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Minutes of the Faculty Meeting

November 14, 1945

A meeting of the faculty was held in the Student Lounge, Wednesday, November 14, 1945, at 2:00 p.m.

Absent: Mr. Baldridge, Dr. Davis, Mr. Forbes, Mr. Fromm, Miss Hill, Miss Ranaudo, Mr. Smith.

Panel: Miss Osgood, Mr. Roethke, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Hyman, Mr. Holt, Mr. Boepple.

Mr. Jones: This meeting is to be devoted to a panel discussion of three basic courses, FORMS OF LITERATURE, FORMS OF VISUAL ART, and THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC. The panel has a tentative outline worked out with the Faculty EPC which will be followed more or less. We were all agreed it would be much better if you confined yourselves in the first part of the meeting to asking factual questions to elicit elucidation rather than argument. After all panel statements have been made, we will open the meeting up to general discussion of problems, but we will try to get a clear presentation first. After all statements have been made we can discuss analogies between various fields and various courses. Miss Osgood will be the main spokesman for FORMS OF LITERATURE. The other instructors are prepared to add to, elucidate, amend her statement.

Miss Osgood: For a few minutes I will be the spokesman for FORMS OF LITERATURE. Our aim is to improve -- which really means to create, even inaugurate -- students' reading habits, and to improve their writing habits. This applies especially to the reading of imaginative literature and the writing of expository prose -- though, as you know, we also give them training in reading expository prose and in imaginative writing. We tend in this training to stress grasping the texts as experiences in themselves, rather than as clues to the Western tradition. What we begin with are the twenty or thirty students in each section and the texts we have chosen to use. We are convinced that these texts have meanings; the students, many of them, are not convinced. We aim to get them to see a meaning. That means that we train them to have a unified apprehension of the work -- to learn to use their senses, emotions, minds in such a way that they do have an aesthetic experience. We believe in literature as metaphor, not as a mere bundle of ideas; and we believe in getting the students to relate their literary experience to their other experiences, to believe in the specific experience of a poem or play or novel and to make it a part of their own lives. This is a difficult and extremely complex job, but we know it is essential and we know it can be done. One important way is through stressing form and its implications, through stressing the relation between form and content. We aim to get them to improve their observation, to see the inadequacies of their sense of language and to revive it, to discover rhythms and the rhythm of

the whole work; we also help them to develop vocabularies for discussing these matters.

FORMS OF LITERATURE is basic in these senses. It is indispensable for further college work, for it is in this course that the students are taught to read. It is also extremely useful to them in their writing. Though of course all teachers who correct papers are teaching students to write, we do know that it is in this work that they get the most intensive training in the use of language. Though this course, especially in the days when it was called LITERATURE AND THE HUMANITIES, used to take into consideration those aims mentioned in the catalogue about "developing the student's awareness and understanding of the significant elements and trends in Western culture," etc., I do not think that the course as it is now operating lays much stress on them.

As to set-up, this course is really four courses, but work in any one of them is accepted as preparation for any further work in literature. Though we all divide the work into four blocks, and deal at some time with a modern novel, a poetic drama (Shakespeare), an anthology of lyric poetry, and some expository prose, we all have different beliefs and methods about training students to get the material, and we do not all use the same texts in the same order. We do not agree to teach any fundamental concepts, aesthetic, moral, religious or other; we do not agree to teach any particular approach to the cultural heritage; nor to teach any one particular method of reading; nor any particular style of writing. This does not mean that we are aiming to be different. What we have is four different slants towards the same thing.

From now on I will be talking about the two sections of my course in FORMS OF LITERATURE. I have one which begins in April, one which begins in August. The section which began in April 1945 studied James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, went on to study Plato's Symposium, Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, and is now working on lyric poetry. The other section began with Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady, and is now studying Plato. What I wish to do now is to describe the method of beginning this course with studying the novel.

If you have them study the novel first, you stress the improvement of reading habits first. My intention is to get them to notice more connections between things in a novel than they have been in the habit of noticing before, and to see the role of these things in their total experience of the book. During the first session I get them to talk about what they think a novel is, and why we like to read novels. We discuss the fact that it is not merely a vehicle for expressing the author's favorite ideas; the fact that it is all expressed in words -- not, as in a play script, with the intention of having actors, setting, etc., provided; the fact that the author is at work on the reader, whether he is very conscious of the author's presence in the novel, or not. We usually have occasion for discussing such terms as "true-to-life", "realistic", "escapist", "morbid", etc. Then I ask them to study the first chapter of the novel for the next time, and to read as far as possible in the book.

This autumn, as I have often done before, I began the discussion of the novel The Portrait of a Lady with the purpose of getting them to discover the functional role of the setting. That the setting itself

has something to do with the total import of the book is frequently a new idea to them. I also discuss, and get them to discuss, the tone set, the behavior of the characters, the themes and topics of conversation introduced and the kind of vocabulary used in the first chapter. This year I had them write a sort of short story about the arrival of a young person for a meeting with strangers. That's the situation in the first chapter of The Portrait of a Lady. Criticism of these papers in class emphasized the use of concrete detail to aid in expressing the emotion of the young person. The other point emphasized in criticism was, this year, their use of trite, flowery, or colorless language. The next assignment was a short expository paper discussing the methods used in six introductory chapters in any novels they chose to write about. In criticizing these papers in class I emphasized sensitivity of observation, acuteness of perception of the role of the first chapter in the whole book -- whether they had already read the book, or were merely guessing -- and, with regard to their writing, I commented on the orderliness of the discussion, the transitions, the parallelisms, the directness and clarity of expression, etc. I read the opening paragraph of one paper to the class, and the class rewrote it together. It was quite a poor paragraph. At this time I recommended to some of them that they acquaint themselves with Perrin's Writer's Guide and Index to English.

Then I start asking them about various lines of development in the book, working not only continuously, but also jumping backwards and forwards to tie up related points. About half way through I ask them to block out the main parts of the book for themselves, and discuss any differences of interpretation there may be. When it is discovered that different outlines are different because their makers were approaching the book from different points of view, I try to use that for the purpose of pointing out how many things may be going on in a book at the same time, and how easy it is to lose out if one becomes too fixated on one single factor in the organization. When there is complete agreement about any one dividing point, I use that to show how the author can express all his intentions in a key episode. (For example: In The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel's decision to return to England would be a definite dividing place whether you were outlining the book from the point of view of the places where Isabel lived, or from the point of view of the people she was most deeply involved with, or according to the stages of her self-knowledge.)

I believe that spending two months on one novel develops a habit of intensive study, gives them the feeling of the value of getting to know a text well enough so that they are aware they have experienced a long series of discoveries about the relationships within the book. They find all sorts of parallels, mirrors, emphases, contrasts, rhythms, etc. Though they do not, I believe, really learn to see the real form of the novel, they have made some progress towards achieving a method for doing that.

Along with this book they read about half a dozen others. They are asked to write a long paper about one of them. I give them a very hard topic; I ask them to write on the structure of that novel. They flounder around; they come up and ask endless questions. Most of them settle on tracing through one thread to discover what light that throws on the way the book is put together. I tell them to try to watch the

the author at work; but very few can do that. They do manage to tell about their reactions. And they don't write book reports. The papers, as you can imagine, are not very good. They mistake the part for the whole, and they are quite bumptious in proving that that part is the whole. But it's not time wasted; it's time well spent.

Then I go on to the study of Plato, preferably the Symposium, and spend the next two months talking about structure of a discussion. They analyze the good and bad points about the speeches; find out how points are discarded and developed from speech to speech; outline Socrates's speech; discuss and practice definition; and, this year, if I can get them to do it, write a Platonic dialogue. My main effort in the discussion of the text is to point out the relationships and differences between the dramatic development and the logical development.

I will now turn the discussion over to Mr. Roethke.

Mr. Roethke: You can't talk about what you do in freshman courses without referring to bromides from education, particularly progressive education. If I use them, it's not that I think they are original with me.

I want to pick up Mr. Tucker's question at the last meeting: Why begin with lyric poetry? There are a lot of reasons you could set up on paper. Some in practice have become more dubious. I believe in the short lyric as an educational instrument. The lyric is a comprehensive human experience. People have a capacity for poetry, until they are twenty-five, a lot of them, and they lose it. All children are poetic. A genuine effort not just to consider lyrics or read poems but to get them to attempt to write them, or if they already do write them, to write them more cleanly, to develop a sense of structure within what they do, is an aim that can be attempted. It's true that there is an area where (I can see people outside that don't care about poetry anyway) it doesn't seem it could be useful. I had a personal reason as well for beginning with poetry this year. Since I was to be here only one semester, I wanted to do what I was most interested in. Then I had got some of my best results in an advanced course, Verse Form, by these methods. I wanted to try some of the things I try with other students on freshmen. There are still other reasons. The practice of writing verse or attempting it and having anyone look at it, even from a grammatical or syntactical point of view, is a healthy intellectual discipline. It improves gummy prose.

My section was too big, 22. It should be only 14 or 15, but nothing could be done about it; the sections had to be too big. In terms of personnel, the group has a fairly high IQ. There is no really bright girl, four or five with something of an ear for language -- an even section of high-level mediocrity, that kind of thing. That made the job even tougher. I began, using as a basis the anthology which had been created primarily in the past. Some of the modifications made last year weren't as good as it originally was, but it was still good. I told ^N them, Here are the six sections of the anthology. We'll function naturally and humanly if possible. The method in class is associational, but with

a core of reference. We went into the differences between prose and poetry. I began the first time in a wrong way, talking about what the differences are. They wrote that all down, but it didn't mean much. Only working with a concrete thing means anything at all. I was way out ahead of them most of the time. If you do believe that a class should be a unique experience you get way ahead of them, you have to be getting them back on the road, pulling the process back. . . . They sit alphabetized, nobody in the front row but over in the corner.

As to their assignments: The first was an autobiographical segment, you might call it "Poetry and I", their early experiences of poetry. This was a very revelatory assignment, taught me a lot about them and what they don't know. It taught me the immense damage that had been done with these students by the preparatory schools. They were steeped in rubbish, or the less dubious material. The second assignment was a piddling one. I gave them several examples of poetic prose, Lawrence, Joyce, etc., and had them analyze these and bring in examples of their own. The third assignment was to write a poem of their own which would at least work sound patterns, work one vowel or two, or would be an observational poem. They had a choice. They were told also to bring in a folder of anything they had done previously. That was really something. I couldn't write comments on all those poems. They all brought in six copies so everybody could see them, and it took a whole week to go through those poems in class. I tried to suggest what was wrong, what was right, and still try to keep the class moving. I was sweating like Wendell Wilkie. In some cases after cutting the thing right down a student would come up to say, "You weren't very specific." So I said, all right, here are five points, bing, bing, bing. She's gone home and improved it somewhat. Three or four of the pieces had real fresh observation. Half a dozen had some sense of rhythm. Almost all of them revised it at least improving it somewhat. About a third rewrote their prose pieces.

The next three assignments were papers written in class about particular poems. The first was just a random selection, Rossetti's "The Woodspurge" and an Elinor Wylie Sonnet. I asked them to analyze and evaluate. I told them to paraphrase if that helped, to follow the figures through if there were figures. I said, regard the paper as an approximation; then try to show whether you think it's good or bad. Some answers were just nonsense. In all three of the papers some were bad, but there was at least an improvement in seeing all that was going on on the page, multiple reference. Then I gave them an early assignment of an original anthology, to duplicate the class anthology, at least three examples in each section with some comment, five pages of introduction. Quite specific.

As to my own shortcomings, I have been playing hard-to-get about personal conferences. I want to see whether they are really trying to work on it. I don't think viewed objectively you can jump up and down about it. Some are writing better, working on the stuff more closely. The whole scheme is a romantic notion of education, a belief in their capacity which is maybe a naive belief, to recapture the creative. If we content ourselves with the paraphrase, the neat and tidy paper, we are not If you try to keep the level fairly high the duller students will think you are being vague. What throws them is activity

of mind, multiplicity of suggestion, shift of point of view in a poem, doing more than one thing at once, moving along fast. Metaphorical thought bothers them. They have been taught to think, "This is true, this is an example." The other way -- this is the poem, not work the other way, that throws them.

Miss Osgood: Jim, do you want to tell now about beginning with expository prose?

Mr. Jackson: Scale means something. It's like the foot soldier: train him tactically, then strategically. If you show form as a necessity of grammar, you have gone a long way, or at least taken the first step toward showing them form in a novel. It's a matter of taking "form is meaning" and trying to revive that a little.

You might put it that if I have to commit vivisection at all I prefer to perform it on non-fictional prose first, then on fictional prose. I prefer an analysis a little less cold and deliberate for fiction: to let some of those things ring like bells. Also I try to bring out to them that we discount the secondary source in this school, and yet if their papers are paraphrases, analyses without illumination, they are secondary sources themselves: not a very attractive position to be in. I would rather work with fiction, but in order to develop instrumentality I start with non-fictional prose, starting right off with imagery and metaphor. In non-fictional prose, imagery is linear, at best harmonic; later in poetry it may be circular, a more comprehensive thing. There is no break about the difference between prose and poetry. That kills it. They put it in their note-books but it doesn't have a direct reference. I started with Lincoln. You can locate his sources; there are echoes in every line. Over the course of his writing you can see the new influences coming in, influences from new sources, metaphorical language coming in. In our Library we have only a Blackstone pony, but we have used other legal material as background. Then we used short pieces, some of Donne's sermons, some of the Screwtape letters, Twain's essay on Cooper, as an example of a literary essay not stuffy, not obviously erudite, etc.

I try to develop through examples some ability to make a standard analysis, to know what things came first, what came second, the place of a paraphrase that would not constitute an analysis, etc. Not just padding with hot licks before and after. You don't understand form unless you can reproduce it, work in it. You have to work in such a way that they will not have a notation or programmatic memory of what form is, but will be able to write (even about form) and have the form in what they write. They will have been working in analysis rather than photographing it off the page and putting it back.

So far it has worked quite well. There are vastly fewer simple mistakes in rhetoric, focus, development of idea, etc. Using a mirror technique in non-fictional prose has helped. It helps make a bridge into fiction. I would rather let some of those rhythmical necessities, necessities of form in the ideas, come out as they hear them, as they hear a rhyme, rather than grab hold and reel it in like a thread until they haul it in. I prefer to have them work at one remove instead of two or three.

After that we go into poetry and after that the play. In a very short time I have had some success in going at it in that way. I explain my terminology in the first class and also work in the recoverable past that they all have. When they come here they see language only visually and understand it so; it has always been on a blackboard and in a book. The other reactions have been stifled, gotten lost, grown vestigial. It is difficult but worth while to make it come to life again, particularly to experience that thing with a unified and really comprehensive sensory equipment.

Miss Osgood: Stanley, would you like to tell how you go about it?

Mr. Hyman: I have a special problem in that I haven't finished a whole year and seen the progress of a whole class, evaluated that, and started another on the basis of that experience. My approach is still experimental, tentative, fumbling. I have a few notions of what I have been trying, what has seemed to work, what hasn't seemed to work. I don't lean toward any of the four types so there was no reason not to start in with the traditional structure this year. My order is therefore novel, prose, play, poetry. For a while, when we thought of trying to make all sections different this year, I threatened to begin with the play. But this was very difficult and I finally couldn't see my way to it. I backed down.

Coming in the middle of the year I inherited Kit's course. They had a very good background. I didn't realize how good until I saw a group of entering freshmen this semester. I had the special problem of imposing my point of view on top of what Kit had begun to impose on top of the lunacy they brought with them from school. We plunged right into Antony and Cleopatra. We were fighting it over line by line and word by word. I gave all the students one of Empson's essays, an essay on Sonnet 94 of Shakespeare, an analysis at very great length. Empson is a very detailed man. He gives several pages of general analysis and then several pages of line by line analysis. I had thought they were finding a lot of stuff and getting some depth. But the reaction to the Empson was that it wasn't justified, there wasn't that much to say, a sonnet couldn't stretch out to ten pages. The problem I have been working on now is to prepare them so that they will get that Empson article and will be convinced that a sonnet will stretch and perhaps will be able to stretch it themselves.

Another special problem is the size of the class. Mine is 27, for a collection of unholy reasons that I don't understand. Actually it is probably good for my angle. I stop the class until they furnish the meaning I want, or some meaning. In a small class, they just stop, whereas with 27 someone is bound to have it, it's that big. There always tends to be someone who can produce at any given moment. From the writing point of view the size of the class is perfectly terrible. I assigned four pieces of writing this first half, there will be two or three in the second half. I think it is important to give them a lot of writing. I simply cannot correct the 27 papers in the detail I would want. I tend to go over some papers for one or one and a half hours. That multiplied by 27 multiplied by seven times a year is a lot. Even that is very superficial to what should be done. I can note obvious errors, some structural points, perhaps write a paragraph or two on the paper as a

whole... One student has a father who teaches. She sent home her paper, and he sent it back with four or five thousand words in addition pointing out the errors I had missed. I probably could have done it if she were my daughter, and if I didn't have 26 other daughters. But it was a sharp reminder of how minimal these criticisms were. It would be better in a smaller class or in an ideal situation.

Another problem is using the traditional assignments of this course or inventing one of my own. My experience has been the ones I invent are more useful for me. The ones I have borrowed from group practice haven't worked as well. To my class last semester with the play and poetry my first assignment was of my own invention. I asked them to do a tentative sketch for a dramatization of a novel they had read with Miss Osgood. I think that was successful. They got some suggestion of the difference between the novel form and the play form. The play is not just a dramatized novel, and the novel is not just a play written out more, etc. They got some notion of form negatively. I think they learned something about the canon of the novel form, less about the drama. I gave them a "traditional" assignment this semester in the early part of their study of A Portrait of the Artist, asking them to write down one or more early memories. This seems to have worked for some people, but I didn't get much of what I wanted. That convinced me that I would have to design assignments for my special needs. Then last year with the other class I gave them a very bad assignment. As a final paper I gave them one poem of Hopkins, "The Windhover", and said, "Take a week on it, write out of your own head. Do not do any research. I have no objection to secondary sources, but this time bring something written out of the human mind spinning." The good ones failed miserably. They had done the research and filtered it in. The bad ones, who never did any research in the library, kind of thrived on it. Either I hadn't been able to convey to them what I wanted, or . . . but I found myself in the position of penalizing the hard workers and glorifying the loafers. There were one or two very good papers. I can see that I will have to work out more intelligent assignments.

Another problem is that everything goes a little more slowly than it should. I tend to go over the thing very carefully, word by word, image by image, line by line. I am still kind of working to finish it. By the time they finish it they have really been over it, sick to death of it, but something registers. The trouble is that whatever comes in the second part is very much skimmed. To the extent that they can carry over they can move faster in the second part, but there does not seem to be much carry-over. I am not using the Plato or short pieces, but Thoreau's Walden. My own interest is not in the Plato, but I am pleased to get third-hand Plato in Walden and have them read Plato as background. I don't know how it will work. The non-fictional form has its own canon and own structure but there is a carry-over. There are things in common. I can sell them the first point easier than the second. Things they can see and feel in the novel they can't see in non-fiction. So the whole job has to be begun again. This is probably common experience, but it is new to me, I am just hitting it this week.

Those are the only problems I can think of in my own teaching. I can't speak for teaching FORMS OF LITERATURE, but I have experienced some very definite successes. This year I am teaching two of the better students I had last year, and I find a good deal of it did register.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Holt will now tell us something about FORMS OF VISUAL ART.

Mr. Holt: As far as the general purpose of the course is concerned it would seem to be pretty obvious that our very specific purpose, as well as general purpose, is to develop in students an awareness of visual form, whether architectural, sculptural, pictorial, etc., any of the mediums; and to try to develop students to the point where they actually do get aesthetic experience from visual form. The second purpose is to give them, actually to instruct them in, some of the basic principles of plastic organization.

As far as the organization of the class is concerned, it's divided into two sections. They do two hours studio a week and meet with me for two hours a week. There's a certain logic that we follow which runs through the studio practice and through the theory sessions. We start with simple elements of design such as the linear and pictorial and go on to organizations in value, without color, then on to questions of texture, color relationships, and finally actual consideration of sculpture in the round and actual spatial organization as you get it in architecture, whereas it's always illusionary in pictorial structure. In studio they do actual exercises and at the same time in class periods they look at things, using visual material, slides, reproductions, and things of that sort which exemplify these principles that he has been talking to them about. There has been some difficulty in the students' realizing any very definite connection between the two groups. Either we teach dumbly or we have very dumb students if they can't see the connection.

As far as my assignments are concerned, I have assigned them two projects right through the year. One is a history notebook, a visual history notebook in which I have asked them to choose some significant object, something they like particularly, to exemplify each of the eight or ten main Western styles (?) and to write in connection with that a very short paper, preferably not longer than a page, saying something about the culture of which that art is an expression. This assignment will be changed slightly in the future. The other is a design notebook, a visual anthology, choosing their own reproductions, but following the logic of the course as I have suggested that it exists in principles of plastic organization, linear, value, etc. In that case they will do very little writing, if necessary some graphic analyses, or a small verbal analysis. They have also been given a reading list right at the beginning of the year which contains about seventeen items. They are told to start anywhere, in order to lick the book situation with a very large class. They have been asked to write short book reports, two every two weeks. They have been asked to write the book reports in the manner of a pauper sending a telegram to a fool. The results have been more nearly a sampling than getting the meat out and re-presenting it. One reason for the book reports is to put pressure on them to get the reading done regularly; the other is so that I can determine whether they are gathering something of the concepts that we are dealing with and understanding them. Also, I have arranged group conferences, this year, eight groups of five each, and meet them for one half hour a week. It's a terrific load but a time saver in the end. I can deal with the written work directly with the student instead of trying to write an essay about them. I am trying to give you the mechanics of the thing.

So far as general concepts are concerned we do obviously lay an emphasis in that the bias is directed toward the creative as against the naturalistic and imitative. We treat visual art as a means of expression like any other art. The course is basic to the field in that these principles of plastic organization are considered pretty thoroughly in theory and practice and in the notebook, which is an actual creative exercise to arrange the books as handsomely as they can. It is basic to Western culture in that there is a certain amount of reading of history and aesthetics, and in that through slides and illustrative materials we do give them a wide frame of reference. We try to let things speak for themselves to a great extent.

As to specific difficulties: The class is far too large, completely unwieldy, 43 to 45. It is extremely difficult to handle a group of that kind, particularly with the extra difficulty of verbalizing in a non-verbal field. The students fall into an initial confusion. I have tended to deliberately plunge them into rather difficult stuff, but the confusion is beginning to wear off. The most confused have come through better than others. The reading list has been short enough so that they can re-read. I would rather have them do that than extend myself on the reading list. There is the difficulty of breaking down prejudices, the horrible experiences they have had before in school and home. There is also a difficulty in getting material for their notebooks this year. The stuff hasn't been made for some time. Instead of a history notebook in future they will be given a choice. They may do either that or choose a specific period or a specific artist and do a more concentrated job on him, or on the period.

In so far as the success of the course is concerned, I can see it in individual cases. So far as general success, that is hard to estimate. Perhaps it is more successful with those outside the field, because they are fresher and less prejudiced in their approach.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Boepple will speak for THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC.

Mr. Boepple: A basic course in English literature can take for granted a rough working knowledge of the language. But it would be futile to undertake a study of fugues and sonatas with students who have only the scantiest experience in the elements of music. For this reason, two consecutive basic courses in music are given at Bennington College. The first, THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC, has no exact parallel in our curriculum. But the scope and level of the second, THE LITERATURE OF WESTERN MUSIC, corresponds roughly to those of our basic courses in literature and visual art.

The students taking THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC course fall into two categories: those without previous experience in music, and those who have had instruction of one kind or other. A small number of the former pursue further studies in music, some even majoring in it. But most music majors come from the second group. The skill they bring to college is usually strictly interpretive -- they either sing or play an instrument. Very few have had general instruction or creative experience in music. For instance, only three or four out of 45 applicants were qualified this year to omit this course. It is significant that students

who possess instrumental or vocal skill are rarely better qualified than totally untrained students when it comes to hearing music. For this reason, the needs of both groups are much more similar than might be expected. The only troublesome disparity is between those who are familiar with music notation and those who are not.

The chief aim of this course is then to develop the students' ability to hear and to understand the functions of rhythm, melody, and harmony, or, to use a somewhat inaccurate analogy, to acquaint them with the elements of musical grammar. It has been argued that a systematic exposure to music will awaken all the dormant sensibilities of an intelligent listener. This may be true in isolated cases. Perhaps it was quite true before radio and gramophone corrupted people's listening habits. (Last year I have seen in the record library room people writing papers while they listened to music at the same time, or even writing harmony exercises. Why they chose that room -- it probably was the warmest. They didn't seem to be uncomfortable.) The fact is that few students know how to focus their musical perception, and fewer still hear anything except the most obvious surface features of a piece. Thus they cannot be aware of the forces underlying musical structure. Blow by blow accounts of symphonies and discussions of their role in Western civilization can, under those circumstances, dwell only on superficialities. It is significant that the only real difficulty I encounter in this course is with students who have factual information without the commensurate ability to hear. (These students say, "I know all of that. Why do I have to come to this course?" Then you give a test and they miss everything in the test, which depends on hearing. They realize they have to hear. They are suddenly very meek and for two or three weeks work hard. Then again, "I know what a tonic chord is, so why should I have to go on doing that?" Then I put in a dominant seventh chord and they can't hear it.)

Practically speaking, the course is organized as follows: One weekly two-hour session is devoted to an outline of the elements of musical expression and the growth of musical language. The students participate by singing examples of the subject under discussion, and by listening to, and by identifying and discussing illustrations played at the piano or on the gramophone. Frequent tests are given to evaluate progress. At the end of each term a short paper on some theoretical or practical subject is required.

For intensive and more individual practice, the students divide into three graded groups, each meeting twice a week for an hour. The beginners' group (Paul Matthen) concentrates on the study of music notation and on elementary ear-training and sight-singing. The intermediate group (George Finckel) practises more advanced ear-training and sight-singing, and the elements of rhythm and melody. The advanced group (Paul Boepple) includes harmony along with the other subjects mentioned. Often some time is devoted to discussion of subjects brought up in the main course. These three groups meet simultaneously so that students can easily be shifted from one group to another as their progress, or absence of progress, may indicate.

Homework consists chiefly of creative exercises in melody, rhythm, and harmony, and of individual practice in ear-training and sight-reading. This kind of homework demands a good deal of concentration and ingenuity.

It takes most students some time before they learn how to organize it efficiently. (The homework is assigned chiefly in connection with the smaller groups. This work offers a particular kind of discipline which is of general value.)

Study material of the kind we need is practically non-existent -- it has to be compiled ad hoc. Occasionally listening to records is assigned. Collateral reading is of little value in this course, its aim being more to develop faculties than to impart knowledge. This is not to say that the student remains mentally idle; quite the contrary. Musical structure is an eminently logical, thought-provoking phenomenon, as many students are finding out, to their great distress.

The completion of both basic courses or their equivalent is required of all majoring in music. Students who wish to pursue interpretive studies purely avocationally may or may not take them. But no instrumental or vocal instruction is offered to students who are not familiar with music notation or whose musical ear is not sufficiently developed. For these, the first year basic course is a prerequisite.

(The course offers groundwork to those who choose music as their major, and is the basic-course-to-the-basic-course to anybody. As such it can be considered as a unit, though it is not on the same level as the basic course in the literature of music. The student who has gone through the course has a more widely awake ear but has not actually gotten into musical literature.)

I might add that, although the division of emphasis between the first and second year basic course is already in effect, it will, because of its recent adoption, be in full working order only next year. At that time it will be possible to define more sharply and to coordinate the small work groups of both courses so that students can attend any of them according to their needs, whether they are enrolled in the first or second year basic course.

Mr. Jones: The meeting is open for discussion, questions, criticisms.

Mr. Hanks: It seems to me as if there were two functions here not described in the catalogue (or perhaps they are described in the catalogue). One seems to be all going throughout here a basic literacy in a new medium, which no one is able to assume, or which they assume to their own chagrin later. And at some other level the facts about Western civilization and culture conflicts within it and the non-historical (non-chronological) historical courses seem to fit in as another kind of basic course. These three courses seem to feel (fill?) the primary need of making one literature within a medium. I am trying to apply this to my own field and see whether this is being accomplished within it.

Mr. Jones: I don't know what differences will be revealed so far as subject matter is concerned. In these three courses certainly there is that emphasis on literacy. Learning to read, teaching people to hear, in the arts teaching people to see.

Mr. Boepple: In order to have a complete picture of music we should have a report of the second-year basic course in music, THE LITERATURE OF WESTERN MUSIC.

Mr. Jones: To be logical, yes. I think we will jump to the WESTERN TRADITION courses next time for analogous purposes at another level.

Mr. Levy will speak on that. The logic of the two music courses is clear as you have put it. Next time we might discuss the courses specifically labelled THE WESTERN TRADITION. You have to see these two basic courses in music as a whole. Mr. Levy is getting at form in a larger sense, the way the literature people do, isn't that right?

Mr. Boepple: In music you can't do it in one year. The situation is different in literature because the students speak the language.

Miss Osgood: In a way.

Mr. Jones: Nobody will admit that the language is learned before they come to college. Each one of these people has commented on it.

Mr. Hyman: It's worse because they think they know the language.

Mr. Jones: You would prefer them to come illiterate?

Mr. Boepple: That is true in music also. There are few who come with preparation, but they come thinking they know because they can describe it in words. But when you play them the thing they are talking about they couldn't to save their souls recognize it.

Mr. Jones: They have a lot of factual knowledge, don't they?

Mr. Boepple: They will tell you what the shape of a symphony is but couldn't recognize one.

Mr. Jones: I imagine in literature they could score pretty well on a literary acquaintance test.

Miss Osgood: Or they think they know a word in a poem because they have seen it written on a blackboard.

Mr. Holt: They look at pictures verbally.

Dr. Chassell: Aren't there always those who say they don't know how to draw?

Mr. Holt: The studio part of FORMS OF VISUAL ART has never been designed to emphasize drawing. The students are never judged on it. They are judged on effort and understanding.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Roethke said all children are poetic. You hear about that in children's art. Is that true of music?

Mr. Boepple: I don't know. Perhaps in some different way. I don't know

what they expect when they come to a course like this. They love to listen to records. There is a hush when I put on a record, so I put on very much fewer. Because I have a good idea what happens when you put one on: the soporific effect of the radio sets in. Another thing that puzzles me: At the very beginning, instead of separate smaller groups I took them all together once a week. I tried to do a great deal through plain singing. We sang, studied, discussed, played, sang again. They don't like to sing! They asked, "When do we stop these singing classes?"

Mrs. DeGray: The basic courses are unique in that they serve not only as introductory to the field but for the non-major. If you were designing a basic courses merely as introductory to the field, stressing only the values of the specialist, would that course be any different from the course you are now teaching? Or are you aware that at some points you have criticized the values of the specialist from the standpoint of general education?

Mr. Boepple: I am aware of what you mean. I think in music there is a potential solution in the small group arrangement. In the large group I teach chiefly from the standpoint of the survey. We work as practically, as actively, as possible, but already the number forbids any great detail. In the small groups (they are large enough, 12 or 13) we can do much more, and adapt it to whatever the need of the particular student is. We can meet both requirements in our field, particularly since I think . . . if we had a choice of offering them a general survey of music forms, talking about the things, on the one hand; and an experience which will enable them to hear the things we were talking about better, on the other, I don't think we should hesitate to give them the experience of more active hearing before giving them the other. And that's what we are doing.

Mrs. DeGray: The small groups are comparable to the studio in FORMS OF VISUAL ART?

Mr. Boepple: Yes.

Miss Osgood: For the FORMS OF LITERATURE courses, introductory is the proper term. If you compare introductory to basic, introductory is the proper term.

Mr. Holt: Haven't we tended to fall between two stools in attempting to deal with historical questions at all? There is very little of it. Or of the aesthetic. I use them only as a stimulation of the seeing process, the actual learning to see.

Mr. Jones: You all concentrate on giving the student an experience rather than encyclopaedic or comprehensive knowledge. A direct experience. Isn't that it?

Mr. Hyman: I'd like to offer a paradox to Mrs. DeGray: I would teach my course just the same to a purely literary group, but the ones who get most out of it are not the potential literature majors. Seemingly there is no conflict. They both need it.

Mr. Jones: You have extraordinarily good students who have no intention of majoring. I hear it on every hand. The same is true in several fields. It is interesting, from the point of view of the aim of literacy. It seems

to me that you are trying to teach a type of literacy that underlies our culture. To that extent it is a pretty valid basic concept. I agree with Millett that all courses should historically and philosophically taught. That doesn't mean you teach history when you do it.

Mr. Brockway: Is there any chance a disparity exists between the major and the non-major because the majors have to take the course?

Mr. Drucker: Why does everybody take FORMS OF LITERATURE?

Miss Osgood: That's what I've been wondering.

Mr. Drucker: That's where my students learn what I want to teach them. At the beginning of the second semester they see what I am after and when I probe it's because of Antony and Cleopatra or some such thing. Do we want everybody to take FORMS OF LITERATURE or is that student inertia? Also, on what basis are students distributed to the various sections?

Miss Osgood: We allow them to sign up for the section they want. It is true that with them it is very frequently a matter of schedule.

Mr. Drucker: Do they know what the differences are?

Miss Osgood: They are told about it at registration.

Mr. Hyman: We try to advise them, to steer them.

Mr. Jones: I can answer your first question somewhat. It is pressure of older students that makes so many take FORMS OF LITERATURE. The course has a great deal of prestige.

Mr. Boepple: It was a most interesting experience to advise freshmen. I was struck by their expression of the issues: I have done pretty well in subject A and subject B. Now subject B I would like to continue. I have done very badly in subject D, so don't you think I should take a course in D? Well over two-thirds of those I had to advise this year took this line. I think it is a very healthy thing, which explains also why students take certain courses. When it comes to art, painting, music, many of them don't know whether they are able at all. In music the experience in high school is so scanty -- many come to college and discover that they have a good ear for music. I know of two or three outstanding cases.

Mr. DeGray: I take it that it is already established in this discussion that basic courses can satisfy the term in two ways: by being introductory, or by being basic to the Western tradition. May I ask whether it is not true that the courses in FORMS OF LITERATURE might be considered basic in both ways whereas in music and art they would not be basic in both ways, only as introduction to their own field. In what way is the music course basic to wider cultural significance unless followed up by a second-year course which Mr. Boepple indicated was obligatory to get the full value out of the introduction?

Mr. Jones: It is basic only in the sense that we define the purposes that we are trying to accomplish: literacy in languages is something that should be a function of liberal education.

Mr. DeGray: Isn't literacy in prose a more indispensable form of literacy than in other fields?

Mr. Drucker: I would doubt it very much. What I would miss in these courses, what I feel valuable in music and art, for non-majors, is the disciplinary effect, the basic effect. It has little to do with introduction to a field. Older students in Political Economy who are more or less dragooned into basic courses in music or art find it releases tremendous energies and shows directly in work on the conceptual or verbal level, adds a dimension of ability or imagination which we tend to underrate or at least haven't played up today.

Mr. DeGray: I agree that it is very good discipline, and that it unleashes new psychic forces within the individual, but as far as clarity of ideas or no salutary effect at all. I seem to remember an old statement around here: people could not be articulate in every medium, therefore an individual articulate in a medium like music and relatively inarticulate in ordinary prose statement was as acceptable as a person articulate in prose and less articulate in music. But when we tried to put that into effect it became obvious that the prose medium is one in which everyone has to be articulate. The prose is really the one thing that is basic in the culture in the way that others are not. I venture to say Paul's presentation in prose has nothing to do with the fact that he knows music. It is part of his general education.

Mr. Woodworth: I am surprised to hear that it might be an either-or proposition. Is it correct that an introductory course has been considered a basic course?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Woodworth is taking up Miss Osgood's point that FORMS OF LITERATURE might best be described as introductory.

Miss Osgood: I meant that "introductory" is a truer label for what is actually going on in FORMS OF LITERATURE now, on the basis of our actual statements. When it was called LITERATURE AND THE HUMANITIES, at the time the curriculum was reorganized, there was more tendency to stress elements and trends in Western culture. More and more, it has become more strictly forms of literature, rather than emphasis on the humanities.

Mr. Drucker: Isn't it true that the stress has become more and more discipline, reading and writing, formulation of ideas, organization, etc.?

Mr. Hyman: We are stressing the creative more than the disciplinary.

Mr. Roethke: You set up a conflict there. The creative is disciplinary. The simple business of learning by doing, while it is not the only way, is a way. It is the hardest task. If you lose sight of it Cleaning up a piece of verse so that it makes sense and so that the order is most effective may not be very fancy but as a disciplinary exercise you go a long way.

Mr. Jackson: Literacy is not just something on a blackboard. Take the wax out of their ears, the blinders off too.

Mr. Roethke: We too encounter an excessive ability to verbalize. They can bustle around and read 200 books and talk back, but in the clutch they can't do a damn thing. ^{clinch?}

Mrs. DeGray: I don't assume there must be a conflict between the two aims, but I do think the average introductory course in the field is different from a basic course. (I thought of our basic course effort as an attempt to criticize) Today we have in science only introductory courses, but they are not labelled basic. That is an inconsistency that ought to be faced. Maybe we should have a set of introductory courses and then basic courses.

Mr. Mendershausen: I think it's the difference between information and education. What we desire in basic courses is an educational objective. That involves elements of the field but the purpose is not to serve the field.

Mr. Jones: What one would hope would be that many special studies courses are trying to achieve the purposes that are achieved in the so-called basic courses, but the basic courses are underlined as basic courses in order to place a special obligation in that aspect of the curriculum. We would expect them to be taught more historically and philosophically. It is a definite obligation there.

Mr. DeGray: That is the dual thing. Try to relate the course to the general culture as described in the catalogue; but because of the nature of the material, we have to place 90% of the emphasis on the introduction to a new technique. Why not introduction to science?

Miss Osgood: We don't lay much stress on the historical-philosophical in FORMS OF LITERATURE.

Mr. Boepple: For an information sort of course we wouldn't need a year. If we wanted just to instruct the student what this field is all about we wouldn't need a whole year's course. We could do it in two weeks.

Mr. Tucker: In listening to the literature faculty talk about the basic courses it seemed to me that their method gave me more hint of what they mean by basic than the text studies. The method of trying to arouse the student to a whole response rather than to infuse information, a creative going out toward the terror, or majesty, and connection of words, not phrase-making or grammatical analysis, strikes me as being the basic part, for it affects the sense of the past in a very live way. That is basic educationally. Where that isn't done, it isn't basic.

Mr. Mendershausen: Emphasis on the experience and on the creative element is very essential, essential for the success of the thing. I am thinking of the POLITICAL ECONOMY basic courses. We have a real problem of having in conjunction with those classes a similar level of experience, and to avoid the mere performance of jobs that look like the real thing but aren't.

Mr. Jones: At a later meeting we will talk about those courses. I suggest THE WESTERN TRADITION courses for the next meeting. More chance for communication. We should have more descriptive information before us for a discussion of the POLITICAL ECONOMY courses. And there will be more questions of this other aim of the basic course program. The freshman courses have special purposes. After THE WESTERN TRADITION discussion we will come back to POLITICAL ECONOMY. Mr. Mendershausen's remark is perhaps very relevant. They are not getting at that basic experience. There is more difficulty in getting at that in that field than anywhere else. Some have said you couldn't do it. Let's get at these other things before getting at this much more complicated matter. Also about the courses in science. I hope we can get a basic course in science which will be analogous. It has been very difficult to get such a thing organized. Those are questions which we can discuss more fruitfully later.

Mr. DeGray: I hold with what Greg has said about the terror and majesty of words (or also of sound in music or electricity in science, for that matter). But it is still just a way of teaching. It doesn't make any course any more "basic". It's the way all courses should be taught.

Mr. Jones: That's why we thought along these lines, because it was a way of teaching. Our temptation when we attempt to teach is to pull out a good part of what we have learned. We are natural survey course givers, we want to give them the last word that we have learned about a thing. The basic course, with a different method of teaching, is a protest. It is difficult to get the entire faculty even to consider this much more simple approach to teaching. The distinguishing feature is a method, trying to get at an experience. (??) It is harder for the academic or professional in a field to follow. We can all give survey courses; it is harder for us to think more simply.

Mr. DeGray: By survey courses you mean . . .

Mr. Jones: . . . where the emphasis is on learning facts.
In any field a great many people who are not teaching so-called basic courses may use this as their method and achieve purposes achieved by the basic courses; that is all to the good.

Mr. DeGray: But that is what we were all brought to Bennington to do.

Mr. Jones: But it was not typically done.

Mr. DeGray: In that respect we should label the whole catalogue basic.

Mr. Jones: That would be delightful. The meeting is adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Shaw

Mary Shaw
Secretary