

Reading, Writing, and Moffat

Miriam Scharfe

IN 1917 Mr. John Moffat, complete with Bachelor of Science Degree, drove into Emmerich Manual Training High School history and parked himself in the English Department. From that first green light, Moffat began practicing rituals which have made him legendary among graduates of Manual High. To every graduate within the last forty years, Manual and Moffat are synonymous. Reminiscing among former students about time and tricks in "John's" class is as common as the strains of the old school song are at a football game. Many students, however, do not realize how scholarly Moffat is, because his methods of teaching often cause students to question this man's mentality. Very much to the contrary, though, is the fact that in 1920 Moffat earned his master's degree from Columbia University and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. It was not until my sophomore year that I had the "opportunity" (because of rumors concerning the man I had reason to doubt my fortune) to be in one of Moffat's classes and to draw my own conclusions about him.

Before Moffat stalked into the scene on that first day of class, we sat nervously expounding and exaggerating the most recent stories we had heard about him. It must have sounded like a confab of the local gossips whose tongues cannot waggle fast enough when a juicy tidbit has come their way, but at least it relieved some nervous tension. Suddenly every tongue froze before sounding its next syllable as the master waddled into the room. He quacked out a greeting through an impish smile which resembled the satisfied look of a sly old fox before he devours his prey. Moffat sat waiting for the pupil with a comment who would serve as his first victim as his popped blue eyes roamed from student to student. He was a curious sight—this little old man. His ruddy complexion, accented by a much too large nose, was eventually lost in a receding hair line. A clump of white curls on the top of his head reminded me of whipped cream on a helping of strawberry Jello.

Since there were no takers of his bait, Moffat pounced on the class with the comment, "Well, it looks as though I've got a pretty stupid group here."

This was only the beginning. For the remainder of the semester we were never quite sure what might happen during the seventh period and Mr. Moffat's class. One day I was the subject of one of his favorite pranks which always happened when someone walked in tardy. As I buzzed into the room a few seconds after the buzzer, the class snickered because it knew what my consequences would be. I glanced at Moffat, drew a deep breath, and began the process of clearing myself.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Moffat," I offered.

"A gerund is a verbal used as a noun," Mr. Moffat started explaining to the class as he completely ignored me.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Moffat," I tried again but to no avail. After drawing several of these blanks, he nonchalantly turned to me and gave me one of those what-are-you-trying-to-prove looks.

"Why good afternoon, Miriam," he said innocently. I smiled, sighed, pivoted on my heel, and made a dash for my seat.

"Wait a minute," the voice halted me. "You have to get a reply from the class also before you can sit down."

Hesitantly I made my way to the front of the room and blushing pleaded several times, "Good afternoon, class."

This could have gone on all period (it has frequently happened) if it had not been for a friend who sensing my agony finally answered my greeting.

Mistakes on tests caused the formation of many Moffat clubs. After our first test was graded and handed back, many students became semester-charter-members in two of Moffat's popular clubs. Students who misused the word "its" automatically became an "itsy-bitsy-witsy" club member. Whenever Moffat asked them who they were, they would have to reply, "I'm an itsy-bitsy-witsy" and recite the rules governing the usage of "it's" and "its." "Verb choir" was for those students who mistakenly identified participles and gerunds as verbs. Daily these singers entertained the class with their chant, "an 'ing' word by itself is not a verb." If a poor unfortunate happened to spell "all right" as "alright," he would find himself spending the rest of the period going around the room whispering to each student the correct spelling of "all right." But for the student who proudly displayed a perfect paper, Moffat had a reward—his own monogrammed candy. The drooling student anticipated a creamy chocolate as Moffat clumsily jerked a box from one of the desk drawers. He flipped open the lid, plucked out a moldy M & M candy tablet, and tossed it to the student. This was Moffat and his uncanny sense of humor.

I shall never forget the day he announced we would have moving pictures about the book, *Silas Marner*, we had just read and discussed. This was really a treat! But our jaws dropped as Moffat pulled out sketches of the Eliot characters and announced, "I'll pass these pictures down the rows and we'll have moving pictures." Moffat humor was also reflected in the papers he graded for the class. Whenever his evil eye cornered a mistake on a student's paper, he punched a hole through it. Then when he returned the papers (this was done by means of sailing the paper in the general direction of the owner), he reported that he did not accept papers with holes in them, "so please do them over if they resemble a sieve."

His management of discipline was also part of his notoriously popular method of teaching. For the girl of the class who just could not control her sound box, there was the closet. All Moffat had to do was transfix a grin on the culprit and point to the closet door

with his withered forefinger. The guilty person would vanish into the two-by-four prison for the remainder of the period. To the boys of the class this looked like great sport, and so they proceeded to antagonize Moffat in hopes of being sent to the dungeon. But as usual, Moffat had other ideas. One day he quietly and deliberately drew circles, two inches in diameter, on the blackboard. Then he turned on the agitators and marched them to the board ordering them to insert their noses in the circles. The girls and Moffat enjoyed a good laugh.

Like the hundreds who had gone before me, I too, by the end of the semester, had learned respect not only for this educator but also for the subject material. For through his unconventional teaching techniques, Moffat was able to make students retain material far longer than the colorless school-marm could ever hope to. In fact, never have I seen an educator who makes a more perfect subject for the old Italian proverb, "Whoso would kindle another must himself glow."

Hiroshima

J. W. Stilwell

AT EXACTLY ten minutes past six in the morning, on August 6, 1955, Japanese time, Mr. Osyki Kamura stepped off the train at the Hiroshima station and joined the crowd of businessmen and schoolchildren who were politely pushing their way toward the exit. Before leaving the building, he stopped to buy a package of Golden-Bat cigarettes, and was puffing on one as he stepped out onto the sidewalk. The crowd had almost completely dispersed, and he easily made his way to the corner where he would catch the trolley. The traffic, which was made up of every type of vehicle from rickshaws to two-ton trucks, was exceptionally heavy on the six-lane main street; but by bluffing the driver of a late-model Chrysler he was able to dash to the trolley's safety zone. As he stood there waiting, his glance fell on the clock of the new eight-story department store, and he was pleased to find that his own Omega was in agreement with it. When the trolley arrived, he dropped his twenty yen into the box and walked to the rear of the car, where he found a seat by the window, complete with a discarded newspaper. He flipped through the first few pages of the paper, paying only slight attention to the picture on the front page when something made him turn back and observe it more closely. Suddenly he realized that it was a picture of the very street he was now on, taken two months before the Americans dropped the bomb. Why, if it hadn't been for Toyami's fish-market in the foreground, he would never have recognized it as being the same town. How depressing was the sight of the old, crowded, two-lane street with no building over three stories high. Even the old Kyo bridge looked as if it was ready to crumble and float on out to the sea. As the trolley hummed on down the street, he began com-