

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, I present a review of the relevant literature to provide a context for my study on exploring various strategies and approaches to 'lure' my reluctant learners into poetry. I begin by focusing on the rationales for, firstly, teaching literature followed by teaching poetry in language. Next I explore the theoretical underpinnings of this study which are based on the views in developing literary competence through reader-response approaches in the learning of literature, and in this case, poetry. Then, I examine the teaching of literature as well as poetry in the ESL curriculum.

#### Why Teach Literature

Literature has been an important component of second language courses for a very long time in many parts of the world. More recently, however, a growing number of scholars have begun to reconsider the role of literature from a different angle: instead of being taught in addition to the language proper, literature could be used as a resource for language teaching with a plethora of authentic and interesting texts that could benefit the process of second language learning from several points of view.

Widdowson (1975), Collie and Slater (1987), McRae (1991), Duff and Maley (1992), Lazar (1993), Carter and Long (1991), among others, have all identified three main ideas in which the use of literary texts as a language teaching resource can be beneficial: language development, personal growth and cultural enrichment.

### *Literature for Language Development*

According to Gwin (1990) literature helps to improve students' writing. This is achieved through exposing the students to coherent and expert writing which unconsciously guides them to write well too. The exposure to different writing styles of various authors could also eventually help students to unconsciously develop their personal writing styles (Chin, 1989). Although students may never again be required to write on aspects of text like setting, structure, or poetic rhythm, they will certainly find a future need to write. Indeed, the more effectively students learn to write about literature when taking their literature courses, the better they will be able to write later on – no matter what the topic. It is undeniable that the power to analyze problems and make convincing written and oral presentations is a major quality to leadership and success in all fields. To acquire the skills of disciplined reading and strong writing is therefore the best possible preparation that students can make for the future, whatever it may hold.

Furthermore in reading literary texts, students have to cope with language intended for the native speakers and thus gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and convention of the written mode. Literary works, though created, offer a full and vivid context in which characters from many different social backgrounds can be depicted.

This is further asserted by McClorkey and Stack (1993), who say that literature is an ideal platform for language teaching:

Language is learnt best in a setting in which it is put to use...collaborative activities help students to relate it to their

own ideas and experiences and to go beyond the literature to produce their own literature related products (p. 19).

The many wonders of literature in helping to develop the English language proficiency of a second language learner is further expressed by Mahmud (1989). He writes, through the use of literary texts in the language classroom, students will acquire “a native like competence in English, express their ideas as in good English, learn the features of modern English, learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication, see how idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely, concisely and become more proficient in English” (p.25).

In addition to the above mentioned benefits, literature also helps to develop students’ interpretive abilities (Lazar, 1993). As they meet a figurative expression which has no direct dictionary translation, the students could be encouraged to discuss their own interpretation of the expression, based on the evidence embedded in the text. An interaction between the reader and the writer, mediated by the text, takes place in the reading of a literary text (Widdowson, 1978). To make sense of what is conveyed, the reader must be sensitive to the hidden hints and clues.

#### *Literature for Personal Growth*

The teaching of literature, according to Carter and Long (1991), is “essential because literature not only expresses the most significant ideas and sentiments of human beings but also because it has a value in language development” (p. 64) and this, in due course helps readers to effectively grow as

individuals as well as in their relationship with the people and institutions around them.

Purves (1968), goes on to say that literature has the potential to develop the cognitive and affective domains in the student.

The response to literature is mental, emotional, intellectual, sensory and physical. It encompasses the cognitive and affective, perceptual and psychomotor activities that readers of a poem, a story or a novel performs as he reads or after he reads (p. 13).

Literature, also has the capacity to stimulate the imagination, to offer different perspectives and wider worlds that the young reader can wander at leisure and experience in safety, without pressure or judgment (Gillespie, 1994). We read ourselves imaginatively into other lives and by this act expand the pages of our own. Literature thus, “does offer – inexpensively – a vision of other lives and other vistas” (p. 17). One of its potential benefits is to enlarge a reader’s sense about the many possible ways to live.

If we keep following the track of our imaginative response, other arguments for literature emerge. As readers, we read not only to ‘find’ ourselves, we also read to ‘lose’ ourselves. Swept along by the magic of narrative, we give ourselves over to other lives, landscapes and points of view. In this experience is the cultivation of a deeper form of imagination, the empathetic identification with other humans, often people quite unlike ourselves (Gillespie, 1994). Through literature, readers travel to different locales, to the past and to the future, and learn during their travels about other cultures and peoples. Literature offers students diversity that their neighbourhood may not.

As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has said, “No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world” (1991, p. 1). And literature can be a form of this habitation.

### *Literature for Cultural Enrichment*

Literature offers a bountiful and varied body of written materials which are beneficial to us because it says something about fundamental human issues which are enduring rather than ephemeral. Its relevance does not diminish with the passing of time. A literary work can transcend both time and culture to speak directly to a reader in another country even in a different period of time.

While most people acknowledge that literature is to be enjoyed and loved, sometimes we neglect the truth that study and delight are complementary. Roberts and Jacobs (1998) assert that:

intellectual stimulation and emotional enjoyment develop not only from the immediate responses of pleasure, involvement, and sympathy, but also from the understanding, contemplation, and confidence generated by knowledge and developing skill (p. 35).

Thus, “reading literature is important to the high school student for it has the capacity to acquaint the student with his cultural heritage, to enlarge the possibilities for the student’s own growth and not least to give enjoyment” (Gorden, 1964, p. 76). In recognizing the major value of literature towards developing wholesome individuals, it is pertinent to this study that we examine the rationale for teaching poetry in the ESL context, which will be discussed in the following section.

## Why Teach Poetry

The word 'poetry' comes from a Greek word which means both 'doing' and 'making'. In its physical form, poetry is seen as an emotional and imaginative discourse, in metrical form - that is the representation of experiences or ideas with special reference to their emotional significance in language characterised by imagery and rhythmic sound (Harkavy, 1996). The teaching of language through the use of poetry has been seen as a road to meaning making by ESL practitioners from both philosophical and practical perspectives (Bakhtin, 1986; Carter & Long, 1990; Isenberg, 1990; Widdowson, 1975).

### *Using Poetry to Develop Critical Readers*

The usefulness of poetry in teaching secondary school students is proposed by Fehl L. Shirley (1983). Shirley sees the study of poetry as one stage of the process of sharpening thinking skills that are important in responding to various types of advertising. Poetry, Shirley asserts, helps students recognize the function of connotation, denotation, symbolism, and imagery. Knowledge of these techniques, Shirley argues, is integrally related to critical thinking, and students can use this knowledge effectively in confronting the "language of commercial and political persuaders." (p.1).

Francis Kazemek's work on the usefulness of studying poetry balances an intense appreciation for poetry with an in-formative, practical outlook both on how to present poetry in the classroom and on how such study can benefit students. In one of his papers on poetry and adult literacy (1985), Kazemek

argues convincingly that adult literacy training should begin with the reading of poetry and other more expressive text. This argument is founded on Kazemek's contention that 1) literacy is not a process that can develop over a short period of time, and 2) such an assumption sets adult students up for disappointment.

The ambiguity of much poetry invites students to explore language "in a non-threatening manner," Kazemek argues, because it invites unique explications rather than finding a right answer. After immersion in the "compressed and symbolic world inside lyric poems," students "have been better able to move out from poetry to other functions of reading and writing." (pp.334-335). Like Fillion and Duke, Kazemek underscores the necessity of promoting group discussion and questioning and reflecting by students.

#### *Poetry for Cognitive Development*

Poems usually do not have direct statements but are conditioned by emotional attitudes and their intention is to evoke the impact of expression. Poetry achieves its effects by careful selection of words that are suggestive not only of sensory experiences but also of the emotional attitudes. It is creative open-ended use of the language that uses a range of styles, techniques and features of languages. Poems usually have statements using figurative comparisons and concepts which are fused with the readers' or listeners' experiences, association and sensitivity so that a new dimension of reality becomes visible. Alton Biron Philip (1993) aptly says "What one receives from a poem is an experience. Poems have a 'total meaning' which is a blend of the poet's sense (what the poem is apparently about), his feelings (the poet's

attitude), his tone (attitudes towards readers) and his intention (aim or effect)" (p. 117).

Poetry also enhances and challenges students cognitively as Tompkins (1980), aptly says, "constructing meaning from a literary work [poetry in this case], is a collaborative cognitive task". When reading a poem the focus is on the stages of understanding and learning that students have to undertake as it involves many kinds of mental activity that is from first glance impressions through to reflective evaluation of the written text (Brown & Gifford, 1989).

Albeit, there is no one perfect way to define poetry, however the notion presented by Scannell (1983) about poetry should help:

Poetry is a kind of writing which is unparaphrasable, untranslatable; its primary purpose is not to communicate information, but to induce in the reader or listener feelings as close as possible to those which have moved the poet to write. Its purpose is not to inform but to inflame. It is less interested in telling us about a thing than in presenting the thing itself. (p. 16)

Why can poets not use normal, straight forward, conventional ways of presenting their matter and make life a little easier on readers? This is a question that lingers in the minds of most students. The reason is because, "there are vast expanses of reality within the awareness of the individual which are beyond the scope of conventional statements" (Widdowson, 1992). For example, let us take a look at two different descriptions of a daffodil. One is taken from a book on botany and the other is by a poet.

- i. Narcissus pseudonarcissus: flower stalk hollow two edged, bearing near its summit a membranous sheath and a single flower: nectary notched and curled at the margin, as long as the sepals and petals.



ii. I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high over vales and hills  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of daffodils:  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees.  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

(Adapted from *The Study of Literature*, 1964, p. 595)

Poetry tells us about the world through our feelings. It speaks directly to our senses and shows us what makes us human. It sharpens our senses, makes us more keenly and fully aware of life, exercises our imaginations and stores up treasures in our memory. Once we have seen that ‘host of daffodils’, coloured by the poet’s feeling, they will continue for the rest of our lives to ‘flash’ upon the inward eye - the mind. “Good poetry helps you to know and love the world as intimately as you know and love a friend” (Eller, Reeves & Gordon, 1964, p. 596).

#### *Poetry for Language Development*

According to Sithamparam (1990), poetry strengthens the need for language awareness. A poem’s language patterns, through its rhyme, rhythm, meter and sentence structure will be internalised unconsciously by the students as they recite the poem repeatedly. The students will also internalise the poem’s vocabulary, structure and intonation as they read a poem aloud (Lazar, 1993). As such poetry brings into sharp focus the linguistically rich variety of syntax and different variations of grammar and vocabulary (Dunning, 1966). Thus, the

more students read, the more their language proficiency would be improved. This internalisation of the grammar and vocabulary of the target language is the result of the rich context that literature provides (Collie & Slater, 1987).

In teaching poetry, an analysis of the metaphorical use of language in the poems provide suitable framework for the study of meaning. As Widdowson (1975) says, poetry is extremely elliptical as an artistic medium and it achieves its effect by deliberately deviating from the normal use of language.

### The Teaching of Literature

According to Brown (1987), the traditional focus on “the author of the text, the whole text and nothing but the text” (p. 94) used to dominate the teaching of literature. Salasar (1992), however, reveals that time has not changed literature lessons. He observes that they still consist of “boring, teacher-centred lectures”, lacking activities where the “teacher, the bearer of the right answers, imposed ideas to a class of passive, lifeless students” (p.98). Students are still regarded as containers that need to be topped up with knowledge by the expert, the teacher (Icoz, 1992).

In the year 2000, the inclusion of literature in the Malaysian English Language syllabus, gave way for numerous linguistic opportunities and valuable language learning exercises in the ESL classroom. The learning of literature in such a context also allows for personal development and growth as readers make sense of their reading. This draws on the notion that reading is a transactional process (Rosenblatt, 1978) between the reader and the text as meaning is shaped by what each reader brings to the reading experience.

In view of this shift an emphasis towards the need for students to express their own responses to their reading, “teaching literature has moved towards interaction, reader response and activity work on the texts” (McRae, 1987, p.9). This approach encourages students to experience literary texts in interactive terms. To this end, literature teachers “have to come down from the pedestal” (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 7) and take on new roles of enablers and facilitators of learning, working with students and intervening to ensure a meaningful experience through reading literature. In this context, the teaching and learning of literature is seen as a collaborative process between the teachers and students as well as students and students as they engage in an active experiential process working with the text.

In view of this study which is focused on teaching poetry to reluctant learners, I will now focus this discussion to the teaching of poetry in the ESL classroom.

### The Teaching of Poetry

Poetry is usually the genre that provides the most problems for the English teacher because students often reach secondary school with little experience in relating to poetry and are often hostile to it. Like what Lewis (1955) says “. . . people are always suspicious and a little afraid of things that they do not understand and instead of admitting it they are apt to invent reasons which are complimentary to themselves - such it is with poetry.” On the other hand there are also students who, “wonder whether the study of poetry however

enjoyable is not a waste of time or at least, an annoying obstacle” (Kennedy, 1994, p. 65).

Lockward (1994) also observes that “poetry is the genre most English teachers seem least comfortable with.” (p. 65). She further states that most teachers acknowledged a discomfort with teaching poetry; some admitted that they do not enjoy or actively read poetry. Most teachers, according to Lockward (1994), said that they “had never had an English teacher who taught poetry effectively and, therefore, they had no models to emulate” (p. 65).

Kennedy (1994) observes that “students’ dislike for poetry often stems from bad experiences with poetry, incompetent teachers, the print and the very nature of its presentation in books - the alien diction, conventions, and queer associations to things that are worlds apart and of course the string of mind boggling questions that follow the poem” (p. 187). In other words, students dislike poetry because of their own bad experience with poetry, thus it is the aim of this study to explore various teaching approaches to enhance students’ interest and liking to poetry. The next section will therefore, discuss views on letting poetry serve each reader and encouraging poetry reading as an inquiry.

#### *Letting Poetry Serve Each Reader*

Fillion (1981) argues that a teaching approach that promotes student inquiry is one way to sharpen the three abilities he sees as essential to a student's "capacity to read and derive benefit from literature." These abilities are aesthetic reading (when attention is focused on what happens during the reading rather than on what remains afterwards), reflecting, and problem finding (p.40).

Fillion urges that students be provided with opportunities to identify a poem's relevance to their lives. He suggests encouraging the students to generate their own questions about the text and points out how this supports an inquiry approach in the classroom. For instance, he would encourage young readers to develop a literal comprehension of a poem by asking, "What does this say?" With selections likely to provoke varied student interpretations, students should ask "What does this mean?" The question "What does it matter?" is appropriate in studying selections that deal with concerns apt to be of keen interest to adolescents (p.44). Such questions, Fillion asserts, allows students "to examine and develop strategies" while pursuing these and other central questions, such as "How should this be read?" and "What is there to say about the character development in this piece?" (p.44)

#### *Encouraging Poetry Reading As Inquiry*

Duke (1984) also discusses the need for an inquiry approach to reading, enjoying, and understanding poetry and echoes Fillion's emphasis on encouraging problem-solving and reflection. Duke stresses the danger of teachers championing the beauty and fruitfulness of a poetic reading experience while relying on a teacher-centered question and answer period: "...if we do not also provide equal time for students to enjoy, contemplate, and relive the experience of reading a text, we may be sending a contradictory message about what the purpose of literature study is." (p.3)

Traditionally, poetry lessons have been a teacher-centred process. In taking centre-stage, teachers often ask "a long series of questions and it is the

teachers who are working through the text and not the students” (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 24). The study of a poem then becomes a series of long lectures that explains the literal and inferred meanings of the text. The teacher explains and agonizes over the meanings and nuances in a single line that may not contribute to the overall understanding of the text. More importantly such teaching will not do anything to develop an interest in the student to read or enjoy poetry.

The teacher’s task, therefore, is to overcome this hostility that students have towards poetry first and then start exploring poetry with the students. There is no way we can force poetry onto students. The teacher has to create situations or circumstances for student participation whereby the students are ‘lured’ into the world of poetry and in the end, enjoy every minute of it. Participation does not depend on having high intellect or a good memory or a faculty for absorbing information. Veronica O’ Brian (1985), in the book *‘Teaching Poetry in the Secondary School’* says that:

It is not our job to bring pupils to some measurable standard of performance, but rather to make clear space for the ‘joy’ to happen’ for intuition, imagination, feeling - those secret common powers – to play with the poem, or the picture or the music (p. 117).

The teacher must refrain from teaching the poem as a peculiar form of comprehension exercise with neatly defined goals for improving reading and writing skills. The less pedagogic anxiety brought to the task, the more effective and successful the lesson will be. Poetry should enter the class as “naturally as the leaves come to a tree” (Lewis, 1964, p. 592).

Selection of usable and valid poems that can foster fruitful interactions between readers and literary works is important. Rosenblatt (1985) highlights that “both the text and reader must be considered if one seeks to understand the factors that either permit or block the reader’s attention to the elements of the text or the organisation or synthesis of the reader’s responses to the patterns of words” (p.36).

### Text Selection

The following sections present arguments regarding the most common criteria that are perceived crucial in selecting a reading text, namely the learners’ interest, background and language proficiency.

#### *Learner’s Interest*

Coady (1979) suggests that the selected text must be of the students’ interest so as to capture their attention and to further encourage them to read on, regardless of the linguistic difficulties. Basturkmen (1990) points out that the texts should be chosen based on topics and themes that are universal in nature to enable students to relate to them based on their own experiences. She further states that literary texts should be selected through the eyes of the students as the complexities of the language can lead to frustration rather than enjoyment in reading. Students’ mental maturity are determined by their age and thus, age is among the basic factors that must be considered as it influences the students’ interests (Kellerman, 1981, p.27). Students’ interests are also influenced by their cognitive development because this determines their understanding of the text’s significance and their sensitivity in responding to it (Icoz, 1992, p. 98).

Teachers must also consider the need for a more balanced selection to cater for readers with various interests (Akyel & Yalcin, 1990, p.98). A wide range of genres and themes will cater for the interests of a larger number of individuals in the classroom. Protherough (1989) expresses the crucial need for a literature programme to be flexible for modifications “in the light of (students’) changing needs and interests” (p. 172), while being firm enough to “exemplify some identifiable pattern” at the students’ level.

#### *Learner’s Background Knowledge*

Text familiarity to students’ background knowledge is important in contributing to meaningful reading. Hedge (1987) defines background knowledge as students’ understanding of the world that enables students to identify themselves with the situation and characters that are presented in the text.

It is further supported by Hirvela and Boyle (1988), that a text that can relate to students’ background knowledge and experience makes reading more interesting than one that is unfamiliar and unrelated. This is because readers interpret what they read according to their own schemata (Rumelhart, 1980, p.98), and thus they comprehend better when they have prior knowledge on the events, people or feelings that they are reading. Successful reading thus greatly depends on successful match between the students’ background knowledge and the text’s content (Nuttal, 1982). In addition, the reading text and how it relates to the students’ existing prior knowledge actually influence students’ motivation to read (Hedge, 1987).



Rosenblatt (1985), in her description of the relation between the students' lives and the text's content, reveals how "the marks on a page becomes a text by virtue of its particular relation with the reader, who in turn is a reader by virtue of his relation to the text (as) the reader brings to the text a network of past experiences in literature and in life" (p. 35). This aesthetic transaction (Rosenblatt, 1985) that takes place during reading, makes the character and events familiar people and places, where motives are "tested by 'how would I feel' or 'what would I do?'" (Protherough, 1989, p.21).

### *Language Appropriacy*

Giving too much weight on linguistic difficulties during text selection may actually mislead teachers into having a lower expectation than they should on their students success (Hedge, 1987). Furthermore, it is also irrelevant (Flyod & Carrell, 1987) as neither elementary nor intermediate students can be expected to read major prose work (Carter & Long, 1991). The mastery of decoding skills is not as influential as learners' background knowledge in determining successful reading (Brock, 1990). Thus, teachers should be more concerned with cultural familiarity than language complexity (Floyd & Carrell, 1987).

Krashen and Terrel (1983) reveals that students can actually read beyond their present level. They reveal that students can actually read beyond their present, lexical, syntactic and semantic levels if they are truly intrigued by what they have been given to read. Contextual clues enable the students to read at the level of 'i + 1' (Krashen, 1982) and thus help students in understanding and interpreting the

meaning in the text. Hence a reading text should consist unfamiliar words or new meaning to familiar words so as to strike a “balance between a challenging and a frustrating reading task” (Hedge, 1987, p. 34). This is crucial in developing students’ strategies in reading.

Hill (1986) warns that finding a suitable literary text as an introduction to fresh literature students can be challenging since they may feel they could do without the literary English they perceive as irrelevant and unrelated to their daily communication. Kachru in Brumfit and Carter (1986) and Brock (1990) highlight that using a non-native English literary text may actually aid in students’ understanding as it consists an element of the culture they are familiar to. Hence, as discussed in the earlier section, this promotes successful reading as students will be able to relate to what they are reading in contrast to native English literary texts with culturally foreign setting (Hill, 1986; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1987; Krashen, 1982). Apart from promoting reading, local works help in motivating the students in reading as they can identify themselves with the characters, issues and events in the text (Vethamani, 1992).

Finally, teachers need to make a reasoned choice to balance the different, sometimes conflicting claims of the various criteria when choosing and using books with our learners. In so doing, it is important to select texts that positively have qualities that will make for emotional, moral and conceptual development. The reading of literature programme includes not only exploration and enquiry anchored in students’ own experiences, perceptions and prior knowledge but also their construction of meaning.

As the reader's personal response to literary experience is valued in a literature class, reader response becomes the focus in teaching literature. Thus, the following section will discuss reader- response approaches in relation to literature.

### Literary Competence

Contrary to the beliefs of many teachers, language proficiency alone does not necessarily guarantee that students can derive meaning from a literary text. Instructors of literature- poetry in particular, should therefore rightly go beyond the parameters of the four language skills, i.e. listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills. Brumfit (1991, p. 32), calls these skills '*literary skills*'. To have acquired or rather to have a working knowledge of these skills would mean that one has a certain degree of *literary competence* which says Brumfit (1985), is an integral part of literary appreciation. Thus without some degree of literary competence

... one would be quite baffled if presented with a poem. His knowledge of the language would enable him to understand phrases and sentences, but he would not know, quite literally, what to make of this strange concatenation of phrases. He would be unable to read it as literature...because he lacks the complex "literary competence" which enables others to proceed. He has not internalized the 'grammar' of literature which would permit him to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings. (Culler, 1975, p. 114)

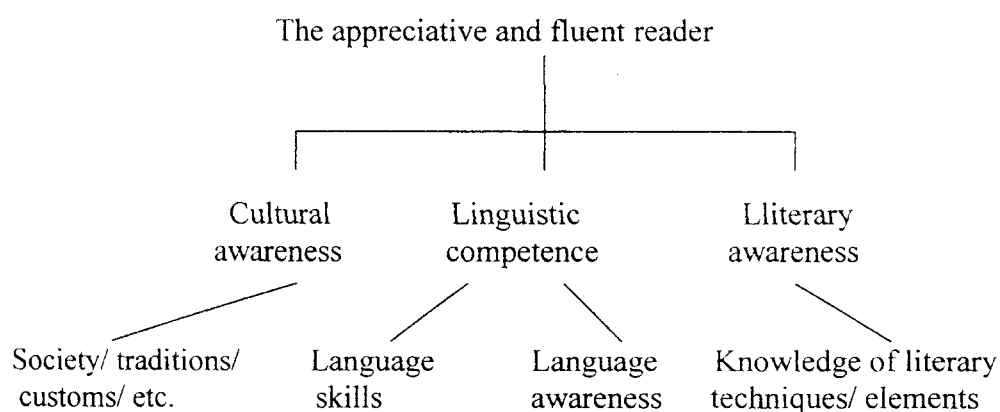
Lazar (1993) too clearly points out that for a student to be able to read, understand and appreciate literary works, he must first of all have 'literary competence'

(p. 13). Literary competence would encompass a good command of the language, knowledge of the mechanics and style of writing, a working

knowledge of literary devices and how they work, cultural impacts and implications in writings through the ages and much more.

The following diagram which captures the competencies of a fluent reader of literature also gives a general idea of the areas that may be involved in the term 'literary competence'.

Figure 1 : Competencies of an Appreciative Reader



(Adapted from Brumfit, 1991, pp. 18-22)

The diagram above shows that literary appreciation very much depends on linguistic competence as well as aspects of cultural awareness and literary awareness. Rightly so, because it is quite impossible to be able to appreciate literary texts without appreciation of the language in which they are constructed. This is true with cultural awareness as well - without a sound understanding of the setting, the nature of a society and their way of life, a literary text can be misinterpreted in many ways (Brumfit, 1985). He asserts that the negotiation of meaning "will include the interplay of event with event, relationships between characters, exploitation of ideas and value systems, formal structure in terms of

a genre or other literary convention, and relationships between any of these and the world outside of literature" (Brumfit, 1985, p. 106).

Brumfit's illustration concerning the skills a person needs to acquire in order to possess this 'literary competence', is well specified in his model of the various skills (and sub-skills) necessary for literary competency (Brumfit 1991, pp. 44-45). The skills are divided into six levels. The first level is about understanding plain sense, which concerns understanding of the gist and specific meaning of a text. The second level concerns understanding of context by using knowledge of the author's life and knowledge of the social, historical, cultural and geographical background of the literary work. The third level is the ability to empathize with feelings, characters, events scenes and setting depicted in the literary text. This calls for reader to relate to the text emotionally. The fourth level is the ability to appreciate the use of poetic devices, literary techniques, forms and the use of language in the text. The fifth level concerns the ability to respond creatively in expressing feeling, describing characters, setting and events, and the use of poetic devices in the explication of text While the sixth level concerns deeper understanding the critical framework such as, New Criticism, Structuralism, Marxist Criticism and so on within which a literary work is written.

This model put forward by Brumfit (1991), is based on global literary competence in understanding and appreciation of literary work categorically divided into: a) informed appreciation of literature; b) ability to respond appropriately to all literature in the target language; c) ability to analyze and

define responses to literature; d) ability to relate literature to one's personal experience/ to empathize with text; e) ability to place literature within a wider social/ cultural/ linguistic context; and f) enjoyment of literature.

In a nutshell, lack of competence or knowledge in any one of the areas for literary competence as shown in the diagram above, will make literary text difficult or uninteresting to the learners. Consequently, they will start rejecting or avoiding all forms of literary texts and poetry will be the first casualty.

As the reader's personal response to literary experience is valued in a literature class, reader response also becomes the focus in teaching literature. Thus, the following section will discuss reader-response approaches in relation to literature.

#### The Reader-Response Approaches

Literature is believed to provide learners with highly motivational material of an incomparably rich nature. The key to unlocking this material lies in encouraging students' responses to literature and helping them define the meaning of their response on both an individual and group basis. The aim is to enable students to discover the meaning of texts from within themselves, and to negotiate that meaning as a group, rather than have the meaning imposed from without. Interest in refocusing literary reading from objective goals to more aesthetic goals began with the emergence of reader-response theories.

Although reader-response criticism rose to prominence in literary analysis in the early 1970's; its historical roots can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s. The reality of the effects and influence of a literary work on the audience

was acknowledged even as early as the times of Plato and Aristotle (Bressler, 1992, p. 47). The reader-response approaches therefore focus more on the experiences of the reader in response to a text rather than who the author is and what he or she is trying to propagate. In other words, "it is the individual reader's freedom to interpret a text according to his own outlook on the world" (Murdoch, 1992, p. 3). Consequently teaching literature would be more effective if approached through learners' perception of their own needs, rather than from some logically systemized construction or overview.

Louise Rosenblatt, (1978) explains why she believes that the reading process involves very much the reader and the text. She says the reader and the text share a transactional experience: the texts acts as a stimulus for eliciting various past experiences, thoughts and ideas from the reader, those found both in real life and in past reading experiences. It is seen here that simultaneously, the text shapes the reader's experiences, selecting, limiting, and ordering those ideas that best conform to the text and thus together creating something new.

Although reader-response critics all believe the reader plays a part in discovering a text's meaning, just how small or large a part is debatable. What differentiates Rosenblatt's and all reader-response approaches from other critical approaches is their diverting the emphasis away from the text as the sole determiner of meaning to the significance of the reader as an essential participant in the reading process and in the creation of meaning (Bressler, 1992); while her assumption is that the reader and the text play somewhat equal parts in the interpreting process because the reader-response criticism allows for

so much diversity in theory and methods. Although there are many approaches and methods in reader response, the main point of convergence is that they all trigger the creative activity of the reader.

Ingarden (in Booker, 1996, p. 44), argues that literary texts are filled with gaps, where it is the responsibility of the reader to fill in these gaps, and he refers to this activity as “concretisation of the literary texts”. Iser (1974) gives the reader a more creative role in “completing” a literary text (pg. 45). Iser’s concept focuses more on the communication that occurs between the reader and a particular text during the reading process. Iser also advocates that during the process of formulating and revising interpretations of a literary text, a reader will develop a more open-minded and flexible response to the world in general. Nevertheless, Ingarden and Iser’s models corresponds in the sense that both agree to the notion that how a reader reacts to the text very much depends on the reader’s own assumptions and expectations which are based on experience, knowledge and cultural origins. Thus, it is essential that teachers know and understand diverse values, beliefs and characteristics of students for the purpose of effective instruction. Purves has found that the teacher’s expertise and experience is the most outstanding variable that determines the objectives of any literature course, besides the resources used and instructional methods utilised (quoted by Rueksupasompan, 1983).

Competence in the case of reading literary text is something that can only be observed or measured through tangible performances, such as in oral, written or other non-verbal responses by the learners. One of the crucial issues



that teachers have to contend with is that each learner would be on a different plateau of literary competence based on their experiences with literary text as well as their own cultural background. It is therefore the teachers' responsibility to gauge students' ability in relation to literary competence, which would to a certain degree determine the students' interest in reading literary texts. Sinclair (1996), says thus regarding the training of students to read literature:

The capacity to be autonomous is not innate, there must be training: Learners need to be trained. Learners need to understand *what* they are doing and *why* and how this can be transferred to other texts (p. 143).

An excerpt from the book, "*Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and the Essay*" by Di Yanni (1994) below, serves as food for thought for teachers of poetry and students who are seriously thinking of doing poetry.

We also bring to poetry the same intellectual and emotional dispositions, the same general experience with life and literature that we draw on in reading drama, fiction, and essay. And yet there is something different about reading poems. The difference admittedly is more one of degree than of kind, involves our being more attentive to the connotation of words, more receptive to the expressive qualities of sound, rhythm in line and stanza, more discerning about details of syntax and punctuation. This increased attention to linguistic detail is necessary because of the density and compression characteristic of poetry (p. 13).

In this chapter, I have drawn extensively on the relevant literature to provide a conceptual and theoretical framework for my study in investigating students' perception towards, how can poetry be taught to reluctant learners and their perceptions regarding the teaching of poetry. In the next chapter, I will discuss the procedures I used for gathering and analyzing the data for my study.