards of what is true and fine in men and women. The literature lesson must furnish the material out of which may be created worthy and lasting ideals of life and conduct.

3. "The literature lesson should raise the plane of enjoyment in reading to progressively higher levels. Reading is still the chief recreation of many people. It should be the aim of the English teacher to make it an unfailing resource and joy in the lives of all. To make it yield the greatest pleasure will involve the consideration of literature not only as to its content as a statement of facts and ideas but as an art. The literature teacher should not be content with arousing an interest in what is said; if he would give the fullest enjoyment, he must develop some appreciation of the way in which it is said.

4. "In order that the reading habit may yield the pleasure and joy of which it is capable, the English lesson should give to the student such knowledge of the scope and content of literature as will leave him with a sense of abundance of interesting material, and a trained ability and desire to find for himself such intellectual and spiritual food as he may need for his growth and his pleasure.

5. "In order that the above ends may be realized, the teacher of literature must assume his part in the conscious development of the intellectual faculties of his students. They must be trained not only to feel more sensitively and deeply, and to imagine more vividly, but to think more accurately and intelligently, that they may have the power not only of correct inerpretation but of sane and wise application to life of the literature to which it is the teacher's duty to lead them."

I have no doubt but that this statement of aims has proven as highly inspirational as it is highly ideal. Although published in 1917, I can find no other statement written since then that even approaches it in comprehensiveness. Without more ado the, let us, for the purposes of this paper, accept this definition of objectives in teaching literature.

Let us now consider these objectives, in this one division of one subject, in relation to the cardinal principles of secondary education, as laid down for us by the Committee on Reorganization of Secondary Schools.(1)

Without comment, I will list these seven well know principles. They are

1. Health
2. Command of the fundamental processes
3. Worthy home membership

(1) Principles of Secondary Education, Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 35:1918

4. Citizenship

5. Vocation

6. Worthy use of leisure time

7. Ethical character

Theoretically, any subject in the program of studies can justify its continued existence only if it can readily be tied up with these principles. Again theoretically, every subject should dove-tail in some way with every principle.

"We must appraise the contributions of each subject to the improvement of adjustments to the physical world, to family, social, economic, and civic situations and the effects of each in increasing bodily and mental health and balance, and the recreational, ethical, and intellectual resources. The main criterion of the worth of any experience is, indeed, the degree to which it promotes these general objectives of education."(1) This, of course, is too idealistic to be practical.

In the actual teaching of any given subject, the very nature of the subject-matter demands that certain of these cardinal principles be neglected, just as it demands that certain other principles be stressed. Of English literature this statment is especially true. What principles, then, are we to stress?

(1)Thorndike and Gates: Elementary Principles of Education; Macmillan Co., 1929; p. 166

On this question, Inglis,[1] writing in 1918, said that the social-civic aims were to be realized by the study of literature because "it (literature) affords contact with human experiences and human conduct in complete variety." He was not so sure of the achievement of other aims, although he thought that for a few pupils the study of literature might be an integrating factor in achieving the economic-vocational aim of secondary education. Of the worthy use of leisure he says nothing.

Koos,[2] in 1927, says: "When the problem of aims and values of English is reviewed, it may be seen that with an appropriate content and method an important role is assignable to the subject in achieving the aims and functions of the secondary school. The civic-moral-social aim may be served directly by literature.... ...Achieving the aim of recreational and aesthetic participation and appreciation is mainly an obligation of literature..... Ordinarily this subject....is not to be directed to achieving the occupational aim....."

In 1930, we find a Doctor's dissertation[3] starting with this statement: "As an objective, worthy use of leisure, with reading as a securing means, has become generally accepted in education...."

It seems to the writer that no higher authority than common sense is necessary to prove that this is the objective with which teachers of English literature would be concerned. Obviously

(1) Inglis, A.J.: Principles of Secondary Education, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918; p. 438
(2) The American Secondary School, Ginn and Co., 1927; p.390
(3) Chodte AE. A "Relation of the Literary Background Recommended by Courses of Study to that Found in Current Literature." Graduate School, University of Pennsylvania, 1930; p. 11

we can do little with the principles of health and command of the fundamental processes. We could quibble, I suppose, in this psychological age, and indicate that literature can do much for mental health. But it would be quibbling. And when a pupil is able to start his adventures into fields literary, we assume, and not without reason, that his command of the fundamental processes is such that he will be able to progress normally. Then so few of our boys and girls will ever become professional writers or critics that we can discount entirely the vocational aim in teaching literature.

This leaves for our further consideration four of the seven cardinals principles; worthy home membership, citizenship, ehtical character, and the worthy use of leisure. To realize the first three aims, which are Inglis' social-civic aims, we must concentrate on the fourth and last, the worthy use of leisure.

Let us recapitulate briefly. We have examined various statements of aims and objectives of English literature teaching, and found that of the Committee on Reorganization to be the best . Taking these objectives as a starting point, we have shown that their attainment would result in realizing that aim of secondary education known as the worthy use of leisure time, which we have shown is the single objective upon which we should concentrate.

We now come to the problem of whether we are realizing at all well the accepted objectives. The simple fact is that we are not. Why? Because, says Douglass,(1) we fail to be governed

(1) Douglass, A.A: Secondary Education; Houghton Mifflin Co. 1927:-p. 510

by the ends set up for the purpose of literature teaching, and because we have been unwilling to accept enjoyment as an end. Yet this isn't the complete answer. Granted that the ends set up by the Committee are eminently desirable, when we examine their principles for choosing literature for courses of study, we begin to see light.

"Literature chosen," states the Committee,[1] "should make a natural appeal to the students concerned, for without interest, which depends upon this appeal, there will be no enjoyment; without enjoyment there will be no beneficial result...." This pertinent statement loses some of its strikingness when, a little further on, we read, "In general, the trend of choice should favor the classics." Here speaks tradition. "Classic literature still has appeal for healthy-minded young people, if it is sympathetically and wisely presented." But the fact remains that more often than not we do not present our material sympathetically and wisely.

Let us suppose that on a savage, cannibalistic island, there lived one who, because he had won his spurs on some battlefield, had become a distinguished and highly honored man in the life of the natives. A teacher of young savages desires his charges to become intimately acquainted with this respected and revered gentleman of parts. He decides, in his instinctive, unintelligent way, that there is but one method whereby he can

(1)Bulletin No. 2; p. 64

bring the two parties together and establish once and for all, the desired contact.

He plans accordingly, and one day he waylays and kills the great man. In triumph he drags home the carcass, proceeds to hack it to pieces, to parboil, and then to roast it, Then he forces his pupils to partake of the dish he has prepared. Some become nauseated. Whether they survive or not, this man and the wisdom that he might have imparted to them, are gone forever.

"How cruel!." you cry. And well you might. For daily, in this supposedly civilized part of the world, similar atrocities are committed in Literature's sweet name. Classroom teachers take some great author, mutilate him horribly, and then, willy nilly, try to cram down their pupils' throats the charred and crusty crumbs of some other age's idol. Small wonder that so many of our pupils become sickened of thing literary, and eagerly look forward to the day when, after four years of literary Sadism, they can turn on their tormentors and say, "Thank goodness, I'm through with you. No more literature for me. I loathe it."

Civilized procedure in the hypothetical case given above would merely demand that the teacher effect an introduction between the great man and the pupils. He might not be able to do so on the day planned, and the route to the great man, over which he led his charges would probably be a circuitous one.

It would be gratuitous of me to point out further this sin of omission and commission in methodology. "How an echo of the questions asked by a college professor about Shakespeare's use of words and Dickens' style..... can impress high school boys with a lasting interest in books is incomprehensible," says Douglass,(1) and his sentiments are indeed echoed, probably by hundreds of pupils.

But the fault surely cannot be entirely one of method. Method has been analysed and commented upon for years, and this writer is not going to attempt a treatise upon a question so vast and moot that its literature today might well be gauged in terms of tomes rather than volumes. We will concern ourselves from here on with the content matter of literature courses. Subject matter needs revision. All the puffings and blowings of the most inspired teacher cannot ignite a spark of fire in the cold, dead ashes of by-gone literary ages. It is high time that academic traditions and ideals gave way to twentieth century needs adn interest.

For the youth of today the problems, literature, and traditions of the eighteenth century simply do not exist. I have suggested that the route to literary appreciation must be a long and circuitous one. "Art is long and life is short," wrote Benjamin Franklin, when he planned the first academy in America. Nowhere can we apply this truism with more telling effect than in the field of literature. School time is indeed

(1) Secondary Education; p. 311

short. Cognizant of the enormity of the task confronting us, that of introducing young America to pleasures literary, we should not attempt to create literary taste by spoon-feeding over-analyzed masterpieces to adolescents. Rather we should nurse whatever present interest they have in reading matter, regardless of its literary merit, and guide, rather than direct, the first faltering steps of our charges along the highways and byways of literature. If we encourage pupils' interests, whatever they may be, time will do the rest towards "broadening, deepening, and enriching the emotional life," for the development of literary taste is an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary affair. The content of literature courses today forces the teacher to make a quick and determined assault upon the sensitive and unsupecting nature of the adolescent.

"Too often the study of literature is a purely academic and intellectual exercise entirely devoid of any worthwhile values to the average pupil in the high school...."(1)

Koos,(2) trying to be progressive, would like to see changes in subject matter, yet finds himself forced by tradition to say, "We should, of course, make sure of the merit of the content by letting the canons of literary taste be one of the criteria for deciding upon the particular selections to be

(1) Bolton, Fred E: Adolescent Education; Macmillan Co; 1931; p. 466

(2) The American Secondary School: p. 396

studied." But who is to say that the adults' criteria will provide subject-matter interesting to the adolescent?

James F. Hosic, who was chairman of the all-important joint committee felt that its aims weren't being realized when he wrote,[1] "What high school literature needs and must develop is a functional organization. Each step in the course must perform its distinctive service, a service apparent not only to the teacher, but to the students." The students, then, are entitled to courses other than those in which "one classic succeeds another in never-ending procession without evident rhyme or reason." Yet the only real constructive suggestion that Mr. Hosic had to offer was a new type of emphasis upon extensive reading, <u>including all types of literature</u>. The underscorings are mine, to indicate that Mr. Hosic felt a desire to break away form the purely classical.

We must consider how a course of study in literature comes to be. Choate[2] points out that the forces of elimination and preservation represented behind the content of courses include (1)the opinion of authorities; (2)the experts convinced of the importance of their subject; (3)the residue of former courses, i.e., the effects of common practice, and (4)the historical importance of the subject. English literature, from the standpoint of ~~moreover~~ educational history, is certainly

(1)Teachers College Record, 24: 338-343: September 1923
(2)Dissertation; p. 1

important; there are, moreover, experts and authorities enough in the field; the residue from previous courses is tremendous; and so the content of English literature courses changes little from year to year. Notice that no mention is made of pupils' interests as a criteria for including material in any given course. Yet says Bolton,[1] "literature studied by pupils must be interesting to them. They should read it because they like it. The fundamental question raised by the teacher in selecting literature for the high school should be,"Will the pupils enjoy it?" Again,[2] "Afinal criterion (of value of subject-matter) is interst." "Burke's Speech on Conciliation is a fine example of political philosophy but no freshman in high school will become enthusiastic over it. Pope's 'Essay on Man,' and Milton's 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Pensoroso' are masterpieces of literary workmanship and are enjoyed by college professors of English but not by high school boys and girls. Very few of the classics selected for high school pupils make much of an appeal to pupils of that age. ..Materials chosen should be full of adventure, abound with heroes, and shot through with romance."[4]

Young people, the psychologists[5] tell us are hero-worshippers and idealists. They enjoy books with emotional appeals. They

(1)Adolescent Education: p. 468
(2)Thorndike and Gates, Elem. Prin. of Education p. 180
(4)Adolescent Education: p. 469
(5)Tracy, Frederick: Psychology of Adolescence: Macmillan, 1920; pp. 76, 77

enjoy action, adventure, the triumph of good over evil, and they enjoy books written in their own times about their own people. In giving the principles of choosing literature designed to attain its end, the Committee on English literature[1] says, "The literature chosen for study, as distinguished from that used as supplementary reading, should be above the level of the pupil's unguided enjoyment, otherwise there is no raising of the standard of taste." Is it not conceivable that Arnold Bennett, Willa Cather, John Galsworthy, to mention but three, are as worthy of study as Scott, Dickens, and Thacheray? There is certainly literary merit in some of their works, and where the social conditions of Dickens' nineteenth century may be dead issues to pupils, the twentieth century authors, by the mere fact that they live and deal with problems of this generation, and write in the style of this century, give them a meaning, a lustre, lacking in the works of our dead master-writer. The best of what is being written and has been written in the immediate past, should be the goal towards which we guide our pupils. If we are going to train our pupils worthily to use leisure after school years, we should begin in school. High school pupils do not read the classics when they leave us. They read what is being written.

Choate,[2] in his disseration on the relation between literary

(1) Bulletin No. 2: p. 64
(2) Dissertation: p. 67

backgrounds taught in school, and the current literature read by the average American citizen, shwos that the backgrounds found in popular literature "represent a much broader international and world-wide type of literary culture than the one recommended by the courses of study of the public schools of this country. This study gives rise to the question as to whether or not the courses of the United States foster a narrow nationalizing of literary culture. It gives rise to the question as to whether the type of literary background recommended for intensive study by courses in the public schools throughout the country best develops the capacity of reading as a leisure activity."

Jordan,[1] who has made the most comprehensive analysis of, and valuable contribution to, the subject of children's reading interest quotes a study by J. C. Shaw in the West Virginia Journal of October, 1897, when he shows that the senior high pupils of that faded age were reading, during the summer, for pleasure, the following books: Scottish Chiefs, Middlemardh, Silas Marner.

F. W. Atkinson,[2] found that his senior class had read these books in 1897: Soldiers of Fortune, Thelma, Romance of Two Worlds, Quo Vadis, Les Miserables, Knight Errant, Prisoner of Zenda. These were the popular books of that day.

(1)Jordan, A.M. "Children's Interests in Reading", Teachers College Contributors to Education, #107, Columbia University, 1921 p. 8
(2)Library Journal; XXXIII, 1908: quoted in Jordan; p. 8

In 1929, the New York Public Library[1] found books by the following authors being widely read by high school pupils: Biggers, Sabatini, Fletcher, Doyle, Milne, Halliburton, Cather. These are the popular writers of our yesterday.

That pupils like the type of reading matter suggested by the psychologists is borne out by this quotation:

"Pupils from thriteen to fifteen enjoy stirring narratives full of movement and manly virtues...stories of action and adventure.

"Literature of action and adventure may be continued in the second year, but usually by this time students are less easy to interest and arouse. Interest in life is no longer mainly objective and students are interested in developing their own nature. The literature with a prominent love element is not best here. Literature presenting large and serious questions of right and wrong is of great value. Students of this age are eager for a taste of life and its problems. Their minds are open to vital questions of human responsibility. Virtue in characters is recognized, and a moral stimulus from imaginary association with them results.

"If students are guided safely past the second year, the rest of the way is easy. In the third year the love of man and woman in their relations with each other may be discussed frankly. Students of this year are interested in human conflicts

(1)Bulletin, Vol. 6; No. 8, October 1929

and great moral laws. Literature must be wholesome, for it is still youth and not maturity that is being guided."

This quotation[1] continues further and concludes, "This is not a course of study." Unfortunatley, we might add, parenthetically.

Again, Allan Abbot,[2] says: "High School boys and girls are frankly young: they lack sublety, complexity of interest, minute insight, and the sense of form, and consequently they do not relish these qualities in books. Their interest is always in the content rather than in style; in the direct story rather than in one to any degree satiric or symbolic....Boys and girls like novels of the day, whatever the subject; they enjoy the study of their own daily life."

Classics chosen for courses of study, in addition to being uninteresting from the adolescent angle, are also too didactic. This is especially true of poetry, although it holds for other types of literature also.

Speaking of poetry, Poe says,[3] "Aristotle, with singular assurance, has declared poetry the most philosophical of all writing, but it required a Wordsworth to pronounce it metaphysical. He seems to think that the end of poetry is, or should be, instruction: yet it is a truism that separates part

(1) Supplementary Reading List for High School English: Ida Morgan and Lester W. Boardman: Colorado State Teacher's Bulletin No. 5, Series XXII, 1922.
(2) School Review: X: 585-600 (1912)
(3) Poe, E.A: The Purpose of Poetry. Collected Works: VOL. I. P. 156 G.P. Putnam 1902.

of the end of our existence is happiness: if so, the end of every separate part of our existence, everything connected with our existence, should be still, happiness. Therefore the end of instruction should be happiness; and happiness is another name for pleasure.....To proceed....he who pleases is of more importance to his fellow-men than he who instructs...."

Of course, Poe was merely a genius, and despite the fact that many of the most brilliant contributions to educational theory and practice have been made by men who were not themselves educators, courses of study are still made up by teachers who feel that literature should be didactic, so Poe's theory of enjoyment, happiness, and interest in books has not yet found expression in stimulating and rejuvenated literature courses for adolescents.

It becomes evident, then, that in spite of the Committee statement that "literature cosen (for the course of study) should make a natural appeal.... for without interest....there will be no enjoyment...without enjoyment...no beneficial result," we are not incorporating such literature into our courses.

The next question that presents itself is this: if such literature is not found is the course proper, do we entice the student to read on his own by placing such reading matter on the so-called "supplementary reading lists?"

Before the writer began an examination of these lists, he was forced to determine specific examples of the type of literature sought: literature, or, perhaps we should merely say, reading matter, that would please and interest the pupil: the type of thing he would read of his own volition, without direction or guidance. For it is apparent that before we begin to direct wisely we must first know what interests the pupils when they choose their own reading without guidance. As this paper was outlined before he knew where the study would take him, he had hoped to prove that the best of the moderns, writers like Galsworthy, Conrad, Cather, would prove interesting to youth just because they are modern. He discovered early that none of these writers have a natural appeal. But novelists like Henry Syder, Harrison, Robert W. Chambers, Booth Tarkington, Jeffery Farnol, and George Barr McCutcheon had appeal.(1)

A check-up on as many reading lists as the writer could lay hands on, including those of individual schools as well as studies such as Colorado State Teachers' Bulletin and Jordan's masterly thesis, on "Children's Interests in Reading," that include statistical material culled from many more individual sources, than he had access to, disclosed the fact that out of a total of over sixty novels written by these fine men, only twenty-four have ever been recommended to pupils by

(1) Based on circulation figures of Boston Public Library, and three surburban branches: Upham's Corner, Fields Corner, West Roxbury.

reading lists. Of these twenty-four, six were recommended but once. Tarkington, with eleven novels suggested, of which "Monsieur Beaucaire" and "The Gentleman from Indiana" received the highest number of approvals, was the most popular individual author. Farnol, whose "Broad Highway" and "Amateur Gentleman" were heavily endorsed, came next on the list with six books. Chambers had four, Harrison three, and McCutcheon, the author of the widely read "Graustark," "Beverley of Graustark", and "Blades" was not represented on a single reading list that I could locate!

These authors are popular, and the question arose as to just why any of them should be put on reading lists. Did they in any way help to achieve the high aims of literature teaching? We are forced to the conclusion that they are merely offered to the pupils as an antidote for the plethora of boring, uninteresting "classical" literature of the usual course of study. There seems to be little close connection between books studied in classes and books offered in supplementary lists. The supplementary lists are but one feeble attempt we make to provide <u>interesting</u> reading for pupils. It is strange that the objective these lists help to attain, namely, "interest in reading", often seems diametrically opposed to the objective of courses of study, "knowledge of great literature."

The Bulletin of the New York Public Library[1] is prefaced

(1) Volume 6, October, 1929. Every issue of the bulletin carries the same statement.

with this statemetn: "This list is primarily for use in adult sections of the Library, to suggest books to boys and girls when they are first transferred from the Children's Rooms. It is not expected to replace any of the lists now used by the schools. High school lists are naturally affected by the curriculum and the desire to give pupils and opportunity of knowing all forms of literature before leaving school. Furthermore, their use is dependent not only upon inclination but also on compulsion, because of the vaious checking-up methods used in the schools. This list, on the other hand, includes only those books which boys and girls are known to have enjoyed either through their own discovery or the suggestion of a friend, a teacher, a librarian, or through the impetus received from bookd talks or reading clubs." The underscorings are this writer's. We might add, in passing, that although he noticed many novels of distinct literary merit on this list chosen by the pupils themselves, he did not find a single book by either Zane Grey or Harold Bell Wright.

Back in 1913, the report of the Committe on Home Reading of the National Council of Teachers of English, offered a lengthy list of recommended books, mostly fiction "since it is through good fiction that most perople are led to appreciate other forms." The list has a timely warning appended to it. "The list should not be put without comment into the hands of the pupils. The books are suited to many needs and it is essential that each pupil shall get the books that fit his case. From this list,

as from a pharmocoepia where the cure for one would be poison to another, the teacher must prescribe the right medicine...." This, to the writer, is about as pat an illustration of how recommended readings have been prostituted to tradition as any I have found. Literature is not medicine, although it has remedial, preventative, and therapeutic properties. It should not be advertised as a nostrum, and dosages prescribed. And what, we might well ask, are the "many needs" that the list suits, and why should we even intimate that each pupils has a "case" that needs to be "cured"? It is refreshing to note that the reading lists of the present day, although professedly more dissociated from the courses of study than in the past, do concern themselves with the only problem that justifies any meddling with pupils reading--the problem of interest. Thus we find today Phillips Exeter Academy offering summer reading with this note:(1) "All the books proposed have been chosen, first of all, because they are known to be interesting. Wide reading is the foundation of good work in English." Again the underscorings are the writer's.

If the studies, circulation figures, and reading lists show where our pupils reading interests lie, it seems as if, before attempting to utilize these interest to better attain the less immediate and more lofty aims of literature teaching, as set

(1) Summer Reading list, 1930

forth earlier in this paper, we ought to find out just why the books pupils read with interest do interest them. In such an attempt, the writer read all the novels of Tarkington, Chambers, Farnol, McCutcheon, and Harrison. These five men are popular with adolescents, their books are found on reading lists if not in courses of study, and the "why" of their appeal will now be discussed.

The writer confesses that before he finished wading through the literary swash-buckling of Chambers, the mock historics, or should we say histrionics, of McCutcheon, the bald plot expositions of Farnol, the artificially sincere characterizations of Harrison, and the definitely worthwhile artisty of Tarkington, he had quite enough of reading matter, near literature, and light literature, but he did find out to his own satisfaction why these books appealed to youngsters.

A detailed analysis of any one book or any one author would be as uninteresting as it is unnecessary. The general conclusions to which he arrived only bear out psychological theories of adolescence that have long been known to educatiors, but which English teachers have apparently held lightly.

First, then, adolescents like action. Compare the opening of Scott's "Ivanhoe". "In that pleasant district of merry England which is watered by the river Don, there extended an ancient times a large forest...." with the opening paragraph of Farnol's "Guyfford of Weare":(1)

(1)Little, Brown, Co: 1928 p.1

"The flash of a face glimpsed beyond opening door, a puff of breath, and candle, suddenly extinguished, choked him with its reek. Rigid he stood, peering into the engulfing darkness, every faculty keenly alert, every nerve and musle strung for swift action: thus for a long moment he waited grimly patient, until there stole to him a vague rustle of stealthy movement, then, dropping the canlestick, he leapt--to grasp drpaeries that tore in his fierce clutch--to hear a faint cry, a stumbling fall.

"Uttering a smothered exclamation, he started backward to the door, locked it, groped feverishly for another candlestick, took out a tinder box, and struck a light, all in as many moments.

"She crouched with in a yard of him, her face and form hidden in the fold of a long cloak."

Action? Yes, twentieth century action, although the setting is in the eighteenth. Twentieth century action and twentieth century writing. No waste motion--plenty of dashes--action, if not art.

It is openings of this sort, and atrocious puns and English that make Chambers' so-called historical novels appeal where his nineteenth century masters fail to click with today's youth. One critic says of Chambers[2] "He has facility and

(2) Quoted in Dickinson, ASA DON: The Best Books of Our Times, Frederick A. Stokes Co. 1927

grace and wit.." Says the Nation,[1] "He was framed for popularity. Emphatically not the literary epicure." Most of us would hold with Mencken[2] that Chambers is a "Boudoir Balzac;" that "woodn't that bark you," "you gink," "she gave you the eye?" and similar inane expressions are neither graceful nor witty; that "Chambers grows sillier and sillier, emptier and emptier, worse and worse"; yet, withal, when we take him apart, find no characterization but much action, we at least know why he appeals to youth. And that is, after all, what we wish to know.

Next, we find that, by and large, books by these authors are wholesome in tone, romantic in the extreme, with Virtue always Truimphant. Well, Youth today, as well as yesterday, is essentially idealistic and sentimental. With this in mind we can understand why Youth enjoys a closing like this:[3]

"But tonight--nay, prithee, kiss me not yet--'tis joy far beyond my poor telling to know myself so truly loved by one so brave, so honorable, so proud a gentleman as my...Guyfford of Weare."

Interest in reading makes for worthy use of leisure time, but even if we disregarded this ultimate aim entirely could we teach any better say, eithical character, than is done informally by Farnol when, without conscious didacticism he writes and adolescents read:

(1) Ibid
(2) Mencken, H.L.:Prejudices, First Series; Knopfance Co., 1926 p. 132
(3) Guyfford of Weare: p. 472

"And now come Hope, that most blessed and beneficent spitit that lifte'th the fallenfrom the slough, that bindeth up the broken heart, that cheereth the sad and downcast and maketh the oft--defeated bold and courageous to attempt Fortune yet again"?

Perhaps we owe a debt of gratitude to this man who, in the "Broad Highway" gave us "an unpretentious thing supremely well-done."(1) There is much to be said in favor of a writer who tells "a tale full-blooded and wholesome, unflagging in its interest," and interest does count heavily for of "The Amateur Gentleman" it is said, "Judged by the number of pages, the book is long, but it seems short to the reader."(2) Apparently, volume alone does not separate the nineteenth century authors enthroned in our courses of study from the writers of the present day. But interest does.

Wholesome characters, like wholesome ideals, interest adolescents. The hero of Henry Sydor Harrison's "Queed" appeals, not because he is a sort of living advertisement for phsyical education, but because, being physically insignificant, he has the mental strength (will) and the motive (love) to spur him onward, and upward, and make him triumph over circumstances. Mencken may call Harrison a "merchant of mush"(3)

(1)Dickinson
(2)Ibid
(3)Prejudices: First Series; page 138

and write "He is touched, I should say, by the delusion that he has to make life sweeter, to preach the Finer Things, to radiate Gladness. What! "More gladness?" "Queed" may be "simply Locke diluted with vast drafts from "Laddie" and 'Pollyanna',[1] but juvenile readers are more likely "bound to find pleasure in every one of its five hundred pages."[2]

One might almost formulate a rule for picking blindly novels interesting to adolescents: if they overflow with action, depict wholesome, if idealistic and sentimental characters, lack ultra-sophistication, and are duly relegated to the ash heap by the keen if caustic Mencken, they will probably prove ideal for adolescents, from the interest angle. Another instance of an outsider rendering a unique service to the cause of education?

I confess that I had expected to find George Barr McCutcheon, whose books circulation records show, are widely read by adolescents, represented on some reading lists. He wasn't. The moving picture dramatization of "Beverley of Graustark" ought in itself to have stimulated the reading of his books, I felt. He may be a "prince of story tellers.....master of the light romance".....and Graustark surely is "as full of impossibilities as a fairy tale and as full of good reading,"

(1) Mencken: quoted in Dickinson
(2) Dickinson

yet he fails to register as high in the regard of youth as Farnol and Chambers. This again can be understood when we apply our knowledge of adolexcents. They like action, yes, and romance. But imaginative flights that are intended to convey them into lands so ethereal and fairy-like that they seem a return to kindergarten stories in plot if not in treatment are apt to receive slight consideration. "Blades," that delightful young New Yorker in the novel that bears his name, found himself isolated in a lost colony where Puritans dress as well as Puritan ideals and speech still held sway. This smacks a little too much of a new version of "Alicein Wonderland". "Alice" has long since been outgrown, so Youth scornfully rejects the more recent attempt to bring him once more to that type of yarn, and turns to Chambers, Farnol, and their ilk.

A consideration of Tarkington's appeal to adolescence presents several difficulties. Tarkington is an anomaly in more ways than one. He gives us, of course, stories that interest because of their action and historical significance. "Monsieur Beaucaire" is one of that type. In its own way the "Gentleman from Indiana" is a historical novel. Certainly it established his reputation as a "historian of Hoosier manners." These books are widely read by high school pupils. So, too, are his "Penrod" stories, and "Seventeen" which are inimitable satires on 'teens. The psychologists and child reading

experts tell us that youth does not enjoy satire. But youth enjoys Tarkington's books.

The answer is that, although youth is sensitive, almost supersensitive at times, to criticism of its quirks and peculiarities that mark the onslaught of adolescence, it can be said, and is, brutally frank in itself-criticism. Johnny and Bill see clearly their own faults and foibles. Their own social group can discuss them. But not Father, Mother, or Uncle Jim. Criticism, satire, suggestion from them would be intolerable. Adolescent sensibilities would be hurt. It is Tarkington's art that he can portray the adolescent as the adolescent sees himself. He is indeed, a "perennial sophomore," as Carl Van Doren says. That is why high school sophomores and seniors take Penrod to heart. They know him. He is one of them. They suffer with him and laugh with him, just as they understand, laugh, and blush at Willie Baxter in "Seventeen." "Seventeen" is a definitive work. What Tarkington has done so well there need never be done again for American youth. "Seventeen" is seventeen, and always will be.

But Tarkington offers even more interesting material to his youthful readers. "The Magnificent Ambersons," "Turmoil," and"National Avenue" are not mere yarns. They are cross sections of social history, meaty, timely, and interesting.

Why this should be so can only be explained on the grounds that present day problems do interest pupils when they are fictionally well presented, and intermixed with what the movies

would probably call action sequences and heart throbs. Tarkington can satisfy on all counts.. What democratic boy or girl wouldn't secretly admire Georgie Amberson, secretly pity him, yet be glad when he met his "come uppance," and secretly thrill at the eminently satisfactory close of an eminently satisfactory love story?

The critic spoke wisely who said of Tarkington, "The many dote on him....some of the wise approve him." His literary skill matches his sincerity. Miss Beecher in her "Adventures in Reading"[1] listed Alice Adams as a "sincere" book, and was asked "How could you put" Alice Adams "on a list of sincere books when she was such an awful bore"? This is just the point; the important feature of this fine novel is not that Alice is a liar, but that Tarkington tells the truth."

Adequate studies have been made to show where pupils' reading interests lie. Others will be made from time to time, because children's interests, unlike courses of study, are dynamic rather than static. The writer has endeavored by going directly to the same books and authors that do interest children, to show, from content, just what it is in these books that commands interest. Action stories, adventure stories, wholesome love stories, with characters that embody the ideals of sensitive youth seem to fill the bill. But this

(1)Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1927: p. 24

is not the complete story. If present day problems can be injected into a book without sacrificing other qualities, so much the better. Then, this is the twentieth century, an age of speed, and the stories that youth reads regardless of their literary merit, are going to be stories written in twentieth century English; the English understood without too much effort by the untrained, English written as is spoken, tersley, even slangily.

Douglass says:(1) "Boys care little for books recommended to them by their teachers, but when left to their own volition choose tales of adventure and exciting out-door life. They like physical action and swift movement. Popular themes are making the football team in the face of odds or at the expense of an unjust rival, saving someone's life, and gaining the the upper hand of an unworthy opponent in physical combat. Frontier tales make a strong appeal. Boys prefer that the hero show self-control, loyalty, honesty, and trustworthiness. They are in short, appealed to by stories based upon the instinctive appeal and impulses of mastery and rivalry, social approval, square dealing and kindness. Boys choose only members of their own sex as heroes, and manifest a strong favor for historical and public characters. Girls prefer books of greater sentimental and emotional appeal. They do not care for Scott,

(1) Secondary Education: p. 512 ff

Dickens, or Thackeray, but like novels of the day which concern daily life and manners.....Both boys and girls like novels of the day which contain feeling and incident.....A book is read for the story it contains, not for style of writing.....The current newspaper, magazine, and novel will continue to supply material for a great part of leisure reading. People will read current fiction because it can be understood and enjoyed without much mental strain and exertion, for it is written primarily for entertainment, relaxation, or amusement. It will be read because it reflects life as it is being lived in the present. Its problems are easily understood, emotions portrayed are similar to those of the reader, and descriptive phrases and sentences require no elaborate explanation....."

These statments are confirmed by the writer's investigation of five authors. The books offer, for the most part, the stories and treatment demanded by adolescence. If this be the type of story and the literary style interesting to pupils, may we not utilize these interests to further the attainment of the ends of literature teaching?

Says Jordan,(1) "The abiding interest of school children in their subjects of study as for many years in one of the criteria of good instruction. In classes of literature this becomes a problem of peculiar interest. Unless the student turns to his

(1) Childrens Interests in Reading: p. 1

literature with satisfaction there may be developed in him a distaste for that type of thing considered desirable; and if a distaste for, then a turning away from, and finally an almost complete forgetting of, all he has learned about the subject. If we could determine what the child's major interests are, be those interests good or bad, it would be possible to direct these forces along lines that would be desirable.....If not directly, at least indirectly, we could connect the subject with his interests and show how this subject is related to these interests. Psychologically, this interest would strengthen the connections between the bonds formed in the reading of some or many good books."

Summary

In recapitulation:

1. A brief résumé of aims and objectives of English teaching show that the setting up of specific objectives for teaching English literature was a evolutionary process, culminating in the ideal statement of aims set forth by the Committee on Reorganization of English in the Secondary Schools.

2. We are failing to attain these objectives, and are, consequently, failing to attain the major objectives of secondary education.

3. Douglass says we are not governed by the ends set up for literature teaching. He criticizes method.

the objectives of secondary education, curriculum makers must use pupils' reading interests as bases for courses of study. Apparently they are loathe to put into practice psychological principles which educators have long since adopted in theory. This hesitancy has resulted in failing to attain in practice objectives so ideal in theory.

To utilize the knowledge we have of pupils' reading interests will mean bringing into closer juxtaposition materials in courses of study and materials on reading lists, with the hope that some literature, interesting to adolescents, will seep from the supplementary list into the course of study. Courses of study will have to be made extensive rather than intensive.

With youth reading of its own volition stories as wholesome and ideal as they do, it is futile to worry because they enjoy content rather than form. Content suits their adolescent needs. It is not too much to hope that they will, if one interests them in reading, outgrow, in their maturity, their present interests, and reach out for the best of what is written at that future date. Literary taste is also an evolutionary development. An interesting book, regardless of stylistic merit, is a tonic to whet the adolescent: appetite for literature. The more he reads, the more he will want.

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Robert W. Chambers

1.	The Man They Haged	1926	
2.	The Painted Minx	1930	
3.	The Rake And The Hussy	1930	
4.	The Rogue's Morn	1928	D. Appleton and Co.
5.	Special Messenger	1909	
6.	The Happy Parrot	1929	
7.	The Dark Star	1917	
8.	The Girl Phillipa	1916	
9.	The Flaming Jewel	1922	George H. Doran and Co.
10.	Cardigan	1901	Harper and Co.
11.	Ashes of Emipere	1898	Stokes and Co.

Jeffery Farnol

12.	Amateur Gentleman	1913	
13.	Another Day	1929	
14.	Black Bartlemy's Treasure	1920	
15.	The Broad Highway	1911	Little Brown and Co.
16.	Guyfford of Weare	1928	
17.	The High Adventure	1926	
18.	A Jade of Destiny	1931	
19.	The Money Moon	1911	Dodd, Mead, and Co.

Henry Sydor Harrison

20.	Queed	1911	Houghton Mifflin Co.
21.	V V's Eyes	1913	Houghton Mifflin Co.
22.	Angela's Business	1915	Small Maynard and Co.
23.	Andrew Bride of Paris	1925	Houghton Mifflin Co.
24.	The Good Hope	1931	Houghtom Mifflin Co.

Goerge Barr Mc Cutcheon

25.	Graustark	1907	
26.	Beverly of Graustark	1906	
27.	The Prince of Graustark	1914	Dodd, Mead and Co.
28.	The Inn ofthe Hawk and Raven	1927	
29.	Blades	1928	
30.	And Hern At Land	1923	Bobbs, Merril and Co.
31.	The Merivales	1930	
32.	Kindling and Ashes	1926	

Booth Tarkington

33.	Alice Adams	1921	Doubleday, Page and Co.
34.	Claire Ambler	1928	Doubleday, Doran and Co.
35.	Conquest of Canaan	1905	Harper
36.	Gentle Juba	1922	Doubleday Page and Co.
37.	Gentleman from Indiana	1899	Doubleday and McLure Co.
38.	Mary's Neck	1932	Garden City
39.	Magnificent Ambersons	1918	Doubleday, Page and Co.
40.	Mirthful Haven	1930	Doubleday, Doran and Co.
41.	Monsieur Beaucaire	1900	McLure, Phipps and Co.
42.	Penrod	1914	Doubleday, Page and Co.
43.	Penrod and Sam	1924	Doubleday, Page and Co.
44.	Seventeen	1916	Harper
45.	Turmoil	1915	Harper
46.	Young Mrs. Greeley	1929	Doubleday, Doran and Co.