

EXAMINERS AND THE EXAMINED CAN BOTH LEARN FROM EXAMS.

There was an optional spoken Eng. Lit test at A-Level. I decided to do it. So I walked into the Royal Institution, Colquitt Street, Liverpool. Turning to the left I was just outside the lovely library that smelled of books. I was placed on a chair and given some prose and some poetry to scan and think about for 20 minutes. I seem to remember that the prose came from Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog. I knew of it but had not read it.

I was called in. At one end of the room was a nice man sitting behind a desk. He told me to stand where I was. First I was to read aloud both passages, then to sit across the desk from him and have a chat. So I did.

It suddenly dawned on me that he had had no more advanced notice of either the prose or the poetry than I had. "Don't you think", he said about the prose, "that it is redolent (or some such word) of the work of X?" "Maybe", said I, "but I was thinking that it had more of Y about it".

And so we went on, having a really pleasant chat. I like examinations to be like that. You both learn from and enjoy the experience. I hate the use of the word Defence when it is applied to the examination of a PhD. It implies a Prosecutor. As an external validator for a masters programme a university once surprised me by remarking that they thought it strange that I sat on the same side of the table as them.

Examinations are not inspections. In fact Lawrence Stenhouse who examined me proposed, back in 1975, that both teaching and inspection should be brought together under the heading of Research, professional research.

Government does not think like that. For them teaching is about telling people what to do and both examinations and inspection are measuring jobs for traffic wardens. There is only one F in Ofsted.

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