Items of Interest for REG Newsletter???

We would welcome your submissions to the newsletter. Please send your article via email to lovett.gc@verizon.net. Please type “REG” on the subject line of your email.

Thanks, we’d love to hear from you!
Gena Lovett, Editor

TWENTYFIRST CONCERT UNDER THE STARS!

On September 10 at 6:00 PM come and enjoy the 21st Concert Under the Stars. Casual dining and Broadway show tunes take center stage for this event. Bring along a picnic dinner and enjoy the sunset before the free open air concert. A fireworks finale is included. Children are welcome. For additional information, please call (714) 278-3456.

Please join REG Board Members at Concert Under the Stars on Friday September 10 at 6:00 pm. This is a wonderful evening of music provided by current and former CSUF students. The picnic event takes place on the lawn just north of the Gymnasium. If you would like to join us in the festivities, please contact Donna Padgett by August 31st at (714) 278-2758 x 9 or (562) 693-4641.

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AS OTHERS SEE US
Harper Lee Looks at Education

Pull up a list of beloved books, recommended books, American classics, you name it, and To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee will be on it. More than a good read, Lee creates time travel to the simple streets, the kitchens and courtrooms of the deeply segregated South—Maycomb, Alabama, during the Great Depression—and, in so doing, explores the timeless riddles of human behavior with compassion and honesty, with high justice and art. When I read To Kill a Mockingbird as an adult and began to hold it and its author in such high esteem, I wanted to acquire every other work in her collection. I wanted to learn her opinion on every issue, to absorb every lecture and study every article. However, for most of her adult life, Harper Lee, now 78, has lived quietly in her hometown; she grants no interviews, writes no letters to the editor, delivers no guest lectures at universities, and, apart from a couple of essays in popular magazines, has not published another work.

Nevertheless, I invite you to hear exactly what Harper Lee thinks about reading. This is possible because we have the novel. If we posit that authors always reveal their life philosophies within their works, whether they say they have done so or not, whether they want to or not, then a reading-theory lecture is in our hands. What or whom does Lee admire? In reading To Kill a Mockingbird for several semesters in my classes at Long Beach City College, I have realized this brilliant author has opinions apropos to our bailiwick: education, in general; reading, in particular. But be forewarned: her opinions may make you more than a little uncomfortable.

Meet the Finch family: Scout (Jean Louise), Lee’s voice as the novel’s eight-year-old narrator, a “tomboy” and bright beyond her years; Scout’s big brother Jem (Jeremy Atticus), who, at age 13, is an imaginative adventurer, all boy, but acquiring a thoughtful maturity; and their widowed father Atticus, perhaps the finest father in American literature. Seemingly dry and distant, Atticus is stable, logical, fair and wise, evoking deep trust, admiration, and love from his children and readers of the book. An attorney, Atticus Finch is assigned the defense of Tom Robinson, a black man wrongly accused of rape; on this plotline hangs the inti-
cies of the entire novel, but its profound moral considerations are peppered with hundreds of charming, comic or biting images in an educational motif, the first of which is the “Miss Caroline” incident.

**Theory and Practice**

Lee creates the lovely, red-haired, pink-cheeked, high-heeled Miss Caroline Fisher, Scout’s first-grade (and first) teacher, as short on experience and long on theory which, unfortunately, combine to overwhelm her common sense. She starts the school day in a way we literature-based-classroom advocates would applaud—by reading a story. However, this story about talking cats that wear “cunning” clothes and buy chocolate mice is straight from the Theater of the Absurd to her audience, half of whom are rural children, “immune to imaginative literature” (17). Upon discovering that Scout can read anything set in front of her (something she picked up sitting on her father’s lap as he read the paper) and can write in cursive (taught by their black housekeeper-nanny Calpurnia to keep Scout occupied on rainy days), an indignant Miss Caroline instructs the baffled little girl, “You tell him [Atticus] I’ll take over from here and try to undo the damage— . . . Your father does not know how to teach” (17). Both Scout and the reader wonder what is the matter with her.

At recess, Jem sagaciously counsels Scout not to worry—it’s just the Dewey Decimal System that Miss Caroline learned in college and that all the schools are adopting. As the morning progresses, Scout perceives that flashing sight words on cards appears to be a component of the Decimal System, and now I’m really beginning to worry because Jem and Scout are smart children, but they have Dewey all mixed up, and Harper Lee pointedly wrote it that way. This is “my” Dewey—the Dewey of pragmatism/progressivism/experientialism whom we studied in Curriculum Theory, the Dewey whose educational philosophy incorporates the ideas of personal relevance, individualism, and learning from life that many of us adopted as our own credo. (The father of the Dewey Decimal System for classifying library books is Melvil Dewey, 1831 – 1931.) Is this the public’s trickle-down understanding of a school system’s curriculum reforms?

Next, after evaluating the contents of each child’s lunch paci, public health being another early educational foundation, Miss Caroline unwittingly humiliates Walter Cunningham by insisting he borrow her quarter for lunch, as he has none, not realizing that he is too poor either to bring lunch or pay her back. When, at the class’s urging, Scout tries to explain these subtleties to Miss Caroline, Lee’s fed-up, young instructor raps Scout’s knuckles and sends her to the corner, promising the same for the rest of the class, but thus provoking such a rumpus that Miss Blount in the next room, “as yet uninitiated in the mysteries of the Decimal System” (22), threatens to “burn up” the class unless they quiet down. It is all very funny, except for the lingering suspicion that Harper Lee is laughing at us!

It is one Burris Ewell who reduces Miss Caroline Fisher to tears. Lee uses first-grader-for-the-third-time, lice-haired Burris to introduce a family who play the literary antagonists in this novel. They are disease-ridden from living in filth; have an alcoholic father who drinks up the welfare check; are ignorant, racist, and proud of it. Burris calculatingly cusses out our weary teacher when she attempts to reprove him, and Lee concludes the incident with one more gentle jab at Miss Caroline: the class, more mature than she, gathers around, urging her to read them another story (“That cat thing was real fine this mornin’ . . . .” [28])—they know it will make her feel better.

We learn a great deal about Scout and Maycomb in these two amusing chapters, but if we are listening for it, we also begin to learn that Harper Lee does not have such a red-hot opinion of formal education systems. Miss Caroline means well, and she cannot help her inexperience, but she is so steeped in theory that her students are invisible to her. It is our education in the CSUF Master’s program, our enrichment through theory, that sets us and our instructional opinions apart from and, I would say, above those of the “man on the street”; but Harper Lee warns us against arro-

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“Creating an eighth college is a move to expand leadership in teacher preparation on campus,” said CSUF President Milton A. Gordon. “This is another milestone for Cal State Fullerton. Even in tough budgetary times, we must not let that stop us from positioning ourselves to excel.”

Dr. Ashley L. Bishop III, was appointed to a two-year term as acting dean of the new college. A national search will be conducted for a permanent dean in the future.

“It is with real pleasure that I assume this position,” said Bishop. “Having been with the university for 28 years, I have come to value and respect the students who have earned their teaching credentials and/or graduate degrees from Fullerton. They are making a tremendous difference in our schools. Much of our students’ success can be attributed to faculty members of the College of Education. They bring a powerful combination of rich experiences as teachers and researchers to the instructional setting. I look forward to the next two years working closely with Fullerton’s students, faculty and the educational community.”

Several advantages were noted in the move to create a College of Education at CSUF. 1) All other large CSU campuses have Colleges of Education; 2) Fullerton will now be able to more effectively respond to new demands on teacher education; 3) A dean dedicated to education will be able to seek outside resources more effectively; 4) A College of Education will be more able to attract top faculty and administrators nationwide; and 5) The students benefit from the increased status of a College of Education.

Dr. JoAnn Carter-Wells will serve as chair of the Reading Department. JoAnn was acting chair while Ash was on sabbatical last year and is looking forward to returning to that role.

**CONGRATULATIONS NEW REG MEMBERS**

Newport-Mesa cohort students at their graduation dinner. The dinner was hosted by Dr. Julie Chan, Director of Literacy NMUSD.

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play revolves around acting out the plots of those books. Such must have been Lee’s own wholesome, creative, naturally literate childhood; she shows that it works.

Uncharacteristically, Lee on one occasion actually lectures about what does not work, choosing Atticus to express her adamant opinion on the subject of equality as he addresses a jury (oops, we’re back to disapproval): it is, it must be, a court where all men are created equal. However, Atticus continues, “there is a tendency in this year of grace, 1935, for certain people to use this phrase out of context, to satisfy all conditions. The most ridiculous example I can think of is that the people who run public education promote the stupid and idle along with the industrious—because all men are created equal, educators will gravely tell you, the children left behind suffer terrible feelings of inferiority” (205). His tone is her tone, and it is contemptuous of educational policy makers, especially if we/they practice social promotion, a blander from which she would like to free us. The question of how to handle “the stupid and idle” has long been a contentious one, and, sadly but not surprisingly, Lee does not offer any solutions.

To be bright and self-motivated is always a recipe for success; it is for Atticus and even for Calpurnia and her grown son Zeebo. Denied formal education because of their race, they are among the few Maycomb Negroes who can read. An early employer taught Cal, and she taught Zeebo, using the Bible and Blackstone’s Commentaries, a law text valuable for its “fine English” (125), but certainly not for its “high interest.” Never mind about high interest; Cal and Zeebo were highly interested because they and Lee knew the life-changing power of reading. Cal also speaks Standard English, so when the children hear her use “Ebonics” as they accompany her to her church one Sunday, they are appalled. But Cal refuses Scout and Jem’s scolding about her dialectical departure from Standard English by simply stating, “It’s not necessary to tell all you know” (126). Harper Lee’s own complicated syntax and sophisticated vocabulary show her appreciation of literary grace, but, through Scout, she also marvels at farm boy Walter Cunningham’s practical knowledge of agriculture as he and Atticus talk as men over lunch (24). In Cal’s, Walter’s, and many other situations, Lee shows she values wisdom over knowledge.

It is not a tidy package that Harper Lee delivers us, but I like to keep her perspective in mind, seeing myself, ourselves, CSUF Reading Program graduates, as she might see us, and hoping she would be pleased.


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**REG Awards First Grant**

Congratulations to Leslee Milch! Leslee is the first recipient of the REG Grant for classroom or professional materials. Her proposal detailed a plan to supplement her classroom library as part of the “Read with Me” program she uses in her primary classroom. Leslee works with predominantly English language learners in Orange County. The grant of $300 will purchase 90 books for classroom and home use.

FACULTY FOOTNOTES by Kathryn Bartle-Angus

Gordon creates College of Education appoints Bishop acting dean

President Gordon made it official in June. We are now a College of Education, the eighth college at CSUF. The College of Education includes the departments of Educational Leadership, Elementary and Bilingual Education, Reading, Secondary Education and Special Education. A program in instructional design and technology and a joint doctoral program with the University of California at Irvine in Educational Administration and Leadership are also part of the new college.

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Further, Lee affirms that we can count on problems when we adopt theoretical extremes. Compare the “Dewey” features to, perhaps, widespread adoption of “teacher-proof” materials. Anecdotally, I am acquainted with an elementary school instructor whose administration walks the halls to make sure each teacher is on the same Open Court page at the same minute. Such a policy might have protected Scout and company from the likes of Miss Caroline, but a non-extremist policy of balance would surely be the better choice.

We Teach Who We Are

Another Mockingbird incident shows that Harper Lee would concur with the above maxim. This time, Scout’s third-grade teacher, Miss Gates, is Lee’s vehicle. During a teachable moment when a student asks how Adolf Hitler can get away with persecuting his own citizens, Miss Gates introduces the concept of DEMOCRACY, which she writes on the board in large caps and which Scout aptly defines as “Equal rights for all, special privileges for none” (245). Contrasting a democracy with a dictatorship, and decrying prejudice and persecution, Miss Gates looks good until Scout remembers her words after the Tom Robinson verdict. Tom and Atticus had lost the case, despite clear evidence of Tom’s innocence and his accusers’ duplicity. Why? As Atticus explained, “There’s something in our world that makes men lose their heads—they couldn’t be fair if they tried. In our courts, when it’s a white man’s word against a black man’s, the white man always wins” (220). So Scout wonders why in the classroom Miss Gates preached against prejudice when after the trial Scout had heard her say that “it’s time somebody taught ‘em a lesson, they were gettin’ way above themselves, an’ the next thing they think they can do is marry us” (247). Her hypocrisy is evident, but not to her. Lee’s Miss Gates is a cautionary tale, leading us to amend our lives because we teach who we are, and, sooner or later, our students will discover our blind spots.

Incidentally, knowing one’s population and Lee’s deprecatory view of schools echo through this incident, as well, since Lee describes the assignment that led to the democracy discussion, presenting a current event, as a well-intentioned one that “allegedly overcame a variety of evils” from poor posture to staying outside of “the Group” (243), but also as one that, again, did not work in Maycomb. Racial segregation is a non-issue in this completely white school (although, certainly not in this novel), but we do observe age-old segregation along economic lines. The bused-in farm children do not have the same access to current-eventful, quality newspapers as the local students, “convinces the bus children more deeply that the town children got all the attention anyway” (244). Lee lets us know that the State educational system solved culture clash by “paying teachers to discourage” the trappings of rural experience (such as mispronunciations or playing the fiddle), but she, an early multiculturalist, clearly disapproves of their disapproval.

Do It Yourself

Of what educational practices does Harper Lee approve? As I look at the evidence, it appears there are few that professional educators can either learn or influence. Lee’s strong marks go to the self-educated man. Erudite, scholarly Atticus, the character she sets in highest esteem, did not attend school, but, along with his brother Jack, a physician, was taught by their father (one assumes until their law and medical studies). Scout and Jem’s life experiences exemplify William Teale’s early reader studies in that reading and writing materials were always available to them and these activities were naturally integrated into the life of every Finch family member, including Calpurnia. It was Calpurnia, you recall, who taught Scout to write to keep her busy, and it seemed that all Atticus did was read (much to the children’s dismay, until they learn that “Atticus Finch was the deadest shot in Maycomb county in his time” [98]), so that Scout grew up reading on her father’s lap, absorbing the Maycomb County Tribune. Scout, Jem, and their friend Dill had read all the children’s chapter books of their era; we know because their imaginative outdoor

“There’s something in our world that makes men lose their heads—they couldn’t be fair if they tried”