

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 MERITS OF A LITERATURE PROGRAMME

The teaching of English literature or 'Literature in English' has received considerable impetus in the last decade and now the Malaysian Education Ministry too has realised its merits and has drawn up the 1990 syllabus 'Kesusasteraan Dalam Bahasa Inggeris' for the upper secondary students in Forms Four and Five. This new Malaysian syllabus is aimed at providing for a holistic and integrated development of the students with regard to their intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical growth in accordance with the National Education Philosophy. This two-year literature programme (Form Four till the Form Five SPM examination) is primarily to enhance the students' awareness, understanding, appreciation and sensitivity to human, universal, moral, social, cultural and aesthetic issues and values. Various writers and authorities on literature and language teaching have described the merits of English literature in no ordinary terms.

According to Eagleton (1988,p.2), literature has been simply defined as "imaginative writing" as translated from the German word, "Dichtung". In addition, the Russian critic, Roman Jakobson, considers literature as a kind of writing which represents "an organized violence committed on ordinary speech", while Eagleton further adds that "Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech and uses it in peculiar ways" (Eagleton, p.2).

Cherrier (1975, p.85) aptly defines literature as

an artistic creation embodying a theme expressed in a piece of writing to be treated as an object of contemplation and interest in itself.

Moody too (1986, p.2) attempts to answer the question, "What is Literature?"

Literature springs from our inborn love of story-telling, of arranging words in pleasing terms, of expressing in words some special aspects of our human experience. It is usually set down in printed characters for us to read.

Here Moody stresses on our inherent desire for narration, oral and literary skills as we communicate with our fellow beings. In fact, children too get ample stories from oral narrations from their parents, books and folklore. Thus, there is obviously a rich store of stories we have gathered from our childhood which enable us to appreciate new literary materials which come our way through the years.

The 1942 American Literature Committee resolved that

Literature is a humanistic study, an art embodying a record of values. This, in the view of the Conference, is the chief importance of literature, and the ground for the belief that it forms part of the birthright of all students and deserves that prominent place which tradition has given it in their education. This Conference believes that if the teaching of literature is so conceived of and is skilfully carried out on wise principles, there will be no need to question the importance of literature as an indispensable part of the intellectual, aesthetic and moral heritage that we wish to perpetuate and enlarge. (Stone Jr.1962, p.65)

Here, it is remarkable that leading American educationists were able to draw up an educational policy which clearly spelt out the indispensable role accorded to the teaching and learning of Literature even as the world was at the height of the Second World War.

In addition, in 1948 Leavis's journal called "Scrutiny" was not just a journal, but a focus on a moral and cultural crusade to nurture human values through the study of literature. He writes " the kind of rich, complex, mature, discriminating and morally serious responses which would equip individuals to survive in a mechanized society". (Eagleton, 1983, p. 23)

Daiches (1981, p.4) also successfully attempts to define literature in distinct terms and stresses certain new aspects

Literature, as we are using the term, refers to any kind of composition in prose or verse which has for its purpose not the communication of fact , but the telling of a story (either wholly invented or given new life through invention) or the giving of

pleasure through some use of the inventive imagination in the employment of words.

This appears to highlight the aspect of oral presentation of a literary piece or an oral art form which commonly exists in several societies as part of their cultural heritage, as is the case in some African countries where Shakespearean plays have penetrated into their oral literature. Thus, Guerard (1972, p. 8) too stresses on how literature has been deep-rooted in society as he attempts to describe

literature as one of the elements of a civilisation, conditioned if not determined by social life as a whole, reacting upon social life in its turn. Therefore, literature is part of the cultural heritage of a nation.

Thus, the variety of definitions of literature seem to reveal the wide spectrum of aspects and merits which are embodied in the study of this subject. Despite the natural complexity in defining literature, its study seems to provide a wealth of benefits which make it an essential part of the study of the English language at an L1 level. According to Daiches, Shulz (1981, p.51) and Moody (1986,p. 2), the elements of enjoyment and pleasure ought to be strongly emphasised in the study of literature. They highlight the need for proper choice of texts in order to enhance and enjoy the study of literature, while responding and experiencing the aesthetic value of the text on a personal level.

The overwhelming current focus on the reader's interaction with and response to the literary texts has been given ample emphasis by the various authorities especially Widdowson, Rosenblatt, Moody, Brumfit, Carter, Iser, Maley and others. The salient feature is that the successful reading of texts will enhance the learners' language learning skills and proficiency as several innovative techniques have been adopted to elicit their personal responses and experiences. As early as 1929, I.A.Richards pioneered the investigation into the actual readers' responses in their interaction with texts which had their

writers' names kept anonymous. Moreover, Brown and Gifford (1989, p.5) quote from Leavis (1948) who found the significance of the students' interaction and noted that

The literary work of art comes into being through the reader's attention to what the text activates in him.

While Sinclair (1982, p.9) too focuses on the pedagogical implications of literature lessons when he explains, "literary texts are effective since students like primarily literature in an integrated form" and no distinction is made between literary and linguistic aspects in order to achieve command of the language. Short (1989,p.181) too, along with other researchers, agrees on this point that there is no reason to banish literature since it is difficult to make any linguistic distinction between literature and other kinds of language learning. Widdowson (1975, p.77) further adds that it is a basic pedagogical principle that

the study of literature is primarily a study of language use and so it is not a separate activity from language learning.

Mohan (1986, p.1) too stresses in his Introduction that language is vital in education

... education is fundamentally a process which occurs through the use of language. Language is the major medium of instruction and learning. In many cases, learners fail to reach their potential in academic achievement because their language learning is poorly coordinated with their learning of content and subject matter.

Thus, the merits of a literature course are quite evident since the learners' reading skills and their constant exposure to the best uses of the English language in the texts and the classics could lead to the fact that language would "rub off" on them and improve their own performance and proficiency (Short, p.181). This was one of the reasons why non-native learners were introduced to substantial doses of English classics in order that the language would stir in them an enthusiasm and admiration towards the 'alien' and supposedly more superior culture. Widdowson (1975, p.77) too stresses that students could benefit from

the study of literature since the resources in English literature are among the best and not clearly excelled by any other in quality or continuity. Amidon (1987) highlights a unique quality in drama as it is a visual art form with an audience to view and appreciate it for all its literary value. He adds that "drama epitomises the visual opulence often lacking in the short story, the poem or the novel". This point too stresses that drama has to have an appeal to an audience in order to captivate the viewers' appreciation and imagination.

Brumfit (1985, p.114) too explains that literature has a rare quality which captivates learners as they get "caught" by the aesthetic beauty inherent in the texts read by them. He adds that

none of us teach anything worthwhile directly to students: we simply create the conditions for successful learning.

The salient features in the teaching of literature are in enriching the learners' language competence and enhancing their appreciation of the aesthetic elements in the literary genres, including even cultural, moral, political, historical and sociological aspects. Iser (1978, p.22) highlights the aesthetic element as he points out that

Aesthetic response is therefore to be analysed in terms of a dialectic relationship between text, reader and their interaction. It is called aesthetic response because although it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus. This is why the study of a literary work should concern not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text.

Hence, the learners can be reasonably trained towards an aesthetic response as they are exposed to the human and social conditions, relationships and conflicts within the world of the text and in their own milieu. However, when literary texts, both classics and contemporary, became rather difficult and inaccessible, literature materials were replaced by "surrogate literature" in the form of textbook dialogues and short tales which lacked the intrinsic quality and effect . Despite this unique compromise, Short notes that it has been

found that where the same teacher handles both language teaching and literature lessons, the learners tended to benefit from this enriching and mutually reinforcing situation as the weak readers could enhance their growth by developing their imagination and creative faculties to overcome their weaknesses (Short,1989 p.181).

Here too, the effectiveness of literary texts in language learning is rather evident as they are considered stimulating resource materials for the learners who could read and appreciate literature primarily for enjoyment (Cummings,1983). Enjoyment too ought to be a key element in the reading and studying of literature as highlighted by Moody (1986) who puts pleasure and entertainment as his first motive. Ross (1991, ELT) points out that the pleasure derived from literature will stimulate interest in reading.

2.2 THE LEARNER'S EXPERIENCE WITH LITERATURE

One very important characteristic about the study of literature is the "experience" the readers achieve in their interaction with the texts and Brumfit explains that this ideally leads on to other activities such as describing, explaining and responding to the feelings invoked. The sharing of this experience is an integral part of the language learning process, just as the "enjoyment" one obtains from the experience of going through that stimulating text. Lillian Feder (in Tuerck,1987) in an article on teaching literature stresses that

one vital requisite is that instructors be aware that they are not only 'educating feeling', but developing capacities for creative thought, which is intrinsic to an aesthetic response to a work of art.

Thus, ample exposure to imaginative literature is an important stimulus for the intellectual and emotional development of the learners. Feder further adds that there are two dimensions to creativity and they are: one which is revealed in the text that is read as a work of special quality and genius "that alters fundamental ways of apprehending reality"

and the other more significant one is the development of individual modes of assimilating, expressing and internalizing the experience (Tuerck, 1987 p. 281). While, Iser (1978, p.22) points out that

Literary work has two poles - the artistic and the aesthetic; the artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. This is why
.... the study of a literary work should concern not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to the text.

The modern age of technology has been known to bring about adverse effects on the children and their educational programmes. Thus, Abbs (1969, p.3) in his "Introduction" expresses concern for their education as clearly spelt out in his definition

Education is the progressive movement of the child outwards into responsive relationships with the world and inwards into a greater understanding of himself.

He too affirms the merits of teaching literature and English language in order to inculcate the need for greater concern with creativity, freedom and human qualities and relationships among the secondary school learners. He also criticises the conventional classroom lesson which is primarily a teacher-centred one that cripples the experience of literature in them. Several authorities caution the overbearing teacher in a literature class as expressed in the words of one

The teacher is no longer the expert exegetist, dispensing authoritative interpretations to students, but an enabler, questioner, supporter and challenger. (Daiches, 1987, p.7)

Thus, the current vogue is to conduct literature lessons using more learner-centred strategies in order that the students attain a more personal experience from their texts. So potent and stimulating can this personal experience be that phrases and fragments of poetry (or drama) may be recorded in the "inward ear" (Maley, 1987), to be used again in our language development and speech.

Here students are required to possess a set of diverse skills in order to personally interact with the texts, as part of their attempt to seek relevance and value in their readings. Besides, Rodgers (1983, p.45) adds that learners need "above all else a gradual, patient and systematic training in how to read literary works". The success of a literature programme depends substantially on the selection of appropriate literary texts from the various genres prescribed for the learners in foreign and second language classrooms. Widdowson stresses that the more advanced learners would be sensitized on the linguistic varieties and the values presented in the texts. Schulz (1981, p.51) in his article points out that

the linguistic complexity of a work of literature affects accessibility, comprehensibility and enjoyability on the part of the reader, and educators should look carefully at this factor before selecting literary texts for foreign language instruction. They are useless if learners cannot sufficiently penetrate the texts to make general sense of it. If the text falls into the "frustrational" category for a particular group of readers, this means that the instructor has to give sufficient time to assist students to handle text - related exercises to make them accessible to students.

Besides, Murdoch (1992, p.3) in his article too supports the findings of other researchers which reveal that specific selections of drama and role play activities stimulate the learners' oral language skills and their imaginative sensibility. He further adds that the texts must be accessible for them to respond and interact in the light of their own socio-cultural experience. He argues that selection of texts to instil moral values in the learners is not a reliable justification, since all of them may have varying degrees of literary experience and reactions and they may react adversely to works that others find "inspirational".

Another important aspect to be considered is the status of "classics" in the classroom as they have so often been extolled and venerated for their excellent language and literary value. The primary reason for the teaching of literature is for more people to read and enjoy great works of international literature. Though the path to this is indirect, a proper access to some works of universal fame is vital, and to be deprived of valuable educational and

human experience is unfortunate. An appreciation of masterpieces and classics is also essential as we share and exchange views on them. The educational value is in reading and appreciating their immense quality and teachers should find a path towards the best accounts of human predicament (Brumfit, 1985, p.103).

However, they may pose considerable difficulties for the learners. Widdowson (in Short, 1989, p.18) stresses that the teacher's reliance on them "may lead to students' incomprehensibility" and adds that attempts to translate and paraphrase them could result in a "resistance to literature or a misrepresentation of the nature" of the subject. Widdowson further provides a distinction between our normal reading skills and that used for literature as he explains that

The amount of information we normally take out of something we read is minimal actually, because we simply take from the passage what fits the frame of reference we have already established before reading. Now, you can't do that with Literature, because you've got to find the evidence, as it were, which is representative of some new reality. So, with literary discourse the actual procedures for making sense are much more in evidence. You've got to employ interpretive procedures in a way which isn't required of you in the normal reading process. If you want to develop these procedural abilities to make sense of discourse, then literature has a place. (Short, 1989, p.18)

However, Povey (1972, p.186) firmly notes that

literature will increase all language skills because it will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage and syntax.

Besides, he adds "it is disheartening that students are being required to study English classics without the least attempt being paid to the inadequate language skills" non-native learners bring to their study. Pattison (1972, p.196) too points out that "literary works must not only suit their linguistic capacities but be with their general experience" . Hence, their interest in reading literature would be enhanced with encouragement and self-reading.

It is essential for teachers to note that there is a significant link between the learners' language proficiency and their attitudes towards literature ; those with a good command of English appreciated and enjoyed literary works, while those with average proficiency and negative attitudes generally found such texts difficult and even boring especially with challenging linguistic and cultural elements. Hence, the teachers need to be aware of such situations and help the less proficient ones to cope eventually with ample language-based exercises and guidance. (Akyel and Yalcin, ELT 1990 p.175)

The third essential aspect in the study of literature is the substantial exposure to the various cultural elements presented in the texts. The National Council of Teachers of English (1983) points out that literature is

one of the primary means by which a culture transmits itself by broadening their insights, allowing them to experience vicariously places, people, events and adding delight and wonder to their daily lives. (Stoodt,1988).

Here we can appreciate a unique experience from our profound readings which allow us and invoke in us such a vicarious experience and adds a new dimension to our lives.

Povey (1972,p.186) too adds that when we read, we make many "cultural presuppositions with unthinking confidence, most of which are going to be quite literally foreign to the non-native speaker."

Rosli T. (1995, p.24) too points out that

the reading and studying of literature can also contribute to the development of students' insights as literature is recognised as one of the fundamental ways by which a culture transmits itself.

Thus, it is a significant experience as the students read and perceive a wealth of knowledge from the various cultural, social, religious and political elements and folklore presented in the texts from the English speaking world including India, Africa and Southeast Asia. Maley (Rivers,1987, p.93) suggests that poetry and songs are poignant and stimulating

resources as they convey common themes from all cultures namely love, death, nature, children, religious beliefs and other social predicaments which augment the learners' perceptions of the world around us. Judith Oster (1989) writing for TESOL states in an article that through critical reading

students become involved in a world that engages their feelings, yet is not the world they actually inhabit . They may identify with the characters and their situations, but they do not, in reality, share them. Separated from the student's own life, fictional conflicts, complexities and points of view can be felt and understood at no great personal risk to learners in general.

Hence, there is a need for guidance from the teacher in order that the students appreciate and understand the wealth of cultural elements which enhance and support the human drama in the texts.

Finally, several authorities support the view that for a literature programme to be successful, the students ought to possess some degree of "communicative competence in the foreign or second language. Without this solid background in English language the ESL student will be unable to perceive the literary values of the texts"(Rodgers 1983 p.45).

Brumfit (1985) quotes Culler (1975) who goes further and places a higher expectation on the learner's literary reading abilities as he stresses that

anyone unacquainted and unfamiliar with the conventions by which fictions are read, would be quite baffled if presented poems. His knowledge of language would enable him to understand phrases and sentences, but he still would find difficulty with strange concatenation of phrases - so he would be unable to read it as literature, because he lacks the complex 'literary competence' and has not internalised the grammar of literature to aid in converting linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings. (in Carter and Brumfit 1985)

Thus, the successful teaching of literature ought to include the development of literary awareness in order to sensitize the learners on the conventions of the literary tradition, which is a challenge indeed in the ESL situation. Prof. Charles Blatchford of University of Hawaii firmly states that

the study of English literature is a luxury that cannot be indulged in during the limited amount of time allocated to English. (Marckwardt, 1978)

His stand is based on three assumptions pertaining to the Asian region: first, that the Asian nations are primarily concerned with the attainment of a functional command of the language in order that the students would be able to handle the four skills. Thus, the need for functional English is vital, but not literature. In addition, there are inadequate teacher training programmes to cope with literature teaching. Finally, there is an apparent shortage of finances to promote literature in these countries. Hence, the scenario painted here could also be applicable to the difficulties in teaching literature in Malaysia, since only a limited number of the students can enjoy and study this subject with adequate appreciation due to the factors mentioned. However, with the deep-rooted British colonial links in our history, education and other developing sectors, there is ample impetus and potential for a viable English literature programme for the Malaysian learners.

Some valuable strategies used in the teaching of English literature need to be highlighted since these are still considered vital in current teaching, learning and reading comprehension. One such important source is the Barrett Taxonomy which covers a wide range of techniques to evaluate cognitive and affective dimensions of reading comprehension based on literary texts. This is indeed an essential document which provides different levels of questions to evaluate the varying degrees of comprehension, from literal to inferential, from simple recall to prediction and from reorganisation to appreciation. The nature of questions allow the learners to understand the text layer by layer, from the surface meanings to the deeper ones, perhaps more aptly put as "the onion approach" (Minot, 1965, p.7). Besides, the other aspects covered by the questions include the "cause and effect" relationships, imagery, emotional responses to content, analyses of characters and incidents, reactions to the author's craft and intention, judgment of fact and opinion or reality and fantasy. The variety of questions offer an interesting array of aspects

which can be examined to enhance the learners' grasp and appreciation of the texts - prose, poetry or drama. In addition, according to Ellis (1987), the Bloom's Taxonomy on Educational Objectives four decades ago, still provides us with certain conventional strategies which are still applicable such as - simple recall, inferential-type questions, the context including the author's effectiveness and choices (English Journal,1987).

Finally, teachers need to impress upon their literature students that "reading is by far the most important of the four skills in a second language, particularly in English as a second or foreign language (Carrell,1988, p.1). In addition, students need to realise the long-term benefits of the English language in their academic pursuits as clearly spelt out

In second language teaching-learning situations for academic purposes, especially in higher education in English-medium universities and other programmes that make extensive use of academic materials written in English, reading is paramount .

Brumfit and Carter (1986, p.185) too distinctly stresses that

reading is the most autonomous and individualizable ability in language work, and literature is a rich and widely-appealing source of material for reading.

Summerfield (1971, pp 17-18) further adds,

Only a minority of our pupils come from homes where reading is a natural and normal activity; therefore the first essential thing in this matter is to demonstrate that reading is a pleasurable, an entertaining, a consuming and rewarding experience. the teacher must first and foremost find time and energy to read aloud to his students to animate the words on the page, to respond to the life that is there to express adequately the vitality of the rhythms, to become the characters, to read feelingly. Our sole task is to ensure that something happens to our pupils in their response...

The overwhelming view is that the use of literature for language teaching besides enhancing the proficiency among the learners, can also instil various qualities for personal, moral and cognitive development.

Alex Rodger adds that

the fundamental purpose of a literature course should be to teach students how to discover literary significance for themselves in the very act of reading... The reader has to reconstruct or re-create his own version of what the author hopes to convey by means of language. ... Meanings in literature are not to be instantly perceived in a ready-made state but must be actively recreated by the reader.
(Brumfit,1983, p.46)

Maley (ed. Rivers,1987 p.95) points out that learners need to be aware that poetry and literature in general facilitate a unique aspect of language use, that is the "Reactional" dimension, which allows us to react personally with the "verbal sensibility" of others. Thus, the teacher-student interaction or one among students is essential as no two students will have "totally convergent interpretation" and this quality facilitates genuine and meaningful exchanges of ideas related to the literary texts examined during lessons. Thus, language-based and student-centred activities should aim to involve learners with the text, to develop their perceptions of it and to help them explore and express those perceptions.

Since the recent inception of literature in English in a formal manner, the learners who have opted to pursue this challenging programme are suddenly thrust with the task of reading original texts; this certainly does pose considerable problems especially for those who lack proficiency and literary competence.

Neil Gilroy- Scott in his "Introduction" clearly states that

In the long-term, the problem is the rehabilitation and reintegration of literature as an integral part of communicative language programmes not only to minimise the shock of such sudden and demanding exposure to primary texts, but also to exploit the enormously high potential of literature for educational enrichment.
(Brumfit,1983 p.1)

Thus, the continued emphasis on the "Class Readers" among the primary to the lower secondary students will ensure a proper and long-term exposure to popular literature texts, including the abridged editions of the "classics", and this in turn would encourage them to appreciate and enjoy reading from an earlier stage. Another advantage derived from an early exposure to literature is the obvious acquaintance with the wealth of the language and literary conventions which cultivate literary competence in the learners. Hence, the ample exposure to literature will indeed reduce the "shock" that could occur when primary texts are introduced and read at the present upper secondary level. Stoodt (1988,Ch.9) stresses that literature ought to be introduced to children early, since "literature is the foundation of the English language arts" and it is the content of language arts which includes essential values expressed in the authors' perspectives of the world. Heah (1982, p.90) in her paper stresses Widdowson's interpretation that literature and language study must be aspects of the same activity. She adds

This approach which has been referred to as 'linguistic' rests on the definition of English literature as 'literature written in the English language'. On this definition or interpretation of English Literature, the reason for teaching it would be essentially a linguistic one,... . This approach to the study of literature helps to improve the students' command of the target language in a number of ways.

Various writers have emphasised the use of drama and poetry in language learning especially among children in order to inculcate the creative and imaginative elements in these language arts. Drama seems to hold much enthusiasm in the classroom and Stern (in Oller,1983, Chap.13) quotes Hines (1973) who points out that this in the ESL and EFL classes is to develop communicative competence, especially oral language skills. Drama in the form of role-play, "is a standard classroom technique which has long been recognized as a valuable and valid means of mastering a language".

Stern (in Oller,1983) adds that

dramatizing communicative events leads to the necessary bodily and emotional involvement which results in the motivation to make meanings and intentions clear in the target language and also achieves competence in the language.

Certainly drama is effective primarily for language acquisition and it facilitates communication by bringing psychological factors into play which elicit the desired behaviour in the learner; these factors are motivation, empathy, sensitivity, self-esteem, and spontaneity. Besides, the dramatic activities in the lesson inspire the learners to want to learn another language; they possess a "curative" value for the frustration and lagging interest which so often occur during L2 learning and these facilitate effective acquisition of the target language (Oller, 1983).

On the other hand, teachers need not perceive themselves as "dispensers of knowledge", but rather "enablers" in the class to facilitate a more aesthetic form of experience (Gaudart, 1992, p.28). This aspect is further driven home by Brumfit (1991, p.1) as he stresses that

A successful reading of literature is an act of interpretation, in a context where taste and style are often highly valued, and where inexperienced learners face an enormous temptation to rely on secondary understanding, parroting the opinions of teachers, textbooks or critics.

Thus, the current emphasis is on the readers' personal interaction with and response to the texts as part of the student-centred approaches in the study of literature. Protherough (Brumfit, 1991, p.14) too provides a guide, invaluable tips and strategies to learners and teachers on how to interact with and evaluate the responses prompted by the texts. The salient approach towards literary texts according to him includes four levels, namely,

- (i) the "thematic" aspects of the texts;
- (ii) the "empathetic" quality of readers towards the characters;
- (iii) the "motivational" aspects prompting characters' actions and events; and
- (iv) the "predictive" aspect which allows readers to infer from the text and venture beyond it.

These are essential tips for an indelible experience with the texts as learners interact with and enjoy them. According to Wellek and Warren (1966) when a work of literature functions successfully, the two 'notes' of "pleasure" and "utility" should not merely coexist but coalesce. (Wellek & Warren, 1966, p. 31)

Hence, the teachers and students need to realise the merits of the "pleasurable seriousness" in their reading and interaction with literary texts which will inevitably enhance their understanding, imagination and appreciation of the different genres. T.S.Eliot stresses this point further (in Reeves,1978) by stating that we shall enjoy literature more if we appreciate it critically

since experience shows that the readers who can at least talk (if not write) intelligently and critically about what they read are the ones who get most out of it (Reeves, 1978).

Here too there is an essential focus on an informed response from the learner after having critically read the text.

Papalia (ed. Rivers,1987, p.72) in his article highlights "prediction" and "inferencing" as part of the learner's reading process especially when trying to make sense of foreign language texts. He further suggests the need to integrate reading experiences with developing language control as it should be continually linked with purposeful communication, oral or written . The following approaches have also been urged :

- a) to provide meaningful tasks related to the text that is read;
- b) to design activities which encourage them to communicate;
- c) to allow them the freedom to experiment with their language use: and
- d) to create a classroom environment which prompts them to be free to
express ideas and personal interpretations stimulated by the texts and
the discussions

Moody's approach involves examining the special features in literary works and they are:

- a) the Extrinsic or external factors such as the biographical aspects of the writer, his values, the society portrayed and the underlying themes; the historical aspects include the economic, social and political setting; the aesthetic elements constitute the art form, its structure and language and finally the philosophical and psychological themes.
- b) the Intrinsic or internal factors include the language and grammar use; the lexical groups, register, style and figurative language; the structural factor embodies the expository, narrative or symbolic nature of the texts; and the cultural elements constitute the content or the message that is stated or implied. (in Brumfit, 1983,p.23)

Another important aspect that Maley (1987) and Becker (1988) reveal in their studies in China and Japan respectively is the lack of argumentation and debate among learners in the Far East. Becker points out that

where there is a lack of verbal debate, the necessary sensitivity to nuance and difference of opinion is due in part to a homogeneity of culture and language..., which a pluralistic society - or world does not, cannot share. ... in a Western education system, a plurality of views, and openness to them, is considered a value, and we must see it as such - a value (Oster,1988).

Here, it is evident that the non-native speakers find it "threatening" when it comes to "self-disclosure" of their inner personal experience; they in fact need "to feel more free to express what they are willing to share and to find value in what they have thought and experienced" (Oster 1988, p.87).

Hence, it is not uncommon to find learners who are generally passive in class during lessons since, it is a deeply ingrained feature in the Asian education system and societies

(Abbs,1969, p.3). Thus, the focus on student-centred strategies and ample oral communication can overcome their general passive interaction and responses with the texts handled in class. Several authorities especially Moody, Widdowson, Brumfit, Carter and even Marckwardt (1978, p.8) believe that the wide variety of resource materials in English provide ample motivation and impetus for an enjoyable experience and study of literature in English.

2.3 TEACHING DRAMA IN SCHOOL - ITS VALUE IN EDUCATION

In 1990, the new syllabus and format of the SPM elective "Literature in English" was incorporated into the Ministry of Education "Kesusasteraan dalam Bahasa Inggeris" programme. This new syllabus has provided a completely Malaysian image to its objectives and needs in order to enhance the level of proficiency and promote the need for a reading culture among our students. This syllabus has included the key genres - Prose (novels and short stories), Poetry and Drama, in order to provide the students offering this Literature paper as an elective ample exposure to a broad range of literary texts from the British, American and Commonwealth English works.

However, in this study the focus would be primarily on drama with the sole attention given to the teaching of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in the classroom. It must be noted that the students at the SPM Level have been provided a choice of two plays to choose from namely : *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare) and *Inspector Calls* (J.B. Priestley).

However, most Literature teachers have considerable experience in teaching Shakespeare, but many opted to teach the latter since it appeared less formidable.

Drama has often been regarded and defined as a form of "dramatic literature", yet it does not encompass the actual scope of drama as an art form. The immense possibilities and scope of drama can be perceived in the words of George Bernard Shaw who says

There are fifty ways of saying "Yes", and five hundred of saying "No", but one way of writing them down (McRae 1985, p.3).

Another essential aspect of drama is its focus on " performance" which appears difficult to define, but broadly stated as

Drama is something conceived specifically for performance in a theatre (or equivalent) in front of an audience. (Cadden, 1988, p.2)

Thus, the definition highlights that drama can only be fully appreciated in performance on stage. This further focuses on the need for

an actual stage, with its potential for movement, gesture, costume, lighting, scenery and props. The actual script is the centre of the dramatic process, ... waiting for actors, director, set, costume and lighting designers to bring life with their own creativity.

Therefore, the definition emphasises the "public" and "open" nature of drama which Poetry and prose do not share. Yet, it is still a literary work with a host of non-literary elements while the written script forms the core of the performance which is usually shared with other members of the audience - and this sense of "shared experience" is a vital aspect of the drama appeal. (Cadden, 1988, p.2)

Another vital element in drama is Coleridge's notion of "the suspension of disbelief". As Linnell (1982, pp.2-3) explains this notion by providing the two phases in the professional actor's art : the first phase involves his prior struggle during rehearsals to understand the reality of the script and make sense of it; while the other involves selection of certain

qualities from his experience and belief to be communicated to his audience. It is this innate skill in children and actors - the ability to pick up and drop pretence at will

to go into a pretend situation with absolute sincerity and belief, that is at the core of all dramatic activity.

Likewise, a learner in the classroom too needs the same "suspension of disbelief" before the fictional situation can take on some element of reality and transform into a drama.

Linnell (1982, p.12) further points out the difficulty that drama confronts in our modern era

In every society, drama has a function to present our version of ourselves to ourselves, in a way that helps make sense of some little part of it. In our day and age this happens mostly through television, since in our society relatively few people congregate to share a dramatic experience... Television has made popular drama available to the majority, as the melodramas did in the nineteenth century.

This too demonstrates the challenges confronting the conventional drama and theatre as art forms. Of course the television has revolutionised drama into the film media, yet the experience of reading and studying a text provides immense satisfaction. Cadden (1988, p.4) points out the extent of the richness of a learner's experience

The reader's imagination 'sees' and 'hears' the play in the theatre of his or her mind. The reader becomes, in effect, the Director - challenged by the script before him to create a living performance of the work.

Eagleton, including Beckerman (Brown, 1990, p.33) too confirms this experience in the reader who would feel the "dramatic energies" of the living text as he emphasises that

the problems which Shakespeare confronts are in some ways very much the problems which concern us, and we cannot examine these problems as they are present in his plays except through the focus of our own experience.

Hence, the richness of reading and experiencing the actual text is paramount, since in most cases, watching that same play on stage, may present certain shortcomings and

weaknesses in its performance. Indeed the "readers' boundaries of emotional and creative experiences are extended." (Feder in Tuerck, 1987, p.281)

However, Linnell cites a group of approximately 40 primary and secondary school teachers who firmly believed that drama should be offered to school children for the following sixteen reasons

- to increase confidence; to enable the individual to work as part of a group;
- to encourage a growth in language ability;
- to promote self-expression in words and movement ;
- to put oneself in another person's shoes;
- to develop the imagination;
- to increase the ability to memorize and make sense of dramatic literature;
- to reinforce learning by enacting stories and situations;
- to handle difficult concepts and emotions in controlled surroundings;
- to enjoy a communal activity;
- to learn to see the funny side of things;
- to motivate other forms of learning,;
- to develop sensitivity;
- to learn to relax;
- to develop a critical faculty; and
- to learn to concentrate.

Such a list of merits indeed goes to show the far reaching gains students and adult learners can derive from the study of plays and an involvement in theatre.

The difficulty in defining drama is clearly expressed by Hayes (1984, pp.5-6) as she prefers to outline for us certain educational aims involved in the teaching of drama and language.

Firstly, through drama one can aim to increase the students' self- esteem and self - presentation by using a teaching method which emphasises achievement and puts little stress on the 'right' or the 'wrong' way of doing things.

Secondly, one aims to increase self- confidence by providing students with direct experiences from which they can discover and develop their own strengths. Students can test the effectiveness of their use of language through drama, and increased competence through practice will increase confidence.

Thirdly, one aims to improve the students' social awareness and interaction. Through drama, students gain practice in relating to other individuals, to small groups and the whole group. They learn to give and take in a 'working' situation. They learn to use their initiative and to develop sensitivity by working in pairs, and improvisation in small or large groups.

Fourthly, one aims to improve a range of skills related to language learning. These are : thinking, memory, imagination through movement and dramatic improvisation; verbal fluency; ability to express emotional range; and a sense of form...

Fifthly, one aims to increase the students' awareness of non-verbal elements of language and how to interpret and respond to them.

Finally, the long-term aim of drama is simply to help students to understand themselves and the world they live in and to gain an insight into all kinds of human behaviour.

The study of drama has been described in favourable terms especially since it enhances oral and spoken skills and brings about cultural proximity as

a play allows language learners to participate in the new culture helping them to develop a sensitivity as to how speakers of the target language interact with each other. This facilitates familiarisation with cultural appropriateness of words and expressions to specific and social setting. A great deal of our everyday learning is acquired through experience, and in the language classroom, drama fulfils this experiential need. (Via, in Rivers, 1987 p.110)

The nature of drama lessons and activities have been effective in promoting language learning, the use of emotions and presentation. Via continues to further emphasise the four golden rules for language teaching through drama. They are:

- (i) self - all good acting must express the feelings of the individual ;
- (ii) the magic "If"- that is, if I were in this situation and I had to say that word or lines ;
- (iii) imagination - learners need time to imagine the scene, the moods, the conflicts, the clothes, the place , the characters and the setting;
- (iv) the five senses - they (including sense of the audience) seem essential when speaking the native language, more so unconsciously; so their use is also vital in second language use (as popularised by Moody,1971).

Rosenblatt (1970, p.25) points out the complexity of the reading process poses a burden on the readers and they require guidance to attain effective reading skills to unravel meaning. She distinctly and aptly states that

A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until the reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between the reader and text : the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the patterns of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience.

While Maley & Duff (1978) emphasise that "dramatic techniques restore the body and emotions to language learning" thereby restoring motivation. Also they add that drama is "an art that makes language alive (Maley & Duff,1985).

According to Maley and Duff (1982), they contend that drama helps to put life into our spoken language and have highlighted certain drama techniques which they term as major phases in drama and language teaching. These phases are

- (i) presentation - presenting language items clearly so that they understand;
- (ii) practice - language items need practice for familiarisation; and

- (iii) reinforcement - to enable students to use the language items in relevant situations.

In addition, Gaudart (1990, RELC, pp.243-249) stresses that

the possibilities of using drama techniques as teaching techniques are limitless... Drama activities have added relevance, variety, excitement and fun to the ESL classroom. They have provided a change from the traditional classroom arrangement and allowed students to be totally involved in the task.

These techniques too provide teachers and learners effective strategies to examine and interact with the text in pairs, in groups or even individually. The teacher needs to create a conducive atmosphere which stimulates learning, and not be a "fount of knowledge", but a guide or facilitator, not a controller.

A further point in this direction is explained by Stern who highlights the findings that dramatizing communicative events leads to the necessary bodily and emotional involvement which results in the motivation to make meanings and intentions clear in the target language and also achieves competence in the language (Oller & Amato, 1983, Ch. 13).

Collie & Slater (1987) explain that drama, like *Romeo and Juliet* is accessible and interesting to pre-university students since their emotional involvement with the tragedy and theme of love is felt universally and still profound today. This distinctly shows that elements in drama or other literary texts would have appealing themes, cultural aspects and human issues which the learners could identify with. Thus reading and studying drama provide enrichment and add a new dimension to language learning. Collie and Slater also stress on the merits of integrating language and literature teaching in order to exploit the emotional dimension vital in language learning through drama. Besides, Julius Caesar is "a play about politicians, figures in authority, who are human beings with human longings"

(Gurr, 1988, p.5). Thus, it is inevitable that common themes on political power, greed, pride, conflicts and human power struggles will indeed appeal to readers and learners of all ages and stations in life.

Another interesting aspect pertaining to the reading and learning Shakespeare is that

Shakespeare's plays are such a complex mass of words that every age finds it necessary to read them differently. The text of the plays themselves do not change much, but the readers of the texts do, and so the readings have to be constantly modified by the different kinds of preoccupation each new generation of readers brings to them Each age quite rightly reads it in different ways.
(Gurr, 1988, p.1)

This is indeed an enlightening and plausible comment which provides us a unique insight as we come to understand that Shakespeare could present different perspective in different ages or generations of readers. Thus, the common themes on political conflicts, romance, love, family, greed, jealousy and social issues could be construed and interpreted differently among readers of different ages and generations; and so each new perspective brings a fresh interpretation and viewpoint . This point ought to be impressed upon new readers and students since they too can endeavour to interpret and understand different perceptions which emanate from the texts.

To enhance the study and reading of plays, Collie and Slater (1987) have attempted to enumerate several strategies and aspects of a text which can stimulate drama learning, such as, the title and cover design; visual images, photographs and the mood invoked; the prevailing themes; the plot development; vocabulary and key sentences; biographical framework and author's background; and listening to and/or watching recordings of the actual play. These aspects have been considered as primary and form the basis for an effective study of drama or other literary texts.

2.4 STUDYING SHAKESPEARE IN THE CLASSROOM

Enright D.J. (1970, p.9) quotes and highlights the challenge posed by Shakespearean plays and texts which a reader or learner must be prepared to confront

Read him therefore; and again, and again. And if then you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him. (Preface to the First Folio - 1623)

He adds that a proper study may require several readings of a Shakespearean play or text and that would be fruitful to any student since, the whole drama in the text examined, comes alive in the reader's mind, as Maley (1985) too points out. Enright stresses that the study of Shakespeare entails the profound involvement of the reader with the characters, the human conflicts and the tragedy portrayed. He vehemently criticises Wilson Knight 's assertion that the characters of the plays

ultimately are not human at all, but purely symbols of a poetic vision - an unhappy consequence of this view is to make Shakespeare's work an academic subject , remote from the merely "human" concerns of the subject . Students have all too swiftly taken a further tip from Knight's reference to ' the necessary aloofness from a work of art ' and art is then seen to be about what happened to other people - or better still, not to people at all, but just to symbols. (Enright, 1970, p.9)

Here, he drives home the point that the learner has to experience some degree of realism in the text and identify himself with the characters and their circumstances in order to attain a richer and more profound experience as he immerses himself into the text. Cadden (1988, p.7) defines "Realism" as "describing a piece of work that faithfully presents human life as it is actually lived." This would ensure a fuller and more successful reading and study of Shakespeare. Prof. Beckerman (Brown, 1990, p.172) stresses on reading and re-reading, including vigorous searching to find its dramatic pulse and "sense the vibrations in the text". In addition, the eminent linguist, Saussure too points out the unique effect and impact that a drama can create with a keen examination of the text ; readers and students

cannot easily know what happens when any particular words are written, still less when they are spoken or heard, as they are in drama. (Brown, 1990, p.31)

Therefore, the readers and learners are to be virtually explorers, to explore the rich possibilities offered by the language and the text.

The significant popularity of Shakespeare in English Literature studies can be realised in the words of Longhurst D. (in Ryan, 1989, p.3)

Generations of labourers in the vineyard of high culture have bent themselves to the monumentalising task of constructing Shakespeare as the National Poet and as the example of the individual literary genius who transcends his period and produces texts of timeless value which reveal fundamental truths about a universal human condition.

There is some obvious truth in the fact that Shakespeare has transcended his period in the Elizabethan age and has become "timeless" in value. Thus, literature teachers and curriculums in the Commonwealth and the United States have advocated his ideology and have accorded him a prominent place in English literature. This view is stressed by Sinfield A. (Ryan, 1989, p.2) who points out that

Shakespeare has become, in other words, one of the places where ideology is made and thus, inevitably, a site of cultural struggle and change.

Rosenblatt (1970) emphasises that the human personalities and human problems portrayed in the texts would certainly captivate and stimulate the readers to sink into the text which becomes a "medium of exploration". Research has proved the merits of drama teaching in the curriculum as it benefits students of all ages. Interest, motivation and learning all occur when drama is employed for educational purposes. In addition, Morgan and Saxton (1987) in their Foreword, clearly explain that

In drama, teachers and students are engaged in collective enquiry and exploration. Learning is likely to occur through cooperation, interaction and participation.

This is evident as we need to understand that in the context of our Malaysian schools, the teacher is the paramount provider of knowledge, and therefore a great deal of time and effort may be spent in order to guide the learners through the drama text, *Julius Caesar* . Not surprisingly, this situation is confirmed by Prof. Koh Tai Ann of Singapore, (SEAMEO, RELC, 1995) as she admits that Shakespeare may appear difficult to most students and that its current relevance too in the curriculum is even in doubt. However, students still appeared to score best in it and find Shakespeare their favourite since they and their teachers spend considerable time on it.

Morgan and Saxton (1987) in their " Foreword " quote that according to Jerome Bruner, teachers should possess certain skills to develop a "drama-creating personality" and create significant learning experiences in the classroom. He adds, "Good teachers are human events, not transmission devices", thus confirming the dominant role of the teacher. Samarawickrama (1979, p.67) too stresses that

it has become increasingly clear that the use of drama can aid a teacher to make language classes interesting and enjoyable. Through drama he can help students practise language skills and persuade them to see a language as a living entity throbbing with vitality.

This puts a heavy responsibility on teachers to bring about an effective and an indelible experience in the teaching and learning of literature or drama in particular. It would not be wrong to expect an experienced teacher with a reasonably dynamic personality, to conduct exciting drama lessons which would turn out to be memorable experiences for the learners. Such indelible experiences would, in fact, make the study of drama and literature as a whole virtually more memorable than all the other subjects in the curriculum. Finally, without venerating and putting Shakespeare on a pedestal, it would be ideal to consider Gurr's (1988, p.1) question - "Why study Shakespeare ?" He responds in the following way

The study of Shakespeare can last a lifetime. It has absorbed a great many lifetimes already, of course, in the four centuries that his plays have been performed and read. The riches that can come from such study are enormous.

Reynolds (1991, p.1) further adds from the Cox Report (1989, chap.7)

Shakespeare's work conveys universal values, and his language expresses rich and subtle meanings beyond that of any other English writer. ... But almost everyone agrees that his work should be represented in a National Curriculum . Shakespeare's plays are so rich that in every age they can produce fresh meanings and even those who deny his universality agree on his cultural importance. ... that secondary pupils of a wide range of abilities can find Shakespeare accessible, meaningful and enjoyable.

Studying Shakespeare is a challenge; indeed the playwright himself did not write plays for students, but wrote for a receptive audience. Therefore, as Brown (1990) puts it

Shakespeare outreached other dramatists for the dexterity and power of wit ; and if this needs labour to appreciate, then the effort will be well rewarded.

Thus, it would not be wrong to say that if the students took pains and studied Shakespeare at school, it would be a challenging, yet memorable experience. So even if the learners do not appreciate Shakespeare for its aesthetic value , at least they can be preoccupied with its rich poetic, literary, linguistic and cultural elements.

Finally, it would be remarkable to note that *Julius Caesar* made its historic debut in Malaya in 1916 when it was first staged at the Ipoh Anglo Chinese School (ACS) and produced by Dr. Lester Probstel, but no record remains of the players' names (Sunday Star, Sept.25, p.23). This is clear evidence that certain British and locals proficient in English drama managed to stage this play out of sheer enthusiasm and commitment to the literary and aesthetic values of Shakespeare, which is drama at its best. Thus, with English Literature having been taught since 1891 and first staged 80 years ago, it would be strange that curriculum designers and educationists still may find it difficult to perceive the various

merits of an English literature course for the limited number of proficient and enthusiastic learners here in Malaysia. Thus, it is hoped that Literature in English will flourish with more and more students being initiated into studying and offering this subject in the examination.