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A Bequest of Wings: Dialogical Teaching - Literature as a Mediational Tool

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Research Report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education (Coursework and Research Report)

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A Bequest of Wings: Dialogical Teaching - Literature as a Mediational Tool

Abstract: This research report explores the unique nature of literature and its efficacy as a dialogically mediating tool. In this study, drawing primarily on the theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, the dialogical small-group teaching of nine A Level students is considered, (with the teaching aimed to be within this group's Zone of Proximal Development) it was found axiomatic that there was a supporting framework of schemes, tropes, narrative role taking, schemata theory and genre, among other concepts. Qualitative analysis of the edited transcripts from eight consecutive seminars substantiates these theoretical presumptions and leads to the conclusion that literature, in this case the prescribed poems of Elizabeth Jennings, is an highly efficacious, dialogically mediating, pedagogical tool.

Key Words

Bakhtin, Dialogical Teaching, Literature, Mediation, Schemata Theory, Vygotsky, Zone of Proximal Development

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Education by coursework at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any examination in any other university.

Marc Stuart Falconer

Johannesburg, 4th October 2006

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He ate and drank the precious Words -

His Spirit grew robust -

He knew no more that he was poor,

Nor that his frame was Dust -

He danced along the dingy Days -

And this Bequest of Wings

Was but a Book. What Liberty

A loosened spirit brings -

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this report I attempt to come to understand if literature, taught dialogically, can be a pedagogically effective mediational tool. I do this by analysing the transcripts of seminar discussions to discover if guided, small group, dialogical teaching is likely to be an effective pedagogical situation.

Nine, University of Cambridge A Level Literature in English students were involved in this study over nine seminar discussions taking place over four consecutive weeks. The sole literary text under discussion was *The Selected Poems of Elizabeth Jennings.*

The questions for which I am seeking answers are not original, nor are the arguments I synthesise in attempting to answer them: why are some teachers more effective in 'teaching' one particular text than another? Why do particular texts work with some groups and not with others? Why do various people respond to particular texts and not to others? What makes literary texts 'transformational' for certain individuals and not for others?

1.2 Scope and Assumptions

Teachers of literature are involved in mediating a particular type of mediational tool: literature. I have found it intensely interesting, personally and pedagogically, exploring current notions of mediation, psychological tools, the implications of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)(Vygotsky, 1962) in the teaching of literature and the unique nature of dialogic literary discourse as a mediational tool.

The method traditionally employed in the teaching of literature is, I believe, imperfectly understood and randomly successful, however unanimous are the cries for the importance of literature (however literature is defined). It makes sense then to examine the nature of literature – as opposed to other written forms - to discover what, if anything, gives literature its uniqueness (as common sense indicates) as a mediational tool. Pedagogically, if literacy (of the sort I am going to be discussing) is "centrally a matter of dialogic involvement with texts, then, we [teachers] must provide for instances of this sort of involvement in order to understand it and better facilitate it" (Hunt, 1996, p.16).

During the course of my research, I explore the concept of dialogic reading as an efficacious tool for an affective, empathetic and decentred approach to the world around one, as well as for a more complete understanding of individual consciousness. Tying down precisely the type of mediation effected by literature was an expanding endeavour, far beyond the scope of this research report. The best I could hope to do was to explore the unique discourse of literature and the notion of dialogic teaching and then, by analysing my research data, consider the efficacy of dialogic teaching and, if dialogic teaching was found to be the case, offer some reasons as to why this should be so.

1.3 Overview and Structure of this Report

I realise that many of the concepts – especially, perhaps, the nature of literature itself - are not commonly agreed on. I have made some attempt to define key terms during the course of my theoretical discussion. What I wish to do in this introductory chapter is to state simply the paths and limits of my argument and to link its various stages,

which may not, in practice, be necessarily as sequential as they appear in this review (from Chapters Two to Four). While there have been many and varied attempts to answer some of the questions I pose in the Statement of Purpose, even the definitions of the key concepts are problematic and understanding, certainly in my case, is far more gradual than sudden.

For Vygotsky (1991) it is axiomatic in all his writings on language that even the most basic linguistic ability mediates what he calls “higher mental functioning”. It makes perfect sense then, if we are happy to accept the above contention, that the sophistication of the language use, literary or not, needs to occur within an individual’s (which creates the group’s) ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

Having presented a Vygotskian foundation on which to construct my argument, I present an argument for the uniqueness of literature as a mediational tool. The various defining aspects of literature are examined: schemes and tropes; narrative role taking; metaphor and metonymy; schemata theory and genre. I began my research with the hypothesis that literature is a mediational tool. Throughout my reading, teaching, and analysis of transcripts, I attempt to find evidence to support this thesis. After this, I am in a better position to explore the idea of dialogical reading and teaching. After this, finally, I am in a position to discuss and analyse the transcripts of the seminars in the light of these theoretical discussions and to come to some possible conclusions about the pedagogical role of literary discourse as a mediational tool, particularly at the points where literary discourse, used in a Vygotskian framework, overlap with dialogical teaching.

CHAPTER TWO

A Vygotskian Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter locates the research study in a Vygotskian framework, including the central concept of mediation and the refinements that the concepts of the ZPD (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) and scaffolding provide in understanding the role of literature as a mediational tool in dialogical teaching.

2.2 Mediation

Vygotsky developed his theoretical framework using genetic analysis. This framework posits that mental processes can only be understood by understanding how and where they occur in the developmental process. The genetic process emphasises the importance of process over product. Furthermore, Vygotsky distinguishes between elementary mental functions, which are genetically inherited (what children have when they are born: an intact nervous system, elementary perception and eidetic memory, among other things), and higher mental functions, which are developed through social interaction (including abstract reasoning, logical memory, language, voluntary attention, planning, decision-making). (Vygotsky, 1978)

In Vygotsky's view humans do not respond directly to the environment; for him our psychology is *mediated* by cultural means. Consistent with Vygotsky's logic is his idea that all development occurs twice or takes place on two planes; first interpsychologically (between people) and then intrapsychologically (within the individual) (Vygotsky, 1978).

In understanding this process of internalisation, however, one still needs to bear in mind the relationship between human action and the cultural, historical and

institutional context in which this action occurs. Wertsch (1994) suggests that one of the basic ways in which sociocultural settings shape mental functioning is through the cultural tools employed. Mediation provides the formulation of how this shaping occurs. For Vygotsky there are two levels of mediated development. As he argues:

> We can formulate the genetic law of cultural development in the following way…Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as the inter-psychological category and then within the individual child as an intra-psychological category…but it goes without saying that the internalisation transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 114).

"The central fact about our psychology is the fact of mediation" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.91). Exactly how this mediation occurs, though, is not explained.

What is clear is that development is a socio-genetic process with learning coming about through social interactions between at least three voices: the voice of the text; a more expert voice (in this report, the voice of the teacher) in mediational dialogue with a less expert voice (here, the student reader), using various psychological tools; in this case the most important and most powerful being the mediational tool of language.

What Wertsch called "semiotic mediation" (1994) is central to all aspects of an individual's epistemological construction of the 'reality' of the world. The semiotic mechanisms- of which language is the most profound and, in the context of this report, the most interesting - which mediate how the individual, during the course of his or her social functioning, connects the external world with the internal world; the world of the social with the world of the individual (Wertsch 1994). Semiotic

mediation allows individuals to move from the elementary to the higher mental functions.

2.3 Language as a Mediational Tool

This transition is facilitated by what Vygotsky called " psychological tools". Although there are many tools, Vygotsky's special interest was *language*. It was clear to Vygotsky that language played a central role in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1962). Language is mastered by social interaction.

Complex concepts are conveyed in language. New objects are categorised by giving them names. The process introducing individuals to new objects is what Vygotsky called "intermental". Any communication is achieved not by any ability the child has mastered, but as a result of his or her relationship with others. It is only when the child has learnt that a particular word communicates a particular meaning that the child has developed an "intramental" ability (Vygotsky, 1978). In short, then, this is the outline of the process of internalisation.

For Vygotsky this goes further. For him it is language that makes thought possible.

Thought and language do, however, have different roots. Vygotsky makes a distinction between his first stage, a baby wailing for milk: what Vygotsky called "external speech" which is unrelated to intellect or thinking and which is designed to direct the behaviour of others, and "egocentric speech", the second stage, a point of transition in which there is an intersection between the primitive first stage and the far more sophisticated "inner speech" of the third stage. It is in this third stage that children believe that language must be articulated in order to direct behaviour.

Children in the third stage will often speak aloud to direct their own behaviour. (Vygotsky, 1978). In the third stage of “inner speech” the child can engage in forms of higher mental functions using internal dialogue to mediate behaviour.

For Vygotsky “the child begins to perceive the world not only through its eyes but also through its speech. And later it is not just seeing but acting that becomes informed by words” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 32). Language, then, is the most important of the “psychological tools that mediate our thoughts, feelings and behaviours” (Nicholl, 2000, p.3).

Interesting, and developed in more detail in Chapter Three, is the idea that an individual’s ability to decontextualise the semiotic potential of language allows for a particular text to become an “object of reflection” (Nicoll, 2000, p.4). Obvious but perhaps worth stressing is that texts do not, in and of themselves, have mediational power. In Wittgenstein's famously quoted metaphor, words are as tools in a toolbox, "although all are similar, all have different uses" (Wittgenstein, 1972, cited in Cook, 1994, p.95). (For example, even reading a set of instructions for constructing a bookshelf, although we may not see this as being a ‘social interaction’ that is socially or culturally mediated, makes use of words that are signs and symbols that allow us to think in more complex ways.)

2.4 Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a useful and helpful concept to bear in mind when considering mediation.

Vygotsky first mentioned the concept of the ZPD only 15 months before his death. This notion has been adopted by various champions and articulated in several ways. What Vygotsky had to say about the ZPD is, however, worth reproducing:

> The ZPD defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions could be termed the "buds" or "flowers" of development rather than the "fruits" of development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86)

Even those who are not linguistically gifted have a certain potential for learning; the social environment in which learning takes place shapes it. The potential for learning is greater than the actual ability of the individual when the learning is 'facilitated' by a more competent other who is capable of evoking more appropriate and more complex responses. To assist an individual working in his or her ZPD, a degree of empathy and judgment about the abilities of that individual when working alone is called for. The ZPD is 'activated' when one person (or the group or even a text) acts as mediator for another person who is not able to execute a particular action alone.

It seems difficult to contest that development and instruction are not only inseparably linked but also socially cemented. This has long been acknowledged by teachers and tutors (Cole, 1996; Tappan, 1991; Heath, 1986; Mackenzie, 2000; Wertsch, 1994; 1998). Teaching and, in the context of this study - teaching literature - is what awakes and allows growth in the higher mental functions that are in a state of maturing. It is in this ZPD and through one of the myriad number of social interactions that we learn

how to use the psychological tools available to us, particularly a tool as "complex and as rich" as literature (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988).

Clearly, for mediation to be most effective, especially if dialogic teaching is proposed, the teaching group would need to be within a homogenous ZPD. This is discussed in far more detail in Chapter Five.

2.4.1 Scaffolding

The industrial-sounding "scaffolding," a pedagogical device most closely associated with the ZPD, is not Vygotsky's own metaphor but one developed by Bruner (1996) to elaborate on Vygotsky's theory. The concept describes the cognitive progression in a particular learning context and allows for the closing of the gap between the actual skill level of the learner and his or her potential levels as this individual is guided through a task.

With scaffolding, working within one's own ZPD and having the world mediated by psychological tools, the individual is capable of performing at a level of which she or he would not be capable alone. The notion of the ZPD will be used and developed in this study, as it is theoretically and empirically powerful in dealing with the quintessentially human semiotic tool of language generally and literature as a mediational tool in particular.

2.5 Literature: A Unique Mediating Tool

In the context of a Vygotskian framework as discussed above, it seems axiomatic that the study of *language* mediates the potentiality for higher mental functioning. It is my

contention that *literature* is also a tool that allows for the development of meaning-making for the individual of the world around him or her.

Literature, particularly narrative, allows for the creation of a meaning-making 'reality': defining, shaping and facilitating thought; communication and the organisation of experience. Literature mediates in a formal pedagogical situation or, more informally, when readers engage in dialogue and are informed by the genre and the necessary schematas. Cook's (1994) schematas (which are discussed in Chapter Three) have the potential to mediate learning. (Although it is not the focus of this study, it is an interesting aside that in literary discourse, cognition and morality seem to be inseparably linked.)

While it is important to acknowledge that all linguistic 'utterances' have elements in common, I am interested in exploring the possibility of literary discourse functioning as a uniquely powerful mediating tool that is qualitatively different from other linguistic usages. In this there is no divergence from Vygotsky's arguments. In fact, this would be entirely consonant with Vygotsky's theory of individuals constructing 'reality' through language and this construction being mediated by society and culturally shaped contexts. It is language, in particular language as used in literature as a mediational tool, that I explore in the next chapter.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter is based on a theoretical Vygotskian structure including his central tenet of semiotic mediation. The significance of the ZPD and the related concept of scaffolding are introduced and briefly discussed. Once I have explored literature and

the possibility of its uniqueness as a mediational tool, I investigate the logical progression from the ideas of Vygotsky to the refinements made by Bakhtin and post-Bakhtinians, particularly in the area of dialogical teaching.

CHAPTER THREE

The Nature of Literary Discourse

3.1 Introduction

While it makes sense to see literature as uniquely mediating, it is difficult to isolate exactly what makes it so. In teaching, perhaps it is the context as much as the formal elements that allow for literature the possibility of being a unique type of mediational role. All elements I mention here, however, do occur in 'everyday' language, written and spoken: narrative, metaphor, metre, formal rhyme, puns ambiguities, tropes, schemes with Cook's (1994) reinforced, represented and (or) refreshed schematas. All or some of these may allow those engaging in dialogue to construct a mediated response which may also allow literature to be decontextualised and internalised as part of a pedagogical experience.

3.2 Literary Discourse: Schemes and Tropes

What is it about literature that makes it different, since so many of the features thought of as specifically literary appear in common usage? Metre and formal rhyme sometimes occur in everyday speech, as do puns, ambiguities and tropes and schemes, "although it is true that often in literature there is a greater concentration of these examples, deliberately arranged and controlled." (Blake, 1990, p.1).

However difficult it is to pin down, there is a difference between the colloquial simile that is "as bold as brass" and T S Eliot's simile for the young man in *The Waste Land:* "One of the low on whom assurance sits/ As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire". The difference is not only one of originality and unexpected juxtaposition but the forced expansion of consciousness that, in a sensitive, thoughtful and informed reader, allows for the creation of a disapproving image of a wealthy man that accords with the austere tone of the whole poem. Here the simile, in the resonant rhythm of the

verse and the contemptuous sounds of the short vowels in the second line, invites the reader to “pause, to consider, re-read and assess in a way that would destroy the flow of mediation of other modes of communication” (Blake, 1990, p.1). This pausing, considering, re-reading and assessing the response to context-independent literature will be examined in a practical way in this study.

The pedagogical implications of what seems to be a unique reflective assessment are discussed in more detail by Cook (1994). Cook, however, initially grapples with the more commonly used non-literary but written stimulus and seeks to understand why using this exclusively linguistic analysis (not literary) can be considered “soul-less” (Cook, 1994, p.27). He also confronts the more general cross-cultural problem posed by the western literary canon which, he argues, inhibits the discovery of common experience across the boundaries of nation, culture and history (Cook, 1994, p.34). Furthermore, he argues, a national canon of literature can have all the divisive associations of the nationalism it perpetuates, diminishing the ‘excluded’ and quite at odds with the potentially humanising and civilising effects of literature which should stress the commonality rather than the particularity of the human condition.

However interesting this discussion of the clear but inarticulable nature of literature (not to mention the literary canon) is, it does not move us very much closer to answering the question of how or if literature is a unique psychological tool, mediating meaning in a different way from other semiotic signs. It is, however, still clear to any discriminating reader that Jonathan Swift in his satirical essays on the Irish famine of the eighteen-hundreds, does not really advocate eating human babies and J M Coetzee in *Disgrace* does not necessarily believe that being raped is paying

an ‘African tax’. The difference may involve literature capturing the consciousness or entering a “person-affecting” dimension, an aspect that will be addressed tangentially in this study. Certainly, however, there are clear literary tools that constitute at least a necessary ‘conglomerate’ definition.

3.3 Literary Discourse and Narrative Role-Taking

Literary discourse, I believe, includes the notion of moral language, and exhibits how moral reasoning works. (Sadly though, the idea of the connection between moral development and cognitive development and the idea of literature mediating morally are beyond boundaries of this study. It seems clear, however, and worth mentioning that for both the reader and the writer, literature captures both the cognitive and affective dimensions of morality.) Two aspects of literature do present themselves as worthy of further exploration: narrative and metonymy/metaphor. Narrative is a primary meaning-making scheme that occurs always in time and in relationship (Tappan, 1991) and provides, as Tappan argues, “an important corrective to the strictly cognitive, formal (that is, abstract) and hypothetical focus of the cognitive-developmental approach to the study of moral development” (Tappan, 1991, p. 245).

Thus, the narrative approach makes sense if one is attempting to understand behaviour in context. Participants in events have a construction of their own. A ‘narrativist’ is not as concerned with the underlying deep structure of language as, with looking for more detail in the context.

Narrative allows moral dialogue by the re-organisation of an individual’s thought patterns. (This is a concept I will return to in my discussion of Cook’s schemata.)

Literature would necessarily mediate using this narrative model and the most crucial and significant understanding from narrative would be the concept of "role-taking". For Jennings narrative mediation is "fundamentally a process of restructuring the modes of role-taking and this is what differentiates social experience from mere social interaction" (Jennings, 1989, cited in Day 1991, p. 306). In other words: narrative structuring happens in the dialogic interplay where ideas are built, one on another, by the role-playing technique and the creation of a personal story that emerges in the course of the dialogue.

Role-taking is an active, not a theoretical, subjective or relative undertaking and it is informed by literature. For Day, role-taking is no less than "rationality in action…a rationality which is good for any and all times irrespective of context or condition" (Day, 1989, cited in Conroy 1999, p. 495).

Day's universalist approach may be a tall order for the teaching of literature but it is, however, a Kantian position which Rudd summarises thus: to construct a personal, decontextualised narrative "…I must abstract from my social relationships and roles, from my relationships with God (if I believe in Him) and from my very humanity" (Rudd, 1989, cited in Conroy 1999, p. 495). In short, narrative role-taking is an affordance of literature which, because it is decontextualised in terms of the experiences of the individual and the teaching group, can be both pedagogic and dialogic because of the opportunity it allows for dialogical entanglement with the text, each other and the teacher.

Narrative does not remove from the individual his or her ability to see differences (of race, gender, tribe, customs) but makes these differences meaningful in the context of the similarities one can understand with respect to hurt, pain, humiliation, joy and affirmation, among other commonalities.

Of course 'dream narrative,' or literary discourse, can be debilitating and 'irrational' but it can also be the scaffold for any number of human activities, "…we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (Hardy, 1988, p.12). Certainly we dialogue in narrative in the sense that we construct a story with clearly distinguished time, structure, theme, motif and using figurative language, among other features.

Without the potentiality of imaginative (dream) narrative, we could have no means of establishing, maintaining or transforming our relationships - or ourselves. In this way, alone, if by no other means, literature has the potential to be uniquely mediational. (This is, of course not to discredit 'real-life' experience. It is, rather, whatever experience individuals have is destined to become part of that individual's personal narrative - an inner dialogue which each human is involved in telling him or herself every waking moment and, less obviously, sleeping too - although this study is not the place to explore these interesting ideas).

For Hardy, it is a dubious but generally accepted progression that human beings begin "by telling themselves fairy tales and end by telling truths" (1988, p.13). Dream narrative allows us to tell stories to escape from the tyranny of reality, or allows us to

confront universal realities that provide a tool for decision-making. “Dreams are productive when they lead to productive conflicts. Stories need not be just lies” (Hardy, 1988, p.19). Narrative literary discourse does not compete with the world of happenings; as Hardy argues, it allows for a “continuation in disguising and isolating art, of the remembering, dreaming and planning that is life imposed on the uncertain, attenuated, interrupted, and unpredictable and meaningless flow of happenings” (1994, p.14).

It is no great logical feat to see that the pedagogical affordances of literature (narrative and metonymic language) are also its limitations. Wittgenstein, like so many thinkers before and after him, sees that “the limits of [his] language are the limits of [his] world” (Wittengenstein, 1979, cited in Witherell, 1991, p.236). Thus the ability which literature has to mediate is limited by one’s language and also by one’s sensibility, inhibitions, history, intelligence and inclination to wish, hope, believe and dream. It is to some of these mediating tools that teaching literature can make a difference. An important case can be made, for all teaching in that, as Pegano argues “when we teach, we tell stories about the world… about the kind of world we want to live in and what we should do to make that world” (Pegano, 1990, cited in Witherell, 1991, p.238).

Teaching literature is “taking seriously life and human conduct – in both essence and consequence” (Witherell, 1991, p.238) and calling on others to do the same. It calls on individuals to make moral decisions and gives opportunities for “cognitive, affective and aesthetic responses to human suffering, injustice, caring and joy" (Witherell, 1991, p.238). The question is surely not if this can take place when engaging in

making meaning through literary discourse, but if it is possible to engage in this activity without literature mediating on all pedagogical facets mentioned. Narratives, both historical and literary "call us to consider what we know, how we know, what and whom we care about, and how to be just and caring in a complex world" (Witherell, 1991, p.240).

Interestingly, it is also the case that literature allows a truly individual construction of reality using the social tool of language to make sense of external reality. Thus, narrative becomes an active, idiosyncratic and personal creation of identity within a social context. (This approach is also, incidentally, consonant with the constructivist approach to meaning making.) The individual needs to be aware that part of the human condition, along with the necessity to create narrative, is the necessity to entertain the fundamental paradox that all narrative is ironic: Schelgel's "ironic temper" (that essentially we are finite beings attempting to make sense of the transcendent and infinite.) The individual must learn "a capacity to see in one's, or one's group, most powerful meanings, while simultaneously recognising that they are relative, partial and inevitably distorting apprehensions of transcendent reality" (Fowler, 1981, cited in Conroy, 1999, p. 436). How one goes about using literature as a mediational tool in the light of all these layers of complexity becomes even more fraught than it seemed at first.

3.4 Literary Discourse: Metaphor

One of the aspects of literary discourse in which the philosopher and writer Iris Murdoch is particularly interested is the metaphor, which she sees as "the fundamental form of human awareness" (Murdoch, 1978, cited in Weldhen, 1986, p.

119). I too believe that possibly more than any other literary device, metaphor and its transforming of the meaning of words, is a defining trope of literary discourse.

In spite of Vygotsky's argument concerning language and thought briefly touched on beforehand, it would be over simplistic to argue that thought and language are co-extensive. In fact, Murdoch's entire point is that there is what she calls a "creative tension" (Murdoch, 1978, cited in Weldhen 1986, p.120) between thought and language; an inexact fit. This is, for Murdoch, not the case in the language of the mathematician. Metaphor is, perhaps the literary heart of language. Metaphor is not a "peripheral excrescence upon the linguistic structure, it is its living centre" (Murdoch, 1978, cited in Weldhen, 1986, p.121). Metaphor is central to the conceptual exploration of meaning and coherence. For Murdoch ordinary language is "no philosopher" (Murdoch, 1978, cited in Weldhen 1986, p. 121).

Murdoch's methodology involves analysing how we 'naturally' use metaphor in narrative. There is, she writes, "a sense of the unbridgeable gulf between the 'meaning' which is investigated by linguistic analysis, and the 'meaning' involved in poetry, or investigated by psycho-analysis which seems inextricably linked with experience" (Murdoch, 1978, cited in Weldhen 1986, p.121).

Metaphor in narrative is, then, a process of creating a 'continuous personality' forming a 'fabric of being' where moral distinctions and judgements are being made all the time" (Murdoch, 1978, cited in Weldhen 1986, p.123). To mistrust one's individual inner life would be a mistake, according to Murdoch. The individual's particular and unique experience is clearly then also essential for Murdoch's

individual identity or notion of selfhood. This is certainly not the situation in which many ‘social philosophers’ find themselves. For Sartre, for example, to suggest that a “substantial self” exists, is “…to fall into bad faith” (Weldhen, 1986, p.124).

Thus for Murdoch, it is imperative for any mediation performed by literature, individual and societal, that we need to develop a richer vocabulary in order to continue with a “conceptual exploration” and complex make up of the individual. This is for her, a condition of “good action” (Weldhen, 1986, p.125) that is perfectly natural, not esoteric. For pedagogy the message is clear: “the more the imagination can be fed by immersion in literature… the more we can educate ourselves to be able to see more clearly and so be capable of that imaginative perception of the other…” (Weldhen, 1986, p.126).

It is clear the metaphorical narrative has a mediating and shaping effect on the individual psyche. The question remains: how does one explain, pedagogically, how literary discourse can be allowed to achieve its potential as a tool for mediation?

3.5 Cook's Refinement of Schemata Theory as Applicable to Literary Discourse

Cook's schemata theory, not original to him but as refined by him, specifically in the light of literary discourse, is particularly helpful in answering this question by explaining how and why individuals read texts differently. Through the medium of the metaphorical narrative and enlightened by Cook's theory, an individual in the right situation can be transported to another actively and individually mediated universe.

Cook’s chief pedagogical contribution is the notion of schemata theory. It is an adaptation of 1920s gestalt psychology in which new experience is processed in terms of deviation from a stereotypical version, or conformity to it. However, texts “are not merely a category which needs to be included in an overall theory, for the sake of completeness; they are different in kind, representative of a type of text which may perform the important function of breaking down existing schemata, reorganising them and building new ones” (Cook, 1994, p.12). The idea is that literature manipulates any individual’s environment and maintains any number of social relations. Language also builds new schemata and ‘plays with’ existing ones, although obviously not at moments of practical urgency or social delicacy; hence the need for withdrawal to the ‘artificiality’ of the classroom to do this. Destruction and construction of schemata often require a degree of consciousness that would be difficult for individuals alone and engaged in everyday activities to achieve; but in dialogue with the group, the text and the teacher, Cook's theory is one that is potentially applicable to any context where literary discourse can be employed.

There is, necessarily, an asymmetrical relationship between the reader and the read, which must be wholly empathetic if the text is to be in any way mediational. It may also be the case that inexperienced readers believe that reality comes from the writer and not from the factual world, which they are in the process of creating. It is on this level that voices of other readers, among them the voice of the more competent other (the teacher) needs to be heard. In other words, the mediational experience is enhanced by dialogical teaching.

In the framework of Cook's schemata theory, texts work in at least three ways: schema reinforcing, schema presenting and schema refreshing. Schemata call for both the reader and the writer to share, to some degree at least, knowledge of the world and various levels of inference. The former is clearly the most important one for Cook. The fact that the reader routinely fills in gaps in narrative from his or her own schemata, indicates, for Cook, the extent to which they are employed in narrative discourse.

In the short poem by Margaret Atwood, *You fit into me*, the reader's schemata is at first confirmed before being jolted and forced into a sudden re-processing (Cook, 1994, p.14).

You fit into me

You fit into me
Like a hook in an eye –
A fish hook
An open eye

In essence then, literary discourse gives the reader the ability to break down existing schemata, reassemble new ones and draw new connections and this is synonymous with intelligence and adaptability.

For some readers, particularly inexperienced readers, literary texts give the idea that they create the 'facts' from which they apparently derive. The value of this type of discourse is that the "illusory experience offered by texts (that have no immediate practical or social consequences) [allows] the opportunity to re-organise schemata

without fear of unpleasant practical or social consequence" (Cook, 1994, p.191) and provides a safe place for formal growth and consequently is pedagogically vital.

Schemata theory can allow a range of responses such as on one hand: reinforcing, preserving or adding; and on the other hand: disrupting, refreshing, destroying, constructing or connecting. The tool of schemata theory, for formalists at least, defamiliarises through the manipulation of form and calls on readers to make cognitive and attitudinal adaptions or changes. In the same way, development cannot be taught or forced, but may be mediated. The schematic, narrative re-construction of a literary text is, however, reader-specific and would certainly suggest that the individual may 're-read' the mediated text and through it, may re-read his or her own life.

Cook's analysis of Gerard Manley Hopkins' *The Windhover* shows the interconnectedness of various schemata better than Elizabeth Jennings (the text used in the research conducted for this research report) could in the space available, because, while Jennings uses such schemata, it would be difficult to find the same variety and density in so concentrated a manner.

The Windhover

To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
Dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding

Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

Here, Hopkins' falcon is the servant of the morning; the prince and eldest son (like Christ), heir to the kingdom of daylight. All this has been "caught" (captured) by the "I", or has caught (infected) him. The effect is the fusion of a range of disparate schemata, a foregrounding of the elements they have in common, giving each the potential to disrupt and change the other.

The schemata include: Christ, morning, knight, falcon, skater, fire and ploughing, although for individual readers there may be many others. The poem as discourse or dialogue is interpreted through a reader's schemata. It enters into dynamic interaction with these schemata, both being interpreted through them and simultaneously disrupting, recombining and refreshing them. This is literary discourse in an extreme sense. Hopkins' sonnet calls for a highly literate and sophisticated reader to engage with a text of unusual complexity, with values deeply grounded. This text makes demands far beyond those called for in conventional discourse. On this level, the expertise of the reader to a certain extent would be part of the social reality Fish (1980) mentions. The individual sophistication of the reader would also be applicable to his or her efficiency in processing the information already gathered and applying it to novel situations and contexts.

Thus *The Windhover* can represent and cause a change in 'life theme' from passivity to activity; a change effected through such devices as the dual senses of the verb "caught" and the constantly changing schematic expectations about the stability of perception and attitude. There are, however, other aspects of literature that go towards providing a 'conglomorate' definition of literature. One of the key facets, I believe is genre.

3.6 Fowler on Genre

Genre, the textual clue to the reader on how to approach the text, is another vital part of the literary discourse in which the teacher needs to play a role in stimulating dialogic involvement. Of course genre does not only apply to literature, but I would argue that the textual clues given in literature make more of a difference than in other kinds of discourse.

Every work of literature belongs to at least one genre (or kind) and by understanding what this kind is the "author communicates…much as the speaker might express himself, by a system of shared but more-or-less unconscious and unformulated grammatical rules" (Fowler, 1982, p.20). Genre is not merely a tool for classification and prescription but also an agent of meaning; it is the most important literary code. It provides the literary context and reinforces the signal system with additional coding and rules. Every convention the writer uses – repetition, refrains, thematic parallels, sense emphasised by sound and rhythm – bears upon the meaning of the text. Fowler goes further than this. He says "to have any artistic significance, to mean anything distinctive in a literary way, a work must modulate, vary or depart from its generic conventions, and consequently alter them for the future" (Fowler, 1982, p.20). If

writers, as do the Post-Modernists, use genre to make meaning, a writer needs to have a clear idea of what genre she or he is using and what the rules are that are being manipulated or broken. It is genre as communication that Fowler has in mind when he calls this the study of genre "more of a pigeon than a pigeon-hole" (Fowler, 1982, p.21) since the classification is not an end in itself, but a tool for communication and interpretation. To discover the genre (or generic blends) of a work is, to a great extent, to discover its meaning. As most teachers of literature would agree, discussion of genre is an essential pedagogical tool of mediation and necessary before any worthwhile dialogue can be engaged in.

Genre is a coded meaning since generic operations by a reader are partly unconscious. The conventions of comedy are not all held in mind when one reads a comedy, yet one is aware that what one confronts is comedy, not a work of tragedy, or a lyric or any other distinct kind (although there may be elements of all these genres in any given work). An inexperienced reader might find it very difficult to classify a work generically and the voice of the 'more competent other' would need to be heard at this point. (This is particularly interesting in the context of the Bakhtinian dialogues to be discussed shortly.)

The nature of lyric poetry in the Elizabeth Jennings selection (as distinct from narrative, epic, ballad, or any other genre for that matter), is key in making sense of vital clues in the poem. Significant for understanding these poems, and important indeed for this entire selection of 'confessional' poems, is that students are able to decontextualise this information and transfer and understand the generic clues of one lyric with the next lyric with which they are presented. For example: in the standard

conventions of the genre, lyrics are non-narrative poems presenting a single speaker expressing a state of mind or a process of thought and/or feeling and that it is not always the case that the “I” of the lyric can be identified as the poet him or herself.

3.7 Conclusion

In summary, it is my understanding that literature, particularly through the metonymic narrative discussed earlier, abstracted through Day’s (1989) role-play to rationality in action in which meaning is mediated by Murdock’s (1978) ‘creative tension’ between thought and language and informed by an understanding of Fowler’s (1981) genre, as discussed, is pedagogically aided by the text’s confirmation or challenge to the individual’s schemata as Cook (1994) discusses. It is when these elements mentioned are, to a lesser or greater extent, available to those engaging in a pedagogical ‘entanglement’ with the literary text that a meaningful, mediated and pedagogically enriching dialogue can be engaged in. It is this dialogic teaching of the sort Bakhtin (1981) investigates that I am about to explore.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dialogic Teaching

4.1 Introduction to Teaching Literature Dialogically

In my attempt to understand the role of literature as a mediational tool when it (literature) is taught dialogically, an obvious starting point was Vygotsky (1962) and the later refinements on his original theory by Bakhtin in, among other texts, *The Dialogical Imagination*, (1981). Various other theorists have added to and developed on this original thesis. From my point of view, the most interesting have been Hunt and Vipond (1984, 1992, 1996) who have researched dialogical teaching over several years. Sadly, this research has not involved literary discourse in the sense in which I define it and which, as became apparent during the course of this research, is of a different sort of communication to the more simply defined "read word" with which so many of the other theorists, including Vygotsky (1991), Bakhtin (1981), Hunt and Vipond (1984, 1992, 1996) and others concern themselves.

4.2 Vygotsky and Bakhtin: Dialogic Reading

For Bakhtin (1981), an "utterance", his fundamental unit of language analysis and use, is a unique social transaction. The writer and reader (or hearer) on the basis of the text, construct it, but the features of the text do not alone determine it: "Two completely different utterances may be constructed on the basis of an identical text" (Hunt, 1996, p.5). The difference involves two factors crucial to my study: what the reader brings to bear on the exercise and the situation in which the reading occurs.

Bakhtin continues that utterances occur in "dialogic chains" (Hunt, 1996, p.7). Thus for Bakhtin, no utterance "exists except in the anticipation of some kind of response to it" (Hunt, 1996, p.7). This sounds plausible for most common utterances, especially

spoken ones. But regrettably, Bakhtin does not answer all the questions about how literature mediates. The unanswered questions are wide-ranging and prompt each other: how do sensitivities to literature change? Why do they change? Why do they change for some people and not for others? Is there a method that will make cognitive changes necessary?

Bakhtin does not even describe how dialogic mediation occurs; he simply takes it as a social given. Brandt (Brandt, 1990 cited in Hunt, 1996), Olson and Goody and Watt (1968, cited in Hunt, 1996), all see the problem of the "false dichotomy that leads to an impoverished notion of what literate behaviour consists of" (Brandt, 1990, cited in Hunt, 1996, p.6). For Brandt, it is least successful writers and readers who perceive the literate enterprise as a matter of "text-making or text taking" (Brandt, 1990, cited in Hunt, 1996, p.7). Those who are most successful have learned that "rather than learning to disengage from pragmatic events, literacy requires learning to become purely and actively entangled" (Brandt, 1990, cited in Hunt, 1996, p.7). Quite possibly, it is this idiosyncratic entanglement that makes the analytic enterprise greatly more complex.

The notion of involvement in a dialogue with literature that extends beyond the confines of the text, seems to me to be key in understanding the unique mediating function literature can perform, both intra and extra textually.

In Bakhtin's dialoguing third voice, that of the "superaddressee", (the first two voices being those of the text and the reader), stands above the particularity of the dialogue as a kind of "reference and authority whose true responsive understanding assumes[s]

various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth [the genre]…)" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.126). This third voice is an essential, though implicit, feature of Vygotsky's ZPD, an outside referent shared by more than two interlocutors; something more broadly shared among members of communities.

If literature mediates in a social and dialogic manner, then the only way in which to study these phenomena is to create the situation in which the texts are studied in a wide-ranging and ongoing dialogical, social context. One such teaching context (small group and dialogical) is the basis of this study.

Recently, there has been a growing sensitivity to the differences between the dialogical views of Bakhtin and Vygotsky (which of course also has several implications for an expanded notion of the ZPD).

> For Vygotsky, dialogue was the concrete, psychological equivalent of the social nature of the mind, i.e., the totality of all social relations constituting the human essence. Thus, dialogue characterises the human mind and consciousness.
> (Radzikhovskii, 1991, p.12, quoted in Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999, p.2)

These general sentiments are ones with which I am sure Bakhtin would agree. However, he makes refinements that are interesting to note in the present context.

> The dialogic nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself; the single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.293).

Wertsch argues that, although "Vygotsky never made claims that were as specific about the dialogic nature of inner speech, as [Bakhtin claims]…a detailed examination

of his writings reveals that he was thinking along very similar lines" (Wertsch, 1996, p.152, cited in Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999, p.4).

Vygotsky does, however, articulate apparent differences. He writes: "written and inner speech are monologic speech forms. Oral speech is generally dialogic" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.271). Thus in Vygotsky's mind, "inner speech" and "social speech" which both have as their function to communicate, serve radically different functions. Literature, as Vygotsky would doubtlessly class written 'speech', is for him monologic (not dialogic) in spite of the hugely complex mediational function it serves. It seems likely though, that he has argued himself into this corner through his analysis of the internalisation of egocentric speech as opposed to written or literary "speech".

Vygotsky's genetic law of cultural development, mediated at least in part by literature, would then for Vygotsky presumably be "monologic". He does, however, allow himself an avenue of escape by commenting that: "it goes without saying that the internalisation transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions" (Vygotsky, 1962, p.163). Possibly it is this transformation that makes the empirical study of the mediation of literature difficult. (Internalisation, however, as deep-level understanding is too tangential and complex a process to be thoroughly discussed in this study. Again, it is a concept that Vygotsky simply presumed since for him there was clear evidence of its having taken place.) Perhaps, simply presuming that the internalisation involves some sort of internal dialogue is enough to prevent a great deal of space being spent on unpicking this argument. It is certainly the approach Bakhtin took and one which seems sensible. Wertsch, too, makes a case

for allowing these two apparently divergent understandings of dialogue to be commensurate. He argues that the intrapsychological functioning bears an affinity to Bakhtin's notion of "hidden dialogicality" (Wertsch, 1996, p.197).

> Imagine a dialogue of two persons in which the statements of the second speaker are omitted, but in such a way that the general sense is not at all violated. The second speaker is present invisibly, his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker. We sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fibre to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person. (Bakhtin, 1984, p.197).

Bakhtin's utterance is permeated with the notion of the 'other': the fact that the other speaks from a different horizon that "constitutes the enabling condition for the productivity of dialogue" (Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999, p.7). Here Bakhtin and Vygotsky diverge considerably.

For Bakhtin, the notion of the other is not only retained but also deemed essential in that consensus in the dialogue does not mean productivity or construction of meaning. In fact it often means the very opposite.

The multilevelled 'other' in this instance is the more competent facilitator (the teacher) and the literary text itself, both of which need to be within the ZPD which serves as the connecting concept in the various strands pertaining to the sociogenesis of the specifically cultural forms of thought which Vygotsky's theory examine. The third voice in the 'dialogue' would be that of the reader. To engage in this three-way dialogue, all three voices need to be positioned within the individual's ZPD in such a way as to allow scaffolding.

The scaffold metaphor, mentioned before, has made a valuable contribution in shedding light upon the nature of the ZPD. It is described as a "process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976, p.11). Key for a discussion of how literature mediates is the idea that scaffolded instruction within the ZPD is informed by the teacher's constant appraisal of and sensitivity to the student's level of functioning.

More importantly, in the context of scaffolding in literature, is the appropriate selection, organisation and presentation of suitable texts to achieve the agenda; in this case the establishment of dialogic reading. This continuous 'on-line' appraisal may not be amenable to process-oriented research but a post-hoc analysis may reveal at least the teacher's ongoing interpretative mediation. This has clear implications for my chosen research methodology.

While the notion of dialogic reading is central to my argument, Cheyne and Tarulli (1999, p.13) refine the notion of dialogue in helpful ways. They distinguish three types of dialogue, using the term "ventriloquation" to describe the inhabiting of the third voice within the first voice to focus on teleological, cultural or, in this context, more specifically pedagogical outcomes. The first species of dialogue they discuss is "magistral", the second, their version of "Socratic" and the third, "menippean".

"Magistral dialogue" is characterised by a first voice of superiority dominating the second voice, that of the child and drawing on an authority that could be the "word of the prophet, the received view of science, the democratically constituted government,

the school curriculum, ‘what everybody knows about child development’, medical authority or even rationality itself” (Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999, p.11). It can be argued that the voice of literary authority (critical voices, the canon) could be seen speaking in the accents of the “third voice” as well.

In their definition of the ‘Socratic’ version, dialogue is always open-ended and may be turned against any of the three voices. In this dialogue, the child/student becomes an active participant in the magistral dialogue and negotiates meaning as opposed to simply having it transmitted or prompted by the teleologically aimed third voice. In the Socratic dialogue, telos is often avoided and the authoritative third voice is less dominating and awe-inspiring. In the true Socratic dialogue it is perfectly possible, perhaps even unavoidable, that the dialogue will have “bi-directional effects” (Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999, p.13).

The third dialogue Cheyne and Tarulli mention is Menippean dialogue. If the Socratic dialogue is “a kind of discursive game that escapes the relatively tidy systematisation of the Magistral dialogue” then the Menippean dialogue is a discursive “Borgesian garden of forking paths”. (Weissert, 1991 cited in Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999, p.15) in which the voice of authority is turned on its head and rebellion is evident. The Menippean dialogue is a seriously undertaken diminishing of the voice of authority that accounts for the idea that, in dialogue, the second voice is almost always seen as the immature, thoughtless and punishable voice.

Pedagogically, the recalcitrant second voice in the Menippean dialogue is ‘remediated’ to make up for poor parenting or badly trained teachers and, if this is

unsuccessful, the remedial solution may be medical or quasi-medical therapies. If this too is unsuccessful, then the voice of authority may have to become even more extreme (Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999, p.16).

A Post-Modernist tradition, certainly in Cheyne's and Tarulli's reading (1999), offers an alternative image of a loosely connected set of guides, ever open to reinterpretation and constantly under re-negotiation. This opens up more radical forms of Socratic dialogue and even makes possible Menippean dialogue, which is not necessarily the point at which a teacher of literature would wish to arrive. A Socratic dialogue seems infinitely preferable - although all dialogues are mediational. The notion of dialogue too, becomes not merely a neutral field of communication but a potentially emancipatory and decentring tool.

Bearing in mind the three-voiced dialogue and the inherent potential for chaos, the ZPD ceases to retain the image of a cosy womb in which development may occur safely and without radical challenge. Hence the teacher could lose complete control of the achievement of the potential level of development. Vital for the teacher of literature is the need to be aware of the kind of dialogue one is engaging in and the projected outcome (if this is possible) from the point of view of all three dialoguing voices.

In contrast to this neo-Bakhtinian approach, it is interesting to note that Vygotsky's intersubjectivity (admittedly used specifically in the context of problem solving) emphasises the need for individuals involved in dialogue to occupy the "same epistemological space" and emphasises how "communication strives for congruence"

(Vygotsky, 1978, p.125). In other words, and to use a helpful colloquial phrase, both the reader and the teacher would need to be on the ‘same page’ for a meaningful dialogue to achieve clear and specific outcomes.

As Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999) argue, expert (experienced) readers are more likely to make the "kinds of connections between texts and situations than the less expert readers" (p.8). Creating a context that supports using the text as a medium for social exchange of values and ideas make it much easier for the less skilled reader to do this.

If teachers are hoping to ‘teach’ literature and hoping to maximise the potential for developing the key facility of dialogic reading as a mediational tool within the individual's ZPD, then as facilitators of literature they need to create situations in which dialogic involvement with texts is decontextualised and they also need to find ways in which texts can be attached to, and be made relevant to, immediate contexts. The teacher's role is not then to simplify the content, but to provide unfamiliar content and a setting for both expert and inexpert readers to step from their current level to a higher level of understanding.

Literature, as the above theoretical overview attempts to show, is a social tool and appears as a dialogic interaction that plays a fundamental role in mediation. Dialogic reading of literature is at first a social interaction (interpsychological) involving at least the generally accepted elements of literature such as genre, metaphor, narrative role-taking. Then, the theory goes, provided the scaffolding is in place and the literary text approach is within the individual's ZPD, it can be ‘entangled with’ as a mediated

dialogue. For increasingly expert readers the dialogue becomes decontextualised, and potentially mediates internalised dialogue.

Understanding the nature of the tool of literature is what Vipond and Hunt , among other theorists, explore (1984, 1992, 1996). It is encouraging to find confirmation of the importance of this line of questioning. If teachers have no idea of what literature is, as opposed to other mediational texts, and how it works and what it does; or if the understanding of how literary texts work changes depending on the critical school to which one subscribes, it certainly cannot make for anything more than the most haphazard teaching of literature and the rather vague hope that teachers will hit the mark, or that simply transferring information or being particularly enthusiastic about the subject will produce readers sensitive to the mediational power of literature.

My experience is that teaching literature is, as often as not, a hit-and-miss activity. Occasionally, when a situation seems bereft of hope, understanding dawns and a sensitivity to both linguistic and metonymic 'meaning' begins to blossom, sometimes in spite of my efforts. As Gooderham mentions "windows on cognitive processes are questionable and delicate devices" (1997, p.2).

Hunt (1996), making a parallel between what physicists and do at the sub-atomic level where to look at particles is to change their behaviour, believes that the same is true with an in-depth analysis of what reading literature means and an examination of precisely how literature mediates. It is hoped that the more dispassionate tools of semiotic psychology will nevertheless add something to the nature of our understanding, particularly of literature.

Reading is a private, inaccessible activity that seems not to repay inspection or observation in others or oneself. If this is true of even the most ordinary sort of reading (such as, for example, instructions for assembling a bookshelf), then how much more private is the reading in which one is enraptured by a poem or forced to confront deeply personal issues in a post-modernist novel such as J M Coetzee's *Disgrace*. (A recent IEB Grade 12 set book.)

Vipond and Hunt (1996) distinguish the latter reading from the bookshelf-assembly variety, which is what they call "information driven" (Hunt, 1994; 1996). "Point-driven reading" is the sort that occurs when thematic concerns are followed as opposed to "story-driven reading" which is simply following the plot. "Point-driven reading" is quite simply when the reader asks of the text, or the teacher, or him or herself, "what is the point?"

Although these divisions and categorisations seem neat and clear cut, they are anything but this. Testing mediation is difficult, especially since psychological testing is inevitably of literacy rather than seeing literature as a mediational tool. It seems evident that literacy and literature working as mediational tools are completely different concepts.

For testing and evaluation purposes, psychologists traditionally use "fragmentary and inane texts" (Hunt, 1996, p.12) in seeking to determine how information is processed which, for Hunt, limits a true understanding of the mediational functioning of reading as a psychological tool to nothing more than "information-shunting" (Hunt, 1996,

p.14). It should be clear that the present study is not of the “testing and evaluating” type, nor does it deal with literacy, as mentioned.

The distinction between the different types of reading, although it seems obvious and common-sensical, only emerged in the late 1970s. Chatman (1881, cited in Hunt, 1996) uses a version of the Russian Formalist distinction between “story” and “discourse” and Rosenblatt (1998, cited in Hunt, 1996) similarly, makes a distinction between completely different kinds of reading: one “efferent” which is concerned with acquiring information from the text, and the other, “aesthetic” which is concerned with the lived-through experience of engaging in a transaction with a text. It is the latter category of reading that comes closest to a further distinction Hunt and Vipond (1984) make: “dialogic reading”.

Hunt’s search is for a causal relationship between readers' sensitivity to “narrative surface” and their “aesthetic response”. This is in Hunt’s terms “matters of tone and point of view as opposed to story events” (Hunt and Vipond, 1984, p.2); in Rosenblatt's terms, “aesthetic” reading as opposed to “efferent” reading (cited in Hunt, 1996).

I have simplified Hunt’s research, done over many years and developing through various stages. Hunt (1984) argues convincingly for the similarity of all language-based discourse, but, while essentially he is right, it would seem, from my synthesis of the arguments above, that literary discourse mediates in different ways from other types of discourse. None of the theorists I cite mention genre, for example, as one of

the key ways in which readers are prepared for the difference between prosaic discourse and literary discourse, although this may be an implied understanding.

Hunt's research (1984), however, shows that “point-form” reading (what he later calls “dialogic reading”) is not synonymous with “aesthetic” reading. Even more vexing for him was that when he attempted to study “point-form” reading the phenomenon seemed to vanish. Hunt and Vipond found themselves in the “awkward position of trying to study a phenomenon [they] couldn't find” (Hunt, 1984, p.4). How then does one study the kinds of mediation literary discourse performs when, in studying it, the phenomenon evaporates? It was clearly necessary for further ingenuity to be exercised when attempting to capture what is essentially ephemeral consciousness.

Here it may be helpful to outline briefly Fish's Reader-Response theory before discussing in more detail the pedagogical implications of Bakhtinian dialogic reading.

4.3 Vygotsky’s Theory and Fish's Reader Response Theory

Fish (1980), too, is concerned with what happens in the act of reading and his focus is on what the text does, as opposed to what it means. Fish's theory rejects all author intentionality and places meaning solely within the area of those receiving it. As such it is not as much a school of literary criticism as a theory of epistemology.

Meaning, for Fish, resides not in the text alone, an artefact of objective reality, but in each individual and the reading community; logic that has lead Fish to being charged, with good reason, with being a subjectivist.

The implication of the “self-written text” for researchers is clear, according to Fish: for any literary theorist “success is inevitable”: one's reading actuates the “reality” (Fish, 1980, p.105).

Of more concern is that “reading can only repeat reality, in that it necessarily consists of nothing but replications of independently existing, collective, interpretative strategies” (Worthen, cited in Fish, 1980, p.108). This would effectively disallow any literature from becoming becoming transformational since in this school the text could only function as a mirror that provides a reflection of the preconceptions of the reader. Fish is well aware of the limitations of the lone reader here. I too would not be able to take this thesis of dialogic teaching of literature any further if it were not possible to move beyond this limitation.

Consonant with Vygotsky, what lies behind Fish's thinking at this point is the strong view of the social construction of reality. Fish believes that all one thinks and knows is only made possible by the social context in which one lives. With this I would agree. He continues that individual readers cannot interpret beyond the limits made possible by their culture. This culture is referred to by Fish as an “interpretive community” (Fish, 1980, p.14).

This is a problematic concept. If literature is allowed to be the expanding and mediational tool I believe it to be, I am going to need to expand Fish's idea of the “interpretive community”. The refinement is a subtle but a pedagogically vital one. Interpretation is not the same as creation. A community simply and conventionally interpreting a text can do so only if the rules of the community are static and

conventionally followed. This is manifestly not the case in many literary readings. Readers, as a result of engaging in the dialogic entanglement with a text, will have the potential to emerge from the experience transformed. This experience is an example of creation and growth, not simply interpretation according to existent conventional constructions erected by consensus, it involves a co-creative process that mediates and is potentially transformational. On this point, Wegerif's (2000) implication process points to the difference between simple interpretation and creation.

4.3 Wegerif and Teaching as a Process of Implication

Wegerif (2000), although not talking specifically about literary discourse and dialogic involvement, does make an interesting point about using language as an "induction" to creative thinking (Scribner and Cole, 1981; Heath, 1983; Mercer, 1995, cited in Wegerif, 2000). Wegerif calls this "exploratory talk" or the idea of "general reasoning" that affords readers the opportunity to expand their consciousness (within each individual's ZPD - although this is my comment and not Wegerif's) working in groups - or more surprisingly - alone.

Wegerif (2000) questions how the lone dialogue could allow this to happen and he suggests that there is evidence that the discourse genre of "dialogical reasoning" or "exploratory talk" are first introduced by the teacher and then finally become implicit in readers' talk as readers become more adept participants in literary reasoning dialogue (Wegerif, 2000). In short, language becomes a tool to stimulate and facilitate the thought of the students; open questions and discussion topics which elicit ideas, repetitions and recapitulations. This leads to a creative re-interpretation in more

general or de-contextualised terms and challenges students to take a transformed position in relation to the mediated text, which is internalised.

Assumptions, which have been internalised, are essential to the understanding of what is said in conversations. Similarly, “inner speech” is different from “external speech” for Vygotsky because implicit ground rules are different from external verbal forms (Vygotsky, 1978 cited in Sheldon and Woodhead, 1991).

For Wegrif (2000), it is clear that it is the implicit assumptions that are essential to understanding what is said in any conversation. He draws a parallel that just as inner speech for Vygotsky is different from external speech, so too are implicit ground rules different from explicit verbal forms; “everything that is now implicit was at one time explicit and everything that is now transcendental was once empirical” (Wegerif, 2000, p 4). It makes sense then that to uncover the implicit, one would need to uncover the underlying assumptions. This would apply as much to large group teaching as to micro-level dialogic seminar groups.

This awareness of implicit assumptions could be seen to draw students into a kind of self-consciousness and responsibility for what they are saying that they did not necessarily have before. An opinion elicited then recapitulated and then re-presented as distanced and de-contextualised, becomes an object on which reflection can occur to uncover the implication of the implied. This is clearly evident in the Discussion Chapter.

Wegrif (2000, p.6) takes this to the next logical level. Students are not only discussing the subject matter, they are also interrogating their response to the wider, more decontextualised world. Besides this, they are constructing and creating the process and understanding how to read, reflect, articulate, and respond. As Wegerif has it, "the self they are coming to know is the self that has been constructed in the very process of learning how to reflect and think" (Wegerif, 2000, p 8).

4.4 Conclusion

Dialogical entanglement with a literary text (aesthetic as opposed to efferent) is an enormously complex psychological process, potentially involving innumerable external and internal dialogues. Magistral, Socratic or Menippean – possibly many other combinations and kinds; at least one of which seems to have to do with the dialogue occurring in an appropriate ZPD and an understanding of how to move from a purely text-bound dialogue to a mediated, implied, de-contextualised and potentially transformational experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

Research Methodology and Data Collection

5.1 Research Methodology and Data Collection

In this research, literary texts are presented to students in the context of directed small groups in order to look for instances of literature working as a mediational tool in dialogical teaching. From the nature of this research, it is evident that this is not a comparison between one pedagogical approach and another. It is, rather, an exploration of the nature of one pedagogical approach - dialogical teaching - in a theoretical Vygotskian framework with particular attention paid to the unique role of the nature of literature as a mediational tool provided it occurs within the individual's ZPD. It is certainly not my intention to engage in a debate as to which system is a superior educational model. In the case of this study, there are too many other variables that would skew such a comparison - such as the far smaller groups and the seminar style dialogues small groups encourage.

For several years, I have taught the IEB English Literature curriculum at secondary school level, from Grade 8 to Grade 12. At the same time I have taught the University of Cambridge Literature in English A-level curriculum. I was struck by the different demands of the two examining bodies and how this influenced my own teaching style. It is interesting to me that the Cambridge system with its wider range, more exhaustive outcome objectives (such as inter-textual links, the ability to show an understanding of the cultural, historical and other contextual influences on literary texts and study, the articulation of independent and current critical opinion and an understanding of genre and form) provided a vehicle for literature to act as a mediational tool that was not as noticeable in the IEB curriculum.

I chose to use the prescribed University of Cambridge A-level Literature in English syllabus the *Selected Poetry of Elizabeth Jennings* (1979) as a richer and more compact text, wider ranging in theme and more personally intense than many of the other texts prescribed for the year. I thought the generic homogeneity of the lyric poetry would allow for more of an opportunity for dialogic 'entanglement' and Jennings's dense metonymic style would provide ample opportunity for observing what Murdoch (1978, cited in Weldhen, 1986) called the "creative tension" between metaphor and meaning. It also seemed an ideal vehicle for the narrative role-taking that Day (1991) mentions and Cook's (1994) schematas. This text also seemed ideal to explore the contributions of Vygotsky (1991), Fish (1980), Wegerif (2000) and Bakhtin (1981) to the development of my understanding of the importance of dialogical teaching.

The seminars all took place in the A-level Centre at St Stithians College, Randburg, for four consecutive weeks, Monday and Thursdays, starting on Monday the 8th September, 2003. The nine students of Literature in English participating in the seminar were registered for their A-levels at the time. The seminar sessions were taped and transcribed (a selection of transcriptions, edited for ease of reading, is available in the Appendix - as are the seminar topics and poems studied.) The nine students were told of my research and consented without reservation to be part of the study since it called for nothing extra from them and, if anything, provided them with more of an opportunity to understand the demands of the syllabus and what was expected of them in seminar discussions.

Using the one text mentioned as the basis for this research, I decided to tape record all nine seminars. The first seminar was video recorded too, but I found this to be too intrusive, disrupting and artificial and so it was the only video recorded seminar.

Other than the tape recording of the seminar discussions, there was little or no further disruption of the normal routine. Students were presented with general discussion topics (appended) before the seminars and were told to prepare for the seminars by reading the poems to be discussed, paying particular attention to the seminar topics given.

I transcribed the seminars myself and lightly edited them for ease of reading. I left out repetitive seminars or sections of seminars – for no other reason than to keep the length of the report more manageable. I have included those transcripts I believe best show the development of the mediation I am exploring and I edited out inaudible contributions or noisy group discussions. Since I had already substantially assembled the theoretical framework in which I was operating, selecting the parts of the seminars I found particularly apposite and substantiating became an interesting and enlightening operation.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

It is difficult to the keep the theoretical concepts to be discussed neatly compartmentalised. It is often the case that more than one theoretical concept calls to be teased out in the selected except of the transcript. While I have attempted to analyse the transcripts in the order in which the theoretical argument is presented, this is often not practicable since in any transcript it may be the case that several theoretical points present themselves. I have not analysed every transcript, only those I believed are particularly apposite in substantiating the theoretical chapters of the report. I have done this in an attempt to keep this report to a manageable size. I have, however, attempted to show the importance of each of the theoretical concepts mentioned.

In the extract below, from early on in the first seminar, of the several interesting issues to be discussed, the key concepts worth focussing on are ideas of literature as a unique mediator and the idea of a scaffolded ZPD. In addition to these theoretical points, the unique nature of literature is evident in the notion of narrative and the constructing of a narrative voice as well as in role-taking. Also evident are the implicit schemata already assembled and the open-ended nature of the Socratic dialogue the students engage in, within the already discussed interpretive – or in this case - constructivist community.

Julia: It seems odd that birth and death are grouped together – I mean they are very different things. Why does Jennings…what does Jennings mean by calling this "Song for a Birth OR a Death". I could have understood "AND" …but why "OR"? I'm confused...

(Seminar 1 and 2: lines 178-181)

Here Julia is engaging in an open ended dialogue, clearly expecting someone to answer her questions and remove her confusion. Julia begins a Socratic open-ended

dialogic chain with the expectation of at least one reply to her initial speculative questions. The nature of her query is not to receive information about the text. Julia is preparing herself and the rest of the group to undertake a dialogue that will allow her and the group to undertake a creative construction of understanding. Her opening comments immediately move beyond the schemata of generalised platitudes about life and death being part of every mortal's fundamental experience. Julia is attempting to grapple with meaning-making, not just of Jennings's poem but about the grouping that Jennings is making by including birth and death in an already understood category; schemata articulated but not yet understood or internalised. Here, and throughout these excepts, literature is playing a role as a key mediational tool. In these lines, Julia seems to be showing some ability to move from the particular of this lyric poem to a decontextualised situation. This would seem to be a particular mediational strength of literature. Julia's comments are not confined to the poem, she is seeking to understand in what meaningful circumstances "birth" and "death" could evoke an undifferentiated response.

MF: *I think that is a brilliant question. Perhaps it would make more sense…more sense if we looked at the idea of song first. What …why does Jennings talk about a song. Obviously she means the poem…but what other things do we associate with songs…what could a song do that a speech, for example, could not do? Arin what do you make of that? Also, what do you think about the question Julia asked…why birth or a death?*

Matthew: *I would say this poem is more for a birth and a death… until the beginning of the second stanza, it is all about for a death…the "pouncing owl" and all that…and then "the men in bed"…but the end of the stanzas is more about the birth part…but I don't know why she pairs them…*

(Seminar 1 and 2: lines 182-191)

MF makes an attempt to keep the dialogue on the level Julia has initiated. The ZPD in which Julia seems to be operating is encouraging, and her ability to decontextualise

the material at this early stage of the dialogue is one that is worth pursuing. MF, in an effort to keep the dialogue on a level of decontextualised concepts, as opposed to the particulars of the poem, asks about the genre of the poem. The fact that this is a lyric poem and deals with particular lyric concerns is a possible way of holding open the ZPD of Julia's opening remarks and of using the genre question to scaffold understanding in the light of Fish's (1980) "interpretative community". Unfortunately, this level is not one that Matthew is able to match. He retreats from the decontextualised seeking for mediated meaning-making to attempting to make sense of these words as used in this poem by Jennings. Matthew, even if he does not build on Julia's dialogue, allows a scaffolded approach for the next member of the dialogue in making some sense of the structure of the poem. Matthew's re-posing of the question, even if it has not provided a particularly helpful response on the level of Julia's opening remarks, has added to a scaffolded group understanding. Julia's question is clearly the key one to grapple with in the poem. Matthew's acknowledgement of this, even though he does not shed more light on that particular question, allows the group to understand the importance of this line of questioning. It is by no means certain that individual members of the group would have pursued this line of questioning themselves.

MF: Well, what do you lot think…is this just a typographical error?

Rod: In three poems, the start of each one is talking about a death and then the last bit is talking about life…the start of the first part it has to do with "the savage world" and then at the start of the second half has something to do with "blood must flow and teeth must grip…and the third one talking about the fox…it seems very much if this is talking about how one needs to go through from death to life…in each stanza…in each of these three stanzas.

(Seminar 1 and 2: lines 193-199)

MF makes another effort to elicit a response to what has emerged as a central concern of the poem; the connection in Jennings's lyric between birth and death. Rod finds it difficult to build on what has already been said. His comment makes reference to the formal literary qualities of the structure of the poem. In this he is clearly occupying a ZPD similar to Matthew's. His dialogue does, however, begin to expand on the idea of metonymic language, reading the flowing "blood" and the "fox" as more than literal. In this Rod is refreshing the already presented schemata and making some effort at decontextualising this poem. Once again, the dialogue is Socratic since his questions are open ended. (Magistral would have presented or demanded a voice of authority and Menippean would have sought to overthrow whatever was said before.)

Matthew: But then the beginning one ends the poem doesn't it? The first one ends…

Rob: Yes, but the second one also ends off nicely…and then the third one is quite a violent ending…

Marybeth: And then in the third stanza also has something to do with love and sex and an element of how this connects to death as well…that love is related to death in some way…perhaps we are talking about religious love and death to oneself or something…I never thought of this before…but this seems to make sense now that I hear Rob and Matthew talking about the shape of the poem…and life and death…how else could it draw human creatures lip to lips…but wait…this doesn't seem to be religious…it seems sexual. I think it is. What do you think? That is the very question you are probing…

(Seminar 1 and 2: lines 199-209)

Mediated by literature, the interesting dialogue emerging here builds incrementally, each on the scaffolded insights of the previous speaker. This shows a group operating well within a common ZPD and 'entangling' with a text that is affording not just a refreshing of schemata informed by metonymy, but a re-presenting of schemata: an understanding of how the paradoxical concepts of life and death could – mediated by

this literary text but with the possibility of decontextualisation after internalisation – be reconciled.

Matthew, Rob and Marybeth all add to what the last voice of the ongoing dialogue has to offer. “But…”, “Yes…”, “And…” all show a slowly emerging and group-constructed, dialogically mediated understanding of the text. Marybeth, without being fully aware of the significance of her, “I never thought of this before”, acknowledges the importance of the co-construction of meaning-making in a Socratic, dialogical interaction within a common ZPD.

Sometimes, however, creatively constructive entanglement is beyond the ZPD of one of the students in the group - as it clearly is for Ingrid, below. The nature of the analysis in which she involves herself is reduced to commonplaces. Possibly the reason for this is the nature of the dialogue that stimulates her ideas. Ingrid's dialogue is on the level of stereotypical and prejudiced comments polarising the group into crude distinctions that use the literature in a regressive and undermining manner, as opposed to using it as a mediational tool constructing meaning. There is a clear contrast below between Ingrid's one-dimensional and reductive analysis – where profound questions on the nature of being a human are raised – and Marybeth's insight into how she sees the moonlight as an objective medium for both birth and death in Jennings’s poem *Song for a Birth and a Death*. Before this extract, smaller groups (pairs or threes) had been asked to make sense of the poem. Ingrid is asked to comment.

MF: *Ok…Ok…Ok, as you can see, this is quite a difficult poem to get to the bottom of…*

MF: OK…Ingrid, what did your group have to say about the poem? It's hard sir, these two were excluding us. (Lots of laughter)

MF: Just try Ingrid…

Ingrid: Ok, cool…well we thought it was about sex and death…sex being life and death being …well…death.

(Laughter)

(Seminar 1 and 2: lines 221-227)

Here, Ingrid is aware of the possible metaphorical implications of what literature is mediating. She is, on one level at least, giving some idea of her understanding of the need to reconcile life and death energies as opposing but complementary forces. Ingrid is also, however, making an attempt to be amusing in an effort to be spared the effort of entangling herself with the poem in a meaningful way. In a clumsy, inarticulate way, Ingrid shows she is aware of what it is she should be grappling with, but she has neither the rigour nor the tenacity to hunt down the idea, which in its paradoxical quality, is something which calls for a sophistication of thought for which Ingrid has no words. In frustration, Ingrid opts out, with "OK, I don't know…". Here there is no dialogue of any sort, nor is there Bakhtin's (1981) "expectation of utterance" in response". There is no open-ended questioning as was the case with Julia (above), although both students are floundering. Ingrid neither adds to nor even passes on the discussion. She simply reduces it and then closes it down entirely.

Ingrid: It was one of those going in circles type effort…like with the fox and the owl both …Ok, I don't know…

(Seminar 1 and 2, lines 228-229)

In contrast, Marybeth positions herself firmly within the ZPD of the former discussion with her "All right". In this, Marybeth is disregarding Ingrid's inanities and repositioning the discussion on the level Matthew, Julia and Rob were engaging on before.

Marybeth: *All right. The moon, which is the giver of light, is acting like a guide, um, it's illuminating what's going on, but it says that blood must flow and teeth must grip…but without the moon this would not be emphasized, because without the moon, this would just be going on and there is nothing to see. So the moon sheds the light on what it is doing…it illuminates the entire poem. But it doesn't understand that because of it the blood is flowing and the teeth are gripping and there is all this savagery…all this sort of carnage, death thing. And when it says the light which draws the tide and the ship, it is also sort of emphasizing that this is the power that makes things happen…this provides the…energy…the power that the light has…you know, it has the power to control the tides, the ships and all that sort of thing. But yet that same light drags the owl upon its prey…so the same light which is sort of like a celestial beam, is sort of acting as a higher power, it also drags the owl upon its prey, it kind of acts as something evil, you know…the light that's shining also provides the power for something else to happen…something evil to happen and the human creatures lip to lip, which is something beautiful and something nice, and something that people like to do… that sort of thing. That people like kissing in the moonlight and all that. So the same light which is providing the light for the animals to kill each other, also is the same light which provides lovers with the light that gives atmosphere to lovers and so on. We also saw that the same light which drags the owl upon its prey is bringing death but the human creatures lip-to-lip is bringing birth. It is kind of like the birth of love…and…*

(Seminar 1 and 2: lines 288-309)

Marybeth chooses one of the central schemata of the poem, in this case the moonlight. Here she presents this light as literal and figurative, exploiting the creative tension between the meaning and metaphor within the ZPD of the group as established earlier. This is an interesting and crucial point in the study of the nature of dialogue in this pedagogical context. On one hand, dialogic involvement and construction of meaning can, provided it is in the individual's ZPD, lead to expanded, refreshed schemata and a co-creative meaning beyond what any individual member of the group, working alone, could arrive at. On the other hand, if the dialogue happens outside the

individual's ZPD, (as seems to be the case with Ingrid) it can lead to reductive and simplistic understanding and more importantly, it can have a destructive effect on the ability of the group (interpretative community) to achieve its potential.

In several of the extract analyses below, it is clear that on a fairly superficial level at least, the students in this study are able to adopt the mode of role-taking of the anguished speaker in the love poem. This seems to be the case with almost any informed reader of literary discourse. For such informed readers, however, there is also a reinforcing, presenting or refreshing of schemata (previous to the seminars on *The Selected Poetry of Elizabeth Jennings* (1979), the text on which this research is based, these students had just spent several weeks discussing the feminist concerns in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. The Magistral necessity for these students – they presumably believed - was to reinforce the mediated feminist schemata already assembled.) MF attempts to focus the discussion on the genre of the poem, a genre the students had already discussed and researched.

MF:… I want you to look at who is the "I" of the poem, now this is a lyric poem and this makes the "I" of the poem really quite important. It may or it may not be Elizabeth Jennings, but whatever, you have to understand who is the voice in the poem.

Matthew: I am always inclined to take her literally…if she says "I" then she means "I", and not someone else.

(Seminars 1 and 2: lines 416-421)

Matthew simply misses the point of the individualised speaker in lyric poetry. In this dialogue, he would not, alone, progress beyond the biographical details he knows about the poet. Rob, however, allows the "I" to be decontextualised to the extent that "I" becomes a representative of all women.

Rob: But that is what I said earlier…but "I" here was all women.

Matthew: The "I" is all women from the past…sexual objects from the past.
(Seminars 1 and 2: lines 423-424)

Once again, the dialogue flounders since the schemata already assembled insist on reinforcing an exclusively feminist reading of the poem. While clearly there is empathetic role-taking, it is of a specifically feminist nature. This dialogue has not yet become of a Socratic kind since the internalised Magistral voice echoes in the group's collective head.

MF: Nic, who do you see as the "I" of the poem.

Nic: Pretty much Elizabeth Jennings, hey? She is woman in that situation.

MF: Ok, if you are going to say Elizabeth Jennings and this would be perfectly logical, and then you still need to find out what kind of persona is the "I". To simply say it is Jennings is great, but it doesn't take us forward because none of us knows anything about Elizabeth Jennings. But in this poem, we learn a whole lot about the speaker of the poem. So who is Elizabeth Jennings…who is the Elizabeth Jennings that comes through here?

Marybeth: I would say it was Elizabeth Jennings, but not only Elizabeth Jennings. I mean if you read a poem like this…last night she is sitting contemplating and then she sat and wrote it down, I mean if you write a poem…and you are in love at that moment, then you write a very beautiful, lovely poem, but somebody knows who you are, somebody could say that this was a different part of you. So, I think this poem is her, but it is a different aspect of her. I mean how would you write this down…that the "I" is part of a split personality? How would you put that?
(Seminars 1 and 2: lines 424-439)

Marybeth's dialogue, however much she would like to arrive at meaning that is decontextualised, is bound too firmly to the role-taking that has already been discussed. Like an albatross flapping and scrabbling over the surface of the sea in an attempt to take off, she cannot get her idea airborne, so limited is it by the internalised schemata of the previous text's dialogue.

MF: That is a very good question…and obviously, if you had to say, "part of Elizabeth Jennings" this is not going to be very helpful anyway. The question

that is being asked here is what do we know from the poem, about the speaker? Rob: maybe the "I" could be her, but is also a representative?

Arin: No, it could never be like that. It's silly. "I" means one person and not a group. She is the one.

Arin's response to this attempted dialogic entanglement leaves no room for further dialogue. There is no open ended exploring and no room left for anyone else in the group to contribute.

Matthew: I think that Elizabeth Jennings is just a woman, either she is or she is trying to be one…she is in a relationship but one that is not full of love and she has just come back from a night in which the man has just taken pleasure from her and she has not got any back…and she is reflecting on that.

Matthew's engagement ignores Arin's cul de sac statement and makes an effort to use the poem as a tool to mediate a decontextualised meaning. His internalised dialogue is, however, too compelling for him to simply abandon it and he ends up by occupying an uncomfortable position desperately attempting to straddle two schematas.

MF: It's really quite difficult to talk to you lot. You clearly have this whole feminist thing going and it makes it difficult to make any sense of other possibilities. It may well be there are some feminist things happening in the poem…but this is not all that's happening…and if this is all you are looking for, its all you will see and you will be closed to all sorts of other things. By the time we get to end of the study, I really hope you will be able to see all sorts of other themes that you will allow to come out.

(Seminars 1 and 2: lines 449-455)

MF, somewhat exasperatedly, attempts to force the idea that the internalised feminist schemata are not necessarily the only territory in which this dialogue can occur.

Marybeth: The speaker still refers to men and human things…this is all to do with human emotions. The humans kiss and touch. But the fox, if it is a woman and the dog represents a man…um…then the woman fears the human lust. I think it has more to do with emotions. Not that the woman is trapped…but that the man just jumps her and she just takes it all the way. I think the feminist thing comes in this way…but this is not only talking about feminist issues.

(Seminars 1 and 2: lines 456-461)

Marybeth allows for a breach of the prevalent schemata. Her dialogue engages on a metaphorical level with the text in an effort to re-assemble a more inclusive, cogent and coherent schemata that allows this lyric to mediate in a unique literary way. She also shows a scaffolded dialogue that engages with the text beyond the confines of the poem alone and is a refreshed view of the schemata current with the rest of the group.

Even in the later seminars there is a difficulty several members of the group experience in overcoming a well-internalised sexist schemata. The difference between this dialogue, mediated as it is by Jennings's poetry, and the earlier one is the leap each participant in this dialogue has made to involve themselves in narrative role-taking which here is decontextualised meaning-making. All members of the dialogue below are working within a common ZPD and their insights while divergent, show a Socratic open-endedness and a scaffolded entanglement beyond the confines of the text.

It is, however, when the text is the key mediational tool in the dialoguing interpretative community, all functioning within a common ZPD, that focused, decontextualised meaning-making can occur. This meaning is internalised since it has become part of individually narrated roles, refreshing and even re-presenting schemata.

In this extract below the students are able to (within the context of the poem) make, abstracted comments about the nature of love and the human condition, aware of the

individual particularities, as well as being able to talk in general abstractions: "part of what love is?… living is…never mind just love. You cannot escape falling in love".

Julia: She refused to get married didn't she? She got engaged, but she refused to get married.

Marybeth: Oh Yeah.

Matthew: I think she is talking about running away.

Marybeth: Yeah…a duck from the world…stop the world…I want to get off thing…

Matthew: She can't avoid it.

Marybeth: Beauty and compassion…that is part of what love is…

Matthew: Part of what love is…? Living is…never mind just love. You cannot escape falling in love.

(Seminars 7 and 8: lines 96-104)

This experience is an example of creation and growth, not simply interpretation according to existent conventional constructions erected by consensus. Note in this extract how the group understanding is incrementally increased with each interjection, substantiation and addition. Here understanding is refined and honed by the group's dialogical entanglement with the text, not simply interpreted, but actively, imaginatively and co-operatively created by the engagement.

Worth noting in the extract below, taken from the final seminar, is the incremental, Socratic nature of the various participants' involvement in the dialogue and the connections the group makes between the one text and another, using the schemata created or refreshed during the course of the seminars. Individual group members working within the general ZPD, one contribution scaffolding the next, create a narrative role based entirely on the text as mediator.

MF: This is a good point to go back to the poem with which we started this entire discussion. That's the poem "One Flesh" "Do they know they're old, / These two who are my father and my mother/ Whose fire from which I came, has now grown cold?" And so everything has ended in apathy and passivity and um…

Marybeth: That is not necessarily true…

Julia: Not in this poem…

Matthew: But to Jennings it is…

Julia: But in this poem she is… she is…

Matthew: We are trying to discuss a reason why she would run away from everything.

Julia: This poem is not about coldness…because these things like generosity…don't have coldness…they are not cold…

Matthew: No, that's not it. This poem is about running away.

Julia: No, what I'm saying that the time here is not the time of old age…this is not a poem about old people…

MF: Yes, that's true. But we are looking at fear…

Marybeth: We are trying to see where the fear comes from.

MF: The fear that animates here is the fear of passivity, the fear of apathy, the fear of…

Carol: No, nonsense. The poem is talking about "generosity, integrity/Compassion…"

MF: Yes, but read that in the context of the poem: "now generosity, integrity, /Compassion too, are what makes me exist, /Yet still I cannot come to terms or try,/Or even know, the knot I must untwist."

Carol: Yes, I know…they make me exist, they are current…

Marybeth: But what she is ultimately talking about is fear…here and in the later poem.

Carol: But why is this a problem…hasn't this just got to do with the earlier poems being written earlier and the later poems just being written later?

MF: No, these poems in this volume have been selected by her and put in a particular order to deal with certain themes…

Carol: Oh…selected by her…then surely we need to ask why she chose to put this poem after the poems where she is in the asylum. Because those poems are so dissipated from emotion and these poems…however painful they may be…are full of life…are back into life…she is back into real full life…

Matthew: But in this case running away from it…ha ha.

MF: But she always does, doesn't she. There is always fear that she…

Marybeth: It's what she says in the last lines of the stanza "Lest it should make me lose control and fall".

Matthew: So maybe that's why. When she went to hospital…maybe she did lose control and maybe she is afraid of this happening again…

(Seminars 7 and 8: lines 134-172)

Encouraging is that even members of the group who do disagree with what has been said before have their contributions to the dialogue incorporated into general meaning-making of the poem.

I believe that the extracts from these dialogues show literature acting as an effective and uniquely mediating tool. I also believe that what made these dialogues pedagogically viable was that they, for the most part, occurred within a common ZPD and that one dialogic contribution scaffolded the next. (In the case of Ingrid in one of the discussed extracts above, however, this was obviously not the case.)

The dialogue was focussed by the fact that the unique tools for engaging with literature were available: particularly schemes, tropes and genre. The group, an interpretative community – specifically within this pedagogical context - by creating narrative roles, were able to undertake decontextualised meaning-making that in some

of the cases mentioned, presented or refreshed schemata that allowed for internalisation as a result of ongoing, sometimes hidden, self-dialogue.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

There is little reason to doubt that the selected poetry of Elizabeth Jennings was an effective mediational tool for this research on dialogic teaching.

All members of the group learned a great deal about lyric poetry, about the Confessional Movement in late Twentieth Century poetry and some of the skills and tools needed to critically analyse a lyric poem. These tools may or may not have been specifically articulated by teachers or students, but it is clear from the seminar transcriptions that by the end of seminars based on these lyric poems by Jennings, students had amassed a great deal of knowledge about how one engages in a pedagogical Socratic dialogue using literature as a mediational tool literature with many of the formal literary schemes and tropes that are presumed or used in literary analysis. For example, students showed an understanding of the schemata, without necessarily being told that the kind of dialogue one involves oneself in with one text is not necessarily appropriate dialogue with another text.

I believe there is evidence this literary text was an efficacious mediational tool in the dialogically conducive environment of directed small-group seminars, held within a common group ZPD.

It became clear to me that the ZPD is a key concept in developing Socratic dialogicality and that members of the group who were not part of the collective ZPD had an influence that was not only worthless for them, but was destructive for the learning of the entire group.

Literature as a unique mediating tool was, as far as I am concerned, incontrovertibly evident. It (literature) allowed for what Day (1991) called role taking, not simply empathy, but an abstracted 'entanglement' that is expanded by the metanymic layers of meaning that the students' dialogue leads them to uncover.

Cook's schemata theory (1994) was clearly evident in this group, some of whom initially insisted on using Jennings's poetry as nothing more than a vehicle for feminism, a trend which became apparent as the seminars progressed. Existing schematas were broken down and new ones reassembled more consistent with Jennings's emerging themes.

It was perhaps unfortunate that Jennings's selected poems were all lyrics since it made it impossible to assess, in this series of seminars, if the students were able to read and respond to the other generic clues of individual texts. Clearly though, in the context of the other poets studied in the entire syllabus, students were able to see the different forms mediating different concerns.

Certainly, as some of the excerpts of the seminar transcripts show, students did eventually show themselves to be capable of decontextualised and abstracted comments, often presented to the group as universal truths and which were incrementally built by the group who engaged in (sometimes Socratic) dialogue and created meaning (as opposed to Fish's (1980) less strong "interpretation"). It is this mediated personal narrative role-taking dialogue, in a pedagogical context, that Vygotsky (1962), Hunt and Vipond (1984, 1992, 1996), and Bakhtin (1981) shed light

on and which can lead to, I believe, a scaffolded, internalised understanding: of the text, of the students themselves and of the world around them.

7.2 Recommendations

For literature to become the unique and mediating tool it has the potential to be, I believe it is helpful for teachers to use directed small-group teaching in which Socratic dialogic entanglement with others and with the text is encouraged. The importance of this being within each member of the group's ZPD became apparent to me during the course of this study. The destructiveness of even one member of the group being significantly outside the group ZPD was far more evident than I thought would be the case. Probably the single most important recommendation for the teaching of literature at this level and in this way is to achieve group ZPD homogeneity.

One of the caveats of the research undertaking in writing this report, is that my approach to the teaching of literature, while I believe efficacious with this text and with this group in this situation, may not necessarily be appropriate for other teachers – even in similar conditions.

Even so, I believe that for literature to be a highly efficacious and unique mediational tool, the use of open ended texts, as well as questions and exercises which allow for the decontextualization of the textual dialogue, should be encouraged. This would enable students to apply literary insights to their personal experiences in order to empower them to articulate reinforced, re-presented or refreshed schemata and subsequently internalise these scaffolded insights, mediated by the text.

It seemed clear that the group would not necessarily respond to the promptings of the teacher's voice unless it was, as a collective, ready to do so. The teacher's voice, besides needing to give guidance on technical information such as schemes, tropes and genre, was vital to involve the group in the appropriate kind of dialogue (Socratic – as defined here), since it became apparent that even students within the common ZPD, could simplify or reduce the transformational potential of the dialogue, if left completely without guidance.

7.3 Limitations and Implications For Further Research

It became clear to me as I analysed the research transcripts, that the methodology of this report was alarmingly subjective and that it was quite possible to draw different conclusions from the data, or at the very least to make refinements to the conclusions I arrived at. As many of the theorists I consulted noted in one way or another, literature, by its nature is slippery to define and it is obviously impossible to arrive at conclusions that are uncontentious and empirically provable.

Furthermore, to remain manageable, this report has not explored the role that literature plays in moral mediation. This dual mediation, cognitive and moral, became clearly apparent as I analysed the transcripts. Literature's role as moral mediator would be an extremely interesting area to explore in more detail. Clearly though, this aspect of literature's mediation would involve a separate theoretical framework and quite possibly a different research technique.

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APPENDIX 1

Transcriptions of Selected Seminars

Elizabeth Jennings: Transcriptions From Seminars 1 and 2 (Double Period)

(I have lightly edited these transcriptions for ease of reading)

Monday 8th September 2003

MF: What makes literature different from other kinds of things- like the back of a rice crispy box, or instructions for making something or a dictionary entry or in fact a bus timetable? My question is what makes some teaching of literature more effective than other types, how can we make the teaching of literature the most effective it can be… and how can one make this information available to other teachers of literature so that their teaching of literature can be informed by what I believe to be important and helpful guidelines to make this teaching of literature the most effective it can be? Some of the questions I would like to discuss are to do with small group discussion – for example is this better than large group formal teaching? What is the best way to present texts, what is the difference in quality of response between directed discussion of the sort that we are likely to have here…and the kind of discussion you would have more formally in a traditional classroom…or less formally in an informal group? What kinds of things do you need to know about before…being able to articulate a response or make help helpful comments that makes the learning the most appropriate it can be in the circumstances? (And here I simply have to presume there is one way of responding that is more appropriate than some other way.) One of things that I am going to use to judge how appropriate your response is, is what I am going to call the quality of transformation that I can see emerging from your response to the text I have chosen to study for this research – *The Selected Poetry of Elizabeth Jennings*. An English, Roman Catholic…a depressive… with sometimes-suicidal tendencies and who spent about 20 years of her life in and out of asylums – as you will see from her poetry. Jennings concerns herself with the connections between the mystical…by which she means the spiritual and sacramental too. Don't get freaked out by all these terms, they will come to make sense to you later. In essence Jennings is doing what so many 20th century poets are doing – looking at what poetry is and how it works. What makes inspiration and what keeps it? How does poetry work…why does poetry work? How is poetry different from the other genres of things we read? Is it different? Why should we care? 29

When we read a text… poetry, a play or a poem, what kinds of things happen in…in…your reading of this. To make this thing… or whatever it is that you are reading… what could be responsible for making this a life changing experience? I mean…sometimes when you read something, the whole way you see the world changes after that…I'm sure that you all have example of that…perhaps you could tell the group some of that…them? 34

(Long silence)

Robert: Yeah, like when I read Stephen king…(silence)

MF: OK…the great literary theorist Stephen King…For example I will tell you something about one work…text…that changed the way I saw the world. When I was in Standard 7 – I was fourteen – and I read …for the first time "Lord of the Flies"…the William Golding novel "Lord of the Flies" – and for the first time in my life, I confronted the idea that there is evil in everyone. And that we are all made up of good and bad and that it is perfectly possible for that evil to be released…. uncovered and from then on the way that I saw the world has changed…was changed. I am sure that you have had similar experiences… 43

(long silence)

MF: What has been the most astounding text you have ever read…?

Sophie: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

MF: Why?...(silence) Why?

Sophie: I don't know…I just have used it… the language, everything just fascinated me it changed…it got me more interested in English as a language…doing it as a subject…

MF: Yes…(silence) Julia, what was the novel or poem that…that did this sort of thing for you?

Julia: (inaudible mumbling)

MF: What text has been the most astounding for you? 53

Julia: Um…I really can't say…

MF: Julia, shame on you… John what about you…

John: It was one of the things…something I read at school, but I can't remember so well, but it was good I think.

MF: Mmm, Marybeth, what about you?

Marybeth: Umm… *Brave New World* by…Who is it…um…um…

MF: Huxley isn't it?

Marybeth: Yes it was something that I was really shocked…I was really shocked by it… I mean, wow, I didn't know that something could be this interesting… and yeah… 63

MF: and…um…Roy, what about you?

Roy: Um…Um…mine was by a South African called Peter…Peter Abrams…

MF: Yes…

Roy: He wrote a book called "Mine Boy" and it was kind of talking about how people are suffering and I never know anything about it…so I never knew…I had no record of it in my extra work or anything like that…

MF: Yes, yes…and Moe, what about you…

Moe: Um (long silence)

MF: Its OK, your words are being recorded for ever… 72

Moe: (laughs) I think for me its…ahh… *A View from the Bridge* which is play I did last year in my O levels…I think its by Tennessee Williams and… um…its got a lot to do with history, which I like and its about…you know…Italians who have moved to America and how they struggled to make their lives…you know…

Nick: Tennessee Williams?...

Moe: I think so…its…well it's a *View from the Bridge* and its …you know…I found it very interesting…

MF: And life changing?

Moe: Something like that… 82

MF: And Robert?

(All laugh)

Robert: I'd say…(more laughter) I'd say…that the book which affected my life the most was by Tom Clancy about psychological warfare…about how they would…like use people…their insecurities to do…like… evil things…and stuff like that. It is similar to *Schindler's List.*

MF: Great. Ingrid?

Ingrid: Um…Sir, I do have one, but I'd rather not talk about it… if you don't mind…

MF: don't mind…Nic?

Nic: Um…I wouldn't say there is like much books that have affected me …horribly…hugely… 92

MF: OK. Not necessarily affected your life…but changed the way you understand something…about the world…It doesn't necessarily have to be a mind altering experience…just the way you have changed in some area perhaps…

Nic: I don't know…I mean…I read fantasy…

MF: That's OK, fantasy can change too…

Nic: I mean…*Lord of the Rings* is cool…A little Hobbit that cruises around…I mean…

MF: Lots of things happen in Lord of the Rings that could…

Nic: I mean…he could…he is so small, but he could save the world…and that's cool, I mean like…ja… 102

MF: Yep…Husseini, what about you?

Husseini: I would have to say the "Animal Farm". It didn't exactly change the way…OK it changed the way I thought…the way I looked at…say a politician…it made me quite cynical about most people…

(silence)

MF: Ok, thanks…um, ok, very briefly…what I'm…what I'm trying to look at… what I'm trying to do…the idea that I'm looking at is that, that when we read, we…well its not exactly my idea… but it is that when we read…this idea is Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's psychologists and theorists… who had the idea, is that when we read, we form dialogues…with…well in fact there are a whole range of dialogues…we form dialogues when we start reading…The dialogue is not only our dialogue… it comes from …especially if we are doing it in a context like this…it forms a dialogue with the person who is sitting where I am…supposedly a voice of authority…in a normal traditional school environment…I would be the voice of authority…someone who would say ok, this is what it means, or no you can't say that or yes, that sounds fine…yes…that's good. 117

(Drawing on the board)

So if you have got the text and you have got the reader…and shall we call it…well let's call it the teacher…there is a kind of three way dialogue that's happening….at least…and that dialogue…that dialogue…depending on how the text is being approached, and how each of these is approaching the other…that dialogue changes. And for Bakhtin, there were three main types of dialogue. The first one (Writes on board) is a magisterial dialogue…and that is where the teacher…or the voice of authority is dominant…where he or she is saying, this is what the text means, this is how it goes, this is how you should approach it…ok so there is always this voice of authority…although it may not necessarily come from the teacher…it may come from the…from the …text… which may give clues which say "this is how you read me…and this is how you need to respond". And if you think…what happens with Jane Austen…the omniscient narrator…to some extent at least…and certainly at times becomes the voice of authority, doesn't she…doesn't it? And the way we respond to that, depends…depends on dialogue that we…that we have created… 132

The second one is…um…is a Socratic dialogue. (Writes on the board) Now, a Socratic dialogue is a much more open ended dialogue…it is a dialogue in which the relationship between these is the relationship that is much more open ended. And it may be that at one point the teacher is dominant, it may be that at another the text is dominant, or that the text is dominant…it depends really…on what the context is and how the text is being approached…and …and…that kind of environment…and the third kind of dialogue…

(Writes on board)

The third kind is…that Bakhtin talks about…is…is…the Menipeain dialogue in which, this voice of authority, wherever it comes from…is always going to be turned on its head, so, you know…the thought of having someone stand up here saying "Ok, I want you to look at this…or I want you to look at that…I want you to think about what this means, and how this works, the dialogue that you would be establishing as the reader…and what you would be using the text to do…is to try and turn what I am saying on my…on its head.

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Ok, so what we are really looking at, not necessarily in that order, is… this is not a rank ordering of how this dialogue works, is …what I'm trying to look at is…I'm trying to look at the dialogue that we are establishing in a group like this, as different from the kind of dialogue that is established at school, and what I am trying to argue is that a magistral dialogue…with its voice of authority that is constantly saying, "this is how the text needs to be interpreted…this is what you need to do with it…this is the meaning it has…is not going to be a transformational experience…that the only time that it can be a transformational experience…or rather that the most effective transformational experience is…will come if there is Socratic dialogue…where you…where you and this so-called voice of authority and the text…where you are constantly involving…being involved in and interrogating each other and that is the only way that you can use this as a transformational experience. And I am going to look at the poems of Elizabeth Jennings to do this…and the poem I am going to look at is "A Song for a Birth of or a Death". 161

(Rustling while pages are turned)

Ok, *Song for a Birth or a Death* is on page 60 of your pack and it just so happens to be the first of the poems that we are going to be looking at. Come, you are wasting time here…You can't do this, you have to have your poems with you…you are holding us all up…

Who would like to read the poem "Song for a Birth of a Death".

Robert: Matthew

MF: Matthew, that's a good idea. Would you?

Matthew: (Reads the poem). See insert - "Song for a Birth or a Death".

MF: Thanks. Now this is the first poem of Elizabeth Jennings that we have read…as a group and it is obviously an important poem, because it is obviously chosen to give us an idea of the themes of the poems we are going to encounter…and this is important, not only for exams, but also because it gives us a sense of what it is we are going to encounter in the rest of the poems we are going to read. Some of you, last year…you did the "One Flesh" poem. What are the things that strike you about this poem…before you start looking at the seminar questions…what are the things that you see.

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Julia: It seems odd that birth and death are grouped together – I mean they are very different things. Why does Jennings…what does Jennings mean by calling this "Song for a Birth OR a Death". I could have understood "AND" …but why "OR"? I'm confused...

MF: I think that is a brilliant question. Perhaps it would make more sense…more sense if we looked at the idea of song first. What …why does Jennings talk about a song. Obviously she means the poem…but what other things do we associate with songs…what could a song do that a speech, for example, could not do? Arin what do you make of that? Also, what do you think about the question Julia asked…why birth or a death?

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Matthew: I would say this poem is more for a birth and a death… until the beginning of the second stanza, it is all about for a death…the "pouncing owl" and all that…and then "the men in bed"…but the end of the stanzas is more about the birth part…but I don't know why she pairs them…

MF: Well, what do you lot think…is this just a typographical error?

Rod: In three poems, the start of each one is talking about a death and then the last bit is talking about life…the start of the first part it has to do with "the savage world" and then at the start of the second half has something to do with "blood must flow and teeth must grip…and the third one talking about the fox…it seems very much if this is talking about how one needs to go through from death to life…in each stanza…in each of these three stanzas.

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Matthew: But then the beginning one ends the poem doesn't it? The first one ends…

Rob: Yes, but the second one also ends off nicely…and then the third one is quite a violent ending…

Marybeth: And then in the third stanza also has something to do with love and sex and an element of how this connects to death as well…that love is related to death in some way…perhaps we are talking about religious love and death to oneself or something…I never thought of this before…but this seems to make sense now that I hear Rob and Matthew talking about the shape of the poem…and life and death…how else could it draw human creatures lip to lips…but wait…this doesn't seem to be religious…it seems sexual. I think it

is. What do you think? That is the very question you are probing…

MF: Would it be easier, before we start looking at the actual questions…would it be easier if we went through and did a summary of what it is she is actually saying…before we start looking at what she is actually meaning…would that be helpful? Because then…do you know what is going to happen…is that you are going to do it.

Why don't we just divide into little grouplets…what you are going to do is divide into groups and discuss…to discuss the questions…and then…well there are twelve of you and there are six questions and that means that you can just divide into pairs…but maybe we could divide into a slightly bigger group…that means that each group could look at one stanza and there are four…so that will be three in a group.

(Some time sorting out groups - noise and general confusion as the groups are sorted out. Group discussion – not taped)

MF: Ok…Ok…Ok, as you can see, this is quite a difficult poem to get to the bottom of…

MF: OK…Ingrid, what did your group have to say about the poem? It's hard sir, these two were excluding us. (Lots of laughter)

MF: Just try Ingrid…

Ingrid: Ok, cool…well we thought it was about sex and death…sex being life and death being …well…death.

(Laughter)

Ingrid: It was one of those going in circles type effort…like with the fox and the owl both …Ok, I don't know.

MF: Ok, tell me what you thought about the blood pumping up the stair…

Ingrid: Well, Nic had a rather interesting comment to make about that…

Nic: Well, I thought it had something to do with the blood pumping to the head…up he stairs, so you are getting this blood in your head…like the whole sex thing…like…

(General laughter)

MF: Ja, well I don't know Nic…how does this fit in with the context of the rest of the stuff? It doesn't seem to fit…

Nic: Well theoretically it does…

MF: Well what about the "savage world"?

Rob: Well, sex could be savage I suppose…

Nic: Well, the fox's bark and the owl's pounce makes it …kind of not on the same topic and nobody liked my little theory…but I still think that this has something to do with it…

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Matthew: No, I think the fox's bark is all about orgasm…I think it can work…

Nic: Yeah…I mean a bark is a kind of explosion…

Matthew: Yes, and the idea of a fox in the first place…this may be something to do with what women…what women are called. I think she is foxy…women are foxes…

Rob: And here the fox is barking…which means that she …like…wants some attention…she is calling for attention.

Nic: Now that is the kind of fox I would like to meet.

Sophy: Oh come on…why is it that women are foxes…like are all men gorillas?

Marybeth: Actually that seems quite true…perhaps they are…certainly these are…or anyway…a woman is a fox to a man is a dog…straight up…is it going to be like that?

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Nic: But it is common knowledge that women are…

Marybeth: It is not common knowledge that a woman is a fox…

Matthew: But the fact that you are able to understand the stereotype means that you…kind of know about it. It means something…

MF: Ok, I think that is not a particularly helpful avenue…but thanks anyway. Rob where did you go…Husseini, what about you…

Matthew: Well, we got to the point that in those days women weren't really recognized as people – about 15 years ago, so I feel, except for the owl and the fox the whole poem talks about a masculine type of thing, so I reckon that it also refers to men, so she could be talking about how only men were considered to be real people, and so something about that…because it excludes women.

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MF: Ja, all right, let's …that kind of just makes it more complicated…but I see your point. Let's hear from Husseini…

Huseini: Ok, …I don't know…I don't think there is anything of that in the poem… not really.

MF: Ok. Carry on.

Husseini: (a fairly long and detailed discussion about blood and savagery but largely inaudible).

Rob: Well, looking at the past and this may be the woman looking back and thinking about how women were treated and the blood of her past. And how women were treated. And the blood pounding on the stairs is how women were treated and were not considered to be human. The fox and the owl can all be referring to women and how they can do nothing about the way they are treated…all were there means that everybody witnessed it and "men in bed with love and fear" means that men are afraid of what women could do…that they may be more powerful than they were thought to be…and men are in fear. 280

Matthew: That means that the MEN are in bed with love and fear. This means it is the men. I think that it is the women who are in bed with the men…they love him, but they are also afraid of him…

MF: Do you know what we are doing? We are moving from looking at what the poem says…to looking at what the poem means. So lets leave that. Its not bad…not necessarily bad…but let's see if we can understand what…so if we can paraphrase the content…Marybeth would you like to try?

Marybeth: Alright. The moon, which is the giver of light, is acting like a guide, um, its illuminating what's going on, but it says that blood must flow and teeth must grip…but without the moon this would not be emphasized, because without the moon, this would just be going on and nothing to see. So the moon sheds the light on what it is doing…it illuminates the entire poem. But it doesn't understand that because of it the blood is flowing and the teeth are gripping and there is all this savagery…all this sort of carnage, death thing. And when it says the light which draws the tide and the ship, it is also sort of emphasizing that this is the power that makes things happen…this provides the…energy…the power that the light has…you know, it has the power to control the tides, the ships and all that sort of thing. But yet that same light drags the owl upon its prey…so the same light which is sort of like a celestial beam, is sort of acting as a higher power, it also drags the owl upon its prey, it kind of acts as something evil, you know…the light that's shining also provides the power for something else to happen…something evil to happen and the human creatures lip to lip, which is something beautiful and something nice, and something that people like to do… that sort of thing. That people like kissing in the moonlight and all that. So the same light which is providing the light for the animals to kill each other, also is the same light which provides lovers with the light that gives atmosphere to lovers and so on. We also saw that the same light which drags the owl upon its prey

is bringing death but the human creatures lip-to-lip is bringing birth. It is kind of like the birth of love…and…

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Moe: That is perfectly summarized…

Roy: Yes, it just like that. The light that is for death…is also the light for birth. It brings the humans lip-to-lip and the owl on its prey.

MF: Good. Well that was helpful. Thank you. Group three…

Matthew: Well…I think that a lot of that is about the actual physical making of love…it kind of describes it pretty well…she repeats how last night she watched how pleasure comes…this could mean that last night she did actually have sex – or last night, she watched someone having sex…but she talks about…

MF: Where do you get that from?

Matthew: "Last night, I watched how pleasure must"… So, last night she had an experience, or last night simply means in the past… or just that he had a revelation from last night. While she was in mid…ja. The fox was, I didn't understand how pleasure must met disaster with its will… 322

Arin: Ok…I don't think that the first verse…first stanza has anything to do with death. But something like…ok…something like the past….all the way down. It has to do with the past having an influence on the future and in the mid century…having sex was a sin, or something like that, so its pleasures will to live from disaster…disaster was what happened in the past and is now reflected in the future…and that is like more than explaining this part. And that's why all matings mean a kill, and you can see why this has to do with love and blood and everything…in the middle of stanza four. We have, something like ok, ja, a young fox and a young child trapped…this is like, having a baby, or something like that. 342

Matthew: Foxes fear, the watchdogs…I thought the foxes are ladies, and this refers to the bit with all men in bed with love and fear…and the watchdog is the man, and this could refer to the fact that he is possessive and watching out for his woman. Um…to know that all matings mean a kill…I think refers to the post climax, the come down, after having sex…where…um…it's the death of passion which is kind of a prevalent theme of Elizabeth Jennings…is…is the death of passion that we saw in "One Flesh". Um…human creatures kissed in trust, until "feel the blood throbbed death" which is…is…the act of sex and the throbbing of the orgasm until it is done…and done to death.

MF: Thanks, that was very helpful too. Some really interesting ideas. Um…what about the last stanza…let's see what we can do. 353

Julia: The death of passion, I agree. The birds are thronging in the air, which kind of indicates, maybe, that something has died, the moon…like Marybeth was

saying is a romantic symbol, it gives light to action, what is happening, as well as the hunt, that has been described…um…I am really not sure about the last two lines the child is trapped, perhaps literally, trapped in the woman…this is when it is being conceived…um…and the cries of love and the cries of fear… are men in bed with love and fear. This is the "trappedness" of life I suppose.

MF: Good, thank you. Um…I think you all found it difficult…and it is difficult…the difference between a paraphrase and starting to say what you thought it means is always a very difficult thing to do. And it was always to be expected that you would start going off into what things mean…

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Matthew: You can't avoid it…

MF: I agree, you can't avoid it, especially in a poem like this…where you clearly have been trained to look for things happening…where you are constantly seeing one thing representing another thing, or that the literal words stand for something else. And in many ways this is very encouraging. It means that you are looking for layers of meaning…. That you are searching for, not just the obvious level of meaning, but also the level of meaning where the complexity defines being spoken about. On this level…it is hard to reach any consensus about what it means. And, this is as it should be. If you could do this…um…then, perhaps there was not reason to write the poem in the first place…and however right or wrong…um…we are…the important thing is that…you…you engaging yourself with…with…words…the individual words on the page. What may be helpful is that what poets are traditionally trying to do… is that this is how poets work… they try to communicate moments of inspiration. This may not be as true for a poet like William Blake…but a poet like Elizabeth Jennings is communicating feeling…intense feeling and poets talk about this in many different ways…I think we touched on this when we spoke about what the Romantics do…how Romantics start working. And that's why William Blake isn't a very typical Romantic. Because he is… he is doing the same kind of thing as Alexander Pope is doing, in the sense that he is looking at society in which he lives…and he is trying to find ways…is trying to articulate ways in which it can be made better. But that is not doing the same thing as Elizabeth Jennings is doing or William Wordsworth, or Samuel Taylor Coleridge is doing. What it is that Elizabeth Jennings is trying to do, is trying to communicate the personal, intense insight that she has…

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Matthew: She's an idealist, in some ways…

MF: Yes. If fact if you look at the notes I gave you from the Smith book. She is called and Candour…and the Candours are people like Silvia Plath, people who are…

Rob: What is a Candour?

MF/Matthew: confessing…

MF: As in honesty…an honest confession. And this is what Elizabeth Jennings is trying to do. To speak honestly about her experience. But whatever she sees, she processes as poets do. Wordsworth's definition of poetry…do you remember this…did you speak about this…Wordsworth definition is that poetry is intense emotion recollected in tranquility and the idea of…of…if you look at what happens there, you have this moment of epiphany, this understanding, this intense understanding of how the world works, and how things are, and then what happens is that poets try to communicate this and obviously you can't communicate this in literal language…you can't say last night I had this moment of insight. Well I suppose you can, but it is not going to have the layers that this has. So what Wordsworth was talking about, his moments of intense insight are in some ways similar to what is happening in the poetry of Elizabeth Jennings…and there is a very strong Romantic tradition to what she is doing…and its not the William Blake thing…William Blake is a social satirist but he does not have that same kind of intense personal feeling that she does. And that is what makes this poem a very difficult one. Because, for a start it is the first time you have read Jennings, and secondly, because it is very difficult to be able to see exactly what represents what…I mean for William Blake it is much easier because you have the correspondences that are clear. Here you don't have. Here you have to make those correspondences…here you have to make them and sometimes this is easier than other times.What I want you to do…and we need to finish because we are running out of time…I want you to look at who is the "I" of the poem, now this is a lyric poem and this makes the "I" of the poem really quite important. It may or it may not be Elizabeth Jennings, but whatever, you have to understand who is the voice in the poem.

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Matthew: I am always inclined to take her literally…if she says "I" then she means "I", and not someone else.

Rob: But that is what I said earlier…but "I" here was all women.

Matthew: The "I" is all women from the past…sexual objects from the past.

MF: Nic, who do you see as the "I" of the poem.

Nic: Pretty much Elizabeth Jennings, hey? She is woman in that situation.

MF: Ok, if you are going to say Elizabeth Jennings and this would be perfectly logical, and then you still need to find out what kind of persona is the "I". To simply say it is Jennings is great, but it doesn't take us forward because none of us knows anything about Elizabeth Jennings. But in this poem, we learn a whole lot about the speaker of the poem. So who is Elizabeth Jennings…who is the Elizabeth Jennings that comes through here?

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Marybeth: I would say it was Elizabeth Jennings, but not only Elizabeth Jennings. I mean if you read a poem like this…last night she is sitting contemplating and then she sat and wrote it down, I mean if you write a poem…and you are in

love at that moment, then you write a very beautiful, lovely poem, but somebody knows who you are, somebody could say that this was a different part of you. So, I think this poem is her, but it is a different aspect of her. I mean how would you write this down…that the "I" is part of a split personality? How would you put that?

MF: That is a very good question…and obviously, if you had to say, "part of Elizabeth Jennings" this is not going to be very helpful anyway. The question that is being asked here is what do we know from the poem, about the speaker? Rob: maybe the "I" could be her, but is also a representative?

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Arin: No, it could never be like that. It's silly. "I" means one person and not a group. She is the one.

Matthew: I think that Elizabeth Jennings is just a woman, either she is or she is trying to be one…she is in a relationship but one that is not full of love and she has just come back from a night in which the man has just taken pleasure from her and she has not got any back…and she is reflecting on that.

MF: It's really quite difficult to talk to you lot. You clearly have this whole feminist thing going and it makes it difficult to make any sense of other possibilities. It may well be there are some feminist things happening in the poem…but this is not all that's happening…and if this is all you are looking for, its all you will see and you will be closed to all sorts of other things. By the time we get to end of the study, I really hope you will be able to see all sorts of other themes that you will allow to come out.

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Marybeth: The speaker still refers to men and human things…this is all to do with human emotions. The humans kiss and touch. But the fox, if it is a woman and the dog represents a man…um…then the woman fears the human lust. I think it has more to do with emotions. Not that the woman is trapped…but that the man just jumps her and she just takes it all the way. I think the feminist thing comes in this way…but this is not only talking about feminist issues.

MF: Ok, can I ask two questions? The first question is, does this interpretation hold if Edwin Jennings wrote this? Would the same poem suddenly mean something completely different?

Matthew: Yes, certainly, Edwin is a male feminist. A bit of a fruitcake…but

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MF: Guys, what worries me is that your entire understanding of this poem is based on the fact that this poem has been written by someone called Elizabeth and she was a she. And if her name were Clint Eastwood, then it would be a completely different poem for you. And this is profoundly disturbing, because your interpretation is the interpretation of a name and not what is going on in the poem.

Arin: I want to say something…I think this poem has something to do with sex and not feminism.

MF: Yes, possibly. What I want you to consider is that this poem is to do with humanity and not with one woman's relationship to a woman. Try, read the poem and think about the poem as to do with humans. Now I want you to look at the questions that I have given you…think about why I have asked you these questions. And then think about the exercise I have given you and I want you to do this exercise properly…it's really important.

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Elizabeth Jennings: Transcriptions From Seminars 3 and 4

Thursday 11th September 2003

MF: Recap of what salient points were covered in the last seminar group. (General introduction to the poem and a definition of a vocation.)

(Read the poem "To a Friend with a Religious Vocation")

MF: Ok what does she mean by symmetry of purpose, what is she talking about and why symmetry of purpose?

Julia: She is talking about abstract things. Poetry is not like other things. This is an artistic thing.

Marybeth: She is talking about where her poetry comes from. It comes from the darkness and it is her inspiration…the words, she doesn't even know where they come from, but they come, but the priest takes these vows of poverty and that is where he is going to…and his purpose comes…let's say from God and so does his vocation…but she doesn't know where her vocation comes from…and um…it's not religious and…so where does it comes from. It's big and it has not symmetry and this is where the words like poetry come from…from somewhere deep and dark inside her.

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MF: As far as her concerns …go…ja…yes…perfectly right…but as far as her concerns go…is it merely her calling to be a poet? Is it a scaffolding she erects…"half out of fear and half out of laziness"? In the light of her vocation, do you think this is a reasonable question to ask?

Matthew: I think she is just trying to justify her existence…I think…

MF: Now, that's quite interesting…

Marybeth: She is trying to justify her vocation…

Julia: Isn't she feeling insecure about her purpose in life…?

MF: Well, perhaps. But who is she talking to…who is she asking?

Matthew: Because she is questioning the purpose of her own existence, she is wondering if her life has some meaning…or if poetry has some meaning in her life…or is poetry just her justification for her existence. Is it unstable scaffolding?

MF: Yes…

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Marybeth: She also compares her vocation to the priest's – and she says his is breathed and built and part of him…compared to hers…um…what is hers in the light of his…what does she do with her vocation…does her purpose fulfill something?

MF: Yep…carry on…

Marybeth: That the priest has something that makes her directed…it gives him meaning…so that "breathing is a way to bless"…

MF: What does that mean, "so that breathing is a way to bless"?

Marybeth: Well, I guess, breathing is something that you know you must do…so that the priest can only do this thing…it is what he must do…he is so filled with purpose and direction that everything that he does is with…is a means to an end. But with her, she is not really sure.

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MF: Ja, I think that is absolutely right…that as far as she is concerned, that this person with a religious vocation has made a choice and has a clear objective…that everything he does…that every moment that he lives – perhaps it could be a she too…it is simply addressed to "C"…that every moment is fulfilling their task on earth and every moment that they live is a moment of blessing. Whereas…for her…um…she says that the "fitful poems come, but can't protect the empty areas of loneliness". "You know what you must do"…implying that she doesn't know what she must do. She doesn't know if what she is doing is the right thing to do. What is this "dark night perhaps, but no grey days for you"?

Matthew: She is either a very bad or a very good kind of person.

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MF: Isn't this one of Jennings's characteristics? That this is also a poem about the half world of sterility and the passionless life? That a life that is lived without conviction, without…without focus. A life that is muddled through…as opposed to a life that is lived…a vocationally directed life. That there is a wandering-ness, as opposed to the certainty the priest shows. And the "dark nights"?

(Long pause)

Probably the most famous expression of this…comes from St John of the Cross, a mystic saint, who battled terribly with his faith. He wrote a whole spiritual journal in which he called this spiritual experience, which he went through, the "dark night of the soul". It is a kind of temptation, and turmoil and frailty…but there is a morning…there is a relief to this "dark night of the soul".

What about "your arms enfold the dawn"…? 60

Matthew: Here there is a sense of security… of arms enfolding.

MF: Ok…we are talking about the choice of the word "enfold'. Why is this appropriate? There is a sense of security, but what else is there a sense of?

Roy: That she is enclosed by these arms…

MF: OK…what is the difference between "enfold" and "enclose"?

Robert: I would say enfolding is more constricting…

Marybeth: No, the other way around. Were you talk about enfolding, you talk about choosing to wrap yourself around something…something nurturing. Enclosed is where something is …like shoved into a room and locked.

Matthew: Or something to do with blankets… 70

MF: Yes…so there is a sense of security but there is also a sense of comfort…

Marybeth: Whereas enclose means cut-off…it's not a good thing.

Robert: The thing is that enfolding can be a negative or a positive word. It's like you would enfold a baby, but you could also enfold someone so they couldn't do anything.

Matthew: You could perhaps take this to the point of being possessive…

MF: In essence I think the connotations of the word are positive though…in this context at least…or nurturing…as Marybeth said. You can't say he enfolded me in prison, could you?

Matthew: Well you could but then you would be talking about something else… 80

(General laughter)

MF: What about the bit about the poems moving from things not yet written to the "flash" that she talks about? "A moment's peace"?

Robert: She seems to be weighing up the pros and cons of the priesthood and her life. That is honestly the way I see it.

MF: You are right. It's a monologue isn't it? It's a monologue that's conducted…although there is not another voice…in her monologue… she is conducting an argument…about the virtues…

Julia: It is as if she is almost saying that poetry is almost a kind of rescue religion …but that you can never be sure.

Marybeth: Yes…that you can never know what to expect or how you will feel… 90

Julia: And that sometimes your religion will not be there, that you will have the gray days that she speaks about.

Robert: And that sometimes there will be silence…

MF: Yes, that is the point we are going to move to…the silence. In the religious sense he grille of silence is a chosen thing…a good thing. In her case the silences are always enemies. For a religious person, silence is a peaceful thing…for a poet… silence is not cool, at all. And we spoke about the flash…the moment of poetic insight, we called it an epiphany, a moment of inspiration …what else did we call it? 99

Marybeth: Enlightenment…

MF: Yes, that's a good one…a moment of nirvana…Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Kublai Khan moment…a moment of paradise. What about the next part of the poem…we need to move, we are running out of time?

Marybeth: I think this is all to do with …what's the word love that spiritual love…that feast thing…?

MF: Agape?

Marybeth: Yes…that's it. I think she is also talking about how she has not taken the vows of poverty…the three vows…and she still believes in them and she still believes in God and religion, even though she is not in the same vocation…and just because she has a different vocation doesn't mean that she does not believe in God and all that. 111

Matthew: Yes, these poems are all to do with love…but not sex like some of the other ones we did at the beginning. And I am sure that there is something about the idea that carnal love is a sin…doesn't the Bible have something to say about this…that carnal love is a sin?

MF: No, no, no…not quite. But I think you are right from the point of view that we are talking about perfect love here. Although, if it is human love, it can't be perfect since there are always limitations…for there to be perfect love, it has to be in relation to her friend who…who has a religious vocation.

Matthew: But the friend cannot have a perfect love for God since he has these periods of darkness. 121

MF: No…I didn't say that he has a perfect love.

Marybeth: Yes, I agree…that one must be able to believe in the perfect love…that it is a possibility.

MF: Yes, that's it. That one must be able to believe in a perfect love…not have or achieve…but believe in. Which is why we keep coming back to her need to express this perfect love. We keep coming back to her need to find the perfect

love and her intense frustration when that perfect love isn't realized. Because, if you have these moments of inspiration, if you have these moments of revelation of perfect love, then how frustrating is it to live your life without that…which is why poets are driven, which is why…because if you have had that moment, then you are constantly seeking to duplicate it. 132

Matthew: It is like a drug…

MF: Even more compelling. And anyone who has written poetry will know exactly what this is like. It is like something precious has been stolen from you when it is most needed. It is also related to the idea of Plato and the shadows. I think…who is it… yes,

Matthew is going to tell us about Plato and the shadows in the next seminar.

Marybeth: And the silence that she talks about…this is the silence that poets most fear since…it is because of this that poets cannot say what…when they need to. Cannot communicate their thoughts…

MF: Yes, to be inarticulate in the face of…to have a vocation as a poet and then to be stunned by silence…. 143

Elizabeth Jennings: Transcriptions From Seminars 5 and 6

Monday 15th September

MF: OK. Let's look at the "Pride of Life" which I think is a good and closely related poem.

Moe: (Reads the poem)

(A general discussion of the diction and a summary of the poem from MF and questions from Matthew, Marybeth and other members of the group.)

Marybeth: am finding this difficult…I don't know.

MF: What do you mean? What is difficult?

Marybeth: I don't know…the whole poem. What is the pride of life? What is the point of the title?

MF: I am going to give my version of this. Then I would like you to fight with me and make some effort to reinterpret this yourselves. This is the kind of mural you would find in a dug up city…like Pompeii, where you have Roman people disporting themselves. Can you imagine the scene…a dug up mural and various people young and old and men and women going about their lives in the usual ways? Old men discourse…are talking, arguing and discussing upon wise topics here. Women and children pass the shadows by – so these old people…if you think what we mentioned about the shadow and the substances…then these old folks are shadows. The world has passed them by. 18

Only the young are desperate since it is only these who have a mission…they are the only ones who have a mission. (A long section of quoting from the poem).

These people…the young are the ones who have a mission. They are filled with purpose and life is directed for them.

Marybeth: And I suppose these are filled with passion too. They are passionate unlike the old people.

MF: Yes, yes, yes… Marybeth, you are hot on the trail. And she is talking of the young to say that they haven't been polluted by the decadence that has infected the older people so that they lack drive and focus.

Matthew: Why is she using a Roman setting? This obviously applies to to day as well.Why go back to some poxy mural? I find it irritating that she is trying to be difficult to understand. 30

MF: Yes, of course and I think that is exactly why she has chosen a Roman setting. That's exactly the point. She is trying not to be difficult to understand. Look at the title. "Life" not just modern life or "ancient life". She has taken something from 2000 years ago or 25000 years ago and she is showing that nothing has changed. Things are as they were and they will presumably be for some time to come. We are all the same. There is universality in this and then civilization fell as one gets the impression it…is destined to... It became too urbane,… too effete… too decorous.

Matthew: So there is a connection between civilization and decay and lack of passion? I didn't see it before, but Jennings always comes back to this theme of hers…this passion thing. 41

MF: Well… to some extent – although they are not the same thing…rather that the one can lead to the other in time. And comfort can lead to a lack of passion and direction since there is nothing that one needs work for. Look at the contrast that she sets up in the poem. You have the contrast of the primitive and the effete…the young and old. The young are off hunting, with a mission and a lack of ambiguity.

(Short discussion of cycles of civilization – before the end of the seminar.) 47

Elizabeth Jennings: Transcriptions From Seminars 7 and 8

Thursday 18th September

Detailed discussion of "Words from Traherne"

(Marybeth reads the poem)

Matthew: What does she mean the knot she must untwist?

Rob: Perhaps it's a marriage?

Marybeth: Yes, perhaps…

Rob: You know…you tie the knot.

Matthew: Maybe she has a knot in her hair.

MF: OK, lets get back to planet earth. Would you categorise this as a love poem?

(General discussion)

Marybeth: It is about the fear of being in love…

Rob: Yes, it's a very scary thing.

Marybeth: It's about love itself and the fear of loving someone.

Matthew: It is not like "To his coy mistress" or something like that.

MF: OK, lets look at it another way. Is love…an honest reference, or a kind of game? She says "Fear often came/ And intervened between the quick expression/ Of honest movements or a kind of game/ I ran away at the chance of passion".

Julia: Of course there is a possibility that the honest movements are a kind of game?

MF: Or, or…is she putting them in opposition to…or is she saying love starts as this and becomes this?

Marybeth: I think she is saying that it starts as this and becomes this…I mean, let's say that you meet someone and you like someone and what, what, what…and you don't want them to know, so you like pretend something like this…

Matthew: The games girls play…

Marybeth: So you pretend to be something that you are not. Let's say, I meet this guy and I fall for him hook line and sinker, but then I am waiting for his call…

and I am waiting for his call. And then he doesn't call and I am waiting… and then he calls and I think…ha, he called.

Matthew: As I said…the games that girls play.

Marybeth: Not only girls…

Matthew: I don't wait by the phone…

MF: Matthew, you beast, you are so damn sexist…we can't move anywhere with you.

Julia: Yes, its true…boys just play on the other side of this. 30

Marybeth: Let's say that a guy likes this girl, but he doesn't want her to think that he likes her too much… so he will play with her…it's like fishing. If you bring in the fish too quickly, it may get away. You cannot be too keen. It's his frail ego…what if she dumps him. So he will get to her friend, to get to her…that kind of thing. It starts as a game and develops into something better than this.

Matthew: I just relate to this poem. I think she has got the right idea, absolutely.

MF: And what is this idea of "honest movements" then?

Matthew: Honest - surely this is what it says? Honest.

Julia: No it's a quick expression of honest movements.

Carol: No, excuse me. There were three things there. Fear, which intervenes between the expression of honest movements, or a kind of game. If you look at that whole sentence. 42

Matthew: So the kind of fear comes and intervenes between these things…and while you are still in love…still scared…you get hit with bouts of insecurity about things.

(Noises of agreement from the group)

Rob: Mass agreement from the group. That's what I think.

Carol: I'm not at all certain that's how men think.

Matthew: Oh, yes, we do…sometimes. Just not as often or as obviously.

Maybeth: I'm not at all certain that men think at all.

(Sounds of agreement or disagreement from the group)

Carol: Oh, no sorry…I did not mean to start something. I just wanted, perhaps an alternative positioning here. 53

MF: I am trying to look at how she categorises love. And I agree that this is not a love poem…at least not in the traditional sense in the same way that Traherne's poem is about love…but in his case… this poem is about man's love for God…Um…here

Matthew: This is definitely a partner love…that you would feel for you wife…or chick or something…

Marybeth: Pardon…she is talking more about an entity here… she is putting love in a ontext.

MF: The speaker is representing…the speaker's position is clear…"I ran away at any chance of passion…. But not for long. Few can avoid emotions/ So powerful'.

Julia: She can hardly think what she is doing. 65

Matthew: It's like she writes to get away…but it always comes back.

Marybeth: She is talking about the "honest movements" and "passion" and these are separated by fear. Right. But when she finally comes to the chance of expressing the passion, which I guess overcame her fear…she ran away…she couldn't handle it.

Arin: Don't you think that she is always coupling fear with everything she writes? Because whatever she talks about…she always has fear in it. She is a very fearful person.

MF: You are perfectly right Arin. It does seem to be what she worries about most. Fear is what is motivating her. Think about this. How many times have we come across fear in so many different contexts…in how many times does she talk about fear? 76

Matthew: Fear in the hospital is one…

Rob: There was the fear before the operation.

Marybeth: The fear of death… the fear of silence.

Matthew: Specifically there is the fear of love…for man and for God. In the "Song for a Birth or a Death" she is going on about fear as though there would be no tomorrow.

Rob: She is a fearful woman.

Matthew: Too right…I'm scared.

Rob: I don't blame you Mat.

MF: But isn't this the condition of an intelligent and sensitive person? This fear.

Julia: Well, perhaps. Although she seems to be totally paralysed by it.

Matthew: Because she understands her feelings, ja?

Marybeth: Because she analyses her feelings too much. There is only so much you can do. You can't understand love. I mean she analyses it too much. I mean, really... She takes the whole meaning out of love.

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Carol: Can I ask…did she write this when she came out of the institution?

MF: I have absolutely no idea… but it seems clear from the concerns of the poem that the issues she deals with here are of a different type from the issues she deals with when she is in the asylum.

Julia: She refused to get married didn't she? She got engaged, but she refused to get married.

Marybeth: Oh Yeah.

Matthew: I think she is talking about running away.

Marybeth: Yeah…a duck from the world…stop the world…I want to get off thing…

Matthew: She can't avoid it. 101

Marybeth: Beauty and compassion…that is part of what love is…

Matthew: Part of what love is…living is…never mind just love. You cannot escape falling in love.

MF: What is interesting…and what I was thinking about when I read this poem…and I read this poem several times before and then again last night when I was getting myself ready to talk about it…is the need for passion that she has… there seems to be this…it seems to be what you would expect from a poet… but what she is trying to do is to capture this moment, this intensity…and it…when I was thinking about that…and looking for this intensity…this moment…think about that…and then read this…"few can avoid emotion/ So powerful, although it terrifies./ I trembled, yet I wanted that commotion/ Learnt through the hand, the lips, the ears, the eyes."

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So she knows it is not going to be fruitful…and that it is going to lead to hurt…

Matthew: When she runs away…

MF: Yes…but she knows she is going to do it…it is going to break her heart…but there is this constant searching for this moment of intense, anguished, passion…

Matthew: She is like a masochist

MF: Yes…she is…but she is also saying that humanity is also like this…we all know we are going to get hurt

Marybeth: I think she has submitted herself to the love…I mean why doesn't she try the other side of this…

Matthew: Yes, she has never committed herself 123

Marybeth: She is willing enough to experience the pain and the heartbreak…why isn't she willing enough to experience the love? Because she is scared that she will lose control and fall…because she is afraid…

Matthew: You say she is heartbroken…but she has never committed herself to love…and she doesn't like being heartbroken. Imagine the extent of the pain she is going to feel when she actually commits herself and it still doesn't work out. Maybe that's what she is scared of…

Marybeth: I'll fall in love, she says, and my heart will be broken for sure.

Julia: That's what she seems to be saying…but don't forget this is just her impressions at the moment of …writing this poem. 133

MF: This is a good point to go back to the poem with which we started this entire discussion. That's the poem "One Flesh" "Do they know they're old, / These two who are my father and my mother/ Whose fire from which I came, has now grown cold? And so everything has ended in apathy and passivity and um…

Marybeth: That is not necessarily true…

Julia: Not in this poem…

Matthew: But to Jennings it is…

Julia: But in this poem she is… she is…

Matthew: We are trying to discuss a reason why she would run away from everything. 143

Julia: This poem is not about coldness…because these things like generosity…don't have coldness…they are not cold…

Matthew: No, that's not it. This poem is about running away.

Julia: No, what I'm saying that the time here is not the time of old age…this is not a poem about old people…

MF: Yes, that's true. But we are looking at fear…

Marybeth: We are trying to see where the fear comes from.

MF: he fear that animates here is the fear of passivity, the fear of apathy, the fear of…

Carol: No, nonsense. The poem is talking about “generosity, integrity/Compassion…”

MF: Yes, but read that in the context of the poem: "now generosity, integrity, /Compassion too, are what makes me exist, /Yet still I cannot come to terms or try,/Or even know, the knot I must untwist." 155

Carol: Yes, I know…they make me exist, they are current…

Marybeth: But what she is ultimately talking about is fear…here and in the later poem.

Carol: But why is this a problem…hasn't this just got to do with the earlier poems being written earlier and the later poems just being written later?

MF: No, these poems in this volume have been selected by her and put in a particular order to deal with certain themes…

Carol: Oh…selected by her…then surely we need to ask why she chose to put this poem after the poems where she is in the asylum. Because those poems are so dissipated from emotion and these poems…however painful they may be…are full of life…are back into life…she is back into real full life… 166

Matthew: But in this case running away from it…ha ha.

MF: But she always does, doesn't she. There is always fear that she…

Maybeth: It's what she says in the last lines of the stanza "Lest it should make me lose control and fall".

Matthew: So maybe that's why. When she went to hospital…maybe she did lose control and maybe she is afraid of this happening again…

Marbeth: I guess love makes you do this…

Matthew: I suppose love make you do this…it makes you nutty…

MF: OK, this is not the final word on this poem…but for me at least, this poem makes sense in the context of the search for passion that we have already discussed…and it ties together in the light of what we have already done. 177

Carol: Can I ask you? Can you tie this poem up with the lady who went to every movie there was at the cinema and who eat ice cream all the time.

Marybeth: But there is nothing strange in that…what's to explain?

Matthew: But she is an academic who likes ice-cream, where is the problem…aren't poets allowed to eat ice-cream...

(Laughter)

Carol: Well that's put me in my place…Its because she is a very good literary critic that this happens…that somebody would do such mundane things…. I mean would you see every single film?

MF: I don't think that she necessarily saw every single movie…just that she had a life-time membership to the cinema… Most people have this sort of ambiguity…so tame…so tame 188

Carol: I suppose…. Picasso was very cruel to those around him…

MF: It's like great artists being addicted to…pornography…people are complex…

Matthew: Just because she watched movies does not mean that she had a tame life…

Carol: And the ice cream?

Marybeth: It's possible. Ann Smith says that you can believe in God in the morning, be an atheist in the afternoon and still be the same person at the end of the day.

MF: For Jennings, the idea is that she is ruled by the search for intense passion…and not only love… and not only secular love although the way into it is through the senses.

Arin: I still don't see what this has to do with ice cream? 198

Carol: I am trying to make a parallel with this woman who writes these poems but has a predictable life…so boring…

Julia: Well, it's not that boring…she was in and out of mental hospitals…

(Laughter)

Carol: No, she only went into hospital once…

Matthew: No, she was in and out of asylums all the time wasn't she?

Carol: Then I misunderstood the part about her having a period of instability that lasted for a couple of years…

MF: No, she did have a particularly bad period, but she battled this from the age of 19, or so we are told until just before she died.

Matthew: Well we seem to have drifted off the topic quite substantially… 108

MF: Well not really. We are going to finish now anyhow…

Appendix 2

Seminar Discussion Topics

Elizabeth Jennings Seminar Discussion Topics

Seminar Discussion 1

"Song for a Birth or a Death"

- Who is the "I" of the poem?
- What is the connection you make between "men in bed" and the other creatures: the fox and the owl - do you think?
- What is your understanding of the connection between pleasure and "disaster"?
- How/why do all "matings" mean a kill?
- How are the young fox and the child trapped that make "cries of love" , "cries of fear"?
- What is Jennings saying about the face of the natural light of the moon and the natural links between love and death, the "owl and its prey"?

Assignment

Write a letter to a friend and tell him/her your initial impressions of the poet Elizabeth Jennings based on the poem.

Seminar Discussion 2

"Family Affairs"

- How appropriate is the title "Family Affairs"?
- What common theme do you see in this poem and in "Song for a Birth or a Death" and "One Flesh"?
- What is the question being asked in the last stanza of the poem?
- Consider the poetic "mechanics" of the poem: structure, rhyme, and rhythm? How effective is this?

"A Game of Chess"

- To whom is the poem addressed and who is the speaker of the poem?
- The title of the poem introduces the central theme of the poem. Would you agree?
- Explain the force of the word "emotionless" in the second stanza?
- What is the duality Elizabeth Jennings talks about in stanza 4?

"My Grandmother"

- What is the "point" of the first stanza?
- The poem uses an extended metaphor to make connections between the grandmother and antique objects. Explore this connection.
- Explain what is meant in the final line of the third stanza.
- How does the final stanza link with the beginning of the poem?

Assignment

Write a short dialogue (about 500 words) between you, an interviewer, and the prize-winning poet, Elizabeth Jennings, for publication in a broadsheet newspaper on the advent of Jennings being awarded the W H Smith poetry prize.

Seminar Discussion 3

"World I have not Made"

- We need to discuss Plato's idea of the shadows - substance and reality.
- Do you believe we create our world? Account for your ideas.
- How willing are you to surrender your ideas, to know one has no control?
- If one had created "the reality of the world" then the "trapped wild beast" is one with its shadow. The "real" world and even great faith would leave great holes. The mind would still be unsatisfied. What is your comment on Jennings's logic?

"Harvest and Consecration"

- Sacraments - what part do they play in the poetry of Jennings?
- What is Jennings saying about the putting together of opposites in this poem? Why or why not is this an effective poetic technique?
- Why does "wine and bread" protect from "the ecstasy"? What is the ecstasy and how does this relate to Jennings's characteristic preoccupation with passion and poetry?

"A World of Light"

- Pick out the senses Jennings mentions in the first three stanzas of the poem.
- How does this "sacramental" poem relate to "Harvest and Consecration"?
- Do you think this poem is characteristic of Jennings's central thematic concerns?
- Explain in your own words the last 3 lines of the poem.

"A Requiem"

- What is Jennings's central argument in this poem?
- Answer the question she asks in the last lines of the poem.

Assignment

Using the characteristics of regular rhyme, rhythm and structure, schemes and tropes, write a short poem in the style of Elizabeth Jennings to present to the seminar group.

Seminar Discussion 4

"The Resurrection"

- Once again, who is the "I" of the poem – the speaker?
- How would you argue if faced with the proposition that this poem moves by opposites? How could you characterize these opposites and how do they work?
- If you were looking for a key quotation from the poem, would it be "Not by a natural joy could I be blessed/ or trust a thing I could not understand"?
- Explain your understanding of "dancing despair".

"Visit to an Artist"

- What does this poem presume about the efficacy of language? Do you agree?
- If this poem argues for the mysticism of art – from this poem try to explain Jennings's view.

- After having made connections between art and sacrament, Jennings concludes this poem with: “Art with its largesse and its own restraint”. How do you understand this statement?

”Lazarus”

- Discuss the parts of this sonnet. Is Jennings being traditional – or is she adapting tradition?
- Discuss the Jennings’s poetic technique of using words to convey wordlessness – or the failure of language.

”The Diamond Cutter” and “Stargazers and Others”

- In its use of the mystical in opposition, how effective do you think this “The Diamond Cutter” is as an exploration of Jennings’s poetry?
- In both poems, the speaker talks not of “the thing” but the absence of it”. If this is true, is it an effective way of communicating Jennings’s insight?

Seminar Discussion 5

“To A Friend with a Religious Vocation”

- 3 vows: poverty, chastity and obedience.
- What is the "sense" Jennings talks about?
- Do you think Jennings’s poetry is a substitute for a vocation?
- Convictions and vocations - discuss the difference.
- The dark silence - is this characteristic for Jennings.

“The Pride of Life: A Roman Setting”

- Jennings’s poem celebrates youth. What of youth does she most admire? Why?
- Discuss the last two lines of the poem.

“Men Fishing in the Arno”

- For the fishermen, Jennings sees a metaphorical philosophy of life. Discuss this metaphor - take it to its logical conclusion. Does it make sense?

“Two Deaths”

- In what way is the "image" characteristic of Jennings’s poetry.
- Why does the speaker conclude her poem by saying that she is "ashamed I have never seen anyone die…"

“About these Things”

- The first stanza talks of wordlessness - a characteristic of Jennings’s poetry.
- Think of Tennyson's poem "Tears, idle tears". What do you think of the similarities?

Seminar Discussion 6

“The Instruments”

- What kind of lyric is this poem?

- How appropriate do you find the title of this poem?
- Explain the logic of the lines, " acts not done can still be taken/Away, like all completed passions."
- How effective do you find the metaphor of vows of love being compared to a musical instrument? Explore this metaphor in further detail.
- Explain the last two lines of the poem.

“Remembering Fireworks”

- Would you agree that this, too, is a love poem? In the light of the "Diamond Cutter" and "Stargazers and Others" what similarities can you see between these poems?
- Elizabeth Jennings sometimes mentions the half-world. Do you think this is an appropriate tack to take in this case? In the context of the entire poem, explain the last sentence.

Formal Essay Question: Choose One of the Following

1. Select one of the poems we have studied. Critically analyze this poem and indicate why you believe this poem is characteristic of Jennings’s poetry.
2. Jennings has been described as "one of the most passionate and precise of our writers, a woman of humane values, religious vision and natural sympathy". Do you agree with this contention? In your carefully constructed answer, pay close attention to at least three of the Jennings poems you have studied,

Seminar Discussion 7

“Pain”

- Why is oblivion a stronger fear than pain for Jennings? Is this characteristic?

“The Ward”

- "A past they never honoured all the time." Is this a way of deceiving oneself?

“After an Operation”

- What is Jennings’s fear?

“Patients in a Public Ward”

- Does Jennings’s poem relate to healthy people? Can the "normal" desire peace in lying still?

“Hospital”

- How important is the ability to articulate pain in this poem?

“For a Woman with a Fatal Illness”

- What would Jennings want to happen or do besides passively wait?
- Why does Jennings loathe passivity in this and other poems?

Seminar Discussion 8

“Admonition”

- Caution, warning reprimand, rebuke
- To whom is this poem addressed.
- About whom is the poem written?

“The Young Ones”

- What is the poetic effect of the "we" at the beginning of the third stanza?
- Does the conclusion Jennings comes to seem assured - or wistful?

“A Mental Hospital Sitting-Room”

- Discuss the statement, "So much is stagnant and yet nothing dies".

“The Interrogator”

- Are the power dynamics of the patient/psychotherapist ever in favour of the patient?

“Night Sister”

- To whom is the poem addressed?
- What does the image "A world of fears/ Like the ghost-haunting of the owl appears" convey?

“Words from Traherne”

- Would you categorise this as a love poem?

- What is love in your mind - "honest movements" or a "kind of game"? Could it be both?
- Do you believe that Jennings is right that love is a commotion "through the hand, the lips, the ears, the eyes?
- What is a “the knot” Jennings talks about in the last line of the poem?

Seminar Discussion 9

“Samuel Palmer and Chagall”

- In what way(s) do you think Jennings’s words about palmer and Chagall are appropriate when applied to her poetry?

“On a Friend's Relapse and Return to a Mental Clinic”

- What do you feel about the poetic form Jennings uses in this poem? Is it appropriate for the subject matter under discussion?
- Would you agree that this poem is expressing "the problem of pain" - a universal human predicament?

“Night Garden of the Asylum”

- Would you agree that Jennings sets up opposition between humanity and nature in this poem? Do you agree with her on this?
- Discuss the last line of the poem. Why does Jennings see herself - and the others as "bedevilled"? Is illness not part of the natural cycle Jennings should expect?

“A Depression”

- In what way(s) do you think this poem is typical of Jennings? Do you think Jennings here deals with characteristic themes?

“Grove House, Iffley”

- Why do the objects Jennings mentions "say…something of death…-and birth"?
- What other poems we have discussed relate to this poem? Why do you think this?

“Chinese Art”

- For a poet whose main ambition is to capture the transient, why would the Chinese art she describes be less than satisfying?
- What is the point she reaches in the last stanza of the poem?

“Love Poem”

- Jennings makes several assertions in this poem:

> Love is restraint.
>
> Discrete love is true love.
>
> Love is pain.

Do you agree? Why or why not?

APPENDIX 3

Selected Poems of Elizabeth Jennings Listed for Study for the University of Cambridge A-Level Literature in English Course