

*The Place
of Literature
in the Teaching
of English
as a Second or
Foreign Language*

ALBERT H. MARCKWARDT

The Place of Literature in the Teaching of English as a Second or Foreign Language

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Foreword

I AM GRATEFUL to have been given the sad privilege of introducing Albert H. Marckwardt's last book. In many ways it is an epitome of his life's work, representing as it does his love of English studies as a whole, his refusal as a linguist to regard literature as anything but central to his concerns, his deep interest in the teaching of English in every part of the world. Its value as a bequest, moreover, lies in its author's well-nigh uniquely wide and long experience as a teacher and an adviser of teachers and in the succinct way in which it presents the fruits of this experience.

Written in "retirement," when Professor Marckwardt was working with unremitting and characteristic energy at—with symbolic appropriateness—the East-West Center, Hawaii, the book reflects a mind not merely well-informed on the most controversial issues of teaching English as a second and as a foreign language but boldly determined to tackle them. He has left us much to argue over: specialists will fruitfully debate several of his detailed analyses, prognoses, and prescriptions. But few will fail to be convinced by the main lines of his book—a twofold thesis which in both respects is strictly congruent with his persuasively argued approach on related issues over the years.

First, despite the varied aims and conditions of English teaching, Professor Marckwardt argues unequivocally that literature has an indispensable place in the curriculum. But this is in no way to bolster up the old elitist attitudes of English teachers intent on transmitting their own expertise in the metaphysicals or Pope, still less to ignore recent demands for "relevance."

Second, just as he always insisted on seeing English as overwhelmingly a single language, so he viewed it as essential to regard all literature in English as significantly and fundamentally a single literature—the cultural product “of a world-wide linguistic and intellectual commonwealth.”

All in all, precisely the kind of last word that Professor Marckwardt would have wished to leave with us.

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CHAPTER 1

Issues and Assumptions

FOR MANY YEARS, and indeed until quite recently, the reading of literature was regarded as the capstone of the foreign-language learning experience. This was true, at least, of the Western World. The student of German climaxed his studies with a course in Faust, his Spanish counterpart with the reading of Cervantes and the works of the *Siglo del Oro*. When English was studied as a foreign language, all roads led to Shakespeare.

The reason for this would seem to be fairly clear. From the time of the Renaissance until the middle of the nineteenth century, the two foreign languages which held undisputed sway in the classroom were Latin and ancient Greek. Except for the liturgical use of the former, there would have been little reason for studying those languages as current media of communication; certainly not after the seventeenth-century decline of the use of Latin as the language of science and of international diplomacy. If a mastery of them was to be put to any use at all, it would have to be primarily a reading knowledge. The materials to be read consisted of the works of the ancient philosophers, historians, poets, and dramatists. And, in fact, this is still the situation as it applies to the study of Latin and ancient Greek today.

Shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century, the modern Western languages began to encroach upon the place of the ancient languages in the curriculum. Their advocates made the case for them primarily on the grounds of practical utility. They were living, not dead languages. Important scientific works were written in them. Each of them possessed a literature broad in extent, high in quality. On the basis of such arguments, an acquaintance with the literature remained as an

important factor, but it was no longer the primary motive for study. This was especially true in the United States, a country always notable for its pragmatic approach to education.

The mid-twentieth century brought in its wake a vastly greater opportunity for the practical use of foreign languages. The dissemination, across national boundaries, of the printed word increased, and that of the spoken language even more dramatically. Air travel placed speakers of different languages into contact with each other on an unprecedented scale. In many countries the amount of time devoted to the study of foreign languages in the schools did not increase proportionately to the demands for heightened skill in their use. This has resulted in a reassessment of the aims of foreign-language study and a reconsideration of the content of the curriculum, including that of English where it is studied as a foreign or second language.

As a consequence of this reassessment, there have developed sharply divergent points of view about the place of literature in the foreign-language or second-language course. An emphatic negative reaction is to be found in an article by Professor Charles Blatchford of the Department of English as a Second Language at the University of Hawaii (1972). His conclusion, that "the study of English literature is a luxury that cannot be indulged during the limited amount of time allocated to English," is based primarily upon three considerations. He feels, first of all, that as far as the Asian nations are concerned, their primary interest is in the attainment of a functional command of the language to the point that the student will be able to handle simple English language situations involving the four skills. "With such objectives," he argues, "it follows that the classroom emphasis should be on a functional use of the language, not on literature" (p. 6).

Blatchford cites as a further objection the inadequate preparation of teachers for the task of dealing with literature in the foreign-language classroom. To substantiate his point he asserts that few ESOL training programs in the United States include literature as a requirement. In fact, only three M.A. curricula for such teachers value literature sufficiently to list specific courses in the subject that the trainees may take. The reader is also given to understand that the resources available for teacher training in Asia are meager with respect to literary content, and that the growing body of information about teaching language which the prospective teacher must master can easily fill his course of study.

Finally Blatchford contends that the current trend in the English language curriculum is toward understanding the place of language in society and its relation to the culture of a people. "The discussion of cultural understanding as a trend in ESOL can be connected with the

current emphasis in the United States on bilingualism and biculturalism. The 'Guidelines' for teacher training being considered by TESOL for teachers in America place more emphasis upon an understanding of the differences in register and sociolinguistic and sociocultural understanding that a teacher must have, rather than upon literature which does not contribute to the student's ability to function in the society" (p. 7).

In all justice to Professor Blatchford, it should be pointed out that his concern is primarily with the inclusion of literature in elementary and secondary school programs, and that he does concede that "there may be more justification for literary studies where English is a second rather than a foreign language." Nevertheless, his concluding statement leaves little room for question or compromise: "The three considerations, then, of aims and objectives of English, teaching training, and trends in ESOL appear to be fairly strong reasons for not encouraging an inquiry into literature during a pupil's limited exposure to English."

The same issue of the *Culture and Language Learning Newsletter* in which Professor Blatchford's article appears also carries a discussion by Dr. Thelma Kintanar, Research Associate at the Culture Learning Institute of the East-West Center, on "The Role of Literature in Culture Learning" (1972). Although she does not deal as directly with educational or curricular issues as Professor Blatchford, she does see linguistic and literary studies touching at various points. Possibly the statement which best summarizes her view of this relationship is the following (p. 3):

An important focus of culture learning is the learning of languages not only because language is an important part of culture and an indispensable tool of culture learning but because language learning provides analogies to culture learning. Literary study too is primarily concerned with language but with the particular uses of language in literature including, and perhaps most specially, its non-discursive and non-referential uses. Its emphasis is on the metaphorical, stylistic and other aesthetic uses of language. The linguistic interest of culture learning is broader, its approach more scientific and pragmatic, but there is no reason why it should not include in its scope the literary uses of language.

She then goes on to describe the connections between language and literature in somewhat more specific terms:

From the point of view of the study of language and culture, literary study can make a valuable contribution in tracing the development of a language . . . as reflected in its writings; it can influence and, in fact, has influenced such development—the history of any language would be quite different without its poets and major writers. A thorough study of the development of a language, therefore, entails a study of its literature. (p. 3)

It is quite true, of course, that the issues of the place of literature in language instruction are not squarely joined in these two articles. In contrast to the very practical educational questions with which Professor Blatchford is concerned, Dr. Kintanar is interested primarily in the development of man's awareness of his culture. She takes pains to demonstrate that no matter whether one proceeds from an Arnoldian or an anthropological concept of culture, literature, by expressing both universal human values and the values of the culture out of which it has come, makes a notable and unique contribution to man's understanding of himself and his relations to other men.

A third analysis of the current disagreement over the place of literature in the curriculum is offered by Professor Peter D. Strevens (1974), who places the matter in a historical context. He begins by emphasizing the recent mushrooming rise of the demand for English for special purposes, that is to say, English to meet the needs of scientists, engineers, lawyers, and other people with very special though somewhat limited linguistic requirements. He sees this as important for the following reason:

In our profession, up till twenty years ago, there really was only one educational framework, one set of pedagogical aims and these were considered sufficient to justify the entire profession in which we worked and that was the aims of teaching English—and this applied to all other languages as well—teaching languages, teaching English, as a part of a general education—not only, however, a general education but, indeed, a general *humanities* education. The teaching of English was automatically assumed to be part of a general education on the humanities, the arts side, with the tacit assumption that the very best students would go forward and study English literature. And this was taken for granted, this was how we operated: virtually the entire organisation and arrangements of our profession were based on this assumption. (p. 3)

He goes on to say that the situation described in the foregoing statement prevailed until about twenty years ago, at which time a new demand for English developed, "a demand this time for English unrelated to literary studies and not necessarily within the framework—indeed, outside the framework—of general education." It was a demand for English as a practical communication skill or set of skills, "made stronger in the wake of the large number of countries, particularly in Africa, also in the Indian sub-continent, which had formerly been British colonies or possessions and which were now independent and which . . . agreed that they needed to continue English as an important and probably an official language for their countries, nevertheless felt that the time was past when they needed to be linked directly with the cul-

ture, the direct, domestic day-to-day culture, of either Britain, or similarly if the culture was American, with [the] United States" (pp. 3-4).

As a result of this development, "there grew up two different kinds of learners, two different kinds of demands that learners were making upon the teachers of English. One was a continuation of the demand for English as a general educational subject linked very much to English-speaking culture . . . and the other, very much linked to the new idea that English was a communication skill needed by some of the newly-independent countries in order to further their futures and to have a window on world culture, a window on science, a window on the transnational industries of the arts, entertainment, science and so on" (p. 4).

To complicate the matter still further, Strevens sees the even more recent demand for English for Special Purposes as a third framework—"namely, of people who are looking for English but who are looking for it neither as a general educational subject limited to literature, nor as a complete command of the language skill for practical communication, but rather to do a specific job." He concludes, "Indeed, if you wanted to, you could nowadays regard literature and the study of literature as being yet another way in which English for special purposes is being supplied." This amounts, of course, to a restriction or a narrowing of the place of literature in the study of English as a foreign or second language, but it is not a call for its elimination nor is it a continuation of the tendency to see literature as the *summum bonum* of the language-learning experience.

Even somewhat earlier, the question of the place of literature had been raised by W. R. Lee in an editorial in the journal *English Language Teaching* (1970). He begins by asking the by-now familiar question:

To what extent need learners of a foreign language study the literature? . . . Often the answer given is "Not at all." But what is missed, and how is the language-learning affected, if the literature is ignored?

Much of the world's business is conducted in English, an international means of everyday communication. Much of science and technology is accessible in English but not in the student's own tongue. Thus the exclusion of literature from courses in English is easy to justify on vocational grounds: "We need only a means of reading and discussing science." "We need only a medium in which to conduct trade," and so on. In parts of the world where languages are many and various, English is also the means of general education for all.

The substance of the English language, however, has been shaped by literature. It is in literature that the resources of the language are most fully and most skilfully used. It seems to follow that literature should enter into the

language-study of those who are to use the language with the greatest possible skill and effect.

The inclusion of literature in a language-course is also, of course, justifiable on other grounds. They are the grounds on which the study of literature is to be justified at all, in any language; and study of a foreign literature, at least where the cultural and historical tradition is on the whole the same as the learner's, may be a broadening-out of study of literature of the mother tongue.

Yet "study" seems hardly the word, summoning-up as it does the image of the mature student bent over his books. Lyrics are to be heard and not merely seen, plays are to be seen and heard. Literature is rooted, so far as the foreign-language learner is concerned, in the oral basis of language learning; rooted in lively and meaningful oral drills, in spoken and acted dialogues, in simple dramatisation of stories; indeed in those very procedures which make for successful and interested learning of the language.

The printed literature cannot come to life if this basis has been lacking: it will remain largely impenetrable on the page if the reader is deaf, in the ear of imagination and memory, to its sound. Reading one's own literature one is never incapacitated by such deafness.

The question of the place of literature in the experience of the language learner is by no means confined to the teaching of English. It has been a moot point in the teaching of foreign languages in the United States. Over the past twenty years, ten working committees of the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages have considered the matter, and in the interval between 1954 and 1967, eleven separate reports were issued. In addition, there has been much discussion of the subject in the journals of the so-called AAT organizations, that is to say in *Hispania*, the organ of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, in the *German Quarterly* and in the *French Review*, the journals of the professional associations of the teachers of those languages.

In general the issues seem to center about the point in the curriculum at which literature should be introduced, the relevance of literary studies to the needs and interests of the language learner, the content of the literary curriculum (whether it is to be limited to belles lettres), the use of simplified or abridged editions, and the role of literature in the transmission of the target culture.

All of this suggests that a considerable amount of uncertainty surrounds the question of the role of literature in foreign-language instruction, not only in connection with English as a foreign language but with foreign-language instruction in general. Moreover, most of the discussion concerning this matter has been somewhat fragmented. Much of it has dealt with only a single question or issue: the vocabulary problem, the efficacy of abridgment or simplification, and so on. There has been

little attempt to explore the question in depth from as many angles as possible. It will be the purpose in the chapters which follow to present a consideration of the question that will be as free from bias as possible and one which will give due regard to a number of relevant factors which are rarely dealt with. Although the primary focus will be on the English-teaching situation in the Asian countries, the very nature of the approach will insure some attention to other parts of the world as well.

Before setting out on this somewhat ambitious course, we must clarify certain fundamental assumptions about the teaching of language and literature, for the purpose of furnishing a general context for the inquiry. Too often, so it would seem, educational discussions are carried on and curricular decisions are made with insufficient awareness of the beliefs about education, about learning, and about the particular subject matter under discussion which underlie the discussion.

To draw upon illustrations outside of the field of language, it is quite clear that the history teacher, requiring a class to memorize a list of key dates, does so not out of an inherent sadism but rather to establish a few chronological benchmarks which will serve as a context for other events. Justification for either the old or the new mathematics rests upon different concepts of the learning process and varying assessments of what is mathematically important. And in the teaching of language it is clear that a concept of language as habit-governed oral response to external stimuli would lead to oral drill in the classroom, whereas a view of language as a creative process would call for a quite different type of classroom activity.

Unfortunately, teachers are often too pressed for time to consider such underlying premises about the subject matter and the learning process as they go about their daily tasks. Even when they discuss matters of curriculum and teaching technique, these are generally dealt with in terms of *what* is to be done in the classroom and *how* the teacher is to perform rather than what would seem to be a due regard for *why* the teacher is to do what he does when he does it. Questions of *what* and *how* are matters of teacher training. Questions which ask *why* are of a higher order. They fall into the province of teacher education, and can be dealt with only in the broader terms of clearly stated beliefs and underlying principles.

The necessity for a recognition and clarification of general principle is all the more evident here because of the tendency to deal on an ad hoc basis with the whole complex of questions which inevitably arise in any consideration of the place of literature in the foreign language curriculum. As we have already seen, discussions of the topic have been so fragmented as to preclude a consistent and overall approach to the problem.

It is the purpose here to set forth the assumptions which would seem to

be important to any consideration of the place of literature in the English curriculum when it is taught as a foreign or second language. Certain of these may seem self-evident; others may come as something of a surprise. A brief statement of these principal premises will suffice here. A more detailed presentation will follow later in the study as each of them is taken up in turn.

- A. The position of English within a country, that is, as a foreign language, or a second language, or a language of study has an important bearing upon the determination of the aims of English instruction in that country.
- B. The aims of English instruction within a country will influence the place and treatment of English within the total curriculum, and this in turn will determine the role of literature in English instruction.
- C. The way in which the native literature is taught in the country and its place in the general educational scheme establishes a set of expectations and restrictions which will inevitably have a powerful influence upon the teaching of a foreign literature.
- D. The availability of English literature in translations, particularly in terms of the identity of the authors and works translated, serves as an index of public taste and interest which should be taken into consideration in planning the literary portion of the English curriculum.
- E. The particular nature of the English vocabulary and the well-established facts of word frequency and distribution must be taken into consideration in the selection of literary works to be studied, in the classroom approach to these works, and in connection with whatever decisions are to be made about the use of simplified or abridged versions.
- F. The role of literature in transmitting the target culture must be realistically appraised in terms of curricular aims and teaching procedures.

There are other matters which might have been listed here, but the six which have been included seem basic to the question and the spirit in which the inquiry will be conducted. At a time of heightened uncertainty about language-teaching philosophy, techniques, and approaches, it is of paramount importance that a spirit of cool rationality and unfettered inquiry be not only preserved but strengthened. Only in such an atmosphere can sound educational decisions ensue.

CHAPTER 2

The Role of English in the Nation and in the Schools

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE is notable not so much for the number of persons who speak it as a first or native language, but rather for its wide distribution throughout the world. With respect to sheer numbers it lags far behind Chinese and does not far surpass Russian and possibly Hindi. Yet no other language is firmly entrenched as a native language on four continents, with some additional use on a fifth. It is this factor which, perhaps more than any other, accounts for its importance not only as a native but as an auxiliary language as well.

As an auxiliary language the role of English may vary considerably. If the native language of a country is one of the seven or eight so-called languages of wider communication, the English language has little more than a circumscribed supplementary function to perform. This could be equally true if several languages are spoken natively within the country and one of these is a language of wider communication.

At the opposite extreme, one may conceive of a situation where several mutually unintelligible languages, none of them widely spoken, have been native to a country which in the past had been a colonial possession of an English-speaking nation. Under these circumstances, communication with the world outside, and even much of the communication within the country, beyond narrowly confined local or regional boundaries, will depend upon English. In fact, much of the functioning of the country will call for a widespread mastery of English on the part of a significant portion of the total population.

What have just been described are, of course, polar opposites, and ac-