

## Tekst 6



### SEAN french

1 **H**as anybody famous come out of the “Fame School of Performing Arts” that Paul McCartney helped set up in Liverpool four years ago? And what about that football academy that the FA set up with great publicity in the mid-eighties? What percentage of its graduates have become Premier League footballers? Or even professional footballers in any division?

2 Some cultural academies might be dubious, while others – such as the Royal Academy of Music – are obviously necessary. Nobody can become a classical musician without long and rigorous training. Lots of people who weren’t writers have suddenly produced – in middle, or old age – a good book. No people have overnight, from scratch, become professional classical performers in middle age.

3 There are plenty of grey areas in the subject of teaching the arts. Simon Callow has argued that certain forms of training – especially in the voice – are essential for stage performance. In his biography of Orson Welles, he argued that – with all Welles’s genius – there were still limits as to what he could do on stage because he hadn’t gone to drama school. But Welles became a great screen actor and there are many examples of models, writers, sportsmen and producers becoming fine movie actors. In fact, stage training can be a disadvantage for the movies.

4 But about one thing I have no doubt. The establishment of a “National Academy of Writing”, reported in the *Observer* this week, is a really terrible idea. I don’t just mean that it shouldn’t be a priority, but that it is a bad idea in itself, a waste of money and of the time of everybody involved.

5 You hardly need to marshal contrary arguments, just observe the cloudiness of what people said in

favour of it. Melvyn Bragg said lots of people write to him asking for advice: “Hopefully, the academy will be able to take on that role.” Carmen Callil said the academy could assume the role once played by “great editors” in publishing houses who would help writers improve their work. Alan Plater, the TV scriptwriter, hoped the academy would raise the level of writing for television: “Whatever it was that gave us the great screenwriters like Potter, Bleasdale and Rosenthal isn’t there any more.”

6 These are matters to do with the structure of publishing, the new hierarchies in television management, the difficulties of getting an agent or a commission, but what have they to do with writing? The academy itself will have courses in lots of things that are not worth taking courses in: “poetry, research, biography, editing, reportage, criticism, lyric writing and translation”, as well as writing scripts for different performing media.

7 The only sensible advice given by a teacher of these courses would be: don’t do this course, do something more useful. My advice to a young writer would be to read a lot and try to learn what works and what doesn’t work. Writing, though, isn’t even as fair as that. Reviewing Laurence Olivier’s<sup>1)</sup> memoirs, John Carey observed how remarkable it was that he could have learnt so much great literature and still write so badly.

8 Perhaps the best advice to a young writer is: travel, learn something useful, do a weird job, so that if in the end it turns out that you are one of those people who can write, then you’ll have something to write about. And if it turns out in the end that you can’t write, well, at least you’ve got the weird job.

*‘New Statesman’, December 4, 1998*

noot 1

Laurence Olivier (1907–1989), a famous British Shakespeare actor

## ■ Tekst 6 Has anybody famous...

- 1p **10**  Wat was voor Sean French de aanleiding tot het schrijven van zijn artikel?
- 1p **11**  Waarop doelt de schrijver met 'suddenly' (aline 2)?  
(Let op: Een vertaling van het woord 'suddenly' levert géén scorepunt op!)
- 1p **12** ■ How does paragraph 3 connect to paragraph 2?  
**A** As a continuation of the line of thought in paragraph 2.  
**B** As a counter-argument to the point made in paragraph 2.  
**C** As an ironic comment on the view expressed in paragraph 2.
- 1p **13** ■ Why does Sean French quote Melvyn Bragg, Carmen Callil and Alan Plater in paragraph 5?  
**A** To indicate the high calibre of the staff the new academy of writing will be employing.  
**B** To point to the lack of convincing grounds for establishing an academy of writing.  
**C** To show that people from various backgrounds support the new academy of writing.  
**D** To stress the wide range of interests the new academy of writing will have to serve.
- 'Writing, though, isn't even as fair as that.' (aline 7)
- 1p **14**  Waarom niet?
- 1p **15** ■ What does the writer's advice in the last two paragraphs amount to?  
**A** A travelled writer will go far.  
**B** Nothing ventured, nothing gained.  
**C** Study anything but writing.  
**D** There is a time and a place for everything.