

## REVIEWS

*Teaching English in African Schools.* Four lectures from a conference held by the English Academy of Southern Africa in Lesotho in January, 1973, 62 pp. Paperback 80c.

The subject of this conference reflects a healthy trend in South Africa: a growing concern amongst educators for what is, after all, one of this country's major problems. The four lectures published do not all bear on the same facet of education: the second deals with a linguistic approach to the teaching of literature, the third with the construction of second-language literature courses, and the first and fourth with the importance of African literature to education in this continent. The essays will be dealt with in that order.

In 'Literature and its Communicative Value' Mr H.G. Widdowson, a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, contrasts 'literary communication' with 'conventional communication'. He does this by illustrating the special uses to which writers and poets put pronouns, verbs, tenses, sound patterns and finally, word associations. And 'because the literary writer operates in this way, he is able to give linguistic elements a value – a unique communicative value which they would not, indeed could not, have'. Mr Widdowson illustrates all his points, showing exactly why a description is a literary description and what its uniqueness consists of; and this he does purely in terms of usage. Finally, he discusses in detail how one might convey this uniqueness to a class of pupils. The lecture is cogent and well-constructed, and Mr Widdowson is not afraid to explore fully the issues he has raised.

Mr Roy Holland, a senior lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Botswana, considers 'What?' and 'How?' in relation to the teaching of literature, in a lecture entitled 'The Second Language

Literature Course'. He justifies the teaching of literature on two grounds, the first 'psychological' and the second 'linguistic'. His 'psychological' reason consists of a direct and well-stated assertion that literature is studied because it gives pleasure: 'In my experience, pupils learn most quickly and efficiently from activities they enjoy. Studying literature is pleasurable; because it is pleasurable, they learn'.

His linguistic justification for the teaching of literature is more complex. His first argument consists of a balanced discussion on the question of whether or not literature is of practical use in education. His second argument 'has to do with the area of language varieties called *register*'. This stems from the fact that one's style of utterance depends largely on social context, and this involves elements such as the presence or otherwise of feedback to the communicator, the medium of communication, whether or not the utterance is spontaneous, the subject of the communication and finally, the degree of familiarity existing between the communicator and the receiver. This leads in turn to a consideration of situation, and a stressing of the importance of practical situations (e.g. a science lesson):

For the learner of a second language, it is essential that the pupil be faced with these kinds of situation: where he must see, handle and learn the names of the objects around him: where he can learn to put names to the experiences and situations he has had: where the situation will force him to try to use language structures by analogy. Only thus... can an understanding of the abstractions of science and the abstractions of literature come.

Mr Holland's final argument for teaching literature is based on its potential for providing passages for comprehension. However, he does protest at the fact that comprehension passages are rarely self-contained, leaving a certain amount of contextual information to the imagination, and at the unsuitability of most comprehension passages for second-language pupils. He therefore advocates the writing of stories and books specifically for such pupils, as well as the production of tapes and records which would enable the pupils to hear 'how the structures they had learned from the printed word sounded when spoken by good speakers'. Finally, he pleads for graded reading matter for second-language pupils in both 'intensive' and 'extensive' reading,

and suggests that publishers could do far more than they are doing for the second-language student. Mr Holland's lecture is remarkable for the practical way in which it deals with a field that has been too neglected in this country.

The last part of this review will consist of a comparison between 'Trends in Modern African Poetry' by Mr T.J. Couzens, a lecturer in the Department of English of the University of the Witwatersrand, and 'Why not African Literature?', by Professor Bernth Lindfors of the University of Texas at Austin. Professor Lindfors's lecture is more directly concerned with education, but the two lectures bear comparison.

Whilst Mr Couzens and Professor Lindfors do not diverge in most of what they say, the difference between their lectures is seen in their differing approaches. Mr Couzens seems to stress the view that African literature is worthwhile, whilst Professor Lindfors concentrates on demonstrating the shortcomings of British literature in the African context. Mr Couzens also deals with the latter aspect, but his reasoning seems to me to do a serious injustice to the many worthwhile Western artists alive today by equating them all with people such as Andy Warhol and Marshall McLuhan:

Much of Western art has perhaps reached a crisis of self-consciousness. Many artists seem to have nothing to say so that the medium is all. A tin of Campbell's soup becomes an art object simply because it is *not* an art object. Western artists have suddenly clicked to the idea that art is not life, that an art object creates its own environment. True this has its dangers – art can deteriorate to something in itself, divorced from any interaction with life. We all hang pictures on our walls which after a while cease to have any place in our consciousness, art has been removed to picture galleries and museums. The extreme reaction to this is body-art. The catchphrase of the modern Western world is 'the medium is the message'.

Professor Lindfors, on the other hand, bases his objections to the pre-eminence of British over African literature in African schools on the very convincing evidence of the Joint Matriculation Board's 1969-1972 syllabuses and examinations. Of the southern African Non-White school

syllabus, he says that 'we must begin by discarding the musty heirlooms and bric-a-brac of the past. We must release the syllabus from the stranglehold of Shakespeare. We must shut out the poets who wrote in England more than a hundred years ago. We must put the longwinded Victorian novelists back into cold storage'. And, of the problems that African students have in making Shakespeare meaningful to their lives, he says:

All interpretation continues to come directly from above. The student's job is merely to suck up what he can, filter it through his consciousness, and flush it out at the appropriate moment. No love of literature blossoms from this dreary process. Transforming oneself into an efficient intellectual water-closet is very hard work, especially when one has to wrestle with heavy, outdated materials, and no African who has been through such torture is likely to remember it as an experience he would voluntarily repeat later in his life.

No one with any experience of teaching Africans in this country can doubt the justice of his remarks.

Both writers also share a regard and enthusiasm for African literature, but Professor Lindfors, because his arguments are more thorough and persuasive, is a better advocate of it. On the subject of persuasiveness, whilst recognizing that this is always a very subjective matter, I feel that Mr Couzens has not sufficiently justified his description of Captain Blair's *The Bloody Orkneys* as 'our greatest poem' in English.

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Deborah Fanaroff, *South African English Dialect: A Literature Survey*.  
Institute of Languages, Literature and Arts. Pretoria, 1972.

Deborah Fanaroff's is the second report on 'The position of the Official Languages in the Republic of South Africa', a study undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council. The preface states that the orientation of the survey is sociolinguistic and that this report therefore 'contains a fairly lengthy exposition of the sociolinguistic viewpoint