LITERATURE FROM THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD IN THE CLASSROOM: SHORT PROSE FICTION FROM THE NEW ENGLISH LITERATURES

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English literature from all over the world has successfully penetrated the European book market. The interest of publishers in originals and translations, the market for the young reader, the growth of the ELT (English Language Teaching) market, and annotated, abridged, and simplified texts have increasingly shifted towards the New English Literatures, whose relevance for the European academic and for the interested non-academic reader is most obviously reflected in recent reference works of English literature. The pages of these works have been opened to the New English Literatures, even if not all publishers have actually gone so far as to change their titles to "Guides" or "Companions to Literature in English." A standard work such as The Oxford Companion to English Literature (1985 edition, Margaret Drabble, editor) would have been the poorer for not including Nadine Gordimer, Ngugi Wa-Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, and many others whose origins clearly lie outside the traditional boundaries, at least geographically, of English literature.

English literature has indeed been redefined on the basis of the common denominator of all these writers - a language which Anita Desai describes as "the most flexible, the most rich in nuances and subtleties," making it the natural vehicle of communication and artistic expression, even for writers for whom English is not the mother tongue, or whose rejection of colonialism may make them hostile towards European culture. It is the instrument of expression particularly for all those who seek to find solidarity outside their own worlds in their struggle for human rights, for freedom, or for the liberation of women in cultures as diverse as those of Nigeria, New Zealand, or the Caribbean.
The short story is an extremely popular form in the New English Literatures, and anthologies devoted to it are a new growth industry in themselves. Short story collections by individual authors abound. The brevity of the texts lends itself to teaching purposes more readily than longer fiction and the more demanding forms of poetry.

All the examples which will be discussed, with the exception of one, are from lesser-known editions: Patricia Grace's story "Hills" from her collection *Electric City*, Jean Rhys's story "Let Them Call It Jazz" from *Tigers are Better-Looking*, probably the most widely-known, Shashi Deshpande's "The Death of a Child" from *The Legacy*, and Kamala Das's story with the slightly misleading, ambiguous title "Running Away From Home" from *Panorama: An Anthology of Modern Indian Short Stories.*

Literature teaching at school level should not and need not take place at the cost of language instruction. Accepting this, I will begin with the contribution which short stories from the New English Literatures can make in this direction.

The New English Literatures offer a wide variety of themes - personal, sociocultural, political - very often in the mode of a social-realist style, and as such serve as fascinating points of departure for practicing English in discussions, written and oral, on almost any topic of daily life.

Patricia Grace's initiation-story "Hills" covers not more than five pages, yet it deals with adolescence and the discovery of sexuality, with growing up as a member of an ethnic minority, with family relationships and parental attitudes, and with police practices, alcohol, and drugs as social problems. It offers ample opportunity for students to describe, analyze, and criticize situations, feelings, and attitudes. Moreover, the story, written in deceptively simple English, gives insight into the language of a culture shaped by the present and by its history. Although in standard English, the story contains elements of the language of an age group, the slang of youngsters, and subtleties of language which may escape the casual reader, and which can be brought out by a short exercise in translation. The reader, our student of EFL, will suddenly discover that what he seems to understand so easily during the reading process contains difficulties when he is asked to make the transfer into his own language and culture.

I like it when I get to the top of the road and look out and see the mist down over the hills. It's like a wrapped parcel and you know there's something good inside.

And I like being funny. When someone says something I like to have something funny to say back, because I like people to laugh, and I like laughing too. A funny man, that's me. 'Man' may not be quite the right word - but 'boy' isn't either. 'Boy' means little kid, 'boy' means dirty with a filthy mind. It means 'smart-arse.' A 'boy' is a servant and a slave. (65)

Translating these lines into his own language, the student will immediately have to make decisions such as how to translate "funny." Does he want a word which maintains the connotation of "strange," or does he want to go in for a neutral term simply to describe someone who likes to laugh? A decision like this forces on the student the realization of how literary language works by association. "Smart-arse" requires a careful assessment of slang belonging to
the language of youth, and its degree of coarseness, which in turn will require an assessment of the tone of the story. Full insight into a dimension of the English language, shaped by the fact that Britain once was an empire dominating the world, will be provided by the translation problem inherent in the word "boy." Students cannot fail to grasp the full scope of this word in English, ranging from "kid," "boy," "smart-ass," "servant" and "slave" in the text itself. Within the context of Grace's story it is untranslatable. For the ambitious teacher this could serve as a starting-point for a closer look at the historical development of language and the changing meaning of words. The inauspicious word "boy" will prove to be a most rewarding example for the functioning of a word in different cultural contexts. It will be a natural step to work from the untranslatability of a specific literary sentence or text towards problems of literary translation in general, a discovery of the power of literary language and the potential loss of the wealth of associations in a translation. Valuable insight into the functioning of language can be gained through analysis of a text which is simple and short, and interesting enough to hold a young reader's attention.

With Jean Rhys's short story "Let Them Call It Jazz," a rare example among her short fiction in which she seeks to render West Indian English, we are confronted with a different situation. For teachers of English, the legitimate question arises of whether students of English as a foreign language should be exposed to a text which departs from standard language in such an essential element as the dropping of the third-person singular "s," to name but one of several deviations from the norm in non-standard varieties of English in general, and in Jean Rhys's rendering of West Indian English in particular.

... I have trouble with my Notting Hill landlord because he ask for a month's rent in advance. He tell me this after I live there since winter, settling up every week without fail. I have no job at the time, and if I give the money he want there's not much left. So I refuse. The man drunk already at that early hour, and he abuse me - all talk, he can't frighten me. (47)

Teachers may think it unwise to expose their students to what they are likely to regard as "serious mistakes" in their students' work. Yet, the confrontation with such a text may provide new insight into what is right and wrong in a language. For advanced students the text could be used for comparison with other non-standard texts which are more daring in their use of the whole range of English, for example from Creole to standard West Indian English. Rhys's attempt to identify a black protagonist through use of isolated departures from the norm may seem unsatisfactory and may serve as an explanation for her controversial position in West Indian literature, where as a white writer she is not accepted as she may have wanted to be, as her sympathetic rendering of West Indians, white or black, would lead one to expect. "Let Them Call It Jazz" invites a comparison with Joan Riley's description of a young West Indian immigrant in England who, after her return to the Caribbean, in the end discovers that she no longer belongs anywhere. The fate of Joan Riley's heroine in The Unbelonging (1985) is that of Jean Rhys, whose fate was also to not belong; her characters experience the cultural heterogeneity of their environment and their own displacement. It may be worth mentioning that black British writer Joan Riley is equally hesitant to bring the West Indian element into the language of her novel in anything more than a moderate attempt at characterization, which is just enough to set the protagonist off, linguistically, from the British speakers. She, too, hesitates to go further, most likely in order not to limit her readership to West Indian speakers of English. "Let Them Call It Jazz," however, is not typical of Rhys's work, which generally conforms to standard
English. Her careful handling of language in stories such as "Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers" or "The Day They Burnt the Books" makes her attractive for the teaching of literature in a language class. Unlike the younger generation of West Indian writers, Rhys provides the link with Europe, which makes her works about the Caribbean more readily accessible for European students. "Let Them Call It Jazz" raises questions not only of authenticity of language, but also of translation, if not of untranslatability in the case of non-standard varieties of English. In terms of the teaching of foreign language, this type of text reveals the problems inherent in the translation of non-standard language, but also keeps these problems accessible to students.

Patricia Grace's use of language in "Hills" nearly masks the fact that the story's protagonist is Maori. Small details attract the attention first, and the reader familiar with New Zealand might pick up small clues in the description of family life. The ethnic identity of the protagonist, however, only becomes clear towards the end of the story when he is told to "shut his black face" (68) and when he refrains from contradicting: "If I pointed out that I was brown it was like denying blackness, like saying you're halfway to white" (68), which involves the reader directly in a discussion of race, minority, and identity. A story so far removed from the student's own world might offer a basis for a more honest discussion of discrimination and abuse, as its New Zealand setting provides the necessary emotional distance. This is a primarily pedagogical aspect of literature instruction: to encourage an understanding of oneself and the world through the interpretation of fiction. This applies to Rhys's story as well. What she has to say about racial prejudice in "Let Them Call It Jazz" is a more embittered statement than is Patricia Grace's in "Hills"; it is a statement about the treatment of outsiders in general, a recurrent theme in her work.

The study of texts set in a different socio-cultural context not only provides insights into different cultures, but may also shed new light on one's own life and culture. Within an entirely different social and cultural framework, Shashi Deshpande in "Death of a Child" portrays the effects of choosing abortion on a woman who has all rational arguments on her side, who makes her decision freely and independently, who is not restricted by a religious moral code or by law. The story reveals areas of discussion normally blurred within a Euro-Catholic forum.

Literature as such also has its place in the curriculum. What Alistair Niven deplores as a "misplaced emphasis" on recent authors is actually the strongest argument for taking up literature from the broader community of the English-speaking world at large. It is the New English Literatures in their artistic diversity that can boast of writers whose modes of narration and choice of themes and styles retrace 19th and 20th century British and American literary paths. And many take part in recent developments in literature. Many write from the most basic impulses of giving shape to their experiences, of recording rapidly vanishing worlds, of provoking others to fight injustice, oppression, discrimination. There are others whose academic and creative careers within the intellectual establishments of British and American universities make them reject literary conventions in favor of experimentalism. Naipaul's road from a Sherwood Anderson-style Miguel Street (1959) to the Enigma of Arrival (1987) in the great tradition of English novels is as interesting as Salman Rushdie's success, which is unthinkable without Laurence Sterne, James Joyce or Günter Grass. Keri Hulme, for example, belongs to this group of innovative writers. The works of these writers will surely play a limited role, if any at all, at the school level. However, a story like Kamala Das's "Running Away from Home" may serve its purpose and suffice to include even this aspect in one's teaching of trends and developments. Kamala Das makes use of a simple form of stream-of-consciousness
technique, conveying the desperate protagonist's futile flight from a humiliating marriage. The text is marked by a total absence of punctuation, reflecting the author's attempt to render the turmoil of feelings, thoughts, and fears of the young Indian mother who escapes from her husband, only to fall into the hands of his friend who takes advantage of her situation and then, in male solidarity, returns her to him.

When authors go beyond the minimum of a standard variety of English either in the form of heavy dialect, social or regional, or beyond the English language itself, their readership is narrowed. This is the case with writers as diverse as the early 20th century Australian Barbara Baynton, whose consistent use of Australian dialect in her novel Human Toll (1907) has barred it from general recognition, whereas her short stories in standard English have become minor Australian classics, and Keri Hulme, whose Maori titles and texts, in the absence of a glossary or translation, leave European readers in the dark. Anita Desai's use of German in her novel Baumgartner's Bombay (1989) adds a dimension of limited accessibility to her work. These authors confine their readerships to those with at least a command of language(s) not to be taken for granted among readers in general. But they are in good company.

Moreover, authors from different cultural backgrounds will inevitably also create works in languages other than English, so that only part of their literary output will reach European readers, unless they are - like many Indian works - translated or transcreated into English. Even without the barrier of a non-European language, many of those works will be difficult to approach. The more they are removed from the Western tradition, the more they are likely to find their readers elsewhere.

Teaching the New English Literatures inevitably demands selection. Short stories from all over the world offer a vast field for selection for the teaching of English and of literature on all levels. The establishment of the New English Literatures as a rival discipline within existent English and American studies, in both literary and linguistic contexts is, however, an urgently required step to provide future teachers with information, to keep up with developments in publishing, and to acknowledge that other parts of the English-speaking world may have more to offer than many a European scholar is prepared to admit. It is a matter not only of what the Caribbean poet Louise Bennett has ironically called "Colonizin' in reverse" in her poem "Colonization in Reverse." It is a matter also of the reflection of a world drastically becoming smaller, and at the same time of horizons widening, not least in literature.

Notes
1Corinne Bliss, "Against the Current: A Conversation with Anita Desai." Massachusetts Review, Fall 1988, 533.
"In Tigers Are Better Looking."

"Shaping the language to the landscape," Times Literary Supplement, 14-20 September 1990, 981.


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"SURROUNDED BY A GILT FRAME"

MIRRORS AND REFLECTION OF SELF IN JANE EYRE, MILL ON THE FLOSS, AND WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Jamie Thomas Dessart

It was then that I saw her - the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. (Rhys 189)

When Jane gazes into the mirror in the red-room, is what she sees the "sign and preparation for a collapse of self-identity" (La' Belle 138) or is it a narcissistic view of self-love (Spivak 250)? Why, when she gazes at her reflection, does she see a stranger, a fairy child that does not belong to this world? Is it because the mirror only reflects the "image the patriarchy has of women" (Leigh 271)? What is she seeing and what does this image framed by gold mean?

M.M. Bakhtin suggests that our view of ourselves includes our inner imaginings and the perceptions of others. We can never see behind us, nor can we ever see ourselves from outside of our own bodies; instead, we are dependent upon the "other" to see for us, to help us construct our own image of our outer selves. "Only the other is embodied for me aetiologically and aesthetically. In this respect, the body is not something self-sufficient: it needs the other, needs his recognition and his form-giving activity" (51). The "other" supplies an emotional and volitional dimension to our self-conception that we could otherwise never have and never experience, even though we can gaze into mirrors and see reflections of our outer selves.

Although it would appear that we could see ourselves directly in a mirror, Bakhtin argues that this is not the case. We merely see the reflection of the exterior - a reflection which in no way encompasses all of our inner selves. A mirror is two-dimensional. We see a static frozen moment in time that can never reflect our emotions or actions at any other given moment. We are in front of the mirror and not in it. We still need the input of the other to complete the picture of who we are. What we see in the mirror is "distinct and unnatural" and an expression we "never had in our lived life" (33). It is made up of three facets: the one we are feeling and can justify at the static moment of reflection, how we perceive others will see us at that moment, and our perception of the response of the other - good or bad, pleased or displeased (33). The other, although not reflected physically in the mirror, is there nonetheless and makes his presence known through our own expressions.

If then our concept of self is constructed by others, what becomes of the unique view that only we can have of ourselves? The other can never view the world the way we do, from behind our eyes, and so the construct of the other will always be lacking in its description of self. Bakhtin recognizes this problem and suggests that, when we try to reconcile the two views of self, we end up