

As we enter the third year of our new composition program, we have found that choosing textbooks is becoming easier because publishers are now aware of the interest in international/multicultural themes and they are producing some excellent new collections with a much wider choice of authors. One of these anthologies contains sixty short stories from thirty different countries; another redefines American literature by including Canadian, Caribbean, and minority groups traditionally excluded.² Another publisher has developed an extensive list of non-western literature complete with study guides.³ Also, there are bookstores which are beginning to specialize in the new collections which are appearing.⁴ These and others which are being published soon will offer a broad selection of authors and genres, with accompanying instructors' guides and teaching aids. These texts will eliminate the problems we encountered in availability, and they will offer a wider range of choice. In fact, we have decided to use the new anthology *Sudden Fiction International* (mentioned above) for both College English I and II next year. Authors from six continents and thirty countries are represented, including Argentina, Guatemala, Poland, the Soviet Union, Japan, China, Australia, Botswana, and others. We intend to designate certain sections or stories for each level and decide in our first meeting various ways in which they can be taught. Although in both courses, we have felt the best location for our unit on fiction was at the end of the semester, we may find that with short fiction we can intersperse selections with other assignments. We may run several pilot sections to see how effective this alternate scheme is. Also, in College English I, we want to introduce the students to non-western ideas earlier in the semester. At present, we teach them to develop positions on current issues such as gun control, capital punishment, and animal experimentation. But our selections and focus have been limited to American authors and publications. We are considering trying to broaden our perspective by not only using appropriate stories from the anthology but articles from newspapers and magazines illustrating how the issue is viewed and dealt with in other cultures.

It is not an easy decision to abandon our favorite authors and the tradition we have been trained in, but American universities, English departments, and even composition teachers have been isolated and themselves largely ignorant of the great body of literature which is non-western. That's why it has come as a surprise to many for a Colombian, a Nigerian, and an Egyptian author to win the Nobel prize in literature, for a Chilean woman to top the best seller list in this country, for a Laguna Pueblo woman to win one of the coveted MacArthur Prizes, and for a Mexican to have one of his novels made into a popular film starring Gregory Peck. Yet this recognition is hardly amazing to the rest of the world who feels it is long overdue. America is only one of the many countries on this planet, and it is time that we realized that other people have voices which should be heard, read, and studied by ourselves and our students, too. Internationalizing the Freshman English curriculum is only a small step in this direction, but it will help by opening a door for our students so that they can begin to have an understanding not just of their home towns and states, their country and hemisphere — but of the entire earth.

NOTES

¹The report of the NEH Institute on the Theory and Teaching of World Literature includes discussions of the planning and teaching of new courses by the participants. This report can be obtained by writing to Professor Sarah Lawall, Department of Comparative Literature, South Building, The University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts.

²Jerome Beaty and J. Paul Hunter, *New Worlds of Literature* (New

York: Norton, 1989).

³Heinemann Educational Books, 4 Front Street, Exeter, New Hampshire 03833.

⁴Pandora Book Peddlers, 68 West Palisade Avenue, Englewood, New Jersey 07631.

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I'LL SHOW YOU MY FOG INDEX IF YOU'LL SHOW ME YOURS

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If it is acceptable to begin with conclusions, then let me state that there is no conclusive, statistically valid data to show that the use of typewriters results in measurable and predictable improvement in students' writing skills, Remington typewriter ads notwithstanding. For our study, we followed the careers of umpteen million students from their freshman English experience through ten years of post-college experience. Once each decade we read two hundred words chosen at random from papers retrieved from random garbage dumps around the country. These papers were evaluated by a team of trained experts using a modified holistic system. In order to assure valid response, each reader used a different point scale (4-point, 7-point, 22-point, and the like), and the resultant values were correlated using the NCTE-Umlaut Generation test. [This test has remarkable coefficient correlation with the famous "Nine out of Ten Doctors Recommend Crest" sampling technique.]

Enough already! A pox on all the houses of those who seek to turn the experience of writing into a numerical experience. Damn and blast on those regnostic souls who trust formulae more than their own linguistic sensitivity! I come fresh from yet another CCCC where a legion of papers was presented with the intention of proving or disproving or commenting upon the worth of the computer as a tool in training people to write better. My anger at the pseudo-research I have been stuffed with for the past three days swells my fingers to the clumsy point. Never have so many proved so much with so little expertise: they proved that humanists untrained in statistical modeling should stay away from numerical testing. Most of them wouldn't know a Chi Square from Times Square. The one paper I heard that asserted that the results were "statistically significant" was based on the experience of two semesters by about eight teachers. Back to the garbage dump! One paper was meant to show that writing checkers (Writers Work Bench et al) are not of value in conceptualizing and organizing a work. That is almost tantamount to saying that looking at a menu after one has eaten will provide a better culinary experience. Menus provide guidance before one eats as writing checkers analyze writing after it is done.

What is needed is not another NCTE white paper on the

efficacy of using micro computers in teaching writing! What is in order is a simple resolution. And, obviously, this resolution should embrace much more than the limited question of computer technology in our classrooms and laboratories. (Just think of the presumption in calling our writing centers "laboratories" with the attendant hint of scientific approach and application!) Most teachers of English have been trained in the Humanities, a discipline in which the study of statistical inference and research design is notably absent. The "research" that is done in this discipline amounts mainly to a sophisticated game of trying to ferret out a dimension of a work heretofore unnoticed and to substantiate that observation with highly selective quotes from others in our business. Granted there is nothing amiss about this: it provides in its exercise the opportunity for others to quote still others in order to refute the original observation. [Read, if you've the stomach for it, the point and counterpoint trivia in some of our journals.] Of course, rebuttal must at all costs be polite and circuitous. Dangerous it is to boldly say that Professor Errant Brain has exposed his diminished mental processes indecently. No, not dangerous, actually, because such direct challenge rarely sees the printed page. Too many of our profession are like the scholars that Alice of Bath parodies. At least Alice had experience going for her! Perhaps Chaucer was prescient. Had he modern scholars also in mind in the Reeve's Tale when the miller challenged the two students from Cambridge to conjure up a larger room than he had to offer them? I suggest that creating larger conclusions than reality admits is precisely what much of our current "research" binge in the writing area is all about.

Not long ago there was the case of a writing program directorship open. Among the applications was a person of some experience, whose name was deleted because he was accused of being a "number cruncher," meaning that he insisted on hard statistical proof before reaching conclusions. Quite unlike the scholar at MLA a few years ago who showed that computers vastly improve the quality of student writing, his evidence being 16 students in one semester in one class. At the 1987 CCCC meeting a scholar "demonstrated" that computer-assisted writing instruction does not work — despite the fact that a number of objections to his model structure existed. Another "proved" that writing checkers had no great value and based much of his "proof" on a comparison of some contemporary student writing with speeches by William Jennings Bryan and Abraham Lincoln in the last century. Shades of Morpheus! Must we

go to professional meetings, spend university funds, tire our bodies, cheat our students of class time only to hear this sort of chop logic?

For some time many of us felt that NCTE was a more professional organization than MLA. And for much of that time some of us have felt that CCCC was the best of NCTE. And a few of us have been around long enough to see CCCC energies diverted into areas that perhaps we should have stayed out of: the gay lit hubbub of a long ago Boston CCCC convention, the African divestment stir at another, the ERA challenge at Cincinnati, and the Wyoming uproar in Atlanta. Mayhaps all of these are legitimate causes, but some of us — dare I cloak us in the phrase "a minority"? — would very much like to see NCTE and CCCC focus on the original reason for our being — the improvement of literacy skills for our students. Illiteracy for a long time to come is going to result in social and professional discrimination long after race and sexual preference rights are established.

Raise your glasses (or your Yellow Scott, Foresman mugs) in a toast. Join our little band that seeks to have the profession — not just isolated minute pockets of teachers — the whole damned profession set about studying what works and what doesn't. Do readers work? Can we dare challenge that sacred cow? Do rhetorics and/or handbooks work — another Fat Cow strolling unchallenged through our bookstores and — what is worse — our classrooms? Do standardized tests (ACT, SAT, GRE) have any validity? Has the profession ever taken a shot at them? Did the quill pen work in the 17th century, the typewriter in the early 20th? Will the computer work in the future? Can't we set about collectively evaluating what we are up to? Or must we continue to suffer the baseless and boring papers poorly read and more poorly illustrated with scrawled and illegible transparencies?

But we were about to have a resolution for our happy band to ponder. WHEREAS, most humanists are ill trained in statistical methods, and WHEREAS, conventions are of more value when people learn and are refreshed by the experience, and WHEREAS, proof of any human change requires a fair passage of time before it is certifiable, BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that NCTE and CCCC meetings will cease and desist from the promulgation of superficial results, and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the word "research" shall not be spoken during the time of any NCTE and CCCC meeting.

— A Wounded Soul