



on problems concerning the teaching of literature

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When asked by the editor of this periodical to contribute an article to this issue, on the place of English literature in the syllabus of the UFSC letters course, I felt reluctant to do it because I did not belong to the area. Then I realised that what he wanted was exactly this: the views of an outsider. A non-specialist may sometimes see more clearly what deficiencies exist in a discipline in which he is not involved.

Although I do not at all claim to know what is right and what is wrong in the teaching of English literature in our letters course, I will raise two sets of related questions to be discussed. In the first set the questions are concerned with the courses which are now being given. In the second, some theoretical and methodological issues will be discussed.

It is assumed that when teachers get together to devise programmes for a course they will first of all discuss the students' needs both in terms of what knowledge of the subject in question they must acquire so as to become competent professionals and also in terms of the policy to be followed for the goal considered adequate to their needs to be attained. In the specific case of the teaching of English literature, and taking for granted that learning literature is important for a number of reasons, these questions seem relevant.

(a) Considering that our students are going to be teachers of English at first and secondary levels, how much literature should they learn? Should the students of the culture of the people(s) whose literature they will study be

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part of the literature course or should it be a separate, perhaps optional, course?

(b) Considering that in general the student's knowledge of the English Language at the time they begin their obligatory literature course is insufficient to understand the vocabulary of the texts they have to read and even less sufficient to appreciate how the writers use the resources of the language to create a certain effect, how should the texts be handled to prevent both students and teachers from feeling frustrated at the enormosity of the task they have to face?

(c) Another question which requires some thinking out is whether the teaching of English literature and English language should be integrated. If they should, then how?

We shall now consider how the English literature courses are organised at the UFSC.

The teaching of literature may have different orientations. It may aim at acquainting the learners with the culture of the people(s) whose literature is taught. It may aim at giving them a general survey of the whole of a national literature in chronological fashion or directed to the study of literary periods. It may also be genre orientated. And finally, it may be linguistically based.

A look at the five programmes which make up the complete course of English literature now given at the UFSC shows us that four of them implicitly have all these aims but last one. English Literature II, a survey in American Literature and the only one whose objectives are stated in the programme, is the one that is somehow linguistically based. According to the objectives, at the end of (the end of) the course the students are expected to have learnt how to analyse the relation between form and theme (content?) in the four literary genres.

Put this way, it might appear that there are no criteria underlying these programmes. But there are. The three courses in American literature follow a progression that goes from a

culturally-based programme, through a complete survey one, to a course in advanced studies with emphasis on literary criticism. Of the two British literature courses, the first deals with the prose and poetry of the 19th century, and the second with the prose and poetry of the 20th century, Both are concerned with literary criticism with a marked social bias. However, it is not easy to understand why there should be three American but only two British literature courses. Nor why the British courses only cover the 19th and 20th centuries. Furthermore, the American literature courses seem to follow quite different lines from those followed by the British literature courses. Of course, within the narrow limits of Time allowed, one has to choose what to do according to some criterion or other. Apparently, one criterion was used in determining the content of the American literature courses and another in determining what should be done in the British Literature courses.

What I believe to be the problem is related to the question of orientation, which brings us to the theoretical issues. In what follows, I will try to compare two different points of view: one is H. G. Widdowson's¹ and the other is Roger Pearce's².

Widdowson, who describes his book as an "exercise in applied stylistic analysis" (1), makes a distinction between discipline and subject, the former being the concern of specialists (in our case, of literary critics) because of its theoretical requirements whereas the latter has pedagogic implications which can be defined at different educational levels. Stylistics, which is neither a discipline nor a subject, serves as a bridge between two disciplines or between two subjects. It would thus be a mediator between literary criticism and linguistics (disciplines) or between literature

¹WIDDOWSON, H. G. *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*, London, Longman, 1975.

²PEARCE, Roger. *Literary Texts. Discourse Analysis Monographs* 3. Birmingham: English Language Research, 1977.

and language (subjects).

Literary criticism, linguistics, and stylistics would each have a specific concern:

The literary critic (...) is primarily concerned with messages and his interest in codes lives in the meanings they convey in particular instances of use. The linguistic (...) is primarily concerned with the codes themselves and particular messages are of interest in so far as they exemplify how the codes are constructed.

.....
The purpose of stylistics is to link the two approaches by extending the linguist's literary intuitions and the critic's linguistic observations and making their relationship explicit. (5f)

The definition of stylistics would qualify it as an adequate approach to the study of literature as a subject in schools and universities, regardless of whether the literature is that of the mother tongue or that of a foreign language. The teacher would establish the aims and procedures according to the objectives of the course. The procedures should aim at the development of the students' sensitivity to language. They should also be taught strategies of understanding to language. They should also be taught strategies of understanding applicable to any piece of literary work.

To highlight the style of literary works, Widdowson suggests a comparative method: a given literary piece containing, for instance, the description of a man would be compared with other descriptions of a man in what he calls 'conventional forms of communication' (see Chapter 6: exercises in literary understanding).

Among other advantages of the stylistics approach, Widdowson says that it paves the way 'imperceptively' for literary appreciation.

The view of stylistics and distinction between linguistics and literary criticism are criticised by Roger Pearce in his monograph.

It is unfortunate that it is not possible, within the limitations of an article, to present a fair summary of Pearce's arguments and proposal for the analysis of literary texts. I will thus only touch on the issues which are of immediate interest to the present discussion.

With regard to style, although Pearce recognises the usefulness of the concept "for all (practical) purposes except the detailed analysis literary texts" (34), he proposes the abolishment of stylistics as a mediator between linguistics and criticism for the simple reason that it does not produce adequate linguistic descriptions of literary texts 'as coherent units'. For a work of literature "can always be seen as a unitary language even composed of a string of units of different sizes" (6).

As to the two disciplines, linguistics and criticism (description and interpretation), he considers the division both unfortunate and unproductive:

The criterion for a successful description is the same, whether the analyst is called a linguist or a critic: an insightful and intuitively satisfying description supported by and deriving from the facts of the text to a greater extent than a rival description. These two aspects of the criterion that it be intuitively satisfying and supported by the facts are exactly parallel to the two aspects of the investigative enterprise, hypothesis and rigorous examination. In a situation in which the analyst concentrates on examination at the expense of interpretation, a relatively un insightful description is understandably often the result. And where he eschews rigorous description in favour of interpretation, an arbitrary and unjustified description may well ensue. (39)

Although considering description and interpretation interdependent and therefore inseparable in the analysis of literary texts, Pearce says that if one chooses to take them separately, then, it is description which should be undertaken first, in support of interpretation.

Another important part of Pearce's study is that which

explains the theory of linguistics and the approach to linguistic description on which his thesis is based — that of M. A. K. Halliday in "Categories of the Theory of Grammar". This part is important not only because it explains the theory and its application to the analysis of literary texts, but mainly because it makes it clear to us that behind practical purposes there should be an adequate linguistic theory to validate the analyst's hypotheses: "An objective analysis, description and explanation of literary texts must be set within a broadly linguistic perspective". (3)

The purpose of this rather sketchy presentation of two different points of view is to help to find answers to questions raised in the first part of the article.

considerations on "time" in narrative discourse

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Narrative is a feature of human experience. Language users develop from a very early age, notions or intuitions about what constitutes a 'story'. Children can understand and produce narrative structures, and through the retelling of their stories, they organise and interpret their world experience and reality, which will then be systematically ordered. Over the last two decades, the study of Narrative, in the field of Linguistics and in Literary Criticism, has developed greatly. French theoreticians, like Barthes, Todorov, Bremond and Genette, to name just a few, have concentrated on narratives in such a way that the term Narratology is now used to describe the analysis of narrative texts. Linguists like Labov, Grimes and Longacre have also been concerned with narratives. The study of spoken, factual and fictional narratives is promising both as a study of language and as a study of human experience.

I am going to adopt here Gerald Prince's suggestion (1980: 50) that a Narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence. I interpret 'events' as being actions or happenings which are represented as causing a change in state. The events must be reported as either having happened or in the process of happening. Chatman (1978:44) says that "an action is a change of state brought about by an agent or one that affects a patient". Van Dijk (1977), discussing the theory of action, says that "CHANGE" is a relation between, or an operation on, possible worlds or states of affairs. It implies a DIFFERENCE between world-states or situations and hence requires a TEMPORAL ORDERING of worlds." (p. 168) For him, changes can be minimal or several events can occur at the same time. A sequence of events would be a

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