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**Some remarks on teaching
Introduction to English literature
to Polish students of English**

Before dealing with some aspects of teaching Introduction to English Literature courses to Polish, or more generally non-native students, let me begin with the presentation of a scene that proved it to me once again how difficult it is to teach literature as a school or university subject; how much we have been exposed both as teachers and students to the traditional approach and how difficult it is for us, as teachers of English Literature (and most probably any Literature) to adopt efficiently alternative approaches. Mike Hayhoe (Hayhoe :170) sees a “standard” literature lesson in this way:

The teacher assumes that the poet has been breathed into by some amazing force and his or her job is to seek out what the poet has hidden and then to come down from the mountain and say “Okay, turn to page thirty-three”. And the poor students turn to page thirty three. The teacher has probably spent the whole summer vacation on this task – or at least part of the previous night – but for the students, there’s this sudden unseen thing confronting them and they’re expected to answer the agenda of questions and interpret *his* clues as to whether “they’re getting the poem right” or not. You know the sort of thing I mean. The drawn out “yes”. Which is a polite way of saying a partial “no”; the “um, interesting” with a stress on the “in”. which equals “Foolish answer”; the “Ah yes indeed, very interesting” which means you are getting really warm. And the kids aren’t interested in *their* understanding of the poem at all. They’re interested in getting hold of the poem which they believe *the teacher* has defined.. Forgive the vulgarism, but this method can lead to the puke curriculum. The teacher has digested the poem; the students eat what he has digested and have to regurgitate it. If their regurgitation is the same as *the teacher’s*, then everything is fine; high marks and it’s all done.

Teaching survey courses of English Literature in Poland is an intriguing activity. One is supposed to have acquired this skill during the course that may have been called "Introduction to English Literature" or "History of English Literature" or "British Literature" or "Survey of English Literature" or simply "English Literature" and that may have lasted from 90 to some 300 hours covering the canon from *Beowulf* to modern literature that may have meant anything from T.S. Eliot through Angela Carter to T.R.R. Tolkien or even J.K. Rowling. Then, as one loves reading or at least prefers it to linguistics or ELT methodology, one chooses one or three courses dealing at depth with one novel each, one class called "pro-seminarium" and one called "seminarium" on "English Literature" or "English Novel" or "Victorian Novel" or "Late Victorian Novel" or "Thomas Hardy" or "Late Novels of Thomas Hardy" or "Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*" and having written and defended his/her 40 to 80 page long M.A. dissertation on "Post-feminist motives in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*" one is considered competent by his alma mater to teach "Introduction to English Literature" or "History of English Literature"

Then one is asked to teach canonical writers, a wide proportion of whom one had only been exposed to in short extracts taken from various anthologies of English Literature, and if one is lucky enough (Lucky Jim enough) one will teach the same extracts to his/her own students. Fortunately, however, it is not this "teaching" that one's academic career depends on. "Publish or perish" phenomenon reigns not only at American or British universities but also at Polish ones. So it is not the quality of this "teaching" that counts but rather the academic papers, articles and books that one publishes. And these are generally concerned with one narrow and ever becoming narrower field of research (one day one may even be called a distinguished Hardyan). If one is brilliant enough in his/her research one will design his/her own ever more specific courses that will be closely connected with one's research, and hopefully, one day one will become a Professor, teach fewer hours and maybe not teach introductory courses at all.

Teachers of such introductory courses in English literature are generally left to their own devices. Course curricula would include titles of canonical works but usually little more. There is little generally accessible literature (pun intended) on how to teach such courses. There are, of course, set books and anthologies and there are vague memories of one's own teachers of English Literature and their methods. If these recollections are positive one will try to emulate those classes, if not, one has to come up with one's own vision of interesting and/or efficient classes on English Literature.

It seems that the dominant method of teaching such introductory courses of English Literature at Polish universities is still a variation of the traditional "philological" method. It is perhaps no coincidence that most English departments at Polish universities are named "Filologia angielska", the 19th century spirit of philology, conceived at German universities, lives on, philology that was based upon old fashioned linguistics (mostly etymology and historical grammar) combined with an equally outdated interpretation of literary history. The method has been modified over the decades as less grammar has been taught but its fundamental principles remain unchanged. It was conceived in the era of the belief in the unity of the meaning of a literary text and clear cut dichotomies: Literature vs literature, literary language vs practical language, high culture vs popular culture, study of language vs study of literature. This method is also elitist in a twofold way. It conveys the belief in the uniqueness of Literature, as an area of human activity best suited to educate better, more noble and refined scholars/gentlemen/people. It also keeps alive the high blown sentiments about Literature conceived of on the local turf by numerous generations of Polish intelligentsia and later supported from Britain by the likes of F.R. Leavis. Literature is thus seen as an area where it is only the brightest that can form their independent critical judgement and are eventually able to become scholars and critics; the priests of the Humanist cult. And the remaining 95 per cent seem to matter only in the sense that they have to take and pass their final English Literature exams, which incidentally most of them do as they manage to memorize enough data to satisfy their examiner's sense of humanistic mission and declining levels of students' *literariness*.

How can we avoid teaching classes like the ones described by Mike Hayhoe? How can we change the "philological" way of teaching English Literature? This paper is an attempt to look for some general clues to answer this question and is a brief survey of different trends, approaches, theories and methods that have been proposed over the last thirty years, or so, and which, in my belief, can help to make our survey course of English Literature better.

I would like to concentrate on the aspects of teaching English Literature to non-native tertiary students of English. The situation of such students is radically different from the situation of British or American undergraduates choosing to read English; it is different in many ways. The three main areas of difference are: linguistic, cultural and literary.

Although non-native tertiary students of English usually speak English at advanced, and often at proficiency level, there are areas in which they lag far behind average native students, areas often crucial for the understand-

ding and interpretation of literary texts. The grasp of idiomatic expressions and colloquial language, the ability to recognise often minute differences in registers and local and/or professional, social etc varieties of English are possibly most obvious, but definitely, not exclusive points of disparity.

As far as culture is concerned there seems to be even a bigger world of difference comprising areas of the synchronic and diachronic knowledge of such diverse phenomena as customs, social stratification, nursery rhymes, pop culture with its idols and craftsmen. All aspects of culture are deeply embedded in literary works and although one can claim that the cultural competence of an average non-native English under-graduate has grown over the last two or three decades thanks to bigger exposure to various mass media and multi-media data in English; the frames and schemata that such an undergraduate has, when confronted with a piece of English literature are definitely less sophisticated, much more vague and less cohesive than the ones at disposal of a British or American student of English literature.

But it is the hiatus in the exposure to English literature prior to the course of English Literature that is probably the greatest of the three above mentioned areas. With average British or American undergraduates the number of English Literature classes and works of English Literature they have read or have been supposed to have read is definitely a three or, in some cases, a four digit number; whereas a non-native, non Anglo-Saxon student may have been taught English with some more or less regular component of English Literature, but s/he may have just as well have been asked to read one or two Shakespeare's plays in their vernacular language and one or two very popular very short stories in their Longman/OUP coursebook. The former seems to be the case in such diverse countries as Germany, Italy, Hong Kong or Tanzania, where English Literature (for various reasons, which are outside the scope of our considerations here) is still an important component of secondary school English curricula. The latter is definitely the case (for various reasons, which are also outside the scope of our considerations here) in countries like Poland.

Obviously the gap in the general literary competence between native and non-native students of English and English Literature is not so tremendous, as the latter are exposed to a long term instruction in their vernacular literatures. They can transform some of their interpretative skills and some of their knowledge about literary genres to their English Lit classes, but this would only minimally close the hiatus existing between them and native English or American students of English.

The hiatus in knowledge, frames and schemata between these two groups of students is not only the result of the three main areas: lingu-

stic, cultural and literary operating on their own but also of phenomena that are clearly the result of the interaction of the two or three of these elements; interactions that are and have been traditionally exploited in literary texts and which are, because of their mixed breed, so difficult to teach; they definitely include concepts like: satire, irony, pastiche, inter-textuality. The difference between these two types of students as far as teaching/learning English literature is presented vividly by John Honey (1991:115):

Student's A initial approach to an English literary text reveals a confidence which is a function of proximity of the language of that text to the vocabulary, grammar and idiom of educated standard English literary usage of the present day, to which his social and cultural background give him ready access. The further back in time that the text dates from, the more that confidence will depend on explicit teaching and textural annotation to help this student to understand both the linguistic forms of an earlier period and the social institutions. Graham Greene and Virginia Woolf require little such explication; Hardy, Eliot and Dickens rather more; and from Jane Austen back through Swift and Milton to Shakespeare and Chaucer there is a line of increasing difficulty which demands more and more detailed explication both of language itself and of "background" (Brumfit, 114) Whereas: "Student's B situation is enormously different. The language of Graham Greene and Virginia Woolf poses some kind of challenge – not a daunting one, since unfamiliar vocabulary or idiom is coped with by recourse to dictionaries – and the cultural background to the events of the story, though unfamiliar, fairly accessible. But the moment we step back into the 19th century, and increasingly as we go back earlier than that combination of linguistic and cultural difficulties comes to constitute the major blockage, a high level threshold which must be laboriously surmounted before any worthwhile or realistic exercise of appreciation can begin.

Some general and fundamental notions and ideas developed over the last thirty years connected with the way we look at literature and teach it are valid for all literature teaching irrespective of level and native/foreign language/culture situation. These would include influence of Reader Response theories, EFL methodology and stylistics on literature teaching but they would also include the awareness of continua, clines that we encounter in the areas connected with literature: Literature and literature, literary language and non-literary language, product and process teaching methodologies and so on.

The fundamental notion influencing literature teaching over the last few decades has been an unstable and vague status of the term Literature itself and what it signifies. Ever since Roland Barthes announced the death of the author and claimed that "literature is what gets taught", the tradi-

tionally strong and unique position of Literature in the Humanities was no more, at least with more theory oriented scholars. Terry Eagleton claimed, in a similar fashion, that literature can be compared to weeds, as the status of both literature is equally arbitrary and as a “weed” is a name we give to plants we simply do not want in our garden that may have otherwise little in common anatomically, “literature” is a name of a group of texts we want to treat as literature. And thus he claimed that “Any bit of writing may be read ‘non-pragmatically’, if that what reading a text as literature means, just as any writing may be read ‘poetically’. If I pore over the railway timetable not to discover a train connection but to stimulate in myself general reflections on the speed and complexity of modern existence, then I might be said to be reading it as literature” (Eagleton 1983: 9). It seems that these and similar ideas did not have a lot of influence on the choice of texts for the Introduction of English Literature course, as they remained mostly traditionally canonical (even though the very concept of canon was questioned from many directions and alternative canons have been prepared), but more on the ways in which the crucial concepts such as a literary text, literature teaching methodology, role of literature teachers have been perceived.

Literature was no longer perceived as one pole in a bi-polar relations, dichotomies such as Fiction versus non-fiction or literary versus non-literary language. Instead it started to be perceived as an area where different continua, clines, spectra are in operation. Ronald Carter (1997; pp xi-xii) in the introduction to *Investigating English Discourse* discussed the following set of continua operating in the areas connected with Literature

- literary and non-literary language
- process and product-based teaching methodologies
- standard and non-standard Englishes
- high-risk and low-risk metaphors
- recognition and discourse literacy
- old style and new-style grammar teaching
- spoken discourse and written discourse

Later on in his book Carter (1997) presents more clines: Literature-literature and polysemic versus monosemic texts (the former show multiple layers of meaning). This list is by no means complete but it shows clearly how many dimensional the world of clines in Literature is and that perhaps it is only the educational system within which we teach English Literature that is cline-proof. It is the system that imposes sharp, clear divisions and borders: secondary/tertiary, lectures/seminars pass/failure, English Literature/British Studies, English Literature/Practical English. Most of these

pairs of dichotomies are in reality clines on which the system has more or less arbitrarily imposed its borders or cut-off points. So we have a situation that the subject we teach is internally dominated by numerous clines. Moreover there are more clines that can be shown to exist in the relations with other subjects like British Studies, Practical English, History of England. After all, teachers of all of these subjects use more or less extensively more or less canonical works of English literature, whereas even the most purist of English Literature teachers while presenting the background of the literary works, must regularly refer to phenomena outside the scope of literature; phenomena traditionally attributed to the domain of cultural studies, linguistics or history. In extreme cases such an attitude may lead to a call for more or less intensive integration of these subjects; whereas in its mild form it leads to a call for co-operation between teachers of these subjects so that they are all aware about the range and depth of problems presented to the students. From the point of view of literature teaching methodology, the awareness of the clines English Literature – British Studies, English Literature – English Language Teaching should result in the more eager adaptation of the methodological know-how of foreign language teaching and teaching cultural studies in the teaching of literature in a foreign language.

The traditional pairs of dichotomies: Literature and literature, or High Culture and Popular Culture operated alongside obvious assumptions as to the values and value judgements which was to be marked “plus” and which “minus”. The emergence of the awareness of the clines coincided with the tendencies not to assign absolute value systems to such and other dichotomies. But this does not imply complete neutrality in the assessment of the usefulness of some approaches to teaching literature over others. The most obvious examples would be the preference of process based methodology over product based methodology and the preference of student centred classes over teacher centred ones. These are more or less direct influences of reader response criticism and communicative language teaching methodology; the two areas of studies that have influenced literature teaching in the most profound ways over the last three decades.

Reader response criticism (also referred to as reader oriented criticism, or, particularly in Germany, reception theory) is not and has never been a uniform approach to literary texts but rather a variety of approaches with some common features, the most obvious is the shift from a text as such to its reader and his reception. Reading, as an activity is no longer seen as rediscovering of the meaning of a text, but as the creation of this meaning. In the most extreme, subjectivist versions “the absolute priority of individual selves as creators of texts” was postulated. (Mailloux 1982: 31) But it was

not the extreme version that many teachers of literature turned to in their search for literature teaching methodology but to more “objective” approach presented for example by Stanley Fish who tackled the question: why is it so, that different readers show an inclination to read the same works in the same way. He argued that “the stability of interpretations among readers” is a function of “shared interpretative strategies”. These strategies, which “exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read” are held in common by “interpretative communities” such as the one constituted by American college students reading a novel as a class assignment” (1980:167-171). That was a good point of entry for teachers concerned with the new methods of teaching literature and Reader Response theory in its mild versions became popular with them for many reasons. Brumfit and Benton summed them up in their introduction to *Teaching Literature, A World Perspective* (1993:3-4)

1. It appears as the “natural”, evolutionary successor to old-fashioned liberal humanism. There is a clear focus as in Leavis, upon the concrete experience of reading the text, yet divested of the cultural and aesthetic snobbery that disfigures criticism from that earlier period.
2. It honours both the integrity of the text and the reader, acknowledging the uniqueness of each reading event. It has, therefore, a universal attractiveness to readers and, more especially, to literature teachers with its focus upon responsiveness – the live process of the classroom. This concern with pedagogy goes back to Richards but without the debilitating effect that his notorious ten difficulties produced in the literature teaching that derived from *Practical Criticism* (1929)
3. It defines the question of value not only in terms of the inherent value of a work but also in transitive terms, thus back-grounding the issue of the critical evaluation of the “great texts” in favour of value – judgements pertaining to particular readings by particular people. It offers a new perspective on the moral values of reading literature by asserting the importance of the individual’s ‘reading’ of a text. The responsibility of making meaning lies with the reader.; the emphasis shifts from critical authority and received knowledge towards the development of personal responses, their refinement through sharing these responses with others, and their evaluation through what Stanley Fish calls the authority of the interpretative community of the classroom.
4. It is inclusive in respect of other significant strands of contemporary literary theory. It is able to accommodate aspects, of say, narratology or feminist theory within its framework as allies in the effort to elucidate the interaction between text and reader which is its focus of concern.

5. It represents the contemporary preference for process over product in recognisable and explicit ways. In practical terms, it implies the use of explanatory talk and informal writing to monitor, record and share one's own thinking with that of others. Such activities follow from a theoretical position which can live comfortably with the idea of resisting closure, with meanings not fixed, with the infinitely renewable quality of literary experience

Reader Response techniques, when applied in a too orthodox fashion, are accused of concentrating too much on an individual and forgetting about socio-political implications; one more criticism is that if you are too engrossed in a text, you may not be aware of what is bringing about the response. To offset this, Werner Delanoy, who calls himself a "reflective practitioner", suggests combining Reader Response techniques with various strands of New Materialisms (1996: 79)). Thus yet another branch of modern literary theory crops up in literature teaching, but it seems that on the level of introductory survey courses in English Literature "New Materialisms" really may mean very basic general historical, sociological and biographical background of the texts read and analysed with students. A cline with British Studies also comes to mind here and various ways in which English Literature and British Studies can be linked (Moroz 2002).

Communicative method of teaching has dominated English Language Teaching over the last twenty years. This method shares some crucial features with Reading Response methods discussed above. These include the preference of process over product as well as preference of student centred activities against teacher centred ones. As it has been mentioned above, teaching language and teaching literature can be perceived as two extremes of one cline. On the one end of the cline we have teaching English Literature at the English departments of universities where students are expected to concentrate on the content of the course and their native or near native proficiency in English is discretely assumed and usually not overtly dealt with. On the other end we have teaching of the English literature with no recall to literature of any kind at all. In between there is a vast field of interaction of language and literature. Somewhere in the middle of this field there exists an arbitrary border. This border separates classes with more emphasis and focus on literature on the one hand and more emphasis and focus on language on the other. In the educational context, literature and language teaching are clearly separated but I think that teachers of English Literature to non-native students as well as the teachers of English as a Foreign Language should remember about the cline existing between the two subjects.

Many types of activities that have been tried, tested and elaborated over the last two decades in ELT communicative classrooms may also be adopted by literature teachers teaching both native and non-native students of English. Alan Durant (1993: 164-165), listed them together with his pieces of advice for the teachers of literature:

1. "Comparison activities" – Compare texts about same subject in different registers, from different periods, etc. Choose texts which are as similar as possible, varying only in the aspect you want to investigate. The aspect investigated might be a feature of style, or an attitude taken towards the subject matter etc.
2. *Replacement activities* – Substitute words into a text and monitor changing effect created as you do so, by listing responses and connotations. Use this method to explore: rhythm, alliteration, word-stress, sentence-construction, connotation of words and phrases, etc.
3. *Ordering activities* – Put sentences of a paragraph into a jumbled order; then invite students to recreate order by looking for clues in the language; re-arrange words of a jumbled sentence. This method is suitable for exploring grammaticality and phrase structure, discourse connectives, bridging inferences, paragraph structure, narrative development
4. *Completion activities (cloze)* – Delete words from a text and explore predictive properties of context, choose words or phrases to delete which illuminate the aspect of the language of the text you are interested in. Useful for work on rhyme, alliteration, metre, word connotations, metaphor, fields of allusion, topic or theme, etc
5. *Prediction activities* – Present an opening to a novel or short story, at first the title and then sentence by sentence, testing hypotheses about what follows, compare the hypotheses at each stage with what was actually written. This method assists with work on narrative point-of-view, plot construction; narrative enigmas etc;
6. *Classification activities* – Select odd-one-out and justify, label utterances of dramatic dialogue in terms of what they do or achieve, then classify functions listed. Draw grids, breaking down one large question into many smaller, individually more accessible questions or description tasks. Useful way of re-organising material to be presented in lecture form as problems and puzzles
7. *General problem solving activities* – Create puzzles with possible solutions instead of asking direct questions. Which lines? What order? How many? Identify point of transition in novel unfinished by original author and later completed by someone else.

8. *Continuation activities* – Write further lines of poem or continue any text-excerpt, trying to keep the style consistent. This method depends on close reading of the extract given and so focuses attention on specific aspects of style.
9. *Composition activities* – Re-write text in different genre; as newspaper report, file entry, diagram, map etc. Useful in making comprehension and close-reading enjoyable, by making such work productive rather than merely re-productive
10. *Performance activities* – Storyboarding and dramatising a passage; improvisation. Useful motivating work; connects reading with editorial and compositional work.

Thus, two main sources of inspiration for innovative teachers of literature to non-native students over the last decades have come from two directions: research in literary theory and in particular in reader response approach and also from the communicative approach to English Language Teaching. So the general direction for development in this area have been shown. So far it has been German and Austrian scholars with their *Literaturpädagogik* who seem to be the leaders in this field, but a lot remains to be done, both in the areas of non-native literature classroom research and in practical applications and lesson plans.

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