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## Deaf Studies in the English Curriculum

by Robert F. Panara

What do we mean by "Deaf Studies"? Where is its place in the schools and classes for the deaf? How do we teach it? Before we attempt to answer these questions, let us consider some of the more salient trends in contemporary education and the problem of teaching our multi-cultured society.

Not very long ago, I happened to read an article in The English Journal entitled, "American Indian Culture: Promises, Problems, Possibilities", which raised two important questions. The first: "Can a white teacher in any sense at all communicate to his classes what it is, or was, to be an Indian in white America?"<sup>1</sup> As might be expected, the answer was quite negative in view of the fact that the time "when every university has a professor with even some Indian blood to teach Indian Studies is in the future, and still further in the future is the time when every high school has an Indian teacher, even in states where there is a fairly large Indian population".<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the writer proposed that the most logical step to take in communicating this truth was to provide students with the opportunity to get "the inside story" through the medium of literature written by, for, and about Indians. The second question raised by the author was: "Why should we teach it?"<sup>3</sup> The answer should be obvious to every

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1 Stensland, Anna L. "American Indian Culture: Promises, Problems, Possibilities", The English Journal, Dec., 1971, (NCTE, Urbana, Ill.), P. 1195.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

teacher in America who has made an effort to honor and understand the human spirit.

It should be obvious, moreover, that one of the more interesting movements in the socio-cultural revolution of our time is the tendency to provide "a place in the sun" for all those minority groups and disadvantaged peoples of today. Thus, the Negro is granted increasing opportunities to enjoy the rich cultural heritage of his race by pursuing research in Afro-American Studies, and similar opportunities for the "pursuit of happiness" are available to those other minority groups whose interests lie in Latin-American, Asian-American, and other ethnic studies.<sup>4</sup>

This awareness of all minority groups for the unique contributions of their own kind should not in any way be construed as a polarization or a drifting away from the mainstream of American society. Rather, and as one writer has observed in dealing with a social study of Italo-Americans, it serves to interpret the problems, the progress, and the life-style of such minority groups by viewing it "in the context of the total American experience."<sup>5</sup> In other words, it is time that these peoples are "studied as the Americans they are".<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, it is time that the deaf are studied as the human beings they are -- as a living representation of the experience of Everyman in his journey through life. Certainly, the experience of the deaf has followed the same pattern of

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<sup>4</sup> Panara, Robert F. "The Deaf Writer in America", American Annals of the Deaf, Part I, Sept., 1970, P. 509.

<sup>5</sup> Iorizzo, L. and Mondello, S. The Italian-Americans, Twayne Publishers, Inc., N.Y., 1971. (Quoted from Oscar Handlin in Preface).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

oppression and neglect, alienation and despair, perseverance and progress as that of all other Americans. However, the proper study of their kind has yet to be acknowledged, much less initiated, in our schools and classes for the deaf. Can it be that, in our zeal to educate and rehabilitate the deaf, we have treated them as an object instead of as a human being, as unwittingly as the phonetics professor treats the Cockney flower girl in Shaw's Pygmalion?

Truly, the paradox of our time is that we are inundated with thousands of professional books and articles dealing with the problems of deafness and the deaf -- physiological, psychological, sociological, educational -- yet, so little attention is given to the literary and cultural image of the deaf.

How can we account for the increasing appearance of deaf characters in modern literature? What is their function? How are the deaf depicted in fiction and drama? Are these characterizations valid? Do they compare with representations of non-deaf characters in the sense of having common problems and experiences? And, turning to the realm of biography and non-fiction, what about the "success stories" of deaf people who have made significant contributions to the larger world of man -- in the arts and sciences, education and industry, in the world of sports? How do the deaf identify themselves with these fictional characterizations and success stories? What can they learn from such studies?



Evidently, the time has come for us to seriously consider the place of Deaf Studies in our schools and classes for the deaf. We already have the rationale for such a thrust or movement in the example of the many colleges and high schools for the hearing which offer a variety of ethnic studies to interested students. We also have the needed precedent in the recent break-throughs at Gallaudet College (Washington, D.C.), which initiated a course, "The Deaf in Literature", in 1972, and at the Rochester Institute of Technology (Rochester, N.Y.), where a similar credit-bearing course in "Deaf Studies" will be offered to interested deaf and hearing students, beginning with the Fall Quarter, 1973.

In almost every school and college, the place of these special studies fits nicely in the English curriculum, inasmuch as this area includes the study of the Humanities. Most of the subject matter is classified under Poetry, Fiction and Drama -- although factual studies in the form of Social History, Biography and Personal Narrative are equally germane, in view of their common capability to provide social criticism, motivate achievement, and stimulate creative expression.

All this should serve to add new blood to an already jaded English curriculum, and it may prove just the incentive needed by most deaf students at the advanced school level where the development of communication skills is of paramount importance. A course, or "honors program", in Deaf Studies

should encourage the habit of independent reading; it could be the catalyst for spontaneous class discussions and extemporized talks; and it might challenge the deaf student to write more extensively, such as when comparing his own experience with that of a deaf character in a story or when reporting on the achievement of some outstanding deaf sculptor, architect, or baseball player. And, for the student who elects to read the published works of deaf authors, he may even be inspired to write a little poem or short story of his own.

Needless to say, the opportunities for discovery and involvement can be as exciting as the quest or mission itself in search of relevant materials for a program in Deaf Studies. I say this from personal experience, having spent the last 10 years in a scholarly adventure that sometimes seemed like a wild goose chase or an endless "tilting with windmills" in the attempt to realize "the impossible dream". Happily, it didn't turn out to be a mirage, and there was a little pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, after all. A brief review of the literature should bear this out, as should the accompanying bibliography on the subject of Deaf Studies.

Because of limitations in time and space, it will be necessary to restrict this survey to only those works which are generally available in the libraries and publishing houses. These include both hardbound and paperback editions, as well as periodicals such as The Silent Worker, The Deaf American, The American Annals of the Deaf, and The Volta Review. For

those who may wish to dig deeper into the past and cope with the problem of rare books or editions no longer in print, I shall be glad to distribute reprint copies of two articles that I have written on the subject, namely: "Deaf Characters In Fiction and Drama" (The Deaf American, May, 1972) and "The Deaf Writer in America: From Colonial Times to 1970" (American Annals of the Deaf: Sept. and Nov., 1970). Additional reprints are available on request via NTID.

#### Deaf Characters in Fiction

In developing any program or syllabus in Deaf Studies, at the very center should be the study of deaf characters in fiction. They reveal the universal deaf adult or deaf child in all of his complexities. They also hold up the mirror for the non-deaf reader to view his own complexities and reflect upon the coincidences. It takes imagination to see reality, and the increasing appearance of deaf characters in modern fiction stresses the truth that they are used for a twofold purpose -- to evoke a sympathetic understanding of their special handicap and to symbolize the large and universal problems of everyman.

The best known novel featuring deaf characters is that outstanding work by Carson McCullers which was also popularized as a motion picture, The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter (1940). A bizarre group in a Southern town -- a tavern owner, a teen-aged girl with musical ambitions, an alcoholic radical, and



a Negro doctor -- confide their troubles to John Singer, a deaf-mute, whose only outlet for self-expression is with a mentally retarded deaf-mute. The story of these individuals symbolizes the loneliness of the human heart and man's eternal need of companionship and communication. (Houghton Mifflin; Penguin Book).

A somewhat similar theme is expressed in Joanne Greenberg's recent novel, In This Sign (1970), which also tries to reproduce the language and idiom of the deaf illiterate by method of the flow of consciousness that reflects their psychological states and underscores the problem of communication. Abel and Janice Ryder, a deaf-mute couple, exist merely to pay off a debt of 20 years, during which time their hearing daughter provides their sole link of communication with the outside world. It is a moving plea for understanding the educational deprivation of deaf illiterates and their total dependence on sign language. (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1970; Avon Books: \$1.25).

Another searching study of the deaf illiterate is in that fine novel by Prudence Andrew, Ordeal by Silence (1964), a fictional history focused on the time of Henry II of England, immediately following the murder of Thomas a-Beckett. The main character, however, is Philip Ganter, an illiterate deaf-mute. His story is told posthumously by 10 people, drawn from all walks of life, who testify before a Cardinal of the Church to determine whether or not the deafmute is worthy of canonization following the miracles which the eye-witnesses



vouch for in his favor. As Ganter's story is unfolded, we gradually become aware of his holy, simple life, of his attraction and devotion to the Church and "the good life", despite his illiteracy and the many hardships he experienced because of social prejudice, brutality and ridicule. The book affords an excellent study of the medieval lack of imagination in finding ways to educate the deaf and of the strong discrimination against physical handicaps by the Church and society. (Putnam's Sons, N.Y., \$3.95).

For students interested in archaeology and adventure, there is Silence In Crete, written by Elisabeth Ayrton (1964). This popular romantic novel tells the story of Arkas, a young Cretan archeologist, who is left totally deaf from a wartime explosion. Bitterness and suspicion pervade his world of silence and distort a natural aptitude for archeology into illegal excavations with a gang of thieves who care nothing for preserving the marvels of antiquity. The story of how Arkas averts disaster and a near tragedy, of how he undergoes a change of attitude to society and is rehabilitated by the aid of sympathetic friends, most certainly should strike a responsive chord in the deaf high school student, particularly those who have still to recover from the shock of a hearing loss. Moreover, the effect of having the main character tell his own story adds to the realism of the themes of loneliness and the breakdown of communication. (William Morrow & Co., N.Y., \$3.95).

Another book dealing with the psychological effects of sudden deafness is Rachel Field's absorbing novel, And Now Tomorrow (1945). Emily Blair, the main character, is rich, beautiful and envied by many people in the staid New England town controlled by the family fortunes. She is also passionately in love and engaged to be married when, suddenly, she becomes totally deaf from an attack of spinal meningitis shortly after her twenty-first birthday. In the same year, the Blair Industries suffer a reversal of fortune and the townspeople are divided in their loyalties to the Blairs when the employees go on strike to establish a workers' union. Emily also discovers that her fiance has been unfaithful and has started to keep company with her own sister. The story of how she endures these humiliations, of what she learns from her personal tragedy -- why people admire her, who will remain loyal and who will desert when misfortune strikes -- also serves to illustrate the truth that the handicap of deafness can be a blessing in disguise and that adversity will often serve to strengthen the human character. (Macmillan Co., N.Y., \$2.75).

A book well worth reading, especially by mature students, is Margaret Kennedy's provocative novel, Not In The Calendar (1964). Subtitled "The Story of An Unorthodox Saint", it is about two English girls -- Wyn Harper, a deafmute believed to be mentally retarded, and Caroline Knevett, a resourceful hearing companion who learns to communicate with Wyn by inventing games and developing their own symbol language. This

begins a lifelong friendship which has lasting consequences despite the fact that the two girls are separated and do not meet again until they are grown women. By then, Wyn -- who was adopted by a wealthy family with a deaf daughter -- has become a distinguished artist, and Caroline decides to dedicate her life to freeing other deafmutes from the dungeons of silence and gloom. A study in positive thinking and liberal attitudes, the novel should inspire both student and teacher. (Macmillan Co., N.Y., \$4.95).

Students at the Junior High School level, as well as those more advanced, are sure to identify with the childhood experiences of the deaf boy in Veronica Robinson's short novel, David In Silence (1966). When twelve-year old David moves into a small English town, he faces various reactions among the neighborhood children. Some are friendly, but others are actually mean -- for David is totally deaf. One of the boys, Michael, takes a special interest in David and learns sign language. They soon communicate and become best friends. Eventually, David wins the friendship of other children who learn to admire his courage when he takes a risk and does something that no one else dares to do. (J. B. Lippincott Co., N.Y., 1966, \$3.50).

Another book about children's experiences with a deaf newcomer in their midst is Jerry West's exciting mystery story, The Happy Hollisters and the Haunted House Mystery (1962). Pete and Pam Hollister enlist the members of their "Detective Club" to help old Mrs. Neely get rid of the



"spooks" that haunt her Antique House and threaten to ruin her flourishing business. One day, they meet Charles Belden, a deaf boy who is spending the summer vacation working at a nearby farm. They quickly become good friends and invite Charles to join "the Detective Club". Soon, all the members have learned the finger alphabet from Charles and this helps them to communicate in secret silence while on the trail of two men whom they suspect are plotting against Mrs. Neely. After an exciting hunt, they solve the riddle of the "ghosts" hidden in the haunted house, helped no little by Charles' alertness of vision and his skill in lipreading. For these feats, Charles is rewarded with a medal from the Police Officer, along with the other members of the Club. (Doubleday & Co., N.Y., 1962. \$3.95).

The foregoing represents a sampling of fictive works which could be used to introduce a program in Deaf Studies at the high school level. A number of other books is also available in print. These include novels, short stories, and plays which feature deaf characters in major or minor roles.

The following bibliography (both Fiction and Non-Fiction) is by no means a complete listing, and there is a continuing need for further research and dissemination of information. Titles marked with an asterisk (\*) are intended for younger readers and for those students with certain reading disabilities:

I. Deaf Characters in Fiction and Drama

A. Novels

- \* Cable, Mildred and French, Francesca. The Story of Topsy: Little Lonely of Central Asia, (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1957).
- Calisher, Hortense. The New Yorkers, (Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1969).
- Canfield, Dorothy (Fisher). Bonfire. (Harcourt, Brace & Co., N.Y., 1933).
- Hugo, Victor. The Hunchback of Notre Dame. (Random House Modern Library Edition; also available in paperback: Norton; Bantam; Everyman).
- Huxley, Aldous. Crome Yellow. (Doran Co., 1922; Sun Dial Press, N.Y., 1937).
- Salinger, J. D. Raise High The Roof Beam, Carpenters. (Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1963; Bantam Books, 1965. (\$.75)).
- Thompson, Morton. Not As A Stranger. (Scribners Sons, N.Y., 1954).
- Trevor William. Mrs. Eckdorf in O'Neill's Hotel. (Viking Press, N.Y., 1969. \$5.95).
- \* Wojciechowska, Maia. A Single Light. (Harper & Row, N.Y., 1968; Bantam Books, 1971. (\$.75))

B. Mystery Novels and Detective Stories

- \* Creasy, John. Deaf, Dumb, and Blonde. (Doubleday & Co., N.Y., 1961).
- \* McBain, Ed. Cop Hater, in The 87th Precinct: A Trilogy, (Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 1959. \$3.95).
- \* McBain, Ed. Let's Hear It For The Deaf Man, (Doubleday & Co., N.Y., 1973, \$5.95).
- Queen, Ellery. The X, Y, Z Murders: A Trilogy, (J. B. Lippincott Co., N.Y., 1933).
- Queen, Ellery. Drury Lane's Last Case, (Avon Paperback, 1933, \$.35).

C. Short Stories

Bierce, Ambrose. "Chicamauga", Twenty-nine Short Stories, Wm. Peden (ed.), Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1960 (paperback).

Dickens, Charles. "Dr. Marigold", Christmas Stories (Thomas Crowell & Co., N.Y., 1935).

Maupassant, Guy. "The Deaf Mute", Complete Short Stories, (Doubleday & Co., N.Y., 1955).

Turgenev, Ivan. "Mumu", Famous Dog Stories (Doubleday & Co., N.Y., 1948).

D. Drama

*wrong category title*  
Harris, Elmer. Johnny Belinda, (A play in three acts), Samuel French Publishers, Ltd., London & N.Y., 1939. ✓

Ionesco, Eugene. "The Chairs", Four Plays, (Grove Press, N.Y., Evergreen Paperback, 1958, \$1.95).

O'Neill, Eugene. "Warnings", Ten Lost Plays, (Random House, N.Y., 1914 and 1964, \$6.95).

[See also the following dramatic productions of The National Theatre of the Deaf as reproduced on film by Captioned Films for the Deaf (U.S. Office of Education, Washington, D.C.):

"Gianni Schicchi", an operetta by Puccini  
"The Tale of Kasane", a Japanese Kabuki play by Namboki  
"Tyger, Tyger and Other Burnings", dramatic readings of classic poems.] 7

E. Anthology

An excellent selection of excerpts from novels, including several complete short stories, can be found in an unpublished work of Xeroxed material: The Deaf in Literature, edited by Trenton Batson and Eugene Bergman (Gallaudet College Bookstore, 1972, (\$5.50). This work includes the following anthology of deaf characters in fiction:



- "Pierre et Camille", a short story by Alfred de Musset  
 "Dr. Marigold", a short story by Charles Dickens  
 "Mumu", a short story by Ivan Turgenev  
 "The Deaf Mute", a short story by Guy de Maupassant  
 "Chicamauga", a short story by Ambrose Bierce  
Not In The Calendar, a novel by Margaret Kennedy  
 (excerpted chapters)  
 \* "Why It Was W-On-The-Eyes", a short story by Margaret Montague  
King Silence, a novel by Arnold Payne (excerpted chapters)  
A Voice From The Silence, a novel by Howard L. Terry (excerpted chapters)  
 "Deaf Writers in America", a survey by Robert F. Panara

## II. Non-Fiction (Personal Narrative and "Success Stories")

### A. Autobiography

- Ballin, Albert, The Deaf Mute Howls, Gallaudet College Press paperback, 1930 reprint (\$1.00).  
 \* Parsons, Frances. Sound of the Stars, Vantage Press, Inc., N.Y., 1971 (\$5.95).  
 Wiggins, Julius. No Sound, Silent Press, N.Y., 1970.  
 Wright, David. Deafness, Stein & Day, N.Y., 1970, (\$5.95).  
 Keller, Helen, Helen Keller's Journals, Doubleday, N.Y., 1938.  
 \* The Story of My Life, Dell Paperback, (\$.75).  
Midstream, Doubleday & Doran, N.Y., 1929.

### B. Biography

- \* DeGering, Etta. Gallaudet: Friend of the Deaf, David McKay Co., N.Y., 1964 (includes biographical sketch of Laurent Clerc, first deaf teacher of the deaf in America) \$3.75.  
 \* Hunter, Edith F. Child of the Silent Night: The Story of Laura Bridgman, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1963, (\$3.95).  
 Marlowe, Stephen. Colossus: A Novel about Goya, Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1972, (\$6.95).

Ludwig, Emil. Beethoven: Life of A Conqueror, G. P. Putnam's Sons, N.Y., 1943. (\$4.00).

- \* Shippen, Katherine B. Mr. Bell Invents the Telephone, Random House, N.Y., Landmark Book, 1958 (Mabel Hubbard, his wife, was totally deaf).
- \* Powers, Helen. Signs of Silence: Bernard Bragg and the National Theatre of the Deaf, Dodd, Mead & Co., N.Y., 1972 (\$6.95).
- \* Woods, Willard H. The Forgotten People (includes biographies of Beethoven, Edison, Thomas Marr, and Robert Gregg), Dixie Press, St. Petersburg, Fla., 1973; also available from the National Ass'n. of the Deaf, Wash., D.C. (\$6.50).

### III. Magazine Articles (Non-fiction)

#### A. The Arts and Sciences

Arnold, N. Hillis. "A Deaf Sculptor", The Volta Review, June, 1967.

"Deaf-Blind Man Named Handicapped American of the Year" (Robert J. Smithdas), The Volta Review, May, 1966.

Domich, Harold J. "John Carlin", American Annals of the Deaf, September, 1945.

Kowalewski, Felix. "The Deaf in Art", The Silent Worker, October, 1954.

Kowalewski, Felix. "Hillis Arnold: American Deaf Sculptor", The Deaf American, November, 1972.

Panara, Robert F. "The Deaf Writer in America", American Annals of the Deaf, Sept. & Nov., 1970.

Runde, Winfield S. "Douglas Tilden: Sculptor", The Silent Worker, December, 1952.

Simon, Arthur B. "Call Him John, Please" (A biographical sketch of the deaf artist, Jean Haneau), Volta Review, January, 1949.

Wright, David. "A Deaf Man Goes To France" (Odyssey of the deaf poet, David Wright), The Volta Review, September, 1949.

B. Professional Sports

- \* Kruger, Art. "William E. Hoy: Pro Baseball Star", The Silent Worker, July, 1952.
- \* McCarthy, Samuel. "Dummy Decker: Deaf Ring Great" (Professional Prize-fighter), The Silent Worker, April, 1952.
- \* Warshawsky, Leonard. "The Taylor-made Story" (Dummy Taylor, Pro Baseball Pitcher), The Silent Worker, September, 1952.
- \* Weingold, Hal and Jean. "Silent Rattan: Deafdom's King of the Mat" (Professional Wrestler), The Silent Worker, November, 1948.

IV. Literary Works by the Deaf

A. Autobiography

(See foregoing section under "Non-fiction".)

B. Anthologies

Panara, Robert F.; Denis, Taras; and McFarland, J.B. (Eds.). The Silent Muse Anthology: Poetry & Prose by the Deaf, Gallaudet College, Washington, D.C., 1960 (Out of print; revised edition projected).

C. Novels

Muse, Helen. Green Pavilions, Carlton Press, N.Y., 1961.

Sullivan, James A. Valley Forge, Dorrance & Co., Philadelphia, 1964.

D. Poetry

Lowman, Rex. Bitterweed, Bella Vista Press (Arkansas), 1964 (Gallaudet College Bookstore, \$2.75).

McVan, Alice. Tryst, Hispanic Society of America, N.Y., 1953.

Wright, David. Monologue of A Deaf Man, Andre Deutsch, London, 1958.

New Lines, Andre Deutsch, London, 1961.



ADDENDA (July, 1974)

I. Novels:

- \* 1. Cole, Sheila R. MEANING WELL, (illus. by Paul Raynor), Watts, 1974, 63 p. (\$4.95)
- 2. Cookson, Catherine. THE MALLEN GIRL, E.P. Dutton & Co., N.Y., 1973 (\$6.95)
- 3. Crews, Harry. THE GYPSY'S CURSE, Alfred Knopf, N.Y., 1974 (\$5.95)

II. Detective Stories:

- 1. Steward, Dwight. THE ACUPUNCTURE MURDERS, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1973, (\$5.95)

III. Non-Fiction:

- 1. Ashley, Jack, MP. JOURNEY INTO SILENCE, The Bodley Head, London, 1974 ( 2.50)
- 2. Tidyman, Ernest. DUMMY, Little, Brown & Co., N.Y., 1974 (\$5.95) (Note: Ernest Tidyman is the author of the famous "Shaft" series and of such screenplays as "high Plains Drifter" and "The French Connection", for which he won an Academy Award. He will produce the film version of Dummy.)

IV. Biography & Reportage:

- 1. Bowe, Frank & Sternberg, Martin. I'M DEAF, TOO: 12 Deaf Americans. National Ass'n of the Deaf (NAD), Washington, D.C., 1973 (\$2.50)
- 2. West, Paul. WORDS FOR A DEAF DAUGHTER Harper & Row, N.Y., 1968.