

## Exercises: Chapter 15

To skim or to scan, that is the question. Hone your reading skills with these exercises:

- 1 Skimming, scanning, reading word-for-word
- 2 Skimming
- 3 Scanning

### 1. Skimming, scanning, reading word-for-word

- 1 A search has thrown up 10 journal articles you think may be relevant to your topic. Do you skim, scan or read them word-for-word?
- 2 Your research project focuses on social realism in the novels of Charlotte Bronte. You find an article with the title 'Social Realism in the Nineteenth Century novel'. Do you skim, scan or read it word-for-word?
- 3 You have found a book on a library shelf that is close to the catalogued section that is most relevant to your topic. It doesn't seem directly relevant to your topic, but you think sections of it could be very useful. Do you skim, scan or read it word-for-word?
- 4 Your project involves examining the relative influence of SOE (Special Operations Executive) agents and *Maqui* group leaders on the members of the *Maqui* during the build up to the D-Day landing. You find a memoir of a member of a *Maqui* group. Do you skim, scan or read it word-for-word?

Answers:

- 1 You skim them to get a clear impression of the scope of the contents of each article.
- 2 You scan for any mention of Charlotte Bronte's novels.
- 3 You scan it to identify those sections that look as if they will be most helpful, so that you can then go on to read them word-for-word.
- 4 You scan it to identify those sections where SOE agents and group leaders are mentioned.

### 2. Skimming

Read the following passage and then summarise the main points in a short paragraph.

#### **The Art of Survival**

As the first autumnal day of that hot summer of 1939 came to an end, W.H. Auden sat in a New York bar reflecting on the fading ideals of his generation. It was Friday, 1st. September, the day German troops swept into Poland, heralding the start of World War II. Staring thoughtfully into his drink, Auden wrote:

I sit in one of the dives  
On Fifty-Second Street

Uncertain and afraid  
As the clever hopes expire  
Of a low dishonest decade.<sup>1</sup>

His was the disillusion of all those who had enlisted their talents throughout the 1930s in the service of any movement prepared to fight the tyranny fascism represented, only to find their hopes and ideals dashed and betrayed when Russia signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact just a week earlier.

It is sometimes said that in a watched society like ours the need for adventure turns inward, to drugs. A similar argument appears to hold for art: in a secure society the need for expression turns inward, whereas in a society where the values of civilisation are threatened the need for expression turns outward to more didactic, political goals. In his talk *The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda*, broadcast by the BBC on 30th. April 1941, George Orwell argues that in the years 1890-1930 every European lived in the tacit belief that civilisation would last forever. Given this security, artists could pursue their art in an atmosphere of intellectual detachment with only aesthetic values occupying their thoughts. To use an old phrase, this was 'Art for Art's Sake.'

However, after 1930 the world changed: not only life, but a society's whole system of values was constantly menaced. In such a situation intellectual and aesthetic detachment was no longer possible. As Orwell says, 'You cannot take a purely aesthetic interest in a disease you are dying from; you cannot feel dispassionately about a man who is about to cut your throat...any thinking person had to take sides, and his feelings had to find their way not only into his writing but into his judgements on literature. Literature had to become political, because anything else would have entailed mental dishonesty.'

But, just as many writers learnt in the 1930s that it was not possible to remain detached from events, so they learnt in 1939 that you cannot sacrifice your intellectual integrity for the sake of a political doctrine. As Orwell discovered, 'Aesthetic scrupulousness is not enough, but political rectitude is not enough either.'<sup>2</sup> And in this conflict between aesthetics and political commitment lies the one enduring concern for art if it is to flourish under different political systems.

So, before we embrace Auden's disillusion, dismissing all those who use their art for some political purpose, there are questions we need to ask. Are we right in assuming that art only thrives in conditions free from political influence; that it will inevitably atrophy into pallid stereotypes of the genuine article, when it's enlisted in the service of ideologies and intrusive government? Or, are we forced to admit that every political regime, including liberal democracies, has a pervasive ideology that compels creative talent, in one way or another, to work within the values and ideals it represents?

And if this is the case, might it not be true that more intrusive management of the arts, perhaps even along the lines of totalitarian leaders like Hitler and Stalin, is more likely to produce the best results? After all, it often seems that not only has the devil got the best tunes, but he commissions them too.

<sup>1</sup> Auden, W.H., 'September 1, 1939', in *Poetry of the Thirties*, ed. Robin Skelton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> Orwell, George, 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Volume 2*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 149-153.

Answer:

*One possible answer might be:*

Artists cannot remain detached from the political and social influences in which they work, but, equally, such influence can distort their work, reducing it to pallid representations of their talent. So, where should they draw the line between, on the one hand, being free from the concerns and suffering of others and, on the other, enlisting their talents in the service of political causes and ideology?

### 3. Scanning

Scan the following passage for answers to the questions below:

- 1 What is it that distinguishes the hedgehog and the fox?
- 2 How does this reflect on the distinction between democracy and authoritarianism?
- 3 What does the author mean by 'one of the crueller ironies of the twentieth century'?
- 4 According to Freedom House what characteristics determined whether a country could be described as democratic?
- 5 Why do many countries fear losing their democratic freedoms?
- 6 Why do some leaders fear democracy?
- 7 What is the new form of authoritarianism that has emerged over the last few years?

#### **The Hedgehog and the Fox**

In his essay *The Hedgehog and the Fox* Isaiah Berlin quotes a line from the Greek poet Archilochus which says: 'The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.' As Berlin explains, 'there exists a great chasm between those, on one side, who relate everything to a single vision...and, on the other side, those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory.'<sup>3</sup> Within many modern democracies there appear to be small groups directing a rising tide of authoritarianism, who have decided that it is better to ensure that most people know just one big thing, than to allow many people to know many things.

In this lies one of the crueller ironies of the twentieth century. While most leaders around the world persisted in describing their political systems as democratic, the majority of the world's population lived under non-democratic systems of government. During the last two decades of the twentieth century it appeared that democracy was taking a hold in every corner of the world. Just a few years before, the overwhelming majority of the members of the United Nations were not democratic, but by 1996 Freedom House was reporting that 118 of the 191 member countries had competitive elections and guarantees of political and individual rights. In fact this number had more than doubled in just twenty-five years.

More of the world's population, therefore, are faced with the problem of the hedgehog and the fox, wondering how long they will retain their new found freedoms without deep roots in the values and

<sup>3</sup> Berlin, Isaiah, 'The Hedgehog and the Fox', in *Russian Thinkers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 22.

processes of democracy. In many of these new democracies a tradition of blind submissiveness to authority is not only being kept alive, but is getting stronger. A growing number of political and religious leaders appear convinced that allowing the individual scope for independent political and moral judgement has brought with it the worst of the problems associated with western democracies. As individuals heedlessly pursue their own self-interests and as crime and drug abuse increase, along with homelessness, poverty and the breakdown of the traditional sense of community, the forces of authoritarianism appear to be strengthening.

This wouldn't be quite so troubling if it were just a few insecure individuals retreating from western society into an extremist political group bent on some messianic display of political martyrdom, or into the secure embrace of a religious sect intent on drowning their anguished souls in the aura of a leader's charisma. But now, in fact, over the last few years we have seen the emergence of a new authoritarianism or, rather, an old one in new clothes. Political systems, indeed whole cultures, seem to be battling between the conflicting demands of authoritarian populism, with its unbending desire to return to an idealised past, and democracy, with its commitment to pragmatism and the freedom for independent judgement.

Answers:

- 1 The fox knows many things, while the hedgehog knows just one big thing.
- 2 In democracies there are many different opinions, whereas in authoritarian regimes there is just one official view.
- 3 The author means that while most leaders described their systems of government as democratic, the majority of the world's population lived under non-democratic systems of government.
- 4 The characteristics are that they have competitive elections and guarantees for political and individual rights.
- 5 They fear losing their democratic freedoms because their freedoms do not have deep roots in the values and processes of democracy.
- 6 They fear democracy because they suspect that individuals freely pursuing their own self-interests produce crime and drug abuse, homelessness, poverty and the breakdown of traditional community.
- 7 The new form of authoritarianism that has emerged is authoritarian populism.