

the electrical discharge as being a "60 volt current". In every beginning physics class, one learns that current is expressed in amperes. Names are sometimes used confusingly and the uninitiated reader may not know which species, or that the same species, is being discussed: in two pages, the African knife fish is referred to as a mormyrid, and then by the generic name.

Overall, the book has attempted to take on a very large subject, and its organization includes unnecessary duplication and confusion, perhaps because it was hastily written. It is not a book for the specialist; and, in spite of its beautiful illustrations, it is difficult to recommend it for the beginner because of errors which appear between those chapters that are well written.

John H. Prescott
New England Aquarium

Joseph Gold, ed.
IN THE NAME OF LANGUAGE!
Toronto:
Macmillan, 1975.
209 pp. \$5.95.

The jauntily superficial attitudes of "experts" that brought about many "with it" programmes and curricula in the sixties were bound to get their come-uppance, and this book is one instance of the counter attack. Editor Joseph Gold unfurls the battle banner in his Preface when he says, "For too long we have given our Discipline into the hands of 'educationists'." However, the eight essays that constitute the book do not join in direct confrontation with the exponents of permissiveness in language. Despite the origin of the book, in a 1973 gathering of Ontario teachers of English to discuss "The Survival of Literacy", the book is not a collection of apologetic diatribes

against "newfangledness". Instead the writers offer a thoughtful presentation of ideas on various facets of language and on its relation, not to academic endeavours alone, but to life in general.

The character of the book can be sensed from the authors: F. E. L. Priestley, George Whalley, Geoffrey Durrant, Michael Hornyansky, Maurice Elliot, Philip H. Smith, Jr., and Joseph Gold himself. Their topics range from Priestley's "English: An Obsolete Industry?" to Smith's "The Failure of the Machine and the Triumph of the Mind".

With so many commissions and journalists providing analyses of the alarming rate of illiteracy in the country (as well as giving innumerable reasons for the inability of almost everyone to read and write), it is worthwhile to hear the personal views of those who live by and love language. Those who also love language will nod in approval at Gold's remark that "It is through the acquisition of language that human beings realize themselves as humans"; those for whom language is a social and a political as well as a humane instrument will recognize the implications of Durrant's comment, "...those who are incompetent in the use of language are forever condemned to believe that language is ineffectual, since they never experience its effective use."

Many aspects of the particular problems of literacy in Canada are not touched upon in these essays, and few directions are given to those who genuinely wish to solve at least the grosser effects of ignorance. However, Durrant has indicted, not too gently, High Priest Marshall McLuhan for his role in making popular "the mystical notion" that language is going out of style, and Smith makes a brief but interesting case against the idea that computers can handle language as well as

can a human being. The book is not meant as a series of solutions to specific problems but as a view of language from those, not often quoted in the press, who have both a wide and a deep insight into what language is and what it can do.

If we are to avoid one of our alternate futures — that of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, we need to listen occasionally to such traditional wisdom as is provided by the essays in this book and is admirably summed up by Gold in his Preface:

The theme that runs through these essays... is that language is inseparable from our humanity, that literature is its highest expression, and that the study and practice of writing, speaking, listening, and reading must once again become the central, nucleic, irreducible mainspring of our culture and of its formal educational system — that is, if we are to sustain the humanity of learning.

Amen.

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Eric W. Johnson
HOW TO ACHIEVE
COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH
New York: Bantam Books, 1976.
184 pp. \$1.50.

Like many books which fall into the "How To" category, the title of Johnson's book promises more than it could possibly achieve. The introduction indicates that the book is not a course of study; it is a reference book, as the subtitle but not the title states.

As a reference book, *How to Achieve Competence in English* has many virtues. It contains information, organized in dictionary format under specific headings such as "colons", "footnotes", and "prefixes", and also treats more general topics such as "plagiarism" and "debating". Its scope extends from definitions of the parts of speech to information on stylistic aspects of writing. Many of its entries are specific and accurate enough to be useful, but others, like those on "the gerund" and "clichés", are not definitive enough.

It is in the area of writing style that Johnson goes beyond the scope of his book as a quick reference guide. Although he is aware of the necessity of avoiding theoretical discussions on writing in a book of this nature, he does not refrain from offering advice on topics which are highly controversial. Many English teachers would consider his suggestions for paragraph-writing dangerous for even the most sophisticated writers. "I feel that much instruction given under the heading 'How to write a Paragraph' is not very useful or realistic. It leads a student to suppose that real people organize their writing by thinking of topic sentences, by supporting the topic sentences with a few points." (p. 43) This extension of scope in a few instances is the most serious flaw of the book.

Nevertheless Johnson has accomplished his task of compiling a quick reference guide, the format of which is quite attractive. The entries are arranged alphabetically and signposted by a large letter on the upper right hand corner of each page. The author claims that this arrangement facilitates "quick use", but I cannot help feeling that it has very little to offer over the practice of including an index at the end of a book.