PERCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE IN NARRATIVE FICTION

by 1264

LAWRENCE JOSEPH FOX

B. S., Kansas State University, 1966

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1970

Approved by:

Major Professor

LD
2668
R4
1970
F68

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	INTRODUCTION	1
1.	THE PERCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE	4
2.	PERCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE IN _TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD_	8
	THEME	8
	POINT OF VIEW	10
	INDIVIDUAL ENCOUNTERS AS LEARNING EXPERIENCES	11
	Miss Caroline Fisher	13
	The Cunninghams	15
	The Ewells	17
	Calpurnia	19
	Aunt Alexandra	21
	Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose	23
	Mr. Dolphus Raymond	26
	Atticus Finch	28
	Boo Radley	31
3.	IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GUIDANCE SETTING	36
	CONTRIBUTIONS OF OTHER FORMS	36
	PERCEPTION AND POINT OF VIEW	38
	THE NARRATOR AND THE COUNSELING INTERVIEW	40
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	44

INTRODUCTION

How can we enter the world of another person? What avenues of perceptual approach represent the most productive techniques for understanding? Client-centered therapy emphasizes the perceptual frame of reference--the empathic identification with another's perceptual field, attitudes and emotions--as an organic method for gaining insight. In other words, we need to understand the other person's point of view.

The concept is relatively easy to define, but its application may present problems. With a lifetime of experiences constantly exerting influence on both client and counselor, the difficulty of assuming this internal frame of reference becomes obvious. We cannot easily suspend the experiences of a lifetime, even temporarily.

Having recognized the inherent obstacles that may act to prevent understanding, it becomes critically important for guidance education to do everything possible to insure the vivid illustration of this basic concept. This paper suggests the use of narrative fiction as a teaching device to define the emotional and psychological dimensions of the perceptual frame of reference. To Kill A Mockingbird, Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize winner, takes the limited perceptual boundaries of a child's world and expands its horizons to accept previously incomprehensible or undesirable behavior. Through an elaborately conceived series of experiential episodes, Scout Finch, the narrator, is able to gain insight and understanding when she sees the world from another person's point of view. These experiences, through the vehicle of the first-person narrative, literally demand the emotional participation of the reader. Since the narrator is only a child, we are able to appreciate her confusion and frustration; we have experienced much

the same thing, and our maturity enables us to gain quick insight into the real nature of her dilemmas. Empathy is established, and the author invites our participation with consummate skill.

The posture of the reader, then, is suggestive of the counselor, counsciously working to gain empathic understanding and identification with the client's world. We are transported into the world of the narrator as she, in turn, uses the "other person's point of view" to identify with the perceptions of still another individual. Repeatedly, throughout the course of the entire novel, this layman's version of the perceptual frame of reference is offered by the girl's father as the key to understanding human behavior.

This novel, then, seems uniquely suited to a critical role in guidance education. If it can be effectively applied to the guidance setting, it seems logical to explore the creative dimensions of literature in search of additional "raw material" for the illustration and definition of other guidance concepts and techniques.

The approach of the paper, generally speaking, is persuasive. It does not consider specific lesson plans or teaching methodology for the novel, but the implications for a cross-discipline approach seem to suggest themselves. Since the novel is so laden with consecutive illustration of an important guidance technique, it is logical to assume that guidance and literature, working together, might create a vibrant teaching tool from the distinctly humanistic dimensions of the novel.

Finally, while the writer does not wish to appear redundant, an additional comment regarding the novel's theme seems appropriate. A good deal of debate, on the part of literary critics, has proposed

two dominant interpretations of the novel's basic theme. Some critics suggest the story as primarily a "racial novel," emphasizing the prejudice of a white jury as symbolic of the corrupt nature of contemporary American society. Others contend the "mockingbird motif" is the real theme, with its moving plea for the innocent and the beautiful as the important statement of the novel. Both theories, in this writer's opinion, appear to focus only upon fragments of an organic whole. The repeated philosophy of Atticus Finch is one of understanding and tolerance for all behavior. Poverty, disease, sustained isolation and learned prejudice all are regarded as causative, contributing influences on human behavior. This is why some behavior is so hard to understand, especially for a little girl. The perceptual frame of reference filters through the maze of apparently contradictory or abnormal behavior to define and illuminate the real reasons that often contribute to human misunderstanding. The innocent black man and the vindictive bigot can both be embraced in this spectrum of human acceptance and understanding. Miss Lee pleads for a quality of understanding that can both accept and ignore individual differences.

Chapter 1

THE PERCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

With the rise of client-centered therapy, Carl Rogers became the popular advocate of a counseling technique that has since become basic to a large body of guidance theory. Utilized by psychiatrists and psychologists for decades, Rogers defined the concept and established it as one of three principal characteristics of client-centered therapy. The perceptual frame of reference—empathic identification with the client's attitudes and perceptions—came into vogue in the early 1950's, and guidance theory has continued to build and expand upon the concept. Many definitions have been proposed, but Rogers himself probably offered the best description:

> This formulation would state that it is the counselor's function to assume, in so far as he is able, the internal frame of reference of the client, to perceive the world as the client sees it, to perceive the client himself as he is seen by himself, to lay aside all perceptions from the external frame of reference while doing this, and to communicate something of this empathic understanding to the client. . . . The experiencing with the client, the living of his attitudes, is not in terms of emotional identification, where the counselor is perceiving the hates and hopes and fears of the client through immersion in an empathic process, but without himself, as counselor, experiencing those hates and hopes and fears. . . . I trust it is evident from this description that this type of relationship can exist only if the counselor is deeply and genuinely able to adopt these attitudes.[1]

We can state this another way, in the language of the layman.

---

[1]Carl Rogers, Client-centered Therapy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 29.

We can say that the perceptual frame of reference is our sincere effort to understand the other person's point of view. Atticus Finch, the wise attorney of Harper Lee's To Kill A Mockingbird, put it this way: "You never really understand a person . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."[2] We can define the concept and analyze its various components, but we are really talking about only one thing—the ability to share the attitudes and perceptions of another human being. As Rogers emphasized, this is the key to much of success in client-centered therapy. It is of vital importance in everyday life, as well. The salesman, the advertising executive and the school teacher must, if they are to remain effective, continually employ this fundamental principle for understanding human behavior. For the guidance counselor, the internal frame of reference is one of the first, basic concepts to which he is introduced in counseling theory.

Given the importance of our concept, the problem now becomes one of implementation. How, in fact, can an individual be "taught" to make effective use of the perceptual frame of reference? Is its use indicative of a skill, an art, or simply a tolerant attitude? Perhaps even more importantly, which individuals are capable of assuming this role? These questions cannot remain academic. While it is not our purpose to approach them within the framework of this paper, we must at least recognize their implications. It is one thing to talk about the internal frame of reference, but it is entirely another matter to insure that the concept is implemented into the operational methodology of the student

---

[2]Harper Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1960), p. 34.

counselor. But, again, can the role be learned or does it, perhaps, demand a certain rare type of instinct? For the moment at least, our answer must remain as a kind of compromise. Nevertheless, personality theory emphasizes the critical role of empathic understanding, and even the objective discipline of behavioral science stresses the total importance of the (subjective) value systems. For this writer, at any rate, the impression persists that guidance can only assume that counselors are using the perceptual frame of reference as an effective tool.

This paper will suggest another method by which, it is anticipated, the concept might be effectively demonstrated to the individual. Plotted diagrams of the counseling encounter, motion pictures and recorded interviews have been employed to demonstrate both the technique and its value. This paper suggests narrative fiction as an agent through which to define and illustrate the perceptual frame. To Kill A Mockingbird, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Harper Lee, takes the perceptual frame of reference for a dominant theme, and an elaborate series of personal encounters testifies to the inherent value of the concept. The major theme of the novel, in fact, might be defined, literally, as this internal frame of reference. The concept is continually demonstrated and articulated throughout the entire length of the novel.

The implications for guidance education, particularly, seem obvious. Moreover, the book implies a vast teaching potential, for guidance, to be found in literature. Perhaps, if we explore the realms of creative writing, more effective methods for illustrating guidance concepts and techniques might suggest themselves. Perhaps something in the creative media lends itself to the teaching of attitudes—if we can define the perceptual frame of reference as an "attitude." This issue

will be discussed at some length later in the paper, together with a consideration of the several, apparently similar characteristics common to both the guidance setting and the idiom of creative literature.

Chapter 2

PERCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE IN TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Without attempting a formal literary critique of the novel, certain aspects must be identified and analyzed so that they may be seen as applicable to the guidance setting. Any literary analysis runs the risk of defining the component parts of a work to the point of diminishing return. Certain features are often distorted or ignored so that we are left with an odd collection of themes, motifs and plot analyses, with little or nothing of substance left to unite them into a meaningful whole. For our purposes, however, a consideration of theme, character analysis and point of view will serve to suggest the novel as a potentially valuable tool for guidance education. We can ignore serious considerations of plot, style, tone, and various other literary dimensions without distorting the unique personality of the novel or relinquishing its pertinent message.

THEME

The pervasive, recurring theme of the novel is nothing less than an elaborate, repeated illustration of the perceptual frame of reference in action. The author subject Scout, the narrator, to a chronology of learning experiences which alter her perceptions of various individuals. These episodes, it is emphasized, cannot be regarded as erratic or isolated. There is not a single chapter in the book that does not teach the little girl something new or which does not build toward a new learning experience. Time and again, Scout finds herself looking at life, suddenly, through the

eyes of another person. Consistently admonished to "walk around in the other person's shoes," the girl's learning experiences always reflect the inherent value of her father's advice. When she is able to do this, she gains new insight and understanding into the nature of the human condition. This new information changes her behavior so that, at the end of the novel, we see an amazingly perceptive, intelligent and rather sophisticated young lady. While critics have belabored the fact that Scout is much too mature for her age, it is a liberty the author has taken in order to put Scout through her perceptual curriculum. The girl's unusual maturity and growth are no oversight; they are, rather, the residue of her accelerated appreciation of human behavior.

Many of Scout's learning experiences begin in apparently insignificant scenes. The confusing dilemma of abnormal behavior, whatever the setting, is so consistently frustrating for our young narrator, however, that she feels compelled to search for explanations. For this, always, there is Atticus; not to provide the ultimate answer but to encourage his daughter to appreciate all types of human behavior by "walking around inside the other person's skin." It is only at the very end of the novel, however, that Scout is able to fully comprehend the value of this axiom. Only when the haunting mystery of Boo Radley is resolved will the narrator realize the total implications of her father's advice. In the meantime, she must experience a succession of perceptual encounters that will enable her to view the wide spectrum of human behavior with a good deal of tolerance.

Admittedly, other motifs exist in the novel. Sympathy for all the "mockingbirds" of life, appreciation and recognition of real courage, the destructive impact of racial prejudice and the uniquely precious

nature of the relationship between Atticus and his children—all these make important contributions to the total impact of the novel. Their primary function, however, is supportive; they all serve to embellish the program of perceptual lessons experienced by the narrator.

This series of object lessons in understanding behavior is presented in logical order so that one learning experience builds upon the other. They become a vehicle for developing the plot, as well as establishing the recurring theme of the novel. For that matter, since these encounters are conceived in terms of individual personalities, Scout's experiential curriculum becomes the basic method for character development. Both the narrator and her reader remain ignorant of the disease that is slowly killing Mrs. Dubose. We must assume that Dolphus Raymond is, indeed, a sleazy alcoholic until Dill accepts that first "drink." Even the reality of Boo Radley, the monster in the neighboring house, remains hidden until Scout spies him in the shadows of Jem's room on that final, fulfilling night.

It is impossible, then, for the reader to dismiss these learning experiences for anything other than what they really are—a consecutive, emphatic tribute to the inherent value of the perceptual frame of reference. Any other interpretation must gloss over 95 per cent of the novel as either accidental or incidental. It goes without saying that Pulitzer Prize novels are not written in this fashion.

POINT OF VIEW

When a story is presented through the first-person narrator, the reader automatically accepts the narrator's frame of reference. (This fact, by itself, contains important implications for guidance, and it will

be explored later in our discussion.) If the narrator is intelligent and mature, many of our problems are eliminated from the very beginning. The wisdom of this narrator enables us to evaluate, infer and comprehend. If, on the other hand, the narrator is a mere child of six, we must be prepared to accept a more restricted interpretation of the environment. While Scout is exceptionally mature for her age, she is much too young to understand all the complexities and contradictions of contemporary society. While we are able to understand the basis for behavior that confuses the girl, our identification with her is still enhanced. The innocent, naive manner in which Scout comments on certain (adult) behavior is both charming and thoroughly effective. When she refers to her snowman as "a morphodite," we bite our tongue. Her inability to rationalize the inevitable conviction of an innocent Negro reminds us of our own confusion and disillusionment in the face of bigotry and prejudice. We are quite willing to accept Scout, and to identify with her. Her stature is not at all diminished by our advantages of age and experience. She is a vividly perceptive little girl, and we enter into her adventures with relish and abandon. Our relationship to the narrator is almost identical to the role of the counselor that client-centered theorists have formulated: acceptance, empathic identification, and understanding. We wait and listen, willingly, while our narrator gains new knowledge and insight.

INDIVIDUAL ENCOUNTERS AS LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Having identified the formula by which Scout gains new understanding, we can now examine the specific encounters that are representative of this process. In every case, Scout must first discover some of the reasons causing a behavior before she can accept or understand the particular individual. If she is able to do this, her future behavior will be modified. However,

whether she realizes it or not, Scout is dealing with several rather complex issues. Her "answers" are likely to be tentative rather than final; relative rather than absolute. If she is to understand the mechanics of poverty, she must first understand the Cunninghams. If she is to make any sense of bigotry and ignorance, she must appreciate the tragic degradation of the Ewells. While the explanations may not be definitive—may not really appear to "explain" anything—they will be sufficient because they are expressed in terms of individual human beings rather than abstract sociological theory. She may never really understand how her teacher can be so adamant about prejudice practiced against Jews in Germany while she tacitly condones the social murder of an American Negro. Nor can she accept a Missionary Society that is "deeply concerned" for the Negroes in Africa while it ignores the Negroes of Alabama. Still, like many children, her intuition will provide a fairly accurate scale when she measures the worth of an individual. There is something in Aunt Alexandra's starch and pomp that is worthy of emulation. There is some special quality about her father that sends the man back to the state legislature, unchallenged, year after year. Scout must struggle to find answers to these riddles, but she will be satisfied. These individuals—her world of Maycomb County, Alabama—are the working roster for the girl's experiments with the perceptual frame of reference. They represent the "other person's shoes" she must try on for size.

Except for Atticus and Boo Radley, who both exert sustained influences over the children, these individual learning experiences are presented in chronological order. Since the author has saturated the novel with samples of unusual or abnormal behavior, the following characters represent only

the more significant illustrations of Scout's perceptual experiences. We cannot completely ignore a person like Mr. Underwood, say, who refuses to hire a Negro but is somehow willing to thrust a shotgun into the faces of a lynch mob. Or a man like Link Deas, a cotton planter who flirts with social ostracism when he is removed from the courtroom for stubbornly proclaiming the integrity of a Negro accused of raping a white girl. These actions are puzzling, perhaps, but they lack the compelling potential for insight and understanding that is characteristic of Scout's encounters with the following individuals.

Miss Caroline Fisher

Scout's first day at school is one of the most bewildering experiences the girl will ever suffer. The author has taken care to make sure of this. Miss Lee introduces an intelligent, confident six-year-old into a setting packed with confusion, frustration and contradiction. Miss Jean Louise ("Scout") Finch appears with reading and writing skills already polished. She is several years ahead of her class, and she observes, with some detachment, the clumsy efforts of her classmates as they battle the fundamentals of formal education. We would expect such an advantage to work in Scout's favor, but our narrator soon experiences some problems of her own. She is bored; she must wait for dreary hours while her classmates plod stubbornly on. Since she is the recognized leader of the class, Scout must assume the major responsibility for dealing with Miss Caroline, a jittery young pedagogue fresh from college. More importantly, Scout's maturity forces her to analyze the meaning of some rather unusual behavior that her peers simply accept at face value. Scout can't do this; she is too mature, too intelligent.

She must struggle with alternatives until she becomes thoroughly frustrated. When Miss Caroline is made aware of Scout's premature literacy, the nervous young teacher feels threatened. She tells Scout that these skills simply cannot be learned until the third grade. The girl must stop writing letters and reading Atticus' newspaper! This doesn't make sense! She is almost amused at the silly little fairy tale, and the subsequent flash cards, spelling words Scout has long since mastered, bring no release from the boredom.

Stifled in her introduction to formal education, Scout is content to spend most of her time evaluating her teacher and her "peers." Compared with mature, confident adults like Atticus and Calpurnia, Miss Caroline's nervous efforts at self-composure are practically transparent to the girl. Here, indeed, is a jittery young teacher! Scout is amused, but she is not without compassion. When her teacher is baffled by Walter Cunningham's refusal to accept lunch money, Scout attempts to clarify the boy's thinking so that Miss Caroline will spare him further embarrassment. The teacher loses her composure, slaps the girl's hands with a ruler, and the morning is lost.

The afternoon is just as confusing. Burris Ewell, grimy with dirt, swears at his teacher and stomps from the building, vowing never to return. Scout can't accept this behavior, either. It's too bad, she notes, that Miss Caroline had to break down and cry like that—that Ewell kid must be some kind of monster!

Atticus, in his gentle manner, must attempt to make some sort of sense out of all this for his bewildered daughter. He defines the poverty and pride of the Cunninghams, excuses Burris' dismal performance in terms of his drunken father, and quietly consents to continue the family reading

sessions. (Miss Caroline isn't wrong, she's just a bit confused.) Atticus does something more; he offers his daughter a key—a secret trick for understanding others. It is a personal microscope that will allow Scout to "see" through the eyes of other people—if she will just take advantage of it.

> First of all . . . if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.[1]

Atticus defines several lessons Scout has learned. Miss Caroline has learned a great deal, too, he points out, and her behavior becomes almost understandable for the girl. In this manner, constantly employing the internal frame of reference, Atticus puts the events of the day into their proper perspective. Nothing is horribly wrong, now; the pieces begin to fit together. They will continue to fit, for as long as Scout remembers to use this "trick" to understand the other fellow's point of view. The picture will be blurred, at times, because Scout is still only a child. But the precious technique of insight that her father has offered will give the little girl a dimension of wisdom and maturity that will make her seem even more perceptive and intelligent than she already is. School is over for the day.

The Cunninghams

This family, struggling farmers with little or no money, provides a lesson in human dignity for Scout Finch. She is already aware of their

---

[1]Harper Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1960), p. 34.

plight, and she attempts to help little Walter Cunningham explain why he can't accept lunch money from his teacher. Walter is poor; he has no way of repaying the loan, so he must refuse. Scout picks the wrong time to intervene, however; Miss Caroline has had a bad morning, and her temper is short. When Scout's hands are slapped, the little girl takes revenge on Walter, and is merrily rubbing his nose in the dirt when Jem puts a stop to the slaughter and invites the boy home for the noon meal. Scout, still smoldering with embarrassment, chides Walter for his lack of table manners. Her pointed sarcasm brings an instant rebuke from Calpurnia, and Scout is made aware of the fact that Walter is a guest in her home; he must be accorded both courtesy and respect.

Scout's healthy temper, more than anything else, is the stumbling block in this episode. Her efforts in Walter's behalf have backfired. What's more, retaliation against the boy is apparently out of line.

Atticus explains, that evening, that the Cunninghams deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Their poverty is irrelevant. They pay their few debts with labor, food, kindling wood and various other consumable items. They are, in their own way, worthy members of the social community. Furthermore, since everyone in Maycomb is poor, the differentiation is simply a matter of degree.

The "key" for Scout, in this case, is the matter of pride. This commodity is in ample supply around the Finch household, and Scout can accept the Cunninghams when she is made aware that pride and poverty are not mutually exclusive characteristics. This new tolerance for the plight of the rural poor brings a significant reward later in the story. Walter's father joins a lynch mob that challenges Atticus in front of the local jail, determined to handle the problem of Tom Robinson in their own way. Atticus,

facing the crowd alone, is in real danger; reasoning and compassion may be of little value against ignorant hate. Scout, watching with Jem and Dill, suddenly breaks through the group and totally disarms Mr. Cunningham with her charmingly naive greeting. Reminded of his own child, the man quickly loses his taste for the grisly business, and the mob disintegrates.

Scout can't know the real meaning of what has happened, of course, but the dramatic value of her "lesson" is obvious to the reader. Both Atticus and Tom Robinson have been spared physical harm, and an explosive confrontation has been avoided. The dramatic value of Scout's lesson has been emphasized in terms any adult can understand. For the narrator, Scout has learned to accept another dimension of human behavior, and the benefits of her learning experiences are just beginning to be harvested.

The Ewells

This clan, the "poor white trash" of the community, presents Scout with her most difficult challenge of perception, save for the continuing mystery of Boo Radley. The Ewells, she discovers, are symbolic of those human conditions that are without rationale. Filth, degradation and total poverty live in the squalid shack that adjoins the local dump. Lacking the redeeming pride and self-respect of the Cunninghams, the Ewells represent that chronically ill, pathetic dimension of human behavior that society is powerless to help or change.

The real blame for this tragedy lies with the father. Bob Ewell spends every dime of his welfare check—he refuses to work—on liquor. The children, totally without care, exist from day to day in the filthy hut, gradually reflecting the hate and ignorant despair radiating from their father. The local school officials are content to mark the Ewells

"truant for the year," since they attend the first day only.

Still, the Ewells are human beings, not animals, and Scout must be made aware of this. Atticus explains that, since the Ewells do not behave like humans, society is forced to make allowances. Bob Ewell is allowed to hunt game at will; there is no game limit or seasonal restriction for him. This is not "fair," Atticus agrees, but it is the only method available to prevent the family from starving! The law overlooks such behavior, then, for the sake of the children's food.

Ignoring the law is one thing, but skipping school every day is much too precious a privilege for Scout to accept. She has seen Burris stomp haughtily from the classroom, firing parting profanities at Miss Caroline. Besides uniting the sympathetic children behind their shattered instructor, this behavior has condemned the name of Ewell, in Scout's mind, for all posterity. Atticus, becoming a bit pragmatic in this instance, reminds Scout that the Ewells are a different breed of people. They are the rare exception to human standards, and they cannot be accepted—only tolerated.

If Scout is to gain any degree of sympathy for the family, it must ultimately come from the dramatic personal confrontations of the trial. She must witness her father expose Bob Ewell as a cruel liar; she must listen as Atticus proves that Mayella Ewell—from the pathetic loneliness and isolation of her girlhood—violated a rigid social code when she kissed an adult Negro male. This is a sad task, indeed, but it is probably the only alternative to seeing his client hanged. Finally, Atticus must show that it was Bob Ewell—not Tom Robinson—who beat his daughter in ruthless anger at what she had succumbed to. He must demonstrate, in all of its squalid and humiliating tragedy, the depths to which Bob Ewell has condemned

his family. When Atticus does this—so conclusively—Scout comes to realize the tragedy and humiliation with which the Ewells must exist. Here, then, is the cause—the reason behind the animal behavior of this family. The sad, cruel light of reality has made Scout aware of the hopeless depths of human despair. The Ewell children, at least, are no longer condemned in the girl's eyes. Pity and compassion have replaced open resentment.

As for Bob Ewell, his fury remains to be physically demonstrated. When he spits in Atticus' face, after the trial, Scout recognizes the act of a wounded, attacking animal. The implications are as threatening as they are pathetic.

Calpurnia

The Negro cook has assumed the role of mother-protector for Jem and Scout since the death of their mother. She is an established member of the Finch home, and her secure position within the family resists even the powerfull will of Aunt Alexandra to replace her. The author uses Calpurnia to introduce the children to the world of the Maycomb Negro and to illustrate both the tremendous challenge their father has accepted in defending Tom Robinson, and the courage the task demands.

As the trial approaches, Jem and Scout remain somewhat puzzled and resentful at their father's self-appointed role. They are beginning to experience prejudice now, and they are the innocent targets of name-calling and dripping sarcasm from adults and peers alike. (Mrs. Dubose is the prime example.) A method must be found whereby the children can develop an appreciation for Atticus' battle against impossible odds. First, however, Jem and Scout must come to understand what the Negro is really

facing in the culture of a small Alabama community.

Calpurnia is the logical choice for this role. She is intelligent and literate, and Atticus himself trusts her implicitly. She has an ideal relationship with the children, and when Atticus is attending a meeting of the state legislature, they accept her invitation to attend the Negro church. This is an exciting experience for Scout, and she finds the First Purchase African M. E. Church teeming with a new and vital flavor of life that she has never before experienced. Scout can enjoy the Negro community because she is a stranger to racial prejudice. Atticus has always shown his children that they must respect the individual rather than his color, and Calpurnia herself has provided the perfect example.

Prejudice, of course, works both ways. Now, in the Negro congregation, Jem and Scout are the minority group. Miss Lee has created a situation in which the children are made aware of the smothering hostility directed at members of a minority group. They see that at least some members of the church might resent their presence in the congregation. Even the children of Atticus Finch—"the nigger lover"—can be the victims of prejudice. Calpurnia leaps to their defense, or course, and the Reverend Sykes welcomes them warmly from his pulpit. The lesson, however, has been learned.

Another important insight is derived from this morning at the church. The children are aware, now, that Calpurnia must really live in two completely different worlds, and they have seen her function effectively in both. Again, this serves to emphasize the distinct separation between the worlds of black and white. With this insight, the children can appreciate Atticus' lonely role in defending a Negro.

In addition, their compassion and understanding for the Negro condition make them much more vulnerable to the bigotry and prejudice that will be displayed at the trial. Finally, their identification with the Negro world will serve to enhance their affection for Calpurnia and increase the potential threat of Aunt Alexandra in a very realistic dimension. The perceptual experience of Calpurnia—as a Negro in a Negro's world—has led them to appreciate still another variety of human response to the challenge of a social dilemma.

Aunt Alexandra

Scout is confronted with an apparently impossible challenge when her aunt joins the Finch household. Alexandra, determined to act as a "steadying and feminine influence" for her niece, during the time of the trial, places the girl in an untenable position. For Scout, Aunt Alexandra represents a distinct threat to the warm relationship that exists between her father and his children. Alexandra would like nothing more than to assume Calpurnia's mother-role in the home, and she makes no doubt of this. Atticus is confused, as well; he can find no adequate response to the imposing, assuming figure of Alexandra. She must be treated with love and affection, but she threatens to create a vacuum between the man and his children.

For her part, Scout must remain an individual. She is not at all concerned with the proprieties of decorum and social "responsibility" that Alexandra holds so dear. More importantly, Scout is aware that Alexandra disapproves of Atticus' relations with the Negro community. His function, in defending a Negro, is "beneath" the family. It is a necessary but odorous chore more properly assigned to some struggling,

obscure young member of the legal profession. In addition, Alexandra openly resents Calpurnia's presence in the home. The Negro cook is simply not qualified for her role of parent-substitute to the Finch children.

Alexandra is present, then, because family blood is sacrosanct; it cannot be violated or betrayed. She will stand with Atticus and his family until the embarrassing summer is done. She will not remain passive, however. She will take advantage of every opportunity to emphasize proper grace, breeding, and family tradition to her niece.

We can see why Scout cannot accept her aunt. Their values just aren't the same; they are products of two different philosophies. Aunt Alexandra seems to ignore the concept of individual dignity that Atticus has so carefully instilled in his children. In addition, Scout is quite concerned that her father will gradually succumb to Alexandra's values of social status and propriety as the proper standards for his children.

Only after the draining emotional experience of the trial does Alexandra exhibit the warm sense of tenderness and compassion that redeem her in Scout's eyes. Alexandra is fiercely proud of her brother. She has been deeply moved by the simple dignity and courage with which he has weathered the insults of bigotry and hate. Her cool, distant stance has been transformed into a sense of empathy and admiration for both the man and his children. She is genuinely disturbed when Tom is killed. The immorality and inherent dishonesty of the trial, revealed with sickening impact, summon a real sense of grief and frustration to the lady. Scout senses the change in her aunt, and begins to accept her. She sees that Alexandra, on the verge of tears at the news of Tom's death, is able to compose herself and return to her social club without a trace of sorrow

or bitterness. This takes courage, and Scout quickly recognizes that her aunt has performed in a manner well worthy of emulation. She sees Alexandra, too, working beside Calpurnia each day, and the barrier of racial consciousness slowly dissolves.

Scout understands, for the first time, some of the problems involved in becoming an effective member of even the socially approved group. It is not easy to function among women who pretend to be concerned about African tribes while they gossip about their Negro cooks. With the transformation of Alexandra, then, comes a gratifying release of frustration and anxiety for Scout. The threat has been removed, and her aunt is accepted as a real member of the family. Scout, the classic tomboy, discovers that a "real lady" implies much more than a starched petticoat.

It is interesting to note that the real "change" or "learning experience" in this instance took place within the character of the aunt. Her modified behavior enables Scout to identify with Alexandra, and to recognize the unique, worthy qualities of her aunt.

Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose

The author devotes an entire chapter to the treatment of this lady. The lesson, this time, is primarily for Jem's benefit, but Scout, the narrator, is present in every scene. While Jem is probably much more emotionally involved in the experience, Scout is able to be ever-so-slightly objective. The girl can stand a step behind Jem while her brother undergoes a thorough emotional wringing.

Mrs. Dubose, to be quite frank, appears to be an old wretch. She is openly hostile to the Finch children, predicting their ultimate

doom and damnation, making every attempt to ridicule them. She is violently critical of their father, and she makes no bones about the fact that, in her opinion, Atticus is a "nigger-lover." She condemns him for defending a Negro, and her comments concerning the entire Finch household drip with sarcasm. Once more, the author has intentionally created a personality that will be impossible for the children to accept. Scout and Jem are furious at the old lady, and their anger reaches its zenith when Jem, raging in defense of his father, slashes the tops off the old lady's beautiful camellias.

Both children have been admonished by Atticus to remain calm in the face of this barrage. "She's an old lady," Atticus would say, "and she's ill. Just hold your head high and be a gentleman. Whatever she says to you, it's your job not to let her make you mad."[2] For his part, Atticus has been gallantly gracious to the woman. It is all too obvious to the children that Mrs. Dubose is a vicious hypocrite! While we can assume that their father is well aware of this, his reaction to Jem's flower-chopping is all too predictable. Jem must read to the lady each day after school, and on Saturdays, for two hours. The children, of course, cannot understand how Atticus can be so stubborn. They are both somewhat disillusioned by his failure to recognize that they were fighting for <u>him</u>. Nevertheless, Atticus' word is law. The dreaded "reading sessions" begin.

Scout elects to accompany her brother, partly out of a sense of curiosity and partly because she feels sorry for Jem. As for the hours spent with Mrs. Dubose, they are only to be dreaded. Jem drones <u>Ivanhoe</u>

---

[2]Lee, op. cit., p. 104.

for two hours, until the alarm clock rings, and they are sent home. Mrs. Dubose laces her few comments with vindictiveness and sarcasm; she shows a total lack of any compassion.

After the children have endured a month of this treatment, Scout begins to notice that the alarm has been sounding just a bit later on each succeeding day, and that Mrs. Dubose "was well into one of her fits by the time it sounded." The children are afraid that someday soon the alarm will never sound, and Jem will be forced to read endlessly on. Then, suddenly, after another terrible week, Mrs. Dubose abruptly announces, "That'll do, and that's all. Good day, children."

It is over. A month later, Mrs. Dubose is dead of cancer. She was a morphine addict, Atticus explains, a consequence of the disease that killed her. Determined to rid herself of her dependency on the drug, she had used Jem's daily reading sessions as distraction from the pain. As the reading periods gradually lengthened, Mrs. Dubose became able to concentrate on Jem's story and succeeded in reducing her need for the drug. She died, as Atticus put it, "free as the mountain air--conscious and cantankerous to the end." Her parting comment to Jem was in the form of a white, waxy camellia, a silent gift of gratitude from a dying woman. Atticus remarks that she was the bravest person he ever knew, and Jem dissolves in tears.

The point is obvious. Miss Lee has created the character of Mrs. Dubose as a symbol of disease and sickness—bigotry, perhaps—but she has once more provided a rationale for the behavior. Similar behavior, derived from prejudice and hate this time, will confront Jem and Scout this summer when Atticus takes the stand in defense of Tom Robinson. Through this bitterly melancholy experience, the children again have a preview of what

awaits them. Atticus realized this from the beginning, and subjected them to her punishment as a means of preparing them.

Scout will remember the symbolic disease that killed Mrs. Dubose when she tries to understand the inherent social disease of Maycomb. The experience with Mrs. Dubose, then, is something much more important than just a footnote to the life of a courageous lady. It will remain as a definitive illustration of the contributing circumstances that can mold an individual into an instrument of hate. One more life understood. Another lesson learned.

Mr. Dolphus Raymond

Another of the town's drunkards, Raymond is associated with an even more unique social stigma; he lives, in unmarried sin, with a Negro woman. Moreover, he chooses to remain "among the niggers," in the hidden marshes of rural Maycomb. There are reasons for this, so the story goes. His bride-to-be committed suicide at the wedding rehearsal when she learned of Raymond's affair with the Negro. Since that terrible event, he has remained in relative isolation with his woman and their half-breed children. Raymond appears on weekends and holidays, lurching drunkenly from his plodding horse, a bottle of whiskey clutched desperately in his hand.

There is a good reason, of course, for such behavior. Raymond appears but once in the entire novel, and in that brief encounter with the children this individual, as much as any character in the book, transforms the author's theme into a symphony of supreme beauty and strength. While the jury is out, Scout, Jem and Dill retire to the courthouse lawn, bewildered and confused at the prejudice and dishonesty they have witnessed. Raymond is there, with his family, and suddenly his clear voice echoes

Jem: "You ain't thin-hided, it just makes you sick, doesn't it?" As the man talks with the children, Dill discovers that the "whiskey" is only Coca-Cola. Raymond, for that matter, isn't a bit drunk! Responding to their puzzled expressions, Raymond explains that, since people can't understand why he chooses to live in such an unorthodox manner, he offers them an explanation—the whiskey. People can accept such behavior, he says, in terms of an alcoholic. "He's in the clutches of whiskey," they say, "and that's why he won't change his ways. He can't help himself."[3] As Raymond continues, he appears to the children as a unique, delightful kind of individual. The vital bits of information, once supplied, again create the perceptual frame of reference. The logic and rationale transform Mr. Dolphus Raymond into a country sage.

> It ain't honest, but it's mighty helpful to folks. Secretly, Miss Finch, I'm not much of a drinker, but you see they could never, never understand that I live like I do because that's the way I want to live. Some folks don't—like the way I live. Now, I could say the hell with 'em, I don't care if they don't like it. I do say I don't care if they don't like it, right enough—but I don't say the hell with 'em, see? I try to give 'em a reason, you see. It helps folks if they can latch onto a reason. When I come to town, which is seldom, if I weave a little and drink out of this sack, folks can say Dolphus Raymond's in the clutches of whiskey. . . "[4]

Raymond, then, is far from a drunkard. He is an intelligent, compassionate man with a deep social consciousness. Like Scout's father, he feels a responsibility for even those persons who condemn him. Rather than flaunt the hypocrisy of the community in its collective faces, he creates an elaborate masquerade. Like Atticus, he can understand and forgive. This strange person, with his sack of "whiskey" and his handsome brown

---

[3]Lee, op. cit., p. 202. [4]Ibid.

children, feels a distinct responsibility to the people of the community, the citizens who will never be able to accept him for what he really is. In a very real sense, the man is neither a liar nor an imposter; he is merely a century or so ahead of his time.

This is the last we hear of Raymond; the author has injected him into her narrative at exactly the right time to provide several pertinent lessons in human behavior. He has served to define the scope of racial bigotry, provide an object lesson in understanding "abnormal" behavior, and offer an invaluable reference point from which Scout can come to understand her father's role. There can be no other reason for his brief appearance before the children. He has absolutely nothing to do with the apparent plot, and we see him for one time only. He is another remarkable episode in the series of learning experiences through which Scout is able to understand the lives of others. Miss Lee's point is obvious. There is nothing "wrong" with the man. The affliction—the unacceptable behavior—lies within society itself.

Atticus Finch

It is easy to see, from the material already presented, that Atticus performs several roles in the novel. He is father, friend, counselor and companion. As far as the theme is concerned, his primary function is both definitive and representative. With Scout seated on his lap, he explains the poverty of the Cunninghams, the pathetic despair of the Ewells, the courage of Mrs. Dubose and the raw materials of prejudice. At the same time, Atticus himself is a perfect example of the philosophy he offers his children. Some of <u>his</u> behavior seems puzzling to them. He remains calm and composed in the face of vivid prejudice, he apparently chooses a role of

whipping-boy for the community bigots, and he seems humble and apparently ignorant of the respect and honor repeatedly accorded him by the people of Maycomb County. He is, indeed, a formidable individual. If Atticus seems to become a kind of human oracle, he is eminently qualified for the role. Scout must watch and listen constantly, for her father has a great deal to offer. Now, if she could just learn to see things through *his* eyes . . . .

Perhaps the key to understanding the man lies in the uniquely warm and trusting relationship he enjoys with his children. He is painfully careful, always, to treat Jem and Scout with the same respect he accords all individuals. He will allow them to make their own mistakes, of course, but he does something much more; he insists that they *learn* from their experiences. Rather than provide quick, easy answers, Atticus stands by as Scout and Jem struggle with their problems, secure in the knowledge that they are always received and accepted by their father. This quality, the wisdom and intelligent tolerance to allow his two children to grow in every possible way, is what makes Atticus such an effective parent. Of course, when his children are frustrated or frightened, Atticus is eager to provide support and gentle understanding. But this support is never automatic, never premature. Scout must struggle with the dilemmas of Mrs. Dubose, Miss Caroline, the Cunninghams, and the constantly lucrative mystery of Boo Radley. Then, at the appropriate time, Atticus can once more offer his "trick" for understanding.

Atticus, all the while, remains an object lesson for Jem and Scout. He insists that his children learn to accept him—whatever the circumstance—as an individual worthy of their love and respect. He demands, in his quiet and gentle manner, that they develop a certain kind of tolerant restraint

for behavior they cannot immediately understand—even, perhaps, the actions of their father. The rule is a sound one, and it works both ways. Atticus asks only that the children afford him the same kind of trust and positive regard he gives to them.

Atticus appears to his children, most of the time, as a kind of gentle, obscure figure, aging away in a dusty law office. They know he is unusually wise, of course, and that he has the respect of the entire community, but it remains for them to discover for themselves the noble, quietly courageous man their father really is. Thus, when Atticus drops his glasses to the ground and destroys a mad dog with a single, crack shot, the children gape with amazement. Atticus—a marksman! This physical act of courage means even more to the children because their father has never mentioned his skill with the rifle. Always the teacher, he reminds them that courage is often a silent, hidden quality. He repeats this definition at the death of Mrs. Dubose. Later, when the children have a somewhat better conception of his tremendous, uphill battle to save a Negro, he can use this definition of courage to probe the apparent futility of the struggle. True courage, he will say, seems to have a sustaining quality all its own. "It's when you know you're licked before you begin," he explains, "but you begin anyway and see it through, no matter what."

The Finch children, at the trial, come to know the magnitude of their father's courage. Atticus knows defeat is inevitable, and his task is made even more discouraging by the humiliation he must bestow on Mayella. Still, after having endured the taunts and the petty jibes of Maycomb, Jem and Scout can perceive their father as the single voice of justice and reason that is heard above a chorus of hate. This is Atticus; it's what he

stands for, and they have come to expect it. Seated among the Negroes in the hushed, sweating balcony of the courtroom, they watch in bitter admiration as their father walks from the empty room below. Scout is so preoccupied with her thoughts that she almost misses the silent, humble tribute rising all around her in that crowded balcony. It is the Reverend Sykes who whispers, "Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin'."

Boo Radley

The metamorphosis of Boo Radley, from phantom monster to frightened, cowering savior of the children's lives, requires the length of the novel. Indeed, a great deal of the story is the legend of Boo Radley. This mysterious recluse of a man is the definitive and ultimate revelation in Scout's chronology of experiential discoveries. More than this, even, he represents the author's dramatic plea for compassion, sympathy and tolerant understanding in an aloof world of human interaction. His story is the central, symbolic message of the novel.

Miss Lee has taken great care to shroud this character in a maze of superstition and rumor, constantly providing fuel for the furnace of childish imagination. Boo, they say, was punished for some childish prank; punished so severely that he never again set foot out of his home. Through the years the legend has grown, and the history of a monster has been carefully articulated. The old house has decayed with the years, and the image of the hidden phantom has been transformed into reality. Boo has developed into a monster figure of such terrifying stature that the children must run past the house, never stopping to look back. From the threatening shadows of the Radley hermitage, lurid imagination and super-

stition have been accepted as documented fact, and so Boo has remained hidden in his chamber, stabbing relatives with bloody scissors and occasionally haunting the neighborhood by night. In a word, Boo Radley was used for the entertainment of the entire community. When all else was done, there remained the Radley mystery to ponder. When the summer was baking and things were slow, there came memories of Boo, bloody scissors dangling from his hands. When winter came, there were eager witnesses to his murders, footprints of the monster in the snow.

It was natural, then, for the children to fall heir to the grim little game. Contributing their own, personal embellishments, Jem and Scout fell in love with the superstition of the years. It was just too much fun! Fun to play "Boo Radley games," complete with screams and corpses. Fun to scamper to the corner of the house, slap it and fly back out of danger. Fun to peer through the closed shutters of an autumn night, searching the darkness for a specter; to listen, not even breathing in the heavy stillness, for the footsteps of the monster, until a shotgun's blast brought reality too close.

Oh, Atticus got a little disturbed, now and then, and the games would be over for a while. Still, even then, there were all those funny little things Jem and Scout could never understand. The soap dolls and the coin purse and the gum, waiting for them in the notch of the tree—who put them there? Who wrapped that warm blanket around Scout's shoulders the freezing night Miss Maudie's house burned? Who retrieved Jem's pants from the fence, patched them and left them neatly folded, waiting for him?

The reader has guessed, by this time, that Boo Radley is probably just some harmless kind of recluse who enjoys watching the children play. The monster of Maycomb is probably just some shy, local moron. We can

almost see him there, peering out at the neighbor children from behind the heavy, drawn curtains.

By this time, the legend had become too precious for the children to relinquish. And so Boo must wait; he must wait until Scout can begin to understand people like the Cunninghams and the Ewells and the Raymonds and Miss Carolines of this world. Wait, until Atticus becomes a gentle hero in his daughter's eyes; wait, until the "secret courts of men's hearts" take Tom Robinson's life. Wait, then, until vindictive hatred turned to murder on Halloween night. Wait, until the ghost was forced to come out into the cold, stalking darkness and defend the lives of his little neighbors.

They had grown in many ways, of course, in the time it took for that night to arrive. Jem had probably already guessed that it was Boo who had tried in so many ways to communicate with them. Even Scout was becoming a little more mature about it—(silly, teasing Mr. Radley that way). And yet, the shadows were still deep, it was Halloween night—and he was still in there, that much was for sure. He was still in that house because, as Miss Maudie liked to say, "no one's seen him carried out yet."

Actually, only one person ever knew what really happened, and Boo would take the secret to his grave. Jem and Scout were both unconscious when it happened, and Bob Ewell—well, he was down there under the tree, with a kitchen knife planted in his body.

Harper Lee has constructed the full range of dramatic empathy for a character not yet seen or heard. She has, literally, defined the perceptual frame of reference for us, and the flood of emotion comes rushing to the surface when Scout regains consciousness and sees him standing there, hiding in the shadows of Jem's bedroom. This is enough.

She knows Boo Radley from the years of imagining and wondering. The phantom is forever gone; in his place stands a frightened, hesitant human being who must shade his eyes from the probing light. Scout takes his hand, leads him to the porch swing, and chats pleasantly with her old neighbor.

She would walk him to his home, across the street, leading him like a little child who is lost in a strange neighborhood. In the short space of those few steps to the haunting isolation from which he will never again emerge, Scout experiences the complete, fulfilling insight into the mystery of another human being. She understands, now; she has received her friend. The definitive portrayal of this moving experience is described in what are probably the most effective lines of the entire, Pulitzer-Prize winning novel. If any lingering doubts remain to question the purpose of the novel, all the reader need do is review these last, parting lines.

> We came to the street light on the corner, and I wondered how many times Dill had stood there hugging the fat pole, watching, waiting, hoping. I wondered how many times Jem and I had made this journey, but I entered the Radley gate for the second time in my life. Boo and I walked up the steps to the porch. His fingers found the front doorknob. He gently released my hand, opened the door, went inside, and shut the door behind him. I never saw him again.
>
> Neighbors bring food with death and flowers with sickness and little things in between. Boo was our neighbor. He gave us two soap dolls, a broken watch and chain, a pair of good-luck pennies, and our lives. But neighbors give in return. We never put back into the tree what we took out of it: we had given him nothing, and it made me sad.
>
> I turned to go home. Street lights winked down the street all the way to town. I had never seen our neighborhood from this angle. There was Miss Maudie's, Miss St.phanie's—there was our house. I could see the porch swing—Miss Rachel's house was beyond us, plainly visible. I could even see Mrs. Dubose's.
>
> I looked behind me. To the left of the brown door was a long shuttered window. I walked to it, stood in front of it, and turned around. In daylight, I thought, you could see to the postoffice corner.

Daylight . . . in my mind, the night faded. It was daytime and the neighborhood was busy. Miss Stephanie Crawford crossed the street to tell the latest to Miss Rachel. Miss Maudie bent over her azaleas. It was summertime, and two children scampered down the sidewalk toward a man approaching in the distance. The man waved, and the children raced each other to meet him.

It was still summertime, and the children came closer. A boy trudged down the sidewalk dragging a fishing pole behind him. A man stood watching with his hands on his hips. Summertime, and his children played in the front yard with their friend, enacting a strange little drama of their own invention.

It was fall, and his children fought on the sidewalk in front of Mrs. Dubose's. The boy helped his sister to her feet, and they made their way home. Fall, and his children trotted to and fro around the corner, the day's woes and triumphs on their faces. They stopped at an oak tree, delighted, puzzled, apprehensive.

Winter, and his children shivered at the front gate, silhouetted against a blazing house. Winter, and a man walked into the street, dropped his glasses, and shot a dog.

Summer, and he watched his children's hearts break. Autumn again, and Boo's children needed him.

Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough.[5]

---

[5]Lee, op. cit., pp. 281-282.

Chapter 3

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GUIDANCE SETTING

Since To Kill A Mockingbird is so richly endowed with the raw materials of discovery and learning, its contribution to guidance education would appear significant. A rich teaching potential for the novel should be found in general survey courses and counseling theory classes alike. Since the perceptual frame of reference is such a vital, basic concept, the possible contributions of the novel must not be minimized. If it becomes just another entry on some required reading list, the book's unique qualities of description and definition will be wasted. However, when the novel is assimilated into the context of client-centered theory and counseling, with imaginative teaching methods To Kill A Mockingbird should become an effective tool for the field of guidance education.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF OTHER FORMS

That the novel is so uniquely functional suggests a wealth of relevant guidance potential on the horizons of creative literature. Harper Lee's first effort is surely not the only literary work that the field of guidance can utilize. Much of literature is a vast panorama of human behavior, and narrative fiction is certainly not the only form used to convey emotion or elicit empathy. Psychodrama, conceived from the dramatic form of literature, has already been put to work in the guidance setting. Drama is a unique literary form; theorists have recognized

this and capitalized, in the case of psychodrama, by creating a vehicle for the therapeutic display of emotions. Dwight Burton, in a discussion of the reasons for teaching drama, has identified some of these unique characteristics:

> Why teach drama? Perhaps the most important reason is to discover more about what it is to be human, for man, in all his complexity and conflicts, constitutes the central subject matter of drama. Not only does drama mirror the environment, but helps us to surmount it, to grow in sympathy, imagination, and understanding. The very root of the term 'drama'—to act, to do—suggests its possibilities: it is perhaps our most effective and direct means of depicting and working out social conflicts, moral dilemmas, and personal problems without suffering the specific consequences of our actions. The dramatist compels us to empathize with the play's protagonist, to feel his emotions, and to experience his conflicts, yet spares us the actual suffering or indignity his characters must endure. . . . Drama, then, must be viewed as an essential humanizer, a spur to imagination, to insight, to reflection, and, hopefully, to self-knowledge.[1]

Again, notice the striking similarity between the function of drama and that of the perceptual frame of reference. Drama, Burton is saying, represents another kind of "alter ego" that man can use to see himself and gain better understanding of his problems, environment and condition.

Poetry, literally the "language of emotions," might contain the potential for similar contributions. It seems to be constantly gaining popularity as a vehicle for expressing both the frustrations and dreams of contemporary society. And what of biography? Because the characters and events are real, biography might have much more impact and relevance, for some, than either fiction or drama.

---

[1]Dwight Burton, Literature Study in the High Schools (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 225.

PERCEPTION AND POINT OF VIEW

During the course of this discussion, we have suggested various characteristics as common to guidance theory and narrative fiction. The first-person point of view and the perceptual frame of reference share several traits. They both require, for example, the submission of self to the attitudes and experiences of another person. The client must be encouraged to express his feelings, and the counselor must be prepared to meet those feelings with acceptance and empathy. In almost exactly the same manner, the reader must be willing—indeed, eager—to receive the attitudes and experiences of the narrator if he is to gain dramatic reward through his vicarious adventure. Both persons, then, must be capable of forgetting themselves so that they might enter the world of another human being. This vivid sharing of experiences, in client-centered therapy, has been described by Rogers. The following, from a discussion of the "psychological novel," is an author's idea of what happens in a sustained first-person narrative.

> In the psychological novel the author is nowhere in sight. Suddenly we are seated at the window. Somewhere, above, behind, below, out beyond the window the author is busy being a stage manager and an actor, arranging what we shall see . . . so that we forget ourselves and are out there amid the confusion, living all that the writer has arranged for us. From being listeners once removed from the scene, we have become actual participants. The effect is to make us use our eyes to see—and to feel what we have seen—rather than rely upon someone else's report of what he has seen . . . (This) places us largely at the center of the character's thoughts—that center where thought often uses words rather than images.[2]

This vicarious experience, for full effect, demands continued

---

[2]Leon Joseph Edel, The Psychological Novel (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1955), p. 209.

concentration and mental effort. If the writer is less than skilled, we are quickly tempted to toss his book aside. In the counseling interview, when the client cannot express himself effectively, the task becomes most demanding.

Another common principle is the distinct emphasis on the subjective rather than the objective. We must be prepared to suspend judgment, for a time at least, so that we can appreciate the feelings of the narrator or the client. For the fleeting moment they remain exclusively ours, and the effort we make must necessarily be one of receiving, assimilating, and understanding. We are concerned with the manner in which they perceive, how they feel and what they think. The norm, the accepted social standards and mores must be set aside; we are dealing with the individual, not with the group that might have already rejected him. If his emotions and/or behavior appear abnormal, this cannot matter. We are concerned with the fact that they are authentic; that they might not conform is not our proper domain. We do not measure, evaluate, or make comparisons. We listen, clarify, appreciate and understand. If the client thinks that mysterious men are following him, we recognize his fears as crippling but genuine. If a child imagines a monster to be living in an old house across the street, we are tolerant.

This emphasis on the subjective is as old as man himself. Romantic literature discussed the doctrines of idealism and materialism, but Coleridge chose to work with the terms "subjective" and "objective."[3] The former declares the "material and corporeal world to exist only as far as it is perceived." The term "objective," on the other hand, "attributes a reality

---

[3]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Reality of Perception," A Grammar of Literary Criticism, Lawrence Sargent Hall (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), pp. 389-90.

to objects independent of the mind that perceives them."[4] For his part, the client-centered counselor has no time for this philosophical debate. His choice is clear; reality exists only as it is perceived by the client. The eye of the beholder is the camera for depicting reality. The client's attitudes and emotions reflect reality for him, and we must recognize and respect this fundamental principle.

Another, quite similar qualification that must be met, whether we are in the reading room or the counselor's office, is that of unconditional acceptance. Our personal standards and opinions, in this case, are of no importance. We are concerned solely with our efforts to enter another person's frame of reference. If we are to subject the narrator of every great novel of the past fifty years to a moral or social scrutiny, we would probably forfeit at least half our wealth of fiction. Thus, if we as counselors feel obliged to "judge" our client, the interview runs the risk of being a complete waste of time, if not actually harmful for the client. The client/narrator, for the moment at least, is our only concern. We represent his one possibility for complete freedom of expression.

THE NARRATOR AND THE COUNSELING INTERVIEW

If these similarities do not yet suggest a common profile for literature and counseling, we would do well to compare the verbal expressions of the client with the narrative style of writing. When we do this, we are examining the function of dialogue as it appears on the printed

---

[4]Ibid.

page and within the counseling interview. Rogers has this to say:

> (But) just as in the case of visual perception, the figure occasionally changes, so that the counselor may at times find himself standing outside the client's frame of reference and looking as an external perceiver at the client. This most invariably happens, for example, during a long pause or silence on the client's part.[5]

In other words, an interruption in the dialogue may present obstacles to sustained perceptual empathy:

> The counselor may gain a few clues which permit an accurate empathy, but to some extent he is forced to view the client from an observer's point of view, and can only actively assume the client's perceptual field when some type of expression again begins.[6]

Compare these comments on verbal expression within the counseling interview to a discussion in which Percy Lubbock defines a range between the loosely conceived first-person narrative and the completely objective form of the drama. He describes what happens when the narrator stops speaking and his voice is silenced:

> The mind of the narrator becomes the stage, his voice is no longer heard. His voice _is_ heard, however, so long as there is narrative of any sort; his voice is heard because the language and the intonation are his, the direct expression of his experience. In the drama of his mind, there is no personal choice, for there is no narrator; the point of view becomes the reader's once more.[7]

Word choice, inflection and tone are seen as important factors in both the written and spoken media.

---

[5]Carl Rogers, _Client-centered Therapy_ (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 32.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Percy Lubbock, "Form and Point of View," _A Grammar of Literary Criticism_, pp. 389-90.

Clearly then, the therapist and the literary critic are discussing the same thing—the requirement of sustained verbal expression. It is the primary avenue into the perceptual field of another individual. It is not the <u>only</u> avenue, but it is certainly the most efficient. We are not interested in the "point of view of the reader" or an "observer's point of view" of the client. We are concerned, again, only with original and authentic attitudes; with our ability to share those attitudes.

Assuming that communication has common implications for counseling and literature, how can we then apply our knowledge so that it will be of value to the guidance setting? Rogers himself has already identified one possibility:

> The reader can . . . give himself practice in assuming the internal frame of reference of another while overhearing a conversation on the streetcar, or while listening to a friend describe an emotional experience. Perhaps something of what is involved can even be conveyed on paper.
>
> To try to give you, the reader, a somewhat more real and vivid experience of what is involved in the attitudinal set which we are discussing, it is suggested that you put yourself in the place of the counselor, and consider the following material, which is taken from complete counselor notes of the beginning of an interview with a man in his thirties. When the material has been completed, sit back and consider the sorts of attitudes and thoughts which were in your mind as you read.[8]

Rogers next provides dialogue from the interview and follows with a series of optional responses for the student counselor. Might not a work of fiction be used in much the same way? Or, for that matter, could we not employ a <u>fictitious</u> interview—conceived by a Mailer, Godden, Shute or Capote, and tape-recorded, probably—for just such a purpose? If the

---

[8]Rogers, p. 32.

questions seem academic, or if the discussions appear to represent simply a shared phenomenon of oral communication, it is not because the potential of creative literature is absent from the field of guidance. Perhaps we simply lack the imagination with which to apply it.

Literature—good, creative literature—can prepare us for life; we can linger in the medium and explore the whole range of behavioral and emotional experiences. Good literature is symbolic—not synthetic. If used properly, it can establish a portable laboratory for the vicarious examination of our personalities. It is a mirror, and the reflections we see represent ourselves; our frustrations, fears, hopes and dreams. Let us examine the wealth of literature, select our resources with care and imagination, and assimilate those features which prove to be relevant into our efforts to help individuals help themselves. The well is deep.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burton, Dwight L. Literature Study in the High Schools. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

Edel, Leon J. The Psychological Novel. New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1955.

Hall, Lawrence S. (ed.). A Grammar of Literary Criticism. New York: Macmillan Co., 1965.

Lee, Harper. To Kill A Mockingbird. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1960.

Rogers, Carl R. Client-centered Therapy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951.

PERCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE IN NARRATIVE FICTION

by

LAWRENCE JOSEPH FOX

B. S., Kansas State University, 1966

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1970

ABSTRACT

The perceptual frame of reference, basic to client-centered theory, is both a vital guidance concept and a demanding technique. This paper proposes the novel To Kill A Mockingbird as a definitive illustration of the concept, and suggests its application to the setting of guidance education.

The book contains a series of learning experiences that constitute consecutive, emphatic illustrations of the perceptual frame of reference as it is employed to gain insight and understanding of human attitudes and emotions. The first-person narrative, as utilized by the author, is itself suggestive of the internal frame of reference, and the possible applications of this literary technique to guidance education are explored. The function of dialogue as communication, the subjective demands of counseling and fictional literature, and the potential contributions of other literary forms are discussed.

The novel's repeated experiential episodes are analyzed, and the behavioral changes of the narrator are explored. Evidence is presented supporting the contention that the perceptual frame of reference, defined in terms of the layman, is actually the basic theme of the novel, and implications for guidance are defined and explored.

Relevance to the guidance setting is suggested, for the most part, by several common functions and/or characteristics of literature and counseling. Empathic identity of the counselor with his client is thus compared to the reader's shared experiences with the narrator via the first-person point of view. Both roles demand at least the temporary submission of the self to the attitudes and experiences of another person.

Personal standards must be forgotten, for the moment, so that the feelings of another might be received and accepted. The function of dialogue, in both the counseling interview and the fictional narrative, is noted as still another common trait. When the flow of verbal communication is for any reason interrupted, both the counselor and the reader revert, to a certain extent, to a more objective, judgment-oriented stance. Practical experience might be derived, it is suggested, from (fictitious) interviews created by skilled writers.

Finally, the distinctive qualities of drama, poetry, and biography are identified for potential application to the guidance setting.