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ON TEACHING LITERATURE ACROSS CULTURAL DISTANCES

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1. Introduction

Perhaps I should begin by congratulating the organisers of this conference on choosing a theme which puts together some of the most contentious terms known to the Humaanities and the Social Sciences. The complexity of these terms invites discourse — no, it does more than that: it actually encourages controversy, for each of these terms can be viewed from different standpoints; and each of us is convinced — and rightly so of course! — that ours is the one! That the organisers put so many of these controversial terms together did not necessarily mean that I had to choose them all, but I did — or nearly; and here I am with a title which explicitly imports two terms from the conference theme — *literature* and *culture*; reverses the third — *learning* to *teaching*; and, of course, as one might guess, reflection on these processes can hardly progress far without forcing our attention to the fourth term, *language*, as a presupposed and indispensable condition for all three: learning, literature, and culture. Since my title announces some concern with each of these wide and complex domains, it may be useful to say a few words at the outset about the main foci of the paper.

Many, perhaps most of us, have the experience of teaching literature across cultures, if only for the simple reason that, in an ideological reversal, it was assumed for a long time, and, indeed in many parts of the world continues to be assumed even today, that language is best taught, best understood by reading literature. In my presentation today, I will argue, without setting up an opposition, that the very nature of literature — whether one's own or an alien one — is best understood, and certainly literature is likely to be better taught, with an understanding of language. This is not simply because our point of contact with literature is always language — that is obvious enough though its implications are often ignored — but, in this respect, what seems to me far more important is the understanding of the place of language in the social contexts of human life. For example, an issue that engages many teachers of literature in the context of second/foreign language/literature learning is the problem of *cultural distance* — the problem of teaching *Shakespeare in the bush*[1], as Laura Bohannan (1974: 22 ff) put it. The following section of the paper is intended as an elaboration of the concept of cultural distance by tracing its origins in the social conditions of the child's learning of his mother tongue. I will suggest that the experience of "languaging" in early infancy in the course of living everyday life within one's "speech fellowship" (Firth 1957) is, in fact, also the experience of becoming oriented to certain specific orders of relevance — a particular point of view that informs our ways of being, doing, feeling and saying. And the ways of being, doing, feeling and saying are not necessarily shared across all the distinct speech fellowships in one's culture: in other words, *learning language is learning to be culturally distinct*. If it is true that the linguistic and cultural experience of persons within the same culture is heterogeneous, what are the implications of this fact for understanding the nature of literature? I will explore this question in sections 3 and 4 where I place the literature discourse amongst the other discourse types, and present a framework for the study of literature which will hopefully do justice to the specificity of literature as literature while throwing light on the place of language in the creation of literary artefacts. This will allow me to explore in section 5 the implications of this approach for teaching literature, when I shall return once more to the question of teaching and learning in the context of literature as a recognised part of the educational curricula. The difference in the meaning of *teaching* and *learning* is thus relevant both to the starting point of this paper and to its conclusion. So it seems sensible to begin by saying a few words about the contrast between these two processes.

1. Though judging from current debates on literary cannons, it might seem that teaching Shakespeare in Sheffield or Cambridge is no less problemmatic! A point that needs to be recognised is the relative nature of the notion of cultural distance.

2. Teaching and Learning: Two Modes of Knowing

We know of course that the relation between the processes of *teaching* and *learning* does not parallel that between *selling* and *buying*: one cannot really buy anything without someone selling it, but one is learning something nearly all the time whether anyone is teaching it or not. This poses a question: what is the difference between that sort of learning which occurs as a response to someone's premeditated pedagogic action, and that other kind of learning which comes about as if all by itself?

To answer this question in general terms, one important difference is already implicit in the very formulation of this question: the role of a designed pedagogy in the learning process. The first kind of learning is not expected to happen without an agent other than the learner; it presupposes a teacher whose role it is to take communally designed pedagogic action, i.e., to teach. The teacher is an active participant in this kind of learning, and not surprisingly, discussions of such learning typically foreground teacherly activities as a salient element of the process. The second general difference between the two types of learning derives logically from this: designed pedagogic action presupposes pedagogic programmes, as attested by the presence of terms such

as *field, discipline, curriculum, educational knowledge* etc. In other words, this learning has a set agenda. There is an assumption that what is to be learned is, in some sense, finite and explicitly stateable. I will refer to this mode of learning as *schooled learning*; it is typical of the kind of learning that is expected in the classroom environments. It is a kind of learning that is typically thought of as the converse side of teaching, though this may be at once expecting too much and too little, in the sense that not all teaching results in successful learning and to be successful all learning must go beyond the teaching itself!

Schooled learning contrasts with the learning that appears to happen as if all by itself: the ordinary perception is that no other agency is engaged in the processes of learning; there is no teacher. Speaking metaphorically, one might say that the learner is being schooled by the experiences of his/her living of everyday life. It is not surprising that what the learner learns through this experience of living cannot easily be inventoried; its limits and partitions cannot be specified with certainty. To describe the essence of what is being learned in this process, one uses such words as *everyday knowledge, commonsense, practical know-how*. So while schooled learning is characterised by designed forms of pedagogic action and a set agenda, with clearly charted out areas of knowledge, the other form of learning occurs as if by *osmosis* without clear limits to what can be and is learned in the everyday living of life. I will refer to this mode of learning as *everyday learning*: each of us lives life by our everyday learning; most of us, in today's world, continue on to the school, where this primary experience is overlaid by the learning of the other kind.

2.1 Learning Language, Learning Culture

Not all contexts of learning permit the operation of both these modes with the same degree of apparent ease, and when they do so, the general characteristics of the two modes of learning identified above will have specific manifestations. One context that appears to be particularly well suited to exploring the specific differences between the two modes is that of language development[2], since here both modes can operate apparently equally well. Thus the inclusion of what is often called "language education" in the curricula is evidence of the communal expectation that the schooled learning of language will occur in our pedagogic institutions; at the same time, the learning of

2. In the context of the literacy debate, I have also referred to the schooled and everyday modes of learning as the official/exotic and the natural/mundane lines of literacy development, respectively (Hasan 1996). As I see it, the former is an aspect of what Bernstein refers to as official pedagogy, the latter that of local pedagogy.

the mother tongue is typically treated both by the lay members of the community and by experts[3], as a case *par excellence* of everyday learning — a process that comes about without teaching. And of course the context of language development is particularly relevant to our concerns as I have hinted above. Let us then first look at everyday learning in this context.

There exist in the literature excellent accounts of young children learning their mother tongue, including nativist/formalist descriptions of the "acquisition" of linguistic form and functionalist ones of learning how to mean[4]. From the physiologically mediated language of gaze exchange, mouth posture and other body movements[5], the infant moves to his own unique symbolic system — what Halliday (1973; 1975) has called the *proto-language*. Here is how the anthropologist, Malinowski describes the infant's protolinguistic acts of meaning:

> .. a small child acts upon its surroundings by the emission of sound which is the expression of its bodily needs and is, at the same time, significant to the surrounding adult. The meaning of this utterance consists in the fact that it defines the child's wants and sets going a series of actions in his social environment.
> [Malinowski 1935: 6]

Malinowski was convinced of the practical nature of the child's relation to language. "In the child's experience, words *mean* in so far as they act .." (1923: 321): the processes of living and of saying are intertwined, and learning the mother tongue is a complex activity consisting of "learning language, learning through language (and) learning about language" (Halliday 1979). By the time the child enters his mother tongue, roughly around the age of two years, he is already something of a linguistic sophisticate, for he can talk about talking, and he can refer to naming and meaning (Halliday 1977; Painter 1984). And along with the participation in discourses of different kinds, comes the child's understanding of his world. He internalises the world of his speech fellowship which he experiences in the actions and locutions of those who attend to his needs, whose acts of meaning define his being. This is what it means to say that

3. This should be evident from most text book accounts of "language acquisition" where so far as the nativist is concerned there is no real learning, only a matching of innate rules with the rules evident in the community's language.

4. As a prototype of the formalist account see Brown 1973, and of the functionalist account see Halliday 1975.

5. For a fascinating account of the gesture and movement based pre-linguistic communication see Trevarthen 1979, Trevarthen and Hubley 1978, Lock 1978, and Bullowa 1979.

the child is learning by osmosis. There is no designed pedagogic programme, no official pedagogue. To use Halliday's words:

> .. nobody teaches him the principles on which the social life is organised, or their systems of beliefs, nor would he understand it if they tried. It happens indirectly through the accumulated experience of numerous small events, insignificant in themselves .. in which he contracts and develops personal relationships of all kinds. All this takes place .. through language. And it is not from the language of the classroom .. that the child learns about the culture he was born into. The striking fact is that it is the most ordinary everyday uses of language, with parents, brothers and sisters, neighbourhood children, in the home, in the street and the park, in the shops and the trains and the buses, that serve to transmit to the child, the essential qualities of the society and the nature of social being. [Halliday 1974: 4]

Later, when the child is already able to enter into conversation, mothers do engage in discourse about language, explicitly explaining meanings, wordings, proverbs, and the like (Hasan 1984; Butt 1989). The remarkable fact about such teaching is not so much that the child is being tutored about language form or even about "truth" as Brown (1973) suggested. The teaching is in fact headed towards the child's practical concerns; it thus links the experience of the elements of language to his nonlinguistic experience, as for example with Kristy (3;6 yrs) who is doing some cooking with the mother:

Dialogue 1:

Mother: Now I'll cut up the onions and the capsicums, and I'll get you to grease the dish

Kristy: What's grease?

Mother: I'll put a little bit of oil in that dish

Kristy: Mm

Mother: And then I want you to rub it around with your fingers ..

Kristy: Mm

Mother: all over the dish .. only on the inside. That's right .. Lovely! Yeah, that's right .. with the tips of your fingers, and all down the sides as well .. etc

Compare this practical *exposé* of what it means *to grease* with what the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* has to say about the same word: *vt put or rub grease on or in (especially parts of a machine)* (sic!). The mother's explanation is so effective because it adjusts to the child's needs; it follows the child's agenda, instead of an already predetermined and pre-designed agenda, a law unto itself: *Monday we teach the present tense, Tuesday it's the conjunctions*. It is this characteristic of the meaning group, their willingness to adjust to the child's practical concerns that makes everyday discourse such a powerful means for the child's linguistic and ideological apprenticeship — the agent without a perceptible presence, truly active in everyday learning.

Linguistically speaking, the child does not simply learn the "words and vocables" of his mother tongue, as the formalist account suggests; this is putting the cart before the horse. Primarily the child interacts with other social beings, personally significant to him, and he learns the formal patterns of his language in the course of these interactions. As he learns to participate in discourse (Painter 1989), he also learns about the indispensable condition of natural discourse — its *double relevance* (Hasan 1996), how all language is contextualised, keyed into what is being said, and what is being done, relevant at once to the locutions and the actions of the interactants.

Ideologically speaking, if the child imbibes his local culture by participating in the everyday, mundane conversation with those close to him (Cloran 1989; Hasan 1989; 1991; 1992a), it is because his acts of speech can never be separated from the practical concerns of life within his speech fellowship, and more specifically within his meaning group. These concerns arise and themselves have some meaning within the framework of the ways of being, doing, feeling and saying, specific to the child's meaning group. What is more, this design for living — this local culture — is not randomly fashioned: it is historically related to the group's social positioning, as both its producer and its product. In living his life by his group's design for living, the child *affiliates* himself to the local culture of his immediate speech fellowship. This is how his *coding orientation* is formed. And to the extent that language mediates in this process, we may claim with Bernstein:

> The experience of the child is transformed by the learning generated by his own, apparently, voluntary acts of speech. The social structure becomes .. the substratum of the child's experience through the manifold consequences of the linguistic process. .. every time the child speaks or listens, the social structure is reinforced in him and his social identity shaped. *The social structure becomes the child's psychological reality through the shaping of his acts of speech.* [Bernstein 1971: 144; emphasis added.]

Seen from this point of view, osmosis is a good metaphor for describing what goes on in everyday learning. Literally the word refers to a natural process wherein some fluid passes from one place to another via a semipermeable membrane, and in so doing it equalises the material conditions on both sides. The metaphoric extension of the word to everyday learning aptly draws attention to the exchange between individuals and the local culture of their community. Much before the child comes to the school to confront the designed pedagogic programmes for languaging, he has already been schooled with respect to language through the design for living prevalent in his specific community. He has been inducted into its *accent*; he is predisposed toward certain social processes and so toward certain *registers*; and he has fairly clear, though not perhaps consciously formulated, ideas of what is relevant: what is desirable, enjoyable and good or bad. Cultural distance is inscribed in the fact of local cultural affiliation.

2.2 Local Cultural Affiliation and Cultural Distance

It is customary to say — sometimes rather wistfully — that TODAY we live in multicultural societies, as if yesterday this was not the case; as if yesterday we all lived happily in societies each of which had just one homogeneous culture. As we know this is just a myth, like that other myth of "the good old days": we have, in fact, never known a human society anywhere anytime whose processes of affiliation have gathered up every member in the self-same inclusive circle. There have always been men *and* women; the rulers *and* the ruled; the strong *and* the weak; the keepers and defenders of law and order *and* the ragged and motley band of anti-heroes. Throughout its known history, the human social world has been non-egalitarian, hierarchic, and hegemonic, with the privileged and the less privileged ranked vis a vis each other. It is immaterial that for rare individuals there most probably exists mobility across the different classes, or even that the inventory of the classes themselves is subject to change over time. All that matters is simply the persistence of classification as a fact of human history: humans have always sub-classified themselves; and cultures and speech communities have always been heterogeneous.

Once this fact is accepted, then given the nature of local cultural affiliation as described above, it follows that alternative points of view co-exist in every society: in every society there are alternative designs for living, alternative discourses and other voices; the necessity for their co-existence is logical. Of course not all voices have enjoyed the same legitimacy; only some have been dominant; and not all have been heard clearly. But we can hardly deny social subjects the awareness at some level that round the corner there exist worlds other than one's own, with different ways of being, saying, feeling and doing, with different designs for living. These other worlds may be forbidden and reprehensible, or coveted but out of reach. The sense that there

exist other worlds, other designs for living and that there are other voices, is what constitutes *cultural distance* across sub-groups of people who on some other basis — such as religion or race — might appear to belong together. Therefore, in every society, across these cultural distances, will be found alternative readings of the same event, same text, same rule. For example, when in the early 20s this century, a middle class English woman was obliged to view marriage and paid engagement of her labour as two mutually exclusive options, she was contending with a reading which was different from the reading of the same event that would be produced either by a man she might marry or by a woman affiliated to the working class. Readings across cultural distances will vary, even if sometimes the variant readings complement each other, as for example, again in the 20s the gender based readings of marriage in the English middle class.

2.3 Some Legacies of Schooled Learning

If in the context of language development, everyday learning fashions a social subject's local cultural affiliation giving him an identity which distinguishes him from the members of other groups, schooled learning represents a negation of the heterogeneity of human culture. It either does not recognise the concept of cultural distance, or treats it as an undesirable aspect of human societies. The logical outcome of this attitude is the nomination of some voice, some design for living, some way of being, doing, feeling and saying, as THE legitimate one that must be adopted by all members of the society[6]. These attitudes naturally permeate the teaching of both language and literature.

Where the pedagogically legitimate voice comes from is no secret. Controlled typically by those members of a society who also control its material resources[7], our official pedagogic institutions design language development programmes which in effect deny the validity of all varieties of accent, all forms of speech and writing, which do not conform to the imagined standards of the dominant social group(s). This intolerance of linguistic variation is bad enough, but in fact, given the inertia that characterises large bureaucracies, what the language education programme typically treats as "the" legitimate language is no more than an outdated version of some variety of language, which is at best a historical relic, and often entirely mythical.

6. As bourdieu 1992 forcefully argues, this is the apparent "goal" of education. However, since hierarchisation is to be maintained, the logical outcome is that the dominant voice must subtly change to maintain its distinction even as it being adopted by **all** members of a community in an attempt to close the gap.

7. See Basil Bernstein 1971, 1973 and 1990; also Bourdieu 1991.

Much of the teaching agenda in language education programmes, especially in schools, is based on a false homogenisation of the society's linguistic experience, and an ignorance of the nature and function of language in society. It is not surprising then that in its early stages language education in schools largely turns into what I have called recognition literacy (Hasan 1996). Lessons in self-expression, evaluation, and creativity are the later stages of such programmes, where the self to be expressed is sanitised, and creativity — even critique — is standardised, brought into line with the ascendant ideology of the pedagogues, if not necessarily of the dominant class. This goes unchallenged, most of all by the pupils, because typically one thing they have never been equipped with is the means of independent scrutiny either in the domain of language or of literature: much of what passes for pedagogic knowledge is, in fact, *doxic*, based on faith in the intellectual leader, be it Leavis or Derrida.

Had there existed social conditions allowing our educational system to be less partisan, less dominated by the single dominating voice, then the multiplicity of voices, the presence of many points of view, the recognition of many designs for living would have been as many ways of seeing, an enriching experience. Cultural distances would have been celebrated instead of being repressed. When we bewail the "lowering of standards" in language education as politicians are fond of doing (Carter 1996), it would be useful for them to be reminded that between teaching and schooled learning, lie the many patterns of everyday learning, with the weight of the many designs of living prevalent in a community. The equation of one speech variety with *correct* language, the elevation of a specific group's taste to *taste* as such, the naming of one design of life as *cultured* has deprived language/literature educators of reason, giving them a false authority based on an appearance of knowing what is best. If, today, in teaching literature across cultures we find ourselves at a loss, this is in no small measure due to the fact that our educational systems have specialised in cultural purity, turning away from the other points of view. One cannot but sympathise with Derek Freeman's view of education as "artificial stupefaction" (*Good Weekend*, March 9, 1996: 34).

But how can views about the variation of language be of any consequence to the teaching of literature? This is the question that I address briefly in the following two sections.

3. Literature as a Variety of Language

First the basic principle of language variation: variation in language correlates with some circumstance of the speakers of the language. These circumstances may very simply be named as follows:

(i) place

(ii) time

(iii) practice

(iv) positioning

I will ignore the first of these dimensions of language variation. In fact, it is much more sensible to think of varieties related to it i.e., geographical and social dialect, as *accent* varieties, as the manifestation of variation is largely at the phonological level. This being the case, the variants are simply *indexical*, signalling the speaker's cultural affiliation. Both kinds of dialects are used in literature metaphorically precisely in this way, as a mode of signalling a character's "place" in the world.

A source of complexity in the discussion of variation resides in the fact that the dimensions cross-cut each other. Any given text[8] will be an instance of some variety along each of these different identifying circumstances. This is in fact saying no more than that speaking is a situated activity: it is situated locally, temporally, practically and by social positioning. And each kind of situatedness is relevant to the understanding of important aspects of literature, as I hope to show in the following discussion.

3.1 Linguistic Variation and the Dimension of Time

It has been long accepted that the different historical stages of the "same" language vary from each other in their form and phonology, so much so that today, without schooled learning, a normal speaker of English would find it difficult to follow the language of an Old English text such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, or the sermons of Bishop Wulfstan. This might make one think that Old English has nothing in common with present day English, except perhaps the word *English*. This would, however, be an oversimplification of the situation. It is noticeable that Old English is closer, in its form and phonology, to Middle English, and the latter is closer to Modern English. There is no linguistically identifiable point at which one might sever the connection of one temporal variety of English with the others and the three are treated as temporal dialects of the same language.

To think of temporal dialects in this way could be rather misleading, as if all we need do to make texts such as *Beowulf* or *Sir Gawain and the Greene Knight* accessible

8. Scholars have used the words text and discourse differently. I myself think of text as a term that identifies a particular perspective on linguistic interaction.

to modern readers is to simply "translate" them from the older dialects into modern English. This is to miss an important dimension of temporal dialects. If with Williams (1977) we believe that culture is "an achieved state of development", then the long history of a community could be seen as a succession of cultures, each representing a somewhat different "achieved state of development" from the others. Each cultural stage has a specificity of its own. The translation of Beowulf in Modern English cannot write off, in fact **must not** write off, the evidence of the culture specific to the time when Beowulf was created. It follows that cultural distance has a diachronic dimension as well as a synchronic one — the ways of being, saying, feeling, and doing in a community differ over time. For example, the point of view typical of the English woman who spoke Old English is bound to be quite different from her counterpart today. This leads us to revise some of the earlier claims I made about cultural distance.

I have claimed (sections 2.1-2.2) that the perception of cultural distance is a product of everyday learning. However, the differences in the design of living across the various speech fellowships of which everyday learning makes us aware, are temporally co-located: the different varieties of language co-exist in the same historical moment. Everyday living is affected by history, but the patterns of the past are not visible as one of its aspects. Nonetheless, as we see cultural distance is not simply synchronic arising from the diversity of groupings in any one society at one particular historical point. Time marked by human history also creates cultural distance, as for example between the modern reader and the Old or Middle English texts. It is doubtful that everyday learning by itself can create a perception of diachronic cultural distance.

We also see clearly at this point what it means to say that variations in language cut across each other. On the one hand, we know that on the whole modern ways of being, doing, feeling and saying in England are distinct from those common to the Middle English speakers' England. On the other hand, we also know that at each such recognised cultural stage there have always co-existed different groups, just as they do today. A text in a temporal dialect such as, say, Old English will also bear traces of other kinds of variation. Cummings (1995: 278) analyses a pair of sermons by Archbishop Wulfstan and by Abbot Aelfric each of which combines the narrative variety with other varieties. And of course every reader of Chaucer knows that he combined several social varieties of language. The modern reader reading Chaucer, at one level reads a text that is culturally different from any today, and at another level a text which shows synchronic variations presented as concurrent with the happenings in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Diachronic dialects and diachronic cultural distance would be less relevant to us but for the fact that texts within which is encapsulated the record of some interaction

are bound to span cultural stages: they survive the here-and-now of that social process whose realisation they are, entering into a time and a place where the very perception of the nature of that social process might have altered considerably. The diachronic dimension of cultural distance thus demands a recognition of the possibility of disjunction between the context underlying the creation of the text and that underlying its interpretation (Hasan 1985a).

3.2 Linguistic Variation and the Dimensions of Practice and Positioning

I am going to talk of the third and the fourth dimensions of linguistic variation together, since their interaction is so close as to make it almost impossible to talk of the one without the other without much repetition. The dimension of social practice correlates with discourse types, or *register*, to use the technical term in systemic functional linguistics (SFL), while that of social positioning correlates with *semantic variation* or ideology. Register and semantic variation interact closely, since the sorts of social process one may participate in and the way in which one views their nature is in fact not free of one's design for living. One's point of view or ideology if you like plays an important part in where one sees the discourse as situated, what one thinks the situation is a situation for. In terms of Bernstein (1990), the recognition and performance criteria for discourse types will differ across cultural distances.

With these introductory remarks, let us turn to social practice. In using language, whether we are speaking or writing, we are *doing* something — even if the something we end up doing is not what we either intended or claimed to have been doing. Social practices — or *social process*, which is the technical term used in SFL to refer to social practices — form the **context of situation** for the discourse. One aspect of the double relevance of discourse is that except under pathological conditions, persons talk a propos some context of situation. A discourse and its context of situation are related by a realisational dialectic: the perception of a context *activates* the discourse, while the continuing discourse *construes* the specificity of that context. Context of situation is further analysable as *social activities*, technically known as **field of discourse**; *the actants of the social activity*, technically known as **tenor of discourse**; and the *signing mode(s)* for carrying out the social activity, technically known as **mode of discourse**. As our primary concern in social processes arises from an interest in discourse, each of these parameters needs to be viewed from the twin perspectives of physical doing, i.e., action and semiotic doing, i.e., locution.

The field of discourse might be such that it entrains locution as subsidiary to action. For example, from this standpoint, the language used by the mother in bathing a small child is typically one of instructing the child to do certain things and of identifying certain objects relevant to the activity of bathing (Hasan 1995). Contrast this with explaining a metaphor to a small child (Butt 1989). Here locution is

constitutive of the social activity; no physical action is capable of defining the activity of explanation (Hasan 1984; 1995). Alongside this distinction of locution as ancillary or constitutive to action, it is necessary to consider the distinctions relevant to the experiential domains — what I have referred to sometimes (Hasan 1985b) as the domain of signification. Bathing a child and getting the child his lunch call for locutions that are ancillary to action, while both explaining and recounting a past event call for constitutive locution but each of these four activities pertains to a distinct experiential domain.

Hopefully, one can immediately see the relevance of these distinctions to literature type texts. In doing literature, as in doing an explanation, the sayings are constitutive of the action; despite other crucial differences (see section 4), in this regard literature is like philosophy, history, mathematics, physics and so on. If someone claims to be doing literature — or to put it more conventionally is creating a work of literature — the only way to know whether or not the action has been carried out is by examining the language.

The tenor of discourse — the interactant relations — refers to how the speaker and addressee see themselves in relation to each other as well as in relation to the social activity in hand. A definite set of features is relevant to interactant relation, e.g. social status as determined in the community by regard to various categories of capital (Bourdieu 1991) — material, intellectual, and social. Equally important is the notion of social distance, i.e., the specific relation between the two actants as constructed by their individual life experiences (Hasan 1995). The interactants are the dynamic element of the context of situation, and it is at this point that I would locate the basis of the realisation of culture in the discourses of the community. For example, their local cultural affiliation to a particular social group — their social positioning — has consequences not only for the kinds of social activity they are likely to engage in, but also for how they would relate to that activity. This has been borne out by some large scale empirical research (Hasan 1989; 1991; 1992a; 1992b; Cloran 1994; Williams 1995). The points of view the interactants bring to the situation, whether convergent or divergent, makes a difference to how they see themselves in relation to each other — what accommodations, what compromises, what dominations, and what forms of cooperation they might consider possible in the performance of the social activity. The implications of tenor considerations for the study of literature are discussed in more detail below.

Mode of discourse too can be viewed from the standpoint of action and locution. From the standpoint of action, the co-presence of the interactants is the important issue: whether or not they are within reach of each other's speech — whether they can access the spoken word. If yes, then the channel (for the physical manifestation)

of discourse is highly likely to be *phonic*, as for example in a telephone interaction; if not, then it is highly likely to be *orthographic*, as for example in applying for research funding. From the standpoint of locution, the consideration is whether sayings are shared or not. If shared, as for example in enquiring about a holiday package at a travel agent's, then the locutionary mode is *dialogic*; if not, then it is *monologic*, as for example in producing a comprehensive report on one's research.

There is a default pairing of the terms derived from the consideration of mode from the perspectives of action and locution: the phonic channel typically "goes with" the dialogic locution, and the orthographic, with the monologic. The significance of this default pairing has rubbed off on the meanings of the popularly used words *spoken* and *written*, so that what is known as the spoken medium is a form of locution that possesses an immediacy of presence and a give-and-take, typical of shared activity. Halliday (1985) has described this medium as "choreographic". By comparison, the written medium has a somewhat untrammelled linearity which is symptomatic of the dual distancing of absence and non-sharing; Halliday (1985) has referred to this attribute of writing as "crystalline". The terms *spoken* and *written* in this sense, then, are dissociated from the physical manifestation of the semiotic activity, i.e., the channel, and from its semiotic management i.e. locutionary modes, dialogic/monologic. Rather, the words *spoken* and *written* have become composite terms referring to a synthesis of certain physical and semiotic phenomena.

It is, however, important to recognise the independence of channel from medium: channel refers to physical means of representing. As such it is also capable of representing representation itself. So we can have *written as-if spoken* as, for example, in the representation of dialogues in a novel, or indeed, in a play, where a single interactant — the artist — semiotically enacts more than one interactant role, writing what is supposed to be spoken. Part of what one is saying, in effect, is: orthographic representation of sayings as if the sayings were phonic. And it is not difficult to imagine yet another curl in this configuration, for a dialogue in a novel or a play might have the quality of *spoken as-if written*. So for example dialogues in Ivy Compton Burnett or in George Bernard Shaw — think especially of plays such as *Man and Superman* — might be described as *written as-if spoken as-if written*.

Social positioning is relevant to the management of mode. Consider first the phonic channel which implies physical co-presence. It raises an interesting question: what underlies the physical fact of the interactants' co-presence? It seems reasonable to suggest that cultural distance exerts itself in this matter, and the co-presence of interactants always implies some specific social relation between the social groups to which they are affiliated. Not just any member of a society can be in the same place with just any other member of that society a propos of the same social activity. Again,

apart from being able to hear the spoken word, what is the significance of co-presence? Obviously under certain conditions, the interactants are able to share the same scenario — sense the same "sens-ible" data. But at this point, it becomes important to know whether their points of view are convergent or divergent, for with divergent points of view the same physical scenario is not likely to be the same scenario as interpreted by them. Next consider dialogue, underlying which is shared semiotic activity. Like co-presence, this too is not an open option: not every one in a community can dialogue with just any one. The greater the cultural distance the less likely the possibility. And where semiotic activity is shared across such distances a calibration is established between the dominant and the subservient, the hostile and the accommodating and so on, which, as it were, plots out the coordinates of such "conversation". So the phonic-dialogic mode of interaction does not necessarily imply an absence of cultural distance; what it does imply however is a relatively immediate pairing of production and interpretation: in other words the reaction to the other's discourse — what is sometimes described as feed-back — has the possibility of appearing in closer contiguity. Certainly this is the case so far as the interactants are concerned; and that of course is the only important consideration from the perspective of the function of the text in its context.

But what about the mode of interaction that is orthographic and monologic? Here, because the active interactant is not face-to-face with the other, the social activity is not really one carried out in concert: the activities of the two, even if "logically" related, are not synchronised. It is not as if monologue does not receive response, but there may be gaps of variable extent between the semiotic activity of one interactant and the response of the other, so much so that typically the response would be viewed as a separate social activity as in replying to a letter, or writing the critique of some work of literature. I choose these examples to highlight a complication that is evident from the difference between the interactant relations.

The letter is typically responded to by or on behalf of a specific addressee, and the normal expectation is that the letter itself would carry at least some of the specificities of the addressee. This designated interactant is present *in absentia* — or as one would put it today, is *inscribed in the text* — for in his semiotic activity the text-producer has regard to this person as the addressee. A consequence of orthographic mode is, however, to make the text accessible to other than the intended addressees, since along with some other conditions, the orthographic channel has the effect of turning the text into a material object. This is pertinent to literature. Here we already have a problem of determining the interactant relation between the author and his readers: certainly the specificities of the addressee, if there is one intended, are not built into the work of literature, or at least not quite the way that they are in other discourse types. When this feature is juxtaposed with cultural distances — whether temporal or

ideological — between the literature writer and the critic, we might well question whether a response to Shakespeare's work, for example such as by Terence Hawkes (*Sydney Morning Herald*, March 21, 1995: 17), is relevant to Shakespeare's works of literature as literature, just as it is doubtful that the *fatwa* by the Ayatullah tells us much about the status of *The Satanic Verses* as literature. There is clearly a difference between responding uninvited as critics of literature do, and responding as the intended addressee does. In the latter case the response turn is obviously an integral part of the interaction scheme and is assigned by the speaker, as in responding to a letter. The critic of literature always falls into the former category: it is never clear that he is the person spoken to by the writer. It seems to me that a price the critic has to pays for this is the effacement of the self: that self was never meant to be there anyway. This in turn implies respect for the text's world — indeed, respect for the text itself. As Edward Said has remarked:

> ... texts are ... in the world [and] ... as texts they place themselves — one of their functions is to place themselves — and indeed are themselves, by soliciting the world's attention. Moreover, their manner of doing this is to place restraints upon what can be done with them interpretively. [1991: 40]

In a superficial sense one may place texts in the world by attending to what was said explicitly about their relation to the world either by the author or the contemporaries, or the readers down the corridors of time. But creating such communities of consensus is less viable a way of placing a text in the world than knowing the principles for deciding on the interpretations they might permit; to respect the restraints they place upon their own interpretations. And this cannot be done without close attention to the text's language relating it to the author's own affiliations. The following section is an attempt to suggest just such a framework.

4. Language for Reading Literature

Let me begin this section by saying quite plainly: *literature is verbal art*. One of the questions that has to be satisfactorily answered is the nature of the relation between the modifier *verbal* and the head word *art*. Is literature art that, incidentally, happens to be verbal; that is to say, is the relation between the two a contingent one? Or is it a stronger relation whereby the art in literature can only be found in the languaging? The framework I shall be presenting in this section supports the latter position. This commits one to taking seriously both the art which is languaged and the language which is artistic, to see literature as a variety of language, but the variety itself as possessing attributes which are not matched by non-literature varieties.

The uniqueness and individuality of the artist have been emphasised so much that perhaps it is best to make another unequivocal statement: *the artist is as much a*

socially positioned being as the readers of his work. So at some level of consciousness, the artist experiences the effects of the cultural *milieu* of the historical moment that is his, the bonds of local cultural affiliations, as does his reader. The multiple ideologies known to the artist's time and place, prevalent at that specific cultural stage, are relevant to what the artist says as a private being or as an artist just as they are relevant to a scientist such as, say, Newton both as a private being and as the writer of *Opticks*. The real difference is in how the saying as an artist is done, in contrast to how the saying is done as a private individual.

To look into this a little more closely, let us turn to the *context of creation* for literature texts (Hasan 1985a). If text is in a realisational dialectic with some social process, and if literature texts are texts, then it is valid to ask: what is the field a propos of which this text has come about, what is the social relation between the speaker and the addressee, and how are field and tenor semiotically organised by the signing modes? In the last section, I have already provided some indication that context of situation will be relevant to literature as a type of disclosure. The two most important attributes of the context for the variety literature appear to be its *as-if* character, and its tendency for *double articulation*. Let me explain what I mean by these terms by looking at the three parameters form the point of view of this duality.

4.1 The Field of Discourse in Literature

Using the perspectives of action and locution, the field for the literature work will reveal an absence of physical action, giving the locution a constitutive character. But in this respect the literature text does not differ very much from, say, a scientific one, such as for example Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, which is a scientific exposition. The locution in Chaucer's Treatise constitutes an explanatory exposition of the astrolabe.

In the literature text too the locution constitutes a verbal doing of the sort that might be called novel, drama, short story, lyric, sonnet, blank verse etc., words that refer to some *genre*, as that word was conventionally used. It is when we ask in the case of any specific literature text: what does this verbal activity of, say, "storying" constitute, that we note the feature of double articulation. Suppose we were answering this question with reference to Les Murray's blank verse with the title *Widower in the country* (see Appendix to this paper) which I have discussed elsewhere (Hasan 1985a: 29-55), then it would not be inaccurate to say that the poem constitutes something which in terms of Cloran (1994: 133) we might describe as a *prediction* detailing what the widower thinks he will be doing, or more precisely what will be happening to him. This is comparable to what I called the experiential domain (see section 3.2). But if one reads Murray's poem as simply constituting a prediction about the widower's

day, one would miss out on a very important aspect: the details of how the poet "says" these things about the widower's day constitute a generalisation on an important aspect of the human condition, namely that, to be truly human, we need other human beings; and that isolation is synonymous with a form of dehumanisation. The experiential domain specifying the widower's predicted activities has to be re-interpreted, and this is what I mean by double-articulation.

The poem presents a situation that we may describe as doing one thing by way of another: constituting a statement about the relation between individuality and community by a particular way of constituting an account of how someone lives his days. Now, what we regard as literature texts happen to possess this characteristic of double articulation overwhelmingly often, and it is for this reason that literature may be said to function as an extended metaphor. We could then recognise two levels of context in the literature text. The field in the first level is what we are able to, as it were, paraphrase — eg., Murray's *Widower in the country* tells us about how a lone widower lives his days in the Australian outback. The field for the second level of context is what we are able to, as it were, deduce from the particular ways in which the first level field is constituted. I have suggested that the second level of field interpretation contributes to "the deepest meaning" of a literature text — its **theme**. The art of the artist lies precisely in the skill with which s/he is able to calibrate the two levels of articulation, so that the events, episodes, claims of the first level succeed in articulating the deepest meaning — the theme of the text.

4.2 The Tenor of Discourse in Literature

Turning to tenor, we find an equally complex situation. Who are the interactants? We know that "in reality" the one writing the poem is Les Murray, but we know also that the *I* of the poem does not refer to Murray. We need to recognise a complex interactant role: *author as-if the widower in the country*, and while the author is Murray, the creator of the voice of the widower, the widower himself is entirely "created" by the wordings-meanings of the poem. Thus when we ask if there is another interactant, an addressee, in this activity, there is no simple answer to this question: it depends whether we are asking: who is Murray, the author, addressing? or, who is the widower addressing? Let us take the author-role first.

Does the author have an intended addressee? For example, someone who would treat the literature work as an object text? Is there an element of showmanship — the poet creating a text for an expert, i.e., the literary critic, who is intended to go on to analyse it? This is a possibility that cannot be ignored particularly today, when literature texts are scrutinised as candidates in the race for some prestigious prize. And it isn't just the expert who might be present to the artist's mind in the context of creation: the

artist may choose to write for a specific readership. So there are cases where we recognise that the reader is, in some sense, inscribed in the text: for example, the nursery tales are so called because they are primarily addressed to a specific category of readers defined by their state of maturity; *popular literature* is literature intended for a specific category of reader, and so on. Of course there is no specific person designated as the interactant in these cases, but this is not very different from, say, the situation of Newton's *Opticks*. Perhaps one difference voiced in the common belief is that whereas, to be read with understanding, Newton's *Opticks* requires a specialised audience, the work of literature does not do so — anyone can access the work of literature. I suggest this is not a viable position. The ability to present a viable reading of literature is a specialised activity that does not come about simply because we naturally happen to have the right sensibilities, the aesthetic ability.

So much for the author's interactional other, but what about the widower? The Murray poem simply gives information; who is this information addressed to? In the case of this poem, the widower seems to have no addressee; but when the verbal activity of a literature text is novella, novel, play or short story, we are very likely to find that an entirely verbally constituted *I* — an interactant role at the first level of context, a character — might interact with other verbally constituted characters, as for example the characters in Angus Wilson's *Necessity's Child* do (Hasan 1985a). Such constituted characters are subject to double-articulation, since these are in fact *as-if* interactant relations. Their relevance to the first level of context is obvious enough; they carry the discourse of who did what to whom etc. But typically they are also relevant to the second level since these *as-if* relations themselves become a resource for the reader in making a second order reading which contributes to the articulation of the work's theme. The extent to which these relations contribute to such reading is also a measure of the artist's artistry. Imagine for example *Pride and Prejudice* without Elizabeth Bennett. It follows that part of the artistry consists in the languaging aspects by which such characters are constituted in such a way that it is possible to project on the basis of their first order behaviour a significance which contributes to the deep meaning of the text.

When there is a disjunction between the contexts of creation and interpretation, as with diachronic cultural distance, the question of readership for the literature text assumes even greater importance. The hold of the reader, whether the professional critic or a lay person, on a literature text is always somewhat tenuous, and in view of what diachronic cultural distance implies, the reader appears all the more extraneous to the internal workings of the text. If it is true that texts place restraints upon what can be done with them interpretively, and if it is true that the author speaks from a particular social position at a particular cultural stage, then listening to this voice

across the cultural distances requires special expertise. I do not mean by this that the work has just that meaning which the author had in mind, and the task of the reader is to "find" that meaning in the work: this is simply a confused proposition, which lacking meaning also lacks feasibility. What I am suggesting is that the more the reader understands about the particulars of the author's speaking position, the more rewarding the reading is likely to be. Both the author and the reader are spatio-temporally located, which is to say that through their cultural affiliations, they are also socially, ideologically specific. The bridge across this is formed by attempts to understand the social semiotics, of which language is the most important since it is in its language that the creativity, the artistry of the verbal art is revealed.

4.3 The Mode of Discourse in Literature

At the first level of its context, the locutionary mode for literature texts is overwhelmingly monologic. Typically, literature texts are not created interactively, with two or more interactants sharing the process of text creation.[9] Similarly, ever since the invention of printing, the channel by which a literature text is manifested has typically been orthographic. I have already commented on the *as-if* quality of mode from this perspective. A few words more on some consequences of this.

Consider any novel or play. Typically the language is constitutive of many *as-if* registers; that is to say, very many different contexts are constituted by the language of such texts. Snippets of lectures, as in Stoppard's *Arcadia* or Angus Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, academic discussion as, say, a problem in maths in *Arcadia* and of archaeology in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, nursing the sick, as in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, narrating a past event etc. are just a few. Again, different dialects might be represented within the body of one text: these might range from geographical dialects as in many of D H Lawrence's novels, to social class based ones. What is outstanding about the appearance of these varieties in a literature work is their use as a resource for constituting the second level context, and more specifically for the realisation of the theme of the work. In a way literature texts put to work the expressions of cultural distances commonly acknowledged in a community, to reconstitute these in the work. An important ingredient of verbal art is the ability of the artist to see across cultural distances: the literature work typically presents multiple points of view, creating transformed records of the various social positionings present in the society. The obvious implication is that unless the reader familiarises himself with the sub-cultures,

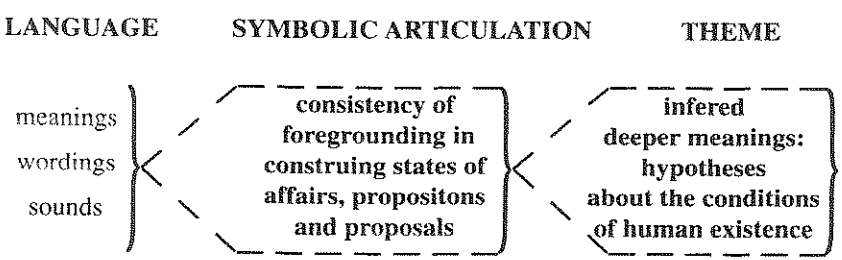
9. This situation might change with the so-called revolution in information technology.However, neither improvised drama nor mushaira (ritualised poetry presentation sessions in Indo-Pakistani sub-continent, where poets vied with each other and presented their new compositions) are examples of interactive text construction.

range of social situations, ways of living the life that was common to the author's cultural stage, the significance of events, episodes, characters, their relations, their ways of talking which are reconstituted in the literature text might escape the reader. And this is tantamount to saying that the reader is very likely to miss aspects of the author's artistry. This artistry is quite obviously constituted in language, which in turn means that the nature of a literature text as an instance of verbal art cannot be appreciated without the ability to examine the meaning making resources of language[10].

4.4 Languaged Art, Artistic Language

Figure 1 is a schematic representation of how art is languaged and how language becomes artistic. The first column in the figure is labelled LANGUAGE and enumerates the levels of linguistic organisation, consisting of meaning (semantics), wording (lexicogrammar) and sounds (phonology). The double articulation is made possible through the combined workings of these levels. The specific characteristic of languaging which is necessary for permitting the second order interpretation, is called here SYMBOLIC ARTICULATION. This consists in the creation of patterns from the patterns of language, for example how the tenses are organised in The Widower in the Country, how process types are patterned and how clause complexing is not random (see for details Hasan 1985a). On the basis of such linguistic patterns, can be inferred the deepest level of the meaning of the literature text, called THEME.

Figure 1: Language and the nature of literature



The art of literature lies in the way that symbolic articulation is managed. Time was when creativity was equated with deviation; in fact, this view of creativity persists in certain quarters. Conventional figures of speech and tropes were considered the stock-in-trade for literary language. I am suggesting that language becomes artistic

10. For a discussion of how language works in literature see Hasan 1972; 1985a; 1987; Butt 1987; this volume; O'Toole 1982; Halliday 1972.

not necessarily by having these features, but by the way it is deployed in contributing to the semantic design — theme enunciation — of the literature work. Certainly parallelism, contrast, proportionalities of one kind or another are important, but they only gain significance if they succeed in articulating the theme. The artist needs a sensitivity to language to be able to repattern its patterns; the critic must ideally possess understanding of the working of language to be able to show how the symbolic articulation is managed.

To elaborate on the last comment, the artist's relation to the language is *practical* in terms of Bourdieu (1991): to create art the artist does not need to be able to analyse the workings of language. By contrast, the critic's engagement with the language of the literature text cannot be just practical: it must be informed by a theoretical understanding as well, because the very act of choosing to talk about a literature text, assigns it an "object" status. The critic's discourse is self-consciously a discourse on an objectivity real discourse, one that can certainly be seen from different perspectives, but that still has a hold on reality simply because it IS; it EXISTS, and that being the case it exists in some form, with some specificity that is ITS. To be explanatory, to be revelatory of the existent object discourse, the critic's discourse cannot be *simply* subjective, taking his/her own understanding of meaning as those inhering in the object text. To rise above personal, private opinions and above the pursuits of "fashions in taste", be they ever so socially responsible, the critic's discourse must *also* be objective, able to show how the meanings he/she claims to be "there" are actually made. Clearly this will still be the critic's perception of how certain meanings are made, but they will have the merit of laying bare the basis of her/his claims of meaning, instead of proclaiming their existence, *ex cathedra*. To do this one needs a good deal more than the ability to perceive in some consonants the noise of apples being crunched (of Leavis on Keats *Ode to Autumn*), or the ingenuity to turn words around in a paroxysm of deconstructive enthusiasm (cf those critics who hope to gain visibility in the effulgence of Derrida's undoubted originality), by playing on words through association of their literal meanings while denying that such literal meanings exist. (cf Bourdieu's 1991 views on denotation). The valuable notion that the meaning is not in the text but is largely relative to the social location of the reader has become vulgarised, turned into a *credo* of a new individualism whose external facade is that of social responsibility but whose lack of engagement with modes of social semiotic, the most crucial basis for the enactment of the social, is deplorable.

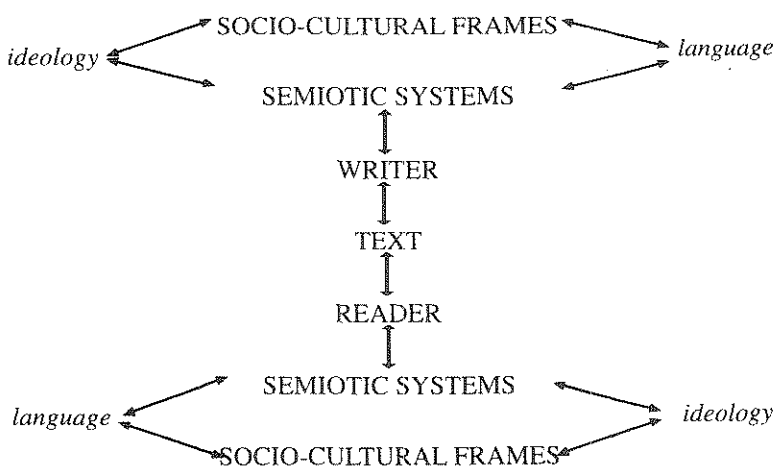
I am aware that these sentiments are out of fashion, and will most probably incur displeasure. To compound my culpability, I should also say a few words on the universality of literature. At the highest level of abstraction, the theme of the literature text is concerned with hypotheses about the conditions of human existence. Theme

in its nature is closest to a hypothesis (Hasan 1972; 1985a etc) - a declaration of some states of affairs that inhere in the condition of being human, such as for example, humanity being attainable only in the company of other humans (cf Murray's *Widower in the Country*; see Hasan 1985a), or the centrality of human interaction in generating perceptions of what is real or imaginary as well as in creating the perceiving self (cf Angus Wilson's *Necessity's Child*; Hasan ibid). How an instance of theme would be valued is an ideological issue: depending on one's point of view, hypotheses about the human condition may or may not impinge on one's perception of what it is to live as a human being. This granted, I would still claim that as a species, human beings do share experiences across the boundaries of cultural distances of one kind or another. These may be experiences about the world outside us or inside us. While the survival of a work of literature through time and social space is a complex issue, neither entirely rationally determined nor just a matter of chance, I would suggest that a work of literature that "speaks" to us across time and social space is very likely to be interpretable as an expression of theme(s) which resonate with time-less, pan-cultural hypotheses about the human condition. To the extent that human existence has universal characteristics, the theme of the literature text has the potential of attracting universal recognition: in fact, if we examine works which have continued to be valued across communities, we would find that typically the theme of such works speak to humanity as a whole; it singles out an observation, a hypothesis, that has significance for the multiple designs of living prevalent across humanity. Objectively speaking, it is not so much that literature has the property of *solving* cultural problems (cf Butt, this volume); it is that, in its valued cases, it has the property of *identifying* them; it has the function of making visible some truth about humanity. Despite the experiences of such authors as Faiz of Pakistan, Neguib Mahfouz of Egypt, Ngugi wa Thiongo of Kenya, Chinua Achebe of Nigeria, Pramoedya Ananta Toer of Indonesia, one is entitled to hope that this characteristic of literature itself may result in an awareness that they become a significant step in social change, as Gordimer (1995:131) suggests: "The expression in art of what really exists beneath the surface is part of the transformation of a society. What is written, painted, sung, cannot remain ignored". But to be a vehicle of social change literature needs to be read reflectively, with understanding; and talk about in it in the educational context needs to be enabling; that is to say, it has to be such that it enables the pupils to read *any* work of literature reflectively. While in sympathy with many of the claims of "critical theory", my idea of reading reflectively (Hasan 1996) is not necessarily the same thing as putting critical theory into practice, for in the approach called "critical theory" there seems to be a transformation of the word "critical" which becomes almost synonymous with "politically correct", legitimised by the fame of certain intellectual leaders.

5. Teaching and Learning

I have only made very general remarks about the way in which language is central to the study of literature. To provide details of the ways in which language functions in literature in such a way as to create verbal art would call for much more time and space. Besides my focus has been only on those aspects of literature which become problematic in the teaching of literature due to cultural distance. The very notion of cultural distance implies social variation, multiple voices, and alternative readings. In the first two sections of this presentation I tried to show that the infinite, ongoing process of everyday learning shapes the consciousness of the social subjects. Sub-cultures — that is to say, the cultures of the many social groups in the society — bring different points of view to what in some sense is the same situation. Figure 2 schematically represents the way that writers, their texts and readers are located vis a vis each other. The socio-cultural frames for the author and his readers are very often not isomorphic: they differ to varying degrees, depending upon the social positioning of the reader.

Figure 2: The text, the writer, the reader, and the language in the context of culture



The concept of "the reader" as an anonymous singularity is perhaps the biggest assumption that literature education makes. Pupils come to the school already affiliated to the ways of being, saying, thinking and doing which are characteristic of their social group. The structure of the society is represented in the classroom through the pupils. The problems of teaching literature across cultural distances are first and foremost problems associated with the nature of the pedagogic system in the societies known to us. I identify below four characteristics of literature education which make it less than satisfactory.

First, I have already commented on the false homogenisation. The assumption that the members of the class, unless they lack ability, must all have a unity of reaction, a standard way of approaching learning, and the same perception of the significance and value of phenomena.

Second, as a concomitant of the first, and given the control on educational agenda, there is the raising of one voice as the legitimate voice: this covers every aspect of relating to knowledge, being expressed also in the standardisation of the literature curricula. Today a good deal of talk continues about the undesirability of retaining the "literary canon"; one hears less about the undesirability of teaching literature by "fashions of appreciation".

Third, an unwillingness to engage with literature itself, using it to hang on to it whatever happens to be the intellectual flavour of the decade. This in turn is most probably a consequence of failure to appreciate the close relationship of literature and language. Teachers' own language education is often deplorably lacking in an understanding of language as a social semiotic. The false dichotomisation of form and function remains: those who follow the formal approach, know little about how language is used in the living of life, and those who profess to follow function as opposed to form, have no objectively valid way of describing what they subjectively perceive. The view that if the students can "get the meaning" this is enough for a critique of literature is a delusion, and it is a dangerous delusion for where there is an alternative reading, there is no way of analysing the respective strengths of those readings. In fact, in the domain of literature study to privilege the understanding of meaning divorced from any understanding of how linguistic form construes meanings is as ludicrous as the idea that all native speakers can be teachers of their language, simply because they can speak it. Although the detailed analysis of a literature text is not presented here, I have hopefully said enough to support my argument that the validity of postulating this theme or that for a work of literature is based on how far it is supported by the languaging in service of the symbolic articulation.

Finally, and perhaps, the most serious: I do not believe that literature as such can be taught, nor can it be learned. What can be taught and learned is an orientation, a

principle for approaching literature. From this point of view the arguments which would displace Shakespeare or Austen from the curriculum to bring in someone else, are something beside the point. It is not so much *which* literature text should or should not be taught, since we can never teach even a representative sample of what communities own by way of literature: the question really is what principles, what orientations, what methodology should we teach to enable the pupils to approach whatever work of literature they would wish to read with appraisal. This our pedagogic systems sadly fail to do, trading labels for analysis.

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Appendix

THE WIDOWER IN THE COUNTRY

I'll get up soon, and leave my bed unmade.
I'll go outside and split off kindling wood
From the yellow-box log that lies beside the gate
And the sun will be high, for I get up late now.
I'll drive my axe in the log and come back in
With my armful of wood, and pause to look across
The Christmas paddocks aching in the heat
The windless trees, the nettles in the yard..
And then I'll go in, boil water and make tea.

This afternoon, I'll stand out on the hill
And watch my house away below, and how
The roof reflects the sun, and makes my eyes
Water and close on bright webbed visions smeared
On the dark of my thoughts to dance and fade away.
Then the sun will move on, and I will simply watch,
Or work, or sleep. And evening will draw in.

Coming on dark, I'll go home, light the lamp
And eat my corned beef supper, sitting there
At the head of the table. Then I'll go to bed.
Last night I thought I dreamed — but when I woke
The screaming was only a possum skiing down
The iron roof on little moonlit claws.

Les Murray

From *Twelve Poets 1950-1970*, edited by Alex Craig. Milton, Q'ld: Jacaranda Press. 1971.