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# The Modern Novel: Reading, Writing and Wrestling with Form and Content

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The urban high school student often asks, upon being assigned a piece of fiction, “What do I have to read this for?” (or possibly, “Why I be reading this?”). Of course, most students will accept their fate and begin the assignment, and later, after reading a few pages, will repeat the question and answer it in light of the brief reading experience. Typically, the answer is a flat. “There is no reason for me to read this—it offers me, personally, nothing.”

One goal of this unit, therefore, is to instill in the student a belief that the fiction assigned has been selected on the basis of its ability to hold meaning for the student while resonating with his intellectual and physical experience. The novels in this unit find their primary resonance in each author’s use of concrete description, hard-hitting action and physically-revealed meaning. The urban student’s realm is characterized by blatant physicality. Violence is generally acceptable, and physical intimidation is often a more potent form of discourse than logic. A further parallel between the urban student and the characters in this unit’s novels is that anonymity serves to define some aspect of existence. As the adolescent student moves anonymously through the corridors of his school and the convolutions of thought, so move the characters of these fictions. This should provide an immediate resonance for the student as he reads.

Another goal of this unit is to assist students in learning the facets of critical reading. They should become more aware of word function, narrative style and technical device. The teacher must assist the reader in moving beyond the surface of a fiction. Since reading is a symbolic process, relative ideas must be noted, and the reader must be encouraged to differentiate between one-word images and more complex descriptions. For example, a narration might give a simple association, such as the word “car.” The noun creates an image in the mind of the reader which approximates: “A four-wheeled vehicle with steering wheel, windshields, etc.” A more complex description includes many associations, many images, and thereby creates a singular, complex image: “It was a 1948 Hudson with musty seatcovers and wide whitewalls, and the steering wheel had faded from white to a sick yellow color that matched the pallor of the tarnished hood and fenders and chrome parts.” The *word* “car” summons a general image for any reader, but the *description* calls to mind a set of associations (some of which might require investigation—what is a 1948 Hudson?) which characterize the general image, the *car* in this case. Such distinctions must become part of the reading process in order for the student to have a more detailed critical approach.

The third goal of the unit focuses on the moral issues that appear in fiction. Seldom does the narration

articulate these issues, and thus it requires the teacher's guidance for the student to become sensitive to them. When, for instance, a character kills another character, we may read only of the action of the killing, but there certainly exists a moral question for the reader to answer. We assume the student knows what events led up to the action of killing, but can the student articulate the issue of justification? Can the killing be, in any way, justified? The student needs to assess the morality of the entire scenario and not just read a progression of events. The possibility of alternatives and outcomes must be present as the student reads. The novels chosen for this unit involve strong moral dilemmas throughout, and hence assist in the development of this critical outlook during the reading experience. The moral questions continually face the characters and reader.

Therefore, the student must be made to recognize that the task of reading is twofold: first, to digest and associate with his own values the conditions within the fiction; second, to draw in his mind a completed character with both physical and moral definition. The teacher may assist the student in this process by reminding him that a character's sympathetic or unsympathetic nature is the result of that character's solutions to moral dilemmas. The reader's definition of character will often change in accordance with the character's own moral improvement or degeneration.

If students can be made attentive to the moral dimensions of a novel, they may even find a truth in the fiction. When a student reads of a character's action, he may ask "Why this action?" When the student can, from evidence in the narrative and in his own thoughts, answer the question "Why?" he has most likely discovered the truth of the fiction. This truth, this moral statement, if conceivable by the author, is then possible as a reality, and can then be judged as a reality by the reader for the purpose of defining his own set of truths.

The final goal of this unit is to present the student with examples of good writing—specifically, solid prose that includes description of action, characterization of setting and unified style. Most of the works in this unit are straightforward, standard narrations, and although the advanced junior or senior has probably encountered stream-of-consciousness in fiction, he shall not encounter it in this unit of study. To do so would only cloud the purposes of the unit. Writing is, after all, an initiative art, and the authors in this unit may serve well to show the power of the standard language. At the same time, the student will encounter idiom and dialect in the novels' dialogue, thus making for a realistic amount of digression in study for a four-week unit.

Pertaining to this goal, several creative-writing assignments are included in the unit, as well as a method of stylistic analysis which the student can then apply to his own writing. This method is designed to offer the student insights into improving his own style without making the writing process too mechanical.

Although the novels in this unit have been chosen mainly for their succinct, straightforward prose style, that is not to say that they do not stand up to the teacher's demand for literary merit. The theme of the unit is primarily The Search, a theme that can cross the boundary between fiction and the student's existence as the characters and the reader trek in search of an existential logic—a truth for life—in the face of hostility and illusion. Ideally, the reading experience provided in this unit will compel students to attempt more difficult reading tasks and to grant more careful consideration to their own ideas before putting those ideas on paper.

***The Novels***

1. *A Feast of Snakes* by Harry Crews

This novel is the third-person narration which centers around Joe Lon Mackey and his struggle to understand himself and the world that is Mystic, Georgia. Joe Lon was the star fullback of his high school football team, but never went on to college because of academic non-existence.

Joe Lon, now twenty, is married and the father of two children, and the novel's theme is Joe Lon's search for control and understanding over a situation that has soured and made his life, in his mind, unbearable. He laments that his old girlfriend, now a college student, has left him, and he cannot rationalize his present condition. He feels he has ruined his wife's appearance through impregnating her twice, and he finds no gratification from running his father's business—a liquor outlet in the "dry" town.

Joe Lon's attitudes lead him to violence and revenge, which he first imposes sexually on his ex-flame, Berenice, and later upon everyone within shotgun range. Despite his efforts to understand and believe in his life, he tragically resorts to a finality-of-power that leaves the reader shaking his head. One hopes that Joe Lon will discover and reconcile himself to a realistic identity, and his struggle is sincere and great, but when he fails, the reader must withhold his sympathies. Joe Lon's story is a lesson that indirectly shows the merit of obtaining objectivity in life.

**2. *The Floating Opera* by John Barth**

*The Floating Opera* is the first-person narration of Todd Andrews which explicitly aims to discover a philosophical tenet for the pursuit of life. Andrews is a highly self-conscious character/narrator who, in addition to telling the story, talks of the writing process.

Although the novel is packed with anecdotal sections, the plot centers around Todd's decision to commit suicide by exploding a bomb on the Floating Opera, a showboat, and thus taking hundreds with him. The reader is shielded from the suicide plan's details until the novel's climax. The moral question here is obvious.

The novel's plot is impelled by the fact that Andrews may be the father of a friend's daughter, which is explained in the narration quite well and in an entertaining fashion. Andrews establishes his situation, and informs the reader of his philosophy. The Floating Opera serves as Todd's metaphor for life—life is like a showboat that is being watched from the shore; the play onstage sometimes is in view, sometimes further down the river, and sometimes out of sight. Andrews' moral dilemma becomes moot when the bomb fails to detonate, and he then turns over a new leaf, thus providing a happy surface ending. He retains, despite surface contentment, his premise that nothing is of any inherent value.

**3. *To Have and Have Not* by Ernest Hemingway**

Harry Morgan, a tough boat skipper in Florida and Cuba, gets involved in transporting fugitives in his fishing boat. Some of the best descriptive writing Hemingway ever laid a pen to is in this novel, which also pursues character depth through narration from several points of view.

Harry's "allegiance to no one" philosophy makes him sympathetic in the reader's viewpoint, mostly because no one worth allegiance appears. Harry is true to himself, but even his own strength cannot carry him through his situation. Harry does show love and sympathy, however, to his wife and Eddy respectively. His wife shares Harry's hopes and her point of view is strongly presented in the novel. Eddy, on the other hand, is an alcoholic who appears to be more trouble than he is worth, yet Harry remains loyal to him as much as he can. Action and point-of-view are typically strong in Hemingway's narration, and this novel is no exception. This novel is a key in the study of narrative style.

**4. *The Lady in the Lake* by Raymond Chandler**

Philip Marlowe may well be one of the strongest characters in American Literature. Not only is he one of the shrewdest private eyes in the realm of mystery, but he also reveals insights into human nature, and

importantly, is always the benefactor of good and enemy of the exploiter. The theme of search is well brought to the fore in this novel, as well as moral issues which Marlowe articulates as a matter of course in the telling of the story.

This novel's literary key lies not in the solving of a mystery, but in Marlowe's method, which is primarily one of character assessment in order to find who would commit the crime. Circumstantial evidence misleads where character evidence does not.

Chandler's stylistic habits bear a study as well. His use of immediate metaphor and simile make the reading experience one worth any reader's time, and finally the resolution is a moral resolution that supercedes the piecing together of the puzzle.

***A Philosophy for Studying the Novel***

Premise:

Since advanced juniors or seniors have likely read a wealth of fiction compared to the average student, the key to teaching a unit on the modern novel is to aim the students' perceptions toward the author's methods in terms of both style and story. Although armed with a good background in reading, it is likely that students will lack a terminology and articulated understanding of the creative process, and will instead have nebulous insights which are not based on any deep understanding of plot and character. Thus, the unit intends to fine-tune the reader's approach, and in order to accomplish this end a terminology has been included. (See Appendix I, wherein Norman Friedman's essay, "Forms of the Plot" is condensed. See also Philip Stevick's collection of essays, *The Theory of the Novel* , which contains Friedman's essay in full.)

Secondly, since the unit is based on a more detailed study of literature, the student's reading eye must be sharpened. A reasonable method for attaining this goal is the study of stylistics. Stylistic analysis involves the noting of how an author tends to *use* language, primarily in terms of grammar and syntax, but also in terms of *function* : For example, how many adverbs does Hemingway use *per sentence* as opposed to Barth? How many nouns? Adjectives? How long are a given author's sentences on average? Are the sentences simple, compound or complex? Does the author make use of non-standard constructions in narration and/or dialogue? (A detailed method of analysis appears in Appendix II.)

By using this method to compare authors, the student may identify quantifiable evidence as to why he may or may not enjoy a particular writer's work. Furthermore, this study will give the student a greater awareness of style in his own writing, which is, after all, a key to the improvement of that writing. In essence, the student must be aware that writing involves *strategy* , and that strategy appears in style.

To reinforce the philosophical premise here, the unit intends that the student accomplish writing tasks during the course of reading, and that these writing assignments should avoid the typical "book report" form. Instead they should afford insights into the creative method so that the student perceives the author's intent and sense of structure. Plot summaries and obvious character traits only scratch the surface of the in-depth quality-of-analysis desired here.

***Strategies* :**

The ideas established in the *Strategies* should be incorporated into lessons set down in the *Activities* . The various strategies may be more appropriate for a given novel, and thus it is at the discretion of the teacher where to emphasize specific ideas. The Strategies deal with general principles of fiction, and thus will assist

the teacher in tracking the study of the novel.

1. *Definition of narrative tone and point-of-view:* Early in the reading process the student must articulate some sense of the novel's tone. He also must note from Whose point-of-view the story is told. If the fiction is a first-person narrative, how opinionated is the character telling the story? Is the narrator the protagonist? Does the narrator have omniscience as a first-person teller? If the narration is in the third-person, with whom is the narrator sympathetic? Is the reader inclined to share that sympathy?
2. *Narrative bias* : Does the narrator have any outstanding bias that might later affect the resolution? Is the bias designed to gather the student's sympathies? Or is it a knowingly-flawed bias?
3. *Character analysis:* Whether in agreement with a character's bias or not, the student must be able to see, from the narration, the definition of character philosophically. That is, if we remove the plot from the character and insert him into another setting, how does the character then appear? Is the character a victim of the plot, or does the character cause the plot events to occur?
4. *Apparent philosophy of the novel:* After reading the text, what overriding message does the novel seem to deliver? To what purpose have these characters played out their parts? What does the author intend to show or tell by the fiction he's created?
5. *Plot resolution:* Closely aligned to #4. Why has the story ended in the manner it has? Does the resolution take a potentially happy ending and make it a tragedy? Or vice-versa? What force is in control at the plot's conclusion?
6. *Summations and categorizations* : If given a set of categories, such as those in Appendix I, can the student apply the distinctions and articulate points of detail? Can the student adequately summarize the changes in character point-of-view? Can he chart moral dilemmas and show how they develop the character's behavior? Can he identify philosophic flaws in a character's outlook?

***Activities* :**

The activities set down here apply to all the fictions in this unit of study, and each pertains to one or more of the strategies listed above. They are listed here as a comprehensive approach to a week's study. The novel should be assigned on the Friday preceding the week of study, thus allowing the student to get well under way before exercises begin. It would be best if the student could read half the novel before commencing any exercises. The reading would conclude during the week of study. This would allow for a creative speculation which lends itself to the productive completion of the exercises themselves.

*Monday* —Narrative tone exercises:

The student should find a passage from the text that, in his opinion, best exemplifies the *tone* the author is

trying to establish and present. The possibilities of optimism, pessimism and apparent neutrality should be addressed in terms of the narration selected. The student may be able, with guidance from the teacher, to identify specific aspects of the passage that make it exemplary. From this he should make generalizations: is the tone set through description of physical reality in the novel, or is it established more through opinions of the narrator, or perhaps through the thoughts of a certain character? The assignments should be handed-in after a half-hour's work. The class should conclude with a brief discussion of tone. If possible, the class should arrive at a consensus concerning the matter.

Homework: The student should write a two-page narrative using what he feels to be the established voice and tone of the novel being read. The student should make himself the primary character of the narration, as if he were a character in the fiction. If the narrative being read is third-person, the student should write in the third-person, and he should attempt to imitate the style of the author being studied.

*Tuesday* —Stylistic Analysis

After returning graded assignments, the teacher should make comments regarding their quality, etc. The two-page narratives should be collected, and two or three read at random.

The rest of the class should be devoted to following the method outlined in Appendix II. The students should have a clear idea of the purpose of stylistic analysis. Before the class is over, field impressions of the current writer's style. Make a note of those impressions. For example, have the class, through discussion, decide whether they believe an author's sentence-length will be on the average long or short. Any of the categories may be impressionistically guessed at at this point.

Homework: After consulting Appendix II, have the class analyze a random sample of the author being read. Different students may be assigned different tasks. For example, one student may analyze sentence length, another active-passive structures, another may count nouns-persentence, etc.

*Wednesday* —Results of Stylistic Analysis:

Tally the results of each student's analysis and list the figures on the board. Discuss the results briefly. Then, return the two-page narratives (graded) and have the student assess one stylistic characteristic of his own writing and compare the result with the result found for the author. (Again, use Appendix II as a guideline.)

This "workshop" approach will often prove a revelation for the student, and will greatly assist in opening for him the idea of style.

The reading of the novel should be completed by Thursday.

*Thursday* —Discussion and assessment of the novel:

Very briefly, the students' general reactions to the novel should be discussed. Then the teacher should provide a copy of Appendix I to each student. The categories and terms should be discussed and placed within the frame of the novel being studied. The students should attempt to select the appropriate forms and back their decisions by citing plot and character qualities which make the category appropriate.

Homework: The student should attempt, in a two-page essay, to categorize the novel being read. The essay should concentrate on drawing parallels between evidence in the novel and the available categories. The essay should conclude with a critical assessment of the fiction's worth. The student should identify what he

believes to be exceptionally strong or weak points in the fiction.

*Friday* —Conclusion and Introduction of next novel:

In a discussion, the class should chart the development of the novel in terms of plot, character and theme. This class should try to view the *whole* work and, if possible, articulate an overriding meaning. This overriding meaning is akin to the moral at the end of a fairy tale. Although the conclusive meaning may be complex, its identification is a major step in critical analysis.

The previous day's assignment should be collected.

***Notes on Activities* :**

Obviously, the unit will require some preliminary review of literary terminology and the introduction of the terminology in Appendix I. How much review will depend on the kind of group at which the unit is directed and, therefore, is at the discretion of the teacher. The stylistic method should indeed be practiced before actually applied to a novel for the purpose of study.

The teacher may wish to extend assignments over a longer period of time rather than following a four-week schedule. This is fine. In fact, the unit could easily be expanded into a six-week unit.

Ideally, however, I believe that a rapid, concentrated study will better assist the individual student in putting into practice the critical method aimed for in the unit. Revelation and insight are more likely to come upon the student through the use of the methods outlined in the unit, and through the actual reading, than through elaborate explanations of the method itself. Simply, the method is a set of tools the student will be given to take apart the fiction. It is not important that he know how the wrench was cast.

Discussion is a key element of the unit, but it would be purposeless for me to direct actual questions, since discussions vary from class to class.

It is assumed that terminology such as "plot," "irony," "character" and "theme" are already working members of the student's vocabulary. The terminology in Appendix I will likely not be so, and as such should be introduced.

The grammar terminology included in the stylistic method should also be nothing new to the student, but if the teacher wishes to carry this aspect of study further, there are helpful texts listed in the Bibliography.

**Other Possible Activities:**

1. Have the student assume a character in the novel and write about another character, attempting to keep within the assumed character's point-of-view.
2. Have the student continue the narrative beyond its conclusion in the novel in order to add more to the narration after the plot has been terminated by the author.
3. Have the student attempt to write a fiction himself, aiming at the construction of a coherent fiction with a distinct point-of-view, plot resolution, character development and metaphor.
4. Examinations: As a helpful tool, examinations should be designed to motivate the student to compare specific aspects of one or more of the novels. A comparison of Joe Lon and Harry Morgan, for example, might help the student understand the two authors' views of masculinity

and violence as elements of character.

Actual examination time was not set aside in the unit proper because each teacher might have personal views on how to conduct such examinations. The unit is not exam-oriented by design, at any rate, and therefore the teacher should use testing as a tool to make the student assume a more critical outlook. Thus, examinations should concern themselves more with philosophical issues than surface concerns.

5. Overview: Finally, a unit overview and review seem applicable, but again should be the construction of each teacher for his or her class. The teacher may wish to delete and add novels pertaining to the unit on the basis of availability and reading level. Some possible additions to the unit appear in Appendix III.

**Addendum:**

For less-advanced students, I suggest that the unit's theoretical nature be lessened and the stylistic study pursued to less detail. The novels have sufficient action and plot to draw any reader's attention, particularly that of the adolescent. In preparing assignments for a lower-level class, the teacher should probably include quizzes and basic question assignments—plot summaries and basic character analysis may be employed frequently here.

For the lower-level class, it is also important that the teacher help the student to understand that the novels come from different genres, explaining of course, what a genre is, and why the novels thus seem very different while all dealing with similar themes. The teacher should, in short, strive to make accessible as much of the unit as possible.

In any case, the teacher will likely want to take vocabulary items from the novels and present them to the class as part of regular vocabulary assignments. The modifications listed here would, naturally, lengthen the duration of the unit.

***Conclusion* :**

The idea of a *search for truth and logic* is not alien to the urban high school student, and the novels included in this unit, although seldom seen in the typical curriculum, are devoted to that search. Being so, they will not strike the student as narratives of tortuous pedantry, and by virtue of their excellence as literature, they should lend themselves to opening the student's critical horizons.

As a condensed, college-oriented unit, the content of the novels is less relevant than the intensive method of study, which will become the typical method the student employs as he pursues a college degree. That the novels are somewhat less than Jamesian (Henry) should make the assimilation and employment of the method easier, while affording greater student success.

Of course, this unit is not the be-all or end-all of a student's literary education, but it should prepare the

student for more cerebral texts and a more critical outlook. Simultaneously, it hopes to motivate the student to become an autonomous seeker of reading material. Literature has different meanings for every student, and when the student realizes that the boundaries of good literature are not seen from classroom assignments only, then he may begin to discover his own sources of literary study and entertainment. The methods used in this unit seek to make the task of study and articulation more appealing to the student.

Finally, the unit hopes to assist the searching adolescent in his ultimate goal: Truth. Insofar as any fiction may do so, the novels chosen for this unit are applicable. If they succeed, the educational process has been served beyond the call of duty. If the teacher can make the elements of the search clearer, then the writer has a friend.

***Appendi x I: Norman Friedman's Forms of Plot Condensed (From Philip***
Stevick's collection, *The Theory of the Novel* . See Bibliography)

Friedman's essay notes that plot is mainly a conception which puts its whole emphasis upon what everyone feels to be the essential quality of fiction; that is to say, the sequence of events and that sequence's causes, means, effects, and end. We must define, according to Friedman, all the related causes and conditions in order to understand and respond to the process of change in fiction. Hence, he creates the following categories:

***I. Plots of Fortune***
*The Action Plot* —The most common and most primitive type of plot. The primary interest lies in "what happens next." Adventure, Science Fiction, Detective Stories fall into this category. Many classics have emerged from this field, including Sherlock Holmes Mysteries, the novels of R. L. Stevenson, and the novels of Raymomd Chandler and Dashiell Hammett.

*The Pathetic Plot* —A sympathetic protagonist undergoes some misfortune through no fault of his own. Primarily a plot of suffering. Long range fears materialize, even though we hope for better, urged to do so by brief, intermittent short term hopes. Thomas Hardy's novels, James Jones', and Harry Crews' all have a foot in this door.

*The Tragic Plot* —When the protagonist is reasonably willful and sophisticated in his ability to think and change idea, then he is somewhat more responsible for any misfortune that takes him. There are here the same long range fears as set up by the action. Frequently resulting in the death of the protagonist, we are left asking what other end is possible. *Hamlet* is the pinnacle of success in this field, but in the unit, Hemingway and Crews ring of it.

*The Punitive Plot* —Here we have a protagonist whose character is essentially unsympathetic and his action are repugnant, but due to some other striking characteristic, such as strength of will, we may find him admirable to a degree. This is the hero-villain, such as Faustus or Milton's Satan. We are curious and attentive as the hero-villain overruns moralistic simpletons, but we are irritated when some truly good person is victimized. Elements of this character show up in Joe Lon Mackey of Crews' *Feast* .

*The Sentimental Plot* —The sympathetic protagonist comes through thick and thin to be all right at the end. We are overjoyed to see virtue reap its just reward. The protagonist is acted upon, rather than being the primary force.

*The Admiration Plot* —A sympathetic character's nobility of thought results in the success of our long range

hopes, even though it may cost him materially. Something of a fairy tale form, this category shows good conquering evil philosophically.

***II. Plots of Character***

*The Maturing Plot* —A sympathetic protagonist is in an aimless state, or one involving a misconceived goal. A coming-of-age form, some means of change must be encountered, and our hopes that the protagonist will choose the right course are confirmed. The crucial element of choice, coming to a radical decision, is the distinguishing feature of this form. Mary Conrad, Faulkner, and Dickens works exemplify this category.

*The Reform Plot* —This resembles the Punitive Plot, but the protagonist is thoughtful enough from the outset. First, we like the character, then, as he deceives others, we grow irritated, and are righteously relieved when the proper course is ultimately shown.

*The Testing Plot* —The distinctive mark of this form is that the noble, strong and sympathetic character is pressured into compromise or surrender of his noble ends. He wavers, and the plot takes the question of whether or not he will remain steadfast. Usually, his personal realm is at stake if he holds firm, and we are typically gratified when he makes the morally correct choice in the end.

*For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a chief example.

*The Degeneration Plot* —A character who is at first sympathetic and full of energy is subjected to some crucial loss which results in his utter disillusionment. He has to choose then whether to pick up the pieces or give up altogether. This is a key to most of Chekhov's work, and it appears often in the stories of Sherwood Anderson.

***III. Plots of Thought***

*The Education Plot* —A change in thought for the better in terms of the protagonist's conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes occurs here. The author often serves up a situation which forces the change in beliefs, and often the character winds up the better for his experience. *Huckleberry Finn* serves as an excellent example.

*The Revelation Plo* t—This hinges on the protagonist's ignorance of the essentials at the plot's outset. It is dependent upon a discovery by the character. Our short range fears are superceded by our long range hopes, followed by relief and pleasure at the end.

*The Affective Plot* —This involves a character changing his estimation of another character through the course of events. The change may vary, and will leave the protagonist with some emotional change toward himself and the affective character. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Daisy Miller* are two prime examples.

The Disillusionment Plot—The protagonist begins with some full set of ideals. Then, through some misfortune, he abandons the ideals entirely. This plot leaves the hero somewhat like the puppet at the end of a string, such as Gatsby in the novel bearing his name. Our long-range fears succeed in dumping our short term hopes.

*Conclusions*

These fourteen plot types do not intend to be absolute, and a great many stories will have recognizable affiliations with more than one of these forms. However, the noting of which plots serve which categories may help the student to develop clearer, more detailed approaches to discussion and analysis.

If we want the student to go on and then discuss the whole fiction, he must have a foothold on some understandable terminology. The fourteen plot types provide some of that terminology. They are not

categories for the sake of categorization, but are a variety of possible ways of attacking the entire problem of fiction. We must devise a method of discovering a hypothesis that explains *what* is relevant *to* and effective for critical analysis.

It is my suggestion that the teacher peruse Stevick's collection of essays mentioned at this Appendix' beginning in order to prepare for teaching the unit. Also, each student should be armed with the terminology provided in this Appendix, since it may clarify the pursuits of the unit before actual exercises commence.

***Appendix II : Stylistics***

Stylistic Analysis is not a content-oriented study, yet it applies itself best to the comparison of literary texts as a means of revealing *how* an author uses language to tell a story. Some of the more obvious and easily quantifiable attributes will be discussed here so that the teacher may present stylistics to the high school student in an understandable and revealing fashion.

Such an analysis must always be undertaken with an eye for syntax and grammatical construction, since in its method it is concerned only with form, and must by definition ignore content. It is most revealing as a comparative method since statistical data, such as average sentence-length, is meaningless unless compared to a norm or other sample. For instance, if we know one author's average sentence-length is 23 words, then we know his sentences are 23 words on the average. If, however, we compare this to another author whose average sentence is 42 words, then we know that either one or the other is probably highly unusual, and we can expect that certain aspects of the text's readability will result from the figures revealed in the quantifying of sentence-length.

A concrete example of the above follows: Most people consider Hemingway's style to be succinct and unverbose, while at the same time they consider Fitzgerald to be florid and wordy. Thus, one would expect Hemingway's average sentence to be shorter than Fitzgerald's. Not so. Hemingway's average sentence is two words longer than Fitzgerald's. A further study of these two authors finds that Fitzgerald uses five times as many adverbs as Hemingway, and therefore F. Scott's florid nature appears in part because of the -ly words he so often uses—the -ly's liquid sound is read and the reader's impressions say "florid." The impression of longer sentence-length in Fitzgerald is an illusion created by phonetic impression.

Student writing is fair game for stylistic analysis, and such an analysis is well worth its results, since it identifies, concretely, traits of style in the student's own writing—undeniable evidence that his sentences are too short, not active, or what have you.

Here follows a step-by-step method of stylistic study:

The first step in any stylistic study is the gathering of a *random* sample of the writer's work. Since novels have a few hundred pages from which to choose, the sample can be chosen in pages. A random number chart with 1-1000 can be used. Math texts generally should have one (especially in Advanced Texts), but the year's results of the Daily Numbers (lottery) is equally random. Simply, read down the list and where a number occurs that is a page number, use that page. (The number 876 might be on the chart, but would not be a page number. Simply go on to the next number on the chart that is a page number.) By this method, select a minimum sample of 2500 words for study.

In studying a novel's narration, dialogue is generally omitted from the sample, since it is consciously in-character, or can be assumed so. A study of dialogue would, of course, mean the omission of narration from the sample.

The next step in the stylistic analysis is to quantify characteristics of the prose. Quantification means this: Identify the characteristic to be studied, such as sentence-length. The student counts the number of words in each sentence in the sample (beginning with the first sentence that begins on the sample page, and ending with the last sentence that ends on the sample page). The length of each sentence should be noted on paper until the entire sample is quantified. To find the average, add the numbers and divide the sum by the number of total sentences. Another meaningful statistic pertaining to sentence length is the standard deviation. (An advanced Math text should be consulted for method of finding standard deviation.) Standard deviation is, simply, a statistic which tells how far from the average any given sentence is likely to be. If we have a three-sentence sample where the sentences are 3, 10, and 17 words, then the average (mean) is 10 words-persentence. However, the standard deviation is 7. Therefore, any sentence between 3 and 17 words would be considered typical. Of course, the greater the sample, the more effective is the use of standard deviation, since it then takes into account a greater body of data.

There are innumerable characteristics that may be quantified. Some of the more prevalent traits used in stylistic analysis are:

1. Sentence-length—This often tells a great deal about how an author's prose will appear to the student. Henry James can be expected to have longer average sentence-length than Raymond Chandler. And almost every author will have a longer average length than the students. To recognize this fact through analysis reveals a great deal about sentence construction.
2. Number of active versus passive-voiced independent clauses—This ratio reinforces impressions about narrative flow and action. Note that since sentences may be compounded and include different voices, that independent clauses must be used. (Example: I was sick and Joe ran home.)
3. Number of nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs—These function words are easily quantifiable, and their relative numbers reveal a great deal about an author's clarity of style and technique. Hemingway, for example, has a highly-nominal style. Fitzgerald tends to be more verbal.
4. Simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences—To see how often an author chooses to use these different constructions reveals how easily read the work is, and also applies to showing students that more complex constructions generally occur in passages of thought as opposed to passages of action.
5. Unusual constructions—How often an author uses Apostrophe, Fragment, or Colloquialism is certainly pertinent to how his tone is perceived.

The resulting statistics may then be discussed and the author's style assessed. This discussion will likely reveal style with more clarity than the student has previously encountered.

The statistics and data, of course, are only indirectly relevant to the actual story, but the process of reading/quantifying serves as the closest possible reading of an author. As the student gathers the data, he will likely notice aspects of writing that in reading he overlooked. Most likely, the student has never studied grammar by means of a literary text. This study will probably force the student to see that there is a

connection between what he reads in literature and the exercises he has done in grammar books.

In short, grammar texts put language into an artificial vacuum, while stylistic study of literature puts significance to the study of form. Form and Content are not mutually exclusive, and need not be studied as though they were.

Perhaps the best exercise in stylistic analysis will be the student's analysis of his own writing, compared then to one of the authors studied. When the student sees that his sentences are on the average ten words shorter than Hemingway's, he might gain some idea as to why his own sentences seem so choppy. When the student sees that he uses no adverbs or dependent clauses, then he can understand why there exists a miniscule sense of flow. And so on.

The Annotated Bibliography offers suggestions for further study in stylistics. It is clear that stylistics could be a unit of its own should the teacher choose to make it so. For this unit, stylistics is aimed at heightening the immediate literary study.

***Appendix III. Alternative Texts for the Unit***

*Slaughterhouse Five* —by Kurt Vonnegut. Available in most schools, this text fits in with the theme of search. Not used in the unit because of Vonnegut's unusual method of presenting plot. However, an excellent novel in terms of character and theme.

*The Deep* —by Mickey Spillane. A very hard-boiled narrative with a surprise ending. Very good for less sophisticated students in order to approach terminology and critical method.

*The Great Gatsby* —by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The classic, simply, of search and disillusionment. Fits tightly with the unit's philosophy and theme, and is readily available.

*Native Son* —by Richard Wright. This takes the themes and views them from the black perspective. A bit complicated in its implications and not extremely action-packed after the first half, *Native Son* will resonate more strongly with some students.

*Wuthering Heights* —by Emily Bršnte. No better novel exists for studying the demonic character (Heathcliff). Bronte's style is also a model of technique for any student.

*Nightmare in Red* —by Dashiell Hammett. A classic of the detective genre.

Highly readable and a very good text for emphasis of point-of-view.

Other novels may be chosen at the teacher's discretion. There are endless works which will fit in the unit's philosophy.

## Bibliography: Literary Texts.

Barth John, *The Floating Opera* . New York: Ballantine Books, 1972.

(See Unit Text.)

Crews, Harry. *A Feast of Snakes* . New York: Atheneum Press, 1978.

(See Unit Text.)

Chandler, Raymond. *The Lady in the Lake* . New York: Vintage Books, 1976.

Hemingway, Ernest. *To Have and Have Not* . New York: Scribner's Sons, 1937.

## Bibliography: Resource and Research Texts.

Enkvist, Nils Erik. *Linguistic Stylistics* . Paris: Mouton, 1973.

The bible of stylistic study, period. Not long, but essential to this study.

Gass, William H. *Fiction and the Figures of Life* . New York: Vintage Books, 1971.

A potpourri of fictional study and philosophy.

Milic, Louis and William Chisholm, Jr. *The English Language* : *Form and Use* . New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1974.

A very useful text in approaching stylistics. This is the Freshman English Text at Cleveland State University. Chapters 22-25 are valuable, especially 23. The whole book is an excellent resource text for the English teacher, and runs the gamut of lessons in English language.

Stevick, Philip, ed. *The Theory of the Novel* . New York: The Free Press, 1967.