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Reviewed work:

Literature in Language Education. (2005). Geoff Hall. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 278. ISBN 1403943362. \$29.95

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There is a debate raging about the use of literature to teach English as a foreign language (EFL)—or is there? Kelly and Krishnan (1995), Gilroy and Parkinson (1997), Belcher and Hirvela (2000), Hanauer (2001), Yang (2001), Vandrick (2003), Kim (2004), and Paran (2006) have all conjured the spectre of this controversy in their work, before going on to question its existence. The phantom nature of the debate seems self-evident: why would anyone argue that literature should never be used in English language programs? And who would argue that only literature should be used? The above studies share a sense that the real question, of course, is not whether literature should be used to teach EFL, but how it should be used.

Geoff Hall begins *Literature in Language Education* by stating that his book “offers an account of existing research and practice, and aims to stimulate further research [...] in the field of literature and language teaching, with special but not exclusive reference to foreign language studies” (p.1). He then evokes a “historic tension” between “two distinct fields, ‘language’ and ‘literature’,” thus contextualising the above debate in a larger, ever evolving academic division between the “philological” and the “literary critical” (p. 3). What Hall establishes clearly in this introduction, and maintains throughout the book, is a movement (a cinematic zooming in and out) between the specific—the use of literature in teaching EFL—and the broad—the relationship between literature and education.

Often, this zooming is to good effect, linking issues in the smaller debate with a much larger cultural arena, but at times it can be confusing or frustrating. It is sometimes unclear, for example, whether Hall is discussing second language or first language education. Perhaps more importantly, this zooming process raises expectations that are not met, by creating gaps which

are left unfilled, which are out of the spotlight he uses to illuminate the landscape but firmly within the unsatisfied imagination of the reader. Though arguably most books have something of a zooming structure, illustrating the broad with specific examples, Hall seems to have aimed at the reverse: illustrating a specific English language teaching debate with a broad overview of issues surrounding language, literature and education. It is the relevance of his selection of the broad to shed light on the specific that I am questioning.

The first chapter of Part 1 (“Language, Literature and Education”), “Literary Language and Ordinary Language,” could seem a strange starting point, were it not for the fact that one element of the literature-in-EFL debate concerns what Hall frames as, “Does literature have a different language of its own, perhaps rather unrepresentative of, or rather different from, ordinary language?” (p. 9). Hall follows his question with the answer that most teachers and researchers would give: no, but literary language could be “particularly interesting” (p. 9). The rest of the chapter rounds up the research and theory that supports this sensible answer, with few surprises.

The strengths of this chapter are the strengths of the book as a whole: the gathering up and synthesising of a range of research studies and theories, from the literary theory of the Russian formalists to a French proverb about figures of speech at a Paris market. *Literature in Language Teaching* is in this sense a grab bag to dip in and out of, uniting and displaying cultural gems (and as with all titles in the *Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics* series, edited by Christopher N. Candlin and David R. Hall, discrete nuggets of data, quotes, and concepts are set apart from the main text). Its weaknesses are those of any grab bag, concerning such questions: What has been left out? Why grab some things and not others? In this case what are missing are genuinely varied cultural references. What at first looks like a wide range of sources is in fact the usual Anglo-American cultural canon (and the European theory that has been appropriated into this canon). Is *Literature in Language Education* a collection of Anglo-American scholarship or an intrepid investigation into issues of literature and language teaching? If the latter, which it seems to want to be, why not look further for some more diverse examples, such as the relationship between ordinary language and literary language in Mexico or Algeria?

The second chapter of Part 1, “Literature in Education,” would have been my choice of starting point, an engaging charting and analysis of the development of literary studies in Anglo-American education, from its origins as a “poor man’s classics” (p. 44, quoting Palmer (1965), though Eagleton (1996) also has much to say on this) to its present-day shift into cultural studies, and the class, empire, national identity and assessment issues at play. Here Hall’s zoom lens is at a distance, looking at the location of literature within education and at times the link with foreign language teaching seems forgotten. It returns, however, to look at how the teaching of modern languages at grammar schools and universities across most of Western Europe is based on a classics tradition and was therefore literary based before the communicative revolution.

This chapter is a good example of how the zooming motion can whet appetites it cannot fulfill. I would have liked to have read more about when reading literature ceased to be the aim of learning a foreign language and become a possible vehicle for learning instead. How many British universities still ask students to write literary essays in English about foreign language literature for foreign language degrees? What about the English language and literature faculty divide at most British universities but at few American universities? What about in other

countries? What is the tradition of teaching literature in Japan? How is the Japanese language taught in Japan? What about foreign languages? Expecting a book of this length to cover so much is unrealistic, of course; but even a few examples would provide a more rounded basis for illuminating the specific. If, as we are told by Hall, quoting Gilroy and Parkinson (1997), “in South Asia, for example, the English textbook is sometimes *only* a collection of literary texts” (p. 58), we also need an idea of how other languages, home and foreign, are taught in South Asia. Within which tradition(s) should a discussion of the use of literary texts in English language teaching in South Asia be located?

In the third chapter, “Reading Literature,” the zooming in and out between EFL specificity and education in general moves the reader from cognitive psychologists’ ideas on reading literature to action research with teenage Germans learning the English language by reading plays and novels about cultural issues of the English-speaking world (such as the Northern Irish conflict or ethnic tensions in the United States or Canada). Once again, what is overlooked by the zoom lens becomes noteworthy. Although examples are taken from English language classes in a range of countries around the world, nothing is said about how literature is read in other languages, foreign and native, in these countries.

While Part 1 provides an overview of research and theory in three areas: literary language and ordinary language, literature and education, and reading literature, Part 2 returns to these same areas, in the same order, this time focussing on *key studies*. When *Literature in Language Education* is read cover to cover, this structure creates an eerie sense of *déjà vu*; but when the book is dipped into (as is probably the author’s intention), this is an appropriate and useful division. Examples of particular research studies are expanded upon, including the studies of Hanauer (2001) and Kim (2004) mentioned above.

Part 2 leads smoothly to Part 3, where research methods and methodologies for researching literature and language education are discussed, with strengths, weaknesses and examples. This provides an excellent overview for a beginning researcher or a language teacher interested in developing an awareness of how the research discussed came into being. A more experienced researcher may find it overly simplistic or prescriptive. The final section, Part 4, makes more explicit the intended audience of the book (i.e., graduate students or teachers soon to be engaged in research projects), providing advice and examples of available resources. The glossary, references, name index, and subject index are equally useful to the relative beginner in this field.

Literature in Language Education identifies and fills a gap. It addresses the use of literature in EFL teaching and places it on a broader stage, where the role of literature in education and the purposes of language education constantly reconfigure one another. The bringing together, and teasing out, of these two areas is ambitious and largely successful, but the zooming between the specific and the broad highlights the territory from where its main gap can be observed—the lack of a genuinely multi-cultural approach. *Literature in Language Education* aims its searchlights at a wider territory than it achieves. However, this does not mean that it is not largely successful or that it is not worth reading.

Perhaps the best reason for reading this book is to understand how close it gets to examining the vast shift underpinning the current debate around the use of literature in language teaching: the

change that is occurring in thinking about why, and not merely how, we learn foreign languages. Anglo-Americans (to zoom back to the specific) used to learn languages to read literature and sacred documents from other cultures, to look inside those cultures or pillage the secrets of their spiritual and intellectual worlds. Now, that same literature is just one of many means to learn languages in order to travel, work, and communicate with other cultures. This is a monumental shift in how learners and teachers can position themselves in relation to other worlds and in the roles different cultures play in others' imaginations. This shift is worth evoking, however incompletely.

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