



WAYNE C. BOOTH

Wayne C. Booth (1921–) has had a long and distinguished career in academia. A professor of English and author of numerous books on literature and higher education, Booth spent much of his teaching career at the University of Chicago. It was there that he delivered the following talk as part of a series of lectures to the freshman class. Like the other pieces in this section, Booth's essay examines the purpose of education. Specifically, he is concerned with the value of a liberal arts education.

What's Supposed to Be Going on Here?

Liberal education was originally called "liberal" because it was supposed to liberate men to apply their minds, their critical thinking, to the most important decisions of their lives; how to act, who or what to love, what to call good or true or beautiful. We all know, of course, that much that traveled under the name of liberal education did not in fact liberate, because it was not in fact a removal of ignorance but an indoctrination with new forms of ignorance; or because the ignorance it removed was trivial, and the knowledge substituted was not of how to use critical intelligence but of how to use a collection of information, more or less inaccurate, for social climbing. But these perversions do not destroy the value of the genuine article: in the great educational philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle through Newman and John Dewey to whoever is your favorite of today, we discover a kind of perennial philosophy of liberating education. They all say that only in knowledge, only in the right kind of knowledge, can we liberate ourselves to make free choices. Without knowledge we may have the illusion of free choice; we may embrace political programs and schools of art and world views with as much passion *as if* we knew what we were doing, but our seeming choices are really what other people have imposed upon us.

Now if you're listening to me critically—and I hope you are—you will already be troubled with a lot of questions. Some of you will be wondering whether I'm against spontaneity. Some will be worried about the possible selfishness of cultivating free minds while the world burns (what *use* is freedom?). Some will want to ask whether I'm not just delivering a disguised bit of brainwashing, trying to *impose* an institutional doctrine to protect you from the educational efforts of SDS or the Black Panthers or whomever. I like to think that I have answers to such questions—every speaker would like to think he could answer *all* questions—and I hope some of your objections will be met as I go along. Keep them in mind, in any case, so that we can then discuss them later on, and let me try for the moment to explain this notion of mental freedom, a notion which is not original with me by any means but which is different from much of what gets said these days.

There are many ways of talking about the arts of liberal education, the arts that genuinely liberate. At the risk of being gimmicky, I'd like to suggest a way

of reviving that tired old list, the “three R’s.” Reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic made up a highly simplified, minimal list of the arts of liberation: to be able to read is to be free to learn what other men know; to be able to write is to be free to teach or move or change other men with your words; and to be able to calculate is to be freed from enslavement to other men’s calculations. Without scrapping arithmetic, which raises additional problems I can’t go into, I’d like to expand the first two of these into four. The new list would have reading and writing mixed up in every one of the four, and it would run like this: first, the art of Recovery of meanings, the seemingly simple but never finally mastered ability to learn what other men have known or believed; second, the art of Rejection of whatever is false or enslaving in other men’s meanings—what is often called critical thinking; third, the art of Renewing or (the thesaurus yields lots of “R’s” here) Renovating or Recognizing or Re-presenting what is valid or worthwhile in other men’s meanings; and finally the art of Revising or Revolutionizing thought by discovering genuinely new truth.*

Both critics and defenders of current education seem these days to be far more interested in the last of these four, revolutionary novelty, than any of the others. Under the names of “creativity,” “originality,” or novelty, educationists often talk as if a little institutional doctoring would make it possible for everyone to become intellectually revolutionary, thinking bold new thoughts that nobody else has ever dared to think. Well, maybe. Nobody knows precisely the limits of our creativity. All I can say is that genuinely new ideas seem to me terribly rare, and if it is the goal of education to produce them most of us seem to be doomed to perpetual second-class citizenship. Maybe I can dramatize what I mean by saying that so far as I know, there are no original ideas in this speech. It is true that the whole thing is brand spanking new in one sense: my various sub-points under the theme of education for freedom have never been put together in quite this shape before. But anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with the history of thought will find all of my ideas expressed by many before me, often expressed in better form than I can manage. So I’m going to leave genuine revision or revolutions of thought to one side for awhile, and concentrate briefly on the three R’s that to me are more important to liberal education: more important, first, because they must be mastered before creativity has a chance, and more important, second, because they are available, in some degree, to every student who is willing to seek them out, regardless of his past educational experience. If I offered to teach you how to be a genuine intellectual revolutionary, I would be a fraud, because I don’t know how it is done (believe me, if I *did* know, the world would be paying more attention to me than I seem to be able to get it to). But I *can* look you in the eye tonight and promise you that here at Chicago, in classes or on your own in the library or in conversation, you can learn how to free yourselves, maybe a little, maybe a lot, never totally, but enough to make a difference—to free yourself by working on the arts of recovery, rejection, and renovation. In the process you will not necessarily

* Yes, I really uttered all of these *mens*, to an audience about half of whom were women! And I heard no protesting groans, then or later. . . .

make yourselves happy; the liberal arts will not save you from disease and death, or from anxious pride and personal anxieties and the suffering that all human beings seem to inflict on each other. But they might save you—could save *all* of you, and almost certainly will save *some* of you—from the special forms of slavery that only these arts can remove. Nobody can force you to become educated, nobody can even convince you in advance that to become educated is worth doing. But the curious fact is that most of you do not need to be convinced; you already want this mysterious thing. The big problem is how to go about getting it.

The first step toward this elusive kind of freedom is learning how to recover other people's meanings and thus make available to oneself what others have already learned. You and I were born as ignorant as the most ignorant newborn baby in the most primitive corner in the most backward moment in man's history. We were born ignorant provincials in time and space. But we were thrust immediately into a world buzzing with knowledge (and with misinformation disguised as knowledge). We must either learn to recover what is really known or be doomed to drift through seas of confusion.

There is no reason to think that a modern college is the only place, or even the best place, in which to earn this freedom. For some people a job as a newspaper reporter would be better, and for some others prisons are better places. I know of no more moving account of how freedom comes to a man when he learns how to recover meanings for himself, how really to listen to what is there on the page, than Malcolm X's story of his prison reading.

If you haven't read his *Autobiography*, you ought to, and you ought to pay special attention to Chapter 11, which he calls "Saved."

First, he says, talking of how learning saved him, he literally re-copied every word and definition in the prison dictionary, determined to master the world of words. Think of that, ye innovators. *There's* innovation for you, and interdisciplinary at that!

And suddenly, he says,

for the first time [I could] pick up a book and read and *now begin to understand what the book was saying*. Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened. Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk. You couldn't have gotten me out of books with a wedge. . . . Months passed *without my even thinking about being imprisoned*. In fact, up to then, *I never had been so truly free in my life*. . . . No university would ask any student to devour literature as I did when this new world opened to me, of being able to read and *understand*. . . . I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke inside me *some long dormant craving to be mentally alive*. . . . My homemade education gave me, with every additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and

blindness that was afflicting the black race in America. Not long ago, an English writer telephoned me from London, asking questions. One was, "What's your alma mater?" I told him, "Books." You will never catch me with a free fifteen minutes in which I'm not studying something I feel might be able to help the black man. . . . Where else but in a prison could *I have attacked my ignorance* by being able to study intensely sometimes as much as fifteen hours a day. [Except for the word *understand*, italics are mine.]*

Even in this isolated quotation we can sense the miracle of freeing that has occurred. Every time I read that chapter I feel that there in that strange moment of human history, there in those seemingly binding circumstances, lies the full wonder of what education ought to be about: "I had never *been so truly free in my life*." Malcolm Little, freed to become Malcolm X, still had a lot of mental chains upon him, as he himself says; we all do. But he had begun to learn the *ways* of freeing, and he went on to new and surprising freedoms throughout the rest of his short life.

It is important to look closely at what really happened in that first moment. The curious thing is that Malcolm X in fact already knew how to read, in the usual sense, long before he went to prison. In chapter 2 we learn that in seventh grade he was at the top of his class. As a thirteen-year-old boy he could, it is clear, read and write far beyond the average of his age group. But what happened later in prison, as his own emphasis shows, is that he suddenly became "able to read and *understand*." What the words before him were really saying became for the first time available to him, and he "*attacked his ignorance*" and became freer than ever before in his life.

Unfortunately, freedom to recover meanings, freedom to understand, is not as simple as my account so far would suggest. As Malcolm X would have been the first to admit, there is understanding and understanding, and there is a tremendous problem, even for highly literate folk, of deciding what meanings are worth understanding. Even that voracious and highly intelligent prisoner sneaking his gulps of learning behind the backs of the patrolling guards far into the night could not cover more than a fraction of the books that are worth reading. Our library here contains more than two million volumes, every one of them thought by somebody—if only its own author—to be worth reading. Even the speed readers among you, reading an average of a book a day for four years, will cover at best only around a thousand of those books, fewer than one two-thousandth of what is available: and meanwhile, during those four years, something like 150 thousand more books will have been published in America alone, scores of times more than you have read in the four years. Clearly nobody is free to recover knowledge in that quantity, and if anybody tried to he would soon crack up under the strain.

I am frequently told that your generation is "better educated" than any previous generation, partly because you have picked up so much knowledge from TV. It may be true that you have recovered, in this sense, more information than

* *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, edited by Alex Haley (New York, 1966), 172-73; 179-80.

your predecessors, though from what little I see on TV I would say that more of it is misinformation than not. Even if our minds are filled with information, we could still be totally enslaved in the sense I'm talking about (and that Malcolm X was in part talking about), unless we had mastered that very different kind of knowledge—the knowledge of how to reconstruct what other people really mean by what they say or write. And *that* includes the knowledge of how to guard against one's temptations to misunderstand. It sounds simple, but it is one of the most difficult arts in the world—the art of recovering what other people mean and not what we'd like them to mean. It is an art that is not highly honored in the world around us: all the value is usually placed on reacting to meanings without discovering first what the meanings actually are. Our intellectual lives are for the most part lived about on the level of our TV watching: you can tell the good guys from the bad guys by simple symbols, and the heroes and villains shift from day to day without real thought. One day [Herbert] Marcuse is our hero (though don't ask how many have actually *read* him) and the next day he is attacked, still without really being read. It is all done with simple catchwords and slogans: Is he *for* the movement or *against* it? One day Paul Goodman is so besieged with invitations to campuses that he can't keep up; the next day (still without really being read or listened to) he is down and out, because he has accidentally pushed this or that button marked "Bad Guy."

And poor Goodman is left, in a recent poem called "The Young," lamenting 14

When young proclaim Make Love Not War
I back them up because it's better
and some are brave as they can be,
but they don't make love to me.

He brought petunias to the Be-In
and fed a lump of sugar to a policeman's horse,
but me, he said, he didn't like my vibrations.
For this I didn't need to trudge to Central Park.

Sure I am heartened by my crazy allies
and their long hair looks very nice on some,
but frankly, more of them were interesting
before they all began to do their thing.*

If I am right, then, the chief threat to our intellectual freedom is not illiteracy, or censorship committees, or boards of trustees firing radical professors, or the heckling and shouting down of speakers without caring about what they have to say. Though all of these are bad, they are openly bad, as it were, and few of us are fooled into thinking that they are good. More threatening to you and me is the subtler mental violence that occurs when people who think they are listening with an open mind actually wrench complicated or new or unacceptable messages into simpler, ready-made categories of old ideas. The person who reacts passionately for or against what was not actually said or written is a slave 15

* Paul Goodman, "The Young," *The Nation*, June 20, 1970, 794. (Reprinted by permission of The Nation Company, Inc., copyright 1970.)

to his own ignorance, no matter how gloriously free and spontaneous and righteous he feels as he reacts. Yet the shameful fact is that most of us most of the time reduce other folks' meanings to nonsense that we *can* reject. After all, if it's shit already, I don't have to try to digest it.

Jim Hoge, the editor of the *Sun Times*, told some of us freshmen last week that he often cannot recognize quotations attributed to him by other journals, particularly the weeklies. The fault of mis-hearing and mis-reading is indeed so common, among the so-called educated professors, journalists, and politicians, that it is difficult to find counter-examples, examples of the painstaking recovery of what the other person knows or claims to know. *You* think you are an exception, I'll warrant. But bright as you are, full of information as you are, clever as you are at checking the box marked "None of the above," quick as you are at deciding whether this or that item from the past is relevant to your lives, I would be very much surprised if there are three of you here who could read a dialogue of Plato or an essay by Hume and reconstruct what is said in a form that Plato or Hume would recognize. I look you in the eye, you marvelous promisers of future freedom, and say something even more insulting: I doubt that many of you could write a summary of a speech by President Nixon or Senator Fulbright that *he* would accept as a genuine recovery of his meanings. I have no doubt whatever that you could write colorful *criticisms* of what you *thought* he said, criticisms that would pass for relevant because they wouldn't miss the target any further than most of what gets printed these days. But you're not free to learn from Plato or Hume or Fulbright, or even Nixon, and therefore you are not free to accept or refute them, until you are free to find out who they really are.

Just to show you how serious I am in this arrogant little part of this arrogant little speech, I am going to make an offer: to any one of you first-year students who can write a summary of *this* speech, in 100 to 250 words, a summary that really reconstructs what *I* think I mean, I hereby offer twenty-five dollars, tax free. In case there is more than one more-or-less successful entry in the Booth Recovery-of-Meanings Prize Contest, twenty-five dollars will go to the best entry, and five dollars to each of the others. Just remember: all I want is a summary or *précis*, the kind of thing that English teachers used to ask for before they got up-to-date and began to ask students to do what they call "research." And all I ask is that I will be able to say, "Yes, that's what I really said."

Some of you at this point will be wanting to ask, "Who are *you* to judge?" "How can *you* be objective?" To which I reply, "Who else?" For the contest, it's *my* meanings we're after. Then we can move on to your refutations. If anyone insists, however, I'll be glad to appoint a review court, students of your choice. Anyway, don't be afraid that I'll be trying to protect my twenty-five bucks. I'm pathetically eager to be understood; I am praying for a winner this time, because I want to feel that I have not been talking into that great, garbling meaning-chopper that often seems to swallow all our meanings at one end and spew out nonsense at the other.*

* To my surprise, there were three winners. The first prize went to a young man who wrote his summary in an excellently formed sonnet sequence!

Everyone who has ever been reported in the press, and especially in the weeklies, has felt the effects of the meaning-chopper. Norman Mailer, who almost always seems to me to misunderstand everyone else, is very good on the subject of how it feels himself to go through the meaning-chopper of the media: "The papers distorted one's actions, and that was painful enough, but they wrenched and garbled and twisted and broke one's words and sentences until a good author always sounds like an overcharged idiot in newsprint." Mailer sometimes makes the mistake of talking as if the meaning-chopper worked only out of malice—if people would only be friendly all would be well. But finally he recognizes the truth: "The average reporter [can] not get a sentence straight if it [is] phrased more subtly than his own mind. . . ."^{*} In our terms, the "average reporter," whether a professional reporting for other readers, or simply you and I trying to record for our own future needs, is not free to recover meanings that are richer than his own mind. And the first goal of education is thus to prepare your minds for the free conversation with other minds that can only take place if you really know what those other minds are offering. 19

Unfortunately, this first freedom, freedom to understand, is even more complicated than my examples have suggested. Even experts, dealing calmly with issues that are not tied to survival or burdened with emotions or cluttered with business, often have trouble understanding each other. Philosophers always claim to be misunderstood by other philosophers. Hegel is said to have lamented on his deathbed: "There never was but one man who understood me—and even he did not understand me." The reviewer of scholarly books who can discover what the books attempt before damning or praising is a rare bird indeed. And of course none of us ever becomes free, in this sense, in very many subjects. I cannot, for example, recover the meanings of current papers in mathematics or atomic physics; even the popularized is papers on these subjects in *Scientific American* frequently throw me. To this extent, I am unliberated in these subjects; the only freedom I can hope for is the freedom that comes from knowing my own ignorance. But this in itself is no mean thing, as Socrates taught the world. To know when you don't know and what you don't know is in fact probably the most important step in earning the first freedom, because unless you know that you are ignorant, you will not know that you are enslaved, and you will have no motive to "attack your ignorance." 20

My second and third "R's" are Rejection, on the one hand, and Renewal or Renovation, on the other. I won't discuss them at length tonight, but just describe them briefly. It is obviously not enough just to feed back accurately and justly what the other speaker or writer meant. We must be able to sort out, distinguish the sound from the unsound, and then *re-present* old meanings in forms intelligible and useful in new situations. The freedom to reject falsehood and renew truth by transmitting it to others is in effect the freedom to exercise power over the world and over other men's minds, and it thus clearly includes 21

^{*} Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night* (New York, 1968), 80–81

(though it goes far beyond) what we mean when we talk about “learning how to speak and write.”

There’s a lot of talk in America these days about how we professorial ignoramuses have failed to teach you student ignoramuses how to write. Supervisors of Ph.D. dissertations blame college teachers, college teachers blame high school teachers, and the public blames us all. But most of the complaints I see from the public are trivial, concerned only with spelling and grammar. The real failure we ought to be concerned about is that hardly anybody seems to be concerned with writing in the sense of composition—com-posing in the sense of testing, with hard mental labor, whether ideas really fit together. The writer who matters to us is the one who has faced honestly what happens when ideas are recovered and set free in a free mind. What happens is that some of the ideas fit together and some do not. The complacent, uneducated mind does not worry when ideas do not fit. Such a mind can believe, or believe that it believes, both that all men are brothers, or children of the same divine father, and that a particular man, whose skin color is wrong, can be used as a machine convenient for economic purposes, thus ignoring his humanity and brotherhood. The mind struggling to free itself can’t do that. It looks at the two ideas and they start nagging at him: “One of us two has gotta go.” The uneducated mind can accommodate the belief that “the students must be put down” because they are all immature, dirty, paranoid revolutionaries with the knowledge that particular students—Jones, Kozol, and Grziack—are mature, clean, reasonable people, deeply devoted to their studies in a university of which they are proud. The uneducated mind will accept slogans like “students are the most exploited class in America today,” even though it also knows that migrant workers and black workers have been immeasurably more exploited and have a right to be insulted by the comparison with affluent middle-class students. The mind struggling to free itself will never rest easy with such plain and living disharmonies of words with words and of words with deeds. It cannot believe that to napalm a village is to liberate it, that to destroy a country is to bring it a better way of life, or—on the other side of the political fence—that the misery or even death of this particular human being now standing innocently in my path does not matter, so long as it is required in order to build a beautiful revolution. From this point of view, the ultimate expression of the enslaved mind would be something like that of the fathers of the Inquisition, who could kill a man to save his own soul, or the California cultists, who are said to have killed in the name of liberating the victims. But most of us can find examples in our own ideas and practices of equally crude disharmonies.

Note that I am not saying that an educated man has no ideas that clash with other ideas. All of us struggle throughout our lives, until we die or die on our feet, with many incompatibles or seeming incompatibles. But it is the mark of an educated, free mind to struggle with its seeming incompatibles and to try to remove them without cheating. And it is one mark of anyone with this special kind of freedom that he has developed some skill in doing it: some capacity to take the various notions in his head, clarify them, sharpen them, reshuffle them in application to the manifold new situations that come thrusting at him from all directions. Such skills can of course be used in evil causes, and just as it is

possible for an uneducated man to be a good man, it is quite possible for an educated man in this sense to be a bad man. But he will never be satisfied with the slavery of deceiving himself.

I don't have to remind you that what I am saying about rejection and renovation, old and tested as it is, conflicts with a great deal that we are told. Everywhere you look, in the press, in art and movies and novels and books and essays about where we are in this decade, you can find claims that the effort to reason about things in this sense is old-fashioned, irrelevant, or even downright destructive. The medium is the message; linear thought is passé. We are in a time of "electronic simultaneity," of "iconic vision." Don't try to sort out the various messages and think things through for yourself: let yourself go, sink blissfully into cosmic pools of illumination, and you will find truths beneath truths, mystical roads on which nonsense is sense, contradictions are harmonies, everything anyone says is equally beautiful and equally true. And if you need intellectual support for repudiating the intellectual endeavor and believing anything you damn please, why there is the Freudian tradition, teaching that ideas are simply superstructures for our deeper, and hence realer, psychological and sexual motives; and there is the Marxian tradition, teaching that ideas are really only superstructures for historical and sociological motives that are deeper, and hence realer. Or there is the tradition of popular sayings, like "A foolish consistency is the bugbear of little minds." Or there are the Spiroviaan prophets [the reference is to Spiro Agnew, the already disgraceful Vice President, who was only later publicly disgraced] who address their stirring words to members of the silent and blissfully unthinking majority, telling them in effect not to worry about relating notions of right and wrong to U.S. actions abroad: that if there were "only" one-hundred Americans killed in Viet Nam this week—how I marvel at that "only"—things are getting better all the time; or that the evils of American life are caused by the "reds" and "radicals" who insist on pointing them out. Or there are the current anti-theorists of mindless activism: "Principles-Schminciples," a "Weatherman" wrote two years ago, when some of his SDS critics argued that deliberate and unprovoked violence contradicted certain clear principles of SDS. Or there is the philosophical tradition, promulgated by men who claim to be educated, telling you that the universe is itself proved to be absurd, and that true intellectual power comes from recognizing and surrendering to its absurdity, not from trying to penetrate the fog and find islands of clarity. Or there is the message found in so much of contemporary fiction: not only the universe, but every institution in it is absurd. After all, all values are only relative anyway; even *Time* magazine teaches that these days, so it can hardly make sense to try to wrestle with seeming inconsistencies between value X and value Y.

When I consider the floods of mis-education of this kind that have baptized you daily since your birth on that unlikely (but of course star-studded) day back in 1951 or '52 or '53, I am almost surprised that you haven't lynched me by now for casting doubt on the true church of freedom-as-caprice. But of course nobody can ever be fully baptized into hopeless absurdity. We all come strangely equipped with Malcolm X's "dormant craving to be mentally alive," a hunger for reasonableness that can seldom be totally repressed. We are, it is

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true, equipped with many other hungers that often overwhelm this one, and this kind of psychological disharmony has sometimes been used as evidence that disharmony is at the heart of things. But the fact is that we all have a natural resistance to contradictions, we all feel violated by them *once we see them clearly*. And if I am right, it is the main task of education to help us see our contradictions clearly and, more importantly, to teach the methods of bringing contradiction to the surface, of working out genuine harmonies, and of presenting the results persuasively to our fellow men.

There are many complications to be explored in all this, if only we had time. 26 There is, first, the plain fact that if I spend too much time trying to get all my ideas clear before I act, I may never act, and while I cultivate my precious mind, the needed actions may not be performed by anyone. I can't pretend to a satisfactory solution to this problem, since I am often torn between the need to act *now* and the desire to think some more. But what I do know is that the conflict is not between simple and easily realizable impulses to act for good in the world and simple and selfish impulses to cultivate mental freedom. On the contrary, more harm is done in the world by well-intentioned and mindless action than by a failure to act. Arthur Koestler has argued that in fact the chief cause of man's suffering in all ages has been group-oriented altruism—that the man selflessly committed to a noble cause, acting—or so he thinks—for the good of his group, usually does more harm than good. Just as it is true that only the man who is free to love is of much use to those who need love, so it is true that only the man whose mind is free is of much use to his fellow men—in any task, but especially in the task of freeing their minds. Was Malcolm X being selfish when he spent his time mastering those books? In this, as in so many things, it turns out that true self-fulfillment yields the greatest possibility for true service.

There is, secondly, the complication that just as everything under the sun, including slavery, travels under the name of freedom, so does everything under the sun, including grossly inhumane and irrational behavior, travel under the name of reasonableness. And there is the third complication, that pleas like mine to educate free critical intelligence imply a radically misleading notion of independent, isolated thinking "atoms." Modern western civilization has contributed to per- 27 versions of "reason" by isolating an imaginary construct, the critical intelligence somehow belonging to an isolated individual ego. One of the main contradictions we moderns must wrestle with is between this fictional critical calculator of independent thoughts and the world of passion and feeling and shared values and traditions and collective inquiry that in fact creates what we call the "self" and makes it able to function in the first place. Much of the present youthful revolt against abstract rational calculation divorce from value is thus justified, and it would be a mistake to defend education of the critical intelligence without taking into account what we now know, or should know, about our "selves." Individuals simply cannot go it alone intellectually, as autonomous logical calculators, any more than they can go it alone morally and emotionally, ignoring the needs and promptings of their brothers and sisters.

And there is a fourth complication: How do we preserve ourselves, as we 28 seek an education, from the influence of indoctrinators disguised as educators?

(Am I an indoctrinator, for example, or have I been an educator tonight?) Everything I have said implies that there is a sharp difference between indoctrination and education: indoctrination enslaves us to the opinions of others, often by making us believe that we have thought for ourselves; education—if there really is such a thing—liberates us to recover and renovate ideas by making them our own. Even if this difference is, as I am claiming, real and fundamental, it will never be an easy one to recognize.

Each of these four complications deserves hours of discussion, but I think none of them invalidates my general claim: It is the main goal of education to liberate minds otherwise enslaved, by developing the skills, first, of recovering meanings, then, of rejecting the ones that do not hold up under a close look, and finally, of renovating, re-synthesizing those that do. About the fourth “R,” the art of intellectual Revolution, I really have nothing to say; we must leave it to the geniuses. 29

Well, my time is up—and I’ve necessarily only scratched the surface. There are no doubt worst disasters than never learning to think. Never learning to love, never learning to enjoy laughter or music, never knowing friendship—these kinds of binding would seem to me even more tragic than never learning to think. But if anything is clear about recent experiments in anti-rational lifestyles, it is that even loving and laughing and friendship and making music can be poisoned by thoughtlessness. I suppose that “every man trusts his own consciousness-expanding devices,” and I know that I am preaching to a generation that wants to believe that there is more education in a sunset than in Plato. But I hope I have shown that whatever crisis we face in education is made of our own fears, not of any real lack of value in our disciplines. To pretend that college education is an empty farce is to make it into an empty farce. But the age-old task of imparting the four arts of freedom is at least as important as it ever was, and it is as important as anything else in the world. Let’s get on with it, all of us, celebrating the good fortune of living in a time when what we are doing here is not only allowed by our society but encouraged and rewarded by it. What could be a better gift than to be freed, for the next few years, to pursue the meaning of freedom together here? □ 30

▣ REREADING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Booth says that the intention of a liberal education is to liberate. In what sense does he use the term “liberate?” What kind of learning must take place, according to Booth, to liberate the mind?
2. What are the four R’s that Booth claims comprise the essential arts of liberal education? Which of those arts is considered most important by most education theorists, according to Booth? Why does he believe the other three R’s are really more important?
3. How does Booth use the example of Malcolm X to illustrate that learning to recover other people’s ideas is the first step toward intellectual freedom?

4. Booth defines the art of Recovery as "the seemingly simple but never finally mastered ability to learn what other men have known or believed" (par. 3). What does he mean in saying that Recovery is an ability we can never finally master? What difficulties hinder anyone who sets about trying to recover knowledge?
5. Booth anticipates his audience's response to several points in his speech. Identify at least three passages in which he acknowledges the likely questions or criticism of his listeners. How does he respond in each case?

RESPONDING

1. Booth remarks that the students he is addressing have, through television, picked up more information than their predecessors, yet he questions whether this information has made them "better educated." What is the difference between being well educated and being filled with information? Booth delivered this speech in 1967. What do you think Booth would say about the current technology that gives students greater and easier access to incredibly more information?
2. Booth offers the following metaphor to illustrate our tendency to reject others' ideas without considering them: "If it's shit already, I don't have to digest it." Do you agree that we try to "reduce other folks' meanings to nonsense we can reject"? Try constructing your own metaphor to illustrate ways people respond to others' ideas.
3. Booth illustrates his claim (par. 22) "that the complacent, uneducated mind does not worry when ideas do not fit" with references to incidents familiar and relevant to college freshmen in 1967. Can you find examples in current events of actions that do not fit with the stated ideas of the actors? Can you think of times when you have said or done things that betray contradictory ideas?

RESPONDING IN WRITING

1. Booth challenges the freshmen listening to write a summary of his speech and offers \$25 to the student who is best able to reconstruct his meaning. Unfortunately, we cannot offer a cash reward, but we encourage you to take up the challenge anyway. Write a 100–250-word summary of Booth's speech. Compare your summary with your classmates' versions.
2. Booth says that college may not be the best place to learn how to recover and understand other people's meanings. Write about a personal, non-school experience or encounter that taught you something you could not have learned in school or that helped you to understand or make sense of something you had learned in school.