

THE ENGLISH USED BY AFRICAN WRITERS
AND ITS APPLICATION
IN A SECONDARY ENGLISH COURSE*

John Rogers

"... Wolde Soyinka has done for our napping language what brigand dramatists from Ireland have done for centuries: booted it awake, rifled its pockets and scattered the loot into the middle of next week..." (Penelope Gilliatt, 'The Observer', London, September 19th, 1966, commenting on the Commonwealth Arts Festival Production of Wolde Soyinka's play *The Road*.)

"... What I do see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language... The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience..." (Chinua Achebe, in an article entitled 'English and the African Writer', in *Transition* 18, Volume 4, 1965.)

This paper takes for granted that it is now recognized (in Africa, if not universally) that the reading of African Literature in English should be an indispensable part not only of an African university English course, both for specialists and non-specialists, but also of any self-respecting secondary school English curriculum in any African country where English is the official language, second language or medium of instruction. It seems to the writer that there is no need to belabour the point that African students are far more likely to respond to stories, novels, plays and poems written in English by African writers than they are to stories, novels, plays and poems written by American or British authors. This paper also takes it for granted that there is considerable value in students being exposed to literature in English, or indeed in any other language. It so happens that in Ethiopia, so the writer is informed, the average secondary school student is exposed to hardly any literature at all, either in his country's official first language, Amharic, or official second language, English.

This paper is rather concerned with the proposition that where secondary school students are forced to use English as a medium of instruction and therefore as a medium of expression a study of the way various African writers have used English (used, abused, enriched, despoiled...) might conceivably help them with their own English. The conventional method is often to expose them to the way American and British writers have used English. George Orwell's admirable essay, 'Politics and the English Language'¹ is frequently used as a teaching text. It is

* A paper prepared in advance for the Interdisciplinary Seminar of the Faculties of Arts and Education, Helle Sellassie I University.

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admirable as such a text. Nevertheless, it seems to the writer that African writers writing in English (a language which is not, usually, their native language) can provide an even more effective model, principally because they are, like the students themselves, using a language that is not their own. Again, this paper doesn't concern itself with the problem of whether English and French should continue to be used as official first or second languages. To quote from Chinua Achebe's *Transition* article again, "... on the whole it [colonialism] did bring together many peoples that had hitherto gone their several ways. And it gave them a language with which to talk to one another. If it failed to give them a song, it at least gave them a tongue for sighing. There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication".

Appendix A, a miniature anthology of African writing in English, consists of extracts from African writers writing in English which illustrate the different ways in which English has been "booted awake" and/or abused. The writer suggests that similar extracts could well be included in a secondary English course, not only for comprehension and/or literary "appreciation", but also, and perhaps more usefully, as models for the students' own writing. Here, a warning is perhaps in order. The writer is most emphatically **not** advocating that African secondary school students should be fed on a diet of African literature and then let loose to produce reams of uncontrolled, so-called "creative" writing. The writer is only too well aware that there aren't likely to be many Chinua Achebes, Wole Soyinkas or James Ngugis in Africa.

Another warning might also be in order. The title of this paper and its treatment of the quotations in Appendix A may perhaps suggest that the writer is advocating that African writers writing in English should be read mainly for how they use English rather than for what they have to say. Donald Davie made precisely this point in a review of *Young Commonwealth Poets*² in the *New Statesman* of 10 December, 1965. In discussing the poems he said, quite categorically:

We must read these poems less for what they say than for how they use English to say it. This is a rather specialised interest to take in poems, and an exacting demand to make of them. But some of them measure up...

The present writer doesn't agree that this is how we must read these writers. On the contrary, he believes that these writers can be read for both reasons: what they say **and** how they say it.

In commenting on content and form, however, one must beware this kind of thing, taken from Donald Davie's review referred to above:

'A Dirge' and 'The Return from Ball' by the Ghanaian George Awoonor-Williams; 'Enjoy the African Night' by the Kenyan Joseph Mutiga; ... these seem to be other good poems which extend the resources of standard English. How this comes about is none of our business. It is more likely to happen to happen to a poet whose command of standard English is imperfect. When Awoonor-Williams says,

² *Young Commonwealth Poets*, editor: P.L. Brent, Heinemann, London, 1965.

Can you see the eyes that watch you
And transcend the superfluous of a presence?

the strangeness is authentic and exciting whether it came about by accident or design. And the most compelling case is surely 'Enjoy the African Night':

Brave you walk, alone but not lonely,
Buzzing insects, noising birds, keep you coy;
The form-curves delight your sight.
The air sweet, fresh and warm to you,
You look, but seeing nought you muse,
None seeing you but the feeding creatures.

The awkward fresh exactness of 'form-curves', and the beautiful limpity of 'the air sweet, fresh and warm' and 'the feeding creatures', — these, it seems almost certain, could have come only to a poet so out of touch with the habits of current written English that he can use 'coy' as a term of approbation, and declare with a straight face that 'seeing nought you muse'. Let it be said at once that there are some degrees and kinds of ignorance, of being out of touch, which are disastrous; one or two of the African poets show this clearly. But in 'Enjoy the African Night', Mutiga is a Kenyan John Clare. Like Clare, Mutiga smoothly surmounts problems simply by being unaware of them. The product is what matters. The art which recognises the problems it surmounts is not any more admirable, though the admiration we accord it is different.

The present writer's own opinion of 'Enjoy the African Night' is that it is an almost perfect example of how African writers should **not** use English. Mr. Mutiga clearly has a very uncertain grasp of different styles of English, derived, it would seem, from his reading of English poetry. He has failed to blend these very disparate styles into a distinctive style of his own. It is true, as Dr. Davie asserts, that Mr. Mutiga is unaware of his stylistic problems. He certainly hasn't surmounted them.

Dr. Davie was immediately taken to task, and rightly so, by Edward Braithwaite, the West Indian author, in a letter to the *New Statesman* of 24 December, 1965. Mr. Braithwaite asks Dr. Davie:

... Did the merit of these poems lie, for the reviewer, in their strangeness and awkwardness, and the skill of ignorance which helped their writers to surmount their problems 'simply by being unaware of them'? ... Wouldn't we be getting dangerously close to a kind of double standard?

Dr. Davie's comeback to this comment and a further one by a Mr. Sergeant (who had said that it wasn't feasible to study these poems for how they use English) was the following:

... If the focus isn't on how African poets use English, then there is no scholarly justification for reading their poems along with poems from Barbados and New Zealand; instead they ought to be studied along with African poems written in African languages and in other European language like French...

Dr. Davie probably has a point about the need to study poems (and stories, novels and plays) in vernacular languages, where they exist. But it would surely

only be piling chaos on top of chaos to add yet another European language, French, to the already overburdened school system of countries like Ethiopia, for instance.³

The rest of this paper, then, deals with poems, plays, stories and novels written in English by African writers, pointing out how the language employed can form a useful part of English-teaching, in addition to, but not to the exclusion of, the reading and study of this literature as literature.

Appendix A consists of quotations from 14 African writers and selections from two collections of anonymous poems (traditional African poems and Yoruba children's songs). These are arranged alphabetically and not in any order of merit, though many critics might well agree that the first writer, Chinua Achebe, is probably one of the best writers of all, in so far as he exemplifies the principal idea behind this paper.

Chinua Achebe, in an extremely interesting paper delivered at the Leeds conference on Commonwealth literature in 1964,⁴ discusses one way in which an African writer might teach students in secondary schools. It is not such a specialised way as this paper suggests, but it is closely allied to it. Achebe's wife, who at that time taught English in a boys' school,

asked a pupil why he wrote about winter when he meant the *harmattan*. He said the other boys would call him a bushman if he did such a thing! Now, you wouldn't have thought, would you, that there was something shameful in your weather? But apparently, we do. How can this great blasphemy be purged? I think it is part of my business as a writer to teach that boy that there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather, that the palm-tree is a fit subject for poetry.

Achebe goes on to say that here is "an adequate revolution" for him to espouse—

to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of denigration and self-abasement . . . I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past — with all its imperfections — was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive . . .

And the language which is used in this particular kind of education is an integral part of any attempt to teach African students that their own environment, tradition, culture, folk-lore and language should be a part of the way they use English as a means of self-expression, not merely in "creative" writing but also whenever and wherever they have to use English.

An examination of the quotations from Achebe's novels (Appendix A, I, p. 62) might suggest that the writer is advocating that every African

3 The writer has just heard, incidentally, that the French government is supplying 75 teachers to teach French in 22 Ethiopian secondary schools. A 4-year course of French was introduced in October, 1968.

4 This paper was later published as 'The Novelist as Teacher', *New Statesman*, London, 29 January 1965.

secondary school student should sprinkle his writing liberally with proverbs, similes and metaphors translated from his vernacular. Clearly this would be ridiculous. What wouldn't be ridiculous, however, would be the use of a comparison drawn from the vernacular in place of a tired native English cliché. Probably every English teacher has at one time or another told his students to avoid using clichés — as if the average African secondary school student (or university student, for that matter) knows what is or is not a cliché in English. There is, of course, another danger, apart from an over-liberal sprinkling of vernacular proverbs and similes. To non-African and non-Ibo readers, Achebe's imagery seems fresh and vivid. To an Ibo-speaker, however, these translations from Ibo, if they are translations, may themselves be tired old clichés — the Ibo equivalent of 'cool as a cucumber', 'warm as toast', 'quick as lightning' or 'selling like hot cakes'. We don't know. We hope not. We sincerely hope we aren't trying to replace one set of hackneyed images and phrases with another. At least the attempt to freshen up English, as Achebe has done, seems worthwhile. The texture of his novels is enriched and the atmosphere heightened.⁵

It's interesting in this connection to look at the quotation from Achebe's last novel, *A Man of the People* (Appendix A, pp. 62-63). While the comparisons from *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* might well be Ibo clichés, the images in *A Man of the People* are frequently related to modern urban life (B.2 and B.3, pp. 62-63).

Achebe's discussion of one aspect of his own style, in *Arrow of God*, throws an interesting light (to use a tired old native English cliché) on his attempts to fashion an English equivalent for Ibo. The Chief Priest's English seems vivid to us — simple, dignified and firmly rooted in things real to that society. The translation into an English which is difficult to label is tired, abstract and cliché-ridden — a string of worn-out phrases.

The unacknowledged translation into English of an Amharic love song (Appendix A, II, p. 64) represents a warning against translation into English as a form of writing poetry or self-expression. The attempt to introduce 20th century imagery and references — 'piston' (to describe a thigh — a mistranslation of 'waist?') and a 'triggerhappy (cowgirl?) eye' — does not quite come off.

John Pepper Clark has made interesting, if not entirely successful, attempts in his plays (*Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade* and *The Raft*) to reproduce in English, the speech of Ijaw villagers and fishermen. While the imagery in a poem like *Night Rain* (... the run of water / That like ants filing out of the wood / Will scatter and gain possession / of the floor ...) is effective the way Achebe's is, the way his characters speak in his plays seems, at least to the present writer, to be in the first place very much out-of-character and, secondly, affected, pretentious and derivative as far as the English as English is concerned, when we stop to reflect that these are supposedly villagers and largely uneducated villagers. What seems to have been an attempt to write Nigerian/Greek tragedies is not, this writer contends, a conspicuous success.

There are good things in the plays, however, at least from this paper's narrow, language point of view. Appendix A, III B. and C, pp. 64-65, lists a few of

⁵ There is a very interesting and much fuller analysis of Chinua Achebe's language in an article by Bernth Lindfors, 'The palm oil with which Achebe's words are eaten', in *African Literature Today*, number 1, 1968.

them. B.2. 3, and 4, and C.1 and 2 are, like Achebe's use of Ibo imagery, effective examples of the use of local (in this case, fishing) references.

The other two examples (B.1, and C. 3), though, just 'don't ring true'. What they do sound like is early or pseudo—Shakespeare. Perhaps the Ijaw fishermen are poetic speakers and Ijaw is very similar to early Shakespeare. Gerald Moore took up a similar point direct with J. P. Clark. In his paper, 'The Language of Poetry',⁶ originally given at the Freetown Conference on African Literature and the University Curriculum, in 1963, Moore describes a correspondence he had with Clark over one or two minor linguistic points in *The Masquerade*:

... I was not very happy because one of the characters in the play ... had used the word 'phenomenon' at one point — a peasant, a fisherman in the play; and he had also said at one point that he was 'privy to' a certain secret. And I just said I was sure J. P. Clark knew what he was doing, but I was wondering whether this word 'phenomenon' did not rather stick out as being a word (or the equivalent of that word in his language) that such a person would be unlikely to use. And also this construction, 'being privy to a certain secret' is a very Elizabethan piece of English, hundreds of years old. And I thought it might be a little obtrusive in this context. J.P. Clark wrote back: 'Education and class consciousness which presuppose and actually create levels of speech and language in European societies have, thank God, not done that havoc yet to the non-literary tongues like Ijaw. Style, imagery, etc., these are what tell one user of a language from another — not grammar or class; for we haven't that. And you very well know that all I consider myself is a letter-writer for my characters.' ... He is convinced that there is no great difference in the imagery of educated and uneducated characters when they are speaking Ijaw. He is trying to translate this situation faithfully into English. And I think our correspondence centred around the precise point of debate in this exercise, of just how far can you go when you are writing in English, and for an audience part of which is certain to be English. How far can you go in translating this completely different language situation which exists in Ijaw, into English? Probably, you can go much further than I was disposed to go...

The whole of this paper is well worth reading since Gerald Moore clearly feels that Clark's linguistic experiments in his plays are much more successful than the writer of this paper does. A very necessary corrective is applied.

Alex La Guma is a powerful South African writer. The descriptive passage from his novella, *A Walk in the Night*,⁷ (Appendix A, IV, p. 65), is included to show how suggestive accurate and forceful description can be. It's probably more effective in a secondary school English course for African students to show them how an African writer describes his own surroundings (and the fact that it is a South African Negro writing about South African Negroes and the conditions they live in will make the example even more effective) than to illustrate effective description from Charles Dickens or even from George Orwell, when he describes the old ladies labouring under their enormous bundles of firewood in Marrakech.⁸

⁶ Reprinted in *African Literature and the Universities*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1965.

⁷ Mbari Publications, Ibadan.

⁸ "Marrakech", *Collected Essays*, George Orwell, Mercury Books, London.

James Ngugi's accurate and amusing description of the 'direct method' of teaching English as a second or foreign language — a worm's eye view as opposed to the God's-eye view most of us assembled here might have — is included neither as a sop to the linguists and teachers, nor as a warning about what our teaching might lead to (though this may not be entirely unnecessary), but rather as a suggestion to our students. Their views of us might be very salutary and very amusing. Most of us complain about the lack of feedback when we are researching and/or experimenting. Do we really want genuine, honest feedback from our long-suffering pupils? (Appendix A, p. 65).

Gabriel Okara's experiment in *The Voice* is not, this paper contends, an experiment worth repeating. It certainly isn't an experiment that should be recommended to secondary school students. Gabriel Okara apparently tried to translate Ijaw syntax, word order and Ijaw-style descriptions into English (Appendix A, VI, p. 66). As Gerald Moore says in his paper/article, 'The Language of Poetry' (already referred to above):

The effects are interesting and at times very beautiful, but of course it is not Ijaw, because once you transfer it into English, you are introducing an entirely consequent rhythm, a new music. And therefore I imagine that since he is a poet Okara has fiddled about a bit with the result — in fact, judging from what other Ijaw speakers have told me, he has done so . . .

It is perhaps possible to read a chapter written in this style; it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to read an entire novel in this kind of English. To quote Gerald Moore again:

I think the whole thing should be read, but I remain first of all convinced that it is an interesting and rather beautiful experiment; and secondly, doubtful whether this is really anything but a blind alley for the poet or prose writer in English.

Christopher Okigbo is, admittedly, a 'far-out' choice for a secondary school course. He has also proved to be rather beyond the capacity (and patience) of 4th year English-major students at Haile Sellassie I University. As many critics have said, Okigbo has clearly been influenced by Eliot and Pound. When Wole Soyinka, another Nigerian writer, castigated fellow Nigerian poets for "regrouping images of Ezra Pound around the oil bean and the nude spear," he clearly had Okigbo in mind. (Appendix A, VII, pp. 66-67).

The second Okigbo extract (from *Limits X*) illustrates the danger of references that are too private and therefore too obscure. When the present writer was living in Eastern Nigeria, as it then was, he once gave a buffet dinner party for a group of people, including Okara and Okigbo. Instead of conventional knives and forks, we all used an ingenious Swedish implement, one-third spoon, one-third fork and one-third knife. Okigbo was particularly taken with this ingenious tool and he and Okara spent some time trying to think of a suitable name for it. The correct name is "sporkni". Okigbo rather liked his own coinage, "spooknif". Now read the last section of his poem, *Limits*, Appendix A, VII, p. 67. What do you suppose is the meaning and/or significance, if any, of the line:

"Give me a spooknif, and shave my long beard . . ."?

Okigbo's work, beautiful and evocative as it often is, could well serve as a

warning against too much imitation of Western writers, although as Gerald Moore said in a discussion of this very point:

African writers must be free to read anybody they like, and be influenced by anybody they like, and, by doing so, they will enrich African poetry. And they will enlarge the awareness of the African audience. But I don't think we are really in a position to say that you should be influenced by Methodist hymns but not by Eliot or Pound. To put it at its crudest — I think this is possibly how Okigbo would put it — an African poet has got just as much right to be obscure as anybody else.⁹

The extract from the English translation of Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de Boy* (Appendix A, VIII, p. 67) illustrates how students might be encouraged to write about their experiences from their own viewpoint, as they see them rather than the way someone tells them to see them. One wonders how many more illuminating insights one might get from the "mouths of babes" when they have read the houseboy's version of why he went to work for the priest.

Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* is interesting as one of the first examples of what might be a new literary and English-verse form to be produced in Africa (Appendix A, IX, pp. 67-68). To many readers it may appear to be reactionary, a satirical indictment of what many students may welcome as a necessary breakaway from traditional values. Whatever its message, it is certainly a powerful piece of writing. It is also very interesting for the way it develops a new verse form and for the way it reveals what can still be done with English by an African writer. Its form and message might be too sophisticated for the average secondary school student, but one hopes that a secondary English course for African students can still find room for encouragement for the above-average students.

David Rubadiri's *An African Thunderstorm* (Appendix A, X, p. 68) should serve as a useful corrective to pseudo-Wordsworth nature poetry attempts, if they still get written. Its use of rhythm and (African) onomatopoeia, and its description of an African thunderstorm make it particularly effective as a part of an English course for African students. Nor is there any need for the "double standard" referred to in the Davie/Mutiga controversy.

Sahle Sellassie's account of what it meant to send a son away to school is not intended as a sop to Ethiopian students, but rather as an example of how any African student's personal experiences of what going to school actually meant in personal, family terms could form the basis of some valuable, because felt, accounts of what this might entail. Appendix A, XI, pp. 68-69).

There will probably be only one Wole Soyinka in this generation. Few, if any, African students can hope to approach his mastery of an alien tongue. These selections (Appendix A, XII, pp. 69-70) are included merely as an illustration of what can be done with English if you happen to be a genius like Soyinka. His writing should certainly be a part of any secondary school English course for any African country.

⁹ From a discussion on a paper by Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Postscript on Dakar", given at the Free-town Conference on "African Literature and the University Curriculum", April 1963, *African Literature and the Universities*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1965.

The selections from traditional African poems are included because it seems as though there might well be a valuable source of material, in every African country, which could be used for similar English-writing exercises, under strict control, of course. (Appendix A, XIII, pp. 70-71).

The extracts from Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's play (Appendix A, XIV, pp. 71-72) illustrate again how local images and references can enliven what might otherwise be pedestrian attempts at "description". The fact that Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin uses arbitrarily shortened lines of what we might generously call "free verse" need not prevent us from using these lines as examples of how closely observed local phenomena can effectively illustrate student writing in normal prose form.

Amos Tutuola is included not because Chinua Achebe thinks that he is a talented "natural", but because the writer thinks he should serve as a warning of how *not* to use English, although his inspired use of traditional story-telling forms and themes could well form an excellent example of how to adapt such traditional techniques and use them in English (Appendix A, XV, p. 72).

The final selection, of Yoruba Children's Poems (Appendix A, XVI, pp. 72-73) is included because it occurs to the writer that there might well be a vast untapped source of similar material in other African countries. While the average student may not be capable of producing such effective translations as the authors of this collection, it seems as if the exercise may not be entirely without value or, indeed, enjoyment, in a secondary English course.

Appendix B should be self-explanatory. "African Literature in English" might seem to be an obvious choice for a university English course. The import of this paper is that such a study should be begun before the university and that it should be used to help the students to express themselves in English. Appendix B illustrates some of the pitfalls of trying to get university students to read, understand and appreciate African Literature written in English. It is the present writer's contention that it is too late to start this study at the university. It should be started at the secondary school.

APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTATIONS FROM AFRICAN WRITERS

I. CHINUA ACHEBE

A. *Things Fall Apart* (Heinemann, London)

1. ... during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bushfire in the harmattan.
2. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.
3. He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor ... he felt like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito.
4. Okonkwo stood by, rumbling like thunder in the rainy season.
5. A strange and sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voices, like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite.
6. When the moon rose late in the night, people said it was refusing food, as a sullen husband refuses his wife's food when they have quarrelled.
7. The priestess cursed, her voice cracking like the angry bark of thunder in the dry season.
8. A man's place was not always there, waiting for him. As soon as he left, someone else rose and filled it. The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another.
9. ... as busy as an ant-hill.
10. ... the lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did.
11. I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle.

B. *A Man of the People* (Heinemann, London)

1. ... as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth.
2. ... like that radio jingle advertising an intestinal worm expeller.

3. ...as those winged termites driven out of the earth by late rain dance furiously around street lamps and then drop panting to the ground.
4. ...like a slowed-up action film.
5. ...like a dust particle in the high atmosphere around which the water vapour of my thinking formed its globule of rain.
6. ...if you look only in one direction your neck will become stiff.
7. A man who insists on peeping into his neighbour's bedroom knowing a woman to be there is only punishing himself.
8. ...like the man in the proverb who was carrying the carcass of an elephant on his head and searching with his toes for a grasshopper.
9. I thought much afterwards about that proverb, about the man taking things away until the owner at last notices. In the mouth of our people there was no greater condemnation. It was not just a simple question of a man's cup being full. A man's cup might be full and none the wiser. But here the owner knew, and the owner, I discovered, is the will of the people.

C. From an article in *Transition* (Volume 4, No. 18, 1965), on "English and the African Writer".

(Achebe has just been discussing Amos Tutuola, whom Achebe calls a "natural", as far as language is concerned):

A good instinct has turned his apparent limitation in language into a weapon of great strength — a half-strange dialect that serves him perfectly in the evocation of his bizarre world.

"From a natural to a conscious artist: myself, in fact. Allow me to quote a small example from *Arrow of God*, which may give some idea of how I approach the use of English. The Chief Priest is telling one of his sons why it is necessary to send him to church:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow.

Now supposing I had put it in another way. Like this for instance:
I am sending you as my representative among these people — just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.

The material is the same. But the form of the one is in character and the other is not. It is largely a matter of instinct, but judgement comes into it too."

II. A TRANSLATION FROM AN AMHARIC ORIGINAL

(This English version appeared in a recent issue of 'Black Orpheus'. There was no indication of who had translated it or where the original had come from. The present writer's copy of the magazine has been "borrowed".)

Love Song (from the Amharic)

You lime of the forest, honey among the rocks,
Lemon of the cloister, grape in the savannah.
A hip to be enclosed by one hand;
A thigh round like a piston.
Your back — a manuscript to read hymns from.
Your eye triggerhappy, shoots heroes.
Your gown cobweb tender,
Your shirt like soothing balm.
Soap? O no, you wash in Arabian scent
Your calf painted with silver lines.
I dare not touch you!
Hardly dare to look back.
You mistress of my body:
More precious to me than my hand or my foot.
Like the fruit of the valley, the water of paradise.
Flower of the sky; wrought by divine craftsmen;
With muscular thigh she stepped on my heart.
Her breast resembles the finest gold;
When she opens her heart — the Saviour's image!
And Jerusalem herself, sacred city, shouts, "Holy, holy!"

III. JOHN PEPPER CLARK

A. From Night Rain

I know her practised step as
She moves her bins, bags and vats
Out of the run of water
That like ants filing out of the wood
Will scatter and gain possession
Of the floor...

B. From Song of a Goat (Oxford University Press, London and Ibadan)

1. After all you are just stepping out
On the morning dew of life with mist all prostrate
On the ground before you...
2. ... In a situation
Like yours one may be content to drift as do
The weeds of the stream. But that carries very
Little, because the tide always turns
Back on one.
3. ... they have picked my flesh
To the bones like fish a floating corpse.
4. EBIERE. ... what
Short temper have I when it is pulled and
Tugged at daily like a hook-line?

TONYE. You certainly are showing it today,
And nobody has baited you.

C. From **The Masquerade** (Oxford University Press, London and Ibadan)

1. ...dried out, as you can see, like a fish
Basket visited overnight by rats.
2. ...a new moon that has sprung
Such a list, there must be a terrible leak somewhere.
3. Oh, what magic moonlight! Look at the sands,
They are like a silver spawn
In their first outing with the tide.
And see how they glide to meet the moon!
....
You are hot, young man. Really you are
Restless as the stars that forever
Are flying and rushing although footless.
Take a look at those tireless beings some
Of whom are now beginning to peer down
At us, and learn something of their coolness.

IV. **ALEX LA GUMA**

(From **A Walk in the Night** — Mbari Publications, Ibadan)

In the dark a scrap of cloud struggled along the edge of Table Mountain, clawed at the rocks for a foothold, was torn away by the breeze that came in from the southeast, and disappeared. In the hot tenements the people felt the breeze, through the chinks and cracks of loose boarding and broken windows and stirred in their sweaty sleep. Those who could not sleep sat by the windows or in doorways and looked out towards the mountain beyond the rooftops and searched for the sign of wind. The breeze carried the stale smells from passageway to passageway, from room to room, along lanes and back alleys, through the realms of the poor, until the massed smells of stagnant water, cooking, rotting vegetables, oil, fish, damp plaster and timber, unwashed curtains, bodies and stairways, cheap perfume and incense, spices and half-washed kitchen-ware, urine, animals and dusty corners became one vast, anonymous odour, so widespread and all-embracing as to become unidentifiable, hardly noticeable by the initiated nostrils of the teeming, cramped world of poverty which it enveloped.

V. **JAMES NGUGI**

(From **Weep Not, Child** — Heinemann, London)

Lucia, Mwihi's sister, taught them. They all sat expectantly at their desks with eyes on the board. A knowledge of English was the criterion of a man's learning.

Teacher: I am standing up. What am I doing?

Class: You are standing up.

Teacher: Again.

Class: You are standing up.

Teacher: (pointing with a finger): You - no - you - yes.
What's your name?

Pupil: Njoroge.

Teacher: Njoroge, stand up.

He stood up. Learning English was all right but not when he stood up for all eyes to watch and maybe make faces at him.

Teacher: What are you doing?

Njoroge: (thinly) You are standing up.

Teacher: (slightly cross) What are you doing?

Njoroge: (clears his throat, voice thinner still) You are standing up.

Teacher: No, no. (to the class) Come on. What are you, you doing?

.....

Teacher: (pointing to Mwihaki) Stand up. What are you doing?

Mwihaki: (head bent on to one shoulder) I am standing up.

Teacher: Good. Now, Njoroge. What is she doing?

Njoroge: I am standing up.

The class giggled.

VI. GABRIEL OKARA

(From *The Voice* - André Deutsch, London)

It was the day's ending and Okolo by a window stood. Okolo stood looking at the sun behind the tree tops falling. The river was flowing, reflecting the finishing sun, like a dying away memory. It was like an idol's face, no one knowing what is behind. Okolo at the palm trees looked. They were like women with hair hanging down, dancing, possessed... And, on the river, canoes were crawling home with bent backs and tired hands, paddling.....

...he read until night fell and closed the eye of the sky. To the window he went once more and looked at the night... The moon was an about-to-break moon...

"Who are you people be?" Okolo asked. The people opened not their mouths. "If you are coming-in people be, then come in." ... As Okolo closer to the men walked, the men quickly turned and ran out...

VII. CHRISTOPHER OKIGBO

(From *Limits* - Mbari Publications, Ibadan)

I
Suddenly becoming talkative
like weaverbird
Summoned at offside of
dream remembered
Between sleep and waking,
I hang up my egg-shells
To you of palm grove,
Upon whose bamboo towers hang
Dripping with yesterupwine

A tiger mask and nude spear ...

Queen of the damp half light,
I have had my cleansing,
Emigrant with air-borne nose,
The he-goat-on-heat.

.....
X

But at the window

Outside

at the window,
A shadow —
Listen. Listen again under the shadow ...
Give me a spooknif, and shave my long beard ...
The Sunbird sings again
From the LIMITS of the dream,
The Sunbird sings again
Where the caress does not reach,
of Guernica,
On whose canvas of blood,
The newsprint-slits of his tongue
cling to glue ...
& the cancelling out is complete.

VIII. FERDINAND OYONO

(From *Houseboy* — translated from the French by John Reed — Heinemann African Writers Series, London)

They say in the village that I was the cause of my father's death because I ran away to a white priest on the day before my initiation when I should have met the famous serpent who watches over all the men of my race. Father Gilbert believes it was the Holy Spirit that led me to him. In fact I just wanted to get close to the white man with hair like the beard on a maize cob who dressed in woman's clothes and gave little black boys sugar lumps. I was in a gang of heathen boys who followed the missionary about as he went from hut to hut trying to make converts to the new religion. He knew a few words of Ndjem but his pronunciation was so bad that the way he said them, they all had obscene meanings. This amused everybody and his success was assured. He threw the little lumps of sugar to us like throwing corn to chickens. What a battle to get hold of one of those little white lumps! They were worth all the scraped knees, swollen eyes and painful cuts ...

IX. OKOT P'BITEK

(From *Song of Lawino* — East African Publishing House, Nairobi)

Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal,
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in blood,
Her mouth is like raw yaws

It looks like an open ulcer,
 Like the mouth of a fiend!
 Tina dusts powder on her face
 And it looks so pale;
 She resembles the wizard
 Getting ready for the midnight dance:
 She dusts the ash-dirt all over her face
 And when little sweat
 Begins to appear on her body
 She looks like the guinea fowl!

X. DAVID RUBADIRI

An African Thunderstorm

From the west	In the village
Clouds come hurrying with the wind	Screams of delighted children
Turning	Toss and turn
Sharply	In the din of whirling wind,
Here and there	Women —
Like a plague of locust	Babies clinging on their backs —
Whirling	Dart about
Tossing up things on its tail	In and out
Like a madman chasing nothing.	Madly
	The Wind whistles by
	Whilst trees bend to let it pass.
Pregnant clouds	
Ride stately on its back	
Gathering to perch on hills	Clothes wave like tattered flags
Like dark sinister wings:	Flying off
The Wind whistles by	To expose dangling breasts
And trees bend to let it pass.	As jagged blinding flashes
	Rumble, tremble, and crack
	Amidst the smell of fired smoke
	And the pelting march of the storm.

(From *Modern Poetry from Africa*, edited by Ulli Beier and Gerald Moore, Penguin Books).

XI. SAHLE SELASSIE

(From *Shinaga's Village — Scenes of Ethiopian Life* — translated from Chaha by Wolf Leslau, U.C.L.A. Press)

3.....

Kerwagé and Zemwet

For two months Kerwagé and her new baby remained on their special bed behind the customary curtain of grass and jute. Bala fed his wife well so that she would regain her strength, and because she had given him a son and he wanted her milk to be rich. At no time did Kerwagé lack for meat or honey. She had been a beautiful woman before; now at the end of her seclusion she was twice as lovely. Her skin had lightened, too, for she had not been exposed to the sun.

The day Kerwagé left her bed and came from behind the curtain, her friend Zemwet came to congratulate her and visit. The bed and curtain had been removed when Zemwet arrived, and Kerwagé was in the **kakat** seated on a low stool, her son at her breast. Zemwet said: "O Kero, you have left the curtain looking well!"

"May your heart rejoice as mine does Zemo! But you've come alone today. Why didn't you bring your little boy with you?"

"A week ago his father took him to Indibir."

"And why did he take the child to that land of drought and hunger?"

"He took him to the mission to go to school."

Kerwagé was astonished. "To the mission, to school?"

"Of course, to school. What's so surprising about that?"

"You must be out of your mind, Zemo."

"Why?"

"And so you really sent him away to school! Shinega, my son, will never go to school, not even if my throat should be cut. Parents make their sons strangers by sending them to school. Kwerye's son finished his studies and lives in Addis Ababa and makes a lot of money, and he never comes home to see his parents, not even once a year . . . not even at Meskel! No, my son will never go to school, God forbid! God will give Shinega what he intends to give him, without any going to school. What difference does school make so long as a man has luck with him?"

"Pah! All I want is for Degemu to have a decent life. Let him study as long as he wants to, if it will help him. As for me, if God intended me to live alone, I can content myself."

XII. WOLE SOYINKA

A. From *The Lion and the Jewel* (Oxford University Press, London and Ibadan)

1. LAKUNLE: A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,
Rejected, denounced, accursed,
Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,
Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.
Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable.

SIDI: Is the bag empty? Why did you stop?

LAKUNLE: I own only the Shorter Companion
Dictionary, but I have ordered
The Longer One — you wait!

SIDI: Just pay the price.

2. SIDI: See how the water glistens on my face
Like the dew-moistened leaves on a **harmattan** morning
But he — his face is like a leather piece
Torn rudely from the saddle of his horse,
Sprinkled with the musty ashes
From a pipe that is long over-smoked.
And this goat-like tuft

Which I once thought was manly;
It is like scattered twists of grass —
Not even green —
But charred and lifeless, as after a forest fire!
Sadiku, I am young and brimming; he is spent.
I am the twinkle of a jewel, but he is the hind-
quarters of a lion!

3. ... in a dark corner sulking like
a slighted cockroach

B. From **A Dance of the Forests** (Oxford University Press, London and Ibadan)

ANT LEADER: ... Freedom we have
Like the hunter on a precipice
And the horns of a rhinoceros
Nuzzling his buttocks.

...
Freedom indeed we have
To choose our path
To turn to the left or to the right
Like the spider in the sand-pit
And the great ball of eggs
Pressing on his back.

C. From his poems (From **Modern Poetry from Africa**, Penguin Books, London)

1. From **Telephone Conversation**

... public hide-and-speak.

...
... like plain or milk chocolate?

...
"Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused
Foolishly, madam — by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black ...

...
"Madam," I pleaded, "wouldn't
You rather
See for yourself?"

2. From ... **And the Other Immigrant**

...
And sacrifices are gladly made
Like two square semolina meals a day
By thinking of the government house,
Senior Service car,
And hordes of admiring women awaiting me,
Where the one-eyed man is king.

XIII. TRADITIONAL AFRICAN POEMS

From **African Poetry — an anthology of traditional African poems**, compiled
and edited by Ulli Beier, (Cambridge University Press)

A.

Hymn to the Sun

The fearful night sinks
trembling into the depth
before your lightning eye
and the rapid arrows
from your fiery quiver.
With sparking blows of light
you tear her cloak
the black cloak lined with fire
and studded with gleaming stars —
with sparking blows of light
you tear the black cloak.

(FANG)

B.

Prayer to the Moon

Take my face and give me yours!
Take my face, my unhappy face.
Give me your face,
with which you return
when you have died,
when you vanished from sight.
You lie down and return —
Let me reassemble you, because you have joy,
you return evermore alive,
after you vanished from sight.
Did you not promise us once
that we too should return
and be happy again after death?

(BUSHMAN)

C.

The Worthless Lover

Trousers of wind and buttons of hail;
A lump of Shoa earth, at Gondar nothing left;
A hyena bearing meat, led on a leather thong;
Some water in a glass left standing by the fire;
A measure of water thrown on the hearth;
A horse of mist and a swollen ford;
Useless for anything, useful to no one;
Why am I in love with such a man as he?

(AMHARA)

XIV. TSEGAYE GABRE-MEDHIN

(From Oda-Oak Oracle —Oxford University Press, London)

... I have known loneliness.
I have valued
The sight of the shadow
Of the white clouds
Embracing the naked fields.
I have valued

The sight of a hidden flower
Under the thick shade of a bush
Waiting
For the song of the buzzing bee.
I have valued
The sight of the evening sun
Dipping its arrow of rays
Into the shimmering horizon.

Loneliness is
When the aged mule
Rubs its flank
Against the deserted trunk
Of a dead bush.
Loneliness is
When the moon is left cold
Among a glowing
Jungle of stars.

XV. AMOS TUTUOLA

(From *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* — Faber and Faber, London)

I was a palm-wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm-wine in my life. In those days we did not know other money, except COWRIES, so that everything was very cheap, and my father was the richest man in our town.

My father got eight children and I was the eldest among them, all of the rest were hard workers, but I myself was an expert palm-wine drinkard. I was drinking palm-wine from morning till night and from night till morning. By that time I could not drink ordinary water at all except palm-wine.

XVI. YORUBA CHILDREN'S POEMS

(From *The Moon Cannot Fight*, collected and translated by Ulli Beier and Bakare Gbadamosi, Mbari, Ibadan)

A. The Moon

The Moon cannot fight
Sun leave him alone.
The Moon cannot fight
Sun leave him alone!
The Moon gives the earth his good light.
Come and eat beancakes with us at midnight.
Thief! Thief with the goggle eye!

B. The Lazy One

The trousers of the lazy one
cannot reach the ground.
The trousers of the lazy one
can't even reach his knee.

C.

Praise of a Child

A child is like a rare bird.
A child is precious like coral.
A child is precious like brass.
You cannot buy a child on the market.
Not for all the money in the world.
The child you can buy for money is a slave.
We may have twenty slaves,
We may have thirty labourers,
Only a child brings us joy.
One's child is one's child.
The buttocks of our child are not so flat
That we should tie the beads on another child's hips.
One's child is one's child.
It may have a watery head or a square head,
One's child is one's child.
It is better to leave behind a child,
Than let the slaves inherit one's house.
One must not rejoice too soon over a child.
Only the one who is buried by his child,
Is the one who is truly born a child.
On the day of our death, our hand cannot hold a single
cowry.
We need a child to inherit our belongings.

APPENDIX B

- i. The following poem, 'Trouble Not the Birds',¹⁰ by the Yoruba poet, Adebayo Babalola, was given to a class of fourth year students at Haile Sellassie I University for explication and analysis. The students, all of whom were English majors or minors, included Ethiopians, Americans, Nigerians, one Swede, one Dutchman and one Ugandan. The following comments, on the content and language of the poem, which hadn't previously been discussed in class, are taken verbatim from their papers. They show not only some of the problems involved in this kind of work but also the need to start it much earlier than at the university.

Trouble Not the Birds

Trouble not the birds, ye little children,
Know ye not they're things by Nature given
Us, to further furnish every garden
Lovely, and to give us joy by singing?

Are you deaf whene'er these ones are chirping
On that almond tree that spreads its branches
Like a huge umbrella? — 'tis distressing
That in this land birds aren't sweetly chanting.

As they're said to do in England always.
How I long to hear the skylark's warble,
And that honoured singing that's the nightingale's!
I do hope that sometime I shall listen

To these birds outpour their tuneful language;
Then, I'm sure, I shall be three times happier,
But meanwhile I see the motley plumage
That our birds possess, and on it I'm keen.

ii. Comments by Students (English uncorrected)

- A. Babalola wonders why a minority white people come and trouble a majority black Africans who have their own way of living, their own culture and their own system of government. . . . Furthermore the poet asks why the white man comes to the black man's home and disturbs him. (Ethiopian)
- B. Adebayo Babalola's poem seems to be an expression of his acceptance of things as they are present. The poem makes it evident that he is a

¹⁰ *An Anthology of West African Verse*, edited by Olumbe Bassir, Ibadan University Press, 1957, page 21.

man, ahead of the situation of his country. He hopes for a new, perhaps better, future but is willing to be patient and not expect immediate changes. (American)

- C. The English in the first two stanzas is very different from the English in the two last ones — as far as I can see. The poet seems to want to point out the differences of speaking English in the two countries. He uses expressions like 'ye', 'tis', 'whene'er', which are a bit out of date now.(?) If he does want to make this difference, I don't think he has thoroughly succeeded. To me it seems to be only half-way done. (Swede)
- D. ... one cannot, as a matter of fact, be blind to the fact that the writer's intentions are not clear for the images cannot be properly seen. In other words, since Babalola's motive of writing this poem is absolutely vague, the reader may not be sure of whether it is suggestive of praising nature as a whole or else the writer is trying to convey dissatisfactions which have confronted him while in England in contrast with the happy life he had in his own country — Nigeria. (Ethiopian)
- E. The writer seems to speak about the African — to be specific the Nigerian — culture which has been mixed with the British one. I dared to say this after seeing the word 'motley'. This particular word seems to indicate or refer to the African or West African mode of dressing — having various colours. Perhaps, the writer seems disappointed in that many Africans don't seem to like their native culture; instead they like imported cultures and speaks of the ways things are done in distant places... the language is fairly simple and straight forward... it is meant to force the reader to read and think... (Ethiopian)
- F. ...unlike other African poets he is free from using pigeon English. He rather has resemblances with Wordsworth: when Babalola uses 'ye little children', 'know ye not...' compared to Wordsworth 'The Nightingale': 'thou surely art these notes of thine... thou sing'st as if the God of wine.' ...In my opinion the good quality of the poem is that it is un-Africanized, but universally written. (Ethiopian).
- G. The language is refined and faultless. Unlike his contemporary poets, Babalola has not made use of either pidgin English or slang. The pronoun 'ye' is no longer in use, in ordinary prose. This word gives the poem the tone of extracts in the Bible and 18 and 19 century poetry. (Ethiopian)
- H. The symbolism is this. England being an advanced colonial power has cast its shadow like a huge umbrella over many countries just as the huge almond tree mentioned in the poem does... This symbolic umbrella has cast its shadow of power over other countries, and has deprived them of doing things in their own way. A fashion of high calibre has been set for them by England, and what these overshadowed countries have to do is to ape them unsuccessfully, just as birds in other countries can hardly imitate the Nightingale or the Skylark. The author, therefore, is waiting for the day when colonized countries can do things just as good as the English do them.
(Ethiopian — now a secondary school teacher)

- I The figurative meaning of the poem on the other hand, refers to the unnatural restriction, rules and regulations imposed upon the native Africans by European colonialists... In the last two stanzas, the poet hopefully postulates the coming of the day when his native countrymen will be free to express their way of life as natural and as proper to their own environment.

(Ethiopian — now a secondary school director)

- J. In a line, 'Trouble Not the Birds' seems to be saying, "Things may be great in the white world, but I like my own."... The poem is a rejection, not simply a protest, of the white world at a level beyond the written word... The language reflects the thoughts of an "educated native" or at least what the white man supposes those thoughts to be. (American).

However, the job is not absolutely impossible and there are occasional glimmers, as in:

- K. The language is affected, ostentatious and stilted... His usage of words is twisted, stilted and strained... as a whole (it) is an excellent example of how not to write a poem in English or any other language. (Ethiopian - now teaching Amharic at Haile Sellassie I University)

BRIEF NOTICES

APPLIED LINGUISTICS: A Survey for Language Teachers, ed. Monika Kehoe,

Collier-MacMillan Teacher's Library

As the preface states, this book is written for teachers who have no formal training in linguistics but have an interest in language or language teaching. It is meant as a practical text for use in introductory courses in Applied Linguistics. Its emphasis is on second-language teaching. Dr. Kehoe's wide-ranging selection covers all the essential topics and presents them in a coherent form which makes the subject intelligible, though without any patronising over-simplification to the general reader.

The needs of the beginning teacher of a second language are kept clearly in mind; an extensive bibliography and a list of institutions concerning with language teaching or employing second-language teachers is provided. The book, however, will also be of interest to first-language teachers.

The chapter on Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages contains a section on TESL in Ethiopia, in which Dr. Kehoe draws upon her own experience gained in the Department of English at Haile Sellassie I University.

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH USED AS THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

John Wilson: Faber & Faber, London

The principal question raised in Mr. Wilson's book is: "How within the secondary school itself can the learners' command of English be raised speedily and efficiently to the level of functioning completely as the medium of instruction in the secondary school itself, not only within the English curriculum but in all other subjects?" The author adds, "The condition that it is to be done within the secondary school itself is stated to alert teachers in second language situations to the hard fact that they must expect little command of English to be acquired in the primary school."

In answering the question, the writer argues vigorously for a teaching method based upon the creation of situations which will generate realistic uses of language. The task of the secondary schools, he insists, is not merely one of remedying language forms (though he admits the need for remedial work, especially

in the first year of the secondary school); "the basic problem is how to encourage meaningful communication in a second language to enable the whole secondary school curriculum to move forward speedily and efficiently". Communication is a skill, not a body of inert knowledge, and skills are learned through practice in situations which require their use. The teacher's main task, therefore, is "to exercise all his teaching skill and ingenuity in order to put his pupils in genuine communication situations: in these situations the learning of English is achieved by ever-improving attempts to use it meaningfully".

Few would quarrel with these assertions, though cries of "Heresy" are likely to be heard when he goes on to say, "... in the development of the skill of communication in language, some structural, grammatical and phonological error has to be tolerated for the time being in order not to inhibit the development of the overall skill". And strong objection will certainly be taken to the author's argument that, if English teaching is to be situationally based, then English teaching material must be situationally graded. That's a revolutionary suggestion! So also is his suggestion that, if every subject teacher is a teacher of English, so the English teacher must be a teacher of every subject. "It is an error to carry on the learning and teaching of English for any long period of time (certainly no longer than three months), without applying it to a field of learning other than English... To apply English in one field of learning after another necessitates grading according to subject matter... It calls for co-operation, thought, preparation and action by both the teacher of English and teachers of other subjects."

Alas, the writer does not suggest how the necessary co-operation, thought, preparation and action are to be obtained — nor does he consider the alternative possibility of having all teachers — at any rate, in the junior secondary school — qualified in the teaching of English.

Nevertheless, though the immediate reaction of that very conservative individual, "the practical teacher", may be a hostile one, Mr. Wilson's ideas are worth serious consideration. The problem he deals with is a genuine problem, for communication (or composition), both oral and written, is essential and central to the total curriculum, and his radical approach to that problem should prove stimulating and helpful not only to the specialist teacher of English but to all who are concerned with secondary education where a second language is employed as the medium of instruction.

A BALLAD BOOK FOR AFRICA, ed. Paul Edwards: Faber & Faber, London

The traditional ballad is the product of an unsophisticated, not to say savage, society, and the force of its appeal to the average schoolboy, who shares some of the characteristic of the society that produced the ballad, has long been acknowledged by teachers of English. Unfortunately, for those who speak English as a second language the absence of cultural obstacles in the way of appreciation has sometimes been counterbalanced by the difficulties of dialect. Mr. Edwards has hit upon the idea — such a simple and excellent idea that one's first

reaction is, "Why didn't anyone think of this before?" — of translating some of these traditional ballads into Standard English, thereby making them immediately accessible to a much wider audience.

To those brought up on the original version, it may come as a shock to find:

The ankers brak, the topmasts lap,
It was sic a deadly storm,
And the waves cam owre the broken ship
Till a' her sides were torn.

transmogrified thus:

The anchor's snapped and the topmast cracked,
It was such a deadly storm,
And the waves came o'er the broken ship
Till all her sides were torn.

Traduttore, traditore. But surely in this case the end, providing an easy access to worthwhile literature, justifies the means.

Mr. Edwards' does not confine himself to the Border ballad, however. His concept of the ballad is wide enough to encompass not only **Sir Patrick Spens** and **Edward, Edward** but also Blake's **Poison Tree**, Synge's **Danny, Frankie and Johnny** and **The Big Rock Candy Mountains**. The inclusion of these last two may bring a wrinkle of distaste to the nostrils of the literary snob, and it must be admitted that they are no more likely to make the Top Twenty on Parnassus than Wordsworth's **Goody Blake and Harry Gill**, which is also included, but there is a strong case to be made out for the inclusion of a good deal of roughage in the literary diet of the young. Mr. Edwards' wide-ranging selection, properly handled, might have the very desirable effect of awakening the young to the idea that English studies serve, among other things, for delight. For teachers who inculcate rehearsed responses and dictate notes on Hist. Eng. Lit. the volume is not recommended.