

THE UNWOBBLING PIVOT? THE PLACE OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

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Introduction

Earlier this year I was re-reading Yeats and I was struck by a poem, 'The Long-legged Fly'. It concerns 3 tumultuous lives—Julius Caesar, Helen of Troy & Michelangelo—and three points of silence at the centre of those lives:—

There on that scaffolding reclines

Michaelangelo.

With no more sound than the mice make

His hand moves to and fro

like a long-legged fly upon the stream

His mind moves upon silence.

Three creative silences in the fields of politics, myth and art: three intense, still and harmonious moments amid the surrounding turmoil and clamour.

There is a similar idea developed in Ezra Pound's 'Cathay' poems: a still point, something enduring surrounded by the clamorous and the transitory; and in his translations of Confucius—in particular, the text he calls THE UNWOBBLING PIVOT—the idea of CHUNG YUNG is made explicit:—

p.97 The word CHUNG signifies what is bent neither to one side nor to the other. The word YUNG signifies unchanging . . . that which never wavers or wobbles is the calm principle operant in its mode of action.

The unwavering, harmonious centre: the UNWOBBLING PIVOT. Elsewhere, he locates art, and poetry in particular, at the still centre of the vortex.

You may be wondering what these circles and still centres, vortices and CHUNG YUNG have to do with English teaching or teacher training.

Well, reading these coincided for me with a time of extreme dissatisfaction with the diluted and trivial content of much English language teaching material: the swirling detritus of bus tickets and cornflake packets; the cardboard characters; the shallow pursuit of the 'functional' and the 'authentic'; the Sunday supplement junk-food of the mind. Very often those who write textbooks can write exercises but not texts which are interesting to read; which have some surprise, suspense, something fresh and unpredictable about them: I began to wonder if it would be possible to 'poach' from literature texts which contain these qualities, but which are not too complex and difficult to understand—simple but not simplistic or simple-minded. And then to make these the CORE of language teaching.

At the same time, as someone who works in a teachers' training college, I was pondering what should be central to the English Department's work. As well as the educational theory etc., given by another department, we give them language improvement courses, methodology courses and a very short course called 'Language Arts'.

This course which contains an introduction to literature is seen as very marginal, a luxury, an extra and there was talk of dropping it altogether for more 'utilitarian' elements.

This only reflects the position given to 'language arts' in the HK English syllabus. There 'language arts' set us apart from the main 'instrumental' and 'utilitarian' business of language teaching. The notion of 'utility' needs closer examination, since after all, creativity in language is needed whatever someone's chosen field is to be—engineering, business or whatever.

Full-time & part-time students at the College confirm the low esteem in which literature or 'language arts' is held throughout schools in HK and the findings of two surveys on attitudes to language arts in schools (carried out last year by two of our final year students seemed to endorse this).

Literature is seen as too difficult, and grammar (with a thin communicative gloss) is seen as central to the job. Surely they are right: grammar does provide the girders of the language. But a building is more than girders and learning a language is more than just acquiring its grammar. I would want to argue that the UNWOBBLING PIVOT of literature is a central pillar too.

It is obvious that we cannot neglect language proficiency but the best teachers I have seen were not those who had just a mechanical competence or who were dexterous at setting up pair-work or using the overhead projector but those whose enjoyment of the language was evident and who were able to COMMUNICATE THEIR ENTHUSIASM FOR ENGLISH AS A SUBJECT TO THE PUPILS. The CONTENT and not just the PROCESS of English teaching: the WHAT as well as the HOW.

Perhaps the idea that literary texts can be at the core of language teaching is overly ambitious, but I am convinced that literature can play a crucial part in fostering enthusiasm for English as a subject and help to make students who will be future teachers alert and alive to the rich possibilities of the language they will be teaching.

So much for the homily, but how is one to do it?

At a seminar on literature and language teaching last June, Dr. Peter Stambler, of the Baptist College, took the uncompromising view that literature cannot be used at all in EFL without diluting its complexity and so doing literature a disservice; or, in using difficult texts with non-native speakers, doing language learners a disservice. Literature, in short, is too difficult and too idiosyncratic. But if literature in HK is to be saved until a few advanced learners are ready for it there will be no one left to study it: interest needs to be created or generated at lower levels and this has to begin with those who teach pupils at those levels. Anyway, there may be virtues in strangeness: the idiosyncrasies of literature—its unpredictability, unusual characterisation etc.—may be to some extent advantageous.

So, when I was given a short 'Language Arts' course to teach at the College I drew up the following guidelines for myself:—

- (1) I would avoid the canonical Shakespeares, Milton etc. and try to find materials that were as simple as possible but not banal; which were accessible but which had at least some of the minimum attributes of literature, the unpredictability and suspense which make us want to read on to the end; fresh, vivid, surprising language; 3-dimensional characters; and a more highly-charged, uninsulated emotional content than polite, safe English-as-a-Foreign Language materials usually contain.
- (2) I would start if I could with the familiar and simple and move to the more strange and difficult.
- (3) The exercises I did would be for the students' enrichment but would not be so far removed from the classroom that they could not see how they could do similar, simpler things themselves.
- (4) I would get them to DO things, to participate to some extent in the creative process. We listen to music with more understanding if we have tried to play ourselves.
- (5) To enhance their enjoyment and to open their ears and eyes more to English.

I have not addressed the vexed question of non-native (Cantonese) literature in English.

In searching for material, I found particularly useful: POETRY WORKBOOK, Eric Boagey & ONCE UPON A TIME, M. Rinvinoluceri.

BALLAD

Thinking about the bare bones of poetry, the ballad came to mind:

—regular jogging rhythm

—refrain (familiar from pop songs)

—poems to be read aloud

—poems which tell a story (mysterious, heroic); began as songs.

(1) I began with the familiar song 'Scarborough Fair'* intending to go on to the original ballad, I did the usual listening comprehension exercises, cloze, jumbled sentences, OHT overlays, discussion and so on; but when we came to the original ballad it was too capricious and the vocabulary too difficult: a false start.

(2) I tried a simpler sung ballad 'High Barbary' and

(3) I then gave them one of the more accessible Scots Border ballads, the sinister and mysterious tale of 'Edward, Edward'.

We discussed rhyme, refrain, rhythm, effect of repetition, the story, the characters of Edward & his mother etc.

(4) We moved on to a consideration of Yeats' use of ballads & songs:

(A) Early Yeats: Ballads, langorous & hypnotic

BALLAD OF THE FOXHUNTER

BALLAD OF MOLLY MAGEE

DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

(B) Later Yeats: After a gap of 27 years, Yeats again returned to the ballad form but this time there was a radical change. There is no romantic bric-a-brac. He speaks through the mouths of lunatics, lovers and frenzied old men who refuse to grow old with dignity. Explores his own lust and rage in old age.

Uses the impersonal ballad form for poems of intense private feeling. He subverts the ballad form: the reader is lulled into false patterns of expectation by the surface sing-song (horizontal plane) then encounters complex tone and feeling (vertical plane). The ballads are like 'Wordsworth's, *Lyrical Ballads*. The refrains are not there for decoration but are strategic, to mock and jibe and to undermine the authority & convention of the rest of the poem.

I shall not pretend that the students recognised all the subtleties but they did discover most of these things for themselves.

I was concerned about using such culturally alien material but the intensity of the poems communicated itself to them and far outweighed this consideration. Anyway, learning a new language is more than just learning to describe one's own familiar world in another language but an introduction to new worlds.

CRAZY JANE poems: earthy, gusto, mocking
(trad. ballad features: inversion, full rhymes, regular rhythms BUT also dissonant half-rhymes and a surprising refrain: resigned, pious, fearful, innuendo). Rejuvenated ballad form.

WHAT THEM? attempt to sum up his life. Nagging, insistent, goading refrain undermines any attempt at too neat a summary.

SEE/HEAR

There is a little book by Ted Hughes about introducing people to poetry called 'Poetry in the Making' in which he speaks of words which appeal directly to the 5 senses:—

hear : click, cluckle

see : freckled, veined

taste : vinegar, sugar

smell : tar, onion

touch: prickly, oily

I looked around for simple poems which would appeal directly to the EYE and to the EAR with the intention of building up then to a consideration of rhythm, similes & metaphors.

EYE

- (1) I began with the idea of a poem as a thing to be seen on the printed page, a shape, a thing made, an artifact analogous to sculpture or carpentry rather than to music.
- (2) We started off with playful verse which plays tricks with typography and spaces on the page:—
40 LOVE; GRASSHOPPER; SILENCE; A CELLO; SNAKE; EYESORE
- (3) We then moved on to look at purposeful shapes and word pictures—similes & metaphors—and the students had a go at writing some simple ones themselves.

The point, as I mentioned before, was to show how vivid, fresh, original language need not entail great complexity.

(T. E. Hulme wrote)

'prose is the museum where the dead metaphors of poets are preserved'

Here are a couple of live similes from Heaney's poetry:—

/a day/

close as a stranger's breath

/telegraph wires/

*like lovely freehand curved for miles
the space we stood around had been
emptied into us to keep.*

OR, Pound's MTR poem:

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

*The apparition of these faces in the
crowd
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

(where the mind runs on after the poem has stopped)

(4) SIMILE & METAPHOR poems—exercises

(5) We worked up to a poem of the quality of WIRES which we looked at in some detail, especially with regard to its shape, how it works on the page and makes demands on the EYE:—

—There is no virtue in looking at form if it is just a matter of spondee spotting or hunting the pentameter but in so far as an understanding of form aids a deeper understanding of meaning, it is helpful. And it does no harm to address rudimentary questions such as why are the lines chopped up in this way and what would be lost if it were a piece of consecutive prose. To ask students to look at the poem before they look into themselves so as not to foist too simplistic an interpretation on it.

Approach:—

—Responses to title, slide of cow in a field + barbed wire.

—RHYME: underline last word—rhyme closing round, enacting meaning. Palindromic. Not just for decoration.

—PUNCTUATION: full stops, commas, enjambment punctuation is functional.

—RHYTHM, VOCABULARY, METAPHORICAL SIGNIFICATION.

WIRES

*The widest prairies have electric fences,
For though old cattle know they must not stray
Young steers are always scenting purer water
Not here but anywhere. Beyond the wires*

*Leads them to blunder up against the wires
Whose muscle-shredding violence gives no quarter.
Young steers become old cattle from that day,
Electric limits to their widest senses*

EAR

When I turned to rhythm, poems for the EAR, I began with simple LIMERICKS and got the students to write their own:—

By stages we led up to another Larkin poem, COMING, and considered amongst other things, the sound effects of the poem.

(6) Next we took some poems which lend themselves to dramatisation e.g. JABBERWOCKY, MACAVITY, TARANTELLA ETC.

Students worked on them in groups with an eye to rhythm, pace, intonation & stress, pauses, movement, reading in unison, in harmony etc. After that we had a first run through which I had videod and then a second, more polished presentation in front of their classmates.

/I was a bit uncertain about 'poetry recitation' OR 'choral verse speaking': it has more than a whiff of Boy Scout jamborees, church halls and sandals about it for me. But they enjoyed it, it got them to pay close attention to the words and to project better: useful preparation for teaching.

DRAMA

Most of the textbooks our students will teach from in Hong Kong rely fairly heavily on dialogues to introduce or to practise grammar. Looking at some of them I was reminded of Ionsco's anecdote about how he got the idea for his play 'The Bald Primadonna' from the textbook exercises he was given as a student learning English:—

A 'Good morning, How do you do?'

B 'Fine thank you. How do you do?'

A 'Very well thank you. Who are you?'

B 'Oh, I'm your husband.'

A 'Oh, are you? I'm your wife.' & etc.

The exercises are not quite as bad as this, but the language is often inert, dull, predictable and the characters impossibly polite and two-dimensional.

When we turned our attention to dialogues and sketches I wanted to get the students to see how the words could come alive, get up off the page and move around. As before, I tried to find material that was simple but not banal; which they would enjoy doing but also with an eye to possible classroom application.

- (1) We began with some Maley & Duff half-dialogues to focus on conversational coherence. Students then wrote their own simple dialogues in pairs; handed them on to another pair who would write the 'real thoughts' of the characters as they uttered those words. It was a chance to be a bit mischievous and send-up predictable, conventional dialogues familiar from textbooks: in a restaurant, at the airport, asking for directions, daily routines etc.
- (2) We went on to look at some Pinter extracts where the language seems to be simple, trivial, flat but important transactions are couched in seeming banalities and even a silence carries a lot of emotional weight.
- (3) On a lighter note, we also looked at some Monty Python sketches, those which were not too culturally alien and quirky:—
BUYING A BED AN ARGUMENT THE BOOKSHOP
- (4) We continued with the idea of 'thought-bubble' dialogues where there is a disparity between what people say and what they mean:—
e.g. a scene from UNDER MILK WOOD

PROSE

As with poetry and drama, I chose short stories that were simple, but which had some emotional depth & resonance and suspense.

- (1) THE MONKEY'S PAW by W. W. Jacob
(I had already decided to use the story when the BBC broadcast it on the radio, I taped it and was able to use it as a listening Comprehension too).
/Frank and Richard Murphy work at Bristows, a factory in Belfast. Frank's former workmate, Tommy returns after a lifetime's travelling abroad. Shows a monkey's paw given to him by a fakir. 3 wishes but pay the price for them with 3 dire consequences. Frank's wife Martha against it but Frank takes the paw. His first is for 200 pounds to pay off the mortgage on his house. Son Richard goes off to work on the nightshift. Next morning they have as visitor, a Mr. O'Leary from Bristows./
Approach:—
Preliminary discussion of superstition, talismans, charms, 3 wishes they would ask for.
—Played it in instalments over a couple of days (they speculated on possible continuations—anticipate what might come next.)
—Stopped it before climax of the story and asked them to think of an ending.
- (2) LOVE by Catherine Lim (Singapore Chinese)
—Title: anticipate words likely to occur/ elicit Moon in June pop song view of romance.
—Note-taking on the characters of Frankie & Pearl.
—Retell parts of the story.
(uninsulated. Simple but moving)

(3) STORY-TELLING:—

- in conversation: anecdotes, news, jokes, gossip.
- fresh: story-telling, improvising not listening to a tape.
- Stories from 'S. China' (unusual, funny, sad, astonishing)
- in retelling unearthed story-telling talent among students.

GRAMMAR

I mentioned earlier that I am convinced Literature has a central role to play in creating ENTHUSIASM for English as a subject which trainee teachers may well communicate to their pupils later. I also said that it was perhaps too ambitious to have literary texts at the core of language teaching material but I must confess that I am not altogether dissuaded.

In the Rinvinoluciri book he has things to say about grammar and narrative which set me thinking:—

- if . . . (conditional) 3 wishes.
- have you been doing . . . Goldilocks
- had done . . . (past perfect) in narratives.
- Every time we use the future we engage in a fiction (since we don't know what it'll be).
- Every time we use the past we engage in a fiction (since we can't remember what was)

I wonder if Literature can be used for grammar teaching to show the meaning of e.g. verbs in a vivid context.

- Heaney: language & politics—changes in political mood in N. Ireland are reflected in changes of grammatical mood too (shift from the indicative/conditional (wishes + desire) to the imperative/indicative (demands))

—PASSIVE: Examples taken from stories by J. Joyce & E. Bowen.

Of course, these are difficult; but here grammar is palpable, tense, mood and aspect are tangible. Is it possible to build up a corpus of similar examples which could be used in language teaching?

You may have noticed that there was a? mark in the title of this article: THE UNWOBBLING PIVOT? THE PLACE OF LITERATURE IN ELT Teaching Education IN Hong Kong. Perhaps there is a? mark over the place of Literature in Hong Kong given prevailing attitudes to literature here; but I am in no doubt about its centrality in English language teaching and learning, for reasons I have tried to outline and for others, more eloquently and profoundly expressed in the following quotes.

'A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us'

—***Franz Kafka***

' . . . through literature we rediscover a sense of the density of our lives.'

—***I. Murdoch***

' . . . spontaneous creativity is the life force of existence'

—***A. Wesker***

'The only end of writing is to enable the reader better to enjoy life or better to endure it.'

—Dr. Johnson

'A poet is before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language.'

—C. Sandburg

'Poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement.'

—C. Fry

'Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive and widely effective mode of saying things and hence its importance.'

—M. Arnold

'Poetry should . . . strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost as a remembrance.'

—J. Keats

'Remember that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless; peacocks and lilies for instance.'

—J. Ruskin

'Poetry reconciles the world outside and the world inside . . . to live removed from the inner universe of experience is to live removed from ourself, banished from ourself and our real life.'

—T. Hughes

***Editors' Note: for a contrasting opinion, compare Chan in this volume.**

TOWARDS REINSTATING LITERATURE INTO THE LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

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The background and the Present Situation

The year 1966 saw the separation of literature from language in the Hong Kong secondary school English curriculum. Ever since then, they have been taught and examined as two separate subjects. This paper does not argue for their reintegration; it examines how the language curriculum has become, to a large extent, emotionally and intellectually impoverished since being deprived of any literature. And it proposes to reinstate a literary component into the language syllabus as one possible means to improve the teaching and learning of both subjects.

The Language Syllabuses

First we must take a look at the language syllabuses recommended for classroom teaching (Syllabus for English Forms I–V Hong Kong Curriculum Development Committee 1983) and for the School Certificate Examination (English Language Syllabus B Hong Kong Examinations Authority). The two syllabuses are not always compatible in guiding the English language education of Hong Kong (see below for elaboration). The examination syllabus dominates the homes and classrooms of both teachers and students. This domination means that many of the recommendations for the teaching of language skills and of language arts made in the teaching syllabus are bypassed. In short, what is not tested in the examination is seldom taught in the classroom. So the examination syllabus becomes critically decisive. It has in some way impoverished the language curriculum emotionally and intellectually.

How?

This paper focuses on the language curriculum in the fourth stage, i.e. secondary four and five, when students are fifteen to sixteen and have been learning English for at least eleven years. At this stage students will take the School Certificate Examination at the end of the second year, an open examination which is equivalent to the Ordinary Level Examination.

The Examination consists of three written papers, a listening test and an oral test tabled as follows:—

The School Certificate Examination

PAPERS	EXAM TIME	MARKS
Composition:	1 hour	25%
Summary, Comprehension & Usage:	1½ hours	30%
Reading Comprehension & Usage (MC Questions):	1 hour	20%
Listening:	35 minutes	15%
Speaking:	5 minutes	10%
Total:	4 hours 10mins	100%

A Typical English Language Weekly Timetable

Composition, Summary, Comprehension & Usage:	3 Periods
Reading Comprehension & Usage (MC Questions):	2 Periods
Listening:	1 Period
Speaking:	1 Period
Stories: (Simplified or Graded Readers)	1 Period
Total:	8 Periods

The English timetables in most secondary schools are more or less the same. This is due to the reality that the marks of each examination paper prescribe the amount of teaching time for each language skill. Not only that, the examination syllabus also dictates the context of language use and teaching.

Reading and Listening

Teachers and students are exposed, on the whole, to one kind of reading material. It comprises two Reading Comprehension passages, a passage for Precis writing, some Cloze passages and Multiple Choice Questions and Answers (Appendices 1 & 2 contain an abridged version of the 1987 Certificate Examination Papers). There is nothing wrong or inappropriate for this choice if it is served as only one among different kinds of testing materials. The trouble is that it tends to monopolise the examination. As a result, most coursebooks model themselves not only on its format but also on the content and register. So on the whole, the reading material that students and teachers are exposed to is to a large extent uninteresting factual accounts and irrelevant informative writing which is not conducive to authentic communication between students and teachers. It is stylistically uniform and bland. Many of the passages are written in controlled vocabulary and grammar for 'easy' reading. Few passages are extracted from authentic sources of different styles, registers, or types. Very often, the only interaction occasioned by such material between the student and teacher is

in checking and answering comprehension questions. Professor John Sinclair has decried the use of English solely for the transmission of information as an impoverished view of language. Although his remark does not refer to the Hong Kong situation, it nevertheless throws light on the language students and teachers are exposed to.

The language students hear in the listening examination and classroom exercises are predominantly instrumental. Students are tested on their ability and speed to take down instructions in the exercises for mainly academic and occupational purposes. Teachers mostly use English to give instructions, to explain a point or a grammar usage. Moreover, it is not uncommon to find teachers using Cantonese for explanation. This may reveal to some extent how English is viewed. When the language is treated as some data or rules to be memorised, it is more convenient and direct for it to be taught in the mother tongue.

Writing and Speaking

The singular exposure to this type of English affects very much the students' performance in writing and speaking. They are simply not encouraged to express personal feelings and thoughts. Workbook exercises deprive language of life. Students are drilled to reproduce mechanically sentences which are grammatically accurate but meaningless. And dictated by the examination, many teachers tend to overmark; attention is paid more to the form of language. The sheer quantity of written assignments and the quantity of resultant mistakes found in them produce frustrations for both students and teachers. And in speaking, many teachers still prescribe complete grammatical sentences and they cannot help stopping their students at any point of their utterances to correct their mistakes.

In short, the type of English that is examined is predominately utilitarian in purpose and monotonous in content and style. The correct form of the language is emphasized more than the need to communicate. The topics are uninteresting and the contexts are mostly irrelevant to the experience of the learners. What is at stake is that this kind of English is not only found in tests or examinations, it is taught (in fact, tested) to some extent every day in the classroom. Most textbooks are functional only for examinations; they are, designed and compiled to familiarize students with the varied examination formats. Model test paper series do even more harm to students and teachers; they substitute testing for teaching, thus giving users a false idea about the nature of language and language learning. Many lessons thus become a kind of answer guessing and checking routine.

What then Are the Effects?

As a consequence, the attitude of many students and teachers to English is somewhat perfunctory. Most of them view English simply as a requirement or qualification to be sought after. To achieve this, many teachers find themselves administering, checking and marking tests of the four skills in

the language classroom; while students are drilling and regurgitating chunks of language items for operational need in examinations. It does not get them interested or involved in what they are doing. Learning and teaching the subject becomes purposeless, except of course for examination. Most students do not bother to read anything in English when they leave school. Many teachers of English prefer watching a movie with Chinese subtitles or reading a newspaper, a magazine or a novel in Chinese. They complain that their students do not read any English outside the classroom when they do not do it themselves. For many of them, teacher development means only refresher courses and seminars on language teaching methodology and examination testing and techniques.

Another point about the type of English taught and examined in Hong Kong is that it does not help to cultivate interpersonal relationships between the student and the teacher. Its content is impersonal; its style banal. There is very little cultural context, aesthetic appeal, affective involvement or intellectual stimulation. It is not conducive to authentic communication. The language is devoid of any experience; it is not used for self expression. It thus becomes vicarious: learning and teaching English is somewhat of a vicarious experience. Teachers of English and their students do not seem to achieve the mutual understanding, support and satisfaction which is derived from an inter-personal relationship built on the subject of study.

So, what can we do about the situation?

The Teaching Syllabus

If the examination syllabus is so decisive, it seems that the only way to change this situation is to modify what is to be examined. And this modification can be made with reference to the teaching syllabus.

The English as conceived in the teaching syllabus is rather different from that which is tested in the examination. But this syllabus is neglected and even unknown to many teachers. Many of the recommendations listed are not implemented in the classroom language teaching programme because they do not count in the examination. Let us find out what these recommendations are and why literature should be incorporated to improve the situation.

The principal objective of the English Language curriculum stated in the teaching syllabus (P. 8) is to 'develop the maximum degree of functional competence . . . in those domains of use which are specially appropriate to the Hong Kong situation'. However, the examination syllabus only tests two domains of use: English as a tool for study and work. There are other domains of use which are not included in the examination syllabus. They are: English as the key to communication with the world outside Hong Kong and English as a medium of pleasure and entertainment. The first points to the international role the language plays in helping young citizens of Hong Kong to 'live in harmony with others by encouraging understanding and tolerance for peoples of other countries, their ways of life, their values and

their ideas'. The second domain emphasizes English as the language of one of the world's great literatures and as the medium of international popular culture through which learners can broaden 'the range of aesthetic experience and entertainment available in Hong Kong'. These two domains of use are simply omitted in the examination syllabus. But they are not in conflict with the uses of English as a tool for work and study. On the contrary, they are complementary to them because they make the learning of English meaningful and enjoyable. And to include these two domains of use, it is necessary to incorporate literature into the syllabus.

Reading, as described in the teaching syllabus (P. 21), is 'an active, creative process'. It means 'the ability to grasp the implied meaning conveyed by the writer as well as the ability to respond to that message in the light of the reader's past experiences, so that there is some sort of communication between the reader and the writer'. One of the reading needs is defined as 'to seek enjoyment or excitement by reading novels, short stories, poems and other types of writing'. Besides reading for information and the main ideas, other reading skills such as reading for implied meaning and critical reading are emphasised. And literary materials such as novels, plays and poems are recommended for the teaching of these skills.

In the Chapter on Listening (P. 52), the Syllabus identifies social and cultural listening needs in addition to academic listening needs. And the inventory of listening skills includes the skills 'to understand the difference between connotative meanings and denotative meanings', 'to identify the speaker's attitudes' and 'to be aware of persuasive devices used by the speaker and to get meaning from imagery'. The syllabus also presents exercises for developing skills in understanding the speaker's intent or attitudes'. But these skills are not tested in the Listening Examination.

Speech is quoted in the syllabus as 'purposeful oral expression of thought', and 'thought' here embraces 'ideas, feelings, desires, hopes ...' (P. 62). In short, speech is defined as 'a deliberate human act by which one person reveals, or communicates, part of himself to another person orally'. Speech in the Oral Examination seldom reaches this level of interaction.

The Teaching of Language Arts

The syllabus designers preferred the phrase 'language arts' to the word 'literature' because literature in the past was understood as whatever texts happened to be set for external examination. Language arts is meant to be 'a broad and liberal study of the potential of the English language for enjoyment and for providing the student with the aesthetic satisfaction of using the language for some creative purpose'. And there are two reasons for language arts, a non-utilitarian, non-instrumental component to be included in the language curriculum which 'serves mainly utilitarian, 'instrumental' purposes in adult society':—

1. Since English is 'one of the great literatures of the world' and the 'major medium of international popular cultures', the 'ability to read for pleasure and to understand films and radio/TV programmes widens substantially the range of aesthetic experience and entertainment available to the citizens of Hong Kong'.
2. 'The possibility which English (and indeed any language) offers of pleasurable experience and enjoyment can be a very strong factor in motivating the learner to persist in the always difficult task of learning a second or foreign language' (P. 85).

The 33-page chapter on the teaching of language arts is the longest chapter in the teaching syllabus. It presents comprehensive and practical approaches and activities on teaching the novel, poetry, drama and non-fiction. Yet despite the emphatic justifications for its inclusion in the curriculum, language arts receives very little or no attention from coursebook writers, teachers and students. The reason is, sadly but true, that it is not included in the examination syllabus.

It is true that in the class timetable, a period per week is allotted to Readers, and this is supposed to be a lesson of language arts. In reality, the situation leaves much to be desired. First let us examine what students are exposed to in this lesson. From secondary one onward, they are taught through graded readers which were written or simplified within strict lexical, structural, technical and even thematic limits. Comparatively speaking, they are stylistically bland and non-communicative. They do not help teachers and students to develop sensitivity to language or encourage communication between the author and the reader, or between the teacher and the student. Although some vocabulary and structural drills and reinforcement can be done, the language and its context is trite and even artificial. The narrative point of view is usually suppressed or left out. The language of these stories lacks the illocutionary force to get the reader interested and involved.

The way these stories are taught varies from teacher to teacher. Some even use this period for language testing in secondary five. So, usually, the book is left unfinished. Many teachers and most students are not interested in, or enthusiastic about, these readers. These stories and the teaching methods used tend to create a misconception of the nature of literature for students and even teachers. This can be one of the reasons why the English Literature candidature is dropping.

Language arts, as recommended in the syllabus, is intended to be a 'broad and liberal study'. It is 'non-instrumental' and not to be examined. This can only be an ideal. The reality is that it does not find its way into the classrooms or the homes of the students. We must remember that English is only a second language in HK, and it is more difficult to cultivate or encourage language arts in a second language without some incentive and utilitarian consideration. So the most practical way is to include it in the language examination.

What Kind of Literature?

I prefer to use the word 'literature' instead of 'language arts'. I mean it to be an examination component incorporated in the language syllabus. Here literature does not refer to literature with a Capital 'L', studied for cultural, historical or aesthetic reasons. It is approached from the language point of view and is studied for language improvement (i.e. to stimulate sensitivity to and interest in language) and for affective involvement (i.e. authentic communication of feelings and thoughts). So besides extracts of great literature in English, it can include songs, TV drama, jokes and even graffiti, etc. It may be chosen from the stylistic and discourse points of view.

Selections from works which clearly offer examples of the way in which language can be consciously used to achieve a certain purpose or effect can be used. Students' attention can be drawn to the choice of a word, a structure or a pattern to embody a particular intention and to highlight a specific effect. Here, the concept of style as deviance can be brought to shed light on the mistakes students make in their writing.

Many people have reservations about exposing students to works of literature for fear that they will follow the deviant or ungrammatical examples which are often found in them. This fear is based on the wrong concept that language is acquired in bits and pieces out of context. The fact that students have been exposed to correct grammatical language 'models' in textbooks over ten years does not guarantee that they can use language grammatically, let alone realistically. Their language also deviates from the norm. It is revealing to compare in context the deviant and ungrammatical sentences in a work of literature with those in most students' writing. Students do not deviate consciously or deliberately to achieve a certain effect. They are writing without a clear sense of purpose. They are accustomed to the denotative use of words to represent the world of objects. Literature can sensitize them to the shades of meaning. It alerts them to exercise their volition in their choice of words and structures to express themselves. Using language then becomes a voluntary experience.

Another useful consideration in choosing literary materials for the language classroom is the discourse element. Discourse as explained by Roger Fowler is 'speech participation and attitudinal colouring'. Every utterance implies a situation whereby the addresser and the addressee are related in some way. And the attitude is coloured by the choice of word or tone of voice in relation with its context of use. As we have seen, the English HK students are exposed to in coursebooks and examinations seldom demands speech participation because it seldom conveys attitude and it seldom invites the reader's response. If there is little or no speech participation between the reader and the author, such use of language is unlikely to generate communication between the student and the teacher in the classroom. The use of English becomes artificial; learning and teaching it thus is a surrogate experience.

Sample Material and Lessons

Now let us Consider some of the literary materials I have tried out in the language classroom.

1. *Drama: From Julius Caesar III, ii, 13–113*

An extract from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar was shown on video in a secondary four language class. The main stylistic features of the two speeches were discussed. I wrote the stylistic analysis for myself. The urge to share my reading of the extract with the students motivated me to write this, i.e. to learn with them. As a follow-up assignment, students were asked to use the structures and rhetoric found in the speeches for creative writing. The purpose was to encourage them to apply what they had learned to express themselves. And the script THIEVES SPEAK IN COURT (Appendix 3) was the result of our effort.

2. *Story: The Soldier and Death: Jim Henson's Storyteller*

This story on video was chosen because it illustrates an author/reader communication situation. The narrator and the narratee appear on stage to mediate between the author and the reader. The narrative point of view is clearly communicated to the reader so that one cannot help generate discussion and creative writing. The analysis appended was written to describe the process of reading (Appendix 4).

3. *Poetry: 'Gruesome' by Roger McGough and 'Hunting Song' by Donald Finkel (Appendix 5)*

These two poems are Schools' Speech Festival pieces. The Festival is a big annual event in Hong Kong schools. This year, more than 60,000 participants entered events including poetry recitation, prose reading, acting, playwriting, Bible reading and public speaking. I think that teachers can better make use of the opportunity and the mood of the Speech Festival to incorporate literature into their language classroom and extra-curricular activities. The two poems presented on video illustrate what I did with my students in class. During the preparation, we together tried out and decided the ways the poems were understood, read and dramatised. We rehearsed together different facial expressions, eye-movements, dynamics in tone and rhythm, and moods until everybody came into agreement with why and how to treat each word, phrase, sentence and the whole piece. There were some follow-up activities after the competition.

4. *Song: 'Scarborough Fair' re-arranged by Simon and Garfunkel (Appendix 5)*

To explore the full communicative potential of language in songs, we must guide students to respond to the message, to feel the impact of the utterance and to work at the style. This can be done by critical analysis and appreciation of the form and the meaning of the song. Let me illustrate this with the song SCARBOROUGH FAIR presented on slide.

Most students will have no difficulty in understanding the subject matter. The 'what' question is not a problem. But the more essential task is to sensitize them to the experiences of the soldier. This leads us from the

content to the techniques of the song. How do the writers/writer present the cruelties of war? How effective is this presentation? Why does it make a deep impression?

First, we may guide them to understand the narrative structure. The song does not narrate a story in straight chronological order. It dramatizes a theme hinging on the interplays of the present with the past; the now with then; here with there. Contrast is here basic to the structure. The setting of the battlefield stands in great relief to the background of home. The cruelties of war and the helplessness of the soldier become more striking and oppressive amid the spices of the kitchen and the warmth of home. Repetition serves to reinforce this impression and effect. The line 'Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme' reiterated in every stanza the scent of sweet memory. It revives the soldier who has become numbed and stupefied, following mechanically the orders of the generals to 'fight for a cause that they have long ago forgotten'. These herbal spices are both healing, as they help restore the senses to the soldier, and soothing as they bring him back sweet memory of his love. However, she can only mourn for him as he can sleep 'unaware of the clarion call' only in his grave.

If students are moved to put themselves in the position of the soldier, their sympathy will be enlarged and their sensibilities sharpened. They will begin to analyse the techniques in presentation, such as the use of contrast, repetition, imagery and even counterpoint in music. Their power of appreciation will be increased.

A Proposed Language Examination Syllabus

To administer one examination in Hong Kong for students of different abilities and aptitudes will produce mediocrity and frustration. In view of the huge candidature which is composed of students of mixed abilities, interests and aspirations, the examination should be more flexible and accommodating. Its content could include some optional papers and the evaluation could take project work into account. This could, to some extent, reduce pressure created by the one-for-all examination and encourage different potentialities and needs. The following are some tentative suggestions. They are by no means exhaustive.

Composition—can invite creative writing as one option. Book reports, film reviews, poems, stories and playscripts can be adjudicated on project basis

Precis' and Reading Comprehension Passages— can include passages of different styles and registers, e.g. extracts of literary prose

Listening— can include dialogues from movies, episodes from novels, songs and jokes, etc.

Oral—can include verse and prose speaking.

By including some literary extracts in the language syllabus, it is hoped that the way language is treated, taught and tested might be changed. Literature implies an attitude to language. It demands our treatment of

language in its own right. It instils in us a positive attitude to and even a love for language. Through it, we may develop our sensitivity to, and interest in, language so that we come to enjoy its playfulness, creativity and subtlety.

Literature also implies a different approach to language. Language is not treated as a fixed entity, data or rules for rote learning. Literature engages us emotionally and intellectually to feel and think into what the language embodies. We cannot help but participate in the communication situation created by the language. For this purpose, we can choose the literary extracts which illustrate how language is consciously used to convey point of view, tone and attitude, feeling and mood through repetition and contrast, metaphor and simile, irony and humour. And to involve students emotionally and intellectually in what they study, the exam can test their understanding of these different uses of language.

I must here clarify that it is not only literature that embodies these different uses of language; literature is only one of many sources. In order to declare that I am not biased against other sources, I hereby propose my ideal coursebook for the language curriculum.

The Proposed Coursebook

It can be stylistically compiled to include authentic passages of different contents, styles and registers, business letters and memos, ads, news reports, jokes and humour, historical writing, technical writing, legal documents, religious and philosophical writing, authentic speeches, linguistic description and terms, as well as literary works and criticisms, etc. Some people might think that authentic material is too difficult for senior secondary students. They have underestimated the potential of both students and teachers as well as the versatility of authentic material.

In this way, students are exposed to different situations. It becomes really a tool for study, a medium of genuine communication and of pleasure and entertainment, as well as a valuable asset in everyday life.

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HONG KONG CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION EXAMINATION 1987

英國語文(課程乙) 試卷二(多項選擇題)
ENGLISH LANGUAGE (SYLLABUS B) PAPER II
(MULTIPLE-CHOICE)

10.15 am-11.15 am (1 hour)

PART I COMPREHENSION

PASSAGE A *Read this article and then answer questions 1-11.*

THE MASTER CUTTER'S GREATEST CHALLENGE

In a small windowless room, totally hidden from outsiders, several flat steel wheels spin silently on a workbench. They resemble record turntables, only each is equipped with special tools which gently but firmly press a rough gemstone against it, and they must go on turning for days, and sometimes even weeks or months. Amongst them one stands out because its tools are bigger than all the others. This is because they were made for a one-time task. Once this one job is done, they will not be used again. The room has bullet-proof doors that open electronically under the watchful eye of security cameras. Its location is so secret that it can only be viewed in pictures, and the Zale Corporation, who are in charge of this operation, will not even say what city, or what country it is in.

1. We can assume that the room is windowless 2. In line 5, 'a one-time task' means a job which
- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| A. because the wheels can't be heard. | A. is not done any longer. |
| B. so that no one can see into it. | B. only requires one person. |
| C. because it's a store for special tools. | C. will take a long time. |
| D. so that the workers can't look out. | D. will not be done again. |

PASSAGE B *Read this magazine article and then answer questions 12-22.*

DOES EXERCISE WORK?

The craze for fitness which began in America in the 1960s has been followed almost everywhere else in the West. It has led people to adopt various new habits, which can be summed up in two ways: better diet and more exercise. In developed or developing countries, where work involves less and less physical effort, and where people eat food that is both richer and less natural, few would dispute the importance of being careful about what one eats. The value of exercise is more debatable. Some people believe it is the key to longevity. Senior executives can be found cycling to work, playing squash in the lunch hour, or working out in a gymnasium. If you get up early in any Western capital you can see people jogging along the pavements and through the parks.

12. The main point the writer makes about diet in the first paragraph is that it is
- | | |
|--|--|
| A. obviously important in Western countries. | 13. In the first paragraph, 'diet' means |
| B. necessary for people who have to work hard. | A. trying to be slim. |
| C. something people tend to disagree about. | B. the craze for fitness. |
| D. less important to health than exercise. | C. being careful about what one eats. |
| | D. eating richer food. |

PART II USAGE

Decide which of the choices on Page 6 would best complete the article if inserted in the blanks.

CHINA'S LAST LINK WITH THE IMPERIAL PAST

In an old house in northern Beijing (23) one of China's few remaining links with its imperial past — Pu Jie, brother of the last emperor, Pu Yi. Pu Jie is a thin little old man, who (24) a well-tailored Mao suit. Nowadays, (25) helping to govern a vast empire, he works with ink and a brush, producing calligraphy for the endless (26) of visitors who come to see him. But if there (27) two revolutions and two world wars, he would have been a senior member of the imperial government, and might have (28) his brother as emperor.

23. A. lives
B. living
C. lives there
D. had lived

33. A. on
B. at
C. in
D. by

43. A. For
B. In
C. During
D. By

24. A. wears
B. wearing
C. dresses
D. dressed

34. A. lack of
B. lacking
C. lacked
D. had lack of

44. A. name
B. call
C. address
D. say

In each of the following questions, decide which of the choices given best completes the sentence if inserted in the place marked

52. Have you any news about John's brother?

- A. known
B. heard
C. found
D. listened

54. Did you that job you were interviewed for last week?

- A. get
B. have
C. offer
D. succeed

53. What's the of worrying when you've done the best you can?

- A. use
B. help
C. need
D. reason

55. I hope I can see "Platoon" this week. I a chance since it came to Hong Kong.

- A. haven't
B. hadn't had
C. haven't had
D. couldn't have

HONG KONG EXAMINATIONS AUTHORITY
HONG KONG CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION EXAMINATION 1987

英國語文(課程乙) 試卷五
ENGLISH LANGUAGE (SYLLABUS B) PAPER V

8.30 am-10.00 am (1½ hours)

VOLCANOES

1 History is full of natural disasters, but perhaps the most frightening and at the same time the most beautiful to watch is the eruption of a volcano. Volcanoes are found all over the globe, from the hot tropical regions to the frozen areas of the Arctic and Antarctic. There are several types of volcano. They range from those that erupt regularly but do not do much damage, to those that 'sleep' for years and then suddenly erupt without warning and with tremendous energy.

2 One of the most famous 'sleeping' volcanoes was on Tristan, a small island in the south Atlantic Ocean. It erupted at the end of the last century. Some of the effects of the eruptions were described by people who had lived on Tristan or one of the islands nearby while others were recorded by scientists.

3 Things first started to happen in July 1893 when the fishermen who lived on Tristan noticed the volcano beginning to smoke. This was followed soon afterwards by small earth tremors that shook their small huts. The few hundred inhabitants were terrified and fled to neighbouring islands shortly before the first of a series of massive explosions that shook the island in early August of the same year. These were heard 150 kilometres away.

4 The volcano continued to erupt at intervals for the rest of August and throughout September. By early October, according to notes left by one visitor to Tristan, Professor Verdi of Milan University, although most of the trees were still standing, the surface of the island was covered by a layer of ash 50 centimetres thick.

- (B) Professor Verdi's notes give us scientific evidence of what happened in early October 1893. There are other scientific records of what happened later, on October 26th and 27th. In not more than 70 words, say where these other records were made, and what they tell us. (30 marks)

Question 2

- (A) Paragraph 8 of the article is rewritten below. However, some of the words are missing. Fill in each blank using ONE word only to complete the meaning. THE WORDS YOU USE MUST BE TAKEN FROM PARAGRAPH 8.

The first one has been done for you as an example.

(8 marks)

- (a) do not completely
(b) on what led to the dramatic eruptions
which (c) the island of Tristan but

- (a) Scientists
(b) _____
(c) _____

Question 3

Fill in each blank in the passage with **ONE** word only which best completes the meaning. The first three have been done for you as examples. You should write your answers in the spaces by the side of the passage. (21 marks)

What you should do when the typhoon signals are hoisted

Because of sudden changes in (a) conditions some early precautions may be necessary (b) you plan your activities.

(c) on precautions is contained in weather bulletins.

The following notes (1) you more information on what action to (2).

(a) Weather

(b) when

(c) Advice

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

(7) _____

SIGNAL		SYM- BOL	
STAND BY	1	T	Listen to all weather (3).
STRONG WIND	3	L	Take all necessary precautions because even at (4) stage strong winds and heavy (5) may occur. Secure all loose objects so that they will not be (6) away by the wind. Remember that ferry services (7) probably be affected.

NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY

1988 HKCE Oral English Examination

DIALOGUE 1

(Read the candidate's words ONLY)

Examiner : *Are you working in the holidays?*

Candidate : Yes, I've got myself a job working in a clothing factory. It'll probably be quite boring, but at least it'll be easy. I'll be checking the clothes to make sure that the quality is up to standard.

Examiner : *Why take a boring job?*

Candidate : Well, to tell you the truth, I'm only doing it for the money. My parents have promised me that if I save all my earnings, they will give me the same amount, so that I can buy a computer. You know I've been wanting one for ages.

APPENDIX THREE

APPENDIX TWO

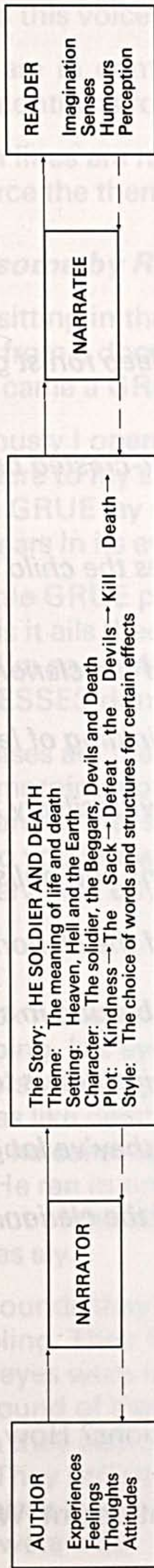
THIEVES SPEAK IN COURT

Cast: Thief, Judge, Prosecutor, Millionfacturer and Jury.

- P: Mr Judge, this suspect stole one dollar from a millionfacturer on the second of May, 1986.
- J: Plead guilty or not?
- T: No, I had'nt stolen it.
- P: Even though you deny it, we have our honourable citizen, Mr Millionfacturer to prove the case. Mr Millionfacturer please.
- M: Swearing I am. What I speak is true, if not, I will be struck dead by the Thunder God. Okay?
- T: (wickedly) Okay?
- J: Be serious.
- P: Is he the one who stole your one dollar coin?
- W: Yes, I saw him steal it in his right hand, then hand it to his left hand and at last he put it into his right pocket.
- J: Have you got any proof?
- M: Proof? As I am a millionfacturer, I provide goods for society, work for people; as I contribute so much, I am regarded as an honourable man; as I am an honourable man, I am the proof.
- J: Do you plead guilty or not? If not, defend yourself.
- T: All right! I plead guilty but . . .
- J: Then why did you ruin your future for such a little money?
- T: Oh! Not that I love my future less, but that I love money more. Hmm . . . and I love all of you more, understand?
- J: No! You mean you stole the money for us?
- T: In fact, money is for exchanging purposes. And now, I use my effort to exchange the money. Besides, if I had not stolen it, other people would do it. Anyway, some need to be thieves, if not what are you judge and prosecutor here for?
- J & P: There is a point.
- T: Had you rather I had'nt stolen the money, you all be either theives or unemployed, than that I stole the money, you all be honourable men? In fact, I am very great. I save you all.
- J: (moved) Go on.
- T: As you see luxury goods, you buy them, as I find you indulge in such materialistic luxuries, I weep for you; as I wept for you, I want to save you; and as I wanted to save you, I must steal all your money. You see! I did it for all the honourable motives in the world.
- J, P, Jury: (moved and crying)

(To be continued.)

AUTHOR/READER COMMUNICATION



Functions:

- To tell the story to the reader
- To express the author's tone and standpoint

TEACHER'S ROLE:

- To facilitate the author/reader communication
- To sensitize students to the stylistic use of language
- To elicit their response
- To help them to express their perception

Functions:

- To listen to the story for the reader
- To signal the reader to response

STUDENT'S ROLE:

- To participate in the narrative communication situation
- To get beyond the storyline and the characters
- To enter into discourse with the author

Jim Henson's Storyteller: THE SOLDIER AND DEATH—AN ANALYSIS

NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW

1. From whose point of view the story is told?
2. What would happen if the story were told by the Soldier himself or by Death or by the Devils? To experience the change and difference, try to retell/rewrite the story.

CHARACTERIZATION

1. What is the significance of the title THE SOLDIER AND DEATH?
2. Why do you think the author chose a soldier and death to be the main characters?
3. What would the story lose if it were called THE MAGIC SACK, or AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE DEVILS?
4. Which of the following appeals to you most and why:
The Soldier, Devils, Death, the three Beggars, the Narrator, the Narratee, the Author?

TIME AND ATTITUDE

1. What is the author's to the Soldier's kindness to the three old men? How is this attitude expressed in the narrator's tone?
2. Which events/episodes make you laugh and why?
3. Which scenes are most touching? How do the narrator and author make them so?
4. Discuss the attitude of the author towards life and death in the light of the ending of the story.

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE

1. Discuss the use of music and sound effects in
 - The soldier's whistle
 - The Devils' castle
 - The Czar's bed
 - Heaven
2. Discuss the use of colour and space in Heaven and hell, What impressions are created?

APPENDIX FIVE

Scarborough Fair

Are you going to Scarborough Fair;

Em G A Em

Parsley, sage, rose mary and thyme.

Em G G #m Em D

Remember me to one who lives there.

Em No. D Em D Em

Em Even D Em

G.

(On the side of a hill in the deep forest green)

Tell her to make me a cambric shirt

Em G A Em

(Tracing of sparrow on snow-crested brown)

Parsley, sage, rose mary and thyme;

Em G G F#m-Em D

(Blanket and bed clothes the child of the

With out no seams nor needle work,

Em D G D Em D Em

mountain)

(Sleeps unaware of the clarion call)

Then she'll be a true love of mine.

(On the side of a hill a sprinkling of leaves)

Tell her to find me an acre of land

(Washes the grove with silvery tears)

Parsley, sage, rose mary and thyme;

(A soldier cleans and polishes a

Between the salt water and the sea strand,

run)

(Sleeps unaware of the clarion call)

Then she'll be a true love of mine.

(War bellows blazing in scarlet

*Tell her to reap it with a sickle of
battalions)*

(Generals order their soldiers to kill)

Parsley, sage, rose mary and thyme;

(And to fight for a course they've long ago

*And gather it all in a bunch of heather,
forgotten)*

(Sleeps unaware of the clarion, call)

Then she'll be a true love of mine.

Who is the speaker? Where is he?

How does he get you involved in the song?

Does he want you just to carry out his instructions?

What does the writer want to express through these instructions? How does he express this?

A second voice in the third person is embedded in the counterpoint. Whose voice is that? To whom is the voice addressed?

How is this voice related to the voice of the speaker?

What are in contrast in the song? And what does the writer make use of these contrasts for:

Which lines are repeated? What are the effects of the repetition? Does it help reinforce the theme?

Gruesome by Roger McGough

I was sitting in the sitting room toying with some toys
when from a door marked: 'GRUESOME'
There came a GRUESOME noise.

Cautiously I opened it
and there to my surprise
a little GRUE lay sitting
with tears in its eyes.

'Oh little GRUE please tell me
what is it ails thee so?'
'Well I'm so small,' he sobbed,
'GRUESSES don't want to know'

'Exercises are the answer,
Each morning you must DO SOME'
He thanked me, smiled,
and do you know what?
The very next day he . . .

Hunting song

The fox he came lolloping, lolloping,
Lolloping. His eyes were bright,
His ears were high.
He was like death at the end of a string
When he came to the hollow
Log. He ran in one side
And out of the other. O
He was sly.

The hounds they came tumbling, tumbling,
Tumbling. Their heads were low,
Their eyes were red.
The sound of their breath was louder than death
When they came to the hollow
Log. They boiled at one end
But: bitch found the scent. O
They were mad.

The hunter came galloping, galloping,
Gallop. All damp was his mare
From her hooves to her mane.
His coat and his mouth were redder than death
When he came to the hollow
Log. He took in the rein
And over he went. O
He was fine.

The log he just lay there, alone in
The clearing. No fox nor hound
Nor mounted man
Saw his black round eyes in their perfect disguise
(As the ends of a hollow
Log). He watched death go through him,
Around him and over him. O
He was wise.

Donald Finkel

THE CULTURAL BRIDGE

(From Asian Poems to English Poems)

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Editors' Note:

This was a paper presented at the International Conference on the teaching of English Language/Literature in the Hong Kong Context at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. June 7-9, 1990.

In Appendix 1 of H.L.B. Moody's book *Literary Appreciation* (Longman: 1968) there appears a poem written by one of his students when he, Moody, was teaching in Africa. The student is speaking to Poetry and he begins:

Surely, they find pleasure in you
Who read and understand you.

He goes on to mention some of what he calls the 'qualities' of poetry, and then continues:

Sometimes I try to see
What images I can form out of
The imagery you provide
But with less success do I
See these 'qualities'. The rhymes sure,
I can see for they are simple
As learning my A B C.
But why is this? Am I the only one
Of all your lovers who finds this trouble?
No, is my answer and so is of many
Of my fellow friends, Africans at least.
Beside the different gowns you wear
Of the different ages you live,
You sometime speak of places,
Places, historical happenings, or
Some characteristics of your time
All alien to me and never have my eyes seen
Even your description of the furniture
Or of the atmosphere around you,
Helps to throw me in some bewilderment . . .

I suspect there may be quite a number of literature students in Hong Kong Secondary Schools who would sympathize with this African student. It is with these students in mind that I wish to suggest that Hong Kong teachers of Literature could profitably exploit poems written in English by poets from their own or a similar culture to their students before they ask them to read and respond to English poetry i.e. the poems of English poets. One reason is

that the students will only have to contend initially with linguistic difficulties found in poetry, and not have to face the additional problem of, for example, trying to understand the cultural connotations of many of the lexical items to be found in English poetry. I will suggest three additional reasons for using Asian poems written in English, at the end of this paper.

In 1986, while teaching English at a Residential School in Malaysia, I was asked to prepare a small group of students for the Literature paper of the Malaysian equivalent of the 'O' Level examination. One of the set books was *A Choice of Poets*, an anthology of nineteenth and twentieth century English poetry. The first thing I discovered was that these students, though very intelligent, highly motivated and displaying a very good standard of spoken and written English were totally unprepared for the study of English poetry. In fact hardly any of them had read any poetry before either in English or their mother tongue. Now suddenly they were expected to appreciate and make a personal response to one of the most demanding forms of literary language.

Since 1986, I have come across a number of poems written in English by Malaysian and Singaporean poets, which I realize now would have been ideal material to 'lessen the shock of this sudden and demanding exposure' (Gilroy-Scott in Brumfit, 1983:1) to English poetry. Let me illustrate what I mean. Compare, for example, an English poem to be found in *A Choice of Poets*, with a Malaysian poem written in English.

AN AUGUST MIDNIGHT by *Thomas Hardy*

A shaded lamp and a waving blind,
And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:
On this scene enter—winged, horned, and spined—
A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;

While 'mid my page there idly stands
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands
Thus meet we five, in this still place,
At this point of time, at this point in space,

—My guests besmear my new-penned line,
Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
'God's humblest, they!' I muse. Yet why?
They know Earth-secrets that know not I.

NIGHTPIECE by *Lee Tzu Pheng*

If I listen closely
to these razor sounds that
saw the night
I hear in them the small cries
That used to make an enchanted thing
of the lawn at our old house