
The Search for Values: Young Adults and the Literary Experience

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EACH GENERATION, DESPAIRING ADULTS observe with trepidation their youth's walk on the wild side. Pessimistically they assume the worst, unconvinced that restraint, prudence, or even good sense will prevail in the actions of their offspring. These handwringers marshal some compelling evidence—data on sociopaths, the high rate of suicide, and the widespread use of drugs. But even among ordinary teenagers, many of today's adults point toward reckless sexual behavior; lack of concern about unfortunates; self-indulgence and preoccupation; and the adoption of deliberate coarseness in speech, dress, and behavior as pandemic to a degree that appears to surpass even the usual rites of passage. How pervasive these acts are is not at all clear since data are available on only some of them. The public perception, however, is that such behavior is rampant and out of control. And, most importantly, the countervailing forces in society seem impotent to redress this situation.

A concerned community finds little solace in examining the less than heroic conduct of the celebrities many teenagers adopt as models. Superstars in sports and music are the cynosure of adolescent eyes and their lifestyles widely admired. But one critic argues that the message sports figures give is: "It is [all] right to do anything you can get away with, not just anything within the rules, in order to win (Bauslaugh 1986, p. 31)." Although adult society may practice such tactics as insider trading to beat the stock market and political deals to ensure election, it nonetheless endorses sentiments closely aligned to Thackeray's nineteenth century views on sportsmanship: "Go lose or conquer as you can,/But if you fall or if you rise/Be each, pray God, a Gentleman

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(Thackeray 1957, p. 141)." That young adults may be missing this message causes alarm, leading social critics to conclude that athletes "should not be teaching our children that winning supercedes everything else, including honesty, decency, and truthfulness (Bauslaugh 1986, p. 31)."

Similarly, teenagers, entranced by contemporary music, often come to idolize the musicians making it. Many performers believe that acting in increasingly nonstandard ways improves their image by differentiating themselves from their competitors. Violence, cruelty, irresponsibility, and insensitivity often characterize popular songs, with repetition, in a sense, legitimizing their message. Underscoring this situation, Tony Johnson points to rock star Joe Walsh's lyrics: "I live in motel rooms, tear out the walls, I have accountants pay for it all...(Johnson 1985, p. 48)." Furthermore, those who concentrate on tune rather than words have MTV's vivid dramatization to highlight and strengthen the appalling lyrics. While a few celebrities vociferously protest against apartheid or raise money for the homeless, outrageous violations of civility still abound.

Some observers of the contemporary scene have pointed with alarm at these influences and at what they see as one of the consequences: the dulling of awareness about what they are convinced are clear-cut examples of immoral or senseless behavior. This perception is chillingly documented in an article by Lewis Lapham titled "Supply-Side Ethics." In it, a professor of history despairingly reports on the difficulty she has had recently in convincing her students of the immorality of Nazi policies. To support her allegation, she cites a portion of a term paper in which one of her students describes Hitler as "a kid with a dream [who enjoyed] a pretty good run at the top of the charts... (Lapham 1985, p. 11)." With this one statement, the student not only launders Hitler's power and personality but also trivializes the dictator's deeds.

In a recent newsletter, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development reported another shocking illustration of callousness. That organization cites a new study in which 54 percent of the teen boys and 27 percent of the teen girls responded that it was "all right for a boy to hold down a girl and force her to engage in intercourse if she 'led him on.'" Forty-three percent of the males and 12 percent of the females said such behavior "was okay if he spent a lot of money on her (Brick 1987, p. 3)."

While a high level of personal conduct is considered essential for the moral development of the individual, it is seen as no less crucial for the good of the nation. A spokesman from the Ethics Resource Center was interviewed by a reporter for a story entitled "A Nation of Liars?" and commented: "A free and open society needs a high degree of ethical conduct, because people must have trust in their institutions and in the leaders of those institutions (McLaughlin et al. 1987, p. 60)."

But presidential candidates, stockbrokers, legislators, military heroes, and even the clergy have been found to have feet of clay. While

one can argue that the sordid adventures of those in the public eye have always existed, media exposure heightens the impact, and the television generation cynically notes the hypocritical difference between rhetoric and action among adults. What is depressing is that these views are not seen as isolated examples. Indeed, John Gardner, the founder of Common Cause, warns: "Duplicity and deception, in public and private life, are very substantially greater than they have been in the past (McLaughlin et al. 1987, p. 54)."

The connection between the continued health of the nation and collective personal integrity must be a strong one. During this period when we celebrate the birth of the Constitution, it is particularly fruitful to examine and reflect on its meaning, particularly as to how its vitality may be assured in perpetuity. In its truest sense, democracy cannot coexist for long with its citizens, young or old, devoting themselves to hedonism, self-preoccupation, destructiveness, or other forms of moral drift. Certainly this does not encompass a significant proportion of contemporary youth; however, it does describe a great many. That apprehension has energized many segments of the commonwealth.

Leaders in education, politics, religion, and business, responding to pressures from their constituencies, have called for action to address the values issue. Many like Mario Cuomo, the governor of New York, have looked to the schools to address this matter. But it is not solely to the classrooms that we should turn for instruction in values. We need to look for an institution that zealously guards material which contains opposing viewpoints, materials which provide extensive opportunities for young adults to confront and examine their own actions. Such an institution is the library; such materials are literature. Yet, by not reminding our communities of these traditional functions and of the nature of library collections, school and public librarians will abdicate their responsibilities to the young adults they serve.

It is clear that the lay public supports the schools, rather than libraries, as the primary institution for providing examples of our nation's collective beliefs and values. "Public opinion polls repeatedly show that parents want 'values' taught in the schools (Dworkin 1987, p. 61)." Unanimity on this topic appears to exist at every position on the political spectrum. A university president recently remarked: "Suddenly we find ourselves living in a changed and changing world. Like romance and marital fidelity, virtue and morality have returned to our social and cultural scene (Trachenberg 1987, p. 333)."

But it is also clear that although there is widespread agreement on need, implementation in school systems is another matter. Strident calls issue from those articulating radically opposing positions who insist that their viewpoints are unassailably correct and therefore should be preferred to all others. Many principals will argue that it will be extremely difficult to add values education to an already overburdened secondary curriculum. Others may be fearful that religious or political ideology will be injected into lessons, and that an orthodoxy of sorts will

replace a neutral examination of controversies. They may wish to let sleeping dogma lie. Some beleaguered administrators are convinced that a new curriculum which places emphasis on morals may result in divisiveness and, ultimately, community conflict.

To confound the issue even more, some "parent advocates...seem unable to better articulate what they mean by 'values,' and the schools remain bewildered by the demand to do what they believe they are already doing (Tyson-Bernstein 1987, p. 16)." Already, California's State Superintendent of Schools Honig, a leader in curricular reform, has been criticized by a group called The Traditional Values Coalition, claiming backing from 5000 churches. Honig, reporting on a meeting to reach an accord, stated that there was a consensus on such issues as honesty, integrity, civility, and self-discipline, but his adversaries objected to matters such as the treatment of the family.

Some observers strongly believe that schools basically have no choice in the debate. Gordon, a prominent educator, proclaims: "If, at its heart, education is moral education, then we have to face the fact that values will be part of the process. Education cannot be conducted in a value-free context (Gordon 1986, p. 8)." He goes on to provide a convincing rationale: "Moral education would foster the basic values embodied in the Bill of Rights. Since America is a democratic society and public schools are committed to the values enumerated in the Bill of Rights, moral education is logical and appropriate for American society (Gordon 1986, p. 9)." Although some agree with this premise, they also view values education as an antidote for what they argue are lapses in patriotism among the young. Others quarrel with a curriculum which ignores the personal ethical struggles adolescents typically experience as a part of the maturation process, asserting that "a new push for values education that focuses on a narrowly drawn core of citizenship values will not be enough. We need to strengthen the humanities, because it is only there that students are exposed to the complexities of the human dilemma and to the language of heart and soul, right and wrong, good and evil (Tyson-Bernstein 1987)."

Most proponents of values education tend to embrace two perspectives—character and citizenship. Within those domains, there appears to be three emphases: first, an awareness of moral rules which are universal, obligatory, unalterable, and impersonal and involve justice, human rights, and human welfare; second, an understanding of conventions which are generally considered desirable but are nonuniversal, alterable, and consensual and concern habits of civility, tolerance, and respect for differing ideas and behaviors (Turiel 1983); and third, a heightened sensitivity to precisely what a matter of honor is, accompanied by guidelines and skills as to how to evaluate ethical dilemmas.

How to translate these concepts into specifics is still being debated in some quarters, according to Ernest Boyer (1985). Some states have already taken action. The Maryland State Department of Education's

Commission on Values has developed a list of academic objectives for a values curriculum. These are divided into two segments: one enumerates the behaviors held to be important for youth as knowledgeable citizens; the other focuses on exemplary personal acts and beliefs. Some examples of these behavioral goals are: "Patriotism: love, respect, loyalty to the United States of America and the willingness to correct its imperfections by legal means; An understanding of the rights and obligations of a citizen in a democratic society; [and] An understanding of other societies in the world which do not enjoy the rights and privileges of a democratic government." The character objectives include: "Personal integrity and honesty rooted in respect for the truth, intellectual curiosity, and love of learning; A sense of justice, rectitude, fair play and a commitment to them; [and] Respect for the rights of all persons regardless of their race, religion, sex, age, physical condition, or mental state (Gordon 1986, p. 10)."

In other states and cities—e.g., California and Salt Lake City—school leaders have already mandated values education for their pupils. In the revision of curricula in California, teachers of all ages and of many subjects are being directed to meld topics concerning ethical issues into their lessons (Dworkin 1987, p. 61).

Joining the implementation debate, many educational leaders have wisely concluded that didactic or hortatory approaches will not be efficacious with today's teenagers. Johnson, for example, suggests that an authoritarian approach begets mindless compliance and ultimately, passivity. He proposes that the desirable way for adolescents to achieve self-discipline is to encourage them to consider what it means to be human as they struggle with their own personal odyssey into the development of the mature self. He strongly suggests that this can effectively come about through the students' exposure to and incorporation of the emergent lessons in humanistic studies (Johnson 1985, p. 49).

Within this camp, there appears to be growing support for the use of literature as a vehicle to reach these curricular targets. A high school teacher reminds us of this attribute of literature: "As we teach the significant literature of our culture, children are exposed to the values of our civilization (Burkett 1987, p. 56)." Both Honig and Boyer support this tool as does U.S. Department of Education policy advisor Gary Bauer (1986).

The notion of using literature as the means for understanding human conflict and resolution is an obvious one—and has been so used from the beginning of time. In the process of examining stories, readers become aware of multiple perspectives, of varied and innumerable motivations of individuals, and of productive, unproductive, and counterproductive strategies for dealing with stress as characters are compelled to select options which have ethical elements in order to resolve a conflict. "When a literary work connects with a student, that individual is often moved to ponder the good or bad qualities of various characters

and to question their actions. Regardless of the form they take, literary works vividly dramatize the many ways that humankind has dealt or can deal with the infinite possibilities of life (Johnson 1985, p. 52)."

Teachers in California who use a literary approach are encouraged to "let moral issues emerge from the choices made by literary characters and the consequences of their actions (Dworkin 1987, p. 61)." They are not alone. English teachers have traditionally used literature to help youngsters wrestle with moral and ethical perplexities. But teachers cannot, should not, and must not shoulder the entire responsibility for linking young adults with values-oriented literature, for they are limited by selection, time, and obligations to other curricular charges.

Although, as Robert Probst suggests, "literature offers us formulations, value-laden conceptions of the way things are or might be, against which we may test our own visions (Probst 1987, p. 27)," young adults are hardly able to test their visions if the curriculum still stresses *teaching about* literature rather than *interacting with* it. Discussions on values may emerge as interesting and often dynamic sidebars, but they fade to insignificance if the intended focus of the class is only to enumerate multiple points of view or analyze the use of realism. Yet, even with the ideal curriculum, the business of literature and humanities teachers must be able to help young adults interact with text. In this process, instructors encourage students to move from simple, emotional responses and discover within the works "not knowledge ready-made but the opportunity to make knowledge (Probst 1987, p. 27)." Young adults must take the words they read and make them their own, without mimicry, but as a result of employing higher level thinking skills—i.e., analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These opportunities—to interact with text, to begin creating a personal value system based on society's norms, and to "make knowledge"—must occur repeatedly, not simply within the context of a single unit or class period, but with book after book, poem after poem, and text after text. These tools spring from the literature classroom; the materials from our young adult library collections.

Hampere by time, budget, and organizational restrictions, literature curricula in the secondary schools cover limited selections and by definition do not offer the range of materials available in libraries. The long role call of the great and not so great books that have been excluded from study in English classrooms invariably encompasses titles which confront someone's value system. Yet, these books may well contain the very passage that triggers a deep response in a particular reader. Although school and public libraries have certainly received challenges on these very same works, their assertive activism has resulted in ready access of many titles for young adult readers. Championing availability has had the effect of protecting student access through libraries when these same books are forbidden or not approved for use in direct instruction.

Other problems exist within the scope and sequence of many literature programs. An examination of California's Reading Initiative list points out several of these. With exceptions, such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, titles like *Aesop's Fables* are old or, like *Death of a Salesman* and *A Man For All Seasons*, concern essentially adult problems. While these classics could be included in the curriculum on their own literary merits, their foci are typically not congruent with the moral quandaries confronting contemporary youth, nor are they readily transferable to adolescent predicaments.

We must remember that it is story, not an approved list of particular stories, that acts as the natural vehicle through which young adults explore the range of human behaviors from the venal to the exalted. Authors from Sophocles to Robert Ludlum have used the crises in the lives of their literary characters to examine moral issues. Pride, envy, greed, deceit, loyalty, integrity, and generosity are but a few of the raw materials from which writers construct characters and propel their story lines forward. The fables of Aesop employ anecdote to deliver a homily; in case the obvious point is missed, a single phrase or sentence summarizes messages which encourage honesty, tenacity, patience, diligence, and the like. The narratives in the *Old Testament* as well as the parables in the *New Testament* are vehicles through which conduct is condemned or condoned and evidence of divine will demonstrated. While injunctions or commandments may summarize a moral stance, it is story that adds meaning and life to values, offering powerful heuristic support, generating identification, and promoting commitment.

The stories which one encounters from infancy to adulthood are laden with values and gain in subtlety and potency as they are addressed to increasingly mature audiences. Fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm are peopled with simple gentle maidens, youth whose kindness and humility are rewarded, and selfish siblings and conniving stepmothers whose lack of concern for others is duly punished. Within these tales resides the inescapable message—i.e., not how things truly are, but how they should be. Here are the virtues society esteems even if they are not always practiced.

Throughout history, authors have used their talents to illuminate the incessant struggle between good and evil. Classics have generally achieved that status by dealing profoundly and insightfully with such themes. The more profound the work, the more moving and disturbing it is to the sentient reader who struggles to sort out the novel's ambiguities and respond to its subtleties.

Older readers see Sidney Carton place honor above all else—even life itself. He is clearly Dickens's hero and, by story's end, also is generally the reader's. After the particulars of the novel fade, the concept of honor as an admirable trait persists in the reader's consciousness.

Dorian Gray's internal corruption poisons his soul and ultimately destroys him. Again the specifics become less distinct with the passage

of time, while the idea of the self-destructive power of hedonism is introduced to the reader's value system.

In more complex works, warring elements are frequently contained within the same character. The audience watches in fascination as Macbeth's ambition wrestles with his conscience. Playgoers, recognizing similar conflicting elements in themselves, identify with the usurper and vicariously take part in the battle. The play endures because it remains relevant to persisting human struggles and has become part of Western civilization's collective value system. As Probst cogently explains: literature "trains the reader in the conventions of meaning peculiar to the society, giving the members of the group a common conceptual framework (Probst 1984, p. 241)." This is what Jauss has called the "socially formative function" of literature (Jauss 1982, p. 40).

That values are present in such classics, however, is not the point in question. The issue is, instead, whether these works are the most appropriate means for introducing and transmitting mainstream values to adolescents. For a variety of reasons, many students are incapable of understanding those demanding time-honored books which are frequently the core of academic literature programs. Too many teenagers are not sufficiently familiar with the techniques and devices commonly used by these authors. They miss irony and sarcasm; they fail to keep subplots and parallel plots straight; they are frustrated by ambiguities and contradictions; and they are confused by shifting narrators and time manipulations. Students' vocabulary may be too impoverished to follow sophisticated narrative and, most frequently, they sadly do not bring to such a work the background of general knowledge that would allow them to make sense of their reading. Other young adults may simply avoid reading them, expressing lack of interest, time, or motivation.

For the most part, classical books are adult books which deal with adult problems and concerns. The main players—the heroes and victims—are adults; the conflicts are over adult issues. Struggles take place in the palace, on the battlefield, or in the boardroom—not the schoolroom, the principal's office, or the shopping mall. For youth preoccupied with the here and now, there is neither desire nor motivation to identify with such seemingly far removed literary situations or temporarily adopt the concerns of the characters in those dramas. Far too many of the concepts seem too remote to be important. As Louise Rosenblatt reminds us: "Like the beginning reader, the adolescent needs to encounter literature for which he possesses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment. He, too, must draw on his past experiences with life and language as the raw materials out of which to shape the new experience symbolized on the page (Rosenblatt 1968, p. 26)."

What have been described by Havinghurst as the developmental tasks of adolescence typically form the focus of teenage interests. It is

sometimes difficult for adults to remember the urgency of what they have come in later years to see as relatively trivial problems—i.e., the desperate need for peer approval, the confirmation of gender role acceptability, and the anxiety over physiological changes. These topics are rarely found in mature novels. When they do appear, they are often treated humorously or nostalgically, and neither approach is calculated to appeal to readers whose everyday experiences are so lightly dismissed.

Some developmental tasks concern more enduring subjects—i.e., the search for independence from parental control and the establishment of a separate identity, the definition of a social role that acknowledges a community responsibility, and the development of a value system. But youngsters, for the most part, are asked to put aside these compelling interests when attending to adult novels. This is not meant to imply that no students are able to read, care about, and understand adult literature. There are certainly some who are sufficiently well read and therefore knowledgeable enough to meet this challenge. Some readers have a high tolerance for frustration and are sufficiently tenacious to bulldog their way through formidable books. Others may so love reading that they are willing to labor over literature in the expectation that they will ultimately be amply rewarded.

Many youngsters, however, do not care to struggle with complex or classical adult literature. For them, adolescent novels can be used as both a bridge to more exacting works and as the most appropriate forum for approaching values-laden issues. Whatever the case, these stories use adolescents as protagonists, focus on familiar situations and circumstances, and typically revolve around some aspect of a developmental task also facing their readers.

The moral issues embedded in adolescent fiction typically involve young people in crisis. In other words, it is not an adult character who has to choose between options, it is a stand-in for the teen reader. An examination of the core of two works, one primarily aimed at adults and the other written for young adults, illustrates this point.

In *An Enemy of the People*, an adult must decide whether to take the morally correct position even though in doing so he will face the fury of his community. He will be ostracized, vilified, and eventually destroyed. A clear ethical dilemma exists—but one which likely only an adult would face. As such, the young adult reader has an easy choice and can feel satisfaction in supporting the obviously appropriate view. In effect, there is little at risk.

On the other hand, in Lipsyte's *Summer Rules*, Bobby is asked to conceal his knowledge about the guilt of his employer's relative and allow a social outcast to take the blame for a crime. The young hero, urged to keep silent—a behavior that is described as altruistic if viewed in a certain light—is warned about the consequences of speaking out. The youth is clearly faced with a moral problem as an adult attempts to manipulate him through implied threats and a twisted argument. He

realizes it is in his own self-interest to go along with the lie and accept the rationalization. The thorny situation is one to which young readers can and do relate. The emphasis of this title is not on adult misbehavior but on what a teenager should consciously and deliberately choose to do in such circumstances. This attribute of presenting issues in terms of realistic adolescent circumstances is precisely what makes the young adult novel so powerful.

Just as there is no universally appropriate list of books for use in the literature classroom, there are no secret, optimal selections for presenting society's values to adolescents. What those of us working with young adults need to remember is that it is not the sophistication of the text that matters, but rather the sophistication and intensity of the interaction between reader and text that allows teenagers to confront, question, establish, refine, internalize, and articulate a value system through their own literature.

Most young adult novels, curiously even the most frequently criticized ones, reaffirm traditional values. *Go Ask Alice*, often challenged because of passages concerning drugs and sex, unequivocally proposes that those who use drugs will lose control of their lives, will degrade themselves, and will ultimately die. Judy Blume's *Forever*, another highly censored title, concludes that sex should not be engaged in frivolously, and that the decision to have a sexual relationship is a serious one which may establish an unintentional pattern for subsequent relationships. Similarly, in Mazer's *I Love You Stupid*, Marcus doesn't just lose his values along with his virginity but rather discovers that he cannot use people irresponsibly simply to satisfy his purely selfish needs.

But readers must not uncritically adopt society's mores, even those repeated in their literature. They must instead use these tenets as a framework to test their own beliefs. This is the process Probst refers to when he states:

In the end, only I—and only you—can decide what *love, goodness, evil, and justice* mean, though I must do it in the context of the culture. I read Shakespeare, then, and [Richard] Peck, not to submit to them, not to absorb unreflectingly and uncritically their visions and their values, but to think with them. Ultimately, I want them to submit to me, to feed my thinking, not to control it (Probst 1987, pp. 27-28).

Books that will thus feed an adolescent's thinking can be found in any respectable young adult library collection. Only a few will be mentioned, embracing varying degrees of complexity in theme, style, and narrative, and which pointedly address the values in question. Consequently, the following books do not comprise a finite list for values instruction but rather serve as thematic illustrations of the numerous works young adults may select for themselves.

The concept of patriotism and "love, respect, loyalty to the USA" provides the framework for many young adult titles. Older works, like

Forbes's *Johnny Tremain*, clearly enumerate the values on which we presume our country stands—i.e., the rights of all humans, freedom from tyranny, and respect and concern for the individual. In this young adult classic, selfless and altruistic patriots ensure these ideals by marching off to war:

For men and women and children all over the world...even as we shoot down the British soldiers we are fighting for rights such as they will be enjoying a hundred years from now.... There will be no more tyranny. A handful of men cannot seize power over thousands. A man shall choose who it is shall rule over him.... The peasants of France, the serfs of Russia. Hardly more than animals now. But because we fight, they shall see freedom like a new sun rising in the west (Forbes 1943, pp. 178-79).

Readers may be caught up in the glorious causes of the Revolution, and much of young adult fiction reiterates these sentiments. But the literature also explores a patriotism which flourishes off the battlefield, and consequently the ideals of "love, respect, [and] loyalty to the USA" do not have to coexist only with rousing accounts of armed conflict.

Tim Meeker, from *My Brother Sam Is Dead*, also loves his country and does so just as much as Johnny Tremain. His devotion, however, recognizes some flaws in his country's actions, and during his story Tim critically questions how a nation can claim to preserve human rights on the one hand, and assault those very rights on the other. During the American Revolution, Tim discovers that he cannot exercise a basic freedom and buy the *Rivington Gazette* because it is a Tory paper, that English and Americans alike control horrible prison ships off the Atlantic coast, and that both sides unmercifully exploit the colonists. Summing up his feelings, Tim concludes that: "Free of British domination, the nation has prospered." Nonetheless, he questions the cost of such prosperity and of freedom itself: "Perhaps on some other anniversary of the United States somebody will read this and see what the cost has been. Father said, 'In war the dead pay the debts of the living,' and they have paid us well. But somehow, even fifty years later, I keep thinking that there might have been another way, beside war, to achieve the same end (Collier and Collier 1974, p. 211)."

And those other ways are found in young adult literature. The "willingness to correct [the nation's] imperfections by legal means" provides the cornerstone for yet another adolescent novel, James Forman's *Freedom's Blood*. A thinly fictionalized account of civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman, *Freedom's Blood* shows three young protagonists who, in 1964, realize that the Fourteenth Amendment overlooks some citizens. They adopt legal redress rather than physical battle as they fervently work to register previously disenfranchised Mississippi blacks. In this story, and in history, the three pay for their beliefs with their lives. Patriotism and passion for those liberties underscores how heroic individuals in contemporary society can fight to make their country move closer to its own articulated ideal.

Love of country involves more than standing up for time-honored principles; it also includes a dark side as Robert Cormier reminds us in *After The First Death*. In a 1985 interview, he admonished:

Even patriotism, carried to extremes can be evil, as in the person of the General, and also innocent. I report to that belief when I read about bombs being left indiscriminately by terrorists in post offices, where they could go off at any time and probably injure a child and a mother, and I thought, "What kind of a mentality could do that?" My conclusion was that it could only be done out of a great innocence. People are so caught up in a cause that they're doing these things innocently. They're not realizing how important one particular life is, even though it's not within the cause they uphold. Certainly that was one of the big themes in *After The First Death*. Miro was the epitome of the innocent monster (Bugniazet 1985, p. 17).

While Miro certainly typifies that role—i.e., one who is manipulated by his father to use terrorism to bring about a twisted concept of freedom—the General chillingly embodies an even more corrupt demon. Driven by power, he attempts to capture Miro's terrorists who hold captive a group of innocent children and their teenage driver. Willing to sacrifice his honor, his self-respect, and even his son, General Marchand comes to exemplify that very evil he so desperately wants to destroy—and does so in the name of democracy and patriotism.

In addition to confronting the meaning of patriotism, adolescents are asked to come to "an understanding of the rights and obligations of a citizen in a democratic society." In Nat Hentoff's *The Day They Came To Arrest The Book*, several young protagonists find themselves embroiled in a community fight over censorship. These adolescents have never considered either their rights or their obligations as citizens, until the responsibility for understanding the implications of the First Amendment enters their own classroom.

"Where you been?" Barney said. "This has been happening all over the country."

"Yeah"—Luke ran his hand through his hair—"but it hasn't been happening to me. I mean, I heard some things last year about some books just dropping out of sight because Mighty Mike [the principal] met with a parent or somebody, but I didn't pay it much mind. I should have, I suppose, but I didn't. You didn't either (Hentoff 1982, p. 82)."

The conflict centers around the use of *Huckleberry Finn* in an American history course. On the one side, young adults and their parents, certain that the book is offensive, demand its removal so that students will "have the right to be free of racism...and free of sexism (Hentoff 1982, p. 104)." Yet on the other side, equally vocal students and teachers state the book should remain in order to preserve the right of unrestricted access to information as well as the freedom "to read and to discuss controversial thoughts and language (Hentoff 1982, p. 104)." While the conflict about the book is resolved, and *Huckleberry Finn* remains as required reading and on the library shelves at the high school, readers are not led to any simple answers concerning censorship. They may, however, conclude, adopting feisty and strong-willed Kate's

position, that constitutional issues cannot be ignored and debate is "all part of the learning process (Hentoff 1982, p. 168)."

Proponents of values education also suggest that young adults look not only at their own civilization, but also at "other societies in the world which do not enjoy the rights and privileges of a democratic government." Young adult literature fails to extol the virtues of non-democratic societies. Instead, it attempts to show that wherever young adults may live, and under whatever social structures, they are more alike than different. Felice Holman's *The Wild Children*, a historical account of the *bezprizorni*, or homeless youngsters who fought for survival in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution, reaffirms that even a lawless band of children living in a country far removed both geographically and philosophically from the United States, will still have values in common with their Western readers. The *bezprizorni* are like animals of nature. Perhaps they are cold as dogs in the snow and as hungry as wolves in the forest, but they are free (Holman 1983, p. 43), the leader of one such band tells Alex, a newcomer who has just arrived in Moscow with no money, no family, no future, and no hope. Alex discovers that this band of children lives by rules—rules that come from a now dead baker who respected "living in good ways, [and] the rights of people to choose for themselves what they will do (Holman 1983, p. 55)." The rules are simple: members must work, they may not drink or use cocaine, they may not bring new youngsters with typhus or syphilis to the group, and they may not kill. Consequently, those who live by these strictures are rewarded with escape, a chance for a future where they don't have to "spend the rest of our lives doing nothing but trying to find food, freezing, [and] wearing filthy rags (Holman 1983, p. 111)."

Young adult literature also provides a forum for examining individual as well as political character. Typically these books place adolescent protagonists in situations where they make choices which ultimately lead to self-respect and incorporation into society. In one such work, Suzanne Newton's *I Will Call It Georgie's Blues*, readers meet Neal, a ninth grade boy hiding a terrible secret. The Reverend Sloan, Neal's father, presents a pious and caring face to his small North Carolina congregation but turns psychologically and physically abusive within the confines of his own home. Unable to alter this situation alone and unwilling to work together, each family member reacts idiosyncratically: Mrs. Sloan retreats into helpless bitterness; Aileen, the older child, flagrantly opposes her father by dating a young man he disapproves of; Georgie, the youngest, builds a fantasy of psychological horror; and Neal tries to avoid unpleasantness, accept the status quo, and simply keep the peace. As he tells Aileen: "Look—people handle their lives whatever way they can. If you want to be the great, all-time revolutionary, then that's your business. I don't. I'm saving my energy for m—for something else (Newton 1986, p. 47)."

Neal's energy consumes him as he spends it protecting Georgie, trying to understand Aileen and his mother, silently raging at his father, and covering up his love of music. In doing the latter, however, he hides an important part of himself. As the teenager admits: "Music is as much a part of me as eating and sleeping. There's nothing I can do instead of it to ease the craving. It crowds out everything else, especially when reality is so bleak (Newton 1986, p. 148)." When he finally confronts his dad, Neal's accusations also ironically apply to himself: "But how can you stand it, being miserable all the time, worrying about what people think? What's the good of it (Newton 1986, p. 71)?" And it is that feeling of shame—of hiding, of doing something dirty—that finally lifts when Neal protests with his music, "I'm not hiding any more!...This is *me*—Neal Sloan—the real Neal Sloan—and I ain't gonna hide no more (Newton 1986, p. 196)!" His triumph and self respect come from within, but not without nurturing from his community. Although he stands alone, he gains strength by meshing his beliefs with the accepted views of society.

Not so with Jerry Renault from Cormier's *The Chocolate War*. When readers first meet Jerry on the football field, they encounter a youth who plays sports tenaciously and seriously. A character comments: "Don't let him fool you, Obie. He's a tough one. Didn't you see him get wiped out down there and still get to his feet? Tough. And stubborn (Cormier 1986, p. 16)." Jerry's toughness is rewarded by a slot on the football team. But in the larger society of Trinity High, Jerry discovers a different set of rules when he stubbornly refuses to sell candy in an annual fund-raising event. "I'm Jerry Renault, and I'm not going to sell the chocolates (Cormier 1986, p. 149)," he proudly announces to the acting headmaster, Brother Leon. Jerry knows why he, like the figure illustrating his locker poster, stands "upright and alone and unafraid, poised at the moment of making himself heard and known in the world, the universe (Cormier 1986, p. 143)." Cormier contrasts Jerry's emergent self respect with Mr. Renault's inability to face himself, with his classmates' feelings of contamination and pollution, self-loathing, and banal malevolence. Yet Jerry's community, unlike Neal Sloan's, rejects him because the youth's beliefs are not congruent with the system. Will readers find in *The Chocolate War* the message that it is futile to stand up for yourself? Perhaps. But perhaps they will see that the violence at Trinity erupts because Jerry's classmates, with their silent, ineffective support, force him to stand alone in opposition to the rules of society at Trinity High. With this work, Cormier is activating a young adult's thinking rather than controlling it.

The titles that confront these and other values-laden experiences continue on shelf after shelf, list after list, and season after season. M.E. Kerr's *Gentlehands* forces a serious decision on the protagonist, Buddy Boyle. In order to impress his new girl, the sophisticated and wealthy Skye, Buddy takes her to see his grandfather, a near stranger who lives

close to Skye's resort community. But under his kindly manner and worldly polish, grandfather hides a terrible past: the old man, known ironically as Gentlehands, once ran a Nazi war camp and was personally responsible for thousands of deaths. He has lived his life in hiding and fear of discovery and the decision of whether to expose him to the authorities falls squarely on the young hero's shoulders.

The questions of "What is justice?" and "What is law?" are as old as our civilization. *Bad Man Ballad* by Sanders begins as a simple quest: young Ely Jackson, and the town lawyer, Owen Lightfoot, set out from the Ohio Valley in 1813 to track a half-man, half-animal supposedly responsible for the violent murder of an itinerant peddler. But when the two find this bearman and bring him to trial, they realize that the law actually mocked justice, and man and boy reflect on the disparity.

Yet whether presenting realistic, historical, or science fiction; whether providing an understanding of patriotism, the rights and obligations of citizens, or of other societies in the world; whether exploring self-respect, personal integrity, or a sense of justice, young adult literature umbrellas one recurring theme: we are responsible for our actions, and our choices are important. Charles, in Holland's *The Man Without a Face*, first hears this idea from his summer tutor, Justin McLeod.

Once he asked me, "What do you want most? Quickly—don't think."

"To be free."

"Free from what?"

From being crowded. To do what I want."

"Fair enough. Just don't expect to be free from the consequences of what you do, while you're doing what you want (Holland 1987, p. 87)."

Johnny Tremain, Tim Meeker, Neal Sloan, Buddy Boyle, Ely Jackson, and Jerry Renault all confront this idea, as do the teenagers in Lois Duncan's *Killing Mr. Griffin*. These high school seniors fear and dislike their English teacher: he grades strictly, gives impossible assignments, does not accept late work, and possesses the power to keep them all from graduating. "Well, why don't we...plan to kill the bastard (Duncan 1979, p. 17)." Mark suggests one day when the group meets at the local snack shop. "Inappropriate," they conclude, although they are willing to go along with a simple kidnapping just to scare Mr. Griffin. But their scheme collapses when Mr. Griffin, a heart patient, dies at the remote spot. They did not really mean to kill him, only frighten him and make him beg as they had done for passing grades. But he dies anyway and the students must decide whether the responsibility lies with those who participated in the prank, with Mark who masterminded it, or with Mr. Griffin who had the bad grace to pick that moment for an angina attack.

Readers will interact with this and any other book in a variety of ways. Some will find themselves caught up solely in the action and turn pages to see what will happen next. Others will come away from the experience with specific information—e.g., that nitroglycerin tablets are not explosives. Still others may conclude that simple apologies fail

to atone for consequences of some actions. Some may figure that with a little more cleverness the students might have pulled off their scheme. Individual responses are unknown, for each reader brings his or her own particular background to the literary experience and uses this background to give meaning to the text.

What we do know, however, is that young adults need practice in making choices and that they need role models with whom they can identify or reject. Adolescent literature provides them these opportunities, because it is "through literature they acquire not so much additional *information* as additional *experience* (Rosenblatt 1968, p. 38)." Many of their books will contain powerful prompts for confronting values-laden problems and consequently provide the framework within which young adults will ultimately build their own value systems. They must take these works and, while reading, make them their own. The classroom may give birth to this process, but it cannot see it to maturity. Only public and school libraries, with the depth and expanse of their uncensored collections, can provide the widest possible opportunities for today's youth to understand society and to find their places in it.

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