

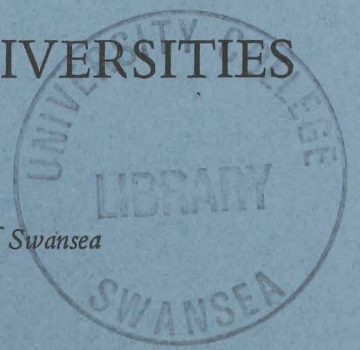
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FRENCH AT THE UNIVERSITIES

*an Inaugural Lecture
delivered at the University College of Swansea
on 2 December, 1975*



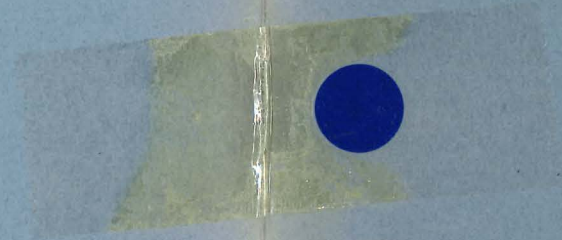
by

PROFESSOR A. H. DIVERRES

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Officier des Palmes Académiques

Professor of French and
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UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA

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FRENCH AT THE UNIVERSITIES (I)

I well remember my first visit to this campus one fine afternoon in September 1925, five years after the college had opened its doors and four after the Chair of which I am now the proud incumbent had been founded. And so it was for me a moving experience to return to Swansea in 1974 after an absence of thirty-eight years, and to the college, whose development I had not ceased to follow.

For the first eleven years the Department was the Department of Modern Languages, the two languages being French and German, until a separate Department of German was set up in 1932. The Head of the Department of Modern Languages during those years had been Professor Mary Williams, who continued until 1948 as Head of the Department of French. As all who know her will testify, she was imbued, and still is, with an ardent love of her native Wales and is steeped in its culture. She was the late L. E. Kastner's pupil at Aberystwyth and joined her master as Lecturer at the University of Manchester before proceeding to King's College, London, where she was Reader in Romance Philology at the time of her appointment at Swansea, not only as the first woman professor in the University of Wales but as the first woman professor in the United Kingdom. She had been trained in the nineteenth-century tradition of modern language teaching, which had inherited from the teaching of the classics the insistence on a strict linguistic discipline. All Honours students in French at this college during the inter-war years will remember how, in addition to fortnightly essays in French and fortnightly translations into English, we had to hand in every week two translations into French, and woe betide us if we did not. Considerable emphasis was placed on the spoken language; all classes were conducted in French, and French was the medium of conversation between staff and students. The intercalary year in France, though not compulsory, was warmly encouraged, at a time when few modern languages department thought it necessary. Professor Mary Williams knew how to drive her students, but she won their respect because she drove herself as hard as she drove them. She abhorred all that was slovenly, and the rigorous intellectual discipline to which we were subjected left an indelible impression on us all. Her literary interests lay in the mediæval field, particularly in source study with special reference to the debt of French Arthurian literature to Wales. Her work on this subject is known far beyond the shores of these islands.



After an interregnum of two years, the college appointed R. C. Knight to the Chair and Headship of the Department of French. He was Senior Lecturer in French at the University of Birmingham and had already made a name for himself as a leading Racine scholar. At Oxford, he had been the pupil of Eugène Vinaver, who has probably exercised a wider influence on French studies in Britain during the past forty years than anybody else (I myself had the good fortune to be a very junior colleague of his at Manchester for eight years). For Vinaver what mattered were the literary masterpieces, the craftsmanship which had gone into their making, the human experience which they expressed. He played a major part in shifting the focus of undergraduate literary studies from the history of literature to a close study of the individual texts. This was R. C. Knight's view, which he expressed with admirable succinctness in his own inaugural lecture delivered nearly twenty-four years ago, and I quote:

'For, in our studies, the facts are not merely raw material for generalizations, as they are to the scientist: the facts matter more than the generalizations; they are books, and to cause great books to be rightly read and fully enjoyed is the chief end of our teaching of literature, as I understand it. The man who, like Taine, reads a book only to know the man that wrote it, or the society behind the man, is not studying literature, but some kind of psychology or history'. (2).

Throughout the twenty-four years of his teaching at this college, this remained R. C. Knight's guiding principle, and he succeeded in stimulating in successive generations of students the appreciation of great literature, thus broadening their taste and knowledge of human experience. Their debt to him is considerable. This he did without sacrificing the standard of language teaching for which the Department had already gained a high reputation. He was responsible for the introduction of Italian and Spanish as degree subjects, thus transforming the Department into a Department of Romance Studies, the name it has borne since 1964.

It may be thought that this inaugural lecture should touch upon all three languages taught in the Department. However, the Head of Department holds the Chair of French, and French is the only one of the three in which I have any competence. My decision to limit the subject of my lecture to French should not be taken as an indication that, in my view, French should occupy *a priori* a place apart, though, in fact, it has done so in this island since

1066. I would not wish French to flourish at the expense of Italian and Spanish and would welcome greater parity among all the modern languages taught at this college.

It was once the tradition for a newly appointed professor to range over the whole field of French studies in his inaugural lecture, and perhaps this is what my title has led you to expect to-night. If so, you will be disappointed. As the field widened and research probed deeper into every century, it became more and more customary for inaugural lectures to consider the new professor's own research interests. Since mine lie principally in the field of mediæval literature, I felt that this would provide a subject of interest to only a small minority of those present. I have decided, therefore, to describe the long struggle that French had to wage for recognition as an academic discipline and the way in which it has developed as such, ending with a statement of my own approach to its study in the context of this college. I realise that by adopting this course, I risk appearing trite. However, I have many precedents to fall back on, and I can name men incomparably more distinguished than I can ever aspire to be, who have chosen for their inaugural lectures subjects outside the field in which they made their reputations. One inaugural lecture delivered by a professor of mathematics at the University of Padua in 1592 took as its subject the relevance of academic dress. The professor's name was Galileo.

Though French was only accepted as an academic discipline by British universities in the nineteenth century, and then not by all, it has, for historical reasons, occupied a place apart from other foreign languages in the life of this island since the Norman Conquest. It was then that it became the vernacular of the court and the nobility, rapidly gaining wide currency too among clerics and the professional and merchant classes. As it came to be used by people of mixed parentage or of pure English descent, it was quickly influenced by English accent and usage, so that by the end of the twelfth century writers of continental origin stressed the superiority of their French over that of England, some two centuries before Chaucer's prioress, to whom the French of Paris was unknown.

During the twelfth century, a command of French was a *sine qua non* for every ambitious young man, and the process of gallicisation became so widespread that French bade fair to become the first language in England by the beginning of the thirteenth century. Now occurred the event that was

to herald the turn of the tide, the loss of Normandy to the English crown, loosening the bonds between life in this island and the continent, cutting from its sources Anglo-Norman, as the French which had developed on this side of the Channel is called to-day, and turning it more and more into an acquired language. The death-blow was struck by Edward III's determination to create a new national feeling during the Hundred Years' War, paradoxically since French remained the language of his court until his death. In 1362 he disallowed the use of French in pleading, claiming that it had come to be badly known. Had this been the sole reason for the enactment, it is strange that it took the legal profession, despite its notorious conservativeness, until 1731 before it turned to English as the one medium for recording lawsuits. This seems to bear out the view that Edward's motives were, in some measure, political. The French that remained in current use at the King's court began to change its character, for those English writers who still wrote in French tended to model their usage on continental speech, that of Paris in particular. It was realised how much Anglo-Norman had diverged from the French of France, which had now become the accepted *lingua franca* of the aristocracy of western Europe, the acknowledged language of politeness and refinement, a good command of which was one of the prerequisites of the gentleman. This situation was to persist in Europe until the end of the eighteenth century. In 1783 Frederick the Great, no lackey of the French, persuaded the Academy of Berlin to set a dissertation on the theme of 'The Universality of the French Language'.

Let us return to the island of Britain and the position of French at the schools and universities in the later Middle Ages. French seems to have been widely used in the grammar-schools until the mid-fourteenth century, but at the universities the dominant language was Latin, a position of pre-eminence it was to maintain until the seventeenth century. But students were allowed to use English or French at meals and in their everyday conversation, and at certain Oxford and Cambridge colleges the use of French was actively encouraged. The pattern of university studies in the Middle Ages was for a student to complete an Arts degree before proceeding to either of the more vocational law and theology schools. The courses that made up the curriculum for the Arts degree were in the seven liberal arts, so called because their study was thought to develop the free man, since they offered no monetary rewards. Hence the tradition that has survived until to-day of the non-vocational university course. Three of these subjects—grammar, rhetoric

and dialectic—trained men to use language for reasoning, argument and persuasion, but they concentrated solely on the Latin language and literature. There was no provision for teaching the vernacular in these studies, though the vernacular was used as one of the means of instruction, and there is evidence to show that both English and French were used for this purpose in the fourteenth century. At Oxford, certainly, and probably at Cambridge too, classes in spoken and written French by recognised teachers existed outside the degree courses for those who wished to study the language, future lawyers, for example, for whom a good command was essential, but these classes were governed by strict rules. They must not clash with any of the Arts lectures. Those who followed them had not only to attend lectures in Latin grammar and rhetoric, but were compelled to contribute to the maintenance of the Masters lecturing in these subjects, as were the teachers themselves. The greatest care was taken to ensure that French did not encroach on the dominating position of Latin. I quote from the Chancellor's Book:

'Those who give such lessons [i.e. in spoken and written French] shall swear before the Chancellor and Proctors to observe the statutes; and they shall be subject to the control of the superintendent Grammar Masters, and they shall pay thirteen shillings and four pence a year to the Masters in Arts, by way of recompense for the injury done by them to their schools, and if there be only one of them he shall pay the whole sum'. (3).

This quotation from an Oxford regulation which existed at the beginning of the fifteenth century, perhaps earlier, suggests, to me at least, that the study of French may have been more popular than that of Latin among many of the students, in spite of Latin's great prestige in the world of learning.

In the three pre-Reformation foundations in Scotland: St. Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen, all of which had been modelled on the Universities of Paris and Orleans and had maintained closer ties with them than with Oxford and Cambridge, we find similar provision for French, though there too, in the European tradition, it occupied no place in the degree curriculum composed of the seven liberal arts. I cannot refrain from quoting from an early sixteenth-century University of Aberdeen charter since, in addition to mentioning the place of French, it throws light on the *mores* of students and perhaps of teachers.

'It is strictly forbidden for all within the said university to consort with whores and to carry swords and daggers in secret or in public and to roam by night as pimps and dandies. They are to be given over to good behaviour and occupied with lofty study, conversing among themselves in Latin or French, and not in the vernacular tongue'. (4).

In our more permissive age such restrictions on students' liberty would be unthinkable. However, they may appear less inappropriate in a university which culled its motto in Psalm III, verse 10: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. Need I say that this regulation is no longer in force? The encouragement to converse in French leads me to believe that provision to teach the language must have existed at Aberdeen as at Oxford.

By the sixteenth century not only was French firmly established as the language of elegance and refinement, though challenged for a while by Italian and Spanish, but it was ousting Latin as the language of diplomacy. Nevertheless, sixteenth-century humanistic studies and the rediscovery of classical Greek literature militated for a time against the study of French at Oxford and Cambridge, and no doubt at the Scottish universities as well. Latin strengthened its hold on the curriculum, particularly at Cambridge, where openings for teachers of French appear to have been fewer than at Oxford. In spite of official discouragement, however, French and, to a lesser extent, Italian were widely read for pleasure by students at both universities during the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century.

Judging from what has survived, the material used by teachers of French during the whole of the period discussed so far was much more utilitarian and less systematic than that used for teaching Latin as an academic discipline. The method in Latin was to commit grammar to memory and to study rhetoric in the works of Latin writers in prose and verse. French material, on the contrary, maintained close links with everyday life, showing that the language was studied primarily as a means of communication. Collections of model letters were used for instruction in French epistolary art. Surviving treatises, often in the form of dialogues, were aimed at increasing the learner's vocabulary, though they contained a small amount of essential grammar, introduced unsystematically as required in specific situations. This method was still being adopted in the eighteenth century, when French was reintroduced into the curriculum of some of the grammar schools, all of

which had been solidly committed to the Græco-Roman classics for the previous two centuries. That French continued to be refused the status of an academic discipline at the universities, and was considered rather as a fashionable accomplishment is illustrated by the situation that existed in the University of Edinburgh during the early eighteenth century. The Teacher of French, as he was called, had a room in the university, but he did not hold a university appointment and was usually bracketed with the teachers of painting, music and dancing, and the instructors in fencing and riding.

The first attempt to gain official recognition for French came at the time of the Restoration, when what proved to be a vain move was made to establish a Chair of French Eloquence at Oxford. Nevertheless, the general climate was becoming more favourable to modern languages. At that time we come across the first suggestions that they might be more suitable vehicles than Latin for imparting knowledge, and in France itself the claim that the French literature of the seventeenth century was in no way inferior to that of antiquity was gaining wide acceptance. By 1700 French had come to be regarded by many in this island as an essential part of a liberal education. It was indisputably the dominant language in Europe, yet, among candidates for government service, the supply of men who could handle it competently, or any other European language for that matter, was woefully inadequate. In 1724 an experiment was tried by George II's government to introduce the teaching of modern languages at Oxford and Cambridge. Twenty young men at each university were to receive free instruction in modern history and modern languages with a view to entering the service of the state. Two teachers of modern languages were to work under the direction of the professor who was to hold the newly endowed Regius Chair of Modern History at each university. Though the chairs were in modern history, the letter from the government to each university laid great stress on the need for competent linguists, and little on the need for modern historians. One wonders whether the decision to place language teachers under the direction of a historian was really a device for allaying the fears of the classical fellows, whose worst suspicions must have been aroused by a development that would have appeared inimical to their vested interests. The course lasted for three years and was open to scholars of at least two years' standing. Nearly all of the first intake of students studied French as one of their two languages, but some, unsuited to the course, failed to complete it. Of those who succeeded, three only found appropriate employment, and so the scheme collapsed,

though the Regius Chairs of Modern History subsist to this day. As for the posts in modern languages, they continued an undistinguished existence until they were suppressed around the middle of the last century. Yet, despite its lack of success, this scheme is important as the first organised attempt to start a degree-type course in modern languages in England.

The first Chairs of Modern Languages were founded at Trinity College, Dublin, some time between 1776 and 1778. There were two Chairs, one of French and German and the other of Italian and Spanish. The first holder of the Chair of French and German was one Antonio Desca, LL.B., whose name suggests that he might have been better qualified for the Chair of Italian and Spanish. His successor was the minister of the French church in Dublin. The third incumbent seems to have been a qualified medical practitioner, though he did possess a French name. The inclusion of modern languages among the subjects that it was possible to study for an Arts degree at Trinity only came much later.

It is to University College, London, which admitted its first students in 1828, that goes the distinction of raising modern languages to the status of the more traditional subjects and of including them in the degree scheme. University College was born out of the social changes which followed the Industrial Revolution. It had two main aims: the first was to provide higher education for those unable or unwilling to go to Oxford or Cambridge, and the second was to afford the opportunity of studying subjects neglected by the two ancient universities. It drew many of its distinctive features from the Scottish universities, but with one great difference. It was less hide-bound by the traditional syllabus of the Arts degree, and among the extended range of subjects introduced into its degree scheme were French, German, Italian and Spanish, in all of which Chairs were founded. Three, if not all four of them, were filled by political exiles from the countries in question, of whom there were many in Britain at the time, and so started the practice of appointing foreign nationals to Chairs of Modern Languages, which lasted well into the present century. One interesting innovation was the titles of the Chairs. They were not Chairs of French, German, Italian and Spanish, but of French Literature and Language, German Literature and Language, etc., Literature seemingly being placed deliberately before Language.

When King's College, London, established under Anglican auspices, opened its doors in 1831, professors with the same four titles had been installed. Among the qualifications of the Professor of French Literature

and Language was that he was a convert to the Church of England and had translated Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible* into his native tongue, dedicating it to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been a member of the College Foundation Committee. The text of his inaugural lecture has survived. Though I have not read it, I gather that it was an introductory survey of the whole of French literature.

Durham, founded a year later, was less progressive. This is scarcely surprising, since it was modelled on Christ Church, Oxford. Among its original posts was a Lectureship in Modern Languages, it is true, but within twelve years it had been reduced to the status of teachership. For some decades the appointee seems merely to have provided service teaching, for which he was paid by the hour. In 1868, the Teacher, who bore the picturesque name of Monsieur de Karpe, informed the university authorities that he found it impossible to deal satisfactorily with the large number of students studying French in two hours a week. He was permitted to raise these to four, and his miserable pittance was increased accordingly.

The civic universities and the University of Wales, founded at regular intervals from 1850 onwards, followed the example of the London colleges. Modern languages, usually French and German, were introduced as part of the degree curriculum from the beginning, though few started with Chairs in each; most, in fact, seem to have started with one Lectureship for both. Aberystwyth went one better still, for it appointed a Professor of Hebrew and Modern Languages. It is because of this combination that the Chair attracted as its second incumbent one of the most remarkable characters the college has ever appointed, Hermann Ethe, a German scholar with an international reputation, who had originally come to Britain in order to catalogue the oriental manuscripts at the Bodleian. He was responsible for French for nineteen years, until a separate Department and Chair of French were established. What his qualifications were for teaching it I do not know, but his knowledge is said to have been encyclopædic.

This overlong saga of the struggle of French and the other modern languages for acceptance as respectable academic disciplines cannot end without a brief word about their fate in the ancient universities, English and Scottish, in all of which traditional attitudes died hard. Cambridge was the first to relent with the establishment of the Mediæval and Modern Languages Tripos in 1884. The four Scottish universities followed when, in 1892,

the Crown Commissioners substituted a degree scheme with multiple options for the old inflexible Arts curriculum made up of seven or eight prescribed courses. Here, as at Cambridge, these innovations were introduced only after long and acrimonious discussions, the majority of classical scholars expressing the firm conviction that people of minimal intelligence could learn French and German with ease.

Finally, Oxford capitulated. Though instruction in modern languages had been provided at the Taylor Institution since it opened in 1848, French and German first received minimal recognition as optional courses in the pass degree in 1872. An abortive attempt to establish a Modern Language School was made in 1887. While a Final Honours School in English was accepted seven years later, European languages had to wait until 1903 for full recognition. But the battle in the men's colleges had only just begun, and the creation of tutorial fellowships was woefully slow. When Sir Charles Firth's book entitled *Modern Languages at Oxford* appeared in 1929, only one of the men's colleges had taken this step, surprisingly Christ Church. St. John's, Oriel and Queen's followed suit during the 1930s. While some other colleges appointed lecturers during this period, their election of Tutorial Fellows in French had to wait until after the second World War. The staunchest opponent of modern languages was Balliol. In 1973, however, it finally yielded and, believe it or not, appointed as its first modern language fellow a woman, thus fully accepting modern languages on the day of its recognition that the age of woman's liberation was dawning. Need I add that the attitude of the women's colleges to modern languages was far more enlightened? In them, the election of Tutorial Fellows came sooner.

This arduous struggle to win acceptability as an academic discipline in the universities was to have a profound influence on French syllabuses and on the teaching methods adopted. Since the acquisition of the language had been considered to be a social accomplishment up to the eighteenth century, the teaching methods had been little affected by the formal nature of the teaching of Latin and Greek. But when French began to be accepted as an academic discipline at the grammar schools and universities there was a natural tendency to turn to the methods of teaching a dead language, since they had been hallowed by long use. Their adoption no doubt surrounded the new discipline with a pale aura of respectability in the eyes of other academics, but it was to have a disastrous consequence, which has only recently been corrected. I speak of the total neglect of the spoken language.



Another important factor which affected the teaching of French at the time at which it was being introduced as an academic subject into British universities was the great prestige of German scholarship. German scholars of the first half of the nineteenth century had led the world with their research in comparative philology and historical linguistics, and these soon became the central components of undergraduate courses in modern languages beyond the Rhine, where such courses were seen as training in research methods. Mediæval texts, for example, instead of being studied as works of literature, were treated as material for discussing etymologies and sound laws. I must make it clear that I am not criticising nineteenth-century German scholarship, for which I have the highest regard. What can, with hindsight, be seen to have been mistaken, however, was the wholesale and uncritical application to undergraduate studies in French in Britain of certain German methods in order to demonstrate the academic soundness of the new discipline to those who had opposed it with such grim determination. The prestige of German scholarship was harmful to the study of French in another way, temporarily at least. When, in the early days, a Lecturer in Modern Languages was appointed to teach both French and German, as was often the case, the post tended to go to a German, and this no doubt militated further against practice in spoken French. When the first British-trained graduates started to fill Chairs early this century, they were predominantly philologists by training, and so it is not surprising that what would be considered to-day to be an excessive philological bias was given by them to the Honours French syllabuses.

French literature was not neglected; there were courses covering it from its origins to the middle of the nineteenth century, but in them the emphasis was placed entirely on the broad currents of literary development, with hardly more than passing reference to the individual works themselves. These disappeared beneath a mass of detail about the author's life and the various influences to which, it was claimed, he had been subjected. Students were expected to read the works of literature in their spare time, and no doubt the better ones did, but little effective check was kept, since the written work was more often set on the background than on the texts themselves. I have often wondered how many students succeeded in obtaining a Second Class Honours degree by concentrating entirely on the manuals of literary history and without the close reading of a single text. Quite a number, I suspect.

A change of attitude did not come overnight. Among the first to give expression to it were Eugène Vinaver, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this lecture, and P. M. Jones, Carmarthen born, an undergraduate at Aberystwyth before the first World War, and university teacher at Cardiff, Cambridge, Bangor and Manchester. By the time he retired, he had become to very many the most widely respected and beloved of the professors of French of his generation. The new trend began to make itself felt in the late twenties. For those who shared the views of Vinaver and P. M. Jones, the focal point of any course in literature should be the close study of the literary masterpiece, a shift of emphasis which brought in its wake a method for training students in the technique of reading a text closely. As its name, *explication*, indicates, it had been pioneered by the French and had come to occupy a central place in the teaching of literature across the Channel, at secondary schools and universities. It had developed from the exercise of commenting upon Greek and Latin texts, in which case it had been primarily linguistic. By adapting it to literary texts in the vernacular, French educationalists, with their Cartesian background, saw in it, above all, an instrument to develop the pupil's ability to think and express himself with clarity and method and only secondly as a means of training him to appreciate the beauties of a great piece of literature. Those of us who have received part of their education at a French school or university know how stimulating this exercise can be when well done, but how it can descend to the stereotyped and occasionally even to the absurd, as it is practised by a number of teachers. Sometimes I still dream of a class that I once attended and which was devoted to an explication of one of La Fontaine's fables, in the course of which each comma was endowed with an almost mystical significance. Though *explication* was first tentatively introduced into this country in the 1920s, it was not until after the second World War that it became widely adopted in British universities. Its value is not in question, since it forms the student's perception and taste, and I feel that on this side of the Channel many of the pit-falls of the method have been avoided, because it has been applied more flexibly and imaginatively.

As university departments of French have grown since 1945, they have tended to broaden their syllabuses to enable interested students to study at least one of the following aspects of French life and culture as part of their course: philosophy, history, politics, painting, music, to name the most popular, though usually the study of language and literature has remained

the central core. During the last ten years or so, in five of the new universities and several polytechnics, Honours courses combining the study of language with that of economics, politics, sociology or business studies have been devised, and it is certain that they fulfil a need. When the Languages Board of the Council for National Academic Awards was set up ten years ago to advise Polytechnics on the planning of degree courses in modern languages, its aim was to ensure that as little duplication as possible existed between courses at universities and polytechnics, for it viewed the latter as complementary to the former, but it has not been entirely successful. In two or three polytechnics in which the staff have been insistent, a traditional language and literature course has been allowed to develop.

Technical aids in the teaching of the spoken language have been perfected beyond recognition within the last century. In 1977 we shall celebrate the centenary of Edison's invention of the phonograph, which made it possible to record speech accurately for the first time. This was certainly an important factor in starting to shift the emphasis of both linguistic research and language teaching from the written to the spoken word. The invention of the tape-recorder with its greater flexibility after the second World War marked a further step forward, until finally in the early sixties the language laboratory was born. It was confidently predicted at the time by many who should have known better, but who were no doubt misled by the manufacturers' lavish publicity, that now it would be possible to train competent linguists in a matter of weeks and that the days of the modern language teacher were numbered. None of this has happened. The language laboratory has proved to be a useful new technological aid, which has relieved the teacher of some of the drudgery. It is most valuable during the early stages of learning a foreign language, when the class is dealing with fundamentals, but it has yet to find its proper place in advanced language teaching. What about its use to Departments of French, which recruit students who have studied the language for at least six years at school? It has been most effective at first-year level, though it must be made clear that it cannot be an adequate substitute for small conversation groups with native speakers, since it is unable to simulate the face-to-face aspect of spoken communication. At present, two main problems relate to the use of language laboratories in the teaching of French at universities. The first is that suitable material is in short supply, because publishers have understandably preferred to cater for the far larger school market, with its greater monetary returns. This is a deficiency that

it should be relatively easy to make good, and in the not distant future. The second problem may prove more intractable, and that is the dislike felt by many twenty year olds for the monitored class of some fifteen or so, in which they find themselves in relative isolation, apart from the students and in spasmodic contact with the tutor. Language laboratories have far greater potentialities for boredom than classrooms. Somehow, therefore, we must learn to use them in a different way from the way in which they are used with relative beginners. What appears at present to be a more promising line is to treat them as libraries, with the same opening hours as the university library, from nine in the morning to ten at night, so that students can come in for two or three hours at a time, if they so wish, to listen to tapes in a concentrated manner and to practise in their spare time, instead of attending, as is the trend at present, for a fifty-minute session a week to complete certain prescribed exercises. Used in the way I suggest, the language laboratory could be of as much use in the teaching of literature as it is in the teaching of language, but it demands the setting aside of sufficient booths for private study in rooms other than those used for monitored classes and the provision of a tape-library stocked with recordings of all kinds by native speakers, whole plays by the leading French companies, poetry and prose readings, as well as purely linguistic tapes. Students might be prescribed work, but, as in the case of prescribed reading, they would do it in their own time. Of course, all this would demand the adequate staffing of the laboratory. I should like to make it clear that at this college booths are provided for private study.

Another word that has been much to the fore in recent years is programming, and I have been asked on more than one occasion why we do not programme French language syllabuses. While this should not prove too difficult for the early stages of a language, and so at university level wherever a language is taught *ab initio*, students taking French have already studied it for six years. One of the main problems is the great disparity in the linguistic attainment of the students on admission. A-level results are not necessarily an accurate guide to performance because there is often no correlation between the standards reached in language and literary studies. In any case, we only know the overall mark. About four years ago a first step towards solving this problem was taken in Scotland when a group of some ten university teachers of French representing all the Scottish universities held a series of unofficial meetings with a group of leading secondary teachers to discuss whether they could decide among themselves what points of French

grammar pupils could fairly be expected to have mastered at given levels. Such a list was drawn up and had been submitted to official bodies for their views when I left Scotland nearly eighteen months ago. As far as I know, that is where the matter still rests, since consultation of official bodies is apt to be a lengthy procedure. There are inherent dangers in this approach, of course, for while the list is intended to be a minimum, in the minds of some teachers minimum has a habit of becoming maximum, and it could be argued that you will end up with a lowering of the level of achievement. Nonetheless, a satisfactory answer can never be found unless schools and universities come together to search for a solution. In the past, collaboration between the two has been woefully lacking.

One consequence of this initiative is that a team made up of members of French staffs from all the Scottish universities, with the collaboration of the Institut Français d'Ecosse at Edinburgh, has been working for more than a year to devise a first-year university French language course, in which both the spoken and the written language will have their place. If successful, and I have every hope that it will be, I feel sure that the course will be profitably used far south of the Tweed, perhaps even west of the Severn. This year, in fact, we at Swansea have had permission to use some of the tapes on an experimental basis, and very good they are too. What is likely to be more important is the course-book, which, it is hoped, will appear in about three years from now.

The time is overdue for me to say a few words about the development of French studies in this college over the next few years, as I see it. This is one of the smaller French Departments in the country—strictly, it is only part of the Department of Romance Studies, but for the sake of convenience I shall call it a department. Apart from Lampeter, it is the smallest in Wales in terms of staff, though not in terms of students. In 1975 it produced more single and joint Honours graduates than the French Departments of any of the other four constituent colleges of the University. In an ideal situation, one would like to cater for a number of diverse interests and approaches, but in a department of this size this is impossible. What must be safeguarded above all else is the quality of the teaching, and so diversification at the expense of the pursuit of excellence would be disastrous. The tradition of the course in this Department from its inception has been in the fields of language and literature, though a few years ago the opportunity was provided for the study of political ideas. It is in line with the predominant tradition of the

subject at British universities, and it is a very natural one, because literature is language at its most sophisticated. It is impossible to divorce literature from language, and that is why a sound command of language is essential for the proper appreciation of literature.

This leads me to a matter that concerns me a great deal, as it does many of my colleagues who teach modern languages at universities, and that is the lack of rigour in teaching the native language in a number of schools. Many school-teachers of English seem obsessed by the Romantic notion that all that matters is the creativeness of their pupils, and they pay scant attention to the manner in which the thoughts are expressed in writing. Grammar is treated as a dirty word and norms of current usage are disregarded. Grammatical categories used for over two thousand years have been rejected on the grounds that they are inadequate and misleading, but what is serious is that they have not been replaced by better ones. However unsatisfactory the traditional categories may be to the specialist in linguistics, at least they provided the pupil with a frame of reference which allowed him to think in terms of language. To-day, unfortunately, a growing number of our students can no longer do this. In recent years I have been asked what I meant by the terms 'adverb', 'present participle' and 'subordination', to name but three. Such ignorance makes the task of the teacher of foreign languages incomparably harder, whether it be at a secondary school or at a university. I wish I knew what to do about it.

What should a student have achieved in language by the end of his Honours course? While it would be unreasonable to expect him to have acquired a command of several registers of speech, he should have learnt to write and speak everyday French with fluency and accuracy. In the past, French Departments have tended to concentrate too exclusively on the literary language, sometimes even ignoring the common core of general language which must be mastered before studying any of the more specialised registers. Of these, the one in which he should have reached a level of competence is, of course, the literary register, thus permitting him to deal with abstractions in speech and writing. The year spent in France, now obligatory in most British universities, is essential in my view, for it provides the only opportunity that the great majority of students have for a near total immersion over a period of several months, and, in many cases, it is an important factor in furthering the student's maturity. For those more keenly interested in language than in literature the opportunity must be given for

its deeper study by providing classes in linguistics conducted by a specialist in the subject and others on the evolution of French, to show it as a dynamic phenomenon constantly changing to meet new needs as well as a mirror of the civilisation and culture of France.

Let us now pass to the study of literature. Like my predecessor, I am strongly of the opinion that a very important function of any degree course in the Humanities is to teach the student to read meaningfully, and by that I mean, with sufficient concentration and perception to allow him to extract the deeper significance of texts and to appreciate the skill with which they have been written. It is alarming how, in this age when so much is presented by the mass-media, often superficially and, I regret to say, trivially, the art of concentration in face of the printed word is being lost. Man will be the poorer if this is allowed to happen.

I think that in the first-year, when our students have to study three subjects and so can only devote one-third of their time to French, the literature course should deal largely with contemporary works or, at the most, with nineteenth- and twentieth-century works, so as to avoid the kind of linguistic confusion which may arise in the mind of the average first-year student, whose command of the contemporary language is still uncertain and limited. In my opinion, and I respect those who hold the contrary view, it is too early to plunge him into archaic vocabulary, syntax and style, too early to introduce him to the best literature of past centuries. Not only will his acquisition of twentieth-century French suffer, but his inadequate reading skill in French of earlier centuries may encourage him to read the works in English translations, which now proliferate. When this happens, one of the main *raison d'être* of a university course in French disappears. The student might as well be following a liberal arts course in European literature.

In recent years there has been much criticism of the historical approach to literature. To me it is still a valid approach, but I would agree that it must no longer be the historical approach as practised in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, with the emphasis on literary movements and biographical details about the authors. It must now be used to help our understanding of the texts and thereby our appreciation of them. In second- and final-year courses, is it possible to present a great text of the past in terms of its intrinsic values and implications at a level of understanding that can legitimately be expected of an Honours student, if it is studied entirely out

of its historical context: I still remember with pain Zeffirelli's production of *Romeo and Juliet* in which the heroine was transmogrified into *Baby Doll*. That was not interpreting the text in modern terms, it was a deliberate distortion of what Shakespeare was trying to say. Honours students should be made to search for the author's meaning within the context of the author's time, even if it can never be found with absolute certainty. I would hope that our students would be brought into contact with several approaches to literature, not merely the historical or the aesthetic, since students react differently. It is our task to provide them, as far as we can, with the means of fulfilling their own potential. The development of their self-awareness and the growth in their appreciation of human values are, in my view, the most important prizes that they can win from the study of the great works of literature. These deal with the main problems of human existence, with man's relations to his fellows, with the very meaning of life itself. How many of us have learnt more about ourselves by reading some of the great works of the past than by any other means? French literature is ideally suited to the study of the human predicament, for in none other do we find a greater store of human experience and wisdom.

The language and literature of France may have had to wage a long struggle before winning recognition as an academic discipline, but I have no doubt as to their right to be so recognised and to stand side by side with the other great humanities in the very centre of the Faculty of Arts. Long may they prosper at this college!

NOTES

(1) Since this is a lecture, I have deliberately avoided cluttering it with references, but it behoves me to acknowledge my debt to the following works: Kathleen Lambley, *The Teaching and Cultivation of the French Language in England during Tudor and Stuart Times*, Manchester, 1924; Sir Charles Firth, *Modern Languages at Oxford 1724-1929*, Oxford, 1929; M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French with especial consideration of Anglo-Norman*, Manchester, 1934; W. Rothwell, 'The Teaching of French in Medieval England', *The Modern Language Review*, LXIII (1968), 37-46; H. H. Bellot, *University College London 1826-1926*, London 1929; F. J. C. Hearnshaw, *The Centenary History of King's College London 1828-1929*, London, 1929; C. Whiting, *The University of Durham 1832-1932*, London, 1932; D. Emrys Evans, *The University of Wales. A Historical Sketch*, Cardiff, 1953; G. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect. Scotland and her Universities in the nineteenth century*, Edinburgh, 1961; D. B. Horn, *A Short History of the University of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1967. For the information about Trinity College, Dublin and Oxford since 1929, I am indebted to Emeritus Professor T. B. W Reid.

(2) R. C. Knight, *Racine, Convention and Classicism*, Swansea, 1952, p.28.

(3) *Munimenta Academica*, ed. H. Anstey, London, 1868, pp. 302-3.

(4) *Fasti Aberdonenses*, 1494-1854, Aberdeen, 1854, p.100.



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