

H.B. FALKENA and J.D.U. GELDENHUYS. *Fool's Enterprise*.
Johannesburg: Taurus, 1981. 110 pp. Paperback.R5,75.

'With few exceptions', writes Sheldon Sacks, in his preface to *Fiction and the Shape of Belief*, 'friends who have read ... this book seem to fall into two classes: those who dislike the first and last chapters, and those who dislike the chapters in between'. Although one of the authors of *Fool's Enterprise* is a friend to readers of *English Usage*, Sacks' claim in relation to his own book is, of course, not true in this instance. But there are similarities, and interesting ones at that. Sacks distinguishes between two large fictional types: satire and apologue. Falkena and Geldenhuys employ them.

Fool's Enterprise presents an explicit statement of theme, using narrative for illustrative purposes. Characters appear in episodes, serve their turn, and disappear from the pages. Similarly, the satire in the book concentrates on the general, on the species known as the family physician.

For the purposes of *English Usage*, however, it is the language, rather than literary content that should interest us. And, as we are informed in the 'Publisher's Notes', there is a 'veritable mire of economic and literary associations' (p.8) to titillate the reader:

For example, already in the first paragraph of Chapter 1 in 'numerous abortive attempts', 'abortive' refers to 'unsuccessful' as well as the procured miscarriage of a birth. (p. 9)

One might, in pondering the way in which a woman is able to miscarry a 'birth', recall - along with the authors - 'the old question of "*Quis custodiet custodes?*"'

The book is about the 'illovable' Dr Shlomo Shlock and abounds in 'reverse takeovers' and 'inadvertent ambiguities'. It's a rollicking good read and well worth the price.

A.D.A.

K. RAYAN. *Advanced Reading Comprehension: a Post-Secondary Course*. London: Evans, 1979. xix. 218pp. Paperback n.p.

The title of this book takes some grammatical deciphering. What precisely does 'Advanced' qualify? Is 'Reading' a noun, a verbal

noun, or an adjective? Humpty Dumpty would have something to say about all this. Leaving aside the puzzle of what the title means, we can find plenty to argue about in the book's contents. Apart from an ability to use English correctly, the prime requirement for reading this collection of prose extracts is a stopwatch. The idea, as the author explains, is to time your rate of reading; you should aim for something between 135 and 600 words per minute. Anything less than this puts you in the 'unacceptable' educational rank - a nice way of saying you are illiterate - while anything more suggests that you are a latter-day Baron Munchausen.

So, thumb on stopwatch and eyes fixed to the page, you set off at a cracking pace through the 35 extracts which have been arranged 'by applying to them the Rudolph Flesh formula for determining Reading Ease'. After recording your time score you add this to the figure obtained from the comprehension test following each extract. Then pick up bonus points for better than average speed and *voilà* - a SCR (Speed and Comprehension Rating) that indicates how well you can cope with the ever-increasing number of textbooks in undergraduate courses run by lecturers oblivious to the limits of human endurance and understanding.

The comprehension test following each extract in Mr Rayan's book is guaranteed to screw any student into tight knots. There are 10 questions set on each extract, each question consisting of three alternative answers. Two of the answers are admissible or in accordance with the statements and inferences made in the extract, the other is not. What is the wrong answer? You have only 20 minutes to decide which 10 out of 30 possibilities are incorrect.

Clearly, what we have here is a testing rather than a teaching method and one geared to computer marking of assignments. Frankly, this reviewer finds the testing method unacceptable. In the first place, comprehension comes from re-reading. A first reading is seldom more than an organizational and spatial survey, a glance over the textual terrain. Only after several readings does the sense of what is being said begin to emerge out of the verbal foliage. Stopwatches have no place in English Departments trying to get this sense out of students.

How long have you not been saying what you didn't say? This, basically, is the corollary to the type of questions set at the end of Mr Rayan's extracts. Searching for what does not exist is both time-wasting and contrary to the learning process. We know what we know because of the co-existence of related facts and impressions, because we work from the known to the unknown. Working from the non-existent to the non-existent is rather like Hunting the Snark. And we all know what happened to the

unfortunate Bellman and his crew on that expedition.

W.D. MAXWELL-MAHON
University of Pretoria

JESSICA CORBYN. *Proficiency Use of English*. London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1981. 80pp. Price in U.K. £1.25.

Whatever one may feel about the modern tendency to prepare students for examinations rather than to educate in the broadest sense, one must acknowledge the usefulness of this book to students who have to pass Paper 3 of the Cambridge Proficiency Examination. The author, experienced in preparing students for this examination, found that they felt very anxious at the prospect and, being aware that 'the element of alarm is detrimental to any learning process', she set out to develop their confidence by providing practice in the type of questions which regularly recur. She has systematically analysed past papers to discover the underlying pattern of question types. The Cambridge Proficiency Examination consists of three sections: Section A (Language), Section B (Comprehension), and Section C (Composition).

The book begins with a comprehensive Introduction to individual questions in the Language Section, giving the necessary background knowledge required to answer them. This is followed by a Practice Section, where numerous examples of the different question types are given, and finally, the author has compiled seven complete Test Papers which follow the actual examination format closely in length and content.

In the Introduction and Practice Sections, the author devotes all her attention to Section A (Language), justifying her exclusion of Sections B and C (Comprehension and Composition) by saying that the type of practice required for these - extensive reading and writing - is a lengthy business requiring much time to be spent with the student and teacher working together. Herein lies my only criticism. While I agree that very little can be done to 'teach' Comprehension, so much depending on the individual's insight, I do think the author could have supplied some practical pointers as to how to go about writing a Report, Letter, or Talk, tested in Section C. True, she does provide sample questions and answers in the Test Papers, but, while these are helpful, I feel that some definite instructions should also have been provided. Not all students have the advantage of working with a teacher and would appreciate this aid.