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May 24, 1973

TEACHING POETRY IN HIGH SCHOOL

by

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A professional paper submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

with concentration in

Secondary Education

Approved:

Head, Major Department

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

June, 1973

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ABSTRACT

This professional paper first takes a brief look at the status of poetry in the United States. It then comments on the importance of poetry to our culture and to the individual. Some authorities believe that in our society precise and effective use of language is beginning to deteriorate and that the reading and appreciation of poetry is an important means of checking this breakdown.

Poetry will be widely appreciated in the United States if high school teachers give their students a true appreciation of its magic and its power.

Therefore, as a guide to means of teaching poetry, this paper surveys some methods of experienced English teachers in teaching poetry to high school students. This is the main purpose of this paper, and herein lies its bulk. Methods surveyed are grouped according to philosophies or points of view. These methods are explained in some detail and generally, suggestions are given as to how the methods may be applied in classrooms.

The nature of this survey does not permit conclusions to be made concerning the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of the methods surveyed. However, the survey does offer many helpful suggestions to present and prospective teachers of English.

In the final section of this paper, the author offers his opinion and commentary on the teaching methods presented in the survey.

Chapter I

THE IMPORTANCE OF POETRY

INTRODUCTION

In the United States today poetry does not appear to hold a high place in the affections either of students or of adults. In our high schools, for example, a few students respond favorably to poetry, but many have a decidedly negative attitude toward it. Some consider it to be irrelevant to them and to their life situations. Male students sometimes consider poetry effeminate and rather weak in comparison to other school subjects. Other students find poetry needlessly obscure, and view the struggle to comprehend it as repugnant. Too often, prose is the form of communication that is considered important and direct, and poetry is viewed as an unwelcome intruder in the orderly science of writing.

Students are not alone in this attitude toward poetry. Adults, too, are sometimes less than enthusiastic about this fine art. English professor Stephen Dunning (1966:1) speaking of poetry says,

> Not many Americans even read it; and enjoyment is not an inevitable consequence of reading poetry. Enjoyment requires skill in approaching poetry, a sense of what the poet is doing with language, an awareness of how form, image, and sound combine to make meaning. It is here that teachers fail; they teach poetry badly or indifferently or not at all. If they were successful in teaching poetry, the result would be enjoyment. TV would be featuring poetry, students would be buying it, booksellers would be selling it, libraries would be shelving it, and parents would be subscribing to the little magazines.

Dunning goes on to make a few other points about the state of poetry in the United States. He says, for example, that poetry is not in such disfavor in other countries. In Denmark a book of poetry will sell thousands of copies, but this is not the case in the United States. Poetry magazines in this country have a very small circulation and many meet with financial disaster. Those that do survive are usually kept alive through a sense of obligation or commitment on the part of the publisher.

An aspiring young writer in this country should think long and hard before turning to poetry as a profession. Unless he is an exceptional poet, a potential Robert Frost or E. E. Cummings, he will find it quite risky to seek a livelihood writing poetry. In our country with its millions of readers, a reputable poet does well to sell 500 copies of a book, and most of these are sold to libraries. Books of poems rarely find their way onto bestseller lists.

Check-out records of libraries indicate that books of poetry are seldom checked out and the ones that are checked out are usually not the "best" poetry by critical standards.

These are some of the points that Dunning makes about the state of poetry in the United States. He strongly emphasizes them with a personal anecdote. For years he has made visits to the homes and classrooms of former students of his who are now English teachers in high school and junior high school. Sadly, or maybe significantly,

few, if any, of them have bought books of poetry since their college days, when they were required to do so for certain courses.

Thus, poetry should hold a higher place in the preferences of the reading public. And the main burden in achieving this objective rests squarely on the shoulders of our country's English teachers. It is likely that there is no great audience for poetry in America mainly because the teaching of this subject has been so uninspired and inept. If tomorrow's citizens are to take delight in poetry, teachers must greatly improve their methods of handling this vital subject.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Accordingly, the purpose of this study will be to survey some methods of experienced teachers in teaching poetry to high school students.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

This study or survey will present classroom-tested methods of presenting poetry to high school students so that present or prospective teachers may examine these methods with a view to effectively implement some of them in their own classrooms.

The introduction to this chapter emphasized the present status of poetry in the United States. The tragedy of this situation is

further emphasized by a recognition of the need for poetry in human life. Poetry is not only a vital part of the humanities, but it is also vital to the general human scene in many ways, some obvious and some subtle.

Cleanth Brooks (1971), in commenting on the importance of teaching poetry, emphasizes that language is beginning to break down because people can't use it exactly and precisely. Advertising, propaganda, and irresponsible rhetoric have subtly damaged our language by suggesting inaccurate usage patterns to our young people.

However, poetry can be a prime instrument in reestablishing order in language and in restoring the health of our culture. Poetry uses concrete images and transcends the realm of purely literal and logical language. It helps offset some of the unimaginative passivity that television builds into young children. Being able to handle imaginative literature is important. As Brooks (1971:17-18) says,

> If we do not know how language works in imaginative literature, we shall probably not be able to articulate our concerns, desires, anxieties, and beliefs. We shall not be able to share our values and convictions with our fellow human beings. We shall not be able even to understand ourselves. Worse still, if we do not know how language works, we are likely to become the victims of those who do--those who use language shamelessly to exploit the public in their own interests.

Brooks further emphasizes that the study of poetry can teach a student to read in depth. Often, poetry is viewed mainly from a subjective standpoint, but Brooks feels that this is a very shallow viewpoint. Certainly poetry is not as objective as physics and chemistry,

for example, but it is based on criteria and students should be aware of this. They should have some training in standards so that they can distinguish true poets from pseudo-poets and good poems from bad poems and good art from bad art. They should have a careful understanding of metaphor and tone so that they won't be pushovers for shallow writers. They should learn to become emotionally and sentimentally involved in issues that warrant their involvement and reject those that don't. In short, they should have such a depth and command of language that they will not be pawns in the hands of the rhetorician or the sentimentalist. A careful and guided study of poetry will help them acquire this skill. Brooks (1971:29-30) summarizes,

> To give the young student--at the very beginning of his education, and in so far as he is able to absorb it--a sense of language and its possibilities, and to train him in some kind of discipline in the responsible use of it, are perhaps the most important things that the schools can do. If they can't do this, then many of their students are going to be left truly tongue-tied, frustrated, and all but mute.

Stephen Dunning (1966) offers some cogent reasons for the teaching of poetry. First, poems, especially short poems, offer the unique opportunity of bringing complete works of art into focus. They perplex and persuade students into consideration of every word. Second, poetry tends to be richer linguistically than any other genre. It helps students see the possibilities of language. It broadens their vocabularies and enriches their powers of sentence structure better than word lists and dictionary exercises. Third, poetry is an exotic

form. Stories and plays might draw the reader into an emotional identification with character or situation while poems keep a prism of linguistic uniqueness between reader and experience. Prose gives students reality while poetry gives them the perspective to deal with reality objectively. Poets sometimes speak differently from the way young people speak and thus they encourage a more objective consideration of life's realities on the part of their young readers.

Thus, Cleanth Brooks and Stephen Dunning offer some very convincing reasons for the necessity of effective teaching of poetry. In addition to these, the writer of this paper now also offers some reasons.

A positive attitude toward poetry and a willingness to make it part of one's life is a valuable asset to any individual. Poetry is a concise art, and the person who has had familiar contact with it might thus be able to express himself in a concise and ordered manner. In fact, certain individuals of a sensitive and contemplative nature might find emotional release and a deep inner satisfaction in the writing of poetry.

The study of poetry can refine a person's aesthetic sense. He can make fairly reliable judgements concerning the value and quality of literary works. He should be able to contrast the vague and cheap and ugly with the precise and valuable and beautiful.

The study of poetry should make a person more sensitive to life and to its meaning and value. To the poet, the universe and the living things in it are extremely important, and he generally conveys this respect for life to his readers.

Finally, and probably most important of all, poetry can help a person to understand himself and his place in the universe. The scourge of loneliness and alienation seems all too prevalent in modern society. Man, in this age of revolutionary change and computer-oriented technology, often feels useless, insignificant, and forgotten. But man has always felt that way no matter in what century or era he has lived. Poetry helps modern man to see this truth. It acquaints him with the struggles of men past and present to understand their environment and their relationship to it. It poses many questions, but it also offers some solutions. It provides man a bulwark against confusion and helps him to remain human in the midst of a technological nightmare.

Therefore, it is justifiable to say that some authorities believe that poetry is important in a specific sense to the individual and in a larger sense to society. Consequently, effective teaching of poetry is of great importance, and this study will present some methods which have been successful in the past and, hopefully, will continue to be so in the future.

GENERAL PROCEDURE

A survey or review will be made of literature relating to the teaching of poetry. Professional journals offer many stimulating articles in their specialty areas, and the English Journal is no exception. Pertinent methods and approaches to poetry as presented in this source will be included in the survey. In addition, information from various other publications on the subject of teaching poetry will be included. Especially helpful and appropriate are publications from the National Council of Teachers of English.

In some cases the methods of teaching poetry that will be presented will appear to contrast each other. This will be so, because the researcher will try to present a balanced and inclusive survey of teaching methods. Such an approach is necessary because every classroom teacher is unique, and it is his personality which determines the method or methods best for him. A certain approach to poetry might work well for one teacher while the same approach will achieve little if used by a different teacher. Thus, no one method of teaching poetry can necessarily be said to be superior to another method.

At the conclusion of this paper, the researcher will offer some opinions and comments concerning the teaching of poetry.

SUMMARY

It has been pointed out in this chapter that some students in U.S. high schools have a negative attitude toward the study of poetry. Also, a large segment of the general population of this country does not make poetry a staple in its reading diet. Many of these attitudes might be traced to the quality of poetry instruction in our high schools.

Appreciation of poetry is important to an individual because it can help him to handle imaginative literature; to express convictions and beliefs accurately; to judge literature according to objective criteria; to see the possibilities of language; to refine his aesthetic sense; to be more sensitive to the value of life; and to understand himself and his place in the universe. Consequently, effective teaching of poetry is important to the individual and to society.

This study will survey methods of experienced teachers in presenting poetry to high school students. No one method will be considered superior because methods depend on and must be adapted to individual teachers.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

Classroom teachers have various time-tested and classroom-tested methods for handling the study of poetry with high school students. Articles dealing with poetry generally offer clear and concise explanations of these methods by teachers who have used them in actual classroom situations. These articles and (or) their authors tend to fall into certain categories depending on their approaches to or philosophies of teaching poetry. Accordingly, this review of literature on the teaching of poetry will point out some widely used types of approaches, detail the philosophy or attitude of teachers who advocate each type respectively, and point out the methods by which these teachers applied the various approaches in classrooms.

METHODS OF TEACHING POETRY

Contemporary Approach

One method of approaching poetry which is attractive to many teachers might be termed the contemporary approach. Fisher (1972) speaks of this approach at length. He points out that a slight problem arises in the study of contemporary poetry because many teachers don't feel very comfortable with it. It was not part of their literary education and they have not always kept abreast of new trends, themes,

techniques and forms. However, he feels that contemporary poetry is a definite means of attracting students to poetry so it should be a part of a school's curriculum. He suggests that each school should have teachers who can help students understand the poetry of the 60's and 70's. In some cases this might mean that faculty members might have to return to college or take extension courses which will update their knowledge of poetry.

This attractiveness of contemporary poetry to the contemporary generation is also emphasized by Helen English (1970). She feels that English classrooms have been emphasizing irrelevant and boring subject matter in an obsession with poetry of the past. Poetry study should be relevant and meaningful to students and this is best achieved by concentrating on contemporary poetry.

Somewhat the same point is made by De Lois Garrett (1970). She emphasizes the importance of contemporary poetry and further points out that contemporary Negro poetry is an invaluable tool in interesting students in poetry. She feels that students will respond enthusiastically to Negro poetry because they find contemporary themes in it. Much Negro poetry deals with ideas of conflict and alienation and these are themes interesting to today's students. Certain types of dream themes are presented in Negro poetry. Themes such as acquiring a decent home, the idea of brotherhood, the realization of racial equality, the dream of self-realization, the search for identity are all themes that

high school students can identify with. Most of them have had similar dreams and ambitions and they thus respond to those such as Blacks who have many unfulfilled dreams.

Thus, it may be stressed that some teachers feel that students are motivated to study poetry by being immersed in contemporary poetry. Especially important is the fact that teachers should have a commanding knowledge of contemporary forms and techniques.

Not all agree with this premise, however. Some teachers feel that the contemporary is overemphasized to the detriment of the student.

Adele Stern (1971) makes such a point at some length. She thinks that it is cheating the student to teach only contemporary works or what students think is relevant. She has little use for so called "swingers" who think their purpose in the classroom is to throw out everything before 1970, and who seek to establish sensitivity training, non-directive discussion, chaos, and something called relating to the student as the ultimate in atmosphere in an English classroom. She stresses that it is a teacher's function to bring students into contact with the ideas and hopes and thoughts of the men of letters of all the world. A student should be able to internalize the wisdom of ages, determine his place in time, and understand what it has meant to be human in all times and places. She points out that students respect good teachers who respect them and know how to interest them in good literature. Such teachers can bring students into contact with great

literature without capitulating entirely to them and their as yet undeveloped values. Themes such as alienation, struggle against the establishment, war, loyalty, moral values, and violence are not, as many young people mistakenly think, just contemporary issues. Adele Stern (1971:613) emphasizes this point:

> Man has been cruel to man through Homer and Plutarch and Chaucer and Boccaccio, and Cervantes and Rabelais, and Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy. But if we read only the daily newspapers and listen to the television news for our education, then we don't know how to make sound value judgments; we talk off the tops of our heads in brilliant-sounding ignorance.

Accordingly, the point that it is unfair to students to stress only the contemporary in poetry seems to have some merit.

Using Media

Another approach to the teaching of poetry is the practice of combining media and poetry. Cecilia Nagy (1972) stresses that poetry and art are closely related. Both are personal celebrations which the poet or artist wishes to share with all mankind. This sharing comes about when the reader (student) appreciates the four elements of poetry: rhythm, color, response, and creativity. Nagy describes an approach to the poem The Creation by James Weldon Johnson, using media. After students have read the poem a recording of Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" is played and on an overhead projector a pyrex pie plate containing water is placed. A hand is placed over this to illustrate the hand of God

and food coloring is added to the water and blown upon. These devices are intended to illustrate the processes taking place in the poem. After the projector is shut off students sing songs such as "Rock My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham" or "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," while the teacher plays the guitar or piano. Then students are led into a discussion of this poem and of the elements of poetry in general. The purpose, again, is to use media to involve students in poetry.

La Verne Coffin (1970) describes how songs and ballads can be used to involve students in poetry. The teacher can take some old and new ballads and sing them to the class with guitar accompaniment. Students can then take one of the ballads and write an additional stanza. The student must match the rhythm of the song and follow the original idea and add to it. Then, students can bring in lyrics from currently popular songs for the purpose of class discussion. Songs might deal, for example, with themes of protest, the search for identity, social criticism, love, etc. Then each student is to find a melody which he likes and to compose a new set of lyrics for it. In writing lyrics the student is actually writing poetry. The written songs would then be displayed on a bulletin board for all students to read and discuss. In the course of such a project students would learn about rhythm and rhyme, about different kinds of poetry such as the ballad and the lyric, about the punctuation and capitalization of poetry, and about the value of vivid words in creating a picture.

Helen English (1970) also emphasizes the use of contemporary music in the teaching of poetry. She points out that rock music cannot be rejected. It is an art form that speaks to students in direct, charged, and organic ways. They are children of the rock age so they should learn about themselves and their music. She used a text entitled The Poetry of Rock by Richard Goldstein (Bantam, 1969). Her lectures were taped and could thus be interrupted to play a record or for discussion. Subjects considered were (1) history of rock music, (2) influences on rock music (Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel, John Lennon, Paul McCartney), (3) protest themes--illustrated with songs and poems on tape and teacher's own taped readings. At times the classroom lights were turned off and poetry was listened to in darkness and then for the final fifteen minutes of the period students wrote their subjective reactions on paper. Students were graded on the following bases: (1) a short resource paper about a poet, rock artist, or rock group, (2) essay type tests in which most of the questions were of an affective nature, (3) a poetry notebook containing the student's favorite contemporary poetry centered around one theme. English points out that students were given the opportunity to feel relaxed and free from tension and to enjoy learning. Most of them contrasted the atmosphere of the poetry class with their other classes.

In the area of the media approach to poetry, Richard W. Lewis, Jr. (1972) suggests the use of photographs as an aid. Color

photographs can be presented to a class and the students can respond to a photograph in a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph. Then the class would read what poets have written about a similar situation. Comparisons would be made between their ideas and diction and those of the poet. In time, by means of this comparing, students might start reacting accurately and poetically to life situations.

Accordingly, the multi-media approach can be viewed as a popular means of involving students in the study of poetry. This implies that school districts should have adequate audio-visual equipment for use in English classrooms.

Library and Resource Material

However, the printed page should not be overlooked. Classrooms in which poetry is taught must have a wealth of resource material. Fisher (1972) points out, for example, that students should be allowed to pursue their own interests in individual reading of poetry. Thus, a well-equipped classroom should have a variety of reading material such as avant-garde poetry magazines, books on mythology, the Bible, books on Eastern religions, historical references to political and social protests of the 60's, books on drugs, etc. Maurice Gibbons (1972) emphasizes that in addition to audio-visual equipment, books of all kinds are vital to the poetry classroom. He feels that if students are to form their own value systems concerning the poems they read they must have wide contact with many kinds of poets.

Gibbons (1972:365) states, "show them found poems, concrete poems, minimal poems, form poems, tone poems, prose poems, chants, ballads, songs, couplets, quatrains, cinquains, haiku, kokku, tankas, sonnets, filmed poems, constructions, drawn poems, mobile poems, sculpted poems."

While Fisher and Gibbons emphasize the importance of classroom libraries or resource centers, Stephen Dunning (1966B) stresses that the school library is extremely important in the study of poetry. He points out that most textbooks or anthologies are quite burdensome (750 pages or more) and tend to be conservative rather than innovative. Since most adolescents respond to the innovative, the school library might be viewed as the richest source for the poetry curriculum. Students should be able to use the library effectively. They can use the card catalogue to find poems by various authors or to locate particular collections of poems. Most can become familiar with the American poetry section of the library, but they should learn to explore beyond this. Too many students rely on general encyclopedias which, of course, give some information about poets and poetry, but which are, nevertheless, somewhat superficial. Students should learn to use such works as Twentieth Century Authors and Speller's Literary History of the United States.

As a stimulus to using the library, students might be encouraged to keep personal poetry files. These might be on particular poets, on subjects, or on types of poetry. For example, a student might

collect poems by James Weldon Johnson, poems on baseball or poems of the love sonnet type. Excellent guides to finding this poetry would be Granger's Index to Poetry and the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. For literary, historical, and mythological allusions, students should be familiar with Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia. Stevenson's Home Book of Quotations is also a very helpful poetry reference source.

If a teacher stimulates his students' interest in poetry, he also must show them where to find poetry to match their interests. Thus, poetry teachers should help their students become ardent users of school libraries.

Item Listing

One group of students who are usually quite reluctant to study poetry are those who are inclined to be slower readers and less articulate writers and speakers. Irene Sherwood (1970) has some suggestions for dealing with such students. She feels that some experience in writing poetry can be extremely valuable to these reluctant learners for it can enhance their appreciation of poetry and also give them a sense of accomplishment. However, this type of student will not attempt to write unless he is really turned on to poetry. One way, perhaps, to turn him on is to use "laundry lists," as Irene Sherwood calls them. The general idea is to get students to list types of items that might be included in poems. Songs can be used for

this purpose. Songs such as "These Are a Few of My Favorite Things" and "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You" can be played and then the titles can be listed on the board. Similar types of headings that might be used are: "These are the things I love" or "My favorite things are simple." Under a title of his choosing, the student can then make a list of appropriate objects. A slightly different type of heading would be one such as "A misty day" after which students would list qualities of a misty day which appeal to the senses. The lists, of course, can be expanded into poems, but this approach can also be used as a springboard for extended class discussions of poetry. Students might discuss, for instance, how the five senses play a part in poetry and how capitalization, punctuation, and typography may be used to emphasize the pattern of poetry. Students tend to feel comfortable with this approach because with a little encouragement they generally can make extensive lists and they can see how relatively easy it is to convert the lists into poems. These suggestions by Irene Sherwood seem to have definite promise of involving slower readers in the study of poetry.

Figures of Speech

Teachers should be aware that students who appreciate how uniquely poetry handles language are likely to respond favorably to most types of poetry. Laurence Perrine (1970) offers some thoughts along these lines. He states that students must realize that poetry

deals in figurative language and they must have an understanding of the basic elements of figurative language if they are to handle poetry effectively. Many students criticize the use of figurative language because they think the poet is not being direct. In this case, the teacher should stress that they actually use figurative language everyday. Expressions such as, "I'll die if I don't pass this test," "I've got two strikes against me already," or "My idea went over like a lead ballon" are good examples of student use of figurative language. Students should be aware that poetry is not a language for stating facts, for presenting arguments, or for setting forth ideas. Since its purpose is to communicate experience, it can best do so through figurative language. Our language, for example, has only three words for snow (snow, sleet, slush), but through figurative language a poet can show snow's infinite variety. The same holds true for the word love. It can usually be expressed adequately only through metaphorical language.

In Chapter I of this paper, the statements from Cleanth Brooks emphasized that the study of poetry helps one to know how his language works. Accordingly, the points made by Perrine are significant. If a student cannot learn to grasp metaphorical concepts expressed in good poetry then he is losing a valuable language experience and a uniquely human experience and ability. As Perrine (1971:60) says,

> Without poetry whole areas of human experience would simply have to go unexpressed. Without poetry man is dumb and

> inarticulate to half his life. Without poetry he can only stammer and stutter in seeking to express what lies deepest in his heart or courses most thrillingly along the channels of his blood.

Emphasis on metaphorical language, therefore, can help a student not only to appreciate poetry but also to become more skilled in language use generally.

Teaching Particular Poets

Another approach to poetry concerns itself with emphasizing certain poets. The English teacher should be aware that some poets appeal more strongly to youth than do other poets. In addition, the teacher himself will likely have favorite poets. If he approaches the latter with enthusiasm he may very well be successful in turning his students on to these poets. Roland Bartel (1972) emphasizes the war poetry of Wilfred Owen. World War I is the setting for many of Owen's war poems and some of them contain many allusions to the Bible. This provides an opportunity for the teacher to show the complexity and the effectiveness of successful allusions. Additionally, present-day students are quite interested in war poetry and Owen's poems can show them how poetry transcends time. His themes are as relevant now as they were during World War I. Owen's "Parable of the Old Man and the Young" is built around the story of Abraham tempted to sacrifice his son Isaac. This is related to the older generation of World War I sacrificing their sons as well as sacrificing the young men of Europe.

The poem "Greater Love" relates to Jesus' discourse with his disciples at the Last Supper when he said that greater love hath no man than that he lay down his life for his friends. Soldiers laying down their lives are compared and contrasted with the deeds and attitude of Christ. Other appropriate poems are "At a Calvary Near the Ancre"; "Sonnet: On Seeing a Piece of Our Artillery Brought into Action"; "Insensibility." Juxtaposition of solemn Biblical admonitions with situations of war helps Owen express his outrage over the effects of war on the human spirit. Owen uses the Bible to exalt the suffering of soldiers, but he also uses the Bible satirically to shock his readers into seeing the hypocrisy of their endorsement of war. Understanding such Biblical allusions and parallels might enhance students understanding of poetry and of life.

Since the 1960's in the United States were a time of social upheaval and youth rebellion, students might be attracted to poets who were rebellious products of their times. Peter Sheehan (1971) suggests that Hart Crane is such a poet. His problems can be made parallel to those in the lives of some students. He copped out by committing suicide. He was a rebel who attempted to go beyond the social limits of his time in order to find lasting values. This latter trait is illustrated in his poem "The Bridge." In "My Grandmother's Love Letters" Crane embodies emotions with which the young readily identify. "Black Tambourine" parallels our present civil rights situation. Students can

be shown the tremendous creative gifts that Hart Crane possessed and the problems that went with them. They might see that suicide is a disastrous waste of the unique wonder which each person is. At least they might see that the problems they share and endure are common to all men and all times. As Sheehan (1971:1213) summarizes,

> Almost all of Hart Crane's poems fit into a biographical interpretation, and thus handled they come alive for our students, who themselves are struggling for their own biography. In an era of frantic self-identification, it is essential for teachers to use the energy of the quest, relating it to an artist's life and then striving to give students the lasting human values they so badly need. In so doing, literature comes alive with relevance for students, and these days that in itself often seems miraculous. Crane's miracle sputtered and then died. We must not let that of our students do likewise.

Hart Crane offers a great deal to contemporary students.

Robert H. Meyer (1971) offers Dylan Thomas as a poet worth studying. He suggests that the poems of Thomas provide excellent examples of an art form evolving from real, human experience to word pictures which communicate a message in the sense of a vision or "flashing" insight into the meaning of existence. Students might find this pattern helpful in gaining a deeper appreciation for and a sharper comprehension of the wholeness or integrity of all art. Beneath the apparent flashy abandon of Thomas' poetry, there is an underlying logic, discipline, and organization of a kind worthy of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Hart Crane. Thomas was a man obsessed with words and his poetry reverberates with a richness of sound and metaphor

that transmutes the poet's personal experience with the elements of nature into a dazzling, universal vision of the very meaning of existence. Students might particularly be interested in "Ceremony After a Fire Raid" which deals with the violent, instant deaths of mother and child resulting from an incendiary bomb during a modern air raid.

Sister Therese Dolores McFadden (1971) feels that Emily Dickinson has much to offer the present generation of young people. She explains that students now want teachers to "tell it like it is," and they are quite ready to dismiss certain authors as irrelevant. Since anthologies do not always present the best works of certain authors, a teacher should be very selective in choosing poems for study. Some poems might cause students to reject a certain author, whereas other poems by the same author might be very appealing to students. Because many teachers have stressed the Emily Dickinson of the moors and bogs, many students have rejected her poetry. However, Emily Dickinson has much to offer present-day students. She was very introspective and assessed the relationship of her sensitive soul to the world around and beyond her. She felt that such people as she must be prepared to suffer. Some students relate readily to this general theme of the striving, wounded, misunderstood soul. Emily Dickinson produced many soul searching poems. For example, "The Soul Has Bandaged Moments" portrays the seesaw effects of the attack-battle-conquest sequence which accompanies most great confrontations of life.

In other writings she dealt with attempts by others to nail down the lid of our hopes and dreams. She lamented the harsh realities which are so often a part of life in our complex society but she had a pervading sense of praise for the courageous people who do hope and dare to try. She admired examples of quiet gallantry in the face of life's problems. Again, students should be able to relate well to these themes. They might, for instance, be able to give contemporary examples of people who have shown quiet gallantry in life. If Emily Dickinson's poetry is approached carefully, students will not see her merely as a quaint little cameo-lady, totally out of contact with life as it is. Rather, they will see her as a woman who gave lyric expression to those surging tendencies within man which propel him toward infinity, yet thrust him back within the confines of his nature. This is the same problem which preoccupies so many thinking students today. Sister McFadden (1971:464) says of Emily Dickinson,

> Like many modern authors, Emily Dickinson offers no pat solutions to the problems which beset striving man. She presents the situation as she understands it, voices the questions which have been raised by her observations, and initiates discussion. What more could teachers ask? What more do the students before us want?

From these four examples of emphasizing particular poets, the principle is clear. Students can profit from extended study of the works of one poet. These examples were somewhat extensive so that the method of studying a poet in depth could be clearly understood. The

same approach might be used with any poet whom the teacher feels has a message for students. The poet need not be contemporary. Every good poet has something to say which is capable of bridging the gap of time and of evoking a response on the part of the students of any generation, even the very demanding students of the now generation.

Biography or Meaning?

In teaching the works of a particular poet, one is confronted with the dilemna of how much attention should be given to the poet's life and how much to his writings themselves. In fact, this is a main issue in the teaching of poetry. One school of thought holds that the teacher should concern himself only with poems themselves, and dismiss the poet's biography as irrelevant to his art. Another group, however, feels that knowledge of the incidents in the poet's life is of crucial importance to complete understanding of his poetry.

Michael J. Cardone (1966) holds to the latter philosophy. He believes that it is a sound principle to introduce external evidence of a poet's life into the study of his poetry in the classroom. He believes that external biographical evidence can serve to fix and extend poetic meaning. He condemns the teacher who sticks to the received text of the poem in order to preserve its integrity as a work of art. Such a teacher is short-suiting his students. Cardone (1966:9-10) explains,

> One of the best ways I know either to prevent or dissolve any interest students may have in poetry is to subject every poem which is assigned and discussed to close textual analysis and explication, particularly when the explication excludes external evidence and stops with the very narrowest consideration of the poem's instrumentation--meter, tone, diction, symbol, image, etc.

According to Cardone, the meaning of all poetry is to some extent dependent upon our knowledge of its origins and intentions and the meaning of some poetry is crucially dependent upon such knowledge. If a student is to study closely the language of a poem, he must understand the doctrines and events that gave the poet's vocabulary its specific meaning.

The poems written after World War I, for instance, evidence a tone of bitterness and emptiness. This was an era of crass materialism and exploitation. The tone of the poems of this time is a reflection of moods and attitudes residing in poets prior to their writing poems. A biographical knowledge of the poets and events surrounding this post-war era adds greatly to the student's understanding of poems written then.

Sometimes students are puzzled by the tone of bitterness in some of Keats' poetry, especially in his poems about love. But biographical knowledge of his rejection in love by Fanny Browne, his incurable disease, and his abysmal poverty can give a greater understanding of his writings.

Students might know that Emily Dickinson was a lonely recluse. This knowledge is heighthened by understanding of her love for the stranger, Charles Wadsworth who is the father-lover figure in many of her poems. Students aware of this might read her poems with greater appreciation.

Thus, the biographical approach to poetry seems to have merit. Any poem is in a very real sense an historic fact. This fact had its genesis in its creator at a specific time, in a specific place, and under specific circumstances and conditions. Knowledge of these factors might help considerably in understanding certain poems.

Not all teachers agree, however, that knowledge of the biography of poets is important or relevant to the study of poetry. Robert Donaldson (1966) feels that the teacher's primary responsibility is to be concerned with the meaning of the poem. He cites questions from a well-known anthology about the poem "Richard Cory." The questions are concerned with philosophizing about the poem, generalizing about the character's fate, and paraphrasing the poem. But Donaldson says that questions such as these do not really lead to a discussion of the poem itself. Rather, they are a substitute for studying the poem. The true study of a poem lies in an examination of its unique meaning. Ideas do, in some way, exist inside and outside of poems, but the new critics, the philosophers of language have said that the expression of an idea in a poem, its context, its shape, makes it unique, makes

it different. As Donaldson (1966:2) says,

> The novelty in poems is not just the new expression of an old idea; it is the modification of the idea as it is discovered in a different matrix. Because two poems are different expressions, the ideas in them cannot be the same. It is precisely these differences that attract us; and we cannot separate their differences from the language that expresses them.

Accordingly, the meaning of poems is centered in their unique use of language. Before students study poetry, then, they should have some familiarity with semantics. They should have experience in analysis of language and should have contact with many different uses of language. Then they can analyze poems more accurately.

Additionally, Donaldson stresses that part of a poem's meaning lies in the idea of discovery. A poet discovers what he wants to say by composing the poem. The reader, consequently, can make discoveries through reading the poem. His awareness might be sharpened and his perceptions powerfully modified. Poems should be taught as discovery. Students should see that poets, being only human, have a hard time writing. It is a very valuable experience for students to see, if possible, the first drafts of poems and then compare them with the final version.

Thus, the dispute continues. Some teachers say biographical study of the poet is important; others say it is not. Still others do not hold to one extreme or the other and take a middle course between the two.

Poetry Workshops

So far, this investigation has concentrated mainly on means of getting students involved in the reading of and the appreciation of poetry. However, if students become deeply involved in poetry, and if they have ability to write, it seems to follow that they should be given an opportunity to express themselves in poetry. For this purpose it is worthwhile to consider the idea of poetry workshops. Phyllis Thompson (1971) describes the use of this device in Hawaii. The Haku Mele (Hawaiian for poet) poetry workshops were funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Their purpose was to give young poets a chance to develop their talents by providing an honestly critical peer audience. University of Hawaii student volunteers directed poetry writing workshops at various levels above the third grade--with the majority of these projects at the high school level. College students were selected as directors because it was felt that high school students would be more open and at ease with them than with teachers. It might, of course, be questioned whether college students would have more skill in dealing with poetry than experienced teachers would. However, Thompson does not examine this question. But it is pointed out that the student volunteers should have had some experience in writing poetry.

Peer criticism was important to the workshop idea. Thompson (1971:215) points out, "The belief back of the entire scheme was that

rigorous peer criticism, far from being a deterrent to the young poet, is a strong incitement to write as well as he can." The workshop meetings were generally held in an empty classroom during lunch hour, free periods, or after school. Ideally, the leader would try to get the young poets to rid themselves of the "ego" or "self" in their writing in order to be more objective than they might otherwise tend to be. He had to be tactful in leading the group into sincere peer criticism. Gradually, the leader would move the role of directing the group away from himself and let students handle things themselves. He would still guide them, though, toward a consideration of good poetical principles. Thompson (1971:218) considered the poetry workshop idea successful for she said,

> When poetry is understood by students to require as much mental energy as chemistry requires because the standards of the object are equally high and strong, then they will have more reason to respect and to love it. As long as it is treated as indulgence of the nebulous ego, no one need treat it as serious art. To achieve the status of other intellectual subjects, poetry must be accorded that critical respect which I believe can only be won if it is handled in a critical manner. Good poetry flourishes under strong careful criticism; good poets flourish also.

Poetry Readings

Another possible key to use in unlocking students' interest in poetry is the practice of "poetry readings." Rex M. Lambert (1972) is an advocate of this approach. He stresses that poetry is primarily an oral form and is meant to be read. A teacher can often capture the

attention of his students by discussing and reading songs from their favorite rock or folk singer. This not only equates these people with poetry, but it also prepares students for oral reading of other, less contemporary, poetry. The teacher can read poetry aloud; the students can read poetry aloud. However, this might become tedious if it is continued over an extended period of time. The alternatives are interesting. For variety, the teacher might arrange to bring in another faculty member who is especially proficient in oral interpretation. If a college or university is nearby, professors and poets might be asked to read to high school classes. The Academy of American Poets, for example, sponsors a program of high school poetry readings for minority groups in Arizona and New Mexico. Students especially seem to profit from poetry readings if the reader takes time afterwards to comment on the poems he has just read and allows time for a question and answer period. Lambert feels that students respond best to three main categories of poems: (1) War poems--those dealing with war protests or with experiences in war. (2) Love poems--boy-girl relationships or love between members of a family or between friends. (3) Emotional geography poems--reactions to the external world, concern with social problems such as pollution, overpopulation, drug abuse, alcoholism, etc. Lambert (1972:714) summarizes his thoughts about poetry readings by stating,

> It is amazing what a reading can do to bring out creativity in students. I have been stunned by the amount of poetry, much of it good poetry, that students have written after listening to a reading. It seems to be a great way to thaw that frozen creativity that lurks in every high school student and to create an atmosphere that will change the students' negative attitude toward poetry.

Teachers, especially those in schools near colleges or universities, would do well to consider Lambert's ideas. In addtion, any teacher who is not himself a proficient oral reader of poetry might find it helpful to improve his skill in this area.

The Affective Approach - Pro and Con

Up to this point, methods of teaching poetry that have been examined have stressed the study of contemporary poetry, the use of media in teaching poetry, the importance of well-equipped classrooms, the study of particular poets, the relevance or non-relevance of biography, and the effectiveness of poetry workshops and outside speakers. Many of these methods stress the importance of the affective approach in teaching poetry. William Fisher (1972), for example, emphasized poetry of the 60's and 70's as being especially relevant to today's students. De Lois Garrett (1970) stressed that students identify with dream motifs in contemporary Negro poetry. Helen English (1970) uses songs and ballads to help children of the rock age learn about themselves and their music. And other methods previously mentioned have more or less emphasized an affective

approach. The affective philosophy suggests that the student be encouraged to pursue his own interests in poetry and to view poetry primarily from the confines of his own mind and his own emotions. In other words, the important thing in the affective domain is how the poem affects the individual student.

But it should be pointed out that not all teachers of poetry agree with this. Some feel that the affective response has been overemphasized. Don Gutteridge (1972:210), for example, states, ".... the affective response to art has come to form the dominant critical framework of our age--a cause celebre for the New Left, and a sacred cow for the unwitting young." Gutteridge feels that good poetry has within it an emotional quality of objects that is not found in much of modern art where transitory and intense feeling is so strongly emphasized. Gutteridge would not reject modern poetry entirely. He feels that a teacher should teach some modern poetry or songs to show what they can do and then contrast them with other poetry and let students make value judgments. To this end, close reading of poetry is important. There is a difference between intensity of response and richness of response. In other words, the student should be taught not to confuse his response to rock music or a Rod McKuen poem with the richer and more complex response to Shakespeare or Keats or Shapiro.

At times, a teacher is confronted with student responses such as, "That's how I feel about this poem. What does it matter how others feel?" Or, "I only like poems that have a theme to them, themes that are about things now." In the face of such responses, Gutteridge feels that the teacher has an obligation to bring out a level of connotative response rather than let the student respond only in an affective fashion. In addition, he must not abdicate his responsibility and let students choose the poetry that they wish to study. If students have this power, Gutteridge states that, in the name of a factitious relevance, English lessons will degenerate into debates on pollution or general discussions of sex and life.

There is a strong difference of feelings and philosophy between those who advocate basically an affective approach to poetry and those who feel that the affective is emphasized too strongly. Gutteridge (1972:210) probably epitomizes the feelings of the anti-affective group when he says,

> Many of our current dilemmas are probably due to the increased permissiveness of a society which puts few demands (mental or physical) on its children; a society, in which the term discipline can only be used by faculty members susurrating timidly behind closed doors. It is also due to the contemporary phenomenon of popularism in the arts: where the teenager is begged to indulge his emotions in the atavistic rhythms of acid rock; or sip leisurely at the predigested and commercially packaged song poems of Rod McKuen; or, of he musters courage enough to confront poetry at all, to take it in diluted doses--in the communal security of a coffeehouse or the private safety of a marijuana dream.

Obviously then, the philosophical gulf between the affective and non-affective advocates is, in some instances, a rather wide one.

Miscellaneous

Much of the discussion on poetry so far has emphasized what positive approaches a teacher should take toward the subject. But there are some approaches to be avoided. Sister Madeline De Frees (1970) points out some of these, but she also tempers her remarks with some positive suggestions on the teaching of poetry. Sister illustrates that different teachers abuse the study of poetry in the following ways: (1) Emphasis on mechanics, e.g. - anapest, alliteration, trochaic, etc. This is equivalent to teaching poetry as a mortician might teach anatomy, without ever coming near a live body. (2) Loving ambiguities and relishing difficult poems. Such a teacher, according to Sister De Frees, keeps in trim by hunting symbols with a specially designed Geiger Counter and mowing them down with a small machine gun. (3) Adopting the attitude that the poem is exquisitely beautiful and poets are divinely inspired. Therefore, the poem can be admired from a distance but is too fragile to be touched. (4) Over the years, preparing ditto masters paraphrasing every poem in the high school literature anthologies. Such teachers tend to force their interpretations on students. (5) Trying to be very liberal and democratic and, accordingly, telling the class that nobody really knows what poems are about so anything goes. Sister De Frees (1970:929)

says of such a teacher, "When, in examinations, his students mistake Henley for Poe, he gives them credit for knowing how to spell the names." (6) Teaching that every poem has a didactic meaning and is preaching a moral message to its readers.

Sister De Frees makes more comments and suggestions. Poetry should not be confined only to units in poetry but should be brought into the classroom whenever it is applicable to the subject or theme at hand. However, a teacher must introduce poetry carefully because approaching the elements of poetry in the wrong way can kill the student's interest in poetry. Many teachers mistakenly begin with the mechanics of poetry. It might be better to first discuss the poem and how it achieves its particular effect and then lead into mechanics.

Care must be taken not to overdo critical examinations of poems. Some relatively simple poems are overexamined and exploited. If the meaning of the poem is too difficult and abstruse, the poem should not have been presented to secondary students in the first place.

A poem does have a definite meaning structure and it is not fair to high school students to say that a peom means, "whatever it means to you." There cannot, according to Sister De Frees, be a purely relative meaning to poetry and even the poet himself is not necessarily the final authority on his own work. At times, an exceptionally difficult poem might be paraphrased, but the paraphrase should never be substituted for the poem. Thus, the teacher should

be wary of didactic tendencies in his students. Young people often have a strong ethical bias because they are searching for values to live by. However, they must not be allowed to turn poems into sermons, nor vice versa.

Sister De Frees states her key to teaching poetry in the form of a rule or principle from the poet Karl Shapiro--a poem should do what it says. If it presents a visual image, for example, it should be structured that way. And the teacher should be careful to interpret it according to its context and meaning. Not doing this, a teacher is liable to fall into the trap of talking about or around a poem rather than teaching the poem itself. Sister De Frees (1970:930) offers teachers some food for thought when she says,

> I am convinced that much of the mayhem committed in classrooms in the name of teaching poetry is a consequence of the teacher's feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, sometimes of genuine dislike for poetry, and his willingness to seize on anything that will occasion a suitable lapse of time and permit him to return to discursive language.

Probably some of the most comprehensive and inclusive ideas on the teaching of poetry are those offered by Stephen Dunning (1966). As a college professor with experience at the secondary level, Dunning is qualified to offer valuable insights to high school teachers of poetry. He lists some general aims for the teaching of poetry.

The most general aim is to make poetry attractive enough that pupils will become voluntary readers of poetry after they finish high

school. Other aims are: (1) to provoke pleasure, (2) to sharpen students' sense of observation, (3) to improve students' taste in poetry, (4) to increase students' skill in approaching poetry, (5) to hint the teacher's own delight with poetry. These are general aims in teaching poetry; specific aims will vary with each poem considered.

Dunning goes on to offer nine principles for teaching poetry. The researcher will list them here and give some of Dunning's comments on each one.

Principle One: The teacher who is not himself a reader of poetry must not pretend to teach poetry. If this were taken too literally, it would mean some students would go through school without contact with poetry. The principle means simply that if a teacher isn't interested in poetry he cannot build his students' interest in the subject. Teachers should put themselves into contact with poetry whenever possible. They should read it in magazines, buy verse, and browse in libraries.

Principle Two: The teacher of poetry must teach only those poems for which he can engender real enthusiasm. If he dislikes Poe, for example, he should bypass Poe. An objection might be raised here that under this principle students will not receive a broad literary background. However, in large high schools, students will come into contact with many teachers of broad backgrounds and tastes. In a small school, it is probably better for students that a teacher deal

enthusiastically with his favorite poets than teach other poets unenthusiastically. Teachers should recognize an obligation to look beyond their own taste to their weaknesses and limitations and try to improve their poetry backgrounds. Teachers who do not care for poetry should be in some other area of the English curriculum such as grammar or composition.

Principle Three: The teacher must keep experience with poetry itself at the center of his teaching. The teacher should not concentrate on biography, philology, or background, but should let students experience the poems themselves. Some biography is helpful, but it should not be carried to excess. The teacher should guard against trying to impress students with names of famous poets. Occasionally he should bring into the classroom poems unidentified as to author and time and tradition and let these poems speak for themselves.

Principle Four: The teacher must teach the mechanics of poetry inductively. Mechanics such as meter, rhyme, metaphor, symbol, etc. should not be taught as separate entities. They are best taught within the context of poems. In addition, the teacher should move from simple to complex. In teaching metaphor, for instance, he should move from metaphor in popular songs and simple poems to that in more complex poetry. Furthermore, a teacher should not approach mechanics casually, but should select poems suitable for teaching certain techniques.

Principle Five: Teachers must stop overexplaining poems. Teachers sometimes tend to elaborate their own interpretations without encouraging student explications. Naturally, the unsupportable student interpretation should be challenged but with the view that teachers themselves sometimes know little about the true meanings of poetry. If a teacher is certain of his own interpretations he can carefully guide class discussions toward these views. At times, poems should be taught that defy elaborate explications but allow considerable discussion.

Principle Six: The poetry unit must give way to the occasional teaching of poetry. Poetry is too rich and too demanding to be taught in sustained units. Rather, it should be taught sparingly; it should be interspersed with the other subject matters of the English class. Poems can complement the study of a short story. They can be used as models for composition. They can be grouped by sets--crows, cars, fog, etc. The teacher would do well to have a folder of poems to read at appropriate times. Such times might be on gloomy days, when students are restless, when the air is taut with excitement or during the final fifteen minutes of a class period.

Principle Seven: Students must often have the chance to choose what poetry they will read, study, and discuss. Bookmakers, curriculum makers, and teachers usually decide what the student will study. This is certainly acceptable--up to a point. The good teacher, however,

will give students the opportunities to bring in poems for study and discussion. Some students will bring in terrible poems, but this presents an opportunity for careful analysis and criticism of the poem brought in. Thus, the burden for selecting, reading, and explaining is placed on the student. The teacher should not avoid issues, but should challenge poor poems and make students question their satisfaction with such poems. In this process, the teacher is not dictating taste, but is improving it in students. Not only are students showing their taste by the poetry they bring in but the teacher is also showing his by the poems he brings in.

Principle Eight: Students who are asked to read and study poetry must sometimes be asked to say something poetically. They should become conscious of figurative language and use it in writing poetry or poetic prose. They might try "listing" types of poems in which they would take a title such as "These Have I Loved," list items after it, and then work the lists into poems. They might write ballads about deeds of a local hero; write haiku; put last lines on limericks; or write epigrams and couplets.

Principle Nine: Students must be helped to discover that poetry is written about many things. College bound senior high students should, of course, have some contact with older poetry. Non-college students should see that poetry has something for them; that there is not a great linguistic and cultural distance between them and poetry.

Both groups of students should study poems dealing with today's excitements and situations. These might be about subjects both lovely and ugly. They might be poems from magazines or from paperback collections of new poems. They might be about the new meanings to be found in our new lives. They might deal with freeways, for example, or with jet flights or computing machines or the moon and Mars; or the place of TV in our society. Dunning (1966:32-33) makes a significant point about this when he says:

> The subjects of poetry are not comprehended by nightingales, daffodils, anticipations of death, man's yen for life at sea, and the romantic love of landlubbers. Poetry is also about city streets, juke boxes, oil barges, and cars; hunting, prize fighting, rockets, and wars. Students need to learn well that the subjects of poetry come out of the very things that they see and know, that the language of poetry depends on contemporary and available sources for its nonliteralness, that the writers of poetry include well-groomed ladies and short-haired men who share the 1960's with them.

The researcher feels that Dunning's nine principles are sound ones which provide very helpful suggestions to present and prospective teachers of English.

Textbook Suggestions

A survey of this nature would be remiss if it overlooked suggestions made in textbooks that are designed for prospective teachers of English. These sources offer systematic and helpful approaches to the study of poetry in secondary schools.

Mary Fowler (1965) carefully lays out attractive ways of approaching poetry. She states that the aim of poetry study is to produce pleasure in the reading of poetry. To do this, a teacher must have an acquaintance with many poems and must know his students well so that he can select poetry to match their needs. A key factor in interesting young people in poetry is the teacher's own love for poetry. Knowledge of the language of poetry is important, and students should be familiar with such elements as imagery, symbol, word order, syntax, rhyme, meter, and rhythm. The good teacher will conduct a variety of learning activities such as choral speaking, listening to poetry, and memorizing.

Fowler helpfully suggests several ways to judge whether or not poetry teaching has been successful. One measure is whether or not students will continue to read poems after they are out of class and on their own. Another measure is to ask students to write about a poem they have never read. Their response in this situation will reveal a great deal about the poetry instruction they have received. Still another measure is to give students a copy of a poem they have never read along with a teacher written parody of that poem and to ask them to choose the one they like best and explain why. These suggestions for evaluation might well be used by teachers on regular occasions to evaluate their own effectiveness.

Students easily tire of poetry study and the teacher should know a variety of learning activities in order to stimulate their lagging interests. Some suggested activities are panel discussions on poetry, student poem folders, allowing a student to teach a poem to the class, and imaginative writing assignments about certain interesting poems.

Walter Loban, Margaret Ryan, and James R. Squire (1969) offer helpful suggestions to the teacher of poetry. They suggest, as did Mary Fowler, that the main purpose for the study of poetry is pleasure in reading poetry. However, this pleasure is not possible unless the student thoroughly understands the poem. And thorough understanding of the poem comes from understanding the language of poetry. Students must be aware of imagery--how the poet selects words to evoke associations and control the reader's mood. A knowledge of metaphor and symbol is important, but these should be taught inductively. Students should be aware of how poets use tone in poems. Sounds of words, for example, affect emotions, and vowels and consonants can be used in very deliberate ways in the construction of a poem.

One main problem encountered by all teachers of English is how to organize poetry study. Some teachers like thematic units, but many, including Stephen Dunning, believe that the most effective approach is to take poetry in small doses. A teacher might find great class response if he sometimes reads poems on appropriate occasions.

Some of these occasions might be after snowfalls, after assemblies, on Monday morning, or when there are fifteen minutes or so left in the class period.

The poetry teacher should strive to accommodate the diverse personalities within his class. He can have students prepare booklets of poetry. He can have student readers who will explain the poems they have just read to the class. He can use such devices as paintings or moments of national crisis as stimuli for student writing of poetry. He can have the class compare actual poems with spurious ones.

The textbook authors mentioned in this section (Loban, Ryan, Squire) feel that teachers should encourage students to memorize poetry. But they hasten to add that students should not be forced to do so. Many other authors and teachers agree. Most believe that forced memorization can quickly destroy a student's interet in poetry. A teacher might show a student ways to effectively memorize poems or parts of poems, but the impetus for so doing must come from within the student himself. Some helpful suggestions for effective memorization are the following: (1) write the poem out, (2) first try to memorize the sequence of images and ideas, (3) read the poem several times a day, (4) in reading the poem, concentrate on the thoughts and feelings in it.

Royal J. Morsey (1969) gives some general principles that a good teacher of poetry will follow. He will not usually assign poems for reading before clearing up present and anticipated student

difficulties with these poems. Realizing that poetry is primarily an oral form, he will read aloud every poem assigned. He will, with his class, study poems, but not dissect them. Finally, he will welcome questions and attempt to answer them carefully--not showing annoyance or telling students they should be able to find the answer on their own.

To give an example of an effective poetry teacher, Morsey lists the main principles under which a certain Mr. Brown operates. Mr. Brown (1) reads aloud poems students can enjoy and appreciate, (2) asks students to bring and read their favorite poems and then encourages questions from the class on each poem, (3) asks the class to do some reading and analyzing on their own and to be prepared to discuss and defend certain poems, (4) encourages students to memorize lines, (5) teaches mechanics inductively as poems are read, (6) minimizes biographical and historical study, (7) encourages students to develop individual reading programs, (8) does not give objective examinations but uses poetry discussion questions instead.

Morsey (1969:84) summarizes by stating:

> Understanding usually comes to students who hear a poem read aloud by an expert who takes the time to explain troublesome words and allusions, and who relates the theme of a lyric poem and the narrative thread of a narrative poem to their experiences through thought-provoking discussion questions.

Some very excellent and quite comprehensive suggestions on the teaching of poetry are those presented by J. N. Hook (1965). Some of the suggestions offered by Hook are similar to those presented elsewhere in this paper. Other suggestions by Hook are quite helpful and as thorough in some parts as those of Stephen Dunning.

Like most other commentators on the poetry scene, Hook emphasizes that the purpose of reading poetry is for pleasure. However, he qualifies this by saying that one difficulty in the teaching of poetry is that not all students are ready for the same kind of pleasure at the same time.

Hook categorizes the teaching of poetry into different approaches and explains each approach.

The historical or biographical approach has been previously mentioned in this paper. The teacher should not overdo the historical approach, but there are times when biographical knowledge is essential to understanding poetry. For example, the reader cannot fully understand William Cullen Bryant's "To A Waterfowl" unless he knows something of the situation in Bryant's life which prompted him to write the poem. Political history is closely tied to a poem such as Emerson's "Concord Hymn." Sociological background of a group of people plays an important part in a poem such as Keat's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

In the Sociopsychological approach the teacher attempts to interest students in poems about people and their problems. The poems might be about individuals such as "Richard Cory" or "Lucinda Matlock." Families or people in love might be the subjects considered. Poems about human relationships are very popular with young people and poems about groups such as working people, minority groups, those caught up in war can often spark great interest in the young.

The emotive approach stresses that poetry should be enjoyed and the teacher can make it so if he stresses a variety of class activities. Oral reading, choral reading, and singing of poems are popular activities. Students at times enjoy dramatizing poems and ballads. Teacher and students together will sometimes try to illustrate what the poet is saying by means of photographs, drawings, and paintings. Students enjoy a diversion such as light and humorous poetry and they also enjoy collecting poetry that is meaningful to them. Writing is another valuable activity but this is enjoyable to students only when they are excited about poetry. All of these are activities which make poetry enjoyable and are thus categorized under the emotive approach.

Didacticism refers to the idea of a writer's using literature to teach or to put across a particular viewpoint. In the didactic approach to poetry, the student is asked to find the poet's viewpoint toward his subject. The student may or may not accept this viewpoint,

but, either way, interesting class discussions are sure to ensue. Examples of poems with a strong viewpoint are Whitman's "Miracles" and Frost's "Mending Wall."

The paraphrastic approach to poetry is meant to help students understand the meaning of such elements in poetry as words, allusions, and sentence structure. A summary is a short statement of the main idea of a poem. A paraphrase is longer, closely follows the original and attempts to convey the full meaning of the poem. An explication is less inclusive than a summary or a paraphrase and attempts to answer hard questions about the poem's meaning. Teachers should be careful not to overuse the paraphrastic approach and not to substitute it for a close and careful examination of the poem itself.

To a certain extent, careful analysis of a poem is important to understanding it, and this idea forms the basis for the analytical approach to poetry. Students should know how such poetical elements as metrical form, mood, and figures of speech combine to form a unified whole.

A three stage study of poems is recommended: (1) one or two readings for pleasure, (2) paraphrasing (if necessary), historical background, discussion of author's point of view, analysis of poetic techniques employed, (3) one or two additional readings (which will probably now be more enjoyable than the first readings). Overall, the purpose of the analytical approach is to help students see the

appropriateness of each element of the poem. Again, it must be stressed that, as with certain other approaches, this method should not be overused.

Hook has carefully categorized the main approaches to teaching poetry. However, it should be pointed out that teachers do not generally categorize their poetry teaching. Comprehensive poetry instruction would consist of a combination of some, or all, of these approaches.

SUMMARY

In summary, it may be said that somewhat different means of approaching the study of poetry have been presented in this chapter.

The contemporary approach seems to be a very popular one since some teachers believe that the young respond enthusiastically to it. However, advocates of a more traditional subject matter approach feel that over-emphasis on the contemporary is not fair to the young, since it limits their contact with poetry to one dimension in time.

Media of all types is viewed as a valuable tool for the teacher of poetry. Classrooms should be well-equipped with audio-visual aids and with reference and resource materials.

Reluctant learners and slower readers might be led into the study of poetry by being asked to list favorite or attractive things which could become part of a poem.

Awareness of figurative language and its importance to poetry is an important goal. Students can be better readers in any area if they can handle figurative language.

Often, students and teachers respond well to certain poets, and such response, consequently, provides a favorable atmosphere for studying these poets in depth.

Opinion differs among teachers as to the importance of emphasizing a poet's biography. Advocates of the biographical approach say that a poem is a product of its times and knowledge of those times is an aid to understanding the poem. Those who minimize the value of biography charge that concern with a poet's life and times is a diversion from the primary purpose of poetry study--examination of the poem itself.

The workshop approach to poetry holds promise for involving students in the writing of poetry. The key to the effectiveness of this approach seems to be rigorous and constructive peer criticism.

Outside speakers, including poets themselves, provide students a variety of contact with authorities other than the classroom teacher.

Some teachers stress the affective approach to poetry because they believe the student's individual response is of primary importance. On the other hand, some teachers feel that over-emphasis on the affective approach might lead to a narrow, emotional, and purely subjective attitude toward poetry on the part of students. Such

students might learn no objective criteria on which to judge poetry.

By unduly emphasizing mechanics, ambiguities, unapproachable poets, paraphrasing, didacticism, and extremely liberal interpretations teachers sometimes destroy student interest in poetry.

Stephen Dunning emphasizes that the teacher of poetry should (1) be an avid reader of poetry, (2) teach poems he enjoys, (3) emphasize the poem itself, (4) teach mechanics inductively, (5) not overexplain poems, (6) intersperse poetry with other language arts areas, (7) let students occasionally choose the poetry they wish to study, (8) sometimes ask students to write poetry or poetic prose, (9) show his students that poetry deals with a variety of subjects.

J. N. Hook categorizes poetry into approaches that teachers can use in combination rather than in isolation. Hook's categories are historical, sociopsychological, emotive, didactic, paraphrastic and analytical.

Chapter III

SUMMARY AND COMMENTARY

INTRODUCTION

Chapter I of this paper emphasized the status of poetry in the United States. The low standing of this important literary genre can to a great extent be attributed to ineffective teaching of poetry, especially at the high school level.

The study and reading of poetry, as previously pointed out, can be very rewarding and beneficial. The reward comes primarily from the pleasure of sharing with the poet the unique insights he offers into life and the universe. The benefit comes from an increased awareness and appreciation of the intricate workings of language.

Accordingly, Chapter II presented a survey of methods of experienced teachers of poetry. These were grouped according to general categories or approaches.

In Chapter II, the researcher occasionally offered an opinion concerning a method or approach under discussion. But it was emphasized that no one method of teaching poetry could be said to be superior to or more effective than another method. It is the individual teacher who makes the method effective, and he must select methods that fit his personality. Beginning teachers must try methods on an experimental basis. Gradually, with experience, they will learn which

methods work best for them. However, they should be aware of a variety of possible approaches to poetry, and a paper such as this offers them helpful information in that area.

Experienced teachers, on the other hand, should not be complacent. Perhaps they have found methods which work, but they should not presume to be knowledgeable of all possible approaches to the teaching of poetry. The researcher, for example, has found this study to be very profitable. As a result of his investigation, he is conscious of methods which he is eager to try in his classroom. In addition, he has found new ways of applying and implementing methods which he has previously used.

Again, it must be emphasized that the nature of this survey does not allow the researcher to make recommendations concerning the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of certain methods of teaching poetry. However, the researcher has done extensive reading in this area, and has taught high school English for eleven years. Accordingly, in this Chapter, the researcher will make commentaries on some of the approaches presented in Chapter II.

COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

There will likely always be some difference of opinion between teachers who advocate the study of primarily contemporary poetry and those who prefer to emphasize the traditional forms. Each type of

poetry has its good points, but teachers should not take an extreme position on either side. Contemporary poetry might effectively be used to introduce students to poetry. To this end, teachers, even those with many years experience, have an obligation to keep up to date on current poetry. This does not mean that they should not be critical readers of modern poetry. Much of it is poor, just as some traditional poems are. The teacher of poetry should critically select appropriate forms to introduce to his students.

However, he must keep in mind that he has an obligation to his students to achieve a balance between the contemporary and the traditional. Even if the teacher strongly prefers contemporary forms and students also prefer them, these forms should not comprise the entire poetry curriculum. How can students reasonably pass judgment on traditional poetry if they have had little or no contact with it? This is comparable to the situation of the child who says that he hates asparagus when in reality he has never tried it.

Additionally, poetry from the past helps students to keep a sense of perspective. They see that in many ways modern times are not unique. Men of all eras have had overwhelming and sometimes similar problems to contend with. Many of those problems are examined in the poetry of their times. Great understanding of human nature is to be found in many traditional poems. It would be criminal, for example, to rob students of an encounter with William Shakespeare,

merely because their teacher does not like the Bard's poetry.

Stephen Dunning emphasizes that teachers should teach only the poems that they like. The danger in this principle is that if it is carried to extremes, poetry teaching becomes entirely teacher-centered. Dunning counters this by saying that students will come into contact with many teachers of various tastes. In large high schools they will. But in a state such as Montana with its many small high schools, Dunning's principle is not especially appropriate.

Dunning also emphasizes that teachers should show students that poetry is written about many things. How can this better be done than by achieving a comfortable balance between contemporary and traditional types?

Teachers whose knowledge of poetry is not extensive have an obligation to broaden their backgrounds. Otherwise, their poetry instruction will be narrowed to their own meager interests or those of their students.

The idea of using media to involve students in poetry is a sound one. Students of this generation have grown up in a mass media world. They respond to media and it is thus a valuable tool for capturing and holding their attention. The obligation of the poetry teacher, then, is quite clear. If he cannot comfortably and proficiently use media, he has an obligation to learn these skills. He might try to teach himself or he might attend university courses

designed to impart these skills to teachers.

There are several drawbacks to the use of media in teaching poetry. A teacher should beware of overemphasizing the use of media. If a student arrives at the stage where he can get turned on to poetry only through media, one of the purposes of his studying poetry has been lost. For it is hoped that when this student has left the classroom he will want to sometimes sit down and ponder poetry on his own. If media has become a crutch for him, he may find that he can't really respond without it. He has been responding to media rather than to poetry itself. This happens to many students if the classroom media atmosphere is too strong. The media actually becomes a distractor. Students respond mainly to it rather than to the poetry. Additionally, many poems do not lend themselves well to media accompaniment. Their medium is words. No more, no less; just words. And the poet intended this encounter between reader and words to be unique. Many poets, when they composed their works, surely had no thoughts of guitar accompaniment or strobe lights or overhead transparencies enhancing their poetical atmospheres. They relied on language, and if the language itself does not bring about full poetical experience, either the poet or the reader is deficient.

Again, it should be stated that media is a valuable tool if not overused. And the teacher of poetry would be wise to involve talented students in media presentations. Student artists, for example,

might be engaged to illustrate poems. Musicians might provide musical accompaniment and effective oral readers can certainly be helpful.

In several places in this paper, the use of the library was emphasized. Students must often find poems, information on poets or historical periods, etc. An imaginative teacher might use this situation to advantage. High school students must become proficient in the use of the library. Rather than teach them this directly, a teacher might combine it with poetry study. He perhaps runs the risk of ruining his students' interest in poetry, but careful planning and wise teaching might make such a combination of language arts areas possible.

Emphasizing figures of speech is important. This paper has previously emphasized the importance of an individual's being able to handle figurative language. But far too many teachers go about this in the wrong way. Dunning's principle that mechanics should be taught inductively is imperative. Sister De Frees stated that too many teachers search for symbols and figures of speech with a Geiger Counter. The researcher agrees wholeheartedly. There is no faster way than this to destroy a student's interest in poetry.

Some consideration must be given to the idea of studying particular poets in depth. Many of them, as pointed out in Chapter II, have much to offer modern youth. Also, an in-depth study counteracts

the tendency of some young people to misjudge a person. They might hastily accept or reject a poet because of only superficial contact with him.

However, the coin has another side. Time is a factor in the high school curriculum. If some poets are studied in depth, others will be ignored. And those ignored might have definite appeal for some students. Thus, the teacher is faced with a dilemma. Should he select certain poets for careful examination or should he expose students somewhat superfically to many poets in the hope that they, on their own, might study some of them in depth?

The biographical and non-biographical camps are naturally at odds. The general philosophies of each have been presented elsewhere in this paper. However, the researcher has a slightly different viewpoint. Stephen Dunning said that poetry should be interpersed with other parts of the language arts. Poetry often requires intense concentration, and secondary students cannot handle it for prolonged periods of time. Here is where biographical study might valuably be used. It can provide a break in the study of poetry, and many students find a sketch of poets or of times interesting in itself. This, in other words, is the converse of Dunning's principle. The teacher can intersperse poetry with biography.

For certain students, the poetry writers' workshop idea is valuable. The workshops have important anti-affective elements within

them. Student writers must meet certain objective criteria and they are subjected to rigorous peer criticism. However, this approach can encompass only exceptional students--those who can write poetry. For this reason, this approach is very exclusive. There is certainly value in letting students express themselves through writing poetry. Some show outstanding sensitivity and insight. But few will ever write it professionally, and most, as adults, might write it occasionally. It is hoped, though, that they will read and enjoy it as adults. This, then, is the main purpose of poetry study--to make students voluntary readers of poetry. The workshop idea has value, but teachers involved in these projects should be careful not to emphasize writing to the detriment of a thorough high school poetry reading experience.

One other point is relevant to this issue. It was emphasized in Chapter II that the teacher of poetry must himself be a wide reader of poetry. A similar principle applies here. The teacher who emphasizes the writing of poetry should himself be an occasional writer of poetry.

Providing outside speakers for poetry classes is an excellent deviation from the ordinary class routine. Students naturally tire of their teacher at times and a new face provides a refreshing stimulus. The experience of hearing and seeing a good poet read his poems is a very stimulating one for most classes. It can provoke discussion and makes both the class and the poet feel somehow fulfilled.

However, the teacher must be careful to select a truly qualified speaker or be prepared for a disastrous experience. Students will not accept pretenders and find it difficult to show such persons even the rudiments of courtesy. In a predominately rural area, qualified speakers are quite hard to find. So the Montana teacher must be careful not to provide just any speaker so that his class may have some diversion.

The conflict between the affective and anti-affective groups is a vital one. It should first be pointed out that for many teachers there is no conflict. They do not align themselves wholeheartedly with either group, but strive to achieve a comfortable balance between the two extremes.

However, the researcher feels that too many teachers, especially younger ones, place too much emphasis on the affective philosophy. This is grossly unfair to young students. It prohibits them from learning to make sound value judgments. By teaching a student to base his opinion of poetry only on his own highly individualistic reaction to it, a teacher is neglecting to equip that student with important objective criteria--criteria essential to sound and true evaluations of poetry.

Certainly a teacher must let students respond spontaneously to poetry, but then he should gradually and carefully lead them into objective considerations. This is his reponsibility as a teacher.

He should challenge his students by often disagreeing with their poetical interpretations. He can't be expected to know all there is to know about poetry, but he probably knows much more about it than his students do. Accordingly, his opinion is important, and he should not let students trap him into a complete condescention to their values and interpretations.

Stephen Dunning said that students should occasionally be allowed to choose the poetry they wish to study. The researcher agrees, but he would emphasize the word occasionally. If the word always were used instead, another important idea of Dunning's would be negated. This is the view that a teacher should show his students that poetry is written about many things. How can he, if they are allowed to study only what they strongly react to? A skilled teacher might show them that they can react to many kinds of poems. Students whose tastes and interests are thus broadened will probably be deeply appreciative.

The researcher has strongly commented on this issue because he believes that the affective viewpoint is overemphasized in modern classrooms.

Finally, a few comments should be made concerning one of Stephen Dunning's principles for the teaching of poetry. In his principle number six, Dunning emphasized that poetry study should be interspersed with other language arts areas. The researcher agrees.

Concentrated poetry study can be mentally strenuous and secondary students should not be expected to take it in overly strong doses. Even students who greatly enjoy poetry can tire of it when they study it constantly without any diversion.

In view of this, the researcher is somewhat skeptical of the effectiveness of some current language arts elective programs. Most larger high schools have adopted such programs. Students select English courses, generally on a semester basis. They might, for example, study American literature, the short story, modern poetry, advanced composition, world literature, etc. for one semester each. There are many advantages for student and teacher in such a curriculum arrangement. However, an obvious disadvantage presents itself in light of Dunning's recommendation of occasional poetry study. Semester poetry courses do not generally conform to this principle. In them, students are saturated with concentrated poetry study. The results, in many cases, could be disastrous. Ardent poetry fans might be made indifferent, and indifferent students might even become hostile to poetry.

Thus, poetry elective courses are not appropriate. Perhaps the best approach is to make occasonal poetry study part of courses such as American literature, world literature, or creative writing. This would bring about a more balanced approach toward poetry study.

One other obvious disadvantage of the elective approach

presents itself. Poetry study will not be part of some courses. Electives such as business English, the American novel, college preparatory composition, etc. fall into this category. A student with an aversion to poetry might, by careful selection of courses, generally avoid it throughout high school. The larger the high school, and the more elective courses offered, the easier it would be for him to do this. Such a student is cheating himself. He is pre-judging poetry without giving it a chance to work its magic on him. And in view of the comments made in Chapter I of this paper concerning the need for poetry, such avoidance can be viewed as having serious consequences. One hesitates to say that students especially those with low verbal ability, should be forced to study poetry, but it is sad and even tragic, to contemplate students finishing high school without any appreciable contact with poetry.

Both of these issues are serious drawbacks to language arts elective programs as far as poetry is concerned. The researcher can offer no definite solutions.

But administrators, teachers and curriculum directors should be aware of the problem and work toward a satisfactory solution.

SUMMARY

A study of this nature can offer no definite conclusions or recommendations. Accordingly, this chapter is a compilation of the

researcher's opinions on the material presented in Chapter II.

Teachers of poetry should strive to maintain a balance between contemporary and traditional poetry study. Students need contact with both forms and the teacher who overemphasizes one or the other is not being fair to them.

Stephen Dunning's principle that teachers should teach only the poems that they like has some drawbacks. Poetry study might become too teacher-centered and students might not have broad contact with many types of poetry.

Media is a valuable tool in poetry study, but it can be overused. At times it can be a distractor to poetry study, and in other cases, the student who can respond to poetry only with the aid of media is hindered more than helped by it.

Library use is an integral part of language arts programs. The imaginative teacher might combine this area with the study of poetry.

Too many teachers teach the mechanics of poetry other than inductively, and such an approach is self-defeating.

Certain poets offer more than others to contemporary youth, and they might thus be studied in depth. Because of time limitations, however, such an approach might severely limit the number of fine poets that a young person would study.

Biography is viewed by some teachers as non-essential to poetry study. However, it might provide a diversion from concentrated poetry study.

Poetry workshops do involve some students in the writing of poetry. But they should not be overemphasized. The main purpose of poetry study is to make students voluntary readers of poetry.

The teacher who selects outside speakers for his poetry classes must be sure that such people are highly qualified. Youth do not respect pretenders.

The affective approach to poetry is generally overemphasized. As a result, many students value their own opinions too highly, and have no objective criteria from which to judge poetry.

The poetry teacher cannot be expected to know everything possible about the subject. But he is generally more knowledgeable than his students. Accordingly, he has an obligation not to capitulate entirely to their values and preferences.

The semester elective approach to poetry has two serious disadvantages. It can mentally exhaust students by saturating them with poetry, and in larger high schools, the elective approach might allow some students to avoid poetry entirely.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that any present or prospective English teachers who read this study may find in it helpful suggestions for the teaching of poetry.

To the researcher this project has been immensely valuable. He has come to respect other English teachers as true professionals who know and search for effective means of educating youth. He has come to challenge and question some of his own methods of teaching poetry. He has an enhanced respect for poetry as an essential element in human communication. Finally, he has acquired many new ideas about the teaching of poetry which he is anxious to try in his own classroom.

Some administrators and teachers downgrade the importance of poetry in the curriculum. They perhaps view it as essentially non-utilitarian in nature. But they should be more perceptive. As our society becomes more technological, poetry becomes more important. Its value might be seen in light of Robert Frost's comment that poetry provides a momentary obstacle to confusion. It does just that. It is a strong bulwark against a general breakdown in the ability to use language effectively. Furthermore, it acts as a humanizing influence in the midst of an increasingly dehumanized society.

Young people instinctively recognize poetry's value. They will respond to it enthusiastically when it is skillfully taught in our high schools. Thus, English teachers have a serious obligation to make themselves true craftsmen in the important art of teaching poetry.

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