"THE MEDIA + THE RELUCTANT READER"

NATE - 3/1967

Your main concern - the impact of the media on the teaching of response to literature among young people.

A commitment to literature as an imaginative activity; to its meaning + relevance in terms of the quality of life + personality of the reader. This implies a concept of the positive effects of literature of high seriousness; a certain way of valuing the sensibility which is responsive to literature + imaginative work; a way of characterising the ideal common reader.

These are the implicit values of the pursuit of literature, at once personal, cultural + educational. These values need to be stated.

To suggest later.

(1) that much of what we teach, necessarily, is not literature of the highest quality. That taught in the examination context, it need not necessarily develop the sensibility in the ways we imagine. That certain compromises in relation to the ideal lit. taught in the ideal way to the ideal receptive child are undertaken by us in our roles as teachers.

(2) that our teaching of lit. has many functions + purposes - uses + gratifications - not allowed for in the 'ideal situation' + that we should face these squarely extrd. literary/elicit

(3) that the ideal common reader + the ideal response nowhere exists. Lit + criticism are more exploratory activities than we accept

Our conception of lit, of reading, of the sensibility, of the reader - reluctant or not - needs to be radically extended + sophisticated.

Teachers already aware of this. Hence the crisis within English teaching the assertive-defensive stance, the search for some pseudo-scientific escape routes - linguistics: and the simplistic hostility towards the mass media, which have brought out these ambiguities + compromises. Media function as stereotyped scapegoat.

The best of what is read - the defence of lit. is often unreal - a Gutenberg galaxy response - based on the primacy of the written word. - McLuhan territory

Why is Kon-Tiki better than High Noon or 2-Cars or Softly Softly?

(A) Direct impact of t.v., direct correlation with reading.

(1) initially, t.v reduces the time spent on reading books, magazines, comics.

(2) but children with no t.v. spent little time reading at all, and

(3) the reading consisted mainly of adventure stories, comics, thrillers + romances.

(4) in general reading of addicts more immature than the more selective children.

(5) main impact on those who were already heavy readers of comics, mags, romances.

(6) In this group need for simple, stereotyped, readymade entertainment is strong. This type of entertainment is displaced by t.v. viewing. This has to do with content - similar content in t.v. more effectively presented. TV. ∴ provides the same fare, fulfils the same need & replaces the heavy dependence on comics etc. HIMMELWEIT - New Society

(7) In the group more selective more used to reading books, the initial drop seems to be made up. In the long run, books for book-readers are immune to t.v.

(8) pattern of reading may be affected. More non-fiction,

use of books dramatised or serialised on t.v. Volume may be maintained; new interests stimulated. But tastes are more standardised + uniform.

(9) For both groups — comic readers predominately, book readers for an interim period — there may be a reduction in reading practice. Slow readers badly handicapped by this break.

(10) These studies are before-and-after t.v. comparative studies. The pattern may be modified or altered for the present generation who grow up with t.v. from the earliest years.

(B) More indirect relationships: Between the quality of imaginative life offered in fact & the media; between the kinds of uses we make of t.v. and of literature.

(1) Three important qualifications:

(a) The impact of the mass media are not direct but indirect. They operate through other persons, in conjunction with the social situation, the personality needs of the child or adult.

- The insecure or immature child will be drawn to the stereotyped work, whether in reading (comics) or in television & the mass media.

- the social network

(b) the impact of the mass media is selective. To some extent, viewers take from the material what they want: they find in it what they bring to it.

- attention to latent themes of hostility, aggression, violence or reassurance from material which is overtly differently organized.

- Thematic apperception tests: children restructure stories in line with their personality + social needs.

- Of course, an interaction or fit between needs/content. To some extent, the material must offer the opportunity to be selectively structured in this way.

- the same thing may be true for television. Readers may not be 'ideal readers', but may use television in conjunction with emotional needs.

- it may be that great art or work of imaginative power in the media is defined precisely by its power to control or structure what we take from it. Then to make us attentive to values, situations, possibilities in life which we 'imaginatively' give ourselves to in the willing suspension of disbelief. True both for art + the mass media.

- entering the viewing or reading situation has many points in common. We take on a fictional world, we identify

with + project ourselves empathically into the material, we live out the experiences at second hand. All art - lit + the media - is "as if" activity. fictional activity. Symbolic interaction. Harding shows that, in reading a looky, the range of Types of identification, projection etc are wider than we think - for the transient & the involved to the participating & the loss of self to the work. Few works of either lit or the media command this full involvement

- Our projection is within an imaginative construction which is the work. It is not a cognitive or evaluative assent to the manifest values, the beliefs, ideas or the message. It is the latent themes + patterns which exert their control, via language,

image characterisation, plot, resolution, structure.

(c) the media are not prime movers. They do not so much produce great attitude a personality a behaviour change as reinforce existing pre-dispositions + orientations.

(B2) All let is a form of escape. If we contrast let with the media we must mean something about the modes, the qualities, the uses of escapism.

(3) much media material does provide relaxation, increase for care entertainment escapism.

- substitute for real human contact.

- a means of emotional release - a character cry, surprises happy or sad.
- vicarious participation, substitute per social activity.
- a compensation for problems + anxieties in real life.
- certain lessons for problem solving. Superficial, unreal, simple solutions, simple + stereotyped.
- helps to adjust to the realities of life by sublimation + identification.
- escapist material more popular among frustrated or disturbed children. Form of symbolic relief or acting out. Subject to personality or family disturbance, worries, fears, feelings of rejection.

general feelings of insecurity, anxiety about growing up.

- orientation away from these real situations, a desire to escape
- fixation at the stereotyped level among addicts
- promote social apathy

(4) Interaction between what the media provide + what the users want or need.

- tv. addicts turn to heavy viewing (a) because of the kind of person he is, the situation he is in, and (b) because of what the media have to offer

a 'fit'

- media do not create this orientation.

- but it does confirm intensify + support the weltanschauung, the outlook, the orientation.

KLAPPER P179

- a fit between the needs of audience + the material supplied.

KLAPPER P186

- no research explains the true dimensions of this interaction. Does suggest the need for a cultural model which would explain the simultaneous existence + mutual interaction of a common weltanschauung KLAPPER P190 P202 P 189

this pattern includes most written literature as well as most mass media material. Both are often supportive + reinforcing of the world-view they share with the audience. The media no doubt positively reinforce + intensify this world-view. They do not create it.

- the interpretation of the world-view, the relation of the media + consciousness to it, is the core of cultural studies: the structure of feeling.

- The critical function of art + art. Imitates life, but estranges it in the moment of symbolic detachment from it. While art is like this, some